Abstract

This thesis asks the following questions: What are the impetuses for the recent emergence and dominance of the postmodern genre minor-character elaboration? How has the Jewish literary field been affected by this genre? And what can this genre teach us, if anything, about the similar but ancient practice of writing midrash?

Over six chapters, I will demonstrate the connections between minor-character elaboration and midrash using characters from the Torah who are deemed evil or morally ambiguous. Chapter 1 is dedicated to clarifying and defining "minor-character elaboration," including its motivations and key literary markers. Chapters 2-4 isolate particular evil or morally ambiguous biblical figures and follow their treatments by the midrash, highlighting when they are particularly similar to minor-character elaboration. Finally, in Chapter 5 I present a fictional story that both honors the traditional text and elaborates on a minor character, and Chapter 6 elucidates my process in writing the story.

MIDRASH AND MINOR-CHARACTER ELABORATION
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

DANIEL LOUIS BRENNER

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Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Rabbinic Studies
Los Angeles, California

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Adviser: Rabbi Dr. Joshua Garroway

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Chapter 1: Minor-Character Elaboration

In her book, *After Abel,* Michal Lemberger re-visions familiar biblical characters in new stories in order to give a fuller background to each character. For example, the title story, After Abel, weaves a tale from Eve's perspective after losing her two sons, Abel to murder and Cain to banishment. The Tanach says nothing of Eve's reaction to these events, so Lemberger takes up Eve's voice and breathes life into the situation. Throughout her tales, Lemberger pays homage to the biblical text by alluding frequently to it. Her decision to do so could imply a reverence to the source of these characters, or a desire to allow for her fiction to fit within the narrative constraints of Tanach to make them as digestible as possible to readers who might take issue with commenting on biblical text.

The stories Lemberger tells deal with characters with limited voice in the Tanach, including Eve, Lot's wife, and Miriam. Her selection of less prominent characters with minor roles gives voice to the voiceless and supposes that every person in the Tanach has a story to tell. It also allows Lemberger greater creative freedom; the limited descriptions of minor characters make for fewer constraints.

Lemberger inspires me to write my own fiction about a biblical character. My interest in biblical characters varies slightly from hers, however. Rather than minor characters, I look at characters in the Tanach whom Jewish readers have generally considered either outright evil (Pharaoh) or, in the least, morally ambiguous (Esau).

This project is threefold. First, I illuminate the use of minor-character elaboration through creative fiction as literary phenomenon in both secular and Jewish fields, and

explore some of the political and social motivations for fleshing out minor characters from other literary works. Second, I consider the representation of certain characters in midrash to see which traits the rabbis emphasize, and which traits I can expand further. Finally, I write new fiction about one of those characters, incorporating biblical and midrashic allusions.

What makes a story "minor-character elaboration"

Lemberger's work is not a new form of fiction writing. Her style falls within a growing field which Jeremy Rosen has called "minor-character elaboration; the conversion of minor characters from canonical literary texts into the protagonists of new ones."[1] These elaborated minor characters still exist in the fictional world from which they originate, interacting with the same cast and often following the same plot points as the original text. A hypothetical book about, say, Seamus Finnegan, a minor character in the Harry Potter book series, which ignores character details from the original story and includes no narrative similarities to the original Harry Potter novels would not constitute 'minor-character elaboration'. To fit within the genre, the story must interact with, or inform, the character's literary origin.

Perhaps the most well-known example of this genre is Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* and its musical adaptation. This story takes the Wicked Witch from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum—a work called

[1] Jeremy Rosen, *Minor characters have their day: genre and the contemporary literary marketplace* (New York, NY: Colombia University Press, 2016) 4.

by the Library of Congress "America's greatest and best-loved homegrown fairy tale"[2]—and tells a story from her perspective. *Wicked* uses most of the characters from the original tale and some of the original plot, but recasts them from another perspective. These are both vital aspects of "minor-character elaboration." The purpose of the story, according to Maguire, is to encourage people not to be so hasty to demonize other people.[3] His tale softens the character of the witch and transforms her from an antagonist to a tragic, sympathetic character. John Gardner's *Grendel* gives similar treatment to the evil monster in *Beowulf*, as does Jon Clinch's *Finn* to Huck Finn's abusive and alcoholic father, and John Scieszka's *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, by A. Wolf* to the wolf in the famous fairy tale.

Not all works of "minor-character elaboration" focus solely on an evil character in order to make more likeable. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* tells Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* from the perspective of two courtiers in the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. These characters, who play minor roles in the original play, seem confused, even unaware, of the events going on around them in Stoppard's comedic rehashing. Stoppard's use of minor characters to re-vision the Shakespearian work is less an attempt to enhance our understanding of Shakespeare's original characters, and more so a parody of Hamlet. According to Rosen, "Stoppard refuses to develop the characters he has appropriated…using to great comic effect the fact that they remain as indistinguishable

[2] Library of Congress- The Wizard of Oz, an American Fairy Tale, April 21, 2000. Accessed Oct. 13, 2017. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/oz/.
[3] John Joseph Adams "Interview: Gregory Maguire." Lightspeed Magazine. March 26, 2014. Accessed October 13, 2017. http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/nonfiction/interview-gregory-maguire/.

from one another in his play as they are in Hamlet."[4] Instead, this style of minor-character elaboration is meant to "poke at the fictionality"[5] of the original protagonist, in this case Hamlet, who is reduced to the role of a minor character.

Some authors have used this genre to give a voice to defenseless characters whom they feel are undeservedly trampled. In *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood retells Homer's *The Odyssey* from the perspective of Penelope as she deals with her marriage to Odysseus, his departure, the overtures of the suitors, and his eventual return. Between the novellas of her story, Atwood appropriates the voice of the twelve maids Odysseus killed for being disloyal. In their last song, they voice their purpose. They sing "we had no voice, we had no name, it was not fair, but now we're here."[6]

Similar to Atwood, Anita Diamant gives voice to a silent female character in the biblical text when she wrote *The Red Tent* from the perspective of Dinah. In this text Diamant addresses the issue that the Bible is a tale of patrilineal descent, and the voices of the mothers and daughters are lost in the masculinity. *The Red Tent* refuses to allow Dinah to exist solely as an object of plot and "imagines itself as an empowering act of feminist education (the more a daughter knows the details of her mother's life- without flinching or whining- the stronger the daughter.)"[7]

The emergence of the genre.

[4] Rosen, *Minor characters*, 14.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Margaret Atwood. *The Penelopiad*. (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005).

[7] Rosen, *Minor characters,* 96.

Rosen designates the publication of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, a novel that incorporates the story and characters of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, as the emergence of minor-character elaboration as a genre. At the time, postmodernism was emerging as a rebellion against the modernist tendencies to promote a utopian vision of life assuming that universal principles of truth formulated by religion or science could be used to explain reality. Postmodernism rejected the notion that a single voice could speak for all. This cultural shift appeared in music, art, architecture, and literature among other areas.[8] According to Rosen, four aspects of postmodernism led invariably to the emergence of minor character elaboration as a genre: liberal individualism, pluralist inclusiveness, emergence of silenced margins, and feminist revisionism.[9]

Liberal individualism opened the doors to unique forms of self-expression that previously had been frowned upon. Participants in this liberation assumed that they were not the first to desire freedom from societal constraints. Authors used minor-character elaboration to extend their own experience of individuality to historical eras during which breaking from homogeneity was tantamount to uprising. While postmodernism rejected the idea of a utopian homogenous society, the movement did subscribe to universal pluralism, the idea that society could be utopian but at the same time be filled with diverse cultural personalities. Society had to make way for all of these personalities to exist within the same framework. Similarly, minor-character elaboration as a rule did not remove the

[8] Tate Museum "Postmodernism – Art Term." Accessed October 12, 2017. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postmodernism.

[9] Rosen, *Minor characters*, 17.

pre-established societal norms in an original text, creating instead a literary world where multiple truths could exist at the same time. The emergence of the marginal, silenced voice, as well as feminist revisionism, attempted to give a voice to those who for centuries had been ignored. Minor-character elaboration invented what might be called an "authorial presentism." Presentism is the act of judging a historical event or personality by modern standards, and in this genre, authors imposed modern standards onto characters who, owing to historical norms, had not been given the chance to exercise authority by their authors. As much as the postmodern movement caused the emergence of minor-character elaboration, the genre fanned the flames of postmodernism. Minor-character elaboration encouraged the development of post-modernism by using characters and stories familiar to society, and offering alternative understandings of previously fixed narrative.

Continued popularity of the genre

Today, the genre does not break literary boundaries as it once did. It has become a successful commonplace, which leads one to ask; why authors have continued to write in this style? Why has it become so popular? Rosen identifies several possibilities.[10] First and foremost, the genre offers a platform for progressive authors wishing to challenge societal injustice in the classic texts. Second, the genre has proven profitable, either because the reading (and paying) population has caught up politically with the postmodern vision of the genre, or because of the value of nostalgia. Readers already invested emotionally in classic characters are interested in reading more about them. Third, minor-character elaboration

[10] Ibid 30.

provides an easy style of writing because much of the creative process is already done. Authors avoid the time-consuming task of drawing up characters from scratch and creating original story arcs, jumping onto a ship that is already sailing instead of building a new boat. Finally, authors competing in the highly competitive literary marketplace also get to establish their own prestige by associating themselves with the great authors of yesteryear. For example, Jean Rhys lived in relative obscurity before publishing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but her fame grew after associating herself with Charlotte Bronte. Rosen notes that authors are not the only group drawn to this genre. Publishers have also caused the spike in volumes that feature minor-character elaboration. Recognizing a genre that resonated with readers, publishers actively sought works in this style to sell.[11]

Spread into the Jewish field

Minor-character elaboration has made its way into modern Jewish literature as well. A recent article written by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency highlighting the twentieth anniversary of *The Red Tent* notes how the book sparked an explosion of similar books.[12] Although the article incorrectly states that the book invented a new form of fiction, Diamant's book is one of the first nationally recognized works that reimagines a minor character from the bible. The liberal Jewish community welcomed this type of fiction. For

[11] A majority of works written in the minor-character elaboration genre appropriate characters from works that exist within the public domain. This is due to one of the complications of this genre, namely navigating intellectual property rights. Authors have been sued in the past for elaborating on the stories of more recently written works. There have been instances, however, in which the original author permits a second author to elaborate on a minor character in the hope of promoting readership for the original.

[12] Erika Dreifus. "How 'The Red Tent' invented a new kind of fiction." August 1, 2017. Accessed October 19, 2017. https://www.jta.org/2017/08/01/life-religion/how-the-red-tent-invented-a-new-kind-of-fiction.

publicity, Diamant sent the novel to every female Reform and Reconstructionist rabbi in the country with letters of endorsement from the presidents of those rabbinic networks. As the book was read and preached from the pulpit, its popularity grew to the point where it has now sold 3.3 million copies worldwide.[13]

Novels like *The Red Tent*, which elaborate on biblical characters, face obstacles because so many Jews and Christians consider sacrilegious any alteration of the bible or its use for literary, non-religious, purposes. *The Red Tent* angered many in the orthodox movement. Rabbi Avram Rothman, senior rabbi of Thornhill Community Shul in Ontario, published an online critique in which he said of Diamant that "Only sheer audacity would enable an author to rewrite the history of a nation's seminal figures, tarnishing the name of Judaism's noble ancestors. They were fallible, but they were giants. Even historical fiction must be based on history. And in this, she fails."[14] Chabad is no kinder, calling works like Diamant's "things non-believers read."[15]

Conservative Christian readership had a similar reaction. One reader said: "This is definitely not a retelling of Joseph, Leah, Rachel, and Dinah's story that meshes with the Bible. As a Christian, this bothered me to a degree; I feel that Diamant could just have easily used other names, and this book would have been just as compelling."[16] This review

[13] USA Today- Top 150 Books, Oct. 23 2008. Accessed October 19, 2017. https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2008-10-29-top-150-books_N.htm
[14] Avram Rothman. "The Red Tent." Aish.com, June 09, 2001. Accessed October 19, 2017. http://www.aish.com/ci/a/48931452.html.
[15] Sue Fishkoff. "Pioneering Chabad Emissary…Passes away in Nashville." Chabad.org. Oct. 24, 2007. Accessed Oct. 19 2017. http://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/585088/jewish/Pioneering-Chabad-Emissary-Mother-and-Grandmother-Passes-Away-in-Nashville.htm.

[16] Anita Gandolfo. *Faith and Fiction: Christian Literature in America Today*. (Praeger, 2007), 151.

raises a question about the purpose of elaborating on characters from the Bible. Was Diamant's appropriation of biblical stories motivated by a desire to reach a wider readership, or was this book her way of engaging with her tradition and heritage in a constructive way?

Diamant's treatment of the biblical text is similar to rabbinic midrash, the vehicle the rabbis used to elaborate on the biblical text centuries ago. The rabbis, too, created stories and legends that go far beyond what is said in the bible. Indeed, an examination of the origins of midrash reveals the similarities between it and the contemporary minor-character elaborations discussed above. Just as one of the main reasons for the growth of contemporary minor-character elaboration was the familiarity of the classic characters, so, too, the rabbis might have recognized that no literature was more familiar to ancient Jews than the Tanach. Additionally, just as minor-character elaboration may be inspired by political and social motivations, so midrash may have been used to express contemporary sensibilities through an ancient and revered text.

In what follows, I study the midrashic expansion of characters found in the biblical text, seeking to understand whether midrash indeed fits into the category of minor-character elaboration. Following Daniel Boyarin's suggestion in his book *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash,* I consider a new reading of *aggadah*, "one which, from the distance of our time, tries to understand how the rabbis read the Torah in their time—taking seriously the claim that what they are doing is reading, and trying to understand how

a committed reading of the holy and authoritative text works in the rabbinic culture."[17] If midrash indeed does resemble this modern genre, it urges us to also consider seriously the practice of current authors such as Diamant and Lemberger as a committed reading of Torah in our time. Boyarin claims that "midrash is a portrayal of the reality which the rabbis perceived in the Bible through their ideologically colored eyeglasses."[18] As modernity and postmodernity changes the tint of our ideological glasses, we have the opportunity to read and interpret the Bible in new ways too.

[17] Daniel Boyarin. *Intertextuality and the reading of Midrash*. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pr., 2010), 15.
[18] Ibid.

Chapter 2: Introduction to Midrashic Research

Minor-character elaborations often focus on an evil antagonist from a well-known work, the most famous examples being *Wicked, Grendel,* and *The True story of the Three Little Pigs.* In order to see how midrash is similar to this modern genre, I explore how midrash treats evil biblical characters as well as morally ambiguous characters who might be construed as evil.

There are numerous potential candidates for evil and morally ambiguous characters in the Tanach, but this focused treatment requires a carefully selected sample. To narrow down the potential field dramatically, I only consider characters found in Torah. This decision is pragmatic for a midrash study because while some collections of midrash focus on other books of the Tanach, and reference morally ambiguous characters like, for example, Kings Saul and David, the majority of midrashic writing involves the characters of the first five books, the Torah. Limiting characters to only Torah also adds a level of familiarity for many readers who have not extensively studied other books of Tanach.

From the Torah's characters, some are easy to dismiss. The patriarchs/matriarchs (even the ones we consider morally ambiguous) are out because our tradition tends to spin them so positively. The same applies to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Amalek, the epitome of evil according to the Torah, is also out because it is a tribe and not a person, making it too difficult to observe the similarities to minor-character elaboration. This also rules out the evil peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the morally ambiguous brothers of Joseph.

Of the remaining characters, those best to study are: Eve, Cain, Hagar, Esau, Laban, Potiphar's wife, Pharaoh, and Korach. Each of them either interacts with the main protagonist, or even is the main character for some portion of the Torah. Each of them already has their own voice in the Torah. (Silent characters, I hypothesize, have little potential for suddenly vocalizing their thoughts in midrash, making them weak candidates for possible minor-character elaboration.) And each of them fall on the spectrum between morally ambiguous and evil. Unfortunately, a brief search of midrashic references makes clear that Laban and Potiphar's wife lack the appropriate amount of material to do a comprehensive analysis, thus the focus of the research in the following two chapters includes only Eve, Hagar, Esau, Cain, Pharaoh and Korach.

I classify who is evil and who is ambiguous by the Torah's treatment of the characters, not by our current understanding of the text. That is to say, a more modern reading of Noah and the flood allows us to blame Noah for not bargaining on behalf of humanity like Abraham does with Sodom and Gomorrah, but the Torah does not blame him for this omission of deed. Thus Noah is not considered as morally ambiguous. Korach, on the other hand, who challenges Moses' authority, is devoured by the earth within the Torah text, showing that his actions are not considered proper.

Based on this premise, I initially label Cain, Pharaoh, and Korach as evil characters, and Eve, Hagar, and Esau as morally ambiguous. These designations raise two questions. What is the line that must be crossed by a character's actions to move them from moral ambiguity and solidify them as an either good or evil character? And specific to this project, what is in

the Torah's description of Cain, Pharaoh and Korach that make them definitely evil, but in Eve, Hagar, and Esau's portrayal leave room for questioning?

To answer the first question, it is not so much a line that must be crossed but scales that must be shifted, and a prevailing dominance of good or evil in a character can shift those scales to one side or another. One of the most endearing aspects of the Torah is that even the most heroic characters have their flaws. Noah becomes drunk after the flood, but his dominant character is the one God seeks out to preserve creation. Jacob tricks his father Isaac to take Esau's blessing, and later secrets away from his uncle Laban with wives and children in tow. These actions in a vacuum would lead us to question Jacob's virtue, but the Torah overwhelmingly highlights Jacob's covenantal relationship with God, and therefore the Israelites' continued covenant as the "Children of Israel." Jacob's more ideal memory is preserved by the Torah, not the mistakes he makes in the past. The selective memory of Torah makes Jacob's dominant character good. On the other hand, Laban is the foil of Jacob. Despite the fact that he provides Jacob with sanctuary from Esau, allows Jacob to marry his daughters Rachel and Leah, and even expresses he would have been willing to send Jacob off with fanfare and song when they flee, the Torah presents him less favorably, highlighting more his trickery and idolatry. His character is at the very least questionably moral, if not evil.

To answer the second question, the narrative differences between the grouping of Cain, Pharaoh, and Korach compared to Eve, Hagar, and Esau, I consider a few common themes which I have charted below.

	Evil				Ambiguous		
	Cain	Pharaoh	Korach		Eve	Hagar	Esau
God speaks to directly or indirectly (through an angel)	x				x	x	
Receives a Blessing	x[1]				x[2]	x	x
Is killed or punished directly by God	x	x	x		x		
Has story in Torah separate from morally ambiguous or evil deed.					**x**	**x**	**x**
Breaks a commandment.	**x**	**x**	**x**				

[1]Cain receives a reprieve from his curse, which can be construed as a blessing. [2]Eve does not receive a blessing directly, though Gen 1:28-29 is a blessing given to the new unnamed humans.

As the top of the chart describes, the search for commonalities between characters on both sides of the evil/ambiguous spectrum finds that most plot themes that apply to one side end up applying to at least one character on the other side as well. For example, being directly punished by God could be a good indicator of an evil character, but Eve is also punished directly by God and the Torah does not consider her to be evil. On the other hand, if God (or an intermediary of God) deems a character important enough to speak with, this might be a reason to consider that character at least morally ambiguous, but God tells Cain of his punishment directly. Despite these crossovers, there are some particular commonalities that apply to just one group.

Every ambiguous character above is multi-dimensional. The Torah tells a story of each of them separate from their evil act. Although Eve takes of the fruit of the forbidden

tree, she also is part of the second creation narrative. Hagar never actually does something herself that is questionable, but because Sarah is the heroine and casts her out, Hagar's character is called into suspicion. Despite that, she also is given to Abram by Sarai to have a child, thus leaving her in an ambiguous state. And Esau, who threatens to kill Jacob later has a story of reconciliation between the two brothers. To expand the comparison further, Laban, whom I did not study but fit into my criteria of ambiguity, is also there when Abraham's servant Eliezer comes to take Rebecca back to be Isaac's wife. Each of these stories expanded slightly more on the demeanor of these characters, giving us the readers pause to immediately group them in with those who are evil.

The evil characters also had a common thread. Each of their evil actions become forbidden as part of the commandments. Cain murders his brother Abel, thus we have the commandment not to murder. Pharaoh harshly enslaves the Israelites, thus we have commandments on how to treat slaves. Korach makes an offering to God despite his lack of priestly role, thus we have commandments about who makes offerings. And again expanding the comparison, Potiphar's wife lies about her interaction with Joseph, thus we have a commandment not to bear false witness. The sole purpose of each of these characters in the Torah is to teach how not to act.

Now that the commonalities of these characters are identified via the Torah's reading of them, it will be easier to see how they are developed through midrashic writing. In order to claim the rabbis employ an early form of minor-character elaboration to develop these characters, the midrash will need to express one of a number of traits that best identify the current genre; social or political motivations for the change of character, an

attempt to bring a suppressed voice to the forefront, or a piggybacking on the Torah in order to promote their writing.

Chapter 3: Evil Characters in Midrash

This chapter will focus on treatment of Cain, Pharaoh, and Korach in midrash. The rabbis engaged in the writing of midrash as a tool to fill in details they felt were missing from the original text. Certain elements in the midrashic treatment of these characters resembles the techniques used in minor-character elaboration: (1) softening, even validating, Cain's murder, Pharaoh's enslavement of Israel, and Korach's rebellion against Moses; (2) giving a voice to the character in a situation where the Torah does not; (3) and changing the plot of the Torah to elaborate on a character's virtues.

Cain

The Torah brands Cain as evil for murdering his brother Abel in Genesis 4:1-16, but lacks details surrounding the murder, and parts of the verse in which the act takes place, Gen. 4:8, seem to be missing: "Cain spoke to Abel his brother… when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him." Some midrashim clarify missing information in the Torah text without changing the story. An example of this is Genesis Rabbah 22:7. This midrash tries to clarify the missing text in verse eight.

> AND CAIN SPOKE UNTO ABEL HIS BROTHER (Gen. 4:8) about what did they quarrel? 'Come' said they, 'let us divide the world'. One took the land and the other the movables. The former said 'the land you stand on is mine' while the latter retorted 'What you are wearing is mine'….R. Joshua of Siknin said in R. Levi's name: Both took

> land and both took movables, so about what did they quarrel? One said 'The Temple must be built in my area' and the other said 'the Temple must be built in my area'…[19]

This midrash fills in a gap. It does not pass judgement on Cain or Abel, describing the two brothers as "the former" and "the latter". It does not matter what they were quarreling about, nor does it matter which brother is which in the argument. Because of the unclear nature of who is arguing for what, the murder comes from Cain's rage, and not from a justified argument. Cain's murder of Abel is no more justified than if Abel had murdered Cain.

On the other hand, the next midrash is an example of the rabbis' willingness to change the story in Torah, a key feature of minor-character elaboration. It reads:

> AND CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST HIS BROTHER ABEL etc. R. Jochanan said: Abel was stronger than Cain, for the expression ROSE UP can only imply that he (Cain) lay beneath him. Cain said to him 'Only we two are in the world: what will you go and tell our father [if you kill me]?' At this he was filled with pity for Abel; straightaway he rose against him and slew him. Out of that incident was born the proverb, 'Do not do good to an evil man, then evil will not befall you.'

Here, Cain's motivation for murder is removing the burden of potential murder from his brother. The proverb at the end names Abel as evil, and Cain's act of murder as an

[19] This, and all subsequent midrash translations are taken from:
Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, trans. *The Midrash Rabbah*. (London: Soncino Press, 1983).

attempt to do good, albeit by evil means. Further on in the same midrash we read that Cain may have even offered Abel as a sacrifice to God:

> Cain had closely observed where his father slew the bullock [which he sacrificed]…and there he [Cain] killed him [Abel].

Genesis Rabbah 22:8 morphs Cain into the tragic victim who tries to do the right thing. This departure from the original text exonerates him. Another midrash that does not absolve Cain from the sin of Abel's murder, but softens him is Esther Rabbah 1:10, which postulates that Cain's designation from the beginning of creation to murder his brother.

> Rabbi Berekiah opened with the text, *Who hath wrought and done it? He that called the generations from the beginning (Isaiah 41:4)* From the beginning of the world the Holy One, blessed be He, appointed for each one the lot which was fitting for him. He appointed Adam to be head of all creatures, Cain the first of slayers, Abel the first of the slain, Noah the first of those saved from calamity…

The Soncino commentary clarifies that "lot which was fitting for him" implies that God chose these men to be the "prototypes of a particular character," one by which all later men who fell into the same category could be judged. This midrash puts agency into the hands of God rather than Cain, vindicating him of the crime of murder.

Some midrashim consider Cain evil and misguided simultaneously. Genesis Rabbah 22:12 reads:

> 'WHOEVER SLAYETH CAIN', etc. R. Nehemiah interpreted: Cain's judgment shall not be as the judgment of other murderers. Cain slew, but had none from whom to learn, but henceforth, all who slay shall be slain….AND THE LORD SET A SIGN FOR CAIN R. Judah said: He caused the orb of the sun to shine on his account. Said R. Nehemiah to him: For that wretch He would cause the orb of the sun to shine? Rather He caused leprosy to break out on him…

R. Nehemiah explains why Cain's punishment is less severe than the punishment for murder the Torah demands: Cain had no one tell him that murder was wrong, thus he could not be punished to the same extent. R. Judah's interpretation of the second half of the verse implies Cain is fully exonerated, but R. Nehemiah is quick to correct him, leaving no allowance for Cain's complete innocence.

Why might these midrashim seek to soften Cain? Their purpose for doing so may be found in Genesis Rabbah 97:

> Thereupon Cain arose and prostrated himself to beseech mercy of God, as it says *"Is my sin too great to be forgiven?* (Gen.4:13) 'Sovereign of the Universe!' he pleaded. 'Surely my sin is not greater than that of the sixty myriads who will provoke Thee in the wilderness, yet immediately he [Moses] exclaimed *Forgiving iniquity* (Num. 14:18). 'Thou didst forgive them….In that moment the Holy One, blessed be He, said 'If I do not forgive Cain, I will shut the door in the face of all penitents.' Consequently God forgave him half; yet because his repentance was incomplete, He did not forgive him all his sins.

According to the midrash, Cain is proof that repentance works. For the rabbis, Cain is less a prototype for murderers than a foil to sinners who seek forgiveness.

Pharaoh

Pharaoh presents an interesting predicament because we meet his character three separate times in the Torah, potentially as three separate pharaohs. Abraham meets a Pharaoh and lies to him about his relationship with Sarah in order to safely pass through Egypt. Joseph is brought before and interprets the dreams of a Pharaoh. Finally, a Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites. While no differentiation exists between the first two Pharaohs in the text, they are likely different characters based on the multiple generations that pass between Abraham and Joseph. Contrastingly, a separate designation *is* given to the Exodus Pharaoh in Exodus 1:8 which reads, "And there arose a new king over Egypt that did not know Joseph."

The Genesis Pharaohs are not evil characters. On the contrary, both have redemptive and endearing qualities and give assistance to our ancestors. The Exodus Pharaoh, on the other hand, is entirely evil. He enslaves the Israelites making their lives miserable, denies God's requests through Moses to let the Israelites go, and after freeing them from slavery changes his mind and pursues them into the sea. Midrash validates the Torah's expression of an evil Pharaoh more often than not, including Exodus Rabbah 5:18.

> AND THE SAME DAY PHARAOH COMANNDED (Ex. 5:6) thus teaching how wicked he was in not delaying a moment to do evil unto them…..Thus because they rested on the Sabbath, Pharaoh said to them: 'LET HEAVIER WORK BE LAID UPON THE MEN,

> THAT THEY MAY LABOR THEREIN AND LET THEM NOT REGARD LYING WORDS (ibid 9)—let them not take delight or rest on the Sabbath day.'

This midrash comments on the first time Moses comes before Pharaoh asking for the Israelites' freedom. Pharaoh's refusal of Moses' request prompts the ten plagues, and with them, the one phrase where the Torah allows us to question the evil of Pharaoh. God famously "hardens Pharaoh's heart" multiple times throughout the ten plagues, softening Pharaoh's character. The midrash questions the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Exodus Rabbah 8:3, and provides a quick rebuke to any who consider it a chance to see Pharaoh more positively.

> FOR I HAVE HARDENED HIS HEART (Ex. 10:1) R. Jochanan said: Does this not provide heretics with ground for arguing that he had no means of repenting, since it says FOR I HAVE HARDENED HIS HEART? To which R. Simeon b. Lakish replied: Let the heretics be stopped up…when God warns a man once, twice, and even a third time, and he still does not repent, then does God close his heart against repentance so that He should exact vengeance from him for his sins. Thus it was with the wicked Pharaoh. Since God sent five times to him and he took no notice, God then said 'Thou hast stiffened thy neck and hardened thy heart; well, I will add to thine uncleanness.'

Not only does the midrash quash any consideration that God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart gives permission to think of Pharaoh in better terms, but it goes so far to say that any person who considers Pharaoh in a way other than purely evil is a heretic. This is an emphatic statement of Pharaoh's character according to the midrash.

Despite the fact that most midrashim preserve Pharaoh's memory as evil, there are some which, using techniques found in minor-character elaboration, shine a new light on Pharaoh. Exodus Rabbah 1:8, for example, erases the differentiation between the Pharaoh of Joseph at the end of Genesis and the Pharaoh of Exodus and Moses:

> WHO KNEW NOT JOSEPH: The Rabbis say: Why did they call him a new king, since it was Pharaoh himself? Because the Egyptians said to Pharaoh: 'Come and let us attack this nation,' to which he replied: 'Idiots that you are! Until now, we have been eating of their provision, and how can we think of attacking them? Were it not for Joseph, we would not be alive.' Because he [Pharaoh] did not listen to them, they deposed him from his throne for three months until he had promised them: 'I will agree to do all you desire;' whereupon they restored him. Hence it is written: NOW THERE AROSE A NEW KING.

This midrash removes the blame for the enslavement of Israelites from Pharaoh and places it on the Egyptian people. Here, Pharaoh attempts to protect Israel from the Egyptians, but they strong-arm him into doing their bidding. Similar midrashim follow suit:

> Exodus Rabbah 1:10:
>
> THEREFORE THEY DID SET OVER THEM TASKMASTERS (Ex 1:11) It does not say *aleihem*, but rather *alav.* The school of R. Eleazar, the son of R. Simeon taught: This teaches that they brought a brock-kiln and hung it round the neck of Pharaoh; so that if an Israelite pleaded with them that he was of delicate health, their reply was: 'are you more delicate than Pharaoh?'

Exodus Rabbah 1:18

> AND EVERY DAUGHTER YE SHALL SAVE ALIVE; what need did Pharaoh have to save the girls? What they said in fact was 'Let us kill the males so that we may take unto ourselves the females for wives,' for the Egyptians were steeped in immorality.

These midrashim minimize Pharaoh's wickedness, portraying him as a pawn of a vicious Egyptian population. To what end might the rabbis have shifted the blame from Pharaoh to his people? Midrashic authors wrote at a time when Jews lived under the rule of other nations. Some of those nations treated the Jews well, allowing them free practice of their religion. Others were not so kind. When the Sassanid Empire deposed the tolerant Parthian rulers of Babylon in the 3rd century, and declared Zoroastrianism the official religion, local Zoroastrians persecuted the Jewish community until King Shapur I gave them relative freedom, permitting them to practice Judaism more freely and protecting them from oppression.[20] It is possible that these midrashim reflect the political situation of the day. Song of Songs Rabbah 2:7 supports this hypothesis:

> R. Jose b. Hanina said: 'These are two adjurations, one addressed to Israel and one to the other nations. God adjured Israel not to rebel against the yoke of Governments, and He adjured the Governments not to make their yoke too heave on Israel, for by making their yoke too heavy on Israel they would cause the end to come before it was due….what did the officers of Israel say to Pharaoh?' *There is no straw given unto thy servants…but the fault is in thy own people* (Ex. 5:16), meaning, Thou sinnest against

[20] Massoume Price, *A Brief History of Iranian Jews,* October 2009. http://cultureofiran.com/judaism.html

thy people and though sinnest against thy nation and through thy actions the kingdom will be taken from thee and given to another nation.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians are representations of the current political situation in which the Israelites are living. The changes made to Pharaoh's character by the midrash are not to soften him or present him in any way other than evil. They instead highlight the evil of the regular citizen who allows for the repression of Israel.

Korach

In Numbers 16, Korach and his compatriots, Aviram and Datan, lead a failed rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron offer a test between the two sides: each should offer incense in fire pans and God will make clear whom is chosen. The cultic story ends with Korach and his followers being swallowed up by the earth or destroyed by God's fire. The midrash is highly critical of Korach's dissension, which writes in Genesis Rabbah 26:7

R. Aha said: Dissension is as great an evil as the generation of the Flood: It says here MEN OF RENOWN but elsewhere it says, *they were princes of the congregation, the elect men of the assembly, men of renown.*

God chose Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelite people, and this story highlights that God's plan can only be altered by God, not by man. Public dissension is tantamount to the worst kind of evil, bad enough to wipe out an entire community. The rabbis use Korach as a symbol of what the fate of those who go against the community should suffer. Another

midrash shows God admonishing Korach for his assumption of right to challenge Moses, and elucidating precisely why Moses was chosen over him. Exodus Rabbah 33:5 says:

> It is written, *a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches* (Prov. 22:1). '*Chosen'* was the name of Moses, of whom it says, *had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach* (Ps. 106:23)… '*than great riches*' i.e. than the riches of Korach, of whom it says that he had *Two hundred and fifty fire-pans* (Num. 16:17). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Korach: 'Thou dost preen thyself because of thy great wealth. Well, the name of Moses is rather to be chosen than all thy wealth of gold and silver.'

This midrash teaches that wealth is not a true marker of leadership or power, and that God prefers a good name to riches. The rabbis seem uncomfortable with wealth, and often uses Korach as the example of how wealth can lead to ambition and evil. Both Exodus Rabbah 41:1 and Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:2 present this same correlation between Korach's ill-fated coup and wealth.

> Exodus Rabbah 41:1
>
> This is why Solomon said: '*A faithful man shall abound with blessings,'* because everything over which Moses was appointed custodian was blessed, on account of his trustworthiness, '*But he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be unpunished*' this is Korach who was a Levite, but was ambitious for the High Priesthood also. What end awaited him? *And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up.* (Num. 16:32)
>
> Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:2

THERE IS A GREIVOUS EVIL WHICH I HAVE SEEN UNDER THE SUN, NAMELY, RICHES KEPT BY THE OWNER THEREOF TO HIS HURT: R. Joshua said: 'It alludes to Korach.'

The Soncino commentary says that the grievous evil is one who holds on to their riches so long it becomes their downfall, instead of giving it to people who need it and making it a blessing. The midrashim do nothing to soften Korach. Their limited commentary about him presents him as evil and power hungry, and blames his wealth for his yearning for authority. Among him, Cain, and Pharaoh, his character is altered the least. The authors have no reason to make him any more virtuous than how he is presented by the Torah, and if anything turn him into a worse character than originally.

Cain and Pharaoh undergo transformations through elaborations and Korach does not. Cain is an example of successful repentance and Pharaoh is a comparison to non-Jewish political leaders that rule over Jewish communities. These changes of character are only possible through the re-writing of the Torah text by the midrash. On the other hand Korach's character in its Torah iteration is already the example the rabbis need, removing the necessity to change how he is perceived. It is conclusive that evil characters in Torah were subjected by Amoraic authors to practices similar to minor-character elaboration, but only when it served current political or social motivations.

Chapter 4: Morally Ambiguous Characters in Midrash

This chapter looks at Eve, Hagar, and Esau, the morally ambiguous characters of Torah identified in Chapter 2, and make the argument that minor-character elaboration is used by the rabbis to pigeon-hole them as good or evil. Eve, Hagar, and Esau all experience some form of exile, Hagar and Esau from their families, and Eve from the Garden of Eden, but their punishments are far less severe than their evil counterparts. The uncertain nature of their merit allows the midrash creativity in categorizing them.

Eve

The presentation of Eve in the Torah is mixed. She is the first created woman, mother to all. She is also blamed for Adam's sin of partaking in the forbidden fruit. She blames her own partaking on the serpent, who is punished for tempting Eve to take the fruit in the first place. As a result of these events, God curses Eve with painful childbirth, but also dresses her and Adam for their time outside the garden, and blesses them with children. The rabbis attempt to tackle the simultaneous reverence and contempt the Torah projects on Eve and they too have a difficult time categorizing her as good or evil.

Genesis Rabbah 17:6 sees Eve as the source of evil in the world:

> R. Hanina, son of R. Adda said: 'From the beginning of the Book until here no *samech* is written, but as soon as she was created, Satan was created with her.

According to this midrash, along with the creation of Eve came the creation of Satan, the Adversary, and all that came with him; temptation, evil passion, and a counterbalance

to the forgiving nature of God. Two midrashim later we read the sin of Eve is also the reason particular mitzvot are assigned to women:

> And why was the precept of menstruation given to her [women]? Because she shed the blood of Adam [by causing his ability to die], therefor the precept of menstruation was given to her. And why was the precept of challah given to her? Because she corrupted Adam, who was the challah of the world, therefore was the precept of dough given to her. And why was the precept of the Sabbath lights given to her? Because she extinguished the soul of Adam, therefor was the precept of the Sabbath lights given to her. Genesis Rabbah 17:8

It is rare that mitzvot apply only to women, and this midrash explains the phenomenon in no uncertain terms as a form of repentance for Eve's partaking of the fruit. Men, for whom it is common to assign particular mitzvot, do not have a corresponding midrash describing repentance for the sin of Adam, perpetuating the very one-sided nature of rabbinic writing. The difference in treatment between Adam and Eve in the midrash also gives interpretation for why a man should not listen to or take advice from a woman, including this passage from Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:5:

> So God commanded Adam, *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it* (Gen 2:17). What did Eve do? She did give him to eat of it. R. Abin said: she merely had to weep and wail over him, whereupon he ate of it….Whereupon God replied 'And have you listened to Eve rather than to Me?' He was immediately

> driven out [of the Garden of Eden]….Here, then, is an instance of a man listening to his wife and losing thereby.

The midrash does not hesitate to blame Eve for the exile from the Garden of Eden, thus cursing humankind. According to the three midrashim above, Eve is evil. By contrast, some midrashim group her and Adam together and speak of their joint transgression. In these midrashim, Adam and Eve are the beguiled victims of the evil serpent. Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:10 says:

> R. Joshua of Siknin said in the name of R. Levi: The first serpent possessed the power of speech like human beings; when Adam and Eve would not eat of that forbidden tree he began to slander his Creator, and he said to them: 'From this tree the Creator ate and created His world, and He therefore forbade you to eat thereof lest you create another world.' And what did God, do unto him? He severed his feet and cut off his tongue so that he should not be able to speak.

In this midrash, the serpent addresses both Adam and Eve in order to convince them to eat of the forbidden fruit. This minor change to the Torah narrative replaces Eve with the serpent as the harbinger of evil to mankind. Numbers Rabbah 10:2 attempts to remove blame from Eve by adding that the snake managed to get Eve drunk in order to convince her to break God's rule:

> As the serpent, by enticing Eve to drink wine, was the cause for which the ground was cursed…As the basilisk divides between the dead and the living, so the wine causes

man to take leave of the paths of life for the paths of death. Because wine leads him to idolatry…

This midrash warns against drunkenness, but in order to make its point, it bends the story of Eve and the serpent and in the process provides Eve an excuse for her behavior. The line "as the basilisk divides between the dead and the living" is a reference to how the serpent caused death to enter into creation, not Eve.

The rabbis do not solely focus on Eve's role in getting humanity kicked out of the Garden of Eden. They also consider her a symbol of beauty, comparing her with other women in the Torah. Regarding Genesis 2:22, the formation of Eve from the rib, Genesis Rabbah 18:1 comments on the use of the verb *Vayiven,* to build:

…and it was also taught in the name of R. Simeon ben Yochai: He [God] adorned her like a bride and brought her to him [Adam] for there are places where adornment is called building.

The rabbis believe that beauty is a primary feature of Eve's creation. And her beauty stands the test of time, only rarely being surpassed, such as in this midrash from Genesis Rabbah 40:5.

R. Azariah and R. Jonathan in R. Isaac's name said: Eve's image was transmitted to the reigning beauties of each generation. Elsewhere it is written *And the damsel was very fair*- "Ad Me'od" (I Kings 1:4) which means that she attained to Eve's beauty, but here in truth it is written THE EGYPTIANS BEHELD THE WOMAN [SARAH] THAT SHE WAS VERY FAIR (me'od) which means even more beautiful than Eve's image.

The midrash highlights the ambiguous nature of Eve. She is both the originator of evil and the helpless victim tricked by the serpent into sin. She is the bane of Adam, and also his reluctant partner in eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The rabbis maintain Eve's ambiguous nature, not making her entirely evil or good. Eve's lack of transformation by the midrash is also a lack of character elaboration.

Hagar

It is difficult to classify Hagar as entirely good or evil in the Torah because she does not do anything. She is almost entirely a passive character. She is exiled twice and blessed twice. Unlike Eve, Hagar is not part of the direct lineage of the Jewish people, so it would have been very easy for the midrash to ignore her character and not embellish her at all, and yet it does. Genesis Rabbah 45:3 solidifies Hagar's position in Abraham's household.

> AND SARAI ABRAM'S WIFE TOOK HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN (Gen. 16:3) She persuaded her with words 'happy you should be to be united to so holy a man' she urged….AND GAVE HER TO ABRAM HER HUSBAND TO BE A WIFE TO HIM but not to another; TO BE A WIFE; but not a concubine.

Here Sarah comes across almost as a mentor, coaching Hagar through what might be a scary moment. However as time passes this relationship becomes rocky and tenuous as Genesis Rabbah 45:4 raises.

> AND HE WENT IN UNTO HAGAR, AND SHE CONCEIVED (Gen. 16:4) R. Levi b. Haytha said: She became pregnant through the first intimacy….Why were the matriarchs barren?....R. Huna, R. Idi, and R. Abin in R. Meir's name said: 'So that their husbands

might derive pleasure from them, for when a woman is with child she is disfigured and lacks grace. Thus the whole ninety years that Sarah did not bear she was like a bride in her canopy. Ladies used to come inquire how she was and she would say to them 'Go and ask about the welfare of this poor woman [Hagar]. Hagar would tell them: My mistress Sarai is not inwardly what she is outwardly…."

Sarah seems to regrets her offer to Abraham to take Hagar as a wife because as soon as she becomes pregnant, their relationship in the midrash seems to change. Genesis Rabbah 45:6 finalizes the transformation of the relationship, and turns Sarah into a less than pleasant character.

It is written, A*nd Sarah dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face* (Gen. 16:6). While it is written, t*o sell her unto a foreign people he shall have no ability, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her* (Ex. 21:8): after we have made her a mistress [wife] shall we make her a bondmaid again? I [Abraham] am constrained to do her neither good nor harm; hence it is written AND SARAH DEALTH HARSHLY WITH HER, AND SHE FLED FROM HER FACE. R. Abba said: She restrained her from cohabitation. R. Berekiah said: She slapper her face with a slipper. R. Berekiah said in R. Abba's name: She bade her carry her water buckets and bath towels to the baths.

Abraham knows that Hagar's status of a wife precludes him from demoting her back to the position of servant. Sarah however, continues to treat her as if this new status is non-existent. None of these details are present in the Torah narrative, thus the midrash is elaborating more on the story from Hagar's perspective of why she would run away. This is

a classic purpose of minor-character elaboration. It is peculiar though that the midrash would endear Hagar at the expense of Sarah, a matriarch.

Contrastingly, Abraham is presented as an even greater figure through midrashim of Hagar. One explanation of how she comes to be in the company of Abraham and Sarah is a testament to the lengths Abraham would go to in order to protect his family. Genesis Rabbah 15:1 says:

> R. Simeon b. Yochai said: Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter. When Pharaoh saw what he had done on Sarah's behalf in his own house, he took his daughter and gave her to Sarah saying, 'Better let my daughter be a handmaid in this house than a mistress in another house.'

Abraham's actions during the "sister-wife" chronicle are so admired by Pharaoh that he would rather his daughter serve Abraham's family than marry an Egyptian. This also adds a secondary political twist that Ishmael is the combination of two great powers, the Egyptian monarchy and Abraham's dynasty. The midrash does not explore further into this political union, but the fact that the midrash acknowledges it is a major consideration. In this story Hagar is just a pawn, thus it would not be considered minor-character elaboration for her, however it possibly explains why the rabbis are so keen to make Hagar seem less ambiguous and more in the "good camp". Still, the midrash is not comfortable enough to put Hagar on the same level as the Sarah, as Genesis Rabbah 20:6 curtails Hagar's status:

> UNTO THE WOMAN HE SAID: 'I WILL MULTIPLY THY PAIN AND THY TRAVAIL, etc. (Gen. 3:16). R. Judah ben R. Simon and R. Jonathan in the name of R. Eleazar ben R. Simon

said: The Holy One, blessed be He, never spoke directly with a woman save with that righteous woman [Sarah]….but it is written, *and she* [Hagar] *called the name of the Lord that spoke unto her* (Gen. 16:13), etc. R. Joshua b. Nehemiah answered in R. Idi's name: That was through an angel. But it is written, *and the Lord said unto her*- Rebecca (Gen. 25:23). R. Levi Said in the name of R. Hama ben R. Hanina: 'That was through an angel.'

Hagar is not quite righteous enough to warrant a conversation with God, but neither is Rebecca, another of the matriarchs. Equating Hagar with Rebecca in this midrash implies the goodness of Hagar, and the story found in Genesis Rabbah 60:14 solidifies it. It reads:

AND ISAAC CAME FROM COMING, etc. (Gen. 24:62): i.e. he came from a mission to fetch someone. And whither had he gone? TO BE'ER-LAHAI-ROI: he had gone to fetch Hagar, the one who had sat by the well (*be'er*) and besought Him who is the life (*lahai*) of all worlds, saying 'Look upon (*roee)* my misery.'

According to the midrash, after Sarah dies, Isaac seeks out Hagar to return. Other midrashim suggest that Abraham's new wife Keturah is actually Hagar, coming back to her rightful place at Abraham's side. Through minor-character elaboration, Genesis Rabbah takes Hagar's morally ambiguous character and transforms her into someone who requires a level of respect and honor.

Esau

The final ambiguous character of the study is Esau. In the Torah, Esau is grizzly and rough, but this is not considered a bad thing. His father Isaac actually favors him to his

younger, smaller brother Jacob. Except for a flash of rage threatening to murder his brother, he does little to warrant being considered evil. In fact, Esau has two redemptive tales in the Torah. When Esau first takes Hittite wives, he upsets Isaac and Rebecca, but after hearing Isaac's instructions to Jacob not to take Canaanite wives, he journeys to Ishmael to get a wife Isaac would approve. Additionally in the story of reunification between Jacob and Esau, the two brothers embrace and go their separate ways at peace. It is surprising then, to see how Esau is twisted by the midrash into a vile despised character. Esau is first in Genesis Rabbah 2:3.

> AND GOD CALLED THE LIGHT DAY (Gen. 1:5) this symbolizes Jacob; AND THE DARKNESS HE CALLED NIGHT, Esau. AND THERE WAS EVENING-Esau AND THERE WAS MORNING-Jacob.

This midrash does nothing to change the presentation of Esau. It merely compares the two brothers as opposites. But as the Soncino commentary points out, this midrash is only read for what it truly means through Genesis Rabbah 3:8.

> R. Jannai said: From the very beginning of the world's creating the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw the deeds of the righteous and the deeds of the wicked….*And God made a division between the light and the darkness,* between the deeds of the righteous and those of the wicked, *And God called the light day*, alludes to those of the wicked *And the darkness He called night'* to those of the wicked.

From the outset, Genesis Rabbah sees Esau as the embodiment of the deeds of the wicked, therefore considering Esau himself to be wicked. To prove this point, they amend

and embellish multiple scenes of his in the Torah to show Esau as the quintessential "bad guy."

The first story the rabbis elaborate on is the interlude between Jacob and Esau when he trades his birthright for soup. This long midrash comes from Genesis Rabbah 63:12

> AND ESAU CAME IN FROM THE FIELD (Gen. 25:29), etc. R. Phinehas said in R. Levi's name, and the Rabbis in R. Simon's name: You find that Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years, Isaac, one hundred and eighty. God withheld these five years from Abraham's life because Esau outraged a betrothed maiden and committed murder. Thus it says AND ESAU CAME IN FROM THE FIELD, which means that he violated a betrothed maiden, as it says *But if the man find the damsel that is betrothed in the field, and the man take hold of her and lie with her* (Deut. 22:25); while HE WAS FAINT signifies that he committed murder, as in the verse *For my soul fainteth before the murderers* (Jer. 4:31). Said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'I made a promise to Abraham, assuring him *…thou shalt be buried in a good old age* (Gen. 15:15) is this a good old age when he sees his grandson practicing idolatry, immorality, and murder? Better that he quit this world in peace!

The midrash accuses Esau of rape and murder, and blames him for the early demise of Abraham. Even by midrashic standards, the textual proofs they bring are weak justifications for their claims. The midrash is quick to accuse Esau of being willing to commit any crime to get what he wants, as in Genesis Rabbah 65:13 when Esau goes out to prepare for Isaac's blessing.

> AND REBECCA HEARD…AND ESAU WENT TO THE FIELD TO HUNT FOR VENISON, AND TO BRING IT (Gen. 27:5): If he found it, well and good; if not TO BRING IT through robbery and plunder.

This midrash is meant to clarify why the text says both "to hunt" and "to bring," but their solution expresses additional wariness of the character Esau.

The Torah is clear that Isaac favors Esau, however in the midrash, the rabbis coopt Isaac to seed greater mistrust of his elder son, as in Genesis Rabbah 67:2:

> AND ISAAC TREMBLED VERY EXCEEDINGLY (Gen. 27:33) etc…When a man has two sons, and one goes out while the other comes in, does he then tremble? Surely not! The reason, however, was that when Esau went in Gehenna went in with him. R. Aha said: The walls of the house began to seethe. Hence it is written WHO THEN: who is it that is to be roast here [in Gehenna], I or my son [Jacob]? Said the Holy One blessed be He, Neither thou nor thy son [Jacob] but HE THAT HATH TAKEN VENISON [Esau].

The midrash implies that the growing flames of Gehenna follow Esau around, foreshadowing his status of evil. It also fabricates Isaac worrying about the fate of Jacob at the expense of Esau, realigning Isaac's favor.

Finally, the rabbis make sure that the reconciliatory scene between Jacob and Esau leaves no doubt of Esau's full-fledged transformation to evil. They imagine in Genesis Rabbah 78:9:

> AND ESAU RAN TO MEET HIM…AND KISSED HIM (Gen. 33:4). The word it dotted….Said R. Jannai to him: If so, why is the word dotted? It teaches, however, that he wished to bite him, but that the Patriarch Jacob's neck was turned to marble and that wicked man's teeth were blunted and loosened. Hence AND THEY WEPT: one wept because of his neck and the other wept because of his teeth.

Esau is given no reprieve in any of his original stories, constantly cast as evil. To what end do the rabbis do this? Why take such an ambiguous character and turn him so completely? Their motivations are entirely political. The rabbis attribute Esau to Haman by lineage, and more often still he is attributed to Rome. A final midrash of the creation story highlights the connection the rabbis made between Esau and Rome. Genesis Rabbah 6:3 states:

> R. Levi said in the name of R. Jose ben Lai: It is but natural that the great should count by the great, and the small by the small. Esau [Rome] counts time by the sun, which is large, and Jacob by the moon, which is small. Said R. Nachman: That is a happy augury…just as the sun rules by day but not by night, so does Esau enjoy this world, but has naught in the World to Come….just as the moon rules by day and by night, so has Jacob a portion in this world and in the World to Come. R. Nachman made another observation: As long as the light of the greater luminary functions, the light of the smaller one is not noticeable, but when the light of the greater one sets, the light of the smaller one becomes noticeable; even so, as long as the light of Esau prevails, the light of Jacob cannot be distinguished; but when the light of Esau sets, that of Jacob shall be distinguished, as it is written *Arise, shine…For behold darkness shall cover the*

earth, and gross darkness the peoples, but upon thee the Lord will arise, and His Glory shall be seen upon thee. (Isaiah 60:1)

Esau and Jacob, Rome and Israel; the two are locked in polar opposition. Israel had been politically persecuted by the Romans/Byzantines for hundreds of years when these midrashim were written, so linking Israel's current suffering back to the struggle between Jacob and Esau was a redemptive message that one day, just as Esau fades away in Torah, Rome would also fade away, and Jacob would prevail. Esau is the perfect example of a minor-character elaboration in the midrash.

Eve, Hagar, and Esau are three examples of what the midrash does to morally ambiguous characters. Esau is made out to be evil, Hagar to be good, and Eve continues to exist in the ambiguous plane. The intentions of the rabbis in changing the characters of Hagar and Esau are very similar to modern motivations for the authorship of minor-character elaboration.

Chapter 5: Coming Home- A new story

Isaac trudged down the mountain alone. His emotions flickered between rage, confusion, and pain. How could his father have been so willing to sacrifice him-- slaughter him like a bull on the altar? At the base of the mountain he found the two boys that journeyed with them from home. They were anxious to see Isaac return without Abraham.

"Stay and wait for him," Isaac ordered them. "I'm sure he will be down soon enough." He mounted his donkey and kicked its ribs twice, setting off for home. He stopped only as often as his donkey needed rest, and arrived in Beersheva in two days' time.

Dawn was breaking as he approached the camp. The circle of tents under the tamarisk tree grove had been Isaac's home his entire life. He made a beeline for the largest tree whose branches made a canopy over the tent he shared with his father. For as long as he could remember it had just been the two of them, not counting their various workers and slaves.

Isaac's mother Sarah left just after he turned three years old, and now lived in Hebron with her handmaiden, Netanya. Isaac had been allowed to visit her from time to time as a child. During his visits Sarah would often tell him that she got Netanya in the divorce. This never made sense to Isaac seeing as he knew Netanya was the daughter of Abimelech of Gerar, but he didn't let it bother him. He never really got along with his mother anyways.

Now he wasn't sure if he could get along with his father as well. How could he? He didn't know if he could speak to his father again, let alone live with him. Isaac stormed into

the tent and started to gather his things. He was so deep in his own thoughts that he never heard the tent open and close behind him. When the tent's new occupant started to speak, Isaac nearly doubled over in fright.

"I take it you are leaving?" Despite the surprise, Isaac immediately knew it was Eliezer, his father's most trusted advisor. Isaac turned to face him. He stood a head shorter than Isaac, but Isaac still felt small in his presence. Eliezer continued. "I thought that might be the case. I advised your father he should at least tell you what God requested of him. Where will you go?" he asked.

Isaac spoke for the first time in two days. "I don't know. Anywhere is better than here." He continued to gather his belongings, packing a knife and a water skin on top of his spare tunic. He tied his pack with a bit of sinew and stood to leave.

Eliezer looked warmly at his master's son. "If you would permit me, Isaac, I know where you should go."

Isaac was taken aback. He had expected Eliezer would attempt to convince him to stay. "Where?" he wondered aloud.

Eliezer took Isaac by the arm and walked him out of the tent toward the south end of the camp. They stood facing the Negev desert as Eliezer described exactly how to reach a tiny settlement called Beer-Lahai-Roee. "Go there and sit by the well. If someone should come to you and offer you and your donkey water, go and stay with them." Isaac's bewilderment replaced his earlier anger as Eliezer directed him where to go. Baffled, he set out for Beer-Lahai-Roee without saying another word.

Isaac arrived at the well without incident; Eliezer's directions had been precise. He unburdened his donkey and sat in the shade of a tree next to the well. As he gazed towards the sky he realized it was a tamarisk tree, just like those at home, only much larger. He tied his donkey to its trunk and began to climb as he had in his youth; the knobby wood providing handholds as he ascended further into the branches. When he reached the point where he could climb no higher, he settled onto the branch and looked around. The area surrounding the well seemed completely deserted. Stretching from the north where he came to as far as he could see south was all desert. It was similar landscape to the west. To the east he assumed was the same, but a large mountain blocked his view. As he stared at the mountain he noticed a hooded black figure slowly winding its way down a narrow rocky path. As the figure neared, he realized it was an older woman wrapped in what looked like a single sheet of dark cloth. Two clay jugs hung from a wooden yoke she carried on her shoulders.

The woman approached the well, saw the donkey tied to the trunk, and trained her eyes up the tree until they met Isaac's. "What are you doing in my tree?" she snapped. Her voice was simultaneously warm and striking, and her accent was strange. He had only heard it from traders that occasionally would pass through his family's land on their way north.

"Your tree?" he asked, slightly miffed.

"Yes, my tree," she retorted. "I planted it almost forty years ago. And to the best of my knowledge, I'm the only one who has ever watered it. Pretty sure that makes it mine. Now will you please come down?"

Isaac obliged. He worked his way back down the trunk and was about to ask the mysterious woman who she was when she turned away from him. She walked to the well, lifted the stone cover with strength he would not have expected from a woman her age, lowered a bucket of water down the well, drew it back up, and placed it in his hands. "You must be thirsty" the woman started. "Drink!" Realizing how thirsty he actually was, he again obliged. He returned the bucket to her, which she quickly filled again from the well. "The donkey too," she demanded. "He had to work harder than you today, I'm sure." Amazed at his luck of finding the stranger Eliezer described so quickly, he rushed the bucket of water to the donkey, splashing some of it as he hurried.

"Thank you," he said as he returned the bucket to the woman. She lowered the bucket into the well repeatedly, filling the clay jars she carried with her until they could hold no more. Isaac marveled again as she replaced the stone cover with the strength of two men. She then lifted the yoke over her head, and, balancing it on her shoulders, turned back towards where she came. She walked about thirty paces before turning back to Isaac, shouting, "Well, are you coming or not?"

"You don't even know who I am," he yelled back. "But you would invite me to where you live? What if I intended you harm?"

The old woman looked at the two large clay jars full of water she was carrying, then back at Isaac. "Do I look like someone who needs to be worried by the likes of you?" Her eyes lit up as she laughed, and Isaac couldn't help but grin. "Come on," she continued. "It will be dark soon and it gets cold here at night."

Isaac knew he was meant to follow her. He untied his donkey and the three of them set off up the mountain path. It was nearly dark when they reached a cave halfway up the mountain, the entrance hidden behind massive boulders. Anyone passing by in the desert would have no idea it existed. As they entered, Isaac could barely contain his amazement. The small cave opening led to an enormous cavern glowing with light. Lamps were set up around the edges of the cave, and ornate tapestries woven in bright colors hung on the walls. Near the back, a large loom stood beside a sleeping area with two beds, though only one seemed to be in use. A cooking fire near the entrance glowed red with heat, and brown clay jars were nestled between two large flat sitting-stones on the far side of the fire. Adding to Isaac's wonder was a small olive tree growing miraculously from the stone floor in the center of the room.

The woman broke Isaac's stunned silence with a chuckle. "I know," she sighed. "I've been here for years, and I still sometimes can't believe how beautiful it is." She pointed to the ceiling, which rose at least thirty feet, arching to an oculus, like an egg missing the top of its shell.

The woman busied herself near the fire. She took a large bowl and filled it with flour from one of the clay jars. She sent Isaac with a ladle to one of the water jugs she carried up

from the well and added the liquid to the bowl, making a basic dough. Out of the other jars came oil, salt, olives, and a bit of dried meat. The two chatted as she worked.

"So what do you think of my home?" she inquired.

"It's wonderful!" Isaac exclaimed. Thinking of the second bed he asked, "Do you live here alone?"

"I do," she responded. "My son used to live with me, but he has long since grown and moved away. He begged me to join him, but I just couldn't." Her eyes stared past Isaac as if recalling a long-past memory. Then, blinking and shaking her head, she looked back to him. "Now it's just me and the mountain."

Isaac was surprised. "But, how do you survive? Where do you get your food?"

The woman gestured to the clay jars from which the ingredients had come. "Every morning those are full, no matter how much of them I use." Pointing at the olive tree she said "no matter how many olives I pick, whether for food or to press for oil, the tree is always full of fruit. God has provided me with everything I need. Now eat!"

The two spoke little as they ate. Isaac spent the time looking at the weavings on the walls. One pictured a great river with pyramids rising behind it, and in another, a boy hunting birds with a bow. Each tapestry was different and beautiful. He smiled at the woman. "Thank you," he said as he handed her back his plate. "It was delicious."

She took it from him and placed it on her own. "It is so nice to have a bit of company. You're welcome."

“Isaac,” he said, trying to be polite. “My name is Isaac, son of Abraham.”

He watched helplessly as the plates slipped through her fingers and crashed to the ground. His eyes focused on the shattered clay, but hers were boring a hole into the bridge of his nose.

“Say that again…” she stuttered, still not taking her eyes off of him.

Isaac noticed her studying him intently. He was suddenly nervous. “Isaac,” he finally managed to repeat. “My name is Isaac, son of Abraham.”

The silence lasted an age. Or at least it felt that way to Isaac. She still stared at him, barely flinching. Finally she responded. “I had always hoped this day would come, but I never truly believed it would. Eliezer would write me letters, telling me how much you had grown, what sorts of trouble you would get into, just to keep me aware; but to see you here, that I never thought would happen.” Tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke.

Isaac couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You know Eliezer? How? And why was he telling you about me? Who are you?”

She took a deep breath before answering, “I am Hagar.”

“Who?” Isaac asked incredulously.

“Oh, of course,” sighed Hagar, “you were too young to remember when I left. And obviously your father wouldn’t have told you about me.” She finally sat back down on the flat stone across from him. “I’m Hagar,” she repeated. “I’m your step-mother.”

She began to weave him a tale as rich as the tapestries surrounding them. She told him how she grew up in Egypt, and about how her father, the Pharaoh, gave her as a gift to Abraham and Sarah. She told him how his mother Sarah gave her as another wife to Abraham so he could have a child. She told him about Ishmael, his elder brother by fourteen years, who was forced to grow up in the desert away from his father. Isaac had never heard any of these stories. "Why didn't my dad ever tell me about you, about my brother…about any of this?" Isaac exclaimed.

"Your mother." Hagar answered simply. "When you were born, she was so happy. She thought she would never experience the joy of a child. But I was a threat her. As long as Ishmael and I were there, Abraham would always have to split his time between his two sons. She wanted you to have your father all to yourself, so she cast us out. Abraham had Eliezer find us a home nearby, and he would sneak off from time to time to see us. It worked at first, but one day she followed him. I had never seen her so angry. She threatened to have us killed, so we fled. We ran as fast as we could into the desert and never saw him again. Eliezer wrote to us, I assume by Abraham's direction, but that was the most contact we could have. I imagine Sarah forbade him from telling *you* anything," she concluded.

Isaac couldn't listen fast enough. "But my parents have been divorced for as long as I can remember," he blurted out, face flush with rising anger. "He could have told me any time he wanted!"

Hagar nodded thoughtfully. "Isaac," she said, a sad smile painted across her face, "Your father is a righteous, honorable man. God chose him because of it. But he has one fault. When overcome with guilt or grief, he falls silent. It's been this way ever since he failed to save Sodom and Gomorrah. He doesn't know how to deal with failure. Your father lost two wives, one after the other. I'm not surprised he never spoke of it." Seeing how overwhelmed Isaac was by this new information about the life of his family, she gingerly offered they call it a night. He agreed.

The ensuing few days were a blur. At sunrise Isaac would wake to Hagar making a loaf of bread on the cooking fire. They would pick and press olives in the morning so they could have oil for the lamps later that night. In the afternoon, Hagar would sit at the loom, and Isaac would watch her work, asking her questions about his father and brother, and the life he never knew. At night they would sit by the fire, and he would tell her everything that had happened since she had left. On the third night of this pattern, Hagar asked the question Isaac had been dreading would come up.

"So why did you leave home?" she probed casually. Isaac recounted for her what had happened on Mount Moriah; how he thought he was going to be ritually slaughtered by his own father until the ram appeared, and how the entire time Abraham said nothing.

"I felt like I couldn't trust him anymore. I'm not saying I would have still gone with him, but he should have told me what we were doing, what he planned to do. So I left," he finished.

Hagar came over to the rock Isaac sat on and crouched down next to him. "And what do you think was going through his head?" she entreated.

Isaac hadn't considered it previously. "I want to believe he was upset God asked him to sacrifice his son," he admitted.

"Not just his son," Hagar pointed out. "The last person he could call family. His wives were both gone, Ishmael he hadn't seen for 30 years, and now you, his only relation left, was going to be taken from him." Isaac was silent. He knew she was right.

The next morning, Isaac was surprised to find Hagar was not in the cave. He stretched and walked outside. There he found Hagar standing by one of the large boulders that hid the cave's entrance with a young man. And not just any young man, but one of the servants from his own camp. Hagar turned to Isaac, but the young man spoke first. "Eliezer sent me with this." He held out a small parchment. "It's for you" he said to Isaac. Isaac silently took the scroll, unrolled it, and read its contents:

Isaac

Your mother has died. Your father has gone up to Hebron to find her a place to be buried and to mourn her. I know it would comfort him to see you when he returns. He has also tasked me with finding you a wife. If I do not find you here upon my return, I shall know where to bring her.

Eliezer

He read the letter twice more, then rolled it back up. It was clear by the look on Hagar's face that she knew what had happened as well. "I need to go back," said Isaac.

“I know,” Hagar replied.

“Come with me,” he beseeched. “Come back home.”

Hagar was taken aback. “Come back? Oh, I’m not sure I could.”

“Please, Hagar,” Isaac continued. “Come back with me. And send word for Ishmael to come as well. If you have taught me anything these last few days, it’s that my father needs us in his life to show him that he hasn’t failed.”

Hagar’s face broke out into a wide, toothy grin. “Oh, alright. I’ll come. No promises that I stay, but I’ll come. I can’t stay here much longer anyways,” she said, eyes drifting skyward.

“Why’s that?” Isaac asked.

She laughed and pointed at the clay jars near the fire. “Those were empty when we woke up this morning.”

…

Eliezer could see the tents off in the distance; they were almost home. Suddenly, Rebecca stood up in her harness.

“Who is that there, out in the field walking towards us?” she asked.

Eliezer squinted until the figure became clear. “That would be Isaac, my master’s son and your husband-to-be.”

“And who is that with him?”

Eliezer looked again and, recognizing who he saw, broke into a wide grin.

The End

Epilogue

Jacob stumbled into the tent limping- a streak of blood painted across his left arm, two small beads slowly racing each other down his left leg. He was covered in other smaller scratches and scrapes, and bits of green were smeared across his wool tunic.

"*Safta*!" he cried. "It hurts, *Safta*!"

Hagar looked up from her loom. Her sunbaked face and wrinkled skin momentarily glowed maroon as light refracted off of her weaving when the tent flap flew open. "Hush *hamudi*" she crooned, face returning to is normal dark complexion as the tent flap closed again. "Let's take a look."

Esau followed closely behind, sprinting into the tent screaming, "I didn't do it, I promise! We were only playing."

"You pushed me!"

"I did not. You fell."

Hagar cut strips of fabric and wrapped them gingerly around Jacob's wounds as the boys continued to bicker.

"So what happened?" inquired Hagar.

Esau spoke first. "I was teaching Jacob how to use the snares Uncle Ishmael gave me. We set a few under a rock near the top of the hill, and climbed down to wait. We heard one go off so we raced up to see what we caught. I guess we bumped into each other climbing and…"

Jacob cut him off. "You pushed me off the rock. You wanted to be first. So he pushed me, *Safta*, and I fell into a caper bush." Jacob started to cry again. Being smaller and weaker than his brother was hard for Jacob. But it wasn't Esau's fault. Every day during the spring and summer, Esau worked alongside his father and uncles tending to the herds and collecting the wheat. The labor made him hardy and strong. Jacob preferred staying closer to home. He helped Rebecca cook and picked vegetables from the garden. Hagar had taught him to sew and weave, and hardly an afternoon went by without Jacob paying a visit to his grandfather Abraham for a story and a slice of honey cake. Hardly a recipe for toughness.

Hagar turned to Esau. "*Dubi*, my little bear, do you think it's possible you could have been nicer to your brother?"

Esau looked to the ground as he answered. "Yes, Safta…" after a pause "I'm sorry Jacob" he murmured, eyes never leaving the rug he was standing on.

"Look at your brother when you apologize, Esau." Hagar said firmly.

Esau stared at his brother standing across from him, arm and leg bandaged with the off-white cloth, and his eyes softened as he saw Jacob's pain. "I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to hurt you." Jacob said nothing, but he could tell Esau meant it.

Hagar looked at the two boys, only nine years old but growing up quickly. "That's better," she concluded. "Now, Jacob, go to your mother. She is getting dinner ready." Jacob hobbled off, favoring his right leg. Hagar gestured to one of the multicolored cushions on the floor next to her loom, and Esau silently sat down. She knew that Esau

wasn't mean-spirited. He was, however, rather unaware of how much he had grown in the last couple years, and that got him into trouble. She gave him a quick wink so he knew this was not one of those times. Esau relaxed.

"You need to be more careful, *Dubi,*" she said as she continued to weave. "You are bigger than your brother today, but you never know what will happen in the future."

Esau laughed. "He'll never be as big as me."

"Even more of a reason to be more careful then, sweetheart." Esau knew she was right. He continued to sit and watch her work until Isaac's voice echoed from the next tent over, "Dinner!"

Esau jumped up, "Finally, I'm starving," he exclaimed.

Hagar laughed aloud. "You're always starving. Now help me up. I'm an old woman."

Esau walked Hagar out of her tent to where the family had gathered around the campfire, under the shade of the giant tamarisk tree. All was peaceful in Beer-Lahai-Roee.

Chapter 6: Coming Home-Explained

AND ISAAC CAME FROM COMING, etc. (Gen. 24:62) i.e. he came from a mission to fetch someone. And whither had he gone? TO BEER-LAHAI-ROEE: HE HAD GONE TO FETCH Hagar, the one who had sat by the well. -Genesis Rabbah 60:14

AND ABRAHAM TOOK ANOTHER WIFE, AND HER NAME WAS KETURAH, R. Judah said: This was Hagar. -Genesis Rabbah 61:4

These two midrashim are the inspiration for the story of Hagar returning to Abraham through Isaac. This short story bends the narrative of the Torah, but does not break it. There are multiple aspects of the plot that are tied to specific verses in Torah, and I found gaps in the Torah version where I could elaborate. I will talk through each deviant from the traditional story individually, clarifying what my intentions were with each.

The story opens with Isaac coming down Mount Moriah after the incident of the Akedah. The Torah never gives us Isaac's account of what happened, so I felt free to imagine what I thought he was thinking and feeling. He encounters the two young men mentioned in Gen. 22:3, and tells them to wait behind for Abraham.

He journeys to Beersheva, which according to Gen. 21:25-31 is where Abraham and his servants are currently living. Additionally, Gen. 22:19 restates that Abraham lived in Beersheva. The Torah lacks details on where Isaac is during this time, only mentioning him again returning from Beer-lahai-roee in Gen. 24:62, so having him return to Beersheva with the intention of leaving for elsewhere is entirely plausible.

I include early the claim that Sarah and Abraham are divorced. This is perhaps the most non-normative detail of the story. I draw this from two parts of the Torah narrative. The first is that Gen. 22:19 claims Abraham is in Beersheva with no mention of Sarah.

Shortly following, Sarah dies at Kiryat Arbah, clarified by the Torah as Hebron in Gen. 23:2. In the same verse it reads *Vayavo Avraham*, that 'Abraham came' to mourn for his wife. This felt like a narrative disconnect I could exploit. Why would Abraham and Sarah not be living together? Additionally, in Gen. 23:4, Abraham labels himself as a *ger v'toshav*, a stranger and a foreigner, amongst the locals of Hebron. Some may choose to read this as Abraham is a stranger because he originates from Ur, but I chose to read this that Abraham did not live in Hebron, and had not for 30-some years.

The second section I draw the possibility of divorce from is the second sister-wife motif in Gen. 20. One of the major narrative differences between this and the first sister-wife motif in Gen. 12 is that here, Abimelech speaks directly to Sarah. He says in 20:16 that he gives silver and wealth to her brother as a covering for the eyes of all who see her, and that she is vindicated. This departure from the Gen. 12 narrative was a permission in my eyes to imply that this money was actually a bride-price, and he was releasing her from Abraham. Or at the very least providing Abraham with the ability to pay her off if she were to leave.

In the story I say that Sarah is with a handmaiden, Netanya, and that she is the daughter of Abimelech. This is taken directly from Genesis Rabbah 45:1, which reads

> AND SHE HAD A HANDMAID, AN EGYPTIAN, WHOSE NAME WAS HAGAR. He (Pharaoh) saying 'Here is thy reward (*agar*). Abimelech, too, when he saw the miracles performed in his house on Sarah's behalf, gave his daughter to her, saying, 'Better let my daughter be a handmaid in this house than a mistress in another.'

Abimelech's daughter is unnamed in the midrash, so I chose to call her Netanya from the root *natan* meaning given.

As Isaac returns home, he sees the camp underneath a Tamarisk tree grove. This tree becomes a common theme in the story, with one at Beer-Lahai-Roee as well. I use this symbol because of its mention in Gen. 21:33 as the tree Abraham plants at Beersheva before Isaac is born.

Eliezer, the servant, is taken from Gen. 15:2. He is widely assumed to be the servant who goes to fetch Rebecca, though he is never named as such. Eliezer would have been part of Abraham's life since at least the time he took possession of Hagar in Egypt (also from Genesis Rabbah 45:1) and thus he could be the narrative lynch pin between she and Isaac, ensuring they find each other.

Eliezer sends Isaac to Beer-Lahai-Roee. This is the name of the well Hagar finds the first time she flees from Abraham and Sarah in Gen. 16:7. The text says she fled toward Shur, Egypt by historical account, but stops at this well somewhere between Kadesh and Bered. In examining maps of ancient towns in Israel, this would have put Beer-Lahai-Roee in the middle of the Negev desert, south of Beersheva. The second time Hagar runs away, Gen. 21:14 says she "wandered in the wilderness of Beersheva." I saw these two as linked, and made it so that Hagar ran back to the well she found the first time.

Isaac's scene at the well with Hagar is meant to be juxtaposed with Eliezer's encounter with Rebecca. The Torah is replete with repeated symbolism, and it felt appropriate to add some of those details in when possible. Their interaction by the well is

meant to be almost comical, and pays homage to the playful and wise nature of strangers in many Hasidic stories. Also a nod to Jewish story writing is the miraculous nature of the clay pots. They are also proof that God indeed does stay with Ishmael and his mother, as said in Gen. 21:20. At the end of the story, the sudden lack of ingredients after years of them replenishing daily was God's nod that it was time for Hagar to return to Abraham.

The "reveal" of the story is a dramatic moment of reconciliation, but also a commentary on Abraham. Hagar was with Abraham for decades and I felt should have insight into his character. They also are meant to answer the question, why is Abraham silent during the Akedah, especially after he bargains for Sodom and Gomorrah. Only Hagar has the answer, which she gives to Isaac.

The small insertion of Eliezer and Rebecca is an expansion of Gen. 24:64-65.

Finally, the epilogue is the 'many years later' moment, showing Hagar having an influence on all three generations of men in our text. It quietly endears the reader to Esau, but more so to Hagar, the grandmother. Ishmael has a relationship with the family, which explains why he joins Isaac to bury their father, despite being sent away as a teen. It also gives a small mention of connection he and Esau share, since Esau will come to marry one of his daughters one day. The family is back at Beer-Lahai-Roee because Gen. 25:11 says this is where Isaac settles and has Jacob and Esau.

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