

Inspector Calls Key Quotes and Analysis

This colour is the character/act reference, this is for stage directions, this is a quote, this is extra analysis, this is everything else, including just normal analysis, which comes right after a quote or stage direction.

The lighting should be pink and intimate until the inspector arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder.

This stage direction portrays the capitalistic and nonchalant atmosphere in a pink and soft light until later on, suggesting that it is 'rosy', unlike reality, where this sort of lighting is hardly ever present. It suggests that the events inside the household are somehow unrealistic, or sheltered, as most of the characters appear to be (especially Sheila at the beginning), which is why the inspector, who inspects all of this, brings a brighter and harder light, which shines lights on everything, dispelling this rosy atmosphere, replacing it with reality – how it really is. The inspector is in this sense like a literal torch, shining a light on falsehood, so the inspector is the moral correctness in this story.

“Arthur, you shouldn’t be saying such things-” –Mrs Birling (Act 1)

This is from the Mrs Birling, a woman of higher class who has married Mr Birling, for his wealth, as she was no longer rich, despite being aristocracy, as not enough people were working on her lands. She is reprimanding him because he complimented a person of a lower class (he was complementing their chef), and highlights how she is 'stuck-up' and sees herself as the better of Mr Birling.

(half serious, half playful) “Yes – except for last summer, when you never came near me” –Sheila (Act 1)

Suggesting that she doesn't fully trust him, despite the fact that they're going to be married soon, but again shows how she is childish, and relatively light-hearted, as she is still 'half playful' even in something which could be seen as quite serious.

“men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You’ll have to get used to that, just as I had.” –Mrs Birling (Act 1)

Highlights the ever-present overarching patriarchal hegemony which was present at the time this Act was set in (~1910), as it suggests that not only should wives become submissive (*you'll have to get used to that*), but also that men are superior and women have no need to work. Mrs Birling symbolises the women of her generation who believed that, whereas Sheila seems like she will not, as she says *“I don't believe I will”*. Shows discord between the generations.

“You’re squiffy” –Sheila, to Eric (Act 1)

Colloquial language, she is saying that Eric is drunk, and highlights their casual brother/sister relationship, a childish one at that, despite them both being over 18 years old. Also shows Eric drinks too much, so is quite immature and doesn't really know self-restraint.

“Oh – it’s wonderful! Look – Mummy – isn’t it a beauty?” –Sheila (Act 1)

Showing the childish nature of Sheila, despite being in her early twenties, highlighted by here use of the word 'Mummy'. It also suggests that she has a sheltered upbringing. Furthermore, her childish nature is further exemplified by the uncontained excitement, presented by the frequent use of dashes, and how she is very materialistic, as her excitement is entirely as a result of a ring.

“Germans don’t want war. Nobody wants war.” –Mr Birling (Act 1)

Dramatic Irony, as a number of groups wage war a few years after that play is set, and it helps Priestly (the playwright) go on to discredit the capitalistic Mr Birling right from the start.

“the Titanic – forty six thousand eight hundred tons – forty six thousand eight hundred tons – and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable” –Mr Birling (Act 1)

This portrays the didactic nature of Mr Birling, and goes to highlight the Edwardian hubris (pride/confidence) of the time, incredibly positive, and also shows that Mr Birling thinks that he knows it all (by the repetition). This also serves as dramatic irony. Also highlights his arrogance. He goes on, and on, and highlights the fact that whatever he says is **subjective**. (Also dramatic irony).

“there’s a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List. Just a knighthood, of course.” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

Social climbing, and may also imply that the reason that Mr Birling has married a relatively poor aristocrat (Mrs Birling), was as a trade deal, he gets to climb the social ladder (be part of the aristocracy to some extent), and she gets the money, and by that we can infer the very capitalistic nature which is evident among that family.

“don’t get into a police court or start a scandal, eh?” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

Foreshadowing of the entire accusation involving Eva Smith.

“a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family too” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

The capitalistic view that Mr Birling presents, at a point when people are aware that he is not a credible figure, so is a device of Priestly’s to negate non-socialistic views, such as his.

“But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up, together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

He’s calling socialists cranks, and denounces the very ideas of socialism, by saying that the entire system is weak and subhuman (insect like, like bees).

“But take my word for it, you youngsters – and I’ve learnt in the good hard school of experience – that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own – and –” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

Again shows how he thinks he knows it all, as he thinks of himself as an elder teaching the younger generation which will succeed him, evident by his use of the term ‘youngsters’, and portrays his arrogance and capitalistic views, and he’s cut off right after by the *sharp ring of the doorbell*. This is Inspector Goole, who, like the doorbell, cuts off the assertions of Birling like a *sharp ring*, implying that it may somehow cause pain – to the Edwardian hubris, and is used by Priestly to show that Mr Birling is disreputable, as it abruptly cuts him off.

(defiantly) “Nothing” – Eric (Act 1)

In response to Mr Birling saying ‘what’s wrong with you’. Shows discord between the generations, in the case of Eric this time.

He creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity, and purposefulness... ..has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.

Despite the Inspector being a social inferior, he seems to create an *impression of massiveness*, which hasn’t been created by any other character thus far, and gives him an air of authority. This, combined with his ‘*disconcerting*’ habit, makes him seem unnatural, almost, for that era, especially, and combined with his name ‘Goole’, which sounds like ‘ghoul’, makes him seem supernatural, like some sort of spectre, right from his introduction.

Eva Smith is a name which represents two types of people. Firstly the common people of lower class, as many of the people of the lower classes had the surname ‘Smith’, at the time, and also women, as Eva sounds like Eve – supposedly the first female human there was, according to the Bible, so she encompasses the idea of lower class women, and to a lesser extent, women and lower class people separately.

“Quite so.” – Inspector Goole (Act 1)

In response to Mr Birling saying talking about how he has connections with the police, which could be considered him threatening Goole, because of his attitude, in which he doesn't recognize him as a social superior, to which the Inspector sharply contrasts his rambling on with 2 cold and objective words. This highlights the inspector as a character who says things based on objective fact, and doesn't care about *purposeless* matters (as he seems to have an impression of purposefulness), unlike Mr Birling. They contrast, as Mr Birling serves to disprove capitalistic concepts, by saying them, and the inspector serves to prove socialistic concepts, due to his objective and moral views throughout the rest of the play. For similar reasons he simply says “Why?” to Birling later on, questioning him.

(involuntarily) “My God!” – Eric (Act 1)

When he hears of Eva Smith drinking bleach. Shows how innately human he is, despite being immature, as he again didn't have self-restraint.

(impatiently) “Yes, yes. Horrid business.” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

He doesn't care about lower class people at all, and shows no empathy, in fact seems annoyed by the mention at all. It further deepens the division between his older generations, and the generation of Sheila, Erica and the ideas Inspector Goole will present.

“Well, it's my duty to keep labour costs down” – Mr Birling (Act 1)

He makes it seem as if he has a moral obligation to be rich, and stay upper class, as if capitalism, or his purist view on it, is what keeps society together.

“Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices.” – Eric (Act 1)

Eric now presents himself as more of a socialist, and again displays his humanistic side, as he is essentially saying that everyone should be allowed to try to better their own situation, which is more socialistic than capitalist.

“Oh – how horrible!” – Sheila (Act 1)

This mirrors Eric's reactions, and further goes to show the divide in opinion between the older and younger generations. It portrays that Sheila has a moral conscience.

“What was she like? Quite young?” “Pretty?” – Sheila (Act 1)

Sheila asks these questions and the inspector replies that Eva Smith was twenty-four and was pretty, but the fact that she asked these questions shows that she has an affinity towards Eva Smith, just because of her being of a similar age, and being pretty, despite her being of a totally different class and upbringing compared to Sheila. But with the foresight, and knowing Sheila's potential involvement with Eva, we can conclude that she thinks that she knows this Eva Smith, at this point, and feels guilt over the fact that she is dead, but the guilt is not solid at this point.

“These girl's aren't cheap labour – they're people.” – Sheila (Act 1)

Priestly using Sheila as his mouthpiece, in place of the inspector, and also highlighting the division between the generations further, and the moral aptitude of Sheila.

Daisy Renton, another name for Eva Smith, brings to mind the fact that she was a prostitute, due to the word *Renton*, which suggests *rent*-out or lend out for money – her body. One could also say that the fact that she didn't want to be a prostitute was reflected by her forename, Daisy, which connotes a common flower, and has also typically connoted purity. Interestingly, it was also the Norse god *Freya's* sacred flower, the goddess of love, beauty and fertility, and clearly the aspect of love is reflected in Daisy's character, towards Gerald. The flower itself, in the context of Freya, goes to represent childbirth, motherhood and new beginnings, and is symbolic in that sense of how she found a new beginning with Gerald.

“Why – you fool – *he knows*. Of course he knows.” – Sheila (Act 1)

In response to Gerald trying to hide the fact that he knows anything about ‘Daisy Renton’. It also shows how she seems to be an emotional wreck, and cynical, in the way she describes him in a way which makes him seem all-knowing, omniscient, and overwhelming. This is likely due to the fact that the Inspector has presented evidence that Sheila was in fact related to the suicide of Eva Smith.

(with an effort) “Inspector, I think Miss Birling ought to be excused.... She’s had a long and exciting day.” – Gerald (Act 2)

This makes Sheila look childish, in the sense that Gerald is taking charge, despite clearly feeling uncomfortable talking in this atmosphere, as he speaks ‘with an effort’. This solidifies Gerald’s position as among the Birlings’, as he treats Sheila as a child; that she needs to be ‘managed’ somehow.

“You see, we have to share something. If there’s nothing else, we’ll have to share our guilt” – Inspector Goole (Act 2)

The inspector is highlighting how the Birlings share nothing, but if they should share something, it should be their guilt over their actions, otherwise they wouldn’t be able to cope with it. He’s saying that the responsibility is not hers alone.

“We often do on the young ones. They’re more impressionable.” – Inspector Goole (Act 2)

He suggests that the younger generations are able to change more, as opposed to the older generations, in response to Mrs Birling saying that he seems to have made a great impression on Sheila.

“absurd business” – Mrs Birling (Act 2)

She calls the entire case concerning Eva Smith ‘absurd’, which is euphemism, which she is using to downplay the scenario, and therefore any responsibility that any of them bare in it, and highlights her aristocratic uncaring nature concerning the lower classes – she doesn’t care at all, she thinks it’s stupid.

“Girls of that class-“ – Mrs Birling (Act 2)

Again, a demonstration of Mrs Birling’s snobbery, in which she first said ‘we can’t understand why the girl committed suicide’, and with the pronoun *that*, it is suggested that she thinks of them as completely separate from her, and the ‘*that*’ makes it seem as if she is denouncing them, as if they are criminal or vulgar.

“You know of course that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago, and that he’s still a magistrate-“ – Mrs Birling (Act 2)

Mrs Birling is trying to reinstate the fact that her husband bares great power, and tries to use this to stop him from ‘offending’ them, and make him go – she’s trying to use wealth and influence to undermine the law, which further highlights how she sees herself as above the common person, just due to the wealth and influence, despite supposedly being the same sort of citizen as them, of a country.

“Women of the town?” – Mrs Birling (Act 2)

Again, Mrs Birling is using euphemisms to talk of people of a lower class than herself, as she is referring to prostitutes, and again separating them from herself. This extreme self-centeredness and disdain for the lower classes is what Priestly is arguing against, by using such a snobby character to present those views, we dislike the character, and we get that we should also dislike those views.

(*She hands him the ring.*) – Sheila (Act 2)

This shows great change in character, as at the start she was very materialistic, and naïve about what she had done, and now she willingly relinquishes a ring she had been given. She now juxtaposes with the character she was at the beginning.

“I rather respect you more than I’ve ever done before.” – Sheila (Act 2)

Demonstrative of the great change in character than Sheila has undergone, and she’s even ditched her role as a child, as she’s matured to the point that she can forgive Gerald, despite his affair with Daisy Renton, due to him not being uncaring towards her in her desperation.

“You and I aren’t the same people who sat down to dinner here.” –Sheila (Act 2)

Again showing how she has matured enough to recognise that she has matured, and that both of the characters present have undergone great change (Sheila and Gerald), due to their confessions of involvement with Eva Smith, and this also shows how Sheila has become rather perceptive over this play.

(massively) “Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.” – Inspector Goole (Act 2)

Inspector Goole is saying that ‘public men’, such as Mr Birling, who has societal responsibilities, have great responsibilities, due to their great power.

“Let’s hope not. Though I’m beginning to wonder.” – Sheila (Act 2)

In response to her father saying that the Inspector hasn’t come here to talk about his responsibilities, she’s perceived that the Inspector may well be a moral inspector alongside a literal inspector.

“Don’t stammer and yammer at me again.” – Inspector Goole (Act 2)

This is demonstrative of the fact that the Inspector is unconventional for the Edwardian era, as he doesn’t care about class differences.

Mrs Birling thinks lower class girls are sexually promiscuous – ‘very loose’, and, concerning the fact that she trapped Eric into harsh blame by being arrogant and ignorant, it is ironic that she is named *Sybil*, which means prophetess, particularly in the context of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and suggests that she would have foresight – but in this case, ironically not.



“Certainly. He ought to be dealt with very severely-“ –Mrs Birling (Act 2)

The person she’s blaming is her son, but she doesn’t know that, otherwise she wouldn’t blame him as such.

“There’ll be plenty of time, when I’ve gone, for you all to adjust your family relationships.” – Inspector Goole (Act 3)

This is key, as it shows that the Inspector has realised and has highlighted that the mechanics of the family has fundamentally changed. Mr and Mrs Birling seem to have formed an alliance of sorts, intent on ignoring their responsibility concerning Eva Smith, whereas Eric and Sheila seem to have formed one to accept what they’ve done, and to change in line with it.

(shocked) “Eric! You stole money?” – Mrs Birling (Act 3)

More shocked at Eric stealing money than at the entire case concerning Eva Smith, including the actions they’d done, again highlights how she doesn’t care at all for Eva Smith, as anything that happened to her doesn’t concern her that much, and also shows the lack of change that Mrs Birling has undergone, contrasting the younger generation, and paralleling Mr Birling.

(unhappily) “Look, Inspector – I’d give thousands – yes, thousands-“ – Mr Birling (Act 3)

Still as capitalist as he was before, as he thinks money can cover for a dead girl, and is almost comical due to that, and with his reaffirming ‘yes, thousands’, we see how much he values the money, as he is also saying it *unhappily* – he really doesn’t want to part with his money. He parallels Mrs Birling in the way that he has undergone no character change, contrasting the younger generation.

“There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and do. We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish.”

– Inspector Goole (Act 3)

Foreshadowing the world wars, saying that if they don’t learn that people are innately equal, they will learn by force. And it also represents the moral teaching of the play. The Eva Smiths and John Smiths, represent men and women of the lower classes, and with the description of hopes/fears/suffering/chance of happiness, is emphasising the fact that they are also human, just as the Birlings are. He basically wants to ensure that they recognise that they are all responsible for the events that have taken place.

By this point, the inspector has proven his initial quote in Act 1, calling it a chain of events, he’s proved that every actions has a consequence, ones which people may regret - “what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide. A chain of events.” – Inspector Goole (Act 1)

“If all that’s come out tonight is true, then it doesn’t much matter who it was who made us confess.” – Sheila (Act 3)

She feels a lot of guilt over the actions, despite the fact that the accusations may have been false, as, if she’d gotten someone fired, she feels guilt for them. She parallels Eric, and contrasts with Gerald, and the older Birlings.

“Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And Mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It’s still the same rotten story whether it’s been told to a police inspector or to somebody else.” – Eric (Act 3)

Eric is paralleling Sheila’s stance, that they’ve all done something bad, and that they should take responsibility for it – something which Gerald, and the older Birlings are adamantly refusing to do.

“Everything’s all right now, Sheila” – Gerald (Act 3)

He’s reverted back to his former patronising tone with Sheila – so long as he wasn’t to blame for any suicides, he’s happy.

Gerald goes on to find out that Inspector Goole isn’t even part of the police force, and that Eva Smith/Daisy Renton doesn’t exist and seems more at ease than before, and doesn’t seem ‘shaken’ at all by the events that had taken place, and he seems to form an ‘alliance’ with the older Birlings, by confirming the Inspector wasn’t real, and shows that he was unable to change. Over the course of the play, he changed to a more moral and humanistic person, but changed back to his former self, at the very chance of possibly being let off this crime. Though it shows he expresses regret if it did happen, it shows that he doesn’t care if he wasn’t involved.