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Memory in Comics: Testimonial, Autobiographical and Historical Space in MAUS

Ana Merino

Introduction

- 1 In *Adult Comics: An Introduction* Roger Sabin explained how between 1986 and 1987 the term ‘graphic novel’ became recognized mostly as a result of the success of Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen*, and Art Spiegelman’s *MAUS*. This type of comic signified a revolutionary evolution towards an elaborate adult perspective. From the lesser and ephemeral space of the children’s comic, there was a shift towards the graphic novels for adults, novels which eventually became part of library collections. Sabin explains how this evolution from periodical comic to ‘graphic novel’, that is, a lasting comic (that remains on the shelf) was intended to ‘add prestige to the form and thus to sell more product (as Art Spiegelman pointed out: ‘graphics are respectable, novels are respectable, so whammy: double respectability’)” (235).
- 2 The Founding Statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group declares “in cultural production, the emergence of testimonial and documentary form shifts dramatically the parameters of representation away from the writer and the avant-gardes” (140). This state of urgency so inherent in the testimonial form has developed in the context of Latin America but also globally. Comics, as a cultural space, incorporate both testimonial and documentary forms, offering the possibility of representing subaltern subjects who in and of themselves form a part of the construction of the text. This kind of comic, as in the work of Spiegelman or Joe Sacco (Chute)—both of whom merit a detailed analysis regarding how they show the rapid maturity attained by the testimonial genre within comics, one that is beyond the scope of this article—comes in part as a response to the male-centered meta-narratives of

mainstream super-hero comics. They create an alternative space that I would define as the vanguard of the underground comic scene. Testimonial gives emphasis to the concrete, to the personal, focusing on the minuscule details of the lives of women, political prisoners, and other marginalized subjects.

- 3 I will concentrate on *MAUS*, a comic based on the direct recuperation of the past. *The comic* initially appeared serialized in the experimental comic magazine *RAW* edited by Art Spiegelman and wife Françoise Mouly. *MAUS*, as Kim Thompson explained back in 1980 in the review he wrote about *RAW* premiere, was “a chronicle of the life of Jewish families under the Nazi occupation retold in funny-animal terms, with cats playing the Nazis and mice the Jews” (21). The past and the search for truth through memory are the cornerstones of the narration in this fascinating work defined by a cast of anthropomorphic animals. *MAUS* exemplifies the theme of memory and the role that individuals play when the time comes to evoke the space of history. Written and drawn by Art Spiegelman over the course of thirteen years, it represents an effort to recuperate his family roots from a variety of perspectives. It is easy to describe this work as simply an autobiographical commentary about the author’s father Vladek, in which Vladek tells of his hardships in Auschwitz. But *MAUS* develops various chronological moments and diverse parallel stories, in which the testimony of the father forms the central axis but depends upon others for its context.
- 4 According to John Beverley, testimonial literature is a narrative told in the first person by a narrator who is the protagonist or a witness of the events he or she is relating. In many cases, this narrator is someone who is illiterate, or simply someone literate who is not a writer. The production of testimony, according to Beverley, “often involves the tape recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, journalist, or writer” (1993, 70-71). In *MAUS* we see elements that perfectly fit the definition given by the critic. Furthermore, Beverley points to the importance of remembering that testimony is a narrative of urgency: “a story that needs to be told-involving a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, exploitation, or simply survival” (1993, 73). In its subtitle, *MAUS* indicates that it is a “survivor’s tale” and possesses all of the elements that make up a testimonial. Vladek’s narration appears in the first person, as he is the protagonist of his story. Vladek is not the writer or the creator. Spiegelman (who happens to be Vladek’s son) is the artist who uses his recorder to transcribe and edit the oral testimony taken down from Vladek, transforming it into a comic strip and balloon dialogue. Furthermore, Vladek’s narration as compiled in *MAUS* is an urgent narration since the memory of these events deserves a space for expression before Vladek’s death (he is an older man whose health is failing). Vladek is a survivor of possibly the most terrifying repressive event of the 20th century, the Holocaust.
- 5 Vladek’s first-person narrative can also in turn represent the story of many others who suffered the same situation: “By contrast, in *testimonio* the ‘I’ has the grammatical status of what linguists call a ‘shifter’-a linguistic function that can be assumed indiscriminately by anyone” (Beverley, 1993: 83). But his story must be told and collected not only for general societal interest but also because affective familial implications exist within it. Art needs his father’s memory in order to construct his own identity in the context of a double urgency, social and familial.

The beginning: feelings that materialize in memory

- 6 Art Spiegelman's narrative of his relationship with his father begins in 1958, as he remembers a lesson by his father about friends in need. Young Art is skating with his friends and breaks his skate during a fall. His friends laugh at him and then abandon him. Art comes to his father crying: "I...I fell, and my friends skated away w-without me" (I, 6). His father answers him by questioning friendship in a manner clearly evocative of his past experience on the trains to Auschwitz: "Friends? Your friends? / If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week/THEN you could see what it is, friends!" (I, 6). This point of departure marks the two principal lines of representation in the narrative: Art begins with a childhood memory that marks his relationship with his father Vladek, and through this memory shows how Vladek carries with him his own past experiences in the concentration camps.
- 7 Is this a suggestion that Vladek is harvesting the fruit of involuntary memory? Unlike the Madeleine and nostalgia-filled infusion, which characterize Combray's universe of memory in Proust¹, in MAUS, the evocation does not arise from a flavor or smell, but rather from the allusion to the concept of friendship, born of the memory of the terrible days spent in the horror of Nazi camps. The concept of memory here accords with Richard Terdiman's interpretation of Proust: "For Proust the convergence of significance and recollection is [...] fundamental: it is that the meaning of our experience materializes in memory" (346).
- 8 The anecdote featured in the two-page prologue of MAUS materializes more than one level of meaning related to the concept of friendship as experience. On the one hand, there is the meaning of friendship created and interpreted by Art Spiegelman as represented through his drawings: the evocation of a painful moment of his childhood. He draws himself as a child (a baby mouse) and establishes a date for this perceptive moment (at the beginning of 1958). Memory has created this space and the comic strip is the place where it is reproduced. The other level would be the interpretation Art assigns to the meaning of his father's memories. These drawings are capable of reproducing (just as in Proust's prose) the narrative of memory, which has materialized in the present of the adult Art when he constructs his graphic novel. The memories of his father on friendship have for Art a very special meaning because they are associated with a concrete sentimental experience that materialized in his memory. It is the moment at which Art's father articulates his words and suggests to his crying son his past experiences, associating them to the feelings that friendship entails, when memory is transformed into another experience.
- 9 This is an experience of learning for the young boy Art who listens intently. Art's friends made him cry and feel alone. Art looks for familiar affection after the painful moment, and his father gives him a new meaning for the concept of friendship as consolation: only in extreme circumstances is it possible to see if friends are true. If the friend was dependable in certain circumstances, memory materializes into a pleasant image of that person accompanied by feelings of gratitude and affection.

Survival: friends that remember

- 10 Memory is fundamental in the constitution of the ego. For Blas Matamoro “the ego is, because it remembers having been.”² In the same way, the historicity of the ego is quite important because he who has a history will have memory: “That which is historical is temporality and continuity. The past cannot come from the present, nor the present from the past, without danger of the continuity that binds, historically, one stage with another.”³ Art needs an initial moment of memory recognition, and the concept of friendship will be one of the thematic keys in future conversations between the adult Art and his father. In effect, throughout all of his story, Vladek remembers all those who helped him to survive and performed kind deeds. For example, in 1943 Miloch, a Jew with influence, helped Vladek and Anja to survive in the ghetto of Srodula, Poland (I, 117-125). In Sosnowiec, Mr. Lukowski, a Pole who worked as a janitor for Anja’s family, hid them from the Nazis (I, 136-137). Mrs. Motonowa, a Pole who sold food in the black market, hid them temporarily in her house (I, 141-142, 146-151). In the same way Vladek also helped his friends when he could. He obtained shoes, a belt and a spoon for his friend Mandelbaum in Auschwitz (II, 33-34).
- 11 In Auschwitz, a Polish priest who was also a prisoner had a brief conversation with Vladek, which revived his hopes for survival. The priest, while looking at the numbers the Nazis had tattooed on his arm, told him that he would survive: “And LOOK! Added together it totals 18. That’s ‘chai’, the Hebrew number of life./I can’t know if I’LL survive this hell, but I’m certain YOU’LL come through all this alive!” (II, 28). The conversation with the Polish priest was fundamental in Vladek’s regaining some type of faith. The priest could no longer animate and encourage his inmate companions with his normal religious talk, as the situation was so extreme, insufferable, and absurd. The priest comforted the other prisoners, creating new codes of hope that were associated to the religion and culture of each prisoner. Vladek, after his conversation with the priest, began to see the number tattooed on his arm not as the fatalistic Nazi mark that condemned him to die, but as the secret code of his salvation: “I started to believe. I tell you, he put another life on me. / And whenever it was very bad I looked and said: yes the priest was right! It totals eighteen” (II, 28).
- 12 Analyzed in detail, all the memories of Vladek are associated with people who offer their friendship to him and his wife, and thanks to the intervention of these friends, they are saved. Therefore, the feelings of gratitude for past friends arise as the testimony is forged.

Testimony, or the art of re-narrating memory

- 13 MAUS revolves around an already adult Art, reconstructing the memory of his father. The two volumes of the work attempt to represent through drawings and balloon dialogue the experiences of Vladek narrated in memory to Art. However, it is important to recognize that Vladek is not directly narrating these events; the narrator is Art, who remembers and recounts his father’s remembering. In Proust’s work we find a purifying aesthetic. The French writer articulates his memory with the utmost care. Terdiman, in the end, questions the use of memory in Proust’s work: “involuntary memory recovers anguish, misery and disappointment-but more than that, involuntary memory is their product, they determine it. This is the painful side of recollection”

(238). Do the margins between involuntary memory and conscious elaboration in narration permit Proust to construct a memory of the past, or is he subject to the involuntary memory mentioned by Terdiman, which is “rather a utopian projection [...] which promises the restoration of the past - better understood as the intimation of an alterity potential in our present” (237)? What happens in the case of MAUS? How does Art Spiegelman represent memory? Does his story suffer the same problems that Terdiman finds in the truthful representation of the past in Proust?

- 14 For Art Spiegelman, his work “was intentionally made for readers”, although “the engine in MAUS is [his] father’s narrative, a verbal construct” (Interview, *The Comics Journal*, n.189, p.65). This ‘verbal construct’ permits truth to be analyzed from another perspective, using testimonial as a literary instrument for representing memory. On the one hand, Art is the narrator, but on the other, his father becomes both protagonist and narrator for a good part of MAUS. Art, in his sketches, represents the orality and the dialogues with his father, but also the tensions and contradictions between the young Vladek of the past, and the Vladek narrating in the present.
- 15 Orality is a key element as a first step in this process of recuperation and representation of memory. In a certain sense Vladek is the Benjaminian storyteller of his own experience, one that Art converts into graphic material. The spontaneity of Vladek’s spoken words would at first be annotated by Art, but later on, Art decides to record his father, and the possibility of collecting every word would make the narration much stronger. Art had the opportunity to listen to the words of his father again and again and thus reproduce them more accurately in his panels. Also, it is probable that if Vladek had written the text directly instead of having narrated it to his son, many details would have been changed through the writing process, demanding conciseness, and eliminating the interplay between Art and Vladek. Spiegelman illustrates the process of creating a testimony in the initial phase of collecting the orality of the testimony, first through a block of notes and later with a tape recorder: “Vladek: -What are you holding? / Art: -A new tape recorder- writing things down is just too hard” (I, 73).
- 16 The parts of the story that deal with Spiegelman’s father are represented in the first person, and relate how he met his wife Anja, the process of war itself, life in concentration camps, and the end of the war. The story of Art in the present, speaking with his father and gathering his testimony and the information necessary to create his memoirs, is presented in sporadic fashion, mixed with Vladek’s reminiscences. MAUS demonstrates the validity of comics as a means of testimonial representation and of expressing memory. In deciding to investigate his father’s past, Art becomes his interlocutor: “I still want to draw that book about you/ the one I used to talk to you about/ about your life in Poland and the war”(I, 12). At first his father resists; “It would take MANY books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories” (I, 12) This initial resistance denies the past a space in the present, not because Vladek has forgotten the past, but rather because he imagines that nobody would care to remember it. Nevertheless, Art insists, moving away from the war to more pleasant memories: “I want to hear it. Start with Mom...tell me how you met”(I, 12). And finally, his father begins to narrate his memories: “But, if you want, I can tell you-I lived then in Czestochowa, a small city not far from the border of Germany”(I, 12). The family ties that bind Art and Vladek allow for the development of a different model of history, in spite of Art trying to establish a conventional chronological rhythm in order to write

the comic: “WAIT! Please, dad. If you don’t keep your story chronological, I’ll never get it straight-tell me more about 1941 and 1942” (I, 82).

- 17 In *How Societies Remember* Paul Connerton points out that many socialist historians have seen in oral history ‘the possibility of rescuing from silence the history and culture of subordinate groups’ (18). In this way, “oral histories seek to give voice to what would otherwise remain voiceless even if not traceless, by reconstituting the life histories of individuals” (18). Connerton, however, finds potential problems in this approach, since the question asked by the interviewer can impede the realization of testimonial intentions. Moreover, it often happens that the interviewee offers resistance by pointing out that there is nothing that the interviewer does not already know. If this is so, we add the fact that the interviewer unconsciously adjusts the life history of the interviewee to a preconceived model based on classic memories of ‘great men’, the possibilities of representation in his oral history are circumscribed by the models created by hegemonic discursive structures (19). In the case of *MAUS*, Art does not represent his father as a great hero, but rather plays with the present image of the very old manic who his father has become.
- 18 Physical and mental resistance is the key that Vladek gives to survival, along with patience and the capacity to not lose hope. Nevertheless the younger man whom he evokes is full of contradictions as opposed to the older one that lives in the present and is narrating the story of his life. Old Vladek is obsessed with money, perhaps because in so many cases money saved his life. He is obsessed with leftover food: if they cannot eat it, he will take the half-used boxes back to the supermarket because he cannot stand to see it spoil. These things young Art does not understand, and feels ashamed. Vladek replies: “What’s to be so ashamed? It’s food I can’t eat. You wait there in the car while I arrange it.”(II, 89). The reader and the owner of the supermarket are affected quite differently. The reader, vividly influenced by the memories of Vladek, is most likely to feel compassion for a man who reacts in the present on the basis of his experiences of the past. This is corroborated by the owner of the supermarket: “He helped me as soon I explained to him my health, how Mala left me, and how it was in the camps”(II, 90).
- 19 Many of the difficult characteristics of Vladek in his old age are justified by the traumatic experience of the concentration camps. Although the comic is centered on Vladek, Mala, Vladek’s second wife, questions this justification. Art says to Mala: “I used to think the WAR made him that way!” But Mala is forceful in her response. “FAH! I went through the camps! / ALL our friends went through the camps. NOBODY is like him!”(I, 131) Art does not hesitate to include these other characters who relate to his father, expliciting the difficulty to pin down an individual. Time and life cause any individual to undergo numerous changes depending on the situation in which he finds himself. Vladek represents a perspective of the Holocaust through his individuality and his personal narration. Mala, who has also suffered the same trauma, emphasizes that his character traits cannot be reduced to the events lived in the war.
- 20 Pierre Nora brings another perspective to this idea of the difficult balance between the space of hegemonic history and individual memory. For Nora, “the transition from memory to history requires every social group to redefine its identity by dredging up its past. The resulting obligation to remember makes every man his own historian” (10). Art Spiegelman seeks to redefine his identity by way of his father’s memory. This phenomenon of seeking memory is not isolated. According to Nora, “There is hardly a family today which some member has not sought to reconstruct the hidden ancestral

past as fully as possible” (10). What is the relationship established between testimonial, memory, and history?

- 21 The representation of memory in *MAUS* depends upon the testimonial of Vladek. In this case, the harsh events of the past have transformed the voice of Vladek into a testimonial. The relation between memory and history has been so dramatic that neither can remain simply in the annals of history or the tradition of communal memory: “In the Jewish tradition, whose history is its memory, to be Jewish is to remember being Jewish” (Nora, 11). Art individualizes the voice of his father, offering another kind of memory. The concept of truth changes, because we see the truth of an individual in his struggle for survival. Vladek was dehumanized by the terrifying discourse of the Nazis. This period of annihilation that nearly cost him his life and did indeed take the life of more than six million Jews transformed him into a subaltern. He was the ‘other’ that either did not exist or needed to be destroyed by the Nazi apparatus. Vladek resisted the genocidal machine and saved himself.

The muted voice of memory

- 22 In *MAUS*, the testimony of the father punctuates the rhythm of the narration. Yet there is a parallel testimony that has disappeared and can only be evoked in its past existence: the diaries that Anja wrote to her son Art. Art looks for these testimonies throughout the first book. “This is where Mon’s diaries will be ESPECIALLY useful. They’ll give me some idea of what she went through while you were apart”(I, 158). Finally, Art’s father confesses that “These notebooks, and other really nice things of mother...one time I had a very bad day...and all of these things I DESTROYED” (I, 158). He justified himself by referring to the weight of memory that those papers carried; as objects of memory, they were highly symbolic: “After Anja died I had to make an order with everything...these papers had too many memories. So I BURNED them” (I, 159).
- 23 Testimonial in comics grants a voice to the subaltern subjects previously ignored and left in anonymity. In the case of *MAUS*, the voice of Vladek becomes a balloon, and gives us the sensation of being real. However, Anja’s voice cannot ever articulate itself, because Vladek destroyed the manuscripts. She is the subaltern of the subaltern, eliminated in spite of her attempts to create a space of resistance by way of her notebooks and souvenirs. All had been saved with the intention of evoking and transmitting her voice to her son. Art desperately asks his father, “Did you ever READ any of them?! Can you remember what she wrote?” (I, 159). Vladek responds, “Only I know that she said ‘I wish my son, when he grows up, he will be interested by this...’”(I, 159). But the voice of Anja no longer exists, eliminated because her memories carried a symbolism loaded with truth that Vladek could neither tolerate nor respect. The comic is in part based on the tension between Vladek’s story and what cannot be known or said of Anja’s story. The son’s efforts to recuperate his parents’ story will always be frustrated without the mother’s version. Art will have to make do with the perspective of his father. He will also have to resolve himself to the fact that it is his father who destroyed the last breath of memory that Anja had created for her son.

Childhood: space of identifications

- 24 It bears asking why Art uses this instance from his childhood in relation to his father as the starting point of MAUS. Perhaps it is because this conversation entails a first step toward the memory of the Holocaust in the voice of his father. But it is also a scene where we see Art the child share his feelings with his father, feelings which will change notably when Art is an adult. Freud explains that the early expression of emotions plays an important role in the so-called Oedipus complex. When boys are small they show a very special interest in their father, they want to be like their father “and take his place everywhere” (105). For the child, the father represents the ideal model. But as soon as this identification with the father appears, the child begins to develop ‘a true object-cathexis toward his mother’ (105). In this manner he develops two psychologically differentiated emotional ties: “a straightforward sexual object-cathexis toward his mother and an identification with his father which takes him as a model / which he takes as a model?” (105). These two relationships will subsist for some time without any mutual interference. But when the mental life of the child is unified, the so-called Oedipus complex arises, as the child notices that his father in some fashion interferes with his relationship with the mother. His identification with his father transforms into the desire of replacing his father in relation with the mother: “Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone’s removal”(105).
- 25 In a reading of certain episodes of MAUS in which the relationship between Art and Vladek is presented, we can see many interesting points by taking some of Freud’s ideas into account. Apparently the relation between Art and Vladek has changed into something remote: “I went out to see my father in Rego Park. I hadn’t seen him in a long time-we weren’t that close” (I, 11). Nevertheless, as he takes notes about his father’s living arrangements, in the pauses between note taking and recording, Art relives transcendent episodes from his childhood. In one of these, he remembers how different his mother and father treated him, her with sweetness, him with excessive sternness: “when I was little if I didn’t eat EVERYTHING mom served, pop and I would argue till I ran out to my room crying/ mom would offer to cook something I liked better, but pop just wanted to LEAVE the left-over food around until I ate it/ fortunately for me, mom would eventually feed me something I liked” (I, 43-44). At another moment, he remembers the arguments that his mother would have with Vladek so that he would buy Art school supplies: “whenever I needed school supplies or new clothes mom would have to plead and argue for WEEKS before he’d cough up any dough” (I, 130). Art capitalized certain words to emphasize them in the word balloon.
- 26 Throughout the two volumes of the graphic novel, we see how the relationship between Art and his father is marked by certain traits of the Oedipus complex and the desire to recuperate the memory of his mother, which drove Art to confront his father and call him an assassin when he discovers that he has destroyed the diaries she wrote. In the desire for the recuperation of the familial past and its representation in drawings, does there not exist an attempt to supplant the vivid space of his father in respect to his mother? Art inserts a realistically drawn underground comic of himself as a young boy shortly after his mother committed suicide. Included is a 1958 photo of Art with his mother, the same year of the initial story concerning his father during his childhood.

- 27 From a Lacanian point of view, we can interpret in *MAUS* a narrative that brings Art to the recovery of moments of his infancy that reproduce the Imaginary as well as the Symbolic Order. The Imaginary would correspond to the pre-Oedipal period, when the child, according to Lacan, believes himself to be a part of the mother and recognizes no separation between himself and the world. Toril Moi defines this argument of Lacan explaining that “in the Imaginary there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence” (99). And it would be the Oedipal crisis which represents the entrance into the Symbolic Order, a crisis associated with the acquisition of language: “In the Oedipal crisis the father splits up the dyadic unity between mother and child and forbids the child further access to the mother and the mother’s body” (99). In the scene where Art discovers that his father has burnt the diaries of his mother, we can recognize a type of “Oedipal crisis”. Art’s yearning to reconstruct the memory of his mother and to re-live those feelings is destroyed since his father has annihilated the possibility of accessing the thoughts of his mother. The father has made the possible mother-child union through the texts that she left for her child impossible. To enter into the Symbolic Order, Art must accept the Law of the Father.
- 28 Has Art accepted the Law of the Father? The underground comic which Art drew when he was 20 years old, included in *MAUS*, relates the suicide of his mother: “In 1968, When I was 20, my mother killed herself. She left no note” (I, 100). At that point, Art refuses to enter the Symbolic Order. But as a consequence, to continue in the Imaginary means to become a psychotic incapable of living in society. Those feelings are summarized in the mini story that he initially drew in 1972 entitled “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” where he represents himself mentally disturbed in a jail as the result of his mother suicide. Art explains that everything happened three months after he left the mental hospital: “I was living with my parents, as I agreed to do on my release from the state mental hospital 3 months before” (I, 100). Art feels a terrible guilt for what has happened and is obsessed with the last moments when he spoke with his mother: “I remember the last time I saw her/she came to my room...it was late at night/ Artie [she asks] you...still love me don’t you?/ I turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord”. Those painful moments coincide with the period when Art fought to fit into society and argued with doctors about his emotional stability, allowing the hospital psychiatrist to send him back home. It was then, which could be considered the transition between the Imaginary and the Symbolic Order for Art, when his mother chose to commit suicide. Art re-enters the Mirror Stage, suffering an absolute emotional crisis in regards to his mother. By committing suicide, she drastically separates herself from him, just as he is acquiring a new consciousness of his duality in relation to his mother. He wants to capture this instant, this relationship with his mother, and for this reason he must narrate it in his comic. The Symbolic Order appears in these panels when his father embraces his son and both confront the social reality of the death of Art’s mother. Nevertheless, Art yearns to return to the Imaginary Order and repeats in his memoirs the last moments with his mother. As an expression of his intense desire to return to the Imaginary, and subsequent frustration, he draws himself in a jail cell blaming his mother for his insanity “congratulations! You’ve committed the perfect crime/ [...]...you MURDERED me Mommy, and you left me here to take the rap!!!”(I, 103).

Conclusions

- 29 Graphic novels covering topics that are directly related to their authors, as is the case of MAUS, help question the relation of postmodernity with the past. This work can be associated, by virtue of belonging to the comic genre, with a type of production that has been labeled as impersonal. For many, comics signify a universe of commercially produced superheroes drawn by workshops that lose touch with their individual creators. This vision of disappearance of the individual subject that Jameson announces in dealing with the loss of the personal style and the creation of pastiche, cannot be identified with MAUS. In spite of the multiplicity of elements that it entails, its clear anxious yearning to take a new look at the past is based upon very solid characters. Collective suffering is constructed in Vladek's individuality, as the France of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. In their capacity for recreation of a recognizable whole through a personal style, this type of work acquires a fundamental resonance. Trying to erase traces of the creator in the work he produces confronts deeply rooted narrative traditions. Proust died in 1922 and left a work from which all of modern Literature has learned.
- 30 MAUS represents to the comic what Proust's work represented to literature, achieving narrative maturity for the present-day comic based on the concept of memory, giving it a multiple content: testimonial, autobiography, history, and personal memoir. In order to achieve this maturity, the comic genre has had to construct complex and interconnected narrations ideated around individuality. The space of representation in MAUS has portrayed bellicose and ideological tensions akin to those of the bourgeois European universe so well portrayed by Proust. The texts of Proust, Freud or Lacan continue to vitalize critical discourse and allow works from little-recognized genres such as comics to find means of analysis that includes them within the reflexive space of modernity.
- 31 Perhaps MAUS is a key example of the so-called memory crisis alluded to by Terdiman, because it is a narration that reflects the tension between individuals, their culture, and their past. Art no longer belongs to the subordinate space in which his father lives in the present in the United States. His father suffered subalternity when the Nazis came to power. Before, Vladek belonged to the bourgeoisie; afterwards, he became an emigrant victim of the war and the Nazis. It has taken some time, after the Nazi period, for history to fully recognize the Jewish drama and provide compensation to those who suffered. Nevertheless, the memory of Vladek's suffering is multiplied and accompanied by the silenced memory of millions: Jews, Gypsies and dissidents, transformed into a voice that reconstructing that time. Thanks to memory, it is possible to recover and narrate the universal drama generated by Nazi repression and genocide and to share each moment of suffering. But memory also engages in a dialogue with individuals and their perspective of the present.

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NOTES

1. "And suddenly the memory returns. The taste was that of the little crumb of Madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before church-time), when I went to say good day to her in her bedroom, my aunt Leonie used to give to me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or of lime-flower tea" (Proust 61).
 2. "el yo es porque recuerda haber sido." (Matamoro 47)
 3. "Lo histórico es temporalidad y continuidad. El pasado no puede desprenderse del presente, ni éste de aquel, sin peligro de la continuidad que liga, historicamene, un estadio con otro." (Matamoro 47)
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