

An Inspector Calls.

In J. B. Priestley's play, *An Inspector Calls*, Sheila goes through a number of important changes. Priestley wrote the play during the great depression. He felt that Britain had stopped caring about their fellow citizens. The character of Sheila Birling is supposed to represent Britain and how it must change. In a way, J. B. Priestley tries to scare the audience into caring about the effects of their actions. There are many ways in which Sheila changes, the main ways being: Sheila is less naïve; less materialistic; she shows empathy towards people; she no longer wants to be protected from the outside world; she becomes less childish and Sheila becomes quite rebellious against her parents and the rest of her family.

At the start of the play, Sheila is very naïve; she does not seem to know a lot about the worlds outside her home and family. Sheila is engaged to Gerald Croft, the son of Mr. Birling's rival business owner, she become suspicious when Gerald avoided her in the summer, but still took his word for it that he'd been working. "Yes – except for last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what happened to you..." This suggests that perhaps Sheila isn't as naïve as she acts. This is why Priestley uses stage directions such as (half playful, half serious), to reinforce her naïve attitude. Another way in which Sheila expresses her naivety to the audience is through her language and behaviour. For example, "I'm sorry **Daddy**. Actually, I was listening." Whilst the word Daddy can be considered naïve in itself, the fact that Sheila displays that she was not paying attention to her father, to the audience, could also indicate why Sheila is so naïve. She was also paying more attention to her beautiful, new ring. J. B. Priestley also uses stage directions to convey this element of naivety to the audience; (Noticing that Sheila is still admiring her ring). Positioning and body language were the very important techniques used in this scene, she would be away from the rest of the actors/actresses and possibly holding her hand, as Priestley had to make it obvious to the audience that Sheila wasn't paying attention.

This brings me onto the next point in my introduction.

Another way that Sheila changes is that she becomes less materialistic. Sheila comes from a rich family. This is mostly conveyed through the set. It is the dining-room of a fairly large suburban house. It has good solid furniture etc. Only rich families could afford large houses and nice furniture in 1912. Sheila can afford lots of nice things but still seems to enjoy getting new things. At the start of the play, Sheila is obsessed with her ring and how beautiful it is; "...look – Mummy – isn't it a beauty?" however she changes and objects become less important to her. We know that Sheila was fixated on her ring during her father's speech but, in act two, Sheila gives the ring back to Gerald, "... Gerald, I think you'd better take this with you." (She hands him the ring.). This is an obvious statement to the