

# How effectively russell portrays the change in rita

Literature



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" Educating Rita" is an amusing play, describing a young woman's journey of self-discovery propelled by discontent. The author's background encourages realism in his writing so much so that educating Rita could almost be an abstract autobiography of Willy Russell showing personal experience of prejudice and attitudes of class, this and Russell's effective portrayal of the change in Rita throughout may contribute to the plays popularity.

The character Rita looks to education as a means of escape, a way of distancing herself from the working class background that smothers her, she needs to feel a sense of significance from her life. Her mother comments in a later scene:

" There must be better songs to sing than this"

This is a turning point for Rita as metaphorically it inspires Rita to continue.

The initial Rita is brash and seems to exaggerate her appearance - in all she displays artificialness. This is connected with the superficial nature of changing her name to Rita to make her more in keeping with life as a student. She uses very evident dialect and colloquial terms associated with the lower classes.

" 'Y' can tell he's a flora man."

But as she proves this doesn't always reflect on intelligence although society seems to label people from less fortunate backgrounds, this is prejudice she must overcome. Rita is relatively shy in the beginning showing little academic confidence and concentration. She continually tries to delve into Frank's personal life as a distraction; this is what sparks the less serious part

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of the relationship. Frank admires Rita almost to the point of jealousy, he sees her as someone who is able to be free. Ironically Rita shares the same view of Frank

Although she is adapting through Frank's guidance, Rita's reactions to the literature are primarily sentimental although Frank tries to embrace that.

" It's a totally honest and passionate account of your reaction to a play. It unashamedly emotional statement about a certain experience."

Rita insists that she must pass the exam so in reply Frank states " in those terms it's useless." To become analytical she is going to have to change.

" To pass examinations, you're going to have to suppress, perhaps even abandon your uniqueness."

Rita doesn't value what she has because to her that is worthless.

" The only thing that matters to me is coming here every week"

To her passing an exam reinforces the fact that she can be better " there are better songs than this"

At the end of act one we discover Rita's determination, Russell portrays her extreme reluctance to revert back to the person she once was.

" I want to write essays like those"

This emphasises the idea that she needs to belong, to find a culture, a feeling of security but as she later finds out literature and education aren't the answer alone.

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The notion that she tries to gain what Frank and later Trish, her flat mate, has to find that they may be just as likely to be dissatisfied.

" She's great, y' know, like she's got taste, y' know, like you, Frank."

The audience is aware of this through Frank as he tries to show Rita what she has is just as important, this forms the foundation of his reluctance to change Rita. This has references to Macbeth.

" But your leaving is as inevitable as Macbeth's"

Frank may be in a similar situation along with his pessimism about his future and poetry leads him to drink. Denny, Rita's husband echoes the holding back of Rita; he doesn't want to accept how Rita is changing her life. She agrees she has betrayed Denny but she couldn't betray herself. Russell writes these lines symbolically referring to Rita's betrayal of her culture, which increases the feeling of insecurity within that group. This links to how she sees herself as a half-caste. She doesn't belong in own culture but still can't seem to breach this.

" I can't seem to talk to the people I live with... I'm a half caste"

When she is asked whether she is discontinuing the course we see how much she is willing to sacrifice. When the marriage breaks down, Rita seems more able to commit to the work; this abrupt change prepares us for act two, the interval cleverly placed between the two acts to emphasize the contrast of Rita when she returns from summer school.

After the interlude we see a new enthused Rita, with the symbolic reference to new second hand clothes, although Frank has changed his behaviour and is shown typing poetry, is Rita's influence affecting him? Rita is able to burst into the room when she previously couldn't, subconsciously telling the audience that Rita is more able to enter Frank's world.

The incident at summer school where a teacher asks her if she's fond of Ferlingetti is reacted to in a totally different way, it is the author showing the audience how Rita can suppress her previous self and not reply with " Only when it's served with parmesan cheese"

Rita's aspirations of becoming a proper student come to light in act two. Instilled with a newfound confidence she begins to feel she can be accepted, unlike the episode where she neglected the invitation to Frank's party here she speaks freely.

" I feel young, y' know, like them down there"

Finally she does approach the other students, like Tiger, despite Frank's disgust, probably due to jealousy as he realises the fact that he is not her one source of knowledge. Trish has been an influence as we can see by the affected voice Rita uses in scene \_\_. She is also able to recite Blake from memory. This shows how Russell uses a dramatic technique to emphasize the change in Rita.

" We did Blake at summer school"

The reference to Blake is particularly relevant because it could be said about Rita she has been naive but has grown with experience.

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" So you've done innocence and experience?" (Frank)

" You don't do Blake without doing innocence and experience." (Rita)

Rita's vocabulary continues to change and she begins to use more complicated language.

" Any analogy will break down eventually"

It would be possible for this to be one of Frank's lines.

Despite the dramatic change Russell is ready to show that the transformation of Rita is not complete she may have quit smoking but when Frank begins to use French it highlights her ignorance. She may have become more academic but she is still not middle class.

" Oeufs a la crecy does that mean eggs"

Rita's newfound self-assurance with the added advantage of working in the bistro with Trish she finds herself less of an outcast and she can socialize with the types of people she considers piers.

" Yeh, I got here early today. I started talking to some students on the lawn"

When we see Rita again she has temporally stopped smoking as we find out later and echoing the words of Trish, although in a comical way, to entertain the audience. Frank sees it as pretentious. This is another way in which Russell subtly highlights the change in Rita through character interplay. Frank's attitudes change towards her. He tries desperately to return her to

the person she once was by introducing into the conversations things she would have previously said.

" I got around to reading, you know, Ruby fruit jungle, it's excellent.

Rita immediately dismisses it.

" Oh go way, Frank. Of it's type it's quite interesting, but it's far from excellence."

Although Rita loses the voice she also drops the name, in an attempt to become more relaxed within her personality, however, Frank doesn't accept this.

" You're the only one who calls me Rita."

Rita is becoming more assertive about what she wants out of life, she is adapting to her new standards too much so for Frank.

The setting is important as we see all the action takes place in the same place. This one room resembles continuity and how Frank's unable to remove himself from a life he's not happy with. This is shown in where Frank displays reluctance to go and sit on the lawn it is another example of irony because at one time Rita was desperate to enter the office and now she is just as eager to escape. Russell attempts to portray the contrast in Rita.

This use of scenery like the stubborn window represents Frank's lack of enthusiasm with his life. This is another example of how more visual imagery is used to illustrate his opinions and ideas. More importantly the audience are able to concentrate on Rita's changes without the change of scenery, as <https://assignbuster.com/how-effectively-russell-portrays-the-change-in-rita/>

when you isolate someone from their natural surroundings there are no responses to situations.

Despite her determination she sees her change as incomplete, regression Russell uses the last few scenes of the play symbolize this. This can be seen by the fact that she's started smoking again and frank goes back to the drink.

Frank begins to resent her, maybe through jealousy but she emulates the monotony he still feels with his life.

" Have you come all this way for so very, very little? Found a better sound have you? No - you've found a different song, that's all"

The swapping of cultures is an evident idea but as Rita says in the last scene. She appreciates what Frank has done for her. It's not that she wanted to change her culture it was about making opportunities for herself. She has the choice - as she chooses to smoke.

" I had a choice - I did the exam."

If Frank cannot see it, she found herself as a natural, independent and inspirational woman.

The story comes to life through Russell's writing and subtle wit, which is entertaining yet, meaningful. Through the clever use of props and metaphor it inspires the audience with a somewhat mediocre plot and setting.