

*Daylight on Saturday* (1943)

Priestley takes us behind the scenes at Elmdown Aircraft factory during war-time production where he concentrates on the variety of individual workers, creating snapshots of each as we meet them on our tour round the place. We learn about their characters, background, political struggles, hopes and fears; and how they came to be working at the factory. Some are escaping sad or tragic home lives; others trying to widen their horizons and break free from domestic shackles. This is all revealed as we eavesdrop on characters in different sections of the factory.

Priestley threads all these different characters together as they encounter each other through the working day, each one introducing us to the next. Although there is a large cast of characters, Priestley manages to remind us discreetly of each as they re-appear later on as events happen at the factory.

Not a happy bunch. Works superintendent, Bob Elrick, who finds solace in drink from the burdens of a wife who has lost a baby and has retreated into a child like state, playing with dolls with all day. Or Mr Stonier who is quietly going mad (and whom we later witness become increasingly and dangerously insane); and engineer, Gwen Ockley's unrequited love for Elrick:

*'There he was, giving her nothing himself, except a nod and a grin that sometimes seemed worse than nothing, and yet, preventing anybody else from giving her anything real.'*

An inspection by officials from the Ministry underpins the whole book and links the characters together in a common dilemma – the future of the factory and their jobs. Like the machines grinding, punching and cutting the aircraft parts, a conveyor belt of characters' thoughts, emotions and struggles pass before us. There is a lot of darkness and sadness in the book – the daylight coming at the end when the workers are released from their shift in the 'cave'

*'blinking, chattering, grumbling, laughing, sniffing and tasting the cool air... But the sun was there, and so was the honest daylight; and this was Saturday.'*

There is Priestley polemic and political arguments voiced by certain characters. I think this gave an added dimension and helped to raise the book from its seemingly soap opera-style material.