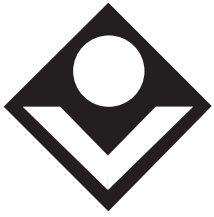
LITERATURE AND BELIEF

Guest Edited by Victoria Aarons



Literature and Belief
Volume 40.2 & 41.1

Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

LITERATURE AND BELIEF
A semiannual publication of the Center for the Study
of Christian Values in Literature
College of Humanities, Brigham Young University

Daniel K. Muhlestein, Director Edward Cutler, Associate Director

EDITORS
Daniel K. Muhlestein, Editor
Edward Cutler, Associate Editor
Jane D. Brady, Production Editor
Lance E. Larsen, Poetry Editor

EDITORIAL BOARD
Thayle Anderson, Murray State University
Marilyn Arnold, Brigham Young University (emerita)
Alan Berger, Florida Atlantic University
John F. Desmond, Whitman College
James Dougherty, University of Notre Dame
Bruce L. Edwards, Bowling Green State University
J. Karl Franson, University of Maine at Farmington (emeritus)
Thomas E. (Ted) Lyon, Brigham Young University

The opinions expressed by contributors to LITERATURE AND BELIEF are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Brigham Young University, or the editors. LITERATURE AND BELIEF considers scholarly, interpretive articles that focus on moral/religious literary issues, book reviews, interviews, and also poetry. Manuscripts should conform to *The MLA Style Manual*. LITERATURE AND BELIEF is indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography*, *Abstracts of English Studies*, *American Humanities Index* (*AHI*), and *Literary Criticism Register*. This journal is a member of CELJ, the Council of Learned Journals.

The images in "Analogies Drawn Online: Bidirectional Holocaust Memory in Trump-Era Web Comics" are reproduced with the kind permission of Dorian Alexander, Leela Corman, Eli Valley, Lisa Rosalie Eisenberg, and Matt Lubchansky. The images in "Comics, Visibility, and Exposure in Roz Chast's *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant*" are reproduced with the kind permission of the Bloomsbury Group Agency. The images in "How Jewish is a 'Jewish' Comic?" are reproduced with the kind permission of Liam Sharp. All other copyright permissions are indicated within the individual essays. All rights reserved.

Subscription cost is $10.00; $14.00 outside the USA. Address all correspondence, submissions, and subscription inquiries to *Literature and Belief*,
3184 JFSB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602 (801) 422–3073
http://christianvalues.byu.edu/literature-and-belief/

Vol. 40.2 & 41.1 2020 & 2021
Copyright © 2021 Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature,
Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. ISBN 0-939555-33-6

Contents

Guest Editor's Preface v

ESSAYS

In the Land of the Beech Trees vi
Emily Steinberg

How Jewish is a "Jewish" Comic? 19
Ken Koltun-Fromm

Analogies Drawn Online: Bidirectional Holocaust Memory in Trump-Era Web Comics 43
Golan Moskowitz

Comics, Visibility, and Exposure in Roz Chast's *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant* 83
Davida Pines

The Germanness and Jewishness of *Belonging* 105
Kevin Haworth

"We Carry that History": an Interview with Nora Krug 127
Tahneer Oksman

Jewish Identity amid Wars and Migration: Transnational and Transgenerational Itineraries in Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter: A Graphic Revolution* 147
Dana Mihăilescu

A Sharpened Pencil: The Evolving Political Commentary in Asaf Hanuka's "The Realist" 173
Matt Reingold

Women Artists Under the Nazi Regime 205
Helen Blejerman

BOOK REVIEW

The Book of Sarah 216
Zanne Domoney-Lyttle

Contributors 220

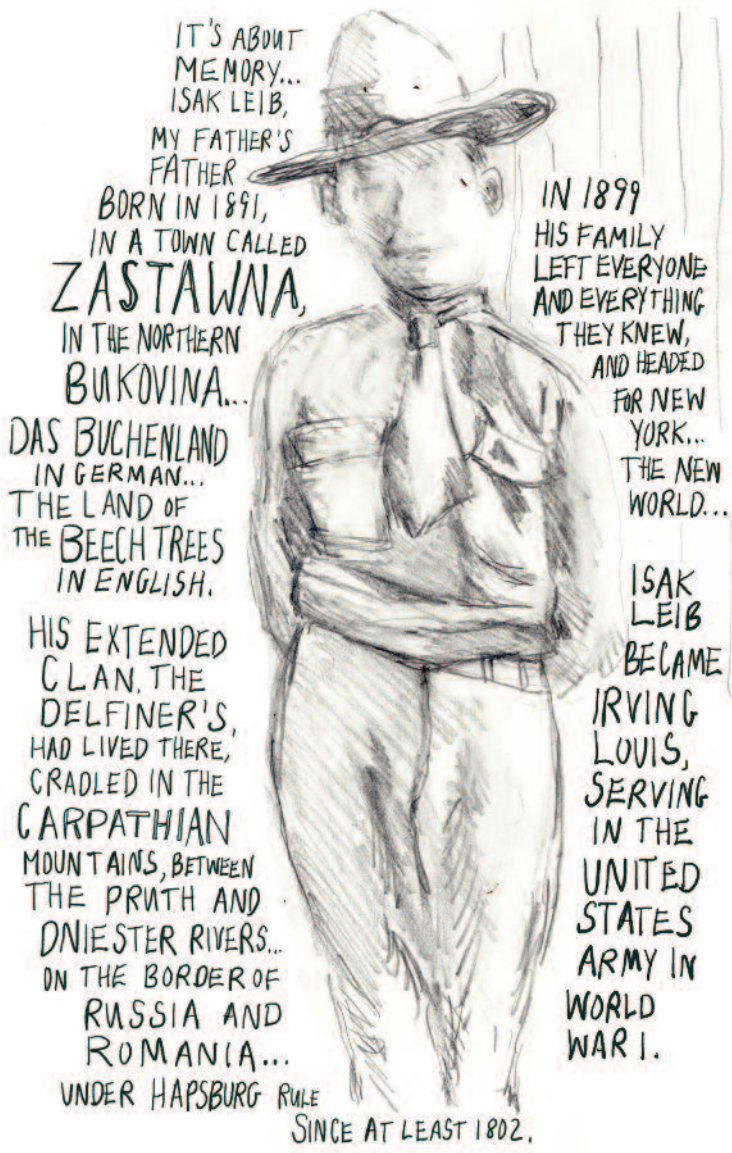
Guest Editor's Preface

The graphic novel is an elastic genre. The hybridity of the form—the juxtaposition of text and image and temporal and spatial intersections—opens itself up to a layering and merging of generic conventions: fiction, life writing, memoir, autobiography, biography, letters, testimonial writing, historical narratives. Thus, the medium lends itself to complex narration, perspectives, points of view, and modes of perception. Its polyphonic and multi-layered structures perform complex visual-verbal expressions of identity, memory, and the implied tensions produced by absence and presence in the overlapping of past, present, and future. The genre of comics narratives distills an immediacy and urgency that situate both reader and narrator/graphic artist in a dialogic and participatory experience of collective and personal witnessing.

"What is Jewish about Jewish comics and graphic novels?" Ken Koltun-Fromm asks in the opening essay for this collection. The pieces that follow, both the essays and the graphic narratives, respond to this question in provocative and multi-faceted ways. The contributions from scholars and graphic artists in this special issue reflect the range and fluidity of the genre as it responds to issues of memory, identity, and historical and individual consciousness.

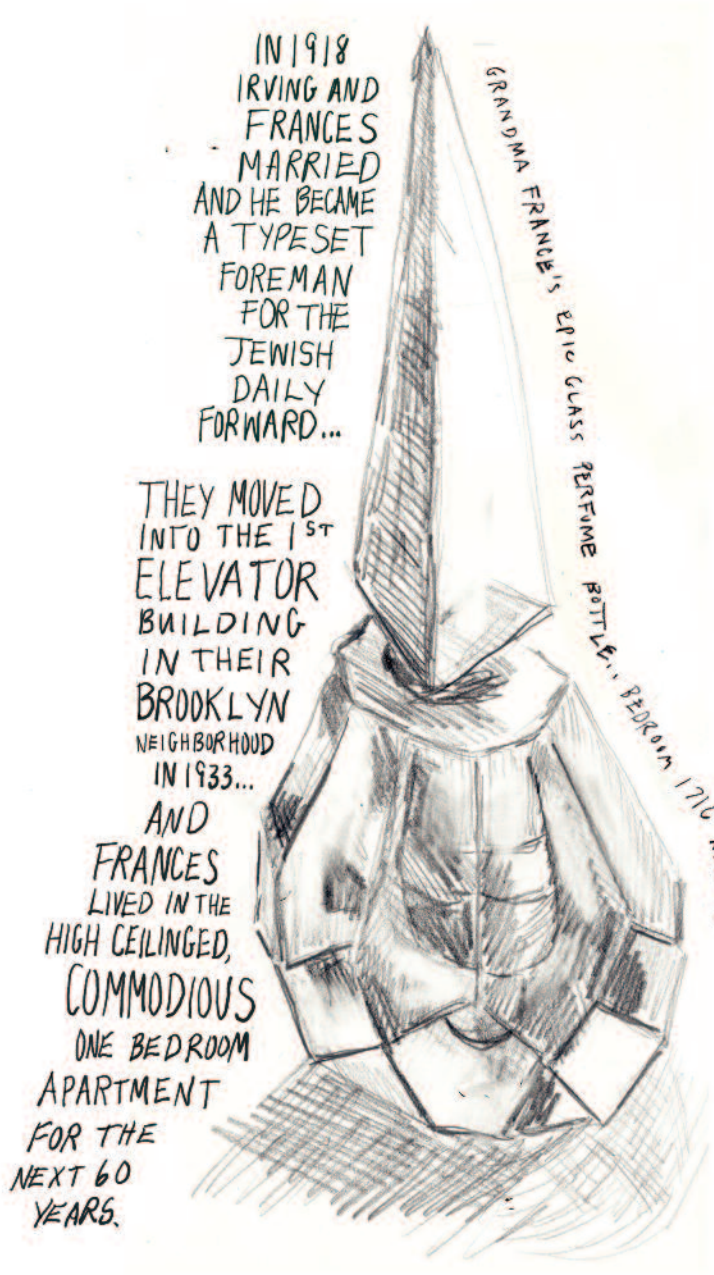
—Victoria Aarons
Guest Editor
Trinity University

IN THE LAND OF THE BEECH TREES


IT'S ABOUT MEMORY... ISAK LEIB, MY FATHER'S FATHER BORN IN 1891, IN A TOWN CALLED ZASTAWNA, IN THE NORTHERN BUKOVINA... DAS BUCHENLAND IN GERMAN... THE LAND OF THE BEECH TREES IN ENGLISH.
HIS EXTENDED CLAN, THE DELFINER'S, HAD LIVED THERE, CRADLED IN THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS, BETWEEN THE PRUTH AND DNIESTER RIVERS... ON THE BORDER OF RUSSIA AND ROMANIA... UNDER HAPSBURG RULE SINCE AT LEAST 1802.
IN 1899 HIS FAMILY LEFT EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING THEY KNEW, AND HEADED FOR NEW YORK... THE NEW WORLD...
ISAK LEIB BECAME IRVING LOUIS, SERVING IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR I.

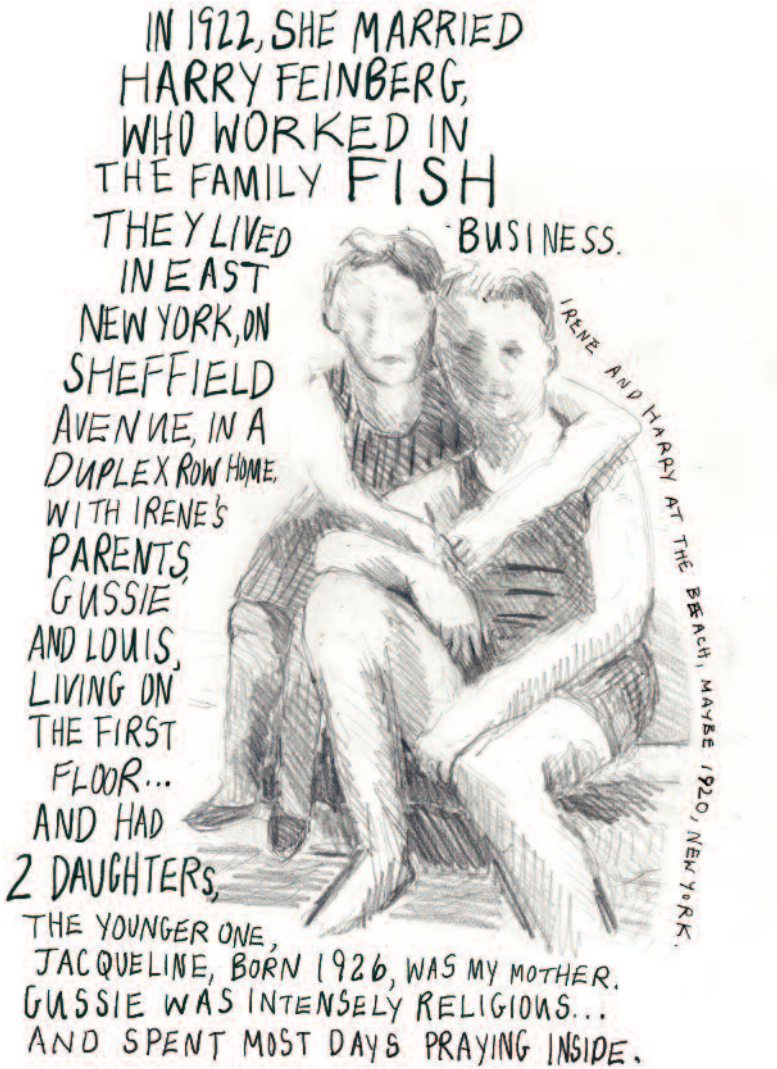
IT'S ABOUT FAMILY LORE... FRANCES FLAX MY FATHER'S MOTHER WAS WAS BORN IN 1895, IN VILNA LITHUANIA... THE JERUSALEM OF EUROPE... UNDER TSAR NICHOLAS II OF RUSSIA.
HER FATHER WAS A HANDSOME HEBREW SCHOLAR... VERY RELIGIOUS, WHO DIDN'T WORK MUCH.
HER MOTHER SOMETIMES SUPPORTED HER 5 GIRLS AND 2 BOYS BY SELLING VODKA TO THE GOYIM.
SHE REMEMBERS LIVING IN CONSTANT FEAR OF ANTI-SEMETIC VIOLENCE.
GRANDMA FRANCES AT MY PARENT'S WEDDING, BROOKLYN, 1948

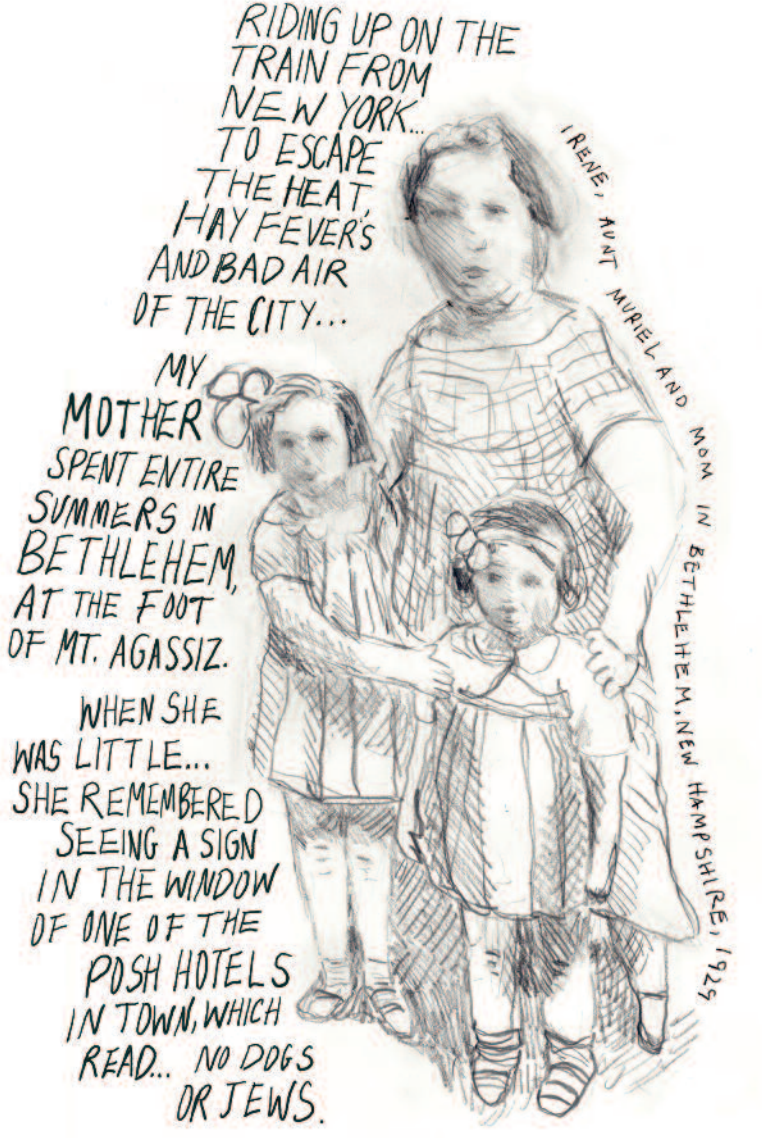
ON THE BOAT TO PHILADELPHIA IN 1905... BY WAY OF HULL ENGLAND, FRANCES, AGE 10, SMALL, BLONDE, BLUE-EYED, STRONG WILLED AND INTREPID, STOLE LEFTOVERS FROM FIRST CLASS TABLES FOR HER FAMILY IN STEERAGE.
GRANDMA FRANCES, SOMETIME IN THE 30'S OR 40'S, BROOKLYN.


IN 1918
IRVING AND
FRANCES
MARRIED
AND HE BECAME
A TYPESET
FOREMAN
FOR THE
JEWISH
DAILY
FORWARD...
THEY MOVED
INTO THE 1ST
ELEVATOR
BUILDING
IN THEIR
BROOKLYN
NEIGHBORHOOD
IN 1933...
AND
FRANCES
LIVED IN THE
HIGH CEILINGED,
COMMODIOUS
ONE BEDROOM
APARTMENT
FOR THE
NEXT 60
YEARS.
GRANDMA FRANCE'S EPIC GLASS PERFUME BOTTLE... BEDROOM 1716 AVE T.

THE TRADITIONAL OBSERVANT, JEWISH WAY OF LIFE IN EUROPE OFTEN ABRUPTLY SHIFTED IN NEW YORK... SHED CASUALLY BY THE YOUNGER GENERATION... LIKE A PIECE OF OLD SKIN... UNWANTED... UNNEEDED...
IRVING WAS AN ARDENT SOCIALIST AND ZIONIST. HE HAD NO TIME, INTEREST OR USE FOR THE OLD WAYS... RELIGIOUS RITUAL... HE WAS A MODERN MAN.

GRANDMA IRENE AT MY PARENT'S WEDDING
BROOKLYN, 1948
IRENE GOLDSTEIN, MY MOTHER'S MOTHER WAS BORN IN 1900, IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK... HER AMERICAN BIRTH A SOURCE OF GREAT PRIDE.
HER FATHER LOUIS, LEFT THE OLD COUNTRY AT NINETEEN, ON HIS OWN... LANDED IN ENGLAND... AND LEARNED TO BE A TAILOR ... ARRIVING IN NEW YORK DURING THE BLIZZARD OF 1888.
HE OWNED A DRESS SHOP ON DIVISION STREET ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF MANHATTEN...
...AND WAS SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH TO BUILD THE FAMILY A SUMMER HOME IN BETHLEHEM NEW HAMPSHIRE.

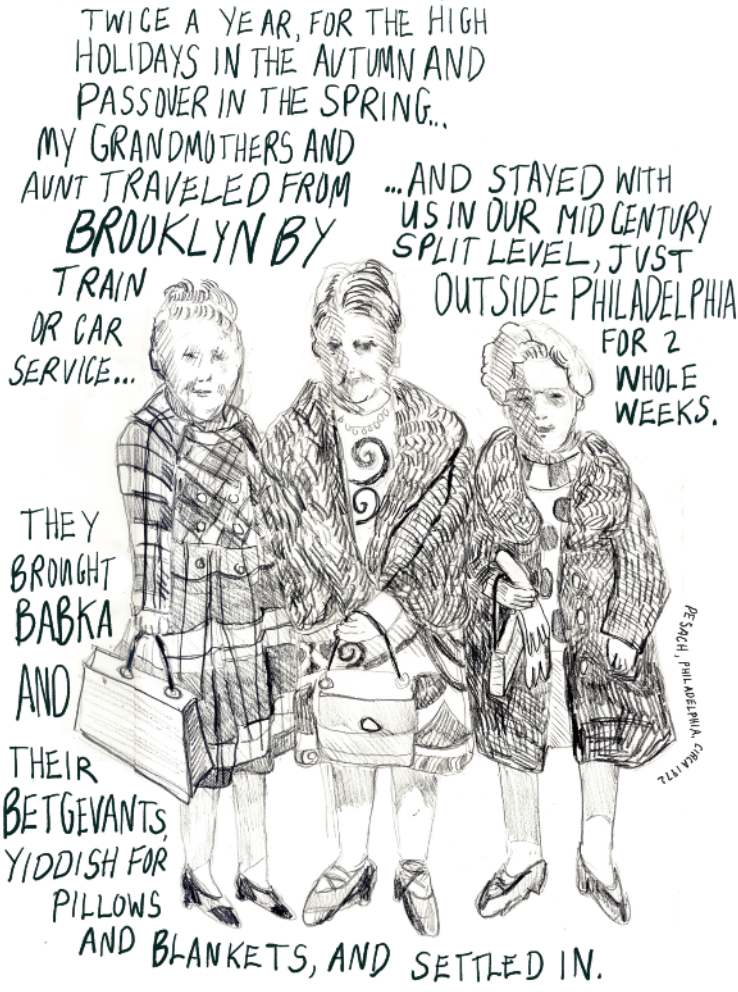

IN 1922, SHE MARRIED HARRY FEINBERG, WHO WORKED IN THE FAMILY FISH BUSINESS.
THEY LIVED IN EAST NEW YORK, ON SHEFFIELD AVENUE, IN A DUPLEX ROW HOME, WITH IRENE'S PARENTS, GUSSIE AND LOUIS, LIVING ON THE FIRST FLOOR... AND HAD 2 DAUGHTERS,
IRENE AND HARRY AT THE BEACH, MAYBE 1920, NEW YORK.
THE YOUNGER ONE, JACQUELINE, BORN 1926, WAS MY MOTHER.
GUSSIE WAS INTENSELY RELIGIOUS... AND SPENT MOST DAYS PRAYING INSIDE.


RIDING UP ON THE TRAIN FROM NEW YORK... TO ESCAPE THE HEAT, HAY FEVER'S AND BAD AIR OF THE CITY...
MY MOTHER SPENT ENTIRE SUMMERS IN BETHLEHEM, AT THE FOOT OF MT. AGASSIZ.
WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE... SHE REMEMBERED SEEING A SIGN IN THE WINDOW OF ONE OF THE POSH HOTELS IN TOWN, WHICH READ... NO DOGS OR JEWS.
IRENE, AUNT MURIEL AND MOM IN BETHLEHEM, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1929

WHEN I WAS
A LITTLE GIRL...
THE HOLOCAUST
WAS STILL
INCREDIBLY
RECENT...
HAPPENING
LESS THAN
30 YEARS
BEFORE.
THE RED
DELFINER
BOOK OF NAMES
TRACES THE
FAMILY LINE IN
BUKOVINA
FROM 1802...
STARKLY
RECORDING
A FAMILY
CUT IN
HALF
BY THE
DISASTROUS EVENTS
OF THE 1930'S AND 40'S IN
EUROPE.

AS YOU PAGE THROUGH THE BOOK...
ENTIRE FAMILIES DISAPPEAR...
...ENDING IN 1942 IN TRANSINISTRIA,
AN AREA BEYOND THE BUG RIVER...
WHERE THE ROMANIAN FACISTS...
INSPIRED BY THE GERMAN NAZIS...
BANISHED THE JEWS OF BUKOVINA...
TO DIE... WITHOUT FOOD, WATER OR SHELTER.
THIS HAPPENED TO LUDWIG DELFINER, BORN IN ZASTAWNA, IN 1901.
LUDWIG, GRANDPA IRVING'S FIRST COUSIN... SON OF HIS MOTHER'S BABY BROTHER.
HIS WIFE AND 10 YEAR OLD DAUGHTER ERIKA WERE MURDERED THERE.
LUDWIG DELFINER, 1941

BUT ALL OF THIS WAS NOT TALKED ABOUT MUCH...
MY FATHER FOUND HIS WAY BACK TO TRADITION IN 1957, AFTER HIS FATHER DIED...
WE KEPT A KOSHER HOME...
HAD TWO SETS OF DISHES...
AND EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT WE HAD SHABBOS DINNER... IT WAS ALWAYS MORE CULTURALLY GROUNDED THAN RELIGIOUS.


TWICE A YEAR, FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS IN THE AUTUMN AND PASSOVER IN THE SPRING..
MY GRANDMOTHERS AND AUNT TRAVELED FROM BROOKLYN BY TRAIN OR CAR SERVICE...
...AND STAYED WITH US IN OUR MID CENTURY SPLIT LEVEL, JUST OUTSIDE PHILADELPHIA FOR 2 WHOLE WEEKS.
THEY BROUGHT BABKA AND THEIR BETGEVANTS, YIDDISH FOR PILLOWS AND BLANKETS, AND SETTLED IN.
RESEARCH, PHILADELPHIA, CIRCA 1972

AT PASSOVER, WE CHANGED
THE DISHES AND BROUGHT UP THE 1930's
DEPRESSION GLASS AND THE 1950's
STANGLWARE POTTERY WITH IT'S FLORAL
PATTERNS AND EARTHEN COLORS
FROM THE DOWNSTAIRS CLOSET.

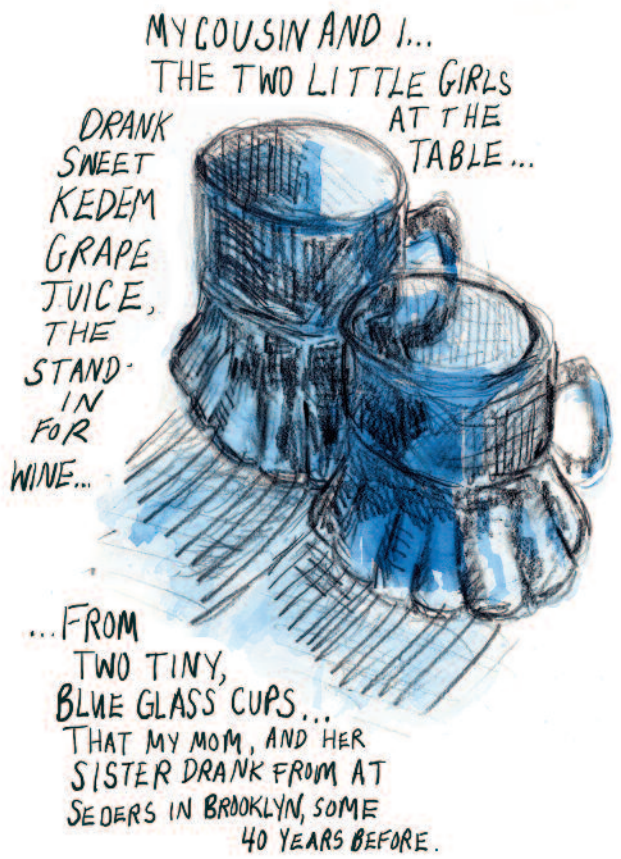
GRANDMA
IRENE
MADE
KNAIDELS
IN A HUGH
SHISLE,
LADELING
THEM OUT
FOR US
TO TASTE,
BEFORE
THE
SEDER...

OIL PAINTING OF "GOLDEN HARVEST" STANGL POTTERY TEACUP AND SAUCER. 2004

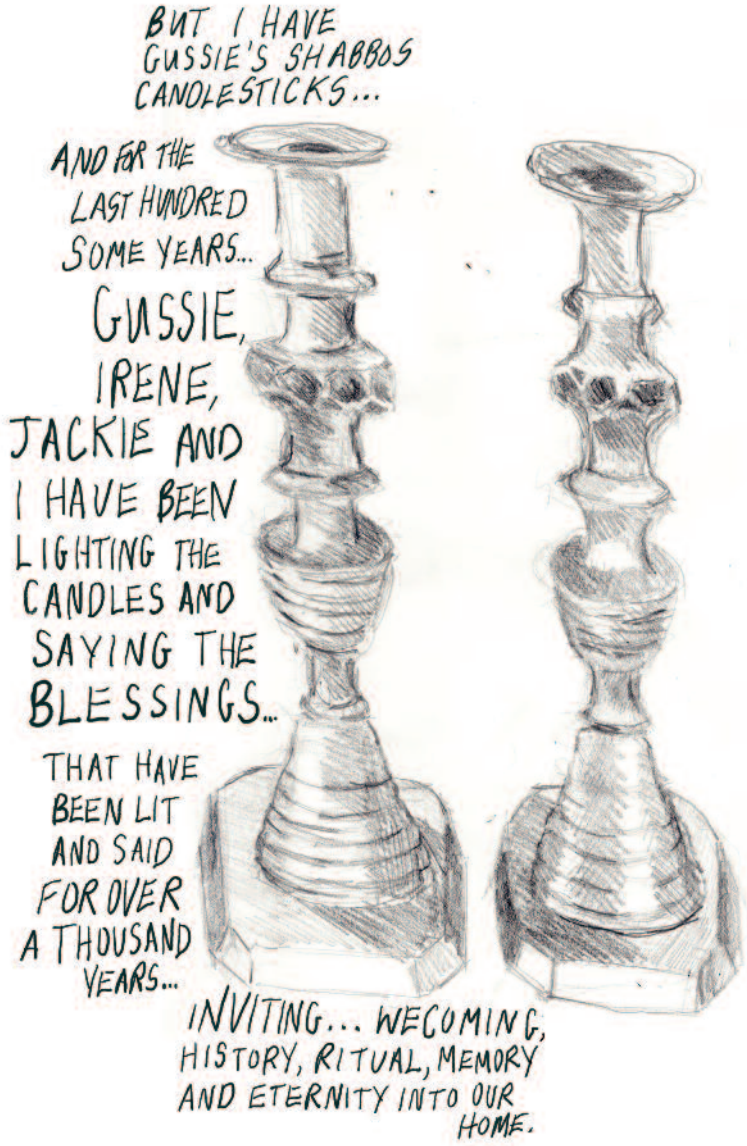
WHILE
CARRYING ON
A RUNNING DISCOURSE
WITH GRANDMA FRANCES
ON WHO MADE WHAT BETTER.

THE SEDERS OF MY CHILDHOOD, LARGE, BOISTEROUS AFFAIRS... THE YEARLY RETELLING OF THE ANCIENT STORY OF ISRAEL'S REDEMPTION FROM SLAVERY IN THE LAND OF EGYPT...
WERE A BRIDGE FROM THE OLD COUNTRY INTO THE SPARKLING NEW ATOMIC AGE OF THE 1960'S AND 70'S.
SEDER, PHILADELPHIA, CIRCA 1964

SOME TRADITIONS LINGERED... LIKE BOWLS of EGG WATER... LITERALLY, HARD BOILED EGGS, CUT UP IN WATER, WITH A LITTLE SALT TO SYMBOLIZE THE TEARS of ENSLAVEMENT. NOBODY REALLY LIKED IT... AND IT DIDN'T SURVIVE FOR VERY LONG.


MY COUSIN AND I...
THE TWO LITTLE GIRLS
AT THE TABLE...
DRANK SWEET KEDEM GRAPE JUICE, THE STAND-IN FOR WINE...
...FROM TWO TINY, BLUE GLASS CUPS...
THAT MY MOM, AND HER SISTER DRANK FROM AT SEDERS IN BROOKLYN, SOME 40 YEARS BEFORE.

BEING JEWISH FOR ME WAS AND IS ABOUT ALL OF THIS...
... ABOUT PLACE AND HISTORY...
ABOUT TIME SPACE AND MEMORY...
ABOUT AN ANCIENT TRIBE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST...
ABOUT THE OLD COUNTRY AND THE NEW COUNTRY...
ABOUT FAMILY AND STORIES AND THE OBJECTS LEFT BEHIND...
ABOUT PLAYING WITH MY DAD'S TALLIT FRINGES IN SERVICES TO KEEP FROM GETTING BORED...
AND ABOUT REALIZING, AT AN EARLY AGE, THAT IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH GOD.
GRAMPA HARRY'S LUNCHPAIL


BUT I HAVE GUSSIE'S SHABBOS CANDLESTICKS...
AND FOR THE LAST HUNDRED SOME YEARS... GUSSIE, IRENE, JACKIE AND I HAVE BEEN LIGHTING THE CANDLES AND SAYING THE BLESSINGS...
THAT HAVE BEEN LIT AND SAID FOR OVER A THOUSAND YEARS...
INVITING... WECOMING, HISTORY, RITUAL, MEMORY AND ETERNITY INTO OUR HOME.

How Jewish is a "Jewish" Comic?

Ken Koltun-Fromm
Haverford College

The title of this essay plays off of Kirin Narayan's influential essay, "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" and I do so because claims to authenticity work much the same in supposedly "Jewish" comics as they do in ethnographic studies. Narayan exposes how anthropologists often assert insider status, or authentic sources, by appealing to problematic notions of the native, both as researcher and as informant. That sense of "native status" is rooted in thorny questions about the insider, about authenticity, and about stable, uniform identities. Too many of us, Narayan suggests, carry turbulent and unsettling "multiple identities" that defy and frustrate claims to authentic selfhood and the native informant (671–86ff).

So how do we locate or distinguish "Jewish" from non-Jewish comics, the native from the pretender? What criteria do we deploy, and in what sense do these evaluatory schemes appeal to some notion of nativity and authenticity? Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman offer one cogent model for approaching this dilemma. In their *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches* (2010), Baskind and Omer-Sherman recognize the descriptive quandary, but still try to offer a helpful guide: "Although our governing framework may prove too conservative for some, for the sake of coherence and

focus we consider the Jewish graphic novel to be an illustrated narrative produced by a Jew that addresses a Jewish subject or some aspect of the Jewish experience" (xvi). So a "Jewish" comic is one authored (does this mean written, illustrated, colored?) by a Jew about some recognizable Jewish subject or experience. Yet even Baskind and Omer-Sherman know that Jews rarely agree on these matters, much less the scholars who study them. Who, exactly, counts as a Jew, and what kind or amount of "production" actually matters? These questions only multiply when we try to pin down some notion of a Jewish subject or experience. Again, how "Jewish" does all this have to be in order for readers, or scholars, or even producers, to accept a comic as Jewish?

I want to argue that instead of answering that question we should recognize it as a perpetual anxiety facing Jewish identity in America, and a particular tension exposed by graphic narratives. The question is an anxious one, and to see this I want to take an approach similar to Laura Leibman's analysis of "Jewish" objects in her magisterial *The Art of the Jewish Family* (2020). Objects, argues Leibman, are "Jewish enough" according to "how they were used rather than in the genres themselves" (209). I take Baskind and Omer-Sherman's analysis to be a genre approach: a Jewish comic is Jewish when it fits within a type and/or class of subjects. But to focus on use, as Leibman does, is to consider how objects are handled, deployed, read, cultivated. In this essay, I want to focus on use in a very particular and somewhat rhetorical mode: how do comics present or enact themselves as "Jewish" comics? What rhetorical and pictorial strategies do they employ to be read as "Jewish"? In other words, how do the comics as graphic narratives, as objects, articulate themselves as Jewish comics?

I will look at three comics that do this kind of "Jewish" work in very different ways: Douglas Rushkoff and Liam Sharp's *Testament: Akedah* (2006), A. David Lewis and Marvin Perry Mann's *The Lone and Level Sands* (2005), and Amy Kurzweil's *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir* (2016). In *Testament: Akedah*, the very title stakes a claim to an insider, "Jewish" language by appealing to the traditional Hebrew term for the binding of Isaac story in The Book of Genesis. But even more, Jewish here means recognizing the foundational

"building blocks" of that story as a universal paradigm, and taking hold of the Jewish revolutionary desire to overthrow those blocks for new, more liberating narratives. *The Lone and Level Sands* is a story about the Jewish Exodus, but this time told from the Egyptian point of view. In my reading, this comic asks its readers to recognize this Egyptian perspective as a critical feature of the "Jewish" story, as a kind of counter-narrative that enables a fuller, more complex reading of the Exodus. Of course this comic is not just for Jews, but it makes the normative claim to be read, and thus be counted, as Jewish. Finally, Kurzweil presents Jewish in her *Flying Couch* as a form of neurosis, as inner turmoil, as psychological conflict. Yet Jewish is not only an anxious form of psychological obsession; it is also the very subject of this comic. The text itself raises the question, what counts as Jewish, or better, what kinds of stories enable and form a Jewish subject? All three comics offer distinctive rhetorical strategies for answering how Jewish is a "Jewish" comic, but their answers, we shall come to see, witness to the anxiety of Jewish identity as presented through word and image.

Testament: Akedah

Writer Douglas Rushkoff and artist Liam Sharp's *Testament: Akedah* is a story about idolatry and the Jewish propensity to rewrite foundational myths and codes.[1] *Akedah* is a self-proclaimed mythological account of foundational violence: a war between the gods who use humans to further their own ends. That battle between Moloch and the Hebrew God in Genesis recurs again and again, in every generation, and much of the imagery in this text makes this clear. Sharp will draw biblical scenes that mirror contemporary ones to ensure that readers recognize the parallel lives. Abraham and Isaac are types that resurface in every epoch. But we need not subsume our identities nor our lives to this divine narrative; Rushkoff suggests we can rewrite our stories, change the founding code, and

[1]I have appropriated and adapted this account of *Akedah* from my analysis in *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics & Graphic Novels*.

so liberate ourselves to become who we seek to be. This is what Jewish means in this text: to take hold of this revolutionary fervor to question every foundational truth, and rewrite our narratives and so be liberated from debilitating forms of false worship. Human liberation is a Jewish act of religious destruction and rebirth.

The comic book *Akedah*—the biblical Hebrew term for "binding" that functions as the traditional, Jewish shorthand for Genesis 22—rewrites Abraham's sacrifice of his beloved son as a liberation story from false worship. Rushkoff is remarkably candid about this, and opens his introduction to *Akedah* with this revisionary pressure in view: "The Bible may have actually been better off as a comic book" (in *Akedah*, this is all in bold, all in capital letters). The suggestion is clear: the *Akedah* comic lying in the hands of the reader might actually liberate and transform the Bible into what it *should have always been*. In this way, the comic may transform the biblical account into a revolutionary text. Rushkoff understands the boldness of this claim. Perhaps few of his readers know of his professional life as Professor of Media Studies at City University of New York, Queens College. They probably do not know of his website (http://www.rushkoff.com/about/) or of his many books and articles on media and technology. So Rushkoff seeks to legitimize his credentials to his readers: "I'm saying this in my day-job persona as a halfway respectable media theorist—a guy who has written books and novels, taught university classes and made documentaries about the impact of new technology on the way we relate to stories" (Introduction). He has also written a book about Judaism—*Nothing Sacred: The Truth about Judaism* (2003). His *Nothing Sacred* book may have moved Rushkoff to do this comic series, for his reading of Judaism substantiates much that we see in the comic narrative.

Though Rushkoff's interpretation of Judaism reveals how media revolutionaries are working out of a foundational, "Jewish" framework, I want to point out the very title of this comic, *Akedah*, is itself a claim to Jewish roots and Rushkoff's own authority as textual interpreter. This is inside, Jewish language: most readers, perhaps even most Jewish readers, do not know Genesis 22 as the *Akedah*, but as the sacrifice of Isaac, or the binding of Isaac, or just as the

twenty-second chapter in Genesis. To call this story *Akedah* is to self-consciously appropriate an internal, religious, and Jewish story. It is a claim from the native to the native; that is what insider language does. I, for one, only use the term *Akedah* when speaking to insiders aware of this title, or to those I want to impress with my Jewish knowledge. This latter point is how I read Rushkoff—his authority lies not only in his university training, but also in his knowledge of *Jewish* texts. He is the native informant advising other natives about Jewish origins. And that claim to nativity is one of the ways Rushkoff positions *Akedah* the comic as a Jewish text.

"Jewish" is a positionality: it is to recognize narrative myths as false accounts of the self, and to create new, more truthful stories about human flourishing. Rushkoff writes as a native informant who sees through the false idols. He compares our relation to biblical texts to "watching TV or a movie and imagining ourselves as the characters on the screen." The scripts have been written for us, and we all just insert ourselves into these ready-made narratives (you should hear the media theorist behind this account). We all "get lost in the seamless reality and get taken along for a ride," and "we're either afraid or forbidden to inhabit the places where temporality, interpretation and sequence are up for grabs" (Rushkoff, *Testament* Introduction). Clearly Rushkoff is not a member of this "we" he describes here. He has already seen through the misty clouds of manipulation, prophetically calling to those of us who passively receive our media as pure entertainment. We do not read the binding of Isaac story as a call to arms, or as a fundamental choice between idol worship and liberatory self-empowerment. Rushkoff's authority as a prophetic truth-teller is important because his claim rests on the way media works. "We get a good night's sleep" because media dulls our critical capacities, and so appeals to our unconscious desire for order and security. This too is what idols do: they transform selves into passive worshipers of false narratives. But this is not our story, Rushkoff now tells us, and so we must rewrite the Bible as comic book to break the spell. And this is what Judaism tells us to do; it is the "truth about Judaism" because Jewish means destroying false myths and rewriting the foundational code.

Rushkoff appeals to something like Weber's notion of charismatic decline to describe how new media arises as the iconoclastic destroyer of older media idols. But soon this new media declines much like its predecessor, seeking only to defend its authoritative claim on our lives; iconoclasm devolves into idolatry. The printing press transformed a sacred document into a "mass-produced book," but now that book has become oppressive and authoritative as closed text. Rushkoff believes we are in a new era of the "open source tradition" that radically questions sacred truths (and so the title of his book on Judaism, *Nothing Sacred*). This iconoclastic tradition re-imagines that printed text as alive and forever open to interpretive creativity, and this is what makes a Jewish text Jewish. We, as those native informants, can change the code: "the emergence of interactive technologies like the computer has revived the open source tradition, providing the opportunity to again challenge unquestioned laws and beliefs and engage with our foundation myths as participatory narratives, as stories still in the making" (Rushkoff, *Testament* Introduction). Genesis 22 is not a settled text—it is one we can again return to and rewrite as our own *Akedah*. We can make the biblical text Jewish, as it were, by being media revolutionaries. In truth, this is what the comic *Akedah* performs as well: it transforms Genesis 22 into a Jewish comic.

But Rushkoff's comic is more radical still: the Bible was actually the first open source text, but readers have sought to protect its divine, fixed status:

> I've found some less than receptive audiences for these observations. When I wrote a book presenting the Bible as an "open source" collaboration [*Nothing Sacred*], I was blacklisted by fundamentalists of more than one religion. They just didn't want their story messed with—even though I had been able to prove it was written with that very intent! (Rushkoff, *Testament* Introduction)

In my reading of *Nothing Sacred*, Rushkoff does not prove so much as assert the "core beliefs" he discovers in the Bible: iconoclasm, abstract monotheism, and social justice. Above all, Judaism is a "breakthrough concept" that can awaken us from our slumbers. That

tradition "has been built to change and to cause change," and so what we require is less revolution than "renaissance—literally, the rebirth of old ideas in a new context." Open source Judaism *is* Judaism: "A Jewish renaissance, too, will demand that we dig deep into the very code of our religion, then reexperience it in the context of full modernity. It will require us to assume, at least temporarily, that nothing at all is too sacred to be questioned, reinterpreted, and modified. . . . And, perhaps ironically, we'll be engaging ourselves in Judaism's most time-honored tradition" (Rushkoff, *Nothing Sacred* 3, 36, 84, 111). Rushkoff's open-source developers are Jewish iconoclasts who return us to the core of Jewish practice and the original intent of Jewish texts. Modern code "hackers" are "today's equivalent of the Hebrews" (Rushkoff, *Testament* Introduction) and like their predecessors, must reject the idol worshippers who oppress them. This is what makes a Jewish text "Jewish." And this is what makes a Jewish comic "Jewish" as well. Judaism is iconoclastic, and Jewish comics reveal how foundational stories can be rewritten, codes can be hacked, how in truth nothing is sacred.

Reprinted with permission of the author.

These scenes occur throughout *Testament: Akedah*, but none more clearly than in Rushkoff and Liam's depiction of the Jewish Torah scrolls. In a two-page spread toward the end of this graphic narrative, Sharp depicts the Dutch industrialist Pierre Fallow (he is the modern idol worshiper who sacrifices to Moloch) on the *verso* (left) page, and the warring gods on the *recto* (right) side. As Fallow attempts his world takeover

through universal currency and technological tracking devices, Sharp depicts him as pulled by competing narrative threads. Each block is a narrative unit in both biblical and modern times, and when spliced together they create mythological, narrative unity. Fallow is just the plaything of the gods as they battle each other for possession and dominance. On the *recto* page, Sharp beautifully inscribes this warfare in the biblical scroll itself, as we literally see the Torah scroll become comic book creation. In these scenes, Lord Krishna plays the trickster who speaks truth to power: "In the thick of it, still, my Hebrew friends? Shaping human destiny to your will?" Melchizedek's response comes across as weak apologetic: "We do not fight for ourselves, dear Krishna, but in the name of the one true God" (103). If that is so, then they all seem unconcerned with human suffering and repetitive violence. This is really *their* narrative, not ours. The backdrop to this divine scene makes this clear: behind Krishna stands an endless bookshelf projected beyond the page, and on each shelf lies countless Torah scrolls. There are other stories, but this is the one the gods choose to inhabit. These narratives could be different, and they could have been chosen otherwise. The visual dynamics on the page suggest this is but one of many Torahs, but they all remain stories of violation by the gods. Even those other Torahs are not sacred and must be overthrown. Rushkoff and Liam show us how we have been written; it is time to become Jewish revolutionaries and write the Torahs for and by ourselves. This is the objective of the comic *Akedah*, and this is how it presents itself as a "Jewish" comic.

The Lone and Level Sands

Susannah Heschel has effectively deployed the notion of "counter-history," a term borrowed from such scholars as Amos Funkenstein and David Biale, to help explain how Jewish thinkers appropriate the sources of their antagonists in order to polemically offer an alternative narrative reading (Heschel, *Abraham Geiger* 14; Heschel, "Jewish Studies" 101–15). Something like this is going on in Lewis and Mann's rendition of the Exodus story, this time from the perspective of the Egyptian court. *The Lone and Level Sands* plays off

that well-known biblical account, and subverts it by allowing readers to linger in the minds of those who lost that battle.[2] It is a counter-history to Jewish history, and as such attempts to be part of that Jewish story. The normative claim in *The Lone and Level Sands* is that this Egyptian story of the Exodus is a Jewish narrative too. Egyptian tragedy is a Jewish one in talking back to the winners of this history.

The Lone and Level Sands retells the Hebrew God's battle with Pharaoh as a decidedly human, tragic story. It offers a deeper, exploratory account of human limits, obligations, and failures. Lewis and Mann present Ramses as villain to better assess the heroic, and by taking up the other side to the divine narrative, one that has proved so foundational to Western culture (see Walzer), Lewis and Mann present a more anxious, conflicted, heartening sense of liberation. And this is why it reads "Jewish": Lewis and Mann re-envision Exodus as a more complicated account of human and divine relations, suggesting this is just as much a Jewish story as it is a universal one. Indeed, this more textured, tragic narrative ought to be *the* Jewish Exodus story. *The Lone and Level Sands* reads Jewish because it is a critical awakening to what counts as Jewish.

The opening prologue establishes two important themes that run throughout the comic: familial ties and accepting one's place in the world. The Pharaoh Seti has just returned from battle, but on his own, familial terms. Three timelines confront the reader on the opening page, with dates for the Gregorian and Hebrew calendars, together with the year fourteen of the Nineteenth Dynasty in Seti's reign. Those calendar dates appear as backdrop to the larger panel depicting the fourteenth year, thereby returning the reader, like Pharaoh's army, to "an antique land." But it also indicates that Jewish time (the Hebrew calendar) is not divorced from other temporalities. Egyptian, Jewish, and Gregorian calendars traverse along the same page, along the same space and time of comic narrative, to

[2]I have appropriated and adapted this account of *The Lone and Level Sands* from my analysis in *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics & Graphic Novels.*

suggest an interweaving, a braiding as Robert Orsi calls it, of narrative histories (9). Turning the page we see the first close-up of Seti as a kind, handsome, and regal Pharaoh. He is muscular and lean, and though he speaks the language of state and warfare, he yearns for the comforts of home. Young Ramses greets his father with stately grace, but Seti quickly dispenses with formalities, taking his son Ramses into his arms—a public sign of affection that seems immediately out-of-place in this courtly setting. Indeed, Ramses at first appears worried, if not threatened by how his father will react to his official welcome. But the gutter between that look of fear and the melting into his father's embrace suggests a quick jump toward his bosom and a more intimate, if shy love. There are more important things, Seti teaches his son here, than statecraft and warfare.

This regal, public affection contrasts sharply with Moses' agitated state on the very next page. He seems out-of-place too, but distracted and, when compared to both Seti and Ramses, thin, frail, and unsteady. Seti calls him quiet and awkward, and Ramses considers him "withdrawn and mild-tempered." We soon learn that Ramses and his confidant Ta have news for Seti about Moses, who has inexplicably killed a Hebrew slave master. But before hearing those rumors, Seti warns, "we follow what paths are written for us" (008). News, good or ill, reflect the roles we are destined to play out. If this is Moses' fate, then he too follows the only path open to him. *The Lone and Level Sands* is about finding, and so accepting, one's place in a world already designed and written. This is true for Seti, Ramses, and even Moses, and so is as much a Jewish story as it is an Egyptian one. Their histories, their place in time, are inexorably linked and braided.

Clifford Geertz once famously argued that studying culture is about symbolic action and according to that linguistic model ethnographers write down what "is getting said." We are meaning-making creatures, and so anthropologists like Geertz read cultures like a text, decoding "the said" for meaning rather than the embodied act of "the saying" (10). But in a world already written, "the saying" is an embodied placement within an established order. This is Seti's model too for his son: the "saying"—our embodied, often familial

acts in the world—does not signify ("the said") but instead locates our stories in an ordered, and so meaningful world. Moses will follow one path, and Ramses will follow another. But they are both connected by time and place, and this is how *The Lone and Level Sands* critically intervenes as Jewish comic. Egyptian tragedy is part of the Jewish Exodus story; it is Jewish in this way. Both Pharaoh and Moses find themselves here in their imbricated stories. Readers of the Exodus story know already that Moses' God will upset Egyptian time and purpose, and even Ramses will soon come to understand his role in a wider universe he barely understands. In fact, Ramses is alone in recognizing his place in this broader religious landscape, for his wife Nefertari and his advisor Ta do not accept fate in this way. But Ramses is wiser than his friend and spouse, for he has adopted his father's good counsel. He is more the inheritor of his father's world than a builder of new ones. His path too has been written for him, and it is written as a Jewish story.

The comic quickly moves from the young Ramses to his rise as Pharaoh, now with son and grandson, and Ta as his trusted advisor. There are signs—omens only Ramses appears to recognize—of a new, more powerful God than his Amon-Ra. When a guardsman repeats Moses' message to Ramses—a note concerning the intimate talk between Seti and his son—the guardsman who had been sturdy and upright on the previous page now seems bewildered and unsure of his surroundings. This foreshadows, as readers will soon discover, divine possession where the Hebrew God controls the words of others (the hardening of their hearts). Here again, Lewis and Mann interweave the Jewish narrative within the Egyptian one and present both as two sides of the same story. Moses' intimate message to Ramses is but one revelation of these interlocked histories. The quoted message from Moses—"Does your father still watch you sleep, little apricot?" (022)—could only be known by an intimate family member. Seti had called Ramses little apricot, just as Ramses and his son call their children by this affectionate nickname. Hearing these words repeated by an Israelite slave unwinds these inherited lines, displacing Ramses' sense of familial order. It is now unclear who this Israelite other really is, and where Ramses as Pharaoh stands in relation to

him. But the temporal displacement is just as disorienting. This message comes from Pharaoh's past and it upsets the intimacy of a father's love for his son. It pierces that soothing memory of a father's protective watch, but it also suggests that other eyes were watching too. Moses had always been there—glancing from the side, invading that private, familial space, perhaps experiencing the jealousy of a father's love. Moses exists within Ramses' familial space, and he lingers there too. In this way, Pharaoh cannot escape the Jewish story.

Lewis creates a double narrative in the following pages to confuse the temporal dimension of the narrative plot. In the wake of Moses' encounter with Ramses, Nefertari falls into a trance, and her confusion slowly infuses the reader's own. Envisioning battles and a female oracle, Nefertari soon dreams about her grandson Seti who rules over Egypt, but she fears he may be the last of the Pharaohs. Yet that dream effortlessly shifts to another vision in which Nefertari takes on the character of an oracle who witnesses the present unfolding before her eyes. This we trust as prophetic vision, not of the future but of the present, as Ramses confronts Moses and Aaron on the banks of the Nile. Lewis and Mann use Nefertari's dream as a gloss to that meeting, as a kind of interpretive overlay (in block panels) to this male scene of power. These dual registers, where female oracles revision and interpret male authority, displace present time and progressive, narrative structure. Ramses might appear alone, but there are other worlds, other visions impinging on his political realm. And this back-and-forth movement of time and prophecy is now part of the readers' awareness as they weave in-and-out of oracular visions and current events. Lewis and Mann have manipulated readers to experience both Jewish and Egyptian time as one kind of displaced time. It is a dreamscape, and it suggests how *The Lone and Level Sands* can be Jewish too. It is "counterhistory" as part of Jewish history.

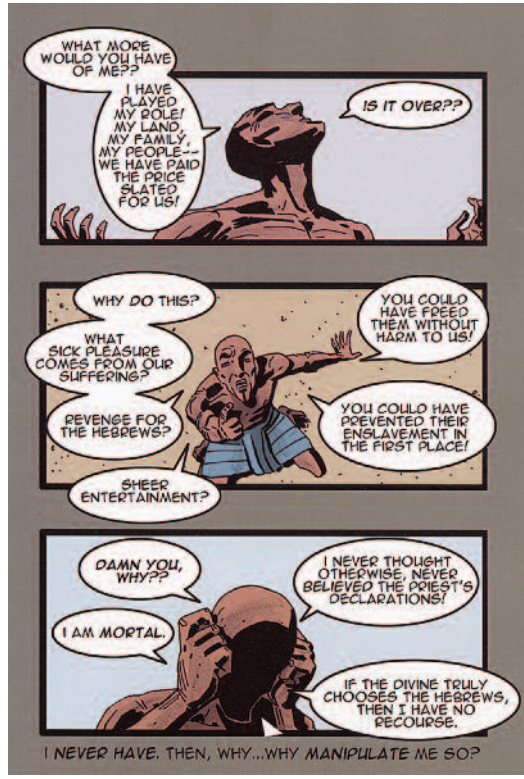
As plague after plague overwhelms Egypt and its people, Ramses stands in the middle of two competing narrative movements: the one traces his own indecision and growing recognition of powers larger than his own, while the other counsels him to remain strong and defiant before Moses' demands. His counselors, Ta and Nefertari, are possessed by a spirit that demands strong leadership from Ramses.

This is a clever counterhistory to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the biblical Exodus story, and reveals what "Jewish" looks like to the Egyptian court. At first Ramses is unaware of these divine voices possessing his spouse and friend, but Mann employs possessed facial expressions, bent-over bodies, zagged font lines, and darker hues to indicate divine control. Nefertari challenges Ramses to defend his kingdom rather than attend to her sickness, and Ta mocks his weakness by appealing to kingly pride. Most readers of *The Lone and Level Sands* know how this story goes, and how it ends. Lewis and Mann know this too, and so emphasize not the freedom of a people but the way Ramses comes to accept the fate assigned to him and those he loves. I want to emphasize once again that only Ramses recognizes these forces controlling the destiny of both peoples; *only he recognizes Jewish*. He is the lone character who questions, lingers, and meditates on events beyond his own control: "Is this what is written? Am I . . . am I destined to lose you, my queen? Have I steered us wisely? Could only catastrophe for Egypt be what is written? And if so—what cruel author assigns us this fate?" (073–074). Ramses' other servants, including Ta and Bekenkhonsu, hold tenaciously to their impotent worldviews. Not even Moses questions or reflects on his role in this cosmic drama. A force beyond all their comprehension, one directed by that cruel author, now takes over Pharaoh's kingdom. Where Ta lashes out at the enslaved Israelites, Ramses questions his own leadership; where Bekenkhonsu appeals to the Egyptian gods, Ramses knows there are other "Jewish" forces at work that command his movements.

Haunted by nightmares, Ramses turns inwards to question his own place in a world not of his own making. Ramses' own sense of place is no longer stable, but he recognizes, even at this point, that something has dramatically altered his place in the world. He lashes out at the Jewish God: "I needed control restored. . . . Face me, Tyrant . . . stop hiding behind your emissaries . . . your plagues. Face me!" (086). This, of course, God will not do, in part because power lies in silence too. In this ultimate sign of rebellion, Ramses has finally capitulated to the Hebrew God. Even Bekenkhonsu recognizes Yahweh as the more powerful deity, and Ramses follows the only

path open to him: "Yahweh is mighty. I have led my people wrong. You are free to go . . . go and worship Yahweh" (090). Finally, Ramses understands this Jewish story as his own.

Confronting Moses' world, and his God, has uprooted Ramses' sense of place, but as readers we place Ramses squarely within the Jewish Exodus story. *The Lone and Level Sands* rhetorically presents itself as a counterhistory to that Exodus, but one from within rather than outside of that narrative. This is why the comic arrives as "Jewish": it shows the tragic underside of liberation from bondage. These two worlds Ramses holds together. It is particularly instructive, I think, that in the end Ramses accepts Yahweh's power and his own mortality. He has come to see the world through the eyes of a Hebrew slave, and his cry to Yahweh is from one who suffers inexplicably (145):



Reprinted with permission of the author.

This declaration of injustice, as I read it, is how this comic positions itself as "Jewish." Mann's images of Ramses highlight his solitude in the desert, yearning upwards to a God that, as we all know, confronts Pharaoh's rage with silence. Like Frimme Hersh in Will Eisner's *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (1978), who also leans back to project his anger upward towards his God, Ramses must accept silence as God's final act of power. But in that raging silence, Ramses takes on the position of the destitute slave—who cannot understand one's place, but who also refuses to accept it. Pharaoh has come to recognize the limits of his power, the insecurity of control, and the inexplicable condition of human suffering. He has achieved these insights, and a new sense of what it means to be Pharaoh, by becoming "Jewish."

Flying Couch

Amy Kurzweil's *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir* falls squarely within Baskind and Omer-Sherman's definition of a Jewish comic: "an illustrated narrative produced by a Jew that addresses a Jewish subject or some aspect of the Jewish experience" (xvi). It is a brilliant memoir about a young Jewish woman discovering her own Jewish identity within a family of strong women. Though framed as a story about her grandmother's life as a Holocaust survivor, it really is a story about what counts as Jewish, and the existential and psychological burdens for American Jews. Kurzweil's grandmother, much like Spiegelman's father in *Maus*, is both lovable and cringe worthy. She forever embarrasses her children and grandchildren by being loud, ostentatious, and she consistently mispronounces English phrases. But she is also loving, kind, and strong. Amy's mother Sonya appears as the calm, somewhat distanced presence in the room. But she has depth that Kurzweil keeps somewhat muted: a psychotherapist and PhD who has "received her share of therapy" and who has suffered an identity crisis with real "fear and memories" (10–11). Readers are rarely granted full access to those anxieties, but we do see them in full force with Amy, who struggles to try on various Jewish identities, settling on the "Expert Educated Jew" (107). This claim to being a "Jew"

is far more fraught and difficult for Amy to bear, and in this comic it registers differently than being "Jewish." The grandmother is a Jew in the sense that her identity is not up for grabs; she is a Jew because those around her label her as such, and she never seriously questions that existential designation. It is a fact about her being, even if she does not look Jewish: "There was anti-Semitism, of course. They used to take snow and put a rock in it and throw it at the Jew. But I had the blonde hair and the blue eyes. I looked like a shiksa, a gentile" (61). These are set, racialized categories, Jew and shiksa. You are a Jew or just somebody else. But to be Jewish is to take on a particular feature, to be a kind of Jew. It is a becoming rather than a being, and we see this in Amy's anxious decisions about what kind of Jew she wishes to be. So even as *Flying Couch* is easily recognizable as a Jewish comic, it still moves us to ask, what kind of Jewish comic is it, and how does it perform that Jewishness?

Kurzweil initially presents Jewish as psychological neurosis, as a beleaguered condition and sickness. Freud had always been concerned that psychoanalysis would be considered only as a Jewish science (and therefore not fully a legitimate one), and in *Flying Couch* his fear is fully realized. On the very first pages of chapter one Kurzweil draws a map of her home, with her mother encircled on the *verso* side and Amy on the *recto* page. Her mother reads a book on psychotherapy, while Amy holds markers to draw; the one is intellectual and studious, the other is creative and insular. But even if her mother has survived trauma and plenty of therapy, it is Amy whose anxieties and fears "are mostly imaginary" and require her mother's professional touch: "Sometimes we create minor anxieties for ourselves . . . to distract us from what we're *really* anxious about" (15). This only confuses the young Amy as she searches for the source of her unease. But her paranoia goes deep: "The ordinariness of life was a ruse. Perilous dramas hid under the surface of everything" (21). Now it might not be altogether noteworthy that "a graphic memoir" opens with inner psychic turmoil. Comic narratives often center on inner trauma and anxiety, and there is nothing particularly Jewish about doing so. But Kurzweil registers this psychosis as Jewish. In a scene that many young Jewish adults might recognize, Amy stands before her congregation chanting

her bat mitzvah portion (one she does not understand), while her peers doze and gossip, even as her grandmother cheers her on. But later during her celebratory party she races to the bathroom and, believing she is dying, realizes she has just had her first period. This is how Kurzweil narrates this scene: "There it was, in my underwear: the reason for all the neuroses, the guilt, the pressure to succeed, the ever-present nag of responsibility not only to myself but to some amorphous and mystical force. There was no escaping it: I was a Jewish woman" (56). Even if the blood signifies womanhood, it is the neuroses, guilt, pressure, and burden of responsibility that are catalogued as Jewish. And like the grandmother's designation as Jew, Jewish here also appears as inevitable, if not inescapable. To be Jewish is to be neurotic; it too is like some mystical force carried in the blood. In *Flying Couch*, psychic neurosis performs a kind of Jewish identity in America.

But this is not the case with Amy's grandmother. Kurzweil follows Amy's story about her first period with her grandmother's own recollection: "You wanna hear about a period? I'll tell you about a period. We didn't have the Kotex in Warsaw. . . . I remember it so clearly, the first time, my mother, she slapped my face. To put some color in it, she said. That's what I did to my Sonya when she got it" (58). There is no guilt or neurosis here. It is a simple retelling: this is what my mother did to me, and so I did the same to my daughter. We do not hear Jewish anxieties about this transitional moment to adulthood. It happened, I got slapped in the face, and then we move on. And all of the grandmother's life appears like this: "Oh I could tell you so many stories, I have stories and stories. A thousand and one stories." Those narratives do not carry the existential concerns that they do for Amy in *Flying Couch*. Her grandmother retells her stories because they are hers; they present who she is. And this is what I mean by the way *Flying Couch* distinguishes Jew from Jewish: the grandmother is a Jew, while Amy is Jewish. The one is complete, secured in identity, rooted in stories and places, while the other is searching, relentlessly questioning and obsessing over who she has become and wishes to be. In *Flying Couch*, a Jew is a fixed identity; being Jewish is a problem. Perhaps the answer to the question, how Jewish is a "Jewish" comic?, comes down to how much anxiety Amy embodies in becoming Jewish.

Reprinted with permission of the author.

That anxiety manifests as a perceived choice in *Flying Couch*: there are a few options for American Jews to choose, and Kurzweil depicts this scene as a "University-wide Identity Fair." Amy arrives to see various "identities" lined up on each side of the walkway. You have your "Asian Techies" across from "Filipinos Who Dance Well," together with "Lesbian Activists" and "Politically Active Black People." All of these identity groups are singular, focused, and narrow. But not so the Jews, whose sign carries the parenthetical "various" to note that, unlike these other affinity groups, Jews are different in more than one way. As Amy approaches the table with the "Jews" flag, she is told to "go choose your Jewish identity." Now this makes perfect sense to Amy; it is what Jews like her struggle to do. I for one cannot imagine her grandmother understanding that demand. There is no identity for her to choose; she is who she is. But Amy is

not that kind of Jew; she is not settled in her identity. Now arrayed before her to try on for size, each Jewish identity comes with pros and cons. There is the "Ardent Pro-Israel Jew" who is passionate and attracts plenty of dates from admirers, but then is simply inoffensive to parents (this is actually both a pro and con in *Flying Couch*). Next up is the "Radical Anti-Zionist Jew" who is admirably rebellious and cool, but is lonely at Jewish holidays. There is the "Politically and Culturally Apathetic Jew" who has the great advantage of sleeping well at night, but at the cost of repressed guilt. Finally, we have the "Expert Educated Jew," the one Amy chooses in the end, who gains a wealth of knowledge but must suffer an "inevitable existential crisis." Indeed, knowledge is the only pro listed for this character (107), and the list of cons are far longer than the other three Jewish identities. Why would anyone choose this persona? If I read Kurzweil right here, it's not really a choice at all. It is a "perceived" choice, one apparently layed out to inhabit, but in reality the choice has already been made. Amy chooses the identity that fits her, not the one she wishes to be. Amy is already this kind of Jew, and her only choice is to accept what it means to become this Jewish person. Her grandmother does not face that existential crisis; she can be this and no other. But Amy faces the challenge, and the inevitable existential crisis, of taking hold of this Jewish identity as her own. Being Jewish is an anxious play of acceptance.

Reprinted with permission of the author.

Becoming an "Expert Educated Jew" is a tall order, and Kurzweil mischievously draws this challenge as a large stack of books, with the Bible at the very bottom, balancing a mound of "Jewish" texts that include the Talmud, Mai-

monides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, works from Kafka and Roth, and, of course, texts about the Holocaust. Amy carries them all home, surrounding her couch with her now daily reading, when she dreams of visitations from the patriarch Jacob, Sigmund Freud, and Theodor Herzl. Becoming a Jewish intellectual comes with some obligations, as Jacob tells her: "Just as I, Jacob, wrestled with a nefarious angel in order to prove myself as the father of a nation and earn the name of Israel, so, too, must you wrestle with the demons of the past in order to—in order to, well . . . " (111). Jacob never completes that thought, and so the existential crisis, why and how does one wrestle with those demons? Freud's demands are equally weighty as he requires Amy to analyze her familial life in order to cleanse "your unconscious of all looming symbols and repressed desires." Finally, Herzl arrives to ask what Amy is really doing to help save the Jews. It seems that the Jewish intellectual must still satisfy religious, scientific, and cultural desires represented by Jacob, Freud, and Herzl.

Reprinted with permission of the author.

Amy, however, wishes only "to draw pictures," and so vanquishes these patriarchs in favor of her own Jewish idols: Art Spiegelman, Will Eisner, and Harvey Pekar. But if these are her preferred angels, why is Amy running away from them? Why do these literary giants demand far too much from Amy? Kurzweil ends this scene, and this chapter in *Flying Couch*, by labeling all these Jewish men in her dreamscape as "monsters." What is going on here about choosing to accept one's identity as an "Expert Educated Jew"?

The problem is that all this knowledge, all these great men, are of no help to Amy. This is *her* crisis, not theirs. Take a close look at that towering stack of books. As the pile increases the books become smaller, teetering at the top as if they could topple in a heap at any moment. It might seem like the "5 Books of the TORAH" offers a solid foundation, but clearly this booklist will collapse. It appears to me that the student who has brought the books to Amy, apparently in two stacks, could just as well come back with more, and more again. The list is endless. But no amount of reading, and no amount of sage advice, can help Amy wrestle with her demons. Not just Jacob, Freud, or Pekar are monsters; they all weigh down heavily on Amy's fraught relation to being and becoming Jewish. Recall that the one pro for the Expert Educated Jew is "a wealth of knowledge," but that will never overcome the many cons, especially the "inevitable existential crisis." In fact, so much knowledge might exacerbate that crisis and the anxiety to respond adequately to father Jacob's demand. Indeed, the question, how Jewish is a "Jewish" comic?, manifests the crisis itself. We have no answers from our authorities, texts, or great figures of the past. The very fact that we have to ask the question suggests a felt unease with how to mark Jewishness, how to accept its demands, how to judge its modality, and how to know when enough is enough. As in Narayan's text on the native anthropologist, Jewishness is a claim to authenticity and nativity that is always receding. It really is never enough; the comic is never Jewish enough to prevent the anxious question from arising. We can define a Jewish comic, as Baskind and Omer-Sherman courageously do. But these definitional categories will not ease Amy's fears, nor should they. *Flying Couch* asks too, how Jewish is a

"Jewish" comic?, and the answer leads to the anxiety of becoming: "Mom I can't sleep! There's MONSTERS in the window!" (118). The anxieties come from without to enter into the deeper recesses of our minds. We cannot sleep because we do not know who we are or should become. How much Jewish is Jewish enough is the crisis of Jewish identity.

When I was in graduate school, I remember my mentor telling me something like this: the great thing about ritual is you know when you have done it right. I have always remembered this comment, in part because it took me years to reject it. Rituals do not work that way: there are always more stringent ways of doing it; there is always someone to your right or left who suggests you, in fact, are not doing it correctly, or according to this or that tradition or authority. And this is true for Jewish comics as well. How we judge "Jewish" is a fraught activity; there are simply no foundational or universally compelling models to go by. Like ritual, we tend to do the best we can. We have seen this anxious performance in three comics: Rushkoff's *Testament: Akedah*, Lewis' *The Lone and Level Sands*, and Kurzweil's *Flying Couch*. Jewish registers differently in each of these texts, and we should expect no less. What counts as Jewish is a contested matter, one that can be worked out only in the doing of it and, as Kurzweil movingly portrays, in the personal acceptance of becoming that kind of Jew. There are countless other "Jewish" comics that mark Jewishness in competing ways. For something like Stan Mack's *The Story of the Jews: A 4,000-Year Adventure* (2001), Jewish is a kind of sarcastic and intimate humor, an inside joke for Jews alone. With Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* (2011), Jewish can sometimes mean a deeper ambivalence about family and commitment. But in these and other graphic narratives, Jewishness is a mode of living, becoming, and accepting one's place as Jewish. That is not an answer but a witness to the struggles of identity. How Jewish is a "Jewish" comic? That, indeed, is the question, and much beauty in life is a response to it.

Works Cited

Baskind, Samantha, and Ranen Omer-Sherman. *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches*. Rutgers UP, 2010.

Eisner, Will. *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*. Baronet P, 1978.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973, pp. 3–30.

Heschel, Susannah. *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*. U of Chicago P, 1998.

———. "Jewish Studies as Counterhistory." *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, edited by David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel, U of California P, 1998, pp. 101–15.

Koltun-Fromm, Ken. *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics and Graphic Novels*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2020.

Kurzweil, Amy. *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir*. Black Balloon, 2016.

Leibman, Laura. *The Art of the Jewish Family: A History of Women in Early New York in Five Objects*. Bard Graduate Center, 2020.

Lewis, A. David, and Marvin Perry Mann. *The Lone and Level Sands*. ASP Comics LLC, 2005.

Mack, Stan. *The Story of the Jews: A 4,000-Year Adventure*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001.

Narayan, Kirin. "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist*, vol. 95, no. 3, Sept. 1993, pp. 671–86.

Orsi, Robert. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton UP, 2005.

Rushkoff, Douglas. *Nothing Sacred: The Truth About Judaism*. Crown, 2003.

———. *Testament: Akedah*. DC Comics, 2006.

Spiegelman, Art. *The Complete Maus*. Pantheon, 2011.

Walzer, Michael. *Exodus and Revolution*. Basic Books, 1985.

Analogies Drawn Online: Bidirectional Holocaust Memory in Trump-Era Web Comics

Golan Moskowitz
Department of Jewish Studies
Tulane University

The comics medium, drawing on an expansive history of broadcasting political satire and subversively embodied knowledge, offers a prime context for studying political feeling in relation to contemporary events and cultural disagreements, including those relating to memory of the Holocaust. Twenty-first-century disagreements about the meaning or insight of a post-Holocaust perspective characterize a divided cultural landscape at whose poles lie those who prioritize a militaristic defense of Jews and Israel, and those focused on eliminating state-sponsored violence for any marginalized minority in one's midst. The present work addresses this division by examining a sometimes contentious phenomenon of Holocaust and Nazi analogies posed during Donald Trump's presidential campaign and his tenure as U.S. President from 2017–2021, as specifically presented in the context of web comics by or about Jews. Creators of Holocaust-analogizing web comics pursue a range of different approaches to their work, from vilification of Trump's administration to reanimations of Holocaust-era dynamics and narratives in dialogue with contemporary realities. This article focuses specifically on those who make such analogies and asks on what grounds they do so and to what ends.

Arguments about the appropriateness of analogizing the Holocaust relate directly to the shifting cultural position occupied by Holocaust survivors in the United States. Scholars have traced the evolution of the "traumatized survivor" in America from an often discredited and shamed position in the immediate postwar years to one bearing special insight and affective power by the confessional era of the 1970s and beyond (Cvetkovich; Stein). Hagiography and nationalist ideologies, however, have coopted survivors' empowered voices in the service of chauvinist agendas, which focus on protecting a specific group at all costs, rather than addressing systemic violence universally to protect all marginalized groups threatened by the forces of populism or state. This occurs when the Holocaust becomes untouchably exceptional, almost "sacred" in its remove from the world of contemporary ideas and experiences, when it becomes a partisan cudgel, a wielded tool or weapon reserved for those who claim authority over it, rather than an embodied memory and ethical warning for postwar humanity as a whole. In the summer of 2019, for example, some community leaders attacked Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's use of the term "concentration camps" in her description of the Trump administration's migrant detention facilities at the southern border, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) voiced its disapproval of AOC's analogy (Steinbuch). In response, over four hundred academics, including prominent members of the museum's Academic Advisory Committee, defended Ocasio-Cortez's characterization in an open letter to the museum's director. The letter's subheading read: "The Museum's decision to completely reject drawing any possible analogies to the Holocaust, or to the events leading up to it, is fundamentally ahistorical. It makes learning from the past almost impossible" (Bartov). The notion that Holocaust memory might offer valuable insights beyond contexts of German Nazism itself is not a new or obscure one. Included even in the mission statement of the USHMM, for example, is the imperative of encouraging visitors "to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy." The mission statement also includes its goal to "enhance understanding of the Holocaust and related issues, including those of

contemporary significance." Nevertheless, post-Holocaust ethics are heavily policed in popular discourse. In December of 2020, for example, Rebecca Pierce discussed the backlash that faced the Holocaust Memorial and Education Resource Center of Florida for its exhibit *Uprooting Prejudice: Faces of Change*. This exhibit included John Noltner's photographs of mourners and protesters gathered at the site where police killed George Floyd that summer, in a brutal act that would catalyze renewed energies in the movement against systemic, state-enforced racism in America. Despite the fact that no claims were made to imply any direct equation between Floyd's death and those who died in the Holocaust, right-wing commentators and their followers saw the inclusion of this content as a trivialization and distortion of Holocaust memory, rather than a needed reminder of the historical connection between systemic prejudice and government-sanctioned violence against minorities (Pierce).

Considering this context of broader cultural disagreement, the comics analyzed below subvert restrictions placed on collective memory and its contemporary application to consider the Holocaust and Nazism in direct relation to Trump-era politics and culture. Taken together, they employ what I term "bidirectional memory," which both brings the past into the present and the present into the past in order to provoke, to testify and bear witness to injustice, and to raise more critical social consciousness. Bidirectional memory places the main emphasis not on Holocaust history itself but on the affective reverberations between its cultural or familial legacies and a contextualized, embodied "now." It is like Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" in its creative investment in a weighty past not directly experienced by the subject/creator, but it is different in its critical distance from the original trauma and in its goals of political commentary, witness, and satire rooted in perceived social dangers in the present. More prevalent in the generation of survivors' grandchildren and great-grandchildren (the "third" and "fourth" generations), bidirectional memory uses a "lighter touch" as far as memorialization is concerned, treating historical analogies and creative "time travel" as exercises through which to test hypotheses and provoke discussion on the most urgent social issues of the pre-

sent and future through re-embodied "memory" of the past. It does so in order to insist on the importance of maintaining currently meaningful and affective connections to the Holocaust and its historical warnings in ways that contribute to a more equitable future.

Web Comics and the Politics of Holocaust Memory

The historic intertwinement of comics and politics, as evinced especially by the longstanding form of the political cartoon, speaks to a formal commonality of comics and political discourse, which both balance representative and intentionally provocative systems of meaning. Political feelings, like comics, are neutralized by excesses of abstraction, as well as by excesses of realism. To internalize all extant historical frameworks, details, and angles of a complex social situation, were that ever possible, would lead to overwhelm, disorientation, and a loss of conviction; when facticity becomes unstable or mutable ("fake news"), apathy and disillusionment are likely to follow. On the other hand, it is dangerous to simplify or narrativize a situation to the point of abstraction, in which certain groups or "types" are denied humanity or nuance. Comics contains a legacy of holding complexity, of self-consciously calling out oversimplification even within its own visual logic of essentialized forms. Like political discourse, comics walks a tightrope between complicating and simplifying common perceptions. Comics, as a medium, is rooted in the impulse to comment playfully and critically through layered intersections and critical, if subjective, declarations. Creating microcosms of metaphorical icons, comics arranges complex realities into cognitive and emotional shorthand with a "punch." With its favoring of metonymic images and its tendency toward the satirical or the subversively extreme, comics asks its creators and viewers to flirt with the boundaries of oversimplification in the service of informed reflection: what do these simplifications obscure or distort? What aspects ring (surprisingly) true? What desires or anxieties are mobilized by such high-contrast handlings? Simplification, when executed well, is an aesthetic virtue in comics. As in political discourse, excessive details in a comic can risk rendering it ineffective, tedious, or simply

no longer what it is (this is how comics become drawings, or how they become illustrated literature). According to Scott McCloud's now-canonical writing on the comics language, readers most identify with characters and situations that hit a "sweet spot" between realism and abstraction. The "magic" of comics exists at the crossroads of reading and seeing, stillness and motion, stasis and flight. It happens when images are broken down to "read" as coherent language, when text is aestheticized for quick visual consumption. Too much realistic specificity can overwhelm or impose distance, turning an inviting avatar into a particular person, a "not me," an Other. Too much abstraction, by contrast, can make a character incomprehensible. What, then, must be considered with regard to contemporary comics' handling of politically charged and emotionally fraught memory, such as that of the Holocaust and its afterlife in the present? How do comics' gestures to the Holocaust avoid oversimplification and overdetailing in their pursuit of formal success and meaningful impact?

These questions require greater attention to the layered nature of the comics form. Comics integrates stylized drawing with diegetic and extradiegetic text, as well as metonymic icons and strategic organization through panels and borders. It sets otherwise disparate elements in dialogue with each other: visual with verbal, real with imagined, public with private, past with present, or concept with detail. Comics have accordingly offered some of the most accessible and powerful handlings of the relationship between history and contemporary life, considering connections and differences between past and present, political and personal. The form itself is designed for such juxtaposition, as McCloud has most directly demonstrated in a strip in which a character borrows money from himself "in the future," reaching visually into the final panel in the strip in order to pay his restaurant tab, which ultimately places the character in an endless time loop. The artists examined here do not manufacture time loops in this same manner, but their work builds on a formal comics tradition of allowing past and present to inform each other in surreal but direct, graphic respects, applying the relational and conglomerate nature of the comics form to present bidirectional

memory in ways that combat metanarratives policing how and when we relate to historical traumas that bear upon our present and future. More specifically, comics artists of the past several years have used their form to process and respond to the political shifts and ruptures that characterize recent American history, including a broad reckoning with systemic racism, the emboldening of alt-right and white supremacist voices, the deadliest antisemitic killings in American history, a President who repeatedly broadcasts falsities, a ban on immigration from Muslim-majority countries, the forced separation of refugee families and detaining of their children in cages, and a global heath pandemic that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has killed over 560,000 Americans to date.

Web comics, which emerged at the end of the 1990s, have championed the form's democratic spirit by largely eliminating gatekeepers, making it possible for almost anyone to publish comics online through such user-friendly platforms as Wordpress, Tumblr, or Patreon, even without a publisher or editor. Web comics combine the ephemeral, fleeting quality of the comics form's early appearance in turn-of-the-century newspapers, as well as the literary weight and critical substance of the graphic novel. They are designed for casual scrolling but also tend to live indefinitely at a given URL for extended or permanent access. As comics artist Matt Lubchansky explains, they are a "hyper-fast communication tool" well suited "for talking about current events, because you can get so much information across so quickly." They are also "intensely shareable," given the ease with which they might be "copy/pasted" or "linked" (personal interview). Web comics tend to adhere to the norms of social media in their privileging of the visceral, single-panel or four-panel form, which can be consumed relatively quickly in passing. They often adhere to niche markets or "newsfeeds," appearing where one's virtual "friends" post them, or in the inboxes of those who subscribe to a given artist's page or a particular digital platform. In this regard and others they are a staple of what Adrienne Resha describes as the "Blue Age" of comics, which began in the 2010s, characterized by guided reading technologies and by self-selected subject matter, including content designed by and for marginalized identities, among

them women, immigrants, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities (66–67). The Blue Age has also welcomed what I call bidirectional memory, perspectives that revise their approaches to canonized histories, questioning how we relate to the past and urging us to do so in ways that promote progressive social ethics. More specifically, Blue Age comics artists tend to protest exceptionalist approaches to the Holocaust that foreclose the possibility of connection between Holocaust memory and contemporary warning signs of normalized discrimination, or that hoard Holocaust history as a sacred monopoly on an ultimate victimhood that discounts solidarity with "lesser" victims of state-enforced prejudice and violence. These comics creators, instead, apply political associations, family memory, and Holocaust history in the service of fighting systemic injustices in the present, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia.

One prominent platform for web comics is *The Nib*. Founded in 2013 and supported primarily by its own members and subscribers, *The Nib* is a left-leaning digital hub for political and non-fictional comics that use journalism, essay-writing, memoir, and satire to comment on contemporary life. In March of 2017, *The Nib* published a feature titled "Never Again?: Five Jewish Cartoonists on the Use of Holocaust Imagery in Trump's America," which included strips by Matt Lubchansky (who is also associate editor), Lisa Rosalie Eisenberg, Leela Corman, Eli Valley, and Sarah Glidden. These and other Jewish comics artists express their disdain for the Trump administration and the white supremacism emboldened by it. Whether themselves descended from family Holocaust experiences or only indirectly connected to that history through a collective identity shared with survivors, these and other web comics artists assert their right to claim, or at least consider, both similarities and differences between Trump's America and Hitler's Germany. In order to do so, they press for a shift in attitude toward Holocaust memory, critiquing those who position the Holocaust beyond human history and, thus, beyond critical or creative analysis or bearing on the present.

Reasonable Alarm: Lisa Rosalie Eisenberg's Visual Essays

About a month after Donald Trump's election in November 2016, Lisa Rosalie Eisenberg published a strip on *The Nib* called "Being Jewish in Trump's America," which considers the problems associated with prohibiting comparisons between Holocaust history and present-day political warning signs. She begins the strip with a scene from her own childhood in which she learns that to invoke Hitler is to halt reasonable conversation. Narrating from her adult perspective in the present, she reconsiders this well-established notion. Vertically juxtaposed with her scene of childhood memory are panels quoting Trump's expressed desire in December 2015 to ban all Muslim immigrants to the U.S., his conflation of all Muslims with "people that believe only in Jihad, and have no sense of reason or respect for human life." Eisenberg places her panel in visual dialogue with Trump's earlier statement that "If I win the election for President, we are going to Make America Great Again," as well as with a black-and-white rendering of an iconic photograph from the Warsaw Ghetto, in which a young Jewish boy raises his hands before a group of armed Nazi soldiers. Collectively, this intentional combination of images invites critical reader engagement and focalizes attention on the potential harm that might occur under the protective shield of memory-policing. Does relegating the invocation of Hitler to the culturally taboo, or even to the obscene, give license to undeterred Hitleresque behavior by politicians who, by the laws of this taboo, cannot be civilly criticized as such in public discourse? Does it thus enable the protection of such dangerous actors from socially-acceptable critique? At the time of the Jewish Warsaw boy's endangerment, was it not also taboo in the Third Reich to compare Hitler to other historical demagogues or tyrants, or to suspect his anti-Jewish policies of being anything other than protective measures for the good of the national majority? Eisenberg is not alone in making this connection. Comics artist Leela Corman, for example, has also noted the similarity between Trump's framing of Muslim refugees in 2015 and American characterizations of Jewish refugees escaping the Third Reich in the 1930s, recalling, "One of the arguments against allowing refugees from Syria and Iraq

into the U.S. is that, 'what if there are members of ISIS and Al-Qaeda among them?' And that's *exactly, exactly* the argument that was made against allowing Jews into the country in the 1930s ('what if there are *Nazis* among them, *hiding* among them?')" (personal interview). Complementing Corman's perspective, Eisenberg's visual juxtapositions elicit visceral responses connected to the widely-known images she renders, in order to challenge the reader to think twice about the limitations placed on Holocaust references in contemporary political commentary; such limitations, her work suggests, safeguard figures like Trump from criticisms rooted in appropriate historical perspective. For Eisenberg, as for other artists discussed below, the Holocaust may be an extreme and distinct history, but the logics that undergirded it are not immune from reappearing in new contexts, including contexts closer to home, and including in situations in which non-Jewish groups are victimized.

Eisenberg's Holocaust-analogizing comics emerge from a Jewish social conscience and sensitivity to the treatment of minorities in her midst. Explaining her concerns about Trump's administration, she cites her own Holocaust education, which began in Hebrew School and continued through personal research, reading Art Spiegelman's *Maus* at age ten and considering other books and films. A central takeaway for Eisenberg was the "incremental nature" of the Holocaust. "One by one the rights of Jewish people were taken away," she writes, "then there was more overt terrorizing, then the camps. So with the benefit of that hindsight, why wouldn't I want to call attention to the potential danger of Trump through my comics?" Eisenberg was immediately compelled to draw analogies between Trump and Hitler in her work when the former "announced his candidacy by calling Mexicans rapists and criminals," she writes. "For me," she shares, "my knowledge of the Holocaust is an omnipresent reminder to be vigilant for myself and for others—it's inexorably linked to my political outlook and therefore a central part of my comics work." Thus, Trump's framing of social reality "set off my alarm bells immediately. It made me think of the Holocaust in the sense of—here is a compelling (to some) political figure who is putting forth an argument that a group of non-white 'outsiders' are responsible for many

of the problems of 'rightful' Americans" ("Re: Interest in writing"). Corman had a similar reaction to Eisenberg's, articulating a physiological response to Trump's election: "I, like a lot of other people, Jews and others, had this really visceral fear reaction, like *terror* reaction when he was elected. It just flipped the epigenetic switch, like you have to figure out how to get . . . out of here quickly if you need to" (personal interview). As Eisenberg recalls, it was not a great leap to assert, or at least to muse about analogies between Trump and Hitler, considering earlier comics by *The Nib*'s creator, Matt Bors, who "very early on incorporated Nazi imagery into his comics," including "a post-apocalyptic Trump army, with red armbands that had a black 'T' in white on them—a reference to swastika armbands." Also credited for early inspiration was the popularity of iconic white supremacists like neo-Nazi Richard Spencer in the early Trump administration, Spencer offering an especially "easy target for cartoonists," given "his own ridiculous emulation of Hitler's haircut." According to Eisenberg, such comparisons were "pretty well accepted by the general public before too long" ("Re: Interest in writing").

Eisenberg's work does not lambast Trump as a comic villain. Rather, it functions as a sort of visual essay, carefully exploring the appropriateness of Trump-Hitler analogies and asking adjacent questions about representation, including questions about the role and function of humor in political critique. She offers an explicit rationale for her decision to scrutinize Trump. Her "Being Jewish in Trump's America" links data from the 2013 Pew Study ("42% of American Jews think having a good sense of humor is an essential part of being Jewish") with a mildly unflattering drawing of a pontificating Trump juxtaposed against a Hitler doppelganger drawn from Mel Brooks's film musical *The Producers* (1967). Trump, who sways crowds with his xenophobia and impassioned "might makes right" rhetoric, she suggests, must appear ridiculous in order to expose the dangerous self-interest and ethical callousness beneath his force and charisma. Interrupting a rhythm of evenly spaced panel gutters, Eisenberg merges the ridiculous Hitler imposter with an aggressive, perspiring Trump, the extradiegetic narration flowing across the panel border between them, further stitching them together as a thought exercise,

for our consideration. This conglomerate image is preceded by a drawn Brooks's declaring that when it comes to master orators, making them look ridiculous is the best way to win audience solidarity against them. While Eisenberg actively contemplates the logic behind mobilizing humor toward political subversion, her work itself is decidedly more contemplative than humorous or mocking. Her comics about Trump are measured, shining a light on the reasonable motivations and mechanisms by which critics respond to their concerns, rather than visually demonizing Trump herself. Despite Trump's vindictive facial expression, he appears in Eisenberg's strip as a rather balanced figure, a human being rendered not unlike the others in her comic, without exaggeration or demonization. Her rationale about using humor to undermine his rhetoric thus works most as a thought exercise, buttressing other artists' more overtly damning depictions of Trump.

Eisenberg also asks readers to think about themselves and their own potential complicity in the unfolding of contemporary social horrors. In her 2017 strip for *The Nib*'s "Never Again" feature, Trump again appears mundane and unremarkable, as do his supporters, but the latter are visually likened to a depicted crowd of 1930s German civilians in another panel. The artist draws the reader's attention to the dangers that may lurk in "business as usual," in the unnoticed workings of everyday politics and their insidious social ramifications. She makes this clear in her final panel, as a monochromatic crowd—which, stylized in the same line quality as her contemporary figures, could exist both in 1933 and 2016—is framed by the questions, "How are we similar to those who saw Hitler rise to power? How are we different?" In other words, the question of how Hitler and the Holocaust infiltrate comparisons to Trump in Jewish-created comics must also be extended to those who consume these comics. Eisenberg's work reminds us of Christopher Browning's "ordinary men," of Jan Gross's "neighbors," of the colloquial "Good German," and of any who are not held sufficiently accountable for their role within their own flawed system of government or cultural ecology.

Arts of Outrage: Matt Lubchansky and Eli Valley

Contrasting Eisenberg's studied contemplations, the comics of Matt Lubchansky and Eli Valley use markedly direct and purposefully inflammatory imagery in order to vilify Trump and his supporters. Valley's work also specifically condemns the hypocrisy he perceives in those who police the use of Holocaust analogies to the detriment of Jewish involvement in contemporary social ethics. Both artists see their sharp approaches as a fitting response to the extremism they critique. Lubchansky, for example, recounts how many describe Trump-era bigotry as "subtext made text," or as "masks off," a revived expression of policy from the era of Ronald Reagan but "expressed differently, more uncouth," with old prejudices "untethered," taboos eroded. Lubchansky espouses the view that "People who always felt this way have become completely emboldened to act, because of who's in power, and they feel there's no consequences for shooting up a synagogue or desecrating a cemetery" (personal interview). From this perspective, Lubchansky's satirical comics "de-mask" Trump, depicting him bragging about his "enormous Germanic brain" ("Trump Uses His Big-League Brain"), as a Ku Klux Klan member, and as a death-cult leader who insists that "dying is the tremendous new thing," mandating death for the masses during the rise of COVID19 in spring 2020 ("The GOP Death Cult"). In *The Nib*'s 2017 "Never Again?" feature, Lubchansky draws Trump condemning the press as "enemy of the people" in his sleep, beneath a swastika-patterned comforter and a headboard engraved with a Nazi eagle, his hand resting on a copy of Hitler's *My New Order* (see fig.). Beneath the satire of these exaggerated characterizations is palpable outrage behind Lubchansky's work,

which may induce readers' question-asking, critical thinking, and, hopefully, data collection. In order to know how to process these anger-fueled depictions, it becomes necessary for audience members to educate themselves on Trump's actual policies, statements, and track record of actions. For example, Lubchansky's tendency to depict cops with swastika and lightning-bolt tattoos, as in their "Stick to Your Guns" strip from August 2017 (see fig.), might prompt uninformed readers to research the problem of white supremacism in the American police force and its connection to a history of police brutality against Black Americans (Downs; Levin). Accordingly, though not particularly optimistic about comics' potential to change minds, Lubchanksy makes a conscious effort to feature lesser-known or insufficiently-reported details for politically uncertain readers to consider. This might be understood as a productive outcome of ideological comics that run on political outrage, beyond the entertainment value they offer to like-minded audiences.

If the lambasting tone of these comics have sometimes led to reactionist anger among those who do not share Lubchansky's understanding of political reality, Lubchansky is not particularly concerned. It would be counter-productive, they believe, for their comics to try to please all sides. Caveats and footnotes may prevent others from taking offense, but they also may dilute a comic's effectiveness. Overcomplication of a comic's reality can destroy its formal success and aesthetic impact. "You can't put in enough 'if-then' statements in your work to make it be read perfectly without completely destroying the flow of it or destroying a joke," Lubchansky states, "You hope people read what you make in good faith, and you can't affect how they're going to read it. [. . .] You can only put so many caveats in one

comic strip" (personal interview). Beyond the impossibility of controlling reader reception, to fret about "both sides" or "all sides" can sometimes itself become a harmful or politically dangerous act in contexts of systemic inequality and hate. Similar to the notion of those who would replace "Black Lives Matter" with "All Lives Matter," it becomes politically irresponsible to equate the validity of all perspectives when some of the most vocal of those perspectives are violent ones, espousing hate-based ideologies against minorities. Lubchansky makes this point clearly in "The Important Columnist Goes To a Nazi Rally," published on *The Nib* in August of 2017. In this strip, a reporter enters the scene of a protest clash between white supremacists carrying guns and Black Lives Matter activists. After collecting the perspectives of both sides (the former being that "nonwhites are genetically inferior" and should be "systematically rounded up and killed," the latter being a counteraction against Nazis marching in the streets undeterred by the police), the frazzled reporter throws pen and paper in the air and flees what he calls "the extremism on both sides, which are equally at fault!" The absurdity of this simplified interaction in comic relief gives the reader license to mock the reporter's deplorable equation between those set on enacting racist impulses that, for some, are nothing short of genocidal in intent, and those resisting American neo-fascism. Uncoincidentally, Lubchansky's comic appeared a day after the press conference in which Trump stated that there were "very fine people, on both sides" of the violent clashes that occurred at Charlottesville's "Unite the Right" rally days earlier. Context is key to appropriateness in this regard. As Eli Valley offers, "If you *always* draw Trump in a Nazi uniform, then it's going to lose its value. But if you draw him in a Nazi uniform immediately after he spews a version of the Great Replacement theory within days of the Tree of Life massacre, then I think it's legitimate . . . more than legitimate; it's necessary" (personal interview). Comics by Lubchansky and Valley are thus perhaps most successful among readers who follow the news and stay at least relatively up to date with American political developments in critical context.

Valley, who found himself creating more single-panel comics during the Trump era, has drawn similar comparisons to Lubchansky's,

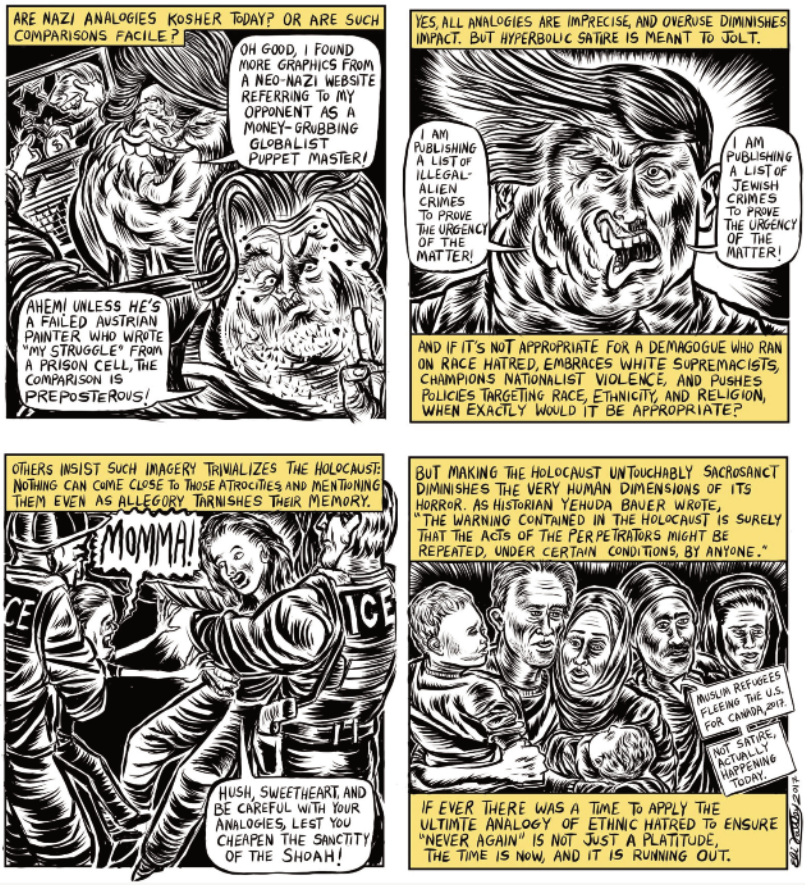
presenting Trump in Klan garb, Trump's face literally morphing into Hitler's (see fig). His decision to make work analogizing Trump and Hitler first began as a cautionary provocation but gradually, he felt, became more of an appropriate comparison. In his words:

> Early on it was sort of using the memory of demagoguery that was used to dehumanize Jews and others as a warning. But then as [Trump] started implementing policies that had direct echoes and sometimes direct ideological precursors of the worst atrocities of the twentieth century, then it became less of a fantastic reflection. . . . On the one hand, I was drawing Trump as more and more obscene and grotesque, and on the other hand I was drawing specific developments regarding border policy, for instance, or regarding his use of Jews as a scapegoat in his Great Replacement innuendos. (personal interview)

As Valley's depictions of Trump evolved throughout the latter's presidency, Trump's image became almost more of a texture or a landscape than that of a person. In Trump's continuous appearance in the comics featured on Valley's Patreon, Instagram, and Twitter accounts (all listed under the username "elivalley"), Trump's face has grown increasingly craggy and monstrous, Valley's stylus inventing intricate, irregular crevices that, more than skin, resemble a mountain of chewed gum. Reflecting on his evolving depictions of Trump, Valley comments on the duality of abstraction and realism:

> It was sort of a reaction to the fact that reality kept outpacing satire [. . .] It just became sort of metaphorical art for this total demolition of taste, humanity, norms, etcetera. And also because he kept creating his own realities [. . .] the growths of his face were sort of, for me, a mirror . . . [. . .] representing the multiple and almost infinite sort of darts of, you know, fake news, falsehoods that he was throwing [. . .] I was hoping that the visuals would sort of represent that aspect as well—the ever-metastasizing versions and lies and presentations of fake reality that he would insist are reality, and always with an undercurrent of violence, demagoguery,

hatred, race hatred, religion hatred, just an abomination. (personal interview).



Valley's images of Trump are both so abstracted as to become inhuman and so detailed in textured specificity as to feel imposing, demanding of visual study (see fig.). The effect of these renderings is to present Trump as a grotesquely unknowable, yet threatening Other whose actions recall specific abuses of history that sound the alarms of Valley's post-Holocaust conscience.

As an artist, Valley generally feels most confident in black-and-white, and his work takes inspiration from the monochromatic

works of Charles Burns, Robert Crumb, early twentieth-century Yiddish cartoonists like Leon Israel ("Lola"), pre-war German artists deemed by the Nazis as "degenerate" such as George Grosz and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and horror and science fiction comic art published prior to the self-censoring Comics Code of 1954. By presenting his political comics in a stylized, thick black line, and generally without color, Valley transports the reader from the complacency of mundane, contemporary life to enter the psychologically heightened space of newsprint journalism, as subjectively stylized via his expressionist drawing style. The effect is to both highlight and defamiliarize situations taken for granted as "normal" by cynical contemporaries, such as

the separation of refugee children from their parents by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and to place them in historical relief, as subjective "documents" of outrage in the face of a present reality that is unjustly neutralized by perspectives that only extend empathy to a Holocaust framework yet condemn any suggested similarity between the Holocaust and contemporary horrors. One of Valley's panels for his comic in *The Nib*'s March 2017 "Never Again" feature depicts ICE officials forcibly separating a crying child who screams "Momma!" from a mother who answers, "Hush, Sweetheart, and be careful with your analogies, lest you cheapen the sanctity of the Shoah!"

Valley does not see Jews as the primary victim of Trump's actions or the most at-risk group in Trump's America; rather, he believes it necessary for Jewish memory of occupying such a position in Nazi Europe to compel Jews and others to "serve as witness" to any vulnerable group's dehumanization, even in the early stages, "so that it doesn't happen again to anybody, to any group of people, to any marginalized community" (personal interview). Despite the harsh criticism he has faced, including outrageous comparisons between his work and the antisemitic drawings of *Der Stürmer* (Hoffman), Valley creates his Holocaust analogies with informed intentionality and conscious restraint. "Drawing an image of displacement," he argues, "is different than drawing a gas chamber" (personal interview). His "Doomed to Repeat It," published in *The Nib* June 27, 2019, directly critiques what he perceives to be a horrific misinterpretation of the "Never Again" injunction. His comic deliberately uses recognizable imagery from Jewish memory (a well-known photograph of a May 1944 transport of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz) but with a measure of distance that places it in a surreal register, the arrangement of subjects altered from the original composition. A stylized cluster of harried Jews marked with Star-of-David badges stand beside a cattle car and collectively proclaim, "Never again . . . will our ethnic cleansing nightmare . . . be invoked . . . to stop . . . an ethnic cleansing nightmare." The intended ridiculousness of the message is accomplished in part by the way the depicted transport thinks and speaks with a single mind, with speech bubbles emerging across the group, one by one, to com-

plete this shared sentence (see fig). The strangeness of this collective speech act supports Valley's reflection that these figures represent "memory itself." Given that "memory is not bound by strictures of individuals' speaking respective sentences," they speak in a singular, collective voice. If this image turns a scene of victimized individuals into an anachronistic automaton, a mouthpiece in the service of Valley's position, I argue it does so productively in order to criticize how the "Never Again" injunction is itself depersonalized and rendered meaningless when it turns too far inward, prioritizing the "sanctity" of Holocaust exceptionalism over attention to the humanity of the victims and the related need for solidarity with victims of contemporary atrocities (regardless of specific similarities or differences with the Holocaust itself). For Valley, Trump and right-wing Jewish organizations alike exceeded hypocrisy by espousing "Never Again" while remaining silent as the country enacted sadistic "ethnic-cleansing policies" toward asylum-seekers and refugees—policies, Valley insists, that were deliberately "designed to reduce the percentage of people of

color in our population." Reflecting on this issue, Valley asserts, "The abrogation of historical and moral responsibility by Jewish communal organizations was profound and disturbing. So in those cases, using images from Jewish trauma and memory were necessary as a sort of corrective to the deliberate obfuscation of our memory that was being perpetrated by our own organizations" (personal interview). Valley's work uses symbolic, stylized gestures to Holocaust displacement and loss in order to challenge audiences to consider "Never Again" in juxtaposition not only with contemporary antisemitism but also with Trump's "*torturing* [of] families [. . . ,] pulling children from their parents." From his perspective, "we must employ Jewish memory as witness and warning when the horrors of dehumanization begin to be perpetrated against other vulnerable populations, even if it's just at the earliest stages" ("RE: Interest in writing about your work").

If we are to understand Valley as somehow aligned with the Jewish Holocaust victims he depicts in his visually symbolic arguments (as his boldness in satirically depicting them would suggest), we are also likely to read a level of self-deprecation or even collective self-mockery expressed by Valley on behalf of American Jews who fall short of his standard of post-Holocaust ethics. From Valley's vantage point, it is worth mocking the chauvinism of those who claim a legacy of Holocaust survival and loss without also prioritizing sensitivity to state-sponsored violence against other minority groups within one's midst. In this respect, the Holocaust victims Valley depicts read less like historical appropriations and more like symbolic mirrors of their American descendants, arrested in the frame of sanctified memory yet willfully blind or mechanically unresponsive to the systemic oppression of others whose plight reads, to them, only as an intrusion on the right to Jewish Holocaust exceptionalism. Valley's expression of collective Jewish American self-mockery reflects what Louis Kaplan ponders about the place of self-deprecating Jewish jokes within contexts in which antisemitism has become more palpable. In his afterword to *At Wit's End: The Deadly Discourse on the Jewish Joke* (2020), Kaplan considers the Trump era and asks the reader, "Has the current toxic political environment brimming with racism and xenophobia moved the threshold of appropriateness [for Jewish self-depre-

cating jokes] in a way comparable to the rise of Hitler and the Nazis at the end of Weimar Germany? [. . .] Or has it made Jewish wits even bolder and more provocative in defending their freedom of comic speech?" (224). Both may well be true, with Lubchansky's and Valley's work speaking especially to Kaplan's latter formulation.

Flesh-and-Blood Solidarity: Leela Corman's Comics Activism

Like Valley, Leela Corman is outraged by those who do not extend the meaning of "Never Again" beyond their own in-group. "I feel pretty iron-clad," states Corman, "if I have to stand up for it, for using Holocaust language and analogies in this time period. I think it is a morally and ethically bankrupt argument [. . .] when anyone [tells] us not to do that" (personal interview). As she understands it, cultural trauma creates lasting insular responses but also speaks to the universal truth that "if you give too much power to people, they will do this to each other. And nobody is immune. So being Jewish doesn't confer some sort of moral authority on you. It confers a generational responsibility" (personal interview). Even preceding the Trump era, Corman recalls her outrage about the growing number of refugees in the world, with right-wing reactionary Jews focusing instead on the antisemitism they discerned "around every corner," and the phrase "Never Again" used only selectively and self-servingly by particular factions. "It's absolutely *bullshit*," she insisted, "that people say 'Never Again' and 'Never forget.' We have *forgotten*" ("Re: Inquiry about your work"). In answer to such forgetting, Corman's graphic narrative work is an incisive and compelling reminder of history's bearing on the present.

Corman has generally identified as a long-form comics artist but occasionally offers online excerpts and shorter web comics, once depicting historical trauma as a faceless figure who weighs on her shoulders, a burden carried into the present ("Drawing Strength"). One reason she prefers to create longer-form comics relates to perceived shortcomings of Internet culture in general, the ways in which online feedback lapses into anonymous aggression rooted in hierarchies of identity politics and the silencing-weapons of political correctness. "I don't like publicly engaging with strangers about the

semantics of atrocity," she states, "the semantics of genocide. And that's because Twitter and other social media are not the place to have these conversations, except as calls to action [. . .], especially if the opening gambit of the conversation is somebody yelling at you for something, rather than just asking a question or making a comment" (personal interview). Still, Corman has offered recent Internet comics, including a four-panel piece for The Nib's "Never Again" feature in 2017, longer pieces for *Tablet*, and online excerpts for *The Believer* from her graphic novel, *Victory Parade*, which takes place in wartime Brooklyn and the Buchenwald concentration camp ("Victory Gar-

den"). The Jewish corpses and survivors Corman depicts in *Victory Parade*, with chestnut-shaded locks, hairy legs, distinctive facial features, red polka-dot garments, and translucent, rosy skin that bruises in purple watercolor, are decidedly not idealized or saintly (see fig.). Rather, they are living, breathing parents, children, and siblings as they would appear on their way to work or school or the grocery store. Like Mati and Maya Kochavi's 2019 *Eva.Stories* project, which uses the format of an Instagram story to reimagine the experience of a Polish Jewish girl under Nazi occupation, Corman's work seems to proclaim, "This happened in 'real life!'" Unlike the Kochavis' project, however, "real life" here is not a filtered Instagram curation but an interiority that is equally gritty and poetic, in which dismembered human legs invade the imaginings of a factory worker's drab smoking break (see fig.). Looking at contemporary social injustices in America, Corman insists, "This stuff is happening right in our faces and so if

we're not looking at history, we will miss what is happening right in front of us [. . .] It feels ever more vital, but in a way that cannot be insular in our community. It has to be connected to broader human history and to the vast network of atrocities that people perpetrate on each other, and this is why I'm doing this work now. This is my activism now" (qtd. in Sahdev).

Corman's aesthetic is rooted in juxtapositions of history and presence, anger and awe. She takes inspiration both from punk artists of the late twentieth century and from Weimar-era German painters who explored human existence as simultaneously beautiful and grotesque and whose work was condemned as "degenerate" by the Nazis. She cites George Grosz, Otto Dix, other Neue Sachlichkeit artists of Weimar Germany as comprising a tradition in which her work is grounded. These painters critiqued German nationalism by painting the realities of wounded soldiers, urban sex workers, and corrupt politicians. "I think they're the progenitors of a lot of comics," asserts Corman, "and of the frame of thinking [of] not flinching from something very ugly, not trying to make something 'pretty,' of finding the meeting ground of beauty and brutality. I mean, that's my entire aesthetic" (personal interview). Contrasting Valley's stylized, expressionist usage of Holocaust imagery to comment on contemporary atrocities, however, Corman reanimates scenes of Holocaust events in the gradient and blended flesh-and-blood hues of watercolor, jolting readers awake into the tangibility of traumatic violence and its legacies, against what has become, for many, an unproductively fossilized and untouchable past. A descendant of Jews who survived the Shoah in hiding "on the run, in ghettos and in the woods" ("Interview by Stef Lenk"), she believes her family history made her instinctually aware "that mass traumas worldwide are connected" and that "there have been so many holocausts," with America itself being built on two of them (qtd. in Sahdev). Corman thus denaturalizes the perceived exceptionalism of the Holocaust, drawing connections to other episodes of genocide and systemic violence without conflating them. Despite the efforts of institutionalized history, which draw lines and create divisions, "History isn't neat," she insists, "History is chaos. We try to make order out of the chaos later on when we are safe but

that's just not how it actually happens" ("Picturing Victory").

Corman's work visually layers disparate spectacles of violence to express the constant "oppressive dread" she perceives within the daily life of Trump's America (personal interview). Immediately after the 2016 election, writes Corman, neo-Nazis began to harass her online. "I didn't know who in my town I could trust," she admits, "Who among them voted for him? I figured those people would be happy to dig whatever mass grave my daughter and I would end up in if this went as far as it could go, and I was sure they'd be rolling up on my Black neighbors first, obviously, given the racial hierarchy of America" ("Re: Inquiry about your work"). Corman's piece for *The Nib*'s "Never Again" feature in 2017 employs visual juxtaposition in ways that mirror her text's call for greater perspective and solidarity across disparate experiences of social violence. In one panel, a man's hand gropes a woman's body against a backdrop in which a lynched man, painted in brown, hangs from a tree whose olive-green leaves become the army uniform of a swastika-marked soldier stamping through piles of mangled bodies clad in concentration-camp uniforms (see fig.). The rusted reds of the tree trunk spill into the blood that frames these corpses. In the following panel, the gates of Auschwitz, marked

"ARBEIT MACHT FREI," seeps into a present-day landscape in which the artist and other Jews share a single thought bubble that links them with this ominous image in the midst of passing anonymously in the street. This urban scene includes individuals of different ages, genders, and skin colors (a brown-skinned woman wearing a hair wrap, a blonde-haired white man, a bald elderly man, and others). The effect of placing these panels beside each other is to make it impossible not to see even this dreary passing moment without also noticing the evident connections that exist between contemporary people and the racial-, ethnic-, and gender-based violations of recent history, even in the context of an anonymous twenty-first century crowd. "For 70 years now, we've said 'Never again,'" writes Corman, "as new atrocities have overtaken the old, and new bodies pile & rot on top of the old ones" ("Re: Inquiry about your work"). As stated in the text, her work envisions disparate instances of violence in holistic dialogue with each other, as parts of a problematic whole. Put another way, her work does not merely compare present dangers to past ones; it also asks contemporary Americans and bystanders to look at themselves more deeply, to think about the traumas and atrocities to which they are connected and in which they are implicated by virtue of their being part of the same flawed, traumatized, guilt-ridden, and divided social structure.

If Corman is angry about empty uses of "Never Again" and undue restrictions on historical analogies, she is also optimistic about recent cultural shifts she has observed. She recalls that the months leading up to Richard Spencer's November 2017 lecture at the University of Florida at Gainesville were:

> the most contentious I ever experienced in my nine years living there. We all argued with each other about it, the university tried to get out of renting him the theater but couldn't, and a friend of mine who served on the university Board of Governors told me that […] she was as angry as I was, and that her grandfather had been one of the Italian anti-fascists who carried Mussolini's corpse through the streets. At the time the only independent bookstore was downtown, and owned by a Black

> man, and I was terrified for his safety, and that of all my friends and colleagues and students. [. . .] But, what actually happened was kind of amazing: 1,000 people turned up to protest (a huge number in such a small town), my partner and many friends among them. The few white nationalists who tried to provoke violence were escorted out of the crowd by demonstrators. The theater was nearly empty, the only seats filled by more protesters [. . .] Eventually [Spencer] gave up on delivering his speech and slunk off stage, and he and his people silently drove out of town ("Re: Inquiry about your work").

More broadly, Corman also notes a decrease in pushback against Trump-era Nazi analogies that she traces to the public's reaction to learning about the conditions of U.S. ICE detention centers. She also attributes this shift to a deeper rooting in diaspora identity she has observed among American Jews, including the group Never Again Action, which formed in summer 2019 and proclaims itself a "movement of Jews and allies fighting to end America's cruel immigration policies," through civil disobedience and nonviolent protest against ICE practices. In the words of the organization's website, "We knew from our own history what happens when a government targets, dehumanizes and strips an entire group of people of all their civil and human rights. We recognized the signs, and we could feel it in our guts—the words that we learned in our communities and from our grandparents: 'Never Again'" (*Never Again Action*). Having grown up somewhat alienated in the Jewish world, Corman now aligns herself with Jews who have "found our voice in understanding the ways that the atrocities our ancestors experienced continue now and are often done in our name. And the responsibility that we have to fight them. That, for me, is the 'Holocaust analogy.'" I felt like a kind of lone voice in the wilderness for a long time with these thoughts," she shares, "but I don't anymore. Now I feel like there are thousands of us who are on this page" (personal interview).

From the Margins of Holocaust Memory: Dorian Alexander on a Queer "Never Again"

Questions about the appropriateness and moral authority of those who analogize the Holocaust are not solely Jewish questions, even if they are primarily so. Numerically speaking, the murder of six million Jews by Germans and their collaborators constitutes the most drastic decimation of any people targeted by the Third Reich, carried out with clear intentions of total annihilation. Nevertheless, millions of gentile Soviet citizens; over a million gentile Poles; hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Roma and Sinti people, and people with disabilities; as well as others were also subjected to Nazi terror, imprisonment, and systemic violence and killing; Holocaust memory and designations of authority over it are not often extended to the contemporary communities of these groups, some of which also remain subject to legalized discrimination, harassment, and violence in twenty-first century contexts. Especially as a majority of U.S. Jews accumulate benefits of white privilege and cultural enfranchisement in America, it is essential to maintain embodied and impassioned investments in remembering and meaningfully channeling the insights of those who were subjected to systemic, state-based violence and murder. Lubchansky, who expresses more fear as a trans person than as a white Jew in New York, might have had less reason to connect with Holocaust history had they not experienced firsthand the endangerment of existing as a queer subject in the present (personal interview). The biological and cultural descendants of all Third Reich victims and survivors, Jewish or not, are implicated in discussions about analogizing Trump with Hitler. Accordingly, Holocaust analogies in contemporary web comics have helped work against the historic erasures and marginalization of those victimized by Nazi Germany for reasons other than being Jewish. Considering this contextual framework, some Trump-era web comics have spoken from "alternative" post-Holocaust perspectives and have worked to compel the investment and concern of audiences less aware of a variety of victimized and resistant experiences under German fascism.

In "The Life of Gad Beck: Gay. Jewish. Nazi Fighter.," published on *The Nib* in January 2019, a contemporary interracial queer couple's experiences frame the story of Gad Beck. Beck is a historical figure and author of a memoir recounting his experience as a gay Jew in Nazi Germany for whom underground activism, queer solidarity, and same-sex partnerships helped fuel his resistance and survival of the Third Reich. Brought to life with art by Levi Hastings, the comic strip begins with the present-day couple's experience witnessing Berlin's Memorial to Homosexuals persecuted under Nazism, the famous video of two men kissing, visible through a small opening within a massive block of concrete, as designed by Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset (see fig). In December 2020, Dorian Alexander, who wrote the comic, recalled their own interaction with the Berlin memorial and the uncanny feeling experienced when stepping away from the video peephole and back into the "real world," in which anyone might have descended from perpetrators of Nazi violence. Alexander visited the memorial in 2017, in part to learn more about queer history and the late Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld. "It's a very effective memorial," they recalled, as it draws one into an intimate queer moment in the context of a "very public" space. "I was unnerved by the people around," Alexander remembers from the moments of re-entering the public space surrounding the memorial's window, "because there was immediate suspicion, I suppose, of 'who could do this to me? is it you? is it you?,' which was irrational, of course, but that was just the emotional response after engaging with the memorial, I suppose" (personal interview).

Alexander's experience of the Berlin memorial is not unlike the experience of the comics reader, with comics visualizing subversive realities subsumed within structuring frames and boxes. The described power dynamic between encased queerness and external endangerment is reversed in one of the final panels of Alexander's comic, in which a queer domestic space is invaded by a television frame broadcasting a white supremacist counter-protest (see fig.). In this final scene, the contemporary characters watch footage of the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the men onscreen bearing tiki torches. Alexander's accompanying narration offers, ". . . it can be hard not to tremble. Because we don't have to imagine what they will do to us, if they take enough power. We already know." Hastings depicts this moment of flatscreen footage of the Unite the Right protestors as it fractures the living space of the comic's contemporary protagonists. A somewhat chilling design places the Caucasian partner's face beside the row of shrieking white supremacist faces onscreen, as though to merge him visually with the white male privileges that his partner lacks, and thus to pose further threat to their unity as a couple; the racially ambiguous character departs from the couch and hunches over in solitary anguish against a jet-black background

that, in the subsequent panel, becomes a mammoth pile of shoes, like those of Auschwitz victims, a metonymic image for state-facilitated, hate-based atrocities in a broader sense (see fig.).

Alexander shares that the inspiration for this latter character was a "visualization of my own experience" of reading queer survivor memoirs, including Beck's, for a course in graduate school taught by a Jewish historian of fascism. "Reading about the experiences of these men in the past," shared Alexander, "made me feel like, 'if all the people I knew from my childhood, and their orientation toward queerness, if they got their way, this would be the end result [. . .] There was a deep connection to thinking, 'This could have been me if I lived during that point,' and once Trump starts getting into power and we see the rise of, you know . . . it's almost like, 'This could still happen'" (personal interview). Having grown up near Charlottesville, Virginia, the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally that took place there weighed heavily on Alexander's mind, and they wrote the Gad Beck piece shortly after the rally took place. Alexander approaches their comics work from the position of having personally survived an Evangelical Christian upbringing as a gay person, recalling, for example, their brother's Liberty University graduation in a stadium of about 10,000 people "who were all cheering the slander of marriage equality, essentially," and honoring speakers who used "crusading rhetoric" with "very explicit warlike imagery" of "Christian soldiers" to compel these students and their families to be "warriors in a culture war" against queer people and others envisioned as enemies. As an alienated family member in this crowd, Alexander internalized "how easy it is to whip these people up into a frenzy and how non-normative identities can be swept up into a logic of elimination" (personal interview).

Affective Implications of Bidirectional Memory

At the heart of the debate around the appropriateness of Trump-era analogies to Hitler and Nazism is a fundamental disagreement about the injunction of "Never Again." If one interprets this phrase universally, it stands as a prohibition against the committing of atrocities against any people. However, an alternative interpretation of

"never again, only to us" prohibits the extension of the Holocaust's warnings and Jewish ethical witnessing to any group beyond Jews themselves. It also participates in the erasure of other targeted communities' claim to Holocaust legacies, including LGBTQ people who were persecuted and sometimes imprisoned in the queerphobic postwar societies of their liberators. Similarly, though history supports the notion that Jews have been exceptionally or especially victimized, valuable solidarity between Jewish and other peoples is fostered when each group transcends myopic perspectives to recognize the violence suffered beyond one's own in-group. As Eisenberg writes, on the one hand, Trump-era Holocaust analogies might harmfully erase the nuance of the Third Reich as "its own unique horror," but, on the other hand, comparisons do not need to be *equations* in order to be appropriate or worthwhile as comics ("Never Again?"). They might also work as affective *reverberations*, promoting productive evaluations of how contemporary realities are both similar *and* different to those of historical horrors. From Valley's vantage point, Trump is certainly not Hitler, but he has been rightfully considered in relation to Hitler due to his border and immigration policies, his alignment with white supremacists, his broad discrediting of the press, and his blatant promotion of self-aggrandizing falsities. Discussing his use of the Nazi analogy, Valley states, "If they have Stephen Miller on staff and Steve Bannon, who are working with literal white supremacists to launder their views into the mainstream, whether on Breitbart or in the policies that Trump is putting forth in our immigration system, the Nazi analogy, even though it's dangerous because it can be glib or overused, is also worthwhile" (personal interview). Eisenberg offers similar reflections, noting a shift from an earlier need to "lay out exactly why I thought this was an appropriate comparison" to a growing public acceptance of this analogy at face value, which accompanied reactions to the rise of the alt-right ("Re: Interest in writing"). While Lubchansky satirizes the ethnic nationalism and bigotry that appears in the daily news, Corman depicts a logic of epigenetics and interconnection of experience to advocate for persecuted and oppressed bodies, rather than for identity-based hierarchies in the name of an exclusionary form of memorialization. All examined artists seem to agree that "Never

Again" loses its meaning when it cannot be invoked against state-supported violence against *any* marginalized population, Jewish or not. As Eli Valley writes, "making the Holocaust untouchably sacrosanct diminishes the very human dimensions of its horror" ("Never Again?").

The comics tenet of introducing complexity through simplification is not only a matter of the depicted subject but also a matter of audience reception and potential complicity. We, as readers, are not absolved from contemplating our own positionality within the inferred comparisons of Holocaust analogies. Valley quotes historian Yehuda Bauer: "the warning contained in the Holocaust is surely that the acts of the perpetrators might be repeated, under certain conditions, by anyone" ("Never Again?"). Including these words beside fact-based drawings of Muslim Americans fleeing the U.S. for Canada in 2017 and families forcibly separated by ICE, Valley provokes readers to question the dangers of discounting the significance of any government-enforced endangerment, even those that do not necessarily trigger immediate associations of European Jews of 1933–1945. Corman's piece for *The Nib*'s 2017 feature agrees with this stance, concluding, "If we can't look at this very worst turning point in our recent past for lessons, 'Never again' is worse than meaningless, it is a mockery of our grandparents' bones." Lubchansky offers a similar perspective in their contribution, which asserts, "When we say 'never again,' we should mean it." In this iteration, the dangerous phenomenon to which "never again" refers is neither Jewish genocide nor Hitler; rather, Hitler is invoked as visual shorthand for the empowerment of a demagogue who delegitimizes public reason and media, dehumanizing groups of people for his own political advantage—an unacceptable situation regardless of who the social targets are.

The artists examined in this article are under no delusion that Trump and Hitler are one and the same. Rather, their work uses bidirectional memory to assert the importance of considering and resisting the normalization of authoritarianism and hate-based violence. As Lubchansky muses,

> I don't think Trump is Hitler [. . .]; I don't think he has an exterminationist agenda for anybody necessarily. I think he's just

> not a very smart person, he's grasping for power, he's a conman . . . it's a completely different scenario. [. . .] American fascism's going to look completely different than Italian, German, Eastern European . . . so it's more complicated than 'Can you call them Nazis? (personal interview)

Similarly, for Alexander, the question of whether Trump is comparable to Hitler is somewhat impossible to answer substantively and is beside the point. Rather, what interests Alexander is that the "affective lens," that "people are *feeling* there's a connection there, and why is that? I'm not sure if it says as much about the actual Holocaust as much as those connections make a comment on the United States' relationship to the Holocaust." Rather than allow politicians to align Holocaust memory with an agenda that enacts state violence upon other groups of people, Alexander argues that Americans should connect Holocaust memory to the warning signs of fascism, whether or not fascism looks identical to that of the Third Reich:

> I think it is fair to say that Trump and a lot of his political followers, either unknowingly or quite intentionally, with a minor but vocal group of them, fully embrace fascist ideology. I think, then, the comparisons are quite fair [. . .] how it forms now is much different. I think there's a lot more 'wink-wink, nudge-nudge' sort of attitude, a system of plausible deniability that's built into fascism now that makes it a lot more insidious [. . .], and I think that people are right to be afraid of that, and they're right to look to the past, to historical trauma, as both informing their fear and as being something to point to – to say 'this is the reason we have to resist fascist ideology as it emerges today.' We can talk about it being neo-fascism all you want, but it's still grounded in historical corridors that we need to be reminded of. (personal interview)

Popular Trump-era web comics that analogize Hitler and the Holocaust tend to prioritize a set of cultural values shared by Jewish, feminist, and queer perspectives: values of questioning, learning,

and critical debate, as well as witnessing and empathy for the systemically oppressed, regardless of whether or not the oppressed share one's own identity categories. Valley insists on the "moral requirement" of Jews applying Jewish memory "to stand as witness and to oppose" atrocities of the Trump era (personal interview). None of the artists discussed here view these implied commitments as a rejection of Jewish loyalty or identity; instead, most describe them as central to Jewish, feminist, or queer ethics, as well as to the lessons derived from Holocaust memory, Hebrew Exodus narratives, and ongoing social liberation movements. A commitment to fighting all forms of social injustice, of course, does not preclude a commitment to fighting antisemitism. While Valley attributes his Nazi analogies to the need for alarming the public that Trump's administration might revive "the horrors of history" against refugees and people of color, among others, he also remains simultaneously committed to calling out what he perceives to be Trump's interconnected "antisemitism and the entire administration's antisemitism, the way that it led to both Pittsburgh and Poway massacres," even if Jews are not the primary victims of Trump-era bigotry (personal interview). Likewise, though Eisenberg's critiques of Trump focus on the danger he poses mainly to current refugees, Muslim immigrants, and people of color, she links her critique directly to her position as a Holocaust-conscious Jew, placing her depiction of the gates of Auschwitz directly above a tweeting Donald Trump and beside a panel that reads, "I felt safe in the same way, I imagine, that Jews in Squirrel Hill felt safe," in a comic published on *The Nib* just days after the Tree of Life shooting, in which a white nationalist man killed eleven Jewish congregants in a Pittsburgh synagogue ("It's All Happening Again"). According to the artists examined here, Jewish endangerment is always interconnected with other forms of endangerment and, if one loses historical perspective, it can become a weapon for victim-competition rather than a means of advancing ethics and solidarity across social groups. Trump's election was, for Corman, "the first time I really felt unsafe as a Jew," but also a time that made more palpable a pronounced "hierarchy of unsafety." In addition to recalling her feelings of fear as a Jew and a woman, she remembers realizing the

ways in which her own positions of potential vulnerability could also become obstacles rather than bridges to connecting with others facing renewed terror in American society: "I'm a Jew and I'm a woman, but my skin is white, I'm able-bodied, I'm straight . . . [. . .] I can use that privilege, but also it's really important to be aware of it and not let it get weaponized, and also to really recognize the parallel universe that other people around me are living in every day" (personal interview). Lubchansky similarly shares being targeted more as a trans person than as a Jew in Trump-era America, as well as balancing the memory of their grandparents' racialized Jewishness with Lubchansky's own present-day privilege as someone read by others as white, with all the relative privilege that designation entails (personal interview).

Conclusion

It remains important to preserve Holocaust memory and the distinctive aspects of Holocaust history, as well as to respect the particular experiences and perspectives of those communities most impacted by Nazi terror; that being said, exclusionary approaches to such remembrance imperils the possibility of embodied, twenty-first-century relevance, as well as ethical imperatives of what Valley calls "Jewish witnessing" to the plight of other (non-Jewish) targets of the public and of the state. The comics examined here use Nazi analogies to protest the reservation of Holocaust-related insights and ethical imperatives exclusively for descendants of survivors and victims, or the refusal to acknowledge connections between the Holocaust and contemporary systems of violence that "fall short" of a full-on, state-sponsored murder of millions. Would analogies between Trump and Hitler raise an eyebrow had Hitler stopped at discrediting the "Jewish press," rather than ultimately discrediting Jewish existence? Would it be less controversial to color ICE activity with Nazi connotations had the Germans and their collaborators stopped at separating Jewish families, without also murdering them? The comics discussed in this article sometimes provoke impassioned reactions but more importantly ask us to remember that history and

contemporary life are not neatly defined units that can be separated by clean borders; rather, as Art Spiegelman most famously articulated it, they "bleed" into each other, and it is up to all thinking minds to maintain perspective, remaining critical not only of the simplistic historical analogy but also of the dangerous, fear-based metanarrative, the sometimes-attractive invitation to see only the most convenient side of the story, to see the world as a battleground of "us" and "them," rather than as a set of multiple complex and intertwined realities that inform each other and offer human points of connection between elements and across peoples or panels. Provocatively stretching established usages of sanctified Holocaust history and memory, the use of bidirectional memory in these twenty-first-century web comics sometimes does risk simplification or trivialization of the Holocaust, but it does so from informed, contextualized positions, and in order to address urgent social issues relevant to Holocaust history. Calling out the myopia of ethnic nationalism and its violent social implications, they succeed in promoting critical thinking about current social climates, as well as relating to the Holocaust more as an affective legacy and ethical warning than as a badge of honor or a silencing monopoly on victimhood. Taken together, the separate projects of these comics artists challenge audiences to study history and contemporary life more closely, as well as to become sufficiently aware of the interconnectedness of past and present. Channeling anxiety, terror, and outrage into satire, visual essay, or social provocation, they envision present-day and historical concerns bidirectionally and with creative license, painting today's social atrocities in the appropriately grandiose, panicked tones of expressionist art, with the grotesque beauty of Weimar Germany's "degenerate" aesthetic, or in a measured manner that highlights the unsettlingly mundane nature of historical horror-in-the-making. They break pedestals of Holocaust history to expose its disturbingly human characteristics and, thus, to consider dangerous historical afterlives in the embodied present, beyond exclusionary approaches to memorialization that obscure physiological and ethical knowledge about social danger, approaches that pound such knowledge into ideological weapons and political "Trump cards."

Works Cited

Alexander, Dorian. Personal interview. 18 Dec. 2020.

Bartov, Omer et al. "An Open Letter to the Director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum." *The New York Review of Book*s. 1 Jul. 2019, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/01/an-open-letter-to-the-director-of-the-holocaust-memorial-museum/

Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. Harper-Collins, 1993.

Corman, Leela. "Drawing Strength From My Grandfather, Who Carried His Losses From the Holocaust." *Tablet*, 29 Dec. 2013, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/grandfather-carried-losses.

———. "Re: Inquiry about your work." Received by Golan Moskowitz, 28 Dec. 2020.

———. Interview by Stef Lenk. "Picturing Victory from Brooklyn to Buchenwald." *Literaturwissenschaft in Berlin*, 26 Apr. 2019, literaturwissenschaft-berlin.de/leela-corman-picturing-victory/.

———. Personal interview. 22 Dec. 2020.

———. "Victory Garden." *Believer Magazine*, 14 July 2020, believermag.com/victory-garden/.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke UP, 2003.

Downs, Kenya. "FBI warned of white supremacists in law enforcement 10 years ago. Has anything changed?" *PBS New Hour*, 21 Oct. 2016, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/fbi-white-supremacists-in-law-enforcement.

Eisenberg, Lisa Rosalie. "Being Jewish in Trump's America." *The Nib*, 15 Dec. 2016, https://thenib.com/being-jewish-in-trump-s-america/

———. "It's All Happening Again." *The Nib*, 5 Nov. 2018, thenib.com/it-s-all-happening-again/.

———. "Re: Interest in writing about your work for journal article." Received by Golan Moskowitz, 21 Dec. 2020.

Gross, Jan T. *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Princeton UP, 2001.

Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, pp. 103–28.

Hoffman, Ari. "Op-Ed: A disgrace in the Valley – Co-sponsoring anti-Semitism at Stanford." *The Stanford Daily*, 6 May 2019, https://www.stanforddaily.com/2019/05/06/op-ed-a-disgrace-in-the-valley-co-sponsoring-anti-semitism-at-stanford/

Kaplan, Louis. *At Wit's End: The Deadly Discourse on the Jewish Joke*. Fordham UP, 2020.

Levin, Sam. "White supremacists and militias have infiltrated police across US, report says." *The Guardian*, 27 Aug. 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/27/white-supremacists-militias-infiltrate-us-police-report.

Lubchansky, Matt. "The GOP Death Cult." *The Nib*, 8 Apr. 2020, https://thenib.com/the-gop-death-cult/.

———. "The Important Columnist Goes To a Nazi Rally." *The Nib*, 16 Aug. 2017, https://thenib.com/the-important-columnist-goes-to-a-nazi-rally/.

———. Personal interview. 21 Dec. 2020.

———. "Stick to Your Guns." *The Nib*, 30 Aug. 2017, https://thenib.com/stick-to-your-guns/.

———. "Trump Uses His Big-League Brain." *The Nib*, 1 Nov. 2017, https://thenib.com/trump-uses-his-big-league-brain/.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. HarperCollins, 1993.

"Mission and History," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history.

"Never Again?: Five Jewish Cartoonists on the Use of Holocaust Imagery in Trump's America." *The Nib*, 15 Mar. 2017, thenib.com/never-again/.

Never Again Action, www.neveragainaction.com/.

Pierce, Rebecca. "Selective Memory." *Jewish Currents*, 4 Dec. 2020, jewishcurrents.org/selective-memory/.

Resha, Adrienne. "The Blue Age of Comic Books." *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, Spring 2020, pp. 66–81.

Sahdev, Sanvitti. "Cartoonist Leela Corman speaks on visual storytelling, activism." *The Rice Thresher*, 29 Oct. 2019, https://www.ricethresher.org/article/2019/10/cartoonist-leela-corman-speaks-on-visual-storytelling-activism.

Stein, Arlene. *Reluctant Witness: Survivors, Their Children, and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness*. Oxford UP, 2015.

Steinbuch, Yaron. "US Holocaust museum denounces AOC's 'concentration camp' remarks." *New York Post*, 24 Jun. 2019, https://nypost.com/2019/06/24/us-holocaust-museum-denounces-aocs-concentration-camp-remarks/?utm_medium=SocialFlow&utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_source=NYPTwitter

"United States COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by State," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Accessed 11 Mar. 2021, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100klast7days

Valley, Eli. "A Springtime of Erasure." *Jewish Currents*, 25 Nov. 2019, https://jewishcurrents.org/a-springtime-of-erasure/

———. "Kapo, Kapow." *Jewish Currents*. 27 Jun. 2018, https://jewishcurrents.org/kapo-kapow/.

———. Personal interview. 21 Dec. 2020.

———. "Re: Interest in writing about your work." Received by Golan Moskowitz, 30. Dec. 2020.

@elivalley. "This is @benshapiro. Shabbat Shalom." *Twitter*, 21 Jun. 2019, 11:03 a.m., https://twitter.com/elivalley/status/1142100794017275905

Comics, Visibility, and Exposure in Roz Chast's *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant*

Davida Pines
Boston University

In her comics memoir *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant* (2014), Roz Chast uses her wry and unthreatening cartooning style to show the decidedly unpleasant aspects of what she calls "this aging thing" (10). Her book documents her experiences as the primary caretaker of her elderly parents in the last years of their lives as they move from independence to "assisted living" to hospice and finally to death. Notwithstanding those "nice pinks, safe peaches, inoffensive blues, soft greens, and harmless neutrals" (127) characteristic of both Chast's comics as well as, yes, the décor of the assisted living establishment where Chast eventually moves her parents, the memoir exposes bracing realities. Rather than turning away from the unpleasantness associated with end of life, Chast uses the comics form to make what we as a culture prefer not to see starkly visible, putting unsuspecting readers in a position to witness painful, and painfully personal, moments.

As determined as her parents are to avoid talking about and facing death, Chast seems equally determined in her memoir to expose and explore old age with all of its attendant indignities. Fellow *New*

Yorker writer and physician Atul Gawande explains his own decision to write *Being Mortal* (2014), a book, like Chast's, on death and dying, as driven by a belief that "by pulling back the veil and peering in close, a person can make sense of what is most comforting or strange or disturbing [about death]" (9). Through careful, probing questions, Gawande encourages patients, family, and friends to imagine the unimaginable: a time when we are no longer able to care for ourselves. If we can permit ourselves to envision such a time, Gawande suggests, then we can have a hand in shaping what happens: we can prepare. Chast's comics memoir helps readers picture what most people prefer not to imagine. By juxtaposing different kinds of images, specifically, comics, photographs, and sketches, Chast experiments with what it means to make visible, using the multidimensionality of the comics form to pull back the veil and peer in close at death, dying, and loss. In particular, Chast brings together her signature pastel-colored comics, a selection of black-and-white family portrait photographs from her childhood, a cluster of informal digital snapshots, a few, devastating all-text panels, and finally twelve portrait sketches set one after the next in slow, silent progression. The multiple, intersecting visual modes testify not only to the expansiveness of the comics form but also to Chast's commitment to showing and exposing uncomfortable and at times unspeakable truths.

Comics and Visibility

The comics form lends itself to visuality, specifically, to making what is typically unseen seen. Most discussions of the rise of nonfiction and autobiographical comics point to Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972), an underground comics autobiography that permits readers to see and experience drawn representations of Green's own tormenting thoughts due to obsessive-compulsive disorder. Green's comics autobiography stands as one of the first to offer verbal and visual access to interior, painful, and otherwise unseen experiences. Art Spiegelman famously credits

Green with inspiring his own autobiographical work in *Maus*. Citing Spiegelman's remark that "'Justin turned comic book boxes into intimate secular confession booths,'" Jared Gardner notes that, following Green's lead, "[Spiegelman] and others began lining up to offer their own confessions to this new repository" (8). Indeed, the use of the comics form to broach taboo subjects and enable readers to enter intimate spaces continues strong today. As comics artist and editor MK Czerwiec observes in the introduction to *Menopause: A Comic Treatment* (2020), "Comics have a long history of taking on stigmatized topics" (3). The collection, featuring work by female comics artists including Lynda Barry and Ellen Forney, makes public and visible the physical and psychological experiences most commonly associated with menopause and yet so rarely seen or discussed in popular culture.

In particular, Hillary Chute's 2010 *Graphic Women*, a study of the use of comics by five female artists to represent deeply private and previously overlooked trauma, paved the way for this recent collection. The decision to depict painful experience in words and images, Chute argues, challenges accepted notions of trauma as being beyond visual and verbal representation: "The complex visualizing [that graphic narratives undertake] suggests that we need to rethink the dominant tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility that have tended to characterize trauma theory as well as our current censorship-driven culture in general" (18). By drawing images of trauma onto the page, the artists give literal shape to emotionally overwhelming memories, making the experiences visible, legible, and ultimately thinkable to themselves and others. Readers gain empathy and understanding by being able to see and witness suffering. Through drawing, comics memoirists assert and inscribe a sense of themselves as whole and separate from their experiences: "Against a valorization of absence and aporia, graphic narrative asserts the value of presence, however complex and contingent" (17). The power and innovation of the comics form, Chute argues, is precisely this ability to show what has been deemed personally and culturally un-showable. The comics works refuse the crippling silence

and devastating invisibility imposed by traumatic events, risking the pain, shame, and social opprobrium of telling and showing.[1]

Roz Chast's memoir fits into this comics tradition of making private and painful experience visible. She includes multiple modes of representation in order to be true to the complexity of her own experience even as it intersects with that of her parents' traumatic history. As Chast notes about her parents, "Between their one-bad-thing-after-another lives and the Depression, World War II, and the Holocaust in which they'd both lost family—it is amazing that they weren't crazier than they were. Who could blame them for not wanting to talk about death?" (6). Scarred by losses connected to their terrifying past, Chast's parents worried constantly about possible, looming catastrophes even as they sought not to tempt fate by discussing or planning for the future. The stories of their past traumas defined Chast's own childhood, creating the "postmemory" that Marianne Hirsch defines as the "experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (*Family Frames* 22). Despite her parents' refusal to face the "unpleasant," Chast risks over-showing for the sake of not turning away from the emotional, physical, and material realities of aging and death. Pushing up against the boundaries of her parents' privacy, as well as her own public and private status as a "good" daughter, Chast calls the ethics of representation into question, preferring to err on the side of excess and openness rather than insufficiency and fear. She displays not only the realities of aging but also her family history, insisting,

[1]In addition to making unconventional, forbidden, or culturally unrecognized desires and conditions visible, comics permits the visual representation of imagined worlds—private, internal spaces. In *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi makes what is typically overlooked—a child's inner world—seeable. Satrapi draws, for example, the conversations that ten-year-old Marji has with God. Rather than an abstract concept, God appears as the physical being Marji imagines him to be. Drawing lets the reader participate in the child's subjective reality, showing the literal ways that she works to make sense of the violent political realities taking place around her. Comics in this case offer readers the chance to see how a child makes sense of words and experiences.

finally, on her own inextricable connection to her parents lives. Chast unexpectedly puts her readers in the uncomfortable position of entering spaces and witnessing situations that are surely not intended for public scrutiny. Very little appears to remain sacred.

In addition to following in the comics tradition of breaking representational taboos, Chast's memoir also intersects with the growing field of graphic medicine, in which comics artists seek to fill the gaps that exist, for example, between doctors and patients, medical educators and students, objective medical diagnoses and the subjective experiences of those diagnoses. In particular, Chast's work faces into old age, not, as she notes, "TV commercial old age," but instead "the part of old age that was scarier, harder to talk about, and not a part of this culture" (20). Using verbal and visual modes, Chast reveals the deep unpleasantness of aging, documenting the falls, hospital stays, memory issues, financial strains, loss of bowel control, and the general unpredictability of death. Though published shortly before Gawande's book, Chast's memoir reckons with the problem that Gawande explores—namely, "a society that faces the final phase of the human life cycle by trying not to think about it" (76). What is clear is that Chast's decision to witness, talk about, and make visible the disturbing realities of dying is the guiding principle of the book.

In the way that she brings together different kinds of images, Chast works as much by what she shows as by what she withholds, as well as by the contrast between one form of visual representation and another. By juxtaposing photographs, hand-drawn cartoons, all-text panels, and pencil sketches, Chast offers multiple visual representations of "the truth." As Nancy Pedri observes, by using a "plurality of visual modes in the communication of a narrative," the artist creates a "dynamic interplay of semiotic resources," thus contributing to the complexity of a narrative ("Mixing Visual Media in Comics"). In Chast's memoir, the layering of different visual modes calls meaning and memory into question, ultimately refusing a single way of seeing and making sense of the past.

Family Portraits

The opening two pages of Chast's memoir present the reader with two contrasting visual modes: black and white photography on the left page and comics on the right. Whereas a single image appears on the left-hand page, eight comics images appear on the right. The family shot on the left presents one well-arranged, sepia-colored moment, frozen in time and space. By contrast, the comics sequence on the right reenacts the painful, drawn-out moments of an awkward conversation. Whereas the photograph presents a carefully-positioned family of three, with each member of the trio staring placidly, pleasantly at the photographer and now the reader, the members of the family on the right appear silly, ruffled, and uneasy. The opening pages thus underscore the gap between the acceptable and desired image that the family sought to capture and project of itself—what Marianne Hirsch called the "familial gaze"—and the uncurated one that Chast enacts and reenacts with each drawn panel. From the start, Chast seems to establish comics as the visual mode closest to the messy truths of daily life.

Examining the family photograph more closely, one notices that it floats on the page without any identifying information. What was the occasion? Is this an extended family gathering? A wedding? If so, who else was at the party? Is it possible that the picture was taken at a studio, for the sake of creating a family portrait? Despite

the age of the image—given how young Roz looks, the photo must be more than fifty years old—any cracks that might have appeared on the face of the original have been smoothed over. The photograph, like the impeccably dressed, coiffed, and smiling figures, has been rendered spotless.

The image itself features the Chast family, with Mr. and Mrs. Chast seated on either side of a settee and angled slightly towards each other, their knees not quite touching. With one parent on each side, a bright-eyed and eager Roz, about two or three years old, sits off-center, propped closer to her mother than her father, her ear grazing her mother's chest and her small shoulder tucked under Mrs. Chast's encompassing bosom. The family has been artfully, decorously arranged. Sitting on his own on the other side of the settee, Mr. Chast gamely holds his side of an open children's book—*Babar*—while Mrs. Chast holds the other, mother and father forming a parental circle around Roz.

The photograph thus offers the polite and upstanding image that the family apparently sought to project. The image is in keeping with Hirsch's observation that, "As photography immobilizes the flow of family life into a series of snapshots, it perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history" (*Family Frames* 7). The smiling threesome, and perhaps most of all Mrs. Chast, who appears strong, sturdy, upright, and immovable, as opposed to Mr. Chast who appears relaxed despite his formal attire, present a kind of fortress, daring anyone to see behind this curtain of pleasant and tidy family life. In Hirsch's introduction to "The Familial Gaze," she observes that "The rigid conventions [governing families and family pictures] seem to shore up dominant familial myths and ideologies, supporting a circumscribed and static self-representation of the family and closing it off from scrutiny and critique" (xvi). It is the comics images that invite the reader into the unscripted flow of the everyday. On the left, what is preserved and projected is a family narrative that underscores decorum. Here is a calm and careful family, preserved for the ages.

In contrast to the sepia tones of the photo, the eight panels on the right-hand page are awash in Chast's familiar, seemingly light-hearted

pastels. The cartoons feature animated figures, speech bubbles, emanata, a narrator. While the figures on the left appear placid, the figures on the right are flailing. Whereas Chast and her mother form a winsome pair in the photograph, in the comics sequence Roz's parents sit together and Roz makes her appeal from the opposite side of the couch. As Chast comments on the last page of her memoir, "for as far back as I can remember, I felt outside my parents' duo" (228). Despite the visual contrast between the flat, floating, and wordless photo and the embodied speech- and gesture-filled comics sequence, both the photograph and the comics panels underscore the drive to obscure or evade the truth. Roz has gathered her parents to talk about what she calls with meaningful inflection "THINGS"—specifically, their end-of-life wishes. She makes several valiant if veiled attempts to broach the topic of "PLANS" (3), but each time her parents play dumb. One panel after the next show her parents mostly in mimed conversation with each other, forming their own family circle. In answer to Roz's query, "So . . . do you guys ever think about THINGS?" two sets of hands fly up in the air, two question marks float over each head. Like children, George and Elizabeth eye each other, giggling, first a little, then wildly. Exasperated, seemingly the only grown-up in the room, Roz lets the conversation drop. It's only in the last panel, a split screen showing Roz back in her own house and George and Elizabeth alone again in theirs, when what Gawande refers to as the "treacherous subject" of mortality (9) has been safely dropped, that Roz's own reluctance to talk about death is revealed.

One photograph in particular illustrates Chast's deliberate use of comics as a way of breaking the silence. This photo appears towards the end of the memoir and merges photography and comics, as Chast draws her inner thoughts (as a 12-year-old) onto the black-and-white image. About ten years have passed between this photo and the first. Sepia-toned, the image shows the threesome standing rather than sitting, arranged in a triangle rather than in linear formation. Mr. Chast, the tallest, presides over the photo, his genial grin and relaxed countenance appearing at the top. One arm wraps around Mrs. Chast, who stands next to him on his right; the other arm wraps around Roz, who stands in front. With a hand resting on his wife's and daughter's shoulder, respectively, Mr. Chast appears content. Mrs. Chast, fully presentable in blouse, pleated skirt, and white cardigan sweater, leans just slightly towards her husband. Rather than holding or enfolding either her husband or daughter, her hands are locked in a prim clasp in front of her, and she offers a thin, close-lipped smile. She is the image of self-containment: proper, in charge, all-knowing, inscrutable. Determinedly outward-facing, she engages fully in perpetuating the image of "an ideal family and of acceptable family relations" (Hirsch 11). As for Roz, she stands up straight (one wonders: has she internalized this maternal directive?) and pins her arms, soldier-like, to her sides. Though her shoulder grazes her mother's arm, Roz stands determinedly separate from the group. Staring out from behind dark-rimmed glasses, Roz seems at first to glower at the viewer, though further inspection reveals a forlorn quality to her steady gaze. Refusing to smile for the camera, Roz ruptures the "familial gaze." Captioned "Me at 12," the cartoon includes a speech bubble that breaks

the frame, as well as her own stony silence: "Just a few more years, and I am outta here." As a child trapped within the strictures of family life, Roz found space in comics.

Despite establishing comics as the visual and verbal mode that will offer readers full access to the messy truth (what Chast refers to as "The Big Book of What I Really Think" [179]), one photograph in the family portrait collection permits visual access to Chast's own memories and heart. In comics, Chast represents her father as persistently addled by nerves and fears. A number of panels show his close-up face ringed with sweat droplets and etched with worry lines, eyes bugged out, mouth open and frowning: "My mother was sick, and my father was losing it" (56); "'Mom's in Maimonides Hospital.' 'W-WHAT??!??'" (64). He fears germs, gadgets, accidents, insults. The prospect of putting toast into a toaster paralyzes him, and senile dementia leaves him confused, fearful, and doomed to ask the same questions repeatedly (72, 74, 75). And yet, after his death, Chast observes the shifts and reversals of her own memories. "I noticed that all the things that had driven me bats about him . . . now seemed trivial. The only emotion that remained was one of deep affection and gratitude that he was my dad" (167).

In this case, the photograph enacts and preserves that predominant, overriding, and enduring feeling. The photograph's frozen moment appears not to hide the truth but rather to reveal it, making visible George Chast's love and ability to see and to cherish Roz. Whereas the first family photograph offers a wall of propriety, this picture captures Chast's father gazing at his young daughter in unending delight, holding her with exquisite tenderness. It

is this image that serves in the memoir as a visual epitaph, a headstone marking and honoring her father: "George Chast March 23, 1912–October 17, 2007" (159).

The family photographs thus play different roles in Chast's memoir, with some photos standing in direct contrast to what the comics reveal and others capturing an essential feeling or understanding about the past. Whereas in photographs Mrs. Chast appears imperious and imposing, in comics she is witty and sharp ("I gave him a Blast from Chast!" [34]), frugal to a hilarious extreme ("Waste not, want not," the comics Elizabeth sings, as she heads to a department store register with deeply discounted stockings of the utterly wrong size and color [47]), and bossy right to the end: "We're going to 100!" she tells George crossly, forbidding either of them to think about dying any time before then (10). As in the family photographs, the cartoon Mrs. Chast always looks presentable in her blouse and skirt, coat and hat, delivering insults with cheerful abandon: "That Harry Bendlestein. What a Cluck!" (34).

The incorrigible Mrs. Chast is indeed a character—so much so, that when the exaggerated comics image of Mrs. Chast's giant-sized head and wide-open mouth ["I'm going to Blow My Top!!!" (35)] looms threateningly over the tiny and cowering figures of George and Roz, it takes a moment to register anything other than humor.

The silliness of the image belies the seriousness of the text: upsetting Mrs. Chast could lead to "a terrifying volcano-like explosion of rage" (35). As lighthearted as the comics purport to be, what underlies them is often deadly serious.

The final comics-photograph juxtaposition comes near the end of the memoir. At this point in the narrative, the comics panels have wedged open the closed surface of the photographs. The cartoon sequence that precedes the final photograph is anything but comic. The nine-panel sequence documents Roz's attempt to have a death-bed reconciliation with her mother, offering her mother a last chance to talk about, if not make amends for, a life-long, distanced, and disconnected relationship with her daughter. "I wish we could have

been better friends when I was growing up," Roz makes the opening volley. "Does it worry you?" her mother returns. "No. . . ," Roz says, and then, trying again, she asks, "Does it worry YOU?" The conversation recalls the opening one about "*Things*." Weak and exhausted, her mother simply replies, "No." Mother and daughter sit together in silence. Offering her mother one last chance to let down her guard, Roz asks: "Do you want me to stay or should I go?" The devastating reply: "It doesn't matter." The last panel on the page, in the bottom right hand corner, shows Chast's mother alone in the room with her eyes closed. The chair Roz had been sitting in is empty. The caption—"It was time to go"—applies, it would seem, to both Roz and Elizabeth. Turning the page, the strained economy of the deathbed scene gives way to a wash of unleashed, narrated emotion. Walking through "the tasteful lobby of the Place," Roz leaves decorum behind. Alone in her car, she cries bitterly: "The bellowing quality of the sobbing and the depth of the sadness I felt surprised me. I was angry, too. Why hadn't she tried harder to know me?" (202). Deprived of an end of life reconciliation, Roz permits her reader to peer into the emptiness at the center of her relationship with her mother. Still, she admits the difficulty of confronting and changing deeply engrained patterns in the final months of life: "if there had ever been a time in my relationship with my mother for us to get to know one another—and that's a very big 'if'—that time had long since passed" (202).

The family photograph that ends this chapter freezes for posterity a moment when Roz's relationship with her mother seemingly had the potential to blossom into something warmer and more open. In this family shot—the last one in the memoir—Roz and her mother appear together in the shade of a tree in a park presumably in Brooklyn. The precision, stiffness, and deference of the pose notwithstanding, Roz, eight or nine years old, is shown embracing her mother. Her body faces and presses into her mother's body; her arms make a circle around her mother, her clasped fingers coming to rest on her mother's shoulder. The image projects grace, if not unbridled love. Roz wears a white sleeveless party dress, the skirt of which lifts elegantly behind her. Her hair is pulled neatly into a ballerina bun; her bangs are combed smoothly down her forehead. She turns her head towards the

camera and smiles the same close-lipped smile that her mother does. For her part, Mrs. Chast, facing forward with her arm seemingly wrapped around her daughter's waist, wears a festive, polka-dotted dress, a dark overcoat, and a jaunty hat. A large pocketbook sits like a barricade on her lap. True to form, she sits upright, presenting a dignified front to the public. Despite the curated nature of the pose—a projected idea of Mother and Doting Daughter—the photograph captures the potential for a closer relationship.

While Chast never refers specifically to it, the four Chast family portraits showcase physical connection. Rather than traditional family portraits that gather relatives into a standing group, offering a visual family roll call, the shots that Chast includes in the memoir tell a different story. These images focus on arms and hands, on holding and on being held. In the first portrait, Roz's parents each hold one side of a children's book. Their arms along with the book effectively encircle Roz, whose own hands lay in her lap. This is a careful portrait that shows restraint. In the photo of Roz and her father dancing, perhaps at a family party, the center point of the photo are father and daughter's clasped hands. The image is one of adoration—Mr. Chast gazes lovingly at his daughter, holding her with his other hand as though she might break. He encircles her. The third photo captures and upholds the separateness of mother and daughter. As in the other photos, arms and hands make up the interest of the photos—these are the telling details. Roz holds herself straight and aloof, her arms energetically pinned to her sides. Tellingly, the photo cuts off Roz's hands at the wrists. By contrast, Roz's mother's clasped hands appear prominently in the photo, as do

her father's, as he reaches his arms around his wife and daughter, pulling them into a circle with a hand on each of their shoulders. Finally, the last photo shows Roz's bare arms encircling her mother's neck; her own hands clasped on her mother's shoulder. None of the pictures show mother and daughter turning towards each other. None of the pictures show Roz's mother holding, cradling, reaching toward her daughter. This is the visual legacy of the family photographs.

Snapshots

Whereas the black-and-white family photographs that Chast includes at key moments in her comics memoir reveal subtle as well as obvious cracks in the smooth surface of the happy family mythology, the color snapshots, clustered in the center of the memoir appear to cross an ethical line. The images of the interior of her parents' apartment, including the insides of their kitchen drawers, hallway closet, refrigerator, and medicine cabinet, position her parents' right to privacy against Chast's right to show what would otherwise never have been viewed publicly. The images, indeed, the spectacle, of the Chasts' apartment, as it appeared on the day they left it, testify both to their inability to maintain order over the encroaching chaos and to Chast's determination to hold nothing back.

Indeed, the snapshots stand in direct opposition to the portrait photography. Whereas the family pictures project decorum, the snapshots reveal an utter loss of control. By including the latter, Chast offers unsparing visual evidence of her parents' decaying minds and bodies. For the sake of not turning away from the truth, she pushes the bounds of decency, taking the reader behind doors that Mrs. Chast would certainly have kept firmly closed. Unlike the selected and somewhat ghostly black-and-white family portraits which float, like memories, against the white pages of the memoir, grounded in neither captions nor context, the color photos appear, one after the next, with short, orienting explanations. As unfamiliar, if not shocking, as the gallery of images might be to the reader, this is, one remembers, nonetheless deeply familiar territory to Chast. This is the apartment where she grew up; these are the lives, and a way of life,

to which she remains inextricably linked. The past that she exposes is also her own.

The reader comes upon the images casually. Faced with the task of "the massive, deeply weird, and heartbreaking job of going through my parents' possessions, almost fifty years' worth, crammed into four rooms," Chast explains that she "took some photos" (108). The visual tour begins innocently enough with a few "mementos": images of objects once used by her parents. Chast arranges eyeglasses, a stapler, shavers, art supplies, colored pencils. She has assembled, it seems, a collection of amusing oddities. Nothing untoward.

Then, without preparation, the reader turns the page to find herself standing in Roz's parents' bedroom. Here is the messy dresser—not a cartoon version but the real thing—strewn with everything from bottles of talcum powder to a pile of books to note pads. In the dresser mirror we see the reflection of the bed: tussled pillows with flowered patterned sheets. One shrinks from the image. We should not be in here. We have breached a private space and the instinct is to avert our eyes—from the night gown draped across the chair to the under garments that peak out from the open drawers. One thinks with pain of the image that Mrs. Chast sought to project of herself and the family in public. What does it mean for the reader to enter into such an abject, and abjectly private, space? Is this breech of privacy truly necessary in order not to be accused of averting one's eyes in the face of the realities of aging? Are these images of lives no longer held in check less personal because aging is a universal condition, or are we witnessing a deliberate act of betrayal? Where is the line between showing and exposing, testifying to what was and committing a profound act of disloyalty? Whose side, Chast seems to ask us, are we on?

The photos that follow offer close-up shots of what Roz found in the apartment: upwards of 50 handbags, desk surfaces ("work stations") overwhelmed with tall stacks of books and binders. "My old bed," Chast labels one picture in which there is no bed in sight, only stockpiles of toilet paper, a metal filing cabinet on top of which sits a dish drying rack filled with odds and ends, including a wooden sign announcing "The Chasts." From the bedroom, we move to the kitchen and find ourselves peering into the refrigerator. In the hallway, on a "random shelf," we happen upon Roz's worn baby shoes (117). In what stands in for an attic, Mrs. Chast's "Crazy Closet" (117), we note the wardrobe crammed with old tweed jackets and discarded but not yet given-away coats and bathrobes. Finally, we peak into the bathroom medicine cabinet. As in Roland Barthes' discussion in *Camera Lucida* in which he explains how the details of a photograph can unexpectedly wound ("Certain details may prick me" [47]), each of these photos contains a punctum, for Chast, surely, as well as, if differently, for the reader or, in Barthes' terms, the spectator. Whether it is the open container of milk or the Telfa Band-Aids, we are stung by the exquisitely specific evidence of lives that were once in full motion. The photos sting on several levels, attesting to the passage of time as well as to our mortality, our inability,

This used to be my bedroom. Same horrible linoleum of my childhood, same nice view of the brick-walled side of a neighboring church

One of my dad's "work stations."

at the end of our lives, to care for ourselves. This is Roz's story, her parents' story, and, finally, her readers'. Needless to say, the reader feels a surge of relief upon re-entering the softer, buffering zone of comics. Chast's familiar cartoons offer a comfortable distance between the reader and the reality. We can breathe again.

In her discussion of Spiegelman's juxtaposition of comics and photographs, as well as the inclusion of comics from an entirely different time and place in *Maus*, Hirsch considers the impact of "breaking the frame." In particular, she asks, "How are we to read the radical breaks in the representational continuity of Maus?" (*Family Frames* 31). Ultimately, she argues that the abrupt shifts in representation add to the complexity as well as the uncertainty of the narrative. Commenting specifically on the three "sparsely distributed" family photographs that appear over the course of the two volumes, Hirsch observes that "these three pictures tell their own narrative of loss, mourning and desire, one that inflects obliquely, that both supports and undercuts the story of Maus" (*Family Frames* 31). "The power of the photographs," Hirsch asserts, exists "in their status as fragments of a history that we cannot assimilate" (*Family Frames* 40). The gap between the reality that we come to know through comics and the one seemingly represented in the photos preserves the unknowability of the history. Despite a seeming excess of representation of the individual and collective trauma of the Holocaust, Hirsch reads the breaks in the frame as safeguarding against the suggestion that the events, after all, are graspable. The photographs operate differently in Chast's memoir. Rather than defamiliarizing the world that we have come to know in comics, the images lift the veil further. In fact, the photographs confront the viewer with what it means, and what it feels like, to look, and not to look away.

Beyond Images

For all the visuality of her memoir, the worst moments are offered without images. The first is the night of the day that Roz's father dies. "My father, who had been alive that morning, was now not alive" (162). Chast brings her mother home to her own house. The

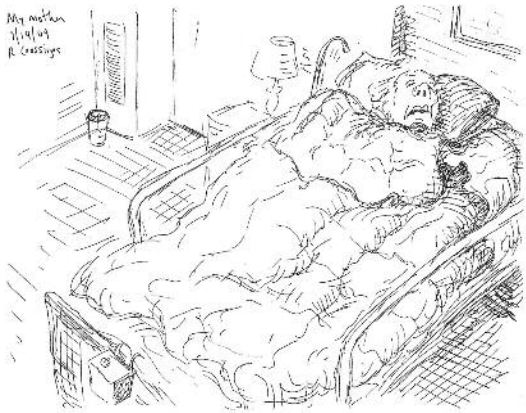
story she tells about what happened is offered in text only: no comics panels, no images. The facts are painful, embarrassing, and sad. Chast's determination to relate what happens speaks to her continued commitment to face into what is deeply unpleasant. As with the images of her apartment, one can only imagine her mother's pain had she known that her private horror would be made public. Chast writes with clarity: "My mother had suffered one of the worst, if not the worst, indignities of old age: loss of bowel control. The walls, the floors, the rugs were covered with excrement. Her clothing, her hands, and the sofa were caked with it." She notes paradoxically, "It was beyond imagining" (163). What to say about the decision to offer these details? What to make of giving her readers permission to imagine the unimaginable? This, Chast suggests, this loss of control of the body, is the image of heartbreak.

Three days before her mother dies, diverticulosis leads to a skin abrasion: "my mother developed a hole which came through the skin on the surface of her abdomen" (209). Her mother's nurse covers the wound, but Chast asks to see the opening. She explains, "I did not want to turn away from what was happening" (209). Here is the logic behind Chast's willingness to show. Here is her commitment to witnessing, exposing, and seeing.

Deathbed Sketches

As committed as Chast is throughout her memoir to offering her readers access to what is often deemed unspeakable, she remains unable, finally, to heal the gap in her connection with her mother. No matter how determined Chast might be to look at and to show what is underneath the surface, a fundamental emptiness, or inaccessibility, remains at the center of the text. What Chast documents, ultimately, amidst the plethora of images, funny and not funny, pleasant and unpleasant, is the absence of connection with her mother. In his essay "Drawing Desire," W.J.T. Mitchell explains that the title phrase "is meant not just to suggest the depiction of a scene or figure that stands for desire, but also to indicate the way that drawing itself, the dragging or pulling of the drawing instrument, is the performance of desire.

Drawing draws us on. Desire just is, quite literally, drawing, or a drawing—a pulling or attracting force, and the trace of this force in a picture" (59). It is perhaps Chast's desire to know and to be known by her mother that is reflected, etched, into the final drawings in the memoir.



At the conclusion of the book, Chast offers her readers one last visual mode; she draws her mother "from life," offering twelve pages of portrait sketches, each one made as Chast sat with her mother in the months and days before, and even after, she dies. Neither cartoons nor photographs, the sketches appear one after the other in silent, steady progression.

Once again, the reader finds herself in a space where she does not belong. Surely dying should not be an event open to a viewing public. And yet, after the first few pages, the succession of images creates a respectful and meditative quiet. We are there with Chast, studying the close-ups of her mother's face, noticing the slight changes in expression, wondering at the mysterious process of dying. Chast brings the intensity of her artist's eye to the work. Drawing her mother means looking at

her for long periods of time, noticing her eyebrows, her forehead, the lines around her mouth. Like Chast, the reader looks carefully at the surface in an effort to understand the depth.

"I had been drawing her all summer," Chast explains, "since the conversations had been reduced to almost nothing" (210). Drawing has served as a way of being with her mother, of continuing to try to know her. While the decision to draw her mother sounds offhand, Chast's inclusion of these portraits of her mother dying feels deeply generous. She seeks, all the way to the end, a way of knowing her mother. She shares intensely private, even sacred, moments with the reader, documenting what it means to look and to witness; to see; and in this way, finally, to be seen.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1981.

Chast, Roz. *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant: A Memoir*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

Chute, Hillary L. *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Harvard UP, 2016.

———. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*. Columbia UP, 2010.

Czerwiec, MK, et al. *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2015.

Czerwiec, MK. *Menopause: A Comic Treatment*. Pennsylvania State UP, 2020.

Gardner, Jared. "Autography's Biography: 1972–2007." *Biography*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-26. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23540919.

Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. Picador, 2014.

Hirsch, Marianne, ed. *The Familial Gaze*. Dartmouth College P, 1999.

———. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Harvard UP, 1997.

Pedri, Nancy. "Mixing Visual Media in Comics." *ImageText*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, n.p.

———. "Photography and the Layering of Perspective in Graphic Memoir." *ImageText*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, n.p.

Satrapi, Marjane. *The Complete Persepolis*. Pantheon, 2007.

The Germanness and Jewishness of *Belonging*

Kevin Haworth
Carnegie Mellon University

> When I meet people from Germany, my kind of people, you know, artists, educated people, we have more or less the same story. We have an agreement about who is the victim, who is the oppressor, who is the bad guy, who is the good guy. There is a general agreement that we have even before we speak about the narrative, about the story, we have the same narrative more or less. (Rutu Modan)

This statement from Rutu Modan, Israel's best-known graphic novelist, suggests that discourse about the Holocaust has reached an important place of mutual understanding. Stubborn elements of Holocaust denial aside, the facts have long been understood. Six million Jews and millions of others were murdered. The Nazi project intended to rid Europe of all its Jews as a core element to establishing a German empire over all of the continent. The Jewish refugees created by the war, bearing with them their witness testimony, speaks both to the ultimate failure of that project and the horrifying extent to which it succeeded.

But Modan is speaking to something different than facts. She is referring to sensemaking, the process by which individuals or groups

give meaning to events. As introduced by organizational theorist Karl E. Weick in the 1970s, sensemaking attempts to understand how individuals might ascribe different meanings to the same event, and how those meanings might evolve over time. Sensemaking is most acute in the face of traumatic events or ongoing ambiguity and is often an ongoing process which can shift in response to additional trauma, uncertainty, or new understandings (Mills et al. 183). Understanding the sensemaking practiced by survivors of trauma and their descendants, such as in the case of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, offers insight into not just how these survivors tell their stories but also how that telling shapes their present lives (Sekalala 2).

In that context, Modan's statement offers the opportunity to explore how comics—Modan's chosen medium—participate in sensemaking around the Holocaust. Since the publication of Art Spiegelman's two volume *Maus*, comics have served as a rich and much-studied medium for Holocaust narratives. Many of the best-known ones tell Jewish stories, in diverse ways. There are survivor memoirs, such as Miriam Katin's *We Are on Our Own* (2006); second generation memoirs such as Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986 and 1991) and Michel Kichka's *Second Generation: The Things I Didn't Tell My Father* (2012); and third generation memoirs such as Amy Kurzweil's *Flying Couch* (2016). There are also numerous graphic novels, such as (to name just a few) Will Eisner's *A Life Force* (2003), Joe Kubert's *Yossel: April 19, 1943: A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (2011), and Modan's *The Property* (2013). This list is far from fully representative, and is not intended to be. Rather, it nods to the remarkable output from Jewish comics artists on this subject. For all their diversity and complexity, however, these and other books like them affirm what we understand Modan to mean by 'the same story': the fundamental notion that the Holocaust was an oppressive and genocidal campaign against Jews ('the good guys'), waged by Nazi Germany and their allies ('the bad guys').

Against this background, Nora Krug's *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018) offers the opportunity to explore Modan's statement in the context of a recent graphic memoir, this time from a German perspective. Krug was born in Germany in

1977, emigrated to the United States in her twenties, married into a Jewish family, and currently teaches at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. *Belonging* is a visually and narratively complex investigation of Krug's family history, particularly those who served in the German armed forces in World War II, as well as of Krug's own relationship to German culture, language, and identity. *Belonging* has quickly become one of the most celebrated recent graphic memoirs, winning the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography, and being named on books of the year lists by the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, National Public Radio, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and many others.

It is worth noting for our purposes that the book has also been warmly welcomed into Jewish spaces. *Belonging* has been shortlisted for a National Jewish Book Award, and Krug has discussed her work at Jewish museums, synagogues, and other Jewish communal spaces. For Jewish audiences, Matt Reingold has argued, books like *Belonging* can "lead to a more thoughtful and nuanced dialogue about the ways that non-Jews should engage with Holocaust commemoration" (1). This essay seeks to take Reingold's statement a step further and explore the idea that in *Belonging*, Krug acts as a crucial interlocutor between Jewish and non-Jewish experiences of the Holocaust narrative. In doing so, *Belonging* serves to explore contemporary sensemaking around the Holocaust in a way that, as Modan suggests, reaches something akin to a 'same story' without erasing individual layers of identity construction.

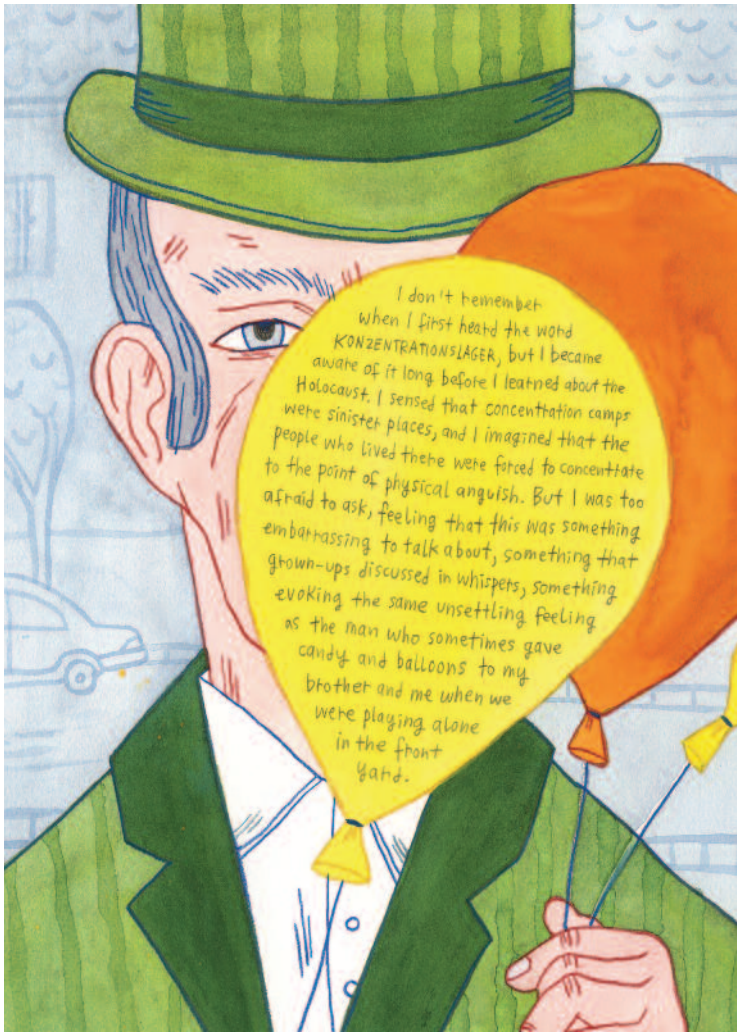
Krug's personal history positions her firmly as one of Modan's 'kind of people.' Like Modan, Krug is one of the 'artists, educated people' of which Modan speaks, and a member of what Holocaust scholars call the third generation, those whose grandparents experienced the war. It might seem problematic, even sacrilegious, to include Krug—who is a descendent of German soldiers, not Holocaust survivors—in this generational category, but the similarities are important: Krug's understanding of her family's history as a third generation German follows quite closely the paradigm seen in many third generation Jews. It is limited and elliptical, and yet suffused by an overwhelming sense that knowing is important—exactly what sets

her on the journey that *Belonging* enacts. In Chapter 1, Krug writes:

> I don't remember when I first heard the word *Konzentrationslager*, but I became aware of it long before I learned about the Holocaust. I sense that concentration camps were sinister places, and I imagined that the people who lived there were forced to concentrate to the point of physical anguish. But I was too afraid to ask, feeling that this was something embarrassing to talk about, something that grown-ups discussed in whispers, something revoking the same unsettling feeling as the man who sometimes gave candy and balloons to my brother and me when we were playing alone in the front yard.[1]

Krug sets these words within an image of a balloon, both a play on the standard comics word balloon and a visual transition into her personal memory of the man whose attention she sensed was improper. Behind the balloon—in an image that takes up the entire page—the man's face is partially obscured, further linking her knowledge of the war with mystery, uncertainty, and a looming menace. In their study of third generation Jewish writers, Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger write that their "attempts at knowledge-making are patchwork, weaving together the strands of stories . . . in order to create a unified narrative out of fragments" (5). *Belonging*, which takes collage, mixed media, and varied illustration styles as its aesthetic, does so to demonstrate how her own process of discovery, like her third-generation Jewish counterparts, must necessarily "draw upon a collage of sensations, affects, competing and broken memories, implied and circuitous hints, sideways references, and whispered asides" (5). Krug's aesthetic is complemented by her narrative, which is investigative and inconclusive, yet motivated by a deep sense of obligation.

[1] *Belonging* has no page numbers. All references are indicated by chapter.



Before we delve deeper into what similarities might exist between Krug and third generation Jewish narratives, it is important to recognize that it is largely only in this generation, as Modan's statement implies, that these narrative understandings begin to converge. For decades after the war, German historiography largely ignored the Holocaust and downplayed the specific suffering of Jews or other groups. Jewish narratives, such as in the form of survivor testimonies, were not solicited or welcomed at the trials of war criminals. Overall,

Germans attributed the atrocities of the war (and the war itself) to a relatively small group of Nazis, ignoring the roles of most of the German armed forces, the police, or citizen-collaborators (Black 155–58).

As extensively documented by Zohar Shavit in *A Past Without Shadow* (2005), children's literature in Germany after the war—exactly the kinds of books that would inform postwar German youth—often went even further, placing everyday Germans as the main victims of the Nazis. According to many children's and young adult narratives, a select group of Nazis led ordinary Germans into a destructive and exploitative war that left their country in ruins. These narratives present typical Germans as ignorant of Nazi genocide against Jews while simultaneously highlighting narratives in which Germans attempt to help their Jewish neighbors in the face of antisemitic legislation and violence. In these books, Germans who were conscripted into the war suffered for their service, often with their lives, and their obligation to follow military orders meant that they should not be held individually accountable for their actions. This view was largely supported by the United States, which in the Nuremberg trials and its subsequent strong military presence in West Germany (a feature of Krug's childhood) accepted the idea of a relatively small group of criminal actors exploiting their fellow German citizens. This allowed postwar Germans to "distinguish the criminal guilt of the few from the political guilt binding all members of the national collective" (Diner and Golb 303). Under this framework, Germany had done terrible things, but there was no need or motivation to investigate what typical individual Germans had done.

Germans of Krug's generation, however, inherited a different, if still limited, understanding of the Holocaust. The 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem exposed the death camp apparatus and featured survivor testimony prominently for the first time. This was followed by a trial in Frankfurt of twenty-three men connected to Auschwitz, including the camp's two deputy commanders. German audiences had followed the Eichmann proceedings, but the Frankfurt trial, as Jeremy Black writes, "brought the Holocaust to the forefront of public knowledge. Witness statements left no doubt of what had occurred and also provided an opportunity for public

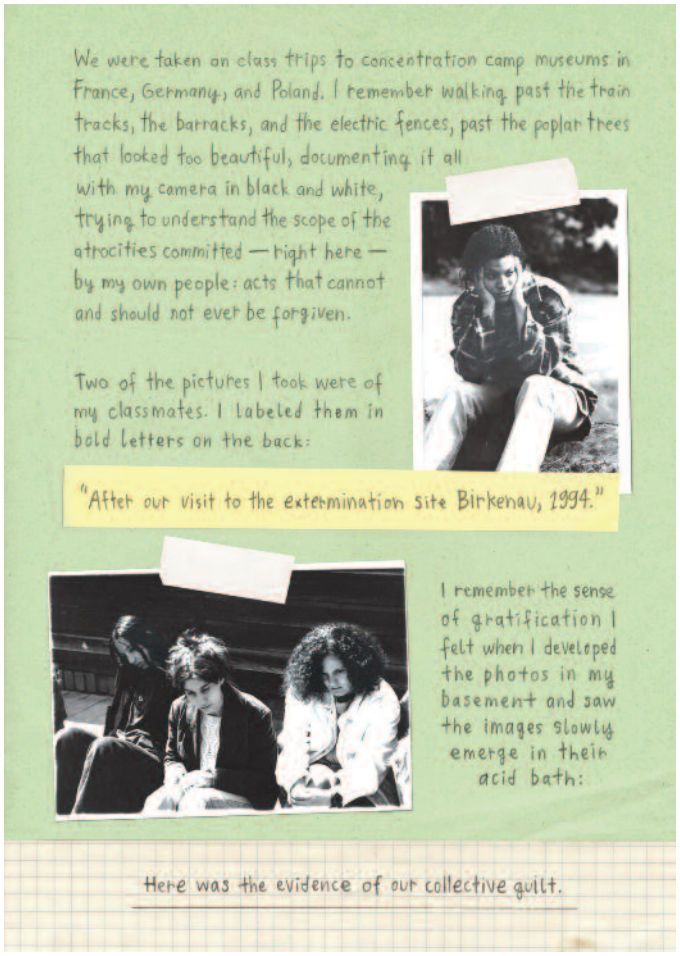
testimony by survivors. A wall of silence was broken" (158). By 1967, Holocaust education had become part of school curricula, though public commemoration or maintenance of sites such as Dachau still did not occur until years later.

For our purposes, this points to how Germans of Krug's generation shaped a narrative about the Holocaust similar to that understood by Jews—especially Israeli Jews. Holocaust education in Germany was second only to that of Israel, exceeding that all other European countries and even the United States in many ways. Through the Eichmann and Frankfurt trials, Israel and Germany foregrounded narratives constructed from a combination of documentation and firsthand testimony—the same combination used in many Holocaust graphic narratives, including both *Maus* and *Belonging*.

Holocaust education for Krug's generation also used some of the same tactics practiced by Jewish educators. Krug writes of her class trips to concentration camp sites. in France, Germany, and Poland. She recalls:

> I remember walking past the train tracks, the barracks, and the electric fences, past the poplar trees that looked too beautiful, documenting it all with camera in black and white, trying to understand the scope of the atrocities committed—right here—by my own people: acts that cannot and should not be forgiven. . . . Here was evidence of our collective guilt. (Chapter 1)

Krug's photographs from a trip to Birkenau in 1994 accompany these words. The photographs document not the sites themselves, but rather the devastated and horrified looks on the faces of her classmates. Thus what the reader sees is not the documentation of atrocities (those are long established), but rather Krug documenting the narrative—the shift from Germans as Nazi victims to Germans as victimizers of Jews.



This same educational practice of visiting concentration camp sites is a staple of Jewish groups in the United States and a near-ubiquitous event in Israeli high schools. One such "March of the Living" trip is featured in Modan's own third generation graphic narrative *The Property* (2013). While *The Property* critiques the way that these trips can become a rote itinerary, at the end of *The Property* we see the high school students, post-visit, in states of shock and dismay that closely resemble Krug's photographs. This is not to say the experiences are the same; one group is feeling the collective guilt Krug describes, while the other experiences the collective trauma of seeing their people's

murder sites. But in each case, the group is asked to imagine firsthand the bodily experience of being victimized in this space, which reifies the narrative of German oppressors and Jewish victims. For both groups the result tends to be powerful and formative.

The goal of these trips, and of Holocaust education practiced by both groups more generally, is not just to forge a similar narrative about the past. It is to develop the same narrative of the future, one in which another Jewish genocide is not possible. The language of 'never again' is a prominent part of not just trips to death camp sites but of much Jewish education around the Holocaust. For their part, German intellectuals came to see "collective guilt as a way of ensuring that Germans would not repeat the atrocities committed by the Nazis" (Clewell 469). The collective guilt seems to serve its intended purpose—Krug tells us that she and her classmates learned to reject Germany as a heroic, powerful country—but it also alienates Krug from her own history. For third generation Jews, narratives from their grandparents' generation are a critical link to both the history of the Holocaust and their family's individual history. As Eva Fogelman writes of third generation Israeli Jews:

> Youngsters saw survivors on the screen being interviewed about their lives in concentration camps, in ghettos, in hiding, and escaping by disguising themselves as non-Jews. The Third-Generation was learning history, and imbibing a language in which to talk to their grandparents. At home these high-school students found their parents to be almost useless when it came to answering questions about family history during the Shoah. However, this did not deter these teen-agers from approaching their grandparents. This phenomenon of intergenerational dialogue became a national sensation and was recorded in documentaries and television discussion programs.

For Krug, the experience of seeing and hearing survivor testimony has its intended effect of reifying the crimes of the Nazis, and it aligns her viewpoint with that of her Jewish counterparts. It causes her to regard German culture with suspicion, not just in the

Nazi era but overall, because it is the culture that the Nazis embraced. But this comes at a personal cost. Krug writes that she and her classmates "prepared questions for the old women who traveled from America to tell us about the camps, but we never thought to ask about one another's grandparents" (Chapter 1). Her troubled connection to her own family history and to German culture is a lingering place of anxiety and shame. *Belonging*, in large measure, is an attempt to address that anxiety within the larger context of the narrative she shares with her Jewish counterparts.

But Krug's personal history allows her to explore her birth culture and birth family from a place that is more multifaceted than if she had spent her entire life in Germany. Krug's childhood, as represented in *Belonging*, shows how many Germans of her generation developed a narrative of the Holocaust that reflects a clear understanding of perpetrator and victim. But when Krug writes *Belonging*, she has not lived in Germany for many years. In fact, Krug enacts her journey from an intersectional identity that reflects multiple strands: her German childhood, her immigration to the United States, and her marriage into a Jewish family.

Krug dedicates *Belonging* "to my old family and to my new family" (Front Matter). Her old family is, of course, her German family. Her new family is the Jewish family into which she has married. By placing herself at the fulcrum of those two families, Krug does not lessen her Germanness but does complicate the binary of German and Jew. It reminds that this binary of language is itself is a product of historical antisemitism, solidified and made murderous by the Nazi era. The German/Jew binary erases the history and experiences of German Jews, who were firmly separated from their Germanness by the "abyss formed by the Holocaust," as Marija Grujić and Ina Schaum put it (197). In practice, this binary serves as shorthand for perpetrators and victims, even when the individuals (such as Krug) are not themselves perpetrators or (like Krug's husband) themselves victims. Krug's relationship to her Jewish family reminds us that the shared Holocaust narrative does not just code the past into perpetrators and victims—it obliges people in the present day to represent those roles emotionally.

Krug characterizes her interactions with her husband's family as positive and welcoming, but the mutually understood roles of perpetrator and victim provide the common ground for their interactions. One of Krug's mother's friends tells her, "I always wished I had a Jewish boyfriend so I could make up for the horrible things our parents did" (Chapter 2). On the facing page, her mother-in-law's elderly Jewish boyfriend tells Krug, "I don't care if you are German. . . . When I went to Israel for the first time and saw all the Mercedes on the street, and people told me what the reparations payments had done for them, I stopped resenting the Germans" (Chapter 2). These exchanges are kind and forgiving, but they also show how the interlocutors are interacting with narrative roles as much as they are interacting with fellow humans. Krug's mother's friend wanted a Jewish boyfriend—an archetype, not an actual person—in order to assuage her perpetrator's sense of guilt. Krug's mother-in-law's boyfriend must address Krug's Germanness, and deem it okay, before he can grant her passage into the family. He says he does not care that she is German, but he clearly does care, or else he would not feel the need to address it. Because he sees Germany as having held itself accountable, as made manifest by economic reparations, he is content with how the roles have played out.

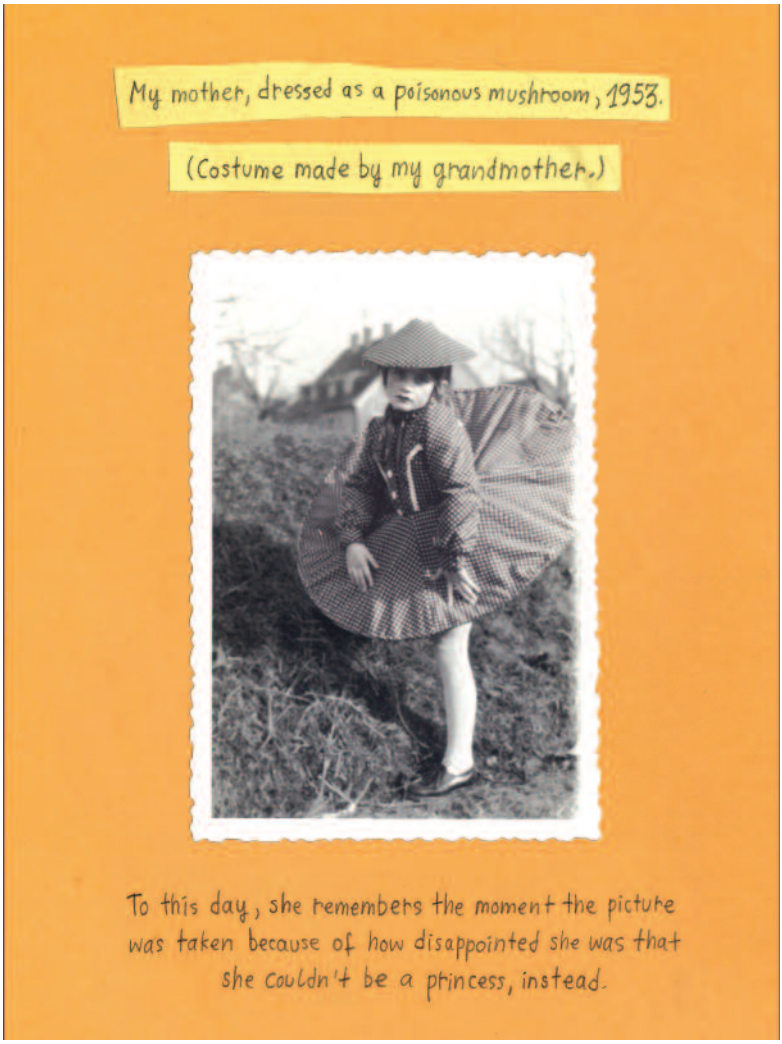
The limitations of the narrative, however, can be seen through Krug's mother-in-law, who comes from a family of German Jews. Krug is grateful that, for her mother-in-law, "the fact that [Krug is] German was never an issue for her" (Chapter 2). This statement, however, makes clear that the mother-in-law sees German as something that Krug is, and she herself is not. The mother-in-law's family has firmly rejected German material culture—Krug mentions that they specifically refused to buy a German car—as being permanently tainted by the Nazi era. This rejection is in contrast to Krug's own experience of German material culture, which in *Belonging*'s 'notebook of a homesick emigre' pages, with their depictions of German bandages, German binders, and other everyday objects, is shown to be where Krug has the most positive emotional interaction with her birthplace. Krug's mother-in-law has to overcome this alienation from Germany in order to attend Krug's wedding to her son, which,

happily for Krug, she does. But it is not just Krug's homeland—it is the homeland of her mother-in-law's grandparents, as Krug points out. Later, as dementia sets in, the mother-in-law cannot imagine why she would go there. Krug is German; her husband's family is Jewish. The reconciliation offered by the shared narrative allows Krug's new family to welcome her Germanness, but it does not allow them to welcome their own.

Much of *Belonging*, of course, is focused on Krug's engagement with her family's history and her non-Jewish encounter with German culture. But as we see here, much of her account is informed by—even inextricable from—her encounter with Jews. Growing up, she did not know any Jews personally, and her understanding of Jewish people swung from the lingering antisemitism of the church, where she was told that Jews killed Jesus, to a clumsy overidentification with Jews in which she sews a yellow Star of David onto her clothes (an act which her mother quickly shuts down). At these moments it is easy to see why German Jews might feel uncomfortable with Germanness, when they may be known in Germany only through books, and even then in roles in which they either commit deicide or have their suffering appropriated by overeager children.

But elsewhere in *Belonging* Krug shows how difficult it is to separate German culture and history from its Jewish presence. In Chapter 3, titled "Poisonous Mushrooms," Krug confronts her uncle's antisemitic education. She shares his 1939 school essay titled "The Jew, a Poisonous Mushroom," which likens the Jewish people to a toxic species of mushroom that grows in Germany's forests. The essay, Krug believes, is inspired by a popular antisemitic children's book of the same name distributed by the Nazi party. But in the same chapter, Krug shows how that same species of red, white-polka-dotted mushroom has a positive role in German culture. It is a symbol of good luck on New Year's Day, she tells us, and sweets are made in its shape. She includes a photograph of her mother costumed as this poisonous mushroom in 1953—just fourteen years after her uncle likened the mushroom to a Jewish people bent on eradicating Germans. And Krug ties herself to this image as well. On *Belonging*'s cover, we see Krug standing on a hilltop, the beautiful German countryside laid

out before her. On one hand, she is visually quoting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, an 1818 painting by Casper David Friedrich that is considered an exemplar of German Romanticism (slightly modified versions of the image occur several times in the book). On the cover, Krug wears a red coat with white polka dots and gazes to the side enigmatically—at the reader, at the landscape, or perhaps neither. But the color scheme of her jacket, the center of the image, is unmistakably that of the mushroom.



It is not Krug's job to reconcile this seemingly irreconcilable imagery. Is the poisonous mushroom a cherished part of the German landscape? Or a metaphor for the alien Jew infiltrating the otherwise strong German people? Culture is not perfectly consistent, and the Nazis coopted many aspects of German culture for their propaganda. But this feels like a step further than acknowledging, for example, that Krug's homeland is also her Jewish husband's homeland. Krug sewing a yellow Star of David onto her coat was a well-meaning, if problematic, attempt to feel what it was like to be a Jew. With the cover image, however, she doing something more complex than performing the role of Jewish victim. She is embodying the contradictions in German culture, the ones that layer both Germanness and Jewishness onto the German landscape, and collapsing, if briefly, the distinction between German and Jew.

This embodiment is possible because, despite Krug's deep sense of guilt and her ambivalence toward German culture, she can still access it in a way that many Jews, even descendants of German Jews, cannot. For Jewish readers of Krug's work, Krug serves as an emissary into the land and culture of the perpetrators. She does so not as a Jew but as someone with a deep respect for Jews and Jewish culture that informs her work. Aside from *Belonging*, we see this in a one-panel comic Krug drew for the *New York Times*, published in September of 2019 and titled "A German Finally Picks Up *Mein Kampf*." Krug writes that "As a German, I was appalled by the idea of reading it, even touching it," a sentiment undoubtedly shared by many, especially Jews. But, spurred by the resurgence of far-right activity in Germany, she feels motivated—or better yet, perhaps, obliged—to have a first-hand encounter with the book. She shares the book's post-war publication history: its long-time ban in Germany and 2016 re-issue with proceeds benefiting victims of the Nazis. She obtains a copy via her "trusted" bookseller, who would not think ill of her for purchasing it. Her encounter with the book melds German and Jewish cultural perspectives. She describes the current edition as being inspired by the Talmud, with annotations surrounding the main text and critiquing it. As a native German speaker, though, she is able to read Hitler's writing in its original, which she characterizes as "badly writ-

ten and full of grammatical mistakes." The accompanying image shows her curled sheepishly in the bath (to where she has retreated so no one will see her reading it), a caricature of Hitler's face superimposed on the giant tome and replacing/obscuring her own face. This image reinforces Krug's precarious position in her chosen work. Despite her sensitivity to Jewish culture and her shame of being associated with *Mein Kampf*, her shared cultural heritage with its author means that, when she reads the book, the two of them occupy a type of same space, even if she rejects everything he says.

In *Belonging*, Krug's exploration allows Jews and Germans to contemplate their own shared space within the war, some of it just by implication and without overreducing the individual experience. Readers of *Maus* are familiar with the story of Richieu, the brother lost to the Holocaust that Art Spiegelman never knew. Spiegelman describes Richieu as his "ghost-brother" whose photograph, hanging in his parents' bedroom, haunted him as an image of a child who could do no wrong. "It's spooky having sibling rivalry with a snapshot," Spiegelman says (15). The dedication page of *Maus II* reads "For Richieu and For Nadja," with Richieu's photograph in between the two names. Much like Krug's dedication, this is a nod to Spiegelman's old family (albeit one he never knew), and his new one—his daughter.

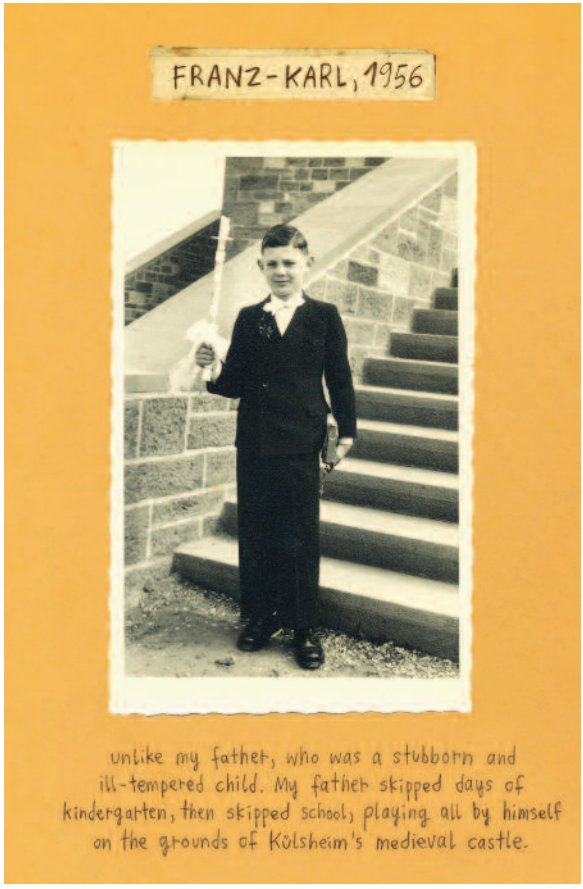
Richieu's presence makes clear that Art Spiegelman is a replacement child, a child born after the traumatic loss of another child during a war or other event. Gabrielle Schwab, a literary scholar who is a replacement child herself, writes that "Children born after such wars may feel the burden of having to replace even more than merely the child or children whom their parents lost during the war; they grow up with the sense that their generation must replace the entire generation that was meant to be exterminated" (280). In *Maus*, Schwab finds, rather than ameliorating the loss, Art the replacement child serves as a way for his parents' trauma to be transmitted to him and other members of his generation.

Krug is not a replacement child, but her father is, and as it does for Spiegelman, being a replacement child defines her father's relationship to his family. In Chapter 3 of *Belonging* we learn that Krug's

paternal uncle, Franz Karl, was a German infantryman killed in Italy when he was eighteen years old. Krug's father, born just after the war ended, is named Franz Karl after his deceased brother. Similar to how Spiegelman employs photographs in *Maus*, Krug uses photographs to document her uncle's short life, along with photographs of her father, which reinforce his role as a replacement child. In Chapter 3, a side-by-side spread shows each of the Franz Karl boys in nearly identical photographs, each one dressed for church and holding a First Communion candle in their right hand, the first brother on the left facing page, the brother who never knew him on the right. Their (identical) names are at the top of each page, with only the dates of the photos, twenty years apart, being different.

Marianne Hirsch writes that "Like all pictures, the photos in *Maus* represent what no longer is. But they also represent what has been and what has been violently destroyed. And they represent the life that was no longer to be and that, against all odds, nevertheless continues to be" (9). The photos of the brothers in *Belonging* evoke much of this same sorrow and trauma: the uncle's life that no longer was, the father's life that continues to be both as himself and as an avatar of his dead brother.

Like Spiegelman, Krug's father remains haunted and traumatized by his role as a replacement child. Schwab writes that "tacit comparison with a dead sibling is a classical syndrome of replacement children" (281). For Krug's father, the comparison is not even tacit.



Beneath the photographs of her uncle and her father, Krug writes, "All throughout my father's childhood, his mother told him that his brother had been a sweet and well-behaved boy, unlike my father, who was a stubborn and ill-tempered child" (Chapter 3). As with Richieu in *Maus*, the memory of Krug's uncle created comparisons that are impossible for the replacement child to meet, either in temperament or in achievement. Krug's father had been expected to replace his brother in maintaining the family farm, a preservation of the connection between family and land that he failed to perform. As an adult, Krug's father still suffers from the effects of being a replacement child. He is alienated from his sister, who still mourns her lost brother and resents Krug's father for reminding her of the loss. He tells Krug that he does not feel a sense of *Heimat*, or belonging, to his home, and unlike Krug, he does not seem motivated to reforge it. The trauma of his childhood is too great.

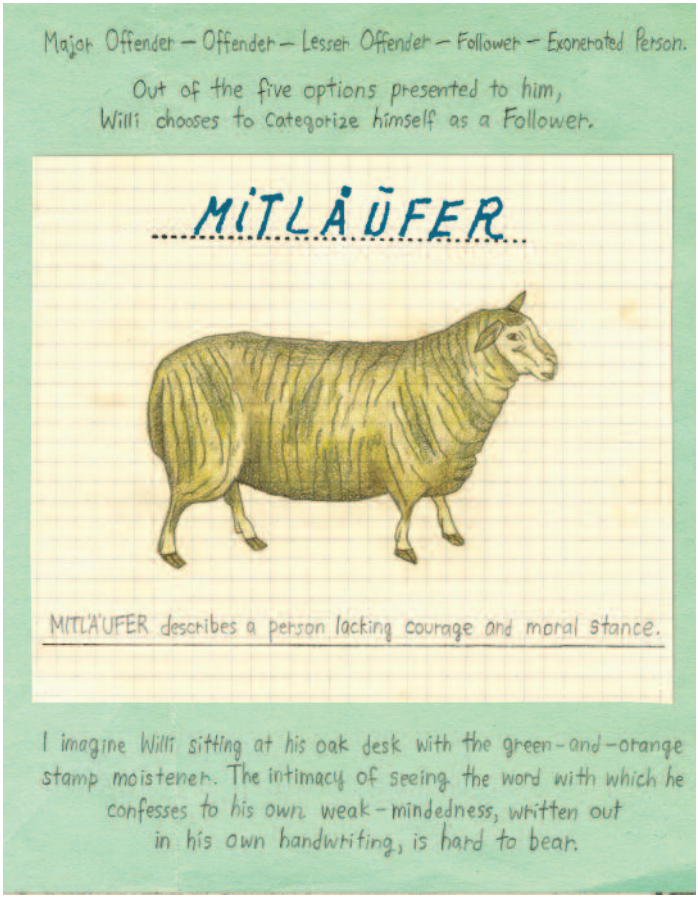
Nonetheless, Krug persists in learning about her uncle's short life, and here the story of the lost child diverges from that of *Maus* in important ways. Richieu was a child victim of the Holocaust, poisoned by his aunt in desperation when they are in danger of being captured by the Nazis. The first Franz Karl, on the other hand, is the author of the antisemitic school essay about the poisonous mushroom, and a boy who idly drew swastikas in the margins of his schoolwork. He is also the same young man, described by his loving sister as cheerful, diligent, and humane, who was killed in southern Italy in 1944 and buried there. Grujić and Schaum write that Krug is part of a German generation whose "national, ritualized culture of remembrance is full of contradictions" (198). Krug's relationship to 'big Franz Karl,' as the family calls him, is likewise full of contradictions. Growing up, she knew little about her uncle, whose role as a soldier made it easier to ignore him rather than talk about what it meant to serve in the German army. But this lacuna of silence around the war and trauma is emotionally destabilizing, a phenomenon that is true for Germans as it has shown to be for Holocaust survivors and their descendants. Krug's persistence in learning about her uncle shows us that one can accept the narrative of Germans—even average soldiers—as perpetrators and a core part of the war

machine that made the Holocaust possible, while still recognizing their lives as human.

For Krug, recovering her uncle's humanity requires holding him accountable for his actions even as she tries to understand his life more deeply. In *Belonging*, holding her relatives accountable often means acknowledging the Jewish lives around them. Of her uncle, she writes, "Kolsheim is a small town. Jews and Christians lived side by side. . . . My uncle probably knew the Jewish boys and girls who lived in town." She adds that as a schoolboy he was "too young to understand the power of Nazi propaganda. But old enough to understand that Jews are not like poisonous mushrooms" (Chapter 3). Krug will only grant her family (and by extension, herself) freedom from guilt and shame if she sees evidence that they were not complicit, that they acted positively to protect their Jewish neighbors. As Krug explains in Chapter 12, the denazification hearings in postwar West Germany delineated five categories of German behavior during the war: major offenders, offenders, lesser offenders, follower, and exonerated persons. Speaking of another relative, who placed himself in the category of follower, or *Mitlaüfer*, Krug writes, "The intimacy of seeing the word with which he confesses to his own weak-mindedness, written out in his own handwriting, is hard to bear" (Chapter 12). In postwar Germany, classifying oneself as a *Mitlaüfer* typically allowed one to escape legal or practical repercussions for wartime actions. But it is not enough for Krug.

We see here how far the narrative has evolved for Germans of Krug's generation compared to first or even second generation Germans. Postwar Germany punished only the most overt actors in the Nazi regime and allowed the vast majority of Germans to feel only a collective sense of guilt. In many cases the narrative Germans told themselves went a step further, foregrounding the suffering of Germans and ignoring the presence of Jews in their towns and in their lives. That is not an option for Krug.

But her willingness to hold her relatives accountable is what allows her to see them as individuals and explore their lives in depth, rather than obscuring them behind a wall of silence. Krug recalls a family trip to Italy that takes them to a military cemetery, a "vast



labyrinth" with the remains of 30,683 German soldiers. An inscription at the entrance reads "Blessed Are They Who Are Suffering, For They Shall Be Comforted" (Chapter 3). She finds that her father has led them to the place where her uncle is buried. As the inscription suggests, it is possible to recognize that these soldiers suffered and died, and that those left behind suffered too. "This is the closest I've ever been to my brother," Krug's father says while standing at the grave (Chapter 3). But Krug needs more than brief physical proximity; she needs to understand her uncle's role in her personal narrative, not just the larger narrative of the Holocaust. Toward the end of *Belonging*, she meets with her father's estranged sister, who has firsthand memories of Krug's uncle and remains devastated by his death seven

decades later. Rather than releasing her from her sense of guilt and shame, Krug says that "each step that leads me closer to my uncle . . . entangles me, that I am irrevocably intertwined with people and with places, with stories and histories." Echoing her father's words, but in the place that he lived rather than where he died, she says, "This is the closest I have ever been to my uncle. And this is the closest I will ever get" (Chapter 13).

These are the last words in *Belonging*, save for the epilogue, and they demonstrate how the shared narrative of the Holocaust is a starting point for Germans and Jews, not a mutually agreed and closed discussion. For people like Rutu Modan, it is a way to connect with like-minded artists who are German and find ways to pursue their mutual creative interests.[2] For Krug's new Jewish relatives, it allows them to build an intimate relationship with a German woman and form a family that embraces both Germanness and Jewishness. For Krug, it forms the moral center from which she can engage in the complex exploration of her family that *Belonging* entails—an exploration that incorporates both her old family and her new one, with Krug at their intersection.

Works Cited

Aarons, Victoria, and Alan L. Berger. *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory*. Northwestern UP, 2017.

Black, Jeremy. *The Holocaust: History and Memory*. Indiana UP, 2017.

Clewell, Tammy. "Beyond Graphic Memoir: Visualizing Third-Generation German Cultural Identity in Nora Krug's *Belonging*." *American Imago*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2020, pp. 459–96.

Diner, Dan, and Joel Golb. "On Guilt Discourse and Other Narratives: Epistemological Observations Regarding the Holocaust." *History and Memory*, vol. 9, no. ½, 1997, pp. 301–20.

[2]For examples of collaborations between Israeli comics artists (including Modan) and German comics artists, see *Happy End* (written by Modan et al. in 2002), Tim Dinter's *Cargo: Comics Journalism Israel-Germany* (2005), and *Tel Aviv Berlin: Ein Reisebuch* (written by Moden et al. in 2010).

Dinter, Tim. *Cargo: Comics Journalism Israel-Germany*. Avant-Verlag, 2005.

Fogelman, Eva. "Psychological Dynamics in the Lives of Third Generation Holocaust Survivors." *evafogelman*, www.evafogelman.com/_psychological_dynamics_in_the_lives_of_third_generation_holocaust_survivors__94110.htm. Accessed 21 Dec. 2020.

Grujić, Marija, and Ina Schaum. "German Postmemory and Ambivalent Home Desires: A Critical Reading of Nora Krug's (2018) Graphic Novel *Heimat: A German Family Album*." *Ethnoscripts*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2019, pp. 196-212.

Krug, Nora. *Belonging: a German Reckons with History and Home*. Scribner, 2018.

———. "A German Finally Picks Up 'Mein Kampf.'" *New York Times,* 13 Sept. 2019. www.nytimes.com/2019/09/13/books/a-german-finally-picks-up-mein-kampf.html.

Mills, Jean Helms, et al. "Making Sense of Sensemaking: The Critical Sensemaking Approach." *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2010, pp. 182–195.

Modan, Rutu, et al. *Happy End*. Actus Independent Comics, 2002.

Modan, Rutu. Interview with Molly Johanson. "One Big Cemetery: Jewish History and Memory in the Comics of Rutu Modan." BA thesis, Whitman College, 2014.

Modan, Rutu, et al. *Tel Aviv Berlin: Ein Reisebuch*. Avant-Verlag, 2010.

Reingold, Matt. "Bridging the Divide through Graphic Novels: Teaching Non-Jews' Holocaust Narratives to Jewish Students." *SANE Journal*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2019, n.p. Web.

Schwab, Gabriele. "Replacement Children: The Transgenerational Transmission of Traumatic Loss." *American Imago*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2009, pp. 277–310.

Sekalala, Seif. "The Dynamics of Deliberate and Unintentional Amnesia in Narrative Sensemaking and Enaction of Resilience: A Case Study of Four Rwandan Narratives of Genocide Survival." *Cogent Social Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, n.p. Web.

Shavit, Zohar. *A Past Without Shadow Constructing the Past in German Books for Children*. Routledge, 2005.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*. Pantheon Books, 1991.

"We Carry that History": an Interview with Nora Krug

Tahneer Oksman
Marymount Manhattan College

The cover of Nora Krug's *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (2018) features an illustrated young woman dressed casually in jeans and high boots, superimposed over a photograph of a lush, green countryside. She looks contemplatively at the landscape ahead of her, legs planted on a small boulder, hands gently resting on her thighs. This is one of just a few images readers see of our narrator/author, in a book that is as much about looking outward—carefully investigating one's history and circumstances, as well as the history and circumstances of one's upbringing and family—as it is about the subjectivity and reflection inevitably tied to any such exploration.

As hinted on the cover, the book is a visual experiment of sorts, combining photography, clean and careful prose narration, short comics, and an archive of various objects presented through photographs and illustrations. It is also a book very much tied to what it means, two generations after World War II, to be German. (The cover image, which appears in a related form in the second chapter of the book, is an adaptation of German Romantic landscape artist Caspar David Friedrich's famous 1818 painting, *Wanderer above the sea of Fog.*)

Born in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1977, Krug's visual memoir was written after she had moved to New York City and, as she explains in this interview, started to experience, in a more pronounced way, a deep cultural connection to her home country and also a continued sense of confusion and discomfort in relation to its past. Though at school she had been taught the perils and effects of Germany's fascistic, genocidal history—one powerful page in *Belonging* shows an excerpted speech by Adolf Hitler, which she had to carefully annotate and interpret for an eleventh grade assignment—she had never learned much by way of her own family's history. In the book, comprised of fifteen expansive chapters plus an introduction and epilogue, Krug returns to explore her own hometown and her father's hometown, to dig deep into her family's past. Of course, as in any such investigation, many aspects of her family's and her country's history remain mysteries. But the experience of the search, as any reader of the book will quickly see, is one of intensive, thoughtful investigation.

I interviewed Krug over a video chat call on an afternoon in early August of 2020. We were both at home, in our respective Brooklyn apartments, less than a mile from one another. As the grandchild of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, I was surprised at how deeply attached I felt to Krug's narrator from the very opening of her book. In fact, what struck me in reading the visual memoir, as well as over the course of our conversation, were the parallels in the frameworks surrounding our family histories, though we were coming to the story from different "sides." For both of us, a silence, like Friedrich's thick fog, surrounds our family's pasts. Each of us was raised with a domestic taboo against speaking of, or asking about, our family's histories—though for very different reasons—even as we were both deeply embedded in learning about the subject at school and via other, unfamiliar people's narratives.

Talking to Krug, who was born just two years before I was, made me realize how much a book like this one would have been a salve for me in my youth, when I was first learning the history of the Holocaust and reading one personal story after another. To know that the aftermath of the Holocaust haunts not just its victims, and

their descendants, but also perpetrators as well as those more indirectly involved—including "followers," and *their* descendants—was something of a belated revelation, and an oddly comforting one, at that.[1] As cartoonist Amy Kurzweil—also the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor—wrote, in an illustrated review of Krug's book, "Reading *Belonging* was like reading my own history's shadow."

As Krug pointed out in the interview, many books have been written and published, especially in Germany, by and about children and grandchildren of Nazi perpetrators. What makes hers stand out—besides its brilliant design—is that she was looking to uncover the history of family members whose involvement was, like so many, less clear or traceable. The careful manner with which Krug engages with the many layers of historiography and autobiographical representation is one reason that the visual, collage-like format of the book is eminently suitable to the subject at hand. Krug mentioned, toward the end of our interview, that, since the publication of her book, many German readers have come to her for advice in researching their own family histories. In *Belonging*, and in Krug, they have found a skilled and sensitive guide.

Tahneer Oksman (TO): Your memoir begins with an image and description of the *Hansaplast*, a German bandage brand that you describe in the book as "the safest thing in the world" besides your mother. This is followed by a powerful scene in which you are on a New York City rooftop, and you encounter a Jewish Holocaust survivor. She recognizes your German accent and asks you where you are from. You ask if she has been to Germany, and she tells you her story of survival. The scene ends when, sensing your discomfort, she tells you, "That was a long time ago," and "You seem like someone who was raised by loving parents."

[1]Of course, a number of relevant books and films on the subject have long been in circulation, including, for example, the 1990 West Germany film *The Nasty Girl* and Gerald L. Posner's 1991 book, *Hitler's Children*, or, more recently, Katrin Himmler's 2007 *The Himmler Brothers*, Tania Crasnianski's 2018 *Children of Nazis*, and Angelika Bammer's 2019 *Born After*.

Could you talk about why you chose to pair this object with this scene, as a way of opening your memoir?

Nora Krug (NK): Like most of the objects I feature on the pages in the book that I entitle "Things German," it's an object that I associate with a sense of security. The experience of falling, and your wound being tended to by a parent, is a common childhood experience. It's essential for any child to experience this feeling of being anchored and sheltered.

The book also addresses the conflict of growing up in a sheltered way in your family, while also feeling deeply culturally disoriented and confused as a German. How do you negotiate that contrast between wanting to love where you came from—because it represents your family, your home, your friends, the food you grew up eating, and so forth—while at the same time deeply questioning it? It's a very painful thing to do.

One of the main things I learned from writing and illustrating the book is that it's important to look at the scars; it's important to uncover the wounds. The goal should not be to make them invisible. The scars left by wounds will always be there, although that's not necessarily a bad thing.

TO: In chapter 1, "Early Dawning," you describe a number of childhood experiences in which you learned bits and pieces about what happened during the war in Karlsruhe, the city in the south of Germany where you grew up, and about the Holocaust more generally. These experiences are all in some ways linked through strong visual elements.

So, for example, you include a copy of a school exercise that you did in eleventh grade, carefully analyzing and annotating a speech that Hitler once gave. Another page includes photographs of your classmates after a class visit to the concentration camp Birkenau. Could you talk about these early, formative experiences, and why you chose to include them in the book? In what ways did they lead to your wanting, years later, to go back and research your family history?

NK: Often you make sense of things in retrospect, as you grow older, and you see connections that you didn't see before. As a teenager, the whole process of learning about this history was a difficult one. It coincided with a feeling of insecurity about what kind of girl I wanted to be, who I wanted to be as a person. As a teenager, you already have to deal with going through an identity crisis of sorts, and for Germans of my generation, it meant having to deal with a cultural crisis on top of that. It was a challenging thing to experience. Our education about the Nazi period was very intense and thorough, but at the same time, we weren't particularly encouraged to engage with the subject on a personal level. I knew nothing about what happened in my hometown, on the streets familiar to me, and I had no idea who my hometown's prominent Nazis had been.

It was very moving for me when, as an adult, I went to the library here in New York City, and, for the first time, and in a foreign country, sought out and found books on the wartime history of my own hometown. One of the books, which I found at the New York Public Library, was about the bombing of my hometown, and it was written by my former physics teacher. There I was, twenty-five years after being in his class, finding my physics teacher's book. I remembered then how he had occasionally talked in class about how he had experienced the war as a child. He had described the impact that the bombs left on him emotionally, but also their physical impact on the cityscape. The way he talked about the moment when a bomb was dropped, the way he imitated the sounds of the bombs, made it feel almost humorous, and caused us students to chuckle in response. But when I read his book at the Public Library, I suddenly understood why and how deeply he had been impacted by the subject. This personal narrative of the wartime experience was exactly what's missing in our regular curriculum. It would have made our understanding of the war more tangible.

TO: I find it compelling how you say that as teenagers you all found it humorous, almost surreal, to hear of these things that had happened in your town before you were born. Throughout the memoir, what I kept sensing was that, on the one hand, nobody in your family was

actively talking about your history before you started asking questions, nobody around where you grew up seemed to be willingly talking about the past. But at the same time, it almost felt like, underneath, everyone—or, at least, the older generation, like your physics teacher—was always wanting to talk about it, trying to open up. Like in a way, they were all deeply mired in the past, even as it seemed to the contrary.

I was thinking about this especially with regards to a later scene, in Chapter 15, "Shaking Hands," when you meet your aunt Annemarie for the first time. She seems, oddly, to be both eager and hesitant, all at once, in terms of discussing the past with you.

NK: I think there were many reasons for different people not to talk about the past. For instance, my parents didn't talk about it not because they didn't want to but because their parents hadn't talked about it. It had been a taboo subject in their homes, so my parents just didn't have any information they could share with me. And when I started digging, my parents were as interested and excited to find out about our family's past as I was.

In the case of my aunt Annemarie—my father's sister—I think the memory of the Nazi era was painful because she had experienced firsthand the loss of her brother, my uncle Franz-Karl, and she had felt a sense of not being allowed to mourn that loss. At the same time, she witnessed her own mother mourning his loss all her life.

I think for my aunt, it probably took a stranger—me—to come by and ask those questions that would otherwise have been difficult to answer. I don't think she would have been as open, or would have taken all of my uncle's photographs and mementos out of her cabinet, if it had been her own children addressing the subject. Sometimes it takes a complete stranger to come by to allow for a deeper access.

TO: In Chapter Two, "Forgotten Songs," which is another sort of introductory chapter, you write about how one of the events that compelled you to make this book was your move to the United States. There's something of a familiar narrative there—of the immigrant moving to a new country and suddenly discovering her differences from

people around her, suddenly realizing her connection to her native country. Could you talk about the factors that led you to this book?

NK: It was not one key moment but several that drove me to write the book. One of them was the encounter with the elderly Jewish woman on the rooftop in New York City not long after I had moved to New York City to study. I had met survivors before, back in Germany, survivors who had come to my school to talk to students about their experiences. But this encounter with the woman on a rooftop of a friend's apartment was unexpected. It was an emotional encounter because it was so intimate, and she was so frank about her experiences without being reproachful towards me as a representative of Germany. I felt a sense of inherited guilt while listening to her story, but she didn't mean to make me feel guilty, and that freed something up in me.

That encounter was very instrumental. At the same time, I often felt myself being confronted with negative stereotypes about Germans and Germany while living in the US—some of them justified, others ill-informed and therefore hurtful. I wanted to write a book exploring the gray zones a bit more, a book that would not stereotype either the victims or the perpetrators, because I felt that that perspective was often lacking in people's understanding of WWII.

As Hannah Arendt once wrote, "Where all are guilty, no one is" (65). The experience of being a German amongst non-Germans allowed me for the first time to confront my sense of guilt on a personal, rather than a collective, level.

TO: Throughout the book, in addition to the "Things German" that pop up in various places, you include different series of objects that you find in thrift shops, in Germany and elsewhere. You also include "field notes," as well as objects—photographs, documents, and other things—that you find in personal, familial, and more public archives. What roles do you think objects play in your book?

NK: Objects are carriers of history and histories. They can convey stories and emotions in a different way than a textbook does, for instance. When you go to flea markets in Germany or other countries—

in Italy you can find a lot of WW2 era items, too—and you see, for instance, a cigarette box made by a German prisoner-of-war made out of the scrap metal of a crashed airplane, it gives you a different insight and access into that period because it's so personal, so intimate. A person carried this object around in their pocket and now you're carrying it in yours, and you're bringing it into your home. It establishes a strange connection that is also often uncomfortable, because you don't want to be associated emotionally with this stranger whose involvement in the war might have been morally fraught.

The flea market objects reflect both a personal and collective narrative. Even though they are personal items once owned by somebody I don't know, they say something collectively about the war experience. I interspersed the pages featuring these objects into the main narrative of the book because I wanted the reader to occasionally step back from my family story and look at it from a different perspective, a more collective perspective. I also wanted to convey that this is not only a book about my own family or my own personal experience. It's not even just a book about Germany or the Germans, but about anybody's responsibility in facing one's country's past.

I hoped that those less personal pages—including the ones entitled "Things German" that feature objects that represent a sense of German cultural identity to me—would remove the reader from the narrative for a short period of time, and then allow them to reenter it in a different way.

I wanted to free myself from the more traditional graphic novel style, i.e. panels and speech bubbles. I wanted the book to feel more like a scrapbook or a diary. I also wanted to reflect on the idea of memory as something fragmentary that we make sense of in retrospect, and acknowledge that history cannot be neatly summarized from A–Z, or chronologically retold from 1933–1945. History can also be understood as a series of chaotic incidences or personal experiences and memories that evolve over decades and generations. Memory isn't as reliable as we want it to be.

Of course, I'm not debating historical facts—there is no alternative reality or truth. But I think there are many different entry points into what we think of as history. And we have to be able to reflect on it

not only as historians but also as writers and artists, not only as scholars but also simply as humans. We should learn about history not merely through numbers and facts.

TO: Could you say more about the comics you include throughout the book, and how you decided when to tell parts of the story in that way?

NK: I chose the comic format when I told a narrative that took place in the past and was able to stand on its own—uninterrupted by a verbal reflection of my own feelings or thoughts. I chose the format to illustrate the realities of my grandfather's life under the Nazi regime, for instance.

Because I was working in a multitude of visual styles, I wanted to make it easier for the viewer to recognize those moments in the narrative that talk about my family's life in the past. I thought that if I always return to this specific format whenever I talk about my grandparents' or uncle's lives, then people would immediately recognize where they are temporally and spatially. I used different visual formats for different categories of narratives throughout the book.

The word *illustration* literally means to shed light on something, to enlighten, to manifest. Illustrating means clarifying things, allowing for a new perspective. That's what I was trying to do. To me, drawing is also an exercise in empathy because it forced me to confront my family members' lives and the decisions they made in a more tangible way. It was a way, not necessarily of understanding, but of trying to figure out how they felt as they found themselves in these difficult situations.

TO: As someone who reads and writes a lot about memoir, I'd be curious to know whether you think of your book more as memoir or more as biography?

NK: The book is a book about my family, but of course their lives and experiences are all filtered through me and my own reflection. The book isn't only about the past and about what my family did, but

also about what this particular past means to me as a German. How has it impacted my cultural identity, my human identity? Would I be a different person if my family had made different decisions?

In a way, the book is a physical manifestation of me. It carries my family's narratives.

TO: You end up writing about both sides of your family—your mother's side and your father's side—by switching back and forth in different chapters. Could you say more about why you chose this structure?

NK: Initially I thought about making two books and then selling them as a set. But then I thought it would be more interesting to intertwine the two narratives. Because all of these stories and all of the people that we grow up with or encounter in our lives are intertwined within us, too. Even though the two family histories are separate, what we consequentially learn from them is connected within us.

I wrote the stories separately and then divided them into chapters. I thought about which moments would make for good chapter endings and allow the reader to reenter the other family narrative from a different perspective. I assigned a different color range to each of the two family narratives. For my father's story, I used mostly warm colors, and for my mother's story mostly cool colors. This was not for an emotional reason but just to make it more recognizable which family I was talking about at a given point.

TO: Did putting these stories side by side help you see or understand something about the different family histories that you hadn't thought of before?

NK: What was interesting to me was the juxtaposition between city versus countryside. The war was perceived differently in the city than it was in the countryside. The countryside wasn't bombed. Usually people were better off there because many were farmers, so there were fewer food shortages.

Changes happen much more slowly in villages. People don't come and go as much as they do in cities. Memory is preserved in a different way. Everybody in the village of Külsheim, where my father is from, still knows exactly whose father or grandfather was a Nazi, or which houses belonged to Jewish people. These memories don't go away.

TO: You tell two very different stories of familial loss—of death during the war—in your book. The first is of your uncle, Franz-Karl, whom your father was named for. He died in Italy, as an SS infantryman, before your father was born. The second, on your mother's side of the family, was your grandfather's brother, Edwin. He also died in wartime, on the frontline at the Sworbe peninsula.

Could you address these two narratives of loss, and whether grief played a role in telling these stories about relatives who had died in the war?

NK: As a German, you grow up feeling like you're not supposed to grieve German loss. There's obviously a good reason for that because many Germans were involved in atrocities.

With Franz-Karl, I'm not sure if I ever actually allowed myself to grieve because I couldn't get a full sense of the person he really was. I don't know if he believed in the Nazis' ideology, because I don't have any proof that he did or didn't. But I don't think I could grieve for someone who was a supporter of the Nazi ideology.

With Edwin, the brother of my grandfather, Willy, who wrote those heartbreaking love letters to his wife in Switzerland that I included in the book, it was different. He didn't want to be a soldier. He wanted to become a Swiss citizen and live in Switzerland with his family. His letters are warm and there is no single mention of the Nazi ideology or acts of atrocity. When I read his letters, for the first time, I actually allowed myself to feel sadness over his death. Here's a man who did not want to experience any of this, and he was forced into a situation that was inhumane, and that he himself referred to as inhumane in his letters.

Obviously, that can't be said for every German soldier. That's why it's so important to look at each individual case.

TO: The book opens and ends with mentions of your present life: how you are married to a Jewish man; interactions you have had with his family. You also close the book by mentioning yourself as pregnant with your daughter. I wonder if you could talk a bit about how these present-day roles and relationships shaped your explorations of your family's story.

NK: I wanted to bring my daughter into the book because children always represent the possibility of a new beginning, the possibility of a clean slate. This book addresses the question of whether guilt can really be measured, whether innocence can ever be proven, or if it is just a utopian idea. Growing up as a German, I experienced a sense of taintedness, even though I myself hadn't lived through the Nazi period.

My sense is that in the U.S. it's the other way around. Here, you grow up with a strong and positive origin story, a story that is easy to accept as your own. It's a story that lacks a crucial and critical in-depth confrontation of America's past failures, and it doesn't confront appropriately and in depth the history of slavery and the mistreatment of Native Americans.

In Germany, on the other hand, you grow up with a negative narrative and there's no state of innocence or accomplishment that marks its beginning. The question becomes whether there is actually such a thing as innocence? Because we are all deeply impacted by our country's pasts, not only collectively, but also as individuals. We carry that history in us, and we have a responsibility to keep it alive. We can't separate ourselves from it, nor should we.

I include some visual motifs in the book to reflect on this problem. For instance, I feature an image of a glass of milk where I talk about the dispossession of my grandmother's milk business by the Nazis. I put the drawing in the chapter that talks about Willy's postwar attempt at defending his actions under the Nazi regime in front of the U.S. military government.

And towards the end of the book, I feature a photograph of him standing in a snowy landscape. I used these images as a way of reflecting on the concept of innocence. Can guilt ever be measured?

Can innocence ever be proven? Should we strive for it, or just accept it as a utopian concept? And what does all this mean for my daughter? She's obviously not guilty of anything but she carries that history within her. And now, as an American, she also carries the history of slavery within her. She, too, will have to take responsibility and defend our democracy and human rights when she gets older. I think that was the reason for why I decided to bring her into the book. I wanted to look both into the past and into the future.

TO: There's a moment early in the book when you mention getting your first period and learning about the Holocaust in school at around the same time. I thought a lot about gender as I read through the memoir. So many of your investigations into your family's pasts had to go through men because they were the ones connected to the military and to various establishments. With the women in your family, it's much harder to discover their feelings about anything.

Could you say something about the role of gender in this story?

MK: I worried that people would ask me where the women are in the book. But the truth is that it used to be mostly men that held key positions in the war. Of course, there were women who committed atrocities under the Nazi regime, women who chose to do terrible things. But they did not in my family—at least based on the information I was able to find.

My aunt Karin—Willy's other daughter—my mother's sister, who recently passed away, was the person in that family who actually remembered details about my grandparents' lives under the regime. She was deeply tied to that history, maybe because she herself experienced the bombings as a child, which my mother did not because she grew up after the war.

Maybe that's the role that women play in my book—women as the carriers of our family's histories. Perhaps men of that generation were less apt to open up about those narratives.

TO: When you were writing the book, did you have a particular audience in mind? Were you thinking that you were writing for other

Germans like yourself, or were you writing for Jews, like the woman from the rooftop?

NK: Because the book came out of my experiences living in America, I had an American audience in mind first. I wanted to write a book that presented less of a stereotypical view on the war, to move away from the narrative of losers versus winners, culprits versus victims. I felt that a more subtle perspective is often overlooked in the America media and entertainment industry. And that bothered me because it's dangerous to only learn about history from such a black-and-white perspective. If we don't try to look under the surface and understand what drove people to make wrong decisions then we're much more likely to make them again.

I worried very much that the book could be read as a justification of why Germans acted the way they did, or as a story of self-victimization, or as an apology. You can't and shouldn't apologize for atrocities like the ones Germans committed, because they are unforgivable, and we shouldn't expect atonement.

The book was never meant as an attempt of overcoming my feelings of guilt. I was worried that people might think that, especially Holocaust survivors and their descendants. But when I've given talks at Jewish institutions, I've only been met with openness and curiosity. I'm thankful that the book was not misunderstood in that way. I also had a group of sensitive and reasonable people looking over the text to make sure that the way I wrote—about German loss, for instance—couldn't be misunderstood in that way.

I was also careful about how I weighed the images with the text. When I wrote about loss in my family, I tried to write about it in a very stripped-down way. I was worried about creating a sense of sentimentality. A book about WWII written by a sentimental German would be the worst kind of book on the subject. It was very difficult at times to balance those narratives with the right image because images can convey an idea of sentimentality, too. I had to find the right images in order not to allow for ambivalent interpretations of what it was that I wanted to say.

TO: I think you succeeded.

NK: Thank you.

When the book was sold to Germany, I became very nervous. I somehow hadn't thought about writing it for a German audience because I thought, "Why would they find this interesting? They already know all about this." And I also thought, "Nobody in my family was a major Nazi. Who cares about a story of a 'follower'?"

But Germany was the country where the most publishers made offers, where there was the strongest interest in the book. I think that's because, first of all, it's a visual book. There are so many books in Germany on the subject, but not many graphic memoirs or graphic novels. Also, I think this idea that we actually have to look more critically at our family members who were "only" followers is also important and often overlooked, even in Germany. It's easy to fall into the trap of saying: "My grandfather was a follower, just like everybody else." There were different ways of being a follower. There were Nazi party members who hid Jews. There were people who did terrible things who refused to join the party. You have to look at every individual person, and I, personally, think this level of introspection should happen in every German family.

What has been satisfying to me is that when I do events in Germany, people often come up to me and ask my advice as to how they can embark on their own family research. In a way, at least in Germany, I feel like the book has fulfilled its purpose.

TO: There are obviously many graphic narratives about the Holocaust, most famously Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. Were you influenced by the graphic novel, or the graphic novel memoir? Do you see yourself in this vein?

NK: There's not really a term for the type of book this is, though it is in the graphic non-fiction realm. Graphic memoir, visual memoir, perhaps.

The book is obviously visual, but it's also more text-heavy than most graphic novels. When I pitched it, I hoped that it would be

primarily understood as a memoir rather than a graphic novel. Because my previous audience had been mostly visually oriented—illustrators, designers, fine artists, comics readers—I wanted to broaden the audience a bit, to move beyond the graphic novel world. The book has a variety of audiences. Historians read it. Graphic novel and memoir enthusiasts read it. Holocaust scholars read it. It fits into many different categories.

In terms of influences, there are graphic novelists whom I greatly admire. Chris Ware is a wonderful storyteller. I also like Belgian graphic novelist Olivier Schrauwen. But when I worked on the book, I wasn't really paying too much attention to graphic novels. I was focusing more on reading non-fiction and memoir books of prose. For example, Alexandra Fuller—I'm a big fan of her work. I also watched a lot of documentaries, but documentaries with an essayistic point of view. Those are the two mediums I was most engaged in looking at when working on my book.

TO: Are there any particular documentaries that stand out, in terms of influence?

NK: I love Joshua Oppenheimer's related films *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*, about the genocide in Indonesia. The way he uses images is powerful but never sentimental. When I watch documentaries I always think about how they use words in relation to images. I also like the films of Werner Herzog, the German filmmaker. They are always as much about him as they are about his subjects. That's in part because of his personal, essayistic voice and the way he looks at the subjects.

TO: It sounds like at some point you were planning to be a documentary filmmaker?

NK: Yeah. And I have to say, I really felt like I found myself with this project *because* I have a history in documentary. I abandoned that professional pathway because I felt like I had to focus on just one thing. As an illustrator, you don't depend on grants, you don't

depend on equipment or on other people to help you. You have everything under control, and you don't need a lot of money. So I pursued that as a profession but realized later that I was missing a lot of aspects of documentary filmmaking: interviewing people, getting to the bottom of things, reporting what's happening in the world and learning from what's happened previously. I realized with this book that visual narrative is my preferred format, and it allowed me to combine my interest in documentary film and illustration.

TO: How do you feel now about the book's afterlife—the audiences it has been reaching?

NK: What's really wonderful is to see that the book is still being translated into other languages. It just came out in Korea; it will come out in China. We just signed with Russia. Eastern Europe is going to be another important audience for me because they were so deeply affected by Germany's actions. It's satisfying to see that many different countries feel that it's important to look at this subject from a different angle and to engage in a dialogue. You have to be able to talk about the subject in order to break down cultural barriers.

TO: The book concludes with a recognition about a German word you introduce early on, which is *Heimat*. Roughly translated as "home" or "homeland," you note by the end of the book that this sense—of familiarity, of identity—that you have been searching for "begins to exist once you've lost it." What are your thoughts now on *Heimat*, with the book's publication now two years behind you? Do you feel like you've been able to move on from this past history, in a way? Does it still haunt you?

NK: In terms of *Heimat*, I've come to recognize that, like "identity," "culture," and "belonging," it's not a static term. It's something that evolves over time. It would be unnatural if our idea of culture and belonging remained static even though we, as humans, evolve.

The extreme right—its recent development is as concerning in Germany as it is here in the US —claims that there's only one way

of looking at the concept of *Heimat*, or only one way of being a German, or an American. That's a very dangerous position to take, but also very unrealistic. I think *Heimat* should be allowed to mean anything to anybody. Anybody has the right to interpret it in a different way.

For me, *Heimat* is as much an attempt of embracing what I love about it, but also a continued effort of looking at it from a critical angle. Both should be possible together.

I think that most Germans either have a hard time embracing their cultural heritage or they feel like they want to "move on" and shy away from looking critically at its past. I think Germans need to learn how to confront their country's past while at the same time feeling like they're allowed to articulate their positive feelings towards their cultural identity. If we leave the latter only to the extreme right, we have a problem.

A lot of people in the U.S., too, are afraid of talking about America's own troubled past. I think there's a worry that you won't be able to love your country as much if you look at it from a critical angle.

During this current Covid-19 crisis, I've come to realize how much I miss Europe. It's the first year that I haven't been back at all ever since I moved here in 2002. This crisis has caused me to rethink my idea of *Heimat* yet again, and I think it will continue to change going forward as well.

Works Cited

Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. Harcourt, 1970.

Bammer, Angelika. *Born After: Reckoning with the German Past*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

Crasnianski, Tania. *Children of Nazis: The Sons and Daughters of Himmler, Göring, Höss, Mengele, and Others—Living with a Father's Monstrous Legacy*. Translated by Molly Grogan, Arcade, 2018.

Himmler, Katrin. *The Himmler Brothers*. Pan Macmillan, 2007.

Kurzweil, Amy. "Illustrated Book Review. Belonging by Nora Krug." *Moment*, 13 Nov. 2018. https://momentmag.com/illustrated-book-review-belonging-by-nora-krug/

Krug, Nora. *Belonging: a German Reckons with History and Home*. Scribner, 2018.

Posner, Gerald L. *Hitler's Children: Sons and Daughters of Leaders of the Third Reich Talk About Their Fathers and Themselves*. Random House, 1991.

The Nasty Girl. Directed by Michael Verhoeven, Filmverlag der Autoren, 1990.

Additional Reading

Aarons, Victoria. *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma, and Memory*. Rutgers UP, 2019.

Grujić, Marija, and Ina Schaum. "German Postmemory and Ambivalent Home Desires: A Critical Reading of Nora Krug's (2018) Graphic Novel *Heimat: A German Family Album*." *Ethnoscripts*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2019, pp. 196–212.

———. "Bridging the Divide through Graphic Novels: Teaching non-Jews' Holocaust Narratives to Jewish Students." *SANE journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, vol. 2, no .4, Sept 2019, Article 3.

Reingold, Matt. "*Heimat* Across Space and Time in Nora Krug's *Belonging*." *Monatshefte*, vol. 11, no. 4, Winter 2019, pp. 551–69.

Jewish Identity amid Wars and Migration: Transnational and Transgenerational Itineraries in Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter. A Graphic Revolution*

Dana Mihăilescu
University of Bucharest

Between 1970 and 2010, around 1.6 million Jews and their non-Jewish relatives emigrated from the (former) Soviet Union primarily to Israel, the United States, and Germany. After a timid start in the 1970s, the movement evolved into a mass exodus in the early 1990s in the wake of the fall of the communist bloc and the dismantling of the Soviet Union into a number of successor states (Kobrin and Oppenheim 275–76; Gitelman 5; Tolts 23). Most of those emigrating from 1989 to 2010 settled in Israel (nearly a million, i.e. 61%), around 326,000 migrated to the US, and 224,000 to Germany (Gitelman 5; Tolts 23–24). In the US, Russian-speaking Jews represented the most significant Jewish migration wave after the 1924 anti-immigration policies (Kobrin and Oppenheim 276) that curbed the first great wave of Jewish migration from the Russian empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when almost two million Russian Jews migrated (Zvi 4). Even though after 1990 the US again introduced quotas that significantly reduced the number of Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union states by only allowing Jews who already had relatives in the US to immigrate, between 1991 and 1996 the US ranked second

after Israel as a receiving country, the number of Ukrainian Jews and their relatives being 1.6 times higher than those from the Russian federation (Tolts 25–26). Based on a call for the life stories of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants to the US and Germany from this wave of migration (a call which was modelled after the earlier YIVO contest for autobiographic accounts in the 1930s and 40s about the first great wave of Jewish migration from tsarist Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century), Kobrin and Oppenheim concluded that Jewish migrants from the former Soviet Union between 1989 and 1999 left both because of anti-Semitism—the reason they were encouraged to tell by the Western democracies welcoming them—and because "they believed opportunities for their children would be unlimited in places such as the United States, while the opposite was true in Russia" (Kobrin and Oppenheim 287). More recently, Jews emigrating from the (former) Soviet Union also emigrated because of discrimination against LGBTQ individuals and their families following Russia's new "homosexual propaganda" law (Katsnelson 162). Like the stories received by YIVO that went beyond the clichés of evading military draft and pogroms as the only reasons for Jewish emigration at the turn of the twentieth century, the life stories of the post-1990 Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants to the US are nuanced. Such stories offer precious details about family-related decisions and sometimes provide intimate views on family life, rather than simply chronicling the usual political life and policies of the Soviet Union undergirding Jewish global mass migration (Kobrin and Oppenheim 288).

Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter. A Graphic Revolution* (2017) significantly contributes to this nuancing of the discussion of Jewish identity for post-Soviet Jewish emigrants to the US as a graphic narrative that brings together older and newer generations of Jewish migrants to the US in a unique manner. This is the case because, as Karolina Krasuska notes, Julia and her great-grandmother Lola "are first and fourth generation Holocaust survivors, but [also] first and 1.5 generation immigrants" ("Post-Soviet Migrant" 256). The artist, Julia Alekseyeva, was born in 1988 and emigrated in 1992 from Ukraine to Chicago, together with her mother, grandmother, and great-grand-

mother. *Soviet Daughter* is based on the Russian-language diary of her great-grandmother, Lola, née Khinya Ignatovskaya, who was born in January of 1910 and died in February of 2010. The diary was ghostwritten by the great-granddaughter artist and is interspersed with self-reflective "Interlude" chapters about the artist's own coming-of-age. *Soviet Daughter* is a good example of what Dalia Wolfson calls "the mixed-memoir format" and what Tahneer Oksman calls the "'hybrid' autobiographical comics" format (Oksman 16)—an innovative format that allows Julia Alekseyeva to foreground anti-essentialist notions of the Jewish self by ghostwriting Lola's story. In that capacity, Alekseyeva acts as both a translator of her great-grandmother's diary and an interpreter through whose lens we get a mediated access to Lola's life story. But Alekseyeva does more than that: like Liana Finck's *A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York* (2014)—a graphic narrative that looks back on the early twentieth century immigrant Jewish community on the Lower East Side without detaching it from the twenty-first-century hindsight perspective which involves the artist's textual and visual translation—Alekseyeva's graphic narrative features a long durée approach that suggests "how the medium can open up relational considerations of identity" (Oksman 222).

In an interview with Hillary Chute, Alekseyeva explained that *Soviet Daughter* was meant as "an homage" to her great-grandmother, noting that the diary was filled with "incredibly rich historical information" as well as personal experiences. The artist chose the graphic narrative format to give her readers a sense of what it "truly meant to have lived there [in the Soviet Union] in a really visceral way" (minute 1–3). In the interview, Alekseyeva noted that "eighty percent of this book is straight from my great-grandmother's memoirs." She also pointed out that the book was structured in twelve more-or-less chronological chapters focusing on the great-grandmother's agency and decisions in the historical contexts she was living that did not give her space for doubt and rumination before acting. The other twenty percent represented the artist's own perspective, via "Interlude" sections of reflection designed to convey the two women's closeness by highlighting both their strong interpersonal connection and their shared experience of immigrating from

the former USSR to the US (minute 14:30–18). Through these emphases, Alekseyeva's graphic narrative occupies a unique space in the contemporary North American Jewish literary field bridging the gap between her post-Soviet peers that "tend to explore the various caveats of the immigrant theme" and her American-born Jewish peers that particularly delve into the past, with a preference for the Holocaust framework that favors and romanticizes reproductive sexuality and filiation (Krasuska, "Narratives" 286, 289). Thanks to her focus on her great-grandmother's life, Alekseyeva's graphic narrative works both ways, considering both the impact of migration from the Soviet Union and the toll of past historical moments, including the Holocaust but not limited to it, on Jewish identity.

Like many other contemporary artists, in choosing the genre of the graphic narrative—which in the twenty-first century has become "a platform for evoking defining and rupturing moments of history," most notably the Holocaust—Alekseyeva uses the genre's "elastic conditions for a collaborative effort in bearing witness and sustaining memory" to "generate a graphic performance of individual stories set against the backdrop of the historical period of the Holocaust" (Aarons 6). Unlike many other artists, however, she also situates *Soviet Daughter* in relation to other historical moments defining the great-grandmother's experiences and connecting them to the fourth-generation artist's smaller existential scope. To that end, Alekseyeva's graphic narrative follows the eclectic style of most contemporary graphic artists, combining standard grids and panels for some pages with open-page layouts for others. Most significantly, *Soviet Daughter* differs from the majority of other contemporary Jewish graphic narratives that most often provide a tight focus on the memory of the Holocaust only. Instead, Alekseyeva's graphic narrative offers a much broader temporal and historical scope for Jewish identity, spanning the century of her great-grandmother's life, from 1910 to 2010 under the shadow of the Bolshevik revolution, a civil war, the Holocaust, communist indoctrination and work environments, Stalinist purges, and post-Chernobyl immigration to the US. In this respect, the introduction to *Soviet Daughter* invites comparison to the beginning of contemporary graphic artist Amy

Kurzweil's graphic narrative *Flying Couch* (2016), which is also based on the diary of the artist's grandmother, who was a Holocaust survivor from Poland. Kurzweil uses her grandmother's notebooks as the starting point of the narrative both to suggest cross-generational itineraries of Jewish women's identities over time and to highlight the important role mediation played in connecting the artist and artist's mother to previous generations (Mihăilescu, "Mapping transgenerational memory" 96–97). In Kurzweil's narrative, written and published while the artist's grandmother is still alive, Bubbe's diary notebooks are drawn to emphasize the grandmother's celebrity survivor, princess-looking persona on the cover (Mihăilescu, "Mapping transgenerational memory" 96–97). These American myths undergird the typical American media and popular culture depiction of Holocaust survivors, tropes which were familiar to the artist granddaughter. By drawing our attention to them, Kurzweil's opening underlines how the English language and American practices of Holocaust representation are an integral part of her Jewishness and the main grids of understanding for her as a third-generation artist born and raised in the US. On the following page, the grandmother's Holocaust diary volumes get transformed into the shape of the house in which the granddaughter grew up, as if the grandmother's life story lovingly envelops the new generations' comfortable life trajectories, representing a protective space of warmth, well-being, and constant care. In other words, Kurzweil's initial drawings suggest how the strong personality of her Jewish grandmother represents the other shaping force of the artist's Jewish identity alongside the American myths of Holocaust celebrity survivors and media-disseminated "Jewish mother" personas with which Kurzweil was familiar.

Alekseyeva's introduction also revolves around the persona and memoir of a much-loved generationally-removed relative, her great-grandmother, including her great-grandmother's impact on Alekseyeva's identity. Nevertheless, in contrast to Kurzweil's emphasis on her still alive grandmother (who is an important presence and influence on the rest of the family's identities), Alekseyeva starts with the Chicago funeral of her great-grandmother, who died at 100 years of age in February of 2010. It is in the wake of her great-grand-

mother's death and in keeping with her great-grandmother's wishes that the family should not read the memoir she wrote before her passing (Alekseyeva 6) that Alekseyeva introduces the cover of the memoir, as she carries it along.

Figure 1

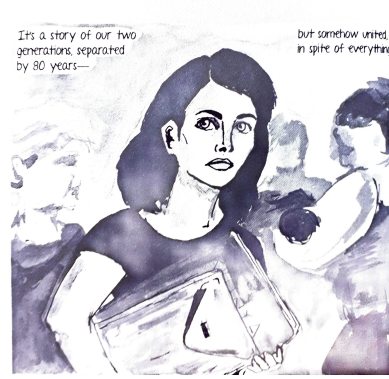


Figure 2

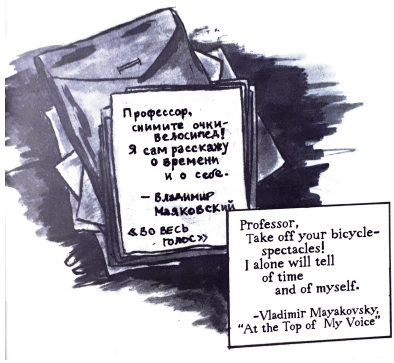


Figure 3

On page five of *Soviet Daughter*, Alekseyeva establishes a connection between her great-grandmother's small photo, which is visible on the cover of the memoir, and Julia's arms and torso (figure 1). On the next page, the artist's face is emphasized as she carries the memoir (figure 2). Then, on page seven (figure 3), like Kurzweil, Alekseyeva puts forward her great-grandmother's actual memoir cover. On top of it, though, we don't have a princess-like image of the grandmother as in Kurzweil's case, but instead have the grandmother's front cover note taken from poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, "I alone will tell of time and of myself," in the original Russian, accompanied at one side by its English translation. The inclusion of Lola's and Julia's mother tongue (Russian) alongside its translation into English performs a similar work to Miriam Katin's

inclusion of her mother tongue, Hungarian, alongside its translation into English, in her two graphic narratives about mother and daughter's shared Holocaust experiences, as perceptively identified by Eszter Szép (255–60): in this case, the two languages authenticate the graphic narrative just as they bridge the geographic distance between the Soviet Union and the United States and the temporal distance between generations, signaling the connected experiences of great-granddaughter and great-grandmother as a form of communication maintained and developed in the private sphere of their home. In this way, Alekseyeva gives center stage to the great-grandmother's Russian language and birth country and not the American myths reconstructing it. This is explainable by the fact that the artist herself was born in the Ukraine and first identified with the Soviet identity norms and claims, and not the American ones like US-born Kurzweil. In this case, the Soviet Jewish great-grandmother represents the major shaping force of the artist's Jewish identity alongside the Soviet myths that were the other shaping conduits of the artist's early years before coming to America.

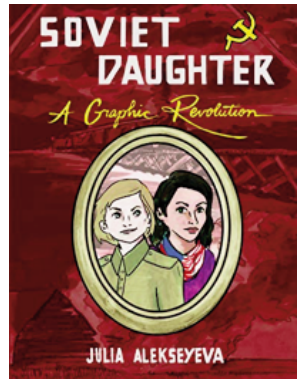


Figure 4

To close the circle, the two women's faces, at around similar ages, are brought together in a staged medallion photo on the graphic narrative's cover, the only colored image in *Soviet Daughter* (figure 4). The image features the great-grandmother clad in a Soviet-looking military uniform shirt and the great-granddaughter wearing a

scarf that primarily resembles the US flag but also the colors and arrangement of the Soviet flag. The two women look like sisters bridging initial Soviet trajectories towards US coordinates over time. The playfulness of the image conjoining the US and USSR flag tones further correlates to the background image of a train that apparently comes from "the staple repertoire of Holocaust representation in the West" as to "deportations and camp imagery" (Krasuska, "Post-Soviet Migrant Memory" 257). Nevertheless, the same train reappears in the graphic narrative in connection with Lola and her children's evacuation to Kazakhstan in 1941 shortly before the bridge was bombed (Alekseyeva 142). As such, it contributes to a reframing of the meaning of this imagery beyond its straightforward connotations by the representation of the lesser discussed framework of the Soviet hinterland during World War II from the perspective of the time's Soviet Jewish experiences (Krasuska, "Post-Soviet Migrant Memory" 257). By this choice of drawings, the sense of mediation that connects the Jewish identities of various generations in the case of immigrant Alekseyeva does not come from the American space (as it happened for Kurzweil) but from the Soviet space, culture, and memory that both great-grandmother and great-granddaughter initially absorbed.

In an interview with Olga Breininger, Alekseyeva mentioned that her initial version of the book looked more like a snapshot of the great-grandmother's life from the Soviet Union to the US over a broad span of time but that she was asked to make it more educational for publication, which involved making a significant number of edits. Central to this process were the addition of a number of footnotes in which Alekseyeva explained aspects of Soviet life and culture that were unknown to an American audience and that she initially had thought did not need explaining (minutes 5 to 8; Alekseyeva 12, 13, 26, 27, 30, 55, 56, 80, 93, 94, 102, 109, 113, 171, 183). As she noted in the same interview, in preparation for drawing the illustrations, she went through a thorough research process including reviewing thousands of reference photos about Soviet life taken from historical books, family albums, films set or shot during the time period under discussion, historical footage about Soviet

life, and newsreels from that time period (minutes 24 to 27). This approach differs from that usually employed by second-generation artists/authors who deliberately do not re-create or re-imagine their parents' eye-witness testimonies as a form of respect and awareness of a direct experience that eludes them. In contrast, third-plus generations like that of Alekseyeva openly use "rewritten histories, emotionally laden textual interactions, verbal and physical interplay, interviews with relatives and strangers who are Holocaust survivors, [or excerpts from their memoirs/diaries], intense and well-documented historical and archival research" and other kindred methods to re-create or re-imagine the direct testimonies of their more distant relatives and thereby draw them closer to their generation (Lang 87). At the same time, unlike most third-generation authors for whom the grandparents' language is a mystery or "shadow language" as they were usually born in the country of the family's migration and speak a different language than that of the grandparents (Besemeres 847), Alekseyeva is in a unique position as a fourth-generation migrant artist who simultaneously incorporated Russian, the primary language of her migrant family, and English, the language of their new host country, the US.

Working within this context, as early on as in the introduction to *Soviet Daughter*, Alekseyeva suggests a nuanced understanding of Jewishness as she breaks the romantic family filiation ring, calling family an "odd thing" while visually positioning herself alone on one side of the great-grandmother's coffin, while the other four members of her family stay together on the other side. Two panels later, the artist goes on to confess, "Truth be told, I just never got along with anyone else [apart from the great-grandmother Lola] in my family. An unnavigable rift formed between us when we immigrated to the U.S. in 1992; we spoke the same language, but no longer understood one another. Lola, however, was a different story" (5). We soon learn, in the first Interlude section, how the bond was established: as refugees to the US when Julia was four years old, with the mother and grandparents busy with jobs and "acclimating to the U.S.," the girl spent most of the early years in the care of Lola (22). Accordingly, a visual panel shows Julia in the arms of her smiling great-

grandmother, happily reading from a children's book, away from threatening ghostly monster-like silhouettes at their back replicating the mother's constant complaints to Julia, the "demon-child" on the previous page, with the text significantly reading "Lola—my only refuge in a land of monsters" (24). These scenes position the artist's mother and the new host country, the US, as threatening figures raising the child's fears and anxiety, while the great-grandmother functions as the opposite protective, warmth-instilling pillar in the midst of the confusing new land. In highlighting this discontinuity, Alekseyeva joins many other contemporary Jewish American women cartoonists who put forth "a politics of rebelliousness in relation to communal belonging" but who simultaneously display "partial affiliations and identifications" (Oksman 1–2).

Significantly, the title pages for the chapters about the great-grandmother's life offer a crescendo that gradually dismantles the romantic, sexual reproduction framework undergirding the Jewish great-grandmother's life in the shadow of the Holocaust. This is achieved thanks to Alekseyeva's inventive and provocative ways of drawing the various, developing versions of Lola's self over the span of a century. Chapter 1: 1910–1917 uses on the title page an image of a single-standing Lola as she grows up to be a self-assured, positive, confident person with the Soviet flag at her back (8). The actual chapter discusses the hard times of her Jewish family in the midst of blood-libel accusations like the Beilis affair, pogroms, her family home's being ransacked by thieves, and the father's reading renowned Yiddish-writer Sholem Aleichem's stories to the children. The title page of Chapter 2: 1917–1920 features a scared figure of Lola while the battleground of the Civil War in the Ukraine and of World War I features in the background (25). In this chapter, we learn that during this time, pogroms and "the most violent atrocities against minority groups and the poor were perpetrated by nationalists, not by communists" (27) and that the family escaped the typhus epidemic by keeping strict hygiene and a "spotless clean" house (31). The title page of Chapter 3: 1920–1925 visually renders a surprised, worried Lola reading from a book (39); the chapter records Lola's hard work in her large and poor family as the eldest girl who was put in

charge of cleaning and taking care of her other six siblings, having to stop going to school after the fourth grade and learning how to sew to help the others, while her education continued with the help of communist club pamphlets featuring "the teachings of V.L. Lenin" (44). In chapter four the artist contextualizes how Lola became part of Prof-Soyuz, the Soviet Trade Union in 1927, where she met her first husband, Mitia, and how she joined Komsomol, the Young Communist League, in 1930, after she was sent to her cousin to learn how to sew but was exploited by her and became her housekeeper, and then little by little found work in a stamp-making factory and, after its bankruptcy, the Kiev Arsenal Factory. As such, the chapter documents the lure of the communist party for a lower-class youth like Lola, not only for its ideological promises but also for the helping ventures in which she was able to participate. The latter range from being the "Komsomol leader for the blind" (61), being able to partake in the Prof-Soyuz club involving "dances, readings, films [. . .], operettas," (56) and playing in "the Komsomol drama club" (61). These were socializing activities that would have been otherwise outside of the reach of her class and that sustained the idealistic romantic bonding of the youth.

Chapters five to seven, from 1930–1933 to 1937–1939, rely on title page images of a young version of the great grandmother in the presence of a male lover, in the typical romantic mold of the family plot. Nevertheless, chapter five dismantles the idealized image of the compact family by representing Lola's marriage to Mitia as part of the 1930s marriage culture, which Lola explains as follows: "At this point in history, marriage was no big deal; couples married and divorced at the drop of a hat" (69), which also happened to her. Lola characterizes her marriage to Mitia as an "entirely utilitarian" union after which she returns to her Komsomol club and Mitia to his troupe of pioneers, their time together consisting of constant fights especially concerning her non-submissive, too assertive and open go-out life style (75). Moreover, she is to sole-handedly take care of her newborn Tanya, while he is drafted into the army. Soon, Lola leaves the child with her mother to be able to go back to work, and she gets a divorce after two and a half years. Through these emphases, the

chapter visually renders the discomfort and "fabric of everyday life" beyond the "familial gaze" encompassed by family photography—"the conventions and ideologies of family through which they see themselves" (Hirsch, "Introduction" xi). It does that by providing insight into Lola's lack of help from her husband, as such going "beyond the conventional happy representations of family rituals" by exposing "the darker and more hidden aspects of family life, the disagreements and compromises that are most commonly excluded from the family's self-representation" (Hirsch, "Introduction" xi). This chapter thus resists and dismantles the dominant romantic family myths and draws our attention to acts of agency and responsibility for the other which Lola had to address single-handedly, as suggested by the worried, active and gradually happy, relaxed postures of herself as she finds ways to survive and provide for her daughter's survival, while the husband's visual rendering only depicts his anger and aggressive complaints towards unhappy-looking Lola.

The following chapter continues in the same direction by focusing on a few fleeting love affairs Lola went on to have, about which she comments "I felt revived, like I was truly living for the first time in my life" (95). Visually, Lola looks happy at the side of men from whom she feels she also learns many things. As a correlative, in the Interlude section about the artist's life between 2008 and 2014, Alekseyeva does not incorporate the typical romantic and happy-looking family photos. Instead, she includes photo snapshots of herself having fun in various locations bespeaking her happiness given by "enormous parties, passionate and ill-fated love-affairs, spontaneous trips to far-corners of the world" (107). Meanwhile, the artist notes that Lola's "'G.I. generation'—is closest to Generation Y ('millennials') in sentiment and personality," sharing "An idealism, maybe. A desire for something—anything—out of the ordinary" (107).

Nevertheless, the chapter seven title page includes a romantic image of Lola kissing and embracing a lover who becomes her husband, Kyril Rudenko, while the portrait of Stalin looking in the opposite direction stands at their back (108). The portrait stands as an omen of the political purges against his enemies Stalin started in the USSR during the times that are discussed and which also affect Lola

and her family (109–10). This chapter returns to the romantic family plot while pinpointing the tensioned, threatening political situation of the USSR because of "Stalin's paranoia of political sabotage and the desire to cement his own authority," which deflates Lola's previous idealism about communist organizations (109). Nevertheless, Lola finally finds and marries "the love of her life," Kyril Rudenko, about whom she writes, "He was a wonderful care-taker, while giving me my freedom" (117). In the chapter, happy images of family life together with him and daughter Tanya abound.

Chapter eight, spanning the early World War II years from 1938 to 1941, offers an intermezzo positioning the image of a uniform-clad Lola that looks a bit scared and wary in the presence of two imposing Soviet soldiers that hold her as some kind of captive (122). This follows her getting a job as a typist for the NKDV, the precursor of KGB, because she is the only one who can translate their documents from Ukrainian into Russian (130) but where she also learns how personal life, especially several bosses' love for different mistresses, ends up with relocating the latter to East Siberia when the wives found out about them. As fear of political discriminations takes center stage, the happy family life continues, and Lola gives birth to a son, Leo, in 1939. This superimposition of a dystopian historical political context and an almost utopian family situation in chapters seven and eight is an efficient artistic technique to nuance any simplistic interpretation of family life and to warn about the short-lived character of happy personal and political moments and the primacy of incertitude and unexpected turn of events.

Chapters nine through twelve capitalize on the image of an active Lola, independently working and proudly wearing her military uniform. In chapter nine, which is about the start of World War II, Lola is initially rendered wearing a gas mask as bombings fall on Kiev (137–38) and she has to relocate with her two children to Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan. She continues to work as a typist and secretary by day and as a nurse by night, taking care of wounded soldiers while Kyril is drafted into the army and not to be seen again. As Lola keeps working hard in Chapter 10: 1942–1943 to keep herself and the children alive in the midst of hunger, we get an accumulation of details about

the high war toll on her family: firstly, her three-year-old son, Leo, suffers from whooping cough, scarlet fever, and mumps (154); then Lola records the brutal murder of her parents, sister Lyuba, and her two daughters—they were evacuated to Vladikavkaz, in the North Caucasus, and the Chechens burned them in a barn, "thinking that they would then fare better under the Nazi regime" (155). Lola then mentions the death of her husband near Kharkov in June of 1942, following the Germans' bombing his tank, and the death of her soldier brothers Solomon and David. As for Lola and her children, they are evicted by their landlord in February of 1943 upon finding out that they are Jews and were being held responsible for the death of Soviet soldiers: "I won't have any JEWS in here. It's because of YOU our husbands, sons, and brothers are being murdered in cold blood! Out! GET OUT!" (159). This scene echoes other contemporary Soviet Jewish American writers' depiction of the hard times of Jews in Ukraine / the Soviet Union during World War II, including how they often fell victims to anti-Semitism from their non-Jewish Soviet neighbors, as perhaps most strikingly depicted in Lara Vapnyar's 2004 story "There Are Jews in My House."

In Chapter 11: 1943–1944, set towards the end of World War II, even if Lola counts as a sergeant of the Red Army like each member of NKDV, food is scarce. Then, on getting back to her Kiev apartment, she merely finds "an empty cabinet, an empty chest, a bed. Everything else was gone" (176), while Kiev is a city in ruins where bombing still continues. After the war's end, depicted in Chapter 12: 1945–present, Lola's daughter continues to suffer from anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union: despite entering the pedagogical institute of the University of Kiev in 1948, she is rejected because she is Jewish, a response in keeping with Stalin's anti-Semitic views, which accused Jews of being "'rootless cosmopolitans' and thus they rarely received top positions" (183). This anti-Semitism leads to the collapse of Lola's faith in the communist party ideology in the wake of "massive and paranoid persecutions" (184). Nevertheless, the family did not join the initial mass of Jews leaving for Israel or the US, considering them traitors, and they only apply for refugee status after the Chernobyl nuclear accident and after the birth of Julia two

years later, as "we didn't know what would happen to her" (186). In spite of it all, for Lola, getting to the US felt "unbearably lonely" and she "missed everything familiar" (188).

In including all the above details of Lola's life, Alekseyeva joins other of her peer women authors who, as Karolina Krasuska has demonstrated, "project a vision of community that is quite open and makes us question various hegemonic coordinates of Jewishness" ("Narratives of generationality" 287). Like them, Alekseyeva performs cultural work on two levels: by "interrogat[ing] the interdependent complex of Holocaust normativity and heteronormativity" and by "interven[ing] in normative narratives of immigration, which are predicated on the centrality of acculturation" ("Narratives of generationality" 295). Firstly, Lola's family experiences a range of strains of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union before, during, and after the Holocaust from both left-wing and right-wing political ideologies. As Maria Vallarta has pointed out, the part of *Soviet Daughter* dealing with Lola's experiences during World War II offers an original gendered, female perspective that critically reflects on Holocaust memorialization/representation and heteronormativity through its focus on Jewish experiences from within the Soviet interior and its account of the class-related experiences of a mother who was part of the productive workforce to support her family, first within factories, then as a typist and secretary for NKDV, the precursor of KGB, and as a nurse taking care of wounded soldiers during World War II.

Secondly, Lola's family, just like that of her granddaughter, is not nuclear, as both women end up as single mothers, one in the Soviet Union, the other one before coming to the US. This is also visually presented in the family portrait of the first Interlude section about 1992, the year they migrated to the US, in which we have the identified faces of "Lola: great-grandmother," "Lena: mother," "Julia (self)," "Tanya: grandmother," "Vladimir: grandfather," and no face for Julia's unnamed father, the blank space for the gap being filled with the dry text "Father of Julia: whereabouts unknown, divorced 1988" (20). Furthermore, Lola's sexuality, even if undergirding a form of heterosexuality, is not centrally reproductive and interrogates the normative diachronicity of generations.

The twelve chapters of the graphic narrative are entirely in Alekseyeva's great-grandmother's words but translated into English. In addition, Alekseyeva added drawings designed to give American readers insight into her great-grandmother's feelings and to open up a space for reflection. In the case of Alekseyeva, the verbatim rendering of her great-grandmother's words reflects the new generation's wish to capture the immediacy of her great-grandmother's direct-eyewitness diary. Yet, the simultaneous act of translating Lola's words from Russian into English and adding drawings to contextualize them for the reader ensures the presence of the fourth-generation artist's perspective within the traumatic memory. In that respect, third-plus generation narratives such as this one "are intensely personal" so as to be able to connect the dots and link the historical narrative to their present (Lang 93). As such, *Soviet Daughter* includes an important emphasis on transgenerational itineraries and transnational crossroads—an emphasis which is highlighted explicitly at the end of the book's introduction: "It's a story of our generations, separated by 80 years—but somehow united, in spite of everything" (8). Here, Alekseyeva suggests that the millennial generation has a lot in common with the ideals of the so-called great generation, the generation growing up and experiencing World War II (Interview with Breininger, minute 34). The Interlude sections establish a sense of intimacy towards the remote past, sanctioning Jessica Lang's claim that the third-plus generation artists are different from both the first- and second-generation artists in being centered on the active role of themselves as an author/artist in the historical record, as "a figure who becomes imperative to the telling of the story, to uncovering parts of the family history heretofore unknown," stretching family history both backward in time via family and archival documents and forward in time, by including the present and implications beyond (114).

This is especially the case in the second Interlude section, about the years 1996 to 2002, in which Alekseyeva discusses her relation to Jewishness. She at first relates it to her mother's fear of the anti-Semitism that was rampant in the Soviet Union and also present in the US, forbidding Julia "to tell anyone I was Jewish" or "wear certain clothes which made me look like the orthodox girls who lived nearby"

(35). Even if Julia is an atheist who is confused if Jewishness is an ethnicity or a religion, she herself also suffers from bouts of anti-Semitism in school in the US, after being called a "Russian Jewish girl" and especially following other peers' ironic, trivial, demeaning, and negationist use of the most iconic Holocaust references in relation to her: "Nice hair, Anne Frank *snicker*"; "My sister watched *Schindler's List* last night, and thought it was a comedy. She laughed . . . and laughed . . . and laughed . . ." (37). As a result, the artist expresses how, for her, being Jewish "felt more than anything, like a ball and a chain" (37), noting that she feels a pawn to both family members' and outsiders' perceptions. For instance, outsiders explain her getting an A+ in connection to the fact that "you're Jewish," and her mother and grandmother keep telling her "They just don't like anyone different, and you are different," etc. (37). These episodes primarily reflect the long-lasting power of race-based, anti-Semitic undertones of Jewish stereotypes continuing to circulate in contemporary US media, part of "a long lineage of anti-Semitic racial-gendered-sexual imagery" based on "accusations of abnormal Jewish gender and sexuality" central to nineteenth and early twentieth century ideologies that cast Jews as different (Branfman). In response, Alekseyeva disaffiliates from both hostile anti-Semitic gentile American peers and her mother's and grandmother's conservative and submissive attitudes that rely on a rejection of Jewish identification "because of the political, social, economic, and cultural assumptions that come from claiming that identity" (Oksman 5). She finds an appeasing sense of her Jewish identity "only around Lola, where it seemed natural beyond discussion—something free from judgement but not ignored completely," undergirding "a sense of freedom" (Alekseyeva 38). In doing so, Alekseyeva follows other contemporary Jewish American women artists and adopts "notions of Jewish difference" (Oksman 2) by affiliating herself with the model of her great-grandmother's secular, rebellious and unconventional life path.

In a following Interlude section about the years 2002 to 2009, Alekseyeva chooses as the drawing for the title page an image of herself raising up in bed, in fear, as a result of nightmares she has about Nazi perpetrators (figure 5). The visuals use the typical iconic

images of Nazi destruction: a soldier's arm is in the foreground, with a swastika armband, shooting a gun that triggers fire and ruin in the name of the Nazi ideology suggested by the presence of Nazi flags, while to the left of the picture a typical convoy of deported Jews is visible (133). In the chapter proper, Alekseyeva acknowledges how, in her young age, as with most American Jews post-1945, Jewishness was connected to the Holocaust experiences described to her by grandparents who lived through World War II. As a result, her relation to the war was "more visceral than it was for the average American," while also encompassing indirect representations of World War II from Hollywood films (134), a typical feature for post-memory generations, using the most iconic images of camp inmates behind barbed wire, Nazi perpetrators, or Jews forced to wear the star-of-David. Through these renderings, Alekseyeva foregrounds how she has internalized and grapples with the commodification of Holocaust memory in the US. For Julia, these aspects function as a haunting revenant to which in college she adds a nuanced political understanding of Jewishness, as she learns of people's "varied and complex relations [. . .] with their own Jewishness" (136), drawn similarly to Kurzweil and equally suggesting the artist's interest in transcultural, reflexive engagements with the varied, disorienting aspects of their heritage (Mihăilescu, "Mapping transgenerational memory" 104).

Figure 5

For most third-plus generation authors who do not share the primary language with their (great)grandparents, the "transcultural experience" provided by the other languages spoken by the older generations "remains defining of their ways of seeing and of the distinctive memory-worlds they conjure up in their writings" (Besemeres 865). This is similarly true for Alekseyeva, who does share the primary language with her great-grandmother. The majority of Jewish graphic narratives about the Holocaust from the US are also typically built around familiar Holocaust icons for the American and worldwide audience such as barbed wire, the star of David, entrance gates to concentration camps, etc. (Hirsch, "Surviving Images" 16–21) as well as around the input of American popular culture on Holocaust representation (i.e. Bernice Eisenstein's 2006 *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* discussed in Kamińska 58–68 or Emil Ferris's 2017 *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*. Book I discussed in Mihăilescu's "'Shot in the heart on Valentine's day': Monsters, Sexuality, the Holocaust and Late 1960s American Culture in Emil Ferris's *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters. Book I*" 351–78). Alekeseyeva's graphic narrative, however, only marginally mentions such American tropes. Instead, the narrative is typically grounded in Soviet icons contextualizing the great-grandmother's experiences before, during, and after World War II. This contributes to the representation of Jewish identity as part of a post-Soviet Jewish American literary culture in which the space and culture of the Soviet Union prove to have held the major impact on the migrant artists' and previous generations' lives. This is meant to create what Anna Katsnelson calls "new material and intellectual transnational practices" by artists who "connect the former Soviet Union to the United States through a focus on the emergence of a diasporic Russian Jewish culture [. . .] and the spread of both Russian and US economic cultures and cultural commodities" and who "belong to an immigrant group that defines itself as 'Russian Jewish' (despite their origins in various Soviet successor states other than Russia), maintains the Russian language, engages with Russian media, and participates in a community with origins in the former USSR" (147–48). Alekseyeva's graphic narrative promotes such transnational itineraries of identity by including US markers in the Soviet

setting of the graphic narrative and, for the Interlude sections, showing how the US geography also becomes infused with Russian markers by a propagation of a Russian-speaking culture via the immigrant great-grandmother's constant interactions with the great-granddaughter artist who was educated and reared in America. Like other US immigrant authors of Soviet background, most prominently Gary Shteyngart (Katsnelson 153), Alekseyeva makes ample use of Russian cultural iconography and visual imagery that are most familiar to Russians.

Stylistically, Alekseyeva's graphic narrative features the standard adoption of black-and-white tones in popular culture for suggesting an authentic representation of the Jews' World War II past. Furthermore, Alekseyeva uses gray watercolors and a monochrome softness for the drawings, bearing resemblance to Katin's soft pencil drawings about bourgeois life in Budapest before the adoption of anti-Jewish legislation during World War II from *We Are on Our Own* (2006). In Katin's case, "the pencils give the art a rough, handmade quality, and the reader gets a sense of the pressure of the artist's hand on a page, as if transmitting the artist's emotions directly into the images" (Kunka 90). Alekseyeva's similar drawing style signals a visceral, "affectual experience steeped in nostalgic reflection" as well as the memory-like character of intergenerational legacies (Vallarta). Nevertheless, Alekseyeva differs from Katin, who marginally in *We Are on Our Own* and more extensively in *Letting It Go* (2013) contrasts the use of black-and-white tones for the past (especially World War II experiences) with the use of brightly-colored drawings for postwar US locations as a means to underscore the protection and care the country of immigration has offered to the artist vs. the fear and impending life threat associated with the European locations where the Holocaust happened (Mihăilescu, "Haunting Spectres" 166–67; Kunka 90–91). By comparison, Alekseyeva keeps the painterly gray watercolor style for both the great-grandmother's Soviet and American past experiences and her own experiences as a refugee with her family to the US. She thereby signals the disconcerting experience of Jewish migration to the US over time that both she and her great-grandmother experienced. Via this technique, she also draws readers' attention to

one particular time period, spanning from the 1920s Soviet avant-garde art and socialist-realist posters specific to the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 1950s, as she confesses in her interview with Hillary Chute (minute 6).

Most importantly, Alekseyeva's graphic narrative brings together the migration trope and the trope of the traumatic historical past, especially via the Holocaust framework, as a post-Soviet Jewish immigrant artist by emphasizing another non-normative Jewish lens, as to the reason for her family's emigration from the Soviet Union to the US. She explains this was not because of anti-Semitism, just as anti-Semitism was not the main lens for her great-grandmother's life in the Soviet Union before, during, and after World War II. The reason for their, and many other Soviet Jews' migration at the time was the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, which made them decide to leave for health considerations. This piece of information places the post-1986 Jewish migrants from Russia in a different relation to health issues relative to the previous generation of Russian Jews migrating to the US at the turn of the twentieth century, when American society conjoined its fight against "epidemic disease" with "the potential for social scapegoating" (Markel 12). In 1892, Russian Jewish immigrants on New York's Lower East Side were quarantined because of a typhus and cholera epidemic in the neighborhood that was closely associated with newly arriving East European Jewish immigrants, just as Alekseyeva's great-grandmother remembers how in Kiev, only her family escaped the typhus epidemic during World War I that affected all their neighbors by keeping strict hygiene and a "spotless clean" house (Alekseyeva 31). Yet, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the quarantine was also used as "a medical rationale to isolate and stigmatize social groups reviled for other reasons," in this case the poor, uneducated immigrants of Eastern Europe that American officials deemed to be undesirable, and a health threat to America (Markel 4–11). This happened even when Eastern European Jews on the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century proved to be physically healthier than other immigrant and American-born neighbors, with some of the lowest disease mortality rates in the city (Dwork 33). By contrast, post-1986, Soviet Jewish immigrants left because of

the non-transparency of Soviet authorities and the life-hazard the Chernobyl disaster left in its wake in the region. This was an issue that had been largely undiscussed and was largely unknown to American audiences when Alekseyeva published her book, in 2017. Since then, however, the issue has gained a more prominent point of global critical interest, thanks—in part, at least—to HBO's airing of the historical drama miniseries *Chernobyl*, in 2019. *Chernobyl* included a significant amount of visceral graphic content, which helped raise global awareness and sentiment as to both short-term and long-lasting health implications of the disaster as well as insight into "how the Soviet system was operating in its final years and how the regime of intimidation and secrecy was instrumental in promoting the causes of the major nuclear accident in 1986" (Wakeford 355). According to Wakeford, however, the health effects of the Chernobyl radiation exposure were insufficiently and inaccurately explored within the mini-series, especially "the pronounced excess of thyroid cancers that started some four years after the accident among those who as children drank milk heavily contaminated with radioiodine" that "was not covered in the mini-series" (Wakeford 356). Indeed, Chernobyl did leave this very health mark on Julia Alekseyeva, included in *Soviet Daughter*, as in 2009 she develops "thyroid cancer, a result of radiation poisoning from Chernobyl when I was a kid" (Alekseyeva 86), from which she slowly recovers. Adding to this the COVID-19 health emergency situation of 2020 which has triggered many similar reactions to the early 1900s in regards to official US policies linking epidemics with foreigners and migration (under the guise of suspension of immigrant and non-immigrant visa services and entry opportunities), Alekseyeva's mention of health policies subordinated to various regimes of states' political interests and their impact on migration adds another very significant angle for reflecting on Jewish identity in addition to the dominant place held by World War II in defining one's relation to Jewishness.

Overall, Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter* persuasively articulates a number of important caveats with respect to Jewish women's identities amid wars and migration. Alekseyeva does so by highlighting the transgenerational impact of past historical events and

migration from the Soviet Union to the United States in relation to anti-Semitic attitudes and health concerns on Jewish identity coordinates. Alekseyeva also foregrounds various strategies of self-assertion that go against conventional, traditional ways of Jewish belonging, thereby dramatizing the extent to which Jewish women's identities are always in process, the result of one's location in relation to others and of the changes undergone by one's own self over time. At the same time, Alekseyeva expands the post-Soviet Jewish American literary canon beyond the exploration of various caveats of the immigration and Holocaust themes and towards the lesser-known and lesser-discussed stories of survival and death in the Soviet hinterland. In the process, she conjoins the state socialist memory and the memory of the Holocaust in visual terms, while dismantling normative reproductive sexuality and filiation as ways to define the Jewish self and adding the complex input of health concerns for one's self-related decisions and trajectories both in the past and in the present.

Acknowledgment: Research for this paper was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, UEFISCDI, for grant grant PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-1631, no. 101 / 2021, *Familiar Perpetrators: On the Intimacy of Evil in Contemporary American Literature and Popular Culture*.

Works Cited

Aarons, Victoria. *Holocaust Graphic Narratives. Generation, Trauma & Memory*. Rutgers UP, 2019.

Alekseyeva, Julia. *Soviet Daughter. A Graphic Revolution*. Microcosm Publishing, 2017.

Besemeres, Mary. "Listening to the Grandmother Tongue: Writers on Other-Languaged Grandparents and Transcultural Identity." *Biography*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2019, pp. 846–68.

Branfman, Jonathan. "TV Family Tree: The Racial Roots behind Jewish Media Stereotypes." *The HBI Blog*, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute,

Brandeis University, July 28, 2020. http://blogs.brandeis.edu/freshideasfromhbi/tv-family-tree-the-racial-roots-behind-jewish-media-stereotypes/.

Breininger, Olga. "Interview with Julia Alekseyeva." *New Books Network*, Mar. 14, 2017. https://newbooksnetwork.com/julia-alekseyeva-soviet-daughter-a-graphic-revolution-microcosm-publishing-2017/.

Chernobyl. Historical drama TV miniseries, 1 season, 5 episodes, HBO, 2019. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7366338/.

Chute, Hillary. "Interview with Julia Alekseyeva." *A CEERES of Voices, an author-centered series of readings and conversations on books from or about Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Eurasia, and the Caucasus*, Nov. 10, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-TCOtvKLZY.

Dwork, Deborah. "Health Conditions of Immigrant Jews on the Lower East Side of New York: 1880–1924." *Medical History*, vol. 25, 1981, pp. 1–40.

Gitelman, Zvi, ed. *The New Jewish Diaspora: Russian-Speaking Immigrants in the United States, Israel, and Germany*. Rutgers UP, 2016.

Hirsch, Marianne. "Introduction. Familial Looking." *The Familial Gaze*, edited by Marianne Hirsch, UP of New England, 1999, pp. xi–xxv.

———. "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2001, pp. 5–37.

Kamińska, Aleksandra. "The Witness of the Unspoken Experience: Postmemory in Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was A Child of Holocaust Survivors*." *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2016, pp. 58–68.

Katsnelson, Anna. "Transnationalism in Contemporary Post-Soviet North American Literature." *Twentieth-Century literature*, vol. 65, nos. 1–2, 2019, pp. 145–66.

Kobrin, Rebecca A., and Jay Oppenheim. "The long silent revolution: capturing the life stories of Soviet-Jewish migrants to the West, 1970–2010." *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 47, nos. 2–3, 2017, pp. 275–91.

Krasuska, Karolina. "Narratives of generationality in 21st century North American Jewish Literature: Krauss, Bezmozgis, Kalman." *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2016, pp. 285–310.

———. "Post-Soviet Migrant Memory of the Holocaust." *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture*, edited by Victoria Aarons and Phyllis Lassner, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 251–66.

Kunka, Andrew J. *Autobiographical Comics*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Lang, Jessica. *Textual Silence. Unreadability and the Holocaust*. Rutgers UP, 2017.

Markel, Howard. *Quarantine! East European Jewish Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

Mihăilescu, Dana. "Haunting Spectres of World War II Memories from a Transgenerational Ethical Perspective in Miriam Katin's *We Are on Our Own* and *Letting It Go*." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2015, pp. 154–71.

———. "Mapping transgenerational memory of the Shoah in third generation graphic narratives: on Amy Kurzweil's *Flying Couch* (2016)." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, pp. 93–110.

———. "'Shot in the heart on Valentine's day': Monsters, Sexuality, the Holocaust and Late 1960s American Culture in Emil Ferris's *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters. Book I* (2017)." *Beyond Maus. The Legacy of Holocaust Comics*, edited by Ole Frahm, Hans-Joachim Hahn, and Markus Streb, Böhlau / An Imprint of Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, 2021, pp. 351–78.

Oksman, Tahneer. *"How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?" Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs*. Columbia UP, 2016.

Szép, Eszter. "Discourses of Trauma and Representation: Motherhood and Mother Tongue in Miriam Katin's Graphic Memoirs." *Documenting Trauma in Comics. Traumatic Pasts, Embodied Histories, and Graphic Reportage*, edited by Dominic Davies and Candida Rifkin. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 243–62.

Tolts, Mark. "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora." *The New Jewish Diaspora: Russian-Speaking Immigrants in the United States, Israel, and Germany*, edited by Zvi Gitelman, Rutgers UP, 2016, pp. 23–40.

Vallarta, Maria. "United, In Spite of Everything: A Review of Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter*." *Weird Sister*. June 22, 2017. http://weird-sister.com/2017/06/22/8225/.

Vapnyar, Lara. "There Are Jews in My House." *There Are Jews in My House. Stories*, Anchor, 2004, pp. 3–50.

Wakeford, Richard. "Chernobyl, Home Box Office (HBO)/Sky Atlantic television mini-series, May—June 2019." *Journal of Radiological Protection*, vol. 40, 2020, pp. 355–57.

Wolfson, Dalia. "Review of *Soviet Daughter. A Graphic Revolution*." *Jewish Book Council*. May 16, 2017. https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/soviet-daughter-a-graphic-revolution.

A Sharpened Pencil: The Evolving Political Commentary in Asaf Hanuka's "The Realist"

Matt Reingold
Departments of Jewish Thought and Jewish History
TanenbaumCHAT

Introduction

Typically published in the editorial section of a newspaper or a magazine, political or editorial cartoons are complex visual texts designed to elicit and provoke an emotional and intellectual response from the newspaper's readers. Cognitive scientists Joost Schliperoord and Alfons Maes argue that political cartoons "aim at affecting states of minds, beliefs, points of view, and perspectives on socio-political affairs" (218). Like the successful prose editorialist, the successful political cartoonist is able to affect the way readers think about an issue because, at its core, "cartooning is a form of persuasive communication" (Medhurst and Desousa 198). This is because through the use of visual signifiers and textual prompts, the effective political cartoonist is able to offer significant social commentary within a short space.

Israeli graphic artist Asaf Hanuka began publishing his weekly political cartoon series "The Realist" in January of 2010 in the weekend edition of the daily economic newspaper *Calcalist* which was founded two years prior in 2008. Hanuka's weekly comic strip is

an autobiographical exploration of his family's experiences navigating Israel's economic landscape. Over the ensuing ten years as an editorial cartoonist, Hanuka has addressed a number of economic challenges in Israeli society. These include the rising costs of groceries, his family's inability to find affordable real estate in metropolitan areas, and the difficulties he has working from home with his children around. Hanuka has also illustrated topics that are tangential but related to the Israeli economy; these include the difficulty in establishing a healthy work-life balance, the role that religious observance and gender play within Israeli society, and even the ways that new technologies shape how we communicate with the people around us.

Hanuka's depiction of the economic and societal challenges facing the average Israeli mirror *Calcalist*'s own orientation as an economic newspaper that is geared for all Israelis, and not just for those who are knowledgeable about the intricacies of local and international financial markets. In the editors' opening letter to their readers when the paper was founded in 2008, they wrote that the newspaper was "born from the idea of connecting Israel to the economy. The economy plays a central part in our lives. It affects one's workplace, one's family life, the opportunity to age with dignity and the well-being of our children. . . . The time has come for us to stop being afraid of it." Even more recently, upon the launch of *Calcalist*'s online platform, they observe how "we can all be economists [and] we all have to understand the rules of the game" (Esteron et al.). To that end, the inclusion of a comic such as Hanuka's "The Realist" provides an opportunity for a non-business-oriented citizen of Israel to express his or her understanding of Israeli society and Israeli economics alongside the myriad other realities of living in a twenty-first century developed nation.

And yet despite *Calcalist*'s reputation as a non-politically oriented newspaper, over the course of his near-ten year run as the paper's cartoonist, Hanuka has published a number of overtly political comics that address controversial topics in Israeli culture and society which are sprinkled in among the many other topics that he tackles. As will be demonstrated below, not only is the rate at which Hanuka is publishing political cartoons accelerating, he has transitioned from primarily critiquing issues affecting Israeli society to primarily critiquing

Israeli leaders, most notably incumbent Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In the following essay, I will suggest that a confluence of pressures placed upon both the Israeli press and the country's democratic legislative bodies primarily by Netanyahu lead to a transformation in Hanuka's public political stance. Once democracy and the press's status as an independent body are challenged and questioned, Hanuka becomes an active critic of the political system and of the leaders who seek to undermine the country's democratic integrity, and this shift can only be understood as an attempt to alter public perception of Israeli government in its current manifestation.

Calcalist AND "THE REALIST"

Asaf Hanuka was born in Israel in 1974 and, like his twin brother Tomer, has worked as a professional illustrator and cartoonist for over twenty years. Growing up, Hanuka was encouraged by his parents to hide his *Mizrahi* or Judeo-Arab ethnicity so as to better fit into and assimilate into the normative Israeli society of the time. Hanuka was drawn to positive role models in American superhero comics. Hanuka appreciated how in superhero comics, many of the heroes had secret identities so that they could better blend into society; in his formative years, Hanuka believed that he behaved similarly to the American superheroes because he worked to hide his *Mizrahi* identity in order to assimilate into Israeli society (Anderman). Since becoming a professional illustrator, Hanuka has become far more comfortable depicting his *Mizrahi* identity in his work as this part of his identity plays a prominent role in "The Realist."

While every weekly comic of "The Realist" is different, Hanuka does have a fairly consistent layout and cast of characters. Most of his strips employ a traditional 3x3 panel layout with borders separating each panel, but he also frequently uses single panel splash pages in order to emphasize a particular point or idea. Other layouts include a mirroring technique wherein he juxtaposes two images so as to highlight a disjuncture between different elements of Israeli society (Reingold, "Critiquing Israeli Society") and in four comics, he transmogrifies his own face into the face of someone or something

else in order to critique the ways that minorities are treated in Israel (Reingold, "Autotransmogrification"). Alongside Hanuka himself, the main characters in the series are Hanuka's wife, son, and daughter. Accompanying them are a wide range of fictional and fantastical characters like vampires, Wonder Woman, and the Minions who are integrated into the strips. While not every week features an element of the fantastical, it is by far the most regularly included element in the series (Reingold, "Fantastical Autography").

Calcalist was launched as a Hebrew-language daily business paper by the Yediot Aharanot Group in 2008 as an extension to their existing lineup of media services which already included Ynet (the most popular news site in Israel) and the daily Hebrew-language newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*. A 2020 survey revealed that *Yedioth Ahronoth* is the second-most read newspaper in the country with a market share of 29.6% on weekdays and 30.7% on weekends, trailing only *Israel HaYom* in circulation ("TGI survey"). A 2017 study showed that *Calcalist* is the most popular business newspaper, controlling 10.5% of the total newspaper market (Kitain).

Popular perceptions of *Yediot Ahronoth*'s editorial stances yield a centrist bias, and this has been proven by quantitative analysis (Grossman et al.). In a study of the ways that *Yedioth Ahronoth* and its main competitor, *Israel HaYom*, cover the news, Guy Grossman, Yotam Margalit, and Tamar Mitts determined that *Yedioth Ahronoth* consistently uses less right-wing discourse in its presentation of the news and is also more critical of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Despite *Israel HaYom* financial backer Sheldon Adelson's contention that *Yedioth Ahronoth* has a far-left agenda, this is not reflected in the survey data nor in its readership, who overwhelming align as ideologically centrist (Grossman et al.). Conversely, *Israel HaYom* openly acknowledges that a central value to its publishing ethos is to promote Prime Minister Netanyahu, and given his right-wing slant, the paper understandably also leans rightward. While *Yedioth Ahronoth*'s place as the second most popular newspaper in the country is relatively stable, unlike *Israel HaYom*, its readership has been in decline over the past decade. Whereas *Yedioth Ahronoth* is a newspaper that has a fixed cost and relies on advertising revenue, part of *Israel*

HaYom's success can be attributed to the fact that it is distributed free of charge and undersells advertising costs by fifty percent in comparison to other newspapers (Dahan and Bentman).

So concerned was *Yedioth Ahronoth* with the rise of *Israel HaYom* as a free competitor that it attempted to have the paper's presses shut down due to unfair competition by arranging for parliamentarians to try to pass legislation banning the paper (Pfeffer). As well, in 2017, *Yedioth Ahronoth*'s publisher Arnon Mozes was recorded in conversation with Netanyahu discussing a quid-pro-quo agreement wherein in exchange for positive press in the newspaper, Netanyahu would use his political influence to pass legislation curbing *Israel HaYom*'s circulation (Pfeffer). Despite these legal and financial hurdles for the Israeli news industry, Dahan and Bentman argue that "the printed press in Israel remains a central and important source for news . . . [and it] remains one of the primary gate keepers and mediators of the news" (102). This assertion is echoed by Freedom House's assessment of the Israeli media as a site where "protections for freedom of the press are robust" ("Freedom of the Press 2017–Israel").

Unlike its parent paper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Calcalist* generally eschews a formal political stance and remains editorially neutral on many issues by presenting a range of perspectives and positions. This staid approach to controversy helps ensure that the paper is accessible to a broader audience that wants to better understand the Israeli economy. As noted above, the majority of Hanuka's comics for "The Realist" reflect this type of apolitical position. As an autographical comic,[1] the minutiae of Hanuka's daily life and the obstacles he faces navigating the economic realities of Israeli society introduce readers to an everyman with whom they can relate.

[1]Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti have coined the term *autography* to refer to texts that are visual autobiographies. An autography is a "life narrative fabricated in and through drawing and design using various technologies, modes, and materials. A practice of reading the signs, symbols and techniques of visual arts in life narratives" (Whitlock and Poletti v). Through the creation of autography, the author chooses to use visual media to tell his or her narrative. The autography is therefore a synthesis of visual arts and autobiography.

Whether it is the joy felt by being able to go on vacation after saving to afford it to being unsure which fruits and vegetables are most cost-efficient, Hanuka's honesty about his own financial struggles facilitate an opportunity for the average Israeli to see him- or herself in Hanuka's shoes, despite the myriad ways in which they differ. Hanuka's work challenges comics scholar Scott McCloud's seminal notion that the more realistically a face is illustrated, the greater difficulty the reader has in relating to the character being depicted (31). The long-term success of the series testifies to Hanuka's ability to show that it is possible to transcend specific and superficial realistic and personal differences in order to demonstrate how similar Israelis are on many of the more salient features of their daily lives.

"The Realist" 2010–2017

The first seven years of Hanuka's tenure publishing "The Realist" include very minimal obvert political critique. The work has a light tone and an expressive colour palette. It is also the period where Hanuka most frequently employs some of the fantastical tropes that define his style (Reingold, "Fantastical Autography"). The period provides the reader with an extended introduction into Hanuka's life and his daily routines. Readers are treated to comics that welcome them into the Hanuka home and even to their celebration of Jewish holidays in a uniquely Israeli secular way (Reingold, "Secular Jewish Identity"). This type of slow pacing reflects Martin J. Medhurst and Michael A. Desousa's contention that political cartoonists—especially those like Hanuka who are at the beginning of their careers—must first gain the trust and respect from their readers before presenting them with highly charged and confrontational comics (232). Despite the slow pacing, during the first half of Hanuka's run, there are a few examples of comics that touch on controversial and politicized topics in Israeli society.

The focus in Hanuka's political comics published between 2010 and 2017 are on issues that involve a conflation of economics and social justice. In the six examples of political cartoons that I have

identified from this period, four are focused on specific societal issues, while only two make mention of Netanyahu, and both are fairly benign and harmless. Unlike the majority of comics that Hanuka has published, all six of these comics rely solely on visuals as all of the comics are devoid of written prompts. The comics include a clarion call to the reader to consider the ways in which the issues depicted in the comics are prevalent in their own lives. These types of powerful comics, suggest Janis L. Edwards and Laura Ware, involve "implied attacks on a citizenry that is sometimes too lazy or ignorant . . . [and a reminder] that citizens are among the powerful—if only they would value and employ that power" (477). Hanuka's political comics from this period have a clear bias and slant, but as a form of complex visual imagery, they place the burden of responsibility on the reader, as he or she is called upon to recognize the ways that they, too, have become complicit in facilitating injustices in Israeli society.

The four comics that address social issues in Israeli society all revolve around the ways minorities are treated by non-minorities. The first, entitled "Take Care," was published in the first years of the series and challenges the Israeli government's position about deporting the children of foreign workers who are, by law, not permitted to have children while working in Israel. The second, called "Underworld," was published in November of 2012 and is about the exploitative practice of child labor. In May of 2015, Hanuka published "Glass Wall," which was a response to recent incidents of police brutality against Ethiopian Jews and a series of subsequent protests and rallies that were held in support of the Ethiopian community. Lastly, in January of 2017, Hanuka illustrated "The Price of Happiness," which addresses the Yemenite Children Affair, an injustice in Israeli history wherein hospitals falsely declared newborn children of Yemini immigrants dead and instead placed them up for adoption with non-Yemini parents because of negative stereotypes associated with Mizrahi parents.

Stylistically, "Take Care," "Underworld," and "The Price of Happiness" look aesthetically similar, with the lone exception within the group of four politically-motivated comics being "Glass Wall."

In "Glass Wall" (see fig. 1), an Ethiopian man wearing a dirty smock is illustrated cleaning an ice cream store. Asaf Hanuka and his family are illustrated looking inside the shop through a window with a large crack running through the middle of it. Comics with only a single panel are called splash panels and are used primarily to emphasize or highlight a particular detail. Here, the cracking of the glass is meant to symbolically represent the breaking down of barriers between different Israelis, and yet the Hanukas are walking past the man, and he has his back turned away from them, focusing on his work, suggesting that no meaningful encounter has transpired. The comic is reflective of a wider trend in Hanuka's work wherein he "challenges the reader to consider to what extent Israelis are inclusive of minorities and to recognize their rights as a distinct community within wider Israeli society" (Reingold, "Fantastical Autography" 152–53).

Figure 1 – "Glass Wall" by Asaf Hanuka.

Unlike the splash panel employed in "Glass Wall," all three of "Take Care," "Underworld," and "The Price of Happiness" make use of an artistic term that I have elsewhere called mirroring. In mirrored comics, Hanuka "presents two fully constructed images that are distorted reflections of each other [and] joining together these two distortions is to form a singular image which offers a statement or commentary about Israeli society" (Reingold, "Critiquing Israeli Society" 167). The conjoining of the images "uncovers or reveals the hidden sides of Israeli society" (Reingold, "Critiquing Israeli Society" 167), and the juxtaposition of the images—alongside an absence of any linguistic prompts—necessitates a critical engagement on the part of the reader to construct meaning by decoding the comparison.

In "Take Care" (see fig. 2), Hanuka illustrates two four-panel short stories. Running down the left side of the comic is a depiction

Fig 2 – "Take Care" by Asaf Hanuka.

of Hanuka driving his unhappy son to a sleepover at his mother's house. Mirroring the first story are four panels depicting parallel scenes except instead of Hanuka and his family, the panels depict an Israeli border guard driving a crying mother and her son to the airport where they are shepherded onto a plane and are being deported. The comic is a critique on the seemingly oblivious stance that many Israelis have towards the plight of foreign workers who are brought to Israel to help solve some of the country's economic challenges but are prohibited from marrying or having children.

"Underworld" (see fig. 3) contains a similarly pointed challenge against Israelis who have become inured towards the ways that Southeast Asians are treated and towards how Israelis profit and benefit from this exploitative behaviour. In the comic, Hanuka juxtaposes an image of his son excitedly opening a new toy with an illustration

Figure 3 – "Underworld" by Asaf Hanuka.

of a group of Asian children miserably packaging the toy in a darkened factory.

Lastly, in the top panel of "The Price of Happiness" (see fig. 4), Hanuka illustrates himself as a child being given to an Eastern European Jewish family while in the bottom panel, he illustrates his parents crying after being told that he has died.

As political comics, "Glass Wall," "Take Care," "Underworld," and "The Price of Happiness" articulate a sharp rebuke of Israeli readers for their active and passive roles in perpetrating the contemporary and historical mistreatment of minorities and vulnerable sectors of the population. The comics serve as strong examples of Ilan Danjoux's observation that "while generally targeting leaders, the cartoonist's impact cuts across society" given their forceful critique of the average Israeli citizen (246). The comics are effective as visual

Figure 4 – "The Price of Happiness" by Asaf Hanuka.

political commentary for a number of reasons. First, because of their rarity, Hanuka has had significant time over the first seven years of his print run to establish a solid relationship with his reader; critiques like these only come along rarely in the series, and therefore they are more likely be listened to than either ignored or rejected. More importantly, however, is how Hanuka illustrates himself as part of the problem. With the exception of "The Price of Happiness," in each of the other three it is Hanuka's own family that is complicit in the act of social injustice. By inserting his own family into the comics, he draws himself into the critique and is therefore acknowledging that he, too, is culpable and is therefore not just 'pointing fingers' at the Israeli reader and demanding that they do better. Instead, in acknowledging his own complicity, he is inviting the reader to adopt an alternate stance alongside him. Last, it is important to recognize that in all four of the comics, Hanuka purposefully avoids words. Paul Messaris has suggested that sometimes, cartoonists "convey persuasive messages in visual form that would be controversial or unacceptable if spelled our verbally" (76). While the comics do contain a sharp rebuke—perhaps all the more so given their infrequency—I see in the absence of words also a call to action and a summons to the reader to not forever remain rooted and bogged down in the language of protest but to take the next step as well, by taking meaningful action.

Medhurt and Desousa have identified contradiction as one of the key ways political cartoonists ply their trade. Contradiction "depends upon a clash of forms" which ultimately steers the reader to a very specific conclusion; "every reader is led to respond in the same way or to reject the appeal altogether. The individual, party, or idea being exposed is condemned by all reasonable people because it has been judged guilty of that most unpardonable political sin, hypocrisy" (207). Considered together, the comics work effectively because the juxtaposed images lead the reader to a clear end point, and to reject Hanuka's conclusion implies that one is supportive of child labour, police brutality, deportation of children, and even kidnapping. Supporting any of these is clearly untenable; consequently, the reader is expected to support Hanuka's position.

During the same time period in which Hanuka illustrated the four cartoons about issues in Israeli society, he also published two cartoons that prominently featured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In March of 2015, Hanuka illustrated "Look to Your Left, Then Right . . ." (see fig. 5), and in it, Hanuka is shown outside with his son while standing at a crosswalk, waiting for the light to turn to green. Behind them is a campaign poster for Netanyahu from the 2015 national election. The streetlight bisects Netanyahu's face, covering his eyes, nose, and mouth with the red streetlight placed directly in the center of his face where his nose would be. Framing the Netanyahu poster are the first words of his campaign slogan "it's only us or the left." Garbage and debris flutter around the splash page as Hanuka struggles to maintain control over his son's stroller and over his son who is desperately trying to run across the street.

Figure 5 – "Look to Your Left, Then Right …" by Asaf Hanuka.

The second comic of Hanuka's to feature Netanyahu was published in May of 2017 in response to United States President Donald Trump's first visit to Israel. Titled "The American Uncle" (see fig. 6), Trump and his wife Melania are illustrated in the center of the comic, walking down a red carpet. Trump's right hand is raised with his middle and pointer fingers holding up the universal peace sign, and in his left hand is a military tank wrapped in a blue bow. At Trump's feet are comically miniature images of Benjamin and Sarah Netanyahu, with Sarah illustrated using a vacuum cleaner to suction up dirt on the carpet. Flanking the Trumps on both sides are a group of Israelis—including Hanuka—dressed as clowns holding balloons, wearing face paint, and juggling balls.

Both comics are parodic satires that are meant to elicit laughter from the readership. The comics—while critical of Netanyahu—are

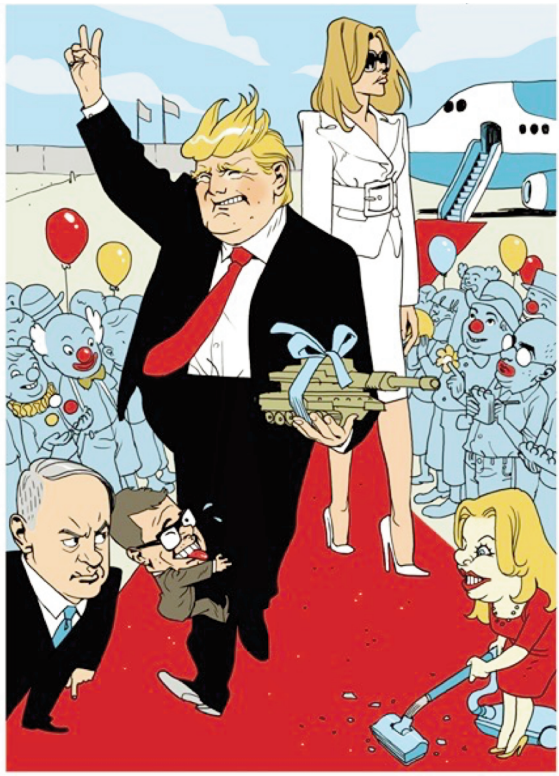


Figure 6 – "The American Uncle" by Asaf Hanuka.

apt more to amuse than to arouse feelings of anger. Both play upon notions of clowning: in the former cartoon the red stop light across Netanyahu's nasal area is reminiscent of a clown's get up, while in the latter all Israelis have been turned into clowns. The juxtaposition of the Netanyahu campaign slogan of "it's only us" with a depiction of shabby and polluted streets and a child running away from Netanyahu are more humorous than they are sharply critical. The comic is devoid of any context or rationale justifying a distancing from Netanyahu. Similarly, while the second comic makes use of physical exaggeration, which Medhurst and Desousa identify as the clearest form of the "essence of caricature" (214), the comic is rather benign in comparison to what Hanuka will soon publish. Depicting the relationship between America and Israel as one that is imbalanced and one in which Netanyahu places too much emphasis on placating and pandering to Trump as opposed to concentrating on his own Israeli citizens is something that most Israel Prime Ministers have been accused of in the preceding seventy years of the country's existence. Similarly, Hanuka's illustration of the voters as clowns is devoid of the far stronger ways that he challenged Israeli citizens to consider their role in perpetuating racial and social issues in the comics that have previously been examined.

"The Realist" in 2018

When *Calcalist* published its first issue of 2018, readers of "The Realist" were introduced to an entirely new way that Hanuka engaged with Netanyahu and Israeli politics. Between January of 2018 and the end of December of 2019, Hanuka published five comics that took direct aim at Netanyahu's government, two that questioned the integrity and ethics of the Israeli political establishment, and one that directly acknowledged systemic racism and police brutality against Ethiopian Israelis. Combined, these eight comics, which were published over the span of two years, are a higher total of politically-motivated comics than were published in the entire previous eight years combined. Furthermore, what sets them apart from the earlier comics is the clear and forceful way in which Israeli leadership—especially

Netanyahu—is challenged. Hanuka has shifted his focus from the Israeli population's reactions to specific issues to Israel's elected officials. Additionally, with the exception of one splash page, all of the comics make use of panels along with a tremendous amount of written text surrounding the images; writing as an omniscient narrator, Hanuka removes the subtlety and room for interpretation that were present in the previous comics and instead offers a far clearer and sharper statement about Israel's politicians.

I contend that there are a number of individual events that occurred at the end of 2017 and throughout 2018 and 2019 that led to Hanuka's increased politicization in "The Realist." These incidents, while varied and different, are all interrelated and reflect an increase in the way that democratic freedoms and the Israeli press came under scrutiny from elected politicians. I argue that the gradual removal of the freedoms that had previously existed pushed Hanuka out from the shadows and forced him to take a greater and more vocal stand against those who were encroaching on the democratic liberties of Israeli writers, photographers, and cartoonists.

Published on January 4, 2018, "Join with Full Strength" (see fig. 7) explores the decision by former Israeli newspaper editor Eldad Yaniv to become a politician in order to fight against corruption in the Netanyahu government. The impetus for the comic was the emergence of recordings of Netanyahu agreeing to use his role as the Minister of Communications to shut down *Israel HaYom* in exchange for positive press in *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Pfeffer). Over the course of nine panels, Hanuka compares Yaniv's fight against government corruption to the French Revolution. Visually, this is accomplished by dressing Yaniv and Netanyahu in eighteenth century French clothing. Hanuka equates Yaniv to French revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre and Netanyahu to stubborn French king Louis XVI. Hanuka sees Yaniv's crusade as a continuation of his prior role as an editor who transformed the Israeli daily *BaMachaneh* into a newspaper that refused to turn a blind eye to government corruption and was committed to reporting the truth. Hanuka writes how the old guard, led by Netanyahu, refused to accept the critique and, in some cases worked to dismiss the accusations. Hanuka concludes by declaring

that anyone who does not support the anti-corruption revolution being led by Yaniv should be considered part of the opposition.

Published later in 2018, "The King of the Pigs" (see fig. 8) depicts Netanyahu, Hanuka, and other Israelis as pigs. The comic was a response to a controversial editorial cartoon published July of 2018 by Avi Katz, who depicted Netanyahu and other Israeli politicians as pigs after they celebrated a recent political victory in parliament. There, Netanyahu successfully passed a law called the Nation-State Law in which Jewish citizens of Israel were legislatively prioritized in certain ways over non-Jewish citizens of the country. Katz's comic parodied George Orwell's statement in his novella *Animal Farm* that "all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." For satirizing the politicians as pigs, Katz was fired by *The Jerusalem Report* because Netanyahu and other politicians were angered by their depiction.

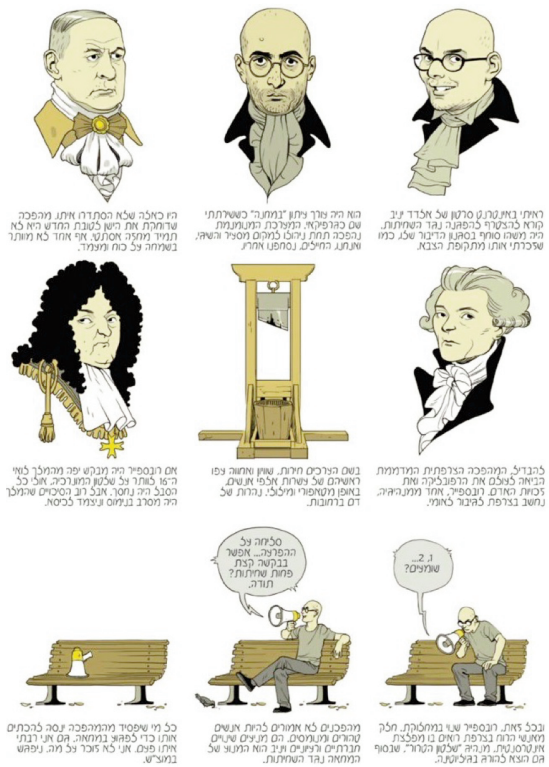


Figure 7 – "Join with Full Strength" by Asaf Hanuka.

Hanuka relays in his comic that he is nervous that anything that he publishes may now result in his being fired, but he ultimately concludes that cartoonists are like village fools who observe and identify societal absurdities and that their strength and power lies in their ability to call out societal injustice through sharply barbed parody. Hanuka argues that Katz was ultimately fired because of his willingness to call out and ridicule the Prime Minister, who then abused his power to stifle the freedoms afforded to the press.

Both "Join with Full Strength" and "King of the Pigs" represent a significant shift in Hanuka's political messaging because they involve direct attacks on Netanyahu and on the ways he is using his power to manipulate and stifle the press. By turning his attention directly towards Netanyahu, Hanuka's work reflects Danjoux's contention that "the ability of cartoons to undermine the legitimacy of

Figure 8 – "The King of the Pigs" by Asaf Hanuka.

rulers . . . remains one of their most potent and feared attributes" (246). The 2018 comics also diverge from the earlier comics in their ability to retain relevance and context in the years following their publication. Medhurst and Desousa argue that because "they have little salience beyond their immediate context . . . so many historical cartoons [are] incomprehensible to modern readers" (202). Unlike the 2010–2017 comics, which were almost entirely devoid of words and in turn devoid of a contextual anchor, the lengthy descriptions of what happened to Avi Katz and how he was fired for his cartoon and of Eldad Yaniv's decision to become a politician and fight corruption work to combat the entropic process that usually occurs over time. While the inclusion of so much text removes some of the nuance and opportunity for personal interpretation, both of which are evident in the earlier comics, the inclusion of context allows for the

Figure 9 – "Brothers" by Asaf Hanuka.

comic to be understandable by future readers. Significantly, the inclusion of large blocks of text not only allows these future readers to be able to understand the comics but also ensures a greater long-term ability for readers to critically judge Netanyahu's tenure as Israeli prime minister, thereby ensuring that this critique remains perpetual even when the specific incident is no longer in the headlines.

The passing of the Nation State Law and Hanuka's interpretation of it as an attack against democracy served as the basis for two further comics, and while neither directly features Netanyahu, Netanyahu's behaviour clearly motivates their creation. "Brothers," (see fig.9) published on July 26, 2018, depicts Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, being gagged, blinded, and beaten up by unknown assailants gradually over the course of the comic's nine panels. Accompanying the images of Israel's ideological founder being harmed is an exaggerated and fictional description of how Israeli parliamentarians used legal mechanisms to turn the country into a theocracy in which all Jewish Israelis were required to follow biblical and religious law. In the concluding panels, Hanuka shares that all of those who refused to follow the new rules—including a cleaned up hipster Herzl—were placed inside a walled reservation where they could follow secular rules and customs however they like.

Along a similar vein decrying the breakdown of democracy and justness is a comic called "Rabin" (see fig. 10) that was published in October of 2018. In it, Hanuka illustrates himself having a coffee with Yitzchak Rabin. Rabin was Israel's Prime Minister who was assassinated in 1993 for agreeing to a peace plan with the Palestinians. In their conversation, Hanuka laments the internal divides that are fracturing Israeli society and the civil war that is looming; he seeks council from Rabin, Israel's exemplar for avoiding conflict, for how best to deescalate the conflict. Rabin replies that people should start behaving like grownups.

"Brothers" and "Rabin" are unique amongst the political cartoons considered in this paper because of how they prominently feature figures from Israel's near and distant past. Both Theodor Herzl and Yitzchak Rabin serve as ideological foils for Benjamin Netanyahu. Elisabeth El Refaie has suggested that "metaphors must always be

studied within their socio-political context" (75). Here, by hearkening back to two of Israel's most important historical figures, Hanuka further challenges the ways that Netanyahu has made use of the political system for his own benefit and gradually eroded the state's democracy, much like Herzl, who was gradually beaten up over the course of "Brothers." One of the hallmarks of both Herzl's and Rabin's legacies is their willingness to make painful concessions for the benefit of the people. Herzl did this by forgoing the British offer of allocated land for Zionists in Uganda in 1903, and Rabin agreed to the 1993 Oslo Accords despite making concessions that upset many Israelis, including his assassin. In these comics, by reimagining the two leaders in a fictionalized contemporary Israel, Hanuka performs what Edwards and McDonald II see as one of the primary features of visual metaphor. Visual metaphors, they write "are a common means of redefining

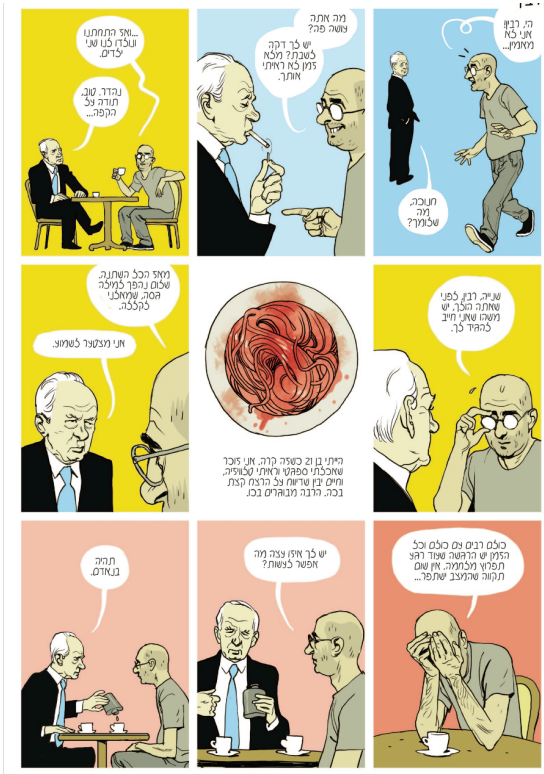


Figure 10 – "Rabin" by Asaf Hanuka.

people featured in cartoons" (320). Here, the juxtaposition of Herzl and Rabin with comments about Netanyahu's purported behaviors establishes a dichotomy that not only implies that Netanyahu is *non*-democratic but, more importantly, that he is not like two of Israel's most famous and respected historical figures. As is well known, historical legacy is of paramount importance to political leaders, and Hanuka's comics suggest that because of Netanyahu's actions, he is not due the same historical reverence that has been awarded to Rabin and Herzl.

"The Realist" in 2019

If in the comics of 2018 Hanuka responded to specific incidents that were led by Netanyahu against Israel's press and its democratic institutions, Hanuka's three Netanyahu-focused comics of 2019 address concerns of a more existential nature. In 2019, Hanuka's focus is on what he perceives to be the systematic abuse of these institutions, and he calls attention to them in order to directly change the nature of Israeli society. Netanyahu is illustrated as not only a perpetrator of injustices but also as an abuser of the powers vested in his position as Prime Minister. Furthermore, in the 2019 comics, Hanuka is also concerned with the gradual erosion of democracy itself within the country as he fears that Netanyahu has entrenched himself as an elected dictator over the country, contrary to the country's own legislative policies. This fear is expressed in three comics. The first comic, published in April of 2019 and entitled "2048" (see fig. 11) is an illustration of a dystopian Israeli society set in 2048. In the comic, busses and shuttles fly through the air as large posters of Netanyahu cover two buildings. Written under a futuristic illustration of Netanyahu is a campaign slogan of Netanyahu's that translates to "especially now!" The comic satirizes Netanyahu's recent rhetoric that only he is able to solve Israeli society's problems. By situating the comic twenty years in the future, when Netanyahu will be nearing 100 years old, Hanuka challenges the de-facto dictatorship that has emerged from Netanyahu's hegemony over Israeli politics for the last twenty years.

In an even sharper rebuke, Hanuka accuses Netanyahu of following the lead of populist rulers in countries like Brazil, Poland, and Hungary, who prey upon people's insecurities and desires for simplicity in order to weaken democratic institutions so as to ensure that they are re-elected in perpetuity. Published in September of 2019, "The End of Democracy" (see fig. 12) spans nine panels as Netanyahu is fitted for a new suit by a tailor who is coloured in greyscale. Accompanying the images is an explanation that Netanyahu should be credited with the dismantling of democracy since, like a new suit that needs tailoring, he has shaped Israeli laws to suit his own personal needs. It is only at the end that the reader learns that Netanyahu's new suit is being fitted for his coronation ceremony as the new dictator of Israel after having ridden the nation's fears and used their own laws in order to elevate himself to power in this undemocratic way.

Figure 11 – "2048" by Asaf Hanuka.

The final comic about Netanyahu was published in December of 2019. In "Tziona and Ben: An Israeli Love Story" (see fig. 13), his harshest critique of Netanyahu, Hanuka extends his observation that Netanyahu manipulated Israeli laws for his own benefit. Hanuka does this by illustrating an extended visual metaphor comparing Netanyahu to a dashing yet superficial and manipulative prince who seduces a woman and convinces her to shoulder the blame and bear responsibility for crimes he committed. Coloured in shades of Israeli blue, "Tziona and Ben: An Israeli Love Story" is, on the surface, a story about a lighter-skinned Ashkenazi Israeli man named Ben and Tziona, a dark-skinned *Mizrahi* woman. Their love story is told over nine panels, including details about how Tziona thought she would never fall in love before meeting Ben, but he won her affection and she supported his political rise. Ultimately,

Figure 12 – "The End of Democracy" by Asaf Hanuka.

despite mounting evidence pointing towards his guilt, Ben convinces Tziona that all of the people who are accusing him of crimes are falsifying evidence. Tziona believes Ben and agrees to bear the brunt of Ben's punishment by going to jail on his behalf while he lounges at the beach. Ben's name, appearance, and behavior are clear allusions to Netanyahu. Tziona is a metonym for the Israeli population writ-large which has been deceived and manipulated by Netanyahu as he selfishly places his needs over the country's needs and also for the *Mizrahi* community which has loyally supported Netanyahu and other right-wing politicians for many years only to ultimately be mistreated and cast aside at their earliest convenience.

In early 2020, Asaf Hanuka stopped writing "The Realist" and began publishing a weekly comic called "The Jewish Arab" for *Calcalist*. Therefore, the 2019 Netanyahu comics serve as the end

Figure 13 – "Tziona and Ben: An Israeli Love Story" by Asaf Hanuka.

point—for now—of Hanuka's critique of Netanyahu's performance as Israeli Prime Minister. The 2019 comics transcend local and specific Israeli issues and instead focus on what Hanuka sees as the wider negative societal impact of Netanyahu's policies. In these comics, Hanuka employs what El Refaie sees as a central component of visual metaphor which is that they facilitate "thoughts and concepts" (90) that extend beyond just the literal image. In all three of the 2019 comics, Hanuka makes use of extended metaphors that engage with the Israeli national psyche. Edwards and Ware have noted that editorial cartoons "tap into the process of creating what might be termed a national imaginary, or fantasia" (468). In the case of these three comics, Hanuka uses cartoons to envision alternative realities of what might happen if Netanyahu's power is not limited or stopped; these include turning the country into a dictatorship, experiencing his rule perpetually, and eventually even the destruction and desecration of Israeli society as it has come to be defined over the course of its history. Ultimately, as expressed in "Tziona and Ben," Hanuka fears that in the end, Netanyahu will leave the country a husk of its former self once he has finished exploiting it for his personal gain, much as Ben did with Tziona.

In 2019, Hanuka also returned to a topic that he had previously illustrated in 2015. Like "Glass Wall," which criticized the divisions in Israeli society by featuring the Hanuka family watching an Ethiopian man in an ice cream shop, "America" (see fig. 14) sharpens the earlier critique by establishing that, like American society, Israeli society suffers from pervasive racism. The comic is a response to the June 30, 2019 murder of Ethiopian-Israeli Solomon Teka by an off-duty policeman and the subsequent riots that broke out across the country in major metropolitan cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa. In the July 2019 comic, Hanuka facetiously explains how America and Israel are different because in America, racism exists because black people were forced to move to there, whereas in Israel, Ethiopians immigrated by choice and acculturated and fit right in. The rest of the comic, however, explores how pervasive and systemic racism have resulted in mistrust between Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians, in violence against Ethiopians, and are the cause of the protests

sweeping across the nation. The comic ends on a note of optimism that perhaps the senseless deaths and the protests will, like the protests of earlier immigrant communities, finally lead to meaningful change in Israeli society for Ethiopian Israelis.

Where "America" differs from Hanuka's earlier treatment of racism towards Ethiopian Israelis is in the ways that he more actively engages and depicts the police brutality while simultaneously identifying the potential alliance between *Mizrahim* and Ethiopians based on shared experiences of racism under the aegis of political institutions. Unlike in "Glass Wall" where protests and racism are alluded to as part of the background, here, they take on a greater part of the narrative. This is accomplished by illustrating a physically disproportionate clash between scrawny Ethiopian protestors and bulked-up police officers wearing riot gear. The visual signifier suggests imbalance and

Figure 14 – "America" by Asaf Hanuka.

reflects Hanuka's contention that the protestors are justified and that the police officers use excessive force against the Ethiopian community. A second crucial difference which highlights the ways that Hanuka has raised the political stakes on his exploration of the Ethiopian community is by way of his own absence in the comic. No longer is Hanuka standing by and looking through the window; now, the focus is placed squarely on the Ethiopian community's experiences and the ways that systemic racism have inhibited their ability to integrate and become Israeli. The lone reference to Hanuka himself is contained in the concluding sentence of the comic; there, the parallel that Hanuka creates between his *Mizrahi* community's integrationist challenges and those of the Ethiopian community is identified. Learning from his own experiences and offering them as a template for others to follow is part of a broader pattern in Hanuka's work that I have written about elsewhere, that Hanuka offers "a model for how other Israelis can similarly [change by] recognizing the necessity for a more complex understanding of what it means to be Israeli" (Reingold, "Autotransmogrification" 13–14). Here, doing so with regards to the Ethiopian community will allow for Israelis to "synthesize the narratives together into a more diverse, yet coherent, national Israeli narrative" by recognizing, through the Ethiopian protests, a mistreated community yearning to fit in and to be respected as both people and as fellow Israelis (Reingold, "Autotransmogrification" 14).

Conclusion

Over the course of his lengthy run as writer and illustrator of "The Realist," Asaf Hanuka has written about many topics that are salient to Israeli society. Following the ideological lead of *Calcalist*, Hanuka has engaged in a prolonged exploration of the ways in which economics impact the daily lives of Israelis. But Hanuka's editorial cartoons do not stop at economic realities within Israel. Counted amongst the cartoons are examples that explore all aspects of Israeli society, including clashes between secular and religious Jews, the role of Arabs within the country, family dynamics, and

even architecture. The significance of exploring so many facets of Israeli society is that it positions "The Realist" as a comic that truly speaks to the Jewish-Israeli experience in the twenty-first century.

The comics in this article have explored a further dimension of Hanuka's "The Realist." Hanuka's political cartoons offer his readers insight into the ways that he has come to understand the decline of democracy in Israel based on policies implemented beginning in 2017 and continuing throughout 2019. While Hanuka did offer commentary on political issues during the first seven years of "The Realist," the increased attention on Israel's free press by Netanyahu coupled with the diminishing rights afforded to minority communities led to a change in tone and substance in Hanuka's work along with a relative proliferation in politically-motivated comics.

While Hanuka's comics do often have a dark and edgy tone to them, the comics, especially those from the last two years, do not present an unavoidable and fatalistic outcome for Israeli society. Like the village fool who points out society's absurdities that Hanuka compares cartoonists to in "The King of the Pigs," Hanuka is not resigned to the end of democracy and the perpetual abuse of power. Jeremy Stoll has argued that "political cartoons provide the people of a nation with symbols and voices to help engage with and mediate the disjuncture between the imagined, ideal nation and their local roles within it" (311). Hanuka's political comics, by calling out injustice, lead to an envisioning of an alternate reality, one where democracy is respected, rights are afforded to all citizens, and corrupt leaders do not use their power in corrosive ways. By challenging Netanyahu's policies and practices, at the very moment that he has turned his attention to media outlets that challenge him, "The Realist" serves as a model for brave editorial cartooning and as a testament to the power of the editorial cartoonist to serve as a watchdog over society.

Works Cited

Anderman, Nirit. "The Man Who Churns Israeli Anxiety Into Comic Art." *Haaretz*, 22 Aug. 2016, www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-man-who-churns-israeli-anxiety-into-comic-art-1.5427521. Accessed 22 June 2020.

Dahan, Michael, and Mouli Bentman. "The Ripple Effects of a Partisan, Free Newspaper: *Israel HaYom* as Disruptive Media Actor." *Studies in Communication Sciences*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2017, pp. 99–106.

Danjoux, Ilan. "Reconsidering the Decline of the Editorial Cartoon." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2007, pp. 245–48.

Edwards, Janis L., and C. Austin McDonald II. "Reading Hillary and Sarah: Contradictions of Feminism and Representation in 2008 Campaign Political Cartoons." *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2010, pp. 313–29.

Edwards, Janis L., and Laura Ware. "Representing the Public in Campaign Media: A Political Cartoon Perspective." *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2005, pp. 466–78.

El Refaie, Elisabeth. "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons." *Visual Communication*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2003, pp. 75–95.

Esteron et al. "About *Calcalist*." *Calcalist*, www.*calcalist*.co.il/home/0,7340,L-3854,00.html. Accessed 22 June 2020.

"Freedom of the Press 2017 – Israel." *Freedom House*. https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/1410205.html. Accessed 22 June 2020.

Grossman, Guy, et al. "Media Ownership as Political Investment: The Case of *Israel HaYom*." Mar. 2020. www.semanticscholar.org /paper/Media-Ownership-as-Political-Investment%3A-The-Case-Grossman-Margalit/11966e12f611009c53fc016e72c88d1189d0c783. Accessed 22 June 2020.

Hanuka, Asaf. "America." *Calcalist*, 11 July 2019. z.*calcalist*.co.il/assets/pickerul/76c5a153-5a68-4518-88c2-3738b7384eab.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "The American Uncle." *Calcalist*, 27 May 2017. images1.*calcalist*.co.il/PicServer3/2017/05/24/728723/D6.jpg. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Brothers." *Calcalist*, 26 July 2018. z.*calcalist*.co.il/assets/pickerul/1d5f3912-8486-4f74-9a2d-c43804411ed3.png. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "The End of Democracy." *Calcalist*, 12 Sept. 2019. z.*calcalist*.co.il/assets/pickerul/64fd7c93-ab60-487c-8a9d-c857914cadee.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Glass Wall." *Calcalist*, 7 May 2015. images1.*calcalist*.co.il/PicServer2/20122005/513568/realist.jpg. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Join with Full Strength." *Calcalist*, 4 Jan. 2018. images1.*calcalist*.co.il/PicServer3/2018/01/03/784462/realsit.jpg. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "The King of the Pigs." *Calcalist*, 2 Aug. 2018. z.*calcalist*.co.il/assets/pickerul/65cbffe6-2f8d-4a0b-b1ad-e1c4ee8aa467.png. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Look to Your Left, Then Right . . ." *Calcalist*, 19 Mar. 2015. www.facebook.com/realistcomics/photos/a.272467856132339/853361104709675. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "The Price of Happiness." *Calcalist*, 26 Jan. 2017. images1.*calcalist*.co.il/PicServer3/2017/01/25/698643/10.jpg. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Rabin." *Calcalist*, 25 Oct. 2018. z.*calcalist*.co.il/assets/pickerul/bd23bee1-4580-4ecc-aac5-d6a9516bebf9.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Take Care." *Calcalist*. encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn%3AANd9GcTiIWW9BDkO2_gXRsfraitUxce1-e8Y_EfkjA&usqp=CAU. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Tziona and Ben: An Israeli Love Story." *Calcalist*, 5 Dec. 2019. newmedia.*calcalist*.co.il/magazine-05-12-19/m13.html. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "Underworld." *Calcalist*, 15 Nov. 2012. www.facebook.com/realistcomics/photos/a.272467856132339/465335480178908. Accessed 20 June 2020.

———. "2048." *Calcalist*, 4 Apr. 2019. z.*calcalist*.co.il/assets/pickerul/66e34bdf-af4f-4ef4-a6f3-dc08d40525e3.pdf. Accessed 20 June 2020.

Kitain, Yonatan. "TGI survey: Weekend '*Israel HaYom*' overtakes 'Yedioth'." *Globes*, 20 July 2017. en.globes.co.il/en/article-tgi-survey-weekend-israel-hayom-overtakes-yedioth-ahronoth-1001198125. Accessed 22 June 2020.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. William Morrow, 1994.

Medhurt, Martin J., and Michael A. Desousa. "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form: A Taxonomy of Graphic Discourse." *Communications Monographs*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1981, pp. 197–236.

Messaris, Paul. "Visual Aspects of Media Literacy." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1998, pp. 70–80.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. Penguin, 2008.

Pfeffer, Anshel. "Everything You Need to Know About the *Israel HaYom* (Or anti-Sheldon Adelson) Law." *Haaretz*, 12 Nov. 2014. /www.haaretz.com/.premium-a-primer-on-the-israel-hayom-law-1.5327699. Accessed 22 June 2020.

Reingold, Matt. "Autotransmogrification in Asaf Hanuka's 'The Realist' as Critique on Israeli Society." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 2019, pp. 1–15.

———. "Critiquing Israeli Society Through Mirroring in Asaf Hanuka's 'The Realist'." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, vol 7, no. 2, 2020, pp. 165–80.

———. "Fantastical Autography in Asaf Hanuka's *The Realist*." *Shofar*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2020, pp. 146–66.

———. "Secular Jewish Identity in Asaf Hanuka's 'The Realist'." *Israel Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2021, 82–107.

Schilperoord, Joost, and Alfons Maes. "Visual Metaphoric Conceptualization in Editorial Cartoons." *Multimodal Metaphor*, edited by Charles Forceville and Eduardo Urios-Aparisi, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, pp. 215–42.

Stoll, Jeremy. "A Domestic Schizophrenia: Gender and Political Cartoons in the Middle East." *IJOCA: International Journal of Comic Art*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2010, pp. 302–22.

"TGI survey asserts Israel HaYom's lead as country's most popular daily." *Israel HaYom*, 30 Jan. 2020. www.israelhayom.com/2020/01/30/tgi-survey-asserts-israel-hayoms-lead-as-countrys-most-popular-daily/. Accessed 20 June 2020.

Whitlock, Gillian, and Anna Poletti. "Self-Regarding Art." *Biography*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2008, pp. v–xxiii.

Women Artists Under the Nazi Regime

Helen Blejerman
Department of Art and Design
Sheffield Hallam University

From 1933 to 1944, the Nazi Regime in Germany censored all forms of art except those that represented specific racial, heroic ideas: art used as propaganda. Living under Nazi rule, hundreds of Jewish women artists were forced to sublimate the world that they witnessed and the sentiment the world produced in them. Most of them were annihilated in concentration camps for being Jewish, and most of their work was burnt or lost.

My desire to make digital portraits of the artists described below grew out of the rage I feel as a Jewish artist woman. Part portrait and part a dream, these portraits are intended to allow me to connect, through my imagination, with the inner child of each of these Jewish women artists—artists who suffered under the Nazi Regime and whose childhoods are mostly unknown. My goal is to make a humble homage to them, to sublimate the free spirit that followed them the rest of their lives.

Otti Berger (1898–1944)

Otti Berger was a Croatian textile artist and designer who studied and worked in the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany. She sat at Klee and Kandinsky lectures and became the Deputy Head of Weaving while experimenting with methodologies and material for mass production with in-depth knowledge of the needs of industry. She rejected the understanding of textiles as a feminine craft and used the rhetoric of photography and painting to describe her work.

In 1932 she opened her own company, *Atelier for Textile*, in Berlin and collaborated with various textile companies that produced materials based on her innovative solutions. In 1936 she was forced to close her company due to her Jewish origins. After that she fled to London and unsuccessfully tried to obtain a teaching visa to travel to the United States where other Bauhaus lecturers were already teaching at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. She also could not find a job in London because she did not speak the language and had no friends. In 1938 she travelled home to take care of her ill mother, and years later she and her family were deported to Auschwitz to be assassinated.

Hannah Szenes (1921–1944)

Hannah Szenes was a Hungarian poet, diarist, playwriter, and spy. After studying agriculture, she began writing in Hungarian and Hebrew. During World War II she became a member of the clandestine organisation *Special Operations Executive* conducting espionage and reconnaissance in occupied Europe. In 1943 she enlisted as an aircraftwoman in the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force. In 1944 she was parachuted into Yugoslavia, and upon landing she joined the partisan group when she heard that the Germans had already occupied Hungary. Szenes crossed the Hungarian border and she was arrested by the gendarmery who found her British military transmitter.

In prison in Budapest she used a mirror to flash signals out of the window to prisoners in other cells. She was tried for treason and executed by a firing squad in a snow-covered Budapest courtyard, age twenty-three. After the Cold War a Hungarian military court officially exonerated her.

Charlotte Delbo (1913–1985)

Charlotte Delbo was a French writer, known for her memoirs as a prisoner in Auschwitz. In March of 1942 the French police arrested her as she was preparing to distribute anti-German leaflets in Paris. The French turned her over to the Gestapo, who imprisoned her as a member of the French Resistance. Delbo remained in prison in Romainville in German-occupied France until January 24, 1943. Then she was deported to Auschwitz. After a year in the concentration camp she was selected to farm the perennial flower Russian Dandelion—an emergency source of rubber in World War II—and survived. She was liberated by the Red Cross and was transported to Sweden for rehabilitation.

During the 1960s she worked for the United Nations with philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Two decades later, she died of lung cancer. Delbo's work has been influential for scholars and became part of most college-level courses on the subject of the Holocaust.

Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943)

Charlotte Salomon is an overlooked artist from Berlin. She studied art but stopped when Hitler came to power. When her father was captured during *Kristallnacht*, she was sent to the South of France with her grandparents. Decades later a thirty-five page confession was brought to light in which she explains how she killed her grandfather after he abused her sexually, and how she made a portrait of him dying. After her grandmother killed herself, the family doctor suggested that she paint, and she started her work *Life? Or Theatre?* 769 autobiographical paintings were made in her last two years. She was gassed to death in Auschwitz.

Gertrud Kolmar (1894–1943)

Gertrude Kolmar (pseudonym of Gertrude Chodziesner) was a lyric poet considered by post-war critics to be both one of the most important women poets in German literature and one of the greatest lyrical poetess of Jewish descent who has ever lived. In the late 1920s, her poems appeared in literary journals and she published her poetry books, the third of which, *Die Frau und die Tiere*, came out in 1938, but was destroyed after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom that year.

Kolmar was an interpreter and censor of soldiers' correspondence in a prison-of-war camp near Berlin, and in July of 1941 she was ordered to work in forced and unpaid labour in the German armaments industry. She had a disappointing love affair, which ended with an abortion that her parents insisted on. With the intensification of Jewish persecution, her sister emigrated to Switzerland, and Gertrude stayed with her father. They were obliged to sell their house and move to "Jewish housing" in Berlin. In Kolmar's imagination that was "her lost paradise." Her surviving work consists of 450 poems, three plays, and two short stories. She was the cousin of Walter Benjamin. She died in Auschwitz.

Elena Shirman (1908–1942)

Elena Shirman is an overlooked Russian poet. She studied at the Gorky Literary Institute and, while working as a kitchen assistant, taught literature and culture to the children of factory workers. Her poems defied Soviet conventions by having, at their center, the unsatisfied love she felt for Valery Marchikhin, a young man and former student.

In July of 1942, Shirman was traveling to the frontline area as part of the editorial group of the Soviet newspaper *Molot*. She was arrested by the Nazis at the railway station in Rostov Oblast and never heard from again. The details of her death were brought to light twenty years later by a woman who lived next to the station. According to that eyewitness, Shirman was forced to watch the Nazis kill her parents; then she was undressed to dig her own grave, then beaten to death. Witnesses to the atrocity rescued some of Shirman's notebooks from the Nazis trash. In 1969 a collection of her poems was published in Moscow. Her work is included in several Russian anthologies.

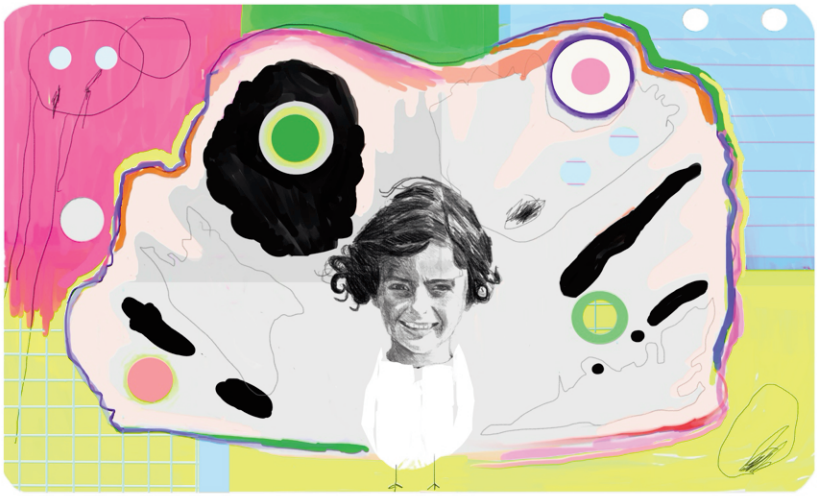
Rokhl Auberbakh (1903–1976)

Rokhl Auerbakh was a Yiddish-Israeli writer, journalist, historian, Holocaust scholar, and survivor. She wrote extensively in Polish and Yiddish about East European Jewish Polish literature, education, psychology, linguistics, and art. In 1933 she moved to Poland, and during the German occupation she was detained and taken to the Warsaw Ghetto.

Amongst the bombs and fires of the Warsaw Ghetto, she set up and directed a public kitchen in a building in ruins, feeding thousands of people a day and spending the nights writing as the ruined building became a hub for cultural and political activities. She secretly documented the events and personal encounters as part of the clandestine group with the code name *Oyneg Shabbes*. Auberbakh escaped the ghetto and was instrumental in the retrieval of the archive's collection in 1946. After the war, she continued to collect survivors' testimonies as part of the Historical Committee in Poland. She established the Department for the Collection of Witness Testimony at Yad Vashem, Israel, and she testified at the Eichmann trial in 1961. Auberbakh died of breast cancer.

Gerty Simon (1887–1970)

Gertrude Simon was a successful German-Jewish photographer who exhibited her work in Berlin between the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Although her career has been forgotten, she belonged to the artistic and intellectual scene of the time, and she photographed actors, singers, politicians, and scientists, as well as artists, writers, and critics. In 1933 she left her home, studio, and husband and fled Nazism with her son. She settled in England, taking photos of people in the most influential circles of London. The Sunday *Times* described her as "The most brilliant and original of Berlin photographers." The Wiener Holocaust Library had an exhibition of her work in 2019, and in 2021, for the first time in eight decades, her work will be shown to the public in Berlin.



Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger (1924–1942)

Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger was a world-class Romanian poet. She studied in Yiddish but wrote by hand in German. With her friends she gave readings by Rilke, Heine, Tagore—whose novel *The Home and the World* she took to the labour camp—and discussed Goethe, Freud, and Kafka. She wrote by hand a collection of fifty-two poems called *Blütenlese* ("The Reaping of Blossom") about love and life. She gave this collection of poems to her love Leiser Fichman. He kept the notebook of poems in the camp until 1944, when he sent it to Else, Selma's friend, in Czernowitz.

Fichman boarded the *Mefküre*, a clandestine immigrant vessel going to Palestine. The vessel was attacked and sank in the Black Sea. Selma's grandfather immigrated to Palestine and suggested to Selma that she follow him, but her mother could not bear to be separated from her daughter. Meerbaum-Eisinger died of typhus at eighteen in the Mikhaylowka labour camp, where the German and Ukrainian interns were terrorized and starved. She was the cousin of Paul Celan.

Debora Vogel (1902–1942)

Debora Vogel is an overlooked 1930s avant-garde Polish Yiddish philosopher and writer of poetry, prose, literary and art criticism. She studied philosophy in Vienna and Polish literature in Cracow. She completed a PhD on the influence of Hegel's aesthetics upon Józef Kremer. Vogel wrote in German and Yiddish and published essays, art reviews, and her own experimental poems, fusing poetry and art. She was a part of Yiddish literary circles and contributed articles for several Yiddish journals of literature and art. Her works explored aesthetic concepts in a highly experimental way. She was an artistically emancipated soul. Debora Vogel was killed in the Lwów ghetto.

Book Review

The Book of Sarah. By Sarah Lightman. Myriad Editions, 2019. 256 pp. $35.

Sarah Lightman's *The Book of Sarah* is an ambitious and moving text-image chronicle of Lightman's experiences from childhood to parenthood, embedded within a framework of Jewish feminist approaches. It is biography intertwined with hazy memory, family mythology, and some meaningful and other not-so meaningful objects which combine in a forceful way to remind the reader that our own life stories are a mixture of fact and fiction. As comic writer Grant Morrison once noted, we live in the stories we tell ourselves, and Lightman's book is a textual and visual reminder of that. As Lightman puts it: "dynamics and tensions are ossified in stories repeated through the years, traditional retellings at family meals and in front of new friends" (26). This layering of remembered and retold personal narratives come to shape our identities in ways Lightman attempts to untangle and contextualise in her work.

The story is told through a series of images of often mundane objects or unidentifiable buildings complemented by text. It must be noted at the outset that the artwork is a triumph; it has always been this reader's personal preference to see the hand of the artist at work in the art, and Lightman's art

is full of her touch. The artwork is mixed media; sometimes simple sketches, other times elaborately detailed pen and pencil work, and there are also paintings and perhaps other media in use. A strong example of Lightman's abilities and wide range of media can be seen on pages 90–91, which is a double-page spread of various self-portraits of the artist. One could spend a long time looking at each individual panel to gauge the emotion and expression of each face, though all share a kind of sadness or tiredness between them. Mostly, the artwork is almost tactile, inviting the reader to touch the pages, to feel for the textures which cannot be reproduced in prints but which are evidently there in the indentations of the pencil marks, the thickness of the paint (see for example the front cover image), and the areas where finger prints and eraser marks are faintly visible. Such a style complements the narrative of the book because it humanises the subject and encourages the reader to appreciate the life of the creator behind the book's content.

Clearly invoking the Hebrew Bible as a reference point, the title *The Book of Sarah* is a slightly amusing yet important play on biblical books which name their central characters (e.g. The Book of Ruth, The Book of Job, etc.). Lightman describes in what may be considered the preface to the book, that while both her siblings shared a name with a biblical book and figure (Esther and Daniel), the figure of Sarah (with whom she shares a name) is similarly central to Jewish narratives of genealogy and covenant but is not granted such a privilege. Lightman's *Book of Sarah* is then a nod to the biblical matriarch and the importance of her position in Jewish history and tradition, as well as an account of Lightman's biography. The two are intertwined at points given that the stories of both the biblical Sarah and Lightman share themes of mental health, family, genealogy, fertility and motherhood.

The book is divided into chapters which all reference biblical literature: "Genesis," "Exodus," "Bamidbar," "Numbers," "Leviticus," "Harry's Genesis," "Revelations," and "Apocrypha." "Genesis" tells of Lightman's beginnings, her family, her home, and her early education in London. "Exodus" recounts Lightman's move from England to New York, time spent in Italy, and a return to England. In this chapter, the emotional complexity of the artwork comes to the fore. For example, a frantic sketch of a door representing the possibilities which extend beyond its frame (62) is positioned opposite a

neat, controlled drawing of a house signifying potential boundaries and restrictions were Lightman to have taken an alternative path. It is visual details such as these which draw the reader into Lightman's experience, rather than the words. "Badmidbar" charts Lightman's return from New York and her continued questions and musings on her situation, but the real success of the book lies in the latter chapters, and especially in "Leviticus," which juxtaposes the death of Lightman's grandfather with her newly married status and her thoughts of future possibilities such as pregnancy.

The most striking sequence of images, however, is found on pages 173 through 181. A carton of eggs is drawn in various stages of opening, closing, sometimes with four eggs, other times with three, and often with the eggs outside of the carton. The egg sequence finishes on an open carton of six eggs. It is Lightman's reflection on fertility, age, pressure from family and friends, and her own needs and desires regarding pregnancy and motherhood. This sequence is beautifully executed and impactful. The book ends with the arrival of Lightman's son and her reflections on motherhood.

Throughout the book, there are moments of great joy intermingled with sadness, but overall, the book is sombre, even morose in tone. There is very little light or laughter throughout the pages, though that is not a criticism (merely an observation); rather, the emotionality of everyday object set against a textual rendering of Lightman's feelings reminds the reader of how our own lives and emotions are closely connected to even the most mundane objects around us: a tube of moisturiser, an empty baking tin, or a street sign. All are material objects which can embody memory and sense. The stilting narrative encourages the reader to make connections between Lightman's words and those drawn images even when there is maybe no sense of reason nor rhyme to them. For this reason, Lightman's book is not a comic book or a graphic novel in the conventional sense, but this is welcome since it is time we moved past such limited definitions of what comic books are.

As noted, the major themes of the book center on mental health, family, and fertility in particular. Such themes are prevalent also throughout the biblical narrative of the matriarch Sarah in Genesis, though Lightman does not often directly reference that character (notable exceptions are pages 13, 15, and 231). Instead, the connection is subliminal; the reader who knows the biblical Sarah's story can see reflections of it woven throughout Lightman's chronicle and may also delight in finding the resonances and echoes when

they appear. Such shadows are heightened by Lightman's discussions of her Jewish heritage and faith, which link the reader back not only to the Jewish text of the Bible, but also to how those allusions continue to shape and be shaped by Lightman's interactions with them.

This is not just a book about Lightman's life. Nor is it a book just about Jewish identity, or feminism, or mental health, or fertility and parenthood. It is a book about how the stories about our past inevitably influence the potential of our future. The ruminations on Lightman's Jewish identity, her quest to become a mother, her relationships, her family, and her visual storytelling through objects is a reminder that, like the biblical Sarah, the journeys we take in our lives are often entirely out of our control, but what we can control is our response and maybe, sometimes, for a little while at least, our direction of travel.

—Zanne Domoney-Lyttle
University of Glasgow

Victoria Aarons holds the position of O.R. and Eva Mitchell Distinguished Professor of Literature at Trinity University, San Antonio, TX, where she teaches courses on American Jewish and Holocaust literatures. In addition to over 90 scholarly articles and book chapters, she is author or editor of eleven books, including *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (co-authored with Alan L. Berger, 2017); *The Cambridge Companion to Saul Bellow* (2017); *Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives: Memory in Memoir and Fiction* (2019); *The New Jewish American Literary Studies* (2019); *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma, and Memory* (2020); and *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture* (co-edited with Phyllis Lassner, 2020). She is on the editorial board of *Philip Roth Studies, Studies in American Jewish Literature*, and *Women in Judaism*, and she is series editor for Lexington Studies in Jewish Literature. She is currently working on a monograph and a collection of essays on Jewish women graphic novelists.

Helen Blejerman is a Mexican artist and writer based in the UK. She works as an Associate Lecturer in the Department of Art and Design, Sheffield Hallam University, where she explores radical ways of collective thinking for artists and the public. Her graphic novel *Lulu the Sensational* was published in France by *Presque Lune Éditions* and was named 'graphic novel of the year' in ComFor, nominated by the University of Cologne. A few years later, Lulu was published in English, along with Helen's second graphic novel, *Tito and the Love Letters*. She co-wrote the film As Sure the Rain, which was awarded a Silver Laurel by The Independent Film Awards in Los Angeles, California. Her work has appeared in *Art Monthly* and *The Guardian*, as well as in numerous anthologies and art magazines in Mexico and the UK.

Zanne Domoney-Lyttle is a Tutor in Biblical Studies at the University of Glasgow. Her research focuses on popular- and sub-cultural retellings of biblical stories, with special regard for the role, function,

and narrative of biblical women. Her monograph, *The Bible in Comics: Women, Power and Representation in Graphic Narratives* is due to be published by Bloomsbury early 2021.

Kevin Haworth is the author of five books, most recently the Eisner-nominated *The Comics of Rutu Modan: War, Love, and Secrets* (University Press of Mississippi). He has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ohio Arts Council, Headlands Center for the Arts, and Vermont Studio Center, among others. He teaches writing and literature at Carnegie Mellon University.

Ken Koltun-Fromm has published five books—*Moses Hess and Modern Jewish Identity* (2001), *Abraham Geiger's Liberal Judaism: Personal Meaning and Religious Authority* (2006), *Material Culture and Jewish Thought in America* (2010), *Imagining Jewish Authenticity: Vision and Text in American Jewish Thought* (2015), and most recently, *Drawing on Religion: Reading and the Moral Imagination in Comics & Graphic Novels* (2020)—and edited three volumes, *Thinking Jewish Culture in America* (2014), *Imagining the Jewish God* (2016), and (with Assaf Gamzou) *Comics and Sacred Texts: Reimagining Religion and Graphic Narratives* (2018).

Dana Mihăilescu is an Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Bucharest. Her most recent projects are a published monograph, *Eastern European Jewish American Narratives, 1890–1930. Struggles for Recognition* (Lexington Books, 2018), an encyclopedia entry on "Hate Crime" in *Violence in American Society: An Encyclopedia of Trends, Problems, and Perspectives* (ABC-CLIO GREENWOOD, 2020), and a research grant on *Transcultural Networks in Narratives about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe* (2018–2020).

Golan Moskowitz is an Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Catherine and Henry J. Gaisman Faculty Fellow at Tulane University. He is the author of *Wild Visionary: Maurice Sendak in Queer Jewish Context* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

Tahneer Oksman is an Associate Professor of Academic Writing at Marymount Manhattan College. She is author of *"How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?": Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs* (Columbia University Press) and co-editor of *The Comics of Julie Doucet and Gabrielle Bell: A Place Inside Yourself* (University Press of Mississippi).

Davida Pines is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric in the College of General Studies at Boston University. She is the author of *The Marriage Paradox: Modernist Novels and the Cultural Imperative to Marry* (University of Florida Press, 2005). In addition to composition and rhetoric, she teaches and lectures on the representation of traumatic history in nonfiction comics and has published essays on works by Art Spiegelman and Lynda Barry.

Matt Reingold teaches in the Jewish Thought and Jewish History departments at TanenbaumCHAT in Toronto, Canada. He has published widely on arts-based learning in Jewish education and on Jewish graphic novels. His recent articles have appeared in *Studies in Comics, Journal of Comics and Graphic Novels, Postscripts*, and *Shofar*. His new book *Gender and Sexuality in Israeli Graphic Novels* is forthcoming from Routledge Press.

Emily Steinberg is an American painter and graphic novelist whose work has been shown across the United States and Europe. Most recently, her first cartoon was accepted into *The New Yorker* Magazine. She has been named the first Artist in Residence at Drexel College of Medicine in Philadelphia, where she works with medical students to translate their medical school experiences into words and images. Her visual narratives have been regularly published in *Cleaver Magazine* since 2013, and since Summer 2019 she has taken on the role of Visual Narrative Editor at *Cleaver*. Her memoir, *Graphic Therapy,* was published serially in Smith Magazine and her short comic *Blogging Towards Oblivion*, was included in *The Moment* (HarperCollins). She is a Lecturer in Fine Art at Penn State University, Abington College, where she has been teaching since 2011. Steinberg

earned her M.F.A. and B.F.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.