

SUZANNE SCANLON'S

HER 37TH YEAR

A Teaching Guide

Preliminary Vocabulary:

Intertextuality, Collage, Pastiche, Juxtaposition, Modulation, Synchronicity, Trajectory, Epistolary, Conflation, Simultaneity, Transcendence, Convention, Subversion, Linearity, Vignette

Define each term and discuss. Find an example of each in *Her 37th Year*.

Questions:

Suzanne Scanlon's *Her 37th Year* is an index. The form of an index is an imposed, external structure that creates an assemblage of modulated, alphabetized units—providing an allusion of pattern, order, chronology, logic and systemic methodology.

What are the re-occurring themes in *Her 37th Year*?

Why might the author have chosen to constrain these themes into an ordered structure?

There are statements that not only provide narrative insight, proposed ideologies, and access to narrator interiority, but also serve as meta-commentary on writing process, on art-making, as well as instruct the reader on how to read the text/body. Such examples:

“ . . . the end is contained within the beginning,”

“ . . . I won't fit into what is allowed,”

“I want to deny the arch,”

“the impossible trajectory of hope,”

“For some, the emptiness itself is God; for others, the space must stay empty,”

“Of life, of loss, which you haven't yet found your way around,”

“ . . . exhilarated despair. A desire for obliteration,”

“ . . . accidentally on purpose,”

“Knowledge is constructed,”

“We fill pre-existing forms and when we fill them change them and are changed,”

“never satisfied, never resting, mythically hungry,”

“writing as a histrionic assertion,”

“for most of this, this is as good as it gets. Aspiration,”

How do these statements engage or subvert conventional narrative structures?

In traditional trajectories, the reader is propelled forward. There’s a horizontal momentum in that we encounter a beginning, a middle, an end. How is the horizontal reading axis antagonized in *Her 37th Year*? How is form informing meaning?

If we imagine each vignette as a compositional field—or constellations—what’s the center that each section of *Her 37th Year* orbits around? What instance (s), narrative moments, moods, etc. serve as primary catalysts for the book’s creation? If this “*space must stay empty*,” what propels each separate part?

What’s the single re-occurrence in *Her 37th Year* that acts as a consistent, narrative weave?

Answer: The Man in Boots.

Are Suzanne Scanlon’s “*literary notions too sexy for [this] classroom?*”

Discussion Prompts/Activities:

Does self-imposed order further reinforce order or magnify its disarray?

Suzanne Scanlon states that “the essence of humanity is the pair,” which references how a letter ends: “I write because I can imagine you, there, reading. I don’t exist without you.” Throughout *Her 37 Year*, there are symbiotic relations (or tensions) between reader and writer, doctor and patient, body and mind. What other textual examples exemplify this tethered, duality of existence? Provide examples from your own life.

How might a discombobulated trajectory encourage the reader to disengage conventional notions of time, space, past, present, and future?

How do exterior synonymous or antonymous references (see also:) obliterate linearity?

How are dimensions of meaning electrified by a word’s relationality to another word? For example: “**VICTIM** (see also: *Erotically Attached, Intentional Passivity, and Status*)”

How might unconventional forms (collage, fractured narratives, footnoted narrative and dialog, stage play formatting, lists, fragmentation, modulation, the index) mirror contemporary social or cultural phenomena?

Follow the trajectory of love: what did you go through? Where do you end up? What’s referenced? Where are you referred to? Follow the trajectory of desire, happiness, boredom, madness, creation. Note facts within each category. Pay particular attention to syntax, craft, motifs, objects, narrative movement, pronouns, and settings of each. Are there consistent patterns while travelling through detritus in order to return to, or to be re-located to an alternate state? Is there an associational logic to this development or trajectory?

What references most piqued your interest? These could be philosophers, writers, artists, or literary and artistic movements of varying epochs. Choose three. Research them. Present on them. How does this new knowledge add further dimension or enrichment to your experience of the novel? Was development of this knowledge necessary to your experience of *Her 37th Year*? Or does *Her 37th Year* function as a self-contained, singular artifact?

Creative Projects:

Create your own index without reverting to an alphabetized chronology, yet enforce some instance of a cohesive, consistent, structured system.

Read the list of acknowledgements—or to those whom Scanlon states she’s “copied, (mis)quoted, reformulated and invoked.” Look up three people. Present biographies as well as provide examples of their creative work. Ask these acknowledged individuals three life questions.

Create your own lifetime list of acknowledgements.

Write an embryo’s 0th year.

Study literary confessionalists or confessionalism as a literary movement. Create a multi-modal confessionalist or quasi-autobiographical poem using social media platforms. This may include Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

What words would you add to the archive of Scanlon’s index? Why? Would these word be re-routed by any “see: also’s”?

Attempt to diagram, illustrate, graph, geometrically shape or create any visual representation of the narrative structure in *Her 37th Year* **without** resorting to language. What does a cubist text look like? Contrast this with a visual representation of a traditional narrative arc.