The Cone-Gatherers by Robin Jenkins

**In this extract, Mr Tulloch arrives to speak with the brothers after their expulsion from the beach hut by Lady Runcie Campbell.**

When he caught sight of Neil ahead of him, he halted and watched from behind a slender

spruce long ago wind-blown, with its roots in the air. From that distance, judged only by

his gait, Neil appeared like an old man. He was gathering beech seed, which he had been

instructed to do whenever bad weather kept him from climbing. He would cautiously go

5 down on his haunches, wait, apparently to gather strength and endurance against the pain

of that posture, and then would begin to pick up the seed-cases or mast, squeeze each one

with his fingers to find if it were fertile, and drop it if it were not. The watching forester

knew most of them would not be, unless this luckily was the tree’s year of fertility:

otherwise as many as ninety out of a hundred would be barren. To fingers crippled with

10 rheumatism it would not be easy to examine them with the necessary patience. When that

area had been searched, Neil hobbled on his haunches to another. Thus he would go on

until break-time. Such fidelity to so simple but indispensable a task was to the forester as

noble and beautiful a sight as was to be seen in that wood so rich in magnificent trees. To

praise it would be to belittle it, so inadequate were words; but to fail to appreciate it or to

15 refuse to defend it, would be to admit the inadequacy of life itself.

He stepped out from behind the hanging roots, and without hurry approached the intent

seed-gatherer.

Neil looked up, saw him, stared a moment, and then went on with his inspection of the

beech nut. That one was fertile. He held it out to his employer.

20 “That’s the first good one in the last half hour, Mr Tulloch,” he said.

“Well, it’s a slow business, Neil,” replied the forester, smiling, “but look at the result.”

Walking forward he touched the huge grey trunk.

Behind him Neil began to sob. He did not turn to look, but kept stroking the tree.

“Don’t fret over it, Neil,” he said.

25 “It’s not for me,” sobbed Neil. “It’s for Calum.” And he began to pour out an account of the

expulsion from the beach hut, all mixed up with the story of the insult in the hotel bar. The

forester had heard about that episode from one of his workers, but he had been given to

believe that the soldier had apologised, and that afterwards the sympathy of nearly

everybody in the pub had been with the brothers.

30 “I’m responsible for him, Mr Tulloch,” said Neil. “If you were to ask me to whom I’m to give

account for the way I’ve looked after him, I couldn’t tell you; but I’m responsible just the

same.”

“No man on earth has ever looked after his brother so well,” replied Tulloch. “We all know

that. You can give a good account, no matter to whom.”

35 He turned round and saw, with a shock he did not show, how stooped and contorted Neil

was then, by rheumatism and despair: it was as if, in some terrible penance, he was

striving to become in shape like his brother.

“Why is it, Mr Tulloch,” he asked, “that the innocent have always to be sacrificed?”

“Is that really true, Neil?”

40 “Aye, it’s true. In this war, they tell me, babies are being burnt to death in their cradles.”

The forester was silent; his own brother had been killed at the time of Dunkirk.

“I suppose it’s so that other babies will be able to grow up and live like free men,” he said.

“But I see what you mean; in a way, aye, the innocent have to be sacrificed.”

“We were driven out like slaves, Mr Tulloch. Her dog was to be saved from the storm, but

45 not my brother.”

“I think maybe she was taken by surprise, Neil. She didn’t expect to find you there. After

all, you did get in by the window. Maybe she got a bit of a shock.”

“Did she think we were monkeys that would bite her?”

“I think she was in the wrong, Neil, but I would like to be fair to her. She’s a good woman

50 really; but she’s got a code to live by.”

Neil shook his head dourly.

“My brother’s the shape God made him,” he said. “What right has she, great lady though

she is, to despise him?”

“No right at all, Neil. But don’t think about it anymore. I’m seeing her this afternoon, and

55 I’m going to tell her I’m taking you back to Ardmore.”

Questions

1. Look at lines 1–37. By referring to at least two examples, analyse how Jenkins evokes both sympathy and admiration for Neil. 4
2. Look at lines 38–53. By referring to at least two examples, explain the reasons for Neil’s attitude to Lady Runcie Campbell. 4
3. Look at lines 38–55. Explain the reasons for Mr. Tulloch’s attitude to Lady Runcie Campbell and the ‘code’ by which she makes decisions. 2
4. Neil’s words “Why is it . . . that the innocent have always to be sacrificed?” clarify one of the central concerns of the text. With reference to such features as setting, characterisation and narrative in this extract and elsewhere in the novel, discuss how Jenkins develops our understanding of this central concern. 10

***Marking Scheme***

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| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | For full marks candidates should make reference to how both sympathy and admiration are evoked, but there is no requirement for equal coverage of the two elements.  Award 2 marks for one detailed/insightful comment, supported by reference from lines 1-40.  Award 1 mark for a more basic comment plus reference. Award marks 2 + 2 or 2 + 1 + 1 or 1 + 1 + 1 + 1  Award 0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **4** | References may be used to support sympathy and/or admiration.  Possible answers include:   * ‘Neil appeared like an old man…He would cautiously go down on his haunches, wait, apparently to gather strength and endurance against the pain of that posture…’ ― Neil’s rheumatism, worsened by Lady Runcie’s Campbell’s thoughtless rejection of the brothers from the beach hut and their subsequent soaking, causes him great pain and yet he is stoical and perseveres with the task in hand. The alliteration in ‘pain of that posture’ emphasises the discomfort. * ‘…and then would begin to pick up the seed-cases…if it were not.’ ― the detailed nature of Jenkins’ description emphasises the painstaking nature of the task/Neil’s dogged determination to carry out the task properly despite the pain he is in. * ‘…as ninety out of a hundred would be barren.’ ― the statistic demonstrates Neil’s perseverance in carrying out so futile a task, which adds to our admiration. * ‘crippled with rheumatism’, ‘hobbled on his haunches’ ―Jenkins’ detailed description(s) of the severity of Neil’s physical problems adds to the sympathy we feel for him. * ‘Such fidelity to so simple but indispensible a task…magnificent trees.’ ― Neil’s stoical commitment to his work evokes the simple goodness of the common man in the face of adversity. * ‘To praise it…inadequacy of life itself.’ ― Neil’s quiet faithfulness to his task is a thing of great nobility and seems to illustrate something fundamental about man’s existence. * ‘Behind him Neil began to sob’, ‘And he began to pour out an account of the expulsion…’ ― Neil’s burden of looking after and protecting Calum is overwhelming when he is faced with the thoughtless cruelty of others. ‘Sob’ has connotations of childish crying, which effectively conveys the distress of Neil. * ‘I’m responsible for him, Mr. Tulloch…’ ― Neil’s simple declaration of dedication to looking after and protecting Calum provokes great admiration. * ‘No man on earth has ever…so well.’ ― Mr Tulloch recognises Neil’s loyalty to Calum, and admires his selfless commitment to his brother’s well-being. * ‘…how stooped and contorted Neil was then, by rheumatism and despair…’ ― Neil’s problems are both physical and emotional, creating sympathy in the reader. * ‘…as if in some terrible penance, he was striving to become in shape like his brother.’ ―   the idea of Neil doing ‘penance’ because he feels such guilt for failing to stand up to Lady Runcie Campbell provokes sympathy for the despair he feels and the burden he carries on his own. |
| **2** | Candidates should explain Neil’s attitude to Lady Runcie Cambell. This attitude does not have to stated separately; it can be explained through the references given.  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** | Neil’s attitude towards Lady Runcie Campbell: he bitterly resents her superior attitude towards the brothers, in particular Calum, and is angered and insulted by her behaviour towards them.  Possible answers include:   * ‘Why is it, Mr Tulloch…that the innocent have always to be sacrificed?’ ― Neil is bitter about the way he and Calum have been treated because they are of low social standing in the eyes of Lady Runcie Campbell; they are not worthy so must be ‘sacrificed’ for her comfort. * He is also referring to the working class man fighting at war to preserve a way of life which gives nothing to him, or people like him (but is much to the benefit of the ruling elite as symbolised by Lady Runcie Campbell). * ‘We were driven out like slaves…Her dog was to be saved from the storm but not my brother.’ ― Neil is disgusted by Lady Runcie Campbell’s callous treatment of the brothers. She values animals over men, and thinks her superior social standing justifies her actions. * ‘Did she think we were monkeys that would bite her?’ ― Neil is angered by Lady Runcie Campbell’s ignorant prejudice towards the brothers, thinking that they are little better than uncivilised animals just because they are simple working men. * ‘Neil shook his head dourly. My brother’s the shape…to despise him?’ ― Neil cannot agree with Mr Tulloch’s more measured attitude towards Lady Runcie Campbell. He points out Lady Runcie Campbell’s arrogance in believing herself a greater judge than God Himself, but also hints at her hypocrisy as a Christian |
| **3** | Candidates should explain Mr Tulloch’s attitude to Lady Runcie Cambell. This attitude does not have to be stated separately; it can be explained through the references given.  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** | Mr Tulloch’s attitude towards Lady Runcie Campbell: he is more measured and sympathetic, recognising the conflict she feels between being seen to do her ‘duty’ as a member of the ruling class and reaching out to all men with Christian compassion.  Possible references include:   * ‘I think maybe she was taken by surprise…Maybe she got a bit of a shock.’ ― Tulloch recognises the unexpected nature of the brothers’ appearance in the beach hut, and is prepared to believe that Lady Runcie Campbell acted out of surprise rather than malice. * ‘She’s a good woman really; but she’s got a code to live by.’ ― Tulloch recognises that Lady Runcie Campbell’s decisions are driven by her need to be seen to be doing what is expected of a woman in her position. She must uphold the natural division between the classes and preserve the ‘code’ on which society is founded. |
| **5** | Candidates should discuss the central concern of the innocent being sacrificed, and its development, 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.  Elsewhere:   * The conflict involving Duror, Calum and Neil ― the weak and vulnerable at the mercy of a more powerful and malevolent force * The world of nature (the wood) mirrors the world of war: Jenkins’ use of animal imagery suggests a world of destruction and violence, culminating in the deer hunt * Calum’s death: the culmination of Calum’s Christ-like associations   Other references are possible. |