R. Crumb's The Book of Genesis Illustrated: Biblical Narrative and the Impact of Illustration

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Publication Date
Spring 2014

School
College of Arts and Sciences

Major
English

Disciplines
English Language and Literature

Recommended Citation

Abstract
An artist known for his sexually charged, grotesque art joins with the sacred text of the Bible's Genesis in R. Crumb's The Book of Genesis Illustrated. An academic approach to the graphic novel recognizes the depth of meaning the art develops through the story. The intriguing facial expressions within Crumb's book call into question the motives of the active participants within the narrative of Noah and the infamous floating zoo. Deviant from a Christian view of the Bible, Crumb disputes the honor of Scripture and perpetuates his typical social satire though he uses a biblical text. Reflecting upon a traditional Christian understanding, Crumb's audience reflect upon rounded, emotional characters who balance between an experience of God's justice and His grace.

Robert Crumb's straight retelling of Genesis lacks his trademark humour. By Michel Faber. If the book does not intend to ridicule, what exactly is its intent? Hard to imagine. Crumb's lack of religious fervour means the images lack the weird mystery that suffuses the visions of, say, William Blake or David Tibet. But, with his gifts for satire and grotesque playfulness locked away, Crumb merely manages to depict the soap-opera antics of primitive Israelites in a manner that neither illuminates nor nuances them. The difference is that there's no one, in the narrative of Genesis, through whom Crumb can vicariously live. Of course there is some fine artwork. In a project encompassing one and a half thousand panels, there ought to be. R. Crumb, frame from THE BOOK OF GENESIS ILLUSTRATED, 2009. Courtesy W.W. Norton & Company. For the last five years, Robert Crumb, the father of underground comix, has been laboring over a graphic retelling of the first book of the Bible. This might seem odd given his predilections for countercultural subversion. From his LSD-influenced stories for Zap to his collaboration with Charles Bukowski to...
his biography of Franz Kafka, Crumb’s evolution as a storyteller has led him here. With Genesis he tackles some of the great tropes of Western culture. This awareness is reflected in his illustrations throughout, which tend more toward realism than ever. Gone are the caricatures, the bulging eyes, the hallucinatory style that defined his early work. The marriage of Crumb illustrations and a biblical storyline works with surprising harmony and fluidity to recast the Genesis story as an unfolding linear account of the history of a tangible tribal people. There are few precedents for Crumb’s ambitious project, and though there may be some who have difficulty with the idea of an acknowledged agnostic tackling subject matter sacred to so many, the end result is a visceral, fascinating vision that invites the reader to view the Book of Genesis with a renewed freshness. Criticize ideas, not people. Stay on topic. Avoid the use of toxic and offensive language. Flag bad behaviour. Comments that violate our community guidelines will be removed.