

The Steamie

by Tony Roper

*Textual Analysis and Critical Essays
for Intermediate 1*
E. Snodgrass

When it first opened in 1987, *The Steamie* took the theatrical world by storm. Set during the 1950s, the play takes place on Hogmanay in a Glasgow public wash house or Steamie. As the washing is done, four women sing, laugh and cry their way through the last working day of that year, with a little help from the increasingly not so handy Andy. Portraying a way of life in the midst of change, *The Steamie* quickly became a firm favourite with people of all ages, and its popularity shows no signs of waning.

RANGE

- Intermediate 1

KEY TEXT

- *The Steamie*, by Tony Roper. Play text published in *Scot-free: New Scottish Plays*, edited by Alasdair Cameron (Nick Herne Books, 1990).

RECOMMENDED

- *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies*, 3rd edition, edited by Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (Edinburgh University Press, 1996)



TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Look at the telephone conversation, starting 'DOLLY: Hello Doreen' to 'Doreen collapses laughing' (about one page of text)

Understanding

1. Quote 3 examples of Scots words/phrases, giving their English translations.(3)
2. Quote 3 examples of Standard English words/phrases which Doreen uses in her characterisation of a posh woman..... (3)
3. What makes you think that this is not the way Doreen normally speaks? (2)
4. Why couldn't Doreen's posh woman find her tiara?..... (2)
5. Name 3 new household appliances which are mentioned..... (3)
6. Why are these appliances causing such excitement? What did people do before these appliances existed? (each situation in turn)..... (2)

Analysis

7. What **impression** or **effect** is Doreen trying to create with her posh character amongst the women at the Steamie? (2)
8. Can you think of a **serious point** she might be trying to make behind the fun and games? .. (2)

Evaluation

9. The Steamie is a very **humorous** play. What sort(s) of humour are being used in this extract?
 - Why does Tony Roper use humour rather than another, more **serious method** to get his point across?
 - Do you think he is **successful** and that the play is funny? Why/why not?..... (4)
10. This is also a play very concerned with the **status** and **relationships** of men and women. What **information** or **insights** does this extract add to this picture of women in Glasgow society at that time?
 - What other information do you gather about the lives of women elsewhere in the play?.. (4)
11. Most of the play is written in Scots, specifically **Glaswegian** dialect.
 - Why do you think Tony Roper wrote it this way, rather than the **formal Standard English** we often find plays written in?
 - How **easy/enjoyable** did you find it to read a text (aloud or not) in Scots?..... (4)

Total marks = 30

PREPARATION FOR THE CRITICAL ESSAY

Characters

- What kind of person is Doreen/Magrit/Dolly?
- How do they treat Mrs. Culfeathers? Does this change at times?
- How do they treat each other?
- What do they think of Andy?
- What do they think of men generally? Is Andy typical?

Remember to quote and use evidence from the play to back up your points

Techniques which generate a sense of community/belonging

- humour
- local places/people/references
- cheek/insubordination
- fast and funny exchanges
- songs shared by the cast/taken in turns
- reminiscing
- sharing an imagined future
- shared hardships:
 - money/poverty
 - men
 - housing
 - heating/washing
 - hygiene/disease/medical intervention

Pupils must be reminded not to simply list these – and other – techniques: they should select a few and illustrate/evaluate them.

Changes Ahead

- steamies giving way to launderettes – effect on social behaviour
- appliances appearing in the home (hoovers, fridges, televisions) with America leading the way – social effects?
- what will be lost when certain domestic hardships are eradicated?
- discussion of various forms of poverty (e.g. financial/social/loneliness/lack of support – ref. song *Pals*)

CRITICAL ESSAY

Discuss a play in which relationships and community are as important as the characters' individual lives.

- Introduce and describe the main characters
- What can we tell about the relationships between them?
- What techniques does the writer use to generate a sense of community and belonging?
- Do we find that this sense of community is more important to them than what might be happening in each woman's own, individual life?
- Are the characters supportive of one another?
- Will they continue to live in this way, or are changes starting to creep in?

Remember to quote and use evidence from the play to back up your points

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS MARKING SCHEME

1. **yer** – your
hen – dear
stoor – dust/mess
Aye – yes
Zat – is that
mind – remember
Magrit – Margaret
goat – got
mairied – married
oan tae – to
coarner – corner
o' – of
etc.
2. Goodness me yes
 - what with ... and everything
 - one of those days
 - going to the opera tonight
 - Oh yes, Mrs Johnston, *terrazo* marble, etc.
3. because we have heard her speak in Scots in the rest of the play (1)
 - with a quotation for illustration (2)
 - because it sounds like she's trying hard (1) with illustration (2)
 - because it contrasts sharply with all the other women (1)
4. pile in the carpet so thick it buried the tiara (2)
5. television set, display cabinet, radiogram, refrigerator, washing machine, telephone – 3 examples: (2), 2 examples: (1)
6. labour saving – before those inventions they made their own entertainment/ couldn't display ornaments/washed by hand/had to buy fresh produce daily
Good, full explanation: (2)
7. character is better than them, has all these luxuries – they have none
 - maybe Doreen really will be like that character one day
 Full, well-explained response: (2)
8. sending character up because Doreen would rather have friends than material wealth
 - loss of solidarity – these women are going to become isolated through wealth
 - this will no longer be a caring community
 Full, well-expressed response: (2)
9. **types** of humour: pretending to be another character/improvisation/group
 - joining in with play-acting
 - **why?** audience will enjoy play more; seduce rather than brow-beat them
 - **funny/not funny?** – because of Scots (inherently humorous)/recognisable characters/local history/old people
 Good, full comment on all 3 aspects: (4)
10. women are doing all the household work – lives would be transformed by appliances
 - hard working lives – they rely on each other
 - men are useless drunkards
 Good, full comment making reference to other parts of the play and with quotation/illustration: (4)
11. because Tony Roper is Glaswegian and knows/speaks it
 - because it's essential for authentic dialogue
 - difficult to read at first because I was not used to it
 - became easier/more enjoyable
 Good, detailed combination of analysis and personal experience (whether pro- or anti-Scots!): (4)

Total marks: 30