

Comparative Essay #2

awkward phrasing

It is a fact that in life, the past always has a way to impact the present, and even more so, the future. As Oscar Wilde words it in The Picture of Dorian Gray, "our future would be the same as our past [...]" In his novel, the author appears appearances to the inner self in order to demonstrate the damage that self-reflection on past sins can inflict on someone. The portrait and its muse become a symbol in the novel, for the maddening influence the past can have on the mind. Contrastingly, in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, it is thanks to the help of foregone memories that Offred is illustrated as keeping her sanity. These remembrances, through the shift of tone and detailed descriptions rescue her balance of mind. As such, these two characters call to mind Emily Dickinson's statement, "The past is not a package one can lay away."

try to make the first sentence of a new paragraph a "mini-thesis", not just a transition

I'm not sure you need this last sentence in your intro unless you are going to expand on the quote

This is a very strong paragraph. Just try to make sure you link everything back a little more clearly to the question/your thesis

Atwood, in The Handmaid's Tale, presents Offred as her protagonist. In the dystopian society in which the story takes place, the patriarchy takes away the freedom of women, especially fertile women. As such, Offred is apart of the minority targetted by Gilead's totalitarian regime. In order to survive and stay sane she counts her thoughts; "I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thoughts must be rationned" (p. 13) This quote shows the detachment of her tone, the inventory style of her thought process indicates her resigned state. Throughout the entirety of the novel, many shifts in tone are apparent; a contrast between the past and the present is made by the author. Whenever Offred narrates her life as a handmaid at the service of the government, the tone of the passage is, as aforementioned numb, cold or even detached from reality. This is her method to remain sound, through long and particular descriptions of what she does, of her surroundings. "I fold back the sheet, get carefully up, on silent bare feet, in my nightgown, go to the window, like a child, I want to see. The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snear. The sky is clear but (p.) hard to make out [...]" The metaphors, similes and, overall, lengthy descriptions demonstrate how she does, in fact, think, that she makes use of her imagination and illustrates the surroundings to which she shows attention to detail to. However, when Offred recalls memories of her pre-Gilead life, the shift in tone usually indicates the passing from present to past: "This is what I feel like; this sound of glass, I feel like the word shatter. I want to be with someone. Lying in bed, with Luke [...]" (p. 109) This quote depicts the shift in setting. Offred is no longer in her bed at the Commander's house, she is no longer a handmaid, she is once again Luke's pregnant wife. When these changes occur, the tone of protagonist alters as well. Her cold and resigned self becomes more lively as she recalls memories of her past, in detail. "I can remember what I wore, each blouse, each scarf. [...]" Along with the tone, the tense of the narration changes as well, from present to past tense. The nostalgic recollections of her mother, her best friend, her husband and her daughter help her stay sane. Offred encounters various reminders of her past relationships in her life as a handmaid, in addition to her thoughts and longing for affection and communication. Atwood uses Offred to show the past an instrument to sanity, nostalgia is the reason her past is so important to her.

can you link this "mini-thesis" more clearly back to the question/thesis?

Secondly, in The Picture of Dorian, Oscar Wilde exposes an unhealthy relationship between Dorian Gray and his portrait, along with Lord Henry. When the portrait is painted by Basil, the youthful, handsome and pure face of Dorian Gray is immortalized. Even Lord Henry values youth as the most precious thing, the following epigram confirms it: "Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the

one thing worth having." (p. 37). Thereafter, Dorian Gray discovers his own beauty joyfully, until Lord Henry's warnings of the brevity of it all seeps into his mind. He makes the wish to remain the way he is while the fresh piece of art gets spoiled, swearing to give up his soul for it. (p. 43). Uncannily, his wishful thinking becomes reality: the portrait takes on the human characteristics of growth and physical change whereas Dorian remains forever youthful, "a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face". As time passes, the unaging face of the protagonist becomes curious; his naivety leads him to be influenced into a hedonistic life, where he is devoted to pleasure, where his desires and wants are fulfilled with no regard for others. "I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure." The selfish Dorian Gray does become self-aware when his sins catch up to him. Exposed on the once pure canvas, the features of cruelty and ugliness reveal the shameful actions of the past which haunts the protagonist. "I want to escape, to go away, to forget" (p. 100).

Both works, The Handmaid's Tale and The Picture of Dorian Gray, demonstrate through their main characters how the past can impact life, as nostalgic fantasies and dreams or haunting nightmares and delusions. In addition, the past seems to bring regret to Offred and Dorian Gray. On one side, Offred mourns the loss of her life, of her family, of her freedom, and on the other side, Dorian feels remorseful about the wrongdoings and suffering he has spread around. Yet in both situations, the protagonist try and contest and repent.

Overall, Margaret Atwood and Oscar Wilde make use of their characters to relay their ideas that the past is a baggage filled with either relief, or misery. Whereas Dorian Gray is haunted by life and his experiences, Offred finds a sanctuary in recalling her life before Gilead. While Dorian regrets his selfishness, Offred regrets her freedom and family. The past has multiple facets which oppose each other in these novels, the duality of regret as well. The two works expose the difficulty to let go of the past since it has an influence on the future.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR OIB AMERICAN OPTION WRITTEN EXAMINATION: ESSAY

N.B. A short response may require assessment to be lowered.

Category	Below Level -0.5 or more at the discretion of the examiner	Level 0	Level 1 + 0.5	Level 2 + 1.0	Level 3 +1.5	Level 4 +2.0
Knowledge & Understanding	No true understanding or first-hand knowledge shown. Factual inaccuracies void argument.	Some understanding but superficial. Learned response replaces first-hand knowledge. Factual inaccuracies affect argument.	Satisfactory understanding and knowledge. Development may be limited with some inadvertent or minor factual inaccuracies.	Good overall understanding. Knowledge is full and developed.	Very good and thorough understanding, including some subtlety. Levels of meaning are apparent.	Excellent understanding, including some subtlety. Levels of meaning are apparent. Detailed and pertinent knowledge.
Response to the Question	Off-subject or no clear response discernible. Observation, commentary or opinion may be present but no attempt to form an argument.	Response is partial or muddled. Argument is directed at the question but may be confused or superficial.	A satisfactory response to the main implications of the question. Some aspects of the question may be ignored.	A good response. Argument addresses the question but may need more development.	A very good response. Argument is complete and well-targeted, and the question is well-understood.	An excellent response. Argument demonstrates original thought and addresses the question with clarity and depth.
Analysis & Depth (Includes discussion of style at Level 2 and above)	Plot summary or generalizations dominate. No successful attempt at analysis.	Plot summary or generalizations frequent. Little or unsuccessful analysis.	Inconsistent analysis that does not always address important elements. Analysis may be uneven or lacking in depth.	Good analysis that appropriately addresses important elements. Generally appropriate analysis of style illustrated by relevant examples.	Very good analysis. Thoughtful, pertinent analysis of style. need more reference to style	Excellent analysis and argumentation. Insightful, sophisticated and coherent analysis of style.
Organization of the Essay & Integration of Evidence	No logical sequence of ideas. Chronological confusion. Development is so inadequate that clarity is in danger of dissolving completely.	Weak or mechanical structure. Development is barely adequate and examples are either impertinent or lack clear connection to the argument.	Satisfactory structure and development. Sequence of ideas generally logical. Examples not always pertinent and integration may be awkward.	Good structure with some transitions. Sequence of ideas logical. Examples are generally pertinent and most often integrated appropriately.	Very good essay structure with solid transitions. Clear development throughout and good integration of supporting evidence.	Excellent essay structure with clear transitions. Carefully planned, persuasive development throughout. Sophisticated integration of supporting evidence.
Expression	Meaning often cannot be surmised. The essay is very difficult to read.	Prose can be read and its meaning surmised even if hampered by weak control (or French interference).	Prose conveys the writer's ideas adequately. Vocabulary is sufficient and notions of good English usage are evident if sometimes inconsistently applied.	Prose shows evidence of good writing skills. Lapses are minor and do not impede understanding. Some care is shown in word choice and register.	Prose is clear and coherent. A rare lapse does not mar ideas or flow. Effective use of vocabulary and register.	Prose is articulate, fluid, and displays an excellent command of written language. Sophisticated use of vocabulary and register.
Totals						