

KEY WORDS

egocentric, archetype of irresponsible capitalists, stagnant, self-absorption, rigidity

Mr Birling Act 3

THE INSPECTOR AS A FOIL TO MR BIRLING

- As an **advocate of collectivism** and social responsibility, **the Inspector is used in Act Three to dismantle the ruthless individualism endorsed by Mr Birling**. The inspector **crystalizes his socialist beliefs** within the phrase **"We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other"**.
- The **anaphora of the collective pronoun "we" directly contrasts** Mr Birling's egocentric view.
- This concept of **collectivism is dismissed** by Mr Birling in Act One through the simile "like bees in a hive". Mr Birling **zoomorphises socialism** to portray it as **absurd and foreign**.
- This is where the role of the inspector becomes apparent; he educates his audience that socialism is in fact humane, perhaps why the **metaphor** of a 'body' is used to juxtapose Mr Birling's previous **animalistic simile**.
- The inspector is used to **hold a mirror up to the flaws in Mr Birlings' beliefs**.

DESIGNED TO BE CONDEMNED

- Mr Birling's final words of the play were intended to ridicule his children, **"now look at the pair of them. The famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke"**.
- Not only is his **callousness apparent through his acerbic tone, but his apathy also resonates** through his belief that the notion of suicide, and the revelation of all the ways they have exploited the working class, could be considered a **"joke"**.
- This phrase is also laced with irony, as Mr Birling is the only character who has claimed to **"know it all"** with his mentions of the **"Titanic"** and **"silly little war scares"**, Priestley deliberately set the play in 1912 to **fragmentize the "know it all" ignorance of the older generation**.
- To an extent by identifying them as the **"younger generation"** Priestley groups Sheila and Eric with his own audience, intending for them to be riled by Mr Birling's ignorant sarcasm, Priestley intends to encourage his audience to **reject the capitalist views of their parents**.
- It is important here to note that Mr Birling is interrupted by the telephone much like he was interrupted by the inspector at the start. Perhaps Priestley chose the form of a play to communicate his **allegorical diatribe so he can visually portray Mr Birling's beliefs as the archetype of the capitalist older generation as unimportant**. He enforces a pensive **"moment of silence"** to amplify the dramatic effect of the phone call.

TOP TIP



Use this as an opportunity to link to context (AO3), the play was set prior to the "fire and blood and anguish" of the world wars. In 1912 class divisions were rigid and political views seemed so deeply ingrained that it was hard to imagine them changing, both of these truths were **breached by the world wars**- it is an allegory for the possibility of change

DENYING RESPONSIBILITY

- *"That fellow obviously didn't like us. He was prejudiced from the start. Probably a socialist or some sort of crank - he talked like one".*
- The complex sentence is used as **an act of deceit** to make himself come across as more informed than he truly is, the preface of his argument doesn't hold much logic.
- The adverb *"obviously"* shows his arrogance and ignorance, he turns rather defensive and aggressive at the prospect of someone threatening his respectability, which may again **stem from a place of insecurity**.
- 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.

COMPARISON

Gerald and Mr Birling's characters **become superimposed** in the ending of the play; we see them both **blurring into the archetype of capitalism**. They both act *"triumphantly"* as they expose the inspector as a hoax, which is ironic as we question what it is they have achieved.

TOPIC SENTENCES

- The cathartic relief exhibited by Mr Birling upon discovering the Inspector was not real is used to epitomise his self-absorption and portray how this left him apathetic and uncompassionate even when matters of death or suicide were concerned.
- The Inspector is used as a foil to Mr Birling so he can directly dismantle and expose his flawed beliefs, as a mouthpiece for socialism, the Inspector destroys the foundations of Mr Birling's views.
- Mr Birling is a character that is designed to be condemned, the employment of dramatic irony exposes his ignorance and self-absorption. Priestley's contemporary audience can identify this crudeness as a flaw of society that came to light through the world wars.
- Priestley employs a cyclical structure to portray Mr Birling as stagnant within his capitalist views, he stands to represent the upper classes who are trapped in a cycle of immorality and preoccupation with superficial wealth.

