

CONTINUING AND EVOLVING
NARRATIVES:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOLOCAUST
GRAPHIC NOVELS POST-MAUS

Master Thesis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The creation of comics about the Second World War and the Holocaust was already initiated as the war began, with a small comic in *Look Magazine* titled *How Superman Would End the War* published February 27, 1940. The comic is only two pages and depicts Superman as the ‘All-American’ superhero. Superman is depicted arresting both Adolf Hitler and Jozef Stalin, bringing them to the League of Nations where they are pronounced guilty of ‘modern history’s greatest crime – unprovoked aggression of defenseless countries.’¹ The use of Nazi’s and other war related subjects became increasingly recurring themes, especially in superhero themed comics. Over time, more comics that were specifically about the Holocaust, rather than only touching upon the subject, began to appear.² This already started during the war as well. In the French concentration camp in Gurs prisoners were allowed to have some artistic activity. Horst Rosenthal created the ‘comic’ *Mickey au Camp de Gurs* as a prisoner in the camp in 1942. He died in Auschwitz later that same year.³ *Mickey au Camp de Gurs* was not a classic comic, but rather a small notebook that included drawings and made references to the comic book medium. For long, the general assumption remained, and especially in America, that ‘serious’ topics could not be dealt with in the form of illustrated text.⁴

However, the publication of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* in 1986 changed how the public views graphic novels about ‘serious’ topics, such as the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman is the son of two Polish Jews and is an American cartoonist himself. The combination of the serious and dark content with the longstanding cartoon tradition of illustrating characters as animals, made *Maus* into the perfect example for the public that comics could handle serious subjects. Because of its subject, among other reasons, *Maus* was published by the American publishing house Pantheon Books. This provided the graphic novel with a radically different publication strategy compared to other graphic novels. Therefore, *Maus* was distributed through mainly mainstream bookstores, instead of small-scale specific comic bookstores. This meant it could completely transcend the comics-reading public into the general population and literati.⁵ *Maus* started out

¹ Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, “*How Superman Would End the War*,” Illustration, *Look Magazine*, February 27, 1940, <https://archive.org/details/HowSupermanWouldEndTheWar/page/n3/mode/2up>

² “Comic Books to Tell the Story of the Holocaust,” Holocaust Centre of Pittsburgh, last modified August 4, 2020, <https://hcofpggh.wordpress.com/2020/08/04/comic-books-to-tell-the-story-of-the-holocaust/>

³ Shreya Chakrabarty, “The Transition from Comic Strip to Holocaust Graphic Novel: A Comprehensive Study,” *Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2016): 19

⁴ Sander L. Gilman, “Can the Shoah Be Funny? Some Thoughts on Recent and Older Films,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 279-280

⁵ Robert Hutton, “A *Maus* in the Bookstore: “*Maus*” and the Publishing Industry,” *South Central Review* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 34.

as a three-page strip in 1972. It then grew into an insert in *Raw*, a comics and graphics magazine published by Spiegelman and his wife, Françoise Mouly, that they co-founded in 1980. The first six chapters of the full graphic novel appeared in 1986 under the title *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* and in 1991 the second volume came out as *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*. *The Complete Maus*, an edition that contains both *Maus I* and *Maus II* was first published in the United States of America in 1996.⁶ As *Maus* thus became available in more mainstream bookstores and grabbed the attention of the wider public and media, it is often thought about as one of the first graphic novels by a Jewish graphic artist about his personal history and experiences concerning the Holocaust.

Spiegelman was, however, not the first graphic artist to address Jewish history through personal historical narrative. Will Eisner, generally seen as the creator of the graphic novel and a central figure in the comics industry in the United States during its formative ‘Golden Age’, also worked on Jewish themes, especially in the last decades of his life. This resulted in the posthumous release of his final work *The Plot: The Secret Story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was published in 2005.⁷ Nevertheless, Spiegelman’s *Maus* was the first graphic narrative to receive a Pulitzer Prize. Spiegelman won the award in 1992 and thus established the graphic novel as a legitimate form of Holocaust representation. This was an important moment for other artists as well. As Miriam Katin, a Hungarian born American graphic novelist put it, other artists gained permission to enter the space of Holocaust history and memory. It gave just the push they needed to tell their own and their families’ stories of survival within this genre. As the graphic novel gained more respectability over the past four decades, moving out of a fine arts ‘canon’ and into a more mainstream medium to be consumed, more publications appeared. To varying degrees of success, many graphic artists have attempted to give voice to the traumatic halo surrounding the Holocaust, as well as some attempting to voice their own trauma.⁸

The definition of the graphic novel remains problematic. The term is often used very broadly and interchangeably with comics, even though this is highly contested by industry professionals and academics, as they argue both literary forms are different and serve different purposes. Some criteria that we need to keep in mind when classifying a narrative as either a

⁶ Dan Kois, “The Making of ‘Maus’,” *New York Times*, December 2, 2011, Accessed January 18, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/books/review/the-making-of-maus.html?searchResultPosition=2>

⁷ Jeremy Dauber, “Comic Books, Tragic Stories: Will Eisner’s American Jewish History,” *AJS Review* 30, no. 2 (Nov. 2006): 279.

⁸ Victoria Aarons, *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma, and Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2019): 1-3.

comic or graphic novel is whether the storyline is published over multiple editions. With comics, their storyline can continue over months, or sometimes even years, such as comics produced by the *Marvel Comics* publishing company. Recognizable titles could be *The Avengers*, *The Amazing Spider-man*, and other characters from the ‘Marvel Universe’ such as Thor, Venom, or the X-Men. Some storylines of these comics have been going for so long, that some publications have their serial number in the hundreds. This is for example the case with *The Amazing Spider-man – Man Facsimile Edition*, published in 2024, number #255.⁹ On the other hand, the storyline of a graphic novel tends to be wrapped up in just one book, or sometimes two. Additionally, graphic novels are often written and illustrated by the same person, especially when personal stories are involved that are portrayed in this format. Comics, and especially the more popular superhero ones, are often created by a whole team of pencillers, inkers, and writers. Though categorized as a ‘novel’, graphic novels do not always contain fictional stories. Many of the most powerful graphic novels are written as autobiographies or memoirs.¹⁰ Stephen Weiner and comic artist Will Eisner define the graphic novel as book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story. The genre does not play a role in this definition, and a graphic novel could thus also be a story that is meant to be read apart from their corresponding ongoing comic book storyline.¹¹

Concepts

In 1992, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman in the book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* started exploring the idea of an *intergenerational transmission of memory*. This refers to the passing down of memories, experiences, and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.¹² Dori Laub was an Israeli American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, and Shoshana Felman is an American literary critic and professor of comparative literature. Within the historical field, Marianne Hirsch, a professor of English and comparative literature has explored this idea further with the concept of *post-memory*. The

⁹ Marvel Unlimited, “The Amazing Spiderman – Man Facsimile Edition,” by Tom Defalco and Ron Frenz, Published April 17, 2024, accessed April 22, 2024, https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/112609/amazing_spider-man_facsimile_edition_2024_255

¹⁰ Stephen E. Tabachnick, *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2017): 26.

¹¹ Stephen Weiner, Will Eisner, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel* (NBM Publishing, 2012): 10.

¹² Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (Taylor&Francis, 1992).

concept is most extensively researched in relation to Holocaust survivors and the following generations. Post-memory, as defined by Hirsch, refers to how traumatic experiences and memories of a past event are transmitted to the next generation.¹³ In this sense, the trauma and memories concerning a certain event are somewhat ‘inherited’. Especially Art Spiegelman has been very open to the public about his trauma related to his father’s Holocaust experience, which also overlaps with the traumatic experience of his mother’s suicide and how he feels he is a ‘replacement child’ for his brother Richieu. Spiegelman develops some rivalry with his ‘ghost brother’, which is a classical symptom in replacement children, and additionally a prevalent form in which parental trauma is transmitted onto the next generation. For Spiegelman, this also meant an obsession with the Holocaust.¹⁴ The term ‘replacement child’ was coined by two psychologists, Albert C. Cain and Barbara I. Cain, in 1964 to define a child who is used by its parents as a substitute for a sibling who has died.¹⁵ Especially intergenerational transmission of memory, and post-memory regarding second- and third-generation artists carry significance for this research. Case studies into replacement children were regularly derived from Holocaust survivors and their families. Authors not only focused the replacement child as a replacement, but also on the transmission of memory and transgenerational transmission of loss which occurred in the Holocaust within these case studies.¹⁶

For post-Holocaust generations, these transmitted traumatic memories play an extensive role within their *identity formation*. It influences their individual self, but also their community. Susan Sontag, an American author and literary critic, argues that collective memory is not merely a remembering, but rather a societal promise. It is the promise that *this* is important, and *this* is the story of how it happened.¹⁷ Elie Wiesel, a Jewish American writer and Holocaust survivor won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. In his Nobel lecture ‘*Hope, Despair, and Memory*’ he refers to a ‘supreme duty towards memory’ that we have as a society, it is the obligation of the transmission of memory he speaks of.¹⁸ For post-Holocaust

¹³ Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “Incongruous Images: “Before, During and After,” the Holocaust,” *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (Dec. 2009): 15.

¹⁴ Stanislav Kolár, “Intergenerational transmission of trauma in Spiegelman’s *Maus*,” *Brno Studies in English* 39, no. 1 (2013): 231-232

¹⁵ Gerald Rosen, “Replacement Children: Expanding the Concept,” *Journal of Developmental & Behavioural Pediatrics* 3, no. 4 (Dec. 1982): 239.

¹⁶ Sarah Reed Vollmann, “A Legacy of Loss: Stories of Replacement Dynamics and the Subsequent Child,” *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying* 69, no. 3 (Nov. 2014): 220.

¹⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003): 86.

¹⁸ Elie Wiesel, “Hope, Despair, and Memory,” Nobel Lecture presented on December 11, 1986, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1986/wiesel/lecture/>

generations, identity formation is still heavily influenced by the trauma and memory of the Holocaust. Due to this continuum of trauma, the direct pain and suffering of the Holocaust may become less intense for later generations, but at the same time, the memory still plays a central role.¹⁹

In 2006, Lisa A. Costello, who mainly focuses on research on writing, gender and the Holocaust, coined the term '*performative memorialization*', which she defines as 'a layered memorial activity that performs in every Holocaust genre to create a temporally fluid Bakhtinian dialogic between the author and the subject (memory) and the event and the audience (history) – combating tendencies toward collective amnesia or foreclosure' which is used to make meaning of Holocaust memory.²⁰ In literature, Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argues that dialogic interactions between characters, narrators, and readers, all contribute to the depth of meaning in a text. In representing the Holocaust, it is a complex conversation, thus a Bakhtinian dialogic with several participants that all form a chain of communication. Costello argues that due to the hybrid nature of genres used by Spiegelman in *Maus*, as well as through the complex visual and textual narration, the graphic novel is inherently performative and creates a performative dialogic. For *Maus* the two narratives consist of on the one hand his father's experiences during the Holocaust, and on the other hand there is an overarching narrative between Spiegelman and his father, Vladek, as he conducts the interviews in a homely setting to gather the story for the graphic novel.²¹

Additionally important is the concept of *symbolism*. Often, animal characters represent (human) stereotypes in graphic novels. It is a technique that can achieve a powerful literary outcome but using *anthropomorphisation* is a risk as well. Animal metaphors have the potential to dehumanize the target group they are supposed to represent, and when perpetrators are represented as animals it absolves them of their human responsibility for their crimes.²² Art Spiegelman uses this technique in his graphic novel *Maus*, where all people are represented by animals. The Jews are presented as mice, the Germans as cats, the Poles as pigs, the French as

¹⁹ Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Memory and Trauma: From Survivor Writing to Post-Holocaust Representation," in *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Northwestern University Press, 2017): 46.

²⁰ Lisa A. Costello, "History and Memory in a Dialogic of 'Performative Memorialization' in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: A Survivor's Tale," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 22.

²¹ Costello, "History and Memory," 25.

²² Deborah Mayersen, "Cockroaches, Cows and 'Canines of the Hebrew Faith': Exploring Animal Imagery in Graphic Novels about Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 12, no. 2 (2018): 166.

frogs, and the Americans as dogs.²³ Interestingly, Spiegelman on some occasions not only portrays a person as one animal but gives the specific animal the mask of another. This happens on occasion with a Jewish person, portrayed as a mouse, wearing the mask of a pig to hide from the German perpetrator.²⁴

Historiography

Moving forward to what has already been done within the field, the historiographic overview for this thesis focuses first on the thematic approaches different scholars have taken for research into Holocaust graphic novels and especially noticeable shifts between generations. This is followed by a historiographic overview on more specific Holocaust discourse and commemoration. The Holocaust is of course not the only historical event that is represented through drawn mediums such as comics and graphic novels. Graphic novels have also been created about other violent historical events, such as other genocides, but can also include other topics such as colonialism, politics, or social topics and issues. A good example of a graphic novel discussing social issues is the recent publication of *Uitweg (Way Out)* by author B. Carrot, published in March 2024. The graphic novel focuses on the struggle of Polish women for abortion, as their bodies suddenly become a political statement.

Concerning genocides, first, the work of Laurike in 't Veld is discussed, titled *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, the work was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2019 and contains a wide range of topics. In 't Veld discusses the role of kitsch, as well as anti-kitsch strategies, visual metaphors, the moralization of perpetrators and the visualization of mass violence and sexual violence. Kitsch is, as a cultural and visual concept, associated with features such as excess, aestheticization, and (emotional) manipulation. Kitsch is often looked upon as a questionable mode when it is used in dealing with precarious topics like mass violence, destruction, and death. In 't Veld takes kitsch as an aesthetic mode that is characterized by a simultaneous sense of being *too much* and *too little*. For In 't Veld, kitsch is an interaction between excess and simplification, excess in visuals, narrative techniques and the eliciting of an emotional response, and simplification as it tends to simplify morally and politically complex situations.²⁵ Taking a comparative approach, she discusses not only the

²³ Michael E. Staub, "The Shoah Goes on and on: Remembrance and Representation in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," *History and Memory* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 33.

²⁴ See for example: Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (Harlow, England: Penguin Books, 2003): 66.

²⁵ Laurike in 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 2.

Holocaust, but also graphic novels about other genocides, specifically in Rwanda, Bosnia and Armenia. In 't Veld challenges the typically negative connotations of kitsch as meaningless or inappropriate, instead, she argues some kitsch strategies can produce meaning and create an emotional connection within the narrative of the graphic novel. The work is not all kitsch positive, as she takes a more critical approach to the use of kitsch in the depiction of perpetrators and visual representations of sexual violence.²⁶

Especially influential in the field was the publication of *Beyond MAUS: The Legacy of Holocaust Comics* in 2021, a book that is a collection of sixteen contributions that shed a light on different Holocaust representations apart from *Maus*. The book, as a collection of essays, focusses on comics published before and after *Maus*, as well as the role comics have in the memorialization of the Holocaust.²⁷ Sarah Lightman, one of the contributors, sees the book as a collective reminder to look back and forward, to examine new works being created about the Holocaust, whilst also finding innovative ways to research and understand the works made in the past.²⁸ The book fits perfectly within the current developments within the field, as the authors acknowledge the book as an attempt to recognize the broad corpus of Holocaust comics and graphic novels, whilst providing material for further discussion and research.

This thesis discusses four different graphic novels, of which two are fictional works, and two works are based on the memories of survivors. For the two memory-based graphic novels, it is important to recognize that scholars have found a shift between second- and third-survivor generations in how they create representations of the Holocaust and how they engage with the trauma and memory thereof. This idea of a shift between second- and third-generation authors also means a shift in the comics and graphic novels they produce. Victoria Aarons, professor of literature, acknowledges that representations like graphic novels are challenged by the unbridgeable distance between those who first-hand experienced the Holocaust and for those whom such memories are barely imaginable.²⁹ Aarons argues that both second- and third-generation comic artists have recently started making more use of *prosopopoeia*, the metaphorical reanimation of the dead, and an awakening of the found voices of the past. We

²⁶ Laurike in 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 140.

²⁷ Ole Frahm et al., *Beyond MAUS: The Legacy of Holocaust Comics* (Böhlau Wien, 2021): 7.

²⁸ Sarah Lightman, "Forward (And Backwards)" in *Beyond MAUS: The Legacy of Holocaust Comics* ed. Ole Frahm et al. (Böhlau Wien, 2021): 10.

²⁹ Victoria Aarons, "Sometimes Your Memories are Not Your Own: The Graphic Turn and the Future of Holocaust Representation," *Humanities* 9, no. 4 (2020): 8.

see this occurring in graphic novels in the form of artists visually reproducing the transcribed or recorded words of survivors, making claims for their unmediated testimony.³⁰

Another noticeable shift between second- and third- generation artists, is, according to Matt Reingold, a scholar of Jewish graphic novels and Jewish customs and culture, that only in the third-generation artists, post-memories are liberated from being exclusively about trauma. This too, results in new approaches to Holocaust remembrance and Holocaust graphic novels. This is due to the increased distance between the historical past and present, meaning the generational distance. This allows the third generation the freedom to choose how to navigate their history, trauma, and memory. The trauma is somewhat removed from them, at least further than from the second generation, but remains not so distant as to just become history. This gives the third generation the ability to seek for new and creative ways of relating to, and commemorating, the Holocaust.³¹

Lola Serraf, a literary scholar who focuses on narratives of the Holocaust, also recognizes that a shift is visible in the graphic novels created by second- and third-survivor generations. Her findings are supported by literary as well as psychological studies and shows that there is a growing desire to move away from the Holocaust. Especially third-generation artists experience a growing desire to focus on freeing one's individuality from this painful past.³² For graphic novels, this means that for the second generation there is still more of a longing to stay connected to the past. Art Spiegelman, as belonging to the second generation, for example spend years listening to his father and passing on his memories. In more recent publications, authors draw on their difficult relationship with the inherited trauma. Some authors, such as comic book author Michel Kichka, an Israeli cartoonist of Belgian origin, bluntly state their refusal to go to Auschwitz and engage with their past this way.³³

Marianne Hirsch identifies two problems in how traumatic experiences impact the children of survivors. The first is rooted in a natural tension between parents and children, and stems from the child's desire to both know their parents as well as to be independent from them. The second issue arises from the fact that post-memories are often very powerful and can be overwhelming. For a child, this means its identity is overshadowed and can become

³⁰ Aarons, "Sometimes Your Memories are Not Your Own," 5-6.

³¹ Matt Reingold, "On the Limits of Trauma: Postmemories in the Third-Generation Holocaust Graphic Novels *Flying Couch* and *The Property*," *History & Memory* 33, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2021): 135-137.

³² Lola Serraf, "Holocaust Impiety in 21st Century Graphic Novels: Younger Generations 'No Longer Obligated to Perpetuate Sorrow'," *Genealogy* 3, no. 53 (2019): 3-4.

³³ Serraf, "Holocaust Impiety," 2.

defined by their parents' traumatic experiences.³⁴ This process of identity formation is often noticeable in the graphic novels produced by second- and third-generation artists, often portrayed in various ways.

Kate Polak, a scholar who focuses on genocide, feminist approaches and comics, argues some Holocaust comics and graphic novels tend to 'sugar-coat' the event, by avoiding telling too horrifying or too depressing stories.³⁵ However, in terms of sugar-coating it is important to recognize the distinction between authors who use this as a technique to make their work more accessible for younger ages, or because of other considerations, such as making their narrative more respectful and ethically responsible towards the victims, and on the other hand, authors who purposefully glorify their characters' actions, making them more heroic, instead of presenting reality. Polak argues that sugar-coating is also sometimes unconsciously done and then due to the overuse as well as uncreative use of iconic images, that are often already worn-out. Additionally, this gives the reader a false sense of moral security, as they have been confronted with similar visuals so often in other Holocaust narratives. This feeling of moral security comes from the assumption that they have already 'learned the lessons' this particular narrative seeks to impart.³⁶

Other than sugar-coating, we can speak of authors 'sanitizing' the Holocaust for younger readers. This is often done by using euphemisms or creating unrealistic happy endings. Survivors are often turned into heroes, to the annoyance of some of them. Sally Grubman, survivor of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, says that when she is asked to speak to young people about the Holocaust, teachers pressure her to focus on the positive stories and not, or even mention, the atrocities and deaths. Grubman argues that teachers by doing this deceive child learners, but also disrespect victims and survivors.³⁷

Research Question and Structure

It is thus clear many scholars have noticed different shifts between second- and third-generation graphic artists in their graphic novels. However, not all authors belong to the Jewish

³⁴ Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 12.

³⁵ Kate Polak, "Displacing the Memorial: Holocaust Comics in Conversation with Memory," *DIEGESIS* 8, no. 1 (2019): 73.

³⁶ Polak, "Displacing the Memorial," 73.

³⁷ Eric J. Sterling, Jessica B. Hayes, "'You don't understand this yet, you're too young still': Holocaust Atrocity in Three Important Children's Novels." *Children's Literature in Education* (March 2023): 2-3.

community, and thus not all belong to second- or third-survivor generations. The central research question is how the representation of the Holocaust in graphic novels has developed between the first publication of *Maus* and 2022. The year of 2022 is a specific choice, which relates to the publication year of *But I Live* by Charlotte Schallié et al. *But I Live* is one of the most recent publications of a Holocaust graphic novel and thus a perfect contemporary example. To answer this question, it comes down to a comparative study on how the representation of the Holocaust has changed throughout the last three decades. Four graphic novels have been selected, namely *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, since it remains one of the most well-known Holocaust graphic novels, is chosen as a starting point. Secondly, *Auschwitz* by Pascal Croci as published in 2000.³⁸ Pascal Croci is a French comic strip author. Thirdly, *The Search* by Eric Heuvel, Ruud van der Rol and Lies Schippers as published in 2007.³⁹ Eric Heuvel is a Dutch comic book artist best known for his graphic novels about the Second World War. And lastly, the aforementioned *But I Live* by Miriam Libicki et al. as published in 2022.⁴⁰ *But I Live* was created in collaboration with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, and like *The Search* also created with the idea of being used in classrooms in mind. *But I Live* is a graphic novel that consists of three different stories, *A Kind of Resistance* by Miriam Libicki, an Israeli-American-Canadian graphic novelist and child-survivor of the Holocaust David Schaffer. The second story is *Thirteen Secrets* by Gilad Seliktar, an Israeli illustrator and comic artist, and Nico and Rolf Kamp. The third story *But I Live* is created by Barbara Yelin, a German cartoonist, and Emmie Arbel. Only the last story, *But I Live*, is analyzed in this thesis. This graphic novel fits best within the greater picture, compared to the other two narratives, because it was the story in which the most survivors' guilt came through, and in terms of Holocaust representation it featured more aspects of the Holocaust than the second narrative of the book. Additionally, analyzing all three graphic novels incorporated in this book would make the corpus too broad. These four graphic novels present a good overview over the past three decades, as well as a more global, although Western, overview considering their original publishing locations, the United States, France, the Netherlands, and Canada.

In *Maus*, Spiegelman describes the story of his parents' persecution by the Nazi's and how they later both end up in concentration camps. Both his parents survive the war, although their first son did not. Spiegelman's parents find each other again after the war, but his mother

³⁸ Originally published in French with the title 'Auschwitz' in 2000 by Emanuel Proust Éditions.

³⁹ Originally published in Dutch with the title 'De Zoektocht' in 2007 by Uitgeverij L.

⁴⁰ *But I Live* is a collection of three graphic novels made by Miriam Libicki, Gilad Seliktar and Barbara Yelin, published by University of Toronto Press in 2022.

could not live with the memories of the Holocaust and dies by suicide in 1968. Spiegelman incorporates the mental and emotional pain from this event throughout the story of *Maus*.⁴¹ Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* is a short fictional story of a couple, Kazik and Cessia who survive Auschwitz, but lose their daughter. The couple gets caught up in the genocide in former Yugoslavia in 1993. Croci uses a recognizable visual setting, with an emphasis on familiar symbols.⁴² Eric Heuvel's *The Search* was published in cooperation with the Anne Frank House and the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam. It was specifically created for teaching 13- to 16-year-olds about the Holocaust. *The Search* is about a fictional family, in which Esther, the main character, survives the Holocaust and tells her grandson Daniel and his friend about her experiences.⁴³ In *But I Live* the reader is presented with three stories of four Holocaust survivors, who experienced the war as children. The first story, *A Kind of Resistance* by Miriam Libicki depicts the experiences of nine-year-old David Schaffer, a Romanian Jew, as he and his family survive the Holocaust in Romania due to their refusal to obey Nazi collaborators. They are on the move often and at times find a hiding place. The second story, *Thirteen Secrets* by Gilad Seliktar follows two Dutch brothers, Nico and Rolf Kamp, who were five and eight years old at the time. The brothers were hidden by the Dutch resistance in thirteen places, therefore the title. The third story by Barbara Yelin, *But I Live* depicts the story of Emmie Arbel, she was born in the Netherlands and only four and a half years old when her life was so devastatingly disrupted by the war and Holocaust. Emmie Arbel is a child survivor of the Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, and through her story the reader is confronted with the lifelong trauma inflicted by the Holocaust. Only this last story by Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel is used for analysis. The following paragraphs present the outline of the thesis, every chapter is concluded with a small summary that presents some general findings.

For this comparative study, three sub-questions are formulated that define the structure. Chapter 2 is centered around the question: 'How and to what extent do authors use authentic historical facts and how are these portrayed in the artwork of the graphic novel? This question comes forth out of a discussion point created by Henry Gonshak in his article *Beyond Maus: Other Holocaust Graphic Novels*. He raises the question whether Holocaust graphic novels can be fully non-fiction. On the one hand, most graphic novels employ imagined plots and make

⁴¹ Michael Rothberg and Art Spiegelman, "'We Were Talking Jewish': Art Spiegelman's 'Maus' as 'Holocaust' Production," *Contemporary Literature* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 676.

⁴² Polak, "Displacing the Memorial," 72.

⁴³ Wendy Stallard Flory, "The Search: A Graphic Narrative for Beginning to Teach about the Holocaust," *Shofar* 28, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 34.

use of artistic techniques that psychologically influence their non-fiction status. On the other hand, most graphic novels do lay claim to a certain non-fictional authenticity through their use of primary source material as a basis for the presented story.⁴⁴

Secondly, the question is what the new and recurring themes are within these graphic novels, and whether they present a significant shift through time. This question is answered in Chapter 3. The themes that are analysed relate to the representation of specific groups of people, namely the Jews, Germans, and the perpetrators. Additionally, some concepts can also be identified within these graphic novels as recurring themes, such as survivor's guilt and trauma, which is discussed in a second subchapter. This is followed by a subchapter on symbolism, focusing on the use of the doll as a stand-in for the fate of children. This chapter identifies whether these themes are present in the different graphic novels, and if so, how they have developed through time. This in turn presents one of the main characteristics on how Holocaust graphic novels have developed throughout the last four decades. Not all mentioned themes are present in every graphic novel, thus the focus on them may change for the different graphic novels.

Lastly, this question relates to the public reception in various societies of these graphic novels. Namely, what is the (trans)national context in which these graphic novels were published? This chapter analyses reviews and criticisms of these graphic novels, which allows for a broader contextualization for their publication as well as a conclusion on whether society's perception towards Holocaust graphic novels has changed. These reviews and criticisms are searched for internationally, and critiques by both professionals and the public are analysed. Not searching internationally would have posed the risk of the corpus otherwise being a bit sparing as well as culturally biased. Additionally, it is important to note that for *But I Live* only reviews of the past one and a half years are available. Furthermore, this chapter deals with the educational possibilities of graphic novels, showing their multiple advantages within history education.

Societal Relevance

As Henry Gonshak already noted in 2009, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* has received and inspired much critical attention, but other graphic novels are still relatively neglected in the academic

⁴⁴ Henry Gonshak, "Beyond Maus: Other Holocaust Graphic Novels," *Shofar* 28, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 78.

field.⁴⁵ However, there has been more effort in the field in the last decade to push for more research into different graphic novels, with success. Other graphic novels are analysed to show what they can provide, how they contribute to the remembrance of the Holocaust, and how they reflect on the event. The other three graphic novels chosen for this thesis, *Auschwitz*, *The Search*, and *But I Live* are not as broadly researched as *Maus*, meaning it will contribute to this broader effort to steer the field away from *Maus* and see what other graphic novels have to offer.

I believe it is important to keep researching the impact of trauma on subsequent generations and the ongoing impact of the Holocaust on the general population as well. It is important here to note that the research into child-survivors in relation to graphic novels is scarce. Even when authors take note of the concepts of post-memory or intergenerational transmission of memory, or present generational differences in the memorization of the Holocaust and the creation of graphic novels. Therefore, in this thesis specific attention is paid to the significance of the memories of child-survivors within graphic novels and the broader historical discourse, as it is a central theme in Miriam Libicki et al.'s *But I Live* and somewhat also features in Eric Heuvel's *The Search*. This also makes that post-memory, and the intergenerational transmission of memory, are important concepts for these graphic novels. The others remain relevant but are mainly not applicable to all four of the graphic novels that are discussed, while these concepts have a link with the whole corpus analysed here.

Additionally, collaborations between historians and graphic artists can ensure accuracy in historical representation while allowing for creative and artistic expression. As some graphic novels also use primary sources as a basis, such as interviews, newspaper clippings, photographs, letters, or other official documents, they blend historical authenticity with artistic interpretation. This is for example done by Pascal Croci as he uses interviews with Holocaust survivors as a basis for the story and presentation of *Auschwitz*. As the research in the field progresses, researchers and artists can explore new ways of combining visual and textual elements to create strong standing narratives that contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust. Even though it is not a common standard yet for authors and researchers to work together, it has been done before, as for example with the creation of Eric Heuvel's *The Search* in collaboration with the Anne Frank House. Thus, as authors of graphic novels use primary sources in their work, the graphic novel itself can also be seen as a primary source. In 1973, Thomas Milton Kemnitz, a historian and author of books for students, already argued for the

⁴⁵ Gonshak, "Beyond Maus," 55-56.

comic as a historical source. Although like any historical source, the comic has limitations, and interpreting may be difficult. Nevertheless, the comic is able to provide valuable insights into public opinion and portray contemporary interpretations of events that other literature may not.⁴⁶ As the research regarding comics, graphic novels, and primary sources progresses, researchers and artists can explore new ways of combining visual and textual elements to create strong standing narratives that contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust.

Lastly, societal relevance of this research lies in the educational possibilities of graphic novels. By introducing graphic novels to the classroom, teachers are able to present resources that are visually exciting and captivating, which keeps students engaged.⁴⁷ Part of the role of history and social science educators is to help students see the ways in which their lives brush up against or maybe even collide with the events of the past. Graphic novels can offer these educators a way of politicizing and historicizing the personal within a broader historical context.⁴⁸ However, there are also researchers that argue for a bit more caution, their main concern being that some novels may lack contextualization. This will prove important in the third chapter on societal reception of these graphic novels. Nevertheless, teachers should be able to easily make up for this in their classroom, and these cautions do not weigh up to the enrichment it brings to students' experiences.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Thomas Milton Kemnitz, "The Cartoon as a Historical Source," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (Summer 1973): 92.

⁴⁷ James Barbre, "The Practical Implications and Possibilities for Graphic Novels and Comic Books as a Component of the Literacy Experience: A Proposal," *International Journal of Learning Teaching and Educational Research* 17, no. 11 (Nov. 2018): 53.

⁴⁸ Michael Cromer and Penney Clark, "Getting Graphic with the Past: Graphic Novels and the Teaching of History," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 585-586.

⁴⁹ Alicia C. Decker and Mauricio Castro, "Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel," *The History Teacher* 45, no. 2 (Feb. 2012): 182.

Chapter 2: Historical Accuracy

Graphic novels and (historical) accuracy are interestingly intertwined. On the one hand, artists have a certain level of artistic freedom to create representations as they see fit within their creative scope, while on the other hand, when dealing with historical topics, readers often expect a certain level of historical accuracy as well. In contemporary cases, where for example inclusivity is taking an important role, especially historical TV series often include an artistic justification for certain creative choices. Accuracy is even more expected when the series, or graphic novel, is dealing with more precarious topics, such as mass destruction, violence, death, and thus in the case of this thesis, the Holocaust. Graphic novels generally do not include such a justification, and although a story may be classified as fiction, we often do expect authors to include some historical truth within their narratives and graphic works.

While this chapter aims to determine the historical accuracy of these graphic novels, this is sometimes hard to determine. For especially *Maus* and *But I Live* this is the case, as both are mainly based on a person's memories. For *Maus*, Art Spiegelman has drawn his father Vladek's experiences during the Holocaust in Poland, as well as some of his own experiences with his father in more recent times in the United States. However, in some cases Spiegelman has used external research to substantiate Vladek's narrative, which provides historical accuracy in the graphic novel. In *But I Live* the memories and experiences of Emmie Arbel during the Holocaust are drawn by Barbara Yelin. Throughout the story Yelin also depicts some scenes with Emmie Arbel from their time together. The other two graphic novels, Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* and Eric Heuvel's *The Search* do rely on factual information in the creation of their narratives, but are nevertheless fictional stories. For these, this chapter points out their documentary aspects, use of historical facts, and how this is portrayed in the graphic narrative by the authors. This chapter is divided into multiple subchapters that each focus on one of the graphic novels, in chronological order of publication.

Maus – Art Spiegelman (1986-1991)

When Art Spiegelman was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Maus* in 1992, the committee could not quite categorize the medium of the work. A biography seemed ill-suited for a comic book; editorial cartooning did not quite fit either. The Prize committee was not the first to struggle with the categorization of *Maus*, as it is a problem that earlier the *New York Times Book Review* had to take on. Editors struggled with placing *Maus* either on the Fiction or Non-Fiction Best Seller List. As they put it on the Fiction List, Spiegelman protested this decision with a letter

to the editor, leading the editors to move it to the Non-Fiction List where it took the 13th place.⁵⁰ Apart from the discussion on whether *Maus* is fiction or non-fiction, it could also be assigned as ‘historiographic metafiction’, which is defined by Linda Hutcheon as ‘postmodern works ‘which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages’. Indeed, Spiegelman does have some metafictional tendencies, such as the interpolated frames in which he describes the difficulties of dealing with his father, providing an accurate portrait of the man. Secondly, metafictional tendencies can be found in volume II, as he describes the difficulties created by the first volume’s success. However, the term seems to fail to do justice to the complexity of *Maus*, and it can also be argued that these tendencies are opposed by a streak of traditional historiography.⁵¹

The narrative of *Maus* is built from interviews Artie, as Art Spiegelman is called by his father Vladek throughout the novel, has with his father. Their interview sessions, as well as Art’s personal entanglements and processes, are incorporated into Vladek’s narrative. As Artie asks Vladek about his experiences, he reminisces about his younger years, with mundane experiences such as work and romance, which then intermingles with horrific memories of mass executions and casual brutality.⁵² Throughout the novel, Spiegelman keeps working with stereotypes, as he portrays his father as self-absorbed and thoroughly unpleasant, later worrying that ‘in some ways he’s just like the racist caricature of the miserly old Jew’. He says this to Mala, Vladek’s second wife. Only a panel later, he speaks the words ‘I mean, I’m just trying to portray my father accurately!’, which reveals Spiegelman’s drive for a realistic representation.⁵³ For the creation of *Maus*, Spiegelman exclusively uses black and white contrasting images, and with this, draws into the black-and-white imagery we often already associate with archival footage from the Holocaust and Second World War.

Detailed maps and schematics

To substantiate and enrich Vladek’s narrative, Spiegelman pays attention to the historical accuracy of his drawings of his father’s past. In some cases, he also introduces maps, charts, timelines, and detailed diagrams, based on research external to Vladek’s narration.⁵⁴ Although

⁵⁰ Thomas Doherty, “Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*: Graphic Art and the Holocaust,” *American Literature* 68, no. 1 (March 1996): 69.

⁵¹ Joshua L. Charlson, “Framing the Past: Postmodernism and the Making of Reflective Memory in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*,” *Arizona Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 94.

⁵² Doherty, “Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*,” 70.

⁵³ Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (Pantheon Books, 1996): 133-134.

⁵⁴ Charlson, “Framing the Past,” 108.

these are used throughout the graphic novel, this accuracy is most visible in the following three examples. First, when Vladek is describing the difference between Auschwitz and Birkenau, Spiegelman includes an illustration of half a page that depicts the layout of the camps. He explains to Artie that at the beginning he only knew Anja's number and that she was in

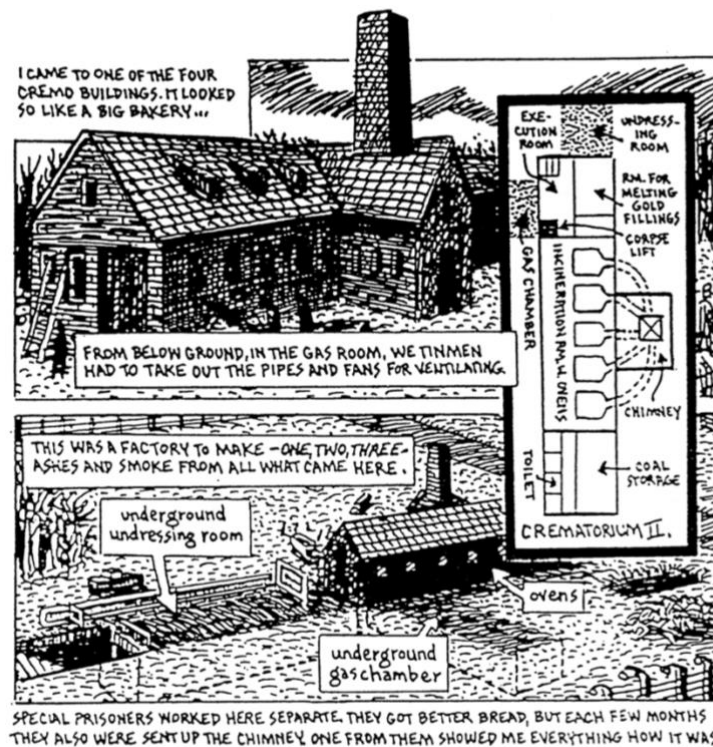


Figure 1: Spiegelman's illustration of the gas chambers and crematoria (*The Complete Maus*, p. 230)

Birkenau, and how Birkenau was a part of Auschwitz.⁵⁵ Secondly, Vladek explains how he repaired shoes during his imprisonment in Auschwitz. Vladek lies to the kapo that he has been a shoemaker since childhood, as he only learned 'a little shoe fixing' by watching his cousin in the ghetto shoe shop. As he explains this, Spiegelman provides the reader with an extremely detailed illustration of how the soles were threaded together.⁵⁶ And thirdly, a detailed schematic is presented to show the physical construction of the gas chambers and crematoria, called a 'cremo building' by Vladek. Vladek further explains that people really believed it was a place for showers, as they were told.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 211.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

Photographs

Another documentary tendency in *Maus* is Spiegelman's use of real photographs that appear in the two volumes. There are three, a photo of Spiegelman with his mother at the beginning of *Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History*, a small story drawn by Spiegelman in 1972 about his mothers' suicide. The picture was taken by the Trojan Lake in New York in 1968, as written below the photograph.⁵⁸ Secondly, there is a photo of Spiegelman's brother Richieu placed at the start of volume II, where Spiegelman dedicates this volume to his brother, 'For Richieu' is written above the photograph.⁵⁹ Richieu died when an aunt poisoned him, her own children and herself to save them from transportation to one of the concentration camps. Both photographs represent the two most haunting absences in Spiegelman's life. It is especially interesting that Spiegelman uses Richieu's photograph, as it served as an admonishment throughout his youth. In Volume II, Chapter 1: *Mauschwitz*, Artie is in the car with his wife, Françoise and he tells her 'The photo never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble... It was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete. They didn't talk about Richieu, but that photo was a kind of reproach'.⁶⁰ However, as Spiegelman places it at the start of the volume, the photograph no longer serves as a reproach, but rather as an attempt to heal the rift of past and present.⁶¹ Thirdly, at the end of the graphic novel Spiegelman incorporated a



Figure 2: Photograph of Vladek taken shortly after the war. (*The Complete Maus*, p. 294)

⁵⁸ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁶¹ Charlson, "Framing the Past," 109.

photograph of Vladek taken shortly after the war. In the photograph he is wearing a camp uniform, which he found in the shop where he let the picture be taken, as a souvenir.⁶² (Figure 2) Vladek sent the photo to Anja as evidence he was still alive, and thus the photograph serves a double testamentary function. It offered Anja proof of Vladek's survival and gives the reader a glimpse behind the voice that has been guiding them throughout his narrative.⁶³ Additionally, Spiegelman has incorporated illustrations of photographs using mouse figures rather than actual reproductions of the original photographs. Especially in Volume II, Chapter 4: *Saved* these are most present, as at the end of the chapter Vladek shows Artie photographs of dead relatives.⁶⁴

Anthropomorphism

The artistic choice of Art Spiegelman to use anthropomorphism in *Maus* is discussed in this subchapter of historical accuracy, because it has influenced the graphic novel's non-fiction status. Spiegelman's anthropomorphism was namely one of the reasons *The New York Times* and Pulitzer Prize committee struggled with classifying the graphic novel. Within *Maus*, all characters are anthropomorphic animals; Jews are depicted as mice, the Germans as cats, the Polish as pigs, the Americans as dogs and the French as frogs. The inspiration for Spiegelman's cat and mouse dynamic were the visual stereotypes and symbology used in Third Reich propaganda. This includes the caricatures used by Joseph Goebbels's⁶⁵ Reichsministry and Julius Streicher's⁶⁶ publication *Der Sturmer*, an anti-Semitic weekly newspaper with editorial cartoons which depicted the Jews as subhuman creatures with hooked noses and rodent-like features. Spiegelman admits that his mice carry trace elements of these propaganda caricatures, but with *Maus*, he turns this around by making the mice more human-like. They are invested with personhood, and affirm their humanity, and thus actually stand as a defiant symbol against dehumanizing stereotypes.⁶⁷ The use of mice and cats captures the power dynamic and predatory relationship between the Jews and Germans during the Second World War. (Figure 3) The Americans, as dogs, represent the liberators and thus also play a role in illustrating a

⁶² Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 294.

⁶³ Charlson, "Framing the Past," 110.

⁶⁴ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 274-275.

⁶⁵ Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945) was the chief propagandist of the Nazi party and Reich Minister of Propaganda from 1933 to 1945.

⁶⁶ Julius Streicher (1885-1946) was the founder and leader of *Der Sturmer*, as well as a member of the Reichstag.

⁶⁷ Doherty, "Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," 74.

power dynamic, considering the influence of the Allied powers and their role in the outcome of the war.⁶⁸



Figure 3: Germans depicted as cats beating Jews depicted as mice. (*The Complete Maus*, p. 35)



Figure 4: The Polish depicted as pigs (*The Complete Maus*, p. 191)

By depicting the Jews as mice, Spiegelman emphasizes the vulnerability of the Jews, the dehumanization they experienced, and the inhumane treatment they endured during the Holocaust. The use of animal metaphors thus has the potential to dehumanize the group they represent. However, this works the same when the perpetrators are depicted as animals. Due to the dehumanization process through anthropomorphizing, perpetrators are absolved of the human responsibility for their crimes.⁶⁹ Another reason the cat and mouse dynamic Spiegelman uses works so well, is that in many instances, the Nazi propagandists represented the Jews as mice or rats, suggesting their presence in Europe was an infestation that needed to be wiped out.⁷⁰ Some readers have taken offense at Spiegelman's decision to represent his characters as animals. They claim it to be an insult to the victims of the Holocaust, and that it perpetuates the same racist and anti-Semitic beliefs that led to Hitler's Final Solution.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Leonard Min, "Maus: Reimagining Holocaust Literature Through Animal Metaphor," *International Journal of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Studies* 8, no. 8 (August 2023): 12.

⁶⁹ Mayersen, "Cockroaches, Cows and 'Canines of the Hebrew Faith'", 166.

⁷⁰ Andrew Loman, "'Well Intended Liberal Slop': Allegories of Race in Spiegelman's *Maus*," *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 3 (December 2006): 553.

⁷¹ Richard De Angelis, "Of Mice and Vermin: Animals as Absent Referent in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," *International Journal of Comic Art* 7 (2005): 230.

There is one instance in which we see Spiegelman struggling with the anthropomorphisation of his characters. This happens right at the beginning of Volume II: *And Here My Troubles Began*. The first chapter, “*Mauschwitz*” starts with a sketch of different ways Artie is trying to portray his wife, Françoise. (Figure 5) He has sketched her as different animals and is trying to determine what to do. Françoise argues she should be drawn as a mouse, to which Artie replies “But you’re *French!*”.⁷² Spiegelman compromises here, as Françoise’s French origins are depicted through her physical aspects as her style is reminiscent of French fashion in the 1960’s, but she is still depicted with a mouse head.⁷³ It was thus a conscious choice for Spiegelman to portray his wife as a mouse, which is comically played out in this small sequence, while this page also depicts the difficulties of making the right artistic decisions when creating interpretations of events.



Figure 5: Artie's sketches of his wife Françoise (*The Complete Maus*, p. 171)

⁷² Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 171.

⁷³ Ana-Maria Gavrilă, “Holocaust Representation and Graphical Strangeness in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*: A Survivor’s Tale: “Funny Animals,” Constellations, and Traumatic Memory,” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Communicatio* 4, no. 1 (2017): 70

Auschwitz – Pascal Croci (2000)

The creation of Pascal Croci's narrative for *Auschwitz* relies exclusively on testimony, secondary studies, and other fictional works, such as the movie *Schindler's List* (1993) by Steven Spielberg.⁷⁴ Pascal Croci is a French self-taught comic book scriptwriter, illustrator, and colorist. His career started off drawing biographies in comic book form of blessed figures and saints for the Catholic press. *Auschwitz* made him gain significant recognition, and the graphic novel additionally received the Prix de l'Assemblée Nationale, a prize meant for comics and graphic novels that contribute significantly to the public debate or deal with social, political, or historical issues in a meaningful way, in 2001. Pascal Croci himself is not a survivor, nor Jewish, and unlike Art Spiegelman or Emmie Arbel could not directly rely on personal memories in the creation of this graphic novel. Therefore, J. S. Demsky argues *Auschwitz* resulted in 'post-memory masquerading as lived memory'. Nevertheless, he does find Croci's work responsible, as the representations 'affirmed accurate truth'.⁷⁵ Demsky does not introduce any specific criteria on which he bases this statement, which thus functions more as an informed opinion. At the end of the graphic novel, Pascal Croci has included an interview with himself, in which he discusses the origins and inspirations for the graphic novel, as well as Holocaust survivors he has been in contact with through the creation of the graphic novel, such as Renée Eskenazi.⁷⁶

Throughout the narrative, a Jewish couple, Cessia and Kazik, look back on their time in Auschwitz and the loss of their child, which is reminiscent of Spiegelman's *Maus* in which he pays attention to the loss of his parents first born child, Richieu, who they lost during the Holocaust. The story starts in former Yugoslavia in 1993, where Kazik and Cessia are introduced as an elderly couple before they flash back to their memories of the Holocaust and Auschwitz. Croci uses stark black and white drawings, and his characters are portrayed with large eyes that overall contain a haunted expression.

Auschwitz does not refrain from graphic images of death and violence, Croci shows the heaps of bodies in the gas chamber and how they are subsequently thrown in a pit to be burned, and overall multiple panels depict the atrocities of the death camps throughout the story. Nevertheless, it is visible Croci has struggled with consistent negotiations in this work between

⁷⁴ Pascal Croci, *Auschwitz* (Uitgeverij Toog, 2003): 83.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Scott Demsky, "We Are a Long Ways Past *Maus*: Responsible and Irresponsible Holocaust Representations in Graphic Comics and Sitcom Cartoons," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 534.

⁷⁶ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 80-87.

showing and not showing certain atrocities. Over a sequence of multiple pages Croci takes the reader inside the gas chambers but does not visualize the inside during the final moments of life, but rather chooses to fill two pages with clouds of gas. Although these pages are thus only filled with clouds of gas, Croci does include captions that explicitly describe what the gas clouds try to hide. However, this is countered as Croci subsequently provides the reader with a full page that depicts the mass of dead bodies as the doors to the gas chamber are opened.⁷⁷

The origins

At the end of the graphic novel, Croci has included an interview in which the work, and its origins, are discussed.⁷⁸ However, at no point is the identity of the interviewer disclosed, nor does the reader learn more about the interviewer or the overall context in which the interview took place. This may suggest that Croci uses the interview as an imaginary dialogue, to answer to objections he has chosen to raise himself. The interview discusses the validity of the work, and multiple questions center around Croci's interviews with survivors, such as what they told him and how much of that is used in the actual narrative of the graphic novel. Additionally, apart from the fictional characters, Croci emphasizes that his story 'strictly follows the course of history'. Here, again, he makes a claim for the graphic novel's truthfulness, which seems intended to ward off any criticism about the graphic novel's fictionalization of the Holocaust.⁷⁹

In the narrative of *Auschwitz*, Kazik at some point finds his daughter, Ann, alive in the gas chambers. Croci discusses this scene in the interview as well, as he states he was inspired by a true event from the book *Les mannequins nus* (1971) by Christian Bernadac. In this book, a witness tells the story of a girl from Transylvania who was found alive in the gas chambers, most likely because she laid face down on the wet concrete, and Zyklon B does not have effect in a moist environment. At first, the German officers did not know what to do with her, something which is also shown in the narrative of *Auschwitz*.⁸⁰

One of Croci's most important sources is Renée Eskenazi, she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with her family when she was seventeen years old, she and her sister both survived the Holocaust. Eskenazi is one of the survivor's Croci approached, and she was willing to answer interview questions of Croci about her experiences during this time. After the graphic novel was published, Renée wrote a letter to Croci, stating: 'However, you should

⁷⁷ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 46-48

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-87.

⁷⁹ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 201.

⁸⁰ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 80.

know that the characters you have imagined do not reflect the reality as we experienced it.’⁸¹ It is interesting Croci is willing to share this part of Eskenazi’s letter in this interview, as she thus makes a clear statement on the graphic novel being fictitious, while throughout the rest of the interview Croci tries to point out how the graphic novel is mainly based on factual information.

Photographs

After this sequence, Croci makes a drawing of an iconic photograph taken in 1944 by the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz. The photograph depicts how prisoners are forced to dispose of the bodies in large incineration pits.⁸² Although the photograph is seen as iconic, not everyone may immediately recognize Croci’s redrawing as such. The photograph is part of 4 different photographs that are often referred to as ‘The Sonderkommando Photographs’, which were taken secretly in Auschwitz in August 1944. Several sources identify the photographer as Alberto Errera, a Greek naval officer who was shot and killed after striking an SS officer. Taking the photographs in secret, they are quite blurry, and he was unable to aim the camera



Figure 6: The iconic photograph taken by Alberto Errera



Figure 7: The redrawn photograph (Auschwitz, p. 52)

⁸¹ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 85.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 52.

with any precision.⁸³ Unlike the original photograph, Croci does provide the man in this drawn photograph with a voice. (Figures 6 & 7)

It proves Croci's overall method throughout this graphic novel, as he uses facts and historical resources as a basis from which the fictional narrative unfolds. Especially the drawing of this photograph provides a more extensive explanation of the *Sonderkommando*'s tasks, as well as an interpretation of what the mass violence by the Nazis looked like.⁸⁴ As Croci thus creatively reworks an existing Holocaust photograph in this narrative, it works as a strategy to link the narrative to historical context. It provides the reader with a notion of evidence and historical documentation, and thus the use of photographic material is an authentication strategy. There is a second instance in which Croci uses existing photographic material, although redrawn. Towards the end of the graphic novel, Cessia finds a Nazi photo album with the contents and photographs scattered across the floor. By then, the Germans had deserted the camp.⁸⁵ Croci shows the photographs in a collage, and some of them are redrawn versions of actual photographic evidence.⁸⁶ The photographs Croci draws, as well as the photo album Cessia finds, are likely based on the 193-photo 'Auschwitz Album' which consisted of photographs taken in May or June 1944 either by Ernst Hofmann or Bernhard Walter, two SS men who were asked to take ID photos and fingerprints of the prisoners. The album is assumed to have been prepared as official reference. The album is the only surviving visual evidence of the process of mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau other than the four photographs taken by Alberto Errera.⁸⁷

⁸³ "Sonderkommando Photographs from Auschwitz (August 1944)," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed May 26, 2024, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sonderkommando-photographs-from-auschwitz?utm_content=cmp-true

⁸⁴ Laurike in 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 140.

⁸⁵ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 62-63.

⁸⁶ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 162.

⁸⁷ "Auschwitz-Birkenau Photographs: Visual Evidence of Mass Murder," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed May 26, 2024, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/visual-evidence-of-mass-murder-at-auschwitz-birkenau>

The Search – Eric Heuvel (2007)

The Search is drawn by the Dutch artist Eric Heuvel, and the narrative is written by Lies Schippers and Ruud van der Rol of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. *The Search* was made as a sequel to a different graphic novel by Eric Heuvel and the Anne Frank House about the Holocaust, titled *A Family Secret* (2005), in which a character named Jeroen finds his grandmother's scrapbooks from the war.⁸⁸ *A Family Secret*, as well as the *The Search*, were created specifically to teach the Holocaust to students from the ages of thirteen to sixteen, with little to no knowledge of the subject. Historians from the Netherlands and abroad evaluated and advised on the project at all phases of its development, as well as teachers and students who collaborated in the production of the book. The graphic novel was first published in Dutch, and later translated, with accompanying teaching materials, for use in German, Polish and Hungarian schools, as well as an English version made available by the Anne Frank Center in New York in 2009. The graphic novel was tested as teaching material by over 3.000 students in Germany, Poland, and Hungary. Additionally, beginning in March 2008, the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, which is located in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, which is in turn located on the site of the former concentration camp, joined a pilot program connected to the graphic novel. In this pilot program, about 1.000 students from all over Poland worked with the graphic novel, and together with their teachers, sent their comments to the Center for Education.⁸⁹

According to the website of the Anne Frank House, 'The story is built around historical pictures, eyewitness accounts and biographies. The characters in the story are fictitious, but their experiences are loosely based on the accounts of eyewitnesses'. Well-known archival photographs are for example used to recreate certain scenes, such as the arrival of a transport at Auschwitz and the following separation between those fit to work from those who are sent to the gas chambers immediately.⁹⁰ The story is about Esther, a Jewish girl born in Germany, who survives the Second World War by going into hiding on a farm in the Netherlands. Her parents were murdered in Auschwitz, and that is all she knows. Her grandson, Daniel, manages to locate Bob, who used to live next door to the family. Bob was in Auschwitz with Esther's

⁸⁸ "A Family Secret – Graphic Novel (3 languages)," Anne Frank House, accessed May 26, 2024, <https://webshop.annefrank.org/en/a-family-secret-comic-book.html>

⁸⁹ Stallard Flory, "The Search," 35-36.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

parents, and this starts Esther's search towards learning more about her family.⁹¹ Thorough research by the Anne Frank House made that the creators could be as precise as possible in their depictions. As the Wannsee conference is shown, snowflakes are depicted falling from the sky. Snow was documented in a weather report for that precise day in January 1942.⁹² The Wannsee conference was held on January 20, 1942. Fifteen high ranking Nazi Party and German government officials gathered to discuss the implementation and coordination of what they called 'the Final Solution of the Jewish Question'.⁹³

Eric Heuvel uses a *ligne claire* style of drawing, thus foregoing an entirely original, signature style, as for example Spiegelman has done in *Maus*. This makes that the attention of the reader can go fully towards the contents and subject of the book, instead of to the artist and the specific drawing style. Additionally, the graphic novel is drawn in colour, making it more appealing to children. The use of colour also makes it easier for the reader to distinguish between the story's two time-periods, the past and the present, as the narrative constantly moves back and forth between these periods. These two time periods are distinguished by Heuvel's use of vivid colors for the scenes from the present, and more muted pastel colors for scenes from the past.⁹⁴ The novel is extensive in its coverage of the many aspects of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Europe from 1933 to 1945. It briefly refers to the murder of Roma and Sinti, as well as political prisoners, the dangers of helping Jews are highlighted, as well as the struggles of hiding from the person's perspective, and one specific panel even shows the different reactions soldiers had to what they were doing. (Figure 10) Additionally, both child-characters survive against overwhelming odds, but it is made clear throughout the story how atypical Esther's and Bob's survival was.⁹⁵ The story contains two survivors' stories, Esther's story, as a viewpoint from a fugitive and a person in hiding, about the early days of the Nazi takeover in Germany and the Netherlands, and Bob's story, from a prisoner's viewpoint, about the later death camp period of the war. Both stories are designed in such a way that they work well as personal and historical accounts.⁹⁶

⁹¹ "The Search: Lesson material about the Holocaust and the Second World War," Anne Frank House, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://www.annefrank.org/en/education/product/98/the-search/>

⁹² Kees Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past: Interpreting History Through Graphic Novels," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History* (Oxford University Press, 2017): 115.

⁹³ "Wannsee Conference and the 'Final Solution'," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed May 26, 2024, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/wannsee-conference-and-the-final-solution>

⁹⁴ Stallard Flory, "The Search," 39-40.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 44.

Detailed Maps and Schematics

Comparable to the schematics and maps that Art Spiegelman uses in *Maus* to present the reader with historical accuracy based on research external to his father Vladek's narrative, Eric Heuvel uses some schematics and maps as well. In *The Search*, like in *Maus*, a detailed schematic is drawn of the lay-out of Auschwitz-Birkenau. This schematic presents the reader with the locations of the different barracks, the gas chambers, where the men and women were located, the hospital, as well as the train station and the gate through which the prisoners entered the camp.⁹⁷ (Figure 8) Additionally, Heuvel has incorporated two maps in the graphic novel. One of these is a map with the locations of the different death camps that were located in occupied Poland. A second map is shown on the same page, depicting the train routes from cities and transit camps all over Europe to Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁹⁸ In this specific map, only Auschwitz, as the biggest death and concentration camp, and the Dutch transit camp Westerbork are specified on the map. Considering the graphic novel was originally published in Dutch and created by Dutch artists and authors, this may be the reason for only specifying Westerbork. (Figure 9)

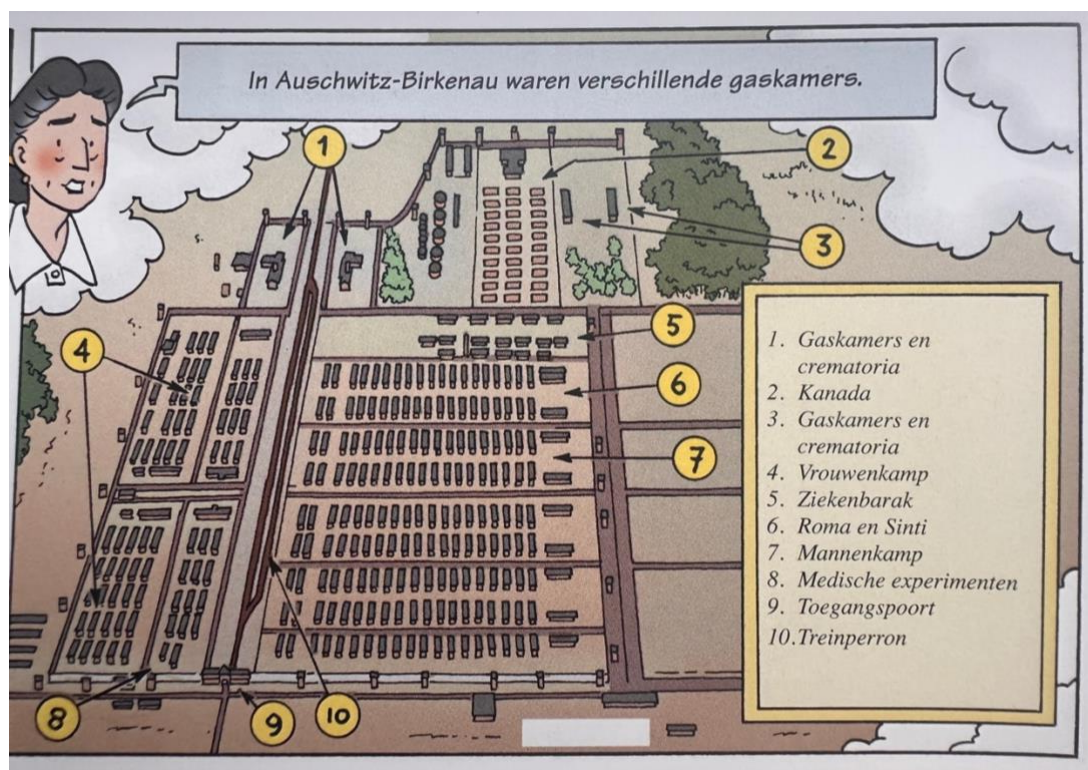


Figure 8: tailed schematic of the lay-out of Auschwitz-Birkenau. (*The Search*, p. 44)

⁹⁷ Heuvel et al. *De Zoektocht*, 44.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

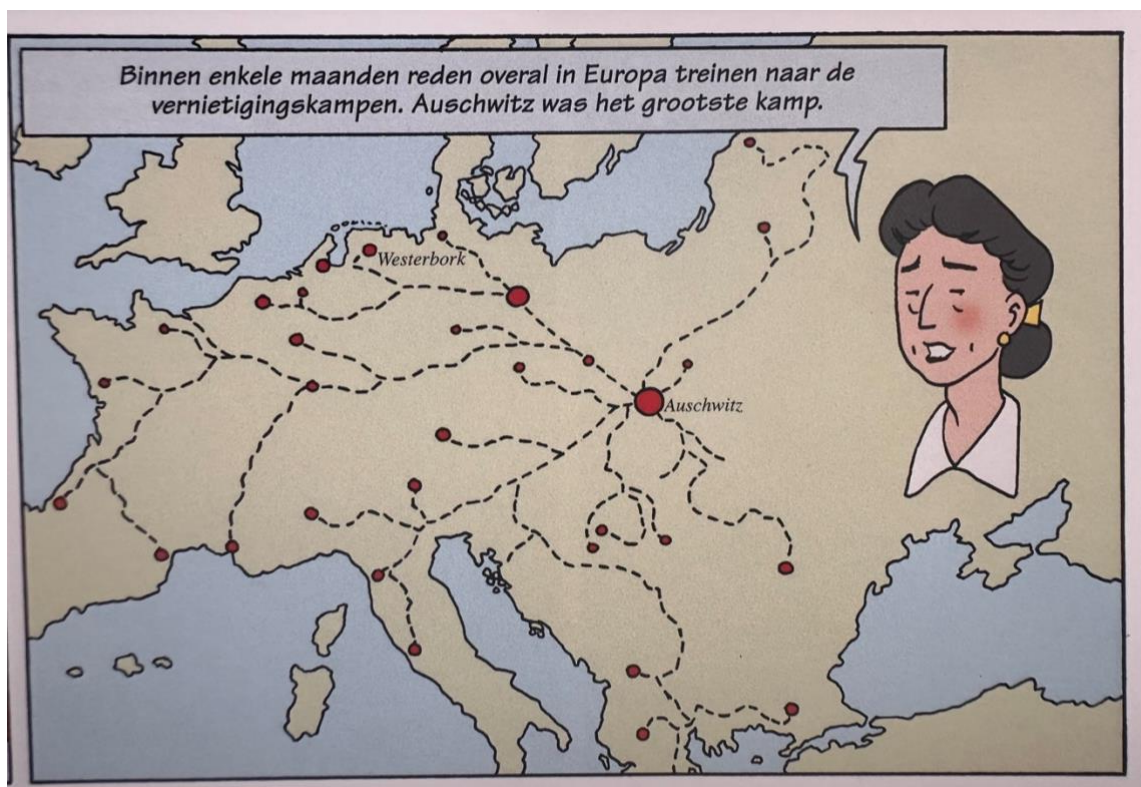


Figure 9: Map depicting the train routes from cities and transit camps all over Europe to Auschwitz. (*The Search*, p. 39)

Photographs

An important documentary aspect in *The Search* is when Esther retells to her family the story told to her by Bob Canter. He tells Esther about his train journey and arrival at Auschwitz. The page ends with a black panel with the text: “They were on their way to Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp in occupied Poland. The reality of what had gone on in Eastern Europe only became clear after the war”. The combination of the visuals and this text box give accurate information to the reader about the concentration camps. The following pages illustrate the Wannsee conference, with Hitler, Heydrich, and Eichmann speaking about their ‘final solution’.⁹⁹ After the depiction and explanation of the Wannsee conference, a scene is drawn of the arrival of the transport at Auschwitz, as everyone is stepping out of the train. This is followed by panels depicting the selection of prisoners between those fit to work and those who were sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival.¹⁰⁰ These scenes are based on archival photographs and provide accurate depictions of the reality of prisoner’s arriving at Auschwitz.¹⁰¹ (Figures 10 & 11)

⁹⁹ Heuvel et al. *De Zoektocht*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁰¹ Stallard Flory, “*The Search*,” 41.



Figure 11: The panel from *The Search* showing the arrival of a prisoner's transport at Auschwitz (*The Search*, p. 40)



Figure 10: Photograph of prisoners arriving at Auschwitz

Inclusivity

After the depiction of the Wannsee conference, the Einsatzgruppen that Hitler sent to the Soviet Union to shoot as many Jews as possible are shown. The final panel shows three soldiers, with a pile of clothing left from the dead when they were forced to undress. The soldiers all have different reactions, one seems proud of what they have accomplished that day, the other seems glad to have it over with, speaking the words 'Dirty job. But we've got our orders', the third soldier can't stomach it, and has a bottle in his hand as he walks away from the scene.¹⁰² (Figure 12) Although men in the Einsatzgruppen and other killing units would not face repercussions when asked to be assigned different work, many stayed with their units because of peer pressure. Many were giving alcohol in large amounts to deaden the psychological trauma of murdering people.¹⁰³ This specific panel is thus an important addition to the graphic novel's

¹⁰² Heuvel et al. *The Search*, 38.

¹⁰³ Stallard Flory, "The Search," 45-46.

already broad inclusion of different aspects of the Holocaust, providing the reader with a glimpse of the hesitation soldiers sometimes faced. This additionally makes them more human, as the creators deliberately tried not to demonize these characters.¹⁰⁴



Figure 12: Panel depicting three soldiers from the Einsatzgruppen after a massacre with the clothing of the dead in the background. (*The Search*, p. 38)

After the selection, the fate of the women and children at Auschwitz, the gas chambers, are depicted, although not as graphic as in *Maus* and *Auschwitz*. One of the panels depicts a long line of women and children walking towards the gas chambers, with a big chimney with flames coming out. A guard is telling them they need to shower, thus Heuvel here shows the reader the general lie the Nazi's told prisoners to keep them calm as they walked towards their death. The women are told to undress and remember the number of the hook when they hang up their clothing, all playing into the lie that they are going to take a shower. (Figure 13) As with the Einsatzgruppen panel, only the discarded clothing is pictured, not the dead themselves.

It was a deliberate choice of the creators to not depict exactly what was going on inside the gas chambers. They did not want to shock the target audience, students from 13 to 16 years of age, through explicit representations of the atrocities and bloody scenes, for they feared readers would be less open to the information from the story through the effect of shock and confrontation with this.¹⁰⁵ The text provided during this scene gives the reader a lot of

¹⁰⁴ Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 115.

¹⁰⁵ Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 115.

information about the gas chambers and crematoria. Esther's head is inserted in the upper corner of a panel, explaining that instead of taking a shower, "But poison gas pallets were dropped through the ceiling. In 15 minutes, everyone was dead".¹⁰⁶



Figure 13: Panel from *The Search* that depicts a woman, child, and older man as they get undressed to enter the gas chamber. (*The Search*, p. 43)

¹⁰⁶ Heuvel et al. *De Zoektocht*, 43.

But I Live – Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel (2022)

But I Live is the third and last story in a collection of three graphic novels based on the testimonies of four different child Holocaust survivors, published under the same title in 2022. Although all three narratives within the book are incredibly interesting reads, *But I Live* is the only one analyzed throughout this thesis. Between 2019 and 2022 the four survivors were paired with a graphic artist to co-create a graphic narrative based on their personal experiences during the Holocaust. *But I Live*, is narrated by Emmie Arbel and drawn by German cartoonist Barbara Yelin. Arbel was only four and a half years old when her life was disrupted by the Second World War and Holocaust. Barbara Yelin interviewed Emmie Arbel in Kiryat Tiv'on in Israel. This chapter takes a slightly different approach from the other three graphic novels, which is mainly due to the fact that Yelin and Arbel have taken different approaches in implementing historical accuracy in the graphic novel than the other three graphic novels have done. Yelin and Arbel have not used any maps or schematics, but they have included redrawings of photographs. Additionally different is Yelin's use of archival material about Emmie, as well as the three added sections in the back of the graphic novel that play an important role in establishing some historical accuracy.

After the three stories by the child survivors, the authors have added a section to the graphic novel titled '*The Histories*'. This section offers historical and geographical backgrounds to the three stories, as well as an interpretation of each survivor's narrative which is provided by three Holocaust scholars, Alexander Korb, Dienne Hondius, and Andrea Löw.¹⁰⁷ After *The Histories*, another section, titled '*In Their Own Words*', presents additional information by the four survivors about their experiences and survival.¹⁰⁸ Because the authors placed the testimonies first, they give the authority and authenticity of the stories to the survivor. First, the stories stand on their own, directing the reader to the displacement, upheaval, horrors, and devastation of the Nazi genocide as personal experiences of these survivors. Every survivor thus speaks in two different voices, viewing their experiences from two different perspectives. First, returning to the trauma of experiencing the Holocaust, and then from a more distanced position, looking back on the past.¹⁰⁹ Another section is added to the stories of the child survivors, titled '*Behind the Art*'. This section consists of a short graphic

¹⁰⁷ Miriam Libicki et al. *But I Live* (University of Toronto Press, 2022): 125.

¹⁰⁸ Libicki et al. *But I Live*, 157.

¹⁰⁹ Victoria Aarons, review of *But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust* ed. Charlotte Schallié, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2023): 460.

narrative showing the graphic artists and survivors in their collaboration of creating the graphic novel.¹¹⁰ The addition of these multiple sections in the end of the graphic novel is not something especially common in graphic novels. However, within the four graphic novels analyzed here, Eric Heuvel's *The Search* is the only one that does not include something similar. Art Spiegelman has written another book on *Maus*, titled *MetaMaus*, which was published in 2011. In this book, he delves into the creation of the graphic novel, discussing among others its creative process, the historical context, some personal reflections, and the critical reception of *Maus*.¹¹¹ As for Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*, Croci has included an extensive interview after the graphic novel, discussing its creation and origins.

Relevance of Archival Materials

Especially the addition of the section 'The Histories' provides historical accuracy with the stories of these survivors. In the case of the story of Emmie Arbel, historical information is provided by Andrea Löw, deputy head of the Centre for Holocaust Studies at the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. This section explains the deportation of the Jews from the Netherlands, where Emmie was born, and how she and her family were first deported to Camp Westerbork from The Hague. Additionally, the section provides more general information about the concentration and extermination camp system of the Nazis, drawing further on Emmie's and her brother Menachem's experiences in Ravensbrück. Near the end of World

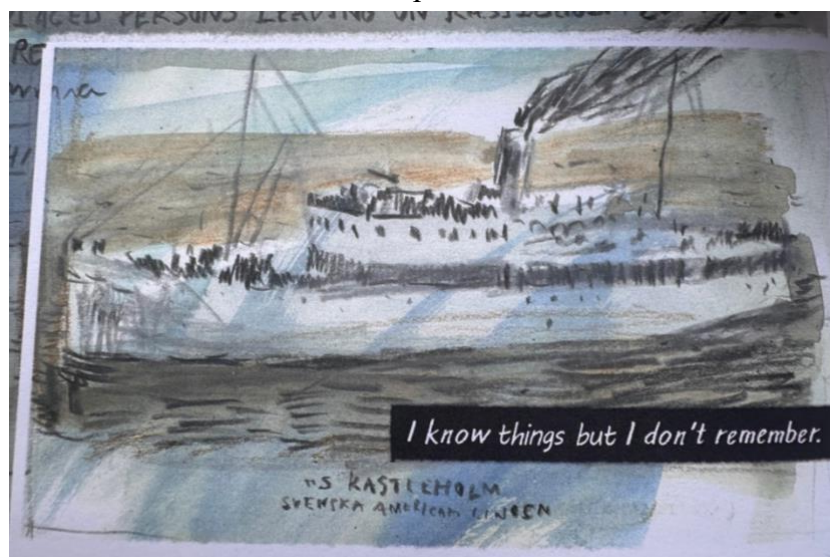


Figure 14: Emmie Arbel's statement 'I know things but I don't remember.' (*But I Live*, p. 114)

¹¹⁰ Libicki et al. *But I Live*, 173.

¹¹¹ Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* (United States of America, Pantheon Books, 2011): 5.

War II, in the spring of 1945, Emmie was transported to Bergen-Belsen together with her mother and brother Rudi. Emmie's mother, Julia, died a few days after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen in April 1945. After the war, through the help of the Red Cross, the three siblings, Emmie, Menachem, and Rudi were eventually reunited in the Netherlands.¹¹²

Since Emmie was only four and a half years old when she was deported to Camp Westerbork in 1942, her ability to recall imagery or recollect any specific events is limited. This created a recurring theme throughout the testimony, as she acknowledges she is unable to remember things, stating 'I know things, but I don't remember.'¹¹³ (Figure 14) Arbel speaks these words as she is telling Yelin the story of how her and her brother Rudi came to Sweden after the war. How this happened exactly, she also does not remember, but she knows it was with a boat. However, as many of her recollections start with the words 'I remember...' or 'I don't remember...' it draws awareness to the reader of Emmie's personal witnessing process. These few specific sentences show Emmie is aware of all that has happened to her, but her story is a mix of both memories and knowledge gathered through exterior sources.

In an interview between Barbara Yelin, Emmie Arbel and Charlotte Schallié, the editor of the graphic novel and project manager of the bigger project *But I Live* is a part of, published by the Arolsen Archives, they talk about the process of creating this graphic novel. Here, Yelin states she read up on Emmie's life story, as well as the places and historical events that are related to it. Yelin did further research in the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial and consulted the Arolsen Archives for documents concerning Emmie. One of the documents she



Figure 15: Photographic material from Emmie's childhood that Barbara Yelin used in the creation of the graphic narrative

¹¹² Andrea Löw, "Surviving Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen as a Child," in *But I Live*, Miriam Libicki et al. (University of Toronto Press, 2022): 154.

¹¹³ Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel, *But I Live* (University of Toronto Press, 2022): 114.

was able to use is Emmie's DP-2 card that was issued to her by the Allies at the end of the war to register displaced persons. Additionally, she has read the memoirs of other survivors, and the memoir written by Emmie's oldest brother, Menachem Kallus. Yelin states this additional research was extremely valuable to be able to fill in the gaps in Arbel's memory for certain parts of the narrative.¹¹⁴ In this same interview, a photo is included of photographic material from Emmie's childhood, that Yelin was able to use in the creation of the graphic novel. (Figure 15) One of these, the photograph of Emmie with the stuffed penguin, is redrawn in the graphic novel, showing Yelin's use of existing historical photographic material in the creation of the narrative. (Figure 16)



Figure 16: Redrawing by Barbara Yelin of Emmie Arbel's childhood photograph. (*But I Live*, p. 92)

In an interview with the *Jüdische Allgemeine*, a German-language newspaper and online news outlet that focuses on Jewish topics and issues, Barbara Yelin revealed that Emmie was very concerned with accuracy throughout the creation of the graphic novel. Emmie's memories were very direct, but she could not be routine in her storytelling. According to Yelin, it is important to recognize that not all traumatic experiences are retrievable, and therefore,

¹¹⁴ "But I Live!," Arolsen Archives, last modified March 18, 2021, <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/news/but-i-live/>

‘even the gaps in memory tell us a lot’.¹¹⁵ This is further confirmed by the editor of the graphic novel, Charlotte Schallié. Especially in the case of Emmie’s graphic novel, the gaps are important, but Schallié argues that the empty spaces in comics are not really empty, but instead create a space for the inexpressible. These empty spaces, and the gaps in Emmie’s memory, would be nearly impossible to capture in traditional contemporary witness reports or traditional forms of text, but it is more accessible in comic form.¹¹⁶

Lastly, it is important to recognize that somewhat like Eric Heuvel’s *The Search, But I Live* was also created with the idea of using it to teach young people about the Holocaust. However, as the three different artists held their interviews with the four child survivors, the research team behind the project did not get involved in their conversations or steered them in any way. The survivors themselves were always given the final word on everything concerning the manuscript of the graphic novel. The research team at times expressed their criticisms, but the authors and the survivors had the freedom to create their stories. With the graphic novel, different teaching materials have also been produced that educators can use. The project behind *But I Live* even went so far as to organize a workshop for German teachers in Yad Vashem to introduce them to the book as a modern teaching resource and to introduce the additional teaching materials that were produced.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Knut Elstermann, “Die Künstlerin Barbara Yelin über ihre Gespräche mit der Schoa-Überlebenden Emmie Arbel,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, May 5, 2024, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/wir-hatten-das-grosse-glueck-der-vielen-zeit/>

¹¹⁶ Sarah Cohen-Fantl, “The art of remembering,” Deutschland.de, last modified July 13, 2023, <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/culture/the-art-of-remembering>

¹¹⁷ Cohen-Fantl, “The art of remembering,” <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/culture/the-art-of-remembering>

General Findings

Examining the ways in which these four different authors have incorporated historical facts within their narratives reveals both commonalities and divergences over time. In terms of commonalities, all four graphic novels show a dedication to historical accuracy by the integration of extensive additional research, archival materials, and the use of survivor testimonies. The differences lie mainly in the authors' style and approaches, *Maus*, for example, stands out with its use of anthropomorphic characters, and Spiegelman's style emphasizes the psychological trauma and generational impact of the Holocaust. Especially Spiegelman's insistence on placing *Maus* on the New York Times Non-Fiction Best Seller List underscores its basis in real historical events. *Auschwitz* on the other hand, uses detailed, but brutal visuals to show the horror and brutality of the concentration camps, giving the graphic novel a totally different focus. *The Search* uses vibrant colours, with a ligne claire style, while approaching the reality of the camps more gently, making the narrative accessible and engaging for younger audiences. *But I Live* prioritises personal testimony and the emotional and psychological trauma of the Holocaust. Through the addition of the multiple sections in the back of the graphic novel, in which the four child survivors relay even more information about their experiences, which is further supplemented with historical commentary provided by three different historians, the graphic novel adds an additional layer of historical accuracy.

Throughout the last four decades, we thus see that the earlier works, like *Maus* and *Auschwitz* had more graphic depictions of Holocaust events, that confronted the reader with the grim realities of the concentration camps and the Holocaust as a whole. The later works, both *The Search* and *But I Live* take a softer approach, suitable for education, with a focus on making the Holocaust accessible to younger readers, without overwhelming them with content too graphic for their ages. Additionally, *But I Live* represents an important contemporary shift in which the survivor's voice, and especially a child's survivor's voice is given more attention, creating a great interaction between memory and historical fact.

Chapter 3: Recurring Themes

This chapter identifies the recurring themes in these four graphic novels. First, the depiction of different groups of people are analysed, such as the Jews, Germans, and the Perpetrators. Secondly, the following subchapter analyses two more conceptual themes, survivors' guilt, and trauma. Lastly, a third subchapter discusses the symbolism of the doll as a stand-in for the fate of child victims during the Holocaust. The depiction of the Jews and Germans in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as animals has been quite extensively discussed in the subchapter on anthropomorphism in the second chapter on the use of historical facts in graphic novels. Thus, for *Maus*, this chapter mainly discusses the cat/mouse metaphor Spiegelman has created through these depictions.

Jews and Germans

The first subchapter of this chapter on recurring themes in these graphic novel focuses on the representation of the Jews, Germans, perpetrators, and bystanders. Not all specified groups are equally present in every graphic novel, which is indicated in the subchapter, with an explanation.

According to Spiegelman, the realization to draw the Jews as mice came as a surprise to him. His knowledge of the Second World War and Hitler's Germany was, as he says, modest and he was unaware of the existing imagery of Jews as vermin within Nazi narratives.¹¹⁸ By introducing the Germans as cats, Spiegelman plays into the cat/mouse metaphor, which was a conscious choice. However, Spiegelman did not want the metaphor to work as an endorsement of Nazi ideology or an implicit plea for sympathy by drawing the mice as a 'cute defenseless little mouse'. This was one of his reasons to draw both animals the same size, as equalizing them in scale did not give them equal power, but it also does not put the mice at the total biological disadvantage that the cat/mouse metaphor otherwise already implies.¹¹⁹ Wendy Stallard Flory even suggests that because the Jewish characters, the mice, are the 'heroes' of the story, the reader identifies with them and therefore barely registers the 'mouse-ness', because they are seen as the norm.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* (United States of America, Pantheon Books, 2011): 113.

¹¹⁹ Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 118.

¹²⁰ Stallard Flory, "The Search," 37.

In Croci's *Auschwitz*, somewhat due to his art-style, the Jewish prisoners are shown terrified, with big hollowing eyes. Their emaciated bodies in combination with the hollowed-out eyes highlight the physical as well as emotional torment of the concentration camp. While this portrayal is thus quite grim, Croci also tries to humanize his Jewish characters by focusing on their personal stories and emotions, as well as their hope and resilience for better times. This is for example shown in the hope Kazik shows throughout the graphic novel for both his wife's and daughter's survival. The German population is not represented in the graphic novel, as it solely focuses on Kazik and Cessia's experiences in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

Eric Heuvel's *The Search* also tries to show hope and resilience in its presentation of Jewish characters. This becomes especially clear in the first pages of the graphic novel, after Esther, the protagonist of the story, moves with her family to the Netherlands. She finds a new school, her father finds a new job, and they try to make the best of it. In *The Search*, the German population is only shown in the beginning, before Esther and her family move to the Netherlands. The graphic novel does however, in these few pages, show both sides of the German population. A panel is shown in which four men are standing around a poster pole that shows a big poster reading '*Unsere Letzte Hoffnung: Hitler*' (Our Last Hope: Hitler), meanwhile the men are saying Hitler's got their votes, and he at least has ideas. (Figure 18) On the following page, it is shown not everyone within the German population sympathised with Hitler and his ideas. The panel shows people fighting in the streets, with a Nazi flag sticking out of the dust clouds behind which the people are fighting, as well as a poster of the KPD, the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany). Esther's head is inserted in the top of the panel, saying 'Hitler had opponents as well. There were fights in the streets often'. (Figure 17) Additionally, it is important to recognize Heuvel's depiction of the Dutch population and those people we might regard as 'bystanders'. A few days after the invasion of the Netherlands, after her parents are deported, Esther runs into a policeman on her way home from school. This policeman actually works for the German occupiers, and has arrested her parents, but rather than arresting Esther as well he gives her a chance to escape.¹²¹

¹²¹ Stallard Flory, "*The Search*," 42.

prisoners.¹²² Because the reader looks over Emmie's shoulder in this panel, it shows the fear Emmie must have felt during this experience. (Figure 19) The fact that the perpetrators are not



Figure 19: The reader looks over Emmie's shoulder towards two Nazi perpetrators (*But I Live*, p. 102)

significantly present in Yelin and Arbel's *But I Live* may have something to do with Arbel not remembering much from this specific period. On the other hand, throughout the narrative it does become clear that the perpetrators have played a significant role in her personal development and identity formation.

In *Maus*, the cats depicting the perpetrators are quite uniformly depicted as evil. They are portrayed with grim dispositions, their mouths often twisted in angry grimaces, and in most cases their eyes are shielded by their helmets. The cats barely have any narrative perspective, which reinforces their character as dehumanized and dangerous creatures. In contrast to the mice Spiegelman draws, the cats lack any form of individualism. It can be argued that this is a visual strategy that adequately captures the Nazi totalitarian regime. The shielding of the cats'



Figure 21: Depiction of a Nazi perpetrator as a cat in *Maus* (*The Complete Maus*, p. 217)



Figure 20: Depiction of Nazi perpetrators in *Maus* shooting Jews (the mice) in a forest (*The Complete Maus*, p. 63)

¹²² Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel, *But I Live* (University of Toronto Press, 2022): 102.

eyes, as well as the fact that they lack any narrative contribution and variation of image or character, further enforces their anonymization and lack of individuality.¹²³ (See figure 20 & 21)

Throughout *Auschwitz*, Croci always shows the Nazi perpetrator in full attire. This makes the perpetrator stand out in the crowd and chaos of the camp, while further highlighting his menacing presence through the use of showing close-ups of the perpetrator.¹²⁴ In one of Kazik's dreams, he dreams of the Nazi officer. Here, Croci draws the officer as Nosferatu, the officer is drawn with fangs and long claw-like fingers, as well as the haunted eyes used for all the characters. In Kazik's dream, the officer is ranting on about exterminating the Jews. Here, the perpetrator is thus depicted as an actual monster.¹²⁵ (Figure 22) Throughout the rest of the graphic novel, Croci's portrayal of the Nazi perpetrator fits with the kitsch figure of evil, portraying them as coldblooded and immoral figures with full Nazi attire.¹²⁶ (Figure 23)



Figure 23: The officer depicted as Nosferatu in Kazik's dream (*Auschwitz*, p. 39)



Figure 22: One of the Nazi perpetrators in full attire as shown in *Auschwitz* (*Auschwitz*, p. 45)

¹²³ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 87-88.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 87.

¹²⁵ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 39.

¹²⁶ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 87.

In *The Search*, different moral positions are highlighted by the author which shows the reader the often morally difficult positions people navigated in wartime. The graphic novel shows a range of characters that are used to explore perpetrator and bystander behaviour and involvement, although these characters often remain unnamed and only come forth in singular instances.¹²⁷ As *The Search* thus aims to point out the different types of involvement, not all perpetrators are portrayed as vicious killers. Certain Nazi perpetrators are still presented with angry grimaces, but another instance presents a guard in Auschwitz turning a blind eye when Bob finds a piece of bread during his work in the Kanada commando.¹²⁸ Rather than anonymizing the perpetrators, *The Search* does imply the individuality of them. The graphic novel clearly shows different levels of perpetrator involvement and forms of complicity, but resistance as well. This is also shown in the earlier discussed scene about the *Einsatzgruppen*, in which the three soldiers all have different reactions to the executions they just committed.¹²⁹ (Figure 12) Apart from focusing on perpetrators and victims, *The Search* additionally points



Figure 24: The policeman gives Esther the choice whether she wants to go to her arrested parents or somewhere else (*The Search*, p. 17)

out that bystanders can be conflicted in their actions as well. The father of the Dutch girl Helena, who is good friends with the main character Esther, is a police officer. He helps the Nazi perpetrators with the transportation of Esther's parents.¹³⁰ This action is only implied, as Esther's father one day tells his family that a friend has been able to find a hiding place, which

¹²⁷ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 104.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁹ Eric Heuvel et al. *The Search* (Uitgeverij L., 2007): 38.

¹³⁰ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 104.

leads Esther to tell Helena that they will go into hiding the day after tomorrow. The next day, as Esther is at school, her parents are arrested and deported, which Helena's father, the police officer, tells her when they run in to each other on the streets. While he thus aids in the deportation of her parents, he asks her whether she wants to go to them, or if she has a different place to go.¹³¹ He deliberately gives her a choice to go into hiding, which gives him the double depiction of a perpetrator, as well as a resisting bystander. (Figure 24) Apart from these morally difficult positions, Heuvel further depicts the Nazi officials always in full attire, like Croci does in *Auschwitz* as well. The perpetrators are mostly shown in the scenes that depict the concentration camps. (Figure 25)



Figure 25: A Nazi perpetrator shown in full attire in *The Search* (*The Search*, p. 42)

Survivors Guilt and Trauma

This subchapter analyses the thematic presence of survivors' guilt and trauma. This is mainly present in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel's *But I Live*. It also somewhat features in Eric Heuvel's *The Search*, and Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*, but only in a few specific panels. In these two graphic novels the theme does not have an overarching presence. Vladek, Art Spiegelman's father, throughout the narrative shows signs of psychological trauma and survivors' guilt. Vladek shows survivors' guilt through the many times he reflects on and speaks about people he knew who did not survive the Holocaust. Additionally, in *Auschwitz*, Vladek became friends with someone named Mandelbaum.

¹³¹ Heuvel et al. *De Zoektocht*, 17.

Mandelbaum eventually died in the camp, and Vladek explains the helplessness he felt, and his inability to save his friend from dying.¹³² This still weighs heavily on him even all these years later. In some way, he feels responsible for the death of his friend, thus showing his guilt over surviving himself.

However, due to Spiegelman's representation of his father, he is a survivor, but not a straightforward victim. Vladek is a character that also inflicts suffering upon others, and due to presenting him that way, Spiegelman shows the complicated ethics involved when creating representations of trauma.¹³³ Although there are multiple sequences and panels in *Maus* that show Art Spiegelman dealing with the intergenerational trauma, there is one specific sequence in *Maus* that stands out in Art Spiegelman showing his own psychological problems concerning the writing of *Maus*. In Volume II, chapter II titled *Auschwitz: Time Flies*, the chapter begins with a meta-narrative that takes place in 1987, one year after the publication of the first volume. This sequence deals with Art's anxieties about the publication of *Maus*. He is sitting over a drawing table, now portrayed as a human in a mouse's mask. With the following panels, the focus zooms outwards, showing more of Art in this situation. In the final panel, the reader is confronted with Art sitting hunched over his drawing table, which rests on a mound of naked mouse corpses.¹³⁴ (Figure 26)

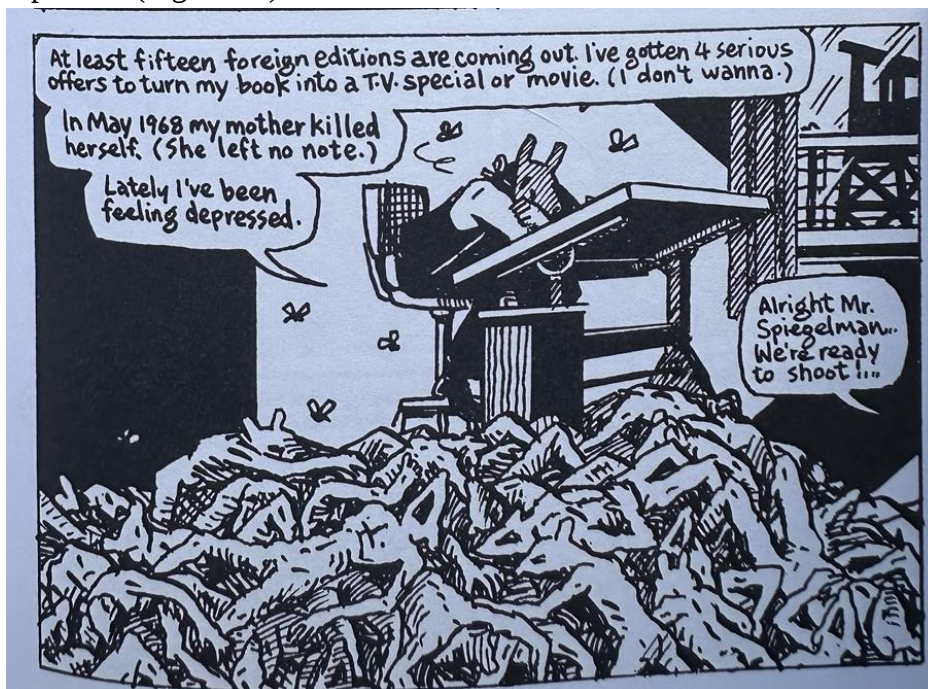


Figure 26: Page depicting Art sitting hunched over his drawing table, showing his anxieties concerning the publication of *Maus*. (*The Complete Maus*, p. 201)

¹³² Spiegelman, "The Complete Maus," 194-195.

¹³³ Karen Crawley and Honni van Rijswijk, "Justice in the gutter: representing everyday trauma in the graphic novels of Art Spiegelman," *Law Text Culture* 16, no. 6 (2012): 114.

¹³⁴ Crawley and Rijswijk, "Justice in the gutter," 104.

However, the panels in which Art shows his struggles with the inherited trauma from the Holocaust, are somewhat contradicted later in the graphic novel. Nearing the end, Françoise, Art's wife, peeks into his studio and asks him if he wants some coffee. At this moment, Art is listening to the tape recording in which his Vladek describes the moments before his brother was killed: 'And then she said, No! I will not go in the gas chambers. And my children will not – click'. As Françoise asks him this question, he enthusiastically answers 'You bet!'. (Figure 27) In this moment, he shows the ease with which he assimilates his father's horrific stories.¹³⁵ Additionally, in the following panels, Françoise and Art discuss Vladek's situation after he left for Florida, discussing whether they should ask him to move in with them, as Françoise is worried about his wellbeing. Instead of answering with empathy, Art makes some sarcastic remarks about his father, insisting he cannot live with them. However, the guilt soon comes back as Françoise remarks 'Well... It's up to you... He's **your** father' to which Art replies 'Stop! I feel guilty enough already!'.¹³⁶



Figure 27: Panel showing Françoise asking Art if he wants coffee while he is listening to the tape of the interviews with his father. (*The Complete Maus*, p. 280)

The narrative of Croci's *Auschwitz* begins with Kazik and Cessia during the conflict in former Yugoslavia in 1993, this prompts them to think back on their experiences in Auschwitz. The graphic novel again ends with Kazik and Cessia in former Yugoslavia, and right before they are found and executed for political betrayal, Kazik is shown saying to Cessia 'Now it is our turn'.¹³⁷ This specific sentence shows survivors' guilt, as he almost seems relieved. In Eric

¹³⁵ Crawley and Rijswijk, "Justice in the gutter," 105.

¹³⁶ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 274-275.

¹³⁷ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 72.

Heuvel's *The Search* there is additionally one specific panel that shows Esther experiencing survivors' guilt. Barend, the son of the farmer on whose farm Esther went into hiding during the war, asks her if she ever found her parents again after the war. Esther goes on to explain she has not, because they were murdered in the concentration camps.¹³⁸ This panel shows her with a tear rolling from her eyes and her hand supporting her head. (Figure 28)



Figure 28: Esther with a tear rolling down her cheek, displaying signs of survivors' guilt (*The Search*, p. 24)

In Yelin and Arbel's *But I Live*, survivors' guilt presents a more overarching theme that is present throughout the whole narrative. The graphic novel focuses on the everlasting trauma the Holocaust has inflicted upon Emmie throughout her life. Emmie's survivors' guilt becomes especially clear in the pages where she speaks to Yelin about her mother. A few days after the liberation, while Emmie, her brother Rudi, and her mother were still in Bergen-Belsen, her mother fell ill. Emmie explains she and Rudi knew she was dying, and even everyday now, as she wakes up and eats her yoghurt she thinks back to her mother, thinking that if she could have given her a bite, maybe she would have survived.¹³⁹ (Figure 29) This specific memory relates to her breakfast, because she knew all her mother had to eat was given to her during their time in the concentration camp.

¹³⁸ Heuvel, *De Zoektocht*, 28.

¹³⁹ Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel, *But I Live* (University of Toronto Press, 2022): 111.



Figure 29: Emmie Arbel at her kitchen table thinking back on how her mother maybe would have survived if she could have given her some food (*But I Live*, p. 111)

Symbolism: The Doll as a Stand-in

Symbolism can be an important artistic tool in literary and graphic works, it gives the author or creator the ability to convey deeper meanings without explicitly stating them. It is something that is used in these four graphic novels to a certain extent as well. Spiegelman's *Maus* has symbolism in the form of anthropomorphism, and the cat and mouse metaphor, as discussed earlier. This chapter deals with the symbolism of the figure of a doll to stand in for the fate of child victims. The dolls are often presented with human features and their mistreatment by perpetrators further strengthen their metaphor.¹⁴⁰

Already quite in the beginning of the story, Croci introduces the brutality that is directed by SS officers at children when a baby is shot through the head by an SS officer after the family's arrival in Auschwitz.¹⁴¹ Throughout the narrative of *Auschwitz*, the doll figure is linked to Cessia and Kazik's daughter, Ann. The doll closely resembles a human body, with eyes similar to those of the other characters, making it look more like a small child than a toy. The doll serves as a marker of innocence amidst this death camp and returns at several points in the story.¹⁴² One important return of the doll is made in Kazik's recounting of the events. Kazik is part of the Sonderkommando and finds his daughter alive in the gas chamber, followed

¹⁴⁰ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 16.

¹⁴² In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 59-60.

by a confrontation between a Nazi officer and Kazik where they discuss sparing her life or not. At this point in the story, the reader does not yet know whether the officer will spare Ann's life.¹⁴³ As Kazik's recounting of the events moves on, he is moving bodies from one of the mass graves as a SS officer throws Ann's doll at Kazik's feet, seemingly suggesting he has not spared Ann's life. (Figure 30) As the doll is thus presented with these human features, the symbolism of the doll works on multiple levels. The doll as an inanimate object directly mirrors the treatment of the Jews in concentration camps, and it makes a referral to the euphemisms *Stücke*, 'pieces' and *Figuren*, 'figures' and 'dolls', which the Nazis used to refer to prisoners in the camps.¹⁴⁴



Figure 30: Officer throws Ann's doll at Kazik's feet. (*Auschwitz*, p. 55)

Similarly to how Pascal Croci has used the doll as a metaphor, Eric Heuvel's *The Search* also uses a doll figure to represent the fate of children. In this narrative, the doll belongs to a little girl that is presented in the pages depicting the women, children, and elderly walking towards the gas chambers. During their walk, the girl comforts her toy using the words 'Don't be afraid', and as they are undressing to enter the gas chamber, she tells her doll 'see you later...'. (Figure 13) Later, prisoners are depicted searching through the clothes and belongings of those who entered the gas chambers for valuables. The next panel depicts a soldier kicking

¹⁴³ Croci, *Auschwitz*, 49-51.

¹⁴⁴ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 60.

the doll in the head.¹⁴⁵ (Figure 31) The doll once again becomes a stand-in for the earlier depicted little girl and the mistreatment the children suffered in concentration camps.



Figure 31: Prisoners searching through clothing for valuables and the officer kicking the little girl's doll. (*The Search*, p. 43)

The fact that the doll breaks apart, in combination with its helpless position, further stands for the horrors perpetrated against the specific girl and other children. Here too, the doll works on multiple levels, as in its first layer it thus represents child victims, and the officers' boot represents the Nazi's methods of destruction. Looking deeper into the narrative, the doll refers to a previous sequence that depicts how children were smuggled out of the nursery near the Theatre Hall in Amsterdam. Jews were brought here prior to their deportation, and the nursery was on the other side of the street. To make sure the Nazi's head count was still correct, the women used dolls to replace their children as they left them behind to save them from deportation and the fate of the concentration camps.¹⁴⁶

The treatment of the doll in these two graphic novels resonate with a development in Holocaust literature from the 1970s onwards, where 'comforting symbolism' is replaced with a 'stark and disquieting treatment of anthropomorphic playthings'. As the doll thus refers to child victims, this symbolism also ties in with a more widespread use of children as main characters in genocide depictions. Children are in many ways the perfect victim, they are without guilt or history, and therefore present the reader with a morally unambiguous character

¹⁴⁵ Heuvel et al. *De Zoektocht*, 43.

¹⁴⁶ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 62.

that sends out a clear message, that whatever happens to the child is unequivocally wrong.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, the dolls embody a notion of ‘too late-ness’, which builds further onto their powerlessness and innocence. In *Auschwitz* this is done by Croci by implying that the death of Ann, Kazik and Cessia’s daughter, could have been prevented, as the caption with the image of her grave reads ‘Ann died of typhus just two days before the camp was liberated...’. (Figure 32) In *The Search* the ‘too late-ness’ is shown as the little girl tells her doll she will see it later, right before she enters the gas chamber. (Figure 13) Of course, due to the context and following panels, the reader realizes that ‘later’ won’t happen.¹⁴⁸



Figure 32: Ann's grave in Auschwitz-Birkenau, with the doll on top. (*Auschwitz*, p. 71)

¹⁴⁷ In 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels*, 66-67.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

General Findings

To encapsulate, Holocaust graphic novels often include similar themes and representations of Jews, Germans, perpetrators, bystanders and their approach to survivors' guilt and trauma. Nevertheless, all graphic novels approach these themes differently. *Maus*, for example, uniquely uses anthropomorphisation and depicts Jews as mice and the Germans and perpetrators as cats. Spiegelman underscores Nazi ideology's dehumanization and challenges traditional stereotypes with the resilience of his Jewish mice characters, such as his father Vladek, who navigate survival and loss. Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* focuses mainly on Kazik and Cessia's experiences in Auschwitz, showing the physical and emotional toll of Nazi brutality, while *The Search* offers the reader a broad spectrum of complicity with the Nazi regime and resistance. The portrayal of Survivors' guilt and trauma within the narratives of these graphic novels show the enduring psychological scars of those who survived the Holocaust and the effect this still has on these people. Additionally, Spiegelman's *Maus* shows intergenerational trauma through Vladek's memories and Spiegelman's struggle to understand his father's experiences. *Auschwitz* and *The Search* touch upon survivors' guilt more briefly, with only a few moments that highlight the experience of reflection and resilience of the main characters. In contrast, in *But I Live*, survivors' guilt plays a prominent role in Emmie's experiences, and portrays Emmie's lifelong struggle with the losses she experienced during the war and the burden of her survival.

Over time, the representation of these themes in the graphic novels reflect a broader societal shift in understanding and commemorating the Holocaust. *Maus* shows a blending of personal narrative with symbolic imagery, aiming at the accurate representation of Vladek's experiences, challenging conventional, factual, approaches to Holocaust representation. In a way, *Maus* laid the foundation on which the other three graphic novels could expand, offering nuanced perspectives, emphasizing the human dimensions of the Holocaust by portraying suffering, survival, and moral ambiguity alike.

Chapter 4: Public Reception

To determine the public reception of graphic novels during the timespan since the publication of Spiegelman's *Maus* to the publication of Charlotte Schallié et al.'s *But I Live*, these four graphic novels are first placed in a broader sociological context of graphic novels in Western cultural memory. This sociological context shows the growing importance of graphic novels in the transition of the Holocaust from being a communicative memory to a cultural memory. The second subchapter discusses some reviews and criticisms these graphic novels have received throughout the years, both by professionals and the public. This chapter includes commentary on these reviews, as well as an analyses whether a collection of reviews could be useful to determine society's mentality towards Holocaust graphic novels. Lastly, due to the growing importance of graphic novels in education, the following subchapter discusses the relevance of graphic novels as an alternative approach to teaching history. This chapter specifically focuses on Holocaust graphic novels and teaching about the Holocaust, but graphic novels are used for other topics in the classroom as well. Alicia C. Decker and Maurice Castro, for example, in their article focus on graphic novels that can be used to teach students about the historical particularities of Uganda.¹⁴⁹

Broader sociological contextualization of graphic novels in Western cultural memory

It is important to keep in mind that the events of the Holocaust are fading from living memory as time passes. This means the places where it happened, but also other forms in which we remember the Holocaust are becoming more important. Esther Jilovsky, a Rabbi and scholar in German Studies, in her book *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations, Witnessing and Place* argues that place is emerging as a central motif in Holocaust narratives. Over the last two decades, specific Holocaust sites have been starting to play a central role in the commemoration process for survivors as well as second and third generations.¹⁵⁰ Commemoration processes are not only important for survivors and their subsequent generations, but for society as a whole. Dan Diner, an Israeli-German historian and political writer, argues that Europe seems to be finding a more common unifying memory in World War

¹⁴⁹ Alicia C. Decker and Mauricio Castro, "Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel," *The History Teacher* 45, no. 2 (Feb. 2012): 169.

¹⁵⁰ Esther Jilovsky, *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations, Witnessing and Place* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015): 1.

II and the Holocaust.¹⁵¹ Additionally, Diner argues there is especially a growing awareness concerning the Holocaust in Europe since 1989. According to him this is due to an anthropological assumption, namely the restitution of property and the evocation of past memories, or as the restitution of property as a result of recovered memory.¹⁵²

On the other hand, in 2010 Tobias Ebbrecht, a researcher with an interest in German postwar social, cultural, and film history, argues that especially in German and Europe the commemoration of the Holocaust is ignoring anti-Semitism. Additionally building on the argument of Daniel Levy and Natan Szneider from their book *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (2006), Ebbrecht argues that the meaning of the Holocaust is often reduced to a lesson in tolerance, because as such it has universal relevance. Levy and Szneider argue this is due to the tendency of Americanization of the Holocaust. This Americanization seeks to mediate between absolute moral guidelines, American values, and subjective experiences.¹⁵³ Within popular culture, Ebbrecht argues that the Holocaust has often become visually stereotyped in contemporary popular culture. The same iconic images are repeated and are subjected to constant circulation. Due to their constant repetition, historical images derived from the Holocaust are sometimes dissociated from their historical origins. Popular films sometimes reference these images when they are dealing with other topics, although these topics could be war related, it results in a de-contextualization of Holocaust images from their original sources and reception.¹⁵⁴

Tobias Ebbrecht, in a collaborated article with Barak Ben-Aroia, argues that especially Germany has used Second World War and Holocaust related iconography to shape commemoration sites as instruments to link current Germany to their historical period of National Socialism. They argue this is done to bring attention to the dangers of extremist right-wing and National Socialist ideology, while simultaneously promoting the desirable character of the present democratic society.¹⁵⁵ These iconic images that we thus often see in films, but also in memorials are present in other visual media, such as comics and graphic novels, as well.

Comic biographies or ‘biographics’ as they are often called, seem to have gained importance during the last few decades. Although they often focus on prominent figures such

¹⁵¹ Dan Diner, “Restitution and Memory: The Holocaust in European Political Cultures,” *New German Critique* no. 90 (Autumn 2003): 36.

¹⁵² Diner, “Restitution and Memory,” 39.

¹⁵³ Tobias Ebbrecht, “Migrating Images: Iconic Images of the Holocaust and the Representation of War in Popular Film,” *Shofar* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 88.

¹⁵⁴ Ebbrecht, “Migrating Images,” 90.

¹⁵⁵ Barak Ben-Aroia and Tobias Ebbrecht, “Memorials as discursive spheres: Holocaust and Second World War iconography in public commemoration of extremist-right violence,” *Memory Studies* 14, no. 4 (2021): 798.

as Anne Frank, lesser-known individuals are depicted as well. One good example of this is Irena Sendler in the graphic novel *Irena's Jar of Secrets* by Marcia Vaughan which was published in 2011.¹⁵⁶ *But I Live* would also be a good example of this. Some of the survivors, such as Emmie Arbel herself, have spoken out about the Holocaust and their story before, and their name thus might be recognized by some, but they are significantly less well-known as for example Anne Frank.

But I Live was created in collaboration with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. The project acknowledges a need to rethink how we teach and learn about the past, and how to demonstrate the relevance of the Holocaust to younger generations, as society experiences a growing distance from the survivor experience of the Holocaust, as well as a lower level of awareness of the Holocaust and other genocides.¹⁵⁷ This is also confirmed by the Anne Frank House, as in their description of Eric Heuvel's *A Family Secret*, the prequel to *The Search*, they explain how the graphic novel was developed as lesson material for educators, as research shows that 'young people's factual knowledge about WWII leaves much to be desired'.¹⁵⁸ According to the Anne Frank House, *The Search* addresses these facts about the war in an accessible manner for younger students, while simultaneously showing what the Holocaust meant for people in various roles and positions.¹⁵⁹ The narrative for example offers interesting insights into what happened to most of the deported Jews in the concentration camps, while not providing any graphic imagery. The story also includes mentions of other persecuted groups, such as Roma and Sinti and political prisoners. The book thus has a strong European and international character, and both its creation and content reflect the universalization of Holocaust history.¹⁶⁰

For a long time, child survivors have been given little attention, mainly due to the fact that for long they were not considered reliable witnesses because they have the memories of a child, often not chronological and incomplete. In the past decade, their stories have gained significant value, as there are not many adult survivors left to speak about their experiences, but a few child survivors still remain. Additionally, the fact that their memories are often not

¹⁵⁶ Christine Gunderman, "Real Imagination? Holocaust Comics in Europe," in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 238.

¹⁵⁷ Fransiska Louwagie et al. "Testifying to Genocide: A Creative and Critical Use of Memory and Testimony in Holocaust Education in the UK and Canada," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023): 407.

¹⁵⁸ Anne Frank House, "A Family Secret – Graphic Novel," Accessed May 31, 2024, <https://webshop.annefrank.org/en/a-family-secret-comic-book.html>

¹⁵⁹ Anne Frank House, "The Search – Graphic Novel," Accessed May 31, 2024, <https://webshop.annefrank.org/en/the-search-graphic-novel.html>

¹⁶⁰ Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 115.

chronological and incomplete make them particularly special. Their experiences tell us how the children felt, what they experienced and how they viewed what happened. It also tells us about how they continued to live after the war and Holocaust.¹⁶¹ Additionally, as less survivors remain to tell their stories, child survivors are becoming more important, which we also see in the publishing of graphic novels. *But I Live* is completely focused on different child survivors, but it is becoming a recurring theme. For example, *Survivors of the Holocaust: True Stories of Six Extraordinary Children*, by Barbara Krasner was published in 2019, and shows the personal stories of six child survivors of the Holocaust who now live in Leeds, in the United Kingdom. In education, the Holocaust is often taught to young people from the perspectives of the perpetrators. Graphic novels, like *But I Live* challenge this, and show a new approach by showing the topic from the victims' perspective.¹⁶²

Reviews and criticisms

This subchapter sets out to analyze multiple reviews and criticisms that these four graphic novels have received since their publication. Additionally, some graphic novels include critique given by scholars, but the main focus is reviews by the public. Analyzing and comparing different reviews, especially comparing recent ones to those published around the publication dates of these graphic novels, may show a shift in society's mentality towards graphic novels dealing with difficult topics, such as the Holocaust. One platform that is used for every graphic novel to show contemporary review results is Goodreads, an American social cataloging website. It is simply a database of books, that allows users to search for books, annotations, quotes, and reviews, while users can review books themselves as well. The platform launched in January 2007, and by September 2023, the site had more than 150 million active members, making it one of the largest online reading communities worldwide. On Goodreads, users can give books a rating in stars, from one to five, but can also leave more elaborated reviews.¹⁶³ The reviews and criticisms are divided per graphic novel, in chronological order of publication. Important to note is that because of the recent publication date of *But I Live*, 2022, only reviews from the last two years are available in this analysis.

¹⁶¹ Knut Elstermann, "Die Künstlerin Barbara Yelin über ihre Gespräche mit der Schoa-Überlebenden Emmie Arbel," *Jüdische Allgemeine*, May 5, 2024, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/wir-hatten-das-grosse-glueck-der-vielen-zeit/>

¹⁶² Sarah Cohen-Fantl, "The art of remembering," *Deutschland.de*, last modified July 13, 2023, <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/culture/the-art-of-remembering>

¹⁶³ Phil Stamper-Halpin, "How to Reach More Readers on Goodreads," Penguin Random House, News for Authors, Last modified September 2023, <https://authornews.penguinrandomhouse.com/how-to-reach-more-readers-on-goodreads/>

Maus – Art Spiegelman (1986-1991)

Shortly after its publication, *Maus* made an appearance in *The New York Times* in a rubric titled ‘Books of The Times’ which is dedicated to book reviews written by experienced critics, offering in-depth analysis and critical assessments. *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* was reviewed by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in *The New York Times* that was published on November 10, 1986. Lehmann-Haupt in this review pays specific attention to the comic book medium in which *Maus* was published, stating it as an unusual innovation Spiegelman has used to tell his story. Additionally, in this review, Lehmann-Haupt confirms the earlier statement that the general opinion was that comic books and other illustrated works could not deal with difficult topics like the Holocaust. In his review he namely states that ‘Naturally, the effect of treating such a subject this way is shocking at first’. However, he does also write how he easily was ‘transported’ to the experience of reading World War II comics such as ‘Blackhawk’ or ‘Captain Marvel’.¹⁶⁴

While this early review of *Maus* is thus quite positive, other early reviews have been not. Harvey Pekar in a 1986 Comics Journal review noted that ‘the major defect in *Maus* is Spiegelman’s biased, one-sided portrayals of his father, himself, and their relationship’, Pekar further questions Spiegelman’s ability to portray Vladek accurately.¹⁶⁵ However, this question about Vladek’s accurate portrayal is contested by multiple scholars, such as Joshua L. Charlson, who argues that Spiegelman does portray his father accurately.¹⁶⁶ Critiques like these are even contested in the book itself, as Spiegelman is at some point shown saying to his wife Françoise, “I am only trying to portray my father accurately”. Some reviewers have accused Spiegelman of being too self-absorbed, and too interested in his role as artist. They additionally argue that because of this, Spiegelman was not objective enough about the history his book was trying to tell.

On Goodreads, out of 222.870 ratings, *The Complete Maus* has earned 4.57 stars, and as of May 2024, over 14.000 people have left written reviews on the book. Most of the bad reviews, especially those with only one star, have been published on the platform between 2014 and 2017, and users mainly critique Spiegelman’s artwork, calling it “distracting, too cluttered,

¹⁶⁴ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, “Books of the Times: MAUS: A Survivor’s Tale. By Art Spiegelman. Illustrated. 159 pages. Pantheon. Paper, \$8.95.,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 1986, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/10/books/books-of-the-times-589186.html>

¹⁶⁵ Rosemary V. Hathaway, “Reading Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* as Postmodern Ethnography,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 48, no. 3 (2011): 252.

¹⁶⁶ Charlson, “Framing the Past,” 94.

and unclear” (posted online July 17, 2017) or stating, “The artwork is done in a horribly primitive, poor man’s Japanese woodblock sort of way” (posted online May 14, 2020).¹⁶⁷ Whether a person likes the artwork in a graphic novel is highly personal, as with any form of art, making it an easy critique point. However, in these bad reviews, not many go in on the actual narrative of the story, apart from some critiquing Spiegelman’s use of stereotypes in the depicting of the different nationalities that appear in the book.

Auschwitz – Pascal Croci (2000)

Pascal Croci’s *Auschwitz* has both gained a lot of positive reviews as well as criticisms. It was highly celebrated in France, as a graphic novel that shows reality and does not shy away from the Holocaust as murder and the annihilation of life, in Germany it was heavily critiqued. A main point of criticism concerned the plot, as it is advertised as a realistic graphic novel that reminds the reader of the duty to remember, but the graphic novel itself does not refer to any biographical sources.¹⁶⁸ Concerning the graphic novel being highly celebrated in France, a review article by *Le Monde*, one of France’s most prestigious and widely read daily newspapers, focuses on the hardships Croci came across in the development in this graphic novel. The article also points out the mistrust some of Croci’s sources had towards depicting the Holocaust in comic format, but that the well documented realism of the narrative and concern for authenticity were stronger.¹⁶⁹ The concerns and mistrust by Croci’s sources are well presented in a letter by Renée Eskenazi, an Auschwitz survivor who Pascal Croci repeatedly interviewed for the creation of his graphic novel. In this letter she writes: “Thank you Pascal for what you did. You should, however, know that the characters you made up are unable to represent the reality that we had to go through. Too many terrible things separate us from other human beings.”¹⁷⁰ Eskenazi’s critique is especially interesting because of her involvement in the creation of the graphic novel, as this might suggest she should have had an earlier say in the representations of reality in the camp.

¹⁶⁷ Goodreads, “Rating & Reviews for The Complete Maus: Art Spiegelman,” Accessed May 31, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/15195/reviews?reviewFilters={%22workId%22:%22kca://work/amzn1.gr.work.v1.8l2wrIObSxKZ3S5NXbrgHQ%22,%22ratingMin%22:1,%22ratingMax%22:1,%22after%22:%22MTUyLDE1NTQ2MzE3MTMyNjQ%22}>

¹⁶⁸ Christine Gunderman, “Real Imagination? Holocaust Comics in Europe,” in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 236

¹⁶⁹ Yves Marie Labe, “Pour Mémoire,” *Le Monde*, last modified October 20, 2000, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/10/20/pour-memoire_3717394_1819218.html

¹⁷⁰ Learning From History, “Auschwitz – A Graphic Novel About the Holocaust,” last modified January 29, 2010, <http://learning-from-history.de/International/Posting/7467>

Concerning the heavy critique in Germany, Jewish leaders in the country feared that the book would become a collectors' item for neo-Nazis. Additionally, Paul Spiegel, chairman of Germany's Central Council of Jews has also spoken out about the graphic novel, stating 'We will have to watch very carefully whether this kind of treatment really does address the people it is aimed for.'¹⁷¹ These concerns are spoken against by Alexandra Germann, an editor in charge of graphic novels at Ehapa, the publisher behind the German edition and translation of *Auschwitz*. According to her, graphic novels are exactly right to reach a younger public that might otherwise not have had any interest in the Holocaust. Additionally, one way in which she tries to decrease the concerns is by pointing out that the graphic novel has been researched intensely.¹⁷² It is thus interesting to see how these two countries, France and Germany, both look upon the graphic novel so differently. Through additional research it has not yet proven possible to find out whether the German fears about the book becoming a neo-Nazi collectible were right.

German historian Christine Gunderman also critiques what Croci decides to show in his graphic novel. Considering the themes and topics that play the most significant roles throughout the graphic novel, it becomes clear what Croci considers worth remembering, namely feminized victimhood and two kinds of male prisoners, those who closed their eyes and those who acted as the resisting, fighting heroes. She critiques the way the men are thus displayed as autorotative figures capable of making decisions concerning their fate, while the women remain passive victims. Although a comic artist is generally not required to work like an academic, but rather focus on their artistic abilities, Croci's appearance as a quasi-historian through his interview in the ending pages of the graphic novel irritates as well as justifies many critics. According to Gunderman, it leads the reader to believe in the authenticity of the drawn narrative by Croci, while it actually points out a rather non-critical handling of history by the publisher.¹⁷³

Nevertheless, many comic journalists still reviewed the comic as a realistic representation of the crimes committed by the Nazis during the Holocaust, although the comic style is very close to the horror genre, which is accentuated by the transformation of a Nazi official into *Nosferatu* in a dream sequence. Additionally, the fact that Croci used the same

¹⁷¹ World Jewish Congress, "Comic books on Holocaust met with skepticism by German Jews," last modified June 22, 2005, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/comic-books-on-holocaust-met-with-skepticism-by-german-jews?print=true>

¹⁷² Kyle James, "Drawing the Unimaginable," Deutsche Welle, last modified June 24, 2005, <https://www.dw.com/en/drawing-the-unimaginable/a-1626470>

¹⁷³ Gunderman, "Real Imagination?," 237.

drawing style a few years later in his graphic novel *Dracula*, additionally draws the *Auschwitz* graphic novel closer to the horror genre. In general, the discussions around *Auschwitz* point out that in current times the remembrance of the Holocaust in graphic novels mainly consists of an accumulation of Hollywood icons that also include narrative fragments of the Holocaust.¹⁷⁴

On Goodreads, in June 2024, Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* gets an average rating of 3.33 stars out of 810 ratings. Both the number of ratings, as well as the general score, already show that *Auschwitz* is significantly less popular than *Maus* among the public. However, on Goodreads, some German readers are positive about the graphic novel, for example stating 'A very intense and immersive book. Definitely not for the faint of heart' with a five-star rating accompanying this review. (posted online March 13, 2021) On the other hand, going through the lower ratings and reviews, multiple French reviews can be found that critique the graphic novel on its storyline. Overall, many of the reviews are positive about Croci's artwork and art-style, but critique the narrative, arguing it is hard to follow and consists of many inaccuracies.¹⁷⁵

The Search – Eric Heuvel (2007)

Shortly after the graphic novel's publication, Dutch news outlets started reporting on its appearance. Especially Heuvel's sensitive ways of showing the mass murder aspect of the Holocaust is often praised, for example by Annemiek Gringold from the Hollandsche Schouwburg, a theater in Amsterdam that was repurposed by the German authorities as a deportation center for Jews, which is now a museum. Gringold in a 2007 news article praises Heuvel's narrative for not showing the actual killing, but having surrounding panels make clear what is actually happening. Gringold says, that especially as it is a teaching text, this specific way of presenting the narrative will make a student ask the right questions, and that it therefore does not matter whether there are corpses in the background.¹⁷⁶

A news article from shortly before the publication, however, reveals some skepticism that was felt by the Hollandsche Schouwburg and people from the Jewish History Museum in Amsterdam, from before they started working on the strip. At first, they thought it would be

¹⁷⁴ Gunderman, "Real Imagination?," 237-238.

¹⁷⁵ Goodreads, "Ratings and Reviews for Auschwitz: Pascal Croci," Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1128740/reviews?reviewFilters={%22workId%22:%22kca://work/amzn1.gr.work.v1.zoQ9I9FMZGI4doJrB3bTA%22,%22ratingMin%22:5,%22ratingMax%22:5,%22after%22:%22OSwxNDE0NjI2NzYwMDAw%22}>

¹⁷⁶ Het Parool, "We laten zien hoe moeilijk de keuzes vaak waren," March 3, 2007. <https://advance-lexis-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4N66-JC50-0151-050K-00000-00&context=1516831>

impossible to show the Holocaust in a graphic novel format, but they also realized that every representation, such as a book or movie, would always be a pale imitation of reality. Additionally, due to the previous publication of *A Family Secret* by the same authors in 2003, the authors could prove they could work with such a sensitive topic.

Kirkus Reviews, an American book review magazine has written the following about *The Search* “Evocatively written and deftly illustrated, this graphic novel about the Holocaust might be one of the best since *Maus*. ... Clear and concise explanations depict the struggles and the horrors of the time. Heuvel holds little back from his audience, presenting his facts starkly and through Tintin-like illustrations that depict the atrocities without artifice”.¹⁷⁷ The School Library Journal, an American monthly magazine that contains reviews and other articles for school librarians, media specialists, and public librarians who work with young people, has written about *The Search* “Heuvel’s graphic novels were written in the Netherlands as a resource to teach children about the Holocaust. ... But even with, or perhaps despite, the educational focus, these two stories (respectively *A Family History* and *The Search*) are still gripping reads that offer a nuanced, highly researched look at the Holocaust, World War II, and their effects on ordinary people. ... My only slight quibble is that Heuvel relies a little too heavily on voice-over boxes at the top of each panel, but for the most part he avoids the trap of telling rather than showing”.¹⁷⁸

On Goodreads, the graphic novel receives an overall rating of 3.94 stars out of 396 ratings as of May 2024. As the graphic novel was originally published in Dutch, the Goodreads platform provides a good insight into how internationally read the graphic novel is, considering the fact that the book has editions on the platform in all different languages, as well as the fact that the review section contains multiple languages. As the School Library Review has pointed out Heuvel’s representation of ordinary people, on Goodreads some reviews also offer insights into this. One user for example writes “I appreciate that this graphic novel doesn’t shy away from discussing how many average citizens were complicit in this by being bystanders and remaining silent.” (Posted online December 30, 2022) The graphic novel has a few bad ratings, one or two stars, but unfortunately these users have not left reviews. However, looking at three

¹⁷⁷ Kirkus Reviews, “The Search,” last modified June 24, 2010, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/eric-heuvel/the-search-3/>

¹⁷⁸ School Library Journal, “Review: A Family Secret and the Search,” Review by Snow Wildsmith, last modified September 29, 2009, <https://goodcomicsforkids.slj.com/2009/09/29/review-a-family-secret-and-the-search/>

star reviews, many people critique Heuvel's timeline in the graphic novel, arguing it was a confusing read as multiple days or even weeks were skipped throughout the narratives.¹⁷⁹

But I Live – Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel (2022)

But I Live has gathered exceptionally positive reviews from its reviewers, educators, learners, and other readers alike. Additionally, it has received a Canadian Jewish Literary Award in the category Biography/Memoir in 2022.¹⁸⁰ An important review published on the site of the publisher, University of Toronto Press, from James E. Young, an American Historian, regarding the graphic novel is "Each of these 'graphic novellas' captures the distinct memories and experiences of its child witnesses in a different style and register, all expertly hand-rendered by different teams of graphic artists. Together with deeply insightful reflections by the artists on their process, by the child-survivors as adults, and by historians of each region, *But I Live* is the most powerful collection of non-fiction 'graphic novellas' of the Holocaust since Art Spiegelman's *Maus*".¹⁸¹ Michal Kichka has said 'Libicki, Seliktar, and Yelin take on the responsibility to continue the chain of transmission. Their graphic novels are an act of resistance against forgetting, denying, or not willing to face the truth. Too many survivors left us taking their untold testimony to eternity. *But I Live* transforms memory into accessible beautiful images in one of the most popular art forms".¹⁸² Considering these reviews by Young and Kichka have been published on the site of the book publisher, their praises may have been written commissioned by the publisher, thus diminishing their objectivity. However, both reviews do show some important aspects of what is generally liked about the graphic novel, as broader societal reviews will show.

In Germany, compared to Croci's *Auschwitz*, Yelin and Arbel's *But I Live* was very well received. German News outlet *Die Welt* published an article about the graphic novel shortly after its publication, stating that 'drawings once again open up a very individual, almost intimate way of illustrating traumas that have not yet found a suitable medium'. The article

¹⁷⁹ Goodreads, "Ratings & Reviews for De Zoektocht: Eric Heuvel," accessed June 18, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13377988/reviews?reviewFilters={%22workId%22:%22kca://work/amzn1.gr.work.v1.ceduGX0uqD7grbLijkCeag%22,%22ratingMin%22:3,%22ratingMax%22:3,%22after%22:%22MTAsMTM4OTEyNTM3ODAwMA%22}>

¹⁸⁰ Fransiska Louwagie, Caroline Sharples, Charlotte Schallié, Andrea Web, "Testifying to Genocide: A Creative and Critical Use of Memory and Testimony in Holocaust Education in the UK and Canada," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023): 422.

¹⁸¹ University of Toronto Press, "But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust," Reviews, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://utorontopress.com/9781487526849/but-i-live/>

¹⁸² University of Toronto Press, "But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust," Reviews, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://utorontopress.com/9781487526849/but-i-live/>

further states that due to the fragmented panel structure, comics are a great way to show the fragmentary nature of memory, as well as the inner turmoil that is experienced by many Holocaust survivors.¹⁸³ Emmie Arbel's difficulties remembering also do not go unnoticed by readers in other reviews, but most are positive about the way Barbara Yelin has been able to grasp this with her art style. Ami Sands Brodoff from *Quill and Quire*, a Canadian magazine about the book and publishing industry, for example writes "Yelin's illustrations range from expansive, richly detailed, and colourful paintings to dark and sombre sketches of grey, black, and brown used to depict the camps. The variety of size, colour, texture, and detail in her art is distinctive. Some frames are simply translucent washes of colour to reflect that which Arbel cannot remember".¹⁸⁴

The following paragraph discusses the reviews on the platform Goodreads, however, on this platform, a user is only able to rate the full edition that includes all three graphic novels, not only the one analysed here. However, many reviews do only rely on Emmie Arbel's story, as the publisher and NetGalley, a company that helps publishers promote digital review copies, have distributed e-ARC's specifically of Emmie Arbel's story.¹⁸⁵ On Goodreads, the graphic novel receives 4.36 stars out of 234 ratings, interestingly, out of which none are one-star reviews. In the reviews, the graphic novel is especially praised for intertwining Arbel's past and present situation, and her trauma, so delicately. However, the graphic novel is also critiqued, as one user states 'I feel there could have been more depth or detail to the story; it seems like only the surface is explored as of now'.¹⁸⁶ (Posted online March 11, 2022)

¹⁸³ Marc Reichwein. "Memory, speak; People who survived the Holocaust as children were often marginalized in their own families. The trauma behind their fates is shown by three impressive graphic novels". *Die Welt*, July 19, 2022, [https://advance-lexis-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65YF-RNB1-JBK9-208K-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65YF-RNB1-JBK9-208K-00000-00&context=1516831)

¹⁸⁴ *Quill and Quire*, "But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust," Review by Ami Sands Brodoff, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://quillandquire.com/review/but-i-live-three-stories-of-child-survivors-of-the-holocaust/>

¹⁸⁵ E-ARC's are Electronic Advanced Reader Copies that are distributed by the publisher before a books' official release date. This is used to promote the book and gather early feedback from readers and industry professionals.

¹⁸⁶ Goodreads, "Ratings & Reviews for But I Live: Three Stories of Child Survivors of the Holocaust: Miriam Libicki, Gilad Seliktar, Charlotte Schallié, Barbara Yelin, David Schaffer, Nico Kamp, Rolf Kamp, Emmie Arbel, accessed June 18, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/60524822/reviews?reviewFilters={%22workId%22:%22kca://work/amzn1.gr.work.v3.pXCTRzQBSkhfmHP3%22,%22after%22:%22MTU1LDE2NDk1MzI3MjEyMjE%22%22}>

Graphic Novels: An Alternative Approach to Teaching about the Holocaust

Many history educators do not view the graphic novel as a legitimate text for teaching. They are of the opinion that the graphic novel lacks substance in comparison to other literary forms, often stemming from the graphic novel's lineage to the comic book. However, there are educators that see the opportunities graphic novels have to offer within the classroom, as it offers an interesting alternative to traditional texts, narratives and mass media.¹⁸⁷ Unlike other visual sources, such as films, where the pace is dictated for the viewer, with the graphic novel the reader can dictate their pace of consumption themselves. This gives a reader the possibility to employ their own imaginative interpretations to fill in the gutters and blank spaces within the story.¹⁸⁸

E. Doyle Stevick and Zehavit Gross argue that teaching about the Holocaust in schools can contribute to a better world. They argue it can protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and even go so far as to say it would help prevent genocide. However, they recognize their position depends almost entirely on anecdotal evidence.¹⁸⁹ Their anecdotal evidence is due to the research into what Holocaust education looks like, or its efficacy, being scarce. In Jewish schools even more so.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, efforts are being made to provide better understandings of Holocaust education, and what role graphic novels may play in this. In 2017 Jeffrey Alan Ellison explored *why* the Holocaust was taught in schools. He found clear differences in the approach of Jewish and non-Jewish schools. Jewish schools argue for a positive impact teaching the Holocaust has on a student's Jewish identity and emphasize the Holocaust as a unique experience in Jewish history. Non-Jewish schools on the other hand, when teaching the Holocaust are focused on teaching about the dangers of prejudice, the effects of stereotypes, and respect for human rights. They argue that students better educated about the past, including the Holocaust, helps them become advocates against other genocides.¹⁹¹ Matt Reingold argues it is important for Jewish students to engage with Holocaust narratives from non-Jewish perspectives. It is especially important they are exposed to narratives that present nuanced

¹⁸⁷ J. Spencer Clark, "Encounters with Historical Agency: The Value of Nonfiction Graphic Novels in the Classroom," *The History Teacher* 46, no. 4 (August 2013): 490.

¹⁸⁸ Matt Reingold, "Bridging the Divide through Graphic Novels: Teaching non-Jews' Holocaust Narratives to Jewish Students," *SANE Journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education* 2, no. 4 (2019): 3-4.

¹⁸⁹ E. Doyle Stevick and Zehavit Gross, "Holocaust education in the 21st century: Curriculum, policy and practice," in *As the Witnesses Fall Silent: 21st Century Holocaust Education in Curriculum, Policy and Practice* Z. Gross and E. Doyle (Cham: Springer, 2015): 3.

¹⁹⁰ Reingold, "Bridging the Divide through Graphic Novels," 2.

¹⁹¹ Jeffrey Alan Ellison, "How they teach the Holocaust in Jewish day schools," *Cogent Education* 4, no. 1 (2017): 12.

portrayals that move beyond familiar tropes of denial and pity. Graphic novels by non-Jewish authors could show Jewish students that the Holocaust continues to impact non-Jews as well, even if it was not their personal tragedy. This in turn combats the tendency of Jewish students to become ignorant or uninterested in non-Jewish narratives but may lead to a more nuanced dialogue about how Jewish and non-Jewish narratives contribute to and engage with Holocaust commemoration.¹⁹²

With society moving chronologically farther away from the event, and with the passing of each Holocaust survivor, the Holocaust moves from being communicative memory to cultural memory. The past remains available to us only through material objects, visual and written narratives, memorial sites, and other historically significant locations. Claire Gorrara suggest the graphic novel could be able to play an important role in facilitating this transition from communicative memory to cultural memory.¹⁹³ But researchers and educators are revisiting Holocaust pedagogy by exploring the use of other material apart from graphic novels as well, such as virtual reality testimonial formats.¹⁹⁴ Many graphic novels use chronological leaps, blurring the past and the present. For a student, this could help show how the past remains active in, and can still affect, the present. Additionally, the combination of images and words makes the visualization of trauma easier along the dialogue and verbal descriptions within the graphic novel. The visuals within the novel can be used as a visual anchor, as well as a testament to the authenticity of the experience of the character.¹⁹⁵ The images in graphic novels can highlight the personalities, values, and beliefs of the (historical) character, humanizing them for the student.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, the use of graphic novels can provide students with a better understanding of the complexity of historical agency. Narratives within graphic novels often focus on difficult historical situations, in which the characters are faced with external pressures and forced to make choices. The student therefore must consider the relationship between cause and effect, as well as the economic, political, or social forces that influence or shape the individual character, increasing their engagement in historical thinking.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Reingold, "Bridging the Divide through Graphic Novels," 1.

¹⁹³ Claire Gorrara, "Not seeing Auschwitz: Memory, generation and representations of the Holocaust in twenty-first century French comics," in *Comic Books, Graphic Novels and the Holocaust: Beyond Maus*, E. Stańczyk (London: Routledge, 2019): 111.

¹⁹⁴ Fransiska Louwagie et al. "Testifying to Genocide: A Creative and Critical Use of Memory and Testimony in Holocaust Education in the UK and Canada," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023): 407.

¹⁹⁵ Reingold, "Bridging the Divide through Graphic Novels," 3-4.

¹⁹⁶ Kenneth T. Carano and Jeremiah Clabough, "Images of Struggle: Teaching Human Rights with Graphic Novels," *The Social Studies* 107, no. 1 (2016): 14.

¹⁹⁷ J. Spencer Clark, "Encounters with Historical Agency: The Value of Nonfiction Graphic Novels in the Classroom," *The History Teacher* 46, no. 4 (August 2013): 490.

In France, Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* is used as educational material, in the United States Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's *X-Men: Magneto Testament* is used in Holocaust courses. Both examples include fictional characters when young people are taught about the Holocaust, thus we may consider how much fiction we should allow in teaching history. When it comes to graphic novels, this is not easy to determine, as historical 'truth', and empirical cogency can be found in at least five different types according to Christine Gunderman. Firstly, she argues the comic is always a source itself, irrespective of its content, as it is an authentic depiction of a certain time and space. Secondly, it can be based on biographic or autobiographic memories, which is already a form of authenticity. Thirdly, a comic can draw on historical facts, and on scientific historiographies and it therefore itself becomes a historiographical product. Fourthly, the style plays a fundamental role, as this can create an aura of fiction or faction, which also depends on the comic culture of a certain society. And lastly, symbolism and stereotypes need to be considered, as the stereotypes are necessary to introduce the reader in as little time and space as possible to the situation and its characters. Based on these five different types we can consider to determine historical truth. Gunderman argues that the comic medium is never a realistic representation of history, and needs to fulfil some academic requirements to be used as teaching material.¹⁹⁸

Everything considered, graphic novels thus seem to be interesting materials to use in schools. Nevertheless, Spiegelman's *Maus* was banished by the McMinn County Board of Education in Tennessee, because of nudity and curse words.¹⁹⁹ Still, many schools worldwide continue to use *Maus* in their curriculum of history courses to teach students about the Holocaust. Eric Heuvel's *The Search* is additionally doing really well in terms of education, as the graphic novel is used in schools in all countries of which translations are available, which is Dutch, English, German, Hungarian, and Polish.

¹⁹⁸ Gunderman, "Real Imagination?," 241.

¹⁹⁹ Jenny Gross, "School Board in Tennessee Bans Teaching of Holocaust Graphic Novel 'Maus'", The New York Times, January 27, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/27/us/maus-banned-holocaust-tennessee.html>

Conclusion

In sum, graphic novels about the Holocaust have seen many developments, and many constants alike, in the past four decades. All four graphic novels, for example, show a dedication to historical accuracy, although presented differently in each case. In Spiegelman's *Maus*, this is done through the representation of Vladek's personal memories, and the inclusion of external research by Spiegelman in the form of detailed maps and schematics, as well as the use of real photographs throughout the narrative. In Croci's *Auschwitz* this is achieved through the redrawing of historical photographs, and the interview in the back of the graphic novel in which Croci shows the narrative is based on interviews with, and testimonies of, survivors. In *The Search*, Heuvel achieves this through the redrawing of historical photographs as well, but the information for this graphic novel was additionally researched by the Anne Frank House, to create accurate depictions. For Yelin and Arbel's *But I Live*, accurate representations are created through a combination of these things. Yelin has used redrawings of photographs, external research, archival materials, and Arbel's personal memories to create the graphic novel.

In terms of the recurring themes, these show that even if these graphic novels all include the same themes in their narrative, they all deal with these differently. Where Spiegelman's representation of Germans and the perpetrators as cats while the Jews are mice, for example, highlights Nazi ideology's dehumanization, Heuvel's *The Search* explicitly tries to introduce different levels of complicity with the Nazi regime and German occupiers throughout the graphic novel. Although all four graphic novels at a certain point show signs of the portrayal of survivors' guilt, this is most prominent in the graphic novels that are based on personal memories of survivors, such as *Maus* and *But I Live*.

Analyzing these graphic novels in their sociological context show the evolving roles these narratives have played in shaping Western cultural memory. Overtime, Holocaust graphic novels have become crucial in the transition from communicative memory, that relies on direct survivor testimony, to a cultural memory, accessible to future generations through artistic representation. Additionally, the importance of graphic novels in education reflect a broader societal shift towards the recognition of diverse forms of historical narrative as useful teaching materials. In this analysis, we see this in both *The Search* and *But I Live*, as these two are the most recent publications and created with the idea of the graphic novels functioning as a teaching text for Holocaust education. For both graphic novels additional teaching materials were developed, and many history educators find they are a great success. Additionally, even

graphic novels not specifically created for education, or at least with keeping education in mind, are still sometimes used in education, as is the case for both *Maus* and *Auschwitz*.

Analysing reviews and criticisms of these graphic novels reveals a shift in societal attitudes towards the graphic novel as a medium for topics such as the Holocaust. Early reviews of *Maus* show an initial shock of using the graphic novel format to depict the Holocaust, while later critiques mainly focus on the artistic and narrative complexities, showing the initial shock has left, and other parts of the narrative started becoming the focus points. The narratives and critiques of *Auschwitz* show how graphic novels can receive mixed reactions in different countries, possible due to their relation to the Holocaust, as the graphic novel was highly celebrated in France for its realistic representation, while criticized in Germany due to fear for the graphic novel becoming a collector's item for Neo Nazis, especially due to its realistic representation. On the other hand, the last two graphic novels, Heuvel's *The Search* and Yelin and Arbel's *But I Live* have been praised for their sensitive and innovative approaches to representing and illustrating Holocaust narratives.

With the graphic novels that have been chosen for this study, it may seem possible to determine at least the time span from 2000 to 2010, or maybe even 2020 if you will, as a period in which more fictional graphic novels about the Holocaust appeared, because both Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* and Eric Heuvel's *The Search* were published in this timeframe. Both fictional stories precisely fall in between the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Barbara Yelin and Emmie Arbel's *But I Live*, two graphic novels both based on survivors' memories. However, more research is needed to determine whether this is period can be classified as one in which more fictional than non-fictional graphic novels have been published, and if so, what the reason of this may be. Further research into the role of fiction in history education could additionally analyze how fictional elements influences a person's understanding of the historical event, and thus draw further conclusions on the ethical implications of using fictionalized narratives in history teaching. Additionally, more research may be useful for more elaborate cross-cultural analyses. This thesis focuses specifically on graphic novels that are published in the Western world, Europe and the North American continent, but cross-cultural analysis may reveal interesting insights into how different cultures and educational systems incorporate graphic novels, especially for countries with different historical relationships to the Holocaust.

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