

A) "My yesterdays walk with me." Discuss the role of the past in two OIB works.

In The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood and in To Earthward by Robert Frost, the past and history of the protagonists occupies an important place. However, the use of the past in these sometimes differs as it is presented in a different way. Still, both authors use this focus as a way to give more depth to their protagonist or to show the experience one has developed in response to, events and encounters and therefore, life.

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In J. The Handmaid's Tale, Offred, the main character, is described as an adult whose life has been stolen. The Gilead society, in which the story is set, is a dystopian reality in which fertile women are forced to become handmaids and bear children for richer ladies unable to have kids. Their transformation into handmaids and of their society led to a forced loss of their memories. The aunts, older women who train them into becoming handmaids, make them reject their past and prohibit them from remembering their old lives. At first in the book, Atwood doesn't reveal the protagonist's past and presents her as a bland character, a servile handmaid. However, as the story goes on, the reader learns more about Offred. Atwood gives her power as Offred lets her mind wander and has flashbacks of her previous life. Stream of consciousness leads Offred to describe her surroundings and associate them to things she has already seen, heard, smelled, felt or tasted "The kitchen smells of yeast, a nostalgic smell. It reminds me of other kitchens, kitchens that were mine. It smells of mothers; although my own mother did not make bread. It smells of me, in former times, when I was a mother. This is a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out.". Such a description in a first time, goes against the society's values and rules, as said in the last sentence, and secondly, gives more depth to Offred as well as it shows her knowledge of the world. It gives more information on her position as a mother, but also what kind of mother she was as well as more information on her own mother. Stream of consciousness lets the author demonstrate the extent of Offred's mind, memories and experience. It unintentionally gives a better understanding of the character as well as her past experiences. It highlights her past and illustrates how it lives up with her and how humans are unable to completely let go of it. Atwood also brings up the past but through flashbacks without any transition "Lying in bed, with Luke, his hand on my rounded belly. The three of us, in bed, she kicking, turning over, within me. Thunderstorm outside the window, that's why she's awake, they can hear, they can sleep, they can be startled, even there in the soothing of the heart, like waves on the shores around them.". This sudden memory once again gives more details about her way of living before but also, her experience as a pregnant woman and her knowledge on babies. She explains their sensations within the uterus as she already could feel it through her daughter. Bringing up the past, highlights her previous experiences and the lessons it brought her. **In the Handmaid's tale, Margaret Atwood gives power to Offred, and details about her previous life as well as her knowledge of the world to readers by letting Offred describe her surroundings, and, associating it to things she knows by adding sudden flashbacks.** Her past is omnipresent and accompanies her through her journey, it "walks along with her".

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Commenté [1]: good observation

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Commenté [2]: excellent job linking style/language/devices to how they enhance your thematic argument

Commenté [3]: good

On the other hand, in "To Earthward", Robert Frost describes young love from the point of view of an elder as the reader understands throughout the poem. The reader is confronted with, the protagonist's experience, his past, before "meeting" him. However, throughout the

Mis en forme : Non souligné

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whole work, he comes to describe his present self confronting his recurring memories of the past and the comparisons that come with them "I craved strong sweets, but those / seemed strong when I was young;". Frost uses repetition of the word "strong" to demonstrate the shift between old and young. He brings up the present as he talks about the past, which sounds gone as he uses the past simple, by now giving his vision of things. This highlights how his present is filled with comparisons to his past and how he does not forget his previous experiences and the shift reinforces that feeling. A bit further in the poem, Frost describes the elder's present, however, he compares it to the past and is brought, once again, to do its description "Now no joy but lacks salt, / that is not dashed with pain / and weariness and fault". His life is now bland, not filled with pain as well as happiness. And this emptiness leads him to go back again and again to his past and tell the reader about his past experiences. Frost emphasizes these experiences by using sensory imagery with "salt" as he compares love to a taste, a metaphor he wouldn't be able to do if he hadn't experienced both. Moreover, even though Frost starts by describing the elder's present life, he ends up describing the "salt" that is now lacking and that once was a major thing in his life. The elder seems like he's attached to his past and that it lives with him. The knowledge it made him acquire lets him describe in a more profound way what he feels. It also leads him to take a stepback to analyze what's happening in his life, something he learned to do after being too passionate. Finally, in the last two stanzas of his poem, Frost focuses on the elder's health and feelings. Throughout these lines, he also describes metaphorically how the past lives up with him "When stiff and sore and scarred / I take away my hand / from leaning on it hard / in grass and sand". In this metaphor in which "grass" and "sand" represent love that at first seems soft, Frost synthesizes this idea that experience leaves a permanent mark which leads people to take a step back and always have in mind their past to go further and do better than the previous time. "stiff", "sore" and "scarred" illustrate how the past lives with us and how, sometimes, experiences mostly come from trauma and pain, at least for subjects such as love. For example, the opposition between the soft grass and sand and the scars they leave might be proof that even the most pointless things have an impact on us and that we live with them even years after. Frost, throughout its poem about young love, draws attention to how recurring our past is in our lives, how useful it is to compare it to things we are now facing and how the most insignificant event still leaves traces and lives with us. To illustrate these, he uses metaphor, diction of pain and trauma as well as sensory imagery.

Commenté [4]: good job illustrating your point with devices/language

In both works, the past is used as a way to draw attention to the knowledge that comes with time and experiences as well as how it follows the different characters and how it impacts them. Frost highlights the past and not the present like Atwood does. He first builds his poem on something gone to then bring the actual protagonist and associate him to what has been said. It lets him highlight the importance of the past and how the character is always brought back to it. However, through a totally different manner, Atwood expresses this same recurrence. To do so, she first starts by presenting the present and as she describes it, bring up the past. She also brings it up in very sudden flashbacks that emphasize this omnipresence in the protagonist's life. Nevertheless, these two ways of bringing up the past still create some differences in the purposes these works have as they use this theme. In Margaret Atwood's novel, this use of the past firstly serves the character's depth and history. However, through stream of consciousness, it also highlights how our knowledge is based on personal experience and therefore, how humans tend to use their history on a daily basis for a better understanding of their surroundings. To build new things, humans need the

Commenté [5]: good -- clear, persuasive

knowledge they acquired in the past. In Frost's poem, the recurrence of the past and its description also demonstrate how previous experiences serve humans in their daily lives. Nevertheless, Frost doesn't specifically talk about knowledge but how the past brings humans to do comparisons and use their history as a base for these. Moreover, he also insists that everything has an impact on someone even the most pointless things by depicting the scars they leave behind. Furthermore, just like in Atwood's novel, it serves the character of the elder as it gives him a backstory even though this protagonist seems more to be a pretext to Frost to write about young love from the point of view of an old man. Despite these slight differences, both works have a found interest in the use humans do of the past in their lives. Both authors draw attention to the knowledge it comes with and how it serves humans to describe their surroundings, have a deeper understanding of it and make connections and comparisons to things they've already witnessed or experienced. This way, the past has a tendency to live with humans whether it's through flashbacks, descriptions, scars or comparisons.

In both of the works The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood and To Earthward by Robert Frost the characters' past lives along with them. In The Handmaid's Tale, Offred has multiple flashbacks in which the reader learns more about her past as well as descriptions using her past for reference. In To Earthward, Frost starts by describing the past to then compare it to the present and the marks it left. In these two pieces, the past is the protagonists' knowledge in a way. For Offred, it's a way to link her surroundings to something familiar and for the elder, it's a way to compare and contrast his present to something he knows. Even though it is presented in a completely different manner through these two works, the past constitutes each human, its experience and its knowledge. Each action leaves marks that stay until death, every moment, even the most painful one should be kept and memorized as a way to evolve in the future. The knowledge, the comfort humans can feel in unfamiliar spaces as well as the comparisons they are able to make come from their past and experience. Through knowledge, the past walks along with the different characters and humans.

Commenté [6]: Nice, solid conclusion.