

MTC Education Teachers' Notes 2016

# Miss Julie

by August Strindberg

– PART A –

**16 April – 21 May**  
**Southbank Theatre,**  
**The Sumner**

Notes prepared by Meg Upton

# Teachers' Notes for *Miss Julie*

## PART A – CONTEXTS AND CONVERSATIONS

*Theatre can be defined as a performative art form, culturally situated, ephemeral and temporary in nature, presented to an audience in a particular time, particular cultural context and in a particular location – Anthony Jackson (2007).*

Because theatre is an ephemeral art form – here in one moment, gone in the next – and contemporary theatre making has become more complex, Part A of the *Miss Julie* Teachers' Notes offers teachers and students a rich and detailed introduction to the play in order to prepare for seeing the MTC production – possibly only *once*.

Welcome to our new two-part Teachers' Notes. In this first part of the resource we offer you ways to think about the world of the play, playwright, structure, theatrical styles, stagecraft, contexts – historical, cultural, social, philosophical, and political, characters, and previous productions. These are prompts only. We encourage you to read the play – the original translation in the first instance and then the new adaptation when it is available on the first day of rehearsal. Just before the production opens in April, Part B of the education resource will be available, providing images, interviews, and detailed analysis questions that relate to the Unit 3 performance analysis task.

### Why are you studying *Miss Julie*?

The extract below from the Theatre Studies Study Design is a reminder of the Key Knowledge required and the Key Skills you need to demonstrate in your analysis of the play.

#### THEATRE STUDIES UNIT 3 – AREA OF STUDY 3 – Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate the interpretation of a written playscript in production to an audience. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

##### Key knowledge

- The contexts of the interpretation of a written playscript
- Decisions taken that were evident in the production to interpret the written playscript for performance
- The application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
- Theatrical styles in the written playscript and in the play in performance
- Terminology and expressions used to describe, analyse and evaluate a theatrical production.

##### Key skills

- Analyse ways in which the contexts of a written playscript were interpreted through performance to an audience
- Evaluate the interpretation of the written playscript for performance
- Analyse and evaluate the application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
- Discuss similarities and differences of theatrical styles between the playscript and the play in performance
- Use appropriate theatrical terminology and expressions.

## About the Playwright – Who was August Strindberg and why did he write plays?

*I am a socialist, a nihilist, a republican, anything that is anti-reactionary...I want to turn everything upside down to see what lies beneath; I believe we are so webbed, so horribly regimented, that no spring-cleaning is possible, everything must be burned, blown to bits, and then we can start afresh*  
August Strindberg, 1879

A great deal of academic, historical and critical writing examines August Strindberg's personal, literary, political and philosophical life. The overview presented below barely begins to introduce him.



Johan August Strindberg (January 22, 1849 – May 14, 1912 – Stockholm in Sweden) Swedish playwright, novelist, and short-story writer, who combined psychology and **Naturalism** in a new kind of European drama that evolved into **Expressionist** drama. His chief works include *The Father* (1887), *Miss Julie* (1888), *Creditors* (1888), *A Dream Play* (1902), and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907).

To the end, Strindberg debated current social and political ideas (returning to the radical views of his youth) in polemical articles, while his philosophy was expounded in the aphoristic *Zones of the Spirit* (1907–12). He was ignored in death, as in life, by the Swedish Academy but mourned by his countrymen as their greatest writer. On Swedish life and letters he has exercised a lasting influence and is admired for his originality, his extraordinary vitality, and his powerful imagination, which enabled him to transform autobiographic material into dramatic dialogue of exceptional brilliance.

Read more: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/August-Strindberg>



### RESEARCH AND DISCOVER

Explore the links offered below and write a detailed profile of August Strindberg. Things to include could be:

- Early life – location, education, family, religion, class
- Key people in his life, as a child and as an adult
- Key ideas and philosophies that influenced him
- Key literary, artistic and theatrical works
- Key events that influenced him

These may be separated into single research areas for pairs or groups and then report back in order to create a complete profile. What did each group discover about Strindberg that they felt was important to their study of *Miss Julie*?

## Strindberg – Online Resources

### Source Book – Strindberg on Drama and Theatre:

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=8REy3tHjvOYC&pg=PA178&lpg=PA178&dq=Intimate+theatre+of+Stockholm&source=bl&ots=yHMZ5KRqQj&sig=UdNM7-pLEM-rZRyCUwir7RuRfIE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRodL4m7zKAhXlpJQKHbDAhwQ6AEIOjAG#v=onepage&q=Intimate%20theatre%20of%20Stockholm&f=false>

### Source Book – The Cambridge Guide to August Strindberg:

[https://books.google.com.au/books?id=zMdlel\\_QG7EC&pg=PA115&lpg=PA115&dq=Intimate+theatre+of+Stockholm&source=bl&ots=eu6jn7-8Hh&sig=X8ll6zxG8hXGYlsqySt8Fj6Ezo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRodL4m7zKAhXlpJQKHbDAhwQ6AEIPDAH#v=onepage&q=Intimate%20theatre%20of%20Stockholm&f=false](https://books.google.com.au/books?id=zMdlel_QG7EC&pg=PA115&lpg=PA115&dq=Intimate+theatre+of+Stockholm&source=bl&ots=eu6jn7-8Hh&sig=X8ll6zxG8hXGYlsqySt8Fj6Ezo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRodL4m7zKAhXlpJQKHbDAhwQ6AEIPDAH#v=onepage&q=Intimate%20theatre%20of%20Stockholm&f=false)

Swedish Cultural Site: <https://sweden.se/culture-traditions/august-strindberg/>

Online Biography of Strindberg: <http://www.biography.com/people/august-strindberg-21429601>

Essay on Strindberg's position as a literary writer and its impact on modern theatre:

[https://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/August\\_Strindberg](https://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/August_Strindberg)

### Youtube:

Strindberg: A Life - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRyTFcJhZyo>

Juliette Binoche – Playing Miss Julie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOMMr8ON8eU>



Drawing on your research, use an online meme generator to create a Strindberg Meme. The above are just simple examples. Remember the purpose and function of a meme. A **meme** is "an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture". A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices that can be transmitted between people through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena with a mimicked theme. Be satirical, be comic, be bold, be creative, be clever.

## Strindberg – The Artist

Strindberg painted during three periods of his life: from 1872 to 1874, from 1892 to 1894 and for a few years after 1900. Even though he did not attend art classes, his paintings demonstrate a great power of expression. In parallel, he developed a theory of art that anticipated the surrealism and abstract impressionism of the twentieth century, with the main text entitled "On Chance in Artistic Production". The canvas thus gives room to surprises and unexpected encounters: in *The Land of Marvels*, a painting dated 1894, the forest countryside overlooking the sea turns into a subterranean grotto. In his photographic works, Strindberg reproduced the same principles, also over three periods: 1886-1888, 1890-1894 and 1905-1907. Wavering between a temptation to produce documentaries and experimental research, he wrote that he was looking for "truth [...] intensely, as I look for it in many other fields".



Source: <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/in-the-musee-dorsay/exhibitions-in-the-musee-dorsay/article/august-strindberg-1849-1912-peintre-et-photographe-4182.html?cHash=56041a267a>



### Discuss the following terms/phrases

- Power of expression
- Surrealism
- Abstract impression
- Surprises
- Unexpected encounters
- Truth
- Intensity

How might these terms apply to the four paintings by Strindberg pictured above?

Consider the relevance of these terms as you prepare to see *Miss Julie* and, indeed, after you have seen the play.



## Synopsis – What happens in *Miss Julie*?

*The action of the play takes place on Midsummer Night, in the Count's kitchen. CHRISTINE/KRISTINE stands on the left, by the hearth, and fries something in a pan. She has on a light blouse and kitchen apron. JOHN/JEAN comes in through the glass door in livery. He holds in his hand a pair of big riding boots with spurs which he places on the floor at the back, in a visible position – opening stage directions from the first English translation*

This single act play tells the story of the Count's daughter, Miss Julie, who during a party on the estate, flirts with her father's valet, Jean, and he likewise with her. Despite Jean and Christine being considered a 'couple' the flirtations between Jean and Julie become more adventurous and an intense sexual tension builds. Both characters know they are placing themselves in danger of discovery and of disgrace, in terms of their class and their gender. After consummating their passion, they plan to run away and start a new life knowing that staying under the roof of the Count is impossible given their class differences and morals of the time. It is during the planning that Jean's pragmatism and callousness emerges and Miss Julie learns she has given herself to a man who has completely taken advantage of her. As the reality of her untenable position becomes clear she knows she must make a final decision.



The first production in Stockholm of *Miss Julie* in November 1906, at The People's Theatre. Sacha Sjöström (left) as Kristin, Manda Björling as Miss Julie, and August Falck as Jean.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss\\_Julie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss_Julie)



Image from 1951 Swedish film



Theatre of Maine Production © Michael Lamont

## Theatrical Styles

*Miss Julie* has been described as one of the naturalistic dramas of the modernist period. Outcome 3 asks students to examine the theatrical styles inherent in the playscript. The following Table provides an overview of acting styles adopted in both Realism and Naturalism.

### Realism and Naturalism – An Actor Checklist

<b>VOICE</b>	Lifelike, more precise articulation and effective vocal production in Realism, emphasis on dialects, unusual use of silence and pauses, conversational modes but more heightened in Realism, use of full vocal scale, expressive speech, motivated speech.
<b>MOVEMENT</b>	Motivated by thoughts, feelings, and speech; total and controlled body responses; considerable physical interaction with others; some selective movement imposed in Realism but seemingly none in Naturalism; all stage areas used; all body positions used (consider this re actor audience relationship).
<b>GESTURES</b>	Related to inner experience; natural and spontaneous; full use of the entire body; lifelike; more selective in Realism
<b>CHARACTER</b>	Based on inner psychology and believable human emotions; multidimensional; linked to their environment, particularly in Naturalism; subjective, inner use of observation; imagination, senses and personal experience is important, highly motivated particularly in Naturalism; Super-Objective is clear.
<b>EMOTION</b>	Complex; based in human psychology; use of affective or emotional memory; motivated, closely tied to physical action and speech; audience identification and empathy strong.
<b>IDEAS</b>	Strong social orientation in Realism; strong human orientation in Naturalism; related to experiences in daily life; problems of environment, human experience and heredity.
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	Lifelike prose; often rich in symbolism and imagery; more selective in Realism.

**Adapted from:** Crawford, J.L., Hurst, C., Luger, M.L. (1995) (5<sup>th</sup> Ed) *Acting: In Person and in Style*, McGraw-Hill, United States, Pages 228-229.



### RESEARCH, DISCUSS AND DISCOVER

As you read the script of *Miss Julie*, consider how some of the above conventions are apparent in the writing.

What ideas are explored, how is language used, who are the characters, and how are their emotions caught on the page?

## What is the difference between Naturalism and Realism?

“In thinking about the difference between Realism and Naturalism, Realism concerns looking at society and its various strata, but Naturalism pursues contradiction **inside human behaviour**. Maybe that is the defining difference” Chris Mead, Literary Director at MTC. (Full interview below)

**The following extracts discuss how Naturalism emerged as a theatrical and literary form:**

It could be argued that the public interest in the new theories of psychology was heavily influential in the development of the **naturalistic style of acting** that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, tied to the Realism/Naturalism movements led by playwrights like Chekhov, Ibsen, and **Strindberg**. In order for actors to function successfully in this new style, they had to learn to appear ‘natural’ on stage. This created a need for actors to create characters that appeared to have some kind of ‘inner depth’, which could easily have been seen as a need to recreate the ‘real’ emotions called for in any given scene. For instance, if a script called for an actor to cry in a particular scene, it falls to that actor to cry. This would not be a particularly new demand – actors cry onstage all the time – but **in the new style the emphasis was on ‘truth’ and being ‘natural’**. This leads to the question, ‘How do I really cry when called for?’ This seems to be what Stanislavsky was seeking to discover in his early work where he focused on French psychologist Ribot’s theories about emotion memory as a way of helping actors to find the right emotion for a particular moment on stage. By recalling an event where the emotion was very strong (you cried), then by recalling the event in all of its exactness, the needed emotion ought to be called forth in a very ‘real’ manner.<sup>1</sup>

Strindberg emphasized the shift from the conventional plot of the *well-made play* toward a new attention to character, and explained that, in *Miss Julie*, he had concentrated on **the passionate relationship between the two main characters**, a feminist aristocrat and her father’s valet, rather than any formally structured plot because he believed that “people of today (1888) are most interested in the psychological process. Our inquisitive souls are not satisfied just to see something happen; we want to know how it happened. We want to see the strings, the machinery, examine the double-bottomed box, feel for the seam in the magic ring, look at the cards to see how they are marked.” For Strindberg, psychological plays are more realistic than those with well-formed plots...The naturalists rejected “magic” because they wanted to show life as it really was. *Emile Zola* had complained that the theater was “the last fortress of conventionality”; the naturalist plays of **Strindberg** and the realist plays of Ibsen seek to storm this fortress and to create a ... truer theatre.<sup>2</sup>

Naturalism in theatre was an attempt to create a perfect illusion of reality through detailed sets, an unpoetic literary style that reflected the way ordinary people spoke and a style of acting that tried to recreate reality. Naturalism in literature is the writer’s attempt to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to the study of human beings. *Emile Zola*’s play of *Therese Raquin* is a good example. Naturalistic writers were influenced by the evolution theories of Charles Darwin. Whereas Realism seeks to describe subjects as they really are, Naturalism also attempted to determine “scientifically” the underlying forces such as the environment or heredity – consider *Miss Julie* here. Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subjects such as sexual behaviour. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life including poverty, racism, sexism, prejudice, disease, prostitution, filth. They were often pessimistic and tragic.<sup>3</sup>



### DISCUSS

What insights do these extracts offer you with regard to Naturalism and Realism?  
How might some of these insights apply to *Miss Julie*?  
Do you think it possible to have a truly naturalistic play? Why/why not?

<sup>1</sup> Hetzler, Eric T (2007) Actors and Emotion in Performance. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 28 (1). pp. 59-78. ISSN 1468-2761

<sup>2</sup> [https://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/August\\_Strindberg](https://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/August_Strindberg)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Naturalism\\_\(literature\)](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Naturalism_(literature))



## Tragedy

***Miss Julie* is also described by Strindberg as ‘a naturalistic tragedy’.**

The play’s subject matter, the fall of Miss Julie and the downfall of the feudal order (her estate servants and her father’s valet) aligns it with classical tragedies such as *Oedipus Rex*. The pity that Strindberg says Miss Julie will arouse in spectators is similar to Aristotle’s notion of catharsis – high emotional outpouring....further Strindberg describes Miss Julie as ‘a tragic type, continuously fighting a losing battle against nature, manifested in her struggle against Jean. Her romantic notions lie in her desire to transcend her class and her gender, which she sees as suppressing and stifling. Strindberg points out that Julie is caught amidst a multitude of life-forces that lead to her ultimate destruction.

**Source:** International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities, Vol II Issue II, June 2014.

*Miss Julie*, a one-act tragedy, is no doubt a brutally frank portrayal of the most intimate thoughts of man and of the age-long antagonism between classes. Brutally frank, because August Strindberg strips both of their glitter, their sham and pretense, that we may see that "at bottom there's not so much difference between people and people – Preface to the first English Translation of the play

In his interview for this resource, Literary Director of MTC, Chris Mead talks about a **character’s agency**: their capacity to influence what happens to them. In classical tragedy a character’s downfall is determined by a combination of external forces and the character’s choices and actions.



### DISCUSS

**As a class discuss whether *Miss Julie* is a tragic figure and why.**

- Do you sympathise with her?
- How do you feel about Jean?
- How do you feel about Christine?
- To what extent is Miss Julie responsible for her downfall?
- To what extent do the other characters contribute to this?
- To what extent is Miss Julie a victim of her time, class and gender?

## Interview with Chris Mead, MTC Literary Director

In the following interview, Chris Mead examines how a play from 1888 continues to have something to say in 2016. Some parts of the text are bolded. You may like to use these as discussion points.

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**Chris, why does Melbourne Theatre Company program a play first published in 1888 for an audience in 2016?**

One of the great surprises of looking at the work that MTC has programmed in its history as a company is how rarely it programs work prior to 1900. If you remove Shakespeare, the Company has done few classic texts. We have an interest in showing more of the canon but it is difficult to pursue that. You can suggest things like *The Prince of Homburg* or *The Night of the Burning Pestle* but we still need a director who wants to do that type of play. So performing more classic texts sits there as an ambition and the Company wants to consider works across the 2,000 years of Western theatre, but we needed a theatrical collaborator who is willing to do that. The desire to program a Strindberg and a director who desired to direct it came together when Kip Williams, an associate at STC, was chatting with Brett Sheehy, Artistic Director of MTC.

In that discussion various classic texts were discussed and Kip expressed an interest in *Miss Julie*. It is a fantastic play to look at because it is at the beginning of what we would consider “modern drama” and the idea that, as drama moved away from the stories of Kings and Queens and started to occupy different rooms in the everyday house, in a place that the horrors and joys and everyday struggles of people were examined and put before us. What is fascinating about the writers from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was they were trying to *render the real*. There were probably 30-40 years of that, as dramatists, not simply Ibsen, but also Chekov, Appia, Craig, Zola and others looking to find a way to align what was on stage with what was happening in contemporary literature.

**Realism and Naturalism. Do you have a sense of what the differences are? My own thoughts are that Realism is the overarching form and that Naturalism is the style through which the actors render the play real. But I am really not sure.**

I think people are still fighting that fight. You can simplify it by asking, what is the difference between *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*? **Realism is perhaps an intention and Naturalism is immersion.** You can see all the playwrights of that period struggling with it. Chekhov is working his way towards the idea of ‘time’ on stage. When people talk about structure and time, those words that terrify playwrights, a play is segments of time and space. In a way, in trying to manage Naturalism you are trying to make it look normal so that the divisions of time and space don’t feel forced. If you aren’t going to rely on the classic unities of theatre – unity of action, unity of time, unity of place – then you have to think about how to divide time and space and make it as unforced as possible and not show your artistry. The artistry is not to show the artistry. Perhaps Realism is blunter, and Naturalism is what we come to expect and know. Naturalism has been somewhat corrupted by television and new writers who come to playwriting are influenced by television and telling a story in different places in different times. The ancient Greek plays, however, happened in real time and in one place.

In thinking about the difference between Realism and Naturalism, Realism concerns looking at society and its various strata, but Naturalism pursues contradiction **inside human behaviour**. Maybe that is the defining difference. In Hollywood where a story should function as expected, the balance between **want, need and realisation**, a good way of thinking about Naturalism – what we want is not necessarily what we need and the climax is what we realise. We may say, ‘Too bad! I will pursue what I want despite what I need’ or that ‘I realise’ or ‘I don’t realise’ and either or all may lead to tragedy. There are versions of all these things in the realist tradition. Certainly the idea that character prior to the Modernist era (forgetting about the Greeks)

was representative of only one thing. Maybe what is happening in Naturalism is the desire to move through society and expose its contradictions, foibles and follies. ***Naturalism is burrowing down without solipsism (concern for self) and moving towards understanding that humans pursue the opposites of our own interests all the time.*** We can perhaps choose to change that, sometimes we fail and sometimes we never know what could be.

***What is the difference between Realism and Naturalism? Can Realism and Naturalism be produced on stage? Is the stage the right place for it? These were the questions of the time.*** As most people know, if you go to a real setting, put a recorder down and capture everyday conversation, it is really boring! We can't just put the everyday concerns of people on stage because we would all be asleep in ten minutes. If you go to the hairdressers or to a public toilet you aren't going to capture great conversation. ***So the question around Realism and Naturalism is how do you create the compression and the distillation required to make great drama but still make it about everyday people? In many ways that has been the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century drama*** and here is this guy, Strindberg, who is difficult and who is angry and he wrote with those qualities. He is angry with Ibsen and his idea of the modern woman. He is trying to crunch these things together so it is the site of a number of exciting collisions, culturally and literally given the way he lived his actual life. So Kip Williams (Director) saw this and was really excited by this particular play, *Miss Julie*, and that is how things often come together. There are wider interests, a play may be something the Company could do then then a director says, 'I am fascinated by this particular text' and suddenly MTC is programming *Miss Julie*.

In contemporary times, the battle is constant for the playwright to be naturalistic. We take it for granted that is how a play should be – realistic and naturalistic. However, it doesn't need to be that at all and the main history of drama is not Naturalism it is something different. In this instance the question is: do we think Strindberg is successful in making a naturalistic play? You can't answer the question unless you look at the work of a number of playwrights. I suppose it is the desire of playwrights to make the work seem as it is. To ask the question – is this how we want life to be? Most playwrights don't begin writing a play knowing the answer. ***The play, is in fact, the question.*** That question was very much in Strindberg's mind at the time. He was furiously trying to say 'No, this isn't how we want women to behave, this isn't how we want the world to be'. But in the gap between him writing it and now, so much of the world has changed and the question is **refracted** in a different way.

**So how does that refraction relate to a contemporary production and to a contemporary audience? Post-dramatic, post-structuralism are new ways to consider theatre making. How does *Miss Julie* become relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

Part of the frame around Naturalism is that there is no frame. This is life. This is our life. Perhaps Naturalism allows is to put the frame back and to pursue the idea of the art around that play. We know in the naturalistic play where we are. We are invited to ask the question – is this how I want the world to be? ***In the MTC production it is more than likely - but it can't be confirmed - that it will be performed in the period in which it was written.*** You may well ask if that is right. If Strindberg set it in his own contemporary time which was 'now', the question is can this production be 'now'? If you set it in period times but not 'now', possibly enclosing it in a glass box with video links and close ups, it is a different incitement to how we want to live now and how we want women to be.

**Who is 'we'...**

Exactly! How are we receiving this information and is that gendered? How do we consider gender differently in our 'now'?

**Could we now turn to the script of *Miss Julie*? In my research about the play there is the original text written in Swedish translated into English for the stage, and then later adapted to film. We talk in contemporary terms about adaptations, re-imaginings and versions of classic texts. What is this version of *Miss Julie* going to be?**

Kip Williams (Director) is very keen to use a script that is as close as possible to the original. So, MTC has commissioned a literal translation. In talking to the translator, a Swedish playwright who holds a position at the national touring theatre of Sweden, the Riksteatern (<http://riksteatern.se>), she made the point that for a contemporary ear the play is old fashioned and some of the words in Swedish have significantly shifted. At the time, in 1888, it was seen as quite modern. That is an interesting dissonance right there. What Kip wants is to get as close to the original as possible. There may be some edits but they will be small, a gesture or two to now. We aren't using the literal. The MTC version will be close to the literal but not necessarily what Strindberg intended given that what he wanted was to make us furious about Julie and about women, and what he considered was their essential nature.

The other crucial historical events that were happening at the time were that novelists like Zola and Flaubert were writing about the human condition, and it was the beginning of Psychology as we know it. There was a radical shift in thinking about what a human being is. In 1859 *The Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin is published. Marxist theories arrive late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Freud's theories of psychology arrives in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Suddenly the human, who we traditionally understand is made by God, is completely decentred by the idea that humans are just a part of an incredibly long evolutionary and economic process. Marx says humans are prey to long term historical economic forces. *We are not in control, capitalism is in control.* So we are destabilized by evolution and capitalism. Freud was one of many thinkers saying that God hasn't given you your brain or your destiny. Actually you can determine your destiny. Freud then went on to say that a human brain may not be one entity. It may be shattered into three fragments – Id, Ego and Super-ego – that are constantly at war with each other.

For dramatists, psychology was a wonderful offering with regard to the role humans have in their own destiny, if any. While we comfort ourselves that we are getting this human thing right, psychology has undergone fundamental paradigm shifts – Freud, Jung, Pavlov, Skinner, Piaget, Watson, Thorndike etc. ***We want to think that we are certain, but maybe we aren't. How does theatre fit into this?*** Is it about rendering the real in order for us to discuss it, or is it about the theatrical that allows us a lot more than "let's get the acting right" and what are those "emotional memories" that allow you to act "better"? You can show us your trauma on stage and maybe that is not right. Acting training was developing at the same time. The acting training we took for granted was the "right" approach, such as the methods of Stanislavsky, a method he himself changed as he grew older and subsequently abandoned. It was concerned with the psychology of acting as real people act, whatever that is!

**I am fascinated by male playwrights writing about women of that time. For instance the characters of Therese Raquin, Nora, Hedda Gabler, and Julie. They each represent different understandings of women. What was the fascination for men writing about women at that time?**

I know from chatting with various directors, including many female directors, they are attracted to the character of Miss Julie because she escapes from Strindberg entirely and ***his furious desire to mock her and loathe her in fact creates a space for agency. An ongoing question of any play is what is the character's sense of agency?*** That has been taken up by feminists, second-wave feminists and subsequent female playwrights and continues to be.

What is so depressing about theatre and film is that somebody had to go and invent the Bechdel test<sup>4</sup>. When you consider contemporary cinema and contemporary plays, the Bechdel test revealed that writers haven't thought about the female characters. They are often cardboard cut outs for men having existential crises, rather than being front and centre and having complicated roles and complicated dilemmas. So Alison Bechdel overlays a series of key questions including: Do the women ever speak to each other except about men? To have roles such as *Miss Julie* in the canon is important. Women's struggles and dilemmas are half the population and their questions are how to live their lives, how to find agency, how to find power and certainty in a society in which repression has been the expected and the norm. ***Of course Strindberg's time is one where first wave feminism is beginning, particularly women's suffrage, creating a space for the possible for women.***

It seems to me there is a clue between thinking about the difference between Realism and Naturalism. Realism concerns looking at society and its various strata, but Naturalism is pursuing contradiction inside behaviour. Maybe that is the difference? Realism is about capturing a spectrum of society and Naturalism is burrowing into behaviour and how we often behave.

### **1888 to 2016 – Chris, is *Miss Julie* a reflection of the eternal human condition?**

It still seems that we love drama because we get to experience contradiction in a way that makes sense to us. Not in a melodramatic way where we want to shout out loud - sometimes we do want to do that – but in a way that we know innately is right. We recognise that we, as humans, often pursue the wrong thing and we can't seem to change it.

***So many of the dramatists of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century didn't want to create theatre that would fit into a 2,000 seat theatre.*** What had happened since Shakespeare's time is that theatres got bigger because architecture developed and the possibility of building larger buildings meant more income. Simultaneously acting changed and grew into what we think of as ridiculous make up and gesture to convey simple emotions – happiness, sadness, confusion, and anger. The cartoons of 19<sup>th</sup> Century theatre depict ridiculous exaggeration of human emotion and absurd reductions in order to get the message across or to make an emotional climax. So many Russians, Scandinavian and German theatre makers and writers were eager to make something that allowed for *real* acting, in order to present stories in small spaces so audiences could get closer and not look at crazy, made up fools. Rather to find something that got closer to something about being human, more intimate and nuanced. Is there an acting style for that? Do we need to write new plays, create new theatres that reflect that? Those were the key questions and Strindberg was part of that.

### **DISCUSS**

As a class discuss some of the bolded comments and questions in this interview.

What insights do they offer you with regard to the theatrical style known as Naturalism?

What insights do they offer with regard to the purposes of theatre?

Is *Miss Julie*, as a story about a woman and as a commentary on the human condition, relevant now?

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel\\_test](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test)



## Strindberg's theatre

Strindberg's Intima Teater or *Intima teatern*, is a theatre stage in Stockholm, Sweden. It was founded and managed by the famous Swedish playwright August Strindberg between 1907 and 1910. The playhouse was a small (6 x 6 meters) but engaging space based on the designs of the French and German models of the time. The small auditorium could hold up to 150 patrons and featured some of the most advanced lighting innovations of the day. The size of the space in no way limited the company but actually encouraged continuous experimentation. The author used the stage for his own plays as well as for guest performances of modern drama from abroad. In all, 25 of Strindberg's plays were performed and a total number of 2500 performances were given during the theatre's short but highly influential existence. Among its most successful stagings were the original productions of *Easter*, *The Ghost Sonata*, *Miss Julie* and *Svanevit*. The theatre also triumphed on tour throughout Scandinavia and Europe.



Source: <http://www.strindbergsintimateater.se/om-teatern>

### DISCUSS

Consider the description and images of Strindberg's Intima Teater.

How might the design and purpose of such a theatre have enabled the staging of naturalistic plays?

Discuss what 'intimacy' means in the theatre and how it may affect the actor-audience relationship.

Look at the images below of the **Sumner Theatre** where MTC's production of *Miss Julie* will be staged.

Discuss how its dimensions might enhance or detract from the 'intimacy' that Strindberg was trying to create.



## Character in theatre

Part of your study of the play is to consider how the characters as written transfer to the stage through the director's vision and interpretation. This next section explores character and especially the characters in Strindberg's *Miss Julie*.

A character (or fictional character) is a person in a narrative work of art (such as a novel, play, television series or film). The English word dates from the Restoration, although it became widely used after its appearance in *Tom Jones* in 1749. From this, the sense of "a part played by an actor" developed. Character, particularly when enacted by an actor in the theatre or cinema, involves "the illusion of being a human person." In literature, characters guide readers through their stories, helping them to understand plots and ponder themes. Since the end of the 18th century, the phrase "in character" has been used to describe an effective impersonation by an actor. Since the 19th century, the art of creating characters, as practiced by actors or writers, has been called characterisation.

A character who stands as a representative of a particular class or group of people is known as a type. Types include both stock characters and those that are more fully individualised. The characters in Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1891) and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888), for example, are representative of specific positions in the social relations of class and gender, such that the conflicts between the characters reveal ideological conflicts.

The study of a character requires an analysis of its relations with all of the other characters in the work. The individual status of a character is defined through the network of oppositions (proairetic<sup>5</sup>, pragmatic, linguistic, proxemic or spatial) that it forms with the other characters. The relation between characters and the action of the story shifts historically, often miming shifts in society and its ideas about human individuality, self-determination, and the social order.

Adapted from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character\\_\(arts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character_(arts))

## The characters in *Miss Julie*

**Miss Julie** – aged twenty-five, the strong-willed daughter of the count who owns the estate. Raised by her late mother to "think like and act like a man", she is a confused individual. She is aware of the power she holds, but switches between being above the servants and flirting with Jean. She longs to fall from her pillar, an expression symbolically put across as a recurring dream she has.

**John/Jean** – aged thirty-five, a manservant to the Count. He tells a story of seeing Miss Julie many times as a child and loving her even then, but the truth of the story is later denied. There is good evidence both for and against its possibility. He left the town and travelled widely, working many different jobs, before finally returning to work for the Count. He has aspirations to rise from his station in life and manage his own hotel, and Miss Julie is part of his plan. He is alternately kind and callous. Despite his aspirations, he is rendered servile by the mere sight of the Count's gloves and boots.

**Christine/Kristine** – aged thirty-five, the cook in the Count's household. She is devoutly religious and apparently betrothed to Jean, although they refer to this marriage almost jokingly.

**The Count** - Miss Julie's father. He is never seen, but his gloves and his boots are on stage, serving as a reminder of his power. When the bell sounds, his presence is also noted more strongly.

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<sup>5</sup> **PROAIRETIC** CODES: The two ways of creating suspense in narrative, the first caused by unanswered questions, the second by the anticipation of an action's resolution

## Strindberg's views on his characters

In the preface to the first English translation of the play Strindberg wrote an essay that clearly instructed the audience and directors as to his intentions. The following extracts, originally published in 1888 in the first English translation by Michael Meyer, provide his thoughts on the characters from *Miss Julie*.

### Miss Julie

*Note that the translator has called her Miss Julia.*

In explanation of Miss Julia's sad fate I have suggested many factors: 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; furthermore, and more directly: the festive mood of the Midsummer Eve; the absence of her father; her physical condition; her preoccupation with the animals; the excitement of the dance; the dusk of the night; the strongly aphrodisiacal influence of the flowers; and lastly the chance forcing the two of them together in a secluded room, to which must be added the aggressiveness of the excited man. Miss Julia 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.

Miss Julia is also a remnant of the old military nobility which is now giving way to the new nobility of nerves and brain. She is a victim of the discord which a mother's "crime" produces in a family, and also a victim of the day's delusions, of the circumstances, of her defective constitution--all of which may be held equivalent to the old-fashioned fate or universal law. The naturalist has wiped out the idea of guilt, but he cannot wipe out the results of an action--punishment, prison, or fear--and for the simple reason that they remain without regard to his verdict

### John/Jean the Valet

Jean, the valet, is of the kind that builds new stock--one in whom the differentiation is clearly noticeable. He was a cotter's child, and he has trained himself up to the point where the future gentleman has become visible. He has found it easy to learn, having finely developed senses (smell, taste, vision) and an instinct for beauty besides. He has already risen in the world, and is strong enough not to be sensitive about using other people's services. He has already become a stranger to his equals, despising them as so many outlived stages, but also fearing and fleeing them because they know his secrets, pry into his plans, watch his rise with envy, and look forward to his fall with pleasure. From this relationship springs his dual, indeterminate character, oscillating between love of distinction and hatred of those who have already achieved it. He says himself that he is an aristocrat, and has learned the secrets of good company. He is polished on the outside and coarse within. He knows already how to wear the frock-coat with ease, but the cleanliness of his body cannot be guaranteed.

He feels respect for the young lady, but he is afraid of Christine, who has his dangerous secrets in her keeping. His emotional callousness is sufficient to prevent the night's happenings from exercising a disturbing influence on his plans for the future. Having at once the slave's brutality and the master's lack of squeamishness, he can see blood without fainting, and he can also bend his back under a mishap until able to throw it off. For this reason he will emerge unharmed from the battle, and will probably end his days as the owner of a hotel. And if he does not become a Roumanian count, his son will probably go to a university, and may even become a county attorney.

### Christine/Kristine

Christine, finally, is a female slave, full of servility and sluggishness acquired in front of the kitchen fire, and stuffed full of morality and religion that are meant to serve her at once as cloak and scapegoat. Her church-going has for its purpose to bring her quick and easy riddance of all responsibility for her domestic thieveries and to equip her with a new stock of guiltlessness. Otherwise she is a subordinate figure, and therefore purposely sketched in the same manner as the minister and the doctor in "The Father," whom I designed as ordinary human beings, like the common run of country ministers and country doctors. And if these accessory characters have seemed mere abstractions to some people, it depends on the fact that ordinary men are to a certain extent impersonal in the exercise of their callings. This means that they are without individuality, showing only one side of themselves while at work. And as long as the spectator does not feel the need of seeing them from other sides, my abstract presentation of them remains on the whole correct.



#### READ AND DISCUSS

**Compare your reading of the play with the descriptions of the characters by Strindberg.**

Are these qualities, so carefully outlined by Strindberg, evident in the script? What **examples** can you find?

As you discuss this consider how language is used, how characters speak about each other and about themselves – what words do they use?

How do the characters behave in the playscript that might reflect the above descriptions?

How might these descriptions reflect Strindberg's own context and lived experience?

Discuss how these descriptions relate to a contemporary world and contemporary men and women.

**As a class discuss how you think these characters will be interpreted on stage.**

## Contexts: Historical, Cultural, Political, Literary, Sociocultural, Philosophical

In theatre, contexts are generally understood to be the historical, socio-cultural, political, and philosophical conditions in which a play was written - the world of the playwright - the contexts evident in the playscript, and the contexts of the performance. For instance, Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the 1950s (the playwright's context) but he drew on the historical, socio-cultural, political and philosophical contexts of the Salem witch hunts of 1692 (the play's contexts) in order to draw a parallel with the hysteria and persecution experienced by many people during the McCarthy era in the United States. The play was first performed during a critical time for US politics. Subsequent performances in new contexts will enable new understandings. Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* sets some of its action in British Colonial Africa during Victorian times, juxtaposing it with characters from Churchill's contemporary time of 1979 to make a point about gender, difference and social roles.

Of course, many plays are written for and of their time and the contexts in which the play is written are directly reflected in the script, and the performed play. Arguably *Miss Julie* is such a play and reflects Strindberg's personal and social beliefs. The following background information may be useful in your discussions around contexts, Strindberg and *Miss Julie*.

**Your previous research into Strindberg will have allowed for many discoveries with regard to his background, educations, and key influences. Sweden during this time was a united kingdom with Norway. Its artistic and literary folk were influenced by the rise of modernism and of Darwin's theories of evolution. Strindberg was both intrigued by and critical of Ibsen, the great Norwegian playwright.**

### The world in 1888

In the year that *Miss Julie* was published (1888), the following events occurred around the world:

- English Football League established
- The following items were patented: first wax drinking straw; Kodak box camera; Engineering system to build skyscrapers; the pneumatic car tyre; the revolving door; the adding machine; the ballpoint pen; the timecard clock
- Princess Isabel of Brazil signs "lei Aurea" abolishing slavery
- Frederick Douglass is 1<sup>st</sup> African-American nominated for US President
- First known recording of classical music is made (Handel)
- First baby placed in an incubator, State Emigrant Hospital, New York
- World's first beauty contest in Spa, Belgium
- Emilie Rathou becomes the first woman in Sweden to demand the right for women suffrage
- Royal Court Theatre in London opens
- Jack the Ripper murders three women in Whitechapel
- New Zealand Natives, a privately organised mainly Maori rugby team plays in the UK
- Tchaikovsky's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony premieres in St Petersburg
- Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh cuts off his left ear with a razor and sends it to the woman he loves for safe keeping



#### DISCUSS

Which of these events were you familiar with?

Which of these events could have impacted Strindberg's thinking and life?



## Other contextual information – cultural, political, social

### CLASS

*Miss Julie* is concerned, amongst other things, with class – an aristocratic woman and a servant. The **Swedish nobility** (*Adeln*) has historically been a legally and/or socially privileged class in Sweden, and part of the so-called *frälse* (a derivation from Old Swedish meaning *free neck*). The archaic term for nobility, *frälse*, also included the clergy, a classification defined by tax exemptions and representation in the diet. Today, the nobility is very much part of modern Swedish society and do not maintain their former privileges although their family names, titles and coats of arms are still protected.

### RELIGION

Strindberg's own religion was discarded in favour of a more nihilistic approach to life. However, **Lutheran Christianity** is officially the largest religion in Sweden, with 6.3 million Swedish citizens being members of the Church of Sweden. Other **Christian** Churches include the **Catholic Church** and the Eastern Orthodox Church. **Islam** is the second largest religion in Sweden, practiced by 5% of the population.

## Women in Strindberg's time

### Full Definition of suffrage

- 1: a short intercessory prayer usually in a series
- 2: a vote given in deciding a controverted question or electing a person for an office or trust
- 3: the right of voting

Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suffrage>

### UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE – refers to the universal right to vote as a citizen

From the 1860s a lively debate emerged on the question of voting rights, and demands for universal suffrage became increasingly vociferous. The first private member's motion on equal political rights for women and men was put before the Riksdag, the Swedish parliament, in 1884 but it was rejected. In later years, the issue was raised persistently in various motions, but in vain.

In 1909, a reform was passed in the Riksdag giving Swedish men the right to vote in elections to the Second Chamber. The first Government bill on suffrage and eligibility for election to the Riksdag for women was submitted in 1912 by the Staaff Government. It was, however, outvoted in the predominantly conservative First Chamber. Outside the Riksdag a powerful movement for women's suffrage was taking shape, often through special suffrage societies. In a historical perspective, suffrage has been one of the women's movement's major issues.

Source: <http://www.riksdagen.se/en/How-the-Riksdag-works/Democracy/The-history-of-the-Riksdag/>

## STRINDBERG ON WOMEN

Strindberg wages relentless war on woman, neither asking nor granting quarter. She is a parasite living on man; she lacks the most elements perceptions of right and wrong; she is unjust, cruel, shamelessly exacting in her demands, imperious and eager for power though deficient in every quality of leadership. She is a creature stunted in development. And Strindberg “proves” by physiological and psychological data that she occupies an intermediate position between child and man, between the negro and the Caucasian; but in spite of this she insists upon her full equality with man, clamours for rights and privileges without corresponding duties and obligations; organised society she does all in her power to destroy by competing with man in the labour market; home she makes a hell on earth.

- From a 1914 essay by Jules Mauritzson, “Strindberg and the woman question” in *Publications of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study*, Vol 1, No. 5 (June, 1914), pp. 207-213.

Strindberg didn’t always think about women like this but at a critical point in his life (1884) he was called away to a court case and in the meantime his role as the leader of a literary society was given to a woman, Mrs. Edgrn-Leffler. Further, his marriage had been destroyed. How? A woman has thrust herself between and his wife, lured the latter away from her husband and ruined their home

- From the preface to the first English Translation, Michael Meyer.

## LATE 19th CENTURY ETIQUETTE

Etiquette is not a servile yielding up of one's individuality, or a mere cold formality. It is rather the beautiful frame which is placed around a valuable picture to prevent its being marred or defaced. Etiquette throws a protection around the well-bred, keeping the course and disagreeable at a distance, and punishing those who violate her dictates, with banishment from the social circle.

### Soft Voices in Women

*How much more essential are good manners to a woman! A rude, loud-spoken, uncultured woman is a positive blot upon nature, and repels, by her lack of breeding, those who would not be slow to acknowledge the real worth and talent she possesses, and which would come to the surface were she clothed in the beautiful garments of modesty, gentle speech and ease of manner.*

Source:

<http://logicmgmt.com/1876/etiquette/etiquette.htm>



## COMPARE, CONTRAST AND DISCUSS

On page 15 of these resources, Strindberg’s describes the character of Miss Julie in some detail.

Re-read that description and then discuss how it may relate to the above expectations of women in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and England

Read the extract from the preface to the first translation where Strindberg is accused of waging war on women.

How might Strindberg’s personal contexts and broader contexts have influenced the creation of the characters of Miss Julie and Jean?

How does the image of **women’s fashion above** relate to the expectations of women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?

## How the play was first received by audiences and critics

First published in 1888, August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* shocked early reviewers with its frank portrayal of sexuality. Although it was privately produced in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1889, the play was banned throughout much of Europe and was not produced in Sweden, Strindberg's native country, until 1906. Britain's ban on public performances of the play was not lifted until 1939. Notoriety is often the best publicity, however, and the play soon gained an underground popularity in both Europe and America; mainstream acceptance and success came a bit slower, but by the early twentieth century the play was considered an important facet of modern drama.

The contention over the play stemmed from its frank portrayal of sex. Not only does *Miss Julie* contain a sexual encounter between a lower-class servant and an upper-class aristocrat (outrageous for the times), the play clearly describes the sex act as something apart from the concept of love. The idea of intercourse based completely on lust was scandalous to late-nineteenth century thinking and enough to provoke censure. And it was nothing more than the idea of sex without love that caused the trouble: the act is only referred to in the play, not actually depicted on stage.

Strindberg's drama focuses **on the downfall of the aristocratic Miss Julie**, a misfit in her society (the author refers to her in his preface as a "man-hating half-woman"). Julie rebels against the restrictions placed on her as a woman and as a member of the upper-class. From the beginning of the play, her behaviour is shown to alienate her peer class and shock the servants. She displays a blatant disregard for **class and gender conventions**, at one moment claiming that class differences should not exist and the next demanding proper treatment as **a woman of aristocracy**. Her antics result in her **social downfall**, a loss of respect from her servants, and, ultimately, her final decision.

Source: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-2692900023/miss-julie.html>



### DISCUSS

How does this description of the reception of the play link to the values of the time?

Reading it as a 21<sup>st</sup> century person, what are your thoughts on its potential to shock and scandalise now?

Why is Jean's character absent from this description?

## Is *Miss Julie* based on Strindberg's own life?

In May 1888 the Strindbergs moved into Skovlyst, a ruinous manor house not far from Copenhagen. The estate belonged to Countess Louise de Frankenau. She was forty, unmarried, and quite eccentric. The young, good-looking Ludvig Hansen was bailiff on the estate. Everyone believed that Hansen was his mistress' lover; in reality he was her illegitimate half-brother. Hansen was assisted by his sixteen-year-old sister Martha who looked after the Strindberg children. Intimate relations between the married couple by this time belonged to the past. Strindberg found Martha sexually attractive and once or twice he slept with her. Hansen spread rumours that his sister was pregnant and then tried to blackmail Strindberg. Again his reputation was tarnished. In the long novella *Tschandala* (1888), his most Nietzschean work, he gives his version of the Hansen affair. Strindberg considered himself victimized by two calculating and greedy pariahs but at the same time he was presumably ashamed of his own behaviour. His reaction can be sensed in his portrayal of Miss Julie who retrospectively regards her coupling with Jean as an act of bestiality.

If Miss Julie is the embodiment of certain aspects of Strindberg himself, she also resembles some real and fictional women. The social gap between Strindberg himself, whose mother had been a servant, and his noble wife Siri von Essen has an obvious kinship to that between Jean and Julie. Both the masculine upbringing and the suicide of Miss Julie resemble what overcame Victoria Benedictsson, one of the leading Swedish writers of the 1880s. Strindberg happened to stay at the same hotel in Copenhagen as Victoria Benedictsson when, in January 1888, she made an unsuccessful attempt to end her life – after a disrupting affair with Georg Brandes. The following July, when Strindberg was at work on *Miss Julie*, she succeeded in killing herself.

In the preface to *Miss Julie*, Strindberg tries to divert attention from these probable life models by claiming to have based his play on a true story he had heard about years earlier. Because this story dealt with the reversal of fortune and the extinction of a noble line, he felt it provided excellent material for a modern tragedy.

Source: <http://www.missjulie.eu/?p=74>



### DISCUSS

Discuss this story about Strindberg.

Why would Strindberg protest it was not based on his life?

Why would Strindberg think that such a story would be 'excellent material for a modern tragedy'?

## Midsummer's Eve festivities in Sweden

The celebration of Midsummer's Eve (St. John's Eve among Christians) was from ancient times a festival of the summer solstice. Bonfires were lit to protect against evil spirits which were believed to roam freely when the sun was turning southward again. In later years, witches were also thought to be on their way to meetings with other powerful beings.

The solstice itself has remained a special moment of the annual cycle of the year since Neolithic times. The concentration of the observance is not on the day as we reckon it, commencing at midnight or at dawn, as it is customary for cultures following lunar calendars to place the beginning of the day on the previous eve at dusk at the moment when the Sun has set. In Sweden, Finland, Latvia and Estonia, Midsummer's Eve is the greatest festival of the year, comparable only with Walpurgis Night, Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve. Ancient Romans would hold a festival to honour the god Summanus on June 20.

In *Miss Julie*, the people on the estate of Julie's father the Count are celebrating St. John's Eve (Midsummer Night's Eve) with dance, song and revelry. The Count is absent, and Julie graciously mingles with the servants. But once having tasted the simple abandon of the people, once having thrown off the artifice and superficiality of her aristocratic decorum, her suppressed passions leap into full flame, and Julie throws herself into the arms of her father's valet, Jean -- not because of love for the man, nor yet openly and freely, but as persons of her station may do when carried away by the moment.

Source: [http://www.theatredatabase.com/20th\\_century/august\\_strindberg\\_004.html](http://www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/august_strindberg_004.html)

Traditionally, Midsummer was celebrated on June 24, the feast day of St. John the Baptist, but the holiday has its roots in a pre-Christian solstice festival. Rather than trying to stamp out such pagan festivals, the early Catholic Church found it useful to co-opt them by associating them with Christian celebrations.

By establishing December 25 conveniently close to the winter solstice as the date when Jesus was born, the Church was able to absorb the pagan midwinter festival of Yule into the Christian celebration of Christmas. Biblical sources suggest that St. John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus, meaning that his birthday could be equally conveniently associated with pagan summer festivals.

Midsummer was considered to be a time of magic, and anything to do with nature was thought to have a special power. Gathering flowers to weave into wreaths and crowns was a way to harness nature's magic to ensure good health throughout the year. Even though most people these days probably are unaware of the magical origins of the tradition, weaving crowns of flowers is still a major part of any Midsummer observance.

The magic of Midsummer also extends to the realm of romance. A Swedish verse says Midsummer night is not long but it sets many cradles to rock. For unmarried girls, it's said that if you pick seven (or sometimes nine) types of flowers and place them under your pillow, you'll dream of your future husband.

Source: <http://realscandinavia.com/midsummer-in-sweden-origins-and-traditions/>



## DISCUSS

- Strindberg has decided to set his play on the eve of Midsummer, traditionally one of celebration, festivity, special power, bewitchment, magic, dance, and nature.
- Do you think this is a purposeful choice?
- From your reading of the play how does the evening affect Miss Julie?
- How do the servants and estate people treat and comment upon Miss Julie's behaviour?
- What judgements do you feel Strindberg may be making?
- Do you know Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
- If so are there any common themes between that play and *Miss Julie*?

## Strindberg on the staging of his work

The following are statements by Strindberg on how he wished *Miss Julie* to be staged. All are taken from his essay in the preface to the first English translation.

### STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

*Turning to the technical side of the composition, I have tried to abolish the division into acts. And I have done so because I have come to fear that our decreasing capacity for illusion might be unfavourably affected by intermissions during which the spectator would have time to reflect and to get away from the suggestive influence of the author-hypnotist. My play will probably last an hour and a half, and as it is possible to listen that length of time, or longer, to a lecture, a sermon, or a debate, I have imagined that a theatrical performance could not become fatiguing in the same time. A one act play in the naturalistic form, a single moment of continuity, life is a continuum, to heighten the complexity of the characters and build the dramatic tension*



## SET DESIGN AND STAGING

*As far as the scenery is concerned, I have borrowed from impressionistic painting its asymmetry, its quality of abruptness, and have thereby in my opinion strengthened the illusion. Because the whole room and all its contents are not shown, there is a chance to guess at things--that is, our imagination is stirred into complementing our vision. I have made a further gain in getting rid of those tiresome exits by means of doors, especially as stage doors are made of canvas and swing back and forth at the lightest touch. They are not even capable of expressing the anger of an irate pater familias who, on leaving his home after a poor dinner, slams the door behind him "so that it shakes the whole house." (On the stage the house sways.) I have also contented myself with a single setting, and for the double purpose of making the figures become parts of their surroundings, and of breaking with the tendency toward luxurious scenery. But having only a single setting, one may demand to have it real. Yet nothing is more difficult than to get a room that looks something like a room.*

## DIRECTING

*Of course, I have no illusions about getting the actors to play for the public and not at it, although such a change would be highly desirable. I dare not even dream of beholding the actor's back throughout an important scene, but I wish with all my heart that crucial scenes might not be played in the centre of the proscenium, like duets meant to bring forth applause. Instead, I should like to have them laid in the place indicated by the situation. Thus I ask for no revolutions, but only for a few minor modifications. To make a real room of the stage, with the fourth wall missing, and a part of the furniture placed back toward the audience, would probably produce a disturbing effect at present.*

## MAKE-UP

*In wishing to speak of the facial make-up, I have no hope that the ladies will listen to me, as they would rather look beautiful than lifelike. But the actor might consider whether it be to his advantage to paint his face so that it shows some abstract type which covers it like a mask. Suppose that a man puts a markedly choleric line between the eyes, and imagine further that some remark demands a smile of this face fixed in a state of continuous wrath. What a horrible grimace will be the result? And how can the wrathful old man produce a frown on his false forehead, which is smooth as a billiard ball?*

## LIGHTING

*In modern psychological dramas, where the subtlest movements of the soul are to be reflected on the face rather than by gestures and noise, it would probably be well to experiment with strong side-light on a small stage, and with unpainted faces, or at least with a minimum of make-up.*



### DISCUSS

- What do the above extracts suggest with regard to staging *Miss Julie*?
- What images do they evoke and conjure? What do you imagine this production will be like?
- How do the descriptions and recommendations reflect Naturalism or Realism?
- To what extent do some of the descriptions seem more expressionistic or symbolic?
- The original setting is a single kitchen in the Count's house. Do you think the play could take place elsewhere?
- Discuss how the play could be RECONTEXTUALISED. To what era and why? Who would the characters represent in this new era?
- From your reading of the play, do the above extracts reflect what Strindberg has **written in the script**?

## Themes and meanings

What does *Miss Julie* mean? What is it trying to say? What themes is it exploring? How do acting and stagecraft convey the themes and enable meaning to be made by an audience? What have you understood from your reading of the playscript?

### Strindberg says...

*In the following drama I have not tried to do anything new for that cannot be done but I have tried to modernize the form in accordance with the demands which I thought the new men of a new time might be likely to make on this art. And with such a purpose in view, I have chosen, or surrendered myself to, a theme that might well be said to lie outside the partisan strife of the day: for **the problem of social ascendancy or decline, of higher or lower, of better or worse, of men or women, is, has been, and will be of lasting interest.** In selecting this theme from real life, as it was related to me a number of years ago, when the incident impressed me very deeply, **I found it suited to a tragedy, because it can only make us sad to see a fortunately placed individual perish,** and this must be the case in still higher degree when we see an entire family die out. But perhaps a time will arrive when we have become so developed, so enlightened, that we can remain indifferent before **the spectacle of life, which now seems so brutal, so cynical, so heartless; when we have closed up those lower, unreliable instruments of thought which we call feelings,** and which have been rendered not only superfluous but harmful by the final growth of our reflective organs – August Strindberg, preface to the first English translation.*



### DISCUSS

- Discuss each of the bolded pieces of text.
- What does each mean? How might it relate to *Miss Julie*? To particular characters? Actions? Feelings?
- What other themes do you think are present in the play?

## Symbols in *Miss Julie*

Many scholars believe that *Miss Julie* presents the following as having symbolism or significance in the play:

- The madness of Midsummer Eve
- Flowers
- The dog Diana
- Class and status
- The power and danger of feelings
- The absent count/father
- Mental instability
- The canary
- The Turkish pavilion



### DISCUSS

#### What is a symbol?

- As a class discuss what each of these ideas and entities mean to you?
- What similarities and differences exist in your understanding and in their meaning?
- How might each of these concepts act symbolically in *Miss Julie*?
- Make a note of when they are present in the script, how often, when they occur, what precedes and succeeds them.
- When you see the production, consider how the creative team may or may not have focused on them.

## To consider before seeing MTC's *Miss Julie*

Returning to the Key Knowledge you need to analyse the performance...

### Key knowledge

- The contexts of the interpretation of a written playscript
- Decisions taken that were evident in the production to interpret the written playscript for performance
- The application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
- Theatrical styles in the written playscript and in the play in performance
- Terminology and expressions used to describe, analyse and evaluate a theatrical production.

1. What understandings do you have of the cultural, political, philosophical and social contexts that shaped Strindberg's thinking and his life?
2. What are key themes in the play and how are these present in the script? Give examples.
3. What theatre was being made at the time? Was Strindberg thinking differently and why?
4. What evidence is there in the script of particular theatrical styles? Generate a list of six examples.
5. What clues and evidence are there in the written playscript with regard to:
  - Characters and their characteristics
  - The acting styles
  - Structure of the play
  - Use of stagecraft – costume, set, lighting, props, make-up, and sound
  - The use of language both verbal and non-verbal
6. Evidence – generate a list of quotes or stage directions from the script that relate to each of these areas
7. Write a list of 'expectations' or 'predictions' you have about the play e.g. I expect/suspect that Miss Julie will be...

## Epilogue

In the recent design presentation for MTC's *Miss Julie*, Kip Williams spoke about his vision for the production. He stated that its setting – a kitchen – will be consistent with the original intention but that the era would be shifted forward a couple of decades. He wants to focus on the intensity of the piece, as if the characters were caged and constantly under surveillance. These ideas will be explored in the set design. For Kip, *Miss Julie* is about **choice**. What is the future these characters wish to make? In his version the stagecraft and performances will collide in a fusion of ideas and politics. A full interview with Kip Williams will appear in Part B of the resource.

**Part B of the *Miss Julie* Teachers' Notes will be available just before the production opens**