

An inspector calls –
discuss the
representation of the
inspector



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the play 'An Inspector Calls' the Inspector is one of the main characters. He is the one who brings to light exactly what the Birlings have done. We first meet him just after the beginning of Act 1, after Arthur Birling has made his big speeches on war, politics and money.

When Inspector Goole, as he is called, enters he is described as 'not a big man, but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'. He is described as being in his fifties, 'dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period'. We are told that he speaks 'carefully, weightily and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking'. When he enters, the light changes from a nice, warm pink to a bright white, implying he is going to shed light on what they have done. He has also made it a more interrogational atmosphere. His name, Inspector Goole, suggests that he might be a ghost.

He could be the ghost of Eva Smith's dead child, or he could be a ghost from the future, from 1945 when the play was written. This is shown in the modern interpretation of the play, which is currently being shown in London. In this the Inspector arrives through the audience, suggesting he is on their side. More importantly he is wearing a Trenchcoat and carrying a Cardboard Suitcase, a 'Demob' outfit, which soldiers who left the army after World War II were given.

This suggests he is a time traveller as he starts in the year 2000 by going through the audience and he enters 1912 by going up onto the stage where the Birlings are, but he is from 1945 because of his clothing. This all, however, is pretentious as we are never told who the Inspector really is,

where he comes from, and why he's there. There are lots of theories. For example that he represents J.

B Priestley, the plays author, and his fight against the rigid anti-socialist class structure of 1912, or he could be a time traveller, coming back from 1945, trying to show people how much better things are then and trying to change their ways. What we do know though, is that he is not a real Police Inspector from the Brumly Police Department. We know this much because Gerald Croft asks another policeman about him, and the policeman says there is no Inspector Goole. It is hard, however, to work out that he represents the cause of the underdog the “ millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths”. It is then a puzzle how he knows so much as most of it could have been gained from the Birlings, because once the Inspector starts them off they basically dig their own graves, telling him everything he needs to know. The Inspector is not exactly rude to the Birlings, but he is more stern and cold.

From as soon as he enters the house he enforces himself upon people, making sure they know he is in charge. This annoys Arthur Birling, who is normally in charge, especially after his attempts to pull rank on the Inspector fails. He does not care how the characters feel. In fact it seems as if he wants to make them feel as bad as possible about themselves.

This is well shown with Sheila, when he works her up so much, and then shows her the picture of Eva. This makes her so upset that she runs out. Then the Inspector just says, “ I didn't do it. She's upsetting herself”.

However, when he sees he has got to Sheila and there is evidence that she

may change her ways, he lays off her and makes sure that she doesn't proportion all of the blame to herself by saying that she is not entirely to blame, but that she is partly to blame.

Just as 'her father is' Inspector Goole's job gives the play tension because he makes good use of Dramatic Irony. This is when the characters are in a state of ignorance when the audience know what is going to happen, but the characters don't. This is shown well in Act 2, when all the other characters have suffered at the hands of the Inspector, except Sybil who is the middle of being interrogated and Eric. Sybil says all the things the Inspector should do to the man who got Eva pregnant, and has led her to say things like, "he ought to be dealt with very severely", when, in fact, she does not know that it was Eric.

The audience know because, if they have been following the play, they would know that each character questioned would pave the way for the next to be interrogated. For example, when Sheila gets Eva sacked from Millwards, she is driven to prostitution where Gerald finds her. It is a logical progression, and after what Sybil has said, and with Eric the only character left, it adds to the tension because the audience have some idea of what will happen. The family will find out about Eric and Eva. However they do not know how exactly how the Inspector will treat him and how the rest of the family will react.

The Inspector allows the play to fit in neatly with a 'Whodunit' genre. This is because he is trying to find out who is more responsible, and who was the least guilty. He interrogates them, which also gives it the feel of the genre.

He arrives, announcing there was a death, not accusing anyone and slowly collects his information. It is rather like a 1945 version of something like 'The Bill' or 'Inspector Morse' today, but the Inspectors do not get emotionally involved as Goole does.

The play also follows a sort of 'Cluedo' form, where the Inspector has a few clues and makes some educated guesses about what happened. For example, he may have known Sheila got Eva sacked from Millwards, but he may not have known why. He makes good use of the phrase 'knowledge is power', the more he has, the cleverer he is, and therefore the more powerful he is. As Gerald said, Goole, "very artfully worked on bits of information he's picked up here and there, he bluffs us into confessing". This proves Goole is very clever.

The Inspector also acts as a chorus. The chorus was a sort of narrator, who was often used in 'Early Greek Drama'. They were not actually involved in the play, but stood at the side and told the audience what was happening. Priestley has adapted this and has the Inspector narrating and re-capping what has happened, as well as playing the part of a main character. This is shown well on page thirty-three, when well after the Inspector has found out what Sheila has done he says, "last year this girl had to leave Millwards, because Miss Birling compelled them to discharge her".

The Inspector says this may be to add to the characters guilt, but mostly to re-cap for the audience, so they know why Eva Smith was unemployed and so if they were not paying attention before they could be told what stage the play was at. Priestley makes the Inspector do this often when he begins to

interrogate a character and when he has finished interrogating a character. When J. B Priestley wrote the play in the winter of 1945, the world had just experienced another World War.

Unlike the First World War (1914-1918), where the Working Classes were sent to the Front Line to fight, and probably die, while the Upper Classes stayed back in safety in nice little French Chateau's, planning where to send the armies next, the Second World War (1939-1945) was much different. People were not given ranks because of their position in society, but because of their knowledge and skill. This meant that you had all the classes fighting together for the first time. Back home, the class system was also weakened.

Everyone's food was rationed; no matter if you were rich or poor you got the same amount. Clothing Rations also meant the rich had to be dressed the same as the poor. For the first time, possibly ever, the classes had to work together so they could survive. There was no room for their Moral Values and class system in War Time Britain.

This trend of classes mixing, along with new socialist ideas being introduced such as the 'Dole' and the National Health Service, made Britain a much better place, not a place Arthur Birling would have liked. He had strong anti-socialist ideas on community, saying "a man should look after himself and his own", and that "being all mixed up like bees in a hive", was "nonsense". He would have preferred life in 1912, when there were rigid class structures of Upper, Middle and Working Classes. This class structure was extremely beneficial to the handful of rich and the Upper Class, who could live a life of luxury.

The Upper Class made up only 5% of the total population of the United Kingdom in 1910, but controlled 87% of the countries wealth. Someone had to pay the price for the rich being so greedy and this was the Working Class. During the Victorian and Edwardian Eras, the Working Class were continuously exploited for the benefit of the Upper Class. The Working Class, the “ millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths” had to work in extremely poor conditions, often for over ten hours a day, non-stop with only half an hour break for lunch. For this they only got paid a pittance, on average twenty-two shillings and sixpence.

As Birling put it they were more concerned in keeping “ labour costs low, and production levels high”. The pittance the workers were paid could be reduced even more because if the workers did not keep to strict and sometimes unnecessary rules, they would be fined. These fines ranged from one penny, which is a 1/2 penny now, for making noise, to one shilling that is five pence today, for using bad language. The list was endless. In addition to this there was no National Health Service, no Workers Rights and no Welfare State .

This was something Priestley strongly disagreed with as he was a strong socialist and he wrote the play as a warning to people in 1945 and after not to ever consider going back to the way things were in 1912. Goole has strong intentions to find out what part each character has had to play in Eva’s downfall. However, he has not exactly set out to administer blame and to work out who is the guiltiest. It is more probable that he has set out to make each character realise the error of their ways and to try to make them change. He does realise that he will have more effect on the younger

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element of the family, and he says “ we often find that with the younger ones”. This is said after he has caused Sheila to run out, and has seen that she will change her ways. Goole has tried many ways to force the family to change.

He has succeeded in changing the younger ones, and these will be the founders of the Socialist Britain after World War Two. He has not been able to make Gerald, Arthur and Sybil change, possibly because Arthur and Sybil have lived the way they have too long to change and Gerald is obviously a strong supporter of the Birlings, because he is engaged to Sheila and has to support whatever the Birlings say. The Inspector makes one final effort to change them in his final speech; this is his last part in the play before he leaves. In this he says, “ We don’t live alone. We are members of one body.

We are responsible for each other. ” This uses pattern of three repetition. In addition to that ‘ we’ is a personal pronoun, implying that everyone is responsible. This speech gets across Priestley’s view that we all have to look after each other, rather than only to look after yourself. He follows then with “ and I tell you that the time will soon come when if men will not learn that lesson then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish”.

This “ fire and blood and anguish” is referring to World War One, which was not that far in the future, even though Birling has convinced the family that it will not happen so they probably don’t know what the Inspector is referring to. He is basically saying if we do not learn to live together and cooperate then we will be forced to learn how to cooperate with each other by a war, which will hopefully make us change. These were Priestley’s ideas, and

maybe he thought it took two World Wars for us to learn properly. Why didn't he write the play after World War One; maybe because he did not feel enough had changed to comment on. The Inspector affects all of the characters in the play, some more than others. He probably affects Sheila the most; she would represent the sin of jealousy in a 'Medieval Morality Play'.

He may have affected her the most because, although she is in her early twenties, her parents still treat her like a little girl and try to hide and protect her from all the nasty bits of life. They say things to her like, "run along now", and constantly patronise her and shout her down. A good example of how Sheila is treated by her parents is when Gerald is saying about what happened between him and Daisy Renton; Eva when she became a prostitute. Sybil says, "it would be better if Sheila didn't listen".

This may be why the Inspector gives her the cold, hard facts because it shocks her so much that she changes her ways so she never has the opportunity to play a part in driving someone to their death ever again. Sybil, who represents the sin of pride, is much harder for the Inspector to crack and he never really succeeds in doing so. He never makes her realise the error of her ways, maybe because she has had fifty years of living off the Working Classes, having them dying around her because of her greed. She has probably learnt to ignore what she does and how many people she has helped to kill. Sybil is the head of a 'Charitable Organisation' supposedly for helping Working Class women.

However just because Eva is cheeky to her she decides not to help her, probably because a Working Class women who dared to cheek a woman of her status deserved no better! She says, “ I was perfectly justified in my decision Inspector, and I feel no shame”. It was probably known to her that Eva would die, but she doesn’t care. That’s what fifty years of living like a queen has done to her, and unless she has all this taken away from her she will never change. Goole tries his hardest to make her see what wrong she has done, but she refuses to. When he does back her into a corner about something she, like Arthur, is very quick to pass the blame. She thinks she has done nothing wrong and because she is a cold, hard woman, the Inspectors cold, hard facts don’t upset her, they don’t even make her cringe.

For example when Goole tells her all the details of Eva’s death, all she can say is, “ yes, yes nasty business I’m sure”. This quote and reaction basically sums up Sybil. If I was one of the characters being interrogated by Goole, I suppose at the start I would be a bit like Sybil or Arthur. I would be a bit shocked and angry that this man, Police Inspector or not, has come into my house and has given me a hard time about my alleged part in someone’s death, when I had actually committed no crime. I did not murder her. All I had done was to play a part in driving her to her death, and I would not be able to be put in court for it.

After a while I think I would feel like Sheila and Eric. I would realise how I led Eva to her death. I wouldn’t assume full responsibility, but the Inspector doesn’t really want anyone to do that. He just wants them to realise what part they have played in her downfall. He actually is quite fair.

If I were a director, I would make Goole look much as he does in the modern interpretation of the play. I would make him wear a brown trenchcoat, with a cardboard suitcase, a 'Demob' outfit. Along with a rimmed hat that hides his face, the actor would make sure the audience would never see his face. This puts an air of mystery around him. Why has he got the suitcase and what is in it? Why is he wearing clothes from the 1940's? What does his face look like? These are just a few questions that the audience could then ask.

I feel that if there were this air of mystery it would add more tension and drama to the play. The audience would be left asking lots of questions. He would not be as aggressive as he is in the modern production, because I feel this stops the play building up to the aggression and tension at the end if it starts with it. He would be polite at the start, only getting angry when a character answers back or questions his authority. The reason for more anger towards the end is that Sybil annoys him because he finds her hard to crack, and it is vital that he makes her realise what she has done quickly, so that there is time left to question Eric and to get out before the telephone call comes from the Police Station. The other characters would react much the same as they have in the original version of the play.

Arthur, Gerald and Sybil would refuse to see what they have done wrong, and resent the Inspector. Sheila and Eric would side with him, going against their parents. I would, however, have Gerald starting to see what he has done wrong, but then refusing to realise what he has done and refusing to change and reverting back to the way he was. Then, why should Gerald change when he has prospered in the Edwardian Era? Why should he risk all

that by changing? Eric would also be a bit harder for the Inspector to crack at the start.

This would add more variety to the play, because now it is Sybil who is the only one he has trouble with and the play follows a sort of repetitive chain, where a character is given the facts, they first refuse to see what they have done, then the Inspector wins them over. If there were more variety, it would make the play more interesting for the audience. The play is a 'well made play' – it flows quickly in 'real time'; it takes the time it would take to complete a family interrogation in the real world, to complete it in the play; from beginning to middle to end, with no flashbacks or skipping of parts. It can also be referred to as a 'Medieval Morality Play' where a character represents one or more of the 'Seven Deadly Sins'. Sheila represents Jealousy, Eric represents Lust and Sloth, Sybil represents Pride, Arthur represents Greed and Anger, and Gerald represents Lust and Greed. I think the play would have passed the message across to the audience watching it, the message being never to return to the days of the Victorian and Edwardian Eras.

However, I feel that the people who really needed to watch the play so they got the message never to return to 1912 would be the rich who went away to Canada during the war. They will still try to uphold their old, antiquated values of the class system and live as they have before, and will not go and see the play because it was written by a "socialist crank" as Arthur Birling put it.