

Eton College King's Scholarship Examination 2014

ENGLISH

(One and a half hours)

You are advised to spend ten minutes reading the poem and the two prose passages. Spend about thirty-five minutes on Questions 1 – 12, fifteen minutes on Question 13 and thirty minutes on Question 14.

Do not turn over until told to do so.

MY PARENTS KEPT ME FROM CHILDREN WHO WERE ROUGH

My parents kept me from children who were rough
And who threw words like stones and who wore torn clothes.
Their thighs showed through rags. They ran in the street
And climbed cliffs and stripped by the country streams. 4

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron
And their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arms.
I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys
Who copied my lisp behind me on the road. 8

They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges
Like dogs to bark at our world. They threw mud
And I looked another way, pretending to smile,
I longed to forgive them, yet they never smiled. 12

Stephen Spender

THE ROSE-BEETLE MAN

from *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell.

The author describes an encounter he had as a boy on the Island of Corfu.

Perhaps one of the most weird and fascinating characters I met during my travels was the Rose-beetle Man. He had a fairy-tale air about him that was ‘impossible to resist’, and I used to look forward eagerly to my infrequent meetings with him. I first saw him on a high, lonely road leading to one of the remote mountain villages. I could hear him long before I could see him for he was playing a rippling tune on a shepherd’s pipe, breaking off now and then to sing a few words in a curious, nasal voice. As he rounded the corner both Roger and I stopped and stared at him in amazement.

He had a sharp, fox-like face with large, slanting eyes of such a dark brown that they appeared black. They had a weird, vacant look about them, and a sort of bloom such as one finds on a plum, a pearly covering almost like a cataract. He was short and slight, with a thinness about his wrists and neck that argued a lack of food. His dress was fantastic, and on his head was a shapeless hat with a very wide, floppy brim. It had once been bottle-green, but was now speckled with dust, wine-stains, and cigarette-burns. In the band were stuck a fluttering forest of feathers: cock-feathers, hoopoe-feathers, owl-feathers, with the wing of a kingfisher, the claw of a hawk, and a large dirty white feather that may have come from a swan. His coat was dark and shapeless, with patches of different hues here and there; on the sleeve a bit of white cloth with a design of rosebuds; on the shoulder a triangular patch of wine-red and white spots. The pockets of this garment bulged, the contents almost spilling out: 10
combs, balloons, little highly coloured pictures of the saints, olive-wood carvings of snakes, camels, dogs and horses, cheap mirrors, a riot of handkerchiefs, and long twisted rolls of bread decorated with seeds. His trousers, patched like his coat, drooped over a pair of scarlet *charouhias*, leather shoes with upturned toes decorated with a large black-and-white pompon. This extraordinary character carried on his back bamboo cages full of pigeons and young chickens, several mysterious sacks, and a large bunch of fresh green leeks. With one hand he held his pipe to his mouth, and in the other a number of lengths of cotton, to each of which was tied an almond-size rose-beetle, glittering golden green in the sun, all of them flying round his hat with desperate, deep buzzings, trying to escape from the thread tied firmly round their 20
waists. Occasionally, tired of circling round and round without success, one of the beetles would settle for a moment on his hat, before launching itself off once more on its endless merry-go-round. 30

I asked what the rose-beetles were for, and why he had them tied with pieces of cotton. He held his hand out to denote small boys, took one of the lengths of cotton from which a beetle hung, and whirled it rapidly round his head. Immediately the insect came to life and started on its planet-like circling of his hat, and he beamed at me. Pointing up at the sky, he stretched his arms out and gave a deep nasal buzzing, while he banked and swooped across the road. Aeroplane, any fool could see that. Then he pointed to the beetles, held out his hand to denote children, and whirled his 40
stock of beetles round his head so that they all started to buzz peevishly.

LUTHER DRIGGERS

from *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt

The unassuming, shy, and hapless Luther Driggers had a darker side. He was possessed by inner demons who showed themselves in disturbing ways. Chronic insomnia was one of them. Luther had once gone nine days without falling asleep. Sleep, when it came, was rarely peaceful. Luther usually slept with his teeth and his fists tightly clenched. By morning he would awake with sore jaws and little crescent-shaped cuts in his palms. People worried about Luther's demons. But they were not so much concerned with the uneaten breakfasts or the lost sleep or the bleeding palms. They were fearful about something much more serious.

It was rumoured that Luther had in his possession a bottle of poison five hundred times more deadly than arsenic, a poison so lethal that if he ever dumped in into the city's water supply it would kill every man, woman, and child in Savannah. Years back, a delegation of nervous citizens had informed the police, and the police had searched Luther's house without finding anything. That satisfied no one, of course, and the rumours persisted. 10

Luther certainly knew all about poisons and how to use them. He was a technician at the government insectary on the outskirts of Savannah. His job required that he sift through jugs of barn sweepings, sort out the weevils and beetles, and raise them in colonies so that he could test various insecticides on them. The difficult part of the job was the requirement that Luther inject insecticide into the chest cavities of the individual insects. This operation demanded the dexterity of a watchmaker. It was hard enough to do sober; with a hangover and tremors it was nearly impossible. "God, it's tedious work," Luther said. 20

Sometimes, to relieve the boredom, Luther anesthetized ordinary house flies and glued lengths of thread to their backs. When the flies awoke, they flew around trailing the threads behind them. "It makes them easier to catch," he said.

On occasion, Luther walked through downtown Savannah holding a dozen or more threads in his hand, each a different color. Some people walked dogs; Luther walked flies. Now and then, when he visited friends, he took a few of the flies with him and let them loose in the living room. 30

At other times, Luther pasted the wings of a wasp on top of a fly's own wings to improve its aerodynamics. Or he made one wing slightly shorter than the other so it would fly in circles the rest of its life.

It was just this side of Luther, his quirky tinkering, that left people with a lingering uneasiness about whether he might one day pour his bottle of poison into Savannah's water supply. 39

Questions on the poem

1. Explain in your own words the meaning suggested by the following phrases in the poem:
 - (a) 'I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron' (1.5) [2]
 - (b) 'the salt coarse pointing of those boys' (1.7) [2]
 - (c) 'They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges' (1.9) [2]
2. What do you understand by 'our world'? (1.10) [2]
3. Write down an example of alliteration from the poem and explain its effect. [2]
4. Summarise the boy's attitude to the 'children who were rough'. (1.1) [5]

Questions on *The Rose-beetle Man*

5. Write down a simile from the extract and suggest why it is effective. [2]
6. Write down a metaphor from the extract and suggest why it is effective. [2]
7. Write down an example of assonance from the extract and suggest why it is effective. [2]
8. Why does the 'Beetle-Man' emit 'a deep nasal buzzing'? (1.38) [2]
9. Describe the sort of gesture he makes with his hand to 'denote children' (1.40) [2]
10. Considering the passage as a whole, what qualities made the 'Beetle-Man' 'impossible to resist' (1.2) for the author when he was a boy? [5]

Questions on *Luther Driggers*

11. Explain in your own words the meaning suggested by the following phrases in the extract:
 - (a) 'The unassuming, shy, and hapless Luther Diggers' (1.1) [2]
 - (b) 'Chronic insomnia' (1.3) [2]
 - (c) 'crescent-shaped cuts' (1.6) [2]
 - (d) 'a delegation of nervous citizens' (1.13) [2]
 - (e) 'demanded the dexterity' (1.23) [2]
12. Considering the passage as a whole, what aspects make Luther such a frightening character? [5]

Question on both prose passages

13. Compare and contrast the personalities of the ‘Rose-beetle Man’ and Luther Driggers, particularly as expressed by their attitude to, and treatment of, their insects. [15]

14. Write a story of an encounter between a boy and an unfamiliar or eccentric character.

You may want to consider:

- The eccentric’s appearance and clothing and possessions;
- His or her activities;
- The boy’s responses to him or her;
- How the encounter developed.

[40]

[End of paper]

