How Is Power Used And Abused In ‘An Inspector Calls’?

‘An Inspector Calls’ is a play written in 1945 that exposes how power was used and abused upon the lower class citizens in 1912. JB Priestley exposes the faults in a capitalistic society through the death of Eva Smith. The play follows the awful events that lead to her death through the power abuse of the Birling family. The author shows the audience the flaws of life back in 1912 when rigid class structures were in place and capitalistic views were dominant. This mindset that was popular in 1912 then led to the awful events of the two world wars that ended in many deaths around the world. The great depression that also hit Britain in 1933 stemmed from the belief in selfish capitalism. Priestley then juxtaposes his idea of socialism and a perfect society through the character of the Inspector, showing his audience the importance of working together in a society. The post-World War 2 audience watch their actions from a different point of view and can finally realize the way power was used immorally.

Power and dominance are instantly asserted over the social inferiors such as Edna, the servant of the household, and the Inspector by the social superiors such as the Birlings. Enda isn't the main character and has a very limited amount of lines, one of the few stage directions she has is ‘going’ this can suggest that the working class are irrelevant to people like The Birlings and should rarely be seen. When Mr. Birling is first introduced to the play, the stage directions describe him as a ‘prosperous manufacturer’ and ‘portentous’. Immediately we are led to believe that he is a powerful member of society with a lot of influence. His love of power is introduced right away when at the start of ‘An Inspector Calls’ Mr. Birling shows off his riches and power to Eric and Gerald. ‘I might find myself into the next Honours list. Just a knighthood of course’. Mr Birling soon is seen to be a self-centred, capitalistic character as he asserts his dominance over everyone as wanting a knighthood proves that all he wants is more power. The adverb ‘just’ causes the audience to believe that Mr Birling couldn't care less about his newest accomplishment, yet in reality, he uses every moment to preach and brag about his latest success. Birlings false modesty shows through massively …..

Morality is a dominant topic in the play, with JB Priestley exploring how the misuse of power has a negative impact on the character’s morality. Each of the characters’ immoral actions that are linked with Eva Smith's death is brought to light and inspected meticulously. When the Inspector arrives the characters’ power is ripped away from them as soon as their egotistical actions begin to emerge. The Inspector acts as a moral judge, made apparent when he declares ‘each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it’. Priestley uses absolute imperatives such as ‘never’, ’listen’ and ‘forget’, these are inflexible and don't give any room for the Birlings to squeeze out of their tight situation. These imperatives are extremely effective as it gives immediate force to what the Inspector is declaring, as if he is commanding the family to act in a more moral way, following a more caring, socialistic mindset.