

Review of maus

Literature



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"Maus" is the first-ever comic book that won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. It is not just all about Holocaust literature but really about the people during and after that fearsome period. This wonderful book tells the story of Vladek Spiegelman who luckily survived the Holocaust during World War II in Europe as a Jew. The destruction, however, continued even after the war ended, as Vladek and his family moved to America to begin a new life. There in their new home, their relationships were not so good as that special father-and-son bonding was sorely lacking.

Artie Spiegelman proves with "Maus" that the graphic novel is also capable of dealing with "serious" issues by becoming a legitimate art form beyond being a part of popular culture. "Maus" sets a new example for comic books by introducing innovative elements and methods that affect the comic positively: substituting human faces with iconic figures, the jumps in time within each chapter, and confessing of the book's limitation to his readers honestly.

The appearance of different categories of people that Spiegelman chose is intriguing. Stereotypes of animals along with the record that Nazis called Jews "vermin" and Poles "pig" ironically results Spiegelman showing the Jews as innocent and vulnerable as mice, the Germans as bloodthirsty cats, and with the Poles as selfish pigs. Further, the French were portrayed as frogs, the British as cold fish, and the Americans as dogs. Whether these groups of people have the qualities of the chosen animal or not is irrelevant as they were treated as such back at a time. The Jews had to hide, find ghettos to hide in, gather food, and pray, while the Germans wore leather boots, and stayed as a dominant power. Meanwhile, the Poles are compelled to abandon their Jewish friends in order to survive. While these iconic groups

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of people symbolized the dehumanization of the Holocaust that twisted people beyond their endurance, Spiegelman used them as a means so that the image on each panel will be less sentimental for the readers.

Spiegelman tells the story honestly and portrays his characters truthfully. From the beginning to the end of the comic book, Spiegelman documented his father's wartime experience without over-glamorizing his father as some kind of hero. Rather, the self-referentiality method used in the "book within a book" motif allows Spiegelman to reveal the interactions between the wartime story itself and what was being told beyond Vladek's wartime story. Further, Artie Spiegelman tells of his feelings that contributed to make the story lively as well. Spiegelman himself consciously provides the basis of why he mocks and neglects his elderly father while at the same time he wants his father's struggling story to fill his new book (Spiegelman 3). Chapters I and II of "Maus" echo this regret and guilt of his inconsiderate treatment of both his father and mother, who later on committed suicide (Maus I, 103; Maus II, 104).

While "Maus" has such high critical approval, there are also the negative voices, such as its repetition of other Holocaust survivors experiences and doubts on the credibility of Artie Spielegman (as the second-generation descendant of a Holocaust survivor) telling the story. Spiegelman does not neglect the fact that his book has its limitations. He wrote this book by explicitly telling his readers that it is the story of one family which is seen through the eyes of one man, Vladek Spiegelman, and later filtered again through his son, Artie Spiegelman. Each process of transmitting the information could be exaggerated, enhanced, hidden, misunderstood, or re-told in a new way altogether. Moreover, the burned diaries of Spiegelman's

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mother is a further proof of Spiegelman's honesty in the comic book. I think the diary is not just a symbol of the lack of telling the other side of Vladek's story, but it is also a reminder that there are millions of similar stories left untold. Many Holocaust survivors are both physically scarred and in many ways emotionally traumatized by their experience as internees in Nazi concentration camps.

Just like Artie Spiegelman, I grew up in a place and time period with no memories or experiences of starvation and fear, and I cannot envision “ a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams”. (Maus II, 16). However, my parents and grandparents kept telling me stories of how the entire family had always starved before and how fearful they were to be beaten and arrested by the Red Guards during 1930s to the 1960s in communist China. As a child of these revolution survivors and their authoritarian oppressors, I can relate to and feel empathy with the story of the Spiegelman family and especially with Artie Spiegelman. Further, I believe that this graphic novel will have a different impact on people with different kinds of traumatic, struggling experiences in their lives depending on the particular personal circumstances or situations.

This book is an excellent alternative choice for those who find reading books on depressing topics like the Holocaust because it treats the subject matter differently in a light-hearted and funny way. Spiegelman will walk you through the otherwise horrific situations in a much less upsetting way.

Anthropomorphic characters prevent the readers from instantly substituting or identifying themselves into the comic book characters. Further, with the present-past-present storytelling sequence, it embeds the knowledge in our minds that the main character, Vladek Spiegelman, will always live on no

matter how unsustainable the situation had become. The abstract layout of “Maus” Holocaust characters helps to reach out to more audiences as well as being an important example of the strength of using a graphic novel as a medium/genre. I recommend this book to those who want to start reading some graphic novels as a legitimate art form, and for those who want to know more about human stories and their complex emotions.

Work Cited

Spiegelman, Art. Overview. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1997. Print. Due on October 25, 2014 @6 a. m.