**Summer of the 17th Doll by Ray Lawler (1957)**

Genre conventions - Play: Scripted dialogue, detailed stage directions (mood and motivations), scenes, acts, etc. Informal Australian vernacular, Metaphysical symbols – Kewpie dolls (symbolising innocence, tradition, and the infantilisation of Olive – a middle aged woman, by Roo), coral that turns to dust when Olive cleans up after the fight (symbolising loss of tradition and broken relationships), Setting – Melbourne 1950’s, post-war boom, White Australians indulging in mass consumerism as the war has ended.

First performed in 1955, the play is considered to be the most significant in Australian theatre history, and a "turning point," openly and authentically portraying distinctly Australian life and characters. It was one of the first truly naturalistic "Australian" theatre productions.

**Realist/Naturalistic theatre** – like Realist fiction (e.g. Zola), Naturalist theatre focuses on the play being realistic, and the result of a careful study of human behaviour and psychology. The characters should be flesh and blood; their motivations and actions should be grounded in their heredity and environment. The presentation of a naturalistic play, in terms of the setting and performances, should be realistic and not flamboyant or theatrical. Naturalist theatre is usually dialogue heavy and focuses on working class subjects.

The play is set in Australia, in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton and it details the events of the summer of 1953, in the lives of six central characters. The structure of the play is such that the nature of these characters and their situation and history is not revealed immediately, but rather gradually established as the story unfolds. By the end, the story and all its facets have been indirectly explained.

**Synopsis:**

The summer that the story spans marks the 17th year of an annual tradition in the lives of the characters, wherein two masculine sugarcane cutters, Arthur "Barney" Ibbot and Reuben "Roo" Webber, travel south to Melbourne for five months of frivolity and celebration with two city women, Olive Leech and Nancy (Roo bringing with him as a gift for Olive a kewpie doll, hence the name). One of the women, Nancy, had apparently married some months ago, and she is not present in the play, so in her place Olive has invited Pearl Cunningham to partake in the tradition. The other women present in the play are Kathie "Bubba" Ryan, a 22-year-old girl who has been coveting Olive and Nancy's lifestyle from her neighbouring house almost all her life, and Emma Leech, Olive's cynical, irritable, but wise mother.

As the play progresses, it becomes obvious that, for many collective reasons, this summer is different from others; it is full of tensions, strains to recreate lost youth, and from what is said of previous years, not a fraction of the fun that others have been. Steadily things become worse; Roo is revealed to be broke and is forced to take a job in a paint factory. He is disillusioned with his age and weaknesses, while relations between Barney and him are in doubt, due to a recent question of loyalty. The situation is agitated in part by Pearl's uptight indignation and refusal to accept the lifestyle she is being presented with as "proper" or "decent".

The play ends with a bitter fight between Olive and Roo after he proposes marriage to her and she is affronted, threatened by the prospect of any lifestyle other than the one to which she is accustomed. In the final scene, the two men leave together, the summer prematurely ended and the characters' futures uncertain.

**Characters:**

**Pearl Cunningham**

A widow; probably in her late thirties (though her age is not specified in the text); mother of Vera (eighteen years old, lives with relations); works as a barmaid in a hotel with Olive; has been invited to stay with Olive for the lay-off season. She and Barney are introduced to each other as a possible match. Pearl is cynical and often suspicious of Olive’s life, which she perceives as less than respectable.

**Kathie ‘Bubba’ Ryan**

Supporting character; twenty-two years old, but Olive and the men still tend to think of her as the child she was when they first met her. She has lived next door to Olive and Emma all her life, and looks up to Olive and to her life with the men

**Olive Leech**

Olive is thirty-nine years old but has a youthful optimism that tends towards naivety. She is the daughter of Emma, with whom she lives. She works with Pearl as a hotel barmaid. Olive loves Roo and lives for the lay-off season each year, when she can spend five months with Roo and

Barney.

**Arthur ‘Barney’ Ibbot**

‘Barney’ is forty years old, a canecutter and Roo’s best mate. He has a ‘weakness for women’ (p.17) and has grown accustomed to winning them over easily and regularly with confidence and charm. Although he is described as a small man, this is mostly in comparison to Roo. He fought in World War II and was paired with Nancy before she married. He has two adult sons and a younger daughter – all by different mothers – for whom he has willingly paid ‘maintenance’

**Emma Leech**

Supporting character; Olive’s mother; in her late sixties; shrewd (particularly when it comes to money and judgement of character); protective of her daughter but in a way that often comes across as sharp and brusque instead of affectionate. While she is fiercely proud of her piano playing and happily participates in the ‘community singin’, she nevertheless goes through life ‘expecting the worst’ of the world (p.17).

**Reuben ‘Roo’ Webber**

Roo is forty-one years old, a canecutter who is well respected as a ganger (foreperson of a labouring gang) and good at his job, but who is now slowing with age. He is Barney’s best mate – a ‘man’s man’ (p.18); physically large though usually gentle; proud and defensive of his own masculinity; paired with Olive.

**Johnnie Dowd**

A supporting character, Johnnie is twenty-five years old; he is a strong, fast canecutter taken on by Roo as part of his gang. He takes over as ganger when Roo leaves. When Dowd comes to find Roo and Barney in Carlton he treats Bubba as an adult, thus winning her affection.

**Themes:**

**Belonging** – Melbourne 1950s. Bubba and Olive are intrinsically linked to the men coming each summer, Bubba states “you wouldn’t understand” to outsiders who find the routine and traditions strange and insignificant. Bubba covets the group coming, and doesn’t reveal her real name until Johnny asks her. Olive positions Johnny as Bubba’s own ticket to the continuation of the tradition she’s grown up with.

**Identity** – sense of self – the group reinforces their own sense of self. Olive’s identity is tied up with the five months she spends with Roo, and when Roo offers her commitment and a full-time relationship, she rejects it, fearing being trapped like her married friends and a break-down of the group’s dynamics. Olive sees not wanting to get married as unique to her identity, and “special.”

**Masculine identity -** Men (Barney and Roo) are seen as having a strong masculine identity in regards to their jobs, Barney loses his charm with women, Roo loses his champion canecutter status when he “puts out his back.” Roo’s identity is challenged by this, and he returns to Olive broke. The men are challenged by their fading youth, Barney is no longer seen as a Don Juan, Roo is no longer the strongest cane cutter. Barney is somewhat ‘put-off’ by Pearl, who knits sweaters for his estranged children after a few weeks of dating, thinking she’ll try to reel him into a committed relationship. Roo is visibly upset when Johnny comes to visit and is embarrassed that he is seen with paint on his clothes, as he has taken up an “emasculating” city job.

**Maus**

**Postmodern literature** is literature characterised by reliance on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and the unreliable narrator; and often is (though not exclusively) defined as a style or a trend which emerged in the post–World War II era. Postmodern works also tend to celebrate chance over craft, and further employ metafiction to undermine the text's authority or authenticity. Another characteristic of postmodern literature is the questioning of distinctions between high and low culture through the use of pastiche, the combination of subjects and genres not previously deemed fit for literature.

**Heteroglossia:** Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia: the coexistence of two or more voices within a text. The text shirks the traditional stylistics and univocality associated with poetry in favour of multivocality, incorporating “[a]uthorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, [and] the speech of characters...each of them [permitting] a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships...” (Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin, p. 263). A novel also features languages “...that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations, and so forth” (Bakhtin, p. 272), which, in other words, is more indicative of common, every day conversation.

**Poioumenon** (plural: poioumena; from Ancient Greek: ποιούμενον, "product") is a term coined by Alastair Fowler to refer to a specific type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation. According to Fowler, "the poioumenon is calculated to offer opportunities to explore the boundaries of fiction and reality—the limits of narrative truth."In many cases, the book will be about the process of creating the book or includes a central metaphor for this process.

**Fragmentation** is another important aspect of postmodern literature. Various elements, concerning plot, characters, themes, imagery and factual references are fragmented and dispersed throughout the entire work.

Maus is a combination of different writing – biography, autobiography, oral history told through the medium of a graphic novel, as well as Metafiction – self-referential fiction, focusing on the writer writing the fiction.

Tradition of holocaust fiction (other texts of note): *If this is a man* – Primo Levi, *This way for the gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* – Tadeusz Borowski, *Leap into Darkness* - Leo Bretholz, *Night* – Elie Wiesel.

Anthropomorphised characters – Jews = mice, Germans = cats, Pigs = Poles, US = dogs, French = frogs, Gypsies = moths.

Maus plays off the racial stereotypes, and even stereotypical thinking in general, by indicating where the allegory falls apart. The mice are not universally good, nor are the pigs universally good or bad. Mice can pass for other animals by wearing pig masks or cat masks. The allegory falls apart at times when the animal-humans deal with actual animals, as when in Maus 2, Art’s Jewish therapist has pet cats (!), or when Art and Françoise have to use bug spray to get rid of bugs when they are vacationing in the Catskills, a reference to Zyklon-B.

Vladek’s Eastern European dialect – a dialect is the variety of language that is distinguished from proper speech by pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, in addition to its use by a group of geographically or socially distinct speakers, especially when it is considered improper or substandard. Vladek’s dialect, highlighted by his fractured and awkwardly worded English, is featured prominently throughout the two volumes of Maus. The inclusion of Vladek’s dialect is important, as it highlights Spiegelman’s commitment to linguistic and historical authenticity throughout the graphic novel.

Stylistic choices – swastikas and SS symbols permeate every page.

“Prisoner on the Hell Planet” – comic within a comic – mise en abyme.

Jagged panels/fractured panels borders to literalise disconnect between characters.