

How does the playwright show the changes in rita's character during the play



'Educating Rita' is a play written and set in 1985. There are two characters, Rita and Frank, though others are referred to during the course of the play. Rita is a working-class, twenty-six year old hairdresser. She has taken the decisive step of enrolling on an English Literature Course at the Open University. It was a difficult decision to make as it meant breaking away from the restrictions imposed on her by her husband, the community and her background.

The main theme of the play is change. During the course of the play we see many changes in both Rita and the relationship between her and her tutor, Frank. One of the most noticeable changes in Rita is that she becomes more educated, widens her vocabulary and develops her cultural awareness. When we are first introduced to Rita we are introduced to a lively, confident woman. Though obviously not fully educated, we can see she is not unintelligent. She shows signs of astuteness that need to be built on and developed.

We see that she is not unintelligent when the playwright shows Rita's ability to understand Frank, and then to make an analogy on her level. [Frank] "Read it, by all means read it. But don't go mention it in the exam." [Rita] "Aha. You mean, it's all right to go an' have a bit of slap an' tickle with the lads as long as you don't go home an' tell your mum?" Though having a limited vocabulary, she can occasionally use more sophisticated language.

"Is it supposed to be erotic? I mean when he panted it do y' think he wanted to turn people on?" "So I sort of, y' know, encapsulated all me ideas in one line." Through the play the playwright shows the changes in Rita, at first

subtly. When she comes back from Summer school she is still dropping letters while speaking, but has stopped swearing and has widened her vocabulary, and the more sophisticated vocabulary seems to come naturally. “ Everything in the flat’s dead unpretentious, just books an’ plants everywhere.

” Halfway through she likens herself to a ‘ half-caste’, who is both out of place in her own society and yet unable to fit into Frank’s social circles too. She likens herself to a half-caste because Frank invited her to dinner and she was unable to go because she felt she did not fit in. She then went to the pub with Denny, but felt out of place there too. During the second Act, we see Rita changing dramatically.

The playwright now shows us how she has lost her individuality, by the way she is speaking and acting. [Rita] “ I know Frank. I’m terribly sorry. It was unavoidable. ” [Frank] “..

. What’s wrong with your voice? Will you kindly tell Trish that I’m not giving a tutorial to a Dalek? ” Rita, to seem more educated decided to speak in a more refined voice, but Frank, does not see it like this and asks her to revert to her usual voice. Frank has decided to show Rita the poet William Blake, but she has already learnt about him at Summer School even though it wasn’t part of the syllabus. Rita is able to recite a poem by Blake by memory; this shows that she has become more educated and more cultured, [Rita] (reciting from memory) ” ‘ O Rose, thou art sick! The invisible worm That flies in the night.

“ But by becoming more cultured she has lost her sense of individuality. This becomes apparent when Rita constantly refers to Trish, her flatmate and what she has said and what she does. Trish says that no matter how difficult I may find it I must persevere. ” “ As Trish says there is not a lot of point of in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice. ” Her use of longer, more sophisticated words seems more forced and ‘ put-on’.

Rita is no longer ‘ herself’; all her ideas and opinions are made up from what other people think, she has lost the ability to think for herself, she isn’t able to put across her view, but only others. At the end of the play, after Trish has tried to end her life, Rita changes back. She is still intelligent, but it is not forced, but more natural and fluent. She has realised that to be educated does not just mean using a complicated and refined vocabulary, but it is having her own informed opinion, not an artificial, affected one made-up by others. During the play the playwright, Russell, shows us that Rita’s attitude to learning changes. When she began Russell showed us an animated young lady, with an enthusiasm for learning, who wanted to learn everything from Frank.

[Frank] “ What do you want to know? ” [Rita] “ Everything. ” She liked Frank, and wanted him to be her tutor. “ Wait a minute, listen to me. Listen: I’m on this course, you are my teacher and you’re bleedin’ well teach me.

” This also shows confidence. She constantly comes to Frank for advice, and tells him everything. “ I know I shouldn’t be here, it’s lunch hour, but listen, I’ve got to tell someone, have you got a few minutes, can you spare...? ” At first she doesn’t see herself as a ‘ proper’ student.

“ I love that lawn down there. When it’s summer do they sit on it? ” “ The ones who come here all the time. The proper students. ” She feels that because she is older and only comes once a week, that she is not a proper student. But, during the play we can see that gradually she becomes more like a student.

After coming back from Summer school, Russell shows that she sees herself more as a student. Before she thought only proper pupils sat on the lawn, but now she wanted to sit there, like a student. “ Down there - on the grass - come on. ” Later on Russell again shows us that Rita is becoming a ‘ proper’ student when her essay is on the pile with the others. “ Oh - it - erm - wouldn’t look out of place with these. ” Rita also begins talking with some other students, again showing that she feels she is like them.

Yeh, I got here early today. I started talking to some students down on the lawn. “ During the course of the play as Rita becomes more educated, her attitude towards learning with Frank changes. All this becomes obvious at the beginning of the second Act, after Summer School.

Rita does not seem to care much about her tutorials with Frank anymore and Russell illustrates this when Rita turns up late, “ No - honestly, Frank - I’ve wasted your time. I’ll see y’ next week, eh? ” She also forgets to tell Frank about her new flatmate Trish, [Rita] “ Trish was goin’ on about those; is that all it is, eggs? Frank] “ Trish? ” [Rita] “ Trish, me flatmate, Trish. “ Rita no longer wants to be taught by Frank and her attitude towards him and his work has changed. “ I’ve got a room full of books.

I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what paper and books to read. I can do without you. ” “ Rita? (She laughs) Rita? Nobody calls me Rita but you. I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was. ” Rita’s character has altered.

She has become condescending and snobbish. This is shown when Frank says, “ What is it now then? Virginia? Or Charlotte? Or Jane or Emily? ” Frank was referring to all educated women. We also see a role-reversal. Rita begins to encourage Frank that his poems are good, but with a hint of being patronising “ These are brilliant. Frank, you’ve got to start writing again. ” After Rita’s exam and after Trish has tried to kill herself we see Rita’s attitude has changed again.

She now sees herself on a level with Frank and is not so condescending. She realises she is educated, but is grateful to Frank, “ I came to tell you you’re a good teacher. ” We also see that her relationship with Frank changes dramatically. At the beginning the playwright shows the two as being good friends and quite close. He seems genuinely interested in her relationship with Denny and he cares for her “ Where are you going to stay? ” “ We should really talk about you and Denny, my dear.

” Frank likes Rita, and maybe sees their relationship as more than just tutor and pupil. [Rita] “ This Forster, honest to God he doesn’t half get on me tits” [Frank] “ Good. You must show me the evidence. ” Though, we cannot be sure whether Frank sees Rita as more than a student, because all his comments are covered by humour.

Rita cannot see how Frank and her could be having an affair. At the beginning, Rita saw herself inferior to Frank, she wanted to learn from him, but during the play we see that they become level, they learn from each other. She assumed that because she has stopped smoking that Frank would stop drinking, but he hasn't. " Just that I thought you'd started reforming yourself. " Rita thinks she is superior to Frank; this is when the playwright begins to make the audience dislike her " I'll tell you what you can't bear, Mr Self-Pitying Piss Artist; what you can't bear is that I am educated now.

" Her relationship with Frank is very strained, and no longer are they close friends. He refers to her as his creation, a bad one – like Frankenstein, " You know, Rita, I think – I think that like you I shall change my name; from now on I shall insist upon being known as Mary, Mary Shelly – do you understand that allusion, Rita? " " She wrote a little Gothic number called Frankenstein. " When she comes back after her exam her and Frank seem on the same level, she has realised that he is a good teacher and that he has helped her, I came to tell you you're a good teacher. Thanks for enterin' me in for the exam. " To emphasise their friendship she gives him a haircut, which symbolises a thank you for his present of the dress. Another main change in Rita is that she now has a choice.

At the beginning of the play we see her as a person with no choices, being led by her background, but she comes out of the play having a choice of what to do with her life. " I dunno, I might go to France. I might got to me mother's. I might even have a baby. I dunno. I'll make a decision, I'll choose.

I dunno. ” The fact that Rita, by the end of the play has a new, more sophisticated dress signifies that she has become an educated woman. At the beginning of the play she promises herself she would buy a new dress when she became educated. Then I’ll get a proper dress, the sort of dress you’d only see on an educated woman, on the sort of woman who knows the difference between Jane Austin an’ Tracy Austin. ” Halfway through the play when she returns from Summer school, the playwright shows us that Rita has changed and is maturing, by letting us see she is wearing a second hand dress.

[Rita] “ Frank! ” (She twirls on the spot to show off her new clothes) During the last scene, Frank buys her a new dress, a more sophisticated dress. The play is structured in two acts; the first half deals with Rita’s struggle to fit into Frank’s world. He possesses all the knowledge, and speaks the right words. Rita, on the other hand, is exactly the opposite; she struggles with language and needs help.

Act 1 shows Rita’s gradual development to the point where she fits in. The interval the turning point of the play and this is where Rita begins to change dramatically; she now seems to be the one to take charge. Act two shows role reversal, where Rita is the one who is encouraging Frank to start writing poetry again, and she no longer needs him any more. The fact that the more Rita is educated means that she needs Frank less and this then leads to their relationship conflict. The play has been structured in such a way where Rita’s changes are obvious. The first act being where she needs Frank’s advice and where she is uneducated.



The interval is the turning point, where so much happens to Rita, where she changes and then Act 2, where she takes charge and her relationship with Frank is breaking up. Thus, Rita emerges from her metamorphosis as a whole, more rounded character. There is no more of the false language and along with the return of her natural speech, comes her old vibrant sense of humour. She has matured and symbolically, Frank's present of the dress serves to emphasise this fact.