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# "Ghosts Hanging over the House"

Anja Spiegelman and Holocaust Memory in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

*Angela Ricks*

Art Spiegelman's groundbreaking graphic novel, *Maus*, is saturated by memory, both literally and thematically. Memory and its impact are explored through two different storylines, both of which are conveyed almost exclusively as memories. Using a nonlinear narrative, *Maus* follows the experiences of a Holocaust survivor, Vladek Spiegelman, and those of his son, Art, as both men navigate their relationship to each other and their relationship to the the Holocaust. To differentiate between Art Spiegelman's role as a character and as an author, the character in *Maus* will be referred to as Art and the author of the work will be referred to as Spiegelman. This narrative weaves together memories of the distant past,

recent past, and present, raising compelling questions about the role of memory in framing the travesties of the past. One such question, prominent in both Vladek and Art's memories, is this: how should the living remember the past and the lives of the dead? The character who brings this issue most to the foreground is Anja Spiegelman, Vladek's wife and Art's mother. Anja, who died before the start of the narrative, exemplifies the intangible yet pressing weight of memory. Her life and legacy have an indelible impact on the lives of her family members and how they view the past. I suggest that Anja's role as a character in the text is to symbolize the persistent memory of the Holocaust and how the Holocaust's legacy affects the lives of her family members. Due to her passing, she is unable to directly represent her perspective of the events that make up her family's Holocaust past. Instead, Anja is seen only through the lenses of her grieving family. How Vladek and Art relate to Anja's life and death parallels how they grapple with the weight of Holocaust memory and its effects on their lives. By creating a link between Anja's memory and the Holocaust, Spiegelman suggests that the memories of past atrocities, whether acknowledged or ignored, still permeate the lives of those affected by them.

Anja is a silent presence in the text, yet one that "dominates" every part of Spiegelman's carefully constructed narrative (Hirsch 418). Despite her influence on the narrative, there are two reasons for her direct absence. First, Anja died prior to Spiegelman beginning to interview his father to gather the content that would become the subject of *Maus*. (Her suicide is graphically depicted in the novel and will be discussed in detail later in this essay.) Second, Anja's written record of her Holocaust experience was destroyed (Spiegelman 160). While her inability to share her voice in the present was a byproduct of her own tragic decision, the destruction of her journals was not. Vladek, in a moment of intense emotion after his wife's death, destroyed the handwritten records containing the entirety of her Holocaust experiences (Spiegelman 160). This loss of Anja's voice is due, in large part, to Vladek's decision to burn her Holocaust journals. The simultaneous loss of Anja herself and of the destruction of her journals creates a vacuum in Vladek and Art's lives. As a result of this pressing vacancy, Anja and her memory hangs over her family, permeating the past and the present.

Despite her importance to Vladek and Art's lives, Anja would be rendered invisible without her family integrating her into the narrative via their memories. Most of these memories are Vladek's and are told to Art

during their interview sessions. Art discusses only one memory of Anja, and much more briefly than Vladek. These dual recollections of Anja, as related through the lenses of a grieving widower and a disillusioned son, are crucial to understanding both Anja and her family. Anja's absence in the present serves to emphasize the importance of memory throughout *Maus*. Like Anja's absence in *Maus'* narrative, millions of Jewish people had their voices silenced in the Holocaust and were unable to testify of their own experiences, requiring their story to be told by the survivors of the tragedy. This parallel between the loss of Anja's voice and the loss of the voices of those killed in the Holocaust creates a strong link between the two events (Mandaville 218-219). This link, in turn, elevates the importance of Anja's memory to Art and Vladek. Her past now takes on a new weight, representing both the personal tragedies of the Spiegelman family and how Art and Vladek relate to the memory of the Holocaust. Anja's death, a tragic byproduct of the Holocaust, hangs over the text, a specter, indirectly driving the events of the storylines of the past and present.

One such storyline of the present is about Vladek's life in the aftermath of the Holocaust. As seen through Art's eyes, Vladek's personal life is riddled with longing for his deceased wife, making his decision to burn her journals that much more surprising. I suggest that Vladek's choice to burn Anja's Holocaust memories symbolizes how he suppresses his own Holocaust experiences. In a 1991 interview about *Maus*, Spiegelman, described these Holocaust memories as "... ghosts hanging over the house" and as being an influence on Anja's decision to kill herself (UW Video). These ghosts, intangible remembrances of past horrors, were something that Vladek also could not escape. Anja's suicide forces him to face his recollections of Auschwitz that he had previously brushed aside. In the wake of Anja's death, no longer could Vladek face his past experiences with casualness. When explaining to Art why he destroyed the journals, Vladek says, "These papers had too many *memories*" (Spiegelman 160). In his struggle to carry the weight of his past, Vladek chooses to destroy the journals. He tries to destroy the memories—symbolically and literally—and incinerates Anja's journals. This coping mechanism only further suppresses Vladek's traumas, which manifest themselves in his strained relationships with his son and his second wife.

Vladek's decision to burn Anja's journals creates tension in Art's relationship with his father. Prior to the beginning of the narrative, Art's

relationship to the Holocaust and Anja begins as an inquiry to process how both events have defined him as a person. He struggles to define his relationship to either event. As a result, he is badly shaken by the loss of his mother, and, later, by her Holocaust narrative. Art sees the inclusion of his mother's Holocaust account as a key element to understanding his past. Art demonstrates this desire to have a clear picture of his family's past when he asks Vladek about Anja's journals multiple times. When Vladek reveals the destruction of the journals, Art is outraged, denouncing his father as a "murderer" (Spiegelman 160). In extinguishing Anja's first-person account of the Holocaust, Vladek, in Art's eyes, has severed a crucial way Art could have understood the past. By branding his father a murderer, Art reveals his anguish over what is the death of his mother a second time. With her memories destroyed, Art is unable to have a more complete picture of the Holocaust. Without his mother's account, Art struggles to comprehend his mother's life and her experiences in Auschwitz. By linking Anja's loss and Art's inability to process his relationship to the Holocaust, Anja becomes a symbol for Art's Holocaust memories. Anja's absence in the narrative, much like his lack of answers about the Holocaust, haunts Art, weighing him down with guilt throughout the narrative. What began as a vehement discussion between Art and Vladek has a hidden depth, as Anja's memory and its ties to the Holocaust endow the act and implications of burning the journals with deep psychological consequences, directly affecting Vladek and Art.

Nowhere is Anja's absence more apparent than in the singular memory Art shares of his mother—her suicide. This tragic event is brought to the forefront when Vladek stumbles upon Art's comic about his mother's death, entitled "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History" (Spiegelman 101). Inserted into *Maus*, the comic displays Art's staggering grief through a harsh black and white color scheme and tortured, expressive characters. It is clear that Art's relationship to Anja is one of crippling guilt, confusion, and isolation, and that this relationship with his mother's memory is paralleled by his reaction to the Holocaust. Art's comic, with its lamentations about Anja's death, also indirectly addresses their shared familial trauma that stems from the Holocaust. By addressing both events simultaneously in his comic, Art equates his complicated relationship with his mother to that of his complicated relationship with the Holocaust. The catalyst of Anja's death, combined with the linkage of these two traumatic events, forces Art to

grapple with the guilt from life-altering events at the same time, causing him to struggle with the familial trauma that has defined his life.

Art conveys his sense of loss and confusion about Anja's death by linking it to the Holocaust through three crucial themes, which are reflected in the formal elements of "Prisoner on Hell Planet." First, Art's visual depiction of his grief, surrounded by imagery of Anja's suicide and of the Holocaust, suggests that the guilt he feels towards his mother's suicide is similar to the guilt he feels about the Holocaust. One significant panel contains several different images: Anja's corpse in a bathtub; a pile of Jewish corpses; arms, bearing an Auschwitz identification tattoo, that cut their own wrists; and Art's stricken, grieving form huddled in the corner (Spiegelman 105). Mixed in with these images are the phrases "menopausal depression," "bitch," "Hitler did it!" and "Mommy!" (Spiegelman 105). Since this comic is set in Art's memories, which occur from his psychological perspective and are of his own creation, the lack of separation between the imagery of Anja's suicide and that of the Holocaust points suggest the inseparable nature of these events in Art's mind. To Art, these events are striking in their similarities: they are both unexpected and unfathomable personal tragedies that define his family and his own life. How Art draws himself in relation to the images in this panel further suggests this relationship. The other images in the panel are visually oppressive as they hover above Art, who sits in the bottom of the panel, weighed down with the heaviness of the elements overhead. These elements are overwhelming: the figure of his mother's naked corpse in blood-filled water is haunting; the phrases inserted in the panel are intrusive and violent; the distinct visibility of his mother's Holocaust tattoos as she cuts her wrists suggests an unspeakable weight of the past; the unidentifiable heap of Jewish corpses rots beneath a Swastika (Spiegelman 105). In response to these graphic elements, Art's comic self is bent in grief, pressed down under circumstances that are out of his control. He is a passive viewer of this panel, displaced in time and space, unable to interact with the panel and its events that have already occurred. All he can feel, instead, is guilt, which literally weighs him down. Art's overwhelming guilt showcases how the memory of his mother and the memory of the Holocaust are symbolically linked together, compounding his grief about both events together.

Second, Art's unbalanced memories of his mother reflect his view of the past. Art grew up with his mother and had a relationship with her well into his adult years. However, the only memory Art includes in this comic,

outside of the events directly before and after Anja's suicide, is a black and white photograph of his childhood self with Anja. Surely, after years of life with his parents, Art has some other memory to include? As the picture in the opening spread suggests, Art must have had other memories of his mother (Spiegelman 101). Instead of including these memories, however, Spiegelman silences Art's other thoughts of Anja, deliberately excluding ". . . childhood memories, vignettes, or even small details that would suggest anything about his own relationship with Anja" (Elmwood 709). To emphasize this point, Spiegelman's inclusion of the comic is the only time Art's direct memories of his mother are shown in the narrative. What "Prisoner on Hell Planet" implies is that the trauma of his mother's death has superseded his childhood and adolescent memories of her, redefining and recontextualizing Art's relationship to Anja. This overwhelming event has transformed all of the memories they had together. This echoes Art's relationship to his family's Holocaust memories. Although his mother survived her time in Auschwitz and gained some semblance of a happy ending, her death throws Art's interpretation of the Holocaust into flux. Throughout several points in the text, Art notes that the events of the Holocaust were somewhat normalized when he was a child. As he confesses to his wife, Art used to "think about which of my parents [he'd] let the Nazis take to the ovens if [he] could only save one of them" and imagine "Zyklon B coming out of [his] shower instead of water" (Spiegelman 174, 176). In the wake of Anja's death, however, he must confront Anja's death and its implications on his relationship to the Holocaust together, since both events have become inextricably linked through cause and effect. Anja's suicide was influenced by her relationship to the Holocaust, and now Art's understanding of the Holocaust is shaken by her death, needing to be processed anew. The death of his mother drives Art to confronting his family's Holocaust experiences. The similarities between Art's recontextualization of his mother's death and his need to truly process his family's relationship to the Holocaust establishes a link between Anja's memory and how Art processes the past.

The third important element of "Prisoner on Hell Planet" is how Art feels that he is being held prisoner by Anja and her Holocaust experiences. In the last three panels, Art's character stands behind bars, quarantined, and is the only person visible in the jail. He yells out into the building, declaring to Anja, "You *murdered* me, Mommy, and you left me here to take the rap!!!" (Spiegelman 105). Art feels he is a prisoner of Anja and her Holocaust

experiences, as represented by how he is literally being held captive. He feels trapped by Anja's memory, including that of her life and legacy. He has become imprisoned by both memories and grief over past events, extending to the point where Art feels "his parents have psychologically destroyed him" (Gordon 57-58). Art's isolation is common among surviving relatives whose family members have taken their own lives (Saarinen 221). This perception of destruction has created in Art a profound sense of isolation, as he is the only person visible in the jail. His experience is unique, isolating him from his American peers, whose parents did not experience the horrors of the Holocaust (Spiegelman 5-6). This is compounded by the stigma surrounding suicide during the 1960s (Ginsburg 202), as shown in the reactions of Anja's friends and family to Art's "wrong" reaction to his mother's death (Spiegelman 104-105). Art feels wrongfully imprisoned by circumstances out of his control, which contrasts to the overwhelming guilt he feels he has earned because of perceived complicity in Anja's death. By not doing more to confirm his love for her, especially during the last time he saw her, Art feels deserving of his guilt (Spiegelman 105). Complicated and complex, Art simultaneously feels he is deserving of punishment while simultaneously pushing back against this guilt. To link this psychological "jailing" to the Holocaust, "Prisoner on Hell Planet" provides a striking visual connection: Art's clothing. In jail, Art's cartoon version of himself wears a uniform similar to those worn in concentration camps (Spiegelman 294). Art's clothing—which he has to wear because his mother "left [him] there to take the rap!!!"—gives interesting insight into Art's relationship with the Holocaust (Spiegelman 105). The reader does not see Art being taken to jail. Instead, his cartoon depiction of himself appears there suddenly, with no transition between panels, now atoning for atrocities he did not commit. His guilt about Anja and the Holocaust, further muddled by his rupture with his past relationship with the Holocaust, condemn him to suffer through a similar experience to Anja, being "murdered" and unjustly imprisoned. By reenacting the general shape of Anja's Holocaust experiences through his comic, Art is equating his mother and her death with the Holocaust, resulting in Art needing to grapple with his grief about both events at the same time.

Taking a different shape than Art's grief, Vladek's reaction to Anja's death is one of explosive mourning that cools into a more internal, but no less potent, feeling of loss. This transition from intense outward expression to aching introspection parallels Vladek's post-war relationship to his Holocaust

experiences. While Art grieves in his quiet, internal world, passively taking in his mother's funeral and the words of friends and families, Vladek turns outward to express his grief. He clings to Art, literally and emotionally, as he insists they sleep on the floor the night after Anja's suicide, as Jewish custom dictates (Spiegelman 104). At Anja's funeral, Vladek cannot contain his grief, sobbing openly on her closed casket (Spiegelman 104). His sorrow, starkly visible in Art's comic, eventually fades to something less external, moving away from outward grief and into the realm of memory. Vladek's remembrances of Anja slowly become his way of mourning his late wife. This transformation of grief from the external to internal world mirrors Vladek's relationship to his Holocaust experience. Initially, Vladek's experiences with the Holocaust are overshadowed by his boundless expression of joy after making it out of Auschwitz (Spiegelman 296). In response to the Holocaust, Vladek sensibly begins to reestablish his material wealth to find financial security, which has been taken from him when his property was seized during the war (Spiegelman 284-285). This external, physical reaction, with actions that are motivated by a direct response to the impact of the Holocaust, fails to address the internal, emotional aspects of Vladek's reaction to his experiences. Gradually, his external indicators of processing his relationship to the Holocaust fade, become less consuming as the years go by, allowing Vladek's reaction to the Holocaust to become more internal. Somewhere between reuniting with his wife and Anja's suicide, Vladek's memory of the Holocaust becomes subdued, no longer a clear motivator driving all his actions. The parallel between the transformation of Vladek's grief over Anja's suicide and Vladek's reaction to his post-war experience links the two processes together, firmly establishing Anja's memory as a symbol of how Vladek processes his traumatic past prior to the beginning of *Maus*.

Vladek's pre-war memories of Anja are precious commodities in the wake of Anja's suicide and the loss of her journals, pushing Art, along with the reader, to rely on Vladek for a fundamental understanding of Anja's character. These flashbacks, while providing more information about Anja, mostly serve to inform the reader about Vladek's character, as he is the one interpreting and presenting Anja in each memory (Elmwood 712). These segments of memory, as seen from the perspective of the present, reflect how Vladek processes his memories of the traumas of the Holocaust. Understanding this filter of memory allows Vladek's stories of Anja to be a reflective medium for how he understands his relationship to both his wife

and the Holocaust. Vladek's memories of Anja before, during, and after World War II have a deep impact on how he relates to his Holocaust trauma in the present.

One insight Vladek's flashbacks give is that he views Anja, and the pre-war period, as an idealized, unreachable past. Before the war, Vladek's remembrance of Anja is wistful and sweetly nostalgic. He recalls the beginning of their romance, as he later recounts to Art, which Vladek remembers as sweet and innocent (Spiegelman 20). In some of his earliest memories of Anja, Vladek remembers meeting her wealthy, upper-class Jewish family and being impressed by their material circumstances (Spiegelman 17). When Vladek first entered Anja's family home, he remarked, "But when I came in to their house it was so like a king came . . ." (21). This sense of gentle awe surrounding both Anja and her financial situation is infused throughout Vladek's early stories about her. Even after Anja suffers a mental breakdown, Vladek recalls that period of their life as being a happy time: "And [Anja] was so laughing and so happy, so happy, that she approached each time and kissed me, so happy was she" (Spiegelman 37). This statement, fondly recalling the past, contrasts with the reality of the situation. Anja's breakdown was so severe that she declared she no longer wanted to live (Spiegelman 33). Yet, the grimness of Anja's mental health is completely offset by Vladek's amiable feelings towards the event years later. The divide between the reality of the memory and Vladek's interpretation of it highlights his idealization of that phase of his life. The dreamy quality of Vladek's pre-war memories of Anja, lightly touched by a sense of yearning, serves as a brutal contrast between the couple's later time in Auschwitz. The brightness of Vladek's pre-war memories, when compared with his harrowing time during the war, helps establish Anja as a representation of both the Holocaust and an unreachable past.

Vladek's repeated tendency to romanticize Anja and the pre-war period directly plays into his marital strife with Mala, his second wife, after the war. His relationship with Mala is characterized by constant bickering and confrontation. Through Vladek's constant comparisons, Vladek sets up Mala as a foil for Anja and her memories. Mala has become a symbol of Vladek's discontent with the present, as opposed to his conception of Anja and the idealized past. Vladek's act of comparing the two women occurs in a smorgasbord of domestic situations, ranging from comments about purchasing new clothing to managing household finances. This contrast,

which is the source of multiple arguments between Mala and Vladek, highlights the difference between Vladek's idealized life with Anja before the war and the reality of his present life in America. Mala, in Vladek's eyes, constantly falls short of Anja. Anja, who has become memorialized in her husband's mind, has had her flaws glossed over in the wake of her death; Vladek does not include any negative memories of her in *Maus*, other than a few mentions of her mental health struggles. This avoidance of Anja's negative qualities or darker aspects mirrors Vladek's avoidance and suppression of his Holocaust memories since Vladek choosing to avoid thinking about the Holocaust in lieu of focusing on the good in his pre-war past. Using a purifying lens of nostalgia and grief allows him to see only her good qualities, further solidifying Anja's role as a symbol of an idealized past. In contrast, Mala exists imperfectly in the present, unable to compete with the rose-tinted memories of a former wife. Vladek's perpetual juxtaposition of Mala and Anja represents his desire to return to the past, to suppress traumatic memories, and to remain dissatisfied with the present.

Vladek's attempted suppression of his Holocaust memories also plays into his constant thoughts of Anja and his normalization of his Holocaust experience after the war. This reaction stems from Vladek's relationship with Anja, which is bound up in unfathomably deep emotional intensity, some of which is due to their shared Holocaust experiences. Vladek's primary thoughts, while working various jobs in the concentration camp, were about the welfare of his wife. This acute concern for Anja's wellbeing propelled Vladek to sneakily visit his wife when he was unable to send her letters or packages containing much-needed food supplies (Spiegelman 217, 225). His impetus to cling to life was heavily influenced by his desire to ensure Anja's survival, no matter the pain or suffering he might personally endure. This pressing desire to take care of his wife, despite the dire circumstances, would help form the Spiegelmans' marital relationship into something that would bind them together, creating immeasurably strong ties. The desperate urge for survival, coupled with the instinct to cling to his wife, plays a crucial role in defining Vladek's relationship to Anja's memory after the war. These emotional ties consume Vladek's day-to-day life, even after his wife's death. As Vladek tells Art, "Anja? What is to tell? Everywhere I look I'm seeing Anja" (Spiegelman 263). Vladek's consuming thoughts of Anja echo his unconscious, consuming thoughts of his war experiences. While he is not consciously thinking about the Holocaust, his behavior suggests his constant

awareness of his memories. The present-day interactions between Vladek and Art help readers understand that some of Vladek's behaviors in the United States are leftover Holocaust survival mechanisms. This behavior ranges from meticulously counting pills to picking up scraps of telephone wire (Spiegelman 28, 118). Vladek's habitualization of previously "strange" behavior shows his normalization of what happened to him during the war. These behaviors, present in every facet of his life in America, rhyme with Vladek's constant pining for Anja. Both are on his mind, always. For Vladek, Anja's memory represents how he simultaneously internalizes and dismisses the trauma of his Holocaust memories.

Vladek's Holocaust trauma plays an integral role in understanding Art and his relationship to his parents and their war experiences. As a child of Holocaust survivors, Art is inadvertently placed in a difficult familial situation. The effect of living through the Holocaust changed the whole course of Anja and Vladek's lives and affected different facets of what would become their post-war personalities. However, Art did not live through these same experiences. The traumas of the Holocaust, so integral to the "founding" of the Spiegelman family, are something that Art can have no first-hand experience with (Elmwood 691). At the same time, the Holocaust still affects so much of Art's life. This complicated tangle of memory and its effects comprises what Marianne Hirsch, a professor and scholar of memory studies, terms "postmemory," which "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation that can be neither understood nor recreated" (416). Grappling with postmemory defines Art as a character, as he imagined Zyklon B, a lethal chemical used in the showers of Auschwitz, coming out of his own shower as a child (Spiegelman 176). Attempting to process his family trauma is at the core of Art's relationship to both Anja and the Holocaust.

Reflecting the incomplete nature of postmemory, Art sees Anja's memory as a puzzle, one he must piece together to make sense of his own self. Art, without explicitly expressing his motivations, turns to interviewing his father to begin solving this puzzle. However, Art had spent his entire childhood and adolescence without sparing much thought for the Holocaust. What, then, was the catalyst for his decision to learn more about it? Art's inability to process his mother's suicide is what propels him to try and understand his family's past. As Stephen Tabachnick, a scholar specializing in graphic

novels, observes, "Spiegelman does not discuss openly the trade-off between Anja's suicide and his desperate need to write *Maus*" (11-12). Art's silence surrounding aspects of Anja's death speaks of confusion and a lack of an ability to process what happened. Suffocating between the postmemory of his parents' time in Auschwitz and the stark reality of his mother's suicide, Art turns to his namesake, *art*, to focus. Attempting to grapple with the memory of his mother and all it represents, Art is propelled into the world of art in order to heal and process from his familial trauma (Tabachnick 11). This act of attempting to understand the past represents another facet of postmemory, in which the next generation must work to understand and frame their relationships to the trauma of the past (Adams 231). In an attempt to bear this burden, Art, as a second-generation child of Holocaust survivors, decides to process his mother's death and the Holocaust through art. Mediating postmemory through art becomes an act of survival. Art's pressing need to piece together his family's past in order to understand his present has become tied to his ability to understand Anja's memory. By choosing to frame his relationship to the past through art, Art reinforces his relationship to Anja's memory as symbolic of his relationship to the Holocaust. Art's memories of his mother, although almost debilitating in their guilt, become both the catalyst for Art's understanding of the Holocaust and the end goal for Art's exploratory process.

Fortunately for Art, through the unfolding of events, Anja's suicide eventually becomes a topic of discussion with Vladek. This conversation, along with Vladek's shared memories of Anja, help Art to start processing the "the chief trauma" of his life: Anja's death (Morris 29). However, reflecting the role of postmemory in his life, Art needs an intermediary to understand both events. For that, he turns to his father. Anja's role as a symbol of postmemory and Art's relationship to the Holocaust is emphasized by the relationship between Art and Vladek during their interview sessions. Vladek serves as a mediator between Art and the memories of Anja's death and the Holocaust. This role is essential because Art is unable to understand the past without someone to tell him what has occurred. Interestingly, Art's conceptions of how he relates to the Holocaust differ from this viewpoint. Consciously, Art tends to link the Holocaust with his father, not his mother. He often lumps the two together, as when he tells his wife, Françoise: "I mean, I can't even make any sense out of my relationship with my father . . . How am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz? . . . of the Holocaust?" (Spiegelman

174). Art, by making explicit verbal connections between his father and the Holocaust, seems to see his father as a symbol of memory. Since Vladek is telling Art his Holocaust narrative, Art's connection seems natural. However, Vladek functions as a conduit for understanding Anja, who represents Art's relationship to Holocaust. This is underscored by the fact that "Vladek is not portrayed as a survivor who needs to talk about his past, it is rather the son, Artie, who needs to listen" (Martínez-Alfaro 139). Art is the one with the need to find out what happened, to discover the memories that defined him since his birth. Vladek, on the other hand, is not demanding attention to his Holocaust narrative. He is merely answering Art's questions, helping him to satiate his need to understand his mother and the Holocaust. Art's hunger to understand, to solve the puzzle of Anja's memory, is further emphasized by how the interviews with Vladek began. Art tells his father, "Start with Mom . . . tell me how you met" (Spiegelman 14). By needing Vladek to tell him about Anja, Art is linking his mother's memory to that of postmemory. This emphasizes Anja, not Vladek, as a symbol of Art's relationship to the Holocaust, a puzzle that must first have its pieces found through the role of a mediator.

The complicated relationships between Art, Vladek, Anja, and the memory of the Holocaust demonstrate how the weight of past atrocities still affects those living in the present. In so many aspects of Art and Vladek's lives, Anja permeates their conscious and unconscious decisions. Her memory symbolizes the profound longing, idealization, and guilt that Art and Vladek feel towards her, and the past, during the entirety of *Maus*. Her legacy looms, specter-like, over every aspect of the narrative, lingering in the lives of her surviving family members. For Vladek, his wife typifies the unreachable past—a past infused with longing but tempered by the reality of the horrors of the Holocaust and Anja's death. Vladek's remembrance of Anja also shows how he relates to his Holocaust memories, through suppression and avoidance. Affected by his parent's past, Art, a generation later, tries to make sense of his family's experiences and how they have impacted his own life. For Art, Anja's memory is like a puzzle, something to be discovered and pieced together. This investigative aspect is characteristic of post-memory and permeates the whole of *Maus*. Art must also come to grips with his guilt towards his mother's suicide and the Holocaust, along with feelings of resentment towards the impact they have had on his life. Lacking definitive answers about how to process his past, Art must come

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to his own conclusions about how to relate to his mother and the Holocaust. Despite both being impacted by the same person, the Spiegelman men each have a different approach to Anja and the Holocaust, processing and managing their memories of painful experiences in different ways. Memory, understood and handled so differently, is a powerful driving force, shaping both the lives of Vladek and Art and the narrative trajectory of *Maus*.

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