A SURVIVOR’S GUILT: ON DISABILITY IN *MAUS* AND MEMORY

*By Kevin C. Treadway*

*Content Warning*: Nazism, Anti-Semitism, Ableism, Suicide

Much of the power of Spiegelman’s book lies in his discourse with the reader, a discourse that exists “between the panels,” beneath the narration and the dialogue. [...] *Maus* captures the terrible relationship between the lost world of European Jewry and the present. It portrays the frustration of a son who grew up in a different setting, trying so hard to understand the world that shaped his father, to grasp the stunning dimensions of an unfathomable experience.[[1]](#footnote-1)

—Joshua Brown

# Introduction

The graphic memoir *Maus* needs little introduction. Since the mass release of the first six chapters of the comic serial in 1986 as *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, vol. I: My Father Bleeds History* and the later 1991 publication of the final five chapters in *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, vol. II: And Here My Troubles Began*, the text has received widespread critical and mass acclaim. Created by comic artist Art Spiegelman and classified variously as biography, autobiography, memoir, historical fiction, non-fiction, and genre-busting, *Maus* has garnered significant academic attention for its complex, deeply personal, and intersectional themes of identity, mental health, familial relationships, and intergenerational trauma.

*Maus* largely alternates between two time periods. The first, set in 1930s and 1940s Poland and Germany, focuses on the experiences of Polish Jew Vladek Spiegelman — Art’s father — showing his pre-war life, conscription into the Polish Army, time as a German prisoner of war, forced relocation to various Polish ghettos, and internment in Auschwitz, prior to his liberation in 1945. The second period takes place primarily in Rego Park, New York during 1978 and 1979, as Art interviews his father in the hopes of creating a written account of Vladek’s experiences, which ultimately becomes *Maus*.

In *Maus*,human characters are depicted in a postmodern anthropomorphic style — pigs represent Poles, cats Germans, mice Jews (irrespective of nationality), and so on[[2]](#footnote-2) — but otherwise behave and speak as expected for humans. The earlier story set in Poland and Germany is often interspersed with mundane anecdotes about seemingly unrelated aspects of Vladek’s life or brief jump-backs to the present featuring dialogue between Vladek and Art — a product of *Maus*’s presentation as the summation of Art’s numerous conversations with his father. These and other narrative elements combine to create what is often credited as one of the most unusual, memorable, and certainly influential graphic memoirs ever created.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This essay is a close reading of the first six chapters of *Maus* as collected in its first published volume, *My Father Bleeds History*, through the lens of disability studies. Particularly, I will discuss the validity, necessity, politics, and consequences of identifying, labelling, or otherwise “reading” several characters as disabled, while highlighting the importance of *Maus* as a textual record of how otherwise abled people can be made “disabled” through traumatic experiences from which they do not or cannot ever fully recover. Briefly, I will first provide germane historical background for the narrated events of the earlier period of *Maus I*’s story — central Europe from the mid-1930s until 1944 — to provide useful context for several critical events, developments, and situations depicted in *Maus*, referencing the text as necessary.

# Historical context

In *Maus*, particular attention is paid to the situation and treatment of the Jews in Europe during that time period. For the purpose of brevity in contextualizing the circumstances for many Jewish people in Europe, as depicted in *Maus*, I open this section with a quote from Holocaust historian Robert Moeller’s introduction to *The Nazi State and German Society*:

The enemies in this war were European Jews. Hitler explicitly linked the two dimensions of the Nazis’ war before the invasion of Poland, proclaiming in January 1939 that if a world war began, “the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and with it the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The leadership of the Nazi Party, which came to power in 1933 and rapidly transformed Germany into a totalitarian dictatorship, considered war as an ideological and practical necessity. In pursuit of their goal to “[cleanse] Germany of all vestiges of ‘Jewish influence’,” the Nazis identified war with the Soviet Union, which they considered the principal source of Jewish influence in Europe, as particularly necessary — it was envisioned as a war of annihilation.[[5]](#footnote-5) The conquest of Eastern Europe, including not only Soviet territories, but also those of the Baltic States[[6]](#footnote-6) and Poland, would further enable the fulfillment of the oldest and one of the most important aspirations of Adolf Hitler and his party: the acquisition of *Lebensraum*.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Jewish population in these areas thus held special significance to the Nazis. Moeller remarks:

In Poland and the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, the Nazis established ghettos — sealed off parts of big cities, where they concentrated the Jewish population from the surrounding territory, isolating them and killing countless thousands through starvation and overwork.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Such ghettos are the setting for most of *Maus I*’s narrative during the war. Two fundamental elements of these ghettos shown in *Maus* were the *Judenrat* and *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*, which Vladek encounters several times, sometimes as friendly and sometimes as hostile parties — a representation of the complicated relationship these authorities had with local populations.[[9]](#footnote-9) In *Maus I*, members of the *Judenpolizei* help secure Vladek’s release from a work camp and find shelter for him in a local Jewish home, but also act as proxies for the Nazis by registering Jews for transportation to concentration camps.[[10]](#footnote-10) Members of these bodies often shared the fate of the general inhabitants of the ghettos — as depicted in *Maus I*, when local *Judenrat* members are executed before the Zawiercie ghetto is evacuated.[[11]](#footnote-11)

As the war progressed, the methods and haste with which Jews were killed intensified. Moeller elaborates:

Mobile killing squads ... worked in cooperation with the regular army ... [and] attempted to recruit collaborators in places such as Latvia and Ukraine where the local population shared their anti-Semitic views ... in an attempt to make these regions *judenrein*, “free of Jews.” [...] Impressed by the successful use of poison gas in the [*Aktion T4*] euthanasia program, the SS began to see this as an answer to the “Jewish question.” Killing Jews by gassing began ... in December 1941. [...] In the year following the Wannsee Conference, the rate of mass murder accelerated rapidly. Historian Deris Bergen calculates that in early 1942, “75 percent of the Jews who would be murdered in the Holocaust were still alive.” A year later, “75 percent of the approximately 6 million who would be killed were already dead.” [...] For German Jews ... the future remained terrifyingly uncertain.[[12]](#footnote-12)

I compare the policies towards Jews and disabled people in areas under Nazi authority later, where I argue that the Nazis socially disabled Jews through their racial and eugenicist policies. For now, I wish to return to the main focus of this paper: critique of *Maus I*’s depictions of Art and Vladek through the lens of disability studies.

# Traumatic memories and the search for answers: depicted impairments in *Maus*

In this section, we will examine Art and Vladek Spiegelman, two characters in *Maus*, through the first six chapters of *Maus I*, and critique the depiction of these characters and their self-conceptions. We will be seeking to determine how each of these characters has been impaired by life events and traumatic experiences, and we will also discuss to what extent that impairment affects their presence in the story and relationship with other characters. I do not intend to offer diagnoses or prognoses for the mental health of said characters. Rather, I consider how people who are otherwise able-bodied and able-minded can have their lives “impaired” by their or others’ past experiences and whether, consequently, it is possible to consider them “disabled.” Because neither Vladek nor Art is discernibly disabled, I seek to understand how their interaction with others is hindered by prior trauma. In doing so, I consider the experience of trauma itself as disabling.

## Art Spiegelman

Art Spiegelman appears in *Maus* in two respects. Though interpretations vary, I think of *Maus* primarily as an autobiographical historical memoir; Art is *Maus*’s main character as well as the book’s author. Though Vladek is depicted more often, it is Art who elects to ask his father about his experiences during the war, to record them, and ultimately to translate that recording into a permanent artistic piece, for reasons that line up with what Ian Williams describes as “graphic medicine,” and Timothy Don-Adams calls “therapeutic fiction making.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Art himself has also corroborated this approach, referring to *Maus* as not primarily a didactic text but one that he created in order to learn something (about) himself.[[14]](#footnote-14)[[15]](#footnote-15)His psychological state is probably best summarized by Andrew Gordon:

Artie is caught in a bind, overshadowed by Vladek and by his “ghost brother” Richieu, who died in the Holocaust (Artie is a replacement child), and tormented by his mother’s suicide in 1968, when Artie was 20. Artie wants to make restitution for his parents but feels guilty because he can never make up for what they suffered.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Art, then, has a kind of survivor’s guilt resulting from both his father’s experiences and his mother Anja’s death by suicide, but, as we will explore, he also harbors lingering resentment toward both of his parents — for distinct reasons — further complicating his character.

First, as shown throughout *Maus I*, Art has an estranged relationship with his father. As described on the book’s physical cover, the second story of *Maus I* is “the author’s tortured relationship with his aging father as they try to lead a normal life of minor arguments and passing visits against a backdrop of history too large to pacify.” Art believes he has to live up to his father surviving the Holocaust, which he considers an impossible effort. This belief — that nothing he achieves with his life could ever match let alone surpass the importance of his father’s survival — has a serious and detrimental effect on his mental health. He — along with Vladek’s second wife, Mala — is also frustrated by what Gordon calls the “tough Jew” behavior that Vladek exhibits, i.e., his “stubbornness and tenacity, a capacity for hard work.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Art is more directly traumatized by the suicide of his mother, however, which contributes both to an anger, even resentment, toward his father and a sense of responsibility for his mother’s early death. At the end of *Maus I*, he calls his father a “murderer” twice, once to his face — “God **DAMN** you! You–you MURDERER! HOW THE HELL COULD YOU DO SUCH A THING?” (emphasis in original) — before quickly apologizing, and the second under his breath — “...murderer.” — reflecting lingering mental wounds caused by perceptions about his father’s role in Anja’s death.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Both of these outbursts, occurring at the conclusion of the story, resemble David Tennant’s admission at the end of *Mother, Come Home* about his complicity in his wife’s death. David exclaims to his son, shortly before his own suicide, “**Thomas**! I **killed** her! I helped her...” (emphasis in original).[[19]](#footnote-19)Additionally, the comic-within-a-comic, “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” where Art dresses himself in the same clothing as Auschwitz prisoners and narrates his initial reaction to his mother’s death, reveals a deep inner torment:

I felt confused; I felt angry; I felt numb! ... I didn’t exactly feel like crying, but figured I should! [...] My father had completely fallen apart! ... ***I***was expected to comfort ***him!*** [...] The next day at the funeral home was worse... It was too much – I had to leave... A friend of the family found me out in the hall... I felt nauseous... the guilt was overwhelming! [...] The next week we spent in mourning... My father’s friends all offered me hostility mixed in with their condolences... But, for the most part, I was left alone with my thoughts... I remembered the last time I saw her. [...] I turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord... Well, mom, if you’re listening... Congratulations!... You’ve committed the perfect crime... You put me here ... shorted all my circuits ... cut my nerve endings ... and crossed my wires![[20]](#footnote-20)

The clearest conclusion one can draw from “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” is that Art was resentful immediately following his mother’s death, which I consider to be a transfer of feelings from more difficult to more “easily” handled (while still very difficult) emotions — in this case, anger at his mother for leaving him “alone” in place of guilt about possibly contributing to her death. This reaction to Anja’s death is demonstrated through the use of immature words toward his mother — principally, “Mommy” and “Bitch.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The comic’s ending also rejects the Augustine narrative, as Kristen Gay defines it, of “[moving] from trauma/turmoil to recovery/healing,”[[22]](#footnote-22) in that Art depicts himself as unchanged from the beginning to the end of the comic as a prisoner in his own mind, tormented by Anja’s unexpected suicide, with little evidence that he has begun the process of recovery.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Unsurprisingly, Art was severely affected by his mother’s suicide. Thus, while it is clear that Art believes he can never exceed his father’s achievements, he remains angry over Vladek’s treatment of Anja. From this, I consider Art mentally “impaired” by the trauma of losing his mother and his failure to fully reconnect with his father. Gordon provides us with an apt summary of Art’s mental state (emphasis mine):

Artie lives in what Marianne Hirsch calls “post-memory,” his life “**dominated by memories that are not his own**.” But he is also angry at them because they offered him little emotionally: **his father was too self-absorbed, domineering, critical, and manipulative, and his mother too fragile and needy**. [...] Artie is “**psychologically and literally unacknowledged and orphaned**.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Art’s continuing guilt over his mother’s death, his frustration over his relationship with his aging father, and his desire to live up to both of their expectations (partly imagined — by Art) significantly affect his life and actions. As Gordon writes, “the children of concentration camp survivors feel they have a mission to live in the past and to change it so that their parents’ humiliations, disgrace, and guilt can be converted into victory.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Art, then, is — at the very least — scarred by his and his parents’ trauma, which he carries with him in his present life out of a mixture of beliefs.

## Vladek Spiegelman

Vladek is the other main character throughout both volumes of *Maus*. A Holocaust survivor living in Rego Park, New York, Vladek is the chief narrator of *Maus*, and it is his story that the bulk of *Maus* focuses on: his time as a well-to-do man in pre-war Poland, his wartime experiences in Poland and Germany, and, finally, his quiet life in 1970s New York City. Gordon identifies him primarily as a *mensch*, a “good person,” but possibly also as a *kvetch* or a *nudzh*, “a complainer or a nag.”[[26]](#footnote-26) After his first wife, Anja, suddenly committed suicide — which he has difficulty addressing directly[[27]](#footnote-27) — Vladek married Mala, another Holocaust survivor, with whom he lives in New York. His relationship with Mala is nearly as strained as his relationship with his son, Art, owing partly to the stubbornness and rigid frugality of Vladek’s character.[[28]](#footnote-28) Mala also appears to be annoyed by Vladek’s continued attachment to Anja.[[29]](#footnote-29) Vladek is further suspicious that Mala only stays with him for his money, but ignores the issue because he is afraid of being alone.[[30]](#footnote-30) As discussed earlier, his son Art also remains bitter at him over Anja’s death.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Vladek is unconvinced that his story of survival is relevant to other people. Early in *Maus I*, when Art tells Vladek about his renewed interest in adapting Vladek’s story, Vladek remarks, “It would take too many books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories... Better you should spend your time to make drawings what will bring you some money.”[[32]](#footnote-32) He does not appear to have difficulty recounting memories of his life before the war or during his internment, although he often reminisces about his days with Anja and obviously misses her company.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, he may be trying to downplay trauma from these memories; the interjection of banal facts or anecdotes into the more serious sections of his story (an element of the narration that has attracted significant praise) may serve as a means to lighten the weight of his story. Yet it is unclear how precisely traumatized he remains in his later years.

In Rego Park, Vladek is clearly trying to live a simple life. I would argue this is in direct reaction to his chaotic and trying experiences in the 1930s and 1940s; in Vladek’s mind, it may be better to be bored all day than overwhelmed.[[34]](#footnote-34) His traumatic past thus affects his present behavior, which I would consider a symptom of his “ravaged body,” as described by Margaret Flinn in her essay on cultural memory in the Franco-Algerian *Petit Polio* series.[[35]](#footnote-35)

# Lingering questions of “impairment” and “disability”

Disability studies is a developing field; as described by Lennard Davis in 2013, the “political and academic movement around disability is at best a first- or second-wave enterprise.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Multiple models of defining disability exist. The older medical model of disability “[was] developed with no need to create unity amongst diverse patient groups,” such that “wheelchair users saw no commonality with people with chronic fatigue syndrome or Deaf people.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The more recent social model “[sees] disability as a constructed category, not one bred into the bone” and identifies a “distinction between impairment and disability,” with “impairment” the “physical fact of lacking an arm or leg” but “disability” the “social process that turns an impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access,” as Davis writes.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Though consensus has not been reached, we have an opportunity to extend the application of “disability” as defined above to social processes that not only cause impairments to become negatives, but cause what should not be impairing characteristics of a person — such as ethnicity or religion — to become, under certain circumstances, socially disabling.[[39]](#footnote-39)Two questions arise that I wish to consider here. First, regarding Art Spiegelman and in particular the impact of his mother’s death, to what extent must memories and experiences be traumatic for someone to be considered truly “disabled” by them? Second, for Vladek Spiegelman, did his Jewish identity, in the context of Nazi racial policy, disable him socially?

Throughout the first six chapters of *Maus I*, Art listens to his father recall his experiences up until his internment in Auschwitz in the winter of 1944. On the surface, Art does not appear particularly on edge or otherwise traumatized by anything. Were it not for the inclusion of “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” which Robert Leventhal calls “a particularly compelling segment of the text,” there would be little to cite from the first six chapters of *Maus* regarding Art’s mental health.[[40]](#footnote-40) At first, it seems strange to include such a piece in a memoir that has up until this point been almost entirely dedicated to Vladek’s life. As Leventhal writes, the inclusion of “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” in *Maus I* completely changes the text’s nature:

This text-within-the-text recounts Artie’s own incomplete or failed attempt to work through the traumatic loss of his mother, his own melancholic and masochistic tendencies to internalize the dysfunction of his family and his mother’s depression, and the degree to which his writing bears the mark of that loss and is itself a type of working-through in its own right. The subtitle “A Case History” mocks the case history in psychoanalysis, in which the patient is “cured” of the incessant return of the traumatic past... there isn’t any closure, and the suffering individual remains captive in the prison of his own masochistic melancholia, the jail cell of his wounded self.[[41]](#footnote-41)

We see from “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” that Anja’s suicide left deep psychological scars on Art, for or from which — because of its unexpected, sudden nature — he will most likely never receive true closure. It is impossible to read “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” and not conclude that Art has experienced severe trauma. From this set of circumstances, and our earlier discussion of Art’s character, we recognize that Art has severe and recurring senses of guilt and a lack of control over his life. It is thus evident that Art is impaired by experiences that continue to influence him through to the present day. Indeed, even *Maus*’s success and the “overwhelming positive response” to it surprised him and have weighed on him ever since *Maus*’s publication.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Throughout *Maus I*, we see the cruelty of the Holocaust and the German occupation of Poland through Vladek’s memories. Even though his experience in Auschwitz is not detailed in *Maus I*, Vladek endured extreme hardship during the five years that he spent as a prisoner of war and ghetto resident. In the following pages, I wish to move away from Vladek’s personal character and focus on how we can consider his Jewishness in general as a disabling factor within the Nazi social hierarchy, which he and millions of others were forced into. While Jewishness is not in itself a disability, Nazi social and racial policy considered and rendered Jewishness a societal impairment, with the remedy being removal and, ultimately, extermination from society. Nazi antisemitic policies, practices, and beliefs are well known and unnecessary to address in detail here. Instead, I compare the legal sanctions, verbal descriptions, and other means of oppression of both the Jews and disabled people in Nazi Germany below.



A poster appearing in a 1944 issue of Der Stürmer, a Nazi propaganda paper, showing a parasite-like creature with antisemitic features, including an exaggerated large nose, towering over the world, especially Europe. In its eyes are a dollar sign and a hammer and sickle, symbols of capitalism and communism respectively. A caption in the top left, within a Star of David, reads: “You see the people who devour the world.” Image credit: Wikimedia Commons.

As early as April 1, 1933, the Nazi Party took official state action against Jews, beginning with a nationwide *Judenboykott* (“Jewish boycott”). This was an extension of the boycotts that had been organized by members of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) against Jewish businesses since the 1920s.[[43]](#footnote-43) A week later, the Civil Service Restoration Act was passed by the Reichstag, the increasingly subjugated German parliament, which ordered “non-Aryans” (as well as members of the Communist Party of Germany) to be dismissed and prohibited from the civil service. This law effectively banned Jews from serving in the German government or in education; later, the law expanded to the medical and legal professions as well. In July of 1933, legislation was enacted that stripped the German Jews of their citizenship, and in September 1935, the Marriage Law and Reich Citizenship Law — collectively called the Nuremberg Laws — forbade marriage between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans and rendered only those of “German or related blood” citizens with entitled rights, making all other parties, including Jews, “state subjects.” These laws effectively removed the remaining legal protections for all Jews in Germany. In November 1938, during the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, nearly 300 synagogues and thousands of Jewish businesses were destroyed by SA members, and about 30,000 Jews were placed into concentration camps. These events are considered by scholars the principal legal and social forerunners to the perpetration of the Holocaust in Germany and German-occupied territories during the Second World War, which would kill approximately six million Jews.[[44]](#footnote-44)



A Racial Policy Office poster from 1938. It shows a man standing over another man in a chair with the standing man’s arm on the seated man’s shoulder. The poster reads: “This person suffering from a hereditary disease costs the national community 60,000 Reichsmarks during his lifetime. Fellow citizen, that is your money as well.” Image credit: Wikimedia Commons.

In 1933, the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring was enacted, which authorized the forced sterilization of any person deemed by a “genetic health court” to have a genetic disorder. Beginning in early 1934, an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 people, most of whom were patients in mental hospitals, would be sterilized under this law. As loose a diagnosis as “feeblemindedness” was sufficient for a person to be sterilized. Several thousand people were killed during these operations. After the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, an additional clause was added to the Marriage Law, the first of such statutes, that “required for all marriages proof that any offspring from the union would not be afflicted with a disabling hereditary disease.” Throughout the 1930s, the Nazi Party promoted the concept of *Lebensunwertes Leben*, “life unworthy of life,” in reference to individuals who were considered useless, even detrimental, to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, “people’s community,” like the *Untermenschen* (“subhumans”).

In October 1939, Hitler authorized the implementation of what was then called the *Gnadentod-Programm*, “mercy death program,” but which is now commonly called *Aktion T4*. Originally carried out publicly, the program was officially ceased in late 1941 after protests primarily by religious organizations but carried on in secret until the end of the war. Approximately 300,000 people were killed under this program. Methods of killing pioneered for *Aktion T4*, such as mass gassing,would later be used to execute the Holocaust.[[45]](#footnote-45)

It is clear from *Maus I*’s depictions of Vladek and Art that both characters have continuing, unresolved trauma that they internally and externally contend with. Art is resentful toward his father because of the coldness received when he was a child and for Vladek’s perceived role in Anja’s suicide. Vladek remains attached to Anja despite remarrying and is unable to fully reconnect with his son on a grounded basis, while remaining tormented by the depravity of the war. Though being Jewish is not a disability, within the specific context of Jewish experiences under Nazism, as noted — considering how Jews were labelled, incarcerated, and ultimately exterminated on an industrial scale by the Nazi Party — we may thus consider the characteristic to have been socially disabling.

# Works Cited

Brown, Joshua. “Of Mice and Memory.” *The Oral History Review* 16, no. 1 (1988): 91–109. <http://marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/classes/33d/33dTexts/maus/JBrownMiceMemoryOHR1988.htm>.

Davis, Lennard. “The End of Identity Politics: On Disability as an Unstable Category.” In *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th edition, edited by Lennard Davis, 263–277. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Flinn, Margaret. “The ‘Ravaged Body’ as Carrier of Cultural Memory in Farid Boudjellal’s *Petit Polio* Series.” *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 8, no. 4 (2017): 341–358. DOI: 10.1080/21504857.2017.1288640.

Foss, Chris, Jonathan Gray, and Zack Whalen, eds. *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Friedländer, Saul. *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933–1945*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007.

Gay, Kristen. “Breaking Up [at/with] Illness Narratives.” In *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives,* edited by Chris Foss, Jonathan Gray, and Zach Whalen, 171–186. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Gellately, Robert. *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.

Gordon, Andrew. “Jewish Fathers and Sons in Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Roth’s *Patrimony*.” *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 1, no. 1 (2002). <https://web.archive.org/web/20190805011932/http://imagetext.english.ufl.edu/archives/v1_1/gordon/>.

Gross, Jessica. “It Doesn’t Add Up: Mental Illness in Paul Honrschemeier’s *Mother, Come Home*.” In *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth Donaldson, 215–233. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Leventhal, Robert. “Art Spiegelman’s *MAUS*: Working-Through the Trauma of the Holocaust.” In *Responses to the Holocaust: A Hypermedia Sourcebook for the Humanities*, edited by Robert Leventhal. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995.

Moeller, Robert. *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, vol. I: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

Spiegelman, Art. *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://www.ushmm.org/>.

Williams, Ian. “Autography as Auto-Therapy: Psychic Pain and the Graphic Memoir.” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32, no. 4 (2011): 353–366. DOI: 10.1007/s10912-011-9158-0.

Editor’s Note: For more information about Aktion T4, view a videorecording of the panel presentation, On Being a Vicarious Witness: Aktion T4 and Contesting the Erasure of Disability History on YouTube, and review a listing of [accompanying resources](https://bbi.syr.edu/projects/oipo/resources/resource-guide-aktion-t4/), shared by panelists and the Office of Interdisciplinary Programs and Outreach in the Burton Blatt Institute.

1. Joshua Brown, “Of Mice and Memory,” *The Oral History Review* 16, no. 1 (1988): 91–109, <http://marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/classes/33d/33dTexts/maus/JBrownMiceMemoryOHR1988.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Maus*’s anthropomorphic style has received criticism, but Spiegelman has defended it as based, principally, on Nazi propaganda that routinely portrayed Jews as rats or other vermin. Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 114–117. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Maus* is sometimes called a “graphic novel” — an appellation Art Spiegelman has rejected, for example in Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*,75. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Robert Moeller, *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were independent states during the interwar period until being *de facto* and forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in June 1940. The annexation of these states was not recognized by Western powers. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. German for “living space.” A critical National Socialist concept, and the principal goal of the war on the Eastern Front. Through invasion and displacement, if not extermination, of much of the native populace, “living space” was to be acquired for future German settler colonies founded across occupied Eastern Europe after the defeat of the Soviet Union. Gellately 2007 and Friedländer 2007 provide more information. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Moeller, *The Nazi State and German Society*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Judenrat* and *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst* literally mean “Jewish council” and “Jewish police service” in German, respectively. A *Judenrat* was a semi-autonomous intermediary authority between the German military or civilian administration (depending on the area) and the corralled Jewish populations of the ghettos. A *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*, also called *Judenpolizei*, was an auxiliary police unit established by a local *Judenrat* to suppress unrest and maintain order. A semi-voluntary hierarchical organization, *Judenpolizei* performed roles similar to *kapos* in concentration camps. There is continuing debate regarding the role of these authorities in the Holocaust. See Friedländer 2007 for more information. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, vol. I: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 62, 87–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Moeller, *The Nazi State and German Society*, 20–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ian Williams, “Autography as Auto-Therapy: Psychic Pain and the Graphic Memoir,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32, no. 4 (2011): 353–366, DOI: 10.1007/s10912-011-9158-0. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 102–103, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Jewish Federation of Greater Chattanooga, “A Conversation with Art Spiegelman, Author of *Maus*,” Facebook video, 23:34, February 7, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/JFedChattanooga/videos/2114662165363446/. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Andrew Gordon, “Jewish Fathers and Sons in Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Roth’s *Patrimony,*” *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 1, no. 1 (2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gordon, “Jewish Fathers and Sons.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Spiegelman, *Maus, vol. I*, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Jessica Gross, “It Doesn’t Add Up: Mental Illness in Paul Hornschemeier’s *Mother, Come Home*,” in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. Elizabeth Donaldson (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Spiegelman, *Maus, vol. I*, 101–103. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Gay, Kristen. “Breaking Up [at/with] Illness Narratives,” in *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narratives,* eds. Chris Foss, Jonathan Gray, and Zach Whalen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Further, when making *Maus*,Spiegelman explicitly sought to avoid representing his father as “a survivor who’s ennobled by his suffering—a very Christian notion, the survivor as martyr.” Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Gordon. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Spiegelman, *Maus, vol. I*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid, 11, 116, 130–132, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid, 126–127, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid, 18, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Vladek, in this sense, reminds me of my own grandfather, who grew up during the Great Depression but was too young to fight in the Second World War. He recycled even aluminum foil and paper towels well into his august years. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Margaret Flinn, “The ‘ravaged body’ as carrier of cultural memory in Farid Boudjellal’s *Petit Polio* series,” *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 8, no. 4 (2017): 341–358, DOI: 10.1080/21504857.2017.1288640. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Lennard Davis, “The End of Identity Politics: On Disability as an Unstable Category,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* (4th ed.), ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid, 264–265. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. A foreseeable objection is that such characteristics of a person cannot ever be removed as factors in how a person is perceived and treated within a specific society. However, with regard to the specific circumstances faced by the Jews under Nazism, I consider these characteristics to have been socially disabling due to explicit Nazi policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Robert Leventhal, “Art Spiegelman’s *MAUS*: Working-Through the Trauma of the Holocaust,” in *Responses to the Holocaust: A Hypermedia Sourcebook for the Humanities*, ed. Robert Leventhal (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 79–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The *Sturmabteilung* (literally “storm” or “assault detachment”) was the original paramilitary organization of the Nazi Party. It was superseded in most functions by the *Schutzstaffel*, SS, following the 1934 purge and execution of many of its ranking members, including its chief, Ernst Röhm. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Friedländer 2007 or Gellately 2007 for more information on the state-sponsored persecution and murder of Jews in Nazi Germany. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Various pages on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s official website provide overviews of the Nazi persecution of people with disabilities. Also see Friedländer 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)