

## Character Profile — The Inspector

At the end of the play it's not clear who or what the Inspector was. This uncertainty makes a big difference to some of the Birlings, but not to others. "Who was he?" and "Why did he 'call'?" are very different questions.

### The Inspector "massively" takes charge

- 1) The Inspector arrives unexpectedly. He just says he's here to ask some questions.
- 2) He's an outsider. He doesn't seem to have much in common with the Birlings.
- 3) The Inspector leaves after delivering a speech about social responsibility. When Gerald finds out that the Inspector is probably a fake, the older characters forget his speech and try to avoid the blame.
- 4) He is described as authoritative and imposing. He's not a big man — but his presence fills the room.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

#### Inspector Goole is...

**Moral:** "We don't live alone. We are members of one body"

**Authoritative:** "All in good time"

**Mysterious:** "Was it a hoax?"

**An outsider:** "The rude way he spoke to Mr Birling and me — it was quite extraordinary!"

### The Inspector is the driving force of the play

Think of the Inspector as the engine of the play — he keeps things rolling by asking pushy questions:

- 1) He starts it all off with a summary of the afternoon's events — "Suicide, of course."
- 2) He forces more information out of people by bluntly saying what the other characters try to skirt around — e.g. When Gerald's describing how he met Daisy Renton, the Inspector asks "And then you decided to keep her — as your mistress?" But it's not really a question. This forces Gerald to admit the truth.
- 3) He also reveals new information which heightens the drama, such as when he drops it into the conversation "that this girl was going to have a child".

### The Inspector's 'calling' is pretty ominous

- 1) The word "calls" sounds so casual — as if he's just dropping in.
- 2) "Calls" is a deceptive word to use about the Inspector. He may appear casual and spontaneous, but in fact he's single-minded and calculating. If anything, he 'calls' the shots.
- 3) Another inspector "calls" the Birling household on the telephone at the end of the play.
- 4) The title of the play is echoed in Edna's words as she announces the arrival of Inspector Goole at the start of the play and in the telephone call at the end of the play.

## Character Profile — The Inspector

### His language is emotive and personal

- 1) Inspector Goole has come to the house to stir things up. He does this with emotive language.
- 2) He describes Eva/Daisy as a "pretty" and "lively" girl. These attractive words make the audience more sympathetic towards her.
- 3) This sympathy is strengthened by the harsh tone used to describe her death. He says that she's now lying "with a burnt-out inside on a slab".
- 4) Sheila is "rather distressed" by the Inspector's language and says that she "can't help thinking about this girl — destroying herself".



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### The Inspector uses shock tactics

- 1) He answers his own questions if he's not happy with someone's answer — e.g. when Sybil refuses to admit there was a committee meeting he says, "You know very well there was, Mrs Birling."
- 2) He follows up questions with more questions until he has pieced together a confession — e.g. when Sybil won't say she convinced the committee to reject Eva/Daisy's appeal he asks "Was it or was it not your influence?"
- 3) He's blunt, "You're not even sorry now, when you know what happened", and is prepared to ask personal questions — e.g. he asks Gerald "Were you in love with her?".

#### Writer's Technique

Priestley makes the Inspector's language forceful and to the point — he forces the other characters to answer him.

### He knows how to make an entrance — and an exit too...

- 1) The Inspector's timing's crucial. Priestley has the Inspector ring the bell just as Arthur says "a man has to mind his own business". It's as if Birling's announcement summons the Inspector to prove the exact opposite.
- 2) The Inspector uses exits as a clever tactic. Leaving Sheila and Gerald alone lets Sheila interrogate Gerald and allows the time for suspicion to break them apart. This makes it easier to get Gerald to confess when the Inspector returns.
- 3) The Inspector's language gets more dramatic, which builds on the tension and emotion of the final scene. He claims that if the Birlings don't learn their lesson, they will be taught it in "fire and blood and anguish."
- 4) After his last exit there's a sudden silence because no one else has been speaking. The audience, like the characters on stage, are left "staring, subdued and wondering".

For more about entrances and exits see page 48



### Write about the use of stage directions...

Show that you've paid attention to the whole text by mentioning stage directions. Priestley uses them to describe the Inspector. His authoritative voice and "impression of massiveness" get everyone under his spell.

## Character Profile — The Inspector

Inspector Goole — quite the mystery man. Is he an Inspector? Is he even a man? The audience know by the end that he “definitely wasn’t a police inspector at all”. But they don’t ever find out what he actually was.

### Who is this Inspector Ghoul?

- 1) At the end of the play, the audience aren’t sure who or what the Inspector is.
- 2) He claims he found “a rough sort of diary” kept by Eva/Daisy. But her identity isn’t certain, and the audience aren’t sure she ever existed (see p.32-33). So, the diary might be a neat bluff to stop anyone asking him any questions.
- 3) Why he has so much knowledge and power is never properly explained. He could be a ghost. Or he could represent the spirit of a religious or moral figure — just like in the Medieval morality plays (see p.42).

#### Writer’s Technique

It’s a bit of a joke that Inspector Goole’s name sounds like ‘Ghoul’ — a word for ‘ghost’. Priestley’s put little clues into some of the character’s names (see Eva/Daisy on p.8 and p.33).

### He’s more than a police inspector

- 1) In a way, he represents the police and the courts — he’s tracking down the truth, like in a murder mystery.
- 2) Because he’s not a police officer, Mr and Mrs Birling don’t think he has the authority to tell them off.
- 3) Eric and Sheila realise that his moral judgement is just as important as his legal power.
- 4) Goole has the attitude of a philosopher and social commentator, and the knowledge of a spooky ghost delivering a prophecy.



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### His authority strengthens his strong moral tone

- 1) Whatever Goole is, his unsettling presence might just be down to confidence. He knows how to create an air of uncertainty and reel everyone in.
- 2) He makes sure everyone recognises that he’s in charge.
- 3) He takes control and leads the events. They’re confused, but Goole never is.
- 4) He “massively” interrupts which means that he cuts into the dialogue “with authority”, e.g. when he tells Birling that Eric can “wait his turn”.
- 5) His authority makes people take him more seriously and makes everything he says sound more important.

#### Writer’s Technique

It’s worth thinking about how an actor might play the Inspector — maybe with his voice getting louder and louder as the play progresses.

## Character Profile — The Inspector

### The Inspector’s from a different world

The Inspector doesn’t share Arthur Birling’s interests or values:

- 1) The Inspector doesn’t play golf and he’s not impressed by Arthur Birling’s public profile as former Alderman and Lord Mayor.
- 2) He talks about taboo subjects like sex and politics.
- 3) He interrupts, repeats and pauses in ways which were not the norm in middle-class prewar England. He doesn’t follow etiquette (normal rules of social behaviour).

For more about etiquette see p.24.

### The Inspector is classless

- 1) The Inspector seems to come from outside the class system that the Birlings live in. This makes him ‘classless’.
- 2) The Inspector doesn’t recognise any of the Birlings’ ideas about class. He treats everyone the same.
- 3) Instead, he says that “We are members of one body” so classes shouldn’t ignore each other’s needs.

#### Theme — Social Class

Priestley has set his play in the Birlings’ dining room. In 1912 only well-off households would have had a dining room — this makes it a symbol of the middle-class lifestyle.

### Priestley uses the Inspector as a mouthpiece

See p.44 for more on Priestley’s socialist views.



J.B. Priestley

- 1) The Inspector stands outside the class system of the Birlings’ social world — he is an outsider in the play.
- 2) But he doesn’t take a neutral position — he’s on Eva/Daisy’s side, and he tells the Birlings what he thinks of them.
- 3) Priestley’s own views are reflected in the opinions of the Inspector. You could say that the Inspector is Priestley’s ‘mouthpiece’ — Priestley’s voice in the play.
- 4) This is most clear during the Inspector’s final speech. He’s speaking to the Birling family, but it could also be Priestley’s speech direct to the play’s audience.
- 5) The play (and Priestley) has a strong message about looking after one another, and it’s the Inspector’s job to deliver it.



#### “He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector —”

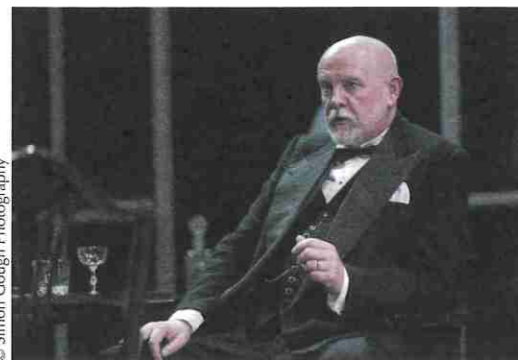
Gosh — what a pickle. Sheila admits that something wasn’t right about him from the start, but nobody ever knows who or what Goole is. It does seem like he’s been used as Priestley’s ventriloquist puppet, though...

## Character Profile — Arthur Birling

Arthur Birling's head of the Birling family. He's the boss of his own company. He even plays golf with the boys. But he's so bothered about money and power that he can't think about anything — or anybody — else.

### Arthur Birling seems to be pretty pleased with himself

- 1) Arthur Birling seems very **confident**. He is head of his **family** and the **boss** of his own business.
- 2) He likes to be in **control** and he keeps reminding everyone that he's **in charge**, e.g. Birling doesn't want to be told what to do, and "**angrily**" tells the Inspector, "Well — if you don't mind — I'll find out **first**".
- 3) Over the course of the play, Birling's authority is **undermined**. The Inspector reveals Birling as an **ambitious, anxious** man who'll **ignore** the needs of others to keep up **profits** and a **good reputation**.



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#### Birling is...

- ambitious:** "there's a very good chance of a knighthood"
- business-minded:** "a hard-headed, practical man of business"
- selfish:** "a man has to make his own way"
- anxious:** "there'll be a public scandal — unless we're lucky"

### He's a successful and ambitious businessman

- 1) Birling hints that his company could **merge** with the larger company owned by Gerald's father. He sees his daughter's **marriage** a bit like a **business deal** and hopes it will bring "**lower costs** and **higher prices**".
- 2) Birling thinks he's successful because he's a "hard-headed, practical man of **business**". He has the same attitude to all areas of his life.
- 3) He is very **optimistic** about the future. He thinks that strikes won't be a problem for his company and dismisses any fear of **war** as just some "**silly little war scares**".

#### Writer's Technique

Priestley uses **dramatic irony** to make Birling's optimism seem **foolish** and **short-sighted** (see page 50). This **undermines** his authority.

### He won't accept responsibility for the death of Eva Smith

#### Theme — Social Responsibility

Birling **dismisses** the idea of **social responsibility**. He calls people like Goole "**cranks**".

- 1) Birling finds it difficult to think about other people. He doesn't believe in "**community** and all that **nonsense**". He sees other people as "**cheap labour**".
- 2) Birling didn't just refuse higher wages for his workers — he **actively** made things worse for them. He **personally** fired the ringleaders of the strike.
- 3) Birling is **selfish** and **self-centred**. He'd rather pass off the Inspector's visit as a "**hoax**" or a joke than **face** up to what he's done.

## Character Profile — Arthur Birling

### Birling likes to be respected — he wants to be in control

- 1) Birling's a **public figure** in Brumley and obsessed with his **status**. When his good name's threatened he's **terrified** and would "give thousands" (a bribe) to avoid scandal.
- 2) He isn't used to being challenged. The Inspector barely says twenty words before Birling shows "**a touch of impatience**".
- 3) Birling's family is **falling apart**, and he can do nothing about it. He blames the Inspector for making a "**nasty mess**" of the night's celebrations.



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### Underneath it all, Birling is an anxious man

- 1) Birling desperately tries to win the Crofts' **approval** by talking about a knighthood and by getting Gerald's father's favourite port.
- 2) Birling tries to make himself seem important by drawing attention to his connections with influential people — e.g. he plays **golf** with the Chief Inspector.
- 3) The Inspector threatens Birling's **middle-class values** — the reputation of his company, his important connections. Birling is **rattled** by this. He has spent his entire life believing that **these things matter**.

#### Theme — Social Class

Birling's a wealthy businessman, but it was more **prestigious** to come from an "old county family" like the Crofts, that had **land, inherited wealth** and **titles** (e.g. 'Lord', 'Lady').

### Birling uses authoritative language to be in control

Priestley uses **stage directions** and careful **language** choices to help create Birling's character:

- 1) Priestley writes that Birling should be "**provincial in his speech**", which means he has a **regional accent**. **Accent** and **social class** were closely linked, so it would be clear that Birling was a **middle-class businessman** rather than upper-class.
- 2) Birling has the most **continuous speech** in the play — he likes to talk and doesn't like being interrupted. When Eric tries to correct him, Birling ignores him, saying "**Just let me finish, Eric**".
- 3) Birling repeatedly shouts "**Rubbish!**" to **dismiss** what other people have said. But he finishes his own sentences with "**of course**", to make his own claims seem **obvious** and matter-of-fact.



### "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself"

Birling's looking after number one, and he's not going to change. He wants his business to make higher profits, but Priestley uses the character of Birling to show that this profit comes with a high moral cost.

## Character Profile — Sybil Birling

Sybil is proud of her reputation and social status. She'll do anything to protect them — they're more important than the happiness of her children. Even when the Inspector's questioning her, she won't back down.

### Sybil Birling is proud of her social status

- 1) Sybil has traditional values. She strictly follows the rules of **etiquette** because a good reputation for being polite will improve her family's **status**. These rules are **more important** to her than **moral rules** — the difference between good and bad.
- 2) She has a **strong** set of **beliefs** about people's social status, which makes her **prejudiced**.
- 3) To **preserve** her own status, she's prepared to be **cruel**, such as when she rejects Eva/Daisy's appeal.



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#### Sybil is...

**traditional:** "When you're married you'll realize..."

**proud:** "I was the only one of you who didn't give in to him"

**prejudiced:** "As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!"

**cruel:** "I used my influence to have it refused"

#### Etiquette

Etiquette is a **set of rules** about social behaviour — what's **'acceptable'** and what isn't.

### Sybil is Mr Birling's "social superior"

Sybil Birling is from a family with a **higher social status** than Arthur Birling's family. Even though Arthur's head of the family, Sybil is his **"social superior"**:

- 1) Sybil tells her husband off for saying the food was good in front of a **guest**. It wasn't **polite** to mention the cook or lower **servants**. **Upper-class families** would not say "Tell cook from me".
- 2) Sybil's always reminding her family to have **better manners** — e.g. she tells Sheila off for using **slang**.
- 3) Sybil won't let anyone **boss** her around. She warns the Inspector, "You have **no power** to make me change my mind".



### Sybil lives by strict standards

- 1) Sybil's social standards make her prejudiced against people from a **lower class**. She thinks that they have **lower standards** and can't imagine her son being involved with women **"of that sort"**.
- 2) It's her **'standards'** that make her walk **straight into** the Inspector's trap when he asks her who **she blames** for Eva/Daisy's suicide.
- 3) Even though it was Sybil herself who **refused** to help Eva/Daisy when she **most needed it**, she **blames** the father of the unborn child.
- 4) Without realising it, she condemns her own son and demands that he should be **made to pay**, and to **confess publicly**.

## Character Profile — Sybil Birling

### Sybil supports charity — but she's not very charitable

- 1) Mrs Birling is involved with the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation which she says only supports **"deserving cases"**.
- 2) This gives Mrs Birling the **authority** to decide who's **"deserving"** and who's not.
- 3) She uses her **"influence"** (social status) to **convince** the other members of the board to reject Eva/Daisy's appeal because she's **offended** by the young woman using the **Birling name**.
- 4) She's outraged that Eva/Daisy would pretend to have the **"fine feelings"** of a **higher social class**, but Mrs Birling is unfeeling towards the women who make appeals to her.

#### Theme — Social Responsibility

The word **"deserving"** was traditionally used to **distinguish** between the poor who physically **can't help themselves** and the **undeserving** who **shouldn't be helped**.

### Mrs Birling doesn't change



- 1) Mrs Birling is **self-centred**. She **hasn't noticed** her own son's **alcoholism** and **dismisses** her **daughter's worries** that Gerald lost interest last summer.
- 2) She **won't accept responsibility** for her actions, and claims that she did the right thing — "I accept no blame for it at all".
- 3) She **doesn't learn** from the Inspector's message. She only **regrets** not having "asked him a few questions" — she wants to be in **control**.

### Stage directions show Mrs Birling has her mind made up

Even when her **language** is polite, her **tone** is severe and superior:

- 1) The stage directions say that Mrs Birling answers **"haughtily"**, **"very sharply"** and **"bitterly"**.
- 2) In Act Three, Mrs Birling **repeatedly** tells everyone that she'd already guessed it was a hoax. The script says that she **"triumphantly"** tells everyone she **knew it all along**. It's more important to her that she comes out **on top**, than that her actions could have caused a girl's suicide.
- 3) In the final moments of the play, Mrs Birling is **"smiling"** and telling everyone to feel as **"amused"** as she is by the evening's events. These words suggest she has already put it all **behind her**.



#### Remember to talk about Sybil's social prejudices...

Mentioning Sybil's social prejudices will help you explain why she acts the way she does. She doesn't think Eva/Daisy's important as she's socially inferior. And at the end of the play, Sybil hasn't changed at all.

## Character Profile — Sheila Birling

Sheila's not heard the old saying 'start as you mean to go on' — at the beginning of the play she seems childish and petty, but later reveals herself as thoughtful, sensitive and sharp. By the end, Sheila wants to start again.

### Sheila seems to be different from the rest of her family

- 1) Sheila's quick-witted and strong-minded. She hands Gerald's ring back when she finds out he's been unfaithful and is wise enough to suspect that Eric might be the father of Eva/Daisy's child.
- 2) However, Sheila was more selfish the year before. She abused her status as a wealthy customer at Milwards when she insisted they dismiss Eva/Daisy.
- 3) Sheila is now seen to be sensitive and moral. By the end of the play, Sheila has changed for good.



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#### Sheila is...

**Strong-minded:** "I don't believe I will. So you be careful."

**Sharp:** "he's giving us the rope — so that we'll hang ourselves"

**Selfish:** "you used the power you had [...] to punish the girl"

**Moral:** "But these girls aren't cheap labour — they're people"

### Sheila's language makes her seem childish at first...

- 1) The stage directions say she's "very pleased with life and rather excited".
- 2) She uses slang expressions like "squiffy" which remind the audience that Sheila belongs to a younger generation.
- 3) When she gets the ring she's very excited, and looks to her mother for approval when she says "Look — Mummy — isn't it a beauty?".
- 4) She jokes with Gerald, but the stage directions say that she's "half serious, half playful". Her childishness might be a way to hide "serious" concerns about her relationship with Gerald.

#### Writer's Technique

Priestley gives Sheila lots of witty lines to make her appear sharp. Sheila's wit lets her undermine the authority of the others as she makes jokes at their expense.

### ...but Sheila's more mature than the audience first think

Sheila behaves childishly at the beginning, but what she learns over the evening makes her feel she has to be herself and break away from her parents.

- 1) She has wise instincts — she sees what the Inspector is doing, and knew Gerald's absence was suspicious.
- 2) She's not naive — she knows men use prostitutes and knows about dirty old men like Alderman Meggarty.
- 3) As the Inspector says, she "isn't living on the moon", and as she says to her father, "I'm not a child."



## Character Profile — Sheila Birling

### Sheila has moral standards

- 1) Sheila acknowledges she used her "power" to "punish" Eva Smith, but she regrets her actions and is eager to learn from the consequences.
- 2) Priestley uses her as a moral judge at the end of the play — she says "probably between us we killed her." The others don't get as far as admitting that.
- 3) She tells Gerald she respects him more for being "honest". She also knows the family must stop these "silly pretences". Priestley uses Sheila to show there's hope for change in the new generation.

#### Theme — Learning about Life

Priestley makes Sheila seem young and childish at first. It makes her involvement in Eva/Daisy's downfall seem like the result of immaturity. This makes it easier to forgive her.

### The Inspector's revelations change her for good



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- 1) Before Gerald leaves, she hands back the engagement ring, saying that they are changed people — "You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here."
- 2) After the Inspector goes, her parents want everything to return to the way it was. Sheila, along with Eric, are the only ones who see that they all have to change.
- 3) Out of all the characters in the play Sheila's the one who changes the most.

### Sheila becomes a bit like the Inspector herself

It's not surprising that Sheila takes the Inspector's side in a lot of this, and even seems to help the Inspector's investigations. They're both after the truth. She adopts some of the Inspector's techniques:

- 1) She asks Gerald as many questions as the Inspector does.
- 2) She reveals Eric's drinking problem to her mother.
- 3) She contradicts and undermines her parents, like the Inspector does. When she's giving the ring back to Gerald she tells her father, "Don't interfere".
- 4) She shocks Eric by telling him that his mother refused to help Eva/Daisy. The Inspector moves the discussion on quickly by suddenly startling the listeners, and Sheila does the same.

Sheila sees that the Inspector attacks the others' confidence by asking questions. He does this to break down the "wall" which they've put between themselves and the girl — Sheila wants to do the same.



#### Write about how Sheila's character develops...

Sheila offers hope to the audience — she grows up by the end of the play and realises she needs to change her priorities. Explain in your essay that she allows the Inspector's story to affect and change her.

## Character Profile — Eric Birling

Eric is a troubled soul. He has turned away from his family and taken up drinking. But no one seems to notice, or at least they think it's more polite to not mention it. So, instead, Eric's friendless and stuck.

### Eric Birling is a troublesome son

- 1) Eric's isolated from the rest of his family. He says that no one understands him and he doesn't feel as if he can talk to any of them.
- 2) Eric apparently forced himself on Eva/Daisy while he was drunk and got her pregnant. He was so drunk he didn't even remember it happening.
- 3) Eric deeply regrets his actions — by the end of the play he says he'll never forget what he has learnt.



© Simon Cough Photography

#### Eric is...

**Irresponsible:** "I didn't even remember — that's the hellish thing."

**Unloved:** "You don't understand anything. You never did."

**Sensitive:** "My God — I'm not likely to forget"

**An alcoholic:** "I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty"

### Priestley drops hints that Eric isn't all right

- 1) Priestley's stage directions say that Eric is "not quite at ease". He's described as being "half shy" and "half assertive".
- 2) He interrupts Sheila and Gerald when he "suddenly guffaws", but says he doesn't know why he's laughing. He finds things his family say funny, even when there's no joke.
- 3) When Gerald says, "Unless Eric's been up to something," Eric acts suspiciously and seriously — "I don't think it's very funny," he says "still uneasy", and also answers "defiantly".

### Eric's been hiding some dirty secrets

Eric's drunkenness and bad behaviour represent the dark side of family life.

- 1) He's a heavy drinker, and has been for a while. You can see his "familiarity with quick heavy drinking" in the way he pours his whisky in Act Three. The rest of the family sees it too.
- 2) He got a prostitute pregnant — his first encounter with Eva/Daisy results in her getting pregnant and there's a suggestion that he forced himself on her.
- 3) He has stolen money from his father's business to support her.

These secrets are potential dynamite — if they got out and became public gossip, then Birling's knighthood, Sheila's marriage and the whole family's reputation could be blown sky high.



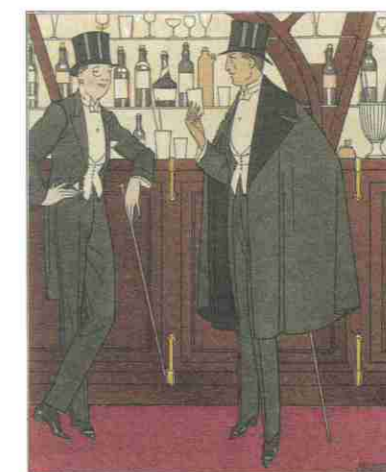
#### Writer's Technique

Priestley uses Eric's odd behaviour to hint that his secrets will later disrupt and threaten the Birlings' whole way of life.

## Character Profile — Eric Birling

### Eric's not the only one...

- 1) Eric meets Eva/Daisy at the stalls bar, which is exactly where Gerald met her, when he was looking for prostitutes.
- 2) Birling's 'respectable' friends go to the stalls bar to find women. The Alderman, Meggarty, even assaults young women in the town hall. They're all behaving badly. But no one says anything.
- 3) It's a pretty murky world that these 'respectable' men inhabit. The play suggests Eric's behaviour is normal for a middle-class man.



© Mary Evans Picture Library

Two finely dressed upper-class (not always) gentlemen.

### ... but he's the only one to have serious consequences

- 1) Eric's behaviour was not unusual — lots of men were doing the same... just in secret. Eric lacks self-control so his secret gets out.
- 2) His parents don't want a scandal. They don't care about him as much as they care about what other people will think of them.
- 3) Eric's laugh interrupts the polite conversation earlier in the play. It's the same when his behaviour disrupts the polite middle-class illusion of respectability. They're all keeping up appearances — but Eric's making it obvious that there's something murky underneath.

#### Theme — Judgement

Gerald treats Eva/Daisy as his "mistress" and ends the affair — his reputation is not damaged. But Eric drunkenly gets Eva/Daisy pregnant, steals money for her and brings a scandal on his family.

### Eric is a villain and a victim

#### Theme — Family Life

Birling seems disappointed in his son, and gets on better with Gerald. This must be a crushing blow for Eric.

- 1) Eric feels isolated and unsupported — he's had to find comfort elsewhere.
- 2) He shouts at his mother — "You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried —" and perhaps he's right. But he's really yelling. It might be the angriest moment in the play.
- 3) He's the obvious villain of the piece, but he accepts responsibility for what he did — "the fact remains that I did what I did". He criticises his parents for pretending nothing's happened — "You lot may be letting yourselves out nicely".



#### "the fact remains that I did what I did."

At first, it seems clear that Eric has the lowest morals of all the characters. But then he regrets his mistakes and learns from them. He comes the furthest — the audience start to see him in a more sympathetic light.

## Character Profile — Gerald Croft

Gerald's the son-in-law Mr Birling dreamt of. He's the son of the competition, Croft Limited. His mother's a Lady. He's respectable. So, apart from the secret mistress, he's spot on.

### Gerald Croft is an eligible bachelor

- 1) At the start, Gerald seems like a good catch. He gets on well with Mr Birling and impresses Sybil Birling.
- 2) But then it turns out Gerald's been lying — he confesses that he had a fling with Daisy Renton last summer. Sheila hands his engagement ring back.
- 3) Gerald leads the Birlings to realise that Inspector Goole was not a police officer, and that there was no suicide recorded at the hospital. He sides with Mr Birling, focusing on how to protect their reputation.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

#### Gerald is...

**Respectable:** "the easy well-bred young man-about-town"

**Upper-class:** "landed people and so forth"

**A liar:** "I wasn't telling you a complete lie"

**Traditional:** "I should say so!" (Gerald agreeing with Birling)

### Gerald's got a rosy future ahead of him...

Gerald's got a lot going for him. He's handsome, wealthy, about thirty — a respectable man-about-town.

- 1) He's from an old county family — unlike the Birlings. That makes him their social superior.
- 2) Gerald works for 'Crofts Limited'. This is his father's firm, and is older and bigger than 'Birling and Company' — the two companies are "friendly rivals". He'll probably take it over when his father retires.
- 3) He's relaxed and comfortable in this company (unlike Eric), and shares jokes with Birling.

### ... but it's a future that looks an awful lot like Birling's

Gerald's like a younger version of Arthur Birling. He's used to and comfortable with being in control.

- 1) Gerald agrees with Birling on politics and women and laughs at his joke about getting into trouble.
- 2) He supports Arthur's sacking of Eva Smith — "You couldn't have done anything else."
- 3) He's business-minded and is committed to his work in the same way that Arthur Birling is.
- 4) He and Arthur are the ones who are determined to take action at the end to find out whether the Inspector or the girl were real.

#### Theme — Young and Old

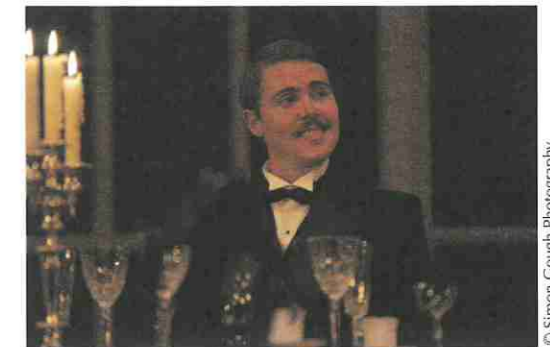
If it wasn't for Gerald, it'd be easy to say that Mr and Mrs Birling are selfish and unchanging because they're too old. But Gerald's character shows that younger people can be just as selfish and old-fashioned.

## Character Profile — Gerald Croft

### Gerald's language shows he doesn't feel sorry for his actions

Priestley makes Gerald sound less passionate than Sheila. Gerald can distance himself from the tragedy.

- 1) He's the first character to use the word "hoax" — he's very keen to prove the Inspector was a fake and clear everyone's names.
- 2) At the end of the play, he says "Everything's all right now, Sheila" to comfort her. He doesn't seem to have learnt any lessons.



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### He thinks he's done nothing wrong

#### Theme — Social Class

Gerald might have made Eva/Daisy happy for a time, but he still treated her badly because of her social status. He kept her as a mistress for his own pleasure and discarded her when it suited him.

- 1) Gerald says that Eva/Daisy "didn't blame me at all". Perhaps the audience don't blame Gerald much at first because Eva/Daisy didn't.
- 2) The Inspector isn't too harsh on him because Gerald "had some affection for her and made her happy for a time". Gerald had some positive effects on Eva/Daisy's life.
- 3) But then he left her and went off on a business trip. He effectively made her homeless.

### Gerald's not simply bad or good

This is a difficult one. Priestley's made it hard to see Gerald as simply good or bad. He's a complex character.

- 1) Gerald is confident but he's also stubborn — he doesn't learn much about himself over the course of the play. The Inspector points out Gerald's hypocrisy:

- The Inspector asks Gerald whether he thinks "young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?". Gerald says yes, thinking of Sheila.
- But it's people like Gerald who are doing the unpleasant and disturbing things to women like Eva/Daisy — he uses her and then discards her. This applies just as much to Mr Birling and other men like him who have the same attitudes.

- 2) Gerald has the ability to separate his public, respectable image from secret, private acts — something Eric doesn't get the hang of.



#### "Everything's all right now, Sheila."

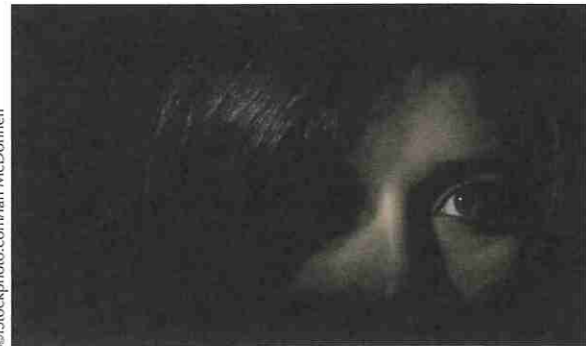
Gerald was upset when he learnt that Eva/Daisy was dead — but he's gotten over it already. He won't let a fake inspector play a prank on him. Not when he's got a reputation to maintain, and Sheila to win back.

## Character Profile — Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

Who was Eva Smith? No idea. Were Eva Smith and Daisy Renton the same person? Was she even real? No idea. What matters most is what Eva/Daisy represents, and what she means to the Birlings.

### Who was Eva Smith?

- 1) Eva Smith was one of Arthur Birling's employees, who was sacked for protesting against lower wages. This dismissal is the first in a chain of events that sees the Birling family tied up in Eva Smith's death.
- 2) According to the Inspector, Eva Smith changes her name to Daisy Renton and becomes a prostitute, which is how she meets Gerald and Eric.
- 3) The real identity of Eva/Daisy is never revealed. She could be the same person, or different people who are treated as the same by the Birling family. They see one working-class girl as being the same as another.



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#### Eva/Daisy is...

- Attractive:** "young and fresh and charming"
- Honourable:** "she didn't want to take any more money from him"
- Working-class:** "Girls of that class", "a girl of that sort"
- A Prostitute:** "There was some woman who wanted her to go there"

### The Birlings take away all of Eva/Daisy's sources of income

- 1) Factory worker at Birling and Company — she was a good worker but Birling sacked her for speaking up.
- 2) Shop assistant at Milwards — Sheila got her sacked out of jealousy for Eva/Daisy's good looks.
- 3) Prostitute and mistress to Gerald — he rescued her from the life of a prostitute but dropped her when it suited him.
- 4) Prostitute — she can't make a living this way after Eric forced her to have sex and got her pregnant while he was drunk.

#### Theme — Social Class

Eva/Daisy lost all these forms of support because other people used their power to move her on or have sex with her. Each of them felt superior to Eva because of their social class.

### She never sought revenge, so the Inspector does it for her

- 1) Priestley has made Eva/Daisy a silent, offstage character, so in the play she represents the silent, invisible and powerless members of society.
- 2) Maybe Eva/Daisy didn't feel that she had the power to make life difficult for the people who mistreated her. She was trapped by her situation.
- 3) Inspector Goole speaks for Eva/Daisy and uses her as a symbol of the powerless working class to teach the Birlings about social responsibility and to make them realise their mistakes.

#### Theme — Social Class

Some productions of *An Inspector Calls* put Eva/Daisy on stage, sometimes as a ghost.

## Character Profile — Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

### Were Eva Smith and Daisy Renton the same person?

- 1) Gerald claims there were lots of different girls — "We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl."
- 2) But Gerald also says that Daisy Renton told him about having to leave a "job in one of the works here" after a strike and "something about the shop too" — so Eva Smith must be Daisy Renton. But...

- The phone call at the end of the play confuses everything. Has Eva/Daisy just committed suicide? Was the Inspector a ghost come to tell the future?
- Or is this a phone call about a different girl? The Inspector warned that everyone's lives are "intertwined", so the Birlings don't know how many lives they have affected.
- Priestley makes sure that, even if you think you've sussed it, that phone call breaks up the girl's identity again.

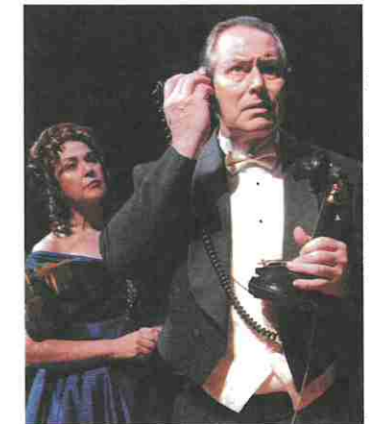


Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

### Eva Smith is a sort of everyman

The identity of Eva Smith is a kind of jigsaw portrait of an ordinary working-class girl, only you don't know if the pieces fit.



- 1) Take her first name. "Eva" — a bit like Eve, the first woman (so the Bible says) and symbolic of all women.
- 2) Take her second name — Smith. It's a very common last name, and it's from the word for a tradesman.
- 3) That's it — Eva Smith represents all ordinary, working-class women.

### Eva Smith is central to the play's message

- 1) The Inspector says that there are "millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left" and that their chances of happiness are "intertwined with our lives".
- 2) This is the key point — the Inspector is telling the Birlings, and the audience, to behave responsibly towards others.
- 3) So, although the focus of the drama is the group of five people sitting around the dining table at the beginning, the focus of the play is the life and death of an unidentified and unseen woman. If they all met different girls, it doesn't matter. Eva/Daisy is a mix of all the people they've ever treated badly.



#### Think about the message that Eva/Daisy conveys...

It's useful to say that Priestley uses Eva/Daisy as a way to show his audience how everyone is responsible for one another. He wanted people to realise that everything they do could affect someone else.