The Writer

JB Priestley was born in Bradford in 1894 and served throughout the First World War before going to Cambridge to study History, Political Science and English. He began writing and selling his work while still a student.

He settled in London in 1922 and began a long career as novelist, playwright, essayist and critic. He wrote three novels in the twenties before he had his first major success with his warm-hearted show business story *The Good Companions* (1929), which has been adapted for the stage (a version was produced at Theatre by the Lake in 2002), television, radio and the cinema.

Twenty-eight novels followed, including *Angel Pavement* (1930), *Let the People Sing* (1938), *Bright Day* (1946), *Festival at Farbridge* (1951) and *The Image Men* (1968). His first play was his own adaptation of *The Good Companions* in 1930 and it was followed by 41 others, including *Dangerous Corner*, *Time and the Conways*, *When We Are Married*, *Johnson Over Jordan*, *An Inspector Calls* and *The Linden Tree*, all written within a prolific 20-year period.

Priestley wrote 63 other books of essays and criticism (including works on Dickens and Chekhov) and *English Journey*, his 1943 account of his roamings through England when he observed growing social inequalities during the Depression. Its influence remains almost 80 years on.

During the Second World War, his Postscript broadcasts for the BBC were very popular; they appealed to listeners needing words of comfort and sanity at a time of turmoil and danger. Priestley famously reflected on the beauty of the English landscape, the Dunkirk evacuation and a pie steaming in a shop window. He supported Labour’s overwhelming election victory in 1945 but later denounced the development of nuclear weapons in an article for the New Statesman, which led to the founding of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Priestley was briefly a member of the board of the National Theatre. He declined both a peerage and a knighthood but accepted the Order of Merit and was named a Freeman of the City of Bradford. Of his three marriages, the last to the archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes lasted more than 30 Years. He died at his home near Stratford-upon-Avon in 1984.
Made in Russia

J.B. Priestley jotted down ideas for *An Inspector Calls* in a little black notebook some time before World War II began, but did not work on the play until the autumn of 1944. He wrote at great speed, he said, ‘blinding on past all manner of obstacles and pitfalls, and only realising afterwards how dangerous they might have proved.’

In January 1945, he told a BBC producer that his play ‘about the Inspector is coming on fairly soon.’ But the play did not ‘come on’ in London, probably because no theatre was available. Two of Priestley’s other plays had previously been successfully staged in the USSR, so he sent the script to Moscow in May 1945 and it was staged that summer by Kamerny (Chamber) Theatre Company.

*An Inspector Calls* was directed by Alexander Tairov, whose non-realistic approach to the play seems to have influenced Stephen Daldry when he staged a much-hailed production for the National Theatre in 1992. In one account, quoted in the biography *J.B. Priestley* by Maggie Barbara Gale, Tairov and his collaborators were said to have emphasised the significance of Inspector Goole from his first appearance.

‘In the big room of the Birlings’ (home), it was semi-dark and only the table at which they were gathered . . . was brightly lit.

But Goole comes in and the whole room becomes lighter, illuminating all corners of the stage space, and the light intensifying, takes on shades of intensifying, takes on shades of flame, the scarlet colour of retribution, the colour of anger and fire . . . The manorial dining room is transformed under our gaze into a courtroom. The table . . . is almost an executioner’s block and the four chairs arranged at the sides, the defendants’ benches. The course of the court is inexorable. One by one the guilty stand up and confess to their crimes.’

*An Inspector Calls* was first staged in Britain at the Old Vic in London in 1946, with Ralph Richardson as Goole and the young Alec Guinness as Eric. It opened to review which, according to Gale, revealed critical opinions clearly split between the political left and right. Priestley described the reception as ‘cool, almost hostile’ and it clearly surprised him after the smash hit success of *The Linden Tree* earlier in the year. He had to wait another 16 years before he had his next London hit with a dramatization of Iris Murdoch’s *A Severed Head*. 
Priestley’s Big Society

J.B. Priestley’s *An Inspector Calls* is a well-made, classic three-act thriller that sends a bit of a shiver down the spine. Or is it? Is there more to it than that? If so, what has it to say about the time when it is set (1912), the time when it was written (1944) and the time we are in now?

In the first act, the Birling family gathers for a self-congratulatory celebration as the *Titanic* is about to set sail on its maiden voyage and the Edwardian age, allegedly as unsinkable as the big ship, is about to crash into the horrors of the First World War, in which Priestley served. He lamented in *English Journey* (1934) that his friends had all gone, ‘killed by greed and muddle and old men.’

In the play, Priestley looks back in anger to early 20th Century Britain and the grim mills and factories owned by capitalists like Arthur Birling, a magistrate, former lord mayor and social climber. Priestley saw men interested only in profit, careless of worlds beyond their smart dining rooms and ruthless in their treatment of workers who dared strike for extra pay.

By 1944, when *An Inspector Calls* was written, Britain was in the midst of a second conflict; Priestley aided the war effort with morale-boosting radio talks but was already looking forward to a new socialist society that might be built once the fighting stopped. ‘I think the writer’s job now is to try and understand the whole wide social scene, to understand what people are thinking, feeling, fearing and hoping and then express as vividly and dramatically as possible that understanding and these feelings. A writer now should speak for the people.’

Priestley might well have talked then of a ‘big society’ and suggested that ‘we are all in this together’; but were he with us in 2013, he would have sucked on his pipe and swiftly distanced himself from David Cameron’s interpretation of both concepts.

In stern Bradford homes, he would say that in his ‘big society’ bankers would not be allowed to run away with mega-buck bonuses while ‘young women count their pennies in dingy little back bedrooms’; and he would have denounced any move to make the small savers of Cyprus pay for the greed of the island’s rampant finance industry.

*An Inspector Calls* is about responsibility, a word that appears at least a dozen times in a play that tells us that we all have a moral duty to care for each other. Arthur Birling regards that kind of thinking as nonsense and tells his family: ‘The way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.’

But then the doorbell rings and in comes the inspector, whose investigations are seen to have more to do with ethics than criminal codes. As he completes his questioning and begins to leave, he utters a warning: ‘We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible [that word again] for each other. And I tell you that the time will come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish’. This is a reference by Priestley of the oncoming WWI of which no-one in 1912 (when the play is set) can be aware – but of which the audience of 1946 would be well aware.
The Director – Mary Papadima

Mary graduated from the Philosophy Department of the University of Athens with a BSc in Theatre Studies and from the National Conservatoire of Greece with a Diploma in Modern Greek Singing and a Diploma in Harmony. In 2008 she graduated from Birkbeck, University of London with a Master in Fine Arts in Theatre Directing. In Athens she worked as an actress and Assistant Director. She also performed as a singer and freelanced as a coach for actors and singers specialising in diction, elocution and breathing techniques. For Theatre by the Lake (her ‘spiritual home’) Mary has directed: Jordan, Blackbird, Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me and A Doll’s House. In her post as Resident Director (2009 – 2011) she worked on several projects with the Education Department and directed the Next Stage Company on Lysistrata and Spring Awakening. She was also Assistant Director on eleven shows, enjoying the variety of repertory and working closely with her mentor Ian Forrest. In 2010 she assisted Alan Ayckbourne on the national tour of his play My Wonderful Day. Mary currently works as a freelance theatre director and enjoys delivering practical workshops for Universities and Drama Schools on a variety of topics and acting disciplines, including Greek and European Drama, as well as directing shows. Mary will join Theatre by the Lake as Associate Director in October 2013.

The Designer – Martin Johns

Having trained at Wimbledon School of Art and the Motley Theatre Design Course, Martin began his career at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry and became Head of Design for the Tyneside Theatre Company, York Theatre Royal and Leicester Haymarket Theatre. During the Latter period he designed for the West End production of Me and My Girl at the Adelphi and subsequently Berlin, Broadway, Japan, Australia, South Africa and the British and American Tours. Other West End shows include Master Class (Old Vic and Wyndham’s); Passion Play (Wyndham’s); West Side Story (Her Majesty’s); The Hired Man (Astoria); The Entertainer (Shaftesbury); Brigadoon (Victoria Palace); A Piece of My Mind (Apollo); The Secret Lives of Cartoons (Aldwych); Rolls Hyphen Royce (Shaftesbury); Let the Good Stones Roll (Ambassador Theatre); Mack and Mabel (Picadilly Theatre) and the set for The Romans in Britain (National Theatre). Martin has been Resident Designer since the theatre’s opening.

Lighting Designer - Nick Beadle  Composer and Sound Designer – Richard Hammarton
The Cast

**Peter McGovern** (Eric Birling)

Peter trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, graduating in 2008.

**Richard Galazka** (Gerald Croft)

Richard trained at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art

**Peter Macqueen** (Inspector Goole)

Peter is a graduate of Manchester University Drama Department and Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

**Roger Delves-Broughton** (Arthur Birling)

Roger’s theatre career began in Swansea and continued with a long association with Theatr Clwyd in North Wales. The most recent of his many TV appearances was as a solicitor in Emmerdale.

**Laura Darrall** (Sheila Birling)

Laura trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

**Maggie O’Brien** (Sybil Birling)

Maggie’s previous experience includes working with Royal Exchange Theatre / Told by an Idiot, Unicorn Theatre, The Octagon Bolton, Theatre de Complicite / National Theatre and the Royal Court.

**Isabella Marshall** (Edna / Eva)

Isabella recently graduated from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and is making her professional debut at Theatre by the Lake.
Synopsis of the play

As the Birling family host a lavish dinner party to celebrate their daughter’s engagement, a knock on the door brings an abrupt halt to their evening. A determined policeman, Inspector Goole, is investigating the death of a young working-class woman, Eva Smith (also known as Daisy Renton) and he has some searching questions for everyone present. As the night wears on, the stunned family begin to unearth secrets that slowly unravel the mystery surrounding the girl’s death. They find that they have each played a part in the young woman’s exploitation, abandonment and social ruin which, effectively, led to her death. But it is only after the inspector leaves that they discover the final twist in the tale.

The Plot

Act I

A family; Mr Birling, his wife, their adult children Eric and Sheila and Gerald Croft, enjoy a dinner to celebrate the engagement of Sheila and Gerald.

After dinner Mr Birling, arrogant and egotistical makes self-important speeches in which he expresses his views on technology and industrial relations. He claims that a person should only take responsibility for the care of his family and that there is no merit to what the ‘cranks’ claim; that everyone has a shared responsibility to care for all others in the community.

The celebration is disturbed when a policeman Inspector, Goole, arrives aiming to make enquiries about the suicide of a young woman, Eva Smith. He shows a photograph of Eva to Mr Birling who admits to having employed the woman at his factory two years earlier. He sacked her because there was a strike at the factory in which workers demanded higher wages and she was one of the leaders of the action. Birling claims that he was justified in sacking her and Gerald agrees with this point of view. Birling’s children, Sheila and Eric both indicate that they feel that Birling was harsh in dismissing her.

Sheila is also shown the photograph and, horrified, she realises that she had the same girl sacked from her job as a shop assistant.

The Inspector goes on to describe how the young woman then changed her name to Daisy Renton and it becomes apparent from Gerald’s reaction he also knew the young woman.

By the end of Act I the Inspector has begun to suggest that the actions of several members of the group may share some responsibility for Eva Smith / Daisy Renton’s downfall and her decision to commit suicide.
Act II

Early in Act II Gerald admits that he had an affair with Daisy Renton which he ended six months later. Whilst Sheila is upset about the situation she respects Gerald for admitting it.

Mrs Birling’s attempts to intimidate the Inspector and to take control of the proceedings fail and Sheila expresses the opinion the more they investigate the more the enquiry appears to be justifiable and that it would be inappropriate to try to stop it. Sheila becomes increasingly concerned that Mrs Birling will also be found to have contributed in some way to the young woman’s distress and death.

Whilst Eric is out of the room, Mrs Birling is forced to reveal that, two weeks earlier, the young woman came to her, pregnant, and that Mrs Birling refused to help her. At this point there is a strong suspicion that Eric might be the father of that unborn child.

Act III

Eric shocks everyone when he confesses both that he stole money from Birling’s company to try to support Eva / Daisy financially and that he got her pregnant. When he finds out that his mother refused to provide her with the help that she needed, Eric blames her for Eva / Daisy’s death and the death of his child.

At this point the Inspector has shown how each of them played a part in the downfall of this young woman. His visionary speech provides a direct challenge to Birling’s assertions at the beginning of the play that a man only needs to care for himself and his family. The Inspector clearly asserts the need for social responsibility and the care, within a society, of one person for all others.

At the end of the play Gerald and Mr Birling attempt to prove that the Inspector was not a real police Inspector, and that they have all been victims of a hoax. No two people saw the photograph he showed at the same time, and this causes them to doubt whether they have all be talking about the same person – and, even whether anyone has actually committed suicide. An enquiry to the Infirmary confirms that no-one has been taken there today after committing suicide.

Whilst everyone is relieved, Sheila and Eric still regret their behaviour and appear to have shifted somewhat in their opinions about social responsibility. Their parents and Gerald, whilst also relieved, feel that due to the fraud that they’ve uncovered the rightness of their actions has been restored.

Mr Birling then answers the telephone for to find that a police Inspector is on his way to make enquiries into the death of a young woman who has just died on her way to the Infirmary.
The Characters

The Inspector

He is described as creating ‘an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.’

- Inspector – someone who looks closely at things.
- The Inspector can perhaps, be seen as someone who trawls through the lives and secrets of others. Goole is also a Homophone with Ghoul – someone who delights in the macabre or whose profession is directly linked with death. A ghoul lures unwary people, slays and devours them.

His arrival, just after Mr Birling has been espousing the view that every man must care only for himself and his family, highlights the key theme of the play – Social Responsibility. The Inspector’s role is to show that our actions have consequences and that, within a society, we are all responsible for the care of one another.

Throughout the play, the Inspector lures each of the unwary characters to reveal the impact of their actions on Eva’s life. He allows them to reveal their own relations with her, Sheila says; "he’s giving us the rope - so that we’ll hang ourselves." Throughout the play he remains constant, firm and unrelenting as the respectable facade of the other characters’ lives disintegrates and their behaviours are revealed. He is solid, nothing the others do or say can distract him from his purpose. He is always a figure of authority that controls proceedings, he deals with each member of the family very firmly, he is unimpressed when Mr Birling tells him of his influential friends and he holds no truck with Mrs Birling’s obduracy and obstructions.

A sense of mystery is built up around the Inspector. He seems to know a great deal, he even has Eva’s diary and a letter even though she only died two hours prior to his arrival. Systematically, he links all of the dealings that the family have had with Eva to create the impression that the wrongs that they have done her have built up to her final desperate act. Towards the end of the play he is in a hurry to conclude proceedings stating ‘I haven’t much time’.

His final speech delivers the central message of the play "We are responsible for each other" and he warns the other characters of the "fire and blood and anguish" that would result should they not heed what he has taught them over the course of the evening. In this way he also takes on the role of the Chorus in a Greek play, summing up events for the audience and explaining what should / could be learned.

At the end of the play we are left with a number of unanswered questions about the Inspector:

1) Was he some sort of hoaxter?
2) Was he some sort of ghost, or spirit, or the voice of God whose mission was to show the characters the errors of their ways?
3) Was he the voice of conscience?
4) Was he a real policeman who slipped out of time and is on his way to interview the family once more from the beginning?
Mr Birling

‘heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech.’

- A successful business man
- Active in local politics
- Has been Lord Mayor (which he boasts about)
- Magistrate
- Hopes for a Knighthood (which will progress him to higher social circles and make him socially closer to Sir George and Lady Croft – his prospective in-laws)
- Proud of his achievements and his social standing
- Un sophisti cated
- Pompous
- Bully
- Frequently puts down his son
- Ignorant of the thoughts and feelings of his family

He’s a self-made man – who is proud of his achievements and sees everything in terms of the benefits to his business; he describes the evening as ‘one of the happiest nights of my life’ because it will be good for his business. Sheila’s happiness is not his prime consideration. He fails to see what he did wrong in firing Eva Smith, as he was simply looking after his business interests.

Priestley uses dramatic irony when Birling espouses his confidence that there will be no war. As the audience already knows that there will be a war, this brings Mr Birling’s judgement into question right from the start.

He’s full of his own self-importance and tries to use his social status to try both to intimidate the Inspector, and to overpower his children and to impose his opinions upon them. He is extremely selfish; he sees only the need to protect himself and his business (and his family). He feels the protection of his reputation is the key element within this series of events and accuses Sheila of disloyalty when she doesn’t feel the same way.

He has a distant relationship with his children, unapproachable; Eric describes him as ‘not the kind of father a chap could go to when he’s in trouble’. Even after Eric’s heartfelt confession his priority is the repayment of the stolen money rather than Eric’s predicament or wellbeing.

He sees no contradiction in wanting to protect Sheila from knowing about the events, whilst taking no responsibility for the protection of the even more vulnerable Eva, herself. He is utterly unrepentant about his actions and delighted when he feels that he and Gerald have uncovered the ‘truth’ about the Inspector and that disaster has been avoided.

However, we can feel some sympathy for him; by the end of the play he knows that he’s lost his reputation and social standing, even though he utterly fails to learn the central message of the play which is to learn to take responsibility for the effect of his actions on Eva’s life.
Mrs Birling

‘About fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband’s social superior.’

- A snob
- Cold
- Unfeeling / unsympathetic
- Lack of conscience
- Keen awareness of the rules of polite society
- Self-Important
- Patronising, treating her adult children as children
- Out of touch and in denial (about Gerald’s affair and Eric’s drinking)
- Hypocritical (about the responsibilities of the father of the child until she finds out that it’s Eric – and about Gerald’s ‘disgusting affair’ which she’s prepared to forget about once the danger appears to be past)
- Prejudiced (social class)
- Narrow sense of morality
- Not above telling lies

Mrs Birling is very aware of the differences between social classes, reprimanding Birling for the social gaffe of praising the cook for the quality of the meal. She has a lack of understanding of the desperation that causes Eva Smith to follow the path to her own ruin describing her as ‘a girl of that sort’. She also refused to believe Eva’s reasons for not accepting stolen money from the father of her child describing the decision as ‘giving herself ridiculous airs’.

She has little respect for the Inspector and tries to intimidate him and force him to leave. She lies to him, claiming not to recognise Eva / Daisy in the photograph that he shows to her. She claims to be justified in rejecting Eva / Daisy’s request for help, seeing it as a duty to expect the father to take responsibility for the child, until she finds out that the father is Eric.

She determinedly refuses to accept that this decision could in any way have led to the young woman’s suicide; it’s only when she realises that her actions could possibly have led to the death of her grandchild that she begins to show the slightest sign of emotion. However, once the Inspector has gone this is short-lived, once again highlighting how cold and unfeeling she is.

By the end of the play, she has been informed that her son is a heavy drinker, that he had an affair and the girl pregnant, he then stole money in order to support her. Her ambitions for her daughter have been thwarted and she will no longer be marrying a good social ‘catch’. Her own reputation within Brumly will be tarnished. Yet she simply desires things to return to how they were at the beginning of the evening.

She praises Gerald for the clever way that he has found out that the Inspector was a hoaxter, and exactly like her husband, she refuses to believe that she did anything wrong, she also refuses to accept that her decision played any part in the young woman’s death. She has no responsibility for it.
Sheila Birling

‘a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited’

- Young
- Pretty
- Playful
- Self-centred / Selfish
- Lively
- Ill tempered
- Astute (she realises that the inspector is unusual and is also suspicious of Gerald’s claim to have been working all through the summer – signalling to the audience that all may not be well)

Later

- Sympathetic
- Repentant
- Caring

Sheila Birling is very playful at the opening of the play; she enjoys being the centre of attention at the celebration of her engagement. However, her caring and compassionate nature is immediately apparent when she hears of her father’s treatment of Eva Smith. “But these girls aren’t cheap labour - they’re people. Her interest in the lives of others and her flexible mind-set is already showing. It’s evident early in the play that she is prepared to be challenged and to change. She feels guilty / horrified at her own jealous behaviour and the part that she’s played in Eva / Daisy’s downfall. Even though she still shows a selfish streak when she regrets that she’ll never be able to return to her favourite shop.

She, very perceptively, realises that Gerald knew Daisy Renton from the moment that the Inspector says her name. She is also perceptive about the impact that the Inspector could have on the family the more he reveals of what he knows” Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don’t know yet”. She warns the others that “he’s giving us the rope – so that we’ll hang ourselves”. She is also the first to suspect that Eric played a part in Eva / Daisy’s life.

Initially shown as somewhat naïve; her curiosity about the way that everyone has been involved in one way or another with Eva / Daisy leads to her development throughout the play. Whilst she’s interested in finding out about Gerald’s part in the story she shows that she’s matured when she says that she is not angry with him, and that she is impressed by his honesty. In this way she also begins to show that her values are not the same as her parents. She becomes angry with her parents for their intransigence and inability to see that what they have done was wrong and that they still want to “pretend that nothing much has happened”.

Throughout the play Sheila develops a social conscience and is aware of the responsibilities of one person for another and, towards the end, she judges the values of both Gerald and her parents from a new, more critical, stand-point – highly aware of the dangers posed to them all by their behaviour, “If it didn’t end tragically, then that’s luck for us. But it might have done.”
Eric Birling

'in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.'

- Young
- Embarrassed
- Awkward
- Immature
- Drunkard (and an angry drunk)
- Intimidated by his father
- Thoughtless
- Rude
- Selfish
- Thief

Later

- Socially aware and responsible
- Horrified by his actions
- Guilty
- Repentant
- Ashamed of his parents
- Challenging authority (though still rudely)
- Able to admit mistakes

Eric Birling is socially awkward, never quite comfortable with the party atmosphere for Sheila and Gerald's engagement. He drinks heavily throughout the evening. Gerald comments 'I have heard that he does drink pretty hard'.

As soon as he hears about Eva Smith he shows that he has a social conscience and that he believes that people have the right to 'try for higher wages'.

He feels guilty about how he’s treated Eva / Daisy ‘Oh God, how stupid it all is’, and even though it is apparent that he had no strong feelings for her and viewed his relationship with her as a casual one, he thought that she was a ‘good sport’.

Throughout the evening the drunker he gets the ruder and angrier he gets and he says of him-self that when he was with Eva he was ‘in that state when a chap easily turns nasty’.

His sense of responsibility is clear both from the way in which he attempted to support Eva / Daisy when he found out that she was pregnant and in the way that he is ashamed of his parents for trying to hide his indiscretions and their role in Eva / Daisy’s death.

Whilst he is an unpleasant character, by the end of the play it is apparent that he has been impressed by the Inspector, he has admitted his faults freely and wants his parents to be able to admit theirs saying ‘we did her in all right’.
Gerald Croft

‘an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town.’

- Aristocrat
- Self-assured and at ease
- Well mannered
- Businessman
- Sense of chivalry
- Lack of moral fibre
- Regretful
- Dishonest
- Self-interested
- Protective of him-self
- Unwilling / unable to change

Gerald Croft is older than Sheila and Eric and is viewed as more of an equal by Mr and Mrs Birling. As the son of Mr Birling’s business rival, Sir George Croft, Mr Birling views the engagement as a step up the social ladder for his family. It is apparent that the Crofts don’t view the engagement in a favourable light, as they have refused the invitation to the celebratory dinner.

Gerald’s views on business, profit and the treatment of workers are broadly in line with Mr Birling’s and he agrees that Birling was correct in dismissing Eva Smith for her role in the industrial action at the factory.

On meeting Eva Smith / Daisy Renton he acted chivalrously in extracting her from a difficult situation with Alderman Meggarty, and it is apparent that his intentions were honourable at that time. He housed her in his friend’s flat and he acted well because he genuinely ‘sorry for her’. However, due to Eva /Daisy being ‘young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful’ his good intentions were forgotten and he made her his mistress.

Due to his apparent affection for Eva / Daisy and that he ‘made her happy for a time’, we feel some sympathy towards Gerald, however, he admits that her feelings towards him were always stronger than his for her.

Despite his regret at his actions, and in the way that he was only able to help Eva / Daisy for a short while, he does everything that he can to discredit the Inspector and to prove him a hoaxer in order to protect himself and his reputation. He is unwilling to accept that he could have been responsible for Eva / Daisy’s death.

He is unable to change which means that Sheila has doubts about whether she should take back her engagement ring and continue her relationship with him.
Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

‘very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes.’

- Working class
- Country bred
- No Family
- Kept a diary
- Resilient and flexible
- Hard working
- Fighter for social justice
- Kind
- Gentle
- Honest
- Protective

Eva is an emblem for the worker and her struggle to survive is a call for everyone to develop a sense of social responsibility. The name Eva could evoke the impression of Eve, the first woman and every working class woman (and perhaps men, too). The Inspector says:

‘One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their homes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do.’

Whilst Eva isn’t physically present within Priestley’s text, the play revolves around her. In discussing their involvement in the last two years of Eva / Daisy’s life and struggle to make a living, the temperament, opinions and questionable actions of the other characters is revealed.

Her struggle to survive provides a direct contrast to the affluence, comfort and ease of the Birling Family home and of what we know of Gerald Croft’s background.

She tries to support the other workers in their claim for decent pay and she tries to protect Eric from his own foolishness when he resorts to stealing from his father’s firm to give her money.

Due to their actions towards Eva / Daisy, Sheila and Eric show the most flexibility in their ability to move towards social responsibility and social justice.

At the end of the play Gerald Croft and Arthur Birling attempt to deny that this was the struggle of one person, saying; ‘We’ve no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl’ (Croft) and; "There wasn’t the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton really was Eva Smith’ (Birling). This inability of the older characters to accept responsibility for the struggle of Eva exposes how they are incapable of recognising their responsibility for their workers and for the wider society. In this way, at the end of the play, they reinforce Birling’s original position that there is no such thing as society and that each man must look only to support his own family. They have not taken on the Inspector’s assertion that everyone has a shared responsibility to care for all others in the community.
The Themes

Morality

An Inspector Calls is sometimes called a ‘Morality Play’ which is a type of allegory depicting good versus evil. Within a morality play:

- Protagonist represents humanity or a smaller section of it
- The supporting characters are personifications of good and evil.
- Supporting characters show virtues and vices and can represent the seven deadly sins.

_Birling perhaps representing avarice, Mrs Birling pride, Sheila envy and anger, Croft lust, and Eric lust, gluttony and sloth.

_(Benedict Nightingale, 1982)_

The Inspector himself represents goodness, and with increasing force he posits the argument that people should care for each other, highlighting the dire suffering that will occur if they do not.

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

In this Priestley is possibly referencing the two world wars that happen after the play is set - of which the audiences in 1945 would have been well aware.

Politics - Social Justice and Moral Obligation

The Central Theme of the play is epitomised by the Inspector in his final speech “We don’t live alone. We are members of one body.”

In 1912 there was no welfare state, there was the poor law and the poor no longer had to go to the workhouse but the Poor Law Institution if they could not support themselves and those suffering poverty had to work hard for low wages, or depend on charity to survive. Charity was normally given to the ‘deserving poor’ as decided upon by people like Mrs Birling. Poverty, on the other hand was seen as necessary for a society to thrive.

In 1807 Patrick Colquhoun said:

_Poverty ... is a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society, without which nations and communities could not exist in a state of civilisation. It is the lot of man – it is the source of wealth, since without poverty there would be no labour, and without labour there could be no riches, no refinement, no comfort, and no benefit to those who may be possessed of wealth._

This appears to resonate with Birling’s beliefs and attitude towards his workers in 1912.
Priestley had an innate empathy for the less well-off and was very concerned about social inequality in Britain. He worked alongside other like-minded people to argue for greater public ownership of land, greater democracy and ‘morality’ in politics. He saw the consequences of poverty on people working long, underpaid hours and living in squalid conditions.

His book *English Journey* written in 1934 was considered to be highly influential and stimulated discourse about the need for social change. This growing public consensus led to the Labour Government’s victory in the 1945 general election, the foundation of the NHS and the creation of the welfare state which required governments to consider the “protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens.” Priestley was also an advocate of the United Nations, Nuclear Disarmament and of equal rights for women.

Within the play the Inspector does not attempt to arrest the Birlings, or to suggest that they need to be brought to justice as what they have done has not been illegal in any way. What he does is to expose their behaviour and require that they consider, for themselves and each other, whether what they have done has been morally correct.

**Time**

Priestley was fascinated by the human experience of time, in particular the mystic philosopher Peter Ouspensky’s theory of recurrence and Dunne’s theories on precognition. He wrote a series of dramas during the 1930s and 1940s dealing with concepts of time.

In *An Inspector calls* Priestley plays with time through what the Inspector seems to know, that he cannot yet know. Priestley wrote the play for an audience just emerging from the Second World War, but he set his play just prior to the First World War. Within the play the Inspector seems to show precognition when he talks about the ‘fire and blood and ashes’ which will take place if people do not look after each other, possibly forewarning the two world wars to follow.

In the final twist in the play the Birlings receive a telephone call informing them that a young woman has committed suicide and that an Inspector is on his way over to interview them. Thus the Inspector arrived and interviewed the Birlings and Gerald Croft before the suicide had actually taken place.

**Age**

Within the play with age comes the development of a fixed view on life. Mr and Mrs Birling show no remorse and, throughout, express the opinion that their actions were correct in the circumstances, refusing to accept any responsibility for the outcome of their actions on Eva / Daisy. Arthur, in particular, is only bothered about the potential threat to his reputation and knighthood. Both of the younger characters, Sheila and Eric, show that they are willing to consider a challenge to their thinking. They both express guilt about their involvement in Eva / Daisy’s death, possibly expressing Priestley’s views that the next generation are more open to accepting a socially responsible society. Gerald, between the generations, sides with the older Birlings in wanting to maintain the status quo.
Class

In Priestley’s text, only Edna (the maid) is from the working classes. All of the action takes place in the comfortable surroundings of the Birlings’ upper middle class home. As the play progresses we hear about the conditions of the working class and the opinions the characters have about them.

Hypocritically, Mr Birling, upwardly mobile and aspiring to the Aristocracy, condemns workers for aspiring to better pay and conditions for themselves. Gerald Croft, comfortable in his wealth and status, agrees with this position. In addition, whilst Mrs Birling is in a position to help the poor she requires that they show that they are deserving of help. In order to deserve help they need to remember their place and she condemns Eva / Daisy for ‘giving herself ridiculous airs’ when she refuses to take any more stolen money from the father of the baby. Only Eric and Sheila believe that working class people should be treated more fairly.

Love

At the beginning of the play there is no love evident within the relationships between the characters. The characters appear too selfish to show affection. Birling’s reasons for wanting Sheila to marry Gerald are based on business and not on emotion. Sheila’s reasons for wanting to marry Gerald are also based on the idea that she needs to make a good match we see that she “kisses Gerald hastily” and we hear the implicit suspicion when she reprimands him for working the previous summer. Where it could be assumed that, as Gerald is marrying a social inferior, he is marrying for love, we find out that he had an affair with Eva whilst engaged to Sheila.

We know that Gerald is attracted to Eva / Daisy saying; ‘she was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes’ but it wasn’t love and he says that she was always keener on the relationship than he was. The Inspector’s reaction is one of compassion to Gerald ‘at least he had some affection for her’. It didn’t, however, transfer into him caring about what actually happened to her once the money he’d given her ran out.

Eric’s feelings towards Eva / Daisy, on the other hand, were about lust, he ‘used her at the end of a drunken evening’.

There is no filial love between Eric and Sheila, as their bickering shows.

Mr and Mrs Birling marriage, as model of romantic love and domestic bliss, also leaves something to be desired. They use terms of endearment, referring to each other as ‘dear’ but without any warmth or sign of real affection. In addition neither one of them appears to show any affection for their children. By the end of the play the cracks in the relationship between the members of the family have deepened and are epitomised in the following exchange:

Sheila: I suppose we’re all nice people now

Mr Birling: If you’ve got nothing more sensible than that to say Sheila, you’d better keep quiet.

Eric: What’s the use of talking about behaving sensibly? You’re beginning to pretend now that nothing’s really happened at all. And I can’t see it like that.
Responsibility

The words responsible and responsibility are used throughout the play and most characters use the words in their dialogue at some point.

The types of responsibility that Priestley examines are personal and collective responsibility.

Personal Responsibility

- Mr Birling believes that his responsibility is to make a success of his business and to care only for the material needs of his family.
- Socially superior to Mr Birling, Mrs Birling believes that her responsibility is to be the arbiter both of the appropriateness of her husband’s behaviour and of public morality. Her prejudices about behaviour being appropriate to status means that as chairwoman of the Women’s Charity Organisation she believes that certain poor people are deserving of help and others undeserving. She very clearly feels that her responsibility is to the deserving poor.
- Gerald Croft showed an inclination towards personal responsibility when he rescued Eva / Daisy from Alderman Meggarty, only to go on to personally commit the offence that he saved her from. Once helping her became inconvenient, he then abandoned her entirely without a second thought.
- Eric Birling reduces his capacity for acting responsibly by drinking heavily. When he does accept responsibility for Eva / Daisy’s pregnancy, his way of dealing with it is by stealing from his father’s firm.
- Sheila Birling is the most willing to recognise her responsibility to others. She recognises that it was her power that had Eva / Daisy sacked from her job and that she needs now to use that power with responsibility.

Throughout the play the characters are forced to consider what they feel to be their personal responsibility in the death of Eva / Daisy. However, not all of them are able to accept responsibility and Priestley exposes the prejudices that class, age, wealth and gender can have on the stance taken in relation to responsibility.

Collective Responsibility

However, when examining collective responsibility, Priestley is clear. The Inspector states that if people do not take collective responsibility for each other there will be dangers ahead.

‘And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.’

Through dramatic irony he is referring to the two world wars that are to come after the era of the play and the Russian revolution where the people revolted and killed the Aristocracy.
Gender roles

There was no gender equality in the Edwardian era. Women couldn’t vote and were expected to marry as soon as possible. Even upper class women had few choices, but working class women had fewer. Most unmarried working class women would work in factories or to go into service (as a servant to upper class families). Once they were married they would leave work to become a wife and mother. It was considered unfeminine for a woman to have opinions. Even Sheila is at the mercy of Gerald’s decision making – as can be observed by their discussion about Sheila’s engagement ring;

Oh Gerald, you’ve got it – is it the one you wanted me to have?’

Women who showed ambition or were politically active placed themselves at severe risk of ostracisation. Women viewed as ‘unemployable’ were likely to end up as prostitutes or in the workhouse. This is why Eva / Daisy ended up at the Palace Bar – a popular haunt for prostitutes. Also poorer women with few options could also be seduced by men in return for material rewards, which could be how Eva / Daisy ended up being so ‘grateful’ and deeply attached to Gerald.

Kier Hardy, a leading figure in the Labour movement which supported women’s suffrage, said that women at this time were viewed as ‘half angel half idiot’. Some men viewed them as angels who should remain in the home and not become involved in the dirty business of politics, and other men thought that women were irrational idiots. Both reasons for opposing women’s suffrage.

During this era it was deemed vital for all respectable womento remain chaste, however, it was thought tolerable for men to have dalliances, Birling himself says:

Now Sheila, I’m not defending him. But you must understand that a lot of young men -
Staging and Performance

An Interview with the Director

1) At the beginning of his plays Priestley attempted to convince his audience that they were safely with the boundaries of what was real and normal and, once he’d done that, he would then seek to destroy those feelings of reality and transport the audience into a fantastical or mysterious realm. Your approach has been different to this – can you explain why you feel that this approach is more relevant for a 21st Century audience?

1935 JB Priestley said:

Theatrical characters are themselves like figures from the past or future. Thinking about the Theatre I cling to my belief that in its own time somewhere along the fourth dimension everything still exists; that lift of the voice, that gesture, that look, they’re still there. When I think about Theatre I only wonder when at least some part of our minds will be able to travel in time to recapture the past that has not really vanished at all to see the old velvet curtains rising and falling again to applaud once more the brave players.

So, I wanted to consider his love of time travelling. He read a lot about it, including some famous essays by Dunne – *An Experiment with Time*, in particular which discusses precognition.

The other thing which influenced my thinking was what he said in 1946:

Only an idiot would consider me a naturalistic dramatist. I was a wild one only pretending to be a tame one.

So, that helped to allow me to take all of the liberties that I did, really.

Staging the Two Worlds

The idea about the two worlds came about after I considered what the play was about for me today. And I felt that it was important to have the two worlds on stage at once, a space where the ‘big’, ‘real’ outside world and the world of a small Edwardian family met. When I talked to Martin, the Designer, we realised how we wanted to tell the story and create a dynamic space on stage where the characters were all able to interact with their memories of Eva Smith. I wanted to be bold about highlighting it and not merely suggesting it.

Essentially I wanted to do this in order to discuss the timelessness and universality of the piece. To give the impression that the events in the play can take place anywhere, anytime, and what became clear from doing this is that it’s frightening how relevant it all is after all these years. And it’s exciting to see how brilliantly Priestley captured the reality of today – the world that we still live in.
In Priestley’s original the character of Eva Smith / Daisy Renton is only present in the memories of the characters and the imaginations of the audience. Can you explain why you chose to have the ghost/vision of Eva / Daisy present on stage for this production?

It all started with my very first reading of the play. She was a presence that wouldn’t go away. And this carried on and I thought that there must be a reason for this and so I asked myself; “What can I do about this?”

When I tried to make sense of this I found myself thinking that she’s is both a symbol and an individual human being. She represents millions of people all around the planet and her story, what happened to her life and the choices she did or did not have, are the stories of many people.

She tried her best to survive. But her ability to do so was affected by the consequences of living in what they would have called an industrial system, but what is now called a capitalist economy.

When we consider what the characters say about this girl in their descriptions of her, we see not just a weak, beautiful woman, but a woman who tries for the best and who never gives up. She has a true spirit – she is crushed again and again and driven into a corner/ a dead end from which she can see no escape.

So, I wanted to make sure that we show that she is not just an idea but that these events happened to a flesh and blood person and we realised that I wanted her present rather than simply represented through the words of the other characters.

I knew it was something that would be criticised by people but I’m not concerned about that, I was only interested in the artistic reasons for having her present. When she’s there we can see the other characters’ guilt and their reactions to their memories are more immediate when we can see her with them and we witness their interaction with what’s left of her in their mind’s eye.

I think as well putting her on stage is like putting in front of them a whole human being full of dreams and aspirations which none of them had asked about her when they interacted with her.

**The Effect on the Audience**

In making Eva Smith a big part of the production I wanted to make sure the audience felt one step ahead of everyone else - with the exception of the Prologue scene. So I was very careful about where I wanted the inserted scenes to be placed; this was to try make the audience feel that they know more than anyone else in the room. Being a step ahead is already written in the text, so what we did in our concept was again highlight it even more, be bold about it.

As part of this – the part that Eva plays – is to show that she belongs to the real ‘bigger’ world – outside of the Birling’s Dining Room. There’s the illusion of life that they have within the dining room and the reality of the lives they live beyond the Dining Room.

I wanted to use the character of Eva to discuss the Illusion of the Birlings’ lives and disillusion of the real world.

So that’s why I selected very specific moments with specific characters where she is seen and these two worlds come together. In this way we can see the individual character’s reactions to her,
whether they are sympathetic, remorseful or whether they still reject her and deny any responsibility for her.

This convention also leads to a certain and intentional destruction. During the characters’ speeches, as they lose their thread of thinking momentarily shocked by Edna’s presence, the audience is also forced to look away from them and see them in relation to the girl and not just as the protagonists of their speech. The intention was to give the audience space to break out and think what they are looking at rather than always try to empathise with the characters’ confessions.

3) How did you approach directing the play with the performers?

The Spirit of Eva

One of the first things that I wanted to examine with the actors was each of the characters’ relationship with memory / spirit of Eva, and I wanted to understand what the relationship between the Inspector and the spirit was.

I worked with the actors on how the inserted elements would work. I had them play their scenes with Eva / Daisy in the moment facing them, from this we had to make the choices of which of the characters registers her and the impact of that moment of seeing her has on the character. This interaction then had a knock on effect of how they respond to the Inspector within the scene at that time. These investigation scenes allowed us to explore in detail how each character was connected to her and how their connection with her informed each character’s journey. For example, Sheila takes it on board and it makes a massive difference in how she sees things, which then influences her responses to the others throughout the rest of the play.

The Truth of a Character

So, it always starts with the truth, we have to examine what characters say about themselves and about each other. From there we needed to create 3 dimensional characters (not 2 dimensional ones). To do this we needed to examine their thoughts and emotions and to create a past that made them who they are today (in the play). Once we’ve created that we can see how what they experience during the evening affects what they think or do in real time – which is great.

We also needed to consider the specific choices of what they respond to in the moment, i.e. what they’re really taking in. When they’re facing each new revelation we had to consider the questions; “Where is their head / what are their primary concerns and thought at this moment? And also; “What’s happening in their heads when they’re not talking or not in the room?”

Also, in order to respond truthfully, the actors needed to be fed with information about the concrete realities of the time so that they had a very good foundation to build their character on; actors need the details, so we make them up, we imagine them based on the facts we know from the text and from general research of the period. This is so that they could describe every room in their house, every place that they mention.
A glimpse of this, even though unspoken, somehow makes an appearance on stage, in the colour of a word or in a gesture. Some of these nuances will be seen or registered by some members of the audience who will then interpret it individually.

In order for the Actors to capture and present coherent and truthful performances we also felt that we needed to answer the following questions;

- Is there more than one photo?
- Are Eva and Daisy the same person?
- Is the Inspector’s visit to the Birlings just a hoax?

Example 1: Developing the Inspector

I also wanted people to consider who the Inspector might be, which has worked as we’ve had some interesting comments from the audience:

- A little boy of 8 during one interval said; “it is scary but I like it. . . I just think it was someone who knew everything that was going to happen before it happened?”
- Was he this girl’s father
- People debating does he exist does he not exist – is he real?
- Is he their conscience/ or a social conscience?
- Is he a figure of justice come to earth?

So when I was considering how to approach the Inspector with the actor, we knew, very early in the process, that we wanted to stimulate the audience to ask these questions. So, we looked at how the Inspector links the worlds presented in the play; Eva’s worlds - the outside world and the supernatural world; and the Birlings’ world. The Inspector straddles all of these worlds and brings them together.

When we first meet the Inspector we see him witnessing the last part of the Prologue whilst reading Eva’s diary, the two events appearing on stage did not happen simultaneously. Then he comes into the Birlings’ intimate world, bringing Eva’s diary with him.

His entrance was also carefully considered. His impact is greatest because he pays them a visit immediately after Arthur Birling has made his speech in defence of Capital and against Communal Responsibility.

When we were considering what was most important for the actor to explore the questions that it seemed important to ask in relation to the Inspector include

- What’s in the diary? (It’s through the diary that he has learned about her and to know about her life).
- What exactly does he know?
- Would it be important for the inspector to know about Eric stealing money?
- Are there any stakes for him?
• If we assume he knows everything what does he have to lose?
• How can he be a human being if he has this obvious power of knowing everything?
• But if he doesn’t know everything, why he doesn’t want them to know this?

There were also questions about his relationship with Eva:

• Assuming he has seen her on the slab and found her diary —when is the first moment he sees her spirit become a vision, a presence that drives him even more and where does he get strength from?

Example 2: Developing Eric

In discussion with the actor about developing the character of Eric we realised that we don’t get to know a lot about him from the text. There are very few facts about his everyday life. So, we decided it would be helpful to examine further the back story we invented based on two lines in the text about his failure at university. We thought it useful that this could be one of the many disappointments that his father has in him.

Due to this we developed the understanding that he’s a fragile creature and we wanted to explore more to see where his neuroses came from, why is he hypersensitive? What family relationships resulted in his being a heavy drinker? What changes to those relationships would have given him the potential to be different to how he turned out? We particularly focused the relationship between father and son.

We investigated an ordinary day in the lives of Eric and Sheila at each stage of their growing up and then decided what events might have had an impact on them.

Example 3: Developing Sheila

Likewise with Sheila, we aren’t given the information as to how she met Gerald, so we investigate various versions of who it was who brought them together and how that happened.

Within Sheila’s character we identified that she might come out as a very irritating character at times, as she shows passion and uses so many words to express herself. In developing Sheila’s relationship with Gerald we explored how that might be from his side, and we imagined their lives together, and how they interacted with each other.

4) Why did you decide to make it a two act play rather than keeping to Priestley’s three act structure?

The Three Act structure is an old fashioned one. When I looked at how the play worked across the three acts I discovered that, for me, this structure had nothing to add at all to the piece; neither to the rhythm of the play nor how the mystery unfolds, in fact it seemed to be more of an obstacle.
So, when I thought about the two act structure I considered the mystery and suspense of the piece and looked for the best place to insert the break. I very much considered how not to lose the peaks that we’d created and the suspense that we’d built up to at each point.

I thought something very physical can be happening between Eric and the ghost. So, when I came to consider it, I felt that it would be good to put in an inserted scene to consider how Eric is haunted by her. We imagined in rehearsals that, in Eric’s story, he’s gone out of the house with a slam of the door. This slam of the door it allowed us to move ahead and showing him for a brief moment at the end of Part 1, helped to maintain the suspense across the interval – with the audience wondering ‘what’s going on with Eric?’

Continuing Eric’s story he’s gone to her house to see if she’s there and he’s walking like a madman. After the interval we decided that we could take it from there, show a glimpse of that as if we are in Eric’s troubled, confused head and to go back to the slam of the door in real time to continue with Part 2.

5) What were the biggest challenges for staging the piece?

The struggle is part of the development of any piece and it’s very healthy. Of course there are going to be moments when you might question everything. However, if you trust the work that you have done already, if you’re happy with the process and the results you’ve been getting from your collaborators then you can’t be totally wrong.

There are always moments when your heart is beating really fast.

There might be times when you get stuck on something, silly moments, like how do you do the toast and you’ll ask questions as to how to do it the posh way, and do we need all of that. When you get stuck like that you realise that over-thinking is just getting in the way and so you have to forget about it.

The reward comes when you try to find different ways with different actors to create the circumstances where we can try things and stretch and exaggerate things, just to get a really bold taste of what they feel like inside. Some glimpses of what the final piece will look like will be there in the exaggeration. Whilst these investigations have nothing to do with the final result of the production they do reveal a big truth for the character.

Example 1: The Aftermath

One of the most intense moments to rehearse was The Aftermath which takes place once the Inspector has gone. It’s a very long scene and highly emotionally charged which makes it difficult to rehearse in bits because of the rhythm and the flow of it. You could discuss how elements could run together but it was almost impossible to run tiny bits of it. I was particularly interested to make clear the huge gap that evolves gradually and at moments violently between the two generations.
So, one of the rehearsal techniques I used was to ask the actors to paraphrase, but stay near to the text. I placed no restriction on movement or what they did to one another. It was purely an exercise. This revealed a lot about how the characters were feeling in that moment. The words/phrases were chosen by the actors very instinctively and quickly. They had to fight for their opinion and try to stop the character they disagreed with or support/protect the character they agreed with.

- Gerald had a repeated “can’t you see?” which he could use whenever he felt necessary.
- Eric swore
- Sheila called the others animals
- Mrs Birling called her children hysterical
- Mr Birling called the children chickens

The tension in the rehearsal room was extraordinary during this improvisation.

**Example 2: The Inspectors big speech**

I think that people sometimes misconceive this speech and say that it’s didactic and patronising. Well, one of the things that I try to do when I direct a play is to introduce as much doubt and ambiguity as possible with things that are sometime read as certain. And there is space within Priestley’s text to do that.

I think the reason that it has been considered didactic is because you read something direct and in your face which, depending on your background, you may dismiss or make it divine.

What I felt is that you can agree or disagree make it as big or little as you wish. There is no doubt, it is a very direct speech, it’s very bold but it’s the opinion, the thought, of one character talking.

What I didn’t want to do was either to apologise for it or to make it into a big political speech. That’s always a good start, when you know what you don’t want to do, you can then think about what you do want.

So, in rehearsals I had some decisions to make about how to work on it. Whether we saw the speech as a whole chunk, how static / how much movement there should be; how closely the Inspector should refer to each individual; and then, of course, I had to consider how to bring the spirit in to decide how much of the speech is referred to her and to consider the following questions:

- How do we enable the other characters to see her?
- Do we want all of them to see her?
- If they do see her, what do they see of her?

We tried many different versions, discussed what we take out from each and went for what we thought best for our production. It was another big challenge but, like I said, that’s the best part.

6) What themes did you particularly want to draw out in your staging of the play?
Capitalism

I don’t understand how anyone can discuss this play without talking about capitalism; it’s as if people are afraid of using the word in relation to the play. An Inspector Calls is such a political play, that diminishing this, or try to cover it and just present it as a mystery in the luxurious living room of a well-off family was absolutely out of the question for me.

I wanted to give the audience food for thought about capitalism, both during the production and, if they’re up for it, to give them some work to do after the production. However, I didn’t want the audience to leave with a specific message about it.

People of different political persuasions and opinions have enjoyed the show for different reasons. You become aware of the different positions when you hear the audience’s chuckles

However, one thing we didn’t expect was the laughter of the audience at times, particularly in The Aftermath. Actors find it difficult to hear laughter when it’s an intense moment – I think it’s great because the laughter at this point in the play seems to be about the question; “how much more deluded and awful can you get?”. In all of those moments when people do have a reaction which may be totally unexpected the Actors are still required to completely believe in their character and the things that matter to them. And of course every audience is different, their reactions different and the actors respond to that as well in every show – which makes each experience totally unique, although the story we tell is the same.

Love

Another theme can be the question of love – and whether any one of the characters knows what it is. For example The Birlings; why are they together? He’s smart and on the rise and Mrs Birling is one of the least sympathetic and ruthless characters. We found that she’s written as a character who it is quite difficult to have any sympathy for so, in order to explore her as much as we could, we opened up a discussion about whether there was any love in her? What did the two families behind the Birlings think about that relationship? We also took some time to explore her role and position as a mother. If there are maternal feelings how does she show them or not?

Humanitarianism/personal and social responsibility

I wanted to explore what Priestley says about our responsibility for each other. That we are “part of the same body” is the Inspector’s key message. The core of this play is humanity.

Within the play there is a debate about Capitalism and Humanitarianism. The play seems, to me, to imply that they cannot coexist; you cannot use those two together because capitalism is a system which requires exploitation so you have to have people who are exploited and those who exploit. This is the opposite of what humanitarianism is about.

There is also a lot to say about each person’s responsibility for one another and about the responsibility that we all bear as a society for one another collectively. But this would be a really long discussion which could explore all the different prisms of Religion, Philosophy and so on.
The Supernatural

We did have a first chat before rehearsals with the actor playing the Inspector regarding where we should start with him. Obviously, there’s so much written in analytical essays and books about the essence of the supernatural and his other-worldliness and we thought – “why would we go down that road?” There’s no reason in the text obvious enough to do that solidly. So we started him off as a real, living person, and added touches – the supernatural moments to enhance his mystique. They were linked with the presence of Eva; a muted dialogue and a rapport between those two started appearing as the most natural thing during rehearsals.

With the supernatural element we wanted to examine the things you cannot put into words, the things we cannot be articulate about, but that we have a sense of.

The inspector as a figure is a very human person. But he’s not just a person; he’s a symbol as well, and we needed to strike a balance between portraying a rounded human being and a symbol of humanity. Under the rules of these legends you find visionaries and people who challenge the reality of the time – this is one of the things that the Inspector does. He questions everything taken for granted and called reality/realism of the time.

Illusion and Self-Delusion, and Reality

The etiquette of the Birlings lives is a social construct. Their morality; their charitable work; their respectability; their aspirations to a higher social class are all about buying into the meta-narrative of the era.

However, it’s all a façade. We know by the end of the play that both Gerald and Eric have had affairs outside of marriage, (which was actually quite all right for their class of the period) we know that Eric’s respectability is an illusion and that he’s a drunkard and a thief. Whilst Mrs Birling does charitable work, she is cruel and judgemental. Yet, the Birlings are not concerned with being truthful about their actual existence; they merely want to make every effort to keep up the illusion of respectability.

It appears that they present the illusion of the Perfect family unit, the perfect microcosm to thrive in. However, they’re living a lie.

We wondered how much Mrs Birling knew about Eric’s drinking, yet didn’t want to know, how much Sheila suspected of Gerald’s affair and yet didn’t address it. These types of self-delusion are also part of what I wanted to explore.

So then I started thinking about reality:

- What is reality?
- Who defines reality?
- Is it possible to question absolutely everything?
It’s easier not to question the overarching rules of a society, because if you do then you may have to take action. These actions may have unintended consequences which you can’t possibly know in advance; it’s a circle.

So within the play the characters who are most willing to question the reality and ask whether things have to be that way are the younger characters Eric and Sheila, the older characters are far more willing to maintain the status quo as it has benefited them.

7) **What is the contemporary relevance? Why did this play need to be staged now?**

The play is as relevant today, if not more so, as it was when it was first staged.

**Progress, Consumerism and Illusion**

Mr Birling talks about his belief in how progress will cure all ills. We get the same message today. We hear that the way out of the current financial downturn is through growth; through making more things for more people to buy.

Capitalism relies on consumerism. It’s a very cleverly constructed concept – in fact the ‘American dream’, which we all seem to have bought into, requires us to engage with consumerism and to believe that it’s the path to happiness. Marketing tools employed within consumerism sell you the ideal way of living and tell you about all of the things that are essential for a happy life. Capitalism requires us not to be citizens but to be consumers. It demands from us all to keep buying and tells us that as long as we can keep that going; keep making, keep desiring and buying – there’ll be no need to worry because the economy will keep turning. In addition everyone else needs to buy into the story and to do the same.

**Philanthropy – the not so good side**

Whilst we all acknowledge that charity can be altruistic, as we see with Mrs Birling, being charitable brings with it a sense of power and a hint of superiority. If you have something in your pocket you can do something charitable, which means that you’re a good person and you can help others and feel good about yourself at the same time.

However, there is also the opportunity for people to develop a very judgemental stance and to feel that only people who ‘really’ deserve assistance should get it – the deserving poor. At the moment the newspapers bring us stories of the ‘undeserving poor’, those who are skivers not strivers. With this comes the government rhetoric that people who are in receipt of benefits need to do something about their situation, regardless of whether they’re disabled, or ill, and despite the fact that there are simply too few jobs. This position also ignores the fact that most of this government’s benefit bill is spent on ‘in-work’ benefits because capitalist employers are ‘maximising profit’ and paying wages that people can’t survive on.
Maximising Profit versus Workers Rights

Mr Birling wants to ensure that he is able to pay his workers as little as possible. Capitalism, as an economic system is based on specific principles, with the maximisation of profit at its heart. It’s an exploitative system that works brilliantly. Capitalists claim that if you cannot make profit you cannot sustain the economy; therefore the profit motive is a good one. Profit, in and of itself, may or may not be a problem; it might well be an incentive to companies or individuals to work harder, be creative, and provide the goods that we need. However when a system has the necessity to ‘maximise profit’ this leads to the necessity for ‘maximum exploitation’ of the workers. We see this today and, within the play, this is how Eva falls foul of Mr Birling.

The workers within the play are fighting for better employment rights, pay and working conditions; today workers’ rights and working conditions are being eroded with ever more insecure and low paid work becoming the norm. So we exploit the vulnerable and neglect the needy.

Some people may believe that, with all of the progress of technology and the achievements of science and the human mind that there is no need for anyone on this earth to suffer. Some people may suggest that each and every person alive today should have all they need to survive from the day they are born and to develop to achieve their full potential during their lifetime on this earth, without having to accept, as fate, the difficulties and the everyday struggle for survival, merely living in the hope of a much better afterlife. Yet anyone who actually propounds that this could indeed happen if governments had this aim at the centre of their agenda is labelled an idealists, a romantic and unrealistic; mad, or dangerous for “society”. In Priestley’s play they are called cranks, or “socialists of some sort”. So yes, the contemporary relevance is obvious and makes it almost necessary for this play to keep being revived and performed.

An Interview with the Director and Designer

Where would you normally start with your design process?

Martin: Over the last three years I do more and more research online. I also have a huge reference library. Normally I’ll start with a ground-plan and see if it can sit comfortably with the sight-lines as ours in the theatre are quite tricky and then I immediately go to white card. I sculpt it rather than draw it. Sometimes on the ground plan there’s a doodle of something. The joy of doing it that way is that, if you’re not satisfied, then you can destroy it and start again. I like all of that; if it’s not working you can scrap it and do something else.

Did you collaborate with the Director before designing the set for An Inspector Calls? How did her concept of how to stage the play impact on your design?

Martin: It was difficult for me to think about where to start with the design because of the very famous inspector calls production by the National Theatre. I have two friends who directed and designed it. I saw it in York and it bowled me over, and I wondered; ‘How do we follow that?’ , but we have.
Mary: The story that we tell is that Martin read the play and had a strong reaction and he felt that he’d like to explore the story of the ghost. I read the play and also felt drawn to the spirit of Eva. Then, we met in a corridor and I said ‘Can you see things that don’t exist that need to be there?’

Martin: We both felt that the ghost was the most important thing.

Mary: After that, we came into the first meeting after reading the play to have an exchange of ideas and, from the beginning, we knew that we wanted to create two very different worlds; worlds that needed to co-exist. We also went through the script sharing ideas of images that arose about specific moments. We discussed whether we thought that the ghost should have a physical body or just be a presence in the play; someone discussed. We didn’t want to make any definite decisions, but to share our thoughts with one another and to inspire each other.

Martin: We talked about the machinery, and we wanted to create the world that Birling had made his money from, a cruel and mechanical world. And we wanted to contain the Birling family quite tightly. We also wanted to ensure that when they see the ghost the mechanisms turn. That’s the world that she comes from as a worker that’s what she’d been doing.

Mary: Usually, what we do is to have a long initial meeting where all the ideas are thrown on the table, everything – whether this is too much or exaggerated – to get a sense of what’s important for us.

Martin: Then, we talked about the period and the circumstances and habits and how they would live back then, about the relevance to today, and whether things have changed or not. This led to discussions about costume and whether we should use modern dress or period costumes.

Mary: We talked about specific moments and when the inspector should first be visible from the beginning which enabled us to say who belonged to which world.

Martin: I researched a lot of images of mills and mills working and undertook a lot of research about what was new and up-and-coming in terms of factories and innovations in that specific year, both in England and worldwide. I studied photographs and researched the first were used when the first sewing machines were utilised. I was really interested in the new inventions of the time.

At the beginning of his plays Priestley attempted to convince his audience that they were safely with the boundaries of what was real and normal and, once he’d done that, he would then seek to destroy those feelings of reality and transport the audience into a fantastical or mysterious realm. Can you describe the creative process that caused you to remove the characters from Priestley’s solid and naturalistic stage setting?

Martin: I dismissed the idea of a naturalistic set very quickly. I felt that if we used a box set that it would be too cosy. If I remember rightly, in the Priestley stage directions he had his set move, to either open up or close down the space. That’s why we chose to create both an
internal and an external world. We added a dimension by physicalizing the girl and by giving her a world to inhabit beyond the dining room of the Birlings.

Mary: Defining the two worlds within the play, the world of the Birling’s and the outside world is what makes this play work today – otherwise it becomes just about domestic detail.

Martin: We wanted to pare the whole thing back and really concentrate on the relationships which are extraordinary.

(How) did the theatre space influence your set design and the way you thought about the set?

Martin: When I was thinking about the two worlds – the wider world and the small, intimate world of the Birlings the first question was about ‘What do we actually need to show?’ In early meetings we talked a lot about shadows and appearances.

Mary: Initially we didn’t know how much we were going to have Eva’s presence at all – we wanted a space where we could explore things.

Martin: Decisions were made about raising the floor and raking it and having the simplicity of a single door. All the while we were thinking about how small we could make the area and the minimum of pieces of furniture that we could get away with. It’s quite a brave space. I was keen to float it so that it wasn’t grounded – to isolate it even more.

Mary: The elevation gave the Birling much more power in relation to the spirit depending on where they stood.

Martin: Also, this remarkably gave us the opportunity for Peter to stand with his back to the audience when he’s on the lower elevation and for the audience still to see the reaction of all of the other characters.

Mary: Another thing about the design is that the characters are somehow presented to the audience – it’s as if we’re presenting them on a plate.

Did you make a model box for the set? (How) did this develop your thinking?

Martin: I have to say it’s one of the fastest designs I’ve ever done. After the meeting I knocked it out in white card and by midnight I was sitting wondering if I’d gone too far.

Mary: For me it’s the first design that we didn’t need to do many hours to clarify detail – it was there. There were specific things to discuss, but nothing vital needed to be changed.

Martin: I knew exactly what we were meant to do from the white card point. After that it meant we could play with colours and with things like how red do we want the edges of the machinery to be, how rusty, how blood-coloured. With the machinery we looked at the texture and wondered how it would impact on the space, where would be soft and where sharp. We felt that the machinery stage left was to soft and too kind, so we added more cogs.
Mary: For a director, once your world is ready and you can see the space that the characters will inhabit you can start thinking specifically. Moments start cooking in your head and presenting themselves to you. You can start really imagining live people.

Martin: The only thing we played with was the size of the table, we began with one size and we decided to shorten it and be even more daring with it by taking 10cm from each end. This had an impact on the way that people could move in the space.

Mary: With the larger table, sometimes the actors felt that they wanted to move and they couldn’t do it, because, every time, someone else would be in the space. We also discussed the importance of the space by the door and how the threshold is a very strong position. We needed stage management to find the right little table to enable us to free the space by the door and not to worry about it opening and closing and traffic into and out of the room.

What impact did the design decisions have on the performance?

Martin: I first recognised the cosiness of the house and I was interested in relationship between the inspector and the girl, so I was really inspired when Mary said that she was going to physicalize that. We made the room as small as we practically could to really give the ghost as much freedom to reveal and exert her presence/influence on the family and to reveal the impact that they’d had on hers.

Mary: By confining and defining the space the actors needed to overcome all of the obstacles of thinking ‘you don’t have anywhere to go’ and to find the variety of expression for the character they play from stillness. The set requires them to use the minimum amount of movement, so when movement happens it means something; it actually needs to be there.

There are few and precious moments when there is a big movement. Actually, it’s only three times in the piece – those moments are there because their importance came through rehearsals.

Martin: Some of the main impacts of the set were for the performers. Practically, as a performer you have the raked stage to deal with and to present your character smoothly, both within the confines of the room and not moving awkwardly due to the incline. It was interesting for them to deal with that and the heels that they have to wear.

Mary: Also, with the female performers they found it interesting having trains on their dresses which led to Maggie moving less and less and revealing more of the character through this.

Martin: At times, in rehearsal when she moved her train to swing over the wall, it’s a real discipline to contain your movement so that this doesn’t happen. As a result, particularly with Maggie, I made the train a lot shorter and the sheer weight of the embroidery on that made it very difficult to move. The dresses are based on original designs from the period.

What were the challenges for your design?
Martin: there were some practical considerations that impacted on my design. One of my early ideas was to have the machinery all moving and to have a wheel coming through the floor but I knew if I’d suggested we were going to put a slot in the floor the crew might not be too keen on it. Also, if we'd had an endless budget, everything, all of the machinery would have moved but, it being static has no detrimental impact on the piece – a lot of people do think it moves just from the lighting effects.

Everything worked brilliantly. It’s a complicated piece in repertoire and I thought it would really challenge the stage crew, but the set did everything we wanted it to do in the way that we wanted. The lighting works really well with it, making the machinery appear as if it’s moving when it’s all absolutely static.

When we first considered the set it had chandelier on it, but it would have caused sightline problems from the circle, it also meant that we’d be stretching the back projection fabric which would have been an impossibility. So Nick broke it up with lights giving it some texture.

We also wanted the chair backs to be open as much as possible so that they didn’t afford a barrier to the table and we could still through them to it. The other thing we discussed was what would the spirit of Eva wear? So I developed some images for her – we felt it was important to present her in the various ways that we heard about her. We wanted to show her dressed appropriately for what she’d be doing. However, she’s not actually a character within the original text; so, we had to consider whether, we could justify the purchase of the five costumes for her character. When we decided on creating Eva’s inserted scenes / moments it became apparent that it was necessary to see her as:

- Factory girl
- Shop girl
- Bar girl
- Desperate and destitute
- In the white night-dress

Also, for the ending of the play we originally talked about whether we could ‘see the body, Eva’s body and, we tried to bring her body up through a table. The table was built with a lift inside it and Eva’s body would through it and appear as if wrapped in a shroud. We tried this concept, but, unfortunately, the reveal didn’t have the intended impact. So we removed it from the production.

Mary It’s a different ending but it doesn’t take away from the production in any way.

How would you describe the style of the set?
Martin: Brutalist – because the world of that era is a very unfeeling world, very mechanical, despite the cosiness of the interior.

Mary One of the things that we achieved is that when the audience comes in they see the full set. There are no tabs, no curtain. So, as an audience member, you know from the word go that you need to think about things, that you might have some work to do. It puts them in a place of knowing what not to expect, their curiosity is aroused because of the concept of the set

Martin: the set creates a dynamic relationship between the characters, between the family and the Inspector and sets up the idea of destruction which we see in the play.