

KEY WORDS

Irony, Foreshadowing, Abuse of power, Hypocrisy, Alcoholism, Assault, Antithesis, Guilt, Responsibility

Eric Act 2

IRONY

- We don't see much of Eric throughout Act 2, rather we hear of a mystery man, responsible for impregnating Eva Smith, who in turn went to Mrs Birling for help
- Throughout Mrs Birling's interrogation we hear her pass the blame on to all but herself, saying **"look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility"** and saying the man (Eric) was a **"drunken idler"** and ought to be dealt with **"very severely"** and **"made an example of"**, showing the **myopic and egotistical world view (short sighted and selfish)** held by those of the upper class
- Priestley utilises **dramatic irony** all throughout this scene to highlight the **wilful blindness** of the capitalist mindset and the **catastrophic** consequences of it
- Eric's actions highlight the **pusillanimous** (cowardly) nature of capitalism, hiding from responsibility towards the masses
- The **irony** that the person Mrs. Birling feels so strongly about punishing is her own son shows how high society **harboured** double standards in the treatment of the upper class when compared to the lower class

COMPARISON

You could compare Mrs Birling's change in attitude, going from "the man ought to be punished severely" when the culprit was a lower class nobody to "you're not the type- you don't get drunk" when the culprit is revealed as her son, showing the wilful blindness and hypocrisy in capitalist society

GUILT

- Eric is not present during Act 2, rather the Act deals with the guilt of Gerald and Mrs Birling, following on from the interrogations of Sheila and Mr Birling before.
- Instead we see the effects of the interrogation on an increasingly more **distraught** (hysterical) Sheila, who says **"[rather wildly, with laugh] No, he's giving us the rope- so that we'll hang ourselves."**
- The **metaphor** of a rope here alludes to how the **virulent** (harmful) actions of the Birlings were akin to executing Eva Smith, giving her no other options and forcing her into a corner where suicide was the only escape
- The irony of **"hang ourselves"** would also not have been lost on the audience, a twisted form of **justice and karmic retribution**, showing how the **Machiavellian** (scheming) actions of the capitalists in power would come back to bite them
- Eric's absence from this Act therefore insinuates that his actions are not as serious as those present in the act and therefore would haunt him less in the future
- Eric's absence in this Act is juxtaposed by Sheila's **ubiquitousness** (presence everywhere) throughout the act and her increasing hysteria, perhaps showing how Sheila is to blame more than Eric, and the weight of this guilt is leading to her hysteria
- Alternatively, it could be perceived that Eric's lack of presence is represented through Sheila. As they are both apart of the younger generation and therefore **"more impressionable"**, Sheila's hysteria and guilt could be seen to be **an extension of Eric's** despite him not being physically there



TOPIC SENTENCES

- Through his masterful use of irony, Priestley exposes how upper class society is wilfully blind to the harsh realities of life and lower class society, showing just how out of touch the aristocracy is.
- Through his use of irony Priestley exposes the hypocrisy of capitalism and high society, highlighting the chasm between the treatment of the rich vs the poor.

COMPARISON

You can compare and contrast Sheila's awareness of the inevitability of their wrongdoings being exposed with the older Birling's stubbornness in order to exhibit the differences in generation and the hope present for the future.