



EVA SMITH

Priestley's Purpose

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THE EVERYMAN (AVERAGE JOE)

The Everyman is a classic allegorical figure who represents all of humanity; he is also known as

- the Average Joe,
- the Good old boy,
- the Person next door,
- the Regular Jane,
- the Common man,
- the Realist,
- the Working stiff,
- the Solid citizen,
- the Good neighbour
- and the Silent majority.
- One of the most common ways for the focal character to start the story in order for the audience to identify with him is through the Everyman archetype.
 - The Everyman is equal to the reader.
 - This results in sympathy because we recognise ourselves in them, and thus identify with
 - them,
 - their desires,
 - and their needs.
 - These characters struggle to rise above their
 - doubts,
 - limitations,
 - and obstacles.
 - Alfred Hitchcock made a career out of these protagonists—
 - ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances.

THE EVERYMAN (AVERAGE JOE): NAMES

- Mr. Utterson in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*,
- Edna the parlour maid and Eva Smith in *An Inspector Calls*,
- Peter Parker, the *Spiderman*,
- Alfred in *Propping Up The Line*,
- Bob Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*,
- Rick Grimes in *The Walking Dead*,
- Piggy (possibly, Ralph and Jack too) in *Lord of The Flies*,
- And, perhaps, most fittingly, Thomas A. Anderson in *The Matrix*,
 - These are all typical Everyman archetypal characters.
 - Names are one of the first things we learn about characters, especially the Everyman.





THE EVERYMAN (AVERAGE JOE): FUNCTIONS OF NAMES: PART 1

Inspector Goole's final speech in *An Inspector Calls* talks about 'the millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths';

- what is his main point?
 - At first glance, it may be easy to see the Everyman as a boring plain Jane type of character but from another point of view, we can see the Everyman as a blank canvas that allows the audience to project their own consciousness into because ultimately, that is what authors really want us to do:
 - to see ourselves in the character as if we are the ones living and experiencing the story; this is how we truly connect with the story's meaning.
 - One of the ways authors design the Everyman as a blank canvas is by constructing them with an ordinary name or even no name at all.
 - This technique has two effects;
 - on the one hand, it emphasises the Everyman's universality because it illustrates the idea that we are all the same;
 - on the other hand, it also highlights how we can lose our identity, particularly when trying to fit in.
 - The unnamed protagonist in Phillip Roth's book *Everyman* portrays one of humanity's greatest fears when he must face his mortality (death) alone both without the security of human connections or the belief in an afterlife as a result of living as an atheist and a materialist.

THE EVERYMAN (AVERAGE JOE): FUNCTIONS OF NAMES: PART 2

Another thing to consider is that the name authors choose for their Everyman characters often have double meanings;

- for example, in *An Inspector Calls*, 'Eva' could be a half-homophone for Eve the mother of humanity in the Abrahamic faiths,
- and 'Smith' denotes a person skilled in creating something, like a goldsmith or wordsmith;
 - so, on one hand, to kill Eva, the symbolic mother of humanity, as the Birlings have done indirectly, is to kill the whole of humanity,
 - and their inhumane treatment of Eva represents the author's view, the dehumanisation of the Everyman by capitalism.
 - However, on the other hand, the name 'Smith' suggests that it is the Everyman who has the ability and power to sculpt a better future,
 - first by recognising his shared humanity with the rest of the common population and then using that understanding to build strength in numbers to overturn injustice.
 - Since Mr. Birling represents capitalism, we can view the play as being about exposing the contempt capitalism has for humanity,
 - as represented by the Everyman,
 - but on the other, it is about highlighting the power the Everyman has to control his own destiny.





WHAT DOES THE SETTING HAVE TO DO WITH EVA?

Priestley chooses “an evening in Spring, 1912” because it is just before The First World War

- One way to look at it is that it places the play during the context of women’s campaign for the vote (suffrage), and the Suffragettes
 - For the suffragettes, 1912 was seen as a turning point as they turned to using more militant tactics, such as the famous window-smashing incident of March 1912
 - Nearly 200 women were arrested as a result of the action taken on that night
 - The context of the suffragettes could provide several other links to the play
 - Eva kills herself and her unborn baby
 - After a series of abuses by the upper classes, she turns to her last hope, which is to take a militant approach to making her suffering visible, by drinking bleach
 - Priestley may have used the allusion to the militant tactics the suffragettes adopted for the same reason they believed they were doing it: to bring into prominence their fight for a fairer society
- It may also be a specific allusion to Emily Wilding Davison, who died under the King’s horse on 4th June 1913
 - It was thought that she may have committed suicide as a martyr to the cause but recent analysis appears to discredit that theory, including the fact she had a return train ticket, as well as holiday plans
- Lucy Wallace Dunlop, another militant Suffragette was the first one to go on hunger strike; after refusing food for 92 hours, it was feared that she would become a martyr to the cause and was released on health grounds.
 - From this perspective, it may be possible to say that Eva gave up her life and that of her baby’s as martyrs to the fight for justice in a society that was being ‘infected’ with the vices of the upper classes.
 - This perspective also explains why she drinks ‘bleach’ rather than any other poison; it symbolises a desperate attempt to disinfect, not only herself, but wider society from the abuses they suffer at the hands of the deluded upper classes.

WHAT KILLS EVA SMITH?

One perspective is that Eva Smith is killed by the selfishness of others

- Her death could be said to represent the consequences of a lack of responsibility in society because:
 - She was dismissed from her first job at Birlings for protesting for worker's rights





- then sacked from her job at Milwards at the whim of Sheila Birling
- She loses her virtue to the predatory but weak Gerald Croft
- and becomes pregnant by the spineless Eric Birling
- Then she is refused help and support by Mrs Birling's charity committee.
 - Eva's death would be recorded as suicide as she drank disinfectant
 - But she was driven to suicide by the actions of all of the guests at the engagement dinner which the inspector interrupts

SHEILA AS A FOIL FOR EVA

In the stage directions, Sheila is described in the following ways

- 'Sheila is a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited'

In the following dialogue, we learn that Eva shares many similarities with her:

- Sheila: (rather distressed) Sorry! It's just that I can't help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly – and I've been so happy tonight. Oh I wish you hadn't told me. What was she like? Quite young?

Inspector: Yes. Twenty-four.

Sheila: Pretty?

Inspector: She wasn't pretty when I saw her today, but she had been pretty – very pretty.

- The point Priestley appears to be making is about how two people who appear to be similar in so many ways, can live through such contrasting situations simply because of the class of family they are born into:
 - Priestley makes this point explicitly through Sheila's words when she says 'I can't help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly – and I've been so happy tonight'
 - Earlier in the play, when Mr. Birling is talking about her engagement to Gerald, he makes the remark that 'Sheila's a lucky girl'
 - As with so much of what Mr. Birling says, there is a sense of irony about this statement because when we think more closely about Eva's description, we realise that Sheila is not just lucky to be marrying Gerald, but she is extremely fortunate to have been born into the circumstances that she has
 - It is a privilege that 'millions and millions of John Smiths and Eva Smiths' will never come to experience, particularly if capitalists like Birling and Gerald can come together for 'lower costs and higher prices'
 - The wider point Priestley is making here is about the inequality inherent in a capitalist society like the one the Birlings and Gerald are working towards.
 - A woman's position in this type of society is possibly the most fragile of all because if she lacks the power of status, then she may have to live through a plethora of degrading and life-destroying experiences such as Eva did at the hands of the entire Birling family.





THE INSPECTOR'S VERDICT

The inspector sums up the effect that each person had to lead to Eva's death, and gives the characters and the audience a clear moral to the story:

- 'We are responsible for each other...If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish.'
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WHAT DOES EVA REPRESENT?

Priestley appears to have created Eva Smith to represent everybody

- which is why he constructed her with the common "Smith" surname
 - Additionally, her first name, **Eva**, reminds us of "Eve", the first woman on earth (particularly for those follow one of the Abrahamic faiths)
 - and so her name emphasises how "innocent" she is, just like Eve was
 - and this name also represents everybody
 - because we are all descended from Eve
 - Therefore, Priestley's purpose is to create a character who represents everyone in order to show that the upper classes prey on and victimise everyone.
 - These ideas are reflected in the inspector's quote, 'we are all members of one body'
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EVA AT THE END OF THE PLAY: THE IMPORTANCE OF HER ABSENCE

By the end of the play, we have forgotten about Eva

- because for the whole of the third act, she has been missing from action;
 - she is no longer there
 - So why does Priestley do this?
 - The answer is that he wants us to focus on the upper classes
 - In other words, by the end of the play, Priestley is no longer really interested in the working classes, themselves
 - he is interested in the upper classes and changing their viewpoint
 - because these are the type of people actually in the audience at the time his play was first being produced in 1946
 - they are the people to whom the message of the play is being directed.
 - In Priestley's view, it is the upper classes who have got to change in order for the working classes to have a happier life.
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HOW EVA SYMBOLISES THE INSPECTOR'S LESSON

We could argue that had everybody learnt their lesson, Eva would not have died and symbolically, the working classes would have been saved

- however, they are not saved because the upper classes do not learn their lesson
 - and the key point to focus on, at the end of the play, is when Gerald offers Sheila the ring back and she does not reject it;
 - she simply says, “not yet, it's too soon”.
 - We could view this moment in the play as Priestley illustrating the idea that the Inspector's lesson was not learnt and therefore, future tragedy is inevitable;
 - working classes will still be exploited and the ruling classes will not change their ways.
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PRIESTLEY'S POLITICAL POINT: A SAMPLE ESSAY CONCLUSION

The second death carries with it Priestley's political point that the lessons of World War 1, represented by the death of Eva, were not learnt, so the Birlings now face, in the final word of the play, “questions”. Priestley's question in 1945 is about how the ruling classes allowed World War 2 to occur, so that millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths lost their lives again. Eric and Sheila, therefore, represent the younger generation who grew up in the interwar years and failed to live up to their responsibility. Priestley's play reflected the mood of the country, who ousted Winston Churchill and his Conservative government, that had taken them to war and replaced them with the socialist Labour government; it's not Sheila and Eric, but their children who have learnt the Inspector's lesson.

