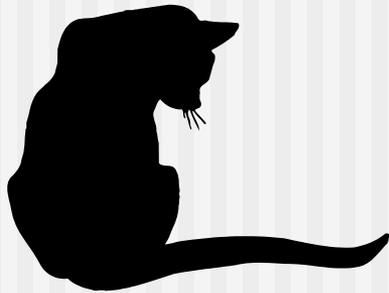




MAUS



My Father

Bleeds History

By: Art Spiegelman

Why MAUS?



There is a difference between bearing witness and telling a narrative.



Bearing witness occurs when the actual witness was there to experience the events.



Telling a narrative is when a secondary source is used or when a person who was there but not a participant narrates.

A novel about bearing witness to bearing witness



There are a decreasing number of people left to bear witness to the events of the holocaust.



The novel *MAUS* is a son's attempt to narrate his father's experiences and their relationship



Artie, the son, is trying to understand Vladek and what he lived through in an attempt to understand himself as a child of a survivor, but also to tell Vladek's story as a survivor.

Let's Talk about genre

Is it...



Fiction?



Non-Fiction?



Novel?



Comic Book?



Memoir?



Biography?



Autobiography?

Nobody seems really clear on this point.

The Boston Globe and *Publisher's Weekly* list it as non-fiction. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* originally listed it as fiction. Spiegelman himself suggests "non-fiction/mice."

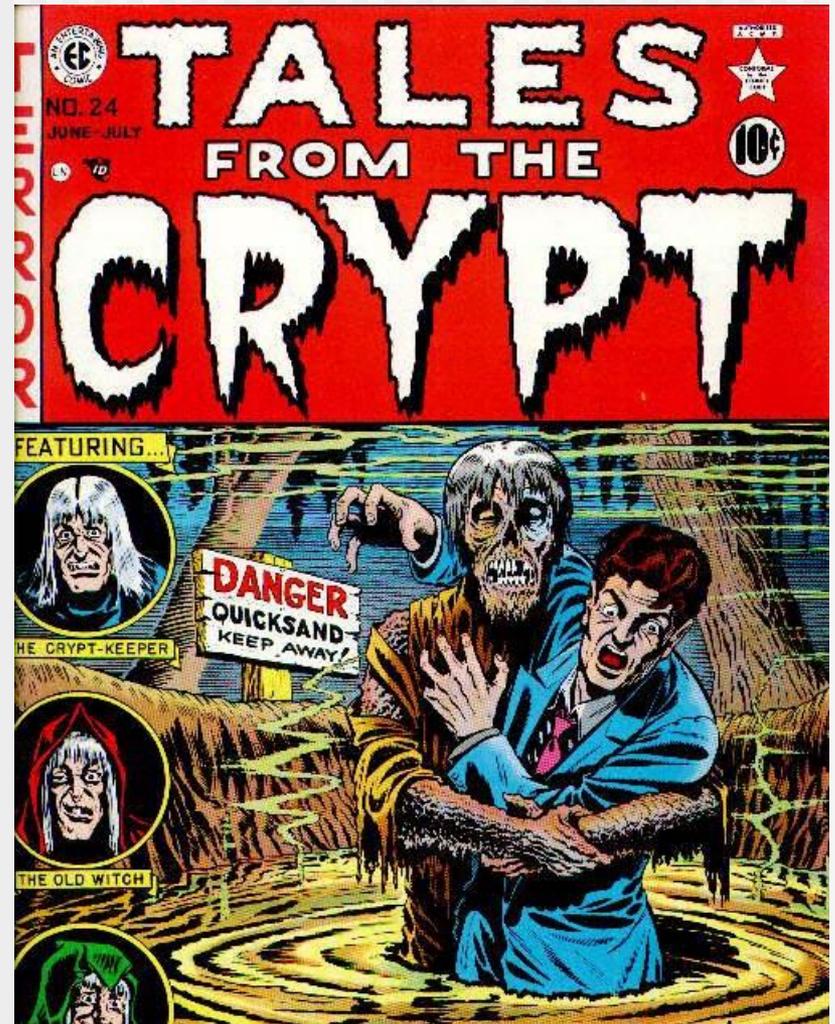
Genre (cont'd)

The debate was so strong as to divide newspaper editors. One *NYT* editor was purported to say, “let’s ring Spiegelman’s doorbell. If a giant mouse answers, we’ll put *Maus* in nonfiction.”

Maus is both all of these genres and none. It transcends categorization.



Comics as fiction



Non-fiction?



I WAS A LITTLE SAFE. I HAD A COAT AND BOOTS, SO LIKE A GESTAPO WORE WHEN HE WAS NOT IN SERVICE. BUT ANJA-HER APPEARANCE- YOU COULD SEE MORE EASY

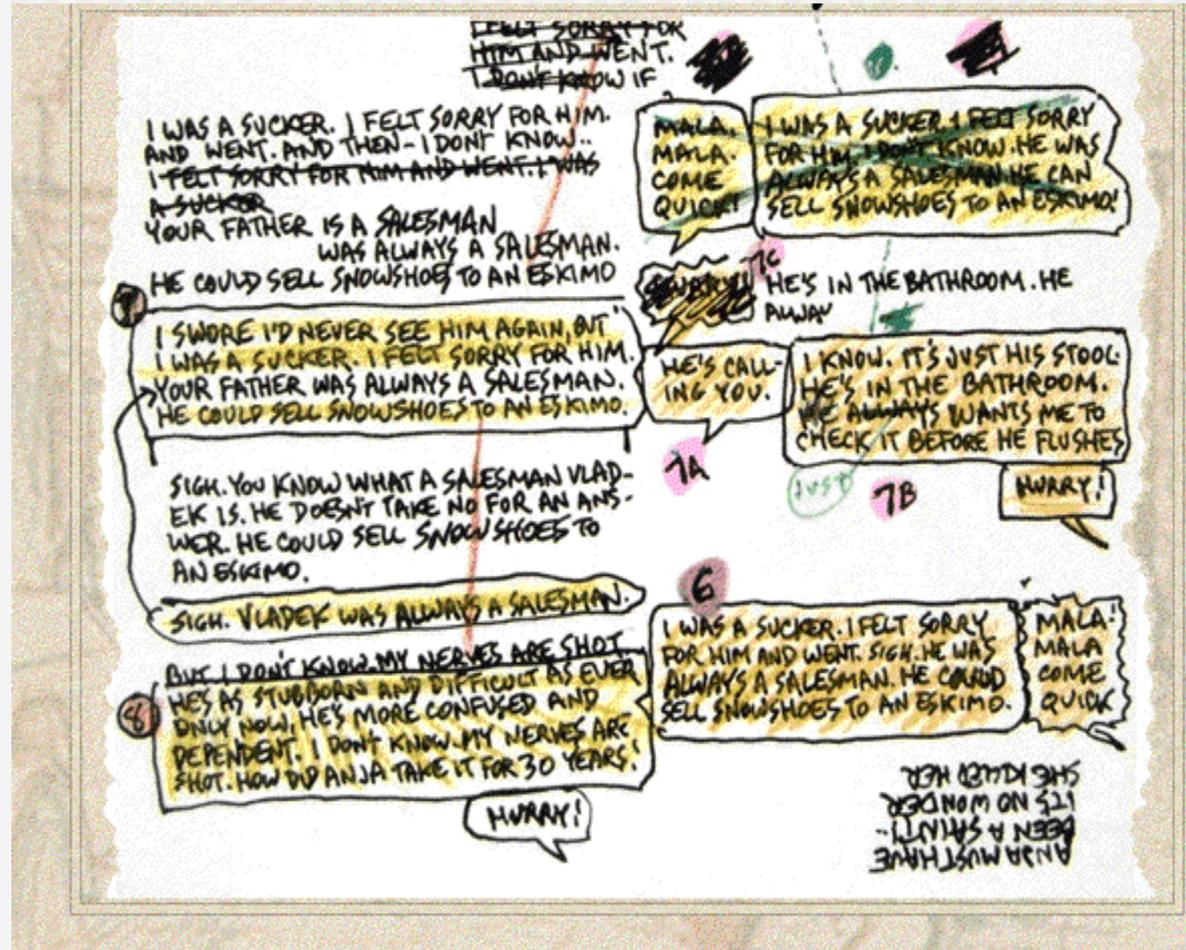


Tough to read

You have to read:
Text

Pictures

Layout



So What Makes MAUS Different?

Which animal would you choose to represent you?

Cat

Mouse

Pig

Based on the connotations of Western society, the majority of us would choose “cat.” Mice are vermin and pigs are swine—two things with negative associations.

Spiegelman plays with this preconception. He also plays with the common visual images we, as an audience, have about cartoons like *Tom and Jerry* and *Itchy and Scratchy*.

Stereotypes aren't always a bad thing.

They short-circuit the brain to make
powerful statements

In this novel, Spiegelman uses animals as allegories for different races.

Cats—The Germans

Mice—The Jews

Pigs—The Polish

Unfortunately, some of it's also
based in history-fact

MAUS



"Mickey Mouse is the most miserable ideal ever revealed. . . .Healthy emotions tell every independent young man and every honorable youth that the dirty and filth-covered vermin, the greatest bacteria carrier in the animal kingdom, cannot be the ideal type of animal. . . .Away with Jewish brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse! Wear the Swastika Cross!"

—newspaper article, Pomerania, Germany, mid-1930s



Again, Spiegelman knowingly deals with this

Maus, my comic book about my parents' life in Hitler's Europe, which uses cats to represent Germans and mice to represent Jews, was made in collaboration with Hitler. It was the Nazis' idea to divvy the human race up into species, into Übermenschen and Untermenschen, to “exterminate” (as opposed to murder) Jews like vermin, to use Zyklon B—a pesticide—in the gas chambers. My anthropomorphized mice carry trace elements of Fips' s anti-Semitic Jew-as-rat cartoons for *Der Stürmer*, but by being particularized they are invested with personhood; they stand upright and affirm their humanity. Cartoons personalize; they give specific form to stereotypes. In *Maus*, the mouse heads are masks, virtually blank, like Little Orphan Annie' s eyeballs—a white screen the reader can project on.

Critics agree

The most important distinction between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom is man's ability to understand, reason, and think. Conscience and intelligence are perhaps the human race's greatest gifts. Since humans possess such qualities, it is often hard to try to understand the Holocaust without having been there.

The most important two, Germans and Jews, are represented by cats and mice, respectively. Natural sworn enemies, both cat and mice lack reason and conscience. As a result, the Nazi cats find no fault in the systematic killing of Jewish mice.

The graphical novel format, in conjunction with the depiction of Nazis as cat and Jews as mice, permits Spiegelman to force the reader to abandon any preconceived notions of human nature. Such an effect would have been quite hard to create if he had written a standard text, attesting to the incredible value of the novel's format.

Interesting...

The reduction of the players to cats (the Nazis), mice (the Jews), pigs (the Poles) and other national stereotypes offers a conscious, intentional miniaturization and reduction, pointing up not merely the process of compression, simplification and devaluation not merely of the Nazi's practices before and during the Holocaust, but the reduction and simplification present in many "responses" to the Holocaust as well.

As you read...

Consider the following questions:

- What is the subject?
- Who is/are the protagonist(s)? 
- Why this format?

Resources

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