

Analysis of Sybil Birling

Sybil Birling is an unsympathetic woman with some public influence, sitting on charity organisations and having been married two years ago to the Lord Mayor, Arthur Birling. Sybil is mother of Sheila and Eric Birling. Priestley describes her as a "about fifty, a rather cold woman," and her husband's "social superior."

She is described as a rather cold woman and is her husband's social superior. She is an icily impressive woman, the only one of all the Birlings to almost resist The Inspector's attempts to make her realise her responsibilities. She has a lack of understanding of how other people live and thinks that all classes behave in a certain way, this is shown in her snobbish comment "a girl of that sort" and in her unwillingness to believe that a lower-class girl would refuse to take stolen money or marry a foolish young man responsible for her pregnancy.

Mrs Birling is a very naive character. She doesn't think there is any problem in her family at all and all problems exist outside, only seeing what she wants to see. She is quite prepared to put the blame onto the father of the child because she doesn't know the father is her own son. It is only when Mrs Birling realises that her son, Eric, was the father of Eva Smith's child and her actions have resulted in the death of her own grandchild that she begins to show any signs of remorse. The speed at which she recovers after the inspector leaves reflects her coldness and lack of conscience.

Mrs. Birling is described as "cold" and Mr. Birling's "social superior." Throughout the questioning process, she resists the Inspector's inquiries and reminds him, to Sheila's frustration, of the Birlings' high social status. Despite her reluctance, Mrs. Birling finally admits to having used her influence in the Women's Charity Organization to deny aid for Eva Smith because she was prejudiced against her manner and offended by the girl's falsely assuming the name "Mrs. Birling." After the revelations at the end of the play that the whole inspection was a hoax, Mrs. Birling prides herself on having resisted the Inspector more than the rest of her family. And, like her husband, she feels completely relieved of any responsibility she had felt previously.

Priestley's message about Sybil Birling:

She represents the wealthier, privileged classes and their selfish attitudes.

She sees the lower class as morally inferior – Priestley hated this kind of attitude and believed that people with these attitudes had to change if society was going to work.

She makes us see just how awful life was for the lower classes (1912) – the class divide was huge.

She played her part in the death of Eva Smith -she turned her away (from her charity) when she needed help. The girl was penniless and pregnant – but Mrs. Birling thought she was lying, as no girl "of that sort" would refuse money.

Mrs. Birling's character development/changes

She does not change at the end of the play – perhaps therefore "an inspector calls" again, to try and make her change.