

## *The Short Stories of Neil Munro*

A Study Guide for Higher Still

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NEIL MUNRO (1863–1930)

Neil Munro was born in 1863 at Inverary, Argyll, near the head of Loch Fyne, an area he loved and used for the settings of many of his novels and short stories. Most of his working life though was spent in Glasgow as a journalist with the Glasgow Evening News which published the first of the Para Handy stories in 1905 and it is these newspaper tales that have ensured his enduring popularity amongst his fellow Scots over the past century. In fact the Para Handy stories became so popular that they were later published in various collections and the crew of the *Vital Spark* became part of the popular culture of Scotland, while they have also been given a new lease of life via several popular television versions over the past four decades. Although he wrote many other fine short stories, comic and tragic, and a number of very great historical novels, such as *John Splendid*, *Doom Castle* and *The New Road*, set in Scotland's turbulent past, his more serious fiction has been relatively neglected. Happily it too is now receiving the attention it deserves, with the republication of his historical novels and short story collections, *Jaunty Jock and Other Stories* and *The Lost Pibroch* etc.

For further information about the author, listen to the Scotsoun tape about him.

### THE PARA HANDY STORIES

#### *The Vital Spark*

Before the days of long-distance road haulage, much of the west coast and the Highlands were almost inaccessible by road which meant that people and goods had to be mainly transported by sea. A very common type of vessel used in the west coast trade was the "puffer" (because of the puff-puffing sound from their steam boilers and the smoke belching out of their funnels) a small cargo boat, with a funnel above the boiler house at the stern, a wheelhouse usually in front of this, where the Captain or his mate steered the ship, overlooking the holds for carrying cargo, with the "foc's'le" (forecastle) below deck at the forepart of the boat containing the crew's quarters. Because of their shallow draft (depth of water necessary to float a ship), they were often beached on an ebb tide to unload their cargoes by horse and cart and then floated off again at the next high tide which allowed access to many places without a proper pier. You can see one of these puffers in the Maritime Museum in Irvine.

In Munro's day there would have had hundreds of these small fat vessels, puffing up and down the Clyde, keeping all the west coast and the islands supplied with coal, building materials and just about anything that could not be moved by road, everything in fact "from bird cages to pianos." This period was also the heyday of the Clyde as a holiday resort, when both rich and poor flocked "doon the watter", especially during "the Glesca Fair." Thus Para Handy's voyages and adventures take us from Glasgow and the Clyde, especially around Loch Fyne, to the West Highland ports and islands, sailing in fact "all the seas between Bowling and Stornoway":

"There is not a port I am not acquent with from the Tail o the Bank to Cairndow, where they keep the two New Year's. And Campbeltown, ay, or Barra, or Tobermory."

The *Vital Spark* was Para Handy's pride and joy, sometimes transformed in his fertile imagination into a steam yacht fit for carrying royalty:

"Oh man she wass the beauty! She was chust sublime! She could be carryin' nothing but gentry for passengers, or nice genteel luggage for the shooting-lodges... I wass ass prood of that boat ass the Duke of Argyll, ay, or Lord Breadalbane. If you would see me waalkin' about on her dake when we wass lyin' at the quay! There wasna the like of it in the West Heilan's. I wass chust sublime! She had a gold bead about her; it's no lie I am tellin you, and I would be pentin' her oot of my own pocket... She drew four feet forrit and nine aft, and she could go like the duvle."

#### **RANGE:**

- Higher Still

#### **KEY TEXTS:**

- *Para Handy Tales*, by Neil Munro: Pan, 1969
- *Para Handy*, by Neil Munro: Birlinn, 1992
- *Jaunty Jock and Other Stories*, by Neil Munro: Lochar, 1999
- *The Lost Pibroch and Other Stories*, by Neil Munro: Lochar, 1996

#### **RECOMMENDED:**

- *Exploring New Roads: essays on Neil Munro*, ed. Ronald Renton & Brian Osborne: Lochar, 2003
- *Neil Munro* cassette: Scotsoun, available from the Scots Language Resource Centre, AK Bell Library, York Place, Perth, PH2 8EP



### The Crew of the *Vital Spark*

Captain of the *Vital Spark* is the pawky Peter Macfarlane, better known by his nickname Para Handy, “a short, thick-set man with a red beard, a hard round hat, ridiculously out of harmony with a blue pilot jacket and trousers and a seaman’s jersey.” He and his first mate, the wily Dougie Campbell, a “Cowl laad, ass cheery a man as ever you met across a dram,” are both Highlanders, speaking English with a Gaelic accent and intonation, often reflected in the spelling, as in the example above. In contrast, the other two members of the crew are both Lowlanders: the cynical “enchineer” from Motherwell, Dan Macphail, who spends most of his time reading paperback romances and moaning about his job, and Colin the Tar, renowned for his laziness and incompetence as a cook. The latter is replaced in many of the stories by his “kizzen”, the irrepressible optimist, cook and melodeon player, “Sunny Jim”, a “cheery wee chap” who “smiled like a sunset.” Another character who features in many stories is the legendary “Hurricane Jack” Maclachlan whom Para Handy holds in such high regard as “the most fearless soul who ever wore oilskins,” almost “a sort of demigod,” in the Captain’s eyes.

Though most stories deal with the comic interplay between the crew, you might like to examine stories which highlight aspects of particular characters, such as the following:

**Para Handy:** *Master Mariner, Para Handy – Poacher, Para Handy’s Piper, The Baker’s Little Widow, The Valentine That Missed Fire, Para Handy’s Wedding, Pension Farms, Para Handy’s Pup, Para Handy’s Vote, An Ocean Tragedy* etc.

**Dougie:** *The Mate’s Wife, Dougie’s Family, A Desperate Character, The Hair Lotion, Commandeered* etc.

**The Tar and Sunny Jim:** *The Tar’s Wedding, The Return of the Tar, The Sea Cook, A Lost Man, In Search of a Wife, The New Cook, A Vegetarian Experiment, The Treasure Trove, Leap Year on the Vital Spark, Sunny Jim Rejected, How Jim Joined the Army* etc.

**Macphail:** *Among the Yachts, Mudges, A Rowdy Visitor* etc.

**Hurricane Jack** (also in *The Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories*): *The Complete Gentleman, Hurricane Jack’s Luck-Bird, The Bottle King, The Fog, The Mystery Ship, Under Sealed Orders, A Search for Salvage, The Phantom Horse and Cart, A Double Life, Bonnie Ann, The End of the World* etc.

**A few suggestions for Intermediate 1:** *The Maligner:* The Tar’s laziness leads to a near-fatal dose of “convolvulus in the inside”; *Para Handy’s Pup:* a “pure-bred”, but deaf, “Pompanion” watch-dog proves a mixed blessing; *An Ocean Tragedy:* drunken tales of surviving a storm get somewhat blown out of proportion; *Mudges:* Macphail, in search of a midgy repellent, lands himself in a sticky situation; *The Phantom Horse and Cart:* how Hurricane Jack cures an alcoholic for life.

### Intermediate 2/Higher

The above, plus the following: *Pension Farms:* how Para Handy’s cousin plans to prosper by “rearing” pensioners; *Para Handy’s Vote:* how a floating voter is easily swayed at election time; *The Wet Man of Muscadale:* Para Handy reveals a legendary wet man’s secret of longevity; *The End of the World:* Hurricane Jack’s mean old uncle awaits the final judgement; *A Double Life:* Hurricane Jack’s philandering lands him in hot water; *How Jim Joined the Army:* Jim pretends he is Macphail in order to join up; *The Mystery Ship* and *Under Sealed Orders:* tall tales of how Para and Hurricane Jack help to win the war; *Commandeered:* Dougie learns that the *Vital Spark* is being sent on a dangerous mission.

### *The Maligner:* Pan edition, p.23-28

**Vocabulary** (page references to Pan edition): working with a partner, and using a dictionary only if necessary, check out the meaning of the following words or expressions: inclined to, destined to (p.23, l.6-7), ascribed (p.23, l.17), to avail himself of (p.24, l.14), gusto, enhance (p.24, l.16-20), winch (p.24, l.26), chastened grief (p.25, l.9), surreptitiously (p.26, l.6), convolvulus (p.26, l.16), functionary (p.28, l.8).

**Meaning and Context:** try to find contextual clues from the story that confirm you have selected the correct meaning for each of the following: maligner, lugubriously (p.24, l.4), dispense (p.24, l.16), indignant (p.25, l.9), ostentation (p.25, l.28), solemnly (p.26, l.16), countenances (p.27, l.18), proportions (p.27, l.23)

**Idioms:** note Dougie’s repeated expression, “sherp as a preen” = sharp as a pin (p.25, l.20) i.e. emaciated, like a skeleton. You will find many characteristic idioms or catch-phrases in the stories, especially “chust sublime”, “he hass the wonderful agility”, “if Dougie was here he would tell you” etc. Collect examples of these to help with character study.

**To the teacher:** perhaps you might feel that section A is more appropriate at Intermediate 1/2 Level and section B at Higher or you may prefer to use section A as a quick follow-up/warm-up before pupils work on their own responses in section B.

**Reading Questions:** these may be done in pairs or as individual tasks. They should help you to understand, analyse and evaluate various aspects of plot, character, language and style. They should give you practice in doing **close reading, textual analysis** and help you to prepare for writing a **critical essay**.



<b>A) Intermediate 1–2</b> .....	<b>Marks</b>	<b>B) Intermediate 2–Higher</b> .....	<b>Marks</b>
1a. What does the opening line sentence		1a. What does the narrator’s comment on p.23, line	
(i) explicitly tell us about the Tar		19-20 imply about the Tar? .....	2
(ii) imply about him? .....	2	b. Comment on the tone behind the phrase the	
b. Is his “excuse” meant to be taken seriously? Why? ...	1	“unfortunate Tar’s weaknesses” and show how it	
2a. What expression sums up the Captain’s attitude		contrasts with Dougie’s expression “sheer	
towards the Tar and which expressions show he		laziness.” .....	3
often believed him? .....	1	2. What does the narrator’s comment about the Tar’s	
b. What does this tell us about the Captain’s		disappearing appetite imply? .....	1
character? .....	2	3. What does the fact that he “moaned lugubriously”	
3a. What does Dougie’s remark about a wife imply		tell us about the Tar and why is “lugubriously” an	
about the Tar? .....	1	effective word choice here? .....	2
b. How does Dougie’s attitude towards the Tar contrast		4a. Explain how and why the Captain gradually changes	
with the Captain’s? Find two bits of evidence to		his attitude towards the Tar on p.24, supporting	
support your answer. ....	2	your answer with textual references. ....	3
c. What does this tell us about Dougie as a		b. What light does this shed on Para Handy’s	
character? .....	2	character? .....	2
4a. Why is the Tar so bad on the way up Loch Fyne? ...	1	5. How does Dougie’s plan contrast with the Captain’s	
b. What does the narrator’s description of the Tar’s		immediate reaction and what light does this shed	
symptoms (foot p.23) add to our understanding of		on their respective characters? .....	3
his character? .....	1	6. The word “lugubrious” is used earlier to describe	
5. What does the Tar mean about not troubling them		the Tar’s voice (top p.24). Show how this word now	
long, etc. and how do we know that we cannot take		fits the Captain and Dougie’s performance rather	
his claim too seriously? .....	2	well. ....	3
6. How do we know that the Tar is quite enjoying		7. Show how Munro increases the Tar’s fears and	
himself and looking forward to further treats?		explain how his own pretence ironically backfires	
Support your answer with textual references. ....	2	on him. ....	3
7. Dougie has made the Captain change his mind		8. Do you think the last line is an effective way of	
twice here. Explain what these are and what this		concluding the story? Why? .....	3
tells us about their relationship. ....	3	9. What do you think contributes most to the humour	
8a. Find at least 4 things that the Captain and Dougie		of the ending? Consider things like plot, dramatic	
do to make the Tar feel ill (p.24-7). ....	2	situation, character behaviour, visual humour,	
b. Find at least 4 things that the Captain and Dougie		dialogue and narrative. ....	5
say to make the Tar feel ill. ....	2	<b>Total</b> .....	<b>30</b>
c. Pick one thing they do and one thing they say and		<b>Further Discussion:</b> you may already have discussed	
explain why you found it funny. ....	2	quite a number of issues working with a partner or in	
9. What effect does the arrival of the joiner/undertaker		a small group. You could have used one of these for	
have and what does he say that contributes to this		group discussion.	
effect? .....	2	This story is very much a battle of wits. Who	
10. Explain how the Tar’s punishment fits the crime		displays the greatest “agility” in dissembling and	
and provides a satisfactory ending to the story. ..	2	deceiving others? Arrange them in ascending order of	
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>30</b>	cunning, from least to most.	

Do you think the Tar gets what he deserves? Explain why and try to suggest as many reasons as you can why his punishment is entertaining.

**Individual Presentation:** now you have the chance to prepare an individual talk on a topic arising from your reading of a Para Handy story. You are free to suggest one of your own, but here are a couple of suggestions.

a) An experience where others played a trick on you or you were involved in playing a trick on someone else. Did you feel that it was deserved, fair/unfair, done in good humour or was there a nasty element to it? How did the “victim” react at the end of it?



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b) Your favourite Munro story, character or pair of characters or Munro's sense of humour.

c) The craftiest character/biggest liar you have ever known.

d) Any aspect of Munro's life and/or works or about his birthplace, Inveraray.

e) Puffers, the Clyde Coast, its history, industries, traditions, famous people etc.

**Writing:** a) Write in any way you like about a trick being played, etc. – see **Talking** section above.

b) Write a story or poem about a crafty character, lovable rascal or notorious liar.

c) Making use of your own local dialect, e.g. in narration or dialogue, write a story or script, about tables being turned on a malingerer, "chancer" or would-be joker or about such a character who is too cunning to be caught out, or thinks they are.

d) Script the scene in the pub or the shop between the Captain, Dougie and the joiner or a scene on the boat a few days later when the Tar is working very hard lifting the cargo of logs.

e) Make up a tall tale about why someone has failed to complete some task on time, e.g. not done their homework or failed to tidy up their bedroom or failed to turn up/pay up etc.

Read Liz Niven's story "It's Virtual Reality But" in *A Braw Brew* (Watergaw).

### Critical Essay Guidance on *The Malingerer*

The plot of *The Malingerer*, as with many others, relies on a series of comic reversals, such as turning of the tables on someone who gets what he deserves or brings trouble upon himself. Show how *The Malingerer*, or a story of your own choice, makes effective use of this element.

**How Do I Start?:** 1. Firstly read over your answer to the reading questions, especially B question 9 and listen to other answers as part of the class or group discussion. Make further notes.

2. Discuss/make notes on the issues raised below: plot, character, narrative viewpoint and style, types of humour, anything else you think important.

**Plot:** you have been asked to consider the elements of comic reversal or revenge where the tables are turned on a character who gets what he deserves and is taught a lesson via an appropriate punishment or humiliation. Discuss and make notes about the following:

How far the Tar deserves what he gets, how he brings it on himself, sets himself up/falls into a trap of his own making, how the others outwit/deceive him and play a clever trick on him which punishes him and brings about at least a temporary change in his behaviour.

Think about how appropriate his punishment is, how far it really fits the crime and teaches him an effective lesson.

**Character:** after looking back over your answers to the reading or discussion questions, take each of the main characters in turn and list the following:

(a) the most important things they do in the story

(b) any important or characteristic things they say

(c) anything interesting or amusing they say about each other

(d) anything interesting or amusing that the narrator tells us about them

Leave space under each of the above to add your own comments about this information and also add your own adjectives for each character.

This story is very much a battle of wits between the main characters. Consider the role each plays in this and also who displays the greatest wit or cunning.

**Narrative Viewpoint and Style:** consider how Munro makes good use of different perspectives or viewpoints in his story via:

(a) the use of the third person narrative voice which allows him to see events from a neutral and superior viewpoint of one who is all-seeing and all-knowing

(b) extensive use of dramatisation which allows each character to come alive from the page in his own voice, to develop a dramatic situation towards an effective dramatic climax

(c) the effective use of contrasting perspectives and styles of language as he switches skilfully from narration to dialogue and back again.

Consider the balance of the two, especially in the climax and ending of the story.

**Types of Humour:** consider the different types used:

Verbal humour, in both narration and dialogue. Find examples of each.

Specific verbal techniques: comic banter, sometimes blunt or abusive, sarcasm, irony, exaggeration, understatement, play on words, malapropism, idioms, catch phrases or recurring expressions used by a character.

Character: arising from the funny way they behave or speak, especially any peculiarities.

Visual humour, in both description and dialogue. Find examples of each.

Dramatic humour: from the dramatic situation and dialogue; may also involve visual humour and of course play-acting or deceit.

**Moral:** do you consider the story illustrates a moral point, serious or humorous or do you think it is only a narrative that tells a funny story and so the humour itself is the real point of the story? If you think it has a moral, how do you think the story conveys this, as there is no explicit moral comment from the narrator at the end?

### How To Write Your Essay – a Few Reminders

**Plan Carefully:** make a list of the points you want to make about plot, character, narrative style, humour etc. and list a few examples under each heading, leaving space under each example to add a comment on what each of these tell you or what effect it had on you while reading the story.

Once you have sketched out your main points in note form, decide on a sensible order for them, possibly keeping what you consider to be your most important significant/interesting point to the last.

**Structuring Your Essay:** effective structuring throughout is essential. Use a clear **introduction** to the story and say how it fits the question to be discussed. Also briefly indicate how you intend to answer the question, based on your plan.

In the **main body** of your answer devote at least one paragraph to each of your main points, by introducing each new point clearly, expanding your discussion, adding supporting evidence and commenting on this, to develop, paragraph by paragraph, a relevant discourse on the question under consideration, i.e. don't just tell the story or bits of it.

Finally, you should arrive at an appropriate **conclusion** which confirms your opinion/response to the question.

**Use of Textual Evidence:** most of your answer will involve clear explanation, description and discussion of how your text relates to the question under discussion, so you will often be drawing on evidence from the text, using mainly your own words or sometimes telling us indirectly what the author or a character says.

**Short quotations** of significant words and expressions may be incorporated into your discussion to show how effectively you can integrate evidence and explanation/commentary.

If done skilfully, this can let the reader see how well you know and understand the text.

**Longer quotations:** you should quote directly and accurately anything you consider to be very significant and helps to highlight your argument. If it is important you should also have something relevant to say about this quotation or try to analyse it in more detail to further your argument.

### JAUNTY JOCK AND OTHER STORIES

This anthology, first published in 1918 and reprinted in 1999 (pub. House of Lochar) contains a superb blend of humorous, satirical comedies and grim, ironic tragedies, with diverse settings – Highland and Lowland Scotland and on the Continent.

This anthology would be an excellent source for Specialist Study topics at Higher or Dissertations at Advanced Higher. Particularly recommended for Higher are the grimly tragic tales *Young Pannymore* and *The Tale of the Boon Companion* or the ironic and satirical *First-Foot* and *The Scottish Pompadour*.

#### *Young Pannymore* (Intermediate 2/Higher Level)

The rebellion referred to is the 1745 Jacobite rising in support of Charles Edward Stewart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) called “the Young Pretender” by his enemies, the Hanoverians who supported King George’s government. As Argyll was ruled by the head of the clan Campbell, the Duke of Argyll, a staunchly Protestant supporter of the Hanoverians, it would have been most unusual for someone from this area to have supported the Jacobite cause. The story therefore suggests that Young Pannymore was either very impulsive and high spirited or a bit naive. It is also set in 1752, the year Britain abandoned the Julian calendar in favour of the Gregorian, which meant removing 11 days from the calendar (something that actually provoked riots in some places) and this change plays an important part in the plot. This grim tale of hatred, revenge, madness and murder is clearly in the great historical tradition of Scott, Hogg, Stevenson and Buchan etc. in its tragic portrayal of individual lives in the grip of more powerful historical forces, and a strong sense of inevitable cruel fate hanging over the tale, driven by a demonic element which ironically brings about the very thing it seeks to prevent.

#### Discussion

Remember that in those days news travelled slowly, so it could have taken weeks for a messenger to travel to Edinburgh and back with a decision.

1. “They seemed poor souls! miraculous in their great endurance.” Have your sympathies for his parents changed in any way by the end of the story? How and why? Who do you feel sorriest for and why?

2. Examine the crucial turning points in the story, where a different choice could have led to a different outcome, and decide who is mainly responsible for each of these. How far back does this chain of events actually go? Arrange each turning point in ascending order of importance.

3. At the end of the story what could the parents do, if anything, to prevent their son’s hanging?

4. Who would you blame most for the death of young John Clerk: the lad himself, Lord Elchies (the Judge who sentenced him), his father, his mother, Campbell of Lochgair? Arrange these in descending order of blame, from most to least.



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5. Check all the references to time in the story and show how they play a central part in the story: date of the hanging, days passing quickly for parents, change of calendar, Lochgair's mission, her accusation that Lochgair has robbed Time itself of a fortnight, references to "our times are in his hands" (top p.12) and repeated foot p.13 "our times are in God's hands," contrasted with "now they are in the devil's".

6. Consider how the narrative viewpoint gradually narrows from an unlimited, omniscient, third person perspective at the start to a more limited one (from about foot p.11, "And there was no tidings from Lochgair") of mainly seeing and hearing only what the husband and wife do. Why do you think Munro uses this switch of focus?

**Vocabulary:** working with a partner, check out any words you are not sure about and write out their meanings. Why do you think he uses a few archaic words like "nonce" or "swound"?

**Reading Questions** (page references to House of Lochar edition, 1999). These should help you to prepare for **close reading, textual analysis** and the **critical essay**. They could be divided into two sections – up to and after question 7 – which would equal 25 marks each.

1. How does the author arouse sympathy for young John Clerk in the first two paragraphs? ..... 2
- 2a. Referring to word choice, show how the narrator shows his attitude towards the hanging in the first two paragraphs. .... 2
- b. By referring to word choice and one other feature, show how he shows his attitude towards the following:
  - (i) the people who capture young Clerk ..... 2
  - (ii) the judge, Lord Elchies (para.3)..... 2
3. Apart from the narrator's comments about him at the start, we are only given one other description of young Clerk's behaviour, where he leaves the court (top p.11).
  - a. What qualities are revealed here that complement what we have learned about him earlier? ..... 2
  - b. Why do you think this is the last time the author lets us see him? ..... 2
4. "So the days passed... the flap of wings." (p.11, para.3)
  - a. Explain how Munro makes effective use of contrasting similies here. .... 1
  - b. Examine each of the following to show how they add to the idea in the above image.
    - (i) "We're here forgot... and all the world sleeping sound" etc. (p.11, para.5). .... 1
    - (ii) "wan lights... the world went on its ordinary way... engaged with misery" (p.12, para.2) ..... 1
    - (iii) "she screamed..and yet the distant lights... glowed on with unconcern." (p.13, para.2) ..... 1

- 5a. By referring to two examples, show how Munro uses the weather or darkness to create an appropriate atmosphere. (p.12)..... 2
  - b. Identify any two techniques used by Munro and explain their effectiveness in creating a sinister atmosphere when Margaret discovers the man hanging from the gibbet. (p.12-13) ..... 2
  6. How does her husband react when he discovers that the calendar has been changed and what does this reveal about his character? ..... 2
  7. Notice how she mockingly repeats his words "our times are in God's hands" (foot p.13) which he used earlier (top.12) and tells him that "now they are in the devil's!" What do you think this shows about her attitude towards her husband and his faith and how does it signal a turning point in her character development? ..... 3
  - 8a. Explain the contrast between the state of mind of the two parents on their way home. (p.14, para.2) ..... 2
  - b. Show how Munro uses imagery to describe Margaret's appearance and state of mind at this point. .... 2
  - 9a. What does Margaret mean by "her one triumphant thought"? (p.12, para.6) ..... 1
  - b. Check her explanation on p.14. What does this tell us about her state of mind? ..... 1
  - c. Explain her husband's conflicting feelings when he discovers what she had intended. .... 2
  10. Briefly explain their contrasting attitudes towards Campbell of Lochgair, at the foot of p.11, and show how they play a key role in the plot. .... 3
  11. How does Munro suggest Lochgair's speed (foot p.15) and how is his hurry ironic? ..... 3
  - 12a. Why do you think her husband shoots Lochgair, when he has just said that he will spare him? .... 1
  - b. Do you see any reason to doubt the truth of what she whispers in his ear? Why? ..... 1
  13. Show how Munro makes effective use of repetition at the foot of p.15-top.16. .... 2
  14. Select any two techniques used by Munro in the last two paragraphs and show how they help to create a dramatic effect. .... 2
  - 15a. Show how each twist at the end of the story intensifies the shock and pain of the tragedy. (p.15-16) ..... 3
  - b. Also explain the full significance of the last line. .... 2
- Total** ..... 50

### Further Questions on Character and Theme

(These may be used for discussion and/or close reading in pairs or individually.)

1. “the proud and bitter dame and her pious husband... peevish dame.” (p.11) How far do you think these words effectively sum up the wife and husband?

2. Note the number of times the word “pious” is used about the husband (p.11, para.2 and top p.12). Also notice his words about “God and His grace” (foot p.11) and “our times are in His’s hands” (top p.12). Check out the term “predestination” and look at their argument about “doom” (foot p.14 – top p.15).

a. Explain his religious beliefs, especially as regards the idea of fate and the will of God.

b. Show how and why his faith is tested and finally broken.

c. Why do you think he is never given a Christian name?

d. How good a Christian do you think he really is?

3. Early in the story he seems a man of strong character, but as the story progresses, he is found wanting. How far do you agree with this view?

4. When she reveals her plan to murder Lochgair (top p.15) he cries out “Woman!.. get behind me” and takes refuge “in a gust of mumbled prayers.” This perhaps reminds us of Christ’s words in the bible “Get thee behind me Satan.” What does this suggest he is thinking about the state of her soul at this point?

5. How does she mock and taunt him and what effect does this have on him?

6a. What does it tell us about his character that he is prepared to forgive Campbell of Lochgair until his wife’s final taunt proves too much for him?

b. What does it tell us about her that she switches all blame from everyone else to Lochgair and is prepared to stop at nothing to achieve her revenge?

7. As he becomes weaker, his wife becomes stronger. How far do you agree? (If you have studied Macbeth, you may feel there are perhaps a few parallels with the character of Lady Macbeth.)

8. Do you agree that it is her desire for revenge that eventually brings about the tragedy and their own downfall?

9. How far do you think that his wife is driven insane by circumstances? Notice his use of the word “mad”(p.15) and the number of words describing her which suggest madness, such as “demented” (p.14).

10. How does Munro suggest that there is something far darker, even Satanic, about her desire for revenge? Notice she puts a sort of curse on Lochgair (top p.14).

### Other Stories

(Some Thematic Suggestions from *The Lost Pibroch* or *Jaunty Jock* collections)

**Fate, Death, Cruelty:** *Young Pennymore*, *The Tale of the Boon Companion* (*Jaunty Jock* collection), *The Secret of the Heather Ale*, *The Fell Sergeant*, *A Fine Pair of Shoes*, *Castle Dark*, (*The Lost Pibroch* collection).

**Jealousy and Revenge:** *Young Pennymore* (*Jaunty Jock* collection), *Black Murdo*, *Castle Dark*, *The Secret of the Heather Ale* (*The Lost Pibroch* collection).

**War:** *War*, *The Oldest Air in the World*, (*The Lost Pibroch* collection), *The Boon Companions*, *The Silver Drum* (*Jaunty Jock* collection).

**Fantasy and the Supernatural:** *The Lost Pibroch*, *The Sea-Fairy of French Foreland* (*The Lost Pibroch* collection), *The Brooch*, or *Isle of Illusion* (*Jaunty Jock* collection).

**Friendship and Love:** *The Silver Drum*, *The Scottish Pompadour*, *The Tale of the Boon Companion* (*Jaunty Jock* collection), *The Oldest Air in the World*, *Shudderman Soldier* (*The Lost Pibroch* collection).

### Critical Essay Choices

1. “A powerful dramatic narrative which moves swiftly towards its shocking and tragic conclusion with a powerful sense of the inevitable.”

Discuss how well you think this statement describes *Young Pennymore* or *The Tale of the Boon Companion* or both.

2. Often in a tragic or horrific ending, the sense of shock or pain resonates beyond the end of the story, leaving us with a powerful sense of human suffering which is intensified because we are aware that it is far from over. Discuss how far you think this statement applies to either *Young Pennymore* or *The Tale of the Boon Companion* or both.

3. The conflict between the central characters is what really holds our interest and propels the plot along at the same time. Discuss how far this is true of any of the stories you have read in *Jaunty Jock and Other Stories*.

4. Injustice, cruelty, revenge, betrayal, distrust, selfishness, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, love and hate. Select one (or more) of these themes, or select one of your own, and show how it plays an important element in one or more of the stories you have read from this anthology.

In your essay, you should consider at least several of the following aspects: plot structure, narrative viewpoint, dramatic skill, character conflict and contrast, atmosphere and setting, language, stylistic devices and theme.



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### Further Guidance on Plot and Character

You might find it useful to consider some of the following elements of plot structure and character in Munro's stories. Look for important similarities or differences between the humorous and tragic stories.

**Plot:** the use of any narrative hooks in the exposition or introduction to character and situation.

- The introduction of an inciting force or catalyst which brings about a change or challenge and how this sets the action in motion, setting up some sort of conflict or set of opposing forces.
- The development or heightening of the conflict towards a crisis and point of no return.
- The use of a dramatic climax or showdown of some sort.
- A final turning point, or twist which causes surprise, shock or humour.
- How far is the problem/conflict resolved by the end?

**Character:** consider the role each main character plays in the battle of wills or battle of wits.

- Who is the main character or pair/group of characters and how far do we admire or sympathise with them?
- Is there an important contrast or difference between them in any way?
- What is the greatest problem or obstacle they have to overcome? How far do they succeed or fail?
- Is this problem of their own making in any way or is it beyond their control?
- Who is/are the main opposing character(s) or antagonist(s) in the story? How does the writer present them and what do you feel about them?
- Is there an important or interesting secondary character or a minor character who plays a significant part in the story? How and what role do they have in the story?
- Do the events change the characters' lives for better or worse and are they in any way responsible/to blame for this themselves?
- Do they change as people, for better or worse, as result of what happens?
- How does this come about? Look for the turning points and growth points in the story.

### Writing Choices

1. Select one or more of the following scenes to write an additional short scene or scenes in the story or as a drama script:

a. The parents plead with Campbell of Lochgair for help.

b. Lochgair persuades the Lord Advocate to pardon Young Pennymore.

c. The Innkeeper and his wife argue over what to do about the disappearance of the young man in *The First-Foot* and/or discuss what has happened after his return.

d. Ealasaid seeks advice from her best friend about what she should do about Alan's friendship with Red John and his neglect of her or she tries again to persuade Alan that he is making a big mistake.

2. Write a final scene or sequel for either *Young Pennymore* or *The Tale of the Boon Companion*.



### *The Malingerer: Answer Guide to Reading*

#### Questions

##### A) Intermediate 1–2

1a. He's always tired/contrast with willing workers etc. suggests he is lazy. – 1 mark each.

b. No/it's laughable etc. – 1 mark.

2a. "Generally sympathetic/inclined to believe" – 1/2 mark each.

b. He's trusting/kindly, sometimes a bit gullible. – 1 mark for each valid point made (total: 2).

3a. He's really ugly! – 1 mark.

b. He's unsympathetic, thinks he's lazy – always scoffed/cruelly ascribed etc. to laziness. – 1 mark for contrast, 1/2 and 1/2 for evidence

c. He's less kindly/trusting/more suspicious/cynical/not so easily fooled – 1 mark for each valid point made (total: 2).

4a. They are going to lift a cargo of timber and he wants to avoid the work. – 1 mark.

b. He's not only lazy, but always pretending etc. – 1 mark.

5. He pretends he's dying, something he's probably done before and he's just eaten a very hearty breakfast. – 1 mark for each.

6. We are told about his "gusto" and "gentle slumber" and when dinner time came round he "instinctively awakened" and lay wondering what they will bring him to eat. 1/2 for each (total: 2).

7. Dougie convinces Para that the Tar really is a malingerer and then suggests a more effective punishment. The fact that the Captain goes along with Dougie's plan shows his respect for Dougie's judgement and at the same time Dougie's ability to talk the Captain round not only defuses the Captain's anger but also offers the prospect of some fun. This shows a close relationship, based on mutual dependence and sharing a cunning sense of humour and mischief. – 1/2 and 1/2 for evidence and 1 for each valid point made (total: 3).

8a. They go about on tiptoe, whisper to him, give him nothing but gruel, attempt to feed him, wipe his brow, shake their heads, put on solemn looks, pretend to be grieving/holding back tears, offer to buy things you usually get for an invalid, seemingly trying to cheer him up, show him affection etc. – Any four, 1/2 mark each.

b. They tell him to "wheest, mustn't excite yourself etc... poor fellow, you're looking awful bad," tell him his nose is as sharp as a pin, (i.e. thin, emaciated), warn him of the dangers of smoking, pronounce a seemingly fatal diagnosis, "convolvulus in the inside" (convolvulus = a garden flower), warn him of its grave consequences and causes, ask if they can get him grapes etc., or if he'd like Macphail to read to him from the bible etc. – Any four, 1/2 mark each.

c. Mark on merit – 2 marks.

9. The Tar's "frightful suspicion" at the sight of the local undertaker is greatly increased by the latter's repetition of coffin measurements, "six by two", plus his comments about "no very healthy weather" which convince the former that he is as good as "dead and buried." – 1/2 and 1/2 for words and 1 mark for effect.

10. Since they put the fear of death into the Tar this should teach him to stop pretending and cure of him of his laziness, thus effectively giving him a dose of his own medicine. This rounds off the story in a humorous way, as he gets what he deserves etc – 1 and 1.

**Total = 30**

##### B) Intermediate 2 – Higher

1a. Since his illnesses coincide with heavy work they are a bit suspicious/probably feigned. – 1 and 1.

b. He appears to sympathise with the poor Tar, but since his "weaknesses" are brought on by the prospect of work, we can see he is being ridiculed and contrast between euphemism and blunt truth. 1 mark for tone and 1 for contrast.

2. It's due to being full up, the result of pure greed. – 1 mark.

3. He is good at putting on a performance, part of his dying act, as suggested by mourning/funereal associations of the word. – 1 and 1.

4a. At first he's still sympathetic, showing "kinder feelings" and dispenses the prescription himself, but the Tar's gusto etc. makes him "somewhat suspicious" and when Dougie convinces him that he's been fooled, he becomes so "indignant", he's ready to punish him with the rope end, i.e. need to trace the change from sympathy, via suspicion to anger. – 1 mark for each stage, with evidence.

b. He has a soft heart/is sympathetic towards his crew, but doesn't like being made a fool of and has a formidable temper when crossed. – 1 mark for each valid point.

5. The captain's is so angry at realising how he has been conned that he immediately feels the Tar deserves physical punishment, whereas Dougie is much more subtle/cunning in thinking of an appropriate punishment that would both fit the crime and also give them some fun at the Tar's expense. – 1 mark for contrasting reactions and 1 mark for each character point made (total: 3).

6. Their attitude of "chastened grief", shaking their heads and speaking to him "sorrowfully", Dougie's diagnosis is pronounced "solemnly", they have "countenances full of pity", suggest he hasn't long to live, all of which fit in with the gloomy associations of the word. – 1 mark for each appropriate example (total: 3 marks).



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8. He develops a “fear” about his condition, after seeing them looking and speaking so sorrowfully which rises to tears of pity when told he has a potentially fatal disease, leaving him “incapable of getting up”, mounting to alarm at the arrival of the joiner/undertaker at the climax of the story. He pretended that he was dying, but ends up convinced that he really is dying. – 2 for clear explanation of increasing fear and 1 for explanation of ironic twist (total: 3).

9. The real power of this sentence lies in its simplicity in summing up the complete reversal of behaviour and turning of the tables so economically, but with a clear comic picture of the Tar doing two men’s work which illustrates just how effectively the malingerer has been punished. – 1 mark for each valid point (total: 3).

10. Answers should appreciate aspects of plot such as the dramatic reversal and turning of the tables that have taken place, an appreciation of the comic climax of the story, the trickery of Dougie and the Captain in contrast to the fear and alarm of the Tar, the visual dimension of the Tar looking in the mirror and jumping up to convince them that he isn’t all that bad etc., the double joke of the Tar being tricked into thinking it is him in the mirror, but he doesn’t think he has changed all that much and the subtle comic understatement of the last line. – Suggest 1 for each valid point, with evidence to support (total: 5).

Total = 30

*Young Pennymore: Answer Guide to Reading Questions*

1. He is young, likeable, joins the rising “more for the fun of the thing” than any political reason, he is “the apple of his mother’s eye”, he was probably innocent, he has no time to see his people before being arrested etc. – Any 4 bits of evidence for two marks.

2a. He refers to it as a “scurvy” fate, a “harsh” measure showing explicit condemnation/disapproval. – 1 mark for attitude, with 2 bits of evidence for 1 mark (total: 2).

b(i) As well as a string of words and phrases showing either explicit disapproval or negative connotations, he uses parenthesis to elaborate on his description and repetition via an accumulation of adjectives and a string of parallel phrase to reinforce his condemnation. – Two bits of evidence with explanation, for 2 marks.

(ii) He describes the Judge as “squeaking like a showman at the fair”, creating a very unfavourable impression, while the Judge’s own words are cold and merciless. – Two bits of evidence with explanation, for 2 marks.

3a. He is shown to be dignified/respectful in court and concerned for his parents, all of which supports the positive impression we were given earlier. – 1 and 1.

b. Munro needs to keep him in the dark, literally, and his parents and the reader, in the dark, figuratively, to increase the suspense as we focus on their predicament. – 1 and 1.

4. Contrast of immobility/time passing slowly with that of great speed/passing quickly – 1 mark.

All the examples contrast the parents’ urgency/distress with the lack of awareness/concern in the rest of the community where life carries on as normal. – 1 mark for each clearly explained (total: 3).

5a. Examples chosen, such as the use of the storm and sound effects or the pitch black night need to be clearly linked to atmosphere of fear, dread, etc. – 1 mark for each with evidence.

b. Sound, tactile and visual imagery, onomatopoeia of clanging chains, personification of pitiless clouds and reeling moon. Any two examples with effect clearly explained. – 1 and 1.

6. He is dumbfounded/panic-stricken/afraid and runs to her, showing he is weak, feeble-minded, dependent on her etc. – 1 and 1.

7. She is dismissive/scornful towards him and rejects his faith. She is now so set on revenge that she is almost ready to sell her soul to the devil. – 1 and 1 and 1.

8a. He is clearly numbed and is full of doubts about why God has allowed this to happen, while she is emotionally distraught and evil thoughts are now simmering in her brain. – 1 and 1.

b. Appearance shown in the images of “cuddling her cold secret” (i.e. the pistol) or staring “glassily” at the coming day. – 1 mark for each part (total: 2).

9a. To “save” him from the shame of hanging and allow him to die “like a gentleman”, i.e. by shooting himself. – 1 mark.

b. Her cold resolve is now developing into a mad obsession. – 1 mark.

c. He is torn between feeling annoyed that her plan failed and ashamed that the sin of suicide could now seem preferable for their son. – 1 and 1.

10. He places great trust in Lochgair, while she is dismissive, scornful etc. –  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  (total: 1).

Key turning points in the plot revolve around their conflicting opinions, firstly about how far Lochgair is to blame and secondly about taking revenge on him etc. – 1 and 1.

11. The “clatter” of his horse’s hooves, the “galloping” in “furious haste” and how he would have “swept” on his way etc. –  $\frac{1}{2}$  for each example (total: 2) and 1 for awareness that the man she is blaming is actually in a desperate rush to save her son.

12a. He is overcome by humiliation, jealousy, rage etc. at the news he is not the father of his child. – 1 mark.

b. **No** as her obsessive desire for revenge on Lochgair could be rooted in a past betrayal/wrong done to her. Note how she says “that is the curse of it” and she has also said earlier “I ken the man” which could be ambiguous.

Possibly **Yes** as she will stop at nothing to get revenge and she has sold her soul to the devil, the father of all lies. – 1 mark for valid reason in support of no or yes answer.

13. Need to show how repeating the same word “swound” or the repeated syntax in each sentence suggests shock/the whole world seems to swoon/time stands still etc. – 1 mark for technique and one for effect.

14. Examples could include contrast of the commanding wife’s lack of remorse and the whimpering man, the imagery of stirring the embers and burning the documents, the repetition of active verbs, the use of simple conjunctions, suggesting action/urgency/speed or syntax which places emphasis on her actions at the start of most clauses, but the shocking news is kept to the end of each paragraph, short last paragraph, use of dash and dramatic last short clause etc. – Any two for 1 mark each.

15a. The truth or lie about Lochgair being the boy’s father, the reprieve, the discovery that the body on the cart is not their son’s. Need to show how each adds to their shock and horror as each reveals how tragically mistaken they have been. – 1 mark for each point (total: 3).

(b) They are left with the realisation that they more than anyone else will now be responsible for their son’s death and they can now do nothing with the reprieve unless they are prepared to own up to their own crime. – One for each valid point (total: 2).

Total = 50

## Answer Guide to Character and Theme Questions

1. It is certainly her pride that leads to her plan for her son’s suicide, rather than seeing him hanged and her peevishness is seen in how she reacts when this plan is thwarted, which along with her bitterness causes her to blame it all on Lochgair and taunt her husband’s feebleness, though there is also certainly something much stronger than any of these emotions at work in her by the end. His piety is a key adjective as this is his most central feature which is put to the test, but sadly found lacking by the end.

2a. He is submissive to the will of an all-powerful God who has planned everything from the beginning of time, yet he also believes that God will not let him down and is even capable of performing miracles to save his son, via the calendar change, which of course he would see as having been preordained.

b. Notice how she mockingly repeats his words “our times are in God’s hands” (foot p.13) which he used earlier (top p.12) and tells him that “now they are in the devil’s!” and on the way home he is beset by “satanic doubts” (top p.14) and “he is appalled at the chaos into which the precious edifice of his faith had tumbled.” He is horrified at the thought that he may actually be “doomed” to kill Lochgair and finally sees his wife as the devil, but he is finally driven to obey her.

c. Lack of a Christian name may simply reflect the traditional use of his placename, Pennymore, or a rather formal, unaffectionate relationship with his wife, but it might also suggest that he lacks individuality, as if he is an anonymous representative of a bleak faith which is found wanting and ironically plays into the hands of the demonic arguments used by his wife.

d. His Christian principles and abhorrence at the thought of killing a man are swept aside, presumably in a fit of anger, hatred and desire for personal revenge, thus ironically showing that his wife was right about being “doomed” etc.

3. At the start he seems a man of strong faith who puts a “grip of steel” on his wife’s shoulders (p.12) and it is he who has the strength to cut down the body etc., but on the journey home he walks “without volition, wrestling with satanic doubts” (top p.14), becomes increasingly intimidated by his wife, is reduced to “mumbled prayers”, “cowering” behind the bushes and eventually abandons his principles, under the pressure of her taunts, leaving him at the end a “whimpering man”.

4. This biblical allusion to Christ’s words “Get thee behind me Satan” implies that he now really believes that his wife is under the power of the devil which her earlier words had spelt out to him, almost as a challenge.



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5. She mocks his lack of understanding – “ever your failing” – (p.14), mocks his faith in God (foot p.13) and exploits his belief in predestination (p.14-15) to persuade him that he is “doomed” to kill Lochgair. She accuses him of cowardice and finally taunts him with the news that Lochgair is really the boy’s father (p.15). He is intimidated and reduced to “mumbling” prayers and “cowering” behind the bushes, though he rouses himself when he sees that she is prepared to shoot Lochgair. Her final taunt drives him to murder and he is left “whimpering” at the end.

6a. Although he now seems to have been convinced by his wife that Lochgair was indeed responsible for the death of their son (“he has slain my son”) he still cannot bring himself to murder in cold blood and makes a final stand on his religious principles, indeed almost making a defiant boast of his piety (“but I will spare him”). Yet when his wife whispers in his ear “no son of yours” all his fine principles are immediately abandoned as he is overwhelmed by evil impulses, such as anger, jealousy, hate and desire for revenge. Thus the pious Christian who becomes full of “satanic doubts” is finally driven to commit the devil’s work.

6b. This “proud” and “peevish dame” shows her vindictiveness and increasing lack of rationality in loading all the blame onto one person, though if we believe her claim that Lochgair is the father, there may be other poisonous emotions lurking in her past. Certainly her desire to punish him blinds her to all else but a mad obsession with revenge, in pursuit of which she will let nothing stand in her way, being quite prepared to fire the gun herself or taunt and goad her husband into murder, thereby revealing how demented, ruthless and remorseless she has become.

7. Notice how she becomes “a woman made of stone”, suppressing all her natural feelings in pursuit of her plan to ensure her son dies “in decency” and by the end her “Spartan spirit” has prevailed over her husband’s piety as he cowers in the bushes. After she has goaded him into killing Lochgair we are told she “commanded... and walked without remorse,” in contrast to her “whimpering man”.

8. She becomes increasingly obsessed with punishing Lochgair for thwarting her plan, can only think of one use for the pistol after this and will stop at nothing, even goading her husband to murder the very man who has ironically been trying to save their son and is carrying the reprieve which they can no longer use, without betraying their own crime.

9. The ordeal of trying to save her son, then suppressing all her natural feelings in her stony determination to prevent him from being hung, the shock of “seeing” him on the gibbet, leaving her overwhelmed by despair and fury which whirl “through her brain like poisoned vapours” all have the effect of driving her over the edge of sanity.

10. Notice how from the start she “hissed” her mockery of her husband’s trust in Lochgair and even challenges God himself who “cannot put off the 5th September.” Ironically this does come about, but as she believes her son is hanging on the gibbet, she mocks her husband’s trust in God by saying our times are now in the devil’s hands. On the road home she utters a curse on Lochgair, a traditional way of summoning the devil and it is her obsessive hatred and desire for revenge on Lochgair which leads her to whisper an awful truth (or is it a lie?) in his ear, perhaps reminding us of the serpent (and again she uses the word “curse”) thus driving her husband to murder the very man who is ironically trying to save what may be his own son.