

Samson as The Hulk: Skopos Transformations of Genre and Media in Translation and Adaptation: The American Bible Society and the Graphic Novel

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I. Introduction

Traditionally, discussion regarding (print) Scripture translation has centered on trying to define the difference between translation and everything else, usually taken together in one large category and termed “paraphrase.” Thus translations as different in purpose and style as Clarence Jordan’s Cotton Patch Version and the ancient Jewish Targums (usually literal translations, but with sermon notes attached renderings of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic) have been called paraphrases. Some attempts were made to actually define what the differences were between the two. Thus within the United Bible Societies Eugene Nida’s concept of an underlying semantic structure to all language was often used to mark the difference. If one had all of the semantic elements of the source text adequately represented, and no new ones added, one had a translation. If one failed to have them all, or had extras, it was a paraphrase. And for awhile, it seemed to work.

As more non-print biblical products were developed explicitly as representations of ancient texts (as opposed to those being produced by the entertainment industry), the term “adaptation” arose to deal with the phenomenon. Most print-oriented translators, if asked would probably still say that these adaptations are paraphrastic by nature, and never can hope to rise to the level of translation. There is simply too much which must be made explicit which would-be translators do not know about the source text context, and the addition of all of this extra information violates the rule that no new information can be added to a product and still be considered a translation.

But cracks which have been appearing for some time in the structure of translation studies have recently begun to affect scripture translation as well. Some recognized that the semantic structure concept was too closely tied to the text-signs (words, phrases) of a text, and did not take into account the various ways a text can create contexts, or frames, to introduce any one of the semantic elements at a discourse level. At the same time, others noted how vastly larger the amount of implicit information was for any communication as compared to the explicit utterance, performance, or text in question. And still others called attention to the huge cultural and linguistic differences in terms of which parts of the explicit/implicit continuum of communication a translator would need to make explicit in a new language, or a new media, or a new communication setting. As Roman Jakobson is popularly quoted as saying, “languages [and we might add media and cultures] do not differ so much is what they can say as in what they must say”.

Much of this theoretical re-orientation has been documented in Wilt:2003 and will not be repeated here except as deemed necessary. And the foundational notion of frames has been put forward by many people, perhaps earliest and most thoroughly in Goffman:1974. But the issue of similarity will be taken up in more detail below before examining a specific case in point. While George Lakoff and Mary Douglas will be the major sources for what follows, they are by no means the only ones interested in similarity. Arduini and Hodgson (forthcoming) have compiled an entire book of articles on the subject as it applies to translation. Much of the content of that work can be seen as similar in focus to what has been gleaned from Lakoff and Douglas below.

II. On Similarity; or Resemblance is not a Property

Mary Douglas (1986,1996) and George Lakoff (1980) agree that while similarities are real, and exist in the world “out there,” they are so many and so varied that for all practical purposes, similarities should be seen instead as constructions of purposeful human activity. That is, something is seen as similar to something else

within the context of categorization in the service of whatever activity is being carried out. Thus someone may say “but sheep are sheep and humans are humans,” but not when male versus female is being studied, or mammals versus birds, and so on. For translation, this has important consequences. The purposes of the translator, often hidden or considered irrelevant or unseemly as a focus of discussion in translation theory, become the primary filter through which potential similarities between source and receptor communications are picked out and showcased, or ignored, in translation.

Both Lakoff and Douglas make the point that categorization is the basis for building conceptual worlds. More importantly, they both agree that the process of categorization does not take place the way nearly everyone assumes that it does. Similarities inherent between objects in the physical world would naturally seem to be the logical basis for creating categories. Thus human beings are obviously alike, and sheep are alike, and so on. However, it turns out that cultures often categorize in ways which are quite different from each other, and in ways which seem mutually inexplicable until some work has been done to find the basis for the categories.

Douglas (like Lakoff) makes the point that “similarities” are therefore not really simply “out there” attached to the objects we categorize, nor are they empty mental bins pre-constructed for just such objects, but are always related to specific human purposeful activity, which she calls the “frames of reference” for the categories we make. “Sameness is not a quality that can be recognized in things themselves; it is conferred upon elements within a coherent scheme... The idea of a quality of similarity keeps resurfacing because sets of similar things are so well-established within a particular culture that their sameness has the authority of self-evidence.” (1986, pp. 59-60).

It is not that there are no such things as similarities inherent in objects in the world. Rather it is that so many possible similarities exist, and so many reasons for making categories exist, that it is difficult to impossible to predict which categories will be formed and what objects will be clustered in them. It is the second reason stated above, that is, purposeful human activity, which Lakoff and Douglas believe is the true basis for categorization.

Lakoff (1986) speaks of motivated (rather than inherent, universal, or *a priori*) bases for categories. What he means is that once one understands a formerly unfamiliar categorical system, it can make perfectly good sense (i.e. have a logical structure and an extensible pattern). It can be seen to be motivated by certain concerns particular to the category-makers. But often it would be impossible to have predicted the category or the reasons for it beforehand. Thus the title of Lakoff’s book *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. These are all categorized together in Dyrbal typology for reasons which to the outsider may seem complicated and strange, but which not only seem perfectly natural within Dyrbal culture, but which in the end both give logical structure to the category and serve the purposes for which the category was created.

Lakoff at another point refers to this filtering of certain similarities on the basis of categorization as the metaphorical structuring of our understanding. He believes that “understanding takes place in terms of entire domains of experience and not in terms of isolated concepts.” (1980, p. 117). In a way reminiscent of Goffman’s natural frames, Lakoff speaks of certain “basic domains of experience” which are nevertheless metaphorically structured. He argues that they are “natural” in the sense that they have to do with our own interaction with our bodies or with our interaction with the physical environment, or with our interaction with others within our culture: “In other words, these ‘natural’ kinds of experience *are products of human nature*. Some may be universal, while others will vary from culture to culture.” (1980, p. 118). His now famous TIME IS MONEY or ARGUMENT IS WAR examples are illustrations of culture-specific metaphorical structuring of basic or natural domains of experience.

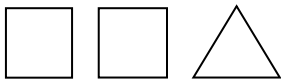
Douglas calls these filters frames of reference. She goes on to say (1996:149):

Any two things whatever, as disparate as you like on some criteria (such as the camel and the rock badger in Leviticus 11), can be counted the same by selecting shared features. There are an

infinite number of good reasons for assigning any two things to the same set... Being similar is an endowment of intellectual activity, which necessarily has to start with sets, categories, classes. But the intellectual activity articulates the rest of the behaviour, and the clues as to what is going on are in that behaviour.

In my household, for example, I could decide to classify all the living beings (already a decision taken presumably for a specific reason). I might choose to ignore the ants and spiders and such, and instead concentrate on the humans and pets (for one thing, they are easier to count). Humans could go in one category (myself, my wife, my son), and pets in the other (a spayed female cat, a male beta fish). However, I may want to group the males together (myself, my son, the beta fish) against the females (my wife, and in some sense at least, the cat). Or fur might be the distinctive or salient feature for categorization, or gills, or color of eyes, and so on. All kinds of categories are possible, each one as legitimate and as perfectly good as any other, depending on the purpose of the classification.

Another example can be given from the rudimentary intelligence test in which the test-taker is presented with three objects such as those below:



The question is then posed: which of the objects is different? Of course the answer seems painfully obvious. The triangle is different. But let us imagine a culture in which “first” things are special (such as first-fruits or first-born in the Hebrew Bible). Furthermore, let us imagine that this culture has a built-in left-to-right spatial orientation preference (as for example with left-to-right writing systems). Then the square on the left might be chosen as “different,” and the (to us) obvious difference between the squares and the triangle ignored. Or imagine a culture where “middle” things are somehow salient (cf. chiasm in the Hebrew Bible). Then the middle square would be chosen. Or take a culture with absolute orientation preference. Then the east/west/north/south-most (depending on which was salient for the culture) might be chosen, and would differ depending on where one was sitting in relation to the objects. And so on.

In our culture, we have ready-made concepts of what constitutes an object, as well as how to manipulate abstract versions of such objects (or shapes) on a page (geometry). Other cultures with different organizational interests may have built up other categories such that the very question above would have questionable meaning. Perception itself is dependent, at least in part, on underlying ready-made conceptual systems. What people will see (squares and triangles, or something quite different) and how they will understand what seem to be even the most straightforward utterances (“objects... different”) can only be fit in some way or another with their prior experience as well as their organization of that prior experience. Otherwise their experience will be by definition existential and ineffable or else no experience at all.

If the above example seems extreme, it is because we assume (perhaps correctly) that shape is more fundamental to all of human experience than the other (cultural) factors put forward. But our assumptions about how people go about assessing similarities are probably overly simplistic more often than not, as I recently realized.

Not long ago my son was trying to tell me about certain older persons who were attending classes with him at the public university where he attends. He complained that the professors had to put up with these persons even though they seemed to have “a cross to bear.” It was clear immediately to both of us that this was not the idiom/image he was looking for, so I tried to help him by offering up some of my own suggestions. We

finally got it, and later returned to look at the unconscious process we went through in matching similarities at various levels in order to come up with the right idiom.

As we tried to figure out the idiom/image, we unconsciously not only steered toward images which were similar at an underlying semantic level (something hitting/rubbing against something else), but just as importantly, after the first miss, we sought only choices with the sound/word pattern of "an x to y". We also steered back toward real idioms after at one point almost abandoning them altogether (in "nail to hammer"-from hammering away at a point). And of course we were groping for the underlying idea or focus all along as well.

Later, my son gave me a specific example of one of these misfits asking about alien communications coming from comets in an astronomy class, which confirmed the idiom we finally settled on. The following table illustrates the movement along various vectors of similarity and difference:

Example	Idiom	Image	Pattern 'x to y'	Agency/focus
Cross to bear	Good/wrong	Burden/resigned	+	Patient/suffering/martyr
Chip on his shoulder	Good/wrong	Burden/resentful	-	Patient/suffering/grudge
Soapbox to stand on	Derivative/wrong	Message/public/obsessive	+/-	Agent/public/committed
Nail to hammer	Derivative/wrong	Friction/repetitive	+	Agent/relentless (?)
Dead horse to beat	Derivative/wrong	Friction/ repetitive	+	Agent /relentless/futile
Axe to grind	Good/right	Friction/ repetitive	+	Agent /relentless/grudge

When telling this story later, someone suggested "bone to pick" as well, which would have fit nicely between the soapbox and the nail (good idiom, close image, right pattern, right agency, wrong focus). It still reaches back to someone who feels s/he has been wronged, as in the first two cases. But the image and pattern are closer to "axe to grind", and the idiom is a good one. One can see complex relationships of similarity among various inter-related domains, and how the search for the form (pattern) can override the search for meaning in the process of finding the right metaphorical idiom, and the perfect match of all elements.

Lakoff makes it clear that the similarities he is talking about are epistemological and experiential, not ontological (1980, p. 154):

...things in the world do play a role in constraining our conceptual system. But they play this role *only through our experience of them*. Our experiences will (1) differ from culture to culture and (2) may depend on our understanding of one experience in terms of another, that is, our experiences may be metaphorical in nature. Such experiences determine the categories of our conceptual system. And properties and similarities, we maintain, exist and can be experienced only relative to a conceptual system. Thus, the only similarities relevant to metaphors are *experiential*, not *objective*, similarities.

Douglas starts from the point of view that the conceptual worlds formed from the purposeful categorizing activities mentioned above are essentially social, not individual:

Emile Durkheim had another way of thinking about the conflict between individual and society... For him the initial error is to deny the social origins of individual thought. Classifications, logical operations, and guiding metaphors are given to the individual by society. Above all, the sense of a priori rightness of some ideas and the nonsensicality of others are handed out as part of the social environment. He thought the reaction of outrage when entrenched judgments are challenged is a gut response directly due to commitment to a social group. (Douglas:1986, p. 10).

In summary, there are several points at which Lakoff's and Douglas' thinking coincide or complement one another, and which can be listed as follows:

1. What members of a culture pick out as *similar* (by virtue of their activities of categorization) are products of human activity, usually group activity, and are not unambiguously inherent in the objects of the physical world.
2. *Metaphors* often form the backbone of conceptual systems, and guide the kinds of semantic networks that are possible for given terms. This (often metaphorical) categorization is the semantic basis for culturally disparate mental maps.
3. Conceptual systems are in large part influenced by and representations of group or cultural loyalty. Ideology is *sociology*. In this way cultures express themselves through the members of the culture, and in fact direct and to some degree determine the values, beliefs, ideas, and even tastes of those members.
4. This sociological basis for conceptual systems from values to tastes is largely *hidden* from those participating in the process of cultural influence. To expose it for what it is would make it difficult to maintain.
5. *Exclusion* is the basis of the sociological processes described above. Thus it is in disagreement, rather than in agreement, difference rather than in similarity, that most people define their conceptual systems (Douglas:1996, pp. 77ff.).

Clearly, what has been presented up to this point has several implications for translation. To begin with, the idea of frames and framing changes the focus of the task of translation from the text-signs to the frames of reference within which and under whose terms those signs are understood. This is by no means to say that the text-signs are to be disregarded, or that they are somehow less important than before. They are, after all, the only direct clues we have in a written text as to what the original frames of communication and understanding were. But without a clear understanding of the various frames of reference, a translator has very little chance of serving as a proper mediator between the original language and receptor language cultures (Katan:1999). Of course the issue becomes even more complicated and thus more crucial when the translation is being done in an indirect way through a third language, as is often the case with Bible translation into minority languages.

In practical terms, this means that translation should begin with a full investigation of all the cultures involved in the translation, using the resources that Lakoff and Douglas present to unpack the most probable understandings of a given text under various translational transformations. Without such a study, the translator is bound, without knowledge of her or his own limits, to either make a translation which suits his or her frame of understanding (domesticated), or to use text-signs which will be similar in various formal aspects to the original (e.g. word-for-word lexical correspondence, grammatical constructions, etc.), but which will fall well outside the frames of experience and understanding of the receptor culture.

Secondly, the issue of similarity is critical to the translator and to those who would attempt to help the translator. Lakoff (1980, pp. 136ff.) cites Dwight Bolinger in an attempt to show how nearly all changes in linguistic form (within a language) produce a change of some kind in meaning. Lakoff claims this is due to the spatial nature of our metaphorical understanding of sentences themselves. Thus length, closeness, or similarities of various formal kinds are used to mark sometimes subtle differences in our understandings of otherwise virtually identical sentences. Lakoff further notes that these formal similarities are often perceived or chosen through a metaphorical filter. He uses as his example the rising tone at the end of yes-no questions. He relates this to the conceptual metaphor UNKNOWN IS UP / KNOWN IS DOWN (e.g. "It's up in the air," vs. "That settles it."). Interestingly, his example of rising tone for yes-no questions is apparently nearly universal, so if he is right about the metaphor guiding the intonation, this metaphor should also be nearly universal.

Since translation already requires various changes in form, similarity must be raised to the level of equivalence (or perhaps simply adequate similarity under a given purpose) at the level of comparable conceptual systems. Lakoff sums up the issue of similarity as related to conceptual systems (1980, p. 147):

We have seen that many of our experiences and activities are metaphorical in nature and that much of our conceptual system is structured by metaphor. Since we see similarities in terms of the categories of our conceptual system and in terms of the natural kinds of experiences we have (both of which may be metaphorical), it follows that many of the similarities that we perceive are a result of conventional metaphors that are part of our conceptual system.

The points made by Lakoff and Douglas about similarity are crucial to anyone using terms such as equivalence or correspondence to describe the products of the activity of translating. If they are right, any discussion of similarity must begin with the recognition that there are many kinds and levels of similarity, and that which kind(s) of similarity we pick out depends entirely on the purposes which those controlling the process of translation have in mind (either consciously or unconsciously). Perhaps we should really have been talking about “similarities” all along.

Finally, Douglas points out the extent to which what we think of as beliefs, values, and even personal taste are to a large extent given to individuals by the cultures in which they live. “For better or for worse, individuals really do share their thoughts and they do to some extent harmonize their preferences, and they have no other way to make the big decisions except within the scope of the institutions they build.” (1986, p. 128). This is something like the weak form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, but at the level of the conceptual worlds which direct the understanding of those who inhabit those worlds by virtue of their membership in corresponding communities.

Douglas’ grid/group typology of the various cultural thought-worlds can bring a certain clarity to what otherwise might seem an insurmountable task. Her four cultural types categorize well the various cultures which are usually involved in Bible translation, as illustrated below:

Increasing personal freedom 		Bible Translation Process	
		Isolate – Marginalized persons	Hierarchist – OT and many receptor language cultures and national cultures
		Individualist – Most Bible translation consultants and some national cultures (e.g. U.S.)	Enclavist – NT and some receptor language cultures
		Increasing solidarity 	

The problems which can result may be seen clearly in such a table. Since the Hebrew Bible, for example, comes fundamentally out of a hierarchist culture, products made for individualist cultures such as modern-day youth in the U.S. will have to work at finding similarities and negotiating shared meaning through them.

The translator is forever caught between the conceptual worlds of original text and intended audience. As Katan’s cultural “mediator,” the translator has a responsibility to both thought-worlds. If these worlds belong to the same cultural cluster, the job is not so difficult. But even between the Hebrew Bible and the NT the

thought-worlds differ considerably, so there inevitably will be points at which there is no obvious contact between the understandings the translator is trying to mediate. In such cases difficult choices must be made. Helps of various kinds can make the task easier. But in the end, the purposes of the translator and of the translation will determine what kinds of similarity will characterize a given translation.

Lakoff (1980, p. 231) captures the essence of the problem, made only worse for translators of the Bible by the fact that it is not possible to directly query the biblical culture in the process of mediating cultures:

When people who are talking don't share the same culture, knowledge, values, and assumptions, mutual understanding can be especially difficult. Such understanding *is* possible through the negotiation of meaning. To negotiate meaning with someone, you have to become aware of and respect both the differences in your backgrounds and when these differences are important. You need enough diversity of cultural and personal experience to be aware that divergent world views exist and what they might be like. You also need patience, a certain flexibility in world view, and a generous tolerance for mistakes, as well as a talent for finding the right metaphor to communicate the relevant parts of unshared experiences while deemphasizing others... [and] the ability to bend your world view and adjust the way you categorize your experience... When the chips are down, meaning is negotiated...

III. Samson

The similarities achieved by the "Samson" graphic novel with other examples of this genre are easy to point out. Samson himself has bulging muscles, is young and virile, and of course has supernatural strength (in the parlance of the genre, his strength would be his "special power"). Delilah, for her part, is appropriately well-endowed, and in a number of scenes, scantily-clad. As for God, he is portrayed as a supernatural being with light surrounding him, and a cloak with stars and planets seemingly circling within it. His eyes are hidden from view, making him look mysterious. His face is strong, the face of a black man (see graphics).

All of these elements can also be seen either in the text implicitly or symbolically. Thus one has to assume Samson had fairly large muscles to do the things he did. And Delilah must have been physically attractive to carry out her part in the story (though in her day modesty would probably not have allowed her to show nearly so much skin in public). As for the visual presentation of God, it must be symbolic. The use of light, heavenly bodies and a sense of mystery are all based in the biblical text in its wider context, if not in the Samson story itself.

There is plenty of sex and violence in the comic, which is also well-documented in the story. In fact, the text describes gruesome details only hinted at in the graphic novel (e.g. Samson's eyes being put out). Samson is always strong in the novel, but especially so when confronting his enemies. The text is more explicit in that it usually precedes Samson's exploits with "...the Lord's Spirit took control of Samson..." Interestingly, this element has some similarities with the comic figure of the Hulk, who only gets strong (as he changes from ordinary man into the Hulk) when he becomes angry.

In fact, one can argue that most print translations for church people have in fact "tamed" the biblical text and made its tone more pious and less risqué than it actually was in its time. One need only consider the case of the Song of Songs and its translation and interpretation in Jewish and Christian communities up until recent times. This kind of pious circumspection has made its way into non-print and non-church representations of the text as well. It has been particularly damaging in modern visual representation. Jayne Loader makes the point (Hodgson:1997, p. 201), speaking of Nicolas Ray's film 'King of Kings':

In the world of the biblical spectacular, evil is glamorous, colorful, sexy, memorable. Goodness and virtue are boring, forgettable, and dull... Gold ordains the palaces of Herod and Pilate...By contrast, Jesus' followers are clothed in dull browns and blues. Their hovels are dark and unappealing. This may be historically accurate, but it has a visual meaning as well, which subverts

the film's ostensible goal...Christianity [is] terminally boring (Hollywood's version of the kiss of death).

We see here the influence of setting on genre expectations. If the graphic novel of the Samson story is presented in a Sunday school class, for example, it will raise a different set of expectations than if it is found mixed in with *Hell-Boy* and *The Hulk* at the local comic store. Of course, these settings also delimit different sets of audiences to a large degree, but setting affects genre even within the same audience demographics. In this context, Samson in the graphic novel genre may be too similar to modern sex and violence as entertainment for some, but it is arguably a corrective to what has gone before (see appendix).

IV. Conclusion

Many translators, and particularly Bible translators, will continue to prefer something like equivalence (however they define it) than talk of similarity or similarities. Thus Ernst Wendland (Arduini:forthcoming, p. 438-footnote):

Equivalence, or “equal value”, includes the semantic component, or implication, of a *positive* evaluation of the activity or item to which it is applied; similarity does not. Thus, “I have achieved an *equivalent* result”, suggests a successful outcome with respect to some recognized norm or standard. But “I have achieved a *similar* result” may be either good or bad, depending on what you were aiming to achieve; your effort may still fall below the required or desired standard.

Yet translation scholars often prefer to speak of similarities as it appears to them to describe the actual situation translators find themselves in. Thus José Lambert (Arduini:forthcoming, p.421): “it is rewarding for research to worry much more about the question of what kind of relationships are there between given (series of) texts and ‘How can we account for them?’ than to look for ‘What kind of a translation is this?’”

It is precisely this distinction between equivalence and similarity(ies) which makes each term preferable to its different constituencies. Most church people want an assurance of a “successful outcome”, while most scholars want to leave that evaluation open, “depending on what you were aiming to achieve”. But as Andrew Chesterman points out (cited by A. Mojola in Arduini:forthcoming, p. 346):

Whether or not two entities are the same (with respect to all salient features) is actually beside the point; there will always be features, albeit perhaps not salient ones, which separate any two entities. But the point is whether or not two entities *count as* the same, within a given frame of reference and for the purposes in hand. And whether something counts as something else is, ultimately, a question of imagination. The ability to see something ‘as’ something else is, after all, central to human cognition...

One can argue as to whether the text on which the graphic novel is based matches up well with the meta-messages of the modern genre (Samson as super-hero versus tragic hero, the dark elements of sexual betrayal and violence as entertainment versus moral lesson, etc.), but it is hard to deny that many of the elements picked out by the graphic novel are in fact in the text itself. The product is not just similar to other graphic novels. It is recognizably the biblical story of Samson as well.

But questions, especially about the meta-messages tied to the modern genre of the graphic novel, remain. To what degree did the sex and violence of the text have similar goals to that of the sex and violence in the modern graphic novel? Specifically, the modern graphic novel's use of sex and violence as a means of entertainment (especially their key audience demographic-young males) would no doubt be at odds with the probable “moral lesson” goals of the text. That is not to say that the modern novels have no moral lessons, or that the ancient texts did not entertain. Both are certainly true. But similarities are rarely, if ever, perfect matches.

In the end, the degree of similarity found between the biblical story of Samson and the ABS graphic novel presentation of that story will depend largely on what the reader brings to each of them. Someone steeped in a church tradition of interpreting the Bible, but less familiar (and less comfortable) with the modern graphic novel, might find the elements of sex and violence out of place. This reader might see these elements as constructing a frame of entertainment, thus blocking Yahweh from being the true hero of the story, and missing the crucial moral lesson (true strength lies only in dependence on God). On the other hand, a young person more familiar with modern presentational forms than with ancient ones might find the graphic novel more accessible, more understandable and more engaging than the considerably more terse biblical story. Most importantly, he (and it would probably be a he) might actually read it.

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Appendix:

Similarities/Differences between Samson and other graphic novel Heroes

	Samson	The Hulk	Hellboy
Source of power/strength	“other” / God	genetic accident	“other” – origin seems to be from hell (like Spawn)
Trigger	spirit/power of God	triggered by stress (usually anger)	desperate situation
Enemies	Israel’s enemies, the Philistines	societal structure, the law	bad guys from the other side, Nazis
Weaknesses	women self-discipline conflicted about identity	pressure self-discipline conflicted about identity	conflicted about identity
Role in society	rescue his people	rescue/help the weak	rescue humankind

The above table shows various elements of similarity as well as difference between the biblical Samson and two modern comic/graphic novel creations. One of the reasons the story of Samson lends itself so well to this genre is that the heroes in the graphic novel genre tend to be dark.

Batman was perhaps the first of this kind in the comic genre before the rise of the graphic novel. Batman and also some versions of Spiderman are not unambiguously good, as is Superman. The Hulk, and especially Hellboy and Spawn, are even clearer representations of this kind of “dark side working for good”. This melding of good, or “light” elements with the darker (if not actually evil, at least dangerous and frightening) elements allows these figures to be presented at once as intrinsically good but also complicated and interesting (see above comments on Hollywood’s “kiss of death”).

The heroes’ weaknesses are an important part of this “dark side”. These weaknesses put them into situations where they may in fact fail—not an option for Superman, for example (or God). This also makes the story less predictable, and thus more interesting. In the biblical Samson story God is both good and at the same time dangerous. But God is not as complicated, and thus not as interesting to humans as is conflicted Samson. Not only strong and weak at the same time, but weakest when trying to depend on himself and strongest when totally entrusting himself to an outside force—this kind of contradiction and inner conflict was made for the graphic novel. If Samson didn’t exist, the genre would have had to make him up.



Samson with Donkey Jawbone



Samson and Delilah



God appears to Samson's mother