The Hero, the Anti-hero, and the Jew in Graphic Trauma Narratives

Kimberly E. Daly

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Popular graphic narratives often depict stories of survival, of growing up, of the difficulties of self-identification, of the personal traumas that we live with from day to day, and the larger traumas that follow us throughout our lives. Integral to the livelihood of this art form are the mainly Jewish artists who have been responsible for the development of comics in late 1930's through to the present day. Through an analysis of Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay,* Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and *Epileptic* by David B., this thesis explores the common historical, traditional, theoretical, and philosophical themes brought to the graphic form by artists who identify with Jewishness.

Les romans graphiques populaires illustrent souvent des histories de survie, de croissance, des troubles d'identités, des traumatismes personnels que l'on subit de jour en jour, et les traumatismes sociaux qui nous poursuivent au long de notre vie. Intégrale à l'essor de cette forme d'art sont les artistes majoritairement Juif qui ont étés responsables pour le développement des bandes dessinés vers la fin des années 1930s jusqu'aujourd'hui. Grâce à l'analyse de Michael Chabon's « The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay », Art Spielgelman's « Maus » et « l'Ascension du Haut Mal » par David B., cette thèse explore les thèmes communs — historiques, traditionnels, théorétiques et philosophiques — qui sont portés au médium graphique par des artistes qui identifient avec la Judaïté.

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Introduction

In *From Krakow to Krypton*, a detailed history of Jews in comics from 1933 to the present, Arie Kaplan credits Art Spiegelman with making "Jewish-themed graphic novels…more common than ever before. And their status as educational resources in schools and libraries ensures that the comics industry will someday gain the respect and artistic legitimacy it has long desired" (207). Indeed, since the publication of the first installment of Spiegelman's biographical fable *Maus: My Father Bleeds History* in 1986 graphic novels have become a more common part of the literary canon. The subsequent publication of *Maus: And Here My Troubles Began* in 1991, and the 1992 Pulitzer Prize awarded to the entire project (Kaplan 214), the first ever awarded to a graphic novel, solidified this status for Spiegelman and *Maus*, paving the way for this genre of comics as a whole. More and more literary scholars in the 21st century are championing graphic narrative in the halls and libraries of academia, scholars are specializing in the subject, courses are being taught, books being published, and academic journals like *MFS* and *ELN* are dedicating issues to comics.

Thankfully, there is little question left over the legitimacy of graphic narrative as worthy of academic study. As William Kuskin writes in one of his graphic introductory essays in *Graphia: The Graphic Novel and Literary Studies* (the Fall/Winter 2008 edition of *English Language Notes*), "Comics raise central issues about identity, authorship, form, genre, social relations…why lock them in a box?" (75). Yet the debate over the place of graphic novels in literary studies still rages today; one cannot assume that all those who find scholarly pursuits in literary studies are in agreement with the cultural position of graphic novels. Even

this three-page short by Kuskin, entitled “Pilgrimage to the MLA” addresses the issue, with the main character, Jared, defending his choice of comics as a dissertation topic to what seems to be the bureaucratic literature police at the MLA conference: ‘You’ve wasted your education young man! Cultural studies are dead,” the literature police proclaim to Jared, who defensively replies “Uh…I don’t do cultural studies…In my dissertation I read literature!” There are cracks even within some of the strongest arguments made by the most established scholars of graphic narrative who champion this medium as a part of literary studies. Certainly graphic narrative can be read as a part of literary studies, but it may benefit scholars to keep in mind that this is not the only way to read graphic narrative, to keep aware that there are certain drawbacks to this approach, and to understand that the inclusion of graphic narrative in literary studies may not necessarily be the epitome of academic inquiry into the medium.

Jan Baetens also explores the position of comics in literary studies in this issue of *ELN*, in an article entitled “Graphic Novels: Literature Without Text?” Baetens asks “why this discussion matters not for the graphic novel but for literature itself” (82), exploring “its possibilities of being read as a thorough example of literariness in the graphic novel” (81). Baetens’ argument highlights the “ask not what you, as a scholar, can do for comics studies, but what comics studies can do for literary studies” mentality currently prevalent in the ivory tower. This article also emphasizes the hierarchy of comics within academia, which almost exclusively places the comprehensive, book-length, bound graphic novel over any other form of comic, including the more common installment form on which many graphic novels are based. Baetens feels that “the risk of stressing

the impact of the installment form within the final book format […] might be that the graphic novel avoids exploring longer narrative forms that help distinguish it from the world of the gag strip as well as that of the short story, which tend to be seen as less ambitious and therefore less literary that the world of the novel" (82). Basically, the risk of exploring the nuances of comics, including the origin of many popular graphic novels as installments, is that it might reveal that much of graphic narrative cannot always be considered literary or high culture.

Another scholar who has made a particularly strong claim on graphic narrative for literary studies in recent years is Harvard Junior fellow Hilary Chute. Though Chute has done much to advance the position of graphic narrative in the eyes of the academy, her general argument of graphic narrative as literary studies can be problematic. Chute's article "Comics as Literature" (*PMLA,* 2008) claims that "even in this early incarnation, comics was understood as an antielitist art form" (455). However, she spends the rest of the page defending an elitist history for this so called anti-elitist art form, comparing the medium of comics to the elite, literary friendly genre of modernist fiction, despite the fact that comics were "marked from the beginning by [their] commodity status," a general crime against any subject claiming to be elite enough for ivory tower consideration. Chute quickly rectifies this by calling attention away from comics' mass market appeal:

> However, it is still largely unrecognized that the comics in the first decades of the twentieth century was both a mass-market product and one that influenced and was influenced by avant-garde practices, especially those of Dada and surrealism (Gopnik and Varnedoe; Inge). It is also little known that in the late 1930s, while comic books began their ascent on the

> back of *Superman*, the first modern graphic narratives, called "wordless novels," had already appeared: beautifully rendered woodcut works—in some cases marketed as conventional novels—that almost entirely served a socialist agenda and that incorporated experimental practices widely associated with literary modernism. (455)

In this portion of text, Chute calls out two major components inherent to graphic narrative, and then seems to immediately disregard them as unimportant. First, she attempts to ignore the importance of their status as a mass-market product. In order to elevate an art form, to be able to call something elite or sophisticated, it is often necessary to limit it to a group of people themselves made elite by social status or, more likely in this case, level of education. Since comics began as a mass-produced product accessible to everyone from children to GIs to the Dadaists and Surrealists of Greenwich village, and continue to be mass-produced today as a result of the commodification of art, it is extremely difficult to argue for their status as anything else but a completely accessible art form. Though not every reader of comics is qualified or even interested in studying them, almost anyone could and can read and enjoy comics, setting them apart from modernist fiction or avant-garde art and making them a different, more accessible kind of cultural icon.

Secondly, by forgoing the ascent of Superman in the late 1930s for the "beautifully rendered woodcut works" with their "almost entirely…socialist agenda," Chute gives the impression that early Superman comics somehow had less influence on the form of the comic book, or at least that their influence is less important than that of their high art counterparts. She also erroneously assumes

that early Superman comics did not serve an agenda that was equally liberal. After all, Superman and his counterparts began as the great avenger of slum tenements and gang violence, and proceeded to defend America in World War II, specifically against Hitler's racially motivated attacks.

Chute chooses to focus on a more elite lineage of graphic novel in this article as well as others:

> Rodolphe Töpffer established the conventions of modern comics in Switzerland, such as panel borders and the combined use of words and images, he specifically described his work as drawing on two forms—the novel, and the "picture-stories" of [eighteenth century Englishman William] Hogarth. We may trace this productive building on and refiguration of the genre right up to today's graphic narrative (*MFS*, 2006, 769).

Though this history is undeniably important, Chute consciously elects to "not emphasize the development of the commercial comic-book industry, which is dominated by two superhero-focused publishers, Marvel and DC" (*PMLA*, 455), and by doing so, she consciously chooses to ignore the anti-elitist history of this anti-elitist art form. This is extremely problematic; if one were to survey graphic narrative today they would observe a phenomenon for which Chute's chosen lineage of Töpffer and Hogarth is not specifically responsible. Comics and graphic narrative are and have always been a medium that caters to marginalized people, a fact that the development of the commercial comic-book industry emphasizes.

Arie Kaplan focuses on this particular history in his book, mentioning in his final chapter that

> "minorit[ies are] making their voices heard in comics: black comics creators like Aaron MacGruder, Kyle Baker, Keith Knight, Barbara Brandon, Ho Che Anderson, and Dwayne McDuffie are seeing their stories told; so are gay and lesbian cartoonists like Howard Cruse, Roberta Gregory, Eric Shanower, and Ariel Shrag; Asian comics pros like Jim Lee, Frank Cho, Adrian Tomine, Stan Sakai, and Lela Lee are going strong, and Latino comic book creators like the Hernandez Brothers (Gilbert, Jaime, and Mario), Rafael Navarro, Yvonne Mijuca, Rhode Montijo, and Spain Rodriguez are making their voices heard (207).

However, the main focus of Kaplan's book is the minority that made the comics industry boom in the early part of the 20th century, and continues to produce significant contributions to graphic narrative today: the Jews. The focus of this thesis is to explore the influence of the Jews on graphic narrative by taking a close look at the Jewish artists of the Golden Age of comics, the themes they imposed on their work, and how this influence carries through to the graphic narrative today through an exploration of the work of Art Spiegelman, Michael Chabon, and David B.

Maus was by no means the first, and it is not the only comic that borrows heavily from and adds significantly to a tradition of Jewishness. Indeed, Rabbi Simcha Weinstein dedicates his book *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!* to the history of the early comic book industry, which "actively hired Jews, who were largely excluded from more 'legitimate' illustration work" (21-22), and to the young

Jewish artists who created well known superheroes in the late 1930's, like Superman, Batman, and Captain America, to name a few. These original Jewish superheroes were a reaction by their creators to the rampant anti-Semitism sweeping the world and "the shadow of persecution…descending upon European Jews" (16). While the bulk of today's graphic novels do not necessarily concern themselves specifically with the same type of superhero, they still "explore the human condition in general (and Jewish…identity in particular) through the eyes of their Job-like antiheroes" (17), like Vladek and Artie Spiegelman.

The Jew's position as an ethnic outsider or other has played a significant role in the creation and development of the graphic genre. In this thesis, I intend to explore other postmodern graphic narratives that continue to address themes of Jewishness. As my primary texts I will focus specifically on Michael Chabon's novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), an historical fiction on early Jewish comic book writers, and David B.'s graphic novel *Epileptic* (2005), as well as Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986/1991), since it is of undeniable influence to the genre of Jewish graphic fiction. The use of *Epileptic* is also especially important in terms of the tradition of Jewishness in graphic fiction. Though David, originally named Pierre-Francois, is not raised in the Jewish faith, his deep connection to the Jew as outsider is what inspires him to change his name, choosing to name himself after the king, warrior, and poet of the Old Testament. Though this connection is touched upon throughout the story of David's life, it is solidified upon his reading of Gustav Meyrinck's *The Golem*, which he describes as "my very first grown-up book" (B. 183). This book marks an important realization for David and a turning point in his artistic life,

"Suddenly it seems obvious to me. Only fantasy books can make sense of the skewed reality in which I live" (184). This Jewish text impacts the fantastical, escapist art David begins to produce at this point, the very art found in *Epileptic* itself.

My exploration of the Jewish imprint on contemporary graphic fiction is divided into three main topics. I will first discuss the Jewish influence on the history of the form itself, focusing specifically on the development of the super hero in the late 1930's. Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* discusses this phenomenon implicitly, as it follows the young Josef Kavalier, a recent escapee from Nazi-occupied Prague, and his Jewish-American cousin from Brooklyn, Sam Clay, as they develop the superhero persona of "The Escapist," an escape artist who not only attempts to fight injustice, but, as Sammy suggests, "*frees* the world of it. He *frees* people, see? He comes in the darkest hour. He watches from the shadows" (Chabon 121). The need for empowerment at this particularly powerless time in Jewish history is clear, but the creation of the superhero fosters an interesting dynamic best described in Nietzschean terms as that of the Übermensch/ Üntermensch. Though these super-powered masked heroes gave American Jews a sense of power through art, and the financial freedom that came along specifically with this kind of commercial art, there is also a "mirror image fascism inherent in [the] anti-fascist superman" (204). Not only do superheroes have a fascist sensibility inherent within them due to their great strength and near invincibility, but their mythical status can also be oppressive to their creators, as it is unclear whether they can, as artistic productions and money making endeavors, exact any political change, or any change at all beyond that of temporary personal catharsis.

Though Joe fights Nazis through his comic book art, he is unable to save his family from the impending Final Solution. Though Vladek Spiegelman makes it through the Holocaust with amazing resourcefulness, a super power in its own right, this resourcefulness also weighs on and oppresses his son, Artie. And though David B.'s brother, Jean-Christophe, suffers the daily trauma of Epilepsy, David and his family also become oppressed by his illness, while Jean-Christophe identifies with fascist leaders as a means of claiming power over his own life. Nietzsche's theory of the Übermensch comes into play here, both in the philosophical sense of what makes the idea of the superhero so fascinating and frightening, as well as the historical sense of how these theories were used by fascists in Europe at the very time the superhero was gaining popularity in America. Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of aesthetics over ethics is relevant to the postmodern graphic genre, to which both ethics and aesthetics are key. This is especially relevant to these contemporary examples since, as Clifford G. Christians states in *Ethical Communications: Moral Stances in Human Dialogue*, "what Nietzsche thought in the nineteenth century…as a matter of fact has happened and is true of the twentieth-century in the West" (65-6), aesthetics have begun to dominate over ethics. Yet these works, which are presented in the especially aesthetically focused genre of comics, are addressing ethical issues. I would like to further explore the notion of whether what Nietzsche thought in the nineteenth century has in fact become the standard of artistic production today, or whether the anti-elitist qualities of the graphic genre enables the breakdown of the hierarchy of aesthetics over ethics, bringing both to the foreground.

In my second chapter, I discuss the superhero further, this time elaborating on the superhero as Golem. The Golem, an ancient Jewish superhero of sorts, finds its way into the works of both Chabon and B. Indeed, when Joe Kavalier is first asked to draw a superhero, it takes the shape of a Golem, as he feels that "To me, this Superman is…maybe…only an American Golem" (86). While Chabon was working on *Kavalier and Clay*, DC Comics released a special issue of *Action Comics* in which Clark Kent travels to a pre-war Polish shtetl where he meets Moishe and Baruch (who are, like Chabon's characters Sam Clay and Josef Kavalier, loosely based on original Superman creators Siegel and Schuster), from whom he learns that "The Golem was a statue that came to life when the written word of God was put in its mouth. He would become a fearsome mighty creature that would drive away enemies and save the people!" (Weinstein 31). It is also the Golem that inspires David to take the fantastical, escapist route with his artwork, and his own Golem continues to visit him throughout his life. The idea of the Golem in comic books is essential, as it provides groundwork for the superhero, while emphasizing the Jewish tradition that went along in creating the art form. The Golem represents the seed of the fascist/anti-fascist dichotomy inherent in the superhero. An aesthetic creation itself, Golems of legend, created to protect Jewish people, often tread the fine line between properly utilizing the protective powers with which they are endowed, and taking these powers to a level of destruction and mayhem.

Chapter 3 addresses the sense of guilt omnipresent in these three works, especially as it is related to the success of commercial art. This chapter delves into the representations of capital gain versus art in the struggle to avoid or offset the

traumatic experiences that recur in each of these works. This chapter will further expand on the two sides of working through trauma via comic art, that of artistic creation versus that of commercial gain. Both provide the traumatized creator with a means of escape, yet as Michael Chabon suggests in his essay "Secret Skin: An Essay in Unitard Theory," the working through of trauma is not always simply about escape, but also about transformation (14). The ability to successfully work through trauma is the mark of this transformation. As a traditionally commercial art form, comics are addressed by Chabon, B., and Spiegelman as a means to make money. All three also emphasize the need for artistic purity to attempt any cathartic process. Yet in the end, it is unclear whether capitalist gain or artistic integrity is more effective in providing agency or closure to a traumatic experience, or whether either can positively intervene in a traumatic situation at all. I will explore how, in each of the texts I have chosen, the creation of art and financial success can complicate this process, simultaneously facilitating and hindering it, working with and against each other in one's attempt to escape trauma, a task which may always seem futile. Guilt, an emotion that is paradoxically foreign to the stoically advanced übermensch, becomes closely entangled with the trauma discussed in each work, which is largely experienced second hand. This trauma consumes all those who come into contact with it, much like it does in *Maus*, effectively revealing the üntermensch dimension of each of these works. The question that begs to be explored in this circumstance is whether trauma can ever be escaped, and how this is done through the creation of comics. David, Artie, and Joe all turn to comics in an attempt to work through their respective traumatic experiences. David's escape through comic books is two-

fold. Though he turns to drawing and story making throughout his life as a way to escape from a reoccurring trauma that he is powerless against, he also uses his skills as a comic artist to leave his parent's country home for a Parisian art school and to achieve success in his own life through the creation of the alternative comics publisher l'Association. Artie turns to comics to make sense of the major trauma suffered by his parents during the Holocaust. But he questions his ability to comprehend or represent their tragedy. Furthermore, he feels an overwhelming sense of guilt over the massive commercial and critical success of his comic. Joe turns to comics before the war to work through the frustration he feels because of his inability to help his family escape the increasingly hopeless situation in Prague. Like David, this attempt is also two-fold. It serves as a means of giving agency to Joe in his seemingly helpless position. Joe also looks to the creation of the Escapist for the more practical means of financial empowerment. After these endeavors prove fruitless, Joe once again turns to the creation of comics to work through the trauma of losing his whole family; this time by creating a 2,256 page comic book entitled "*The Golem.*"

In addressing these issues, I intend to give voice to the impact of Jewishness in the creation and continued success of the graphic genre, beyond the vast body of critical work on Spiegelman's *Maus*. I aim to prove that this impact is undeniable and widespread. It moves throughout history, back through the tradition of the Golem story, through the early creation of the superhero during the 30's and 40's, and well into the 21st century, effecting Jewish and non-Jewish comic artists alike.

CHAPTER I: The Hero as Üntermensch - Cycles of Freedom and Oppression

"There was Mothman and The Silhouette and The Comedian and there was me, all of us choosing to dress up in gaudy opera costumes and express the notion of good and evil in simple, childish terms, while over in Europe they were turning human beings into soap and lampshades." (Moore, "Under the Hood" III, 7)

"Like many narratives about the Jewish people, this is the story of a tradition. A tradition that was handed down from one generation to the next. Only in this case, that tradition is comics. (As opposed to, say, textiles)." (Kaplan xiv)

The development of the super hero in the late 1930s, and the subsequent commercial popularization of the comic book during that period, often referred to as the golden age of comics, was a phenomenon largely led by Jewish artists, writers, and publishers. The reason for this is quite simple: faced with racial prejudice and unable to get work in the fields of commercial art considered more legitimate, like advertising, Jews took work in the less respectable, and hence more accessible, field of comics. This particular history of comics is, therefore, as Kaplan points out, "a reflection of Jews' changing status in American society. Early Jewish cartoonists, street kids with no formal artistic training, wrote and drew comic books to feed their families. It came from an instinct for survival" (xiv). A survey of some of the early creations of artists and writers like Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, or Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, reveals that the instinct for survival from which these creations sprung was not just that of personal survival. Though Superman has been known to beat up a slum lord or two, to champion for

the poor, largely immigrant neighborhoods susceptible to unlivable conditions and gang violence, he also speaks to the survival and upward mobility of an entire culture.

The fight for survival certainly extends beyond the private and personal, as superheroes like Superman and Captain America began to lend a hand to the war effort, pitting themselves against forces aiming to destroy the Jewish population of Europe, as well as generally reflecting the situation of European Jews. Simcha Weinstein points out a particularly striking example of this in his book on Jews in comics, *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!*:

> Living in a country that had stripped them of their citizenship yet perversely obstructed their exit, German Jews resorted to desperate measures. Just as the baby Superman was sent away from Krypton to avoid the mass destruction of his people, many Jewish children were sent on the Kindertransports to seek safety with families in England. (24)

Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* discusses this implicitly. When Josef Kavalier and Sam Clay begin to develop the superhero persona of "The Escapist," their instinct for survival and motivation for success in the field of comics is multifarious. When the novel begins, Joe and Sammy are two young men sharing a small room in their aunt/mother Ethel Klayman's Brooklyn apartment. Sammy works as an inventory clerk for a novelty firm, with only an occasional opportunity to "do a pasteup for an ad. Or when they add a new item to the line, I get to do the illustration. For that, they pay me two dollars per." Sammy is clearly embarrassed by "the menial nature of his position at Empire Novelties" (Chabon 9), which is far beneath his ambitions. He longs to

impress his bosses, Sheldon Anapol and Jack Askenazy, to fill his skeptical mother with pride, to prove his worth as an artist and writer among his contemporaries at Palooka Studios, who have already broken into the business, and perhaps most importantly, to prove to himself his own worth. Sammy seeks his own version of the American Dream in comics, which, in the first part of the novel, is especially centered on commercial success. Though Sammy is gifted with a typewriter, he does not receive any artistic satisfaction from his work in the pulps, or comics, and later on in the narrative he moons over the first chapter of his novel *American Disillusionment*, longing to be successful in a more respected medium.

While Sammy pursues his American Dream, Joe's motivation, the impending doom of his entire family, follows him from Prague. Though Joe longs to impress the beautiful Rosa Saks, his primary concern is the survival of his family, the procurement of elusive exit visas and their safe passage from Prague to New York. Because of his bond with Joe, Sammy also takes up this cause, promising "to sell a million copies of this thing and make a pile of money, and you are going to be able to take that pile of money and pay what you need to pay to get your mother and father and brother and grandfather out of there and over here, where they will be safe" (136). Joe works tirelessly, saving all the money he makes from drawing "The Escapist" and taking jobs performing magical acts at Bar Mitzvahs for the sons of rich West Side families, who sympathize with "a homeless Jewish boy who had somehow managed to get out from under the shadow of the billowing black flag that was unfurling across Europe" (317). Though he takes great stock in the potential for the commercial aspect of his work

to save his family, Joe is also motivated by the artistic possibilities of the comics to which he dedicates himself. He insists on making political statements after a slight push from Sammy:

> 'Plus, oh, yeah, how could I forget. We're putting Adolf Hitler on the cover. That's the other gimmick. And Joe here,' he said, nodding at his cousin but looking at Frank, 'is going to draw that one all by himself.' 'I?' said Joe. 'You want me to draw Hitler on the cover of the magazine?' 'Getting punched in the jaw, Joe.' Sammy threw a big, slow punch at Marty Gold, stopping an inch shy of his chin. 'Wham!' (141-142).

This idea happens to be a direct reference to the first issue of *Captain America*, "The front cover showed its titular hero punching Hitler straight in the face, sending the ridiculous-looking Fuhrer tumbling. With that single, unforgettable image, the Nazi ideal of the Aryan *übermensch* was subverted" (Weinstein 47). Joe has great faith in the cover, convincing himself that "somehow a copy of this comic book might eventually make its way to Berlin and cross the desk of Hitler himself, that he would look at the painting into which Joe had channelled all his pent-up rage and rub his jaw, and check with his tongue for a missing tooth" (159), a notion that is also taken directly from the pages of comics history:

> News of Superman and his ethnic undertones did not escape the enemy's notice in real life. Josef Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, denounced Superman as a Jew. In April 1940, *Das Schwarze Korps*, the weekly newspaper of the Nazi SS, attacked the comic and its Jewish writers: 'Jerry Siegel, an intellectually and physically circumcised chap who has his headquarters in New York […] The inventive Israelite named

> this pleasant guy with an overdeveloped body and underdeveloped mind 'Superman' […] As you can see, there is nothing the Sadducees won't do for money!' (Weinstein 25)

When Anapol and Askenazy refuse to print the cover, Joe nearly walks out of the meeting (Chabon 159). Though the bosses eventually concede to the demands of their artists, Joe and Sammy have several more squabbles about the overt violence brought upon the "Razis" by The Escapist.

Chabon is careful to highlight the commercial nature of comics, but it is often if not always in a position of tension with artistic integrity. Though he is skeptical of the artistic possibilities of comic books, Sammy insists that his creation with Joe has true motivation, "Why is he doing it? [...] Dressing up like a monkey or an ice cube or a can of fucking corn…yes, to fight crime. To fight evil. But that's all any of these guys are doing. That's as far as they go. They just…you know, it's the right thing to do, so they do it. How interesting is that?" (Chabon 94-95). The Escapist, on the other hand, does more, his fights are more than mere acts of gratuitous violence, he not only attempts to fight injustice, but, as Sammy suggests, he "*frees* the world of it. He *frees* people, see? He comes in the darkest hour. He watches from the shadows" (121). The Escapist is of an order who has "roamed the world acting, always anonymously, to procure the freedom of others, whether physical or metaphysical, emotional or economic" (133). Sammy and Joe set him free to roam the pages of the comic book hoping to procure the same freedom.

But the futility of this process is not lost on them, particularly Joe. He longs to save his family, but he also recognizes that "The Escapist was an

impossible champion, ludicrous and above all *imaginary*, fighting a war that could never be won" (168). In the end, both the artistic and commercial opportunities that comics offer are not enough to save Joe's family, but succeed in offering Joe some sort of an escape from trauma, as they did for millions suffering tragedy and loss, domestically and abroad, during the war. Joe's situation is a formidable example of the power of comics in a time of turmoil:

> Having lost his mother, father, brother, and grandfather, the friends and foes of his youth, his beloved teacher Bernard Kornblum, his city, his history – his home – the usual charge leveled against comic books, that they offered *merely an easy escape from reality*, seemed to Joe actually to be a powerful argument on their behalf. He had escaped, in his life, from ropes, chains, boxes, bags, and crates, from handcuffs and shackles, from countries and regimes, from the arms of a woman who loved him, from crashed airplanes and an opiate addiction and from an entire frozen continent intent on causing his death. The escape from reality was, he felt – especially right after the war – a worthy challenge. (Chabon 575)

The need for escape, from slum life, from war, from genocide, from the helplessness of watching history unfold and inflict itself upon millions of one's own people from a position of safety an ocean away, in short, from trauma itself, is no small task.

The need for empowerment at this particularly powerless time in Jewish history is clear, a time when Jews were discriminated against in the United States and persecuted abroad. Yet the creation of the superhero fosters an interesting and ironic dynamic in terms of the Nietzschean idea of the übermensch/üntermensch,

historically and philosophically. In his guide to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Gareth Southwell describes Nietzsche's concept of the übermensch as one that "suggest[s] a progression beyond the current concept of 'man'. The *Übermensch* will therefore go 'beyond good and evil' and establish a new set of values and a new philosophy" (203). This idea was appropriated by German fascists during the Nazi regime. However, Nietzsche's own views on Jews were rather dubious; in *Nietzsche & the Jews*, Siegfried Mandel explains that Nietzsche's opinions were subject to extreme oscillation, "Jews and Judaism are praised, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, and castigated, at times to the extreme of denigration. On the one hand, for instance, Nietzsche sees Jews as being the moral genius among nations; on the other, they suffer from delusions of grandeur and are the most curious and worst "Volk" upon this earth" (23). As Mandel points out, Nietzsche's main objection to the Jews was similar to his distaste for Christianity, "Nietzsche's (sometimes negative) critique of Judaism is primarily directed toward those elements giving rise to the offspring of religion (Christianity)" (26). Religion, the opiate of the masses, clouds one's thinking, making them unable to rise above guilt and negativity. In effect, if one cannot accept the death of God, they never become an übermensch, which is "an individual who could reject the 'God hypothesis', who could look the truths of pessimism in the face and *still* say 'Yes' to life" (Southwell 145). Nietzsche's primary problem with Jewish culture was the religious aspect.

However, unlike many of those close to him, Nietzsche was no enemy of Jews in his personal life. He was contemptuous of his publisher, Ernest Schmeitzner, who "was devoting more of his time and energies to anti-Semitic

publications and activities, and ignoring the promotion of Nietzsche's books; Nietzsche objected to the anti-Semitic movement in Germany and was particularly upset because his continued association with Schmeitzner made it seem that he harbored similar racist sympathies" (Holub viii). In fact, he felt German nationalism and the use of Jews as scapegoats was little more than ressentiment, "the tendency of those who feel inferior or jealous of others to attribute the cause of those feelings to the unjust actions of others" (Southwell 198), and he felt that "the Aryan influence has corrupted the entire world" (Mandel 205). He maintained close relationships with several Jewish philosophers and scientists, including the chemist Friedrich Paneth (who himself fled the Nazis, taking refuge in Britain in 1939), who wrote that "Nietzsche […] possessed a refreshing independence and integrity in regard to religion; absolutely and categorically he is free from any anti-Semitic tendency" (Paneth, qtd. in Mandel 20). As an afterthought to this sentiment, Mandel adds that "Nietzsche's sister cut this sentence from the published version of this letter" (Mandel 20). Even if Nietzsche himself was free from anti-Semitic tendencies, those who held his legacy following his mental breakdown in 1889 and eventual death in 1900, were certainly not. It is largely because of Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth and her husband, Bernhard Foerster, that many of his philosophies were used by Nazis to assert Aryan supremacy, despite his own view that "the Aryan influence has corrupted the entire world" (Mandel 205).

Yet the appropriation of Nietzsche's philosophies by the Nazis is not due to the fascist leanings of his family alone, but also due to some of the nuances in his own writing, with his "vision of an *Übermensch*, a wandering Jew who finally

ends his nomadic life in order to participate creatively and genetically in Europe's destiny […] Nietzsche inadvertently feeds anti-Semites' worst fears and their hysterical propagandistic myths" (Mandel 174-75). On the same note, Nietzsche inverts the idea of the "Jewish problem" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, claiming that

> The Jews [...] are beyond any doubt the strongest, toughest, and purest race now living in Europe; they know how to prevail even under the worst conditions (even better than under favorable conditions), by means of virtues that today one would like to mark as vices […] enriched with the genius of money and patience (and above all a little spirituality which is utterly lacking in these officers) […] I am beginning to touch on what is *serious* for me, the "European problem" as I understand it, the cultivation of a new caste that will rule Europe. (189)

This statement can be easily interpreted as another example of Nietzsche's lack of an anti-Semitic stance, or manipulated for fascist purposes as another example of the Jewish threat to Europe, another justification for the destruction of the Jewish race.

Though fascist manipulation of Nietzschean philosophy may seem to have little to do with the golden age of comic books, the root of the creation of the superhero, namely Superman himself, aptly named after the common English translation of übermensch, is a similar manipulation of Nietzschean terms. In fact, Jews appropriated the übermensch for comics before Nazis began to use it as a weapon against them:

> Siegel and Shuster had derived the name "Superman" from *"Übermensch,"* a term coined in 1883 by Friedrich Nietzsche to describe

> an individual who has battled the corruption of modern values and overcome his own flaws to arrive at the peak of intellectual and creative ability. The term would later become associated with the Nazi notion of Aryan superiority, but at this point, it was a term associated with Nietzsche's philosophy and nothing more; still, the term's Nazi associations are quite ironic considering that the most famous "Superman" in history was created by Jews. (Kaplan 11)

When Superman first appeared in 1933, his powers were largely mental, and he drew greatly on his intellectual ability. It was only after this draft of Superman failed to sell that writer Jerry Siegel gave the Krypton exile super strength, enabling him to perform the more visually striking feats that sold millions of comic books.

Along with super strength, the Jewish-American made *übermensch* was also given an ethnic background encoded with Jewish signifiers. The story of Superman, or Kal-El, "which roughly means 'All that God is' in Hebrew" (Kaplan 14), mirrors that of both Moses in the Old Testament, and the situation of European Jews living at the time of Superman's creation. Kal-El's parents send him to Earth in a tiny rocket ship, in order to save his life and prevent the total destruction of their kind. Moses survived the Pharaoh's decree to kill all Jewish newborn sons after his parents send him downriver in his baby basket. And many European Jews sent their children to America in Kindertransports, which provided the "evacuation to safety of hundreds of Jewish children from Nazi-occupied Europe" (14). Even Chabon refers directly to Superman's Jewishness in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, when Sammy whimsically notes,

"What, they're all Jewish, superheroes. Superman, you don't think he's Jewish? Coming over from the old country, changing his name like that. Clark Kent, only a Jew would pick a name like that for himself" (585). By appropriating the übermenschean ideal, infusing him with Jewish ethnicity, a desire for assimilation, and later having him join the war effort, Siegel and Schuster created a monument to brute force, and gave Jewish Americans a sense of belonging and power at an otherwise powerless moment in history. Beyond a simple artistic or aesthetic escape, or a commercial goldmine, "this dark-haired heir of Moses defeats the Aryans on their own field. Superman, the literary child of Jews, became on pulp paper what Hitler could not create even on the ashes of millions of flesh-and-blood Jewish children: the *übermensch*" (Weinstein 25). Through sheer imagination, Superman became the ideal Hitler was searching for through the ethnic cleansing of the very same culture that so successfully created Kal-el.

Though Siegel and Schuster, and the many Jewish comic book artists that followed, may have successfully created the übermensch on paper, all the comic books in the world could not save the "millions of flesh-and-blood Jewish children" Hitler killed in an attempt to create his own race of Aryan übermensch. Once again, the frustrations presented by Chabon in *Kavalier and Clay,* that Joe felt in trying to work through the trauma of his family's eventual doom become evident. These super-powered masked heroes gave American Jews a sense of power through art, and the financial freedom that came along specifically with this kind of commercial art. However, there is also a "mirror image fascism inherent in [the] anti-fascist superman" (Chabon 204). Superheroes have a fascist sensibility inherent within them due to their great strength and near invincibility,

as well as the way that they mirror the Aryan übermensch. Their mythical status can be oppressive to their creators, as it is unclear whether they can, as artistic productions and money making endeavors, exact any political change, or any change at all beyond that of temporary personal catharsis, like the relief that Joe finds in *The Escapist*.

As an historical fiction on the Golden Age of the comic book, which was also the golden age of the superhero, Chabon's novel explores this phenomenon explicitly. However, the heyday of the superhero has long been over, and many of today's comics, specifically those that take the form of the larger graphic novel, do not deal specifically with superheroes. Yet the theme of the übermensch/üntermensch and the fascistic qualities inherent in the hero are still present in contemporary comics, specifically those with connections to the Jewish lineage of comics. Simcha Weinstein refers to this when he says that "today's graphic novels, while not concerned with superheroes, also explore the human condition in general (and Jewish American identity in particular) through the eyes of their Job-like antiheroes" (17). In many ways this notion makes itself apparent in *Maus* and *Epileptic* as well. Vladek Spiegelman makes it through the Holocaust with amazing resourcefulness, a super power in its own right, yet this resourcefulness also weighs on and oppresses his son, Artie. David B.'s brother, Jean-Christophe, suffers the daily trauma of Epilepsy. David and his family also become oppressed by this illness, while Jean-Christophe identifies with fascist leaders as a means of claiming power in his own life.

Spiegelman's graphic biography of his father's Holocaust story clearly depicts Jews as the üntermensch, the inversion of Nietzsche's übermensch. This is

apparent even upon a first glance at the fable, in which Jews are represented as mice, and Germans as powerful, predatory cats. Yet even in this circumstance, in the story of Vladek's victimization and that of his friends and family, Vladek is shown as exceptionally resourceful, a quality that enables his survival and follows him through the rest of his life. He, and the characteristics that facilitated his survival, are also shown in constant conflict with his son Artie's ability to understand and work through this partially shared trauma. Spiegelman often represents Vladek's survival, which aside from resourcefulness often came down to simple luck, in a way that highlights how supernatural it seems considering the odds against him. Within the first few pages of the first chapter Vladek is portrayed as a somewhat mythical being. Spiegelman does not go as far as to suggest that Vladek is any sort of superhero, but he does include Vladek's report that when he was younger "People always told me I looked just like Rudolph Valentino" (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 13), in an image that juxtaposes the elderly Vladek on an exercise bike (indeed there is hardly anything to distinguish this elderly mouse-man from any other survivor, or any other who might have survived), with a poster of Valentino's *The Sheik* in which the actors are mice. Vladek's charm and good looks augment the effects of his resourcefulness. After he is released from a prisoner of war camp, he charms the daughters of the man with whom he is staying by giving them each a gift unheard of in the time of war and rations. The panel depicts Vladek at the dinner table with his family friend Orbach and Orbach's family. Orbach offers Vladek an apology, "I'm sorry we can't offer you a better meal, Vladek – but the Jews of Lublin get very few food coupons" (*Maus I* 63). Rations may have been meager, but in the very same panel

Vladek announces, “One moment girls – I have a gift for each of you…” which in the next panel is revealed to be “Oh my God! Chocolate!” One of the girls lifts her hand to her face in utter shock, while the other gazes at the chocolate bar as if she had not seen one in years (and she most likely had not). The narrative box in the lower portion of the panel flashes back to Vladek telling his story to Artie. Vladek informs him that “These I saved from a Red Cross package. ALWAYS I saved…Just in case!” This is one of the first glimpses at the power of Vladek’s resourcefulness, and the way it differentiated him from others. Orbach can barely scrape enough food together for his family and one guest, yet Vladek can provide them with luxuries because he is “ALWAYS” managing to save for a nearly unimaginable “just in case.”

However, Vladek’s resourcefulness is not the only aspect of his survival that is often depicted in some way as supernatural. He also has tremendous luck in many situations in which individual survival is completely random. In some cases, this luck comes from his incredible boldness, like when he is operating an illicit “food business” (85). He makes an arrangement with a local grocer in the ghetto to sell “‘extra items to small shops in the area under the counter,” despite the fact that, as he tells Artie, “it was dangerous to carry these things – but maybe I could be lucky.” And luck is certainly on his side in this business, even when he has a run-in with several Nazis while carrying fifteen kilos of illicit sugar. When the Nazis ask Vladek what he is carrying, Vladek simply replies “sugar,” telling Artie “what was I supposed to say? For this I could really hang! [...] I made so they would think it was legal,” acting as if he was bringing it to the grocer’s for a routine delivery, “and they left me go without even checking my papers!” Other

times Vladek's luck is given a more mystical quality, like when he nearly escapes a round-up after "the S.S. closed off the whole street to inspect the working papers from everyone" (78). The whole scenario ends with the S.S. taking "maybe 50% of the people away," but Vladek "managed to disappear into a building," narrowly escaping. This is depicted over three panels, the first in which Vladek is pressed up against the building, an expression of utter panic on his face and a halo of shock lines surrounding him, while Nazis inspect papers in the foreground. The second panel continues to shows the Nazis in the foreground, but Vladek has simply disappeared, with no open door or any other indication of where he has gone, or how he managed to vanish. In the final panel of the series, the building remains static, as buildings tend to do, still with no sign of Vladek, or indication of his "disappearance," while the Nazis pass in the foreground. Vladek's disappearance is mystical and he does not offer Artie any more detail, he merely returns to the story with a report to his Father-in-Law that "they almost got me!" (78)

The mystical, mythic quality of this, and indeed most, survivor stories are partially what makes them so chillingly compelling. Yet it is often these qualities that oppress survivors and their kin, the qualities that beg the question of "why did *I* survive?" There are many reasons that Vladek survived, and many of the characteristics that facilitated this survival are portrayed by Spiegelman as oppressive. The impression that Vladek, despite his will and mystical ability to survive, can also be an oppressive force, particularly upon his son, is given immediately, in the prologue of the book. Set in 1958, the two-page prologue depicts Artie and his friends roller skating. When Artie falls and his friends

abandon him, he seeks sympathy from his father, who asks “Why do you cry, Artie?” (6). The panel shows the young Artie, head bowed in dejection, and the younger Vladek, intent on his work cutting wood, up close. Though Vladek asks his son why he is crying, he barely looks up from his work, and, after asking his son for help with this work, informs him to “Hold better on the wood.” When Artie informs him that he is crying because “I-I fell, and my friends skated away w-without me,” Vladek stops sawing, “Friends? Your Friends?” he asks, in a close up panel of himself, holding the saw parallel to his body. By the next panel, however, Vladek has begun to saw again, and he says to Artie “If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week…then you could see what it is, friends!” The everyday traumatic experience of a child pales in comparison to the trauma that Vladek has undergone in his lifetime; he scoffs at Artie’s pain over this small betrayal by his so-called friends, it seems so insignificant to him that he can barely look up from his housework.

This is an early example of how Vladek’s burden of survival is impressed upon Artie. But it is also Vladek’s behavior, the very same behavior that assisted him throughout the Holocaust, that Artie struggles to understand. Vladek’s resourcefulness, vital to his survival while in the ghetto and at Auschwitz, is one major source of this frustration for Artie. In one particular instance, while mid-story with Artie, Vladek is shown bending over, picking up what looks like a piece of curly string lying next to a garbage bin. When Artie asks what he picked up Vladek replies “telephone wire. This it’s very hard to find…Inside it’s little wires. It’s good for tying things” (116). The panel depicts Vladek staring down at the wire, confident that he has found some sort of treasure, while Artie’s face is

scrunched in an obviously confused frustration that matches his verbal reaction: "You ALWAYS pick up trash! Can't you just BUY wire?" to which Vladek replies "Pssh. Why always you want to buy when you can find!? Anyway, this wire they don't have it in stores." The emphasis on the word "always" in this panel echoes that of the panel in which Vladek makes the impossible gift of chocolate to Orbach's daughters. Yet the scene with the chocolate emphasizes the function of Vladek's resourcefulness, while this one draws attention to the way this resourcefulness is alienating, how he is simply unable to connect to his son's way of thinking.

The opening of the next chapter depicts Artie discussing this frustration with Mala, Vladek's second wife. Mala is livid: "He treats me as if I were just a maid or his nurse…worse!...At least a maid has some days off and gets paid…He only gives me $50.00 a month. When I need a pair of stockings I have to use my own savings!" (103). Artie can commiserate with Mala on this level: "Well…he hasn't changed…Whenever I needed school supplies or new clothes mom would have to plead and argue for WEEKS before he'd cough up any dough!" However he also expresses how problematic this is for him and his project. After suggesting that Vladek has "always been – uh – pragmatic" (131), Mala explodes with anger "Pragmatic? Cheap!! It causes him physical pain to part with even a nickel!" This outburst seems to soften Artie, in the next panel his brow is twisted in an expression of concern, and he stares nervously at his coffee. Eventually he voices this concern to Mala: "It's something that worries me about the book I'm doing about him. […] In some ways he's just like the racist caricature of the miserly old Jew. […] I mean, I'm just trying to portray my father accurately!" (131-32). This

only enrages Mala further, “Even for himself he won’t spend any money. […] He has hundreds of thousands of dollars in the bank, and he lives like a pauper! [...] LOOK! He grabs paper towels from rest rooms so he won’t have to buy napkins or tissues!” (132). Throughout this exchange, Artie sustains his concerned demeanor, expressing his wish that he had “got Mom’s story while she was alive. She was more sensitive. […] It would give the book some balance.” This conversation with Mala is significant, because in it Artie is able to somewhat negotiate the balance he seeks, despite the absance of his mother’s tastimony. Though Mala and Vladek have an antagonistic relationship, Mala’s anger at Vladek’s oppressivd behavior is also reflective of Artie’s feelines. Mala serves as evidence that Artie’s view of his father is objective, which is exactly what troubles him: he is afraid he is portraying his father as a negative stereotype.

In *Maus II*, Artie discusses this more freely in several scenes, expanding on the effects that his family’s traumatic experience had on him more explicitly with his wife as they drive to see Vladek in his Catskills vacation home. He mentions Richieu, the brother he never met, and the frustration of being unable to understand what his family went through:

> I never felt guilty about Richieu. But I did have nightmares about S.S, men coming into my class and dragging all us Jewish kids away. […] Don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t OBSESSED with this stuff. […] It’s just that sometimes I’d fantasize Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water. […] I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz WITH my parents so I could really know what they lived through! I guess it’s some kind of guilt about having had an easier life

> than they did. […] Sigh. I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. (16)

This kind of survivor's guilt is common, and it here it is transferred to Artie, a second generation survivor. He has struggled to understand his father's trauma, as well as to reconstruct and work through it in his comic. Artie's feelings of inadequacy are clear even before he blatantly states them, like when he says "it's just that sometimes I'd fantasize Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water," as if this is a small or normal fear for a young boy to have. Artie did not suffer the trauma of the camps, but he is affected and oppressed by it nonetheless, especially since the guilt of having an easier life than his father is frequently at odds with his frustration with Vladek's behavior.

The theme of Vladek's oppressive attitude and lack of sensitivity is also continued in *Maus II*. Artie and his wife Françoise are called to Vladek's summer resort because Mala has left him. As soon as they arrive, Vladek begins to bear down upon them, showing them their room with the comment that "For the whole SUMMER you can be comfortable here!" (17). Artie, brow furrowed in anger, replies "HEY! We're just staying for a few days pop we-" at which point he is cut off by Vladek, who, instead of listening to his son's comment, yawns and explains that they can discuss it in the morning. Françoise and Artie are left on the sofa bed, feeling hoodwinked and befuddled: "(My God- does he expect us to stay here all summer)" Françoise asks, to which Artie replies "(I guess so. If he had his way we'd move to Queens with him to he-" (17). Once again, Artie is cut off by his father, whose only presence in this panel, which would otherwise depict a couple having a private conversation, is a word bubble that reads "PLEASE! I'm so tired

from waiting ‘til you came. Tomorrow you can talk” (17). This scene immediately follows the one in which Artie discusses his “guilt about having an easier life” (16) than his parents, and here the reader sees how Vladek tries to manipulate this guilt to control his son.

The interweaving of guilt and frustration grows ever stronger while Artie and Françoise are staying with Vladek, culminating in a scene in the last half of the comic, in which Françoise picks up, as Vladek puts it “A hitch-hiker? And – oy – it’s a *colored* guy, a SHVARTSER!” (98). Vladek is outraged, and he begins to mutter insults and complaints in Polish. After conveying the hitch hiker, portrayed by a black dog (Spiegelman draws Americans as dogs throughout the comic), to his destination without incident, Vladek erupts in a fit of racist rhetoric, and given the overall subject of the comic, rather hypocritical anger. Françoise comments on this hypocrisy, after Vladek suggest the “shvartser” may have stolen their groceries from the back seat: “That’s OUTRAGEOUS! How can you, of all people, be such a racist! You talk about blacks the way the Nazis talked about the Jews!” (99). But Vladek is staunch in his prejudicial position, “You are more smart than this, Françoise…It’s not even to COMPARE. The shvartsers and the Jews!” Of course the parallels that Françoise is making are clearly viable, and Spiegelman highlights them in the last panel of this exchange, in which Vladek steps out of the car upon their arrival back at the bungalow, proclaiming that “now we can make a very happy lunch from all my new groceries. Only thank God that your shvartser didn’t take them” (100). Vladek is drawn from a distance, covered in shadow so the color of his skin matches that of Françoise’s “shvartser” hitch hiker.

Vladek's overbearing, oppressive demeanor is as consistently represented by Spiegelman as his unbelievable story of survival against all odds, Artie's own story of being oppressed himself. The relationship between oppressive father and oppressed son is complexly balanced against that of Aryan oppressor (übermensch) and persecuted Jew (üntermensch). Vladek takes on both roles throughout *Maus*, oppressive and oppressed, übermensch and üntermensch. Spiegelman wrestles with the implications of this tension throughout his comic, a tension he must ultimately include because of the biographical form he has chosen. Since it is a memoir, Spiegelman cannot come to a resolution so easily, as the conflict Artie faces with his father is the same that Spiegelman struggles with himself. David B. also wrestles with a similar tension in *Epileptic*: he is sympathetic to the partially shared trauma of his brother's illness, but he also feels oppressed by it. This manifests itself in a way directly related to the Jew as üntermensch; as Jean-Christophe's epilepsy worsens and oppresses both Jean-Christophe and his family more and more, David begins to associate himself with Jews, while his brother feels a growing identification with fascist dictators, specifically Hitler.

This fascination starts early on in the book, which begins early in the lives of David and Jean-Christophe (David, then called Pierre-Francois, is 5, Jean-Christophe, 7), and early in Jean-Christophe's illness. These identifications grow out of the rage David and his brother feel as they and the rest of their family succumb to the traumatic effects of Jean-Christophe's incurable epilepsy. Even early on David finds refuge in his art work, which is primarily of war scenes that help him release some of his cumulative rage: "I have enough rage in me for one

hundred thousand warriors. I relate my brother's seizures to this rage…I keep going, covering entire pages with epic battles. It's my own form of epilepsy. I expend the rage that boils in me. Jean-Christophe suffers from the same rage, but we express it differently" (19). The following panel depicts Jean-Christophe with a toothbrush moustache, because "his fantasy is Hitler" (20). This identification with the domineering dictator comes from a place of utter powerlessness: "seized by this sudden weakness, he develops a huge craving for power and domination." David explains that Jean-Christophe's "Nazi fantasy is in no way anti-Semitic. Neither one of us has any idea what a Jew is," but the panel in which he does so depicts David walking over the center of a swastika, as if he too is ensnared in his brother's oppressive fantasy, which stems from the disease that continues to overtake their family as it and the comic progresses.

Though at this point in the narrative David is unaware of what a Jew is, an association with Jews is eventually made, and it grows stronger over the course of the story, causing him to "stumble onto his new first name" (169). During a conversation, his mother tells a shocked David that "when you were born I wanted to call you David […] your Grandfather was against it. He said it sounded too Jewish." At this David launches into a memory of his Grandfather, who is described as strict, but likeable. It becomes clear that this man had an early influence on David's art, due to his "four fat books on World War II" (171). David dives into the battle scenes, which closely resemble his own early art. However, he is ultimately most influenced by "the end of the fourth volume […] I looked long and hard. Bit by bit I wove together the information I'd gathered and I gleaned the truth behind those photographs of pajama-clad skeletons" (172).

Studying pictures of Holocaust survivors, David becomes aware of the dark side of his heroic war scenes, “It was disturbing. It became clear to me that the Genghis Khan I loved so dearly was not so far removed, with his massacres” (172). David is again juxtaposed with a symbol of Jewishness, standing to the left of a piece of striped pajama fabric. The caption of the panel informs the reader that “Suddenly this first name, David, takes an enormous importance, far beyond my brother’s disease,” while David himself is depicted as saying “Too Jewish…Oo-kay…” Once again David, the hero of the book, identifies with the üntermensch, this time as “a way of staking out a position. I was on the side of the glorious Indians against the lowly, shabby cowboys. I’d be on the side of the skinny Jews against the fat Nazis.” While Jean-Christophe identifies with an übermenschean dictator in order to counteract his feelings of powerlessness, David embraces his position as the underdog, a dynamic that becomes more and more ironic as the story progresses.

One interaction between the two brothers frames this irony over two panels. The first shows Jean-Christophe face-to-face with David. Jean-Christophe towers over his brother, holding a fist near his face. The caption of the panel explains that Jean-Christophe’s “predilection for dictators is still strong” (189), while the boys face off on their interests, Jean-Christophe stating “Hitler is a genius! I’m Hitler!” while David says “Me, I’m a Jew!” But in the following panel, the tables have turned; David is on top of Jean-Christophe, in the midst of throwing a punch. The Jew is beating up Hitler, in a scene reminiscent of Joe’s painting of the Escapist clocking Hitler square in the jaw in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. David, the Jew, is attacking Jean-Christophe,

Hitler, a dynamic that occurs frequently in the book after this point, particularly whenever the übermensch/üntermensch trope reoccurs. For example, when Jean-Christophe is found reading *Mein Kampf* in a darkly drawn panel. The much smaller David is shown pummeling Jean-Christophe, who shouts "HEIL HITLER! HEIL HITLER!" (308) while giving a Nazi salute; to reinforce the regularity of the dynamic, the caption reads "I beat him up like I usually do." Yet, like Artie's hostility toward Vladek, David is always careful to temper the representation of his anger toward Jean-Christophe in some way. The next panel is a shadowy close-up of Jean-Christophe's blank and helpless stare. He is holding his copy of *Mein Kampf*, but it is obscured by the caption, which assures the reader that "There's nothing particularly Nazi-ish about his reading, it's just an act of provocation against us and amounts to an admission of powerlessness." Much like the first time Jean-Christophe associates himself with Hitler, when he is not even aware of what a Jew is, it is the power which attracts him, not the malice. Nevertheless, the oppressiveness related to that power clearly parallels the oppressive effects of his illness and his resulting behavior, which is made all the more tragic when the ultimate powerlessness of everyone involved is taken into account. The family devotes all of their time and most of their resources to finding a cure; they try everything imaginable, from dangerous operations (40) to macrobiotics (49) to Swedenborgianism (154) to the healing baths at Lourdes (219) and beyond, yet they are completely helpless to the enveloping power of Jean-Christophe's epilepsy.

Joe is also oppressed by his own powerlessness to help his family in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. He works endlessly and avoids every

possible pleasure. Yet news from the German consulate, from which he is trying to procure visas, and letters from home consistently leave him with less and less to hope for. Joe is completely powerless, watching helplessly as history unfolds and crushes his family and the weight of it presses upon him. The final letter he receives from his family offers a chance at exoneration from this life of oppression. Riddled with marks from the censor's pen, it reads in part:

> Please, Josef, do not continue to trouble yourself or waste your time attempting to win for us what you have, with the help of your friends, been able to attain for your brother. It is enough; more than enough. Your late father, as you know, suffered from chronic optimism, but it is clear to me and to anyone not foolish or addled by deafness that we ======== and the present state of affairs will be as permanent as any of us shall require. You must make a life for yourself there, with your brother, and turn your thoughts from us and from =====. (Chabon 325)

Joe carries this letter around, unopened, in the front pocket of his coat, until he loses it one day after an especially dramatic bar mitzvah magic show. He never reads it, and thus is never able to draw any comfort from his mother's encouragement to make a life for himself. He becomes a victim of "The true magic of this broken world [...] the ability of the things it contained to vanish, to become so thoroughly lost, that they might never have existed in the first place" (339). This letter might have never existed, as the loss of it confines Joe to a lifetime of oppressive suffering with little hope beyond that he finds on the pages of comics.

Like Joe in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the

(anti)heroes drawn by Spiegelman and B. are designed as a way of working through the effects of partially shared trauma from the perspective of those who are at a position of relative safety. In each of these situations, the roles of übermensch and üntermensch become complicated by the overarching trauma of the Holocaust, in the case of Joe and Artie, or of Jean-Christophe's epilepsy in the case of David, as well as the sense of powerlessness in terms of agency and representation. The survivors, those who have escaped the direct effect of trauma, become oppressed by those who could not, the powerless become oppressive, the oppressed become oppressors. This traditional comic book theme began with the inception of the superhero, a movement largely begun, and still largely carried out, by Jews, those who identify with Jewish culture, and those influenced by the Jewish lineage of the comic book.

CHAPTER II: The Hero as Golem – Violence, Doubt, and Hope

"To me, this Superman is…maybe…only an American Golem." (Chabon 86)

"No other Jewish legend has been as influential in inspiring literary works, artistic expression and scientific speculation as has the Golem legend." (Sherwin 1)

Indeed, the origins of the superhero figure and the übermensch/ üntermensch dialectic in Jewish storytelling predate the golden age of comic books by centuries. Contemporary Jewish superheroes and antiheroes can find their roots in the Golem legend, originally commented upon by eleventh century Talmudic scholar Rashi, who wrote of the clay goat created by Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Oshaia, as well as Rabbi Zera's clay man. These creatures were created using the *Sefer Yetzirah*, a kabalistic text that claims the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet as the source of all creation. According to Byron Sherwin, author of *The Golem Legend: Origins and Implications*, Rashi's commentary on this text "introduces two elements that play an essential role in the development of the Golem legend: (1) the use of the *Sefer Yetzirah* […] as a tool to be used in the creative enterprise; (2) the idea that language is pregnant with creative potency, that language has the power to create worlds as well as words" (6). The Golem legend is firmly based in a tradition of creativity and the artistic process, as well as a belief in the power of language when paired with a visual artistic form.

The Golem legend attests not only to the creation of the Superhero by a group primarily made up Jewish writers, but also to the richness of Jewish story-telling tradition in general. The more specific origins of the Superhero can be

found in the widely popular and inspirational legend of the Golem of Prague, "the legendary creature said to have been constructed by the sixteenth-century mystic Rabbi Judah Loew to defend the Jews of medieval Prague" (Weinstein 50). Indeed, many comics make direct references to the Golem, including Superman, who travels to Nazi-occupied Poland in Action Comics #80-83 (1945), where he is told of "the golem…a fearsome mighty creature that would drive away enemies and save people" (qtd. in Weinstein 31). Superman also fights a character named the Galactic Golem in Action Comics #248 (1972). The Hulk is loosely based on the Golem, as is The Thing from Fantastic Four who, like the Golem, must live everyday in his monstrous form, unable to escape into a human alter-ego. Swamp Thing, another human trapped in a monstrous form, fights a Golem in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* # 11 (March 1983; CBDB) and for a long time *Hellboy* featured a popular Golem-like character, a Homunculus named Roger (CBDB).[1] Will Eisner attested to the place of Golems in comic book history when he said that "the Golem was very much the precursor of the Superhero in that in every society there's a need for mythological characters, wish fulfillment. And the wish fulfillment in the Jewish case of the hero would be someone who could protect us. This kind of storytelling seems to dominate in Jewish culture" (qtd. in Weinstein 2006). There are many Golem references in contemporary comics as well, including James Sturm's *The Golem's Mighty Swing*, about a Golem gimmick implemented by a fictional Jewish-American minor league baseball team in the 1920's, or even Joe Kavalier's graphic novel *The Golem* within Chabon's *The*

[1] *Saga of the Swamp Thing* #11: http://www.comicbookdb.com/issue.php?ID=19163; Roger the Homunculus: http://www.comicbookdb.com/character.php?ID=2614

Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay. Both *Kavalier and Clay* and *Epileptic* feature Golems that shadow their protagonists through all or some of their traumatic journeys. Like the external struggles with which they cope -- the Nazi oppression of his family in Joe's case and Jean-Christophe's all engulfing disease in the case of David -- the Golems that follow the two antiheroes act as both creative and destructive forces. Both Golems call into question the sense of violence inherent in the creation of a protective force, as well as the doubt of the creator, especially in an artistic context, where one cannot claim the righteousness of such a creator as Rabbi Loew.

In *The Golem Remembered, 1909-1980: Variations of a Jewish Legend*, Arnold L. Goldsmith lays out the important motifs in the early Golem of Prague legend that recur in modern usage: "The first is the golem's huge size. The second is the special power, a tellurian force, which enables him to have a vision of the future of mankind. The third is the danger of man's conceit in creating artificial life and thus competing with God" (16). The structure of this chapter will follow that of Goldsmith's motifs. The Golem's huge size testifies to its status as an artistic production, created to be larger than life by man using his creative tools, his own hands and his own use of, and abilities with, language. The prophetic abilities of the Golem, the bleak vision of his own inability to carry through his order to protect, as well as his underappreciated efforts and irrevocably non-human status, provoke him to violence. It foresees destruction and, building upon the first motif of its giant size, it fulfills this prophecy and becomes a violently destructive force itself.

The third motif further complicates the violent fate of the Golem. Goldsmith, who divides his book into chapters on the major representations of the Golem legend produced in the 20th century, says that in Abraham Rothberg's 1970 novel *The Sword of the Golem*, "Rabbi Low becomes aware of the golem's obsession with […] brutality." When this occurs "his first inclination is to assume that since God gave him the ability to create a man out of clay, he cannot be a grievous sinner in the eyes of the Omnipotent. But there is always the possibility that God is punishing the Jewish community by allowing him to create not a redeemer, but a scourge" (122). Similarly, one may ask, is the violence the Golem enacts sanctified because his very creation is sanctified by God, or is there no such thing as sanctified violence? Is man being led by God or is he in fact competing with him by becoming a creator himself? Goldsmith suggests that Rothberg introduced the idea of doubt into the Golem legend into his late twentieth century interpretation, and this belated sentiment carries over to both Chabon and B.'s treatment of the legend, as well as their respective representations of Joe and David as creators. However, before delving more deeply into how these three motifs directly affect *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and *Epileptic*, I would first like to further explore how they have affected the development of the Golem legend itself.

Just as the artistic status of the comic book has been called into question, so has the value of the creation that is the Golem's soul been questioned:

> Over the centuries, Kabbalists have argued over the quality of existence found in a golem. One talmudic text, Pseudo-Saadya, written in the thirteenth century, credits this creature with the highest level of being and

> claims that man has the divine power to give the golem both vitality and a soul. A sixteenth century Talmudist argues that a golem has no *ruah* (soul) because the Talmud says that he is speechless, but that such a mute creature does have *nefesh* (the lowest degree of soul; that is, life) […]. [T]o another, Moses Cordovero, the golem has only *hiyyuth*, a special kind of vitality which is higher than the soul of animals. (Goldsmith 19)

Also similar to the comic book, the Golem is an amalgam of visual art and language, a sculpture brought to life with words. In both the legends of Rabbi Zera and Rabbi Loew, the Golems are also destroyed by language; Sherwin says that "Rabbi Zera's statement: Return to your dust, was taken to mean that the "man" disintegrated at Rabbi Zera's command […] Rabbi Zera's command indicates that language has the power to destroy as well as create" (7). Goldsmith explains that the Golem of Prague is animated by the Hebrew word drawn on his forehead, or, in some versions, written on a piece of paper and inserted into his mouth in the style of many biblical prophets, "the word for 'truth' *emet* [...] spelled aleph-mem-taw" (17). The Golem can be similarly deactivated, and in some versions "the golem himself uses a knife to remove from his forehead the aleph […] 'truth' is reduced to 'dead'" (17-18). In others Rabbi Loew is forced to do so in order to prevent the Golem from becoming a destructive force.

The binary themes of creation and destruction that pervade the Golem legends at their most basic level mirror the more complex binaries at work within the figure of the Golem itself. Like the Superhero, the übermensch/üntermensch figure presented in the last chapter, the Golem was made as a protector, "a being of immense physical strength, capable of assuming huge physical proportions […]

who protects the Jews from physical abuse, from pogroms and from oppression" (Sherwin 17). He acts as a sort of precursor to the superhero, a protector against pre-Nazi era oppression, reflecting "the reality of violence in the life of a Jew and the need of a reliable savior" (Goldsmith 74). Also like the Superhero, the Golem has a darker side that subverts his position as protector and posits him as a power that one needs to be protected from, a destructive and oppressive force. Like the hero, in many ways the Golem becomes the oppressed oppressor, he partakes in a type of brutal, questionably sanctified violence that sparks a rather ambivalent outcome.

In his version of the legend, Rothberg explores the complicated attitude toward violence that emerges with the creation of the Golem during an exchange between Rabbi Low and his son-in-law, Jacob:

> Rabbi Low [quotes] the Talmud in support of pacifism. "Whoever raises his hand gainst his neighbor, even if he does not strike him, is an evildoer." [...] Rabbi Low stubbornly insists that Jews "do not exalt the sword or the fist. We need not die like cattle, but we must not live like beasts. We can live like men." When Jacob cries out against the futility of such idealism, the rabbi confidently points to the golem as the new weapon "that God has sent to protect us." (Goldsmith 125)

The Golem is the exception to the rule of pacifism: "Though the golem represents force, he is sent as a redeemer by God, and thus whatever violence he is responsible for is sanctified" (125). The sanctity of the violence enacted upon the enemies of Jews goes beyond the idea that the Golem was simply sent by God, and links the Golem with messianism. Goldsmith explains that the legend is

imbued with an idea that "messianism [is] inseparable from Judaism […] the vision of an ultimate redeemer accompanied Jews throughout their long history and made their reality tolerable" (75). In addition to being the cultural precursor to the superhero, in a religious light the Golem was seen "as the precursor of the messiah, the son of Joseph who is to serve as the temporary redeemer at a critical juncture and use force as necessary, which the real messiah – the son of David – must not employ" (82). The "real messiah" will have the ability to pacify the Jews' enemies, but this temporary protector, a vastly inferior life form, especially in comparison to the messiah, is given license to use violence. Indeed, given that the Golem's primary attribute is his brute strength, there is little else he can do as protector than use physical violence.

Yet, in the Golem's use of physical violence, the only tool that it is given to do the mission with which it is charged, one finds that which will eventually lead to the Golem's downfall. In the most popular and widely used model of the Golem legend, found even in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* the Golem experiences a palpable alienation and ostracism from those he tries to protect. No matter what variation of life or soul the Golem is imbued with in a particular version of the legend, this position as an outsider among outsiders, and as an outsider among those its sole purpose is to protect, invariably impels the Golem to a breaking point. It will often turn against the Jews, inciting the very destruction it has foreseen. This is where one may begin to question, as Rothberg does, whether "God is punishing the Jewish community by allowing him to create not a redeemer, but a scourge" (122), and whether man can ever claim that violence is sanctified, especially since he ultimately lacks control over all things, including

his own artistic creations. The attitude toward the Golem is almost completely reversed by the end of Rothberg's novel, after a pogrom riot during which the frustrated Golem indeterminately bashes the disturbers, Jews and gentile alike. It goes from being viewed as protector and hero unleashing violence sanctified by God, to a creature that "killed like one of *them*, with joy. To our people […] he is a monster. They will stone him for the Jewish blood he has shed" (qtd. in Goldsmith 136). In other variations of the legend, the Golem itself specifically predicts the violent destruction it will wreak upon those it is meant to protect. In H. Leivick's *The Golem: A Dramatic Poem in Eight Scenes*, Rabbi Low, called Rabbi Levi, encounters the Golem in the dark Prague night, "As the stars are going out, a dark figure, the golem's spirit, suddenly strides across the river and warns Rabbi Levi not to proceed with his creation. He warns that he will bring death, blight, and destruction, and wishes that he were lifeless clay again […]. [T]o animate the Golem meant to unleash brute force" (qtd. in Goldsmith 79). Like the superhero, the Golem is a glorification of brute force, but unlike many superheroes, the Golem's creator does not seem to have control over his creation's sense of good and evil. When the Golem is unable to protect the oppressed people in his charge he becomes indiscriminately violent, and the sanctity of his violence is called into question. Who, then, can be held accountable for the Golem's loss of control? Is it the less-than-human monster's fault, or the creator?

The sense of doubt fueled by such questions pervades contemporary Golem stories, especially when the Rabbi Low figure prominent in past variations is replaced with an artist, who in turn becomes the creator of the Golem. Under this circumstance, the question of the sanctity of violence is altered all together.

How can violence be sanctified by God when the earthly creator is not even a man of God? Perhaps at this point such violence simply becomes brutality: creation becomes destructive. Sherwin addresses this in his book when he explains

> That which we create to help insure our physical comfort or our physical security may ultimately threaten our physical comfort and/or our physical security. The creative act, by its nature, creates the potential for self-harm and for self-destruction […] Creativity can provide psychological fulfillment, but it can also become psychologically self-destructive. Once the creature becomes a creator, the creature may begin to think of him/herself exclusively as a creator. One may have delusions of grandeur and omnipotence. (24)

In this quote, the creature that has become creator is not the Golem, but man, the creation of God. The destruction, or self-destruction, as Sherwin describes it, can often result from the oppression and trauma that inspired the creation in the first place. The Golem was created by the leader of an oppressed people in order to protect those people, but in every single variation of the legend it leaves a wake of violence and destruction, often causing the deaths of those it was charged to protect, and therefore directly affecting its creator. The struggles that ensue between artist/creator and Golem in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and *Epileptic* are no exception to this theme, which is so omnipresent in the Golem legend.

Joe's and David's Golems serve similar purposes, though they are represented in slightly different ways. Chabon depicts Joe's Golem as a physical being, the actual Golem of Prague. Joe must smuggle it out of Czechoslovakia in

order to protect it from Nazi confiscation. The Golem continues to follow Joe over the course of the novel. According to Hilary Chute,

> The figure of the Golem evokes history: referencing both trauma (as a constant reminder of Joe's agonizing journey away from his soon-to-be-annihilated family) and Jewish hope (folklore presents the Golem as the defender of the ghetto), in *Kavalier & Clay* the Golem stands for the work of art. The concept of the Golem also specifically suggests transformation—a Golem is a "great creation" birthed "out of mud," to use one of Chabon's descriptions that appropriately refers to only seemingly lowly beginnings. (*MFS,* 292)

Indeed, the Golem of Prague turns to dust after Joe produces *The Golem*, his own graphic novelization of the Golem legend. Like his guilt over being unable to rescue his family, and the blindly violent tendencies toward all Germans that Joe develops as a result, the Golem follows him, both literally (the physical clay being) and figuratively (the art he produces, including the Escapist, as well as the success and pervasive doubt and guilt that results from this production) until he can let go of the fear of ongoing destruction. Of course, he must first suffer through the total destruction of his own life. David's Golem, on the other hand, is completely of his own making, much like his association with Jewishness. David self-identifies with Jewish culture, as opposed to Joe, whose link to Jewish identity is hereditary. David, whose artistic work reaches a turning point after reading Gustav Meyrink's 1928 novel *The Golem*, his "very first grown-up book" (B. 183), creates his own Golem. Closely modeled after Meyrink's Golem, which

appears to the citizens of Prague every thirty-three years in order to announce a destructive event, David's Golem comes to him during the lowest point of his life.

The representation of the creative processes of the artist and of artistic production as related to the Golem in these books also brings up the notion of the Golem as self-made man. With both Joe's and David's artistic inclinations, violent tendencies, and pervasive self doubt, the Golems presented in both *Kavalier and Clay* and *Epileptic* reflect the internal struggles inherent in the protagonists. This notion recalls an old joke that Goldsmith includes in his book,

> A wealthy American Jew visiting Prague after World War II wanted to see the remains of the golem in the attic of the Altneuschul. When the shammes explained that it was forbidden for anyone to enter, the American businessman was insistent, opening his wallet and taking out a substantial bill, which he slipped into the shammes's pocket. Fifteen minutes later, the visitor returned and complained angrily that he had wasted his time and money because he found nothing in the attic but old, worn tallisim, torn prayer books, and mounds of dust. When the shammes asked if there were nothing else in the attic, the angry American remembered one other thing – an old mirror on the wall. "Aha," said the shammes, "then you *did* see the golem!" (142)

Artistic production makes both Joe and David successful, but it also turns each of them into a sort of monster. In addition to the violent tendencies mentioned above, which are prompted by a deep sense of protectiveness in both cases, they both experience megalomania. Indeed, the artistic production that drives them to be successful, that fulfills them psychologically, distracting them from the ongoing

trauma with which they deal, also damages them and drives them to destructive behavior. Ultimately, however, the creative process carries each artist through a destructive phase into a cathartic one, a working through of trauma, if only a partial one. But before this catharsis can occur, each creator must wrestle with their own Golem.

The Golem legend is deeply embedded in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. In fact, the novel could be seen as yet another re-telling of the tale. It seems that Chabon even plucked the name of one of his title characters, Josef Kavalier, from an early twentieth century rendition of the legend, Yudl Rosenberg's *Nifla'ot Maharal im ha-Golem*,[2] in which "Rabbi Liva names the golem Joseph because, as he explains to his companions, 'he had given him the spirit of Joseph Sheday, who was half man and half demon, and who had helped the Talmudic sages in times of great trouble'" (Goldsmith 44). Josef Kavalier likewise helps when the "circle of [the Golem's] keepers" vote "in favor of removing the Golem to a safe place [...] a neutral nation that was out of the way and not entirely devoid of Jews" (Chabon 15). Joe escapes Nazi occupied Prague by hiding in a coffin with the Golem, eventually making his way to America, which in 1939 was still "a neutral nation," eventually settling in New York City, which was certainly "not entirely devoid of Jews." The Golem's journey and Joe's journey become one in the "safety of exile," sheltered from "the coming of the Nazis [and] rumors of confiscation, expropriation, and plunder […] of Jewish artifacts and sacred objects" (14). Joe's only thought when he begins his journey

[2] Known in translation as *The Golem or Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Liva*. Rabbi Liva is one of the many variations on the name of Rabbi Loew.

is to protect his people, or more specifically his family, to find the means to save them from persecution and extermination. Like the Jewish leaders of the Golem legends, Joe seeks salvation through creation, becoming a creator of his own Golem. Throughout *Kavalier and Clay,* the artistic process is explicitly related to the creation of a Golem, as Joe and his cousin and partner Sammy "[tease] their golem into life" (134) using the typical tool: language. Chabon explains that

> Every universe, our own included, begins in conversation. Every Golem in the history of the world, from Rabbi Hanina's delectable goat to the river-clay Frankenstein of Rabbi Judah Lowe ben Bezalal, was summoned into existence through language, through murmuring, recital, and kabbalistic chitchat – was, literally, talked into life. Kavalier and Clay – whose golem was to be formed of black lines and the four-color dots of the lithographer – lay down, lit the first of five dozen cigarettes they were to consume that afternoon, and started to talk. (119)

The result of this conversation is the Escapist, the masked escape artist who frees the world of injustice through the "black lines" and "four-color dots of the lithographer" of the comic book.

The protective power of Joe's Golem lies in the financial gain it affords him. In his more hopeful moments, Joe holds onto the belief that his Golem has the potential to make him "enough money [that] it might not matter if the doors of all the world's nations were closed – a very rich man could afford to buy some island somewhere, empty and temperate, and build the damned children [of Prague] a country of their own" (283). The popularity of the Escapist does in fact create an "avalanche of money [and] some of this snowfall ended up, in due

course, in the bank account of Josef Kavalier, where it towered in fantastic drifts and was left that way, aloof and glinting, to cool the fever of exile from the day his family should arrive" (370). In addition to this hope, *The Escapist* provides Joe with a healthy artistic outlet for his frustrations, as well as for the constant worry he suffers over the unknown fate of his family. Working on the comic book offers him a much needed escape from the suffering of exile by "drawing, painting, smoking cigarettes, and nothing else for much of the past seven days […]. The joints of his hand throbbed, and the ghost of a brush notched his index finger […]. It was six o'clock on a Monday morning in October 1940. He had just won the Second World War, and he was feeling pretty good about it" (165). Yet, like the Golem, the Escapist's protective power can only go so far. As the doubt creeps in over whether Joe's money-making creation can secure the lives of his family from the impending Nazi doom, Joe becomes increasingly violent, as does his Golem on the pages of *The Escapist.*

This intensifying violence begins after Joe learns of his father's death. At this point, Joe does not yet become completely violent. Indeed, after Joe boards a train headed for Canada, intent on joining the Royal Navy, he convinces himself that the remaining members of his family "required rescue no less that they had before. He could not abandon them further by running off and trying, like the Escapist, single-handedly to end the war. It was imperative for him to remain focused on the possible" (189). Therefore, his first action, after drinking and crying his initial sorrow away, is "Work. I'm going to work" (191). His second action is more destructive: he encounters a (possibly) German man while waiting with Sammy for the subway on his way to work and "decided that he did not like

what he considered to be the superior manner in which the theoretically German man was looking at him […]. [H]e spat, as if casually, onto the platform between him and the man" (191). The (conceivably) German man responds: "with pugilistic quickness, he crowded Joe against a pillar, crooked an arm around Joe's neck, and gave him a swift punch in the stomach" (192). Over the next few weeks, Joe makes a habit of harassing every German he encounters, and though "[t]here could not have been more than a couple of thousand German citizens in New York at that time […] in the following two weeks, wherever Joe went in the city, he managed to run into at least one. He seemed to have acquired, as Sammy remarked, a superpower of his own" (194). The violence that Joe depicts in *The Escapist* is no longer enough to quell the frustration and feelings of hopeless futility from which he suffers, but since he chose work over war in the hope that the former would do more to assist in the rescue of his family, he finds solace in these individual acts of brutality. This violence is the result of the ongoing trauma by which he is surrounded: "it was not that he felt he deserved the pain so much as he thought it suited him [...]. It was like the memory of home, a tribute to his father's stoical denial of illness, injury, or pain" (197). Joe is proud of his cuts and bruises, they are a testament to his ongoing struggle to save his family, as well as a self-flagellation brought about by the latent hopelessness he feels over his helpless position, the guilt he feels over his "safety in exile," and the fear that the path he has chosen to protect his family will nevertheless lead to destruction.

This surge in violence against anonymous German-Americans is also the result of the growing sense of doubt that begins to slip into Joe's creative process from the very beginning. Even when he is basking in the satisfaction of winning

the Second World War (165), the victory is short lived upon his return to reality. He needs only to pick up a newspaper on that morning in October 1940 to feel

> deflated. The surge of triumph he felt when he finished a story was always fleeting, and seemed to grow briefer with every job. This time it had lasted about a minute and a half before turning to shame and frustration. The Escapist was an impossible champion, ludicrous and above all *imaginary*; fighting a war that could never be won. His cheeks burned with embarrassment. He was wasting his time. "Idiot," he said, wiping at his eyes with the back of an arm. (168)

Joe seems aware of the futility of his Golem's fight even at this early stage, a feeling that only grows with his frequent and pointless trips to the German consulate, and the news of his father's death. Despite this constant doubt, he continues to fight, even after his bosses order him to tone down the violence in his work: "giving into Anapol and Ashkenazy would mean admitting that everything he had done until now had been [...] powerless and useless. A waste of precious time. He wondered if it could possibly be simple vanity that made him want to refuse the offer […] No, he thought […] I believe in the power of my imagination. I believe […] in the power of my art" (286). Yet even in this reaffirming statement one can detect Joe's doubt as he wonders if his creation is simple vanity, a futile attempt to gain control.

The catalyst that pushes Joe over the edge, that confirms his doubt and sets him on a path of utter destruction, is the death of his younger brother, Thomas. After Thomas's ship, the voyage of which was in large part due to Joe's tireless work, is torpedoed, Joe leaves New York; this time nothing can stop him from

joining the war effort and, most important to him, killing Nazis beyond the pages of *The Escapist*. Despite being placed by the Navy at Kelvinator Station, Antarctica, and losing nearly every member of his unit save one pilot, Joe still manages to kill one German, so set is his "resolve and his craving for revenge, which grew in intensity as it was frustrated again and again by the inscrutable plans of the U.S. Navy" (457). This action is followed by over a decade of bare survival, through which Joe clings to the idea of the Golem by way of his devotion to superhero comics:

> Comic books had sustained his sanity during his time on the psychiatric ward at Gitmo. For the whole of fall and winter following his return to the mainland, which Joe spent shivering in a rented cabin on the beach at Chincoteague, Virginia, with the wind whistling in through the chinks in the clapboard, half-poisoned by the burned-hair smell of an old electric heater, it was only ten thousand Old Gold cigarettes and a pile of *Captain Marvel Adventures* […] that had enabled Joe to fight off, once and for all, the craving for morphine with which he had returned from the Ice. (575)

Only the creation of a new Golem can propel Joe out of a state of mere survival and back into his old life in "the world in general, and [with] the Clays in particular" (525). Through a cathartic creation of "*The Golem!* [...] the 2,256-page comic book […] which had been coming to him, panel by panel and chapter by chapter, in his dreams, in diners, on long bus rides all across the south and northwest, since he had set out from Cincoteague three years before" (577), Joe is finally able to reconnect with the world. Josef Golem, the creature Joe creates on the pages of *The Golem!*, is vastly different from the Escapist. The Escapist

protects the Jews of Europe through violence against the Nazi regime, which, as Joe anticipated, was little more than futile fantasy. Josef Golem and "the rabbis […] organ grinders, soldiers in breastplates, a beautiful girl in a headscarf […] buildings and carriages, street scenes […] the spiky elaborate towers and crumbling archways of […] Prague, lanes of queer houses huddled in the snow, a bridge of statues casting a moonlit shadow on a river, twisting alleyways" (542), protects them by preserving the memory of their thriving pre-war culture. Joe's new approach to the creation of a Golem is devoid of the brutality, and therefore, of the brutal outcomes; instead,

> the work – telling this story – was helping to heal him. All of the grief and black wonder that he was never able to express, before or afterward, not to a navy psychiatrist, nor to a fellow drifter in some cheap hotel near Orlando, Florida, nor to his son, nor to any of those few who remained to love him when he finally returned to the world, all of it went into the queasy angles and stark compositions, the crosshatchings and vast swaths of shadow, the distended and fractured and finely minced panels of his monstrous comic book. (577-578)

The creation of this "monstrous" memorial enables Joe to let go of much of the pain that is related to his past. Indeed, after completing *The Golem!*, he receives a package "filled, to a depth of about seven inches, with a fine powder, pigeon gray and opalescent, that Joe recognized from boyhood excursions as the silty bed of the Modau" (610-611). This dust is the remains of the Golem of Prague, which had found its way back to Joe so many years after he had escaped with it.

The Golem, which in *Kavalier and Clay* manifests as the physical being of the Golem of Prague, the artistic creation of the Escapist, and the successful artist and self-made man, Joe, incites destruction. Yet, it also allows Joe to let go of the trauma of the past, to heal, to remember, and to move forward. These Golems become violently out of control, specifically those created by Joe, since he creates not only his own violent acts, but the artistic renderings of those of the Escapist as well. However, the commitment to creation that Joe clings to throughout the novel offers him the very thing those experiencing trauma need the most: hope. The violence and destructiveness of the Golem is the risk a creator hazards in order to hope; doubt is the unavoidable low to the high that is hope, and Chabon insists that this binary can be found in nearly every creative act:

> In literature and folklore, the significance and the fascination of golems – from Rabbi Loew's to Victor von Frankenstein's – lay in their soullessness, in their tireless inhuman strength, in their metaphorical association with overweening human ambition, and in the frightening ease with which they passed beyond the control of their horrified and admiring creators. But it seemed to Joe that none of these – Faustian hubris least of all – were among the true reasons that impelled men, time after time, to hazard the making of golems. The shaping of a golem, to him, was a gesture of hope, offered against hope, in a time of desperation. It was the expression of a yearning that a few magic words and an artful hand might produce something – one poor, dumb, powerful thing – exempt from the crushing strictures, from the ills, cruelties, and inevitable failures of the greater Creation. (582)

Hope, and the power of artistic creation, is all Joe has to hold onto as he watches history unfold and engulf his entire family.

David's Golem also offers him a sense of hope; the hope that David can develop an individuality and a self that exists outside of the confines of his brother's illness, which completely envelops his life and the lives of the rest of his family in *Epileptic*. The very fact that Meyrink's *The Golem* is, as aforementioned, David's first grown-up book is indicative of the direction he and his art are moving. He is choosing "the side of the glorious Indians against the lowly, shabby cowboys […] the side of the skinny Jews against the fat Nazis" (172), away from the oppressiveness of his brother's illness. This ability to escape something so all encompassing is what draws David to the Golem, away from depictions of battles and massacres and into a darker fantastical style:

> The Golem fascinates me. This protagonist who escapes the grip of his creator seems familiar. In Meyrink's novel he returns every thirty-three years and announces a tragedy. He walks with an erratic gait, as if he was going to fall forward with every step. His appearance unleashes fear and hate in the crowds. He lives in a room with no exit beyond a barred window. How he gets out of it, no one knows. Suddenly it seems obvious to me. Only fantasy can make sense of the skewed reality in which I live. (183-184)

Through artistic production, David finds hope that he may escape the grip of the traumatic situation of which he is a product and become a creator himself, and therefore a creator of his own self. Seeing his brother's illness worsen day by day, this desire only grows: "I observe him. I study him. I cling to the idea of not being

like him. I can't sleep, I must work. I start by writing stories in the yard. […] I create my version of the Golem" (213-214). Again, the David's powerful ability to create offers him a sense of hope and a way of achieving the autonomy he so desperately desires.

Yet this Golem, this emerging creative power that David has found, incites violent tendencies in him, just as Joe's Golem did in *Kavalier and Clay.* The maturing perspective that David achieves allows him to reflect on the rate with which Jean-Christophe is maturing himself. David decides that Jean-Christophe is "dragging his heels on the road to adulthood. He grabs on to everything within reach to avoid getting there. I think what he needs is to be shaken up" (227). As David makes this observation, he leaps into the air, transforming into a large, solid Golem-like creature, and pouncing on his brother. "No…Pierre-Francois, quit it…" (227) Jean-Christophe pleads, to which David replies, "My name isn't Pierre-Francois anymore! It's David!" (228), protecting his own identity. David continues to push his brother, asserting his power, but also, on some level, urging Jean-Christophe to assert some of his own: "Why should I quit it…You don't even put up a fight! I'm smaller'n you are and I'm kickin' your ass! […] An epileptic seizure? That's the best you can come up with to get away? Lame…" (228). Though he is younger and smaller than his brother, David is depicted as much larger and more powerful, strengthened by his own agency, where his brother is weakened by the overwhelming power of his illness.

Eventually, the power that David gathers from his art overtakes him. He is depicted "living in a little studio apartment in the 20th arrondissement, paid for by my father" (276) during his first year of art school, sitting at his drawing desk,

completely surrounded by books[3] and his own drawings. He is working on a drawing of a creature gazing out of the window of a building, like Meyrink's Golem. He is totally immersed in artistic production; it surrounds him and occupies his every waking hour:

> During the week I attend classes at the Duperre School of Applied Arts, next to the Carreau du Temple. I stay in my room all through the weekends, inking in pages and devouring books in an attempt to fill those two days before Monday when I can get back to the lectures. […] I had to draw and write constantly. I had to fill my time in order to prevent my brother's disease from reaching me. (276)

Yet no amount of violence, obsessive production, or endless traversing of the streets of Paris (since "walking is another way of writing and drawing" [279]) can prevent David from feeling utterly hopeless at times and "furious! So there! During all those years, I said nothing, I deferred to my brother. I wanted to be the one who doesn't cause any problems. I forfeited part of myself, and in vain. It's over. Jean-Christophe will never get better. […] It never worked … So eventually I had to give up all hope" (279-281). Despite the cathartic distraction David gets from his total immersion in art, his creations cannot save him from the trauma of his brother's illness.

No amount of artistic production can fully distract David, especially since, unlike Joe, whose traumatic experience was a historical event with a definitive end, David's is ongoing, as his brother does not get better by the end of the comic; he and his family will cope with the trauma of Jean-Christophe's illness on a

[3] Including Meyrink's *The Golem* in the upper right corner.

continuous basis. So, also unlike Joe, David is unable to fully heal using his ability to create, though it may provide an outlet. Even at the highest point of his life that is depicted in the book, his relationship with Helene, a Jewish singer, David is shadowed by Meyrink's Golem, and thus he experiences the constant doubt that his life can reach a state of sustainable peace and the fear that at any given moment everything can fall apart. He relishes the fact that "For the first time in my life I'm in a long-term relationship with someone… We're living on rue des Rosiers, in the Jewish neighborhood. I try to take it all in, astonished to be living in the midst of this culture I find so fascinating" (320). David looks out the window to find the Golem, a finger held to his lips, as if to indicate that the peace and quiet he is currently experiencing is only temporary, that it will soon be destroyed. The Golem continues to follow David as he and Helene have trouble conceiving a child, a symbol of the growing unrest that will eventually lead to the end of their relationship. "I don't remember how many times we tried before we split up," David says of the ordeal (333). Once again he looks out of the window to find the Golem, "So?" it asks expectantly, "So it's over…" David replies with a sense of resignation. While Joe is able to work through trauma by using his creation, the role of creative catharsis in David's traumatic situation is not as clear. However, though there is not an obvious point at which David begins to heal, it is evident that without his creation, without the artistic life he creates for himself, David's violent tendencies and anger would have no positive outlet or outcome. The finished product that is *Epileptic* is proof of David's working through of his traumatic experiences. In this way, David B.'s memoir is akin to Joe's massive graphic novel *The Golem*. They serve similar artistic purposes, as

creations made in an attempt to heal, to offset the destruction left by the trauma they have each experienced.

The Golems in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and *Epileptic* are represented as actual clay beings, as comic book characters, and as self-made men. They are artists and artistic creation. They protect and destroy, they embody creation and destruction, and they comment on the complex and varied uses and possible outcomes of artistic production. In and of themselves, both Joe and David are representative of the Golem. They work constantly, because it facilitates self-preservation as well as a hope that they can protect their loved ones. Yet this autonomy fills them with violent anger and a pervasive sense of doubt and worry. In addition to creating their own identities, they create Golems of their own through their art, which are also destructive and, eventually, productive. Like the superhero, the Golem is used by those in a powerless position in to gain a sense of control over their lives and, in these cases, the traumatic situation that they must endure. The power of the Golem can spiral out of control, but if the artist can learn how to wield that power, they can create something with a true ability to heal.

CHAPTER III: The Hero as Survivor - Art, Commercialism, and Guilt

"Jewish guilt seems to be a largely American phenomenon. In fact, there is no Hebrew word for guilt! Freedom, affluence, and acceptance came only after the Jewish people had suffered to preserve their faith through thousands of years of persecution and near annihilation." (Weinstein 100)

In *Up, Up, and Oy Vey!,* Simcha Weinstein makes this rather bold statement regarding Jewish guilt. As a Rabbi, Weinstein's pop culture focused writing is quite spiritually based. This quote is indicative of that streamlined perspective; it denies the broader cultural legacy of guilt left by the memory of those who suffered through thousands of years of persecution and near annihilation in order to enable the existence of the free and affluent post-Holocaust Jew. There may be no Hebrew word for guilt, but it exists in the cultural vernacular of every Jew living in the wake of this legacy. There are many ways of dealing with such guilt, including art as memorial. Yet, living in a world in which art is a commodity complicates this process, since the commercialization of art that depicts trauma can be seen as the commercialization of trauma itself, a perversity that can add to the already overwhelmingly guilty conscience of a successful artist. Weinstein's point is that the success of the Jews subsequent to their suffering is uplifting, but the hopefulness of this statement is tested when the cause of this success is the commodification of that suffering. It is difficult to feel "free" when one's affluence and success is predicated on the suffering, and even the death, of others, which is why guilt, debt, and the notion of gain are so closely related in representations of trauma.

Nietzsche explores the connection between guilt and debts in "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like," an essay from *On the Genealogy of Morals.* Nietzsche defines his position on the title sentiments as follows:

> I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced – that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace […] well adapted to the wilderness, to war, to prowling, to adventure: suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and "suspended" [and] a dreadful heaviness lay upon them. (84)

Though the purpose of this chapter is not to pass judgment on the implications of the statement that guilt and bad conscience are a "serious illness," or the extent to which this may or may not be true, I do intend to explore the effects of this "dreadful heaviness" upon commercialized art, specifically the graphic trauma narratives by Art Spiegelman, David B. and Michael Chabon. Crucial to this notion are both the idea that Weinstein expresses, that "freedom, affluence, and acceptance came only after the Jewish people had suffered" (100), as well as the links that Nietzsche makes between guilt and debts.

The idea of payment is inherent in Weinstein's implication that the rewards experienced by modern day Jews are the result of thousands of years of suffering. Nietzsche puts forward a similar idea when he claims that "reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole somber thing called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: how dearly they have been bought! how much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all 'good things'" (62). In other

words, all that may add meaning to life, or to art, is paid for through suffering. This is especially applicable to trauma narratives, to which memory is essential, and the point of which is often memorialization. To Nietzsche, memory itself is the very root of suffering. While forgetfulness is "like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness" (58), memory

> breathes upon us and rises up in us whenever we become "serious." Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges […] the most repulsive mutilations […] the cruelest rites of all the religious cults […] all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics. (61)

To choose forgetfulness and reap the benefits of happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, and present, one must choose to live an autonomous life very close to Nietzsche's ideal of the übermensch, as "the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for 'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive)" (59). Choosing to identify oneself with a community, whether it is a family or a cultural identification, as David, Artie, and Joe do, makes forgetfulness difficult, if not impossible. Nietzsche explains that this is because when

> one lives in a community, one enjoys the advantages of a communality (oh what advantages! we sometimes underrate them today), one dwells

> protected, cared for, in peace and trustfulness, without fear of certain injuries and hostile acts to which the man *outside*, the "man without peace," is exposed. (71)

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman also discusses the safety of community is his *Postmodern Ethics*, explaining that "Social norms, rules, conventions are about security and tranquil conscience [...] the preventive, and effective, medicine for guilty conscience. True, I have lost my autonomy as a side-effect. But what I gained is not to be dismissed lightly" (79). Indeed the security one achieves by taking part in a community is not easily dismissible. However, it is in no way equal to the safety of autonomy; when the safety of the community is violated by a violent or traumatic event, those within the community must respond appropriately to the perpetrator and to one another. This is when the notion of guilt and debts becomes relevant. When there is a rupture within the community, members can no longer bask in the safety of being a part of something bigger than themselves, as each individual member is implicated by and accountable for the threat to the whole. Depending on the intensity of the traumatic event, such a rupture can have long-term effects on a community.

To make the link between guilt and debt, Nietzsche points out that in German etymology "the major moral concept *Schuld* [guilt] has its origins in the very material concept *Schulden* [debts]" (62) and makes a connection between debtor and creditor and "the sphere of legal obligation […] the moral conceptual world of 'guilt,' 'conscience,' 'duty,' 'sacredness of duty' […] its beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time" (65). To turn to Weinstein's quote once again, one can begin

to see that his logic leads directly to a sense of guilt rather than, as he claims, away from it. In the scenario he has created, the scenario that exists today in terms of a Jewish artist's relationship to the past, the affluent contemporary Jew is the debtor, and he is in no way free from his creditor, the Jews who suffered for thousands of years to ensure his position, nor is he able to simply accept his own freedom and move on without paying his debt to the community that made him in the only currency available to him: guilt.

In his essay, Nietzsche tries to explain "to what extent can suffering balance debts or guilt […] To the extent that to *make* suffer was in the highest degree pleasurable […] an extraordinary counterbalancing pleasure: that of *making* suffer" (10). In a community, specifically one in which some members become successful because of the suffering of others, this sort of guilt and suffering can frequently be internalized. A survivor of trauma is already instilled with a sense of guilt. As an artist, one may represent trauma as a way to work through or rise above residual guilt and suffering. As a commercial artist -- and most contemporary artists, specifically comic book artists, are considered to be commercial artists -- the success of one's work can add to an already bad conscience, despite what it may also imply about rising above a traumatic situation. This success should offer a sense of relief; proof that an individual, and by association, the family or community that individual comes from, has risen above their own suffering, yet it also perpetuates that suffering, as well as augmenting and internalizing feelings of guilt.

In his famous essay "Cultural Criticism and Society," Theodor W. Adorno discusses the connection between the commodification of art and guilt. He also

broaches the subject of guilt within the broad community of society: “all culture shares the guilt of society. It ekes out its existence only by virtue of injustice already perpetrated in the sphere of production, much as does commerce” (26). Adorno reinforces the idea that all artistic production shares in the guilt of the community in which it is produced. More specifically, however, he speaks to the guilt associated with commodified art, “the guilt of a life which blindly and callously reproduces itself” (23), and the freedom that comes when an artist rejects such commodification: “their insistence on independence and autonomy, on separation from the prevailing realm of purposes, implies, at least as an unconscious element, the promise of a condition in which freedom were realized” (23). This type freedom is difficult to attain at all in such a highly commercialized world, even more so when the premise of the work in question is residual guilt. This sentiment takes on yet another meaning when analyzed in light of Adorno’s notion of guilt as inherent in the very foundation of the commodification and mass reproduction of art.

As Adorno scholar Raymond Geuss suggests, Adorno observed this condition of art developing particularly after “World War II, culminating in a form of society which is nothing but brute self-justifying fact. In such a situation art turns against its own ability to produce soothing images, aesthetically pleasing appearances, unified works, and produces formally fragmented and jarring ‘negative utopias’” (Geuss 172). This state is especially recognizable in comics, since they employ a double mode of representation through writing and visual presentation. Each of these works explores both aspects of Adorno’s dual definition of negative utopia. The first is similar to dystopia, in that it “show[s]

that the world in which we live is as bad as it could be – because it is" (172). The second definition goes beyond dystopia, suggesting that negative utopia "also show[s] that the only (utopian) hope is for a society which we can only characterize negatively – all we can say about such a society is that it would be radically different from the one we now have" (172). Indeed, each work does show the worst of humanity, the hope for an indefinably better world, and the negotiation that takes place between the representation of negative utopia and reality in art. Not only are the narratives that have been discussed in the previous chapters post-World War II graphic representations of trauma, but both *Maus* and *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* deal directly with the trauma of World War II itself. Both works also play with formal fragmentation in their own ways, by manipulating the typical comic book format with the use of a highly stylized fable in the case of *Maus*, and through the avowed influence of surrealism, Dadaism, and one of the most well known filmic representations of "negative utopia," *Citizen Kane*, upon Kavalier and Clay as they create *The Escapist.* Though *Epileptic* deals with a more personal, familial trauma, the dark, fantastical images contained within are even more in line with Geuss's description. Additionally, all three books use art as a way to "negatively" express utopian ideas. A specific utopian world is not (and perhaps cannot) be defined, but the goal of producing art is to work through trauma and eventually bring the artist to a state of peace, a state indeterminately defined as something beyond the traumatic event or experience.

Geuss's statement regarding negative utopia, based on Adorno's beliefs, is especially fitting in terms of his most famous statement from "Cultural Criticism

and Society," that "even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter [...] To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (34). This impossibility would explain why so much of contemporary art is filled with fragmented, jarring dystopias. It also sheds an interesting light on the notion of guilt in art. Guilt may be a byproduct of mass production, but it is also a direct result of the impossibility of writing poetry after the trauma of Auschwitz. If writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, then the ultimate barbarism would be to attempt to do so without a sense of guilt. Without the anxiety that the memory of Auschwitz produces in these artists, their art would be completely inhumane. Ruth R. Wisse mentions the dangers of transcending trauma in her book *The Modern Jewish Canon*: "no matter how effectively the German people will alter the course of their national politics in the years ahead [...] Germany cannot erase its crime against the Jews, because even its self-transformation will be understood as a reaction to its earlier deeds" (195). In effect, the guilt of this art, the impossibility to ultimately transcend a traumatic event despite attempts at artistic catharsis or artistic and financial success, imbues said art with humanity. The success of this art lies, paradoxically, in the failure of the artist to completely alleviate the pain, and the memory, of trauma. The full working through of historical trauma in art would be a false utopia – an impossible promise of a redeemed society. Negative utopia in art show the truth about the historical moment: the Holocaust was a trauma that cannot be recovered from, a trauma that will never be resolved or redeemed. This type of success, the success of the artist

to be humane by failing to fully recover, traps the artist in a position of worry and guilt, what Bauman refers to as moral anxiety.

This sense of humanity is facilitated by moral anxiety. Bauman describes moral anxiety as that which

> provides the only substance the moral self could ever have. What makes the moral self is the urge to do, not the knowledge of what is to be done; the unfulfilled task, not the duty correctly performed […] This uncertainty with no exit is precisely the foundation of morality. One recognizes morality by its gnawing sense of unfulfilledness, by its endemic dissatisfaction with itself. *The moral self is a self always haunted by the suspicion that it is not moral enough.* (80)

Furthermore, according to Bauman, morality is "incurably aporetic. Few choices […] are unambiguously good. […] Most importantly, however, virtually every moral impulse, if acted upon in full leads to immoral consequences" (11). This notion is applicable to art that is inspired by moral impulse. The need to work through or commemorate a traumatic event inspires a work imbued with the guilt of surviving that communal trauma. In turn, because of the commodification of art, the artistic success of such a work implies both critical and commercial success.[4] The implication of the commercial success of commodified art is the

[4] The specific artistic success of the three critically acclaimed and well selling books discussed here is more than implied. Since the initial publication of *Maus I* in 1986, it has won Spiegelman, among other prizes, a Guggenheim fellowship, a special Pulitzer Prize, and several nominations for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Since 2000 *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* has won the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Society Library Book Award, and been the finalist for both the Pen/Faulkner Award and the National Book Critics Circle

commodification of trauma, the immoral consequence that can intensify the initial sense of guilt.

This seemingly hopeless, aporetic situation incites moral anxiety. Bauman's prime example of moral anxiety is especially relevant to the texts at hand:

> Speaking of the moral responsibility of anyone who survived the horrors of the Holocaust, one of the most active and dedicated rescuers of Nazi victims, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, concluded that 'Only those who died bringing help can say that they have done enough.' This verdict will not bring much succor to those who survived, at whom it was aimed: it sounds like a life-long confinement to guilt. (80-81)

Indeed survivors are confined to a life sentence of guilt, with little chance of relief. *Epileptic*, *Maus I and II,* and *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* all chronicle the imprisonment of their respective characters. Much of David's life (particularly his childhood) revolves around finding care for his brother, yet he and his family never find a solution to Jean-Christophe's disease. Even his own escape into fantastical art and, eventually, commercial art cannot alleviate the guilt and anxiety brought about by this situation. Despite and in certain ways because of his commercial and critical success, Artie laments his inability to understand his father's experience in Auschwitz, and his ghostly competition with his brother Richieu, who died during the Holocaust. This sentiment, however, is most strongly seen in Joe's desperate attempts to save

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Award. *Epileptic* has been awarded the Angouleme International Comics Festival Prize for Scenario and the Ignatz Award. (Jacket Notes)

enough money from his thriving comic book creation in order to rescue his family while still maintaining his artistic integrity. Joe watches helplessly from the safety of American shores as his family is destroyed by forces beyond his control, and he is condemned by the anxiety that he might not be doing enough, as well as the dread that the choices he makes in his attempts to ensure their safety are entirely wrong.

As a traditionally commercial art form, the frequent representations of trauma in comic books become deeply entwined with a sense of guilt. The artist of a trauma narrative, usually writing and drawing from a survivor's position, is faced not only with the guilt of survival, but the guilt of the commercial profit and prestige to be gained as a result of the medium of their product. The debate on whether art or commercial success (in the case of Artie and David) or gain (in the case of Joe) is more effective in the working through of trauma is prominent in each of the books dealt with in the previous chapters. Ultimately, however, neither art nor commercialism serves to fully assuage the deeply palpable feelings of hopelessness and guilt in *Maus*, *Epileptic*, and *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay.* Instead, the characters in these books work through the effects of the indirect traumas they experience (the direct traumatic experiences being that of their loved ones), dealing with the complex emotions that result from the attempted catharsis along the way. Though they may never come to a definitive resolution, by telling their stories of trauma they produce art that becomes part of a collective memory, which is perhaps all these artists can ask of themselves, particularly in the face of a monumental tragedy like the Holocaust. In "Secret Skin: An Essay in Unitard Theory," Michael Chabon suggests that the working

through of trauma is not always simply about escape, but also about transformation (14). As he further suggests in *Kavalier and Clay*, escape itself is not so "simple," which is exactly Joe's perspective when he disputes

> the newspaper articles that [he] had read about the upcoming Senate investigation into comic books [which] always cited "escapism" among the litany of injurious consequences of their reading, and dwelled on the pernicious effect, on young minds, of satisfying the desire to escape. As if there could be any more noble or necessary service in this life. (582)

The escape offered by the possibility of delving into an artistic fantasy world is significant enough in the working through of trauma. It would seem to follow that the ability to successfully work through trauma is the mark of this transformation. Yet trauma can never be completely forgotten, so in the case of these three works, it is representation, rather than resolution, that implies transformation.

The effect that David's art has upon the guilt he feels regarding his brother's illness is only broached in *Epileptic* itself. He establishes that studying commercial art draws him away from the trauma of his brother's illness, over both time, when he begins art school -- "I had to draw and write constantly. I had to fill my time in order to prevent my brother's disease from reaching me" (276) -- and space, when he leaves school for "Tunisia, to work in an advertising agency" (315). During David's lowest point, with pages upon pages of his brother's illness all around him and his inability to conceive a child before him, he confirms that "it's the creation of l'Association that saves me" (327)[5], affirming the positive influence of art in his life, his need for a cathartic, creative outlet. David only

[5] "*Publishing house formed by David B. and five colleagues" (327).

hints at the tension beneath the particular work at hand in a brief conversation with his mother. Set during the time that David is writing *Epileptic*, the scene depicts David's mother protesting a story that he has included in the comic. At first, she firmly expresses concern about the excerpt, which involves her alcoholic great-grandmother, "No, David, I don't want you to tell that story. The first part was pretty bad, but this one is even worse. It's too much…I'm telling you, you're going to lose your readers" (94). This escalates to anger, as his mother continues "Your drawings are terrible you know – they frighten me. Why are you so intent on telling these stories about your ancestors? They've got nothing to do with your brother, do they?" (95). David responds defensively to his mother's anger: "They're important! Our ancestors were locked in a struggle to escape their misery. You endured a similar struggle in your quest to cure Jean-Christophe" (95). His mother responds lividly, "To you, our family's story is a tragedy," before resigning to utter sadness: "You can't reduce my great-grandmother to a drunkard. The memories I have of her are so different…She was a cheerful woman, brimming with energy" (95). David's mother clearly does not appreciate the way that he represents illness within their family, and this scene implies that she is uncomfortable with his attempt to represent their personal family trauma at all, given how rapidly she switches intense emotional states during this short scene.

This sentiment is confirmed in "Memory" a short scene from B.'s forthcoming installation *Babel #3* published in I.G.N.A.T.Z. (International Graphic Novels at their Zenith, a sampler created by Fantagraphics Books for Free Comic Book Day 2008). David is depicted on his mother's face, standing in

for her eyes and nose and in effect, for her perception of the trauma she also experienced, which David interprets in his representation of that trauma. He explains that, "[w]hen she saw *Epileptic* my mother felt as if something had been taken from her" (B., N.P.) His mother's mouth protests angrily, "This is my story, not yours!", to which an adult David responds "But I was there too. I lived through it too!" His mother's mouth softens a bit at this, wondering "But…How can you remember all that?" to the David inhabiting her face, who is now depicted as a small, lost looking boy. The workings of guilt between mother and son are complex and aporetic. David's mother resents his comic; she feels that it is exploitative of a traumatic experience that "belongs" to her. Though this sense of guilt over exploitation does come in to play in terms of David's interaction with Jean-Christophe in the aftermath of *Epileptic*, David is less sympathetic to his mother's resentment. Just as David used his talent for and knowledge of commercial art forms to work through the effect this illness had on his life, his mother exhausted all possible options in her quest to cure Jean-Christophe, exploring even the most esoteric alternatives. One panel in *Epileptic* depicts these methods, common and obscure, as totems surrounding, leering at, and taunting David's mother; the caption reads: "Paths that might potentially lead to a cure for Jean-Christophe's epilepsy keep opening up, and so long as my mother hasn't tried every single one she'll be tormented by guilt" (216). Her method of dealing with her guilt implies self-sacrifice -- she does it all at her own expense -- while David's implies gain. Yet her quest for a cure was also at the expense of her other children, who did not have epilepsy but were still required to give a large part of their lives to possible cures for Jean-Christophe's disease, some of which entailed

large time and lifestyle commitments, and all of which were accompanied by the risk that the side effects Jean-Christophe endured, like violent anger or dangerous absent-mindedness, would pose a threat to their own well-being. Clearly David feels resentment because his mother is not aware that this trauma is his trauma too, and that his method of representing and dealing with it is no more problematic than hers. David and his mother try different methods to assuage their bad conscience over the indirect trauma they have experienced. Yet regardless of the method they employ, they are both left struggling with a persistent and lingering sense of guilt.

The connection between David's guilt and his relationship to his brother is even more complicated. In "Memory," Jean-Christophe confronts David with what he finds a surprising allegation, "So…you made 'nother book…A book where you make fun of me." David responds, shocked and defensive, "Oh. You mean the final volume of 'Epileptic'…I'm not making fun of you." The scene that follows is heartbreaking, as Jean-Christophe becomes confused and frustrated, "How come you can r'member…alla that stuff…Me…Me…I can't remember…nothing." At this he breaks down and, with his head in his hands, cries. David explains that "He's even more isolated than before now that he has no memories to share with us. Bit by bit we see him lose his faculties." This, along with Jean-Christophe's reaction to the book, obviously weighs on David's already bad conscience. He has poured all of his creative energy into a work that creates a memory of his brother's traumatic disease but, like all the attempted cures, the years of self-sacrifice, it can do nothing for Jean-Christophe. The disease, so often portrayed as a snake-like monster throughout *Epileptic*, has

already consumed him. This is the struggle that is depicted in “Memory,” as David “look[s] for an answer but none comes to me. The conversation has already moved onto a different topic. We hold our tongues, my brother and I, and our hearts within our chests.” He turns toward Jean-Christophe with a look of concerned guilt, confronted by the fine line between memorialization and exploitation.

Spiegelman explores a similar issue in *Maus II*, though he eventually relates it more specifically to commercialism. At the opening of the comic, he discusses his “guilt about having an easier life than [his parents] did” (16), and the inadequacy he feels in his attempt to “reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. And trying to do it as a comic strip! [...] There’s so much I’ll never be able to understand or visualize. I mean reality is too complex for comics…So much has to be left out or distorted” (16). He explores the same concept as B.: the notion of ownership over a traumatic event, and the guilt associated with being traumatized by an event that has only affected him indirectly. Adding the production of art into this equation incites the worry of exploitation. Spiegelman addresses this later in *Maus II* in a scene reminiscent of B.’s “Memory,” in which Artie is depicted, at his desk, reciting a series of seemingly disjointed memories. These memories weave together his life with the lives of his fathers and other victims of the Holocaust, “Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944...I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987. In May 1987 Francoise and I are expecting a baby…Between May 16, 1944 and May 24, 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz” (41). This list of memories has two common ties: the

trauma of the Holocaust, which affects each of the parties mentioned in one way or another, and the fact that “In September 1986, after 8 years of work, the first part of *Maus* was published. It was a critical and commercial success” (41). The success of *Maus* weighs heavily on Artie, as he recognizes that it is built upon the suffering and demise of millions of people. He represents this literally, in a panel that shows him at his writing desk, which is perched atop a pile of dead bodies. The bodies are clearly recognizable as Holocaust victims, drawn as emaciated figures with gaping mouths and Spiegelman’s trademark mouse heads. Flies buzz around him as a further reminder of the vulture-like implications of the success of his art, as he explains further that “[a]t least fifteen foreign editions are coming out. I’ve gotten 4 serious offers to turn my book into a T.V. special or movie. (I don’t wanna.) In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.) Lately I’ve been depressed” (41). As his success proliferates, so does his unease with his own subject matter. This escalates more and more over the next few pages, as television reporters inform him “Alright Mr. Spiegelman, we’re ready to shoot!” (41). Questions are shot at him from all directions, as Artie becomes more flustered, depicted visually by his gradual regression to a mouse of child-like proportions and emotional reactions. The reporters bring up the notion of guilt, asking why younger Germans should carry the guilt of a trauma they had nothing to do with, to which Artie replies “Who am I to say?...But a lot of the corporations that flourished in Nazi Germany are richer than ever. I dunno…maybe everyone has to feel guilty. Everyone! Forever!” (42). The topic quickly changes to commercialism as a salesman holding a sign advertising *Maus* vests -- “You’ve read the book…Now buy the vest!” (42) -- proposes to a befuddled Artie a

"licensing deal. You get 50% of the profits. We'll make a million. Your dad would be proud! ...whaddya want – a bigger percentage? Hey we can talk" (42). But Artie does not want further commercial success; he wants "absolution. No…No…I want…I want…my mommy!" (42). The tiny Artie breaks down under the pressure of the media attention and cries.

Due to the success of his work, Artie cannot be absolved of the guilt that he supposes everyone has to feel forever. As a result of the Holocaust, the subject of his work, he cannot have his mother either. He has circled back to the last statement he made before the press arrived in his work space, that his mother killed herself in 1968 and lately he has been feeling depressed. The circularity of this passage mimics the aporetic circularity of guilt and moral anxiety. As the tiny Artie bawls, a reporter asks him: "Could you tell our audience if drawing *Maus* was cathartic? Do you feel better now?" (42). These questions are morbidly ironic in the context of the scene; clearly Artie feels conflicted about his work and the implications of his subject matter and the critical and commercial success he has gained as a result of it. Even when the reporters vanish, these feelings linger in Artie's consciousness. He looks out the window of his studio to find barbed wire and a watchtower like those found in the camps, while the pile of bodies remains in the foreground. He continues to wade through this sea of bodies as he walks from his studio to his therapist's office. He admits to his therapist that he feels

> Completely messed up. I mean things couldn't be going better with my 'career'…but mostly I feel like crying. I can't work. My time is being sucked up be interviews and business propositions I can't deal with. But even when I'm left alone I'm totally blocked. Instead of working on my

> book I just lie on my couch for hours and stare at a small grease spot on the upholstery. (43)

This, and the fact that earlier in the passage Artie mentions that his "father's ghost still hangs over [him]" (43) is further evidence that he is plagued by the fear that his memorial has become an exploitative work, and his unease with the commercial aspects of what is essentially his own father's trauma narrative. This worry about whether it was better to tell the story, or whether the story's success has become something grotesque, is also circular, a notion that Artie comments upon by quoting Samuel Beckett, who "once said: 'Every word is like a stain on silence and nothingness'…On the other hand he said it" (45). Artie cannot even be sure that the guilt and anxiety he feels can be appeased by talking, or writing and drawing, especially since as he does so, he is in the midst of making *Maus II*, which promises to become as big a critical and commercial success as the first installment.

Questions of Artie's father, Vladek, feeling proud of him, and the notion of Vladek's ghost lingering around Artie's life and work brought up in this scene, recall a passage in *Maus I*. Indeed, it seems almost a prophecy as Vladek and his second wife, Mala, look over some of Artie's sketches. Like many survivors, they have the impulse to tell their stories, and they seem to appreciate that Artie is doing this for them. Mala feels that "It's an important book. People who don't usually read such stories will be interested…It should be very successful" (133). Vladek agrees, "Yes. I know already my story by heart, and even I am interested!...Yah. Someday you'll be famous, like…what's-his-name?...You know…The big-shot cartoonist" (133). At this Artie whips his head around, a

shocked expression on his face, “What cartoonist would you know?...Walt Disney?” to which his father replies “Yah! Walt Disney!” (133). The play upon Walt Disney’s anti-Semitism and the parody of the Jew entertainer inherent in his most famous creation aside, what is overlooked here and not even alluded to until the aforementioned scene in *Maus II*, is the irony of the fact that Vladek most likely would be quite proud of Artie’s success. The passage in *Maus I* ends with a punch line, but it is clear that Vladek hopes that Artie will gain commercial success by interpreting Vladek’s story, as a father would wish for his son to be successful. This is quite in line with Weinstein’s idea that the freedom, affluence, and acceptance of contemporary Jews result from the suffering of the previous generations. For Vladek, Artie’s success would indicate that the trauma of the Holocaust had in some way been transcended, that some sort of transformation had occurred. However, as Artie indicated to his wife, he cannot get past the guilt of having an easier life than his parents and of escaping the Holocaust altogether, unlike his phantom sibling. And he cannot bear the grotesque spectacle made of this tragedy because of the success of his own art, which is essentially the telling of a story that does not fully belong to him. He is therefore trapped in an aporia of guilt and moral anxiety, unsure if his work is a contribution or simply a stain where silence should have been.

Joe, from *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, is trapped in a similar pattern of guilt and anxiety. Loosely based on the story of Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, the creators of Superman, the source of the theme of exploitation in this particular work is not the artist but the executives of commercial art, the publishers who exploit their working artists by buying their creations and

pocketing most of the money subsequently made from the popularity of said creations. The pattern in *Kavalier and Clay* does not revolve around the exploitation of trauma as much as around the tension between artistic integrity and commercial art that Joe struggles with throughout the novel. He is in exile in the midst of a traumatic situation, watching it unfold from the safety of New York, trying desperately to save his family from the impending doom of the Holocaust. The uncomfortable safety of exile spurs his guilt; he can barely experience a moment of pleasure without thinking that he is not doing enough to save his family. This seriously affects his relationship with Rosa Saks, the woman he falls in love with at a party where "the greatest obstacle he faced was that he did not feel than he ought – ever – to be enjoying himself socially" (230). This guilt lingers in his relationship with Rosa, and he eventually grows to resent her, specifically after his brother's boat is torpedoed:

> he had blamed her, not merely for having introduced him to Hermann Hoffman and his cursed ship, but also more vaguely and more crucially for having lured him into betraying the singleness of purpose […] that had marked his first year of exile from Prague. He had all but abandoned the fight, allowed his thoughts to stray fatally from the battle, betrayed himself to the seductions of New York and Hollywood and Rosa Saks – and been punished for it. (457)

In effect, since Joe did not devote his entire life to saving his family, since he did not, as Bauman suggests, die for the cause, he will be plagued by guilt for the rest of his life, a guilt in which all those close to him will be implicated.

However, the solace he finds in commercial art, drawing his co-creation, *The Escapist*, is what really locks him in a pattern of guilt and anxiety, instilling in him the constant dread that he is not taking the right steps to procure the safety of his family. This fear is based in a struggle between Joe's artistic goals, which he believes could impact the war, thus possibly ensuring the safety of his family, and his desire to make money, in the hope that he can buy his family's safety and become reunited with them. This idea is firmly planted in his head from the moment he and his cousin Sammy begin creating the Escapist. Yet Joe also wants to use his art to fight back against the forces that are threatening his family and rest of the Jews of Prague and Europe, and just a few pages later he and Sammy are discussing an epic cover depicting Hitler getting punched in the jaw by the Escapist.

By the time the cousins meet with their potential (and eventual) publishers, Sheldon Anapol and Jack Ashkenazy, Joe is already tortured by whether he should privilege art or money in his struggle to help him and his family circumvent their impending trauma and, in the case of his family, eventual annihilation. He is immediately at odds after he "heard one hundred and fifty dollars, six dollars per page, twenty per cover. Those numbers sounded very good to him. But now he thought he had just hear Sheldon Anapol declaring that he would not use the cover in which Hitler got his jaw broken. Nothing that Joe had painted had ever satisfied him more" (159). He refuses to sell the Escapist to Anapol and Ashkenazy without this cover, and he and Sammy end up walking out on the meeting. Though the next section of the book implies that the publishers

conceded and allowed Joe to do the cover, this tension is repeated many times throughout the book.

Joe grows "frustrated and enraged" by both "the impotence of the money, and of all the pent-up warlike fancies that had earned it, to do anything but elaborate the wardrobe and fatten the financial portfolios of the owners of Empire Comics" (177). Yet he clings to the conceived power of both. In another scene with Anapol and Ashkenazy, in which Sammy becomes frustrated with what he considers the paltry percentage the publishers are offering them, Joe reminds him that "'five percent…this could be talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars'…with enough money it might not matter if the doors of all the nations were closed" (283). Yet when the publishers list their conditions, which include no more depictions of the Escapist fighting Nazis, Joe immediately recoils, "He didn't want to hear it. He knew he was being unreasonable. But for a year now, unreason – the steadfast and all-consuming persecution of a ridiculous, make-believe war against enemies he could not defeat, by a means that could never succeed – had offered the only possible salvation of his family. Let people be reasonable whose families were not held prisoner" (285). Joe recognizes that he needs the money if he hopes to save his family, but he needs the art if he wants to save himself, much like David indicated in *Epileptic* that he needed the creation of l'Association to save him. Joe confirms this when he tells Sammy "Yes, god damn it, I want the money…But I can't stop fighting now" (286).

After the cousins see *Citizen Kane*, however, Joe's attitude on the matter changes. A "total blending of narration and image" (361), the movie inspires a new direction for *The Escapist* and a new, more hopeful artistic distraction for

Joe. When Anapol approaches the cousins once again, asking them to stop their pen and ink war against the Nazis, Sammy waits for Joe to "speak up, to tell Anapol about his family and the indignities to which they were being exposed, the one hundred cruelties, gross and tiny, to which, with an almost medicinal regimentation, they were being subjected by the Reichsprotektorat" (366). He is shocked when instead Joe responds "All right. I will stop fighting…I want to do *this* now…I'm tired of fighting, maybe, for a little while. I fight, and I am fighting some more, and it just makes me have *less* hope, not more. I need to do something…something that will be *great*, you know, instead of trying always to be Good" (367), because the good fight is getting him nowhere.

Of course, this decision is not definitive; it is shot through with uncertainty, with anxiety, indicated by the narration, which wonders

> whether the delightful fruit of this collaboration came at a price; whether the thirty-two extra issues, the two thousand extra pages of Nazi-smashing obviated by Anapol's ban, might somehow, incrementally, have slid America into the war sooner; whether the advantage gained in time would have precipitated an earlier victory; whether that victory coming a day or a week or a month earlier would have sufficed to preserve a dozen or a hundred or a thousand more lives; such questions now can have only an academic poignancy, as both the ghosts and those haunted by them are dead. (369-370)

These worries haunt Joe, through his time in the Navy, stationed in Antarctica, up until the day he is finally able to make his way back to New York, and even later back to Rosa and his family, and even thereafter. Yet, despite this complicated

relationship with comic book art, it is clear that Joe finds solace in it. He states explicitly that his massive graphic novel, *The Golem*, discussed in the previous chapter, helps him heal (577) from the massive trauma of losing his entire family, just as *The Escapist* helped him keep his sanity while he was so desperately trying to rescue them. However, this effort is futile; because of the inevitability of their demise, the money Joe earns from his commercial art, the cash that landed "in the bank account of Josef Kavalier, where it towered in fantastic drifts and was left that way, aloof and glinting, to cool the fever of exile from the day his family should arrive" (370), does not have the same therapeutic effect. In fact, since his family never arrives, the money simply sits there, a memory of his failed effort to save them, "$974,000…steadily compounding at the East Side Stage Crafts Credit Union" (601). He considers giving it to Sammy to buy Empire Comics, essentially to start another, possibly therapeutic, art project, but he is unsure. The money is representative of the guilt Joe feels as a survivor, and the need to remember, as well as the burden of remembering: "I forget everyday…You know? Days go by, and I don't remember not to forget" (593). Like Artie, Joe is uncomfortable with the money he has earned through the production of commercial art. Not, like Artie, because it implies that he exploited a tragic event, but because it implies that he did not do enough to prevent it. Writing poetry after Auschwitz without guilt is the ultimate barbarism, and spending this money on himself, for himself, would for Joe be equivalent to this act. Though art can help him heal, he is trapped in a guilty and morally anxious state because of the commercial nature of his art.

David, Artie, and Joe all feel guilt and uncertainty over their art, magnified especially in the case of the extremely commercialized nature of Artie and Joe's comics. None of these characters can buy, draw, or write themselves out of a life confined to guilt and suffering. Yet they also each create a testament to this guilt and suffering, a collective memory that serves their respective communities and families. Despite his mother's misgivings, David (B.'s representation of himself) is attempting to pay homage to the struggle his family faced because of Jean-Christophe's engulfing disease. By creating *Maus*, Artie (Spiegelman's representation of himself) produced one of the most widely read memorials to the Holocaust, and to his own father, that exists today. Joe, who is the only fictional character discussed, and therefore given a greater resolution by Chabon, creates *The Golem!*, a healing memory of all that was lost when the Jews of Prague, including the Kavaliers, were extinguished. In this way, each character sacrifices himself to the cause by creating commercialized art, enduring this life-sentence for a higher purpose by both rising above his trauma to find success, and dedicating his art to the representation of a communal trauma.

Conclusion

Popular graphic narratives very typically depict stories of survival, of growing up, of the difficulties of self-identification, of the personal traumas that we live with from day to day, and the larger traumas that follow us throughout our lives. Spiegelman's *Maus* and David B.'s *Epileptic* both tell these kinds of stories, the authors' own true memoirs and trauma, triumph, and the space in between. Yet both stories are clearly influenced by the history explored in Chabon's fictional *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, the history of the dawn and rise of the comic book industry, largely led by Jewish artists, in the midst of one of the biggest traumatic events in the history of Western civilization, and certainly in the history of Jewish culture. In "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative," Chute calls nonfiction comics "the strongest genre in the field" (452). Fictional comics, many of which still adhere to the super hero format in some way or another, are pushed aside in exclusive favor of the stylized, high-art representations of real life events or personal histories, like that of Spiegelman or B. Yet, I find little difference between the artistic production of an Art Spiegelman or a David B. and that of a Jack Kirby, or a Will Eisner, or even a fictional Joe Kavalier or Sammy Clay. They are all artists (or depictions of artists) struggling with oppression, with the problematic exaltation of brute strength and violence, influenced by a similar history and tradition, drawing inspiration from similar legends, and attempting to rise above a sense of overwhelming doubt, guilt, and anxiety. And they all do so from a place deeply rooted in Jewish culture and cultural production.

This project initially set out to explore the influence of Jewish comic artists and Jewish history and culture on the popular aesthetic production so freely and steadily flowing from the graphic form today, to contest Hilary Chute's willful statement of ignorance against exploring the lineage of the super hero comic as it is related to the contemporary production of graphic narrative. In my introduction, I suggested that this approach, one which bypassed an important cultural lineage in favor of one that demonstrated that comics come from a place of respectable high art, could be detrimental to the full exploration of the graphic form. Through my research, I discovered just how enriching the former approach, the exploration of the historical and cultural lineage of comics, can be, and just how much it adds to the study of graphic narrative. The examination of this facet of comics opens avenues of theoretical and philosophical discussion made even richer by their strong connection to cultural history and traditions. The question of comics as literature or comics as high art becomes very nearly obsolete, as one sees not only the influence of the history and tradition of Jewishness on the art form, but how very ingrained the history and tradition of comics is in the cultural and artistic production of Jews and those who identify with Jewish (and comics) culture. Comics cannot be judged solely based on their proximity to high art. The impact of graphic narrative on art and culture transcends this categorization and approaches something far more meaningful.

Crucial to the acceptance of comics in the world of academics and of art worthy of critical exploration in general, is the recognition of comics as a highly commercialized, commodified art form. This includes the most highly acclaimed graphic novel right through to the cheapest paperback lithograph. Rather than

making a hierarchy within the graphic form, perhaps it should be approached more broadly, embracing the whole art form as one that truly reflects the state of art in our society as it exists today. The commercial nature of comics is not something that needs to be avoided or explained away. This very nature is what makes many of these stories so rich and compelling, as the artists who create them and characters within struggle against and work with this inherently commercial nature. This struggle produces something meaningful, something with the power to heal, something that memorializes and even inspires the greatest and most poignantly bittersweet sentiment that can be found amidst the pain of trauma and the guilt of survival: hope.

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