

The Lady In The Van

Synopsis

The Lady In The Van is a comedy drama based on Alan Bennets' 'true story', starting in the 70's, about Miss Shepherd, an eccentric and contradictory homeless woman who parked her broken down van in his London driveway for a temporary three months...but remained living in the van for fifteen years!

Alan Bennett splits his own character in two and has two actors play him at once. The audience see his story unfold in front of their eyes, making his split psychology sharper and more exposed. The audience are given a glimpse of what it is like to be Alan Bennett. A Northern man from a somewhat mundane background now living and working in London surrounded by, what he calls, "beautiful people".

Miss Shephard is a rich and complex character, showing her vulnerabilities and stubbornness. The theatre is filled with joy and sadness watching her...how can such a talent not reach its full potential? We get snippets of her many abilities and experiences...As an audience we are delighted when we learn a little more...The lady who shits in a plastic bag, speaks fluent French, was a concert pianist, possibly a nun and more.... Has society and the church let her down?

The characters in this play show what it is to be human on many levels. They are complex and 'real'.

The play is a rich, at times extraordinary slice of Life. I am sure we can all relate to one of the characters and the choices that they have made and may have to make. This makes it a truly successful play that delights audiences. It was written as a radio play and after success it went to The West End (Queens Theatre 1999), then was made into a very successful film in 2015.

Most audiences will have heard of the story which makes the performance even more enjoyable.

Miss Shephard- Mary/Margaret Fairchild.

Eccentric, often demanding and enigmatic woman living in her van.

Former pianist, ambulance driver and nun.

Sometimes delusional and vulnerable.

**Moral superiority as a defence...her religiosity becomes her armour.*

**Control through inconvenience...She exerts power by being difficult.*

**Denial of vulnerability...offers of comfort are reframed as threats.*

Alan Bennet 1. The Subject

The playwright himself and house owner, the person who deals with the day to day social responsibilities and Miss Shephard. He is polite and has a desire to appear decent....eventually appearing trapped by his own compassion.

**middle class discomfort with visible poverty*

**the tension between kindness and self-preservation*

**the fear of appearing ungenerous*

Alan Bennet 2. The Writer/script.

The writer/ self observes and writes from a distance, more curious. He analyses, records and interprets. Is Miss Shephard simply a subject?

***Detachment**

***curiosity**

****the transformation of lived experience into narrative***

Rufus

Neighbour, polite, middle class 'trendy' liberal.

He represents the material world.

Rufus's wife

'Mumsy', CND type, middle class. She is compassionate and 'nice'

Mam

Alan Bennets' 60 plus year old mother. She is faced with challenges of old age and loneliness. A typical Northern mother.

Mams GP doctor

Social worker

Miss Shephards' allotted social worker. She becomes increasingly fond of Miss Shephard, caring, whilst remaining officious towards Mr. Bennett.

Leo Fairchild / Doctor

Miss Shephards' brother and her doctor

Lout/Ambulance driver

Lout bangs on the van and shouts at Alan Bennett.

Ambulance driver shows compassion and is gentle with Miss Shephard.

Underwood

Aging, aristocratic 'down and out' with similar undertones whilst remaining calm and practical.

Interviewer

Council worker, undertakers etc..

Doubling and trebling up of roles.