



American Literature 1920 to the Present

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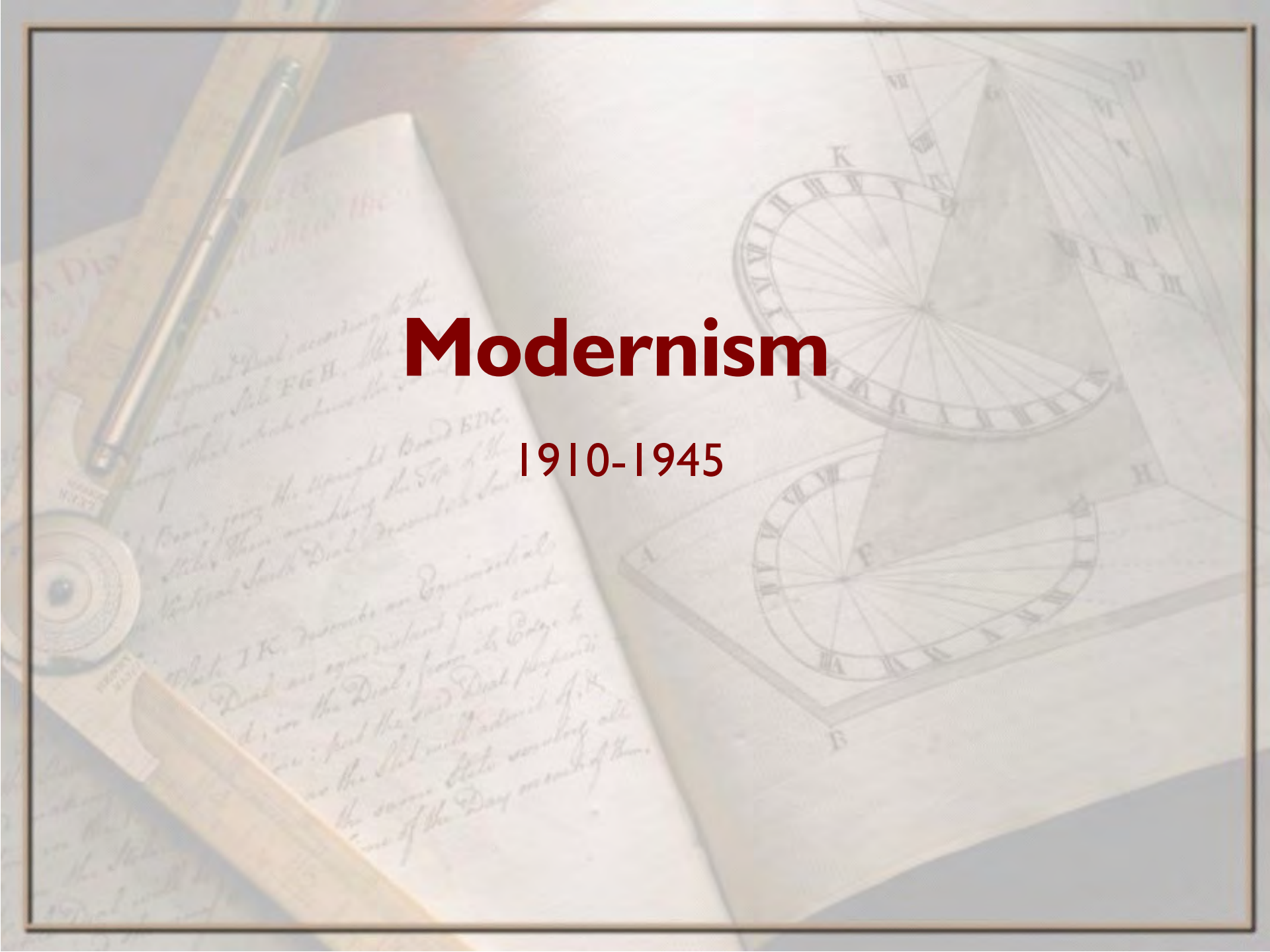
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Modernism

1910-1945

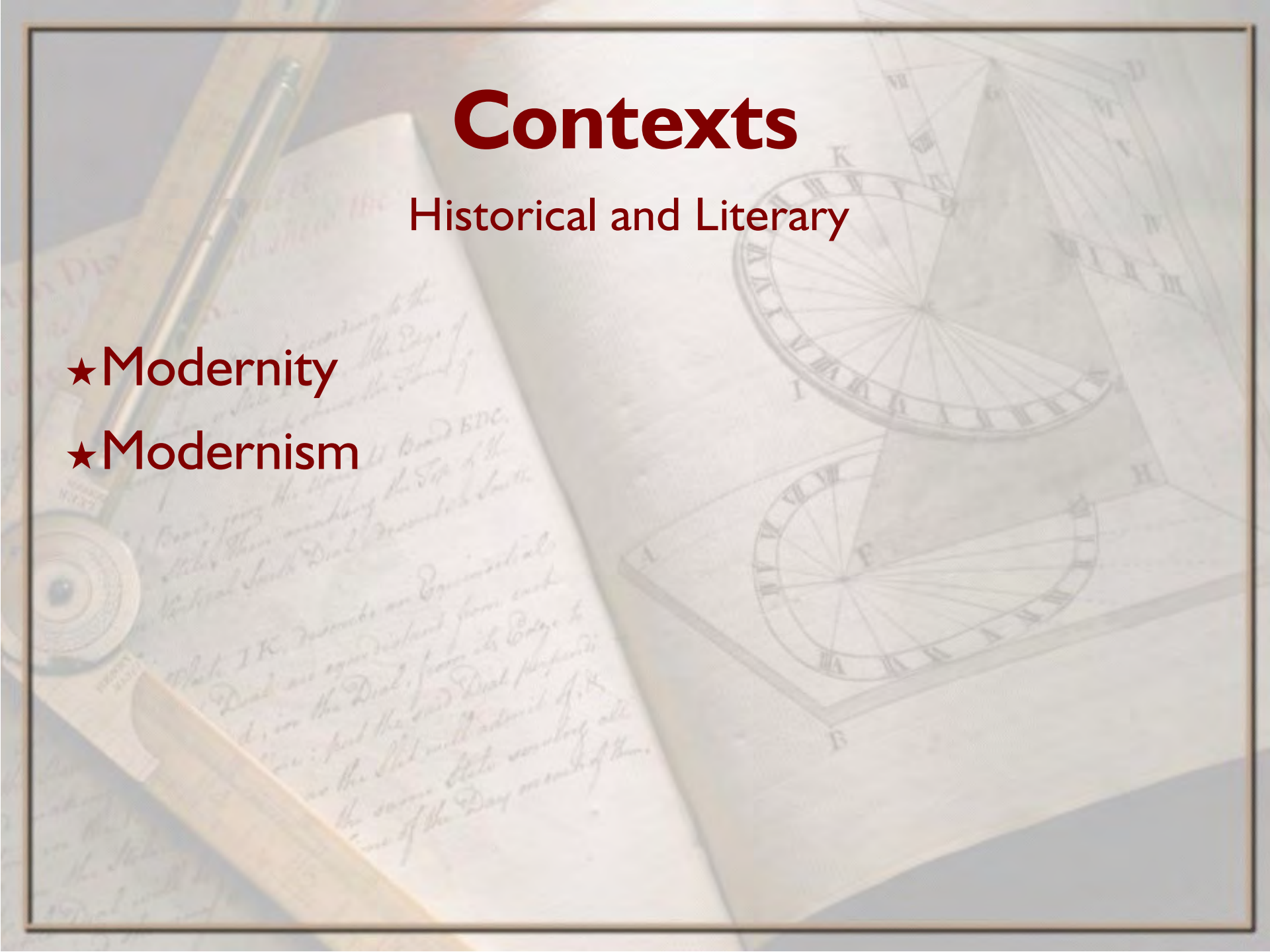


Contexts

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).



Postmodernism

| 1945-present

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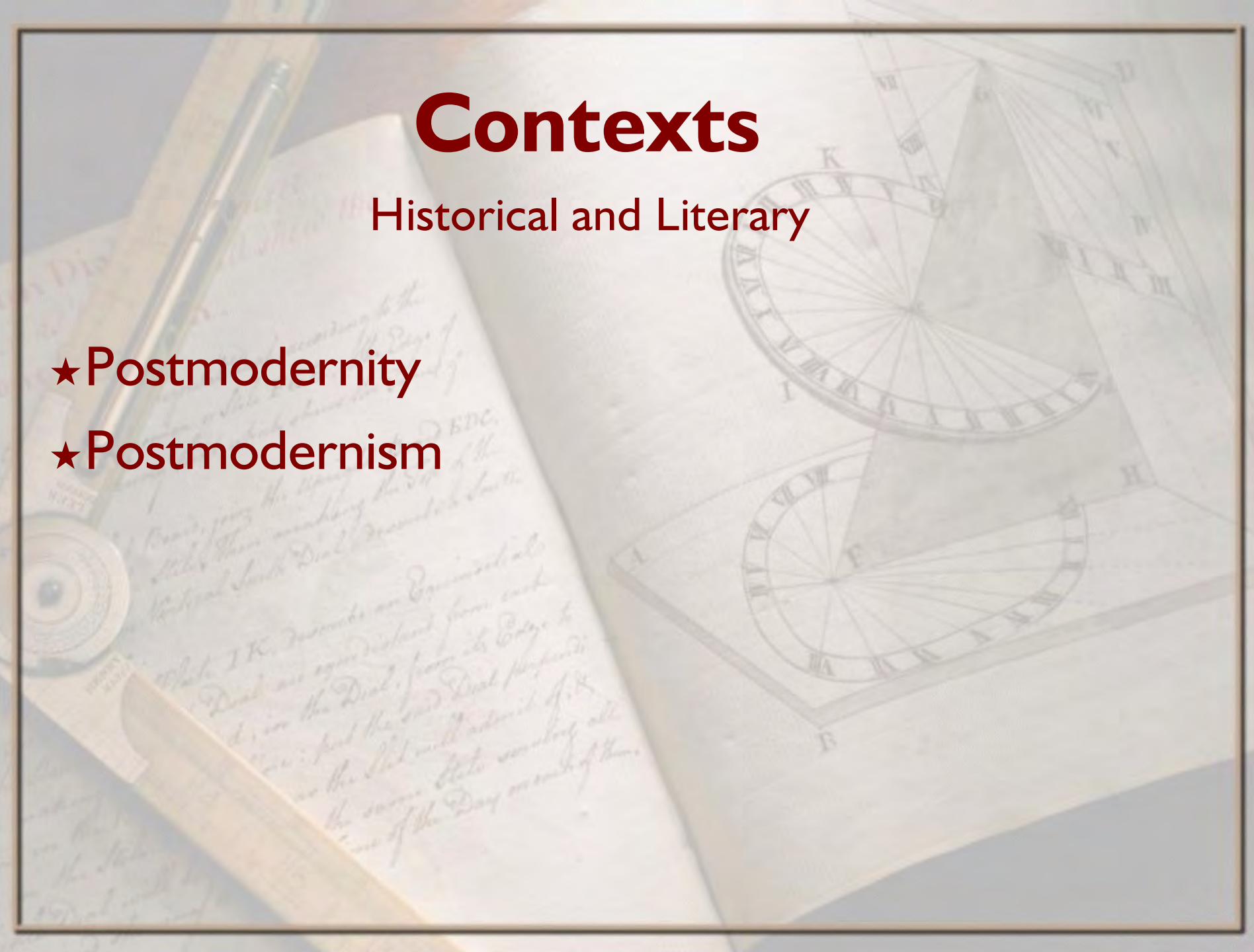
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Contexts

Historical and Literary

★ Postmodernity

★ Postmodernism



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.