

How does willy russell present the development of frank and of rita in educating ...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Educating Rita, written by Willy Russell is a witty, humorous play with only two characters, Frank and Rita. Rita is twenty-six years old and a hairdresser from Liverpool. She longs to break away from her daily routine and not follow the mould of a lower class Liverpudlian woman. She does this by taking a degree in English Literature from the Open University (O. U.). Rita teaches her tutor, Frank, more about life than she learns from him, about books. The development of Frank and Rita's characters is a central part to why the play works and is so successful, in the theatre and on the 'big screen'.

On the one hand Frank starts out very much as a long-suffering cynic, who turns to alcohol for comfort. However by the end of the play Frank has a new perception on life and the lower class. He also acquires a greater respect for his pupils and for literature in general. Rita is very much unlike Frank she is very abrupt and energetic, but still very friendly. She has a very positive attitude towards the course and wanting to learn, however she lacks much confidence in her own abilities and intellect. However by the end of the play she is almost the opposite she is far more laid back and confident.

She is far less abrupt, but still with a thirst for knowledge. At the very beginning of the play Frank is very much bored of his life and his daily routine, and thinks a lot about where his next drink is. We can learn this from the very first scene, where Frank is searching for some whisky hidden behind a bookcase. This shows there is something missing in his life, to which he turns to drink in search of. Also hiding it behind a bookcase shows he is not proud of it and does not want people to find out about him drinking at work, probably because it could jeopardise his career.

I know that he finds his partner Julia tedious and almost a hindrance, as he does not show any respect for her and is very negative towards her in general. As in Act 1 Scene 1, he states, in a conversation over the phone with her: ' Oh, for God's sake, what is it? ' ' You could incinerate ratatouille and it still wouldn't burn. ' ' Yes that's it just pop off and put your head in the oven. ' These quotations show Frank is perhaps tired and under a lot of stress as he is hurling insults at Julia left, right and centre in this conversation.

This is the reason that the audience's first impression of Frank is that he is a bitter, perhaps nasty character with sexist views and a sharp tongue.

However stress is a major factor for Frank at the beginning of the play, as we know he is not doing this job out of choice but to earn more money to pay for his drink habits. I know this as Frank says, in the same conversation with Julia: ' I suppose I did take this on to pay for the drink. ' This shows Frank does not really want to be at the university and thus is another reason why he is unhappy and turns to alcohol to drown his sorrows.

I also noticed another possible reason for why Frank is so snappy towards Julia in this conversation; the reason is that Frank's mind is elsewhere and he is not thinking before he speaks as he is thinking more about going to the pub and having as many drinks as he wants. Therefore he wants to get the conversation and the day over with as quickly as possible. ' Just a couple of pints... four', ' I shall need to go to the pub afterwards'. These quotations show he has a serious issue with alcohol, also he says, he needs to go to the pub rather than, he would like to go to the pub.

This shows he is most likely addicted to alcohol and therefore it is probable that Frank has an addictive personality. This could be a reason for saying that later on in the play he becomes addicted to Rita. Frank also belittles Julia a lot, this not only shows he does not respect Julia but also that he is the dominant male in the relationship and has never known it any other way.

Willy Russell portrays this by using sarcastic, rhetorical questions ' I've got this Open University woman coming, haven't I?... Tch. ', ' But darling, you shouldn't have prepared dinner, should you? I believe that Frank does not actually like always being the boss in the relationship, which could be one of the reasons why he has an instant liking towards Rita later in the play.

Another thing that I noticed about Frank at the beginning of the play is that he dislikes his students as he thinks they are all the same by only doing the degree because they want the qualification and not to expand their knowledge.

In the same conversation Frank states ' I shall need to wash away the memory of some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James. This is another reason why Frank is bored of his life and why he likes Rita so much because she isn't like the other students in Frank's mind. Rita on the other hand, enters in emphatic style. She bursts through the door and immediately challenges Frank by asking him a rhetorical question ' I'm comin' in aren't I? ' And by using reasonably bad language ' Stupid', ' Bleedin,' And by shouting back at him ' You wanna get it fixed! ' Frank is rather taken back by this abrupt and rather brash entrance and is almost speechless.

The entrance, and Frank's reaction to it, is very comical which makes the audience and Frank take an instant liking towards Rita. By the end of Act 1 Scene 1 you find out Rita's abruptness and her swearing are caused by a deep feeling of unease. As Rita does not feel she fits in to her community 'But sometimes I hate them. God, what's it like to be free?' In this quotation Rita is referring towards the people near to where she lives and she states she asks Frank what it is like to be free from these people and therefore she is assuming Frank has no problems because he is educated and she wants to be like him.

Rita has great energy and immediately starts to dominate the conversation with Frank, just like Frank did in his conversation with Julia. This is a complete role reversal, it should be the other way round; Rita should be the nervous, polite person as she is just bravely taking her first steps towards a new world of culture. On the other hand Frank should be the self-assured, confident tutor, as he has been a tutor for a decent amount of time. However Frank is the polite, perhaps nervous and slightly lost character.

This could be because he is not confident in his own abilities as a tutor, as he was formerly a poet. In the first scene he even admits he is not good at what he does 'I'm actually an appalling teacher.' He goes on to say 'Most of the time, you see, it doesn't actually matter, appalling teaching is quite in order for most of my appalling students... but you're different.' This shows he is most probably quite modest and he recognizes and appreciates Rita is not like the rest and that she has a thirst for knowledge, thus his opinion of his students is transformed.

And because of this the two characters build an instant rapport. Not only is Rita different in an intellectual sense compared to the other students, but she is also from a lower class and a poorer background to other students and to Frank. Frank is very much middle class and therefore despite living in Liverpool he does not have a Liverpudlian accent. In addition as a lower class citizen Rita speaks with a common Liverpudlian accent which at first Frank finds hard to understand.

Rita states 'D' y' get a lot like me?' And Frank replies 'Pardon?' Then Rita repeats what she says but slower and without the slang 'Do you get a lot of students like me?' This makes their relationship far more interesting as they are such contrasting characters and the unlikeliest of friends. This is one of the techniques used by Willy Russell to keep the audience's interest with only two characters.

Rita shows her keenness to learn immediately, as she starts probing Frank with lots of questions about a painting on the wall in Frank's office 'Is it supposed to be erotic?' 'Do you think it is erotic?' 'So they made it religious, didn't they?' Rita showed how eager she is to learn from these quotes and that is when Frank realises she is different from his other students and he thought he was not a good enough tutor for her. However Rita persuades him to teach her 'You're my tutor. I don't want another tutor.' This shows her strength of character, which stays with her throughout the play and is one part of her, which never really develops. As the play continues the characters start to develop. Firstly the dialogue becomes less one-sided.

Rita no longer totally dominates the conversations; Frank can now fight his corner. He no longer hesitates as nearly as much and asks nearly as many questions as Rita did earlier in the play. In Act 1 Scene 3 Frank asks 'Is it a joke? Is it?' In this quote he is challenging Rita over her essay, this shows he has developed greater strength in his personality. Later he even mocks her slightly as he says 'Which English feller?' This ridicules her use of slang in the word feller but he does not mock her in a demeaning way but more as sarcastic humour.

Then he challenges Rita once more by asking her a tough question 'And if I asked you to make a comparison between those books, what would you say?' and for once Rita does not know what to say she replies rather hesitantly 'Well, they were all good in their own way.' This shows Frank is developing to become more self-assured and confident in his own abilities as a tutor. This also shows that there are times where they reverse roles again, where Rita becomes the nervous one and Frank the confident one. On the other hand Frank does not always dominate the conversations later in the play, in fact far from it.

Frank tends to only dominate the dialogue when it is about a subject where he has the most knowledge, usually the subject being literature. For example in Act 1 Scene 6 Frank is dominating a conversation about Macbeth and what a tragedy is, Frank; 'Which might be quite tragic, but it won't be tragedy' Rita: 'What?' Frank: 'The tragedy of the drama has nothing to do with the sort of tragic event you are talking about.' Rita: 'Yeh, go on.' As you can

see from this extract when the conversation is about literature, Frank dominates it.

Frank is doing most of the talking with short replies from Rita; Frank is therefore dominating length and the speed of the conversation. Another example of Frank dominating the conversation when the subject is literature is in Act 1 Scene 6. In this scene Rita is telling Frank about a Shakespeare play she went to see, she starts by reciting a quite well known passage from it: ' Out, out brief candle! Life's but a poor player... ' And Frank, quite deliberately replies ' Ah, Romeo and Juliet. '

Knowing full well that it is from Macbeth. Rita does not catch on to Frank's sarcasm and she says ' Tch. Frank be serious! Frank then puts his feet on his desk; this signals that he is in control of the situation and dominating the conversation, a skill Frank has quickly developed, compared his nervous hesitations at the beginning of the play. This passage that I quoted is also a very humorous part in the play as Rita's naivety combined with Frank's subtle sarcasm is another technique that Willy Russell uses to create humour and therefore keep the audience's interest with only two characters.

However when the conversation is about marriage, families, society or life in general, Rita tends to dominate these conversations.

Probably because she has more knowledge of these subjects, we know Rita has a reasonably large family and she is married, unlike Frank, who speaks not of his family and is divorced from his wife. For example at the beginning of Act 1 Scene 6 Frank is challenging Rita to why she did not come to the

dinner he invited her to. Frank is very much dominating the conversation and Rita is on the back foot, Frank: ' Having to cope with six instead of eight is extremely hard on Julia! I'm not saying I needed any sort of apology; you don't turn up and that's up to you. ' Rita rather nervously replies: ' I did apologize.

As Frank has the upper hand he continues to grill Julia by saying: ' ' Sorry couldn't come' scribbled on the back of your essay and thrust through the letterbox? Rita that's hardly an apology. ' However as soon as Rita brings something like family in to the conversation she starts to dominate it, such as her husband Denny: ' When I told Denny we were goin' to yours he went mad. ' Frank now rather nervously replies ' I'm sorry. I didn't realize. '

Therefore with an instant Rita has turned round the conversation and made Frank apologize just by bringing up a subject where Frank is uncomfortable, such as family.

This is a technique that Rita has developed as the play continues. Another development I noticed is how their relationship becomes more and more emotional and less and less professional. The turning point is perhaps when Rita leaves Denny.

This is something Rita has in common with Frank, who split up with his wife. However unlike Frank's marriage, which breaks down because of Frank's laziness, awkwardness and alcohol problem, Rita's marriage to Denny ends because she had the choice between a normal lower class life, going down the pub, having a baby etc. or an education. And she chooses the education,

as she says she wants to 'sing a better song'. Immediately after finding out about Rita's marriage to Denny being on the rocks he tries to talk to her about it and not about literature. In Act 1 Scene 5 Rita and Frank are talking about Denny, Rita does not want to Frank almost insists they do Frank: 'Yes. Well perhaps your husband...' Rita: 'No I don't wanna talk about him.'

Frank: 'We really should talk about you and Denny, my dear. In this passage Frank is trying to instigate an emotional conversation and therefore develop their relationship from professional to emotional. This also shows Frank cares about Rita, her life and her welfare, thus he has grown an emotional attachment to her. To continue this, in the same scene, Frank tries to create a less professional environment than his office. He does this by pouring some drinks for them both and saying 'We'll talk about Chekhov and pretend this is the pub.' This is furthering my point about their relationship becoming less professional.

Rita then asks Frank some very personal questions which could cause an uncomfortable situation in a professional environment, however in an emotional, friendly environment they discuss these questions freely, Rita asks Frank 'Do you actually like drinking?' and 'Why did you stop being a poet?' Frank answers both these questions without putting up a fight or changing the subject, unlike Rita, who repeatedly refused to talk about Denny. This shows, although their relationship has developed to become more emotionally fuelled, but perhaps Frank has more of an emotional attachment and dependence towards Rita, than she has towards him.

Another example of their relationship developing as more than a professional one, is when Frank agrees to go to watch an amateur production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in Act 1 Scene 5. This is significant as it is the first time they are going to meet outside of Frank's office and at a social event. At first Frank does not want to go, as he believes Julia would get jealous 'And how would I explain that to Julia.' 'Even a woman who possesses an M. A. is not above common jealousy.' This is perhaps an excuse as he is nervous of being seen with Julia.

Firstly because it might look like they are having an affair, this shows he is still fond of Julia, but also he may be slightly reluctant to be seen with a woman from a common, lower class background. However as the conversation continues and Rita continues to nag Frank, he tells her that Julia is out anyway and he eventually agrees to go. This is a very big development in their relationship; going to a social event shows they very much enjoy each other's company and that their professional relationship is being overshadowed by their friendship and emotional relationship.

This also shows Frank is starting to make his own sacrifices as he responds to Rita's dedication to her studies, by forgetting his dislike of the theatre to please her. Another example of Frank making his own sacrifices is his attempt to cut down on drink, however this fails when Rita is at summer school Frank is lonely once again and turns back to drink. As in Act 2 Scene 1 Rita picks up a bottle of whisky on Frank's shelf and states 'Are you still on this stuff?' Rita then goes on to say 'Why d' y' do it when y've got so much goin' for y' Frank?'

This not only shows that without Rita, Frank goes back to his old ways, but also that despite not admitting as soon as Rita returns she is immediately trying to reform Frank, which shows also that she still cares for him and his health. After their outing to the watch *The Importance of Being Earnest* Rita starts to develop more confidence in terms of her abilities in literature, but also her confidence increases in general. I know this, as she goes to a professional theatre on her own, something she would never dream of doing in the first few scenes of the play.

She states this in Act 1 Scene 6 ' I had to come an' tell y', Frank, last night, I went to the theatre! A proper one, a professional theatre. ' This not only shows Rita is gaining in confidence, but also that Frank was the first person she told and therefore she considers him a very good friend if not her best friend. Also he is the only person she knows who would understand, this means she holds him in high regard and respects his intellect and Rita does not just value his friendship, which is a development. As the play continues Frank and Rita start to do more social things together.

For example in Act 1 Scene 6 Rita invites Frank to accompany her to an art gallery ' Ey Frank listen, I was thinking of going to the art gallery tomorrow. D' y' wanna come with me? ' Frank replies, with a smile ' All right. ' This shows they are both pleased their relationship is developing, but in different ways. Frank just wants to teach a friend and he wants some fresh, lively company in his rather boring life. Whereas Rita just is not confident enough yet to go somewhere intellectual on her own, she wants someone intellectual to be with her, to guide her.