2013

Visualizing hate: Maus as Holocaust literature

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VISUALIZING HATE: *MAUS* AS HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition:

English Literature

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September 2013

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1/24/2013

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* affected traditional classifications of Holocaust writings, specifically literary memoir. Genre studies use Holocaust writings, especially those classified as "literary memoirs", to define a narrow group to exclusion of texts like *Maus*. If *Maus* was not 'allowed' to be defined as memoir then was it solely cast as fiction? To view it as fictional would have denied that *Maus* was a graphic novel which interlaces both received testimonial 'truth' and receptive 'truth'. Spiegelman unapologetically highlighted his struggle with representing these memories in the text. My research focused on how *Maus*, in this light, participated in the tradition of Holocaust memoirs and viewed genres as flexible and historically located. Eli Wiesel's text *Night* was compared to *Maus* in order to explore the conventions and characteristics of "Holocaust memoir". My research concludes that while *Night* is an autobiographical retelling of lived experience during the Holocaust, *Maus* also participates in the tradition of Holocaust memoir as part of new textualities in the genre.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the generous and wonderful help of my Graduate Committee: Dr. Ellen Gil-Gomez (first reader) and Dr. Mary Boland (second reader and Graduate Coordinator). Without their wonderful guidance, support, and help I would not have completed this thesis.

I would also like to thank my parents and family for their financial support, encouragement, and dedication. To Kenneth and Wendy Curran I owe an enduring debt of gratitude - as well as a few more tuition reimbursement payments.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. David Carlson and Dr. Jackie Rhodes for their hours of work in assisting me down this long and arduous road.

To Kenneth Gregory Curran.

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CHAPTER ONE

NIGHT AS A BENCHMARK OF HOLOCAUST MEMOIR

Setting the Stage

The first contact I had with *Maus* was in a graduate seminar on graphic novels. When it came time to read the text, I had no expectations about what would unfold under Spiegelman's dual pens of author and illustrator. The text challenged notions I held about what was "Holocaust literature" and lead to a personal revelation: *Maus* surpassed not only my expectations of the graphic novel genre, but also any notions I held about the genre of Holocaust literature. As I investigated the text, I found that the majority of critical work on it reflected, what I came to identify as, a lack of discussions regarding *Maus* as Holocaust memoir. The basis of my investigation here is to look at what is held as a definitive example of Holocaust literature (*Night*), examine how *Maus* uses the same elements to establish itself as Holocaust literature, and finally to pinpoint the elements of *Maus* which push it beyond simple classification as an example of Holocaust literature - and rather, put it in position as an example of Holocaust memoir.

Importance of Wiesel

I will first give careful consideration to the novel *Night* by Eliezer Wiesel, which has been long-held by many critics as the most noteworthy example of the Holocaust genre of literature. In my examination of this text I will highlight the elements of Holocaust literature that this text exemplifies and which act as markers for inclusion to this genre: the duty to witness and time and memory. This chapter will establish points with which, later, we will examine *Maus*.

Please note that the term "literary memoir" is used to discuss multiple works here. To investigate how Wiesel's text and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel interact, we must know what is currently categorized as "Holocaust memoir." I will only focus on written works about the Holocaust. Also, the works I am comparing are both memoirs of survivors of the Holocaust. Eli Wiesel lived the experiences and relates first-hand knowledge of the Holocaust in *Night;* a work that defines "Holocaust memoir" in genre studies. Art Spiegelman's work is derived from conversations and tape-recorded interviews about the Holocaust with his father, a survivor of the Holocaust. Therefore, *Night* is an autobiographical retelling of lived

experience during the Holocaust, while *Maus* participates in the tradition of Holocaust writing as (part) biography. Questions naturally arise about the authenticity of Holocaust memoirs but I am more concerned with the authors' struggle to create adequate and accurate "truth" from these memories. I use the terms "Holocaust memoir" and "Holocaust literature" interchangeably to refer to the same genre of texts.

Holocaust Memoir through Cohen's Genre Lens

Before discussing how *Night* is Holocaust literature, the essential elements of the genre need to be examined first. Grouping works that share similar traits, themes, subjects, authors, time periods, approaches, and even linguistic models can be treacherous. It is treacherous because the notion of genres, categorization of literature and texts by ubiquitous or collected similarities, seems to be a passé literary exercise. There are, of course, those who staunchly defend this system and those who categorically attack it. In an effort to present the best possible case for both sides I will use Ralph Cohen's "History and Genre" article as an approach to discussing Holocaust Literature collectively. Cohen navigates the many ideas encircling genre studies and those who would

tear it all down, to present a genuinely engaging idea about genres - that they are shifting, malleable, and mostly defined by the historical period that surrounds them when they are formed or ones that form as time proceeds. Of special importance to my analysis is Cohen's focus on the historical location of the texts and the genres of the time.

Cohen argues that, "genre concepts in theory and practice arise, change, and decline for historical reasons" ("History" 204). Genres will be created, modified, and even reduced in importance over time, depending on historical factors. Cohen notes that "since each genre is composed of text" accumulated, this "grouping is a process, not a determinate category" ("History" 204). All of these literary genres "are open categories" and each of them "alters the genre" through "by adding, contradicting, or changing" things ("History" 204). Genre construction is a continual process that adds, removes, incorporates, nullifies, groups, and processes literary texts constantly. The classifications even alter similar categories. Therefore, those who seek to use genres, or classifications like them, to the exclusion of texts are making an error. Ultimately, all text is of the genre "written work".

However, we do not say that only texts which conform to a standard book format are literature. Literature is a wide and flexible designation that includes prose, poetry, and many other types of written work.

If, as Cohen states, categorization by genre "always involves the human need for distinction and interrelation" then it seems counterintuitive to argue that such classifications serve no purpose at all ("History" 204). Since we naturally seek to order and categorize all things (animals, plants, literature, movies, people, etc.) then there must be an intrinsic value to the nature of the act. Cohen has reworked his ideas and theories about genre and its uses, drawbacks, and features for many years. Since "History and Memory" (published in 1986), Cohen has written nearly exclusively about the relationship between history and literature with a focus on how the categorization of genres are affected.

Further, in his piece "Introduction: Notes Toward a Generic Reconstitution of Literary Studies", Cohen makes an important distinction, "In an originating genre, the initial member and those that follow closely upon it share a number of features" (v). With Holocaust Memoir it is indistinct to identify a single work as having "started"

the genre. Some would argue it is Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* which was first published in 1950, others might argue *All but My Life* by Gerda Weissman Klein was the first text by an actual survivor, and others would certainly argue that the *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign (And the World Remained Silent* - the original title for *La Nuit [Night])* by Elie Wiesel published in 1956 in Buenos Aires was the beginning of all Holocaust Memoir. It is not the purpose of this investigation to look at all precursory Holocaust literature nor is it to assert *Night* was the first such example. What is important to note is that all of these texts are coalesced into a genre of Holocaust Memoir; a genre that is still being added to.

Cohen makes another important distinction that "this sharing becomes less rigid in time as other features are added." ("Notes" v) So the initial characteristics that may have been staunchly required to include early Holocaust Memoirs within the genre, over time lose importance and "A genre can become transformed, leading to new genres; or it can cease to be practiced" ("Notes" v). For my discussion of *Night* it is necessary to identify what elements situated the text as the pre-eminent example of Holocaust Memoir. These elements would, then, be what were used as a test for

inclusion for other literary works of the same historical time and going forward. This is not an attempt to force upon *Night* a distinction of Holocaust Memoir, but rather to identify what classifies it as such for genre purposes. As Cohen writes "Membership in a genre is inevitable, but whether such membership is identified as essential is not" ("Notes" v). For *Night*, classification as the pinnacle of Holocaust literature is a significant claim.

A Survivor's Duty

> One day, when I was able to get up, I decided to look at myself in the mirror on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto. From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me.
>
> The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me. (Wiesel 115)

The final 55 words in Eliezer Wiesel's memoir about his experiences, before and during interment in Nazi Concentration camps during World War II, may very well resound throughout all time as the most powerful words ever used to sum up atrocity, despair, and - ultimately - the triumph of the human spirit. It is important to understand the impetus to share his experiences in order to see why

Night is so highly acclaimed. Carl D. Evans, in his essay investigating the literary memoirs of Wiesel, writes "Elie Wiesel is widely acknowledged as one of the world's greatest teachers" (323). Evans proffers that, at least in part, the reason for this lies in the years of study and tutelage of Wiesel under a man known as Shushani (Mordechai Rosenbaum) (324). It was directly through the influence of Shushani that Wiesel began to feel the need, the burden, and the "duty to testify" about his experiences during the Holocaust (326). As a devout Jew, Wiesel studied for many years, before, somewhat during, and after the Holocaust. During his time studying the Talmud and learning from Shushani after the Holocaust, Wiesel begins to write *Night*. Evans notes that Wiesel's struggle "over the duty to testify" left the survivor "reflecting on what it means to remember" (326).

The struggle to testify elongated into a deep fear for Wiesel of not being able to adequately express the totality of the Holocaust and its effect. This is something Evans refers to as Wiesel's realization that "human words are simply inadequate to express the depths of suffering and its meaning" (326). Wiesel wrote in *Night* of his first experience at the Death Camp, "In front of us, those

flames. In the air, the smell of burning flesh. It must have been around midnight. We had arrived. In Birkenau" (Wiesel, 28). These words hold a straightforward and dead weight, but can never adequately express the horror, fear, and dread of actually seeing the scene through the eyes and mind of a 15 year old boy. This is the paradox of Wiesel's compulsion to testify to the memory of all those who perished *and* do so in an accurate/adequate way. This is the paradox of all Holocaust survivors-turned-Holocaust memoir authors. For now, though, I will put on hold discussions of "time" and "memory" as elements of Holocaust literature.

I begin my examination of the first element that classifies this text as Holocaust literature: witnessing as testimony. Through this element Wiesel pieces together a memoir that is the "archetypal survivor-witness" story (Popkin 51). By witnessing, Wiesel strives to memorialize those who suffered, through remembering and telling his story. Wiesel crafts a memoir which relates in "first-person testimony" the undeniable magnitude and horror of the Holocaust and joins a collection of literature that "has come to play an unusually large role in constructing Holocaust memory." (Popkin, 51) The importance of memoir

in Holocaust literature is that it is virtually all of what is written.

An essential distinction, as Popkin notes, is that "[s]urvivors' memoirs thus reflect a sense that the Holocaust cannot really be understood as a historical event, or even an autobiographical one" (58). The events of memoir are disjointed at times, which encompass the fact that the "months or years spent" in concentration camps "do not connect up with the before and after of the survivor's life" (58). The effect of "survivor's memoir" is that it throws into question historical written record of the Holocaust and questions notions "that all past human experience can . . . be fitted together in a unifying temporal framework" (58). Memoirs from survivors of the Holocaust can neither be viewed solely as historically referential events nor purely autobiographical presentations. Just as preposterously confounding as the Holocaust was, these memoirs' presentation of events by date and time, one naturally following the other sequentially, to a tidy conclusion for consumption by the populace at large, are insufficient.

Wiesel faces this burden of insufficiency in *Night*. In her interview with Wiesel for the *Journal of Education*,

Heidi Ann Walker asked Wiesel "What is your universe, the larger picture?" (49). Wiesel replied that his world is of the "survivor" and the "duty for me as a survivor" to tell his story to others" (Walker, 49). Wiesel also says that if he were to withhold his story it would "betray that experience" (49). Wiesel also makes a damning conclusion that simple "[w]ords can never express the inexpressible; language is finally inadequate" (49). Through the "beauty of literature" Wiesel asserts these stories "give truth a name, force man to look" (Walker 50). Wiesel's comment that language is inadequate, for me, echoes Popkin's earlier criticism of the failings of linear retellings of the Holocaust; ultimately they fail to capture the event. Although inadequate, the need to share drives Wiesel to rehash painful and devastating memories and to create "truth(s)" that we observe. Wiesel remarks to Walker, "The fear that man will forget, that I will forget, that is my obsession" (50). This determination helps him craft a piece of Holocaust literature that is powerful, but still lacks a totality of force stemming from the root of its format: it is language expressing events in a linear fashion.

An eerie similarity between Wiesel's own experiences in this regard and characters from the text occurs with

Moeshe the Beadle. We know these are not "characters" at all, but people from Wiesel's past. David Patterson, in his article "*Night* in the Contexts of Holocaust Memoirs", argues that books like *Night* are "not an account of a person's life; rather, it is the tale of one's own death" (83). Metaphorically, it seems obvious enough; this might seem to reference the accounting of such a tragedy that kills the innocence or humanity in the author/experience. As Patterson points out, Wiesel tips his hat to this very notion when the character Moeshe the Beadle returns to the town of Sighet after having narrowly escaped death (Patterson 83). In Wiesel's text, Moeshe says, "I wanted to return to Sighet to describe to you my death" and also "Life? I no longer care to live. I am alone. But I wanted to come back to warn you" (7). Patterson remarks that Moeshe "faced the frustration of having to transmit a message that could not be transmitted" (83). Here, again, Wiesel's comments on the failure of words to explain or transmit the horrors of his past reverberate. Moreover this is a turn on the survivor story that initiates a conversation about what is it to have "survived" the Holocaust. Only through sharing his story can Wiesel

fulfill this act of communicating, and the audience the act of witnessing.

Witnessing

Wiesel connects his Jewish beliefs with his need to transmit his story for "witnessing." This is the first element which makes *Night* stand out among other Holocaust literature. Witnessing simply means that he presents his story for others to view, learn from, and know. This is tied to his strong beliefs in Judaism and the traditions of the Jewish faith for mourning and dealing with grief. The audience becomes an integral part of the transmission, also. Rachel Leah Jablon discusses this in her article "Witnessing as Shivah; Memoir as Yizkor." She notes that "readers of Holocaust survivor memoirs are a necessary piece of the witnessing puzzle" (Jablon 309). In regard to the survivor-authors, these readers "actualize their experiences, much in the same way that mourners need a community to fulfill certain Jewish mourning rituals" (Jablon 309).

In this symbiotic relationship, based on Jewish cultural traditions, the act of relating experience is tied to the act of the story being witnessed by others. Jablon also comments that, similar to the notion in Judaism that

the individual ideal is held to a community review, so the "same tenet applies to mourning" (309). Thus, Wiesel is enacting his individual experience as testimony through literature and the audience is completing the witnessing and receiving of the testimony.

Wiesel is attempting to restore some sense of order and honor those who died. The very notion of Jewish traditions having impetus in Wiesel's purpose for the text is omnipresent in the memories he shares; especially because the Holocaust disrupted the entirety of most Jewish faith-based rituals and observances. In part, Wiesel attempts to rectify this disturbance through his testimony and the audiences' witnessing. Specifically, an example of this occurs with the character of Akiba Drumer. Akiba is a prisoner that Wiesel encounters in the Auschwitz and Buna camps. He is a deeply passionate man that believes he can predict the end of the war through numerology using the Talmud.

During the progress of the story, Akiba begins to lose his faith in God and ultimately questions the importance of religion during their times of turmoil and dread. Akiba states, "It's over. God is no longer with us" (Wiesel 76). Akiba further refers to himself as "not a saint", "a simple

creature of flesh and bone" and he "suffer[s] hell in my soul and my flesh" (Wiesel 77). After firmly situating himself as a flawed man, he then directly questions, "Where is God's mercy? Where's God? How can I believe, how can anyone believe in this God of Mercy?" (Wiesel 77). At this point, the reader is to assume that Akiba will not survive. A continuing thread in *Night* is the faith that God will deliver them from this torture, although Wiesel himself has serious questions which rise to similar levels as Akiba, but any outright loss of faith results in death. Wiesel the narrator comments at this point, "Poor Akiba Drumer, if only he could have kept his faith in God, if only he could have considered this suffering a divine test, he would not have been swept away by the selection" (77). The direct analysis is that Akiba's loss of faith has killed him.

When it becomes apparent that he will be sent to the crematorium shortly, Akiba says to the other prisoners, "In three days, I'll be gone . . . Say Kaddish for me" (Wiesel 77). Jablon identifies Kaddish as "the mourner's prayer" (310). Specifically, the Kaddish (also sometimes Qaddish) is a daily prayer appealing to God for peace which has been adapted to include sections recited by mourners over time when a "parent or close relative" dies ("Kaddish"). The

irony is that Akiba asks the other prisoners to say Kaddish for him; two-fold is the irony: 1) The prisoners are not actually his family, and 2) he initiates the mourning process prior to his own death. The other prisoners assent to his request, but Wiesel writes a few sentences later, "And three days after he left, we forgot to say Kaddish" (77). In reality, no one should find fault with the fact that the "mourners" neglected this arrangement; they were all fighting for their lives each and every day. There is a meta-narrative moment here where the astute reader can see that Wiesel is now paying his homage to Akiba, paying good on his promise, and his memoriam is forever enshrined in literature.

Witnessing is an essential component of a Holocaust memoir because it integrates the grieving of the community with the testimony of the author/narrator. In this way, *Night* is the paramount example of this witnessing; Wiesel unites the importance of his faith with the compulsion to tell his story so that the world will never forget.

Time and Memory

The second element that firmly situates *Night* as preeminent Holocaust Memoir is the construction of time and memory in the novel. Wiesel drops into his memoir in 1941

when he was 13 years old (Wiesel 3) and immediately begins his recounting of how he met the man who, at least I would argue, influences his life the most - Moeshe the Beadle. From this point Wiesel moves forward in a purely linear recitation of events as they occurred, dipping into flashback and exposition at times to introduce or explain certain events. For the most part, though, *Night* follows a single, linear path of progression with regards to time. The memoir begins with a 13 year old Talmud student, then moves to a Jewish prisoner, then to camp worker, and finally to survivor; Wiesel nary veers from the linear path of presenting events as they occurred. Inevitably, elements of memory being what they are, the author must have inserted a "best guess" about the details in the story or filled in what parts were missing with an approximation of events. Hence, the term memoir is applied to identify the connection between a memory being presented and not a fact.

Some critics focus upon a key turn here, however, to investigate and obfuscate the line between historical accuracy in literature and lived experience informing on historical accuracy in literature. Susan Rubin Suleiman brings this up in her article "Problems of Memory and

, discusses "the gap between facts and writing" when you're writing about something with as much "significance such as the Holocaust" (543). Moreover, how does the apparent gap between purely historical accuracy and creative writing come into play when we discuss historically impactful events like the Holocaust? For Suleiman, and using her argument for my own purposes, the answer lies in comparing part of Wiesel's text *Night* to Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*.

Wilkomirski's text, first published in 1995, was titled *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (translated into English from Swiss) under the name of Binjamin Wilkomirski and which detailed the author's alleged "survival as a child in the Maidanek and Auschwitz death camps" (Geller 343). The book was well met with awards and accolades, but "[s]everal subsequent legal, journalistic, and historical investigations" have shown that the man who penned the book "was not Binjamin Wilkomirski", rather he was "Bruno Doessekker" and "the results of a recently released DNA test have confirmed this finding" (Geller 344).

This faked memoir raises several questions about the Holocaust and the survivor literature it inspired. First, as Suleiman posits, "In what kind of writing do facts matter most, and why?" (544). The nature of empirical data in literature is something many authors struggle with. Suleiman remarks that both texts (*Night* and *Fragments*) "raise, albeit in very different ways, questions about memory and its relation to historical truth" (543-4). To address, first, the issue of authenticity, it should be remembered that memoir is a sort of imperfect recollection of the life events of the author. Total factual accuracy is not the goal of literary memoir nor is it a recollection of the entire linear history of a human being. Suleiman also notes that "memoir can be confined to a single event or a single moment in a life" (544). The memoir "need not be the work of an important person" or even "well written (though that helps)" (544). Suleiman sets up a reading of Holocaust genre as imperfect and incomplete.

A natural sort of confusion can crop up when dealing with the genre of memoir and novel. Is a memoir a non-fiction text, or is it a novel? Suleiman relies on analysis of Meir Sternberg's discussion of fictional and historical narrative, and concludes "historical writing

makes truth claims, whereas fictional writing is independent of such claims" (546). This is our test for memoir versus novel. If a text presents and accounting of personal memory that makes truth claims (like having been interred in a Nazi Concentration Camp) - the text is memoir. If there is no such claim to truth - the text is novel. Obviously this is a severely paired down example, focusing purely on the assertion of claims and their veracity, whereas other considerations are also taken into account.

With a test for the ways to distinguish Holocaust memoir from novel in place, it is important to examine the notion of authenticity. Authentic representation in Holocaust memoir is an important distinction to make. The Wilkomirski Affair highlights the importance of a continued effort to identify factually-based memoirs from those which are wholly fictitious. There is a distinct difference between a man relating lived experience of an event to the best of his memory and a story stolen from the encountered experiences of others. No one, certainly not I, maintains that EVERY SINGLE thing presented in Wiesel's memoir is absolutely referential to the exact way in which it occurred. It is, however, an imperfect recollection of the

lived experience of the author paying special attention as to truthful representation to the best of the author's ability. Dates, locations, names, and events are presented with a keen focus on the importance of the event with supplemental details added to round out the story not alter the presentation. Wilkomerski's (really Doessekker's) situation is completely different. Doessekker intentionally lied about who he was, took small kernels of historical knowledge about the life of another man, and represented himself to have lived horrific experiences which are mingled with entirely fictionalized and fallacious events in his text.

Suleiman remarks in her analysis of the preoccupation with historical truth versus fictitious fancy that, "Contemporary thought is fascinated by borderlines" and "those areas where boundaries begin to blur" (551). In our modern lives compartmentalizing is rampant, but the most interesting (according to Suleiman) are the areas where these categories fade or blur. She does not dismiss genre altogether though, noting that "boundary blurrings can exist only because categories do" (Suleiman 551). According to her "the categories" around us "of fact and fiction with their various literary equivalents such as

memoir or novel" are most at odds "despite our theoretical sophistication about the constructed nature of representation, and even of perception" (Suleiman 551). Suleiman highlights another key to understanding Holocaust literature as a genre, echoing Popkin, despite all of our philosophical and literary constructions about how to represent the Holocaust, or even perceive it, narrowly classifying it within defined borders reduces it to something completed. An interesting parallel develops here between the need to categorize in contemporary thought and literary criticism; a parallel between categorization for the purpose of identifying similar texts to study and categorization for the purpose of simple grouping.

In addition to the question of authenticity in Holocaust literature, is the notion of lived experience in memoir. The representation of memory in these stories is more important than how it is received. Wiesel deals with the issues of memory and remembering in his work in several ways. He represents his memories in a chronological and straightforward manner. This happened here, at this time, with these circumstances. As narrator and author Wiesel's construction of memory is not present in the story but

rather in his forwards, speeches, and other commentaries on his text.

In "Preface to the New Translation" in *Night,* Wiesel states, "It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women, and children, but also against Jewish Religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, therefore Jewish memory" (viii). Wiesel's comments here highlight the importance for his own writings to counteract the attempts by Hitler to rid the world and (indeed) history of even the memory of the Jewish people. Here Wiesel identifies the power of his and other survivors' memories to combat the attempted erasure of Jewish culture, Jewish identity, and the impact of those who were sacrificed in the process of maddening conflict.

Reflecting on his own memories, Wiesel commented during his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech that, "I remember: it happened yesterday, or eternities ago" ("Acceptance Speech"). The conflict between memories of long past events colliding with his present day life offers a glimpse at the importance Wiesel attaches to these memories. Wiesel felt compelled to testify through his

story and text. Wiesel continues in his speech, saying that:

> A young Jewish boy discovered the Kingdom of Night. I remember his bewilderment, I remember his anguish. It all happened so fast. The ghetto. The deportation. The sealed cattle car. The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed. ("Acceptance Speech")

In the memories Wiesel presents (through his text) a testimony to the near-catastrophic ignorance the world displayed at the apocalypse which would eventually be known by a single man's name - Hitler. The young Jewish boy is our narrator and witness. The memories of the aging man speak through the boy and alter forever the image of the reader about the Holocaust. Memories of: babies thrown into the air to be used as target practice, families ripped apart, and sons forced to choke down their protest and anguish while there father is beaten to death on the bunk below them. These are the lasting images brought forth through the memories of our narrator/author to ingrain their lasting presence into the conscience of subsequent generations.

Wiesel continues in Oslo, December 10, 1986 (117) while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize and says, "And now the boy is turning to me" and the boy "asks, 'what have you done with my future, what have you done with your life?' ("Acceptance Speech"). Wiesel replies to the boy "I tell him that I have tried. That I have tried to keep memory alive" and that "if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices" ("Acceptance Speech"). Again, Wiesel focuses on the desire to adequately represent the witnessing, truth, and memory of the Holocaust. In a turn, Wiesel goes on to say, "And then I explain to him how naïve we were, that we did know and remained silent" ("Acceptance Speech"). It is here, perhaps, Wiesel refers to the years it while he struggled with the impetus to testify. It is in these lines that Wiesel marks the crucial aspect of his memories, his texts, and his life - memory is the ultimate witness. A single man, writing about what he lived, saw, and felt forces each generation to look upon the memory of these events with one solemn and unifying thought, "How could this happen?" Furthermore, it marks the need to remember and by remembering to never let it happen again.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPARATIVE ELEMENTS IN *MAUS*

Maus Complicating Holocaust Literature

This chapter focuses on how *Maus* extends the elements of *Night* in regards to the genre of Holocaust literature. To show this, I will examine how narration, time, and memory construction work for Spiegelman in *Maus* to extend beyond expectations of traditional Holocaust literature like *Night*. These elements offer a lens to examine how the meta-cognitive narrative structure and inseparable elements of the text allow interpretation of the subject matter in new ways, revealing other truths.

Maus can be read to do more and do different things than *Night*, but traditional critical approaches to *Maus* focus on the act of telling the story by Spiegelman, his choices for the multi-layered narrative, and even the necessity of this structure to coalesce the work. These critical approaches leave out discussions of the effect of this work to alter the genre itself. The effects of elements such as the meta-cognitive narrative and the inseparable qualities of traditional elements within *Maus* weighed heavily on its production. Specifically, they

expand our understanding of the Holocaust by forcing new discussions and interpretations. This discussion is necessary to view *Maus* as not only a memorial to Spiegelman's father but also to broaden our understanding of how subsequent generations approach the Holocaust.

To begin this discussion the critical lens of Ralph Cohen, regarding malleable genre constructs, is applied. This shows how *Maus* is located as historiography, memoir, and autobiography. Critical examinations of the elements of narration, time, and memory in *Maus* situate it squarely as Holocaust literature, supported by critics such as Assmann, Berlatsky, and McGlothlin. These elements are so entangled that it is almost impossible to break them apart to discuss each separately. Both narrative approach and time elements can be collapsed into a "narrative time" discussion, which heavily influences and is linked to the next element of "memory". These discussions help break down the genre of Holocaust literature using *Maus* and imply a greater understanding of the event is attainable.

Cohen Expands

As discussed in chapter 1, Cohen is not entirely dismissive of categorization by genre. Instead, Cohen gives us a sort of starting point at which to begin our

analysis with categories of "literature as an interrelated system of texts and society" (210). Based on the elements established earlier in this chapter for how *Night* is part of that genre, Cohen allows us to interpret the ways in which Spiegelman alters the genre using these elements and broadens our view of what is part of this genre.

Holocaust literature as a genre does not usually include an explicit textual discussion of history as tied to memory in creating texts about the Holocaust. This is where *Maus* functions to fill some of these gaps. Spiegelman's text contains these self-referential discussions, holds them up to the light, and presents them for all to see. A keen focus on the memory of these events and how it shapes our lives today is part of what *Maus* delivers to help broaden Holocaust literature and its features.

Expectations of Holocaust Literature based on *Night*

In Chapter 1 I discussed how Wiesel dealt with the issues of narration, time, and memory. The reader of Holocaust literature will have certain expectations that these elements and moves will solidify the text as definitively in this genre. In *Night* the audience is presented a straight forward and virtually linear

progression from Wiesel's childhood, to his imprisonment, to his father's death, and finally to his liberation. The elements forward this linear progression. This does not discount that Wiesel conveys his story, but rather highlights the extent to how effectively it is done. What this approach lacks in addressing these elements is the ability to capture the insane legacy of the Holocaust, the actual text itself belies the turmoil Wiesel went through in creating it as an attempt to testify and witness in accordance with his deeply held Jewish beliefs of Shoah (to become witness through certain acts). Part of the reason Wiesel cannot fully capture the realistic affect of these memories stems from an approach of using words alone to convey his meaning. The very formal approach of his text belies the total abject horror of the actual events described in words, reminding us of Carl D. Evans admonition about the futility of human words alone to replicate the mayhem of the Holocaust.

The audience thus becomes a passenger along the timeline of events, first, second, third, and so on. It is tragic. It is heartbreaking at times. It is begun, it is climaxed, and it is over. The elements of narrative, time, and memory used by Wiesel define the structure that the

vast majority of the Holocaust stories take. This is problematic because a single, focused narrative approach in linear fashion cannot possibly exact the madness of the events it seeks to describe.

Wiesel also crafts his text using these elements as separate approaches which culminate together, ultimately, in a transmission of purpose. This approach, again, takes a single approach to transmission of this event as elements which can be separated neatly. There is no such available separation during the actual lived events, so elements which box them into individual categories cannot relate the story as effectively as an approach which considers them all at once.

Narrative Time in Maus

Deviating from the linear structure of previous Holocaust literature, Spiegelman works on three different narrative levels: telling his father's story, telling his own story, and telling the story of the Holocaust for all that cannot tell their stories. This multi-layered narrative approach is the first way that Spiegelman complicates our understanding of the genre of Holocaust literature. Here, the traditional single narrative of survivor or witness is transformed into the narrative of

many. In *Maus* the reader is confronted from the very first moment with the intricate structure that will pervade the story. The first two pages are set outside Part I of the series, and are in a time that may be termed a recent - or not-so-distant - past (with relation to the overall present time of narration for the story), in 1958 when Artie Spiegelman is a child. He is shown outside skating with friends when his skate breaks.

Despite his pleas for them to stay, Artie is abandoned by his friends and sulks home. His father is outside working on something and asks, "Why do you cry Artie?" (Spiegelman 6.2) Artie tells him about his friends abandoning him, his father's reaction is one of shock, and Vladek says, "Friends? Your friends? . . . If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week . . . Then you could see what it is, Friends!" (Spiegelman 6.3-6) Artie's father sets the tone here before we even get into the stories that are to follow, he equips both his son and the reader with a caveat; life can always be harder and people could always do worse things. Setting this two page memory up before the story-proper starts also has the effect of introducing the reader to what is going to happen in the following pages: Artie will ask for his father's memories

of the past to present a story (or rather stories) for us, but we must also pay attention to what is happening in Artie's own story. Only in examining the totality of what is going on will the reader grasp the meaning and important purpose of Art Spiegelman, the man writing the book.

Immediately following the short two-page introduction, the reader is introduced to the present time narrative of Art Spiegelman (writing the comic books around the early 1980's) in the visuals and narration of the first few panels. This has the effect of complicating the reader's understanding of the book as Spiegelman passes from narrative lines of the 1930's (page 11), to the present of the story (page 13), and finally to the intermingling images of the early 1930's with the present day (page 14). This complication unhinges the normative expectation of linear progression within Holocaust literature.

When Spiegelman wants to revert again to the distant past, his father's words on page 13 of the first book in cell 5 appear above the image of present-time Vladek riding the stationary bike, superimposed over the background of an anthropomorphosized mouse Rudolph Valentino on a movie poster. Starting with cell 6 the narrative stays in the distant past and the story becomes both narrated and lived

in the moment. By "lived in the moment" I mean to say the notion that the characters are appearing to have a dialogue (from the distant past) in the present moment of the story. This constant shifting between narratives helps reinforce the complicated, monumental task Spiegelman undertakes in *Maus*. Spiegelman is using this structure to locate the text historically as well as personally, through constant reference to the nature of the information, the knowledge of the source, and the exactness of detail.

There are so many narrative shifts from page to page, on the same page, within the same cell of the page, and even within the same image that the reader might get lost in all of the changes. To prevent this, Spiegelman uses the unique combination of the narrative being told combined with visual images and cues to locate the reader and keep them from confusion. In the pages referenced, the distant past is easily recognized by light inking of the images, the clothes of the characters, and with actual words to indicate the timeframe. The narrative of the present time in the story is identified by mice in more modern looking clothes with modern amenities around them (a stationary exercise bike for Vladek) combined with the story that is "voiced" by Art's father (Spiegelman 14).

The audience is re-introduced to Vladek here at the start of Part I; he is shown as the aging father of Artie. Artie explains to Vladek that he wants to do a comic detailing his father's memories about the Holocaust and life in Poland. At the bottom of the page, as Vladek the narrator takes over, the reader is thrust into the very distant past of Valdek's youth (1930's Poland). Interspersed over pages 14 and 15, the narration flips between distant past and present time. In 15.4 Vladek is pictured relating a distant memory of his youth and that "People always told me I looked just like Rudolph Valentino" (Spiegelman). The present-time narrator Vladek is shown hunched over his stationary bike while a younger, more debonair Vladek is pictured in the background in a Valentino-like movie pose.

These shifts between times occur as easily as the graphic novel shifts between panels. The past and the present even exist temporally in the same panel at times. Taking Cohen to heart, Spiegelman extends beyond the traditional narrative structures of the majority of Holocaust stories. Spiegelman makes the meaning and importance of the Holocaust malleable. He works the narrative of his father with his own images to tell a story

which is part history and part biography, even though the visuals will always be a creation of Spiegelman the artist. This is a partial explanation for the use of anthropomorphosized animals as representations of the humans involved. Spiegelman nods directly to the fact that he is crafting this story as a presentation of how it may have looked using facts and memories from his father, not as how it actually looked. Thus, he makes an unusual move for Holocaust literature, he foregrounds the knowledge that he can only guess as to how things appeared, occurred, and happened visually. This is another shifting of the distinctions of Holocaust literature that situate this text within the genre, but also extend the definitions of inclusion.

Super Present Narrative Time

I have already made a distinction of the present time narration of the story, meaning the time at which his father narrated the story to Art, but what do we do with the other side of the present, Art's story of creating the book? Erin McGlothlin addresses this as "[t]he problem of designating narrative time" and that it becomes hard to know "[t]o which narrative strand is the reader to assign the temporal designation of the present" (184)?

Spiegelman's construction of the present time narrative points to two very different things occurring. The story of his father is the focal narrative of the text. The other present day narrative being delivered is reflexive. McGlothlin calls this second narrative strand the "super present" that inhabits a place of "timelessness" for Spiegelman as he discusses creating the text in the actual story of the text (185, 186). The super present only begins explicitly in Book II, though, which was written many years after Book I had been in circulation. The super-present narration formalizes meta-cognitive discussions of the formation of the project, this complicating narrative time, within the pages of the text.

There are hints of the super present narrative in Book I, but they are subtle. An example of this subtle super present is on page 25 when Art is interviewing his father about how his parents met. His father gives a detailed story over many pages and then in the present time narrative of the text tells his son not to include a certain story of an ex girlfriend trying to ruin Vladek's relationship (with Art's mother). Art protests and says "It's great material. It makes everything more real - more human" (Spiegelman 25.3). This concern is coupled with the

images of both characters sitting close together with serious expressions upon their faces. Beyond the irony of wanting to present a "more human" story through anthropomorphosized animals, Spiegelman makes an important nod to the super present narrative construct: he wants the story to be as close to the historical truth as can be. In the next cell, Art says explicitly, "I want to tell your story, the way it really happened" (Spiegelman 25.4). Here, all of the narrative elements of past, present and super present are unified in the purpose of historical truth and testimony.

In any purely textual format this representation and approach would not only be extremely confusing to the reader, but also possibly obtrusive. In this graphic novel the combination of narrative, concrete visual, and other elements work to prevent this confusion. One reason is that when Spiegelman weaves between the distant past, the present, and the super present he uses visual cues to alert the reader. One cue is the setting - in the distant past all of the panels are heavily shadowed and dark. On pages 150-151, during a story about hiding in Poland to avoid being caught the panels are predominantly dark, shadowed, and at times faces are obscured by dark lines, which lends

a tense or uncertain aspect to the story being told (Spiegelman). Spiegelman uses the last panel on page 151, a natural break before the turning of the page, to hint at shifting narrative perspectives back to the present time of his father recounting this story. The last panel is set outside and has lighter inking. By the time we reach the present time of the panels on page 153 most of the shadowing and dark elements have been eliminated. This would be an impossible task in a text-only format. Only in his graphic novel can Spiegelman shift effortlessly between narratives, which strengthen the ties between the text and the visuals by emphasizing directly how words and images work together here.

Spiegelman collapses normal binaries and the audience is forced into a blurring of their own interpretations of narration and time. For instance, in Part II Spiegelman starts off with a present time scene that describes the choices he is facing on how to represent various ethnicities in *Maus*. After this scene, he goes to visit his father whose medical problems have worsened and ultimately they begin to discuss the past. The audience is again confronted with the super present time creation of the story which leads into the memory of interviewing his

father, and ultimately back to the distant past of the Holocaust. This is only achieved due to the combination of expressed narrative and visual cues/images.

In the next chapter of Part II, titled "Auschwitz: Time Flies", Spiegelman plays with the already altered notion of time in his book. As the scene opens there are literal flies buzzing around Spiegelman, as he sits at a desk, drawing. Something very intricate is being done with the text over the visuals on the page. Artie the character is listing important dates from both of his parents' past and his own recent past. Artie begins with the most important recent event, "Vladek died of congestive heart failure on August 18, 1982 . . ." (Spiegelman 201.1). The rest of the events have to do similarly with life and death, travel and return, joy and pain. Again binaries are being presented and collapsed. As the listing of dates progresses, the image moves down to reveal that the troubles of presenting this story still linger. In the last panel, Spiegelman is shown ruminating with arms folded and head down, atop a pile of emaciated anthropomorphosized mouse bodies. It is clear to the reader at this point the immensity of the task Spiegelman has undertaken: he is speaking for the dead and to present historical truth.

Applying Cohen's lens, this historical location of *Maus* for Spiegelman is also an attempt to create a new truth about the Holocaust. The social impetus to tell the stories of tragic loss, immense grief, and ultimate triumph over this adversity is high. The process of developing these stories is present in *Maus* from even before the story begins and explicitly part of Spiegelman's text beginning in Book II. According to Aleida Assmann in her article "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony", during the "last two decades, our approach to the past has become ever more complex and controversial" due in large part to the fact that the "continuous impact of the Holocaust" and "the impact of living in the shadow of a historical event" works to keep the event prominent in our lives (261). Some events maintain prominent effects on humans throughout subsequent generations and society reacts in ways which maintain the importance of these events. The Holocaust is one of these events and it has influenced much of the way that we view history and the memory of it.

Under Cohen and Assmann *Maus* becomes an important example of Holocaust literature because the text presents an examination of the burden of the Holocaust as contextualized in modern life. Spiegelman breaks down the

fourth wall in his graphic novel to allow us in to see the mounting pressure he feels at the inception of Book Two, his wearing of the mask of his dead father, the demands of notoriety after publication of Book One of *Maus*, and the image of his own anthropomorphosized mouse figure sitting at a writing desk atop the bodies of hundreds of naked mice (201). Spiegelman lays bare his struggle to walk the narrow divide between testifying and witnessing for his father and the false testifying/witnessing *as* his father.

Memory in *Maus*

Spiegelman also compels himself to present a historically accurate graphic text as much as possible (205-206) and this concern is noted by Eric Berlatsky when he discusses this postmodern problem in the fiction of historical retellings of important events. Berlatsky argues that the construction of "'real' as inextricable from the constructed and the textual has also found its way into both historiography and historical fiction" (Berlatsky 102). This, at first, seems problematic for a work like *Maus*. It is undoubted that Spiegelman does not mean to present a didactic and straightforward text like Wiesel. Spiegelman's text is working against "the allegiance to the memory of the Holocaust that has spawned so many narratives

of survival of death camps" (Berlatsky 104). *Maus* incorporates elements of fantasy and takes creative license with some things: the anthropomorphosized characters, the intermingling narratives, and visual reconstructions of distant past events which Spiegelman has no possible way of depicting totally accurately. This ties to the postmodern thought on the "inaccessibility of the real and the truth" affects the "politics of memory" which may raise issues of authenticity or historical truth in *Maus*. Spiegelman presents an examination of the method by which we get at this historical truth and the memories presented in his super present narrative. Here, again, genre borders are disintegrated as Spiegelman adds to the important work of Holocaust literature.

Berlatsky's critique fails to take into account the varied narrative structure which directly addresses the issues of authenticity and historical accuracy in the text. Spiegelman admits freely that "Some part of me doesn't want to draw or think about Auschwitz. That I can't visualize it clearly, and I can't BEGIN to imagine what it felt like" through Art the character's session with Pavel (206.1). In the images, the adult Art is slowly reduced to a toddler-like stature with constant self-doubt about his ability to

adequately convey his father's testimony or be accurate about what it was like during the Holocaust. In his comment about an inability to "visualize" Auschwitz combined with the visuals the reader "sees and hears" the struggle of Spiegelman in crafting this text.

Spiegelman directly addresses the factual reliability of his father's memories, his representations of the Holocaust, and his own story in *Maus*. In Part II of the book, Artie visits another Holocaust survivor trying to clarify the details of the stories his father has told of Auschwitz, Pavel. In his meeting with Pavel, Artie is shown as regressing to a physical stage of childhood, or that he is small when compared to the physical presence of a survivor. In addition to the importance of validating his father's testimony, Artie garners much more from Pavel. Pavel is Artie's counselor and also provides for Artie some needed reinforcement about the validity of his father's words and also the necessary production of this story on the Holocaust. In trying to validate the memories his father presented him, Artie ends up discussing how he feels inadequate when compared to his father, that nothing seems like "much compared to surviving Auschwitz" (Spiegelman 204.5).

The hidden story unfolding and the conflict of telling this tale become the driving force of the text. Artie Spiegelman the son and survivor of his father's legacy, can't see how possibly his life compares to that of his father's life or experiences. Spiegelman fleshes out his underlying guilt and anxiety in the following panels, beginning with Pavel answering his cry that nothing in his own life compares Artie to Vladek the survivor:

> P - But you weren't in Auschwitz . . . you were in Rego Park. Maybe your father needed to show that he was always right - that he could always SURVIVE - because he felt GUILTY about surviving.
>
> A- maybe.
>
> P-And he took his guilt out on YOU, where it was safe . . . on the REAL survivor. (204.5 - 204. 7)

It is here for the first time, in *Maus*, that all of the confusing elements of time, reliability of testimony, and issues with memory collapse on one single point. Artie Spiegelman survives as the living testimony to Vladek Spiegelman. Artie is no longer in comparison to the past, no longer in comparison to his father, and can only bear witness to his own life and experiences through memory.

In this moment of crystallized realization, Artie is out from the shadow of his father's life and the reader sees a partial reason for the intense drive to create this text. In Pavel's statement and Artie's response, this reason is revealed:

> P - Anyways, the victims who died can never tell THEIR side of the story, so maybe it's better not to have any more stories.
>
> A - Uh-huh. Samuel Beckett once said: "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."
>
> P - Yes.
>
> --
>
> A - On the other hand, he SAID it. (Spiegelman 205.5 - 205.8)

Pavel points out explicitly that the victims of the Holocaust have no memory or testimony to share; they are part of the testimony and memory of survivors. The images presented also reinforce the extent to which Spiegelman is daunted by this task handed down to him. From full-grown masked man, to confused man losing himself and reverting to child-like confusion/desperation, and finally a slow return

to the man who entered the chapter – Art the character echoes the intense struggle of the author.

It would be irresponsible to argue that *Maus*, after such careful and visible considerations by Spiegelman, isn't Holocaust literature. The narrative elements of *Maus* force the borders of Holocaust genre open further with these sudden authorial intrusions of doubt or angst that show the careful consideration and work Spiegelman invested into creating it. This text moves the borders of Holocaust genre to include new textualities like graphic novels by expanding notions of what Holocaust literature entails as purpose, consideration, and explicit challenge.

This super-present construction in *Maus* is also telling Spiegelman's memory of his father's memories of an event. In the recent past son Artie Spiegelman is being told the story by his father, but in the super present we cannot escape the knowledge that the entire story is being told through the artwork and words of Art Spiegelman, the writer/artist. This is not something done with traditional Holocaust Literature. Traditionally, survivor stories are told by the survivor in their own words, sometimes with the aid of a person to record the memories. This is yet another way Spiegelman is altering the genre of Holocaust

literature by introducing the effect of the historical truth on subsequent generations.

CHAPTER THREE

MAUS IN NEW LIGHT

Of Mice and Men

In discussions about *Maus* and the genre of the graphic novel, Spiegelman has railed against misinterpretations of his book. In an interview with Rafael Pi Roman from *New York Voices*, Spiegelman talks about one of these "misinterpretations" as he sees it. He says, "And what I was involved in was using a metaphor to get at something you couldn't get at easily. So I was trying to get back at the events, not using the events to get toward a metaphor" (par. 7). There is an important distinction that he makes here: Spiegelman separates the notion of using the Holocaust as a metaphor to understand something else, as opposed to what he is really doing - using the metaphor of the animals to get at how he reconciles his father's memories. This allows for interpretation of the Holocaust as an event that follows new generations and demands attention.

This visual metaphor is wrought out in many aspects of the text and allows deeper analysis of the Holocaust when combined with the other elements of the text. *Maus* is a

successful reflection of Spiegelman's intention of drawing a metaphor to get closer to the event of the Holocaust, his father, and his own history. Spiegelman uses the visual breaks and gutters between panels/pages to reinforce his metaphor. The pages present an array of memory and Spiegelman's metaphorical creation (the text itself) of those memories acts as testimony to these events. The book navigates a juxtaposition of distant past, recent past, present-time, and super-present narrative times within the same pages and panels to produce the type of conglomeration of simultaneous elements informing on the event. *Maus* presents interpretation of historical accuracy through photo-realism to reinforce the complications of real and unreal. Ultimately, Spiegelman's graphic novel reinforces Evan's important analysis from Chapter 1, "words are simply inadequate" by themselves to capture and transmit the Holocaust totally (326). Words, a powerful metaphor through visuals, and an amalgamated narrative are, however, adequate to complete this transfer.

The Space Between

The Complete Maus begins without any introductory materials, or dedications, or chapter headings. Instead, it opens with two pages of comic panels and a simple

description "Rego Park, N.Y. c. 1958", immediately following the titles and publishing pages (Spiegelman 5). Spiegelman does something quite unique here to the format of the graphic novel; he is using the space between the gutters of each page to span 3-4 decades, or more, of time. The gutters of a graphic novel page encompass all of the unused space surrounding the panels, between the panels, and the literal gutter formed by the spine of the book. The effect of using these areas as natural borders, or by extending text/visuals to a new page or new panel, is varied. Spiegelman uses the gutters as borders and weaves in and out, in and through them offering visuals that enhance the effect of the multiplicity of narrative times present here.

The page preceding these first images are the publication and copyright information. The most recent publication date for this text is 1997 and prominently displayed. By the time our eyes travel to the top of the next page, we have been transported back in time 39 years. Immediately the story dives headlong into the brief tale of Artie, the boy, and his father's lesson about friends. Then the story moves through the gutters from 1957 to a more distant past, presumably WWII era 1930's-1940's Europe

(Spiegelman 5-6). Here, images of mice (that represent Jewish characters) again bleed from the end of their brief introduction on pages 5 - 6, to the empty gutter and on to the introduction of Book I of Spiegelman's *Maus*.

On page 8, the dedication page, there are just two words, "For Anja" and the page number at the bottom (Spiegelman). The turn to dedication becomes a little complicated. Spiegelman may be referencing his mother's suicide in 1968. Or he may be pointing to her whole life - which would move us even further into the distant past. The answer lies, again, through the gutters of this page and into the chapter heading and contents on page 9 (Spiegelman). Page 9 is titled "My Father Bleeds History (Mid - 1930's to Winter 1944)" and has a list of contents for Book I next to an image of two dancing mice. Readers are pulled through the visual gutters of the pages from the oppression under the Nazi regime, to a memorial for Spiegelman's mother, and now into the most distant time we will visit - the young life of Vladek and Anja before the Holocaust.

Immediate and abrupt, this sudden distancing of past, present, and super present in the gutters between pages sets the stage for the unique story which follows.

Although a traditional novel might accomplish this same spanning of time and distance, it is only through the use of visuals that interprets Spiegelman's task - the burden of transmitting all of these memories as one story. The gutters of this text become the first metaphorical instance of interpreting the story. The use of the gutters to span time evokes a comment on memory in that no memory is remembered in linear context. Spiegelman's use of the natural divides and empty spaces reinforces the interpretation of this text as an entire series of memories; compressed and occurring at the same time.

Getting at a Truth

One of *Maus'* truths lies in the use of the anthropomorphosized animals in the text to represent all of the characters. The effect of this is to disrupt notions of humanity, pity, and bigotry. After all, the cats (representing Nazi's) are just doing what cats do; the mice (representing Jews) are their prey. When the metaphor is viewed with this disturbing lens it complicates Spiegelman's purpose. Spiegelman is playing upon the notion of truth here by suggesting that humans are not as separate from the Kingdom Animalia as we like to think. Investigating further, other elements help us to interpret

the purpose of anthropomorphosized characters. During the text's brief introduction, and continuing across the first few pages, the anthropomorphosized main characters are revealed. Our first meeting is with Artie (Art Spiegelman as a child) and Vladek (5-6). The scene is from the distant past. Both characters are mice and the effect of this visual is immediate: Spiegelman is using a metaphor to get at addressing this story. There are very few real depictions of humans or characters that are human in *Maus*. This firmly situates the metaphorical purpose of these images. We can interpret Spiegelman's use of the metaphor here to mean "not really human". The effect of this is to begin to question the validity of this non-human nature.

When the characters of Spiegelman's mother and father first appear in the text, they are also mice - anthropomorphosized representations of Vladek and Anja Spiegelman. They are dressed in elegant period clothes that we assume reflects the style of the period, engaged in a close embrace as they dance in front of what appears to be a large white moon or spotlight (Spiegelman 9). It is still not apparent, other than they are being used metaphorically, why this is occurring.

There exists a darker reason behind Spiegelman's representation of Jews as mice, which is revealed pressing deeper into the beginning of Book I. On page 10, there is a two line quote: "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human" and it is attributed to Adolf Hitler (Spiegelman 10). This is apparently taken from an oft-quoted section of *Mein Kampf* and drips with the pure hatred and 'othering' Hitler commits to the Jewish race. It is easy to simply accept that Spiegelman thumbs his nose at Hitler by using anthropomorphosized mice for Jews in the text and this quote does reveal part of his inspiration for the choice, but that analysis doesn't go far enough.

Pressing even further for interpretation, as Book II opens, Spiegelman presents an elongated quotation credited to a "- newspaper article, Pomerania, Germany, mid-1930s" (Spiegelman 164). The article discusses the fictitious character of Mickey Mouse, created by Walt Disney, and says the mouse is "the most miserable ideal ever revealed" and refers to mice as "the greatest bacteria carrier in the animal kingdom" then narrowly asserts "Away with the Jewish Brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse! Wear the Swastika Cross!" (Spiegelman 164). There are so many

ironic things going on with this that it begs digging into them.

To begin with, Walt Disney was not Jewish. Ironically, the Disney family has had to defend against accounts that Walt Disney was an anti-Semite. The irony of this gross over-generalization of Americans as all Jewish and all represented by a fictitious mouse in German propaganda is at once humorous and terrifying. In 1930s Germany this rhetoric of a yet-to-be situated Chancellor of Germany in Adolf Hitler, is frightening. Again, the notion of truth here is being turned upside down and toyed with.

Further, another irony exists on page 135, Vladek remarks to Artie that someday maybe Artie will be "famous" like Walt Disney. Vladek's comments are ironic because Disney is most famous for his character Mickey Mouse, the spurned icon of at least one Pomeranian Newspaper circa 1930's Germany. Indeed, as Book II is out, Art Spiegelman has actually achieved fame and critical acclaim in some circles for his tale starring anthropomorphosized mice, based on his father. In combining these two elements, we can unfold Spiegelman's complex reasoning behind using anthropomorphosized characters in his novels. He uses them to effect a complication of notions about truth and also as

a means to create space between his own memories and those of loved ones from his life.

Spiegelman addresses this implicitly in the super-present narrative of Book II. In panel 4 on page 201, the character of Spiegelman turns directly to face the reader and announces "In September 1986, after 8 years of work, the first part of *Maus* was published. It was a critical and commercial success." Spiegelman the author discusses explicitly the writing of the text at this point, the pressure to perform, and the requests to "sell" himself, but there is a definitively more subtle discussion engaged via the images (201). This is only the second time, in the complete text, in which an image of a character wearing a mask appears. Spiegelman depicts himself as a human man wearing a mouse mask not as anthropomorphosized character.

Other characters appear in *Maus* wearing masks. This occurs in Book One, Chapter Six beginning on page 139 during a narration of his parent's attempt to hide from the Gestapo in Sosnowiec, Poland (Spiegelman). In this scene, his mother and father are trying to evade being captured by the Germans so they flee to Poland. As the scene unfolds, his father relates that he easily passed for a Pole because of his clothes. During this narrative, Vladek has a pig

mask tied to his face. The implication is that he could pass for a Polish citizen (Poles are depicted as pigs in the text). In this instance, Vladek puts on the mask of another to 'pass' and remain safe. This is the final unwinding of the purpose for the metaphor and use of anthropomorphosized characters: Spiegelman only assumes the mask of the witness, testifier, and survivor to tell this story.

By the time we arrive at the beginning of Book Two, page 201, Spiegelman's 'super-present' self wears the mask explicitly for this very reason. The masked Spiegelman must tell the remainder of his deceased father's story, but he cannot escape the effect of the Holocaust on his generation and other generations to follow. The latter reason is established in the subsequent pages which begin Book Two. Super-present Spiegelman discusses his graphic novel's success, the demands on him from greedy business men, and also attempts to answer questions from mask-wearing reporters. In panel 1, at the top of page 202 a reporter in a dog mask asks Spiegelman to "Tell our viewers what message you want them to get from your book?" In panel 2, Spiegelman responds, "I - I never thought of reducing it to a message. I mean, I wasn't trying to

CONVINCE anybody of anything. I just wanted -" but he is cutoff by a reporter in a cat mask announcing his book is going to be translated into German (202). Spiegelman isn't masked because he assumes the role of speaking for his father; he is masked because he cannot escape the Holocaust.

Spiegelman is a part of the history that surrounds the Holocaust, as well as the reporters wearing their dog, cat, and mice masks are part of the culture living with the Holocaust. This is the truth that is revealed through the images and words of Spiegelman. This is the kind of visual truth that no other Holocaust novelization could capture - whether we choose to or not, we all are affected by the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman the writer, artist, and son cannot escape his part in the evolving genre of Holocaust literature. The effect of this is to interpret this choice as a conscious effort of meta-cognitive process on relating the story.

Visual Juxtaposition

Spiegelman's positioning of visuals throughout this text form some great instances of evocative relationships. The placement of these images within a page or two of one another are intended to compel the reader to compare the

visual components of each image. These types of "visual juxtapositions" appear uniquely in this format. Authors of traditional novels frequently use the technique of juxtaposing words/descriptions to highlight irony or force comparisons. These "images" are limited and bound to the words used. Spiegelman's instances of visual juxtaposition are not limited in this way. Further, the effect of these instances is to allow for another truth to surface: behind the history and documentation of the Holocaust, there were innocent and average people just trying to live and be happy.

In a great example of this visual juxtaposition, the images Spiegelman creates on pages 7 and 9 propose shifting tones and stirring kinds of truths about the Holocaust. As two mice kneel, huddled under the oppressive "light" and images of Nazi history on page 7, empathy and compassion are evoked for them. The dark colors stick out in contrast to the rest of the page which "welcomes" us to the yet told story. Even the "light" in the image appears to be overshadowed - both in a literal sense and a figurative sense - with the Nazi sentiment of hatred for these two Jews. There appears nowhere these two may find shelter from that hatred.

In bright contrast, the image of the intertwined mice on page 9 is stoic. They appear strong in their frozen moment and are elegantly highlighted by the dominating spotlight/moon in the background. Here there is no dark shadowing; only the shadowy images cast beneath the two dancers. These two lovers are free from thoughts of oppression or eradication in a time before the Holocaust. This is the pervasive commentary about the Holocaust that Spiegelman is crafting subtly throughout this story - everyone felt the effects of the Holocaust upon their lives, even these stoic figures. Spiegelman is crafting his unique narrative approach before even beginning the story in earnest. He links it directly to the images provided as more than just reinforcement, but also as creator of these meanings. These meanings allow truths to surface as the novel progresses.

Spiegelman creates powerful images using symbolic references in these images. On page 7 the symbolic inference at work is a rewinding of time and history. The first image is the most recent past - two cowering Jews holding each other close in mortal fear. The next image moves into a more distant past and holds up the image of the powerful, confident, and free dancers. Finally, the

Hitler quote appears and reveals part of Spiegelman's purpose in using mice, cats, and other animals to represent humans. Perhaps Spiegelman uses this narrative trajectory to function in a reverse-timeline manner helping to locate the story along symbolic lines. A symbolic inference might be that the story which is about to be told requires these sorts of moves in order to understand it completely.

Photo Realism and Historical Truth

Just as Spiegelman juxtaposes the confident and powerful dancers preceding the Hitler quote on page 10, with the cowering and kneeling figures on page 7, so does he recreate this effect on pages 164-166. The Pomeranian newspaper quote is directly opposed by a black-and-white picture (one of only two used in the entire text) of a small boy, with light colored hair parted to the right, and wearing a white shirt under - what appears to be - a traditional Germanic outfit. The picture is topped by the words "For Richieu" and below it appears "And for Nadja and Dashiell" (Spiegelman 165). Nadja and Dashiell are the daughter and son of Art Spiegelman and his wife. Richieu was Art's brother, who was about 3 years old when the Holocaust began. The picture is of Richieu, who was poisoned by an aunt he was entrusted to upon her fear of

hearing stories of the Nazi's torturing and brutally murdering 2-3 year-old children.

It is unavoidable to notice the stark contrast here between the despicable words of the Pomeranian newspaper article confronted with the innocent and defenseless photograph of Richieu. The photo does not represent the "dirty and filth-covered vermin" referenced or support the conclusion of the article to do "[a]way with Jewish brutalization of the people!" (Spiegelman 164). It is as if Spiegelman presents his own history, his own truth, his own brother as evidence to who the Nazi's called inhuman, who the Germans portrayed as a threat and who the mice represent for his story. In this instance, Spiegelman uses a very real photograph of a victim of the Holocaust to uncover another truth. The photograph of his younger brother is actual evidence that grounds the Holocaust as devastating for the effect upon families. The evidence also extends Spiegelman's metaphorical approach. Spiegelman's dead family members, especially his brother, are the reality of how the Holocaust has affected his life. The effect of this on the story is another way to explain why Spiegelman uses anthropomorphosized characters and a metaphor to tell the story: it is easier to use

"characters" to tell the story which gives Spiegelman some distance from the subject. The narrative distance may help stem the powerful emotions tied to rehashing these stories.

Judith Keilbach traces similar affects on historical truth from Holocaust era photographs in her article "Photographs, Symbolic Images, and the Holocaust: On the (Im)Posssibility of Depicting Historical Truth." Keilabch notes that most of the photographic evidence of the Holocaust in scholarly arenas is highly repetitive although the body of evidence to draw from is vast (68). The pictures then become symbolic images with limited meanings attached (Keilbach 68). The overwhelming evidentiary aspect of visuals from the Holocaust is these symbolic images. These visuals, in and of themselves, create no truth or evidence about the Holocaust though, "the viewer needs to construct a context" (Keilbach 56). With the addition of "a narrative or caption" the context is created for the audience (Keilbach 56), much like the visuals paired with narrative in *Maus*. There is still a question of "whether the pictures will be perceived as truth" which turns on "the way they are viewed" (Keilbach 76). Spiegelman does not rely on photographic evidence from the Holocaust to create his historical truth.

There are only two photographs used by Spiegelman in his text. One photo is on page 294, cell 6, which depicts his father in a camp uniform that he took after the liberation of Auschwitz, as a souvenir. The first way this photograph is contextualized is as proof to his mother that his father was still alive after the Holocaust. Cells 1-5 depict a scene in post-war Poland where his mother is visited by a friend, who has a letter from Vladek, whom she thought was dead. The photograph is provided as proof, knowledge, truth, that he is indeed alive (Spiegelman 294). The photograph is a super-present piece of evidence, a "souvenir" of his healthier, smile-less, survivor father. In cells 7-8, Spiegelman and his father are depicted in the recent past discussing the nature of the photo. It ends with Spiegelman exiting the cell to get the photograph from his father's desk to use in his book. The kind of truth this reveals is that no matter how we try to contextualize the past, the terrible truths about, and the damning human effect of the Holocaust, we will constantly have to revisit these stories and visuals. Each new generation has to confront the horror, the enduring human spirit, and the ultimate heartbreak of these stories.

On page 294 Spiegelman shows the power of visuals post-war as truth that loved ones were still alive. He also shows the enduring power of a visual truth that is irrefutable; Vladek Spiegelman dressed in a camp uniform like the one he wore during his confinement in concentration camps during the Holocaust, where he almost died. In the recent past, this visual evidence kept by his father was as a reminder of enduring hope. Finally, the visuals of the text are linked to the powerful testimony of other visual evidence, like Holocaust photographs. Spiegelman's super-present presentation of the photograph of his father is intended to link all of the visuals of the text to substantial and physical proof. The photograph holds no more weight than, but offers buoying to the anthropomorphosized characters penned by Spiegelman. The truth created by these images of mice, and dogs, and cats, and pigs are our own souvenirs of the Holocaust, they are a truth constructed out of historical context, personal affect, and will never let us forget. The Holocaust was not just an event in the past 70-80 odd years ago; it is a truth that must be carried with us every day.

Ultimately, Art Spiegelman is not attempting to create a superior or more noteworthy text than other Holocaust

stories. *Maus* demands to be viewed as Holocaust memoir and literature because it uses the traditional elements of this genre and incorporates a visual aspect which allows deeper analysis and connection to new generations struggling to create meaning from the event. These visual elements guide understanding in combination with the established elements of Holocaust literature. Simply put, *Maus* is important Holocaust literature which expands the genre to include new textualities of generations dealing with but who are not of the time of the Holocaust.

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