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INTERVIEW



## “It's that guttural, human voice; that's comics”: An Interview with Ken Krimstein

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### ABSTRACT

In Summer 2022 we met with Ken Krimstein, cartoonist of *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth* and *When I Grow Up: The Lost Autobiographies of Six Yiddish Teenagers*. We discussed his process creating comics, his personal history with sequential art, and what led him to create in the form. He also shared insight into his forthcoming work on Franz Kafka and Albert Einstein and how he chooses his subjects. Finally, we considered the relationship between Jewish identity and comics leading us to think about the connection between Yiddish and comics: how both of these hybrid, popular, guttural voices take shape through concision.

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In Summer 2022 we met with Ken Krimstein, cartoonist of *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt: A Tyranny of Truth* and *When I Grow Up: The Lost Autobiographies of Six Yiddish Teenagers*. We discussed his process creating comics, his personal history with sequential art, and what led him to create in the form. He also shared insight into his forthcoming work on Franz Kafka and Albert Einstein and how he chooses his subjects. We finally explored the relationship between Jewish identity and comics leading us to consider the connection between Yiddish and comics: how both of these hybrid, popular, guttural voices take shape through concision.

**Vera Camden and Valentino Zullo:** Hello, thanks for meeting with us today!

**Ken Krimstein:** Thank you. So nice to see you! I've been looking forward to this. You know, I just got back from Comic Con, which was just mind-blowing.

**Camden and Zullo:** It's inspirational, right? You come back with all that energy.

**Krimstein:** In so many ways. Even just learning about the sort of audiences that go to these things that I don't even know about, like animated Netflix series that are new to me. I walked into the wrong room once and it was packed. I thought well this this is interesting, right? So, I just hung out there and I learned about what attracts people to these different works. It's quite heartening to me.



**Figure 1.** Drawing of Hannah Arendt by Ken Krimstein. Reprinted with permission.

**Camden and Zullo:** It's a great part of Comic Con. We just want to say first how much we've enjoyed getting to know your work. We have learned so much from both *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt* and *When I Grow Up*. They're very different in terms of subject and context, but you can feel the same spirit in both. And of course, the cartooning is amazing.

**Krimstein:** Gosh, thank you so much. We can talk about it later, but I am absolutely up to my eyeballs in my next project, and I hope you feel the same way about that one. \*laughs\*

**Camden and Zullo:** Since you're in the middle of creating your next work, why don't you start with your process? What is your process of adapting text into image-text forms as you did with the previous two works? How did you turn Hannah Arendt's story (Figure 1) or the stories of the Yiddish teenagers into comics? Is there something about these stories you chose that lends themselves to the visual?

**Krimstein:** I try to do a lot of research. I immerse myself in the era, visually, musically, cinematically, and I go to the place. I was in Vilnius, Lithuania for *When I Grow Up* for the better part of a month. I would wander the streets taking pictures, painting, and creating sketches. I was, of course, going into the library, the Vilna Archives where the papers are held. They were just handing me these documents and they were helpful. You also skulk around, you sniff, and you look, and you find things like a building that has Yiddish, Polish, and German writing on the walls that's survived since the 1930s. That gives you a sense of the pluralistic society that had existed at the time. You see how close the Jewish quarter was to the city hall and to the Vilnius Castle. You can also see the changes in the city: there's this long street that was once named after Russian Tsar, then it was named for a communist dictator, then it was named for 13<sup>th</sup> Century Lithuanian Grand Duke, Gediminas. You get the sense of how the city feels geographically. You can see how the light was in the city. Then you read everything so that you can immerse yourself. Now, with the internet you can find everything else you need. I want to have authenticity of the images because I'm trying to combine images and words. I say to myself, okay they had phones, alright, what did they look like? I Google search 'phone from Poland 1935,' because at that time, Lithuania was part of Poland.

**Camden and Zullo:** You try to experience that world in some way to recreate it visually.

**Krimstein:** Everything feeds into it for me. For example, I subscribe to academia.edu and so I'll wonder if there were any science fiction movies in Yiddish and I'll do a search there. I don't necessarily hit a homerun, but whatever I find is fascinating and I'll print it out. It's a lot of trees. \*laughs\*

So, to get more into this wool-gathering, when I was in Lithuania for *When I Grow Up*, I had to get approval from the library and a lot of people beforehand that I could go there and deal with these manuscripts that were found. Then when I got there sitting on the desk at the library archives there was a stack of 6 or 7 that the librarians had already pulled and one of the curators there had kind of roughed out what the stories were for me. I went through them and if I liked the story I would ask them to roughly translate the first page or so. Then, once I have a plan, what I do in my process is put everything on notecards with a fat pen. I use these tiny little note cards I learned how to make when I was a history student in college. I use the notecard to define a moment like 'runs upstairs and gets yelled at.' Each notecard is a moment. Once I get all these notecards with fat writing on them then I start putting them together. Well, actually, even before that, I'll keep a notebook and I just stuff it with notes. Then I go through that notebook, circle anything that's really good, and put it on a notecard with a fat pen. It's a filtration process.

**Camden and Zullo:** Then do you use a bulletin board?

**Krimstein:** It's like a detective board. I'll also be doing sketches so it's not like I'm completely divorced from the visual side. I'm doing sketches and I'm getting a feel but it's very important for me to map out the story. When I first moved from doing gag cartoons, like *New Yorker* style cartoons to longer form stories, as most fledgling cartoonists will probably do, I just started drawing because I had a great idea and I got about six beautiful



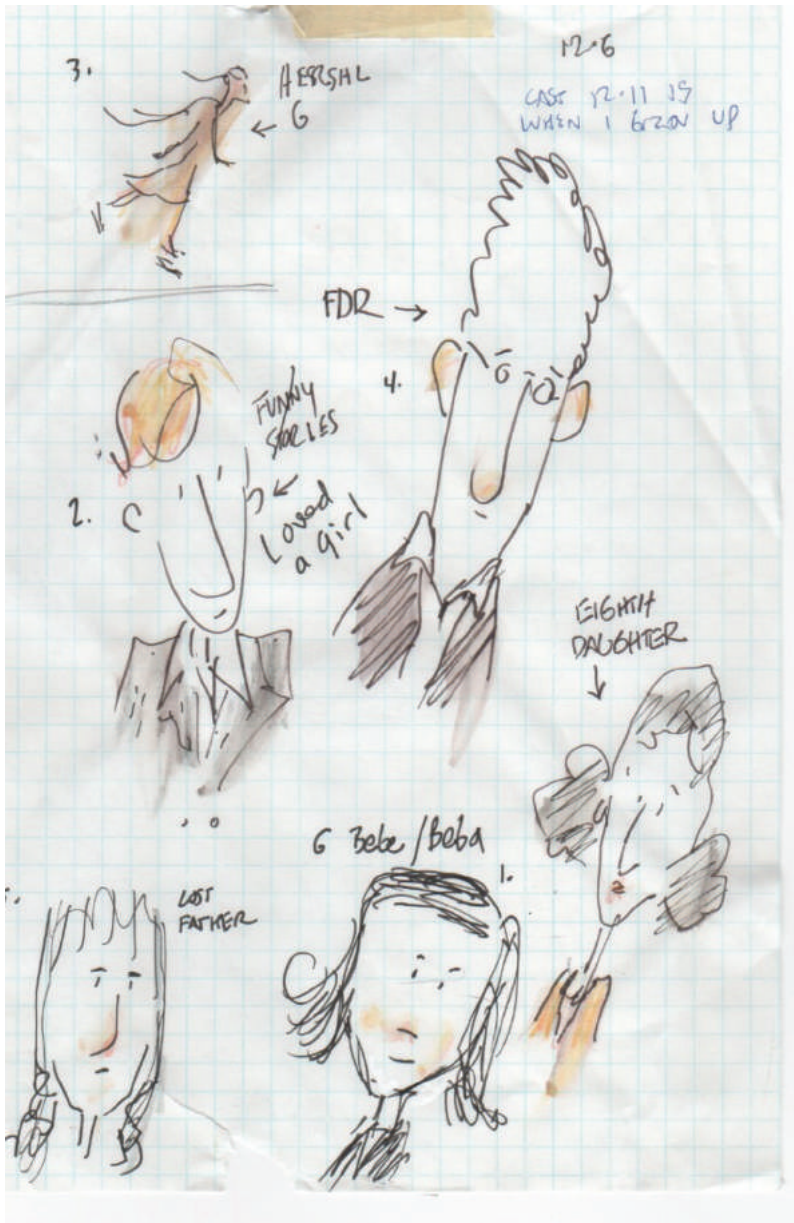
**Figure 2.** Sketches by Ken Krimstein. Reprinted with permission.

pages in and I hit a wall. So now I really try and get the story planned out. Then I know that it's going to change as I start doing it, but once I have those notecards then I have it planned out.

Peter Kuper once shared with me how he does thumbnails. I tried doing thumbnails when creating *When I Grow Up*. The thumbnails have a slight resemblance, but it is just a beginning, a middle, and an end. Some of the stuff actually did survive. For instance, the one with the girl who's skating, I feel I had really captured that feeling of her in the thumbnail. The thumbnails of the one with the girl who plays the mandolin, you can see the musical notes, you can see her face, and I decided she has braids. It's an iterative process (Figure 2).

Here is an interesting image (Figure 3) that I've shared with some people, and I talked about it in some of my talks where I was trying to get the faces of the characters and *When I Grow Up*, and you can see sort of the rough sketches of the characters on lined paper and it has some of the wrong titles of some of the characters. So, you can see things evolve as you work. Part of the process when you're creating these stories, you also stare at what you've done, and you realise, oh, maybe I put that chapter in the wrong place. Oh, it's better there! In fact, I had originally had seven stories, and I decided to cut one completely. It reminds me that I once heard that Fred Astaire cut ten percent of all his routines. It's painful and hard to do. I mean





**Figure 3.** Character sketch by Ken Krimstein. Reprinted with permission.

to cut something, but I felt that maybe that scrap or that thing will have some usage somewhere. So, that's my process. It's very important for me to immerse myself.

**Camden and Zullo:** How did you decide to work on these figures? Hannah Arendt and the Yiddish teenagers?

**Krimstein:** At the beginning I have a seed, more of a feeling of what I want. With Hannah Arendt, I had a question, in fact, I had several questions going into the work. For

example, why did she renounce philosophy? I didn't want to just focus on her philosophy, though. I wanted to do this work on her as a thinker, as a creative person. I'm intrigued by that. How did the life influence the work?

With *When I Grow Up*, I had a notion when these stories were found that it was like a window had opened up to me or a portal that was a way in, perhaps, to talk about the Holocaust, something which is beyond my comprehension. But these stories captured the 'before' moment. They are before the Holocaust. You can compare it in some ways to September 11<sup>th</sup>: let's have a look through the window of 10 September 2001. I lived in New York then and September 10<sup>th</sup> was just a normal day. It was okay. Even the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup> I went into work. History just happened. So, to draw a comparison, I wanted to know: what was it like before the Holocaust? That was the question I wanted to ask. I was very fortunate to be given this sort of window, these archival stories opened the window into that moment. I then had this mission to truthfully transport people to this time so that you have an overarching notion.

**Camden and Zullo:** We found the depiction of the young people quite moving, especially recognising the *in medias res* quality of these stories, and their abrupt, inevitable ending. To say it's tragic is not even close to what it would mean for these young people to not have a future when they're imagining their futures. That's really what comes through.

**Krimstein:** I appreciate your observation about the *in medias res* quality. I have thought about that, too. I mean it's impossible, you know, to contemplate these stories. And that's probably what attracted me to them.

**Camden and Zullo:** They're so distant and yet filled with the future. Everything about them is looking forward, the way a teenager would.

**Krimstein:** Right. What interested me in these stories was because we can all relate to that sense of anticipation in *When I Grow Up*. In many ways this book was my own internal response to my work on Hannah Arendt.

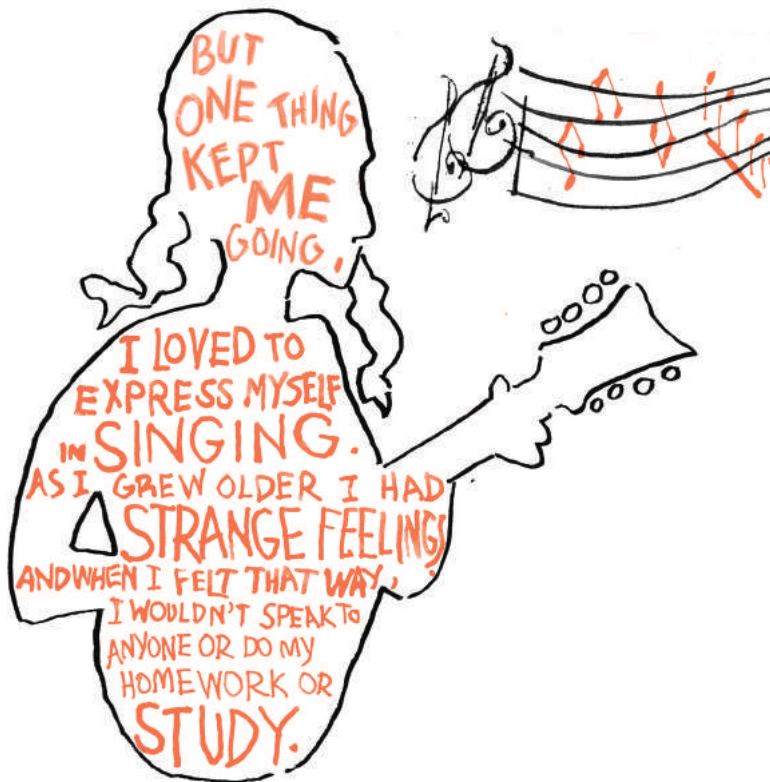
**Camden and Zullo:** The connection you are making to Hannah Arendt is very interesting. Right before we got on Zoom, we were talking about this work as an emotional record of these young people that you have brought into the public consciousness in the sense that it's now published. How do you understand this emotional record, of feeling, and public discourse considering your work on Hannah Arendt?

**Krimstein:** Thank you, that's a great question. I learned from Hannah Arendt. I not only learned about the craft of making a book, but I learned about plurality, I learned about forgiveness, I learned about her ideas and I took them with me to *When I Grow Up*, but I wanted to do something very different. Hannah was somewhat overly intellectual for this story. And for *When I Grow Up* I wanted to focus on emotion (Figure 4). I wanted to try, to use a Yiddish phrase, to try something that hit me in my kishkes, in my intestines. And I do want it to be specific, no question, but it's also somewhat universal in that I thought, hell, I was a teenager; that was crazy. My kids were teenagers. They're nuts. There's something about teenagers or 'youth,' as they called it, that is so hopeful. We're riven with hormones, we think we know everything, we're wiser than adults give us credit for being. While reading these stories, I thought, what was I like in those days? I was

listening to Frank Zappa. I knew that the Beatles' *White Album* was weird. You're formed in many ways by these things. To return to the Yiddish kids in *When I Grow Up*; One thing that I was thinking about as I was making the book was, who's the protagonist? I try and give it a dramatic form. Who's the person who has action? Well, for me, it's the reader. The reader. You can't do anything about those kids.

**Camden and Zullo:** No, they're gone.

**Krimstein:** But you can do something for kids now. So, I made the protagonist of the story the reader. The reader is the hero of this story because I want them to think about what they can do to make change. Where are we in our world letting things like this happen and ignoring them because they're either too far away or we don't want to think about it? I asked, what would I have done? What would I do? And I asked that with Hannah. How does it work coming out of Hannah and this question she brings in about the public sphere? What it comes down to is what is the purpose of these graphic stories? For me, hopefully, I can deliver some truth.







I STARTED MAKING UP MY OWN SONGS, AND THEY JUST  
KEPT GETTING BETTER AND BETTER. I WAS AMAZED.

**Figure 4.** (continued).

That's why I lean on a lot of data. But I must put it into a story, and I have to make it compelling because facts are not enough. Bring in feeling and emotion. I came to this while learning about Hannah Arendt and reading Walter Benjamin during this time. He refers to the storyteller as a chronicler. In my work, I'm telling something that's true but also emotional. I try to cite research so people can read history and philosophy. I say to the reader, 'If you have any questions, go read all the books that I read, and you'll see where I got my opinion.' But we need the emotion to make the facts and the history to come to life for people.

I've been looking at some different ways of dealing with that for my next graphic narrative. The truth is what sets me free, though. I rely up on the words of these



Figure 5. From *When I Grow Up*, 41. By Ken Krimstein. Reprinted with permission.

characters I depict. I wasn't a nineteen-year-old girl in Poland whose father died, as in *When I Grow Up*. I could never have imagined her standing to say Kaddish for her father and getting yelled at and then saying, it was from that moment on that 'I began **not** to understand God.' (Figure 5) I can't make that up. So, to borrow from what Allen Ginsberg said: you take a reality sandwich, and you just give it to people.

Though it did occur to me when creating *When I Grow Up* that when I made the protagonist the reader I had to ask, what if the protagonist doesn't even know the Holocaust happened? Will they ask, why are they writing about kids in Poland?

**Camden and Zullo:** Well, you do provide the historical context.

**Krimstein:** In the beginning and the end a little bit, but it still presupposes that you have some idea of what's to come. I'm not spoon feeding. To me that's where it has real awesome power. And what does it do in the public space? It gets a conversation going. You know, Hannah Arendt wanted to be a provocateur, get people thinking. I want to get people thinking, feeling, learning and these stories can do that (Figure 6).

**Camden and Zullo:** When Hannah Arendt warns about the dangers of passion, do you think she was thinking about it as leading to ideology? In the way that Charlie Chaplin, in *The Great Dictator*, shows the power of fascist rhetoric?

**Krimstein:** Yes. It's great to be passionate in your family. It's great to be passionate with people you love. It's great to be passionate in communities. But she didn't really support the idea of letting emotions into the public arena. It's good for things to be a little boring, I think is what she is saying. The Supreme Court should be boring. I mean I'm being just a little disingenuous, but it's sort of like, we should feel passionate. We all should feel passionate about injustice. And yes, be an advocate, but then I think when you're trying to rule or govern, you better be more than a little bit dispassionate – listen to all sides and try and ferret out what's best.

I do believe in emotion, though, because I think whenever you have more than one person, you've got this plurality and you must listen to one another. But there are some things that I believe as an artist and a human being are sacred. Like, if you've got a human life of a lovely person that's a teen and all they want to do is figure out how to sneak out on a date and smooch with this girl, they should have a chance to do that. But if someone's going around saying they're vermin, I'm kind of passionate about the fact that maybe there's another way of looking at that individual. I must ask, is this vermin? How can this be vermin? I mean that was one of the first questions that that has struck me when I started reading these stories that became *When I Grow Up*. And it doesn't matter whether I'm Jewish or not. Who are these monsters who degrade these children?. I thought, wait a minute: a kid who is trying to get a record to dance to or get a better grade in school or is jealous that one girl has a better hairdo. This is vermin? I think comics responds to such a travesty because it provides the human side with pictures and words together. We hunger for imagery. We see the world in pictures and words together, I think. This has special power: comics.

**Camden and Zullo:** Speaking of, could you share with us how you got into comics?

**Krimstein:** My dad went to the Art Institute of Chicago and he became an advertising guy. He could draw and we have a lot of artists in the family and so I had a lot of art supplies at home. My dad would bring these markers back home for me. I was also always the kid that could draw, I found out very quickly if I could draw something like Santa Claus, I got a lot of friends. So, there was that, and then comic books were just around.



Figure 6. From *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt*, 55. By Ken Krimstein. Reprinted with permission.

One of my best friends liked Marvel so I had to like DC because we hated each other, as best friends sometimes do! I've only recently come to peace with Marvel. *Mad* magazine was also around and through it I learned Yiddish words and I learned about satire and humour in cartoons. Also, a friend of mine's father had a couple of Charles Addams collections in his house and all I wanted to do when I went over there was look at those.

I said to my friend, ‘you go ahead and play with Hot Wheels I’m going to look at these comics.’ I also inherited from my dad’s cousin a box of comic books from the 50s and early 60s. And they were *Classics Illustrated*. The classics were okay, but the non-fiction books on the Civil War, our atomic age, the one on the French Revolution, that was unbelievable.

**Camden and Zullo:** That’s interesting because that’s kind of what you do with your Hannah Arendt book isn’t it? You’re in a way reinterpreting history. It’s interesting and perhaps connected to your early comics reading.

**Krimstein:** I have come to look deeper and deeper into the history of *Classics Illustrated* and there was an incredible woman who was at the helm. I’d love to do a story on her, Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht. She’s definitely worth looking into more.

Here’s one more interesting story. I was thinking about this as I was relating it to somebody at Comic Con. So, I was I was a boy scout, my dad was a boy scout. We were all boy scouts and we had to take the bus up to boy scout camp up in Wisconsin. Of course, the first thing we did when we got on the bus was some guy pulled out two *Zap Comix*. They passed them around and when they got to me, I didn’t want to give them back. I was like, ‘you can do this?’ First of all, it was the most pornographic thing I’d ever seen. I was stunned. I mean it was the rudest, most horrible, beautifully drawn, insane comic. I was like, so that’s what I’ve learned at boy scout camp. I can remember almost every story and I will not mention any of them. So, you know, it’s that combination of things.

**Camden and Zullo:** *Zap Comix* as a boy scout! Wow! So, it was those early years that you saw comics and it touched you.

**Krimstein:** Yes. Then when I got to high school the *National Lampoon* was running, and they had fantastic cartoons in the back. There were a group of us, and we’d get together at lunch and we’d do little jam sessions. Then I was doing comics in the high school paper and the college paper.

When I moved to New York, Sam Gross became a mentor of mine in cartooning. He once turned to me and said, ‘there is not a lot of gag cartooning in Chicago.’ He knew that was my big goal to get into the *New Yorker*. I eventually did *New Yorker* cartoons. I always loved long form, though. I was a history major. So, I got into doing long form when I already had a book out on gag cartoons, *Kvetch as Kvetch Can: Jewish Cartoons*, and my agent said there’s this editor who really likes your work and wants to see what you want to do. Anything that you want to do! So, with no disrespect to my friend, Charlie Kochman, who was the head of Abrams, at that particular time, every cartoonist was being asked to do another *Wimpy Kid* and I had kids and I did not want to do another *Wimpy Kid*. I couldn’t. I tried. I couldn’t do it. So, when this editor said anything, I thought, what if I could do anything what would it be?

**Camden and Zullo:** That’s lovely really. What an opportunity.

**Krimstein:** Lovely. So that’s when I ended up thinking, I love philosophy and I like the power of cartooning to take abstract ideas and make them visual. I’ve always been toying with crazy ideas. Like what if you took a like a famous chess game and made it into



a comic. That's what I want to draw. So, I drew up about thirty or so pages about another philosopher who grew up and worked in Chicago. And I thought, wow, this philosopher was in Chicago, same age as my grandparents. What kind of cigarettes did he smoke? What bus did he take?

**Camden and Zullo:** Who was it?

**Krimstein:** Leo Strauss.

**Camden and Zullo:** Oh, okay, yes, Leo Strauss.

**Krimstein:** So, I called the University of Chicago where the Leo Strauss Center is located and I started reading his work. In particular, I read an article that he wrote called 'Jerusalem and Athens.' I began to think, it's kind of hard to understand in words but what if you illustrated it? It's that kind of heavy but fun stuff I'm interested in drawing. And actually, Sam Gross once said look at heavy stuff. One thing led to another, and the editor said, well I really like what you're doing, but you know could we pick someone maybe a little bit more well-known than Leo Strauss? So, I thought, one of his first girlfriends, was Hannah Arendt. I knew a lot about her and again I had questions so that led me to begin *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt*.

**Camden and Zullo:** Love the title, by the way. *Three Escapes*. It's fantastic.

**Krimstein:** Yeah, well, thank you. I wanted to make it sort of dramatic.

**Camden and Zullo:** Drama, absolutely! Well, these people were gods and goddesses, you know, when you just look at the lives they led. They were like thunderbolts.

**Krimstein:** Then all I had to do, again, was share the truth ([Figure 7](#)). The truth is more fantastic than the fiction like I said about the stories of the teenagers. So, I started to learn about her, I knew she smoked a lot of cigarettes, I knew about 'the banality of evil,' but I said, I don't know what that means, but I'll learn. So, I look, oh she's from Weimar. Oh, she hung out in this place where Billy Wilder was hanging out.

**Camden and Zullo:** The intersection with Hollywood is fascinating.

**Krimstein:** All I have do is sketch them. Show them truthfully. That was a different thing. Now I'm trying something else.

**Camden and Zullo:** Do you want to talk about what you're doing now?

**Krimstein:** Well, I'm so up to my eyeballs in it I was looking for something else and these things are a combination of kismet and intention. So, I have been doing very well in Germany and my German publisher was like, oh, what else does Ken have? I say, I don't know, what are you thinking? They said, 'Well here's some suggestions for people: what about Einstein?' I thought, well no one's ever written anything about Einstein. And I know so much about physics. \*laughs\* Perfect.

**Camden and Zullo:** Fun to draw with that crazy hair! What are you learning right now?

**Krimstein:** What's interesting to me is that everything I've ever read about anything he does seems to contradict. I thought, oh, that sounds good. I started rooting around in



**Figure 7.** From *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt*, 161. By Ken Krimstein. Reprinted with permission.

Einstein's history and I had some notions of what I wanted to learn. I want to look at him as a German Expressionist, not as a scientist. I always try and investigate the different end of the telescope. So, I love Paul Klee and there were a lot of similarities between Paul Klee and Einstein. The book started out focusing on the two of them. They both spent time in Switzerland, both spent time in Munich, they are basically the same age. But as I'm

reading some of the biographies, I found out that Einstein spent sixteen months in Prague hanging out with the crowd that included Franz Kafka. And then at that moment I think, ‘Kafka and Einstein and Prague? There’s something there!’ So then, I shifted the whole book from Paul Klee to Kafka and Einstein. That’s what I’m working on now. The original title was *Albert in Kafkaland*. Right now, it’s either that or *Einstein in Kafkaland*. When I went to Prague, I discovered that again, something happened, and I want to know how I can show it in words and pictures.

**Camden and Zullo:** So, this sort of spins out of this question because again you are working on a Jewish thinker. Recently you were on a panel at San Diego Comic Con about the ‘Jewish Graphic Novel.’ Can you share some insight into your thoughts on this discussion?

**Krimstein:** I had to do a lot of thinking about that because of the panel. One thing I did was I read *Fantastic Four* #1. I’ve become a little bit more woke to the Marvel universe. I always liked *Sgt. Rock*, I liked *Batman*, but now I am getting into Marvel. So, I read *Fantastic Four* #1. I see the Jewish history. For me it’s Einstein because it’s about gamma rays. It’s Freud to me because it’s oh, it pokes at the psychological underbelly of the characters, I’m like an invisible 1950s woman. Oh! I’m the ‘Invisible Girl.’ Oh, I’m a political working hack, oh I’m a stretchy man, I’m Mr. Fantastic. Or it’s I’m a wimp. Oh, now I’m the Hulk. So, it’s ‘the Shadow.’ That’s more Jungian, but still, it’s these Jewish ideas. I’m not sure Stan Lee had any idea of this in mind, but maybe he did. The industry has been very dominated by Jewish people, so maybe that’s part of it that these ideas were part of the conversations.

It brought back a memory of when I was a kid and I used to have to go to Synagogue with my parents and I was bored. I hated it. I couldn’t read Hebrew. The only thing that I liked was when occasionally the Rabbi would riff into a Hasidic tale or one of these little tales and then I’d be like, woah! those are amazing. So, I’ve looked them up and there are these incredible little aphoristic tales. For example, stories from Rabbi Nachman and *The Wise Men of Chelm* and others. So maybe there’s something in these little stories, but maybe it’s not as much about the Jewish connection as the Yiddish connection.

**Camden and Zullo:** Could you say more about that?

**Krimstein:** Yiddish was spoken by almost every Jew and pretty much derided by almost every Jew. They called it jargon. They all want to speak different languages, but they all spoke it, at least Eastern European Jews. Around the mid- nineteenth century, though, some writers started to say, ‘hold on if everybody’s talking this let’s write in it. Let’s meet them where they are at.’ So they actually changed and they started writing in Yiddish. I had to learn about these people like: Mendele Moykher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz. But the stuff they were writing was out there, new, it was fantasy. Incredible stuff. In fact, when I was working on *When I Grow Up* and I was at the library in Lithuania and I was trying to learn about Yiddish culture, I was blown away by all these books. I was thinking, were they reading Kafka? And the librarians said, no they weren’t reading Kafka. I soon found out in my research that Kafka was reading them. Kafka was influenced by Yiddish culture and Yiddish literature. I don’t know the whole answer. But

there's something about again, it's frank, guttural, disrespected. High and low, in your face. Non-proper human. Comics are like that.

**Camden and Zullo:** It's popular. One point you're making is that it's popular. Utterly popular and thus a little bit denigrated, a little bit shameful.

**Krimstein:** It's so very popular and like comics it's a bastardisation. It's takes a little German it takes some Hebrew, it takes some from different languages. But most importantly it has a way of getting to the point.

**Camden and Zullo:** And getting to the guttural as you say.

**Krimstein:** Look at Yiddish phrases or quotes. Some of them are very well known. For example, 'if a poor man eats a chicken one of them is sick.' Or, 'it's only the first bottle of wine that's expensive.' There's this compression. When you look at Stan Lee's writing in *Fantastic Four*, although he could be somewhat verbose, there's a compression. And it's also kind of schmaltzy. After I wrote the book, *When I Grow Up*, I remember talking to this guy and him saying his mother always used this Yiddish phrase that he shared with me, 'When I get up to dance, the band goes out to take a pee.'" It's that guttural, human voice; that's comics.

Some of the Stan Lee stuff is verbose, but take a look at it as a maker, look at the concision. Trina Robbins, who was on the panel with me at Comic Con, was talking about Eisner's concision as well. The concision is important because we learn, I learned in advertising, I learned in cartooning, and I learned in gag cartooning that you never want to do, see, and say. You never want to repeat. Some of that might have been due to the fact that they had a limited number of pages to work with but still condense it, compress it.

**Camden and Zullo:** The point about compression and its link to Yiddish is so intriguing. The marriage of word and image sort of facilitates that compression.

**Krimstein:** It reminds me, when you go to Hebrew school, at some point they say to you that there's a commandment, one of the top ones, where God says you shall not make a graven image, you shouldn't show a picture of the human being. I think, well, okay, but say that to a Jewish kid who likes to draw, and they say, 'why not?' You're told early on you can't show, can't draw a graven image. So, we respond, okay, I'll draw a graven image. That's part of what comics really is, it's that graven image.

**Camden and Zullo:** That's great. We love it. That is what they are capturing, graven images, and that's why there is still push back against them.

**Krimstein:** I can't tell you how many people still tell me, 'oh, I've never read a graphic novel. How do you read a graphic novel?' I'm like well, you start in the upper left-hand corner and you just kind of keep going. I ask, have you ever had Bazooka Joe gum? Can you read those things? Okay. It's not that hard! This happens because people who have never even read comics have read some of mine. Because I like to think of them as history. They get it, though.

**Camden and Zullo:** We do love Bazooka Joe.

**Krimstein:** All right!

I want to say though that the thing I learned from you guys is that it's a slow medium. The reflective nature of comics. Because you can go back to it, you can go back to it, you can go back to it. And unlike a movie, you can't just stop in the same way. With comics you can go back, and you reread those pages over and over again or even stare at one image and you have that choice to just stare at it.

**Camden and Zullo:** It's very kind of you to say that. Well, it seems like a good place to end on our love of comics.

**Krimstein:** Oh, I learned a lot from you. I want to get us out of the kid rack and up into the grown-up rack at the bookstore.

**Camden and Zullo:** Oh, comics is already there. They are already in the grown-up rack. Don't worry about that. The prayer really is that the grown-ups don't destroy it. Lynda Barry is so funny. One of her lines, which we just love is about that: 'I would much rather be in the young adult section than in the, you know, "graphic novels" section'(2012, 71) The kids rack isn't the bad place.

**Krimstein:** Yeah, I hear you. Keep doing it. I'm honoured that you called me.

**Camden:** Cheers.

**Zullo:** See you later.

**Krimstein:** Bye.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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