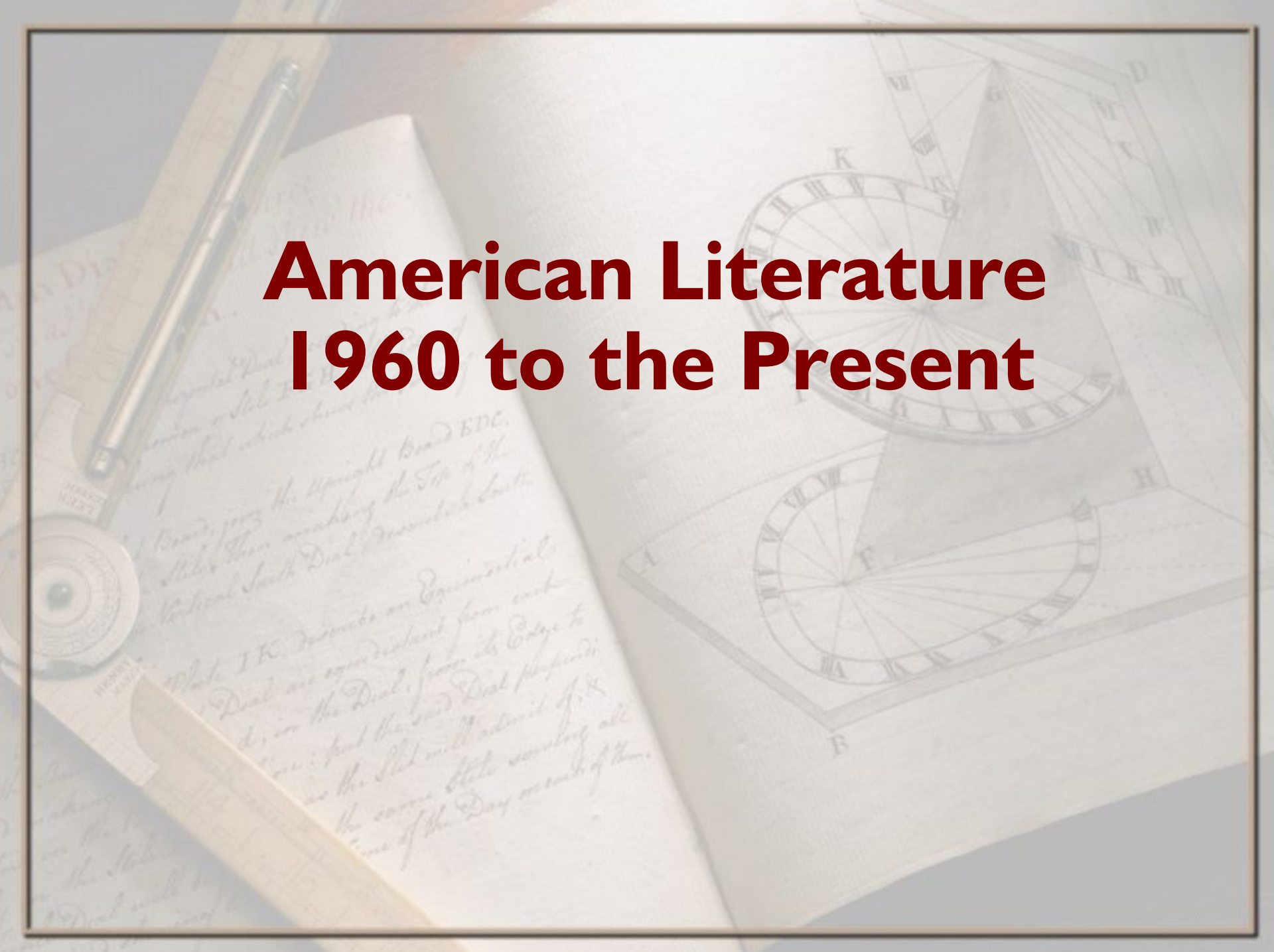


American Literature 1960 to the Present

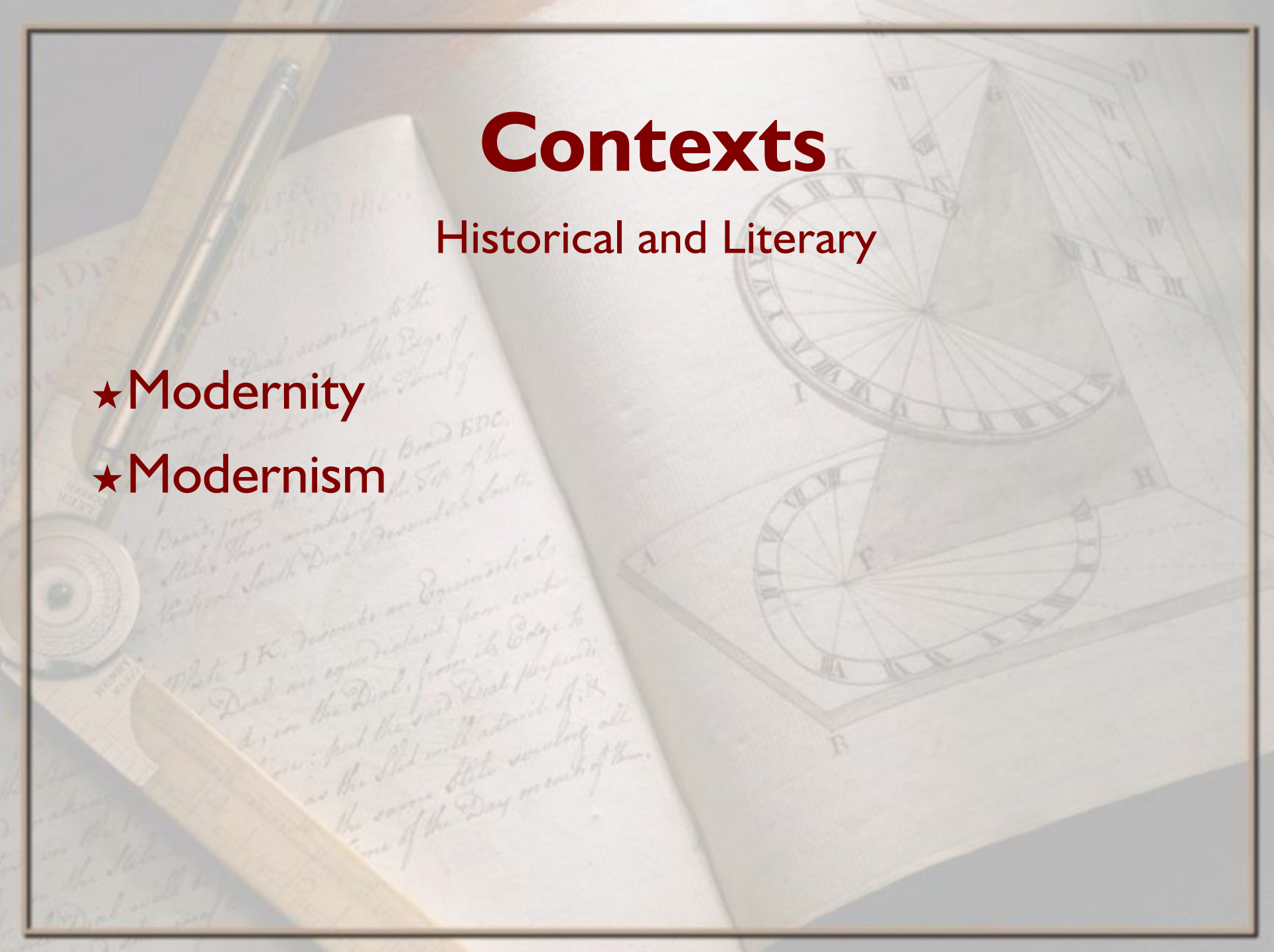


Contexts

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).

Postmodernity

Historical Era from 1945 to the present

- ★ Inaugurated by the Bomb (the Nuclear Age)
- ★ From world wars to cold wars, civil wars, wars on drugs and terrorism
- ★ The rise of multinational, late capitalism
- ★ Multiculturalism and identity politics
- ★ Decline of industry; rise of information (the Information Age), networking (cyberspace), and image consumption (hyperreality)

Postmodernism

Literary period from 1960s to the present

After years of cultural and canonical fragmentation, there remains much dispute regarding the definition of postmodernism. Some critics theorize that postmodernism is merely an extension of modernism; some say the two are directly opposed. Still others argue that there is no definable postmodernist movement and instead speak of the contemporary. The following is one version of postmodernism, the version our class will pursue.

Belief

- ★ Postmodernism has no crisis of belief in traditional authority, as in modernism.
- ★ Rather, the modernist anxiety has been replaced with a postmodernist, relativistic, "anything and everything goes" attitude.
- ★ Literature attempts neither to play off of grand narratives nor to search for absolute Truths.
- ★ Instead, literature seeks to create little narratives and little truths, which result in qualified beliefs and self-conscious themes.

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 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 a mainstay, as in modernism, but with this twist:
- ★ Postmodernist literature doesn't believe there's a real real to represent, for everything's an image or a signifier, reality is socially constructed by language, and the self is in process.
- ★ Therefore, postmodernist literature is self-reflective, self-reflexive, and self-conscious.
- ★ It may not represent grand narratives, but it does try to reveal its own artificiality and textuality in various meta-fictional and intertextual turns.

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 construction.

Examples

Of Postmodernist Literature

- ★ Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse”: meta-fiction
- ★ DeLillo, *White Noise*: hyperreality
- ★ Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, intertextuality
- ★ Kushner, *Angels in America*: high and low
- ★ Ashbery, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*: self-reflexivity

Examples

Continued

- ★ Waldrop, *The Reproduction of Profiles*: self-reflexivity
- ★ Hejinian, *My Life*: self as textual and in process
- ★ Coover, “The Babysitter”: hypertextuality
- ★ Watten, *Complete Thought*: textuality
- ★ Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*: hypertextuality of sutured subjectivity
- ★ Gass, *The Tunnel*: all of the above