

Educating rita argumentative



The attitudes towards women were drastically changing when “ Educating Rita” was being both written and performed. Many women during the 70’s were beginning to feel frustrated that their main roles in life were those of housewife and mother. They were starting to realise that they deserved the same rights as men in all aspects of life and many marches and protests were held to promote these rights.

In 1970 the Equal Pay Act became law and then the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act helped further to protect women from discrimination. Still, women weren’t seen as equals. Yes, they were in theory, but in reality and in society things were just as they always had been. This was just the sort of attitude that Denny had (Rita’s husband) although he is never seen in the play itself, the audience are always aware of his attitude towards Rita’s education. He believes that she should stay at home and have children and become the traditional women, pictured by so many people.

Yet, it is seen right from the beginning that Rita doesn’t want this, and wants more and better things from life. The fact that in the end she leaves Denny shows that she has freedom to do what she wants, more, at least, than women prior to her, and especially womens new found freedom with the advent of the birth control pill. The 1970’s were the days of 11+ exams and those who passed them went to Grammar school, but the majority of the public went to secondary modern schools where they completed their education at the age of fifteen, and very few would ever go onto A-levels or any further kind of education. This means that they would only have four years of secondary education.

However, the play could have been performed around the time that comprehensive schools came in to being, but this is doubtful. In the case of this play, it is most likely that Rita went to a secondary modern school, where being a working class student put her at a major disadvantage, she left at fifteen and from there went straight into a hairdressing job. She would have had no previous training for the job, but would have been trained there as she worked, picking up new things as she went along. In other words, working as an apprentice. This would be the case for most people with a working class background.

Some won't even have been that lucky. Job Sex-stereotyping began as early as ten, when women were persuaded into becoming nurse or hairdressers, rather than manual work, such as engineering or bricklaying. The Open University gave both men and women from all backgrounds, mostly working class, the chance to increase their education and knowledge, while still working and so therefore provide an income to support any family they may have and indeed themselves. Harold Macmillan set up the Open University in 1969.

People didn't have to constantly attend lectures; they could just study from home, with the aid of textbooks and study packs, TV and radio programmes and videos. The only time that the students would have to study away from home would be on a one-week course in the summer. This gave them a taste of what it was like to be a real student. The plays written in the previous centuries before "Educating Rita" were mostly about the upper classes and nobles. If they were ever about the working class, then they never incorporated them making it in the world, and they continually brought

forward the fact of their places in society and how they could not change them.

In the 1950's and 60's "kitchen sink Dramas" started to become very popular and common. The first was written by John Osborne and was titled "Look Back In Anger". "Educating Rita" is about an ordinary, working, lower class girl wanting more for herself in the form of education. This concept takes the "kitchen sink dramas" just one stage further. "Educating Rita" was written in a duologue form.

This means that only two people act in the play. A duologue play is so much harder to write and perform well than a normal play. The reason I think that Willy Russell chose to write the play in this way is because it meant that more focus was given to the two characters (Rita and Frank). If other characters had been introduced, as in the film, the play becomes much more cluttered and the focus is drawn away from Rita and Frank. In the duologue form however, the focus and attention is always there, and the audience are constantly enticed to know more about them, how their relationship will evolve, and how both their attitudes change as the play progresses. There have been very few duologues and one of the first of modern times was "Waiting For Godot" written by Samuel Becket.

It was originally French and is one of the most famous duologues ever written. As I go through, I shall mention the ways Willy Russell overcomes the difficulties, of writing the play in a duologue form, in the humour, the use of the stage and the focus on the passage of time. The first scene opens with Frank, a lecturer at university, alone in his office. From the very beginning

the audience gets an impression of where, and who he is. We also see that he doesn't really care and he that looks completely fed up, due to the constant rummaging around in the bookcase, this also leads to the audience being intrigued, as they want to know what he's looking for. There is humour present from the very beginning: "Where the hell.

..?" At first the audience are under the impression that he's looking for a book, but later, when he takes a bottle of whisky from the bookcase, we realise what he really wanted. His first speech is of him on the phone, although he shouldn't sound drunk, we get the impression that he drinks a lot of alcohol. In this first phone call the audience establish a lot about Frank's character and his background. We establish, that although he is living with a partner he is not entirely happy with her, because she is always pestering him.

We also find out, just how much he loves his alcohol." Yes, I probably shall go to the pub afterwards. I shall need to go to the pub afterwards." The audience immediately get to know that that he's a lecturer for an Open University course, as he refers to teaching "some silly women", about Henry James. Rita enters the scene with a full burst of life. She is a total contrast to Frank in many ways, this becomes immediately obvious as soon as she enters.

Rita is outgoing, and speaks in a rich Liverpool accent. Frank is directly the opposite, his use of vocabulary is very different, and in comparison to Rita he is quite reserved. The first time she speaks she swears, which isn't the language you would expect from a new student: "It's that stupid bleedin'

handle on the door.” The whole play is written phonetically, which means it’s written as she would speak it. I. e.

‘bleedin’ and not ‘bleeding’. Frank is totally shocked and rather confused by her entrance. The fact that Rita ‘butts in’, when Frank is speaking, shows that she’s not afraid or worried. Rita brings deliberate use of humour to the scene, and her fast pace of speech adds to this. When Frank asks Rita’s name, she miss judges him and thinks that he is about to call her something.

Also, Frank is very confused by Rita and obviously isn’t used to her sort of character. As the following dialogue shows: Frank: “ You are?” Rita: “ What am I?” Frank: “ Pardon?” Rita: “ What?” Frank: (now looking for the admission papers) “ Now you are?” Rita: “ I’m a what?” Another point about Rita that is brought out very early on is that fact that she has a short attention span, because as soon as the above duologue is over, she notices a picture on the wall, and starts to put her mind on that. This use of the set is continually used throughout the play. Rita continually comes across as being very forward. While studying the picture hung on Frank’s office wall, she uses the word “ tits”, this disturbs frank as he coughs and retreats back to looking through the admission papers. We also find that she always has her own point of view, and opinions, and frequently wants to put these across to Frank.

Rita is also, extremely open and blunt. This comes over a lot, especially when she asks Frank if the reason he’s doing the Open University is because he needs the money. She’s very unusual in the fact that she asks if she can

smoke and this isn't the 'done' thing in a lesson. What's probably more unusual is the fact that Rita offers Frank one and he accepts.

In this part of the scene, the audience become aware of the total difference in the kind of books that they read and their previous education. We find out that although she has been reading poetry, it's not an intellectual poet like Dylan Thomas, but rather Roger McGough, but at least she's being trying. Once again, Rita reverts back to her usual tendencies, which the audience can see are a huge part of her character, and when she pulls a book of the shelf titled: "Howards End", she refers to the 'end' meaning 'backside', saying: "Yeh. It sounds filthy, doesn't it?" Rita, although very forward, is also very unsure of herself. In the way that she doesn't know whether she'll be able to cope with the course, and she might have to "pack it in". Rita continually wants to learn, and to be on a higher level, she wants to be able to understand, and interact with others.

This impression comes from her all the time, and when she talks about the ballet and the opera, she wants to be able to understand it and not just watch it, because then she has no appreciation for it. Rita is always testing Frank, to see how far she can go with him: "Y, don't mind me swearin', do y'?" But Frank doesn't mind, because he is so laid back. In one of the speeches that Rita gives, the audience find out just how much, she wants to be free from the working class: "But sometimes I hate them. God, what's it like to be free?" At this point, Rita gets up and walks to the window in Franks room, this is yet another example of how widely spread the use of the set is. Even for simple movements it's continually used and makes the play that much more interesting.

Frank, weighs Rita up and finds her a very lively and interesting student. Rita always feels that she has better things to do, than start the lesson; she starts to talk about the room, and tries to avoid her education. They both have the same attitude in that they are both incredibly laid back and relaxed, and open with each other. There's a sort of rapport between them, although there characters are totally different in one way, in another they are the same, because they both want to find comfort. The very fact that Rita has changed her name from Susan is ironic, as she has changed it to make herself sound more intellectual after the writer Rita Mae Brown, however, the writer is no novelist. Rita's vocabulary is very bad: "D' y' wanna lend it?" Rita is amazed at the fact that Frank has read everything by T.

S Elliot, when she couldn't even read one poem, but at least she has tried to read it. Rita judges people very quickly and she confesses that as soon as she walked into the room she saw Frank as being a "Flora Man". This means a conservative man who goes for things simple. Rita talks about her life freely with Frank, and tells him how she thinks she's "totally out of step" with the people around her, and out of tune with her husband. She wants totally different thing to her husband, as she wants an education and a better life, and although he wants a better life, he doesn't want Rita to have an education. Frank suddenly realises that he can't teach Rita, as he feels inadequate for her needs: ".

.. Most of the time, you see, it doesn't actually matter- appalling teaching is quite in order for most of my appalling students. And the others manage to get by despite me.

But you're different. You want a lot, and I can't give it." However, Rita is defiant and adamant that Frank will teach her, and she won't let him give up that easily. In the end they like each other because they are so very different from each other. A major detail that helps Willy Russell to write the play in a duologue form is that although no one else is ever seen in the actual play they are mentioned.

For example, in the very first scene, it opens with Frank on the phone to Julia, letting the audience know about his life. Rita also mentions Denny a lot and he is a main part of her life, and carries a lot of the story line. Trish (Rita's flatmate) is referred to and helps Rita to become almost a different person. Her mother is shown to get Rita back on the right track and makes her realise that education is the right thing for her.

Other students are discussed as well, especially Tiger who has invited her to France for the summer, and is someone who I think Rita looks up to. The acts leading up to Act 1 scene 7 have been about Rita's attitude towards education changing, and what is becoming important to her in her life. The relationship between Rita and Frank really grows in the previous scenes, and they got on so well, that he even invited her to his house for a dinner party. Scene 7 is a very important scene as it forms an effective climax to the first act. In this scene you see that Rita's vocabulary is changing, she isn't swearing constantly, as before.

The scene opens with Frank trying to make Rita feel guilty about not going to his dinner party, which he had previously asked her to go to in the past scenes. At this point, however, the audience do not know that Rita didn't

attend. Frank is actually really upset that Rita did not go, but tries to hide this with sarcasm and guilt. However, he makes the blame seem to come from Julia (his wife) and that she was the only one that was bothered, and not as though he cared, which in fact he did:” Now I don’t mind; two empty seats at the dinner table means more vino for me. But Julia – Julia is the stage manager type.

If we’re having eight people to dinner she expects to see eight. She likes order – probably why she took me on – gives her a lot of practice-...

“ He doesn’t want to show Rita that he really wanted her there, but he wants to make her feel guilty for not turning up:”...You don’t turn up that’s up to you, but...

“ Rita brings up that fact that Denny was one of the reasons she didn’t go and was involved:” When I told Denny we were goin’ to yours he went mad.” We really get to know what Rita is feeling, that she’s not good enough, inadequate, uneducated and her feelings just become more mixed up than they ever were. Not only does she feel like she’s not clever enough for the likes of Frank’s associates, but she also feels socially inadequate. Frank just thinks this is ludicrous, and really feels for her:” I wanted you to come along.” Rita is very insecure in this scene, as she thinks that Frank wants to use her as an object to be laughed at:” I didn’t want to come to your house just to play the court jester.” This just shows how nervous she is about how people of the middle class will react to her, an Open University student from the working class.

She says how she feels like a “ half-caste”, and doesn’t belong in either world. At the end of the scene the audience find out how close Rita came to packing it all in. But her mother made her realise, that she wanted to be able to choose her life and experiences that she wanted to, and she didn’t want to be stuck in the same old place forever. Rita is very serious throughout this scene, and even when Frank makes the odd, snide, sarcastic comment, she shakes it off or just gently smiles. She’s realising fully what she’s doing and what she wants for herself. In the next scene Rita realises what she wants and how totally determined to succeed she is.

The following act brings a whole new change to Rita; and the audience can see the drastic changes made in her attitude and character. After going to summer school her dress sense has changed and she now looks like a real stereotypical student. It’s not just her outer look that’s changed but also her whole view on education. Act 2 scene 7 is the last and final scene. It shows us how Frank and Rita are about to set out on new stages of their lives. The most important aspect of this scene is that fact that Rita is now able to take charge of her own life and to make decisions for herself.

The events in scene 7 take place a long time after the events in the other scenes, and this has to be put across to the audiences and they have to be able to interpret it. So Rita comes in, in a large winter coat, and places a Christmas card, along with others already there on Frank’s filing cabinet. This brings awareness to the audience of the time of year it is. We find out that Frank’s going to Australia for two years, after upsetting the University authorities too many times, and also that Julia is not going with him. The audience really see the effects of the relationship that has progressed

throughout the duration of the play. Rita didn't need to come back to see Frank, but she did, showing that she cares for him and thinks he's a really good teacher.

She brings everything together in her speech, saying that she went overboard, because she was just so eager to learn and so he was right, she had turned in to somebody else, someone with no mind of her own, and who just liked to follow the crowd. Frank likes Rita so much, that he even asks her to go to Australia with him, but without saying no, she declines. Rita chose to take the exam, and passed it, she now has a choice of what to do with the rest of her life, whereas before she was trapped and now she has everything ahead of her. The first scene and the last scene contrast enormously. Her language has changed immensely throughout the course of the play, but, in this final scene there is a definite change, as she doesn't swear, and has a much wider use of vocabulary, she also understands everything that Frank says, which is a lot more than in the first scene. It's not just Rita that's changed, Frank has to, he cares about things more and he to wants a better life for himself.

The film, " Educating Rita", is a very good adaptation of the play. Extra parts are naturally added and it flows very well. Getting to see the other characters is good and helps to explain the play slightly more and to avoid any confusion, which may arise. It would be impossible to have the film in the duologue form as it would not have the same impact as if done on stage. So adding the other characters and places works very well for the film. However, if this was done on the stage, I feel that some of the meaning

would be lost and the relationship between Frank and Rita would not be portrayed half as well.

In my opinion Willy Russell overcomes all of the difficulties of having a duologue form for the play brilliantly. However, it's not just the script that needs to be immaculate for the audience to like the play. The actors too must be able to bring the full meaning of the play across, and that includes the humour, the swearing, the language and the great contrast between Frank and Rita. The great use of the set is exceptional, and this is all helped with the fantastic stage directions. Willy Russell scripted the play brilliantly, and the duologue form added to the affect. The audience are always there and involved, and never bored.