

## KEY WORDS

**Infantile, naive, disenfranchised (no right to vote), oppressed, silenced, child-like, ridiculed (mocked), inferior, confined to her stereotypical role**

# Sheila Act 1

## SILENCING + INFANTILE TREATMENT

- Her silencing is **prevalent** (clear) in Act 1 as her speech is short and simplistic such as "Yes, go on, mummy" and "You're squiffy". This is indicative of how she is silenced due to her being seen as an inferior young woman, but also representing how she is a **disenfranchised woman**– her lack of a voice could be utilised by Priestley to **critique** the lack of a political voice women had in the Edwardian Era.

- Sheila's language is very **regressive** and simplistic for a woman of the middle class who is in her **[early twenties]**. Her language remains **infantile** and **childlike** as she refers to her mother as "mummy". 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** (brutal) world.

## COMPARISON

Sheila's dismissal of her role as a silenced women is broken subtly through her development in language. She goes from the infantile reference of her "mummy" to calling her "mother". This subtle progression is indicative that Sheila has deviated from being oppressed and has been empowered because of her introduction to socialism.

## OPPRESSED BY THE PATRIARCHY

- Sheila's oppression serves to be **emblematic** (symbolic) of the typical oppression of women within the early 20th century
- Her entire being is centred around the patriarchal (men dominated) expectations of her: marriage to **advance her family politically and socially**.
- Her engagement to Gerald is a by product of patriarchy as the uniting of "Crofts and Birlings" is the real reason her family, most significantly Mr Birling, is overjoyed and elated with the marriage with it being "the happiest night of my life".
- We clearly see that Sheila is equally ecstatic about the marriage as she is mesmerised by the "beauty" of the ring, but her later **disillusionment to the idea of marriage** (once she realises its meaningless value to Gerald) proves that this marriage was not a union for her, but for her father.
- Sheila and Mr Birling's relationship is a **microcosm** (small example which represents a bigger picture) for the oppression inflicted by the patriarchy; women were utilised as a transaction to further **advance the political and social status of their fathers**.
- A women's naivety and oppression allowed this transaction to be more seamless, hence Sheila's naivety is used by Priestley to **indict** (criticise) how the patriarchal society objectified women, seeing them for their transactional value opposed to their value as humans.
- She is instantly introduced as a **[pretty girl]**, reinforcing how Sheila's purpose and value at the beginning **did not surpass her physical value**– a representation of the societal view of women.

## TOPIC SENTENCES

Sheila is emblematic of the disenfranchised and voiceless women within 1912 society: their voices are silenced by society- they're not given the opportunity to flourish and gain independence. This is personified through Sheila to critique how a woman's value was based off her exterior looks.

Sheila and Mr Birlings relationship is created by Priestley as a microcosm of the regressive patriarchal norms in the Edwardian era. He utilises their relationship, most significantly Sheila's oppression, to be didactic to the audience about the detrimental impact of a society that oppresses both women and the lower classes.

Interestingly, Priestley creates similarities between Sheila, the epitome of a privileged capitalist, and Eva Smith, an exploited member of the working class, to reinforce how oppression permeates society and many are victim to this. Thus, he uses his political diatribe to urge his audience to make a stand against oppression through uniting society and favouring equality.

### SIMILARITY WITH EVA SMITH

- Interestingly, Priestley draws **parallels** between Eva and Sheila as both are oppressed by the patriarchy and used for their external appearance. Both are described by the flattering adjective of **"pretty"** with Sheila being **[a pretty girl]** and Eva being described by the Inspector as **"very pretty"** and by Gerald as "young and pretty"- both females, regardless of class, are confined to the same oppressing expectations.
- Priestley uses the similarity of oppression, yet the contrasting treatment in how Eva was **exploited**, and Sheila remained **privileged**; perhaps highlighting to the audience how individuals, regardless of class, are united in alternative ways- ones they may not be aware of. Thus, Priestley, although **optimistic** (positive) in the complete unity of classes, may be providing a **realistic alternative** for classes to see their similarities beyond the clear distinctions in their social classes.

### LIBERATION THROUGH SOCIALISM

- The inspector, the **embodiment of socialism**, liberates Sheila through introducing her to socialist ideologies- ones that **juxtapose** (contrast) the views she had been exposed to her entire life. The liberation is clear through her confrontational and assertive tone she develops, **contrasting her previous feeble presentation (comparison)**.
- She directly **indicts** (critiques) her fathers **exploitative** capitalist ways through opposing that **"But these girls aren't cheap labour- they're people."** As girls **connotes** (technique meaning a word that links with other words) innocence and vulnerability, Sheila has recognised that upper class members of society, typically possessing capitalist views, exploit the innocence and vulnerability of the lower classes- one realisation the previous sheltered Sheila would have never come too
- This is the beginning of her disgust and rejection of capitalists **dehumanising, deplorable and unscrupulous** behaviour.