

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

An Inspector Calls

Overview of text and key scenes

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Overview

Written by J.B. Priestley in **1945**, 'An Inspector Calls' is set over one evening in an **English manufacturing town** called Brumley in **1912**. It has 3 acts and is in **real time** which means there is no change in time or location between acts. The **upper-middle class** Birling family are visited by a mysterious inspector, who is investigating the death of a young woman by suicide. The all-knowing detective gradually reveals how each of them are involved with, and partially **responsible** for, her death. Priestley examines how each member of the family reacts to these revelations.

Characters

- **Arthur Birling:** the head of Birling and Company, a manufacturing company situated Brumley, and head of the Birling family. He represents the **Capitalist businessman**.
- **Sybil Birling:** the wife and **social superior** of Arthur Birling. She represents the **upper-class, socially prominent wife**.
- **Sheila Birling:** the Birlings' daughter. She represents the **impressionable, socially-aware younger generation** and the **feminist movement**.
- **Eric Birling:** the Birlings' son. He represents the **impressionable, socially-aware younger generation** and the consequences of **toxic masculine culture**.
- **Gerald Croft:** the son of Sir and Lady Croft, of Crofts Limited, and **socially superior** to the Birlings. He represents **privilege**, and the **dominance** of the **upper classes and patriarchy**.
- **Inspector Goole:** a police inspector. He represents the ideals of **Socialism** and **social responsibility**, and the ideal **justice system**.
- **Eva Smith:** a lower-class, young girl who is mistreated by the Birlings. She represents the **neglected lower-classes**.

EXAM TIP

You can integrate context and the author's intention into your initial point about a character or theme, e.g. "Mr Birling is used by Priestley to criticise the character of the typical Capitalist businessman."

Quick Summary

Act 1

1. Arthur, Sybil, Eric, and Sheila Birling, along with Gerald Croft, are having a dinner to celebrate the engagement of Sheila to Gerald. Mr Arthur Birling, the **patriarch** (the male head of the family), leads the family in a toast, celebrating the **progress** made by society.
2. A police inspector, Inspector Goole, calls and asks to speak to Mr Birling. A young woman, Eva Smith, has **died** at the Infirmary after drinking disinfectant.



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3. Two years ago, Mr Birling **fired** Eva after she led a **strike** at his factory. She was asking for higher wages. He believes he was **fully justified**.
4. Eva Smith then managed to get a job at Milward's, an **upmarket** store, however she was **fired** again after Sheila **complained** about her. Sheila felt Eva had been mocking her, and was **jealous** of her. Though she felt bad about it at the time, she hadn't thought it would have any **serious consequences**, and swears she won't act like that again.
5. The Inspector reveals that Eva was **unable to get another job**, so **changed her name** to **Daisy Renton**. Gerald gives himself away by showing that he recognises the name.
6. While the Inspector is out of the room, Sheila accuses Gerald of having an **affair** with Daisy Renton. He initially denies it but eventually confesses, asking Sheila to **keep it a secret**.



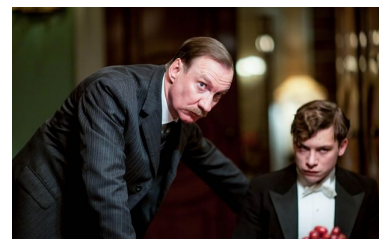
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Act 2

7. The Inspector returns along with Mr and Mrs Birling. Gerald is **forced to admit to his affair**. He rescued Daisy from a bar and put her up in some rooms he was looking after, but **broke it off when he needed to leave on business**. He swears that his concern and pity for her were **authentic**, and that he hadn't helped her in order to sleep with her. Sheila **gives him back their engagement ring**. Gerald leaves, feeling emotional, to go on a walk.
8. The Inspector questions Mrs Birling about a case she presided over at the '**Brumley Women's Charity Organisation**'. Mrs Birling ensured that a **young, pregnant woman** who introduced herself as 'Mrs Birling' was **refused help**.
9. The woman told the committee that she wasn't married to the father, who was a youngster and heavy drinker meaning **marriage was out of the question**. He had been supporting her with **stolen money**, and she didn't want to take anymore. Mrs Birling **blames the father entirely**, saying he was responsible and should be made an **example** of.
10. The family realise that the father in question is Eric.

Act 3

11. Eric returns. He **admits to drinking heavily and acting aggressively** towards Eva to get her to sleep with him. He used money from his father's company's accounts to support her. She learnt it was stolen, so refused his help. Sheila tells him that she went to Mrs Birling for help, but was denied it. Eric is furious. Mrs Birling is **upset that her son could act in such a way**.
12. The Inspector loses his patience with the Birlings. He tells them that they should never **forget** what they did. Eva Smith is dead, so they can't harm her anymore, but they can't help her either. He declares if people don't accept the **responsibility everyone in society has for each other**, "**fire and blood and anguish**" will follow. He leaves.
13. The family **argue amongst themselves**. Gerald returns. They slowly figure out that the Inspector wasn't a 'real' police investigator after all, and that no girl died from drinking



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disinfectant tonight. Gerald, Mr Birling, and Mrs Birling are **relieved** there will be no **public scandal**, and dismiss any **guilt or remorse** they had. Sheila and Eric, on the other hand, believe that all the misdeeds they committed still happened, and **they should all learn from the Inspector's visit**.

14. The phone rings. A girl has just died on the way to the Infirmary, and an inspector is on his way to question the Birlings.

Analysis - Act 1

- The play opens in the dining room of a **suburban house** belonging to Arthur Birling, a **successful manufacturer**, and his family. The lighting is **"pink and intimate"**.
- The family are seated around the dining room table, celebrating the **engagement** of Sheila Birling to Gerald Croft, the son of **another manufacturer**.
- Sat with the **self-important** Mr Birling, **"excited"** Sheila, and **"well-bred"** Gerald, are the **"cold"** Mrs Sybil Birling, and the Birlings' **awkward** son, Eric.
- The family prepare to make a toast. Mr Birling makes an effort to **impress** Gerald, whose family is of a **higher class** to the Birlings. Sheila **teases** him about the last summer, when she barely saw him.
- Mr Birling starts to give a speech. He notes that Gerald's parents couldn't attend, and goes on to say how much the engagement means to him. He hopes their marriage will bring his and Gerald's father's **companies together**. Mrs Birling and Sheila **object** to him bringing up **"business"**.
- Gerald gives Sheila her engagement ring. She is excited, and says she now **"feels engaged"**. Mrs Birling congratulates Gerald, and makes to leave with Sheila.
- Mr Birling gets everyone's attention to continue his speech. He tells them not to listen to all the **"silly pessimistic talk"** concerning **labour strikes and war**, speaking as a **wise, experienced businessman**. He predicts that society is heading for a **new age of prosperity** (financial success), giving the **"Titanic"** as an example of mankind's progress.
- Mrs Birling, Sheila, and Eric leave the room.
- Mr Birling tells Gerald that he knows Lady Croft, Gerald's mother, doesn't **approve** of the Birlings' **social standing**, but she doesn't need to worry, as he believes he is in with a chance of being knighted.
- Eric re-enters.
- Mr Birling **lectures** the young men on women and the **duty of men to care for themselves and their families**. He **rejects** any talk of **"community"**, and tells them to do the same.



Key Quotes & Analysis

(from the beginning of Act 1 to "I wanted you to have the benefit of my experience")

- (Act 1, pg 1) **"good solid furniture [...] champagne glasses [...] port [...] evening dress"** - stage direction



The inclusion of these luxuries, associated with wealth, indicates to the audience that this is the house of a **“prosperous manufacturer” (Act 1, pg 1)**, and creates a sense of **luxury**. We know to expect characters in the **upper classes** are likely to be **arrogant**, **ignorant**, or both. Priestley’s audience of 1945 would be particularly **suspicious** of the upper classes as after **two world wars** the **class system** in the UK had experienced major changes and left people more **cautious** of the



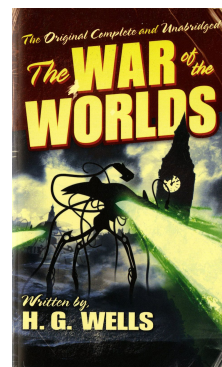
authorities. This is reinforced by the **“pink and intimate” (Act 1, pg 1)** lighting, which forces the audience to witness the opening scenes with the same rose tinted glasses as the characters onstage: people who are **blissfully ignorant** of the **struggles of the wider world**.

- **(Act 1, pg 7) “In twenty or thirty years’ time - let’s say, in 1940 - you may be giving a little party like this [...] - and I tell you, by that time you’ll be living in a world that’ll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares.” - Mr Birling**

The opening scene is full of **ironies**, and this is one of them. There is **dramatic irony** in how Mr Birling discusses the future. He dismisses any chance of war and envisions a world of personal freedom and wealth, reflecting the life he currently has. The play is set in 1912, on the eve of war, and Priestley’s audience in 1945 will have just experienced the horrors of World War II. Mr Birling’s **cruel dismissal** of the serious threat of war, calling them **“agitations”** and **“silly little war scares”**, would **turn the audience against him**.

- **(Act 1, pg 7) “We can’t let these Bernard Shaws and H.G. Wellses do all the talking.” - Mr Birling**
- **(Act 1, pg 10) “But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else.” - Mr Birling**

This is another case of **dramatic irony** that marks Mr Birling as an unempathetic, unlikeable man. Mr Birling tells his children to ignore any **“cranks”**, **“Bernard Shaws and H.G. Wellses”**, once again using **insulting language** to **belittle** them. He doesn’t see them as a **viable opposition**, or believe that their political views are valid. However, by 1945 Socialism was gaining popularity - **Labour won by a landslide in 1945 against Winston Churchill’s Conservative Party**. It is possible that Mr Birling’s **blatant optimism**, ignorance, and arrogance would make the audience resent him, especially as he dismisses both the suffering of WWII and the popularity of Socialism.



- **(Act 1, pg 7) “The Titanic - she sails next week - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - New York in five days - and every luxury - and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.” - Mr Birling**

Mr Birling quotes the **“Titanic”** as an example of **human progress**, but the modern day audience would know it sank during its maiden voyage. The way he reels off facts and stats about it shows how **excited** he is. Priestley uses the *Titanic* as a **symbol for Capitalist ideals**: it represents



strength, luxury, and progress. The fact it sinks shows how Priestley feels about this system of government.

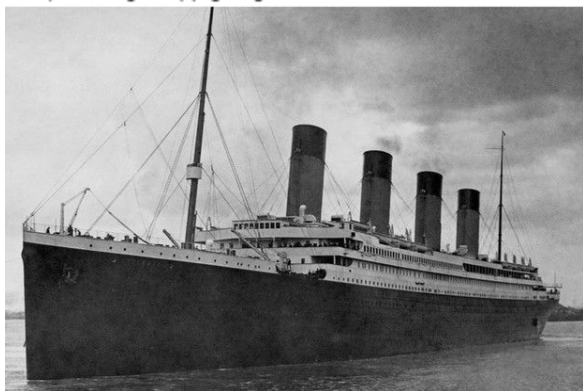
- (Act 1, pg 9 - 10) ***“A man has to make his own way - has to look after himself - and his family, too, of course, when he has one - and so long as he does that he won’t come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive - community and all that nonsense.” - Mr Birling***

Mr Birling’s **lecture** to Eric and Gerald is the **direct opposite** of what the Inspector, and Priestley, stand for. Mr Birling’s **ideal** of a **‘self-made man’** is the perfect summary of Capitalist thinking. Furthermore, Mr Birling clearly thinks highly of his own **“lecture”** and **“experience”**, representing how **the upper classes and Capitalists in 1912 believed themselves to be infallible** (incapable of being wrong). By referring to **“community and all that nonsense”**, it’s clear he believes himself to **be above caring for others**. Mr Birling **rejects his responsibilities** to others, and fails to recognise that **everyone in society relies on each other for progress and a good standard of living**. The **simile “like bees in a hive”** is **animalistic**, attempting to portray Socialism as **primitive and demeaning**.

• **Structure of the first part of Act 1**

When discussing structure, it can be useful to look at characters’ opening lines. Mr Birling and Gerald are the first to speak, proving them to be the **dominant male figures** - until the Inspector arrives. Mr Birling’s first line of dialogue is directed to Gerald, as he attempts to impress him, introducing Gerald as a **socially-superior** character and Mr Birling as one who is concerned with his **social status**. When Sheila first speaks, she is **“possessive”** and hints at the **“jealousy”** that leads her to complain about Eva. Mrs Birling hesitantly agrees to drink before giving the maid an order, enforcing her **“cold[ness]”**, while Eric participates very late into the conversation - and when he does so, it is with an awkward **“guffaw”**.

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Priestley uses this first scene to very skilfully **introduce all the themes and conflicts of the play**. Sheila reminds Gerald of **“last summer, when you never came near me”**, suggesting there are secrets between the happy couple. Sheila accuses Eric of being **“skiffy”**, **foreshadowing** his drinking problem. Mrs Birling is critical of **“the things you girls pick up these days!”** and tells Mr Birling **“you’re not supposed to say such things”**, revealing her **strict conduct** and belief in **social etiquette**. Mr Birling uses his speech and his

time alone with Gerald to improve his social standing, hoping the engagement will bring Birling and Company and Crofts Limited **“together”** and informing Gerald of his possible **“knighthood”**. The audience quickly get the impression that the engagement is a **business decision** rather than an act of love.

Note that the first part of this Act is hugely **dominated** by Mr Birling. He speaks the most, for the longest, and has the most interesting and significant lines. Priestley is giving his audience a



glimpse at the **Capitalist, upper class world of the 1910s**. Mr Birling's **power** at the beginning of the play is a **symbol** for Capitalism's **influence** at the start of the century. His downfall with the arrival of the Inspector **carries a message about how Capitalism will fare against Socialism**.

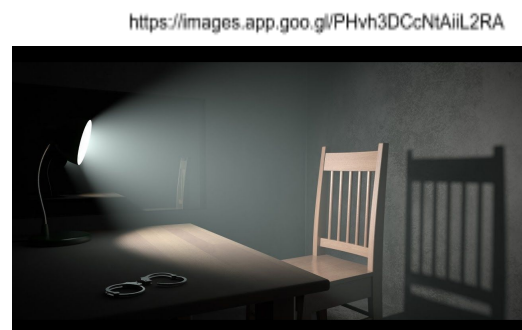
- A ring at the door interrupts Mr Birling.
- The maid, Edna, tells them an inspector has called and is asking to speak to Mr Birling. Mr Birling and Gerald **joke** that Eric is **in trouble**.
- The inspector is introduced as Inspector Goole.
- Mr Birling assumes the Inspector wants to speak to him because he is still a **magistrate** in the city. The Inspector corrects him, explaining that a girl **died of suicide** at the Infirmary after drinking disinfectant.
- The men are shocked, but Mr Birling doesn't understand why it's **relevant** to him.
- The Inspector tells them her name was Eva Smith. Mr Birling says the name doesn't **mean anything** to him. The Inspector reveals she was **employed** at his works at one time, and shows him a photograph of her that prompts Mr Birling's memory.
- Mr Birling recounts how Eva Smith and some other factory workers **demand a higher wage**, and went **on strike** when they weren't given it. The strike **failed**, and Mr Birling **fired** the ringleaders, Eva Smith included. Mr Birling **refuses to accept any responsibility** for her death, as this was 2 years ago. He believes he is **fully justified** in his actions, as it is his **duty** to **keep labour costs low** and keep his workers in check.
- Eric **challenges** him, but Mr Birling **criticises** him for being **spoilt** and **inexperienced**.

Key Quotes & Analysis

(from "we hear the sharp ring of a front door bell" to "Sheila has now entered")

- **(Act 1, pg 1) "Until the Inspector arrives, and then [the lighting] should be brighter and harder." - stage directions**

The lighting changes, imitating the atmosphere of a police interrogation. It indicates that **the truth will be exposed, with no bias or erasure**, and the Birlings cannot escape scrutiny.

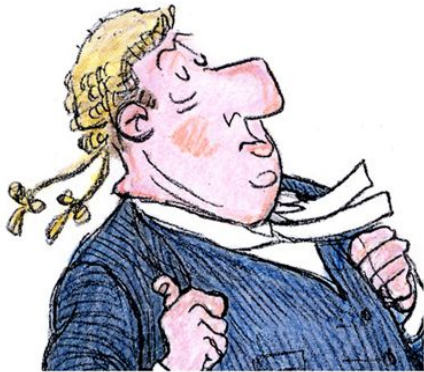


- **(Act 1, pg 11) "The Inspector need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period." - stage directions**

The Inspector's **"impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness"** **takes over from Mr Birling and Gerald's dominance**, showing that he will **control** what follows next. His **"plain darkish suit"** **separates** him from the Birlings' showy, luxurious evening dress and over-decorated home, perhaps comparing **the 1940's post-War perspective with the 1910's optimism**.



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- (Act 1, pg 11) ***“I was an alderman for years - and Lord Mayor two years ago - and I’m still on the Bench - so I know the Brumley police officers pretty well.” - Mr Birling***

Mr Birling quotes his position as **“alderman”**, a member of the city council, **“Lord Mayor”**, and his status on **“the Bench”** to **use his reputation and power to win over the Inspector**, as well as to **intimidate** him. We see him, Gerald, and Mrs Birling continue to do this throughout the play. They are used to getting their own way, and cannot accept that the Inspector does not ‘respect’ their authority. **Priestley suggests that people use their reputation to evade responsibility.**

- (Act 1, pg 11) ***“Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She’d been taken there this afternoon because she’d swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course.” - Inspector Goole***

The Inspector’s **graphic, emotive** description of Eva Smith’s death, using phrases such as **“great agony”** and **“burnt her inside out”** contrasts with the upper classes’ **euphemisms** - such as **“go on the streets”** (Act 1, pg 16) and **“horrid business”** (Act 1, pg 12) - and ignorance. This blunt, straightforward way of speaking **foreshadows** his blunt methods of getting to the truth. It also suggests a high level of **empathy and compassion**. It **combats** the way the upper classes try to **distance** themselves from the lower classes and **dehumanise** them, **pretending** they don’t suffer or feel pain.

- (Act 1, pg 14) ***“Because what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide. A chain of events.” - Inspector Goole***

The Inspector’s use of **parallel phrasing imitates** the **“chain of events”** he speaks of, showing how **everything is linked together**. The Inspector (a mouthpiece for Priestley’s views) seeks to demonstrate to the Birlings how **all their actions have consequences because of how society works**. Nothing happens out of the blue.



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The **metaphor “chain of events”** creates an **image of connection and intimacy**, but could also **connote imprisonment**: our responsibility to others is a **duty** we must face, and **we cannot escape it**. It is the cost of living in a society. The **verb “determined”** implies society almost acts as a source of fate. People have little control over how society treats them.

- (Act 1, pg 14) ***“Still, I can’t accept any responsibility. If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we’d had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn’t it?” - Mr Birling***



Priestley shows how Mr Birling is **resistant to the Inspector's teachings**. This line directly **opposes** what the Inspector just said. He admits the Inspector's proposition is likely, but **chooses not to change his ways**. The **modal verb "can't"** implies there's something in his **nature** that **stops him from taking responsibility** - we could conclude it is down his **privilege** or **entitlement**. The **adjective "awkward"** shows how he **chooses not to care for others** merely because it is an **inconvenience** for him. This is a very **selfish, self-absorbed perspective**. It can be done, but he knows what he'd rather be doing.

- **Structure of the second part of Act 1**

The Inspector's interruption of Birling represents **Socialism's triumph over Capitalism**. It highlights the Birlings' outlook as a **key point of contention** of the play, and can be seen as the Inspector's first act as Priestley's **mouthpiece**: he interrupts Mr Birling, therefore stopping him from speaking and so silencing him. **Priestley doesn't allow his audience to hear any more Capitalist ideals**.



The dialogue between the Inspector and Mr Birling **sets the theme for most of the dialogue going forward**, particularly for the inquiry with Mrs Birling. Mr Birling refuses to take blame, claiming everything he did was **fully justified** and in keeping with how he **"chooses to run [his] business" (Act 1, pg 15)**. On the other hand, the Inspector **challenges** his outlook - asking **"Why?" (Act 1, pg 14)** - and telling him his actions determined what happened next in a **"chain of events"**. Mr Birling is **selfish and motivated by greed**, while the Inspector is **socially-conscious**. This **contrast** is emphasised when the Inspector repeats but twists the Birlings' words against them, such as in the exchange:

- **Birling: If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth.**
Inspector Goole: it's better to ask for the earth than to take it

This **parallel structure** is used several times to great effect, as **it exposes the Birlings' cruel prejudices and their privileges**.

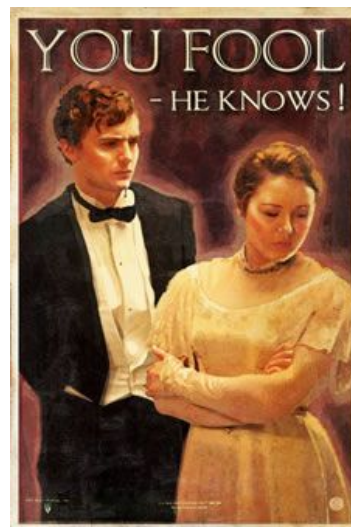
- Sheila enters, **unaware** of the Inspector's visit. When the Inspector says he is not yet done with his enquiries Mr Birling starts to **lose his temper**.
- Sheila is informed of Eva Smith's death and her father's actions. Mr Birling tells her he was **justified**, and Gerald **supports** him. They both say how they can't **understand** why the Inspector is interested in them if it's what happened to Eva after she left the works that is **important**.
- The Inspector **reveals that other members of the family know what happened next**. Mr Birling tries to take the Inspector away so they can **discuss the issue privately**. He is unsuccessful.
- The Inspector continues with Eva's story. Sheila shows **interest and sympathy** for her. When the Inspector says Eva was fired after a customer complaint, Sheila grows



“agitated”, and after she is shown Eva’s photograph, she **breaks down in tears and flees the room**.

- While Mr Birling goes to retrieve Sheila, the Inspector explains his system of **“one line of enquiry at a time”** to Eric and Gerald, **refusing to show them** Eva’s photograph.
- Sheila is brought back in. She tells the story of how she **complained** about Eva, getting her **fired** from an upmarket store, after believing she was **mocking** Sheila behind her back. She explains how she was in a **bad temper, jealous, and humiliated**. She tells them she **regretted** it immediately, but **couldn’t feel sorry** for Eva or **see** how her actions were particularly **“terrible”**, before promising that she’ll never do anything like it again, now that she has **learned** what the consequences are.
- The Inspector recaps how Mr Birling and Sheila were **responsible** for Eva **losing two jobs**, and reveals that next, she changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald is shocked, but **tries to hide it**.
- Everyone but Gerald and Sheila leave the room. Sheila **questions** him about Daisy Renton. At first he **denies** knowing her but after Sheila **accuses** him of having an affair with her last summer he **confirms** it. He **asks her to keep it a secret** from the Inspector, but Sheila **laughs** at this. The Inspector, she tells him, **already knows**.
- The Inspector re-enters and asks **“Well?”**. The curtain falls.

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Key Quotes & Analysis

(from “Sheila has now entered” to end of Act 1)

- (Act 1, pg 17) **“It’s just that I can’t help thinking about this girl - destroying herself so horribly - and I’ve been so happy tonight. Oh, I wish you hadn’t told me.” - Sheila**

In this quote, Sheila shows a lot of **shock** and, most **importantly, empathy** for Eva. She **hasn’t put up a wall between herself and the lower classes** - not to the same extent as her parents, at least. Along with Eric’s demonstration of **pity** for Eva, Priestley establishes **the younger generation as more accepting and caring people** than their elders. However, Sheila is not without her own **prejudices**. She wishes she hadn’t been told about Eva, suggesting **the upper classes avoid tragedy and hardship because it makes them uncomfortable**. It would be difficult for them to **enjoy their luxurious lives if they knew how the other half lived**, so they are **deliberately ignorant**.

It is possible that Priestley wants us to see that Sheila has been **conditioned** to think this way. Her family have **shielded** her from the realities of the world. The Inspector helps her **break away from this influence by exposing her** to such **“horrible”** things. It’s also worth noting how **different** the lives of Sheila and Eva - two girls of a similar age - are: Priestley asks why it is **possible** for one to kill herself after a life of **continual hardship** while the other is having one of the happiest nights of her life. The **double standards** in society cause lives to be lost.



- (Act 1, pg 18) ***“Now, Inspector, perhaps you and I had better go and talk this over quietly in a corner -” - Mr Birling***

In this suggestion, Mr Birling reveals how **obsessed** he is with his **public image**. As soon as he realises his **reputation** isn't safe, he abandons all his protests and instead focuses on **silencing** the Inspector. Priestley implies Mr Birling **cares more about whether the public believe he is innocent** than if the Inspector believes he is innocent. He also shows how the upper classes were **treated differently by the law**. Mr Birling **expects to be able to use his money and power to exempt himself** from consequence.

- (Act 1, pg 19) ***“There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence in every city and big town in this country, Miss Birling. If there weren't, the factories and warehouses wouldn't know where to look for cheap labour. Ask your father.” - Inspector Goole***



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Priestley makes it clear that Capitalism **not only takes advantage of poverty, suffering, and desperation - it relies on it**. We can **infer** that the upper classes **don't take measures to reduce income inequality because it benefits them**. His use of **“a lot of young women”** and **“every city and big town”** emphasises how it is a **universal issue**, not just specific to Brumley. Priestley suggests **there is a dark underbelly to every city**: where someone is **succeeding**, someone else is **struggling**. At the same time, the statement **“ask your father”** makes it **personal** to Sheila. **The villains are people she knows** - she is part of the world of those

responsible. Priestley suggests this treatment of women is not just due to **misogyny**. It is also due to **classism and Capitalist thinking**, because both encourage those in charge to **see profit and business opportunities rather than people**.

- (Act 1, pg 19) ***“But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people.” - Sheila***

Sheila immediately **understands** what the Inspector is telling her. She **recognises how workers are exploited and dehumanised by their employers**, **reduced** to **“cheap labour”** and financial statistics rather than **people** with families and feelings. This statement openly **contradicts** her father, challenging his **business methods**. She voices **beliefs in line with the Inspector's Socialist ideology**. These opinions are used by Priestley with some **situational irony**, however, as it is revealed that Sheila was the one who got Eva fired from her next job. This can be interpreted as Priestley **exposing the hypocrisy of the upper classes**, or demonstrating how **acting responsibly and thoughtfully takes effort - it is easier to have these beliefs in theory than in practice**.

EXAM TIP

Try to think about how a character changes their views or behaviours linking to the theme. Does a particular event change them? Why? This counts as structural analysis and should help you get a deeper understanding of the theme.



- (Act 1, pg 21) ***“We were having a nice little family celebration tonight. And a nasty mess you’ve made of it now, haven’t you?” - Mr Birling***
- ***“That’s more or less what I was thinking earlier tonight, when I was in the Infirmary looking at what was left of Eva Smith. A nice little promising life there, I thought, and a nasty mess somebody’s made of it.” - Inspector Goole***

This is one example of where the Inspector **challenges the Birlings’ selfishness by reminding them of what they have done** and why he is visiting their home. That Mr Birling can complain about how his dinner party has been ruined while ***“what [is] left of Eva Smith”*** lies in the Infirmary is **shocking**, demonstrating how far the **arrogance and ego of the upper classes** go. Priestley shows how **small and self-absorbed the world of the privileged is**. Furthermore, by saying ***“a nasty mess somebody’s made of it”***, the Inspector shows how he believes it is not Eva’s fault she killed herself. He holds her **society**, specifically the upper classes, **responsible**.



Analysis - Act 2

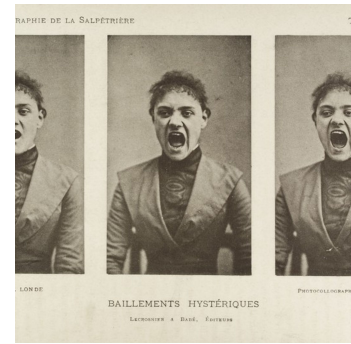
- When the curtain lifts, the scene is **the same as before**. No time has passed.
- Sheila **laughs** at Gerald, saying, ***“What did I tell you?”***. Gerald tries to **excuse** Sheila from the rest of the questioning, but **she wants to stay**. Gerald **thinks she wants to stay so she can watch the others be “put through it”**. Sheila is offended. The Inspector explains to Gerald that Sheila wants to stay so that **she can understand how the blame is shared between them**, rather than **bearing all the guilt herself**.
- Mrs Birling enters. **Her tone doesn’t match the scene** that just went before. She is **self-confident** and Sheila warns her that she is ***“beginning all wrong”***, telling her not to try to **distance themselves from Eva**. Mrs Birling is **dismissive** of Sheila’s insights, and quickly **loses her patience** with Sheila and the Inspector.
- Mrs Birling says that Mr Birling will join them once he has finished talking to Eric, who has **drunk too much**. Sheila **exposes him as a heavy drinker**, **shocking** Mrs Birling.
- Mr Birling enters. He is **annoyed** when he learns that the Inspector wants Eric to stay up so that he can question him later. Both he and Mrs Birling **lose their patience** with Sheila and the Inspector.



Key Quotes & Analysis

(from the beginning of Act 2 to “Well, come along - what is it you want to know?”)

- (Act 2, pg 27) **“I think Miss Birling ought to be excused any more of this questioning. She’s nothing more to tell you. She’s had a long, exciting and tiring day - we were celebrating our engagement, you know - and now she’s obviously had about as much as she can stand. You heard her.” - Gerald**
- **“He means that I’m getting hysterical now.” - Sheila**



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Female hysteria, described by men as **exaggerated or uncontrollable emotion in women**, has historically been **used to belittle, dismiss, and silence women who go against the norm**. Therefore, when Gerald tries to get Sheila excused for being **“hysterical”**, Priestley shows that he sees Sheila as a **danger**. Her newfound honesty and determination **threaten to expose his secret**. He is **condescending**, saying she has **“had a long, exciting and tiring day”**. This **infantilises** her, portraying **women as weak**. It may be an attempt to **invalidate** her later **accusations**. However, he never says it **outright**. He speaks in **euphemism**, and it is Sheila who **translates** what he is **insinuating** (hinting at) into **blunt speak**. She **exposes his attempt to disguise his manipulative insults as concern**.

Also note how he adds that they were celebrating their engagement. At the beginning of the century, **husbands still had a tremendous amount of control over their wives**. Gerald is reminding both the Inspector and Sheila that he has a **claim over her**, and that **she should obey him**. She does agree that she **“probably”** is hysterical, implying she has been **conditioned to doubt or suppress her own distress**. This highlights **how ingrained misogyny was in society**, and how difficult it was for women to be heard, to have a voice, and to be taken seriously.

- (Act 2, pg 29) **“You see, we have to share something. If there’s nothing else, we’ll have to share our guilt.” - Inspector Goole**

Priestley recognises that **accepting blame goes against our instincts as human beings**. It causes **grief and guilt, and admits fault**. He suggests that it can be a **group effort**, where we all **support** each other in our **“guilt”**. This makes his proposition of social responsibility more **appealing** because it isn’t strict or harsh. It should **bring people together rather than isolating them**: nothing will be held against anyone if we all share responsibility and guilt for the wrongs society has caused. Equally, the theme of sharing in this quote **links to Priestley’s Socialist ideology**. He suggests **sharing guilt comes hand in hand with sharing goods and wealth**. Society needs to be **completely connected**. Because Priestley was writing this just after the **Second World War**, when **national moral was low and the country was divided in its struggles**, this statement may be intended as **a sign of hope**. He suggests sharing the **“guilt”** of the war will **bring the country together and help it recover**.



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- (Act 2, pg 29) ***“Now Mrs Birling enters, briskly and self-confidently, quite out of key with the little scene that has just passed.” - stage directions***

Mrs Birling's entrance is another case of **dramatic irony**. As an audience, we know she expects to have **authority** over the Inspector and have her innocence **validated**, and that she will get a nasty surprise in a few minutes. Like Mr Birling, she tries to **intimidate** the Inspector, only to get **undermined** by him and her own daughter. The **adverbs “briskly and self-confidently”** convey **the arrogance and self-satisfaction of the upper classes**. They believe they're **untouchable**. It also shows how Mrs Birling **believes in her own innocence**: she has recently **denied a young, pregnant woman aid**, but still thinks **she has nothing to do with the Inspector's visit**. The fact she is ***“quite out of key with the little scene that has just passed”*** may be a **symbol** for the **class divide**. The luxuries enjoyed by the wealthy and powerful **don't reflect the state of the whole world**. Sheila and the Inspector quickly **dismantle this delusion** by informing her of Eric's alcoholism, foreshadowing how the Inspector will **challenge her outlook** in even bigger ways later on.

EXAM TIP

Talking about stage directions is a good way to analyse form (they are unique to drama) and structure, as it often highlights changes in tone or plot or direction.

- (Act 2, pg 30) ***“We all started like that - so confident, so pleased with ourselves until he began asking us questions [...] You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl.” - Sheila***
- (Act 2, pg 32) ***“But we really must stop these silly pretences.” - Sheila***

Sheila is quick to **follow the Inspector's lead** and **hold her family accountable** for their crimes and flaws. It seems she wants to **make up for what she has done**. The reference to their ***“silly pretences”*** shows how she wants to **escape the protective bubble of her privilege and face reality**. The **adjective “silly”** connotes **childishness or patheticness**. Furthermore, ***“pretences”*** implies her family's actions are **deliberate**: they **choose to perform**, to act like nothing is wrong. When she says ***“we all started like that - so confident, so pleased with ourselves”***, we see **how ingrained confidence is in the mentality of the upper classes**. They all had committed horrible acts before speaking to the Inspector, but still they were ***“so pleased”*** with themselves.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/oveNAFw7r14NIN8y6>



The ***“wall”*** Sheila references is a **metaphor** for the **class divide** as a whole. It implies **society is constructed to block certain people from reaching the same level of success and wealth as others**: the hierarchy is **rigged**. **Social mobility is nonexistent**, and the upper classes leave those less fortunate than them to **suffer**. Priestley uses Sheila as the Inspector's **ally**, showing how she will continue to **preach his ideology** after he leaves. Mr and Mrs Birling's impatience with her and the Inspector

represents how **powerful figures in society during the early twentieth century didn't take Socialism or the lower classes seriously**.

- The Inspector returns to his enquiry. He turns to Gerald and asks when he met her, **to the surprise of Mr and Mrs Birling**. Gerald **denies** it, but **Sheila tells him to tell the truth**. He begins the story of how he met Daisy at the Palace music hall bar. He argues with



Sheila. Mr and Mrs Birling **try to stop him going into the details** as they believe Sheila shouldn't be listening to this story.

- Gerald spotted Daisy being **harassed** by Alderman Meggarty, a **well-known womaniser and drunkard**, and stepped in to **help** her. He took her to a hotel bar where they talked. They met again a couple of days later. When Gerald learnt she was **broke** and on the point of **eviction** from her home he set her up in some rooms he was looking after while a friend was away. He **insists he felt sorry for her and didn't set her up there to sleep with her**, but that it was **"inevitable"** that she became his **mistress**. He **enjoyed her dependency** on him and her gratitude towards him, but **he didn't feel the same way about her as she did about him**. He broke the affair off when he had to go away for work.
- He says that **Daisy didn't blame him, but he wished she did**. She told him he made her **happier than she'd ever been** but **hadn't expected it to last**. He claims he is much more emotional than he appears, and leaves to go on a walk. **Sheila gives him back the engagement ring** despite Mr Birling's **protests**.

Key Quotes & Analysis

(from "(coolly) At the end of January, last year," to "We hear the front door slam.")

- **(Act 2, pg 33) "Where did you get the idea that I did know her?" - Gerald**

While Mr Birling and Sheila couldn't remember Eva until they saw her photograph, showing how **the lower classes were ignored and forgotten**, Gerald is the first character to **deliberately lie** about whether he knows her. It was **believable and acceptable for the upper classes not to take notice of the lower classes**, which is why he lies. He is **arrogant** enough to believe he can avoid the Inspector's questions and trick him, unable to see that the Inspector already **knows everything**. This is why Sheila laughs at him and says **"of course"** he gave himself away: she recognises the Inspector's wisdom. Gerald **represents the deceitful upper classes who believe they are above the law** while the Inspector **represents the ideal justice system**, where **everyone is held accountable despite rank or status**.

- **(Act 2, pg 34) "Why on earth don't you leave us to it?" - Gerald**
- **"Nothing would induce me. I want to understand exactly what happens when a man says he's so busy at the works that he can hardly ever find time to come and see the girl he's supposed to be in love with. I wouldn't miss it for worlds." - Sheila**
- **"But you're forgetting I'm supposed to be engaged to the hero of it." - Sheila**

These exchanges demonstrate the **tension** between Gerald and Sheila. It's very **different** to how they behaved together at the **beginning of the play**, but even back then there were signs that their engagement **wasn't all perfect**. These **conflicts** have now come to light: no secrets remain untouched with the Inspector around. Priestley suggests **the people they were at the start were not their true selves**. The Inspector has **changed** them, made them more honest, and the people they truly are don't get on. It seems their whole marriage was a **meaningless institution or act**.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/1f9J2nPP6WcATpPh7>



They argue for most of Gerald's interview with Sheila using **"sarcasm"** and **"irony"** to **mock and criticise his selfishness**. Gerald seems to want her to **"leave [them] to it"** to stop her **taunts**. Sheila, though, is **empowered** because she can call him out for his



exploitation of Eva as a woman who was **dependent on him for economic security**. Her family try numerous times to get her to leave the room, claiming the story is too **explicit** for her to hear, but she refuses. Therefore, she **rejects the stereotype of women as delicate and sensitive**. She knows she is **owed** truthful explanations. This is supported by her **repetition** of “**supposed to**”, **connoting societal expectations**. Priestley suggests their engagement was only a **performance or facade**. Priestley demonstrates how **selfishness and deceit leads to a loss of love**.

- (Act 2, pg 34) ***“I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women. But then I noticed a girl who looked quite different. She was very pretty.” - Gerald***
- (Act 2, pg 35) ***“She looked young and fresh and charming and altogether out of place down there. And obviously she wasn’t enjoying herself.” - Gerald***

Gerald’s exact **motivations** are **questionable**. He helped Eva escape from the advances of Alderman Meggarty, suggesting kindness and respect, but his **hyperbolic, dramatic assumptions** - “**obviously she wasn’t enjoying herself**” - could suggest he is **exaggerating** the situation to **paint himself in a better light**. He could be using a **narrative** of her distress to **justify** why he pursues her. It is clear he was attracted to her and his descriptions **objectify** her. His focus on how she “**looked**” indicates his **attraction was superficial**, based on her **appearance** not her **personality**. The **adjectives** “**young and fresh**” are troubling because they imply he was **attracted to her vulnerability and innocence**. It suggests he was a **predator**, preying on her. “**Fresh**” could be a reference to her **apparent virginity**. Men wanted to **take a woman’s virginity** because it was, culturally, a **sign of their masculine strength**. Women were a **conquest**.



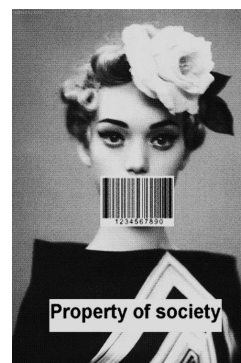
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The way he emphasises how “**different**” she was from “**those hard-eyed dough-faced women**” is important. It is clear he holds a **misogynistic, judgemental view of women**, particularly **lower class women**. To **maintain** his feeling of **superiority** and **deny his hypocrisy** he has to draw a **distinction** between Eva and the other women at the bar.

- (Act 2, pg 37) ***“I suppose it was inevitable. She was young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful. I became at once the most important person in her life - you understand?” - Gerald***
- ***“Yes. She was a woman. She was lonely.” - Inspector Goole***

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Once again, Eva’s **youth and beauty** are used by Gerald as **reasons** for his relationship with her. Priestley suggests men, particularly **privileged** ones like Gerald, are unable to view women as anything other than **sexual objects they can use to fulfil their desires**. Calling it “**inevitable**” portrays the **male sex drive** as something **natural and uncontrollable**. It suggests men should be **allowed** to act as they want, rather than be expected to **control** themselves and **respect** others. The fact Gerald saw Eva’s intense gratitude and dependency on him as **appealing qualities** reveals the **exploitative, advantageous, imbalanced dynamic** of their relationship. Gerald used Eva because she had no one else and her **worship** of him made him feel **powerful**. She **validated his masculinity**. Therefore, Priestley



suggests Gerald's exploitation of her **isn't that different** from the way the factories and warehouses **keep women in poverty** so they can hire them on **cheap wages**. Eva Smith is again a **commodity**, a product that can be bought and sold, picked up and discarded **whenever a man feels like it**, in order to **further his own interests**.

- (Act 2, pg 39) ***"She told me she'd been happier than she'd ever been before - but that she knew it couldn't last - hadn't expected it to last. She didn't blame me at all. I wish to God she had now. Perhaps I'd feel better about it."* - Gerald**
- ***"She felt there'd never be anything as good again for her - so she had to make it last longer."* - Inspector Goole**

This illustrates how **tragic** Gerald's relationship with Eva was, and how the two of them viewed their relationship so **differently**. For Eva, their relationship was **the chance of a lifetime**, a glimpse of **happiness** in a life of suffering and mistreatment. Gerald was the only person who **respected** her. For Gerald, Eva was **one girl of many**, and he used her in **secret**, **isolating** her from the rest of his life. In many ways, he **mistreated** her, but Eva was so desperate, and the bar so low, that **even his selfish acts of generosity were enough**. From the start, Gerald could **escape** whenever he pleased, but Eva was **tied** to him. By leaving her, Gerald **cut off all means of security and support for her**. It suggests he only wanted to help her **as long as it suited him**: why would he pick to help Eva, out of the millions of other girls living in poverty?

Gerald informing them that Eva ***"hadn't expected it to last"*** and ***"didn't blame [him] at all"*** implies there was a **set life the poor were expected to lead**. Priestley shows how the lower classes were **raised** to ***"expect"*** **disappointment**, as if **they didn't deserve good things** to happen to them. Yet, despite how badly the upper classes treat them, they learn to not ***"blame"*** them. If Eva didn't blame Gerald, we can guess **she blamed herself instead**. Eva is **mistreated and exploited over and over**, but she remains generous, kind, and caring. Her **perseverance and love in spite of hardship are symbols**, from Priestley, of **hope and inspiration**.

- Mrs Birling is shown the photograph by the Inspector, but **claims she doesn't recognise the woman**. The Inspector **accuses her of lying**. Mr and Mrs Birling argue with the Inspector about **duty**. Sheila **objects** to her parent's **remorseless, arrogant attitudes**.
- They hear Eric leave the house.
- The Inspector asks Mrs Birling about her role as a ***"prominent"*** member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, where women in need can apply for help. Mrs Birling is **resistive** to his questioning.
- The Inspector reveals that Mrs Birling spoke to Eva only two weeks ago after she **appealed** to the charity for help. Eva initially introduced herself as ***"Mrs Birling"*** which Mrs Birling believes was **an incredibly rude action**. She admits that she was **prejudiced** against Eva and **used her influence to ensure she was denied help** from the charity.
- Eva first told the committee she was a married woman whose husband had deserted her, but after questioning from Mrs Birling **admitted she was unmarried**. She was **pregnant** but not married to the father, who was a youngster and heavy drinker. **Marriage was out of the question** and she couldn't take any more money from him as she had reason to believe it was **stolen**. Mrs Birling thinks her **morals** weren't **believable** in **a woman of her class**. As Eva lied at first and acted so ***"rudely"***, Mrs Birling **believes she did her duty** in denying her help. She says Eva **only has herself to blame for her death**, and she also



blames the father of the unborn child who should have taken it upon himself to be responsible for her. He should be **made an example of**, Mrs Birling says.

- Sheila, distressed, suddenly pleads her mother to stop speaking. Mrs Birling continues to **condemn** the anonymous father. The Inspector repeats Mrs Birling's words back to her and tells her **he will do his duty**. Mrs Birling expects him to leave, **believing she has won**, but he tells her he is waiting. Mr and Mrs Birling **finally grasp** that Eric is the father.
- Eric enters and meets his family's stares. The curtain falls.

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Key Quotes & Analysis

(from "You know, you never showed him that photograph of her" to the end of Act 2)

- (Act 2, pg 41) **"You'll apologise at once."** - Mr Birling
- **"Apologise for what - doing my duty?"** - Inspector Goole
- **"No, for being so offensive about it. I'm a public man -"** - Mr Birling
- **"Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges."** - Inspector Goole

This exchange is used by Priestley to create an **obvious contrast between the elder Birlings' and the Inspector's beliefs** about **duty, reputation, and responsibility**. The Birlings' ideas are **centred around themselves** and what is required by their jobs to keep their **high position** in society, whereas the Inspector believes **he has a duty to the rest of his society**. Mr and Mrs



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Birling **expect** the Inspector to **trust and respect** what they say, and are **outraged** when he accuses them of withholding the truth - they expect to be respected even when **blatantly lying**. The **adjective "offensive"** is linked to Mr Birling's **ego, sense of self-importance, and entitlement**. It seems these all **conflict** with the Inspector's **"duty"** to those who cannot fight for themselves. This is the **fundamental difference between Capitalism and Socialism**, Priestley suggests. One focuses on the **needs of the individual**, the other on the **needs of the many**. By protesting that he is a **"public man"**, Mr Birling reveals how he **relies on his position to avoid conflict and criticism**. He has been **surrounded by privilege for too long**. The Inspector's response is very **damning**: he implies, not very subtly, that Mr Birling and other public men have been **neglecting their duties**.

- (Act 2, pg 43) **"I think it was simply a piece of gross impertinence - quite deliberate - and naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case."** - Mrs Birling

Mrs Birling's **outrage** at Eva's case reveals how the lower classes were **expected to behave**. The upper classes were **meant to be respected** and the lower class were **meant to stay out of their way**. Mrs Birling is **disgusted** at hearing **a working class girl use her family name**, suggesting Eva somehow **taints** it or **reaches above her station**, **disobeying the role society gave her**. Calling it **"gross impertinence"** shows how **seriously** the upper classes took their **family names**



and reputations. All Eva did was call herself Mrs Birling, but this is viewed as something **incredibly rude and disrespectful**. The **adjective “deliberate”** implies Mrs Birling views Eva as a **threat**, someone who is **purposefully out to ruin her**. She isn't **ashamed** to admit she was **“prejudiced”** against Eva, showing how **classism was accepted as the norm** in her society. Furthermore, the **adverb “naturally”** suggests she is **entitled** to **hate the lower classes**, and **expects others to empathise with her** rather than Eva. There is **situational irony** here as we learn that Eva had **every claim to the Birling name**. She chose to lie about why she chose the name to **protect Eric's reputation**, meaning **she is the opposite of how Mrs Birling portrays her**.

- (Act 2, pg 44) ***“I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim - she seemed to me to be not a good case - and so I used my influence to have it refused. And in spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty.” - Mrs Birling***

This proves that Mrs Birling's earlier claims of doing **“useful work”** (Act 2, pg 42) are all **lies**. She **doesn't care about helping people** or she would see every woman who comes to her charity as someone who has a **“good case”**. Priestley shows how the upper classes believed it was **up to them to decide who was deserving and who could be abandoned**. Even worse, they had the **power** to **act on those decisions and control who received help**. The whole **system of welfare**, Priestley suggests, is **corrupt**, because the **people in charge don't care for the poor**. In fact, many **actively hate them** and are **prejudiced against them**. The phrase **“I wasn't satisfied”** shows the **high standards** of the upper classes, and how **self-absorbed and unempathetic** they are. It's possible Mrs Birling is never **“satisfied”** as an **excuse** to refuse the poor help. Moreover, Mrs Birling using her **“influence to have it refused”** demonstrates how the **institutions** put in place to help people were **corrupt**. **Power is more important than need**, and the institutions are **structured to block people from receiving the help they require**. Mrs Birling believes she did her **“duty”** **“in spite of what's happened to the girl since”**, suggesting she is able to **remove herself from blame**. As soon as a woman leaves the care of the charity, they are **no longer responsible for her**. Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as **callous and stubborn**. She is **unable to accept responsibility or blame**, and won't **recognise her own faults**.



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- (Act 2, pg 45) ***“Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility.” - Mrs Birling***
- ***“That doesn't make it any the less yours. She came to you for help, at a time when no woman could have needed it more.” - Inspector Goole***

The Inspector tries to **foster empathy and understanding** in Mrs Birling, attempting to make her recognise that Eva was **in great need of help and support**. The statement **“at a time when no woman could have needed it more”** emphasises Mrs Birling's **failings** as a fellow citizen and member of a charity, and makes her **rejection** of Eva seem even more **cruel and heartless**. Mrs Birling is keen to **place blame elsewhere**, naming **“the father of the child”** as the one responsible. This reflects how **the upper classes blamed the poor for their suffering** even if they, the rich, **were the ones who enabled it**. Equally, it illustrates how **the upper classes wanted to live untroubled by the worries of others**. On the other hand, the Inspector tells her



“that doesn’t make it any the less yours”, suggesting **all those who have the capability to provide support have a responsibility to do so**. Priestley argues that **everyone in society has a responsibility to each other at all times, no matter how involved they are in the problem**. By saying this, he **accuses the British government of serious neglect**. The authorities can give help if they want to, and many have asked them for help, but they have failed to provide it.

- (Act 2, pg 46) **“She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.” - Mrs Birling**
- **“Her position now is that she lies with a burnt-out inside on a slab.” - Inspector Goole**
- (Act 2, pg 47) **“Oh - she had some fancy reason. As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!” - Mrs Birling**



<https://images.app.goo.gl/Rg3K2raIWUBxAM4b9>

Mrs Birling’s **prejudices and judgements** are made obvious here. She **can’t entertain the possibility** that Eva **wouldn’t want to accept stolen money**, portraying the lower class as **greedy, immoral creatures**. She suggests Eva should have abandoned her own morals rather than bothering Mrs Birling with her problems. In reality, though, Eva is the **most moral character** in the play beside the Inspector. She protects Eric’s identity and refuses to take stolen money. Priestley therefore uses **situational irony to challenge the stereotypes surrounding the lower classes**. Mrs Birling’s **prejudice** blinds her to Eva’s kindness and honesty. The **dismissive adjectives** she uses, such as **“fancy”** and **“ridiculous”**, show how **the lower classes**

struggled to be taken seriously. Their **identities** were **controlled** by the **upper classes’ preconceptions of them**. The Inspector **forces** Mrs Birling to realise this with his response. He implies that Mrs Birling’s **failure** to help led **directly to Eva’s death**. He reuses the **euphemism “a girl in her position”** but follows it with a **graphic image** of Eva’s corpse. To Mrs Birling, Eva’s **“position”** was **being a working class, unmarried woman**, but for Eva, her **“position”** was **the threat of death**. Priestley shows how **the upper classes failed to recognise the humanity of the lower classes**.

Analysis - Act 3

- Eric guesses that **they already know what he’s done**. Mrs Birling is **in denial** and when Sheila tells Eric that Mrs Birling had been blaming the unknown, young father for Eva’s death, Mrs Birling implies **she would have felt differently if she knew it was Eric**. The family **argues amongst themselves**, but the Inspector interrupts them.
- Eric tells them how he met Eva at the Palace bar. He was **drunk**, and bought her a few drinks. He thinks he insisted on going to her lodgings with her, but his intoxicated state **makes it hard for him to recall the details**. He is frustrated with himself.
- Mrs Birling **cries out in shame**. Sheila is made to take her into another room.
- Eric says that **he couldn’t remember her name or where she lived**, but they happened to run into each other again at the bar a fortnight later. He says he slept with her again **even though he didn’t love her**, because she was **“pretty and a good sport”**. He blames his



decision to sleep with her on his being **unmarried**, saying most women round town are **“fat old tarts”**. Mr Birling interrupts to tell him off, but the Inspector stops him.

- In one of their next meetings, Eva told Eric she was **pregnant**. He says **she didn't want to marry him** and he felt she treated him like a child. He insisted on giving her money, as she didn't have a job, and confesses that **this money was stolen from the Birlings' company**. Mr Birling is **outraged**, and the pair argue.
- The Inspector asks Eric **if she found out the money was stolen**. He confirms this, and then wonders how the Inspector knew. Sheila and the Inspector **inform him of Eva's appeal to Mrs Birling's charity**.
- Eric is **distraught**. Eva was **protecting** him. He **accuses Mrs Birling of killing her and his child**. Mrs Birling, also upset, denies this, saying she didn't know. Sheila and Mr Birling both intervene. The Inspector **silences** them.
- The Inspector declares that **they all helped to kill Eva Smith**, and tells them to **never forget what they did**. One by one, he recounts their crimes towards Eva. He concludes that while Eva Smith is dead, **society is full of people like her**, and **everyone is tied up with one another**. If people don't learn that society is **“one body”**, they will be **taught** it in **“fire and blood and anguish”**. He leaves **immediately**.



EXAM TIP

Remember that the characters are not real people. They are concepts created by the writer to serve a particular purpose.

Try to always discuss a character's actions or words in terms of what the writer intends to show through them.



Key Quotes & Analysis

(from the beginning of Act 3 to “Good night”)

- (Act 3, pg 51) *“I was a bit squiffy.”* - Eric
- *“She wasn’t the usual sort.”* - Eric
- *“Yes, I insisted - it seems. I’m not very clear about it.”* - Eric
- (Act 3, pg 52) *“I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty - and I threatened to make a row.”* - Eric
- *“It was all very vague.”* - Eric

The **revelation** of Eric’s actions is one of the **biggest causes of tension and conflict in the play**.



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Like his family, he tries to **remove some of the blame from himself** in these quotes. By claiming he was severely drunk, he implies he wasn’t in the state to act **responsibly**. Like Gerald, he suggests **his masculinity compelled him to act so violently, passing the blame** to something else. Alternatively, the way he **dismisses** the events because he was *“a bit squiffy”* and *“in that state when a chap easily turns nasty”* highlights how he **wasn’t thinking** when he acted this way. What turned out to be **devastating** experience for Eva was just **a vague, drunken haze** for Eric. Also like Gerald, Eric **justifies** his interest in Eva by saying *“she wasn’t the usual sort”*. He, too, wants to believe he is **better than the men who sleep with prostitutes and working class women on the streets**.

- (Act 3, pg 52) *“I wasn’t in love with her or anything - but I liked her - she was pretty and a good sport.”* - Eric
- *“So you had to go to bed with her?”* - Mr Birling
- *“Well, I’m old enough to be married, aren’t I, and I’m not married, and I hate these fat old tarts round the town - the ones I see some of your respectable friends with.”* - Eric

This exchange shows how Eric **shares** some of the **same views on women and the lower classes as his father**, and how **discontent** he is with the life he’s leading currently. Describing Eva as *“pretty and a good sport”* suggests she **appealed** to him as a **sexual object**. He didn’t have to **commit** to her: he **exploited the class system**.

“Good sport” portrays Eva as **prey** for Eric to **hunt for fun**.

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His frustration over not being **“married”** implies he **struggles under the pressure he feels** from his family. He feels like he’s **behind** the rest of his peers. His **hatred** for *“these fat old tarts round the town”* is incredibly **misogynistic**. It reflects how **working class women are judged and condemned for their impossible situations**, even though they have **no control or way out**. Women sell their bodies to **get themselves out of poverty** - poverty **inflicted upon them by the upper classes**. As we see with Gerald and Eric, the upper classes then sleep with these prostitutes, **exploiting the situation they created**. There is a level of **hypocrisy** in this culture, as Priestley suggests



with the cutting remark, **“the ones I see some of your respectable friends with”**. We could also suppose that Eric feels the need to **distinguish** between Eva and these other **“old tarts”** is because **he doesn’t want to be like his father’s friends**.

- (Act 3, pg 54) **“I’ve got to cover this up as soon as I can. You damned fool - why didn’t you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?” - Mr Birling**

Again, we see the **tension** between Eric and his father. Priestley suggests the **culture of masculinity** means they have never **bonded as father and son**. The **insult “damned fool”** shows how **little** Mr Birling thinks of his own son, and **the whole younger generation**. Also notice how Mr Birling’s **first priority** is to **“cover [...] up”** what Eric did before there is a **public scandal**. Eric’s act of theft is the only thing that angers Mr Birling: either because Eric **betrayed him**

personally, or because it is a crime that can be **prosecuted**. Even so, all Mr Birling truly worries about is the **potential for public scandal**. It’s not the **crime** that matters so much as the way it will **ruin his reputation**. Priestley suggests the culture of the upper classes meant **people valued reputation and deceit over morality**. Mr Birling is **willing to conceal** what his son did, knowing fully that it was wrong, just to **preserve his status**.



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- (Act 3, pg 55) **“This girl killed herself - and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it.” - Inspector Goole**

For most of the play, we’ve seen how each of the Birlings were **happy to blame Eva for her fate**. Mr and Mrs Birling, in particular, show **no sympathy or remorse**, instead believing Eva **brought it on herself**. It’s possible Priestley made Eva’s cause of death a **suicide** because it **fits the narrative** told by the upper classes: that **the poor don’t help themselves out of poverty, that they only have themselves to blame for their suffering**. Eva **killed herself** - literally. But the Inspector is here to **prove them wrong**. By telling them **“each of you helped to kill her”**, he **challenges the preconception** that **they’re innocent because she killed herself**. He shows how **responsibility goes beyond the obvious**. **All actions have consequences**.

- (Act 3, pg 56) **“We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.” - Inspector Goole**

The Inspector’s **final monologue** is a good **summary** for Priestley’s **intentions** with this play. He uses **the rule of three** twice, showing how it is **designed to be a persuasive speech**. The first rule of three outlines the **duties we have as a society, to ensure it functions properly**. The **metaphor “we are members of one body”** creates the **image** of **one working human**, showing how **a society is greater than the sum of its working parts**. **If one individual suffers, we all suffer**. The second usage of the rule of three is **a warning and an omen**. The **tricolon “fire and blood and anguish”** is almost **apocalyptic**, evoking a sense of **godly wrath**, conveying how **serious and urgent Priestley finds this issue**. **“Fire and blood and anguish”** is an **allusion** to the **World Wars**, as Priestley implicates humanity’s **selfishness and neglect** as the **cause of violence and conflict**. The trio could also **symbolise Eva’s death**, as the disinfectant **“burnt her**



insides out". This would mean the suffering caused by selfishness and irresponsibility can be experienced on both **the small and large scales**. Her death is a **symbol for the worldwide suffering of the lower classes**. These are direct **contradictions** to Mr Birling's teachings in Act 1. His final words can be seen as **Priestley himself speaking**, addressing the past, as the Inspector expresses concisely Priestley's intentions, and **foreshadows** the World Wars that 1945's England just experienced.



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- The family are left in **various states of shock**. Mr Birling **blames Eric entirely**. Mr and Mrs Birling are **ashamed of Eric**, but Eric and Sheila are **ashamed of their parents as well as themselves**. Mr Birling is concerned that there will be a **public scandal**, meaning he'll lose any hope of being knighted. Eric and Sheila are **appalled** that a scandal is **all he cares about**, and Sheila believes her parents are **pretending that nothing has happened** meaning **they haven't learnt anything**.
- Eric recalls how Mr Birling was **lecturing** him and Gerald on how **men must look after themselves** and **mind their own business** before the Inspector arrived, and observes that Mr Birling didn't repeat these same views directly to the Inspector. Sheila wonders if the Inspector was really an inspector at all, but decides **it doesn't matter**. Her parents, on the other hand, are excited by the suggestion, believing **it makes all the difference**.
- Sheila accuses her parents of being **childish**. She says that it doesn't matter who made them confess, because **everything they said is true**. Because of the Inspector's behaviour, Mr and Mrs Birling are convinced he can't have been a real officer.
- The family continue to argue about whether the Inspector's job really matters. Mr Birling is still concerned with the possibility of a scandal, and concludes that **it was a bluff by a Socialist who is biased against the family**.

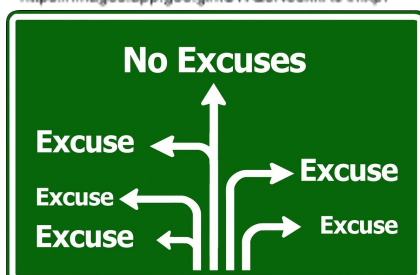
Key Quotes & Analysis

(from "He walks straight out" to "It's Mr Croft")

- (Act 3, pg 57) **"I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well - yes both of you."** - Eric
- **"Drop that. There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did - it turned out unfortunately, that's all."** - Mr Birling

Unlike his parents, Eric is **able to accept responsibility while still recognising the role others had to play** in Eva's death. This is a **perfect example** of Priestley's **ideal of shared**

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responsibility: taking blame for yourself **doesn't excuse others of blame**, too. Mr Birling's response indicates that **his ego is still in tact**. He won't **accept criticism** from anyone, especially not his own son. The **noun "excuse"** usually suggests **a weak attempt to lessen the blame**, but Mr Birling seems to think **he's successfully justified himself**. Furthermore, **"excuse"** implies the death of an innocent girl **can**



be justified by a person's foolishness. The line **"it turned out unfortunately, that's all"** highlights how extremely **insensitive** Mr Birling is. It **belittles and dismisses** Eva's suffering, and implies he won't **dedicate** any more of his energy to it. Priestley suggests the upper classes viewed the suffering of the lower classes as an **unfortunate, but unpreventable, event**. Mr Birling appears **unshaken** by the role he played in Eva's death.

- (Act 3, pg 57) **"But now you're beginning all over again to pretend that nothing much has happened."** - Sheila
- (Act 3, pg 58) **"The point is, you don't seem to have learnt anything."** - Sheila
- (Act 3, pg 59) **"It's you two who are being childish - trying not to face facts."** - Sheila

This **motif** concerning the parents' **stubborn ignorance** continues for the rest of the play. Ironically, each time one of the children points it out the parents threaten them and tell them to be quiet, which in itself is an example of them refusing to **"face facts"**. Also fittingly, the fact Sheila in particular has to keep repeating it shows how the parents **still won't learn anything**.

This idea about **"pretend[ing]"** and **"trying not to face facts"** reveals how **corrupt and toxic the culture of the upper classes is**.

Priestley suggests it is **a world of lies and theatre**, allowing them to live in luxury while others die around them. Because Priestley's audience just lived through two World Wars, they may recognise how **dangerous** this **willful ignorance** is. People **failed to learn from the mistakes that led to the First World War**, so the Second World War soon followed. The **adjective "childish"** insults the parents, suggesting their ignorance shows **weakness and naivety**. Sooner or later, their **protective bubble** will be popped, but they won't see it coming.



- (Act 3, pg 59) **"But it doesn't make any real difference, y'know."** - Sheila
- **"Of course it does."** - Mrs Birling
- **"No, Sheila's right. It doesn't."** - Eric
- **"That's comic, that is, coming from you. You're the one it makes most difference to. You've confessed to theft, and now he knows all about it, and he can bring it out at the inquest, and then if necessary carry it to court. He can't do anything to your mother and Sheila and me - except perhaps make us look a bit ashamed of ourselves in public - but as for you, he can ruin you."** - Mr Birling

The **debate** surrounding the Inspector's **integrity and influence** is another thing that continues for the rest of the play. Priestley uses Goole's **ambiguous nature** to explore the theme of **morality vs. legality**. The younger generation believe **"it doesn't make any real difference"** if they're taken **"to court"** or not because it is the **moral weight** of what they've done that troubles them. This is clearly the perspective Priestley wants us, the audience, to **share**. The parents, meanwhile, **seek any way to let themselves off the hook**. The only thing that scares them is the possibility of being taken **"to court"** because this will have a **permanent impact on their reputation**. This is a **selfish attitude** to have, as they view themselves as the **victims**. Priestley suggests society has **lost sight of morality**. The influence of **legality** and **status** mean people only recognise wrongs if they are **punishable by law**. For example, Mr Birling is only angry at Eric because **"theft"** is a real crime. Meanwhile, he isn't bothered by what Sheila did, even though it was just as catastrophic for Eva, because it **wasn't illegal**.



- (Act 3, pg 60) *“Really, from the way you children talk, you might be wanting to help him instead of us.” - Mrs Birling*

This cutting remark demonstrates the **growing divide** between the two generations, but also reveals the **‘us vs. them’ mentality of the upper classes**. Mr and Mrs Birling see the world through conflict: **upper class vs. lower class, employer vs. employee, Capitalism vs.**

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Socialism. This is why they act the way they do: they view those beneath them with **suspicion** and **contempt**. Priestley suggests that, in the upper classes, the number one rule is **loyalty**. Above all, you should protect your family and your reputation. Mrs Birling, in this quote, **resents** the way her children are siding with the Inspector rather than with their parents. She believes this is an act of disloyalty, but also is concerned they are abandoning her for Socialism and the lower classes. They are breaking the

pact of the family.

- **Structure of the 2nd part of Act 3**

Because the play does not end after the Inspector leaves, we know the play is **about more than the process of the investigation**, or the words of the Inspector. The play does not end like the classic **‘whodunit’** murder mysteries that were popular at the time: the ‘murderers’ are revealed, but there is still a substantial amount of the play remaining. Therefore, we know that Priestley’s focus is not just the Inspector or the mistreatment of Eva Smith, but the **family’s reaction** to the knowledge of their responsibility.

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The moment immediately after the Inspector leaves is probably the last prolonged silence in the play.

The family are left **“staring, subdued and wondering”**, which may lead the audience to think

they will all **heed** his warning. However, once the dust settles, the **first words spoken** are **“You’re**

the one I blame for this” by Mr Birling, showing that **he hasn’t learned anything about accepting responsibility**.

Priestley uses the **structure** of the following dialogue to **highlight the divide between the generations**. There is a **clear split** between the two groups. The children

have **broken free** from the **protective bubble of their privilege**, but the parents still have the **‘rose-tinted’** outlook they had when the play opened. The argument of whether it **“matters”** or not

who the Inspector is goes around in **circles**, making it feel like a **pointless loop**, with the older generation **refusing to listen** to the younger generation.

- Gerald returns and **confirms the suspicions that Inspector Goole wasn’t a member of the police force**. They call the Constable to make sure. Mr and Mrs Birling **claim they had suspicions from the start** about the Inspector’s authenticity. Sheila and Eric are **bitter** about their parents’ and Gerald’s **willingness to forget their guilt**. They are still **troubled** by Eva Smith’s death. Sheila again accuses them of **pretending nothing has happened**.



- Gerald argues that they don't know they all interacted with the **same girl**, which would mean **they didn't all help to kill her**. The family figure out among themselves how this could be possible, and Mr and Mrs Birling **make excuses for their gullibility**. They decide to ring the Infirmary to see if a girl died there. Gerald, Mr Birling, and Mrs Birling make it clear that if there is no **"dead girl"**, it was **all one big hoax, and they're in the clear**.
- Gerald rings the Infirmary and learns they've had no suicides there for months. He starts to **celebrate** with Mr and Mrs Birling, but Sheila and Eric are **still shaken by their new self-awareness**. Sheila is **frightened** by how the others talk but they **dismiss her worries** and tell her to **take back the engagement ring from Gerald**. She doesn't, saying it's too soon.
- Mr Birling starts to **mock** Eric and Sheila as part of the **"know it all"** younger generation, but is interrupted by the phone ringing. Mr Birling answers, and looks **panicked** as he listens. He tells them **a girl has just died** on her way to the Infirmary, and **a police officer is on his way to ask them some questions**. They all look **"guilty and dumbfounded"** as the curtain falls.

Key Quotes & Analysis

(from "Gerald appears" to the end of Act 3)

- (Act 3, pg 61) **"He behaved in a very peculiar and suspicious manner."** - Mr Birling
- (Act 3, pg 62) **"By Jingo! A fake!"** - Mr Birling
- (Act 3, pg 63) **"Somebody put that fellow up to coming here and hoaxing us. There are people in this town who dislike me enough to do that."** - Mr Birling
- (Act 3, pg 64) **"That fellow was a fraud."** - Mr Birling

We know that Mr and Mrs Birling are **"excited"** to hear of Gerald's discoveries. The news was what all three of them were **hoping** for: an **excuse to relieve them of guilt**. They keep returning to how the Inspector spoke to them, suggesting **they can't believe that anyone of a lower class would dare address them in such a way**. They are **shaken** by the experience and **refuse to believe society is changing** to allow that behaviour. Calling his **"manner"** **"very peculiar and suspicious"** shows how there were **rules in society** that **everyone had to follow**. They don't just



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view the Inspector as rude: they see his criticism as **grounds to suspect him**. The **insulting, dismissive language** they use after uncovering the Inspector's lies, such as **"fake"** and **"fraud"**, **symbolise** how society viewed Socialism as a whole. They won't **take it seriously**. Alternatively, it implies they are **superior**, winners in the **war between Capitalism and Socialism**. We as an audience know that the Inspector's teachings still hold worth even if he's not a real police officer, but the elder Birlings take it as **permission to forget everything**. Priestley shows how **thoughtless** and **selfish** they are. They think their actions are allowed because they won't face **prosecution**.

- (Act 3, pg 63) **"(bitterly) I suppose we're all nice people now."** - Sheila

Sheila's reaction to her family's joy and celebration provides a **grounding force** in the conversation. Priestley reminds his audience that, really, **nothing has changed**. The **stage**



direction describing her **tone** as **“bitter”** conveys the frustration she - and Priestley - feels when **confronted with the selfishness of others**. The phrase **“nice people”** is **shallow** and **superficial**: they aren’t **good**, just **“nice”**, which would be enough for the upper classes. Sheila knows that, even if they can’t be prosecuted for their actions, they **still committed awful acts towards another human being**, and this should weigh on their **consciences** forever.

- (Act 3, pg 64) ***“The fact remains that I did what I did. And mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It’s still the same rotten story whether it’s been told to a police inspector or to somebody else.” - Eric***

Eric’s **analysis** of the situation focuses on their **personal involvement**. To a certain extent, Priestley implies it doesn’t matter **who** it happened to. The fact is that **people should never behave like that to anyone**. Priestley suggests what should trouble the family the most isn’t whether they will end up in jail, or that their actions led to someone’s suicide. What should trouble them the most is that they ever thought it was **acceptable to behave in such a way**. You could argue that the precise consequences are **irrelevant**: it is the culprit’s **motivations** and **moral compass** that Priestley is concerned with. He suggests society **cannot function** if its members all have the capability to **act so selfishly and insensitively**.

- (Act 3, pg 65) ***“The money’s not the important thing. It’s what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters.” - Eric***

Again, Priestley draws a **clear distinction between the two generations**. Mr Birling is majorly concerned with **money, reputation, and legality** - all things that are **invented** by society and **benefit the upper classes**. Eric **rejects** this outlook. Priestley encourages **compassion** and **empathy** with this quote. He tries to move away from the **Capitalist ideal** of **“money”** and instead focus on the person behind it all. Saying that both **“what happened”** to Eva and **“what we all did”** to Eva shows that the **morality and motivation of the action is just as important as its consequences**. It was common for the lower classes to be forgotten and neglected by the government, so Priestley is challenging this by **steering the focus back** to what Eva went through.

- (Act 3, pg 65) ***“They’re so damned exasperating. They just won’t try to understand our position or to see the difference between a lot of stuff like this coming out in private and a downright public scandal.” - Mr Birling***

This quote focuses on two conflicts: **private vs. public**, and **young vs. old**. Mr Birling calling his children **“damned exasperating”** demonstrates the **low opinion** he holds of them. He won’t take them **seriously** or **listen** to their **point of view**. Furthermore, the fact that he finds their distress about Eva’s death **“exasperating”** implies he finds moral values annoying, particularly when the poor are concerned. He feels like he is the one who is being misunderstood and ignored, **painting himself as the victim** or minority. Because he believes there is a **“difference between a lot of stuff like this coming out in private and a downright public scandal”**, Priestley implies the upper classes **judged actions** on how



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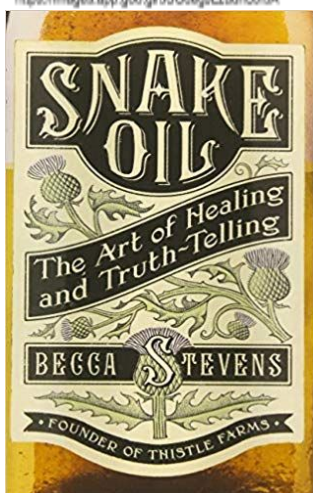
scandalous and **infamous** they were. It seems that morality has been **mutated** so that it depends on publicity and legality, rather than any philosophical or human scale.

- (Act 3, pg 69) ***“Either there’s a dead girl there or there isn’t.” - Gerald***

This very **reductive, simplistic statement** reveals the **ignorance** of the upper classes. Priestley shows how Gerald, like the elder Birlings, has failed to understand the **nuances** of responsibility and blame. The statement ***“or there isn’t”*** implies that, if no girl died, then the whole situation can be put behind them and **forgotten**. It implies nothing went wrong and no wrongs were committed. He sees the possibility of a **way out**, and it is clear he judges the severity of his actions based on their outcome. A dead body is, moreover, the **only thing tying** the Birlings to their **crimes**. This could link to how **materialistic** the upper classes are: they focus on the **physical evidence** of their actions, rather than the **moral implications**. Priestley wants us not to share the same mindset. Even if no girl died, it is clear that none of the characters should have acted the way they did towards Eva. She deserved to be **respected**.

- (Act 3, pg 70) ***“(triumphantly) There you are! Proof positive. The whole story’s just a lot of moonshine. Nothing but an elaborate sell! (He produces a huge sigh of relief.)” - Mr Birling***

The way Mr Birling refers to the Inspector and Eva Smith is very similar to how he referred to Socialists as ***“cranks”*** in Act 1. The phrase ***“proof positive”*** reveals Mr Birling’s **self-confidence**, and implies he now feels completely **liberated** from any **guilt** he had. The **nouns** ***“moonshine”*** and ***“elaborate sell”*** mean the same thing, showing how Mr Birling wants to **emphasise** his **victory** and **relief**. ***“Moonshine”*** is **slang** that refers to **foolish talk**, while ***“elaborate sell”*** connotes **conmen**. Therefore, Mr Birling is **invalidating** everything the Inspector said. Furthermore, the phrase ***“nothing but”*** implies the Inspector said **nothing of worth**, despite the Birlings all **admitting** to treating a working class girl badly. Alternatively, it could imply he thinks the tragedy of Eva Smith was just **invented** to **provoke shame** in his family. Priestley could be showing how the upper classes and authorities thought the suffering of the poor was used to get **attention**, rather than because they truly needed help. The **adverb** ***“triumphantly”***, along with the **dismissive nouns**, establishes Mr Birling as the smarter, more powerful man. He relishes in the knowledge that the Inspector **no longer has power over him**.



- (Act 3, pg 70) ***“But you’re forgetting one thing I still can’t forget. Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn’t end tragically, then that’s lucky for us. But it might have done.” - Sheila***

Priestley asks his audience whether the **actual outcome** of your actions should **matter**. It seems the **possibility of harm** matters more than if harm is actually caused, just as Sheila says ***“it might have done”***. Priestley suggests the morality of your actions **shouldn’t depend** on how things **turned out**, in the same way that morality shouldn’t depend on **legality** or **publicity**. If you get away with it, Priestley says, you should **still accept responsibility and blame**. Even though Eva Smith might not have been a real person, real working class people were treated poorly by the family. They had to cope with the consequences of the Birlings’ actions, **but the Birlings didn’t**.



This could be a **symbol** for how society **operates** with a **social hierarchy**: the **poor suffer** from the consequences of the **upper classes' mistakes**, while the rich **continue to live happily**. Priestley emphasises this by having Sheila say ***"that's lucky for us"***, as it implies the situation was **still unlucky for others**.

- **(Act 3, pg 71) *"It frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it."* - Sheila**

This explores how the younger generation **view their elders as a threat to their futures**. The **verb "frightens"** connotes shock and horror, implying there is a serious threat. Priestley also uses the **repetition of "frightens"** in the scene to **portray the Birlings as the real villains**. As said before, what matters more to Priestley is the fact that people are **prepared** to act in such selfish, cruel ways. Her parents **"frighten"** Sheila because she **knows what harm they are capable of**, and she knows how **remorseless** they are about it.

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- **(Act 3, pg 72) *"Now look at the pair of them - the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke."* - Mr Birling**

This view of the **"younger generation"** is still seen today. Mr Birling believes his children are **oversensitive, arrogant, and foolish** and enjoys the opportunity to **mock** them. This serves to demonstrate how **little guilt and regret he feels** about the Inspector's visit: he's prepared to laugh cruelly about it at the **expense of others**. It's **hypocritical** for him to laugh at how they **"know it all"**, because in Act 1 all he did was **brag** about his wisdom and experience. Priestley suggests the older generation will **never accept advice or help** from the younger generation because they're convinced their children are **foolish**. They want to **educate** their children, not the other way round. There is some **situational irony** in this line, because it turns out that the **"famous younger generation"** are **right**: a girl has died, and the parents instantly regret what they said. There is also **dramatic irony** as the audience knows to side with the children. The audience knows that the promised **"fire and blood and anguish"** does come, as predicted. Priestley implies the **arrogance** and **stubbornness** of the older generations, who want to **uphold tradition** and keep themselves in **power**, are **dangerous barriers** to **social progress** and **equality**.

EXAM TIP

Don't get bogged down in working out who the Inspector and Eva Smith really were. You can propose the different theories, but going any further without commenting on Priestley's intentions won't get you more marks. Priestley left the ending ambiguous for a reason - you could talk about this, instead.

