

# Priestley and his dramatics: an inspector calls



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Priestley and his dramatics: An Inspector Calls. An Inspector Calls is one of J B Priestley's 'time plays'. Each of the time plays depicted a different perspective of time and presented time as a central metaphor based on which the action of the play and the lives of the characters revolved. The unique temporal andscape thus provided by the playwright enabled him to depict, as in the play An Inspector Calls, the domain of the Unconscious powerfully. Here, a family undergoes a police investigation of a murder that has not yet taken place. It is a mental, anticipatory trial.

Since the story takes place in 1912, it can be presumed that it is a pre-war play but suggesting the aftermath of a disastrous war. J B Priestley is not only predicting the consequence of such a war on nations and the international arena but also on individuals and families. The playwright subtly interweaves into the fabric of the play the many colours of fear and its intricate designs. Brumley, where the plot is set, is an industrial town like, say, Birmingham or Burnley. When the play begins, the affluent family of Arthur Birling is all gussied up to celebrate the engagement of Birling's daughter Sheila to Gerald Croft, a handsome young man given to the same set of capitalist canons as his prospective father-in-law. The revelry is paused when Inspector Goole arrives asking for information about the suicide of Eva Smith, Birling's former employee. The interrogation assumes the Birlings to be guilty of the death of the woman. But after the 'inspector' leaves, the family realizes Goole was an impostor and that Eva did not die en route to the infirmary after consuming a disinfectant. Thus, the interrogation acquires a subconscious quality - a trial of the mind, carried out as it were in real time.

When the play opens, amidst the fizz of the celebration, we hear the social

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talk between Gerald and Birling. They talk about business, politics, social attitudes, classes and the like. The philosophy of Birling (" that a man has to make his own way, has to look after himself and his family .") reverberates the hall as the cop enters. He questions why Eva was sacked from the firm and whether she asked for a rise and was leader of a gang of rebel employees. Birling is also made to confess that he did have an affair with her last summer. He then proceeds to interrogate Sheila. She was jealous of Eva because she looked better in a few dresses.

In fact, the first act of the play is real and fantastic at the same time.

Although the inspector is supernatural, the natural characters blend and associate with him so well that the former element is not at all projected.

The playwright's skill in driving home the fact of fantasy that is ingrained even in the mundane tenor of everyday life is explicit even at the beginning.

The rivalry between Birling and the father of Sheila is symbolic of not only the spirit of competition in business but also of the rat race after money.

Even Gerard sees Sheila not as a wife to be, but as a necessity to de-tense himself when wound up in the machine of business.

Priestley exhibits a slice of contemporaneity through a pack of well etched characters. These people are always amidst us. In fact, they are us.

#### Sources

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