



SECOND GENERATION: THE TESTIMONY IN COMIC BOOK GENRE

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to analyze the comic book *Second Generation: The things I didn't tell my father* by Michel Kichka, with the aim of analyzing some characteristics that make up the work such as: It is literary genre, which is the comic book, the Arbiter testimony which is a less recognized type of testimony and very present within history, analyzing the work observing some layers and depths that the author wrote some explicitly and others implicitly, and for this we resort to works by various authors, from Cunha (2013) and Kelley (2009) who tell how comic books have developed to the present day, Samento-Pantoja (2019) whose work is focused entirely on the Arbiter Testimony, in the analysis of the work we see how Flack (2015) commenting on some layers of the story and at the end of the work We have final conclusions that aim to make a small reflection on everything presented in this article and how challenging it is to talk about the Second Generation.

Keywords: Comic book. Arbiter Testimony. Holocaust.

RESUMO: Este artigo visa analisar a história em quadrinho *Second Generation: The things I didn't tell my father* de Michel Kichka, tendo como objetivo analisar algumas características que compõe a obra como: O seu gênero literário que é história em quadrinho, o testemunho Arbiter que é um tipo de testemunho menos reconhecido que está muito presente dentro da história, fazendo uma análise da obra observando algumas camadas e profundidades que o autor escreveu algumas de forma explícita e outras de forma implícita, e para isso recorreremos a trabalhos de variados autores, desde Cunha (2013) e Kelley (2009) que contam como as histórias em quadrinhos se desenvolveram até os dias atuais, até Samento-Pantoja (2019) que tem sua obra focada inteiramente em testemunho Arbiter, na análise da obra vemos como Flack (2015) comentando a respeito de algumas camadas da história e ao final do trabalho

temos as considerações finais que visam fazer uma pequena reflexão a respeito de tudo que foi apresentado neste artigo e o quão desafiador é falar de Second Generation.

Palavras-chave: História em quadrinhos. Testemunho *Arbiter*. Holocausto.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of human history, human beings have always been surrounded by tragedies, which were undoubtedly sad moments of great pain for those involved, but it is undeniable that despite all the cruelty and suffering experienced in moments like these, these are also situations that shaped us and influenced the society we live in, in this article I want to focus on a comic book that was directly influenced by a tragedy called "Second World War".

It has always been my pleasure to watch works that portray the Second World War, since I was a child my eyes were fixed on the TV to watch Captain America defeat the Nazis and save innocent people in the face of Adolf Hitler, stories like that have always fascinated me. Already in my adolescence, in addition to watching it on TV, I discovered the universe of comic books where I encountered a much wider universe of stories, I also discovered the enormous importance of comic books made during the years of the Second World War, this importance was so great that today this period is known as the "Golden Age of Superhero Comics". (Kelley, 2009)

In the midst of my fascination with comic books and the Second World War, I joined the Federal University of Pará better known as UFPA in 2020, the year of the pandemic that forced the whole world to lock themselves in their homes, my class and i were no different, with just two weeks of face-to-face classes we migrated to online teaching, and it was in these Internet classes that i discovered that the subjects that always awakened my interest had a name "tragedies that influence art", and it was at that moment that i decided that i wanted to know more about the subject.

After a certain period of college, I had doubts about the topic of my final report and had no idea what to do, despite the topic always surrounding me, I could not see it as a final report, I only saw the subject with a "hobie" something that I was interested in in my spare time to rest my mind but everything changed when I had to produce my final report project to present to my teacher, he advised us to take a short visit to the memories of our academic careers, and that is actually what I did, I opened some old works that I did in the first

semesters and saw a work there about the tragedies that influenced art, and amidst the memories I realized that my theme was there, right in front of my eyes since I entered university, and from that moment when things become clearer, my writing began.

After deciding who would be my guiding teacher, we decided on the work that i would portray in my article *Maus: the story of a survivor* by Art Spiegelman; an interesting story about a survivor (as the title suggests) of the Holocaust who narrates everything as if all the characters were animals, but over the course of a few months i had another meeting with my teacher and advisor Lilia Rocha and we decided that we would make the change in the work that would be portrayed in the TCC, would stop being *Maus*, and would become "*Second Generation: The things I didn't tell my father*" by Michel Kichka, a story that portrays direct consequences in the life of a son who did not even participate in the Holocaust but through the days lived by his father in the concentration camps, he embarks on a curious journey of self-knowledge.

To begin with, this article will address the comic book genre, from its emergence to its popularization in the past century, the different types of comic books and also show how *Second Generation: The things I didn't tell my father* by Michel Kichka, then i will talk about the testimonial content of the work but specifically the "arbiter testimony", we will have a context about what this type of testimony is about, and some authors who have already used it in their books; then we will analyze the work where we will explore the social criticisms, acid humor and dilemmas present in the book, and show where the arbiter testimony is within *Second Generation* and then we will have final considerations where i will write my expectations of how my article will impact the academic community, and some of the challenges i had when writing about Second Generation.

COMIC BOOK GENRE

To talk about *Second Generation: the thing I didn't tell my father*, it is necessary to talk a little about the comic book genre. According to Cunha (2013), it is not known for sure what the origin of comic books is, with several debates about their emergence, some they say that it appeared in prehistoric times in cave paintings, however, Cunha comments that there are also people who believe that comic books originated in Egyptian hieroglyphs and even claim that it emerged in the industrial revolution with the emergence of modern printing.

The launch of "*yellow kid*" by Richard F. Outcault, in the New York World newspaper in 1895 was the starting point for the emergence of the genre, however it is made very clear that the genre is much older, dating back to the beginning of civilization and even though Outcault's work was a landmark, it was probably not the first of its kind. Throughout our existence we have witnessed different types of stories from the comic genre, many go unnoticed by us but they are there, the images in churches telling the way of the cross (passion of Christ), the eastern lantern that was a precursor to cinema they had a kind of continued images, Bruegel's miniature panels that showed the seasons of the year to the people of the time, Goya's engravings against the disasters of war, which is a document made following the tradition of being shared with future generations, among others. (Melo, 2009)

You can notice a big difference between the styles of stories, but there is something in common in all these comics mentioned above, the lack of words, the stories are written in such a way that the images become enough to understand the narrative without having to do anything written differently than today's traditional comics, which are a mix of drawings and words. Johannes Gutemberg who was an inventor and engraver, was largely responsible for implementing words in headquarters and also for their mass distribution, as he was responsible for the reinvention of the printing press. (Melo, 2009)

William Hogarth was an English engraving painter from the 17th century. The artist created stories in the form of drawings that were published in 1731 in a serial format (continuity format). With this new style emerging there also arose the need to create laws of copyright for this type of work. "*Rudolph Töpffer*", a work that was greatly influenced by William Hogarth, was a great pioneer for the genre of comic books that we know today. Töpffer is well remembered as the father of modern comics, containing ironic images, with an interdependent combination (when one thing depends on the other) of drawings and words. As previously words and pictures did not talk to each other in comics, they were only used for most of the time to represent sounds. *Rudolph Töpffer* changed the way comics were made at the time. Figure 1 shows an excerpt of the work, as seen below. (Melo, 2009)

Figure 1: Rodolphe Töpffer and the first sequential visual narrative.



Source: The Daily Heller (2018)

Despite all the changes throughout the period and all the recognition and success of comic books in the 19th century and earlier, it was in the first half of the 20th century that the comic book genre saw its peak, the genre became popular thanks to superhero fiction stories and to this day comic books are closely associated with these stories, the time of the great popularization of comics is called "Golden Age of Superhero Comics". The kickoff for this era was with the creation of Superman by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel in 1938 and in 1941 the superhero responsible for perhaps boosting the golden age was born as his ideological ideas were perfect for war propaganda in the middle of the biggest war the world has ever seen, Second World War, Captain America, as mentioned above, his ideologies were created based on the American ideology of acting during war: He uses a shield because he does not attack, he defends himself, his identity was not a secret, his clothes were not only in the colors of the American flag but his uniform was the American flag itself but his main characteristic was being a weapon of the United States against the enemies. (Cunha, 2013)

The fear of war made people want to escape the bloody reality they live in to venture into something more playful, although superheroes also go to war in their stories, superhero comics have become an entertainment refuge, and with that the number of sales at the time were stratospheric; according to the data below:

A Yank Weekly article, published in November of 1945, cited the estimates of the Market Research Company of America, which found that about 70 million Americans, roughly half of the U.S. population, read comic books. The ages of readers heavily favored children, with 95 percent of all boys and 91 percent of all girls between the ages of six and eleven reading comic books. The study also revealed a high percentage of adult readers, with 41 percent of men and 28 percent of women aged eighteen to thirty admitting to regularly reading comics. (Kelley 2009, p.1)

This data shows the great importance and public success that comics had at the time, a very large cultural reach because they were cheap and fun, a true golden age that reached all ages and genders in the United States.

The golden age of superhero comics happened between the thirties and fifties, that is, during difficult times in American society, as it was during this period that the Great Depression in the United States happened (a time when the United States was facing a major economic crisis) and the Second World War. (Kelley, 2009)

The great success of comics benefited from these moments, because in times of crisis cheap entertainment was needed, and comics, especially superheroes, were the perfect way to solve this problem and was a topic in the press at the time as the article below says:

Even President Roosevelt was aware of the power of popular culture in times of great suffering. He remarked in 1936, "When the spirit of the people is lower than at any other time during this Depression, it is a splendid thing that for just fifteen cents an American can go to a movie and forget his troubles." While he speaks specifically of movies, the same sentiment applies to comic books. Both media provided fantasy worlds, worlds far away from the heartache of the age. In many ways, the comic book was better suited to meet the needs of the American people. In a time before mass recorded media, the comic book was the one form of entertainment that you could enjoy at any time and as many times as you wanted. (Kelley 2009, p.2)

This article shows how Americans were thirsty for entertainment, and the fact that the President of the United States himself publicly praised cheap entertainment shows how comics became refuges for them.

The end of the Second World War also marked the beginning of the end of the Golden Age the superhero comics were still selling a lot in the post-war period as some soldiers were still returning to their homes, some people still maintained their old habits from War, and the comics started to have stories congratulating the American victory, but the public start to lose interest, after years of a bloody war, the American people wanted to change the subject and with that, little by little, some superheroes began to lose their meaning to exist. (Kelley 2009)

Captain America was one of those most affected by the events after World War II because he was created to defeat the Nazis, but what do you do when the Nazis have already been defeated? The consequences of this led to the cancellation of his magazine in 1956. Superman returned to talking about fantasy issues and left behind the social justice he had done during the War. (Kelley 2009)

Sales stagnated and another era came (the era of silver for example), but even today comics are often associated with superheroes, so having works like *Second Generation* or *Maus* is extremely important to show that not only fiction and superheroes are successful, but

real stories with great weight for Anglophone literature can also have its highlights within the comic book genre.

ARBITER TESTIMONY

Elie Wiesel's 1990 speech "the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the Epistle, the renaissance the Sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony", Eaglestone also says that testimony is related to the discipline of histories, but testimony is not necessarily a work of history or an object of study for historians, but undoubtedly testimony uses the resource of history, because although many testimonies use an autobiographical narrative line, in some there may be historical moments, or its style and narrative content become historical and can be used as a report or descriptive story. (Eaglestone, 2010)

There are several testimonies that have become very important historical documents Eaglestone cites two very important ones below;

David Rousset's very early Marxist-influenced testimony *Univers Concentrationnaire* (1946) is a realist (and not surrealist, as is sometimes claimed) 'report' on the 'depths of the camps': something between a historical overview, in style, mixed with personal observations...Neftali Frankel's / *Survived Hell: The Testimony of a Survivor of the Nazi Extermination Camps* (Prisoner Number 161040), an account of his life in Tarnow before the war, his imprisonment Auschwitz and then his survival of a death march....(Eaglestone 2010, p.119)

All of these works mentioned above are important within the testimony genre, each of these works has a relevance that made them famous and relevant within the genre.

The Testimonial narrative is an option for those in difficult situations, and highlights two types of testimonies; the *Testis* (third) is the one who saw and witnessed the painful scene, and we also have the *Superstes* (first), the one who lived and witnesses his own experience however there is a third type of testimony, a type that can be identified in works on the same theme, but it is often ignored by its constitution, as this testimony is neither seen nor experienced, but "only" heard; the *arbiter testimony*. The *Arbiter* witness will hear and judge the story without interfering in it, hence the term *Arbiter*, arbitrator or judge, who knows the events of the situation because of the primary witness who experienced the specific situation, every time this case happens in this situation a referee is born. (Sarmiento-Pantoja 2019)

It is very important to highlight that the arbitrator's testimony is not associated with the legal field, since in this field the judge's ultimate objective is to punish and declare the guilty because in the legal sector the judge tries to find one version of the story among several, but

the arbitrator's testimony it is more based on finding an "aesthetic truth" to be able to discover the best way to narrate the story, even if the narrator's involvement is only as an interlocutor. (Sarmiento-Pantoja 2019)

Pantoja (2019) also comments on the oscillation that exists in the testimonies and relates the three in an interesting analysis:

"As occurs in the two other forms of testimony, the arbiter also presents an oscillation between the one who survived and the narration of his experience (*superstes*), and the one who saw and could be seen and narrates the experience of the other, which is also his (*testis*); and what the survivor or witness saw and heard and arbitrates a reception about the scene described by the other (*arbiter*)" (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2019, p.15, our translation)¹

In this way, it is clear that all forms of testimony that are *Testis*, *Superstes* and *Arbiter* are interconnected, each of these testimonies has particular characteristics that differentiate them at some times, in addition to having common characteristics that make them the same at other times.

Pantoja (2019) emphasizes that there is no testimony without an *arbiter*, as part of the basis of an *arbiter* testimony is to hear what the other person says, knowing that there is no testimony if there is no other person to listen, it can be said that the *arbiter* is in all different types of testimonies. However, the arbitrator's testimony cannot be limited to a person who heard the stories of their parents or grandparents, some of the *arbiters* witnesses were present in the situations in which they testify, such as some Jews who were in concentration camps when they were little child, and none of them have memories of the situation they witnessed, and end up hearing it through other people and building their memories of survival.

Another situation is when the victim experiences very traumatic situations and erases memories from their mind and is unable to give their testimony, so another person who was present in the same situation narrates the story personally, as Sarmiento-Pantoja (2019) even calls a prosthetic memory, and he also comments: "To the extent that these survivors narrate their stories based on the memories of others, their memories are theirs, because they accept them as their own, they feel that these memories belong to them."² (Sarmiento-Pantoja 2019 p.17, our translation). It is very interesting to observe these people who, despite being in the

¹ "Como ocorre nas duas outras formas do testemunho, o arbiter também apresenta oscilação entre aquele que sobreviveu e a narração de sua experiência (*superstes*), e aquele que viu e podia ser visto e narra a experiência do outro, que também é sua (*testis*); e o que viu e ouviu o sobrevivente ou a testemunha e arbitra uma recepção sobre a cena descrita pelo outro (*arbiter*). (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2019, p.15)

² Na medida em que esses sobreviventes narram suas histórias a partir das memórias de outrem, suas memórias são as delas, por que as assumem como suas, sentem que essas memórias lhe pertencem. (Sarmiento-Pantoja 2019 p.17)

situation, need to hear someone else tell them what happened, thus creating referee testimony of their own story.

Second Generation by Michel Kichka makes use of this testimony, bringing not only the memories of the protagonist's father's concentration camps, but also the protagonist's own memories of living in a childhood surrounded by the traumas of those in the first generation who were present at the Holocaust.

ANALYSIS OF THE WORK

Second Generation: The things I didn't tell my father, is a graphic novel released in 2014 that tells the story of Michel Kichka who is also the author of the work *Michel's* upbringing was directly influenced by the Holocaust, despite not even being born at the time, his father, Henri was a survivor of the concentration camps and this directly affects their relationship and also with their family, the work has a certain similarity with "*Maus: A Survivor's Tale*" by Art Spiegelman (Flack, 2015)

Flack (2020) emphasizes that there are strong similarities and also differences between *Maus* and *Second Generation*, firstly he talks a little about the differences he notices between the two works:

“The book is shows clear inspiration from *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, and at the same time it is distinct in a number of ways. First, there is an explicit shift in focus: *Deuxième génération* does not aim at telling the story of the father’s time in Auschwitz but instead tells the story of the son”(Flack 2015, p.70).

While *Maus* goes back in time and tells the story of the Holocaust era, *Second Generation* focuses on the story after that time, focusing on the son and how he deals with his parents' traumatizing past that affects his family; These differences mean that each of the two works has its own identity, although there are still great similarities and Flack (2015) mentions these similarities as we see below:

“a childhood marked by the telling silence of a survivor father who measures everything by the yardstick of Auschwitz; the discovery of the genocide by the son, through pictures seen when he was seven or eight in the history books about the Holocaust that his father collected, and the nightmares he had as a result; an adolescence that offered no possibility of rebelling because of the weight of the father’s suffering”.(Flack, 2015 p.70)

All these traumas of cruelty experienced by the authors' parents and the uncertainties and particularities of living in the shadow of the Holocaust that are experienced by the authors in their respective childhoods greatly mark both works.

The fact that his father Michel had already gone through the trauma of the Holocaust and had already continued his life "normally" allows the author to direct the story in a

different way than other works that talk about second generations, to perceive a comic tone in the work that does not take away all the burden and cruelty of portraying a testimony from a person who survived the Holocaust but leaves the text of the work a little lighter, and this is fascinating; the comic side, the way in which it throws us into revolting situations in a "naturally funny", a heavy humor, which involves social criticism and at the same time releases a joke that does not make the atmosphere tense, a type of writing that differentiates it from other works of testimony, as for example in chapter 13 the protagonist is prevented from being in class because he is Jewish. As we see in figure 2 below:

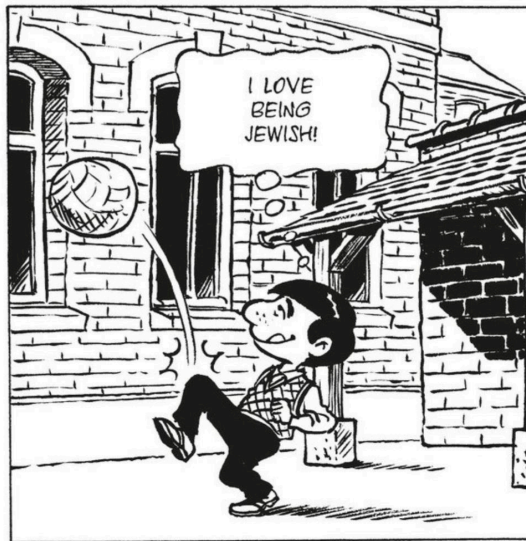
Figure 2: Michel being excused from class because he is Jewish.



Source: Michel Kichka 2014 p.13

What could have been a sad episode of anti-Semitism was seen in a "positive" way by Michel, as the boy left celebrating. As we see figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Michel did not realize (or did not care) that he suffered from anti-Semitism.



Source: Michel Kichka 2014 p.14.

Because besides not needing to attend classes, he can still play football while others study. A few comics later, some boys join Michel at the football game, and after performing well in the game, he says the following sentence in figure 4:

Figure 4: The acid humor of the work.



Source: Michel Kichka 2014 p.14

Everything in a good-humored way but without leaving aside the cruel part of being Jewish and suffering prejudice.

Aarons in his article “*Holocaust Graphic Narratives*” cites an important characteristic in the history of the work, the fact that the protagonist is interested in photographs of his relatives who died in the concentration camps, the author makes a comparative analysis as if it were a “fetishistic” desire to see “forbidden things” to fulfill your desires to discover the past through photographs “There is something seductive yet clandestine and transgressive in the

child's fascination with the photograph, as if he possesses something that he should not see, as if he fetishizes the object of his desire.” (Aarons, 2019, p.92)

Figure 5: Michel's fascination with looking at photos.

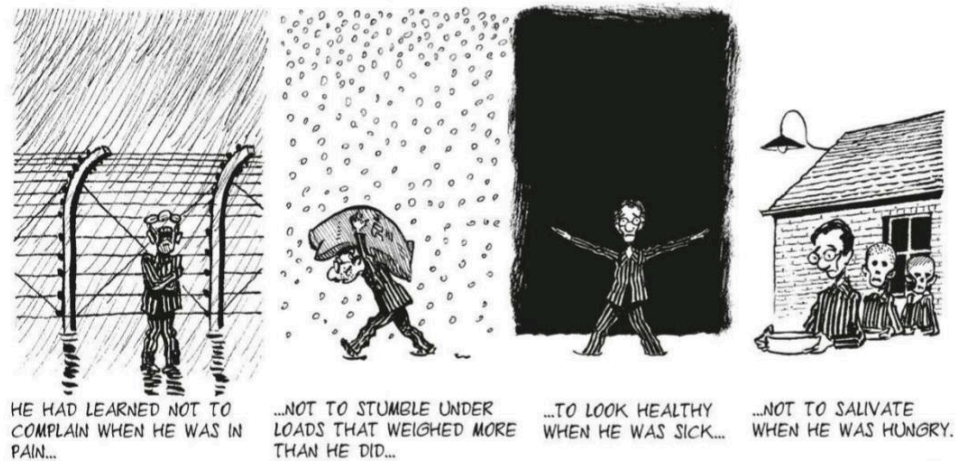


Source: Michel Kichka 2014 p.5.

One interpretation is that perhaps this fascination with seeing photos from the past is explained by the second generation's reason for feeling guilty because they are living a more comfortable life than their ancestors and quotes Art Spiegelman's *Maus* "I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through! I guess it is some kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did.", the guilt that surrounds them also serves as an incentive to keep the family together in the name of the people who have already left and also of all the suffering experienced in the past during the period in the concentration camps. (Aarons, 2019)

The work is full of *Arbiter* testimony an example of these is when Michel interspersing what happened to his father during the war and how his father acts nowadays, the consequences of the traumas that surround the family, Michel tells how his father learned not to complain about anything in concentration camps, how complaints would imply death, how he learned to pretend that everything was fine even though he was dying inside, Michel's testimony shows how his father complains about everything as a way of compensating for everything that the Henry of the past had to endure with their mouths closed in Auschwitz, as we see in the figure below in figure 6:

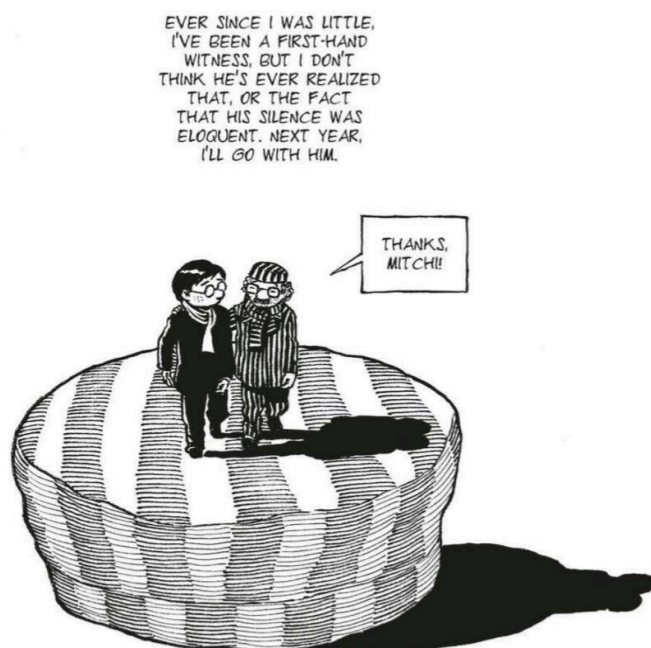
Figure 6: Michel tells things his father went through.



Source: Michel Kichka 2014 p.78.

The *Arbiter* testimony told by Michel comes from his father who is a first-person witness (*superstes*) of all the atrocities experienced during the Holocaust, but all of this is told unconsciously by Henry who does not know he was giving testimony because he always avoided commenting on things that happened in the camps. Michel makes it clear in an excerpt from the story that his father's silence was very eloquent, as a way of saying that even if his father did not talk about his experiences, his actions and manners said many things, and this gives great weight to Michel's *Arbiter* Testimony because the things he witnessed in his childhood were so powerful that he did not need words to formulate his testimony, as we see in the figure below:

Figure 7: Michel says he and his father will visit Buchenwald, where the death march took place.



Source: Michel Kichka 2014 p.90.

Observe how the Kichka family is shaped in parallel with the memory of the Holocaust, both in wanting to be a model family because many Jews in concentration camps were not lucky enough to come out alive to have their own families, even in the names they give to their their children, as all the couple's children have names in honor of their dead relatives, observe how the tragedy shapes the family at the same time as they try to move forward to overcome the past, the great emphasis that the story gives to Henri, the father of Michel, who at one point in the work says that his father's story of suffering overshadowed his mother's story of suffering, the story of understanding that this happens because Henri is the most traumatized among the couple, at one point it is said that the patriarch is unable to cry because his tears dried up during the Nazi era, the dryness in Henri's eyes tells us many things.

Finally, the importance of images in Second Generation as they provide a historical record because it brings many layers to the work *"It creates an opening for ethical witnessing through the remote vantage point of a distanced spectator, one who observes, if not the events themselves, then the afterimage of atrocity. The image thus testifies to both presence and absence"*. (Aarons, 2019, p.93)

The importance of having a graphic work that makes us enter body and soul into what the author felt when remembering the past, all the traumas and fears, "funny" and prejudiced situations, the union of the family especially with the family's patriarch because in the In the middle of all that hardness is just a man who wants his children to be better than them, to have the opportunities he did not have, all these feelings the author manages to deliver with great detail, not explicitly but rather, implicitly, sensitivity that the author deals with with the work makes Second Generation a reference work when it comes to testimonial content.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the end of this work, and after having a brief reflection on everything that was proposed at the beginning of the article, I am happy to conclude that my objectives of showing the history of comics, talking about *arbiter* testimony and reflecting on Second Generation were achieved, it was an arduous task because critically analyzing a *Second Generation* style work is challenging, as each sentence and each image had several layers that can be interpreted differently depending on the person reading, trying to put yourself in the author's shoes (maybe not even possible) to having a small sense of the emotional weight of

the work, from the acid jokes to emotional moments, and especially understanding the historical context that the work supports were crucial to achieving these objectives.

Particularly, I hope that the academic community around me appreciates my work because it deals with a subject little covered in other scientific articles, that it becomes a good bibliographical reference for future readers and article writers, that the originality contained in the article encourages authors to talk about *Second Generation* and bring more news that will contribute more to turning the academic community's attention to this style of literature.

Second Generation: The things I didn't tell my father, is a fascinating work with an incredible testimony, and deserves all the recognition, that when we read the comic we can see how the ability that human beings have to turn tragedy into an art is fantastic and how literature as a whole shapes its readers to have an awareness of the world so that in the future we can live on a planet without prejudice and discrimination, that Nazism, racism, xenophobia, among others, become fiction or a thing of the past.

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