

Compare how women  
are presented in 'of  
mice and men' and  
'an inspector calls'



' What freedom men and women could have, were they not constantly tricked and trapped and enslaved and tortured by their sexuality' – John Steinbeck In ' Of Mice and Men' and ' An Inspector Calls' both authors indirectly show their beliefs and opinions towards women and the way they are treated by society. In the time both texts were set- 1912 and the 1930's- women were generally seen as a lesser class than men and due to their sexuality, they were not treated fairly. Steinbeck and Priestley show this at many points in their texts.

Both Eva Smith and Curley's wife are victims of their class as Eva is victimised by each member of the Birling Family, who each make her life harder and each of them are ultimately partially responsible for her death. Inspector Goole also makes it clear to the reader and the Birling family that Eva is the victim when he says ' A pretty lively sort of girl that never did anybody any harm. ' The character of Eva also conveys how hard life was for many young women in 1912 who had no family and was unemployed which meant she had no income to provide for herself.

Eva was also a lonely character, much like Steinbeck's character ' Curley's wife' who was longing for not only male attention, but any attention as Curley did not give her the attention she wanted. Curley's wife is also a victim of her class as she has little, if any, power over anyone else on the ranch and is practically at the bottom of the hierarchy, despite being the daughter-in-law of the ranch owner. This makes the reader sympathise with Eva Smith and Curley's Wife. Furthermore, in both texts the audience is invited to dwell on Eva's and Curley's Wife's vulnerability at the hands of others caused by their gender and class.

However, we get more of an insight into the lives of victimised women in 'OMAM' through the character of Curley's wife as she is physically in the text and we see how the men on the ranch treat her directly; whereas, in 'AIC', Eva Smith's life and character is told through other people. Although we get more of an insight into the lives of victimised women in 'OMAM' there is a larger spectrum of female characters in 'AIC' so the audience is able to see how differently women were treated and respected by society depending on what class they were in.

For example Mrs Birling would be seen as a highly respectable person due to her wealth and marriage to a wealthy business man- giving her a good name. Unlike Eva, who would have generally been looked down upon due to her being in a lower class to those like the Birling family. Physical appearance is another similarity between Curley's wife and Eva Smith and they are almost punished by society for their beauty. In 'AIC' Gerald describes Eva as having 'big dark eyes and soft brown hair'.

Similarly, Curley's wife is described by Steinbeck as having 'wide spaced eyes' then further on in the novella her hair is described as being 'soft'. Both women are punished by society for their beauty, in 'AIC' Sheila gets Eva fired after she is jealous over the dress she tries on not suiting her when it would have suited Eva. Then, in 'OMAM' Curley's Wife's pre-occupation with her own beauty eventually helping precipitate her death when she allows Lennie to stroke her hair before she yells at him to stop 'mussing it up', which then leads to Lennie accidentally braking her neck when he attempts to stop her screaming for help.

Although 'AIC' was written in 1945, Priestley purposely sets it in 1912, where rigid class and gender boundaries seemed to ensure nothing would change in the future. However, by 1945 most of these boundaries had been demolished, due to WW1, WW2 and the Suffragette Movement. These key events in history brought not only a transformation to the way society worked, but a complete new way of life for women- in complete contrast to what life was like before where they were perceived as weak and unequal to men whereas now they were empowered.

The suffragette movement can be linked to 'AIC' as Eva protests against Mr Birling for higher wages. 'She had a lot to say- far too much- so she had to go'. Around the time of the suffragette movement women were becoming more opinionated, wanted more rights and wanted a voice for themselves rather than being subservient to men like they had been in the past; Mr Birling shows how many men did not like the idea of an opinionated and independent woman as he sacks Eva for having 'too much to say' and Eva can be seen as representative of the more opinionated women who went on strike.

Also, the idea of social class and status are clearly shown throughout the play through the characters of the Birling family and Eva Smith/ Daisy Renton, as each of the Birlings either uses her, turns their nose up at her or rejects her because she is not as high up in the social hierarchy as them. This then leads to Eva's demise into loneliness and despair. 'Of Mice and Men' was written in 1937 and purposely set throughout the time of The Great Depression. At this time, almost every American citizen was without or had very little money- compared to what they had before- no matter what their <https://assignbuster.com/compare-how-women-are-presented-in-of-mice-and-men-and-an-inspector-calls/>

gender or class and thousands were desperate for a job to provide for themselves.

However, in Steinbeck's novella there is still a sense of authority, gender and class divisions. This is particularly visible in the 'harness room' scene where all the 'underdogs' – Curley's wife, Crooks, Lennie and Candy – on the ranch are gathered together in a room whose name represents control and dominance. This scene shows that even throughout the depression, married women such as Curley's Wife were still seen as a lesser class than men and were controlled by others. Prostitutes are mentioned in both 'AIC' and 'OMAM'. 'I could stay in a cathouse all night.'

When George says this in 'OMAM' it shows how prostitutes were seen more as objects used for pleasure and entertainment, rather than actual human beings with feelings and emotion. Furthermore, in 'AIC' Gerald refers to prostitutes by saying 'it's a favourite haunt of women of the town'. When Gerald mentions this he is talking about where he met Eva. This suggests that by the time she encounters Gerald, she may have been working as a prostitute. This then represents how the most desperate and poorest of women would often turn to prostitution to provide some sort of income for themselves.

Mrs Birling and Aunt Clara both take on the mother role; however, they both take different approaches. Aunt Clara took on Lennie when he was a baby out of the kindness of her own heart, despite Lennie not being her own. 'I knowed his Aunt Clara. She took him on when he was a baby and raised him up.' This action suggests that Aunt Clara was a caring, selfless figure that

showed compassion to anyone she could help with. In contrast, Mrs Birling does not show Eva any compassion and gives her no help when she comes to the charity Mrs Birling is a part of.

' I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim. ' Mrs Birling specifically calls Eva a ' girl', which is in the semantic field of innocence, immaturity and in need of guidance and support and possibly a push in the right direction. Mrs Birling and Curley's wife both take on the names of their husband, ' Mrs Birling' and ' Curley's Wife'. This represents how women were subservient to their husbands in 1912 Britain and 1930's America. In ' AIC' Mrs Birling is called Sybil which shows his authority and power over her as no one else calls her by her first name.

However, in ' OMAM' Curley's wife is never named properly she is portrayed as a piece of Curley's property rather than having a real identity, which is a basic human right. This shows how many women were deprived of having a real identity as their husbands ' took' it for them through their name. Also, in ' AIC' Eva Smith changes her name to Daisy Renton to escape the stigma that would be brought upon her by her past. Eva's surname, ' Smith' is also the most common British surname, this relates to how Eva is almost a representation of everybody in her social class.

Light is a significant factor in both ' OMAM' and ' AIC' as it reflects the ' mood' of the text. At the start of ' AIC' Priestley describes in the stage directions that The lighting should be pink and intimate until the Inspector arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder. ' At first, the light gives the scene a ' comfortable' mood giving the impression to the audience that

the Birling home is comfortable. However, when the Inspector arrives it becomes 'brighter' and 'harder', bringing tension into the play.

The light also acts like a spotlight on the Birling family to find out the truth about what really happened to Eva Smith and reveal the truth over how innocent the Birling family really are. Similarly, in 'OMAM' Steinbeck describes the sun streaks as being 'high on the wall by now'. Finally, we never see the aftermath in either text which leaves the reader questioning what happens next and if either of the women's deaths has changed anyone's perspective on society and the way women are treated. 'I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men do not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish'.

When the inspector says this, he is talking about how if perceptions of society do not change; it will lead to man's fall of 'paradise' – the world they currently live in where men have dominance over women. Priestley uses rule of three and repetition of the word 'and' when the inspector says 'in fire and blood and anguish' to empathise the Inspector's point that men will be taught harshly, this is also a reference to World War One that begun shortly after 'AIC' was based and where many men gave their lives fighting over seas while back in Britain women's lives changed completely as they were empowered and took over the men's jobs and roles.