The Cone-Gatherers

**In this extract Duror is returning home to his wife, Peggy, and mother-in-law Mrs Lochie.**

“Is that you, John?” called his mother-in-law sharply from the living room.

“Aye, it's me,” he answered, and went in.

She was seated knitting beside the wireless set. The door to Peggy's bedroom was wide open to let her

too listen to the cheerful music.

5 Mrs Lochie was a stout white haired woman, with an expression of dour resoluteness that she wore

always, whether peeling potatoes or feeding hens or as present knitting a white bed jacket. It was her

intimation that never would she allow her daughter's misfortune to conquer her, but that also never

would she forgive whoever was responsible for that misfortune. Even in sleep her features did not relax,

as if God too was a suspect, not to be trusted.

10 “You're late,” she said, as she rose and put down her knitting. It was an accusation. “She's been

anxious about you. I'll set out your tea.”

“Thanks,” he said and stood still.

“Aren't you going in?” she asked. “That's her shouting for you.” She came close to him and

whispered. “Do you think I don't ken what an effort is for you?”

15 There was no pity in her question, only condemnation; and his very glance towards the bedroom

where his wife, with plaintive giggles, kept calling his name proved her right.

“It's a pity, isn't it?” whispered Mrs Lochie, with a smile, “she doesn't die and leave you in peace?”

He did not deny her insinuation, nor did he try to explain to her that love itself perhaps could

become paralysed.

20 “Take care, though,” she muttered, as she went away, “you don't let her see it.”

With a shudder he walked over and stood in the doorway of the bedroom.

Peggy was propped up on pillows, and was busy chewing.

The sweetness of her youth still haunting admist the great wobbling masses of pallid fat that

composed her face added to her grotesqueness of pathos that often had visitors bursting into

25 unexpected tears. She loved children but they were terrified by her; she would for hours dandle a

pillow as if it was a baby. Her hair was still wonderfully black and glossy, so that she insisted on

wearing it down about her shoulders, bound with red ribbons. White though was her favourite

colour. Her nightdresses, with lace at the neck and sleeves, were always white and fresh and carefully

ironed. When she had been well, in the first two years of their marriage, she had loved to race with

30 him hand-in-hand over more and field, through whins and briers, up knolls and hills to the clouds:

any old skirt and jumper had done then.

Though not capable of conveying it well, either by word or expression, she was pleased and relieved

to see him home. Her voice was squeaky with an inveterate petulance, although sometimes,

disconcerting everybody who heard it, her old gay laughter could suddenly burst forth, followed by

35 tears of wonder and regret.

He stood by the door.

“Am I to get a kiss?” she asked.

“I've still to wash, Peggy. I've been in the wood, handling rabbits.”

“I don't care. Amn’t I a gamekeeper’s wife? I used to like the smell of rabbits. I want a kiss.”

40 Her wheedling voice reminded him of the hunchback’s.

There wouldn't, he thought, be room in the hut for so large a bed. Here too everything was white

and immaculate, whereas yonder everything was dull, soiled, and scummy. Yet he could see,

almost as plainly as he saw his wife in heart-rending coquettish silly tears, the hunchback carving

happily at his wooden squirrel.

45 “It was another fine afternoon,” he said.

“Fine for some folk,” she whimpered.

“Didn't you manage to get out into the garden?”

“You know it's too much for my mother to manage by herself. I just had to lie here and watch the

tops of the trees.” Then her voice brightened. “Do you know what I was thinking about, John?”

50 “No, Peggy.”

“I was thinking of a day at Fyneside long ago. It was autumn then too. I think autumn is the

bonniest season. You put rowan berries in my hair.”

“The rowans are just about past,” he said.

“For me they’re past forever,” she cried. “I used to love the time when the berries were ripe and red.”

55 He saw the appeal in her streaming eyes, but he could not respond to it; once it had sent him away

with his own eyes wet. “Red as blood,” she sobbed.

Questions

1. By referring closely to lines 1 - 21, analyse how the writer conveys the tension between Duror and Mrs Lochie. 3
2. Analyse how the writer's use of language in lines 23 - 31 creates an unpleasant depiction of Peggy.

2

1. By referring closely to lines 32 - 56, analyse how the interaction between Jura and his wife adds to our understanding of Peggy’s character. 3
2. In the scene, Peggy reminds Duror of Calum. Explain fully why Duror chooses to compare his home to Calum's hut at this point. 2
3. By referring to this scene and elsewhere in the novel, analyse the impact female characters have on Duror’s downfall. 10

***Marking Scheme***

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| **Question** | **Expected Answer** | **Max Marks** | **Additional Guidance** |
| **1** | 2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **3** | * “sharply” implies her tone was angry, abrupt * “it was an accusation” suggests she is suspicious always thinking negatively of Duror * ““Thanks,” he said and stood still” Duror speaks only one word during their conversation. The fact that he stood still implies that he is awkward and uncomfortable * “there was no pity in her question ,only condemnation” Mrs Lochie feels no sympathy for Duror, trapped in his marriage to a bedridden wife. Instead,she castigates him for struggling to cope with his situation * “it's a pity… peace” Mrs Lochie’s words, said with a smile, appears to be a trap for Duror as if daring him to agree * “He did not deny …nor did he try to explain” Duror does not or cannot freely communicate his feelings to Mrs Lochie; perhaps he knows he will gain no understanding from her * “with a shudder” it is unclear whether Duror’s shudder is an involuntary action to dealing with Mrs Lochie’s poisonous presence or the thought of moving on to deal with his wife |
| **2** | 2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone. | **2** | * “haunting” metaphor suggests echoes remain * “great wobbling mass” the use of ‘great’ and ‘wobbling’ emphasise is the sheer size of Peggy the word ‘’wobbling has connotations of quivering jelly * ‘pallid’ negative connotations of being sick and pale * ‘grotesqueness’ suggests she is monstrous and gross |
| **3** | 2 marks for an insightful comment and reference.  1 mark for a basic comment and reference.  0 marks for reference/quotation alone | **3** | * ‘voice is squeaky with an inveterate petulance’ she sounds sulky and childish when she speaks to Duror, revealing her frustration at her bedridden state. * ‘I've still to wash… rabbits’ Duror tries to avoid touching Peggy, leaving her simpering and almost begging for his affections * ‘fine for some folk, she whimpered.’ - alliteration; Peggy’s reply reveals her bitterness that others can enjoy the outdoors while she cannot. * ‘you know…. herself’ by beginning ‘you know’ Peggy makes her words an accusation * ‘I was thinking of a day of Fyneside long ago’ given Peggy’s current bedridden state, she is forced to live in the past where she has dreadful memories * ‘the rowans are just about passed’, Duror, who is still able to live in the world, refuses to be drawn into the past with Peggy, further isolating her * ‘He saw… respond to it’ Peggy and Duror’s relationship has deteriorated to the extent that he can no longer even give her emotion and love for pity's sake. She is as trapped in a loveless marriage as him. |
| **4** |  | **2** | * Duror is able to see that his house is far superior to Calum’s Hut-it is much larger and cleaner than the hovel in which the brothers live. * However, there is a sense of contentedness and homeliness about the hut as he imagines it in his mind - Calum sits ‘carving happily’ - that his own home lacks. He is jealous of what Callum has. |
| **5** | Candidates should analyse the impact female characters have on Duror’s downfall.  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.  Commonality:   * Female characters attempt to manipulate Jura * Jewish wife and mother-in-law make home an uncomfortable place for him * female characters use jira as an outlet for their own insecurities and frustrations   Extract:   * Mrs lucky, Duror’s mother-in-law, lives with Duror and his wife to help with Peggy’s care. However, her own bitterness about her daughter's misfortune and her anger at Duror for his continued distance from Peggy means that she makes the house an uncomfortable place for the gamekeeper. * Peggy is bedridden and, lacking company except for her mother, is desperate for Duror’s affections * Peggy has let herself get grossly overweight and this, along with her sulkiness, means Duror does not want to be with her   Elsewhere:   * Peggy and Mrs Lochie make the house uncomfortable place to be so he spends more and more of his time in the woods to escape them. The cone-gatherers are ruining this place for him, quickening his mental collapse. * Mrs Lochie also makes life difficult for Duror by maliciously confiding to his employer that Duror brought home a naked doll to discredit him in the eyes of his employer and create suspicion that he is involved in indecent behaviour. * Mrs Morton defends Calum when Duror attempts to badmouth him with lies. She does not encourage his callous plans for the brothers. * Lady Runcie Campbell gives power to Duror’s hatred of the brothers by turning to him for advice on how to deal with the cone-gatherers. * Lady Runcie Campbell is also complicit in the cone-gatherers involvement in the deer drive. She goes along with Duror’s plans to re-establish class boundaries this leads to Duror having an episode where he confuses a deer with his wife and murders the animal.   Other references are possible. |