

Birling views of Eva/Daisy

Cheap labour, someone who could be fired out of spite, a mistress who could be discarded at will, easy sex after a drunken night, a presumptuous upstart.

The Birlings take away all of Eva/Daisy's sources of income. First, she was a good factory worker at Birling & Company but sacked by Mr Birling for speaking up. Then a shop assistant at Millwards but Sheila got her sacked out of jealousy for her good looks. She then became a prostitute & mistress to Gerald; he rescued her from prostitution & housed her but dropped her as his mistress when it suited him. After this she went back to prostitution but couldn't continue to make a living that way after Eric forced her to have sex & got her pregnant. Finally she asked for support from the Women's Charity Organisation but Sybil convinces the other members of the committee to reject her appeal through her social prejudices towards Eva/Daisy after using the Birling name & seeing her socially inferior.

Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

A young & attractive working class girl, she was honourable in not wanting to take the money but reduced to becoming a prostitute.

The identity of Eva/Daisy is never revealed to all the characters collectively or to the audience, with the only evidence the Inspector & each character provide individually. According to the Inspector Eva Smith changes her name to Daisy Renton & becomes a prostitute, which is how she meets Gerald & Eric. There is no defining evidence that they are the same person. She could be the same person, or different people who are treated the same by the Birlings. They see one working class girl as being the same as another. In Act Three, Gerald claims *"all right, you all admitted something to do with a girl. But how do we know it's the same girl?"* (66) *"There were probably four or five different girls"* (69) as he challenges the Inspector's investigation. Eva/Daisy is like a jigsaw portrait of an ordinary working class girl. Her first name "Eva" is similar to Eve the first woman according to the Bible & symbolic of all women. Her surname "Smith" being a very if not the most common last name & it's from the word of a tradesperson. The Inspector says that there are *"millions of Eva Smiths & John Smiths still left with us"* & *"chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives"* (56). Priestley has made Eva/Daisy a silent, offstage character, so in the play she represents the silent, invisible & powerless members of society. The phone call at the end makes it more confusing, has Eva/Daisy committed suicide, is the call about a different girl? The Inspector warned everyone's lives are 'intertwined' so the Birlings don't know how many lives they've changed. The phone call at the end breaks up Eva/Daisy's identity again. So, although the focus of the drama is the group of five people sitting around the dining table at the start, the focus of the play is the life & death of an unidentified, unseen girl. If each character had met a different girl it didn't matter. Eva/Daisy is a mix of all the people they've ever treated badly, the Inspector telling the Birlings, & the audience to behave responsibly towards others & that everything they do could affect someone else.

Inspector Goole

Is he an Inspector? Is he even a man? Is he a ghost or the voice of God? Is he the voice of Priestley or the voice of all our consciences? The audience never find out exactly apart from *"definitely wasn't a police inspector at all"* (63).

"He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector" (59). He has a name but the characters never use it & he is always referred to by his title. This depersonalises him. Similar to Eva Smith, Priestley uses characters names to symbolise something else, Goole name sounds like 'ghoul' – a word for a ghost. The Inspector is all knowing (almost supernatural) & his knowledge & power & understanding of events is never properly explained. Character is allegorical – not such a human being but a human force. He could be a ghost or represent the spirit of a religious or moral figure as features in medieval 'morality plays'. Questioning morality of actions he knows & understands everything, he knows what is going to happen next. *"I'm waiting to do my duty"* (49) just before Eric returns. Whatever Goole is, his unsettling presence creates an air of uncertainty taking control, leading events, repeating & interrupting the Birlings making them wait their turn not following etiquette. The Inspector ignores or not recognises the Birling's ideas of class. From outside the class system he treats everyone the same. *"we are all members of one body"* so classes shouldn't ignore other's needs. When Mr. Birling name drops & talks of his public profile or playing golf the Inspector is unimpressed. He doesn't take a neutral position but is on Eva/Daisy's side, telling the Birlings what he thinks of them. Priestley's own views are reflected in the opinions of the Inspector – you could say a mouthpiece for Priestley's voice. The play & Priestley has a strong message about looking after each other, the final speech by the Inspector to the Birling family (56) could also be Priestley's speech directly to the audience.

Entrance

An impression of massiveness purposefulness. Speaks carefully looking fully focused at the person before talking. Very systematic one person – one line of enquiry. As if looking into their souls. Sheila *"giving us the rope so that we'll hang ourselves"*. (33)

Is his disappearance at end linked to being a ghost? Closure of investigation / changing view of 'young' Birling's allowing him to pass over the understanding of *"we are responsible for each other"* & that *"Fire & blood & anguish..."* (56) If the Birling's fail to listen to him.

"And my trouble is - I haven't much time" He cuts into Mr Birling comment, in a hurry at the end of the play. Does he know the real Inspector is about to arrive?

An Inspector Calls

Who is to blame for Eva/Daisy's death?

Sybil Birling

Snob, self-centred, rather cold, aware of her class. Traditional, proud, prejudiced, cruel.

Sybil Birling is from a family with a 'higher social status' than her husband's family, so even though Arthur's head of the family; Sybil is his 'social superior'. With a narrow sense of morality she holds the least respect for the Inspector. She lies to him about Eva. Denied things she doesn't want to believe like Eric's drinking & Gerald's affair with a working class girl. Even her refusing to give money was the wrong decision. At the end she accepted Eric's drinking & getting the girl pregnant, stealing money. Though accepting these she still refuses to take responsibility. Admitting 'prejudiced' to Eva on the Charity Panel, seeing it as 'her duty' to refuse help believing it the father's responsibility due to having a strong set of beliefs about people's social status. Sybil wants to be in control & won't let anyone boss her around. Warning the Inspector *"you have no power to make me change my mind"*. She doesn't learn or change from the Inspector's message, only regrets not having *"asked him a few questions"* stating *"I was the only one of you who didn't give in to him"* (63). Even when her language is polite, her tone is severe & superior. In Act Three when she repeatedly tells everyone she 'knew it all along' that the Inspector was a hoax. (62-63). It shows she is more concerned & more important to come out on top, than that of her actions could have caused a girl's suicide. Even in the final moments of the play she is 'smiling' (71) & telling everyone to feel as *"amused"* as she is by the evening's events suggesting to the audience that she has already put it all behind her.

Gerald Croft

Respectable - the easy well-bred young man - about-town. Handsome, wealthy about thirty, Eligible bachelor from an old county family

At first Gerald seems a good catch, impressing Sybil & getting on well with Mr Birling. Not keen to admit his part in her death. He had genuine feelings for her. Sorting her with a flat, feeling 'sorry for her'. She became his mistress. At first he pretends he doesn't know her to protect himself. Gerald tries to prove the Inspector is a fake, may not have been same girl in photos & that there was no suicide recorded at the hospital. Instead of changing Gerald sides with Mr Birling focusing on protecting their reputation. *"Everything's alright now, Sheila"* (holds up the ring) (71) With Gerald not changing Sheila is unsure to accept ring back. Gerald was upset when he heard of her death but quickly gotten over it. Gerald may have made Eva/Daisy happy for a time but he still treated her badly because of social status. He kept her as his mistress for his own pleasure & discarded her when it suited him. The Inspector asks Gerald whether he thinks *"young women ought to be protected against unpleasant & disturbing things?"* (27) Gerald thinking of Sheila saying yes. However it is people like Gerald who are doing the unpleasant & disturbing things to women like Eva/Daisy – using then discarding her. This applies just as much to Mr Birling & other men who have the same attitudes. If it wasn't for Gerald it would be easy to say that Mr & Mrs Birling are selfish & unchanging because they are too old, but Gerald character shows that younger people can be just as selfish & old-fashioned.

Eric Birling

Early twenties he is not at ease, half assertive half shy. He is an unloved irresponsible alcoholic who is isolated from the rest of his family.

He has a tense relationship with his father; Mr Birling seems disappointed in his son & gets on better with Gerald which must be upsetting for him. Eric represents the dark side of the family & has been hiding some dirty secrets that will disrupt/threaten to Birling family. A heavy drinker for a while he got a prostitute pregnant & his first encounter with Eva/Daisy results in her getting pregnant. There is a hint that he forced himself upon her but was so drunk he didn't even remember it happening. He also stole from the family business to support her & doesn't agree with his father when he sacked Eva/Daisy, siding with workers *"why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"* (16). Mr & Mrs Birling blame him for her suicide. His parents don't want a scandal & don't care about him as much as they care what others will think of them. Eric met Eva/Daisy at the Stall bar (same place where Gerald met her when he was looking for prostitutes). Eric pointed to Mr Birling's respectable friends going there & to the fact it being a normal behaviour for middle class men. Eric however had a sense of responsibility by trying to do the right thing & supporting. At first it seems that Eric has the lowest morals but he regrets his mistakes & learns from them, standing up to his father for pretending nothing's happened, Eric going the furthest to recognise social responsibility. "The fact remains I did what I did" (64-65) Eric & Sheila trying to change their parents views & accept some responsibility to her death

The old'

Priestley presents Arthur & Sybil Birling as having very traditional views, thinking they know best & that children should be seen & not heard, not liking their authority to be challenged. They will do anything to protect themselves; they are set in their ways confident they are right & that 'the young' are foolish. They have never being forced to examine consciences before & seem unable to do it. They represent the views of the ruling class. The Inspector & his story about Eva/Daisy cause a rift between the old traditionalists & the young idealists. One side wants nothing to do with the story – the other feels like it's their job to rewrite it. Mr & Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit from the 'real' inspector knowing they would lose everything.

Gerald although closer to Eric & Sheila's age is already old in his attitudes, almost a younger version of Mr Birling. His marriage for business reasons, agrees with Mr Birling that Eva/Daisy should be fired. He doesn't learn anything & at the end thinks his engagement is back on (71). Gerald of the younger generation but remaining unchanged suggests that a more caring future isn't inevitable, people can choose to change or not. Birling states sarcastically "the famous younger generation who know it all". Priestly shows that only Sheila & Eric listen to the Inspectors message & that Mr & Mrs Birling aren't willing to change or learn from their mistakes.

Arthur Birling

Ambitious, business minded, selfish, anxious, a wealthy factory owner, he is a 'self-made man'.

His priority is to make money as he states when questioned about the sacking. *"Well, it's my duty"* (15). Mr Birling happy for the engagement t not because they are in love or for any care of his daughter but for the business implications, the link to Crofts Limited *"both older & bigger than Birling & company - & now you've brought them together"* (4). He has an honest approach to life, a magistrate & a former Mayor he is aware of social superiors as shown through his discussion about port (2). Desperately trying to win the Croft's approval by buying Gerald's favourite port & talking about the knighthood Birling is a businessman but it was more prestigious to come from an 'old county family' like the Crofts (that had land, inherited wealth & titles e.g. Lord/Lady. He tells Gerald that he is likely to be knighted & is optimistic for the future. However he is a selfish & wants to protect the family, the business. He is totally against the socialist ideas held by 'the young'. –He doesn't believe in community & sees other people as cheap labour, seeing nothing wrong with sacking Eva Smith *"so she had to go"*. Mr Birling is a public figure in Brumley & obsessed with his status. The Inspector challenges his 'middle-class values' - the reputation of his company, his important connections. Mr Birling becomes terrified when his good name is threatened & is worried of the press he would get, Eric stealing & at the end he knows he has lost his knighthood, reputation & merging of businesses'.

Sheila Birling

A pretty girl in her twenties she is quick witted & strong minded, sharp. Appears childish, naïve & shallow at start

Selfish at the start, she abused her status dismissing Eva/Daisy however she changes to be more sensitive & moral. Sheila is very pleased with her life & excited at her engagement to Gerald. She appears playful at the opening, joking with Gerald. *'(half serious, half playful) "Yes- except for all last summer"* (3) her childishness might be a way to hide serious concerns about the relationship. Sheila uses slang impressions (squiffy) to remind the audience that she is from the younger generation. Priestley gives Sheila many witty lines to make her appear sharp & her wit lets her undermine the authority of the others, making jokes at their expense. Though childish at the start, but what Sheila learns over the evening makes her feel she needs to be herself & break away from her parents. Sheila is more mature than the audience first think. She has wise instincts & spots what the Inspector is doing (29) & knew Gerald's absence was suspicious. *"I'm not a child"* & the Inspector saying *"isn't living on the moon"* (37). Sheila shows compassion to Eva/Daisy & the conditions of workers *"but these girls aren't cheap labour, they're people"*. Sheila changed her views & feels guilty/responsible for her death & reacts angrily to Gerald's comments *"you've been through it"* (28) & sides with the inspector *'(she goes close to him wonderingly)'* (29). She becomes similar to the Inspector & asks just as many questions to Gerald as him. She reveals Eric's drinking problem to her mother & contradicts & undermines her parents telling her father *"Don't interfere"* when giving the ring back to Gerald. Out the whole of the play Sheila is person who changes the most. *"you & I aren't the same people who sat down: to dinner here"* (40) much wiser in the end her social conscience awakened. *"You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector"* (30).

The 'young'

Open to new ideas, honest & admit their faults. They see the human side of Eva/Daisy's story & are upset. They examine their conscience & have nothing to fear from the 'real Inspector's' visit. Eric & Sheila learn that they are responsible for their actions & that their decisions affect people. The younger generation are shown as challenging the authority of their elders. This threatens Birling, who tells them they'd "better keep quiet" (63). Eric at the end is standing around as if he wants nothing to do with his parents. Sheila stands by him. By the end of the play they're no longer controlled by their parents, because the younger generation learn their lesson, there's a chance for an equal & fairer society in the future.