

At the movies

'Educating Rita' an effective, perceptive film



Most students question the purpose of their education at least once during their college careers and wonder what it's all for. "Educating Rita," now showing at The Valley River Twin

Cinema, presents some interesting angles on how education applies to the growth of one individual.

Rita (Julie Walters) is a lively, young working-class wife looking for an identity through education. She enrolls in the British Open University and, much to her surprise, finds her tutorial professor, Dr. Frank Bryant (Michael Caine), a cynical, disillusioned man. After a somewhat shaky first meeting, Rita and Frank strike up a strong and lasting friendship.

Rita's education has begun.

Although Michael Caine is given top billing, the real star is Walters, who steals the film as the vivacious Rita, a person as hungry for knowledge as she is bubbling with life.

She's a woman who isn't content with the role society has dictated for her, and in her struggle to find her own identity she must battle an uncooperative husband, an unsympathetic father and societal restraints while holding down a full-time job as a hairdresser.

Walters portrays Rita's struggle with power and humor, bringing depth to her character.

Frank is much her opposite — a well-educated, upper-class professor — but he's unhappy and unsatisfied with himself and his students. In Rita he finds a new and

refreshing slant on life. Not only is she bold enough to say exactly what's on her mind, but she also possesses the uncanny ability to decipher problems and get to the root of the matter.

The two make an odd pair, but their friendship transcends all differences. The most enjoyable scenes of the film are the ones showing them together.

Although it has a slightly suggestive name, reminiscent of the teenage sex films of the last few years, "Educating Rita" is a very intelligent film that has nothing to do with sex. Rita's education has to do with literature, society and the decisions she has to make in life.

Based on the award-winning British play of the same name and adapted by its playwright, "Educating Rita" is a particularly perceptive film as it brings some of the implications of education to focus.

The film's fine acting can be traced both to the stars and to director Lewis Gilbert, who allows the film to focus on the characters. Caine and Walters are excellent together, and the rest of the cast is equally as good — particularly Rita's husband Denny, played by Malcolm Douglas.

Douglas brings humanity and respect to a role that could easily have turned into a caricature. Though he stands in Rita's way, he's not really a villain, and Douglas's portrayal brings that into focus.

The film does have a few minor problems. While the plot is not predictable it isn't all that surprising. Both director Gilbert and writer Willy Russell keep the film from seeming staged, but stage conventions do creep in.

In a few spots, Lewis is a little heavy with



Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures

In "Educating Rita," a hairdresser (Julie Walters) struggles to break out of the working-class mold through education, with some help from a disillusioned English professor (Michael Caine).

symbolism. The most obvious is a chorus of church bells after a dramatic revelation from Rita.

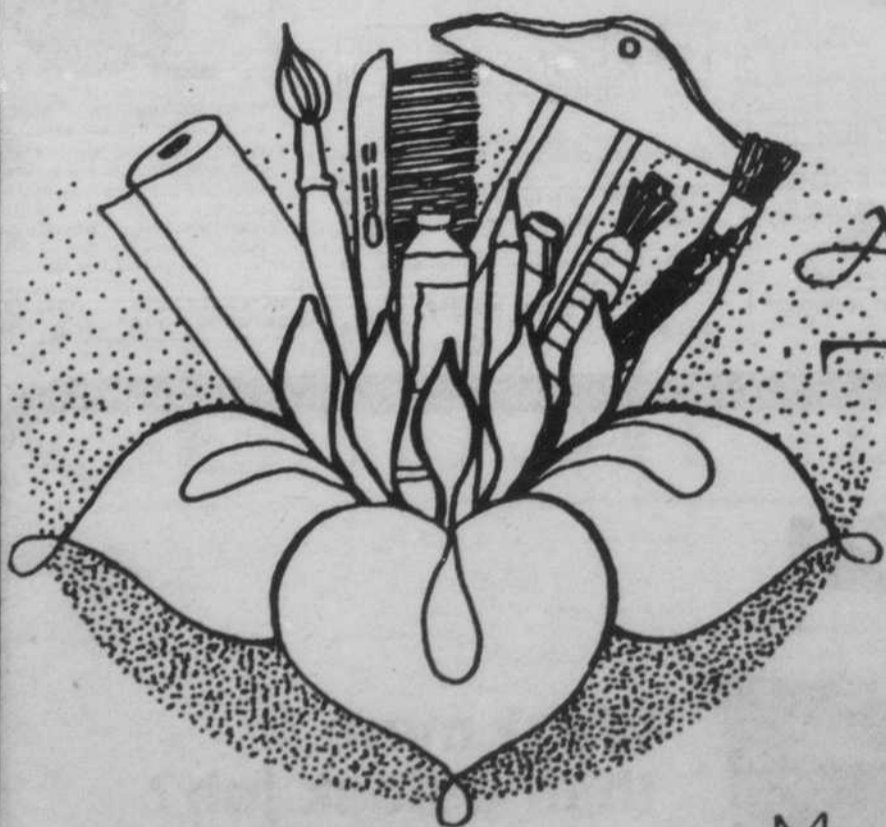
On the whole, however, the film is strong and effective and the characters are well portrayed.

Personal and intellectual growth are what

"Educating Rita" is all about, and these issues are real enough to any college student. What Rita finds in education is as important as what she loses, and the final choices she makes are the same as those we all have to make.

By Sean Axmaker

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