

**'Men Should Weep'     by Ena Lamont Stewart**  
**Written in 1947    Rewritten in 1982**

## **Setting**

Set in 1930s in a tenement in the East End of Glasgow. The Morrison household. The set itself makes a comment about the social effects of poverty. Stage directions show this clearly. "Ernest appears at the door ... and stands there in his bare feet and wearing an old coat over tattered pyjamas."

Men Should Weep tackles social issues but these are interlinked with political and gender issues. It resonates with a contemporary audience and comparison can be made between Scotland today and the Scotland as presented in the play

## **Social Issues**

- Poor quality housing and overcrowding
- Unsanitary conditions
- Lack of food and malnutrition
- Lack of income
- Extreme poverty
- Urban Scotland

## **Political Issues**

- Effects of Poverty
- Effects of Unemployment / Depression
- Effects of Poor Housing Conditions
- Power and Control (including fiscal control)
- Health of the Population
- Feminism and the growth of female emancipation (*This point closely related to*

## **Gender Issues**

- The role and portrayal of women in 1930s Glasgow
- The role and portrayal of men in 1930s Glasgow
- Domestic violence
- Plight of the elderly
- The role and portrayal of children in 1930s Glasgow

## **Use of History and Nostalgia**

- Set in 1930's working class Glasgow
- Life in Scotland Past and Present
- Comparison with an audience today
- Rising unemployment
- Recession / Depression

## **Evidence for**

### **Poor quality housing and overcrowding**

- The flat only has a kitchen with a bed recess, a bedroom and the 'back parlour'
- The living conditions are cramped and the family have little privacy
- Ten people share this space (Maggie, John, Granny, Jenny, Edie, Ernest, Marina, Christopher, Alec & Isa)
- Maggie & John sleep on a mattress on the kitchen floor and use old coats as blankets
- Christopher and Marina sleep in the bed housed in the recess
- Jenny shares a bed with Granny & Edie
- Isa and Alec's tenement flat collapses and they are forced to live in Maggie and John's tenement flat as a result. (Alec has to share a bed with Bertie and Ernie. Isa has to share a bed with Edie, Granny and Jenny.)
- There was a severe shortage of decent housing in the 1930s. There were many slums and private landlords had a lot to answer for. Getting a council house was gold dust
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### **Unsanitary conditions**

- The lack of washing and drying facilities
- The shared toilet on the landing
- There was no inside bathing facilities other than the kitchen sink and perhaps a metal bath which had to be filled using water from the kettle
- The absence of hot running water (water had to be boiled on the range)
- The flat is in a 'muddle' as Maggie cannot cope
- Christopher has rickets
- Mary Harris has lice
- Bertie has TB. In Act 2, Scene 1 we discover that he is kept in hospital. This is devastating news for Maggie. TB patients had to be isolated as TB was a highly contagious disease and life threatening
- They get washed at the sink using the same face cloth
- The 'Sanitary' man from the council could be called in to investigate infestations or poor hygiene procedures such as not washing the dunny stairs

### **Lack of food and malnutrition**

- John is unemployed and cannot afford to buy enough food to keep his wife and children.
- There is obvious ignorance regarding the sort of food you should be giving babies. (Maggie dips the baby's dummy into a sugar bowl.)
- The children are forced to eat bread and jam to fill their stomachs, as John and Maggie cannot afford a meal at suppertime.
- Maggie sends Alec for 'ninepenny worth o chips, two pies an a tin o condensed. Then tae the baker an see if there's ony stale tea-breid left.' This would have been a rare treat. Hardly a balanced diet
- When Jenny worked at the fruit shop, Maggie was there at night to get the 'bashed tomatoes' and rotten fruit for free

### **Lack of income and poverty**

- John and Maggie rely on Lily to help them feed heir children (she gives them food – 'black puddin....on Wednesday, gingerbread on Sunday, forby a the cest-affs and the odd bobs...' 'I brought ye a tin o baked beans the night.' Lily also buys medicine for Bertie as there was no NHS as we know it, you had to pay to see a doctor or a dentist
- John and Maggie also rely on Granny's meagre pension allowance
- John and Maggie rely on Jenny's wages and the bashed fruit and veg she brings home
- The children wear cast off clothing
- Edie has 'nae breeks'
- Maggie is forced to go to the 'Mission' (charity for second hand pants)
- The Morrisons didn't even own a 'wireless' (radio)
- Johan and Maggie don't have enough decent bedding for their bed – they have to use coats along with a blanket to keep them warm at night
- Women had to wash clothes at communal 'Steamies'

### **Lily is a support to the Morrison family**

- Lily provides them with food on a regular basis
- She gives Maggie money
- She brings medicine for Bertie
- She has loaned money to Alec

### **Political Issues**

- It was rewritten by 7:84 (a theatre company with declared socialist sympathies)
- Depression of 1930's is the backdrop
- The plight of the individual shows the effects of government policy
- The situation at the time meant opportunity for those who could take advantage of the situation but poverty for others. "Some men gets on and makes money, depression or no. Ithers hasnae the brains." Jenny
- John reveals the realities of looking for work when there are 'Hundred o us, Maggie, beggin for the chance tae earn enough for food and a roof ower our heids.' When John finally gets a job in Act 3: 'This is the first Chrisimas I've had a decent job for ten year; it's gonnae be the best.'
- Lack of training opportunities and no opportunity to better themselves. "Nae trainin. Nae skill; juist a laborer when there wis labourin needed; and when there's nane – the Burroo." Those on the Buroo (Dole) blame the government.
- Unemployment benefits were first instituted in 1911. Over 2 million people were relying on the payments by 1921, as the United Kingdom was experiencing economic hardship after World War I.
- The housing collapse shows a lack of maintenance generally and no provision for those displaced. A council house was very difficult to find.
- Old age pension introduced in 1908 for those over seventy. "Goad bless Lloyd George! Him that gie'd us wur pension books." For those looking after the elderly, this was a much needed boost to the family coffers.
- There is a perceived devaluation on the pound – "a ten shillingy note's no a ten shillingy note ony longer". Maggie notices that the cost of living is increasing. I dinna ken whit they dirty rotten buggers in Parliament are daein wi ma money, but they're daein something.'
- No government support in maintaining the nation's health and therefore rickets, TB, lice abound. The lack of a National Health Service means that Maggie cannot afford to take Bertie to the doctor or to buy him the medicine he needs. Health is therefore a question of wealth – and not every citizen's right as it is today.
- Maggie's journey can be seen as a political one. By charting Maggie's transition from oppressed wife and mother a woman who provides justification and excuses for her own and other people's oppression, through her growing disenchantment with the state of her relationships to eventually seizing of control over her own and her family's destiny, the play challenges the existing social and political status quo on questions of female roles in society
- The play can be seen to promote the feminist political perspective

## Gender Issues

- The role and portrayal of women in 1930s Glasgow
- The role and portrayal of men in 1930s Glasgow.
- Domestic violence
- Plight of the elderly
- The role and portrayal of children in 1930s Glasgow

## The role and portrayal of women in 1930s Glasgow

- Women were expected to get married, have children, stay at home and look after the family.
- Wives were expected to be dutiful.
- Lily had a 'disappointment' and she is in the unenviable position of being a spinster.
- Women were economically dependent on their husbands.
- Lily, unusually for a woman, works in a 'Coocaddens pub'.
- Isa breaks the mould and doesn't work. She gets Alec to run after her even to the extent that he thieves for her.
- Most women took great pride in keeping their homes clean. This was vital in communal living such as sharing a close and lavatory.
- Isa isn't a typical 1930s Glasgow wife. She goes out to pubs, get involved in muggings, doesn't have children and detests her husband. She also goes out of her way to make Alec jealous. She doesn't respect Alec. Isa's pass at John would have been very shocking for 1947 when it was shown. Isa goes out with other men behind Alec's back.
- In Act 2 Scene 2 we discover that Isa has been – 'gaun wi yon fat bookie'. Shocking!
- Isa leaves Alec. This would be considered shocking as women were expected to stick by their husbands through thick and thin.
- Alec's knife attack and strangling of Isa would have been very shocking indeed. This would also have been seen as a great act of cowardice.
- The women had to rely on each other for support. This included your neighbours as well as your family.
- Jenny asserts her independence and leaves the Morrison household.
- Jenny dresses like a tart and has started to drink gin. She stays out very late and hangs out with a bad element. She chases men who have money.
- Many women had the philosophy that you just had to put up with men.
- Lizzie was untypical as she was a moneylender who charged a high rate of interest. She also bought old clothes at a cheap price and would sell them on for a profit. The people she sold the clothes had little option but pay her, as they couldn't get a loan from a bank.
- In Act 3 we discover that Jenny has a 'sugar-daddy'. Jenny is 'living in sin'. This would have been very shocking to a 1947 audience.

## **The role and portrayal of men in 1930s Glasgow**

- Men were expected to be the breadwinner.
- Unemployment would have been seen as a disgrace and the man would feel less of a man if he couldn't provide for his family.
- The man was considered to be the head of the house.
- The man tended to lay down the law and set the rules of the household.
- A man would consider housework, cooking and looking after children as the responsibility of the women of the house.
- Men would worry about what other men thought if they did contribute to running the household.
- Men hid their feelings and didn't show their emotions (hence the title)
- Alec is not a typical 1930s man. He is a weak 'mammie's boy' who has not got control over his wife. He is dishonest and thieves to feed Isa's hunger for the good life. He runs after Isa. Alec does as Isa tells him.
- Young men were expected to 'learn a trade'. Alec has let his father down by being idle with no real employment prospects, as he has no trade.
- John used to be an alcoholic – typical of the strong drinking culture in the West of Scotland. After Marina was born though, he became Tee Total – gave up the drink. He takes refuge in the local library in part to avoid going to pubs.

## **Domestic violence**

- Mr Bone (the man upstairs) beats his wife when he is drunk. (This happens on a regular basis.) John threatens Maggie with violence.
- Women were expected to put up with the domestic violence.
- Alec is prone to bouts of violence. (He once threw a bread knife at Lily) He threatens Isa with a knife and nearly kills her.
- It was not unusual for a father to take his belt to his children.
- It was not unusual for parents to hit their children frequently to discipline them.

## **The role and portrayal of children in 1930s Glasgow**

- Children were expected to do as their parents' asked/demanded.
- Jenny is rebellious. She stays out very late and has stopped following her father's advice.
- Young men and women were expected to stay at home, hand over all of their wages to their parents and only leave home once they got married.
- Jenny goes out with her new boss. He owns a jewellers shop. John doesn't approve of this relationship.
- Jenny has been drinking. This was frowned upon. Isa is fond of booze. It wasn't regarded as respectable for women to go to pubs. On the whole pubs were the domain of men and their view was that only 'loose' women tended to frequent them.
- Jenny leaves home which was against the norm.
- Lily warns Maggie early on about the fact that Jenny is friendly with '...the riff raff o the toon, and dressed up like a bloomin tart wi peroxidised hair' 'Yon Nessie Tait's a right bad lot...'
- Alec sponges off his mother when he should be helping to support the family.
- Alec is a gambler. Lots of West of Scotland men had a gambling habit.
- Alec owes Lily money. When he wins at 'the dug's' he doesn't pay her back thus not fulfilling his obligations.
- In the past, Lizzie got a ten-day prison sentence for fraud.
- Alec threatens suicide to get his mother to feel sorry for him. This would have been shocking to a 1947 audience.

## **The plight of the elderly – Granny Morrison**

- She gets no real peace and quiet from the children
- She is neglected as Maggie is run off her feet and exhausted (looking after the household as well as working as a cleaner part-time)
- She is sent to bed early in order to cope with her
- She has a very uncaring daughter in law (Lizzie, the wife of John's dead brother) who is only interested in her pension book
- There is an arrangement whereby she lives with her son John part of the time, then she is packed off to live with Lizzie part of the time
- She has to take her bed with her. The removal men are used to the routine
- Granny feels that she is 'naethin but an auld nuisance.'

## Role of the neighbours

- They are all part of close-knit community.
- The women are gossips.
- The neighbours know everyone's business.
- The neighbours help each other out.
- Mr Bone beats his wife.
- Mr Bone is a heavy drinker.
- In 1982 Giles Havergal's production, the 3 neighbours were observed to act like a Greek chorus – thus were both insiders and outsiders commenting on the action as much as being part of it.
- They emphasise the social control exerted by men (their husbands)
- Highlighted the female social experience and interrelationships (having tea, making jokes about the men out of earshot and therefore safely)
- They pass judgement on this social status quo in Maggie's domestic life

## History and Nostalgia

- Set in 1930's working class Glasgow. How much have times changed?
- An audience today finds itself facing rising unemployment and the onset of recession (some have called it a depression).
- We now have a National Health Service but outbreaks of dysentery were recorded in 1990's in Glasgow Housing schemes (cf Doreen in *The Steamie* whose aspirations are to have a house in Drumchapel and TB is on the rise again).
- The issue of female emancipation is as relevant to say as it was in 1947 and 1982. Women often have careers now, laws have changed to protect women from institutionalised sexism ... but legal rights and what is common practice is not necessary the same thing.
- Women's right's movements has had less effect on working class
- Has life in Scotland changed hugely in the last 80 years?