

Comparative analysis of maus by art spiegelman and night by elie wiesel



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From January 30, 1933, to May 8, 1945, around 17 million people were killed in Germany in what is known as the Holocaust. At the time, Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany aimed to remove people who were not of German descent from Germany, especially those who were Jewish. Out of the 17 million people killed, 6 million of them were Jewish, 7 million were Soviet civilians, 3 million were Soviet prisoners of war, and the other million consisted of people who did not live by German norms such as people with disabilities, homosexuals, Gypsies, and Serbian citizens. People not of German descent were deported for forced-labor in either Germany or Poland or they were murdered. Jews in particular were sent to different " ghettos," concentration camps, and forced-labor camps, and between 1941 and 1944 as an alternative others were sent to extermination camps. By 1945, 2 out of 3 of all Jews living in Germany were killed.

There are many different stories of the events that occurred during the Holocaust. Many survivors told their stories, and there are even a few journals and diaries that were found that recount survivor's experiences from the Holocaust. Among the stories of the Holocaust are: The Diary of Anne Frank, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, Schindler's List, The Book Thief, and Number the Stars. Each of the books provides a different perspective of the events of the Holocaust.

The similarities and differences of Maus by Art Spiegelman and Night by Elie Wiesel closely examine what it was like for Holocaust victims. Maus and Night are both about the Holocaust and have several similarities, but, of course, they feature different events and the authors have different means of writing their books. This paper will be investigating the similarities and

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differences between the approaches, point of views, tones, symbols, and characters of the literary works, Maus and Night.

Although Maus and Night are both about the Holocaust, they have two completely different approaches to the subject. In Maus, the author, Art Spiegelman, is interviewing his father, Vladek Spiegelman, about his experiences during the Holocaust. He displays the stories his father tells him, but also the process he goes through in order to learn all of his father's stories. So, not only do readers see all of the stories Vladek tells about the Holocaust, they also see how bad Vladek's relationship with his wife, Mala, is, and how annoyed Art gets with his father sometimes. Maus is a graphic novel, and it is written as if Art and all of the Jews are mice, Germans are cats, and the Polish are pigs. This adds to the comical aspect of the novel. On several different occasions, Vladek pretends that he is Polish while walking among a group of Poles. On page 125, this is clearly seen. Vladek and the other Jews with him are wearing pig masks, which shows that they are acting as if they are Polish. To the readers, it is obvious that they are not Polish, or pigs. All of the Jews pretending to be Polish look like pigs from the front, but at the back of their heads is the tied knot of the masks holding them in place.

This dramatic irony lightens the story about leaving Srodula significantly, and the leaving Srodula story is not very serious as is. Night, on the other hand, is an autobiography. Elie Wiesel writes about his experiences during the Holocaust, and how it changed him as a person. It does not skip around back and forth between the past and the present and does not have the comical feel the Maus has. Elie tells his story in chronological order from when he <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-analysis-of-maus-by-art-spiegelman-and-night-by-elie-wiesel/>

and his family thought the Jews being expelled was a myth to him looking in a mirror 3 years later and seeing dead eyes and a frail body. Maus alternates between Art's point of view and Vladek's. Whenever the novel is on the present with Mala and Art, it is in Art's point of view. The Holocaust stories are- of course- in Vladek's point of view. Whenever the novel is in Vladek's point of view, he narrates, and Art's illustrations provide some insight on what probably happened in every event he explains. In both Art and Vladek's points of views, they talk in first person, but it is still in 3rd person. Night, on the other hand, is in the point of view of a 14-15 year old Jew. Elie wrote the book by himself, about himself, so the book is an autobiography.

Maus is never fully serious, even when Vladek is recounting a serious issue, the illustrations and the banter he has with his son and wife gives the situation a lighthearted tone than it would be if the novel only focused on Holocaust stories. Although all of the things Vladek and his loved ones went through during the Holocaust were very serious, the novel is never gloomy. This is proven in the book when Vladek stated, " They've taken four Jews away for dealing goods without coupons... The next day I walked over to Modrzejowska Street and I saw them... They hanged there one full week," to stating, " Look- Even from my dead eye tears are coming out!"(Spiegelman 83-84)

The seriousness of the Jews being hanged is lightened by Art's ability to switch the focus of the story back to his father. Although Vladek is being serious when he says even his dead eye is tearing up, his statement lacks the seriousness of what he says earlier about the hanging. Another example of the lack of seriousness of Vladek regarding the Holocaust is earlier in the <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-analysis-of-maus-by-art-spiegelman-and-night-by-elie-wiesel/>

novel when he tells Art about being a prisoner of war. Vladek says, " Another German took 4 or 5 of us to a stable. ' See this mess?? It better be spotlessly clean in one hour. Understand!' It was impossible to do in one hour... And somehow we did make the job in only an hour and a half. But look what you do, Artie!"(Spiegelman 52) Vladek is talking about being forced to clean a stable, but he switches out of the past and tells the present-day Art to be more aware of what he is doing. This story may not be that bad compared to some of the other stories, but the seriousness of it is lightened by Vladek becoming distracted by Art dropping cigarette ashes on the carpet. Night, on the other hand, maintains a very serious tone throughout the entire novel. Elie is not with a lot of his loved ones like Vladek is, and the people that he is around are not friendly. The events that Elie deals with are a lot harsher than what Vladek endures. While Vladek was in hiding for most of the Holocaust, Elie was sent to several forced labor camps. Elie- when he was finally freed at the age of 15- saw himself in a mirror, and the man that stared back at him was completely broken. He says, " From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me."(Wiesel 109) In less than a year, he lost his mother, father, younger sister, and his innocence. Elie saw men die and be killed, he watched good people turn mad, and he lost the people he loved the most. He saw everything that happened in those months reflect in his eyes, and when he finally looked into a mirror, it seemed as if he saw a stranger staring back at him, and his own dead eyes haunted him. Even though Night has a serious tone the entire novel, there are still a few moments in the book when Elie sees or hears something that strikes him funny, and would have been funny if it was not in such a dire situation. An example of this is when Elie says, "<https://assignbuster.com/comparative-analysis-of-maus-by-art-spiegelman-and-night-by-elie-wiesel/>

Within a few seconds, we had ceased to be men. If the situation had not been tragic, we should have roared with laughter. Such outfits! Meir Katz, a giant, had a child's trousers, and Stern, a thin little chap, a tunic which completely swamped him."(Wiesel 34) If it was not such a serious situation, it would have been hilarious to see a really big guy wearing a shirt that does not even cover half of his stomach.

However, there are not too many of those should've/would've/could've been funny moments in this book. It shows that although the Holocaust was such a serious thing, the people involved (the Jews) were still human, and they still found some things funny. SYMBOLS Maus and Night have different symbols. All of the symbols seen in Night are negative, while the symbols in Maus vary from positive to negative connotations. In Night, fire is used to show how Elie's beliefs change throughout the Holocaust. Near the beginning of the novel, we see a crematory where Jewish children and babies were burned alive. He writes, " A lorry drew up the pit and delivered its load- little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it -saw it with my own eyes... those children in the flames" Fire is a biblical allusion to God and His wrath. In the bible, God appears to Moses as fire in a bush to show his rage towards humanity, and that is what Elie associates with fire as a Jew. In Night, instead of Elie seeing fire used as he knows from the bible, he sees cruel men using fire to punish the innocent. Here, Elie sees the Nazis throwing children and babies in the flames. From this point on, fire no longer represents the all powerful God; instead, it shows the cruel power of the Nazis. Night is also used in Night as a metaphor for a world without God. With night, comes darkness, and while at all of the different concentration camps, Elie does not see God in the terrible

things that are done to him and his companions. Elie realises that God is neither with him nor all the men around him when he sees a young child being hanged. A man near Elie says, 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice within me answer him: 'Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows...' (Wiesel 62) In this moment, Elie believes that God is dead, and he titled the book *Night* because a world without God cannot have light; it can only be dark like the night. In *Maus*, Parshas Truma is a symbol for hope. When Vladek was a prisoner of war, he had a dream about Parshas Truman. Art writes, "One night I had a dream... A voice was talking to me. It was, I think, my dead grandfather... 'You will come out of this place- free!.. on the last of Parshas Truma...'" (Spiegelman 57) Later, Vladek says, "This is for me a very important date... I checked later on a calendar. It was this Parsha on the week I got married to Anja... And this was the Parsha in 1948, after the war, on the week you were born!... And so it came out to be this Parsha you sang on the Saturday of your Bar Mitzvah!" (Spiegelman 59) The important things that occur in Vladek's life seem to all happen on Parshas Truma. Parsha Truma, in turn, became a symbol for all good things. Nothing bad can happen on that day, it seems.

Maus is mainly focused on Vladek Spiegelman in both his childhood and adult years when he was charming, and fit, and his older age, where he is physically frail and suffers from a weak heart. Present day, Vladek is an obsessive and argumentative perfectionist. He is always trying to make sure something is perfect. This is evident when he spills his pills and Art offers to recount them, but he responds by saying, "No! You don't know counting pills. I'll do it after... I'm an expert for this." (Spiegelman 30) Then, later in

the novel, after fixing a drainpipe he was obsessing over, he has to separate long and short nail and put them away. Art offers to help once again, but Vladek refuses and says, "such jobs I can do easy by myself... You go upstairs. I'll finish here my job and in a few minutes I'll come up." (Spiegelman 98)

For all of the small jobs that need to be precise, such as counting out pills or separating long and short nails, Vladek feels that he is an expert, and he can do those jobs better than anyone else. Art, Vladek's only living son, is the author. Readers can see that he has an awkward relationship with his father, and that he is filled with guilt from his mother's death. It is clear that Art is not very close to his father when he says, "I went out to see my Father in Rego Park. I hadn't seen him in a long time- we weren't that close".

(Spiegelman 11) Before Art wrote his novel, he did not really talk to his father. After he starts writing his novel, Art and his father rarely even speak about anything other than what Vladek went through during the Holocaust. It is also evident in the novel that Art feels guilty about his mother's suicide when he writes, "A friend of the family found me out in the hallway... 'Now you cry! Better you cried when your mother was still alive!' I felt nauseous... The guilt was overwhelming... I remembered the last time I saw her... 'Artie...' She came into my room... It was late at night... '...Artie... You... Still... Love... Me... Don't you?...' ... I turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord... 'Sure Ma!'" (Spiegelman 102-103) Art, along with other people who were close to his mother, thinks that he killed his mother because he did not show her the love and affection that she needed as someone who was suicidal. Art is also resentful towards his father. They

rarely ever agree, and Vladek has never allowed Art to grow and become his own person, which is exactly why Art rebelled against his father and became a cartoonist. He tells his wife, Françoise, “ One reason I became an artist was that he thought it was impractical- just a waste a time... It was an area where I wouldn't have to compete with him.” (Spiegelman 97) Art does not want his father to expect so much from him just because Vladek made it through the Holocaust with minimal scars. Vladek was smart and strong in his youth, and he expects Art to be the same. But, Art does not want to compete with his father in his strength and brains, so he finds something that Vladek did not do. Mala, Vladek's wife, also has a strained relationship with her husband. According to Vladek, she only cares about his money. It actually does seem like she is only after Vladek's money because she is always talking about how close-fisted he is. She says, “ He only gives me \$50. 00 a month. When I need a pair of stockings I have to use my own savings!... Pragmatic? Cheap!! It causes him physical pain to part with even a nickel!”(Spiegelman 131) At the same time as Mala is thinking about Vladek's stinginess, he is saying that she does not care about him, and is only after his money. He says, “ She wants that I give nothing for my brother in Israel, and nothing for you - three times already she made me change over my will.” (Spiegelman 127)

Although Mala may be in the marriage for something other than Vladek's money, almost everything that she speaks of in the book indicates that Vladek just might be right about her only wanting him for his money. Art writes *Maus* as if the Holocaust was just a big game of cat and mouse- which it is. The Jews are the small and skittish mice while the Germans are the

cunning and aggressive cats. The Polish are the dirty and greedy pigs since they choose to be on whatever side they can get the most out of, and sometimes they even help both sides at the same time. They only help the Jews who can pay their way.

In this novel, the big bad cats -Germans- find and kill the small and frightful mice- Jews. Elie shows a lot of dynamic characters in his novel. They all start off very happy and good, and then they change for the worse. Elie himself is an example of this. He is very young and naive in the beginning of the book, but by the time he gets free from the concentration camps, he is broken and no longer innocent and naive. While he is at the concentration camps, Elie realizes that they are changing him for the worse, but there was nothing he could do about it. This is evident when he says, " In fact I was thinking of how to get farther away so that I would not be hit myself. What is more, any anger I felt at that moment was directed, not against the Kapo, but against my father... This is what concentration camp life had made of me." (Wiesel 52)Concentration camp life turns men into animals. They lose touch with their humanity and only think about their own self preservation. Elie's first look at what the Holocaust could do to a person is with Moshe the Beadle. He describes Moshe pre-Holocaust by saying, " Physically he was as awkward as a clown. He made people smile, with his waiflike timidity. I loved his great, dreaming eyes, their gaze lost in the distance." After Moshe the Beadle was deported, he changed. Elie says, " Moshe has changed. There was no longer any joy in his eyes. He no longer sang. He no longer talked to me of God or of the cabbala, but only what he had seen."(Wiesel 1, 4)

The things Moshe the Beadle witnessed after being deported are the type of images that would change a person, and not for the better. The young French girl who speaks to Elie after one of the German guards, Idek, attacks him shows that there is still hope. She is kind-hearted enough to risk speaking in German to tell Elie that he needs to hold onto hope and wait for the time to come when he will be free. Before speaking to Elie, she was acting as if she did not speak German, and getting caught speaking the language would be terrible for her. She- at least- does not lose her humanity. She shows Elie that there is still hope for him, and he only needs to hold on long enough to see the end of the pain of the Holocaust.

The characters seen in Maus are more static while the characters in Night are all dynamic. All of the characters in Vladek's stories seem to remain the same. There is a major different past Vladek and present-day-Vladek, but readers cannot see how he changed from reading the novel. In Night, Elie notices how the concentration camps change men. All of the men -regardless of how they behaved before being deported- acted the same. They all only looked out for themselves whenever the Germans were near. That same sense of self is seen with the Polish in Maus.