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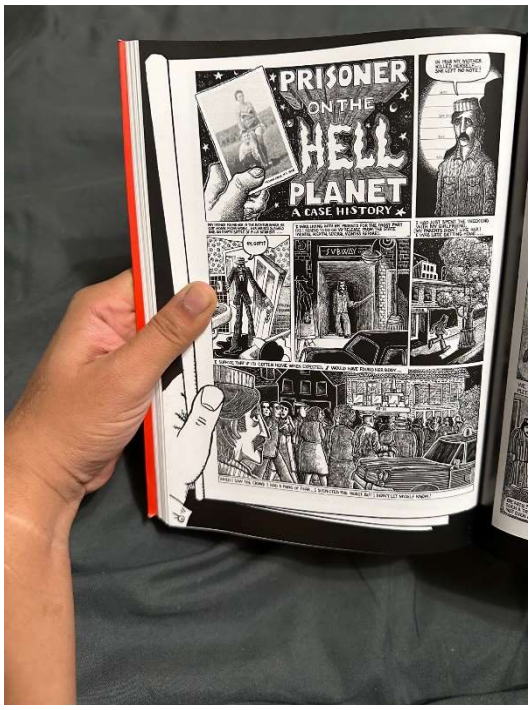
Handling the Weight: Holding History in Our Hands with Maus

In *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I: My Father Bleeds History* (1986), Art Spiegelman interweaves multiple layers of narrative and imagery to simultaneously bridge and distance readers from the Holocaust's gruesome traumas. A poignant example occurs on pages 100-103, where Spiegelman incorporates a 'comic within a comic' titled *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*. Originally published in 1973, this comic reveals Spiegelman's torment and confusion surrounding his mother's suicide. Its inclusion in *Maus* serves as a break in the narrative, providing relief from one story by throwing the reader into another.

Prisoner is stylistically very different from the rest of *Maus*. Spiegelman demonstrates his artistic prowess by expertly imitating German Expressionist woodcuts (Ray), with their stark, angular lines and dramatic contrasts evoking a dire moment in his life. These dark, etched images depict the psychological burden of survivor's guilt and the inherited trauma of the second generation. The narrative frame shows Spiegelman flowing through the moments of his mother's death. The meta-comic serves as a self-examination of Spiegelman navigating trauma inflicted not just by his mother but by the Holocaust on his family as a whole.

The depiction of a hand holding a photograph of Spiegelman's mother on the first page of *Prisoner* is then mirrored by the drawing of Art's hand holding his own work in *Maus*. This image sequence represents artistic creation as both a distancing mechanism and catharsis.

Readers, in turn, hold the physical comic book, adding another layer to this visual stacking. This literal and figurative holding becomes a metaphor for how narratives of trauma are held, shared, and processed across generations. Each layer adds a degree of separation while strengthening the verisimilitude of the text. By holding the comic, readers are invited not just to view but to physically and emotionally handle the weight of the narratives contained within.



This scene reminds us of the difficulty of communication within families affected by trauma. Spiegelman's inclusion of *Prisoner* within *Maus* allows him to voice emotions that may be unspoken or suppressed within his family. This act of storytelling becomes a means to indirectly confront painful truths, making them more understandable for himself, his family, and his readers.

The use of hands—both depicted and actual—represents the instruments through which we interact with the world. They are both active and passive modes of storytelling and memory. In *Maus*, they represent the artistic process of drawing while also carrying the burden of history, the pain and trauma associated with the Holocaust and its after-effects.

By stacking these layers of hands, Spiegelman not only distances us from the narrative but also bridges that distance by making us, the readers, an integral part of the storytelling process. We are not passive observers but active holders of history, participants in a complex dialogue between father and son about memory, trauma, and the power of art to reduce these burdens. Through this intricate play of distance and proximity, *Maus* challenges us to consider our positions in relation to the histories we inherit and the stories we hold in our hands.

Works Cited

Ray, Michael. "Art Spiegelman American Author and Illustrator," *Britannica Online.* https://www.britannica.com/biography/Art-Spiegelman#ref1083439 accessed 18 September, 2024.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I: My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon Books, 1986, pp 100 – 103.