



“I am otherwise”:

The Romance between Poetry and Theory
After the Death of the Subject

Context I

Philosophy v Poetry

The age-old binaries of philosophy/poetry and critic/author now manifest themselves as literary theory/literature.

The author has been declared dead by literary theory, but the author keeps on writing.

We've entered a new age: the melding of theory and literature. We've seen what it looks like in prose criticism and novels; now let's look at the poet-theorist.

Context 2

Post-Romanticism

Something of the Romantic consciousness has been lost (the poet looking out upon the expanse of nature in "Mount Blanc" and expressing his soul); but something remains.

The sublime experience of limit/liminal points still exists for contemporary American poetry, but it exists in language, or more precisely, in theories of language.

Questions

- ★ What is the poet's relationship to language?
- ★ What is the difference between conventional discourse and literary/poetic language?
- ★ What about language itself inspires the poet to write?
- ★ What happens when a poet theorizes language to be beyond her control, or even worse, controlling her instead of the other way around?

Anxiety

- ★ *Anxiety* is the fear that a prior being has constructed and continues to manipulate your psyche, your expression.
- ★ Adrienne Rich's identity politics
- ★ Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence

Irony

- ★ *Irony* plays with conventional language with the hope that its subversive efforts may allow access to a real of subjectivity that lies dormant in the depths beneath the surface forms.
- ★ John Ashbery's distorted self-portraits
- ★ Paul De Man's deconstruction of figures and tropes

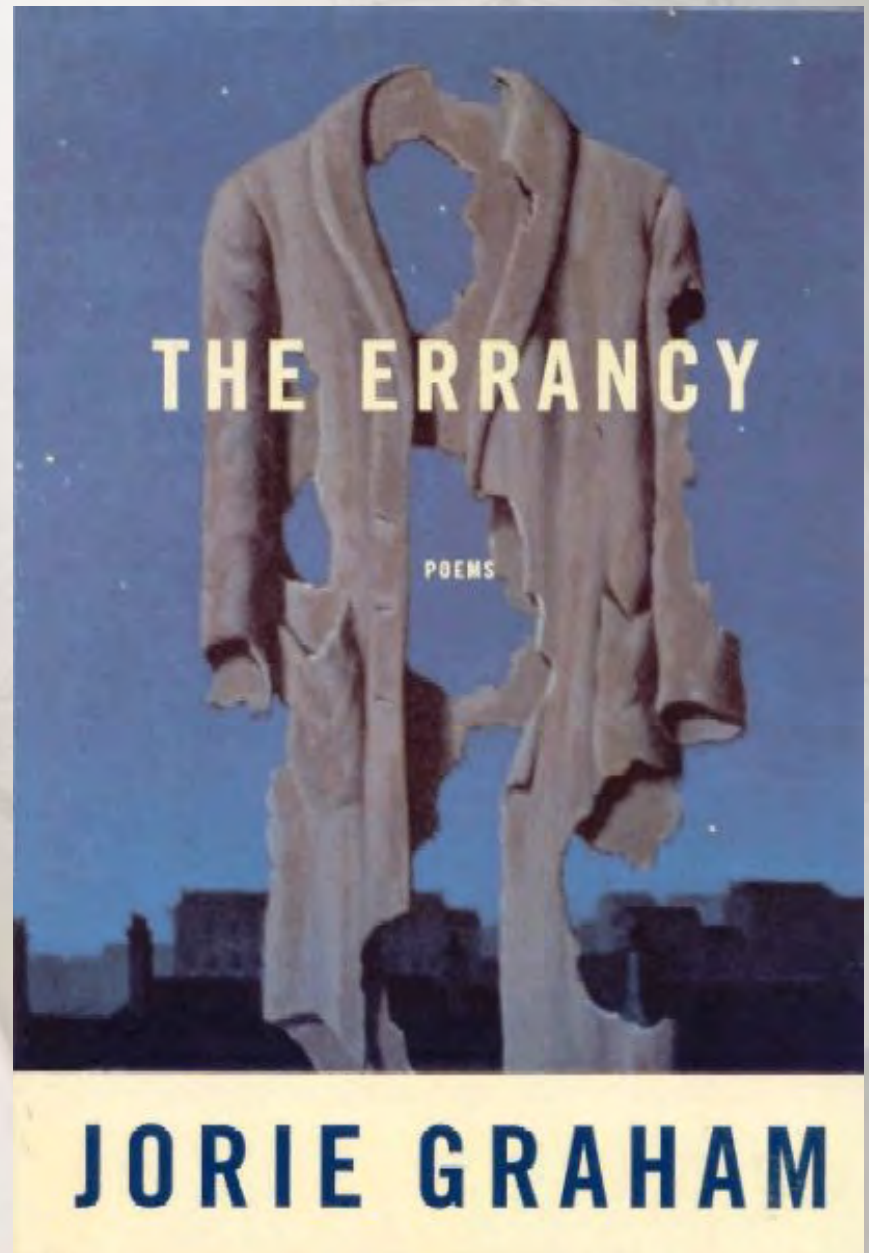
Anguish

- ★ In *anguish*, the poet rubs her language raw in order to cast off the shell of conventional identity and traverse the nothingness at the core of being.
- ★ Jorie Graham's hollows and voids
- ★ Maurice Blanchot's space of literature

Obsession

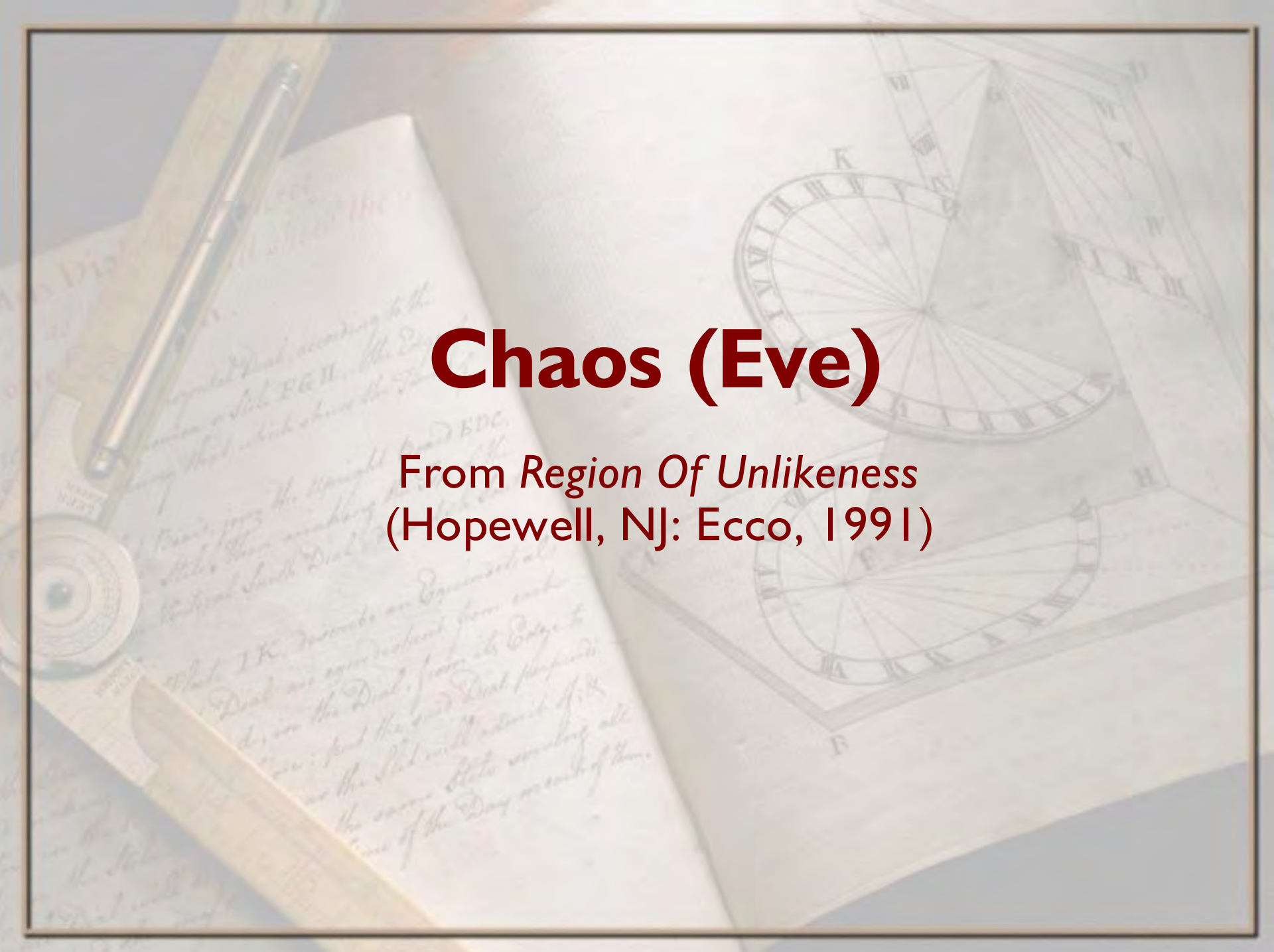
- ★ The *poet* so obsesses over his sub-*scrip*-tion to language that he nullifies his subjectivity to become pure textuality, an infernal machine.
- ★ Barrett Watten's Language writing
- ★ Jacques Lacan's subjective destitution

“Le Manteau de Pascal”
I have put on my great coat
it is cold.
It is an outer garment.
Coarse, woolen.
Of unknown origins.



Chaos (Eve)

From *Region Of Unlikeness*
(Hopewell, NJ: Ecco, 1991)



The Open

The *Open* is

- 1) a space cleared of symbolic representations, of language
- 2) the exposed core of being underneath one's symbolic identity

The *Open* clears the way of the *Symbolic* for the *Real*.

The Symbolic

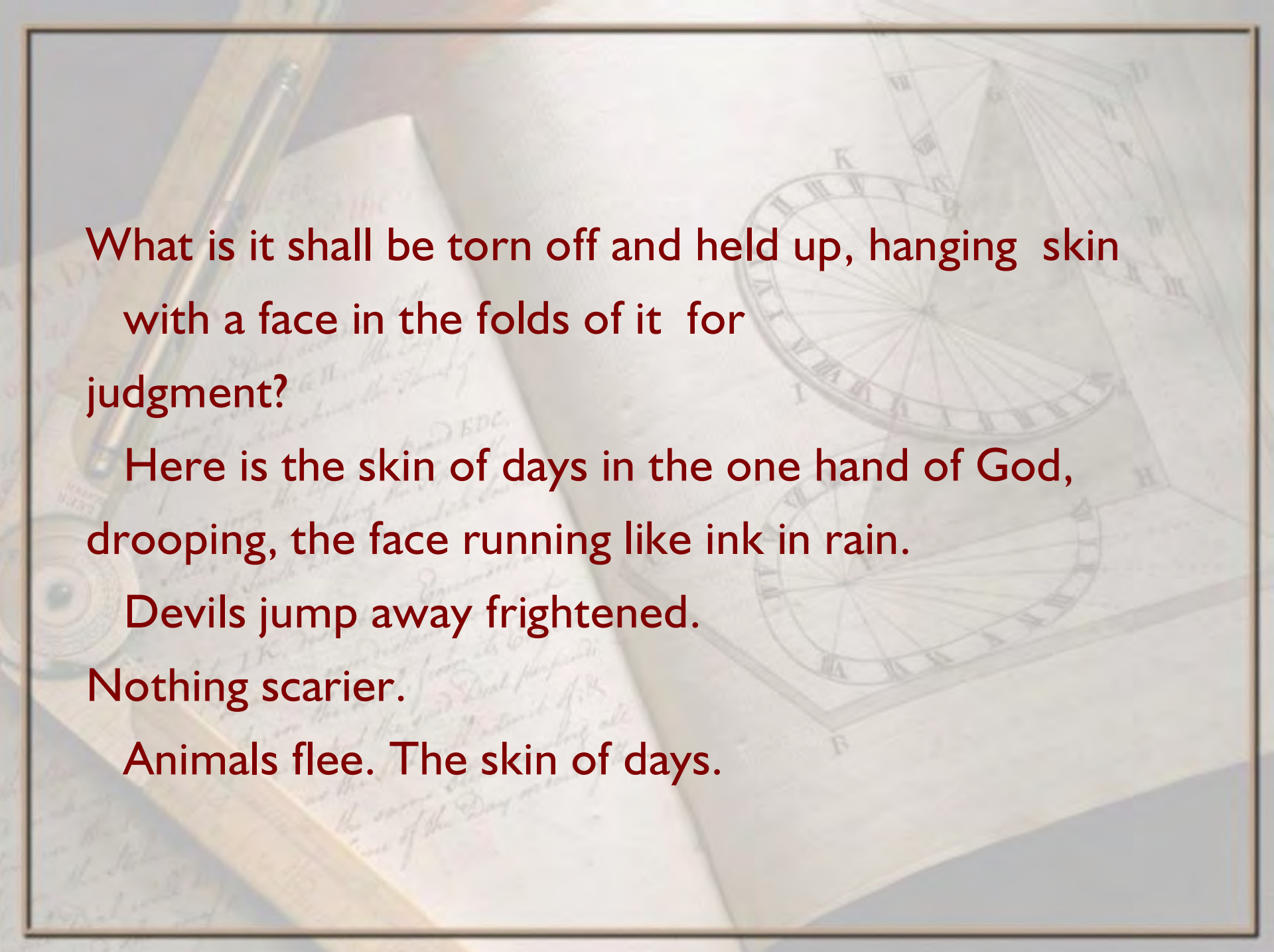
The *Symbolic* order is the realm of language and discourse that constitutes our primary way of knowing the world and positioning ourselves within it.

The *Symbolic* is the language of the Other that not only clothes the mind but also cloaks then closes off the psyche from having an immediate relationship with itself, its inner core.

The Real

The *Real* is the realm outside language, i.e., the traumatic kernel of reality that resists symbolization.

A *real* of subjectivity exists as a psychic core that can be neither known nor touched through language. It is the limit of our symbolic world view, but it also that space which we must traverse in order to truly know ourselves.



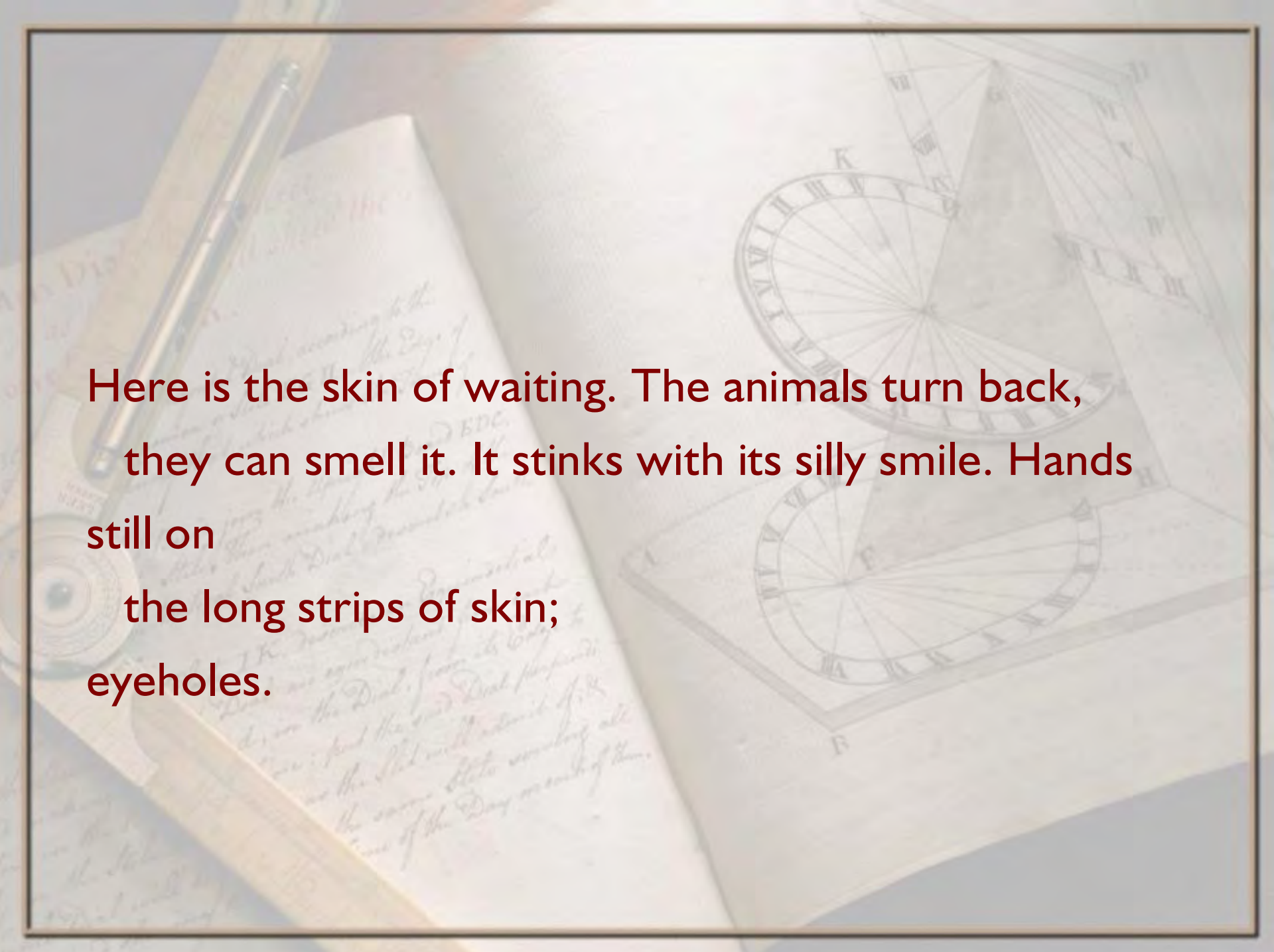
What is it shall be torn off and held up, hanging skin
with a face in the folds of it for
judgment?

Here is the skin of days in the one hand of God,
drooping, the face running like ink in rain.

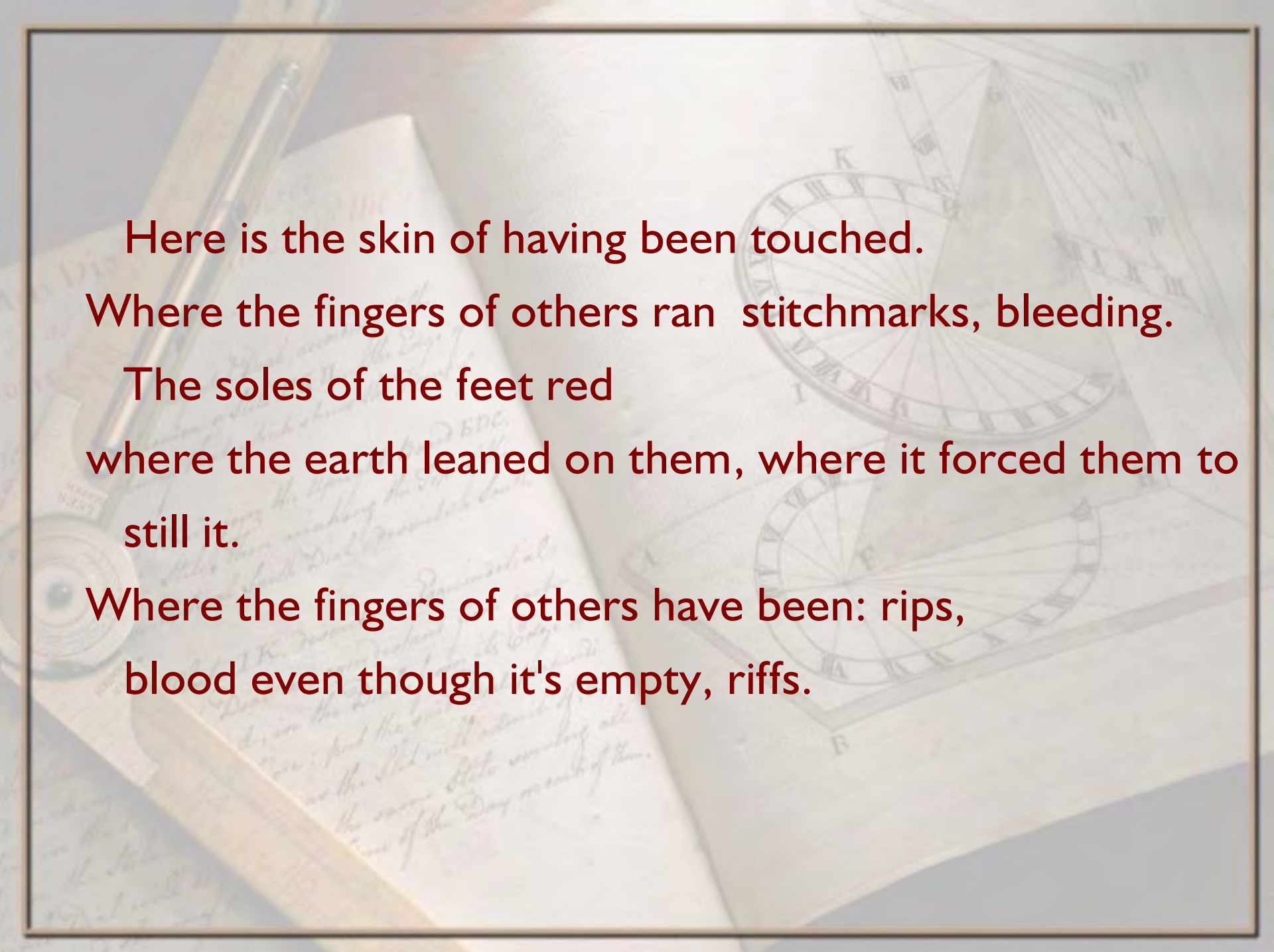
Devils jump away frightened.

Nothing scarier.

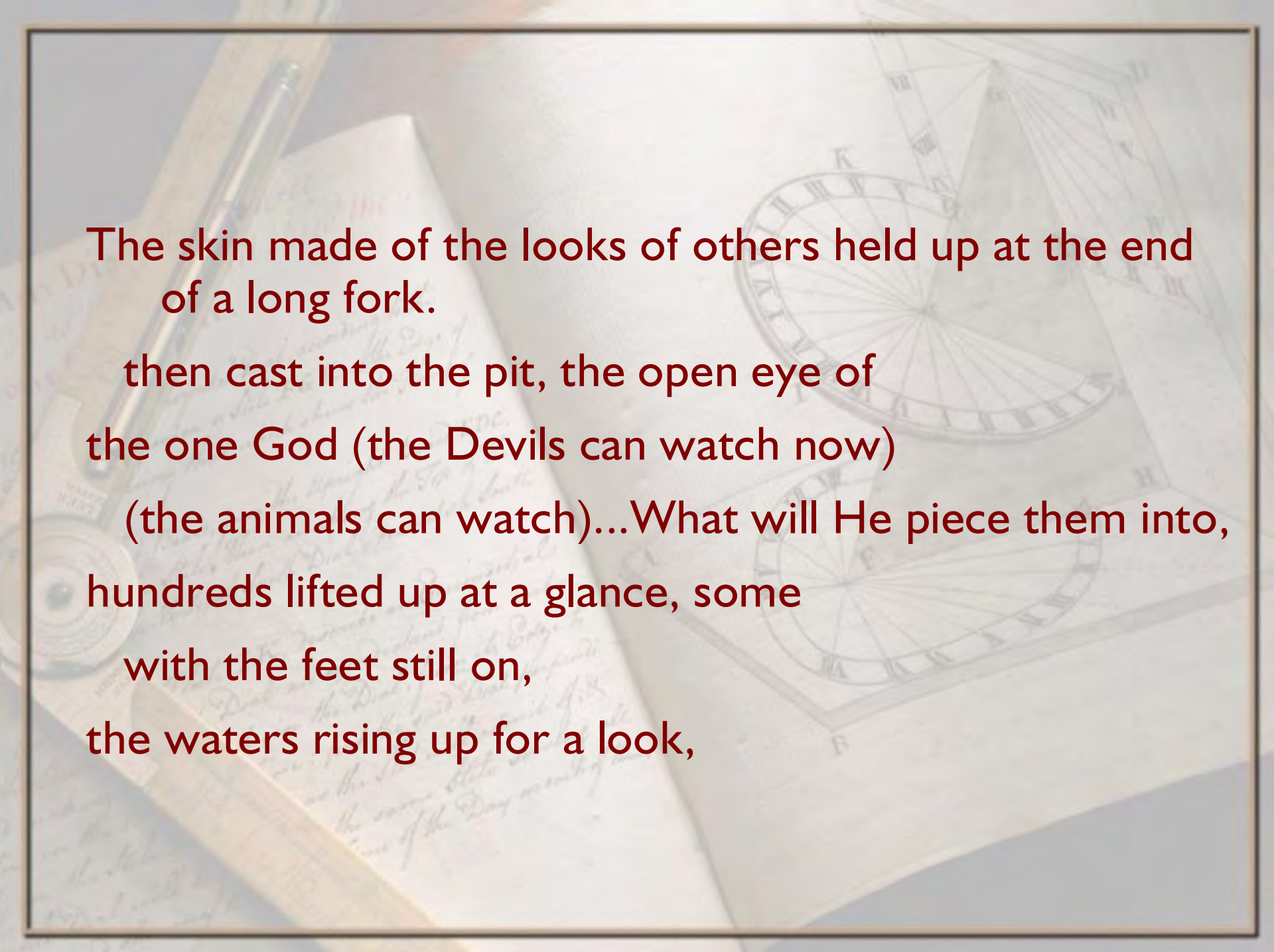
Animals flee. The skin of days.



Here is the skin of waiting. The animals turn back,
they can smell it. It stinks with its silly smile. Hands
still on
the long strips of skin;
eyeholes.

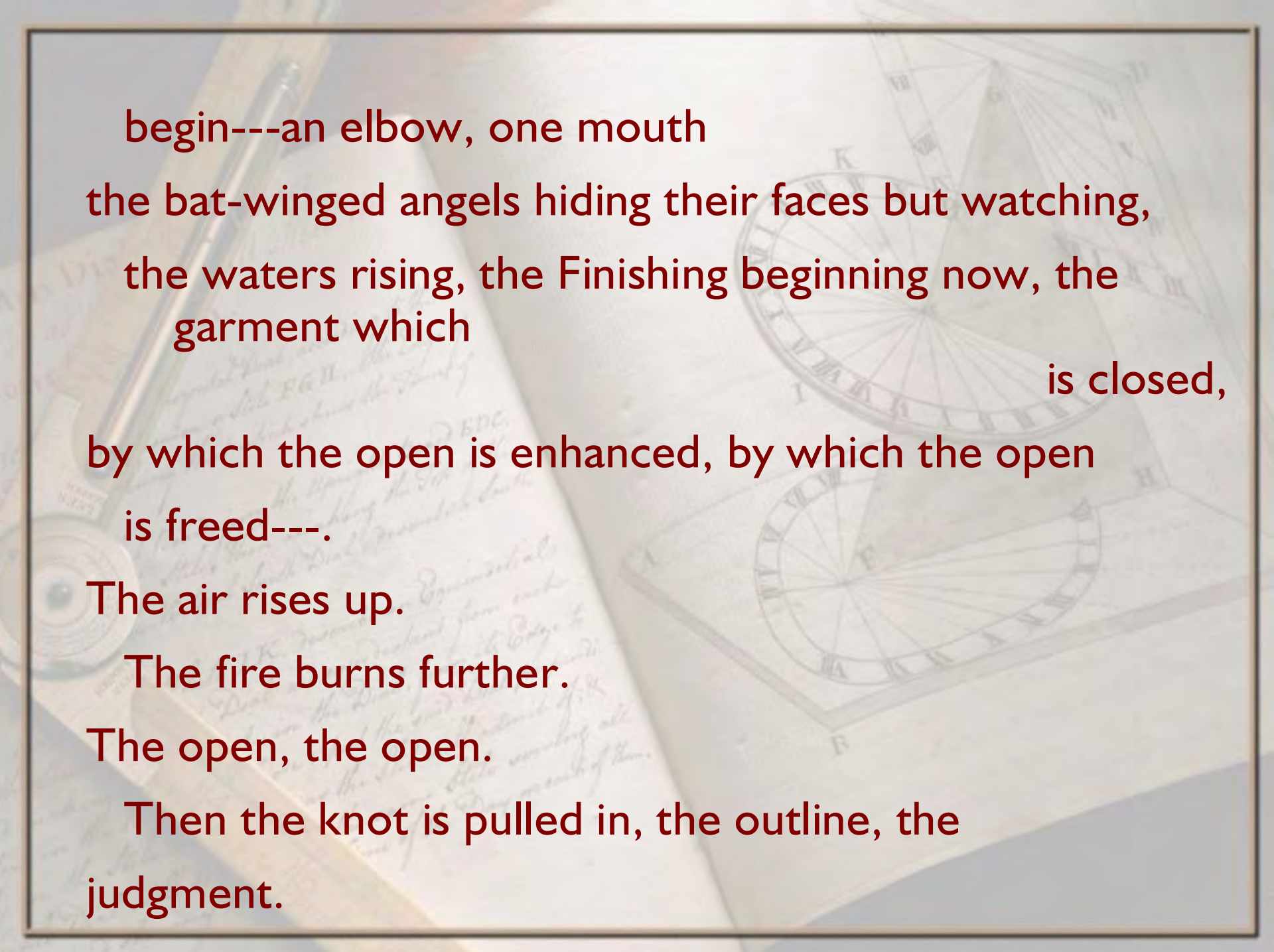


Here is the skin of having been touched.
Where the fingers of others ran stitchmarks, bleeding.
The soles of the feet red
where the earth leaned on them, where it forced them to
still it.
Where the fingers of others have been: rips,
blood even though it's empty, riffs.

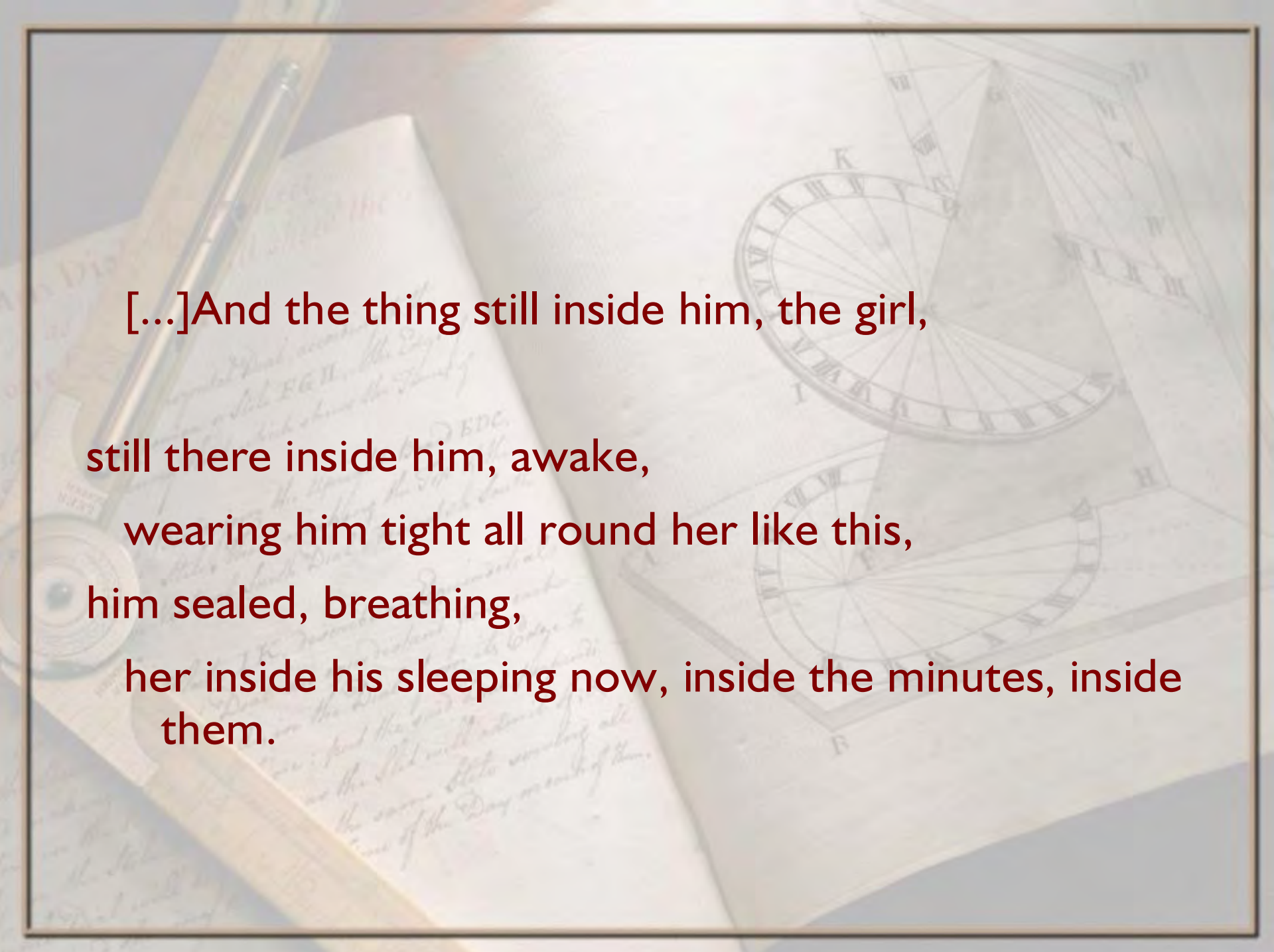


The skin made of the looks of others held up at the end
of a long fork.

then cast into the pit, the open eye of
the one God (the Devils can watch now)
(the animals can watch)...What will He piece them into,
hundreds lifted up at a glance, some
with the feet still on,
the waters rising up for a look,



begin---an elbow, one mouth
the bat-winged angels hiding their faces but watching,
the waters rising, the Finishing beginning now, the
garment which is closed,
by which the open is enhanced, by which the open
is freed---.
The air rises up.
The fire burns further.
The open, the open.
Then the knot is pulled in, the outline, the
judgment.



[...]And the thing still inside him, the girl,
still there inside him, awake,
wearing him tight all round her like this,
him sealed, breathing,
her inside his sleeping now, inside the minutes, inside
them.