

The changing relationship between frank and rita essay sample



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The play 'Educating Rita' written by Willy Russell is a fictional, yet vaguely autobiographical depiction of the developing relationship formed between a budding, impulsive young student named Rita and her somewhat satirically humored tutor, Frank. There are two major themes dealt with in the play: a clash of cultures and Frank and Rita's relationship. The play focuses on the way that Rita and Frank influences each other's lives which is entertaining yet conveys an underlying moral, mainly the point of how class differentiation can cause many limitations in the way people live their lives. While Rita's stifling working class society often collides with Frank's middle class academic upbringing, resulting in misinterpretation of writers and books the two bring up in conversation. Although the comic value of the two frequently misunderstanding each other's remarks is constructive to the play, it seems Russell's real aim is to illustrate Frank and Rita's perception of education and the differences in both their backgrounds.

Many of the larger events happen off stage, for instance we only hear about Denny burning all Rita's books in Act 1 scene 5, but don't actually see this happening on stage. Because of this the author has to use stage directions and engineer small events which draw attention to the larger changes, for example the writer shows her transformation after going to summer school through her new clothes and behavior when she returns to Frank; also her sitting on the bookcase while explaining gives her visually a higher position.

Act 2 of 'Educating Rita' marks a considerable transformation in interactions between the two characters of the play - a plausible reason why I am to evaluate two scenes from this act; these two scenes being scenes 3 and the

last scene of the play, scene 7. This decision due to their relevance in illustrating clearly the characters' varying involvement with each other. It is important to remember that this is first and foremost a play and not a novel, therefore the length and content must be distinct yet evoke interest etc while not seeming forced and unnecessarily exaggerated.

Act 1 revolves predominantly around establishing the character's personalities and previous lifestyles. As an audience we ascertain from Act 1 that neither character is happy with their life. Rita is a twenty-six year old woman belonging to the 'working class', yet unlike most of her fellow kind, it is clear she, like her mother, is aware of a need to change from her lowly values or 'sing a better song' as her mother articulates it; Rita decides to pursue this need through education; meeting Frank through the newly founded 'Open University' scheme enables her to broaden her scope of options in life.

As the Act progresses we see Rita convert from an animated boisterous yet frustrated hairdresser, who longs to understand the things of the well educated upper classes, to a mature woman able to hold intelligent comprehensible conversation, while not feeling inadequate or shy of her lowly upbringing. Frank, her at first unwilling tutor, '... Why did I take this on...?' is a middle-aged, discontented man who is highly educated yet quite disillusioned with his intelligence. Rather than advancing with Rita he in fact seems to radically deteriorate as he witnesses her increasing superiority and independence of him.

One does get the sense throughout the play that this outcome was only ever inevitable- in spite of the positive impact Rita evidently had on Frank's life, it seemed foreseeable that she would come out the better of the two once the relationship came to a close. For Rita was a young, rather charming character who was patently eager to improve her life, '... I'm dead serious [about learning]... ' while Frank from the very beginning though amused and enchanted by Rita's child-like qualities, '... I think your marvelous/ first breath of air... ' was perhaps too old and embittered with life to ever make dramatic amendments; '...

My God, you think you've reformed me! ' presenting his cynicism and unwillingness to change when Rita enquires whether he has stopped drinking due to her remark the previous week, (... kills your brain cells). The sexual element involved yet not developed by the play-writer between the two, seems to occur for the reason that their sexual relationships, Rita with Denny and Frank with Julia, are stagnant and wearisome. Frank's dejection is highlighted by his heavy drinking, something which is made obvious to us at the very beginning of the play; "...

Yes I suppose I did take it [teaching with the O. U] on to pay for the drink... " Before the start of scene 3, Act 2 already determines a modification in their relationship. Rita has positioned herself at an advantage to Frank due to the way she has allowed herself to improve while at Summer school. She is familiar with famous poets such as ' Blake' and renowned works of literature; she has quit smoking while Frank indulges in drinking heavily, found new ' intellectually stimulating' friends and altered her code of dress.

This youthful ability to adapt to change seems to have left Frank at a default, causing friction in their relationship. Act 2 Scene 3 begins with the lights coming up on Rita sitting in Frank's study reading a 'heavy tome', this not only different from the meetings between them in Act 1 because Rita actually has to wait for Frank, but also instead of being excitable and chirpy she shows her maturity and self-sufficiency. Frank comes in drunk and swearing obscenities while Rita listens seeming rather shocked.

He seizes a bottle of whiskey from his briefcase revealing his unfavorable habits haven't changed. He lies on the floor while Rita sits imperially in her chair, illustrating not only visually but abstractly the shift in status between them. Frank shows his contempt for the University authorities by suggesting '... bugging the bursar...' being the only way to get the sack. Russell indicates Frank's depressing uncertain future when Frank explains how the authorities have politely recommended a 'sabbatical' to Australia as a means of '... getting rid... of him.

It is obvious that Frank is completely unfit to tutor Rita in this drunken state, he himself admitting he feels 'off my cake', a phrase reminiscent of the 'old' Rita, yet he refuses to let go of his role as Rita's guide and teacher.

There is a mounting tension between them as Frank broaches the subject of her essay on Blake's famous poem, 'The Blossom'. He admits it is a worthy dissertation on Blake, yet is unhappy to find she interprets the poem in a somewhat different light to Frank's, '... you seem to assume that the poem is about sexuality.

Rita endeavors to justify her stance on the issue backing her argument with her intellectual friend's opinions, '... Trish and me and some others were talkin' the other night...' Frank is extremely unsatisfied with this basis for her reasoning stating '... it's up to the minute, quite acceptable, trendy stuff about Blake; but there's nothing of you in there'. Frank feels she is simply reiterating her friend's views trying to be clever yet not allowing her natural, unrestrained initial idea of things to emerge as before. Rita points out that this is inconsistent of Frank who in the beginning had advised her to consult other's opinions.

Rita is irritated by Frank's incessant aspiration for her to remain the same as when they first met; she is now an independent learner that is able to constructively express and compose her outlook on literature and so on. From the way in which Frank reacts to Rita when she is demonstrating her new-found intelligence and ability, it is obvious he is rather attached to her dependence of him. Frank seems to, when describing Ruby-fruit Jungle as 'excellent', almost show his preference and admiration of the earlier Rita he first encountered.

The book's genre and unintelligent plot does appear in ways to suggest Frank sees it now as a symbol of the former Rita, her opinions and ways. He struggles to articulate his feelings about this, '... because I care for you - I want you to care for yourself'. Frank is clearly afraid of losing Rita completely so even when angry, he attempts to not lose his temper to the point of upsetting her. Rita cuts his almost affectionate analysis of the novel by swiftly down grading her once treasured book, 'Of its type it was quite interesting. But it's hardly excellence'.

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Act 2 Scene 7 appears to set a different mood, for it is the ending of the play; Russell obviously realizes that he must in some ways conclude the play satisfactorily to the audience. A great deal of time has passed since their last meeting, this exemplified through Rita's winter clothing and Christmas card; it had been summer in the last scene. Rita has converted back to smoking after her giving up the habit after summer school. This is rather peculiar of Rita's character I feel. It seems to suggest that she is now confident enough to make decisions of her own.

She no longer has to fight the habits picked up from her impoverished background. We come to know that Frank is leaving the country to migrate to Australia, after having 'made rather a night of it'. Rita enquires whether Julia will be accompanying Frank, who shakes his head seemingly rather dejected. At this point Rita gives the impression that she wants Frank to understand her empathy and also be on the same physical level as him, perhaps this is why Russell decides she should help Frank pack away his books which signifies union perhaps and companionship.

Frank makes rather a pitiful joke about Foster's Lager, changing the Australian Beer name to Forster; Frank is possibly trying to revive the memory of the past, inexperienced Rita who had difficulty spelling. This habitual reminiscent recalling of the younger Rita seems to exasperate her, she demands 'be serious'. This appears to hurt Frank who is more or less showing his affection for her and their past relationship, he snaps back 'For god's sake why did you come back here?' Rita now changes position onto a chair while Frank is still left packing.

A small shift indicated by Russell to suggest a change of feeling. Rita has matured enough during her absence to not play up to Frank's sharpness, but instead calms him. She answers his gruffness with a subtle compliment.

Russell enables Rita to have something flattering to say by her exam question being on Peer Gynt, a topic Frank had lengthily taught her about. She aims to make Frank proud of her intelligence not only in answering the question, but also in being able to resist putting in a witty 'clever' answer, showing she has learnt from her former mistakes.

Yet she also recognizes Frank's wish for her to remain the same as before, 'You you would 'ave loved it if I'd written, 'Frank knows all the answers'/ An' rushed back to tell you...' Rita has choices now that she is educated; choices she feels were given in, some ways, by Frank's intervention. Rita's praise of Frank's teaching and intelligence is clearly stated yet holds no sexual implications whatsoever. The pair seems to talk honestly and agreeably for what seems the first time in Act 2.

They appear to have equaled their odds not because they aren't felt, but more that the parting allows for only perhaps true and agreeable things to emerge. Rita realizes now that perhaps Frank had other motives besides desiring her to remain young and unreserved forever, but there was also truth in what he described of her views, 'You think I just ended up with a load of quotes an' empty phrases; an' I did.'

She comes to admit her own naive and immature conception of her flat mate Trish who she'd appeared to idolize and form her opinions from, 'I thought she was so cool an' together/ tryin' to kill herself. At Rita's openness

and affectionate words Frank seems to renew hope of their continuing their relationship abroad. There's most definitely a sexual element in his tone and awkwardness. ' It'd be good for us to leave a place that's just finishing for one that's just beginning. ' Frank seems slightly desperate and aware of their ever shortening time left together. Rita, having acquired both the academic understanding and self-assurance she had strived for from the beginning seems slightly flippant about her future when discussing it with Frank.

She seems to not realize or acknowledge the effect she'd had on Frank's life; nor the consequence he'd created in hers. Although she seemingly recognizes Frank's significance academically, '... y'a a good teacher... ', she doesn't bring forth any real signs of a love/sexual interest noticeably apparent in Frank's conduct at their parting. Russell chose to end with the usual cheerful ' open' ending where the character's future decisions /lives are left to the audience's imagination.

The sexual innuendos placed on Frank's sentimental gift, and Rita's spontaneous pulling him close to cut his hair leaves the audience with a comforting reminiscent after taste of the comic/playful relationship finally coming to a close. Russell doesn't explore the different sexual avenues that the relationship could take on; this is perhaps for the reason that this wasn't the point of the story. Dramatic devices are used throughout the play to stage visually and subtly the changing relationship between the two characters.

Rita's conduct around Frank's study has altered unquestionably altered during the course of Act 2. Her new found confidence and buoyancy has left

her at ease in the room and Frank's company. For instance Russell often places Rita in higher positions in the room during Act 2, demonstrating visually not only her ease but superiority to him in some respects. This is contrasted distinctly by Frank's lack of enthusiasm to talk freely with Rita, unlike when she depended on him to talk to as an 'intellectual' friend; he seems positively at a loss as how to approach or behave around this 'new' Rita.

The dramatist, Russell, had to use particular nuances in dress and character behaviour to signal changes in time and their development. Just as in 'Blood Brothers', also a play written by Willy Russell, it is made apparent how dividing peoples into segments for what ever reason may it be control or otherwise causes a whole variety of difficulties. The play 'Blood Brother's' revolves around two twins separated at birth, one is given to a middle-upper class family, while the other to its single working-class mother of eight. We see by the end how the subject of class can determine a person's life.

The son that was given to the working class ends tragically by killing himself and his twin, wishing he'd been the one to have been brought up differently in a rich, upper class environment. These issues are dealt with, yet not so extensively, in Educating Rita where Russell endeavors to portray the rising of a woman in life and society, Rita, all due to breaking through the barrier of various 'class' existences. The reason of Rita developing and drifting from Frank seems to be for the purpose of having a thread of story line, while the greater substance depicting a moral ethical message.