

**Authors sometimes change the order of events in literary works while sometimes events play out in chronological sequence. Discuss how and why authors change the order of events in two literary works, and the effects created by these choices.**

One purpose of literature is to reflect on how the past shapes the present. For this reason, writers often change the order of events to revisit the past in the hope of understanding their impact on people in the present. In both *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang and *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* by Ocean Vuong, the writers return to the past to explore the effects of trauma on individuals. However, the techniques they use to explore the past are different. As a novelist, Han Kang uses flashback dream sequences to reveal how Yeong-hye, the story's protagonist and victim, was abused by her father. On the other hand, Ocean Vuong uses non-linear chronology throughout his poetry collection to explore the effect of the Vietnam War on his father and discover why he is such a violent man in the present.

In *The Vegetarian* and *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*, both writers want to explore how traumas from the past impact the lives of individuals in the present. In Han Kang's case, she tells the story of Yeong-hye who one day decides to turn vegetarian. To her family, this is a radical behaviour change and the resulting conflict leads to Yeong-hye's hospitalization and eventual death. By returning to the past, Han Kang reveals that this decision was triggered by abuse Yeong-hye suffered as a child at the hands of her father. Not only was she beaten but she was forced to eat the flesh of a murdered dog. Throughout her life Yeong-hye repressed these traumatic events, but now they have resurfaced as destructive impulses. Her turning vegetarian is an attempt to sublimate these violent impulses into non-harmful behaviour. Similarly, Ocean Vuong changes the order of events in his poetry collection to explore the impact of the Vietnam War on his family, particularly his father. As the war took place before he was even born, he chooses to arrange his poems in non-chronological order, beginning with a childhood memory, then moving back in time before returning to the present day. Just like Han Kang, Ocean Vuong changes the order of events to reveal how repressed trauma impacted his father who was a veteran of the war, and is scarred by his experiences. While his poems are not dream sequences, they are often 'dream-like' as he presents images of the past in a highly visual and surreal way, suggesting the difficulty of reimagining the experiences that his father was forced to endure.

To convey the intensity of past events, both authors use graphic language that contrasts with the language used elsewhere in their works. For example, in his poem *Aubade with Burning City*, Ocean Vuong returns to a time before he was born: 1975, on the day that the north Vietnamese army entered Saigon. As tanks roll into the city and bombs fall, Vuong presents several graphic images of violence and destruction. These images include falling

bombs, a policeman facedown in a pool of blood, and a graphic image of a small dog with his hind legs crushed. Presenting such violent scenes makes his father's erratic and violent tendencies explicable to his readers, as they become aware of the damage caused by PTSD. Equally, Han Kang uses graphic imagery when she returns to the past through describing Yeong-hye's dreams. These passages are filled with graphic descriptions of dead animals that are presented as if they have been murdered and tortured. Language is sharp and violent, filled with words like '*squished*' and '*skewered*' to suggest not only Yeong-hye's fear but to comment on the pain caused by the mass scale killing of animals to eat. A repeated word is '*blood*' which becomes a symbol for the harm that humans cause to other creatures and the violence of living in a modern society. Just like Ocean Vuong's writing, these scenes are likely to shock the reader and imprint violent images on their imaginations. Understanding the extent of Yeong-hye's past trauma helps readers understand the extremity of her actions in the present, ensuring their sympathy. Therefore, through changing the order of events combined with using graphic language when writing about the past, both writers successfully demonstrate how traumatic events can reverberate through time and impact individuals many years later.

While both writers change the order of events in their works, the methodologies they use to manipulate time are different. On one hand, Han Kang uses dream sequence flashbacks to take readers back to Yeong-hye's childhood and reveal her repressed memories. The dreams are disorientating and confusing: for example, Yeong-hye dreams she is trapped in a huge barn filled with hanging meat, but the meat is still raw and fresh, dripping blood. The barn has '*no exit*' symbolizing how Yeong-hye feels she is still trapped in the past. When presenting these passages, Han Kang uses italics, so the flashbacks look visually different to the reader. This is because they are the only sections of the novel told from Yeong-hye's point of view. The rest of her story is narrated by her husband, who describes Yeong-hye's situation in a detached and emotionless way. He uses banal language to describe his wife, repeating words from the lexical field of '*ordinary*' such as '*plain*' and '*unremarkable*' to paint a picture of Yeong-hye as dull and uninteresting. In the flashback sequences Han Kang uses vivid, spiky language, fracturing the sentences into short sharp phrases and revealing a sense of Yeong-hye's fearful inner thoughts. Therefore, an important reason for changing the order of events is to give the reader a truer insight into Yeong-hye's character. Unlike her husband, we are exposed to the trauma of her repressed memories and sympathize with why she would suddenly decide to turn vegetarian in the present day.

On the other hand, rather than interweaving his narrative with flashback scenes, Ocean Vuong arranges his poems in a non-linear fashion to explore the impact of war on his father, who's presented as a complex figure, sometimes tender, sometimes violent. To represent the different sides of his father, Vuong mixes different symbols throughout different poems.

In *Threshold*, a poem set during Vuong's childhood, his father is a 'colt', both a powerful horse and a type of gun. At this stage in the collection, his violent tendencies simmer below the surface and are yet to strongly emerge. In a later poem, *Immigrant Haibun*, Vuong takes the reader back in time to when his father and mother were crossing to the US and he was yet unborn. Here, his father is associated with a '*violin*,' a gentler symbol and something he burns to keep his mother warm. The musical instrument symbolizes his father's pre-war identity so, while burning the violin is a tender act of care, it's also an act of destruction foreshadowing the violence of the father later in the collection. Unlike Kang, who carefully delineates her flashback sequences using italics and section breaks, Vuong manipulates time inside a single poem, running images from the past and present together using enjambment. For example, his father comforts a stranded dolphin by repeating 'Ok, Ok...' and suddenly the word turns into 'AK-47' and the reader is plunged back into the jungles of Vietnam dodging sniper fire. This technique is an effective way of recreating PTSD, which sends his father's mind back in time and causes sudden violent outbreaks. Therefore, while the methodologies they use to manipulate time are different, both writers change the order of events for a similar reason: to show how suppressed trauma can re-emerge many years later in the form of unpredictable, extreme, and even violent behaviour.

In conclusion, both Ocean Vuong and Han Kang change the order of events in their works to explore the effect of the past on the present. While the methods they use differ, both writers reveal how repressed trauma can re-emerge to effect individuals and prompt drastic behaviour changes. One final way the works differ is in outlook. Vuong returns to the past as a way of reflection and his poetry collection is an act of healing on his part. Eventually, he comes to terms with his father's condition and yearns to reconnect with him. By contrast, Han Kang shows how some traumas are irreversible. Throughout the novel, Yeong-hye's condition gets progressively worse. Convinced that she must try to live without inflicting violence on others, eventually she stops eating at all, and sacrifices her own life.