

Candidate 1

Texts used: B/C (2015 paper)

Through my comparison of and contrast between 'Roundabout Papers' and 'The Poplar Field', I aim to explore reminiscence and mortality with regards to memory.

By contrasting the tones of the two narrators, their differing approaches to mortality is evident. The tone in 'The Poplar Field' is melancholy, as the narrator reflects on the absence of those things he reminisces of - 'The Poplars are fell'd', 'the winds play no longer'. The narrator focuses on the loss of these things and a feeling of deathlike emptiness is conveyed - the felling of the trees represents a loss of life and fertility, and the absence of the singing of the winds creates a melancholic silence. The trees have been reduced from a once position of power, casting bounteous shade, whereas now, defeated, they serve only as a seat. The sibilance in 'Hasting' gives a sense of listlessness and the repeated 'I' sounds give a sense of languor and slowness. One might argue that the trees represent how the narrator feels - past the prime of his life, helpless compared to his former power. Contrastingly, the narrator in 'Roundabout Papers' indulges in the use of imagery to fondly reminisce on the feelings felt before - this tone is joyous. The imagery appeals to the senses, such as auditory imagery 'the women crying out', which invites the reader to hear the shrill female voices ring in our ears; the gustatory images of cutlets and wine, appealing to our tastebuds and longing for rich indulgent food - the olfactory imagery in which we too smell the universally inviting and comforting 'fresh smell of the sheets'. By these examples, the narrator demonstrates how vivid these images are in his mind which he conveys so well. Phrases such as 'wonderful' and 'endless amusement' truly encapsulate the narrator's fond memories and invite us to picture an elderly man smiling to himself as he recounts the adventures of his youth. In his descriptions, there is a sense of life, 'beautiful beings', as opposed to the 'fell'd poplars' and the lack of the 'sweetflowing ditty' in 'The Poplar Field'. In the poem, there is very much a pessimistic acceptance of mortality - he ponders on his 'perishing pleasures' and he even pre-empts his oncoming rest, to 'long lie...with a turf on my breast and a stone at my head'. The narrator only sees his memories as a reminder of his ever-present mortality. The poem's narrator is truly miserable - yet the narrator of 'Roundabout Papers' insists

that despite his quiet and perhaps melancholy outward appearance, inside he 'has gone back to the days of his youth', revelling in his ripe age of seventeen or eighteen. Indeed, the narrator, by way of authorial intrusion, directly addresses the reader by inviting us to see memory and reminiscence the way he does – 'a man can be alive in 1860 and 1830 at the same time, don't you see?' He contrasts himself outwardly 'inert, silent, torpid' with the vitality and youth he feels inwardly – his 'spirit' is proud, experienced, in the prime of his life 'in a blue dress-coat and brass buttons', 'a sweet figured silk waistcoat', he revels in his youthful physicality with a 'slim waist' free from the shaking fingers wracked, perhaps, with arthritis, as in his youth buttons (done up with 'perfect ease') presented no challenge. Outside, he may seem 'dull and silent' but inside he is enjoying the folly of youth. His imagination is so vivid, that he can see them with 'perfect clearness', ignoring the place he actually is in. This shows a true vitality of memory – the focus is very much on life, whereas 'The Poplar Field's' narrator is undoubtedly consumed by death.

Interestingly, despite the overall tone of bleakness in 'The Poplar Field' it must be noted that the blackbird has fled to another retreat and his song is described as being a 'melody' and 'sweet-flowing ditty'. This ambiguity is perplexing – a blackbird usually connotes death, yet the black bird is not present in the poem. Perhaps the narrator is demonstrating that before, he was comforted by this reminder of his mortality by the lyrical tune – but now, in silence, he has only his death to consume his thoughts. Thus, this absence of sound in the poem truly depicts the sorrow and emptiness, yet in 'Roundabout Papers' there is constant sound and life of 'squealing' and exclamations 'away!'.

It is apparent in both texts that both narrators are disappointed in the destruction of the physical entities which contained, or represented, their fond memories – the poplar trees. 'Bombarda's, Hotel Breteuil' and the 'poor old Virginia Coffee-house'. Yet the differing ways in which the narrators deal with this loss are stark – for the narrator of the poem, these entities encapsulated all the memories and without them, there is nothing left to fondly reminisce on, whereas 'Roundabout Papers' narrator conjures up the images in his mind, the place names such as 'Tuileries' and 'Place Vendome' make the passage much more personal and familiar. Thus for the former, nostalgia and reminiscence

brings pain, yet for the latter it brings happiness, 'amusing himself with all his might'. Perhaps his reference to 'you young folks' is a marked observance that for the youth, they need constant activity to amuse themselves – yet for this 'oldster', his fascinating memory of his adventurous life is enough to carry him back in time and amuse himself. He acknowledges that in old age he feels differently about the places he sees now which he visited in his youth: 'I hardly see you... but you make me think of a time when you were indeed wonderful.'

Thus, it can be concluded that in 'The Poplar Field', there is a distinct feeling of finality, ending the poem on a sombre note in which mortality and death is accepted. Contrastingly, the narrator in 'Roundabout Papers' acknowledges his old age but ends in his ability to relive the past through his memory – he is mortal, yet memory is undeniably immortal.