The main idea

Sheila’s development is visible in what she does after the Inspector leaves. Her insight survives the attempt to explain the evening away.

Character development

Act 1: pleasure becomes remorse: The ring and family celebration establish her protected position. Admitting the Milwards complaint exposes how customer privilege allowed a moment of jealousy to damage a livelihood.

Act 2: learns to interpret: She recognises evasions and warns her mother. Returning Gerald’s ring gives her changed understanding a physical stage action rather than leaving it as an emotional speech.

Act 3: maintains the lesson: She refuses to treat uncertainty about Goole as innocence. Her independence contrasts with the older Birlings’ relief. She does not immediately restore the engagement merely because Gerald offers the ring.

“very pleased with life”

Priestley's opening Act 1 stage direction about Sheila

The opening direction places her within the family's comfortable celebration.

“I’m ashamed of it”

Sheila, Act 3: acknowledging her conduct after the Inspector leaves

Her later admission keeps attention on what she did, even while her parents worry about scandal.

“cheap labour”

Sheila, Act 1, rejecting the reduction of workers to costs

She repeats an economic label to reject it. The contrast with people begins to challenge her father’s business language.

“all over again”

Sheila, Act 3, confronting her parents after Goole leaves

Repetition in her accusation identifies a return to denial. Her moral judgement survives the disappearance of the authority who first prompted it.

Connections

Responsibility: remorse develops into independent judgement. Gender: she questions the role of compliant daughter and fiancée. Class: her education begins with acknowledging her own abuse of status. Eric: both retain the moral lesson.

Develop the interpretation

She changes substantially but is not innocent at the beginning. An argument about learning needs the shop incident as well as her later moral clarity.

Recall question

Which decisions show Sheila learning independently of Goole’s presence?

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