
Tales Of Misery

The holocaust was a time of sorrow and a time of vengeance. The silent plea of cries of misery inhibiting those who survived, those who died and those who experience the aftermath of the Nazis' reign and destruction. A never-ending cycle of pain that is always remembered and never forgotten especially by those who live in the presence of the survivors. The will to live can be diminished by the pressures that come with the war and responsibility or it can enhance fear to survival. The past and present have impacted Vladek, but Artie is impacted by the in-between lasting effects of the war. It changed every individual and shifted their lives into a war within themselves. A war in which Artie fears he is stuck in with the survivors who changed for the worse.

There is a saying that says a picture is worth a thousand words. In Art Spiegelman's "The Complete Maus" that is exactly true. He delivers his father's story during the holocaust so intimately with pictures and bleak colors that the dialogue in the biographical comic book is merely giving support to the story instead of telling it. Art delicately elevates the imagery by representing different people as animals, primarily pigs, cats and mice. The concept uniquely contributes to his father's story and illustrates the Jews as mice and Nazis as cats to mimic a sense of animal hierarchy in which the cats not only prey on mice but are stronger than them. It may also be easier for the readers to understand how Vladek and his wife Anja hid from the Nazis the way a mouse would hide and scatter away when trouble arrives. Additionally, the pigs were a representation of the Polish Christians. This is rather difficult to understand as pigs are viewed as dirty and smelly and it's also ironic given the fact that Jewish people do not eat pig meat. But in comparison to cats, pigs are more neutral, so it makes sense that he used this animal to represent them as allies and not enemies but, still in a different category of species. An invisible barrier still existed between the mice (Jews) and pigs (polish) which can be shown in the relationship between Mrs. Motonowa and Vladek.

Although she tried helping them and gave them shelter it seems she only did it when money was being provided. It wasn't out of the goodness of her heart but a business that benefitted her. Of course, she was risking her life for Anja and Vladek, but there are times when it seems she's greedy for Vladek's money. Especially when she states, "Sorry... I wasn't able to find any bread today" when Vladek could not afford to pay her the total amount in coins. He had promised to pay her the day after, but she still decided to lie possibly in fear of him never paying her back. Furthermore, as the story progresses we begin to see how the people in times of war change and with the characters as different animals it's easier to distinguish them than it would be with faces.

Art Spiegelman might even have intentionally also wanted a sense of privacy for his father, mother and himself out of respect or embarrassment. His emotions are written all over the comic in a way that may be too overwhelming for him to see the faces of his family and animals make it easier to digest all the history of his father's story. Emphasized on Vladek's side of the story in "The Complete Maus" his view of the holocaust is the main source of information from the comic book. In the beginning he opposes to give out information of his personal life but as we progress through the comic he seems to naturally express his hardships, personal life and the war in general. Art focuses primarily on his father's words and even in some ways connects

with his father more than he ever did before. Consequently, as the story establishes itself, Vladek shows a side Artie may not have experienced. Before the war his father seemed ordinary and caring to a certain extent. His love for Anja is so clear that it's almost as if he views her as a step higher than any other woman even Mala his second wife. Vladek seems to be caught in an inner war between reality and the past that still haunts him. His expression is illustrated clearly, and dark colors are usually used for him. He leads the story well and detailed, it's almost as if the reader can feel the sounds and hear the pictures come alive. Art most likely choose to tell this story in his father's view because his mother was no longer present to share hers, the lack of resources and his father's ability to remember everything clearly lead to his interest to write a personal experience of a survivor of the holocaust. Additionally, Vladek shares some information about Anja's life throughout Maus.

The comic becomes even more personal as Artie learns his father's romantic life with his mother and the woman before, Lucia. Anja before the war was already sick with possibly anxiety and depression. She was presented as a hidden fragile woman. Throughout the book Vladek shares her mental issues and the misery she experienced with him. He remembers Anja with so much adoration that it clouds the reality of why she killed herself. It's as if Vladek wants to preserve the memory of her during better times and Artie is trapped with the memory of her suicide. It's a conflicting issue between Vladek and Artie, an issue that fuels Artie's anger towards his father for destroying personal letters that could have helped Artie relieve his pain. Anja seems to be what keep Vladek and his son separated, it's almost ironic that the very thing that should bring them closer together to grieve and support one another is the same thing that is igniting hatred and pain. As a result, Artie's anger towards his father becomes more and more prominent. Art of course learns more about his deceased mother and the connection Vladek and him had begun to form slowly became nothing.

The comic book Art created is almost a form of expressing his emotions as well. He hides the intimacy of his anger and resent towards his parents in subtle ways until he shows "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A CASE HISTORY." The pictures are so dark and depressing. It's the first time he openly expresses what he feels and is even shocked when he hears his father read it. His privacy had been invaded and he feels exposed. Artie even apologizes to Vladek for expressing it in such a harsh way. It's a rare moment in which he shows how vulnerable he really is. In continuation, Art formatted the story in a way that it shifts between his father's point of view and his own by showing his emotions instead of adding scenarios of his life. He blames himself for his mother's suicide, the imagery shows his internal battles within himself and how much he holds in. Artie suffers the most out of all the characters in the comic book because not only does he experience the misery of those who were broken and worsened during the war, but he grew up in a consist reminder that it had broken his own parents. His life was caught in between a pain and anger he never experienced but was forced to experience because of his mother's suicide.

The war had been too much for Anja, but Artie couldn't understand why because he did not live through it. He only experienced the tormenting emotions his parents shed. Artie viewed himself as a prisoner and chained to the thought that he contributed to her suicide. He expresses he feels he contributed to her murder, but she was also murdering him throughout his life. Art resents the idea of her being selfish for taking her own life and leaving him alive to bear it all but also hates himself for not being able to do more to keep her alive. In return to forget his own pain and guilt he blames his father in self-defense possibly because it's too painful for him to bear alone. The guilt and anger keep him unable to face his feelings and escape his dark

thoughts. In conclusion, Art Spiegelman's "The Complete Maus" portrays the holocaust through a conjunction of personal imagery and language. He uniquely manages to show the trauma that occurred in the genocide of Jews in a personal testimony from his father who survived the war. Moreover, it manages to highlight his own internal war following his mother's death and the hardships embedded in his life.

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