

Explore the importance of the Birling family relationships in An Inspector Calls.

30 + 8 = 38/40

In *An Inspector Calls*, the Birling family are shown to present a variety of people in 1912 and 1945. This includes the capitalist aristocracy, the middle class and the new generation with socialist views. As a result, their relationships can be quite complex and are being used by JB Priestley to show political differences and disputes of the time.

The importance of Birling family relationships is seen through Sheila and her parents. Sheila argues with Mr and Mrs Birling throughout the play for having very arrogant and avaricious views. This is seen when she tells Mr Birling, 'these girls aren't just cheap labour. They are people', after which he tells her to stay quiet. JB Priestley is trying to show the struggle between socialist and capitalists through them. In 1912, many people in the working class suffered from the capitalist aristocracy and after two world wars the post-war society wanted change. JB Priestley therefore, would be showing the audience that it is time to fight for a more socialist society in this scene. Sheila is representing the post-war audience and acting as a representation of what they should strive to be. This is further seen at the beginning of the play when Sheila calls her parents 'mummy' and 'daddy'. Near the end, however, Sheila starts calling them 'mother' and 'father'. Through this Priestley, would, again, be showing how the post-war audience needs to abandon old traditions that contributed to the World Wars. Rather, he wanted the audience to be more socialist like he was, as he created the Socialist Workers Party. Priestley uses the poor relationship between Mr Birling and Mrs Birling and Sheila as a representation of the social and political turmoil at the time, making relationships in the Birling family substantially significant.

In *An Inspector Calls*, the relationship between Mrs Birling and Eric is used to portray the lack of responsibility of the upper class. This is seen as Eric says, 'The fact remains I did what I did. Mother did what she did', however she simply lightly scoffs at his comment. Here, JB Priestley is trying to show how although Eric, her only son, is claiming responsibility for his actions and telling her to do so, she denies all responsibility. With this, Priestley is trying to show how the wealthy will never be able to be 'members of one body' unless they change. The post-war audience would as a result start thinking about what future they want. This is seen again when Eric lashes out at Mrs Birling when she says she denied Eva Smith monetary support when working for a charity. Here Mrs Birling again fails to accept responsibility as she simply ignores anything Eric tells her. Her absolute callous nature even towards her son would be created by JB Priestley to show the neglect of responsibility for others by the upper class. Their relationship would therefore be significant to the play as JB Priestley would be trying to show the audience that a lack of responsibility shouldn't be present after 1945.

Furthermore in the play the importance of family relationships is seen through Mr Birling with Eric. This is seen when near the end of the play, when the Inspector leaves, Eric shouts at his father that it isn't all unimportant simply because the Inspector left. JB Priestley would show this scene to represent the divide between the new generation and the old. Eric would represent the new generation and therefore the post-war society who wanted to be responsible for one another as in 1945 the Labour party won a landslide victory. While the irresponsible Mr Birling represents the narrow minded upper class. This makes their relationship important as it shows how society is changing from bad capitalist morals to good socialist morals.

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