

The holocaust as part of artie's family history



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In "Maus II" by Art Spiegelman a series of three panels helps to encapsulate a continuous theme throughout the two part story. In these panels Artie and Françoise are in the car driving to assist Artie's father who has just been left by his second wife. In the car Artie claims that "I never felt guilty about Richieu. But I did have nightmares about S. S. Men coming into my class...I wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through" (16). Artie struggles with his relationship with his father, the death of his mother, his ghost-brother, and his attempt to recreate the Holocaust in a comic strip. All of these struggles connect back to his lack of common experience. He knows that due to the difference in their pasts, the difference in their upbringing, in many ways he is distanced from his family, people he cannot seem to fully understand. The series of panel mentioned before, along with the highlighted dialogue, capture Artie's inability to connect with his family and their story due to a significant difference in their lack of shared history.

The Holocaust, to Artie, was something horrible and unfathomable that his parents experienced and lived through. This part of his family history is not an element of life that makes him connected to his parents through lineage, but creates a gap in their relationship. He often worries that he does not understand fully their experiences, as he did in the car with his wife. Artie in asking his father for his story is attempting to understand, he wants to be able to capture the survival of his father, the survival of his family, and subsequently himself, in his art. However, many times throughout the graphic novel Artie reveals his despair in failing at his task. Even after the publication of his first graphic novel on his father's story Artie worries that he

has inappropriately captured his father and that the work can never do the experience justice.

Additionally, Artie blames his father's personality on the Holocaust. His father is stingy with money, willing to live on next to nothing. He is demanding, coarse, and judgmental. As a reason behind his personality Artie claims that his father's past has shaped this character in him. That the Holocaust is the reason he will throw away nothing, and do nothing with money but save it. He believes that the Holocaust is the reason that his father is so surly, that surely his attitude is a product of his rough life. His father lived through a death trap, Artie can never measure up to that, and can never be as accomplished as his father. This is what Artie believes, what he thinks, what keeps him at arm's length from his father. His lack of shared history, his inability to experience the Holocausts drives him into creating a world where his father and he cannot coexist in mutual understanding.

In the car with his wife, Artie speaks of his ghost-brother and the impact that has had on his life. Richieu was the first son, the boy that knew the Holocaust, the boy that did not survive the Holocaust. His parents cherish the picture of this son. They recall the memory their son as the perfect boy he was. This perfection plagues Arties. He feels that he is constantly competing with a ghost to gain the approval of his parents. His brother was a mere five or six when he died, allowing him to be the picture of perfection to his parents. Richieu would not have chosen the life Artie had chosen, he would have "married a rich Jew," and known the suffering that his parents knew. Richieu is the missing generational link from Artie to his parents. He, as a son, would be able to relate to Artie and his existence before the

Holocaust creates a shared history. However, his death pushes Artie further from his parents, because now Artie must face a brother he never met in order to prove himself a worthy son in the eyes of his parents. As he sees it, he can never measure up to the perfection of his ghost brother - a person who symbolizes the happiness his parents knew before the war even began.

The Holocaust is a part of Artie's family history. That fact will always remain, but it is a part of their history that Artie cannot truly relate to. His interpretations, as he views them, are inadequate renderings of horror he will never know. Due to this view on the Holocaust, and his parents' life experience Artie continually feels inept and disconnected from his family. His is plagued by inadequacy in his work, compared to his ghost-brother, and in his comparative life accomplishments in relation to the survival of his parents. Artie attempts to understand the event, the history, that has shaped his life, but this understanding may be something out of his reach.