

- 1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the play *Alan's War* by Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins.

Jean has recently married Alan, a worker in a nearby factory, and as the extract opens is talking to her mother, Mrs Holroyd, about the baby that she hopes to have.

- Jean:* Oh, Mother, I like to watch Alan with a child – the way he looks at it and the way he speaks to it! Do you know, with those strong arms of his he can hold a baby as well as you, Mother? He picked up a little mite that was sobbing on the road the other day, and carried it home, and before a minute was over the bairn had left off crying, and nestled itself to sleep on his shoulder. 5
- Mrs Holroyd:* Ah, yes, he'll make a good father some day!
- Jean:* A good father and a happy one, too! Yes, we shall be happier than than we are now even. Oh, Mother, is that possible? – shall I be happier when I have my baby in my arms? 10
- Mrs Holroyd:* Ah, my child, yes, you will that, in truth. People talk of happiness and the things that bring it, and the young people talk about it and dream of it – but there's one happiness in the world that's better and bigger when it comes than one ever thinks for beforehand – and that is the moment when a woman's first child lies in her arms. 15
- Jean:* Is it, is it really? Oh, Mother, to think that this is coming to me! I shall have that too, besides all the rest! Isn't it wonderful?
- Mrs Holroyd:* (*moved*) God keep you, honey!
- Jean:* Yes, when I think of the moment when my child will lie in my arms, how he will look at me— 20
- Mrs Holroyd:* (*smiling*) *He!* It's going to be a boy then, is it?
- Jean:* Of course it is! Like his father. He shall be called Alan, too, and he will be just like him. He will have the same honest blue eyes, that make you believe in them, and the same yellow hair and a straight nose, and a firm, sweet mouth. But that's what he'll be like when he grows up a little; at first he'll be nothing but a pink, soft, round, little baby, and we will sit before the fire – it will be the winter, you know, when he comes – and he'll lie across my knee, and stretch out his little pink feet to the blaze, and all the neighbours will come in and see his sturdy little limbs, and say, 'My word, what a fine boy!' He'll be just such another as his father. Oh, Mother, it's too good to be true! 25
- Mrs Holroyd:* No, no, honey, it isn't! It will all come true some day.
- Jean:* Oh, Mother, Mother, what a good world it is! (*Kisses her*) Ah, I see some more people coming – he'll soon be here now! (*Goes in to right*) 35
- Mrs Holroyd:* (*looking along road*) Yes, there they come. (*Gets up, puts her knitting down, begins straightening table, then goes in as though to fetch something*) 40
- (*Gradual signs of commotion, two boys rush along stage, then return with two more, and go off. Two children rush past; then two women enter at back and stand a little to the right of cottage, shading their eyes. MRS HOLROYD comes out of the door with a brown jug in her hand*)
- Mrs Holroyd:* What is it? Anything happened? 45

- 1st woman: Ay, it's an accident, they say, at the works.
- Mrs Holroyd: (*alarmed*) An accident?
- 2nd woman: Yes, yes, look there! (*She points off to the right*)
- Jean: (*leaning out of room with her arms crossed on window sill*) And, Mother, I've been thinking we shall have to call him wee Alan, to tell him from his father, you know. Mother! (*Looks*) Mother, what has happened? 50
- Mrs Holroyd: (*hurriedly*) Nothing, honey, nothing. (*JEAN comes hurriedly out of room and down passage*)
- Jean: No, Mother, I am sure there is something! What is it? (*To woman*) Do you know? 55
- 1st woman: It will be an accident, they say, at the works.
- Jean: At the works! Anyone hurt?
- 2nd woman: Eh, with yon machines, ye never know but there'll be something.
- Jean: With the machines? (*Sees WARREN coming hurriedly past*) Jamie, Jamie, what is it? What has happened? 60
- Warren: Jean, dear Jean, you must be prepared.
- Jean: Prepared? For what?
- Warren: There has been an accident.
- Jean: Not to Alan? Ah, do you mean he has been hurt? (*WARREN is silent*) But he's so strong it will be nothing! I'll make him well again. Where is he? We must bring him back! 65
- Warren: No, no! (*He looks back at something approaching*)
- Jean: What is that? (*Pause*)
- Warren: God's will be done, Jean; His hand is heavy on ye. 70
(*A moment of silence. JEAN is seen to look aghast at something coming. HUTTON and two more, carrying a covered litter, come to the gate, followed by a little crowd of men, women and children*)
- Jean: Oh, they're coming here! (*Rushes to them*) Hutton, tell me what has happened? 75
- Hutton: Best not look, missis – it's a sore sight!
(*Mrs Holroyd holds JEAN back*)
- Jean: Let me be, Mother – I *must* go to him!
- 1st woman: Na, na, my lass – best keep back!
- Mrs Holroyd: Keep back, honey! you're not the one to bear the sight! 80
- Jean: *I must* – let me go! (*Struggles, breaks away, and rushes forward – lifts up cover*) Alan! (*She falls back with a cry into MRS HOLROYD's arms*)

(Curtain)

- 2 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935). This novel tells of three explorers, who by chance discover a land where the entire population is female.

The extract comes from near the beginning of the book, when the explorers first see some of the country's inhabitants.

There was a very large and beautiful tree in the glade we had just entered, with thick wide-spreading branches that sloped out in lapping fans like a beech or pine. It was trimmed underneath some twenty feet up, and stood there like a huge umbrella, with circling seats beneath.

"Look," he pursued. "There are short stumps of branches left to climb on. There's someone up that tree, I believe." 5

We stole near, cautiously.

"Look out for a poisoned arrow in your eye," I suggested, but Terry pressed forward, sprang up on the seat-back, and grasped the trunk. "In my heart, more likely," he answered. "Gee! Look, boys!" 10

We rushed close in and looked up. There among the boughs overhead was something—more than one something—that clung motionless, close to the great trunk at first, and then, as one and all we started up the tree, separated into three swift-moving figures and fled upward. As we climbed we could catch glimpses of them scattering above us. By the time we had reached about as far as three men together dared push, they had left the main trunk and moved outward, each one balanced on a long branch that dipped and swayed beneath the weight. 15

We paused uncertain. If we pursued further, the boughs would break under the double burden. We might shake them off, perhaps, but none of us was so inclined. In the soft dappled light of these high regions, breathless with our rapid climb, we rested awhile, eagerly studying our objects of pursuit; while they in turn, with no more terror than a set of frolicsome children in a game of tag, sat as lightly as so many big bright birds on their precarious perches and frankly, curiously, stared at us. 20

"Girls!" whispered Jeff, under his breath, as if they might fly if he spoke aloud.

"Peaches!" added Terry, scarcely louder. "Peacherinos—apricot-nectarines! Whew!" 25

They were girls, of course, no boys could ever have shown that sparkling beauty, and yet none of us was certain at first.

We saw short hair, hatless, loose, and shining; a suit of some light firm stuff, the closest of tunics and kneebreeches, met by trim gaiters. As bright and smooth as parrots and as unaware of danger, they swung there before us, wholly at ease, staring as we stared, till first one, and then all of them burst into peals of delighted laughter. 30

Then there was a torrent of soft talk tossed back and forth; no savage sing-song, but clear musical fluent speech.

We met their laughter cordially, and doffed our hats to them, at which they laughed again, delightedly. 35

Then Terry, wholly in his element, made a polite speech, with explanatory gestures, and proceeded to introduce us, with pointing finger. "Mr. Jeff Margrave," he said clearly; Jeff bowed as gracefully as a man could in the fork of a great limb. "Mr. Vandyck Jennings"—I also tried to make an effective salute and nearly lost my balance. 40

Then Terry laid his hand upon his chest—a fine chest he had, too, and introduced himself; he was braced carefully for the occasion and achieved an excellent obeisance.¹

Again they laughed delightedly, and the one nearest me followed his tactics. 45

"Celis," she said distinctly, pointing to the one in blue; "Alima"—the one in rose; then, with a vivid imitation of Terry's impressive manner, she laid a firm delicate hand on her cold green jacket. "Elleda." This was pleasant, but we got no nearer

“We can’t sit here and learn the language,” Terry protested. He beckoned to them to come nearer, most winningly – but they gaily shook their heads. He suggested, by signs, that we all go down together; but again they shook their heads, still merrily. Then Ellador clearly indicated that we should go down, pointing to each and all of us, with unmistakable firmness; and further seeming to imply by the sweep of a lithe arm that we not only go downward, but go away altogether—at which we shook our heads in turn.

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“Have to use bait,” grinned Terry. “I don’t know about you fellows, but I came prepared.” He produced from an inner pocket a little box of purple velvet, that opened with a snap—and out of it he drew a long sparkling thing, a necklace of big varicolored stones that would have been worth a million if real ones. He held it up, swung it, glittering in the sun, offered it first to one, then to another, holding it out as far as he could reach toward the girl nearest him. He stood braced in the fork, held firmly by one hand—the other, swinging his bright temptation, reached far out along the bough, but not quite to his full stretch.

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She was visibly moved, I noted, hesitated, spoke to her companions. They chattered softly together, one evidently warning her, the other encouraging. Then, softly and slowly, she drew nearer. This was Alima, a tall long-limbed lass, well-knit and evidently both strong and agile. Her eyes were splendid, wide, fearless, as free from suspicion as a child’s who has never been rebuked. Her interest was more that of an intent boy playing a fascinating game than of a girl lured by an ornament.

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The others moved a bit farther out, holding firmly, watching.

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¹ *obeisance* – a bow of greeting

3 Write a critical comparison of the following two poems.*Blues for Freedom*

freedom's a blue song coming slow
boat on a river flowing backwards
dragonfly in a thunderstorm
blue dragonfly, blue freedom
freedom's a ribbon in a box
at the back of an old woman's wardrobe
she remembers how it used to be
sunlight on the ribbons in her hair

5

freedom's a story in a book
that ends with a hug and kiss goodnight
it's so warm against daddy's chest
dreaming about freedom

10

freedom's a blue song coming slow
through our dark alleys, slow and sad,
poor freedom waiting for the sun
to rise up in its blue, blue sky
poor freedom

15

Karen Press (born 1956)

As I Grew Older

It was a long time ago.
 I have almost forgotten my dream.
 But it was there then,
 In front of me,
 Bright like a sun – 5
 My dream.
 And then the wall rose,
 Rose slowly,
 Slowly,
 Between me and my dream. 10
 Rose until it touched the sky –
 The wall.
 Shadow.
 I am black.
 I lie down in the shadow. 15
 No longer the light of my dream before me,
 Above me.
 Only the thick wall.
 Only the shadow.
 My hands! 20
 My dark hands!
 Break through the wall!
 Find my dream!
 Help me to shatter this darkness,
 To smash this night, 25
 To break this shadow
 Into a thousand lights of sun,
 Into a thousand whirling dreams
 Of sun!

Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

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