
**REFLECTIONS OF MISERY AND GRIEF IN ART
SPIEGELMAN'S MAUS**

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Abstract:

This article is about the graphic novel MAUS that serves as a cogent narrative which deals with postcolonial critiques of oppression and its lasting effect of trauma. The novel is divided into two volumes and is narrated through two narratives, one that happens in the present between Artie and his father Vladek and the other narrative is by Vladek as he shares his experience of his life during the war period. It is understood that his experience during the war has left him with unresolved misery and grief that affects his post-war life. His suppression of grief stains his mental health and his bond with Artie. He also shares the tragic encounters he has faced during the World War II. The suffering he had gone through is reflected as the significant theme of the novel along with the horrors of war that highlights the psychological toll it has on Vladek's mental health, shaping his relationships and daily life post war times.

Keywords: Holocaust, Psychological scars, Inhumanity, Separation, Grief.

Introduction:

Art Spiegelman, an American cartoonist, editor, and writer is best known for his novel Maus which he had published in two volumes- Maus I: My Father Bleeds History in 1986 and Maus II: And Here My troubles begin in 1991. This novel is a groundbreaking work that uses a comic medium to narrate a story about the holocaust and its traumatic effects. By interlinking themes of post colonialism and animal representation, Maus raises questions about representation, identity and power. The story also mirrors the harsh realities of war life and the aftermath.

Vladek, father of Artie begins narrating his life from his early times of youth in Poland, where he met Artie's mother Anja. Upon their meeting, the two of them fall in love and decide to get married. Anja who comes from a wealthy background, helps Vladek set up a factory and the couple settle in the city of Sosnowiec. The happiness doesn't last long until

the war breaks out in 1939. Vladek is called out to be a Polish soldier to fight in the frontlines of the war. During the war, on a certain morning, Vladek fights with his troop against the Nazi soldiers. Several gun fires later, Vladek finds himself held captive by the Nazi troop. As he manages to converse to them in German, which impress's them, he is refrained from being punished but rather was taken as a prisoner of war by the Nazis.

Later, being captured as a prisoner by the German's, life was not what it used to be for Vladek and a few other polish soldiers who were held captive. The horror of war reigned upon the polish and the Jewish. As a prisoner of the Nazi's, Vladek was forced to witness the cruelties carried out upon the polish and the Jewish. He was forced to load the bodies of the dead and wounded war victims onto a truck that transported them to the gas chambers where the mass-killings took place. The racial oppression reigns over the Jews when they are made to stand separate from the other soldiers and war prisoners. The Germans yelled at the Jews insanely pointing them as the cause and reason of the wars as if their existence was a sin. Witnessing all these miserable actions of inhumanity along with the filthy mistreatment of the Jews grows pathetic when Vladek and the other prisoners were forced to clean the stables within an hour's time. When they fail to finish the task, they are starved without access to food and water. These incidents took a heavy toll on Vladek's life which had transformed all the humility he had faced as everlasting scares imprinted with pain and agony that he had to carry with him for the ewst of his life from then on.

A few days later, the war prisoners and Vladek are transported to a bigger camp where Jewish prisoners are deprived of food and blankets where as the Polish prisoners were provided with blankets and meals twice a day. This cruel oppression made life so unbearable for the Jews. After enduring weeks of torments Vladek escapes the Nazi troop with the help of his one of his friends, Orbach and reunites with Anja and his family. With several rules and curfews imposed on the Jews, it was hard for the Jews to continue their lives but Vladek and his family were glad to be alive. Vladek and Anja move to Anja's parent's house where the entire family resides. Even though they managed to live without getting captured, it wasn't long before they were evicted from Sosnowiec and were sent to prisoner's camp. Vladek and Anja were separated from the rest of the family who were sent to gas chamber to face an excruciating death. Meanwhile, Richieu- Vladek and Anja's firstborn child was sent with Anja's sister. But since Anja's sister was in verge of getting caught, she had no choice but to feed poison to the child and killed herself to avoid getting caught by the Nazi's. The living conditions became grotesque as days passed for Vladek and Anja when they are forced to live in overcrowded ghettos with diseases spreading rampantly. Vladek was traumatized while he was made to watch the destruction of his community and the beginning of mass exterminations. The trauma and terrorization grew further when Vladek was put through relentless physical labor, physical abuse. All this physical trauma paved way for psychological issues that developed the constant threat and fear for death. Apart from all of this, Vladek's profound hardship was the loss of family he had to witness. He got separated from Anja several times and the separation and death of his loved one's left him grappling with survivor's guilt.

Psychological Post- War Effects On Vladek:

The war took a great toll on Vladek's psychological and emotional conditions which had made life after the war difficult for him. A major setback that he had faced was carrying the burden of survivor's guilt. He was constantly haunted by the fact he had survived the war while most of his family perished.

The death of his firstborn son, Richieu increased his obsession with survival. From then on he was very fugal, always on alert for dangers and preparing himself for the worst that could happen. This planted a deep pessimistic attitude that changed the way Valdek looked at life. As a result, after Artie's birth, he grew extremely overprotective over him which created tension between the two. The gap between them widened extremely as Artie could not figure why his father acted in that certain way as Valdek rarely expressed his feelings openly. Surviving alone through the crucial times of war, Vladek's solidarity retrained himself from trusting others as he understood that trusting anyone might pave way for him to be taken away or lead to death through the personal incidents he had witnessed. In the later period of his life after the war, his lack of trust on the people around him has affected his second wife Mala and his son Artie to bond with him as Valdek struggles to connect with him which makes Artie feel that he can never truly meet his father and that he can never meet Vladek's expectations.

Another reason for the Vladek's lack of trust is because of the great shift in the relationship between him and Anja after the war. Their relationship which was once filled with love, passion and devotion towards each other has turned into a bitter relationship encompassing trauma and depression. The separation and the loss of a child has filled the couple with issues that drove each other away from their relationship. Overtime, Anja found it very difficult to co-exist with Valdek because of his controlling and critical nature which led to severe emotional distress. As a result, she internalized her pain and became hopeless of life as days went by. When she tried to express her emotions, Vladek's dismissal of her feelings made it difficult for her to survive without support that ends in her suicide in 1968.

Anja's suicide had more impact on his emotional trauma. After losing both his child and his wife, the pain and sufferings he had gone through rendered him to isolate himself and cease him from feeling any sort of emotions. Due to his emotional instability, his second marriage with Mala took a big hit caused by tension and miscommunication. Because of this, he also failed to build a proper emotional bond and a relationship with his son Artie. Another unusual habit that Vladek picked up was the act of hoarding stuff. During the war he was deprived from the basic needs like water and food which had made him collect and save everything he can to provide for his family. Though this behavior of his was very innate and became more of a coping mechanism, the ones around him were irritated and despised him for doing so. And the most vital war effect was the strained and hard relationship he had with his son Artie. Artie being the second and the only living child of Vladek, found it very difficult to build a relationship between the two of them. Along with a struggled relationship with his father, Artie was forced to carry the weight of his parent's tragic past which was not simple.

The unresolved feelings of grief and misery affects the relationship between Artie and Vladek is a significant theme that serves as the base for the second part of the novel: *Maus: And Here My Troubles Began* about the stiff relationship between Artie and his father Vladek. The bond between the son and the father becomes strained because of the emotional distance amongst them mixed with unloved trauma and character clashes. Anja's suicide marks the start in the drift of their relationship when Artie feels abandoned and fights his feelings of guilt and anger alone. The lack of emotional support from Vladek when Artie needed it the most drives a bigger wedge between them.

When Artie starts interviewing Vladek about his life during the war, their relationship worsens because of Vladek's stubbornness, racism and his hoarding actions. The bridge of struggled relationship become even bigger when Artie finds out about Vladek's destruction of Anja's diaries. Artie views this as a betrayal as the act has destroyed the chance of him to understand about her mother and connect with her. He becomes heavily devastated and is driven by anger to the extent where he accuses Vladek for being a "murderer" what he had done. But Vladek destroys Anja's memories unable to confront the pain of the past. His own psychological scars force him to do the tragic act in the hopes of erasing his feeling of grief and loss. This also reflects the need for Vladek to constantly control the surrounding and his emotions to safeguard him in the belief of protecting himself. Therefore the tension between them never resolves fully, and their bond remains with unsolved misunderstandings, frustration and the weight of shared but difficult experience of grief, guilt and misery.

Conclusion:

Through the relationship between Art and his Father, Vladek, the narrative displays how grief shapes the identities of Vladek and his son. Spiegelman has depicted the plethora of holocaust's horror and the horrid effect on Vladek and how his trauma has manifested in his obsessive behavior and strained relationship. Although Vladek's resilience and his strong will helped him survive his way through the war, the emotional and psychological scars have lasted with him throughout his life affecting his mental health as well as the relationship he has with Artie and Mala. By intertwining Vladek's wartime narrative with his post-war struggles, Spiegelman provides a poignant exploration of trauma, memory, and the intergenerational effects of historical atrocities. Ultimately, *Maus* is more than a historical account, it serves as a medium that portrays the lasting effects of grief both personal and generational. By shaping the narratives intertwining between the past and the present, Spiegelman forces the reader to confront the way trauma lingers, shaping lives long after the events that caused it. The reflections of misery and grief make it haunting yet essential narrative of human endurance.

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