The main idea

Mrs Birling turns social authority into a judgement about who deserves help. The order of revelations exposes the limits of her certainty.

Character development

Act 1: social authority: Her opening presentation establishes distance and status. She corrects manners and expects deference; the household treats respectability as a form of authority.

Act 2: charity becomes judgement: She admits using her influence against the applicant. Class generalisation prevents attention to need. Insisting that the father must be punished prepares the reversal involving Eric.

Act 3: the blame returns: Eric's confession brings the consequences into her own family. Her shock does not automatically mean sustained reform; compare her relief about Goole with her children's continuing shame.

"Girls of that class"

Mrs Birling, Act 2: interrupted generalisation about the young woman

The plural label replaces attention to an individual with a social category.

"I accept no blame"

Mrs Birling, Act 2: defending her charity decision

The later first-person denial protects her own judgement from scrutiny.

"rather cold"

Priestley, opening Act 1 stage direction

The adjective directs performance towards emotional distance. Public respectability does not guarantee warmth or care for someone in need.

“his responsibility”

Mrs Birling, Act 2, blaming the child’s father

The possessive pronoun transfers duty elsewhere. Because the audience is approaching Eric’s involvement, confident blame becomes dramatic irony.

Connections

Class: assumptions about deservingness block compassion. Gender: a mother refuses help to a pregnant woman. Responsibility: blame is displaced rather than shared. Eric: the order of revelation turns her judgement against her household.

Develop the interpretation

The strongest argument is about institutional power: as a committee member she can turn a personal judgement into the denial of material help.

Recall question

Why does Priestley delay Eric’s full revelation until after her demand for the father’s punishment?