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University of Glasgow | School of  
Critical Studies

**Drawing (non)Tradition: Matriarchs, Motherhood and the Presentation of  
Sacred Text in *The Book of Genesis*, Illustrated by R. Crumb**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Ph.D.  
Theology & Religious Studies

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# Abstract

In 2009, Robert Crumb produced a singular work, *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated by R. Crumb*, which purports to be a faithful, graphical interpretation of the book of Genesis from the Hebrew Bible. Among other sources, Crumb states that he used Robert Alter's translation and commentary on Genesis to inform his work, along with the King James Version (KJV), the Jewish Publication Society Version (JPS) and *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* by Savina J. Teubal; from those, he produced his own interpretation together with annotations to explain his interpretive decisions.

Remediating ancient, biblical text into modern, graphical comic books affects the reception of the text in a myriad of ways. The aim of this thesis is firstly to investigate how Crumb's use of comics tools and resources impact his remediation of Genesis, by discussing his visual and textual decisions. This wider question is focused into three case studies, which are each based in the narratives of the matriarchs of Genesis and the theme of motherhood. The second aim of this thesis is to discuss the presentation of the matriarchs in *Genesis, Illustrated* as pro-feminist, strong, dominant characters within the narrative. This is a characterisation which subverts traditional readings of the women of Genesis, as well as expectations of Crumb as an author. Accusations of misogyny and sexism have followed Crumb throughout his career, which are challenged when the reader is presented with his pro-feminist matriarchal remediation of the biblical text.

By presenting a focused analysis of the theme of motherhood within *Genesis, Illustrated*, wider issues concerning popular-cultural remediations of the Bible in general begin to surface, including matters concerning reception in biblical comics, the space between art and literature inhabited by biblical comics, and issues of translation and interpretation within contemporary remediations. *Genesis, Illustrated* shows the importance of graphical remediations in exploring the boundary crossings between ancient script and modern, popular culture, regenerating and re-presenting the text for the modern reader.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note, copyright restrictions prevent reproduction of images in the electronic version of this thesis. Please see the hard copy held in the University of Glasgow's thesis depository. To view the above images, please consult a copy of *The Book of the Genesis, Illustrated by R. Crumb*.

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## Definitions and Abbreviations

<i>Genesis, Illustrated</i>	The Book of Genesis, Illustrated by R. Crumb
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REV	Revised English Version

# Introduction

## The Bible in Comics

In 2009, R. Crumb produced a singular work, *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated by R. Crumb*, which purports to be a faithful, graphical interpretation of the book of Genesis from the Hebrew Bible. Crumb states that among other sources, he used Robert Alter's translation and commentary on Genesis to inform his work,<sup>2</sup> along with the King James Version (KJV) and the Jewish Publication Society version (JPS); from those, he produced his own interpretation together with annotations to explain his interpretive decisions.<sup>3</sup> The project took four years to complete and was successful when published, winning the Harvey Award for Best Artist and it was also nominated for the coveted Eisner Award in three different categories.<sup>4</sup> The comic book spent sixteen weeks at number one on the New York Times bestsellers' list for Graphic Novels.<sup>5</sup>

Crumb's retelling of Genesis is not unique in that it stands in a long line of comic book versions of the Bible, and an even longer history of illustrated Bibles. In recent years, the number of comics based on biblical stories being created and published has increased, and they range in detail, fidelity to the text, and prospective audience. For example, there are those which claim to be a straightforward retelling of scripture and which omit as little textual material as possible,<sup>6</sup> those which base their version on scripture but are much freer

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 9-298. I use both this version and Alter's original translation and commentary: Robert Alter, *Genesis: A Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), portions of which appear in the 2004 title.

<sup>3</sup> Crumb discusses his references for the work in several places including the "Introduction" to *Genesis*, see: R. Crumb, "Introduction," in *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated by R. Crumb* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009) [hereafter referred to as *Genesis, Illustrated*]; and, Frank Browning, "Crumb's 'Genesis,' A Sexy Breasts-and-Knuckles Affair," accessed March 2, 2015: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113842476>.

Note: Crumb's version of Genesis does not contain page numbers of lexical divisions, so none will follow in reference to it.

<sup>4</sup> "The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb," W. W. Norton, accessed August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/The-Book-of-Genesis-Illustrated-by-R-Crumb/>.

<sup>5</sup> "New York Time Bestsellers: Hardcover in Graphic Novels," New York Time, accessed July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books/2010-02-21/hardcover-graphic-books/list.html>.

<sup>6</sup> I acknowledge that "straightforward retelling of scripture" is a highly problematic term, and I explore this in this introduction as well as in forthcoming chapters with reference to Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*. In this instance, however, I use the term loosely to identify the perceived aims of the artist/writer, and to



in omitting or embellishing certain details,<sup>7</sup> those which use biblical stories or characters within their stories but significantly adapt and transform them into something not instantly associated with biblical scripture,<sup>8</sup> and those that retell the Bible in a light-hearted, humorous or satirical manner. The latter are often created as a mockery of sacred text, and sometimes have a political or other agenda attached to them, such that they are unlikely to attract a religious audience, or at the least, unlikely to attract an audience searching for an aid to reading biblical text.<sup>9</sup> All categories range in terms of whether they were produced for a religious or secular audience, and those terms are not clearly definable either. As such, it is often difficult to place biblical comics into specific classifications without some crossover.

Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* falls, for the most part, into the first category. In the introduction to his remediation, Crumb claims that he "faithfully reproduced every word of the original text,"<sup>10</sup> continuing that even though there are a few places in the text which he felt could be made clearer with his own interjection, he "refrained from indulging too often in such 'creativity', and instead let it stand in its own convoluted vagueness rather than monkey around with such a venerable text."<sup>11</sup> Crumb's perceived intention was that he was illustrating the existing text as it stands, and so, in his opinion, producing a straightforward, unabridged comic book version of Genesis.

The claim that Crumb reproduces every word of the "original" text,<sup>12</sup> is also followed by an account of several sources upon which he bases his text, including the KJV and Robert Alter's commentary and translation of Genesis. The two statements clearly contradict each

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distinguish between biblical comics which are designed to be a loyal adaptation of the Bible, and biblical comics which have no such concern. Crumb's *Genesis, illustrated* falls into this category, as well as forthcoming digital comic, "The Word for Word Bible Comic," which claims to be an "unabridged, historically rich graphic novel of the Bible with a high view of scripture." See: "The Word for Word Bible Comic," accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.wordforwordbiblecomic.com>.

<sup>7</sup> Most biblical comics published by Christian publishing houses follow this route and tend to be directed towards children to capture their imagination and make the Bible more appealing. Thus, they often omit material which is not 'child-friendly' and embellish or alter material to make it more appealing to a young audience. See for example: Michael Pearl et al., *The Kingstone Bible* (Fruitland Park: Kingstone Media, 2011); Doug Mauss and Sergio Cariello, *The Action Bible: God's Redemptive Story*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010); Mike Maddox and Jeff Anderson, *The Lion Graphic Bible: The Whole Story from Genesis to Revelation*, (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2004); and Basil Wolverton, *The Wolverton Bible: The Old Testament & Book of Revelation Through the Pen of Basil Wolverton*, compiled by Monte Wolverton (Washington: Fantagraphics Books, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> See for example: Peter Gross and Mark Millar, *American Jesus Volume One: Chosen*, (Berkeley: Image Comics, 2009); Mark Waid and Alex Ross, *Kingdom Come*, (Burbank: DC Comics, 1996). These examples use characters and themes from the Bible, and while the stories are loosely based on scriptural ideas, the final product bears little or no resemblance to biblical narrative.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Winschluss, *In God We Trust*, (London: Knockabout, 2014); Tony Bennett, ed., *Outrageous Tales from the Old Testament* (London: Knockabout Comics, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

other, however, I read them as a comment or reflection upon how Crumb views biblical scripture.

Firstly, Crumb does not explain what he defines to be the original text, and secondly, he immediately lists several texts as part of his inspiration, each of which are different in scope and style. The juxtaposition of the term “original text” with a list of several texts is not a mistake: Crumb is drawing the reader’s attention to the “convoluted vagueness” of the Bible’s history in terms of its own sources, writers, dates and reception. He does not believe that there is a single, authoritative, original source, but that the Bible, and in this case Genesis, is an amalgamation of ancient tribal stories, myths, history and politics. Crumb affirms this in his introduction to Genesis, where he writes: “I believe it is the words of men [...] its power derived from its having been a collective endeavour that evolved and condensed over many generations before reaching its final, fixed form.”<sup>13</sup>

By acknowledging the complex and layered history of Genesis in the introduction, Crumb is probably stating that his version of Genesis is another layer to that history. It is not an authoritative version of Genesis; it is not Holy Scripture and is not meant to be read as such. Crumb approaches the project as if he is producing a graphic commentary, or a visual exegesis of an ancient, mythical text.

## Research Questions

The concept of a visual exegesis brings with it many questions: how does the inclusion of images affect the text? What do the pictures highlight, and what do they hide? Do certain parts of the text receive more attention in the accompanying image than others, and if so, does this affect how the reader understands stories, themes or characters? How does a reader engage with a text-image narrative of a Bible story? Does the text-image narrative represent the biblical text, or has it been reshaped to fit ideas or ideologies which belong to the artist, or which reflect societal zeitgeists? As a graphic commentary, what is the commentator attempting to say? Finally, what kind of interpretive spaces do remediations of the Bible in comic book form offer the reader? These questions offer potential avenues for researching relationships between the Bible and art, and the Bible and text-image narratives, and have

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<sup>13</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

already been identified in the field of the Bible and art by scholars such as J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu in their volume *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue*.<sup>14</sup>

My first research question draws upon some of these questions but with a focus on the relationship between Genesis and text-image remediations instead of the Bible and art. The question is in two parts: a) how does Crumb utilise the tools and resources of comics to remediate Genesis, and b) what kind of remediation has he produced by using these comics tools? For example, what artistic and textual choices has Crumb made in terms of presenting characters, story-arcs and themes from Genesis, and how has this impacted the presentation of these elements to the reader? To answer this question, I analyse parts of Crumb's remediation through the methodological framework of reading comics, as discussed by Ann Miller, Thierry Groensteen, Will Eisner and Scott McCloud. My approach to this is outlined fully in chapter 2 of this thesis.

It would not be feasible to carry out a visual analysis of the entirety of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*; the book encompasses all fifty chapters of Genesis illustrated over 224 pages. Therefore, I have concentrated my analysis towards three stories which share the theme of fertility and motherhood, to compare, contrast and highlight how comic book tools have aided or hindered reading of the text, and to see how the stories are represented. The stories are: Sarah (and Hagar) and her/their quests for motherhood which appear in Genesis 11:29-30, 16:1-6, 18:1-15 and 21:1-12,<sup>15</sup> Rebekah and the birth of Isaac in Genesis 25:17-26 (with some attention paid to earlier verses to contextualise my analysis), and the story of Rachel and Leah and their quest to produce children for Jacob, in Genesis 29:31-30:24 and 35:16-18, again, with some attention paid to earlier verses to contextualise my analysis.

This focus leads to a second question, which is directly linked to the first question in that it concerns Crumb's presentation of characters within Genesis. It is: how does Crumb present the matriarchs of Genesis, in terms of understanding their roles, functions and characters? The reason I have chosen to analyse these characters and themes is due in part to the way in which Crumb has designed and drawn the stories, and in part because of how the theme plays against popular ideas of Crumb's attitudes to women and sex. The design of the stories – of the women, the scenes, the panels and the text – has been influenced by Crumb's reading of

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<sup>14</sup> See: J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu, eds., *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> In the case studies, and throughout this thesis, I use the names 'Sarah' and 'Abraham', unless I am quoting biblical text. In the text of Genesis, 'Sarah' is 'Sarai' and 'Abraham' is 'Abram' up until the story of the covenant of pieces in Gen 17 when God changes their names. However, to avoid confusion between characters and to enhance the clarity of the text, I use the names of the matriarch and patriarch post-covenant.

a secondary text: *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis*, by Savina J. Teubal (1984).<sup>16</sup> As I will discuss in chapters 3 and 4, Teubal's book offers a perspective on Sarah (and by extension, the other matriarchs of Genesis) which is non-traditional.

Briefly, Teubal argues that Sarah is descended from a lineage of high-priestesses and adheres to a matriarchal code of practices, and she explains this as the reason that Sarah does not have children for a long time, challenging the text which describes Sarah as barren and unable to have children. Teubal uses the theory of Sarah as high-priestess to explain other inconsistencies and gaps within the text. Her overarching hypothesis is that the stories of the matriarchs and patriarchs were written at a time when a patriarchal society was developing in strength and power and was challenging and diminishing the power of a matriarchal culture which went before it, and that this can be read in the texts of Genesis pertaining to the matriarchs/patriarchs. While the theory has not gained much academic support, Crumb was captivated by the ideas within Teubal's book.<sup>17</sup> As such, my analysis of his remediation is concerned with examining his presentation of the matriarchs, how he uses the tools of comics to construct their characters and stories concerning motherhood, and how this can be contextualised within the scope of biblical scholarship about women in Genesis.

I chose the theme of motherhood within the matriarchal narratives because it is a common denominator in stories of the matriarchs, whether in relation to overcoming difficulties associated with becoming a mother (i.e. Sarah), being a mother to competing siblings (i.e. Rebekah), or competing with another person to produce the most children (i.e. Rachel and Leah). My approach to reading and contextualising matriarchs and motherhood is outlined in chapter 2: Gender in Genesis.

I will conduct a close reading of *Genesis, Illustrated* by carrying out a textual and visual analysis of the theme of motherhood in the matriarchal narratives. I will then discuss how Crumb presents the matriarch's in his *Genesis, Illustrated*. It is hoped that by presenting a focused analysis of one theme within one biblical comic, wider issues concerning comic book remediations of the Bible in general might begin to surface; this might include, for example, matters concerning reception of biblical comics, the kind of space between art and literature which biblical comics inhabit, or perhaps issues of translation and interpretation which arise in such products. These questions do not belong to just biblical studies or comics studies; rather, they are questions which benefit from an interdisciplinary approach:

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<sup>16</sup> Savina J. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Ohio: Swallow Press, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> "Genesis: R. Crumb illustrates the Bible," NPR, accessed Nov 3, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2009/11/02/120022241/genesis-r-crumb-illustrates-the-bible>.

reception history, comics theories and methodological frameworks, Bible and literature, interpretation studies and art history are all disciplines which can help to shed light on these broader questions.

The interdisciplinary aspect of studying biblical comics also reflects the difficulties facing me, as a researcher. As a student who has completed two degrees primarily in the field of biblical studies with a foot in the door of comics studies, I have struggled at times to resolve the tension and conflict between the ancient, history-steeped discipline of Biblical Studies with the younger, emerging field of comics studies. Working between two areas which are not normally linked has encouraged me to carefully consider my approach to this project. Am I a biblical scholar, or a comics' scholar? The two disciplines do not always fit well together, and as such, are not always compatible at reading or creating dialogue.

As comics primarily consist of a mixture of text and image, I could have approached the study of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* in the same manner as those in the field of the Bible and/in literature might. Alternatively, I could have chosen to approach the study as one might approach the Bible and art. However, neither of these areas take the unique property of comics into account: that they contain both text and image, and that both must be read together because they work together to produce meaning. Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* does not fall into either camp; rather, it straddles both, with several fingers and toes in other disciplinary pies at the same time.

With this in mind, I have chosen a method of reading Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* which incorporates mostly comics studies but with an eye to biblical studies, especially in terms of contextualising the stories of the matriarchs. Using theoretical approaches devised by eminent scholars Ann Miller and Thierry Groensteen, with some reference to creators Scott McCloud and Will Eisner, I apply their understanding of how the tools of comics work (e.g. the visual and literal tools of gutters, panels, composition, lettering, etc.), and how this creates meaning within comics, and impacts how readers might receive the work. I believe that this methodological approach will highlight not only the compatibility between the Bible and comics, but also celebrate differences and areas of conflict and tension which arise and cannot always be resolved. This will allow the reader to view the study of the Bible in comics in a manner unlike the established disciplines of literature and art and help to prepare the ground for future studies in the Bible and comics.

## Layout & Structure

Chapter 1 of this thesis is a review of current literature on the Bible in/and comics and outline of the state of the field. In this chapter, I identify gaps in research and areas which require more work. While I focus on the field of Bible in/and comics, I also briefly look at the field of the Bible in literature, culture and art. Rather than assessing the state of the field, I have reviewed works which have influenced and impacted this project in one way or another and which have crossovers with the area of the Bible and comics. Chapter 2 is on creating a theoretical framework towards reading biblical comics and is where I discuss methodological approaches prevalent in comics, and how I will apply them to reading Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*.

Chapter 3 contains the introduction to, and overview of, R. Crumb and his *Book of Genesis, Illustrated*. This includes a short biography of the creator and his career in comics, an exploration of his style and artwork in *Genesis, Illustrated*, and a brief discussion of the reception and legacy of the book. This chapter ends with a discussion on Crumb's remediation but this time by examining the textual and visual sources Crumb names as influences for his project, with a view to exploring where and how they have affected the final comic book. From a textual standpoint, these include Robert Alter's translation and commentary of Genesis, the KJV, the JPS, and Teubal's study in *Sarah the Priestess*. From a visual standpoint, I consider Cecil B. deMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956); D.W. Griffiths' *Intolerance* (1916), as well as vaguer references such as Crumb's comments that he uses photographs from issues of *National Geographic* magazine and old photography books of "biblical-looking cities."<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 4 contains the case studies of the matriarch narratives which, as discussed, I use as examples to show the effects of comic book tools in remediations of biblical stories. Each case study opens with a summary of that character's role in Genesis. While I recognise that this is not appropriate for those reading this thesis from a biblical studies background, I have found it useful to introduce and summarise each matriarch for those who do not have such a background, and therefore do not know the characters. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this work, it is important to recognise that not everyone will be well versed in biblical stories. After the summary of that matriarch's stories, I provide an overview of Crumb's comments

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<sup>18</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

with regards to that character. *Genesis, Illustrated* has a comprehensive commentary to the text written by Crumb, which appears at the end of the book. I have used this, in conjunction with interviews, to outline his understanding of and approach to each matriarch.

Visual and textual analysis of each matriarchal narrative makes up most of each case study. Each case study includes biblical scholarship on the narratives, to contextualise Crumb's remediation within the scope of biblical studies. While Crumb does not say he explicitly uses scholarly readings of the women of Genesis to influence his work, I recognise the importance of placing his depiction of the women in scholarly conversation, both as a reflection of how his visualisations borrow from scholarly opinion, and how they also fit with modern scholarly understandings of women in Genesis. To that end, I use works by scholars such as Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, J. Cheryl Exum, Alice Bach, David Clines and Athalya Brenner-Idan to better contextualise Crumb's remediation of the matriarchs. Each case study is then summarised and the implications of reading each character in text-image format in Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* is discussed.

The concluding chapter summarises the points made in the case studies, connecting them with previous and current literature, and identifies the impact studying biblical comics has on the fields of reception history and interpretation history of the Bible.

## Limitations

As I have noted, the field of Bible and comics is fairly new and there are still many areas of research within the scope of biblical comics that have not been sufficiently addressed within this thesis or addressed at all. This thesis is limited in what it can achieve in this field. It is not possible to discuss every painting or comic book which represents Genesis, let alone the Bible as a whole. Likewise, in the examples of other biblical comics which I have provided above, I have discussed only English-language examples, not including French, Spanish or Italian examples which I know to exist. Looking at comics in other languages would have complicated my focus on Crumb's work as well as proving too big a project. This thesis is limited to Crumb's remediation of Genesis because it is one of the few biblical comics which is "word-for-word". Crumb's claim of including every word of Genesis is the main reason I chose his remediation as the focus of this thesis, because it is unusual in the category of biblical comics to incorporate every word. As I have discussed above, my hope is that by

focusing on this one biblical comic I will provide a framework for analysing biblical comics which can be applied to other examples of the genre.

## Clarification of terms

**Comic Book:** I use the term “comic book(s)” or “comics” specifically throughout this thesis, instead of “graphic novel.” Within the field of comics studies, there has been some debate on the use of the term “graphic novel” which, to some, indicates a hierarchy within comics which should not exist. The use of the word “novel” is particularly problematic, potentially differentiating between long-form and short-form comics, with the implication that long-form comics belong to a higher stratum than short-form comics. In my opinion, this is not the case, and while it is correct to observe there are many different genres and styles within the world of comic books, I am uncomfortable with the suggestion that some comic books are higher in intellectual (and often monetary) value than others because of their length or complexity. My opinion on this was informed by an illuminating paper and discussion led by Dr. Erin La Cour (University of Utrecht), at a seminar hosted by the Stirling Maxwell Centre (University of Glasgow), which was based on her article “Comics as a Minor Literature”.<sup>19</sup> However, if I am citing a scholarly work which refers to Crumb’s remediation as “graphic novel”, I do not change it to “comic book”.

**Remediation:** Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated* is not just an illustrated version of Genesis as the title suggests. While Crumb was comfortable with this term, insisting on its use over the publishers’ preference for “The Book of Genesis according to Crumb”,<sup>20</sup> I felt that referring to his work as an illustration diverted attention from the exegetical textual work that Crumb carried out in book. I argue that connotations of illustrations focus the reader mostly on the visual elements. As I will discuss, both text and image are important in his rendering, and thus I felt that “illustration” was not the correct term for his book. Further, “illustration” draws illustrated Bibles to mind and while Crumb’s book shares many traits with illustrated Bibles, and is arguably rooted in their history and tradition, it is more complex and detailed

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<sup>19</sup> Erin La Cour, “Comics as a Minor Literature,” *Image [&] Narrative* 17, no. 4 (2016), accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.php/imagenarrative/article/view/1336>.

<sup>20</sup> “R. Crumb illustrates the Bible,” NPR.



than illustrated Bibles which tend to have images intermittently. Thus, while it borrows from their genre, it exists outside of their limitations.

Similar to “illustration”, I also do not feel that “adaptation” or “interpretation” are helpful terms when describing *Genesis, Illustrated*. At the beginning of this project, I referred to the book as an adaptation, but as the project progressed, I felt that “adaptation” limited the potential of reading the comic book as anything more than an adaptation of biblical text. One of the questions which arises from my analysis of the case studies concerns the interpretive space which biblical comics inhabit, and ultimately, what biblical comics are in terms of reception and use. “Adaptation” potentially limits the exploration of those research areas, tying biblical comics to the “original” text of the Bible. “Interpretation” has similar limitations, but also implies Crumb has created an interpretation of the text which suits his own needs. While this is somewhat true, Crumb would disagree with “interpretation” because his intention was a “straightforward illustration job”<sup>21</sup> which illuminated what was in the text, not what his interpretation of the text was. Therefore, I do not call his *Genesis, Illustrated* an adaptation or illustration; instead, I have chosen to use “remediation”.

“Remediation” is a term used by J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*.<sup>22</sup> In their study, Bolter and Grusin describe remediation as the appropriation of the content of one medium into another, usually in terms of “new” media (for example, digital photography) retelling something originally found in an “old” medium (i.e. a painting).<sup>23</sup> In the case of *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb has remediated ancient biblical text (literature) into a comic book.

Remediation is either complete or visible; if complete, this refers to a new medium presenting itself without connection to the old medium it is remediating.<sup>24</sup> For example, Jason Aaron’s comic book *The Goddamned* adapts the story of Cain and Abel but without explicit reference to the biblical text or acknowledgment of the source.<sup>25</sup> Visible remediation refers to pieces of an old medium becoming part of, or inserted into, a new medium so that it remains visible even though it now belongs to a new adaptation.<sup>26</sup> Crumb’s *Genesis*,

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<sup>21</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>22</sup> J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Old media can remediate new media as well, but it is not as common. See: Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Jason Aaron and r. m. Guéra, *The Goddamned*, Vol. 1 (Portland, OR: Image Comics, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 47.

*Illustrated* falls into this category, taking the text of the Bible (from various authoritative sources) and inserting it into a new medium of text-image synthesis.

In Bolter and Grusin's words, "[t]he work becomes a mosaic in which we are simultaneously aware of the individual pieces' and their new, inappropriate setting."<sup>27</sup> I argue that readers of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* are aware of the biblical origins of the text thanks in part to the continuous signposting of sources by Crumb, as well as references to biblical text, and that the incorporation of the new medium of images alongside the text highlights the dichotomous elements of the comic book. It is because of this that I choose to call Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* a remediation over any other potential description.

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<sup>27</sup> Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 47.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

## The Bible in Comics

Starting from Dillenger's work in the 1960s, scholars in various fields have analysed the effects of juxtaposing image and text: Dillenger with regard to biblical texts;<sup>28</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell with regard to literature;<sup>29</sup> and Scott McCloud with regard to comic literature.<sup>30</sup> Much less attention has been devoted to the effect generated by presenting a familiar ancient text in an unfamiliar graphical medium.

There is little doubt and abundant evidence that the study of comic books in academia has grown in popularity over the previous decades. Several highly-reputable journals devoted to the study of comics exist, including: *The International Journal of Comic Art*; *European Comic Art*; and *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. There are several online forums devoted to the study of comics, from the broad-ranging *Comix-Scholars* list,<sup>31</sup> to the subject-area specific *Sacred & Sequential*.<sup>32</sup> Globally, there are now several annual and biennial conferences, such as the *International Graphic Novels and Comics Conference*, and the *International Bande Dessinée Society Conference*, both of which have close links with the University of Glasgow. Additionally, several of the more consumer-driven and fan-oriented Comic-Cons which take place across the world have academic conferences attached to their programmes; arguably the most famous of these is San Diego Comic-Con, which hosts an academic conference entitled *Comic Arts Conference* alongside its other popular events. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Leeds-based convention *Thought Bubble* runs a two-day academic conference, *The Comics Forum*, as part of its week-long convention.

Despite the rise in comic scholarship, very little serious academic attention has been paid to the subject of the Bible in comics; even less attention has been paid to the connection between the Hebrew Bible and graphic narratives. At present, scholars of religion and comics

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<sup>28</sup> John Dillenger, *Images and Relics: Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth Century Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> William J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> The *Comix-Scholars* list-serv offers a more private forum for academic discussion on comics and is members-only. It is available at: <http://www.english.ufl.edu/comics/scholars/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Sacred & Sequential* is available at: <http://www.sacredandsequential.org/>.

are mostly concerned with broader studies of the area, and not specific texts. One such scholar is A. David Lewis, a key figure in the field of religion in comics, whose research focus includes sacred texts, world religions and eschatology. Lewis runs the website *Sacred & Sequential* which is described as an “organisation of scholars explaining and exploring the intersection of religion and the comic art form.”<sup>33</sup> He has published several articles and books and co-edited collections exploring the connection between comics and religion. Most of his publications focus on topics such as afterlife narratives, genre theory and sacred texts, but none of his work focuses on the relationship between bible narratives and sequential art, except for an article published in 2002 entitled “The Secret Untold Relationship between Biblical Midrash and Comic Book Retcon.”<sup>34</sup>

In this article, Lewis suggests that the use of biblical midrash is similar to the employment of retroactive continuity in comic books:<sup>35</sup> both practices fill in the gaps ‘missing’ in the original literature to flesh out the details of the text and its structure, enabling it to perhaps make more sense to the reader, and to contextualise the text in a situation or location which is perhaps familiar to the reader. This comparison provides a useful – albeit loose – framework for identifying the ways in which comic books and traditional theological practices such as midrash act as tools for interpreting sacred text. It also provides a starting point for the exploration of using comic books as tools of contemporary biblical exegesis. However, within the article, Lewis does not consider the relationship between comic books and the retelling of biblical stories in any depth or with any clear examples, and this demonstrates a need for scholarly engagement in the area to help generate a deeper understanding of the relationship between the two forms. This thesis intends to go some way to fill that desideratum.

Together with Christine Hoff Kraemer, Lewis has also edited a collection of essays, *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, resulting from a conference of the same name hosted by the Luce Program in Scripture and Literary Arts at Boston University in April, 2008.<sup>36</sup> *Graven Images* is a wide-ranging collection of essays concerning the broad

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<sup>33</sup> “Resources: Sacred & Sequential Mission Statement,” Sacred & Sequential, accessed August 8, 2015, <http://www.sacredandsequential.org/resources/>.

<sup>34</sup> A. David Lewis, “The Secret Untold Relationship between Biblical Midrash and Comic Book Retcon,” *International Journal of Comic Art* 4 (2002), 261-275.

<sup>35</sup> Retroactive continuity, or retcon, is a tool used in comics, television and film production, and is typically described as a “piece of new information that imposes a different interpretation on previously described events, typically used to facilitate a dramatic plot shift or account for an inconsistency.” See: “Retcon”, Oxford English Dictionary, accessed April 7, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/retcon>.

<sup>36</sup> A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer, eds., *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

theme of religion in comics, and it is useful in shaping a comprehensive outline of academic discourse in the area of religion and comics. Although there is little to do with biblical comics, especially Hebrew Bible narratives, the collections of essays are useful as a starting point in the research process for my thesis, and one article has proved particularly helpful: G. St. John Stott's "Gold Plates, Inked Pages: The Authority of the Graphic Novel."<sup>37</sup>

Stott's essay "Gold Plates, Inked Pages," considers the issue of authority in Bible comics, addressing the question of whether comic adaptations of biblical stories are less authoritative than the original scripture, or if they should rather be taken as a kind of midrash on biblical narratives. As an example, Stott uses a comic book adaptation of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon was first written in 1830 by Joseph Smith Jr., who claimed his book was a translation of the ancient golden plates which contained the holy words; therefore, Smith's book is not the original source of the holy words. Because the comic book is an adaptation of a translation of the original source, Stott argues that the source of the comic book adaptation is not authoritative, but rather, is part of a 'constellation of texts' in which various versions of a work are viewed by the reader as being of equal worth, since none hold the true authority of the original source. In this respect, Stott is implying that the comic book retelling of the Book of Mormon is of equal worth to the book itself, as they are both adaptations/translation of an original source.

This is applicable to Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, as Stott applies this approach to biblical comics, arguing that they "are not to be dismissed as simplifications of a verbally complex source, but, instead, accepted as retellings of stories that had also inspired the authors of scripture."<sup>38</sup> The description of story retellings as 'constellations' originates in André Bazin's work on film adaptations of well-known stories, wherein Bazin argues that instead of considering adaptations as works made out of an original source and therefore of lesser value, literary critics (and by extension the general public) should consider adaptations as a facet of a single work: "the critic [...] would find not a novel out of which a play and a film has been 'made,' but rather a single work reflected through three art forms, an artistic pyramid with three sides, all equal in the eyes of the critic."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Gary St. John Stott, "Gold Plates, Inked Pages: The Authority of the Graphic Novel," in *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by A. David Lewis & Christine Hoff Kraemer (New York: Continuum, 2010), 78-92.

<sup>38</sup> St. John Stott, "Golden Plates, Inked Pages," 88.

<sup>39</sup> André Bazin, *Bazin at work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, edited by Bert Cardullo, translated by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (London: Routledge, 1997), 50.

While Stott does not use any biblical comics as examples in his paper, his approach can be applied to biblical comics, especially in the case of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* which includes "every single word" of the "original" text. I have already discussed the problem that Crumb claims to copy an original source for his remediation, a claim which is then contradicted by a list of both historical and contemporary sources, none of which include a biblical-Hebrew language version. However, the point remains that Crumb's remediation is another *version* of the Bible, which renders it in the same light Stott argues for The Book of Mormon. It is a single work reflected in another art form, part of the constellation of biblical adaptations in existence. In other words, Crumb's remediation is as legitimate and authoritative as any other version of Genesis, apart from the "original source".

A. David Lewis is a contributor to another collection of essays, edited by Dan W. Clanton Jr., entitled *The End Will Be Graphic: Apocalyptic in Comic Book and Graphic Novels*. This book brings together seven contributors from various disciplines to examine themes of apocalypticism within comic books.<sup>40</sup> Although the title implies engagement with religious texts, the contents have very little to do with biblical notions of apocalypse outside of scripture associated to John the Apostle. There is no reference to apocalyptic themes found in the Hebrew Bible. The collection is not a close analysis of the Bible, although some of the articles recognise that it serves as a basis and inspiration for many of the comic books discussed within. Furthermore, there is little exploration of the process of adapting a biblical text, theme or even character into a graphic novel. Of the contents that do deal with adaptation/remediation, A. David Lewis is one of the authors;<sup>41</sup> Emily Laycock is the other.<sup>42</sup> However, neither of these articles engage closely enough with biblical texts in the way which I must with R. Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*. Rather, these articles and the rest of the essays approach apocalypse as an invariable theme across a range of comic genres rather than considering what happens to biblical text when it is remediated.

These two volumes of essays are recent examples of scholarship concerned with religion and comics. The scholarly study of comics is itself a relatively new field; therefore, it is to be expected that an even more specific subject like the study of biblical comics is even less developed. Studies of religion in comics tend to focus on the incorporation of religious

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<sup>40</sup> Dan W. Clanton Jr., ed., *The End Will Be Graphic: Apocalyptic in Comic Books and Graphic Novels* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> A. David Lewis, "(Ir)reverence After Rapture: Mocking and Maintaining Christian Doctrine in *Battle Pope*, *Chronicles of Wormwood* and *Therefore, Repent!*", in *The End Will Be Graphic: Apocalyptic in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by Dan W. Clanton, Jr. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 44-58.

<sup>42</sup> Emily Laycock, "Graphic Apocalypse and the Wizard of Grotesque: Basil Wolverton, the Worldwide Church of God and Prophecy," in *The End Will Be Graphic: Apocalyptic in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by Dan W. Clanton, Jr. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 20-34.

themes into graphic narratives, or the appropriation of divine symbols into superhero characters. Don LoCicero's *Superheroes and Gods: A Comparative Study from Babylonia to Batman*, for example, draws comparisons between modern superheroes and ancient, mythological or religious gods from various cultures.<sup>43</sup> LoCicero concludes that the modern myth of a superhero which still prevails today is a recurring cultural motif which is used to make sense of the world. This argument is comparable to Joseph Campbell's well-known theories in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, *The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Popular Culture* edited by B. J. Oropeza is a collection of essays which covers themes from the appropriation of ancient divine traits into contemporary comic book figures, to themes of sacrifice and redemption in story-arcs.<sup>45</sup> Christopher Knowles' *Our Gods Wear Spandex*,<sup>46</sup> Greg Garrett's *Holy Superheroes! Exploring Faith and Spirituality in Comic Books*,<sup>47</sup> and Ben Saunders' *Do the Gods Wear Capes? Spirituality, Fantasy and Superheroes*,<sup>48</sup> are all written in a similar vein with a focus on comparative elements between mythology, religion and contemporary superhero figures, although Saunders' offering grapples with profound theological themes within comics more than focusing on superficial similarities between gods and superheroes.

While these works offer in-depth studies of superhero comics, they rarely touch on the vast range of other genres in comics and arguments then to be presented from a position of comics' scholarship rather than from a theological perspective. Thus, the argument is nearly always weighted towards the adaptation of religious themes rather than the way in which comics can function as vessels for exploration of theological or biblical ideas, or as a visual aid to sacred texts. This thesis is weighted towards exploring Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* in those areas, especially in terms of investigating if the very characteristic of combining text and image makes Bible comics ideal mediators in the process of interpreting and understanding sacred text. Therefore, while these studies advance certain areas of the study of religion and comics, they are not especially useful to this study.

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<sup>43</sup> Don LoCicero, *Superheroes and Gods: A Comparative Study from Babylonia to Batman* (London: McFarland & Company, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> B. J. Oropeza, ed., *The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Popular Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Knowles, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes* (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Greg Garrett, *Holy Superheroes! Exploring Faith and Spirituality in Comic Books* (Colorado Springs: Pinón Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Ben Saunders, *Do the Gods Wear Capes? Spirituality, Fantasy and Superheroes* (London: Continuum, 2011).

Currently, there have been no published monographs dedicated to scholarship in biblical comics. Most other existing scholarship in the field are in the form of articles and conference papers. However, three key papers which focus on Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* have proved influential in shaping this thesis and in considering my methodological approach. They are: "Graphically Depicted: Biblical Texts in Comic Form," by I. Alderman and C. Alderman;<sup>49</sup> "Interpretive Treatments of Genesis in Comics: R. Crumb and Davie Sim," by Don Jolly;<sup>50</sup> and "Graphic Bibles: The Word Becomes Picture" by R. Seesengood.<sup>51</sup>

Alderman and Alderman's article questions how editorial and artistic choices in biblical comics create meaning, and how the combination of text and image can achieve deeper theological meaning than image or text alone. They use Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* as a case study, alongside Siku's *Manga Bible* (2007)<sup>52</sup> and Iva Hoth's *The Picture Bible* (1978),<sup>53</sup> drawing on selected passages to explore the hypothesis that presenting the Bible in comic form acts "as an interpretive layer allowing different theologies to emerge."<sup>54</sup> They observe that the relationship between author, text and reader is foundational in the study of biblical literature, creating three 'points' of interpretation: the author's original thoughts when writing; the completed text; and the reader's understanding of the text. They argue, however, that comic books, however, have five interpretive points:<sup>55</sup>

1. Author (original source) →
2. Text (original text produced by author) →
3. Author-cum-reader (the reader of the original text, employing it as a source for his own version) →
4. Text 2 (the author-cum-reader's text) →
5. Reader (the reader of text 2)

Alderman and Alderman suggest that a comic book creator is at one and the same time "both interpreter and open to interpretation."<sup>56</sup> The article compares three examples but does not critically analyse them, and though Alderman and Alderman state that "different theologies

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<sup>49</sup> Isaac M. Alderman and Christina L. Alderman, "Graphically Depicted: Biblical Texts in Comic Form," *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 22, no.4 (2011), 22-36.

<sup>50</sup> Don Jolly, "Interpretive Treatments of Genesis in Comics: R. Crumb and Davie Sim," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 25, no.3 (2013), 333-343.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Paul Seesengood, "Graphic Bibles: The Word Becomes Picture," paper presented at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, St. Andrews, Scotland, July 9, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Siku, *The Manga Bible: From Genesis to Revelation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Iva Hoth, *The Picture Bible* (Illinois: David C. Cook, 1978).

<sup>54</sup> Alderman and Alderman, "Graphically Depicted", 22.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 36.



emerge”, they only outline the potential theological perspectives through which comics books can be read, for example, through postcolonial, feminist or queer lenses.<sup>57</sup> I am interested in their claim that biblical comics allow for different theologies to emerge and this is something I will examine in this thesis, specifically with regards to the case studies of the matriarchs in chapter 4 where I will argue that Crumb has presented a feminist interpretation of the matriarchal narratives. I am also interested in interrogating their claim that there are five points of interpretation in the creation and reception of biblical comics, and this is something I will examine further with regards to understanding how Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated* has been created and may be received.

In Don Jolly’s article on Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*, titled “Interpretive Treatments of Genesis in Comics,” he states that the graphic novel should be seen as an exegesis of the biblical text. He focuses on Genesis 1-2, describing how Crumb adds his own interpretation through artistic decisions, and through composition and structuring of text and image. Jolly argues that Crumb “uses the comic book format as a means of limiting the theological dimension of the text”<sup>58</sup> presenting the biblical narrative as a work of literature which he is simply illustrating. This is in accord with Crumb’s own comments on his work, particularly when he states that he does not believe that the Bible is the word of God, but rather the work of men, and that he has approached the task from this basis.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, Jolly argues that Crumb has produced an exegesis of Genesis which is both literature and sacred text; Crumb attempts to extract meaning from a “more direct engagement with the ancient text”<sup>60</sup> while layering the work with his own experiences and influences. Jolly demonstrates the dichotomy in Crumb’s work by acknowledging Crumb’s belief that he is producing a “straight illustration job” but also that he has been influenced by a number of sources and external factors, including the medium in which he is working. This is a good argument in favour of reading Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated* as exegesis rather than authoritative scripture, and one which I agree with.

Another point in Jolly’s reading of *Genesis, Illustrated* is that, unlike most biblical comics, Crumb is working within the cultural paradigms of comic book culture. Jolly argues that other biblical comics (such as those I mentioned in the introduction) are “not part of the contemporary culture surrounding comic books, nor are they part of its material

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<sup>57</sup> Alderman and Alderman, “Graphically Depicted”, 36.

<sup>58</sup> Jolly, “Interpretive Treatments of Genesis”, 333.

<sup>59</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>60</sup> Jolly, “Interpretive Treatments of Genesis”, 336.

infrastructure.”<sup>61</sup> He bases this on the fact that comic book retailers are less likely to stock biblical comics, and that comic book fans do not accord them the same status as they would non-biblical comics.<sup>62</sup>

I agree with this to an extent, and acknowledge it is important to address how and where comic book readers can access biblical comics. However, I question Jolly’s perception that Crumb’s work has been received more positively and on a different basis by comic book fans, because although Crumb is a world-renowned comic book writer and artist and has been part of the industry for over forty years, many of his fans were seriously underwhelmed by *Genesis, Illustrated*, citing their disappointment that the work does not adhere to Crumb’s usual sexualised, satirical or shocking style.<sup>63</sup> Many expected Crumb to produce a spoof version of the Bible rather than the straightforward version he made, and as such, reactions were not as positive as Jolly suggests.

Jolly’s analysis indicates that Crumb’s status as a comics’ hero does not buy him immunity from criticism or negative feedback from his audience. This implies that history and status in comics matters far less than Jolly suggests. I would also suggest that the audience for *Genesis, Illustrated* is different to Crumb’s normal market and as such, the market for the book might be less concerned with the creator than his usual fan-based audience might. If this is the case, then Crumb’s book is not situated within comic book culture as clearly as Jolly suggests. Rather, it sits within comics’ culture due to its medium, but outside of the culture due to its content and target audience, potentially in the realm of literature and of sacred texts and this clearly has implications for how the text is potentially received.

Finally, I turn to Robert Seesengood’s paper “Graphic Bibles: The Word Becomes Pictures”. Presented in the “Bible and Visual Cultures” section of the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in July 2013. Seesengood has two aims in his discussion of Crumb’s work; firstly, he interrogates Crumb’s claim that he has presented a complete, unabridged adaptation of Genesis, by assessing Crumb’s choice of source materials and his understanding of biblical commentary. Seesengood counters Crumb’s claim that he produced a straightforward illustration job,<sup>64</sup> arguing that by illustrating what was originally a text-only source, Crumb is interpreting the Bible and “creating an entirely new literary

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<sup>61</sup> Jolly, *Interpretive Treatments of Genesis*, 335.

<sup>62</sup> This is an interesting point for further study but one which is outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>63</sup> See for example: Dian Hanson, *Robert Crumb: Sketchbook (Vol.1) June 1964-Sept 1968* (Cologne: Taschen, 2016) which has a good range of Crumb’s early works, some of which might be considered satirical or shocking.

<sup>64</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

work.”<sup>65</sup> This is because of the interaction between the source material and Crumb’s own imagination.

This point is similar to Alderman and Alderman’s theory of points of interpretation in biblical comics, but also refers back to Bazin’s theory of a ‘constellation’ of works, in which critics should consider adaptations as a facet of a single work, and of equal value to other adaptations. It makes clear that Crumb’s remediation is just that, and not an authoritative version. However, Seesengood’s argument is that Crumb controls and guides the content and message of his version, even though in the introduction, Crumb insists that he stays true to the source material. An example of this is Crumb’s decision to make substantial use of Savina Teubal’s feminist reading of Genesis, as discussed in the introduction. As noted, Crumb is heavily influenced by Teubal and other sources and as such, his version of Genesis has been coloured by sources external to the biblical text.

The second aim of Seesengood’s paper is to explore how Crumb’s imagery both “challenge[s] and perpetuate[s] what Robert Alter has called the ‘reticence’ of biblical narrative in ways that, instead of simply illustrating Genesis, actually transform it.”<sup>66</sup> This, Seesengood argues, is achieved through the reception of the graphic novel. The reader must engage with the book through both text and image:

[R]equired to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art [...] and the regimens of literature become superimposed upon each other. The reading of a graphic novel is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit.<sup>67</sup>

Reading comic books, and by extension biblical comics, encourages readers to engage with the story on a level different to that of a text-only book. Seesengood argues that the qualities of biblical comics, and in particular Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*, lay the text bare through the inclusion of image, allowing the reader to interpret the text more freely. I disagree with this point, because instead of laying the text bare, the inclusion of images creates a visual world in which the images may limit the imagination of the reader. However, Seesengood’s point about the way readers have to engage with comic books and in this case, biblical comics, is important. Art and literature become intertwined, asking for a different kind of interpretive skill from the reader. This is a point I unpack and examine in chapter 2, when I

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<sup>65</sup> Seesengood, “Graphic Bibles”.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 2.

discuss methodological frameworks, specifically in relation to framing a reading of *Genesis, Illustrated* through comic theory.

These three articles, along with Bazin's theory of adaptations, Stott's examination of the issue of authority in Bible comics, and Lewis' exploration of biblical comics as midrash are intrinsic in shaping this thesis and in formulating answers to the research questions I posed in the introduction.<sup>68</sup> Seesengood's article and Bazin's theory are especially useful in helping me frame my approach to Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, in terms of taking the many facets of biblical comics into account: historical text, literature, art, reception, and interpretation, for example. This framework and the conclusions which it will help me draw will go some way to filling in the gaps left by the above studies. They will also identify areas which still need work, but as it must address areas including the Bible and literature, art and culture, I have given a brief outline of studies in those areas which have helped to shape my approach to the case studies.

## The Bible in Literature, Culture and Art

The study of the Bible in literature, in culture and in art is a well-established, vibrant field of research in biblical studies. This section outlines the studies I have found useful for the study of biblical comics, and is divided into the subsections of: a) Bible in Literature; b) Bible in Culture; and c) Bible in Art. In this section, it is not my intention to present a full review of literature associated with these areas, but rather to present works which have influenced my research methods and approach.

I have been influenced by, and therefore chosen, two studies which I deem to be essential studies on the subject of the Bible and literature. These are: *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (edited by David Jasper and Stephen Prickett)<sup>69</sup> because it was written and edited by two leading scholars in the field, who, in this volume, have provided an encapsulated history of the Bible as literature, with a view to the future of the field. The book is one of the original sources of my interest in the field of the Bible, comics and literature, and it explains the concept of reading the Bible as literature in a clear and concise manner, with good examples which are applicable to my reading of *Genesis, Illustrated*. Secondly, I have chosen *The*

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<sup>68</sup> See p.66 of this thesis.

<sup>69</sup> David Jasper and Stephen Prickett (eds.), *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

*Literary Guide to the Bible* (edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode).<sup>70</sup> Again, both of these scholars are leaders in the field of Bible and literature, and there is an existing connection between Alter and R. Crumb, given that Crumb made use of Alter's translation and commentary of Genesis throughout the compilation of his book. Thus, it makes sense to understand Alter's perspective as fully as possible to provide a base for my exploration of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*.

Turning to the Bible in culture, I have been influenced by *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (edited by Katie Edwards).<sup>71</sup> Whereas the first two studies have helped to establish the history and methods used in reading the Bible as literature, Edwards builds upon these by applying the same thought process to other types of modern media. Clearly, this has implications on reading contemporary cultural products such as biblical comics. I have also made extensive use of, and been greatly inspired by, Katie Edwards' fresh perspective on the issue of biblical literacy in advertising, particularly the image of Eve employed to sell products to consumers. To that end, the second volume I have used in this area is Edwards' *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising*.<sup>72</sup> The third book is an edited volume published by the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter* (edited by Philip Cuthbertson and Elaine M. Wainwright).<sup>73</sup> Published in 2010, this volume acknowledges the rise of scholarship in this area, but notes that up until that point, studies lacked a theoretical engagement with the Bible and popular culture. This volume begins to rectify that oversight, which is useful to my own research, especially as it contains an essay on prophetic voices in comic books.

In terms of examining the history and reception of the Bible and art, two volumes have been particularly useful because of their depth of content and range in subject matter. These are: *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (edited by J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu),<sup>74</sup> and Martin O'Kane's *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter*,<sup>75</sup> and I will discuss these in more depth in the third part of this section.

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>71</sup> Katie Edwards (ed.), *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Katie Edwards, *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Philip Cuthbertson and Elaine M. Wainwright (eds.) *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Exum and Nutu, *Between the Text and the Canvas*.

<sup>75</sup> Martin O'Kane, *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007).

## Studies on the Bible in Literature

Jasper and Prickett's study of the Bible and literature offers a general introduction, two introductory essays on the subject, and chapter-by-chapter examples of the interplay between the Bible and literature. The aim of the study is to: "indicate that the Bible has always been at the heart of the life of poetry and literature, in dialogue with creative writers through the ages in spite (or perhaps because) of its special status as a text,"<sup>76</sup> and helpfully, the writers draw attention to two different ways to understand the term 'Bible as literature.' The first way involves "a *replacement* of the Bible's 'religious' content by aesthetic values."<sup>77</sup> This essentially requires divorcing the Bible from theological assumptions or spiritual values, and instead, reading the Bible as if it were a piece of poetry or prose, wholly removed from religious content. The second way involves "a literary understanding of the Bible not as a replacement of its religious content, but as an *adjunct* to it, leading, so it was argued, to a greater understanding of it as a whole."<sup>78</sup>

Situating Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* within either of these frameworks is problematic, but Crumb appears to place himself firmly in the aesthetic tradition, because he claims he is not adding anything to the text of the Bible in his adaptation. He maintains that he approached the job as an illustrator, and has therefore produced a "straightforward illustration job,"<sup>79</sup> viewing the biblical text as if it were just a book, divorced from religion or spirituality.<sup>80</sup> Crumb is clear that the addition of visual art is intended, as he puts it, to "illuminate the text [and] bring to light things that people might pass over in a written text: adding pictures is a whole other dimension."<sup>81</sup> This suggests an almost Kantian idea of using art as the link between reason and understanding: "that art reveals the world in ways which would not be possible without the existence of art itself,"<sup>82</sup> as Crumb wishes to help the reader engage with the text through his drawings, thus revealing the world of Genesis through art.

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<sup>76</sup> Jasper and Prickett, *Bible and Literature*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>80</sup> Crumb writes at length in the introduction to *Genesis, Illustrated* that he believes the Bible to be the words of men, not the word of God, and that he understands the Bible as we know it to be a product shaped by centuries of political, sociological and historical movements. He does not acknowledge the text to be sacred or spiritual.

<sup>81</sup> "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

<sup>82</sup> Jasper and Prickett, *Bible and Literature*, 8.

This is an idea inherently important in the aesthetical approach to reading the Bible as literature.<sup>83</sup> Crumb is adding to the text with his own images and is therefore inserting another level of meaning to a text which has already been subject to centuries of meaning-making.<sup>84</sup> He is arguably trying to reveal the world of Genesis as he understands it through his own art, regardless of whether or not he believes the text to be spiritually meaningless. For this reason, I argue that Crumb's adaptation of Genesis also adheres to Jasper and Prickett's explanation of the second way of reading the Bible as literature: as an *adjunct*.

In their examples of this approach, Jasper and Prickett discuss authors who write adaptations of the Bible both from a religious perspective and from an angle which speaks to their own time and community. I argue that while Crumb is not creating his book from a religious perspective, he is creating it to speak to his own time and community: using the medium of comic books, for example, is a contemporaneous approach. As discussed above, he is also adding layers of meaning to the text, both through the choice of his sources, the combination of which help Crumb to formulate his own unique take on Genesis and through his artistic choices. However, even with the addition of images, Crumb makes a point of keeping the text as true to the "original" text as possible, thus maintaining a close link with what many view to be religious scripture. In short, Crumb is adding meaning with images and his inventive use of sources but also places his adaptation squarely in a religious-historical tradition.

Applying Jasper and Prickett's outline of the two ways of reading the Bible as literature to Crumb's book of Genesis highlights the problem with examining biblical comics as literature: it does not consider the 'image' part of 'text-image narrative'. However, it does allow us to *partially* read biblical comics using a literary approach, as long as it is understood that there must also be a framework for including images in order to comprehend the whole narrative properly.

Alter and Kermode's *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, is a collaboration between biblical scholar Robert Alter and literary critic Frank Kermode, in which they highlight the many techniques available in reading the Bible as literature. Alter and Kermode state their study is for both the religious and the secularised, and they approach the text conscious of its religiosity but without theological aims.<sup>85</sup> The book is concerned with the interpretation of

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<sup>83</sup> Jasper and Prickett, *Bible and Literature*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> This references Seesengood's approach to reading *Genesis, Illustrated* as outlined in the first section of the literature review.

<sup>85</sup> Alter and Kermode, *Literary Guide*, 2.

the biblical text rather than “using the Bible to understand other texts,”<sup>86</sup> or even understanding the Bible through other texts, which somewhat contrasts their study to the purpose of Jasper & Prickett’s volume.

In Alter’s introduction to the section on the Old Testament, he makes two points which have impacted my approach to the study of Crumb’s work. Firstly, Alter argues that previously, critical approaches to the Bible often focussed on discontinuities, contradictions, gaps and repetitions within the text while literary approaches often reveal unities within the text allowing the Bible to be read as a whole narrative rather than a piecemeal assortment of various genres, styles and even authors.<sup>87</sup> Alter stresses that the literary approach to reading the Bible does not need to focus on areas such as the composite origins of the text, the difference between the authors and redactors, or the difference between poetry and prose. He does not deny that such differences exist and are valuable as study aids but is explicit that this is not always helpful in reading the text.

This is useful advice to anyone reading the Bible as literature and has aided my own approach to reading Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*. Indeed, it would be prudent to theorise that Crumb’s interpretation is a literary approach to the text of Genesis, and his artwork is part of the unification of the text. However, this is a theory which needs to be closely examined: the artwork either unifies the text, synthesising the story and glossing over discrepancies, fissures and gaps, or the artwork only serves to highlight these issues even more plainly. I will discuss this further in the case studies of chapter 4.

Secondly, Alter discusses the fact that narratives are the dominant genre of the Hebrew Bible, but that these narratives are often sparse and vague:

There is never leisurely description for its own sake; scene setting is accomplished with the barest economy of means; characters are sped over a span of years with a simple summary notation until we reach a portentous conjunction rendered in dialogue; and, in keeping with all this, analysis and assessment of character are very rare, and then very brief.<sup>88</sup>

Alter invokes Erich Auerbach’s argument in *Mimesis* wherein Auerbach describes the Hebrew text as “fraught with background,”<sup>89</sup> meaning that on the surface, the text offers no details which enables the reader to read more thoughtfully into the text, either theologically

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<sup>86</sup> Alter and Kermode, *Literary Guide*, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Alter also notes that this is an approach in line with the aesthetic predisposition, similar to Jasper and Prickett’s discussion on literary approaches. See: Alter and Kermode, *Literary Guide*, 22.

<sup>89</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (New Jersey: Princeton, 1953), chapter 1, as cited in Alter and Kermode, *Literary Guide*, 23.



or psychologically, for example. Again, this is a point which I believe should be applied to Crumb's interpretation. If Crumb has made use of the sparseness of the text and the idea of the "background" space to develop his own thoughts and subsequent artwork to Genesis, then the question remains: is his version less "fraught with background" and less open to interpretation because he has, in effect, filled in the gaps with artwork? This question must be addressed in my analysis and response to reading Crumb's remediation of Genesis.

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## Reframing biblical literacy outside of literature: the Bible in Culture

In the introduction to *Rethinking Biblical Literacy*, Edwards states that the book has no overarching thesis uniting the compilation of studies, but that the purpose of the book is to offer "multiple perspectives on the biblical literacies evidenced in popular culture."<sup>90</sup> The collection addresses the problematic idea of biblical literacy, noting that there is no standard way to measure biblical literacy or even define it. It also addresses the fact that for many years, the media, churches and various religious figureheads have pointed out that as a whole, the Western world is becoming less religious and more secularised in its collective mind-set and this is demonstrated by the fact that people do not have an intimate knowledge of the Bible anymore.<sup>91</sup> The articles within the book seek not to refute this, but to instead explore the idea of what biblical literacy is, and to examine where it exists outside of the normal settings.

Edwards hopes to achieve this over the course of nine multi-disciplinary articles, all of which provide insight into how the Bible is used in popular culture. Questions arise such as: what do we mean by biblical literacy? Is it about knowing reams of Scripture by heart, or is it a mere acquaintance with biblical characters?<sup>92</sup> Who should be biblically literate?<sup>93</sup> Finally, and most appropriate to this study, how do contemporary cultural products demonstrate biblical literacy, especially in terms of selection and adaptation of texts?<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Edwards, *Biblical Literacy*, x.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, ix.

<sup>92</sup> James G. Crossley, "What the Bible Really Means: Biblical Literacy in English Political Discourse," in *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* edited by Katie Edwards (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 23-45.

<sup>93</sup> Iona Hine, "The Quest for Biblical Literacy: Curricula, Culture and Case Studies," in *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* edited by Katie Edwards (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 47-67.

<sup>94</sup> Robert J. Myles, "Biblical Literacy and *The Simpsons*" in *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* edited by Katie Edwards, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 143-162.

While the various studies make use of products in popular culture, none of them discuss comic books, but arguably, the same questions can be applied to that area because of the crossover between text, image and cultural products. To that end, I have made use of the studies in and the aims of Edwards' book in developing my approach towards this study. I especially wish to address the idea of multiple literacies which Edwards' highlights in her introduction, by asserting that comics provide a new "space" to read the Bible. This space has its foundations both in literature and in art, as well as in the Bible and popular culture, and therefore should be considered an alternative way to understanding biblical literacy outside of the norm.

The second book I have used by Katie Edwards concerns the re-appropriation of biblical characters and stories in popular culture: this time however, the focus is narrowed to the figure of Eve and the use of her image in advertising. This is relevant to my study on many levels: it touches on the portrayal of women in the Bible in contemporary popular culture, the use of the Bible in media outside of literature, and also provides a postfeminist reading of Eve in contemporary culture. Most useful to this study are the aims which Edwards sets out at the beginning of her book, and which have influenced my approach.

Edwards states that in biblical scholarship, there is a concern that a study such as hers "detracts from the search for the 'original meaning' of the biblical text," but that she does not believe we can ever truly know the original, authorial intent; instead, Edwards is interested in discussing the way the text functions in the present, and the "meanings, messages and implicit and social cultural assumptions it is used to convey."<sup>95</sup> The author is dead in Edwards' study, and the impact of the narrative on the present is her interest.

The death of the author does not apply to my work; at least, not fully. The author of *Genesis, Illustrated* is alive and well, and has provided many insights into the meaning behind his work, including in an interview on the subject for this thesis.<sup>96</sup> However, that does not mean his implied meanings should be taken as absolute, and nor does it mean the reader is aware of his intentions while reading *Genesis, Illustrated*. Indeed, to many readers of his work, the author *is* dead. Referring to Alderman and Alderman's hypothesis on the points of entry for meaning in a text, it is understood that the author's implied meaning is not the same thing as the reader's understanding. Moreover, as we understand in the case of Crumb's adaptation, it is an interpretation of several versions of Genesis. While his belief was that he was depicting the "original text", this cannot be the case as I discussed in the introduction to this

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<sup>95</sup> Edwards, *Admen and Eve*, viii.

<sup>96</sup> See appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb.

thesis. Therefore, while it is true we cannot reclaim the original meaning of the biblical text, it is not wholly true that we cannot fully understand Crumb's implied meanings. Simply put, there is a potential that Crumb's adaptation of Genesis speaks of a feminist reading of the matriarchs, and presents a modern Genesis for a modern reader, depending on how it is received.

Edwards points out that her study acknowledges the influence of the Bible on western contemporary culture rather than its authority,<sup>97</sup> and my thesis is also more concerned with understanding the influence of the Bible on comics (in the west) than with its perceived authority. This is a point which is explored in the discussion of textual and visual sources in chapter 3, as well as in my consideration of biblical comics as text-image exegesis in the case studies of chapter 4. While Edwards focuses on the appropriation of Eve in advertising to sell goods to consumers in her study, and that is not directly related to my area of study, I have included this book because it raises pertinent questions which are connected to my research.

The third volume in this area, *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter*, also raises questions concerning authority, meaning-making and reception of the Bible in cultural products and culture in general. Elaine M. Wainwright notes in the introduction that as of the date of publishing, there existed no "systematic study of the interrelationship between the Bible and popular culture,"<sup>98</sup> and that there probably never will be a single, theoretical or hermeneutical framework with which to approach the study of the Bible and popular culture. Clearly, this is due to the wide range of media which engage with the Bible, which cannot all conform to the same approach.<sup>99</sup> However, this volume emphasises how important the relationship between the Bible and popular culture is, highlighting that it is a seriously understudied and under-utilised field.

The volume also offers a range of hermeneutical and theoretical approaches for analysing various cultural products, including through the lens of reception history, theories of secularisation, and intertextuality between biblical and non-biblical texts. This is an important consideration for when I outline my methodological approach to analysing Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*; that, as no single framework currently exists, it will be influenced by approaches which are both well-established (e.g. Bible and literature, and gender studies in the Bible) and still in their infancy (e.g. comics studies). Furthermore, this

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<sup>97</sup> Edwards, *Admen and Eve*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Elaine M. Wainwright, "Introduction" in *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter* edited by Philip Cuthbertson et al (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 8.

volume also highlights the need for more studies in Bible and popular culture, a charge which this thesis goes some way to meeting.

## The Bible in Art

The focus has thus far been on the textual aspect of the Bible and comics, along with the legacy and heritage of the Bible in contemporary culture. Similar attention must now be paid to artistic renderings of the Bible, and how images can serve to either provide or confuse biblical text for readers. There are two books which have been of particular use to me in this area.

*Between the Text and Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (edited by Exum and Nutu) aims to “create a dialogue between the biblical text and biblical art.”<sup>100</sup> By biblical art, the editors are referring mostly to paintings or etchings which are dated from the sixteenth-century onwards, and include artists such as Rembrandt, Salomon de Bray, Gentileschi, William Blake and Marc Chagall. None of the examples used throughout the various studies in this book look at images which have biblical text incorporated within them, other than within the titles of the paintings. Nevertheless, understanding how artists decide to turn word into image is a clearly a substantial part of my research on text-image narratives, and so these studies are highly relevant.

As the introduction highlights, there is an ongoing conversation between artistic representations of the Bible and biblical text: “[T]he Bible has played an inspirational role in art for centuries, and art has, in turn, influenced the way the Bible is read.”<sup>101</sup> Artistic representations of textual narratives, not just biblical narratives, can help to either disambiguate a text or interrogate a text. Either way, it is way of subjecting a biblical source to exegetical investigation. Thus, biblical art is often referred to as visual exegesis. This is a relationship which is now emerging in comics, as shown through various examples in the introduction to this thesis. However, the term visual exegesis does not consider the important combination of text and image which characterises comics, thus, it might be more useful to refer to it as text-image exegesis.

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<sup>100</sup> Exum and Nutu, *Between the Text and the Canvas*, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Exum and Nutu identify the point where, they argue, a meaningful dialogue emerges between text and visual art:

Staging a meaningful dialogue between the text and the canvas is often a matter of identifying an interpretive crux – a conundrum, gap, ambiguity, or difficulty in the text, a stumbling block for interpretation or question that crops up repeatedly in artistic representations of it – and following its thread as it knits the text and painting together in complex and often unexpected ways.<sup>102</sup>

Examples follow in the first two essays of the book, where Exum discusses Salomon de Bray's seventeenth-century painting of *Jael, Deborah and Barak*, an image which has no textual basis. Exum argues that the artist has presented a visual representation of an issue which was problematic for readers of the text; namely, the identity of the hero of that biblical story.<sup>103</sup> This is an example of an artist presenting the viewer with a visual representation of an interpretive issue in the biblical text.

In contrast, Hugh Pyper presents an essay which analyses an artistic representation of a biblical text. "Love Beyond Limits: The Debatable Body in Depictions of David and Jonathan" discusses visual representations of the relationship between David and Jonathan. Specifically, Pyper refers to representations which challenge traditional depictions of the characters, as well as the relationship between the characters. Pyper argues that these paintings reflect the ambiguity found within the biblical narrative, as well as expressing the artist's understanding of the story.<sup>104</sup> In that respect the paintings which Pyper discusses, which include images by Giovanni Cima da Conegliano, Rembrandt, Julius Schnoor von Carolsfeld and Lord Leighton, are reflective of the text and of the artist.

The volume also includes an essay by Christine E. Joynes exploring the contribution of art to biblical exegesis,<sup>105</sup> in which Joynes highlights the fruitful dialogue which can often result from interactions between theology and the arts. Joynes analyses visual representations of the beheading of John the Baptist to show how artistic choices can lead viewers to "reflect upon features [of the story] which are often implicit, ambiguous or unspecified in the Gospels."<sup>106</sup> Using three examples, Joynes identifies three key issues which must be taken

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<sup>102</sup> Exum and Nutu, *Between the Text and the Canvas*, 2.

<sup>103</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, "Shared Glory: Salomon de Bray's *Jael, Deborah and Barak*," in *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible in Art and Dialogue*, edited by J. Cheryl Exum et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 11-13.

<sup>104</sup> Hugh Pyper, "Love Beyond Limits: The Debatable Body in Depictions of David and Jonathan," in *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue*, edited by J. Cheryl Exum et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 39-40.

<sup>105</sup> Christine Joynes, "Visualizing Salome's Dance of Death: The Contribution of Art to Biblical Exegesis," in *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* edited by J. Cheryl Exum et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 145-163.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

into consideration when examining the relationship between art and biblical exegesis: 1) the involvement of the interpreter in the act of interpretation; 2) the potential for art to fill “imaginative spaces” in the text, that is, visual representations can fill in gaps which the text has left; and 3) the choices made by the artist about what to represent and what to leave out.<sup>107</sup> These issues combined often reflect the intention of the artist as well as indicating their interpretation of the story. Joynes concludes that visual representations of biblical stories are vital to the field of biblical exegesis and reception history, precisely because art continually refreshes and uncovers potential meanings in the text.

This is a thought shared by Martin O’Kane in his monograph, *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter*. O’Kane describes the visual nature of biblical language, arguing that often, the text is written in such a way as to encourage the reader to visually imagine scenes and characters, and that artists’ interpretations of such biblical texts can be viewed as exegetical rather than illustrative.<sup>108</sup> Clearly, both the artists’ rendering of a biblical image and the viewers’ reception of the finished painting are both somewhat subjective and personal to the artist and each viewer, and are often created/received in context of the artist/viewer’s lives; however, the point O’Kane demonstrates is that often, image can act as a commentary to biblical narratives, extending and increasing the afterlives of the text.

Like Joynes, O’Kane argues that art has the capacity to uncover hidden meanings within text. He illustrates this with the idea of metaphors, asserting that

it is only through the medium of metaphor that we can begin to understand and articulate the nuances and subtleties of visibility in the Bible [...] metaphor is fundamental not only to our understanding of language but also to our appreciation of the visual arts. It provides that common ground between text and image that helps us explore the parallel processes at work in the way a viewer draws out what lies hidden or subtly obscured in a painting.<sup>109</sup>

For O’Kane, the use of metaphor is a bridge between text and image, and an example of the viscosity of language in the Bible.<sup>110</sup> His argument for art as exegesis is examined across the book in chapters which deal with six different themes: the adoration of the Magi; the flight into Egypt; the deception of Isaac; the ‘Man of Sorrows’ in Isaiah 53; and biblical landscapes. These case studies showcase the argument of reading art as exegesis and demonstrate the complexities of reading into the layers of interpretation which lie between

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 160-1.

<sup>108</sup> For example, see O’Kane, *Painting the Text*, 126-7, where he discusses examples of paintings concerning scenes between Isaac and Jacob, concluding that artist renderings often add to the drama of the text, expand the story, and allow glimpses of hidden meanings in the text.

<sup>109</sup> O’Kane, *Painting the Text*, 4.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 3.

source material, translation and artists' renderings.<sup>111</sup> As the book is concerned with paintings, it does not deal with art which also incorporates text. However, the argument O'Kane draws across the chapters is convincing and his analysis of specific paintings highlights motifs and visual tools, such as symbols, gestures and composition which I look for in the case studies in chapter 4.

This review of the Bible in/as literature, in art and in culture/cultural products is by no means an exhaustive list. It is not the purpose of this thesis to fully examine these areas, but it is my intention to show how the study of comic book remediations of the Bible, although a relatively new field of research, is part of the history of biblical interpretation and reception studies. The books which I have reviewed in the above sections shape theoretical frameworks for analysing literature, art and cultural products, and comic books belong in each of these categories. To not acknowledge these works, and other studies which have influenced them and been influenced by them, would potentially result in a superficial analysis of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*. The following chapter incorporates some of the frameworks, concepts and suggestions from these studies, but places them in conversation with comics' theorists Ann Miller, Thierry Groensteen, Scott McCloud and Will Eisner to present an inter-disciplinary methodological framework with which to analyse Crumb's comic book.

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<sup>111</sup> For example, O'Kane discusses the reception of Poussin's *The Four Seasons* which have are often interpreted allegorically, and which also relate to philosophical ideas and contemporary social situations in Poussin's life, all of which add to the layers of interpretation a painting can bring to text. Ibid, 213.

## Chapter 2: A Theoretical Framework towards reading Biblical Comics

Areas of interpretation, as highlighted by Alderman and Alderman, exist at various points in the production and reception of adaptations of literary works into comics.<sup>112</sup> The fifth point contains within it, several additional points of interpretation, brought about by the adaptation of a text-only work into work which contains both text and image. In other words, the heterogeneous characteristics of comics means there are many elements within the final adaptation that also act as points where interpretations can be assumed or applied: the composition of panels, the illusion of time, use of gesture, colour or space, and the visual relationship between the text and the image, for example.

This thesis is focused on Crumb's use of comics tools and resources in his remediation of Genesis and will address more widely the impact on biblical narratives of being turned into text-image stories. I will concentrate on points 2, 3 and 4 of interpretation identified in the model put forth by Alderman and Alderman: that is, how does Crumb come to an understanding of Genesis through his combined reading of various sources (noting that the concept of a single source for Genesis does not exist); how does Crumb remediate his reading of Genesis into a comic utilising comic resources; and more broadly speaking, the type of space that biblical comics, drawn from Crumb's example, inhabit or create, especially when compared to text-only sources.

Points 2, 3 and 4 in the framework by Alderman and Alderman are of central concern in this thesis. The interpretive layers that appear within *Genesis, Illustrated* (text 2 in the theory put forth by Alderman and Alderman) are best examined through reading *Genesis, Illustrated* against a comics-based theoretical framework, and that is the purpose of this chapter. By applying text-image theory to a biblical comic, I will demonstrate where Crumb has applied his own interpretation, and where the text he has produced allows for interpretation, and I will demonstrate these points in chapter 4, where I carry out the close reading of the matriarchal narratives.

I cannot examine the first point of interpretation identified by the study above: the original author/authors of Genesis remain unknown and their motivations or intentions cannot ever

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<sup>112</sup> Alderman and Alderman, "Graphically Depicted", 22.



be clearly identified. The last point of interpretation involves the reader of the text; I assume this role but I am limited to my own reading of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* and cannot address the question of reader reception of the text more widely within the limited scope of this thesis.

## Structure

Like textual Bibles, biblical comics can be read in many ways: through postcolonial criticism, gender theories, or from a perspective of certain literary values and so forth. They can also be interpreted under the focus of artistic lenses: art historical perspectives; social criticism and technical approaches, for example. However, the answers I seek to the questions identified in the introduction<sup>113</sup> are best addressed by reading Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* with a view to addressing the text-image relationship specifically. It is that aspect which differentiates Crumb's remediation from literary or artistic approaches. It is the purpose of this chapter, therefore, to discuss a framework of reading comics which I will apply to the case studies of the matriarchs in chapter 4, discussing where points of interpretation occur within the text.

Using a comics-based theoretical framework to analyse a biblical comic such as Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* is novel in the sense that it has not been done before. However, it is also historical in the sense that it relies on a history of Bible and literature, Bible and art, and Bible and reception history to contextualise the results. It also relies on theorists who specialise in analysing text-image narratives, regardless of whether they are biblical in nature or not.

I use three seminal works in comics' theory to serve as a foundation for my methodology. These are: *Reading Bande Dessinée* by Ann Miller,<sup>114</sup> *The System of Comics* by Thierry Groensteen,<sup>115</sup> and *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud. Each of these studies outline methods of storytelling within comics, exploring tools and modes used within the medium which act as signifiers and codes to the reader, often on a subconscious level. Even though these studies are concerned with the medium of comics, they are based in semiological and narratological approaches developed by theoreticians such as Ferdinand de Saussure,

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<sup>113</sup> See p.6 of this thesis.

<sup>114</sup> Ann Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip* (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007).

<sup>115</sup> Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007).

Charles Peirce and Roland Barthes.<sup>116</sup> As I am examining a biblical comic with a comics-based framework, I have also used works by theorists working in the field of translation and adaptation of biblical materials.<sup>117</sup>

If this methodological framework is based on reading text-image narratives as meaning-making devices, then the lens through which I apply this framework is based in gender studies, due to my focus on the matriarchs and motherhood. As outlined in the introduction, Crumb is interested in the matriarchs of Genesis; an interest which was piqued by Savina Teubal's theories concerning Sarah as high-priestess. I argue that the relationship between matriarchs and patriarchs in the Genesis narratives is thus affected by Crumb's reading of Teubal, and I have taken this into account by framing his understanding of the matriarchs against other, scholarly readings of the matriarchs. As such, the final section in this chapter offers an overview of my approach to the idea of gender and power within Genesis which is framed by critical discussions by biblical scholars including Philip R. Davies and David Clines,<sup>118</sup> J. Cheryl Exum,<sup>119</sup> Athalya Brenner-Idan,<sup>120</sup> Alice Bach,<sup>121</sup> and Hemchand Gossai,<sup>122</sup> among others.

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<sup>116</sup> See: R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1993); R. Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers et al (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967); Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally et al, translated by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 2013); C. S. Peirce, *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*, edited by James Hoopes (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>117</sup> See: Scott S. Elliott, "Comic Testaments: Graphic Novels and the Biblical Imagination," in *Translation and the Machine: Technology, Meaning, Praxis* edited by Steve Berneking et al (Rome: American Bible Society, 2008), 103-124; Gregor T. Goethals, "The Imaged Word: Aesthetics, Fidelity and New Media Translations," in *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*, edited by Paul Soukup et al (New York: American Bible Society, 1999), 133-172; Robert Hodgson Jr., "Semiotics, Fidelity, and New Media Translation," in *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*, edited by Paul Soukup et al (New York: American Bible Society, 1999), 233-248; Joy Sisley, "Power and Interpretive Authority in Multimedia Translation," in *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*, edited by Paul Soukup et al (New York: American Bible Society, 1999), 203-217; and, Ubaldo Stecconi, "Peirce's Semiotics for Translation," in *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*, edited by Paul Soukup et al (New York: American Bible Society, 1999), 249-261.

<sup>118</sup> Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, eds., *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>119</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

<sup>120</sup> Athalya Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Women: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015); Athalya Brenner, ed., *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>121</sup> See: Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>122</sup> See: Hemchand Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

## Reading Biblical Comics: A Critical Approach

Ann Miller's *Reading Bande Dessinée* is an examination of critical approaches to reading French-language comics, but the same tools and techniques described and utilised by Miller can be applied to comics in any language. The work is seminal in its field, and draws upon Groensteen's definitions and approaches closely,<sup>123</sup> as well as building upon semiological studies and comics theories. Miller outlines three key categories of comics resources, which she terms: *Mise en page*, *sequential links*, and *tressage*.<sup>124</sup> Groensteen refers to the same categories as: *spatio-topical code*, *restricted arthrology*, and similar to Miller, *tressage* or braiding/weaving.<sup>125</sup> I will use Miller's terms except in the case of *mise en page*, which I substitute for Groensteen's English-language *spatio-topical code* although the two are not directly interchangeable.

In Miller's study, she suggests that resources of comics can be approached by considering the articulation of sequential art, or as an art which may involve text and image.<sup>126</sup> The former approach is constructive in drawing out how meaning is made within panels, and between panels.<sup>127</sup> This approach is especially useful in discussing how text is inserted into image, and while I discuss this, my main objective is of discussing the resources of comics as sequential art, in which the inclusion of text is of equal importance to image.

### Spatio-topical code

This refers to the arrangement of panels on the page, which may include the size, shape and position of panels, incrustation (panels overlaid with panels), the space between panels (the 'gutter'), the page itself as a single unit (multistage-multiframe),<sup>128</sup> and the exterior space outlining the panels which Groensteen refers to as the 'hyperframe.'<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Groensteen's work is translated from French to English by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, and in places, the translation struggles to convey the original. This is partly the reason I have chosen to use Miller's work in the first instance, supported by Groensteen, where the translation makes sense.

<sup>124</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 83-95. There are other terms and different approaches to these areas of comics studies, but I have chosen to limit the terminology to those terms employed by Miller, Groensteen and McCloud. However, for more discussion on the topic, see for example: Mario Saraceni, *The Language of Comics* (London: Routledge, 2003); Benoit Peeters, *Case, planche, récit: lire la bande dessinée*, translated by Jesse Cohn (Paris: Casterman, 1998).

<sup>125</sup> Groensteen, *System of Comics*, 30.

<sup>126</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 82.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Groensteen, *System of Comics*, 30.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Groensteen describes the ‘hyperframe’ as being to the page what the frame is to the panel: it is the frame which encompasses the panels on any given page.<sup>130</sup> It can take many forms, from thick black lines which border the panels within, to no line at all, in which case the hyperframe is made up of the frames of the panels, with intermittent breaks in between the panels. It serves the task of creating consistency across the page, unifying the panels visually. In *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb does not draw a hyperframe, instead the panels make up the hyperframe. There is a thick band of blank paper around the hyperframe; this empty border contrasts with the heavily detailed imagery within the panels and I argue that it allows the reader space to imagine and reflect upon the content of the panels, as well as providing physical space for marginalia.<sup>131</sup>

Within the multistage-multiframe, the size, shape and placements of panels (both on the page and in relation to each other) also encourage the narrative to be read and framed in a certain way. As Miller notes, “[T]he relationship between panels on the page is a function of their size, shape and position.”<sup>132</sup> By this, she means that the configuration of panels can visually convey a change in tone, mood, action or a shift in narrative. Will Eisner argues similarly, suggesting that panel shapes and sizes are indicators of emotional function within the narrative and that they encourage the reader to generate their own reaction to the action, “and thus heighten emotional involvement in the narrative.”<sup>133</sup>

For example, Crumb’s version of Genesis 3:4-8 contains various panel sizes, each of which contribute to the visual narrative in different ways (see appendix B, fig 2.1). The grid pattern consists of two panels on the top row, three panels in the middle row, and two panels on the bottom row. Panel 1 on the page is of the serpent persuading Eve to eat the fruit of the tree. Panel 2 is a depiction of Eve from behind, looking at the tree; her figure takes up most of the space in the frame, potentially indicating her culpability. Panel 3 on the second row depicts Eve eating the fruit, panel 4 is of her offering it to Adam, and panel 5 is of the consequences of their actions: “and the eyes of the two were opened and they knew that they were naked.” Panel 6 in the bottom row shows Eve and Adam hiding their nakedness with loincloths, and panel 7 is of the pair hiding from God behind some foliage.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Marginalia in Bibles is a well-established tradition. Crumb may not have purposefully created these spaces but external influences in his research on Genesis could have subconsciously resulted in space for note-taking.

<sup>132</sup> Groensteen, *System of Comics*, 30.

<sup>133</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 61. McCloud also discusses emotional reactions to visual elements in chapter five of *Understanding Comics*.

Within this page, the size, shape and position of the panels drives the narrative forward by controlling the pacing of the story, the focus of the reader, and emotional content. The pace of the story is controlled by narration and dialogue; the more words on the page, the longer it takes the reader to read and process. The first two panels are full of narration and dialogue. The images in panels 1 and 2 also slow the process down, as very little action occurs within them; in the first panel, Eve is looking at the serpent as it speaks, and in the second panel, Eve gazes at the tree. The same amount of physical space on the page is given to these two panels as is given to the next three panels in the second row; however, the smaller panels quicken the pace, because of both their smaller size which allows the reader to process them quicker, and because there are fewer words so they are quicker to read. These three panels depict the latter half of Gen 3:6 and the first half of Gen 3:7. The last two panels are similar in size to the first two, and again slow the pace down due to their larger size, higher number of words and more detailed visual content, all of which take longer for the reader to process.

While Crumb does not usually change the shape of the panels from square/rectangular,<sup>134</sup> he does use the size of panels to emphasise or call attention to certain aspects of the narrative, or to relay the idea of time passing to the reader.<sup>135</sup> The smaller panels often have close-ups of the characters or are zoomed in on a significant moment of action in the narrative. The larger panels often have more detail (for example, background scenes and characters) but less action.

This is the case, for example, in Crumb's remediation of Gen 3:4-8, where he deliberately positions his panels to relay his own take on the story in one page.<sup>136</sup> As we have seen, the page opens with the serpent telling Eve she will not die but will become like God if she eats the fruit. The closing panel of that page shows the partial consequences of Eve eating the fruit: Eve and Adam hiding from God in the garden, ashamed of their nakedness. The page moves from temptation to action to consequence, enveloping the key moments of this narrative in the multistage-multiframe. One key moment not included in the page, however, is God's punishment; it appears on the next page. The panel of Eve and Adam hiding from God in the garden is in the bottom right-hand corner. This position is often used to create suspense in comic books, because the reader cannot see the next page; it is outside of the

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<sup>134</sup> This is the case in the whole of *Genesis, Illustrated*, except on a few occasions where the content of the panel is describing a thought or a dream, and he uses rounded or wavy frames. Some of the square/rectangular panels have text indented into them which cuts the shape, but I would argue this does not change the reading of the panel.

<sup>135</sup> I discuss the concept of portraying time in a note at the end of this section.

<sup>136</sup> See appendix B, Fig 2.1.

perifield<sup>137</sup> and therefore they cannot know what will happen without turning the page. This is true of Fig 2.1, as the reader does not know how God will react to Eve and Adam's transgression; Crumb has utilised this tool of comics to create suspense within the narrative for the reader, forcing them to turn the page to discover God's punishment.

While each panel is a single unit within the page, its contents are also affected by the perifield: "the [comics] image will always be perceived simultaneously with other images."<sup>138</sup> In other words, even though each panel is a single unit it is framed by what goes before and what comes after, both in terms of content and in terms of the fact that the reader's eye can see the surrounding panels in their peripheral vision.<sup>139</sup> This is apparent in Fig 2.1, as the reader can see the fruit-laden tree in their peripheral vision while the serpent tempts Eve. Similarly, the reader can see Adam eat the fruit on the periphery of Eve taking the first bite, as well as the consternation which follows. Finally, the reader can see the couple hiding in the foliage in their peripheral vision of reading the panel where Eve and Adam clothe themselves for the first time. The power of the perifield is to contextualise the contents of the panels within the larger story arc, and this is an important tool which Crumb utilises to great effect throughout Genesis.

Miller identifies incrustation as another important resource of the spatio-topical code. Incrustation, or the superimposition of panels on each other, is not a resource Crumb employs in *Genesis, Illustrated*, but it is not part of Crumb's usual drawing style and so it is not unusual that he does not use it. Incrustation is normally used to highlight details in small panels set against a wider perspective, or to indicate an interruption of the visual narrative for the purposes of plot development or as a visual contradiction to something which has occurred in the main panel.<sup>140</sup> The lack of incrustation is further evidence of Crumb's perceived fidelity to the text. He chooses to ensure each panel – and each piece of text – is uninterrupted visually or textually in adherence to the biblical text.

Gutters, or the space between panels, is another important tool in the resource kit of comic creators. There are various ways to utilise this space, including the use of imagery bleeding into the area which can suggest the story has no boundaries and is part of a wider narrative,

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<sup>137</sup> The perifield, or *périchamp*, is a term introduced by Peeters which describes how each panel is read with other panels in visual periphery. Therefore, panels are not read alone, but along with neighbouring panels. Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 83.

<sup>138</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 83.

<sup>139</sup> McCloud calls this an act of "observing the parts but perceiving the whole" as 'closure'. He argues closure can take many forms, including reconciling an arrangement of pixels into an object or face and the transformation of a sequence of still pictures into a film. McCloud: *Understanding Comics*, 64-65.

<sup>140</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 83.

a complete lack of space between panels, or distinct, blank spaces between panels.<sup>141</sup> Crumb uses the latter in *Genesis, Illustrated*, and in most of his other work.

Both McCloud and Eisner herald these spaces as invaluable, suggesting they are where much of the “magic” of comics takes place.<sup>142</sup> By this, they mean that the gutter is the space where the reader collaborates with the creator by bringing their own imagination to the story.<sup>143</sup> Where one panel has an image of Eve and Adam realising they were naked, and the next has an image of the two wearing loincloths, the reader inserts their own interpretation between the panels (via the gutter), understanding that Adam and Eve were uncomfortable with their newly-realised nakedness and so they made clothes to cover themselves. The finding of materials and construction of clothes was not shown, but the reader’s knowledge of the production and wearing of clothes, however rudimentary, allows them to fill in the gaps of what has happened. In a manner of speaking, it is an exegetical exercise, akin to Lewis’ argument in his article on Midrash and comic book retcon as discussed in my literature review.<sup>144</sup>

In the foreword to *Graven Images*, Douglas Rushkoff describes this process as the reader taking a “leap of faith” every time they move from one panel to the next, constructing a story out of a sequence of still frames. It is the reader who propels the story forward, in this case.<sup>145</sup> Admittedly, in a comic based on a widely-known narrative such as Genesis, the ability of the reader to input their own knowledge between the panels is easier than asking them to reconcile two images from a story less well-known. Moreover, in the case of Adam and Eve clothing themselves, this is a universal action which readers (presumably) know how to carry out by themselves from an early age. However, the importance of the gutter, regardless of the form it is given, is evident in the reading of text-image narratives. Crumb’s use of definite spaces in his gutters is an indication that he expects the reader to insert their knowledge into the story thus allowing the reader to interpret Genesis more freely.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>142</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 66; Eisner *Comics and Sequential Art*, 39-48.

<sup>143</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 39-40.

<sup>144</sup> A. David Lewis, “The Secret Untold Relationship between Biblical Midrash and Comic Book Retcon,” *International Journal of Comic Art* 4 (2002), 261-275.

<sup>145</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, “Foreword: Looking for God in the Gutter,” in *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, edited by A. David Lewis et al (New York: Continuum, 2010): x.

<sup>146</sup> Julia Moszkowicz examines the function of the gutter against Pail Ricouer’s philosophical writing on time and narrative. She offers an alternative view on gutters, including giving credence to Duncan and Smith’s view that the gutters do not offer space for the reader to insert knowledge, but rather “add panels cumulatively to tell a story.” Julia Moszkowicz, “Time, Narrative and the Gutter in Graphic Novels: how philosophical thinking can make something out of nothing,” Southampton Solent University, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/wp->

The final resource is the pattern of spatio-topical code: the pattern which the panels, gutters and hyperframe make up.<sup>147</sup> Similar to the size and shape of panels, the patterns of spatio-topical code can also frame the narrative, encouraging the reader to view the story in certain ways. Benoît Peeters argues that certain compositions of panels based on the following function determine the narrative within a story: Narrative Dominant and Composition Dominant. If the narrative aspect dominates, the result will be either a regular grid of frames (which he terms ‘Conventional Use’) or a pattern of frame shapes and sizes which reflect the demands of the story (which he terms ‘Rhetorical Use’). If the composition of panels dominates the narrative, then Peeters describes the grid as either ‘Decorative Use’ or ‘Productive Use’.<sup>148</sup> If ‘Decorative’, this demonstrates an “aesthetic preoccupation which has no narrative relevance”.<sup>149</sup> If ‘Productive’, the grid pattern helps to create the story.<sup>150</sup>

In *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb’s grid-pattern is conventional, in the sense that the narrative dominates, but the panels are normally composed in a regular pattern. However, on the pages which illustrate the genealogies in Genesis, Crumb employs a more rhetorical use of the grid-pattern, in the sense that the narrative still dominates but the small ‘headshot’ style panels are used to highlight each person individually and so frame the narrative in a particular way, as if viewing a range of passport photos.<sup>151</sup>

Crumb also uses various sizes of panels to highlight certain aspects of the narrative, which he considers to be of more importance than other parts of the story.<sup>152</sup> Interestingly, Peeters notes that comic artists who follow the conventional pattern of panels have likely had experience working in an environment where they needed to produce short comic strips – either for newspapers or magazines – at a quick pace. The conventional pattern is learnt in this environment and is more likely to affect later work.<sup>153</sup> This is certainly the case with Crumb, who began his career drawing short strips for *Mad* magazine and other publications.

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content/uploads/2012/07/moszkowitzgnpaper.pdf. I disagree with this viewpoint, and see Eisner, McCloud and Miller’s concepts of the gutter as more in coherent with the way that readers interact with comics.

<sup>147</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 86.

<sup>148</sup> Peeters, *Case, planche récit*, 41.

<sup>149</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 86.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 88. There are, of course, criticisms of this model, most notably from Groensteen who, as Miller notes, argues that more important distinctions in grid-patterns are between ‘regularity’, ‘irregularity’, ‘discreetness’ and ‘ostentation’ (Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 88). However, I agree with Peeters’ model over Groensteen’s because the categories identified can overlap comfortably yet still embody certain functions.

<sup>151</sup> See for example: Genesis 35-36 in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>152</sup> For example, in the case study on Sarah, Crumb changes the size of the panels when introducing the family of Abraham because he considers that to be of utmost importance in comparison to the scenes which precede and succeed it. See: Case Study 4a: Sarah.

<sup>153</sup> Peeters, *Case, planche récit*, 42.



## A note on spatio-temporal relations in comics

The technique of illustrating the passing of time in comics involves several tools, including the use of space, language and even the size of the panel content. Eisner emphasises the importance of depicting time in comics,<sup>154</sup> and McCloud devotes a chapter to the subject in his *Understanding Comics*.<sup>155</sup> Having previously touched on the subject above, I return to it now to firstly examine Crumb's understanding of the concept of time in *Genesis*, and secondly, how he depicts it.

In Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, the first page is a full-page illustration, also known as a "splash page." It is of God creating the heavens and the earth out of the formless void.<sup>156</sup> This is the only full-scale image within the book; there are four half-page images throughout the books, but every other page is divided by anything between three to sixteen panels. Don Jolly interprets Crumb's decision to open *Genesis* with a splash page as an interpretive choice which invokes the language of comic books to depict the scale of time passing in one panel:

Speaking very generally, the more space something takes up on the comic page, the more time it demands we spend on the absorption of the image. Sometimes, this technique can be used to imply that a great length of time is passing for characters in the story. In other instances, this lengthening of moment can be used as a kind of "slow motion," making even instantaneous events into images upon which the eye lingers, producing emphasis through extended temporality.<sup>157</sup>

Jolly explains that by depicting *Genesis* 1:1-2 in a full-page image, the reader is given the impression of a "vast, unprecedented length of time [...] the eternity before creation."<sup>158</sup> Comics theorist McCloud also suggests that the shape and size of a panel influences the readers perception of time for reasons similar to Jolly, but expands by arguing that "the words "short" or "long" can refer either to the first dimension or the fourth" in the medium of comics, and that "in a medium where time and space merge so completely, the distinction often vanishes."<sup>159</sup> I would argue that Crumb's depiction of God within this page embodies

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<sup>154</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 23-38.

<sup>155</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 94-117.

<sup>156</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.2.

<sup>157</sup> Jolly, "Interpretive Treatments of *Genesis* in Comics", 336.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 101-102. Comics creator Chris Ware also discusses how to create the illusion of time within panels. See: Gordon McAlpin, "A Comics Panel: Chris Ware, Seth and Ivan Brunetti." Webcomic, Stripped Books, accessed 6 March, 2018, <http://www.strippedbooks.com/comics/stripped07/comics-00.html>. Eisner discusses the above in *Comics and Sequential Art*, 24-37.

both Jolly and McCloud's ideas, not just by the size of the panel on the page, but by the content within the panel.

For example, in the opening splash page, God's figure towers over the earthly void which he cradles in his hands. The viewer is unable to see the entire body, yet they see the beginnings of the heavens and the earth. God himself is vast and unmeasurable at the beginning of creation; a symbol of eternity set against a physically limited world. This image of God is contrasted by panels on the third page, which show God standing on the earth he has just created, next to Adam and Eve. He is purposefully taller than the humans; Crumb designed him to be so which signifies to the reader that God is still dominant; however, his size has shrunk from the splash page in which he was large enough to hold the whole world in his hands. Thus, the reader is given to understand that God can, at one moment, be larger than we can imagine, but he can also walk with humans on the earth. Changing God's size in this way throughout the book, Crumb is not only playing with perceptions of space and time, he is reminding the reader that God is not definable as one form or size.

The concept of larger panels signifying time passing can also be applied to the four half-splash pages in the book, which include an image of the tree of life (Genesis 2:8-9),<sup>160</sup> Noah, his family, and the animals leaving the ark after the flood (8:18-19),<sup>161</sup> the imposing gates to the city of Sodom (19:1),<sup>162</sup> and Jacob's ladder (28:12).<sup>163</sup> However, the size of the panels is not the foremost indication of time passing; it is instead the content. Eisner explains that while size and shape of panel is important in expressing time, it is also symbols, images and often speech within the panels which makes the statement.<sup>164</sup>

For example, the panel of the tree of life is of a large, gnarly, knotted tree which overshadows the surrounding shrubbery both in size and stature.<sup>165</sup> Clearly, this tree has had a long time to grow; its roots run deep to the bottom of the panel and its branches grow high to the top of the page. Eisner explains that the design of a panel, and the act of boxing in specific content helps to establish "the position of the reader in relation to the scene and indicates the duration of the event."<sup>166</sup> In other words, the reader must not only consider the shape, size and position of a panel, but also read the symbols within the content to understand the idea of time within the graphic novel. As previously discussed, the reader must also apply his or

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<sup>160</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.3.

<sup>161</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.4.

<sup>162</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.5.

<sup>163</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.6.

<sup>164</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 24.

<sup>165</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.3.

<sup>166</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 26.

her own knowledge to the imagery to understand it; for example, we understand that trees take a very long time to grow, especially to such a great size as the tree of life, therefore we understand that a lot of time must have passed for such a tree to grow.<sup>167</sup>

Why is it important to understand how Crumb has denoted the illusion of time in his Genesis? It demonstrates what he understands from the text. Firstly, Crumb has actively chosen to give more space to certain scenes than others. The moment of creation is the most important moment, in Crumb's view. Without that moment, there would be nothing, and so dedicating an entire splash page endows the text with great significance. This moment of creation is made all the more important by the juxtaposition of that page with a map of Abraham's world on the opposite page, indicating to the reader what creation will become.

The four half-page panels are also significant points in the story. For example, the tree of life is often understood as a symbol of female fertility in both Abrahamic traditions, and many other ancient Near-East traditions.<sup>168</sup> The moment in which Noah, his family, and the animals descend from the ark is the moment life has been given a second chance, and is symbolic of the promise between God and Noah that God will never again punish humans in such a destructive way.<sup>169</sup> The imposing, dominating gates at the city of Sodom symbolise many things including humanity's evolution into engineers and designers, and their step away from spirituality and a relationship with God. They also denote the location where humanity has once again fallen into evil ways, and as such mark the location where God will once again reign down his judgment and destroy people as retribution for their sins.<sup>170</sup> The final half-page panel of Jacob's ladder is symbolic of Jacob's status as a patriarch, independent from Abraham and Isaac, in a personal relationship with God which is markedly different from those that have gone before.<sup>171</sup>

Theologically, these stories are all important, but depending on the reader's view, not more important than any other in Genesis. As markers in the story however, these larger panels act as indicators for the changing relationship, and the narrowing of the terms and conditions

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<sup>167</sup> I would also argue that the situation of the panel is relevant which refers to the spatio-topical code outlined above by Miller and Groensteen. For example, the panel prior to the image of the tree of life is of God giving the divine breath (i.e. life) to Adam, and the panel after the tree is of the river which runs out of Eden. The connection between the 'breath of life,' the 'tree of life,' and water which is symbolic of both giving and sustaining life is displayed well within Crumb's pages and demonstrates his understanding of how life was created and sustained in the first days of the story.

<sup>168</sup> Michael D. Coogan, ed., *New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20.

<sup>169</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.4.

<sup>170</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.5.

<sup>171</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.6.

of each successive covenant between humanity and God. The original idea of God walking with man and the appointment of man as his regent on earth; the total destruction of earth after humans fail to comply with his ideas and the successive covenant never to repeat the destruction with the whole of mankind (through the vessel of Noah and his family); the singling out of one particular family, represented by Lot, nephew of Abraham, who are saved through their relationship with God while others are destroyed; and finally the chosen heir to God's promised land, Jacob, who later becomes Israel, and who is symbolic of God's personal relationship with Abraham. Crumb is using space and the portrayal of time through space in Genesis to convey his understanding of Genesis, and the relationships between humanity and divine which lie within its pages.<sup>172</sup>

There are no lectionary divisions in Crumb's Genesis, and I argue that this allows Crumb to control the pace and flow of the narrative, which also affects the way in which readers understand the concept of time passing. While I have noted Crumb's use of the JPS version of Genesis, the book is not divided into the ancient Jewish system of forty-three to forty-five *sedarim*,<sup>173</sup> or Torah portions known as *parashiot* meant to be read over twelve weeks.<sup>174</sup> Thus, Crumb has dictated when the breaks come in the narrative, and he has largely done this with the use of panels. His control over where and how the story divides means Crumb's version of Genesis is most similar to ancient scrolls which contained the text, which did not rely on lectionary divisions but on the length of the scroll. Further weight is added to Crumb's constant referral back to the ancient, or "original" text, and his desire to connect his contemporary version with ancient scribal traditions.<sup>175</sup>

## Restricted Arthrology

Another tool in the kit of comics is restricted arthrology. Miller's definition of 'restricted arthrology' (used by Groensteen) is 'sequential links'; that is, the overarching story is divided into "discontinuous units which are aligned sequentially, articulated by syntagmatic links."<sup>176</sup> These sequential links consist of elements such as the use of inter-frame space (spatio-temporal relations, and the use of the ellipsis in visual storytelling, for example), and

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<sup>172</sup> As I continue to explore the artwork and the story-arcs within Crumb's Genesis, I will revisit the idea of space, time and method of storytelling within the book.

<sup>173</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994), xi.

<sup>174</sup> A good example of this style is seen in Aaron Freeman and Sharon Rosenzweig, *The Comic Torah: Reimagining the Very Good Book* (Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2010).

<sup>175</sup> See appendix A, Interview with R. Crumb.

<sup>176</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 88.

stylistic variations such as framing, the angle of vision, composition and use of colour. For Miller, coherent progression of the narrative is contingent upon the proper use of these elements, whether that be conserving them or modifying them to aid reception of the story.<sup>177</sup>

By ‘inter-frame space’, Miller is referring to the way in which spatial and temporal transitions within the story are managed and conveyed through the artistic choices of the creator. Miller identifies the ellipsis as a key tool in the resources of comics, and one which has the job of controlling the rhythm of the narrative, either by inserting gaps into the story to signify a change in time or space within that story, or by smoothing over breaks to give an impression of continuity.<sup>178</sup> For example, in Crumb’s illustration of Genesis 3:7-8,<sup>179</sup> we see Eve and Adam wearing loincloths after their eyes have been opened to their nakedness. In the next panel, we see them hiding from God in some bushes. The gap between the action in the panels implies that there has been a change in temporal *and* spatial dimensions; the second panel in the sequence has moved ahead in time, and to a different location in the garden than the previous panel.<sup>180</sup>

Elsewhere, we can see the alternative use of the ellipsis as a tool to imply that “time excised by the inter-frame space is minimal.”<sup>181</sup> In Crumb’s illustration of Genesis 6:15-18, three successive panels depict God instructing Noah on the building of the ark, and on the establishment of the covenant.<sup>182</sup> In the first panel of the sequence, Noah looks astonished as God gives him building dimensions; in the second panel, we are given a close-up of Noah’s shocked face, with God’s speech continuing, uninterrupted, though his figure is not visible in the frame; in the final panel, God reappears in the frame, speech still flowing, while Noah continues to look on, shocked.<sup>183</sup> The unchanging countenance of Noah throughout the three panels while God’s speech continues uninterrupted, is broken only by the middle panel, with the close-up of Noah’s face. This panel is a beat between panels and is there to highlight Noah’s reaction to God’s command. A minimal amount of time passes, but the

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 88-89.

<sup>179</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.1.

<sup>180</sup> The location within the garden is important. In the first panel in the sequence, the surrounding area is more open with fewer trees in the background suggesting the newly-aware Eve and Adam are still coming to terms with their newly-found knowledge. The second panel in the sequence has them hiding in a dark, heavily wooded part of the garden, representative of their need to hide and their desire for cover.

<sup>181</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 89.

<sup>182</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.7.

<sup>183</sup> Incidentally, the speech bubble which contains God’s words in this panel is attached to the gutter to give the impression that God’s words are found outside of Adam and Eve’s world in the frame.

reaction of Noah is the lynchpin of this sequence of panels, and the constant speech of God smooths over the gap.

Stylistic variations within the panels, including framing, angle of vision, composition and even the lack of colour, are some of the most visually apparent and important signifiers when reading comics, and as Miller notes, “work by variation or constancy from panel to panel.”<sup>184</sup> Similar to framing in the art of photography, framing panels in comics can convey signals that a scene should be read in a particular way. For example, a panel which reframes a previous panel in the narrative suggests movement of characters; likewise, variation in framing potentially corresponds with an alternative point of view in the story.<sup>185</sup> One of the most important signifiers of framing is that, often, it reveals whose viewpoint is controlling the narrative: is it the narrator or the character’s perception? Miller likens this to ‘ocularisation’ in film theory, where the framing of the image tells the viewer if they are seeing the set through the eyes of the narrator or a character.<sup>186</sup>

Framing in *Genesis, Illustrated* is an important function for the reader; one which, I argue, brings the narrative voice to life in the story, but also literally gives a voice to the dialogue in the text. Narration and discourse are the two prominent types of text in *Genesis*; mostly however, the story is told from the point of view of the narrator.<sup>187</sup> Even in dream sequences, which one might argue must take place and be told from the character’s perspective, it is the narrator’s voice which relays the story.<sup>188</sup> In *Genesis, Illustrated*, the framing of the panels and the framing of the text ensure the reader is aware of whose voice is dominant in the scene. Furthermore, the imagery within the panels is always framed from the point of view of the narrator, and never from the perspective of the character within, which reflects the biblical text. Crumb’s adherence to the narrator’s voice in the text is apparent throughout his remediation.

The angle of vision employed in Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*, also reflects his desire to stay as close to the biblical narrative as possible. As Miller notes, the use of high or low angles can indicate that the scene is viewed from the perspective of a character, which does not occur in Crumb’s illustration.<sup>189</sup> Alternatively, the use of high or low angles can have a symbolic function, encouraging the reader to view the scene within the panel in particular

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<sup>184</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 91.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 91-94.

<sup>187</sup> For more discussion on this, see Hugh C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>188</sup> See for example, Fig. 2.6 concerning Jacob’s vision of the ladder.

<sup>189</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 94.

ways; for example, a high angle looking downwards may present a character as being small; a reflection of her/his social status.<sup>190</sup>

Crumb rarely makes use of angling visions in his panels, instead choosing mostly to depict scenes looking straight on. The few exceptions where he does angle the vision of the reader normally include the presence of God within the panel. In these examples, such as Crumb's remediation of Gen 12:7, where God appears to Abraham, the angle of the scene is tilted upwards towards the sky, reflecting the lower status of humans to God, as well as representing the symbolic practice of humans looking towards the sky in search of the divine.<sup>191</sup> Further, this reflects of Abraham's perspective on the scene rather than God's which aligns the reader with the patriarch rather than the divine as they share Abraham's perspective.

Composition of panels has a narrative function first and foremost within comics, but can also emphasise articulation of the story.<sup>192</sup> For example, the use of diagonals within a panel can help to guide the reader's eye and point towards details in the background which may otherwise seem insignificant, but which have an important place in the narrative. Alternatively, diagonal lines may suggest tension or anxiety carried by a character.<sup>193</sup> Likewise, the use of symmetry within a panel may indicate a state of harmony or equilibrium within the story.<sup>194</sup>

In *Genesis, Illustrated*, in the panel where Abraham and Lot part ways after disagreements between their servants, Abraham shows Lot the land before him and asks him to choose his preferred location (Gen 13:10).<sup>195</sup> The viewer follows the outstretched hand of Abraham towards the plain of Jordan, which indicates Lot's decision. The diagonal created by Abraham's arm echoes the text: "...Lot lifted his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan", which is an efficient example of the interplay between text and image, and the use of composition as a reflection of the text.

Concerning the second use of diagonals within panels as a tool of expressivity, Crumb's illustrations of Gen 24: 63-64 offer a good example.<sup>196</sup> In the first of the two panels in this

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.8.

<sup>192</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 94.

<sup>193</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 94.

<sup>194</sup> Clearly, the use of the diagonal is only one tool when it comes to the composition of panels. Others include the use of blank space within panels which focus the reader's eyes on specific details. For example, occasionally when God appears in *Genesis, Illustrated*, the surroundings which were apparent in the previous panel disappear, focusing the reader on the image of God rather than mundane details.

<sup>195</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.9.

<sup>196</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.10.

sequence, Isaac looks along a diagonal line towards a small group of silhouetted figures in the distance. The angle of the panel is tilted very slightly downwards, making Isaac the dominant figure of the panel. This serves two purposes; firstly, the angle – while still from the narrator’s perspective – reflects Isaac’s view, showing the reader his perspective. In turn, this encourages the reader to follow his gaze towards the group of people. Isaac does not know his future wife is in that group but the reader does, lending an air of dramatic irony to the narrative. The use of the diagonal line emphasises the anticipation of Isaac as he awaits the group. This is further intensified by the position of the panel which is situated in the bottom right-hand corner of the page; the position reserved to create suspense within the narrative.

The second panel in the sequence reverses the scene, showing Rebekah’s perspective. The diagonal here is created from folds of material, the back of the camel’s head and the landscape, all of which lead towards the figure of Isaac who is partially obscured. Rebekah’s face is in profile which positions the viewer as if peering over her shoulder. The angle is from a lower point than the previous panel which may indicate that Crumb views Rebekah as subservient to Isaac, but also emphasises the diagonal at a sharper, upwards angle indicating a more acute state of nerves or anticipation than Isaac felt in the previous panel. The combination of angle, framing and composition within and placement of these two panels creates the sense that the moment is one fraught with tension, anticipation, nerves and anxiety. These techniques are subtly used by Crumb throughout *Genesis, Illustrated*, but are effective in adding emotion and perspective into the text.

Finally, we may consider the use of colour within Crumb’s illustration of Genesis. Comics are normally associated with bright pops of colour, and the use of colour within comics normally indicate characters, moods or location. Colours can also be symbolic, invoking connections with religious, social or political constructs.<sup>197</sup> Other than the brightly coloured images on the front cover, Crumb does not use colour in his illustration of Genesis. The entire fifty chapters are drawn in black and white, with graded hatching to create areas of grey. This is not characteristic of Crumb’s previous work, nor is it an anomaly; past works include both the use of colour and the use of black and white. It is not a reference to the history of illustrated Bibles, such as the *Biblia Pauperum*, because Crumb did not access them or believe them to be good representations of illustrated Bible narratives,<sup>198</sup> and nor is

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<sup>197</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 95.

<sup>198</sup> See appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb.



it a reference to any of the other visual materials used by Crumb, most of which contain colour.

It is likely that Crumb's choice to draw *Genesis* without colour was made so that he did not embellish the text more than was necessary. Using colour would have colour-coded the imagery presenting the reader with new array of visual coding to deconstruct, affecting the perception of whether *Genesis, Illustrated* is the straightforward retelling which Crumb intends it to be. Miller also discusses Baetens and Lefevre's discussion of the use of colour in *bande dessinée*, pointing out that "the use of black and white in *bande dessinée* has come to connote an album presented as a work of art rather than a commercial product."<sup>199</sup> Crumb has lived in France since the early 1990's and has perhaps been influenced by French *bande dessinée* rather than the American comic strips he used to be associated with. As such, the lack of colour in *Genesis, Illustrated* perhaps indicates Crumb wishes it to be seen as a work of art rather than a comic book.<sup>200</sup>

## Tressage

The final category noted by Miller, again drawing upon Groensteen, is 'tressage' or 'general arthrology'. Tressage refers to weaving or braiding, reflecting the idea that "panels may relate to each other through links which are woven throughout a [comic]."<sup>201</sup> Repetition is key, both in image and in text, as is the idea of call-backs to previous storylines. Groensteen defines tressage as a "succession of images linked by a system of formal, iconic or semantic correspondences,"<sup>202</sup> and notes that this may extend into spatio-topical codes such as patterns of panels, and restricted arthrology codes such as composition, framing and colour.<sup>203</sup>

There are several types of repetition in the biblical narrative of *Genesis*, including the repetition of words, themes, storylines and settings. One might expect Crumb to highlight these repetitive systems but this is not always the case. For example, a key story which is repeated three times in *Genesis* is the sister-wife narrative, which appears in Gen 12:10-20, Gen 20:1-16 and in Gen 26:1-33. The story is told twice with Sarah and Abraham, and once with Rebekah and Isaac. One might assume that Crumb would mirror the repetition of

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<sup>199</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 95.

<sup>200</sup> I realise there is a tension here as I distinguish comics (traditionally seen as low art) from a higher form of art. It is not my intention to do this, only to note that in France, the use of black and white is used to suggest a work is not simply a comic.

<sup>201</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 95.

<sup>202</sup> Groensteen, *System of Comics*, 174.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

narrative through use of iconic correspondences in his depiction of the stories, but this is not the case. Visually speaking, the panels depicting each of these stories have very little in common with each other. Similarly, repetitions of blessings are another prominent theme in Genesis, but these are also treated individually and do not share many visual commonalities.

However, some iconic correspondences do exist, though they are subtle. For example, the appearance of rounded vases in fertility-themed narratives is repeated throughout stories of the matriarchs and motherhood. Rounded jugs and vases are a common symbol of fertility in ancient Near-Eastern stories, and Crumb's use of them to foretell birth stories for Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah is an acknowledgment of this, reflecting his interest in such stories.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, Crumb repeats certain background imagery in some stories. This is most notable in scenes where a character is angry or afraid, and the background which previously appeared behind a character becomes momentarily blacked out to focus attention on the character's emotion.

There are areas where a reader might expect to find examples of tressage in Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*. However, examples are few and far between and the lack of interrelation is likely an indicator of Crumb's "straightforward" approach to illustrating Genesis. That is, he was not looking for consistencies, patterns or recurring motifs; he was not reading Genesis from a literary perspective or with a narratological approach. Crumb was illustrating the text without a critical approach. However, I argue that not drawing attention to links between repetitive parts of Genesis is also a mode of highlighting the gaps and inconsistencies which occur within the text. The narratives of Genesis are laid bare, read with no obvious literary connections between them; Crumb's "straightforward" approach is not concerned with emulating or repeating established criticisms of the text, instead allowing the reader certain freedom to make their own connections. On the other hand, the inclusion of images can also serve to restrict interpretation of the text to the artist's hand, and this inherent tension between text and image is something I expand upon in chapter 4 concerning the case studies.

### The function of 'text' in text-image narratives

One of the most important traits of comics is the interplay between word and image on the

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<sup>204</sup> See appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb. I explore this further in chapter 3.

page; comics consist of both, and it rare to see a comic without both.<sup>205</sup> Having discussed visual coding within comics, I now turn to a discussion concerning how text functions within text-image narratives. In terms of *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb claims to include every word of the biblical text within his remediation. However, ‘text’ in this instance does not refer only to the text within the story. Ann Miller identifies five types of text in comics which must be considered to understand the function of text: peritext; narrative voice-over; dialogue; sound-effects; and, texts which exist within the fictional world.<sup>206</sup>

Peritext refers to text outside of the narrative, such as that found on covers, flyleaves, and contents pages.<sup>207</sup> The introduction and the commentary in *Genesis, Illustrated* are included in this category because they are not part of the narrative; however, they are important as they contextualise the narrative of Genesis. Notably, Miller states that the peritext is normally the only element which is typeset in comics, but in Crumb’s illustration, this is not the case; all lettering, including on the front cover, is hand-written by Crumb.

Narrative voice-over, or *récitatif* in bande dessinée, refers to the pieces of text within the narrative which are not parts of speech, but which narrate the sequence of events in the story. As noted above, the biblical stories in Genesis are written both with narrative and with speech from characters, but the perspective is always from the position of the narrator. Because Genesis is presented from this perspective, Crumb’s illustration is full of narrative voice-over. Miller notes that this type of writing is “usually separated from the pictorial space by a box which adheres to the top of the frame,” but that it also “may appear with no box [...] indicating, perhaps, an absence of narrative distance from the events portrayed.”<sup>208</sup> There are several examples of narrative voice-over within a frame and outside of a frame throughout Crumb’s remediation. I do not think that the absence of frames around portions of narrative voice-over indicates an absence of narrative distance from events; rather, I think Crumb sometimes does this to create a less cluttered page which is easier for the reader to process.

Dialogue in comics, according to Miller, is normally enclosed within speech bubbles: “non-diegetic elements that intrude into the space of the fiction.”<sup>209</sup> The use of speech bubbles in comics is a way of directing the reader to a message, normally encased in the pronouncement

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<sup>205</sup> There is a category of comics without text, known as ‘wordless comics’ which rely purely on the visual narrative to further the story. However, these are few and far between, and I would argue that they are ‘read’ in an entirely different way to comics which have a more equal share of both words and images.

<sup>206</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 97.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 97.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

of the character speaking, and there are several types of speech bubble which indicate the tone and volume of the speech; for example, 'scream' balloons tend to have sharp, jagged edges to reflect the intensity of the speech within. Crumb uses speech bubbles throughout Genesis to separate dialogue from narrative voice-over, but instead of using different shapes to indicate tone of speech, he uses bold lettering and alters the size of the text within the bubble.

For example, Fig. 2.11 depicts God calling to Eve and Adam after they have eaten the fruit.<sup>210</sup> God is angry in this panel, and this is demonstrated in the large, bold letters of his speech: "Where are you?" God's anger is an interpretation of the text by Crumb; the text of Genesis 3 does not explicitly say God is angry. Fresnault and Duerelle, as cited by Miller, suggest that variations in size of hand-printed text are used for expressive purposes such as amplification of volume, which is the case here.<sup>211</sup> God's anger is further emphasised by the sharp diagonal lines emanating from his body in an aggressive manner, obscuring any surrounding imagery.<sup>212</sup> Though all the letters are bold in this panel, Crumb uses bold letters more sparingly elsewhere to emphasise certain parts of the speech, for example, "for dust you are, to dust you shall return!" this shows the reader where the stress falls in the speech, and thus, the tone of the speech.

The fourth category of text is sound effects, onomatopoeic devices which tend to occur within the picture space.<sup>213</sup> Though a very common tool in most comics, Crumb does not make use of this type of text. Rather, he relies on his drawing skills to indicate sound, such as, for example, the whirling sword which guards the gates of Eden. The movement of the whirling sword is indicated by wavy lines in a clockwise motion, and is drawn in such a way that the reader will imagine an accompanying sound with the whirling motion. I do not think Crumb wanted to use sound effects because it does not correspond with his idea of an original text, and would make his illustration more playful, and potentially less serious.

The final category is texts which exist within the fictional world, such as newspapers, books or signs. These texts are sparse in Crumb's remediation but do appear in places. For example, when Abraham is summoned to the Pharaoh's chamber (Gen 12:18) the walls are covered in hieroglyphics, and in Gen 43:23 a sign in hieroglyphics appears on the wall behind Simeon. The purpose of these texts is to differentiate location for readers, to help identify

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<sup>210</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.11.

<sup>211</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 99.

<sup>212</sup> As noted in the section above on *Tressage*, this is a recurring visual code Crumb utilises to express heightened emotion and expressivity.

<sup>213</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 98.

where characters are. The use of hieroglyphs also adds a sense of distance to the text, placing the reader outside of their own location and enhancing the concept of foreign-ness within the story. This is especially true because these types of text do not appear in any part of the story which takes place outside of Egypt.

## Reading Text and Image together

Miller's identification of five categories of text, along with her analysis of the visual resources of comics have provided a framework which I use to analyse the matriarchal stories of motherhood in chapter 4, especially in terms of textual decisions and textual framing on Crumb's part. Having discussed text and image separately, however, I must also consider what happens when text and image is combined, as in comics, and how they are read together.

The reading process in comics is complex, in that the reader is faced with textual decisions and artistic choices at the same time, both of which normally corroborate with, and support each other. The reader must be able to understand coding within both structures to grasp the full meaning of the narrative. Will Eisner explains that reading text-image narratives is different to text-only or image-only stories:

The reading process in comics is an extension of text. In text alone the process of reading involves word-to-image conversion. Comics accelerate that by providing the image. When properly executed, it goes beyond conversion and speed and becomes a seamless whole.<sup>214</sup>

In *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb does a large amount of the work deciphering the text (under his own interpretations) for the reader by pairing the text with the image. Visually speaking, for example, the reader does not have to imagine what Eve or Adam look like because Crumb has given them a body and a face; nor do they have to construct the landscape or invent the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; these are already on the page. Textually speaking, unlike some early biblical comics and other contemporary comics which do not include all the text,<sup>215</sup> Crumb has provided the whole text, meaning the reader does not even need to approach his remediation with any prior knowledge of the scripture. Therefore, all the tools required to read and decode Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* are in the book, and they present a seamless whole, as Eisner suggests.

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<sup>214</sup> Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and the Visual Narrative* (Florida: Poorhouse Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>215</sup> I discuss types of Bible comics in the introduction to this thesis.

As discussed, the act of ‘reading’ a comic relies on deciphering a ‘code’ of symbols which exist within both text and image. This code is made up of visual signals such as facial expressions and gestures, landscapes, objects and other signs, as well as the text itself which can also be read as an image. Miller describes this as ‘iconic encoding’, where words and letters retain a symbolic function rather than a literary function. This is also true of the use of punctuation marks such as exclamation marks or interrobangs (which Crumb uses frequently).<sup>216</sup>

Mario Saraceni expands on this, suggesting that words are thought of as symbolic in nature, whereas pictures are considered iconic.<sup>217</sup> Saraceni describes a scale from iconic to symbolic, proposing that words and images lie somewhere in the middle of this scale.<sup>218</sup> Words can be both iconic and symbolic, and their size, shape and colour often adds other information to their literal meaning.<sup>219</sup> With reference to Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*, this is true of his front cover, where he uses a mixture of Blackletter font and Hebrew glyphs to signify to the reader that his remediation is in the same category as biblical texts and exegeses; I discuss this further in chapter 3.

As words may be considered iconic, images can be considered symbolic; that is, they can stand for something “associated to its meaning by virtue of a shared convention.”<sup>220</sup> There are examples of this in *Genesis, Illustrated*. For example, the gates to Sodom and Gomorrah at the beginning of Gen 19 are adorned with images of mythical winged creatures and strange, carved faces; these signs are iconic in that they are pictures, but their meaning is symbolic: the city is not associated with the Abrahamic God, because the symbols bear no resemblance to anything we have associated with him in previous pages. The image is ‘read’ and it is understood that this is an alien city which does not share conventions with previous stories in Genesis. Later, in Gen 19, this alien-ness is emphasised by the strange clothes worn by the city-dwellers which are markedly different to those worn by Abraham, his family, and the messengers of God.

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<sup>216</sup> Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée*, 99.

<sup>217</sup> Saraceni, *Language of Comics*, 15.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 15.

Reading comics is an exercise in interpreting images and words together in a narrative,<sup>221</sup> and this act of interpretation relies on the interplay of word and image. David Kunzle suggests this is an important element of comics:

There is a distinction [...] between imagery which illustrates a text and imagery which is clarified by a text. It is often difficult to determine in a specific instance the exact relationship between image and text and which came first, but it is usually clear which carries the burden of the narrative.<sup>222</sup>

The interplay of word and image in *Genesis, Illustrated* is an important aspect to consider when reading the book, and will be further explored in chapter 4. However, from this brief overview, it is understood that Crumb is applying his knowledge and experience of working in comics to *Genesis, Illustrated*, incorporating visual and textual clues to help the reader understand the text. Eisner's understanding is based upon the assessment that text-image stories depend upon "a visual experience common to both creator and audience,"<sup>223</sup> which McCloud agrees with in principle, but he also recognises that common experience might be difficult to accomplish because the reader tends to interpret narratives per their own needs.<sup>224</sup>

### Approaching Gender in Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*

Although the point of this thesis is to apply the above resources and tools of comics to Crumb's remediation of Genesis to illuminate points of interpretation and meaning within the comic book, it is also pertinent that I address my approach to gender when reading *Genesis, Illustrated*. This is because my case studies focus on the matriarchal narratives in terms of how Crumb depicts the women and how he understands their performance as priestesses to be linked to both gender and biological function within their narratives.

Crumb, following Teubal, presents the matriarchs as characters who act outside of the dominant socially-constructed gender roles, even though their role and function in the narrative is bound by the language in which they are written. Since Teubal is reading beyond those limitations, Crumb also reads outside of those cultural restrictions, presenting the matriarchs in a way which is not faithful to the text. By using frameworks of scholarship

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<sup>221</sup> Kunzle has written extensively on the early history of comics and comic strips, and comments on the use of aids in his book. David Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c.1450 to 1825 (History of the Comic Strip – Vol. 1)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>222</sup> Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip*, 2.

<sup>223</sup> Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, 1.

<sup>224</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 194-195.

concerned with gender and the Bible, I intend to interrogate the tension between the gendered significations of Crumb's matriarchs and the gendered significations of Teubal's, since there are some points in common (i.e. an apparent resistance of patriarchal dominance) but also some differences (i.e. Crumb's matriarchs are presented as acting within a gender binary, even if they seem to wish to subvert it).

To that end, each case study also includes a section on contextualising Crumb's remediation within biblical scholarship. The aim is to outline the range of modern scholarship on the matriarchs of Genesis to the reader, situating Crumb's presentation of the matriarchs within a scholarly setting in order to demonstrate how Crumb's matriarchs either correspond with, or struggle against those readings. To do this, I have outlined the perspectives of feminist and gender-focused scholars such as J. Cheryl Exum, Athalya Brenner-Idan, Alice Bach and David J.A. Clines, among others. To conclude this chapter, I summarise my approach to analysing Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, through the framework of comics theory, from a gendered perspective.

## Gender in Genesis

The relationship between gender and biological sex is an important point in terms of the matriarch stories because Crumb sees their purpose in the narrative as mostly always linked to their performance of certain biological and social functions associated with being female, i.e. childbearing, homemaking and acting as "adornment" to their husbands.<sup>225</sup> For example, the success of God's covenant between himself and Abraham relies on the success of Sarah conceiving, carrying a child and giving birth to ensure the continuation of the line, and the same can be intimated in terms of Isaac and Jacob. Therefore, the covenant, which in the text takes place between the patriarch and a male deity, relies on a gendered, biologically female performance by Sarah (and in turn, the other matriarchs) in order for God's promise to be fulfilled.

In this sense, gender roles in Crumb's remediation of Genesis are binary; the males must perform their masculinities and the females must perform as feminine in order for society to uphold certain order and not descend into chaos. Crumb relies on traditional understandings of gender performance in terms of presenting the male and female characters within a binary framework. To better explore the role and reception of women in Genesis, I now turn to

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<sup>225</sup> Philip R. Davies, "Preface: Genesis and the Gendered World" in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* edited by Philip R. Davies et al (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 7.



scholarly readings of gender in the Bible to better contextualise my approach, and my reception of Crumb's approach in the case studies of chapter 4.

Relating to the idea of the matriarch's performance of gender linking with their performance of biological functions (thus protecting and continuing patriarchal lineage), Hemchand Gossai discusses how such performances in the text of Genesis 16 concerning Sarah and Hagar, are further emphasised by interlacing the concept of power and marginality with gender performance.<sup>226</sup> Although Gossai tends towards the portrayal of Sarah as a desperate woman whose main/only desire is to produce children (such inference, I argue, is absent from the text and certainly absent from Crumb's remediation),<sup>227</sup> and although he also suggests that Hagar's use as a vessel for Abraham's children will also fulfil a secret desire to have children of her own,<sup>228</sup> Gossai's description of the power struggle between the three is illuminating.

Gossai identifies Abraham as the figure who holds the most power and influence out of the three: Sarah is the "centre of oppressed people" due to her identification of being female, but Hagar, also female, "represents those who are on the periphery,"<sup>229</sup> because of her servant/slave status, a position also noted by Phyllis Tribble when she suggests that "the maid enhances the mistress."<sup>230</sup> Needless to say, Gossai's reading of the three characters does not correspond with Teubal's suggestion that Sarah's position is equal to, if not above, Abraham. Instead, Gossai presents the matriarch as a secondary character whose function is to provide Abraham with the heir he needs, and her handmaid as a voiceless, marginalised figure.

The premise of Gossai's book is to give voice to the voiceless; those who tend to have the least power and who endure life on the periphery. He draws attention to the fact Hagar is voiceless in the decision to become Abraham's secondary wife, and that she cannot voice her feelings when she is expelled after apparently looking with contempt towards Sarah, for example.<sup>231</sup> Sarah's voice, on the other hand, is all too apparent as she makes suggestions to Abraham; this does emphasise her position of power in relation to Hagar, especially because Hagar is never part of the discussion. The position of power relates to Sarah's performance of primary wife to Abraham, and mistress to Hagar, and so her gender is as important in defining her position of power as her relationship to Abraham is. For Gossai, Hagar's voice,

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<sup>226</sup> Gossai, *Power and Marginality*.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 3-4.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.

<sup>230</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984): 11, cited by Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 3.

<sup>231</sup> Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 7.

or more often the lack of Hagar's voice in the narrative of Genesis 16, is where the indication of power lies.

The Hebrew Bible is often described as a patriarchal text, written by men (probably) for men, about men. As such, successes in the story, be they moral or physical, almost always belong to men; for example, procreating successfully: "the male gender assumes all credit for the process of procreation, with begettings of fathers and (nearly always) sons. The storyline of Israel's ancestors also focuses on the patriarchs, despite some colourful supporting parts for their females."<sup>232</sup> In Davies' understanding of the patriarchal narratives, male gender is marked by successful procreation,<sup>233</sup> lineage through males, and an emphasis on women as secondary to male-centric stories.<sup>234</sup> Indeed, this traditional understanding of the role of men and women in Genesis is nothing new; Davies claims that women are literally products of men, and as such cannot be equals in the Bible. This is demonstrated in the way women's stories are always told in relation to men, but men's stories are not told in relation to women.<sup>235</sup>

Moreover, the women's stories are told only in relation to how they successfully (or not, as the case may be) perform their biological and gender roles, in terms of procreating, hospitality and general spousal support. For Davies, this is reflected in the figure of God: "the male deity behaves according to his gender, dealing preferably with his mates and disposing of the female as he sees fit, particularly with regard to their procreative role."<sup>236</sup> For example, this idea can be seen in the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness (Gen 21:16-21) when Ishmael becomes the centre of God's promises, despite his original promise of descendants which was directed towards Hagar. Furthermore, when women are

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<sup>232</sup> Davies, "Genesis and the Gendered World", 7.

<sup>233</sup> On the note of procreation in the texts of Genesis, Carol Delaney calls the story of Genesis 22, (the Sacrifice of Isaac) the establishment of patriarchy because it marks the point of "the dominance of the *idea* that men are (or can be) authors of children as God is author of life in general." See: Carol Delaney, "Abraham and the Seeds of Patriarchy" in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 131-133.

<sup>234</sup> Davies attributes this to Eve: "she and her entire gender were punished by being subjected to the male, a fate inscribed in the order of creation." Davies, "Genesis and the Gendered World", 7.

<sup>235</sup> Davies, "Genesis and the Gendered World", 22. Sophie Démare-Lafont also discusses the fact that women are only ever described in relation to men in ancient legal documents, describing them as "eternal minors" who are subjects of masculine power and often treated like products which can be exchanged. However, she also notes that the inconsistency of records relating to the ancient Near East means this represents a limited view of women because we do not have the whole picture, but she goes on to conclude that after surveying legal documents, women were not fully legal persons but appendages to their husbands or male relatives. See: Sophie Démare-Lafont, "The Status of Women in the Legal Texts of the Ancient Near East" in *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History – Torah*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer et al. (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 110-111; 132. See also: J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 41-67 for similar themes found in the story of Samson.

<sup>236</sup> Davies, "Genesis and the Gendered World", 8.

told they will give birth to a child, that child is nearly always a son, often with a predetermined name or a name expressive of the fate of the mother rather than the father.<sup>237</sup>

Nina Rulon-Miller picks up on this same point in her exploration of Hagar as a character “with attitude.”<sup>238</sup> Rulon-Miller sees Hagar as a plucky figure who challenges authority – albeit in a minor way – and who is capable of looking after herself in the wilderness both after she runs away (Gen 16:7), and after she and Ishmael are expelled (Gen 21:14). Hagar is the only woman in the text of Genesis to name God (Gen 16:13),<sup>239</sup> and the only woman to have seen God and survive.<sup>240</sup> Her assertive behaviour is demonstrated further at the end of her part in Genesis, when even after God transfers his promise from Hagar to Ishmael, she “retains her attitude and independence, especially in her last act of choosing an Egyptian wife for her son which means his descendants will be Egyptian.”<sup>241</sup>

However, Rulon-Miller suggests that such assertiveness and independence was met with censoring and censoring from both male figures in the story, and (likely) the male scribes/redactors of Genesis in order to downplay the role of women in the narrative, and especially the role of a foreign slave-woman. For example, after Hagar sees and names God “El-roi” (Gen 16:13), God announces himself to Abraham as “El-Shaddai”, (Gen 17:1) effectively erasing Hagar’s name and invalidating their interaction. Further, it is Abraham’s fatherhood which is celebrated when Hagar falls pregnant, rather than her success at conceiving.<sup>242</sup> Rulon-Miller’s argument further advances the idea that biological function is linked to defining gender roles within the text.

Brenner-Idan’s literary reading of women in Genesis and their companions (in this case, Sarah and Hagar; Lot’s daughters; Rachel and Leah, and their maids) points out that the narratives of those women share the theme of each woman lacking something which her counterpart has (thus, the pairs make one complete women), and that as such, the more powerful woman in each pair must somehow usurp or better her inferior companion. A relationship of conviviality or even love is not possible between each pair, which Brenner-

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<sup>237</sup> For example, “Ishmael” refers to God “hearing” Hagar in the wild, and “Isaac” refers to Sarah’s “laughter” upon hearing she will fall pregnant at an old age. See: Irmtraud Fischer, “On the Significance of the “Women Texts” in the Ancestral Narratives”, in *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History – Torah*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer et al. (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 272.

<sup>238</sup> Nina Rulon-Miller, “Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude”, in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* edited by Philip R. Davies et al (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 60-89.

<sup>239</sup> Genesis 16:13.

<sup>240</sup> Demonstrated in her utterance: “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” Genesis 16:13.

<sup>241</sup> Rulon-Miller, “Hagar”, 78-9.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 78.

Idan suggests is almost laughable in the absurd way the stories play to conventional stereotypes of the battle-axe female unable to get along with other women. She then demonstrates how, in the Book of Ruth, such relationships of cooperation can exist, such as in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. However, “these two views are diametrically opposed to one another; and the pictures each draws of woman’s social behaviour within certain conditions and circumstances are widely different.”<sup>243</sup>

So far, I have demonstrated biblical scholarship concerning the roles of men and women in Genesis which notes a gender binary within the text, and which is traditional in the sense that men perform their gender through displaying strength, fertility and enjoying a verbal relationship with God, while women perform their gender by successfully conceiving and carrying their male counterpart’s seed, and generally acting as silent (or quiet) secondary characters which exist to further the men’s stories, even in the case of Brenner-Idan’s reading. In recent decades, biblical scholarship has begun to view the patriarchal narratives through non-traditional lenses, which has often led to more diverse readings of the text, including challenges to traditional power-relations between men and women and general discussion of gender roles in the narratives.

J. Cheryl Exum is a leader in this field. In her study, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, she questions the role of the matriarchs in the text of Genesis, specifically in terms of how they are portrayed by the writers, and in what way the stories serve male interests.<sup>244</sup> As above, Exum notes that the matriarchs are only ever secondary characters to their male counterparts, but that occasionally they are brought to the forefront of a story “in the service of an androcentric agenda” before receding again until required.<sup>245</sup> The fact that the matriarchs are absent for many critical points in Genesis “reflects the fact that Israel is personified in its fathers, not its mothers”,<sup>246</sup> and any attention they do receive is normally only to progress the story of the patriarchs,<sup>247</sup> or to show them as impatient and unwilling to wait for divine promises to be fulfilled, unlike the patriarchs.<sup>248</sup>

Exum questions what the relevance of the matriarchal narratives is, given the lack of narrative space and attention they are given.<sup>249</sup> Her answer lies in the purpose of the patriarchal/matriarchal narratives: to solidify Israel’s claim to be the chosen people, and to

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<sup>243</sup> Brenner-Idan, *Israelite Woman*, 92-98.

<sup>244</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 71.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 81.

justify its claim to the land of Canaan. The only way to do this is through endogamous marriage so that all descendants would be of strong patrilineage, through both parents, even though patrilineage is the only line of descent considered important.<sup>250</sup> Exum then goes on to describe a number of ways in which paternal claim to offspring is affirmed, “all of which entail suppression or denial of women’s importance”,<sup>251</sup> including the omission of women’s names from genealogical lists, the male’s claim to exclusive sexual rights, the construction of relationships between males through blood sacrifices, and resolution of the issue of descent and residence in favour of the patriarch.<sup>252</sup> While the matriarch, for example Sarah, plays a secondary role in a literary reading of Genesis, the use of her body as a vessel for the offspring of the patriarch, in this case conceiving and carrying Isaac for Abraham, is an affirmation of the purity of the line from Abraham to Isaac and beyond, because of her background and heritage.

The role of the matriarch in Genesis, or “the (m)other”<sup>253</sup> is, Exum attests, to distinguish Israel from its surrounding people, specifically those not directly descended from the chosen one, Abraham.<sup>254</sup> While the patriarch is a “source of unity” in that he is the common ancestor between many peoples, the matriarch is a “source of difference”.<sup>255</sup> Exum concludes,

[d]ifference thus has positive meaning, and the matriarchs, as the origin of difference, play an indispensable role. Their importance cannot be underestimated, but it cannot be fully acknowledged by a text in which the significant figures are the fathers. Precisely because the matriarchs are so important for establishing Israel’s separateness and identity as a people, the (m)other’s place in these stories of origins must be undermined. Otherwise patriarchal hegemony over women based on the opposition between self and other would be challenged, and patriarchy would have to acknowledge the value of multiplicity and difference.<sup>256</sup>

The matriarch’s role is vital for the future of God’s chosen people, but the nature of the text is such that her voice remains muted, and her role underplayed. However, Exum’s focus is still on the matriarch as mother, linking her biological functions to her role as woman and not allowing much space for an alternative reading of women outside of this function.

Exum and other biblical scholars concede that the text of Genesis is such that the stories of the matriarchs and other women are essentially hostage to a patriarchal society which sought to focus on maleness within the Bible, in order to: a) propagate an existing system of power

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 81-83.

<sup>251</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 84.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 84-91.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 114.

in which men were the holders, and b) legitimise God's chosen people through patrilineage as well as the concept of monotheism.<sup>257</sup> Because of this, women were never going to be at the centre of, or the focus of, biblical stories, despite their role as mothers to the patriarchs. Further, their role is only ever seen in relation to the men in their lives, in relation to their biological function of producing children, or in relation to each other as incomplete characters who are completed by their female counterparts. Rarely are they seen in their own terms, and never are their own thoughts or words given precedence in the text. That they identify as being women is never questioned, because they are never asked; the patriarchal didactics of the text insist upon a binary gender system of male-female which does not leave room for suggesting otherwise,<sup>258</sup> because women must perform as woman, procreating in order that the males may have descendants.

The question is, how does Crumb present the idea of men and women in his remediation? Does he present a binary construct of gender? Does he focus on the biological function of women bearing children, of sexual encounters between men and women, and of the role of mother? These are questions which must be considered in the case studies of chapter 4. One study I have not discussed which is key to this, is Teubal's *Sarah the Priestess* which challenges many of the suggestions above. It is discussed more fully in chapter 3, because it is a named source of inspiration for Crumb's work. However, the above approaches outline modern biblical scholarship of recent decades, and as such frame my own approach to reading Crumb's remediation.

## A comics framework through the lens of gender

The primary focus of this thesis is an investigation into the ways in which R. Crumb utilises the medium of comics, including the various visual and textual tools of comic book, to produce a new hermeneutical approach to reading the Bible, leading to an exploration of the kind of space biblical comics inhabit or create. Though this thesis focuses on just one biblical comic, one of the broader aims is to demonstrate how the study of Crumb can be applied to biblical comics in general, and in turn, what this means for the reception of the Bible in the

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<sup>257</sup> See, for example: Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible", in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, edited by Alice Bach (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 127.

<sup>258</sup> I mean this traditionally speaking, as I am aware that current biblical scholarship is doing precisely that: reading narratives through lenses which include those from a gender and LGBT+ perspective.

modern age of comics. To that end, this study both borrows from, and adds to, the fields of biblical reception, Bible and popular culture, and biblical hermeneutics.

The secondary lens through which I approach the thesis, is from a gender perspective. This is because, as outlined, one of the main sources for Crumb was Savina Teubal's theories on the matriarch Sarah; theories which were garnered from a gender, literary, and socio-historical perspective. Although other sources are used which are just as – if not more – important, the tension between the perceived character of Crumb as a misogynist/sexist, his actual stated views on women, his history of drawing women, and his rendering of the matriarchs in *Genesis, Illustrated* means there is a lot of unpacking to do in the close readings of these narratives in the case studies. Further, using the lens of gender studies in this thesis is relevant, timely and feeds into the existing field of modern scholarship on the subject in biblical studies.

To that end, the framework of comics studies which I have discussed here, is the main approach I take in the case studies of the matriarchs. On a secondary level, but also throughout the case study, I refer to Crumb's depiction of the matriarchs through the lens of biblical scholarship as demonstrated above. However, at the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the framework of interpretive points put forth by Alderman and Alderman.<sup>259</sup> As discussed, points 2, 3 and 4 of that framework are of utmost interest to this study, and I have reframed them to focus on Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*. The resulting questions are the focus of my case studies in chapter 4:

1. How does Crumb come to an understanding of Genesis through his combined reading of various sources,
2. How does Crumb remediate his reading of Genesis into a comic utilising comic book tools and resources,
3. What space does *Genesis, Illustrated* inhabit or create for its readers, and ultimately, what does this mean for biblical comics in general?

By applying the framework of comics put forth by Miller, Groensteen, McCloud and Eisner to Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, I will answer the above questions, always bearing in mind the aspect of gender studies which provides the secondary focus of this study. I now turn to a short biography of R. Crumb, a summary of his career, religious affiliations and an overview of *Genesis, Illustrated*.

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<sup>259</sup> Alderman and Alderman, "Graphically Depicted", 22.

## Chapter 3: An Introduction to R. Crumb's *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated*

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the life and artistic career of R. Crumb, and a summary of *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated by R. Crumb*. I discuss the reasons behind Crumb's decision to illustrate Genesis, his understanding of, and approach to, the text, followed by a review of his art style, method and visual choices. This introduces the tone and style of the book to the reader, as well as situating *Genesis, Illustrated* in Crumb's life, religious beliefs and artistic career. Due to the influence of Savina Teubal's hypothesis on gender roles in Genesis, and the fact that I am using case studies which focus on the matriarchs, I also discuss Crumb's previous work in relation to his perception of gender depictions and roles. Finally, I discuss the textual and visual sources which influenced Crumb's remediation of Genesis.

### The life and career of R. Crumb

'Misogynist', 'sexist', 'weird', 'perverse' and 'controversial' are labels frequently applied to R. Crumb and his work. Best known for his heavily crosshatched, pen-and-ink drawn comic books and strips such as *Zap Comix* and the *Keep on Truckin'* strip, and countercultural characters like Fritz the Cat and Mr. Natural, Crumb's work pervaded the underground comix scene in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>260</sup> As such, he has become a legendary figure in the comics industry, and an inspiration to many established and aspiring cartoonists and comic book creators.<sup>261</sup>

In his autobiography, *The R. Crumb Handbook*, Crumb discusses a wide range of influences which played an important role in shaping his artistic style, and ultimately, his career. For

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<sup>260</sup> Small press or self-published comics published in America and the United Kingdom in the 1960s-70s are called "underground comix" to distinguish them from mainstream comics. Their content often involved imagery and language that was not acceptable in mainstream comics, due to the rules established by the Comics Code Authority which forbade references to drugs, sex and violence. Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton and S. Clay Wilson are considered among the most important figures in underground comix history. See: Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (London: Phaidon, 1996).

<sup>261</sup> For example, see Monte Beauchamp, ed., *The Life and Time of R. Crumb: Comments from Contemporaries* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), which contains many stories from a range of artists and writers explaining how they have been influenced by R. Crumb.



example, Crumb credits his older brother Charles for introducing him to the medium of comics and discusses how the two would spend hours creating their own comic books.<sup>262</sup> He calls himself “a total child of popular culture,”<sup>263</sup> recalling how he spent his childhood watching films and television. Influential ones which stuck in his mind included Cecil B. DeMille’s *Samson and Delilah* (1949) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and programmes such as *Howdy Doody* and *Lone Ranger*.<sup>264</sup> In terms of cartooning and drawing, Crumb cites the animations which came out of the Fleischer Studios, which included an animated series of Superman, *Popeye*, and a reproduction of *Gulliver’s Travels* as inspiration,<sup>265</sup> and also notes the animations of Walt Disney as influential, along with the artwork of Walt Kelly.<sup>266</sup>

Crumb’s professional career in the comic book industry began in the 1960s when he created a number of comic strips for men’s magazine *Cavalier* featuring the characters “Fritz the Cat” and “Mr. Natural”. He went on to collaborate with S. Clay Wilson and Gilbert Shelton to create *Zap Comix*, which spawned many his now iconic characters, including “Angelfood McSpade”. From there, he worked for magazines including *Mad* and *Weirdo*, co-editing a number of issues and working with other renowned comic book creators such as Art Spiegelman, creator of Pulitzer prize-winning *Maus*. In 1994, Crumb and his family moved to France, where he continues to create artwork, selling prints and working for various magazines. He has featured in several exhibitions in France and the United States and was awarded the *Grand Prix de la ville d’Angoulême* in 1999 in recognition of his achievements in the evolution of comics.

For most of his career, Crumb was known for creating sexually perverse characters and stories, and some of his comic strips have been described as pornographic and graphically explicit in their depiction of sex and the human form. He is also known for his often-satirical critiques on contemporary culture, and his ability to draw keen observations of modern life which focus on problems associated with consumerism and the over-consumption of goods in America and other cultural barometers, using the “medium of comic books to explore the outer reaches of adult assumptions about race, sex and the American condition.”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> R. Crumb and Peter Poplaski, *The R. Crumb Handbook* (London: MQ Publications, 2005), 25.

<sup>263</sup> Andrew D. Arnold, “R. Crumb Speaks,” *TIME*, accessed June 19, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1055105-1,00.html>.

<sup>264</sup> Crumb and Poplaski, *R. Crumb Handbook*, 62-74.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>266</sup> Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan, *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* (London: Continuum, 2009), 158.

<sup>267</sup> Arnold, “R. Crumb Speaks.”

## Religious Affiliations

Crumb's religious affiliations and how they potentially influence his remediation of Genesis are important, considering the subject matter of his project and considering my approach to analysing his *Genesis, Illustrated*. Crumb and his siblings were not brought up in a religious tradition, but were sent to a Catholic-affiliated school because their father, a military man, believed it would instil good discipline and a sense of routine in his children.<sup>268</sup> When he was about 15, Crumb describes how he became "quite fanatically Catholic"<sup>269</sup> attending Church, receiving communion and partaking in other rituals; however his faith quickly dissipated when he began to question and scrutinise the tradition and sacred texts surrounding it. Crumb maintains he has been on a spiritual journey for much of his life and now identifies as a Gnostic, distinguishing Gnosticism from agnostic as follows:

My rough, crude definition of a Gnostic is someone who's interested in the idea of a higher spiritual existence or being or reality – a greater reality that you could call divine, you could call it God, you can call it the great spirit, all-that-is, whatever you want. But I'm interested in that, and I spend time studying that and seeking that, and seeking communication with it, a connection with it: the higher reality. So I call that Gnosticism.<sup>270</sup>

Crumb explains that he believes all living things belong to the same "unified field"<sup>271</sup> of existence and consciousness, but that our limited understanding as humans means we cannot comprehend our place or purpose in the "giant entity."<sup>272</sup> As he phrases it, "something in us wants to know [...] that's where "gnosis" comes from."<sup>273</sup> He describes the human race as always searching for a higher entity but being continually waylaid and distracted by dogma and doctrine, thus he is disinterested in institutionalised religion. Crumb has an interest in the Eastern traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism, describing them as "much more democratic and open, and not as rigid", unlike the "antagonistic and aggressive" religious traditions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> "Comic-Strip Artist R. Crumb Mocks the Book of Genesis," Fox News, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2009/10/21/comic-strip-artist-r-crumb-mocks-book-genesis.html>.

<sup>269</sup> Eric Spitznagel, "Robert Crumb Thinks God Might Actually Be Crazy," modified October 22, 2009, <http://www.ericspitznagel.com/awkward-question-time/robert-crumb/>.

<sup>270</sup> Gary Groth, "R. Crumb: The Genesis Interview," in *The Comics Journal* 301, edited by Gary Groth et al (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2011), 17-70.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

Crumb's ideas of religion and spirituality have impacted his interpretation of Genesis, particularly, in his artistic decisions. For example, he credits his depiction of God partly to the "standard image of God as the severe patriarch with the long white beard" which he was exposed to as a child in the Catholic church.<sup>275</sup> Elsewhere he also describes how his image of God was influenced by a dream he had, in which God revealed himself to Crumb.<sup>276</sup> In his dream, Crumb described how a 'God-being' appeared to him amidst a vision of the earth being destroyed by unknowable and indefinable forces. The God-being explained how Crumb could join forces with other souls to prevent the destruction. Crumb said that in his dream, he could not look upon the face of the God-being for more than a split-second because his face was so anguished and severe; but in that split second, he describes God as looking similar to Charlton Heston or Mel Gibson.<sup>277</sup> However, Crumb concedes that his depiction of God in *Genesis, Illustrated* does not live up to the image he had of him and that no matter how often he tried, he was unable to render his idea of a perfect image of God.<sup>278</sup>

Elsewhere, Crumb explains how he reads Genesis in terms of his belief system. He views the God of Genesis as "the ultimate patriarch,"<sup>279</sup> an angry-tempered, judging and commanding God who is the father of everybody, is almost fickle in his decisions, but who can be negotiated with and who is open to persuasion.<sup>280</sup> Crumb also describes him, especially in his relationship to Abraham, as very personal and present, so much so that he has to be seen as a "physical being."<sup>281</sup> However as the narratives in Genesis progress, God becomes more distant, separating himself from his creation. Crumb explains how he sees God as being "crazy", "irrational" yet "benevolent and passionate" throughout the text of Genesis, adding that rationality is a human concept anyway, so expecting God to behave rationally is illogical.<sup>282</sup>

Crumb believes the book of Genesis is a book of fairy tales and myths.<sup>283</sup> In several interviews given around the time of publication of *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb repeatedly states that he does not believe the Bible is the word of God, yet acknowledges that it holds a 'special' place in the history of humanity. He describes how Genesis appeals to him as it

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<sup>275</sup> Groth, "The Genesis Interview".

<sup>276</sup> Arnold, "R. Crumb Speaks".

<sup>277</sup> Groth, "The Genesis Interview".

<sup>278</sup> Ted Widmer, "R. Crumb, The Art of Comics No. 1," The Paris Review, accessed June 21, 2016, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6017/the-art-of-comics-no-1-r-crumb>.

<sup>279</sup> "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

<sup>280</sup> For example, Crumb cites Genesis 18: 22-33. See: "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Spitznagel, "God Might Actually Be Crazy".

<sup>283</sup> Jean-Pierre Mercier, "Revelations to Angoulême 2010: Robert Crumb on Genesis," accessed June 21, 2016, [http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/revelations\\_at\\_angouleme\\_2010](http://www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/revelations_at_angouleme_2010).

showcases the history of stories which have been retold over thousands of years, and continuously studied to reveal some sort of truth within the words.<sup>284</sup> He describes the expressions within the text as “old, strange and tribal,” with a skewed morality which might have suited communities thousands of years ago, but which has no place today.<sup>285</sup>

Crumb grew to dislike the Bible as he worked through his project, finding it increasingly difficult to comprehend why people still use it for moral guidance and as a foundation for their beliefs. However, the length both in time and material of the project might have impacted his view on Genesis, as it took nearly four times longer than he had originally anticipated, and he grew tired of the task. It is also important to remember that, despite his dislike of the text and his views on religion, Crumb tried to remain impartial and illustrate the text in what he believes was a straightforward manner.

### Portrayal of women in Crumb’s work

R. Crumb has often been accused of producing sexist or misogynistic work throughout his career. His depictions of large, curvaceous woman are described as unflattering and unrealistic, and he is known for producing images of gratuitous sex scenes, many of which involve smaller, inferior men being dominated by strong females. Crumb describes these works as “all fantasy”.<sup>286</sup> While many accuse him of being anti-women,<sup>287</sup> Crumb has addressed the claims as follows:

When I started doing it in '68 or '69, the people who had loved my work before that, some of them were shocked and alienated by it – especially the women, of course. I lost all the women. I’m not antifeminist. I like strong, independent women, like the matriarchs of Genesis – they ordered the men around. The sex-fantasy thing was a whole other side of myself, and when that started coming out, I could no longer be America’s best-loved hippie cartoonist.<sup>288</sup>

In the same interview, he describes women as “powerful and predatory”. In another interview with NPR, he explains that his depictions of sex have always been personal and fetishistic, and were only ever created for himself.<sup>289</sup> The conflict between depicting

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<sup>284</sup> Spitznagel, “God Might Actually Be Crazy”.

<sup>285</sup> Mercier, “Robert Crumb on Genesis”.

<sup>286</sup> Arnold, “R. Crumb Speaks”.

<sup>287</sup> For example, Crumb cancelled a scheduled attendance at a comics/film festival in Australia in August 2011 after newspaper reports emerged in which Crumb was accused of being “sick and deranged” by several groups including sexual assault crisis groups. For a fuller picture and an interview by Crumb on the incident, see: Gary Groth, “Robert Crumb – Live Online: The Interview That Didn’t Happen,” accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.tcj.com/crumb-and-groth-live-online/>.

<sup>288</sup> Widmer, “The Art of Comics No. 1”.

<sup>289</sup> “R. Crumb illustrates the Bible”, NPR.

strong, independent women for his own sexual gratification is one of the main areas of concern for feminists reading his work because it draws upon the problematic issue of the male gaze, and of Crumb depicting women as subservient and objectified rather than as independent strong women. However, it is a conflict Crumb is aware of, as he has previously described himself as “pro-feminist” but with sexual fantasies which do not corroborate this, and do not adhere him to feminist activists.<sup>290</sup>

Crumb does not clearly unpack what he means by “pro-feminist”. However, other cues within his interviews regarding this subject indicate that he supports the idea of feminism but does not identify as a feminist. While he sympathises with many of the causes associated with feminism such as challenging unequal status between men and women and regarding masculinity as oppressive to women, he does not actively pursue or involve himself in campaigns to further the feminist agenda.<sup>291</sup> Generally speaking, it is normally men who identify as pro-feminist, as they argue that feminism is a movement created for and by women. For some men, identifying as feminist would be to take power from, or “colonise” a women’s movement which is something they wish to avoid.<sup>292</sup> This is problematic in that there is not one form of feminism because it is diverse and can take into account liberal, radical, black, queer, postmodern and other forms of feminism. This diversity is reflected in the beliefs of men who identify as pro-feminist as well.<sup>293</sup> However, one of the overarching viewpoints of pro-feminism is that the members are anti-sexist and anti-patriarchal. This is a view Crumb agrees with and has tried to incorporate into his version of Genesis.

In particular, Crumb’s manner of depicting women as strong, independent figures has carried into his work in Genesis. While he describes himself as pro-feminist, I argue that his treatment of women shows a feminist perspective of the matriarchs. I have briefly discussed the influence of Savina Teubal’s thesis in *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis*, but now I would like to develop this further by addressing Crumb’s thoughts on Teubal’s thesis, and how I believe it has impacted his own work.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Todd Hignite, *In the Studio: Visits with Contemporary Cartoonists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 22.

<sup>291</sup> See: Michael Flood, “Pro-feminist men and pro-feminist men’s politics” XY Online, accessed April 14, 2018, <http://xyonline.net/content/frequently-asked-questions-about-pro-feminist-men-and-pro-feminist-mens-politics>.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> I explore this further in this chapter, in the section discussing textual and visual influences on Crumb’s remediation of Genesis.

In an interview with Crumb, I asked why he believed Teubal's female-led perspective to be the correct way to view Genesis.<sup>295</sup> His reply was that Teubal had undertaken research in an area which hitherto had been completely dominated by men who were unable to, or unlikely to, apply a women's perspective on the narrative. He believed that Teubal's approach unveiled a hidden truth to Genesis, that society at that time was female-led rather than patriarchal, and he added that "it needed a serious female scholar to root this ancient buried history out of the tangle of later redactions, distortions, corruptions, biased translations."<sup>296</sup> I followed this answer with a question regarding his depiction of women, and whether he was consciously portraying them in a dominant manner, as per Teubal's theories. Crumb replied: "I believe that I simply portrayed them as they are in the original text. [Eve and Sarah] are both very dominant personalities. Adam is a rather passive character, as is Abraham in relation to Sarah."<sup>297</sup>

Crumb's reading of Teubal has influenced his depiction of women in Genesis, and that this is a perspective which contrasts with general opinions of Crumb's work being sexist or misogynistic. In the next section, I give an overview of the artwork and contents of the book, including a close observation of the portrayal of Eve on the front cover of the book, which supports the above point before discussing textual and visual sources.

## R. Crumb's *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated*

Crumb's decision to illustrate Genesis came from a history of "playing around with Adam and Eve," from a satirical, playful angle.<sup>298</sup> However, he was never fully satisfied with the results of those drawings, and so experimented with the idea of drawing Adam and Eve in a straightforward way. His interest in the area stemmed from a general interest in ancient histories, including Mesopotamian, Assyrian and Egyptian cultures, especially in the repetition or similarities between creation myths, destruction myths and so forth.<sup>299</sup> This interest eventually led to the idea of adapting a biblical book into a comic book.

Crumb also suggests that he only committed to the project because a profitable deal was struck with publishers W. W. Norton. Both Crumb and the publishers felt that a book like

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<sup>295</sup> For a full transcript of the interview, see appendix A.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> For example, see: "Adam and Eve: Our First Parents," from a 2003 sketchbook, reproduced in Crumb and Poplaski, *R. Crumb Handbook*, 46-47.

<sup>299</sup> See appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb.

Genesis would lend itself well to the comic book format because: “comic books have many possibilities. They can illuminate a text: break it down into panels, illustrate everything, and suddenly it brings to light things that people might pass over in a written text. Adding pictures is a whole other dimension.”<sup>300</sup> For Crumb, the text of the Bible was vivid enough already: illustrating it in a comic book format was a logical step, and one which he hoped would help make sense of a potentially difficult text, and W.W. Norton seemingly agreed.

Crumb spent four years on the project in total, often isolating himself in a small gîte near to his family home in France to concentrate on the work. His wife, cartoonist Aline Kominsky-Crumb would visit him with baskets of food on a weekly basis; but otherwise he worked in isolation, cut off from distractions.<sup>301</sup> Some reviewers have commented on the similarity between Crumb’s actions and the actions of others who self-impose isolation upon themselves to study religious texts or other great works of literature.<sup>302</sup>

### Setting the tone: Front Cover

The artwork in *Genesis, Illustrated* is consistent with Crumb’s scratchy, heavily cross-hatched style of drawing, and the lettering is in his own handwriting, consistent with previous work. There is no use of colour apart from the front cover, which is printed in a vibrant red-and-yellow combination.<sup>303</sup> The visual elements on the front cover are a confusing hybrid of modern, contemporary symbols with old-fashioned parts. Beginning with the cover, the words “The Book of” are drawn in a nineteenth-century replication of an ornamented black-letter type. Black-letter is a font which was widely used across Western Europe from 1150 onwards, and was the choice of font for the first printings of the Gutenberg Bible. It is also the style of font in which some of the titles within the King James Version were printed in 1611.<sup>304</sup> Then, the use of the font was intended to convey status and authority. Its use in these Bibles meant it was a popular choice of font for other Bible versions and some other political and religious books, and it remained popular until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it began to be replaced by Roman and Italic typefaces which were easier to print and read.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> “R. Crumb illustrates the Bible”, NPR.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Widmer, “R. Crumb, The Art of Comics No.1”.

<sup>303</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 3.1.

<sup>304</sup> “Sacred Texts”, British Library, accessed February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/kingjames.html>.

<sup>305</sup> Jennifer Farley, “The Blackletter Typeface: A Long and Coloured History,” accessed February 7, 2016, <http://www.sitepoint.com/the-blackletter-typeface-a-long-and-colored-history/>.

Nevertheless its association with Bibles is still recognised, and Crumb is arguably re-appropriating this font to convey the seam idea of status and authority in his version of Genesis.<sup>306</sup> Crumb's use of the font is twofold: firstly it makes the book recognisable to readers as something associated with older Bible texts, thus lending some sort of authority and historicity to Crumb's modern version; and secondly, it sets the tone for the contents of the book in much the same way, signifying to the reader that *Genesis, Illustrated* can and should be read as a serious version of the Bible, and not just a playful, light-hearted or even satirical biblical comic. It must be noted though, that this is dependent upon the reception of the book by individuals.

In the title, the word "Genesis" becomes more cartoon-like, as if it is a hybrid crossed between gothic font and a contemporary comic book font. There is a hint of ancient Hebrew text in the curve and stroke of the letters: for example, the 'G' in Genesis resembles the Hebrew letter ג in shape and style.<sup>307</sup> The other letters bear some resemblance to Hebrew glyphs as well, albeit in a much more contemporary, modern form. The word "Genesis" is twice the size of any other text on the front cover, and its red colouring against a yellow backdrop ensures it is eye-catching and prominent. Underneath "Genesis" are the words "Illustrated by R. Crumb." The word "Illustrated" is hand-drawn in block letters in a style reminiscent of sans typeface, and "by R. Crumb" is hand-drawn in serif typeface, and looks very similar to handwriting. The evolution from traditional, gothic black-letter font towards the modern typefaces at the end of the title signifies the marrying of an ancient text with a modern interpretation.

The rest of the cover has a coloured image of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, an alternative version to the image used inside the book, along with a declaration that the book is "The first book of the Bible graphically depicted! Nothing left out!" and that it contains "All 50 Chapters", along with a content warning expressing "Adult Supervision recommended for Minors."

Crumb's decision to use the image on the front probably comes from three different points. Firstly, Robert Alter uses an image from Hieronymus Bosch's "Haywain Triptych" (1516) of the same scene on the front cover of his translation and commentary of Genesis.<sup>308</sup> Alter's text is one of the main sources of Crumb's Genesis, so Crumb was probably well-associated

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<sup>306</sup> Mario Saraceni suggests that the way we understand words may also depend on the way they look, thus supporting my point that Crumb is using Blackletter font purposefully to inform the reader that his version is to be read similarly to other Bible versions. Saraceni, *The Language of Comics*, 13.

<sup>307</sup> With thanks to Dr. A. K. M. Adam, University of Oxford, for his insights into this topic.

<sup>308</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 3.2.



with it and perhaps wanted to acknowledge it by using the same scene on his own version. While Crumb's version is different in style and composition, it does have similarities to the Hieronymus Bosch image used on Alter's front cover, for example, the colour palette is similar in tones of yellows, nudes, greens and greys and each image has God, Adam and Eve in them.<sup>309</sup>

This connection with Bosch's version of the expulsion from the garden links to the second possible motivation of Crumb using the image. The expulsion from the garden is a common theme recurring throughout the history of art, and famous images of the scene can quite frequently be found on front covers of theological books about Genesis and the Hebrew Bible. By using it on his own front cover, Crumb is situating his version in a long, historical tradition of biblical paintings, as well as a tradition in theological books of using the scene on front covers. Thus, he is attempting to give his own version the same status and regard as other illustrated bibles and theological commentaries on Genesis.

The third reason behind choosing this image may lie in subverting the expectations of the reader. As noted, Crumb is often associated with lewd, pornographic cartoons which frequently show images of men and women engaging in sexual acts, often interpreted by critics as scenes which denigrate women. Those who have previous knowledge of Crumb's work might expect his *Genesis, Illustrated* to follow the same route, but I would argue against this, and instead contend that Crumb's deployment of Eve in the expulsion scene places her in the dominant, powerful position in the narrative. For example, Eve is centred in the image, between Adam and God. Her body moves forward away from the divine, but her face is contorted backwards towards God, maintaining a connection; the emotion on her face is visible through the presence of tears and the parting of her mouth in an anguished expression. In contrast, Adam is facing forward with no sign of distress on his face. Rather, he appears resigned to his fate of toil and hard labour, emphasised by the tool which he already carries in his hand.

Eve is clearly the dominant partner in the couple, and the mediator between man and divine in the scenario. This is emphasised by the space given to her body which is in mid-stride, making it larger than Adam's or God's. Her body stands out against the backdrop of greenery, whereas Adam's body has begun to meld into his surroundings of grey sky and yellow dirt. The serpent is represented by the sinewy, snake-like branches of the trees

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<sup>309</sup> Hieronymus Bosch's version of the image is not the only one similar to Crumb's, but as there is direct connection between Crumb's front cover and Bosch's image on Alter's front cover, I have chosen to focus mainly on it.

between God and Eve. The serpent is the root cause of their fall which has – figuratively in this image – caused a divide between God and humanity. I would argue that this depiction of Eve is characteristic of how Crumb sees women in the Bible, and therefore how he treats them artistically in his version. Instead of seeing females as narrative tools and unequal partners dominated by their male counterparts, Crumb is allowing women their own space and prominence within the narrative, thus subverting expectations and traditional patriarchal readings of Genesis. It also goes against traditional images of the expulsion scene, which normally emphasise either the figure of Adam or the figure of God.

These three motivations for using the expulsion scene as the front cover image set the tone and style for the content of the book. As noted, it reminds the reader of other well-known images of Genesis, so that Crumb's version is easily recognisable. It also acknowledges traditions in biblical theology, and the history of illustrated Bibles and printed Bibles, through the marrying together of black-letter-style fonts and contemporary fonts with images and colour. All of these aspects help to situate Crumb's version of *Genesis, Illustrated* with other Bible versions and with the history of illustrated Bibles.

Continuing the theme of legitimising the book within the scope of biblical exegesis, the design of the content warning advising that "Adult Supervision is recommended for minors" has two functions. Firstly, it is to highlight the dual nature of the book. That there is sex and violence in Genesis is common knowledge, however, the text-only nature of the Bible means that such scenes are not as explicit or indeed visual. Purposefully creating a version of the text which also incorporates images means that the reader must be confronted with a visual narrative as well as a textual one, which implies some adult-scenes which might not be suitable for the younger generation. Secondly, it sets the book apart from other picture bibles, which normally target a younger market.

The message is clearly that *Genesis, Illustrated* is not part of that category, even though it is a graphic novel. The appearance of the content warning is another acknowledgment of the book's place in the worlds of the Bible and of comic books; the font is a return to a contemporary typeface, encased in a speech bubble-type shape, a symbol ubiquitous with comic books. Thus, I argue, even the content warning has been designed in such a way that it situates Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* in both biblical and comics' worlds, again signifying the dual nature of his work. Final proof of this marrying of worlds is the caption exclaiming "The first book of the Bible graphically depicted! Nothing left out!" These words are in Crumb's characteristic handwriting style, synonymous with most of his previous work thus acknowledging his background in comics. However, they are encased in a hand-drawn scroll,

another nod to tradition in biblical text: the way in which biblical stories used to be written and stored in scroll form.<sup>310</sup>

## Contents

Dedicated to his wife, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, *Genesis, Illustrated* opens with an introduction written by R. Crumb. The introduction, in Crumb's signature handwriting, does not explain why he chose to undertake the project. It does, however, explain his approach to the task: "I approached this as a straight illustration job, with no intention to ridicule or make visual jokes."<sup>311</sup> It also contains Crumb's understanding of the Bible, that he believes it to be the work of men, not of God, and that he understands the whole Bible to be "an inspired work, but I believe that its power derives from its having been a collective endeavour that evolved and condensed over many generations before reaching its final, fixed form."<sup>312</sup> The introduction concludes with acknowledgments to friends and family who aided the project in some way, and provides another source of evidence as to what references Crumb used in the project.

Following the introduction is a title page which, in contrast to the cover page, is entirely written in black-letter font apart from the word "illustrated" which appears in the same serif font as before. As is customary in Bibles, there is a map which precedes the biblical text, showing, in this case, "The World of Abraham, circa 2000-1600 B.C.E.," highlighting various locations from the story.<sup>313</sup> Juxtaposed with the map on the opposite page is the beginning of the Genesis narrative. The visual of the map, complete with land formations, geographical locations and a scale contrasts wildly with the opening image of Genesis which is a splash-page of God creating the heavens and the earth from the formless void.<sup>314</sup> The map-page is a reminder that out of the chaos of the formless void on its opposite page, order will be created in the shape of structured lands.

The contents of the rest of the book correspond to the traditional layout of Genesis. As previously noted, Crumb does not use lectionary divisions in his version; instead, he moves

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<sup>310</sup> Timothy Beal discusses the role of the scroll in recording and storing the Torah in the ancient biblical world, suggesting that this was the form in which Jesus would have read the ancient text. See: Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book* (New York: Mariner Books, 2012). The role of the scroll is still important in the contemporary Jewish religion, as the Torah is still read from a scroll in Synagogues in keeping with tradition and history.

<sup>311</sup> Crumb, "Introduction," *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Crumb, "Map," *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>314</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 2.2.

the story along with the images, an acknowledgment that the original Hebrew versions of the Bible do not contain lectionary divisions.<sup>315</sup> In Crumb's version, I would argue that this allows the story to flow freely and without the tradition boundaries set by traditional verse numbering which might have interfered with Crumb's artistic choices as to where and when to break the verses into panels.<sup>316</sup> Each chapter of Genesis is numbered, however, and in keeping with traditional chapter divisions. The chapter headings are written in black-letter font like the front and title pages, reinforcing the idea of a marriage between ancient text and contemporary format. All the lettering within the pages is in Crumb's characteristic handwriting and appears in various modes from caption boxes to speech bubbles. The book concludes with a short commentary at the end, written by Crumb. The commentary explains Crumb's artistic choices, both in image and word, for some of the passages, although he does not comment on every chapter. The commentary also mentions other sources which have influenced his interpretation,<sup>317</sup> and Crumb's own musings on Genesis and its uses over its long history, which illuminate some his choices concerning textual and visual sources. The book is 224 pages in total, and there are no page numbers.

On the artwork, critics have been divided.<sup>318</sup> Crumb is known for a 'realistic' approach to drawing, especially when it comes to people; that is, his depictions of people have all the right body parts in all of the right places and are as straightforward as his style allows. In Genesis, the people are drawn, in Crumb's words, to look like Jews. He took inspiration from ancient Assyrian bas-reliefs, from stills of *Intolerance* and *The Ten Commandments*, and from various other sources. His people are not conventionally beautiful, but they are consistent to Crumb's other work, and perhaps this means they are consistent with Crumb's idea of beauty.<sup>319</sup> The figure of God is the typical long-haired, bearded patriarchal figure, something else which has drawn criticism for lack of imagination.<sup>320</sup> The style of the panels is meticulous in detail, carefully planned and executed, and the style of artwork remains

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<sup>315</sup> This is a fact Crumb would have been aware of from his use of the JPS commentary of Genesis which notes that lectionary divisions were a Christian tradition which were only adopted later by Jewish scholars when they took part in debates with Christians which necessitated a standardised referencing system. See: Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, xi.

<sup>316</sup> This is a point which I posed to Crumb in our interview, and which he agreed upon. See: appendix A, Interview with R. Crumb.

<sup>317</sup> The commentary, for example, is the first place the reader sees mention of Crumb's fascination with Savina Teubal's work.

<sup>318</sup> For example, see the roundtable discussion in: The Hooded Utilitarian, "Slow-Rolling Genesis Index," accessed February 7, 2016, <http://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2010/08/crumbs-limited-literalism/>.

<sup>319</sup> Crumb discussed his idea of beauty and women with Eric Spitznagel, "R. Crumb Thinks God Might Actually Be Crazy".

<sup>320</sup> For example, see: Peter Sattler, "Crumb's Limited Literalism: Seeing and Not Seeing in Genesis," accessed February 7, 2016, <http://www.hoodedutilitarian.com/2010/08/crumbs-limited-literalism/>.

consistent over the whole book. This level of attention is probably the reason why the project took four years to complete.<sup>321</sup>

## Textual and Visual sources in Crumb's Remediation

Crumb names four textual sources and several visual sources which influenced word choice and graphic decisions during the creative process of *Genesis, Illustrated*: Robert Alter's *The Five Books of Moses*; the *King James Version* (KJV) of the Bible; the *Jewish Publication Society* (JPS) translation and commentary of Genesis; and Savina Teubal's *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis*.<sup>322</sup> Crumb also mentions a friend, Betsy Sandlin, who helped him understand the more difficult passages of Hebrew, but does not offer any further information on her.<sup>323</sup>

I have so far mentioned several times that Crumb claims his interpretation includes "every word of the original text" which has been derived from "several sources".<sup>324</sup> This is evidently paradoxical and therefore problematic. His statement leads the reader to assume an original source of the text exists, but it does not. Even without the problems associated with the identification of an original biblical text, Crumb contradicts himself by admitting to using several sources which, as previously discussed, is an acknowledgment that no single source acts as a point of reference for his work. I have discussed why I think Crumb does this previously, but it is vital that the reader recognises there is no original text and that Crumb has used several sources because Crumb's sources – both visual and textual – impacts his understanding and interpretation of Genesis. This shapes the final product and potentially affects how the reader receives the remediation.

This chapter is concerned with examining these sources and illuminating their influence on Crumb's remediation. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) Robert Alter's commentary and translation of Genesis; (b) the KJV; (c) the JPS; (d) Savina Teubal's studies on the roles of women in Genesis; (e) visual sources, and (f) other sources. Each section

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<sup>321</sup> Crumb frequently his obsessive attention to detail in interviews. See: Groth, "The Genesis Interview".

<sup>322</sup> These are all mentioned as sources in the introduction or commentary in *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated*, and in various interviews, including in the interview conducted with NPR, and in the interview which I conducted with Crumb between Feb-May 2016 in appendix A.

<sup>323</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*. I approach this thesis under the impression that R. Crumb does not read biblical Hebrew but is garnering his interpretation from materials which are taken from the Hebrew language text.

<sup>324</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

contains a summary of the work and an analysis concerning how that work impacted Crumb's remediation of Genesis.

While I acknowledge that comics are a visual form of reading by their very characteristic of incorporating text with image, for pragmatic reasons I have chosen to analyse text separately from image. This is because the textual sources are just that: purely textual, without image. However, the concluding remarks in this chapter will reconcile the two, discussing the interaction between text and image in terms of how the various sources interrelate with each other.

## Robert Alter: The Five Books of Moses

Alter published his commentary and translation of Genesis in 1996, and it was collected into a volume with his translations of and commentary on the other books of the Torah, published under the title *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation and Commentary* in 2004. This is the version which Crumb makes use of.

Alter's reason for carrying out the task of translating Genesis, despite hundreds of translations and versions existing, was to re-present the Bible "and above all, biblical narrative prose – in a language that conveys with some precision the semantic nuances and the lively orchestration of literary effects of the Hebrew, and at the same time has stylistic and rhythmic integrity as literary English."<sup>325</sup> Alter argues that modern versions of the Bible, such as the Revised English Bible (REV), Everett Fox's translation,<sup>326</sup> or E. A. Speiser's translation<sup>327</sup>, are too far removed from the original Hebrew language and are thus not a true representation of the Hebrew text. For example, Alter charges the REV as being "one of the most compulsive repackagers of biblical language,"<sup>328</sup> a charge which can also be laid at the door of Fox, Speiser or the Jerusalem Bible. Alter believes this is potentially problematic for the reader who may miss out on the nuances and playful metaphors often found in the Hebrew, and that this means that modern readers are not gaining a true experience of biblical narrative.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, ix.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, xii.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, xix.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*.

In the introductory article to his translation of Genesis, Alter focuses on two aspects: 1. The Bible in English and the Heresy of Explanation;<sup>330</sup> and 2. Genesis as a Book.<sup>331</sup> The first section draws the reader's attention to the history of translating the Bible, and the problems which have arisen from those ventures, and the second outlines the problems associated with reading Genesis – and by extension, the Bible – as a complete book rather recognising the different authorial and editorial voices within.

In the first section, Alter discusses how many modern translations incorporate philological aims to present the reader with a clarified text; that is, they try to disambiguate the text for the modern reader and present a clear, concise and easily understood translation of the Bible. However, while a philological approach to the Bible may be useful in some aspects, a true translation of the Bible should not be concerned with providing clarity for the reader, but with presenting the text as close to the original as possible, even if the end result is unclear, or, to use Crumb's description, "convoluted in its vagueness."<sup>332</sup> The aim of a translation should not be an interpretation or substitution of the original text.<sup>333</sup> It should be to present the text as it was. By this argument, Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* is not a translation; it is a remediation, as I discussed in the introduction.

Biblical text is not, as Alter discusses, a straightforward, clear text to follow; nor can we as readers expect to understand the original authorial intentions behind the text or expect to glean a cohesive message. This is partly because we do not know who the authors were, and we cannot know their intended purpose. In fact, difficulty reading the text is normal, and I would argue, an essential part of the reading experience because it is a text, after all, which was written thousands of years ago, in a politically and socially foreign land, by ancient communities which have very little in common with modern readership and society. In that respect, the disambiguation of the text is to be wholly expected and even embraced. How Crumb reacts to this is important in terms of how the modern reader receives his version of Genesis.

Alter provides several examples of why he believes most modern English translations of the Hebrew Bible do not manage to convey the original text effectively, including the difficulty of transferring Hebraic lexical metaphors into English, the loss of nuanced definition of

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, ix-xxxix.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, xxxix-xlvii.

<sup>332</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>333</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, xvi.

certain words, and the lack of rhythm and diction which leaves English versions often feeling stale, but which arguably bring the Hebrew text to life.<sup>334</sup>

As an example, Alter discusses the difficulty English translations have in presenting metaphors as narrative tools – something the Hebrew version excels in. He uses the example of the “fondness [of using] images rooted in the human body”, such as, for example, the Hebrew noun זֶרַע (*zera'*) which means ‘seed’, a word which is applied to agricultural seed, sowing, human seed (semen) or progeny/offspring. Reading the word in its context in the Hebrew language illuminates which definition is being invoked. However, when this is translated into English, the word tends to be translated using only, or mostly, the definition ‘progeny’ or ‘offspring’, as in the Revised English Bible, for example. Alter’s point is that translations of Hebrew often find it difficult to carry across nuances of the Hebrew language; or at least, most them do not attempt to.

Alter’s translation and commentary on Genesis attempts to address issues like this. He has produced a translation which is not about clarifying the text or providing concrete meanings for readers, but is about re-presenting the text as close to the Hebrew as possible but so that it makes sense for a modern reader allowing the reader to interact with the text in a similar way to how audiences may have received it originally.<sup>335</sup> Of course, the difference in time, politics, social economy and place means we will never receive the text in that way, but his efforts are more about allowing a glimpse into that world rather than making the Bible fit into our world.

Alter is not concerned with presenting an easy version. His version for example, includes all the instances of the conjunctive *vav* (ו), so his text is littered with the word ‘and’.<sup>336</sup> In English, constant repetition of a word might become cumbersome or interrupt the flow. In Hebrew, repetition often makes the text flow. That is Alter’s point: “the translator’s task, then, is to mirror the repetitions as much as is feasible.”<sup>337</sup> However, it does mean that Alter’s version is perhaps more difficult to read because it does not comply with modern reading and writing practices, though Alter is clear that inevitably there is sometimes no English

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<sup>334</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, xxxvii.

<sup>335</sup> How the text was originally received is unclear; some suggest that it was initially a text which was meant to be read aloud to an audience, others suggest that learned scholars pored over the text in isolation. When I suggest that Alter’s version of Genesis might allow readers to interact with the text on a level similar to how it might have been received originally, I mean to say that his translation is as unaltered as possible and so it is possible that modern audiences can derive similar understandings to those reading the text 2,000 years ago.

<sup>336</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, xix-xx.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid*, xxvii.



equivalent for a Hebrew word, or there is no concise way to get over an idea which appears in the Hebrew version, and in that respect compromises must occasionally be made.<sup>338</sup>

The second section of his introductory chapter, *Genesis as a Book*, draws attention to the way Genesis is structured, and our contemporary reception of it. As a book, Genesis is normally divided into two literary units: Primeval History (chapters 1-11) and Patriarchal Tales (chapters 12-50). Both units share common traits, themes and stories, but they are markedly different in narrative, character and, for example, the depiction of God and his relationship with humans.<sup>339</sup> Alter highlights how biblical scholarship has debated questions of authorship, redaction and textual criticism, and how modern scholarship has subjected Genesis to scrutiny through the various lenses of literary, anthropological, and sociological studies.<sup>340</sup> However the most important point he makes which applies to Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* is that even though Genesis is often divided, torn apart by scholars and subject to various criticisms which disrupt the narrative experience, it still works cohesively as a standalone book with fifty chapters, as well as being part of a larger story (i.e. the rest of the Bible). Alter is not interested in source analysis in Genesis, or where divisions appear in the text. Rather, he is interested in the literary whole.<sup>341</sup> I am particularly interested in assessing how Crumb deals with what is both a unified text and, at times, a discordant narrative.

### The Influence of Alter's work on Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*

In an interview with NPR, Crumb addresses why he chose to use Alter: "I used Robert Alter's version mainly because [...] it's a recent translation, and he studied every word of that old Hebrew very closely to get it right."<sup>342</sup> In some areas, Crumb admits to finding Alter's translation "a little bit stilted" because it is so "careful and literate [...]" but it's very, very accurate."<sup>343</sup> Crumb believes Alter's translation is as close enough to the Hebrew as is possible, even though he has no understanding of Hebrew to support this. Crumb relies mostly on Alter's translations, only using the KJV and the JPS in areas where he feels it is more appropriate, or where he believes those translations are clearer or easier to follow, or in some cases, where he feels textual choices from the KJV or JPS are more impressive.

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid, xxix.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, xliii-xlvii.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, xli.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, xlviii.

<sup>342</sup> "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

As an example of Crumb appropriating Alter's choices into his remediation, I turn to a brief look at Gen 21:8-21. Verses 8-10 are identical to Alter's, with Crumb choosing to use the word "slavegirl" to describe Hagar, as opposed to the KJV's "bondwoman" or the JPS' "slavewoman". Alter does not suggest why he translates **אִמָּה** this way, but notes that by not referring to Hagar by name, Sarah "insists on the designation of low social status." Verses 12-21 are also identical to Alter's translation apart from the description of Ishmael in verse 20 where Crumb describes him as a "seasoned archer-bowman". Alter and the JPS both use "bowman" and the KJV uses "archer". Verse 20, then is an example of Crumb borrowing from other translations to clarify word-choices in Alter's translation. One final example is the use of a word which is repeated throughout Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*: "and behold". Crumb chooses to use "and behold" from the KJV over Alter's less-impressive "and look" because Alter's version "doesn't have the Biblical ring that 'behold' has. So I put back all the beholds."<sup>344</sup> Further examples are identified in the case studies of chapter 4.

## King James Version

In the introduction to his *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb notes his use of the KJV as a textual source.<sup>345</sup> He does not refer to a specific commentary or commentator of the text, which I take to mean he referred only to the biblical text rather than any other references. Crumb's choice to use the KJV is partly due to his belief that it is one of the most authentic, or at least authoritative of Hebrew translations.<sup>346</sup> As it was his intention to present an authentic version of Genesis, it is likely that he believed the KJV was a suitable choice because of its perceived authority. As the KJV is a well-known, popular translation of the Bible, it is unnecessary to summarise it here. Instead, I will discuss briefly where it might have influenced Crumb in his remediation.

## The influence of the KJV on Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*

As discussed, Crumb's main textual influence was Alter's translation and commentary of Genesis, but there is some evidence that Crumb prefers word choices and terms from the KJV over other versions. At the same time, it is important to consider how much of an influence the KJV had on the translation and commentary of Alter's version.

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<sup>344</sup> "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

<sup>345</sup> Crumb, "Introduction", *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>346</sup> Crumb does not give an explanation as to why he believes the KJV is authoritative.

In the introduction to his commentary, Alter accuses the King James Version of having a “shaky sense of Hebrew”,<sup>347</sup> but accedes that it is one of the closest translations to the original text as a reader could hope to access in English, “despite its frequent and at times embarrassing inaccuracies, despite its archaism, and despite its insistent substitution of Renaissance English tonalities and rhythms for biblical ones.”<sup>348</sup> Alter’s aim with his own translation and commentary of Genesis was to address the discrepancies and issues he found with the KJV, as well as addressing issues with modern translations.<sup>349</sup> For example, Alter notes that in the KJV, the translation of words associated with bodily fluids and sexual intercourse is much closer to Hebraic connotations than modern translations tend to achieve,<sup>350</sup> and as such, Alter tends to use the KJV translation in such scenarios as opposed to modern translations which, he deems, are often uncomfortable with body terms.<sup>351</sup> On the other hand, Alter identifies several instances where, in his opinion, the KJV has little foundation in biblical Hebrew language, either because the understanding was not correct or because the translation was too contemporaneous in hopes of appeasing a seventeenth-century readership.<sup>352</sup>

In these instances, Crumb appears to use Alter’s translation over the KJV. Genesis 21, for example, is almost entirely based upon Alter’s version except for verses 6 and 21. In verse 6, according to Crumb, “And Sarah said... “God made me laugh, and now all who hears will laugh at me!” This is much closer to the KJV: “And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.” The act of laughing and the reason behind it is clearer in the KJV than Alter’s translation: “And Sarah said, “Laughter has God made me, Whoever hears will laugh with me.” This is one small example where Crumb finds the KJV to be clearer than Alter, or the JPS translation. Verse 21 also borrows from the KJV, but is an example of Crumb’s decision making; he describes Ishmael as an archer-bowman, a combination of ‘bowman’ as used by Alter and the JPS, and ‘archer’ as used by the KJV. I discuss in more detail, word choice and the use of sources in Crumb’s decision making, in the forthcoming case studies in chapter 4.

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<sup>347</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, ix.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>349</sup> For example, see Alter’s discussion on the translation of זָרַע (p. xiii) and נִפְשׁוּ (p. xxix).

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, xxx.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, xiii.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, xxxv.

## Jewish Publication Society (JPS)

The Jewish Publication Society translation and commentary of Genesis was published in 1989 and it uses the Leningrad Codex B 19<sup>A</sup> as its source, “the oldest dated manuscript of the complete Hebrew Bible.”<sup>353</sup> The version I have used for this thesis is edited by Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok and includes an introduction by Sarna. I do not know if this is the same version used by R. Crumb.

In his foreword to *The JPS Torah Commentary*, Sarna argues that a new way of looking at the Bible has developed in the last century, one which often marries traditional exegetical approaches with disciplines including archaeology, biblical history, and the study of ancient languages.<sup>354</sup> The results of these interdisciplinary collaborations often presents the biblical text from a refreshingly different perspective for readers, in terms of approaching the Bible from a non-traditional angle. It is in this cultural milieu that the *JPS Torah Commentary* was produced, with the editors hoping to achieve a translation and commentary which is mindful of Jewish exegetical traditions, but also reflects contemporary readings.

Sarna suggests that, characteristically, the Hebrew Bible “is a prism that refracts varieties of truth”<sup>355</sup> and Jewish scholars of the text traditionally “[refuse] to absolutize any single approach of stance” when studying the book.<sup>356</sup> Instead, attempts are made to draw the many meanings, purposes and applications of the text which exist within the book; an idea which would probably be attractive to Crumb, who also argues that no singular meaning can be taken from biblical text, instead recognising the importance of reader’s experience in shaping the text to their own concerns.

### The influence of the JPS on Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*

There is a clear visual and textual influence which Crumb [perhaps subconsciously] adopted from the JPS into his remediation and which I have previously discussed: the lack of

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<sup>353</sup> Sarna, “Foreword” in *The JPS Torah Commentary*.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, xv.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

lectionary divisions.<sup>357</sup> Crumb's decision to disregard traditional lectionary divisions of verses means that potentially, the reader is encouraged to approach his text in a manner similar to the experience of a reader approaching the ancient Masoretic text from which the JPS is derived: as one whole text and one continuous narrative, or at the least, as whole and continuous chapters. On the other hand, while Crumb did not adhere to traditional divisions, he creates his own divisions within the narrative, controlling the pacing and revelation of the narrative through the employment of images. I argue that the use of panels, guttering and text boxes is another way of breaking up the text, as well as keeping story arcs together. This is aided by the fact Crumb still uses chapter divisions which follow the same structure as traditional Bibles and is something I will discuss further in the case studies of chapter 4.

In terms of word choices as I have previously outlined, the bulk of Crumb's text is taken from Alter's translation of Genesis, with occasional input from the KJV or JPS. I note these during the case studies. However, Crumb prefers the archaic-language of the KJV to the JPS, as he rarely makes use of the latter translation; mostly it is used to corroborate with a choice made by Alter, such as Genesis 21:20, where he uses "archer-bowman", a marriage of the KJV (archer) and Alter and the JPS (bowman). It is a similar pattern across the rest of his translation, which is rarely punctuated by the translation of the JPS. The reason for this is probably that the translation of the JPS is not very "biblical" in the manner of the KJV or, to an extent, Alter's translation. It lacks the "beholds", repetitive conjunctions and embellished language of the others, and that language is important to Crumb, because he sees it as a unique characteristic of what makes the Bible "biblical". In that regard and throughout Crumb's remediation of Genesis, the JPS is the least visible source. It is possible that he wanted to refer to a traditional Jewish source even though he ultimately found the KJV preferable because his images would then be associated with the authority conveyed culturally by the KJV.

### Savina Teubal: *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis*

Teubal's theories that Sarah was descended from a line of, and assumed the position of, high-priestess in her home prior to leaving it to be married to Abraham, has been discussed in this thesis,<sup>358</sup> but I want to expand upon Teubal's theory and discuss where her work is visible

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<sup>357</sup> The tradition of lectionary divisions is a Christian practice, but was borrowed by Rabbi Solomon ben Ishmael in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when Christians and Jews often debated biblical content, and so required a "standardised system of reference". See: Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, xi.

<sup>358</sup> See pp.76-77 of this thesis.

in Crumb's remediation of the matriarch narratives. Unlike Alter's commentary, the KJV or the JPS, Crumb does not borrow selective words or phrases from Teubal; rather, he is interested in the overall idea of Sarah as a high-priestess and reads this powerful position and all its implications back into his rendering. As such, the influence of Teubal is more nuanced than the examples given in the other textual sources; nonetheless, her influence is evident in both the text and the image, though it is in the combination of both that it becomes most apparent.<sup>359</sup>

Published in 1984, Savina Teubal offers a perspective on Sarah which is garnered from an archaeological, history-sociological and to an extent, literary approach.<sup>360</sup> Arguably based in a feminist reading of Sarah and the matriarchs, Teubal's thesis attests that Sarah is descended from a line of high-priestesses and a matriarchal society, elements of which she brought with her when she left her homeland to marry and travel with Abraham.<sup>361</sup> Teubal reads Sarah as being of equal stature to and equal in importance with Abraham. Moreover, she contends that it is the narrative of Sarah and later Rebekah, Rachel and Leah which propels the story forward rather than their male counterparts:

In the story of Abraham the narratives begin with an account concerning Sarah and Pharaoh and continue with this women's trials in securing progeny. Finally, a whole chapter is dedicated to her place of burial. Of the forty-eight years of Abraham's life after Sarah's death there is no detail whatever. In other words, it is Sarah's role that furthers the story.<sup>362</sup>

Within the book, Teubal revisits key scenes of Sarah's story which often seem to be missing information or which are inconsistent with the rest of the narrative explaining them from the above perspective. In some cases, Teubal's approach is convincing and attractive and it is easy to see why Crumb became so interested in this non-traditional approach to the matriarchs. For example, Teubal explains the often-puzzling Sister-Wife narratives of Gen 12:10-20, Gen 20 concerning Sarah, and Gen 26:6-11 concerning Rebekah as less mystifying when the story is placed within the context of being from a matrilineal society which deals with questions of incest and marriage between relations much differently from the way in which a patriarchal society might. E.A. Speiser (as quoted in Teubal), reading the stories as

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<sup>359</sup> For an indication of the scholarly reception of Teubal's work, see: Pamela J. Milne, "Review", in *Studies in Religion* 16, no.1 (1987), 121-123. Milne implies that Teubal's work might be better situated in the genre of fiction, calls it "pseudo-scholarship" (122), and outlines the often-confusing argument within. Though only one review, the reviewer highlights many issues which other scholars have found troublesome about Teubal's work. However, it must be noted that I am not discussing Teubal's work in any way other than how it influenced Crumb's approach to *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>360</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, xiv.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

mythical in function and based in patriarchal codes, suggested that Sarah was not a blood-relative of Abraham, but was adopted as a sister so that, in accordance with marriage and adoption contracts found in northern Mesopotamia, Abraham would have greater authority over Sarah as a wife and adopted sister. In turn, Sarah would enjoy greater protection and a higher status than if she were just Abraham's wife, which also translated to being a purer, stronger "vessel" for producing progeny.<sup>363</sup>

Teubal disagrees, suggesting Speiser's theory is "typical of much biblical scholarship in its attitude toward women."<sup>364</sup> She notes that kinship terms that denote incest are patriarchal, as descent is traced through the male. However, in a matrilineal society descent is traced through the mother. Therefore, in a patrilineal society if Sarah and Abraham shared the same father (Terah) but different mothers, and Sarah's relationship to both Terah and Abraham was described in matrilineal terms, Sarah and Abraham would not be considered siblings because Sarah's descent is traced from her father and not Terah, and they would be permitted to marry each other despite having the same father. Teubal suggests this terminologically different way of describing relationships between matrilineal and patrilineal societies is the source of confusion when Abraham denies Sarah is his sister (following patriarchal codes) and presents her only as his wife to both Pharaoh and Abimelech.<sup>365</sup>

This is one example where Teubal exegetes over inconsistencies and confusion in the biblical text, arguing that Sarah is descended from a patriarchal society, and Teubal continues to provide examples from the same perspective throughout the rest of her book. It also highlights the social implications of reading Sarah's narrative in that context and it begins a thread of discussion suggesting that Sarah has more power and authority than is normally credited to her in biblical scholarship. However, this does not explain why Teubal gives Sarah the title high-priestess, a title which, Teubal suggests, is one of the main reasons Sarah does not produce a child for a long time. I turn my attention to this argument now.

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<sup>363</sup> E.A. Speiser, "The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives", in *Biblical and Other Stories* edited by A. Altman, 15-28 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1963), quoted by Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 12-13.

<sup>364</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 12.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid, 14-15. Calum M. Carmichael, in his thesis *Women, Law and the Genesis Traditions* agrees with Teubal to the extent that he argues no such evidence for the Hurrian legal practice of a man making his wife his adopted sister exists in the text; instead, like Teubal, Carmichael reads the sibling relationship between Abraham and Sarah as fact (i.e. they are both descended from the same father), and asserts that the deception played out by Abraham was purely for the enjoyment of the reader: "By his duplicity Abraham successfully avoids his own death and, receiving largesse on account of Sarah's great appeal, is aggrandised in the process." See: Calum M. Carmichael, *Women, Law and the Genesis Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 8-9.

Teubal suggests that, as well as descending from a matriarchal society, Sarah is a high-priestess and assumes a position of power and authority which can be read in the text from a non-traditional biblical perspective. Teubal's understanding of the role of priestess versus priest-kings is as follows:

On certain occasions the priestess was regarded as Goddess incarnate; her oracles and utterances were those of a divinity. The priest-king, on the other hand, was receiver and transmitter of the commands of the deity. It may be because of the different functions of these offices that the matriarchs of Genesis, while depicted as having no direct communication with the deity, seem to be cognizant of divine will.<sup>366</sup>

Teubal sees Sarah's position of power reflected in God's commands to Abraham. In Gen 21:12 for example, Abraham is told to listen to whatever Sarah tells him regarding the casting out of Ishmael. She also reads power into Sarah's character in Sarah's association with the Pharaoh and King Abimelech: "these events [of a king desiring the wife of another man] are not characteristic of the fate of an ordinary first wife, particularly those related to the powerful monarch of Egypt."<sup>367</sup> This power held by Sarah is reflective of the power held by a high-priestess in a matriarchal society. Other factors support this assertion, including Sarah's residence at the terebinth of Mamre (a shrine), her childlessness which was attributed to her role as a high-priestess, the sister-wife episodes with royalty,<sup>368</sup> the manner in which Isaac is conceived (after visitation from a deity), and her final resting place in the cave of Machpelah, facing the shrine of Mamre.<sup>369</sup>

Teubal's overarching thesis is that the matriarchal narratives in Genesis have been eroded and overwritten over the last 2-3,000 years by editors, redactors and scribes writing in a patriarchal society. She suggests that the story of Sarah and her role as a high-priestess and wife of Abraham would have been well known at one time, imparted orally in a society which was no stranger to matrilineal power structures. However, when they came to be written down (potentially in the late 6<sup>th</sup>-century BCE) they were written in a society more familiar with patriarchal rule, and at a time when matriarchal society was being overtaken and diminished by men.<sup>370</sup> The ancient texts were then subject to millennia of redaction, editing, rewriting and retelling, which shaped them more and more into the mould of male

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> These priestess duties apparently included representing a goddess in the ceremony of *hieros gamos* and being part of the ecclesiastical community in their area. The role has certain political and social obligations, including acting as spiritual head of a temple. Beyond this general information, Teubal does not provide more specific evidence for the role and duties of high-priestesses. See pp. 82-3; 98; 103;110-122.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid, 97-99.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, 136-137.



dominated cultures, eventually erasing any evidence of matriarchal power. Teubal concludes with the following statement:

The narratives of the Sarah tradition represent a non-patriarchal system struggling for survival in isolation in a foreign land. Nevertheless, women of strength emerge from the pages of Genesis, women who are respected by men. Their function in life, though different from that of men, is regarded as equally important to society. Women's participation in society as described in the narratives presupposes a system in which women were able to maintain an elevated professional position into which were incorporated the roles of mother and educator. Just as significantly, these women were in control of their own bodies and their own spiritual heritage.<sup>371</sup>

It is this view of Sarah, which also affects the characters of Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, that has inspired Crumb in his remediation of Genesis. I now explore where this influence is most evident, and why this is important for reading the text.

### The Influence of *Sarah the Priestess* on Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*

In previous chapters, I have discussed where Teubal's influence on Crumb surfaces in his remediation. The most obvious answer is in his treatment of the matriarchs but by proxy, that also means his treatment of the patriarchs in relation to the women. Furthermore, Crumb's representation of the matriarchs as strong and domineering extends to other women in Genesis, including Eve<sup>372</sup> and Tamar, though it could be argued that here he is not representing Eve and Tamar in the light of Teubal's work, but as a reflection of his own attitude to, and previous work concerning, women.<sup>373</sup>

As previously noted, Crumb believes that Teubal's female-led perspective of Genesis unveils a hidden meaning to the ancient text which points to a female-led society dominating the political and social landscape. Reading her work alongside the book of Genesis enabled Crumb to view the text in a new light, outside of patriarchal norms of biblical reception, and this influenced his own rendering of the text into comic book format. Simply put, Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* may be a "faithful" adaptation of the text into text-image narrative in terms of textual correspondence, but Teubal's influential theory inspired Crumb's accompanying illustrations to reflect content not normally read in the text. Crumb stated that he "simply portrayed [the women] as they are in the original text. [Eve and Sarah] are both very dominant personalities. Adam is a rather passive character, as is Abraham in relation to

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 139-140.

<sup>372</sup> I have already discussed Crumb's depiction of Eve as the partner in control of the events leading up to, and after, the Fall, in chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>373</sup> See pp. 76-77 of this thesis.

Sarah.”<sup>374</sup> Unlike the textual sources I discuss above, there are no explicit examples of Teubal’s influence on Crumb’s work, only wider representation through character depictions and relationships to each other. As an example, I turn to the depictions of Sarah and Hagar in Gen 21:9 to demonstrate how reading Teubal’s work shaped Crumb’s remediation.<sup>375</sup>

In Crumb’s depiction, the page depicting these verses opens with Sarah’s observation of Ishmael seemingly mocking Isaac. Her eyes are narrowed in on the scene in a grimace which shows her displeasure at Ishmael’s actions.<sup>376</sup> The second panel demonstrates firstly Sarah’s decision to take control of the situation and control its outcome, and secondly her ability to dominate the decision-making process. In the second panel of the page, Sarah towers over a cowering Abraham in bed demanding that he casts Hagar and Ishmael out of the community and into the wilderness. Abraham’s face has sweat beads and his hands are clenched uncomfortably and defensively against her verbal tirade. Sarah’s body and speech takes up most of the space in this panel reinforcing the idea of dominance and power over Abraham. She is also pictured slightly above Abraham, physically intruding into his personal space and forcing him to look up to her.

Sarah’s dominance of the panel is as juxtaposed against Abraham’s passivity which Crumb has represented by making Abraham physically smaller and speechless. The depiction of power and control is reinforced by the setting; the couple are in bed, undressed. The nakedness adds a level of vulnerability to Abraham, as his body language is an attempt to cover up is nudity. Contrariwise, Sarah’s nakedness adds a sense of power, as she brazenly bares her body, exuding confidence. The setting of the bedroom is suggestive of a sexual encounter between the pair and could imply that Sarah is casting her order to Abraham post-coitus, using sex as a tool of power and control to get her way.

Even in this one panel, Crumb has demonstrated who he reads as holding the power and authority in the relationship between Abraham and Sarah. The case studies contained in chapter 4 explore the influence of Teubal even further, but it is evident here that, unlike more traditional illustrations and images which represent the matriarchs in a subordinate light and as minor characters in relation to their patriarchal counterparts, Crumb has chosen the opposite. As per Teubal’s theories, Crumb’s matriarchs are authoritative, powerful and in some cases, such as Crumb’s representation of a pregnant Rebekah (which I discuss in

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<sup>374</sup> See appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb.

<sup>375</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.4.

<sup>376</sup> Ishmael’s actions, in Crumb’s depiction, seem to be little more than Ishmael standing around in a group of his peers, jeering towards Isaac who is busy eating a chicken leg. See panel 5, Fig. 5.4.

chapter 4b), they are almost divine, representing their supposed status as descending from a line of high-priestesses.

As I have demonstrated that Teubal's influence on Crumb is shown mostly in his artistic choices, I acknowledge that other visual sources mentioned by Crumb must also affect his interpretive choices. I turn now to those sources.

## Visual Sources

Crumb mentions several visual sources which influenced his remediation, including Hollywood epics *The Ten Commandments* (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, no version stated) *The Mummy* (dir. Karl Freund, 1932) and *Intolerance* (D. W. Griffith, 1916). According to Crumb, he had a friend "who was willing to run the DVD's, freeze-frame them and take photos. He took hundreds of photos [...] and those are very useful, actually, even though they might not be precisely authentic."<sup>377</sup> He also used old issues of *National Geographic* magazine (dates/issues unspecified), and ancient Mesopotamian and Assyrian relics and art.<sup>378</sup>

The issues of *National Geographic* magazine were the inspiration behind the characters which Crumb developed in *Genesis, Illustrated*. For example, each member of the genealogical lists in Genesis 4, 5 and 11 was inspired by photographs of individuals from the magazine's pages.<sup>379</sup> Other character inspiration was derived from the aforementioned films; for example, in the interview with Neal Conan (NPR), they discuss D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* and its portrayal of Semitic people which had a direct impact on the way Crumb drew his characters. He describes the characters from *Intolerance* as being Semitic in looks because all of the actors wore prosthetically made hooked noses, which at first glance seems to be a stereotypical depiction of Jewish people. However, Crumb attests that those images of people from *Intolerance* are very similar to "old bas-reliefs of the Assyrians [...] they're all profiles, and they all have hooked noses."<sup>380</sup>

While this statement tries to marry together an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century stereotype of Jewishness with ancient Assyrian and Mesopotamian art as a way of justifying Crumb's artistic choices, there is an obvious tension between using still from a film which imagine ancient Babylonians, and ancient art which represents portraiture of Assyrians at a rudimentary

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<sup>377</sup> "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> "R. Crumb illustrates the Bible", NPR.

level. This is a point I will unpack and examine in the case studies of chapter 4. Taking those two sources and applying their visuals to a modern take of the Bible, along with visuals from other white-male-centric Hollywood films such *The Ten Commandments* and unknown peoples taken from the pages of *National Geographic* often presents the reader with a confusing concoction of characteristics embodied within *Genesis, Illustrated*.

Referring to clothing, Crumb took ideas from “lots of different places”, specifically naming *The Ten Commandments* as a source.<sup>381</sup> Though he acknowledges that the costumes in the film were probably not authentic, he states the lack of visual evidence from ancient Mesopotamia as a prevailing factor as to why he chose to make use of a Hollywood film rather than research original clothing choices.<sup>382</sup> However, he also references the fact a friend of his learned in ancient Mesopotamian studies on several occasions corrected his imagined perception of the clothing worn by biblical figures, because they often looked like they were wearing bathrobes.

Finally, Crumb mentions using photography books of “biblical-looking cities, people wearing robes and using implements that hadn’t changed over millennia.”<sup>383</sup> The books are unnamed, as are the locations and themes within the books so it is impossible to comment upon these as a visual source of inspiration for Crumb. However, another layer of interpretation is added to an already wide-ranging pile of visual data, all of which are processed through Crumb’s imagination, subjected to his personal style of drawing and years of preconceived ideas and method, and resulting in the images contained within *Genesis, Illustrated*.

## Concluding remarks

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I acknowledge that I have looked at the various sources used by Crumb in the categories of textual sources and visual sources. *Genesis, Illustrated*, of course, is a text-image narrative, a comic book remediation in which text and image work with each other to produce a story. Reconciling the textual sources with the visual sources noted by Crumb is a process which can only be carried out in the act of Crumb putting quill-pen to cartridge paper, and therefore can only be seen in the final product. The various traces of word-choice from Alter, the KJV or the JPS, the strands of Teubal’s

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

theories, and the multitude of visual ideas, some anachronistic, some idealistic and others more “authentic” are all blended well together in that it is not always possible to pick out specific sources unless the reader is searching for them. Likewise, searching for them often means missing the point of Crumb’s remediation: it is a visual commentary based on his understanding of the story and the sources are only another layer of interpretation to 3,500 years’ worth of subjecting the text to analysis.

It is not the point to present an authentic view into the visuals of the ancient Canaanite world – such a thing would be impossible to do and fruitless to try. Rather, this remediation of Genesis, while concerned with incorporating all the text from the biblical book, is also concerned with making that book palatable and appealing to a modern society. Therefore, using recent commentaries and older translations with 20<sup>th</sup>-century film stills and popular magazine photos is not an inappropriate way to re-present Genesis to a modern audience. Whether or not this amalgamation of sources, imagination and preconception is successful is open to examination, and I turn now to a close reading of the matriarchal narratives in my case studies of Crumb’s representation which go some way to answering this question.

## Chapter 4: Three Case Studies concerning Matriarchs, Motherhood and the Presentation of Sacred Texts

This chapter consists of three case studies, each of which focus on narratives concerning themes of motherhood and the matriarchs of Genesis: Sarah (including the story of Hagar) in Gen 11:29-30,<sup>384</sup> 16:1-6,<sup>385</sup> 18:1-15<sup>386</sup> and 21:1-12;<sup>387</sup> Rebekah in Gen 24:15-67<sup>388</sup> and 25:19-28,<sup>389</sup> and Rachel and Leah in Gen 29:31-30:24,<sup>390</sup> and 35:16-18.<sup>391</sup> Rachel and Leah's relationship with Jacob is contextualised in a visual and textual analysis of Gen 29:1-30.<sup>392</sup> The purpose of the case studies is to examine the effects of remediating biblical text into text-image narratives. Specifically, this includes a close reading of Crumb's version of these stories, examining what happens to the text when it is subject to the tools and resources of comic books as described in chapter 2, and discussing the kind of remediation produced by Crumb in terms of artistic and textual decisions.

Each narrative includes, at some point, a matriarch and the theme of infertility. Each issue related to fertility/childbearing is resolved differently, though God is a central figure. I have chosen these narratives firstly because the narrative of fertility/infertility and motherhood provides a cohesive theme across the case studies. Secondly, by using stories associated with the matriarchs, I can further examine the impact of Teubal's work on Crumb's remediation of Genesis. As discussed in across this thesis, Teubal's theory is a departure from more traditional interpretations of the matriarch stories. By focusing on these case studies, I demonstrate how the incorporation of Teubal's theories, along with the other sources and Crumb's own interpretations, have converged to present a new angle on the matriarch stories which show them in a strong, controlling and progressive light. This is the case partly

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<sup>384</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.1.

<sup>385</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.2.

<sup>386</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.3.

<sup>387</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.4.

<sup>388</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.5.

<sup>389</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.6.

<sup>390</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.8.

<sup>391</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.9.

<sup>392</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.7.

because of the medium Crumb has utilised to interpret the stories, and partly because of the sources he has used which have shaped his understanding.

The case studies are subject to the tools and resources of comic books outlined by Miller and Groensteen, which are explained in chapter 2. The methodology of interpreting and analysing comics described there is crucial in demonstrating how ancient stories can be regenerated with modern perspectives, questioning how “faithful” a rendering of scriptural text can be. Further, the role of women in terms of the role of child-bearing and roles of motherhood are read against the framework of gender and in the context of biblical scholarship on gender outlined in chapter 2.

In each case study I provide a summary of the matriarch’s story from Genesis,<sup>393</sup> and a summary of Crumb’s perspective of the character gleaned from annotations, interviews and the commentary in *Genesis, Illustrated*. Then, through a close reading of the text, I discuss and analyse the panels which represent each case study. This includes description and comment on both textual and visual choices made by Crumb including but not limited to textual decisions in terms of word choice and lettering choices (i.e. if they are bold, italicised or contain unusual punctuation marks), and visual choices in terms of the comics tools and resources outlined in chapter 2.

To contextualise each case study, I discuss how each character is presented to the reader through Crumb’s visual and textual choices, situating his presentation of the character and the themes of fertility/infertility within existing scholarship where applicable, and within the context of his sources. Finally, to conclude each case study I discuss how Crumb’s “word-for-word” remediation of the ancient stories of Genesis in comic format regenerates the stories, offering the stories in a modern perspective which speaks to the contemporary reader – be they religious or secular.

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<sup>393</sup> As this is an interdisciplinary study between comics and Bible studies, I feel it is important to summarise each matriarch’s story so that readers who may be unaware of their stories, become familiar with them. This is similar to the fact I give explanations concerning comics for readers who do not have a background in comics.

#### 4a. Sarah

Closely intertwined with the narrative of Abraham, Sarah first appears in Genesis 11:29, and her story is told across the succeeding twelve chapters until her death and burial in Genesis 23. Until Gen 17:15, Sarah is named Sarai. After the sign of the covenant between Abraham (previously Abram) and God, she is renamed Sarah. Both names mean “princess” or “noblewoman” in Hebrew.<sup>394</sup>

Sarah is introduced as Abraham’s wife who is barren and has no child (11:29-30), and then as Terah’s daughter-in-law (11:31). Along with Abraham and his family, she leaves Ur of the Chaldeans to travel to Canaan but the group settle for a period in Haran (11:31). In 12:5, God tells Abraham to leave Haran and travel to a land that he will show him. He takes Sarah and his nephew Lot with him; then a famine hits the land and Abraham travels to Egypt. Upon entering Egypt, the reader is told that Sarah is considered very beautiful and Abraham thinks the Egyptians will kill him in order to have her. He asks her to tell them she is his sister, so that his life may be spared. Sarah agrees. Abraham is proved correct in his assumption, and Pharaoh takes Sarah as a wife, giving Abraham slaves and livestock, apparently as a marriage present for his ‘sister’ (12:11-16). The reader is then told that God afflicts Pharaoh and his house with plagues “because of Sarai, Abram’s wife” (12:17). Pharaoh learns that Sarah is Abraham’s wife, returns her to Abraham and sends Abraham away with everything he owned (12:18-20).

In Genesis 13, Abraham leaves Egypt with Sarah and his possessions, travelling to the Negeb. Sarah is not mentioned again until Gen 16 which describes the birth of Ishmael. The chapter begins by reiterating Sarah is barren, referring back to her introduction in Gen 11:29-30, and that she had not borne Abraham’s children. Abraham has been repeatedly promised by God that he will have countless descendants, who will be of his bloodline and have their own land (see Gen 12:2; 12:7; 13:15-16; 15:1-6; 15:18) but the couple remain childless. Sarah offers her slave-girl, Hagar to Abraham in hopes that Hagar will fall pregnant, thus giving Abraham a child.<sup>395</sup> Abraham listens to Sarah, and Sarah “gave [Hagar] to her husband as a wife” (16:1-3). Hagar conceives and “looked with contempt on her mistress”

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<sup>394</sup> As discussed in my introduction to this thesis, I use ‘Sarah’ and ‘Abraham’ throughout these case studies (and throughout the case study) and not their pre-covenantal names of ‘Sarai’ and ‘Abram’, except in cases where I am quoting the Bible.

<sup>395</sup> Because Hagar belongs to Sarah as property, any child Hagar bears belongs to Sarah. The arrangement was common in Ancient Near Eastern societies and was one way to ensure the continuation of a name or bloodline. See: Alter, *Genesis*, 67.



which prompts Sarah, after an angry discussion with Abraham, to deal harshly with Hagar, who runs away (16:4-6).

An angel finds Hagar in the wilderness and advises her to return to Sarah, and submit to her, adding that “I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude” (16:7-10). In this encounter, Hagar also learns she will give birth to a son who will be called Ishmael, which in Hebrew means “God will hear”. Hagar returns to Abraham and gives birth to Ishmael when Abraham is eighty-six years old (16:11-16). In Gen 17, God makes another covenant with Abraham that he will have countless descendants. It is in this chapter that Abraham’s name is changed from Abram, meaning “father of nations” or “exalted father” and Sarai’s name is changed to Sarah. God also declares Abraham will have a son by Sarah within a year, who will be named Isaac. Abraham laughs at this as both he and Sarah are considered too old to bear children (17:15-19).<sup>396</sup>

Genesis 18 begins with three men passing by Abraham’s tent by the oaks of Mamre. After offering them food and rest, which they accept, the strangers ask where Sarah is; Abraham replies that she is in the tent. The anonymous visitors repeat God’s promise from Gen 17, that within a year, Sarah will have a son; upon hearing this, Sarah laughs. The visitor hears her and asks Abraham why she laughed: “is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” he asks, repeating again that Sarah will bear a son within the year (18:1-14). Sarah denies that she laughed but the visitor replies that she did (18:15).

Her next appearance is in Gen 20, where the wife-sister narrative of Gen 12 is repeated; this time it occurs in Gerar, and it is King Abimelech of Gerar who is deceived and who, believing Abraham, takes Sarah as his wife (20:1-2). God comes to Abimelech in a dream and condemns him to death for taking a married woman; Abimelech proclaims his innocence in the matter and says that he has not touched her. God replies that he knows Abimelech was tricked and it was God who prevented Abimelech from touching her; he tells Abimelech to return Sarah to Abraham (20:3-7). When Abimelech confronts Abraham, we learn that Sarah is also Abraham’s sister: “she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife” (20:12). Abimelech returns Sarah to Abraham, giving him with slaves, animals and silver. At the end of Gen 20, we are told that God heals Abimelech and his wife and female slaves “for the Lord had closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife” (20:18).

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<sup>396</sup> Abraham is 99, Sarah is ten years younger.

“The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said”, (21:1) and Sarah conceives and gives birth to a son who is named Isaac.<sup>397</sup> On the day that Isaac is weaned, Sarah sees Ishmael, son of Hagar laughing at, or mocking Isaac.<sup>398</sup> Seemingly angry, she tells Abraham to cast Hagar and Ishmael out, “for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac” (21:10). Abraham is distressed but God tells him to do whatever Sarah says to him, and Hagar and Ishmael are sent away with nothing but a skin of water and some bread: “and she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba” (21:11-14). The reader is not told how Sarah reacts to this. Similarly, we are not told of Sarah’s reaction to the story of the Binding of Isaac in Gen 22. It is the lack of Sarah’s appearance in this narrative which is noteworthy, as Abraham departs in preparation to sacrifice their only son, Isaac.

Sarah lives to be 127, and dies at Kiriath-arba in Canaan (23:1-2). Abraham is granted any plot he desires to bury his wife by the Hittites. He chooses the cave of Machpelah and the field in which it is situated, and he buys it from the owner, Ephron son of Zohar for four hundred shekels of silver (23:3-18). Abraham buries Sarah in the cave, facing Mamre (23:19), and this ends the story of the life of Sarah.

## R. Crumb’s comments on Sarah in *Genesis, Illustrated*

In the commentary to *Genesis, Illustrated* at the back of the comic book, Crumb first mentions Sarah in a note on Gen 11: “Some say Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was a priestess belonging to the Sumerian matriarchal tradition.”<sup>399</sup> This reflects the influence of Teubal’s thesis on Crumb’s work at an early stage, and Crumb’s commentary on Gen 12 continues in

<sup>397</sup> In Hebrew, Isaac means ‘He-who-laughs’. This refers to both Abraham and Sarah laughing when they hear the news that she is to bear a child in old age, and to Sarah’s laughter in 21:6 when Isaac is born.

<sup>398</sup> Various translations interpret the Hebrew לָחַץ differently. Alter, for example, uses ‘laughing’, noting that it is the same verb which means ‘mocking’ or ‘joking’ in Genesis 17 and 18, whereas the NRSV uses ‘playing’. The KJV uses ‘mocking’, and the JPS also uses ‘playing’. The connotation is that Ishmael was not being playful with Isaac but was probably mocking or teasing him (the LXX adds ‘with Isaac’, and in the MT Ishmael is simply playing or laughing). Teubal provides an alternative reading of the verb suggesting Ishmael was masturbating in front of, or potentially even sodomising Isaac. She suggests this partly because of interpretations by Rashi, Westermann and Rabbi Aqiba who all suggest sexual activity was involved, due in part to the fact that wherever the verb appears elsewhere in the biblical text, it is in relation to sexual activity, and partly because these two reasons provide a better excuse for Sarah becoming offended enough to banish her slave and her slave’s son to the wilderness than Ishmael merely mocking Isaac. See: Savina J, Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), 80-81, 136-138, 184. However, no such translation is found in Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon, which translates לָחַץ in the Piel form as ‘to play, to sport, to jest’. Notably, the verb also appears in Qal in 21:6, three verses before the scene of Ishmael ‘mocking’ Isaac. On the other hand, the same form (Piel Participle) of the verb is used in Genesis 26:8 in a clearly sexual context.

<sup>399</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 11, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

this vein. He describes a “knotty problem” where the women of Genesis are concerned, especially in terms of fertility issues when they are meant to carry on the lineage of prophets like Abraham. Crumb attests that, as discussed in chapter 3, Teubal’s book helped him to work through and understand the portrayal of women in Genesis. As he reads it, the matriarchy was only in the early stages of encountering suppression by the strengthening patriarchy; there were still strong, important women who were not just sub-characters in their husband’s stories, and Sarah is one of these. Crumb agrees with Teubal’s idea that Sarah is a woman of “elevated religious status within her community”, and that she is more important to the Abrahamic narrative than she is often given credit for.<sup>400</sup> Further and again supporting Teubal, Crumb alleges that Sarah was a high-priestess in her own country before marrying Abraham, and that this accounts for some of the discrepancies within Genesis that otherwise make little sense, such as the wife-sister narratives. It is important to remember how Crumb views Sarah, as we progress through his notes in the commentary on her character because it informs his rendering of the characters.

In Genesis 13, Crumb’s comments are concerned only with Sarah, noting she goes with Abraham to Mamre, where she stays for the rest of her life and is finally buried. There are no comments by Crumb on Gen 14-15. In Gen 16, Crumb discusses Sarah’s infertility, noting the fact that if she was a priestess, “she was not permitted to have children until after her time as priestess was fulfilled,”<sup>401</sup> and this is the reason she offers Hagar to Abraham to “build up her house.”<sup>402</sup> Further, Crumb interprets the text to read that Abraham was powerless to deny Sarah’s request to banish Hagar to the wilderness, because of Sarah’s status as matriarch of the family.

Genesis 20, concerning a repeat of the wife-sister narrative is, according to Crumb, another indicator that Sarah is a priestess, because she is performing the sacred marriage ritual as described in Teubal’s analysis in chapter 3 of this thesis. Crumb also calls the revelation that Sarah is Abraham’s sister “shocking” but acceptable in the context of matrilineal descent.<sup>403</sup> Gen 21 only reinforces this theory for Crumb, who argues Sarah’s power over Abraham is highlighted in her command to cast out Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness, which he does not deny. Crumb believes that it is Sarah’s actions that ensure Isaac is the only heir to Abraham’s legacy.<sup>404</sup> There is no commentary to Gen 22, but in Gen 23, Crumb argues that

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<sup>400</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 12, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>401</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 16, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 20, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>404</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 21, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

Sarah was clearly of such importance that her death and burial have their own chapter in Genesis, which is further evidence of her status. Crumb also comments that the text suggests that Abraham is living apart from Sarah at the time of her death, as he has to return to Hebron to bury her: “and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her” (23:2).

Sarah remains important to Crumb after her death-narrative. In Gen 24, Crumb suggests that the action of Isaac taking Rebekah into the tent of his dead mother transfers the “mantle of Sarah’s high-priestess position onto the shoulders of Rebekah.”<sup>405</sup> In Gen 25, he describes Abraham taking a new wife who bears him six sons, drawing attention to the fact that we know nothing more about these children: “It would seem that it is not the descendants of Abraham that are of primary importance, but those of Sarah.”<sup>406</sup> Crumb sees the discrepancies and oddness which occur throughout Sarah’s story as evidence that Sarah was a high-priestess and that the story of her, and by extension, of Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, has been suppressed, rewritten and redacted to present a patriarchal society where women are secondary subjects, as opposed to the powerful women of a matriarchal society. Crumb believes that Abraham, Sarah and the other characters of Genesis are non-historical characters and that their characterisation has been adapted as the story has been retold over generations.

### Sarah and motherhood in Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*

Sarah’s introduction in Gen 11:29 is followed by the statement that she is barren; she has no child (11:30). Her barrenness is an important part of her identity, coming only second to her description as Abraham’s wife. The main arc of Sarah’s alleged quest for motherhood occurs in Gen 16:1-6, 18:1-15 and 21:1-12. These passages are the focus of the close reading in this case study, which combines both a visual and textual analysis in the framework of comics theories outlined in chapter 2. Each analysis is followed by an overview of biblical scholarship concerning representations of Sarah and themes of fertility and motherhood, in order to contextualise Crumb’s approach within wider academic discourse, placing his remediation in wider discussions concerned with the matriarchs and motherhood.

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<sup>405</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 24, *Genesis Illustrated*.

<sup>406</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 25, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

## Genesis 11:29-30<sup>407</sup>

The first image of Sarah in Crumb's remediation impresses upon the reader her lack of, and potentially her desire for, a child.<sup>408</sup> Assuming a central position on the page, the panel frames Abraham embracing his brother Nahor. Sarah stands on the right holding a bowl of food resembling bread, and Milcah, Nahor's wife, stands to the left of the embracing pair, nursing a newly born baby, surrounded by excited faces. The scene is one of Abraham offering his congratulations to Nahor on the arrival of a child, even though in the text, Abraham is not aware of the children of Nahor until the end of Gen 22.

The symmetry of the panel contents suggests a harmonious affair: embracing brothers flanked either side by their wives offering mirror images of each other. However, Sarah's facial expression suggests discordance. She appears vacant and her gaze travels outside of the panel effectively removing her from the intimacy of the scene, contrasting her with Milcah whose gaze is fixed firmly on her baby within the panel. The text of Gen 11:29 sits unboxed next to the panel, occupying both the space of the hyperframe and the space in the panel grid. Crumb tends to use this space for the narrative voice, indicating the narrator is observing the scene as the reader does, and is not part of the visual story. The narrator too, is outside the story. In contrast to the presentation of Gen 11:29, Gen 11:30 is within the panel and occupies its own caption box above Sarah's head, imitating a thought bubble. It reads: "And Sarai was barren. She had no child."

The text is taken from Alter. Alter's influence in Crumb's textual choices, as discussed in chapter 3, is evident in Crumb's decision to open most verses with the conjunction "and" which is not as frequently used in the KJV, and rarely used in the newer version of the JPS, published in 1994.<sup>409</sup> Crumb's choice to follow Alter's translation expresses both his desire to stay faithful to the Hebrew text<sup>410</sup> especially in the case of Alter's argument that when biblical translators drop the use of "and" at the beginning of sentences, they affect the "tempo, rhythm and construction of events in the biblical narrative."<sup>411</sup> This is an idea which

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<sup>407</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.1.

<sup>408</sup> Whether or not Sarah desires a child is open to a critical enquiry of the text, hence I have described only the potential desire to have a child.

<sup>409</sup> For example, in this case where Alter uses 'And', the KJV uses the contradictive 'But' and the JPS uses the more modern 'Now'.

<sup>410</sup> Alter's translation faithfully keeps each instance of the conjunction to reflect the Hebrew text, which repeatedly uses the conjunctive vav (ו), especially in opening sentences and clauses.

<sup>411</sup> Alter demonstrates that suppression of the conjunctive vav is linguistically important to a text which was originally written to be heard, not read, and so gives the text a rhythm and pattern which is muted when the repetitive 'and' is removed. See: Alter, *Genesis*, xix-xx. This may be true, although the conjunction vav

I agree with and which I believe is important in terms of providing a “faithful” translation of the text, as well as the translation itself which becomes a modified adaptation rather than a faithful rendering of the Hebrew text.<sup>412</sup>

The panel is designed to emphasise the contrast of situation and emotion which the text indicates. The embracing brothers act as a divider between a happy, loving mother on the left, and a barren childless woman on the right. One woman has fulfilled her biological purpose of providing an heir to the family name but the other has not and according to the text, cannot. The diametric elements of this scene are reflected visually as well as textually: Sarah visually depicted as Milcah’s opposite. For example, Milcah wears her hair loosely tied behind her neck and is dressed in a garment with a bold geometric pattern. Sarah wears her hair untied over her shoulders and is dressed in a garment patterned with organic, wavy lines. Where Milcah nurses a child, Sarah holds a bowl of food close to her body, a barrier to any human contact and a visual reminder that the only way she can provide food is by making and baking it instead of nursing. Where Milcah is shown as happy and excited, closely watching her child, Sarah is looking away, uninterested in the new family member. Finally, as noted, the caption box above Sarah’s head is both framed within the panel and describes Sarah’s barrenness, as opposed to the unframed text of 11:29 which introduces the family.<sup>413</sup> In short, Crumb implies that Sarah and Milcah are opposites, and the reader should understand that in this scene, Nahor and Milcah have what Abraham and Sarah do not. This is significant because Crumb has deliberately contrasted a barren Sarah with a fertile Milcah by taking parts of the narrative from much later in Genesis (in this case, Gen 22:20-24) to highlight Sarah’s childlessness.

The panel itself is the largest on the page and is in a central position. The deliberate configuration of panels conveys what Crumb considers to be the most important point: family lineage. Specifically this is with regards to Abraham who is soon to become the recipient of God’s covenantal promises. Further, the position of the panel which is themed

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carries a wider range of meaning than English ‘and’ – which is important when *vav* implies a contrast (‘but’) or purpose (‘so that’).

<sup>412</sup> I recognise that this raises the question of what a translation of biblical text should be. Alter is clear on what he thinks, but other translators might be more inclined to work a dynamic equivalence, balancing the needs of the modern reader with a “faithful” translation of the ancient text. I argue that Alter’s approach is most suitable when it comes to biblical translations. Alter’s desire to stay faithful to the ancient text, even incorporating grammatical features or words which are not as popular in contemporary society, provides the reader with a text which is more representative of and authentic to the ancient text rather than one which has been modified to speak to modern readership.

<sup>413</sup> The concept of Sarah being contrasted with another woman who has whatever Sarah does not is also relevant in the narrative of Sarah and Hagar in chapter 16. The contrast here with Milcah is perhaps a prelude to the later contrast.

around family and new life is contrasted with both the preceding panel showing Haran's funeral and bereaved mourners, and the succeeding panel which is a scene of departure from both the happy family and from Abraham's hometown of Ur.<sup>414</sup> Crumb has purposefully designed this page to imply to the reader that 1) family is central to Abraham's story, and 2) even with God's forthcoming promises, the family are bound by the cycle of birth, journey and death.

Most importantly, however, Crumb has composed this introduction to Abraham and Sarah in such a way that the reader is left under no illusion that: 1) Sarah is barren and childless, 2) this contrasts Sarah with the rest of the family, and 3) Sarah is uncomfortable with her situation. The scene effectively links Sarah with fertility and motherhood which creates a connection between Sarah and motherhood in the reader's mind. Every time Sarah appears in Genesis henceforth until the birth of Isaac, the reader associates her with childlessness, infertility and, possibly, unhappiness.

This is further emphasised when the page containing Sarah's introduction is viewed against the page opposite which contains the beginning of Gen 12. As noted in chapter 2, the periphery informs the viewer by contextualising a panel/page subconsciously within the wider narrative: namely, the narrative contained within the panels/page in the reader's peripheral vision. Crumb has situated Sarah's introduction and her lack of motherhood against a page which contains the first promise to Abraham that he will be made a great nation (Gen 12:2), i.e. he will have many descendants and his name will live through them. Juxtaposing Sarah's barrenness with such a promise is both a tool to create tension and suspense within the story, and foreshadowing of a future plot. It also serves to emphasise Sarah's difficult predicament in Gen 11:29-30.

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<sup>414</sup> Teubal argues that Ur was the hometown of Sarah and that in the first instance, Sarah's marriage to Abraham was matrilineal. Abraham's hometown was not Ur, but was possibly located in Haran, where the family stop for a period before moving on to Canaan after the death of Terah. She cites the indirect route taken by the family which moved them northwards to Haran rather than southwards from Terah towards Damascus and on to Canaan as potential evidence, reasoning that if Abraham and Sarah shared a father, their mothers might have come from separate locations. If Sarah's mother was from Ur in the south, it would account for why Terah and his family were there, even if Abraham's mother came from the north. Teubal cites Gen 24:7 "and various other passages" as noting that Abraham was from an area in the north. However, it does not explain why the family detour to the north on their road to Canaan. Of the lack of information in the text about Sarah's birthplace, Teubal argues that "[p]atriarchal tradition assumed a connection between Abram and Ur simply because Ur is mentioned in Genesis". Finally, Teubal notes that if Sarah was from Ur, this would further support the suggestion that she hailed from a priestess tradition because Ur was connected with many goddess traditions. See: Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 20-24, and 61 concerning matrilineal residence. My own opinion on this is that the text of Genesis does not support such a view. There is no evidence to suggest Sarah was from Ur and that her marriage to Abraham was matrilineal. While I appreciate the creativity in Teubal's argument, the literary text does not support her argument.

## Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 11:29-30 in biblical scholarship

Crumb's depiction of the introduction of Sarah is one of contrasts and emotions. The emphasis is on family, particularly the importance of descendants and lineage, even though Abraham's promise of such things is yet to happen. Sarah is unhappy, she understands the weight of expectation on her, and she is depicted visually and textually as opposite to Milcah.

Of these short verses, Alter has very little to say, noting the verses are a second genealogical account which focus on Abraham's family and forthcoming journey.<sup>415</sup> The JPS notes that the omission of Sarah's parentage is "so extraordinary that it must be intentional" because Milcah's parentage is given,<sup>416</sup> and concludes that the omission is probably to create suspense for the revelation in Gen 20 that Sarah is Abraham's sister/half-sister.<sup>417</sup> Also noted is that while Sarah is described as barren, Milcah is not even though she also does not have children, or at least, they are not mentioned in the text.<sup>418</sup> The JPS commentary explains the description of Sarah as barren is to provide a contrast with impending promises of progeny.<sup>419</sup>

The issue of barrenness is at the forefront of Teubal's exposition of 11:29-30, who suggests that at that point, Sarah would have been barren/childless for at least thirty years before Hagar was used as a vessel for children.<sup>420</sup> What astonishes Teubal is that Abraham, a man whose "aspirations are generally to have successors and heirs"<sup>421</sup> would stand by a barren wife for so long unless there was another reason, such as, Sarah's status in Ur as a high-priestess for example. Teubal does not discuss whether love might be a reason.

There are parts of the named textual sources which do appear in Crumb's rendition. Sarah's barrenness is highlighted as discussed, her contrast against the family is prevalent, and her childlessness in relation to the foreshadowing of future plots is present. There are also some elements which Crumb includes which are not present in his sources such as the image of

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<sup>415</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 49.

<sup>416</sup> This also indicates another contrast between Sarah and her wider family.

<sup>417</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 87.

<sup>418</sup> The image of Milcah holding a child in Crumb's remediation of Gen 11:29-30, then, is an addition by Crumb; however, it contradicts his statement that this was a "straightforward" illustration job, because he has added something to the text, even though it did not require clarification at that point. The scene of Milcah can be read as a tool to highlight the childlessness of Sarah, and the lack of progeny for Abraham.

<sup>419</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 87.

<sup>420</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 32.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.



Milcah with a child. Further, despite his interest in Teubal's thesis of Sarah as a high-priestess, the reader's introduction to Crumb's Sarah does not propagate this idea, neither visually nor textually. To the first point, it is Crumb's decision to depict Milcah holding a baby which makes this panel all the more significant in terms of pushing home to the reader that Sarah has no child. This is a point Crumb really needs the reader to grasp, though why that is the case is not clear. On the second point, I find it strange that Crumb does not grasp the initial opportunity to show Sarah in the light of high-priestess, as it is something he claims has coloured his work throughout the rendering of these narratives.<sup>422</sup> Instead, Sarah is depicted as a wife and a woman who wants a family but is unable to have one, rather than as a woman of high-standing in the order of a high-priestess who is temporarily unable to have a child until her duties as priestess are fulfilled.

Where does Crumb's introduction of Sarah, both visually and textually fit with scholarly ideas on the matter? I have already discussed at length the idea of contrast and contradiction in these two verses which serve to differentiate Sarah from Milcah and other family members. This theme, along with discussions around barrenness, is prevalent in modern biblical scholarship surrounding Sarah the matriarch. For example, Phyllis Trible writes on the character of Sarah as mother, noting the contrast between Sarah and Milcah but describing it as moving between the "silence and the voice" of the biblical text,<sup>423</sup> where Milcah is given attention and Sarah is not. I argue that Milcah does not receive much of the storyline and only makes a brief appearance, whereas Sarah's character is present across several chapters of the text so Trible's argument is not wholly sound in that regard. However, Trible argues that noting Sarah's childlessness brings her to the forefront of the narrative while Milcah recedes, and Sarah is the only woman chosen to journey with Abraham and his male relatives which makes her "unique".<sup>424</sup> For Trible, it seems that Sarah's childlessness not only sets her apart from other characters but is an important identity marker that makes her special. Abraham, soon-to-be "father of nations" needs a special woman to fulfil his promise, after all.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> See commentary to *Genesis, Illustrated* for the continuous references to Sarah coming from a priestess tradition, and see subsection in the introduction to Sarah in Genesis for a summation of his comments on Sarah in Genesis.

<sup>423</sup> Phyllis Trible, "Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader* edited by Alice Bach (London: Routledge, 1999), 280-281.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>425</sup> Even though Hagar gives birth to Abraham's son in Gen 16, she is not special enough to warrant his prolonged attention, and nor is Ishmael unique enough to count as his progeny. Sarah, then, is something very different and her marked differences begin with her introduction in 11:29.

Others call Sarah's barrenness a critical problem for the question of genealogy, and while some scholars read this as a narrative device to increase tension and suspense<sup>426</sup> or to mark Sarah in the literary pattern of the Hero's Mother tradition,<sup>427</sup> others lean towards describing Sarah's barrenness as providing the background for a "stereotypical conflict" between fertile and infertile women, as the reader comes to see in the case of Sarah and Hagar.<sup>428</sup> In this case, 11:29-30 is a foreshadowing tool pointing towards a situation which will dominate Sarah's life until she gives birth at the old age of 90.

Of course, Sarah is not the only character in these two short verses, but the majority of scholarship focuses on her inability to bear children and most do not question whether the fault lies at Abraham's door and nor do they address Sarah's feelings on the matter. One of the few exceptions is Trevor Dennis, who briefly ponders the issue of Abraham's fertility in his book *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voice in the Old Testament*, but quickly concludes that it must be Sarah who is infertile because God does not include her in the promises of progeny to Abraham which follow in Gen 12, and because God is the ultimate plan-maker of her destiny and the only one who can fix her problem.<sup>429</sup> Mieke Bal, on the other hand, develops upon the idea of Abraham-the-potentially-infertile in the following argument:

It is commonly assumed that in the Bible barrenness is always blamed on the women and that men are presupposed to be both potent and fertile. I question this assumption: [Sarah's laughter, indicating her subversive doubt in Gen. 18.12] is one case that leaves room for the marginal but persistent acknowledgement of the opposite view. Here, like elsewhere, I contend that the insistence on the one view – that barrenness is the woman's fault – addresses, and is an attempt to repress, the opposite possibility – that the men are impotent.<sup>430</sup>

Clearly when Abraham successfully impregnates Hagar in Gen 16, he demonstrates his fertility and this therefore challenges Bal's argument. Further, there is no indication that even if Abraham was impotent, he was also infertile. Medically speaking, the two conditions are

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<sup>426</sup> For example, see: Thomas Heike, "Genealogy as a Means of Historical Representation in the Torah and the Role of Women in the Genealogical System" in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader*, edited by Alice Bach (London: Routledge, 1999), 179.

<sup>427</sup> Wherein the mother of a "hero" is not an unknown, unremarkable woman, but follows a pattern normally including infertility which is overcome by a divine method to give birth to a remarkable, miracle son who goes on to become a hero. See: Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 92-96.

<sup>428</sup> For example, see Mayer I. Gruber, "Genesis 21:12: A New Reading of an Ambiguous Text" in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 172.

<sup>429</sup> Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voice in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1994), 37.

<sup>430</sup> Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 288. Sharon Jeanson attributes Hagar's disdain for Sarah in Gen 16 to the fact that by falling pregnant to Abraham, she has somehow proved that it is Sarah who is infertile, and not Abraham. Rulon-Miller, *Hagar: A Woman with Attitude*, 69.

not necessarily connected. Therefore, Bal's argument is not sound on that ground either.<sup>431</sup> However, at least Bal suggests that barrenness in the Bible should not always be attributed to women, which is a position which has only recently begun to be discussed in biblical scholarship.

From this brief summary of scholarship on Gen 11:29-30, it is clear the introductory view of Sarah varies across biblical scholarship. However, most scholars identify three points concerning the purpose of Gen. 11:29-30: 1) Sarah is barren, not Abraham, 2) she is presented as a contrast to Milcah in terms of fertility, lineage and role (both current and future), and 3) Sarah is marked as unique or special because of her situation. Teubal is alone in proposing a priestly back-story for Sarah; the idea has not gained currency among biblical scholars largely because the evidence is not found compelling enough.

I argue that Crumb's depiction of Sarah agrees with the three points identified above. His composition of both image and text presents a clear difference between Sarah and Milcah and highlights Sarah's childlessness, especially by depicting Milcah with a baby – a situation not told at this point in the biblical text. The contrast of Sarah against Milcah, and arguably the rest of the family, draws the reader's attention to her uniqueness, marking her as a special character who has the potential to become an important part of the narrative. Finally, the fact that Crumb does not portray Sarah in the manner of a high-priestess despite favouring Teubal's readings is also in keeping with scholarly consensus. Thus, Crumb's introduction to Sarah agrees with both scholarly and general consensus.

What Crumb does add to the text, and which can only be added through the inclusion of image, is emotion. While the text does not suggest an emotional response by Sarah regarding her barrenness, Crumb has artistic licence to present Sarah as he believes she would feel which again suggests his version of Genesis is not straightforward but incorporates his understanding of the text as represented in his use of artistic licence. In this case, she is distant (gazing outside of the panel, away from the intimate scene), protective of herself (her

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<sup>431</sup> There also exists the argument that it is not Abraham that impregnates Sarah, but God. Rulon-Miller notes that no scene of sexual intercourse occurs between Abraham and Sarah, so there is no explicit connection between Abraham and the fathering of Isaac. Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: a Woman with an Attitude", 74. Teubal also removes Abraham as the father, arguing that Isaac was the result of sacred marriage, *hieros gamos*, between Abimelech and Sarah, evidenced by the fact she only falls pregnant after being taken by him in Gen 20, and after money is exchanged (one thousand shekels) which Teubal suggests is payment for Sarah's participation in the sacred ritual of *hieros gamos* rather than payment to Abraham as an apology for taking Sarah. Teubal suggests this version of the story was later edited out and redacted to present Abraham as the father, in order to legitimise his lineage and the father of God's chosen people. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 130. However, it is worth noting that neither this theory, nor the theory that God impregnates Sarah has gained consensus among scholars.

arms hold a physical barrier of bowl/food in front of her body preventing anyone getting too close) and blank in expression which at least signifies she is not happy, if nothing else. The bowl of food may also symbolise the fact that Sarah wants to nourish but has no child, therefore she can only provide nourishment with actual food rather than her body.

### Genesis 16:1-6<sup>432</sup>

Genesis 16 begins with a reminder for the reader that Sarah is childless: “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, bore him no children” (16:1). Between her introduction in Gen 11:29 and the beginning of Gen 16, readers have only seen glimpses of Sarah and she has not played a role in the promises of descendants made by God to Abraham. The text in Gen 16:1 calls back to 11:30 reminding the reader of Sarah’s barrenness, attributing the issue of infertility to Sarah rather than Abraham. As such, Gen 16 is devoted to Sarah’s alleged quest for a child, either to fulfil God’s promise to Abraham (which is unlikely because as far as the reader is concerned, Sarah knows nothing of these exchanges between God and Abraham), or perhaps to fulfil societal obligations or personal desires to produce children. Either way Sarah is concerned with producing an heir and enlists the use of her servant, Hagar. Gen 16 also contains the first record of Sarah speaking.

In Crumb’s remediation, the beginning of Gen 16 is on the bottom row of the right-hand page, meaning the end of Gen 15 takes up the rest of the page and constitutes the periphery for the reader. This is significant because Gen 15 contains the story of the covenant of the pieces between Abraham and God,<sup>433</sup> wherein God repeats his promise that Abraham will have countless descendants (15:4-5) and land to support them (15:18-21). In the last panel of Gen 15, God looks down on Abraham, naming the scope of the land he will give to Abraham’s descendants. This scene juxtaposes against the opening of Gen 16 which is a close-up of an older, stern-faced and still childless Sarah. The narrator’s voice in the hyperframe (but within the panel grid) informs the reader of Sarah’s childless state: she has “borne him no children”. Opposite this panel, occupying the bottom row of the left-hand page, is a strange image of Abraham lying asleep on the ground, surrounded by ghostly faces. In Crumb’s words, this was his attempt “to capture his vision of all this future suffering that is supposed to take place with his people. In the background are all the suffering faces of his

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<sup>432</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.2.

<sup>433</sup> The covenant of pieces, which occurs in Gen 15:1-15, is an event where God appeared to Abraham and made a covenant with him, announcing that Abraham and his descendants would inherit land. It is the first of the covenants between God and Abraham.

people. I made them dark and murky because it's a vision of the future."<sup>434</sup> This blurry vision of the future – presumably descendants of Abraham – contrasts with the panel declaring Sarah childless. Crumb's composition of panels increases suspense and subverts the expectation Sarah will be the one to fulfil God's promises to Abraham. This is further enhanced by a contrast between verbal promise and physical reality of childlessness displayed between the three panels.

In the first panel of Gen 16, Hagar is kneeling on the ground making bread behind the older, stern-faced Sarah. The visual contrast between the pair is striking: Sarah is old, serious and powerful with a conniving expression and shifting eyes. Her head is covered, and her figure is indiscernible under the swathes of material wrapped around her body. In contrast, Hagar is young with uncovered short black hair<sup>435</sup> and simple robes which cling to her typical Crumbian-style curvy figure, including rounded hips and stomach which are symbolic of fertility. The simple garments are a visual reminder of her subservient status to Sarah, and they also emphasise the difference between Hagar and Sarah in terms of status and looks, and, as the reader comes to find out, child-bearing abilities.

Read with the accompanying text, Crumb's visual depiction of Sarah and Hagar also demonstrates how the pair mirror or shadow each other. Athalya Brenner-Idan suggests that mirroring in female pairs is a common way to present conflict in the Hebrew Bible, "in the sense that [Sarah] has certain properties which the other lacks but tries to obtain for herself [...] if combined into one person, each pair would form a complete and balanced personality."<sup>436</sup> I agree with this idea from a literary perspective. It is a neat narrative device which signals to the reader that each matriarch must have a "partner" in order to fulfil their characters, separating the patriarchs from the matriarchs because the men do not require someone else to make them "whole".

Whether Crumb is familiar with this reading or not, his remediation does suggest each woman has different qualities and abilities to offer than the other, which when combined, presents one "complete" woman. This is similar to the representation of Milcah juxtaposed against Sarah in Gen 11:29-30 as well. I also argue that, even though Crumb is presenting each woman as the opposite of the other, there are instances in the narratives where the two

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<sup>434</sup> Stephen E. Tabachnick, *The Quest for Jewish Belief and Identity in the Graphic Novel* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 17.

<sup>435</sup> The shorter hair is a mark of Hagar's Egyptian heritage and thus a mark of her enslavement.

<sup>436</sup> Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 92. See also: Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 10; and Phyllis Silverman Kramer, "Biblical Women that come in Pairs: The Use of Female Pairs as a Literary Device in the Hebrew Bible," in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 218-232.

women begin to share visual traits, such as the young Hagar bearing resemblance to the young Sarah whom we first meet in Gen 11:29. Similarities and differences inextricably tie the two women together, blending them into one “perfect” woman at least in the sense that together, they can offer Abraham everything he might require between them: dominance/submission, old/young, infertility/fertility, power/powerlessness, and finally subject/object of the text.<sup>437</sup> Crumb has presented his female pairs in this way through visual decisions and textual composition.

Crumb’s decision to describe Hagar as a “handmaid” is important in terms of reader reception and in delineating between Sarah and Hagar as well. The first use of the word appears in 16:1. Crumb has taken then word from the KJV; Alter translates the Hebrew שפחה as “slavegirl,” and the JPS translates it as “maidservant.” This is a curious decision given Crumb’s usual reliance on Alter’s text, combined with the fact that Alter gives good reason as to why he has chosen to translate שפחה as “slavegirl” and not “handmaid”, which includes the fact that it “imposes a misleading sense of European gentility on the sociology of the story.”<sup>438</sup> Simply put, translating the word as “handmaiden” misses the point that Hagar was owned by Sarah and was not employed or treated as a person with any social status whatsoever, and the KJV’s use of “handmaiden” reflect societal norms during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Crumb does not acknowledge the difficulty of translating the word in his commentary, and neither does the JPS offer a reason as to why they have chosen “maidservant”. Conjecturally speaking, Crumb may have been less comfortable with the implication that Hagar was a slave and more comfortable portraying her as a servant to Sarah, and this may also suggest why he portrays the scene of Abraham and Hagar having sex as potentially consensual rather than treating it as rape which it arguably was.<sup>439</sup> Certainly, Crumb suggests in his commentary that after she falls pregnant, Hagar sees her mistress in a diminished light which made Sarah afraid that Hagar may usurp her position as matriarch of the family and he comes to this conclusion by arguing that this is the reason that Sarah harasses Hagar, forcing her to flee.<sup>440</sup>

From the perspective of a modern reader without a background in biblical Hebrew, Crumb’s decision to use “handmaid” potentially affects the reception of the text. In modern terms the difference between the description of Hagar as “maid” compared to “slavegirl” is, as Alter

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<sup>437</sup> See also: Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 10.

<sup>438</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 67.

<sup>439</sup> Crumb may also be familiar with Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and may have chosen the word ‘handmaid’ because his modern readers already associate it with this story.

<sup>440</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 16, *Genesis, Illustrated*. Similarly, this is argued by Teubal in *Ancient Sisterhood: The Lost Traditions of Hagar & Sarah* (Ohio: Swallow Press, 1997), 49-54.

points out, the difference between a person being in paid employment of their own volition, as opposed to somebody who is forced to work without wages, rights or freedom. Culturally speaking, modern readers without foreknowledge of the biblical term may assume from Crumb's version of Genesis that Hagar enjoys greater freedoms and privileges than if she were described as a slave. Therefore, when Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham "as a wife" (16:3), Crumb's reader might assume that either Hagar is of a higher status and is given to Abraham as a concubine, or even that she will enjoy the same or similar status to Sarah "as a wife" and that she is will be in a position to usurp Sarah once she provides Abraham with an heir.<sup>441</sup> Neither of these are true, but Crumb emphasises his decision by highlighting Sarah's declaration that "perhaps my house shall be built up through **her**!" Crumb emphasising the word "her" implies to the reader that Crumb believes that Sarah – albeit as a last resort – is comfortable with her house being built up through her handmaid. Missing from this narrative is a discussion on the rape of Hagar who, whether Crumb understood her to be a slavegirl or a concubine, is forced to have sex with Abraham in her role as servant to Sarah.

As noted in the JPS, this is a normal situation in ancient Near Eastern laws, citing the laws of Lipit-Ishtar, Old Assyrian marriage contracts and the Hammurabi code as evidence for this. In particular, the Hammurabi law code states that in the case of a wife who is also a priestess, she is barred from having children and therefore must rely on servants to provide her husband with children until such a time that her priestess duties are over.<sup>442</sup> This is what Crumb's word choice and visual illustrations are depicting, and is likely why he chose to call Hagar a "handmaiden" rather than using Alter's "slavegirl." Also of note is Crumb's adoption of "wife" to describe Hagar, as opposed to the JPS' "concubine", which, the commentary argues, designates the lowly status of secondary wife to Hagar, recognising her position as unequal to Sarah despite sharing a husband. Alter refutes this, stating the Hebrew is: אִשָּׁה, the same word used to describe Sarah, and not פְּלִנְיָה, which means concubine,<sup>443</sup> which might explain Crumb's decision.

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<sup>441</sup> In her 1990 book, *Ancient Sisterhood*, Teubal argues that Hagar was neither slave nor concubine because she was not under instruction from Abraham, which would be normal, but she was commanded by Sarah. Further, the fact that the text suggests Hagar only had one sexual encounter with Abraham which was enough to make her pregnant, Teubal argues that it is likely a marriage ceremony (of sorts) took place to sanctify that one sexual encounter, which would have only happened with the permission of Sarah. This is because Hagar was אִשָּׁהּ to Sarah, and not answerable to Abraham, and also explains why Sarah controlled Hagar's destiny, which Abraham was unable to argue against. See: Savina J. Teubal, *Ancient Sisterhood*, 53-54. There is no evidence to suggest Crumb has engaged with this book, and nor does his visual imagery reflect Teubal's argument from this book.

<sup>442</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 119. See also: Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 68.

<sup>443</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 68.

Returning to the visual elements, Crumb maintains a narrative dominant panel pattern, designing the pattern of frame shapes and sizes to reflect the emotional content of the chapter. The first panel of Sarah's close-up creates a diagonal within the image from Sarah's eyes towards Hagar in the background. The composition in this panel indicated Hagar's subservient status to Sarah, and this is repeated in the second panel where Hagar stands at a distance behind Sarah, appearing smaller than the dominant matriarch and her husband. I argue that in both of these panels, the diagonal from Sarah to Hagar is a foreshadowing of Hagar's involvement in producing an heir for Abraham – the responsibility for child-bearing is being passed from Sarah to Hagar, and the order is coming from Sarah to Hagar. The smaller size of Hagar is a visual acknowledgment of her subservience.

Furthermore, in the first panel Hagar appears to be kneading bread in a large bowl, which is a visual recall to the reader's introduction to Sarah in Gen 11:29-30. In that panel, she holds a bowl of food, which looks like bread. The fact that Sarah once held the bowl and was responsible for the nourishment of her husband, but it is now in the hands of Hagar, potentially symbolises Hagar providing nourishment for Abraham in the form of producing children and fulfilling his need for descendants. This is an example of sequential links between panels, or *tressage* as described by Miller and Groensteen. With regards to the symbolism of bread, according to George Ferguson it "has always been a symbol of the means of sustaining life [...] In the Old Testament bread was the symbol of God's providence care and nurture of his people."<sup>444</sup> Gossai writes that "bread represents the universal satiety for hunger",<sup>445</sup> thus the depiction of bread could also refer to God fulfilling his prophecy with Abraham, providing him the means to procreate and begin his lineage. Bread is also symbolic of gestation in modern terms because it has to rise and bake and grow until it is ready, hence the term "bun in the oven" to indicate somebody is pregnant.

Panels 3 and 4 are concerned with the union of Hagar and Abraham. The pairing of these panels, which are situated in the top row of the left-hand page, signal that this "marriage" should be understood as ritualistic and physical. This is in the sense that, in panel 3, Sarah stands over the joining of Abraham and Hagar's hands recalling modern marriage ceremonies of officiants standing over the joining of hands of two newlyweds. Notably, this panel is the first time Crumb depicts Sarah in the role of priestess (Teubal's theory), as she sanctions the union between Abraham and Sarah with the authority of a religious figure. In panel 4, Abraham and Hagar are pictured in a sexual embrace, consummating their

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<sup>444</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 172.

<sup>445</sup> Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 16.



“marriage”.<sup>446</sup> In the background, there is a large, rounded vase which is often symbolically associated with wombs (a vessel to be filled) and by extension pregnancy or fertility in general.<sup>447</sup> In both panels Hagar is submissive, indicated by her smaller stature, her dropped gaze and Abraham’s physical dominance in the consummation scene. This changes in panel 5.

The reader must use their own knowledge in the space of the gutter between panels, to surmise that time has passed between the scene of consummation in panel 4, and the scene in panel 5. Hagar is obviously pregnant, and quite a way along, judging by her swollen stomach. This time, Sarah is placed in the background and Hagar is presented as physically dominant both in size and in body language. Crumb has purposefully drawn Sarah smaller, but she sits in the doorway of a tent which enhances the illusion. Sarah watches Hagar walk past, proudly holding her pregnant stomach. This panel is captioned with Gen 16:4: “and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress seemed diminished in her eyes.” Tellingly, an empty food basket hangs above Sarah’s head, symbolising her inability to nourish a family. Crumb depicts Sarah’s indignation by drawing a white aura around her body which is against a dark background, emphasising the contrast. It gives the impression of Sarah’s anger pulsing from her body. This is exaggerated in panel 6 in a confrontational scene between Sarah and Abraham where her aura takes the form of spikes which point alarmingly towards her husband. In panel 7, the background is totally black, void of any other detail, reflecting Sarah’s mood and tone as she exclaims “Let the Lord Judge between you and me!”

In response, Abraham’s eyes are tightly closed in an almost infantile manner. If he cannot see Sarah, perhaps she will go away, and he won’t have to listen to her. This is a clever reference to the recurring theme of seeing/hearing in Gen 16. As Alter notes, Abraham

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<sup>446</sup> As I have already noted, Hagar is a servant in some capacity to Sarah, whether as a slave with little to no rights, or as a concubine or “second wife” to Abraham, who potentially has some rights. Either way, it can be understood from the text that Hagar is married to Abraham against her will, even though her voice is not presented in the text, and that the scene of “consummation” between the pair is also against Hagar’s will, and should be viewed as rape (see: Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women’s Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice and the Study of the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2017); Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 9-36; and J. Cheryl Exum, “Who’s Afraid of the Endangered Ancestress” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 141-158, for more on the topic of Hagar and rape). This is not something that is obvious in Crumb’s text, although in fairness, his rendering does not deny that either. However, based on his exegesis of the text, it is fair to surmise Crumb has never read the scene of Hagar and Abraham as rape and as such, his version does not portray that.

<sup>447</sup> This is true across religious traditions, including Buddhism, Chinese traditions and Christianity. An empty vase or vessel is often associated with an empty womb, as both have the potential to be filled. Rounded vases or vessels are often associated with pregnancy or fertility in general owing to their shape and contents.

“heeds” Sarah (16:2), Sarah “sees” her status is diminished in Hagar’s eyes (16:4), Hagar’s son will be called Ishmael, meaning “God has heard” (16:11), Hagar calls the name of the Lord “El-roi” meaning “God who sees me” (16:13) and names the place of her epiphany “Beer-lahai-roi” meaning “Well of the Living One Who Sees Me” (16:14).<sup>448</sup> Crumb likes to play with these puns in his visualisations, noting the themes and incorporating them into character traits. This is something that Crumb is uniquely placed to do in a text-image remediation which would not be so easy to achieve in a text-only or image-only adaptation of the text.

Sarah’s final appearance in this chapter closes the page and it contrasts with the opening sequence of the “marriage” which opened the page. Sarah blessing/officiating the marriage has turned into Sarah harassing Hagar and forcing her to flee from both the union and her home. The deliberate design of the multistage-multiframe neatly showcases the emotional aspects of the narrative, moving the characters from a place of giving/security, to physical touch/intimacy, to distress (from Sarah) and contempt (apparently, from Hagar),<sup>449</sup> to anger (Sarah), frustration (Abraham) and ending with Sarah “harassing” Hagar and banishing her.<sup>450</sup> Hagar’s life has been upended across the panels on this single page, from marriage to isolation.<sup>451</sup> Crumb has successfully utilised the resources of comics to showcase the reversal of Hagar’s situation and neatly encompass the reversal of decisions by Sarah.

Crumb’s portrayal of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar, and his understanding of the status of each woman, is influenced by Teubal. Abraham’s power is practically non-existent in his remediation of Gen 16, either visually or textually. Crumb continues to subscribe to a Teubalian version of events, with some support from commentary in the JPS.

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<sup>448</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 67-71.

<sup>449</sup> Some might consider jealousy to be a prevalent emotion in the panel of 16:4, although the text does not explicitly suggest Sarah is jealous and nor does Crumb enforce the idea.

<sup>450</sup> Alter does not comment on the use of ‘harassed’, the JPS translates the text to “treated her harshly”, noting “the laws of Ur-Nammu prescribe that the insolent concubine-slave have “her mouth scoured with one quart of salt,” while Hammurabi prescribed that she be reduced to slave status and again bear the slave mark. The Hebrew verb used here, implies that Sarah subjected Hagar to physical and psychological abuse. It carried with it the nuance of critical judgment of her actions.” Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 120. Genesis’ Hebrew lexicon indicates the verb should be translated as “to oppress, to depress, to afflict” in the Piel form which is used in Gen 16:6. Crumb uses ‘harassed’ and his accompanying image shows Sarah shouting and wagging her finger at a fleeing Hagar but none of the more serious punishments described above. Abraham is not in the scene, which further abdicates him from any responsibility of the situation.

<sup>451</sup> Admittedly, marriage and security are not by Hagar’s choice but by her mistress’s orders, which is important to remember. However, the contrast between being a member of the household and having the security of a roof over her head against the banishment and isolation is the point. It is impossible to tell which situation Hagar would have preferred, though from Crumb’s rendering, he suggests the first situation.

## Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 16:1-6 in biblical scholarship

The story of Hagar and Sarah has received a lot of scholarly attention in terms of biblical studies, feminism and gender studies, power relation, fertility, and bodies in the Bible. It is probably one of the most widely commented upon stories of the patriarchal/matriarchal narratives. To that end, it would be impossible for me to provide an overview of every scholar who has approached Gen 16. Instead, as with Gen 11:29-30, I will contextualise Crumb's remediation of the verses with his immediate source material, before turning to a slightly wider perspective from feminist scholars. I do this because I argue that as Crumb identifies as pro-feminist<sup>452</sup> and is influenced by Teubal's feminist-leaning theories, I expect to see a demonstration of a pro-feminist reading in his images.

Sarna's commentary in the JPS declares that Sarah has been silently suffering in the years since we first met her and for some unsaid reason, she has reached a "critical point" in her quest to give Abraham a child.<sup>453</sup> I find this statement at odds with the text, sparse as it may be, because there is no such evidence to suggest that after thirty long years, the issue is suddenly critical. However, it apparently is and Sarah decides "in desperation" to take the initiative and "resorts to concubinage".<sup>454</sup> The use of the words "desperation" and "resort to" paint a particularly bleak picture of her state, but it does not appear in Crumb's visualisation. On the contrary, Sarah is pictured as plotting to use Hagar, and does not appear distressed or desperate at the thought. In the JPS, Hagar is then introduced and Sarna notes that her description as Egyptian "may have ironic significance" due to the fact in the covenant of pieces (Gen 15), God has declared Abraham's descendants will be enslaved by a land that is not theirs. It is another contradiction/contrast in the text, and one which Crumb visually demonstrates in his stereotypical depiction of Hagar as an Egyptian.<sup>455</sup>

Sarna suggests, as per Nahmanides, that Abraham took Hagar because Sarah urges him to and not out of any desire of his own. This further removes Abraham from any responsibility for the actions and it propagates the idea Sarah is in control. However, in the commentary to Gen 16:5, Abraham shoulders the responsibility because, Sarna notes, Sarah relinquished

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<sup>452</sup> See p.76 for a discussion on what is meant by "pro-feminist".

<sup>453</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 118.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Christian Davenport discusses the intentional hyper-differentiation of people of colour and different ethnicities within comic books as a way to marginalise them from the nominally white characters. This is so in the case of Hagar who is visually markedly different from the other characters of the text, suggesting she is marginalised in physical appearance but also in status and ethnicity. Christian Davenport, "Black is the Colour of my Comic Book Character" in *Drawing the Line: Comics Studies and Inks 1994-1997*, ed. Lucy Shelton Caswell et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 196-209.

her total authority over Hagar by urging Abraham to use her. Finally, as I have previously discussed, the JPS commentary describes Sarah as treating Hagar harshly, causing her to flee.

Crumb does not seem to view the scene in the same way that the Sarna's commentary describes it. Other than laying responsibility for the decision to use Hagar as a vessel for Abraham's child, showing Sarah's control over the situation rather than over Abraham in general, the two accounts do not correspond. Crumb's Sarah is certainly not "desperate" or "resorting to" concubinage; instead, he shows her to be instigator and architect of the plot. Abraham is very much a secondary character who must obey his wife's wishes. In that respect, Abraham is "used" by Sarah to fulfil God's wishes just as Hagar is used.<sup>456</sup>

This view is reflective of Teubal's image of Sarah the high-priestess with a modicum of control over her husband. Teubal refers to the Code of Hammurabi, arguing that when Sarah banished Hagar for her display of contempt towards Sarah, she was following a law which she had the authority to invoke or abide by because it was the legal system in her homeland.<sup>457</sup> Teubal reasons that due to Sarah's position of authority, she was not acting out of jealousy or spite towards Hagar when she banished her but she was following the law.<sup>458</sup> Hagar's function in Sarah's household is to produce progeny, which, Teubal argues, makes her "indisputably superior" to Sarah and is why she has the confidence to show contempt towards her mistress.<sup>459</sup> Teubal understands Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar to be of the type that she was stripped of any privileges previously held, and was reduced to the level of slave (as opposed to concubine).<sup>460</sup> Lastly, the fact that Abraham does not get involved and allows Sarah to deal with the situation is, Teubal contends, evidence that Sarah held authority

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<sup>456</sup> By "used" I do not imply that Abraham is treated in the same way as Hagar; that would be impossible. He is a patriarchal, powerful, wealthy man and she is a slave-girl who is given nothing but her Egyptian identity in the text. However, I am implying that Crumb's remediation shows Abraham as a secondary character in Sarah's plot. That the plot is so he will have his descendants means that his being used is only to going to benefit himself, but it assumes he is not in control and is being used by Sarah to carry out her bidding so that she can fulfil God's promises.

<sup>457</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 31.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid. Teubal states the same can be said of Rebekah and Rachel. The three matriarchs were struggling to uphold their matriarchal social traditions which they had brought from Mesopotamia to patriarchal Canaan.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid, 31-36.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid. Rulon-Miller, citing Jeansonne, references the Code of Hammurabi which states that "a priestess can elevate a slave woman to a wife of her husband, and, if the slave acts arrogantly, the priestess can demote her, but not sell her." This supports Teubal's claims on the same incident. Rulon-Miller, *Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude*, 73.

in the household and that Abraham “is far from being the all-powerful patriarch he is reputed to be.”<sup>461</sup>

Teubal’s reading of the verses have influenced Crumb’s remediation much more than the JPS. For example, Hagar’s confidence to strut past Sarah while heavily pregnant is reflective of Teubal’s argument that Hagar would have felt “indisputably superior” to Sarah, because she could conceive but Sarah could not. Likewise, Sarah’s harsh treatment of Hagar is not physical but appears to be verbal, perhaps an oral impartment of Sarah’s authority expressing the law. Finally, the fact Abraham is nowhere to be seen is reflective of Teubal’s theory that he held no authority in the matter, nor did he have any control over his wife’s decisions despite the fact Hagar carried his child; a child long desired and required to fulfil God’s promises to him.

Of course, Abraham does not appear in the text at this point anyway, so Crumb’s decision to leave him out potentially reflects his “straightforward” illustration job. Alter’s commentary on the situation is at odds with Teubal’s, and by extension, Crumb. Alter presents Abraham as a meek husband who, embarking on a union with Hagar, was only trying to make his wife happy. The fact Sarah shows jealousy and distress towards Hagar is not Abraham’s fault: “her bitterness and her resentment against the husband who, after all, has only complied with her request; his willingness to buy conjugal peace at almost any price.”<sup>462</sup> In this account, Sarah is unreasonable and highly emotional. Abraham wants peace and quiet from his obstinate wife, and that is why he allows her to do to Hagar as she wants.<sup>463</sup> This is not a picture represented in Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated*. Yes, Abraham may appear submissive to Sarah, but not because he relishes a peaceful life; instead, it is because Sarah assumes authority and power which Abraham must also observe.

Sarah and Abraham’s roles in the story are the subject of much scholarly debate, particularly their diametrically opposing reactions as well as the “use” and function of Hagar. Rulon-Miller offers the suggestion that Abraham was not sexually attracted to Sarah and wanted to delay having sex with her. Abraham was told in Gen 17 that he would be given a son by Sarah, to which he responds with laughter, yet he does not tell Sarah this and she only

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<sup>461</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 37. Here, Teubal also claims that the matriarchs were not barren, but “initially childless” as they all go on to successfully produce children later in their lives (God’s involvement is not noted). This, she argues, is because the priestess tradition they belonged to reportedly forbade priestesses to have children until at least their duties were done.

<sup>462</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 67.

<sup>463</sup> Exum interprets the verses to imply that Abraham bestowed authority upon Sarah to deal with Hagar, not that Sarah already held the power. Sarah is instrumental in influencing Abraham to give her what she wants (control over Hagar), but must be granted authority by the patriarch. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 105-6.

discovers it by listening at the tent door in Gen 18. Rulon-Miller suggests this could be a sign that Abraham does not want to be intimate with his wife. Also, Abraham offers his servant and Ishmael as potential heirs in Gen 17 suggesting he either doesn't trust God's word, or he does not want to have sex with Sarah. Finally, Sarah's laughter in Gen 21 could imply that the prophecy she will fall pregnant is ridiculous because her husband does not have sex with her.<sup>464</sup> There is nothing in the text to suggest this, and nor is there anything in Crumb's remediation to suggest he follows this line of thought. Similarly, Crumb does not depict Sarah as lacking the confidence to deal with the Hagar situation, nor does he portray Sarah or Hagar as being "insecure in [their] lot" as suggested by Brenner-Idan.<sup>465</sup> However, in reference to Brenner-Idan's suggestion that the pair of Hagar and Sarah make up a "whole" woman, this idea is prevalent in Crumb's depiction, both visually and textually.<sup>466</sup>

Other scholars have suggested that the scene of Gen 16:4 represents a moment of insight for Hagar: by giving Hagar to Abraham as a wife, Sarah has unwittingly diminished her own status and when Hagar falls pregnant, her status is raised. As Tribble put it, "a reordering of the relationship" takes place<sup>467</sup> which removes the hierarchical blinkers from Hagar's perspective.<sup>468</sup> Tribble's aim in *Texts of Terror* is to reconstruct Gen 16 from the perspective of Hagar. This results in highlighting the passivity of Abraham who is overshadowed by the power and authority of his wife,<sup>469</sup> a situation which is well-represented in Crumb's remediation especially in terms of Abraham's inactivity in the narrative but total obedience to Sarah,<sup>470</sup> but this is not a position which Teubal agrees with.<sup>471</sup> Such a reconstruction of Hagar's story also draws attention to Hagar's taking command of her own life as she flees her mistress, suggesting some level of autonomy. Confidence to flee such a situation in her low-status position, an act which often resulted in punishment of death,<sup>472</sup> should not be dismissed. As Gossai reminds us, Hagar is on the margins of an already marginalised group: she is foreign, female and slave, and any power-shift she has perceived by falling pregnant

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<sup>464</sup> Rulon-Miller, *Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude*, 70-71.

<sup>465</sup> It is not Brenner-Idan who suggests they are insecure in their lot. She attributes that to a male viewpoint which relays some "sharply severe comments on female behaviour and the female psyche." Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 93-95.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid, 92-93. See also: Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 10.

<sup>467</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 12.

<sup>468</sup> Tribble, "Genesis 22", 281.

<sup>469</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 10-12.

<sup>470</sup> See, for example, panels 6 and 7 in appendix B: Fig. 5.2. where Abraham closes his eyes and distances himself from his confrontational wife.

<sup>471</sup> While Teubal focuses on the role of Sarah and her perceived power in her marriage which serves to highlight Abraham's passivity, Teubal is not overly concerned with the role of Hagar, other than using Hagar's character as a literary device to emphasise the theory that Sarah is a high-priestess.

<sup>472</sup> Fischer, "On the Significance of "Women Texts"", 268.

with Abraham's child is not enough to warrant her equality with Sarah who is Abraham's family, female and wife.<sup>473</sup>

That Hagar's story, though closely bound with Abraham and Sarah, should be given so much space in the patriarchal narrative at all is unusual, especially when she becomes the subject of her own narrative after fleeing into the desert where she has a dialogue with God/divine messenger and is promised countless descendants (like Abraham) and granted a promise that her child will be free from slavery (Gen 16:12) is remarkable.<sup>474</sup> The ancient scribes and redactors of Genesis could easily have discarded her story, but it serves as a reminder that Hagar is more than a tool or object used by Abraham or Sarah to further their narratives and their futures. She is more than just a symbol of the oppressed, she is also a pivotal female character in the Bible perhaps partly because she positions Abraham as an ancestor of the Arabs.<sup>475</sup>

From this brief summary of scholarship on 16:1-6, I have discussed a range of perspectives and approaches to the narrative. However, most scholars identify the following points of the narrative as key to understanding the function of Hagar and the relationship between Sarah, Hagar and Abraham: 1) Sarah assumes a position of power and authority in the text, where she is the subject of the narrative and leader of action, 2) by contrast, Abraham is passive. In fact, he is almost silent and is not involved in moving the narrative forward or making decisions, and 3) Hagar is the subject of this story, but with some modicum of autonomy and confidence. While the story of 16:1-6 can be read in a variety of ways and each character can be interpreted through a range of lenses with their actions subject to complex scrutiny, these three points are mostly agreed upon. Again, none of the scholars mention the potential that Sarah is a high-priestess, although many of them note that her use and treatment of Hagar corroborates with legal advice in the Code of Hammurabi concerning priestesses. However, this does not identify Sarah as a priestess, and this theory lacks textual support in Genesis.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 5-9.

<sup>474</sup> In midrashic style, Danna Nolan Fewell retells the story of Hagar, filling in the gaps and explaining the narrative from her perspective. In this exegesis, she portrays Hagar as bargaining for the freedom of her son from slavery and explains that as God grants a promise that Ishmael will be free, she agrees to return to Sarah. Danna Nolan Fewell, "Changing the Subject: Retelling the Story of Hagar the Egyptian" in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 182-194.

<sup>475</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 28.

<sup>476</sup> Furthermore, it is problematic to assume that the Code of Hammurabi was ever practiced in ancient Mesopotamian legal frameworks; it may be an ideological text rather than a strictly legal one. With thanks to Dr. Sarah Nicholson for this point.

I argue that Crumb's depiction of 16:1-6 agrees with these three points, both visually and textually. His composition of panels across the pages – especially in the depictions of Sarah and Hagar's unequal and unhappy relationship – renders a picture of power struggles (evidenced for example in the size and demeanour of Sarah against a smaller, vulnerable Hagar of the first panel, against a proud and confident Hagar walking in front of a smaller, diminished Sarah in the background of panel 5), and emotional content which is absent from a straightforward reading of the text. I argue that again Crumb has failed to seize his chance of portraying Sarah in the priestess-mode he perceives her to be from Teubal's interpretation. This is in keeping with scholarly consensus, however, and thus Crumb's portrayal of Gen 16:6 agrees for the most part with scholarly readings.

As noted, what Crumb does bring to the text is emotional content. For example, where the text is void of emotional description, Crumb has interpreted the passages perhaps from his own perspective on how he would feel in a similar situation. Abraham's passivity corroborates with Crumb's preference for drawing weak, small men being dominated by larger, confident women. His depiction of Sarah also correlates with this, especially in panels 6 and 7 where Sarah is portrayed angrily shouting at Abraham, dominating the panel.

Finally, his depiction of Hagar is quite beautifully rendered, capturing the impossible situation in which she finds herself, encouraging the reader to feel sympathy towards her. Those emotions are lacking in the text, Crumb has visualised the human response adding new layers of interpretation to the text.

### Genesis 18:1-15<sup>477</sup>

The next arc in Sarah's story takes place after the covenant of signs between God and Abraham in Gen. 17, where the names change from Sarai to Sarah, and Abram to Abraham occur. Sarah is still childless, and the couple have travelled to Mamre, Hebron temporarily (for Abraham, at least). The narrator begins the chapter describing Abraham's location at the door of his tent in the heat of the day, when three strangers appear before him. Abraham offers hospitality to the men, and they accept (18:1-5). This occurs over the first five panels in Gen 18 of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*.

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<sup>477</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.3.



In the sixth panel of the sequence, Abraham instructs Sarah to “Hurry! Knead three measures of choice semolina flour and make loaves!”<sup>478</sup> Sarah has visibly aged after her appearance in Gen 16 and in this scene she is sitting on the floor, working at a loom. A rounded vase, similar to that from the consummation scene between Abraham and Hagar, is in the corner of the panel. Next to it is a basket, similar to the one held by Sarah in previous panels. The same vase and basket appear in panel 8, relating to Gen 18:8 which shows the strangers sitting down to eat. In this panel as in others, the items are symbolic of the fulfilment of the promise that Sarah will bear a child and that Abraham will have descendants. They are also symbolic of God’s nourishment of Abraham’s life, and lastly, they symbolise hospitality which is an important theme in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>479</sup> All three of these symbolic functions are prevalent in this panel as they foreshadow the speech of the strangers which is to come, with regards to God’s divine promise.

The visitors’ faces are shrouded in material and they never fully face Abraham. The lack of contact between the group, and the fact that Abraham only appears to address one of the strangers suggests that Crumb is, typical of most interpretations, suggesting these visitors are divine: they are God accompanied by two angels of destruction.<sup>480</sup> The purpose of their visit is apparently to announce that Sarah will have a child after all this time and the pronouncement itself is split over three panels in the middle row, centring the promise in the multistage-multiframe. Once the visitor has made his announcement, Crumb humorously depicts Abraham’s surprise using exclamatory marks which emanate from his shocked face. However, Sarah’s countenance is, rather remarkably, the opposite. Her reaction is shown in the first panel of the bottom row, where she has a calm, almost emotionless expression, with her hand held to her face. Though her face betrays little emotion, her body language tells a different story as her arm curls protectively over her stomach. The empty basket which has in the past been used to shield her body from intimate scenes, lies at the corner of the panel. Her body is open to the idea of becoming pregnant without material objects to create a barrier; the longer shot of her body emphasises this as she is drawn from head to knees.

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<sup>478</sup> Again, we encounter a reference to bread, though this time it is textual rather than visual. The description of the flour as semolina does not appear in any of Crumb’s textual sources but is his own insertion. Gossai notes of this text: “Bread represents the universal satiety for hunger; and the inclusion of the idea of feeding the guests moves this text out of the localised situation in the life of Abraham, to one which has universal implications.” Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 16.

<sup>479</sup> See for example: Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 129.

<sup>480</sup> This corroborates with Alter’s commentary on the passage, but not the JPS which suggests one of the visitors was of a higher status than his attendants, which is why Abraham addresses him over the others. See: Alter, *Genesis*, 77; Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 129.

In this panel, Crumb uses a thought bubble to identify Sarah's thoughts: "Now that I'm withered, shall I have pleasure, and my husband so *old*?!"<sup>481</sup> The incorporation of the thought bubble positions the reader in a position unique to comics. The biblical text implies that potentially, Sarah speaks privately to herself. In Alter's translation it reads: "And Sarah laughed inwardly, saying, 'After being shrivelled, shall I have pleasure, and my husband is old?'" The JPS translates it as: "And Sarah laughed to herself, saying 'Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment -with my husband so old?'" and the KJV translates it as: "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"<sup>482</sup>

By inserting a thought bubble to encapsulate the words, Crumb frames Sarah's thoughts and does not rely on narrative voice-over to relay them to the reader. Thus, the reader is involved in her thought process becoming privy to Sarah's innermost voice: the reader can literally read her thoughts. When this is paired with the next panel where the visitor questions why Sarah laughed and said, "shall I really give birth, old as I am??" the implication is that the visitor can also read her thoughts, or in fact, hear them.<sup>483</sup> If the visitor is, as suggested, an embodiment of God, then the reader is momentarily given the same status as the divine by being allowed to read Sarah's thoughts within Crumb's remediation.<sup>484</sup>

On the following page, the visitor continues to respond to Sarah's reaction. In a call-back to 16:5, Crumb replicates the comic device of an angry aura using white outlines on a black background which emanates from the figure as he speaks. The anger is directed towards Abraham who cowers into the frame, diminished against the tall, angry visitor. Though his reprimand is directed towards Abraham, it is Sarah who is shown in full profile in the next panel, visibly shaking as she denies laughing. She is not seen again in chapter 18.

Sarah's appearances throughout this chapter are few, despite her role as the future mother of Abraham's child. Notably, in the panels where she does appear, she is normally set against

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<sup>481</sup> Emphasis by Crumb.

<sup>482</sup> Crumb prefers the JPS version, using the word 'withered' and describing Sarah as laughing to herself. Using the word 'withered' is a visual term, which brings to mind a dying tree or plant which does not produce seeds or fruit anymore. The word comes directly after the reader has learned that "Sarah no longer had her woman's flow" further emphasising the connotation that Sarah is no longer able to bear 'fruit' or progeny. Crumb visually represents this in the accompanying panel which is a close-up of Sarah's lined, wrinkled face which takes up the majority of the panel, with exception of the thought bubble.

<sup>483</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 78.

<sup>484</sup> Though not directly relevant to this case study, the idea of the reader being of equal stature to the divine is further supported later in chapter 18, when the divine visitor, in a succession of thought bubbles, argues with himself over how much of his plan should be revealed to Abraham. In this case, the reader is granted insight into the inner divine monologue, placing the reader *above* the divine in the sense that we are privy to watching God's decision-making, and become aware that he is conflicted.

a dark background with few details, and her character is prominent in the panels in which she appears. The framing of her character and the lack of background details signals to the reader that Crumb intends Sarah to be the most important figure in this part of the narrative and also ties the emotionality of the narrative to her. The emphasis is on Sarah: her reactions, her emotions and her story. Thus, it is easier for the reader to become more invested in Sarah's story than Abraham's in these panels. This correlates with Crumb's reading of Sarah as a high-priestess, of high status, and his desire to represent Sarah in a strong, pro-feminist light as per Teubal, and his own beliefs. The visual codes and tools he uses to do this are repeated in the other matriarch stories, serving to emphasise their importance and status.

### Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 18:1-15 in biblical scholarship

In the commentary to the JPS, Sarna comments that the divine promise to Abraham by God has been delivered over three stages<sup>485</sup> and that although Sarah is postmenopausal, this will not be an impediment to God's power. Indeed, Sarna suggests that Sarah's age and unfertile situation is such that it marks the forthcoming pregnancy as even more special. Abraham's descendants have been born from an impossible biological situation. Thus, they are "not subject to what seem to be the ordinary norms of history."<sup>486</sup> The exceptional circumstances are noted by Alter,<sup>487</sup> who also draws attention to the fact that it is Abraham who receives the pronouncement<sup>488</sup> and that Sarah only learns of the fact by eavesdropping. This implies that Sarah is less important than Abraham, but more importantly, that decisions regarding her body are made without her consultation.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> "First, in 15:4, Abraham was assured that his heir would be a natural-born son; then, in 17:16-21, he was assured that Sarah would bear this child; now a time limit is set for the fulfilment of the promise." Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 130.

<sup>486</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 130. This has overtones of the hero narrative according to Joseph Campbell, who cites that the hero is always born in exceptional circumstances, such as from an apparently barren mother, or a virgin mother. See: Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

<sup>487</sup> Alter notes that the scene takes on many characteristics of the annunciation type-scene, but "only here is the emphatically matriarchal annunciation displaced from wife to husband, with the woman merely eavesdropping on the promise; only here is the barren woman actually postmenopausal; and only here is there a long postponement". Alter, *Genesis*, 78.

<sup>488</sup> Strangely, Gunkel suggests Abraham is the receiver of the prophecy which states he will father a child within the year, as a reward for his hospitality to strangers, further highlighting the importance of the theme of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible. See: Herman Gunkel, *The Stories of Genesis* (Oakland, CA: BIBal Press, 1994), 81.

<sup>489</sup> Abraham has of course been privy to this knowledge since it was revealed to him by God in 17:15-19 but did not reveal it to Sarah. Davies notes this also, adding that "whether or not wives should overhear males' plans about their own motherhood, they may not be directly addressed by them on the issues", continuing, "and certainly she should not laugh, even privately. It is something so indiscreet, or perhaps so threatening to a male ego, that it must be denied!" See: Davies, "Genesis and the Gendered World", 13.

Certainly, the text this far has painted Sarah as somebody who wants to be a mother and the idea that she might have changed her mind or wants to enjoy her old age in peace is not entertained. Gossai notes that over the sequence of the pronouncement, Sarah is not shown to be unwilling to proceed and reminds the reader that Sarah and Abraham do have a choice not to continue with God's plans.<sup>490</sup> Crumb's visualisation often toys with the tension between Teubal's theory that Sarah chooses not to have children until her priestess duties are over, and the patriarchally-bound assumptions that she *cannot* have children due to infertility.<sup>491</sup> On the one hand, Crumb depicts Sarah as in control of her destiny, but on the other he portrays her as someone desperate to fulfil the role of mother and provide Abraham with progeny as per God's promise. I argue that panel 13 in Gen 18 highlights this tension: the thought bubble denotes Sarah's interrogation of the proclamation, while her face shows pleasure at the idea. At the same time, both emotions co-exist in the expression of her laughter.

The idea of pleasure is central to Rulon-Miller's argument that Abraham and Sarah are not physically intimate anymore. Rulon-Miller identifies the possibility that Abraham has not told Sarah about the prophecy because he does not want to have sex with her, and/or is not attracted to her. Citing Sharon Jeansonne, Rulon-Miller proposes Sarah's laugh in panel 13 implies that Abraham no longer responds to Sarah sexually. Therefore, her laugh is a sign of disbelief that her husband will sleep with her<sup>492</sup> rather than disbelief that she can fall pregnant.<sup>493</sup> Rulon-Miller suggests that when Abraham asks God if his house will be built up through his servant (15:2-3), or perhaps Ishmael (17:18), he is resisting intimacy with Sarah by indicating he has other options.<sup>494</sup>

Exum, on the other hand, shifts the focus to Sarah's pleasure, suggesting that Sarah's doubt at the divine proclamation and her choice of words ("shall I have pleasure, and my husband so old?") insinuates doubt that Abraham is able to please her sexually:

If, by this remark, the narrator means to deny that an old woman could be sexually aroused, he thereby recognises the fact of female sexual pleasure. The slip has serious repercussions, for acknowledging that women experience sexual pleasure raises the issue of men's ability to satisfy women sexually, a fundamental source of male anxiety.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 40.

<sup>491</sup> Again, the concept of Abraham being the infertile one is absent.

<sup>492</sup> The idea of pleasure mentioned in Sarah's speech is therefore read in the context of sexual pleasure rather than pleasure at becoming a mother.

<sup>493</sup> Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: a Woman with an Attitude", 70-71.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>495</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 111-2.

Sarah's response is edited by the divine entity when he relays it to Abraham, notably leaving out the part about Abraham so that her comment becomes "non-threatening, [in] patriarchally acceptable terms."<sup>496</sup> Both of these scholars are interrogating what is a sparse, undetailed text through the lens of feminist and gender scholarship, which allows the reader to observe the biblical characters in a more human, emotional way.<sup>497</sup> I argue that Crumb's depiction of these scenes in Gen 18 are equally proficient in producing such a response from the reader, due in part to the attention he gives to Sarah and her response. Though neither the expositions put forth by Exum or Rulon-Miller figure in Crumb's remediation, there are nevertheless links to physical pleasure through the images of Sarah's body and face.

Concerning Sarah's laughter, I have discussed that Crumb's rendering of this scene is one of dual emotion of disbelief and hope, both of which are expressed in her laughter. Abraham once laughed at the proclamation of a son, Sarah laughs now, and their reactions are transferred to their forthcoming son, Isaac, meaning "he laughs".<sup>498</sup> God hears Sarah laugh (and the reader is privy to her inner thoughts) and asks Abraham why she laughs.<sup>499</sup> Again, the patriarch is central to the story and Sarah is marginalised, unable to provide a response.<sup>500</sup> However this is not the case in Crumb's remediation. While the text concentrates upon the scene between Abraham and the visitors, Crumb's images are mostly of Sarah: Sarah listening at the tent door, Sarah interrogating the proclamation, two panels where Abraham questioned by the visitors (both of which centralise the divine/God/messenger while Abraham is literally at the edge of the panel), and a full portrait of Sarah denying her laughter.

Fischer argues against a reading that Sarah only learns her fate through indecorously eavesdropping: "[Sarah] is not improperly eavesdropping on the men's conversations, but instead the interest of the men is focused on her, which is improper in a patriarchal society."<sup>501</sup> I argue that this is also represented in Crumb's remediation, both through *his*

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>497</sup> I argue that feminist and gender scholarship facilitate the reading of these texts through a narratological approach, rather than a literary approach, which is feminist and gender readings are able to question what is not in the text rather than what is.

<sup>498</sup> In a note to the text, Gossai cites Brisman's attention to the naming of Isaac: "When Sarah laughed *beqirbah* (internally, in her womb, "to herself" as we more idiomatically say), Yava shows that he dwells in her midst, hears her inner laugh and ordains the reformation of that inner word into the flesh of Isaac, the Laugh within the womb." (Brisman, *The Voice of Jacob*, 45) Gossai, *Power and Marginality*, 41. Crumb enjoys these playful connections between words and names in Hebrew, as the reader will encounter in the naming of Rachel and Leah's children in Gen 30.

<sup>499</sup> Davies points this out in his reading of the text: "Gender in Genesis", 13.

<sup>500</sup> This is emphasised by the fact she laughs/speaks inwardly to herself, rather than expressing herself out loud.

<sup>501</sup> Fischer, "On the Significance of the "Women Texts"", 272.

focus on Sarah visually as discussed above which is juxtaposed against his presentation of Abraham as passive. Abraham is a secondary character, literally in the background of panels 8, 9, and 10,<sup>502</sup> and he is positioned on the edge of panels rather than assuming a central position. Further, Teubal argues that Sarah's location in the text/at the door of the tent suggests she occupies a sacred space which is one of a woman of status. Her tent at the sacred groves of Mamre acts as a cloistered space where she is either enclosed or confined.<sup>503</sup> Abraham is only pictured by Crumb at the door, or edge of the tent, further cementing his status as less important in the Crumbian narrative but also that he is not allowed to enter that sacred space which belongs to Sarah. This is reflective of a Teubalian reading of the story.

Exum disagrees with this assessment, suggesting Sarah must be granted the authority to carry out certain tasks by her husband, which indicates that she is subservient to him.<sup>504</sup> In Exum's reading, Abraham is the core character of the narrative and Sarah is secondary. Of course, one could argue that Sarah is secondary only because she was written into a patriarchal narrative where her narrative function is to produce an heir for the patriarch thus negating or downplaying any other role she might have had in the story.

I have discussed the proclamation of a son for Abraham, as well as Sarah's response (and to some extent, Abraham's response) and the presentation of each character within the context of biblical scholarship, as well as the wider issues of body, sexual function and power-relations. The following points are widely agreed upon: 1) Sarah only learns of the proclamation when eavesdropping at the tent door, meaning Abraham has chosen to withhold the information from her despite her alleged eagerness to have a child which indicates a problem of communication between the pair, 2) Sarah responds first by laughter and then denial, though there is no consensus on what her laughter indicates, and 3) even though both Sarah and Abraham are old, this is not an impediment to God. Further, both are willing to proceed with the necessary actions required to fulfil the prophecy, i.e. have intercourse.<sup>505</sup>

I argue that Crumb's depiction of these scenes places the power on Sarah's role. Abraham is shown to be passive and is pictured either in the background or on the edge of the panel. He is unemotional for the most part. In contrast, Sarah is presented in portrait shots, body-length shots, and she displays a range of emotions from shock to happiness to disbelief and more. Moreover, the reader is given insight into her inner thoughts which Abraham is not

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<sup>502</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.3.

<sup>503</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 100.

<sup>504</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 106.

<sup>505</sup> Regarding this last point, it is important to note the text never tells the reader that intercourse occurs.

privity to, but which the divine messenger is. Therefore, the reader is afforded the status of the divine for that moment, further cementing Sarah's character in the narrative because we have a better insight into her, and as such, we are better placed to empathise with her rather than Abraham.

### Genesis 21:1-12<sup>506</sup>

Genesis 21 is the climax of Sarah's journey to motherhood. Crumb's chapter opens with the text of 21:1-4 where the narrative voice is written in the hyperframe but within the physical space of the panel grid. The opening panels correlate with this text: it is the scene of Abraham circumcising Isaac. A basket appears at the bottom of the panel which now serves a dual symbolic purpose in the narrative. Firstly, it is filled with water to signify the fulfilment of God's promise that Sarah will give birth to a child. The basket is empty of food, because nourishment has been provided (both by and to Sarah). Secondly, it serves as a vessel to cleanse Isaac after the ritual circumcision has taken place, a symbolic action which represents Isaac joining God's covenant with his chosen people.

Crumb has placed a footnote at the bottom of the panel noting that Isaac translates as "He who laughs" in Hebrew which is a reference to the laughter of Abraham (Gen 17:17) and Sarah (Gen 18:12) when they were told they would become parents in old age.<sup>507</sup> The footnote discussing laughter is juxtaposed against the scene of infant circumcision where the child is visibly distressed. This is another visual contrast included by Crumb to demonstrate the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies of the text.

While the opening panel is depicting a painful, brutal act carried out by Abraham the father, emphasising the importance of the covenant and close relationship with God, the second panel is the opposite as it depicts an intimate moment between mother and child. The text above the panel references Abraham's age of 100 when he became a father, attributing the success to him, but the image visually shows Sarah's old age. Sarah is nursing Isaac, staring down at him in the same loving way Milcah stared at her child in the panel of Gen 11:29-30. Sarah's distance and unemotional demeanour in the panel relating to 11:29-30 has become the opposite as at last, she can cradle her own child. It is a poignant panel in Crumb's remediation, and one of the more emotional moments highlighted by the dark, featureless background in which Sarah and Isaac seem to glow. Crumb tends to reserve these

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<sup>506</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.4

<sup>507</sup> Sarah and Abraham's laughter is seen, by some, as the etiological reason behind Isaac's name. See for example Fischer, "On the Significance of the 'Women Texts'", 273.

backgrounds for highly emotional moments so that the reader is not distracted by anything else.<sup>508</sup>

The idea of “mother” momentarily eclipses the wider concept that Abraham has become a father through Sarah, and that the promise between himself and God has finally been fulfilled. This is Sarah’s moment. That she has helped fulfil God’s promise by producing an heir is almost inconsequential. The baby in her arms is a symbol of her triumph in overcoming difficult conditions; Abraham’s triumph can wait. Sarah is the important person in this panel and Crumb employs visual tools to demonstrate that, including the decision to hide Isaac’s face. The third panel of the sequence emphasises the centrality of Sarah’s character to the narrative as she proclaims to her husband “Who would have uttered to Abraham, “Sarah is suckling sons!” For I’ve borne him a son in his old age!” The answer is of course that Sarah has uttered those words. The feast scene follows,<sup>509</sup> and closes the page.

On the following page, the configuration of the panels is such that it begins with Sarah noticing Ishmael “mocking” Isaac (Gen 21:9),<sup>510</sup> and ends with Hagar and Ishmael being cast into the wilderness (Gen 21:14), a direct consequence of the page’s opening scene. Crumb’s version of Ishmael mocking Isaac is at first glance, a disappointing scene: Ishmael is surrounded by a peer group looking towards Isaac, perhaps jeering. It is more reminiscent of a group of schoolboys making fun of a younger boy, perhaps egging each other on.<sup>511</sup> There is however, an element of Teubal and Rulon-Miller’s suggestions that the mocking of Isaac implies sexual maturity or more. For example, the food (a piece of meat) is shaped like a phallus complete with testicles (at the end of the bone) and the manner which Isaac holds

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<sup>508</sup> For example, panels 6 and 7 in Fig. 5.2 where an emotionally-charged Sarah is confronting Abraham. Moreover, the lack of detail in the background contrasts with the previous scene where Abraham kneels in front of a landscape of mountains and trees. It is further proof that Crumb considers Sarah to be of primary importance in these narratives, and that he sees Abraham as a secondary character in the narrative of motherhood.

<sup>509</sup> Note the amount of detail in both the foreground and the background, contrasting with the lack of detail in the previous panels in the sequence. The highly-detailed feast scene heightens the emotions in the previous panels.

<sup>510</sup> I have previously discussed the translation and inference of ‘mocking’, observing that it can mean mocking, joking, playing with. It also has potential sexual connotations, perhaps implying Ishmael was masturbating in front of, or even sodomising Isaac. For example, in Gen 26:8, the same verb – *לִשְׂחָק* - is used when Abimelech looks out of his window and sees Isaac “playing” with Rebekah, leading Abimelech to recognise they are husband and wife. I will discuss this in the forthcoming section where I contextualise Crumb’s remediation with biblical scholarship.

<sup>511</sup> I would also draw attention to the connection between Ishmael mocking Isaac, and what some scholars identify as Sarah’s worried laugh in 21:6, that people may laugh at her. There is every possibility Sarah takes Ishmael’s mocking of Isaac to be a personal attack on her, a manifestation of her worst fears that people will laugh at her for being such an old mother.



the food in his mouth is suggestive of oral sex. Although Crumb attests he did not include any visual jokes in his remediation, I argue otherwise based on this panel.

The panels in between Ishmael mocking Isaac and the banishment draw attention to Sarah, painting her as the decision-maker, the matriarch in charge. Firstly, she towers over a cowering Abraham in bed demanding (in bold lettering) that he “Cast out this slavegirl and her son for the slavegirl’s son shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac!!” Abraham’s face has sweat beads and his hands are clenched uncomfortably and defensively. The scene is visually linked to the first time Sarah confronted Abraham about the problem of Hagar in Gen 16:5, showing the same expressions on both faces and so is an example of tressage, weaving visual and textual similarities across the stories to create connections and meaning between them. Moreover, Crumb emphasises Sarah’s word choices with double exclamation marks. This is a common way for Crumb to add a layer of emotion and modern interpretation to the scene, mostly because such punctuation marks are not used in the Masoretic Text or in the textual source materials he used. Thus, it situates the text in the contemporary world and implies certain reactions and emotions for modern readers. The background is once again dark and undetailed emphasising the emotionality of the scene.

As I discussed in chapter 3 when I examined Teubal’s book as a source for Crumb,<sup>512</sup> this panel presents a strong visual argument for Sarah to be considered as equal to, if not dominant to, Abraham. Physically, more space is given to Sarah as she is pictured larger and above Abraham, substantially intruding into his personal space and forcing him to look up at her. Sarah’s dominance is the opposite of Abraham’s passivity (represented in the smaller, speechless figure), and refers the reader back to Gen 16:1-6 when Abraham was just as passive. The depiction of power and control is reinforced by the setting; the couple are in bed, naked, another recall to Gen 16. The nakedness, I argue, adds a level of vulnerability to Abraham as his body language conveys an attempt to cover himself with the sheers. Contrariwise, Sarah’s nakedness adds a sense of power as she confidently bares all, including her anger. The setting of the bedroom is suggestive of a sexual encounter between the pair and again might imply that Sarah is commanding Abraham post-coitus, using sex as a tool of power and control to get her way. The panel reinforces Crumb’s attempt to show Sarah is equal to, if not more powerful than, her husband.

Hagar’s status is also brought to light, as Sarah refuses to name her but now refers to her as the “slavegirl.” Rather “handmaid” which was used in Gen 16.<sup>513</sup> The text is a copy of Alter’s

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<sup>512</sup> See chapter 3 on “Savina J. Teubal: *Sarah the Priestess*.”

<sup>513</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 102.

version, and as Alter has used this term throughout, it is likely Crumb has taken it from the JPS (slave-woman), perhaps influenced by the change in terminology in the KJV (bondwoman) which both reflect the change in Hebrew: אִמָּה ('amah) which can be translated as female slave or handmaid and is repeated in Gen 21:13 by God to Abraham.<sup>514</sup>

Abraham-the-passive is unsure what to do, and so over three panels in the central row he seeks God's advice "because the thing seemed evil" in his eyes (21:11).<sup>515</sup> God affirms Sarah's instructions, advising Abraham to listen to "whatever Sarah says to you" (21:12). Consequently, Hagar finds herself once more in the wilderness but this time with her son. Sarah does not appear again in chapter 21. The rest of the chapter deals with Hagar's situation and Abraham's pact with Abimelech concerning the well of water. However, the final panel of Hagar's story shows her marrying off a grown Ishmael to an Egyptian girl. The design of the panel calls back to Sarah standing over the "marriage" of Abraham and Hagar (16:3) both in composition and by the fact that the unnamed Egyptian girl resembles the younger Hagar, and Hagar now resembles Sarah swathed in cloths and presiding over the ceremony just as Sarah presided over the ceremony of Hagar's "marriage" to Abraham.

Crumb continues to use tressage to draw connections in the narratives between the characters and themes, illuminating his own ideas of the cyclical nature of storytelling in Genesis. The implications of this are that Crumb has drawn attention to the repetition of themes and motifs in the text of Genesis, even though he insisted that he was not interested in presenting literary devices or arguments connected with the text. However, iconic correspondences between characters such as the older Hagar and the younger Sarah do exist within his remediation, which in turn suggest that *Genesis, Illustrated* should be considered a visual exegesis of the text rather than a straightforward illustration job.

### Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 21:1-12 in biblical scholarship

The image of Sarah laughing as she holds Isaac close to her is an intimate and emotional moment in Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, especially when viewed against the clinically-charged, brutal act of circumcision in the panel previous.<sup>516</sup> Alter describes the text of 21:6 as ambiguous because the reader is unsure if Sarah's laughter is of joy or as a result of the absurd situation she finds herself in, giving birth at such an old age. Similarly, her speech

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<sup>514</sup> F. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979).

<sup>515</sup> This is a Hebrew idiom meaning "he was displeased".

<sup>516</sup> See panels 1 and 2, appendix B, Fig. 5.4.

“Laughter has God made me, Whoever hears will laugh at me” is either a nod to her family rejoicing with her, or laughing at her.<sup>517</sup> If Alter finds ambiguity in the text, Sarna’s commentary to the JPS describes Sarah’s laughter as “joyous” contrasting to the sceptical laughs recorded in 17:17 and 18:12.<sup>518</sup> Crumb’s text follows Alter, using “laugh at *me!*” (emphasis mine), which indicates the stress falls on the last word, placing Sarah as the subject. For the modern reader, this potentially suggests Sarah is concerned she will be mocked for having a baby at an old age rather than reading it as an expression of her joy at finally giving birth.

Teubal focuses less on the laughter and triumph of Sarah, and more on questions of fatherhood,<sup>519</sup> Sarah’s role in the conception of Isaac,<sup>520</sup> and the scene of Ishmael mocking Isaac.<sup>521</sup> Crumb’s references to Teubal in this respect are inconsistent because they do not mirror a close reading of Teubal but they do reflect a mixture of sources at once. One could argue that this is to be expected. However, one might have anticipated seeing more of the Teubalian influence because Crumb repeatedly refers to it, along with Alter, as one of the primary influences on his work.

Other scholarly work on these verses often pick up on the emotion of the text. Gunkel, for example, calls Gen 21 (and Gen 22 and the Joseph narratives) a different kind of story that expresses itself in tears and emotions,<sup>522</sup> although conversely, he also notes that no word is given to Sarah to express her joy at becoming a mother.<sup>523</sup> While the text delivers very little detail, Crumb delivers emotions and feelings on a visual level consistently and throughout all the case studies, which is a strength of comic book remediations of biblical material.

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<sup>517</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 97.

<sup>518</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 146.

<sup>519</sup> As discussed, Teubal suggests that Isaac is the product of a sacred marriage ritual between Sarah and Abimelech, not that he is the legitimate, biological son of Abraham. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 130. Rulon-Miller notes that the text itself is suggestive that God is the father of Isaac: “And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. And Sarah conceived...” (21:1-2). Rulon-Miller, “Hagar: a Woman with an Attitude”, 74. This is not a line of enquiry represented in Crumb’s remediation, however. His pairing of the text with the image of Abraham circumcising Isaac denotes control and power to the patriarch who, in performing the circumcision ritual, is demonstrating obedience to God’s rules as per the covenant in 17:12.

<sup>520</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 131-2.

<sup>521</sup> See my discussion concerning the rendering of the scene of Ishmael and Isaac, and the suggestive codes Crumb has utilised that potentially reflect a sexual reading, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the text.

<sup>522</sup> Gunkel, *The Stories of Genesis*, 87.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

Trible calls the birth of Isaac an intensifying factor in Sarah's relationship with Hagar. Sarah notes she has finally been "built up"<sup>524</sup> by giving a son to Abraham which relinquishes the function and role of Hagar and Ishmael to a much lesser status in her eyes. This is a point which manifests itself in the scene of Ishmael mocking Isaac (21:9). This incident is another problematic text in scholarship, not least because the implications of the act lead to the banishment of Hagar and her son into the wilderness which signals the end of Hagar's involvement with the patriarchal family.

I have previously discussed that Rulon-Miller argues, following Teubal's premise, that Ishmael was not merely mocking Isaac but was masturbating in front of, or perhaps even sodomising Isaac.<sup>525</sup> Alter describes the action as Ishmael "laughing", at Isaac, the KJV describes him as "mocking" Isaac, and the JPS describes Ishmael as "playing" with Isaac. It is unclear what the word "playing" means or might refer to. Crumb is seemingly confused by the various translations and as such, his panel which reflects the text is strange: Ishmael stands with a group of his peers as if in a school playground, making fun of Isaac in the presence of his mother. However, as discussed above, there are also possible sexual connotations to Crumb's depiction which, while suggestive, also maintain the integrity of the text. In other words, the scene is a visual joke, but it is not an obvious one and as such, does not render Crumb's remediation as satirical. Simply put, Crumb has remained "faithful" to the text but has created an image which questions the text in a subversive manner if the reader chooses to understand it that way.

While translations of, and comments on the text do not agree on precisely what Ishmael was doing to Isaac, and thus cannot proficiently comment upon the severity of the act, it is not just the act which is important but the wider implications. As Tribble remarks, "the presence of Ishmael in Canaan plagues the future of Isaac whose inheritance is threatened."<sup>526</sup> Tribble's suggestion is that Ishmael's act was nothing more than a physical reminder to Sarah of his existence, which she wants to banish so that her son is the only heir to Abraham's promise.<sup>527</sup> Abraham obeys Sarah's command to banish Ishmael and Hagar as he did in Gen 16, but the

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<sup>524</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 20. Note, the concept that Sarah has become "built up" through the birth of her son is a reference to 16:2 when Sarah suggests the use of Hagar as a vessel for Abraham's children, in order that Sarah may be "built up" through her slave. The Hebrew word – בָּנָה – is also the root of the words *ben* (son) and *bat* (daughter).

<sup>525</sup> Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: a Woman with an Attitude", 80-1.

<sup>526</sup> Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 20-1.

<sup>527</sup> Sarna agrees with this reading, suggesting that even though Ishmael was born to a slave-woman, bound by the laws of the Code of Hammurabi concerning the offspring of a second-wife, he is still a legitimate heir to Abraham. Sarah knows this and that is why his presence and actions at the feast of Isaac's weaning are indicative of a larger problem for Sarah concerning the inheritance of Isaac. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: Heritage of Biblical Israel* (Stuttgart: Schocken Books, 1966), 156.

text does not reveal any emotion when he banishes his firstborn – and the child's mother – to the desert.

Scholarship on Gen 21:1-21 tends to focus upon the narratives of Ishmael mocking Isaac, of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, and God's promise that Ishmael will become a great nation. The birth of Isaac, which the reader has anticipated since we first meet Sarah and are told of her barrenness in 11:29, seems to be subject to little fanfare. God visits Sarah, does unto her as he had promised, and she conceives. Isaac is born, Abraham circumcises him and Sarah laughs with joy or possible concern. But the long-awaited baby has arrived and Abraham's prophecy is at last fulfilled by a viable, legitimate partner and not a slavegirl.

Gen 21:1-12 is anti-climactic in the way it washes over the birth of Isaac, but point seems not to be that Isaac has arrived. It is that Isaac's inheritance and by extension, Abraham's covenant, is not yet safe: there is still the problem of Ishmael to attend to. Scholars identify the following three points to be of importance with regard to this portion of text: 1) Ishmael is a symptom of the problem. His mocking Isaac in front of Sarah is merely a reminder that Isaac is not safe in his position of heir, 2) Sarah is in control of, and dominates, the situation again while Abraham is passive and carries out her orders, and 3) God tells Abraham to listen to his wife, as he did in Gen 16. As in my contextualisation of previous texts, none of the scholars mention the concept of Sarah as high-priestess in the manner of Teubal, and nor does Crumb present her in that way in this sequence.

Whereas in my previous analyses I have argued that Crumb agrees with the points made by scholars, he deviates and presents a slightly confused picture of the narrative in his remediation of Gen 21. For example, his portrayal of Ishmael mocking Isaac is both suggestive with sexual connotations, but also (if the reader were not to pick up on his visual joke of Isaac's eating habits) disappointing; in Crumb's opinion and for the reader of his remediation, it does not present the reader with a good enough reason for Sarah to banish Hagar and her son. His merely standing in a group of friends, presumably talking about Isaac, is arguably typical behaviour for a teenager. It is nothing out of the ordinary. Likewise, Abraham's passive acceptance of his wife's order to cast out his firstborn is confusing without context. The fact he does not even fight for Ishmael and Hagar is disconcerting for the reader.

This is the point in Crumb's remediation: to display the strangeness and convoluted nature of the text, to expose the inconsistencies, the gaps, the things that do not make sense. He achieves this well in Gen 21 through the use of visual choices which do not always reflect

the text. Furthermore, Crumb is also successful at adding emotion to the text. Where words fail, images succeed in capturing a mother holding her new-born, the anger of a wife concerned about the future of her son, the worry of a father who must comply are all well-executed images which add layers of understanding to the often-sparse text. The gaps in the text which Crumb fills with his images give a new sense of humanity and compassion to the scenes.

## Summary

Initially, the overriding portrayal of Sarah in Crumb's interpretation of Genesis is one of a dominant, powerful woman and not a domineering, controlling woman.<sup>528</sup> Visual and textual analysis of Sarah's story in relation to motherhood present a character who is strong-willed, forceful and clever, and who understands the importance of her role in God's covenant with Abraham but who also harbours her own ambitions to become a mother.

However, this is not always the case. Sarah's introduction in Gen 11:29 is a visual indication that her infertility troubles her, and physically and emotionally distances her from Abraham's family. In this respect, Crumb depicts Sarah as the daughter-in-law who does not live up to the expectations of her new family. This image of a young, insecure woman is subverted when the reader meets Sarah in Gen 16. The problem of barrenness is still there – the text tells the reader so – but visually, the reader is met with a sterner, clever-looking Sarah who is no longer unsure or unconfident of her role and function her role in Abraham's family.

The narrative of her quest for motherhood between Gen 16 and 21 is told with Sarah at the forefront of the dialogue, action and power relations between herself and Abraham. When Sarah commands an action to happen, Abraham resorts to seeking advice from God instead of discussing the matter with Sarah. God always supports Sarah's requests, further emphasising the fact she holds the power in the relationship. Crumb highlights Abraham's (and anyone else's, with the exception of God's) inferiority to Sarah by always ensuring Sarah dominates whatever scene she is in. She takes up most of the panel when she first suggests the use of Hagar to give Abraham a child (16:2), even dominating the "marriage" scene acting as both a divider between Abraham and Hagar (16:3), and an officiant. She rages at Abraham, emanating rays of anger towards him in her anger at Hagar's slight

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<sup>528</sup> I will briefly discuss the use of the representation of the matriarchs as dominant and in control rather than as domineering/controlling below.

towards her (16:4), and her anger turns the panel black in 16:5. In Gen 18, Sarah's figure takes up the majority of any panel she appears in, and in Gen 21, she towers over Abraham in bed commanding him to get rid of Hagar (21:10). Abraham is visually submissive to her presence, and his passivity is a visual theme throughout those scenes.

The significance of this representation of Sarah, Abraham and Hagar is that it represents a non-traditional reading of the texts of Genesis and is reflective of Crumb's interpretation of the text, as well as the sources which he used to shape his text. Most significantly, his remediation reflects the influence of Teubal especially in terms of presenting Sarah as a dominant character, and Abraham as a passive, weak character. Even so, I do not think that Crumb presents Sarah as a high-priestess throughout these passages in any way, shape or form. Being a strong, dominant leader of a character does not equal the role of a high-priestess, but his reluctance to depict Sarah in that role is probably connected to his desire to faithfully reproduce the text of the Bible. Because Sarah never appears as a high-priestess within the biblical text, it is almost impossible for Crumb to present her as such in his remediation without offering further explanation to the reader. Offering further explanation would go against his aim of allowing the text to stand as it is and would demonstrate external influences to the reader much more obviously than Crumb would want.

The idea of Sarah as dominant and Abraham as passive also goes against the more traditional idea of Abraham as the patriarch, the father of nations, who is supported by his wife, nominally a secondary character in the text, challenging traditional readings of Genesis. Another challenge to traditional interpretations of Genesis is the fact that Hagar is also portrayed in a more significant light in Crumb's work than normal, especially in terms of giving a face and a prominent visual role to a slave who is supposed to occupy and represent the margins of society. While she is still somewhat marginalised within the visual representation of her story Crumb attempts to depict Hagar as a woman who has a happy ending despite the wrongs done to her by visually connecting her to Sarah at the end of Gen 21:20-21 where she presides over Ishmael's marriage. The visual links, or use of tressage, suggests that as everything turned out well for Sarah, it also turned out well for Hagar.

One aspect which I have not yet discussed is whether or not Crumb can be accused of adhering to a particular stereotype of a Jewish woman in his representations of Sarah (and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah by extension). Has Crumb drawn Sarah as dominant and in control, or is she domineering and controlling? If the latter, Sarah's character may be read as an overbearing Jewish woman or indeed stereotypical Jewish mother. As Lois Braverman notes, the stereotype of a Jewish woman (and Jewish mother in particular) brings to mind

ideas of women who are heavily involved in their children's lives, who are controlling, domineering "pushy, loud, seductive, materialistic, guilt-inducing" and often more so in the case of sons.<sup>529</sup> Given that in American popular culture this is a stereotype created and propagated during the 1960s when Crumb began his career in California,<sup>530</sup> it is safe to surmise that Crumb would have been exposed to and aware of such stereotypes.

In that respect, it is not impossible that he consciously or subconsciously drew the matriarchal characters in adherence to those stereotypes. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah were after all some of the first Jewish mothers in the Bible. Because Crumb has not distanced himself from the stereotypes he knows to exist, this allows the reader to engage with those stereotypes should they interpret the characters that way in *Genesis, Illustrated*. I do not read the matriarchs as stereotypes of Jewish women; rather, I read them through the lens of Teubal's theories which means they are powerful, in control and dominant as pro-feminist visions of women. Crumb's eagerness to represent the matriarchs as dominant creates a tension in which his representations of the matriarchs can also be interpreted as perpetuating unhelpful stereotypes of Jewish women. This tension is underscored by Crumb's use of suggestions of Jewish ethnicity in his representations of the matriarchs and is created partly through the history of Christian reception of the biblical texts, in which the ethnicity of the characters – assumed to be historical figures – has been a source of anxiety. Mediating centuries of anxiety about ethnicity in Genesis is almost certainly beyond Crumb's capabilities; however, this inevitably perpetuates those anxieties.

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<sup>529</sup> Lois Braverman, "Jewish Mothers," *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 2.2 (1990), 10.

<sup>530</sup> Martha A. Ravits, "The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in Popular Culture," *Jewish American Literature* 25.1 (2000), 4.



## 4b. Rebekah

Having discussed the visualisation of Sarah, I now turn to Rebekah in order to analyse how Crumb has depicted her and whether or not it corresponds with his visual treatment of Sarah. The very first mention of Rebekah is in Gen 22:23: “Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother.” Rebekah, then, is Abraham’s grandniece. However, Rebekah’s story begins proper in Genesis 24 after Sarah has died, when Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac from his own people in the country of Ur. The servant is told under no circumstances to take Isaac back to Abraham’s homeland, citing God’s promise of this new land as a reason for staying in Canaan. However, he does stipulate that if the chosen woman does not want to leave Ur, Abraham’s servant is free of his oath and obligation to find Isaac a wife (21:5-8).

The servant travels to Aramnaharaim in Nahor and stops at a well of water at evening time, “the time when women go out to draw water” (24:11). He prays to God asking for help in his quest to find Isaac a wife and sets a test to recognise who God deems is the correct choice of wife for Isaac: “Let the girl to whom I shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’- let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac” (24:14). According to the text, before he finishes speaking, Rebekah appears with a water jar on her shoulder (24:15). She is described as very fair to look at, and a virgin (24:16). According to his test, the servant asks Rebekah for a drink; she complies and then waters his camels until they have drunk their fill (24:19-20).

Rebekah passes the test and the servant offers her a gold nose-ring and two bracelets before asking her who she is and if her father would house him, his men, and his camels for the evening. Rebekah replies that she is the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah and affirms that her father’s house has room and food for all the men and the animals (24:22-25). Rebekah runs to her mother’s household and tells her family about what has happened. Her brother Laban goes to greet the servant at the spring, inviting him into the house where the camels are given food and shelter, and the servant and his entourage are presented with water to wash their feet while food is set before them (24:28-32).

Before eating, Abraham’s servant tells the company of his errand. He tells of how God has provided Abraham with great wealth including flocks, herds, slaves and animals, and how Sarah provided Abraham with a son and that Abraham has “given him all that he has” (24:34-

36). The servant then recounts Abraham's task to find Isaac a wife, and the test which he set which would allow him to know who the right woman was. He tells of Rebekah's sudden appearance and her actions which complied with his test, and his thankfulness to God for sending her (24:35-48). He then asks if Laban and Bethuel, Rebekah's brother and father respectively, will give Rebekah to Isaac as a wife, "and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left" (24:49). Laban and Bethuel agree to the servant's request who brings out gifts of silver and gold jewellery to give to Rebekah, as well as gifts for her brother and mother (24:50-53).

The next morning, Abraham's servant requests to leave immediately. Rebekah's brother and mother request that she remain with them for at least ten days, but the servant denies the request asking that he not be delayed. They call for Rebekah and ask if she will go with the servant that day, and she replies positively. Rebekah is sent away with her nurse, Abraham's servant, and his entourage (24:54-59). Before she leaves, her family bless her: "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes" (24:60). Rebekah then departs.

Isaac first meets Rebekah when he is out for an evening walk and sees camels approaching in the distance. Rebekah sees Isaac from afar, slips off her camel and asks the servant who the stranger is; the servant replies it is Isaac, his master (24:62-65). Rebekah covers herself with a veil before the servant explains who she is to Isaac, "[T]hen Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her" (24:67).

Rebekah's story is then punctuated in Gen 25 with the marriage of Abraham to Keturah, followed by the death of Abraham and a list of Abraham's descendants through Ishmael. The reader is told that Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah (25:20), and that Isaac prays to God on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. God hears his prayer and Rebekah successfully conceives (25:21). The text then refers to "children" struggling within her, noting that Rebekah is experiencing some discomfort as she inquires of God why it is so. God responds by telling her that she will give birth to two babies each of whom will represent a nation. The elder child will serve the younger (25:22-23). Rebekah gives birth to twins. The first is named Esau and he is described as ruddy, red, "all his body like a hairy mantle" (25:24-25), and the second is Jacob who is born gripping Esau's heel (25:26). Genesis 25:28 remarks that "Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob."

In Genesis 26, there is a famine in the land. Isaac and Rebekah are forced to leave, and to settle in Gerar, ruled by King Abimelech of the Philistines. Similar to the two incidents involving Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, Isaac tells the Philistines that Rebekah is his sister because he is afraid the men of the place will kill him for her beauty (26:1-7). The ruse is discovered when looking out of a window, Abimelech sees Isaac and Rebekah in an intimate embrace. He confronts Isaac who tells Abimelech the truth. Abimelech is angry at the lie but warns his own people that no one should touch Isaac or Rebekah, lest they be put to death (26:8-11). The story continues, telling of Isaac's growing wealth and blessings, and Rebekah is next referenced in 26:35, where the reader learns that Esau marries Judith and Basemath, both daughters of Hittites, "and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah."

Genesis 27 concerns the blessing of Isaac's sons. In his old age and with failing eyesight, Isaac asks his favourite son Esau to go out and hunt game, prepare it for eating and bring it to him so that Isaac may bless Esau before he dies. Rebekah overhears Isaac's command and commands her favourite son Jacob to trick Isaac into blessing him by preparing him a meal from their own flock while Esau is out hunting. This is a devious side of Rebekah; when Jacob points out his smooth skin which contrasts with Esau's hairy skin, Rebekah takes the skin of the goats she has prepared for Isaac and wraps them around Jacob's body to trick Isaac. She silences Jacob's worries over the plot, saying she will take the curse for him if Isaac finds out their trick (27: 1-16).

Rebekah's cunning plan pays off, and Isaac blesses Jacob instead of Esau (27: 17-29). Upon finding out, Esau is distraught and vows to kill Jacob. Rebekah hears of Esau's plan and calls Jacob to her commanding him to "obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran and stay with him a while until your brother's fury turns away" (27:43-44). Gen 27 ends with Rebekah lamenting to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of these Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of land, what good will my life be to me?" (27:46). Isaac agrees, and in Gen 28 he sends Jacob to Rebekah's father and brother also; thus, Rebekah deceives Isaac into thinking that sending Jacob away was to find a wife, and not to save his life (28:1-2).

The death of Rebekah is not reported in Genesis, though it is noted in Gen 35:8 that "Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel." Isaac dies at the end of Gen 35. Gen 49:31 notes that Isaac and Rebekah were buried in the same cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, where Abraham and Sarah were buried.

## R. Crumb's comments on Rebekah in *Genesis, Illustrated*

Crumb gleans from the text that Rebekah is the perfect match for Isaac, and interprets the passage where Rebekah receives gifts from Abraham's servant, running to tell her mother's household, as "a very matriarchal situation" because Rebekah is seeking her mother's authority rather than her father's.<sup>531</sup> Crumb describes Bethuel's lack of presence as a potential signifier that Bethuel is "of no consequence" to the story.<sup>532</sup> Crumb agrees with Alter's comments on the chapter, noting that even though the text states at one point that "Laban and Bethuel answered and said..." (24:50), later in the text gifts are given out to Rebekah's brother (Laban) and mother, but not to Bethuel. Alter hypothesises that the words "and Bethuel" were probably a later insertion by a scribe or redactor.<sup>533</sup> Crumb's reaction to Alter's suggestion is to leave out "and Bethuel" entirely, further emphasising the non-status of Bethuel to Rebekah's story, explaining that he believes the insertion of "and Bethuel" was "just those later scribes trying to shore up the patriarchy!"<sup>534</sup> Later, Crumb interprets Isaac bringing Rebekah into the tent of the deceased Sarah as an act potentially designed to "place the mantle of Sarah's high-priestess position on to the shoulders of Rebekah,"<sup>535</sup> further emphasising the matriarchal approach to the story.

Similarly, Crumb interprets the description of Rebekah as barren to be another potential indicator that like Sarah, Rebekah assumes a priestess role which prohibits her having children until her priestess duties are fulfilled. When Rebekah does give birth to Esau and Jacob, Crumb understands there to be competition between Rebekah and Isaac concerning the birthright of their sons; Rebekah's dominance over Isaac is the reason her favourite, Jacob, inherits the birth right.<sup>536</sup> Likewise, the repetition of the sister-wife narrative in Gen 26 is, argues Crumb, another indicator of Rebekah's status as high-priestess because there is the potential that there was another "sacred marriage" between Rebekah and Abimelech, similar to what happened between Sarah and Abimelech in Gen 20. Again, Crumb attributes lack of detail in the text to later scribes and redactors suppressing evidence of matriarchal power to reinforce patriarchal norms.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 24, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Alter, as quoted by Crumb, commentary to chapter 24, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 25, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>537</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 26, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

Finally, Crumb comments that in Gen 27, Rebekah shows “incredible force and determination”<sup>538</sup> when she helps trick Isaac into blessing Jacob over Esau. Crumb highlights Rebekah’s willingness to take any curse inflicted upon Jacob onto herself if the ruse is discovered, and her use of the phrase “listen to my voice” when she orders Jacob to flee to the house of Laban for safety. Crumb speculates that “[A] tradition in matrilineal societies involved sending the son off to his mother’s kinship group to live with them and find a wife among them.”<sup>539</sup> This occurrence in Genesis is another clue that the text represents a matriarchal society, in Crumb’s opinion.

Similar to his understanding of Sarah’s story through the theoretical standpoint of Teubal, Crumb views the discrepancies and gaps in Rebekah’s story as evidence that later scribes and redactors purposefully suppressed her powerful, matriarchal story in order to better fit her story into a patriarchal society, making her seem less powerful and important than her patriarchal counterpart and husband, Isaac.

## Rebekah and motherhood in Crumb’s Genesis, Illustrated

### Genesis 24:15-67<sup>540</sup>

Rebekah’s introduction in the text is in Gen 22:23, but her first physical appearance is in 24:15, which is panel 12 of Gen 21 in Crumb’s remediation.<sup>541</sup> She is rendered in typical Crumbian style with broad shoulders, a large chest and muscly arms, and a beautiful face. Crumb has drawn her with a kind expression which is a visual representation of the story of her helpfulness at the well. Rebekah wears a simple robe gathered at the waist with two strings of beads around her neck, and a shawl over her head.

Representing the text of Gen 24:15, Rebekah’s first appearance pictures her holding a rounded jug on her shoulder, similar in style to the vase that appears in Sarah’s story. Rebekah is on her way to fetch water from the well with the other women of the city and as she leaves the city, a shadowy figure lurks behind her to the left. In panel 13, Rebekah leans over the well to fetch the water; the servant of Abraham is revealed as the same person as the shadowy figure from panel 12, and he stands behind her to the right, watching. His facial

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<sup>538</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 27, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.5.

<sup>541</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 27, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

features are in shadow and are indistinguishable. Crumb has drawn the scene in an unsettling way, which signals to the reader that this is an unusual situation. A strange man has encamped himself next to a well specifically to watch women approach the area so that he can fulfil an oath to find another man a wife. The reader knows that this is a task set and endorsed by Abraham but that does not detract from the peculiar scenario, and Crumb's rendering is disturbing in its detail highlighting the strangeness of the text and vulnerability of Rebekah.

This disturbing sequence continues in panel 14 when the grinning (or is it grimacing?) servant approaches Rebekah asking "Pray, let me sip a bit of water from your jug!" as he gestures towards Rebekah's visible nipple. Whether this is an intentional decision by Crumb to further unsettle the reader is not clear. The servant has physically intruded into Rebekah's personal space across panels 12-14, moving from the shadows, to the background and then foregrounding himself in the narrative in front of Rebekah. More than an intrusion on Rebekah's physical space, the servant is taking space away from Rebekah across the panels indicating that he recognises his power as a man over women in a patriarchal setting. Panels 15 and 16 continues the theme as the servant grows in size, physically dominating Rebekah as he drinks from her water jug, further suggesting the idea of power-play between the two sexes which is reinforced by the downward angle of his vision as Rebekah is forced to look up at him.<sup>542</sup>

Throughout the introductory panels of Rebekah watering the camels and the servant's other menfolk, Crumb has depicted her as always smiling (reflecting her beauty in appearance and nature), but more than that, as someone who, regardless of the intrusion on her personal and physical space, is happy at the news the servant brings. The pattern of panels across Rebekah's introduction reflects the demands of the story as well as Crumb's normal style of using larger panels to create depth and detail, and smaller panels as a narrative tool to drive the story forward. For example, the top two panels on the third page of Gen 24 (panels 15 and 16) depict a short moment in time of: 1) Rebekah passing the jug to the servant, and 2) the servant drinking. Panel 17 is panoramic, and Rebekah has moved from giving water to the servant, to watering all the camels. Crumb is relying on the reader's understanding of how comics work, filling in the gaps between panels so that the story makes sense. Panel 17 is rather static compared to the fleeting moment shown between panels 15 and 16 but is a

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<sup>542</sup> Of course, this sequence could be interpreted otherwise depending on the reader's understanding of the text and their concept of the function of the panels. However, to me, these details are immediately noticeable and an important aid to the discussion of visuality of gender in Genesis.

prime example of the narrative-dominant, rhetorical use of frame patterns which Miller and Groensteen discuss in their respective studies.

As discussed, the main arc of the theme of motherhood in Rebekah's narrative is between Gen 25:17-26. However, before I discuss this in relation to the main themes of this case study, I would draw attention to panels 20 and 21 of Gen 24.<sup>543</sup> Rebekah's introduction to the servant is complete, and he asks firstly whether there is space for himself and his entourage of servants and animals to sleep in her father's house, and then, who her father is. Panel 20, which claims the suspense position of the page at the bottom right-hand corner, is a portrait of Rebekah surrounded by an aura of light, boldly claiming "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." The image combined with the text comes across as an epiphanic moment of self-realisation for Rebekah, complete with light effects. Of course, the moment is revelatory for the servant, not Rebekah, who realises his luck of stumbling across a relative of Abraham's in his search for a wife for Isaac. Because of its position on the page, the panel leaves the reader in a state of questioning – what does Rebekah's revealed identity mean for the story?

The answer is given across the page in panel 21. Crumb has zoomed out from the close-up portrait of Rebekah to a scene where she stands in front of the servant, grasping her rounded jug to her stomach. Crumb foreshadows her new status as wife, but more importantly, as mother to Isaac's children. The very obvious iconic reference to the rounded fertility jug which is repeated throughout Sarah's story,<sup>544</sup> is an indicator to the reader that this woman is the new wife Abraham sent his servant to find, and the position across her stomach visually indicates she will bear children, thus helping to fulfil Abraham's covenant with God of countless descendants.

The rounded jug appears again throughout Rebekah's story, and is again held at Rebekah's stomach in panel 41. Crumb ends Gen 24 with a large panel depicting Isaac and Rebekah lying together in Sarah's tent. The moment is tender and full of emotion compared to the scene where Abraham and Hagar sleep together (panel 4 of Gen 16), as the couple are entwined together in an embrace. The setting of the tent lends a gentleness to the scene, as the pair are surrounded by soft folds of fabric. The folds of fabric are also suggestive of female genitalia, further reinforcing the connection between the concept of motherhood and matriarchy in the story.

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<sup>543</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.5.

<sup>544</sup> Thus, is an example of tressage or general arthrology as discussed by Miller and Groensteen. See chapter 2, *Tressage*, in this thesis.

## Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 24:15-67 in biblical scholarship

Teubal's theory that Sarah hails from a matriarchal society, that she potentially assumes the role of high-priestess within that community, and that her story has been overshadowed and rewritten to accord with a Canaanite patriarchal society inhabited by Abraham is also reflected in the character of Rebekah.

In the case of Rebekah, Teubal indicates matriarchal power and lineage over patriarchy using examples such as Rebekah's mother's appearance in the betrothal scenes. Rebekah's mother is mentioned three times directly in 24:28, 53 and 55, and twice indirectly (24:57, 58)<sup>545</sup> and along with Laban, her mother is the one who Rebekah tells. She is also the one to receive gifts from the servant.<sup>546</sup> Rebekah's mother remains nameless only because, in keeping with patriarchal traditions, her name has been edited out of the text, but Teubal suggests her name is Bethuel,<sup>547</sup> the name given to Rebekah's father in the text who plays a much smaller role, which was an attempt to "introduce a father figure into Rebekah's matrifocal community."<sup>548</sup> This implies Rebekah's mother is the dominant partner in her relationship and is an indication of a matriarchal society.

Further, Teubal argues that the betrothal scene in Gen 24 is so long and detailed because it describes a change from matrilocal to patrilocal residence, reflected in Abraham's order to his servant that Isaac must not leave Canaan. The order is reiterated twice. Teubal understands it to be an indication of a patriarchal society overcoming a matrifocal one, indicating a growth in patriarchal control.<sup>549</sup> Lastly, Teubal understands the scene of Isaac taking Rebekah into his mother's tent in a symbol of matrilocality so that their marriage is consummated in the matriarchal tent.<sup>550</sup>

Does this mean that Rebekah also stems from the tradition of high-priestess attributed to Sarah, by Teubal? There is no direct suggestion of this; only that Rebekah's homeland was, like Sarah's, a matriarchal community, and that she likely brought matriarchal customs and traditions with her to Canaan, some of which are reflected in the text. For example, Jacob is

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<sup>545</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 61.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid*, 61-2.

<sup>547</sup> Bethuel may translate to "House of God".

<sup>548</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 62.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>550</sup> See my discussion on Sarah's tent as a sacred space in the section on contextualising Genesis 18:1-15.



the favoured son as a result of the practice of ultimogeniture in matriarchal societies.<sup>551</sup> As such, he must marry according to matrifocal custom; he must marry endogamously.

Noticeable, Alter does not draw attention to Rebekah's mother in these scenes. Instead, he focuses on the role of Laban as chief-negotiator for Rebekah's betrothal. Alter notes that the inclusion of Bethuel is likely a later scribal insertion and that Bethuel was probably dead at this point.<sup>552</sup> From a patriarchal perspective, this explains why Rebekah runs home to tell her mother and not her father.<sup>553</sup> Alter does recognise that Rebekah must have some status though, because she is allowed to take her nurse with her to Canaan.<sup>554</sup> In his commentary to the JPS, Sarna notes that the Hebrew verb לָקַח meaning "to take" used in 24:4, indicates the patriarchal perspective of the groom's family and "reflects the custom of the parent initiating the marriage transaction."<sup>555</sup> On the subject of Rebekah referring to home as her mother's household, Sarna suggests this to be the norm "in this society" citing Song of Solomon 3:4 and 8:2 as other examples of this usage.<sup>556</sup> However, whatever "this society" is, is unclear in Sarna's notes.

Crumb's sources are conflicted in their telling of Rebekah and Isaac's betrothal scene, in at least three points: the type of society Rebekah lived in, i.e. matriarchal/patriarchal, and the role of Laban and Bethuel, and the identity of the mother/father and status of Bethuel (i.e. dead or alive). Crumb's response to the latter point is to leave Bethuel out of the text entirely. Acting according to Alter's interpretation, Crumb believes Bethuel is probably deceased at this point in the narrative, and the inclusion of his name in Genesis was "just those later scribes trying to shore up the patriarchy!"<sup>557</sup> Crumb does not comment on Teubal's hypothesis that Bethuel may be Rebekah's mother, but his images of the mother do indicate a strong, matriarchal leader who could represent the head of the household. Notably though, it is Laban who is addressed by, and who responds to, the servant which is another indication of a patriarchal society where males are regarded as heads of the household.

As for the former point, scholarly readings on the subject point towards a patriarchal society, but some acknowledge tropes within the Rebekah narratives that do not always corroborate with that. For example, Irmtraud Fischer notes:

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<sup>551</sup> See my discussion on this in my visual and textual analysis of Genesis 25:19-28.

<sup>552</sup> E.A. Speiser, and many other textual critics, have also drawn this conclusion concerning Bethuel. See: E. A. Speiser, "Genesis", in *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 80.

<sup>553</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 120.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>555</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 162.

<sup>556</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, n13, p.362.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid*.

Although in patrilineal societies genealogies are normally androcentric and in the ancestral narratives the line of promise if additionally represented in male succession, the genealogy of Milcah and Nahor points to Rebekah [...] Rebekah and the ancestral father are linked from the very beginning.<sup>558</sup>

Fischer argues that Rebekah acts as a successor to Abraham in place of Isaac, as elements of her leaving her home echo Abraham's willingness to leave for Canaan, for example. Gunkel notes Rebekah was taken home by Isaac, in a manner contrary to traditional customs.<sup>559</sup> Beth Kissileff notes that it is Rebekah who, by controlling her presentation to Isaac, is signalling she will be in control of determining her role and function in her marriage to Isaac.<sup>560</sup> Rebekah's willingness to leave for Canaan (thus a patriarchal society, from a matriarchal society in Haran) may also indicate that she has some power.

However, control or power does not equal dominance or even equality of treatment between genders. Rebekah is merely controlling the parts of her identity that she can control: her appearance, her maids and nurse, and when she wants to depart. By agreeing to a move to patriarchal Canaan, this signifies a departure from Rebekah's power at home. Indeed, as Exum notes:

The story of how Isaac acquired the correct wife serves to affirm patrilocal marriage over uxorilocal marriage, and by uprooting the woman from her family, privileges the husband's line of descent, or Abraham's side of the family, into whose genealogy the woman will be absorbed.<sup>561</sup>

As usual, the texts can be read in a multiplicity of ways. However, Teubal's perspective is still notably absent from most scholarship. To an extent, Crumb has achieved a rendering of Gen 24:15-67 which is neither rooted in a matriarchal setting, nor overtly patriarchal. Instead, it is rooted in characterisations of biblical figures, and it represents what Crumb reads in the text. Rebekah is strong, she is decisive, she is in control and she is beautiful. Crumb knows this and uses it. Isaac, the patriarch is, like Abraham, passive, somewhat marginalised (both literally and figuratively in the panels) and seemingly content to allow others to control his future.

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<sup>558</sup> Fischer, "On the Significance of the "Women Texts"", 275.

<sup>559</sup> Gunkel, *The Stories of Genesis*, 87.

<sup>560</sup> Beth Kissileff, "'The Matter is from God': Retold Narrative and the Mistakes of Certainty", in *Reading Genesis: Beginnings*, edited by Beth Kissileff (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 157.

<sup>561</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 87.

The first two pages of Gen 25 depict the genealogies of Abraham. The first page contains only three large panels: the first panel depicts Abraham's second wife, Keturah and their children, the second panoramic panel shows Abraham sending his new family away to the land of the East, so that only Isaac will inherit Abraham's will, and the third panel is an image of Abraham's burial in the Machpelah cave where Sarah was buried. This first page covers the text of Gen 25:1-11. The second page contains a series of twelve portraits, each containing a descendant of Ishmael. These are followed by the burial scene of Ishmael, where a large group of people watch a funeral pyre burning. The final panel on this page is of Isaac offering a burnt sacrifice to God, and there are striking iconic correspondences between the panel of Ishmael's funeral and Isaac's burnt offering.

The first two pages of Gen 25 visually contextualise the forthcoming narrative of Rebekah's motherhood. Similar to Sarah's story of infertility being juxtaposed against scenes of family and Abraham's covenant with God promising countless descendants, Rebekah's story of motherhood, which begins with problems conceiving, is juxtaposed against scenes of family and descendants. Crumb's decision to portray each of Ishmael's sons directly opposite the page containing Rebekah's story is especially poignant. Ishmael is Isaac's half-brother, but stands to inherit nothing from Abraham even though he has continued Abraham's lineage where Isaac has not, thus fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. Further, this visual representation of each son of Ishmael, "twelve chieftains according to their clans" (25:16) confirms the promise God makes to Hagar in Gen 16:10 and later in 21:17.

Crumb offers a new interpretation of the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac in the pairing of panels 16 and 17 due in part to the composition of panels, panel subject/content, and his awareness of the periphery. These visual decisions affect the forthcoming tale of Rebekah's experience with motherhood. The iconic correspondence between the funeral pyre and the burnt sacrifice is undeniable: each are built upon a bed of rocks, each with a pile of burning wood on top, with black smoke billowing towards the heavens. The funerary image shows a large gathering of people, presumably Ishmael's kinfolk but the burnt offering image has only Isaac, praying to God on behalf of Rebekah, that she might conceive. One is an image of the death of a man who has a large family, the other is an image of a man who prays for one. While Crumb has not strayed from the text, his graphical interpretation of these passages is visually witty. Despite becoming an outcast, Ishmael has bettered Isaac

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<sup>562</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.6.

and the panels are Crumb's way of restoring justice on what he saw as an unfair situation in Gen 21.

The third page of Gen 25 opens with one of the more beautiful and ethereal images in *Genesis, Illustrated*, presenting Rebekah in the light of a goddess, surrounded by an aura of light and stars with her knees crossed in the lotus position; she is heavily pregnant so Isaac's offering to God in the previous panel has worked. Though Rebekah is described as "barren" in 25:21 which was the same description given to Sarah, the text suggests that her infertility is solved with one ritual sacrifice and prayers to God. Unlike Sarah who had to wait a long time and had to consider alternative choices before eventually conceiving Isaac, Rebekah's problem is treated completely differently. Again, Crumb attributes Rebekah's barren-ness to her status as a high-priestess, arguing she would not be allowed to have a child until her duties as high-priestess were fulfilled.<sup>563</sup> The swift resolution of her infertility, however, does not corroborate with this, and nor does Crumb's rendering of the episode, which is, like the text, lacking in detail or answers.

No time is spent on the issue of Rebekah's infertility implying in the narrative that it is less of a problem than Sarah's. However, Rebekah's problem comes both during and after her pregnancy. As Gen 25:21-26 tells, Rebekah experiences a difficult pregnancy. Crumb's word choice is both significant and confusing in this verse. In panel 18, the second half of the narrative caption reads "and the children clashed together within her, and she said... "...Then why *am* I...??" Alter's version translates the text as "Then why me?", the KJV uses "If it be so, why am I thus?", and the JPS translates it as "If so, why do I exist?"<sup>564</sup>

Firstly, by acknowledging that there are "children" implies the narrator is inviting the reader into a secret that the character does not know yet,<sup>565</sup> once again imbuing the reader with a status of omniscience on par with the character of God.<sup>566</sup> Secondly, Rebekah's dialogue is incomplete in every version. Sarna's commentary to the JPS suggests that the text should read along the lines of "Why then did I yearn and pray to become pregnant", as if the difficult, uncomfortable pregnancy makes Rebekah regret wanting to become pregnant.<sup>567</sup> Alternatively, Sarna also notes that it could be read as "Why do I go on living", in reference

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<sup>563</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 25, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>564</sup> Teubal uses the JPS version but notes that it is difficult to ascertain a clear Hebrew translation. Teubal prefers E. A. Speiser's translation: "If this is how it is to be, why do I go on living?" Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 43.

<sup>565</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 179.

<sup>566</sup> Sarna posits it as the narrator taking the reader into his confidence rather than the reader enjoying the same all-knowing status of God.

<sup>567</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 179.

to a Syriac version of this text.<sup>568</sup> Alter comments that Rebekah's speech is a "cry of perplexity and anguish" over the pain of her difficult pregnancy, but does not offer further ruminations on the text, other than that it "might be construed as a broken-off sentence."<sup>569</sup>

Crumb's accompanying image is his own commentary on Rebekah's broken speech. As described, she sits with her legs crossed, hands on her pregnant stomach, surrounded by stars and an aura of white light against a featureless, dark background. The stars have a dual function: firstly, they give a sense of a heavenly presence, either indicating God's involvement in granting Rebekah a child, or even perhaps her status as a priestess in an ethereal, divine setting. Secondly, stars drawn around a character in comics normally indicates pain or an injury, so in this case, they serve as a visual indicator of Rebekah's pain.

The speech bubble visually intrudes upon Rebekah's physical space, dipping behind her head as if it is a response issued from her body rather than her mind. The fact that it *is* a speech bubble rather than a thought bubble indicates a raw, guttural, internal cry. The use of ellipses before and after her words adds a sense that something is missing in her words. Crumb has emphasised "am": "...then why *am* I...???" and used two question marks, so that the reader understands firstly that the sentence is incomplete probably due to the pain Rebekah is in, and secondly that it is an anguished cry. Typical of his style throughout *Genesis, Illustrated*, Crumb's rendering of the single panel is a dichotomous image, showing both a fertile, goddess-like Rebekah whose plea to have a child has been granted, and a woman who is confused and in pain. There is also the potential that Rebekah is regretful of her wish to bear children.

Rebekah seek answers from God with regards to her struggle. God explains that her difficult pregnancy is because she is carrying two children – which the reader already knows – who are destined to struggle with one another in one way or another (25:23). Compared with the serene-like panel before it, panel 19 emphasises Rebekah's struggle by depicting her on her knees hands and knees before the face of God who appears like a sun above her. She is on top of a rocky outcrop, or mountain, which is often the site of a meeting between God and humans. Juxtaposing the goddess-like image of Rebekah with the image of her on her hands and knees, unable to stand (either because she is before the face of God, or because she is in pain – it is unclear which) is Crumb's attempt to paint Rebekah both in the light of high-priestess in accordance with Teubal's thesis, and in the light of a matriarch who must endure some sort of suffering before she can call herself a mother. Again, Crumb saturates his

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<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 127.

depictions of the matriarchs with dual identities, representing conflicting characteristic qualities.

Panel 20 is the pay-off for both the reader and Rebekah. The design of the grid on the page, (i.e. the multistage-multiframe) is 3 rows by 2 panels, resulting in 6 panels. This means each panel is given more space than Crumb's more usual 3x3 grid pattern. Each scene is a detailed snapshot of a moment rather than a quick succession of narrative propulsion: panel 18 is Rebekah pregnant, panel 19 is Rebekah learning she will have twins, and panel 20 is Rebekah giving birth. There is no narrative between the panels, because the biblical text does not support it. Therefore, the reader must input their own knowledge (not necessarily of the Bible, but of pregnancy) to fill in the gaps of the story, using the function of the gutters as suggested by McCloud and Eisner.<sup>570</sup>

Until this point, Isaac has not appeared in a scene with Rebekah since he first takes her as a wife at the end of Gen 24. There is no reason that Crumb could not have included him in any of the panels concerning Rebekah's pregnancy, but his decision not to is another proclamation of Rebekah's strength and status as opposed to a comment that child-bearing is an activity for women only, while the men wait outside, proverbial cigars at the ready. The key panel which propagates my reading of this is panel 19 where Rebekah appears before the face of God. Without Isaac, and without any other visible support, Rebekah has sought out a meeting with God to question her physical state, and it is to her that the secret of two nations within her womb is revealed. Had Crumb shown Isaac with her, it would have lessened the remarkable encounter and potentially recast Isaac as the one with the power to converse with God, as per patriarchal norms. As it is, Rebekah is the powerful one which is perhaps reflective of a Teubalian reading of the narrative.

Rebekah's pursuit of motherhood is not as drawn-out, fraught with tension, or as conflicted as Sarah's was, but she has faced her own set of challenges that were distinct from the barrenness which afflicted Sarah. As a new mother, her story continues to weave through Gen 25 and 26. Though this case study is primarily concerned with Rebekah becoming a mother, I will now turn to the story of the deception of Isaac in Gen 27 because both Teubal and Crumb draw upon this narrative as further proof that Rebekah controls the family and has power over Isaac. Furthermore, Crumb's representation of Rebekah in these scenes intersects with some of his representations of Sarah further proliferating the idea that the matriarchs of Genesis control the fortunes of their families, supporting Teubal's thesis.

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<sup>570</sup> McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 57; Eisner, *Sequential Art*, 13.

Teubal's comments on the deception of Isaac (where Rebekah constructs a plan to trick Isaac into giving her favourite son Jacob the blessing over Isaac's favourite son, Esau) suggest that the story further supports her theory that the stories of the matriarchs occurred at a time when there was a struggle between an increasingly powerful patriarchal society and a dimming matriarchal society. Her reading of the narrative told in Gen 27 is that Rebekah is focused on maintaining the matriarchal traditions of her homeland, which includes ultimogeniture instead of primogeniture (hence Rebekah tricking Isaac into blessing Jacob over Esau).

In contrast, Isaac has grown up in patriarchal Canaan and is more compliant with the practice of primogeniture, hence his displeasure at finding out he has given his blessing to the younger Jacob rather than his oldest son, Esau.<sup>571</sup> Teubal also notes that in the text of Gen 27, it is Rebekah that seeks out God to answer her question of what the struggle was inside of her. Isaac was not present, and nor does the text suggest Rebekah tells Isaac of God's pronouncement that the older child will serve the younger: "in other words, the destiny of the twins would be determined by the observance of ultimogeniture."<sup>572</sup> Conflict between Isaac and Rebekah in terms of their children's futures is inevitable, then, because Isaac does not know what God decreed.

Earlier in the text, Esau gave away his birthright (that is, his inheritance of property and wealth) to Jacob for a bowl of lentils. The blessing which belongs to Esau, however, is concerned with the transfer of spiritual succession; in other words, the blessing of God. It also seals the destiny of the person who receives it, meaning they are considered the next patriarch of their people, in line with Abraham and Isaac.<sup>573</sup> Therefore, Rebekah wants to steal that blessing for Jacob, in compliance with her preferred tradition of ultimogeniture, so that he might become the next person blessed in the eyes of God.<sup>574</sup>

Crumb's depiction of these scenes, particularly Gen 27:5-17, are quite remarkable in the way he illustrates Rebekah's craftiness and her control over Jacob's actions, and ultimately his future. The verses of Gen 27:3-17 are encased in a single page over 9 panels in Crumb's preferred 3x3 grid pattern. The design of the multistage-multiframe itself is a clever separation of the conception of the trick, and the trick itself which takes place on the opposite page. It opens with a blind, infirm Isaac instructing Esau to go and hunt game and prepare a

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<sup>571</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 43-44.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid, 44. Crumb reflects this in his depiction of the event, as Isaac is not seen in a panel with Rebekah until after the birth of the twins. Rebekah is alone in front of the face of God.

<sup>573</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 190.

<sup>574</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 45.

meal for Isaac, so that he can bestow his blessing upon him. The second panel shows Rebekah at the tent of the door, listening to the pair inside.

The separation between Rebekah and the pairing of Esau and Isaac is important. Throughout these verses, Rebekah and Jacob are never seen with Isaac or Esau, which is a manifestation of the preference each parent has for their favourite child, as well as a clear demarcation of trickster v. tricked. In this instance, Crumb uses the liminal door space to act as an invisible barrier between the three characters. It is also reminiscent of the scene where Sarah sits at the door of the tent, watching as a pregnant Hagar walks by with contempt in her eyes (Gen 16:4). Crumb's call-back to this scene reminds the viewer that Rebekah, like Sarah, controls the destiny of her household and lineage. Even Sarah's bowl of food reappears in Rebekah's arms, another example of the weaving of iconic correspondences between the matriarchal stories.

In the following three panels of Gen 27:6-10, Rebekah is the dominant figure and the only character who speaks. Her speech bubbles take up most of the panels indicating her dominance in verbal presence as well as physical presence. Panel 4 on this page is especially indicative of this, as Crumb has drawn Rebekah physically holding Jacob by the shoulders, commanding him to participate in her idea of deception. The central panel of the multistage-multiframe is a portrait of Rebekah's face, accompanied by the final clause of her command: "and you shall bring it to your father, and he shall eat, so that he may bless you before he dies!"

Rebekah's character, speech and idea are central to the overarching narrative across the page. Although Jacob points out obvious flaws in her plan (panel 6), Rebekah is shown to be thorough in her planning. For example, panel 7 shows her anger at his questioning, and her willingness to take the blame for the deceit. In a call-back to Sarah's anger in 16:5, Rebekah is also shown against a black background with a hot-white aura sharply protruding from her figure. Her face, like Sarah's, is expressive; her eyes are popping out of her skull, her mouth is open in a shout, and her fists are clenched under her neck.

Panel 8 of the multistage-multiframe is the opposite. Having vented her anger and controlled the situation, Rebekah is now shown huddled over a pot of steaming food. A thought bubble contains a single music note as she contentedly sings to herself. That Crumb has drawn Rebekah in the style of a witch huddled over a bubbling cauldron is not a mistake – he clearly aligns her deceitful plan with the art of illusion as she helps Jacob turn into Esau. The final panel of the page, before the act takes place, again makes the most use of the suspense



position. Rebekah is in control again, sewing the goat skin around Jacob's neck and arms to turn him into Esau. It is the final breath of preparation before the trick takes place on the following page.

By encasing the preparation of the trick into one page, the page itself becomes, as Miller and Groensteen describe, the multistage-multiframe, meaning the page stands alone as part of the wider narrative. The design of the narrative across one page serves to emphasise the control of Rebekah, and the conflict between her tradition of ultimogeniture, against Isaac's potential preferred Canaanite tradition of primogeniture. Isaac's blindness and infirmity are contrasted against Rebekah's physical dominance and ability to perceive alternative pathways for her children. Her presence in each panel apart from the first shows her control over the situation. Finally, her correspondence with some images of Sarah in previous chapters is an indicator of Crumb's treatment of Rebekah as a matriarch, in the same light as Sarah as matriarch. Crumb's commentary corroborates this perception of the matriarchs, as he describes Rebekah as having "incredible force and determination" and concludes that her control of the situation and the fact that, after the deception, she sends Jacob to live with her brother in Haran, further demonstrating her compliance with traditional matrilineal societies.<sup>575</sup>

### Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 25:19-28 in biblical scholarship

Concerning the scenes of Rebekah and Isaac becoming parents, Sarna consider the text from a patriarchal perspective, casting Rebekah as a secondary character in Isaac's story. Of Rebekah, Sarna notes her age is omitted in the biblical text because, unlike Sarah, she is not past the age of childbearing.<sup>576</sup> This casts her fertility problem in a different light to Sarah's as Rebekah's issue of barrenness is solved in the space of one verse which potentially encapsulates twenty years of waiting for children. This is reflected in Crumb's text. Of her inability to bear children, Sarna notes that the situation is ironic given the blessing Rebekah received as she left her family home: "O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads,"<sup>577</sup> and also that Rebekah and Isaac do not resort to using a concubine, but rather "maintain their faith in God's word and rely on the power of prayer."<sup>578</sup> I argue that this, too, is the dominating theme in Crumb's narrative, especially in the successive pairing of the panel of

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<sup>575</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 27, *Genesis Illustrated*.

<sup>576</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 179.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid*.

Isaac's burnt offering with the image of Rebekah's pregnancy, which is a suggestion of divine intervention after prayer.

Divine intervention is also a running theme in Alter's reading of Gen 25. Alter suggests that 25:19, "the lineage of Isaac" implies a "false symmetry" with the lineage of Ishmael earlier in the chapter (25:12), because it highlights Ishmael's success in creating a long line of descendants against the lack of descendants of Isaac. Similar to the Abraham cycle, Isaac requires God's intervention.<sup>579</sup> I argue this is also replicated in Crumb's remediation, most significantly in the design of the multistage-multiframe incorporating panels 4-17, which sets the lone figure of Isaac against panels of Ishmael's descendants. This has the effect of emphasising Isaac's lack of progeny and why that is an issue.

Teubal also notes the matter of God's intervention, but more importantly argues that the childlessness of Rebekah was proof that she too, heralded from a priestess tradition: "it seems highly unlikely that three generations of women married to patriarchs would be barren", and even more unlikely, according to Teubal, that the husbands of barren wives would continue to be married to them without taking some course of action to ensure progeny.<sup>580</sup> Marrying for love is not an argument Teubal gives thought to. For Teubal, this signifies that the women were treated differently by their husbands and that potentially, their status overrode their child-bearing abilities. Lastly, Teubal suggests that the text represents both Sarah and Rachel as "anxious" to fall pregnant, but that Rebekah's desire or otherwise for a child is not expressed by her, but by Isaac in his prayer to God.<sup>581</sup>

I argue this interpretation is represented by Crumb's visual and textual choices. Rebekah's story, in comparison to Sarah or (as we shall encounter) Rachel, has none of the tension or confused emotion portrayed in the other matriarchal narratives, nor does it seem to span a lengthy amount of time. The six-panel grid in the multistage-multiframe of Rebekah's motherhood arc allows for a time to pass slower for the reader than a nine-panel grid would, because the reader must absorb more information in the larger panels. However, in the first four panels alone, Rebekah has endured a painful pregnancy, spoken with God, given birth, and presented the children to their father. Her issue of infertility, if there is one, is resolved quickly and with minimum effort unlike Sarah and (as we will see) Rachel's stories. By Crumb visually depicting Isaac's prayer to God, it is Isaac who is depicted as anxious. Rebekah's absence in the panel suggests an absence of emotion on the matter, which is then

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<sup>579</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 126.

<sup>580</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 102.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

replaced by frustration and pain when her pregnancy encounters complications in the next panel. Alternatively, it could also represent the silencing of her voice in the text, but Crumb's images do not depict this. Rather, they show emotion and struggle within Rebekah's experience.

Rebekah's visit to God also marks her as different to Sarah or Rachel, neither of whom speak directly with the deity.<sup>582</sup> The result of the visit is that Rebekah learns that she is carrying twins, who will be two nations destined to struggle with each other for supremacy.<sup>583</sup> The fact that this is not shared with Isaac serves to emphasise Rebekah's role and status over her husband, further casting him in a role submissive or perhaps less involved than his wife.<sup>584</sup> However, the tension here is that it is only through Isaac's prayer (and in Crumb's remediation, burnt offering) that Rebekah even falls pregnant, so his role is significant nonetheless. Crumb's remediation, although focused on Rebekah, presenting her as strong enough to speak to God's face, does give equal pictorial space to Isaac to signify this. Further, by situating the panel of Isaac's prayer/offering to God beside the funeral of Ishmael and before the panel of Rebekah pregnant, Crumb is connecting the theme of brothers, family and progeny through the figure of Isaac.

Crumb's use of Isaac as a visual connective tool in these panels is also representative of Esther Fuchs' argument that the matriarchs are contingent upon their husbands' relationships with God to fall pregnant, rather than the actions or character of the wife. In this sense, the patriarch is key to Rebekah's motherhood narrative. However, Fuchs also contends that Rebekah is also central to the story, which can be seen in her interaction with God and the fact that both parents name their children, rather than Isaac alone.<sup>585</sup> This is not a case then, of either the patriarch or the matriarch being the dominant partner, but rather of a partnership where each subject brings their own strengths to the relationship. Though Crumb's remediation leans towards Rebekah as a central figure, Isaac's role is not downplayed. There is a visual difference here with the narrative of Sarah and Abraham, where Abraham is continuously portrayed as a quiet, passive, secondary character.

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<sup>582</sup> Both Fischer, in "On the Significance of "Women Texts"" (277) and Sarna in *Understanding Genesis* (182), discuss the possibility that Rebekah was associated with a local cult which may suggest she spoke with an oracle or priest rather than God directly. However, the text does not suggest this, and neither does Crumb's remediation as he draws God's face bearing down on Rebekah like the sun.

<sup>583</sup> Fischer, "On the Significance of the Women Texts"", 277.

<sup>584</sup> On centrality of Rebekah in a narratological reading of Genesis, see: White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis*, 206-7.

<sup>585</sup> Fuchs, "Literary Characterisations of Mothers", 130.

Exum does not read the story of Rebekah, or the matriarchs, in this light. Instead, she argues that the matriarchs are bound to play a secondary role to their husbands by the patriarchal setting, and the patriarchally-skewed scribes and redactors who tell their stories.<sup>586</sup> Exum has highlighted stories between Gen 11 and 35 to show where the matriarchs appear, and where their function as characters progresses the narrative; however, she notes that their inclusion in the narrative is not to be read as evidence of their importance to the text: “[r]ather, the matriarchs step forward in the service of an androcentric agenda, and once they have served their purpose, they disappear until such time, if any, they might again prove useful.”<sup>587</sup> In Rebekah’s case in Gen 25, the only highlighted portion concerns her infertility, her falling pregnant, her enquiry to God, and her giving birth. Her love for Jacob is also noted. The rest of the narrative concerns her husband or her sons, and so is in line with Exum.

Seeing the portions of text associated with Rebekah highlighted in this way (itself a form of text-image narrative, where the emboldening of the text acts as a visual code to the reader)<sup>588</sup> is persuasive. However, while the secondary role/status of the matriarchs in Genesis can be attributed to both patriarchal scribes, and centuries of patriarchal-based scholarship further obscuring their roles, I do not fully agree with Exum’s analysis on Rebekah’s story. While it is true that Rebekah’s character is used to further Isaac’s role as patriarch by providing him with children, and that God’s intervention in her fertility issue is a narrative tool to mark her children in the same trope as the hero (thus casting her in the role of the hero’s mother),<sup>589</sup> there is evidence of autonomy in the story which cannot be overlooked. Rebekah’s decision to visit with God and enquire of him is one such example in her pregnancy narrative; other examples are apparent in the role she plays as mother to Jacob and Esau, ensuring her favourite Jacob receives the blessing from Isaac (27:1-40), for example, and the way in which she dictates the terms of Jacob’s future marriage (27:46-28:3).

Most scholarship on Rebekah is less concerned with the problem of her infertility than her eventual giving birth to “two nations”. In this respect, Rebekah is a vessel for narratives concerning Jacob and Esau, but mostly the former who inherits the role of patriarch in Genesis. Her role of mother is important, but mostly because it is Rebekah who takes control of Jacob’s destiny, encouraging him to trick Isaac and take the blessing from Esau. The Jacob/Esau blessing narrative is an example of ultimogeniture, which, Teubal argues, is a principle followed in matriarchal traditions. While emphasis is mostly on the sons in

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<sup>586</sup> Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 70-5.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>588</sup> Saraceni, *The Language of Comics*, 18-21.

<sup>589</sup> See: Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*; Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Women*, 92-98.

Rebekah's narrative in biblical scholarship, scholars do identify the following three points as important in the narratives of Gen 25:19-28: 1) narratively speaking, less time is spent on the issue of Rebekah's fertility than Sarah, Rachel and Leah, 2) unlike Sarah, Rachel and Leah, Rebekah does not resort to concubinage to overcome the problem of barrenness, and 3) God intercedes quickly after Isaac prays for a resolution, granting his prayer. Again, there is little attention paid to the potential of Rebekah as high-priestess, in the manner of Teubal.

While her procreative role is the main function of Rebekah's character in the Genesis narratives (as with Sarah and Rachel/Leah), Crumb has chosen to broaden their functions while simultaneously emphasising their biological roles as mothers. As with Sarah in Gen 18:1-15 and 21:1-12, Crumb has presented Rebekah as an autonomous, controlling woman who, in the text-image, is equal to, if not more important than, her husband. Again, I argue that this is not intended to be a stereotypical portrayal of a domineering Jewish women, but is a pro-feminist vision of the matriarch. However, unlike Sarah, Rebekah is not presented as desperate for children. That is Isaac's role in *Genesis, Illustrated*, and Crumb's composition of panels, textual choices and graphic design highlight this.

## Summary

The overriding portrayal of Rebekah in Crumb's remediation of Genesis is, like Sarah, a woman who is dominant, powerful and in control. Visual and textual analysis of her story in relation to motherhood present her as a character who is strong-willed (for example, her confidence in leaving the family home to meet and marry Isaac), but also confident in her relationship with God. Though it is Isaac who prays to God on Rebekah's behalf, it is Rebekah who seeks advice from God, and it is Rebekah who hears she is carrying twins, not Isaac.

Isaac is, like Abraham, portrayed as a passive character in the panels of Crumb's remediation. Though he intercedes on his wife's behalf, he is not part of the panels where Rebekah seeks advice from God, nor the panels where she gives birth to their sons. His introduction to his new-born sons takes place with him on the ground, eating food, while Rebekah and her midwife maintain a position elevated above him. The juxtaposition of Isaac's passivity with Rebekah's activity in seeking help, and in her physical state of pregnancy and birth against his passive seated position, emphasises the strength and power of Rebekah, and diminishes Isaac's status in the eyes of the reader.

The issue of infertility is treated differently in these panels compared to Sarah. Rebekah, though barren, is never shown to be emotionally or physically upset by her infertility and that is because the text does not allow for such an exegesis. Instead, the reader is expected to fill in the gap between Isaac's prayer to God and the consecutive panel of Rebekah heavily pregnant. That she appears alone, surrounded by stars which have the dual purpose of acting as a cartoon indicator of pain and which give the image an ethereal quality, is poignant. I argue that this single panel is the strongest indication in the entirety of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* of the influence of Teubal's hypothesis that Rebekah, like Sarah, came from a high-priestess, matriarchal tradition. At the very least, when this panel is read with the next panel of Rebekah speaking with the divine, the visual coding and language implies Rebekah was of important status.

#### 4c. Rachel and Leah

Genesis 27 ends with Rebekah lamenting to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?” (27:46). Thus, Isaac sends Jacob to Paddan-aram to the house of Rebekah’s father in order that he may find for himself a wife from his mother’s homeland instead of marrying a Canaanite woman (28:1-5).

Rachel and Leah are the daughters of Laban, Rebekah’s brother, and make their first appearance in Gen 29. Once Jacob has left his parents and travelled to “the land of the east”, or, Haran (29:1), he meets a group of shepherds waiting to water their sheep. The sheep are watered from a well which has a large stone in front of it which must be rolled away, so the shepherds must wait until all the flocks in the area are gathered before watering them. Rachel appears with her father’s flock, (29:9), and when Jacob sees her, he rolls the stone from the mouth of the well and waters her sheep. “Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud” (29:11).

Jacob explains that he is Rebekah’s son, and Rachel runs to tell her father (much like when Rebekah ran to tell her father about the meeting with Abraham’s servant in Gen 24:28). Laban embraces Jacob into the household and offers him employment, but he must name his wages. Gen 29:16 formally introduces the reader to Rachel and Leah: “Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.” Leah’s eyes are described as lovely, while Rachel is described as graceful and beautiful. Jacob loves Rachel, and he promises Laban that he will work for him for seven years if he is given the hand of Rachel in marriage, to which Laban agrees (29:17-19).

After seven years have passed, Jacob asks Laban for Rachel, so that he may marry her and “go in to her” (29:21).<sup>590</sup> Laban consents, but conspires to trick Jacob, and after a day of feasting, brings Leah to Jacob. Jacob does not realise it is Leah until the morning, but the text does not clarify why this is the case. Presumably Jacob enjoyed the festivities the evening before too much and was not sober. When he confronts Laban over the deception, Laban explains that it is not customary in his country for the younger daughter to marry before the older daughter (29:22-26), but offers Rachel to Jacob as a second wife, if he

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<sup>590</sup> To “go into her” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse in this instance.

completes the bridal week with Leah,<sup>591</sup> and if he agrees to work for Laban for another seven years. Jacob evidently agrees and after serving the new sentence the text reads: “Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah” (29:30).

The theme of motherhood is prevalent in the story of the two sisters from this point onwards. God notices that Leah is unloved and so for unknown reasons, “opens her womb”, but like Sarah and Rebekah, Rachel is barren (29:31). Over the following four verses, Leah gives birth to four sons, but Jacob still does not love her (29:32-35). Rachel envies her sister because she has not borne any children to Jacob, and she admonishes Jacob for her lack of children: “Give me children, or I shall die!” (30:1). Jacob angrily responds that it is God who has prevented her from bearing children. Rachel’s answer is to follow the actions of Sarah, and give her maid, Bilhah “as a wife” to Jacob. Bilhah conceives and gives birth to a son, named Dan (30:2-6). Bilhah conceives again and gives birth to a second son, named Naphtali, so named because Rachel states “with mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed” (30:8). The competition between the two sisters continues; Leah realises she has stopped conceiving, and so gives Jacob her maid, Zilpah to Jacob “as a wife” (30:9), who bears a son named Gad; Zilpah bears a second son named Asher, and Rachel states her happiness at the outcome (30:12-13).

Leah’s first son, Reuben, returns from the field with mandrakes for his mother, and Rachel asks if she might have some.<sup>592</sup> Leah’s response is filled with bitterness because she is jealous that Rachel has Jacob’s love, despite Leah providing him with so many sons. Rachel is jealous of Leah for bearing children when she can have none. She bargains for the mandrakes, negotiating with Leah that she can lie with Jacob that evening for the price of the mandrakes and Leah agrees (30:14-16). God “heeds” Leah, and she conceives for a fifth time, bearing a son named Isaachar, before bearing a sixth son, named Zebulun. Her seventh child with Jacob is a daughter, named Dinah (30:17-21). After these children are born, God remembers Rachel and he opens her womb so that she too can bear Jacob’s children (30:22). Rachel conceives and gives birth to Joseph.

In the final scenes of Rachel and Leah’s narrative, the text describes a deteriorating relationship between their husband, Jacob, and their father, Laban (30:25-31:13). God

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<sup>591</sup> Sarna clarifies “the week of this one” refers to the bridal week; that is, the seven days of feasting held to celebrate a marriage. See: *JPS Torah Commentary*, 205.

<sup>592</sup> Both Alter and the JPS note that in many cultures, mandrakes were thought to be aphrodisiacs, as well as having properties which promoted fertility. The reference in this scene, then, could be read either that the mandrakes were to be used to entice Jacob to continue his conjugal duties, or to help increase the chance of conceiving. See: Alter, *Genesis*, 160; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 209.



appears to Jacob in a dream and instructs him to leave the land and return to his homeland (31:13). Jacob relays this instruction to his wives, who agree with him. Their own relationship with their father appears to have been reduced to nothing more than profit-making on Laban's part, as Laban has evidently pocketed the bride-price which belongs to them, and they recognised that all the property Jacob has gained while serving Laban belongs to them also (31:14-16). The three decide to leave without telling Laban, but not before Rachel steals the household gods which belong to Laban's house (31:19).<sup>593</sup> They escape, along with their flocks and servants, but Laban catches up with them. God appears to Laban in a dream instructing him not to harm Jacob to which Laban takes heed (31:22-29).

Instead of harming Jacob, Laban confronts him to ask him why he stole away without saying a word, and why he stole the household gods from Laban's house. Jacob does not know that Rachel stole the small figurines, and replies in that manner, stating that anybody found with the figurines will be put to death (31:29-32). The tension in the text rises as Laban goes to search for the household gods, or teraphim, in Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, and the tent of the two maids. He then enters Rachel's tent and does not find them there. Rachel has hidden them underneath her camel's saddle and sits upon them. She deceives her father, telling him that she cannot rise from her saddle before him because "the way of women is upon me" (31:33-35). The teraphim remain hidden.

Rachel and Leah make sporadic appearances in Gen 33 when Jacob and Esau are reunited, but do not have a significant role again in the text. In Gen 35:16-20, Rachel dies in childbirth, after giving birth to a second son named Ben-oni, later renamed Benjamin by Jacob. Rachel is buried on the way to Ephrath (Bethlehem), and Jacob sets a pillar upon her grave. Leah's death is not written about, but Gen 49:31 is a statement by Jacob on his deathbed, that Leah is buried in the same cave of Machpelah as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah. When Jacob dies, he is also buried there.

## R. Crumb's comments on Rachel and Leah in *Genesis, Illustrated*

Crumb first mentions Rachel in his commentary to Gen 28 in reference to Jacob's repetitive act of "pushing up great heavy stones" which he notes Jacob does five times in the story of his life. He comments that the second time Jacob does this, it is to push the stone away from

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<sup>593</sup> The household gods, or "teraphim" are ornamental representations of the deities deemed responsible for the well-being and prosperity of the household. See: Alter, *Genesis*, 169; Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 216.

the front of the well to water Rachel's flock. Crumb thinks Jacob does this to impress Rachel, and notes that the last time he does it, it is to mark the grave of Rachel after her death.<sup>594</sup>

Commenting on the competition which arises between Rachel and Leah in terms of providing children to Jacob, Crumb describes chapters 29 and 30 as "bedroom-comedy relief".<sup>595</sup> It is worth reading Crumb's take on these two chapters in full, because it requires some unpacking in terms of his treatment of both Rachel and Leah in his remediation:

The story in these chapters seems almost intentionally meant to provide bedroom-comedy relief. But who can say how such a tale was received by its ancient listeners? Did they laugh? We'll never know. It is the bizarre story of two women competing with each other to bring sons into the world for one man. Two handmaids, or slavegirls, are dragged into the situation. The two wives compete for Jacob's sexual services, a bargain is struck, and Leah, the less favoured but more fertile of the two, says to Jacob, "You must come in unto me, for indeed I've hired you..." As with his powerful mother, Jacob seems again overwhelmed by these strong, determined women, and does as he is told.<sup>596</sup>

Strangely, having grappled with, and visually represented the difficult narrative of fertility in both Sarah and Rebekah's stories, Crumb has denigrated Leah and Rachel's desires for motherhood by regarding the story as comedic and bizarre. It is interesting that he picks up on the reception of this story in its original setting, but frustratingly, he does not elaborate on this, so it is difficult to read his question into my visual/textual analysis without conjecturing too much with regards to Crumb's authorial intentions.

It is also confusing for the reader that Crumb centres the story around Jacob, describing the competition between Rachel and Leah as a competition concerning who can provide more sons for Jacob, rather than Teubal's interpretation of the story which positions Rachel in the role of priestess who cannot have children until her duties have been fulfilled, and who offers her maid to Jacob in the same way that Sarah offered Hagar to Abraham, in order that her house could be built up that way.<sup>597</sup> In Teubal's thesis, Rachel is the centre of the story and Jacob is secondary. Rachel is subject to the terms of her spiritual role and is limited in when she can procreate. Jacob plays no role in Teubal's narrative, and Rachel and Leah's competition is certainly not seen as a competition between the two sisters to provide their husband with children.

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<sup>594</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 28, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>595</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapters 29 and 30, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 106.

In Teubal's argument Rachel is the one responsible for the religious obligations within her family, because she is above Leah in status,<sup>598</sup> hence Rachel is the one who steals the *teraphim* from her father's house. Further, Teubal infers from the text that Rachel is more concerned about building her own lineage by conceiving, or offering her maid to Jacob, rather than providing Jacob with an heir. The fact that Jacob has children by Leah already is deemed unimportant, because Rachel requires her own heir. Like Sarah, Teubal argues that Rachel is complying with the same rule in the Code of Hammurabi with regards to fulfilling priestess duties before bearing a child. Teubal notes these rules applied only to women of "a certain religious rank in Babylonia."<sup>599</sup>

It is unclear whether Crumb is continuing to follow the theory put forward by Teubal, but his commentary suggests that the story is more concerned with Rachel and Leah outdoing one another in a competition of child-bearing, rather than acknowledging Rachel's inability to bear children, versus the fertile Leah. Indeed, his terminology, describing the handmaids "or slavegirls" as being "dragged" into the situation, emphasises that he views this narrative as a hotly-contested case of sibling rivalry, in which each sister is willing to use their servants to win. He does not even mention that Leah might potentially be so concerned with providing children because she wants Jacob to love her in the same way he loves Rachel, or even because she enjoys having children and being a mother. Crumb does return to his interpretation of the two women as being "strong and determined", in the same vein as Jacob's powerful mother Rebekah, thus suggesting that they are to be seen in a dominant, active and matriarchal light, and Jacob should be viewed as a weaker, passive character. However, I argue that his description of Rachel and Leah as strong and determined is undermined by his visual decisions, as I will demonstrate in my analysis of the text-image story.

In Gen 31, Crumb returns to Teubal, citing her theory that Rachel steals the household gods because she is "attempting to carry with her some vestige of her traditional role as a guardian of these "household gods" which were most often female deities."<sup>600</sup> Crumb draws the reader's attention to Gen 35, arguing it is an example of Jacob asserting his patriarchal power which is rooted in his homeland of Canaan. Jacob demands that all "alien" gods must be turned over to him so that he can get rid of them, further highlighting Teubal's theories that the stories of the matriarchs were happening at a time when the ancient world was in the

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<sup>598</sup> Teubal interprets the fact that Rachel is always mentioned before Leah as indicative of her higher status in the hierarchy of their family. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 51.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>600</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapter 31, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

middle of a tumultuous conversion from a matrilineal, matriarchal society, into a patrilineal, patriarchal society.

### Rachel, Leah and motherhood in Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*

In order to contextualise the story of competition between Rachel and Leah in Gen 29:31-30:24, I have included a visual/textual analysis of the relationship between Jacob and the two sisters, which takes place in Gen 29:1-30. This textual analysis is not concerned with motherhood but does set up the future competitive motherhood narrative to come. To that end, I have focused on contextualising Gen 29:31-30:24 within biblical scholarship to support my case study but will refer to the earlier passages where necessary.

#### Genesis 29:9-30<sup>601</sup>

The meeting between Jacob and Rachel takes place in panels 8 and 9 of Crumb's version of Gen 29. When Jacob sees Rachel, he rolls the stone away from the mouth of the well to water her flocks. The text is undetailed and offers no reason for this action; as such, Crumb does not offer an answer in his visualisation. Rachel appears in both panels behind Jacob. In panel 8 she is portrayed as shocked with her hands to her mouth, and in panel 9 she is even more bewildered by Jacob's actions, depicted through her round, wide eyes. In panel 10, Jacob kisses Rachel. The couple are set apart from the dark background by a white sunburst aura which surrounds them; Crumb's typical tool to heighten emotion. It is reminiscent of a filmic moment when two lovers kiss for the first time. Jacob weeps and embraces Rebekah in one of the more tender scenes in Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*. The embrace is Crumb's addition to the text which does not mention that action, and it is reminiscent of a Hollywood style love-at-first-sight moment.

After the kiss and embrace, Rachel "runs" to tell her father of what has transpired. The biblical text is a call-back to Gen 24:28 when Rebekah runs to tell her mother's household of her meeting with Abraham's messenger. Contrary to Rebekah's scene, Rachel's scene is the opposite. Where Rebekah is depicted physically running to her household, greeted at the door by her family looking excited and expressive (mother, unknown female, her brother Laban), Rachel's journey home is not shown. In one panel, she is in Jacob's embrace, in the

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<sup>601</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.7.

next she is kneeling before her father, Laban.<sup>602</sup> That Laban has experienced this sequence of events before is not acknowledged visually or textually. He sits impassively, hands on lap, while Rachel mirrors his body language and relays her tale.

Laban greets and welcomes Jacob into the family (panel 13), after Jacob “recounted to Laban all these things”, Laban accepts his identity and in panel 14, asks him to name his wages for working for Laban (panel 15). The scene between Laban and Jacob contrasts with the previous panel of Rachel telling Laban about Jacob. In that panel, Laban is stiff and distant from his daughter and the pair do not touch, but in panel 13, Laban embraces Jacob, offering the hospitality of the house in very fine-looking goblets (panel 14). These scenes are relevant in contextualising the story of Rachel and Leah because 1) Crumb sets the idea that Jacob loves Rachel early in the story (Leah’s absence so far is significant), and 2) the sisters are already beginning to be played off each other, foreshadowing the competitive narrative to come.

From panel 15 when Laban asks Jacob to name his wages, Crumb employs some visual tricks which begin to set up the feud between Rachel and Leah. For example, in panel 16, which is a portrait of Jacob with a thought bubble of an image of Leah (the reader’s first visual introduction to her), the background is dark. The narrative voice-over above the panel reads “And Laban had two daughters. The name of the elder was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. And Leah’s eyes were tender...” (Gen 29:16-17). The amount of text takes up a third of the pictorial space, Jacob’s portrait takes up another third, leaving a third for Leah’s face. Crumb has drawn it beautifully, with special attention paid to the eyes in reference to the text. However, panel 17 contains the second part of verse 17 and the first half of verse 18: “But Rachel was comely in features and well-formed.<sup>18</sup> And Jacob loved Rachel.” The entire panel is taken up with a full-length image of Rachel, who is glancing behind her seductively and showing off her figure to the viewer. The panel border is made of wavy lines, indicating this is a thought of Jacob’s mind as well. Finally, the text is shorter and so does not encroach on Rachel’s pictorial space to the same extent as the previous panel.

The fact that Jacob does not appear in the panel with Rachel indicates her dominance over Leah, who must share a space with Jacob and with a larger portion of text. It also suggests that Rachel takes over Jacob’s thoughts, and while Leah’s eyes are worthy of mention in the text and in visual representation, the whole of Rachel is worthy of an entire panel. It must be noted, however, that such depictions also reference Jacob’s male gaze towards the women,

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<sup>602</sup> See panels 11 and 12 of Fig. 5.7.

who he does not know but thinks about in a visual way alone, effectively objectifying them in the process. Crumb is emphasising Jacob's love for Rachel, both with a visual reminder for the reader, and textual reminder suggested in the way he has split the verses over the two panels. Finally, by physically dividing the two sisters by panels, Crumb has created a division between the sisters which foretells the coming narrative of a problem or barrier between them.

Jacob chooses Rachel and agrees to work for Laban for seven years in return for her hand in marriage. Panel 20 is a cleverly drawn panel, placed at the end of the mid-row of Crumb's 9-grid pattern. The reader sees the back of Jacob waving to Rachel who appears in the distance, waving back and both are tending flocks in a mountainous landscape. The simple design of the panel does three things at this point in the story: firstly, it is a simple reminder of Jacob's love for Rachel, since only those two characters appear in the panel, facing each other and connecting over the replication of a gesture. Secondly, it emphasises the divide between the two, by placing both distance and animals between them. Thirdly, the scene underscores Jacob's compliance with Laban's rules that he must work for seven years before being allowed to have Rachel as a wife. The flock surrounding him indicates he is working, and the flock dividing him and Rachel indicates a period of labour separates him from her.

Finally, Jacob's time is complete and he asks for his reward. A feast is held and Crumb draws women passing around jugs of liquid – presumably alcohol – while men play instruments and food is served. The visual reminder of fertility is present again, in the rounded jug held by Leah foreshadowing her fertility against the barren Rachel. Panel 23 is the moment of deception, where Laban sneakily brings Leah to Jacob's bedchamber rather than Rachel. The scene takes place at night. Crumb has drawn Laban physically ushering Leah and her slavegirl, Zilpah, into a door. This panel is directly opposite panel 17 which is of Rachel in Jacob's thoughts, which demonstrates Crumb's careful planning of the pages: his understanding of the peritext, and its potential influence on reader's reception of the text has resulted in the panel of what Jacob wants and has worked for being displayed against the panel of what he is given. The placement emphasises Laban's trickery in an even more pronounced light. Furthermore, the rounded vase which Crumb uses to symbolise fertility and child-bearing is absent from this sober affair, foretelling the coming narrative.

Likewise, Crumb has designed the page containing the narrative of the deception to the eventual marriage between Jacob and Rachel very carefully (Gen 29:25-30). Panel 24, the moment Jacob wakes up in the morning and realises he has been tricked and has married Leah takes up the right-hand upper corner. Jacob is lying underneath Leah who is stroking

his hair. The background is dark and featureless, and Jacob is surrounded by the aura of light which is Crumb's signature indication of a moment of realisation or the height of a dramatic story. However, this time the aura is depicted in wavy lines, indicating an uncertain dramatic moment while Jacob works out what has happened. The panels in between are concerned with Jacob and Laban while the former confronts the latter, before Laban relents and agrees to Jacob marrying Rachel if he completes the bridal week with Leah.

The panel showing the marriage scene between Jacob and Rachel (panel 28) is directly opposite panel 22 on the previous page: the panel of the feast to celebrate what Jacob thought was his marriage to Rachel. The scenes could not be more different. Panel 22 is a feast of food, alcohol, music and dancing, a scene designed to indulge and confuse the senses (which is supposedly what happens to Jacob rendering him unable to tell the difference between Leah and Rachel). Panel 28 is a dignified, sober affair showing a physical union between Rachel and Jacob in the joining of hands, and is like the panel of the union of Abraham and Hagar which Sarah presides over in Gen 16. Crumb's visualisation is clear: the marriage with Rachel demands more respect and sobriety than the marriage with Leah, and the pairing of the panels across the pages reflects this.

Lastly, in terms of page design, Crumb has mirrored panel 29 with panel 24. The image of Jacob waking up to Leah in panel 24 is reversed in panel 29 which occupies the bottom right hand corner (mirroring the position of panel 24 in the upper right-hand corner): an image of Rachel and Jacob in bed. Rachel is underneath Jacob in a reversal of the Leah-Jacob panel, and both are smiling at each other which is contrary to the image of Jacob looking upset and confused in his scene with Leah. Even the text boxes are in the same position. Crumb is visually encoding his panels to create division between the women using a combination of mirroring, facial gestures and text placement, further foretelling the narrative of competitive motherhood between the two sisters.

Crumb's conception of the beginning of the relationship between Jacob, Rachel and Leah accentuates each woman's qualities and focuses the readers on what Crumb perceives to be the important points of the narrative. Leah has beautiful eyes and she perceives herself as the lesser of the two sisters in Jacob's eyes. To claim him as a husband, her father must interfere and confuse his senses – including his sight – with food, alcohol and merriment, before making the switch between daughters. Conversely, Rachel is shown as beautiful, hard-working and patient. The text does not tell the reader how Rachel feels about being swapped for Leah, and nor does Crumb's visualisation. However, the sobriety of his union

with Rachel is an occasion where Jacob's senses are fully engaged, further juxtaposing the sisters against each other.

### Genesis 29:31-30:24<sup>603</sup>

Panel 31 in Crumb's Gen 29 corresponds with verses from Gen 29:31-32 and it depicts the birth of Jacob and Leah's first son. The grid pattern of panels is not Crumb's standard, and this turns out to be a visual trick which impacts the narrative. Panel 30, which opens the page, depicts Jacob feeding Laban's flock. Panel 31 is Leah holding a baby, flanked by a woman on either side. Crumb has positioned the narrator's observations of Gen 29:31-32a in between the panels (as usual unboxed, in the hyperframe but within the grid pattern) which causes a visual, and thus physical, division between one part of the story and another; the narrative voice is a break between one chapter of Jacob's life and the next.

Both panels are linked by a text box with an annotation explaining the meaning behind Jacob and Leah's new son's name, Reuben: "Reuben: in Hebrew, a play on the words *Re'u ben*: "See, a son!"<sup>604</sup> Linking the two panels with Reuben's name is a graphic connection between Jacob and Leah, who otherwise, has so far only shared a panel with Jacob the morning after Laban/Leah's trickery (Gen 29:25). The lack of physical connection between Leah and Jacob is thus represented as close to non-existent; their strongest connection is through their children. This further contrasts Rachel with Leah, as Rachel and Jacob have shared several panels up to this point. Jacob's herding of the flock in panel 30 may also be read as a reference to the first panels of his meeting with Rachel, and the panels where he worked for Laban, looking after the flocks to secure Rachel's hand in marriage. The visual codes in panel 30 are all indicative of Rachel, even though Leah is his wife and mother of his first child.

Crumb's word choices in these verses employ a harsh tone. He uses for example the word "despised" to describe Leah: "And the Lord saw that Leah was despised, and he opened her womb but Rachel was barren" (Gen 29:31). The JPS uses "unloved"; the KJV uses "hated". Alter uses "despised", and while none of the terms are pleasant, I argue "despise" has a certain added level of vitriol, speaking of contempt, and scorn on top of the absence of

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<sup>603</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.8.

<sup>604</sup> Alter calls the etymologies of the names for all of Rachel and Leah's children "ad hoc improvisations", which are "essentially, midrashic play on the sounds of names." It is from Alter's commentary that Crumb takes his footnotes on naming etymology. See: Alter, *Genesis*, 156.



love.<sup>605</sup> In his commentary, Alter interchanges “hate” with “despise”, explaining it as a technical term used for the non-favoured co-wife, and that the “pairing of an unloved wife who is fertile with a barren, beloved co-wife sets the stage for a familiar variant of the annunciation type-scene.”<sup>606</sup> Such a scene does occur in the future, but Crumb’s choice of Alter’s “despise” is to further emphasise the pairing of characters with opposing attributes and qualities, similar to the pairing of Sarah and Hagar in Gen 16.<sup>607</sup>

Crumb’s design of panels mirrors the birth of Leah’s first four children as each birth is presented in a single panel and each panel contains a text box annotating each child’s name.<sup>608</sup> In each panel there is another female present, perhaps in the role of midwife, perhaps as a handmaiden. It is of note, though, that Leah is the prevalent character in this sequence, and Rachel is absent. Her absence could indicate her jealousy or serve to increase the tension of competition when she finally does make an explosive, emotional appeal to Jacob for children in Gen 30:1-2.<sup>609</sup> It also emphasises her lack of connection with children in general.

Gen 30 is an escalation of the competition between Rachel and Leah, beginning with that fiery exchange between Rachel and Jacob. In panel 1, Rachel looks on from the background, surrounded by her flock, as Leah sits surrounded by her children. Panel 2 is Rachel’s emotional plea to Jacob: “Give me sons, for if you don’t, I am a dead woman!!” Sweat beads drip off Jacob’s face as he faces Rachel’s anguish, but instead of drawing her in an angry manner, Crumb has depicted Rachel as someone who is begging Jacob for her own family. This reflects Teubal’s reading of the narrative. Crumb is showing Rachel desperately confronting her husband because she requires her own heir to continue her lineage, as discussed above: it is Rachel complying with the Code of Hammurabi, while requiring an heir to protect her matrilineal traditions.

Crumb has used his own translation of Gen 30:2: Jacob angrily replies to Rachel, “So, then, it’s *me*, not God, who has denied you fruit of the womb!?” His clarification of the text carries the same tone and meaning of Alter, the KJV and the JPS, but it is more conversational. Partnered with the image of Jacob who is incensed with rage (demonstrated by the

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<sup>605</sup> The Hebrew in this passage comes from the root נָאָץ, which means “hate”. It appears several times throughout Genesis, including in relation to Rebekah (Gen 24:60), in a speech by Leah (Gen 29:33), and in relation to Joseph (Gen 37:4, 37:5 and 37:8).

<sup>606</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 155.

<sup>607</sup> See the case study on Genesis 16:1-6, in this chapter.

<sup>608</sup> Crumb’s pleasure in translations of Hebrew names which reflect certain qualities is evident, as his belief that it is important for the reader to understand the Hebraic translation, which will improve their reading of the story.

<sup>609</sup> See panels 2 and 3 in Fig. 5.8.

incorporation of exclaiming marks protruding from his head) shouting at Rachel who hangs her head in shame, or possibly in submission to the truth her husband speaks, the image is animated and expressive. Moreover, the panel and the text demonstrate the tension between Rachel's matriarchal traditions and Jacob's patriarchal traditions, through the lens of Teubal's theories: Jacob's reminder that his God is responsible for Rachel's ability to bear children is a reminder that Rachel's traditions are not the norm. This is reflected in her submission to Jacob's speech.

The second page of Gen 30 is a return to a 9-panel grid pattern which lends the narrative the illusion of pace. The first six panels are a play-by-play report of the competition between Rachel and Leah: 1) Rachel presents her maid, Bilhah to Jacob,<sup>610</sup> 2) Bilhah bears a son named Dan, who Rachel bears aloft triumphantly, 3) Bilhah conceives again, presenting Rachel with a son named Naphtali,<sup>611</sup> 4) Leah, seeing the success of Bilhah on behalf of Rachel, presents her maid Zilpah to Jacob "as a wife", 5) Zilpah bears a son named Gad, and 6) Zilpah bears a second on behalf of Leah, named Asher. The text does not tell us how long has passed or whether Bilhah and Zilpah's pregnancies overlapped but logically a minimum of three years has passed in those six panels. This fast-paced narrative is a nod to Crumb's reading of the scenes as "bedroom-comedy relief" where the two handmaids are "dragged into the situation"<sup>612</sup> in order to see how many children each wife can get. By pacing through these scenes, Crumb is denigrating Leah and Rachel's desires for motherhood especially when they are read against the careful and thoughtful renderings of Sarah and Rebekah's quests for motherhood.

The competition continues but slows in the final three panels of this page which correlate with Gen 30:14-15a, the episode of the mandrakes. In many ways, the culmination of the competition is displayed in these panels, where the emotions of Rachel and Leah take central position. Though they are sitting together which indicates they still have some sort of a relationship, Leah's face is haughty, contrasting with Rachel's shame of having "taken away" Leah's husband, and Crumb shows no sisterly love between the pair.

The final panels of this competition, panels 13-18 are of Leah bearing a further two sons and a daughter to Jacob after bartering with Rachel for the use of her mandrakes. Jacob and Leah are pictured together in a darkened room, emphasising the lack of love/connection between

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<sup>610</sup> Rachel's speech in this panel is like Sarah's in Gen 16:2; both indicate that *their* houses will be built up through *their* handmaids (emphasis mine).

<sup>611</sup> Rachel's speech here is solely concerned with the fact she has "grappled" and "wrestled" with her sister and has "won out". There is no mention of her new son in her speech.

<sup>612</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapters 29 and 30, *Genesis Illustrated*.

them. The competition ends with Rachel finally bearing a child of her own after “God remembered Rachel”. Her son is Joseph, who will inherit the role of patriarch from his father, and whose story constitutes most of the remaining chapters in Genesis, save for Gen 38.

### Genesis 35:16-18<sup>613</sup>

Three panels are given over to the final twist in Rachel’s narrative, and these panels conclude both her desire for children and the end of her life. The first is of an aged Rachel lying on her back, clutching the shoulders of a midwife who stands before her. The angle of Rachel’s vision, looking up at the midwife is a gentle reminder that even the most powerful of people must rely on the expertise and knowledge of others in times of discomfort and pain. The midwife assumes a position of authority in her posture and gesture over Rachel, and this is reiterated in the second panel which is of the midwife looking down upon Rachel. Rachel’s expression contrasts with the midwife; the latter smiles and looks healthy with a radiant backlight crowning her face, but the former appears afraid and distressed. Rachel’s face is in darkness, which is perhaps an acknowledgment by Crumb of what is about to happen. In the third panel, the fear and distress has disappeared from Rachel’s face as she cradles her new-born son and the visibly emotional midwife looks down at the scene, touching Rachel’s arm.

The final panel is headed by the text: “And it came to pass as her life ran out, for she was dying, that she called his name Ben-Oni.” Crumb explains that the name Ben-Oni means either “Son of my Suffering” or “Son of my Strength” in Hebrew. I am not clear where he derives this from, as both Alter and Sarna suggest the name is translated as “son of sorrow” or “son of vigour”. This insertion may have come from his friend who helped him with translation issues,<sup>614</sup> or it may be his own clarification of the text. I do find it telling, however, that Crumb has divided Gen 30:18 into two, leaving out the latter half of the verse in which Jacob changes his son’s name from Ben-Oni to Benjamin. Because this panel is the last on the right-hand page, the reader does not know this happens until they turn the page; therefore, Rachel is given the last word as it were, before her death. The reader must turn the page to continue the story which begins with the renaming on Ben-Oni. Turning the page for a fresh start is given literal meaning.

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<sup>613</sup> See Fig. 5.9, appendix B.

<sup>614</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

Crumb's artistic decisions in these three difficult panels are to present a comforting experience for the reader as they experience Rachel's death in childbirth. This is a potentially challenging narrative for most readers because of its content. By having only Rachel and a midwife present, the scene is intimate and private. By blacking out the background, firstly by obscuring any background by the dark folds of the tent, and then by having no features at all, Crumb is emphasising the privacy of the scene but also ensuring focus remains on the two women. Lastly, by framing the scenes to show only parts of the bodies, the reader is prevented from witnessing the whole private scene.

There is no visual reference to the previous narrative of competition between Rachel and her sister. However, the text does suggest a connection. The midwife's exclamation that "Fear not, for this one, too is a son for you!!" (35:17) is a textual reference to Rachel's plea when Joseph was born, that he would not be her only biological child (see 30:24). Thus, these panels refer the reader back to the end of the motherhood narratives between Gen 29:31-30:24. The fact that Crumb did not visually encode the panels of Rachel's birth to the previous motherhood narrative is probably due to his desire to produce a "straightforward illustration job".

### Contextualising Crumb's remediation of Gen 29:31-30:24, and Gen 35:16-18 in biblical scholarship

Crumb focuses on the element of competition between the two sisters in his rendering of Gen 29:31-30:24, setting up this angle in his illustrations for Gen 29:1-30. As a result, his narrative is reflective of his reading of the scene as "bedroom-comedy relief".<sup>615</sup> As noted above, Crumb also centres the story around Jacob, arguing that the narrative of competition is about how many sons each wife can provide for their husband (including the children born of their handmaids). This narrative is not part of Teubal's argument, who instead suggests that Rachel and Leah were not competitive; Rachel chose to remain childless during that time, choosing also to conceive later in life because, Teubal attests she was of the priestess tradition, akin to Sarah and Rebekah before her.<sup>616</sup> However, this does not explain why Rachel confronts Jacob demanding children or she will die. The biblical text does not support Teubal's theory that Rachel was venerated as a priestess, and nor does it suggest, as Teubal

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<sup>615</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapters 29 and 30, *Genesis Illustrated*.

<sup>616</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 140.

does, that that Rachel wanted a child to build up the future of her house rather than to be inheritor to Jacob's estate and blessing.

The inclusion of the scene with the mandrakes being traded for a night with Jacob also potentially refutes the claim that Rachel was in control of when she might become pregnant, because mandrakes supposedly boosted chances of conception, indicating Rachel is willing to try anything to become pregnant. Indeed, prior to the mandrake scene, she offers the use of her handmaiden to Jacob in a speech which harks back to Sarah offering Hagar to Abraham, so that her house might be built up through her handmaid (30:3).

I argue that Crumb's remediation moves away from the influence of Teubal in these passages. As noted above, his illustrations are concerned with visually separating Rachel from Leah emphasising both the physical and emotional differences between them, as well as the biological abilities. This emphasis of Crumb's explains why Jacob preferred Rachel to Leah, and ultimately, explains why Joseph, Rachel's long-awaited son, inherits the title of patriarch over his eleven brothers. Crumb's version also highlights the competitive narrative of Gen 29:31-30:24 which Teubal barely focuses on. It also fails to present Rachel as associated with a priestess tradition as suggested by Teubal. While her beauty and her emotions mark her as different to Leah, there is no suggestion she enjoys higher status to either Leah or Jacob.

Comparison of beauty and emotional state between Rachel and Leah is one of the main focus points of the narrative for Sarna. He divides the verses into three sections: the birth of Leah's four sons (Gen 29:31-35), the four sons of the handmaids (Gen 30:1-13), and the four children of Leah and Rachel (Gen 30:14-24). Each section is characterised by the opposing physical and emotional states of either Rachel or Leah. For example, the first section concerns the motif of Leah's unhappiness that she is "unloved" by Jacob, pitching her against Rachel who is "beloved". However, Leah is fertile in these passages which contrasts her with the infertile Rachel, and Sarna argues that Leah's fertility is a gift from God to console her for being the lesser-loved of Jacob's wives.<sup>617</sup>

The motif of the second section, Sarna argues, is Rachel's unhappiness at being infertile/childless. This juxtaposes Rachel with Leah, highlighting the argument supported by Phyllis Trible, Athalya Brenner-Idan and Phyllis Silverman Kramer that the pair of women are each other's opposites, and that when brought together they make a whole,

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<sup>617</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 206.

perfectly working woman.<sup>618</sup> The third section of the verses, argues Sarna, is characterised by these two previous motifs, and the way they merge and interact with each other.<sup>619</sup>

The contrast between Leah's state of being unloved yet fertile juxtaposed against Rachel's state of being loved and infertile across the verses is the basis for competition between the sisters. However, unlike Crumb's reading of the narrative as "bedroom-comedy relief", Sarna's exposition of the text expresses the underlying emotional and physical tension which exacerbates the idea of competition between the two women. The narrator effectively pits the sisters against each other in a competition to gain the affection of a man who does not even figure in the story as a central character at this point.

Alter does not comment upon the theme of competition between the sisters, but instead focuses upon Jacob's role in the narrative. He suggests that the scene of the mandrake trade implies that Jacob did not cohabit with Leah for a while. This is a potential reason why Leah had stopped bearing children earlier in the text (see Gen 30:9) and explains why Leah is willing to trade mandrakes so that he will sleep with her again.<sup>620</sup> Further, Alter notes that in the text, Jacob is a passive character who appears to resign himself to complying with Rachel's instructions concerning sleeping with her handmaid, and also when he is instructed to sleep with Leah again.<sup>621</sup>

Jacob's passivity aligns him with Crumb's versions of Abraham and Isaac earlier in Genesis. In a way, implying the patriarchs are passive and undemanding is Crumb's way of making the matriarchs appear to be powerful and in control; balance between the sexes must imply if they are not equal, that one holds more authority than the other. I argue that Alter's reading of Jacob's compliance is represented in Crumb's illustrations both by the fact Jacob barely appears in the panels of these verses, and then conversely by the fact the panels are concerned mostly with the two sisters.

Competition between the sisters is at the forefront of Athalya Brenner-Idan's exposition on the text in *Israelite Women*. More than just competition for Jacob's love, the sisters are competing specifically with regards to how many male heirs they can provide to Jacob.<sup>622</sup>

It is possible to achieve personal security only through an abundance of sons. Love is secondary to personal need which goes far and beyond a 'natural' maternal urge, and which is never wholly fulfilled. Thus, despite the act they are sisters, they cannot

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<sup>618</sup> See: Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 10; Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 92, and Kramer, "Biblical Women", 218-232.

<sup>619</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 209.

<sup>620</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 157.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

<sup>622</sup> Brenner-Idan, *Israelite Women*, 94.

develop any kind of mutual intimacy, and their whole being is wrapped up in the conflict.<sup>623</sup>

The birth of multiple sons is attributed to the founding of the twelve tribes of Israel - literally the foundation of Israel. In that respect, Rachel, Leah and their competition to produce sons is of the utmost importance for the foundation and development of Israel.<sup>624</sup> Fischer suggests that the story of Rachel and Leah could be read from the perspective that the women were not meant to be read as “childbearing machines”, but as the origins of the twelve tribes.<sup>625</sup> However, that their biological ability to conceive and give birth to children is linked to their function as mothers in the text, suggests that their function of “childbearing machines” is ultimately the same as their function of the mothers of Israel: one would not occur without the other.

Rachel’s death and the birth of her second son Ben-Oni, does not figure often in modern scholarship either. Alter focuses on the renaming of Benjamin, only noting the poetic nature of Rachel’s death after the birth of a child she so desperately wanted.<sup>626</sup> Sarna suggests that the midwife’s comforting speech is specifically to remind Rachel she wished for a second child and should take comfort in the fact God listened and provided.<sup>627</sup> Teubal only mentions Rachel’s death in relation to Jacob blessing Ephraim over Manasseh in the future, which, Teubal argues, indicates his compliance with a non-patriarchal order.<sup>628</sup> Of the other studies I have made use of throughout these case studies, none of them note anything of significance in relation to Rachel’s death or the birth of Ben-Oni; that Crumb has paid careful attention to it is almost an anomaly in the reception of Genesis.

To summarise, despite Rachel and Leah playing pivotal roles in the foundation of Israel, I would argue that their roles in the narrative do not reflect their importance. Similar to the story of Rebekah, most scholarship is less concerned with the problems of fertility/infertility than the ensuing competition between Rachel and Leah to provide progeny to Jacob. In this respect, Rachel and Leah, and their two handmaids, are treated as vessels for the continuation of Jacob’s lineage. Their role of mothers is important, but it is overshadowed by their tension-filled relationship to each other.

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<sup>623</sup> Brenner-Idan, *Israelite Women*, 94.

<sup>624</sup> Sarna points out that although the sons of Jacob are attributed to the twelve tribes of Israel, there is nothing in the text to suggest this will happen in the future, and so from a literary perspective, the reader knows nothing of the connection in these verses. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 206.

<sup>625</sup> Fischer, “On the Significance of the “Women Texts””, 281.

<sup>626</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 198.

<sup>627</sup> Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 243.

<sup>628</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 68.

The inclusion of the handmaids in the saga is almost completely overridden by the characters of Rachel and Leah. Unlike Sarah's relationship with Hagar where the reader is given insight into Hagar's character, role and emotional responses, there is no such information provided in the stories of Bilhah and Zilpah. This also highlights the characters of Rachel and Leah because any success of their handmaids is their success, because the text gives no voice to the handmaids. The main discussion concerning the handmaids in most of the literature I have accessed, is given over to parsing of Gen 30:3, "that she may bear on my knees," with most scholars arguing that this act signifies legitimation and proper procedure in terms of adoption of children, normally from surrogate mothers.<sup>629</sup>

Most of the studies which have aided my reading of these verses is concerned with discussing the element of competition between Rachel and Leah, and to that end, the following points are generally agreed upon: 1) Rachel and Leah are to be considered as two opposites which, when combined, create a whole woman, similar to the pairing of Sarah with Hagar which I discussed previously, 2) Jacob, whose love and attention is apparently being fought over, is not central to the scenes and is rather a passive character which aligns him with Abraham and Isaac before him, and 3) the purpose of these narratives is to lay the foundations for the twelve tribes Israel, who are named after each of Jacob's sons.

Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* corroborates for the most part with these points, especially in terms of his choice to visually leave Jacob out of any scenes pertaining to the competitive women (except for when he is told he will go to bed with Leah, after the swap for mandrakes in Gen 30:16) and in his decision to caption the birth of each child with an explanatory note, translating their names so that the reader might link them with the future tribes of Israel. Mostly though, Crumb excels in depicting Rachel and Leah as two opposites who, when brought together, make a whole woman. Crumb's depiction of Rachel is so contrasted to that of Leah in terms of each sister's facial features and expressions, the way Crumb depicts Jacob thinking of each sister in Gen 29:17,<sup>630</sup> and the way in which each sister deals with childlessness.

## Summary

The procreative role of each sister is the main motif of these verses, but Crumb has chosen to demonstrate their emotionality which is not apparent in the texts. In the same way that he

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<sup>629</sup> See, for example: Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary*, 209; Alter, *Genesis*, 159; Gruber, "Genesis 21.12", 174; Kramer, "Biblical Women", 223.

<sup>630</sup> See Fig. 5.7, panels 15 and 16.



visualised emotional content in the stories relating to Sarah and Rebekah, his illustrations to Gen 29:31-30:24, and to Gen 35:16-18 fill in the gaps, as it were, in terms of expressivity and character emotion which is absent from the text. What is missing from this reading, is a depiction of the sisters as dominant, controlling women. They are not presented in the same light as Sarah and Rebekah were, and this is largely due to the absence of Jacob during these scenes. While it is implied that the sisters are competing for his love in the text, Crumb's approach to this story as "bedroom-comedy relief" suggests he did not read the text in this way, and as such, emotional connection between Jacob and his wives was also absent.

As previously noted, Crumb's depiction of Rachel and Leah, and the motif of motherhood contrasts with the way in which he depicted the narratives of Sarah and Rebekah. Crumb has denigrated Leah and Rachel's desire to have children to an often puzzling, comedic scene of what ends up being two bitter women competing with each other for a prize which neither of them have control over – Jacob's affection is his own emotion to control. Jacob's absence from the scenes should potentially mean the reader does not equate his character with such an important role; however, Crumb negates that idea in his commentary to these chapters which suggests that he reads the role of Jacob as central to the competition. It is a dichotomous presentation of the narrative.

Furthermore, Crumb's presentation of Sarah and Rebekah as high-priestesses in the light of Teubal's theories is not carried forward into this story. Rachel is not presented in the role of priestess who cannot have children until her duties have been fulfilled. She does not offer her maid to Jacob in the same way that Sarah offered Hagar to Abraham and neither the text nor the artwork accompanying these panels calls back to these connections with Sarah's narrative. In Teubal's argument Rachel is the one responsible for the religious obligations within her family, because she is above Leah in status. Hence, Rachel is the one who steals the teraphim from her father's house. Further, Teubal infers from the text that Rachel is more concerned about building her own lineage by conceiving, or offering her maid to Jacob, rather than providing Jacob with an heir. The fact that Jacob has children by Leah already is deemed unimportant, because Rachel requires her own heir. Like Sarah, Teubal argues that Rachel is complying with the same rule in the Code of Hammurabi in reference to fulfilling priestess duties before bearing a child, and finally, Teubal notes these rules applied only to women of "a certain religious rank in Babylonia."<sup>631</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*, 52.

None of this is evident in Crumb's rendering of the scenes. Instead, his presentation of the motherhood narratives of Rachel and Leah concentrates on the element of competition. The panels are a blow-by-blow account of consecutive births: Rachel and Leah are the opposite of each other, in terms of how they look, their fertility and their actions. The story lacks the nuance and careful considered artistic and textual choices which were employed in Sarah and Rebekah's stories, respectively. To that end, I argue that Crumb has aligned himself with scholarly input on these verses and deemed them as less important than Sarah or Rebekah. Certainly, his commentary suggests this is the case.

## Summary: Case Studies

The purpose of these case studies is to firstly demonstrate how Crumb utilised the tools and resources of comics to remediate Genesis, revealing how these tools impacted the narrative. Secondly, by focusing on themes of motherhood in the matriarchal narratives, the case studies are conducted through the lens of gender studies in order to reveal how Crumb presents the matriarchs in terms of their role and character within the narratives. In this section, I present a summary of my findings in relation to the case studies, arguing that Crumb has presented the stories of the matriarchs in a pro-feminist light which is reflective of the influence of Teubal, Crumb's opinions on women, men and power structures, and his readings of non-traditional approaches to the biblical text.

The case studies involved applying a comics-based methodology to certain passages of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, in order to show the effects that the various tools and resources of comic books have upon remediations of text into text-image. The analysis of my findings in these case studies suggest that, as stated above, Crumb has presented a pro-feminist reading of each matriarch in Genesis, but this was often accomplished with the use of different visual tools for each character. As a result, the women are presented in a pro-feminist light, but each with different characteristics which associate them with such a perspective. Some of Crumb's perspectives are more successful than others, in this respect. In terms of presenting a pro-feminist perspective, by this I mean he has presented his view of what the matriarchs as if they are a feminist version but without explicitly portraying them as equals to their male partners, because they cannot be considered equal in a patriarchal setting.

The case studies of Sarah are the most successful at reflecting a dominant, strong woman who can be considered as equally important as her husband. Visually speaking, Sarah is presented as the leading figure in the narratives of fertility in Genesis 16:1-6, 18:1-15 and 21:1-21. She is given more space in panels, and compositional decisions position her at the forefront of the scenes. Rhetorical use of the narrative dominant pattern of panels in these verses reflect the status of her character over others; for example, Sarah is either given quick, successive panels which heighten the expressivity and tension in her story, or she is given larger panels in order to allow both her and the reader to reflect upon her situation for a longer duration. Thus, the grid pattern presents Sarah as emotional yet active in driving the narrative forward.

In his illustrations to Gen 11:29-30,<sup>632</sup> Crumb's depiction of Sarah presents her as a woman emotionally affected by her infertility. Her juxtaposition against the character of Milcah (a new mother, in Crumb's version) in a panel which is set against the divine promise that Abraham will have countless descendants, is a visual trick meant to emphasise the irony of Sarah's situation to the reader. However, in the illustrations to Gen 16:1-6,<sup>633</sup> the young, emotional Sarah has developed into a shrewd, controlling woman who presides over the union of Abraham and Hagar, and dominates the panels in which Hagar is banished to the wilderness after falling pregnant. Abraham's passivity is highlighted either by his diminished profile or his absence from the scenes.

Similarly, in the illustrations to Gen 18:1-15,<sup>634</sup> even though Abraham dominates the narrative and assumes a central position in dialogue between himself and the divine messengers, it is Sarah's response to the proclamation she will bear a child that draws the reader's attention. Abraham must always share panel space with other characters, but in this case study alone, Sarah is given three of the panels to herself. Pictorial space is equal to character dominance, in most instances. Finally, in the illustrations to Gen 21:1-12,<sup>635</sup> Sarah's control over Abraham is demonstrated again in the panels where she orders the patriarch to banish Hagar and Ishmael from the family. In the panels, Sarah's body, language and gestures dominate the scenes, and Abraham is passively carrying out his wife's orders. God's reassurance that following Sarah's orders is the correct thing to do further propagates her status as a woman in charge of her family.

Crumb has employed the tools of comics to present this image of Sarah. In particular, he has utilised the periphery to contextualise the narrative (for example, placing the story of Sarah's infertility against images of Abraham's family in Gen 11:29-10), the gutter to allow the reader space to process the text-image narrative (for example, the image of Hagar's pregnancy which is depicted straight after the consummation scene between Hagar and Abraham in Gen 16:4), the conventional, narrative-dominant pattern of the panels (across the text-image narrative) and tressage between panels (for example the recurrence of the rounded jug in scenes pertaining to fertility and childbearing verses).

Rebekah's narrative receives similar treatment by Crumb. While Rebekah's character does not display the same range of emotions which Sarah does, in the narrative she does exercise power and control over her destiny as wife to Isaac and mother to Jacob and Esau. For

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<sup>632</sup> See Fig. 5.1, appendix B.

<sup>633</sup> See Fig. 5.2, appendix B.

<sup>634</sup> See Fig. 5.3, appendix B.

<sup>635</sup> See Fig. 5.4, appendix B.

example, in the illustrations which accompany Gen 24:15-67,<sup>636</sup> Rebekah is first drawn as a young, beautiful woman who is eager to provide hospitality to Abraham's servant. As the narrative develops, Rebekah's character gradually assumes more dominance – physically and textually which situates her in the status which Teubal suggests.

In Gen 25:19-28,<sup>637</sup> this is developed so that Rebekah becomes the central character and Isaac assumes a secondary role. For example, in the motherhood narrative Isaac is seen only in his intercessionary prayer on behalf of Rebekah, and then after the birth of his children. It is Rebekah who physical and textually dominates the scenes of pregnancy, of seeking advice from God, and of giving birth. One might assume that Isaac would not have much to do with the images of Rebekah pregnant or giving birth, but the fact he is not even present in the background, and it is Rebekah's body which dominates the space in the panels is noteworthy. Similar to Sarah and Abraham, Rebekah's character is strengthened by Crumb's perception of the passivity of Isaac.

Crumb uses comics tools to great effect in order to depict Rebekah and Isaac in this perspective. In particular, the periphrase is used to highlight the issue of fertility against Isaac's need for progeny to fulfil God's covenant. Juxtaposing the panel of Isaac's prayer to God against the funerary pyre of Ishmael, which is preceded by panels of Ishmael's descendants, is specifically designed to draw attention to the issue of lineage for the patriarch. In terms of fertility, the use of visual codes signifies Rebekah's future. For example, similar to Sarah, Rebekah is often depicted with a rounded vase and at one point, Rebekah holds against her stomach, foreshadowing her becoming a mother. Compositional tools such as framing and diagonals also combine to present Rebekah as the central character in the narrative.

I argue that while the narratives of Sarah and Rebekah are carefully considered in terms of perspective and approach, less attention is paid to the narrative of Rachel and Leah. This is in part due to Crumb's description of the text as "bedroom-comedy relief."<sup>638</sup> Crumb finds the narrative between the sisters to be a sort of sibling rivalry-based contest to see who can provide the most children for Jacob. As such, the situation of Rachel's infertility is not awarded the same gravitas as Sarah and Rebekah. Further, while the story of Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham was depicted to be fraught with emotion and tension, the same trope in Gen 30:1-24 paints the handmaidens of Rachel and Leah as voiceless women who are treated as vessels to be filled with children. Crumb pays them as little attention as the text allows.

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<sup>636</sup> See Fig. 5.5, appendix B.

<sup>637</sup> See Fig. 5.6, appendix B.

<sup>638</sup> Crumb, commentary to chapters 29 and 30, *Genesis, Illustrated*.

However, Crumb's approach to Genesis as a "straightforward illustration job"<sup>639</sup> certainly means he cannot grant more pictorial space to these scenes than the text allows, so in that sense, his depiction of these scenes cannot offer the same care and precision that Sarah and Rebekah's stories do. Compared to Sarah and Rebekah, Crumb's depictions of Rachel and Leah is demeaning because it devalues the importance of Rachel as a matriarch and certainly casts her issues with infertility in a lesser light than Sarah. Even the display of emotion, which is where Crumb usually excels in this remediation is not as carefully constructed as it is in the earlier case studies. It appears that Crumb does not regard Rachel and Leah's narrative in the same respect as Sarah or Rebekah.

While I argue that Crumb has presented the matriarchs as dominant characters who propel the narrative forward, which often goes against traditional readings of the matriarchal narratives, he does present both men and women as belonging to a binary construct of gender. His focus on the biological function of women being fertile and giving birth to children is always positioned against the need for men to have descendants in order to fulfil God's covenantal promises. The focus of visual interpretations of these passages is not on sexual encounters between men and women (which are mostly toned down and inoffensive) but on the women fulfilling her womanly role of mother so that the man may fulfil his manly role of father to the child and in Abraham's case, to the nations. There is no space in Crumb's remediation for a system of gender outside of a binary construct. Although Crumb is comfortable enough to demonstrate Teubal's influence of powerful matriarchs, he still remediates the text from a patriarchal point of view – his own male-centric view upon a woman's idea of biblical women.

In summary, Crumb has presented the matriarchs of Genesis as strong, dominant and controlling characters who command the direction and pacing of the narrative. His use of comics' tools and resources ensures that textually, he remains faithful to the text, but visually, his interpretation often questions or contradicts traditional readings of the text. His characters operate with a binary system of gender but are more equally weighted in terms of the balance of power between the patriarch and matriarchs than most scholarly readings of the text would suggest.

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<sup>639</sup> Crumb, "Introduction" in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined two research questions which I intended to explore by critiquing R. Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* through a comics-theoretical framework. The first question was: how does Crumb utilise the tools and resources of comics to remediate the book of Genesis? For example, what artistic and textual choices did Crumb make in terms of presenting characters, and how has this impacted the presentation of sacred text to the modern reader?

In order to approach this question, I focused on four central characters – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah – to highlight how Crumb approached the task. This led to the second question, which was: how does Crumb present the matriarchs of Genesis in terms of their roles and functions within the narrative? I was particularly interested in this question because of the alleged influence of Savina J. Teubal's book, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* on Crumb's reading of Genesis.

I used the approach of analysing a biblically-based text-image narrative through a comics framework in order to evaluate what kind of interpretation or theology emerges from the text. This is a point taken from Alderman and Alderman in their theory of interpretive points in which they argue that re-presenting biblical text in comic books allows for the space for different readings to emerge.<sup>640</sup>

In chapter 2, I identified the central three points in Alderman and Alderman's theory of interpretive points as points which this thesis would consider. The first point cannot be discussed because the original author/authors of Genesis remain unknown and their motivation or intent cannot be clearly identified. The fifth point of interpretation involves the reader of the text, and as I noted in chapter 2, I am limited to my own reading of Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* and this thesis does not address the question of reader reception more widely. The central three points, however, have shaped my approach to this thesis and I address them now in the light of the findings from my case studies. The three points for consideration, taken from Alderman and Alderman but modelled upon Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* are:

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<sup>640</sup> Alderman and Alderman, "Graphically Depicted", 36.

1. How does Crumb come to an understanding of Genesis through his combined reading of various sources;
2. How does Crumb remediate his reading of Genesis into a comic utilising comic book tools and resources; and
3. What space does *Genesis, Illustrated* inhabit or create for its readers, and ultimately, what does this mean for biblical comics in general?

Regarding the first point, I demonstrated throughout chapters 3 and 4 that Crumb used several sources to varying degrees to influence his remediation of Genesis. Crumb acknowledges the use of multiple sources in the introduction to *Genesis, Illustrated* but I have demonstrated where these influences appear throughout his remediations of the matriarchal narratives, both in terms of visual and textual decisions. For example, Crumb uses “slavegirl” to describe Hagar (Gen 21:8-21), as opposed to the KJV’s “bondwoman” or the JPS’ “slavewoman” and his visualisation of Hagar in these scenes corresponds with this description, designating Hagar in the low social status of a slave through the use of composition, framing, angle of vision and iconic correspondence, among other tools. The evidence of multiple sources is clear.

Moreover, the connection between Crumb’s sources, in combination with his own comments on woman in general and the matriarchs specifically, is apparent in his approach to the matriarchal stories. For example, Crumb claims that he portrayed the woman “as they are in the original text”, suggesting that he did not set out to depict the women of Genesis in a specific way, but read their characters as powerful, strong and dominant.<sup>641</sup> He suggests that the women play “key roles in influencing the destiny of “God’s chosen people”. It was matriarchal. The women decided, even though it’s men who are always talking to God.”<sup>642</sup> I argue that this reading of the matriarchs is heavily influenced by Teubal, but also by Crumb’s pro-feminist perspective, a perspective which, Crumb argues, he has held for most of his life.<sup>643</sup> Crumb has reached his understanding of the matriarchal texts through his reading of external sources which have both affected and been affected by Crumb’s own pro-feminist perspective on women in the sacred text and more generally-speaking.

With regards to the second point, I have demonstrated that Crumb utilised several of the tools and resources of comic books to remediate the text of Genesis into a comic book. Moreover, he applied these tools in a manner which drew the reader’s attention to the

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<sup>641</sup> See Appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb.

<sup>642</sup> See appendix A, “Interview with R. Crumb”.

<sup>643</sup> “R. Crumb illustrates the Bible”, NPR.



matriarchs as strong, dominant characters. For example, in the case study of the character of Sarah in Gen 16:1-6, Crumb uses framing and grid pattern to paint Sarah as a character who directs the narrative, and who is in control of the future of her and Abraham's lives. In contrast, Abraham is presented as a passive character who listens to and observes his wife and carries out her orders even if he disagrees. The use of comic book tools continues throughout the matriarchal narratives but is less evident in the case study of Rachel and Leah. This is because Crumb seemingly does not afford the same importance to Rachel and Leah's story as he does to the stories of Sarah and Rebekah. Instead, he sees the competition for motherhood between the sisters as comedic, perhaps viewing it as light relief after the intense and emotional narratives of Sarah and Rebekah.

Crumb's understanding of the matriarchal stories, which he has shaped through his interpretations of Teubal, Alter, the JPS, the KJV and visual sources such as *The Ten Commandments* and *Samson and Delilah*, is evident in his use of certain tools and resources. He understands the matriarchs to hold an elevated position in their society, and a central role in their families. Therefore, his remediation reflects this depiction. However, it does not achieve this through Crumb's textual choices, which, though not a direct translation of any existing version of Genesis, is close enough that it has similar meaning to most versions.

The idea of powerful matriarchs is achieved firstly through the accompanying images, and secondly through Crumb's division of the text. By this, I am suggesting Crumb has shaped the narrative he wants to produce by deciding what text accompanies which image; he is not bound by lectionary divisions. This is a key point in the interpretation of biblical text into comics. Crumb has the artistic freedom to choose how the text is displayed, where it appears in relation to the panels and this affects how the story is received by the reader. For example, as I discussed in my case study of Gen 16:1-6,<sup>644</sup> after Hagar has conceived and looked with contempt upon Sarah, Sarah confronts Abraham, blaming him for Hagar's alleged insolence. The text of Gen 16:5 is split between panels 6 and 7; panel 7 contains only the interjection "Let the Lord judge between you and me!" from Sarah to Abraham. Dividing the text across two panels in this way controls the pacing of the story and the tone of the speech, especially when combined with the image of Sarah angrily exclaiming at a wincing Abraham. It is this control of textual decisions, as well the use of punctuation marks such as interrobangs, combined with Crumb's images, that reveal Crumb's understanding of Genesis. It is

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<sup>644</sup> See appendix B, Fig. 5.2, panels 6 and 7 of Genesis 16.

Crumb's understanding of the tools of comic books which then exposes his interpretation to the reader. Crumb is both interpreter and open to interpretation.<sup>645</sup>

Regarding the third point I have highlighted above, which is modelled upon the fourth point of interpretation in Alderman and Alderman's theory (text 2 in Alderman and Alderman's model), I now consider the broader question of the space that *Genesis, Illustrated* inhabits or creates for its readers. By this, I mean what is *Genesis Illustrated*? Should it be received as an authoritative version of Genesis, or as a commentary upon the biblical text? Should it be read as a comic book without regard for its biblical sources? Where are the points of interpretation in *Genesis, Illustrated*, and how do they potentially affect the text?

Applying comics-based methodology to a remediation of Genesis is one approach which allows different readings or theologies to emerge from the text. Alderman and Alderman suggest that the crux of interpretation lies in point 3 of their model: the author-cum-reader. The text which the author-cum-reader produces is itself an interpretation of the original text. Similar to Bazin's theory of adaptations, Alderman and Alderman suggest that when we read text 2 (in this case, *Genesis, Illustrated*), "[w]hat we are reading is relevant as a text in its own right, but it is also an interpretation of the earlier biblical source material."<sup>646</sup> Bazin argues that instead of considering adaptations as works made out of an original source and therefore of lesser value, literary critics (and by extension the general public) should consider adaptations as a facet of a single work.<sup>647</sup>

That being the case, reading *Genesis, Illustrated* can be approached both as a biblical text and as an exegesis of a biblical text, because it has equal value to, but is distinct from, the biblical text of Genesis. The text within the comic book is directly connected to and is a version of the "original" text of Genesis. However, Crumb's artistic decisions, including his divisions of the text and his punctuation and text-presentation choices, are an exegesis of the material he is remediating. As I noted above, it is in the images that Crumb reveals his understanding of the matriarchs. *Genesis, Illustrated* must be regarded as both a version of biblical text insofar as Crumb has included all fifty chapters of Genesis, and also as an exegesis of the text, inasmuch as Crumb has commented upon the text through his images and textual decisions. In that respect, *Genesis, Illustrated* may be categorised in the same group as biblical commentaries.

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<sup>645</sup> Alderman and Alderman, "Graphically Depicted", 36.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>647</sup> Bazin, *Bazin at work*, 50.

However, while this is the case it must also be remembered that the book was never intended for a religious audience and is not treated as a sacred text, so in that respect, while *Genesis, Illustrated* is a visual commentary and Crumbian translation of the biblical text of Genesis, it is not meant to aid or guide the reader's understanding of the text in the same way that a scholarly or religious commentary might. Rather, Crumb's remediation is from a secular approach and he is more inclined to "let [the text] stand in its own convoluted vagueness" rather than attempt to clarify it.<sup>648</sup>

In this respect, Crumb as the remediator, is performing his role as the writer/artist of a comic book, producing a comic book which is a remediation of sacred text rather than sacred text itself. This leads to questions of authority and authorship, especially in terms of: who has the right to reinterpret text which is deemed to be sacred, and how authoritative are such texts? These questions, though important, are outside of the focus of this thesis and would be better discussed in their own right; issues of authority in biblical comics is an area which requires much more study than it currently receives.

*Genesis, Illustrated*, then, can be considered as a translation and visual commentary of Genesis in the same way as Robert Alter's *Genesis* is a translation and literary commentary on Genesis. This means it is subject to the same criticisms and studies as those biblical materials. However, *Genesis, Illustrated* is also a comic book, which means it is subject to the same criticisms and studies as comic books are. In this thesis, I have demonstrated the difficulties in approaching remediations of biblical text in comic books because of their interdisciplinary nature, but I have also shown how meanings can emerge from biblical comics, precisely because of their interdisciplinary qualities.

Reading biblical comics through the lens of comics theories has highlighted not only the compatibility between the Bible and comics, but has also revealed and celebrated the differences, the areas of conflict and the tension which arises from a partnership between the Bible and comics. It is the fourth point of Alderman and Alderman's theory that allow such varied readings of biblical comics, precisely because text 2 of their model encompasses all influences and sources which have preceded it, but also because text 2 provides us, the reader, with the opportunity to find meaning in both the biblical text and in the visual accompaniments.<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> Bazin, *Bazin at work*, 50.

<sup>649</sup> Alderman and Alderman, "Graphically Depicted", 22.

It is this relationship between text and image which can both clarify and obscure the text for the reader. Crumb has repeatedly stated that he approached his remediation of Genesis as a “straightforward illustration job”,<sup>650</sup> never intending to provide guidance or an absolute perspective of the biblical text. I argue that Crumb did not approach this job as a straightforward illustrating task, and that his comments in this capacity reveal his intention behind the job.

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that Crumb’s statement that he “faithfully reproduced every word of the original text” which is partnered by a list of sources, was a conscious comment by Crumb about how he views biblical Scripture as a whole. Juxtaposing the term “original text” with a list of sources was Crumb’s way of drawing the reader’s attention to the history of the Bible, in terms of its many sources, writers, dates and multiple receptions, suggesting that Crumb does not believe there is a single, authoritative, original source of the Bible, instead acknowledging that it is a text which is composed from an amalgamation of ancient tribal stories, myths, history and politics. His decision to say he used the “original text” is subversive; Crumb is playfully alluding to the fact that his version of Genesis is another layer to the history of biblical text.

In the same way, I now argue that Crumb’s claim that he produced a “straightforward illustration job” is subversive. No such approach to the remediation of a text can exist; each minute visual and textual decision or detail combines to present a particular perspective on the text. In the case of the matriarchs of *Genesis, Illustrated*, the perspective Crumb presents is one of a matriarchal society which is competing against a strengthening patriarchal society. His remediation presents the women as strong and dominant, in control of the narrative. The text of Genesis alone does not support this perspective, but Crumb’s accompanying images convey such a perspective to the reader.

Crumb’s *Genesis, Illustrated* is another layer to the history and reception of the Bible, and that means Crumb has taken the role of author and editor of the literary text. He has become part of the tradition of interpreting and commenting upon biblical text which he believes shaped the text in the first instance: “I believe it is the words of men [...] its power derived from its having been a collective endeavour that evolved and condensed over many generations”.<sup>651</sup> He has subverted the reader’s expectation that his remediation is straightforward, by alluding to the often tangled and complicated history of interpreting and reading the Bible. Furthermore, his decision to present the matriarchal narratives in a pro-

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<sup>650</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

<sup>651</sup> Crumb, “Introduction” in *Genesis, Illustrated*.

feminist light is a reflection of his own beliefs rather than of the text itself, which further supports the idea that Crumb knew he was not presenting a straightforward illustration job to the reader. Crumb has produced a text which builds upon both modern and contemporary readings of the Bible, and his own reception of the text.

Crumb's presentation of the matriarchs not only confirms this, but also subverts the reader's expectations of Crumb as an author. Accusations of misogyny and sexism have followed Crumb throughout his career, but do not stand when the reader is presented with a pro-feminist matriarchal narrative which otherwise does not appear in the biblical text. The result is a unique version of Genesis which both speaks to a modern readership, while situating itself in the historical tradition of illustrating Bibles. It is this dual nature of biblical comics which allows them to reinvigorate ancient text, and re-present it in a fresh, contemporary way which appeals to modern readers.

### Implications for further study

In the introduction to this thesis, I noted that very little study has been carried out on the impact of remediating ancient, sacred texts into comic books. While my research intends to go some way towards filling that desideratum, I recognise that limiting myself to an analysis and interpretation of R. Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* is only a small part of what is potentially a large field of research. Further, focusing on case studies of the matriarchs limits the impact of my research even further. In short, I could have chosen a different subject matter such as the characterisation of God or the flood narrative, I could have approached the study from a different perspective, for example, a narratological approach to reading the Bible through comic art, or I could have produced a comparative study using other biblical comics. There were, and are, many other possibilities to studying R. Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, as well as the hundreds of other biblical comics which exist, both in the English language as well as in other languages.

These potential areas of study, and the many more which exist, can be the subject for continued investigation. My research in this thesis should be regarded as a framework which supports further study, both of R. Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated*, and of other biblical comics. By reading biblical comics through a framework of comics-based theory instead of through biblical criticisms or literary approaches, I have demonstrated that new interpretations of biblical text emerge, and the ancient text is regenerated for a new audience. This carries with

it its own implications and consequences which can be both helpful and contentious, but these new interpretations in biblical comics must be considered as meaningful as other critical readings.

Crumb's *Genesis, Illustrated* is not just a cultural product; it should also be considered a marker in biblical reception. The history of biblical interpretation and reception has shaped Western culture profoundly, and ignorance of the Bible leads to ignorance of significant cultural products, from Renaissance art to Victorian novels. Crumb's work in *Genesis, Illustrated* and other biblical comics which currently exist and are in the process of being created continue the work of interpretation and reception. *Genesis, Illustrated* and biblical comics in general are vital to explore the boundary crossings between ancient script and modern popular culture, regenerating what is, after all, a very old text indeed.

## Appendix A: Interview with R. Crumb

Transcript of interview with R. Crumb, conducted over e-mail between February-June 2016.

*ZDL: In several of the interviews given by you around the time of the release of the book, you mention that you studied a lot of texts and took your time to try and understand the text. You mention that you accessed scholarly works on Genesis, as well as studying Ancient Near Eastern literature. Aside from Robert Alter, Savina Teubal and the JPS Commentary on Genesis, can you expand as to which works you really enjoyed, and which might have influenced your approach?*

RC: For a long time before I started Genesis I was curious about ancient Mesopotamia going back to Sumeria and up through Babylon and Assyria. Turned out it was not so easy to find in-depth, detailed descriptions of these ancient societies. Accounts were sketchy, speculative.... I didn't delve as deeply as a serious scholar would. I suspect you'd have to go into the British National Library or someplace like that and pore through old 19th Century tomes. Those early researchers did some of the most extensive and detailed studies on many subjects. There's much more information on Ancient Egypt, it seems to me. Not sure why that is. Perhaps the Egyptian culture is just more attractive, more appealing than Mesopotamia. The artefacts of Egypt have a grace and beauty, a magical, mystical quality, while the visual remnants of Sumer, Babylon and Assyria are clunky, sometimes ugly, scary even. There's more lurid depictions of violence, especially with the Assyrians. Those Assyrian bas reliefs in the British Museum depict an incredible level of mayhem and slaughter, mass beheadings and the grinding up of beheaded corpses between giant millstones, stuff like that.

Perhaps also, there's just more of the ancient Egyptian artefacts, maybe because they were better preserved in the cool, dry tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Egypt was perhaps also more stable than Ancient Mesopotamia, where kingdoms and city states rose and fell constantly. Still, there are all those cuneiform tablets in Mesopotamia, hundreds of thousands of them. And they continue to find more of them still today, even with all the instability and destruction going on in the region in our own time. Ancient myths and lists of laws have come down to us intact on these clay tablets. The oldest ones, from Sumeria,

are a tough challenge to decipher. The scholars are still working on it. The scholarly treatises on this stuff are very dry. I think there are probably good scholarly works on the subject in German that have never been translated into English. The Germans seem to have been more interested in Ancient Mesopotamia than anybody else. They did a lot of the early archaeological work in Iraq, in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

*ZDL: Speaking of Teubal, I am absolutely fascinated that you were influenced by her work. What was it about her thesis which spoke to you, specifically concerning the idea of Priestesses?*

RC: The thing about Teubal is, she did some serious homework to come with what she did, and applied a woman's perspective to this subject which, previous to her, had been studied only by men. Her thesis makes total sense, and to my knowledge no one has come forth to refute it or even debate it. What was so exciting was that so many of the stories in Genesis started to make much more sense after reading "Sarah the Priestess." I read it over and over, soaking it up, while I was working on the book. I was amazed to realize how all — virtually all — the male scholars had missed this! They were utterly blind to it! Let alone the scholars with various religious agendas, forget about them. They are utterly blinkered. It needed a serious female scholar to root this ancient buried history out of the tangle of later redactions, distortions, corruptions, biased translations.

*ZDL: Some critics have often accused you of being sexist, or anti-feminist in previous works, but looking only at Genesis, I think your artwork and your mode of storytelling rather celebrates females, and even portrays figures like Eve and Sarah in a dominant, positive light. Would you agree with this? And would you say Teubal's work influenced how you portrayed females in what is an inherently patriarchal narrative?*

RC: I really don't feel that I was intentionally or consciously "celebrating" females in my illustration of Genesis. My "mode of storytelling" in this case, with the narrative text, was just to directly quote from the old sources, with the exception of a few changes I copped from Savina Teubal, and two or three passages where I kind of did my own translation. But the text of Genesis, as many scholars have pointed out, is full of strong women who just can't be held down, who won't shut up, who tell the men emphatically what they should do, and who play key roles in influencing the destiny of "God's chosen people." It was matriarchal. The women decided, even though it's the men who are always talking to God.



As for my artwork, one reviewer described my depictions of the various female characters as “horrendous.” I portrayed Eve and Sarah in a “dominant, positive” light? I believe that I simply portrayed them as they are in the original text. They are both very “dominant” personalities. Adam is a rather passive character, as is Abraham in relation to Sarah.

Also, I would disagree that Genesis is an “inherently patriarchal narrative.” As Savina Teubal points out, there is an awful lot of push-pull going on between the male and female characters in Genesis. And the females usually win. Okay, God is a patriarchal character, and we have certainly “inherited” him. The historic reasons for the gradually diminishing power of the matriarchy in the ancient Middle East is an interesting story in itself, well worth examining, as Savina Teubal has done more than anyone. It takes some digging. Civilization, as it’s called, has been under the thumb of the patriarchy for so long, we can’t even conceive of what a matriarchal social order would consist of. Of course, the Sumerian matriarchal arrangement was part of much simpler, more elemental society in which ritual and mysticism were a big part of people’s lives. The high-priestess was the keeper of the granaries, stuff like that.

*ZDL: You said that you don't see Genesis as inherently patriarchal, but I suppose I meant in terms of its presentation and reception over history - it was written by men, probably for men, and it has been exegeted by men for centuries, giving it an inherently masculine overtone - do you think your Genesis goes against that grain? I know you approached it from a straight-interpretation point of view, but if your view was influenced by reading Teubal over and over as you drew, do you think that comes through? (I realise this is a difficult question to answer, because readers bring their own bias to the reading of it, but I am just interested to hear your own opinion).*

RC: Several scholars have seen in the Book of Genesis — not my illustrated version but the original text, I’m talking about — a push and pull between the patriarchal and the matriarchal powers in early Mesopotamian society. Savina Teubal discusses this conflict in Genesis at some length. There’s one scholarly book that even attempts to argue that one of the original written sources in Genesis was authored by a female, possibly in the court of King Solomon. These scholars, two men in fact, perceive some of the text as having a strong female point of view. I don’t have this book anymore, can’t remember the title or the authors’ names. They extracted all the parts of the text they perceive as this female’s work and created a whole new Book of Genesis consisting just of this one female author’s passages.

Of course, in later times, as the Hebrew priesthood developed — a strictly male enclave — a heavy patriarchal paradigm was imposed on these ancient stories, and a very overbearing patriarchal god. Still, a strong female element remains and it seems, largely untouched in some places. A close reading makes this abundantly obvious.

As I explained before, Teubal had such a strong effect on me that I altered the text in a few places to make what seemed a more accurate sense of the stories, as she so clearly explains and reveals in “Sarah the Priestess.” I would say that is mainly how her influence comes through. Otherwise I just portrayed these strong female characters as they are revealed in the text, and there are plenty of them. Sarah, first of all. Lot’s daughters — they are incredibly tough and independent, while Lot is a weak, feckless man. Then Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, is a stronger, more decisive figure than Isaac. Then Jacob’s two wives, Rachel and Leah, who order Jacob about. And there’s Tamar, who takes fate by the horns and decides the future destiny of her tribe. This is truly a matriarchal story (chapter 38). Check it out.

*ZDL: I notice you do not use lectionary divisions in your version - was this a conscious decision? I wondered if, upon reading the JPS Version of Genesis which also does not contain lectionary divisions, perhaps this influenced your work. Or, perhaps you might have felt that numbering the verses and breaking up the text would have interrupted the flow of the story and artwork?*

RC: Your “perhaps” speculation is correct. Putting those “lectionary” divisions (I never heard that word before, “lectionary”) in my version was out of the question.

*ZDL: In terms of audience, who were you expecting to read your Genesis? Was it ever aimed at an audience, or was it a project which you just wanted to carry out regardless of who might read it?*

RC: I was not aiming for any particular audience with my *Illustrated Book of Genesis*. I can’t think that way, of “targeting” an audience. I never think about that when I’m working on a comic. Never have. Of course I hope some people will like it and buy it but I never try to cater my work to any particular “demographic.”

*ZDL: In light of that question, I have read in several places that you took on Genesis because you had been playing around with the concept of Adam and Eve for a while, mostly in a satirical light. I understand you said that that take on the couple was not working, and that it made you want to depict their story in a truer fashion - what then propelled you to take on the entirety of Genesis instead of just Adam and Eve?*

RC: Yeah, I gave up on the idea of trying to satirize Adam and Eve. I finally realized that I was attracted to Adam and Eve in the first place because it is such a powerful and bizarre story in its own right, it doesn't need satirizing.

What then "propelled" me to take on the entirety of Genesis instead of just doing Adam and Eve? Good question. The answer is quite mundane. One day, circa 2003, I was discussing with comics publisher Denis Kitchen my idea to do a comic of Adam and Eve. He said, "Why don't you do the entire book of Genesis?" "Too much work," I said. He then asked me if I'd be willing to do Genesis if there was a sufficient amount of money offered as an advance from a publisher. I then, half awake, said, "Okay, yeah, sure." "I'll shop it around," said Kitchen. And he did, and got an offer from Norton to pay an advance of \$250,000, which seemed a huge amount of money to me at the time. So I took the offer. Four years and the biggest amount of hard, demanding work I've ever done later I got the money, and after all that work, 250,000 bucks didn't seem all *THAT* much (especially after Kitchen took his cut — 50,000 — and the tax people took their cut).

*ZDL: We've talked about the historical sources you looked at - did these include early illustrated bibles such as the Biblia Pauperum, or other comic book versions perhaps?*

In fact all the previous illustrated versions of the Bible that I could find, including three comic book versions, were of very little help to me in terms of authenticity and details of everyday life in that ancient time and place. Movies were more helpful, such as Cecil B. DeMille's "The Ten Commandments." I referred to that film over and over for details of decor, furnishings, oxcarts, etc. I had to learn how to draw camels and goats realistically. For that purpose I used books on how to draw animals, and old books with photos of life in the Middle East. I also used Muybridge's great book of photos of the human figure in action quite extensively. All the older works of art inspired by tales from the Bible are extremely romantic and unrealistic.

*ZDL: Did you approach illustrating the Bible as if it were a piece of literature, rather than a sacred text?*

RC: This question is answered in the introduction I wrote in my illustrated version. I say, “I... do *NOT* believe the Bible is the word of God. I believe it is the words of men.” Read the introduction. I explain my position in relation to the Bible as clearly as I possibly could without going on ad nauseum. I do not revere the Bible as a sacred text, no.

*ZDL: Six years after the book has been published, have your views or understanding of Genesis changed? Have you continued to pursue your interest in ancient myths and stories?*

RC: By the time I finished that book I was totally fed up with the Bible and wanted nothing more to do with it. I remember drawing that last panel, “And Joseph was put in a coffin in Egypt.” I couldn’t believe I’d finally reached the end. Yeah, I’m now a world-class expert on the Book of Genesis, no joke. I could hold my own with the best of them.

Consent form:

**CONSENT TO THE USE OF DATA**

University of Glasgow, College of Arts Research Ethics Committee

I understand that Zanne Domoney-Lyttle (name of researcher)

is collecting data in the form of interview over e-mail for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

**I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:**

- ♣ The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- ♣ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Signed by the contributor: R. Crumb Date: JUNE 22, 2016

**Researcher's name and email contact:** Zanne Domoney-Lyttle, z.lyttle.l@research.gla.ac.uk

**Supervisor's name and email contact:** Prof. Laurence Grove, Laurence.Grove@glasgow.ac.uk

**Department address:** Hetherington Building, Glasgow, G128QQ

## Appendix B: Images

Copyright restrictions mean that images cannot be fully reproduced in the electronic version of this thesis. Please consult a copy of R.Crumb's *The Book of Genesis, Illustrated* by R. Crumb and see the images below.<sup>652</sup>

Fig. 2.1: Genesis 3:4-8

Fig. 2.2: Genesis 1:1-2 (Splash page)

Fig. 2.3: Genesis 2:8-14 (half-page panel)

Fig. 2.4: Genesis 8:13-19 (half-page panel)

Fig. 2.5: Genesis 19:1-2 (half-page panel)

Fig. 2.6: Genesis 28:12-15 (half-page panel)

Fig. 2.7: Genesis 6:15-19

Fig. 2.8: Genesis 12:7

Fig. 2.9: Genesis 13:10

Fig. 2.10: Genesis 24:62-63

Fig. 2.11: Genesis 3:9

Fig. 3.1: Front cover of *Genesis, Illustrated*

Fig. 3.2: Front cover of *Genesis: A Translation and Commentary* (Robert Alter)

Fig. 5.1: Genesis 11:27-32 (panels 18-22)

Fig. 5.2: Genesis 16:1-6 (two pages; panels 1-9)

Fig. 5.3: Genesis 18:1-15 (three pages; panels 1-17)

Fig. 5.4: Genesis 21:1- 21 (four pages; panels 1-22)

Fig. 5.5: Genesis 24:15-67 (eight pages; panels 12-56)

Fig. 5.6: Genesis 25:12- 28a (two pages; panels 4-24)

Fig. 5.7: Genesis 29:3-30a (four pages; panels 2-29)

Fig. 5.8: Genesis 29:30b-30:24 (three pages; panels 30-34 of Gen 29, and 1-20 of Gen 30)

Fig. 5.9: Genesis 35:16-19 (panels 14-16)

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<sup>652</sup> Please note, there are no page numbers in *Genesis, Illustrated* so the above descriptions point the reader to the correct images to view.

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