

The Polyphonic Survivor: Dialogism and Heteroglossia in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*

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I dedicate this work to my family, for their constant support over many years of change.

I dedicate this work to the remarkable faculty of Liberty University's English Department, for their love of students and their earnest desire for grace and truth.

And lastly, I dedicate this work to my wife Ashley, for her patience, her wisdom, and her friendship, as the road goes ever on.

Table of Contents:

Chapter One – Voices of the Shoah: Bakhtinian Dialogics and Heteroglossia in *Maus*. 5

Chapter Two – [M]auschwitz: Heteroglossic Utterances in *Maus*'s Holocaust 26

Chapter Three – ‘My Father Bleeds History’: Vladek’s Narrative as Dialogic Construction . . . 46

Chapter Four – ‘Rebuild Me All This’: The Dialogic Recoveries of Art Spiegelman 66

Conclusion 82

Works Cited 86

Chapter One – Voices of the Shoah: Bakhtinian Dialogics and Heteroglossia in *Maus*

The subtitle to Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* is *A Survivor's Tale*, a phrase of no small significance. On one level, this eponymous survivor refers to Vladek, Art's father and a survivor of the Jewish ghettos and death camps at Auschwitz. The majority of *Maus* focuses specifically on Vladek's narrative, as Art interviews him about his life and his experiences throughout the Holocaust. Spiegelman himself affirms the centrality of Vladek to the work, writing that one primary goal of *Maus* lay in the act of "giving a form to [his] father's words and narrative" (qtd. in Chute 200). Vladek's tale is the narrative scaffold upon which the rest of the work is built, and especially for those new to the text, the subtitle is unambiguous in its reference to Vladek's harrowing memories.

However, the survivor of *A Survivor's Tale* does not merely refer to Vladek. The titular survivor is also Art himself, an idea that even the opening pages of the work suggest. *Maus* begins with a brief vignette from Art's childhood. After skinning his knee and being left alone by his friends, Art runs to his father in hopes of comfort, only to have Vladek diminish the significance of his pain: "Friends? Your friends? If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week, THEN you could see what it is, friends!" (*Maus* I 6). These opening moments suggest that Vladek's story is inextricably linked to Art's story, and as the novel continues, the narrative never drifts too far from Art and his presence as both character and author. Because Art is the author, his subjectivity colors every piece of Vladek's recollections. As Victoria Elmwood writes, "We can look to *Maus*'s multitiered metanarrative structure for evidence of the productive, though not always cooperative, interactions taking place between father and son" (691). In this sense, then, the survivor of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* is both father and son, both of

whom are survivors of trauma, coexisting and conflicting with each other as their narratives clash, page after page.

A Survivor's Tale bears a third meaning, as well. As Spiegelman seeks to make sense of both his father's story and his own, he must also contend with the wider reality of cultural understandings of the Holocaust. *Maus* cannot merely function as a family history; its very existence is political, meaning that it must interact with and be informed by the representations of the Holocaust in world history. The novel cannot just be Vladek's narrative or even Art's; the novel must necessarily be read with the understanding that it is "Holocaust literature," a fact that Spiegelman begrudgingly acknowledges and wrestles with throughout the novel. From this perspective, *Maus*'s titular survivor is the generic survivor, the amalgamation of historical and cultural perceptions of Holocaust survivors as shaped through historical lenses.

This brief exploration of the subtitle alone reveals that *Maus* is a work built out of many perspectives. The graphic novel contains a plurality of voices, each of which provides a specific and wholly unique perspective of Vladek's survival narrative and of the Holocaust itself. These voices are distinct from each other, and Spiegelman consistently relinquishes control of his characters, as much as he is able, to allow them to speak, free from the demands of Spiegelman as the author and *Maus* as a graphic novel. At times, these voices are harmonic, building on each other's perspectives and beliefs to create a multi-dimensional picture of the Holocaust. However, at many points throughout the novel, these voices sing discordant tunes; their motives, their beliefs, their memories, their limitations, their accounts of events, and their representations of the Holocaust all fall into persistent conflicts, as each voice and perspective attempts to grasp the unfathomable. These voices do not peacefully coexist; Vladek's memories of the Holocaust often do not match the historical accounts, Art's conceptions of his father clash with cultural

depictions of survivors, and father and son are continually locked in a struggle of identity. To further complicate the issue, as a graphic novel, these competing dialogues clash with each other both textually and visually; the form of the work becomes as dissonant as its content. Art himself laments these difficulties in the middle of the graphic novel; as he drives with his wife Francoise through the Catskills, he confesses, “I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. And trying to do it as a comic strip! I guess I bit off more than I can chew . . . There’s so much I’ll never be able to understand or visualize. I mean, reality is too complex for comics. So much has to be left out or distorted” (*Maus II* 16). Art’s conflict in this passage comprises the thematic core of *Maus*, and at its essence, this question becomes both epistemological and hermeneutical: how can one begin to know or interpret that which is beyond the comprehension of any one individual? How can one discover what is true and represent it fairly amongst the discordant polyphony of competing monologues?

This issue of representation has been widely covered within the larger sphere of *Maus* scholarship. In her article “‘The Shadow of a Past Time’: History and Graphic Representation in ‘Maus,’” Hillary Chute specifically addresses how comics as an art form allows visual and textual modes of communication to play on each other in various ways. As she writes, “Spiegelman’s text turns us to fundamental questions about the knowability of art and aesthetics (as well as to related questions about the knowability and the transmission of history) . . . *Maus*, far from betraying the past, engages this ethical dilemma through its form” (201). Other critics, too, including Andreas Huyssen, Paul Buhle, Michael Rothberg, and Stephen Tabachnick, specifically focus on this question of how *Maus* seeks to represent private and public histories that are beyond the grasp of any one person, making it a central focus of study in *Maus* criticism.

Related to representation, critics of *Maus* have also done some preliminary work into the question of interpretation and epistemology. Eric Berlatsky takes a strongly Derridean approach to interpretation, deconstructing the notion that any of the narratives in *Maus* allows for the discovery of truth: “Spiegelman’s *Maus* stages the problem of the postmodern in the theater of memory by foregrounding memory’s necessity in resisting power, while admitting its own tenuous ties to the real” (102). However, a strictly deconstructive reading seems to dismiss Art’s declarations in the text itself that his desire is directed toward finding the truth—seeking to “reconstruct a reality that was worse than [his] darkest dreams” (*Maus II* 16). Consequently, while deconstructive approaches to interpretation in *Maus* do illuminate the novel’s sense of unfinalizability, they contradict Spiegelman’s honest desire to discover and reconstruct the truth, even in light of the many competing accounts.

For this reason, other critics of *Maus* have turned toward more constructive theoretical approaches. Rosemary Hathaway offers an immensely helpful approach to *Maus*, reading the work as postmodern ethnography. Hathaway rightfully notes that before *Maus* can be properly analyzed, one must first acknowledge that the book “resists easy categorization” (249). As she argues, many of the typical categorical approaches to literature seem insufficient when analyzing *Maus*’s many dimensions:

Because the focus of the story is on Spiegelman’s father, Vladek, and his memories of the Holocaust, it is tempting to describe *Maus* as a graphic oral history or biography . . . However, just as *Maus* is not really autobiography, it also differs significantly from traditional modes of biography and oral history. To be sure, Vladek’s voice dominates the text, and (as in any good oral history) it is only through Vladek’s story that the reader comes to understand the magnitude of

the larger historical events being described in miniature. But Spiegelman's narrative also pulls away from Vladek's story, sometimes even challenging or subverting it. (250)

Because many common lenses, such as autobiography, biography, and history, seem insufficient to describe *Maus* on their own, Hathaway proposes the work might be better understood as an ethnography, a coalescence of many histories into one postmodern family narrative: "The texts are concerned with depicting the complex relationships among personal histories and larger 'official' histories" (249). Hathaway's analysis offers the critical idea that in *Maus*, Spiegelman is less interested with presenting a singular artistic vision of the Holocaust than he is with the interactions that occur between the many voices he collects and depicts. However, for this very reason, perhaps even a term like ethnography suggests a singularity of vision that simply cannot hold together amidst the many voices at play. Consequently, while Hathaway's article eloquently frames the interpretive issues with the work and provides a preliminary foray into sifting through the novel's different voices, *Maus*'s critical field still requires an adequate framework for interpreting its epistemic complexities.

In light of these current problems of interpretation, perhaps the most helpful constructive approaches to interpreting *Maus* can be found in the theories of Russian author Mikhail Bakhtin, a literary critic whose theoretical works deal almost entirely with the existence of multiple voices in a single text. Some critics have already made use of Bakhtinian terminology to inform their analyses of the work. For example, Dane H. Minich, author of "Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as a Heteroglossic Text," writes that *Maus* "displays the characteristics of a modernist novel that best exploits heteroglossia, which are the aforementioned authorial voice, narratorial speech, and the speech of the characters" (2). Through this framework, Minich shows that *Maus* gathers multiple

disparate discourses into a singular vision—what Bakhtin would call a dialogue—despite their mutual contradictions. Sue Vice has also approached *Maus* through Bakhtinian terms, arguing that the novel uses various chronotopes, repeated motifs of time and space, to create a wider vision of the Holocaust (47-48). Through analyses such as those of Minich and Vice, as well as Hathaway's ethnographic analysis, critics of *Maus* have begun to explore the ways that Bakhtin may inform a reading of the novel.

However, the use of Bakhtin in studies of *Maus* is still a relatively nascent field—and one deserving of further attention. Those critics who have utilized Bakhtin have, so far, done so only to explain the structural make-up of Spiegelman's work, explaining how the form of the novel makes use of heteroglossia on a structural level. The critical field has made use of the concepts of heteroglossia and chronotope in their analyses but has not yet applied a dialogical approach to *Maus*, for the purpose of discussing its epistemic or interpretive effects in the work. Therefore, this thesis will explore how a more robust application of Bakhtin, and his dialogical approach to the novel as a literary medium, can offer the reader a deeper understanding of what Spiegelman accomplishes—and how the discordant plurality of voices in *Maus* becomes an avenue toward understanding the complexities of the Holocaust, revealing how the Holocaust's incomprehensibility as a historical event can only be grasped more fully through the discursive interactions between various voices. Additionally, since *Maus* is not merely a novel, but a graphic novel, making use of both visual and textual media to convey meaning and give voice to its characters, this thesis will also pay attention to the ways that Bakhtin's theories translate to the visual-textual medium of graphic novels, providing the opportunity for an increasingly multi-dimensional display of the work's various perspectives.

Mikhail Bakhtin and the Foundations for Dialogical Analysis

Although his work did not gain popularity until it was translated into English in the latter half of the twentieth century, Bakhtin's dialogical form of literary criticism finds its foundation in his seminal work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, a work which was first published in 1929 under the title *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* and revised and republished into its modern form in 1963. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* analyzes the many works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, and in it, Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky's works offer a remarkable new innovation in literary artistry; this innovation, and Bakhtin's exploration of it, introduces three central concepts to its readers—polyphony, unfinalizability, and the dialogic means of seeking truth—each of which will develop and mature in Bakhtin's later works.

Bakhtin observes that in reading Dostoevsky's novels, the reader does not merely experience the authorial voice of the writer; he also experiences the voices of a wide range of characters. Each of these voices maintains its own sense of individuality and personhood while coexisting in a single work of literature, a phenomenon Bakhtin calls polyphony:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (Problems 6).

Using this definition, Bakhtin proposes that Dostoevsky is the modern progenitor of the polyphonic novel, a literary work that allows each character to be his or her own complex individual being, complete with a unique set of ideas, beliefs, prejudices, anxieties, and

presuppositions about the world. In a polyphonic novel, characters do not function as puppets or bullhorns that the author of the work speaks through; in *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, characters such as Ivan and Smerdyakov are allowed to espouse their worldviews without implicit judgment or narrative manipulation on the part of Dostoevsky. Instead, they are distinct and independent beings, able to speak for themselves, and free, as much as is possible, from serving as “a simple object of the author’s consciousness” (*Problems* 7). The character’s voice is remarkably unbounded from the author’s; as Bakhtin writes, “[A character’s word] is not subordinated to the character’s objectified image . . . nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author’s voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters” (7). Under Bakhtin’s theory, then, part of what makes the author of a polyphonic novel, like Dostoevsky, particularly remarkable is his ability to distance himself from his characters, allowing them to speak as individual personae amongst many others, not as merely the means by which the author speaks and imbues meaning into his text.

Bakhtin argues that to properly approach a polyphonic work, the reader must resist the natural tendency to view the author as the sole subject of the work, effecting his will upon an array of objects—his characters—to bring about his own narrative, philosophical, spiritual, or political ends. Instead, characters in the work are also to be seen as subjects, viewers who view the world from their own distinct vantage points. Even though the characters of a polyphonic work are products of the author’s imagination, they often contradict or conflict with the author’s viewpoint on key ideas. As Gabor Bezeczky writes, in “Contending Voices in Bakhtin,” “The character’s independence from the author is fundamental to Bakhtin’s conception of the

polyphonic novel. He often emphasizes that the character's word is as significant as the author's, that the characters have equal rights, that their words sound alongside the author's voice" (326). Therefore, for Bakhtin, the characters in a polyphonic work are not stale philosophic assertions; they must be humanized in order to be analyzed.

Bakhtin's appreciation for the occurrence of polyphony stems from his belief that an individual cannot be fully known by another—a concept he calls “that internally unfinalizable something in man” (*Problems* 58). According to Bakhtin, each and every person is beyond the comprehension of any one individual: “The consciousnesses of other people cannot be perceived, analyzed, defined as objects or as things—one can only relate to them dialogically” (*Problems* 68). Caryl Emerson illustrates this idea using the metaphor of sight; she writes, “Two individuals are confronting each other, looking into each other's eyes. One can always see something that the other cannot, if only what is behind the other's head, if only the other's act of looking . . . Only from the other's perspective can each appear whole . . . Whatever stable definitions the 'I' possesses are inevitably acquired from the other” (70). This, in essence, is what Bakhtin calls unfinalizability—the idea that one cannot fully know or define another.

This unfinalizability exists for multiple reasons. First and foremost, the essential nature of an individual human being—his thoughts, his beliefs, his loves, his desires—is completely inaccessible to anyone except that person himself. The only way to begin to know the essence of another human being is through his words and his actions—the avenues through which he communicates and interacts with the world around him. As Bakhtin writes, “In a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse” (*Problems* 58). Additionally, an individual's soul is never wholly fixed; it is ever-changing, molded and shaped by the individual's evolving thoughts and beliefs, as well as his

experiences. The endless malleability of a soul resists full understanding or definition—a reality that demands epistemological humility when attempting to understand another human being. According to Bakhtin, then, both the author and the reader of literature must accept that interpretation is unavoidable and ubiquitous, especially when working with the ideas and beliefs of another person, as that which is being described is always at least partially inaccessible and unknowable.

In light of man's innate unfinalizability, and the inescapability of man's finite gaze, both the author and reader of literature alike must recognize that they are only individual voices among many. The more that an individual is able to embrace his role as a single subject interacting with a multiplicity of other subjects, whether they be the characters in literary works or the people around them, the better he will be able to understand other human beings and better grasp that which is true. Within this context, Bakhtin offers a key proposition, perhaps the most important conclusion in all of his theoretical works: that the act of understanding is inherently dialogic in nature—that reality can only be understood through the interactions of and between human beings. Emerson goes as far as to say that this is the primary end in almost all of Bakhtin's theoretical works. As she writes, "Bakhtin's ultimate task" is "to make a unified truth compatible with multiple consciousnesses," and for Bakhtin, such a unity can arise only through a diverse range of voices (70).

To elaborate on this concept, Bakhtin distinguishes between two types of thought, the monologic and the dialogic. Monologic thought assumes that understanding can be a solitary act, one that is both performable and attainable outside of a community of other individuals. In a culture or society, a monologic mindset is, for all intents and purposes, closed off from the people around it; a monologic individual remains fixed in his beliefs, and the ideas of another

person are both unwanted and unlikely to effect change, unless those beliefs cohere with ideas that are already fixed in his mind. In literature, such an author resists polyphony; instead of creating characters that think and believe independent of their author's worldview, the author uses his characters and his narratives as proverbial soapboxes—platforms upon which he may say what he wants to say. Near the end of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin describes what he sees as the philosophical flaws underlying monologic thought:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons. (*Problems* 292-93)

A monologic perspective rejects the notion of unfinalizability or the epistemic benefits of polyphony, and in the process, it shields itself from the perspectives of other subjects, removing the possibility of another voice being an avenue towards truth or a deeper understanding of reality. Ultimately, Bakhtin concludes that while there may be times to speak or write in a monologic mode, for clarity or precision of thought, monologism as an epistemic system is both reductive and self-defeating.

In contrast to monologism, Bakhtin believes that writers and thinkers must embrace some degree of dialogism in their methodology for understanding other human consciousnesses, as well as reality itself (*Problems* 271). Bakhtin praises Dostoevsky for his dialogic imagination, a worldview that encourages deeper understanding of other human consciousness and provides new lenses through which to pursue truth. Bakhtin sees immense value in all literature that manages to imbue narratives and themes with such depth and dimension. He elaborates on the inherent necessity such a mode of thought in literature:

The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed. . . to the naïve self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogic interaction. (110)

Bakhtin calls those literary works that function under such a framework dialogic literature (*Problems* 109-110). Bakhtin cites the Socratic dialogues as an ancient example of such literature, as well as the modern novels of Dostoevsky, where diametrically opposed worldviews are allowed to clash with each other through the interworkings of narrative. As he writes, Socrates “brought people together and made them collide in a quarrel, and as a result truth was born,” making Socrates more of a “midwife” for truth than an author or teacher, a method that other writers would do well to employ (*Problems* 110). Bakhtin argues that although truth may be, to some extent, unfinalizable and incomplete, the act of dialogue becomes an author’s central avenue for grasping whatever modicum of truth may be within human reach.

Bakhtin develops and expands these theories in his essays in *The Dialogic Imagination*, moving the arena of study from conceptual philosophy to linguistics, arguing that the nature of

dialogic truth-seeking is inherently connected to the nature of language itself. Up until this point, Bakhtin's ideas in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* primarily focus on dialogism as seen in the novel's employment of characters, narratives, and themes. He analyzes how polyphonic novels allow their characters to speak as living subjects, independent of the thoughts and beliefs of the author, and he argues for the significance of these observations by discussing the inescapably dialogic nature of truth. All of these concerns, though, are primarily issues of content, not of form. However, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin extends his theories of dialogism to form—and particularly to the nature of language itself—a phenomenon he defines through the concepts of heteroglossia and hybrid discourse.

In his essay “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin begins with a central presupposition, that “[f]orm and content in discourse are one” (259). In speech, in writing, in art, in anything that employs language for the sake of communication, what is being said cannot be extricated from how it is said. The two are inescapably linked—the one constantly shapes and is shaped by the other. For literature, particularly, this supposition means that a work of literature is not merely a material vehicle for an abstract idea; the form of the piece—its diction, syntax, mechanics, presentation, and all the other small constituent pieces that make up the language of the work—becomes a manifestation of the ideas themselves. As Robert Zimmerman writes, “The content of a work of art is that work of art . . . The artist does not firstly have a content and secondly a form so that the content could just as easily be ‘inserted’ into a different form. He has a vague enformed content which, hopefully, becomes less vague in its being objectified” (173). Therefore, when discussing a work of art, content cannot meaningfully be spoken of in isolation from the form or language of the piece itself. To do so is to engage in a harmful act of dichotomization. Since language as a form conveys ideas, and since form and language are

inseparable, language is inherently, though not always explicitly, ideological and philosophical. As Bakhtin writes, readers should take “language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a worldview” (“Discourse” 271). Language reflects philosophy, which means that language is inherently epistemological.

Because form and content are inseparable in discourse, and particularly in the language of literature, Bakhtin extends his theories of polyphony, unfinalizability, and dialogics into the nature of language itself. Since truth is inherently dialogical, as Bakhtin argues in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, then language itself is also dialogical, and this conclusion is what ultimately leads Bakhtin to the concept of heteroglossia. Heteroglossia, literally meaning “different-tonguedness,” refers to the idea that every word, every phrase, every instance or utterance of language, is inescapably polyphonic. When an individual uses a word, that word carries with it a plurality of meanings and intentions, all imbued with various competing voices and societal forces. A word is contingent upon these meanings, and one cannot use a word without calling its various connotations to mind. In the appendices to *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin offers a clear explanation of heteroglossia:

At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide. (428)

A word, a figure of speech, or an idea cannot be distilled into an abstract, dictionary definition; one cannot use a word or phrase without calling to mind its many connotations, each of which are contingent upon time or place. Language itself is composed of a complex polyphony of voices, and to better understand the language used by an author, one must analyze and make sense of those competing voices.

One can see heteroglossia at play simply within an everyday conversation or dialogue. Common speech, for example, constantly makes use of references to ideas, events, and occurrences beyond the speaker himself, a reality Bakhtin himself notes: “Every conversation is full of transmissions and interpretations of other people’s words. At every step one meets a ‘quotation’ or a ‘reference’ to something that a particular person said” (“Discourse” 338). As Bakhtin notes here, even a simple conversation occurs because of dialogic interaction, whether it is because two people disagree with each other or because they are seeking to understand something beyond either of their mutual comprehension. Heteroglossia is an inescapable characteristic of all conversation and of all speech, a byproduct of truth’s dialogic nature—speech is always a responsive act, an action given in return to another individual, idea, or occurrence. As Andrew Robinson writes, “We are always in dialogue, not only with other people, but also with everything in the world. Everything ‘addresses’ us in a certain sense. Each of us is uniquely addressed in our particular place in the world” (“In Theory”). Ideas are born from the conflicts and coalescences of other ideas, meaning discourse is a fundamental characteristic of human existence.

Heteroglossia, therefore, affects all language, from an everyday conversation to the most complex of literary works. For the author of the novel, however, Bakhtin emphasizes that heteroglossia should not be seen as a crutch or an obstacle; the dialogic nature of language

should not be overcome, but embraced as a literary tool. For the author of the novel, heteroglossia becomes the very foundation for thematic and narrative complexity. As Bakhtin writes, the many connotations that language conjures “may all be drawn in by the novelist for the orchestrations of his themes and for the refracted expression of his intentions and values” (“Discourse” 292). The author who understands and embraces the heteroglossic nature of language can use the conflicting connotations within a specific utterance to give depth and nuance to the competing voices at play within the novel. When a character, a narrator, or the author himself speaks within the narrative, his or her words are an amalgamation of sociological, historical, spiritual, ethnic, and national influences, all of which have implicitly influenced said speaker. Every act of speech, therefore, is a sort of dialogic construction, a platform for epistemic dialogue. The author can make use of language’s multi-voiced nature to make every act of speech a polyphonic act, bringing together various perspectives and viewpoints to paint a more cohesive and truthful depiction of reality. Additionally, since the novel is already the most ideal literary form through which to employ polyphony, due to its capacity for intricate plotting and various characters, the novel is an ideal form through which to observe heteroglossia. By seeing these dialogic concepts at play in the novel, the reader can see the work as something that is built of many perspectives, voices, and languages—a combination of various cultural forces—and because of this polyphonic nature, it is an ideal avenue through which an author may pursue and depict a more truthful reality.

Bakhtinian Dialogics and the Graphic Novel

Bakhtin’s theories of dialogics and heteroglossia are far-reaching, and their implications for language, literature, and philosophy extend far beyond this brief overview, but these terms and concepts will provide the necessary theoretical foundation for a dialogic approach to

Spiegelman's *Maus*. However, for a theorist as expressly concerned with the oneness of form and content as Bakhtin shows himself to be, a Bakhtinian analysis of *Maus* must earnestly consider how dialogical theories must be adapted and applied to the graphic novel medium. Bakhtin's body of work predates the rise of the graphic novel—and its gradual acceptance as a medium capable of not only entertainment, but thoughtful artistry. However, the graphic novel medium, and its ability to speak through several avenues of communication at once, using both visual and textual artistry, proves itself to be an ideal literary form through which to observe polyphony, dialogic interaction, and particularly, heteroglossia.

Bakhtin's theories and their significance largely depend on a literary work's use of language—how diction, syntax, cultural idioms, and figures of speech convey the dialogic nature of truth and the inevitability of heteroglossia in any communicative act. At first glance, then, one might assume that the graphic novel might be the least ideal art form through which to analyze dialogism, as graphic novels depend less on text than a work of literature that communicates solely through textual means. As famed comic book artist Will Eisner notes, many critics “sometimes accuse [comics] of inhibiting imagination,” arguing that “static images have limitations. They do not articulate abstractions or complex thought easily” (*Graphic Storytelling* 10). Bakhtin would seem to suggest the same, writing that heteroglossia “grows as long as language is alive” (272). How, then, can the graphic novel medium exhibit dialogic utterances or heteroglossia when that medium depends largely on its use of images, rather than just text?

Eisner himself, in his work *Comics and Sequential Art*, offers a helpful solution to this issue, noting that the visual-textual combinations that graphic novels and comic books use to convey narrative have gradually become a language of its own. Eisner explains how this process began in the early twentieth century:

The first comic books (circa 1934) generally contained a random collection of short features. Now, after almost 50 years, the routine appearance of complete ‘graphic novels’ has, more than anything else, brought into focus the parameters of their structure. When one examines a comic book feature as a whole, the deployment of its unique elements takes on the characteristics of a language . . . Comics communicate in a ‘language’ that relies on a visual experience common to both creator and audience. (*Comics* 1)

Eisner proposes, then, that graphic novels do not actually rely less on language; instead, the medium’s unique blend of both image and text functions as a language of its own. Images in a graphic novel are not a linguistic or artistic crutch, and they do not merely depict concrete images that textual language would otherwise be unable to do. Images themselves become an indispensable characteristic of the medium and of the visual-textual language through which it speaks.

To be clear, Eisner does not use the term language merely as a figure of speech; on the contrary, he suggests that the avenues through which a graphic novel communicates ideas and narratives to its readers function quite similarly to a traditionally-conceived language. A single image, for example, works in much the same way that a letter, word, or phrase might in a language. As Eisner writes, “an ‘image’ is the memory or idea of an object or experience recorded by a narrator either mechanically or by hand” (*Graphic Storytelling* 3). Similarly, Eisner defines words and letters as “symbols that are devised out of images which originate out of familiar forms, objects, postures and other recognizable phenomena” (*Comics* 8). Despite the English language’s general tendency to dichotomize the two, words and images function in many similar ways. It is for this very reason that the line between word and image is more blurry in

many Asian cultures, where letters and words often take the form of pictographs, as well as ancient cultures, such as the Egyptians' use of hieroglyphics and the early cuneiform of Mesopotamian civilizations. Additionally, by placing both images and text in various sequences with each other, using both images and words as subjects, predicates, objects, and modifiers, the graphic novel author creates "sentences" of his own, complete thoughts built from visual-textual means. In essence, the graphic novel has its own grammar—its own accepted styles of syntactical structure, style, and flow. Eisner writes that the best sequences in a graphic novel "can be diagrammed like a sentence" (*Comics* 2). If Eisner is correct, then the graphic novel is no simple, inferior genre; it is equally capable of the same linguistic and narrative complexity as a textual novel, only through different expressive means.

Returning to Bakhtin, then, the graphic novel should be just as capable of dialogic constructions and heteroglossia as the novel, and in fact, the medium's blending of words and pictures to convey narrative arguably provides the author even more avenues through which to employ polyphonic characterization and multi-voiced linguistic acts. The images and text can work in tandem to convey multiple dimensions and angles of the same person or event. Conversely, images and text can also exist in discordance; the dialogue in a panel may contradict the visuals, or vice versa, and in doing so, the author can depict the dialogic nature of understanding, allowing multiple disparate discourses to co-exist in conflict and letting their contradictions serve as epistemic avenues to reality. As Bakhtin writes, "An artistic representation, an image of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organize them" ("Discourse" 277). A visual, as much as a word, phrase, or sentence, can be just as capable of heteroglossic semantics—an image or visual artistic

choice may transcend one single source of meaning and, instead, be the social construction of a wide range of personal, political, and philosophical forces.

With these concepts in mind, Bakhtin's dialogics provide a much-needed avenue through which to understand what Spiegelman accomplishes with *Maus*, and as such, this thesis will seek to show that *Maus* is an innately heteroglossic work. Through the use of the graphic novel medium, already a blend of visual and textual narrative, Spiegelman creates a novel where various key voices are allowed to speak within the work—without any one voice being given full authority over the other. Vladek Spiegelman, for example, is given the ability to speak freely, despite his narrative's shortcomings. Although Spiegelman shows Vladek's perspective to be flawed and inaccurate at times, Art's interviews with Vladek provide a perspective into the realities of the Holocaust and particularly of Auschwitz that neither he nor the broad cultural accounts could ever provide. At the same time, in his interviews, Art often challenges Vladek's memoirs with the historical accounts that contradict his own, forcing the two to exist in conflict with each other. Simultaneously, as a character in his own work, Art, through wrestling with his own prejudices against his father, becomes a third voice within the novel, finding his own conflicts with both Vladek and with public perceptions of Holocaust survivors. Through these competing dialogues, *Maus* becomes a polyphonic, multi-voiced construction; rather than allowing one of these perspectives to take primacy or dominance over the others, Spiegelman avoids monologism by avoiding rote reconciliation. Spiegelman does not end by claiming one monologue to be correct; he gives each voice a platform, allowing the reader to inhabit a visual-textual Holocaust built from the personal accounts of Vladek, the troubled mind of Art, and a wide range of historical research. As a result, through all of these perspectives, as well as others,

Spiegelman pursues a more truthful, dialogical depiction of the Holocaust through the narrative tapestry that these perspectives create.

Chapter Two – [M]auschwitz: Heteroglossic Utterances in *Maus's* Holocaust

At the beginning of *Maus II*, as he and his wife Françoise drive through upstate New York, Art laments the impossibility of the task he has undertaken with *Maus*. He confesses to his wife, “I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams . . . There’s so much I’ll never be able to understand or visualize” (16). At each step in the project, Art has been met with his inability to wholly comprehend the Holocaust in all its historical and emotional complexities. Having been born after the Holocaust, Art has no direct personal memories to draw from, making the entire *Maus* project rely on historical accounts and the testimony of others. However, these accounts are invariably incomplete and, at times, inaccurate. In talking to his father, Art discovers that Vladek’s memories are often historically unreliable. At the same time, even though historians have compiled mountains of empirical data about the events, the rote historical details of the Holocaust cannot easily penetrate its emotional realities. They cannot reconcile or synthesize the disparity between different testimonies, the ways that different factions and people groups hold wildly contradictory beliefs about the events themselves. How can Spiegelman, as a single author detached from the events of the Holocaust, account for this plurality of voices while, at the same time, earnestly seek to portray the Holocaust as truthfully and honestly as possible?

This conflict precisely exemplifies why Bakhtin’s theories of polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia illuminate *Maus* as well as they do. Spiegelman’s approach to portraying the Holocaust is inherently Bakhtinian in nature. The various ways in which he depicts the different elements of his narrative are innately dialogic representations, gathering the many competing personal, social, political, and philosophical forces at play into a multi-dimensional and multi-voiced construction that may not be exhaustive—but is more truthful, honest, and comprehensive

than a monologically-voiced work about the Holocaust could possibly be. In no better place can the reader see *Maus*'s multi-voiced nature than in how the novel depicts the dynamics of the Holocaust itself. Therefore, this chapter will show how *Maus* depicts a vision of the Holocaust that is truly dialogic—built, not from one mind, but from the interactions between Art's authorial voice, Vladek's memories, and the competing social and historical forces surrounding the Holocaust—and how that dialogic vision can be seen through Spiegelman's use of animal metaphors to represent race dynamics and his visual and temporal portrayals of Auschwitz.

Before analyzing these specific elements of *Maus*'s Holocaust that are dialogically presented, it is worth briefly noting that the ways the events are conveyed to the reader in the novel are filtered through multiple voices. The visions of the Holocaust that the reader experiences in *Maus* are told to the reader by Spiegelman, who is taking Vladek's memories of the Holocaust and transferring them into comic book form: a frame within a frame, told in frames. To complicate this picture further, Spiegelman's depictions of the Holocaust are not just built from Vladek's memories but through historical research as well. Therefore, the reader must realize that the depictions of the Holocaust in *Maus* are unavoidably products of Art's authorial voice, Vladek's memories, and historical research of the events themselves. In that sense, the Holocaust that readers observe within *Maus* is necessarily a polyphonic construction, and with this categorical triad of voices in mind, a proper dialogical analysis of *Maus*'s Holocaust can begin.

The Use of Animal Metaphors as Dialogic Constructions

One of the starkest examples of dialogism at work in Spiegelman's portrayal of the Holocaust can be seen in his use of animal metaphors. In the years since *Maus* has been published, critics and readers have both berated and praised Spiegelman's choice to represent the

Jewish people as mice and the Nazis as cats—as well as the graphic novel’s various other animal metaphors that represent race. Paul Buhle frames the conflict well, drawing the spectrum of responses to this artistic choice, by writing that “Spiegelman’s mechanism of making the Jews into mice, the Germans into cats, and the Poles into pigs has perhaps attracted the most commentary in comics circles, with one side arguing that any such depiction is inherently limiting and the other answering that the depiction is consistent from the Jewish standpoint” (16).

Those who see the use of mice as an offensive or harmful artistic choice argue that the metaphor only perpetuates the racial stereotypes that initially conceived them. Marilyn Reizbaum, for example, accepts that Spiegelman’s choice to use mice may be “innovative” for a piece of Holocaust literature, but she ultimately concludes that “*Maus* reinforces a stereotype,” dehumanizing and delegitimizing the Jewish people, an act which “questions the greater reception and the acceptance for Spiegelman’s stereotypes” (qtd. in Park 162). Reizbaum seems to suggest that the animal metaphor cannot transcend its racist roots, and consequently, she believes that Spiegelman’s use of it merely revitalizes a harmful image better left in the past. On the opposite end of the spectrum, critics such as Miles Orvell argue that the racial history behind these animal representations ultimately dissolve throughout *Maus*’s narrative: “The reader comes to forget that these are cats, mice, pigs, and soon begins to view them instead as human types” (119). For Orvell, the complexity and humanity of *Maus*’s characters, however they are represented, overcome whatever disturbing history may hide behind the animal metaphors. With these two disparate perspectives in mind, the apparent dichotomy seems clear: do Spiegelman’s uses of animal metaphors perpetuate or transcend their underlying racial stereotypes?

The answer to this conflict, surprisingly enough, is neither—and both. On the one hand, as much as they may correctly identify the dehumanizing subtext behind historic portrayals of Jews as vermin, critics who see Spiegelman's use of mice to represent the Jews as an act of harmful racialization overlook the various ways the graphic novel actively contests against this stereotyping. Conversely, those who see only the human characteristics of *Maus*'s characters, ignoring their visual representations in the graphic novel, overlook their historical context, as well as the ways these metaphors allow Spiegelman to display the Holocaust's racial dynamics—the ways the Jewish people were seen, represented, and treated during the 1930s and 1940s. Instead of falling prey to this false dichotomy of interpretation, the reader must see the animal representations in *Maus* as multi-voiced metaphors. These visual representations, especially Spiegelman's use of the cat-mouse metaphor, have immense heteroglossic significance, and through their use in *Maus*, Spiegelman shows his audience two distinct and thematically disparate voices: the abhorrent racism that contextualizes *Maus*'s Holocaust, as expressed by Hitler and the Nazi regime, and the ways that Spiegelman's authorial voice transcends the racist metaphor, showing the inherent absurdities of the animal metaphors and asserting the humanity of the Jewish people against these portrayals.

At first, Spiegelman did not intend to use the cat-mouse metaphor as a guide to describe the Holocaust's ethnic dynamics; the metaphor initially arose as a response to American race relations in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1971, Spiegelman was asked to contribute some of his work for an underground comix collection titled *Funny Animals* [sic], and his first thought was to create a comic that would act as an artistic response to some of the racially degrading American comics that portrayed African-Americans, in his words, as “subhuman, monkeylike creatures with giant minstrel lips—stereotypes stealing chickens, stealing

watermelons, playing dice, all singin' & dancin', just the daily stock in trade of our racist cartoon heritage" (*MetaMaus* 111-12). Spiegelman considered writing a story about "Ku Klux Kats," who would lynch black mice, and he believed that the cat-mouse metaphor may serve as an edgy critique of racism in America (qtd. in Loman 551). However, he ultimately decided that, when used as a metaphor for American race dynamics, the cat-mouse metaphor could not add any meaningful dialogue to the issue; as Spiegelman writes, "It would have been very easy for my notion to come off as one more racist 'parody' even if I did bring Ku Klux Kats and worked with honorable intent. It just felt problematic" (*MetaMaus* 113). Though Spiegelman ultimately scrapped the idea to use the cat-mouse metaphor as a symbol for American political issues, the idea catalyzed in Spiegelman the thematic possibilities that could arise from using the metaphor to describe the relationship between the Jews and the Germans during World War II.

Spiegelman was unaware of it at that time—as he admits, his knowledge of the European political climate before World War II was sparse—but one reason the cat-mouse metaphor functioned much more effectively in this particular arena was that his work could dialogically interact with the cultural contexts surrounding World War II. As Andrew Loman notes, "the translation of the cat-and-mouse metaphor from America to Nazi Germany succeeds brilliantly . . . [because] in many instances Nazi propagandists represented Jews as mice or rats, claiming thereby that the Jewish presence in Europe was an infestation of vermin that needed to be wiped out" (553). Spiegelman's choice to portray the Jewish people as mice and the Germans as cats comes with the immense weight of that historical context, and because of that, one of the most prominent historical voices that would end up adding dialogic significance to the use of mice in the graphic novel is this wide body of propaganda written and distributed by the Nazi party.

In the years leading up to and during World War II, the Nazi party consistently used mice as an inherently degrading method of marginalization against the Jewish people. For example, Spiegelman particularly notes the ways the mouse metaphor is used in the 1940 documentary film *The Eternal Jew*. The film opens with a quote from Franz Hippler, the director, who says, “Just like Jews among mankind, rats represent the very essence of malice and subterranean destruction” (qtd. in *MetaMaus* 114). *The Eternal Jew* goes on to draw this metaphor in detail, juxtaposing images of rats and mice with pictures of Jewish people. As Spiegelman recalls, “[The film] portrayed Jews in a ghetto swarming in tight quarters, bearded caftaned creatures, and then a cut to Jews as mice—or rather rats—swarming in a sewer, with a title card that said ‘Jews are the rats’ or the ‘vermin of mankind’” (*MetaMaus* 115). In its time, too, *The Eternal Jew* was lauded; in an anonymous review of the film in 1940, a film critic praises “the powerful examples” displayed in “this new and most valuable film,” and even a cursory glance at this review—its title is “The Film of a 2000-Year Rat Migration”—shows how the racist rat metaphors had unquestioningly seeped into eastern European culture (“A Nazi Review”).

Additionally, *The Eternal Jew* was far from unique in its use of mice and rats to dehumanize the Jewish people. Many posters and brochures in this era sought to do the same, likening the Jewish people to disease-infested vermin. In Denmark in 1940, the Nazi party distributed posters that depict a human head on a cartoon rat; with an absurdly large nose and ears, the rat’s human head reflects common racist caricatures of the Jewish people, and the caption at the bottom of the poster reads, “Rats. Destroy Them” (*MetaMaus* 115). In Russia, the Nazis distributed posters of the Jewish people fleeing like mice, with the caption reading, “Get the Jewish-Bolshevist warmongers out of Europe!” (“Nazi Posters”). Even German cartoonists of the era, such as Philippe Rupprecht, perpetuated this dehumanizing metaphor, portraying the

Jews as both apes and rats in many of his cartoons (*MetaMaus* 116). In these ways, the mice in *Maus* inescapably exist within the context of Nazi propaganda, an unfortunate but inevitable voice and social force contributing to the metaphor's inherent heteroglossia.

The dialogic nature of the mouse metaphor does not merely stem from Nazi propaganda, either; if anything, the rat and mouse propaganda the Nazis produced was merely symptomatic and reflective of Hitler's actual methods of systematic genocide against the Jews. As Spiegelman reminisces, "This [propaganda] made it clear to me that this dehumanization was at the very heart of the killing project" (*MetaMaus* 115). In many disturbing ways, the actual methods the Nazi party used to systematically exterminate the Jewish people during the Holocaust were conscious extensions of its belief that Jews were essentially vermin. In the gas chambers at Auschwitz, for example, the Nazis used Zyklon B, a gas specifically made to be a pesticide that would kill vermin and rodents (Loman 553). The barracks that the Jewish people were forced to sleep in were designed for up to 700 prisoners, but the Nazis would commonly pack up to 1200 prisoners in them at once, forcing the Jewish people to sleep in packs, like rodents ("Life"). Even the ways that the Nazis stripped the prisoners of their own clothes and required them to wear identical uniforms function in such a way as to rid the Jewish people of their human characteristics and reduce them to dehumanized "herds." In these methods as well as others, it must be understood that the Nazi treatment and genocide of Jews in the concentration camps was not merely a matter of efficiency or practicality. Their practices were ideologically saturated—all built with the intention of molding the perspectives of the Jewish people, the Germans, and Europe as a whole to see the Jewish people as inferior, weak, mouse-like creatures and the Nazi Aryan ideals as superior and cat-like—superlative models of humanity. As Hannah Arendt wrote, "The concentration and extermination camps serve the machinery of total power as

experimental laboratories that investigate whether the fundamental claim of totalitarian systems—that it is possible to exert total domination over human beings—is correct” (qtd. in Langbein 18). Through these camps, the Nazi party demonstrated this precise act of exertion—seeking to enforce their superiority over the Jewish people—and their methods largely worked due to their “verminization” of the Jews through cultural practice.

These historical realities are the unavoidable context that Spiegelman’s visual representations rely on. Consequently, they are inescapable voices that contribute to the metaphor’s heteroglossic nature, and in no way does *Maus* reject or ignore the ways the cat-mouse metaphor’s dehumanizing and racist origins inform the work. As the author of *Maus*, Spiegelman seems to recall this historical context quite intentionally, too, allowing it to be a key dialogical force in *Maus*’s depiction of the Holocaust. At the beginning of each volume of *Maus*, for example, Spiegelman’s epigraphs suggest as much. On the opening pages of the first volume, Spiegelman includes a quote from Adolf Hitler, saying, “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human” (5). At the beginning of the second volume, Spiegelman attaches a passage from a 1930s German newspaper that reflects Hitler’s quote, which says, “Mickey Mouse is the most miserable ideal ever revealed. . . . Healthy emotions tell every independent young man and every honorable youth that the dirty and filth-covered vermin, the greatest bacteria carrier in the animal kingdom, cannot be the ideal type of animal. . . . Away with Jewish brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse! Wear the Swastika Cross!” (3). Spiegelman’s inclusion of each of these quotes as epigraphs explicitly conjures the voices of Hitler and Nazi propagandists, suggesting that the readers of the graphic novel must understand and engage with *Maus* within the dialogical context of the mouse metaphor’s racist origins.

Looking specifically at *Maus*'s depictions of the Jews as mice and the Nazis as cats, the reader can also see how Spiegelman's visual use of the metaphor consciously draws dialogic significance from the history of Nazi propaganda. In *Maus II*, shortly after he and Anja have been brought to Auschwitz to be processed, Vladek is herded into a room with other prisoners, where they are stripped of their clothes while a Nazi officer yells orders at them (25). The visuals alone depict the power relationships between the Jewish prisoners and the Germans. The German officer, drawn as a cat, appears strong and physically intimidating, and Spiegelman places him in the foreground, making him much larger than the prisoners in the background. Spiegelman uses harsh angles in his composition of the officer's face and fills in his uniform with solid black, the only object in the panel that is completely colored in—a solid, imposing contrast against the rounded angles of the dimly shaded mice that are packed into the background of the panel. His font choice for the officer, as well, conveys power, as it is thicker, bolder, and roughly twice the size of the prisoners' dialogue. Regarding the dialogue itself, one prisoner begins to ask about the whereabouts of his family, but he is quickly interrupted by the officer, who yells, "Shut up, Yids! To the bath house. Quick!" (*Maus II* 25). In this brief conversation, the most human element of the panel—a man checking on the safety of his family—is superseded by the orders of the officer.

Through this panel, then, the reader gains a sense of the power dynamics at play in Auschwitz, and these power dynamics necessarily gain dialogic significance from the wider historical context that has constantly painted the Jews in this same, dehumanized light. In a sense, this panel, decontextualized from the narrative of the graphic novel, contains visual, textual, and semantic similarities to the aforementioned 1940s Nazi propaganda, using that encoded visual language to establish just how dominated the Jewish people had become under

Nazi rule. As Sheng-Mei Ma writes, “Animal imagery in *Maus*, therefore, not only aptly mirrors the racial nature of the Nazi persecution against Jews . . . but such representation goes beyond a mere artistic device; it is a social reality” (117). It is for this very reason that Spiegelman, in multiple interviews, has said, “Hitler was as much my collaborator as my father was” (qtd. in Hays).

However, social constructs do not necessarily determine absolute reality, and inasmuch as Spiegelman uses the cat-mouse metaphor as a way to contextualize *Maus* and dialogically interact with the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people, he uses the very same metaphor against itself, to assert the humanity of the Jewish people against historical racist caricatures.

Spiegelman uses the cat-mouse metaphor as a visual symbol of racial dynamics in *Maus*, but in an interview with Naomi Epel, he acknowledges that the metaphor does not match reality: “‘All metaphors are a kind of lying,’ contends Spiegelman, ‘As soon as you make a correspondence, it only highlights the gaps. Nothing thoroughly interlocks’” (qtd. in Ma 118). It may seem absurd for Spiegelman to base his entire work around a metaphor that he himself does not seem to believe is accurate, but at the same time, that seems to be Spiegelman’s point. The cat-mouse metaphor does not conform to the reality of the Jewish people’s identity and humanity; it cannot depict them in their complexities, their loves, their desires, their histories. Because the metaphor is inherently absurd and incomplete, and because Spiegelman uses the metaphor fully aware of that fact, he can also use the cat-mouse metaphor to highlight the Jewish and German people’s unfinalizability. Loman explains:

Spiegelman’s attempts to register his own distance and alienation from the Holocaust and his frank acknowledgement that he cannot comprehend it are sophisticated ethical responses to the issues of Holocaust representation, showing

Spiegelman to be among those who, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, are 'opposed to the modern world's iconomania,' at least where the Holocaust is concerned.

Spiegelman turns the problematics of representation into a different, non-transgressive means of oblique representation. (557)

Spiegelman himself has affirmed this idea, saying that the use of animals is a "self-destructing metaphor . . . that is there to reveal the inanity of the notion itself" (qtd. in Hays). In short, because any representation is, in some ways, incomplete, inaccurate, or one-sided, the fact that Spiegelman consistently subverts his own metaphors means that he reaches a level of authenticity and truthfulness that many authors do not—and in doing so, allows the metaphor to be truly polyphonic, utilizing it not to make a singular point but to function as an arena for exchange of ideas.

Spiegelman's subversions of the animal metaphors pervade the entire graphic novel. From the opening pages, he greets the reader with mice who stand up on their hind-legs, who walk, talk, and act like human beings, who fumble with coat-hangers, smoke, exercise, and talk to each other over the phone (*Maus I* 11-13). In the first chapter alone, he depicts his Jewish characters as multi-dimensional people with psychological complexity. Vladek is a young and available bachelor, looking to begin his career and find a wife who will support him. Vladek's first girlfriend, Lucia Greenberg, is loyal to Vladek, but ultimately proves herself to be overly-attached and jealous of him. In the second chapter, Art's mother, Anja, struggles with depression, revealing the anxieties and inner melancholy that grow in her long before the Holocaust exacerbates them. Through these displays of human characteristics seen in characters drawn as mice, the reader grows to personally identify with them; as Jeanne Ewert writes, "The

fractures force the reader to read the metaphorical equivalence in only one direction, identifying mice as people, rather than Jews as mice” (95).

As the plot progresses, the metaphor grows increasingly fractured, with Spiegelman going as far as to explicitly poke holes in it through his visual authorial choices. Roughly halfway through *Maus I*, Art picks up and reads one of his old comics, titled “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” which represents Art and his family as human beings. This comic-within-a-comic contextualizes *Maus* within the present-day reality of the Jewish people, revealing to the audience the ways that many of them wrestle with their identity and existence after the Holocaust. Additionally, the comic contains an actual photograph of Art and his mother from 1958, giving readers their first visual glimpse of these characters as human beings (*Maus I* 100-03). In *Maus II*, Spiegelman also includes a photograph of his brother, Richieu (5), and the final chapter has a photograph of Vladek (134). These inclusions of the actual appearances of the Spiegelman family speak against the majority of the novel’s visual depictions, revealing the metaphor as a dim approximation of a much larger reality, as if the book itself cannot conceal the innate humanity of the people it describes.

By the end of *Maus II*, the animal metaphors have almost fully self-destructed. In the first chapter of the second volume, Art deliberates over what animal his wife Françoise should be. One panel focuses in on Art’s sketchbook, showing various doodles that portray Françoise as a moose, a poodle, a frog, a rabbit, and a mouse with long, dark hair. Françoise looks over his shoulder, and she asserts that even though she is French, she should be drawn as a mouse because she chose to convert to Judaism when she married Art (11). The debate between the two of them is humorous, as it highlights the absurdities of the metaphor. Françoise could just as easily be any of these animals or nationalities by different subjective justifications, making

Spiegelman's ultimate decision to draw her as a mouse seem insufficient to describe her or her variegated history—and if the decision to label her a mouse is as arbitrary as it seems, how much more absurd is the Nazi directive to purge Europe of the Jewish people? Later, in the notorious second chapter, "Time Flies," Spiegelman no longer portrays himself as a mouse; instead, he is a man wearing a mouse mask, despairingly attempting to draw his comics and explaining how different companies wish to commercialize his work, all while his desk rests upon an increasingly large pile of mouse corpses (*Maus II* 41). At this point, Spiegelman has wholly resigned to the insufficiency of the mouse metaphor, allowing it to visually fall apart, revealing that beneath every reductive simulacrum lies a human being, torn and divided between many sources of identity, always more multi-dimensional and unfinalizable than any single metaphor can convey. For this very reason, when Art visits his psychiatrist's house just a few pages later and observes that "his place is overrun with dogs and cats," he ironically muses, "Can I mention this, or does it complete louse up my metaphor?" (*Maus II* 43). The question is intentionally rhetorical and sardonic, as at this point, the metaphor has already been proven to be absurd and incomplete.

Therefore, through his construction and subsequent destruction of animal metaphors in *Maus*, Spiegelman creates and participates in a dialogical process of representation. Spiegelman allows the voices of history and culture to speak into the cat-mouse metaphor, depicting the racial and ethnic dynamics between the Jewish and German peoples throughout World War II and the disturbing ways the metaphor was utilized to dehumanize the Jewish people. At the same time, Spiegelman constantly highlights and reveals the many absurdities underlying such a metaphor, and in doing so, he lets the Jewish people speak for themselves, asserting their humanity against the metaphor. Chute writes that through this "productive, dialogical process . . .

Maus exploits the spatial form of graphic narrative, with its double-encodings and visual installment of paradoxes, so compellingly, refusing telos and closure even as its narrativizes history” (202). The heteroglossic depictions of race add further depth to Spiegelman’s portrayal of the Holocaust, letting different voices construct an increasingly deep and comprehensive vision of the historical events.

The Dialogic Process in Spiegelman’s Portrayal of Auschwitz

Alongside *Maus*’s animal metaphors, Spiegelman’s dialogic vision of the Holocaust can also be seen through his complex uses of both time and space to represent Vladek’s imprisonment at Auschwitz. The death camps present yet another epistemological obstacle for Spiegelman: what does it mean for him to “truthfully” depict a place as terrifying and incomprehensible as Auschwitz? As Sarah Farmer writes, “The Holocaust has never not been represented” (115), so whether it is first-hand testimony or historical reconstruction, any account or description of a chronotope like Auschwitz must necessarily be selective and incomplete. Again, Spiegelman could easily use *Maus* to create a relatively straightforward historical reconstruction of Auschwitz, or he could just as easily dictate Vladek’s memories into the graphic novel, inaccuracies and all. However, both authorial approaches to the events would be, in some way, disingenuous toward Vladek’s memories and the events that occurred in Auschwitz. Instead, in *Maus*, the two coalesce into a more comprehensive, though sometimes contradictory, portrayal of Auschwitz, and in doing so, Spiegelman also reveals the insufficiencies of both history and memory—what they both can and cannot convey or transmit. Therefore, once again, Spiegelman portrays Auschwitz through a dialogic process, allowing the competing voices of historical records and subjective memories to conflict, and through this

interaction between history and memory, a more truthful depiction of the camps is created as a result.

While composing *Maus*, Spiegelman put a considerable amount of effort into assuring that his depictions of Auschwitz were factually accurate and historically informed. In *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman reflects on the intense research he completed to ensure that he was representing every aspect of Auschwitz and the Holocaust as faithfully as he could to what had been confirmed by historians:

While in the middle of *Maus*, I devoured documentaries on Hitler and on the camps, from *Night and Fog* to the kinds of things PBS would show during fundraising drives. I'd videotape them and freeze frames to draw from . . . I was reading desperately to understand the history of the period, and some of the anecdotes, in addition to those my father told me, came from sources where I could document events that were problematic. (54-55)

Additionally, Spiegelman explains that he made multiple research trips to Auschwitz and Dachau, paying attention to such architectural minutiae as the scale of the camps, the design of the bathrooms, and the schematics of the crematoria (57-59). At each step in his artistic process, Spiegelman seems expressly concerned with maintaining the historical accuracy of his work and letting those historical details be a key vocal force in the graphic novel. As Amy Hungerford concludes, “Spiegelman’s drawing of the Holocaust . . . shows how closely the text is committed to the historical facts of the Shoah” (qtd. in Park 154).

This heavy investment into historical research consistently pays off in the final product, as well, as Spiegelman’s meticulous passion for the details of Auschwitz shows itself in various spots throughout *Maus II*. When explaining the layout of the two separate camps at Auschwitz,

Spiegelman draws a topographic map of the area, showing the location of the two camps and the roads and landmarks that lie between them (51). Similarly, when Vladek explains to Art how the crematoria work, he includes a detailed blueprint of the building that describes each room and its function in the cremation process (70). At one point, when Vladek is employed in Auschwitz as a shoemaker, Spiegelman even includes relatively detailed instructions on how Vladek would re-sole officers' boots (60). These more factual and historic portrayals of Auschwitz lend a degree of credibility to Vladek's account, as well as Spiegelman's knowledge of the events, allowing the reader to develop a sense of trust in the work's accuracy. *Maus* is not merely an amalgamation of untrustworthy memories or the autobiographical musings of an author uninterested in the historical gravity of the Holocaust's events. On the contrary, the historical voice is one of the most prolific forces in *Maus*, and although Spiegelman often intrudes on the work with autobiographical reflections and subjective perceptions, one cannot deny history's influence on nearly every page.

However, as an author, Spiegelman seems consistently aware of the limitations of history, and its inability to accurately portray the emotional realities of Auschwitz. As Spiegelman himself writes, "Research and travel got me to at least know what a small street in Silesia might have looked like in the '30s and '40s, but a quest for ersatz verisimilitude might have pulled me further away from essential actuality as I tried to reconstruct it" (59). What Spiegelman suggests here is that the most truthful depiction of Auschwitz is not necessarily the most factually realistic—that perhaps Auschwitz's identity as a cultural icon extends far beyond the historical dimension, gaining further significance from the memories of the survivors, however accurate or inaccurate they may be, and the disturbing pall that Auschwitz and other death camps have cast over the years following the Holocaust. Consequently, only through

allowing both history and memory to co-exist in dialogue with each other can this multi-dimensional understanding of Auschwitz and of the Holocaust can be depicted.

Spiegelman suggests this need for a dialogic of history and memory in two key conversations in *Maus II*. When Art visits his psychiatrist Pavel's office, he confesses, "Some part of me doesn't want to draw or think about Auschwitz. I can't visualize it clearly, and I can't BEGIN to imagine what it felt like" (46). In response, Pavel says, "What Auschwitz felt like? Hmm...How can I explain?...BOO! It felt a little like that. But ALWAYS! From the moment you got to the gate until the very end" (46). Born from memory, Pavel's unusual response to Art's question, as reductive or simplistic as it may seem, adds a layer of emotional significance that the historical facts cannot convey. Similarly, later in the novel, Vladek recounts to Art how his belongings were once stolen from his bunk; Art cannot believe that Vladek did not carry his belongings with him, when theft had been common in the camps, but he finally accepts, "I guess I just don't understand," to which Vladek replies, "Yes...about Auschwitz, nobody can understand" (64). In this exchange, Spiegelman admits that memory provides a dimension of reality that cannot be found elsewhere. He has no ability to truly understand this element of Vladek's stay in the camps, as he has no personal memory to draw from, so instead, his best hope in writing or conveying it is to depict the memory in its actuality and explicitly admit his limitations in understanding it, letting the memory be its own voice in the novel's dialogic processes.

In these various passages, voices of history and of memory are allowed to speak into the work individually, free of control from other voices or social forces. However in other key passages, history and memory must dialogically interact with each other simultaneously, creating scenes that are explicitly heteroglossic. One particularly notable example of this can be seen

when Art tries to construct a chronology of Vladek's stay in the camps. On the right side of the page, Spiegelman includes a diagrammatic timeline, attempting to corral Vladek's memories into a precise and exact history (68). The timeline, on its own, appears complete and accurate; however, the panels surrounding it on the page reveal its inconsistencies and inadequacy. Each time Art nearly succeeds in getting a clear timeline from Vladek, he is confounded by the imprecision and blurry, unclear nature of Vladek's memories. Art, seeking to understand and historicize Vladek's imprisonment in Auschwitz, fights to make sense of the timeline, but, as Vladek sullenly remarks, "In Auschwitz, we didn't wear watches" (68). His memories, as much insight as they provide, are limited in scope and accuracy. In this moment, then, history and memory exist on the page, in direct conflict with each other, and since there is really no way for the two to be wholly reconciled or synthesized, the only truthful and honest option that Spiegelman has as an author is to let them interact and contradict each other, in all their disparities.

Readers can see a similar moment in Spiegelman's tragic depiction of the bodies of Jewish prisoners being burned after they have been killed in the gas chambers. A passage as gruesome, disturbing, and incomprehensible as this simply cannot be fully understood or expressed by one voice, whether it be the cold, scientific facts of historians or the limited memories of survivors. Therefore, Spiegelman includes the voices of both, in cooperation with each other, to try to convey the moment accurately. On one page, he draws the crematoria in historic precision, adopting a more realistic style of drawing; Spiegelman shows the aforementioned blueprints of the building, explaining each room's function and location (70). In this way, Spiegelman allows the voices of history to lend as much significance and truthfulness as they are able. However, alongside these historical drawings, Spiegelman shares Vladek's

perspective, who offers a much more horrific perspective of the bodies burning at the crematoria: “And those what finished in the gas chambers before they got pushed in these graves, it was the lucky ones. The others had to jump in the graves while they were still alive. Prisoners what worked there poured gasoline over the live ones and the dead ones. And the fat from the burning bodies they scooped and poured again so everyone could burn better” (72). Along with this textual testimony, Spiegelman draws another picture of the bodies burning, but in contrast to the more historical depictions, this drawing is emotionally charged, showing close-ups of Jewish prisoners screaming to the sky as they are burned in mass graves. In an interview with Chute, Spiegelman reflects on this artistic decision, saying, “To follow that objective photographic representation—the extreme suppression of just showing architecture—with a much more subjective image made sense . . . I did everything I could to draw it with conviction, drew it dozens of times” (*MetaMaus* 60). In these two concurrent depictions of the same events, Spiegelman reveals truthfulness through dissonance. The two panels adopt wholly disparate aesthetics, but in their conflicted dialogic exchange, the reader gains an increasing fullness of vision, an ability to see the many dimensions and perspectives that contribute to an understanding of such wide-scale genocide.

Today’s cultural climate has rendered the Holocaust particularly difficult to represent fairly and accurately. At each step, authors who write about the Holocaust must avoid cold, historical analysis or rote sentimentalization of incomprehensible events. Therefore, rather than committing to merely presenting a public history or recounting his father’s private memories, Spiegelman treads a difficult path in composing his vision of the Holocaust in *Maus*, choosing instead to consistently pit competing discourses and narratives against each other throughout the work. In creating a multi-voiced reconstruction of the Holocaust that combines many accounts

into a single, heteroglossic narrative, Spiegelman offers his readers a “temporally fluid, Bakhtinian dialogic between the author and the subject (memory) and the event and the audience (history)” (Costello 22). In doing so, *Maus*’s odd, hybridized portrayal of the Holocaust and its victims provides a lens into the realities of the event in a way no other work does. As Lisa A. Costello concludes, “*Maus* speaks to re-visioned memory intertwined with history for a performative, evocative Holocaust . . . [an] absence made temporarily present” (23). Through animal metaphors, fluid portrayals of time, dissonant visual depictions of Auschwitz, as well as other multi-voiced literary elements, Spiegelman’s dialogic Holocaust brings a unique sense of honesty and truthfulness to its readers that could not be expressed through monologue.

Chapter Three – ‘My Father Bleeds History’: Vladek’s Portrayal as Dialogic Construction

Maus certainly provides a unique, multi-voiced vision of the Holocaust for its readers, in a way no other work has, but the work’s central concern is not the Holocaust as a whole. At its heart, *Maus* is still a survivor’s tale, whose narrative focuses squarely on Art’s father, Vladek. The work is inescapably biographical in nature, using Vladek’s memories as the narrative scaffold which every other element rests on, commencing with Art’s first interview with Vladek and ending with his last. It is no small significance that Spiegelman concludes the work when Vladek says, “Let’s stop, please, your tape recorder. I’m tired from talking” (*Maus II* 136). When the interviews end, the graphic novel also ends, and this structuring implicitly ties the narrative of *Maus* to Vladek’s memories. Chute rightly identifies that one of Spiegelman’s primary goals in *Maus* is “giving a form” to his father’s narrative, so any analysis of the work’s themes and structure must treat Vladek’s narrative as a paramount concern (200). However, much like *Maus*’s portrayal of the Holocaust, the novel’s depiction of Vladek is not simply the product of Vladek’s memories. *Maus* may be the telling of Vladek’s story, but who does the telling? From what perspectives do readers meet and gradually grow to understand Vladek?

An answer to these questions can perhaps best be found in *Maus*’s final image. After Art’s last interview with his father comes to an end, Spiegelman ends the novel on a drawing of Vladek’s gravestone (*Maus II* 136). By this point, the reader has known for a while that Vladek has already passed away before the book’s publication, so the image comes as no surprise, but the construction of the image itself is worth noting. Vladek’s name and the dates of his birth and death are inscribed on the left side of the stone, and on the right side, the reader sees Anja’s name, as well as her own birth and death. Below the tombstone, however, Spiegelman leaves his own signature, and instead of the dates of his life span, he includes the span of years during

which he wrote *Maus*. Above them all, the Spiegelman family surname and a Star of David line the top of the grave, towering over the names of all three (*Maus II* 136). The image that Spiegelman leaves his readers, then, is another dialogically-composed visual. The Vladek the readers bid farewell to in this final panel is not merely a father understood through his own memories; neither is he just the father as seen by his son. His depiction in the narrative is, again, a dialogic creation, a character drawn, expressed, and understood through the interactions between *Maus*'s many voices. Chute gives a similar conclusion, arguing that "the drawn grave indicates Spiegelman's attention to the idea of text as a social space, here particularly as a collaborative fabric created by father and son (and absent mother) that produces no single master of enunciation, but several interacting enunciators" (219). Spiegelman does not allow any one voice to provide closure on who Vladek is and the type of person he becomes throughout his tragic life. No one perspective can capture Vladek accurately or in his entirety—his depiction in the novel is the epitome of Bakhtinian unfinalizability. Therefore, the reader must see *Maus*'s depiction of Vladek as an inherently heteroglossic construction—a man seen through his own eyes, as well as those of his son and of history.

Spiegelman himself has said as much in various interviews about *Maus* since its first publication. In an interview with *The National* in 2015, in particular, Spiegelman speaks about how his primary desire with *Maus* was not just to tell his father's story, but to interact and dialogue with Vladek's story through the work:

I was trying to tell the story of what it would mean to understand his story, so it was about my relationship with him and what it is that he lived through. It goes from right before to after the Holocaust, but it's basically talking to my father as an old man and looking at our difficulties with each other in such a way that I'm

trying to reinhabit his past enough to understand it. So it's about a cartoonist trying to understand his father by making a comic book about what he went through. ("Graphic Novelist")

Spiegelman's response implicitly rejects the notion that *Vladek* is meant to be read through any one perspective. Instead, he proposes that *Vladek's* portrayal in the novel is a creation formed through the interactions between the novel's various voices, including Art and *Vladek*—as well as both characters' interactions with the historical effects and perceptions of Holocaust survivors in the decades following World War II. Therefore, as the previous chapter has treated Spiegelman's depiction of the Holocaust as a dialogic construction, this chapter will specifically approach *Maus's* portrayal of *Vladek* as a character born from the dialogic interactions between Art, *Vladek*, and various historical forces.

Vladek's Narrative

From the opening pages of *Maus I*, the reader can already see a clear disparity of intention between Art and *Vladek*, particularly in how they each think the story should be told. Art explicitly states, at various moments, that he wants to write *Vladek's* story as fully and accurately as possible. For example, when he first enters *Vladek's* apartment in Rego Park and proposes the idea to his father, Art says, "I still want to draw that book about you. The one I used to talk to you about. About your life in Poland, and the war . . . Start with Mom. Tell me how you met" (12). Art is clearly not just writing a book about the Holocaust or relegating *Vladek's* narrative to his survival of the ghettos and the camps. For Art, *Vladek's* story requires a wider lens, looking not only at public history but at private history, as well, which is why Art asks his father to begin with how he met and married Anja. Art tells *Vladek* that their private histories enhance and add depth to public histories, saying that "it's great material. It makes everything

more real—more human” (23). His hope with *Maus* is to be as comprehensive as possible; as he says to Vladek, “I want to tell your story, the way it really happened” (23).

Although Vladek acquiesces, telling Art the sensitive personal details surrounding his courtship and marriage to Anja, he also asserts that such anecdotes have no place in his story. The entire first chapter of *Maus* recounts the tale of Vladek’s relationship with Lucia Greenberg, a former lover whom Vladek spurns in order to pursue a marriage with Anja. Lucia’s unrequited love for Vladek and her jealousy of Anja drive her to sabotage the couple’s relationship, telling Anja false details about Vladek’s life, but Vladek manages to resolve the conflict and regain Anja’s trust, leading to their marriage and his employment with Anja’s father (*Maus* I 22). Upon telling this entire story to Art, however, he subsequently demands that none of it be included in *Maus*. He says, “I don’t want you should write this in your book. It has nothing to do with Hitler, with the Holocaust! . . . This isn’t so proper, so respectful. I can tell you other stories, but such private things, I don’t want you should mention” (23). From the outset of this work, Vladek’s conception of his narrative is detached from the messy personal details of his past; he appears to want to include only that which further explains his and Anja’s survival of the Holocaust. Vladek has his own perspective of what would and would not add value to his narrative, and as a result, he consistently pushes Art to remove extraneous details, particularly those which may distort and distract the audience from the horrors of the Holocaust and their effects on his family.

This disparity of vision leads to what may be the first major dialogic conflict between Art and Vladek in the work, a conflict which sets a precedent for the chapters to come. The chapter ends with Art surrendering to Vladek’s requests, promising that he will not include the anecdote about Lucia’s jealousy and Vladek and Anja’s rocky beginning. However, as the reader has just finished reading about these stories, it is clear that Art has not kept those promises, revealing the

specific details of Vladek's past that he was forbidden to tell. As Emily Miller Budick writes, "We aren't even past the first chapter of [*Maus*] when the father exacts a promise from the son that the son will violate over and over again in the writing of his text . . . The violation first occurs in a kind of negative speech act in which the assertion of the son's words "I promise" is abrogated in the narrative's breaking of that promise" (379). Art's promise is immediately repealed by the fact that Spiegelman has already included Lucia's story. This raises the question: is Spiegelman being dishonest or unethical by including this part of Vladek's past? Does he have the right to include his father's personal details simply because he knows them, or does he have an obligation to tell Vladek's story the way Vladek wished it to be told?

While there is clearly a sort of breach of Vladek's trust in Spiegelman's decision to break his promise, his choice to portray this scene the way he does provides an elegant and dialogical solution to the conflict. By including the fact that Vladek did not wish for these anecdotes to be told, Spiegelman avoids being disingenuous or inauthentic in his portrayal of Vladek's voice. Additionally, by letting Vladek voice his dissent against this authorial decision, Spiegelman employs a type of Bakhtinian polyphony into the moment, where it is clear that the characters of the work are allowed to hold their own beliefs, perspectives, and ideas that may contradict those of the author. At the same time, Spiegelman can still include these "forbidden narratives" and remain true to his own aesthetic convictions as an author, his desire to be comprehensive and transparent about his father's history. As a result, Spiegelman ends up becoming more trustworthy to his audience specifically because of his willingness to portray this dialogic conflict between disparate voices throughout the pages of *Maus*. As James Young writes, "Artie promises not to betray certain details only to show us both the promise and betrayal together. Indeed, it may be Artie's unreliability as a son that makes his own narrative so reliable" (676).

By allowing his characters to exhibit polyphonic freedom, while still remaining true to his ethics of storytelling, Spiegelman establishes a sense of credibility in his telling of a narrative that seems beyond the authority of any one person.

This dialogic portrayal of Vladek's narrative also allows Spiegelman to authentically recount narrative anecdotes that cannot be historically verified and that he may take personal issue with. Later on in *Maus I*, Vladek has been drafted into the Polish army to fight against the Nazi invasion of Poland, but in the midst of battle, he is captured and put to work at a camp for prisoners of war. Vladek explains that during this time, his Jewish faith became important to him: "Every day we prayed. I was very religious, and it wasn't else to do" (54). Vladek befriends a rabbi in the prison camp, as well, and prays with him and a few others before work on some days. These details seem superfluous at first, but they become particularly significant one night, when Vladek has a vivid dream in which he believes that his late grandfather is speaking to him. His grandfather tells him, "Don't worry, my child. You will come out of this place – Free! On the day of Parshas Truma" (57). Vladek asks the rabbi when Parshas Truma will arrive, learning that the day is three months away, and surely enough, when the day comes, he is miraculously released and returned to his hometown. The rabbi tells him that he must be divinely chosen to see the future. Vladek also reveals to Art that this day continues to hold special significance for the Spiegelman family in the years to come: "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!" (59). Throughout this passage, Art allows Vladek to share this unusual and ambiguous anecdote, and at no point does he question or cast unnecessary doubt on it.

Spiegelman's decision to leave this story unaltered and untested speaks again to his willingness to let Vladek be an untainted voice that adds to the dialogic significance of his own narrative. Spiegelman himself does not seem to hold to the same religious beliefs as Vladek, who, though far from orthodox and prone to theological doubt after his experiences at Auschwitz, still maintains a degree of traditional Judaism. In his own analysis of the religious aspects of *Maus*, Stephen Tabachnik writes that Vladek was likely "prone to accept the idea of such prophetic interventions in human life," and he quotes Alan Berger, who says, "That Vladek feels compelled to tell the story of the Parshas Truma dream and its outcome to his son indicates some belief that divine providence plays a role in his rescue and survival" (3).

In contrast, Spiegelman's religious beliefs tend toward a sort of atheistic spirituality. In an interview in *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman's daughter Nadja says, "I had an anti-religious upbringing. 'Religion is the opiate of the masses,' was one of the first famous quotes I learned" (85). Additionally, Art mentions in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" that at his mother's funeral, he rejected common Jewish prayers, instead reciting verses from the Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Maus I* 102). However, although Spiegelman himself does not hold to Jewish beliefs, he treats the Parshas Truma story with respect, letting Vladek tell it without any skeptical interlude. He reflects on this decision in an interview with Chute, saying, "I didn't want to impose my cynicism on events so significant to my parents' understanding of what they went through . . . Referencing Parshas Truma allowed an indication of what Vladek's religious upbringing was like . . . If I was making this story up, I'd never have come up with those particular anecdotes, but they seem central to my parents' stories" (*MetaMaus* 20). Because these stories hold significance for Anja and Vladek, Spiegelman includes them, and yet, because he has established Vladek's voice so strongly in the narrative, he can recount this story from Vladek's perspective

without betraying his own disparate beliefs. Vladek and Art can both speak for themselves in *Maus*, and the reader can see both voices at work in the construction of this single narrative.

Dialogically composing Vladek's narrative also clarifies elements of the work that a monologic form of storytelling may either obscure or manipulate, which is precisely why Art becomes so enraged when he learns that Vladek has burned all of Anja's old notebooks and diaries at the end of *Maus I*. For Spiegelman, the more voices that contribute to the story, the more truthful, or at least honest, it can become. A multiplicity of perspectives does not hinder Vladek's narrative or render it wholly ambiguous; on the contrary, it brings the depths of his story to light. Ewert notes Art's desire for a polyphonic narrative, writing that "[Art's] repeated requests for [Anja's] diaries indicate that he did not originally see the project as Vladek's individual narrative, but as the story of his whole family" (91). However, in contrast to Art, Vladek is less interested in remembering his personal history as comprehensively and truthfully as possible; there are too many difficult, disturbing events that he would rather forget—which is an understandable position, considering his history. Therefore, instead of adding to the voices of his past, he finds it easier to reduce them, which may be why he chose to destroy Anja's notebooks. As he says to Art, "After Anja died I had to make an order with everything. These papers had too many memories. So I burned them" (159). Vladek's solution to the difficulties of his memories is to forget or conceal the more problematic aspects in order to find a sort of personal reconciliation with all that has happened. Art, however, cannot find peace in the silencing of Anja's voice, and he likens Vladek's burning of the notebooks to murder: "God damn you! You-you murderer! How the hell could you do such a thing!! (159). For Art, the loss of Anja's voice is akin to the loss of her personhood, so inasmuch as he may understand why Vladek chose to do such a thing, the act wholly contradicts the heart of his project. Michael E.

Staub explains the ambivalence of this moment well, writing that “burning the diaries [permits Vladek] to replace the closed record left by his wife with his own subjectivity. His son, in turn, uses *Maus* both to record outrage at such an utterly selfish and despicable act and also to recreate—in many ways sympathetically—the circumstances of guilt, pain, and confusion that made such an act possible” (37). Therefore, the rift formed between Art and Vladek in the closing moments of *Maus I* exemplifies just how integral the notion of dialogue is to Spiegelman and to *Maus* as a whole.

In addition to letting Vladek speak for himself and allowing Art to portray elements of Vladek’s narrative that he could never verify, Spiegelman’s dialogic method of composing Vladek’s story also enables him to simultaneously represent moments of discursive contradiction, where two or more accounts of an event directly conflict with each other. Perhaps the most famous example of this can be observed in the orchestra scene in *Maus II*, where Art wrestles with how to visually represent a moment where Vladek’s memories contradict confirmed historical details. Vladek is recounting to Art the details of his experiences participating in the forced marches each day at Auschwitz. In the first panel on the page, Spiegelman shows the Jews being marched in while an orchestra plays in the background. Art justifies this depiction by saying to Vladek, “I just read about the camp orchestra that played as you marched out the gate” (*Maus II* 54). Vladek, however, rejects this detail, saying, “An orchestra? No, I remember only marching, not any orchestras” (54). Art voices his doubts about the accuracy of Vladek’s memories, noting that the orchestras had been consistently historically documented, but he ultimately concedes this point, and in the following panel, the spot that had previously been occupied by the orchestra has been covered up by more prisoners marching into the camp. However, upon closer inspection of the background, pieces of the orchestra’s musical

equipment can still be seen peeking over the prisoners, almost as if Spiegelman wants to quietly slip in their inclusion, to maintain historical accuracy. In these panels, then, Spiegelman visually unites the two separate discourses. Ewert rightly notes that in this moment, Spiegelman does not “wholly reject his father’s account,” but “he is also reluctant to disregard an event that is elsewhere well-documented” (90). Therefore, in the interest of honestly representing both voices, Spiegelman allows both accounts of the forced marches to remain in *Maus* both visually and textually, thus offering a heteroglossic solution to the disparities in accounts.

Spiegelman himself has spoken often about how integral the orchestra scene is to his creative and epistemological methods for *Maus*, in that it shows how he sought to resolve such tension as he wrote the work. In *MetaMaus*, he says, “It was obvious to me, doing my homework, that Vladek’s memory didn’t jibe with everything I read. I knew I had to allude to that somewhere” (29). The dissonance between his father’s account and the historical facts in this particular instance posed many questions, but it seemed to provide an integral platform through which he could ask some of the primary questions he wrestled with in *Maus*’s composition. As he recalls, “I was trying to figure out where the elision should be: do I just correct errors based on other people’s authority? Or do I ignore other people’s authority and go strictly with Vladek’s memory as if it was an objective correlative that could be drawn?” (30). The orchestra anecdote may seem petty—its inclusion or exclusion bears little thematic weight for the narrative—but for Spiegelman, it offered a vivid and tangible manifestation of the epistemic conflict that comprises the very core of the *Maus* project. Does he correct the inaccuracies of his father’s memories, or does he allow them to persist, giving them authority over the historical elements of his work?

The solution he ultimately chooses maintains the integrity of both Vladek's memory and history. On the one hand, he allows Vladek to assert the validity of his account, giving him a polyphonic voice into the narrative; as he says, "What's really important here was allowing Vladek to say [that there was no orchestra] . . . It's very possible that for him the orchestras didn't exist, and I don't want to deny that" (30). However, in the face of insurmountable historical evidence, Spiegelman feels compelled to maintain accuracy to those accounts, hence including the orchestra in both panels, even if Vladek's distorted memories crowd it out in the latter. Spiegelman himself refers to this moment as one of the most integral examples of "complex visual dialogue" in his work, and he manages to stay true to competing accounts by allowing them both to dialogically interact on the page (31). Thus, Vladek's narrative does not become the product of any one voice; throughout its duration, Spiegelman narrates his father's story in such a way that each voice expresses its perspective within the book, resulting in a dialogically-composed narrative that remains true to historical accounts, Vladek's memories, and Spiegelman's aesthetic convictions. Young calls this method of dialogic narration "received history—a narrative hybrid that interweaves both events of the Holocaust and the ways they are passed down to us" (669).

Vladek's Personhood

For all that *Maus* does to provide a lens through which to understand his narrative, Vladek as a person is still wholly unfinalizable—in Andrew Gordon's words, he is "a character of monumental contradictions" that cannot be perfectly portrayed through *Maus* (58). Each voice in the work further characterizes and adds depth to his personality, but at the same time, they also tend to distort his nature in various ways, including Spiegelman's authorial voice. As the author of the work and Vladek's son, Spiegelman provides insight into Vladek's character that

no other voice could possibly share; however, because of his proximity to Vladek and the ways in which their relationship was strained, he, too, cannot be singularly authoritative in describing Vladek's nature. As Spiegelman writes, "Vladek displays himself to be a much more complex character than I'd, literally, have imagined . . . that was the process of doing *Maus*—finding Vladek as more multifaceted than what would happen with my more meager imagination. The advantage to using the stuff of real life is that one really is left with people who are far more interesting than what one could ever make up" (*MetaMaus* 36). Therefore, as he does with Vladek's narrative, Spiegelman uses the many voices that comprise his work, including his own, to better contextualize and represent Vladek's nature as a person, both during his survival of the Holocaust and in the decades that follow World War II.

One of Spiegelman's biggest obstacles in trying to represent Vladek truthfully and honestly is the cultural dialogue surrounding the Holocaust at the time of *Maus*'s publication. In the years following World War II, western culture became increasingly aware of the Holocaust and the atrocities committed against the Jewish people during that time. In response, many artists sought to represent and illuminate these tragic realities in their work—presumably out of a desire that humanity might never allow something similar to happen again. Countless books and films were made and widely distributed, to the point where art and media concerning the Holocaust were greatly profitable and saturated the market—and still does, to this day. Presently, even a brief look at bookstore shelves or box office records reveals a long list of critically and commercially successful artistry using the Holocaust as its backdrop or subject matter, such as Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful*, as well as the many works of Jewish authors such as Will Eisner and Elie Wiesel. Such lucrative artistry inevitably led to a

commercialization and genericization of Holocaust culture. As Spiegelman once remarked in an interview, “As they say, there’s no business like *Shoah* business” (qtd. in Staub 41). Staub calls this “the enormous selling potential of Nazism. . . the commercialization of Holocaust memories in the modern (and postmodern) world” (41). With the pervasiveness of Holocaust literature in the latter half of the twentieth century comes an increasing perception of such literature as its own sub-genre, subject to its own tropes and conventions. By making the Holocaust a genre replete with its own stereotypical elements, much of its true identity has become obscured and oversimplified. Spiegelman has spoken on this issue at various points throughout his career, criticizing what he calls “Holokitsch,” literature that offers “fatuous attempts to give [the Holocaust] a happy ending” (qtd. in Staub 41).

Within this context, one of the most common effects of such oversimplification and obscuring of reality is the tendency to idealize and beatify the survivors of the Holocaust in unrealistic ways, a convention of the genre that Spiegelman actively seeks to resist. Staub writes that many readers face the impulse “to see survivors—or their children—as either saints or heroes, or indeed to prettify in any way the ‘moral lessons’ one can draw from the Holocaust” (41). Because Holocaust survivors have experienced atrocities beyond any one man’s comprehension, readers wish to see them as faultless and innocent, and similarly, readers often want to see their survival of the Holocaust as a consequence of their intrinsic goodness or moral behavior. The problem, however, with such idealistic machinations is that they do not adhere to reality—and the moral implications of such ideas are problematic, at best. As Spiegelman says in an interview, “If only admirable people were shown to have survived, then the implicit moral would have been that only admirable people deserved to survive, as opposed to the fact that *people* deserved to survive” (qtd. in Ewert 102). The Jewish people were not saints or noble

martyrs; they were human beings, placed into the most impossible and disturbing of circumstances—innately flawed yet intrinsically valuable. For this reason, Spiegelman reflects on his work in *Maus*, saying, “I was trying to not sentimentalize: it never had occurred to me to try to create a heroic figure, and certainly not to create a survivor who’s ennobled by his suffering . . . and that meant a warts-and-all relationship [with Vladek]” (*MetaMaus* 33). Therefore, contrasting against the genericized cultural voices that had begun to pervade art concerning the Holocaust, Spiegelman’s depiction of Vladek resists the dominant cultural monologue, showing Vladek’s strengths, weaknesses, and even his moral flaws. As Art says near the end of *Maus I*, “I’m just trying to portray my father accurately” (132).

For this reason, Spiegelman allows his personal memories to provide a dialogic perspective into Vladek’s nature, revealing his father’s many flaws. For example, *Maus* opens on a scene from Art’s childhood; Art falls and hurts himself while skating with friends, but when he runs to his father to be comforted, Vladek merely minimizes his pain by comparing it to his survival of the Holocaust (5-6). Later in the book, Art recalls how “Whenever [he] needed school supplies or new clothes Mom would have to plead and argue for weeks before [Vladek would] cough up any dough” (*Maus I* 131). Art’s childhood is pervaded with moments like these, when Vladek’s seeming lack of empathy causes him to treat his family unkindly, leading Art to often feel unloved, detached, and disconnected from his father.

Vladek’s flaws continue to manifest themselves throughout the book’s present-day narrative, as well. Throughout the work, Vladek is irritable, cranky, and ill-tempered; he regularly fights with Art and Francoise, and his relationship with his new wife Mala is filled with persistent bickering and domineering attitudes. When Art first enters his apartment, Vladek yells at Mala because she uses a wire coat hanger for his son’s jacket instead of a wooden one (*Maus I*

11). He criticizes her cooking in front of Art (21), regularly tells Art that he does not trust her with his money (67), and refuses to buy her new clothes, instead, making her wear clothes from Anja's old wardrobe (131). Vladek also seems to be rather stingy and miserly with his money, despite the fact that he is financially stable. At one point, Mala tells Art, "He has hundreds of thousands of dollars in the bank, and he lives like a pauper! Look! He grabs paper towels from rest rooms so he won't have to buy napkins or tissues!" (132). Similarly, in *Maus II*, Vladek returns several bags of partially-eaten grocery store items in order to get just a few dollars in return, going as far as to use the fact that he's a Holocaust survivor to manipulate the store's manager into sympathizing with him (90). Throughout the entire work, these moments inevitably arise, and Spiegelman persistently reminds the reader that Vladek is unpleasant to be around. As Art sarcastically quips, "I'll bet you that Anja's notebooks were written on both sides of the page . . . If there were any blank pages Vladek would never have burned them" (*Maus II* 89). *Maus*'s flawed and ill-tempered survivor stands in stark contrast to the monologic cultural conventions of survivors in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of Vladek's flawed nature occurs when he, Art, and Francoise drive home from the grocery store, and Francoise picks up an African-American hitchhiker. Seeing him on the side of the road on a particularly hot day, Art and Francoise give him a ride without a second thought, but Vladek angrily disapproves. For the entire ride, he mumbles to himself in Polish, saying, "Oh my God! What's happened to his wife? She's lost her head!! I just can't believe it! There's a SHVARTSER sitting in here!" (*Maus II* 99). Later, once they have dropped the hitch-hiker, Vladek openly rebukes Francoise, complaining that he had to make sure their groceries would not be stolen for the entire trip (99). This moment of acute and pointed discrimination is shocking to Francoise, as well as readers, as

Vladek's unapologetically racist attitude toward African-Americans seems absurd considering the events he has survived. Francoise even points this out, telling Vladek, "You talk about blacks the way the Nazis talked about the Jews," but he cannot be convinced otherwise (99). To the reader, it appears as if, for all that Vladek has endured, his survival has not particularly made him a better person; it has only made him more angry, less trusting, and selfish. Loman argues the same, noting that this moment is one of several that "collectively suggest that Vladek's salvation from a murderously racist milieu will not be perfect, and that in America he himself will perpetuate, *mutatis mutandis*, the racism to which he has been subject in Germany and Poland" (558). Vladek's suffering is not particularly redemptive; instead, it exacerbates already-existent character flaws. In these ways, by including his own perspectives on Vladek, as well as those of Mala, Francoise, and other loved ones, Spiegelman provides a competing voice that dialogically conflicts with common artistic conventions of Holocaust literature.

However, despite all that Spiegelman shows to illuminate Vladek in a less-than-favorable light, Vladek's own words and actions provide yet another voice to the dialogue, pushing Art and readers of *Maus* to empathize with him, despite his many flaws. As Spiegelman remarks in *MetaMaus*, "The very process of giving voice and visual gesture to Vladek was a way of inhabiting his point of view so he could be more than I might have otherwise reduced him to" (35). Seeing his actions in the work, Vladek can easily be dismissed as unlovable—or oversimplified as racist, miserly, or emotionally abusive. However, as Art continues to interact with his father, Vladek proves to be more nuanced than expected. For example, in *Maus I*, Vladek accidentally finds and read a copy of "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," a short comic where Art wrestles with the traumas he experienced after his mother's suicide. When Art brings it up with him, the reader might expect Vladek to respond in a way that matches his portrayal in the

book up until then—angrily or dismissively. However, to Art’s surprise, Vladek says, “I saw the picture there of Mom, so I read it...and I cried. It’s good you got this outside your system” (104). Unexpectedly, Vladek acknowledges Art’s emotions and empathizes with his pain; he does not chide Art for sharing private information unnecessarily, and he avoids minimizing Art’s feelings or overshadowing them with his own. Art and Vladek share a brief moment of mutual grief—and through it, a real connection. In *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman reflects on the surprise he felt in this memory:

Narratively, this discussion of “Hell Planet” is rich—the characters aren’t allowed to reduce themselves to cartoon types . . . Vladek displays himself to be a much more complex character than I’d, literally, have imagined. I wouldn’t have given Vladek the credit for being sensitive enough to say, “It’s good that you got this outside your system.” He didn’t tend to acknowledge my needs and feelings, and I would have been prone to think of him as responding with hurt and anger that I revealed something too intimate. (36)

This brief scene, as Spiegelman notes above, provides an important dialogic counterbalance to the many moments that portray Vladek’s flaws. It even contradicts much of Art’s own experiences with his father; therefore, by including it, Spiegelman once again allows his father a sense of polyphonic freedom to be as nuanced a character as possible, avoiding the reduction of a monologic narrative.

Even Vladek’s apparent stinginess and miserly behavior takes on an added dimension when considering Vladek’s history. On the one hand, as Spiegelman tells Mala, “He’s just like the racist caricature of the miserly old Jew,” due to his desire to hoard his money and cut costs on the smallest of purchases (*Maus I* 131). However, as Art continues to interview Vladek, he

learns that Vladek's keen use of resources was one of the primary reasons he and Anja were able to survive the ghettos and the death camps. At various moments throughout the work, Vladek recalls how he was able to scavenge enough food for the two of them to survive or how he found scattered valuables that bought them their necessary resources. During their time in the camps, while Vladek works as a tinsmith, he actively trades resources with other Polish prisoners, managing to get higher-quality food and better clothing. Later, once he gets in touch with Anja, his trades and bribes allow him to send letter to her, along with bread to give her strength, all of which is the result of his strict resource management (*Maus II* 48-53). With all of the anecdotes that portray Vladek's smart use of even the most meager of items, one must conclude that Vladek's apparent "stinginess" may precisely be what allowed he and Anja to make it out of the camps as healthily and safely as they do. In a conversation with Pavel, Art admits, "Sure, I know there was a lot of luck involved, but he was amazingly present-minded and resourceful" (*Maus II* 45). Therefore, even when Vladek's harsh and miserly attitudes bring pain to his family and loved ones, Spiegelman allows readers to see why Vladek acts the way he does, giving further dimension to even his negative characteristics.

By the end of *Maus*, Art has not perfectly reconciled with Vladek, nor has he come to terms with his father's many moral flaws. Art still finds Vladek to be a difficult presence in his life, and he avoids spending unnecessary time with him—as seen, for example, in his repeated requests that Vladek stay in the hospital rather than come home with him during his health issues (*Maus II* 127). However, in the work's ending pages, the reader can see that Art has become more willing to understand his father and the reasons behind his actions; his relationship with his father has evolved in such a way that allows his perception of Vladek to avoid rote reductions or simplifications. Art discovers a sense of unfinalizability in both his perception and portrayal of

his father, built through the dialogic interactions between his own memories, as well as those of his father and his loved ones. This growth in perspective seems to be why Spiegelman resists showing the actual photograph of Vladek until the final pages of the work (*Maus II* 134). As Spiegelman reflects, “I knew how important [this photo] was to the entire project, and I knew that placing it was important. It had to come somewhere after other things had happened in the book. By the time one nears that point in the narrative, one already has a very clear picture of who Vladek is, even though one hasn’t a clue as to what he looks like” (220). This first glimpse of a real photograph of Vladek reflects that the *Maus* project has given Spiegelman a truer, more real understanding of his father as a person. Vladek is no longer simply the mouse-like construction on the page; he is portrayed in a fuller way, built through multi-voiced expressions that provide deeper insight into his character without unnecessarily categorizing him. Hathaway writes, “Spiegelman’s innovative ‘structuration’ of his father’s stories may continue to baffle those who need to find one generic pigeonhole for it, but that elusiveness is also the source of its continued narrative power” (265).

Therefore, as readers can see through both his narrative and his character, Spiegelman’s portrayal of Vladek in *Maus* is clearly dialogic in nature. In composing his depiction of Vladek’s survival of the Holocaust, Spiegelman relies on the interactions and conflicts between his father’s memories and historical records to provide a more comprehensive picture of his narrative. Similarly, in trying to portray his father’s character, both faithfully and accurately, Spiegelman recognizes the cultural context surrounding Holocaust literature and survival stories, and he allows his honest portrayal of Vladek to actively and dialogically resist oversimplified conventions. However, despite his desires to reveal Vladek’s many moral failings, Spiegelman still allows Vladek’s words and actions to provide yet another dialogic dimension to his

character. Consequently, by the end of the work, the reader's conception of Vladek is both more comprehensive and less prone to false categorization. As Spiegelman himself says, "We are none of us ourselves. And that's what makes us a self, and that was the process of doing *Maus*" (36).

Chapter Four – ‘Rebuild Me All This’: The Dialogic Recoveries of Art Spiegelman

As seen in previous chapters, *Maus*'s central conflict is that of representation—the issue of how Spiegelman attempts to understand and depict historical events and human beings that are incomprehensible and unfinalizable, respectively—and his solution to the issue can be found in his multi-voiced approach to writing *Maus*. By composing the work dialogically, balancing the many discordant and conflicting perspectives that contribute to his father's narrative, Spiegelman succeeds in portraying the Holocaust and Vladek in more truthful ways than any one voice or perspective could possibly accomplish on its own. *Maus* derives a unity of thought through disparities of vision, exemplifying Bakhtin's theories regarding the importance of the novel. As Bakhtin writes, “the novel is an artistic system of languages,” and through analyzing it, readers can uncover “all the available orchestrating languages in the composition of the novel . . . and the varying angles of refraction of intentions within, understanding their dialogic interrelationships” (“Discourse” 461). What Spiegelman does in *Maus* reflects much of this process. Through the concurrent visual and textual narratives, coupled with the diversity of historical and familial accounts of the Holocaust, Spiegelman composes a hybridized system of languages and uses direct authorial discourse to gather them into one complex, almost paradoxical, yet unified expression of disparate voices. Chute notes this reconciliatory act, calling it “at once oppositional and commemorative” (219). Spiegelman does not attempt to force competing historical accounts to agree, but in synthesizing these disparities, he depicts a largely truthful account of his father and of the Holocaust as clearly as he can—through a unification of contradictions.

However, with this method in mind, one final question arises: what implications does *Maus*'s dialogic nature hold for Art as a character within his own work? *Maus* is certainly both historical and biographical, but it also clearly autobiographical, as well. While the work may use Vladek's tale as its narrative structure, Spiegelman never lets the reader forget that Vladek is

recounting his memories to Art. According to Joan Gordon, inasmuch as *Maus* is the story of Vladek as survivor, it is also “the tale of the survivor of survivors, a frame tale in which the frame overwhelms the story” (81). Art’s perspective bookends every single one of *Maus*’s eleven chapters, and the work seems just as concerned with Art’s thoughts and developments as a character as it is with Vladek’s survival narrative. Spiegelman is certainly crafting a dialogic work, giving vocal freedom to the many storytellers that inform his family’s history, but the reader cannot forget that Spiegelman, too, is one of those storytellers. Therefore, readers of *Maus* cannot properly approach the narrative without also analyzing Art’s role within it.

Art is clearly undergoing a sort of identity crisis throughout *Maus*, unsure of who he is in relation to the Holocaust, his family, and particularly his father. As he says to his therapist Pavel in *Maus II*, “No matter what I accomplish, it doesn’t seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz” (44). Because his conceptions of his past and his family are in constant flux, his own sense of selfhood is unfixed and erratic, a reality seen through Spiegelman’s visual representations of himself throughout the work. For example, in the notorious second chapter of *Maus II*, “Time Flies,” Art breaks away from the established visual convention of portraying himself as mouse; instead, he is a man wearing a mouse mask, exasperatedly trying to continue writing and drawing in his studio, while his thoughts swirl around him, disorganized and fractured. In the course of just a few panels, Art’s inner dialogue erratically shifts between his father’s death, his parents’ imprisonment in Auschwitz, the impending birth of his daughter, the gas chambers in the death camps, the critical and commercial success of *Maus I*, and his mother’s suicide. Amidst this chaotic flood of memories, the only words Art can muster are “Lately, I’ve been feeling depressed” (41). On the following page, surrounded by businessmen and journalists all seeking to profit from *Maus*’s success and to commercialize it, Art fractures

even further, as Spiegelman depicts Art shrinking to the size of a child, calling for his mom, and beginning to cry (42). Art's inability to make sense of the tragic immensity of the Holocaust and his own role in writing about it ruptures his sense of identity, and as a result, he is unable to formulate a consistent sense of selfhood. In light of passages like this within *Maus*, the question inevitably arises: through his reconstruction of his father's history, how does Art Spiegelman himself develop throughout the course of the work?

The answer, once again, can best be seen through *Maus*'s use of Bakhtinian polyphony and dialogism. Spiegelman inserts himself into the narrative of the work *in order to allow his fractured sense of identity to dialogically interact with his family's history*. He gives voice to the many internal conflicts he experiences throughout the process of writing *Maus*, allowing himself to polyphonically express the fragmentation he experiences as a second-generation Holocaust survivor, and in doing so, he saves his own perspective from being subsumed by other voices. As a result, by allowing his fractured identity to openly converse with the voices of history and of family, *Art himself undergoes a dialogic recovery of his own identity*. As Victoria Elmwood writes, "We can look to *Maus*'s multitiered metanarrative structure for evidence of the productive, though not always cooperative, interaction taking place between father and son that allows for a relationship in which Art Spiegelman creates an identity for himself with respect to his parents' experience of the Holocaust" (691). Though Art's identity is initially upended by his inability to reconcile himself to his past, he regains a sense of personhood through re-entering the conflicting dialogues with his family history. Therefore, by observing how Spiegelman allows Art's personal crises to openly conflict with the other voices in *Maus*, the reader can see how Art begins the process of making sense of himself, not through the unearned authority of a monologic voice, but through the competing interactions of many.

The Fractured Soul of Art Spiegelman

In 1992, Spiegelman composed a series of lithographs titled *4 Mice*, which mirrors *Maus*'s visual aesthetics, and one of the drawings in the series is exemplary of the internal conflicts that Art explores within *Maus*. The piece is titled "The Past Hangs Over the Future," and in it, an adult Art Spiegelman sits on the floor of his house, playing with his son Dashiell. As his son cradles a stuffed Mickey Mouse doll, Art looks down at him and pats him on the back. However, looming over this idyllic picture of father and son, harsh shadows take the form of Jewish corpses that hang from gallows, a ghostly visual relic of the Holocaust (*MetaMaus* 72). What should be an image of childhood innocence and parental relationship is wholly subsumed and overcast by the continually overwhelming realities of the Holocaust. "The central trauma of the twentieth century" lives on in every Holocaust survivor, and it is passed down to each successive generation (*MetaMaus* 74). As Staub repeatedly writes, "The Shoah goes on and on," a phrase which refers to "the continuing psychological damages inevitably inflicted on survivors and on survivors' children" (39-40). This, in essence, is the conflict at the heart of Art Spiegelman; he is a man inevitably and unavoidably haunted by his history. Art may not have lived through the Holocaust himself, but its aftershocks are formative for who he is and who he will become. Marianne Hirsch calls this notion "post-memory," the idea of "the child of the survivor whose life is dominated by memories of what preceded his/her birth" (8).

Spiegelman has spoken about the difficulties of being a second-generation Holocaust survivor in various interviews. In a talk with NPR, he reflects on the subtle and systemic ways that being the son of a survivor comes to define one's very being:

You grow up as a survivor's kid—it seems to be a common denominator—that as a kid, you're playing baseball or whatever and you break a window and then your

mother or father says, “Ach, for this I survived?” And that’s a heavy load to carry around for breaking a window with a baseball—or less. And it tends to make kids who grow up to become doctors, lawyers, professionals, overachievers of one kind or another, who tend to try very hard to make things easy for their parents. And for whatever mad molecule is in my particular genetic makeup, I was in rebellion against my parents from an early age and had a very difficult time coming to terms with them. (qtd. in Staub 40)

As the son of two Auschwitz survivors, Spiegelman inevitably grew up carrying much of the psychological weight of his parents’ histories, meaning that his childhood was wracked with guilt and with the fear of the past.

This post-memory that stems from his parents’ survival of the Holocaust becomes a key theme throughout *Maus*, particularly in the second volume, and Spiegelman polyphonically expresses these thoughts through the character of Art, allowing his own voice to be a key contribution to the dialogic field of the work. On his way to see Vladek in the Catskills, for example, Art confesses to Francoise the many ways that thoughts of the Holocaust pervaded his childhood. He reminisces, “I did have nightmares S.S. men coming into my class and dragging all us Jewish kids away. Don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t obsessed with this stuff . . . It’s just that sometimes I’d fantasize Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water” (*Maus II* 16). Although Art did not directly experience Auschwitz, his knowledge of his parents’ disturbing past affects his perception of the present, and it ruptures his sense of safety, making him feel like similar events could just as easily happen in his own life. In addition to these feelings of insecurity and fear, Art’s post-memory makes him feel guilty that his life has not been as difficult as his parents. As he confesses, “I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in

Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through! I guess it's some kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did" (16). Because Art was raised under the psychological weight that his parents held in light of their pasts, he becomes aware of just how much safer and more stable his own life is in comparison, and that realization results in guilt and feelings of inadequacy—the notion that his life and his struggles can never compare to that of his parents.

These traumas that underlie Art's childhood become even more problematic when considering his deceased brother Richieu. Richieu was Vladek and Anja's first child, born in 1937 while they still lived in Poland. He was raised by his parents until 1943, at which point Vladek and Anja leave him with his aunt Tosha in order to keep him safe from S.S. officers who were arresting Jews in Poland at that time. Because of the war, Vladek and Anja are unable to communicate with their family often, so they do not discover what happened to Richieu until much later, when they learn that he and two other children were poisoned by Tosha in order to save them from being captured by the Nazis and sent to Auschwitz (*Maus I* 109). Vladek and Anja are scarred by their loss of Richieu, and, understandably, they cannot come to terms with the reality of his death. As Art recalls, "After the war, my parents traced down the vaguest rumors, and went to orphanages all over Europe. They couldn't believe he was dead" (*Maus II* 15). By the time Art is born, several years after the Holocaust's end, all that physically remains of Richieu are just a few family photos, one of which hangs in his parents' bedroom, frozen in time, looming over Art for the majority of his childhood.

The trauma of losing Richieu becomes a specter that haunts the Spiegelman family for years to come, long after the Holocaust's end; more specifically, however, his death further contributes to Art's feelings of inadequacy and inability to contend with the horrors his family

has experienced. Talking to Françoise, Art recalls that he never talked about Richieu with his parents: “I didn’t think about him much when I was growing up...he was mainly a large, blurry photograph hanging in my parents’ bedroom” (15). However, although he was rarely discussed, the tangible weight of Richieu’s absence impacts Art greatly. For Art, Richieu represents all that he could never be—he is a foil to Art’s many shortcomings as a son. As he reflects, “The photo never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble. It was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn’t compete. They didn’t talk about Richieu, but that photo was a kind of reproach. He’d have become a doctor, and married a Jewish girl...the creep” (15). As Elmwood notes, Art feels that he is the “anti-Richieu,” a black sheep in his own family, unable to measure up to an idealized image of a son that could seemingly do no wrong (702). Richieu feels like an element of his parents’ history in a way that Art simply cannot be, exacerbating his anxiety that his physical distance from the Holocaust precludes him from being a true member of his own family. In this way, Art’s “sibling rivalry with a snapshot” further problematizes his sense of identity and purpose (*Maus II* 15).

Along with the loss of Richieu, Art also wrestles with the death of his mother Anja. Anja had experienced depressive episodes for the majority of her life, long before the events of the Holocaust, but in 1968, when Art was twenty years old, she unexpectedly committed suicide. The trauma that Art experiences in light of her death became the subject of “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” a four-page autobiographical comic that Spiegelman includes in the middle of *Maus I*. By inserting this comic into the middle of his work, Spiegelman contextualizes this tragic part of his personal history within the larger dialogic vision of his father’s narrative and their life after the Holocaust, but even further, the comic also illuminates the psychological traumas and guilt that come to light in Art’s reminiscence of his mother’s death.

The comic reveals that Art feels partially responsible for Anja's suicide, feeling like he could have done more to help her and care for her. For example, he recounts the last interaction he ever has with her, and he realizes that he had completely dismissed her pain at that time. As he recalls, Anja enters Art's room late at night, and she timidly asks, "Artie you...still...love...me...don't you?" (*Maus I* 103). Art, however, has grown increasingly cold to his parents, straining their relationship as he pursues his drawing career and a relationship with a girl his parents did not approve of. Consequently, in response to her desperate question, Art admits that "[he] turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord," and all he can manage to say to her is "Sure, Ma," after which she immediately leaves his room without saying another word (103). Unfortunately, this interaction becomes the last time Art ever sees his mother, making Art feel like his rejection and ignorance of her pain catalyzed her decision to end her life. Art feels the same responsibility that many experience when their loved ones commit suicide—the feeling that their loved ones' choice to die was somehow indicative of their quality of relationships, that if they had been treated better by their closest friends and family, perhaps they would have chosen to live. As Art confesses, "The guilt was overwhelming," and he consistently imagines that his decisions were a key factor in her death (102-103). People around him encourage these anxieties, too. As Staub writes, "His parents' friends reinforce this [guilt] by offering him 'hostility mixed in with their condolences,' implying that his life in the counterculture and his emotional breakdown killed her" (40). Contextualized within the fact that Art already experiences guilt in light of his parents' survival of the Holocaust and his inability to measure up to his phantom brother Richieu, these accusations, from himself and from others, deeply wound his sense of self-worth and cohesion.

It is within the context of these feelings of guilt that Spiegelman draws perhaps one of the novel's most blatant moments of Art's dialogic conflict of identity. In the middle of "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," once Art has expressed his feelings of guilt and responsibility, Spiegelman draws a panel where Art wrestles with his inability to understand the motivations behind his mother's death. At the top of the panel, Anja's body lies floating in the bathtub that she killed herself in, but below her, a picture of Jewish corpses from the Holocaust stands in stark contrast to an image of Anja reading Art a bedtime story, and below that, a picture of Anja preparing to slit her wrists stands immediately next to another image of Art, wearing a concentration camp uniform, bent over, with his face in his hands. Around all these images, Art's fragmented thoughts float through the air, including phrases like "menopausal depression," "Hitler did it," "Mommy," and "Bitch" (103). Art cannot make sense of her motivations and is left anxiously dwelling on his many fragmented feelings in response to the loss of her life.

Additionally, looking beyond "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," Art continues to wrestle with the fact that he no longer has access to her voice, her memories, or her perspective. Because Vladek burned all of Anja's old notebooks, leaving almost no remains of her past at all, Art cannot include her memories in the dialogic vision he creates in *Maus*; all that remains of her is filtered and distorted through Vladek's memories and his own. As Elmwood writes, throughout *Maus's* Holocaust narrative, "We only see Anja as an effect of Vladek's memory . . . We hear no examples of her capacity for survival or psychological endurance, or even a first-person account of her own frailty. Seen through Vladek's loving eyes, she is his charge, vaguely helpless, dangerously weak, and in constant need of his care and protection" (709). Because Spiegelman cannot access her through any other way than the memories of others, she cannot be drawn as fully and comprehensively as Vladek or Art. Therefore, even in his attempts to literarily resurrect

his mother through the memorializing act of composing *Maus*, Anja still retains a degree of absence from the work, creating distance between Art's memories of Anja and the actual woman herself.

In these ways and more, Art's post-memory of the Holocaust, his troubled relationship with his father, the conflicting feelings he has for Richieu, and the underlying trauma of his mother's suicide all contribute to the fractured image of Art Spiegelman that readers observe in *Maus*. As a character within the work, Art is haunted by the disturbing nature of his past and scarred by his inability to fully comprehend and reinhabit his family's history. Spiegelman inserts himself into the work because these crises of identity are a central thematic element to *Maus's* exploration of the epistemic problems of representation, and Art's personal conflict with his past becomes an integral voice within the novel's dialogic exchanges. The reader can see, manifested on the page rather than hidden behind the bounds of authorship, the reality of Art as a fragmentary being, unclear of who he is or how to reconcile himself to his past. As Elmwood concludes, "The disruptions resulting from the Spiegelman family traumas take the forms of fetishes, silenced testimonials, and specters—memories of the dead that continue to influence the living. The relationships that Art has with his father, mother, and dead brother all bear signs of trauma, signs that show how gaps and absences created by extreme events can bleed into the next generation" (692).

Art's Dialogic Recovery of Identity

However, as broken and desperate as Art appears throughout the work, the reader can see that through the act of composing *Maus* and entering into a dialogic exchange with his father's narrative and the history of the Holocaust, Art does not remain wholly fractured or broken. While he certainly still wrestles with the magnanimity of the Holocaust and the traumas

underlying his family history—and probably always will—the dialogic act of creating *Maus* allows Art to regain a sense of purpose and identity within his family history by transmitting it and gathering it into his own dialogic framework. Joan Gordon explains this process well:

How then is the son to survive? By making his own story, one which surrounds his father's and frames it . . . one which makes his father's *katabasis* the mysterious core of his own story, and one which makes as its aim a connection to his father . . . The son's story shows how to survive the survivor by showing what happens to memory when it leaves the mind of the one who remembers. (88-89).

By inserting himself into the story and making his understanding and transmission of Vladek's tale a central aspect of the work, Spiegelman manages to recover a sense of self and of purpose through the act of writing *Maus*, and this act of recovery can be seen in a few key areas.

One of the central ways that Spiegelman experiences this recovery of identity is through his willingness to embrace his role as the “family scribe and transmitter of history” (Elmwood 716). Although Spiegelman may be the only member of his family who did not personally experience the horrors of the Holocaust, which does alienate him from the direct experiences of his ancestors, by collecting as many of the experiences and memories of his family as possible, Art carves out his own unique role within his family history through unifying them into the dialogic vision seen in *Maus*. In a sense, Art finds purpose residing inherently within the act of heteroglossic construction—of being the author who transcribes history and ethnography by gathering the competing discourses and histories into one polyphonically resonant work. As Elmwood writes, “Spiegelman's role as narrative facilitator provides a means by which he narrates himself into the family legacy without appropriating the experience of the Holocaust as his own” (691). Even Vladek acknowledges that with *Maus*, Art has accomplished a task that no

one else in the Spiegelman family has done, providing a way to re-enter the dialogic complexities of his narrative more effectively and truthfully. Near the end of *Maus II*, he confesses to Art, “All such things of the war, I tried to put out from my mind once for all...until you *rebuild* me all this from your questions” (98). Vladek realizes that Art’s dialogic work has allowed him to make sense of his past in a way he was never able to through his own personal monologue. It is for this very reason that Hathaway calls *Maus* an act of “postmodern ethnography,” as Art’s ability to synthesize the competing discourses provides a unique and comprehensive window into his familial and cultural history (249). Therefore, by embracing his role as postmodern ethnographer, Art recovers a sense of purpose that post-memorial disruptions had initially fractured.

In addition to embracing his role as a sort of ethnographic scribe, Art also finds a degree of reconciliation with the memory of his brother Richieu. Although Art clearly wrestles with his inability to fully know his brother, as well as his feelings of inadequacy when compared to him, composing *Maus* allows Art opportunities to partially recover an understanding of his brother and humanize him through dialogically interacting with him in Vladek’s narrative. A key example of this dialogic interaction occurring in Art’s portrayal of Richieu can be seen in the middle of *Maus I*. Vladek has just been released from his imprisonment as a POW, and he sits at the dinner table with Anja’s family as they discuss the increasingly strict food rations in the Jewish ghettos and the rise of the black market. However, as the adults discuss these matters, Spiegelman illustrates an unusual exchange between Anja and Richieu. In the second panel on the page, Richieu appears to be misbehaving, throwing his food on the table, and in the following panels, Anja grabs his arm and rebukes him, Richieu begins to cry, and Anja picks him up and comforts him (*Maus I* 75). Meanwhile, throughout Richieu’s outburst, Vladek continues to talk

with the other adults, seemingly taking no notice of his son's misbehavior. Reading through this series of panels, the reader might assume, as Ewert proposes, "that Richieu craves his father's attention after such a long absence, but is unable to find an appropriate way to attract it," and then immediately move past it (88). However, upon further reflection, the idea that Vladek would tell Art an anecdote like this is extremely unlikely. The more probable likelihood is that this visual sequence is actually a moment of artistic license on the part of Spiegelman. The reader might wonder if such artistic license is unethical for Spiegelman to assert upon the reader; however, through this visual dialogic interjection into Vladek's narrative, Art succeeds in imbuing his deceased brother with a bit of humanity. As Ewert writes, although this scene may be an act of authorial speculation, "it is crucial to an understanding of one of the book's principal themes: Spiegelman's anger over his parents' idolizing of the dead Richieu (who 'never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble') . . . and his own sense that his care was neglected by his traumatized parents" (88). What Art accomplishes through this visual interjection is a moment of empathy and identification with his deceased brother; therefore, through this dialogic exchange, Art succeeds in recovering a sense of brotherhood with Richieu.

This act of humanizing and empathizing with Richieu can also be seen on the opening pages of *Maus II*. Right after the epigraph, Spiegelman includes the infamous picture of Richieu, the photograph that lay at the source of Art's "sibling rivalry with a snapshot" (*Maus II* 15). Around the photo, Spiegelman writes, "For Richieu," followed by "And For Nadja" (5). Through this act of dedication, Art demonstrates a willingness to move past the anxieties and conflicts that he admits characterized most of his upbringing. Richieu is no longer his rival; he is his brother, a part of his family history, and, by extension, a part of his recovered identity. The photo is no longer primarily a source of anger; it is a connection to his past. Additionally, by including his

dedication to Nadja, his daughter, directly below this picture of Richieu, the past and the future intertwine in this image, giving Art access to his history by connecting it to his progeny. Hirsch explains the significance of the photograph's inclusion well, writing:

Seeing, on the first page, a photo of Artie's dead brother Richieu . . . came to focus for me the oscillation between life and death that defines the photograph . . . As such, the photographs included in the text of *Maus*, and, through them, *Maus* itself, become what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de memoire*. 'Created by a play of memory and history,' *lieux de memoire* are 'mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity, enveloped in a Mobius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. (8)

Although Richieu is dead, and far beyond Art's reach, by including his presence in the novel, both through illustration and the photograph, Spiegelman brings his brother into dialogic reality, imbuing him with a sense of humanity that could not otherwise be accomplished.

A similar process can be seen in Art's dialogic interactions with Anja, as well. As mentioned above, Art is clearly still dealing with the trauma of his mother's suicide throughout the process of writing *Maus*, and he feels a certain amount of responsibility and guilt for his mother's death, much of which is still unreconciled by the work's end. However, by illustrating and composing Anja's history in *Maus*, as understood through Vladek's narrative, Art comes to discover some of the contributing factors to his mother's death. Art learns early on in *Maus I* that Anja has suffered from depression for most of her adult life, years before the Holocaust itself. As she says to Vladek one day early in their marriage, "It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. I don't know! I have a good family. A fine son. I should be happy. But I don't care. I just don't want to

live” (*Maus I* 31). In this way, through allowing his personal anxieties to dialogically interact with his family history, Art learns that he cannot bear the full weight of responsibility for Anja’s suicide. Additionally, by ending *Maus II* on the shared gravestone of Vladek and Anja, with Art’s signature written immediately beneath it, Spiegelman demonstrates that Art has found at least a degree of reconciliation with both Anja and Vladek, signing his name to their grave as if he bears a degree of complicity and identification with the life and death of his parents—an identification that he willingly embraces. In Spiegelman’s words:

To have all of [*Maus*] rest on a tombstone allows [*Maus*] to be, for me, like a *yahrzeit* candle, a memorial. So to have the whole book poised on the tombstone of Vladek and Anja together at last allows for the flipside of what’s shown when I showed them embracing two panels earlier. Putting their dates in it and then following it with my dates, as part of the signature, was not gratuitous. It’s part of knotting up, tying everything and leaving it as neat a bundle as one can without simplifying and distorting and lying. A place to stop. (*MetaMaus* 234)

Therefore, through dialogically interacting with his father’s narrative, Spiegelman narrows the rift between him and Anja, which results in a recovery of memories of his mother and an internal reconciliation with his parents that would otherwise remain distant and inaccessible.

In *Maus II*, during his therapy session with Pavel, Art concludes that throughout his writing of *Maus*, “[he] tried to be fair and still show how angry [he] felt” (44). This quote, in short, exemplifies the dialogic relationship Spiegelman shares with his work. Throughout the graphic novel, Spiegelman inserts himself into the narrative in order to give voice to the pains, the anxieties, the traumas, and the desperation he has experienced as a second-generation survivor. He reveals the many ways that his identity is fractured and bereft of purpose in light of

the traumatic memories that define his family's history. However, through the act of re-entering his family history by interviewing Vladek, Art regains a sense of purpose and identity through his role as family scribe and dialogic transmitter of history. Art carves a role into a familial ethnography that he had otherwise felt detached from, and by giving life to the few remaining memories and physical relics of his deceased family members, Art succeeds in humanizing them and recovering the aspects of his identity that had previously been problematized by their deaths. Spiegelman himself concludes, "In making this kind of work, one has to inhabit and identify with each character. You have to act out their poses, you have to think them through. So, in that sense, even though I am very resistant to the notion of my work being dismissed or understood as a therapeutic exercise, it is true that there is a kind of gestalting necessary just to be able to inhabit each character" (*MetaMaus* 35). Therefore, while the Holocaust remains incomprehensible and his family remains unfinalized, the dialogic vision that Art embraces in *Maus* allows him to recover a sense of personhood by crafting his identity within the context of his family history.

Conclusion

The Bakhtinian dialogical approach to *Maus* offers a few notable contributions to the critical field, the first of which is that it provides critics a balanced approach to reading the work, one that does not overstress or marginalize any one voice that contributes to its structure. Many works of scholarship in *Maus* criticism often incorrectly reduce the scope of the novel by overemphasizing one perspective within the work. As a result, these critical approaches incorrectly represent the graphic novel as a whole; instead of analyzing the work as a zeugmatic construction of many voices, *Maus* can easily be misrepresented as being merely Vladek's biography, Art's memoir, or a history of the Holocaust, when in fact, the work contains all these elements and more. *Maus*'s thematic significance lies not in any one of its voices or perspectives; it lies in the interactions and conflicts between each of these voices. Therefore, a more thorough analysis of the work cannot decontextualize one voice from the others. Bakhtin's view of the novel as a dialogic construction provides a helpful lens through which future scholarship can balance *Maus*'s many perspectives, and therefore, this approach effectively reveals the ways in which the work's thematic significance exists only in the tensions that arise between them.

Looking beyond *Maus*, this analysis also shows that Bakhtin's theories of polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia work exceedingly well with the graphic novel medium in general. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *The Dialogic Imagination* may predate the rise of the graphic novel as a medium for artistic storytelling, but the graphic novel's ability to convey meaning through various visual-textual languages at once provides an exemplary arena where multiple characters and voices can simultaneously conflict and coalesce with each other on the page. Spiegelman shows in his works that the graphic novel can be a multi-voiced construction, born of many perspectives at once, and in many ways, this analysis shows how the graphic novel

is even better-suited for polyphony and heteroglossia, due to its unique ability to offer competing narratives concurrently. As Dane Minich writes, “the comics medium in general and *Maus*, in particular, are capable of being embraced by Bakhtinian literary theory by displaying the characteristics of a modernist novel and transcending the misconceptions of [graphic novels’] limitations and uneducated nature to exploit heteroglossic language and engage the reader” (34). Therefore, this analysis creates the opportunity for further scholarship that approaches other graphic novels through a Bakhtinian lens.

Finally, Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism does not merely offer a means by which to approach the graphic novel; it provides a healthy and constructive disposition for human discourse and relationships as a whole. In most debates between two parties, whether they be in political, philosophical, or social arenas, discourse is commonly seen as an act of competition. Each participant digs into his ideological grounds, holds fast to his convictions, and never relinquishes any intellectual footing to his opponent. Western discourse regularly sees language as a struggle for power, not a means of understanding. In contrast, Bakhtin’s dialogic mode of thought sees discourse as a cooperative, not a competitive, act; conflicting ideas must interact with each other in order for the truth to be found. As Bakhtin writes, “truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person. It is born between people collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogic interaction” (*Problems* 110). Therefore, the concept of dialogic thought forces individuals to seek truth in community with others, knowing that it is only through cooperative acts of expression that the world can be known and understood.

Near the end of the *Maus* project, as Art Spiegelman sits with Pavel and dwells on the difficulties of constructing his father’s narrative, he quotes one of Samuel Beckett’s famous postmodern aphorisms: “Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness”

(*Maus II* 45). Art pauses for a moment after the quote and, before moving on, adds a corollary of his own: “On the other hand, he said it” (45). These two short lines of dialogue, in essence, comprise the central epistemic tension that underlies Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. On its own, each word spoken about the Holocaust, its horrors, and its victims falls woefully short of encompassing the tragic event in its entirety. As Art comes to realize through the course of the work, the full, complete, objective reality of the Holocaust will never be wholly known, understood, or expressed by any one human being. Within the shadow of the complexities of the Holocaust and the incalculable loss of human life that resulted from it, Art’s perspective, on its own, cannot begin to make sense of the immensities of the world around him. *Maus* exemplifies this Bakhtinian notion that truth cannot be found through monologic means.

However, to paraphrase the two quotes above, as inadequate as every voice is on its own, Spiegelman still speaks and still listens. Spiegelman’s authorial method of composing *Maus* reflects this dialogic epistemology, embracing the idea that it is only through the interactions of disparate and discordant voices that the world can be more truthfully and comprehensively understood. Bakhtin’s theories provide the necessary framework through which to understand *Maus’s* aims; the book clearly incarnates the notion that “[truth] is born between people collectively searching for truth in the process of their dialogic interaction” (*Problems* 110). By embracing this epistemology, Spiegelman accomplishes what few Holocaust narratives do. Through dialogically composing his vision of the Holocaust and of his father, using dissonant voices that conflict and interact with historical records, Spiegelman brings a degree of truthfulness and honesty to his family history that could not be expressed through monologue. Additionally, by embracing his role as the scribe and transmitter of family history, Spiegelman manages to find a role and a purpose within his family, thus recovering a sense of identity that

the fractures of post-memory had initially ruptured. In short, the reader that can see that Spiegelman's goal, above all, is to approach the truth that transcends mere individual experience or perspective. Though much of *Maus*'s depiction of reality must paradoxically account for disparities—and though these many voices seem to war with each other endlessly—in unifying these competing dialogues through his own unique lens, Spiegelman succeeds in finding brief and partial, yet ultimately hopeful, reconciliation.

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