

How does Priestley present ideas about attitudes towards women in *An Inspector calls*. (30 marks). AO4 (4 marks).

Within 'An Inspector calls', Priestley forms themes of social responsibility and social inequality throughout the play to create a foreboding sense of conflict between the Birling family and with Eva Smith. Priestley represents Eva Smith as being a 'normal' lower class citizen of the 20th century. She struggles to cope with living on such as poor salary and feels very vulnerable and hopeless. Each member of the Birling family represents this idea of social inequality- they are all selfish and only care for themselves. Priestley is able to link in his ideas and beliefs about social inequality and attitudes towards women by representing these ideas through each member of the Birling family and Priestley is able to create a strong message explaining that "**We Are Members of One Body. We Are Responsible for Each Other**". Through creating this message, he suggests and challenges his audience to think about the disasters that could happen in the future if they did not learn from their mistakes in the past.

Commented [MOU1]: Strong introduction/hook

Commented [MOU2]: Excellent insight/back up

Commented [MOU3]: This is absolutely the author's purpose

Commented [MOU4]: lovely

Commented [MOU5]: Yes – Priestley's socialist values are conveyed throughout the play

Within Priestley's morality play, he expresses this inequality towards women through the actions of the members of the Birling family. Mr and Mrs Birling are shown as ruthless and selfish individuals who are self-centred and are both obsessed about their social status. Mrs Birling is seen as socially superior as she is from a family with a higher social status compared to Mr Birling. She lives by strict standards, following the rules of etiquette to help improve the Birling family's status. Mrs Birling's social standards make her prejudiced against people of lower class and she believes that those of a 'lower class' have lower standards.

When Inspector Goole arrives, she derives and forms a snobby attitude and when questioned about Eva Smith, frequently says 'Girls of that sort' and 'Girls of that class' as if she could not imagine ever involving herself in something or someone so poor and socially inferior. Priestley expresses Mrs Birling as a mother with traditional values and someone who has a strict attitude. Mrs Birling also 'supports charity'- even though she is not at all charitable herself; however, she only does this in order to help improve and preserve her social status. She is involved in the Brumley Women's charity Organisation, giving her authority to help or turn down those who need her help. For example, she turned down Eva Smith and was able to do so using her 'social status' and only supports 'deserving cases'. This links in with social responsibility, and how through Mrs Birling's traditional values and beliefs about her class and status, she rejects many women of a lower class who pose as a threat towards her reputation for status and undermine her views on the class system. She does not want to help those of a 'lower class' who need help and support the most.

Commented [MOU6]: absolutely

Commented [MOU7]: yes, she is so far removed from them and the realities of a struggling life. She is a judgemental character

Mr Birling similarly follows in Mrs Birling's beliefs about class and social status. As a former mayor of Brumley and a successful businessman, Mr Birling also has a high social status and is similarly obsessed with preserving it. He believes that he holds a high amount of authority and is the head of his family. He does not like to be bossed around or have his authority/status put at risk by certain individuals. Therefore, when Eva Smith went on strike and protested about the poor wages she and the rest of the women were being given at his factory, he was quick to have her and the others who went on strike sacked from their jobs. Without even negotiating with these poor women about the situation, Mr Birling sacked these women in order to prevent any more dispute that could result in the situation becoming public- which could have, in turn, lead to his status being damaged.

Commented [MOU8]: yes

Priestley reflects Birling as being self-centred like his wife and decided to have his play set in 1912 to reflect just how bad socially inequality was at the time. Even with the 'Suffragette Movement' in 1903, by 1912, there were limited changes and the equality between men and women was still very distant. The lower class women, such as Eva Smith, were working long, hard hours every day in factories for poor wages and limited rest periods. However, these working situations were some of the only job opportunities available for women at the time. Priestley represents Eva Smith as an example of the many women who were treated very poorly and were very vulnerable towards coping with situations such as work, violence from men and other deliberate mistreatment. He explains through his character Inspector Goole that ***One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We do not live alone. We are members of one body.*** His continual message of respect and the need for equality between men and women is continually emphasised and he uses Inspector Goole as a main guideline vehicle? towards issuing these ideas towards the audience.

Commented [MOU9]: yes, it's interesting – there is a juxtaposition of the patriarchal society yet in this family, whilst the women 'know' their place, Mrs B is the matriarch.

Commented [MOU10]: Absolutely – excellent social context

Commented [MOU11]: Super use of quotation

Priestley expresses that Birling, underneath all of his confident and controlled persona, is anxious and as the play continues, Mr Birling's confidence and control is replaced with fear and anguish. insecurities? He is worried more about his social status being affected- rather than reflecting on his actions which had been the reason behind Eva Smith's death. He explains that 'there'll be a public scandal - unless we're lucky'. He refuses to accept responsibility for Eva's death and goes against the idea of social responsibility. His selfish and business-minded attitude means that he does not believe in "community and all that nonsense" and opposes Priestley's main idea that ***"We Are Members of One Body. We Are Responsible for Each Other"***. He sees lower class citizens such as Eva Smith as "worthless, cheap labour". yes

We learn that Priestley expresses his main ideas of equality and social responsibility through certain characters- however he expresses negative ideas that oppose equality and equal rights between men and women, through the representatives of Mr and Mrs Birling. The couple are represented by Priestley as the many selfish individuals during this period who crave only on self-importance, money, power and social status rather than wanting to make a difference by helping others- especially women- who suffer considerably, with poor wages to live on and a lack of help from those who are anything but charitable. Yes there is also a disparity between the generations – consider how the younger characters are presented as reflecting and developing, in comparison to the older generation...

Priestley also represents Edna the Maid as an individual who is mistreated by the middle/upper class- in this case the Birling Family. Both Mr and Mrs Birling treat Edna poorly and expresses lots of imperative language- ordering Edna to do something. An example of this is when Mr Birling says in Act 1 for Edna to 'Show him in here. Give us some more light'- a demanding quote. These two simple sentences are bluntly short and monosyllabic, suggesting no attempt to politeness towards Edna. Using imperative language, it is as if Birling expects his orders to be followed. Having these sorts of orders continually pressured onto women can add to the lack of respect that individuals such as Edna endure on a daily basis. It is Edna who changes the lighting to a brighter and harder light- as if Inspector Goole is about to interrogate the family. Through having Edna change the lighting and bring Inspector Goole into the room could suggest that it will be the working class who will deliver the truth to the middle and upper classes about their mistreatment towards the working class. This in turn results in the Birling family and Gerald having to face the true consequences of their actions.

Commented [MOU12]: Yes but remember that was inline with 'normal expectations' at the time -Priestley holding up a mirror to the audience?

Commented [MOU13]: Excellent – now you are exploring language and structure.

Commented [MOU14]: Yes – this works well as the lighting is an effective technique in the genre of this play

Commented [MOU15]: Super insight!

By 1912, when the play was set, the use of maids and servants within middle/upper class families were more common than by 1945. Therefore, since Priestley's play was first performed in 1945, the audience would have felt that Edna's presence within the play was old-fashioned and outdated and Priestley deliberately does this to remind his audience of the mistreatment working-class women received during the early 1900s. Priestley also deliberately shows that the Birling family expect Edna to follow their commands. An example of this is when Mrs Birling reminds Mr Birling when the doorbell rings that 'Edna will go. I asked her to wait up'. This quote emphasises the lack of respect Edna is given and how she is expected to work for longer hours without any extra pay. The Birlings see Edna as an employee and do not care about her well-being. This links back into the theme of social responsibility and how the Birling family are so immersed in wealth and self-centred that they mistreat Edna without even realising it. They are so used to living a life of riches and happiness that they forget that there are many working-class employees, like Edna, who are struggling more and more to cope with poor wages and long hours in their lives.

Commented [MOU16]: Ah yes – good point – super insight and social context

Priestley delivers his play this way to make the audience feel shocked and in disbelief about the mistreatment and inequality expressed.

Commented [MOU17]:

Priestley also gives Edna very few lines to say, to show the lack of freedom of movement she has compared to those in the middle/upper classes. Therefore, she is unable to speak out and protest about the suffering she endures through having to work. For most working-class women at the time, they would have been worried about speaking out about the mistreatment they endured because they would have been worried about losing their job. Women at the time were restricted in the amount of jobs available for them and if they were to get sacked for expressing their problems then they would struggle even more to try and find another job or risk having to work in a factory- which was even worse. Through Priestley's depiction of Edna, he encourages us to consider how, even when the working-class are being paid, they are being exploited.

Commented [MOU18]: As well as to make them stop, think and question their own attitude? Good – impact on audience

Commented [MOU19]: Yes, I love how you understand the significance of her minor role Seamus.

Eric and Gerald are also expressed by Priestley as those who behave badly towards women. Eric and Gerald both meet Eva Smith at the stalls bar whilst looking for prostitutes and they both mistreat her, with Gerald treating Eva as his mistress and Eric making her pregnant whilst he was drunk. Their actions would have been seen as 'normal' for a middle-class man at the time and adds to the themes of inequality Priestley continually shows within his play. Both of their actions reflects reflect the abuse that women such as Eva Smith receive on a daily basis and Priestley aims to make the audience feel shocked by the whole situation and understand the need for equality within society.

Commented [MOU20]: Yet Eric is more reflective (as is Sheila) about the wrong doing – representing hope for the younger generation in contrast to the older generation

Priestley represents his ideas of equality and social responsibility through his main character of Inspector Goole. Unlike the Birling family, Priestley represents the Inspector with strong opinions and belief that women should be respected better within society. He emits authority and moral judgement that shocks the Birling family and results in Mr and Mrs Birling becoming angrier towards him as they are bossed around by his authoritative personality. Priestley represents the inspector as classless and this is the reason behind Inspector Goole's lack of opinion about class- therefore treating everyone the same.

Commented [MOU21]: Yes! It can be argued that the inspector is representative of Priestley and his socialist views

It could be argued that Priestley uses the Inspector as a mouthpiece and reflects his own beliefs and opinions through the character of the Inspector. This is why both the Inspector and Priestley have similar views on equality. Therefore, Priestley aims to express his message of respect and care for one another not just towards the Birling family, but also mainly towards his audience. This is why the

Commented [MOU22]: Yes!

Inspector's main message that ***'We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish'*** is so powerful in the play. Priestley, through the Inspector, makes sure that his message is not forgotten and will drive a change in the opinions towards equality between men and women for the future.

Overall, Priestley forces change towards the beliefs of attitudes towards women within his morality play and makes sure that his message of social responsibility is portrayed strongly through his characters. He makes sure that his audience agree that the mistreatment of women is unacceptable within society, and changes must be made, and mistakes must be resolved in order to achieve equality and respect for women.

An excellent essay Seamus – you show real insight and understanding of the social context and the message that Priestley is trying to convey. Remember, it is a PLAY so Priestley includes a lot of dramatic irony to convey his message – the audience are alerted to Birling's 'lack of character when he says The Titanic is unsinkable at the start.....More reference to the structure of the play, development (or lack) of characters etc would enhance it more...

....It's hard to imagine that this hasn't been taught in class Seamus, so well done! It is definitely WTG 8.....Well done!