The Cone-Gatherers by Robin Jenkins

The extract is from Chapter Nine.

It was well after picture time when Duror managed to get away from the doctor’s. He’d drunk

more whisky than he’d done for years. The result was a revulsion against the doctor’s

reiterated philosophy of endurance; indeed, as he walked slowly but steadily along the pier

road back into the village he felt in a mood for murder, rape, or suicide.

5 At the edge of the harbour he halted and stared down at the water, which he could hear

slapping gently against the slimy wall. Another step, and down he’d fall, enveloped in the

bag of his own wish for death: perhaps, like the she-cat he’d once drowned, he’d struggle a

little, cowardly at the end; but he was no strong swimmer and would soon enough sink, to

rise again bloated to sicken the godly tomorrow on their way to kirk with their Bibles in their

10 hands. Then, taking himself by surprise, he began to laugh, louder and louder, more and

more harshly, as it occurred to him that perhaps the tide was going out, there was only a

foot or so of water, and all that would happen to him would be a leg broken. He would be

lugged out like an old boot by some officious hero, and sent home to lie in the house all day,

listening to Peggy’s whines of sympathy.

15 Still laughing, he glanced along towards the cinema where, years ago, he had seen a comedy

about a man who, jilted by his sweetheart because of his torn-trousered poverty, had tried

in various ways to commit suicide without success: the fun had been in the failures. He had

lain down on a railway track in the front of an express; it had switched onto another track

a few yards away. He had tried to hang himself: the rope had broken. He had drunk poison:

20 it had turned his hair long and curly. The audience in the picture house had squealed with

laughter at his droll disappointments. In the end of course he’d dropped into a fortune and

married his repentant sweetheart.

No doubt, thought Duror, a similar comedy could be made of his own position: Peggy was fat

enough, and he was at the end of the plank of despair.

25 He headed straight for the hotel bar. A drunk made to greet him with solemn civility, but he

thrust him aside. The thought was in his mind to pick a quarrel in there. To feel his fist

crashing against someone’s face, hateful only for its human shape, would be a relief and

compensation, whatever happened afterwards.

Questions

1. Analyse how the writer’s use of language in lines 1—4 emphasises Duror’s mood. 2
2. By referring to at least two examples, analyse how the writer’s use of language in lines 5—14 reveals the warped nature of Duror’s mind. 4
3. Analyse how the sentence structure in lines 15—22 clarifies Duror’s recollection of the film. 2
4. Analyse how the writer’s use of language in lines 23—28 conveys Duror’s state of mind. 2
5. By referring to the extract and to elsewhere in the novel, discuss the extent to which you think Duror is mentally unstable. 10

***Marking Scheme***

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| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | Candidates should analyse how the writer’s use of language emphasises Duror’s mood.  Award 2 marks for one detailed/insightful comment,  Award 1 mark for a more basic comment plus reference. Award marks 2 or 1 + 1  Award 0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **2** | Possible answers include:  • “managed to get away” suggests dissatisfaction with the doctor’s company  • “revulsion” suggests deep disgust  • “slowly but steadily” suggests ponderous, deep in thought  • the semicolon introduces an expansion on his already dark mood  • positioning of “indeed” emphasises the idea that his mood is even darker than at first thought • list of “murder, rape or suicide” suggests the extent of his dark thoughts  • each of “murder”, “rape” has connotations of violent crime, arousing most revulsion in society • “suicide” reveals the depth of his despair, an act which is to some the ultimate sin |
| **2** | Candidates should analyse how the writer’s use of language reveals the warped nature of Duror’s mind.  Award 2 marks for a detailed/insightful comment plus reference.  Award 1 mark for a more basic comment plus reference. Award 0 marks for reference/quotation alone. | **4** | Possible answers include:  • “slapping gently against the slimy wall” mixes a pleasant sound (“gently”) with an ugly description (“slimy”) which hints at distortion in his mind  • “enveloped in the bag of his own wish for death”—the imagery suggests he sees himself wrapped up, ready for disposal  • compares himself with the “she-cat” and her “cowardly” struggle, as if visualising an embarrassing end for himself  • “sink to rise again bloated”—he imagines his own body in a disgusting state  • “to sicken the godly …with their Bibles in their hands”—as if he will derive some pleasure from upsetting the church-goers, whom he sees as ostentatiously devout  • the ability to “laugh, louder and louder” while contemplating suicide suggests a diseased mind • “more and more harshly” suggests something almost manic • “lugged out like an old boot” suggests self-loathing, being treated as worthless, with no respect  • “some officious hero” suggests contempt even for someone trying to help, reversal of the normal admiration for a “hero”  • “Peggy’s whines of sympathy”—reduces her attempts to care to the level of an annoying noise, as if being alive will be a punishment |
| **3** | Candidates should analyse how the sentence structure clarifies Duror’s recollection of the film.  Award 2 marks for a detailed/insightful comment plus reference.  Award 1 mark for a more basic comment plus reference. Award 0 marks for reference/quotation alone. | **2** | Possible answers include:  • colon before “the fun …” introduces a brief summary of the comedy  • the repeated pattern of “He had …” followed by “It [the rope] had …” emphasises the idea of one failed plan after another  • colon/semicolon used to create the balance between what he tried and how it failed  • insertion of “of course” reminds us that the happy ending was always a given, no matter how much the audience laughed at the failures; introduces a tone of disapproval of contrived ending |
| **4** | Candidates should analyse how the writer’s use of language conveys Duror’s state of mind. | **2** | Possible answers include:  • ironic, bitter use of “comedy” to describe his own situation  • “the end of the plank of despair”—imagery of “walking the plank”, but the plank is not physical; it is his own despair imagined as something physical  • “thrust him aside” suggests rough rejection of company, misanthropic reaction  • “To feel his fist crashing against someone’s face” suggests he relishes the idea of violence, almost a sensual pleasure; reinforced by the alliteration  • “crashing” suggests loud, violent action much larger than simply a fist in the face; it’s all exaggerated in his mind  • “whatever happened” suggests a lack of concern for the consequences |
| **5** | Candidates should discuss the extent to which they think Duror is mentally unstable.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone.  Candidates can answer in  bullet points in this final question,or write a number of linked statements. | **10** | Reference could be made to the following:  • his irrational hatred of the ConeGatherers, especially Calum, and of anything deformed • he consciously plans destruction of Calum, insists on his participation in the deer drive  • he lies about Calum—alleges he is a pervert  • he imagines himself as a “third brother”; visualises shooting them in a “hideous but liberating fratricide”  • the imagery used to describe him: “the tree of doom now high and ripe in him”, “monster”  • his behaviour at the deer drive  • his ambiguous relationship with LRC  • impact of domestic situation, disgust at wife, more attentive to his dogs  • the nightmare about Peggy being attacked by thrushes  Many other references are possible  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. |