

Candidate 2

Texts used: C/F (2015 paper)

The reliability and resulting glorification of memory is presented to varying extents within 'Roundabout Papers' and 'Ancient Light'. While in 'Roundabout Papers' the narrator's memory of Calais is not questioned, in 'Ancient Light' the narrator more freely admits the imperfections of memory.

Comment [A1]: The candidate's introduction considers the reliability of memory and briefly relates this idea to the two passages.

Thackeray's use of extreme specificity and sensory images enact the narrator reliving the experience through the conjuring of the image in the readers' mind. The polysyndetic listing of auditory imagery in 'the voices of the women', visual imagery in 'the red-calico canopy' and tactile imagery in 'the tiled floor' create the sense that the account is entirely factual, as does the assertion that 'I am seeing there'. The use of 'seeing' rather than 'remembering' again creates the sense that the narrator is experiencing exactly what factually happened, with his confidence in this shown by 'perfect clearness'. Conversely, the use of rhetorical questions in 'Ancient Light' suggests uncertainty of the narrator, with 'what, eighty-three, eighty-four?' showing the narrator's lack of conviction on the time, which contrasts to the specific use of '1828'. Similarly, 'what do I recall of her,' conveys a struggle for memory on the part of the narrator, whereas Thackeray's narrator has so great a memory he is able to recall more than 'merely' the place, but also sensations. Banville's narrator portrays memory in a more negative light, as both inaccurate and misleading. The metaphor of a shipwreck is used to this end, thus evoking ideas of chaos and disorganisation. The act of remembering is described as much more deliberate in 'Ancient Light', with the narrator taking action shown by the use of verbs and the personal pronoun in 'I choose' and 'I put them'. Conversely, in Thackeray's piece the memories themselves appear to be taking action through 'all return'; it is the memories choosing themselves in effect, and therefore there is little need for effort on the narrator's part. 'Roundabout Papers' therefore shows memory as innate and uncorruptible, accessed with ease, whereas 'Ancient Light' portrays memory as unreliable and transient, and therefore something that must be acted upon.

Comment [A2]: The answer immediately demonstrates close reading skills, outlining Thackeray's techniques which will later be exemplified in detail.

Comment [A3]: The candidate makes precise judgements about word choice.

Comment [A4]: Early in the answer, a contrast is made with the other chosen passage, supplying apt examples from both.

Comment [A5]: Grammatical analysis helps the candidate to distinguish between an active narrator and one who is more passive.

Banville's narrator, despite admitting that his memory is made up of 'embroidering and embellishing' still wishes to relive it in much the same way as

the narrator of 'Roundabout Papers'. His statement of 'I should like to be in love again' and desire to 'be as we were' clearly illustrate this, and echo the glorification of the past shown by Thackeray in 'You were indeed wonderful'.

Comment [A6]: The candidate finds points of comparison as well as contrast.

While Thackeray's narrator is able to revive the memory to such a vivid extent that his spirit 'goes and dines there', Banville's appears unable to, rather being trapped in the present and therefore taking on a tone of longing, his nostalgia particularly displayed in 'just once more'. Again, therefore, the accuracy of Thackeray's narrator's memory allows a specificity of description that Banville's does not through entering the past in 'spirit'.

The glorification of the past by both Thackeray and Banville's narrators exists only when it is compared to the present through their memories. Thackeray partially shows this through his sentence structure; in the setting of 1860 a succession of two syllable words ('inert, silent, torpid') create uniformity and a slow pace, whereas the detailed, run-on description of the spirit in 1828 evokes excitement and irregularity, as does the exclamation of 'Away!'. Banville's narrator's description of 'these days' also appears negative, with the use of 'not great', however his desire to be in love again appears and with the admission that Mrs Gray was 'so unhappy', however again his uncertainty in his assertions is shown by the 'must have been', which rather than qualifying his assertion confuses it further.

Comment [A7]: An interesting stylistic moment is selected for comment.

Comment [A8]: The answer sustains its argument relating to the imperfections of memory.

Overall, 'Roundabout Papers' and 'Ancient Light' differ largely in their portrayal of the reliability of memory. While Thackeray's narrator's memory is displayed as 'perfect' through sensory imagery, which is listed to emphasize the volume and strength of his memories, Banville's narrator is entirely uncertain of his memory. Though similar to Thackeray's 'images... crowd in my head' they are shown to be confused and isolated through his metaphor of a shipwreck. Both narrators glorify their memories of the past when compared to the present, however Thackeray's narrator enacts this by looking to the past and reliving them, Banville's looks to the future and the possibility of simply repeating events in the hopes they will [appear] as they 'were fifty years ago', unable to relive memories due to their 'random' nature.

Comment [A9]: The conclusion relates closely to the intention expressed in the introduction.

Examiner Marks: 27 + 27 = 54

This answer is well structured, detailed and perceptive. Comprehension of both passages is very good and the answer moves confidently between them. The candidate meets all of the mark scheme's requirements for Band 1. The answer is notable for its clarity and control, especially in identifying an area of interest and sustaining it throughout. To achieve a higher mark, the candidate would need to write a little more expansively and respond with greater literary imagination. A consideration of genre may have helped to extend the answer. (The genre of each extract is given in the question paper, and in this answer extracts from a magazine article and a novel are being compared.)