

HOW IS SHEILA PRESENTED AS A CHARACTER WHO CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE PLAY?

Within Act 1, Sheila is emblematic of the disenfranchised, disempowered, and voiceless women within 1912 Edwardian society- she is presented as childlike and naïve, exacerbating her lack of a valid voice both politically and socially. Sheila is instantly introduced to the audience as a [pretty girl], suggestive of her value not surpassing her physical looks, but most significantly her language is infantile and childish for somebody in her [early twenties]. Her language remains infantile and childlike as she refers to her mother as "mummy", compounded through her simplistic and short sentences such as "you're squiffy". This reinforces that she has been sheltered from the real hardships of life, resulting in her to be preserved in this infantile manner and being prohibited from seeing the belligerent world. Her infantile and naïve presentation is intensified through her relationship with her father: the embodiment of capitalism and the patriarchy. As a daughter's value was based off how far they advance their fathers political and social status, Sheila and Mr Birling's relationship serves as a microcosm for the patriarchal norms that permeated society. Mr Birling sees her marriage as a business transaction between "Crofts and Birlings", yet Sheila is mesmerised by the "beauty" of the ring so cannot see this. The adjective "beauty" once again reinforces how Sheila was the epitome of a typical 1912 woman as she: only measured an item worth on its beauty, was being used as a transaction and was, most significantly, voiceless, and oppressed. Thus, Sheila is illustrative of the disenfranchised women of 1912 who were seen as property to their fathers and husbands- their worth not surpassing this. Priestley creates Sheila as a stagnant, typical 1912 woman of this era to critique how the capitalist, patriarchal society permitted and welcomed these oppressive norms. He thus creates Sheila's character to resemble no glimpse of change to make a 1945 audience reflect on how tragic and devastating it would be to see society return to such ignorance and oppression- without socialism this could be a reality.

Juxtaposingly, Sheila transmogrifies, at the end of Act 1 and Act 2, into an altruistic and empowered individual who: understands the detrimental impacts of capitalism and realises the immense power of the Inspector. Her empowerment is salient as she makes a stand against her capitalist family through her development of empathy and responsibility. This causes her to be a foil to her remorseless and irresponsible parents, as she recognises "[rather wildly, with laugh] No, he's giving us the rope- so that we'll hang ourselves.". The stage direction "[wildly]" demonstrates how Sheila has become disillusioned with the ideas of capitalism: and the proper etiquette of the middle class. This starkly contrasts her earlier naivety as she is now unapologetically freed from these constraints and appears to not hold back this 'wild' side. Moreover, Sheila goes from being ridiculed in act 1, to mocking and ridiculing her ignorant families oblivion to the Inspector's omniscience and moral power. She tries to educate her family on their obliviousness: "You mustn't try to build a kind of wall between us and that girl". Sheila uses the metaphorical phrase of a "wall" to symbolise how the Birling's have created this barrier between themselves and the working classes- they live in their [pink and intimate] lives, with little regard for the consequences of their injurious actions. Surprisingly, Sheila becomes one of the shrewdest characters, despite her earlier docile presentation, as she is the first to recognise both the intent and moral message the Inspector was trying to propagate. Sheila was able to understand, through her introduction to socialism, how damaging the rigid class system was of 1912. Within 1912, there was a rigid class system which caused little social mobility within society- the class you belonged too you were defined by. This is contrasted in 1945 when there was an increased social mobility- acts such as the Equal Franchise Act (men and women over 21 allowed to vote) demonstrated this. Priestley makes Sheila understand, recognise and critique the rigid class system of the time to highlight to the audience that this regressive view on class was synonymous with capitalism- capitalists favoured this regressive and outdated system, yet only socialists (like Sheila) are able to have enough morality to recognise and stand against this.

Lastly, Sheila's change between Act 2 to 3 is colossal as she progresses into the ideal exemplar of morality for the audience. This is most prevalently as a consequence of her becoming the Inspector's proxy within act 3- she was so receptive to his message; she internalises it and tries to teach her family. She does this through emulating the Inspector's words from his final speech: "what he made me feel. Fire and blood and anguish". Her precise repetition even of the polysyndeton on "and", illuminates Sheila is desperately trying to reinforce the belligerent and relentless consequences of having no social conscience. Furthermore, the hellish semantic field created by the triplet reinforces Sheila's desperation to make her family aware of the hellish consequences they will continue to face if they don't feel remorse and embark on a pathway of redemption.

Additionally, her permanent change is finalised through the cyclical presentation of her and Gerald's engagement. Most clearly, Priestley creates a cyclical structure through the Inspector arriving at the beginning and end, but uses the engagement to finalise how Sheila has liberated herself from the societal concepts that constrained her- the patriarchy and capitalism. In Act 1 she feels "really engaged" to Gerald, showing her joy, yet when Gerald [holds up the ring] at the end, she "must think". Although she does not reject the ring, a symbol of eternal love, she does hesitate, making Sheila a now atypical 1912 woman as they would have been expected to stay engaged- even in the case of infidelity. Sheila is now empowered by socialism and has changed as a consequence. This could mimic the change in 1945 politics within society; Sheila's change was drastic, akin to the drastic electoral swing. Within 1945, the labour party won by a landslide victory of 10.7%. As they had more socialist views, this demonstrated that society wanted a more equal society. Therefore, as much as the Inspector is used by Priestley as a dramatic vehicle, he uses Sheila as a recipient of his message and his mouthpiece as she takes on the Inspector's socialist ideologies- the identical ideologies that were possessed by Priestley. Thus, Sheila becomes a symbol of hope for a 1945 audience; ignorant and parsimonious individuals in society are capable of repenting and reforming when provided with a moral example. This providing hope that society can continue to progress and avoid regressing into the stagnant societal ideas of 1912.

In a final effort to concatenate, Sheila is presented as arguably the character who undergoes the largest change. Her presentation within Act 1, replicates a typical voiceless and oppressed woman within 1912 society. However, through the introduction to socialism, Sheila breaks this confining mould and becomes a moral compass to both her family and the audience. Priestley utilises her change to propagate the message of socialism and show how morality is synonymous with socialism.