

**Mahfuz Abdelrahman's Adaptation of *An Inspector Calls*
by J.B. Priestley: An Exercise in Transposition**

Hoda Soliman Mohammed

*Lecturer in English and Comparative Literature, Faculty of Arts,
Department of English, Menoufya Unviversity*

Abstract:

Abdelrahman's play *How Beautiful We Are!* is an imitation of J.B. Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*. The form of the play *How Beautiful We Are!* perfectly suited the dramatic purpose of the author, as he could use a traditional Arab soothsayer as the equivalent of Priestley's police inspector. As an adaptation, Abdelrahman's *How Beautiful We Are!* is dissimilar in the setting and social class, but very similar in the severe moral judgment as it ends up passing on the characters. The two plays share the same structure, they differ in the content as a result of their difference in the values, morals, and attitudes they reflect. So Abdelrahman adapted Priestley's play, transposing it to be suitable for the Arab culture.

Keywords:-

Adaptation – Transposition – Imitation – Soothsayer – Power – Dissimilarity

الملخص:

تعد مسرحية " ما أجملنا " لمحفوظ عبد الرحمن محاكاة لمسرحية " زيارة مفتش " لبرستلي، إذ أن قالب مسرحية " ما أجملنا " يتناسب تماما مع الهدف الدرامي للمؤلف حيث تمكن من استخدام العراف العربى التقليدى مثلما استخدم برستلي مفتش الشرطة. ولكونها اقتباسا، تعتبر مسرحية عبد الرحمن مختلفة عن مسرحية برستلي من حيث مكان ووقت الأحداث والطبقة الاجتماعية، ولكنها تتشابه الى حد بعيد معها من حيث التقييم الأخلاقى الصارم الذى يتطور مع تطور الشخصيات. ان كلا المسرحيتين تشتركان فى ذات البنية الدرامية ولكنها تختلفان فى المحتوى نتيجة لاختلافهما فى القيم والأخلاق والاتجاهات التى تعكسها كل منهما. ان محفوظ عبد الرحمن قد قام باقتباس لمسرحية برستلي ناقلا اياها لتناسب الثقافة العربية.

الكلمات الدالة:

اقتباس - نقل - محاكاة - عراف - القوة - عدم التشابه

Introduction:

Mahfuz Abdelrahman's theatre belongs to the so-called Arabic Literature of disillusionment – that is to say, the loss of the optimism that accompanied the 1952 Revolution. Born to a middle-class family in 1932, Mahfuz Abdelrahman grew up in a small town in Lower Egypt, where his father worked as a police officer, to learn at first hand the suffering of poor people in rural areas. Moving with his family from place to place in Egypt as his father's job took them, Abdelrahman learnt how power worked in the provinces from a very early age. His talents

matured early in life, taking the form of articles in newspapers and short stories revealing what the young man, along with his coevals, believed what their country needed most, namely freedom from foreign domination and even-handed economic policies. This resulted from the atmosphere of the period: King Fuad I controlled the government, tampered with the recently adopted constitution and worked with the British colonial power to entrench his newly acquired authority as Egypt's first King, following the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate system in 1924. The official system under monarchy was capitalist, although a small socialist party was permitted, and the British occupation was regarded as the major evil which united the Egyptians in opposition. The relative freedom of speech allowed did bear fruit, in the form of the 1952 coup d'état. Still, even though the coup was supported by the majority, some of those who had fought to put an end to inequality in most fields felt betrayed. As much as the coup was hailed as a liberating movement declaring an end to the era of slavery, what the people felt was the opposite, as no one was allowed to leave the country without the signature of the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, the socialist minister of culture was working to ensure a flourishing culture industry. He wanted plays to be staged, then televised. In few years' time, a reasonably large audience was created. Some actors, directors and dramatists formed their own companies, creating what we still refer to as the commercial theatre. Theatre became a means to say what one wanted to a live audience. Writers made use of this medium to

express ideas they could neither publish nor broadcast. Their favourite material was historical, taking a historical incident and making it reflect their view of the present. In Arabic, this was called *Isqat*, meaning “projection. An example might be a play where the protagonist betrays his comrades, getting rid of them one by one until he finally has all the power in his own hands, as Nasser did to the members of the Revolutionary command council and emerged as sole ruler.

It was safest to present historical events as though the writer had only historical veracity in mind, while infusing the characters with whatever feelings and ideas he wanted the audience to receive. Still, Abdelrahman al-Sharqawi’s play *Al-Hussein the Rebel* was deemed too inflammatory, It was neither the first nor the last time that the regime was ‘afraid’ of a stage play.

The defeat of 1967 had a devastating effect on young writers, as they had pinned their hopes on the power of the leaders and the Egyptian army. While the defeat could never make them abandon their high ideals, revived in a speech after speech by their leaders, most of them realized that the fault was historical, part of the Arab system of government down the centuries. Mahfuz Abdelrahman was shocked by the revelations that followed the defeat. But like most writers, he still had hopes that the people could rise again.

Mahfuz Abdelrahman left Egypt in 1972 after Nasser’s era and during Sadat’s new era: the latter declared that he would rid the Egyptian people of fear by controlling the secret police and allowing political parties to be formed, in contrast to what Nasser had done. Abdelrahman went East, to

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where newly-discovered oil enabled Gulf governments to create a thriving business for television drama. He found in the new medium a means of honing his skills as a writer. Armed with knowledge of history, his work attracted large audience throughout the 1970s. Television studios were established in many Gulf countries, especially for the now-popular television soap operas. Actors and actresses often abandoned the theatre in Egypt and went to the Gulf to work in those studios. Writers also competed for a share in the flourishing industry, but Mahfuz Abdelrahman outstane them all. He towered above all aspiring television authors with his taut dramatic structure, and the perspicacity of his vision. *How Beautiful We Are!* Represents his work at its best after his return to Egypt in 1978.

Abdelrahman wrote many one-act plays and long plays published and performed in most of the theaters of the Arab countries, where he invites the reader and viewer to enjoy the beauty of language and the flavor of history with his dramatic text, and well-written characters. Abdelrahman draws upon historical material. He takes from history and pours into a contemporary reality that teems with intricacies of the past.

Six of Abdelrahman's plays used political projection. After plays written in the seventies, other texts followed in the eighties such as: *Planet of Mice*, *Beware*, *How Beautiful We Are!* and *The Trial of Mr. Meem*.

How Beautiful We Are! is an imitation of J.B. Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*. The form of the play *How Beautiful We Are!* perfectly suited the dramatic purpose of the author, as he could use a traditional

Arab soothsayer as the equivalent of Priestley's police inspector: This character is, in other words, made to carry out the work of inspector Goole, without being trammelled by legal obstacles. The theme of the play is, of course, fratricide and allied sins which must remain hidden at all costs once the perpetrators are in power. The author may or may not have had a specific incident in mind, namely the fact that an ancestor of a present-day Arabian country had risen to power by stabbing his two siblings to death *in bed*. To ensure that this historical fact not be evoked, Abdelrahman develops a convoluted plot far beyond sibling rivalries. In fact, the situation is not dissimilar to in *King Lear* where family ties are distorted. Everybody in the ruler's household is driven by the primal instincts of power and lust (here called 'love') so that both motives, deep within each, are finally allowed to (or made to) surface by the mysterious fortune-teller who, we find out in the end, is only an illusion.

How true to history, and to Arabian history in particular, this plot is, may be difficult to establish. At one level it may appear to be a modern dramatic handling of the 'power passion' that marked most eras of Arab history. The convolutions of the plot themselves are a reminder of the typical anecdotes told by the people about their rulers; this is an integral part of political life in the Arab world. Whenever a new king or a new ruler comes to power, tongues will wag revealing or inventing conspiracy theories about everybody involved in his accession, and, when the theories proliferate, someone pretending to be truly 'in the know' comes forward to paint a strange picture of the ruler and his immediate family and entourage. There will be those ready to spin many an amusing yarn

about the ruler and others unwilling to believe them. So the best way is to have an 'inspector call', in the guise of an illusory fortune-teller, and let the main characters speak for themselves.

This is, of course, the advantage of the dramatic form, especially as it takes here an ostensible 'whodunnit' structure. As often happens in an Agatha Christie novel, all the characters in this play are brought together and each is made to reveal his role in the intricate plot. Abdelrahman proves to have full mastery of this form: gradually he makes each character contribute to the unveiling of the truth, until the entire ruling 'power house' is shown to be guilty. Behind it all, of course, were the revelations about the private lives of members of the ruling clique in Egypt since 1952. Stories of the riches amassed by some of those army officers are recent history; the confessions of I'timad Khurshid, a woman of doubtful repute, were published in the 1970s revealing the darker side of the 'honourable' members of the junta, especially the intelligence services. In real life we cannot have them put in one room to speak for themselves; but in drama we can. The fortune teller comes carrying his predictions about the future. The Wali, the princess Saphar, Usher and Tanweer are discussing with him certain matters but he gives his own introduction.

Fortune-teller: Honourable assembly, I know a great deal, and if you are all ears, a long time will pass before I lapse into silence; but this is only on one condition: that no one ask me how I knew, otherwise I am wholeheartedly ready to answer your questions. My guess is that you won't pose any. I am

rather surprised that you want to see me in the first place, since what I am going to say you already know quite well. The past is imprinted in your stored memories. I am not of those who fabricates stories about the future for all that, I think my presence is not required! But you may feel content because someone was able to pull aside the curtain on some of what has been buried, Just an entertaining skill, but in fact I don't think it's funny, furthermore, my gracious masters and gentle ladies, I'm afraid you will not be amused.

Wali: An excellent introduction by a devious charlatan of a new kind.

Fortune-teller: An insult that I do not deserve from his royal highness whose heart trembled when I came in.

Wali: (Angrily) Me? Afraid *of you*?!

Fortune-teller: This is the first secret to unlock.

Princess: Do not be angry my Lord, it is not our habit to lose our temper unless with those who deserve it, and this man has come to alleviate the boredom we are dying from. Obviously he can, because he is different somehow and this is good.

Fortune-teller: Your highness, if you wish I could tell you what you ate during these past few days? (*How Beautiful We Are!* pp.136-137)

The beauty of *How Beautiful We Are!* is primarily its dramatic irony; the revelations, however grave, do not seem in any way ugly; they do not affect the semblance of beauty of the ruling house, so long as its

members are willing to brush them all under the carpet. So they pretend in the end that the soothsayer never arrived; that nothing has been revealed; that it was all a scam, and a wicked one at that. The contrast between what 'we really are' and what 'we appear to be' will never be shown, as power hides all, just as time will heal all such wounds as have occurred one evening as a result of a playwright's fantasy.

An old woman: Although I came from far way, I know you well. I am aware that you want to hear a false story. I know you want to hear an exciting imaginary noble story as if adorned with gold and watered with nobility. You want a story that roams the country and causes the heart to tremble; how beautiful the heart is when it sadly shivers, deep down just before sleep.

(How Beautiful We Are! p. 132)

Part of the beauty of the play is due to this irony, but the play owes also much to the quasi-realistic form Abdelrahman adopts. It allows him to recreate situations with their pent-up passions from the past: in a single one-act play we have many revelations and genuine reactions. Using the vital dramatic method of immediate action, often called the *immediacy of action*, the author recreates a living past in delineating the so-called 'beautiful' picture of the present.

An old woman: Therefore, I'm here to tell you the story of a perfectly happy man. He is a prefect to an emirate, and rules it with justice, but unfortunately his people think otherwise. And I will tell you about his wife, the happy princess: how could

she be otherwise when she rules the big emirate? If she rules well, she reaps the praise of the people, and if she does not, it is her husband who is to blame. I will also tell you about the minister of this emirate, the man who serves his master day and night to obtain his satisfaction, I will further tell his story and how palaces can be lonely places. My purpose is to tell you about happy people, shining with nobility, speaking wisely and riding the steed of justice day and night, and how wonderful and beautiful they are.

(*How Beautiful We Are!* p. 132)

A master stroke at the end makes these revelations go *back to the past*: The characters have forgotten them, or should forget them, as nobody knows anything about them apart from the immediate participants in the action. This is what they tell the audience, asking them to forget, perhaps to forgive too, but the audiences already know that what they saw was real, and many of them can neither forget nor forgive.

Mahfuz Abdelrahman as a dramatist manages to prepare the reader, or the audience, for a creative play reflecting the beauty of language and the greatness of history, depicting issues and themes that carry the longing of humans on a journey in search of dignity, freedom, and justice. Abdelrahman attaches more importance to issues related to human suffering such as justice, humanity, and collective consciousness. He presents these with a coherent plot, using poetic dramatic dialogues to achieve his aim. The play opens with the Wali talking to Ushar about his worries regarding the country; instead, he is worried about his crown.

Wali: I am terribly worried about this country, Kaffi, I care for its prosperity and glory. However, some of my boys are messing around in the mountains and impeding my progress. I know it's nothing more than kids fooling around but I would like to know that this folly is driving half of my army to distraction, eating half of my resources, and disturbing my peace, of mind. I think they couldn't do anything without the support of this Badr El Bashir who is misleading them and dragging me into a war high in cost, and cheap in victory.

Usher: It has cost us a lot so far, but now need not cost us more than one Dinar: the price of the dagger Badr El Bashir is to be stabbed with, sleeping peacefully in his remote den.

Wali: That means they have been infiltrated by one of your men.

Usher: I found it difficult and instead I recruited one of them.

Wali: Do you trust him?

Usher: He is his friend, and there is none more vicious than one friend turning against another.

(How Beautiful We Are! pp. 134-135)

How Beautiful We Are! is about lying and betrayal in order to gain power. In a clear nod to *Hamlet*, a man is prepared to kill his brother and make love to his wife for the crown. Even the wife betrays her husband with his brother, who marries his wife to become king. Shakespeare is still our contemporary.

An old woman: I came from the oldest ages after all I am a lover of days of yore. I lived in the time of Cain and Abel, and witnessed how brother killed brother, and still does.

(*How Beautiful We Are!* p. 131)

In his dealing with the issues of human desires and the search for dignity, justice and freedom, Abdelrahman invites the reader and viewer to enjoy the beauty of language and to savor history.

An old woman: This evening, I came out of my cold solitude to tell you a story. I shunned the company of people in search of wisdom, but apparently wisdom may neither be found amidst crowds or in the wilderness.

(*How Beautiful We Are!* p. 131)

Abdelrahman says: “History is my realm where I find a place for my feelings, thoughts and characters that teem with life. It's a real pleasure to write history and project its symbols on reality.” (My translation, Idris, Shreen, 2016) The old woman in *How Beautiful We Are* appears to be not only a narrator but a kind of personification of literature itself:

I came from between the covers of a book; my diversion is to impersonate the eloquent storyteller, Scheherazade. But even in books, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. It's said there's nothing new under the sun. Scheherazade tells stories to amuse you, then the story startlingly stops! How could I ever find words that bring joy to the heart of man, provided they are as clear as a dewdrop?

(*How Beautiful We Are!* p. 131)

Now the character of the seer emerges to reveal their own never-to-be-hidden reality. Everybody is in search of their own interests and pleasures, from the maid and the minister to the governor and the Queen. It's a state of conflict to reach power, where everyone lies and hides his or her faults in order to keep up appearances in front of the other.

An old woman: As for that seat of power, it is no longer an amusement now that fathers and sons have fought each other over it.

(How Beautiful We Are! p. 132)

Characters are able to conceal their underlying motives with the help of masks that hide their malicious reality, from all save the seer, the main mover of the events and the mirror revealing the truth of each character.

Lighting is used to communicate meaning in many scenes, especially when facing the reality of each character. Sound effects, are also used to great effect, avoiding the traditional ready-made music during the dramatic conflict and revelation of intentions. Add to this the use of smoke, which was not a commonly used effect at the time.

The curtain rises very slowly and maybe with a creak-like sound of an antique door and through a dim light that increases very slowly and during the events of the first part of the play we are faced with a situation that holds secrets within it, that should not be known but for what we are going to see.

(How Beautiful We Are! p. 133)

The general atmosphere at the beginning: the light, music and motion gives the impression of the calm before the storm and

when the curtains rise, Wali will be busy talking to his Usher, Kaffi.

(How Beautiful We Are! p. 134)

The decor is appropriate to the nature of the characters that live in the shadow of power, in terms of their level under the throne, while costumes are a mix of ancient and modern. He depends upon the role of the Samarqand fortune-teller to predict the future of the Wali and the Princess. Tanweer trusts his words and Usher is welcoming him.

Usher: I'm keeping a big surprise from you.

Princess: Out with it... Knowing that you're setting something up will certainly amuse me even though you are preparing nothing and you're only making us eager for a worthless thing.

Usher: There is an excellent Fortune-teller outside.

Princess: Oh Kaffi, how wonderful! Nothing is closer to the heart than the truth that lies hidden.

Saphar: Your highness, some Fortune-tellers are skillful, have you forgotten the Samarqand Fortune-teller? He surprised us with his words about our past, and some of what he said about our future did come to pass.

Princess: Do you think so? (To the Usher) Bring in your man, he could be a good liar ... who knows, we are in need of entertainment.

(Exit Usher)

Saphar: Lots of them lie, but the Samarqandi didn't tell a single lie.

Tanweer: Damn him, he said I would fall off something high, then I fell off my horse.

(How Beautiful We Are! p. 135-136)

Abdelrahman began his career in 1975, concluding it with the play *Belqeis* presented by the National Theatre after the so-called “January Revolution” of 2011. This drew on the articles of top critics in Egypt and the Arab world. Perhaps the motivation for the work was Abdelrahman's concern about issues of the Arab individual and his or her relationship to government systems, as well as invoking history in a contemporary context in order to open the debate on current issues, in elegant language.

Abdul-Ghani adds, Abdul Rahman's characters have turned into patterns or functions, as he depicted every person in such a manner that makes of him or her a type. In other words, he did not follow the style of developing a person into a character, by virtue of the dramatic construction he had chosen. But he failed to provide the social dimension of each style, as characters fall short of convincing expression of their roles... The idea of resistance.

(My trans., Ewais, Mohammed, 2013)

It is important to look innocent and honest in front of the community!

Perhaps what I like most, in general, in this text is the fact that it fits almost all times when humans make mistakes and try to entomb them into their inner self or oblivion. Then they appear

in front of others looking completely different as if crying *How Beautiful we are!* though, of course, they bear no trace of beauty, but their appearance may reflect so. What is important is to keep up appearances in front of the community, people or country and others. (My trans., Bakeer, Amal, 2008)

He lies for power and the throne; he kills, or tries to, for this same reason, whether or not he was able to carry out what he intended. Similarly, the minister lies and will do anything to cling to power, be it murder, theft, etc., even if the people closest to him were killed. The princess looks beautiful and chaste while she betrays her husband, Prince Sultan with her lover, the husband of her maid. The maid also has an Achilles heel. What matters is that all these sins are revealed, disclosed to all by the ghost, sage, or seer who elicits their confessions. All are convicted in front of everyone. The flaws exposed are not foibles but deadly sins: not merely avarice or opportunism, but the willingness to kill in order to reach their goals. In the end, everyone is in a hysterical state, but.. after all... *How Wonderful We are!*

The most important characteristic of Abdelrahman is dealing with myth in a transparent mystic sense. Abdelrahman projects his fancies on myth or history, tapping into the collective memory in order to cut through to contemporary political issues. Critic Abdul Ghani Dawood maintains that: “The works of Mahfouz Abdelrahman confirm politicizing the content, which is not in isolation from reality and theoretical difficulties. They seek to clarify its relationship with reality,

but indirectly chosen for itself. His plays are of a political nature and offer a different theater” (My trans. Idris, Shreen, 2016).

The parallels with *An Inspector Calls* are direct yet the differences in setting and, most importantly, culture and politics, make of *How Beautiful We Are!* a masterful adaptation. *An Inspector Calls* is a three-act drama that takes place on a single night reflecting “the prosperous upper middle-class Birling family” (Gale 2004), who live in a comfortable home in the fictional town of Brumley, “an industrial city in the north Midlands” (Priestley 1947). Priestley wrote in the mid-1940’s and set the play in the Edwardian era; in contrast, Abdelrahman elected to set his play in the much more distant past, in order to distance himself from any parallels with current events, while Priestley had no such restrictions. Still, it is significant that both playwrights set their plays in the past, although the reasons could be interpreted differently: Priestley, by starting with Birling’s monologue about the ‘unsinkable’ *Titanic*, is evoking the audience’s prior knowledge to create dramatic irony. Meanwhile, Abdelrahman is obliged to create a world of kings, queens and soothsayers to avoid the censor’s pen. *Inspector* is built on a fantastic framework of a detective mystery that has hints of the supernatural. The action of the play occurs in an English industrial city, where a young lady commits suicide and a respectable family is subject to a routine investigation and inquiry about her death. An Inspector comes to interrogate the family revealing that all the members of the group are implicated lightly or deeply in the girl’s undoing “A mysterious inspector interrogates a wealthy English family about their responsibility for the

death of a young working class factory girl” (Cousin 2007). The visit of Inspector Goole, who questions the whole family about the suicide of a young working-class lady called Eva Smith (also known as Daisy Renton) reveals that the family has been responsible for her exploitation, social ruin, and abandonment, leading ultimately to her death. The play is regarded as a scathing critique of the hypocrisies of Victorian/Edwardian English society. It is a kind of “drawing room drama.”

At the start, Birling, the head of the household and a local politician, makes a lengthy speech, not only congratulating Gerald and Sheila his daughter, on their engagements, but also commenting on the state of the nation. He predicts prosperity, particularly referring to the example of the “unsinkable” Titanic, which set sail the week earlier. Birling styles himself as a “hard-headed man of business.”

A friend of mine went over this new liner last week—Titanic—she sails next week—forty-six thousand eight hundred tonnes—forty-six thousand eight hundred tonnes— New York in five days—and every luxury—and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.

(An Inspector Calls, Act I)

Priestley is reflecting a sense of irony in Birling’s comments that seem more controversial to the audience in 1946 than today as the sinking of the ship *Titanic* was still in people’s memory. The irony is clear here: as the *Titanic* is destined to sink, so too is Birling’s political ideology about to sink under the Inspector’s interrogation.

The women leave the room, and Eric follows them. Birling and Gerald discuss the fact that Gerald might have “done better for [himself] socially”: Sheila is Gerald’s social inferior. Birling confides to Gerald that he is in the running for a knighthood in the next Honors List. When Eric returns, Birling continues giving advice, and he is passionately announcing his “every man for himself” worldview when the doorbell rings.

We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell.

(An Inspector Calls, Act I)

These words reflect an individualist, capitalist point of view about personal responsibility. According to him, experience proves that he is correct comparing his point of view to that of the more idealistic youngster.

Inspector Goole arrives immediately and refuses a drink from Birling. Birling is surprised, as an ex-Lord Mayor and an alderman, that he has never seen the Inspector before, though he knows the Brumley police force pretty well. Already we can see the attempt by Birling to use his political and social power – manifested in his knowledge of the members of the police force personally – being thwarted by what appears increasingly like an external force of justice. The Inspector explains that he is here to investigate the death of a girl who died two hours ago in the Infirmary after committing suicide by drinking disinfectant. Her name was Eva Smith, and the Inspector brings with him a photograph, which he shows to Birling—but not to anyone else.

It is revealed that Eva Smith worked in Birling's works, from which she was dismissed after being a ringleader in an unsuccessful strike to demand better pay for Birling's workers. Arthur denies responsibility for the girl's death. The Inspector outlines that "a chain of events" might be responsible for the girl's death, and—for the rest of the play—interrogates each member of the family, asking questions about the part they played in Eva Smith's life.

Inspector: ... What happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide. A chain of events.

(An Inspector Calls, Act I)

The Inspector covers the nature of the moral crime that the Birlings and Gerald committed against Eva. Each of them is responsible in part for her death, and all of them together are completely responsible. Priestley seems to say that we are all bound up together and responsible for everyone's life and survival. Similarly, Abdelrahman shows that the rulers of a nation ought to be morally pure and an example for the citizens, but like the Birlings, the rulers are actually filled with corruption, which is bound to create ruin in this country just as the Birlings – as a class – have ruined Eva.

Sheila enters the room and is drawn into the discussion. After prompting from Goole, she admits to recognizing Eva as well. "She confesses that Eva served her in a department store and Sheila contrived to have her fired for an imagined slight. She admits that Eva's behaviour

had been blameless and that the firing was motivated solely by Sheila's jealousy and spite towards a pretty working-class woman" (Morley, Sheridan, 1992).

Sheila feels guilty about her part in Eva's death. It becomes clear that each member of the family might bear part of the responsibility.

Arthur's wife Sybil enters the room and Goole continues his investigations revealing that Eva was also known as Daisy Renton—and it is by this name that she encountered Gerald Croft, with whom she had a protracted love affair. Gerald starts at the mention of the name and Sheila becomes suspicious. He admits that he met a woman by that name in a theatre bar. He gave her money, arranging to meet again. At this time, Goole declares that Gerald had installed Eva as his mistress, giving her money and promises of supporting her before ending the relationship. Sheila is not as upset as one might expect; indeed, she seems to have already guessed why Gerald was absent from their relationship last summer. He put Eva up in a cottage he was looking after, made love to her, and gave her gifts of money, but after a while, he ended the relationship. Gerald asks the Inspector, whose control over the proceedings is now clear, to leave. Arthur and Sybil are horrified. The ashamed Gerald exits the room, Sheila acknowledges his nature and credits him for speaking truthfully but also that their engagement is over. Sheila gives him back his engagement ring.

Sheila [laughs rather hysterically]

Why—you fool—he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet.

You'll see. You'll see. *She looks at him almost in triumph.*

(An Inspector Calls, Act I)

Sheila here provides her keen understanding of the importance of the coming of the Inspector reflecting a fact that he has more information than he is revealing. She is the first character in the play to start to understand the Inspector, leading to a view of her engagement that is more cynical. At this moment, Goole identifies Sybil, Arthur's wife, as the head of a women's charity to which Eva turned for help. Sybil remains icily resistant to accepting any responsibility for the girl's death.

Eva Smith came to her, pregnant, to ask for help from a charity committee. Mrs. Birling used her influence to have the committee refuse to help the girl. Sybil had convinced the committee that the girl was a liar, refusing to give her any financial aid. Sheila asks her mother to stop and not to continue the discussion with Goole as he plays his final trick, forcing Sybil to declare that the "drunken young man" who had made Eva pregnant should give a "public confession, accepting the blame".

So she tells him that the father of the child is the one with whom the true responsibility rests. Once Eric returns, the Inspector interrogates him about his relationship with Eva Smith. He is an unusual character at the beginning as he seems quiet and shy. After brief questioning from Goole, Eric breaks down confessing that he drunkenly slept with Eva. After meeting her in a bar when he was drunk, he forced his way into her rooms, then later returned and continued their sexual relationship. He also gave her money that he had stolen from his father's works, but after a while, Eva broke off the relationship, telling Eric that he did not love

her. Mr and Mrs. Birling are upset at the news. Goole declares that each of the people there that evening had contributed to Eva's suicide announcing that their actions have consequences, and that all people are together in one society saying, "If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish" (*An Inspector Calls*, Act III).

Birling: You'll apologize at once... I'm a public man.

Inspector [massively]

Public men, Mr. Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.

(*An Inspector Calls*, Act II)

In the middle act of the play, the Inspector gains more power and control over the situation, "massively" silences Birling with a putdown. Here Priestley blames Birling for his actions and his failure to see that his public position entails a duty of responsibility to others. The idea is that in the more democratic life of Britain, "public men" are not above morality, nor indeed above the law, and if they have more public privileges, their position of power comes with responsibility.

The Inspector makes a final speech, telling the Birlings, "We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night." He exits (*An Inspector Calls*, Act III).

After his exit, the Birlings initially fight among themselves. Sheila finally suggests that the Inspector might not have been a real police

inspector. Gerald returns, having found out as much from talking to a policeman on the corner of the street, telling them that there may be no “Inspector Goole” on the police force. The Birlings begin to suspect that they have been hoaxed. Significantly, Eric and Sheila, unlike their parents and Gerald, still see themselves as responsible. “He was our police inspector all right,” Eric and Sheila conclude, whether or not he had the state’s authority or was even real.

Birling: ... we’ve been had ... it makes all the difference.

Gerald: Of course!

Sheila: [bitterly]

I suppose we’re all nice people now.

(An Inspector Calls, Act III)

These lines summarize the end of the play and the split between the Birlings and their children. The new generation, symbolized by Sheila and Eric, realizes the importance of the Inspector’s lesson to be more socially responsible. But their parents refuse and fail to learn the lesson focusing on the inspector as a failure. Gerald also supports the Billings (the parents’) attitude, refusing to feel guilty or responsible.

Realizing that they could each have been shown a different photograph, and after calling the Chief Constable to confirm their suspicions, Mr. and Mrs. Birling and Gerald conclude that they have been hoaxed, and they are incredibly relieved. Gerald suggests that there were probably several different girls in each of their stories. They call the Infirmary and learn delightedly that no girl has died that night: the Infirmary has seen no suicide for months. Everyone, it seems, is off the

hook, even if each of their actions was immoral and irresponsible. Only Sheila and Eric fail to agree with that sentiment and recognize the overall theme of responsibility.

As Birling mocks his children's feelings of moral guilt, the phone rings. He answers it and is shocked, revealing the play's final twist: "That was the police. A girl has just died—on her way to the Infirmary—after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here—to ask some—questions" (*An Inspector Calls*, Act III)

So the play ends with a telephone call reporting that a young woman has died, a suspected case of suicide by disinfectant and the police is on his way to question the Birlings. The true identity of Goole is never explained, but it is clear that the family's confessions over the course of the evening are true, and they will be disgraced publicly when news of their involvement in Eva's demise is revealed.

J.B. Priestley creates sympathy for Eva's death. The play focuses on social class: Mrs. Birling is her husband's social superior. Gerald will be Sheila's social superior if they get married and for this reason, Gerald's mother refuses their marriage. Priestley is interested in class more than the individual: this is clear in the treatment of Eva's death, which is partly caused by the way society treats her as a woman, but more importantly, as Mrs Birling puts it, "of the class". So the class system is of more importance. This leads to the central theme of the play which is responsibility as we must all care about others' welfare. This call to consciousness is not shared by all, as the older Birlings and Gerald refuse to accept responsibility for their actions toward Eva, but Sheila and Eric

are shaken by the Inspector's message and the role they played in Eva's suicide. It is obvious that the younger generation is taking more responsibility because they are more emotional and idealistic. In this, Priestley calls for a more communally responsible socialist future for Britain. The whole events are centered around the nature of time: time in the play is in its final twist as the play has gone back in time and it is all about to happen again. Priestley is reflecting Dunne's theory of time which means that the past was still present.

The supernatural element is suggested in the Inspector's name "Goole" which is interpreted as "ghoul"; meaning "ghost" (Gale, Maggie Barbara, 2008). The Inspector is not a real policeman, he is a mysterious interrogator claiming that he has seen the dead body of Eva Smith or Daisy Renton earlier that day after her slow and painful suicide. He has been given "a duty" to investigate the Birlings' responsibility for her death. He supports his statements by referring to a diary left by Eva containing the names of the whole family including Gerlad.

Inspector: She kept a rough sort of diary. And she said there that she had to go away and be quiet and remember "just to make it last longer." She felt there'd never be anything as good again for her, so she had to make it last longer.

(An Inspector Calls, Act II)

The Inspector gives his first insights into Eva's feelings and personality as he says that he finds a diary in her room so this can provide an interpretation that he has a personal connection to Eva; maybe

he is her ghost. Priestley does not tell us about his identity, giving a chance for the actor to suggest a more kind of personal connection.

The course of the play focuses on the fact that Goole knows everything about Eva's life and the involvement of the Birlings in her death, so the purpose of his interrogation is to reveal the family's guilt rather than to uncover any new information. During and after the interrogation, the Birlings doubt that he is actually a real inspector, a doubt later vindicated by Gerald's aforementioned discovery that there is no Inspector Goole in the local police force. Thus, Goole can be considered an "avenging angel" or a supernatural being because of his unexplained or justified knowledge or expectations for the events. Moreover, his final speech seems prophetic as he declares that humanity will learn its lesson in "fire and blood and anguish".

The Inspector is the champion of socialism; he symbolizes Priestley's view, as the dramatist uses biased representations of both capitalism and socialism reflected in Mr Birling and Inspector Goole. This paves the way for his message. Moreover, Priestley focuses on the message of responsibility towards others, as the whole play is set at the turn of the century, centered on a wealthy family at a time of poverty for many people. The inspector is an enigmatic figure, leaving his identity open to interpretation. The inspector's speech is very carefully written, letting the other characters confess the story without needing for him to talk too much. He seems to know the truth, leaving the other characters to realize what they have done. His words reflect his power, as his dramatic power lies in his unrevealed identity. He is the most powerful character, "I warn

you, you're making it worse for yourself" (*An Inspector Calls*, Act II). The Inspector may also be seen as a representation of Jesus who came back to reflect that evils are still in the world as embodied in the Birlings. He may be a journalist, as shown in his direct approach; he may be a social leader who wants to achieve equality for everyone, showing the audience what inequality can do to the poor, taking the poor, innocent young Eva as an obvious example.

The final scene of the play reveals that Goole's interrogation of the family will be followed by a further interrogation by the real police force. So the role of Goole is to warn the family and to prepare them to accept their responsibility for their deeds and behaviour with Eva. (Similar to the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.) Goole has another important role as he forces the characters to question the way they conduct their lives. His final speech "We do not live alone", "we are members of one body", refers to an important theme which is social duty: people should be aware of the effects of their actions on others. The Birlings are forced in the play to confront their responsibility regarding Eva Smith; however they do not think before about how they might have affected her leading unconsciously to her death. This is through the Inspector's outline of the chain of events. Eva's death is not the product of one person, but of a group of people who each acted alone. So her death resulted from several causes. The main message here regarding cause and effect is clear as if Mr. Birling had not sacked Eva, Sheila could not have dismissed her from the Milwards, and Eric and Gerald would not have met her in the bar.

Inspector: Yes, Mr. Croft—in the stalls bar in the Palace Variety Theatre....

Gerald: I happened to look in, one night, after a rather long dull day, and as the show wasn't very bright, I went down into the bar for a drink. It's a favorite haunt of women of the town.

Mrs. Birling: Women of the town?

Birling: Yes, yes. But I see no point in mentioning the subject...

(An Inspector Calls, Act II)

The Palace bar is a place known for prostitutes searching for business, so Eva meets Eric there: she seems to be working as a prostitute. She meets Gerald Croft there also, so the question is what Gerald was doing in the bar at night, it is suggested that he was there after a dull day looking for a drink.

If Eva had never met Eric, she would never have needed to go to the charity commission, to meet Mrs. Birlings with her cruel nature. The chain of events is related to Priestley's fascination with time, revealing how things in time cause or are caused by others. The point here is that Eva has been mistreated by each member of the Birlings and by Gerald also. She is a beautiful young lady with no family, working for her living. Her beauty attracts Gerald and Eric, but Eric sexually exploits her. Her beauty, as explained by all the characters, makes Sheila jealous, confessing that if Eva had been plain, she would have been unlikely to have had her fired. Eva is a woman of morals as she refuses to take the stolen money from Eric in spite of her dire financial situation. She is the

victim of her class. The female characters in the play judge her for not acting according to her class and position in society, for example, Sheila says that Eva laughed at her and did not respect her so she punishes Eva by firing her. Sybil, Mrs. Birling, accuses Eva for behaving proudly and being impertinent rather than being grateful to her social superiors like the Birlings. She is a victim as she suffered from the exploitation of the employer and her sexual abuse by Eric resulting from her sex, class, and poverty.

By the end of the play, it is clear that Eva is not a single person but rather a collective personification of different working class women that the Birlings family exploited. This is declared by Gerald. Eva is invented by Goole to force the family to feel guilty, but the last phone call announcing that a real police inspector is going arrive at the Birlings' house to investigate the suicide of a young girl, leaves open the possibility that Eva Smith really did exist after all.

The younger generation, represented by Sheila and Eric Birling, takes on the role of conscience from the Inspector as the play progresses, and becomes fully developed in a sense of responsibility by the play's end. Sheila starts out as a playful, self-centred, selfish girl who loves attention, changes throughout the play to become the most sympathetic member of the family, reflecting remorse and guilt on knowing about Eva's downfall, trying to push the family to admit and accept their responsibility for their part in Eva's death. She revolts against her parents and supports Goole in his interrogations. Her character undergoes a gradual change, from being naïve and selfish at the beginning, to much

wiser at the end of the play when her social conscience has been awakened and she becomes aware of her responsibility. She admits that she had Eva dismissed from her job for a trivial reason, becoming wise enough to accept and admit her guilt. Moreover, she becomes able to see her family's guilt towards Eva. So she rapidly realizes the need to accept responsibility and as the play goes on, she begins to take over the role of the Inspector in trying to teach the others.

The other representative of the younger generation is Eric Birling, who made Eva Smith pregnant and stole his father's money to support her; but Eva refuses the money as she knows that it is stolen. He is a drinker, half shy, half assertive, and naïve. Everyone knows about his drinking except his mother who continues to treat him like a child. Together with his sister Sheila, they continue feeling guilty even after the persona of Mr Goole is revealed to be a fake one. The rebellious Eric at the beginning of the play, changes completely at the end as he as learns his lesson, feeling guilty for his part in Eva's death. He is not the kind of person who can express their feelings, but he is clearly filled with pain. By the end of the play, Eric can be regarded as the only person who confesses without argumentation with the Inspector. When he enters the room, he realizes that the other characters already know what he has done. He says: 'you know, don't you?' and says to the Inspector 'could I have a drink first?' He is calm and he answers his question without any hesitation.

The main theme here in Priestley's play is capitalism, represented by Arthur Birling, the father of Sheila and Eric. In Abdelrahman's play, the

theme becomes power, namely the absolute power wielded by a ruler and the dirty secrets hidden beneath it. Birling likes to describe himself as a “hard-headed businessman”. He is a dominant, arrogant, selfish, self-centred and right-wing man who goes on refusing to accept any part of responsibility regarding Eva’s death. He is the owner of a company, a factory which employs girls to work on sewing machines. He is morally blind, justifying his firing of Eva as a need to keep his labour costs low and quell dissent. Although he is a good businessman, authoritative and of social and economic prominence, he is socially lower than his wife. His aspiration to be the Lord Mayor of Brumley is repeated many times in the play, providing predictions about the future which the audience know will not come true. He is trying to avoid any public scandal by admitting no responsibility towards Eva’s death, demanding the Eric repay the money he has stolen from his father’s company, and asking Sheila to reconsider her relationship with Gerald in order to maintain a promised Croft-Birling merger. The struggle between Arthur Birling and Inspector Goole is a symbolic confrontation between capitalism and socialism reflecting Priestley’s critique of the selfishness and moral hypocrisy of middle-class capitalist society.

Arthur’s wife Sybil, the social superior to her husband, is the leader of a women’s charitable organization, like her husband, she refuses to accept any responsibility for Eva’s death, dealing with Mr Gool as his Social and moral superior, referring to his questions as offensive, focusing on her family’s reputation to the degree that she is ready to tie and to deny recognition of the photograph of Eva declaring her

prejudices against her as working class woman, accusing her of being immoral, dishonest, greedy, and impolite. Mr and Mrs Birling are more embarrassed at being found out for their thoughtless treatment of Eva rather than regretting what happened to her. Goole wants them to repent for their mistreatment and misgivings but they refuse.

However no single member of the family is responsible for Eva's death alone, but they all function as a class system that exploits a vulnerable woman leading to her social exclusion, despair, and suicide. The play also reflects the Victorian-era notions of middle-class philanthropy towards the poor, which is based on the charity givers retaining the social superiority to judge who deserves such charity, reflecting their severe moral judgement. Priestley reflects the romantic idea of helping a fallen woman based upon male lust and sexual exploitation of the weak by the powerful. At the end of the play, Inspector Goole is a call to action for English society to take more responsibility for working-class people.

Edna, the maid whose name is similar to Eva, represents the lower classes and her presence reminds us of Eva. After Mr. Goole's investigations, Gerald Croft suggests that there was more than one girl involved in the Inspector's narrative as Eva's story is not quite true because Eva never really existed. The presence of Edna, the maid with such a similar name to Eva's onstage through out the play symbolizes the presence of Eva and supports Priestley's point of view regarding the abuse of power and the refusal and failure to take any responsibility for others. Through the story, Priestley deals with themes such as the gulf

between the rich and poor and the status of woman at the time the play was set. His main aim is to make the audience think about social responsibility through the character of Mr Goole.

In the final act, after the Inspector leaves, Sheila feels ashamed of her parents' attitude and reaction, she sees that they are only concerned with their status and reputation, "The point is you don't seem to have learnt anything" (*An Inspector Calls*, Act III). She understands the implication of the moment when the Inspector arrived as she realizes that he is not a police Inspector but this is not relevant as she says "it doesn't much matter who made us confess" (*An Inspector Calls*, Act III). She repeats what each one did to Eva.

Regarding Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, the character of the Inspector reflects important values that refine human behaviour, and calls for moral responsibility towards others. The inspector calls for values that leads to high refined morals helping human to feel superior to the other creators. Moreover the whole play is a criticism of the selfishness and moral hypocrisy of middle class capitalist society. it is centered on a wealthy family at a time of poverty for many people.

As an adaptation, Abdelrahman's *How Beautiful We Are!* is dissimilar in the setting and social class, but very similar in the severe moral judgment it ends up passing on the characters. The characters follow Wali blindly, believing in his words, attitudes, values and morals. The characters listen to him, follow his way and accept his ideas without discussion or thinking. The whole play reflects lying and betrayal in order to gain power. Abdelrahman is concerned with issues such as

justice, human consciousness and conscience through calling for not following others such as Wali just to gain power, in the process losing one's feelings, emotions, attitudes, values, and principles. Although Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*, and Abdelrahman's play *How Beautiful We Are!* share the same structure, they differ in the content as a result of their difference in the values, morals, and attitudes they reflect.

The central figure, representing justice and power, reflects a significant difference between English and Arab cultures. Priestley chooses an inspector because in the UK, police means justice: no-one is above the law. This is reflected in Priestley's play, as Arthur Birling, despite having power and influence and being the owner of a company, will be questioned just like any ordinary citizen in front of the police. Although he is a successful businessman, authoritative of social and economic prominence, he must admit his sin and responsibility. This also applies to his wife, Sybil: although she is the leader of a women's charitable organization, she is not above questioning. The British pride themselves on their egalitarian police system, and it is strong enough in the minds of Priestley's audience that they accept it without question.

In Arab culture, as it is reflected in Mahfuz's play, the police cannot represent absolute power or even 'right and wrong', as in Arab culture the police has no power over kings. The king is the most authoritative one: no one can confront him, people must be obedient to him. The police may well twist or corrupt justice in order to serve the king. Therefore, Abdelrahman had to find an equivalent or alternative that would perform this function in his play. This explains the choice of a

soothsayer in place of the Inspector. As Arabs, we fear divine power: the power of soothsayers is the only challenger to the divine power of kings. The characters of the play live in the shadow of power. Mahfouz Abdelrahman creates the role of the Samarqand fortune-teller to predict the future of the Wali and the Princess. Tanweer trusts his words and Usher is welcoming him. The play reflects the Arab world's lack of confidence in earthly justice. Clearly, a police inspector would not be appropriate here: it is clear from the characters' behavior that they try to bury their sins as deep as possible, and the holders of legitimate power (kings and queens) are corrupt, which means that the police force they command would also be corrupt. Whereas British are proud of their police's fairness and even-handedness. The solution was to send a soothsayer, which reflects our Arabian belief in the supernatural from such stories as *The Thousand Nights*, that God could inspire some human figure with divine justice to expose the hypocrisy even of kings and queens. This difference in cultural attitudes is an important factor in the adaptation, moving it into the realm of appropriation. "Appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain." (Sanders, Julie, 2006) Mahfuz Abdelrahman manages to use Priestley's text *An Inspector Calls* as an informing source to his play *How Beautiful We Are!* shifting it into a new cultural domain, Egyptian culture.

Works cited:

- Abdelrahman, Mahfuz. *How Beautiful We Are!*. Translated by Salwa Hozayan, Cairo, Egyptian States Publishing House. 2016
- Cousin, Geraldine. "Past Present: dramatizations of return. *Playing for Time*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press. 2007, p.16.
- Gale, Maggie. "Theatre and Drama between the War." In Nicholls, Peter: Marcus. Laura. *The Cambridge history of twentiethcentury English Literature*, Cambridge, England; Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.328.
- ———. Priestly, J.B. London: Routledge, 2008, p.140
- Morley, Sheridan. "stop messing about." *The Spectator*. P.53.25 September, 1992, Retrieved 4 October, 2015.
- Priestly, J.B. *An Inspector Calls*. Heinemann, London, 1947.
- Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall, Great Britian, 2006, p.26.

