

An inspector calls report



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

John Boynton Priestley whom was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, wrote the play “ An inspector calls”. This play was written in 1944/5 when Priestley set about writing ‘ at top speed, finishing it in a week’.

The time when he wrote this play it was a time of war (the Second World War) there where no London theatres available so Priestley sent his script to Moscow where it was produced in 1945 and in the following year it came out in London. Priestley has created a character with great thought, Inspector Goole seems to be all the different possibilities a character can be in one, he is someone you cannot figure out, whom you see as to be a realistic straightforward police inspector and at the same time a hoaxer, what did Priestley exactly intend this character to be, we still do not know. The play is set in 1912 when people were extremely complacent, they did not believe they had any problems that needed to be solved. But through Priestley’s play, he shows the audience that there is a problem.

.. “ class war’..

. the rich have it all and the poor have nothing. Also in 1929 there was a stock market crash which Priestley could have been referring back to in his play, as Birling believes nothing bad will happen in his business when in fact all business corrupt years after. Priestley is painting an image of what the people were like to show them where they went wrong so they cannot repeat their mistakes twice. He wrote the play to warn people to get themselves to treat people in lower classes better or else they would soon erupt and up rise. Also Priestley named the Inspector Goole ‘ G double O-L-E’ - which sounds very much like ‘ ghoul’.

Ghouls or ghosts are considered to be shadowy, invisible figures that come and go. The Inspector has turned up out of nowhere to tell the Birling family something special and has then disappeared again; this could actually be the answer to the odd character Priestley has created. Priestley sets his whole play in the Birling family's dining room in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands. It is set in the spring of 1912 and to be even more accurate we are told it is a week before the Titanic is to sail, therefore we can assume it was a week prior to this.

The play begins as a dinner party in a wealthy household whom seem pleased with one another, there do not seem to be any arguments or drifts between the family members. We instantly see the class war that went on in 1912 in the first few pages. On page four when Birling makes his speech to congratulate his daughter and son in law, there seems to be more to his happiness than this “..

. kind of son in law I always wanted. Your father and I have been good friendly rivals in business...

and now you've brought us together... for lower costs and higher prices.

.. Just through this one speech we can learn a lot of what Priestley is trying to tell us. The only reason Birling wanted a son-in-law like Gerald was because of the high-class family he came from, business was everything in those days, to get a living you needed a business or to work within one. Birling wanted his daughter's marriage so much so he could increase his middle class to high class.

He tells us of his wishes of the two companies to not work against each other but together for more money in their pockets and less in their workers pockets. When we then get a little further into the play and the angry lower class citizens are talked of, the anger beginning to show. Birling does quote “... Last month, just because the miners came out on strike, there’s a lot of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the near future.

Don’t worry. We’ve passed the worst of it...

” This extract shows us that the people are beginning to rebel, workers are getting angry with were hard work low pay scheme. Birling does continue to tell his children and son-in-law of how he believes life will be like for them in 20/30 years in time in around 1940. He says how there will be NO problems for them in the case of war or business, although actually in that time they are in the middle of world war two. Priestley knows this and is choosing his dates accurately as he heard the attitude of people towards there problem free lives and knew it didn’t turn out that way, again he is warning them for the future. Birling quotes “ we can’t let these Bernard Shaws and H.

G. Welles do all the talking... ” this shows us that he is against the idea of talking of the worse, or in some case, the reality of life.

When Priestley introduces the Inspector into the play for the first time, he does it in a strange manner. We can notice a difference in the way an Inspector should act from the start, just by looking into the stage directions. Priestley tells us through his stage directions that the inspector “ has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking”, it is not usual for an inspector to look at you before

speaking, does not that put you in the maze of being judged? After all, an Inspector's job is to get answers for the questions he has, and report back his findings to the judge. The inspector seems to have presence, not like he owns the world but to show people that he seems to be the centre of attention.

When the Inspector talks, it should be in a loud yet slow tone, we want him to have gravitas, someone who will be respected, somebody who has esteem, trustworthy. The Inspector is not taking on his role as one all the time in the right fashion. He does reply Birling in the right tone telling him the reason he is there, although most of the time he has a rude tone hanging on the end of his words. When Inspector Goole says the victim's name "Eva Smith" he says it with great curiosity in the way the Birling's react to the name, he also says it slowly and unhurried, as if he has all the time to inspect the family.

Here I believe the Inspector is shifting his apparent character here and evolving into a judge-like figure. He is getting the family to confess to themselves, making them feel responsible for their actions and what it 'has' led to, he shows us his judge-like form early on in the play 'you shouldn't have done that'. But the reality of the story is, if what Inspector Goole is saying is all the truth, is that none of the family members actually killed Eva Smith, but they did help with the cause she committed suicide, some people will argue for the innocents of the Birling family, and some against, it depends in which view you look at it from. Although this goes back to the reason I believe Priestley wrote the play, we are not an island, we are all one, and are responsible for each other, do not get yourself into mistakes

again, as you will all play a part in it. The inspector does seem to question about anything that gets brought up, whether it is to do with the case or not ‘ go into what? ‘ and also questions the way Birling thinks ‘ why? ‘ is the Inspectors response when Birling tells his refusal of increasing the ‘ labour costs’.

The conversation between the two men does seem to be quite on a high pitched tone, they seem to both want to win the verbal argument Birling got them into. After asking ‘ Why? ‘ Birling questions the Inspector of what he said, and without hesitation the Inspector repeats himself broadly, and keeps hold his fight going ‘ I’m sorry. But you asked me a question’ ‘ And you asked me a question before that, a quite unnecessary question too’ ‘ It’s my duty to ask questions’. The inspector answers back with his ‘ but’ and Birling does seem to notice the ‘ unnecessary’ questioning that is getting throwed at him, yet the Inspector replies saying it is his ‘ duty to ask questions’ but is that all he is doing, it seems like he is judging the responses to the answer of the questions he asks, is not that taking on many roles, trying to do everyone’s job in one figure, is that what you really call an ‘ inspector’? It is not really the inspectors business about how Birling decides to run his company, but I believe Priestly is trying to get the audience to see that there mistakes can only be seen by others or when they are brought to there mind, but Birling will not drag into the Inspectors talk, but remains believing he is not in the wrong. Furthermore, the Inspector does seem to hide the picture he has of the young ‘ dead’ women, he does it in an extremely sly manner, he only brings out the girls photograph when he things it is needed and only shows the character he thinks it is necessary to set eyes upon it.

I think here, Priestley is trying to show us that the Inspector is like some sort of conscience, judge, someone to warn people of their mistakes and actions, he acts awkwardly, not like what his character is said to suppose to be.

Moreover, the Inspector puts forward advice to Birling 'it's better to ask for the earth than to take it' he is saying indirectly that Eva Smith asked for a pay rise and did not steal the money in which she could well have done, yet still, Birling will not budge his thoughts. The inspector is getting Birling's philosophy on the way his workers are exploited and paid and judging him upon his answers, he seems to be taking the part of his conscience or trying to replace his conscience (maybe seen as a collective conscience) in a way, putting before him the rights and wrongs life can bring to you, and telling him that he is wrong, although Birling's character is strong and does not admit his mistakes. Eric does not say much through the whole play; he seems to be the character of the background whom only talks.

Although he does make an outburst while the Inspector is 'inspecting' his father. Eric's philosophy is different to his father's, he has his own conscience on how Eva was treated and is not following society's, like his father is. Eric expresses how he feels about the situation in a bold manner and seems to be questioning his father about his views 'why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible wages. And I don't see why she should have been sacked just because she'd a bit more spirit than the others. You said herself she was a good worker'. This speech he makes puts his father in an angry position, Eric has just proved his father wrong and told him that the actions he took were also wrong, that definitely pushes down his father's power.

Later on in the play, Eric yet again tells his father that his actions were wrong ' that might have started it. ' Referring to his father excluding Eva Smith from her work place just because she asked for a pay rise, class war, is this not what Priestley is trying to get people to realise? Straight from the start, when Shelia realises what has happened to Eva Smith, she shows her sympathy towards the girl ' Oh how horrible! Was it an accident? she does she that she wants to know more about what happens. After seeing Shelia's immediate reaction, the Inspector introduces himself yet again and repeats why he is here, as seems to start his next ' line of enquiry'. He does seem to grab Sheila's attention straight away, unlike her father ' Sorry! It's just that I can't help thinking of this girl...

' The Inspector seems to take charge of the family and does not listen to Birling's requests to stop bothering Sheila, he keeps asking his questions and ignores Birling as if he did not exist, and focuses of Shelia alone, undermining Birling's authority over his family. Throughout the whole play Inspector Goole does seem to have a indirect way of asking his questions, never asking them in straight words, making the family make sure of what he is saying and answer it themselves, in other words, very cleverly making them confess to their doings without them even realising they have until after they have said all. He drags Shelia further and further more into her sympathy talk about how sorry she feels for the girl, and breaks her when he lets her find out herself she is to do with the dead as well. Shelia realises what is going on as soon as the Inspector mentions the time when Eva Smith had to leave her job, she reply's ' agitated' and asks about it without

hesitation which could mean she is willing to except the responsibility that was coming her way, which she does ‘ when was this? ‘...

‘ What – what did this girl look like? ‘ the Inspector shows her the photo of the woman but does seem to be hiding it from the rest of the family for some peculiar reason. Inspector Goole makes Shelia stand up for the girls rights which means her showing us that she has not got the same view as her father ‘ but these girls aren’t cheap labour-they’re people. Goole replies to her in a very dry accent showing that it is he who knows that the most and slowly slips put to Shelia the truth of how Eva Smith turned the way she did. It is here that the Inspector comes out of his hardly ever followed role of inspecting and tells her ‘ ask your father’ motioning to her that it is he who sees them in this way and not him, shame tactics appear to be used. He is asking Birling to inspect his conscience here as well as Shelia as they have different views on the same subject, getting them to think and face there views, he is being judgmental. Literature does not tell you things but makes you think about them, this is exactly what Inspector Goole is making the family do, inspect their conscience, provoking them to face the facts of there views, trying to make them feel shameful, telling them to stop being proud of themselves, these are all the way the inspector acts, yet definitely not they way he is suppose to act.

Priestly uses shock tactics, which have an effect on some of the family member yet not all. Inspector Goole is hitting the judgment at them in a hard manner ‘ a nasty mess somebody made of it’ telling them they are the ones to blame through the indirect language he seems to use throughout most of the play. The inspector does say to Shelia ‘ you might be said to have been

jealous of her', using all his verbal power to integrate her, he knows the answer but wants her Shelia accepts her responsibility, unlike her father. Shelia is honest to herself and to the Inspector, does not argue her case, no 'buts' or 'what ifs', ashamed of herself she takes her part of the responsibility and carries it along with her for the rest of the play, not ever once backing her wrong. She also tells us she has learnt something from all of it, which comes back to what I assume Priestley wanted people to think like at that time. We must also talk about the attitude being using throughout the play.

In conclusion, I have looked into the way Inspector Goole talked and related to all the characters, and have looked into a few of them in great detail. We can see that Birling has totally refused the idea of taking any responsibility over Eva Smiths suicide, whereas Shelia takes hold of hers straight away, on the other hand, Eric fights for her rights, using his own conscience and not society, in which his father did. I believe Inspector Goole could have been anyone from a typical friend of Eva Smiths to a real Judge, or, to what his name means, a ghostly character whom knows what is going to happen, or what has happened before anyone else. Yet this answer, can never be answered, with the true real answer that Priestley had in mind for this character, we can only wonder, and let our minds decide, who Inspector Goole really was?