

Lucia Greenberg: In-Depth Analysis

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MAUS by Art Spiegelman tells the story of Jewish Holocaust survivor Vladek Spiegelman and his son. The graphic novel follows Vladek from his marriage to Art's mother to the end of his life. The focus of this essay will only be on the first chapter. More specifically, it will be focusing on one character from the first chapter: Lucia Greenberg. She deserved more than the portrayal she got in the book, and because of that this paper is dedicated solely to her.

The attention *MAUS* gave to women was negligible. The exclusion of women from the narrative is something that has been happening for centuries, going all the way back to early Judaism: "Many women appear here and there throughout biblical narratives, often playing strong roles but not dwelt on at any length by the narrators" (Fisher 163). Similarly, very little is written about the women in *Maus*, most analyses focusing only on Mala, Anja, and Francoise. While it is important for all of the women in the story to be written about, Lucia is especially important because of how little we know about her. By providing an in-depth analysis, this paper will show that she was so much more than the measly seventeen panels she appeared in.

Lucia is first introduced on page 15 of *MAUS*. Vladek is bragging about how attractive he used to be and talks about how girls he did not know would want to meet him. Lucia is one of those girls, quick involve herself in Vladek's life. She works very hard to get over to his apartment and they start some sort of relationship together that spans "maybe three or four years" (Spiegelman 17). Lucia is only mentioned because of her relationship with Vladek, and while her time in the story is short, there is obviously a lot happening with her. The first thing that should be addressed about Lucia in general is her appearance. *MAUS* is a book dealing with the Holocaust, and while there is some nudity, there is no sexualized nudity. Despite this, Lucia is drawn in a very over-sexualized way.

Most of Lucia's clothes are form-fitting, and she definitely shows off the most skin of all the female characters. The two panels that definitely show this happen early into her introduction. She is lying on Vladek's bed trying to persuade him to marry her, dressed in a tight black dress that shows off a lot of her chest. There is a lot implied in drawing her this way. Since it is Vladek's son who has illustrated the caricature, it is hard to determine whether Vladek had described Lucia in this way or if the artist made the decision to over-sexualize her through the artwork. Lucia is only seen in the little black dress for two panels, but even in her other panels, her clothes tend to accentuate her figure.

When she is dressed in her coat or not explicitly visible, her sexualization comes more from her behavior rather than how she looks. Lucia is the only female character in text explicitly described as sexually active, whereas it is only implied with a lot of the other women because of the children they have. Lucia's sexual activity does not involve getting pregnant, but it is still made clear that she is having sex. There is an awkward conversation between Art and his father where Art asks if Lucia was his father's first time and Vladek confirms that she was.

Despite the relationship lasting for a while, Vladek seems to know very little of what happened to Lucia. In fact, after getting through the story of what happened with Lucia, he has nothing else to say about her for the rest of the entire collection of *MAUS*. While losing track of someone in such a tumultuous time would make sense, when compared to the knowledge Vladek seems to have about everyone else, it seems a little callous. Another thing to consider is how Lucia is an integral character to the first chapter of the book, and yet never returns.

Looking at the story in chronological order, Lucia is the first female character introduced. Even the author himself is surprised to hear Vladek talking about Lucia, because he knows his mother's name was Anja. Lucia has little to do with the story itself except causing a rift between Anja and Vladek when she sends a letter outlining what she thinks Vladek's true intentions are, yet Vladek thinks Lucia is important to mention. Vladek brushes the letter off and calls Lucia an old girlfriend. Vladek just as easily could have said this again about Lucia and not gone into the long story of how Lucia slept with him.

The span of their relationship is also important. If the two really were seeing each other for more than three years, it is strange that Vladek seems to have no idea what happened to Lucia. There is *no* mention of what happened to her after the relationship. This is significant because with nearly every other character Vladek seems to interact with, he knows exactly what happened to them. Vladek even reveals the fate of a man he had only met briefly—a man who had reported his family's hiding spot to the Germans (Spiegelman 119). While that mention is the grim announcement of his death, it is still more information than we get about Lucia. Vladek seems to know the outcomes of nearly everyone except for Lucia.

The next area that must be looked at concerning Lucia is how she compares to Anja and Vladek. Anja and Vladek are Art's parents, and thus without them, the book would not exist, although Vladek is pretty much who the book is about—it is his story that is being told. Anja is also important, though she does not get to tell her story because she is already dead by the time the book is being written. By looking at how Lucia compares to these two characters, the audience can see more about her own character.

Anja is Vladek's first wife. From Lucia's point of view, Anja is the person who takes Vladek away from her. The differences between Anja and Lucia are pointed out from the very beginning. Lucia is definitely more confident than Anja is. While Anja feels comfortable enough to talk to her friend, seemingly in private, about how handsome she thinks Vladek is, Lucia takes the direct approach and has her friend set a date between Vladek and her. Had Vladek not known English, he would not have known Anja's secret feelings for him. Lucia was very clear about how she felt about him. Additionally, Lucia and Anja clearly have very different personality types. While he does not have kind words regarding Lucia's personality, Vladek praises Anja constantly over the fact that she was "sensitive and intelligent" (Spiegelman 20).

Personality aside, Vladek did find Lucia attractive. When Art asks, "Mom wasn't that attractive, huh?" Vladek says that Anja was not attractive like Lucia was (Spiegelman 20). However, while looks aren't everything to Vladek, the implication seems to be that money is. One of the big reasons he says he was not interested in marrying Lucia was her family was poor and she didn't have a dowry. It is repeated many times how much money Anja's family had. There is very obviously a class difference between the two women.

While there are a lot of differences between Anja and Lucia, their biggest similarity is what connects them. One of the biggest reveals in *MAUS* comes at the end of the first book when it is revealed that Vladek burned all of Anja's diaries. Art calls Vladek a murderer and while it seems over dramatic, the statement is true in a way. Vladek has effectively stolen the opportunity for Anja to tell her own story. He also attempts to do this to Lucia's story. At the very end of the first chapter, he tells Art not to include their story because it is too private. Once again Vladek is keeping a woman's story from being told. Thankfully, Art still writes about it, but it is an experience that Anja and Lucia both shared.

Vladek is the main character in the story and without him, Lucia would not have any significance. While there are a lot of other things that cause problems, in the first chapter, Lucia appears to be Vladek's foil (Abrams 294). Not only does she highlight a different side of Vladek other than the rational way he presents himself, she also acts as a big stressor for him. Yet, the two are more similar than one might assume. They tend to do a lot of similar things, but because of the double standard, the way the things are portrayed end up being different. Lucia is trivialized for doing what she does, while Vladek is rewarded.

One of the first examples is when Vladek tries to break things off with Lucia. She goes to his apartment and desperately tries to get him to take her back. Lucia falls down on the floor and clings to his legs. This image is what makes the cover of chapter one. The readers are supposed to see Lucia as desperate and crazy for going to Vladek's home and begging for his affection. However only one page later, we see Vladek do something very

similar. When Anja stops calling him, he goes all the way to her home. Though she doesn't want to see him, Vladek brings her flowers. He eventually convinces her that the letter she received from Lucia was not true. Vladek going to see Anja is supposed to be considered a romantic gesture; nothing like what Lucia did to him.

The other area where the two seem similar is when they react jealously. Lucia is very upfront about her jealousy. First she reacts by insulting Anja, very obviously cutting the other woman down because of the way she looks. After Vladek ends things with her, Lucia also reacts negatively by sending Anja the letter, hoping to sabotage the relationship. Vladek's jealousy is a little ambiguous, because it also seems to be intertwined with anti-communism. When Art asks if Anja had any other boyfriends, Vladek says that there were no romantic relationships but Anja had been involved with a communist. Vladek prohibits Anja from working with any communists again, and Anja obeys. It is hard to determine if this is jealousy or fear, but it does show Vladek being very controlling. Whether it is from rereading or analyzing a specific part of the text, the way a character is looked at can be completely different. Lucia is definitely one of those characters that could be looked at in many different ways. This last section will look at how Lucia can be viewed, both positive and negative, to see how one character can be interpreted in a multitude of ways.

If looking at Lucia from a positive point of view, she suddenly becomes a character way ahead of her time. She is not without her flaws, but her positive aspects outshine them. Much like Vladek controlled his story and told it exactly how he believed it happened, Lucia transforms into the heroine of her story. Lucia's control of her sexual agency is what makes her one of the most captivating characters in the text. From the very beginning, she knows what she wants and she goes after it. She has her friend set her up with Vladek. When she finally gets to his apartment, they begin a relationship based on sex. This is made clear by Vladek's conversation with Art. It ends when Vladek breaks things off, and this leads into the other area where Lucia shows another positive trait.

From Lucia's point of view, the letter she sends Anja is a warning. As previously mentioned, Vladek does seem to be interested in money. One of his biggest complaints against Lucia is that her family is poor. In the letter Lucia sends Anja, she warns her about Vladek. From Lucia's perspective, what she says is true. Vladek was still doing things with Lucia when he began his relationship with Anja, so that could be what she meant by "a lot of girlfriends" (Spiegelman 24). From what can be gathered from the text, a large part of why he preferred Anja over Lucia was Anja's money, so what Lucia says about marrying for the money could be true. Lucia's letter was a warning to Anja that she ignored because of Vladek's persuasion. By looking at Lucia like this, she can be added to a long list of female characters

that “reinforce a feminist desire for women to break past traditional barriers and control their own lives” (Parker 153).

While the previous version of Lucia definitely seems like a heroine more than the textual version does, it is possible to twist her character in a completely opposite way. More often than not, this is what readers are led to do, especially operating under the impression that Anja and Vladek are the couple they are supposed to root for. When looking at Lucia from this point of view, her character changes drastically, and she becomes somewhat of a villain. Compared to the Lucia introduced earlier that is trying to protect Anja from Vladek, the Lucia in this interpretation is very mean. Spiegelman does a good job of drawing this Lucia in a way where her disdain for Anja can be seen. Lucia sees the picture of Anja and cuts her down for the way she looks. This is the only time we see Lucia talk about something that isn't Vladek or wanting to be with him, and it is sad that it is only to cut Anja down. This is vastly different from the Lucia we see later who calls herself Anja's secret friend (Spiegelman 24).

The other area where Lucia could be painted negatively is in the sense of being Vladek's other woman. While their relationship actually started before Anja and Vladek's, Lucia is still set up more as the mistress. This is mainly because she is not the one Vladek wants to marry; it is made obvious that Anja is that one for him. Because of this Lucia is made the “other”. Despite wanting to marry Anja, Vladek continues to see her because “[i]t was not so easy to get free from Lucia” (Spiegelman 19). She is seen as the one that he is cheating on Anja with rather than the other way around.

As shown, there are different interpretations that could be made about Lucia. She could be a heroine or a villainess. However, due to how little is revealed about her, the readers just know her as one of the women Vladek was involved with. Lucia was so much more complex than how she comes off in the short chapter. By analyzing the depth of her character, I hope to encourage others to look more critically at women in all media forms and in real life. “The problem comes with reducing women to little or nothing except their status as an object,” Parker writes (171). Hopefully by acknowledging this we can encourage better portrayal for women in fictional works.

Works Cited

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