The Cone-Gatherers by Robin Jenkins

**In this extract from Chapter One, Duror is secretly watching the cone-gatherers.**

Hidden among the spruces at the edge of the ride, near enough to catch the smell of larch

off the cones and to be struck by some of those thrown, stood Duror the gamekeeper, in an

icy sweat of hatred, with his gun aimed all the time at the feebleminded hunchback

grovelling over the rabbit. To pull the trigger, requiring far less force than to break a

5 rabbit’s neck, and then to hear simultaneously the clean report of the gun and the last

obscene squeal of the killed dwarf would have been for him, he thought, release too, from

the noose of disgust and despair drawn, these past few days, so much tighter.

He had waited over an hour there to see them pass. Every minute had been a purgatory of

humiliation: it was as if he was in their service, forced to wait upon them as upon his

10 masters. Yet he hated and despised them far more powerfully than ever he had liked and

respected Sir Colin and Lady Runcie-Campbell. While waiting, he had imagined them in

the darkness missing their footing in the tall tree and coming crashing down through the

sea of branches to lie dead on the ground. So passionate had been his visualising of that

scene, he seemed himself to be standing on the floor of a fantastic sea, with an owl and a

15 herd of roe-deer flitting by quiet as fish, while the yellow ferns and bronzen brackens at

his feet gleamed like seaweed, and the spruce trees swayed above him like submarine

monsters.

He could have named, item by item, leaf and fruit and branch, the overspreading tree of

revulsion in him; but he could not tell the force which made it grow, any more than he

20 could have explained the life in himself, or in the dying rabbit, or in any of the trees about

him.

This wood had always been his stronghold and sanctuary; there were many places secret

to him where he had been able to fortify his sanity and hope. But now the wood was

invaded and defiled; its cleansing and reviving virtues were gone. Into it had crept this

25 hunchback, himself one of nature’s freaks, whose abject acceptance of nature, like the

whining prostrations of a heathen in front of an idol, had made acceptance no longer

possible for Duror himself. He was humpbacked, with one shoulder higher than the other;

he had no neck, and on the misshapen lump of his body sat a face so beautiful and

guileless as to be a diabolical joke.

Questions

1. Analyse how the word choice in lines 1—7 conveys Duror’s loathing for Calum. 2

2. By referring to lines 8—17, explain how the writer makes the reader aware of Duror’s disturbed state of mind. 4

3. Analyse how the imagery in lines 18—29 gives insight into Duror’s feelings. 4

4. By referring to this extract and elsewhere in the novel, discuss the importance of the conflict between Duror and Calum. 10

**Marking Scheme**

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| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | Candidates should analyse how word choice  conveys Duror’s loathing for Calum.  2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **2** | Possible answers include:  • “feebleminded” suggests he sees him as stupid, sub-normal  • “hunchback” a very belittling, offensive word, suggests he focuses on the deformity  • “grovelling” distorts Calum’s attempts at mercy into something demeaning, as if he’s begging, bowing and scraping  • “obscene” suggests any sound from Calum would be seen as something disgusting, lascivious |
| **2** | Candidates should explain how the writer makes the reader aware of Duror’s disturbed state of mind.  2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone. | **4** | Possible answers include:   * that he had “waited over an hour” just to see them suggests it is an obsession * “purgatory of humiliation” is an exaggerated way to describe his feelings, suggests how deeply affected he is * “as if … forced to wait upon them as upon his masters” — a reversal of the norm, suggests how distorted his view is * his apparent desire to see the cone-gatherers come to harm, a sense of relish in “come crashing down” and “lie dead on the ground” * the extended metaphor in which he imagines himself standing on a sea floor and sees features around him as if they were underwater — bizarre, dreamlike, surreal: * “standing on the floor of a fantastic sea” — acknowledges that it’s dreamlike, fanciful * “with an owl and a herd of roe-deer flitting by quiet as fish” — terrestrial creatures transformed in his mind into aquatic ones * “ferns and bronzen bracken … gleamed like seaweed” — terrestrial flora transformed into aquatic, ironically described in terms of great beauty * “spruce trees … like submarine monsters” — distorted view of trees as dangerous/ threatening underwater beasts |
| **3** | Candidates should analyse how the imagery gives insight into Duror’s feelings.  2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **4** | Possible answers include:   * “the overspreading tree of revulsion in him” sees, recognises the hatred within him as organic, taking him over totally * “his stronghold and sanctuary” gives the idea of him being at war, needing to defend himself, being isolated * “fortify his sanity and hope” shows awareness that he is mentally unstable and wishes to fight against this * “invaded and defiled” depicts the conegatherers as an enemy, a threat, corrupting, dirty * “its cleansing and reviving virtues” depicts the wood as a place of healing, suggests he views nature as more powerful perhaps than human agency * “like the whining prostrations of a heathen in front of an idol” sees Calum as something alien, primitive, submissive, lacking dignity, entirely different * “diabolical joke” as if dreamed up by the devil, intended to cause him (Duror) suffering; “joke” because of the incongruity of the ugly features and the beautiful face |
| **4** | Candidates should discuss the importance of the conflict between Duror and Calum and should refer to appropriate textual evidence to support their  discussion.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone.  Candidates can answer in  bullet points in this final question,or write a number of linked statements. | **10** | Up to 2 marks can be achieved for identifying elements of commonality as identified in  the question  A further 2 marks can be achieved for reference to the extract given.  6 additional marks can be awarded for discussion of similar references to at least one other poem by the poet.  In practice this means:  Identification of commonality (2) (e.g.: theme, characterisation, use of imagery, setting,  or any other key element…)  from the extract:  1 x relevant reference to technique/idea/feature (1)  1 x appropriate comment (1)  (maximum of 2 marks only for discussion of extract) from at least one other text/part of the text:  as above (x3) for up to 6 marks  OR  more detailed comment x2 for up to 6 marks  Thus, the final 6 marks can be gained by a combination of 3, 2 and 1 marks depending on  the level of depth/detail/insight.  The aim would be to encourage quality of comment, rather than quantity of references.  Reference could be made to the  following:  • Duror’s lying about Calum exposing himself  • the deer drive  • the ending  Many other references are possible. |