

Gender

Key Words / Phrases

Women Being Treated Badly

- Disenfranchised (no vote)
- Oppressed (harsh treatment)
- Marginalised (insignificant)
- Male gratification (satisfy men)
- Plight (suffering)
- Sheltered
- Inferior (less than)
- Objectified (seen as objects)
- Exploited (used for their weakness)
- Shallow perception (seen for their looks)
- Disposable treatment
- Primal and lustful desires

Women Being Treated Well

- Enfranchised (vote)
- Liberated (free)
- Celebrated
- Emancipation (freedom)
- Autonomous
- Empowered
- Unshackled
- Humanised
- Eliminating disparity and oppression

Other

- Patriarchal (male-dominated)
- Virulent (harmful) effects
- Ingrained societal beliefs
- Systemic dehumanisation (social systems make seem less than human)
- Mouthpiece (Priestley can't be in the play so speaks through the Inspector)
- Perpetually (constantly)

Priestley's intentions

- Priestley gives a voice to the **marginalised** (treated as insignificant) and **oppressed groups** in society through the play. He **constructs** both the Inspector and Sheila to vocalise the **virulent** (harmful) effects of these confining and oppressive beliefs on women, especially in the lower classes, and how a lack of gender equality is causing **exploitation**.
- In his **political diatribe (criticising politics)**, Priestley critiques the **patriarchal structure (male-dominated)** within society through illuminating its allowance and disregard for the dehumanisation of women as mere objects for **male gratification**. He makes a link to his audience between male desire and the **callous** (cruel) treatment of women.
- Given that Priestley's 1945 audience primarily comprised women, he aimed to emphasise the importance of women not **regressing (going back)** into docile and submissive roles. This regression enables both the patriarchy and other dominant social groups to exploit and manipulate women, **mirroring the plight (suffering) of Eva**. Eva symbolises an **allegorical (to teach)** figure, serving as a poignant reminder for women to persist in their fight for rights and equality.

Mrs Birling

“Sheila, what an expression! Really the things you girls pick up these days” (Act 1)

- **Exclamative sentence:** She is presented as a **marionette (puppet) of her class as she is complicit in upholding its conventions**, the exclamative sentence emphasises her frantically trying to **iron out any social faux pas (socially awkward or improper) so they operate seamlessly within the expectations of their class**, she is **reluctant to deviate from these in any way**.
- As a member of the older generation, and being of the most superior social standing of her family, she is **almost held in aspic within the hard-wired conventions of a capitalist and classist society**, thus anything that threatens these conventions threaten her.
- **Condescending noun “girls”:** She patronises Sheila through the **condescending noun “girl”**, reinforcing the infantile preservation we see Sheila endure in Act 1. This could be done as Sheila comes to symbolise **emancipation** (freedom), Mrs Birling wants to keep her docile and submissive as she fears **any changes to convention that may put her class position under threat**.
- Mrs Birling **belittles Sheila in order to dismiss her behaviour and portray it as foolish or uncouth**, she reinforces the separation between the older generation who are **robust to these newer ways of thinking** and the younger ones that seem vulnerable to ‘*pick[ing]*’ them up as if they were a disease

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Social class:** Despite belonging to a marginalised group as a **woman**, Mrs. Birling exploits those in the **lower classes**, leveraging their heightened oppression to reaffirm her own power.
- **Older vs younger generation:** Mrs Birling wants to keep **Sheila** docile and submissive as she fears any changes to convention that may put her class position under threat and change the society that she has experienced in the **older generation**.
- **Capitalism vs socialism:** **Capitalist ideologies** are rooted in self-interest, inherently resisting unity and collective action. Consequently, the advancement of **women’s rights** would challenge Mrs. Birling to deviate from the capitalist ideals deeply ingrained in her.

Sheila

“Look Mummy - isn’t it a beauty?” (Act 1)

- **Short simplistic language:** In Act 1, Sheila's **speech is short and simplistic**, reflecting not only how society silences her as a young woman perceived as **inferior** but also highlighting her **disenfranchisement** (lack of a vote). This lack of voice could be seen as Priestley's critique of the **limited political agency** women had during the Edwardian Era.
- Despite her **privileged social status**, Sheila remains **oppressed and marginalised** (group treated insignificantly). Her language, marked by terms like "mummy," suggests an **infantile and sheltered perspective**, illustrating how her social class shields her from life's harsh realities.
- **Objectification:** Sheila's mesmerisation at the "beauty" of the ring is almost ironic as she is only valued for her perceived "beauty" and external looks by society. The **objectification** extends to both the young females we encounter – Sheila and Eva.
- Both are similarly described as "pretty" showing how despite their differing social classes, they were both subject to the **same oppressing and objectifying social perceptions**.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Social class:** Sheila is cocooned and almost shielded by her **social class**, compounded by the **patriarchal** expectations imposed upon her, resulting in her submissive and infantile presentation.
- **Older vs younger:** Sheila's receptiveness to **socialist** ideals, characteristic of the younger generation, challenges entrenched generational views on society, particularly concerning **women**. By the play's end, she is hesitant about Gerald's ring proposal, indicating her growing disillusionment with patriarchal norms, symbolising her liberation through socialism.
- **Capitalism vs socialism:** By the play's end, Sheila is hesitant about Gerald's ring proposal, indicating her growing disillusionment with **patriarchal norms**, symbolising her liberation through **socialism**.

Eric

“She was pretty and a good sport” (act 3)

- **Connotations of 'sport':** The term "sport" evokes connotations of games and amusement, shedding light on Eric's perception of his relationship with Eva as **a form of selfish entertainment**. This exposes the **callousness** (cruel) with which he **exploited and objectified her**, reducing her to a **mere source of gratification**.
- Eric's callous alcohol fuelled relationship with Eva is a **microcosm** of the **toxic dynamics perpetuated by unchecked privilege and substance abuse within Edwardian society**.
- **Syntax of pretty:** Even in her death, Eric still possesses power over her through reducing her to her superficial appearance, focusing first on her physical "pretty"(ness).
- **The syntax (word-order)**, with her physical attributes preceding her character, reflects his **shallow perception**, reducing Eva to a **mere object of desire** rather than recognising her intrinsic worth as a human being. Thus, Eva is emblematic of the **disposable treatment of women** in the early twentieth century by the **heartless upper echelons of society**.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Social class:** Eric's callous alcohol fuelled **relationship** with Eva is a microcosm of the toxic dynamics perpetuated by unchecked **privilege** and substance abuse within Edwardian society.
- **Older vs younger generation:** Despite Eric's efforts towards social reform and equality, his attitudes towards **women** continue to reflect patriarchal and objectifying perspectives. This indicates a slower pace of progress in addressing gender-related issues compared to broader social reforms. Such lingering attitudes may stem from deeply ingrained **generational biases** towards women, which persist despite attempts to combat social prejudices.

Gerald

“She looked young and fresh and charming” (Act 2)

- **Noun “fresh”:** The noun “*fresh*” connotes to innocence and purity which presents Eva as prey for Gerald, it introduces this **notion of consumption** which implies Gerald is acting on **primal and lustful desires**.
- Alternatively, this idea of innocence distances Eva from a typical prostitute- suggesting that Gerald did not pursue their relationship as a **Micheton** (a customer of a prostitute) and it was instead a **heroic response** to the sympathy he felt towards her.
- **Polysyndeton on ‘and’ (repetition of and):** The **polysyndeton** on “*and*” serves to **amplify the list of qualities** that Gerald fondly reminisces about regarding Eva/ Daisy.
- However, the fact that two out of three adjectives list physical attributes showcases how Eva served as a **physical fantasy for Gerald**, a refuge (place to be safe) from the **constraints** of his engagement and the continual pressure of upkeeping his social status.

“Everything’s all right now, Sheila [holds up the ring] what about this ring?” (Act 3)

- **Cyclical narrative:** Gerald conducts the play to follow a **cyclical structure**, focusing back on his and Sheila’s engagement. This is reflective of his unwillingness to change and his overarching desire to absolve himself from **guilt and responsibility**.
- Despite belonging to the younger generation, he **shirks** (avoid/neglects) accountability, disappointing the audience with **his character arc**. Unlike Sheila and Eric, who are impressionable and adaptable, Gerald’s **obstinate** (stubborn) nature remains unchanged.
- **Ring as a metonym:** The use of the noun “*ring*” as a **metonym** (when a noun or an attribute of something is used in place of its actual name another example could be referring to the British monarchy as ‘the Crown’) for marriage displays Gerald’s materialistic view of marriage, **devoid of any emotion or love**.
- He **reverts to this symbol of traditional power and possession** in order to reassert himself; he finds comfort in the **ingrained societal beliefs** which make life ‘*easy*’ for him.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Social class:** Due to Eva's **social class**, Gerald perceives her as more vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. Her youthfulness and "fresh" appearance further suggest a notion of consumption, branding Eva as prey to Gerald's desires. This implies that Gerald is driven by primal instincts and lustful impulses
- **Older vs younger generation:** Gerald remains obdurate (stubborn) in his opinions towards morality, therefore his opinions towards women remain aligned with the marginalisation and objectification of women. He does not embody the progressive attitudes typically associated with the **younger generation** but rather perpetuates oppressive views towards **women**.

The Inspector

“As if she were an animal, a thing, not a person” (act 3)

- **Beastly image on 'animal'**: Eva serves as a microcosm for the exploited lower class, and the depiction of her as an "*animal*" presents a beastly image that symbolises the **dehumanising** treatment endured by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.
- This symbolises the **systemic dehumanisation** inflicted upon the lower classes – they not only suffer physical and emotional degradation but constantly battle **social injustice and inequality**.
- **Asyndetic listing**: The use of an asyndetic list (listing with commas instead of 'and') conveys a sense of relentless repetition, vividly illustrating how Eva **endured relentless marginalisation and exploitation** both due to her lower societal status and her gender.
- The list depicts the extent of **dehumanisation and objectification** endured by a single individual at the hands of the Birlings, aiming to elicit a **cathartic** (purge of emotions) response of guilt. The sheer magnitude of suffering endured by the "*millions and millions*" remains **incomprehensible**, amplifying the Inspector's message that collective responsibility is crucial to tackle this.

How It Links To Other Key Themes

- **Social class**: The Inspector advocates for unity and interconnectedness among lower **social classes and women**, who have been perpetually oppressed by degrading ideologies. Thus, he illustrates a moral obligation to show compassion towards marginalised groups in society.
- **Capitalism vs socialism**: The Inspector highlights parallels between the self-serving nature of **capitalism** and the perpetuation of societal suffering, particularly for oppressed groups like lower-class **women**. He illustrates how capitalism not only allows but also encourages the indifferent mistreatment of these oppressed groups. In contrast, socialism emerges as the solution to eradicate such divisions and promote equality and compassion within society.