Miss Julie

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AUGUST STRINDBERG

August Strindberg was a prolific Swedish playwright, poet, essayist and painter. Strindberg's career spanned almost fifty years, during which time he wrote sixty plays, which often drew from his personal experiences. Strindberg experimented with a multitude of dramatic forms throughout his career. While Strindberg (along with his Norwegian contemporary Henrik Ibsen) is widely considered to be one of the fathers of Naturalistic Drama for plays like *The Father* and *Miss Julie*, he also turned to Expressionism and Surrealism is his later dramatic works like *Dream Play* and *Ghost Sonata*, which were inspired by his growing fascination with the occult and the workings of his own subconscious. Plagued by the poverty of his childhood and adolescence, Strindberg's dramatic work is largely concerned with issues of class, property and capitalism. A series of nervous breakdowns between 1894 and 1896 (known as his "Inferno Period") led Strindberg to focus more specifically on psychological and spiritual drama late in his career, asking broader questions about the nature of God and of the soul. In Sweden, Strindberg is considered to be the father of modern Swedish literature, and his novel *The Red Room* is frequently called the "first modern Swedish novel."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 1880s in Europe saw the Second Industrial revolution, and an associated boom in mass culture and economy. The increased efficiency of new methods of transportation like the railroad connected parts of Europe to each other in ways that had never been possible before. The increased mobility and economic prosperity also contributed to the rise of a new class of wealthy Europeans, self-made men who earned their living through industry as opposed to inheriting it through titles or ties to nobility. Strindberg's discussion of Jean as a "new man" relates to the fact that financial success had (at least theoretically) suddenly become available to anyone with the drive and ingenuity to claim it for himself. The economic revolution also fed Strindberg's conviction that the European aristocracy would soon fall in favor of a meritocratic economy whose guiding principles would be personal drive and innovation—an idealistic sentiment which is reflected in the character of Jean and the death of the aristocratic and dysfunctional Miss Julie.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While Strindberg worked in many styles, *Miss Julie* is a naturalist drama. Naturalists were concerned with creating theater that was highly realistic, with characters who were complex and flawed. Strindberg's work is often discussed alongside that of his naturalist contemporary, Henrik Ibsen. Both men wrote plays that aimed to accurately portray the dark side of the European aristocracy. Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House* concern women who, like Miss Julie, feel constrained by the boundaries of their gender and social position. However, while Ibsen is largely sympathetic towards his central female characters, and has even been called an early feminist writer, Strindberg's writing is overwhelmingly tinged with misogyny. His play *The Father*, which proceeded *Miss Julie* by just a year, also centers around a domineering and "unnatural" woman who succeeds in overpowering and bankrupting her virile, masculine husband. Strindberg's work in the naturalist style was also largely influenced by the works of the French naturalist writer Emile Zola. Strindberg was acutely aware that French dramatists had been struggling and failing to write naturalist theater, and he was determined to succeed where they had not.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Miss Julie
- **When Written:** 1888
- **Where Written:** Stockholm, Sweden
- **When Published:** 1889
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Play, Drama, Naturalist Drama
- **Setting:** The kitchen of the Count's estate
- **Climax:** Jean ordering Miss Julie to slit her own throat, which she does
- **Antagonist:** The outdated and stifling European aristocracy

EXTRA CREDIT

The Show Must Go On. Due to the frank and salacious discussion of sex in *Miss Julie*, the play was initially forbidden from being performed several days before it was set to premier in Stockholm. Strindberg was able to get around censors, however, by premiering the play several days later at the Copenhagen University Student's Union.

All In the Family. The title role of Miss Julie was originally performed by Strindberg's then wife, Siri von Essen, who also served as the artistic director of their theater company.

A Veritable Hit. *Miss Julie* is such a triumph of the Naturalist genre that it is one of the few plays ever written that boasts

having had a production staged every year since its premiere in 1889.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the kitchen of the Count's manor house on Midsummer's Eve, Christine, the cook is frying something. She is interrupted by Jean, the valet. Jean tells Christine that Miss Julie, their mistress, is behaving wildly. The Count, who is Miss Julie's father, is away visiting family, but Julie, rather oddly, has chosen to stay behind to celebrate Midsummer with her servants, and is currently asking many of them to dance with her. Christine explains that Miss Julie has been acting oddly since her engagement ended. Jean explains that the engagement was broken when Julie attempted to "train" her fiancée with a whip like a dog. Christine and Jean are interrupted by Miss Julie, who has come to ask Jean to dance with her. Miss Julie is noticeably flirtatious and forward with Jean, who warns her that they already danced together once in the evening, and a reprise would likely cause the servants to gossip. Jean relents however, and follows Julie to dance.

After Julie and Jean leave, Christine cooks and cleans the kitchen. Jean re-enters and attempts to convince Christine to dance with him, but is quickly followed by Julie who continues to be blatantly flirtatious and is upset to find Jean being so familiar with Christine. Christine falls asleep next to the stove and Julie orders Jean to change out of his servant's livery and come have a drink with her. Despite Jean's protestations, Julie orders Jean to kiss her foot and "drink to her health." Julie praises Jean as an "aristocrat" because he drinks fine wine and knows how to speak French. As they drink, Julie explains that she has had a dream in which she climbs to the top of a slick column and then has no idea how to get down, and indicates that being close to Jean is allowing her to "climb down." In contrast, Jean explains that in his dream he is trying to climb a tall tree, but needs to get hold of the first branch which remains stubbornly out of reach. Julie asks Jean if he has ever been in love. He explains that when he was a child, he fell madly in love with Miss Julie. One day as he worked in the garden, Jean caught sight of a Turkish pavilion (an outhouse) covered in fragrant flowers. Drawn by its beauty, Jean entered to get a closer look, but soon heard someone coming. Trapped, Jean was forced to flee through the excrement in the bottom of the outhouse and out into the rose garden. There he saw Julie and was instantly bewitched by her beauty. The next Sunday, Jean put on his best clothes, determined to see Julie one more time and then go home and commit suicide by falling asleep surrounded by poisonous elderflowers.

Julie is moved by Jean's story and asks him to take her out on the lake in a row boat. Jean councils Julie to go to sleep, because he cannot be responsible for his behavior or its effect on Miss Julie's reputation. Soon, Miss Julie and Jean hear an oncoming crowd of servants and, fearing that they will be discovered together, flee into Jean's bedroom. Jean promises to protect Julie against "the mob" as they exit together. The servants sing a song and dance around the kitchen before they also exit. Julie and Jean reenter the kitchen. The implication is that they have just had sex. Jean says that the servants will know what happened between them, and explains that the only option is to travel abroad. Jean will be able to start a hotel (a lifelong dream of his) and Julie can be the mistress of his house. Suddenly, Julie becomes emotional, begging Jean to tell her that he loves her. As Julie becomes more emotional, Jean becomes more harsh and businesslike. Julie explains that they need money to open a hotel and that she has no money of her own. Jean tells her that, in that case, the plan is off and they must remain on the Count's estate. Julie is beside herself, since staying would mean she would live with a soiled reputation as Jean's "concubine." Jean is unsympathetic, and indeed intensifies his abuses by calling Julie a "whore" and telling her that his story about the Turkish pavilion was a lie engineered to appeal to her womanly sensitivity. Julie is horrified, but decides that she is deserving of Jean's abuse since she was drawn to him in the first place.

Jean asks Julie to escape with him again. In response, Julie tells Jean about her upbringing. She tells him that her mother was a fiercely independent woman who raised Julie to believe in female equality and free love. Her mother's liberal ideas made their family a laughing stock and led to bankruptcy. When Julie's father finally took control of the estate, her mother fell ill, and their farm mysteriously burned down. Julie's mother counseled her father to borrow the money to rebuild from a bricklayer who turned out to be her mother's lover and absconded with their money. Julie explains that she grew up with disdain and hatred for men just like her mother. Jean is disgusted by Julie's story, and tells her that she and her ancestors are sick. Julie cries that she wishes to die, begging Jean to tell her what to do. Jean tells her to go to her room and get ready to leave.

Christine enters and chastises Jean for the way the kitchen looks, reminding him that he agreed to go to church with her. Jean confesses that he and Miss Julie slept together and Christine is angry at him, both for his infidelity and for taking advantage of Julie. She decides she can no longer stay in the house. Suddenly, there is a bell upstairs that signals that the Count has returned from his trip. Christine exits as the sun rises, ending Midsummer's Eve. Julie returns, ready to travel with her yellow **canary**. She begs Jean to flee with her and he agrees as long as they leave the canary behind, offering to kill it. Julie sobs that the canary is her only companion after her **dog** ran off with the gatekeeper's pug, but she allows Jean to decapitate the canary on the chopping block. Seeing the dead bird, Julie screams for Jean to kill her as well. She screams that she wants to see all men swimming in blood and to "drink" from

Jean's open skull. She explains that she will stay and confess everything to her father who will die of shame, thus ending her bloodline.

Christine reenters and Julie begs Christine to protect her from Jean. Christine coldly refuses but Julie continues, telling Christine that the three of them could run away together to start Jean's hotel. Christine chastises Julie for believing a fiction. She leaves, promising to tell the stable boy to stop them if they try to flee. Trapped and scared, Julie asks Jean what he would do in her position. He explains that as a noblewoman whose reputation is tainted, there is only one thing to do. Julie picks up Jean's newly-sharpened razor and slashes the air twice, begging Jean to help her save her father from disgrace.

Having heard the Count ring the bell, Jean is frozen. In the presence of his master, Jean has no authority, and feels himself slipping back into his "menial" role. Jean screams at Julie to leave, that her presence is taking away all of his strength and resolve. Julie begs him to pretend to be the Count and give her instructions. Jean whispers into Julie's ear. Julie asks him if she will receive grace for her action. Jean says he cannot tell her, nor does he have the strength to order her one more time. The bell rings twice and Jean tells Julie, firmly, to leave him. Julie walks resolutely out of the door, and (the audience is left to assume) takes her own life.

CHARACTERS

Miss Julie – The title character of *Miss Julie*, Miss Julie is the hot-blooded and unpredictable daughter of the Count, and the mistress of both Jean and Christine. According to August Strindberg in his Preface to *Miss Julie*, Miss Julie's demeanor throughout the play, because it is out of step with what would have been proper and ladylike, makes her a "half-woman." He writes, "Miss Julie is a modern character, not because the man-hating half-woman may not have existed in all ages, but because now, after her discovery, she has stepped to the front and begun to make a noise. The half-woman is a type coming more and more into prominence, selling herself nowadays for power, decorations, distinctions, diplomas, as formerly for money, and the type indicates degeneration." The "degeneration" Strindberg refers to is a product of Miss Julie's unconventional upbringing. Miss Julie was born to a common mother who married her father, the Count without truly wanting to. Her mother disdained the idea of marriage and conventional female roles, and brought Julie up in a home where there were no conventional gender or class roles. Therefore, Julie grew up riding horses and doing things generally reserved for male children. As a result—according to Strindberg—Julie is constantly fighting against "natural" womanly imperatives like getting married and having children, and the emotional dysphoria and discord that arise from this ultimately render her unable to survive in the world. Indeed, Miss Julie is a largely allegorical character, standing in for Strindberg's beliefs that the European aristocracy was an outmoded and restrictive social construct that elevated evolutionarily unstable individuals (like Julie) while subjugating and enslaving strong, smart, and intuitive men (like Jean.) Miss Julie is also a manifestation of Strindberg's greater mistrust of and disdain for women, whom he portrayed throughout his body of work as bewitching temptresses whose chief goal was to unseat and overpower men. Miss Julie takes this fear to the extreme. A self-proclaimed "man-hater," Julie breaks her own engagement when she tires of dominating and controlling her willingly submissive fiancée. Jean seduces Miss Julie and shames her after they make love, ultimately compelling her to commit suicide. In this way, Strindberg uses Julie's character to argue that such degenerate women are no match for strong, self-possessed, "real" men like Jean. In addition, because Strindberg views Julie's beliefs about her own autonomy to be an evolutionary defect, he presents her suicide as a necessary sacrifice so that she will not breed with a "degenerate man," and "produce indeterminate sexes to whom life is a torture."

Jean – If Miss Julie is an embodiment of the degeneracy of European aristocracy, then Jean, Miss Julie's valet, is the embodiment of the "new man," who is able to make his way up the ranks of society as a result of his own ingenuity and intellect instead of noble birth or a title. Strindberg explains that "Jean, the valet, is of the kind that builds new stock—one in whom the differentiation is clearly noticeable. He was a [tenant farmer's] child, and he has trained himself up to the point where the future gentleman has become visible. [...] He has already risen in the world, and is strong enough not to be sensitive about using other people's services." Indeed, throughout the play, Jean displays a cold, ruthless, and rational desire to fulfil his dream of escaping the Count's employ and running his own hotel, even if it means seducing and manipulating Miss Julie to do it. Jean explains to Miss Julie that he has a dream that he is standing under a large tree, knowing that it would be an easy climb to the top if he could only reach the first branch. Strindberg believed that the aristocracy was an outdated and dangerous social model, and hoped for the societal ascendency of self-made men like Jean, who adapt to and take from their environments in order to actively improve their social standing, instead of inheriting power via a title and wealth. Indeed, Jean is completely adaptable throughout the play. He plays the submissive valet to Julie's dominant mistress and then, once he has sexually overpowered her, takes the role of master himself in order to shame and subjugate her. Jean is preoccupied with achieving nobility and social status, and takes pride in seducing Miss Julie not only because it could provide his escape from the Count's estate, but because sullying Miss Julie's reputation is a way of asserting his superiority to the system of aristocracy which she represents. Yet, despite Jean's sense of his own superiority, he is still constrained by the obligations of his station in society. When the Count returns from visiting

relatives and summons Jean with two rings of his bell, Jean is powerless to fight back. Despite Jean's disdain for the nobility, he also looks up to the Count, whose fine positions and mastery over his own estate remind him of the possibilities of power and wealth. In the end, Jean commands Julie to kill herself—an order which it seems she follows, attesting to the supremacy of Jean's powers of cunning and manipulation.

Christine – Christine is the cook on the Count's estate and Jean's lover. In contrast to Julie, Christine models conventional, nurturing femininity, cooking and comforting Jean even when he is cold or distant. Christine is a servant who, unlike Jean, has no designs about improving her social standing, and sees the desire to improve one's social position as disloyal. According to Strindberg, Christine "is a female slave, full of servility and sluggishness acquired in front of the kitchen fire, and stuffed full of morality and religion." And indeed, Christine hides behind conventional piety and godliness in order to shame Miss Julie for her promiscuity, and to chastise Jean for his desire to achieve his social ascent at the expense of someone else. Because Strindberg views Jean's manipulation of Miss Julie as a necessary step in his escape from servitude, he views Christine's morality, by contrast, as a weakness—characteristic of those working class people who, unlike Jean, do not possess the intelligence and drive to succeed in the world. However, Christine ultimately uses her moral and spiritual high ground to leave the Count's estate. By promising to inform the stable boy of any plot by Jean or Julie to escape, Christine seals Julie's fate and makes Jean unable to escape as well.

Julie's Mother Though she doesn't appear in the play, Miss Julie's mother set Miss Julie up for failure (according to Strindberg) by teaching her about female equality and raising her without gender or the skills needed to adjust to a "natural" life as a wife and mother. Miss Julie's mother was born to common parents without any desire to get married or have children. However, when Julie's father (the Count) proposed, Julie's mother said yes and had a child "against her will." As a result, Julie's mother disdained men, especially her husband, and set about ruining his reputation and life. Her unconventional ideas made Julie's family the laughing stock of their province, and ultimately lead their family to bankruptcy. When Julie's father rebelled and took control of his home, Julie's mother became violently ill and conspired with her lover, a bricklayer, to burn down their farm and have her husband borrow money from the bricklayer to rebuild. However, once the bricklayer collected the money, he swindled Julie's mother, leading, eventually, to her death. Within the play, Miss Julie's story about her mother is meant to illustrate the source of her "degeneracy." The story also foreshadows Miss Julie's own death after similarly placing her trust in a low-born lover who swindles her.

The Count – Although he doesn't appear onstage during the play, the Count is manifested in the play in other ways: his large pair of boots sits on the chair, and late in the play the shrill double-ringing of the bell signals his return. After Miss Julie's mother's death, the Count, who is Julie's father, regained control of his estate, but not without sustaining significant damage to his reputation. When he returns to the estate near the end of the play, his presence is enough to reinstate the social hierarchies that seemed to gradually deteriorate over the course of the paly, sapping Jean of his virility and his resolve to escape. In addition, the specter of the Count hangs over Julie's final decision to end her own life, because she views it as the only way to preserve his already-tarnished reputation and to end his bloodline without causing further damage to his house.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

BIOLOGY VS. SOCIETY

In the preface to *Miss Julie*, August Strindberg explains that his play is a "Naturalist Tragedy." Strindberg, who is considered one of the foremost naturalist playwrights of his era, was concerned with creating theater that was highly realistic, with characters who were complex and flawed. However, Strindberg also refers to the play as "naturalist" because he viewed Miss Julie and Jean as two characters whose innate natures are betrayed by the way they have each been brought up. Indeed, throughout the play, both characters consistently reference their upbringings and the constraints of society as the reasons that they cannot achieve their dreams. Jean (who epitomizes Strindberg's conception of the "new man" of his age) is unable to make the most of his considerable intellect, strength, and ingenuity because he grew up poor and can't get a leg up. Meanwhile, Julie's unconventional upbringing gave her ideas about female equality and autonomy that (in Strindberg's opinion) go against what is "natural" for a woman, ultimately rendering her unable to survive in the world. Jean is ultimately the victor in the play, gaining the upper hand over Julie despite his low class and, Strindberg suggests in the preface, going on to escape servitude. Julie, on the other hand, meets a tragic end when Jean succeeds in convincing her to take her own life—an outcome which Strindberg presents as the natural consequence of her "unnatural" upbringing. Through this sequence of events, Strindberg's "Naturalist Tragedy" makes an argument for the "survival of the fittest," suggesting that those who are made strong by their biology will always rise to conquer those whom society artificially props up.

Strindberg believed that as a man with a strong will to alter his

social circumstances, Jean is superior to Miss Julie. To prove this, Strindberg uses his preface to introduce the concept of "Sexual Aristocracy," which posits that biological sex is the true measure of a person's worth rather than inherited wealth. "Jean stands above Miss Julie not only because his fate is in ascendency, but because he is a man," Strindberg explains. "Sexually he is the aristocrat because of his male strength, his more finely developed senses, and his capacity for taking the initiative." Strindberg, believing Jean to be superior to Miss Julie simply because he is a man, consistently highlights Jean's personal taste and intellect, which sometimes even surpasses Miss Julie's. He learned French, he says, "in Switzerland, when [he] worked as *sommelier* in one of the big hotels in Lucerne," where he also picked up a taste for fine wine and a sense of good breeding. Unlike aristocrats, whose pedigree is conferred at birth, Jean is a self-made man who worked hard to achieve a sense of personal taste. And indeed, Julie selectively validates his efforts. "You are an aristocrat, I think," she tells him flirtatiously, though she is merely referencing his tastes for fine wine. When Jean responds that he is indeed an aristocrat, she states, "and I am stepping down," indicating that, while Jean might have many of the intellectual and emotional qualities of a nobleman, she is the one who has the title, and therefore is socially debasing herself by spending time with Jean even if he is her "sexual" superior.

Yet, while Julie has a title, it is of little use to her because of her "tainted biology." Strindberg portrays Julie as inferior to prove that the social hierarchy is protecting and elevating "biologically" weak individuals. According to Strindberg, because Julie was brought up as a "half-woman" by her free-thinking mother, and raised to hunt, shoot, and wear boys' clothes, she lacks the ability to perform the appropriate duties society expects of both a woman and a countess. For example, Julie learned from her mother to disdain the institution of marriage. Julie tells Jean that her mother married her father without really wanting to, and that Julie herself "came into the world against [her] mother's will." Therefore, from the outset, Julie does not have the necessary tools to fulfil the primary imperative of noble women: to find a husband and continue her noble family line. Indeed, just as Julie's mother caused their family's ruin, Julie ruins her one chance at marriage because she is commanding and cold toward her fiancé instead of warm and nurturing. Without a husband to make her a respectable countess, Julie pursues and fulfils her sexual desire in the way that a man would, ultimately degrading herself and risking bringing shame to her father. Highlighting this disconnect between Julie's egalitarian upbringing and her noble title, Jean tells Julie that, despite her social class, her promiscuity has made her worse than a servant. "Do you think any servant girl would go for a man as you did?" he asks rhetorically. "Did you ever see a girl of my class throw herself at anybody in that way? I have never seen the like of it except among beasts and prostitutes." In this way, Strindberg emphasizes Julie's inferiority to Jean despite her superior social standing, thereby reinforcing the idea of a natural or "sexual aristocracy" that undercuts the constructed hierarchies of European aristocracy.

Although in Strindberg's estimation Jean's maleness, resourcefulness, and intellect make him Julie's moral superior, both he and Julie are ultimately foiled by the artificial social constraints of aristocratic European society. Strindberg portrays Julie's death as the natural outcome of her unnatural upbringing, while Jean's masculine strength and intellect is subverted tragically by his social class. In Strindberg's preface, he outlines the factors the lead to Julie's death: "her mother's fundamental instincts; her father's mistaken upbringing of the girl; her own nature, and the suggestive influence of her fiancé on a weak and degenerate brain." In other words, Julie's misguided upbringing and "weak and degenerate brain" made it impossible for her to fulfil the natural womanly duties of marriage and motherhood, leading her instead to pursue sex with a servant, which in turn ultimately leads to her suicide. Meanwhile, Jean is stopped from escaping simply because the Count returns abruptly, causing Jean to fall back into patterns of servitude, despite having the intellect and drive necessary to escape his circumstances. In Strindberg's preface, he indicates that, while Miss Julie fell victim to a "degenerate" biology, and therefore could not survive her tryst with Jean, Jean is a biological and "sexual" aristocrat, who is only barred from success by the artificial boundary of social class, which he will ultimately transcend as (according to Strindberg) the aristocratic power structure would deteriorate over time. By ending the play with Jean ordering Julie to end her own life, Strindberg suggests that the artificial social hierarchy will soon be superseded by a natural hierarchy dominated by "new men" like Jean, thereby ushering in a new, merit-based society where all strong and resourceful men can prosper regardless of the class they were born into.

NATURAL VS. UNNATURAL WOMANHOOD

In Strindberg's preface to *Miss Julie*, he explains that one of the themes he is intent on exploring in the play is the fact that, despite his low birth, Jean's maleness makes him a "sexual aristocrat" and biologically superior to Miss Julie. This discussion is complimented by the pervasive distinctions that Strindberg draws throughout the play between what is "natural" and "unnatural" behavior for women. In his preface, Strindberg explains that Miss Julie is "a man hating half-woman," who "sell[s] herself nowadays for power, decorations, distinctions, diplomas as previously she did for money." By equating the struggle for female equality and financial independence with prostitution, Strindberg revealed a deep distrust of women, and a fear that they could overpower or eclipse men. Because Strindberg writes under the assumption that the "natural" thing for a woman to do was to

get married and have children, Miss Julie's attempt to gain autonomy and power in society manifests in an unbridled sexual desire, a hatred of men, and an inability to conform to the expectations of her own class—traits which ultimately spell her undoing. Indeed, according to Strindberg, Julie's "revolt" against her true "womanly" instincts is the central reason that she dies at the end of the play. In *Miss Julie*, Strindberg sets out to prove that women only increase their suffering by seeking, against their "nature," to be equal to men.

Strindberg believed that the primary reason Miss Julie was a "half-woman" was because of the way she was raised. Throughout the play, reference is made to Julie's unnatural upbringing. Because her mother raised her and ran her house without gender or class distinctions, Julie continually puts herself in harm's way by being unable to live life fully as either a woman or an aristocrat. From the opening moments of the play, Strindberg shows that Julie prefers spending time outside of her social class. Jean tells Christine that Julie's mother, the Countess, was "more at home in the kitchen and among the cows" as a way of explaining why Julie has chosen to stay behind on Midsummer's Eve with the servants instead of going to visit her family with her father. Indeed, Julie is consistently attempting to undercut her noble birth to have more in common with Jean. For example, when Jean offers her one of her father's best wines to drink she says that she would prefer beer because "my tastes are so simple I prefer it to wine." However, Julie can never truly be safe among her servants because they resent her for her money and power over them. Jean continues to caution Miss Julie that she should fear the servants' gossip, as it will tarnish her reputation. Indeed, contrary to Julie's romantic ideas of working-class life, Jean presents the servants as "a mob" and ultimately convinces Julie to escape into his room so that the mob will not discover the two of them together. Thus, Julie jeopardizes her reputation by sleeping with Jean—and does so, ironically, as a direct result of the threat of servant gossip. She later commits suicide motivated by her fear that the same gossip would ruin her father's reputation and break his heart as well. Ultimately, she is persecuted by the expectations of others that she embody "natural" womanhood by exhibiting typically ladylike behavior.

Another marker of Julie's "half-womanhood" is her voracious sexual desire. Throughout the play, Julie is portrayed as a masculine, sexual aggressor, openly pursuing sex with Jean and multiple other men that work on her estate. However, Strindberg believed that sexual openness was a trait that should be reserved for men, and Julie is therefore shamed once she and Jean consummate their relationship and cannot regain her power over him. Christine references Julie's history of sexual openness in the play's opening scene, telling Jean that she is acting "crazy" asking men to dance with her even in front of their partners and wives. This is a "craziness" that Julie inherited from her mother, who drove their family to bankruptcy when she chose to invest her personal fortune with her lover, a common bricklayer, who stole all her money. Indeed, even within the play's central seduction, Julie's sexual openness is portrayed as inherently negative. Before they have sex, Jean cautions Miss Julie that it is improper for her to be seen drinking with him in a familiar manner and openly flirting with him. "It is dangerous to play with fire," he cautions. "Not for me," replies Miss Julie, "I'm insured." The "insurance" Julie refers to is undoubtedly her social class, which she sees as protecting her even though it is ultimately the factor that makes her feel she must end her life. The misguided comment further proves that Miss Julie has a skewed understanding of her noble title, failing to see that having sex with Jean will ruin her reputation and brand her as a harlot. Indeed, once Julie and Jean have sex, their power dynamic immediately shifts as Jean shames her for her promiscuity and lack of virtue. For example, when Julie attempts to call Jean a "lackey" and a "menial" for speaking improperly toward her, he responds in kind. "You lackey love, you mistress of a menial – shut up and get out of here!" In parroting Julie's words back to her, Jean suggests that by having sex with him, Julie has placed herself on his level, and has therefore given up the right to dictate Jean's actions. Jean emerges from the sexual encounter untarnished, while Julie will never be able to escape from the stain on her reputation and virtue.

Describing Julie in the preface as a "man-hating half woman," Strindberg ultimately condemns Julie for her contempt and outright hatred of men, which he sees as futile and unnatural. Julie explains that she got engaged to the Country attorney "so that he should be my slave," indicating that the only relationship Julie wishes to have with men is one in which she can dominate and humiliate them. However, after Jean and Julie have sex, Jean assumes complete control of her future and her fate, showing that Julie's desire for domination is futile. When Julie realizes that Jean has both ruined her life and murdered her beloved canary, she unleashes a murderous tirade. "I should like to see your whole sex swimming in blood like that thing there," she tells Jean, "I think I could drink out of your open skull, and bathe my feet in your open breast, and eat your heart from the spit!" In Strindberg's view, Julie's hatred of men is yet another of the many qualities that make her an "unnatural woman," and which therefore ultimately lead to her demise.

Despite her deep and angry resolve to see the death of all men, Julie ends the play scared, confused and powerless. Far from drinking from Jean's skull, she allows him to dictate the way that she will die, much like her prized canary. For Strindberg, this tragedy is merely the natural extension of Julie's unnatural upbringing and "weak and degenerate brain." In his prologue, Strindberg explains that the "half-woman" is not only a threat to herself but to the entirety of society: such women "multiply and produce indeterminate sexes to whom life is a torture." He explains that, "Fortunately, however, they perish in the end,

either from discord with real life, or from the irresistible revolt of their suppressed instincts, or from foiled hopes of possessing the man." Julie's end comes as a result of all three: an inability to conform to the dictates of her gender and class; a painful subordination by Jean; and an inability to subjugate all men. As a result, Strindberg shows that Miss Julie's end is expected, and even goes so far as to suggest that the death of such nonconforming, "unnatural" women is necessary in order to preserve the integrity and future of humanity. Another—and less overtly misogynistic—way of looking at the same set of circumstances, however, would be to suggest that Julie's demise was a direct outcome of the strict and repressive standards of "natural womanhood" to which she was subjected in her life.

CLASS

Miss Julie is a drama about class difference. From the moment the aristocratic Miss Julie allows herself to sleep with a servant, she has fallen from grace. In his preface, Strindberg addresses "the innate or acquired sense of honor that the upper classes inherit," which he believed compelled the nobility to sacrifice everything to preserve their reputation, even if it meant losing their life. Julie therefore, falls victim to the inflexible idea of upper-class honor, which leaves her no other option than death. Because Jean has neither pedigree nor ancestry, however, he is able to use his own cultivated taste and breeding to ascend through the social ranks and achieve his goals.

Jean makes it clear to Julie that he believes pedigree and ancestry to be a trap that is imprisoning her. Because Julie's ancestral line is marred in conflict and scandal, she has to spend her life in her family's shadow. Jean, on the other hand, has no ancestors, and has the masculine advantage of being able to start his own family line. Jean tells Julie "I have read about your pedigree in a book that was lying on the drawing room table. Do you know who was your first ancestor? A miller who let his wife sleep with the king one night during the war with Denmark. I have no such ancestry. I have none at all, but I can become an ancestor myself." This question of tainted pedigree is also mirrored at the beginning of the play when Christine explains that Julie ordered that her prized **dog** Diana should be shot after she was found playing with the gatekeeper's pug. This detail suggests that Julie is keenly aware of the importance of breeding, even as she chooses to ignore her own in order to seduce Jean. Jean on the other hand, views his lack of pedigree as an opportunity. A self-made man, he constructs a pedigree for himself out of acquired characteristics: his superior taste in food and wine and his knowledge of languages, things that (despite his lack of monetary influence) will allow him to make money for himself and start a family of his own. When Julie asks him if he has money for train tickets to Italy, Jean responds "I have my expert knowledge, my vast experience, my familiarity with several languages, that is the very best kind of capital I should say." What Jean lacks in inherited class, he makes up for in his resourcefulness, drive, and intelligence—all of which constitute a different kind of nobility.

Despite Jean's insistence that his self-made nobility is superior to Julie's inherited class, however, he continually reminds her that there are insurmountable social barriers between them, created by Julie's inherent privilege. When Miss Julie insists that Jean call her Julie after they have sex because, "between us there can be no barriers hereafter," Jean corrects her. He says, "There will be barriers between us as long as we stay in this house," indicating that, while Jean believes himself to be personally and evolutionarily superior to Julie, their presence on the Count's estate forces them into strict dominant and submissive roles that even their intimacy cannot undo. Nor does Julie have any true idea about Jean's circumstance or the life he leads. Despite her insistence that she should talk to him as "an equal" and a "friend," Julie only has a romantic notion of what it is like to be lower class. Jean asks, "Do you know how the world looks from below? No you don't. No more than do hawks and falcons, of whom we never see the back because they are always floating above, high up in the sky." In this way, he shows that she is unable to truly achieve equality with him in part because she knows nothing about the life he leads. This disconnect indicates that, while Julie wants to drink and cavort with her servants, she is not interested in the true nature of their misery, and while Jean strives to climb the social ladder, he knows that he will never truly ascend to Julie's level of privilege.

Indeed, once Julie's father, the Count, returns to his estate, Jean's talk of his own nobility falters. In the face of his master, Jean is forced back into his role as a "menial," and loses the ability to stand up for himself. Jean tells Julie that even without the Count's physical presence, any reminders of him makes Jean feel like a servant again. He explains, "If I only catch sight of his gloves on the chair I feel small. If I only hear that bell up there I jump like a shy horse. And even now, when I see his boots standing there so stiff and perky, it's as if something made my back bend." When the Count returns and calls Jean to attend him, Jean loses all ability to command or dominate Julie. He exclaims, "I cannot command you—and now, since I've heard the Count's voice—I can't quite explain it—but—Oh, that damned menial is back in my spine again. I believe if the count should come down here, and if he should tell me to cut my own throat—I'd do it on the spot!" Therefore, despite Jean's repeated references to his superiority, both Jean and Julie find themselves subordinate in the Count's dominating presence, which reminds Julie of the responsibilities of her pedigree and Jean of the duties of his station.

In his preface, Strindberg describes the sense of duty that the rich feel toward their pedigree as "the nobleman's *harakiri* – or the law of inner conscience compelling the Japanese to cut

open his own abdomen at the insult of another." In Strindberg's mind, Julie's suicide is a personal *hara-kiri*. Blocked by Christine from escaping and certain that her father will die if he finds out about her disgrace, Julie chooses to die, sacrificing herself to preserve her father's noble reputation. In Strindberg's mind, Julie's fate is inevitable precisely because, as a noblewoman, she has no recourse once she has been dishonored by Jean. Importantly, however, Strindberg sees this attachment to reputation as the reason that the European aristocrats are a dying breed. Because Jean is a commoner, unburdened by ancestry or wealth, he is able to survive his tryst with Miss Julie. Therefore, Strindberg suggests that eventually, the most adaptable and intelligent commoners (like Jean) will rise up to replace the aristocracy, while the nobility will, like Julie, die as a result of their inflexible concepts of honor and reputation.

DOMINANCE VS. SUBMISSION

At its heart, *Miss Julie* is a play about two people that are struggling to attain and maintain dominance over one another. Julie uses her nobility and sexuality to dominate Jean, driven by what Strindberg, in his preface, identifies as her aggressive sexuality and her desire to control men. Jean, despite being of lower class, dominates Julie simply by virtue of his masculinity. As Strindberg writes in his preface, "Jean stands above Miss Julie not only because his fate is in ascendancy, but because he is a man." He writes, "Sexually, he is the aristocrat because of his male strength, his more finely developed senses and his capacity for taking the initiative." Once Julie and Jean consummate their relationship, Julie loses her air of dominance and begins to exhibit more submissive characteristics, including putting her life and fate in Jean's hands to decide. Apart from associating femininity with submission and masculinity with dominance, Strindberg's play argues that the state of nature is an ongoing struggle for dominance in which questions of justice and fairness are irrelevant.

Before Julie and Jean consummate their relationship, Julie tries to use her powerful sensuality to make Jean both physically and sexually subordinate to her. After Julie commands Jean to "drink to her health," she also insists, "now you must also kiss my shoe in order to get it just right." Kissing Julie's shoe is a humiliating task, as she has been outside walking through the stables. The act is meant to remind Jean of his place as her servant by placing him in a physically submissive position, kneeling under Miss Julie's foot. Nor is Jean the only man that Julie has attempted to sexually dominate. Before Miss Julie enters the kitchen, Christine explains in hushed tones that she once witnessed Julie attempting to "train" her former fiancé with a horse whip. "They were in the stable-yard one evening, and the young lady was training him, as she called it. Do you know what that meant? She made him leap over her horse-whip the way you teach a dog to jump. Twice he jumped and got a cut each time." Christine's observation, coupled with Julie's self-proclaimed hatred of men, suggests that Julie views her sexuality as a tool for dominating others.

In his preface, Strindberg goes out of his way to portray Jean as a man who not only will not be sexually or emotionally dominated by Miss Julie, but who uses sex to assert biological superiority to take full control over her. Once Julie and Jean have sex, Julie begins to exhibit conventional womanly characteristics, saying to Jean almost immediately, "Tell me that you love me. Come take me in your arms." The change in Julie's behavior is alarming and immediate, meant to indicate that despite her presumption of sexual dominance, Julie has been "tamed" and feminized by Jean. Indeed, Strindberg includes the stage direction *"with modest and true womanly feeling"* to make clear that the actress playing Julie should reflect the change in her performance as well. As Julie becomes more feminine, Jean becomes more harsh, masculine, and controlling, seeming to delight in punishing Julie for her promiscuity as a method of exhibiting full control over her. "You're the right one to come and tell me that I am vulgar," he says. "People of my kind would never in their lives act as vulgarly as you have acted tonight." Indeed, by repeatedly shaming Julie, calling her a "whore" and a "menial," and telling her that she has debased herself, Jean forces Julie to completely succumb to his influence. By the end of the play, Julie has no strength or conviction to make any of her own decisions, including the one to end her own life. "Command me," she cries, "and I'll obey you like a dog! Do me this last favor – save my honor."

Julie's actions in the second half of the play become increasingly hysterical, dictated by her emotions instead of her previous aloof rationality. In her hysterics, Miss Julie continues to make reference to her own weakness. "What power drew me to you" she shouts at Jean, "Is it the attraction that the strong exercises over the weak – the one who is rising on one who is falling? Or was it love? This – love! Do you know what love is?" Julie's sudden and frenzied discussion of love testifies to Jean's ultimate power over her, which takes on an emotional dimension as well as a physical and sexual one. By tracking a complete and definite shift in Miss Julie and Jean's dominant and submissive relationship over the course of the play, Strindberg indicates that Julie's concept of her own dominance is false, bolstered by both her social position and her "weak and degenerate brain," while Jean's dominance is ensured simply by his gender. Therefore, once Miss Julie seduces Jean, she is both stripped of her social dominance and her sexual autonomy and no longer has any way to fight Jean's power over her, nor any way to return her life to the way it was before their encounter. Therefore, Strindberg suggests that, by having sex with Jean, Julie is restored to a state of "natural" female submissiveness, and Jean wins dominance over her to dictate her actions, up to and including her eventual suicide. In this way, love and sex are portrayed in *Miss Julie* as battlefields where lovers vie for

dominance over one another.

CONFINEMENT AND ESCAPE

Despite their vast socioeconomic differences, Miss Julie and Jean come together out of a shared desire to escape their current circumstances. Jean, frustrated with life as a valet on the Count's estate, dreams of a life managing his own hotel in Romania, while Julie seeks to hide from the pressures of her title, which require her to marry and start a family to continue her father's line. However, the characters must seek their respective escapes in very different ways. Jean's journey towards owning his hotel is an ascent out of poverty, while Julie, forever constrained by her nobility, can only escape by descending the social ladder, indulging in vice and promiscuity. Through his play Strindberg suggests that, in societies where class hierarchies are so strictly defined, freedom from the bonds of both servitude and wealth are equally impossible. Tainted by promiscuity, Julie is only able to escape judgement through suicide, and Jean is unable to assert his dominance any longer once Julie's father returns to the estate. Therefore, despite their class difference, and the opposite paths that both characters take to try to escape, neither one can ever truly be free of the boundaries of their social class and the strict structure of their society.

Throughout the play, both characters view their escape in terms of climbing and falling. Each character expresses a desire to elevate themselves above their current state, but the risk of falling is ever present in their minds. For example, before they consummate their relationship, Miss Julie tells Jean about one of her recurring dreams. "I have climbed to the top of a column and sit there without being able to tell how to get down again, I get dizzy when I look down, and I must get down, but I haven't the courage to jump off." Julie's dream is meant to be a foreshadowing of her plight at the end of the play. The column in her dream offers only a way up, but the slick sides mean that she does not have the means to get down without jumping, a decision that equates with death (thereby foreshadowing the end of the play). Jean, on the other hand, views his success as a giant tree. While Miss Julie starts at the top of her column and can't get down, Jean sees himself under the tree with no way to begin his climb, since "the trunk is so thick and smooth and it is so far to the first branch. But I know that if I could only reach that first branch, then I should go right on to the top as on a ladder." Ultimately, Miss Julie understands herself to be "the first branch" that Jean has to grab to secure his ascent towards his dreams of success, continuing to climb steadily like a ladder. As in her dream, however, Miss Julie has no clear way to escape the ruinous consequences of sleeping with a servant and is forced to take the jump to her death.

In addition to the heavy foreshadowing and metaphor in the text, Strindberg had specific requirements for how the play should be staged in order to heighten the feeling of confinement for the actors and the audience. Strindberg dictated that the whole play should take place in only a section of the kitchen so that the true size of the house can only be guessed at, and the only exits possible for Julie and Jean are up towards the main house or into Jean's room. Therefore, when Julie and Jean are confronted with the chorus of servants who threaten to catch them drinking together, they are physically constrained by the set as much as emotionally constrained by their predicament. In addition, Strindberg explained that the table should be placed at a diagonal on the stage so that the actors "show full face and half profile to the audience when they sit at the table." In contrast to the typical practice of placing actors at right angles to each other so that you only saw one character's face at a time, Strindberg's configuration increased the audience's ability to pick up on even the most minute changes in the actor's expressions or behaviors, which increased the claustrophobic nature of the play because it did not allow the audience to hide or detach from any of the action happening before them.

Both because of the confining nature of the set and the predictive nature of each character's respective dream, escape ultimately proves not to be a positive thing. Far from helping Miss Julie to leave her world behind, Jean uses Julie's disgrace to forge his own escape, leaving her sullied by her association with him and with no other option but to commit suicide to preserve her honor. Because of the lack of entrances and exits on the stage, Julie and Jean's only option is to retreat into Jean's room when the servants threaten to catch them drinking together. Jean explains "The mob is cowardly. And in such a fight there is nothing to do but run away." However, by forcing Julie to "run away" into his bedroom, Jean is only allowing Julie to "escape" on his terms, knowing that by bringing her further into his world he is both preventing her from escape and potentially securing his own. Indeed, once they have consummated their relationship and Julie begs Jean to run away with her, he refuses, telling her instead that they must stay and live with the consequences of their actions. To further torment her, Jean parrots Julie's fear from her dream back to her, "Fall down to me," he tells her, "and I'll lift you up again." However, instead of lifting her up, Jean continues to block Julie's pleas for help and cries for escape. Indeed, Jean ultimately instructs Julie to commit suicide not out of concern for her reputation, but out of fear that further association with her will block his own chance at escape as well. He yells, "Don't think! Don't think! Why, you are taking away my strength, too, so that I become a coward. [...] It's horrid," he says, "but there's no other end to it! – Go!"

In Jean's final line, Strindberg encapsulates the ways in which both characters' desires for escape only serve to trap them further within the duties of their social class. By attempting to champion her mother's ideas about equality and class dissolution, and escape the confinement of aristocracy through

sex with a servant, Julie instead shames herself and her family so completely that the only true escape from her shame is to kill herself and end an already scandal-ridden family line. On the other hand, while Jean pushes Julie to suicide in the hopes that it will give him the bravery he needs to finally leave the Count's estate, his power and impetus to escape has already vanished the minute the Count returned home. In this way, Strindberg shows that, as much as it seems that Jean holds the power to trap and manipulate Julie according to his will, both characters are ultimately equally confined by their inflexible society.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

DIANA (JULIE'S DOG)

In the opening scene of *Miss Julie*, Christine is brewing a tonic for Miss Julie's dog, Diana, who is "in trouble" after being found running around with the gatekeeper's pug. Christine explains that Miss Julie is in a state, wishing to shoot the dog that she had once considered to be a devoted companion, simply because she has been corrupted by a dirtier dog. Diana's fate directly parallels Miss Julie's: a "pure-bred" whose reputation is irrevocably tarnished by cavorting with a member of the lower classes. Miss Julie's relationship to Diana also reveals her contradictory ideas about class and breeding. For example, when Christine finds out that Miss Julie and Jean have slept together, she calls Miss Julie a hypocrite, pointing out that Julie wanted to have her dog shot for sleeping with a servant's dog, while Julie herself willingly seduced one of her own servants. In addition, Jean notes that, like Julie's mother, Miss Julie is incredibly particular about some things while being unrefined and uncaring about others. For example, Julie will happily go riding and hunting like a man, but also insists on having the finest clothes, and no longer wants to keep a dog who has been made unclean through interbreeding. Ultimately, like Diana, Julie is not able to live once she has "mated" with Jean, thereby tarnishing her familial line and bringing dishonor on her family.

THE CANARY

Another animal that Strindberg uses to foreshadow Miss Julie's fate is Julie's prized canary. When Julie brings the bird's gilded cage into the kitchen and asks Jean to run away with her, he tells her that he will only go if she leaves the bird behind. Already reeling from **Diana's** "abandonment," Miss Julie tells Jean that she would rather Jean killed her bird than allow it to be left alone. Jean kills the bird without hesitation, cutting its head off with an axe, foreshadowing the way that Julie ultimately slits her own throat at Jean's command. The canary, like Julie herself, symbolizes what Strindberg believes to be the frivolity of the upper classes. In killing the bird, Jean not only reveals his cold and unfeeling resolve to escape, but also his disdain for the fact that Miss Julie cares more about the fate of her pet bird than for the living conditions of most of the servants on her estate. Like the canary in its gilded cage, Julie herself proves to have been made weak by her privileged upbringing, and is ultimately defenseless against Jean when he decides to do away with her, too.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *Miss Julie* published in 1992.

Author's Preface Quotes

> My souls (or characters) are conglomerates, made up of past and present stages of civilization, scraps of humanity, torn-off pieces of Sunday clothing turned into rags all patched together as is the human soul itself.

Related Themes:

Page Number: xii

Explanation and Analysis

Strindberg explains that, in contrast to most of his peers, whose works of High Drama and comedy featured stock characters, *Miss Julie* featured characters who were flawed and human. Importantly, however, Strindberg also viewed his characters to be symbolic of forces in society at large, in contrast to classic stock characters, who stood in for different kinds of people (the damsel, the clown, the trickster.) In doing this, Strindberg advocates for a theater that is socially-minded, meant to challenge and involve audiences' perspectives instead of merely entertaining and distracting them.

> Miss Julie is a modern character, not because the man-hating half-woman may not have existed in all ages, but because now, after her discovery, she has stepped to the front and begun to make a noise. The half-woman is a type coming more and more into prominence, selling herself nowadays for power, decorations … as formerly for money.

Related Characters: Miss Julie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: xiii

Explanation and Analysis

Strindberg explains that Miss Julie is an example of a kind of degenerate "half-woman," who has recently become more and more prominent in society. According to Strindberg, a "half-woman" was any woman who prioritized and sought her own autonomy, education, or financial security instead of adhering to the more "traditional" womanly roles of wife and mother. Strindberg likens this shift to prostitution, revealing an ugly and overt misogyny that colors his treatment of Miss Julie throughout the play. By calling women that believe in their own equality "half" women, Strindberg not only suggests that female submissiveness is a quality *innate* to womanhood, but that by seeking their own autonomy, these women corrupt their womanhood to the point that they transform into another, indeterminate sex. This argument reveals Strindberg's deep mistrust in and fear of powerful and autonomous women, a theme that recurs throughout the play.

❝ It is this, the nobleman's harikiri or the law of the inner conscience compelling the Japanese to cut open his own abdomen at the insult of another… for this reason the valet, Jean continues to live, but Miss Julie cannot live without honor."

Related Characters: Miss Julie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: xiii

Explanation and Analysis

Strindberg explains that, because Julie belongs to an old line of military nobility, she is constrained by the sense of duty she feels to preserve the honor and dignity of her family. Strindberg views the aristocracy's "superstitious" connection to honor to be the main reason that it is an outdated and stale system. By contrast, Jean, who has no ancestors, is free to live life and succeed solely based on his own merit and the strength of his goals, unencumbered by honor or ancestry. In Strindberg's mind, this is why Jean will likely survive his tryst with Miss Julie while Julie sacrifices herself to protect her family's reputation.

Miss Julie Quotes

❝ They were in the stable yard one evening, and the young lady was training him, as she called it. Do you know what that meant? She made him leap over her horse whip the way you teach a dog to jump.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Christine, Miss Julie

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Jean explains to Christine that he witnessed the precise moment that Miss Julie's engagement to the County Attorney ended. While in the stable yard at night, Jean witnessed Miss Julie "training" her fiancé with a whip, lashing him repeatedly when he failed to jump over it. Placed near the beginning of the play, this instance immediately highlights Miss Julie's "half-woman-ness." Firstly, instead of nurturing and supporting her future husband, Julie is seeking to dominate and physically harm him. In addition, the presence of the whip strongly suggests a physically if not sexually dominating relationship between Julie and her fiancé, and indeed, it is suggested later that Miss Julie shared a dominant sexual relationship with her fiancé as well as an emotional one.

❝ The young lady is too stuck up in some ways and not proud enough in others. Just as was the countess when she lived. She was most at home in the kitchen and among the cows, but she would never drive with only one horse.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie, Julie's Mother

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Christine bemoans the fact that Miss Julie wants to have her dog, Diana, shot for running around with the gatekeeper's pug, but is content to celebrate Midsummer's Eve dancing inappropriately with her father's servants. Jean and Christine disdain Miss Julie for failing to understand the basic requirements of her aristocratic role, clinging to the ornamental aspects of wealth (cufflinks, horses and purebred dogs) but willfully ignoring the boundaries of

social class and the rules of decorum. Importantly, Miss Julie's disdain for her breeding is something that she inherited directly from her mother, supporting Strindberg's thesis that the aristocracy elevates "weak" individuals without strength or leadership instincts, while subjugating men like Jean.

Don't take it as a command. To-night we should enjoy ourselves as a lot of happy people, and all rank should be forgotten.

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

When Jean refuses to dance with Miss Julie on the grounds that it is improper for a servant to be seen dancing with his mistress, Miss Julie urges him to forget his rank and to see her as an equal. In doing so, Miss Julie demonstrates that she views the boundaries of social class as being malleable. Likely as a result of her egalitarian upbringing, Miss Julie sees herself as being able to pass between the ranks of commoners and aristocracy at will, using Midsummer's eve to escape the bonds of her noble life and indulge the romantic and unrealistic notion she has about poverty.

Take my advice, Miss Julie, don't step down. Nobody will believe that you did it on purpose. The people will always say that you fell down.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Jean urges Miss Julie not to continue seducing him, warning her that such a choice will lead to the destruction of her reputation. Unlike Julie, Jean understands that the boundaries between rich and poor are absolute, and the penalty for "falling" through the ranks is harsh. Also unlike Julie, who attempts to escape the constraints of nobility simply by pretending they don't exist, Jean aims to transcend poverty by understanding and manipulating the social hierarchy. Therefore, Jean is ultimately able to survive at the end of the play while Julie's willful ignorance surrounding her own reputation ultimately costs her life.

I have a dream that comes back to me ever so often... I have climbed to the top of a column and sit there without being able to tell how to get down again. I get dizzy when I look down, and I must get down, but I haven't the courage to jump off.

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In the heat of their seduction, Miss Julie explains to Jean that she often has a recurring dream in which she finds herself at the top of a top column with no way of getting down. Julie's dream in many way foreshadows Julie's fate at the end of the play. Both Miss Julie and Jean think about their respective escapes from their social classes in terms of climbing and falling, but while Jean strives for the boost that will allow him to climb the tree of financial success, Miss Julie sees herself climbing without any sense of where she is going, or ultimately, how to get down. Miss Julie's dream mimics the reckless way that she seduces Jean without any mind towards the consciousness of her actions and is ultimately trapped, with no way to escape but to "jump" towards her death.

Do you know how the world looks from below no, you don't. No more than do hawks and falcons, of whom we never see the back because they are always floating about high up in the sky.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Charmed by Jean's intellect and gift for language, Miss Julie asks him more about his upbringing. Before he tells her the story, Jean cautions Miss Julie that she has no idea what it is truly like to live in poverty. Jean compares Miss Julie to a

hawk, who floats so high above him that she does not to see the world as those below see it. However, what Jean does not mention is that, while those on the ground cannot see the hawk's back, they have a perfect view of the hawk's belly: its vulnerability. In his preface, Strindberg explains that one of Jean's advantages in his life is that he has the perspective of a servant. Strindberg indicates that Jean is actually at a social advantage by being able to look at Miss Julie "from below," as it allows him to carefully study and learn from the weaknesses of the upper classes. Therefore, while Jean indulges the misery of growing up poor, he understands that his own perspective has its advantages.

> And I saw you walking among the roses, and I thought: if it be possible for a robber to get into heaven and dwell with the angels, then it is strange that a cotter's child, here on God's own earth, cannot get into the park and play with the count's daughter.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Jean tells Miss Julie that when he was a child growing up on her father's estate, he once caught sight of her walking in her rose garden. Immediately enchanted by her beauty, Jean wanted nothing more than to be able to enter the garden and meet her. Jean prefaces his story by telling Miss Julie that he was in love with her as a child, ultimately attempting to appeal to both her womanly weakness and her romantic notions about poverty. As this section of the story indicates, however, Jean was not lusting after Julie, but rather her social station. Having grown up surrounded by dirt, Jean resents the fence that bars him from crossing into the rose garden and being surrounded by beauty and calm. In the same way, Strindberg laments the arbitrary class distinctions that hold men like Jean back from achieving their potential, while sheltering women like Julie.

> Well, it wouldn't be easy to repeat. But I was rather surprised, and I couldn't understand where you had learned all those words. Perhaps, at bottom, there isn't quite so much difference as they think between one kind of people and another.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Jean tells Miss Julie that, although he went to school for several years, he learns the most by observing Julie and her friends. He tells her that he once heard a conversation between Miss Julie and one of her girlfriends and was surprised by its promiscuous content. By shaming her for her lewd conversation, Jean demonstrates the advantages of seeing the world "from below," uncovering a weakness that Julie wishes to keep hidden. In addition, Jean suggests that Julie's conversation (which likely divulged promiscuous behavior or desires) brings her to "the bottom"—a place where, according to Jean, there are no conventional social hierarchies. Importantly, Jean primarily suggests that, by expressing herself sexually, Julie loses the dignity, privilege, and protection of her noble birth.

> No, Miss Julie, they don't love you. They take your food and spit at your back. Believe me

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

As the choir of singing servants approach, threatening to catch Miss Julie and Jean drinking together (and potentially ruin Miss Julie's reputation), Julie tells Jean that she is not afraid of her servants' judgement because they "love her." Jean contradicts Miss Julie's foolish optimism. He tells her that, much like he and Christine spoke derisively about Julie at the beginning of the play, her servants only feign love, but actually disdain her and gossip behind her back. Julie's blind trust in her servants is another example of the ways in which her class-free upbringing failed to prepare her for the realities of life. Ultimately, Jean's insistence that Miss Julie cannot trust her servants to preserve her reputation is the reason that he successfully coerces her into "escaping" into his room and having sex with him.

That's the life, I tell you! Constantly new faces and new languages. Never a minute free for nerves or brooding. No trouble about what to do-for the work is calling to be done: night and day.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

After they have consummated their relationship by having sex, Jean tells Julie that they must escape the Count's estate. When Julie asks him where they are supposed to go, Jean tells her that they will run away to the Lake District of Italy where Jean will finally be able to fulfil a life-long dream of owning and running his own hotel. Jean's description of why his chosen job appeals to him is highly representative of his values. Having grown up poor in the remote countryside, Jean longs to escape to a world that is constantly-changing, with challenge and excitement at every turn. In addition, Jean longs for a career in which he can make his own destiny. Importantly, Jean does not disdain the concept of work, but welcomes the constant demands of a hotel precisely because he would be working tirelessly on behalf of his own goals and for his own betterment. This desire is characteristic of the kind of "new man" that Strindberg outlines in the preface, who will soon eclipse the fading aristocracy to achieve his own self-driven destiny.

There will be barriers between us as long as we stay in this house... there is the count – and I have never met another person for whom I felt such respect. If I only catch sight of his gloves on a chair I feel small. If I only hear that bell up there, I jump like a shy horse.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie, The Count

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Julie begs Jean to call her "Julie," since their sexual contact has eliminated all "boundaries" between them. Jean tells her that there will always be boundaries as long as they remain in a house where he has been a servant and she has been a master. Here again, Jean demonstrates an understanding that the boundaries between social classes are socially-constructed and rigid, and therefore will always exist on estates where they are sustained by the division of labor between servant and master. In addition, Jean's superstitious relationship with the Count proves that, despite his confidence in his own intellect and aristocratic sensibility, Jean still possesses, as Strindberg puts it, "the mind of a slave" in how he relates to his master the Count. Therefore, Jean primarily wants to leave the Count's estate behind to escape both the reminders of his servitude and the things that trigger his submissive instincts and make him forget his ultimate goal of escape.

I? Of course! I have my expert knowledge, my vast experience, my familiarity with several languages. That's the very best kind of capital, I should say.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

When Miss Julie asks Jean if he has the money to facilitate their escape to Italy, Jean tells her that he does not. However, he believes that his personal and professional skills are adequate "capital" to succeed outside of the Count's estate. Jean's perspective echoes Strindberg's theory in the preface that Jean is the true "aristocrat" as a result of his adaptability, know-how, and drive to transcend his circumstances. Although Jean's emotional capital would serve him well in an ideal world, he is unable to escape from the Count's estate without the physical capital to secure a train ticket. Here again, Strindberg highlights his distaste for his society, which holds smart and capable men in servitude simply because they don't have money. Strindberg believed intellect to be the true measure of a person's worth.

I think I read the story in a paper, and it was about a chimney-sweep who crawled into a wood-box full of lilacs because a girl had brought suit against him for not supporting her kid-.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Jean tells Miss Julie that he was so enamored of her as a child that he fell asleep in a crate of poisonous elderflowers, determined to commit suicide. After he and Miss Julie consummate their relationship, however, Jean explains that he made the story up, adapting it from a newspaper article about a chimney sweep who killed himself rather than paying child support to a woman he impregnated. Jean's embellished story takes advantage of Julie's unrealistic and romantic ideas of what it means to be poor. Like the true story, the realities of both poverty and the circumstances in which Jean grew up are much darker and more unpleasant than Julie wishes to admit. In addition, in brazenly telling Miss Julie that he lied to her, Jean taunts Miss Julie for her trust and naivety, proving that their power dynamic has irrevocably shifted.

> You're the right one to come and tell me that I am vulgar. People of my kind would never in their lives act as vulgarly as you have acted tonight. Do you think any servant girl would go for a man as you did? Did you ever see a girl of my class throw herself at anybody in that way? I have never seen the like of it except among beasts and prostitutes.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Horrified that Jean lied to her about being in love with her as a child, Miss Julie calls him "vulgar" and a "thief." Jean reverses Miss Julie's language, claiming that she is the truly vulgar one for openly pursuing sex with him. Importantly, Jean claims that no one of his kind would be so openly promiscuous, and likens Julie's behavior to prostitution. Just as he shamed her for frankly discussing sexual matters with her girlfriend, Jean again suggests that, by expressing herself sexually, Julie has lost all of the protection and dominance of her noble status. In addition, because Julie uses her sexuality to control Jean at the beginning of the play, she loses all ability to dominate him once they have consummated their relationship. Indeed, once Miss Julie sexually submits to Jean, he is able to use the terms of her sexual desire against her, shaming her and calling her "a beast" and "a prostitute."

> Don't you see: I could have made a countess of you, but you could never make me a count.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

After he shames Miss Julie for her promiscuity, stripping her of any sexual autonomy in their relationship, Jean twists the knife and drives it deeper by insulting Miss Julie's class. Jean explains that he could have (at least theoretically) made Miss Julie a countess if he had agreed to marry her, but since Miss Julie is a woman, she has no social power either to choose her own spouse or to pass on her title. By taunting her with the limitations of both her gender and the "old" aristocracy, Jean furthers Strindberg's thesis that his "fate is in ascendency" both because he is a man and because he has the drive to create a successful life for himself. Because Miss Julie is female, however, she must rely on a man to define both her fortune and title. By telling her that he "could have" made her a countess, therefore, Jean further insults Miss Julie by implying that even he, her servant, is too disgusted by her behavior to agree to marry her.

> I came into the world-against my mother's wish, I have come to think. Then my mother wanted to bring me up in a perfectly natural state, and at the same time I was to learn everything that a boy is taught, so that I might prove that a woman is just as good as a man.

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Julie's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Moved to a sudden moment of tenderness, Jean suggests again that he and Miss Julie should run away together. Julie refuses to leave with Jean until she tells him the story of her upbringing. Miss Julie explains that she was the unplanned

and unwanted child of a low-born mother, who brought her up on an estate where the boundaries between both social class and gender were not observed. Julie explains that she was brought up without the constraints of gender in order to "prove" women and men to be equal. Because Miss Julie's mother defied what Strindberg believed to be female *biological* imperatives (having children and getting married), Julie was brought up without any natural female role models and in contempt of her own sex. Strindberg believed that this created an internal struggle within Julie that made it impossible for her to survive in the world.

But I have read about your pedigree in a book that was lying on the drawing-room table. Do you know who was your first ancestor? A miller who let his wife sleep with the king one night during the war with Denmark. I have no such ancestry. I have none at all, but I can become an ancestor myself.

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Jean explains that he once saw a chart of Miss Julie's ancestors in a book in her father's drawing room. He explains to her that her first ancestor was not royal by blood, but a miller, who let his wife sleep with the King of Denmark during a war. Therefore, Jean explains, Miss Julie's aristocratic line was actually started by the bastard child of a King, as a result of seduction and moral corruption. This revelation supports Strindberg's thesis that the aristocracy shields upper class Europeans from judgement for the same behavior for which the lower classes get shamed. In addition, Jean suggests that Miss Julie's entire ancestral line has been marred by the original sin of her first ancestor, whose weight and reputation they have all had to bear since that time. Without the burden of noble ancestry or the responsibility of reputation, Jean is free to live a self-determined life, while Julie ultimately sacrifices herself to protect her family's (already tarnished) honor.

I can't leave! I can't stay! Help me! I am so tired, so fearfully tired. Give me orders! Set me going, for I can no longer think, no longer act –

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Faced with the reality that she has irrevocably harmed her reputation by sleeping with Jean, Miss Julie feels trapped and hopeless. This moment of confinement, in which she can "no longer think" nor act, recalls the recurring dream that she explains to Jean at the beginning of the play. In her dream, Miss Julie longs to escape the dizzying heights of her pedestal, but cannot muster the courage necessary to jump off. Here, Miss Julie claims that she is too "fearfully tired" to make any choices of her own, and begs Jean to order her to act. By giving Jean the power to command her, Julie cedes her dominance and aristocratic superiority, prioritizing an overwhelming need to escape from her current situation over the pride of her compromised nobility.

...but there's after all some difference between one kind of people and another- No, but this is something I'll never get over – And the young lady was so proud, and so tart to the men, that you couldn't believe she would ever let one come near her- and such a one at that!

Related Characters: Christine (speaker), Jean, Miss Julie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

When Christine re-enters to see if Jean is ready to accompany her to church, she finds the kitchen in disrepair. Quickly surmising that Jean and Julie have spent the night together, Christine chides Jean for taking advantage of Miss Julie, and for forgetting his social station in the process. Christine's insistence that there is "some difference between one kind of people and another" suggests that, for Christine, the boundaries between the rich and poor are absolute, and necessary to the structure of society. For the same reason, she is equally angry at Miss Julie for undermining her own nobility by sleeping with Jean, especially after openly claiming to hate men of her own class and publicly ending her engagement with her fiancé.

That's good and well, but it isn't my style to think of dying all at once for the sake of wife and children. I must say that my plans have been looking toward something better than that kind of thing

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), Christine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Christine councils Jean to start looking for a new, more respectable job since they will soon be married. Since valet jobs are only available to young, single men, Christine suggests that Jean might be able to find work as a janitor or government messenger. Jean scoffs at Christine's suggestions, explaining that he has more ambitious career goals than that. By telling Christine that he has no intention of "dying all at once," he suggests that giving up on his dreams of financial success would be akin to death. Jean's commitment to his own future above the feelings of all others supports Strindberg's thesis that "new men" like Jean succeed by valuing their own needs above all else.

You think I cannot stand the sight of blood. You think I am as weak as that –oh, I should like to see your blood, your brains, on that block there. I should like to see your whole sex swimming in blood like that thing there. I think I could drink out of your skull, and bathe my feet in your open breast…

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Jean

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

When Jean swiftly beheads Miss Julie's prized canary, Julie is thrown into a murderous rage. In a final, dramatic struggle to suppress her "natural" feminine instincts toward submission, Miss Julie's "degenerate" side comes out in full force. This monologue is Strindberg's attempt to illustrate the true dangers that "half-women" pose to both society and themselves. However, by using language of witchcraft and slaughter (e.g., "drink out of your skull"), Strindberg instead reveals his own deep-seated fear of women's potential to subjugate and emasculate him, and by extension, mankind. This is one of many moments in which the play's overt misogyny becomes nearly comical in its extreme transparency.

I don't know: I believe no longer in anything… Nothing! Nothing at all!

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Jean

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

After Miss Julie's murderous "swimming in blood tirade" fails to save her, she attempts to retreat into her own, romantic imagination in order to ignore the realities of her situation. Miss Julie attempts to convince Christine to run away *with* her and Jean, rhapsodizing about the excitement of travel. Unmoved, Christine asks Julie if she really believes that the three of them could be happy together. Julie, defeated, explains that she no longer believes in anything. This moment of utter surrender suggests that Julie has finally been fully, mentally, emotionally, and physically defeated by her "unnatural upbringing." With every one of her previously-held beliefs shattered, Miss Julie loses all sense of herself and all ability to make her own choices.

But he was the one who reared me in contempt for my own sex—half woman and half man! Whose fault is it, this that has happened? My father's—my mother's—my own? My own? Why, I have nothing that is my own.

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Julie's Mother, The Count

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

When Christine vows to leave the Count's estate, making sure as she does so to foil any plans for Jean and Julie's escape, Julie can no longer ignore the grave reality of her situation. In a moment of personal reckoning, Julie looks to her upbringing to find someone to blame for her fall from grace. In her climactic speech, Miss Julie herself lists all of the "factors" that Strindberg notes in his preface as reasons for her tragic downfall. By referring to herself as "half woman and half man," Miss Julie recognizes her own

"struggle against nature," but she is beyond the point of reversing its effects. Therefore, Strindberg furthers his original thesis that "half-women" eventually die as a result of their defective biology.

> Command me, and I'll obey you like a dog! Do me this last favor – save my honor, and save his name! You know what my will ought to do, and what it cannot do-now give me your will, and make me do it!

Related Characters: Miss Julie (speaker), Jean, The Count

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

When the Count abruptly returns home and rings for his tea, Miss Julie is paralyzed with fear. Having stolen money from her father's safe to finance her escape with Jean, Julie knows that she no longer has any time to confess her sins to her father, and that the damage to her reputation is already absolute. However, just as in her initial dream, Julie is unable to make the final "jump" of her escape alone, and begs Jean to give her the definitive order to end her life. In this moment, the power dynamic in Julie and Jean's relationship is fully reversed, with the servant in full power to determine the fate of his mistress.

> I cannot command you – and now, since I've heard the count's voice – now – I can't quite explain it – but – Oh, that damned menial is back in my spine again. I believe if the count should come down here, and if he should tell me to cut my own throat – I'd do it on the spot!

Related Characters: Jean (speaker), The Count

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Julie is not the only one immobilized by the Count's sudden return. The minute that the Count returns to his estate, he reinstitutes the traditional class hierarchy by ringing for Jean to bring his tea. In the presence of his master, Jean's self-created sense of his own nobility melts away and he is left only with what Strindberg calls his "slave" instincts. Just as he explained that he and Julie needed to leave the Count's estate if they ever wanted to be considered equals, his embattled relationship to the Count and his authority threatens to sap him of all ability to escape and fulfil his own goals for success. Ultimately, Jean orders Julie out the door to commit suicide primarily because her indecision, coupled with the Count's presence, threatens to continue to keep Jean in his "menial" position with no way out.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Strindberg likens the theater to a children's bible, explaining that it has become a "middle class" art form for audiences who want to be entertained and not challenged. Therefore, popular drama has become mundane and flat, and truly innovative theater is unsuccessful because it fails to illicit the support of the majority. This trend, Strindberg believes, may cause the theater as an art form to go extinct.

This introduction establishes Strindberg's perspective on his own writing. Dedicated to perfecting the naturalist style of playwriting that French writers like Emile Zola had yet been unable to crack, Strindberg sets his own work in opposition to the popular theater of his day.

Strindberg explains that, though he has not done "anything new" in *Miss Julie*, he has tried to create a modern drama about social class and financial stability because people are consistently fascinated with tragedies about upper class people. Strindberg notes that audiences find it tragic when highly-placed people lose everything, and therefore it is a good subject for drama.

What Strindberg fails to mention is that most of his plays and essays throughout his career concerned class in some way. Having grown up in extreme poverty, Strindberg consistently strove to highlight the plight of Europe's working and servant classes.

However, Strindberg says that he hopes there will come a day when rationality, objectivity, and philosophical thinking will make people indifferent to people's struggles and instead, merely reflective about the harsh and heartless nature of life.

This comment highlights Strindberg's philosophical side. Throughout his writing, Strindberg urged his readers and audiences to think in more objective terms about the social constructs that organize daily life.

Strindberg explains that people find *Miss Julie* sad solely because they fear that her fate might also befall them one day. Strindberg claims that there is no "absolute evil," and that the fact that some families fall from favor and others rise is merely the ebb and flow of society, and should not be viewed through an emotional lens.

Strindberg points out that people's fortunes rise and fall on a daily basis, and suggests that people would not be so emotional about wealth and poverty if they could see society and the economy more like a machine rather than something with moral significance.

Strindberg chastises audiences for finding his work "sad." He mentions his play *The Father* (which proceeded *Miss Julie* by only a year) which was panned by critics for being too upsetting. Strindberg insists that there is nothing upsetting in the failure of upper class families who stand in the way of the social and mental ascendancy of those that they employ and subjugate. He compares the rich to rotting trees who must be chopped down to ensure the health of the forest. Again, Strindberg insists that any audience member who has a sad reaction to the action in *Miss Julie* feels this way because they are projecting their own fears onto the action.

The Father, *like* Miss Julie, *features a man who is increasingly emasculated by his wife. Strindberg's stark descriptions baffled and angered theater critics. Strindberg viewed the responses as shortsighted and uncultured, and doubled down, in* Miss Julie, *on the themes of wealth and poverty that so displeased his audiences in* The Father. *In Strindberg's mind, his audiences were willfully ignoring the unpleasant reality of the poverty all around them.*

Strindberg suggests that Miss Julie's fate results from a combination of factors, including her "mistaken upbringing," her fiancé's influence on her "weak and degenerate brain," and the atmosphere of Midsummer's Eve. Therefore, Strindberg believes he has not been "one-sided" in writing the play, as the wealth of contributing factors implicate many people and elements of society in Miss Julie's fate.

Strindberg's insistence that he has not been overly biased in presenting Miss Julie's fate reveals not only his deeply-held misogynistic beliefs about autonomous women being "degenerates," but highlights the way he treats Miss Julie like a scientific specimen, whose interactions and influences he is merely recording and observing.

Strindberg also claims that he attempted to make his characters "characterless," to fight against writers like Moliere who created stagnant stock characters that have no depth or proximity to reality. Instead, Strindberg aims to present "modern" characters that are caught in a period of transition and are, therefore, "vacillating and out of joint." In other words, Strindberg explains that his characters are more allegorical than individual, standing in for different kinds of people and historical attitudes through time.

Strindberg makes it clear that he views all *his characters—not just Miss Julie—in a clinical, philosophical light rather than through an emotional lens. In doing so, Strindberg re-asserts that the purpose of* Miss Julie *is primarily to educate his audience about patterns of social behavior that persist throughout history and lead to the same cycles of wealth and poverty.*

Strindberg explains that Miss Julie is a "modern character" because the "man-hating half woman" has begun to get more power in society as she becomes more educated and controls her own wealth. Strindberg sees this trend as a threat not only to society at large, but also to the gene pool of humanity, as these women are able to convince "weak" men to have children with them. According to Strindberg, their offspring are members of an "indeterminate sex" who lead tortured lives because their misguided upbringings counteract their fundamental natures. Ultimately, Strindberg explains, the indeterminate sexes die, like Miss Julie, in "fundamental struggles against nature."

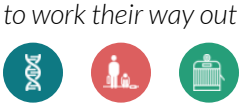
Here, Strindberg couches his overt misogyny in terms of evolution to make it seem more scientific and objective. Instead of merely viewing autonomous, wealthy and educated women as a threat to patriarchal society, Strindberg goes so far as to say that they dilute the gene pool by creating "indeterminate sexes." This suggests that despite Strindberg's focus on uncovering social inequity, he views female *subjugation to be a biological rather than a social matter.*

However, Strindberg believes that Miss Julie is also a tragic character because she comes from military nobility, and is therefore bound by an upper-class sense of duty to preserving the honor of her family. Strindberg likens this "superstition" about familial honor to *harakiri*, an ancient Japanese process in which noblemen would fall on their own swords when they had been dishonored by an enemy. Strindberg believes that Miss Julie cannot live without her honor and therefore commits suicide.

Strindberg viewed the European aristocracy as an outdated model primarily because it saddled individuals with the burden of their ancestors' actions and afflictions. Strindberg was a firm believer in the power of individual will, desire, and action, so the concept of a "superstitious" connection to family honor angered him greatly.

Because Jean is not a nobleman, however, he does not have the same superstitious connection to honor, which allows him to survive his tryst with Miss Julie. Strindberg explains that Jean is "of the kind that builds new stock": a man who adapts to his surroundings and uses refined tastes and a superior intellect to craft a "polished outside" to mask his poor upbringing. Strindberg explains that because Jean is able to run in more upper-class circles, he has become "a stranger" to other members of his own class.

Jean is Strindberg's idea of an ideal man. He is unburdened by the strain of noble ancestry, and is therefore able to excel based solely on his drive and intelligence. By saying that Jean is a "stranger" to the members of his own class, Strindberg suggests that not every member of the working class possess the tools and adaptability to succeed, but a more meritocratic society would allow men like Jean to work their way out of poverty.



Strindberg explains that Jean has "at once the slave's brutality and the Master's lack of squeamishness," meaning that he will not allow the tryst with Miss Julie to halt his goals for the future, and will likely end his life owning his own hotel. Strindberg even posits that Jean may become a count himself one day (in Romania where you can buy aristocratic titles) and, if not, his son will likely go to college and could even become a lawyer.

Strindberg's assumption that Jean may even end his life as a Count suggests that Strindberg believed that the aristocracy was already crumbling in most of Europe, where noble titles were increasingly available for purchase. In the face of this commodified nobility, Strindberg sees anyone who clings to the purity and superiority of their noble title as part of the problem.

Strindberg claims that Jean's lower class is an advantage as it allows him to "look at the world from below," examining and learning from the upper classes. Therefore, even though Jean agrees when Julie asks if poverty is a terrible misfortune, he also uses his low station to his advantage, as it sets him apart.

Here, Strindberg reverses the paradigm of dominance and submission, asserting that Jean is superior to his masters in that he is able to look at them "from below," seeing their weaknesses and that which they hide from view.

Strindberg adds that Jean, stands *above* Miss Julie because he is a man. "Sexually he is an aristocrat," explains Strindberg, "because of his male strength, his more finely developed senses and his capacity for taking the initiative." Therefore, Strindberg posits, the only thing holding Jean back in life is his class, which he will ultimately be able to transcend.

The theme of "sexual aristocracy" again shows Strindberg couching blatant misogyny in terms of social science. Strindberg again calls for a world in which social class is replaced with a hierarchy solely based on evolutionary supremacy. Strindberg crowns men kings of this evolutionary aristocracy simply by virtue of their gender, which he sees as superior.

However, Strindberg notes that Jean's "slave" mind does show up in his fear and reverence for the Count, as well as in his belief in God. Jean primarily views the Count as an example of the kind of success and wealth that he hopes to achieve for himself.

Strindberg laments that, despite Jean's sexual aristocracy, he still has been socialized as a servant and so maintains some of the hallmarks of his "slave" upbringing, one of which (to Strindberg's analytical and areligious mind) is a belief in God.

In terms of the relationship between Julie and Jean, Strindberg explains that he does not believe that "two souls of such different quality" can be in love, but he does claim that Jean believes that if the social conditions were different, he could imagine himself feeling something close to real love for Miss Julie. Strindberg notes that love is like a hyacinth, which spreads roots in darkness before the bud can grow towards the light. In this case, the darkness of the circumstances that lead Julie and Jean to sleep together could have led to love if they had been of the same class.

By admitting that Julie and Jean could have been in love if their social classes had been compatible, Strindberg proves that he is more interested in the allegorical and moral message of his play than in the individual characters he has created. It does not matter whether Julie or Jean see themselves as being able to love one another, it only matters to Strindberg that they act in accordance with their nature and against the constraints of class.

Strindberg abruptly changes his focus to Christine, who he explains is "purposefully sketched as an ordinary character," meant to stand in for the kind slow, overly-pious servants that Jean is trying to distance himself from. Strindberg particularly distains Christine's extreme piety, explaining that it is a way that she can remain "guiltless" and overly moralistic while still lying and stealing to suit her own needs.

Here again, Strindberg reiterates that not all lower-class Europeans are "new men" like Jean. Indeed, Strindberg views overt piety as a hypocritical trait in many servants, who cling to religion in order to feel blameless in their circumstances.

In terms of dialogue, Strindberg explains that he purposefully tried to mimic natural speech, allowing his characters to speak in clipped sentences, trail off and interrupt their own trains of thought as people do in life, instead of using the forced and overly-formal style of French dramatic dialogue of the same period. Strindberg explains that his dialogue repeats, rehashes ideas, and grows like a piece of music.

The French drama that Strindberg refers to, written by his contemporaries like Moliere and Racine, largely had characters speaking in verse and structured rhyme. Strindberg believed that this trope was unrealistic and removed the dramatic stakes from the action.

In terms of the characters, Strindberg chose to exclusively focus on Jean and Julie (adding Christine in for reference), but he made sure to keep the "unfortunate spirit of the father hovering above the action." Strindberg believed that the Count provides important psychological background for both Julie and Jean's action, and gave his drama a psychological undertone.

The observation about psychology speaks to Strindberg's later work, in which he focused almost exclusively on psychological impulses as well as the suppressed memories and influences that drove him and his characters. Strindberg's focus on psychology also made him one of the fathers of modern drama.

Strindberg explains that he purposefully wrote *Miss Julie* without an intermission because he worried that the hypnotic hold that the action has over the audience would be broken if they were able to take a break from the story. In addition, Strindberg dictates that the play should be 90 minutes long, since a play with so many heavy moral themes would become more like a punishing sermon if it lasted any longer. Strindberg notes that he made that mistake with his 1872 play *The Outlaw*, which lasted too long and the audience became restless.

Because Strindberg largely directed and staged his own plays, he has a specific vision for every element of the production. The play was naturally performed according to Strindberg's specifications in 1889, but almost all subsequent directors have followed his instructions in terms of format, never inserting an intermission where one is not indicated.

Strindberg, worried that even 90 minutes may be too long for an audience to sit still, has broken the action in *Miss Julie* up with dance, songs, and pantomime in order to hold his audience's attention. Eventually, Strindberg explains, he hopes for "a public educated to the point that they can sit through a whole-evening performance in a single act."

In wishing for an "educated" theater-going public, Strindberg again jabs at "middle class" theater goers who have no desire to be challenged or instructed by anything they see onstage. The inconsistencies in his own class-based social critique come to bear here.

Strindberg explains that he uses a pantomime instead of a monologue when Christine cleans the kitchen because he believes that monologues are unrealistic, and only truly talented and "creative" actors can improvise enough action and intention to make sense of the fact that they are talking to themselves for a long period of time. Likewise, Strindberg has "permitted" music in his dance sequence, but notes that it should not be any music that would be found in a musical or comedy.

Here again, Strindberg makes sure to distance himself as much as possible from "common" theater. Musicals and comedies were the most popular theatrical forms of the period, favored by those who wanted to go to theater as a form of pure entertainment and escapism. Strindberg wished for a theater that made the audience confront their own humanity, so he disdained the use of theatrical tricks like bawdy music.

Strindberg explains that he borrowed the Impressionist idea of "asymmetry" in his set design. The entirety of the play takes place in the kitchen, primarily to deprive the audience of lavish scenery that could distract them. In addition, Strindberg dictates that the furniture should be arranged so that the audience can see both Julie and Jean's faces whenever they sit across from each other at the table. Above all else, Strindberg explains, the set should feel realistic, as if the audience is truly sitting in a kitchen with Jean and Julie, and witnessing a moment of ultimate tension and intimacy.

The sparse set of Miss Julie *was one of Strindberg's more revolutionary ideas. By stripping away all set décor, music, and lavish costumes, Strindberg created a theatrical space that was completely concerned with and inhabited by his characters' humanity and the way they absorbed and dealt with their problems and emotions. The play is engineered to make the audience uncomfortable, a completely novel idea at the time of its writing.*

Strindberg also explains that, in terms of the actors, he has eliminated the use of footlights (commonly used to give actors' faces a full, rosy appearance) and asks the actors to wear little-to-no makeup in order to look "lifelike." Indeed, Strindberg notes that, in an ideal world, the play would be staged in a small space, so that the actors could be lit primarily with side light and wear virtually no makeup at all. He also asks that the actors make full use of the stage, even turning their backs on the audience if they feel it is appropriate to the action.

Here, Strindberg highlights another modern theatrical concept. Instead of staging important scenes center stage, out to the audience (as was the custom in French drama), Strindberg instructed his actors to turn their backs to the audience when they wanted to, and to never feel like they are playing "for" the audience. This relationship between actor and audience became a hallmark of Naturalist theater.

In his final paragraph, Strindberg makes an uncannily accurate predication for what the future of theatrical spaces should look like. He explains that, in his ideal world, he would place the orchestra in a "pit" so as to not distract the audience, and place the audience on risers or raked seats to that they have a more complete view of the action. In addition, Strindberg would eliminate dining boxes and dim the lights completely during the performance, so that the audience is not able to distract themselves from the action onstage. If these changes are made, Strindberg posits, "a new dramatic art might arise, and the theater might at least become an institution for the entertainment of people with culture."

Most theater of Strindberg's time felt more like a variety show. The musicians were fully-visible and the lights usually remained on to allow patrons to eat, drink, and talk at will. Strindberg longs for a time in which theater goers attend plays with the intention of giving the action their full focus.

MISS JULIE

On Midsummer's Eve, Christine (a cook) is working in the kitchen. Jean (a valet) enters and begins cleaning his master the Count's boots. Jean tells Christine that their mistress, the Count's daughter Miss Julie, is "crazy tonight," having asked both Jean and the gatekeeper to dance with her in full view of the other servants. Jean says that it is strange that Miss Julie would rather stay at home with the servants while her father went to visit relatives.

The opening moments of the play immediately situate the action within the servants' space. Immediately it is clear that Miss Julie's servants view her with disdain for attempting to socialize with her employees instead of going to visit her relatives with her father, the Count.

Christine explains that Miss Julie has been crazy ever since she ended her engagement with the county attorney. Jean agrees, telling Christine that he saw Miss Julie and her fiancé in the stables one day. He explains that Miss Julie was "training" her fiancé with a horsewhip like one would train a dog. Each time he jumped over the whip, he got cut. The third time that the man jumped, Jean watched him break the whip and storm away.

Miss Julie's "training" exercise with her fiancé introduces the audience to her overwhelming desire for dominance (primarily over men) and also, importantly, to her failure to comply with the duties of "natural" womanhood: not only to marry, but to be nurturing and supportive of her husband.

Christine gives Jean the food she has been saving for him but Jean is displeased, chiding her for not warming the plate first and for drinking beer instead of one of the Count's fine wines. Christine jokes that Jean is harder to please than the Count himself.

Jean's incredibly specific tastes suggest the work he has done to differentiate himself emotionally and intellectually from Christine. This, according to Strindberg, is part of what makes Jean a "new man" who will be able to escape from servitude.

Christine explains that she is making food for Miss Julie's **dog**, Diana, who is pregnant after having been found running around with the gatekeeper's pug. Julie is beside herself that her dog is pregnant and she does not want the dog anymore.

Julie's dog's pregnancy foreshadows Julie's own fate, tainted by a dalliance with a member of the lower class and therefore unable to return to her old life.

Jean explains that both Miss Julie and her mother before her are "too stuck up in some ways and not proud enough in others," caring about visible symbols of her aristocracy like coronet cuff links, but insisting on riding horses like a man and dancing brazenly with male servants. Christine asks Jean to dance with her after she finishes cooking and he agrees.

Jean and Christine believe Julie's "mistaken" upbringing and her mother's influence to be the reasons that she is not able to meet even the most basic expectations of aristocratic society. This observation reinforces Strindberg's belief that the aristocracy protected "unfit" and "unnatural" individuals like Julie while subjugating superior men like Jean.

Miss Julie enters, ostensibly to check if Christine has finished the tonic for her **dog**. Miss Julie is immediately flirtatious with Jean, asking him to come and dance with her again. Jean attempts to decline, explaining that he promised to dance with Christine and that the other servants will gossip if he is seen dancing with Julie twice in a row.

Jean is immediately conscious of Miss Julie's reputation and social position, while Julie seems to be willfully ignorant of it. This further suggests that Julie does not understand the workings of aristocratic society, while Jean studies it careful, seeking to learn from it.

Julie is outraged at the suggestion that she is showing Jean preferential treatment, insisting it is simply because she wants to dance with a partner who knows how to lead. Jean relents, placing himself at Miss Julie's "command." They exit together.

By placing himself at Julie's command, Jean makes himself both socially and emotionally submissive to Julie. This naturally plays on her desire for dominance, which Jean observed with her fiancé.

In a pantomime sequence, Christine finishes her cooking, looks at herself in the mirror, and curls the front of her hair with a hairpin. She notices the handkerchief that Miss Julie left behind and lifts it up to smell it.

Strindberg's empty stage set meant that the actors had to pantomime. The spare set made it so that there was little to distract from the characters' emotions and psyches.

Jean returns alone, explaining that Miss Julie has been dancing wildly. Christine says that Julie is on her period and often becomes erratic when she has it. Jean asks if Christine is angry that he abandoned her to dance with Julie, but Christine forgives him, since he danced with Miss Julie and not one of the other servant girls. Jean grabs Christine around the waist and tells her that she will make a good wife to him one day.

Christine disdains and pities Miss Julie's loose behavior, likely as a result of her piety. By telling Jean that she would only be jealous if he danced with a member of his own class over her, Christine indicates that she is firmly entrenched in her servant's outlook, and does not possess Jean's desire to transcend it.

Julie re-enters and is unhappy to see Jean and Christine being so familiar. Miss Julie orders Jean to change out of his servant's uniform to honor Midsummer. He asks to take leave of her in order to change coats, but she urges him not to be modest on her account. When Jean is changing, Miss Julie asks Christine if she and Jean are engaged and Christine confirms that they are.

Julie's displeasure at seeing Christine and Jean together is another example of her inability to fully perform her role as a noblewoman. Her jealously indicates that she sees herself as Christine's romantic rival (and therefore, equal), and yet it also indicates that she views Jean as her property, with whom she has sole rights to intimacy.

Jean returns in his coat. Miss Julie compliments him in French and he responds in French, which he learned while he was a sommelier at an upscale Swiss restaurant. Julie is impressed with Jean's command of language and asks him his parentage. Jean explains that his father was a cotter on her father's estate and that he recalls seeing her as a child, but refuses to elaborate on when or how.

Jean's command of French is an example of the ways in which he learns from and adapts to his environment in order to better himself socially. This adaptability is another of the qualities that make Jean, in Strindberg's eyes, a "new man" who will be able to transcend his social station.

Christine has fallen asleep by the stove. Julie remarks that she will make a good wife, and Jean agrees but tells her that Christine talks in her sleep (something he knows because he has heard it).

By telling Julie that he has heard Christine talking in her sleep, Jean alerts Julie to the sexual nature of their relationship. It is also a somewhat irreverent thing for a servant to tell his employer, signaling a shift in the power dynamic between Julie and Jean.

Julie asks Jean to sit down and have a drink with her. He refuses, saying it would be improper if anyone were to see them. Miss Julie rephrases the question as an order and Jean obeys.

This is another instance in which Julie uses her social status to order Jean to do her bidding. Jean willingly obeys again, as a method of satisfying Julie's desire for dominance.

Jean offers Miss Julie some of her father's wine, but she says that she has simpler tastes and prefers to drink beer. Julie orders Jean to drink to her health and he kneels, gallantly to obey. While he is on his knees, Julie tells him to kiss her shoe in order to "get it just right." Jean does.

Julie's "simple" taste is a reference to her socially egalitarian upbringing. Telling Jean to kiss her shoe is another example of the kind of intimate humiliation that ended Julie's engagement to the count attorney. Here, this behavior is doubly humiliating because it is meant to remind Jean of his low social position.

Jean gets up. He warns Miss Julie against continuing to seduce him. He explains that the other servants are already gossiping about her reputation, and continuing to drink alone with Jean would only fuel the fire. Julie replies coyly that they are not alone, pointing to Christine who mumbles in her sleep and then wakes herself up to go to bed.

By brazenly and autonomously pursuing sex, especially with a member of the servant class, Julie has lost the respect of her staff, who disdain her for acting in a way unworthy of her noble station. Jean's understanding of their social relationship again shows that he aims to understand and ultimately transcend the social hierarchy.

Julie asks Jean to pick lilacs with her and Jean refuses, telling Julie that he does not believe her coy games and understands that she wishes to sleep with him. Miss Julie tells Jean that his keen sense makes him "an aristocrat," and that she is "stepping down" to his level by continuing so intimately with him. Jean tells Julie that it is unwise to step down willingly because everyone will assume that she "fell down."

Julie validates Jean's "aristocratic" tastes, but still understands herself to be "stepping down" in seducing him. This suggests that, although Jean possesses the soul and intellect of a nobleman, his low class resolutely places him in an inferior position to Julie.

Miss Julie tells Jean that she has had a recurring dream in which she climbs to the top of a high column but, reaching the top has no way to climb down without jumping. Jean counters her, explaining that in his own dream, he is under a very tall tree looking upward. He knows that if he can just grab hold of the first branch the climb will be easy to the top, but the first branch remains elusively out of reach.

Both Julie and Jean view their respective escapes from the bounds of their social classes in terms of climbing. However, while Julie dreams of climbing down, Jean dreams of grabbing the "first branch" and easily climbing to the top. The dreams ultimately foreshadow both characters' fates at the end of the play.

Jean is bothered by some dust in his eye and Miss Julie moves close to him to get it out, touching his arms as she does. Jean cautions her to be careful, that he is "only a man." Julie, undaunted, asks him to kiss her hand. Emboldened, Jean takes her around the waist, before he can kiss her however, she bats him away.

Strindberg posits in his preface that one of the reasons for Julie's downfall is that she is in a "secluded room" with an "excited man." While Strindberg views Julie's lust and sexual desire to be abhorrent and degenerate, he views Jean's to be a natural characteristic of maleness.

Angered by her refusal, Jean tells Miss Julie that he is tired of "being her playmate" and prepares to go to bed. Julie stops him, asking him if he has ever been in love. Jean tells her that he was in love once but refuses to say with whom. Miss Julie asks him "as an equal," and he agrees to tell her the story. He explains that he grew up dirt poor in the cotter's hovel on her estate. One day, he saw a Turkish pavilion (outhouse) whose walls were adorned with fine curtains and pictures. Jean snuck in to admire it but, when someone threatened to find him, he was forced to escape through the excrement in the bottom of the outhouse and into the garden.

Jean's humiliating story serves two purposes. Firstly, the outhouse, whose ornate walls mask the toilet and excrement within, is a metaphor for the way that Strindberg viewed the aristocracy, which elevated and protected "rotten" people. In addition, by telling Julie that he had to climb through excrement because it was "the only way out" for someone of his class, Jean attempts to force Julie to understand the humiliating reality of poverty that she can never comprehend no matter how much she desires to speak to him "as an equal."

When Jean emerged, he saw Miss Julie walking in her rose garden and was bewitched by her immediately. Julie is charmed by Jean's story, telling him that it must be "a great misfortune to be poor." Jean agrees, explaining that the following Sunday he put on his best clothes, intent on seeing Julie once more and then killing himself. Determined to die "beautifully," Jean took elderflower blossoms (whose scent is poisonous in close proximity) and fell asleep in a vat of oats. Though he got very sick, Jean was found before he died. Jean tells Julie that he never thought he would win her love, but she symbolized escaping from poverty.

Jean purposefully weaves a romantic story for Miss Julie—one that resembles a fable more than reality. Julie accepts Jean's story as true, though it is later revealed to be false, because it plays into her own conception of poverty as a dramatic, exciting, and freeing condition that will strip her of the stifling responsibilities of nobility.

Julie applauds Jean's story, telling him that he "narrates splendidly." She asks Jean if he went to school. Jean tells her that, though he went to school for a moment, he learns the most from listening to the conversations of upper class people like Miss Julie and her girlfriends. Jean tells Miss Julie that he once overheard one of her conversations and was surprised by its promiscuous content.

Jean begins to gain a more dominant position in his relationship with Miss Julie when he makes it clear that he has been studying her life and remembering even her most intimate and salacious conversations. In lecturing Julie on her promiscuity, Jean oversteps the boundaries of servitude and shames Julie outright.

Julie defends herself, explaining that unlike Jean, aristocrats don't have sex before marriage and so they need an outlet for their curiosity. Julie explains that her fiancé was "a scoundrel." Jean, unconvinced, explains that Julie always calls men "scoundrels" after having her way with them.

Julie attempts to redraw class distinctions between her and Jean, construing promiscuity as lower class and "curiosity" as noble. Jean rejects this idea, insinuating that he knows Julie to have slept with her fiancé (and potentially other men) whom she then saddles with the blame to protect her reputation.

Jean asks for permission to go to bed, but Julie asks him to take her out in a boat on the lake to see the sun rise. Jean councils Julie again to think of her reputation and to go to bed before she makes a decision that she regrets. At that moment, Julie and Jean hear an oncoming chorus of servants who threaten to catch them together, ruining Julie's reputation.

Importantly, Miss Julie never explicitly assents to sleep with Jean, choosing instead to flirt heavily and use innuendo. However, when her servants threaten to catch them together and she is faced with the destruction of her reputation, the consequences of her flirtation become impossible to ignore. In this way, Julie can never truly escape the burden of her social class even if she pretends to "step down" by flirting with Jean.

Julie tells Jean that she does not fear her servants, who "love her." Jean explains that the servants do not love their masters, but rather smile to their faces and spit behind their backs. He explains that the only way to escape the "mob" of servants is to retreat into his bedroom and lock the door. Julie says she will go with Jean if he promises to protect her and he agrees. They exit.

Julie's insistence that her servants "love her" is just another way that she refuses to understand the reality of the social hierarchy. Julie's belief that she can easily move freely between her world and Jean's is misguided; in reality, "the mob" forces her to escape into Jean's room, where she consummates a relationship that will ultimately cause her downfall.

The servants enter and sing and dance around the kitchen before exiting. Jean and Miss Julie re-enter, having consummated their relationship. Jean tells Julie that it is impossible for the two of them to stay on the Count's estate since they have slept together. Jean tells Julie that they will go to Switzerland where Jean will fulfil his dream of opening a hotel and Julie will be the mistress of the house. Transformed, Julie asks Jean to embrace her and tell her that he loves her. Jean refuses, saying he has to be discreet while they remain in the Count's home.

The song and dance is perhaps Strindberg's attempt at making sure his audience continues to pay attention to the action. After Julie and Jean consummate their relationship, the power dynamic immediately switches. Having been overpowered and sexually dominated by a "real" man like Jean, Julie's "suppressed" feminine instincts emerge. She becomes submissive, meek, and emotional while Jean becomes hyper-rational, cold, and calculating.

Jean continues to call Julie "Miss Julie," explaining that social classes will always be a barrier between them until they can escape. While Jean remains in the Count's house, he says that any visual reminder of the Count (like his boots, which are resting on a chair) will remind Jean of his servitude. Once they have escaped and Jean can start his hotel however, Jean will be the master of his own domain, finally having grabbed "the first branch" from his dream of success. Jean explains he will be a self-made count and Julie his countess.

In Strindberg's preface, he makes it clear that Jean is right to assume that he will be able to eventually own his own hotel and even buy a title of his own if he wants one. However, Jean's journey towards self-determinism must begin with physical escape from the Count's home.

Miss Julie agrees but is troubled that Jean will still not express his love for her. Jean is cold and rational, focused on his escape, but Julie finds him to be cruel and unfeeling. Jean explains that they need money if they want to escape and set up their hotel. Julie, taken aback, explains that she has no capital of her own. Jean explains that, in that case, they cannot leave and everything will "remain as before."

Julie's continued insistence that Jean must prove that he loves her is another example of the ways in which she has been restored to a "conventionally" feminine submissiveness after having sex with Jean. Because sex has re-instituted her "natural" submissive instincts, she suddenly relies on Jean for validation.

Aghast, Julie says that she will refuse to stay in her father's house having been sullied by Jean. She laments her poor judgement, which will likely cause her father's ruin as well as her own. She curses the "horrible power" that drew her to Jean and caused her fall from grace.

Here Julie speaks to her regret over having slept with Jean. The "horrible power" of which she speaks is perhaps none other than what Strindberg would call her "natural" femininity. Indeed, Strindberg calls Miss Julie tragic because she demonstrates a "desperate struggle against nature."

Unmoved, Jean opens a drawer and pours a glass of the Count's best Burgundy, claiming it is "good enough for his son-in-law."

Jean's sexual domination of Julie allows him to think of himself as her moral and emotional superior. Therefore, he brazenly shows off the "aristocratic" traits of taste and sophistication that he has been teaching himself.

Julie claims that the Midsummer feast made her drunk and Jean took advantage of her innocence. She prays to God to "save her from the filth" she is sinking into. Jean does not accept the blame, calling Miss Julie a whore. Jean further insults Julie by explaining that his story about wanting to die for her as a child was a lie and that indeed, he only wanted to have sex with her when he saw her in the garden as a young boy.

Having successfully seduced Julie, Jean now also has the power to humiliate and shame her for her "unnatural," brazen sexuality. In addition to calling her a "whore" he further humiliates her by explaining that he lied about being in love with her, and therefore their entire sexual encounter was based on false information and false trust.

Jean explains that he told Julie the romantic story because it is the kind of thing that women like. Indeed, Jean adapted his tale from the story of a chimney sweep who committed suicide when he was sued by his child's mother for failing to pay child support. Julie is disgusted by Jean, calling herself "the first branch" he needed to climb to achieve his own success.

The fact that Julie fell for Jean's overly romantic and "feminine" story is another example of the ways that her "natural" female instincts were exploited by Jean, leading to her downfall. Yet again, Strindberg flatly portrays men as naturally superior to women in the "sexual aristocracy."

Jean doesn't stand for Julie's insults. He shames her, calling her a "whore" and telling her that she behaved more brazenly than any servant would have in pursuing sex with Jean. Julie relents, telling Jean that she deserves his insults and is, in fact, a "wretched creature."

Jean further shames Miss Julie by reminding her that sexual aggressiveness is only a trait acceptable for servant women. By being so sexually aggressive, he suggests, she has lost her right to command Jean as a member of the upper class. Without the dominance afforded by her title, Miss Julie can only define herself based on Jean's insults, so she agrees that she is "wretched."

Julie begs Jean to help her escape and Jean momentarily softens. Jean says that he claims his own part in seducing Julie and that it "saddens him" to see a noble woman fallen so low that she is more wretched than her staff: a "fall flower turned into mud." Julie tells Jean that he speaks to her as if he is already better than she is. He agrees, telling her "I could've made a countess of you but you could never make me a count." Julie disagrees, explaining that she is the daughter of the count, which Jean can never be.

In addition to being patronizing, Jean's "sadness" at Julie's descent indicates his respect for the structures of nobility, even as he disdains the people it protects. In addition, Jean claims that he "could've made a countess" of Julie, reminding her that he could buy a noble title and pass it on to his children while she, a woman, has no right over title or lineage. Therefore, Jean attempts to assert his superiority as a self-made man over Julie and her inherited aristocracy.

Julie calls Jean a thief. Jean is not offended. He tells Miss Julie that, as an employee of her house, he is, in a sense, a member of the family, so it cannot be theft if he "helps himself" to some of the house's goods.

Jean insinuates that, as the unmarried daughter of the Count, Julie is her father's property, and is therefore one of the "goods" of the house that Jean serves. This language is meant to further humiliate Julie and to strip her of her sense of worth and humanity.

Softening again, Jean tells Miss Julie that she is too good for him and has convinced herself she is in love with him to cover up allowing herself to sleep with him. Jean tells Miss Julie that she is beautiful and that there is a world in which he could see himself falling in love with her. Jean attempts to kiss Miss Julie again but she refuses, telling him that he cannot "win her" that way.

Strindberg wrote in the preface that Julie and Jean could potentially love each other if they had been members of the same social class. However, Julie has been thoroughly humiliated by Jean which has made her defensive and suspicious of his sudden kindness and affection.

Following his attempted kiss, Miss Julie becomes angry again, telling Jean she hates him like a "rat." Jean tells Miss Julie that they must escape, but Julie insists that they have to talk more before they go. Becoming increasingly drunk, Julie tells Jean the story of her own upbringing. Miss Julie's mother was a commoner, brought up with ideas about women's equality and independence. Miss Julie's mother disdained the idea of marriage but agreed to the Count's proposal all the same.

Julie's "man-hating" nature is another consequence (in Strindberg's mind) of her "unnatural" upbringing. Indeed, Strindberg believed that ideas about female equality and autonomy had the power to biologically *corrupt women to the point where they had no ability to live happily in the world. The intense mood swings in the dynamic between Jean and Julie are perhaps representative of the toxic codependency that exists between the rich and the poor in society at large.*

Julie says that she was born "against her mother's wish" and raised in a "state of nature": learning everything that a male child would, dressing as a boy, and learning to ride horses and hunt. All across their estate, men and women shared equally in the work, which led their family to be the laughingstock of the province.

Here, Strindberg suggests that a classless society is as "unnatural" as a genderless society. In this way, he builds his argument that Julie is unfit for life because she had no sense, growing up, of her natural place in the world with respect to her femaleness and nobility.

Eventually, the Count rebelled against his wife's ideas and took control over his house. Julie's mother became incredibly ill, often hiding away all day and staying out all night. Then Julie's farm burned down mysteriously the night their insurance expired. Julie's family lost everything, but her mother insisted that they ask her friend, a bricklayer, for the money to rebuild. The Count agreed, but was not allowed to pay interest on the loan, and the house was built again.

When the Count rebelled, and became the master of his house once more, he also re-instituted the "sexual aristocracy" which places men in control of their wives. Julie's mother was unable to live in a submissive position to a man, and therefore got physically ill. Here, Strindberg is arguing that female autonomy is so unnatural that it has biologically negative effects on "degenerate" women.

Miss Julie explains that the bricklayer was her mother's lover and the money to rebuild had been her own fortune that she had invested with her lover instead of allowing her husband to control of it. However, the bricklayer kept her money and the Count could not prove it had been his wife's money for fear of the scandal caused by admitting she was having an affair. Miss Julie explains that this was her mother's revenge for the Count taking control of his house back.

In addition to getting physically ill from the fight against her "natural" submissiveness, Julie's mother's desire to get "revenge" on her husband is an overtly misogynistic detail, casting autonomous women as evil creatures who desire not merely the right to make decisions for themselves, but to cuckold and destroy the men in their lives.

Miss Julie tells Jean that her father almost killed himself but eventually got "a new lease on life" and her mother eventually died. Miss Julie explains that she did not understand the circumstances of their bankruptcy as a child, so she took her mother's side because she had been brought up to hate and suspect all men. Miss Julie promised her mother that she would never be a man's slave.

Julie's blind acceptance of her mother's side of the story supports Strindberg's thesis that "half-women" succeed in passing their unnatural ideas onto their offspring, turning them into members of an "indeterminate sex" who hate men instead of seeking to nurture and support them (which Strindberg saw as the natural female imperative).

Miss Julie explains that she got engaged to her former fiancé, the county attorney, to make him *her* slave. Far from disdaining the idea, the attorney welcomed being submissive to Miss Julie, but Julie eventually got tired of his willingness to submit to her and broke the engagement.

The county attorney is an example of the kind of "degenerate" man that Strindberg refers to in the preface, whom "half-women" convince to "breed" with them.

Julie tells Jean that she hates men unless "the weakness" comes over her, and would kill all men like dogs. Yet, she asks Jean to run away with her to Lake Cuomo in Italy to enjoy themselves for a week time and then die together.

By asking Jean to run away and die with her, Julie indicates that she already understands that her reputation has been tainted beyond repair, leaving her with few options for escape but in death.

Jean disagrees, telling Julie he doesn't want to die; he merely wants to start his hotel. Jean says that he wants to live both because he looks forward to the possibilities of his life and also because suicide is a sin. Miss Julie believes that Jean is bluffing by saying that he believes in God. Jean tells her that he goes to church every Sunday. Suddenly, Jean tells her he is tired and is going to bed.

Without the burdens of honor and nobility holding him back, Jean is free to focus solely on pursuing his professional goals by any means necessary. According to Strindberg, Jean's comment that suicide is a sin shows that despite his status as a liberated "new man," he still has the "slave" mentality of believing in God.

Miss Julie tries to stop Jean from leaving, chastising him for disavowing her after he has seduced her. Jean counters her, explaining that she was the seducer, even though there is no legal punishment for women who seduce men.

Here, Strindberg indicates that one of the ways that "half-women" control men is by seducing them and then pretending that they have been taken advantage of. Jean laments the lack of legal precedent for punishing women for this behavior.

Julie suggests that they could escape scandal by going abroad and then getting married and divorced, but Jean refuses to conspire with her, claiming that he has purer ancestry than she does, since none of his ancestors committed arson. Jean says that, because he has no ancestry at all, he has the ability to start his own line, as opposed to being a slave to the sins of his ancestors like Julie is.

Jean's freedom from the burden of ancestry (and his ancestor's crimes) supports Strindberg's thesis that he is indeed "a new man" who relies solely on his merit and resourcefulness to achieve his goals, escape servitude, and start his own familial line.

Julie again laments the seduction, claiming that it would be better if Jean loved her. Jean refuses to be Miss Julie's slave like her fiancé had been. Julie begs Jean to tell her what to do and he admits that he has no idea of that himself.

Jean's refusal to submit to Miss Julie suggests that, unlike her fiancé, he is not a "degenerate" man, but possesses the "natural" male impulse to dominate and lead. Of course this idea would seem backwards to most readers today, but it is what Strindberg set out to illustrate in writing this "naturalist tragedy."

Jean suggests that no one will know what has happened if Julie does not tell anyone. Miss Julie knows that to be false, asking Jean what will happen to the "results" of their sexual contact. Jean tells her that the only solution is for Julie to travel abroad by herself before the Count comes back and finds out what has happened. Jean refuses to run away with Julie himself, since running away together would certainly cause a scandal.

The "results" that Julie refers to, coupled with Jean's discussion of "fathering counts," is likely a reference to the possibility that Julie may already be pregnant. Indeed, if Diana the dog's fate truly foreshadows Miss Julie's, it is plausible to assume that Jean has impregnated Julie. However, Christine also tells Jean that Miss Julie is on her period, suggesting that Strindberg may not have understood how women's reproductive systems function.

Miss Julie cries that she is "trapped," with nowhere to go and no way to stay. Jean is derisive, telling Julie that he will give her orders so that she can find out how it feels to be a servant. Jean tells Julie to go prepare herself to travel. She exits.

Julie's feeling of entrapment mimics the end of her recurring dream, in which she is caught at the top of a pedestal with no way to get down without jumping.

Christine enters, dressed to go to church. She chastises Jean for the messy state of the kitchen and reminds him that he promised to go to church with her. Jean laments having to go to church since he stayed up all night talking to Miss Julie.

Christine's reentry marks the end of Midsummer's Eve, and with it a sort of return to normalcy. It also signifies the threat of church, ushering in a sense of religious guilt for the sins of the night before.

Christine surmises that Julie and Jean have slept together. She tells Jean that she is not angry with him because it was not one of the other servant girls. Instead, Christine is angry at Jean for taking advantage of Miss Julie's peculiar personality and behavior. Christine tells Jean that she cannot stay in a house working for people that she has no respect for. Miss Julie threatened to have her own **dog** shot for running around with the gatekeeper's pug, but she debases herself by sleeping with a member of the servant class.

Much like the dancing at the beginning of the play, Christine's refusal to be jealous of Miss Julie indicates her strict adherence to the rules of the social hierarchy, which prohibits her from viewing Miss Julie as an equal in any way. However, Christine disdains Miss Julie for the hypocrisy of her behavior—an example of what Strindberg believed to be the self-congratulatory piety and morality of the lower classes.

Christine councils Jean that he should find a "respectable" job since they will soon be married. Jean argues that he will not be "dying all at once for the sake of a wife and children," suggesting that he has better plans for his future. Jean tells Christine that they have plenty of time to discuss their life together and that she should get ready for church. They hear footsteps walking around upstairs and Christine wonders if the Count has come home early without anyone noticing. Jean dismisses the idea and Christine exits.

Jean's refusal to compromise or "die" for the sake of his marriage is another example of Strindberg's belief that true "new" men should only be responsible to themselves. This highlights a misogynistic double-standard, since Strindberg presents Miss Julie's desire for the same degree of self-determination to be unnatural and even evil.

Miss Julie re-enters, dressed for traveling and carrying a cage with her prized **canary**. The sun has risen and Julie is incredibly nervous. Jean tells her that Christine is awake, but he lies by saying that Christine suspects nothing of Julie and Jean's tryst. Julie begs Jean to travel with her, telling him that she has enough money to support them, having stolen it from her father's safe.

In the light of day, Julie is confronted with the reality of her situation and is nervous and unsettled. Far from retaining any of the confident self-possession of Midsummer's Eve, she is now desperate to escape, having dishonored her father by stealing from him and desperate for Jean to give her direction.

Jean agrees only if Julie leaves the **canary** behind, since it will weigh them down. Julie says that her canary is her only comfort after her **dog** "deserted her." She tells Jean that he must kill it rather than abandon it. Jean complies, cutting the canary's head off with an axe.

Much like the dog, Julie's canary is a metaphor for Julie herself. An ornamental bird who has been domesticated and deprived of its natural instincts, the canary is not able to protect itself and therefore, much like Julie, must die.

Julie becomes hysterical at the sight of her dead **bird**. She screams at Jean to kill her as well, cursing Jean and his entire sex. She screams that she wishes to see his whole sex "swimming in blood" and to "eat" his heart.

Sensing that her end may soon approach as swiftly as her bird's, Julie's "degenerate" side again attempts to re-assert itself against her growing submissiveness. The result is an angry and unhuman tirade which suggests that Strindberg (as his preface indicates) views "half-women" as monstrous, non-human creatures.

Julie tells Jean that she will not run away with him to become "Mrs. Hovel" and be the mistress of her servant. Instead, Julie resolves to tell the Count that she slept with a servant and stole money from him to secure her escape. Miss Julie says that the shock will kill her father and end their tainted bloodline, earning them "eternal rest."

In another attempt to survive, Julie attempts to reassert her nobility and sense of personal honor. However, she does so at the expense of her family, whose bloodline she vows to end by humiliating her father to death. Julie's very humanity, it seems, is crushed by the burden of her ancestry.

Christine re-enters and Julie begs her to "protect" her against Jean as a woman and as her friend. Christine coldly refuses, chastising both Julie and Jean for their conduct on the Sabbath. Christine says that she does not care that Julie and Jean have slept together, but she vows to put a stop to any of their plans to run away together.

By stopping Julie and Jean from running away together Christine proves herself to be, as Strindberg explains, "full of servility and sluggishness." Unlike Jean, Christine does not have the vision to recognize her own worth, and therefore is destined to continue as a "slave," contributing to the outdated hierarchy of the aristocracy and limiting "new men" like Jean from achieving their goals.

Miss Julie tries to convince Christine to run away *with* her and Jean, telling her that the three of them could live happily running the hotel together. Julie tells Christine that she must get out and travel in the world to see the beauty all around her.

Julie retreats into her imagination to craft a story in which escape is possible, forgetting the reality of her social positon and irrevocably tarnished reputation.

Christine asks Julie if she truly believes the story that the three of them could happily live together. Julie tells Christine, exhausted, that she "no longer believe[s] in anything." Jean re-enters (having been behind a curtain sharpening his razor) and Christine confronts him for planning to run away with Miss Julie. Jean chastises her for speaking disrespectfully to her "mistress" and urges her to have more respect for herself.

Julie's admission that she "no longer believes in anything" indicates that her continual "fight against nature" has left her confused and untethered to the reality of both society and her own life. On the other hand, by telling Christine to respect her "mistress," Jean further indicates that he is superior to Christine and therefore has the power to chastise her.

Christine counters that she has plenty of respect herself, but Jean chides her for shaming him and Miss Julie for having sex when Christine herself uses her feminine charms to secure deals on meat and other goods from the butcher and other members of the Count's staff.

Here, Jean parrots Strindberg's thesis that servants like Christine use piety and false moralism to shame others while remaining blameless for similar sins that they have committed.

Christine urges Jean to come to church with her and to use the sermon to cleanse his soul of sin. Jean refuses, telling Christine to pray for herself. Christine tells him that she will "bring enough forgiveness back" to cover Jean's soul, as well.

Jean's rejection of Christine's religious moralism proves that Julie and Jean's predicament is philosophical and sociological instead of religious or emotional.

Julie asks Christine if she truly believes in God. Christine answers that she has always believed that God's grace abounds, but only for those who do good. In Christine's opinion, God favors those who are "last" in society (the working class), but does not extend his grace to the rich. Indeed, she says, it is "easier for a camel to thread the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven." Christine vows to leave the Count's estate, and she does so after telling the gatekeeper to stop either Julie or Jean from escaping.

Christine's prescriptive idea about who deserves God's grace is another example of the way that Strindberg believes members of the working class use piety to elevate themselves while judging and subjugating others. Importantly, because Strindberg believes the true measure of personal worth to be intelligence and self-possession, Christine's reliance on God for her self-worth is presented as short-sighted and weak.

Beaten down, Julie asks Jean if he can see any way to escape, begging him to put himself in her place. Jean picks up his razor, explaining that as a fallen noble woman, there is only one option. Julie takes the razor from his hand and slashes the air twice. Jean clarifies that he would not kill himself because he is a man, but that for Julie, a dishonored woman, suicide is the only option.

Jean's ability to dictate the terms of Julie's suicide is the ultimate indication that he has achieved full sexual and emotional dominance over her. In addition, Jean makes sure to present Julie's suicide in gendered terms, proving that while men (like Julie's father) can remake their lives after scandal, women have no control over their own reputations and therefore must kill themselves in disgrace.

Julie tells Jean that she is not strong enough to kill herself, just like the Count before her. Julie sees her suicide as an extension of her mother's revenge against her father, and she wonders whose fault her suicide is, blaming her mother for an unnatural upbringing and her fiancé for indulging her ideas of female equality. Whoever's fault it is, Julie agrees that she is the one who must now bear the blame.

In searching for someone to blame for her death, Julie lists all the contributing "factors" that Strindberg outlines in the preface, including her mother's "unnaturalness," her father's weakness, and her fiancé's "corrupting influence." In this way, she is shown to be a victim of the aristocracy more than anything.

Julie and Jean hear two rings of the bell upstairs, signaling that the Count has indeed returned unnoticed. The Count calls to Jean to bring his boots and his coffee upstairs in a half an hour. Julie is terrified, claiming that she has no time to run away or repent in a half an hour. She begs Jean to command her to end to her life, but Jean explains that he no longer has any power to command Julie or himself. Having heard the Count's voice again, Jean is returned to a "menial" state. He tells Julie that if the Count came downstairs and "ordered [him] to slit his own throat," he would obey.

The Count's return reestablishes the class hierarchy within his home and strips Jean of his sense of power, which cannot measure up to the power of the Count's social station. Importantly, the Count's presence has an equally stark effect on both Julie and Jean, reminding Jean of his duties to his social class and Julie of her duties to (and betrayal of) her family's honor.

Miss Julie begs Jean to pretend to be the Count and muster the resolve of a nobleman to "hypnotize" her and give her orders. Miss Julie says that she is "asleep" and that the whole room has filled with smoke, referring to Jean as a man made of ash with eyes like coals.

Faced with the immovable reality of their social positions, Julie and Jean must both resort to imagination to escape. Jean has to pretend to be the Count in order to access the strength needed to escape and also in order to command Julie to end her life.

Jean whispers orders in Julie's ear and she thanks him. Julie asks Jean if she will also receive God's grace, contrary to what Christine said about rich men not receiving heavenly forgiveness. Jean says he cannot tell her something he doesn't not believe. He begs Julie to leave because her indecision is rubbing off on Jean, making him "a coward."

Although the audience cannot hear what Jean whispers to Julie, it becomes clear that he has commanded her to take her own life. It remains unclear what the consequences of Julie's suicide will be for Jean, but it's likely that by encouraging her to commit suicide, he is protecting himself—without any regard for the life of this "unnatural" woman.

The Count rings the bell again from upstairs and Jean orders Julie through the door. Miss Julie exits resolutely, presumably to end her life.

The fact that Julie follows Jean's command at the sound of her father's bell reflects a reversal of the power dynamic that initiated the play: Julie has, in the play's final moment, become the servant. Meanwhile, Jean is left unaffected—and, if Strindberg's preface is any indication, is free to eventually escape servitude and achieve his personal and professional dreams.

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