

Principles of Literary Study

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Office hours: Thursdays 11:45–12:45 in MU 040A or by appt.

March 26, 2026. Ko, “The Contractors.”

review: midterm

- ▶ meter is hard

W S S S W S W SW S
an old, mad, blind, despis'd, and dying king
o B O B o B o Bo B

- ▶ pentameter: *always* (o)BoBoBoBoB(o)
- ▶ what varies is how stressed and unstressed syllables fit the pattern (promotion, demotion, double offbeat, virtual offbeat)
- ▶ discussing significance is hard
 - ▶ “this is a sonnet” vs. “Yeats takes a love-poem genre and uses it to represent rape and war”
 - ▶ “this rhymes” vs. “rhyming *young* with *jung* literally goes ‘beyond English’”
- ▶ remembering the authors and titles of works we discussed for entire class periods...shouldn't be hard
- ▶ the U.S. Civil War took place from 1861 to 1865

review: form and narrative: layers

text the narrative discourse, a structured sequence of (linguistic or other) signs

sjužet (Ru. сюжет) a particular organization or arrangement of fictional events

fabula (Ru. фабула) a series of logically related events caused or experienced by actors, proceeding forward in time

review: anachrony

anachrony a difference between the arrangement of events in the *sjuzet* and the chronology of the *fabula*

retroversion anachrony going backwards in time. Called **subjective** if a particular character's narration or perspective is used to go back to events earlier in the *fabula* ("flashback")

anticipation anachrony going forwards in time

► anachrony structures the detective story

The whodunit...contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation.

Tzvetan Todorov, *Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978), 44.

- but it is also what the detective *does*: clues
- in "Scandal," it is also what Irene does: "You really did it very well."

non-whodunit

- ▶ Find an anachrony in *The Contractors*. Discuss its significance.

non-whodunit

- Find an anachrony in *The Contractors*. Discuss its significance.

Sandra has never been to the Philippines, but the pictures her mom posts are of warmth and shopping and family....Two months ago, Sandra's mother had been hospitalized with a bad cough, but Sandra only found out when her aunt posted a picture on social media. (5)

narration

- ▶ Who tells the story? Find a passage where it is significant.

narration

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character-bound narrator CN the person telling the story is also an actor in the *fabula*

external narrator EN the person telling the story is not an actor in the *fabula*. If they say “I,” they are perceptible EN(p); otherwise they are EN(np).

from anachrony to simultaneity

Twelve time zones away, on the opposite side of the city from where Sandra's mother is staying, Sandie lives with her parents and little sister in a two-room apartment, an even smaller apartment than the one she'd grown up in, which her parents could no longer afford after they lost their store. (8)

from anachrony to simultaneity

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from individual troubles to social problems

Musu has forwarded the article about Sandie's office to her. *Thought you'd be interested in this*, he writes. Sandra wonders how Sandie is doing and tries to push the thought away. The bad feeling, the guilt and annoyance, churn up again. To Musu, to the real employees on the sixth floor, she is their Sandie. Even to Brandon, she is Sandie, or how the journalist sees Sandie. Or maybe they are all like Sandie, in different ways. (18)

- ▶ What are the implications of the story's implicit comparison between the Sandras?

what narrative knows

She envies Sandra, for not being surrounded by so much family, because it's a sort of freedom, even if Sandra can't see it. For some reason it feels easier to tell this stranger these things because it is someone she will never meet. (22)

media studies

- ▶ Why content moderation?

► Why content moderation?

Sandra sleeps with Cammy on Hima's couch and in the morning, she looks online for warehouse jobs. (24)

She thinks of Sandra in New Jersey, all thirty thousand moderators around the world, doing whatever they need to do to get through the day. (24)

next

- ▶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pt. I (3–100)
 - ▶ getting what's going on matters (it's a novel about the difference between people who get what's going on and people who don't)
 - ▶ read in segments, not in a rush