

How does the audience respond to miss ruddock on alan bennett's "a lady of letter...



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How does the Audience Respond to Miss Ruddock on Alan Bennett's "A Lady of Letters"? Essay Sample

'A Lady of Letters' is a play about a mature spinster who is very lonely and spends her time writing letters to strangers, often getting her into trouble. It stars Patricia Routledge as Irene Ruddock who is the opinionated and irritating lady of letters. The play is written in the style of a dramatic monologue. This style of drama involves one character telling their story. The effect of a dramatic monologue is that it means you get to know the character really well so you can empathise with their situation, thoughts and feelings. The effect of this play being made for television is that it is more personal and therefore more real, it emphasises the claustrophobic nature of the play, and the camera movements allow the audience to examine the character's facial features and understand what she is thinking and her feelings. Also, the lighting shows the natural passing of time and allows the audience into the character's space.

The main themes of the monologue are loneliness, curiosity and judgement of others, living an empty life and social marginalisation. Miss Ruddock is a lonely character. "(She picks up her pen) It's stood me in good stead has this pen. Mother bought it me the last time she was able to get over to Harrogate. It's been a real friend. (She glances in the direction of the window.) p45. This is quite sad because she has no real friends. The only thing she is really fond of can't like her back because it isn't alive. It makes the audience wonder why she doesn't have any friends. She is also very curious about other people and judges them. " I thought. ' Well, you've got a car, you've got a transistor, it's about time you invested in some curtains'."

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(p45-46) She criticises other people and their decisions without knowing enough about them to understand why they might have made them. She lives an empty life. ““ I’m just waiting for the paper coming”” (p46). She is obviously well educated and has some money, but the only thing she is doing is waiting. She could be going shopping or meeting friends but she isn’t. If she spends all of her time waiting, it is like she is waiting for death. She is also socially marginalised. ““ If they knew they were being watched they might behave.”” (p47) She always watches other people’s lives rather than get involved and have her own life. She is on the edge of society.

The main feelings the audience feel towards Miss Ruddock are irritation and pity. ““ I passed the place where there was the broken step I wrote to the council was a danger to the public.”” (p46) The audience are irritated by her obsession of writing letters about such trivial things but also they pity her because that’s all she has in her life.

The first impressions we get of Miss Ruddock are that she is well educated. ““ While I was quite satisfied with my spectacles at the present moment I was grateful to them for drawing the matter to my attention and in the event of my noticing any deterioration I would in due course get in touch with them.”” (p45) She uses Standard English all the time. She can also be a snob because she is prejudiced and pessimistic about everything she sees. The policeman was asking her about the letters that she wrote and said “ We’re asking you because who was it who wrote to the chemist saying his wife was a prostitute?”(p49) This was the first of two examples of letters that Miss Ruddock has written that had been accusing people of things they hadn’t

done without any real evidence. This makes the audience irritated with her, but at the same time, it's quite amusing.

We feel pity for Miss Ruddock because she is lonely, has no friends or family and has nothing to do. Her only friend is her pen. "It's been a real friend." (p45) The only thing she likes can't like her back. This could be because if it could feel things, it wouldn't like her so her only friend is inanimate. If nobody likes someone it makes them isolated and lonely so we pity her. The only person who ever liked her and she respected was her mother, and she died. "She lost her mother around the same time I lost mine." (p44). She has also suffered the loss of the only person she liked and that is a horrible thing because she is sad as well as lonely. The stage directions also give hints about her life. They dim and come up, but she stays in the same place. "Go to black. Come up on Miss Ruddock in the same setting. Morning." (p45) This indicates that time has passed, but Miss Ruddock has stayed the same and she isn't getting anywhere in her life.

Margaret Thatcher said "there is no such thing as society [...] It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour." This relates to the way Miss Ruddock is shown in the play. Margaret Thatcher is saying that people should look out for each other, including their neighbours.

Nobody looks after Miss Ruddock, and she doesn't look after anyone else. "I'd talk to next door's about it, only there hasn't been any contact since the business over the dustbins." (p47). She doesn't talk to the neighbours because of some petty argument, so they obviously aren't very close, and have no desire to look after each other if they can't be bothered to sort out a silly disagreement. Although, Miss Ruddock could do more for herself, she is <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-the-audience-respond-to-miss-ruddock-on-alan-bennetts-a-lady-of-letters-essay-sample/>

let down by the outside world. Like a lot of the elderly people, she is pushed to one side to make way for the new way of life and the younger people. The play's ideological message about society is that it should be a place where people look out for each other. " My mother knew everybody in this street. She could reel off the occupants of every single house. Everybody could, once upon a time. Now, they come and they go. That's why these tragedies happen. Nobody watching. If they knew they were being watched, they might behave." (p47) If people looked out for each other, then nothing bad would happen and the world would be an ideal place.

Alan Bennett constructs the monologue so we judge Miss Ruddock on the small things first. We judge her straight away because she speaks Standard English with Received Pronunciation and complains about formal services not being formal enough. " I said I thought the hallmark of a ceremony of that nature was reverence, whereas the word that kept coming into my mind was brisk." (p44). This immediately creates the impression of her being posh and looking down on other people or things that aren't posh. She also appears old fashioned and grumpy, as she bothers to write a letter about what she doesn't like.

Alan Bennett builds up to the moment of terrible revelation about the ' kiddy' by bringing the family in as new neighbours of Miss Ruddock, and writing about her judging them before she knows them. " I see we've got a new couple moved in opposite. Don't look very promising. The kiddy looks filthy." (p45). This makes the audience feel a bit irritated at Miss Ruddock for being so presumptuous, but also quite amused at her because she acts so oddly.

Alan Bennett then starts to write about Miss Ruddock talking about the '
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Kiddy's' parents going out every night and leaving it on it's own. This is also an example of Miss Ruddock talking about people in a bad way when she doesn't actually know what is going on. When she is told that the boy is dead, she continues to stick to her judgements right up until she is told that he had leukaemia, and wasn't neglected as she had thought. The audience's reaction to this revelation is, mixed. We feel sad because the boy is dead, but also still amused at how Miss Ruddock has been judging people unfairly, although this also makes us more annoyed with her. The way we feel about Miss Ruddock is slightly ironic. We are irritated at her for being prejudiced and judgemental, but we ourselves are judging her.