

Miss Julie Self Reflects: An Essay

By

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ACT I

Scene 1

*Miss Julie, onstage, monologuing:*

MISS JULIE

I was written by a man named August Strindberg, a great deal of time ago. He was white and Swedish and would later be described by playwright Rosalyn Drexler as a "[victim] of sexual dysfunction." He did not, I admit, portray me in a particularly favorable light. If I may speak frankly, he wrote me as a power-hungry bitch. Which just goes to show you what a frightened man he was. When a man writes a woman in this way, it is almost always because he is afraid. A woman's search for power, for selfhood, constitutes a threat to his hateful ignorance. So he wields the greatest power--the construction of narrative--to pathologize her.

*An aside:*

Do I know about pathology? Or did I speak anachronistically?

*Back:*

It's alright if I did. I'm an anachronism.

Strindberg isn't writing me now. A woman is. I don't imagine he could have conceived of it: a woman playwright. A woman, wielding his power. Strindberg didn't like women in power. I'm proof of that. He's probably one of those people who thinks that sex and power are the same thing. Poor sad fool. For him it probably was. For him power is achieved through fear hatred. This is what we mean by patriarchy.

Yes, I know, not of my time. In my time patriarchy was literal and explicit. My father *owned* me. Until sold to a husband. Strindberg wanted you to scorn at me for my treatment of my former fiance. It's what he feared the most: emasculation. He feared it, so you should hate me. It, me. Same thing. Sorry. I don't mean to be sloppy with my language. I was raised to be precise. Precise but not incisive. I wasn't raised to be anything.

I feel myself slipping. Into the abstract, into language. There is only so long, it appears, that the woman writing me can maintain a mimetic voice. Or at least one that apes what she disdains.

I don't think I was ever a person. Just an effigy, made to burn. I was built for the fall. Built to shatter

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MISS JULIE (cont'd)

when I fall. Little bird, flying too high. Wings melted; feathers adrift in the air form beautiful tragedy. The afterbirth of a thing never there. Smoke without fire. There is no end of metaphor.

There are some who would have you believe that I am a great role. A wonderful opportunity for an actress. I am not. True, I get stage time, top billing. But to play me means to embrace the fantasy nightmare that exists as the tool and task of ones own annihilation. To produce me means to reproduce the conditions of my birth: hatred and fear. To teach me means to make me worth something when I was built to be nothing, to make my nothingness worth something, to make me worth nothing. I shouldn't exist. Not like that. Not like he wrote me.

You may question, then, and not without cause, why my new playwright is engaged with me. Why engage in a text she believes should be abandoned?

Well she really has no choice. I stand here, a looming figure, stretched and bloated by years of production, of study. I cannot be denied. Not yet.

One must engage to disengage. Eventually, perhaps, I can return to the nothingness I am. Until then, I must be revealed, lest someone see me and take me for truth.

Or use me as truth. It seems to me it has less to do with belief. Is it useful? A very theatrical question. Does it work?

I work for those who nurture the system. I work for those who witness a man rape and kill me and identify with him. I work for those who would balk at my word choice "not sure if he raped" "didn't actually kill." I work for those who excuse the existential gendered violence of my text by its literary merits, or by its place in history. I work for those who this world already works for.

Rich bitch. Oh yes, the class struggle, the working man vs the landed granded gentry. A decent disguise for his misogynist efforts. Place me at the center of a failing system, point to my privilege without ever understanding that it doesn't grant me selfhood. You must make me hateful to justify your hate. Have Jean despise me for my wealth and desire me for my wealth. Place that contradiction on me.

Place everything on me. Treat me like shit and say I wanted it. If women are masochists than ill-treatment

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MISS JULIE (cont'd)

is a gift. We are born to suffer. Tragedy is a woman's place. Her inevitable outcome. She creates it for herself.

I am the threat you create for yourself. You build me to tear me down, when you could just leave me unbuilt. Are you afraid if I'm left to construct myself that it won't be to your liking? That in my growth I will eclipse you, that if suddenly we could hear other voices yours might not sound so adroit? Do you think I would exploit you? Would I do unto you as you have done to me?

I have no need. If you were not the heir to an asinine power, a gendered divide devised to protract a mass oppression, I would not concern myself with you at all. As it is, I cannot escape you. And isn't that it, really? For all that you dismiss me, defile and deny me, you really just want me to care. You imagine me so you can feel real. You make my life contingent so that you matter. In that I pity you, in your dependence.

My playwright now speaks:

I am dependent too. But not on phantasms, and not on slaves. I am dependent because others have chosen to care for me. And when I depend on another, it strengthens us both. It transcends dependency with its connotations of desperation; it becomes community. I live with people, not for them. Not against them.

Miss Julie ends with my death. Had to. I was not written to endure. It is the only ending that could find any truth, this truth: nothing is nothing. Except sometimes nothing becomes something, in fact, all the time. This is how we write.

*End of play.*