

Write about how the theme of age is presented and how it is important to the play as a whole. (40)

In the majority of Priestley's didactic works he aims to entertain whilst also considering key societal issues. This is evident in the play *An Inspector Calls*, where we see a bourgeoisie family called the 'Birlings' maltreat and neglect the feelings and desperation of a young proletariat girl. This extract is from act one where the Birlings are celebrating the engagement of Sheila Birling and Gerald Croft.

Initially the scene is set in a 'pink and intimate' lighting, which already suggests the family are looking through rose tinted glasses and have a facade covering the truth about this family. The whole play takes place in the Birling house which is not 'cosy' or 'homelike' implying that the family have no genuine love and affection between each other and the family is more based on wealth and how things look on the outside of their facade. The fact that the play also only takes place in one area links to Aristotle's unity of place. The son Eric is depicted as 'half shy, half assertive' which could imply that he got his assertive nature from his 'hard-headed practical man of business' father. However the adjective 'shy' subverts audiences initial analysis and could imply at his age he has not yet grown up to be like his father.

Furthermore Priestley also skillfully reveals the theme of age in the quote 'Yes, please' the pause between these words could suggest Eric initially forgot how to speak to his father so he had to correct himself which gives audiences a clear view that Mr Birling has all the power in the family, perhaps because of his age and status as they lived in a patriarchal society. However in the beginning of the extract given Eric says he 'left' em talking about clothes again' and continues to say 'women are potty about them'. The adjective 'potty' reinforces the stereotype of women being obsessed with clothes, this also lets audiences realise that despite Eric being younger than his mother he can still speak about her with that lack of respect. Also Mr Birling is used to show how foolish the family are as he says things like the Titanic is 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable' and he says 'fiddlesticks to war', with the play being written in 1945 and being set in 1912 audiences begin to realise that even though Mr Birling has all the power and is older he is still a fool. In the end of the extract 'we hear the sharp ring of a doorbell'. Then the maid Edna appears saying 'please sir an inspectors called', interrupting Mr Birlings speech on responsibility audiences may get the idea that the inspector has more power than Mr Birling and will expose the family. The inspector first begins to interrogate Mr Birling about the death of a young girl who has been 'burned inside out' after drinking 'strong disinfectant'. Audiences later acknowledge the fact that Mr Birling fired Eva Smith from his works. Sheila is the next person that the inspector interrogates and gives into the Inspector a lot easier than her father, after finding out that Sheila got Eva fired from 'milwards' because of her 'furious temper' audiences realise that Sheila takes more responsibility for her actions than her father. Perhaps Priestley does this to show how the younger generation are weaker.