

General: Birling is the tool used by Priestley, a socialist, to convey all he thought was wrong with society. Birling is fixated with power and wealth but lacks morals and a sense of social justice. He is Priestley's face of Capitalism and its faults. Birling is also very self-centred, misogynistic and obstinate and even towards the end of the play will not learn from his mistakes.

Quote	Explanation
Birling's speech: 'Lots of wild talk about labour trouble' 'Russia will always be behind, <i>naturally</i> '	Birling, as a capitalist, represents all the characteristics Priestley seeks to ridicule. The use of dramatic irony throughout this speech does this by presenting as Birling as pompous and spouting ideas which the audience would have known to be ridiculous and false due to the play being premiered in 1945 but set in 1912. The lexis of 'wild' here shows how little chance Birling thought there was of any 'trouble', however in May 1926 the General Strike occurred, where over 1.7 million working class coal miners walked out against wage reductions, similarly to Eva Smith and the workers at Birling's factory, proving Birling's ideas as fallacies. Russia also rose up to become a world superpower due to the rising up of the proletariat, something Priestley would have looked favourably on, especially since the play was premiered in Moscow, 'always' shows how deeply wrong Birling was as Russia's rise only took around 30 years from one of the weaker countries to an international player.
'Upsetting the child'	Birling's description of Sheila 'child' shows how out of touch as a parent he is, and how little independence he gives her as he is a very controlling man. 'Child' shows the absurd nature of this attitude as Sheila is engaged to be married, and in her early twenties far from a child and Birling attitude towards her is very demeaning by treating all her views as those of a child.
'Like bees in a hive'	Birling likens the mixing of classes to that of bees in a hive, in a disdainful manner saying it is 'nonsense'. However this use of alliteration gives a natural image, as though Priestley is highlighting the naturalness of people mixing regardless of class, thereby ridiculing Birling, as though he is going against what nature intended.
'Go on the streets?'	Birling has such a low opinion of the lower classes and is such a distasteful character that he assumes that Eva went to work as a prostitute because she was a member of the working classes. 'Streets' and the fact he poses it as a shows how pitiful and dreadful her situation was, as how he believed she deserved it.
'Sheila, take your mother along to the drawing room'	In this patriarchal post-Edwardian era, Birling as the male head of the household, had power to dictate what the women could do. He feels women are too weak to be able to stomach such heavy conversation, as he hold a stereotypical view of women as a whole, less as individuals, seeing them all having the same thoughts and ideas, patronisingly saying women hold their clothes as a 'token of self-respect', suggesting women's minds were only capable of thinking about clothes and appearance.
'I'd give thousands...'	The only way Birling knows how to fix things is with money showing how far his obsession with money has dragged him, with his possible attempt of bribing the Inspector. 'Thousands' shows how the only thing which is more important to him than money is social prestige. He would be willing to lose a huge amount of money which he is very protective of simply to protect his position in the class structure showing his inward insecurity overpowering his outward confidence.
'You're the one I blame'	Birling says this to Eric, trying to shift responsibility even when it was equally as much his fault as Eric's. 'Blame' shows the sole responsibility is landed on Eric, a decision by Birling influenced by Eric being the only one stealing Birling's money. It shows Birling, as a member of the older capitalist generation has not learnt at all from the inspector's visit and his ideas of social responsibility.
'Exactly the same port'	Birling says this to Gerald, showing his desire to prove himself, due to the stigma and his insecurity of having money from trade. He is trying to emulate Sir Croft here, almost desperately 'exactly'.
'kind of son in law I always wanted'	Shows Birling deep rooted ambition and how for him, the marriage is more a chance to climb the social ladder than for Sheila's happiness. 'Always' shows how this was planned and by no means a marriage of chance