

英语注释读物



An Inspector Calls

罪惡之案

外语教学与研究出版社



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A Play in Three Acts

J. B. Priestley

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【英】普里斯特利 著

施 华 注释



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内 容 简 介

约·博·普里斯特利 (John Boynton Priestley) (1894—)，英国著名小说家、剧作家和散文作家。《罪恶之家》(An Inspector Calls) 是他在1947年写的三幕话剧。

全剧以一个年轻女工之死为线索，描写了英国资本家伯令和他的一家，警察局探长以及一个没有出场的女工的形象。探长以步步紧逼的调查方法，证明伯令一家每一个人都要对这个女工的死负责。

剧中清晰的推理和紧凑的情节交织在一起。探长是个若有若无的神秘人物，女工仿佛是好几个人的化身，最后似乎根本没有一个女工自杀这回事。当资本家伯令得意忘形举杯庆祝“骗局”被揭穿时，剧本在结尾处重复开始的情节，原来一切都是真的。这样，观众明白了不管伯令一家是否真的逼死了这个女工，资产阶级对工人的压迫则是铁的事实。

《罪恶之家》直译应为《探长来访》。剧本曾被改编成电影，影片在我国上映时得到观众的好评。

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

CHARACTERS

Arthur Birling

Sybil Birling

Sheila Birling

Eric Birling

Gerald Croft

Edna

Inspector Goole

ACTS

All three acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining-room of the Birlings's house in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands. It is an evening in spring, 1912.

ACT I

The dining-room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has good solid furniture of the period. The general effect is substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy and home-like.¹

At rise of curtain, the four Birlings and Gerald are seated at the table, with Arthur Birling at one end, his wife at the other, Eric downstage, and Sheila and Gerald seated upstage. Edna, the parlour-maid, is just clearing the table, which has no cloth, of dessert plates and champagne glasses, etc, and then replacing them with decanter of port, cigar box and cigarettes. Port glasses are already on the table. All five are in evening dress of the period, the men in tails and white ties,² not dinner jackets. Arthur Birling is a heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in his speech.³ His wife is about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior. Sheila is a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited. Gerald Croft is an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town.⁴ Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.

BIRLING: Giving us the port, Edna? That's right. (*He pushes it towards Eric.*) You ought to like this port, Gerald. As a matter of fact, Finchley¹ told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.

GERALD: Then it'll be all right. The governor² prides himself on being a good judge of port. I don't pretend to know much about it.

SHEILA (*gaily possessively*):³ I should jolly well think not, Gerald. I'd hate you to know all about port—like one of these purple-faced men.

BIRLING: Here, I'm not a purple-faced old man.

SHEILA: No, not yet. But then you don't know all about port—do you?

BIRLING (*noticing that his wife has not taken any*): Now then, Sybil, you must take a little to-night. Special occasion, y'know, eh?

SHEILA: Yes, go on, Mummy. You must drink to our health.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): Very well, then. Just a little, thank you.⁴ (*To Edna, who is about to go, with tray*) All right, Edna. I'll ring from the drawing-room when we want coffee. Probably in about half an hour.

EDNA (*going*): Yes, ma'am.

Edna goes out. They now have all the glasses filled. Birling beams at them and clearly relaxes.

BIRLING: Well, well—this is very nice. Very nice. Good dinner too, Sybil. Tell cook from me.

GERALD(*politely*): Absolutely first-class.

MRS. BIRLING (*reproachfully*): Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things —⁵

BIRLING: Oh—come, come—I'm treating Gerald like one of the family. And I'm sure he won't object.

SHEILA (*with mock aggressiveness*): Go on, Gerald — just you object!¹

GERALD (*smiling*): Wouldn't dream of it. In fact, I insist upon being one of the family now. I've been trying long enough,² haven't I? (*As she does not reply with more insistence*) Haven't I? You know I have.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): Of course she does.

SHEILA (*half serious, half playful*): Yes—except for all last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you.

GERALD: And I've told you—I was awfully busy at the works all that time.

SHEILA (*same tone as before*): Yes, that's what you say.

MRS. BIRLING: Now, Sheila, don't tease him. When you're married you'll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had.

SHEILA: I don't believe I will. (*Half playful, half serious, to Gerald*) So you be careful.

GERALD: Oh—I will, I will.

Eric suddenly guffaws. *His parents look at him.*

SHEILA (*severely*): Now—What's the joke?

ERIC: I don't know—really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.

SHEILA: You're squiffy.³

ERIC: I'm not.

MRS. BIRLING: What an expression, Sheila! Really, the things you girls pick up these days!⁴

ERIC: If you think that's the best she can do—⁵

SHEILA: Don't be an ass, Eric.

MRS. BIRLING: Now stop it, you two. Arthur, what about this famous toast of yours?¹

BIRLING: Yes, of course. (*Clears his throat*) Well, Gerald, I know you agreed that we should only have this quiet little family party.² It's a pity Sir George and—er—Lady Groft can't be with us, but they're abroad and so it can't be helped. As I told you, they sent me a very nice cable—couldn't be nicer. I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this—

MRS. BIRLING: Much nicer really.

GERALD: I agree.

BIRLING: So do I, but it makes speech-making more difficult—

ERIC (*not too rudely*): Well, don't do any. We'll drink to their health and have done with it.

BIRLING: No, we won't. It's one of the happiest nights of my life. And one day, I hope, Eric, when you've a daughter of your own, you'll understand why. Gerald, I'm going to tell you frankly, without any pretences, that your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me. She'll make you happy, and I'm sure you'll make her happy. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now—though Crofts Limited³ is both older and bigger than Birling and Company⁴ — and now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together — for lower costs and higher prices.

GERALD: Hear, hear!⁵ And I think my father would agree to that.

MRS. BIRLING: Now, Arthur, I don't think you ought to talk business on an occasion like this.

SHEILA: Neither do I. All wrong.

BIRLING: Quite so, I agree with you. I only mentioned it in passing. What I did want to say was — that Sheila's a lucky girl — and I think you're a pretty fortunate young man too, Gerald.

GERALD: I know I am — this once anyhow.

BIRLING (*raising his glass*): So here's wishing the pair of you — the very best that life can bring. Gerald and Sheila.

MRS. BIRLING (*raising her glass, smiling*): Yes, Gerald. Yes, Sheila darling. Our congratulations and very best wishes!

GERALD: Thank you.

MRS. BIRLING: Eric!¹

ERIC (*rather noisily*): All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes — but she's not bad really. Good old Sheila!²

SHEILA: Chump!³ I can't drink to this, can I? When do I drink?

GERALD: You can drink to me.

SHEILA (*quiet and serious now*): All right then. I drink to you, Gerald.

For a moment they look at each other.

GERALD (*quietly*): Thank you. And I drink to you — and hope I can make you as happy as you deserve to be.

SHEILA (*trying to be light and easy*): You be careful — or I'll start weeping.⁴

GERALD (*smiling*): Well, perhaps this will help to stop it. (*He produces a ring case.*)

SHEILD (*excited*): Oh — Gerald — you've got it— is it the one you wanted me to have?

GERALD (*giving the case to her*): Yes — the very one.

SHEILA (*taking out the ring*): Oh — it's wonderful! Look — Mummy — isn't it a beauty? Oh — darling — (*She kisses Gerald hastily.*)

ERIC: Steady the Buffs!¹

SHEILA (*who has put ring on, admiringly*): I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged.

MRS. BIRLING: So you ought, darling. It's a lovely ring. Be careful with it.

SHEILA: Careful! I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you, Gerald. Now, Arthur, if you've no more to say, I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing-room and leave you men —

BIRLING (*rather heavily*): I just want to say this. (*Noticing that Sheila is still admiring her ring*) Are you listening, Sheila? This concerns you too. And after all I don't often make speeches at you —

SHEILA: I'm sorry, Daddy. Actually I was listening.

She looks attentive, as they all do. He holds them for a moment before continuing.

BIRLING: I'm delighted about this engagement and I hope it won't be too long before you're married. And I want to say this. There's a good deal of silly talk about these days² — but — and I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know

what he's about — I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk. When you marry, you'll be marrying at a very good time — and soon it'll be an even better time. Last month, just because the miners came out on strike, there's a lot of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the near future. Don't worry. We've passed the worst of it. We employers at last are coming together to see that our interests — and the interests of Capital — are properly protected. And we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.

GERALD: I believe you're right, sir.

ERIC: What about war?

BIRLING: Glad you mentioned it, Eric. I'm coming to that. Just because the Kaiser¹ makes a speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin talking nonsense, you'll hear some people say that war's inevitable. And to that I say — fiddlesticks! The Germans don't want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilised folks in the Balkans.² And why? There's too much at stake these days.³ Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war.

ERIC: Yes, I know — but still —

BIRLING: Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet. And I'm talking as a hard-headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war. The world's developing so fast that it'll make war impossible. Look at the progress we're making. In a year or two we'll have aeroplanes that will be able to go anywhere. And look at the way the automobile's making headway — bigger and faster all the time. And then ships. Why, a friend of mine went over this new liner last week—the *Titanic*⁴—she sails next week —

forty-six thousand eight hundred tons—forty-six thousand eight hundred tons—New York in five days—and every luxury — and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable. That's what you've got to keep your eye on, facts like that, progress like that—and not a few German officers talking nonsense and a few scare-mongers here making a fuss about nothing. Now you three young people, just listen to this—and remember what I'm telling you now. In twenty or thirty years time—let's say, in 1940—you may be giving a little party like this — your son or daughter might be getting engaged—and I tell you, by that time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations¹ and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere—except of course in Russia, which will always be behindhand naturally.

MRS. BIRLING: Arthur!

As Mrs. Birling shows signs of interrupting.

BIRLING: Yes, my dear, I know—I'm talking too much. But you youngsters just remember what I said. We can't let these Bernard Shaws and H. G. Wellses do all the talking.² We hard-headed practical business men must say something sometime. And we don't guess—we've had experience—and we know.

MRS. BIRLING (*rising—the others rise*): Yes, of course, dear. Well—don't keep Gerald in here too long. Eric—I want you a minute.³

She and Sheila and Eric go out. Birling and Gerald sit down again.

BIRLING: Cigar?

GERALD: No, thanks. Can't really enjoy them.

BIRLING (*taking one himself*): Ah, you don't know

what you're missing. I like a good cigar. (*Indicates decanter*) Help yourself.

GERALD: Thank you.

Birling lights his cigar and Gerald, who has lit a cigarette, helps himself to port, then pushes decanter to Birling.

BIRLING: Thanks. (*Confidentially*) By the way, there's something I'd like to mention—in strict confidence—while we're by ourselves. I have an idea that your mother—Lady Croft—while she doesn't object to my girl—feels you might have done better for yourself socially—

Gerald, rather embarrassed, begins to murmur some dissent, but Birling checks him.

No, Gerald, that's all right. Don't blame her. She comes from an old county family—landed people and so forth¹—and so it's only natural. But what I wanted to say is—there's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List.² Just a knighthood, of course.

GERALD: Oh—I say—congratulations!

BIRLING: Thanks. But it's a bit too early for that. So don't say anything. But I've had a hint or two. You see, I was Lord Mayor here two years ago when Royalty visited us.³ And I've always been regarded as a sound useful party man.⁴ So—well—I gather there's a very good chance of a knighthood—so long as we behave ourselves, don't get into the police court or start a scandal⁵—ch? (*Laughs complacently.*)

GERALD (*laughs*): You seem to be a nice well-behaved family—⁶

BIRLING: We think we are—

GERALD: So if that's the only obstacle, sir, I think you might as well accept my congratulations now.

BIRLING: No, no, I couldn't do that. And don't say anything yet.

GERALD: Not even to my mother? I know she'd be delighted.

BIRLING: Well, when she comes back, you might drop a hint to her. And you can promise her that we'll try to keep out of trouble during the next few months.¹

They both laugh

Eric enters.

ERIC: What's the joke? Started telling stories?

BIRLING: No. Want another glass of port?

ERIC: (*sitting down*): Yes, please. (*Takes decanter and helps himself.*) Mother says we mustn't stay too long. But I don't think it matters. I left 'em talking about clothes again. You'd think a girl had never had any clothes before she gets married. Women are potty about 'em.²

BIRLING: Yes, but you've got to remember, my boy, that clothes mean something quite different to a woman. Not just something to wear—and not only something to make 'em look prettier—but—well, a sort of sign or token of their self-respect.

GERALD: That's true.

ERIC (*eagerly*): Yes, I remember (*but he checks himself.*)

BIRLING: Well, what do you remember?

ERIC (*confused*): Nothing.

BIRLING: Nothing?

GERALD (*amused*): Sounds a bit fishy to me.³

BIRLING (*taking it in same manner*): Yes, you don't

know what some of these boys get up to nowadays.¹ More money to spend and time to spare than I had when I was Eric's age. They worked us hard in those days and kept us short of cash.² Though even then—we broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes.³

GERALD: I'll bet you did.⁴

BIRLING (*solemnly*): But this is the point. I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don't seem to understand now, when things are so much easier, is that a man has⁵ to make his own way—has to look after himself—and his family too, of course, when he has one—and so long as he does that he won't come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks⁶ 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.⁶ But take my word for it, you youngsters—and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience—that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own—and—

We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell.

Birling stops to listen.

ERIC: Somebody at the front door.

BIRLING: Edna'll answer it. Well, have another glass of port, Gerald—and then we'll join the ladies. That'll stop me giving you good advice.

ERIC: Yes, you've piled it on a bit tonight,⁷ Father.

BIRLING: Special occasion. And feeling contented, for once. I wanted you to have the benefit of my experience.

Edna enters.

EDNA: Please, sir, an inspector's called.

BIRLING: An inspector? What kind of inspector?

EDNA: A police inspector. He says his name's Inspector Goole.

BIRLING: Don't know him. Does he want to see me?

EDNA: Yes, sir. He says it's important.

BIRLING: All right, Edna. Show him in here. Give us some more light.

Edna does, then goes out.

I'm still on the Bench.¹ It may be something about a warrant.

GERALD (*lightly*): Sure to be. Unless Eric's been up to something. (*Nodding confidentially to Birling*) And that would be awkward, wouldn't it?

BIRLING (*humorously*): Very.

ERIC (*who is uneasy sharply*): Here, what do you mean?

GERALD (*lightly*): Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really.

ERIC (*still uneasy*): Well, I don't think it's very funny.

BIRLING (*sharply, staring at him*): What's the matter with you?

ERIC (*defiantly*): Nothing.

EDNA (*opening door, and announcing*): Inspector Goole.

The Inspector enters, and Edna goes, closing door after her. The Inspector need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.² He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of