

Lady of letters monologue essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A lady of letters is a monologue written by Alan Bennett. The main character is Irene Ruddock a middle aged woman who lives by herself after her late mother passed away a few months ago. She is portrayed to show loneliness and isolation that many people experienced in the 1980's under Margaret Thatcher's rule as prime minister. Bennett uses a Monologue instead of a play, production and so on...

The fact that a monologue is being used tells the audience something about Miss Ruddock. We realise that she is the only person ever speaking in the monologue and we then give an assumption that she has nothing better to do as she is never out and about socialising with others, we never see a scene of her with others in her house which means she doesn't like visitors and prefers to stay isolated from the outside community.

The manner in which she talks as well gives us a clue that she is a lonely woman who really has nothing to do in life as every word spoken is emphasised and slowed down however we then later on at the end realise that our assumption of her being lonely and having nothing better to do which is why every word is emphasised and slowed down is true.

This is due to the fact that when in jail Miss Ruddock ' speaks very quickly and is radiant' this stage direction immediately tells her she has something to talk about that is important and would be considered as ' gossip' because she has a lot of topics to cover and in reality many people talk fast when they have a lot of matters to discuss/talk about. By having these two different ways of speaking we realise that her surroundings had an impact on her personality and characteristics as the Miss Ruddock in the house and the

Miss Ruddock in prison is the same person, however their personality and tone of voice are very different.

Whereas most people would be sad, dull and be deprived of freedom in prison for Miss Ruddock it is the other way round Bennett illustrates this by adding in a line where she is talking of her freedom in prison, ‘ Prison! This is the first taste of freedom I have had in years. ‘ Many would be intrigued by how one can experience freedom in prison, a place where you are isolated in a dull building with nothing to do. This though, is not the case for Miss Ruddock who finds prison a place of freedom and a way to socialise this tells us that she was so isolated and lonely in her home that prison seems more sociable and free to her.

Many at this time would feel sorry for her and realise that she always was a nice person but just needed a nudge in the right direction I however do not feel that this is right, personally I see her as a person who preferred to be isolated, a person who wanted to be lonely, a person who had the chance of freedom but kept turning it down as she is a middle aged woman who has no-one to stop her, she is not a kid or teenager and she isn’t married nor those she have kids so then why would she keep herself away from others and never say hello or hi to anyone?

She however though none the less does open up herself in prison and the whole mood of the monologue lightens and we see a more happy and joyful Irene Ruddock. The irony of this however is the fact that the people with whom she socialises and develops friendships with are the people she would have thought to be below her class, before jail. We can also historically link

this to her time in which she is in which is the 1980's, a time in England where we encouraged to believe there was no community and that people should only look after themselves and their family.

The play of ' lady of letters' was originally broadcasted on television in 1983, a time when Margaret Thatcher ruled great Britain and spoke of many of the above things such as ' there is no community' and ' look after number one (you and your family, no-one else). Many opposed her ideas and Alan Bennett rebelled in a smart way by showing how bad life was for Miss Ruddock when she was following Margaret Thatcher's sayings and when in prison she socialises a lot and becomes part of community, something Margaret Thatcher was against.

The loneliness of Miss Ruddock an how extremely lonely she is shown by the line when she looks at the pen and says ' it's been a real friend' this illustrates that she sees a metal, cold and dead object as a friend, thus making the audience believe that if she can see such an object as a friend she must therefore have no real human friends that she can talk to and socialise with.

This though is her fault as it was her personality and behaviour that caused this as she comments on the neighbours during the monologue in such a way we can tell that she must've done something to stop all contact ' hasn't been any contact since the business over the dustbins' as you can see it seems to be generally a unnecessary thing to have an argument over and her way of wanting everything perfect has caused her to not have any friends.

Therefore I personally do not again feel any sympathy for her as she has bought it upon herself yet people may still argue that the pen was in fact given to her by her mother which it was and therefore reminds her of her mum and she may think of the pen as sentimental value and may think of it as a way of talking to her mum.

But overall the audience after those two lines will either go one of two ways, they will either see her as a woman who has stooped so low and has become so lonely she resorts to talking to the pen and seeing it as a friend or more kind-hearted people will think of her as a person who misses her mother and sees the pen as sentimental value. Alan Bennett then uses a stage direction straight away to emphasise her isolation and in turn these stage directions will cause the audience to realise how isolated and cut off she is from the rest of the world.

The stage direction used this time is ‘ she glances in the direction of the window’ showing she is looking out and spying on others, which she is as she is watching the new neighbours opposite move in and throughout the monologue she keeps looking and spying on them. Miss Ruddock never actually goes to their house or socialises with them, not even a ‘ hi’ is said by her which shows she wants to be isolated and doesn’t want to make verbal contact. There is one part of the monologue which many people in the 1980’s will have picked up on and read between the lines on.

It was this short line ‘ he’s labour but it’s always very good notepaper and beautifully typed’ nowadays no-one will understand it but back then people would have picked it up in a second, some people now maybe able to link it

back to the 1980's like moi. Margaret Thatcher at that time was prime minister, she wasn't labour but a conservative which despised labour who were there main rivals. As you can see therefore the fact Miss Ruddock is labelling the person as a labour shows that she was strongly for Margaret Thatcher and the conservatives.

This also means that people were labelled and judged by their political interests, something which Miss Ruddock frequently does. Alan Bennett also adds on different characteristics and personality hints through the play thus always altering our opinion of her. At first we see her as a lonely old woman who lost her mother and enjoys writing letters but as the monologue goes on we in turn witness her true character, a spiteful and racist person who is mean and is very anti-social.

We can link the anti-social feelings to the decade in which she lives in-the 80's in which the PM Margaret Thatcher has told the public that there is no 'society' and everyone should look after themselves something which Miss Ruddock has taken up quite happily. The movement of Miss Ruddock from her isolated, small and dull house to a prison that seemed more colourful and bigger not only changed her personality but her whole life. By being imprisoned with others and being forced to talk face-to-face she has realised and it dawns upon her that there is such a thing as community and it's great to socialise and have friends.

We see change in her straight away when it says 'she is a tracksuit, speaks very quickly and is radiant' this is proof of her changing as before she would never consider wearing a tracksuit, seeing them as too informal and un-

womanly like. We also notice the difference in the speed of which she talks, While in the house she would speak very slowly and emphasis every word giving us a indication she has nothing to talk about really but when in prison she talks very quickly and doesn't emphasis words at all.

We then understand she has many things to gossip about and discuss as she is talking fast to fit them all in. The change in personality has done her good as she is described as 'radiant', something she never was described before. One also notices the change in facial expressions as she is very stern and frowning most of the time at the beginning and middle of the monologue however when taken to prison near the end of the monologue we see her smiling and jolly, by this we can tell she has changed and her character and personality has undergone a major change.

Miss Ruddock also feels more free and isn't just confined anymore, a line which clearly illustrates my point is 'this is the first taste of freedom I've had in years' this clearly shows how isolated Miss Ruddock was because we all see prison as a isolated and boring place, but for her to be able to see it as freedom must've meant that the isolation in which she lived in before was absolute insane.

What also helps is that her writing stationery isn't there meaning she can't write letters and the fact that she is involved in different classes such as patch quilting and others takes her mind off letters and this in turn makes her a better person. However some of the audience may think she was forced to socialise and had no other choice, on the other hand other members of the audience will rightly argue that she always had a truly

caring and lovely personality a line which portrays this is ‘ sit by the bed and hold her hand till she’d gone off again’ as we can see she cares for her ‘ friends’ and is a nice person.

This will have the audience ponder her true personality. In the 1980’s the contemporary audience at that time may have seen more and managed to read between the lines, that Bennett was in fact encouraging people to socialise and become a community something which Margaret Thatcher said didn’t ‘ exist’ and we now understand that he was secretly rebelling and trying to alter people’s views and opinions. Bennett uses pauses many times throughout the monologue to create tension and allow the audience to reflect on the last few lines.