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Sarah Lightman

Forward (And Backwards)

With this portrait of my paternal grandfather, Harold, I ushered in the only reference to the Holocaust in my autobiographical graphic novel, *The Book of Sarah*. In contrast to the presence of my grandfather's face, the story of his father's – my great-grandfather's – written will stands like Lot's wife outside the destroyed city of Sodom, looking back at the lost sisters who stayed behind in Vilna after the pogroms at the beginning of the twentieth century. As I wrote the text for this page, I was not in any position to verify this story or the origination story about disembarking at the wrong stop, as my grandfather had died years before. But this was what I heard as I grew up, a family mythology of survival, naivety, serendipity and both good and bad luck. The shadow of the lost Lichtmakher family in the Holocaust was not spoken of frequently: firstly, that side of my family was dedicated to becoming as British as possible, and secondly, my immediate family had more pressing war damage to contend with – the breakdown of my maternal grandfather, also named Harold, after his British military service – seemed to have had more direct impact on the emotional life of the family.

I, however, extended this re-remembered/misremembered history into a new life and a new century, by naming my child Harry, after both of these Harolds. Whilst I have yet to introduce the Holocaust to my child – we are currently living through a pandemic so there is enough precarity and death in our lives these days – Harry knows his name has a history. And yet any family history I teach him will be, like this page of my graphic novel, a patriarchal story, about men who survived and recorded themselves, and about women's lives lost, and lost women's voices. I cannot even draw the sisters: we have no photos or records of them, so it can only be my grandfather's face who stands for his lost aunts. This gendered story reminds me that while Judaism is a matrilineal religion, Jewish biblical narrative and, in my case, remembered and recorded Jewish family history focus on the male line.

Which takes us to the conference and now this collection that examines the world of comics and the Holocaust: "Beyond *MAUS*. The Legacy of Holocaust Comics". "Beyond *MAUS*" was a fascinating and occasionally emotional three-day conference at the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Graz in 2019. The conference looked, as does this collection of essays, at the history of comics before and after *MAUS*, and the role comics had, and have, in the memorialisation of the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman's ground-breaking comic was first