

# Eton College King's Scholarship Examination 2013

**ENGLISH**

**(One and a half hours)**

*You are advised to spend ten minutes reading the prose passage and the two poems. Spend about thirty minutes on Questions 1 – 5, twenty minutes on Question 6, and thirty minutes on Question 7.*

**THE BUS JOURNEY by WILLIAM FIENNES**

Buses were berthed on the far side of the terminal: a fleet of silver-styled Americruisers basking under arc lights, decked out in sprinting blue greyhounds with thin, tapering snouts you could clasp in your hand like ice-cream cones. Automatic doors opened on a waiting area with bare beige floors and the featureless walls of transit zones, and luggage heaps, sleeping figures, illuminated vending machines, and ranks of screwed-down seating units, some of them fitted with small, coin-fired televisions in moulded black plastic casings. Passengers were standing around, waiting for gates to be called, checking their watches, wandering from one spot to another, carrying tubes of Pringles potato snacks, portable stereos, transparent Ziploc bags of cookies or muffins, black refuse sacks bulging with laundry, rolled up sleeping-bags, green Army Surplus kitbags, suit bags, duffel bags, rucksacks, pillows, cooler boxes, comfort blankets and swaddled, sleeping babies. 1  
10

The Greyhound left Austin at seven o'clock in the morning. The schedule that came with my ticket told me I would arrive in Fargo, North Dakota, at twenty to six the following afternoon, having changed coaches in Dallas, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, and Minneapolis. Fargo was about 1,000 miles due north of Austin; snow geese would be flying due north from Texas to North Dakota, as if along the lines of longitude. *North* – the word had amplitude now, as if all possible destinations and endings were gathered up in it. North trumped all other places. I wanted the front seat in the Greyhound for its widescreen view of the north, but it was taken, so I sat two rows back on the right-hand side, across the aisle from a young woman and her son, a boy of five or six with brown hair cut in a severe fringe, like a monk's tonsure, and a book of join-the-dots pictures to which he applied himself with a monk's diligence, working with felt-tip pens in the dim light, conjuring motorcycles, tennis racquets, kitchen blenders and giraffes from strews of black points while his mother, who had spiky blond hair and a thin, bony face, laid her head against the window and slept despite its shuddering. 20

A storm broke as we left Austin. Thunder rolled; lightning lit the rooftops in quick, jagged brightnesses; water sluiced across the Greyhound's windscreen, battered left and right by the long, jointed wipers. I thought about Matthew in his tent at the edge of the cedars, hard rain thrumming on the off-white canvas as bolts struck the tall mast. Then the storm passed, the sun rose somewhere beyond Baton Rouge, and the Greyhound surged towards Dallas on Interstate 35. I gazed blankly through the tinted window, lulled by the hum of wheels on even asphalt panels, with flat country skirting past on the far edge of my attention – a Texas bric-à-brac of motels, outlet malls, dancehalls, subcourthouses, pet-grooming salons, ministorages, swags of electric and telephone cables, a non-stop barrage of exclamatory hoardings and signs like heraldic shields raised high on steel masts, flashing the names of gas stations and franchise restaurants as the coach coasted past Georgetown, Temple, Waco and Italy, 200 miles north to Dallas. 30  
40

I boarded a new bus in Dallas, its driver a tall, lean, narrow man, like a cigarette dressed in the grey Greyhound uniform, with sleeves rolled neatly to the elbows and silver hair cut short at the back and sides, swept back on top and glossed with brilliantine. He wore a brown leather belt embossed with an eagle, laterally extended, and a dated-looking digital watch with a calculator keypad underneath its scratched display. He sucked on a toothpick, smoothed his hair back with both palms simultaneously, and addressed his passengers as 'folks'.

[Turn over]

‘Now please remember, folks,’ he said into his microphone, lips brushing the metal mesh as we proceeded through the Dallas suburbs, ‘that we do have ladies and children on board. So let me say, folks, that we do not want to say or do anything that would embarrass those good folks. No bad language. No lewdness of any kind. Now this may not pertain to you, but I’m saying it all the same. I’m deadly graveyard serious on this matter, folks.’ 50

The folks in my vicinity included, in the front seat, a frail, white-haired lady wearing a denim shirt adorned with homemade four-pointed appliqué stars and a smiling brown crescent moon. She tried repeatedly to engage the driver in conversation, but he didn’t respond; he was deadly graveyard serious on all matters of road safety. Behind me, a younger, dark-featured woman, dressed in an orange tracksuit, had immersed herself in a paperback entitled *Blues for Silk Garcia*, and across the aisle sat a burly man with a ponytail falling across his chest, black hair fanning out on a T-shirt that read, *Since I Gave Up Hope, I Got Much Better*. Behind him, through a gap between headrests, I glimpsed a woman in small, round, wire-framed spectacles, stroking the head of a sleeping baby. 60

**[Turn over]**

## NIGHT JOURNEY

Now as the train bears west, 1  
Its rhythm rocks the earth,  
And from my Pullman berth  
I stare into the night  
While others take their rest.  
Bridges of iron lace,  
A suddenness of trees,  
A lap of mountain mist.  
All cross my line of sight,  
Then a bleak wasted place, 10  
And a lake below my knees.  
Full on my neck I feel  
The straining at a curve;  
My muscles move with steel,  
I wake in every nerve.  
I watch a beacon swing  
From dark to blazing bright;  
We thunder through ravines  
And gullies washed with light.  
Beyond the mountain pass 20  
Mist deepens on the pane;  
We rush into a rain  
That rattles double glass.  
Wheels shake the roadbed stone,  
The pistons jerk and shove,  
I stay up half the night  
To see the land I love.

Theodore Roethke

[Turn over]

## THE NIGHT MAIL

This is the night mail crossing the border, 1  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,  
Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner and the girl next door,  
Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb –  
The gradient's against her but she's on time.

Past cotton grass and moorland boulder,  
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,  
Snorting noisily as she passes  
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses; 10  
Birds turn their heads as she approaches,  
Stare from the bushes at her blank-faced coaches;  
Sheepdogs cannot turn her course,  
They slumber on with paws across;  
In the farm she passes no one wakes  
But a jug in a bedroom gently shakes.

Dawn freshens, the climb is done.  
Down towards Glasgow she descends  
Towards the steam tugs, yelping down the glade of cranes  
Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces 20  
Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen.  
All Scotland waits for her;  
In the dark glens, beside the pale-green sea lochs,  
Men long for news.

Letters of thanks, letters from banks,  
Letters of joy from the girl and boy,  
Receipted bills and invitations  
To inspect new stock or visit relations,  
And applications for situations,  
And timid lovers' declarations, 30  
And gossip, gossip from all the nations,  
News circumstantial, news financial,  
Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,  
Letters with faces scrawled on the margin.  
Letters from uncles, cousins and aunts,

Letters to Scotland from the South of France,  
Letters of condolence to Highlands and Lowlands,  
Notes from overseas to the Hebrides;  
Written on paper of every hue,  
The pink, the violet, the white and the blue, 40  
The chatty, the catty, the boring, adoring,  
The cold and official and the heart's outpouring,  
Clever, stupid, short and long,  
The typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.

[Turn over]

Thousands are still asleep  
Dreaming of terrifying monsters  
Or a friendly tea beside the band at Cranston's or Crawford's;  
Asleep in working Glasgow, asleep in well-set Edinburgh,  
Asleep in granite Aberdeen.  
They continue their dreams  
But shall wake soon and long for letters.  
And none will hear the postman's knock  
Without a quickening of the heart,  
For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?

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W.H. Auden

**[Turn over]**

1. Explain the meanings, in their contexts, of the following words/phrases from the prose passage:
  - (a) 'Buses were berthed on the far side of the terminal' (l. 1)
  - (b) 'illuminated vending machines' (ll. 5–6)
  - (c) 'North trumped all other places' (l. 20)
  - (d) 'he applied himself with a monk's diligence' (ll. 24–25)
  - (e) 'a non-stop barrage of exclamatory hoardings' (ll. 38–39)[10]
2. Write down a simile from the prose passage and explain its effectiveness. [5]
3. In your own words, summarise the character of the bus driver. [5]
4. Explain in your own words the meaning suggested by the following words or phrases in the poem 'Night Journey'.
  - (a) 'Bridges of iron lace' (l. 6)
  - (b) 'A lap of mountain mist' (l. 8)
  - (c) 'a lake below my knees' (l. 11)
  - (d) 'I wake in every nerve' (l. 15)
  - (e) 'gullies washed with light (l. 19)[10]
5. Explore some of the ways Auden uses contrasts in his poem 'The Night Mail'. Use quotations if they are helpful. [10]
6. Compare the ways the three writers convey the excitement and interest of travel in their writing. [20]
7. Describe a journey (either real or imaginary) that is unfamiliar or full of excitement. [40]