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Illustration BA(hons)

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What Impact Have Illustrators Made on the Lives of Jewish People Since The Third Reich?

The question of images is at the heart of the great darkness of our time, the “discontent of our civilisation.” We must know how to look into images to see that of which they are survivors, so that history, liberated from the pure past (the absolute, that abstraction) might help us to open the present of time. (Didi- Huberman, 2008 p.153)

When the world is going through the most challenging and disturbing times, what is the illustrator doing to contribute to society? Racism is an important topic that has an undeniable impact on humanity, and it is vital for the illustrator to understand the past, so that they know how to deal with the present. When approached with a brief, should one accept it if it is not clear in its context? For example, to draw a person of another race in an unflattering manner? To answer this question, this essay will study the most well documented genocide in history- The Holocaust, and Anti-Semitism In Nazi Germany and the territories that it occupied, whereby life for the Jewish people would never be the same again. This essay will explore some important drawings, those that harmed and those that still help to heal today. When the war is over, how do we sensitively approach subjects that are so personal and so unsettling? Do we have a right to? Attention will paid to the role of the cartoonist and the role of the graphic novel in regards to it's ability to connect with the audience in a way that pays respect to victims, but also teaches a new generation about atrocities that should never be repeated.

The definition of Anti-Semitism varies internationally, making it most difficult to determine whether one is being critical of the State of Israel or is inclined to discriminatory thought.

The Foreign and Commonwealth office of the United Kingdom has determined that Anti-Semitism, like all hate crime, is defined as “any crime or incident where the perpetrator’s hostility or prejudice against an identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimised” (Lord Pickles, 2016) but the UK college of Policing extends this to include several other important factors to identify Anti- Semitic crime specifically, including the promotion of the Jewish Power Conspiracy- whereby people share unfounded claims that Jewish people have ultimate control over the world economy.

In 2017, Surveys were undertaken by the Anti-Defamation League in one hundred different countries to determine the attitude towards Jews of the local populace and alarming results were found in Europe. Anti-Jewish attitudes were recorded to be as high as 41 percent in Hungary and a staggering 69 percent in Greece. (Antoniou, Dinas and Kosmidis, 2017)

A theory by Durkheim (1899) explains that Anti-Semitism was possibly used as a coping mechanism in times of financial struggle. When a nation’s economic security is threatened, a ‘scapegoat’ may be used to take the blame from the person who feels victimised, its’ own government and/or ethnic group. In consideration of the Jewish conspiracy of power, this would offer a solution for the puzzling reason why a country like Greece, at the front of the Eurozone crisis, that has no valid political reason or sizable Jewish community would feel such resentment towards a race that doesn’t have a direct connection with everyday Greek life.

This was never more apparent than in Nazi Germany. In the grips of a financial crisis, the Jewish people were an easy target for Hitler’s Nazi party to use as a scapegoat for their political misfortune during what is known as the Third Reich. Adolf Hitler had a deep hatred for the Jews, and convinced almost an entire generation of soldiers, civilians and school children of his ludicrous assertion that the Jewish race were responsible for Germany’s

downfall. He achieved this by hiring a team of propagandists, and whether they wanted to or not, they contributed to the destruction of over six million Jewish lives. These included media and film experts, writers, photographers and indeed, Illustrators. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020)



Figure 1: The NSDPA, (1937)
Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew)

The artists brief was made clear by the ministry of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, and that was to make the Jew appear as ugly and dehumanised as possible, as seen in *The Eternal Jew* (fig.1) a book cover for a heavily discriminatory publication of photographs with derogatory commentary, which even Hitler considered rather brazen, thinking that the subtle approach over time would be more successful. (Bytwerk, 2020)

In the Steven Spielberg (2019) documentary *Why We Hate*, they discuss dehumanisation, and the tactics that have been used to justify genocide to civilians in the past. In the case of the Holocaust, the Jewish nose is used as a focal point in almost every illustrated image, the nose is exaggerated so it appears rat like. The comparison of Jewish people to Vermin is something that is continually reaffirmed to erode the empathy of the German people, for if they no longer see the Jew as human, they no longer see them as capable of human suffering. (*Why We Hate, 2019*) The following quote appears in the publication along with a photograph of rats inhabiting the Jewish Ghettos of Warsaw. The photo is not shared for legal reasons but it has been recorded by David Livingstone.

Where rats appear, they bring ruin by destroying mankind's goods and foodstuffs. In this way they spread disease, plague, and so on. They are cunning, cowardly and cruel and are found mostly in large packs. Among the animals they the rudiment of insidious, underground destruction- Just like the Jews among human beings.

(Livingstone, 2011, p.137)

The most poignant aim of these images is to spread the fear that Jewish people cannot be trusted and that they believe they are above all other races, are sub-human and craving of world domination.



Figure 2: Beekman
(1942)

Rare, maar ware commentaren (Odd, but true comments)

A Dutch publication by the National Socialist Party, which had Nazi sentiments, *Volk En Vaderland*, ran a racial comic strip illustrated by Peter Beekman in 1942, and it was argued by Dutch historian Kees Ribbens (2018) that it was the humour and causality of these throw away illustrations that made it so much easier for the Dutch people to agree with the points made, and that the people of Holland had such little exposure to other races that it was easy to manipulate them into holding racist beliefs. This was indeed the toughest year for the Jews of Holland, with the wearing of the Yellow star of David being made compulsory and eventually the mass deportation to occupied Poland for later extermination. Although it cannot be entirely proved that the cartoon strips directly contributed to the apathy of the local population, it is a factor to be considered. (Ribbens, 2018)



Figure 3: Der Stürmer (1935) *Trau keinem Fuchs auf Grüner Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid* (Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Meadow or the Word of a Jew)

In Figure 3, the cover of Nazi Germany's bestselling children's book 'Don't trust a fox in a green Meadow or the word of a Jew' (translation from German) by propaganda publication house Der Strümer embodies the very emphasis of the party's manifesto- the portrayal of the Jew as ugly and the comparison with untrustworthy vermin, in this case the fox, which is considered to be devil himself in German folklore. This book sold over 100,000 copies at a time when people were poor, and it was circulated around all educational institutions and Hitler Youth clubs.

The book was written and illustrated by a teenage art student, who despite her age and lack of connection to the Nazi party, looked at German folklore and common themes to create a nightmarish piece of propaganda that could go down as one of the most dangerous picture books in history. Child psychologists Prater and Dyches (2008) state that children's

books are an important tool in teaching young people to develop empathy. When the protagonist is placed in a dangerous situation, it is very easy for the viewer to automatically develop negative feelings towards the antagonist. As the antagonist in this book and others like it are continuously Jewish, it is possible to see why the children of the Third Reich were so easily manipulated.

“To remain innocent may also be to remain ignorant.” (Berger, 1972, p. 32)



Figure 4: Rosenthal (1942) *Mickey Au Camp du Gurs*

This common anthropomorphic theme did not go unnoticed by the Jewish people- they couldn't escape from it, just as they couldn't escape the torment that surrounded them, but it was possible for some to use this as a way to reach people, to tell their own truth during this nightmare.

French Illustrator Horst Rosenthal was accused of being Jewish and sent to an internment camp named 'Camp De Gurs' and it was whilst he was there that he reclaimed this connection to vermin and instead, used his illustration skills to create an early graphic novel,

a collection of reportage drawings combined with narratives that featured Mickey Mouse as the main character (without Disney's permission) playing the role of a Jew trapped inside the camp. He named his collection (fig. 4) 'Mickey Au Camp de Gurs.' The comic is a fifteen-page piece of satire, where the surrealistic aspects of such an absurd situation are explored with childlike curiosity. (Pnina, 2002) The fact that it does not try to be clever, or philosophical is exactly what makes this work so effective in its haunting reality, because it ironically becomes both highly intelligent and philosophical. He continued these drawings as a way to make sense of his situation until he was sent to Auschwitz and murdered. It is said that this is the first artistic rendering in which the cartoonist used a mouse as the victim against the perpetrator, as opposed to a rat, which the Nazi propagandists cast as the enemy of non-Jewish people. It is this semiotic reference, a mouse, as something defenceless, small and trapped that opens the viewers eyes to the reality of what is actually happening. (Siegelman 1991)

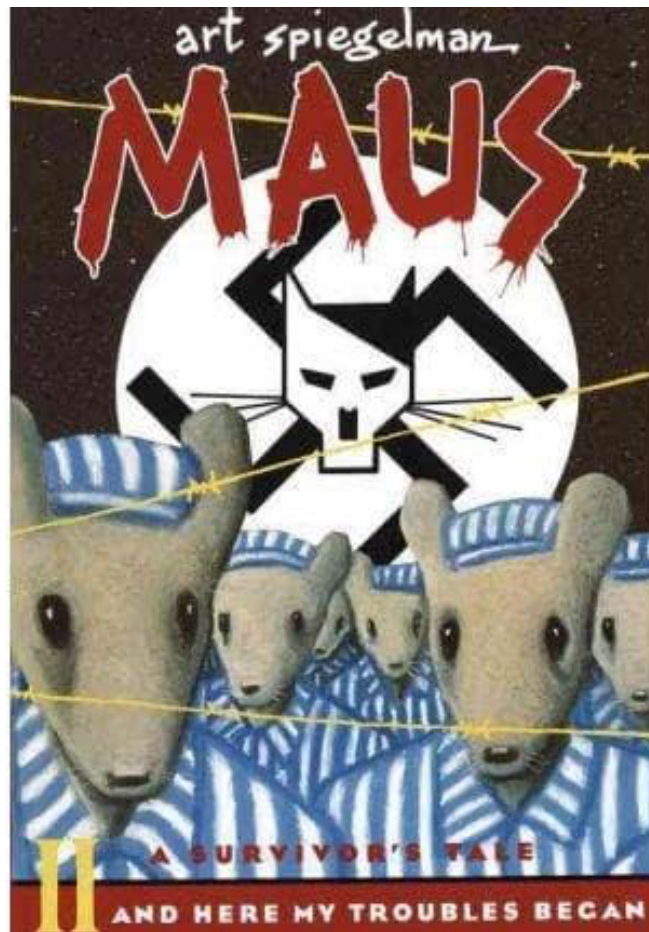


Figure 5: Spiegelman (1992) *MAUS*

It is claimed that Rosenthal's work was the inspiration behind Art Siegelman's world-famous graphic novel, *MAUS* (fig. 5) arguably one of the most important graphic novels of all time. Comprised of a collection of comic strips that appeared in *Raw* magazine, it is a new age graphic novel inspired by the underground scene of the 1970's, a ground-breaking movement in which illustrators were inspired to make their graphic novels deeper in meaning and were more inclined to share their own personal stories. Siegelman felt compelled to share his family story, so that it may never happen again, a biography of his father's time at Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. He, like Rosenthal used the semiotic approach of anthropomorphising the real human characters as cats- the Nazi's, and Mice- the Jews. It is this personal contribution, the minor facts and details that only

someone who was there at the time could know that make *MAUS* so special. (Stromberg, 2012) according to Fredrik Stromberg, it is the ability that mouse has to encourage empathy and tell the horrific truth without scaring the viewer away that makes it a truly unique masterpiece and a vital documentation of Jewish history.

However, *MAUS* has not been received without some criticism, in 2012 Polish-Americans challenged the book and claimed it to be anti-ethnic, by depicting the Polish as pigs, the French as frogs and Gypsies as moths. It could be argued that portraying the Jews as vermin could counteract this, but some believe this to be enough to see *MAUS* removed from libraries. (Pasadena Public Library, 2012) In Russia the sale of *MAUS* was banned as it has a swastika on the front cover, and all items featuring this heinous symbol are forbidden, even though the story is anti-Nazi.

Professor Rob Simon (2015) conducted an experiment in a Canadian school to gage how well adolescent children responded to what he called “problem posing education” by working with grade school teachers to educate children about the holocaust by teaching *MAUS* in their classrooms. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with children not only engaging more thoroughly, but asking more questions and understanding the human impact of the tragedy without ignoring the facts and still allowing room for critical distance. The children were able to identify unfair stereotypes, not just of Jewish people but of the Polish being depicted as pigs. They offered creative activities for the students to reflect on the story and this was deemed to be very therapeutic when faced with such a hard topic to teach, especially when unanswerable questions, such as ‘how can humans do that to each other?’ are asked. In his own words Simon explains the reason why he chose *MAUS* as the graphic novel to teach in grade schools:

MAUS fits perfectly with our larger goal, which is to address injustices and to teach and co-author curriculum through a social justice lens. As we are having this discussion, the traditionally anti-Semitic, far-right Front National is poised to make big gains in France, and the lawful segregation of Roma children in parochial schools is happening in Hungary. We are again at a critical juncture in history and we want to give our students as many tools as possible to be able to affect positive change, each in their own way. (Simon, 2015)

This essay has shown that illustrators have a unique power, the power to kill unconsciously and the power to save without even knowing it (Rhoades, 1976) the responsibility of the illustrator lies within their own ethics and point of view, but just as propaganda was used in the twentieth century, it can be and is still being used today. With social media gaining access to millions of people all around the world it is so important to remember the power that images have. One image that an illustrator posts could be seen by the entire world in minutes, and if containing the wrong message this has the power to cause considerable harm. As Stromberg quotes in his book *Jewish Images in the Comics* "The Holocaust is a human concern and not only a Jewish experience" (p.158) whatever one's religion, or race, or politics, the story of the Jewish people must be learned and taught at a young age. It is a horrific example of the depths of human depravity, and artists like Spielman that have shared their family's personal stories with people, old and young through clever narrative anthropomorphism which allows a sensitive distance whilst telling the truth and there is some evidence to show that by doing this, we could help the world to become a more empathetic place.

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