

Summarised notes- Mr Birling

Act 1

POINT	KEY QUOTES	ANALYSIS
The personification of capitalism	<p><u>"a heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties"</u></p> <p><u>[his home is] "substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy or homelike"</u></p> <p><u>"hard-headed practical man of business"</u></p>	<p>- After the wars in 1945, a plumper frame was synonymous with affluence and indulgence. The adjective "portentous" is used to expose the superficiality of capitalism.</p> <p>- This portrays the cosmetic nature of Birling's wealth. The unorthodox phrase "heavily comfortable" is almost an oxymoron to present the luxury of the social elite as a façade.</p> <p>- This is a political allusion to Sir Stanley Baldwin who accused "hard-faced men" of profiting from the wars, Mr Birling stands to represent these affluent businessmen who callously took advantage of the suffering of war for financial gain.</p>
Insecure and unacquainted with aristocratic life	<p><u>"rather provincial in his speech"</u></p> <p><u>"Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him"</u></p> <p><u>[Mrs Birling tells Mr Birling] "you're not supposed to say such things"</u></p>	<p>- His voice is tainted by a regional accent, in 1912 this would be perceived as a sign he is unrefined and comes from lower-class roots. He is a member of the Nouveau Riche.</p> <p>- His use of name-dropping exposes that he is trying to impress. Mr Birling embarked on a sycophantic investigation to copy Gerald's father's taste in port. Port is used as a metonym for wealth, highlighting how superficial it is. Mr Birling is obsessive in his attempts to assert his status which likely comes from a place of insecurity.</p> <p>- He is scolded by his wife for committing social indiscretions showing his is not well versed in aristocratic life. His attempts to assert his status are rendered futile as his true nature will always shine through.</p>
Denying responsibility	<p><u>"as it happened more than eighteen months ago-nearly two years ago-obviously it has nothing to do with the wretched girl's suicide"</u></p>	<p>- His reasoning is ignorant and illogical, yet his use of the adverb "obviously" shows his arrogant defensiveness. His inability to display any kind of remorse is reflective of the stubbornness of the older generations, he doesn't allow there to be any question of him being responsible.</p>

Act 2

POINT	KEY QUOTES	ANALYSIS
Preoccupied with reputation	<u>He “dubiously” tells his wife “if this comes out at the inquest, it isn’t going to do us much good. The press might easily take it up-”.</u>	- His only concerns are to do with how he will appear in the public eye, the “press” evokes a stronger emotional response from him than the notion of suicide.
Misogynistic to assert his power	<u>“is there any reason why my wife should answer questions from you, inspector?”</u> <u>“a young unmarried girl [Sheila], is being dragged into this—”.</u>	- The possessive pronoun ‘my’ is a means of him establishing control to elevate himself . The use of a rhetorical question paints Birling as patronising , he is in a power struggle with the inspector and he immediately resorts to aggression and disrespect to win the social battle , painting him as undeserving of respect. - His artificial care for his daughter is ironic as we know that he exploits Sheila for social and financial gain through marriage . We also see his insincerity as he doesn’t care that a young girl was pushed to suicide so his apparent concern for a young girl to be involved in a police investigation is deceitful.
Dispassionate to his own family	<u>“what’s the matter with that child?”</u>	- His language transitions from the possessive pronoun “my” to the demonstrative pronoun “that” metaphorically expels himself of the ownership over Sheila once she begins demonstrating socialist ideology . He refers to her as a “child” to dismiss her beliefs as unimportant and immature.

Act 3

POINT	KEY QUOTES	ANALYSIS
The Inspector as a foil to Mr Birling	<u><i>"We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other". (the Inspector) Vs. "like bees in a hive"</i></u>	- The Inspector presents collectivism as a humane idea, through bodily imagery . In contrast, Mr Birling uses zoomorphism to present it as animalistic, absurd and foreign depicting his unwillingness to accept new ideas.
Designed to be condemned	<u><i>"now look at the pair of them. The famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke-"</i></u>	- His callousness is apparent through both his acerbic tone and his ability to dismiss the notion of suicide and the exploitation of the working classes as a "joke" . He ridicules his own children, yet it is ironic as he is the only character who claims to "know it all" with his mentions of the "unsinkable" Titanic and "silly little war scares" . Priestley encourages the younger generation of his audience to reject the beliefs of their parents.
Cyclical structure and characterisation	<i>The play both begins and ends with Mr Birling offering Gerald a drink.</i>	- Priestley presents Mr Birling as stagnant within his capitalism , to metaphorically represent this cycle of immorality the older generation is stuck within. Alcohol is used as a motif of superficial wealth and materialism, but also irresponsibility.
Moment of catharsis	<i>Upon discovering that the inspector is not real, Mr Birling begins speaking "eagerly" and "excitedly"</i> <i>He speaks and behaves "triumphantly"</i>	- He feels intense excitement when he realises his reputation and status are no longer at threat. It is pitiful how closely intertwined his emotions are with his status. - The adverb "triumphantly" connotes to the notion of winning a battle, Priestley is presenting capitalist ideologies as synonymous with a propensity (inclination to) warfare - something that would be greatly condemned by his contemporary audience.