This paper focuses on the idea of trauma in Art Spiegelman’s graphic novels *Maus I* and *II*. Using the description of trauma theory advocated by Cathy Caruth and others, I suggest that Art, a second generation survivor, creates an overlap between the past and present in order to experience the Holocaust for himself, thus attempting to release himself from the trauma that it has caused him. I begin by addressing concerns about the medium and representational style that Spiegelman has chosen and explain the ways in which the graphic novel is well-suited to represent trauma. I place *Maus* in context by providing some background on the Holocaust and its influence on typical second generation survivors.

From there, I offer examples of scenes in which Art actually draws himself into the past and I briefly compare his attempts to overcome his trauma to attempts by other second-generation writers. I examine Art’s struggle with his father for narrative control—and specifically the ways in which his attempt to create chronological order within his father’s story is also an attempt to create a safe space in which Art can experience the Holocaust for himself. Finally, I argue that because *Maus* ends without closure, Art has not succeeded in experiencing the Holocaust through composing this graphic novel. The event ultimately eludes successful representation. He has succeeded, however, in bearing witness to the trauma, thus doing what he can to prevent it from happening again.

I began this project with the intention of examining Spiegelman’s use of the graphic novel’s form and various literary and artistic techniques in *Maus*. It soon became apparent that
an analysis of form and technique would only contribute to a larger, more significant argument. Still, Spiegelman’s use of the graphic novel as medium cannot be fully separated from any discussion of the novel. I have therefore devoted some space to examining the deliberate artistic choices that Spiegelman made in drawing *Maus*, particularly his use of cartoon mice to create characters with which the reader can sympathize. I have also incorporated background about the way time works in graphic novels (based on Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*), which is very useful when discussing how Spiegelman conveys the “presence of the past” through *Maus*.

McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* was also an important resource in helping me overcome several problems. Utilizing the terminology of the graphic novel, for example, presented a challenge to me because I had never performed literary analysis of a graphic novel before. McCloud’s book helpfully defined many of the terms that are used in the medium comics. Furthermore, anyone writing on *Maus* must inevitably grapple with the ethical question of whether a medium typically used for trivial humor is appropriate for dealing with the subject of Auschwitz. McCloud points out, however, that trivial content does not signify a trivial medium. Indeed, *Maus* has opened the door to several more recent, serious graphic novels, such as Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*. I therefore argue that comics is not only an appropriate medium for dealing with Auschwitz but also allows for exploration of the subject in a way that words or images alone do not.

Most critics have examined *Maus* in terms of the questions that it raises about history. Representation and memory especially are important themes that critics such as Hillary Chute and Joshua Brown have examined. Critics such as Michael Rothberg have also looked at *Maus* as a commentary on commercialism or politicization of the Holocaust. I have used these discussions to provide context and support for my argument, but ultimately I have taken a
different direction by examining *Maus* as a trauma narrative. Applying trauma theory to *Maus* is a relatively new approach. Robert S. Leventhal scratched the surface in his online sourcebook, but otherwise not much has been done on the subject. I feel that there are possibilities for further exploration which I have had neither the time nor the space to cover here. I would be interested, for example, in someday applying trauma theory to Vladek’s trauma, or examining the traumatic impact of Anja’s suicide. For the time being, I have focused specifically on Artie’s trauma in relation to the Holocaust.

I had hoped, when I chose the topic of trauma theory in *Maus*, that I would be able to conclude that Artie had managed to work through his own trauma. It gradually became apparent that this was not the case and that the novel ended with a demonstration of the persistence of trauma. This required some reworking of the project, but I also came to see that this lack of closure is what makes *Maus* a powerful and effective novel. The Holocaust is an event that resists representation and closure. It cannot be reconstructed, reexperienced, or understood by anyone who was not there. Had Spiegelman pretended otherwise, he would have betrayed the very story he was attempting to tell.

Cathy Caruth has said, “History is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s trauma” (24). Ultimately, *Maus* considers questions that all of us must ask ourselves in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In a way, we all have something in common with Art Spiegelman. Although we were not there, our society has felt the repercussions of Auschwitz throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The Holocaust was an unprecedented event that not only changed the future but forced us to reconsider the past. It has led us to question the possibility of accurate representation and of truth itself. Finally, it has forced us to reevaluate what it means to be human. Like Art, we are unable to escape the questions that the Holocaust
has forced us to ask. Yet, also like Art, we have to power to pass on the story to others. In this way we can carry on the survivors’ mission to ensure that Auschwitz will never happen again and that stories of survivors have not been told in vain.
MISSING THE MOMENT: TIME AND TRAUMA IN ART SPIEGELMAN’S MAUS

By Theresa Schneider

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to sum up Art Spiegelman’s Maus as a comic about the Holocaust where the Jews are portrayed as mice and the Nazis are portrayed as cats, and thereby miss its nuance and importance. Indeed, at first glance there does not appear to be anything artistically adventurous about it. The pages are relatively uniform, the images framed in a series of black boxes that follow a standard left-to-right up-to-down pattern. Cartoon animals are nothing new, especially these ones, which are drawn simply and without detail. But there is so much more to Maus. Underneath this somewhat rudimentary style, Spiegelman draws attention to questions of history, trauma, and authenticity. He even reacts to criticisms of the novel within the novel, thereby creating a complex system of commentary.

The story revolves around two narratives. The first narrative is the experience of Vladek Spiegelman and his wife Anja, Jews living in Europe during World War II; they must struggle to survive first in the Polish ghettos and finally in Auschwitz. The second narrative takes place in Rego Park, New York in the 1970’s and features Art Spiegelman, Vladek’s son and the author of Maus, as he interviews his father about his Holocaust experience. The two do not get along very well, as Spiegelman points out in the very first panel of Maus I.¹ As the story progresses, we see the ways in which Vladek attempts to cope with the trauma that he has experienced, but we also

¹ Maus is in fact two graphic novels: Maus I: My Father Bleeds History and Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began. When I am referring to one of the two, I will specify Maus I or Maus II. When referring to the complete work, I will simply say Maus.
see the ways in which Artie, as a second generation survivor, has inherited the trauma from Vladek. Furthermore, both men struggle to cope with the emotional effects of Anja’s suicide in 1968.

Artie’s trauma really comes to the forefront in *Maus II*. Here, Spiegelman inserts an entire chapter, “Time Flies,” during which Artie examines the guilt brought on by the Holocaust, Anja’s suicide, the commercial success of *Maus*, and his disconnected relationship with his father. As critic Michael Staub has pointed out, whether or not Spiegelman started writing with this intention, the writing of *Maus* “necessarily became” an “effort at self-therapy” for Spiegelman (40). *Maus* has often been understood in terms of survivor guilt, a concept that this essay will explore later on. Another, less examined way to understand *Maus* is through the lens of trauma theory. Trauma theory is relatively new as a critical lens for exploring literature, and it is becoming more popular thanks to the work of Cathy Caruth and other influential critics.

According to Caruth, “Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (181). In other words, trauma requires an event so shocking that one’s response is delayed until after the event has occurred, which results in one repeatedly re-experiencing the event in one’s mind. The Holocaust is one such event.

One way for survivors of the Holocaust and other trauma to cope is through writing about their experience. Kali Tal says in *Worlds of Hurt* that “Literature of trauma … serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author” (21). Through writing, these authors express their “desires for affirmation and release” (22). Critic Michelle Balaev discusses the attributes of a trauma novel, which she defines as “a work of fiction that conveys profound loss
or intense fear at an individual or collective level” (1). Her definition of trauma applies specifically to the protagonist of a trauma novel and is therefore based more on personal effects than Caruth’s. “Trauma” says Balaev, “refers to a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and standards by which one evaluates society” (1). However, she refers back to Caruth’s work when she asserts that this disruption is caused by a “temporal gap” during which a person fails to consciously experience a traumatic event because such an event does not fit into any of the categories that the conscious mind has created (Balaev 1).

Caruth explains the temporal gap further in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. She bases her arguments around Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*, in which Freud compares trauma of the mind to trauma of the body. Caruth sums up Freud’s speculation that, in the same way that the body protects itself from dangerous situations through its ability to heal, the conscious mind protects itself from potentially dangerous external stimuli by “placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time” (Caruth 61). A traumatic experience is thus caused when an event is so shocking that it results in “a break in the mind’s experience of time” (61). Caruth further explains that trauma occurs, not merely because one’s life is threatened, but because

The threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*. The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being in time, it had not yet been fully known. And it is this lack of direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition ... (62, Caruth’s italics)
The key here is not so much the fact that there was a threat, but rather that this threat was not experienced within the normal flow of time.

Is it any coincidence that time does not flow normally in *Maus*? Spiegelman includes countless instances of the past and present “collapsing into one another” (Staub 44). An example of this phenomenon can be viewed in the image below:

![Image](image-url)

*Fig. A – Artie is literally drawn into the past.*

In this image, the line between the past and present panels disappears so that Artie’s legs appear in the image with past Vladek. Even the words emphasized within the speech bubbles convey a sense of time: the words “days” and “first” are emboldened. Hillary Chute points out that Artie’s body, as he records Vladek’s narrative, links the present moment to the past (*Shadow* 205). Yet Artie is more than just as link; through the act of writing, Artie himself is drawn (literally!) through time and becomes a part of the past.

Critics have pointed to the intermingling of past and present in *Maus* to suggest a variety of things, from the pervasiveness of trauma to the anxiety caused by the inability of the past to be “bridged” (McGlothlin 180). This essay will suggest, however, that through the recording of Vladek’s narrative, Art draws himself into the past as part of an
attempt to experience the Holocaust for himself and thus fill in the “temporal gaps” that have created his trauma. Art missed the Holocaust, not because he was unconscious of the event when it happened, but because, having been born in 1948, he literally did not experience it. However, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that he was not born in time, Art has been forced to experience repetition of the trauma through his parents. Art was unable to consciously experience the source of his trauma because he was not able to be present. In writing *Maus*, therefore, Art is attempting to experience and ultimately release himself from the trauma of which he is an inheritor, paradoxically by drawing himself into it.

ART AND THE “HOLOKITSCH”

Writing a graphic novel about the Holocaust has posed considerable challenges to Spiegelman, the least of which being the unique and unprecedented position of the Holocaust in human history. The Holocaust, in Spiegelman’s terms, is “the central trauma of the twentieth century” (qtd. in La Capra 6). Most scholars agree, though due to the unprecedented nature of the event, it is difficult to agree on precisely what makes it so unique; it is generally accepted that the uniqueness of the Shoah consists not so much the scale of the suffering as the extent to which the inflicted suffering was both “premeditated” and “categorical” (Goodhart 216). Dominick La Capra suggests that as an event the Holocaust was both “unique” and “comparable” to other events in history—at the same time, it was neither, as both comparatives and superlatives “are questionable except perhaps as hyperbolic expressions of one’s own inadequacy in trying to come to terms with problems” (6). Ultimately, La Capra concludes that
its uniqueness comes from the fact that “an extreme threshold or outer limit of transgression was crossed” so that it lacks other events of similar magnitude to which it can be compared (7).

Ironically, as critic Michael Staub points out, from the Holocaust’s incomparability there has sprung “a process of trivialization paradoxically resting precisely on the Holocaust’s status as uniquely horrific” (42). James E. Young remarks on this phenomenon in Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust when he says, “It is ironic that once an event is perceived to be without precedent, without adequate analogy, it would in itself become a precedent for all that follows” (qtd. in Staub 42). Those who wish to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive struggle with this problem, and Staub alludes to two consequences of it in his work titled “The Shoah Goes On and On” (Staub 41). First, there is the problem of “overtitillation,” cultural overstimulation to the Shoah (books, movies, etc.) that have left many feeling desensitized to the horror of it. Spiegelman, terming this phenomenon “Holokitsch,” has criticized many such works for their “fatuous attempts to give [the Holocaust] a happy ending” (qtd. Staub 41). Spiegelman successfully evades this problem in Maus by refusing to provide closure. Time and again, he leaves us without happy endings. Even the closing scene of Maus, in which Anja and Vladek are reunited, is only the illusion of a happy ending; the reader knows that Anja committed suicide a few years later, and Vladek became a miserly old man, estranged from his only son.

However, the second problem is the commercialization of the Holocaust (As Spiegelman himself quipped in an interview with Claudia Dreifus, “There’s no business like Shoah business” [qtd. in Staub 41]), and this is one problem that Maus is forced to confront head-on. The irony within Maus is that the work criticizes this commercialization even while benefitting from it, something that Spiegelman self-critically reflects on in the metanarrative at the start of Maus II (See Fig. B1). The author, now figured as a human wearing a mouse mask, sits at his drawing
pad, perched atop a pile of dead mice. Reporters in masks bombard him with questions, seemingly oblivious to the fact that they are trampling on the bodies of the dead in order to reach him. A salesman wearing a bulldog mask holds up an advertisement blaring “MAUS: You’ve read the book—Now buy the vest!” The ridiculousness of this gimmick communicates Art’s worry that, even if he does not use Maus to capitalize off of the Holocaust, inevitably someone will try to do so. Indeed, rather than being “cathartic,” Art’s success seems to have given him yet another thing to feel guilty about. Throughout the page, he grows smaller and smaller, overwhelmed by the project he has undertaken and the knowledge that he has contributed to the trivialization that he has tried to avoid. The final panel two panels show him as a crying child, exclaiming, “I want ABSOLUTION. No … I want … my MOMMY!” It would not be too much of a stretch to suggest that he wants absolution from his mother—forgiveness for having utilized her death to provide for his own commercial success.

While the struggle to write about the Holocaust without contributing to the trivialization of it is arguably a problem encountered by all attempts to represent the subject, Maus must also overcome problems specific to its method of visual representation. One major complaint is Spiegelman’s use of animals to represent different ethnicities. In Maus, Jews are mice, Poles are pigs, Germans are cats, Americans are dogs, etc. Many laud this choice as the key to Maus’ success. “The more you think about it,” says Douglas Wolk, author of Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean, “the deeper it becomes—real cats don’t just eat mice the way they do in cartoons; they torture them first” (343). Later he suggests that, without the animal metaphors, Maus “would be just another true story of the Holocaust, moving and maybe thought-provoking, but a little tedious to look at” (345). Yet some have criticized
Spiegelman’s portrayal of the characters as animals, claiming that they perpetuate the racial stereotypes that made the Holocaust possible. In an interview with Dreifus, Spiegelman recalled the complaint of a Polish curator who opposed the portrayal of Poles as pigs, recalling how the Germans called them schwine. Spiegelman responded, “Yeah, and the Germans called us vermin. These aren’t my metaphors. These are Hitler’s” (qtd. in La Capra 168). While it at first may seem counterintuitive to use Hitler’s metaphors to contest the Holocaust, it becomes clear through the course of Maus that the metaphor is set up only to be broken down.

For example, the arbitrariness of race is indicated in the story of the old German who claimed not to belong in the camps (Ewert 101; Maus II 50). When he is first introduced, he is drawn as a mouse. Halfway through, however, Spiegelman pauses on a close-up image of him
seemingly frozen in time. In one panel, this image shows a mouse; in the second, it is the same image, but this time a cat. Sitting in front of the second image, almost as if sitting in front of a movie screen, Art asks Vladek, “Was he really a German?” Vladek responds, “Who knows… but for the German’s this guy was Jewish.” In the next panel, when he is being beaten to death, he becomes a mouse again. Significantly, he is only a mouse because others distinguish him as a mouse. When Art suggests that he is German, he becomes a cat. In this way, Spiegelman suggests that there is no difference between races other than what human beings choose to see.

There are other examples that point to the artificiality as well. One of the interviewers, for example, asks Art how he would represent Israeli Jews in *Maus*. Art responds uncertainly, “Porcupines?”—his hesitance in answering suggests that this distinction does not really exist outside of human imagination. Furthermore, whenever one animal wants to masquerade as
another they can simply don a mask, raising the question of whether there is a real difference between races (See Figure C2). Thus, rather than using animals to perpetuate ethnic stereotypes, Spiegelman uses them to respond to these stereotypes and reveal their artificiality.

Finally, Maus has had to contend with those who oppose the use of comics as a medium for dealing which such a serious subject as the Holocaust. Comics are typically understood as a rather low art (McCloud 3), a medium reserved for treating subjects that are funny or trivial.² Spiegelman himself, in response to Adorno’s famous quote, once quipped, “If there can be no art after Auschwitz, there can at least be comic books” (Dreifus qtd. in La Capra 140). Yet Spiegelman meant for Maus to be a serious approach to the Holocaust. In an interview with “New York Voices,” he explained that his choice of medium was no way intended to make light of the subject matter:

MAUS was done in comics form because I make comics and so it was the natural language for me to speak. Comics have to do with art like Yiddish has to do with language; it’s a kind of vernacular. It wasn't like … do it in comics, that will really get a rise out of somebody. And I know that the responses to MAUS when it came out were first great suspicion. And then as they got closer, people who were serious about the issues that lie at the heart of MAUS weren’t offended by its form; they just found that that could work. (n. pag.)

² It is true, however, that since Maus and several other influential graphic novels were published in the 1980’s, people have started to look seriously at comics. Works like Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis have begun using comics to deal with serious issues. Even today, though, there is much reluctance to accept comics as a serious art form. One critic said in a recent review of Persepolis, “She is such a talented artist … it seems wrong to call her memoir a comic book” (Wolk 12). Some have attributed our inability to take comics seriously to the same impulse that prompted early religions to ban graven images. Others have suggested it is the relative newness of the medium. Whatever the reason, it is a long and difficult road to acceptance, but Maus has certainly helped to pioneer the way.
Some of the contention over the use of comics to deal with issues relating to the Holocaust can be attributed to a lack of knowledge about the medium. To begin with there is a difference between comics as a medium and a comic strip; comic strips are just one form that comics can take. Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics*, defines “comics” as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intending to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). There are basically three forms: comic strip, comic book, and graphic novel, and, as McCloud argues, none of these forms inherently require the use of a trivial or humorous subject. While the term “graphic novel” is often intended to convey the complexity and sophistication of a novel, all that it really means is that the work is novel-length. Like any other medium, such as film, painting, or music, comics can be used to present a wide variety of subjects.

Another distinction ought to be made between the word “comics” and “cartoons.” Comics are a medium, but cartooning is a style that is often used within that medium. In cartooning, everything is simplified into its basic form. For example, a face becomes a circle, two dots, and a line.

![Fig. D – From Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics, p. 31.](image)

This is an important distinction to make because Spiegelman does not just draw mice; he draws cartoon mice. His mice consist of little more detail than the smiley face above: two dots for eyes, a nose, sometimes eyebrows. In other words, his characters appear as generic as possible. We can see from the sketch in Fig. E that Spiegelman was capable of drawing much more
realistic-looking characters. Therefore this cartoon-like style is a deliberate choice on Spiegelman’s part and deserves some examination.

Scott McCloud outlines some of the basic benefits of using cartoons as opposed to a realistic style. First, simple pictures amplify the meaning behind them in a way that realistic art cannot; in other words, when we are not distracted by the complexity of the image, we are better able to focus on the complexity of the ideas. Spiegelman explained, “I didn’t want people to get too interested in the drawings. I wanted them to be there, but the story operates somewhere else. So, by not focusing too hard on these people, you’re forced back to your role as reader rather than looker” (qtd. in Brown 104). Brown adds, “Their very lack of individuality heightens the caption’s power to convey information.” By keeping faces ‘blank,’ therefore, Spiegelman forces the reader to find a meaning beyond the simple image that s/he sees on the page.

Secondly, the simpler an image, the more one is able to relate to it. One sees another person when one looks at a realistic face, but in the near-featureless face of a cartoon one sees oneself. In other words, “we don’t just observe the cartoon, we become it!” (McCloud 36).

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3 The sketches in Fig. E appear in the Complete Maus, a separate volume that combines both Maus I and II and includes supplementary material. They were reproduced by Jeanne Ewert in “Reading Visual Narrative: Art Spiegelman’s Maus” (97).
drawing mice using sparse lines and few features, Spiegelman creates a blank slate onto which the reader can project themselves. In this way, he creates characters with which readers can easily sympathize. At the same time, however, the lack of detail also keeps the characters from being drawn as “cute little Disney mice” that would demand our uncritical sympathy. Spiegelman tells of his deliberate avoidance of this cutesy style:

> There’s a lot of literature in which certain demands [for sympathy] are being made on you that I feel should be a given and, therefore, it’s actually demeaning to ask. Using that kind of cute, pudgy little mouse character with big, round, soulful eyes ... would’ve been all wrong. (qtd. in Brown 108)

Indeed, *Maus* strongly resists sentimentalizing survivors of the Holocaust, which is clear enough in the character of Vladek. Vladek is a problematic survivor, for though the reader sympathizes with and admires him, his character flaws are laid out on the table for all to see. Sometimes he even uses his status as survivor to get what he wants, as one can see from the episode in which he is allowed to return partially-opened food once he tells the shopkeeper about his time in Auschwitz (*Maus II* 90). Spiegelman’s neutral drawing style opens up the possibility of presenting this type of character, one who is neither wholly perfect nor wholly bad.

Ironically, the same attributes of comics that at first make the medium seem shockingly inappropriate for representing the Holocaust—presenting information through easily-accessible pictures, for example—are the same qualities that, upon further scrutiny, allow the cartoonist to deal with the issues on a level that written text can never achieve. Thomas Doherty says of comics in *Graphic Art and the Holocaust*:

> By its very nature, it seems ill-equipped for the moral seriousness and tonal restraint that have been demanded by Holocaust art. But—also by its very
nature—the cartoon medium possesses a graphic quality well-suited to a
confrontation with Nazism and the Holocaust. (71)

For example, as Michael Rothberg has pointed out in “We Were Talking Jewish,” accounts of Auschwitz often described a sense of unreality—“at once more real than real and more impossible than impossible” (Rothberg 670). Comics are equipped to convey this sense of unreality in a way that other medium are not. As McCloud points out, when one looks at a comic, one knows that one is looking at something unreal—unlike, for example, film, which is meant to give the illusion that you are seeing things as they happened. Thus Spiegelman is able to convey the intense reality of Auschwitz in a way of which other, more realistic, mediums would fall short. Paul Buhle explains, “Only the caricatured quality of comic art is equal to the seeming unreality of an experience beyond all reason” (qtd. in Chute, Shadow 201). At the same time that it conveys a sense of unreality, however, Hillary Chute argues that Maus also adapts the formal properties of comics to avoid creating a “magical” other-world effect; Spiegelman’s spatial and stylistic effects ensure that the story is very much grounded in reality (Forms n. pag.).

To return to the idea of trauma, comics is also an ideal medium for dealing with “missing moments,” because time is something that must be on the artist’s mind at all time. There are two reasons for this. First, as McCloud says, “In the world of comics, time and space are one and the same” (100). By looking at one page of comics, the reader is viewing many different moments in time. Spiegelman has commented on the details of time and space coexisting: “As a result, you’re always, in comics, being made aware of different times inhabiting the same space” (qtd. in Chute, Shadow 202). Furthermore, this phenomenon allows the same amount of space to show any difference in time—between one panel and another, seconds could pass, or centuries,
or no time at all. *Maus* complicates things, of course, by frequently placing two times, often differing by decades, within one panel.

The second reason that comics are equipped to recreate “missing the moment” is because the success of the medium depends on the reader’s ability to reconstruct missed moments. McCloud points out that most of the action in comics happens, not in the images on the page, but between panels in the space known as the “gutter.” It is up to the reader to interpret what happens within the gutter to provide a sense of “closure,” which McCloud explains as “mentally completing that which is incomplete based on past experience” (63). The very act of creating comics, therefore, required Spiegelman to fill in the blanks, for making logical connections between panels requires a knowledge of what goes in between the two scenes that the reader is being shown. As usual, of course, Spiegelman takes this capacity for filling in missing moments further by leaving out the gutter entirely in some images. Look, for example, back at Fig. A, in which Artie is recording his father’s narrative in the present, while his legs rest in the past. In this image, the space between panels disappears entirely, suggesting that, through the act of writing (for Artie as writing as he spans the gap), the missing moment has been filled in.

**TIME AND TRAUMA**

*Maus* betrays an obsession with time which manifests itself even in the most mundane of situations. In *Maus I*, three of the six chapters begin with some mention of time. Chapters One and Four begin with Vladek telling Artie, “You’re late!” (11, 73). Chapter Five begins with a call from Mala; the first words out of Artie’s mouth are, “What time is it?” (96). Each of the other three chapters open with an example of Vladek’s trauma; his reluctance to waste food, his obsession with doing every task perfectly (meticulously counting out pills), and his stinginess. It
is therefore likely that these opening statements regarding time also reflect a traumatic theme in *Maus*. In the case of Art’s lateness, there is a double meaning; he not only arrived too late for dinner but too late for the Holocaust. It is Vladek who twice accuses Artie of being late, which suggests that Artie’s guilt over having missed the moment has been instilled in him by his father.

Vladek’s concern for time is general—he simply recognizes that Artie is late—but it is Artie who always wants to know the specific time. Both *Maus I* and *II* feature a scene in which Artie wakes up in the morning and immediately demands, “What time is it?” His concerned for time immediately upon awakening can be taken as further evidence of his trauma, as well as his desire to overcome it. Cathy Caruth, paraphrasing Freud, has suggested that, “It is the experience of *waking into consciousness* that, peculiarly, is identified with the reliving of trauma” (64, Caruth’s italics). Trauma originates not only in the unconscious missing of the moment but in the reawakening into time and realizing that the moment has been missed. Art, jerked suddenly out of unconsciousness, is asking for the time, but what he really want to know is “Did I miss the moment, again, while I was unconscious?”

Much of the trauma that Art feels manifests itself as guilt. Barber and Wiseman, in their case study *Echoes of the Trauma*, delve briefly into the guilt that second generation survivors often experience. Guilt, according to Barber and Wiseman, is specifically interpersonal, occurring either when one has caused distress to a significant other, failed to help them when they were distressed, or gained something from them through inappropriate means. It often results in a fear of exclusion or of damage and/or loss of a relationship. In the case of survivor guilt, however, the guilt occurs even when the survivor holds no responsibility for the occurrence or could have done nothing to help (Barber and Wiseman 119).
Furthermore, in some cases parents can pass on these feelings of guilt to their children, although the children had nothing to do with what happened (Barber and Wiseman 119). Laurie Vickroy, in her work on the trauma novel, explains:

Transference of traumatic responses can continue for generations. Family relationships and the children of survivors are deeply affected by their parents’ experience, as manifested in depression, mistrust, and emotional constriction ...

Moreover, children inherit patterns of traumatic response. (19)

These children are often trapped by a paradoxical sense of what Barber and Wiseman call “knowing-not knowing” (126). “There is inevitable tension between the ‘knowing’ of the parent’s traumatic past and the ‘not knowing’ or being unable to think of what the parents went through” (Barber and Wiseman 239). That is, they know that their parents experienced something terrible, but they will never be able to fully understand, and the uncertainty adds to their sense of guilt (126). This tension existed among many Holocaust survivors and their children, and it certainly exists in Maus.

Artie’s conversation with his wife, Francoise, in the first chapter of Maus II reveals some of the ways in which Artie is a typical second generation survivor. Wiseman and Barber describe some common attributes present among this generation, one of which is an insistence on the normalcy of their lives. “The Holocaust has not affected my upbringing in any way,” is a constant refrain among second generation survivors (Barber and Wiseman 1). Artie insists, “Don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t obsessed with this stuff.” But in the very next sentence, he contradicts himself: “Sometimes I’d fantasize Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water” (16). This conversation features a series of similar contradictions—first insistence on his
normalcy followed by a statement disproving it—the abundance of which point to Artie’s attempt to reclaim normalcy despite his upbringing.

Yet these contradictions also remind the reader of an important distinction between Artie the character and Spiegelman the author. Interviews with Spiegelman make it clear that he made an effort to distinguish Artie from himself (La Capra 153). McGlothlin points out that *Maus* contains three layers; the second, Artie’s story, is a *bildungsroman*—a coming of age story in which Artie progresses towards maturity (184). The outer layer, the narration, is a reflection by Spiegelman, who has completed the maturation process that Artie is currently going through. Artie is still trying to work through his trauma; Spiegelman has completed his attempt to work through this same trauma already. This page, then, is evidence that Artie is still trying to escape the effects of the Holocaust on his life. He is trying to distance himself from the Holocaust without realizing that he is contradicting himself by only making its effects more obvious. Yet Spiegelman is consciously inserting these contradictions into the text; clearly, he as the author is aware of the Shoah’s pervasiveness in a way that Artie the character has yet to learn.

To return to Artie’s statement for a moment, that he would “fantasize Zyklon B,” his choice of the word “fantasize” is an odd one, because its connotations are generally positive. This suggests that in some ways he *wants* Zyklon B to come out of the shower. Ellen S. Fine may offer an explanation for this desire in her discussion of the phenomenon of “absent memory.”

In contrast to the presence of transmitted memory, another form of memory manifests itself, *absent memory* ... this nonmemory or lack of memory comes from the feeling of exclusion both from the experience and from knowledge about the experience (187).
This absence is frequently “filled” by “a sense of regret for not having been there” (187). Their sense of guilt is compounded by the fact that they did not participate. Artie even tells Francoise later in this conversation, “I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through. I guess it’s some kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did” (16). Although he admits a desire to experience the Holocaust, he is hesitant about it, using distancing phrases such as “I guess” and prefacing his statement with “I know this is insane” to suggest distance from a desire that he does not understand. His hesitancy to admit to wanting to take part in the Holocaust may have to do with a quote from Terrence Des Pres: “To put a value on suffering is something only the happy can afford” (Des Pres 42). Art’s very desire to have suffered with his parents is a reminder that he has had a happy life.

Immediately following the confession of wanting to experience the Holocaust with his parents, Artie turns to the subject of Maus. Spiegelman uses this transition to suggest that Maus is his way of doing just that, whether Artie the character consciously recognizes it or not. Furthermore, Artie’s inclusion of Richieu’s photograph in the discussion lends powerful credence to the ways in which images can bring life to the past. Although Art insists at one point, “I never felt guilty about Richieu,” he just spent the past four panels discussing the ways in which he felt “reproached” by Richieu’s photo (15). When Francoise calls Richieu Art’s brother, Artie corrects “You mean my ghost-brother” (15). Calling Richieu a “ghost” suggests the ways in which the past has “haunted” Art through the presence of a photograph. Furthermore, the fact that Richieu’s memory lived on through an image — as Artie says, “They didn’t need photos of me in their room… I was alive!” — suggests the power that images have of bringing the past to life. This power has been evident throughout Maus but will become
especially evident in the following chapter. The ways in which the past haunts the present is a theme that is visually apparent, but here it is stated verbally as well.

Art discusses the guilt he felt growing up at the beginning of the next chapter of *Maus II*, with his shrink, Pavel. Here he expands on the idea that his trauma was instilled in him by his father. Paradoxically, in many ways it is based on his *admiration* of his father. When Pavel suggests that Art must have looked up to his father at one point, Art says angrily, “Mainly I remember ARGUING with him … and being told I couldn’t do anything as well as he could” (44). Art’s guilt over his success becomes more complicated here, for on the one hand, he feels bad about disproving his father’s criticism; on the other, he feels that even his success is nothing compared to his father’s success. Later, he adds, “No matter what I accomplish, it doesn’t seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz” (44). The relationship has been visibly strained throughout *Maus*, but here Art adds to that strain the suggestion that it is his own sense of inadequacy, his inability to accomplish what his father did, that embitters him towards his father. This statement suggests that Art’s missing Auschwitz has created an experiential chasm between him and his father. As Barber and Wiseman point out, guilt involves a fear of damage to a relationship. By recapturing the moment of Auschwitz, Art can not only erase his own guilt but repair their relationship.

Nowhere in *Maus* do the past and present come together more visually than in the second chapter of *Maus II*, “Auschwitz: Time Flies.” The first page of “Time Flies,” as discussed in “Art and the ‘Holokitsch’” above, finds Art sitting at his artist’s table on top of a pile of mouse corpses, illuminated by a spotlight and surrounded by flies, with a watch tower and fence looming ominously out the window. This image is arguably one of the most important scenes in *Maus*—its significance is emphasized by the size of the bottom panel, the largest in *Maus II* and
surpassed in size by only two panels in *Maus I*, the first images of a Nazi flag and of Auschwitz. It no surprise, then, that this scene has been examined by critics from a variety of angles. Erin McGlothlin asserts in “Narrative and Time in Spiegelman’s *Maus*” that, in breaking away from the rest of the temporal narrative, this image represents “a sort of timelessness” (186). McGlothlin’s essay focuses on Spiegelman’s use of two temporal narratives, and, although hers is not the only valid interpretation of the dual narrative found in *Maus*, her in-depth analysis of the first page of “Time Flies” contains several helpful insights that will contribute to this essay.

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4 See, for example, Hillary Chute’s suggestion that it conveys an “overtly political” message, intended to “wake [readers] up” to the possibility of history’s repeating itself.
Despite having set up a sense of timelessness through the narration of the first four panels (as McGlothlin observed), when Spiegelman zooms out, it is clear that he has illustrated Art within a specific time. Nor is this time the “present” that he might logically be referring to at the top of the page when he says “I started working on this page in February 1987,” for the room is devoid of any identifying features that he might have had in his studio in 1987. Rather, the only visual details that allow the reader to place him in time are the watchtower out the window and the pile of corpses at his feet; he has situated himself within the time of the Holocaust. Not only that, but, as McGlothlin describes, he has situated himself as a victim of the Holocaust:

For in this mise-en-scene with the barbed wire and watchtower, he becomes the inmate of a concentration camp. The watchtower’s searchlight focuses on him, singling him out as both a potential ‘criminal’ and a victim. Art thus experiences the scene of the Holocaust past; it becomes the surroundings in which he both lives and works. (189)

The fact that Art is sitting at an artist’s drawing board serves to remind the reader that the setting from which he is speaking is an artistic choice on Spiegelman’s part. Within the seemingly timeless space of the metanarrative, Art could have set himself within any time, or no time at all. The fact that he chose to not only set himself into a specific time but this specific time points back to his desire to have been there, to experience the threat of victimhood in the same way that his parents did.

This choice to set himself within the Holocaust might be better understood by comparing Art to other survivor-authors as described by Ellen Fine. One such survivor was Serge Doubrovsky, who was a young child during the war. Unlike Artie’s brother Richieu, Doubrovsky was successfully hidden and survived the war. Yet he was constantly plagued by
what Fine calls “the guilt of nonparticipation” (192) which is caused by “the feeling of exclusion” that many in the second generation feel (192). In a section of his 1969 autobiographical novel *La dispersion*, Doubrovsky, like Spiegelman, imagines himself as a victim, taken to the camps by the French Police in 1942.

His 1989 *Le Livre Brise* continues to struggle with themes of guilt and absence. “Everyone his war [sic],” he writes. “Only here it is. My war. I NEVER WAS IN IT … I came through the biggest war in history … without spilling a drop of blood … In my past, only the *passive*” (qtd in Fine 193, emphasis added). Yet writing provides him with an outlet to return to the moment and reverse his passivity. Fine explains, “While the author is obsessed by his passivity and his nonparticipation in the war, it is by writing about the event that he participates in it over and over again” (193).

McGlothlin has said, “In this [third] layer, [Art] emerges not as the passive receiver of a story of trauma and loss, but as the witness who effectively becomes the co-producer of that story” (180-81). Seen in this light, her statement takes on a new meaning. By choosing to set himself up as a victim of the Holocaust, Art provides himself with a way to overcome his passive role of observer and become a participant. By placing himself in the position of a Holocaust victim, he hopes that he will no longer suffer from the “guilt of non-participation.” Rather, if he is able to recapture the missed moment, then he will no longer be excluded from the trauma that the rest of his family suffered.

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5 Doubrovsky was not, strictly speaking, a second-generation survivor, for the term is generally used to refer to children born after the war; however, Fine explains: “My use of the expression is more comprehensive, encompassing both those born during and after the war, including those who did not directly participate in the Holocaust but who have come to endure the psychic imprint of the trauma. They are designated as ‘the post-Holocaust generation’ ” (186).
“MAKING AN ORDER WITH EVERYTHING”

Artie and Vladek argue over time often throughout *Maus*. Consequently, Artie is constantly interrupting Vladek to get him back into a chronological narrative (refer to Fig. G). Art’s need to know the specific chronology of his father’s story reflects his need to create order out of the narrative, despite the fact that Vladek does not remember these events chronologically. This is not unusual for trauma narratives; according to Lawrence Langer, such written accounts often include “intrusive literary conventions,” such as chronology, that do not exist in the oral recounting of the events. “This voice,” says Langer, “seeks to impose on apparently chaotic episodes a perceived sequence, *whether or not that sequence was perceived in an identical way during the period that is being rescued from oblivion by memory and language*” (qtd. in Vickroy 5, Langer’s italics).

Vladek has said that he destroyed Anja’s diaries because “after Anja died, I had to make an order with everything” (*Maus I* 159). Vladek’s way of making an order was forgetting as much as possible. Art, however, seems to “make an order with everything” by attempting to remember as much as possible. Although Vladek is willing to resurrect these memories for Artie’s sake, their opposing ways of understanding the past often create a struggle for narrative
control between the two. Chute observes, “While Artie emphasizes Vladek’s time there, Vladek insists on the space of his Auschwitz experience” (Shadow 210). One notable example of this contention can be found in Fig. H below:

![Image of a comic strip showing a chronological diagram of Vladek's months in Auschwitz.](image)

**Fig. H — “In Auschwitz we didn’t wear watches.” Maus II, p. 68.**

In this figure, Artie attempts to construct a chronological diagram of Vladek’s months in Auschwitz. Chute says, “This diagram represents a disagreement; the son is ‘imposing order’ while the survivor, caught up in his testimony, resists that historiographic impulse” (Shadow 210). She points out that the diagram cuts off Vladek’s speech in the top right hand corner, indicating that Art is attempting to control Vladek’s personal testimony. Yet his testimony cannot be chronologically controlled because, as Vickroy asserts, survivors “live in durational rather than chronological time” (5). In this scene, Vladek cannot seem to recount events
chronologically; he repeats himself, forgets details, remembers them again, and when he adds everything up, he comes up with two extra months. Finally, with a helpless shrug, he offers, “In Auschwitz we didn’t wear watches” (*Maus II* 68). The timeline remains unfinished, interrupted by the reality of the present.

This means that Artie’s attempts to enforce chronological order do not always work. Two pages after Fig. G, Vladek suddenly remembers a detail he forgot, and the narrative falls out of order anyway. On the other hand, sometimes Art’s illustrations do overrule Vladek’s attempt to control his story. This is present in the very first chapter of *Maus I*, when Vladek ends the story about him and Lucia by saying, “But this what I just told you—about Lucia and so—I don’t want you should write this in your book” (23). Art argues for a few panels, but finally agrees, “Ok, ok, I promise.” Of course, the story he is promising not to include is the one that the reader has just finished.6

Jeanne C. Ewert suggests that Spiegelman includes the story of Lucia in order to “demonstrate his insistence on his right to control the storyline” (90). Yet Spiegelman has also said that he attempts to present some anecdotes from Vladek’s point of view. “Rather than having me always win in my discussion with Vladek of how something should be presented,” this way Vladek could have “the last word” (qtd. in La Capra 147). Something, then, must have motivated him to give his father the last word despite his own desire to control the story. One explanation can be found in a statement by Saul Friedlander, who explains that within trauma narratives there is a struggle to secure a “balance between the emotion recurrently breaking through the ‘protective shield’ and numbness that protects this shield” (qtd. in Vickroy 20). This

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6 For further examples of the struggle for narrative control, see Ewert’s “Reading Visual Narrative: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus.*”
balance allows Art to experience the Holocaust while at the same time maintaining a protective
distance from the events.

On the one hand, Art wants to stay as true to Vladek’s story as possible so that he can fill
in as much of the story for himself as possible. On the other hand, he needs to assert some
control in order to assimilate Vladek’s story in a controlled environment. “The parts that are in
the book are now in neat little boxes,” Spiegelman once said in an interview. “I know what
happened by having assimilated it that fully. And that’s part of my reason for this project” (qtd.
in Chute, Shadow 210). By creating an ordered narrative through these “neat little boxes,”
Spiegelman is able to overcome the sense of not-knowing, at least in part, by processing the
events of the Holocaust in a way that makes sense to him. He is also able, however, to break
open the neat little boxes whenever he wants to experience the past inside. Spiegelman said of
drawing difficult moments in Maus, “I had been dropping into that abyss stage-by-stage just as
my family did, in fact … [only] I have the luxury of slowing it down. For my parents it lasted
from 1939 to 1945; for me it lasted from 1978 to 1989 so far” (qtd. in Sabin 109-110). In this
way, his attempt to work through his trauma takes place in his own time and within a safe and
familiar space.

Vickroy points out that, “Trauma narratives acknowledge ambivalence and doubts about
successful retelling, but they also attempt to provide ways for the traumatic event to be
reexperienced.” What is unique about Maus is that it attempts to reexperience the Holocaust
through images as well as words. Rothberg suggests that “with every image … he does not just
represent the Holocaust, he literally brings it back to life” (669). Yet Spiegelman confesses that
he has difficulty recreating the experience of Auschwitz. Art laments to Pavel in Maus II that,
“Some part of me doesn’t want to draw or think about Auschwitz. I can’t visualize it clearly, and
I can’t BEGIN to imagine what it felt like” (46). This harkens back to Barber and Wiseman’s problem of “knowing-not knowing.” Although Art has probably heard and recorded the entire story orally at this point, it is not enough. Art can know that Vladek worked in a tin shop, but not what kinds of tools they used or what those tools looked like. He can know that Vladek lived in the camps, but he cannot see what his father saw or feel what his father felt. A verbal description allows him to know some of the experience, but there will always be blanks that the words cannot fill in.

A tension exists between the need to witness to the Holocaust and the inability of words to convey truth. Art suggests this paradox when he quotes Samuel Beckett: “Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness” (45). Robert S. Leventhal, in his sourcebook “Art Spiegelman’s Maus: Working-Through the Trauma of the Holocaust,” insists, “No language, no vocabulary can even approach the horror of Auschwitz. Auschwitz becomes a limit that defies phrasing” (2). In fact, Pavel’s first attempt to explain Auschwitz comes not through language but through a visual action (demonstrated in Fig. I). Only once Art has responded to this action does Pavel supplement it with words. By drawing attention to the limits of a strictly verbal account, Spiegelman again emphasizes that graphic novels have a power to recapture a
missed moment (or series of moments) in a way that neither words nor images alone can manage. Thanks to Spiegelman, the graphic novel has been opened up as a legitimate medium through which trauma victims can attempt to recreate past events.

RESOLUTION AND REPRESENTATION

This essay has discussed Artie’s attempt to work through his trauma via the writing of Maus. As the phrasing implies, despite this attempt he does not succeed. He does not achieve control of the narrative, repair the relationship with his father, or work through the trauma of the Holocaust. This lack of resolution is suggested by the final page of Maus, which ends with a false happy ending and a final image that acts as simultaneously as a memorial and as an insistence on the repetition of trauma (see Fig. J). Hillary Chute argues that the grave stone for Vladek and Anja Spiegelman acts as an arrow that points the reader up and back through the work, moving them into the story again (Shadow 220). This suggests that there is no end to the trauma within Maus, but that the story will continue to repeat itself. Chute also points to the artist’s signature, along with the dates of Maus at the bottom of the page, as a sort of second epitaph (Shadow 220). The parallel epitaphs suggest that Maus was a way for Art to share in his parents’ experience; yet Art’s name is apart from theirs, suggesting that despite his efforts, he was unable to become part of their story.

This returns again to the idea of Maus as a bildungsroman in which Artie grows up throughout the course of the narrative. Artie means to deal with his own trauma by understanding the Holocaust through the writing of Maus; instead he learns that the Holocaust resists understanding. He best expresses this lesson midway through Maus II, when he cannot
see why Vladek was surprised when his box was stolen. “I guess I just don’t understand,” says Artie, to which Vladek replies, “Yes… about Auschwitz, NOBODY can understand” (64).

In his talk with Pavel, as discussed earlier, he draws attention to the limits of words in conveying what happened, but there is also an implied sense that images will ultimately reach their limit too. When Pavel uses an action to explain the Holocaust, for example (return to Fig. I), the reader does not see the action but only a single, frozen instance of it. Even then, Pavel only says, “It was a little bit like that,” suggesting that even direct experience of a relatable situation does not result in an understanding. Ultimately, the Holocaust, due to the uniquely frightening nature of the event, entirely resists representation. The missing moments cannot ever be experienced; they can only be imagined, and that is not enough to fill in the “temporal gaps” that keep Art traumatized.

One source of the problem is that the Holocaust is not, in fact, a “story” with a beginning, middle, and end. Paul Ricoeur explains that a story “must be more than just an enumeration of
events in serial order” but must “move forward … under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the ‘conclusion’ … To understand a story is to understand how and why successive episodes led to this conclusion” (qtd. in Wilner 112). Arlene Fish Wilner suggests that this theme is embodied in the story of Vladek’s friend Mandelbaum, which Spiegelman initially sets up as a sort of fairy tale. Mandelbaum suffers from a series of almost comical misfortunes, until Vladek, through his good luck, rescues him by providing the materials he needs. According to Ricoeur’s definition, Mandelbaum’s story ought to have ended on this resolved note. Instead, a few days later the Nazis take him and kill him. Says Milner:

> The essentially plotless ‘story’ of Mandelbaum can be taken as a metaphor—or more precisely a synecdoche—for the incomprehensible sequence of events called the Holocaust. Thus neither Mandelbaum’s life and death nor the Holocaust as a whole is granted the coherence—and hence the dignity—of a story (112).

*Maus* too is not entirely granted the coherence of a story. Although Vladek ends by saying that he and Anja lived “happy, happy ever after,” the reader knows better (Milner 107). Anja committed suicide long ago, while Vladek is a sick old man, estranged from his only son.

The inability of the Holocaust to be shaped into a narrative means that neither Art nor Vladek ultimately has narrative control. This is in part because in order to control the narrative, Spiegelman needed to “turn it from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained and predictable narrative” (Tal 6). This would require “reducing a traumatic event to a set of standard narratives,” a process that Kali Tal refers to as “mythologization” (Tal 6). Only by containing the events in a safe and predictable story could he potentially overcome them, and this is precisely what Spiegelman resists doing. Yet Vladek too lacks narrative control because he ultimately
lacks control over his own fate. Irving Howe asserts that the Holocaust lacks the dramatic tension that drives a story forward because drama is dependent on the ability of the characters to choose their fates, something which the characters of *Maus* ultimately have no control over (qtd. in Wilner 116-117). Vladek’s final statement—“It’s enough stories for now”—suggests this sentiment, but it also seems to suggest that *Maus* is not, according to the definition, a “story”; there are enough stories already, and *Maus* is something different.

In writing *Maus*, therefore, Spiegelman had to make a choice between turning Vladek’s experience into a mythologized story with an acceptable conclusion—thus falling victim to the phenomenon of the “Holokitsch” that he so despises—or staying true to Vladek’s testimony. Fortunately for *Maus*, Spiegelman chose the latter. He may not have achieved his goal of working through his trauma, but that does not mean that *Maus* was a failure; rather, the lack of resolution and the resulting persistence of trauma are precisely what add depth and complexity to the novel.

Furthermore, in attempting to create an authentic account of Vladek’s Holocaust experience, Spiegelman fulfills an important role as a witness. Terrence Des Pres refers the need survivors often feel to report their experiences as “the will to bear witness” (36). As Des Pres explains, “When men and women are forced to endure terrible things at the hands of others … the need to remember becomes a general response” (31). Des Pres asserts that “the primary source of the will to bear witness” is that “the survivor allows the dead their voice” (36). This is made even more poignant in light of the final image of a gravestone, in which the reader is
reminded that Vladek has passed on. *Maus* is Art’s way of giving voice to his dead parents, and even to himself in anticipation of his own death.⁷

This desire to give the dead their voice reflects more than just a need to live on; it also reveals a need to ensure that the memory of what happened is not forgotten. Many Holocaust survivors, throughout their suffering in the camps, experienced “a sense of mission that would give me this strength to endure everything” (qtd. in Des Pres 37). By witnessing, Spiegelman makes the guilt and trauma he has suffered seem worth enduring. Truthfully recording the events that caused his parents’ trauma, as well as his own, becomes part of a mission to “let the world know” (qtd. in Des Pres 32). Mala says of *Maus*, “It’s an important book. People who don’t read such stories will be interested” (*Maus* I 133). In his own way and through his own medium, Spiegelman ensures that those who might not ordinarily be exposed to the Holocaust can learn about the horrors of it for themselves. Spiegelman may not have succeeded in overcoming his personal trauma, but through witnessing to the effects of the trauma on him and his family, he can make sure that such traumatic events will never be repeated.

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⁷He sardonically confessed to “New York Voices,” “I expected that my work would be understood posthumously and it was kind of a disappointment to find out I’d still be around to deal with the consequences.”