

Eton College King's Scholarship Examination 2015

ENGLISH

(One and a half hours)

You are advised to spend ten minutes reading the two poems and the prose passage. Spend about thirty minutes on Questions 1 – 13, twenty minutes on Question 14 and thirty minutes on Question 15. You are strongly advised not to write over-lengthy answers to the questions that are worth only two marks.

Remember to write your candidate number on every sheet of answer paper used

Do not turn over until told to do so.

THE FISH

I caught a tremendous fish
 and held him beside the boat
 half out of water, with my hook
 fast in a corner of his mouth.
 He didn't fight.
 He hadn't fought at all.
 He hung a grunting weight,
 battered and venerable
 and homely. Here and there
 his brown skin hung in strips 10
 like ancient wallpaper,
 and its pattern of darker brown
 was like wallpaper:
 shapes like full-blown roses
 stained and lost through age.
 He was speckled with barnacles,
 fine rosettes of lime,
 and infested
 with tiny white sea-lice,
 and underneath two or three 20
 rags of green weed hung down.
 While his gills were breathing in
 the terrible oxygen
 —the frightening gills,
 fresh and crisp with blood,
 that can cut so badly—
 I thought of the coarse white flesh
 packed in like feathers,
 the big bones and the little bones,
 the dramatic reds and blacks 30
 of his shiny entrails,
 and the pink swim-bladder
 like a big peony.
 I looked into his eyes
 which were far larger than mine
 but shallower, and yellowed,
 the irises backed and packed
 with tarnished tinfoil
 seen through the lenses
 of old scratched isinglass. 40
 They shifted a little, but not
 to return my stare.
 —It was more like the tipping
 of an object toward the light.

I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weaponlike, 50
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away. 60
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine 70
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels — until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

Elizabeth Bishop

FISHING FOR PIKE

from *Blood Knots* by Luke Jennings.

At the far end, as I step out into the ambient light, the towpath and the canal widen. At my back, behind galvanized-steel security fencing and a ragged thicket of wild buddleia, is some kind of electrical installation. A steel sign on the fencing warns of power-grid cables beneath the towpath. In front of me is a long oblong of water, perhaps twenty feet across. Its surface rocks like molten copper. There is no far bank, just a high wall of mossy brick, weeping with damp. As I lower my gear to the paving stones, the cold immediately begins to fold around me. This is the place. 5

I set up quickly, keen to get my hands back into my gloves. I'm using an old fibreglass spinning-rod by Rudge of Redditch, heavy by today's standards but pretty much unbreakable. The reel, battered but well balanced, in an Aerial-style centre-pin. The baits are frozen sprats, mounted by a single treble-hook to wire traces. Pen-torch in mouth, I knot a trace to the fifteen-pound breaking-strain monofilament. A small coffin-lead goes between line and trace, to hold the bait to the bottom. It's the most straightforward rig possible. You don't want to get elaborate in the dark. 10

To begin with, as always, I imagine how it will be. The twitch of the line at my index finger, the slow tick of the centre-pin's ratchet, the shudder of the rod as the fish runs. If it's big, I'll have a problem. The bottom of the canal is a catacomb of old bikes, shopping trolleys and other detritus. The pike will know every twist and turn, and if given an inch of line will bore down into the maze and smash up my tackle. I'll never even see it. And at the very least I'll want to see it, because there's something elemental in the first sight of a pike. 15 20

One overcast autumn morning I hooked one on the pond called Red Arches, on Hampstead Heath. A boy walking a dog saw the rod bucking in my hands and wandered up to watch. The fish kicked deep, going for the weed roots, but finally I brought it up. The water was coloured from the rain, so at first all that was visible was a dark shadow, but gradually you could make out the long back, the rapacious jaw, the slow fanning of the pectoral fins. When I had landed and unhooked it I held it up for a moment. River pike are olive-green, the colour of stones flecked with sunlight, but this was a deep-water fish, as dark and grim as old armour. Eyeing its teeth, meeting its unflinching gaze, the boy backed away. 25

'Jesus,' he breathed. 'What is that?' 30

I told him. And as I slid it back into the water I added that it wasn't particularly big, as they went. That there were pike there three times its size.

'Jesus,' he repeated, looking around him as if seeing the city for the first time.

PIKE

Pike, three inches long, perfect
 Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold.
 Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin.
 They dance on the surface among the flies.

Or move, stunned by their own grandeur,
 Over a bed of emerald, silhouette
 Of submarine delicacy and horror.
 A hundred feet long in their world.

In ponds, under the heat-struck lily pads—
 Gloom of their stillness: 10
 Logged on last year's black leaves, watching upwards.
 Or hung in an amber cavern of weeds

The jaws' hooked clamp and fangs
 Not to be changed at this date;
 A life subdued to its instrument;
 The gills kneading quietly, and the pectorals.

Three we kept behind glass,
 Jungled in weed: three inches, four,
 And four and a half: fed fry to them—
 Suddenly there were two. Finally one 20

With a sag belly and the grin it was born with.
 And indeed they spare nobody.
 Two, six pounds each, over two feet long,
 High and dry and dead in the willow-herb—

One jammed past its gills down the other's gullet:
 The outside eye stared: as a vice locks—
 The same iron in this eye
 Though its film shrank in death.

A pond I fished, fifty yards across, 30
 Whose lilies and muscular tench
 Had outlasted every visible stone
 Of the monastery that planted them—

Stilled legendary depth:
 It was as deep as England. It held
 Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old
 That past nightfall I dared not cast

But silently cast and fished
 With the hair frozen on my head
 For what might move, for what eye might move.
 The still splashes on the dark pond,

40

Owls hushing the floating woods
 Frail on my ear against the dream
 Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,
 That rose slowly towards me, watching.

Ted Hughes

Questions on 'The Fish'

1. Explain in your own words the meaning suggested by the following phrases in the poem *The Fish*:
 - (a) 'venerable/and homely'. (1.8-9) [2]
 - (b) 'with my hook/fast in a corner of his mouth'. (1.3-4) [2]
 - (c) 'still crimped from the strain and snap'. (1.59) [2]
2. In what ways are the 'five big hooks' (1.54) like 'medals' (1.61)? [2]
3. Whose or what is the 'victory' referred to in 1.66? [2]
4. How does Bishop's attitude to the fish she has caught change as she examines it? In your answer you should refer to the poem's vocabulary and imagery in detail and use quotations. [5]

Questions on 'Fishing for Pike'

5. Explain in your own words (as far as possible) the meaning suggested by the following phrases in the prose passage:
 - (a) 'as I step out into the ambient light, the towpath and the canal widen'. (1.1) [2]
 - (b) 'The bottom of the canal is a catacomb of old bikes, shopping trolleys and other detritus'. (1.17-23) [2]
 - (c) 'A boy walking a dog saw the rod bucking in my hands'. (1.23) [2]
6. Write down a simile from the passage and suggest why it is effective. [2]
7. Why does the boy look around 'as if seeing the city for the first time'? (1.34) [2]
8. How does Jennings build up an atmosphere and sense of place in the first three paragraphs? (1.1-21) [5]

Questions on 'Pike'

9. What does 'green tigering the gold' (l.2) suggest to you? [2]
10. What does 'A hundred feet long in their world' (l.8) mean? [2]
11. Explain what Hughes is describing in the line 'One jammed past its gills down the other's gullet'. (l.25) [2]
12. Explain Hughes' meaning in stanza 8. (l.29-32) [4]
13. What impression do you form of Hughes' own character and personality from reading the poem? [5]

Questions on 'Fishing for Pike' and 'Pike'

14. Compare and contrast the way pike are presented by Jennings and Hughes in their accounts. You would be advised to use quotations. [15]

15. **EITHER:**

Write a story about the interaction between a human being and some other non-human creature.

OR

Write a lively account of some interest or activity that intrigues and fascinates you.

[40]

[End of paper]

