

A cream cracker under the settee



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Dramatic monologue is a variation of lyric poem in which the character expresses his/her emotions, actions, feelings or motives. It is written to reveal the situation as well as the character.

In dramatic monologue, a single speaker who is not the poet utters the poem at a critical situation thereby adding depth to the character. In fact, we come to know about the myriad aspects of the character by listening to the speaker. This was developed during Victorian era and Robert Browning perfected this form.

In the dramatic monologue "A cream cracker under the settee", Alan Bennett puts forth his views on the society's treatment of the elderly and the consequences thereof. He accomplishes this by describing an elderly lady's view of the world and her loneliness.

The play starts with Doris, the elderly lady sitting on the floor of her living room. She has fallen down while cleaning the photo of her late husband Wilfred. She strongly believes that the world of her time is much better than the present. She feels that people of her time were cleaner and more responsible than the people of today.

This shows why she disapproves her domestic help, Zulema, who had not cleaned the photo in the first place. She enjoys her old memories and the lovely time she had with her husband as can be seen by the way she talks to her dead husband's old photographs. This also shows that she is lonely and misses company.

She feels she is "left behind" by the people of her generation. This loneliness can also be attributed to the lack of self-understanding and the

understanding of others. Through the entire play, Doris attempts to alienate herself from the so-called “ corrupt” society of today.

Doris has a compulsive obsession with cleanliness. In her younger days, she had forbidden her husband Wilfred from taking up any hobbies that could be messy. When they were younger, they had a baby that died during birth.

The nurse had wrapped the baby in newspaper, which according to Doris was “ dirty”. This reveals that she did not want her child, even though dead, to be associated with anything dirty. She is very concerned about what her others would say if she is not spotlessly clean.

This can be seen when the leaves from the next door blow into her garden and she says “ I ought to put a sign on the gate, not my leaves”. She was scared that other her neighbors may not think high of her hygiene and so she asked her husband Wilfred to concrete the garden so that it would be easier to clean.

While Doris is on the floor, she looks at her wedding photo and talks to her husband about her loneliness and how she was happier in her days. Her happiness in her younger days could be due to various reasons and one of the important reasons would be the total independence and the “ ruler of the roost” that she enjoyed. She also laments about the need for “ home help” now. This is why she disapproves of her home help, Zulema.

She cannot accept that she needs Zulema because that means she is forfeiting her independence. She feels that she is not dependent on Zulema for anything. She gets very picky when Zulema tells her “ you’d be better in Stafford House”. Stafford House is the local old age people’s home.

Though Zulema's intentions were right, she said that because she wanted someone to take control of Doris's life, Doris felt that as an intrusion into her independence. According to Doris, Stafford House represents domination by others and the acceptance of her dependence on someone. She cannot accept her own inability to support herself physically.

This yearning for independence is very evident when a policeman comes to check on her. The policeman asks her, " Are you alright?" Doris replies, " No. I'm all right." This also reflects that she has gotten herself into a mindset which makes it difficult for her to accept the hardships and difficulties of old age.