

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF TRANSMITTED TRAUMA DEPICTED IN ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS* AND ANNE MICHAELS'S *FUGITIVE PIECES*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Trauma is undoubtedly transmitted from Holocaust survivors to succeeding generations, yet the transmitted psychological effects are the most potent as they impact multiple realms of successors' lives. The second generation in particular, as they are the first group to come after survivors, intake it uniquely, as their parents are the ones who first *experience* the Holocaust. In Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, the second generation must cope with how their parents have been impacted by the Holocaust. In relation to Marianne Hirsch's idea of "postmemory" and Esther Faye's theory on how the second generation remembers the Holocaust, these affected members of the second generation absorb the stories of their parents, but also carry them onto their own living. As protagonists Art and Ben reveal in their stories, the lives of their parents are not separate from their own. From relationships to identity, the trauma transcends and psychologically impacts their daily lives. Both Art and Ben hold the weight that comes from their parents. In these works, it is revealed that postmemory is not just the past stories that have been transmitted, but moreover, the psychological implications that the inherited trauma has on successors. The second generation, as proven by Art and Ben, inherit their parents' trauma in forms that go beyond stories, and seep into the psyche.

### **ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS***

Art Spiegelman's graphic memoir *Maus* captures his life as the son of two Holocaust survivors, a replacement child, and a transmitter of their story, and these identities mold him. In both volumes of *Maus*, Art seeks to convey the history with what he can obtain through his father, Vladek, but must struggle simultaneously with his current antics and pressing revelations. By trying to make sense of himself with the past of his parents, Art's psyche is strained. Through the two volumes, Art travels through his parents' stories as they also contribute to his own. Though his relationship with Vladek is not the strongest, the books journey with them as they learn more about each other. The first volume of *Maus* tells the background of Art's parents in Europe before World War II officially began, while the second recounts their experiences in the camps after being taken away. In both, Art seeks to comprehend and record the facts that were influential to his parents, but simultaneously and inevitably, his own story sneaks into theirs, as he gains clarity and understanding. From childhood experiences to marrying a non-Jew, through these volumes, Art reveals how his parents' experiences (especially Vladek's) in the Holocaust have everlasting effects, and were destined to since before Art existed. By yearning for a concrete place in his parents' story, this memoir was born.

The pressure to be a good, exemplar son for Vladek and Anja permeates Art's life, as revealed by the experience he shares through the memoir, and this shapes Art's identity. Also born to Holocaust survivors, Dr. Sam Juni expands upon the distinct hardship the second generation faces, particularly in the realm of identity, in his article "Identity Disorders of Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors." As is commonly the case for the second generation, identity is put into the context of being a child of survivors. He refers to the danger of "*parentification* -where the child is expected to care for parental emotional and practical needs," and when this role swap occurs, the children in the mix struggle with "poor personality

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development and diminished relationship building" (Juni 204). Undoubtedly, Art has a personality and relationships, but as he reveals through the memoir, they are strained *because* they are so entangled with the trauma of his parents. Though Vladek may seem simply senile or jaded, his tendencies seep into the role that Art has to fill, especially *for* him.



As depicted in the panels from page 96 of *Maus I*, Vladek's stubborn nature leads him to trouble. With his older age and uncompromising mannerisms, Art *must* be there for him. Not only would it be dangerous if Art was not physically there for Vladek in many situations, but this obligation resounds much more deeply. Prefacing the story-telling with it having been two years since Art and Vladek have seen each other, this absence reveals more. A reconnect may speak to Vladek's ways that could have been overwhelming for Art, and/or, Art's frustration in functioning and identifying as survivors' children. Art's adversity with his father correlates to Hirsch's explanation of "familial postmemory," which results with living in "close proximity to the pain, depression ... who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma" (34). Art experiences his father as no one else ever does, which is distinctive to his role as his (only) living son. Thus, trauma is not a mere, concrete story that is told and then stored into a memory bank, but rather, an everlasting essence that can be so strong as to jeopardize roles and identity.

Art feels he lives in the shadow of his dead brother, and this aggrandizes the trauma inevitably experienced as the second generation. This facet of his complex identity is explored more in the second volume of *Maus*, subtitled *And Here My Troubles Began*. As he shares his parents' story, the plot mainly incorporates their time in the camps (the climax of their story during the war), yet Art allows himself to share in that title too. Readers experience more of Art's thinking and position, as he reveals more about his perceived role. As a replacement child, Art's is assumed [to take on] the role of his dead brother, Richieu. Since Richieu was born before the tragedy and did not live to survive it, Vladek and Anja transform that loss into proliferation through Art's birth. This phenomenon is not to be accepted as simply romantic, however. For parents in any circumstance, outliving a child is devastating and seemingly unnatural, but in the context of the Holocaust, it is also a call to action. This act not only correlates to the initiative to bring back the Jewish population that was destroyed by the Holocaust, but on an individual familial basis, the replacement child has the "task of filling the emotional void of parents, carrying the torch of family historical and ... insuring the continuation of the Jewish people" (Juni 204). All of these specific guidelines in being a replacement child are embodied in how Art perceives Richieu. Though obviously not still living, according to Art, Richieu *would* have been perfect:

The photo [of Richieu] never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble... It was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete. ... He'd have become a *doctor*, and married a wealthy Jewish girl... the creep. ... It's *spooky*, having sibling rivalry with a *snapshot!* (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 15).

In context of marrying a "wealthy Jewish girl," the article "Trauma in Children of Holocaust Survivors: Transgenerational Effects" by Nechama Sorscher and Lisa Cohen mentions a finding that may affirm or contest part of Art's identity. "Children of survivors who married non-Jews had lower levels of Jewish identification" (Sorscher and Cohen 494), and this speaks to how Art sees himself, but also to how his parents may see him. Despite Françoise converting to Judaism for Art and his family (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 11), the disparity he vents about in his previous quote reflects his cultural identity. Though Art may not be blatantly submerged into Jewish culture and customs, his desire to *know* his parents' story reveals a yearning to be connected and identified with *them*.

Being branded with the responsibility to repair, Art has carried the weight of this since his birth. Fantasizing about Richieu's role contributes to the one Art feels he must own for his parents. As Juni explains, this involuntary phenomenon places a lot of pressure on replacement children. Yet by

responding to what Art's parents expected of him, whether openly stated or not, his sense of self is colored by them. Art is an embodiment of the past –as eerie or stressful as that may be –but simultaneously is a symbol of hope for the future. The psychological stress this carries affects who he comes to understand himself to be, and reveals that the past of his parents inherently contributes to his own pain, particularly with his identity.

Though Vladek is the primary voice in their story since Art's mother Anja is dead, Art does not omit the influence of *both* of his parents. Vladek is demanding in his love of Art, as he expects Art to visit more often, blatantly succumb to all of his requests, and even live with him. Even when Art is an adult and is beginning a family and life of his own with his wife Françoise, Vladek holds expectations as if Art is still only a child, who needs to be directed in everything he does. When Art and Françoise meet at the bungalow after his second wife Mala leaves, Vladek attempts to lure the two into staying a long time. "Look how nice I made for you a bed. For the whole **summer** you can be comfortable here," and even when Art protests, Vladek deflects: "Well! In the morning we can speak more –but now you can make yourself at home, so as like it's your own" (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 17). Though seemingly innocent and loving, this persistence is a taste of Vladek's forceful nature. Persuading Art and Françoise to extend their stay causes an interruption in their own lives, and puts Art in a position to consider how he must be for his father's sake, especially in a time of conflict (caused by Mala's departure). Though this may seem to conflict with parentification, the trauma allows these to coexist. Vladek thirsts for Art's presence, not only to have him as a crutch for need, but also to secure that he is safe. Exerting this control in the name of love and concern bears another weight on the second generation, as Art feels the responsibility of a parent, and simultaneously as the child of someone who deservingly yearns for his presence. Juni explains that Holocaust survivors are overprotective toward their children due to having experienced "prolonged exposure to extreme threat and emergency situations" (205). Vladek and Anja sent away Richieu in hopes to protect him in the safety of a relative's home. When Richieu's guardian Tosha learned that they would all be taken to Auschwitz upon the invasion of the new Gestapo, she forbade this fate for them and killed herself and them with poison. Having lost Richieu in the tragedy, Vladek and Anja consequently desire to protect Art, but it reaches an extreme. Children of Holocaust survivors have "difficulties individuating from *overbearing, overconcerned, and overintrusive* parents" (Juni 205). Art struggles with his parents' demeanor, but it is a result of the trauma they continuously experience. Their concern and way to show love smothers Art, as worry and the trauma with loss taint it for him. In the excerpt from *Prisoner of the Hell Planet* found in the first volume of *Maus*, Anja's impact on Art is captured and reveals more clearly the guilt and burdens Art must continuously face. Clad in concentration camp uniform, Art is shackled to his identity as the son of survivors, which are depicted as not separate from his own. Though a stylistic choice in this comic strip, Art's decision is an indicator of his psychological state. Similarly to how Vladek wants Art near him, Anja is portrayed as needy for confirmation of Art – her only child –'s love. Though this is the only information garnered before her death in this separate strip, it affirms Juni's traits set for parents that are Holocaust survivors. Art is captive to his mother's pain, which unfortunately ends in demise, in a way, for them both.



(Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 103)

Art resents the suffocating love of his parents, as it stifles his identity and being overall. This disguised or skewed perception of emotion contributes to how the second generation intakes the trauma from their parents. The weight of replacing Richieu, easing the trauma of his parents, and living to preserve their memories all take a toll on Art. Though Art never admits to feeling guilty about Richieu, his guilt about

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Anja's death permeates his entirety. Not only must he live on commemorating Richieu, but also his mother. His parents' forcefulness, along with his mother's death, scar Art and add another layer to the trauma, in a seemingly unconventional way.

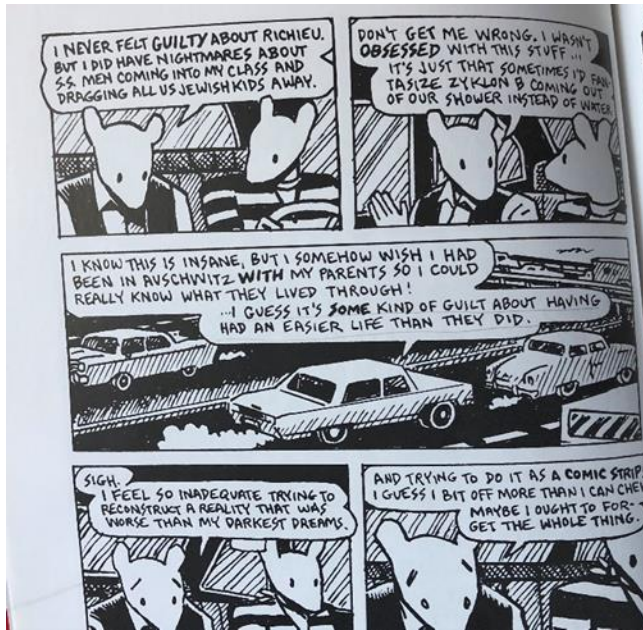
Hirsch explicates "postmemory," particularly the role of photographs on transmitting to survivors. As a replacement child, Art parallels himself against his ghost brother Richieu, and has a physical image to do so. Seemingly minimizing Richieu's role, Art admits: "I didn't think about him [Richieu] much when I was growing up... he was mainly a large, blurry photograph hanging in my parents' bedroom" (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 15), but then goes on longing to have been able to experience what his parents went through. This muddles many boundaries of the mind, as he humanizes a picture, but also desires to have its experiences. Beyond Richieu, many figures are incorporated in both volumes, but mostly in the second. At the end of *And Here My Troubles Began*, Vladek presents Art with pictures of their family, and provides snippets of information to him regarding the photos' people and where they are (now that the Holocaust ended). Even with the first volume, Anja is photographed in a beautiful picture with Art, but its sweetness is cut by the panels it exists with, in *Prisoner of the Hell Planet*. These photos all carry great meaning for Art, not just because he has access to them -when most families' possessions, including photographs, were ruined -but moreover because the images are still active and alive. According to Hirsch, photographs are "fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory" (37), as they are vital in telling the story. Though the subjects may no longer be physically alive, their existence outside of the frame *is*. They are not to be looked at merely as those who died in the tragedy, but as whole *images* that outlive their subjects and owners from a "lost past world" (Hirsch 38). This understanding explains how the presence of the photos remain locked in a time, but still manage to travel in its original form to those who view the image. These figures from the photos provide a connection, in the most hopeful sense, as well as an exchange. Viewers absorb from the image, and simultaneously contribute to it. Hirsch describes photos as "screens -spaces of projection and approximation, and of protection;" viewers "project present or timeless, needs and desires" onto whatever image they may be holding (38). This explains Art's relationship with the picture of Richieu, his mother and him, or even any of the photos he receives from Vladek at the end. He looks at them with expectations, whether they be so that Art can receive their experiences, or to feel the link between him and the past. This yearning is admirable, but also, it speaks to his mind's desires. The subjects in the images are gone, whether physically or merely from the place and time captured, but to seek that connection so strongly is a result of the working mind, which allows viewers to take what the photos give. Postmemory thus uses another medium to provide, and the subjects of the photos are the ones who deliver it. Thus, inherited trauma is not just through actions or words, but also through photos from the past which can still speak pain.

Art's dreams associated with the Holocaust reveal his mind's activity, as "the elevated level of Holocaust ideation in children of survivors illustrates the degree to which they remain preoccupied with parental trauma long after the actual events. It can be inferred that such preoccupation signals an ongoing struggle to integrate the enormity of their parents' experience of horror" (Sorscher and Cohen 498-499). Freud considers dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious" (McLeod), as they reveal thoughts repressed or unaddressed. Art's justification of his fantasy and fascination regarding the Holocaust is in itself intriguing, as desire for connection to such a horrific event may traditionally seem unsettling. In Sorscher and Cohen's study, children of Holocaust survivors "demonstrated significantly greater Holocaust-related dreams, Holocaust-related thoughts, and Holocaust associated places," suggesting an "elevated Holocaust ideation in children of survivors" (497). Not uncommon apparently, the second generation inserts itself into the stories that came before, even if they seem torturous. The craving to be a part of the memories that they received can be seen as logical, as the second generation is a part of the past, without even having physically lived in it. Art sharing his thinking with Françoise attempts to rectify and clarify

his experience (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 16). Art's thoughts are consuming, so much so that they transcend into the deeper realm of his mind that houses his dreams. In context of Freud's theory on dreams from 1900, "for every dream [D], there is at least one wish [W] such that (i) W is the motivational cause of D, and (ii) the manifest content of D graphically displays, more or less disguisedly, the state of affairs desired by W" (Grünbaum 80). Ultimately, Art's dreams (or nightmares) have a desire associated with them, despite any negativity in its actual content. Here, trauma is so strong as to not only be present in dreams, but also, in the desire to want to experience. This phenomenon connects to Faye, and her idea that "the second generation shares memories of events not directly witnessed by them" (526), but still, they continue to be prevalent. The yearning to experience attests to the strength and pull of postmemory, and the trauma from it does not deter from the desire.

### ANNE MICHAELS'S FUGITIVE PIECES

Similar to Art, Ben from *Fugitive Pieces* is shaped by the trauma he takes on from his survivor parents, as it puts the pain into perspective for him. *Fugitive Pieces* is primarily about a Jewish boy named Jakob, who is found by a Greek archaeologist. Jakob is in hiding from the Nazis after his family is destroyed, and the



tale follows his life as he maneuvers through trauma in the ways that it creeps into his living. In the second half of the book, the perspective changes from Jakob to Ben, but Ben's life addresses Jakob's. Though their lives starkly resemble each other's, Ben is a part of the second generation. With parents who survived the horrors, Ben divulges his experiences with them and himself in the second part. From eating habits to disobedience against safety recommendations, Ben's parents have the trauma influence their daily lives, and consequently, it affects his own. Ben shares the stories and lets their influence accrue, as he connects his life to Jakob's. The inherited trauma comes not only from the stories and inferences from the past, but also from how it has molded Ben and his role in the second generation. In a more positive light, as Ben and Jakob strive to tell their stories, they do receive some healing, but nothing can wholly

take away from what they experienced/ what is a part of them.

Through Hirsch's idea of familial postmemory, Ben inherits his parents' trauma by being raised by them. Many of his stories that come from his upbringing are saddening, as they capture the transmitted pain in its prime. Yet some are tender, and reveal that Ben's parents mean not to be harsh, but protective. In an anecdote that is spread across a few pages, he shares the severe consequences from his father when Ben discards a rotten apple as a child.

"Is an apple food?"

"Yes."

"And you throw away food? You -my son -you throw away food?"

"It's rotten -"

"Eat it... Eat it!"

"He pushed it into my teeth until I opened my jaw. Struggling, sobbing, I ate. Its brown taste, oversweetness, tears. Years later, living on my own, if I threw out leftovers or left food on my plate in a restaurant, I was haunted by pathetic cartoon scraps in my sleep" (Michaels 218). As Mei-Yu Tsai analyzes in "A Poetics of Testimony and Trauma Healing in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*," this is a "poignant episode [that] gives the reader a glimpse of what it is like to grow up with a Holocaust parent;

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even the most trivial events such as eating an apple are colored by his father's memories of the Holocaust" (Tsai 62). The brutality of this scenario is heartbreaking, but nonetheless revealing of not only the trauma his father faced (from starvation in the concentration camps), but moreover the continuation of it that is placed onto Ben. "Deriving meaning even from the most absurd, painful, and dehumanized experience, which sets the ground for psychological growth, has been the legacy of many Holocaust survivors" (Frankl as quoted in Dekel et. al. 530). Clearly Ben's father hoped not to wound him by aggression, but rather, to transform his pain from hunger into a lesson for his son. The psychological effects Ben's father endured are thus not only exclusively for Ben as his child and inheritor, but continue to impact himself. Undoubtedly, even if it was not spoken of, Ben's parents had a life that changed how they saw and experienced everything. Since so much of it was negative, and threatening to survival, its impact never faded. This trauma is so embedded into Ben that he lives with it even as an adult, solidifying the impact on his psyche. Trauma thus does not have to be sharp pain that never leaves, but can shapeshift into a scar that comes from the wound of the survivors. Everything Ben lives comes from inheriting the experiences of his parents before he even came to be.

Even after surviving the horror of the Holocaust, the trauma of Ben's parents dictated how they would live their lives. Indeed, this is shown in Ben's punishment of eating the rotten apple, but how his parents interact with other members of society reveals another dimension of the trauma.

A neighbor pounded at the door. He came to tell us that the river was rising and that if we knew what was good for us we'd get out soon. My father slammed the door in his face... It wasn't until the water had sloshed against the second-storey windows that my father agreed to abandon the house. ... With ropes, a ladder, and brute strength, we were hauled in. ... Again, one might say my parents were fortunate, for they didn't lose the family silverware or important letters or heirlooms however humble. They had already lost those things. (Michaels 245-246)

In the article by Sarah Gangi et. al. entitled "The Long-Term Effects of Extreme War-Related Trauma on the Second Generation of Holocaust Survivors," they explain the rationale of Holocaust survivors, which provides some information as to why Ben's parents reacted to the flood warning the way they did. "The survivors live in a world surrounded either by traitors or by those who have suffered, a world infused with suspicion and mistrust. From an early age, they are taught that this is an uncertain world, populated by dangerous people and traitors and that, in order to survive, the family must remain united" (689). Being told to leave the home must have resounded poorly for Ben's father, who already experienced the mandate to evacuate previously in his life. As stubborn as he was to stay in the home until the last, possible, "safe" moment, the family's safety was endangered by the trauma that came from what happened in the past. Ben's experience to have escaped the torrential rain is an offshoot of his father's trauma. Trauma thus travels through history, and psychologically impacts all of its victims. The home of Ben's father was taken away by people, but Ben's own home was endangered by the elements. One clearly holds more weight, but being stripped of possessions has an everlasting impact. Trauma in the form of material loss can stunt confidence in what is tangible, so with aspects that are not (like family), it is all the more intense. In another instance, Ben comes home from an exhibition with a bag full of free samples, and his mother's disbelief in generosity prompted her to believe it was stolen; "though she was certain I'd taken these things improperly –admittedly by accident –she would protect me. My fault. Our secret" (Michaels 228). Even though Ben was excited to share the *free* samples, for the sake of his mother, he cooperated with her reaction, and even took upon himself what she would expect of him. In Fossion et. al.'s study of three generations from the Holocaust, they note that those in the second generation learned to "neglect their own feelings, to regard their own problems and anxieties as unimportant compared to those of their parents. They rapidly realized that their most important task was to be a 'good son' or 'good daughter'" (522). For Ben, this meant succumbing to the ways of his parents, despite how radical they may be. Not only can neglecting feelings be harmful to the mind in the long run, but prioritizing their status as a good child leads to an identity primarily focused on who they are in relation to their parents.

Not only does Ben comply with his parents to essentially be a good son for them, but he discovers that he is a replacement child: an identity laden with weight. As he stumbles upon a picture of his parents with children taken before the war, Ben assumes another role. He takes on the knowledge that

it was not always about him alone, and that his presence serves a greater purpose for his parents. More importantly, however, Ben accepts that his wife Naomi is the receiver of his parents' experiences, particularly his mother's, as she [Naomi] was "the daughter she longed for" (Michaels 252). Yet as Ben goes to show Naomi the picture of his ghost siblings, her empathetic, spontaneous commentary bewilders him. This suggests that Naomi knew, despite Ben not. Gangi et. al. describes this "difficulty of intergenerational communication" as 'silent conspiracy' (Danieli as quoted on 688); it is the "non-oral agreement intended to keep traumatic experiences distant and separate from everyday life." Though in hopes to shield him from pain, this secret kept by Ben's parents shakes his core, as their silence creates a disturbance. Even in context of Ben's parents' lives before the war and any family they had, anything shared was from his mother, and therefore furtive since his father did not know the exchange was occurring. In an instance when Ben accidentally mentions a family member at the dinner table, "my [Ben's] father's gaze jolted up from his plate to my mother; a terrifying look. The code of silence became more complex as I grew older. ... What was our greatest insurrection? My mother was determined to impress upon me the absolute, inviolate necessity of pleasure" (Michaels 223). Clearly Ben's father and mother saw Ben's connection to the Holocaust differently. "For parents, the idea of not sharing Holocaust experiences stems from the belief that their children will grow up psychologically healthier" (Gangi et. al. 688), yet "the consequences include problems in developing interpersonal relationships, low self-esteem, development of a negative identity, and personality constraints (Wardi as quoted on 688). Ben having to live partially in secrecy of knowing and being limited from information that would benefit his identity strains the self, as doubt and confusion hinder his psyche. Another branch of "silent conspiracy," Ben's father keeps the secrets from the Holocaust hidden, but still wants him to know. Though not through his own narrative or speech, Ben was forced by his father to be aware. "He thrust books at me with a ferocity that frightened me, I would say now, more than the images themselves. What I was to make of them ... You are not too young. There were hundreds of thousands younger than you" (Michaels 219). This is a harsh reality to grasp, especially when the words are not spoken. As Fossion et. al. find in their study, "intimate communication was severely restricted, resulting in a form of cognitive restriction" (522). Though memories may not be verbally shared, the second generation will still inherit the trauma, either by stumbling upon it or by simply living in its effects. Yet with a taboo associated with the discussion of trauma, the inheritors may feel an obstacle in addressing and accepting it in its entirety.

## CONCLUSION

The second generation intakes the trauma and experiences of their survivor parents, in the various forms that they are presented in. Whether the harsh past is spoken of or not, merely being a product of those who outlived the horrors has a significant role in shaping identity, and the overall psychological state of themselves. With factors like guilt for what their parents experienced, to the pressure of being good so as not to add any more burden, Art's and Ben's loads are not light, and their trauma is thus two-fold. Not only must they take on the experiences of their parents, but also, their *own* experiences having lived with them. Indeed, the psychological trauma of the children of Holocaust survivors is not equal to their parents' who experienced the horror firsthand, yet its severity must still be acknowledged. Thus, trauma from postmemory is not exclusive from the impacts on the psyche, and both works prove that its effect can be everlasting and encompassing. Transmitted trauma in the second generation thus cannot be seen merely as pain passed on or less than, but more intricately, as pain and experiences that shape the mind and self as a whole.

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