

## KEY WORDS

**Denouement, Guilt, Responsibility, Death, Success, Money, Retribution, Selfishness, Reputation, Society, Socialism, Gender, Generation**

# Eric Act 3

## USAGE OF WOMEN

- Eva's struggles are **emblematic** of those faced by women in early 20th century society, treated as **filth by a heartless** high society
- Eric's treatment of Sheila serves as a **microcosm** (small sample showing a wider idea) of the goings on in society, with women who were made pregnant out of wedlock seen as **damaged and spoilt** whereas the young men responsible got off with **minimal scrutiny**
- Eric tells us "I wasn't in love with her or anything - but I liked her - she was pretty and a good sport" when referring to Eva Smith
- This serves to show us the **depravity** of the mindset of high society, what to Eric was a bit of fun was to an innocent woman a pivotal reason for her ending her own life
- This shows us how though men can commit **irresponsible** actions and get off scot free, it is the woman, **particularly the lower class** women who have to deal with the consequences of these actions
- One could also look at the usage of the phrase "she was a good sport", not only **alluding to how stoically** Eva Smith handled her treatment, but perhaps also showing how at the end of the day Eric's irresponsible actions were a **little more than a game** to him
- Furthermore we see Eric saying "she was pretty", once again showing a **chauvinistic male perspective** (belief that men are better than women) on Eva, confining her to her facial features and looks and defining her value based off that

## COMPARISON

You could compare the usage of the word "pretty" to describe the women throughout the play, whether it be Sheila or Eva, to highlight that regardless of class, the attitudes towards women were archaic and shallow, defining them by their looks and not much else.

## RESPONSIBILITY

- Eric in Act 3 shows more spine, standing up for himself and demonstrating an ability to **fight for justice**
- He says "Then - you killed her. She came to you to protect me - and you turned her away - yes, and you killed her - and the child she'd have had too - my child - your own grandchild - you killed them both - damn you, damn you"
- This **impassioned speech** demonstrates a new side to Eric, showing his ability to raise his voice and show **solicitude** (compassion) for the two lives lost
- This is contrasted with the **heartless** stance taken by Mr Birling, worrying about "honour" and "the money [Eric] stole" as opposed to the two lives lost, showing the **depravity of the capitalist mindset**
- This is further contrasted by the phrase "to protect me", highlighting Eva's **altruism** (selflessness) in the face of **unrelenting** difficulty, a stark contrast to Mr Birling's indifference
- This **deification** (showing her to be perfect) of Eva as a **noble** being serves to further highlight the **shortcomings of capitalist high society**
- This outburst marks a **stark change** in Eric's demeanour towards his parents
- Interestingly here, Priestley does qualify Eric's **enlightenment**; although he is more **outspoken in demanding justice** and highlighting the wrongs of his father, in doing so he he partially downplays his own guilt, saying "you killed her"
- Furthermore, Priestley partially demonstrates himself as still being a **man of his time** despite his **revolutionary** ideas. This is through his **comparative lack of condemnation** towards Eric for what essentially amounts to the act of rape when compared to his harsh condemnation towards the older Birlings and their **unbridled (uncontrolled) capitalism**

**Comment on Priestley's use of language to highlight this contrast, referring to the irony of Mr Birling calling Eric spoilt, in order to hit the targets for A02 (Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language)**



## TOPIC SENTENCES

- Priestley juxtaposes Mr Birling's grandiose wealth and success with his failing family life in order to draw attention to the self-serving flaws of the capitalist mindset, and to demonstrate to the audience that money is no substitute for familial happiness.
- Priestley juxtaposes Eric's willingness to admit his wrongs and admit defeat with Mr Birling's callous indifference towards Eva's death, more worried about money than human life to show to stone-heartedness of the aristocracy and how they only live to serve themselves.
- Priestley demonstrates Eric's changes as a character to exhibit how there is still hope for retribution for those who desire it, and to demonstrate that there is indeed hope for the future with a younger generation willing to accept their wrongs
- Priestley highlights Eric's treatment of Eva as a microcosm of the wider goings on in society, to try and demonstrate the hardships that women face at the hands of the privileged rich.

## FAMILIAL VS MONETARY SUCCESS

- When it is revealed that Eric is in fact the **culprit** responsible for what happened to Eva there are two varying reactions; a **disconsolate** Eric and an **unmoved** Mr Birling, who's only concern is his reputation
- When confronted, Eric tells Mr Birling; **"Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble - that's why."**
- This brings forth a **contrast** within the play, with Mr Birling's success in business being **directly juxtaposed** with his shortcomings as a father, his **lust** for money pushing his own son into a **sequestered** (isolated) bubble where he felt shut off from the world
- Priestley may be using this as a mechanism to expose the **futility of capitalism**; all the money and powered **garnered to impress others** will still not solve the problems that plague your own home
- This furthers the sentiment that money is not the be all and end all in life, **contrary to capitalist beliefs**
- This **paternal failure** is further reiterated by Mr Birling himself when he says **"Don't talk to me like that. Your trouble is - you've been spoilt"**.
- The irony here is that Mr Birling is the one responsible for spoiling Eric, as shown by his **incessant entitlement**, and showing how in wider society the upper class have been coddled and spoilt, leading to their self-centred ways

**Compare the attitudes of different characters towards responsibility throughout the play, ensuring that you make reference to Priestley's perspectives on this topic, in order to hit A03 (interpreting the content from the text with understanding of the relationship of the content with the context)**

