EN 2903 An Introduction to Literary and Critical Theory

Professor S. Jeppesen
Postmodernism

Jean-François Lyotard
Postmodernism is...

- After WWII until current moment; peak in 1980s and 90s
- A reaction against or a break with Modernism
- A continuation of Modernism
- ... A debate about what postmodernism means
Collapse of master narratives

- Universal human subject
- Truth, Knowability
- History
- The Western canon

- Freedom
- Progress
- Scientific rationalism
- Reality
Characteristics of postmodernism

- Pastiche
- Irony, self-reflexivity, and bleak humour
- Intertextuality, metafiction, historiographic metafiction
- Temporal distortion, anti-realism
- Interactivity and participation
- Fragmented narratives and identities
- Resistance to closure
Pastiche in architecture: AGO
Pastiche in art: Warhol
Pastiche in literature: Historiographic metafiction

- Michael Ondaatje
- The Collected Works of Billy the Kid
MAUS by Art Spiegelman (1991)

- MAUS won prestigious literary awards such as the Pulitzer Prize
- comic form challenges the high art/low art divide
- combines several genres: comic book, history, ethnography, biography, etc.
- history is personal
Rego Park, N.Y. c. 1958

It was summer. I remember. I was ten or eleven...

LAST ONE TO THE
SCHOOLYARD IS A
ROTTEN EGG!

I was roller-skating with Howie and Steve...

...til my skate came loose.

OW!

HEY! WAIT UP FELLAS!

ROTTEN EGG! HA HA!

ARTIC! COME TO HOLD THIS A
MINUTE WHILE I SAW.

SNRK?

WHY DO YOU CAY, ARTIE?
HOLD BETTER ON THE WOOG.

I-I FELL, AND
MY FRIENDS
SKATED AWAY
WITHOUT ME.

He stopped sawing.

FRIENDS? YOUR
FRIENDS?...

IF YOU LOCK THEM TOGETHER
IN A ROOM WITH NO FOOD
FOR A WEEK....

...THEN YOU COULD SEE
WHAT IT IS, FRIENDS?....

My father was in front,
Fixing something...
MY FATHER BLEEDS HISTORY
(MID-1930s TO WINTER 1944)

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CHAPTER ONE

9
I went out to see my father in Rego Park. I hadn't seen him in a long time; we weren't that close.

**Poppa:** Oh, Artie! You're late; I was worried.

He had aged a lot since I saw him last. My mother's suicide and his two heart attacks had taken their toll.

**Mala:** Look who's here! Artie!

She was a survivor, too, like most of my parents' friends.

**Hi, Artie. Let me take your coat.**

He was remarried. Mala knew my parents in Poland before the war.

**The dinner is on the table.**

ACCH. Mala!

A wire hanger you give him! I haven't seen Artie in almost two years, we have plenty wooden hangers.

They didn't get along.

11

12

After dinner he took me into my old room...

**Come—we'll talk while I pedal...**

It's good for my heart, the pedaling. But, tell me, how is it by you? How is going the comics business?

I still want to draw that book about you...

**The one I used to talk to you about.**

About your life in Poland, and the war.

The one I used to talk to you about.

**It would take many books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories.**

I want to hear it. Start with mom... tell me how you met.

I was in textiles—buying and selling—I didn't make much, but always I could make a living.

But, if you want, I can tell you... I lived then in Czempinowa, a small city not far from the border of Germany.
I WAS AT THAT TIME, YOUNG, AND REALLY A NICE, HANDSOME BOY.

I HAD A LOT OF GIRLS WHAT I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT WOULD RUN AFTER ME.

HELLO, VLADER? THIS IS YULEK...

A FRIEND OF MINE, LUCIA GREENBERG, WOULD LIKE TO BE INTRODUCED TO YOU.

THE SUN STILL HAD A LITTLE WAY TO GO BEFORE THE NIGHTWALKER

EVENTUALLY, I TOOK LUCIA TO DANCE...

PEOPLE ALWAYS TOLD ME I LOOKED JUST LIKE RUDOLPH VALENTINO.

DO YOU LIVE ALONE?

YES.

I HAVE A SMALL APARTMENT. MY PARENTS MOVED TO SOHNOVKA.

I'LL LIKE TO SEE IT SOME TIME.

MAYBE SOME TIME.

WHEREEVER I WENT — I LOOKED AROUND — AND LUCIA GREENBERG WOULD BE ALSO THERE...

VLADER! WHICH WAY ARE YOU GOING?

JUST TO THE MARKET.

ME TOO. LET'S WALK TOGETHER.

ALL THIS WAS BEFORE I MET ANJA. JUST LISTEN. YES?

WHY DON'T YOU EVER INVITE ME TO YOUR HOME?...

ARE YOU ASHAMED OF IT?

SHE KEPT INSISTING ME TO SHOW HER MY APARTMENT.

— SO FINALLY, I INVITED HER...

EVERYTHING'S SO NEAT AND CLEAN!

I LIKE TO KEEP THINGS IN ORDER.

YOU MUST HAVE ANOTHER GIRL-FRIEND WHO COURTS FOR YOU, NO?

NO.

...I DIDN'T WANT TO BE MORE CLOSER WITH HER, BUT SHE KEENLY WOULDN'T LET ME GO.
WAS SHE THE FIRST GIRL YOU—UM—
YES, WE WERE MORE UNINVOLVED,
SO LIKE THE YOUTHS HERE TODAY!
WE SAW EACH OTHER TOGETHER FOR
MAYBE THREE OR FOUR YEARS.
LET'S GET ENGAGED, VLADIK!
IT'S LATE, I'LL TAKE YOU HOME.
NOT YET, PLEASE.
COME ON—YOUR PARENTS WOULD WORRY!
HER FAMILY WAS NICE, BUT HAD NO MONEY, EVEN FOR A DOWRY.
Cousin Vladek!
Well, every Monday I come over to visit my family. It is nearly 500 miles.
It's good to see you again. Listen...
There's a girl in my class—I want you to meet us tomorrow. Her name is Anja.
She's incredibly clever, from a rich family.... a very good girl...

The next morning we all met together. My cousin and Anja spoke sometimes in English.
How you like him?
He's a handsome boy and seems very nice.
They couldn't know I understood.
You know, you should be careful speaking English—a "stranger" could understand.

Well—I promised to be home early... I'll leave you two alone.
Did you study it in school?
I had to quit school at about 14 to work.
It's a shame you have to return to Czestochowa so soon.
Yes but I have my business.
Have you a phone at home?
As soon as I came back to Czestochowa, she called—once a day... twice... every day we talked.
AND THEN SHE STARTED WRITING TO ME. SUCH BEAUTIFUL LETTERS—ALMOST NOBODY COULD WRITE POLISH LIKE SHE WRITE.

I VISITED A COUPLE TIMES TO HER. SHE SENT ME A PHOTO.

I TOOK A VERY NICE FRAME...

I'M GOING TO GET ENGAGED TO HER, LUCIA.

PESSSHH! AND LOOK AT WHAT A BEAUTY YOU PICKED.

LOOKS AREN'T EVERYTHING, LUCIA. IT ISN'T GOOD FOR EITHER OF US THAT "YOU KEEP COMING UP HERE..."

WE HAVE TO PLAN FOR OUR FUTURES. AND... FORGET HEA! LET ME MAKE YOU HAPPY!

IT WAS NOT SO EASY TO GET FREE FROM LUCIA.

MOM WASN'T THAT ATTRACTIVE, HUH?

NOT SO LIKE LUCIA... BUT IF YOU TALKED A LITTLE TO HER, YOU STARTED LOVING HER MORE AND MORE.

ONE TIME WE WALKED INTO THE DIRECTOR FROM HER SCHOOL.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT A GIRL YOU'RE GETTING—I'VE HAD MANY STUDENTS...

BUT NEVER ONE AS SENSITIVE AND INTELLIGENT AS ANNA!

I WISH YOU COULD VISIT ME IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA—I'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU OFF TO MY FRIENDS.

I'VE BEGGED MY MOTHER TO LET ME GO—BUT SHEL'S SO RELIGIOUS AND OLD-FASHIONED.

...SHE WOULD NEVER ALLOW ME TO GO TO A BACHELOR'S APARTMENT!

OH, MY PARENTS WOULD LIKE YOU TO COME TO DINNER TOMORROW NIGHT.

ANNA'S PARENTS WERE ANGRY SHE SHOULD BE MARRIED. SHE WAS 24; I WAS THEN 30.

THE ZUBERBERG FAMILY WAS VERY WELL-OFF—MILLIONAIRES!
The Yoder siblings had a hosiery factory—one of the biggest in Poland. But when I came in to their house, it was so like a king came...

WELCOME, WELCOME.

ANJA, VLADEN IS HERE!

Make yourself comfortable while I help with the dinner.

To see what a housekeeper can do, I peeked into Anja's closet.

Everything is neat and straight just the way I like it!

I wrote down every pill.

But what's this—pills?

If she was sick, then what did I need it for?

Dinner is ready.

Weed, a fellow, a drug dealer, told me the pills were only because she was so skinny and nervous.

How about some more gefilte fish, Vladen?

So, to make a long story short, by the end of 1936 we were engaged and I moved from Czestochowa to Songsowec.

Ahh! Here I forgot to tell something from before. I moved to Songsowec, but after our engagement was made.

One evening the bell rang...

Lucia

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? I'M ON MY WAY OUT.

No, you can't come with me.

Please, Vladen!

She fell on the floor and held strong my legs.

DON'T RUN AWAY!

I saw now that I went too far with her.

I ran out to my friend who introduced us. He went to calm her down and took her home.
I didn't hear more from Lucja - but also stopped hearing from Anja.

No telephone calls, no letters, nothing! What happened?

Hello, Mr. Z. Berg, could I speak to Anja?

She says she won't speak to you!

But why?

She got a letter from someone in Cieszynov, my God! It says the worst things in the world about you!

Well, I can't convince her on the phone. I'll come down by train on Friday after work.

It wasn't even a weekend, but I went anyway to Cieszynow.

So, tell me, Anja - what have I done that's so horrible?

You should know - just read this!

I don't even want to see it. Just tell me who wrote it. Oh, better yet, I'll tell you -

Lucia Greenberg, right!

It's just signed your secret friend, L.

That you have a lot of girlfriends...

And that you're for my money!

Ach, Anja - you should know me better. Ask anyone in Cieszynow about my character.

Lucia's an old girlfriend who wasn't leaving me alone. She means nothing at all to me.

And after much persuading, I convinced her.

So I moved to Sosnowiec at the end of 1936, and February 14, 1937, we were married.

And now some vodka to toast the young couple.

I moved into one of father-in-law's two apartments. He owned both. And he gave me part anniversary and a very beautiful gold watch for a wedding gift.
Professor S. Jeppesen

But this wasn't just told you—about Lucia, and so—don't want you should write this in your book.

It was nothing to do with Hitler with the Holocaust!

What? Why not?

But pop. It's great material. It makes everything more real—more human.

I want to tell your story, the way it really happened.

But this isn't so proper, so respectful.

...I can tell you other stories, but such private things, I don't want you should mention.

Okay, okay—I promise.
postmodern elements in MAUS

- intertextuality:
  - inclusion of other texts within the text

- self-reflexivity:
  - author includes themselves in the text

- meta-textuality:
  - revealing process of constructing a text

- breaking the frame:
  - edges of text are unclear

- historiographies
  - historical material included in text
past in the present

- alternating narrative
- New York street morphs into a Jewish ghetto in Poland
- Spiegelman shows the process of ethnography – recording the story of his father
Vladek’s sketch of the bunker in which they had hidden for a time
self-reflexivity
Next class :: Oct. 18th

Reading
- Baudrillard – Simulacra and Simulations

In-class writing
- *Inception*
- Please watch this film before class