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Vladek's Resistance and Indifference in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

ABSTRACT

The life of a Holocaust survivor is a very complex one. Art's representation of his Holocaust survivor father Vladek in his Memoir *Maus* is a reflection of a tough reality that has created the character Vladek. However, I would argue that there is a conflict between the author Art and the text *Maus* in terms of the representation of Vladek where Arts seems to be lost in depicting his father's heroic evolution through the stage of the post-traumatic stress disorder. I contend that Art's representation of Valdek in *Maus* is a kind of misrepresentation of a war hero. *Maus* has got powerful persuasive elements as proofs of Valdek's heroic resistance and adaptability to face the threats of dominant racist ideologies and to successfully overcome the post-traumatic stress disorder. The comics form of the text support Vladek's heroic capabilities to the fullest.

Key Words: Art Spiegelman; *Maus*; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; Holocaust; Representation; Heroic

“DON'T WORRY, MY CHILD...YOU WILL COME OUT OF THIS PLACE—FREE! ...ON THIS DAY OF PARSHAS TRUMA.” —Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.

While exploring the world of *Maus* through the perspectives of many scholars who have scrutinized the memoir from various perspectives, I have realized that critics can bring issues from a text which were perhaps never intended by the author or by the main narrator. I understand that this intensity to explore a text from multiple perspectives may have its own validity in the sense of Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" (1967) where

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he argues that the text and the author are not related, signifying that a text is independent of its author and it could give numerous interpretations based on different points of views. Critics of *Maus* have analyzed the text from viewpoints such as Art's intervention into the Holocaust narrative of Vladek, the role of the use of animal masks in the text, the emergence of post-memory (Marianne Hirsch), the use of comics to represent a significant issue like the Holocaust, the remarkable influence of the photographs in the texts, the impact of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder on the life of the survivors, the racial hatred and the absence of significant documents (e.g. Anja's diaries). The text manifests how Art undermines Vladek's heroic capabilities by the absurd and unnecessary portrayal of Vladek's unstable behavior in the later stage of his life. In an attempt to be more "real" in the representation of a Holocaust survivor, Art betrays his father's (and our trust too) trust on him by unsympathetically portraying Vladek's post-war disruptive psychological metamorphosis amidst the epic hero's (Vladek) harrowing adventures through one of history's most terrible racial exterminations (especially from 1939 to 1945) by Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany.

My impression of the reading of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is different from all these above mentioned portrayals and interpretations by the notable critics of *Maus*. I argue that the memoir is an attempt to memorialize the history's (Holocaust) most heroic personalities through the glorification of the extraordinary virtues of the brave and tragic Holocaust survivor Vladek Spiegelman. I want to emphasize that the text visualizes Vladek in a heroic way to mark his steps on the transience of the earth and to uphold his dignity in the face of tragedy. *Maus* glorifies Vladek by emphasizing the following significant issues related to him: his sense of family values (e.g. He shows compassionate attachment and devotion to Anja, Richieu, Art and the other family members throughout the war and afterwards), his devotion to his religious beliefs (e.g. He believed his dream that he would be free one day), his accumulation of emergency life skills to survive any tragedy (which is visible through his escapes in the camps and his capacity to uphold his dignity amidst the mass murder of the Jews), his determination to defy the power of death and discrimination, his irresistible desire to pass the knowledge of the holocaust to the next generations (His narrative flashbacks are extremely brilliant and detailed—e.g. his drawings of the gas chamber), his triumph against all attempts to annihilate all the Jews, his resistance and indifference against all distortion and manipulation of ideologies and finally, through the representation of Vladek's war time close up full human photo—where he is in a camp uniform—, and of course with the cartoon images of Vladek's journey through his emotionally intense reactions and attitudes depicted within the comics. Alongside these, I argue that besides being able

to survive all atrocities and manipulation, Vladek's life is a testimony of the triumph against the post-traumatic stress disorder. Through his power of understanding the past and the willingness to live a new stable life (e.g. His decision to destroy Anja's diary is an act of assimilating himself to a new meaningful life), he overcomes the traumatic disorder. However, I would finally contend that Vladek is a human being and he must taste the defeat against the war of life. But I would say that even with a few limitations of him portrayed by his next generation (who did not witness the apocalypse), Vladek stands as a super-hero. To justify my argument, it is first necessary to explore a few areas of expertise on *Maus* contextualized by several important critics. I will show how most of them have almost left out the issue of Vladek's agency in order to emphasize their interest on other areas which lack not only the actual reflection of the experience of Vladek's involvement in an unprecedented war time, but also his emergence as a stoic superhero in a post-war context. I want to, however, begin with what Art focuses on in several interviews on *Maus*.

Although in most of his interviews on *Maus*, Art discusses issues of comics and animal imagery as a form of defamiliarization in dealing with Holocaust tragedy, it is understandable that he only responds to interviewers' questions which are basically based on the medium of representation of Holocaust. Art, nonetheless, brings his relationship with his father and talks about the impact of his father's involvement in both the war and in creating the text. This memoir is ultimately all about his father's story. However, I have observed a clear lack of focus in his attempt to bring his father into the original emphasis. Vladek, thus, despite being the hero of the text, remains overlooked even in his son's memory. On the other hand, I argue that his relationship with his father is complex and hence, the ambivalence is not only manifested in the text but also, in the life of Art. Reading *Maus* gives this sense of conflict between the father and the son. But the most important thing is that *Maus* is ultimately a celebration of the heroic potential of Vladek, and although Art has sometimes deviated his focus by exposing Vladek's less than super-human trivial activities, he has given Vladek the honor of the originator and preserver of the both personal and public history. All of this has become possible by Art's love and engagement to Vladek. The ambivalence is what makes a human being more heroic and worth respecting. Like all great tragic heroes—Macbeth, Hamlet, Achilles—Vladek also has got a few errors in his characters but he is still the protagonist on whom the central events depend on. Without the survival and resistance of the people like Vladek, the Jews, like Art Spiegelman, would not have found their identity against a world of racial discrimination.

In a lecture at SHU, Art frequently emphasizes his father's present-mindedness and the quality of resistance during the extermination period.

For example, he brings the instance of his father's life lessons where Vladek asserts that "ever since Hitler, I don't like to throw out even a crumb" (Spiegelman). While talking about the "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" section of the book, Art focuses on the reason of Vladek's frustration and the subsequent burning of Anja's diaries. I would argue that it is Vladek's unbearable trauma of losing Anja that has made him destroy the diaries. In order to strongly face the trauma, Vladek decides to destroy all the memories of the war. This has made him enable to survive in a post-war time where "nobody ever looked at" (Spiegelman) the diaries of Anja. In the lecture, Art also focuses on Vladek's power of compassion. For example, Art shows the part where Vladek compares a dog's (killed by a neighbor) final reaction to its death to a prisoner's reaction to his demise in the Nazi camp: "How amazing it is that a human being reacts in the same way as a dog is" (Spiegelman). It further glorifies Vladek's position of being an extraordinary individual.

In a UWTV Classics interview, Art explains his use of the word "murderer" as an irony in relation to his father. He argues that he not only gives this name to his father, but also to his mother Anja. He asserts that both are ironical. I want to contend that most of Art's apparently negative portrayal of Vladek are either careless or ironic. These instances of making Vladek a villain or worthless survivor are not intentional at all. Rather, these express Art's frustration of not being able to create a sense of stable meaning out of the terrible Holocaust narrative. In another interview, Art emphasizes Vladek's power of love to win against the tragedy. He argues that Vladek is the "agent of his own survival." I, however, disagree with Art when he relates Vladek's apparently nonsensical post-Holocaust behavior (e.g. his racial discrimination against a black American) with the Holocaust experience: "suffering does not create noble figure." I think it is absurd to compare these two different time and context to create a meaning for a life. When I say Vladek is a hero, I consider those elements of his life (especially during Holocaust) that are enough to justify his sacrifice for the greater cause of the Jews.

Art's admission to a mental hospital (e.g. in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" and in real life too) and his drug addiction demonstrate that the intergenerational trauma disrupts the flow of Art's life. This raises important considerations regarding the strength of Vladek in facing life with most of its adversities in comparison to the incompatibility of Art to bear the tragedies of life. In a BBC documentary on the making of *Maus*, Art contends that one of his purposes to write *Maus* is to "save himself." When the reporter asks a question about his drug addiction, Art asserts that it was his "search for knowledge." This confirms that Art suffered from traumatic stress disorder, whereas Vladek never seems to be out of control—although

he is the one who faced most of Hitler's racial atrocities. Vladek has been able to come to terms with his experience, and that is why he resembles the power that a person could have to create strong sense of stability and righteousness against mass annihilation. In this interview, Art contends that "telling involves intelligent lying." I would suggest that it is Art who could be distorting a few perspectives on his father's post-Holocaust personal life, but Vladek's narrative does not lie. In an interview to Al Jazeera, Art asserts that his parents were "not well assimilated in the USA." His observation on the life of his parents contends that they were still having the negative effects of the Holocaust experience. I want to bring a different perspective other than this conception of Art because in *Maus* Vladek explains why he left Poland—the country where he suffered a lot due to his racial identity. Vladek here not only connotes the aggression of the Nazi but also the hideousness of the collaborators of Poland who supported the Nazi. This is part of Vladek's characteristic stability and active thinking on the current events that made him to act based on reality—not on fictional emotion for his homeland. Art also shares that his father did not share anything about the Holocaust when he was a child, but he told him about it when Art became a grown-up man. This fact signifies that Vladek is pro-active and because Holocaust experience could be severely disrupting for a child's psyche, Vladek decided not to tell anything about the horrendous experience to Art—the child. This is a part of the reason—as I will clarify in the next paragraph—for which Vladek conquers the "post-traumatic stress disorder" (which is, according to Janet Seahorn's Ted talk on PTSD, "an anxiety disorder that develops in reaction to physical injury or severe mental or emotional distress).

I have argued earlier that Vladek conquers his traumatic and post-traumatic stress disorder. However, most of the critics would argue the opposite because what most people see is the immediate and post-immediate effects of a horrendous experience that repeatedly comes in the psyche of the victim as forms of flashbacks and nightmares. Trauma theorists contend that the victim does not apprehend the trauma when she/he faces the traumatic event but experience the same trauma in its most terrible forms later—"belatedness" (Freud)—in his/her life. This is what I understand as post-traumatic stress disorder. This is related to an experience—like the Holocaust—which is basically "incomprehensible" (Caruth 91-92) at the first encounter because such horrible things are unimaginable to construct in our perception. According to Sigmund Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia," "mourning" is a healthy response to trauma, whereas melancholia is "interminable" which is involved with the modern concept of "acting out" where the traumatic experience does not resolve immediately. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth describes trauma "as the response

to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (9). Caruth’s burning question defines the existence of trauma: “Is the trauma the encounter with death or the ongoing experience of having survived it?” (7).

How can Vladek overcome this phenomenon? I argue that Vladek has acquired a powerful balance in his psyche despite all tragic events. For example, it is observed in *Maus* that he is always conscious of his responsibilities and he is super pro-active in visualizing future events. Hence, his psychological preparedness makes his Freudian “defenses” stable and there is no such traumatic nightmares for Vladek except a few outbursts of his unconscious in instances like Anja’s death (“Prisoner on the Hell Planet”) and in the last line of the text where Vladek’s “enough” storytelling causes him to slightly overpower his consciousness and he brings Richieu’s name instead of Art : “I’m tired from talking Richieu” (296). Therefore, I argue, post-traumatic stress disorder does not grasp Vladek’s consciousness. However, even if trauma would have grasped Vladek consciousness, “putting the emotions into words and reconstructing the past helped alleviate the patients’ symptoms” (Janet).

Merchant of Venice’s Shylock’s famous and brilliant remarks on discrimination against the Jews in act III, scene I has always motivated me to think about racial hatred and its dire consequences: “hath not a Jew eyes, organs, affections, dimensions, passions? ... If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?” (Shakespeare 49-61). I imagine him as a hero. But is there any similarity between Shylock and Vladek? Philip Smith’s essay “Drawing Vladek, staging Shylock: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* in American Holocaust discourse” contends that “*Maus* offers a counter-discourse to dominant American narratives of the Holocaust which present the victim as a saintly or heroic individual” (206). I disagree with his viewpoint although I also think that both Shylock and Vladek carry certain stereotypes—e.g. miserly Jew—and a few of their characteristics often make them look like typical Jews as depicted by the ideologies of anti-Semitism. Shylock’s “my ducat, my ducat” and Vladek’s desperation for money and property are examples through which many critics have rendered them as wasted and laughable. However, when I study the texts, I consider them heroes of their time and space. It is a matter of how one observes the same thing from a different angle and in Vladek and Shylock’s cases, their heroic capabilities and humanitarian issues make them relate more with their strengths and less with their personal life’s trivial faults. In the beginning of his essay, even Smith writes that “Vladek’s postwar life, in which he is cast in an unflattering light, for example, could have been omitted from *Maus*”

(198). He, however, deviates into different direction to focus on the text's part of Vladek's post-war life. This what I abhor.

Smith refers to Art's commitment to be true to the Holocaust history and thus to present his father as he is: "I am just trying to portray my father accurately" (199). Smith fails to understand that it is Art's failure to realize that the trivialities of a character that Vladek has are common to even the most celebrated human being's personal life story. This does not necessarily eliminate the significance of the person's contribution to the public history. When we study a story, we do not inevitably consider the author because the author could have been unrelated to the story that he/she writes. Smith rightly contends that "Vladek is a construction, and in his construction of Vladek, Spiegelman actively sought to understand and engage with anti-Semitic imagery" (200). Hence, if Vladek is a construction, Art lies (Art himself argues in one interview that telling involves lying) in certain part of the story, and I assert that it is the post-war period part where Art lies about his father's behavior. However, Smith brings Berger's argument to prove his central point of the essay where Berger shows the text's attempt to truly represent Vladek: "In the framing narrative of *Maus*, Vladek is depicted as distrustful, manipulative, miserly, and incapable of respecting the boundaries between himself and his son (Berger quoted in Smith 200). He is plagued by psychosomatic illness, hoards money and other items, picks up discarded objects in the street, and barges into Artie's room to wake him" (118, 70 and 178). Smith misrepresent Vladek and Shylock's position in the text by emphasizing yet another misleading perspective: "Both Shylock and Vladek are unable to behave in accordance with the dominant values of the societies in which they live. Their status as outsiders is represented as a direct consequence of the discrimination, they suffered" (202). This is, I would argue, is a totally unacceptable contention by Smith. Is there any standard of behavior? Why should these noble characters conform to society's standard? Smith also fails to realize that their behavior cannot only be the effect of the discrimination they suffered in their life. There is no necessary connection between one's past and the present.

While reading Victoria A. Elmwood's essay " 'Happy, happy ever after': the transformation of trauma between the generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: a Survivor's Tale*" I get a sense that when critics write about intergenerational trauma in *Maus*, they tend to sympathize with the post-war generation at the expense of the original survivor's memory. Elmwood writes that Art Spiegelman tried to include his own life and influence into the story of his father and even this influence signifies that Art has deliberately undermined his father's personal post-war life to highlight Art's post-memory. Elmwood focuses on the part of the text where Art contends that he "did have nightmares" as if he himself witnessed the

Holocaust, and therefore, unhappy with his father's childish post-war behavior.

Michael Brown's "Of 'Maus' and Men: Problems of Asserting Identity in a Post-Holocaust Age" begins with Dante's *Divine Comedy* where those who are once at hell can never escape from the place. Brown argues that "The survivors of the Holocaust felt that no one should have or could have survived that hell" (134). I argue the opposite. I think that Vladek has come out of the hell. I would suggest that Vladek resembles existentialist philosophers' (e.g. Sartre and Nietzsche) idea of human being as free individual for whom "existence precedes essence" (Sartre). I agree with Brown in the sense that he emphasizes Artie's comment on Vladek's win against the adversaries which have been possible due to his "amazing present-mindedness and resourcefulness" (Spiegelman II,45). I, however, disagree with Brown's point that "Vladek continues to live as if the Nazi persecution never ended" (135). Vladek has instead, always tried to forget all the tragedies that happened with him. Hence, he burnt Anja's diaries which could have been his most favorite possession.

Katalin Orban's "Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*" explores the idea of "visual black hole at the core of the Holocaust"(49) where—I contend—Vladek's full blown camp uniform picture is represented as a protest against the darkness of Holocaust. On the other hand, Jill Petersen Adams' "Acts of Irreconcilable Mourning: Post-Holocaust Witness and Testimony" exposes the fact that no absolute resolution is possible in terms of Holocaust experience. I also agree with this idea. Although Vladek has enough strength to bear the tragedy, he is still incomplete—all the heroes have their own limitations. Therefore, there is no final resolution to the story of Vladek.

Hye Sue Parks' "Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: A Bibliographic Essay*" explores the existing literature on *Maus* and criticizes the scholars by contending that they have always focused on a few specific areas—e.g. trauma, post-memory, ethics of representation—on the text that explicitly overlook other possible important perspective of the text. I somewhat agree, and I want to add with Parks that critics have apparently avoided Vladek's significance on the production of *Maus* which is basically based on Vladek's experience. However, the critics that Parks includes sometimes discuss the significance of Vladek in *Maus* too.

Parks mentions several critics' works on a few areas of repeated interests. For example, Ruthberg writes about the commodity out of Holocaust, and I also wonder about Art Spiegelman's reason behind the production. Is it a work which exploits history for popularity or material gain? Parks brings Marianna Hirsch who focuses on the intergenerational trauma and the mimetic power of photography that unsettles Art. I find the

essay remarkable in the sense that it gives Vladek a powerful position through the inclusion of the extraordinary camp photo which makes Vladek and Anja's life meaningful and sparkling. Parks mentions Victoria Elmwood's essay on Spiegelman's autobiography where Artie's attempts to reinterpret Vladek's story is focused. This is somewhat important for my discussion because I argue that Vladek's story has been re-constructed in *Maus* to often highlight Art's influence on the story. On the other hand, Candida Rifkind's essay concentrates on the reconciliation between past and present in *Maus*. In the history and post-history part, Michael Staub writes about the official history's tendency to undermine personal history and in this case, Vladek's story has been compromised with Artie's narrative. I, however, want to write that unlike the oppressed victims that Staub connotes, Vladek has created a potential in himself to resist any dominant narrative and thus, he stands apart from others. In post-modernism section, Daniel Schwarz's concept of post-modernism and modernism in terms of history is analyzed where he asserts that whereas modernism is about Nazi narrative, post-modernism is the narrative of the counter-resistance. Hence, Vladek's narrative is a postmodern narrative that disrupts the Nazi propaganda. Parks argues that critics should concentrate on other areas like gender, race, religion, and critical pedagogy. I have focused that critics should concentrate on Vladek instead of only Art Spiegelman while writing on *Maus*.

Marianne Hirsch's influential essay "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning and Post-Memory" explores the great potential of photography. She has especially analyzed three remarkable full human photographs in the construction of *Maus*—Anja ("Prisoner on the Hell Planet"), Art and Vladek (in camp uniform). Beginning her essay with the photograph of Frieda whose presence in the picture "announces that she has literally 'survived,' outlived her intended destruction, the survivor who has a story to tell..." (5) resonates Vladek's presence in the camp uniform photo which re-ignites Anja's happiness before their reunion after the tragedy in Auschwitz. The photo asserts—as Hirsch imagines: 'I am alive, I have survived' (24)." Hirsch further contends that "like Frieda's picture, Vladek's, with all its incongruous elements, suggests a story. *Maus* is the story elaborated from this photograph of the survivor" (25).

Although Harvey Pekar criticizes *Maus* for the use of animal heads, which is—he argues—"reinforcing stereotypes"(55), I contend that Art first shocks the readers by the animal imagery and then surprises the audience by revealing the real picture of Vladek at the end of the book which reinforces the power of Vladek and his narrative that has the potential to create a vibe of disrupting the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews forever.

A close look at *Maus* reveals how Art Spiegelman, through his power of comics where the past, present and future co-exist in images within panels, has represented Vladek's Holocaust memory that is reinterpreted within the context of Art's perspective. Vladek is shown as resisting against the hardships of life and remaining pro-active in times of emergency. In his post-war time, Vladek is portrayed as a liberal survivor who is not desperately revengeful against the past. Rather, he shows that it is important to learn from the experience and to live a meaningful life. It is crucial to be able to live by the present. However, there is no specific indication in the novel that Vladek has forgotten the Holocaust. He has rather tried to come to terms with the past and that has made him stable in the post-Holocaust age. *Maus* is ultimately an attempt to celebrate the life of Vladek.

The importance of Vladek is given in the title of the first book of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. The emotion for his father's sacrifice is attached to the title. Vladek bleeds history. His life is based on blood and sacrifice that he made throughout his time during Holocaust. He has lost everything that he once had, and he is still alive. His sense of existence is bold, and he has learnt the importance of food through his tragedy: "If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week...Then you could see what it is, Friends" (6). This statement connotes Vladek's struggle to get food during his Nazi camp time and the inhumanity that existed when everyone had to be selfish. It is important to note that the first book is dedicated to Anja who is Vladek's love and for whom Vladek finds meaning in his unfortunate life. This signifies that Vladek's life revolves around his loved ones. He is strong and stable because he is always attached with his family. Hence, when I write Vladek's story as a heroic adventure, I emphasize his attachment to his family. The first duet picture of Vladek and Anja in the first page has extremely great significance to Vladek's story of Holocaust because by showing the bond between the two lovers at the beginning, Art attempts to intensify the tragedy that occurs afterwards. It is unavoidable to notice that *Maus* ends with the picture of the tombstone of Vladek and Anja which further emphasizes the significance of the bond between the family members which is vital for Vladek to overcome all trauma. Even after almost everyone dies except him, Vladek finds another future and that is Artie who would give new meaning for Vladek's survival.

Although it may seem a little awkward for Vladek, his love for Anja may have been initiated because of Anja's family being "well off millionaires" (Spiegelman 20). Hence, Vladek is a materialistic, although his love for Anja seems truly immaterial afterwards. This quality of Vladek saves him from being emotionally broken and helpless in dire circumstances in the war. He knows how to earn money with business. On the other hand,

Vladek was always a mentally strong person and hence, “went in 1922 to the army” (49). Vladek’s language skills—German— (51) saves him from being beaten by the German soldiers (He later writes letters to his family in German too) .Vladek’s first triumph was the killing of a German soldier in his first front battle: “Well, at least I did something” (53). In Nuremberg prison, the first thing Vladek looked for is a job and he exchanged money for that (In page 56, he is seen exchanging “cigarettes to trade for food”). He “bathed” (56) “everyday” (56) and “did gymnastics to keep strong” (56) alongside regular prayers— “I was very religious” (56). These works prove his diligence and pro-activeness in a time of darkness. Vladek’s belief in spirituality (religion)—e.g. Parshas Truma—gives him mental strength to face troubles. He believes in his dream which asserts: “Don’t worry, my child...You will come out of this place -FREE! ...on the day of Parshas Truma” (59). Vladek was free on that day and he shares that “it was this Parsha on the week I got married to Anja...and this was the Parsha in 1948, on the week you were born” (61). His strong sense of belief made him successful. Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning that Vladek always saves food for future needs: “always I saved...just in case” (65). When Vladek returns home to be reunited with Anja and Richieu, the joy is boundless which signifies Vladek’s love for his family that saves him from falling apart. In the present tense narrative alongside this page, Vladek shows his attachment for Artie for whom he “watches out ...money” (69). The family picture in page 76 of book I intensifies Vladek’s strong bond to his family. “Prisoner on The Hell Planet,” with its expressionist style and desperate reactions of Vladek and Artie in the face of the death of Anja demonstrates the bond that is very important for Vladek. He seems to be much more broken apart here than any time during the war. This emphasizes the fact that many of his heroic capabilities are the result of his bond with his family.

Vladek’s business skills give him constant survival opportunities. His work in textile industry, carpentry shop, as a gold and jewelry trader, tin shop, black market business and shoe making give him enough scope to fight back against the tragedy of his life. He knows the importance of money even in concentration camps. Although Mala’s statement that “he is more attached to things than people” (95) is harsh, this makes Vladek stronger than other people. His engineering skills are remarkable too. His drawing of the bunker and gas chambers justify this statement. It shows his brilliant observation skills which makes him clever and saves him from impending dangers. It is Vladek’s description skills that made Art draw the cartoons accurately. Meanwhile Vladek continues to inspire Anja who has lost everyone from his family: “until the last moment we must struggle together! I need you! And you will see that together we survive” (124). Talking about burning Anja’s diaries, Vladek asserts that “after Anja dies, I had to make an

order with everything. These papers had too many memories. So, I burned them” (161). Art confesses that “reality is too complex for comics ...so much has to be left out or distorted” (176). Hence, it is possible that many of Vladek’s representations could be inappropriate. However, Vladek shows great love for Artie too: “Remember, my house. It’s also your house too” (184). Hence, Anja is replaced by Artie, and that is why Vladek remains as powerful as he has always been.

Vladek is seen to help other prisoners too which shows his compassion for others in times of tragedy. His intelligence is justified in his answer to Artie’s question of resistance in the camps: “in some spots people did fight...but you can kill maybe one German before they kill fast a hundred from you. Then its everyone dead” (233). Vladek shares how he survived in a train with his unique idea and how he used to get regular soup with his new shirt. The Frenchman’s comment on Vladek validates this point: “You are a genius, Vladek, A genius” (254). Vladek leaves all his valuable objects—which remind him of good memories—in order to be mentally stable in a post-war life: “All such things of the war, I tried to put out from my mind once for all...” (258). The reunion with Anja is remarkable for Vladek—“Anja, Anja, My Anja” (296)—, and the picture in the camp uniform that Anja gets gives her a new life too. This picture is a proof that Vladek is alive, and that he has survived the tragedy. The picture also suggests that Vladek has won something great. He is bold and powerful. The hero has returned from the battle, but with scars in his heart which he would overcome soon with his new hope and that is Anja and Artie.

Some may still argue that *Maus* represents the true nature of Vladek by showing his greediness and miserliness alongside his being a materialist. I would disagree with this perspective and instead, I contend that *Maus* is evidently an attempt to glorify the heroic capabilities of Vladek. Alongside the representation of Vladek’s epic journey in comics form, the memoir justifies this viewpoint by showing Vladek’s attachment to his family and his compassion for the fellow prisoners, his extraordinary present-mindedness and materialistic attitudes through his terrible days in Nazi concentration camps and with his strength to cope up with stress during and after the war.

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