

How does J B Priestley present Mrs Birling in
An Inspector Calls?

Arguably, Mrs Birling is the most despised character onstage; she met Eva only 'two weeks ago' and showed very little, if any, consideration for her feelings or terrible predicament. Priestley shows quite clearly her attitude to her charity work when she proudly utters that she gives help only in 'deserving cases'. The audience and no doubt, the Inspector, react with contempt and repugnance to this remark, since they would believe that charity should be given regardless of a person's background or situation – charity is there for the most vulnerable and most in need, there for those like Eva Smith. The adjective 'deserving' is one that would particularly offend and leave a sour taste, grating on the audience. Priestley uses it to reveal how truly cruel and vile this woman is as well as to present how challenging life was for the poor and how much they had to rely on the powerful, the rich and often, the unsympathetic. What could Eva and her unborn baby have possibly done not to **deserve** some assistance, sympathy and care from the privileged? Even as a mother, (as the Inspector points out in this scene), Mrs Birling could not offer Eva any support or understanding; her position and lifestyle are too remote and too concerned with propriety and respectability to show any humanity or generosity.'

'A dinosaur of a by-gone Victorian era; Mrs Birling is presented as an extremely blinkered, outrageously self-centred and absolutely ignorant individual. Her obsession with propriety and conservative attitudes are considered outdated to the 1945 audience. Priestley uses this cruel character as a vessel to show that there is no place in post-war Britain for the capitalist oppression inflicted by people like Mrs Birling.'



1.

'(Reproachfully) Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things'

'Of course she does' and 'Now, Sheila don't tease him'

'What an expression, Sheila!' 'Are you listening, Sheila?'

'... when you're married...you'll have to get used to that'



2.



'(Annoyed)'

'(Haughtily. A step toward him) I beg your pardon!'

'That - I consider - is a trifle impertinent, Inspector.'

'I'm talking to the Inspector now, if you don't mind...(rather grandly)...'



3.

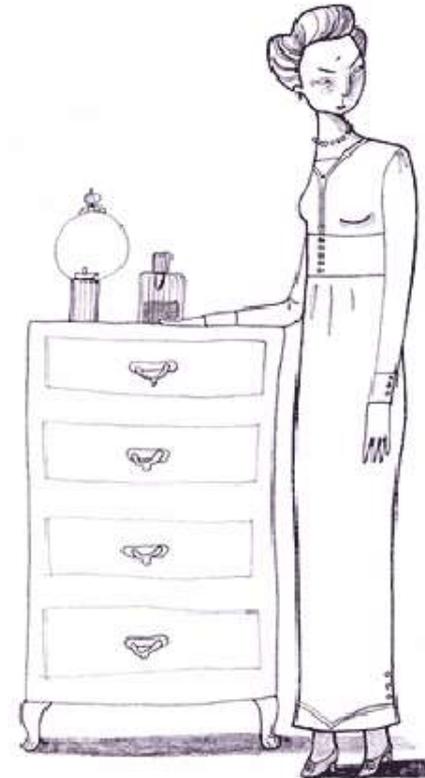


'(Nearly at breaking point) Then - you killed her! She came to you to protect me – and you turned her away...')

'(Mrs Birling, distressed, shakes her head, but does not reply)'

'(Very distressed now)

'(Mrs Birling has collapsed into a chair)'



Irony

Emotive vocabulary

Frequent use of

Exclamation marks

Imperative Verbs

Direct address

Adverbs

Verb

Strong pauses