

Transmitting Holocaust Memory through
Testimonial and Second-Generation
Literature:
From the Analysis of *If This Is a Man* and
MAUS

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Background

Eighty years have passed since the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

→ **Survivors' testimonies are gradually being lost.**

- The Holocaust can never be fully understood by those who did not experience it.
- Many Survivors are reluctant to tell their experiences.

⇔

Survivors and second-generation authors have recorded Holocaust memories in literary works.

Subject
Purpose
Methods

<Subject>

To explore how survivors and second-generation authors have transformed Holocaust memory into literary works

<Purpose>

To clarify the significance of transmitting Holocaust memory through literature

<Methods>

- Analyzing testimonial literature (*Primo Levi, If This Is a Man*)
- Analyzing second-generation literature (*Art Spiegelman, MAUS*)
- Examining ethical issues and a theoretical framework related to the transmission of Holocaust memory

Chapter 1: Analyzing Testimonial Literature

If This Is a Man : Primo Levi recorded his experiences in the concentration camp based on his memories after liberation.

<Content>

- Repeatedly prompt readers to “think about it”

→Levi’s intention: **To awaken in readers an awareness that such threats could occur in their own daily lives**

- Quoting lines from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* to his companion

→**demonstrate his proof of existence: “I am human.”**

<Literary form>

Memoir

- Narratives including current concerns
- Ambiguity of memories →emphasizing incomprehensibility and fear of the Holocaust

<Author's thoughts>

- **Core of the narrative:** "Since the Holocaust happened once, it could happen again."
→A sense of responsibility to prevent atrocities from occurring again
- **Memories of the past = "uncertain source"**
→Mental conflict between the sense of responsibility and the uncertainty of memories

**⇒An attempt to transmit Holocaust memory
in order to prevent humanity from repeating the same mistakes**

Chapter 2: Analyzing Second- Generation Literature

MAUS : Art Spiegelman documents the experiences of his father, a survivor of the concentration camp.

<Content>

- The narrative shifts back and forth between the “present” and the “past.”

→ **The process by which memory is transmitted through narration**

- The differences in values between father and son are deliberately depicted.

→ **An attempt to understand his father’s incomprehensible past**

<Literary form>

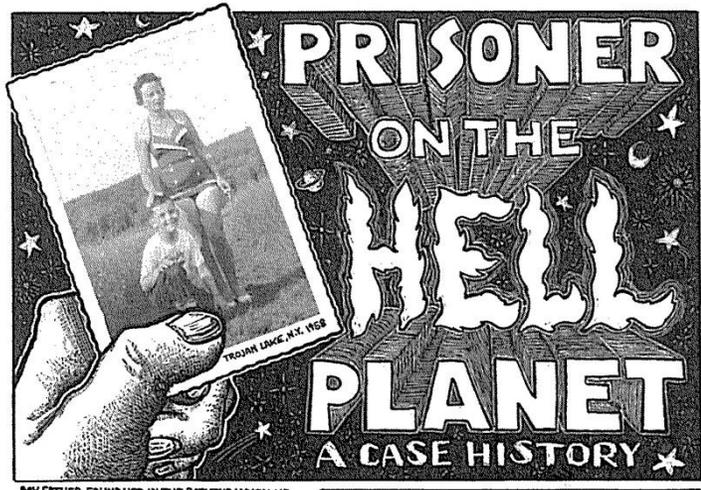
Graphic Novel : Visually portraying the complexity and the characters' psychological conflict



The scene in which Vladek conceals his Jewish identity and behaves as a Pole

→ Jew = mouse, Pole = pig

→ Vladek is depicted as a mouse wearing the mask of a pig. (the figure on the left)



Insertion of Pictures

• The left figure : A photograph of the author and his mother, taken in 1958

→ Emphasizing that *MAUS* is a story grounded in an actual family

⇒ **Challenging the limits of representation**
Possibility of transmitting memory

<Author's thoughts>

- A story not directly about the Holocaust

→ **The author aims to understand his father's life.**

- "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."

- Samuel Beckett

→ **Memories that might fade into silence can only be transmitted through words.**

- **A sense of guilt and powerlessness**

→ The author considers that he have had an easier life than his parents.

→ The attempt to depict the truth faithfully makes detailed portrayal difficult.

⇒ **The second generation's challenge**

Chapter 3: Limit and Possibility of Passing Down Holocaust Memory

➤ **Identification**

The potential for active involvement in the transmission of memory

➤ **Postmemory**

Second-generation literature enables the social transmission of memory

⇔ limitations such as the risk for distorted interpretations of memory

➤ **Transmitting memory thorough literature**

- Vulnerability as testimony
- Reading as an ethical act, in which readers attempt to respond responsibly to the narrative

Conclusion

- Survivors and the second generation attempt to transmit the memory of the Holocaust to future generations through literary works, while confronting the inherent limits of expression.
- Readers are expected to engage responsibly with the texts.

⇒ Holocaust literature plays a crucial role in preventing atrocities from recurring and to prevent individuals from becoming perpetrators or bystanders.