

Educating ritasample



In creating 'Educating Rita' Russell produced a piece of drama to entertain and give a wide audience the opportunity to understand the class and culture difficulties and differences faced between Rita who represents the working class and Frank who represents the middle class. The contrast between Rita's witty and thoughtful remarks, lively personality and Frank's staleness and sarcasm provides both dramatic entertainment to enjoy, and an exploration of culture issues with which some members of the audience may identify.

In 'Educating Rita' Russell uses slapstick humour to amuse the audience. For example at the start of the play humour is created by the increasing impatience of Frank as he repeatedly tells Rita to "Come in!" however Rita must repeatedly keep knocking because of the broken door handle. Rita's response to this event "... one of these days you'll be shoutin' "Come in" an' it'll go on forever because the poor sod on the other side wont be able to get in. An' you wont be able to get out" is not only humorous but provides the audience with a clear insight to Rita's relaxed, ' breezy' personality.

This is effective in highlighting the more serious issue of the development of Rita's character where she becomes more educated and more at ease with herself (at one point in the play the audience sees her already in Frank's office reading a book). Russell's use of visual humour is effective as it provides the audience with comedy directly through what they are seeing on the stage. For example, at the start of the play the stage directions "[noticing the picture... she goes up to it]" and "[coming back to the desk... inspecting a bookcase]" suggest that Rita is constantly moving around, highlighting her restlessness.

This is humorous because it is not the usual way in which an audience would expect a university student to behave. The visual humour is useful as it gives the audience an impression of the character of Rita even when she is not speaking. It highlights the anxiety Rita is feeling and her determination for achieving a decent education. The play also ends with visual humour when Rita says there is something she wants to give Frank to repay him for giving her an education. At this point the audience may become confused because they do not know what to expect " I never thought there was anythin' I could give you.

But there is. Come here, Frank... ". The stage directions which follow however "[Frank sits, and Rita, eventually finding a pair of scissors on the desk, waves them in the air]" provide the audience with actions which they perhaps were not expecting. This has more impact than a serious ending because although Russell had the intention to highlight the more serious issues through humour, the audience are expecting a comedy, therefore a humorous ending would maintain the light-hearted tone produced throughout the play.

The humour with which Russell chose to end the play with may help the conclusion to be regarded as a ' happy' one where Rita has her freedom with her education and Frank has gained freedom by leaving the university. Russell also makes the play comic by using sexual innuendo. For example at the start of the play when Frank introduces the novel " Howard's End" Rita calls it " filthy" and the comedy arises from Rita's understanding of the term " end" which in her culture is a slang term for penis.

As well as providing humour for the audience Russell has used this to highlight the contrast in the cultures of Frank and Rita. This is also highlighted through Rita's "Do it on the Radio" essay, providing humour through the use of her witty answer which is not the standard Frank accepts at the university. The humour created here gives the audience an impression of the gap at the start of the play between academic expectations and the responses given by Rita.

The use of verbal comedy through the differing types of language has enabled Russell to make 'Educating Rita' comic. For example in Act Two Rita changes her accent which provides a contrast to her usual colloquial language which the audience has become familiar with in Act One, "As Trish says there is not a lot of point in discussing beautiful literature in an ugly voice". This comedy highlights Rita's eagerness to change her life. It is effective in suggesting that perhaps Rita is ashamed of her background and culture and gaining an education is not enough for her.

Rita sees education as a solution to escape her unfulfilled life however Frank is adamant that she should just be herself suggesting that he almost regrets the good education he has gained. Russell uses Rita's colloquial language as a contrast to Frank's standard English language to make the play comic. For example, "I'm coming in, aren't I? It's that stupid bleedin' handle on the door. You wanna get it fixed!" is a simple but effective way to highlight the difference in class between the two characters. The discussion the pair have on swearing is also effective as it shows how much Rita is in awe of the educated.

Humour is created in the way that Rita mimics the way she considers the middle class swear “ Pass me the fackin’ grouse” but it also highlights the way in which Rita credits Frank’s freedom in that he can speak the way he wants to because to him, swearing is “ only words”. The references Rita uses at the start of the play also help to give the play its comical tone. For example, when she refers to television “ Far-rah Fawcett Majors”, “ Flora Man”. This creates comedy because Frank does not understand the references Rita uses and this is an important method which allows Russell to highlight the way in which their cultures differ.

Also, the references Rita uses at the start of the play provide the audience with contrasts to the more educated references at the end. For example, when she refers to a Blake poem “[reciting from memory]”. This highlights the way in which Rita’s character has developed in that she has become more educated academically. There is however, a danger that the humorous references Rita uses from the eighties will become dated, and therefore the desired effect will not be produced. Russell not only uses humour to give the audience an impression of Rita’s character, but also for Frank’s, especially through the use of sarcasm.

An example of this is when they are discussing Julia, who according to Frank “ spends a great deal of time putting her head in the oven”. This sarcasm is extremely effective because it highlights the distress and unhappiness Frank feels in his own personal life. It is significant that Julia is an “ Ex-student” who is therefore educated, and this is what Rita would like to be as she believes that an education will change her into a better person. This irony is effective in suggesting to the audience that although an education may

change Rita's culture and ideas in life it will not necessarily change her as a person.

Russell also uses humour to reflect Rita's home situation. For example her husband's jealousy that Rita is gaining an education and lack of understanding that she is not satisfied with the lifestyle which is expected from her culture. Russell uses exaggeration " even if I was havin' an affair there's no point burnin' me books. I'm not havin' it off with Anton Chekov" which helps to illustrate the frustration she is feeling in her own life, not only because she feels that she has no decent education but that she does not want to conform to what is expected of her.

For example, in her society she was brought up believing that " music an' clothes an' lookin' for a feller" were the main qualities of life however, she always had the notion that it was wrong. Hyperbole is also used to show the audience the way in which Rita sees herself as someone who is entertaining but who cannot be taken seriously, for example when she says " I didn't want to come to your house just to play the court jester. " This shows that she is angry at her witty personality and emphasises the extent to which she wants to change.

Russell uses similes to create humour for the audience. For example when Rita says that Frank looks like a " geriatric hippie" humour is created because two opposite contrasts have been placed together. This is effective because it highlights Rita's light-hearted nature and the use of the word " hippie" emphasises the suggestion that Frank is not motivated to change his lifestyle, which could be caused by his depression and alcoholism.

Russell's vision for 'Educating Rita' is definitely a humorous one. The methods which he uses are successful in not only entertaining the audience but also in informing them of the more serious issues. The use of visual humour for example, Frank's hunt for his alcohol is effective as it complements the verbal humour such as the witty conversations between the two characters. Humour is an effective way to present the serious issues such as class and culture without giving the play a dull tone.