

---

## Representation Of Women In An Inspector Calls?

An Inspector Calls is a play written by English dramatist J.B.Priestley, the play is set in 1912 which talks about the controversies, and the political problems in that era like how women were treated poorly because of their gender or their class and how that era was the opposite from the expectations of people in 1945. This essay will discuss about the unfairness, harsh environment for women and how badly they were treated back in the days.

Priestley portrays women as useless objects to men that are used then thrown away. He also portrays how upper class women are treated differently from working class women, how working class women were always humiliated by everyone around them, Mr.Birling says 'Giving us the port Edna, that's right', this shows how Edna is just a function to all the others and how she talked to was different from others. All of them were just toys in the eyes of men. This were the stereotypes in that era, that were attached to women back in those days. Throughout the play, women were portrayed in different ways from age, class and how they're presented as very important throughout the act with life lessons and different messages. In the play, Priestley included a long range of female characters showing how he wanted to convey women from different social backgrounds.

Priestley wanted to portray his ideas by using different characters to show this in the play. How Mr. Birling states that "She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go" about Eva Smith. This suggests things such as freedom to speak wasn't taken seriously when it came to women back in those days. Men thought it was something that wasn't necessary for women. It is something that Priestley portrays the lack of importance given to women. This is shown in how the character of Edna speaks, "Yes, Ma'am" or when she talked to Birling about the inspector calling, "Please, sir, an inspector called". The way that she talks was so different from others and how short it is, this shows even more about sexism, also her class and job in that era. How difficult it was for women to actually live and survive around that decade, like how Eva Smith got sacked by Mr Birling "She was one of my employees and then I discharged her". This is because of his selfishness and his capitalist point of view "Well, it's my duty to keep labour costs down, and if I'd agreed to this demand for a new rate we'd have added about twelve per cent to our labour costs", that he denied her request to raise the wages leading to a chain of events that leads to her death later on, this was how working class women were so mistreated back then. Then the way that she called Mr.Birling "Sir", reminds us even more about how the classes were back then. In certain areas of the play Mr and Mrs.Birling devalues their own daughter's freedom of speech by "cutting in" when Sheila is trying to make a point. Mr. Birling shows that he does not think Sheila as capable to handle the inspector and wants to try and "settle it sensibly for you " which he does not offer to do for Gerald or Eric. "I thought it would do us all a bit of good if we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women", this quote portrays that if the audience try and understand women they will understand the difficulty that they have to fight through everyday in their lives. The way Priestley uses different ways to portray women, gives us a better look about how women were treated badly, differently, because of their social class and gender.

Women in An Inspector Calls are presented and seen as objects. Mr Birling says "Giving us the port Edna, that's right". This represents the invisible working class and how she is only seen like

---

just a thing in the house that serves its owner and the way she is talked to is different from others. Mr Birling says “your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me”, as like he is looking forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together. This suggest Sheila’s engagement is actually a business opportunity, rather than a formal agreement to get married. “Just used her”, “As if she was an animal”, was what the Inspector said about Eva Smith. Also she was also described as “young, fresh and charming” by Gerald. This implies that, for them, she was just someone they could amuse with until they can decide whether they still care for the relationship. Gerald gave her shelter then looked after her which shows that he knew she was vulnerable and that she was in need of help, however soon after that he just abandoned her. This shows us how powerful men were in women’s lives regardless of their class. This is another thing that shows us the theme of sexism and how it is presented by the author.

During the play, women are seen as weak, powerless and having no value. Eva Smith is described as “Pretty” and “Good-looking”. Although these are compliments, their memories of her are filled with her physical appearance. During the Edwardian era, women had little to no ways to prove themselves, other than looking good, and making their husbands happy. Gerald said “Miss Birling ought to be excused anymore of this questioning”, as he didn’t do this just to cover up his affair but also women are seen as weaker species to begin with. Also, when Sheila wanted to stay in the room, Gerald said “Why should you? It’s bound to be unpleasant and disturbing”, this phrase made us questioning whether he wanted to protect Sheila or just wanted her out of the room. Mr Birling sees Eva as just one of “several hundred young women” who worked at his factory and nothing more than just a worker who had no value. By saying “they keep changing” he shows the audience that he didn’t even care if he dismissed Eva as she was just cheap labour to him. Therefore, by the victim of the play being a working class female, Priestley highlights the vulnerability of women in those times, something that was socially acceptable.

However, sometimes in the play, women rise up to the level of power equal to the power of the male characters.. The first time the readers see the peak of power is when Sheila said “Don’t interfere please, father” to cut Mr.Birling off mid-sentenced. This shows how brave and strong Sheila is, to even have the guts talking back to her father, even shutting him off in the middle of his speech like that. When the Inspector left, she took over his role , as the voice of the author. She had the authority over all the characters, “Don’t you see?”, “They don’t seem to understand”. She had a point, and people were taking it in, instead of rejecting it, like how all women back in the day were treated. She was defending Eva Smith, fighting against her family and their idea of capitalism and even sexism in some way. How she stood up to protect someone in a lower class. Eva Smith was the one who represented the whole working class with the Inspector saying “Millions and millions of Eva Smith”. She was abused, looked down on, disrespected and not cared for. The theme of responsibility is emphasised when Sheila stood up for a powerless women like her against the harsh society with the idea of capitalism.

In conclusion, women are portrayed not only as emotional but also as very strong, independent and proud of their gender. The play showed the reader that women rely heavily on age, class and look to survive the cruel society back then.