

Comics history



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Maus: Trauma Expressed in Graphic Form A book review Comics, or graphic books and beast fables are no longer meant only for children. They are effectively used to inform, entertain, and to convey social messages to the general public . Graphic books like Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi and Maus by Art Spiegelman have become famous as a books which portray certain unpleasant truths of the times. Spiegelman has made use of the style of the beast fable in his graphic book. While dealing with the complex subject of his relationship with his father, Spiegelman is concerned with the effects of the Holocaust on the survivors and their lives after the war.

The book is mainly autobiographical, as it draws on the experiences of Spiegelman's father during the World War II, and his own story as a graphic artist. The main theme of the book is the Holocaust It narrates Spiegelman's father Vladek's traumatic experiences during and after the Holocaust., at the same time, showing the trauma which the son Artie is going through in the present time. Vladek, a Polish Jew, has survived the Holocaust in Auschwitz, but his experiences have not removed his own racist tendencies. His wife Anja, Artie's mother, commits suicide soon after they come to America., which leaves a deep scar on Artie's mind. Vladek marries Mala, whom he treats with the same insensitivity.

Spiegelman uses allegory, portraying humans of different nationalities as different animals. In Maus, the Jews are depicted as mice, the Germans as cats, the Poles as pigs, the Americans as dogs. There are other animals like the reindeer, the bears depicting the Russians, frogs, the French and the English, fish. Maus takes its name from the German word for mouse. Mice, which are used to represent the Jews, are small, timid , harmless creatures the qualities which the Jews are supposed to possess. At the same time, they

are dirty, disease carrying vermin according to the Nazis. Mice are also very resourceful, a characteristic of the Jews. Similarly, the Germans are represented by cats, which are always trying to catch, torture and kill mice. The French are represented by frogs, which are slimy. The French are fond of frog legs as a delicacy. Representing people as animals has another advantage, as it makes the writer feel detached from the characters, thereby giving him more freedom. It also shows the futility of stereotyping people. Spiegelman has made intelligent use of graphics to narrate the trauma of the Holocaust. The subject of the Holocaust is too disquieting for leisure reading, but Spiegelman's treatment of it makes it readable. The use of the comic book genre to narrate his father's experiences as a Polish Jew in the Europe of the 1930s juxtaposed with the life of Artie in America of the 1970's adds another dimension to the story of the Holocaust.

Maus also portrays some of the positive sides of the people, such as the Spiegelmans' governess Mrs. Motonowa, who hides Vladek and Anja., risking her own life. The book also shows how people lose faith in their fellow human beings. Artie is reluctant to go to his father for comfort, even as a boy. After reading the book, one can understand that the horrors suffered by the victims of the Holocaust were too catastrophic in comparison with their sufferings later.. The children of the victims are continuing to experience the aftermath of the Holocaust as a psychological legacy.

Being an allegory, Maus deals with complex human responses to situations in a deceptively simple manner. Juxtaposed between two time-frames, it successfully portrays the experiences of a Polish Jew during and after the War and the pain still felt by the younger generation. Spiegelman richly deserves the Pulitzer special prize he received for the book.

Works cited

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