

KEY WORDS

Socialite, Selfish, Confident, Capitalist, Evasive, Attractive, Lustful, Individualistic

Gerald Act 1

CAPITALIST VIEWS

- In response to Mr Birling's capitalist suggestion that Gerald's relations with Sheila would allow them to **amalgamate** businesses to push for **"lower costs and higher prices"** Gerald replies **"Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that."**
- On a surface level, this displays Gerald as supportive of capitalist values, with the **preoccupation of maximising profits** in a selfish manner, even at the expense of others. Upon deeper inspection, however, Gerald is perhaps an opportunity to explore how these views became hardwired and **internalised**; throughout Act One Gerald references his **"mother"** and **"father"** on multiple occasions. This could lead the audience to question whether Gerald's **worldview is merely a product of his upbringing and thus he is almost presented as a victim of his society**, trapped within his social standing as he is **puppeteered by the views of his parents**.

COMPARISON

Interestingly, through subtleties in his language, Priestley arguably presents Eric as a foil to Gerald. Eric is introduced as **"not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive"**, through allowing the audience to **draw parallels** on the differences between them Priestley reasserts how Gerald is comparatively 'untouchable' within his society.

A FASHIONABLE SOCIALITE

- Gerald is characterised as a **paragon** (an ideal example of) social superiority; his wealth, family name, attractiveness and age place him at the **top of the social pecking order**.
- The **prejudices** of Edwardian society work in Gerald's favour, his privileges mean that he can navigate life with ease. He is introduced as **"the easy, well-bred young man-about-town"**, Gerald is incredibly **self-assured** as he has never had a reason to question his social standing.
- The phrase **"well-bred"** highlights the **antiquated** (old-fashioned) Edwardian social values as it is a concept a modern audience would associate more with animals such as pedigree dogs or horses. Perhaps this could be a **diatribe** from Priestley against the **inhumanity of the social structure** at the time.
- His interactions seem **advised and deliberate**, it is clear he knows how to conduct a social setting. In response to Mr Birling's compliments of the food (which we learn was a **breach of social etiquette** through Mrs Birling's reaction to it in saying **"Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things"**), Gerald instead agrees politely claiming it was **"Absolutely first class"** to **assuage** (relieve) his host from any possible embarrassment from his **social indiscretion**. This displays his manners and charisma to depict Gerald as comfortable within his society and **reinforces this concept of ease**.
- The **idiom "man-about-town"** could alternatively **foreshadow the literal action** of going **"about-town"** to find a mistress in the Place Bar.

TOP TIP



To pick up the AO3 marks by relating to context think about how Gerald's character is overshadowed by his class, particularly in act one. Why might Priestley have done this? Perhaps it critiques how class was valued higher than personality in British 1912 society?

HIS AFFECTIONS FOR SHEILA

- Gerald pursues Sheila as a wife despite it being an **unorthodox** relationship for the time as he **"might have done better"** for himself socially if he wanted to. In 1912, women were **commodified**, and men typically would marry above them to elevate their own status this is acknowledged through the Birlings as Mrs Birling is **"her husband's social superior"**.
- Priestley would therefore imply that Gerald does have genuine feelings for Sheila, as opposed to the marriage being a means of **social bargaining**.
- The audience is also given the impression that the marriage was initiated and pursued by Gerald as he questions **"I've been trying long enough, haven't?"** implying that the pursuit took time and was somewhat of a challenge to Gerald.
- Perhaps convincing Sheila to marry him was not as **"easy"** as his usual social interactions which helps to reinforce the idea that his desire and love for her were there.
- There is however a slight **ambiguity** surrounding Gerald's attitudes to this unbalanced marriage, he responds to Mr Birling's discussion of it with embarrassment. This could be interpreted as merely a reaction to an awkward and somewhat **taboo** topic of conversation arising or it could be embarrassment stemming from Gerald's belief that Mr Birling's proposition is true.

TOPIC SENTENCES

- Gerald is a paragon of social superiority in 1912 British society, he advertises the superficial concepts that allow a person to live an "easy" life. Priestley utilises Gerald to interrogate the concept of an 'untouchable' upper class and to display how pertinent the prejudices of the society at the time were.
- At the start of the play, Gerald is overshadowed by the weight of his social status. The audience remains somewhat ambivalent about him as his character is initially quite two-dimensional as Priestley doesn't delve into his personality beyond his wealth. This could exemplify and critique the way in which people of Gerald's class would be defined by their social superiority and their true nature would be side-lined (deemed as unimportant) as a result.
- Priestley refrains from being overtly critical of Gerald unlike the Birling parents to render him in a liminal position where he is neither condemned nor loved. One way in which Priestley explores this is through his genuine affection for Sheila, despite their marriage being unorthodox as he is pursuing a lower social class, he is seemingly driven towards Sheila out of love.