

Arthur Birling

Arthur is described as a 'heavy-looking, rather portentous man.' 'Heavy-looking,' suggests that he is fat, probably due to his rich diet as a middle-class man. Another way in which this could be meant is that he is heavy 'looking.' He gives the impression of someone that has weight (power, authority) but inside he is really quite hollow. He is in his middle fifties, which suggests that he would have a lot of life experience, but also perhaps a lot of prejudices. As it is with a lot of older generations, Mr Birling still has the opinions of someone living in the past. This is one of the reasons why Sheila and Eric don't agree with him in the end- they are able to see things from a modern point of view. The way that Birling is physically described reflects his personality in many ways. He is a show off. Mr Birling is dressed in tails and white ties, which suggests that he is well off. It also suggests that he enjoys having any reason to show off his wealth and family significance, and takes great pleasure in being middle class.

Mr Birling has different relationships with different characters. Mr Birling likes his wife (Sybil) but we are lead to believe that he likes the idea of her more than her as an actual person. She is his 'social superior,' and so, by having a well-off wife, Mr Birling, by default, is also well-off. He doesn't ever admit any love, or give any impression of feelings, towards her at any point in the play. Sybil likes her husband, but it once again seems like an entirely looks-based relationship. Sybil even says to Sheila, later on, that she had to get used to Mr Birling working a lot. This leads me to believe that he had an affair like Gerald. Mr Birling tries to protect Sheila in any way he can, trying to shield her from the real world at every gruesome detail. He treats her as if she is a little girl, even though she is in her twenties. He does not have the best relationship ever with her, as she disagrees and argues with him about the inspector's message. Sheila dislikes her father by the end of the play, as she has grown to realise that he is a self-obsessed man. Eric and Mr Birling don't have a good relationship. Mr Birling doesn't like Eric because he has his own opinion and doesn't act in the way that Mr Birling expects his son to act. Eric hates his father for the most part, as Mr Birling acts as if Gerald would be a better son than Eric, which upsets him. Birling really likes Gerald, because of Gerald's family, social standing and the business opportunities that come with having him as a son in law. Birling sucks up to Gerald, even buying the same port that his father gets. Gerald likes Mr Birling, and takes great pleasure in gang up with him against Eric, and trying to establish himself as a major part of the family.

Themes explored through Mr Birling

- Social Class- 'There's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List.' Just a knighthood, of course'- 'But it's a bit too early for that. So don't say anything.'
- Responsibility- 'I can't accept any responsibility. If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward'
- Truth- 'It has nothing whatever to do with this wretched girl's suicide. Eh, Inspector?'