AfterMaus:

A look into the Afterlife of The Complete Maus

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Introduction: What is Maus?

While comics for the most part up to the 1970s and 80s were made up of Superheroes, the likes of friends such as Archie, and the occasional funny paper; the underground comics scene would try to tell stories in more creative, personal, and risqué ways. In this rose *Maus* starting out as a serialized release in 1980 in Raw magazine Maus would be released as a serialized story that, for the first time, attempted to tell a story through comics about the Holocaust. This story not only encapsulates the way in which Art Spiegelman, son of Holocaust survivor Vladeck and Anja, tells the story of his family's experience through the interview of his father but also the experience of growing up with Holocaust survivors and his growth as an artist. It primarily a story about the Holocaust and secondarily a story about a son and his father. The first volume of Maus a Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History would be published in 1986 with the second volume: And Here My Troubles Began, in 1991 with The Complete Maus released in 1992. With seemingly instant commercial and critical success *Maus* would become a blockbuster in bookstores. The afterlife of Maus shows how this work has evolved from a work of entertainment and storytelling into a classic that's legacy influences aspects of society and the graphic novel medium because, of the way in which it is represented in different institutions and communities.

The Search for Author Intention: Examining MetaMaus

After the commercial and critical success *Maus*, it seemed as if there were more questions than answers. The fact that such a raw story could be depicted in the form of comics seemed to have taken readers by storm and they wanted more. Over the next 20 years since the publishing of *The Complete Maus*, volume I and II, readers and news media alike wanted to

know more specifically the question of why. While readers were left with questions such as what the content of Anja's diary and letters were, there also seemed to have been a discussion and dissection of the book as a whole. Author intention became what readers wanted to know about and for those 20 years after publishing Art seemingly was open to discussing those questions. It wouldn't be until 20 years, in 2011, after the publishing of the second volume of *Maus* that readers would get a print version of those answers in *MetaMaus*, a half interview with the author and half deeper dive into the context of Maus. Not only did *MetaMaus* give readers a look into the process of an artist but also the history of the Spiegelman family. In fact, it is within this look for more that can categorize a classic as such due to its relevancy in the minds and thoughts of the reader.

In addition to this a CD-ROM version of *The Complete Maus* were also snippets of the interviews Art had with his father Vladeck. Art gives readers an explanation for the reason of Mice and animals in the book which dates back to the dehumanization of the Jewish population in Nazi Germany in which Zyklon B, a pesticide for vermin would be used to commit genocide against the Jewish Population, and the propagandic depiction of Jewish people as such. There was also an influence in media with the depiction of animals. Those committing atrocity against the Jews, the Nazis, would be depicted as cats. This decision would be influenced by Tom and Jerry cartoons as well as the power structure of racial oppression that could be illustrated with a cat and mouse metaphor. The same would be said of the polish population that would garner

¹ Art Spiegleman, MetaMaus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 115.

² Art Spiegleman, MetaMaus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 118

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would be represented as animals.

some backlash as they would be depicted as pigs this decision being influenced by Porky Pig.³

This backlash would be protested against by the polish population in America, in which Art would reason that the book did its job at having people assimilate to the past of their people and after the books publishing would be the reason for a ban challenge in a Californian school district.⁴ Within the use of animals it became something that not only grew from a cats and mice metaphor of visualization but also became a part of the aesthetic as many other nationalities

Another question that seemed to be on everyone's mind was, why comics? In doing this Spiegelman goes on to explain that comics are as the *American Heritage Dictionary* puts it, ""a narrative series of cartoons."" Comics are a medium of storytelling that and are treated not only in that way but also as a calculated and scientific process. Equal in art and structure a grid helps Art look at each panel as a word or section of a transcript of an interview in which these panels dependent on size will give readers a time to take in the importance of some aspects. The comic is equal part an art form as it is an emotional storytelling device that seems to want to draw the audience in like other forms of visual media. *MetaMaus* not only gave readers a look into the personal decisions and life of Art Spiegelman but also the gave Maus itself a supplementary document that helps build the foundation that helps a classic reach more meaning in modern study.

³ Art Spiegleman, MetaMaus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 122

⁴ Art Spiegleman, MetaMaus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 124

⁵ Art Spiegleman, MetaMaus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 166

⁶ Art Spiegleman, Meta Maus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 175

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Maus in Schools

Maus as it relates to its afterlife has found a home in the institution of education. Within this institution primary, intermediate, secondary, and post-secondary education. Some have used Maus and graphic novels from an education perspective which changes dependent on the way in which it is examined. The overall popularity and use of Maus has led to the overall spread of other graphic novels in education. Overall though it is most commonly found in middle and high schools with periodically a mention in elementary grades. The sources I selected in this section are meant to reflect the direct impact that Maus has in the institution of education but also the way in which Maus has pushed for the adoption of graphic novels and comics in curriculum.

Jennifer Gonzalez hosted a teacher roundtable which pertained to graphic novels in education with four members of the education profession either then currently or in the past a teacher. Those reported were Alison Walthew, an English teacher in Shanghai; Dr, Michelle Falter, a current English professor at North Carolina State University formerly a middle and high school educator; Beth Gillis, a 6th grade social studies educator from California; and Becky Greenhow, a 4th – 7th grade elementary education from British Columbia.⁷ All of the educators seemed to point to the amount of engagement their students get from graphic novels with one pertaining to the use of Graphic Novels for ELL (English Language Learners also known as English as a Second Language students). Michelle Falter goes on to say about the misconception about Graphic Novels seeming easy saying,

"There is a stereotype that graphic literature is a lesser form of writing. This is absolutely untrue. The tasks and thinking skills required to read a multimodal text are actually

⁷ Jennifer Gonzalez, "Graphic Novels in the Classroom: A Teacher Roundtable," Cult of Pedagogy, October 9, 2016, https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/teaching-graphic-novels/.

higher level than if reading a print-based text alone. You have to see images and words work together, and when and why authors chose to put them together in a frame. I also think people think graphic novels are for ELL or elementary and middle grades students only. Although they are definitely very helpful for these students, this misconception comes from the fact that people see this genre as "easy"—and it is not.".8

Christian Chun from the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy would also write of *Maus's* effectiveness in teaching students who are ESL, "What makes the use of Maus in the classroom so compelling is its intellectually engaging content realized through its visual narrative strategies of representing history." Nearly half of the teachers would end up referring to *Maus* as a favorite when it pertains to their students, but the overall message was that giving students the texts that they enjoy that it overall builds critical reading skills.

As a celebration of *Maus*, the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre released an exhibit focused on *Maus* in 1998. In relation to this Frieda Miller released a teacher guide for *Maus*. This guide focused on *Maus's* application in social studies, language arts, and visual arts education. Within the application of social studies, the guide takes a focus on historical perspectives and with the focus of individuals in the story and how what is shown in the book is either parallel or perpendicular to the history of WW2, the Holocaust, and the groups of people involved. One the focus of Vladek's account the Miller says, "Vladek's personal account reflects

⁸ Jennifer Gonzalez, "Graphic Novels in the Classroom: A Teacher Roundtable," Cult of Pedagogy, October 9, 2016, https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/teaching-graphic-novels/.

⁹ Christian W. Chun, "Critical Literacies and Graphic Novels for English-Language Learners: Teaching Maus," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 53, no. 2 (2009): 147, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40344359.

his particular circumstances, age, personality and country of origin. Yet his unrelenting honesty and unwavering recall provide students with many entry points into the study of the Holocaust including; pre-war Jewish life; the layout and workings of Auschwitz; the euphemistic language particular to Auschwitz; survival and resistance; liberation and the aftermath of war." ¹⁰¹¹ In English education the focus pertains to the use of metaphor and other literary devices. The teacher guide frames the use of *Maus* in the study of language arts as, "As autobiography, expressed through the conversations between father and son, Maus offers English teachers a unique opportunity to analyze form and explore character development and the use of metaphor.", which implements visual arts education frames *Maus* saying, "As a comic book which features the artist as one of the characters, Maus offers art teachers an opportunity to explore style, the artistic process and contemporary cartooning as it relates to issues of social justice.". 12 Spread throughout these subjects are student handouts and sections for teachers to consider. Social studies focuses on Maus as a historical work, language arts focuses on it as a work in character, genre, and metaphor, and visual arts takes a look at the work in graphic novels in both artistic meaning but also how graphics were used in history such as political cartoons.

In the postsecondary sense I will use the application of *Maus* in Hist-H 270 (What is History?) taught by Edward Linenthal at Indiana University and my own experience. This class is mostly taken by students majored in history or secondary social studies education. The overall goal of the course is to examine the practice of history through examining certain historical work

¹⁰ Frieda Miller, *Maus: A Memoir of the Holocaust: Teacher's Guide* (Vancouver: Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, 1997.) 4.

¹² Frieda Miller, *Maus: A Memoir of the Holocaust: Teacher's Guide* (Vancouver: Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, 1997.) 2.

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which Linenthal considers *Maus* to be one of. The syllabus focuses on the use of *Maus* through the aspect of how useful memory is when to history. One such question Linenthal has students consider is, "Do you think "memory" is a constructive or destructive force in MAUS? Or perhaps both?" After reading MAUS students were tasked with writing a 4-5 pg. paper in which they need to examine the way in which the author makes an argument, the evidence they use, what was most challenging in reading the book, and finally why students think it is assigned in the class. 14

Maus as a work is influential in the way that we see graphic novels in education today. Rocco Versaci writes that graphic novels give students the ability to humanize stories through the way in which their visual element are told. 15 Maus is actually noted by name in reference to how it can be used in history. This journal article being published in 2001 means that Maus took precedent in the conversation around graphic novels in education saying, "The most popular no doubt". 16 This focus on graphic novels and comics goes shows the importance of them as tools of engagement but also in developing critical and analytical skills. 17 The overall argument that

¹³ Edward Linenthal, H270 Course Outline/ MAUS Questions (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2020) 7.

¹⁴ Edward Linenethal, H270 Course Outline/ MAUS Questions (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2020) 6.

¹⁵ Rocco Versaci, "How Comic Books Can Change the Way Our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective," The English Journal 91, no. 2 (2001): 62, https://doi.org/10.2307/822347.

¹⁶ Rocco Versaci, "How Comic Books Can Change the Way Our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective," The English Journal 91, no. 2 (2001): 63, https://doi.org/10.2307/822347.

¹⁷ Rocco Versaci, "How Comic Books Can Change the Way Our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective," The English Journal 91, no. 2 (2001): 64, https://doi.org/10.2307/822347.

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Versaci makes is that comics in education diversify the stories told, engage students, and break down misconceptions of a valueless education because of the type of work used. ¹⁸

Not everyone is as supportive of *Maus* in school though as there have been multiple calls to ban the text for different reasons. As we have seen already how members of the Polish community have reacted to the work, in 2022 the work was banned in a Tennessee school district. On January 10th, 2022 the McMinn County School Board voted to remove the text from its schools citing pornographic materials and language. ""It shows people hanging, it shows them killing kids, why does the educational system promote this kind of stuff? It is not wise or healthy," School Board Member Tony Allman said about the book, which was part of the district's eighth-grade English language arts curriculum."¹⁹ This reflects the ideology in the push to ban certain materials in schools as it relates to controversial topics such as depicting violence in historical events. While *Maus* does include a naked woman and vulgar language, Julie Gooden says it helps students learn about the horrors of history.²⁰ As an ironic result of this ban *The Complete Maus* shot up to the top of Amazon's bestselling books.²¹ This ban with the plan of

¹⁸ Rocco Versaci, "How Comic Books Can Change the Way Our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective," The English Journal 91, no. 2 (2001): 66, https://doi.org/10.2307/822347.

¹⁹ Associated Press, "Holocaust Novel "Maus" Banned in Tennessee School District," PBS, January 27, 2022, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/holocaust-novel-maus-banned-intennessee-school-district.

²⁰ Associated Press, "Holocaust Novel "Maus" Banned in Tennessee School District," PBS, January 27, 2022, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/holocaust-novel-maus-banned-intennessee-school-district.

²¹ Alejandra O'Connell-Domenech, "'Maus' rises to top of Amazon's bestseller list after Tennessee ban," The Hill, January 31, 2022, https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/arts-culture/592121-maus-rises-to-top-of-amazons-bestseller-list-after/

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restricting access to this text ironically has increased access for others and the community itself.

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Ryan Higgins, a bookstore owner in California, as a result of the ban sent 100 free copies of the book saying of the availability of the book that, "Everyone is sold out. Amazon was out of stock... Our distributor, Penguin Random House, said, 'We are just seeing unprecedented activity on this book." This in turn reflects the way in which a piece when banned for considerably unrealistic measures is reacted to. Higgins as a result has expanded to giving away more graphic novels due to the impact that *Maus* has had on him.

Maus has also been the focus of many scholars in post-secondary institutions. This shows *Maus* as a piece of text that has evolved into a work that is meant to be studied. Considering the way in which Feba Chacko's study of psychology, as well as Deborah Geis's collection of essays in *Considering Maus*.

Feba Chacko focuses on the trauma response as it relates to the transition of trauma-based experiences within families. As it relates to how Art took in the trauma Chacko states, "Art resents the suffocating love of his parents, as it stifles his identity and being overall. This disguised or skewed perception of emotion contributes to how the second-generation intakes the trauma from their parents." This perception in tandem with his survivors' guilt of both his

²² Jim Harrington, "South Bay comic book store owner fights ban of Holocaust graphic novel." Mercury News, February 8th, 2022, https://www.mercurynews.com/2022/02/08/comic-book-store-owner-fights-ban-of-holocaust-graphic-novel/

²³ Feba Chacko, "The Psychological Effects of Transmitted Trauma Depicted inArt Spiegelman's Maus and Anne Michaels's Fugitive Pieces," *TCJN Journal of Student Scholarship* 22, (2020): 3, https://joss.tcnj.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/176/2020/04/2020-Chacko-Corrected.pdf.

mothers' death and his father's experience in the holocaust are analyzed by Chacko from a psychology perspective.

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One such collection of essays exists which is curated by Deborah Geis called Considering Maus. Through a collection of three parts and eight essays a collection of authors touch on *Maus* as an important work that can be dissected surgically by the words and analysis of others. Going through Maus two things become apparent the personal experience of a storyteller and *Maus* as a piece of Holocaust memorial, perhaps as it relates to this essay in which the Afterlife of Maus is the focus a contrast to it in which it is a telling of the history in the creation of book and its multiple meanings. The main aspects and themes that are touched upon are the relations found within Maus, the work as a piece of holocaust history, and finally the access forms such as CD-ROM that is used to introduce the work to readers.²⁴ It is important to consider the implication of CD-ROM at the time of this collections publishing in 2003 as it would be common rather than the commonality of e-books we have today. For it to be considered on such a platform not only reflected the popularity of the work itself but also how Maus was incorporated into the rise in technology and its relation to the book industry. Considering Maus is one of the important collection of essays because of its status in cementing Maus as something that is studied in a post-secondary institution. This would be one of the works, the other being *MetaMaus*, that Edward Linenthal would recommend as secondary reading in "What is History?" as it has become something that improves the work of Maus as a whole.25

²⁴ Deborah Geis, *Considering Maus* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2003)

²⁵ Edward Linenethal, H270 Course Outline/ MAUS Questions (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2020) 5.

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Maus as an Artifact in the Jewish Community

As *Maus* continued to grow and evolve it seemingly found itself a home in the Jewish community. Within acceptance of the Jewish community it seemingly was accepted in America while there were some backlash from Israelite Jews who didn't care for the depiction of mice, this however never got to the point of protests as it were from the Polish community. As it relates to the story of its foundation it is a story about Art Spiegelman's family's experience in the Holocaust told through interviews with his father and as a connection a story about Art himself in growing up as a child of Holocaust survivors. It is unique in the sense that this artifact can be considered one of the first as another generation of Holocaust stories, those told from the children of Holocaust survivors. As those who survived the Holocaust begin to pass away the history, they have lived passes with them to be continued to be told through their primary documentation. This has become something that only continues to become reality. Not only does Maus document one of these primary stories of the Holocaust but it also brings to light the experience as a child of Holocaust survivors and what it is like to be raised by them.

Remembrance has become an important topic for those in the Jewish community. Seth Moller is a Master Student in Jewish Studies as well as a TA for *Jew, Christians, and Muslims* at Indiana University who said that while, "I am hesitant to say anything generalizing about Judaism. However, memory and narrative are important themes in the academic study of Judaism ... I'll direct you toward a passage from the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 137. It tells about the Israelite exile in Babylon and the importance of song and memory."²⁷ Further research pointed

²⁶ Art Spiegleman, MetaMaus (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.) 125

²⁷ Seth Moller, email message to author, April 11, 2022

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me towards the Rosenfeld Community of Practice who had created educational materials for Jewish students. The Rosenfeld Community of Practice from the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development is committed to teaching and providing resources that reflect Jewish values some of those being remembrance and connected generations. Zachor is the idea of memory and remembrance used for the remembrance of Jewish history such as the Holocaust in which they cite scripture that says, ""Remember (zakhor) the days, consider the years of ages past; ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you (Deuteronomy 32:7).""²⁸ This idea of memory and remembrance is important as it is reflected in Jewish traditions and holidays such as Hanukkah and Yom Kippour.

Through the idea of remembrance *Maus* has seemingly cemented its status as a piece of Holocaust literature with John Roth, author of *Holocaust Literature* a book that is a catalogue of works and their brief summaries, saying "Unconventional though it may be, Maus has interpreted the Holocaust for many readers who might never have approached more conventional histories." James Young would also write about it in their collection of essays about art representations of the Holocaust in *At Memory's Edge*. Within this remembrance Young points to *Maus* not only as a work for the Holocaust but also a work in the perspective of Art Spiegelman and the way in which two stories are told that of the father and the way in which the son tells it. Young focuses more on the way in which the Holocaust is portrayed by Spiegelman

²⁸ Rosenfeld Community of Practice, "Remember!," Rosenfeld Community of Practice, University of Miami, 2019, https://www.jewishlearningmatters.com/AC2-Remember-851.aspx

²⁹ John Roth, *Holocaust Literature* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2008), 320-321.

³⁰ James Young, At Memory's Edge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 15,23.

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through the medium of comics and the way in which the perspective of Art influences the way in which the story is told as a secondary artifact of a primary account of a story.

The Legacy of Maus and Graphic Novels

As it relates to the legacy of *Maus* as a work its impact can be found in the graphic novel medium, its currency, and representations in other forms of media, and the awards that it has amassed. Maus has helped revolutionize the way in which graphic novels have adapted as a storytelling device. Perhaps no other year would be more important for graphic novels than 1986. While it was a periodical release within the subjects of the first volume it wouldn't be until 1986 that the first volume would be released in bookstores rather than a comic store that helped pave the way for comics and graphic novels in bookstores.³¹ This release in 1986 would be in parallel with comic greats alike such as *Watchmen* and *Batman the Dark Knigh,t* that were also released in the same year. Micheal Canva would go to call *Maus* the greatest graphic novel ever written as it revolutionized and seemingly created the term graphic novel as it was an inspiration to many of those who would become the next generation of those who would create graphic novels such as Jeff Smith, who met Spiegelman at Ohio State University to creator of *Bone* who said, "Nobody had ever seen anything like it."³² While not the first way in which comics could tell autobiographical tales Andrew Kunka says, "To say that Maus's impact on comics in general and

³¹ Tom Bondurant, "1986: A Guide to Comics' Most Important Year, Ever" CBR, November 13, 2016, https://www.cbr.com/1986-a-guide-to-comics-most-important-year-ever/

³² Michael Canva, "Why 'Maus' remains 'the greatest graphic novel ever written,' 30 years later" The Washington Post, August 11, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2016/08/11/why-maus-remains-the-greatest-graphic-novel-ever-written-30-years-later/

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autobiographical comics in particular was significant is a gross understatement. Spiegelman's work is an important historical touchstone that continues to influence comics today, especially in the public reception and acceptance of comics as a literary form and in the topics and themes that creators choose to pursue in comics form."³³ It can be observed such as a large amount of autobiographic graphic novels today such as *Grass*, *March*, and *Persepolis*.

While there is a large amount of praise there has been some critique of the work. We have already examined the ban in a Tennessee school district the scale would reach an international stage when it was banned in Russia. Due to a new law that was passed at the time Russian bookstores removed all copies of Maus for the inclusion of a swastika because of the nature of which the law considered all swastikas to be Nazi Propaganda as would be the same sense when Spiegelman had to work around a potential ban in Germany when first publishing his book.³⁴ Due to the influence of Maus Xavier Löwenthal would release Katz which would protest the "fatalism of Maus. Maus showed the Nazis as cats and the Jews as mice, their natural prey; changing all the characters to cats, the anonymous author argues, makes the point that no such natural division exists among humans.", by replacing all the mice with cats, which would later be struck down due to copyright.³⁵ While this is a more negative representation in media there have also been modern positive representations such as representation within a *Simpsons* skit.

³³ Andrew Kunka, Autobiographical Comics (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 46

³⁴ Lauren Gambino, "Art Spiegleman Warns of 'dangerous' outcome as Russia shop bans Maus" The Guardian, April 28, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/28/art-spiegelmanrussia-maus-bookstores-holocaust

³⁵ Brigid Alverson, "Katz v. Maus: Counterfiet or Critique? [Updated]" CBR, March 8, 2012, https://www.cbr.com/katz-v-maus-counterfeit-or-critique-updated/#comment-87447

Perhaps no other place can be a testimony to the legacy of Maus than the accolades it has received over its lifetime. Most notably of these are the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in Special Letters which had categorized it as a fictional work, due to the depiction of animals, which was later reversed by the committee. It is arguable that Maus is the reason why Art Spiegelman would be the first cartoonist to receive the MacDowell Medal Award.³⁶ Not only has it amassed countless awards it also is ranked highly in lists by Time such as 7th in all time nonfiction books³⁷ and 4th in top 10 graphic novels.³⁸

Conclusion

Maus's afterlife from narrative story to cemented classic is illustrated as such due to the way in revolutionized the graphic novel medium through bringing seriousness in storytelling to an oftentimes trivialized medium. This afterlife is reflected not only into further looks into the author intention with MetaMaus but also its utilization and impact on the institution of education. Maus has become an artifact within the Jewish community as a work that reflects the value of memory not only as a piece of Holocaust memorial but also a representation of the offspring of Holocaust survivors. Finally, the afterlife is reflected in a legacy of awards and recognition in media and the impact of graphic novels. Maus revolutionized the way in which we read and

³⁶ Michael Canva, "'Maus' Creator Art Spiegelman is the First Comic to Receive the MacDowell Medal." The Washington Post, August 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2018/08/12/maus-creator-art-spiegelman-receives-first-macdowell-award-for-comic-art/

³⁷ Alexandra Silver, "All-Time 100 Nonfiction Books" Time, August 17, 2011, https://entertainment.time.com/2011/08/30/all-time-100-best-nonfiction-books/slide/maus-by-art-spiegelman/maus-by-art-spiegelman.

³⁸ Lev Grossman, "Top 10 Graphic Novels" Time, March 5, 2009, https://entertainment.time.com/2009/03/06/top-10-graphic-novels/slide/maus/

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interpret comics and graphic novels and will undoubtably continue to thrive as a classic akin to
that of the literacy classics we are all used to.

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