

Write about the character of Gerald and how he is presented in the play [40]

Gerald Croft is the son of a wealthy business man and main competitor to Arthur Birling. His engagement to Sheila Birling, and the meal to celebrate such an occasion, acts as the backdrop to the play itself. Gerald embodies both wealth and arrogance, and yet Priestley hints at some good and compassion within him. Ultimately, his behaviour towards the end of the play may well dictate our overall perception of him.

Priestley states that Croft is a *'well-bred man about town'* conveying his high status and sociable character, all-in-all making him an attractive proposition for Sheila in securing her future. However, such a positive portrayal is undermined by Sheila's probing question concerning his conduct the previous summer *'when you hardly came near me'*. This foreshadows the eventual revelation regarding Gerald's infidelity and affair with Daisy Renton.

Birling's admiration of Gerald is also clear from their initial discussions when he states, *'You're the kind of son-in-law I've always wanted'*. Given his chastising nature toward Eric, *'Just keep quiet, Eric'* an audience would be forgiven for thinking that Birling meant *'son'*, given their shared values and success.

It is clear that Gerald is keen to gain Birling's favour through his almost sycophantic behaviour and support of Birling's decision to sack Eva Smith, *'You had no choice.'* Priestley is presenting a character who shares the same callous, capitalist and *'hard-headed'* views as Mr Birling.

Once Croft's involvement is revealed, he desperately scrambles to cover his guilt, almost pleading with Sheila, *'So-for god's sake-don't say anything to the Inspector'* with his fragmented language reflecting his sense of panic and urgency. Sheila is right to mock his feeble attempts, *'You fool – he knows'* as we are presented with a deceitful and sly character, merely wishing to protect his own interests and reputation. We share Sheila's sentiments in regards to Croft's *'foolish'* behaviour.

His involvement in the *'chain of events'* may not be as easy to define as the cruel actions of Mr and Mrs Birling as some genuine care is showcased: buying her food, offering her accommodation, offering her money as support. Indeed, such compassion is commented on by the Inspector prior to his departure, *'he at least had some affection for her'*. His considerate nature is also presented through the vehement defence of his actions, *'I was sorry for her.'* *'It wasn't disgusting'*. And yet, such kind heartedness is undermined through his initial intentions by visiting the Palace Bar, *'a favourite haunt of the women of the town'* as well as his eventual decision to turn Daisy into his mistress. The audience is quickly reminded of Sheila's seemingly innocuous comment from the start of the play, *'when you hardly came near me'*. Ultimately, Gerald took advantage of the situation, in spite of his relationship with Sheila and simply dropped her when finished. His somewhat pitiful defence of, *'any man would have done'* presents a disregard for responsibility.

However, much like Sheila, Gerald is affected by the news of her plight, *'(distressed) sorry – I – well, I've suddenly realised – she's dead'*. With the adjective *'distressed'* and fragmented syntax once more highlighting a shock and horror at the news. Therefore, his decision to depart, *'I'd like to be alone for a while'* could be symbolic of his grief, remorse and possible redemption, and yet, this could also be interpreted as an escape from responsibility – especially given what he does whilst on this walk.

In the extract, Gerald returns to the household to proudly declare, *'that man wasn't a police officer'*. The use of the adverb *'slowly'* highlights the importance of the revelation for him, unlike Eric and

Sheila. He states that, *'That's what I came back to tell you'* confirming that any guilt or compassion he felt prior to his departure has gone in the face of an opportunity of self-preservation.

Gerald then congratulates Mr and Mrs Birling through the statement, *'You were right'* with the pronoun *'you'* showing his allegiance and support towards the older generation. The line *'We've been had'* highlights his sense that the night's events were simply a joke, echoing Mr Birling's later aspersion towards the younger generation being unable to take a *'joke'*. It is telling that Mr and Mrs Birling are depicted by Priestley with the adverbs *'excitedly'* and *'triumphantly'* and it is clear that Croft agrees and revels in such emotions.

It is symbolic that Gerald joins in the self-congratulatory toast with Mr and Mrs Birling, *'Here's to us'*, with Priestley conveying the cyclical nature of the play as these characters simply return to the start of the play, dismissing any event that occurred in the interim. Croft's dismissal of responsibility and consequence is also conveyed when he approaches Sheila and states, *'Everything's all right now, Sheila. What about this ring?'* Such an act appals the audience given that such a request has echoes of the cold-heartedness and arrogance of Mr and Mrs Birling. It is clear that Gerald feels foolishly absolved of his sins and has no intentions of considering otherwise.

Overall, Gerald does show some compassion and care towards Daisy Renton, more so than Mr and Mrs Birling, and yet his opportunity of reformation is disregarded in favour of simply saving face and reputation.