

# **A quick intro to postmodernism ...**

# Postmodernism

“I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still there is a solution ...

# Postmodernism

... He can say "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly it is no longer possible to talk innocently, he will nevertheless say what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence.

- Umberto Eco

# Postmodernism

“Postmodern art simply *is* and must be experienced. Modernist art refers to a meaning hidden behind its surface and must be understood. Postmodern art *presents* itself as surface [while] modernist art claims depth behind that surface.”

- Hans Bertens

# Postmodernism

“The antiwar and anti-government feelings in [my] book belong to the period following World War II: the Korean War, the cold war of the Fifties. A general disintegration of belief took place then, and it affected *Catch-22* in that the form of the novel became almost disintegrated. *Catch-22* was a collage; if not in structure, then in the ideology of the novel itself ...

# Postmodernism

... Without being aware of it, I was part of a near-movement in fiction. While I was writing *Catch-22*, J. P. Donleavy was writing *The Ginger Man*, Jack Kerouac was writing *On the Road*, Ken Kesey was writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Thomas Pynchon was writing *V.*, and Kurt Vonnegut was writing *Cat's Cradle* ...

# Postmodernism

... I don't think any one of us even knew any of the others. Certainly I didn't know them. Whatever forces were at work shaping a trend in art were affecting not just me, but all of us. The feelings of helplessness and persecution in *Catch-22* are very strong in Pynchon and in *Cat's Cradle*.”

- Joseph Heller

# Postmodernist Style

- Postmodernist works often *reject* many traditional literary conventions.
- Literary devices are not used to bring order but instead to *deconstruct* ideas
- *Metafiction* (unique plot devices)
- Fragmentated narrative (non-linear)
- Freely mixes “high art” with pop culture



# Postmodernist Themes

- Contemporary life is seen as bleak and fragmented.
- Art is not seen as corrective to life's issues; there is no attempt to fix things.
- Instead, postmodernist works celebrate or play with the fragmentation of life.
- *Subjective* experience is valued over objective knowledge.

# The Postmodern Trend ...

In modernist texts, fragmentation is symbolic of the chaos of life itself; the author tries to resolve this chaos by putting everything in perspective.

In postmodernism, fragmentation is still symbolic of chaos, but the author has no intention of overcoming this by trying to impose structure on the complexity of the contemporary world.

# WATCHMEN



# Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

A Latin phrase traditionally attributed to the Roman poet Juvenal from his *Satires*, which is literally translated as:

**Who watches the watchmen?**

# Major Stylistic Elements

- Mixes **high art** with **pop culture**
  - is obviously in the form of a comic
  - grapples with with complex themes
  - utilizes literary devices (e.g. symbols)
- Use of fictional **secondary sources** to provide reader deeper insight
  - Hollis Mason's autobiography
  - Rorschach's psychological report

# Major Stylistic Elements

- Use of **historical events**, altered for the story's greater purpose
  - Vietnam (US won war, Vietnam 51<sup>st</sup> state)
  - Richard Nixon serving third term
- Both **frame** and **parallel** narratives to provide greater insight for reader
  - the two Bernies (news vendor, kid)
  - the Black Freighter pirate comic

# Major Stylistic Elements

- Each chapter is concluded with a **quotation** may provide the reader with further insight
  - Percy Shelley (Mary's husband)
  - Bob Dylan
  - Nietzsche, Jung, Einstein, Freud, Byron
- A **fragmented narrative**
  - Important information intentionally withheld until later in the story
  - Dr. Manhattan's perception of time

# Major Stylistic Elements

- Repetition of **visual symbols**
  - clocks & hands/lines on the face
  - silhouettes of human embrace
- Numerous **unreliable narrators** provide structural irony and manipulate of the reader's sympathies
  - Rorschach
  - Dr. Manhattan



# Major Thematic Motifs

