

The Hetero Social Relations in  
Willy Russell's Educating Rita

العلاقات الاجتماعية المختلطة

في مسرحية ويلى راسل "تعليم ريتا"

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### **Abstract**

After a long suffering from discrimination, isolation, neglect and mistreatment by men, women nowadays play an important role in society as politicians, socialists and economists. However, they still face a great number of problems, obstacles and barriers to become an important member in the society. The fundamental idea of the study is the conflict between diverse social relations, which constitutes the core idea around which the power of conceptualization to mold between men and women rotates. This study presents these social relations from a feminist point of view. It aims to discuss Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* in terms of gender roles, which aptly reveal the systemization of power according to social distinction between the characters in the play. In the current paper, comparative-typological, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, and contextual interpretation of the play are investigated to identify the main problems and plot tendencies. This study concludes that the characters in Russell's play stay committed to competing for power with each other, but Rita's, as a female character, manages to resolve this battle. She is in favour of women advancing their place in society. The maintenance of this conviction allows her to transcend all the social barriers to achieve a new role and status in a masculine society.

**Keywords:** *Educating Rita*, Willy Russell, feminism, gender, patriarchal society.

## ملخص البحث:

بعد معاناة طويلة من التمييز والعزلة والإهمال وسوء المعاملة من قبل الرجال، تلعب النساء في الوقت الحاضر دورًا مهمًا في المجتمع كسياسيات وباحثات اجتماعية ومختصات بالاقتصاد وغيرها من المجالات. ومع ذلك، لا يزالن يواجهن عددًا كبيرًا من المشاكل والعقبات التي تقطع الطريق عليهن من ان يكن اعضاء مؤثرات في المجتمع. الفكرة الأساسية للدراسة هي الصراع بين العلاقات الاجتماعية المتنوعة، والتي تشكل الفكرة الأساسية التي يتم حولها تشكيل مفهوم القوة بين الرجال والنساء. تقدم هذه الدراسة هذه العلاقات الاجتماعية من وجهة نظر نسوية. ويهدف إلى مناقشة مسرحية "تعليم ريتا" لويلي راسل من حيث أدوار كلا الجنسين، والتي تكشف بجلاء عن تنظيم السلطة وفقًا للتمييز الاجتماعي بين الشخصيات في المسرحية. في هذه الدراسة، تم التطرق لتصنيف المقارن والتحليل والتركيب والاستقراء والاستنتاج والتفسير السياقي للمسرحية لتحديد المشكلات الرئيسية واتجاهات الحبكة. خلصت هذه الدراسة إلى أن الشخصيات في مسرحية راسل تظل ملتزمة بالتنافس على السلطة مع بعضها البعض، لكن ريتا، كشخصية أنثوية، تمكنت من حل هذه المعركة. وهي تؤيد تعزيز مكانة المرأة في المجتمع. يسمح لها الحفاظ على هذه القناعة بتجاوز جميع الحواجز الاجتماعية لتحقيق دور ومكانة جديدة في مجتمع ذكوري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم ريتا، ويلي راسل، النسوية، الجنس، المجتمع الأبوي.

## Introduction

Women from the remote ancient ages and in most world societies have suffered a great deal of oppression in terms of social, political, and economic discrimination. In spite of the numerous attempts by women to improve their circumstances, they, not only as married women but also as singles and the most pitiful female children, still experience manifold forms of oppression. This oppression is imposed upon them either by the domineering spirit of men in patriarchal society or by strict traditions and conventions which are often misused for the purpose of undermining their role. Almost in all societies, feminists, in an attempt to prove themselves, have striven to regain their extorted rights as human beings and citizens; however, their struggle has proved certain fruits, so far. Up to the present day, feminism has captured critics' attention due to its controversial theories which awfully mismatch the traditions and conventions in mostly all societies.

Some of the cognoscenti have had an avid advocacy in revolting against the traditions and conventions that grant absolute authority to men over women in the existing social system. In lieu of the bloody encountering, those people of distinction have invested the power of their pens as the only weapon to bring the essential changes into effect. Since the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's (1792) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, western society has witnessed the emergence of various feminist hues which have affected great changes in the attitude and position of Western nations in general and of women in particular. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, women have gained more powerful position in society. Such an improvement in women's daily lives has evoked

playwrights to write in accordance with these changes.

Feminism is preoccupied with women's experience in a man-centered society. In many communities, women are treated by their counterparts of the other sex in a way that sets them equal to slaves. They are never permitted to enter the social zone as men are, and hence their attitudes as well as personalities are denied. However, some feminist hues effectively focus on other issues including gender and class distinction in order to bring into the open how women were socially maltreated by men within their society. According to Patriarchy, the male/female relationship is characterized by the men's figure and woman's social role is through man's only (Arslan111-112).

Feminist philosopher, Kittay (2019), investigates the early issue and conceptualizations of gender equality, believing that equality would mean that women are more like men. Exploring the past of patriarchy and masculinity in ancient Greece, the Renaissance, and modernism, one discerns that women's inferiority is embedded in the conventional relationship between masculinity and reason (9). Accordingly, in recent feminist theory, attempts have been made to rewrite or redefine "the woman" in order to mitigate the subjugation of women (James 129).

Throughout the 1970s, feminist research, the challenge to gender roles and women's stasis in most fields ultimately led to the analysis of men as men based on sexual beings rather than just as "natural," non-gender objects. For instance, Second-wave feminism had an awkward connection to popular culture. Women's liberationists found the mass culture to be yet another venue for gender inequality reproduction and the idea that women were socialized into false

representations of femininity by mainstream media was a central aspect of the second wave of feminism' (Hollows and Moseley 4).

In Willy Russell masterpiece *Educating Rita* tells the attitude of a poverty woman who, by her social position, is stripped of her own self and seeks to conquer the challenges that life brings to her. This paper deals with many of these aspects; Feminism, gender inequality, social levels; and the key issues which often influence woman who has expanded her power and fulfilled her needs and potential to win back her human identity.

### **Study background**

Willy Russell *Educating Rita* was first notable in 1980. At that point, this play has pulled in the appreciation of individuals and increased a gigantic achievement. One of the focal reasons for its being eminent is a result of the exceptional styles that Willy Russell used in his work *Educating Rita*. Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* was written in an excellent and successful way. It shows his attitudes, his visions and his style (Mahon and Chedra 11). One of the major issues utilized in *Educating Rita* is the situation of women and their social status, which is employed to give a reasonable picture about what women can do or cannot do within their social structure. Nevertheless, it idealized the author's life in which he alludes to the contemporary experiences in his culture.

This brilliant achievement offered women's endeavors to achieve an extraordinary situation in a man-centered culture and to show that they have similar chances and are equivalent to men. This is on the grounds that women were usually looked at as powerless. This can suggest the way that women can be believed to be not able to accomplish self-acknowledgement since they are occasionally con-

trolled to speak to the male figure. Women can be seen as “being so desperate to enter into any form of a relationship with a man that they forgive men for their destructive behavior” (Volks10)

### **Question of Gender in the Masculine Society**

In a man-centered societies, the male/female relationship is constantly viewed that female is often limited by the male's power. This state of power shows the way to women being agitated about the men's domination. For a long time, in these societies women's basic role is being restricted distinctly to house commitment and care giving their children, thus women can't understand their privileges.

Though, women needed to call for their privileges, and they called for overcoming the obstacles and to elevate the higher realization. In this manner, as a response for having the same privileges which men have, women started requiring their wants and equal opportunities in a development called feminism. Feminist concentrates on woman's self- decision. It focuses on Hooks definition about it; feminism is a conflict to end sexist injustice, to eliminate the ideology of tyranny, that penetrates the culture on various levels, so that the self-progression of individual can take priority over economic life and ruling authority (Hooks viii). Then, feminists assert that women have the right to have the social privileges and neglected the ruling power by men.

Consequently, Hooks (2000) sees that women should learn how to read and write as well as learning other parts of literacy access in order to help women to elevate their choice effort. She gives the education the essential role for “encouraging women to strive for education, to develop their intellects, should be a primary goal of feminist movement”(116). Moreover, Hooks (2000) contends that



women's liberation requires their fighting the male dominated to be more intellectual and an active creative thinking. Consequently, there is an essential role for education in grading women in their social construction. Therefore, Hooks affirms that the education is so effective on all women in practicing of freedom which it provokes them to realize their goals and the unfulfilled wants (116).

The persistent struggle for gaining recognition in manly societies first has resulted in gaining women's awareness- raising. Though, there was the second wave of women's movement, which presented the concept of gender issues. This feminist waver specifically criticizes the sociology because they assumed that this discipline disregarded the women advantages and studies. For a long time, the scholars of this wave affirmed that sociology discipline focuses on masculine societies and they attacked the growing recognition of men as gendered and women should be inferior to men in the society (Wharton 4).

What is more, the principle scholars of this wave assaulted is the old views that women should be submitted to "sexual orientation" within the social structure, which was based on power relations. They believed that the social work in term of gender issues is the pivotal core which sets the females as subordinate in their social cultures. In their point view, women play a substantial role in the economy and that labor is conducted appropriately by women (Gray & Boddy 374).

Introducing gender issues in this manner, feminist thinkers allude to women's resistance to realize their civil rights in the late nineteenth century and the first half of twentieth century. At that time, feminist movement occupied a great focus within females' issues

and became the center of considerable study. Nevertheless, it was until the economic struggle that gender and sex preserved their global definitions and admission as regular elements of individual behavior. However, three essential figures had been offered in the 1970s which formed the connection between men/women, sex, gender and sexuality. Sex mainly alludes to an organic qualification between the two sexes obviously distinguished in all society (Traub 129).

While, Gender refers to “the social relations among people, young men and young women, and how this is socially developed” (Guzura 1) Sexuality is the way in which people cover their previous elements which constitute their behaviors. It includes “the partners towards whom they direct their behavior and emotional attachments” (Ember and Ember 3).

Accordingly, the prominent leaders of second wave challenged the social traditional views which considered women as secondary beings within their social rank, which concentrate on the Marxist principles. They suppose that the development of regenerative labor concerning sex is the vital point that suffers from placing women in second position in the public arena. In their view, females have an essential role in the structure of society in acquiring power by acquiring their generating knowledge. Feminist’s viewpoint is preoccupied with the position of women, their awareness and their experiences. They reveal how much the feminist thinkers struggle to prevent traditional view of unfair roles for women within the men-centric culture (Pandey 203).

Consequently, feminist scholars believe that the reproduction of labor causes females’ oppression. In their standpoint the work of women is not recognized as a proper labor. This is because most

of women's work occurs outside the market and therefore is not considered as a visible work. As a result, men benefit from women labor in public and private domains. They can benefit in the private arena that they "contribute less labor in the home while enjoying the services women provide as wives and mothers" (quoted in Glenn 2). They also benefit in the public realm in spending their life outside home in which they "can concentrate their efforts on paid employment and attain primacy in that area"(quoted in Glenn 2).

Inside the male-centric culture, male/female relationship portrayed by men's figure to be manly while the men's control must constrain women. In other words, gender formed the connection between the two sexes and verified that "how we are to think of ourselves, how we interact with others, the social opportunities, occupations, family roles and prestige allowed to males and females" (Guzura 1) This condition of relationship regularly keeps an eye on women to be stressed over the authority of men. For a long time, ladies' essential job in manly culture was the care giving of children and home. In so doing, ladies were always seen to be rejected from the esteemed social statuses which seized by men including "the world of paid employment" (Annandale & Clark 25).

In such social orders, men will in general hold women to be intellectual and unaware figure to keep them subsumed under their strength. In patriarchal societies, men think about women's' work as being confined distinctly to house obligation and care giving their kids, thus women can't understand their privileges. These yardsticks show that women were treated as inferior to men in the masculine society. Women were very limited, irrational beings and less consideration than the other sex and were even more considered to be

under the man defense (Traub 130). Traub also spotlights certain statuses in which the women's character show sex-distinct based on gender differences, especially women's character were embedded underline of their men defender as a "'female covert', she had few legal or economic rights" (130)

It is evident that Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* is performed as a response against the man-centric framework in the private and the public domains, that when women can be viewed as a second position their major tasks are children upbringing, taking care of her husband and domestic sphere. Throughout the Victorian age, women prevented from entering the social zone as well as they were often had no option to elevate the upper status and staying in an unacceptable position in their culture. In this era, women were deemed to be restricted within their ranks and left with no options for having a good life in their societies (Barrett10)

Willy Russell wrote this play as a response to the unreasonable social issues. Russell reveals in his brilliant work the relationship between men/women strikingly within the encounter between the two focal characters Frank and Rita considering the fact that the distinctive social standards which they belong. However, Russell uncovered how individuals having a place with higher social class can hold their power over any wants and desires by the worker class. Then again, Russell's works are also paid special attention to women's disasters, insisting women to request freedom in their societies.

The dramatist Willy Russell is viewed as a social writer who tackled the issues that are identified with the class contrasts and different issues which concerning with females' calamities and social layers in the public and private domains. The contrasts between

the higher class and working class constitute the basic theme of his works. In any case, his work reflects how ambitions, particularly for working-class women, are overcome by the bourgeois women. Those working class women face many obstacles when they try to achieve their inspirations of having the privileged life that bourgeois women enjoy (Ramazanoglu17).

Thus, the voice of working women class, the female hero of the play, resounds through the events since she mirrors the endeavors of the depressed ladies in the private and the public arenas. On the one hand, in Russell's play there is Rita who was against the male-centric culture since she was a working female who had a place with the working layer, and she had faced the agony and wretchedness of this layer. On the other hand, there is Frank who idealizes the higher class because he belongs to the domination and the oppression of this layer in the society.

In the first act, Rita vanquishes all the obstructions in the manly society which are limited the women's needs. Willy Russell didn't pick those characters haphazardly to be his piece of information to mirror the social inequality among individuals. Rather he picked them cautiously, and every last one of them represented the social position and the desires inside every individual.

### **Educating Rita and the stereotype image of gender**

"if you wanna change y' have to do it from the inside, don't y' know like I'm doin'...tryin to do. Do you think I will? Think I'll be able to do it" (1.1.p.13).

The selection above by the female character Rita, the significant hero of *Educating Rita*, uncovers her request of the troubles and sufferings that limited her in instructing experience, she imagined how

the powerless ladies battle and strife to support themselves in the male-centric culture. Rita uncovered that she must have the choice in whatever thing she tends to do refusing any imposition to find her needs in the training field. This condition symbolizes the thoughts of manly culture that controlled the public activity in which Rita sub-par compared to her better half. She presents to ladies' interest to achieve a profoundly respected situation in manly social orders.

This is on the grounds that in sexual orientation matters, our force encounters or absence of intensity, connections to men, financial exercises, convictions, and qualities are on the whole generally and socially factor. Ramazanoglu (2012) argues that "our sex is what all women have in common, but it is as a gender that women are oppressed by men" (60). Especially this stressed when Rita converses with Frank about her husband Denny:

**RITA.** So are all the Chekhov books you lent me. Denny found out I was still on the pill; it was my fault; I'd left me prescription out. He burnt all me books

**FRANK.** Oh Christ

**RITA.** I'm sorry. I'll buy y' some more. (1.4.p.36)

Rita demonstrated her great victories to reveal her situation as a lady who broke all the social limits she had embraced to be more impressive than her mentor Frank. Rita accepts that so as to understand the advancement she should cross all the illegal territories. She defeats all the restrictions which she faced in her academic education and the sexual orientation. In other words, Rita's persistence idealizes the struggle between the individual and the society. (Speck23). Willy Russell uncovers "the cultural divide between Rita and Frank to create a number of comic situations" (Speck24). This

shows up when Rita gets some information about culture:

**RITA.** Frank, y' know culture, know the word 'culture', well, it doesn't just mean goin' to the opera an' the ballet and all that, does it?

**FRANK.** No.

**RITA.** It means a way of livin', doesn't it? Well, we've got no culture.

**FRANK.** Who hasn't?

**RITA.** Me; an' the people I come from- people I work with, live with, grew up with – us, we've got no culture.

**FRANK.** Of course, you have.

**RITA.** What? D' y' mean like that 'working-class culture' thing?

**FRANK.** Well...yes. (1.3.pp.31-32)

Anyway, Rita proceeds with her pushes to go all through various boundaries of her wants and personality to find another individual. Though, she enters the field of education to raise her voice as a working class woman. She draws a true life picture of the relationship between male and female, and how the females' voice has been restricted by men's authority. Rita reveals the matters that enable the woman to utter her voice against the unfair class and defeat the limitations in the manly society. Furthermore, she succeeded to be unlike other women who just caring for their children, restricted to serve men and do domestic work only. She rejects to be as "the mere womb which is a tool to help male procreation, man has been regarded as the chief being within the philosophical thinking and critical writing process" (Arslan112). What is more, Rita's empowerment as well as her insight come into increment increasingly more than Frank by acquiring more knowledge. This shows

up when she talks with Frank about her paper on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet:

**RITA.** I had to come an' tell y', Frank, last night, I went to the theatre! A proper one, a professional theatre.

**FRANK.** For God's sake, you had me worried, I thought it was something serious.

**RITA.** It was, it was Shakespeare, I thought it was gonna be dead borin' but it wasn't – it was brilliant. I'm gonna do an essay on it.

**FRANK.** Come on, which one was it?

**RITA.** '...Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.' [.....] (1.5.p.44)

In this manner, Rita is resistant to male's mastery when she improves upon being all the more remarkable and bold. By finishing the play, she holds the circumstances with Frank and shows up very willing to confront whoever and whatever faces her capacities. In this manner, Russell mirrors every single powerless lady ought to act beating all the manliness hostility. Rita then faces all the encounters to demonstrate her womanliness in these social orders and gets prepared to apply and peruse artistic analysis. She discloses to Frank that she gets prepared to enter the literary territory:

**RITA.** I understand literary criticism, Frank. When I come here that's what we're supposed be dealing with.

**FRANK.** You want literary criticism? [...] I want an essay on that lot by next week.



**Rita.** What is it?

**Frank.** No sentimentality, no subjectivity. Just pure criticism. A critical assessment of a lesser-known English poet. Me. (2.5 p.74)

As mirroring the issues of intensity connection between the two characters, it creates the impression that Rita has a major accomplishment to be more and more empowered holder against the ruling class (Frank) and getting her opportunity and fairness as an oppressed class. She begins as she incapable of acting as a middle-class woman and reluctant to change her extraordinary life. In this way, she embodies herself to confront the class differentiation with her tutor Frank and controlled all the circumstances around her since she is toward the start of the play and didn't let any opportunity to Frank to curb her wants and possibility. This is on the grounds that he disregarded her movement as working class lady to become an informed lady. This is showed up explicitly by Frank when called her by (Rita):

**RITA.** Rita? (She laughs.) Rita? Nobody calls me Rita but you. I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was [...]

**Frank.** What is it now then? Virginia?

Moreover, by enrolling her name for the last, most crucial test, Rita gives her appreciation for her tutor Frank and says thanks to him for helping her. Frank, this time, can realize her progression as an individual defeated all the limitations. Even though Frank dismisses her from his office, she is able to control the situation to prove her existence. As Frank clarifies "For God's sake, why did you come back here? **RITA.** I came to tell you you're a good teacher [...]. Thanks for enterin' me for the exam. **FRANK.** That's all right. I know how much it had come to mean to you. (2.7.p79). This an entire play

was composed by Willy Russell, and he manufactured his main character, Rita as a model to be a genuine model for all regular workers ladies who were sacrificed and reluctant to get their necessities and opportunities, they hold a higher position that utilizes power to control their situation in the manly society. As it were, Russell's play uncovers a striking picture of manly society. Both fundamental characters Rita and Frank are the results of their way of life.

### **Conclusion**

Educating Rita is a play which has offered numerous feminist issues that were priorities in their time; nonetheless, when it is perused now, it is seen that these issues are still prevailing in the society at present. This paper handled a portion of these issues. The major issue is the subjugation of women who raised a great deal of awareness to face the patriarchal oppressive deeds practiced against women and to regain their extorted rights as effective members in their societies. This theme is investigated through Rita's character and how she has been able to control the circumstances around her and maintain a powerful position in a patriarchal society. She, as a woman, has been able to deprive Frank of the opportunity to forestall her potentials forward and prove herself as an effective member in the society.

Concerning class divisions which are still evident now; they have been set and imposed according to old traditions. Unlike working class women, those who belong to the high class were given more freedom and no restrictions were imposed on them by patriarchy. However, lower class women then were sacrificed on account of the dominance and authority of the higher class. The delineated female character of Rita is an expressive image of challenging the

old traditions and conventions which have enabled both high class women and men to oppress those who belong to the working class.

Thus, Rita decided to proceed with her endeavors to revolt against the customs. She has deserted her class as a working woman and her family to embrace new life that is parallel to that of the high class in an attempt to secure herself in a position that is equal to man's. Furthermore, in the course of the play, Russell has given many other instances of women who have not acknowledged their oppressive lives and stood firmly against the patriarchal authority.

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