

The background features a historical desk scene. On the left, a quill pen rests on a wooden ruler. Below the ruler is a circular sundial with Roman numerals. In the center, an open book displays handwritten text in cursive. On the right, a large, detailed diagram of a sundial is shown, with various points labeled with letters like A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z. The diagram includes a vertical gnomon and a circular dial face with Roman numerals.

American Literature 1860 to the Present

Dr. Alex E. Blazer

English 226

<http://faculty.gvsu.edu/blazera/>

The background features a light-colored, aged paper surface. On the left, a quill pen rests on a wooden gnomon. To the right, there are two detailed diagrams of sundials, one above the other, showing the gnomon's shadow lines and the dial's face. The overall scene is a study of historical timekeeping and geometry.

Regionalism, Realism, and Naturalism

Mid-1800s to the Turn of the Century

5 September 2007

Regionalism

- ★ The primary American paradox has always been that we are one nation of many individuals. Today, we live in a time of multiculturalism and identity politics. Between the Civil War and the turn of the century, the issue centered on America's reconstruction and evolution from an agrarian country that was divided in distinct regions to an increasingly industrial and decidedly united nation-state.

Regionalism

Continued

★ Regionalism, or the local color movement, was popular from approximately 1800 to 1910, especially in urban centers. America's nascent literature sought to preserve (if not also patronize) its pre-industrial, traditional, and sectional identities on the national scene as well as in city power centers through magazines that (nostalgically) exemplified the heterogeneous regional lives that were passing away in the face of urbanism and industrialization.

Regionalism

Concluded

- ★ Women-centered magazines grew to prominence in the time period, gave women a place to publish, and disseminated regionalist writing, which at the time was not considered high art but rather like a travelogue.
- ★ Thus, besides issues of urban vs rural life and regional vs national culture, regionalism also tarried with travelogue writing vs high art by giving voice to female writers in the traditionally male-dominated literary arts.

Realism

- ★ Whereas regionalism might be considered the popular form of the late 1800s, realism was the mode of high art during that time period.
- ★ Realism as an art form seeks to present life and society in a truthful and real manner. Realism downplays the literary and artistic constructedness of its own form and instead foregrounds the transparency of its lens on life.

Realism

One (or Two) Subsets

- ★ Psychological, or moral, realism is subset of realism that represents the complex and contradictory moral life of the mind. It is akin to stream-of-consciousness.
- ★ Naturalism is another subset of realism that some consider to be a movement in its own right.

Naturalism

★ Naturalism emphasizes the pessimistic and fatalistic determinism of environmental and material forces over against the individual. Nature, the order of things, determines, if not completely overwhelms, existence.

Examples

- ★ The seven fiction writers we're reading constitute a continuum of styles.
- ★ Mary E. Wilkins Freeman work traverses both realism and regionalism. “A New England Nun” sketches the character of the New England spinster and explores the moral complexity of a doomed engagement. “A Mistaken Charity” describes the passage of agrarian and small town values while twisting the ideal of charity.

Examples

Continued

- ★ The message of Sarah Orne Jewett's regionalist “A White Heron” is one of conservation--preserving the folksy and wooded Northeast from the encroachments of the city. “The Town Poor,” unlike “A Mistaken Charity” singly seeks to preserve the ideal of small town community charity.
- ★ Charles Waddell Chestnut straddles regionalism (“The Goophered Grapevine” explores slave folk culture) and realism (“The Wife of His Youth” inspects the moral questions of race and class and “A Metropolitan Experience” oscillates between urban idealism and cynicism).

Examples

Continued

- ★ Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* is simultaneously regionalist and realist for it exemplifies Southern and negro dialect (like a local colorist) but self-consciously so and with the moral irony of high art (like a realist).
- ★ Henry James's psychological realism in "Daisy Miller" shows the complex oscillations of comprehension in the tale of an American girl in European society.

Examples

Concluded

- ★ Stephen Crane's naturalistic "The Open Boat" demonstrates the power of sea over humankind.
- ★ Frank Norris's naturalistic "A Deal in Wheat" illustrates the human "caught once in the cogs and wheels of a great and terrible engine" of economic forces beyond his control.
- ★ Like Crane's "The Open Boat," Jack London's equally naturalistic "To Build a Fire" shows a man overpowered by nature.

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Modernism

1910-1945

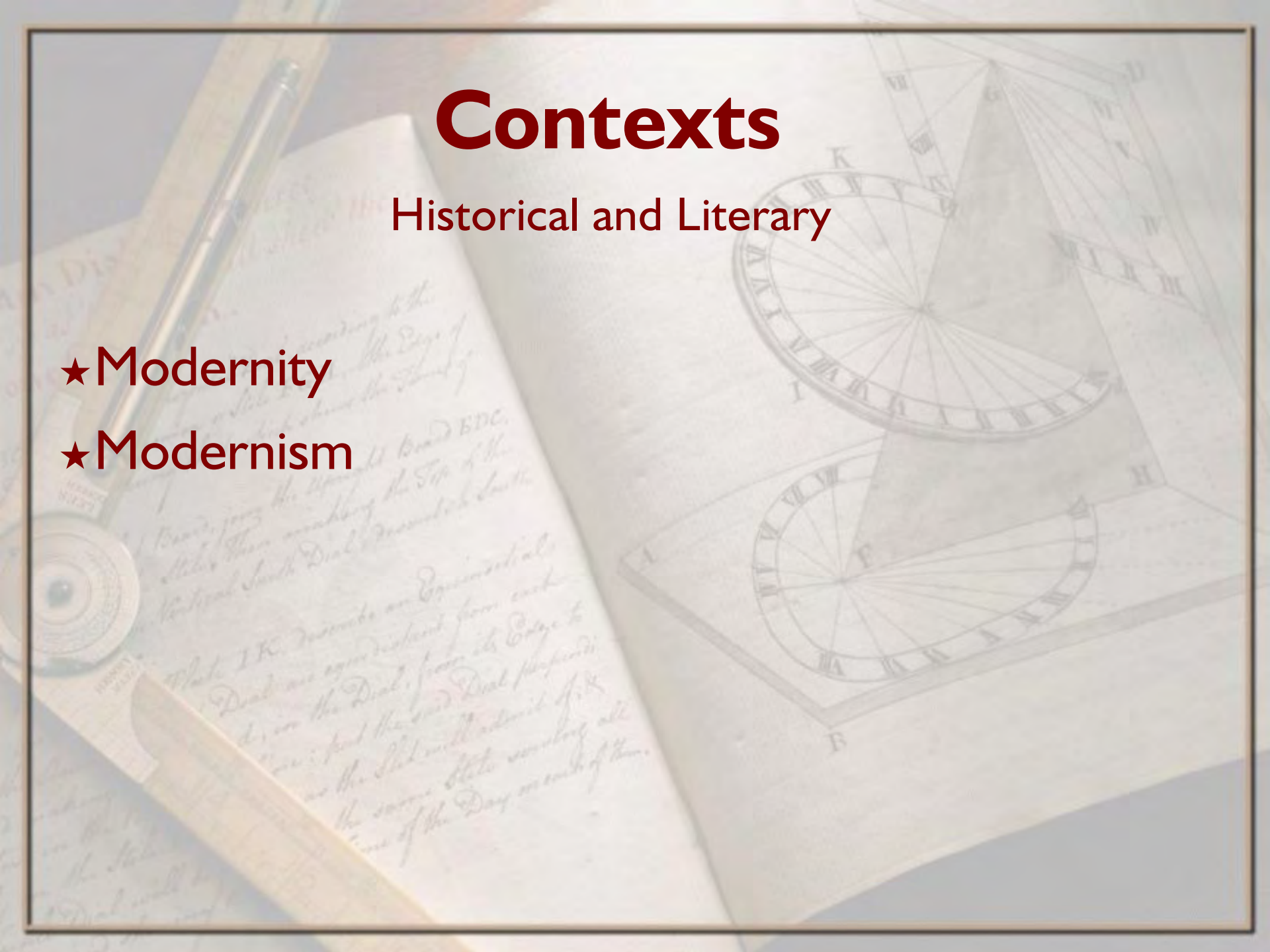
26 September 2007

Contexts

Historical and Literary

★ Modernity

★ Modernism



Modernity

Historical Era

from the Industrial Revolution to the mid-1900s

- ★ Industrialization
- ★ Urbanization
- ★ Exponential technological progress
- ★ Rise of mass, popular, consumer culture
- ★ Global political conflicts and modern warfare (World War I and World War II)

Modernism

Literary Period from the late-1800s to 1945

- ★ Crisis of belief in traditional authority, resulting in
 - ★ The critique of culture that would use its technological progress not for civilization but for mechanized slaughter,
 - ★ A pessimistic, even nihilistic, view of the absurd world that empties out old values and ideals as nothing but arbitrary
 - ★ And the wistful search for new teleological meanings in the fragmentation and flux of the lost generation's waste land.

Modernism

Continued

- ★ **Crisis of representation**
 - ★ Pulp and popular conventions of representation no longer convey the modern, alienated/-ing experience of reality;
 - ★ And so authors find new impressionistic, expressionistic, and perspectivist ways of representing the real
- ★ **Radical experimentation with form,**
 - ★ Such that modernism breaks down conventional forms and structures in order to invent new forms and systems of thought adequate to modern

Modernism

Concluded

★ High vs Low

- ★ During modernism, culture becomes bifurcated between the high (academic, elite) and the low (popular, mass).
- ★ The elite avant-garde strives to shock the middle-class masses into critical consciousness so it will not be absorbed by bourgeois entertainments.

The Harlem Renaissance

Vs/And Modernism

- ★ While literary modernism despairs over the fragmenting modern culture and solipsistic psyche, the Harlem Renaissance brings forth a period of creativity, community, and social and literary consciousness for African-Americans, their first literary movement after the economic and cultural foundations set by Washington and Du Bois around the turn of the century.

Examples

- ★ The ten authors we're reading constitute a continuum of modernist values and styles
- ★ T. S. Eliot's high modernist poetry exhibits the spiritual aridity and psychological-cum-formal fragmentation that is an emblematic response to modernity.
- ★ In contrast to Eliot's fractured allusiveness, William Carlos Williams' poetry is imagistic and popular, though it nonetheless criticizes the modern culture's turn from nature and tradition to industrialization and vulgar decadence.

Examples

Continued

- ★ While H. D.'s poetry in the 1910s is imagistic, her later poetry incorporates classical Greek myth and modern Freudian psychoanalysis to engender an anguished and split psyche seeking to save itself through myth and art.
- ★ While not technically “modernist” the Countee Cullen’s Harlem Renaissance poetry updates traditional lyric with the New Negro creativity and consciousness.

Examples

Continued

- ★ Langston Hughes' Harlem Renaissance poetry yearns for American equality and liberty even as it criticizes modern American culture.
- ★ Ellen Glasgow's "The Difference" contrasts Victorian gender ideals with modern sexual sensibility.
- ★ William Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" juxtaposes childhood innocence with the realities of racism, sex, and violence, thereby painting an ironic and blistering portrait of modern Southern values. The Sound and the Fury illustrates the modern fractured family devolving into solipsists like a suicidal obsessional and a cruel sadist.

Examples

Concluded

- ★ F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Bernice Bobs Her Hair" contrasts social conformity and female liberation while "Winter Dreams" reveals the void beneath the surface of wealth and status of the Jazz Age.
- ★ Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" shows the castrating effect of war on creativity and masculinity.
- ★ Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* illustrates the dehumanizing effects of industrialization on the modern laborer.

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Postmodernism

1945 to the Present

7 November 2007

Postmodernity

Historical Era from 1945 to the present

- ★ Inaugurated by the Bomb (the Nuclear Age)
- ★ *From world wars to*
 - ★ cold wars (capitalistic democracy vs communistic oligarchy),
 - ★ culture wars (traditional vs progressive world views),
 - ★ wars on drugs and terrorism

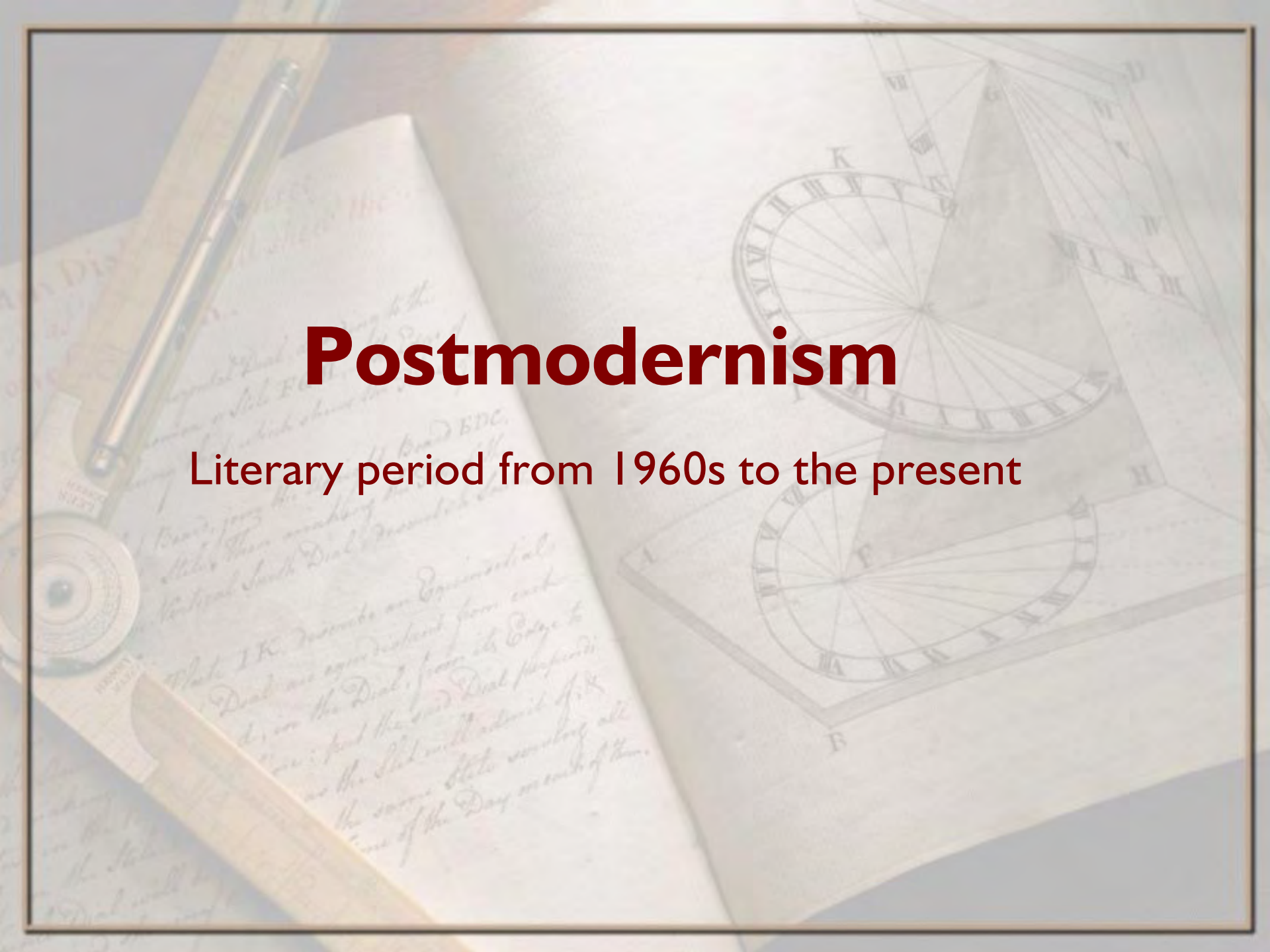
Postmodernity

Continued

- ★ *Decline of industry; the rise of*
 - ★ multinational/late capitalism,
 - ★ information (the Information Age),
 - ★ networking (cyberspace), and
 - ★ image consumption (hyperreality)
- ★ Multiculturalism (ideology of diversity) and identity politics (political action groups based on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc)

Postmodernism

Literary period from 1960s to the present



Belief

- ★ Postmodernism has no crisis of belief in traditional authority, as in modernism.
- ★ Rather, the modernist anxiety has been replaced with a postmodernist, relativistic, absurdist, "anything and everything goes" attitude.
- ★ Postmodernist literature attempts neither to play off of grand narratives nor to search for absolute Truths.
- ★ Instead, it seeks to either create little narratives and little truths that result in qualified beliefs, self-conscious themes, and linguistic/literary games or portray worlds without meaning.

Form

- ★ Experimentation with form is no longer avant-garde and radical, as in modernism.
- ★ Rather, experimentation with conventional forms is the norm--the convention--in postmodernism.
- ★ As postmodern existence becomes eclectic, laissez faire, and hyperreal,
- ★ Postmodern literature loses linearity and coherence and revels in the open and playful and idiosyncratic mixing of forms, genres, disciplines, and systems all within one work. (Modernist collage gives way to postmodernist bricolage.)

Representation

- ★ Crisis of representation is a mainstay, as in modernism, but with this twist:
- ★ Postmodernist literature does *not* believe there is a real 'real' to represent, for everything is an image or text, reality is socially constructed by language and culture, and the self is in process.
- ★ Therefore, postmodernist literature is self-reflective, self-reflexive, and self-conscious.
- ★ It often reveals its own artificiality and textuality in various metafictional and intertextual turns.
- ★ Characters are hybridized or fragmented, shifting or multiplicitous, incohesive or inchoate.

High and Low

- ★ There is no battle between high and low, as in modernism.
- ★ Instead, postmodernism blurs boundaries.
 - ★ Just as postmodernist critics write on the elite and the popular culture, postmodernist literature blends high and low forms in a playful dance of arcane and mass consumption. Some would argue that the low is campily sublimated into the high.

Subjectivity

- ★ In the postmodernist world, there remains no modernist lament over the fragmentation of self and world; nor is there a desire to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.
- ★ Rather, postmodernists revel in socially constructed realities and multiplicitous, shifting subjectivities.
 - ★ Any self-cohesion is merely a tentative suturing of signification.
 - ★ Postmodern literature thematizes the play of the self in a constant process of sociocultural construction.

Examples

Of Postmodernist Literature

- ★ Sylvia Plath is a confessional poet who transforms her personal abjection into a persona of mythological proportions, thus blurring the private and the public.
- ★ Allen Ginsberg is a Beat Generation poet who criticizes the oppressive establishment culture of the 1950s and 1960s and popularizes poetry, thus blending the low and the high, the profane and the sacred.

Examples

Continued

- ★ Tennessee Williams's expressionistic *The Glass Menagerie* portrays a dysfunctional family of fractured psyches drifting in and out of reality, of their shared dream.
- ★ August Wilson's *Fences* explores the generational and filial/paternal conflicts between African-American fathers and sons.

Examples

Continued

- ★ John Barth's metafictional "Lost in the Funhouse" blurs the self-conscious writing process within a coming-of-age framework.
- ★ Whereas readers become lost in Barth's funhouse of storytelling, readers traverse a multiplicity, if not hypertextuality, of film genres (if not narrative frames) in Robert Coover's "The Phantom of the Movie Palace."

Examples

Concluded

★ Mark Z. Danielewski's collage novel, *House of Leaves*, questions the very nature and reality and the possibility of truth by blurring the narrative lines between epistolary, documentary, academic scholarship, ghost story, and paranoid schizophrenia.

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