

How rita and eliza are  
learning a new  
language in an  
attempt to change



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Russell and Shaw present Rita and Eliza's struggle to attempt to change by learning new languages. They both develop an identity through education but they have contrasting effects as one creates happiness the other sadness. Also both women are trapped in their social class systems which expect little from them. Frank teaches Rita the academic language and critics of essay writing; whereas Higgins teaches Eliza how to speak.

Eliza's change is a superficial change because she only changes the way she speaks however Rita believes that change can't be just superficial; change has to be internal as well as external, so her change is both. Rita and Eliza are both dissatisfied with their lives; they are both 'out of step' with their social class. "I've been realisin' for ages that I was..

. slightly out of step...

"this suggests that Rita isn't happy with her life. She wants to discover herself first, this is significant because she confides into Frank who is her only link into the world she wants to belong to. Similarly, Eliza has desires to seek an alternative way of life. "The Flower Girl: I want to be a lady" Eliza's desires set her apart from her social class. At the beginning of the play, Eliza doesn't have a name yet which is important to show us that she doesn't have an identity yet; it needs to be formed. Also at the beginning of the play, Eliza is treated unpleasantly by Higgins 'put her in the dustbin' but Grene in his introduction to the Penguin Classic 2003 edition of Pygmalion, argues that 'what Higgins endows [Eliza] with is the confident articulateness that allows her to withstand him' [1].

I think he purposely treats her with disrespect so she can gain the confidence to withstand him; she learns how to talk back. With Rita and Eliza's desires to change, it becomes apparent that both of the characters' transformations are going to be difficult. "(The door swings open, revealing Rita)" Such language conjures up the image that the door is symbolic to Rita's entrance as it shows her journey is going to be difficult. This quote is significant in the way Russell relates the struggle of the door as Rita's struggle of learning a new language in an attempt to change. Russell uses language to portray the aggression in which the door opened which can symbolise Rita's desperation to be in the world she wants to belong to. Likewise, Eliza has difficulties as well.

"(A birdcage hangs in the window, but the tenant died long ago)" The birdcage with nothing in it could suggest Eliza's poverty, she has nothing in her life and she's trapped in her social class and can't get out. However, it could portray a chance of hope that others have escaped, so can she. While Rita and Eliza are going through their change, they both become isolated from their social class but also from the class they want to belong to, they find it hard to fit in. "..

. I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with anymore...

I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday" Such a phrase would imply how Rita is struggling to cope with what's expected of her. Rita feels isolated from both worlds ' I'm an alien' the language used is expressive as she is struggling, she feels like a ' half-caste' not being able to fit into either working class nor middle class. Stephanie Kitchen argues " The substance of

the play is a darker examination of all that is wrong with education" [2]. The fact that Rita can't get to grips with the language she needs to learn to associate with the middle class and feels miserable is what's wrong with education.

Rita believes that education will provide her with happiness and self-discovery, but this isn't found with education, it can still provide unhappiness which is portrayed by both Frank and Higgins. In the same way, Eliza struggles to conform to expectations. "Walk! Not bloody likely" Eliza relapses back into her old gutter speech, Eliza's attempt to change clearly still needs Higgins help. Eliza's true identity still shines through in her no matter what she does to try and disguise it. During the play it becomes apparent that Rita and Eliza are not the only ones that change throughout the plays.

Frank dislikes Rita's change as he believes that she has lost her 'uniqueness' and it doesn't reflect who Rita really is. "I shall insist upon being known as Mary, Mary Shelley" Frank believes he has constructed Rita; he thinks he has made her into a monster from the classic novel of Frankenstein. Frank and Rita both interpret each other wrongly and get the wrong idea of each other. Stephanie Kitchen argues that "He [Frank] feels education is a hoax, and is spoiling Rita's innate interest and vitality.

" [3]. Frank doesn't think Rita hasn't found a 'better song to sing' but just a 'different song', which doesn't reflect the true Rita. Compared with Higgins, he's constructed Eliza as the play was inspired by the Greek myth with the same name, which explores the issues of constructing the ideal woman. "

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.. I'd make a woman of you... I like you like this" Higgins has created Eliza to be a lady; she can do what she wants with her life.

Frank and Higgins have abandoned their identities because they're not content with their lives; it's showing that people can be unhappy with their lives just as Rita and Eliza are unhappy with their lives, regardless of class status. The structure of both plays is significant in both women's attempt to change. At the beginning of *Educating Rita*, Rita is a hairdresser, but stops when she goes through education. But at the end of the play, she goes back to being a hairdresser as she cuts Franks hair "(... begins to cut his hair. )"

Rita now has choice in what she does. In 'learning a new language' Rita has gained choice but she can still behave like she did before she changed. A similar structure is also seen in *Pygmalion* where Eliza is ignored at the beginning of the play, but also at the end as well. "Eliza flinches violently, but they take no notice of her, and she recovers herself and sits stonily as before". The use of the stage direction 'flinches violently' has something to say about the physical repulsion she has.

She realises that Higgins and Pickering have taken no pleasure in teaching her language, it was all for a bet. Higgins and Pickering don't 'take any notice' of Eliza anymore; they no longer care. This is significant because a woman with the 'right language' can still be ignored. At the beginning of the play, Higgins ignores her while she is talking to him, she is being ignored now. It asks the question if she is any different.

This is significant as it questions Eliza's change. The quote 'sits stonily' is a reference to the myth of *Pygmalion*. The adjective 'stonily' shows she's  
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objectified trying to be silently threatening. She rescues herself, no one will help, she is alone and she's got to deal with it. Nicholas Grene in his introduction to the Penguin Classic 2003 edition of Pygmalion wrote " The whole point of the play is the independent autonomy which Liza achieves, denying her status as Higgins' male artifact. " [4].

Higgins is the creator, she is not just an artifact object, she is talking back, achieving independence as a struggle. Rita and Eliza have different reactions to their transformation at the end of the plays. Eliza has become independent " I have forgotten my own language, and I can speak nothing but yours" The language insinuates that she has left her old life behind and doesn't want it to be part of her new life - but it doesn't fit into her new life because she has become so far apart from what she used to be like, she doesn't know who she really is anymore. This is momentous as it could show she hasn't really changed at all, she's just had an external change.

Whereas, Rita has become dependent " All I've ever done is take from you" She's relied on Frank to give her education. Educating Rita and Pygmalion are both plays that are written in different historical periods. Pygmalion was written in the 19th century, whereas Educating Rita was written in the 20th century. But it's significant because they both still resonate with each other, but they both portray struggles in different time zones.

They share the same message even though they are different literary texts as they are from different cultures from the time they were written. In conclusion, Rita and Eliza's attempt to change by learning a new language is seen as a struggle. At the end of both plays, it seems that all they have

gained is 'how to curse' which Rita already knew how to do. Both women are given a way to speak however in different ways; one is in the world of learning to speak like upper class for the purpose of a bet, the other is in the world of academia.

The structure of both plays is different; Educating Rita has 7 acts, whereas Pygmalion has 5 acts which mirror the tragedy of Aristotle. While teaching Rita she has gained dependence whereas Eliza has gained choice and independence. Both women wanted to change but in different ways. As Pygmalion is linked to the Greek myth of creating the ideal woman, it can be related to the poem of 'Pygmalion's Bride' by Carol Ann Duffy which also represents the Greek myth of Pygmalion.

As Rita already knew how to curse it asks the question if she really changed or whether her identity was disguised with a different one; a better one. Eliza's change has left her uncertain with her life than what she began with as she doesn't know who she is anymore. Both women struggle with what's expected of them. Rita struggles to learn the critics of essay writing whilst Eliza struggles to conform to how to speak properly.

The struggles are linked to their poor backgrounds and little education. Overall, both women struggle to change, but once they've changed, Rita has choice in what she does and can still do things she did before she changed but Eliza becomes separated from both worlds. It asks the question if either has changed or whether their true identities have just been disguised by a 'better one'.