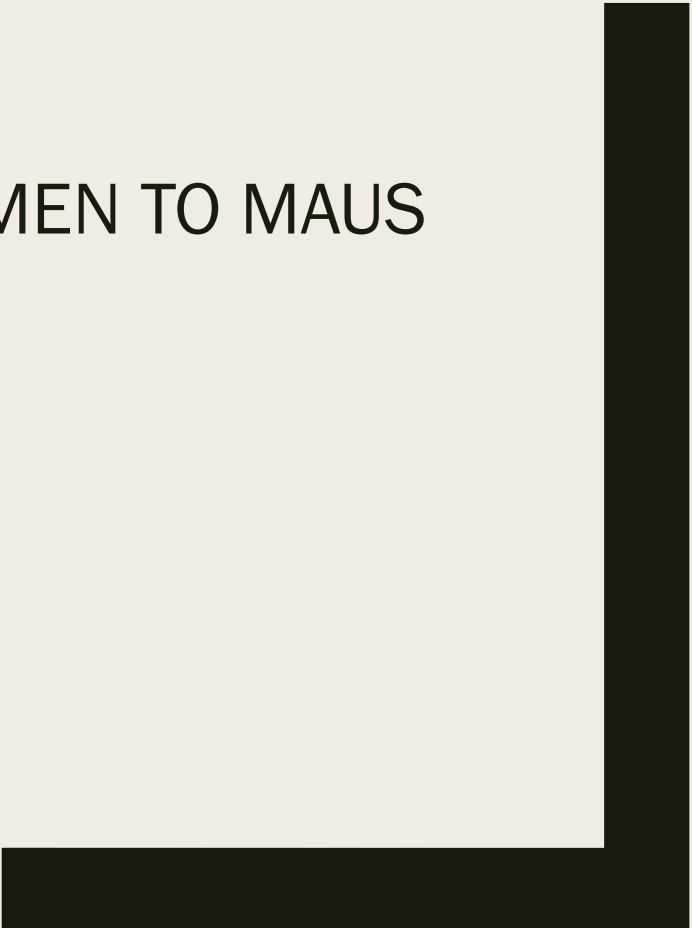




# THE HOLOCAUST AND COMICS: FROM X-MEN TO MAUS

WITNESSING AUSCHWITZ 2021

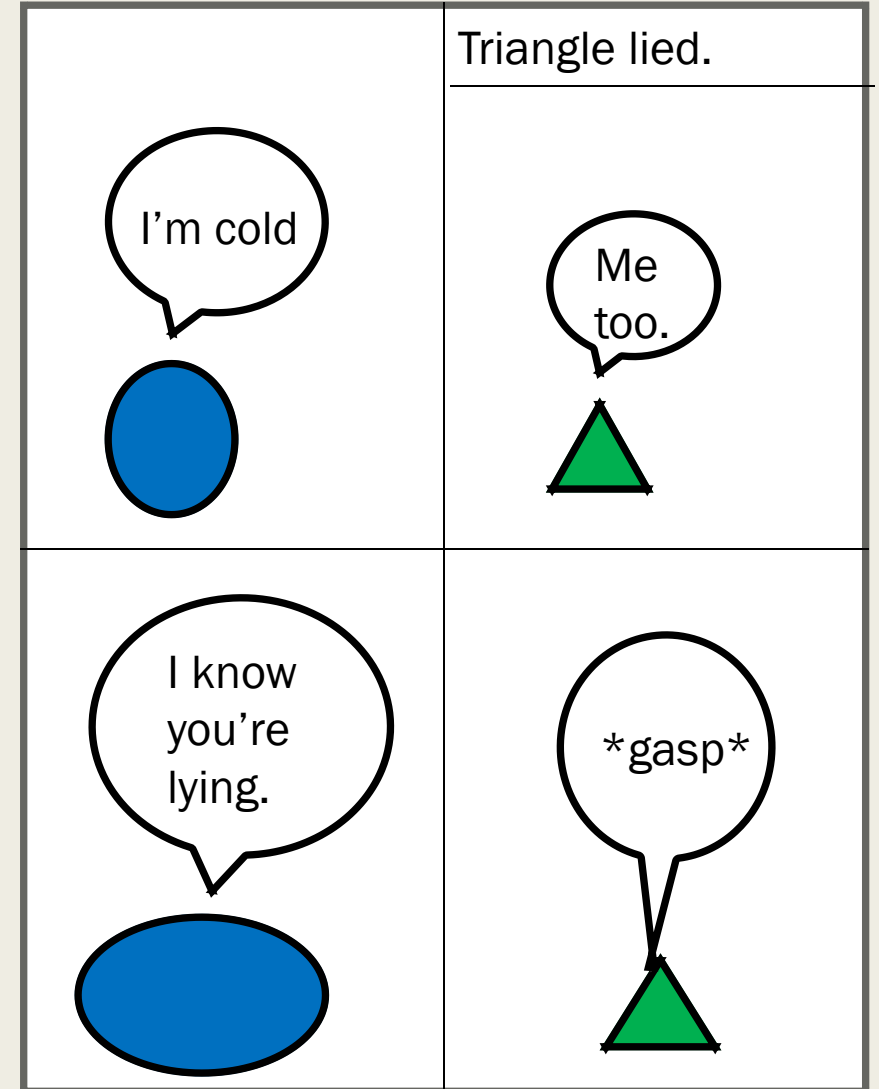
By Sidney Singh



# What are comics?

- In his book *Understanding Comics* Scott McCloud defines comics as “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or an aesthetic response in the viewer “(9).
- Other terms include graphic novel, cartoons. (Graphic novel refers to full length books whereas cartoons refers to short strips.)

## Shape Soap Opera



Written and Illustrated by Sidney Singh

# The Holocaust, Comics and the American Jewish Community

- Comics are a subgroup of Holocaust Literature. In fact, the Holocaust was featured in comics very early on. The Holocaust was thematized across very different comic genres, including, for example, super hero comics. These early comics rarely addressed the persecution of Jews, but mostly alluded to the brutality of the Nazis.
- There were close ties between the American Jewish community and the comic book industry. In the 1930s, many Jewish artists worked in "popular entertainment," including comics (Marks 168). The creators of Superman, Joe Shuster and Jason Siegal, for example, were both children of Lithuanian Jews. Also, both Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who were the bedrock of Marvel comics, had Jewish heritage (Unpacked, How Jewish Writers Shaped the Comic Book Superhero). These artists left an important mark on the medium and were responsible for some of the most iconic comics.

# The Holocaust, Comics and the American Jewish Community, Pt.2

- Today, there is a huge variety of Holocaust comics, addressing the topic both directly or indirectly.
- Magneto, one of the main antagonists of the X-Men series, for example, is revealed to be an Auschwitz survivor. Other comic authors make the Holocaust and its aftermath their main topic. Art Spiegelman, for example, bases his comic *Maus* on the experiences of his father, who survived Auschwitz. Josef Kubert, a Polish Jew who came to America as a two-year-old, imagines in *Yosel* what may have happened if his family stayed in Poland during the Second World War (Kubert x-xxx).
- In my presentation, I will introduce and analyze a number of comics on Auschwitz, published between 1969-2019, written by both Jewish and non-Jewish authors, and available in English. I will emphasize in particular, how these comics portray the physical space of Auschwitz and will show patterns and parallels in representation.

# *The Mad Master of the Murder Maze,* 1969

- Captain Marvel #19
- December 1969
- Roy Thomas writer
- Gil Kane, Dan Adkine artists
- Marvel

In *We Spoke Out: Comic Books and the Holocaust* Dr. Rafeal Medoff writes “The Captain Marvel story was the first superhero comic to involve the Holocaust...In the tale, Captain Marvel’s partner Rick Jones-...makes acquaintance with an Auschwitz survivor. Captain Marvel confronts a renowned but deranged sociologist who is trying to implement Nazi style social engineering...The techniques employed by the Mad Master to manipulate and dominate his subjects will remind readers of those used by the Nazis to subjugate their prisoner” (66).

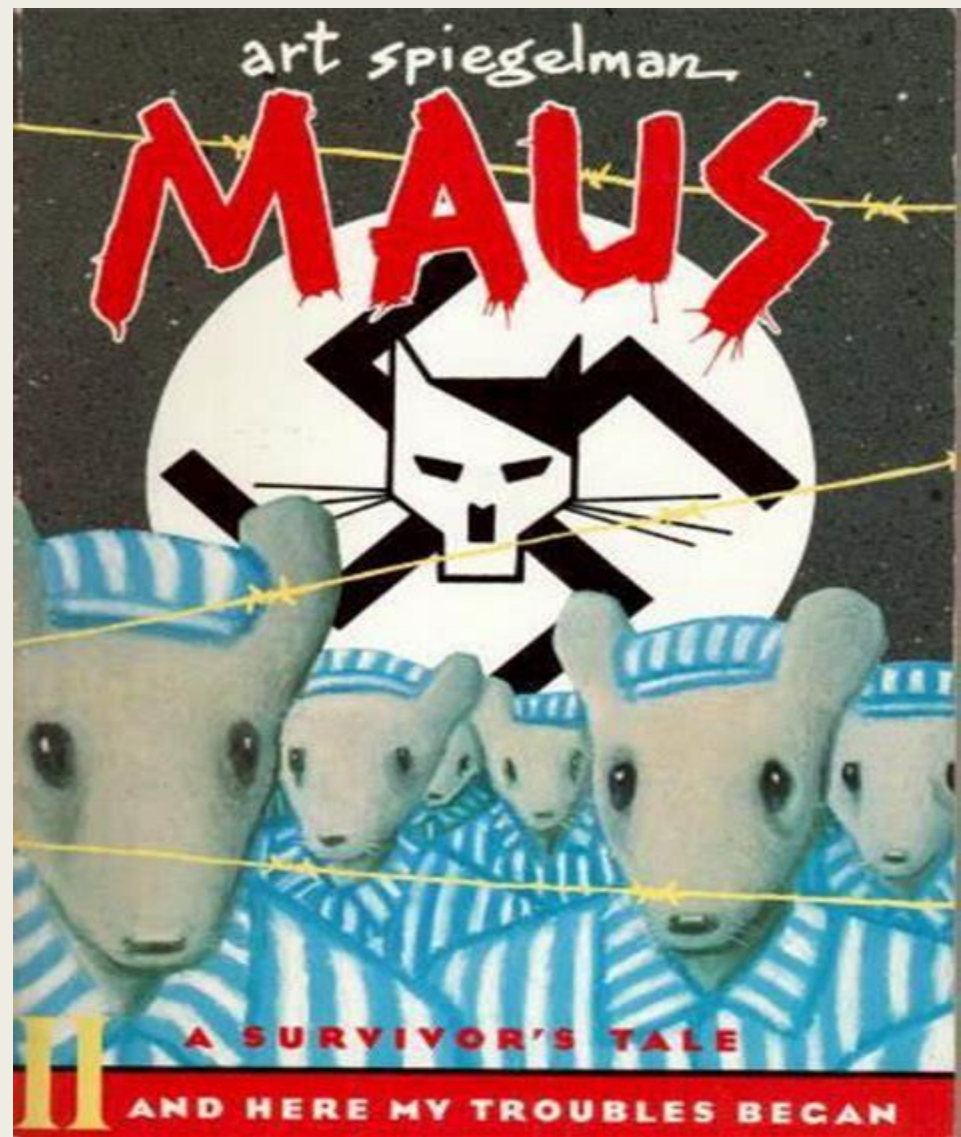


# What happens

- The unnamed survivor helps Captain Marvel and Rick James in defeating the main villain. The survivor dies as a result of his heroic action. ( It is a bit vague).
- The only comic featured in my presentation that does not feature a depiction of the physical place of Auschwitz. I included it for two reasons; It is the “first superhero comic to involve the Holocaust.” (Medoff 66). It is also example of how a Jewish creator, artist Gil Kane brought awareness of the Holocaust to early comics. Is it stated the story was Kane’s idea and the tattoo number on the survivor's arms was a reference to his current home address as noted in the introduction written by Rafael Medoff( 67).

# Maus, 1973-1991

- Written and Illustrated by Art Spiegelman
- Swedish born American who is the son of Polish-Jewish Auschwitz survivor Vladek and Anja
- Details the story of father and mother
- Won Pulitzer Prize in 1992
- Helped comics be taken seriously



Spiegelmann, Art. Maus 2. Amazon. 12, September, 2021. Penguin Random House. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/171059/maus-ii-a-survivors-tale-by-art-spiegelman/>





Spiegelman, Art. Maus 2. Page 51 24 June 2021. Sidney Singh's iPhone.

# Animal Metaphor

- One of Spiegelman's most notable aesthetic choices was to portray various nationalities and ethnicities as animals.
- He portrayed Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, French as frogs, British as fish and Swedes as reindeers.
- These choices were perceived quite critically by some groups (see for example Canadian Polish Congress, 2).
- Spiegelman himself acknowledged in *Meta Maus* that representing nationalities with animals did not account for the complexity of identities (130-131)

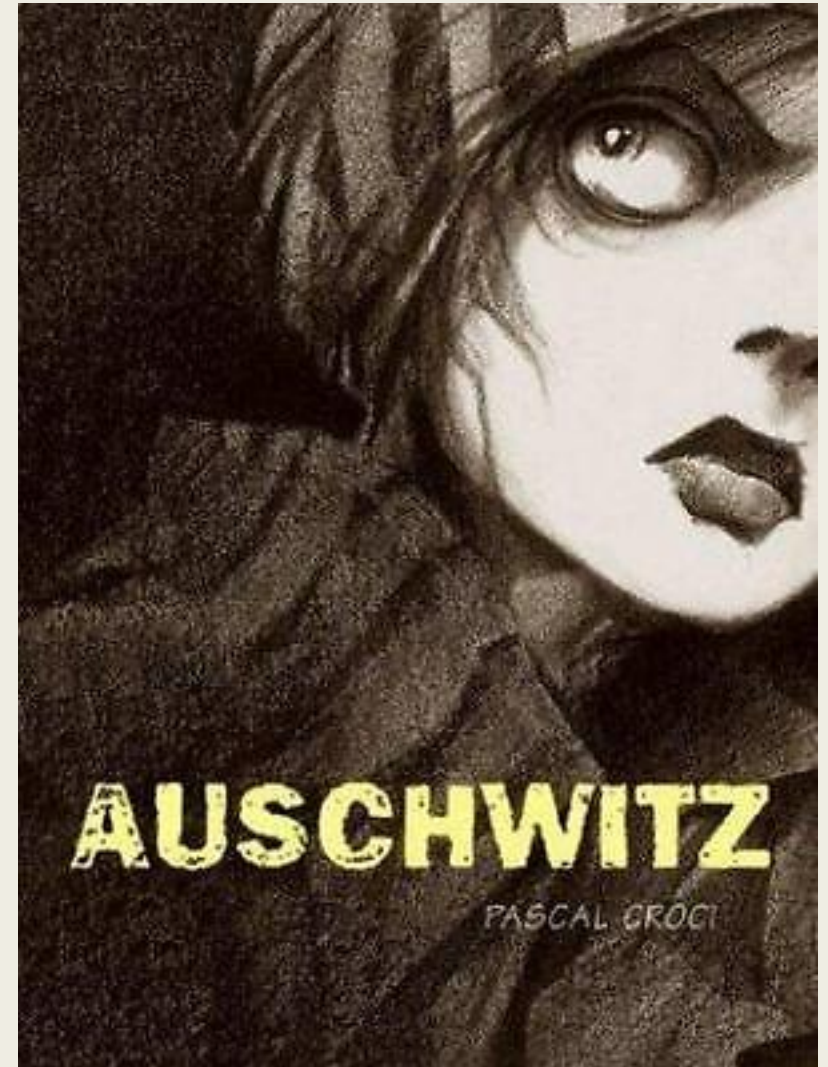
# Additional themes in *Maus*

- Weaves Art's present with Vladek's past
- Post-war memory
- Prewar Jewish life in Poland
- American-Jewish identity ( focuses on New York)
- Intimate family history
- Mother's suicide
- Father-son relationships
- Jewish identity, nationality
- More in *MetaMaus*, 2011

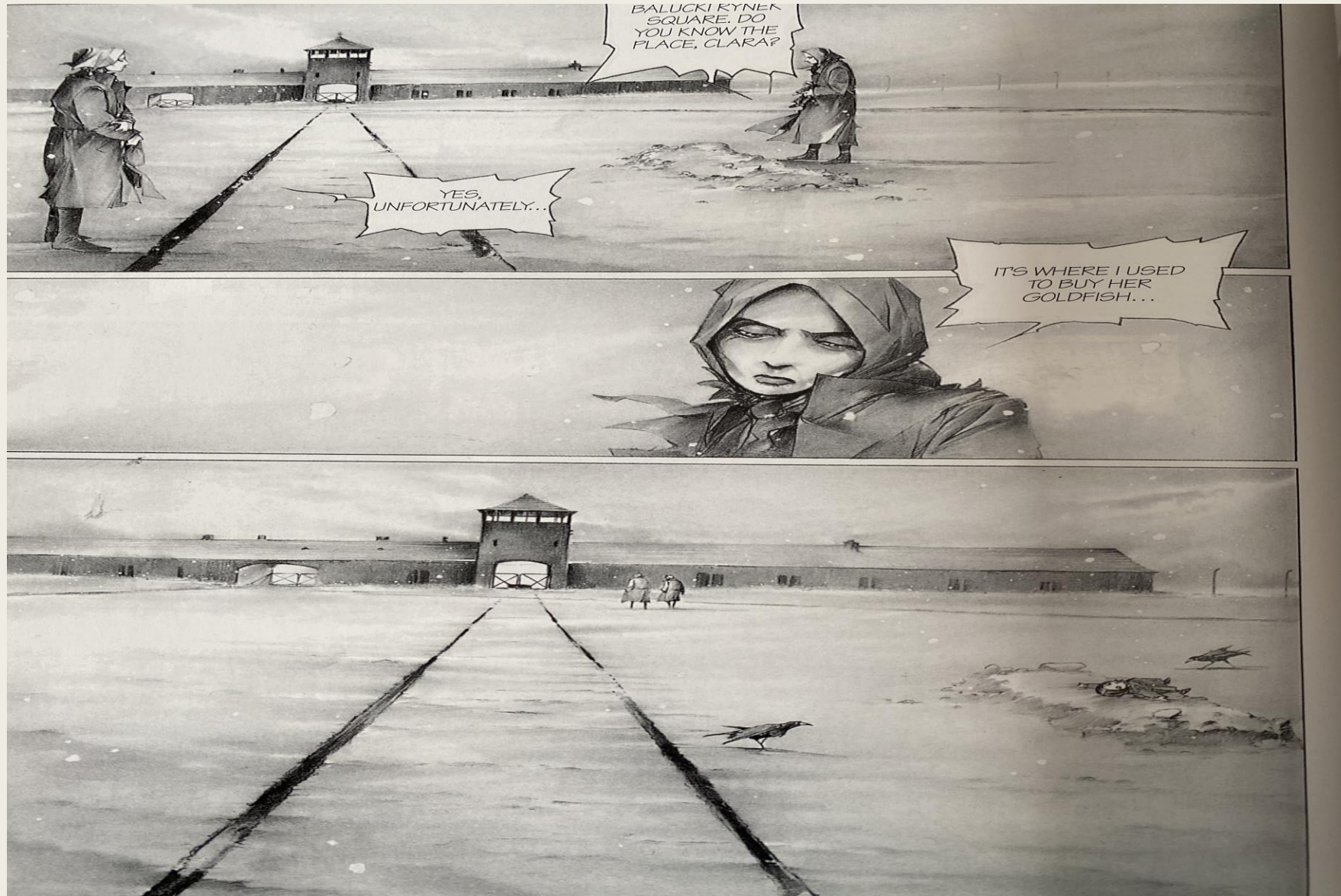
These additional themes adds nuance to Spiegelman's book. Further exploration of his working process, his decisions, his motifs, techniques, can be found in *Meta Maus* (published 2011).

# *Auschwitz, 2003*

- Wrote and Illustrated by Pascal Croci
- Originally published in French
- French artist
- Follows Fictional Czechoslovakian Jewish couple Kazik and Cessia who are transported from the Theresiensadt ghetto to Auschwitz



Croci, Pascal. *Auschwitz*. Amazon, 12 September 2022. <https://www.amazon.ca/Auschwitz-Pascal-Croci/dp/08109483111>.



Croci,Pascal. Auschwitz. Page 66. 24 June 2021, Sidney Singh iPhone.

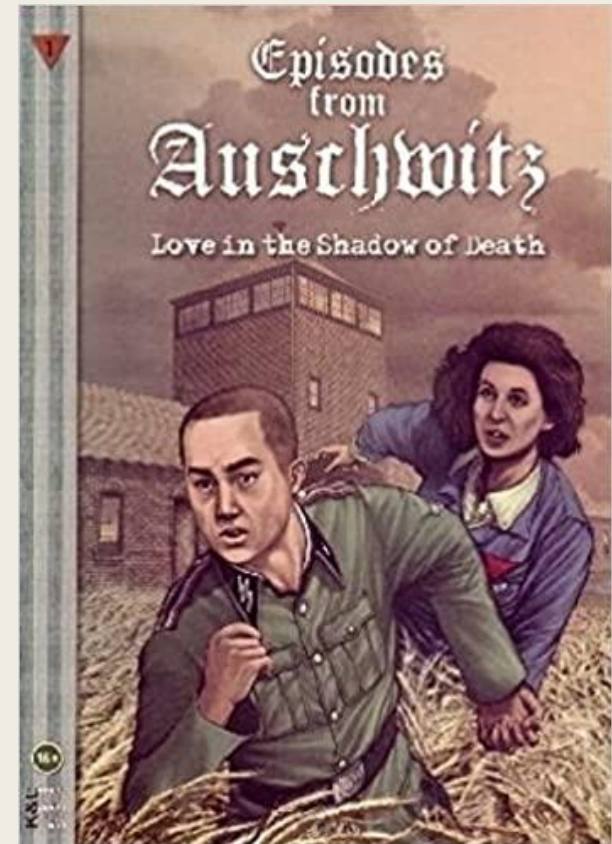
- Black and white pencil drawings
- Croci's characters are gaunt and skinny.
- They have huge bulging eyes that convey fear.
- Croci uses a mixed grid, his characters stay within the panels.
- Croci shows piles of dead bodies to depict the scale of the mass murder of Jews
- The comic uses very little narration.
- Most of the dialogue is direct and sharp.
- Croci consulted with survivors and experts.
- Croci's book was somewhat controversial, because it contained historical inaccuracies: Croci decided to portray the prisoners as wearing caps, although he had been informed by a survivor, that the prisoners wore berets (Croci p. 80-81).

# Museum Comics

- There are, by now, also numerous comics published by Holocaust Museums and other Institutions. These comics usually have an educational purpose. One example is the Episodes from Auschwitz series.

# *Episodes from Auschwitz, 2009*

- Edited by Jacek Lech and written Michal Galek
- Different Artists for each book
- Created in consultation with historians and survivors
- Sold at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum
- Include historical context, introduction, epilogue, bibliography
- Focuses on the fate of notable prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration and death camp
- There is a certain focus on Polish prisoners



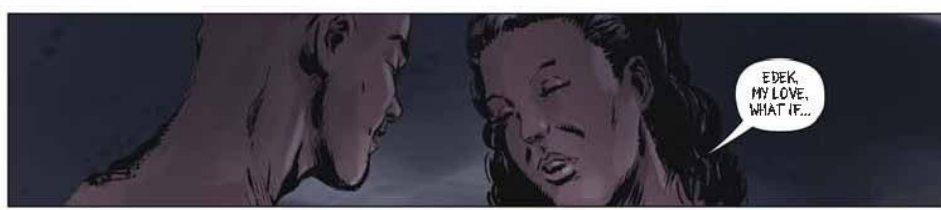
Nowakowski, Marcin. Episodes from Auschwitz: Love in the Shadow of Death. Amazon.

[https://www.amazon.com/Episodes-Auschwitz-Love-Shadow-Death/dp/8361618015/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?dc\\_hild=1&qid=1631509151&refinements=p\\_27%3AMichal+Galek&s=books&sr=1-3&text=Michal+Galek](https://www.amazon.com/Episodes-Auschwitz-Love-Shadow-Death/dp/8361618015/ref=sr_1_3?dc_hild=1&qid=1631509151&refinements=p_27%3AMichal+Galek&s=books&sr=1-3&text=Michal+Galek)



# *Episodes from Auschwitz Pt.2*

- Volume 1: Love in the Shadow of Death (illustrated by Marcin Nowakowski) on the fate of Mala Zimetbaum and Edek Galiński
- Volume 2: Witold's Report (illustrated by Arkadiusz Klimek) on the Polish officer Witold Pilecki
- Volume 3: Sacrifice (illustrated by Łukasz Poller) on the fate of Father Maximilian Kolbe
- Volume 4: Bearers of Secrets (illustrated by Michał Pyteraf) on the Sonderkommando

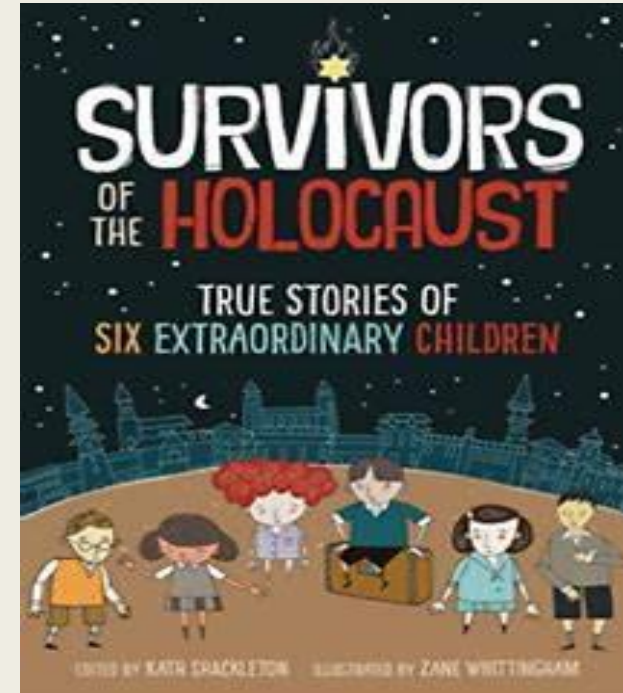


- The camp itself does not look horrific
- It is portrayed as a place where atrocities happened
- Colour is reflecting natural lighting
- Colouring does not evoke emotions or create poignant visual metaphors
- At times very word dense to communicate information

Nowakowski, Marcin. Page 7. 12 September 2021.  
*Episodes from Auschwitz: Love in the Shadow of Death.*

# *Survivors of the Holocaust, 2019*

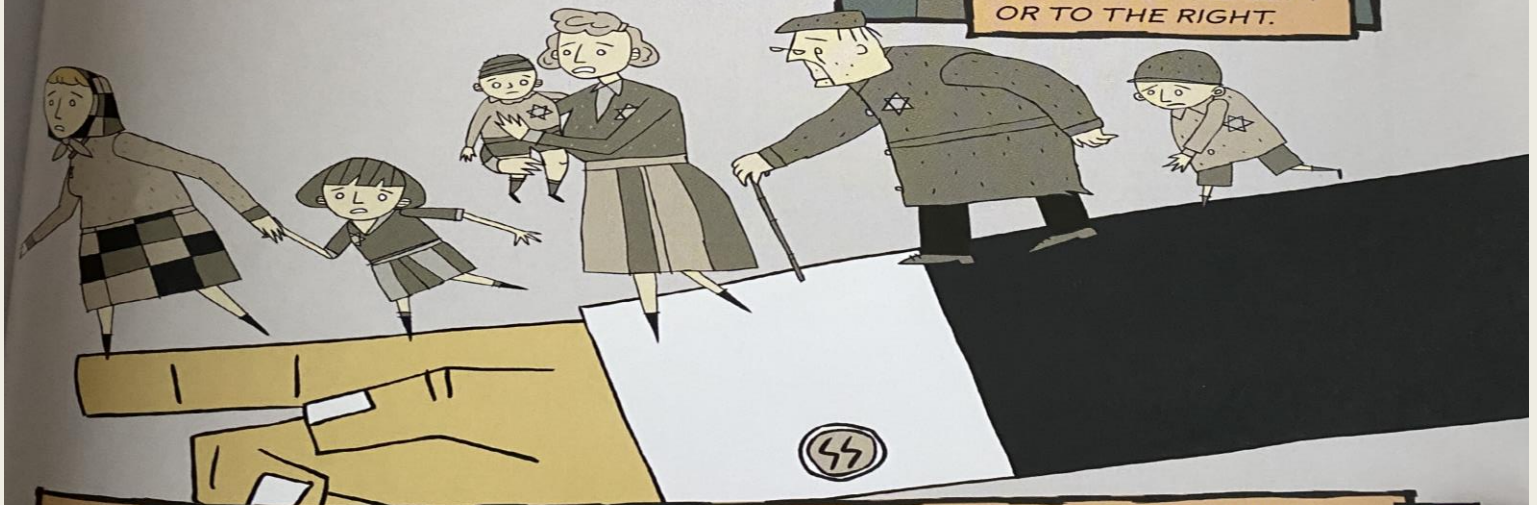
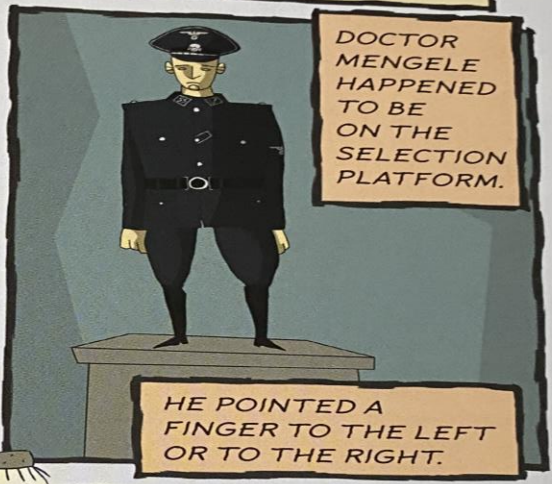
- Edited by Kath Shackleton
- Illustrated by Zane Whittingham
- Aimed for children age 10-14
- Contains 6 stories from survivors who were or are currently based in Leeds, UK.
- Last story focuses on Auschwitz survivor Arek Hersh



Shackleton, Kath. Survivors of the Holocaust: True Stories of Six Extraordinary Children.  
<https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/survivors-of-the-holocaust-true-stories-of-six-extraordinary-children>

- The art has thin black lines
- Not realistic, but very representational and abstract
- Each story has a different colour palette
- The colouring is flat
- For Arek Hersh's story, the colour palette is black, beige, teal, white
- These colours create the impression that Auschwitz was always covered in shadows
- Stories are very simplified, matching the targeted audience
- The artwork invokes feelings of disorientation and fear





TO THE LEFT WENT CHILDREN, MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN, ELDERLY MEN.

Whittingham, Zane. Page 79. 24 June 2021  
Sidney Singh iPhone.

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