

Letter from Priestley
to a colleague
explaining his essay



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Dear Charles, Hello, how are you? I realise it has been quite a lengthy time since we last spoke. The war has seen to that I suppose.

I am utterly dismayed at the state of this country though, as it has been a good two years since the war ended, and still there are many distressed people. It is on this theme that I am writing you this letter - I feel the need to clarify my reasons for, and my approach to writing my latest drama, "An Inspector Calls." I am quite certain you will have read the reviews for "An Inspector Calls." I myself have done so and cannot express my disappointment with them.

I somehow feel that the reason it has been rated so badly is because nobody understands it. This I will explain to you, as you are one of my oldest and dearest friends whom I trust completely. I thought that, with everything going on in the world today, it's a shame that no one takes responsibility for their actions, or for each other. This was my first idea for writing "An Inspector Calls."

"Mankind should learn that everyone has a responsibility for each other and not just for themselves. Other themes I included are those of guilt versus denial and capitalists versus socialists. I also wanted to make the play as dramatic as possible, therefore I used dramatic devices such as dramatic irony to keep the audience in suspense. I suppose, in this way, the style of my play had become one of a detective thriller, with a slight "whodunit" suspense about it. I did not want it to end there, however, as I wanted my play to contain a moral message.

I wanted to show my audience about the battle between good and evil. This influence had come from the numerous morality plays that I had examined, which were created in the Middle Ages. This, in turn, made my play a modern moral mystery. Additionally, I am sure you are aware of my strong socialist views, and so, I decided to display the terrible clash between the classes and demonstrate that this behaviour in society was unacceptable.

As I mentioned previously, one device I used was dramatic irony. This was partly to emphasise my messages to the audience and partly to keep my audience interested in the performance. I used one character in particular, Mr Birling, to do this; A part of Arthur Birling's character was to discuss various important historical events, such as the sinking of the Titanic, which he never anticipated to happen, even though, we as a modern audience know differently. Another aspect which I considered whilst writing the play was the structure itself. I decided to write in the form of 3 acts, with all the acts taking place at the same location and on the same date.

I felt that this would only work if the time were continuous. Furthermore, in order to avoid all the complications of having new stage settings and props for each act, I decided, from a directorial point of view, that following the rise and fall of the curtain for each act, the scene should remain exactly the same as before. (Obviously, the characters should be frozen into position). As I was saying before, I wanted to make "An Inspector Calls" as dramatic as possible. Therefore, I decided upon using doors, entrances and exits, as well as other technical devices to provide this.

One example of where I put this to use is during the first act. Prior to the entrance of Inspector Goole, the lighting was "pink and intimate." Then, on his arrival, it became "brighter and harder." The alteration in lighting, I felt, should change as various feelings do when the Inspector arrives. Another example is the re-arrival of Gerald Croft following Inspector Goole's departure. He enters, bringing with him some "special" news, which is to change the thoughts and feelings on everything that had occurred previously that evening.

I decided to set the play during the years of 1910-1912. I did this deliberately, so that an audience just coming out of the tragedy of war could experience how a family was coping just prior to the start of another. Additionally, these years were very important socially, historically and culturally- I'm sure you still remember the great industrial unrest we experienced as the cost of living rose but prices did not. Furthermore, as well as there being no welfare state, as well as the genuine fears of a revolution, I felt this would emphasise the barrier between the rich and the poor. I also wanted to exhibit how a woman's background and status influenced her position in society as well as different attitudes towards women.

This, I tried to achieve by having the characters originating from two types of background- the middle-class and the lower, working class. I wanted my play to be as interesting as possible in order to provide a good night's entertainment, so here is a brief summary of the actual plot, in case you have not had a chance to visit the theatre yet. "An Inspector Calls" is set in the spring of 1912 and reports the story of an investigation about the suicide of a "young woman," Eva Smith, who also goes by the alias of 'Daisy' <https://assignbuster.com/letter-from-priestley-to-a-colleague-explaining-his-essay/>

Renton. ' Inspector Goole arrives at the Birling household in Brumley, where Arthur Birling, his wife Sybil Birling, and his two children Sheila and Eric are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Mr Gerald Croft, who is also present at the house. The inspector informs them about the horrible incident that has occurred. As the plot unravels, it was my intention that the audience should learn of each person's involvement in Eva's life- Firstly, Arthur Birling dismissed Eva from his company as she and others went on " strike" to appeal for a pay-rise.

A few months later, she gained a new job, at a well-known retail store Milwards. Once more, she got sacked, as Sheila Birling, who was in a unpleasant mood, took it out on Eva, and using her power as the daughter of a well-respected business man, got her sacked. By now, Eva Smith felt " she had to try something else" so she changed her name to ' Daisy Renton. Under this name, she encountered Gerald Croft, at the stalls bar at the Palace Variety Theatre. They had a relationship, but that also came to an abrupt end. A few months later, she met Eric, and they too had a relationship.

Things did not go well; however, as Daisy soon discovered that she was pregnant with Eric's child. Knowing she could not remain with a man that she did not love, the relationship ended. By now, she was in an dreadful state and so, as a final attempt of having a better life, she went to visit Sybil Birling, a prominent member of Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. Here, Sybil heartlessly refused Eva the " pitiable" bit of charity she had in her power. Being turned away so many times, Eva/ Daisy felt she could go on no longer, and so she committed suicide.

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It is only at the end of the play, and after the inspector has left, that it is discovered that the inspector was a fraud. The play concludes with a dramatic telephone call in which the Birlings learn that an Inspector will arrive to investigate the suicide of a young woman. Another detail, which I felt was significant, was the dramatic effects of the various characters and their behaviour. Consequently, to some extent, they were all used as dramatic devices.

I used each character to explore a moral or political belief, with the characters raising a variety of issues. Firstly, Arthur Birling, can be described as a thriving businessman. He thinks of himself as being “hard-headed” and “practical.” Bearing this in mind, I decided upon giving him a very arrogant and self-conceited personality, who is completely opposed to my socialist views. His character is also very confident, headstrong and opinionated.

A fine example of this is Arthur’s references to the “unsinkable” Titanic and his beliefs of “peace and prosperity” during the 1940’s, during which of course, they were to be in the heart of the Second World War. As a modern audience, we would be aware of this, so, from the outset, the audience would learn not to believe in Mr Birling’s judgement. Arthur Birling also believes that “a man has to make his own way” and “look after himself.” He describes working as a “community” as being “nonsense” and that he should not be indebted to look after anyone but “himself and his own. With the audience already aware of Mr Birling’s anti-socialist beliefs, and his uncaring manner, it would not be hard for them to believe his harshness towards Eva and her circumstances. I had a notion that the audience should

learn quite dramatically the manner in which Arthur Birling had treated Eva Smith.

Arthur Birling saw Eva Smith as “cheap labour,” and knowing the poor background she came from, he “refused” her a pay rise from an average of “twenty-two and six” to “twenty-five shillings” a week. I used the character of Mr Birling in particular to show the authority of middle-class employers over working-class employees – Arthur Birling could treat people with no respect, just because he had the ability to do so. When confronted by the Inspector, Arthur Birling states he has no “responsibility” for the death of Eva and when the Inspector tries to contradict him, Arthur starts to become hostile, and “warns” the Inspector that he is friends with the Chief Constable. Arthur Birling uses his social status to try and intimidate the Inspector as he considers himself to be above the law. An actor playing the part of Arthur Birling should “heavy-looking” with “fairly easy manners.

” For example, during the first act, Arthur makes a speech about prosperity and the “developing” world. During this speech, the actor playing his part should use a rather loud, confident tone of voice to show how much he thinks of himself. He should also hold his head up high to try and indicate his authority and superiority. His ironic views, such as those of the “unsinkable” Titanic, and the impossibility of war, should be said in a very self-assured manner. His facial expressions and gestures should also reinforce the pride he has in himself.

The next character I considered being important was Arthur and Sybil’s daughter, Sheila Birling. I wanted Sheila to be “a pretty girl in her early

twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited. " At the beginning of the play, I thought that she should come across as a rather self-centred and careless individual. For instance, Sheila was very much aware of the privileges of wealth and used this to punish Eva when she met her at Milwards during the end of January in 1911 - Sheila went into Milwards in an irate temper with her mother. Sheila had insisted on trying a dress which both, her mother and the assistant had disagreed with.

Sheila had thought she looked rather " silly" in it. Whilst doing so, Sheila had caught sight of Eva in the mirror, " smiling" at the assistant as if to say " doesn't she look awful? " Sheila felt she " couldn't be sorry for her," but after hearing of Eva's suicide, she felt like she wanted to " help her," and regretfully states: " oh why had this to happen? " This was a part of the play I found very important. This was because Apart from Eric, Sheila's brother, Sheila was the only member of the Birling household who felt remorse for what she had put the girl through. I did this to show that, even if the older generation could not be taught to change their ways, the younger generation, being more " impressionable", could grow a conscience and make a better world for themselves and others. After the audience had learnt of Sheila's guilt for her attitude towards Eva, I felt her character should mature, not only emotionally, but also intuitively. Examples of this can be found during Act 2, when her mother, Sybil Birling enters; Sheila is immediately aware of the fact that her mother's self-confidence is out of key with the scene.

Sheila also thinks that this could cause her to " say something or do

something" which she will be " sorry for afterwards. " Sheila's strength is <https://assignbuster.com/letter-from-priestley-to-a-colleague-explaining-his-essay/>

also shown when she learns of Gerald's affair with 'Daisy,' and instead of growing angry, she behaves like an adult and is even willing to "respect" Gerald for being honest and telling the truth. At first, the actress playing Sheila should appear to be quite cocky and arrogant, and like her father, try to intimidate the Inspector with her status in society. The actress should hold her head up high and have her hands on her hip to show this.

Sheila's nasty side should be projected when she says the line "I couldn't be sorry for her." An important scene during which Sheila was present in was the one in which she observes, and recognises the photograph of Eva. After Sheila finds out that she was partly responsible for the death of Eva, the actress should lower her head to show her shame and speak much softer. This brings me on to the next character, which came to have a relationship with Eva: Gerald Croft.

I decided to make Gerald a rather self-satisfied and well-mannered businessman to complement the personalities of the other characters. I thought that Gerald Croft should have a great sense of virtue, but Gerald should also demonstrate how easily others could influence him and how hard he tried to please everyone. I intended for Gerald to come from a rather wealthy and high-class environment and to be a type of person who would agree with the anti-socialist views of Mr Birling, but at the same time, have a conscience. I used Gerald's character to show the way in which men use women like Eva for sex.

Gerald first met Eva in the "stalls bar" at the Palace Variety Theatre and managed to save her from Joe Meggarty, a "notorious womanizer," who was

“ half-drunk and goggle-eyed. Gerald thought of Eva/ Daisy as being “ pretty,” “ fresh” and “ charming. “ She went with Gerald to a hotel where Gerald learnt that Eva/Daisy was “ desperately hard up. “ They met a second time by arrangement, when Gerald offered her a place to stay at his friend’s residence.

His honourable intentions, however, started to go astray, as their feelings for each other grew, and soon, Eva/Daisy, had become Gerald’s “ mistress. “ Gerald still showed his conscience; however, as he presented Eva a parting gift of money when they split, and out of every individual who was involved with Eva, Gerald was the only one who “ made her happy for a time. I decided that Gerald’s guilt and remorse should not be equal to that of Sheila’s, but more than Mr Birling felt, in order to make Gerald a suitable character for discovering the truth regarding Inspector Goole’s identity. The actor playing Gerald Croft should be “ well-bred” and well mannered. He should use a normal speaking voice throughout, but when he brings news of the Inspector’s falseness, he should speak excitedly, and his facial expressions should show the same feelings. This could be done by the actor having large eyes and speaking very quickly.

I used Eric Birling’s character to show how easy it is for women like Eva to be preyed on for sex and also, as Gerald did, to show the way in which some men used women like Eva. I felt that the best way to exhibit this would be through traits in Eric’s personality. I decided upon Eric being “ in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy” and “ half assertive,” as well as being a man who drinks “ far too much. “ I also felt that Eric Birling should have a

tense relationship with his father, and not consider him “ the kind of father a chap could go to when he’s in trouble.

I wanted Eric to meet Eva in a similar manner as Gerald had done- in the Palace Variety Theatre. The circumstances differed slightly, as Eric was “ a bit squiffy. ” (i. e.

drunk). Eric had “ insisted” on going back with her to her “ lodgings” and “ threatened to make a row” when she refused to let him in. After being in this predicament with Eric, Eva decided to let him in. They met a “ fortnight” or so later, again at the Palace Variety Theatre. They went back to her residence again and “ talked” for a while and later “ made love. ” Eric described Eva as being “ pretty” and a “ good sport.

” Eric also admitted to not being “ in love with her. The next time they met, Eva told Eric that “ she thought she was going to have a baby. ” Eva, however, said that she did not want to marry Eric as Eric “ did not love her. ” Eric also confessed to stealing “ fifty pounds” from his father’s “ office.

” I did this to show Eric’s initial immaturity, but as the situation with Eva prolonged, he felt responsible and decided to help her, even if this did involve stealing money. I wanted Eric’s character to be similar to Sheila’s, to the extent that when the inspector leaves, he has been affected enough to consider changing his life and actions for the better. His maturity is shown here, as even though he cannot get his parents to acknowledge their mistakes, he is willing to do so himself. The actor playing Eric should be quite young. An important part of his role should be his ability to show emotion and anger.

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This can be seen in the third act during his argument with his mother. The actor should speak quite loud, almost shouting and speak quite quickly. He should use gestures such as pointing his finger at his mother and shaking his head to show his disbelief at the whole situation. The final character to encounter Eva Smith was Arthur Birling's wife, Sybil.

I wanted Sybil Birling to come across as a cold and callous character who was out of touch with reality and also her husband's "social superior." Sybil Birling is a character with high standards and considers any one of a lower to herself to be unworthy of any respect. When questioned by the inspector about her involvement with Eva Smith, she stated that she could not understand "girls of that class" and tries to "build" a "wall" between herself and Eva. Sybil Birling is also very cold, and unwilling to accept any blame for her actions towards Eva Smith.

Mrs Birling, a member of a Women's charity in Brumley very heartlessly "refused her even the pitiable little bit of charity" she had in her "power." This is because she thought of Eva as being an undeserving cause and purposely used her "influence" to have Eva's case "refused." Mrs Birling consistently remained untouched by the Inspector's questions and the only sign on Mrs Birling's remorse was when she found out that she assisted Eva in killing her grandchild. Like her husband Arthur, I decided that upon discovering that the Inspector was a fake, she should revert to her views before his arrival.

I wanted the audience to see Sybil as thoroughly selfish woman so that they could disapprove of her. This is why I deliberately made Sybil an

unsympathetic character. For instance, during the second act, Sybil Birling unwittingly passed the blame onto her son. During this scene, the actress playing Sybil should have her arms folded across her chest and she should not be facing the Inspector.

She should also hold her head up high, but more than the other characters to give the impression of her snobbery. She should speak her lines very confidently at a normal speaking voice. On "understanding" the implications at her son, Sybil should become "distressed" and "agitated" and this should be shown by Sybil becoming louder in her speech and less confident. She should also shake her head.

I used the Inspector in "An Inspector Calls" to question moral and ethical issues. I achieved this by using the Inspector as a dramatic device. I wanted to create an atmosphere of intense drama and tension when the inspector was present, and so, bearing this in mind, I decided not to reveal the Inspector's identity. This I felt would add mystery regarding his authenticity as well as his identity. To some extent, I used the inspector to put across my views on the situation- like myself; the Inspector opposes Mr Birling's capitalist views. The inspector thinks it's "better to ask for the earth than to take it" as Mr Birling and his company have been doing.

The inspector also appears to know everything. Sheila points this out near the end as she states that neither the Birling's nor Gerald "ever told him anything he didn't know." I did this to indicate a powerful and God-like presence. His superiority is also present in his physical features as he

immediately creates “ an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.

” I also created the inspector to be the Birlings’ voice of conscience. He provokes each person, and tries to make them see the error of their ways. I purposely decided that only Sheila and Eric Birling should feel distress for their actions and not the entire family. I felt it unnatural for the entire family to change their outlook, but, if the younger generation could be changed for the better, it would be hope for the future.

To add further mystery regarding the Inspector’s actual identity, I decided to give him the name ‘ Goole. ‘ I decided upon this as it has a similar sound to ‘ Ghoul’- another representation of the supernatural. Another aspect that I included to reinforce his supernatural status were the Inspector’s abnormal premonitions; The Inspector referred to “ fire and blood and anguish,” suggesting war, which was to follow two years later. The inspector also prematurely held knowledge of Eva’s death, even before it had occurred. There is an air of mystery about him.

He appears to come from nowhere, and instead of solving the mystery, he deepens it further when the audience learn that there is no inspector Goole and no girl had died. This is because it is only after the Inspector’s exit do the Birlings’ receive a telephone call informing them that a “ girl had just died” in the “ infirmary. ” With this in mind, it may also appear as though the Inspector was a “ fraud” and that he had “ very artfully” bluffed them into “ confessing” using “ bits of information” he picked up “ here and there” and that it was a simple coincidence that a suicide had taken place that night. I

think that it is here the critics got confused, and felt they had to slander my play. The Inspector is very important to the composition and the narrative of the play as it is the Inspector that catalyses the characters' confessions.

The Inspector questions them carefully, and sustains the characters and the audience's curiosity through numerous techniques. One example is the way in which the Inspector only questions one character at a time in order not to "muddle" the "line of enquiry." I decided upon this feature in order to keep the drama flowing, as each confession leads to the next. I made the Inspector represent some of the main themes and issues of the play, such as how important reputations were, who was responsible for causing Eva's death, who felt guilt for their actions and is willing to accept blame and finally, how time affects the course of events.

The Inspector's approach to the situation can sometimes be abrasive, but I feel this adds to his power and strength. The Inspector also affects the pace of the play; the action is taken forward by the Inspector's careful revelations of the two years during which the Birlings and Gerald Croft met Eva. An example of where I put this to use is at the end of the second act, where Mrs Birling states that the father of Eva's child should be "dealt with severely." The Inspector was aware of Mrs Birling's righteous attitude and used this to make her frame her son unintentionally.

Furthermore, I wanted the Inspector to create dramatic tension between the characters in the play. The most obvious example would be during the third act. As I mentioned previously, Mrs Birling caused conflict through passing the blame onto her son, when all along, she tried to keep up a pretence of

her family's happy existence. Other examples include the revelations of Eric's "drink" problem and Arthur and Sybil Birling's refusal to accept blame for their part in Eva's suicide.

Sheila Birling continuously points out that they are all keeping up "pretences." I did this to create more tension and drama and to show that the family's initial closeness had been shown to be false. I also wanted the Inspector to bridge the gap between the classes and this can be seen in detail in the Inspector's final speech. I needed the Inspector to be dramatically significant, to the audience, both before and after his departure.

I accomplished this through his "tone" of voice, his methods of working systematically and his tendency not to lose his temper often. In my opinion, the most important speech that the Inspector made was his final before he left the Birling household. I wanted it to be powerful and memorable, both for the characters on stage and for any potential audience. I structured the final speech carefully in order to make it as moving and as thought provoking as possible. By now, I wanted the Inspector to survey the characters "sardonically" and to have taken charge "masterfully" as well as speaking "rather savagely" to the other characters on stage. The speech commences with the Inspector judging the characters and reminding them of their involvement in Eva's demise.

He tells them to never "forget" that Eva died a "horrible death" and he wants them to suffer for what they did. The Inspector tries to make the Birling's feel guilty by telling them that they cannot do her "any good" and that it is too late to say "sorry." The next few lines of the Inspector's speech

are quite repetitive. Examples of this include phrases such as “ millions and millions and millions” and words such as “ their. ” I did this intentionally in order to make the words and phrases remain in the audiences’ minds.

(These particular words and phrases were repeated three times.)

Additionally, I used emotive words such as “ suffering” and “ fears” to evoke feelings. I made use of lengthy sentences with commas to break up the sentence to try and get the audience to think about what was being said. These sentences essentially summed up the aspects of being human. As well as using very long sentences, I also used concise sentences such as “ we don’t live alone” and “ We are members of one body.

” This was because these types of sentences get straight to the point and adds to the drama and tension. It also reiterates to the audience the theme of “ responsibility” and the fact that all our “ lives” are “ intertwined” with each other’s. I felt that the concluding line of the Inspector’s speech, during which he referred to “ fire and blood and anguish”, was very meaningful. This line refers to World War Two which was to follow and to some extent hell, if the lessons were not learnt. Another method I used to try and draw the audience in was having the Inspector talking about “ us” and “ we.

” I did this in order to try and get the audience to identify with what was being said and also to allow them to think about similar things that they have done in their lives. I also used the word “ I” frequently, as the Inspector’s views were effectively my own. The usage of the word “ I” also helped to make the Inspector’s message appear heartfelt and sincere. The end of the play is very important as it contains the final dramatic twists of

the entire play. After the Inspector has departed Gerald returns with the information that “ that man wasn’t a police officer” and that they’d “ been had.

” This was the first dramatic twist, after which, Arthur and Sybil Birling try and discount that evening’s events. I wanted Sheila and Eric to appreciate that they “ all helped to kill her” and it did not matter whether or not the Inspector was genuine. The second twist was when Arthur Birling telephoned the infirmary to confirm whether or not a girl was bought in “ who committed suicide by drinking disinfectant. The result was that the infirmary hadn’t had a suicide “ for months.

“ I wanted the audience to now think that everything would go back to normal, and just as it was beginning to, the final, and most dramatic twist was unveiled- a telephone call from the “ police” declaring that an “ inspector is on his way” to question the Birlings regarding the suicide of a young girl. This meant that the play did not really contain an ending as the entire drama is going to begin afresh. This was deliberate on my part, as I wanted to leave the audience in suspense and question what would happen next. All in all, I wanted the play to demonstrate that we are all responsible for each other despite our class or social status; the significant thing is that we are all humans. I needed to show that we should think about others not just because it is the correct thing to do, but because we cannot escape the repercussions if we don’t. I also wanted to suggest there might be hope for the future.

The two youngest characters, Sheila and Eric, have been taught something and represent hope for the future. I also associated the end of the play to the two World Wars; just as the Birlings' became self-satisfied, they receive a phone call about the dead girl. In the same way, as Europe became self-satisfied, World War Two began. I had hoped that by the time the audience had seen the play, they would learn to think about others so that their selfishness does not lead to disastrous consequences.

I do apologise for writing so much, but I hope you'll understand what I was trying to achieve. Do write back and let me know how things are with you. Take care and thank you for listening.