



THE INSPECTOR ^{v2}

An Inspector Calls

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INTRODUCTION TO THE INSPECTOR

The Inspector is a socialist

- he believes that the profits of business should be used to improve the lives of ordinary men and women
 - either through higher wages
 - or government control
 - The Inspector is a proxy for Priestley's views
 - but he is also the agent who drives the action of the play
 - not just a political figure.

UNUSUALITY

his arrival and departure are both quite surreal

- because he leaves just as mysteriously as he comes - he literally disappears into thin air.
 - Added to that, he has an uncanny knowledge of all the characters and he shows a fixation with the deceased Eva Smith and repeatedly mentions the circumstances and conditions of her demise.
 - A normal person would not focus so much on the finer detail. The inspector, though, almost seems to relish talking about Eva's death, as illustrated in the following extracts:
- Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course.
- When I was in the Infirmary looking at what was left of Eva Smith.
- That was what I asked myself tonight as I was looking at that dead girl.
- A girl died tonight. A pretty lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm. But she died in misery and agony - hating life -
- Yes, she's dead.

DRAMATIC AND MORAL FUNCTION

A major part of the entertainment is in trying to work out who The Inspector is and how he appears to have access to secret knowledge.

- When he arrives, the lighting changes from "pink and intimate" to "brighter and harder".
 - It is no longer rose tinted and innocent, but reveals the Birlings' and Gerald's guilt.
 - This is The Inspector's purpose, to reveal the upper classes' guilt, not just to the audience, but to themselves so that they will have a chance to change their ways.





EDNA INTRODUCES THE INSPECTOR

Because Priestley decides that Edna should announce his presence, this could imply that he is allied symbolically to the working class.

- In her lines, Edna is given the title of the play (or perhaps close to it) when she says "please sir, an Inspector's called".
 - Additionally, she opens "the door" and announces his name, "Inspector Goole".
 - Here, we could say that while she is symbolically "heralding in an opportunity for change" she is also acting as a plot device by adding a new dimension to the play in the form of a mysterious character, whose entrance affects the lighting of the play, from "pink and intimate" to "brighter and harder".
 - The lighting may symbolise a spotlight entering their "intimate" spaces to expose the errors of their ways and selfish attitudes.
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SYMBOLIC MEANING OF EDNA'S EXIT

When "the Inspector enters", "Edna goes, closing door after her" in almost heroic fashion, leaving the Birlings completely oblivious as to the series of interrogations that will unravel and destabilise the safe and cosy world they have built for themselves on the blood, sweat and tears of the lower classes.

- Edna's exit and her closing of the door may also symbolise the end
 - The impossibility of the Birlings escaping questioning:
 - they can no longer get away with mistreating the lower classes and it is time for them to face up to their responsibilities in society.
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AN 'IMPRESSION OF MASSIVENESS'

Priestley insists The Inspector must have an "impression of massiveness".

- This is because The Inspector is his proxy
 - When he has a "habit of looking hard" at people, he is behaving exactly as Priestley would, staring hard at the establishment and ruling classes, in order to accuse them.
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HOW THE INSPECTOR CREATES SHOCK

The Inspector wants to shock

- just as Priestley wants to shock his audience
 - The shock works as a theatrical experience, but also to get across his message –
 - the ideologies of the upper classes damages lives.
 - Greed
 - Selfishness
 - Lack of social responsibility
 - This is why he chooses to state that Eva has died a horrifically painful death:
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- “Burnt her inside out, of course” ...
- “She was in great agony”
 - Concentrating on the pain forces the audience to be more affected by her death
 - and angrier at the cause of it:
 - the characters on stage

“SUICIDE, OF COURSE” – EMPHASISING SHOCK

The Inspector emphasises this again:

- “Suicide of course”
 - The curtailed sentences perhaps mimics her curtailed life
 - However, with the throw away tag “of course” The Inspector suggests it is completely normal for a working-class girl to react this way –
 - the implication being that the oppression of the upper classes leaves them no choice.
 - It also suggests that the manner of Eva’s death is a common occurrence
 - He implies she is just a statistic among many suicides of working-class men and women

INSPECTOR GOOLE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

his name implies, represents the unnatural or spiritual

- The name is a play on the word 'ghoul'
 - which is an evil spirit or a phantom. Furthermore, the word can also refer to a person who has an unnaturally morbid fascination with death or disaster.

WHY THE NAME ‘GOOLE’?

‘Goole’ is a homophone for ‘ghoul’, or ghost

- there is a strong reminder of Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol* here
 - Priestley maybe signposting not just that there may be a supernatural mystery in the play,
 - but that it is didactic, carrying a moral message that the protagonists’ behaviour must change
 - in *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge (the protagonist) is met by the ghost of his old colleague Marley whose spirit is doomed to roam the earth because he lived a greedy and selfish life on earth
 - his punishment is reminiscent of the Christian idea of purgatory
 - a state of limbo in between death and heaven where the souls of sinners go until they have repented their sins and can go to heaven





- therefore, by hinting at the Inspector's supernatural qualities, perhaps Priestley is implying that the characters' actions as well as ours have an eternal affect and not just an earthly one

DOES THE INSPECTOR KNOW EVERYTHING?

Priestley provides hints that The Inspector does not know everything

- and is not in full control of events
 - His interest in Gerald does not appear preplanned
 - "I see. Mr Croft is going to marry Miss Sheila Birling... Then I'd prefer you to stay."
 - He clearly doesn't know that Gerald has had any part in Eva's life.
 - Perhaps he needs to prevent this marriage.
 - This will tie in with Priestley's purpose – if she does not marry him, there is a very strong chance that she will be able to change the future,
 - because by the end of the play, she has understood The Inspector's message
 - If she does marry him, whether she has learned the lesson is open to doubt
 - because she will be marrying a man who completely disagrees with The Inspector's teaching.

AMBIGUITY – DOES SHEILA *TRULY* LEARN?

Ambiguity is an important concept in "An Inspector Calls"

- If something is ambiguous, it has more than one single meaning and what is actually happening is open to interpretation.
 - For example, we could ask the following questions:
 - Is the Inspector supernatural?
 - Does he show all the characters the same photograph of the girl?
 - Are Daisy Renton and Eva Smith the same person?
 - Are there 2 death in the play or are they, in fact, the same?
 - With regards, to Sheila, the audience will generally see her as the heroine of the play because her stance against her parents' actions seems so strong
 - We see her as hope for change but when we look at her final words when Gerald offers her the ring back, she simply says
 - "no, not yet. It's too soon. I must think."
 - These statements open up a number of questions such as:
 - What does she mean by "not yet"?
 - What does she mean by "it's too soon"?
 - What "must" she "think" about?
 - Is she considering taking Gerald back, who is so clearly not willing to change?





- What does that say about her character?
- Are her emotions too spontaneous and therefore not really reliable?
- Is she too easily manipulated?
- Is she strong enough to actually change?
- Is she powerless to change because she is a woman living in a deeply patriarchal society?
- If we cannot rely on her for change, who then, is the real hero?
- Is Eric the real hero?
- Is this the reason why Priestley makes Eric the last one to confess, because he wants to reveal the real hero at the end?
 - These are only some of the unanswered question in the play but the purpose seems to be that Priestley wants us to focus on the most important question of all: 'who is responsible?'

THE INSPECTOR AS A TEACHER OF MORALITY

Priestley's father was a teacher

- The Inspector wants to teach the Birlings that:
 - "we were all responsible for everything that happened to everyone".
 - The Inspector is actually here to teach, not just to discover what has occurred.
 - This is why when Birling objects, saying
 - "how I choose to run my business" is not relevant,
 - The Inspector replies
 - "it might be"
 - clearly signposting that this is a political play, looking at the morality of business.

HOW THE INSPECTOR EXPLORES THE EXPLOITATION OF BUSINESS

One way the Inspector examines this exploitation in business is through the wages Eva and her colleagues are paid,

- defending their right to strike
 - "After all, it is better to ask for the Earth than to take it" observes The Inspector
 - implying that capitalism literally robs people of what should be theirs
 - The metaphor implies that capitalism is in effect a form of theft.

HOW THE INSPECTOR LOOKS AT THE CHARACTERS





For this reason, he looks accusingly at each character even before he knows what they have done

- His reaction so far strongly suggests that he does not know any specific crime committed by Gerald
 - However, he still “looks at Gerald, then at Eric, then at Sheila” because he knows that they will all have committed some crime.
 - Why?
 - Because they are part of the ruling classes – it is simply in their nature.
 - This is why he replies to Birling’s claim that they are “respectable citizens, not criminals” with scorn:
 - “Sometimes there isn't much difference as you think.”

THE INSPECTOR’S PURPOSE

is to remind the Birlings, as well as Gerald Croft, that they have a role to play on others' destinies.

- They hold the lives of others in their hands and should, therefore, be more responsible. Furthermore, he makes it clear that none of his audience can be absolved:
 - ‘This girl killed herself - and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it.’
 - He wants to make it pertinently obvious that each one had a role to play in the unfortunate girls' suicide. In each instance, each one was culpable in driving her closer to the edge. The inspector wishes that they would all accept what they had done and not forget it.
 - Inspector Goole is a symbol for humanity's moral conscience.
 - It is our conscience that makes us judges of our own character.
 - Our integrity is based on the level of responsibility we acknowledge for our role in what happens to others.
 - Inspector Goole came not only to remind his immediate audience but also those of us who watch or read the play.
 - We should be guided by a moral compass that reminds us of the evil of prejudice and arrogance.
 - Since his listeners in this regard were careless, manipulative and abusive because they thought themselves better than Eva Smith, they destroyed her.

