

values and beliefs as well as her ideas about illness and death. She realises that, as unfair as it seems, young people experience terrible situations that are beyond their control. This links to *The Story of Tom Brennan* in that Tom initially resents his situation as he believes that he has done nothing wrong and as such should be treated the same as before the accident. Tom, just like Samantha, must learn to accept the new phase of life into which he has been thrown and then find ways of making the situation work in his favour.

These texts reflect the different ways in which individuals respond to transitioning into a new phase of life. Repetition is used to emphasise Samantha's initial response to her diagnosis: 'No, I don't think I have that, no. No, no, no'. Her disbelief is also conveyed through imagery, describing her response to the doctor as she sat 'listening with jaw agape and eyes on stalks'. Her initial shock finally shifts to despair as the significance of this diagnosis begins to dawn on her, once again conveyed to the responder through the use of imagery: 'I hunched my shoulders around my head, drew my knees up towards my chest and squeezed my legs together as tightly as I could'. After realising that 'This situation was getting way out of control', as she suffers from complications from the chemotherapy, Samantha's response to her new situation turns to panic:

Oh, God, I thought, I don't want to die, not yet, not yet. Why don't they do something? I am trying my best but I don't know how much longer I can go on like this!

The desperate and scared tone of Samantha alters to an angry tone when she perceives that the nurses are not helping her: 'I began to feel a little angry with the nurses. Why weren't they doing something? Surely this had gone on long enough!'. Samantha's changing responses to her situation are similar to those of Tom as he also reacts to his new life with shock, fear and anger. The consequences of transitioning into a new phase of

life are revealed by the composers of each text using the features specific to the chosen form. First-person narrative is used effectively to convey the consequences of Samantha's cancer diagnosis. Her initial belief is that the consequences will be minor, evident in her confident tone when she says 'Of course I was going to get better. I hadn't planned it any other way'. The reality of her diagnosis is much more severe and she soon experiences complications, the consequences of which are illustrated effectively through imagery: 'Soon the bed was strewn with blood-soaked tissues', and later in another confronting image created through metaphor: 'I sat on a sea of wrinkled and limp sheets that were damp from my perspiration and blood'. Samantha soon realises the dire nature of her situation, admitting that 'No one knew what to do. I realised that I was on my own'. These short simple sentences emphasise the consequences of her situation: she is isolated in her near-death experience and must confront it with determination if she is to survive. This determined attitude is highlighted by the use of repetition: 'Just get the next breath. The next breath. The next breath'. As a consequence of her struggle for life Samantha becomes committed to life and this is evident in the challenging tone of her final line: 'I looked at the specialist staring down at me. You bastard, I thought, I'm going to get you for this'. The story of Samantha Miles reveals the changing attitudes that individuals experience when confronted with difficult situations that involve death or loss of liberty. The final decision of the Brennans to face their difficult situation with determination and bravery is similar to the experience of Samantha.

# EDUCATING RITA

BY WILLY RUSSELL

## Introduction to the text

### About the playwright

William Russell, born 23 August 1947 in Whiston, Merseyside, is a British playwright, screenwriter, author, lyricist, and composer. His best-known works are *Educating Rita*, *Shirley Valentine*, and *Blood Brothers*.

*Educating Rita* was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, premiered at The Warehouse in London in June 1980 and starred Julie Walters and Mark Kingston. Mike Ockrent directed the play.

In 1983, Russell adapted the play for the screen. The film starred Michael Caine and Julie Walters and was highly successful.

### Type of text

*Educating Rita* is a play.

### Context

**The context of the period**—Rita and Frank's values and attitudes are a reflection of the context in which they live. England has a strong 'class' system that prescribes particular attitudes and beliefs to different social groups, or levels. Rita is twenty-six and has grown up in a working-class British environment that has a negative attitude towards the value of education. She feels restricted by her name, family history, lack of education and the confines made on women by her social class. Frank, on the other hand, represents a higher or 'upper' class and is highly educated. His values are represented in the play by the type of alcohol he consumes, his preference for the BBC and healthier, 'pebble-dashed' (p. 11), wholegrain bread.

**The context of the setting**—although set within a particular educational context, Russell wanted to present themes and ideas that would be accessible to a varied audience. As he said, 'I wanted to make a play which engaged and was relevant to those who considered themselves uneducated, those whose daily language is not the language of the university or the theatre. I wanted to write a play which would attract, and be as valid for, the Ritas in the audience as the Franks'. His comments can be found at <http://www.willyrussell.com/rita.html>.

**The impact of the context on the content and setting**—Russell uses an educational context to explore the transitions and changes that occur in Rita and Frank.

These transitions are revealed through the individual values and attitudes of the two protagonists as seen by their contrasting attitudes towards, and experiences of, class, level of education, social expectations, culture and value systems.

### Audience

The play's universal themes of self-realisation and personal development allow for a wide and varied audience that transcends its original context.

### Purpose

The play explores the relationship between student and tutor, and issues related to class and choice.

### Reading the play

An examination of the setting, characters and plot will assist in understanding a play. To further your understanding of a play:

- Consider the title, which often has significant meaning in relation to the text.
- Read the introduction before and after you read the play. If you have a critical edition, also read the essays about the play.
- Look at the historical background of the play. Have any famous works of literature influenced the play and has the play inspired or influenced later works?
- Read the lines aloud if there are parts that you do not understand. A play is intended for performance, so imagine what the lines would sound like and what an actor would look like speaking the lines.
- Consider the stage directions. Although they are included to provide instructions for actors, they also allow the reader to visualise physical details of the set as well as characterisation. How detailed is the staging? Do the directions give you a sense of what the play is about and what is happening?

### Key concepts and definitions

**Anton Chekhov**—a Russian playwright concerned with the inner psychology of his characters.

**Canon**—a list of traditional authors and texts that are prescribed for study at a school or university.

**EM Forster**—an English author and essayist, 1879–1970.

**Ferlinghetti**—an American poet and publisher.

**Ibsen**—a Norwegian playwright concerned with realist drama.

**Invigilator**—a person who oversees students doing an exam.

**Isabel Archer**—the female protagonist in Henry James's novel *Portrait of a Lady*.

**Liverpudlian**—a term used to refer to inhabitants of Liverpool in the UK.

## Focus on the syllabus

### Details of the text

#### ◆ Plot summary

University lecturer Frank needs to earn some extra money, so he agrees to tutor an Open University student. He is assigned Rita, a hairdresser who has a basic education and is searching for ways to break free of the class boundaries that restrict her.

**Act One, Scene One**—the audience is introduced to Frank, who is searching for a bottle of whisky. He makes disapproving comments about some 'silly woman' (p. 2) he is waiting for. Rita bursts into his room and tells Frank she wants to learn 'everything' (p. 6). He responds by telling her he knows absolutely nothing and will refer her to another tutor. Rita is insistent that she wants him and will return next week with some scissors in order to cut his hair.

**Act One, Scene Two**—Rita admires Frank's study and asks about the 'proper' students at the university. They discuss literary criticism and why Rita's comments on *Rubyfruit Jungle* are too subjective. Rita is cognizant of the social pressure she is under and expresses how difficult it is for her to think and behave outside the restraints of her social class. The conversation shifts to Rita questioning Frank about his marital situation and Frank flirts with her.

**Act One, Scene Three**—Rita learns the differences between literature and more everyday texts. She is frustrated by Forster and by what she perceives as his ignoring of the issues of the poor.

**Act One, Scene Four**—Frank discusses Rita's *Peer Gynt* essay, which she has responded to in one line. They move on to a wider discussion of life and Rita provides some information on her culture as she sees it. Frank enables her to make a literary connection within a text of Forster's.

**Act One, Scene Five**—Rita provides more information on the state of her relationship with her husband Denny. He has burnt her essay and resents her attempts to educate herself. Rita convinces Frank to go to the theatre with her. Her energy influences him, although he is uncertain of the quality of the amateur production.

**Act One, Scene Six**—Rita is excited, as she has seen a

**Sabbatical**—a type of leave for university staff to travel or undertake research.

You need to know the following terms for this unit. The meanings are given in the glossary on pages iv–ix.

- Allusion
- Ellipsis

professional theatre production of *Macbeth*. Frank engages her in a discussion of literary tragedy, which she tries to apply to a hairdressing situation. She invites Frank to the art gallery with her and he in return asks her to dinner at his house, an invitation which makes her anxious.

**Act One, Scene Seven**—Rita arrives for her lesson and it becomes evident that she did not turn up for the dinner party. Rita explains the real and imagined problems with her attending the dinner: caught the wrong bus, bought the wrong wine, fought with Denny, worry about her literary knowledge. She wants to be able to be considered serious and 'civilised' (p. 45) but she feels more like a 'half-caste' (p. 45), uncertain of where she belongs and fits in.

**Act One, Scene Eight**—Rita is given an ultimatum by Denny and she moves out. She wants to write a 'proper' (p. 48) exam response and is still highly motivated to achieve academically. Frank tells her honestly that in order to change she needs to suppress her originality and fresh perspective.

**Act Two, Scene One**—Rita returns after a week's summer school in London. She is excited about what she has experienced and is learning to 'talk the talk'. Frank offers her the poet, Blake, but she has 'done' (p. 55) him at summer school. There is a shifting balance of power between them.

**Act Two, Scene Two**—Rita begins by talking in a strange way in an attempt to lose her working-class accent. She has been spending time with other students who have invited her to France, and Frank says her essay would not look out of place with the others, which she takes as a compliment.

**Act Two, Scene Three**—Frank arrives drunk and it appears his career is unraveling. Rita gets angry with him and tells him she doesn't need him as much as when she first arrived as she now knows how to identify 'good' (p. 62) authors.

**Act Two, Scene Four**—Rita arrives late and seems anxious to leave as she has university friends waiting. She is irritated with Frank and behaves as if he is no longer of use to her. Frank gives her some of his poetry

in a last and desperate attempt to make a connection with her.

**Act Two, Scene Five**—Rita arrives unexpectedly and is filled with praise for Frank's poetry, which he enjoys hearing. However, their meeting deteriorates when Frank suggests he has created a monster in Rita. He tells her that his work is rubbish and rips it up. She retaliates by accusing and attacking him. The scene concludes with Frank calling her 'Rita' to which she replies it is not her name any longer. He asks her if she has adopted the name of other literary figures to replace 'Rita'.

**Act Two, Scene Six**—the scene is concerned with Frank trying to locate Rita, and he uses her exam details as an excuse to call her place of employment and home.

**Act Two, Scene Seven**—Rita arrives as Frank is packing his things to relocate to Australia. They engage in social chitchat until Frank asks her why she has returned. She lets him know that she thinks he is a good teacher and it is revealed that she received a good mark in her exams. Frank invites her to Australia but she does not commit to following him. He presents her with a dress for 'an educated woman' (p. 73) and the play concludes with Rita finally sitting Frank down and cutting his hair as she threatened to do in the first scene.

#### ◆ Links to 'Exploring Transitions'

This elective explores ideas about growing up, new transitions and coping with change and maturation. *Educating Rita* examines both the individual characters of Frank and Rita as well as their relationships with each other and with those around them. A process of change and adjustment occurs as both deal with transitioning into new phases of life, marked primarily by experience of each other's lives. Themes surrounding personal growth and self-awareness are central to the text as the two main characters deal with their new experiences in their unique and individual ways.

### How relationships shape meaning

#### ◆ Relationships within the text

Rita and Frank both widen their education within the text, in both formal learning and social contexts. The text explores how personal growth and change can transform individuals within relationships and widen understanding of different worlds. These transitions may be challenging, confronting, exciting or transformative and may result in growth, change and a range of consequences for the individual and others.

Rita and Frank both learn a great deal about themselves through their relationship with each other. Frank is influenced to reduce the amount of alcohol he consumes and it is Rita's originality and freshness that causes him to reflect upon aspects of his own life, reigniting his academic purpose.

Despite their cultural differences, Rita and Frank are united by other commonalities. Both experience relationship failures, and some love interest is hinted between them during the play, but they are ultimately confined by their teacher-student relationship: 'I-I care for you Frank ... but you've to-to leave me alone a bit' (p. 63).

The power balance in their relationship oscillates as Rita gains in social and educational knowledge and confidence. This creates tension between them as Frank has enjoyed and grown comfortable in his role as mentor and enlightener: 'I've got what you got Frank, and you don't like it' (p. 68).

By the end of the play it is Frank who is experiencing difficulty in letting go of Rita. This is simply and emphatically expressed by Rita's statement 'I've got choice now' (p. 72) which reflects her growing awareness of the possibilities life holds for her. Rita now views Frank more realistically and sees him for who he really is. Rita and Frank's relationship is left deliberately open at the end of the text, allowing the responder to imagine what ultimate path the characters will take.

#### ◆ Responder's relationship with the text

The responder is invited to consider and engage with characters from varied cultural and social backgrounds and contexts. In doing so, the responder's perception of the world and of differing values and attitudes is widened and challenged. These ideas are revealed through the British location of the play, the working-class Liverpudlian values juxtaposed with those of the British 'educated' class, and the 1980s setting.

### Language forms, features and structures

#### ◆ Dramatic techniques

Dramatic techniques in the text communicate ideas about the theme of exploring transitions. The title is ironic and has meaning on different levels as both characters have their understanding of their contexts widened and challenged. On one hand, it can be interpreted in reference to Rita, who desires an education but ends up learning more than she bargained for. The second interpretation relates to Frank, whose experience of the world is widened through his contact with Rita and who ends up being educated as well.

The first act of the text reveals Rita's initial experiences with educating herself and her struggles as her view is widened and her attitudes challenged: 'I'm dead ignorant, y'know' (p. 25). Frank's role as mentor deteriorates as Rita gains in strength and confidence. The second act exposes the effects of education on Rita and reveals how both characters now have entered different phases as their contexts have altered dramatically: 'Nobody calls me Rita but you. I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was' (p. 69).

### ◆ Settings

The settings have dramatic functions within the text and reflect that transitions can result in new knowledge and ideas for Rita and Frank.

Frank's study represents the academic world that Rita wants to break into but it ironically restricts her movements, which are energetic and enthusiastic and in direct contrast to Frank's stuffy and stagnant attitude. This setting impresses Rita but in contrast Frank is cynical and weary, hiding his whisky behind the books. However, he does feel the same reverence for the symbols of education and academia that Rita does.

Rita's workplace represents the blending of her two realities and worlds. In it, she is able to chat to customers about what she is learning and experiencing, free from the disapproval of her husband and family. However, it is a world that she would ultimately like to leave, as hairdressing is unfulfilling and holds no value or currency for her.

The pub is a world both characters inhabit, although it means something different to each of them. For Rita, it is an unhappy place where she is forced to drink and sing, as her husband and family feel this is appropriate behaviour for her class. For Frank, the pub represents a world where he can escape the restrictions that academia places on him. He drowns his woes in alcohol and feels an unburdening of his suffocating university persona.

### ◆ Stage directions

Stage directions are intended as instructions for the actors but also reveal ideas about the characters and their worlds. The directions in the first scene reveal that Frank is a man who drinks a lot and at work: *'He manages a gulp at the whiskey ... and although his speech is not slurred, we should recognise the voice of a man who shifts a lot of booze'* (p. 1).

The stage directions at the start of Act One, Scene Eight are significant as they reveal a change in Rita's behaviour: *'Rita enters slowly, carrying a suitcase'* (p. 46). This marks a change in mood and is contrasted with Rita's usually bubbly and energetic attitude towards study.

Rita's actions in Act Two, Scene One are a physical indication of her changing social behaviour and attitudes: *'She takes off her shawl and hands it to Frank who hangs it on the hook by the door'* (p. 49). Rita is attempting to act in what she perceives is a more lady-like fashion.

### ◆ Language techniques

Language techniques in the text communicate ideas about 'Exploring Transitions'.

Dialogue is used to communicate the changing attitudes of characters who are transitioning into new phases of

life and social contexts. Language allows Frank and Rita to blend their understanding of the world. As Frank shares and teaches his academic jargon with Rita, she influences him to drop some of the stiffness of his expression and manner. Rita's habit of using the term 'dead' as an intensifier is transferred to Frank, marking the merging of their worlds: 'Dead serious' (p. 8), 'dead affected' (p. 12), and 'completely off my cake' (p. 60).

Other language features include rhetorical questions, which are often used by the characters to express their frustrations as well as to highlight problems and issues. Frank often uses them when he is questioning Rita's motives for educating herself: 'Have you come all this way for so very, very little?' (p. 69).

An ellipsis is often used to show pauses or hesitations in conversation. Frank is often taken aback by Rita's forwardness, and language and ellipsis illustrates this uncertainty: 'Look at those tits ... I suppose ... erm—probably' (p. 3).

Vocabulary and grammar are used at the start of the play to immediately establish Rita as being from a different world to Frank. Her language reflects her working-class background, and her attitude and vivaciousness are juxtaposed with Frank's proper civility: '... bleedin' handle' (p. 2), '... poor sod' (p. 2) and 'I know I take the piss' (p. 11). In contrast, Frank's language is a product of his education and social background: 'This is getting ... a bit wearisome' (p. 32) and 'acquired a certain patina' (p. 15).

The humour of witty banter highlights the very different attitudes and experiences of the two main characters. When Frank refers to Eliot, he means the poet TS, although Rita thinks immediately of the policeman Eliot Ness. When asked to write an essay on the staging difficulties of *Peer Gynt*, Rita responds with pithiness: 'Do it on the radio' (p. 31).

The humour can at times be crude and coarse, which acts to highlight the differences in the two characters' worlds and reveal ideas about their social backgrounds. In Rita's world, foul-mouthed language is common and expected: *'Howard's End ... it sounds filthy, doesn't it?'* (p. 5).

Humour is often generated by the lack of understanding the characters have for each other's contexts:

RITA: I hate that hole [Formby], don't you?  
FRANK: Yes.  
RITA: Where do you live?  
FRANK: Formby. (p. 12)

Literary allusion is often used to create humour in the play and again highlights the stark educational and social differences between Frank and Rita. Frank asks Rita if she's seen Chekhov in the theatre, implying if she's seen one of his plays, but she replies 'No. Does he go?' (p. 36).

### ◆ A range of textual features

The process of change and transition results in experience, self-realisation, insight and understanding. The experience of transition is a unique and individual experience for both Frank and Rita.

Change affects Rita in both positive and negative ways. Education influences her to overcome the negative aspects of her life and create some balance within her life. Frank not only acts as a teacher to Rita, but learns from her as well.

Rita begins the play as a bold character, albeit awkward and uncertain. Her real name is Susan but she laughably renames herself 'Rita' after Rita Mae Brown, the author of the dubiously titled *Rubyfruit Jungle*, a lesbian-themed novel that Rita mistakes for 'literature'.

Rita is frustrated and feels confined by the boundaries created by English attitudes to class. She perceives an education as a means of improving her life situation and escaping the attitudes and expectations of those around her in order to redirect her prospects, though she risks alienating her own social class in the process. She is naive initially in thinking that books and clothes will signal a change in her social status and allow her to become accepted in academic circles.

The opening scene reveals Rita to be nervous and anxious during her first meeting with Frank. Her words and actions are loud and reactive and reveal how difficult it is for her to behave appropriately in a formal interview situation. She is confused by Frank's formal manner, and the awkwardness of the situation is presented humorously by the playwright: 'You are? ... What am I?' (p. 3).

Although uncomfortable with being working class, Rita binds herself to her class through her insecurity and defeatism. Her attitude towards the university courses is humorously alliterative—'Degrees for Dishwashers' (p. 4)—which ironically undermines their quality and usefulness, as she is desperate to identify herself with the academic world. Rita uses hyperbole to express her frustration at the confines of her world: 'I should have had a baby by now, everyone expects it' (p. 12).

As her 'education' progresses she transitions into the other students around her—she stops smoking, wears different 'bohemian'-style clothes and attempts to speak in a 'posh' voice. Her language in Act Two, Scene Two is oddly colourless as she tries to adopt the language of those students she aspires to emulate: 'I'm terribly sorry. It was unavoidable' (p. 56).

Rita becomes increasingly superior and over-confident. She now approaches other students arrogantly and is becoming removed from Frank, marked by her growing independence. When she returns from summer school, she surprises Frank with her growing knowledge of the poetry of Blake and increasing literary knowledge:

This tutor came up to me ... an' he said 'Are you fond of Ferlinghetti?' It was right on the tip of me tongue, to say, 'Only when it's served with parmesan cheese', but, Frank, I didn't! (p. 50)

The transformation does not come without an enormous personal cost:

I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with anymore. An' I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday or them out there because I can't learn the language. (p. 45)

This conflict of worlds is further reinforced by Rita's metaphor of 'I'm a half-caste' (p. 45).

This superficial transformation is ultimately unsatisfying to her and she learns that the sacrifice of her individuality and loss of recognition of who she is will not earn her happiness or intelligence. By the last scene, Rita is markedly altered from the opening scene. She acts with more sophistication and her accent has been toned down. As well, her maturity and growth is evident by her ability to see through people's pretentiousness:

I thought she was so cool an' together ... she spends half her life eatin' wholefoods an' health foods to make her live longer, an' the other half tryin' to kill herself. (p. 72)

This is also revealed by her language choices, which show that her world has widened and been transformed: 'All I've ever done is take from you. I've never given anything' (p. 73).

Frank is presented initially as a cynical and world-weary teacher. His telephone conversation with his partner, Julia, reveals he is already regretting agreeing to tutor an Open University student but he is motivated by money. This 'silly woman' (p. 2) who is going to try to get into the minds of great writers is already irritating him.

However, Frank is surprised by Rita's freshness and vivacity. Although intellectually challenging and antagonistic, her attitudes and values reawaken in Frank his appreciation of beauty in literature and life: 'I think you're the first breath of air that's been in this room for years' (p. 11).

Frank begins the process of transforming and educating Rita and he begins to really enjoy her company and the challenge of teaching her, although he realises that her education will come at the expense of her individuality. He teaches her that she will need to be more discerning and selective about what she reads. He also begins to cut down on the amount of alcohol he is consuming.

He and Rita engage in discussions about their lives and relationships. Frank's relationship with an old student seems cold and loveless and he spends much time in the evening at the pub. Rita also draws Frank out with personal questions about his poetry writing. He admits

that he had been writing to impress others and that there was nothing genuine or heartfelt about the process for him. Frank is disgusted with himself and it is this that contributes to his sense of worthlessness and hollow emptiness: 'This clever, pyrotechnical pile of self-conscious allusion is worthless, talentless ...' (p. 68).

Act Two begins with Frank returning again to writing poetry, signalling his desire to experience growth and change, as well as enter a new phase with a transformed attitude and consciousness, at the hand of his positive experiences of Rita. This transformation is subtle and gradual, and Frank is appalled by Rita's attempt to get him to leave the safety of his study to sit on the grass outside. He is also drinking less, but is not completely reformed: 'What do I do when, in appalling sobriety, I watch you walk away and disappear, my influence gone forever?' (p. 54). At the conclusion of the play, where their separation becomes imminent, the exchanging of gifts is poignant and symbolises the education that they have received from each other.

### Understanding of the relationships among texts

#### Related text—*Muriel's Wedding* by PJ Hogan

##### ◆ Type of text

*Muriel's Wedding* is a feature film written and directed by PJ Hogan and released in 1994.

##### ◆ Summary

Muriel Heslop (played by Toni Collette) is socially unskilled, overweight and immature. Muriel is constantly mocked by her 'friends'—girls she looks up to and sees as more sophisticated than herself, but who are in reality narrow and ignorant. She has two obsessions: the music of ABBA and to have a glamorous wedding. Muriel believes marriage to any man will help her overcome her personal limitations and release her from her dreary life in Porpoise Spit where her life is ruled by her father Bill (played by Bill Hunter). Bill is a corrupt local politician who blames his personal and professional shortcomings on his downtrodden wife, Betty, and their lazy children.

Muriel's life changes when she runs into Rhonda Epinstalk (played by Rachel Griffiths), a former school friend. They run away to Sydney to discover a wider world of relationships and responsibilities but fate keeps intervening to drag them back to the hated Porpoise Spit. When cancer threatens Rhonda's freedom, they make a promise to stay together and never go back.

*Muriel's Wedding* satirised an Australian family in a way that audiences found extremely poignant, as well as very funny. Composer PJ Hogan's portrayal of a

battler family from an unlikeable north coast town is uncompromising but also enormously sympathetic.

##### ◆ Links to 'Exploring Transitions'

This film is an excellent choice for the elective 'Exploring Transitions' as it is a text that reflects the processes involved in transitioning from one stage of life to another. The main character Muriel's different stages of development are structured through three key sections within the film. This film relates to *Educating Rita* because both Muriel and Rita:

- experience significant changes in their lives.
- make transitions into new phases of life and social contexts, although Rita is more socially confident than Muriel.
- live in worlds marked by unique and contrasting contextual details such as age, location, culture and socio-economic status.
- make moral self-realizations and action positive transformations as they move into different realms of experience and understanding.

In *Muriel's Wedding* we see how the social context of individuals' interactions can affect our perceptions of ourselves, others, relationships and society. Details of Muriel's family life and relationships are revealed early on in the film. In Part One—The Bouquet, the responder is invited to share Muriel's experiences of her domineering father during a meal at the local Chinese restaurant. Camera techniques including over the shoulder-shots and subjective camera shots heighten the discomfort and humiliation of the scene. The scene shows Bill Heslop and family plus Victor, a Japanese property developer, and his interpreter in a Chinese restaurant. Bill brags of his power and political disappointments before turning on daughter Muriel, contrasting her unnecessarily with Victor, who was a millionaire at age nineteen. While her mother congratulates Muriel on getting a job interview as an apprentice locksmith, Bill widens his criticisms to all of his children, tagging them as 'useless no-hopers'.

Bill portrays an ugly side to being Australian and is domineering, arrogant and culturally tactless. He patronises his Japanese guests, introduces them as Chinese, and refers to the Chinese owner of the restaurant not by his own name but as Charlie Chan. This scene highlights the ignorance and limitations of the Heslop family, who have not transitioned far. This is further reinforced by Deirdre Chamber's offensive statement that 'Your wives are probably geishas'. This black humour allows Hogan to keep his audience closely identified so that he or she may see him or herself reflected in the values and attitudes exposed by the characters.

Transitions may be challenging, confronting, exciting or transformative and may result in growth, change and a

range of consequences for the individual and others. In Part Two—Sydney: City of Brides, Muriel escapes her family to start a new life in Sydney. Her development is communicated using farcical humour when Muriel and her boyfriend Bryce (played by Matt Day) enter her living room after an evening out, sit on a beanbag and watch television. Muriel's father appears on the television pleading for news from her.

The scene descends rapidly into ridiculousness. Bryce's licentious resolve is balanced by Muriel's girlish silliness. In a desperate attempt to change channels from the news item about her in which her father pleads for her return, Muriel switches the channel randomly to a soft-porn dance program, which further excites Bryce. Having unzipped the beanbag rather than Muriel's trousers, Bryce, in his attempt to take them off, knocks a birdcage, which smashes through the window and which sends Rhonda's guests, the

American servicemen, running naked into the living room. The comic fiasco in the apartment ends suddenly and dramatically with Rhonda suddenly and inexplicably paralysed and being rushed to hospital where Muriel waits anxiously to hear her prognosis.

In this scene Muriel is dealing with new social experiences. The juxtaposition of the comedy with Rhonda's health issues exposes Muriel's gradual transformation into a responsible friend and an independent young woman who can survive outside the narrow world of Porpoise Spit. To assist this transformation on the screen the composer makes gradual changes to Muriel's hair, clothes, speech, stance and expressions as the film progresses, charting Muriel's self-realizations and changes as she transitions into new phases of life and social contexts.