

1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract, the opening of the play *The First Fireworks* (2002) by Alex Broun.

[*New Year's Eve. Close to midnight. A bench on a hillside. DAWN, a frail woman in her sixties enters, wearing a white hospital gown. Her feet are bare. She slowly makes her way to the bench. She sits on the bench, panting heavily. Pause. HELEN, a well-dressed woman in her late thirties enters.*]

5

Helen: Mum? Mum! [*She goes to DAWN*] What are you doing? Dad's going out of his mind.

Dawn: He'll be alright.

Helen: The whole hospital's turned upside down. Everybody's looking for you.

Dawn: But you're the only one who found me. [*Pause*]

10

Helen: How did you get up here?

Dawn: There's a hole in the fence.

Helen: I know, but how did you get up here? The steps almost killed me.

Dawn: I'm not sure.

Helen: It's a good spot. Wonder more people don't get up here.

15

Dawn: They don't know about the hole. [*Pause*] Shouldn't you be at your party?

Helen: I was until Dad called me and told me you'd vanished.

Dawn: He will be annoyed.

Helen: Dad?

Dawn: No. What's his name?

20

Helen: You know his name.

Dawn: Do I? What is it again? Gordon, Gormond –

Helen: Garan.

Dawn: That's right – Garan. Sounds like some kind of rash. "Oh no. I've got a nasty case of Garan on my arse."

25

Helen: Mum, he's my husband.

Dawn: More fool you. I always liked the other one. Simon. He was –

Helen: Wet.

Dawn: Considerate. He was always so nice to me.

Helen: Probably fancied you.

30

Dawn: Me? Really?

Helen: Really.

Dawn: But I'm twice his age.

Helen: Trust me.

Dawn: Garan reminds me too much of someone else.

35

Helen: Who?

Dawn: My husband.

Helen: Dad's alright.

Dawn: You try being married to him for forty years. [*Pause*]

Helen: Come on, we better get you back.

40

Dawn: I'm not going back.

- Helen:* Don't be silly Mum. Come on.
- Dawn:* Helen – I'm not going back. I hate that awful room full of all that stuff. People keep ringing me and saying "What can I bring you?" I say, "Don't bring me anything!" I don't want any more things. [*DAWN taps the bench alongside her. HELEN sits*] Beautiful clothes. They look very expensive. 45
- Helen:* They are. So I guess Gormond is good for one thing.
- Dawn* [*tapping HELEN's stomach*]: Maybe two. How did you work out where I was?
- Helen:* It wasn't hard. New Year's Eve. Where else would you be? 50
- Dawn:* My chair. My view. Surprised you remembered where it was.
- Helen:* Come on Mum, it hasn't been that long.
- Dawn:* Five years.
- Helen:* Five? Really? [*DAWN nods. Pause*] I still remember when you first brought me here. I was eight years old. 55
- Dawn:* Long time ago.
- Helen:* Twenty years. [*Pause*] I remember it like yesterday. We got here just as the sun was going down. My little legs got tired so you had to carry me up the last fifty steps. And I kept asking: "What is it Mum? Why are we here?" And you just smiled and said: "We're going to my chair. The best view in the city." 60
- Dawn:* I remember.
- Helen:* And I kept asking: "But what are we going to see?" And you wouldn't answer. You just put your finger over my lips and said:
- Dawn:* "You'll see my love". 65
- Helen:* And then when it got dark you pointed to the sky and said "Look" and suddenly the sky was full of light. Huge explosions of colour. Orange, pink, blue, green. And noise. Terrible noise. I had to cover my ears the explosions were so loud. I'll never forget it. Looking up at that clear night sky, the colour and the stars. The muffled explosions ringing in my ear. It was my first fireworks. 70
- Dawn:* You never forget your first fireworks.

2 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the novel *New Grub Street* (1891) by George Gissing.

Reardon is a writer struggling to make a living. His wife enters the room where he is trying to write.

‘What *is* the matter?’ she began. ‘Why can’t you get on with the story?’
 It was the tone of friendly remonstrance, not exactly of affection, not at all of tender solicitude.
 Reardon had risen and wished to approach her, but could not do so directly. He moved to another part of the room, then came round to the back of her chair, and bent his face upon her shoulder. 5
 ‘Amy –’
 ‘Well.’
 ‘I think it’s all over with me. I don’t think I shall write any more.’
 ‘Don’t be so foolish, dear. What is to prevent your writing?’ 10
 ‘Perhaps I am only out of sorts. But I begin to be horribly afraid. My will seems to be fatally weakened. I can’t see my way to the end of anything, if I get hold of an idea which seems good, all the sap has gone out of it before I have got it into working shape. In these last few months, I must have begun a dozen different books; I have been ashamed to tell you of each new beginning. I write twenty pages, perhaps, and then my courage fails. I am disgusted with the thing, and *can’t* go on with it – *can’t!* My fingers refuse to hold the pen. In mere writing, I have done enough to make much more than three volumes, but it’s all destroyed.’ 15
 ‘Because of your morbid conscientiousness. There was no need to destroy what you had written. It was all good enough for the market.’ 20
 ‘Don’t use that word, Amy. I hate it!’
 ‘You can’t afford to hate it,’ was her rejoinder, in very practical tones. ‘However it was before, you *must* write for the market now. You have admitted that yourself.’
 He kept silence.
 ‘Where are you?’ she went on to ask. ‘What have you actually done?’ 25
 ‘Two short chapters of a story I can’t go on with. The three volumes lie before me like an interminable desert. Impossible to get through them. The idea is stupidly artificial, and I haven’t a living character in it.’
 ‘The public don’t care whether the characters are living or not. – Don’t stand behind me, like that, it’s such an awkward way of talking. Come and sit down.’ 30
 He drew away, and came to a position whence he could see her face, but kept at a distance.
 ‘Yes,’ he said, in a different way, ‘that’s the worst of it.’
 ‘What is?’
 ‘That you – well, it’s no use.’ 35
 ‘That I – what?’
 She did not look at him; her lips, after she had spoken, drew in a little.
 ‘That your disposition towards me is being affected by this miserable failure. You keep saying to yourself that I am not what you thought me. Perhaps you even feel that I have been guilty of a sort of deception. I don’t blame you; it’s natural enough.’ 40
 ‘I’ll tell you quite honestly what I do think,’ she replied after a short silence. ‘You are much weaker than I imagined. Difficulties crush you, instead of rousing you to struggle.’
 ‘True. It has always been my fault.’
 ‘But don’t you feel it’s rather unmanly, this state of things? You say you love me, and I try to believe it. But whilst you are saying so, you let me get nearer and nearer to miserable hateful poverty. What is to become of me – of us? Shall you sit here day after day until our last shilling is spent?’ 45
 ‘No, of course I *must* do something.’

‘When shall you begin in earnest? In a day or two you must pay this quarter’s rent, and that will leave us just about fifteen pounds in the world. Where is the rent at Christmas to come from? What are we to live upon? There’s all sorts of clothing to be bought; there’ll be all the extra expenses of winter. Surely it’s bad enough that we have had to stay here all the summer; no holiday of any kind. I have done my best not to grumble about it, but I begin to think that it would be very much wiser if I *did* grumble.’ 50 55

She squared her shoulders, and gave her head just a little shake, as if a fly had troubled her.

3 Write a critical comparison of the two poems printed below.

The Last Good-bye

How shall we know it is the last good-bye?
 The skies will not be darkened in that hour,
 No sudden blight will fall on leaf or flower,
 No single bird will hush its ceaseless cry,
 And you will hold my hands, and smile or sigh 5
 Just as before. Perchance the sudden tears
 In your dear eyes will answer to my fears;
 But there will come no voice of prophecy, –
 No voice to whisper, “Now, and not again,
 Space for last words, last kisses, and last prayer, 10
 For all the wild unmitigated pain
 Of those who, parting, clasp hands with despair:” –
 “Who knows?” we say, but doubt and fear remain,
 Would any *choose* to part thus unaware?

Louise Chandler Moulton (1835–1908)

‘Love, we must part now’

Love, we must part now: do not let it be

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And waving part, and waving drop from sight.

Philip Larkin (1922–1985)

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