ETHICAL FORM:

REPRESENTATION, IDENTITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

IN A.M. KLEIN'S The Second Scroll

AND ART SPIEGELMAN'S Maus

AMANDA GEORGE

Biblical Theme, Representation, Identity, and Responsibility in A.M. Klein's The Second

Scroll and Autobiographical Notes

by

Amanda George

Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

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Abstract

The event of the Holocaust persistently defies closure. As the years pass away from that event, Holocaust narratives remain a crucial agent of remembrance. A.M. Klein's novel *The Second Scroll* (1948) and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1980-1991) add to the rich body of Holocaust literature in unique ways. Both writers create hybridized forms of fiction through which to represent the Holocaust and its resultant emotional effects, and both assume a set of ethical responsibilities that are informed by their stylistic choices. Bringing Levinas' theory of ethical obligations to the Other to bear directly on the works of Klein and Spiegelman, this thesis shows that each writer attempts, as much as possible, to write in the service of truth and remembrance. In their prose experiments, Klein and Spiegelman repeatedly come face-to-face with the Other. The dynamic relationship between the formal properties of the texts and the authors' responsibilities to their projects creates an ethical, though not entirely resolved, discourse of meaning around the challenge of representing the Holocaust.

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Introduction

More than fifty years after the liberation of Auschwitz, we are no closer to a consensus on how the Holocaust "ought" to be portrayed in film and literature. My first awareness of the Holocaust came as a young girl of 12, when I discovered a dusty, hardcover copy of *The Diary of Anne Frank* among my parents' books. It was a Friday afternoon, and I, ever the passionate reader, began reading it that day. My bedtime came and passed, and, with my parents' permission, I stayed up until the early hours of the morning. I felt a kinship with Anne's sister—the quiet, studious Margot—while in Anne, I saw traits of my playful, outspoken sister. Eager to discover the fate of these two girls, I was overwhelmed with emotion after discovering that the siblings died, one after the other, in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. For the first time in my sheltered world, I encountered, through literature, a consciousness of genocidal violence.

Such is the power of art: the dissemination of powerful works in society helps to ensure remembrance, as new generations of readers gain the opportunity to experience, through art, that which they have not directly experienced. While an extensive body of Holocaust literature has been amassed since the end of World War II, the number of works in this genre continues to grow. As direct survivors of the Holocaust begin to age and pass away, Holocaust narratives, as well as scholarly works, become more crucial than ever in the service of the ethical representation of history and memory. It is in this vein—ethical representation—that I have decided to approach this thesis project. The primary texts that I have paired—A.M. Klein's novel *The Second Scroll* (1951) and Art Spiegelman's graphic narrative *Maus* (1986-1991)—are superficially dissimilar and

temporally separated by a span of about forty years. However, what makes these works fruitful for comparison is that each author has created a unique, hybridized form through which to tell the story of the Holocaust and its emotional and psychological effects. Klein, well known for his rich legacy of poetic works, created in *The Second Scroll* a complex narrative that draws on biblical and Talmudic influences, among many other literary sources, to take up the themes of post-Holocaust experience. Specifically, he sees the recently formed state of Israel as the political and spiritual antidote to a barbaric history. In addition to the work's elaborate deployment of metaphor and allusion, Klein supplements the main narrative with glosses that play with a variety of literary genres: poetry, letter, and drama. The effect is a multi-layered, richly textured text, a work that invites the reader to make sense of its elusive meaning, a process that parallels the quest of the central figure himself.

In contrast to Klein's text, which draws on "higher" literary forms, Spiegelman places his Holocaust narrative squarely in the pop-cultural realm, situating his story in the unlikely frame of the graphic novel. This is not to say that Spiegelman's text is not complex in its design and execution. On the contrary, the work obliges a similar level of reader attention and interpretation. His story, like Klein's, is multi-faceted. The writer's primary project is to present his father Vladek's Holocaust experiences as a written narrative. Meanwhile, his story also becomes an interpretation of his own guilt and trauma as the child of a survivor, even while he struggles to discover his place within his family dynamic. Both Klein and Spiegelman seek innovative ways to tell their stories of suffering and one of the most odious narratives of twentieth century history, and they do

so by experimenting with the formal properties of literature. My primary thesis question considers the fascinating and fruitful interaction between form and ethics in the works of these two authors. My contention is that these very forms of representation carry ethical consequences.

In my first chapter, "Holocaust Representation and Secondary Witnessing," I provide an overview of the challenges to Holocaust representation over the years, including questions of legitimacy and sayability, as well as the nature of ethics and memory. I also consider the traumatic challenges that are particular to second-generation and indirect victims of the Holocaust. Finally, I provide a brief overview of literary and cinematic representations of the Holocaust, and introduce the primary texts under consideration in this project. Chapter Two, "'Song Alternative': Ethical Responsibility and the Messianic Quest in A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*," considers Klein's Holocaust narrative from three specific points of reference: representation (form), responsibility (to distinct groups and individuals) and terms of reference (metaphors and allusions). I discuss how Klein's reimagined Torah/gloss structure demands that the reader confront the Holocaust as both historical event *and* complex text.

The third chapter, "'Reality is Too Complex for Comics': Trauma, Familial Obligation, and Object-Value in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," analyzes Spiegelman's project of graphic prose from a number of perspectives. I consider the ways in which *Maus* exists as a work of testimony and memory, and how Art (Spiegelman's cartoon self) acts as a (sometimes ethical, sometimes not) enabler of Vladek's testimony. I also address the text both *as* object and as a story of objects that become fetishized during Art's search for

his place within his family dynamic. Throughout my analysis, the Holocaust remains as a potent presence. In particular, I take up the theme of whether the Holocaust ought to be understood as a time-zero marker for an individual's life. Spiegelman privileges an alternate view: that familial history (and attempts to understand and come to terms with that history) is what ultimately provides context and meaning for one's life.

Both Klein's and Spiegelman's narrative experiments bespeak a continued crucial discourse on how to represent the Holocaust ethically. Their works add to the body of existing forms, and in themselves demonstrate that forms impose a series of ethical considerations on authors. In *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*, Alan Berger maintains that "the Contemporary children of Job are preparing their own testament as a legacy for the third, and subsequent generation(s). This legacy will, in turn, become part of the chain of tradition that helps shape future memory of the *Shoah*" (190). If so, then the works of Klein and Spiegelman, while clearly demonstrating that reconciliation of the event of the Holocaust is unlikely (and unhelpful), no doubt represent an attempt to make this legacy (Holocaust discourse) as ethical as possible—through their literary forms and through their continued face-to-face interactions with the Other.

Chapter 1

Holocaust Representation and Secondary Witnessing

What do we owe the unjustly dead, we who shared neither their faith nor their fate? Can we offer an act of memory, or are our tears hypocritical and our stories presumptuous? Do we honour their history with our Sophie's Choice *and our* Schindler's List*, or merely dramatize it for our own pleasure? Will our remembrance guard against repetition, or is it only self-congratulation?*

- *Kate Taylor,* Mme. Proust and the Kosher Kitchen: A Novel *(2003)*

Introduction

In a world increasingly confronted by trauma resulting from a lived experience of violence, the shadow of the Holocaust lingers, and the event refuses to offer full, neat closure. Just as recent or current genocides—Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur—elude lucid, comfortable explanations, so the Holocaust consistently defies a complete rationalization. Conceptions of Holocaust representation are shaped by the dominant *zeitgeist* of contemporary culture—that is, an essentializing sense of what the Holocaust *is*, and how, consequentially, it must be portrayed. In *Re-Presenting the Shoah for the Twenty-First Century*, Ronit Lentin maintains that images of the Holocaust are "both received history and obsession, as Auschwitz became part of the characteristic landscape of twentieth-century history" (2). If we agree with the notion of a collective "obsession" with the Holocaust, then considerations of representation and form become a key component in discussions of ethics. In fact, forms themselves carry ethical consequences. These consequences inform how artists portray the Holocaust in their attempts to describe,

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personalize, rationalize, or simply question paradigmatic understandings of this dark

period in human history. As one well known art historian notes,

> [The Holocaust] refuses to be historicized as an event safely ensconced in the past, and continues to drive a compulsion toward forms of reenactment by those who did not experience the original events, in response to the trauma experienced through intergenerational transmission. These reenactments are both similar to and different from the events or conditions to which they refer, expressing affinity and distance, embrace and resistance. (Apel 3)

Herein lies the problem of representation: artists who would represent the Holocaust—be

they filmmakers, novelists, poets, or graphic artists—must confront how to represent the

Holocaust meaningfully when not a direct victim of the atrocities committed by the

Nazis. In A.M. Klein's novel *The Second Scroll* (1951) and Art Spiegelman's graphic

novel *Maus* (1986-1991), each artist makes this crisis of representation an explicit theme.

In trying to represent the Holocaust ethically, Klein and Spiegelman find that traditional

forms are insufficient to capture the full effect of the event, and so each artist creates a

unique hybridized genre through which to tell his story.[1]

The debate over Holocaust representation has been considered on a number of

fronts. A prolonged and urgent debate rages over the question of what Lentin calls

"sayability," which questions whether we can represent the Holocaust at all, and, if so,

who would be authorized to do so. In *Ethics During and After the Holocaust*, John Roth

quotes Sarah Kofman, a writer and philosopher, who indicates the irony imposed on

those who would write about the Holocaust. There is, she maintains, "a strange *double*

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[1] In this thesis, the terms "traditional forms" and "canonical forms" are understood to signify narrative modes that are familiar to readers. In discussing Klein (who is certainly a traditionalist), I consider his work as adding to the body of traditional forms because of his hybridization of accepted forms. Similarly, Spiegelman adds to the body of canonical Holocaust literature through his graphic narrative, and his prosaic experiment incorporates familiar forms (narrative and photographs) with the comic book form, which has only recently (in the last several decades) come to be the subject of scholarly criticism.

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bind: an infinite claim to speak, *a duty to speak infinitely*, imposing itself with

irrepressible force, and at the same time, an almost physical impossibility to speak, a

choking feeling" (93). Beyond this problematic paradox, Lentin succinctly identifies yet

another primary facet of the crisis:

> Beyond the sayability versus unsayability crisis, a further crisis in representation
> is the tension between historical "facts" and interpretation, or the dilemma of
> historical relativism versus aesthetic experimentation in the face of the need for
> "truth," on the one hand, and the problems raised by the opaqueness of the events
> and the opaqueness of language, on the other. (3)

As with historian Hayden White, who maintains the need for a critical distinction

between historical fact and narrative freedom, Lentin insists that artists must continue to

have the freedom to represent the Shoah[2] in their chosen forms: "Although we are dealing

with an event that tests conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits,'

the Shoah *must* be accessible to representation and interpretation" (2; italics mine).

 Though an entire ethical debate surrounds the question of who can legitimately

represent the Holocaust, artists refuse to be daunted, continuing to create art installations,

movies, books, and poems about the event. Although those who consider such attempts

fruitless or even irresponsible contend that art can never express the *true* horror and

trauma of the Holocaust,[3] it is the tension of the Holocaust's complex, irreconcilable

nature that may offer the greatest opportunity for ethical and poetic discourse. Such

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[2] In this thesis, the terms "Holocaust" and "Shoah" are used interchangeably, where "Shoah" is the Hebrew term for "catastrophe" and has come to be transposable with "Holocaust" in modern discourse. However, it is also important to note that despite my synonymous use, "Shoah" carries a more loaded spiritual meaning for people of the Jewish faith. This is especially true since its association with a powerful documentary, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), that directly takes up the challenge of how to represent the unrepresentable.

[3] Consider, for example, Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted (but also oft-misinterpreted) claim that there can be no poetry after the horrors of Auschwitz.

unrepresentable representations "codify durable evidence against the forgetfulness of
history and the resistance to accountability" (Apel 12). Representation, contrary to critics
who contend that representing a past event entails a forgetting of the event, can ensure
remembrance. In this way, Holocaust testimonies remain both relevant and pressing. In
his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin movingly considers our
obligation to remember the past while simultaneously taking up an often-noted paradox
in discussing the Holocaust (we *must* speak, but speaking cannot relay the event as
faithfully as experiencing the event can):

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image
> which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen
> again.... For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of
> its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the
> historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very
> moment he opens his mouth). (257)

In continuing to resist comfort and reconciliation (in confronting the void), we are
obliged to consider how the Holocaust continues to exercise a traumatic hold on our lives
and imaginations.

To be sure, there is no dearth of scholarship on Holocaust trauma and its varied
effects. In his influential *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra considers
the powerful hold that trauma can have on one's life. Because the maintenance of trauma
guards against a betrayal of "those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that
traumatic past," he argues, "this situation may create a more or less unconscious desire to
remain within trauma" (22). He further argues that this trauma, in addition to remaining
as a link to those who did not survive the traumatic event, becomes what he terms
"founding traumas": that is, "traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or

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intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group" (23). This distinction is reflective of two different approaches taken by survivors of traumatic events. The first heroically valorizes survival, so that the survivor is seen as a redemptive hero, of sorts. The second approach consists of an id-driven repression stemming from a survival instinct. To confront the trauma, this approach seems to suggest, is to forget those who died and the event itself. Such issues find themselves transferred to the children or family of survivors, as well. In "Inheriting the Holocaust: Jewish American Fiction and the Double Bind of the Second-Generation Survivor," Andrew Furman identifies (via Thane Rosenbaum's collection of short stories, *Elijah Visible*) a "vicarious psychological immersion in the Holocaust" in second-generation survivors (88). Extending this trauma to the second-generation survivor/writer, he argues,

> These second-generation children of survivors engage the Holocaust with an unprecedented intensity as they grapple to come to terms, through their fiction, with both the seemingly ineffable horrors committed against their parents and the legacy of those horrors visited upon them. (88)

Second-generation witnesses experience not only an inherited trauma, but also a sense of guilt, as they work to come to terms with the horrors inflicted on their parents and other family members. These second-generation writers identified by Furman are further burdened with trauma created by repetition. In *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, LaCapra argues that "trauma is effected belatedly through repetition, for the numbingly traumatic event does not register at the time of its occurrence but only

after a temporal gap or period of latency" (174). The traumas of survivors, their

descendents, and their descendent *writers* are not the same, but they are driven by the

event itself and manifest in different ways.[4]

The traumatic hold of the Holocaust on a collective memory demonstrates the

complexity of the notion of remembrance. Apart from personal memory of a lived

experience, such as that experienced by direct victims of Nazi atrocities, Lentin argues

for an "ideological memory" that is derived from a shared, public awareness. While the

public memory that Lentin identifies is a benign one, signifying a group awareness of an

important event, its dogmatic counterpart implies more disturbing repercussions. Lentin

claims that "the ideological use of memory serves different purposes for different

collectives, but everywhere the Shoah is transformed into a political ideology, a code: the

Shoah myth replaces the Shoah itself" (11). Marianne Hirsch further defines a

"postmemory," one that "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and

from history by deep personal connection: it is a 'powerful and very particular form of

memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated, not through

recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation'" (Lentin 8). This kind

of memory is what second-generation witnesses to the Holocaust experience. Hirsch's

identification of postmemory is useful in discussing Holocaust representations by the

children or family members of Holocaust victims because it identifies the mediated

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[4] One should not forget, too, the trauma experienced by collective populations, including the global commmunity-at-large. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub contend that encounters with "the real" [traumatic events that are made more real to those who have not directly experienced them] engender "the experience of an existential crisis in *all* those involved [where involvement implies not necessarily direct experience, but also a vicarious learning or understanding of the event and its resultant psychological and social effects]: students as well as teachers, narrators as well as listeners, testifiers as well as interviewers" (xvi; italics mine).

aspect of their work. Though these writers do suffer from the traumatic after-effects of the genocide, they do not have a direct, physical experience of the Holocaust. Their ability to act as witnesses for those who have not been able to speak, or who are now entering the final years of their lives, is, as Hirsch suggests, achieved through an imaginative and creative encounter with the experiences of victims.

One effective way of eluding a sense of comfort that may foreshadow a forgetting is through experimentation with form. This is not to imply that traditional forms are inherently flawed. Instead, as Andrew Furman suggests, "While the narrators of Wiesel's work [*The Oath* (1973)] are painfully aware of the ineffable nature of the Holocaust, they find that they must bear witness through recounting their experiences. Language, limited as it may be, is all they have" (83). Thus, exploring new forms of narration in which to express the Holocaust expands the limits of language and forces a deeper and more critical examination of the event and its resultant ethical and traumatic implications. In a sense, such explorations and new articulations of Holocaust narratives offer a kind of psychological literary strata, whereby we add to the body of work, enhancing Holocaust ethical discourse. In turn, a consideration of the ethics of form in Holocaust representation allows us to consider the ethical obligations of both writer and reader in shaping a body of work that offers redemptive possibilities for responding to current experiences of violence

Theorizing Ethics and the Holocaust

In the half-century following the Second World War, as philosophers, historians,

and critics became disillusioned and cynical of human morality, the concept of a

universal moral ethics came under fire. In "The Holocaust's Life as a Ghost," for

example, Zygmunt Bauman highlights a continued fear in a Post-Holocaust world: "To

many," he argues, "the world appears suspect to the core; no worldly event is truly

neutral—each event is burdened with sinister overtones" (7). More than this, he contends

that a morally confused "legacy of the Holocaust" has been brought to bear on the world:

> ...today's persecutors may inflict new pains and create new generations of victims
> eagerly awaiting their chance to do the same, while acting in the belief that they
> avenge yesterday's pain and ward off the pains of tomorrow; while being
> convinced, in other words, that ethics is on their side. (13)

The obvious question is this: If humans are capable of producing a Holocaust, how can it

be argued that ethics and morals are constant, definable entities? Most recently,

postmodern ethical theory has posed new challenges: in a world not bound to or by

absolutes and certainties, the definability of "ethics," in a postmodern context, is elusive.

However, as Katalin Orban notes, it is this very quality that gives it value: "postmodern

ethics makes a sophisticated argument for proceeding ethically without adequate

knowledge (constantly reinventing ethics on a case-by-case basis without the guarantee

of previously legitimated prescriptions)" (4). Some may charge that such an approach

endorses a kind of moral relativism which could potentially absolve the actions or beliefs

of individuals or groups from being seen as amoral, since morality, under such a schema,

is defined by cultural, societal, religious, or even personal definitions of right and wrong.[5]
However, Orban's argument echoes that of Zygmunt Bauman, who, in *Postmodern Ethics*, contends that it is impossible to cement a universally coherent moral code, since humans are inherently morally ambivalent, born with neither a predisposition towards good or evil (10). He is careful to assert that this position is not akin to moral relativism, because he maintains a critical distinction between a universality that seeks to ensure equality and fair treatment for all persons, and a distorted universality (which is what he is opposing) that "is not so much the 'universalization of morality,' as the silencing of moral impulse and channeling of moral capacities to socially designed targets that may, and do, include immoral purposes" (12). Bauman—and, by consequence, Orban—forcefully argues that in a postmodern world, where absolutes are unfeasible, ethics, too, eludes simple and universal definition. If we consider Jean-Francois Lyotard's assertion in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* that postmodernity is characterized by an "incredulity towards metanarratives," then the result, in a world devoid of prescribed answers, is a discourse that exists not because of a real chance for clear understanding, but instead simply because it must (xxiv).

The discourse of ethics and human morality partakes of a long and honourable tradition. In order to consider how discussions of ethics and morality have changed in the years following the Holocaust, it is first necessary to consider ethical trends prior to the

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[5] The "previously legitimated prescriptions" identified by Orban could, theoretically, have two sources: universal principles and tradition/precedent. The first endorses a universalism, whereas the second is relativistic in nature.

Second World War.[6] Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* fully considers the subject. In Book II, he maintains that moral virtue is achieved through applying practical reason to qualities and decisions: "A [moral] virtue is a habitual disposition connected with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, a mean which is determined by reason, by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it" (Hughes 54). Enlightenment thinkers echo this faith in human reason to drive ethical choices. They believed, like Aristotle, that ownership of reason allows for the possession of a moral consciousness. Immanuel Kant argues in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* that ethics comprises "the doctrine of morals," which, through "rational cognition," can be considered analytically (1). He further maintains that without rational thought, morals are easily subverted to immoral purposes: "morals themselves," he argues "remain subject to all sorts of corruption as long as we are without that clue and supreme norm by which to appraise them correctly" (3).

Moving from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, we see that G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, first published in 1920, is largely recognized as the authoritative piece of ethical writing from the early 1900s. Rejecting many previous philosophical enquiries into the nature of human values, Moore identifies what he terms as the "Naturalistic Fallacy": that is, the false belief that "when we think 'this is good,' what we are thinking

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[6] A comprehensive examination of the philosophy of ethics is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, in considering some of the pre-eminent ethical philosophers over the centuries (Aristotle, Kant, and Moore), I hope to demonstrate some general trends in considerations of ethics and morality—trends that have, for the most part, been scrutinized and reconsidered in the years following the Nazi genocide.

is that the thing in question bears a definite relation to some one other thing" (90).[7] He

further argues that Naturalism, for Moore, is inconsistent with ethics, because, in

Naturalist inquiries, ethics is, in effect, replaced by a natural science. With respect to

conduct, he argues that the actions we are morally bound to perform are also the ones that

will produce good in the universe (197). His theory of ethics also endorses an

appreciation of aesthetic beauty "*together with* the emotion appropriate to it" (239). The

event of the Holocaust, however, has demonstrated that individuals will often

emphatically *not* do what they "ought to do" to create good in the universe, and the fact

of the event has, therefore, precipitated a further enquiry into ethical theory.

In explaining why ethical theory has, unsurprisingly, been reconsidered in the

decades following the Second World War, John Roth succinctly identifies why the

Holocaust marks a key turning point in concepts of human morality:

> That [human] failure [the Holocaust] leaves ethics gray-zoned, for the Holocaust
> did enormous harm to ethics by showing how ethical teachings could be made
> ambiguous, how they could be overridden, rendered dysfunctional, or even
> subverted to serve the interests of genocide. (82)

Certainly, Nazi alterations of ethical judgments—which asserted, for example, that

Germans must remember first and foremost that they *are* Germans, thereby negating

individual existence in favour of an organic whole, which, in turn, allowed for a sense of

superiority over other groups of individuals—demonstrates that value judgments can be

distorted for violent purposes (Roth 87). However, though the Holocaust has blurred

conceptions of ethics, by demonstrating the extent of cruelty that one group of people can

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[7] Naturalism, Moore argues, has two distinct sub-categories, in which we associate that which is good to
either (i) an existing object in nature (a "natural object" or "object of experience") or (ii) an object only
assumed to exist in "a supersensible real world" (that is, a metaphysical one) (90).

impose on another, it has not *negated* ethics, nor has it eliminated the necessity of

analyzing ethical paradigms. Instead, the tragic loss of life in the Nazi genocide has

prompted a reconsideration of approaches to ethical theory. Bauman maintains that

modern concerns have not been eliminated in a postmodern world. Instead, they are

approached differently: "the novelty of the postmodern approach to ethics," he argues,

"consists first and foremost not in the abandoning of characteristically modern concerns,

but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that

is...the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory)" (4). In

dealing with ethical approaches to narrative form, the focus cannot be on whether chosen

forms are "right" or "wrong." Instead, ethical considerations of form can be approached

as a question of responsibility: who are the accounts written *for* or *to*?

Indeed, the concept of responsibility both for and to others is the approach

espoused by the prominent French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who argues for a

responsibility to the other person. Levinas' approach to ethical considerations of the

Other does not propose a totality of existence; his philosophical discourse endorses

instead a notion of alterity, whereby, as Levinas proposes in *Time and the Other*, "the

Other is what I myself am not" (83).[8] Arguing that existing implies, by necessity, a

solitude, Levinas insists that such solitude does not imply an inability to communicate

with or isolate one's self from the Other: "Solitude," he claims, "appears neither as the

factual isolation of a Robinson Crusoe nor as the incommunicability of a content of

consciousness" (43). There is, here, a critical distinction to be made between *solitude*

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[8] Levinas' ethical discourse makes a distinction between "Other" and "other," where Other is the individual before us, and other signifies a non-specific "not I."

(which Levinas argues is a necessary by-product of having distinct existents that are born alone and die alone) and *isolation* (which implies a complete severing—both physical and communicative—from the Other). Roth summarizes Levinas' approach to ethics as one that is focused on the human face:

> By paying close attention to the face of the other person, he [Levinas] affirmed, there could be a reorientation not only of ethics but also of human life itself, for our seeing of the other person's face would drive home...how much the existence of the other person confers responsibility upon us. (78)

The responsibility to the Other, then, is implied by the necessary interactions between ourselves (as individuals) and the Other. Artists trying to represent the Holocaust (when they have not experienced the event first-hand) assume a range of responsibilities as second-hand witnesses. Their continued discourse with the Other—in this case, the direct victims of the Shoah—is not always easy, but is nonetheless necessary to ethical interaction in view of Levinas' theoretical framework, because without it we cannot have a sense of ethical obligation to the Other.[9]

The imposition or relief of ethical constraints on Holocaust writers by their chosen forms is tangled and complex. These constraints are not resolved, and no universalities emerge from them. Lentin maintains that "after Auschwitz, art, and history, cannot supply an answer; indeed, after the Shoah there can be no closure, no 'final solutions' to the question of representation" (19). Art provokes; it necessitates and compels discourse. Answers may not be supplied, but the questions raised and the

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[9] Certainly, the Other can also include those who were responsible for the genocide, too—the Nazis and their collaborators. Indeed, a truly ethical approach to representation would consider these individuals as well. However, it is the victims of the Shoah whose faces are most poignantly present, and their faces are suffering. They, perhaps most potently, are the Other before us.

navigations through difficult or uncomfortable texts nonetheless press a dialogue on ethical responsibilities and experiences of violence.

An Overview of Cinematic and Literary Holocaust Representations

An exhaustive overview of cinematic and literary representations of the Shoah, even focused solely on North American works, is beyond the scope of this study. However, a representative sampling of such works is useful in understanding the tradition in which A.M. Klein and Art Spiegelman write their respective Holocaust narratives. The most widely-recognized (or canonical) works of Holocaust literature are not North American in origin. *The Diary of Anne Frank* was first published in 1947, though in heavily edited form.[10] This text, along with Elie Wiesel's *Night* (originally published in Yiddish in 1956, and in French in 1958), a first-hand account of Wiesel's childhood experiences in a Jewish ghetto, and, later, at Auschwitz, represent two of the most recognized seminal works within the genre. To these, Ruth R. Wisse adds a number of additional, well-known works in *The Modern Jewish Canon*, such as Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (1946) and other titles, including Piotr Rawicz's *Blood From the Sky* (1961) and Chava Rosenfarb's *The Tree of Life* (1972) (Wisse 383). Still other titles have come to be widely recognized within the realm of popular literature, including Bernhard Schlink's

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[10] Not only did Frank's father, Otto, heavily edit the original published versions of the diary, but Anne herself worked on the diary manuscript extensively, thereby highlighting the indistinctness of the boundaries between fact and fiction. The foreward to the definitive edition of the diary, initially published in 1995, notes that there were, in fact, three versions of the diary: "Anne's first, unedited diary is referred to as version *a*, to distinguish it from her second, edited diary, which is known as version *b*....Otto Frank decided...to publish her diary [selecting] material from versions *a* and *b*, editing them into a shorter version later referred to as version *c*" (viii). The definitive edition, itself, had to be revised yet again when new pages of the diary were discovered in 1998.

The Reader (1997), which tells the story of a love affair between an illiterate Nazi collaborator and her underage Jewish lover. Wisse observes that Holocaust literature has a special subversive power that restores a degree of agency onto its victims: such works, she maintains,

> [invert] the hierarchy of values that Hitler imposed. Hitler drew strength from depriving other people of theirs, demanding obedience from his subjects and reducing to ciphers those categories of human beings he determined to eliminate from his Reich. Yet the most impressive feature of Holocaust literature is its reliance on the first-person singular. (193)

In the context of North American Jewish literature, there is no shortage of representative works that have the Holocaust as either an explicit thematic concern or implicit influence. In addition to Klein and Spiegelman, other well-known writers who deal with the Holocaust include Philip Roth, Leonard Cohen, and Mordecai Richler. Of particular prominence within the canon of North American Holocaust literature is Cynthia Ozick, who, in her novella *The Shawl*, tells the story of Rosa, a woman traumatically affected by the Shoah. Throughout her career, Ozick has embroiled herself directly in the debate over Holocaust representation, arguing that the Holocaust ought not to be aestheticized: "I wish," she observes in an interview with Elaine Kauvar, "the Holocaust would *not* turn into a mythopoetical creation" (32). Nonetheless, she is paradoxically complicit in the very system of artistic creation that she argues so vehemently against.

While there is no shortage of literary Holocaust representation, the canon of Holocaust film is certainly very much in development. One of the earliest examples of Holocaust film is Alain Resnais' 1955 documentary *Nuit et Brouillard* [Night and Fog]. His jarring juxtaposition of orchestral music and scenes of Auschwitz (both archival and

contemporary) movingly employs cinematic techniques to make the Holocaust conceptually accessible in the generally silent years following the end of the Second World War. More than this, the film represents an early approach to ethicality in Holocaust works. Christian Delage makes the case that Resnais "involved himself with great humility in the ethical and aesthetic adventure that made *Night and Fog* an inaugural film in many respects" (133). In particular, he argues that Resnais directly confronts the potential ethical dilemma "[in] taking the visible as evidence and, *a fortiori*, [of] voyeurism as the common means of confronting history" (133). This issue, of taking the visual as historical record, has recurred in more recent Hollywood representations of the Holocaust, including Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), based on subversive Nazi collaborator Oskar Schindler's attempt to save as many Jews as possible in Poland during World War II.

In his essay "The Holocaust Film Comedy," Yosefa Loshitzky identifies the three films that provide a "mini-model" for a potentially canonic collection of Holocaust films: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, and Roberto Benigni's *La Vita è Bella* [*Life is Beautiful*] (1997) (135).[11] He maintains that "taken together, these three films constitute a twentieth century Holocaust trilogy, a sacred/non-sacred trinity of canonic texts produced by Western cinema on the Holocaust" (135). Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*, which runs to almost ten hours, provides first-hand accounts of the Holocaust from a variety of perspectives, including victims, witnesses, and perpetrators (who were secretly filmed because of their unwillingness to appear on camera).

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[11] Other Hollywood films that might be considered emblematic of the Holocaust film tradition include Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) and George Stevens' *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959).

Spielberg's *Schindler's List* represents a romantic narrativized retelling of Oskar Schindler's humanitarian efforts during the Holocaust in keeping with the conventions of the popular Hollywood film. Finally, Roberto Benigni's ethereal, mythologized narrative tells the fictional story of a young boy's memory of concentration camp life and how he was saved from the most brutal realities of the camp by his father's construction of concentration camp life as a game to be won. Loshitzky's selection is both obvious and relevant, for while these three are likely the most widely recognized Holocaust films to date, they also embody a wide spectrum of representational possibilities that span fact, fiction, and their intersections.

A.M. Klein and Art Spiegelman: Writing the Holocaust as a Secondary Witness

Within the context of the rich body of North American, post-Holocaust, second-generation Jewish literature, A.M. Klein's novel *The Second Scroll* (1951) and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1986-1991) offer valuable opportunities for considering the broader thematic considerations of second-generation Jewish writers. Such concerns include: the search for familial identity (expressed through the fictionalization of self); the legacy of silence, handed down by parents and critics who contend that language is inadequate to express the horrors of the Holocaust; and a physical (though perhaps not emotional) sense of distance from the Holocaust. My primary concern, however, is a focus on Klein's and Spiegelman's experiments with the novel form and the ethical considerations that attend to these.

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A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, written in part in biblical format, tells the story of one man's journey from Montreal to Italy, Morocco, and the newly-formed state of Israel just a few years after the end of World War II.[12] The unnamed narrator's journey is two-fold: he has been sent on assignment as a journalist to search out the new poetry of Judaism in light of significant contemporary events (the Holocaust and the realization of God's promise to his chosen people). His quest is also a personal one, as he seeks his elusive Uncle Melech, the dynamic Jewish everyman and victim of Nazi atrocities. While the narrator does discover the new poetry of the Promised Land, his uncle Melech evades him, and the narrator discovers that he has been murdered. Klein's writing is poetic in nature and vast in scope, as he assumes responsibility to landed Canadian immigrants, the Jews of the Diaspora, Israeli Jews, and Holocaust victims. The work is based on Klein's own visit to Israel, shortly after its inception as a nation; and, in fusing biography and fiction, Klein's early piece of Holocaust writing demonstrates an innovative technique that straddles modern and postmodern traditions in Canadian writing. Indeed, in his afterward to the 1994 edition of the novel, Seymour Mayne notes that the title implies not just a poetically reimagined modern Torah, but also the poetic hybridization of Klein's experience and his fashioning of those lived moments into a novel: "He rewrote the first scroll of his articles [detailing Klein's journey to Israel], transforming them into another version, his own second scroll, a chronicle of fact transmuted into the story of a quest" (139).

[12] Klein's "biblical format" consists of the chapters of the primary narrative, which are named after the books of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), and the glosses, which have as their inspiration Talmudic commentary ("Gloss Aleph: Autobiographical," "Gloss Beth: Elegy," "Gloss Gimel: Excerpt from Letter: 'On First Seeing the Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel,'" "Gloss Dalid: The Three Judgements," and "Gloss Hai").

Art Spiegelman's *Maus*—actually comprising two volumes—recounts two stories in a tangled narrative: the story of Art's father's Holocaust experiences and Art's attempts to come to terms with his family legacy. While the story is largely based on Spiegelman's real-life experiences as he interviews his father, Vladek, about his life before, during, and after the Holocaust, it also deals with other sources of trauma: Spiegelman's struggle to understand his relationship to his father, his mother, Anja (who committed suicide when Art was a young man), and his brother, Richieu, who died during the Second World War. The graphic narrative has invited debate on the distinction between fact and fiction (complicated by Spiegelman's placement of actual photographs throughout the pages of the comic), and while the work is often used as a text in fiction courses, there are many who maintain (including Spiegelman himself) that the work is non-fiction. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon offers a fruitful way of avoiding the false dichotomies (true or not true) by which narratives are commonly classified. She suggests another category of representation: historiographic metafiction. This type of writing, she maintains,

> suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction...Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses, positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history. (110)

This articulation of a fresh way of reconciling the seemingly disparate prescriptions of fiction and non-fiction effectively reconciles the projects undertaken by both Klein and Spiegelman. Their experiences, transposed into historiographic metafictions, blur the fact-fiction divide and highlight the spectrum of narrative possibilities in a postmodern context.

In *Postmodern Ethics*, Zygmunt Bauman laments the reduction of the postmodern approach to morality to a "celebration of the 'demise of the ethical,' of the substitution of aesthetics for ethics, and of the 'ultimate emancipation' that follows" (2). In this thesis, I oppose such reductions, and will ultimately contend that it is possible to write about aesthetics *and* ethics simultaneously. Klein and Spiegelman approach questions of ethics through their forms. Klein's appropriation of a biblical structure (Torah and glosses) immediately imparts a responsibility to all those for whom the Bible is sacrosanct, as well as for those who wonder about the relevance of a biblically-inspired story in a post-Holocaust world. That this "second scroll" has as its geographical focal point the newly-formed State of Israel further obliges Klein to consider how he represents the citizens of that country. For Spiegelman, his decision to frame his (and his father's) story as an animal fable-styled graphic novel gives rise to questions of permissibility and legitimacy in representing the Nazi genocide. He complicates his stylistic choice further with the inclusion of actual photographs of his family members, forcing a consideration of the nature of testimony and witnessing. Beyond these ethical considerations, there is no sense of "ultimate emancipation" in either work: Klein's and Spiegelman's works do not end with a tidy sense of resolution. The uncle so eagerly sought by Klein's narrator is found only in time for the nephew to participate in Melech's funeral; he discovers that, after his arrival in Israel, his uncle Melech has been murdered by non-Israeli assailants. Art (Spiegelman's fictionalized self) is not able to reconcile his relationship with his father, and on his deathbed, Vladek (Art's father) confuses Art with his dead brother, Richieu. Their writing strategies impose their own ethical considerations, and their

chosen genres alternately compound or ease the writers' ethical dilemmas. By

approaching the texts in this way, I hope to show that form and genre do, indeed, have a

direct, explicit connection to postmodern ethical considerations. Viewed as hybrid

genres that challenge—and add to the body of—traditional forms, Klein's and

Spiegelman's works, albeit disparate entities, have much in common.

"Song Alternative": Ethical Responsibility and the Messianic Quest in A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*

Death may be beautiful, when full of years,
Ripe with good works, a man, among his sons,
Says his last word, and turns him to the wall.
But not these deaths! Oh, not these weighted tears!

- *A.M. Klein, "Gloss Beth,"* The Second Scroll *(1951)*

Introduction

The debate about the legitimacy and authenticity of Holocaust literature is complex and has a number of foci, including means of representation and the nature of ethics, memory, and time. This discussion is indicative of a larger discourse about the nature of fiction itself, and especially the often-indistinct line between fact and fiction. Because a spectrum of narrative possibilities exists (ranging from literal historical exposition to completely fictionalized narrative), these categories are not strictly delineated.[13] A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* both highlight a particular set of assumptions about representation—that is, both writers assume the responsibility to bear witness for Holocaust victims, though neither experienced the Holocaust directly. Further, they choose to frame their stories (and the stories of those for whom they assume a responsibility to bear witness) in texts that supplement more straightforward (non-hybridized) narrative styles. It is important to note, however, that Klein still relies on traditional genres in *The Second Scroll*—narrative, letters, drama, and

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[13] It is important to note, here, that the notion of "completely fictionalized narrative," while generally applicable in considering possible spectrums of representation, cannot legitimately apply to Holocaust narrative because the Holocaust *is* an historical event, and so the "fiction" in a Holocaust narrative consists only of the ways in which the author maps characters or plot points onto it.

poetry. These forms, fused into a single work, create an innovative text that demands that we pay as much attention to its form as to the story being told.

In *The Second Scroll*, Klein blurs the distinctions between both fact and fiction *and* modern and postmodern writing. He writes firmly within the modernist tradition in Canadian literature, though his experiment in hybridization also contains elements characteristic of the postmodern period. As a part of the so-called McGill Group of the 1920s (though not one of its initial founding members: A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, and Leo Kennedy), Klein sought to reconsider earlier forms of Canadian literature, which the group considered to be epitomized by "poetry weighted down by a transplanted Victorian tradition living out a protracted decadence in Canada" (Norris n.p.). This emerging group of poets sought to present a literary alternative to more traditional styles of poetry, such as those of the Confederation poets, who extolled a patriotic sense of virtue and who "became caught up in descriptions of nature and in extended moralizing" (Norris n.p.). In his 1926 article "Contemporary Poetry," A.J.M. Smith proffers an early and succinct analysis of the qualities of the modern:

> Our universe is a different one from that of our grandfathers, nor can our religious beliefs be the same. The whole movement, indeed, is a movement away from an erroneous but comfortable stability, towards a more truthful and sincere but certainly less comfortable state of flux. Ideas are changing, and therefore manners and morals are changing. It is not surprising, then, to find that the arts, which are an intensification of life and thought, are likewise in a state of flux....Contemporary poetry reflects it as clearly as any other art. (Smith 31)

While Smith further notes that it is possible to achieve a new poetry through experimentation with new forms, he believes that it will more likely be achieved through a modification of more traditional approaches. This new poetry, he argues, while

"infused with the new spirit," is most often "written in the traditional metres and with the traditional rhyme schemes" (Smith 31). For these new poets, he argues, "life was to be their glossary, not literature" (31). It is this approach that Klein adopts in *The Second Scroll*, modifying and refreshing traditional modes of literary discourse. His is a new approach for a post-Holocaust world.[14] *The Second Scroll* reflects a new way of thinking about writing: writing which, as noted by Roger Hyman, would influence other prominent Canadian writers, including Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen (16).

What is new about Klein's text, then, is the way that it combines traditional literary forms—poetry, drama, narrative—to create a hybridized form. Through this hybrid form, Klein draws attention to key issues in Holocaust representation—questions about permissibility and artist/witness responsibility. In "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," historian Hayden White argues that a critical distinction between the story and the event is always necessary:

> Obviously, considered as accounts of events already established as facts, "competing narratives" can be assessed, criticized, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain. But narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story.... Here the conflict between

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[14] *The Second Scroll* can also be seen as an attempt to work within the same historical context as that of *The Hitleriad* (1942/43). *The Hitleriad*, too, draws on established modes of literature (in this case, eighteenth-century satire—Pope's *Dunciad*) to unite new subject matter with traditional forms. In a section written in rhyming couplets, Klein takes Hitler as his satiric subject: "Where was he born? (Born is the world that I / Use, seeing *littered* is not poesy.) / Where was he born? In Braunau at the Inn-- / And Austria paid for that original sin!-- / Born to a father, old and over-wined / Who had he slept one night, had saved mankind!" (lines 74-79). *The Hitleriad* is largely seen as something of an ambitious failure; F. Cudworth Flint argues that Klein "has not the ingenuity or verbal dexterity or malice—as distinguished from rage—to lead in such an enterprise" (22), while Irving Layton famously observes that "To know God truly, one must have known Satan; Klein gives no evidence of ever having been within a hundred yards of that versatile gentleman" (24). Despite this criticism, however, there is a link to be made between Klein's satire and Spiegelman's comics experiment, both of which draw on unexpected genres to discuss the Holocaust.

"competing narratives" has less to do with the facts of the matter in question than
with the different story-meanings with which the facts can be endowed by
emplotment. (393)

From this perspective, emplotment—that is, the way a story is shaped by narrative

considerations such as plot, characterization, metaphor, and so on—cannot distort

historical fact, since emplotment involves the telling of an event through a mediated

narration—that is, a narration that spans event and story. Ethically speaking, this position

grants artistic license to the author who is not presenting his written record as fact, but as

fiction.[15]

White's conclusions are not unproblematic. In fact, he overtly acknowledges that

the approach to history he suggests—one that does not allow for the possibility of an

objective outsider—is not unlike that of Hitler or Stalin (Friedlander 389). In *Aught*

from Naught: A.M. Klein's The Second Scroll, Roger Hyman posits a troubling ethical

concern in the light of the fictionalization of lived experience:

> That there are no "hard historical facts," that all events are mediated by the
> discourse which offers them up for consideration is a truism of modern
> historiography, but that truism and modern literary theory as well, if rigorously
> applied to Holocaust narrative, offer a particular challenge, because they tend to
> deny the event in favour of a study of the poetics of the narrative through which it
> is known. (51)

In mediating the telling of an event through narration, he speculates, the event itself can

be lost. However, he reconciles this concern by quoting James Young, who identifies a

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[15] White's articulation of emplotment is not dissimilar to that proposed by Paul Ricoeur, who, in his *Time and Narrative* (vol. 1), argues that " time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (52). Ricoeur's frame of analysis draws on Aristotle's theory of mimesis, but extends it to consider a pairing of *mimesis-muthos* (imitation-emplotment). For Ricoeur, this pair (which he calls an "interweaving reference") is based on "our lived temporal experience," which, he argues, encompasses "fictional *and* historical narrative" (32; italics mine).

"distinction between the hard facts of the Holocaust and the *perceived* softness in their

literary reconstructions" (Hyman 51; italics mine). Hyman goes on to offer a powerfully

useful interpretation of Lyotard's call for the replacement of meta-narratives with "*les*

petits récits [little narratives]." These individual stories, Hyman argues, guard against

absolute claims of knowability, since small-group narratives

> do not try to impose an order on events and...they avoid the issues of absolute
> certainty and absolute knowing called into question by the Holocaust, an event
> based on ideological, genetic, religious and historical master-narratives that were
> both conclusive and "close-ended." (55)

This postmodern approach to narration places value on each narrative, for collective

knowledge is not, in fact, an organic whole, but rather an amalgam of experience and

perspective that does not allow for the absolutism that Hyman argues played a role in the

Nazi genocide.

White's identification of Spiegelman's *Maus* as an example of a Holocaust

narrative that does not lose its emotional or historical impact despite the author's choice

of aesthetic form works well within a postmodern paradigm. While postmodern theory,

generally speaking, ought not to be considered a guiding principle for authors writing in

earlier literary periods, this argument for a critical difference between narrative and

ethical loyalty to the factual, historical event can be easily, and appropriately, carried

over into a discussion of A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*.

The Second Scroll, published in 1951, following Klein's journey into the newly-

created state of Israel, projects itself both backward and forward in time. Structured as a

contemporary Torah with glosses, the narrative has multiple foci. Most overtly, it is a

recounting of the unnamed narrator's search for both his uncle Melech and the poetry of

the Promised Land. It is also a story of the Diaspora and the tension among and between

three related, but increasingly alienated, faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Considering the ethical ramifications of Klein's formal experiment, it is useful to keep in

mind three points of reference: representation, responsibility, and terms of reference. The

structuring of *The Second Scroll* as a refashioned Torah evokes a connection to Klein's

religious heritage. The text that is a *new* scroll for the post-Holocaust era assumes a wide

range of responsibilities. Klein imposes a series of ethical considerations on his fictional

narrator, who assumes responsibilities towards his family—his parents and his Uncle

Melech. However, Klein also writes for Holocaust victims, the Jews of the Diaspora, and

the new citizens of Israel. The novel, then, assumes an epic scope, while the florid

language of the work, infused with elaborate metaphors and a highly allusive language

that evokes Judaic traditions, the Holocaust, and popular culture and art, offers a grand

narrative sweep.

The Second Scroll as Second Torah

Where Spiegelman's novel primarily considers ethical considerations of familial

responsibility, Klein's work assumes an obligation much larger in scope. The journey of

Klein's unnamed narrator in *The Second Scroll* is propelled by an absent victim: his

Uncle Melech, whose movement from eastern Europe to Israel precipitates his nephew's

own journey from Montreal to Israel. However, the narrator's ethical responsibility

encompasses *both* a family member and the rich tapestry of historical Judaism. The

novel, structured as a Torah with glosses, becomes a living, contemporary scripture. In a

letter to his friend and fellow poet A.J.M. Smith, Klein notes that he "desired...a record, a

conspectus of my pilgrimage to the Holy Land, some heirloom to attest to the fact that I

had been of the generation that had seen the Return" ("Letters" 12). The narrator-

journalist's search for Melech, a messianic figure, runs parallel to "the search for Israel's

poetic principle" (13). Melech's paradigmatic experience as a European Jew and

Holocaust survivor further highlights his importance as a driving symbolic character in

the novel. Klein, then, is doing nothing less than attempting to write the collective

memory of European Jews, and is under ethical obligation to represent that memory as

faithfully and accurately as possible.

The innovative structure for *The Second Scroll*, a reimagined Pentateuch with

glosses, highlights the many connections invited in and by the work: connections

between narrative and commentary,[16] between historical event and commentary, between

fiction and non-fiction, and between the Self and the Other. In a letter to Smith, Klein

writes, "I was struck...by the similarity between contemporary Jewish history and my

people's ancient saga—I thought I saw in the events of today, in large outline, a

recurrence of the events of the Pentateuch" ("Letters" 137). Klein, himself, persuasively

clarifies (again to Smith) the meaning behind each chapter, from "Genesis" to

"Deuteronomy":

> The chapters...follow the Mosaic sequence: *Genesis*, for obvious reason; *Exodus*,
> likewise; *Leviticus*, the book concerned with priestly things, wherefore Rome, and
> the Monsignor; *Numbers*—because of the milling multitudes of a wider Egypt;
> and finally *Deuteronomy*, that is to say the recapitulation: Israel. And since no

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[16] The formal properties of *The Second Scroll*, in addition to being based on The Pentateuch, are also heavily influenced by the Talmud, writings on Jewish law, which includes the *Mishnah* (the text itself) and the *Gemarah* (associated commentary), such that the form of the work replicates the combination of text and commentary.

Jew can conceive of a Pentateuch without commentary—the glosses. These serve a double purpose; they repeat in minor the major themes; and they elaborate the tale's essential meaning without impeding its action. ("Letters" 12)

Klein, then, assumes a double responsibility: to tell a story, certainly, but also to elaborate on the vastness of Jewish history—past, present, and future.

Klein's story is embedded in Judaic religious traditions, which allows for that combining of past and present that, according to Levinas, is so necessary to ethical representation.[17] After exploring Israel, the narrator writes that "the fixed epithet wherewith I might designate Israel's poetry, the poetry of recaptured time, was now evident" (57). What the narrator fails to acknowledge is that he, himself, is a participant in this recapturing of the temporal, for it is the act of transforming experience into word that allows for the dissemination of knowledge. Just as the ending and beginning of the Torah are read together at the end of the Jewish year, so, too, this work connects Judaic history (past, present, and future), while also allowing for contemporary interpretations of this history. Interestingly, while Spiegelman relies on a contemporary pop-culture form to express Holocaust trauma and the ethics of witnessing, Klein rewrites the Torah to confront similar issues, complicating the text with a myriad range of forms within his glosses (letter, poetry, drama). This new, hybrid form underscores the difficulty of depicting the Holocaust and its effects within more familiar literary forms; in turn, different literary forms imply different interpretations of events, by virtue of the combination of genres embodying "different story-meanings."

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[17] In *Time and the Other*, Levinas argues that "to comprehend the alteration of presence in the past and future would be a matter of reducing and bringing back the past and future to presence—that is, re-presenting them" (99).

Assumed Responsibilities in *The Second Scroll*

Throughout *The Second Scroll*, Klein's detailing of the diversity of Jewish experience denotes an ethical approach to representation. His narrative defies reductionism and simplistic stereotyping—such as the Nazis practiced to promote anti-Semitic policies that would help rationalize genocide—and seeks to portray Diaspora and Israeli Jews as ethically as possible. In resisting an essentialist notion of Jewish identity, Klein works within a paradigm similar to that proposed by Emmanuel Levinas in *Time and the Other*: a structure that works not towards totality, but towards alterity—a recognition of difference. Levinas explains his dialectic as one that is "not Hegelian" which, he claims, has, as its aim, a reconciliation of differences, but works instead "toward a pluralism that does not merge into unity" (42). In writing a novel that represents the diversity of the Jewish people, Klein seeks, via his main character, to acknowledge the distinctness of those he encounters and to represent them as truthfully and ethically as possible. Because he assumes a wide scope of ethical responsibility, the narrator's attention in this respect varies: he assumes a responsibility to his Uncle Melech, his parents, the Canadian Diaspora, worldwide Diaspora, Holocaust victims, and the Israeli Jewish population. Ethical complications present themselves throughout the narrative, but Klein's narrator confronts them: not necessarily to answer them (since the fact of existing, according to Levinas, implies an unavoidable separation from the Other), but perhaps to highlight the tension that continues to exist between (and among) groups that are vastly different, yet always achingly human. In this respect, Klein's narrator-

nephew assumes the role of a cultural ethnographer: as he moves from location to location in search of his uncle Melech and the new Hebrew poetic principle, he strives for a position of empathy, so that his journey becomes a humanizing one in which he repeatedly comes face-to-face with the Other.

The character who drives the primary action in the novel is the narrator's uncle Melech. This uncle, though never seen throughout the narrative, is nonetheless poignantly present. In his childhood years, the narrator is in awe of his uncle who comes to represent, for him, the Jewish ideal: "I never saw my uncle Melech," he recalls, "but reports of his Talmudic exploits kept sounding in our house and there made a legend of his name" (6). The nephew's idolatry is made explicit when he asks for a photograph of his uncle from his mother. She retorts, "Don't you know that Jews don't make or permit themselves to be made into images?" (6). Melech's transformations of identity throughout the novel—from Talmudic scholar, to Bolshevik, to (almost) Christian convert, to humanitarian, to Zionist—indicate his traumatic search to define himself in view of the pogrom in Ratno and the event of the Holocaust.

That Klein's fictional narrator-nephew assumes a particularly heightened sense of responsibility to Melech, the messianic Jewish everyman, is highlighted by the fact that Melech's voice is given significant attention in the narrative and its accompanying glosses. In "Exodus," Melech's letter to the narrator's parents (who have since passed away) is presented in its entirety. The letter offers a glimpse into the trauma suffered by Melech in the light of Nazi atrocities. In it, he contends that it is not only direct victims, but indeed the entire world that is affected by this violent event: "We were all in that

burning world," he argues, "even you who were separated from it by the Atlantic" (15).

He willingly assumes the burden to bear witness for the victims who are no longer living.

His gratitude at being alive, he maintains, convinces him that he "must live their unexpired six million circuits, and that my body must be the bed of each of their nightmares" (15). Through Melech's eyes, the reader is presented with an eye-witness account of Nazi atrocity, an account that Fischer speculates was likely based on Klein's research into real-life accounts of survivors (176). Though Melech maintains hope—in the realization of the Promised Land, and in the humanity of mankind—he expresses his desire not to soften his epistle with heroic tales: "There will be, I hope, other occasions when I may write you of the times that went over me...of that good peasant family over whose house there presided the image of the man of Galilee, who hid me and fed me and preserved me" (19). The story, though, is told all the same. Ultimately, Melech is presented as both the victim of Nazi atrocities and the harbinger of hope for kindness in the midst of a world suddenly bereft of acts of morality. Fischer observes that "Melech represents the entire Jewish people because Jewry reasserted its strength at the moment when it seemed most weak, at the darkest moment of its history" (176).

Melech's voice is again brought to bear on the narrative in "Gloss Gimel," which is an excerpt from his letter "On First Seeing the Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel." In this letter, Melech attempts to reconcile Christian and Jewish ideologies to express a common reverence for human life: "under the guise of fecundation," he argues, "immortality is symbolled" (76). In addition to the gloss, the narrator comments on the excerpt, thereby increasing the probability of message transmission in Michelangelo's art. Melech sees in

the art the promise of survival, and in that promise, he sees the triumphant resurrection of Israel (where the Flood is analogous to the Holocaust, and so the rainbow comes to signify God's rescue of his People). "In a single circular sentence," the narrator observes, "he described God coming to the rescue of His chosen" (32). And while the narrator imagines Melech's papal potential (in which he, as a Jewish pope, could unite the two faiths), he nonetheless gleefully expresses Melech's reassertion of loyalty to his faith.

If the narrator-nephew is, dually, searching for the identity of a global sampling of the Jewish people *and* his own place among them, then his uncle Melech certainly complicates these purposes. This is because Melech comes to represent, for the narrator, not only a missing family member, but also a Messianic figure representing the hope, despair, and mutability of his people. Melech's experiences precipitate his movement both literally (geographically) and figuratively (ideologically). If, as G.K. Fischer maintains, "[Melech] is the searching, striving aspect of Jewry personified," then this serves to make the narrator's search more confused, as the subject of his search is never stable (171). There is a long tradition of messianic mythology in Judaism, and Klein draws on this legacy in creating his uncle Melech. Many have also said that the founding of Israel was the *real* fulfillment of the messianic promise. In her introduction to *The Second Scroll*, Elizabeth Popham observes that "Klein repeatedly argues, as does his narrator, that the establishment of the State of Israel is a 'miracle,' figuring the redemption of Israel as a people" (xxiv) and she acknowledges Melech's "messianic identity" (xviii).

The narrator of *The Second Scroll* does not forget his parents in the midst of his search for his Uncle Melech. Indeed, he often defends them vigorously, which

sometimes ethically complicates his assumed responsibility to Melech: defending his father's belief that "Bolshevism meant the denial of the Name," for example, he implicitly ignores his uncle's change in ideological stance—a change that occurred only after Melech experiences the traumatic pogrom in Ratno (10). He turns on his uncle yet again when he finds out that Melech has gone to Rome and is considering a conversion to Christianity: "Uncle Melech, then, a cutter-down of plants, an uprooter, a convert! It shocked the thirty score inhibitions of my upbringing. My father had been right after all. Unstable as water, fickle as wind, That Other!" (23). Likening his Uncle to an "uprooter," the narrator confuses his ethical responsibility: he had defended his immigrant father as exhibiting a "loyalty solidly grounded," and the notion of being uprooted from the soil is fundamentally negative (10). His identification of his uncle as "That Other," rather than a family member, distances the unseen Melech, even as his nephew continues to search for him.

Throughout the narrative, the narrator does not forget the people who can no longer make their own voices heard: Jewish victims of violence and genocide in the pogrom and the Holocaust. These victims are brought to immediate presence in the first chapter. The names of the victims of the pogrom in Ratno are blocked out in the letter received by his parents, but they are nonetheless identified to the reader, not just by name, but through their personal connections to other human beings:

> The marked-out blocks on the letter, I gathered from the snatches of talk...were the names of those who were no longer among the living: the old rabbi, Rabbi Heshel; Israel Meyer, the shochet, slaughtered with his own knife; our cousin Aryeh Leib, Yentel Baila's son; both daughters of Braina, the potter's daughter; and others, and others—names that I had heard often before, connected with some

holy parable or comic anecdote, which now moved about my bedstead like ghosts." (8)

For the young narrator, the victims are, in their deaths, made more explicitly visible to him; they become *real*. This creates a perceived ethical challenge: the narrator more readily recognizes his family and heritage more keenly in their loss than in their presence—in death, they are more alive to him. This idea is echoed in "Gloss Beth: Elegy," in which the speaker of the poem acknowledges the heightened presence of his family member/Holocaust victim in death: "O cousin, cousin, you are everywhere! / And in your death, in your ubiquity, / Bespeak them all, our sundered cindered kin" (66). However, under Levinas' ethical scaffolding, death and life (or, more explicitly, presence and non-presence) are false dichotomies; instead, Levinas maintains that "Man is *not* to be conceived in function of being and non-being" (*Otherwise* 14; italics mine). Extending this argument, he contends that language and denomination (the process of naming individual entities) in fact "designates or constitutes identities in the verbal or temporal flow of sensation" (14). The identification of individual victims of the pogrom is, in fact, a profoundly ethical move since it is "through the opening that temporalization works in the sensible" that memory does its best work, so that "the ideality of the same in the diverse" is realized, and each victim is recognized and remembered (Levinas 35). A reading of Michel de Certeau's analysis of spatial practices further sheds light on the narrator's vision. According to de Certeau, such a construction is a natural process whereby "haunted places are the only ones people can live in" (108). Arguing that "Demonstratives indicate the invisible identities of the visible," de Certeau observes that "the very definition of place...is composed by these series of displacements and effects

among the fragmented strata that form it" (108). In the face of memory, he claims, such hauntings are natural, since the past comes to bear on the present. From this theoretical standpoint, the narrator synthesizes time in such a way as to create a space for the victims, first of the pogrom at Ratno, and then the Holocaust, in the present.

If Melech is a Messianic figure, then Settano represents the Satanic embodiment of evil (consider, for example, the linguistic play on his name: Settano/Satano). The narrator meets this menacing figure in Rome, as he frantically searches for his uncle. At first an almost benign character, Settano engages the narrator in a debate about religion, playfully styling the narrator as "a typical emissary of the new religion, a sound, orthodox Cocacolian" (26). While the narrator-nephew takes the bait, and responds "spitefully," arguing for the beauty of the Coke bottle, Settano becomes increasingly more menacing, and the narrator comes to realize that he sought to "provoke *me* to anger and indiscretion" (27). Settano's involvement in the narrator's journey becomes increasingly threatening, culminating in the narrator's brief abduction by Settano and four of his accomplices, during the course of which Settano steals the narrator's copy of a letter written by Melech, given to him by the Monsignor. It is never made clear why the letter was stolen, though it is eventually returned to the nephew-narrator. Materialistic, conniving, and sinister, Settano makes a compelling contrast character to Melech, who figures at times as a Moses figure, leading the Casablanca Jews into the desert to save them from their poor living conditions (62). Ultimately, Melech's messianic sacrifice enables a spiritual rebirth, whereas the character of Settano represents a banal evil presence that serves no ultimate purpose. According to Fischer, "Settano, as a symbolic Satan figure, "gives vent

to his hatred, which is inspired by no recognizable cause, does his evil work, and then, less

disappears" (181). Klein's depiction of an irrational evil presence mirrors Hannah

Arendt's well-recognized assertion of the banality and randomness of evil. In this way,

Settano's aggression and menacing presence mirrors, though with less tragic to Klein's

consequence, the senseless crimes of the Nazis. Indeed, Klein's placement of Settano in

Italy, an Axis power during World War II, only serves to reinforce this (perhaps th both

unintended, though nonetheless clearly evident) connection. itself

Klein's Holocaust Poetics

Like other North American Jewish writers who would follow in his footsteps—

most notably Cynthia Ozick—Klein never explicitly refers to the Holocaust in *The*

Second Scroll. Despite his refusal to identify it by name, however, it is a potent presence

in the novel. Indeed, virtually all of Klein's assumed ethical subjects—the Jews of the

Diaspora, Jews in Israel, his own family, his uncle Melech—are all profoundly affected

by the Shoah. Returning to White's assertion, then, we see that a Holocaust narrative

need not necessarily comprise a direct exposition upon recorded facts. A work that does

not directly address the recorded specifics of the Nazi genocide, though perhaps not

immediately recognized as belonging to the genre of Holocaust narrative, should not be

immediately excluded as such.

White's argument that the poetics and metaphors informing Spiegelman's

Holocaust narrative add to its emotional potency finds a complement in Roger Hyman's

reading of the symbolic value of *The Second Scroll*. Arguing for a metaphoric approach

to Holocaust narrativization, he claims that "In the most sensitive Holocaust fiction, less is more, the gaps in context the key to the rendering of that world. Such narrative obliquity is the aesthetic response to an event which both demands and defies emotional engagement and intellectual understanding" (39). Writing more specifically to Klein's narrative, Hyman notes that the reader's navigation through Klein's highly symbolic and metaphoric text offers the opportunity for direct confrontation and interaction with both the story being told *and* the historical event of the Holocaust itself:

> Klein's allusive and demanding language is one of the keys to the novel's ability to contend appropriately with its subject matter. It allows us access to the horrors of pogrom and Holocaust and *mellah* while providing the indirection and obliquity which is the prerequisite for a constructive engagement with them. (47)

This perspective, in keeping with postmodern responses to other Holocaust texts— particularly *Maus*—relieves, to an extent, the ethical burden that would otherwise be ascribed to Klein, since part of that burden is passed onto the reader. Klein himself observes, in the papers published by Pollock and Caplan, that "Every successful poem involves a talented reader" (*Notebooks* 122). Far from distancing the Holocaust, the author, through his poetic attention and metaphoric allusion to the genocide, offers (and indeed requires) active reflection on these elements from the reader.

Perhaps because of its very allusive nature, Klein's narrative experiment has posed challenges to critics, as they seek to define what, precisely, *The Second Scroll* is. Certainly, a pat definition of Klein's work is elusive; the critical literature supports Klein's work as being either poetic prose *or* prose poetry. Hyman, notably, acknowledges the poetry explicit throughout the work: "Klein's language in *The Second Scroll*, also like the language of poetry, is essentially figurative, and thus he involves the

reader in a way not demanded by writers of the relatively determinate language of more discursive prose fiction" (20). By acknowledging that the language in the narrative is "like" poetry, however, Hyman clearly positions himself in the poetic prose camp. Elusive consensus on the taxonomy of the text, however, further marks Klein as an innovative writer who, though certainly writing in the Canadian modernist tradition, was also creating a text with postmodern elements that would blur ethical and formative boundaries.

Klein's symbolic and metaphoric language in *The Second Scroll* is both varied and rich, drawing on physical, social, and cultural references. Among his most poignant metaphors are ones that draw on the land, nutrition and disease, art and architecture, and popular culture and commodification. Some of these allusions—the land connecting Israel to the world, for example—specifically address the Holocaust, but others do not. However, the interplay between the overt and implicit language in these sophisticated analogies creates an appropriate multi-faceted sense of purpose (since the purpose of the narrator's journey is not singular) while focusing them through a vicarious experience of the Shoah. Precisely because his journey is not singly focused, the narrator's attention varies; however, the Holocaust remains as an unseen, though always present and forceful, traumatic lens through which all the events in the novel are focused and interpreted.

Because many Jews, including Klein, identify the state of Israel as the physical realization of God's covenant with them, it comes as no surprise that Israel as poetic metaphor figures heavily in *The Second Scroll*. As the nephew-narrator leaves North America in his dual quest for the poetic principle of the new state and his Uncle Melech,

he sees Israel as a beacon of light, set against the darkness of contemporary history: "even as over the abyss of recent history there had risen the new bright shining microcosm of Israel" (22). His uncle extends this metaphor even further in his letter. In contrast with the narrator, who identifies Israel as a "microcosm," Melech sees a connection to the land of Israel everywhere. At Bari in Italy, he senses its promise: "Before me there extend the waters of the Mediterranean—blue; and its foam—white: an Israeli banner. And between flag and banner and banner and flag there proceed these the pauperized rich argosies of our future" (20). For Melech, the oceanic connection that binds Israel to other lands is symbolic of the greatness of the place itself; in nature, more specifically in the sea, he sees a life-giving force that will help to populate Israel with both people and "a cargo of re-membered bones" (20).

Melech's poetic naturalization of the blue and white Israeli flag in the colours of the sea and the sky identify Israel not as a microcosm, but as a land connected to the world at large. While the narrator and Melech differ in their poetic interpretations of Israel, both, in these passages, see the nation in terms of its contemporary status and role within history. Both implicitly refer to the Holocaust—the narrator speaks of "the abyss of recent history," while Melech identifies the incorporeal, but nonetheless present, victims of the Holocaust, who, along with their living counterparts, are transported across the ocean to the home long promised to them.

This poetic connection to the land that Klein suggests is not strictly tied to contemporary understandings of the importance of Israel. In keeping with his assumed responsibility to write a narrative that embraces the past, present, and future of Judaic

history, he employs biblical metaphors when referring to Israel. While flying between Morocco and Israel, the narrator notes that "the land lay before us like an open slanted Bible" (45). He feels a sense of kinship with a land on which he had never physically set foot: "if I could only stretch out my arms and make them the land's frontiers! For there wasn't a place, disguised though it might be under a latter-day name, that didn't speak to me out of my personal past" (47).

The intimacy that the narrator feels with the land that he had never physically set foot on is partially explained by the unnamed passenger who sits next to him on the plane en route to Israel. The stranger elaborates on the changing nature of Israel, arguing that it exemplifies a Jewish "miracle of Discarnation" (46). He speaks first of the "Judaic Idea," which "had come into the world concretized in the customs and thoughtways of the Hebrews," so that "the Jewish nation...had been the dwelling place of the Immanence of Deity" (46). Thus, according to the passenger, the Idea of Israel was represented by the land. However, upon losing physical ownership of the land, "the Idea had been banished" along with the Jewish people (46). In Diaspora, "It lost Its local habitation and in a sense Its name....Jewry had ceased as existence [but] It continued as Essence" (46). That the Idea of Israel persisted is explained by the passenger as a separation of "Essence from its typical Existence" (46). The stranger then posits a "Return to Time" following the Holocaust based upon the realization that "Jewry could not wholly die" (46). Despite its resemblance to his uncle's reasoning, the narrator does not find this explanation wholly satisfying, since the passenger does not account for the placement of God within this schema.

Moving from one physical metaphor to another, the narrator finds poetic inspiration not only in the land but also in the language of nutrition and disease, both of which he uses extensively to explore the tensions between different religions and cultures. Throughout the narrative, food imagery is employed to denote the conflicts that exist between characters and groups of people within. In "The ethno-semiotics of food: A.M. Klein's 'Second Scroll' as recipe for multiculturalism," Marta Dvorak argues that the narrator's quest

> is fundamentally constructed around the metaphor of food, universal basis of cultural identity and social order. Throughout the novel, food is the basis of cultural identity: when shared, it generates understanding, when unshared, it generates conflict. (20)

In the "Genesis" chapter, as point of illustration, food is introduced as a source of both familial understanding and familial conflict. The narrator's mother uses food to dispel tension, and would "rise to serve tea, in glasses, each with its floating moon of sliced lemon," in order to avoid discussion of Melech and dispel the conflict within the family (Klein 5). The metaphor illustrates the narrator's innate tendency, even in childhood, to see the cosmic in everyday objects. In contrast, food also signifies family strife. When word of Melech's conversion reaches the narrator's family, his treachery is indicated by his new eating habits: "Uncle Melech, it was whispered, ate pork" (Klein 11). The fact that this sedition is whispered underscores the depth of the scandal as this direct violation of Jewish dietary law is used as one of the primary markers of family strife.

Throughout the narrative, food continues to be symbolic of ethnic difference and class tensions. In Casablanca, the food of the higher classes is varied and rich: the privileged have access to "the golden oranges of Tetuan..., the pomegranates of

Marrakech...[and] the royal grapes of Rabat" (Klein 36). In stark contrast, the food of the *mellah* [Jewish quarter] is unappealing. There, the inhabitants live without water and eat "the guts of fish" (Klein 40). Klein's attention to nutritive deficiencies in Morocco highlights the continued mistreatment of the Jewish population, drawing attention to continued persecution in a post-Holocaust society.

In addition to the language of nutrition, Klein makes extensive use of disease metaphor throughout his narrative. This imagery has a two-fold purpose: the first is to distinguish between physical illness and ailments of the soul (identifying the second as the more dire). In his letter to the narrator's family, Melech addresses his survivor's guilt, and considers those "who cheated the chimney" as those "who by some divine antitoxin were preserved" (16). This inoculation imagery is mirrored by the medical procedures undertaken by the nephew in preparation for his journey; he notes that he was "scarified...against smallpox, punctured against typhus, pierced for tetanus, injected for typhoid, and needled with cholera" (14). Their respective vaccinations (one figurative, one literal) are unable to preclude other, non-physical ailments: in his guilt, Melech finds that he "would almost add to theirs [the victims] my own wish for the centigrade furnace and the cyanide flood" (15), while the narrator-nephew is hard pressed to keep himself from vomiting upon arriving in Casablanca's impoverished Jewish quarter.

The poetics of physicality and disease also highlight moments of injustice. In Rome, the narrator encounters Krongold, an employee at the American Joint Distribution Committee, from whom the narrator seeks information about Melech's whereabouts. Krongold dismisses all Jews who choose not to move to Israel immediately, identifying

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them as maladied: "He [Melech] had a change of heart," Krongold muses: "He would

leave Rome, but not for Haifa. And here it was that he showed he was not yet fully rid of

the Diaspora infection. He desired to go to Casablanca" (34). Here, Krongold dismisses

an entire group of people, framing their choices (or circumstances) as sickness; this

unethical consideration of the Other highlights a continued discordance between groups

of people who should be striving for ethical discourse, yet seem unable to attain this goal.

In *The Second Scroll*, Klein repeatedly makes reference to art—architecture,

music, and literature—as his narrator makes his pilgrimage from Montreal to Israel.

These allusions and metaphors, in turn, are constructive vehicles through which to

examine ethical themes. Upon arriving in Casablanca, Morocco, the narrator finds in that

place a musical poesy: "It was the music, however, its minor key, its gesticulative

cadence, that bowed to me, that touched lips and forehead to me, that greeted me with

salaam-shalom" (35). Recognizing the beauty in the art of the Other, the narrator unites

Islam to Judaism, by hyphenating the Moslem and Hebrew salutations of peace into a

single compound salutation—a reunion of greetings derived from the same root.

However, it is the architectural sophistication of the city that particularly impresses the

narrator:

> It was...the everywhere-encountered art of smiths, builders, and craftsmen that
> won back my admiration and in its shapes and forms dovetailed and mortised into
> the welcoming hollows of my heart. Like the music I had heard the night before,
> this was an art of traceries and fretwork. (37)

Despite this initial favourable reaction, the narrator's impressions of Casablanca are

subverted when he enters the *mellah,* the Jewish quarter. Having escaped the literal

(though not emotional) trauma of living through the physical realities of the Holocaust,

the narrator, at least at first, troubles his descriptive account of the Casablanca Jews. He quite literally "casts" the inhabitants of the *mellah* as the filmed participants of a distantly unreal production: "some Hollywood producer," he muses, "had come here to stage a frightful scene" (41). Comparing the horrors of the *mellah* to Canada, where poverty is not "mythical," but perhaps less "wretched" than in this experience, he at first refuses to acknowledge a difference in existence. Since *he* is unable to imagine how such horrific living conditions can exist in reality, he is initially reluctant to accept them as a real, lived experience, framing them instead as an imaginary sequence, a dream that is in stark contrast to his newly-realized dream of an Israel reinstated in the world (41). Fischer, too, notes the disparity between the narrator's initial impression of Morocco and his adjustment of that impression:

> At first, when the young Montrealer arrives in Casablanca, the colours, the shapes and sounds, the sensuality of the city intoxicate him.... But soon the fascination gives way to contempt. Like the great English aesthete [Ruskin], he feels that beauty, when it thrives amidst social injustice, is tainted.... One sees a man who is acutely sensitive to aesthetic experience, who is irresistibly drawn to beauty, yet who will reject art, no matter how exquisite, when it seems to ingratiate itself on behalf of a system or person that must be condemned on moral grounds. (191)

Indeed, the narrator is unable to find the initial beauty of the city in the face of such injustice. On his way out, he observes, "I was eager to leave the city where the word Jew was a term of pornography, eager to leave it and its false music, its hollow art, eager to shake from feet the dust of this city of the teated domes and the phalloi of minarets" (44). The sexualizing metaphors employed by the narrator speak to a perversion of his initial vision of the city. Unable to ignore the inequalities in Morocco, he transforms his

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portrait of the city from the elegant to the obscene as he continues his search for his uncle Melech and the poetry of the Promised Land.

The narrator's explicit search for the poetry of the newly-founded state of Israel speaks not only to an experiential observation of the diversity of Jewish experience but also to Klein's own experimentation with form in *The Second Scroll*. In his quest to realize the poetic voice of Israel, he finds that there is no essential, common voice; instead, he discovers a diverse, rich tapestry of experience and poetic approach that mirrors the experiences of the varied sub-populations in the new nation. For example, writing of the poetry of the *Sabra* poets—native-born Israeli Jews—the narrator maintains that, though their poetry is "exciting," "large-gestured," and "primitive," it also contains a "reactionary" theme that repels him (52): "It would vanish. It did not belong to the essential thoughtways of our people...it surged up only as an answer to contemporary history. It was Israel's retort to Europe, couched in Europe's language" (52). The narrator's criticism seems to identify the kind of narrative that Klein sought to avoid. Here, the narrator argues against poetry that responds *solely* to a specific, contemporary historical context. In such poetry, he seems to argue, the existence of the Jewish population prior to the Holocaust is denied.

Just as Spiegelman implicitly argues in *Maus* that the Holocaust ought not to be considered a time-zero marker for one's life, so Klein attempts to address the ethical dilemma of narrativizing a specific moment in history. Instead of serving merely as an "answer to contemporary history," *The Second Scroll* acts as a nexus of the past and the present, the ancient and the modern, essence and experience. In so doing, it invokes the

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Holocaust as both historical fact *and* as narrated poetic subject. The victims of the

Holocaust are victims of genocide, certainly, but they are also real subjects deserving of

consideration, for they had lives prior to—and, in some cases, following—the event

itself. The victims—including Melech Davidson—who are ultimately unable to tell their

own stories require another voice to bear the ethical burden of speaking for them.

Klein's focus does not rest solely on "higher" poetic symbols and motifs. Instead,

in a proto-postmodern appropriation and elevation of "lower" concerns—popular

culture—the author focuses attention on the collision between contemporary culture and

consumerism and the larger spiritual and political themes embedded within the narrative.

Indeed, Klein's focus on contemporary culture at times foreshadows the commodification

of the concentration camp. While in Israel searching for the poetic voice of the people of

the newly-founded state, the narrator notes that part of the impetus driving the angry and

traumatic poetry of some poets is the influx of tourists. "The tourists who were filling

Israel's hotels," he observes, "also did much to keep alive the resentments on which this

poetry fed" (52). The travelers, in addition to what the narrator observes as their

"patronizing airs," have a "singular incomprehension of the ideals that were building the

State" (52). The *Haim*, or Other, as these tourists are designated by some of the country's

poets, ignore their ethical responsibility to the customs of their host country, not only by

objecting to the food and asserting the superiority of their own customs, but also by

commodifying the inhabitants of the nation:

> They photographed everything, including the "inmates" of refugee camps, who
> surprised their visitors by refusing to be treated as exhibits. They were
> disappointed, these pilgrims, when they found that not everyone in Israel wore
> sidecurls, observed the Blue Sabbaths, prayed thrice daily; in their home towns at

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> the chicken dinners where they had so valiantly wrested their heritage from the
> hands of the usurper, they had dreamed, apparently, of Israel as of a great
> Established Synagogue devoted to an incessant praying for the salvation of the
> souls of its materialist benefactors. (52)

While Klein had no specific knowledge that could have allowed him to intuit the future commodification of the Holocaust experience, his narrative prefigures this consumerist alteration of violent history (and the commodification of cultural tourism). This is in keeping with his thematic focus on existing outside of time—the essence versus the experience.

That the narrator of Klein's narrative does ultimately discover the new poetry of the Promised Land in the everyday lives of Israel's citizens speaks to Israel's reinsertion into the world. The narrator observes that

> They were not members of literary societies, the men who were giving new life to
> the antique speech, but merchants, tradesmen, day labourers. In their daily
> activity, and without pose or flourish, they showed it to be alive again, the
> shaping Hebrew imagination. (55)

Ultimately, the narrator sees around him the intersection of the spiritual and the everyday, and it is in their fusion—their hybridization—that the new poetry of Israel is to be found. An insurance company called *Sneh* brings to mind "Moses' burning bush, which had burned and burned but had not been consumed"—thereby celebrating the continuation of the Jewish peoples even after the event of the Holocaust (55).[18] Another commercial establishment, a dry-cleaner, named *Kesheth*, or rainbow, signifies, to the narrator the "cessation of floods" (55).[19] It is in this gleeful discovery of "metamorphosis and

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[18] In addition to representing the reinsertion of the spiritual into the temporal, the insurance company *Sneh* is also an ironic allusion indicating the commodification of the survival of the Jewish people.
[19] The same can be said of *Kesheth*.

rejuvenation" punctuated by "nameless authorship" that Klein subverts his previous use

of disease metaphors, replacing them with a poetics of healing: "It was as if I was

spectator to the healing of torn flesh, or *heard* a broken bone come together, set, and

grow again" (56). The poetry of the Promised Land, the narrator observers, is composed

of the language of miracles, all of which reassert God's covenant with his chosen people.

Israel, now reinserted into the world, has begun the process of rebuilding after the flood

of recent, genocidal history. The poetry of the everyday is a miracle simply because of

its persistence and survival. The past combines with the present, and the biblical

promises on which the Jewish faith is based have, once again, have been demonstrated in

the temporal realm.

Conclusion

In "Gloss Gimel," the narrator's uncle Melech aptly comments on the respective

responsibilities of artist and viewer. "Such is the nature of art," he maintains,

> that though the artist entertain fixedly but one intention and one meaning, that
> creation once accomplished beneath his hand, now no longer merely his own
> attribute, but Inspiration's very substance and entity, proliferates with
> significances by him not conceived nor imagined. Such art is eternal and to every
> generation speaks with fresh coeval timeliness. (73)

Speaking here about his reaction on viewing the Sistine Chapel, Melech succinctly

addresses the project undertaken by his creator, A.M. Klein. *The Second Scroll* is not

easily analyzed through a single lens. Klein's ambitious project is almost as open to

interpretation as it is vast in scope. Each reading of the text provides new opportunities

for analysis, and each analysis works with the others to create a complex and dynamic

dialectic of meaning. Klein's ethical representation of the Holocaust takes the form of the narrator's journey, as he seeks both his messianic uncle and the poetic principle of a newly-temporalized state of Israel.

In his attempt to represent the Holocaust ethically, Klein assumes a vast number of responsibilities: to the Jews of the Diaspora, to Israelis, to Holocaust victims both living and dead, and indeed to a world increasingly divided over the complexities of ethical discourse. These he tries to resolve through both through the action of the plot (in which the narrator repeatedly comes face-to-face with the Other) and the language of the text itself, which, in its allusions to nutrition, disease, land as metaphor, and contemporary culture, creates a varied and rich linguistic fabric, demanding that the reader confront the difficulty of the Holocaust, as both event and complex text. Similar obligations will be placed on Spiegelman's readers, as he, too, considers the event of the Holocaust from a generational distance while trying to represent his father's testimony as truthfully as possible. Where Klein's narrator encounters the face of the Other on his journey from Montreal to Israel, Spiegelman's fictionalized self will complicate conceptions of the Other by giving them animal faces. Despite this outward difference, the two authors' ethical projects both represent an attempt to reconsider the role of form in ethical narration.

Speaking of her husband's project, Bessie Klein observed that the title of *The Second Scroll* highlights Klein's philosophy that "the Bible is a living book, read by a man of the present time, a book that immerses us in the present, explains the world to us, provides a context for the events that we experience" (Kattan 81). Certainly, this

statement is accurate: Klein's narrative reimagines the Torah, clearly establishes its

continued relevance, and sheds light on the diversity of Jewish experience. More than

this, however, *The Second Scroll* stands as an early example of post-Holocaust ethical

writing. The narrator's quest does not end with a clear resolution, since his uncle Melech

has died, and will therefore never be cathartically heard in the pages of the narrative.

Nonetheless, the narrator expresses a sense of optimism, in which vein he finally and

hopefully observes "the beacons announcing new moons, festivals, and set times" (87).

"Reality is Too Complex For Comics": Trauma, Familial Obligation, and Object-Value in
Art Spigelman's *Maus*

*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.*

- Art Spiegelman, Maus 2 *(1991)*

Introduction

It is only in the last few decades that serious academic attention has been given to

the comics genre. Scholars[20] are now recognizing that graphic narratives offer multi-

faceted opportunities for interpretation. A medium that marries image and word, the

graphic novel provides multiple sites of analysis—visual, linguistic, and a third,

hybridized amalgam of both. Speaking to the recent conflict over the publication of

Mohammed caricatures in the Danish publication *Jyllands-Posten*, Spiegelman describes

the power of cartoons and cartoon language to influence public opinion and subvert

accepted ideologies. "Cartoon language," he argues,

> is mostly limited to deploying a handful of recognizable visual symbols and clichés.
> It makes use of the discredited pseudo-scientific principles of physiognomy to
> portray character through a few physical attributes and facial expressions. It takes
> skill to use such clichés in ways that expand or subvert this impoverished
> vocabulary. ("Drawing Blood" 45)

Here, Spiegelman not only overtly expresses the potential power of the graphic novel (in

the hands of the capable artist) but also assumes a theoretical stand as to the meaning of

language. In the graphic novel, he implicitly argues, *language* is constituted not only by

the word but also by its accompanying image.

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[20] Including Philippe Marion, Benoît Peeters, and Jan Baetens

Spiegelman's *Maus*—portions of which were initially published in *Raw*, Spiegelman's alternative comics magazine (co-edited with his wife, Françoise Mouly)— weaves together a number of narratives, all of which are bound together through an exploration of familial and genocidal history. Where Klein's narrator assumes a double quest in his search for his uncle Melech and the poetry of Israel, Spiegelman's cartoon self assumes a two-fold narrative style. One narrative recounts the life of Vladek Spiegelman (Art Spiegelman's father) during and following the Holocaust, including accounts of his marriage to Spiegelman's mother, Anja, and the death of their first son, Richieu, during the Holocaust. The second tale occurs in the present time (*Maus* was first published in 1986), and tells the story of Spiegelman's troubled relationship with his father and stepmother, Mala; it also provides marginal information about his own family—his wife, Francoise Mouly and daughter Nadja. The narrative provides an account of Spiegelman's discussions with his father about the Holocaust, as he attempts to document the story for publication.

By framing his father Vladek's Holocaust story, as well as his own trauma as a second-generation Holocaust survivor, as a comic book, Art Spiegelman assumes a range of ethical responsibilities that are explicitly linked to his choice of form. Though A.M. Klein writes a personal story based on his own journey to Israel, his narrative ultimately speaks to a wider audience in its search for the poetic principle of Israel; his narrative structure (a reimagined Torah) embodies the reach of his quest. In contrast, Spiegelman's story, while addressing the Holocaust generally, is much more personal in intent. Indeed, Michael Rothberg notes in *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust*

Representation that in *Maus*, "Knowledge of [The Holocaust] is revealed as the product of ongoing acts of representation that...juxtapose it with other historical and personal traumas...sometimes pressing, sometimes trivial" (190). Ultimately, *Maus* is the story of one artist's attempt to work through his personal relationships in view of the Holocaust, which has had traumatic effects on every member of the family.

This story—one focused primarily on Spiegelman's relationship with his father—is complicated by its location in the pop culture realm. In addition to the larger debate surrounding the feasibility and limits of Holocaust representation, the question arises as to whether the Holocaust can be situated in the comics genre, and, by extension, whether such a narrative can ever be rendered comic. The author's deployment of animal allegory, in which Jews are represented as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, Americans as dogs, and so on, forces a consideration of whether the beast-fable motif reinforces national, ethnic, or religious stereotypes, while undermining the truth of the Holocaust as a barbaric, *human*-created genocide. Further, each of these particular ethical concerns (surrounding representation and allegory) embedded within the text ultimately becomes confused and intertwined as Spiegelman takes them up in his work: sometimes implicitly, other times more explicitly. He also works to confront his own residual trauma as the son of a Holocaust survivor. As it turns out, he is not able to delineate one ethical issue from the other easily, and the design of his work mirrors this entanglement. His story becomes an intricate narrative of ethical responsibility to his family, of obligation to a consumer culture, of the defiance and subversion of stereotypes, and a fetishization of objects onto which he ascribes deeply personal and symbolic

meaning. What the graphic novel form offers him is the opportunity to deconstruct these various dilemmas through both visual and linguistic tactics. The hybrid language of the comics form, wherein the interaction of word and image works to create a dialectic of meaning, provides multiple levels of interrogation and interpretation.

Maus as Work of Testimony and Memory

A defining feature of the Holocaust narrative is the expression of personal trauma. The reader, because of the horrific nature of the atrocities committed by the Nazis in World War II, is likely to share that trauma, however vicariously. As argued by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, *all* are affected by "the encounter with the real," thereby causing an "existential crisis" (xvi). Because we, as readers, still struggle with representations of the unimaginable and problems of literality (the fusion of fact with artistic license), we strive to understand how "art inscribes...*what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*" (Felman and Laub xx). Because the reader is at least partially responsible for the "knowing" of the event, s/he must also, by consequence, assume a certain amount of the trauma, since "to know" is not only to have in the mind but also to have personal experience of what is "known" (Felman and Laub 58). Through careful reading practices, then, the reader can enable the writer's testimony.

Trauma is not a uniform experience. Certainly, there is a critical distinction to be made between trauma that is physically experienced by a direct victim of an event and those who inherit a vicarious trauma as a result of the event. In *Memory Effects: The*

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Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing, Dora Apel argues that the focus of the

second-hand witness is different from that of the direct survivor:

> Because of their distance from the events...secondary witnesses do not deal with
> the Holocaust directly but in ways that bring to the surface the tensions and
> discontinuities between the past and the present, ambiguities, impasses and
> lacunas that are part of the "memory effects" of the Shoah. (21)

The trauma of second-generation (or indirect) witnesses to the Holocaust, then, is

channeled through a crisis of interpretation and representation. The guilt experienced by

indirect victims is channeled into a traumatic meditation on the incommensurability

between the past and the present.

Because the horrors of the Holocaust have impressed themselves not only on the

survivors but also on those who hear second-hand accounts of the atrocities, children of

survivors assume a degree of the trauma, as they are forced to confront both their parents'

stories and their place within their family dynamic following such a tragedy. A large

body of scholarship considers the traumatic effects of the Holocaust on the children of

survivors.[21] Although Spiegelman has not lived through the Holocaust himself, he

nonetheless experiences trauma as a result of his father's experiences. His trauma

complicates his understanding of his ethical responsibility to his parents' story. One

manifestation of Spiegelman's own survivor trauma in *Maus* is his depiction of Art's

continuing child-like behaviour. For example, he adopts the child-like pose of stretching

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[21] One scholar in particular who addresses the effects of the Holocaust on second-generation survivors is
Alan Berger. In *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*, he maintains
that while "it is the survivors who remember living with death and routinized evil as constant companions"
(2) the children of survivors also assume a degree of the trauma, since "the violence of the European past is
very much a part of the American present, and attests to the continuing impact of the Holocaust on
subsequent generations" (3). Similarly, in *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust
Survivors and Perpetrators* (which he coedits), he argues that the second-generation legacy is one that is
full of questions—about family, about religion, and about why people have to suffer (2).

out on the floor while listening to his father's story, just as one would when listening to a tale of long ago and far away (Spiegelman 1:45). In doing so, he creates a (perhaps unintended) analogy between his father's Holocaust narrative and a contemporary, happy-ending, violence-free childhood fairy-tale; despite the darkness of the tale, Spiegelman is enraptured by the story itself:

figure 3.1. story-telling

As discussed by Hamida Bosmajian, this image of Holocaust narrative as bedtime story widens the gap between Spiegelman and Vladek. Because Spiegelman adopts the role of a child, he is not, in this case, able to be a proper witness:

> Bedtime stories provide intimate moments between parent and child, but the child must be able to understand the story.... The confusion of genres and storytelling situations contributes to Artie's withholding, in the text at least, the empathetic reaching out of the listener to the witness who gives testimony. (Bosmajian 29)

Thus, Spiegelman's identity issues become entangled with his responsibilities as a second-hand witness. If he were to treat his dialogue with his father as a professional interview, his identity issues—in this case, man as child—would not get in the way of his task of witnessing as a second-generation Jewish writer. In the given frame, he avoids his ethical responsibility as listener. Here, though, the reader offers redemptive

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possibility: though Art is, perhaps, an unsatisfactory witness in this scene, the reader still listens to and acknowledges what Vladek is saying. It is in this way, as Felman and Laub assert, that narrative itself becomes testimony, by forcing a rethinking and transformation of history through the very act of bearing literary witness (95). While the reader is not able to ease Art's ethical dilemma—understanding and enabling his father's testimony— the reader's witnessing of the testimony *does* ease one ethical dilemma caused by Art's inadequate witnessing: that of receiving the testimony of Holocaust survivors.

A particularly contentious ethical dilemma surrounding *Maus* is Spiegelman's use of the beast fable to depict characters within his narrative. Some critics argue that such beastialization is unethical, because it supports and propagates stereotypes. For example, David Mikics argues that Spiegelman's portrayal of characters as animals "is frightening because it echoes the Nazis' own reduction of their victims to nonhuman status" (20). From an ethical standpoint, implicit acceptance of such caricatures, without considering the strategies of the text, would subvert the value of the text as a Holocaust narrative— one that should reject the tropes and motifs used by the Nazi party in committing their genocide. Indeed, *Maus* is replete with reappropriations of Nazi propaganda. The very title of the work plays on the Nazi depiction of the Jews as vermin. The image, a key one used by the Nazi party, is most hauntingly depicted in the propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* (1940), in which the narrator equates the Jewish people to rodents in need of extermination. The Nazis also made extensive use of pseudo-scientific racial profiling: Jewish people, they argued, were easily identified by the shape of their heads, their noses, and so on. George Mosse notes that such stereotypes were "the catalyst which pushed

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German nationalism over the edge, from discrimination to mass extermination" (Herf 7).

Though this is perhaps overstated, Mosse's claim nonetheless acknowledges the role of such reductionism in the project of genocide.

The graphic novel is a result of the dynamic interaction of the linguistic and the visual; similarly, the Nazis made use of a hybridized visual-linguistic form to disseminate a racist depiction of Jews. *Word of the Week*, an official Nazi wall newspaper, was mass distributed in Germany between 1937 and 1943 (Herf 14). Besides relying on inflammatory headlines, such as "The Jewish Conspiracy" and "The Jew: Instigator of the War, Prolonger of the War," the weeklies also made extensive use of caricature to depict Jewish people. These posters, as noted by Jeffrey Herf, were designed through their large, bold type to grab the attention of passers-by, and so were "the most intrusive and pervasive form of visual propaganda in everyday life in Nazi Germany" (28).

However, Spiegelman does not shy away from using racist tropes. Instead, he appropriates them immediately and explicitly in the title of his series. In doing so, he claims his authority over both word and image. As noted by David Sisk, such linguistic articulations are not only laudable, but obligatory: "we must claim mastery over the word. Nothing more is necessary to protect our freedom...but...nothing less will do" (180). Spiegelman claims mastery over both the word and the *idea* propounded by Hitler and his party. He opens each book in the series with anti-Semitic quotations. The first, quoting Hitler, expresses the Nazi construction of Jew-as-vermin: "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human" (Spiegelman 4). The second, taken from a German newspaper article, reiterates this attitude, identifying Mickey Mouse as a Jewish ideal,

and exhorting readers to do "away with Jewish brutalization of the people" and to "wear the Swastika Cross" (Spiegelman 3). Though Spiegelman begins his narrative with such statements, what follows, in a truly postmodern ironic appropriation, is a refutation of the racist tropes expounded by the Nazis. His work, though immediately accessible as an animal fable, whereby Jews, Germans, Poles, and Americans are represented as animals, is a story about humans.

Spiegelman's sophisticated animal allegory has been seen as particularly problematic and unethical when it comes to the cat-and-mouse metaphor, where Nazis are depicted as cats and Jews as mice. Cynthia Ozick notoriously argues against the use of the beast fable:

> There is a certain metaphorical difficulty, though, [sic] a misleading one, in *Maus*'s depiction of the Germans as cats and the Jews as mice. Spiegelman's point of course, is that the Jews were the German's prey. But prey is legitimate in nature; you can't argue with cats when they catch mice and kill them. It's killing, not murder. There is no murder in nature. The Germans were not cats and the Jews were not mice; both were human. And *that* is the *real* point in contemplating the Holocaust. (380)

Ozick argues that Spiegelman's work implies an element of *naturalness* to the Nazi (cat) persecution of the Jews (mice). Still others, like Mikics, protest on the grounds that such anthropomorphization reinforces stereotypes and caricatures of nationalities. Taken more symbolically, however, Spiegelman's appropriation of geographical and ethnic stereotypes represents his *defiance* of their analogical truthfulness: he does not deny or subvert the reality of the Holocaust as a human-caused and human-driven genocide. Presenting his memories of the people important in Spiegelman's life as mice, pigs, or dogs does not preclude their importance as *people*, and the symbolic use of animals

within the series does not serve a reductionist posturing.

The animal allegory in *Maus*, while certainly original in its application in a text about the Holocaust, draws upon an entire genre of animal fables. Aesop's didactic fables, the oldest and most obvious example, are centred on anthropomorphic animals, through which the author imparts moral values. More recently, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) allegorizes an entire totalitarian society largely based on Stalinist Russia. His text functions on at least two levels: the literal story that is being told within the narrative and the meaning associated with it, which connects the story with political and historical events. Following this tradition, Spiegelman, like Orwell, relies on personification as a stereotyping technique. In "Appreciating *Animal Farm* in the New Millennium," John Rodden notes that Orwell uses animals to represent humans reduced to singular characteristics: "Animal Farm," he observes,

> is an allegory written in the form of a beast fable, in which the misadventures of animals expose human follies. Orwell draws on our cultural stereotypes of animals: Pigs have a bad name for selfishness and gluttony. Horses are slow-witted, strong, gentle, and loyal. Sheep are brainless and behave as a flock without individual initiative. (72)

Orwell's appropriation of animal allegory as a means of satirizing a corrupt regime was highly original. In fact, this was such a unique approach to the beast fable (and to satirical political allegory) that the book was often mistaken as a simple children's animal story (Rodden 71). Similarly, Spiegelman's deployment of animal allegory is distinctive within the realm of Holocaust narrative, though three years after publishing the first volume of *Maus*, Eve Bunting published her children's book, *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* (1989), which modified the beast fable motif to impart post-

Holocaust moral lessons for children. Where Orwell's characters, however, are figured to highlight specific traits, Spiegelman sets up such analogies only to subvert them.

Spiegelman's articulations of the difficulties in drawing reductive analogies between ethnic or national populations and animals, directly addressed in the work, demonstrates that the paradigm proposed by the Nazis simply does not hold up to scrutiny. Consider, for example, the difficulty Art has in deciding how to draw his wife, Francoise Mouly. Mouly defies simple reductionism: a French woman and a converted Jew, she is not easily explained through simplistic paradigms. The first panels of *Maus 2* show Spiegelman's notebook, as he considers depicting her as a frog, a dog, a rabbit, a moose, and a mouse (2:11).

figure 3.2. representation

Though he eventually settles on depicting her as a mouse, he notes that he is not fully

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satisfied with this image, finding it ultimately insufficient, especially in light of France's history of anti-Semitism.[22] Spiegelman's appropriation of Nazi propaganda, then, turns the initial racist paradigm on its head.

Spiegelman further troubles simplistic models of characterization through the introduction of masks and shape-shifters. At various points throughout the narrative, Spiegelman draws himself and other characters (such as Pavel, his psychiatrist) wearing a mouse mask. Climbing down from his cartooning desk, Art's head (facing away from the panel) clearly reveals the mouse mask (2:43). Clearly, underneath the mask is a human face.

figure 3.3. masks

At such points, Spiegelman explicitly reminds the reader that this is a story about human events. However, his reliance on shape-shifting signifies that characters in his story are not always who they appear to be. He notably blurs Nazi definitions of Jewishness in a series of panels in *Maus 2*. Describing the roll calls held in Auschwitz each morning and evening, Vladek recounts the story of one particular inmate who insists, in racist terms, that he is not a "Yid" or a "Polack" (2:50). Instead, he claims, "I have medals from the Kaiser. My **son** is a German soldier" (50). In side-by-side panels, Spiegelman draws the

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[22] Art references the Dreyfus Affair—in which Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish artillery officer, was wrongfully convicted for treason—as a particular example of French anti-Semitism.
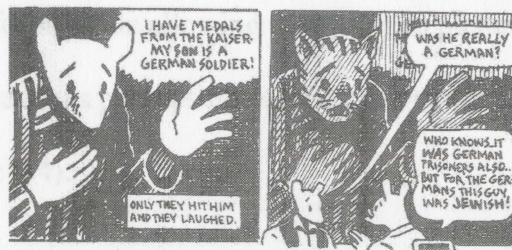
inmate first as a mouse, and second as a cat:

figure 3.4. shape-shifting

Creating uncertainty in this single identification forces a consideration of all other tropes set up in the novel. This strategy powerfully discredits the anti-Semitic statements that open each of his graphic texts. Indeed, the graphic novel form itself allows for a deeper and more critical exploration of racist tropes—the images and text create a complex dialectic of signs that refute, perhaps more potently than pure text, the very notion that ethnic groups can be reduced to a single distinguishing characteristic.

Complicating the ethics of reductionism and the reappropriation of Nazi techniques in *Maus* is the inclusion of actual photographs in juxtaposition to Spiegelman's graphic illustrations of characters. Though these figures in *Maus* are generally depicted as animals (thereby framing the story as an allegorical Holocaust narrative), all three of his family members–Vladek, Anja, and his brother, Richieu (who died during the Holocaust)–are depicted through actual photographs. By showing "real" pictures of his family, Spiegelman infuses the photographs with object value, at the same time jarring the reader into recognizing that the "characters" within his narrative are all drawn from real people. It is important, at this point, to distinguish between the ethics of historical

and personal truth. For the reader who has become invested in the story, Spiegelman's

family has already become real. Vladek's appearance in a *posed* photograph wearing a

concentration camp uniform, while allowing the reader to picture his human features

accurately, strikes the reader as perhaps more false than the images in which he is

portrayed as a mouse (2:134):

I PASSED ONCE A PHOTO PLACE WHAT HAD A CAMP UNIFORM - A NEW AND CLEAN ONE - TO MAKE SOUVENIR PHOTOS..

ANJA KEPT THIS PICTURE ALWAYS. I HAVE IT STILL NOW IN MY DESK! HUH? WHERE DO YOU GO?

I NEED THAT PHOTO IN MY BOOK!

figure 3.5. surreal reality

Vladek's portrait in an Auschwitz uniform has a feeling of unreality—a surreal

commodification of Holocaust experience.

The question of historical truth and the limits of representation is integral to the

ethics debate over Spiegelman's use of animal allegory, and is explicitly linked to

postmodern debates over the very nature of history. *Maus* (or, for that matter, *The*

Second Scroll) provides a two-fold testimony: global and personal. The photographs do

lend documentary evidence to Spiegelman's life and the experiences of his parents and

brother. Indeed, Amy Hungerford reiterates Marianne Hirsch's observation that "the

photographs attempt to make history and comic one seamless reality within narrative"

(117). This powerful fusion of fact and artistic license creates a narrative that is all the

more gripping, and establishes a hybrid of genres that works in the service of truth and witnessing.

Having examined Spiegelman's presentation of memory and narrative through the frameworks of reliable and personal witnessing, I believe it is now useful to consider the ways in which Spiegelman demonstrates the complexities involved in reconciling memory and time within the graphic novel. Because Spiegelman assumes the responsibility of telling both his and his father's story, there is necessarily a collision between chronology and memory, as he struggles to convey both stories simultaneously (as a single text) and yet separately (two narratives about two different individuals who have experienced life differently). He is also constrained by the necessity of telling his story in an accessible, readerly way: the ethical onus on the writer to disseminate his story to a wider audience would be impeded otherwise, since the value of the text would be viewed merely from the author's own perspective.

Above all, *Maus* suggests that the Holocaust perhaps ought not to be used as the absolute marker of one's life. The work offers a balanced alternative, emphasizing the value of familial history in providing context and meaning to one's life. Spiegelman consistently places a heightened emphasis on familial relations and connections, rather than on the particulars of the Nazi project. Rothberg, too, notes this shift in subject matter: "Ultimately, in de-absolutizing Jewish identity and the experience of the Holocaust...Spiegelman displace[s], but do[es] not negate, the place of the Nazi genocide in contemporary culture" (*Realism* 190). However, the constraints imposed by the graphic novel form, along with the importance of maintaining a logical narrative

structure, force an obsession with order and time, particularly as they relate to Vladek's recounting of his experiences during the Holocaust. Art insists that "if you [Vladek] don't keep your story chronological, I'll never get it straight" (Spiegelman, 1:82); however, Vladek continues to confuse chronology, mistaking the temporal order of events, and even confusing (on his deathbed), Art and Richieu, Art's brother, who died during the war. Whereas his wife had a written record of her experience, Vladek produces instead a confused and tangled oral remembrance. Vladek's difficulties in articulating his story reinforce Sarah Kofman's notion of "knotted words" (Roth 90). Kofman, a philosopher-writer who was a direct victim of the Holocaust, and later committed suicide, argues that these knotted words are "demanded and yet forbidden, because for too long they have been internalized and withheld" (Roth 90). This succinct declaration embodies within it the essence of the Holocaust representation debate. Words are necessary, indeed "demanded," to ensure remembrance, continue discussion, and, optimistically, prevent such tragedies from occurring again. However, words expressing the Holocaust are also "forbidden"—constrained by the ethical question of acceptable representation. If this is so, then Vladek's inability to temporalize his story, after so many years of silence, is a reflection of his own residual trauma.

Spiegelman, too, is affected by this traumatic inability to sort micro-narratives (his story and his father's) within the larger context (of global history), and so his story fuses with his father's. This mingling is represented visually in frames which simultaneously depict details of his and Vladek's lives. In one frame, Art is sitting at his

desk, while mounds of bodies lie at his feet, and a concentration camp guard tower looms

outside his window (2:41).

figure 3.6. Success

This panel powerfully illustrates both Art's trauma as the son of a Holocaust survivor and

second-hand witness *and* the intersection between histories: personal/global and

past/present. Art's cartooning desk looms over the mound of dead bodies in a manner not

dissimilar to the concentration camp tower that looms above *him*. His linguistic

articulation of personal trauma is punctuated by a swarm of flies, harbingers of disease

and death. In the distance, an unseen voice informs Art that the unseen "we" is ready to

"shoot"—a *menacing* play on words between photography and murder. Positing the

existence of a "Chronotope of the Holocaust," Sue Vice observes that "Memory-time and

chronological time collide in nearly every panel [of *Maus*], as do the spaces of the past

and the present" (48).[23] Her articulation of the collision of the past and the present in the

spaces of the graphic novel identifies the challenges inherent in trying to depict one's life

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[23] Vice defines Bakhtin's notion of chronotope as "the combination of space and time markers which appear in any text" (47). A Holocaust chronotope, she argues, is most easily discussed with respect to the graphic novel form, which, because of the inherent properties of the form (framing and the combining of linguistic and visual registers) can most easily express this idea.

in a strictly chronological order: life is a synthesis of chronological history, personal

experience, and individual memory of that history and experience. This conflict arises

from frames of reference that are insufficient to process one's life neatly in a

chronological way; Felman and Laub argue that standard cultural frames of reference

(shared referents that are mediated by a normative understanding of the world), which

determine our understanding of what is *real*, are unable to process the scale of what has

occurred in history (xv). Similarly, Spiegelman is unable to fuse his and his father's lives

neatly because they are not bound by a shared frame of reference determined through

common experience; thus, they fuse and collide throughout the spaces of the graphic

novel. De Certeau supports this notion of memory as being transformative, and it

therefore cannot be neatly categorized and delimited:

> An "art" of memory develops an aptitude for always being in the other's place
> without possessing it, and for profiting from this alteration without destroying
> itself through it.... Memory comes from somewhere else, it is outside of itself,
> it moves things about. (87)

It is only through Art's grappling with the collision of his and his father's stories that his

memory becomes an agent of transformation—one that by being teased out of the various

participants becomes available outside of themselves (to the reader). It is important to

note, however, that this transformative memory is not seamlessly achieved.

To be sure, the reader's memory also imposes itself on the narrative—a memory

that, generally speaking, is shaped by the dominant *zeitgeist* of contemporary culture, as

well as a shared understanding of what the Holocaust is, and how it should be portrayed.

De Certeau argues that the memory of the reader is intrusive in that it "insinuates into

another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is

transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body" (xxi). Thus, the reader projects her/his own experience onto the text, and in doing so, appropriates it. Felman and Laub maintain that there are, in fact, three levels of witnessing: being a witness to oneself within the experience, being a witness to the testimony of others, and being a witness to the process of witnessing itself (75). If the reader is making the effort to acknowledge and learn Spiegelman's truth (the third conceptualization of witnessing), s/he is, as de Certeau notes, an active reader, one who ethically enables the text.

Maus as Object and a Story of Objects: Commodity, Form, and Object-Value

If we are to consider the ethics of object fetishization in *Maus*, it is first necessary to consider the graphic novel as a fetishized object itself. The first part of *Maus*, subtitled "A Survivor's Tale," was published in 1986 to critical acclaim. Its success was not only critical but financial, as well, thus effectively transforming Spiegelman's work of testimony into commodity. These roles are not easy to reconcile. Spiegelman notes his discomfort with commercial success in *Maus 2*: *And Here My Troubles Began*: "At least fifteen foreign editions are coming out. I've gotten 4 serious offers to turn my book into a t.v. Special or movie. (I don't wanna)" (41). What he fails to acknowledge in this section, however, is that it is the *reader* who has complicated the value of the book through her/his consumption of it. The reader becomes explicitly involved in the ethics of form; as a reader of the comic book testimony, s/he must inscribe her own meanings onto it, while also enabling the testimony of Spiegelman, the second-hand witness. In

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The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau maintains that the very act of reading is the "'exorbitant' focus of contemporary culture and its consumption.... For the binary set production-consumption, one would substitute its more general equivalent: writing-reading" (xxi). For de Certeau, the creation of commodity is not possible without the participation of both a producer and a consumer (or writer and reader). According to this conceptualization of consumerism, Spiegelman, as the writer of the text, is the producer (while his cartoon self, Art, is the "actor" in the produced commodity), and the reader, the viewer/voyeur, is the consumer. It is important to make this distinction between viewer and voyeur, since the reader is not merely a spectator to Spiegelman's story. S/he is forced to experience and confront her/his own residual trauma. The reader's investment directly imparts object-value onto the graphic novel, for without consumption, there can be no valued commodity.

Spiegelman works his criticism of the commodification of his Holocaust narrative into the binding of the text. On the back cover of *Maus 2*, Spiegelman offers a visual criticism of the transformation of his work from a testament of experience to an object to be purchased and consumed. Above the barcode, he has drawn an image of a Jewish concentration camp inmate; the stripes on the prisoner's uniform blend into the lines of the barcode, highlighting the blurred distinction between the victim and the testifying and selling of his experience. Michael Rothberg comments on this image:

> The text's very "wrapping" asks the reader to consider its implication in a system
> of economic entrapment. The self-conscious irony of this parallel between
> imprisonment and commodity production marks one of the many places where
> Spiegelman rebels against the terms of his success.... This paradox, which is
> foregrounded everwhere in *Maus*, can be read as a comment not only on the status
> of memory and history in capitalist culture but also on recent debates about the

possibility and desirability of representing the Nazi genocide. ("Production" 142) Rothberg's consideration of a parallel between "imprisonment and commodity production" warrants further consideration, as he conspicuously avoids identifying who or what is imprisoned: is the story itself imprisoned? Is it the writer himself who is constrained by these forces, or is it the reader? In varying ways, all of these suggestions have merit. The story itself is constrained both by its role as Holocaust narrative (which imprisons it within a genre that sets up expectations of how the story must be told) and by its role as object of mass consumption. The writer, too, is limited to working within the responsibilities dictated by these dual roles. The reader already brings to the text a determination of what a Holocaust narrative should and should not contain. The unresolved Holocaust trauma (whether direct or vicarious) on the part of author or reader will also have an impact on the ways in which the story is written, read, and imprinted. The barcode, then, fuses with a new, contemporary social coding of the Auschwitz uniform in a way that unites the seemingly disparate discourses of consumerism and memory, as Spiegelman's testimony to his father's experience becomes inextricably linked with his own understanding of western capitalist culture.

The complicity of the reader in turning a graphic novel about the Holocaust into a commodity necessitates a consideration of the ethical constraints binding Spiegelman as he struggles with the production of his work. Art's sessions with Pavel, his psychologist (himself a Holocaust survivor), highlight Art's struggle to reconcile himself to the very notion of writing about such a horrific event. In fact, he quotes Samuel Beckett as saying that "every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness" (2: 45). It is

Pavel, however, who most explicitly comments on the reader's complicity in Holocaust narratives: "Look at how many books have already been written about the Holocaust. What's the point? People haven't changed...Maybe they need a newer, bigger Holocaust" (2: 45). Pavel's scorn for the general public has a two-fold ethical implication: the first, and certainly more dire, is that the plethora of Holocaust narratives is failing to prevent further violence and injustice. In addition, he suggests that increasing-violence is necessary in order to provoke reaction from the masses. This line of criticism implies that the producers of works are responsible for not continuing to write the *status quo*— and that the reader-consumer, in her/his relentless pursuit of goods (in this case, Holocaust narrative), perpetuates the cycle of production, such that nothing new is ever written. This notion hearkens back to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's theory in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that, in the contemporary culture industry, consumers are willing proponents of a system driven by economic relationships which imposes a cycle of repetitious productions. In light of Marx's critique of capitalism, this is a widely held view, though one could counter that repetition can also act as an impetus for remembrance. In "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin identifies this same paradox. While he acknowledges the argument that "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art," he also maintains that reproduction "reactivates the object being produced," because replication ensures the dissemination of a work of art to each individual (223).

During Art's session, Pavel notes a key difficulty faced by Holocaust writers: how to write a book that is, in some way, its *own*—part of the plethora of Holocaust

narratives, yet still remains an original testimony to personal experience. What *is* new

about *Maus* is the depiction of the Holocaust narrative in a graphic novel, a pop-cultural

form that marries the visual with the written word. Because it is encased within frames,

the form provides boundaries and limitations for the artist who has to come up with both

images and dialogue that convey his message concisely. When he is unable to contain

the horror of a particular image, Spiegelman's images bleed outside their frames, in the

same way that his father 'bleeds history.' This is seen in *Maus 2*, when Vladek arrives at

Birkenau; the entrance tower looms above the frame, and indeed invades the two frames

above it, demonstrating the difficulty of representing the enormity and significance of the

concentration camp (2:55):

figure 3.7. Birkenau

When Spiegelman is fully unable to contain an image within a context, he dissolves the

frames altogether. When Vladek describes the murder of Jews in the ghetto for dealing

goods without coupons, Spiegelman draws the hanged mice free-form on the page; there
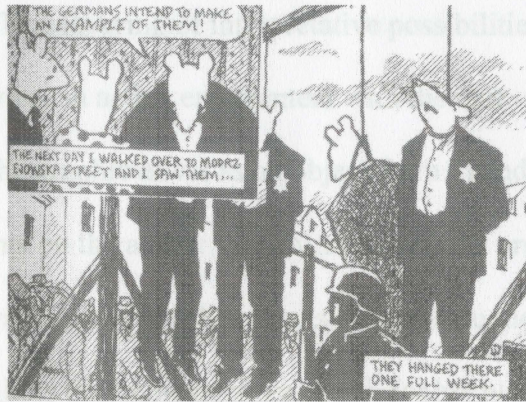
are no borders (Spiegelman 1:83):

figure 3.8. *mice in the ghetto*

This approach conveys, visually, the senselessness of the atrocities committed by the

Nazis; no boundary can hold in the element of terror. Though Spiegelman's decision to

depict a Holocaust testimony through the graphic novel genre is contentious, the form of

the graphic novel itself offers redemptive possibilities for ethical representation and

exploration. The spatial qualities of the graphic novel present a challenge to the reader,

as s/he works to inscribe what is not explicitly told—what happens *between* the frames.

As de Certeau observes, reading is not a passive act:

> to read is to wander through an imposed system.... Recent analyses show that
> every reading modifies its object,' that...a system of verbal or iconic signs is a
> reservoir of forms to which the reader must give a meaning. (de Certeau 169)

If, in fact, the graphic novel is a successful melding of word and image, then there are,

ultimately, more of what de Certeau terms "verbal or iconic signs" to which the reader

can impart meaning. These additional signs add value to the text for the reader, because

there is more to process and interpret; however, they force the writer to consider his *own*

message, and to ensure that his own value and meaning within the text is not lost within

the reader's interpretation. This layering of interpretative possibilities, by forcing

increased consideration, invites an active engagement with the text.

A consideration of the graphic novel as an object/form in and of itself raises the

question of ethical constraints on the author; however, the objects presented *within* the

text itself hold a symbolic value as well. The objects in *Maus* are more than *things*, as

they become fetishized symbols that indicate Art's search for his place within his family

dynamic. This consideration of object value ought not to be equated with consumer

value. As asserted by Bill Brown in *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American*

Literature,

> The tale of...possession—of being possessed by possessions—is something
> stranger than the history of a culture of consumption. It is a tale not just of
> accumulating bric-a-brac, but also of fashioning an object-based historiography
> and anthropology, and a tale not just of thinking with things but also of trying to
> render thought thing-like. (5)

Brown's argument proposes a theoretical distinction between accumulation and

possession. Accumulation refers merely to the owning of an object, whereas to *possess*

an object implies a value that is ascribed onto it, so that the object becomes highly

symbolic to one's sense of identity and history.

The most striking—and ethically complicated—model of the transformation from

thing to valued object within *Maus* is Anja's (Art's mother) detailing of her own war-time

experiences. Art's focus on Anja's diaries gives them an anthropomorphic quality, so that

the diaries *are* Anja, or, rather, Anja's experiences told in her own voice. Because her

diaries take on a life and meaning of their own, Vladek's destruction of Anja's written

record (Anya, herself, committed suicide and was never able to pass her stories on to Art

directly) is a symbolic murder. As with any Holocaust narrative, *Maus* details the murder

of Jews by the Nazis. However, in Spiegelman's own words, Vladek himself becomes a

"murderer" when he burns Anja's diaries. The Nazis burned books, and so Vladek,

ironically, ends up reenacting this gesture. Ole Frahm states that, "in [Spiegelman's] eyes

his father, by burning Anja's recollections, has continued the triple destruction

'committed' by the Germans [destruction of people, memories and remembrance of

destruction]" (63). In the final frame of *Maus I*, Spiegelman walks home after learning of

Vladek's destruction of written record; the only word he utters in this frame is "murderer"

(Spiegelman, 1:159). Such a statement holds strong ethical imperatives. In particular,

Eric Berlatsky questions the extent to which Vladek's symbolic murder of the diaries

creates an implicit link between this direct victim of the Holocaust and the revisionist

Holocaust deniers. Noting that "the political importance of memory...is not merely

hypothetical" (105), Berlatsky quotes Kenneth Stern of the American Jewish Committee:

"'If the Holocaust is denied, relativized, *recedes from memory with the passing of*

generations...a braking force against the two-thousand-year world tradition of anti-

Semitism will be diminished" (105; my italics). Spiegelman cannot escape this

problematic revising of his mother's story: Anja's story is not omitted, but is instead

retold from Vladek's perspective. A piece of the puzzle is missing, but Spiegelman

insists on finding a way to attempt to put it together:

> In the absence of his mother's autobiography, Art writes his father's. He also
> writes his own; or rather, through the father's murder of the mother's texts, the son
> seeks to repair his own monstrosity: the fatal unseemliness of surviving the
> victims. (Miller 51)

Equating his father to Nazis or Holocaust-deniers subverts Art's role as sympathetic enabler of his father's testimony. Further, his equation of his mother with her written record hierarchically elevates the object—the diary—above his father and his oral testimony. Privileging the written over the oral in a Holocaust narrative placed into the public (consumer) sphere, Art could be implicitly privileging the written accounts of survivors over the testimonies of those who did not—or could not—record their experiences. These issues are not reconciled in the narrative; rather, they remain as an ethical burden that reflects Spiegelman's trauma as the son of not just one, but *two*, Holocaust survivors—one of whom lived, the other who only had the possibility of continued life through the pages of her diary. Thus, just as the atrocities committed by the Nazis do not prevent survivors' tales from being told, neither does Vladek's destruction of Anja's diaries completely prevent her story from surviving. However, the object-value of Anja's diaries for Art becomes a focus of his own survivor trauma, as his interaction with these objects that he will never *literally* possess represent a "dynamic of interiorization [through which] human subjects come to find the world of objects replete with meaning" (Brown 105).[24]

The meaning of the diaries fuses with the trauma of losing his mother to suicide—as evidenced in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," a section of *Maus 1* dealing explicitly with his mother's death. After Anja's suicide, Art's thoughts juxtapose personal and global tragedies: "...But, for the most part, I was left alone with my thoughts...Menopausal

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[24] There is a useful comparison to be made between Artie and the narrator-nephew in *The Second Scroll*, who, like Artie, fetishizes the texts that replace Melech's direct voice—his letters, play, and poems.

depression...Hitler did it! Mommy! Bitch..." (1:103). As his guilt overcomes him, Art is

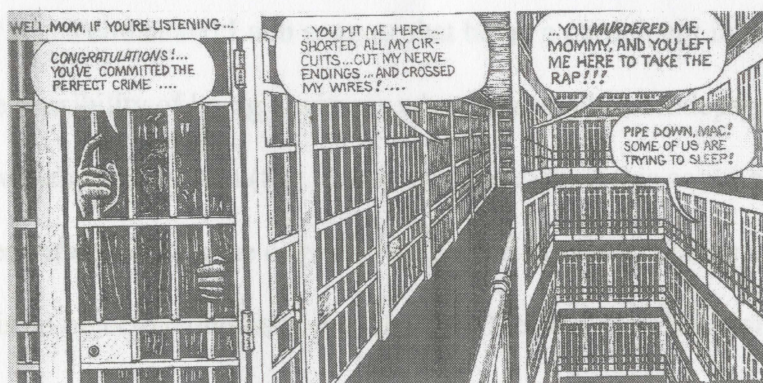imprisoned in a cell within a series of panels:

figure 3.9. imprisoned

In this series of panels, Spiegelman depicts himself graphically with a human face. After

Anja's death, Art is unable to cope with the trauma of having lost his mother, and, in one

of many jail cells, wearing the striped uniform of a prisoner, he likens her suicide to a

murder—except that the one murdered is not Anja, but Art. In another cell, an unnamed

inmate complains, "Pipe down Mac! Some of us are trying to sleep!" (1:103). The two

dialogues in this panel highlight two different perspectives on how best to deal with

trauma: to cry it out, or to suppress it.

　　　Art struggles not only with the trauma of losing his mother to suicide, however,

but also with the trauma of *living*, in the face of the unfathomable victim count during the

Holocaust. In this way, object/material theory becomes linked to trauma theory in a way

that highlights the complexities of writing and analyzing Holocaust narratives.

Analysis: *Maus* as Commodity, Object, and Work of Testimony

What is at stake in a consideration of the multiplicity of roles assumed by the

Maus series is a question of ethical reconciliation: if the novels are, simultaneously,

works of commodity, object, and testimony, how can the author and reader reconcile

these notions, if at all? Felman and Laub suggest that being a participant in an event

itself precludes the possibility of being a witness who can provide an independent frame

of reference from which to observe it (81). In an extrapolation of this assumption, the

"other" or "outsider" of an event is the only one who could provide an objective depiction

of the event. But is an objective depiction a *testimony*, if testimony is understood to refer

to the telling of a memory? Although the reader of the text may not have lived through

the Holocaust, s/he is likely still struggling to come to terms with the scale and

atrociousness of the event. Therefore, s/he cannot be considered an "other," since the

passing of time has yet failed to produce a fully adequate analysis and reconciliation of

the event. There is no *one* way to tell the story of the Holocaust. This notion is made

explicit in *Maus*, because it "refuses the paradigm of objective history telling by refusing

to obscure the role of Artie, who both elicits the story and through whom the story is

told" (Apel 21). This lack of reconciliation creates a continued tension and discussion

that ensures that the event itself will not be forgotten. That the Holocaust has not been

fully understood, however, does not preclude the necessity of talking about it; in fact, this

lack *compels* us to continue to discuss it, since it is necessary to continue to create a

discourse on the moment "when, precisely, the phenomenon of violence and the

phenomenon of culture come to clash–and yet to mingle–in contemporary history"

(Felman and Laub xiii). To disseminate written word in western society is to compel its

inclusion in the commodity-driven economic market, since our involvement in this system ensures the propagation of such testimonies. Though Spiegelman clearly struggles with the commodity-value of his narrative, it is this binary of producer/consumer (reader/writer) that allows him to present his personal truth to a wide audience, who can then enable the testimony.

Conclusion

Spiegelman's *Maus* offers a unique forum for consideration of the ethics of form in representations of the Holocaust. In her essay, "Surviving Rego Park: Holocaust Theory from Art Spiegelman to Berel Lang," Amy Hungerford specifically addresses the significance of Spiegelman's Holocaust narrative:

> In *Maus*, Spiegelman aims at a literal truth that photographs or realistic drawings would fail to convey: the truth that not only Jewish identity but all identities arise from the Holocaust and, more specifically, from telling Holocaust stories, for it is Holocaust-centered identity that the animal heads make visible, make literal, and it is telling Holocaust stories that makes the heads themselves "REAL." (124)

Her conclusion eloquently reconciles the multiplicity of roles Spiegelman assumes (or is constrained to assume) through the production of his Holocaust testimony. His literal truth, which is also a personal one, is depicted accurately within the spaces of the graphic novel. In fact, his choice of form is particularly apt, since his use of animal allegory allows for a universal understanding (and debunking) of the classifications imposed upon people of different faiths and nationalities by Nazi Germany, and how such classifications fall down when subjected to scrutiny. Hungerford also notes that the telling of Holocaust stories conveys the universality of shared trauma: it is not just people

of the Jewish faith who question their identities in the face of the atrocities committed during the Second World War. This questioning is incumbent upon all readers of the testimony, who themselves assume the burden of bearing witness to an event whose effects they are experiencing. Reconciliation and answers are elusive, but that very fact ensures the persistence of a productive tension that continues to inspire Holocaust writers to grapple with ethical questions of trauma, memory, time, and violence.

This perpetuation of the attempt to discuss and reconcile the effects of the Holocaust on the human psyche is heightened because of the place of the Holocaust testimony within a goods-driven society. Though it is perhaps ethically objectionable that stories of the victims of the Holocaust are part of an economic chain, it is, paradoxically, this very chain that helps to ensure that the stories continue to be told, and their part in this system does not diminish their importance or validity. Rothberg argues that "the power and originality of Spiegelman's effort derive quite specifically from this shock of obscenity that *demands* that we confront "the Holocaust" *as* visual representation, as one more commodity in the American culture industry" (*Realism* 203; first italics mine). From this perspective, the choice of a pop-cultural form is particularly apt; the iconic status of the comic book and its inclusion in a commodity-driven market force readers to confront that which is easily forgotten if relegated to forms that omit the visual or exclude the lay reader. The commodification of Holocaust narrative aside, the reader's involvement in Spiegelman's story ensures that witnessing occurs, for without a listener, a story cannot be known.

On the final page of *Maus 2*, Spiegelman depicts a tombstone, inscribed with his

parents' names and dates of birth and death. Below this, he has signed his own name with

the dates 1978–1991, the years of composition of the *Maus* series. In doing so, he

purports that everything that needs to be said *has* been said over the thirteen years. This,

however, is not the case, as readers continue to bear witness to his testimony, bring it new

meaning, and infuse it with new life, thereby ensuring the continued relevance of his

work for years to come.

Go catch the echoes of the ticks of time;
Spy the interstices between its sands;
Uncover the shadow of the dial; fish
Out of the waters of the water-clock
The shape and image of first memory.

- A.M. Klein, "Of Remembrance," The Second Scroll *(1951)*

There is an inherent paradox in searching for the past in the present. The more the past is explored, the more complex it, and the present, become. Dora Apel argues that "secondary witnessing ends in a kind of crisis, a greater sense of traumatic history's elusiveness, but also of its pervasiveness and its imminence" (188). This is certainly true of both Klein and Spiegelman: the closer they get to the source of their respective searches (for Klein, his uncle Melech and the new poetry of Israel; for Spiegelman, a resolution of inter-generational trauma and a sense of his place within his family), the more these subjects elude them.

"Gloss Aleph" of *The Second Scroll* consists of a single poem entitled "Autobiographical." In the final stanza, the speaker acknowledges a difference between passive memoir and active memory:

>   I am no old man fatuously intent
>   On memoirs, but in memory I seek
>   The strength and vividness of nonage days,
>   Not tranquil recollection of event. (65)

Seeking an active memory of a time that exists outside of the temporal—the "nonage days"—the voice of the poem expressively addresses Klein's project. *The Second Scroll* thoughtfully considers, through a textual form that draws inspiration from the Torah and

the Talmud, the ways in which the essence and the experience come to interact in history.

The creation of the state of Israel in the years following the Second World War brought

the idea of the Promised Land from idea to lived reality. More than this, though, the

novel represents an early approach to ethical representation in a post-Holocaust world. In

his narrative, Klein assumes a responsibility to varied populations, most notably the

Diaspora, Israeli Jews, and the victims of the Holocaust. In turn, he projects these

responsibilities onto his fictional narrator, who encounters these distinct groups

throughout his search for his uncle Melech and the poetry of the Promised Land.

Sometimes the narrator acts ethically (as when seeing the ghosts of the pogrom of Ratno

at the foot at his bed), sometimes not (as when assuming ambivalent positions towards

his uncle Melech), but the Other is nonetheless always poignantly present.[25] The reader,

too, is forced to confront the Holocaust through Klein's ornate prose, which discusses the

event through sophisticated metaphors (including, among others, references to art,

nutrition, disease, and the environment).

Spiegelman's project of graphic prose, *Maus*, similarly denotes an ethical

approach to representation. His beast fable presents the reader with a hybridized

language (consisting of linguistic and visual registers) that confronts the Holocaust as a

traumatic event that has come to (inappropriately, he suggests) represent a time-zero

marker for the lives of its victims. His complex, non-linear narrative adopts an ethical

duty to Art's family (who represent, in fact, Spiegelman's own family transposed into a

historiographic metafiction)—in particular, his father's experiences during the Holocaust.

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[25] It is important to note that Melech, himself, provides a model of ethical witnessing for his nephew.

Simultaneously, Spiegelman attempts to reconcile his own place within his family in the light of his brother's death and his mother's suicide. The graphic novel's symbolic status as a pop-cultural form further complicates the narrative, as it prompts a consideration of its place in an economic chain. This chain, however, ensures that Spiegelman's story is received by a wide audience of readers, all·of whom have an opportunity to act as enablers of his and his father's testimonies.

Klein's and Spiegelman's projects eloquently demonstrate that narrative forms do, indeed, carry ethical repercussions. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra argues that "The larger question in reading and interpretation is the relation of genres and disciplines to one another as well as to hybridized forms or modes" (204). Certainly, experimentally hybridized forms supplement pre-existing modes of narrative expression, and add to a body of literature that is never terminal. Taken together, the myriad works that constitute the genre of Holocaust writing allow for a continued discussion about responsibility (on the part of both author and reader), about representation, and about responsiveness. Their goal, I would argue, is not reconciliation of the event, but instead a continuing ethical discourse on how individuals respond to experiences of genocide and violence.

Walter Benjamin's famous analysis of Klee's painting "Angelus Novus" is a useful closing analogy for the burden of the secondary witness to the Holocaust:

> [the painting] shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what

has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. (259)

Like Klee's angel of history, both Klein and Spiegelman see the wreckage of history. The Holocaust, and its traumatic effects, is the storm that forces these writers to confront the past through the adjusted lens of the present. Like the angel, they are profoundly affected by what they see; the weight of history and the burden of ethical responsibility lie heavily on their shoulders. However, both authors also seem to recognize that, though they would like to "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed," they must instead consider the ways in which the past interacts, irrevocably, with the present—the ways that their history (and their families' histories) affect them, and the world at large. Considering this same analogy, Apel further argues that post-Holocaust responses consist of "an inability to find redemptive meaning in the abyss and [are] marked by the attention it has paid to the fragmentation and destabilization of identity" (189). Apel, here, argues that it is not possible to find redemptive meaning, but does not consider the possibility that art and discourse can, in and of themselves, be redemptive—not because they provide answers or resolution, but because in continuing to consider the ethics of form in Holocaust literature, we have an increased opportunity to see, as Levinas so ardently hoped, the face of the Other.

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