

Postmodernism



Postmodernism

- ❖ Literally, after modernism
- ❖ Term first used in architecture



Modern Architecture

- ❖ Removed traditional forms of building and decoration from architecture
- ❖ Used cubiform buildings with flat roofs to replace pillars and gables.
- ❖ Rejected history



Postmodern Architecture

- ❖ Disliked standardized approach of modern architecture
- ❖ Saw modern architecture as boring
- ❖ Took a renewed interest in historical form



Features of Postmodern Architecture



- ❖ Deliberate placement of incompatible geometries

Features of Postmodern Architecture



- ❖ Outgoing and colorful character

Features of Postmodern Architecture



- ❖ References to older styles of architecture

Porch of the Erechthium, Athens



Features of Postmodern Architecture



- ❖ Traditional and modern construction styles and techniques juxtaposed for effect

Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris



Pompidou Centre (2)



Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota



Disney Hall, Los Angeles



Urban Cactus Building, Rotterdam



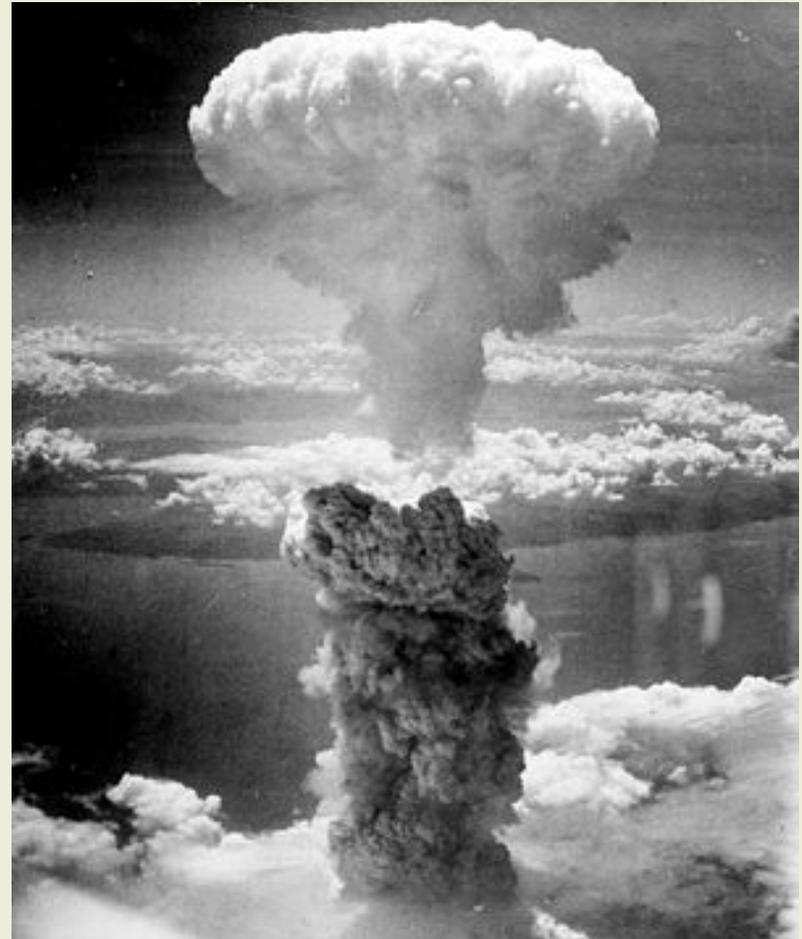
The Sage Gateshead, England



Literary Postmodernism

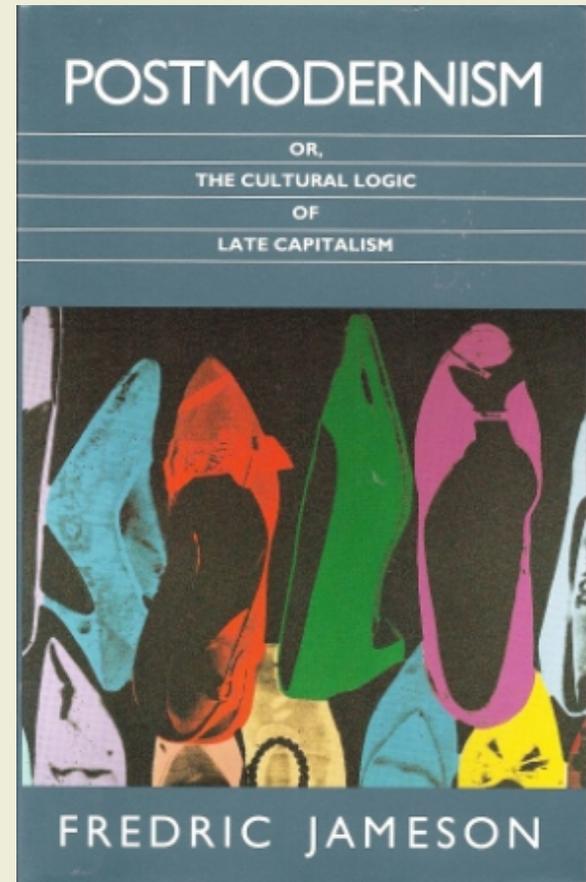
Postmodern literature responds to and engages with postmodern culture:

- ❖ Digital or information age
- ❖ Rejection of a homogenous American culture; valuing of diversity and multiculturalism
- ❖ Recognition of dangers of nuclear/environmental devastation
- ❖ Multi-national or consumer capitalism

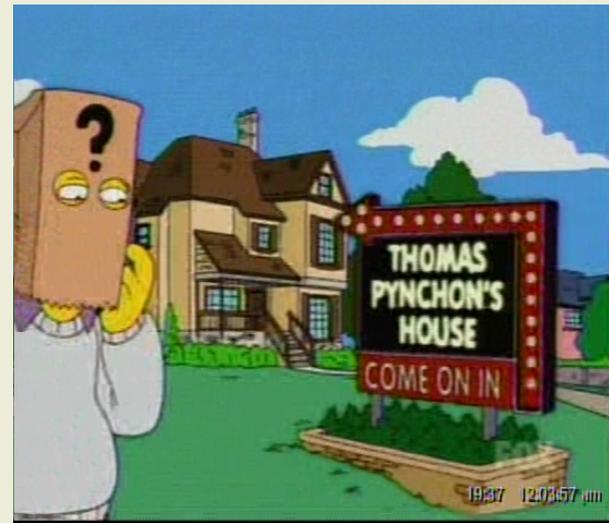
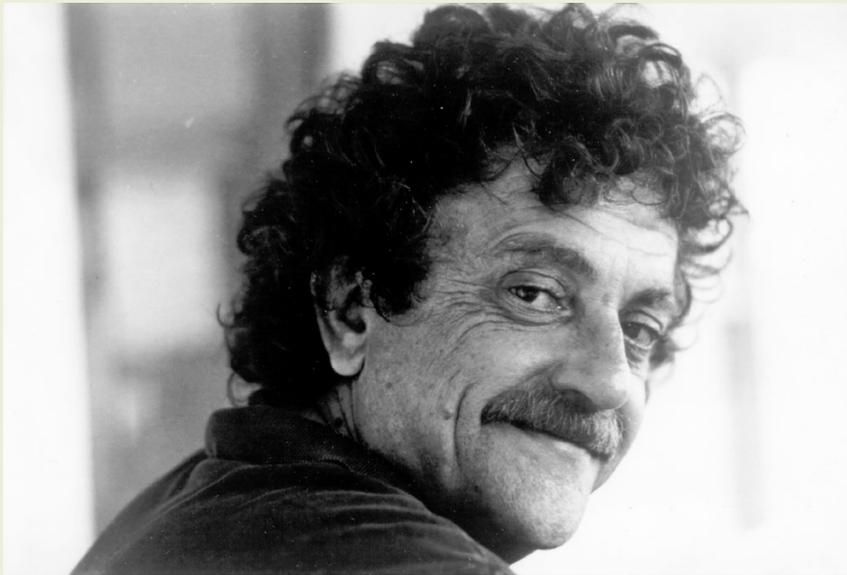


Frederic Jameson

- ❖ 1) Market capitalism (18th-late 19th centuries in Western Europe, England, and the US). Associated with technological developments such as the steam-driven motor. Aesthetics = Realism.
- ❖ 2) Monopoly capitalism (late 19th-mid-20th C). Associated with electric and internal combustion motors. Aesthetics = Modernism
- ❖ 3) Multinational or consumer capitalism. Nuclear, electronic, and digital technologies. Aesthetics = Postmodernism.

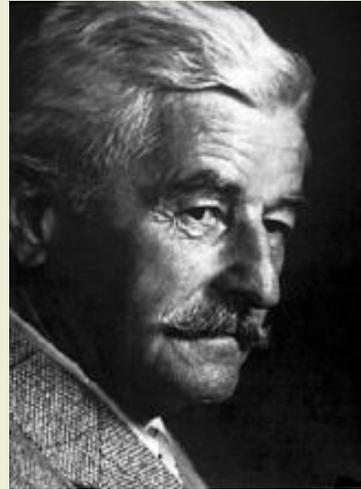


Literary Postmodernism



- ❖ Again, “After Modernism”
- ❖ In literature, Modernism a between-the-wars movement (approximately 1910-1945)

Modernism



- ❖ Writers such as Woolf, Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Hemingway, Faulkner
- ❖ Experimental style
- ❖ Stream-of-consciousness
- ❖ Focus on interior rather than exterior reality
- ❖ Emphasis on point-of-view



Differences From Modernism

- ❖ In Modernism, “Things fall apart,” “The center cannot hold” (Yeats)
- ❖ Usually cause for lament

**Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned...**

~W.B. Yeats

Differences: Modernism/ Postmodernism



- ❖ Centers not holding, things falling apart, not necessarily a cause for lament in postmodernism
- ❖ Old ideas about Truth, Tradition lies anyway
- ❖ Good to be free of them

Differences: Modernism/ Postmodernism



- ❖ Modernists retreat to individual consciousness to find truth (thus emphasis on stream-of-consciousness style, point-of-view)
- ❖ In Postmodernism, individuality itself is often undermined.
 - We're all social constructs?
 - We're prisoners of forces larger than ourselves?
 - Or maybe we're simply made up of neuro-chemicals impulses?

Characters in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*



“There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces. One of the main effects of war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters” (164).

Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Spoken by Heinrich, the 14-year-old son of the novel's main character, when his father asks him if he wants to visit his mother for the summer:

“Who knows what I want to do? Who knows what anyone wants to do? How can you be sure about something like that? Isn't it all a question of brain chemistry, signals going back and forth, electrical energy in the cortex? How do you know whether something is really what you want to do or just some kind of nerve impulse in the brain?” (45).

Differences: Modernism/ Postmodernism

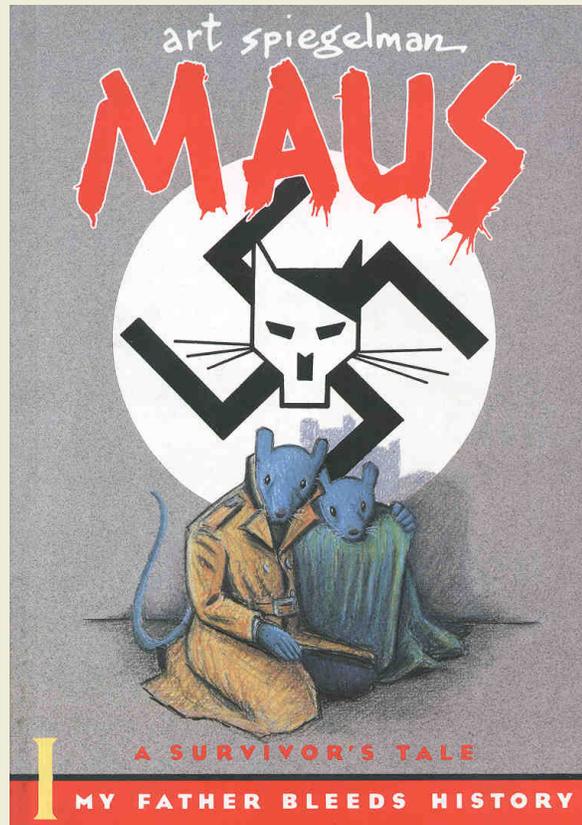


- ❖ In Modernism, art often replaces religion
 - American poet Wallace Stevens: ““In an age of disbelief...it is for the poet to supply the satisfactions of belief in his measure and style.”
- ❖ Not possible in Postmodern view which tends to be very irreverent
- ❖ Postmodernism often debunks notion of “high art”

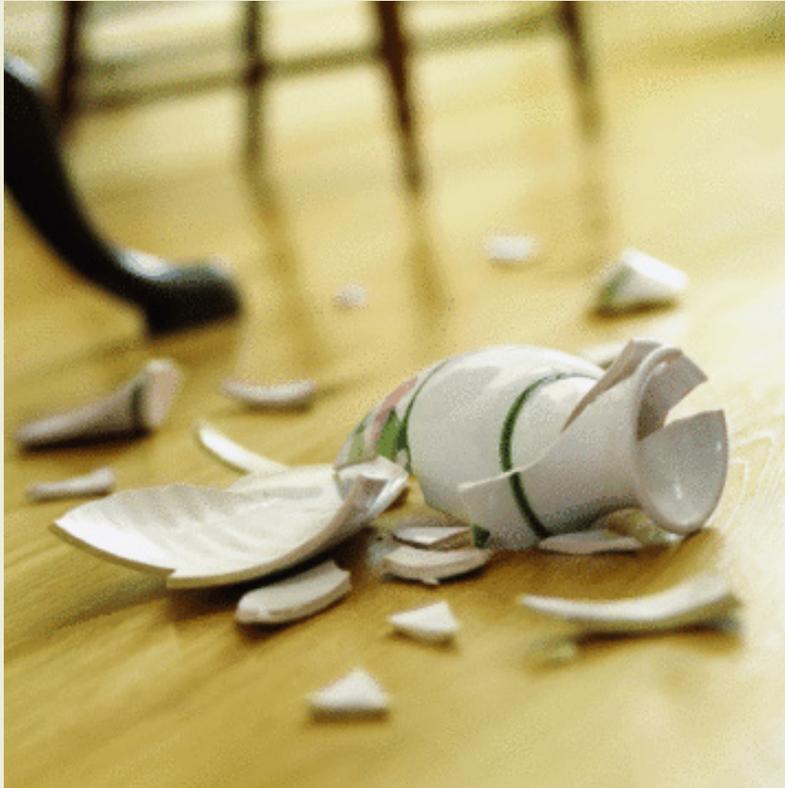
Characteristics of Postmodernism

Decanonization

- What's considered “literature” or “art” open
- Blurs the line between “high art” and “low art”



Characteristics of Postmodernism

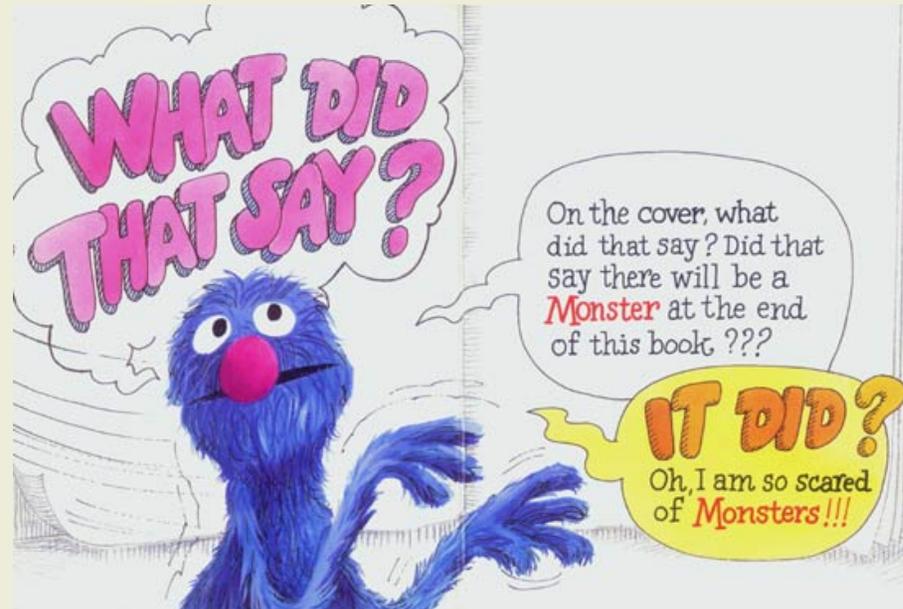
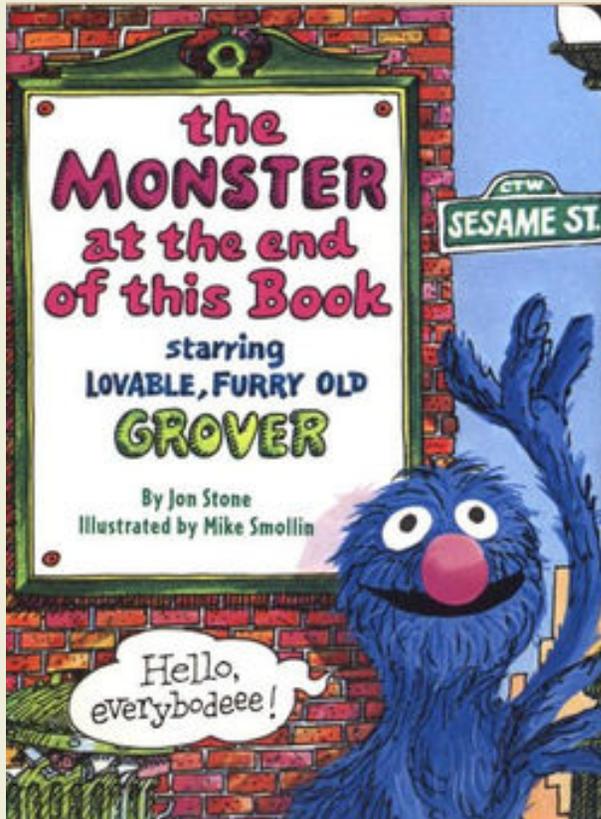


Who broke the vase?

Reality as Linguistically Constructed

- ❖ Idea that we can't get at reality without language
- ❖ Postmodernist idea that language doesn't merely describe reality, but SHAPES reality
- ❖ New cognitive research that suggests language profoundly shapes the way people think about and perceive the world

Characteristics of Postmodernism



*Metafiction

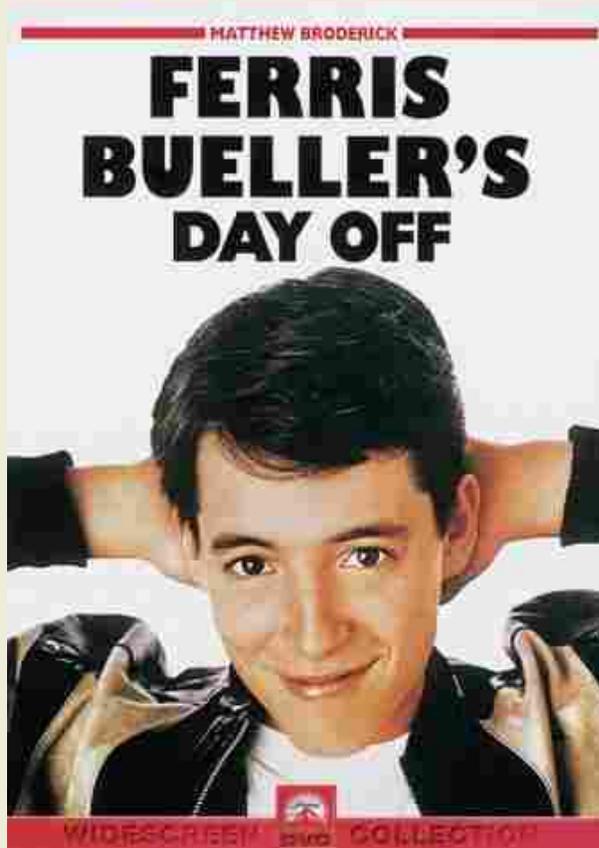
- Because reality itself often seen as linguistically determined, language becomes extremely important
- Thus, often books *about* books, about language, about how language shapes and interacts with reality

*Metafiction

“Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.”

--From Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*

Characteristics of Postmodernism



Self-Reflexivity

- ❖ Literature, then, often calls attention to its own artificiality, its own status as fiction (its “constructedness”)
- ❖ Often breaks the “fourth wall”
- ❖ *Seinfeld* as a sitcom ABOUT sitcoms (thus reflects on the form of the sitcom)

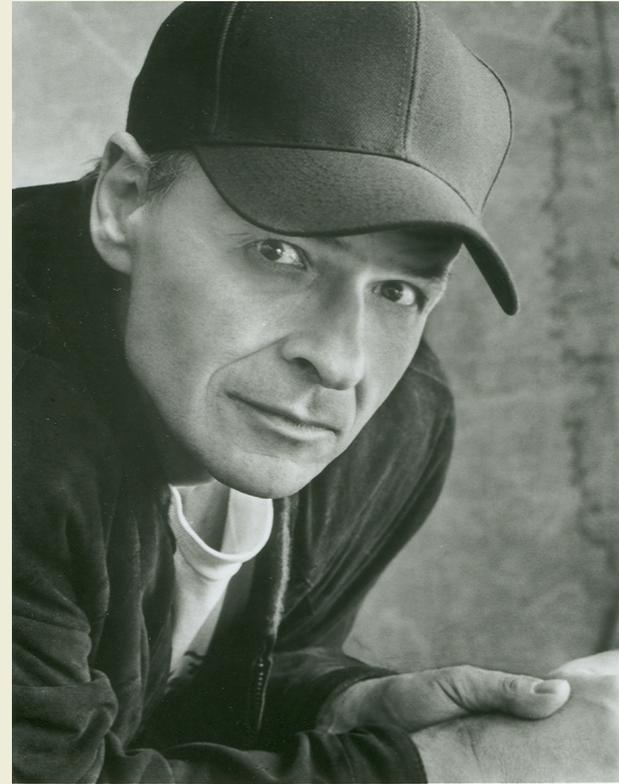
Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris



Characteristics of Postmodernism

*Indeterminacy

- No TRUTH, only truths
- Suspicion of history as TRUTH--history becomes “story”



photograph by Marion Ettlinger

Tim O'Brien, from *The Things They Carried*:

“Absolute occurrence is irrelevant. A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth” (from “How to Tell a True War Story”)

“Story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth” (from “Good Form”)

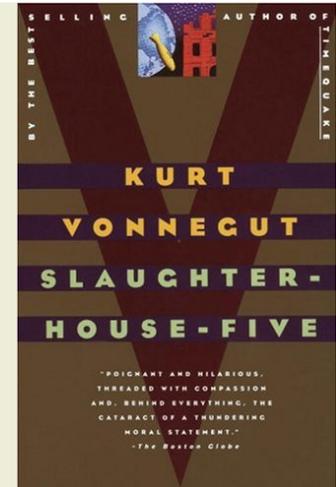
Characteristics of Postmodernism

Fragmentation

- ❖ Synthesis impossible
- ❖ Suspicious of “grand narratives”—totalizing narratives that try to create an orderly understanding of human history or culture
 - Marxism
 - Enlightenment idea of progress



Tralfamadorian Novels in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*



“Billy couldn’t read Tralfamadorian, of course, but he could at least see how the books were laid out - in brief clumps of symbols separated by stars. Billy commented that the clumps might be telegrams.

“Exactly,” said the voice.

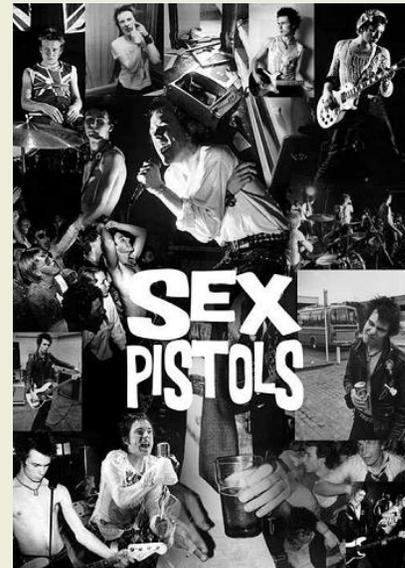
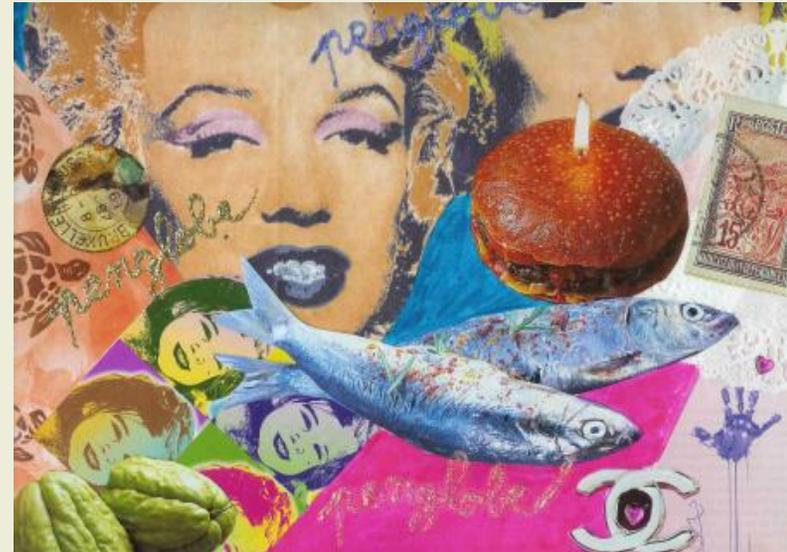
“They *are* telegrams?”

“There are no telegrams on Tralfamadore. But you’re right: each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message - describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn’t any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time” (88).

Characteristics of Postmodernism

Collage Style / *Pastiche

- ❖ Rather than linear narratives with a beginning, middle and end, often juxtaposition of images
- ❖ Readers supply narrative thread
- ❖ Like music videos
- ❖ Pastiche is the technique of combining various forms and styles in a single artwork



Characteristics of Postmodernism



Self-less-ness, Depth-less-ness

- ❖ Flatness of characters (again, Postmodernists skeptical about individuality)

Characteristics of Postmodernism



Self-less-ness, Depth-less-ness

- Focus on surfaces, images over reality
- Bobbie Ann Mason: “I think the surface *is* the reality. . . . My characters live in a world in which television and popular music are an intimate part of their lives, and I take that seriously.”
- Often, lots of pop culture references

Jean Baudrillard: Simulation & Simulacra



- *Simulation: Representations of things come to replace the things being represented; representations seem more important than the “real” things themselves (Borges: “On Exactitude in Science”)
- Simulacra: Copies of things that no longer have an original (or never had one to begin with)

Back to Characteristics of Postmodernism

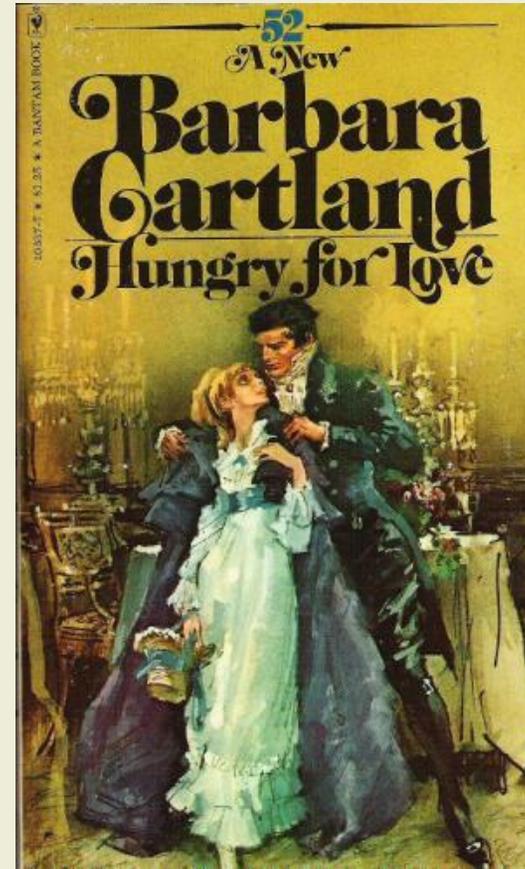


*Irony

- ❖ The dominant mode is the ironic

Umberto Eco and the Ironic

“The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed... must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently. I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, “I love you madly,” because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, ‘As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly.’ At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this she will have received a declaration of love all the same.”



Summary

Characteristics of Postmodern Literature

- ❖ Decanonization; blurs line between high and low art
- ❖ Emphasis on language; reality as linguistically constructed
- ❖ Metafictional; self-reflexive
- ❖ Indeterminacy
- ❖ Fragmentation
- ❖ Collage Style/Pastiche
- ❖ Surface/images over reality; simulacra
- ❖ Irony