

Maus and the worlds of reality and fiction



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History is a vast spectrum of information, this study of past events is not only quantitative and qualitative but also emotionally diverse. To understand history we need to look beyond the boundaries of physical reality. The drawings in Maus are split into categories, reproductions, and interpretations.

Reproductions are real images, they're reproduced within the book specifically as they seem in the real world with human faces intact.

Interpretations are primarily hand-drawn versions of real images, that translate pictures into the comic and replace human heads with mouse or pig heads. Spiegelman's call to use each of those depictions in Maus, compels him to straddle the worlds of fiction and reality.

It's generally viewed and agreed upon, that a life narrative established from a tenuous strand of your memory and the suspiciously trustworthy information accumulated from friends, loved ones and other associates around you, are consistently going to be viewed as facts. Since we can't outwardly accuse these people and their content as being lies and slander, it's generally accepted to be facts. Perhaps this is because no one is really willing to admit that their memories just aren't as perfect and hole-proof as they'd hope them to be. This thought also carries easily into our reading and understanding of life narratives. When reading and interpreting a life narrative, it is necessary to peel off that band-aid so to speak, no matter painful it may be, and reveal the truth for what it actually is. Memories do not equate to facts. They are a matter of perspective upon a fact, and those perspectives will go through countless stages of evolution, so that by the time you look back at them again, they may bear only the vaguest whisper

of resemblance to what they were before. However, this does not reduce their significance. Thinking of *Maus*, Art Spiegelman is recording, depicting and directing the story, partially from his memory, of himself interviewing Vladek, his father, about his memories of the Holocaust. Their conversations were recorded on tapes and just in those tapes, the information is most likely solid but his confrontations with his father and the precise moments of the interviewing and how they happened for both son and father during those moments of the interview are straight from Art Spiegelman's own memory. Vladek's memories of the war could hardly be exaggerated and yet it is still possible that between the times he experienced those horrors and the time he recounted those same horrors to his son, much of his perception about all the events may have changed. Art Spiegelman's memory of how time really passed during his interviews with his father may also have been altered slightly, a mental image blurred and diluted based the information he received, as well as his close relationship and deep feelings towards his father, all of which are definitely not constants.

Although Vladek is talking about actual events and real people, Art does not have any access to the deep-rooted realities of what his father actually experienced. He does not have access to the people and places that undoubtedly defined Vladek's life during the war, and his experiences during the war, are completely foreign to his son. Similarly, Art has no basis for understanding the intense emotions and deep traumas the war created. When looking at and interpreting his parents' photographs, most of which show relatives who did not even survive WW2 and the Holocaust, and who Artie will never meet. Artie understands that because he will never meet

these family members he will have to re-create their experiences, and in doing so he will not be accurate. the victims who died can never tell their side of the story (Spiegelman, 45). And because of this, Art recognizes that his work is an act of imagination as much as, or maybe even more than, it is an object of historical memory. This is important because Art knowingly admits that his presentation of the story may not be accurate. He goes as far as to say "" reality is too complex for comics ... so much has to be left out or distorted""(Spiegelman, 16). Further expanding on the point that Maus is a work of imagination and fiction as much as it is a work of history.

In total, only three of the photos in the book are actual reproductions: the snapshot of Anja and young Artie in "" Prisoner on the Hell Planet"" in Maus I, Chapter 5, the photo of Richieu at the beginning of Maus II, and the "" souvenir"" photo of Vladek near the end of Maus II, Chapter 5. Hand in hand, these three pictures show to people in Spiegelman's immediate family.

These are the people he can actually picture in his mind, relate to, as well as share a connection and memories with. Because his connection with them is the strongest, they are shown as they actually are. The hand-drawn photographs in the book, on the other hand, are all family members who died during the war or passed later on. To Art, these people's lives are completely separate from his own, like a fictional story with a distressful ending. He's trying to connect with them but can't picture them as fully formed people because he has never shared memories or connections with them. They basically remain one-dimensional characters who look like every other mouse in the book. And because of this, even though the faces of his

long-lost relatives are fiscally accessible to him through photographs, he can never truly know the people they depict.

In chapter 2 of *Maus II*, *Auschwitz (Time Flies)*, flies make an abundant appearance. Flies commonly appear to represent death as they often surround dead bodies and flies are also seen buzzing around Art at the beginning of *Maus II*. This is representing the memories of the dead that haunt him while making his book. In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note)(Spiegelman, 41). He is always thinking about these real events while writing *Maus* and this is why Art also drew flies near him, representing how he is haunted by the ghost of his past with the death of his mother. The fact of the matter is that Art was so perplexed by his mother's death that he could not represent her as the fictional character he displayed everyone else with. And he also couldn't do this because of his direct relationship with his mother, he understood why his mother killed herself and blamed himself for it as well. In "" Prisoner on the Hell Planet"" Artie said that I Felt Nauseous The Guilt Was Overwhelming!(Spiegelman, 102). He was referring to the guilt he had of his mother killing herself, he believed that because of his last conversation with his mother and some other reasons were the reasons she committed suicide. Because this was such a traumatic event in Art's life it caused him to switch from depicting characters as mice to depicting them as people and he even included a reproduction. Since this was such a major event in his life he started to shift to the world of complete reality. This is because he was actually able to picture, remember and connect with these events in his head. He remembered exactly how he felt, which caused him to make this part of the comic as realistic as possible.

Throughout *Maus* (I and II) Spiegelman has been forced to straddle the worlds of reality and fiction. This is shown time and time again and gives us an understanding that history is never going to be documented perfectly because we can never truly understand the veracity of what has happened, but this is what makes history so diverse, complex, entertaining, and insightful. Through Vladek's experiences written by Art, we can come to understand how insightful this form of presenting history is. We can gain a wide spectrum of perspectives through these two publications which give us enormous comprehension of what actually happened during the Holocaust and what exactly Art wanted us to understand. Going in between reality and fiction really expanded the meaning of the book as well as provide us insight upon what Spiegelman's perspective really was.