

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. To 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. The entire scene is set against a light, aged paper background.

American Literature 1860 to the Present

Dr. Alex E. Blazer

English 226

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

Regionalism, Realism, and Naturalism

Mid-1800s to the Turn of the Century

18 January 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.

Citation

★Blazer, Alex E. “Regionalism, Realism, and Naturalism.” English 226: American Literature II: from 1860. Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI. 18 Jan. 2007.
<http://faculty.gvsu.edu/blazera/226/Lectures-07-WI.pdf>.

Modernism

1910-1945

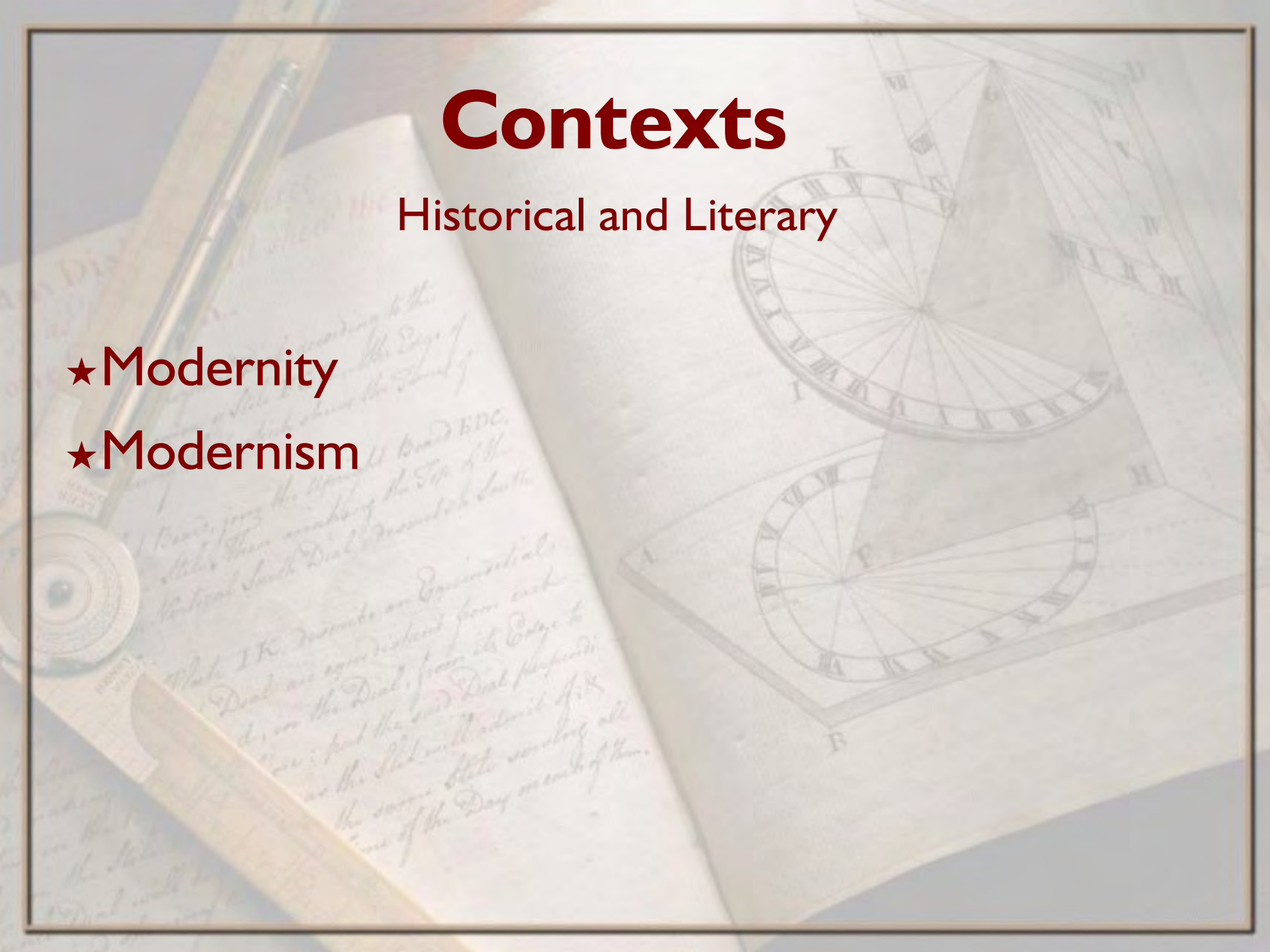
8 February 2007

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
 - ★ And the wistful search for new teleological meanings in the fragmentation and flux of the lost generation's waste land.
- ★ Radical experimentation with form,
 - ★ Such that modernism foregoes conventional forms and structures in order to invent new forms and systems of thought adequate to modern experience.

Modernism

Continued

★ Crisis of representation

- ★ Pulp and popular conventions of representation no longer convey the modern experience of reality;
- ★ And so authors find new, utterly impressionistic and perspectivist, ways of representing the real

★ High vs Low

- ★ During modernism, culture becomes bifurcated between the high (academic, elite) and the low (popular, mass).

The Harlem Renaissance

Vs/And Modernism

- ★ While literary modernism despairs over the fragmenting modern culture, 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.
- ★ Marianne Moore's high modernist poetry portrays modern isolation and loss of faith in the traditional authorities that brought about world war.
- ★ In contrast to Eliot's fractured allusiveness, William Carlos Williams' poetry is imagistic and popular, though it nonetheless criticizes the modern culture.

Examples

Continued

- ★ While not technically “modernist” the Countee Cullen’s Harlem Renaissance poetry updates traditional lyric with the New Negro creativity and consciousness.
- ★ 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.

Examples

Concluded

- ★ 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.
- ★ 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 "Big Two-Hearted River" exemplifies modern alienation and shell-shock from World War I.

Examples

Concluded

★ Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* illustrates the dehumanizing effects of industrialization on the modern laborer.

Citation

★Blazer, Alex E. “Modernism.” English 226:
American Literature II: from 1860. Grand Valley
State University, Allendale, MI. 8 Feb. 2007.
[http://faculty.gvsu.edu/blazera/226/Lectures-07-
WI.pdf](http://faculty.gvsu.edu/blazera/226/Lectures-07-WI.pdf).

Postmodernism

1945 to the Present

29 March 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.
- ★ Leslie Marmon Silko's "Lullaby" examines unresolvable multicultural conflicts between white and Native American cultures.

Examples

Continued

- ★ Like O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* portrays the alienation and dehumanization of the contemporary world.
- ★ August Wilson's *Fences* explores the generational and filial/paternal conflicts between African-American fathers and sons.

Examples

Concluded

- ★ Kurt Vonnegut's "Welcome to the Monkey House" is a dystopian story that criticizes the governmentization, bureaucratization, and medicalization of society over against poetry and passion.
- ★ Don DeLillo's *Americana* first portrays the conflict between our two Americas (the corporate vs the individual; mass/pop culture vs artistic/avant-garde culture) and then exhibits postmodern identity quest in which autobiography devolves into hyperreality.

Citation

★Blazer, Alex E. “Postmodernism.” English 226: American Literature II: from 1860. Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI. 29 March 2007. <http://faculty.gvsu.edu/blazera/226/Lectures-07-WI.pdf>.