

How does JB Priestley  
reveal the hypocrisy  
of the Edwardian era  
in an Inspector C...



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An Inspector Calls is a controversial play set in the subtle society of 1912.

Written in 1945, the play script critically analyses the hypocrisy of a symbolist group of characters living in the Edwardian era (1901 - 1914).

During this period many revolutionary changes happened ; there were dramatic rises in business and many factories grew larger and richer. Other important changes include design and warfare. Throughout the Edwardian period and 1912 in particular, design in transport improved tremendously.

The famous Titanic sank upon its launching maiden voyage - travelling on the way to New York, and many industrial towns, for example the setting for An Inspector Calls Brumley, were becoming more significant and were again improved dramatically. Hypocrisy is the term given when there are false claims to have admirable principles, beliefs or feelings. A person is named to be hypocritical or a hypocrite if they show the pretence of possessing these definitions ; pretending to be something they're not. Throughout the play J.

B. Priestley reveals the hypocrisy of the Edwardian era using various techniques.

Several ways in which the didactic play unravels include using one interrogative character to draw the story and Priestley's message out to the audience. To do this Priestley invents the inspector. This is the main dramatic device used by Priestley, and the inspector is most importantly not only a crucial character to the story but a device used to structure the play and to reveal the whole family one by one. " And I tell you that the time will soon come that if men will not learn that lesson then they will be taught it in fire, and blood and anguish.

He also uses small dramatic devices to highlight specific symbolist actions, characters and meanings at staged times throughout the play e. g. tension building phone calls. " That was the police.

A girl has just died - on her way to the Infirmary - after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here - to ask some - questions - " Firstly, Priestley establishes the Birling family to give the audience an understanding of the way of life during 1912 and to allow them to make relevant connections to those involved in the story. Then he introduces the inspector : " Inspector - Mr. Birling ? " This shows complacency between the characters and also begins to give the audience a slight belief in the Birling family, making their opinions very critical but eventually truthful. The inspector not only pulls the story together but shows the main concepts of Priestley's ideas : " .

. . with their lives, their hopes, and fears all intertwined with our lives, what we think say and do. We do not live alone. We are members of one body.

" The inspector is the individual who shows symbolism in all characters such as Eva - representing the entire lower / working class : " . . one Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us . . " This is the very reason why Inspector Goole is both a major dramatic device and a vital character.

Another device used is characterization. For example the way in which both Sheila and Eric are frequently referred to and ones respected as children : " No of course not, he's only a boy" The strongest demonstration besides the inspector of Priestley's ability of characterization is Gerald. His character <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-jb-priestley-reveal-the-hypocrisy-of-the-edwardian-era-in-an-inspector-calls/>

shows formality and routine of life ( typical marriage to Sheila ) although also sets double standards within the emblematic upper class family. He portrays another aspect of duplicity, which has again been tangled into the story. This is because he is allowed a mistress, however conversely to the situation with their own children, Mr and Mrs Birling both continue to respect Gerald and hold no grudges upon his actions, which are in themselves hypocritical. Gerald is hypocritical as he simply focuses on what he did right for Eva rather than what he did wrong.

He believes, just as the other characters reflect their own actions upon themselves and other people, that what he did was insignificant and irrelevant. This symbolises the established routine that took place in the economic class system during the Edwardian era. Gerald's character is reaccepted into the family, however his relationships with Sheila and Eric change dramatically. Sheila despises what he has done, and realises the exact effect that not only his actions - but her failure in preventing them has caused. Eric becomes slightly jealous of his parent's ability to freely forgive Gerald although resents the way in which they ' deal' with what he has done. Every one of the characters show hypocrisy however at different levels - Sheila and Eric being the least hypocritical.

Priestley chose to do this as it would firstly highlight movements from other characters but more so to introduce the idea of change into the play. Again a representation of his ideas ) " Sheila - I suppose we're all nice people now" A smaller but no less important dramatic device used to show the hypocrisy of the Edwardian era is the set of the play. There is one, very grand and rich looking set for all three acts, making the characters and audience the only

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aspect imposing on any scene. Priestley also gave stage directions to help show emotion, build up and superiority all through the story, and also to dictate the pace and atmosphere of each revelation and character : ” (sharply turning on him) “ Doing this enabled him to again reveal hypocrisy, as the status of the character changes visually depending on the placement of the individual on stage and the manner in which they approach a specific piece of speech: “(bitterly)” “(angrily)” “(gravely)” Stage directions lastly allowed Priestley to show both developing and analytic language between characters: “ Edna (opening door and announcing)” This builds a realistic belief in the characters but more importantly allows the audience to relate to each individual and to see how easy it is to become hypocritical in their situation. The least hypocritical character is Sheila, She represents the change that Priestley wants to happen; all classes to be equal: “ I behaved badly too. I know I did.

I’m ashamed of it. But now you’re beginning all over again to pretend that nothing happened -” She realises the hypocrisy within the family and tries to convince the others that change is necessary : “ No he’s giving us the rope – so that we can hang ourselves” The most hypocritical character is Mrs. Birling who even after confession, refuses to accept the fact that what was said was real. Priestley reveals her hypocrisy as unknown knowledge – in the sense that she is unaware of what she is doing: “ No you haven’t, simply because I’ve done nothing wrong – and you know it. ” Her character shows no individuality and represents the entire upper class including their outlook on life and their resistance to change.

This resembles much of Priestley's work with the Fabian Society. In conclusion it is clear that J. B Priestley was very successful in revealing hypocrisy during the Edwardian era. He not only created social awareness about the moral issue of equality but put his ideas across to the audience in an established, tactful and didactic manner. Priestley uses a number of dramatic devices in harmony with representation to create an overall controversial view about people living in the unconventional setting of Brumley - 1912.

The most important dramatic device is the inspector who continuously reveals the hypocrisy of each character, and challenges the attitude of all classes at the time. Hypocrisy is perhaps the most important feature of "An Inspector Calls" and influences the whole play. In my opinion Priestley reveals the hypocrisy in a defined, and controlled approach, using informative characters to show the truth of individuals living in the Edwardian era, and knowledge of later years to comply an outstanding review of hypocritical people. He has created a piece of literature which can, even today teach each and every one of us about hypocrisy and the general viewpoint of the majorities and minorities of life.