

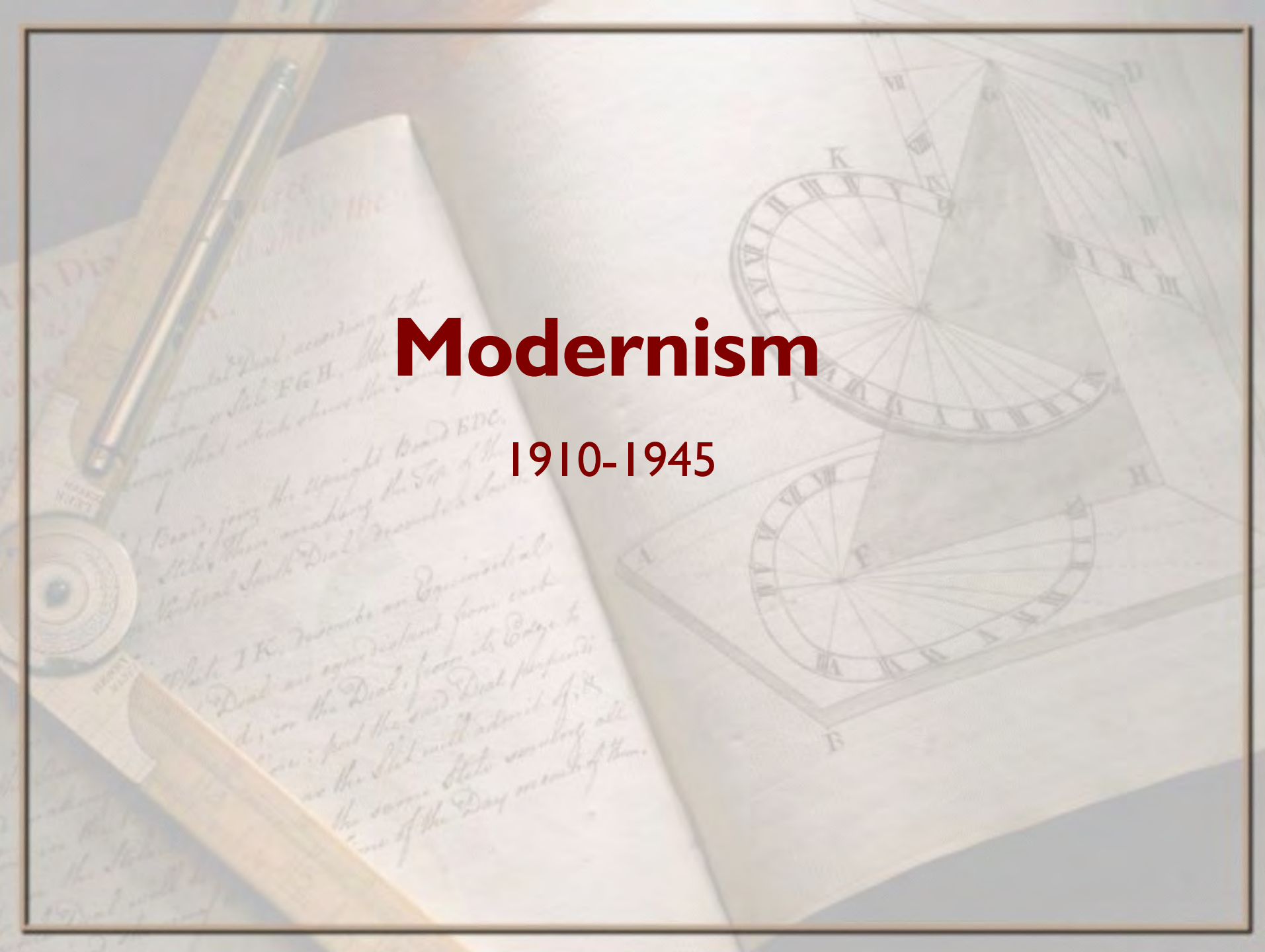


American Literature 1920 to the Present

Dr. Alex E. Blazer
English 4665/5665
13 August 2012
<http://faculty.de.gcsu.edu/~ablazer/>

Modernism

1910-1945



Contexts

Historical and Literary

★ Modernity

★ Modernism



Modernity

Historical Era

from the Industrial Revolution to the mid-1900s

- ★ Industrialization (the rise of factories)
- ★ Urbanization (from rural, agrarian)
- ★ Exponential technological progress (cars and machine guns)
- ★ Rise of mass, popular, consumer culture (radio and film, department stores)
- ★ 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,
 - ★ Joyce's Stephan Dedalus: “non servium: I will not serve”
 - ★ Resulting in the critique of culture that would use its technological progress not for civilization but for mechanized slaughter
 - ★ Eliot's *The Waste Land*: “I think we are in rats' alley / where the dead men lost their bones.”
 - ★ And the wistful search for new teleological meanings in the fragmentation and flux of the lost generation's waste land.
 - ★ Pound's “Hugh Selwyn Mauberly”: “Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;”

Modernism

Continued

- ★ 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.
 - ★ Poetry: Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Williams' *Paterson*
 - ★ Fiction: Joyce's *Ulysses*, Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury*
 - ★ Drama: Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Rice's *The Adding Machine*

Modernism

Concluded

- ★ 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
 - ★ Imagism and Objectivism and Surrealism in poetry
 - ★ Stream of consciousness in fiction by Joyce, Faulkner, and Woolf
 - ★ Expression is drama by O'Neill and Treadwell

Modernism

Concluded

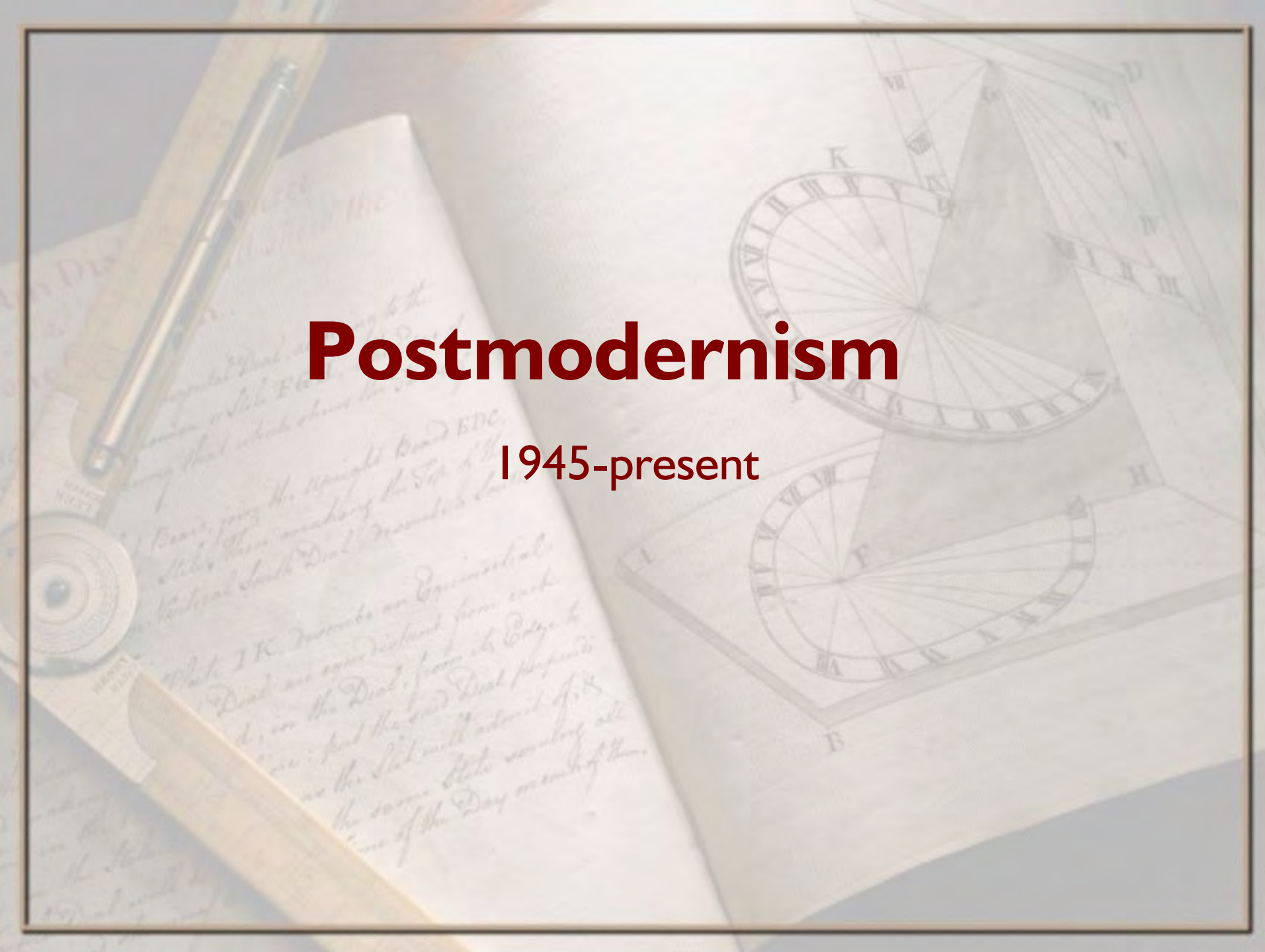
★ High vs Low

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

- ★ Pound's *Cantos* XLII–LI (1937) and LII–LXXI (1940), Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1940) are published during the same period as genre fiction Tolkein's *The Hobbit* (1937) and Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939). Orson Welles broadcast *The War of the Worlds* (1938). 1939 films *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Stagecoach*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* were nominated for Best Picture Oscar. Benny Goodman's big band and Duke Ellington's jazz band are prominent in the late 1930s.
- ★ In 1939, T. S. Eliot published *The Love Song of Gerontion*, *Waste Land*, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* and the detective play *The Family Reunion*.

Postmodernism

| 1945-present



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),
 - ★ endless wars on drugs and terrorism

Postmodernity

Continued

- ★ *Decline* of industry; the *rise* of
 - ★ multinational/late capitalism,
 - ★ information (the Information Age),
 - ★ networking (cyberspace, social networking), 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

The Columbia Encyclopedia

“postmodernism”

★ “In general, the postmodern view is cool, ironic, and accepting of the fragmentation of contemporary existence. It tends to concentrate on surfaces rather than depths, to blur the distinctions between high and low culture, and as a whole to challenge a wide variety of traditional cultural values.”

Ihab Hassan

“Toward a Concept of Postmodernism”

- ★ “Pop and silence, or mass culture and deconstruction--or as I shall later argue, immanence and indeterminacy--may all be aspects of the postmodern universe.” (275)
- ★ “The dichotomies this table [on the next slide] represents remain insecure, equivocal. For differences shift, defer, even collapse; and inversions and exceptions, in both modernism and postmodernism, abound.” (281)

Ihab Hassan

Continued

Modernism/Postmodernism

Form/Antiform

Purpose/Play

Design/Chance

Hierarchy/Anarchy

Finished Work/Process

Totalization/Deconstruction

Centering/Dispersal

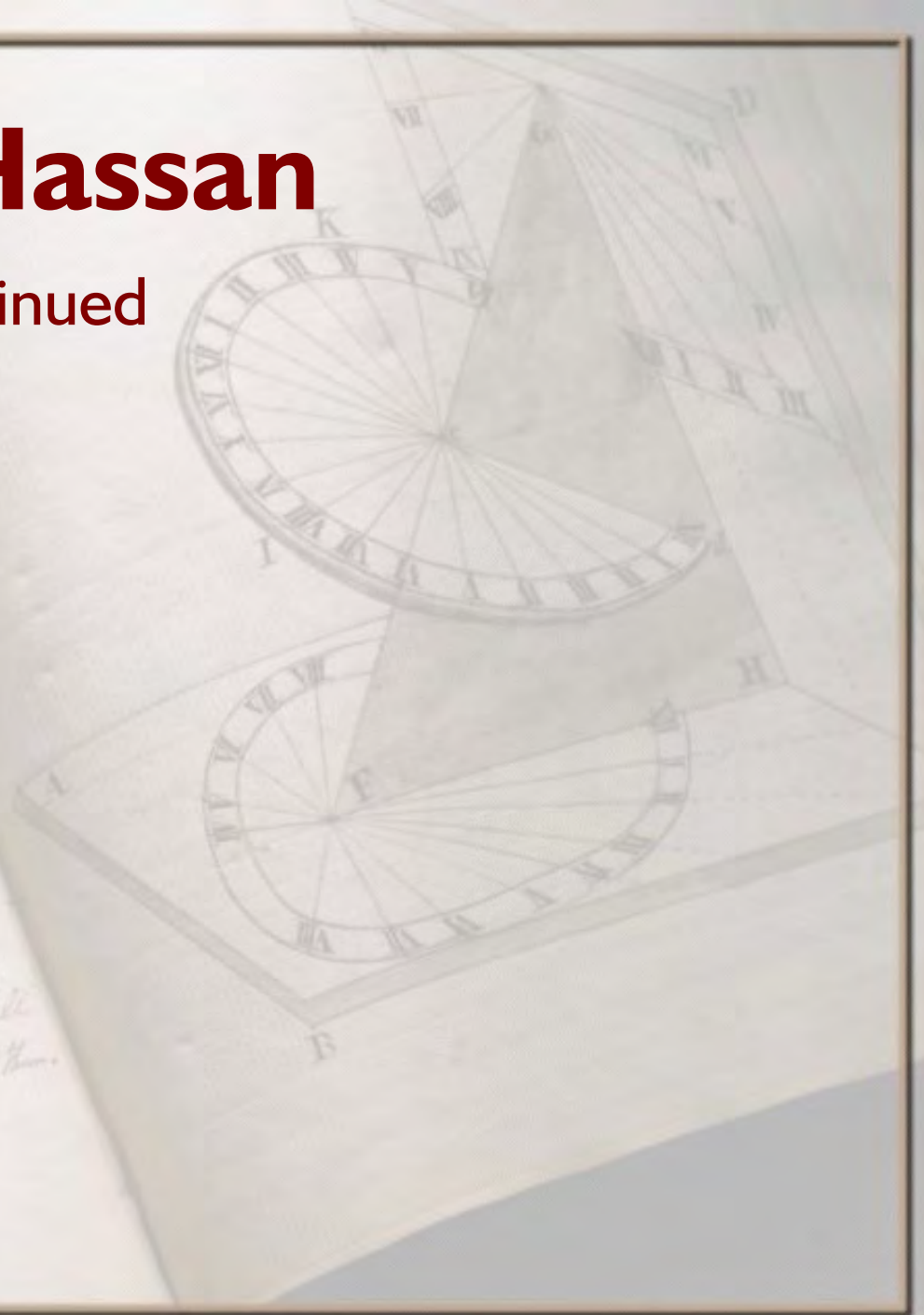
Depth/Surface

Narrative/Anti-Narrative

Metaphysics/Irony

Determinacy/Indeterminacy

Transcendence/Immanence



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.