

Fall of Miss Julie And Rise of Jean: A Stylistic Look on the Power Relations of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*

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Abstract

One of the most important figures of 19th century drama, Swedish August Strindberg's 1888 play *Miss Julie* is a rich, complex work open to begetting different interpretations. The play is only one act and set mostly in a kitchen on a midsummer's eve with three main characters who become Miss Julie, the daughter of the Count, footman Jean and cook Christene. An upper class, noble character Julie's wish to get out of the class and sexual constraints of the society results in a flirtation followed by a sexual intimacy that brings about her tragic doom in a scene of hypnosis at the end of the play. As the night proceeds, the relationship between Julie and Jean turns into a power battle and presents a rich pattern that could be analyzed within stylistic features and devices. The play allows exploring how power relations between characters are indicated in speech acts, turn-taking, dramatic irony and other features of conversational structure especially uncovering who is in control or how one builds up power over one another. A stylistic analysis of their interactions acknowledges the exchange of power between them- the degree to which Jean imposes a set of gradually growing attitudes of authority and the degree to which Julie endeavors to resist with her social status privilege. In that battle of power Julie's descend or 'fall' from upstairs to the kitchen is replaced by

Öz

Julie'nin Düşüşü, Jean'in Yükselişi: August Strindberg'in *Miss Julie* Oyununa Güç İlişkileri Bakımından Biçembilimsel Bir Bakış

19. yüzyıl tiyatrosunun en önemli figürlerinden biri olan İsveçli yazar August Strindberg'in 1888 tarihli oyunu *Miss Julie* (*Matmazel Julie*), farklı yorumlamalarla sahnelenmeye devam eden zengin ve karmaşık bir eserdir. Tek bir perdeden oluşan ve bir yaz dönümü arifesinde çoğunlukla mutfakta geçen oyun, Kont'un kızı Matmazel Julie, uşağı Jean ve aşçı Christene olmak üzere sadece üç karakter üzerine kuruludur. Soylu bir aileye mensup olan Matmazel Julie, hem sınıfsal hem de cinsiyet rollerinin getirdiği sınırlamanın dışına çıkmak isterken Jean ile önce sözlü flörtleşme olarak başlayan yakınlaşmasının cinsel bir boyut kazanması ile oyunun sonunda bir hipnoz sahnesi ile adeta trajik bir sona doğru sürüklenir. Gece ilerledikçe Julie ve Jean arasındaki ilişkinin biçembilime özgü söz edimi, konuşma sırası, dramatik ironi gibi sanatlar ışığında adeta bir güç savaşına dönüşümü çok daha katmanlı bir yol izlemektedir. Gecenin başında Julie'nin Kont'un kızı olarak üst tabakaya mensup oluşunun verdiği statü gücünü kullanarak üstünlük kurmaya çalışması Jean'in gittikçe otoriteyi eline Alan bir

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Jean's authoritarian rise which is in accordance with the rise of the sun. Therefore the aim of this study is to adopt a closer look on how the strength gained by social status or personal characteristics clash and change hands in the course of the play which could be revealed with reference to power in various forms as Miss Julie's social power over Jean because she is from upper class clashes with Jean's personal power over her as he is confident, proud and ambitious.

Key words: Stylistic, Power, Class, Sex, Strindberg, Distinction.

otoriteye boyun eğmesi ile son bulacaktır. Sınıfsal ve cinsiyet çatışmalarının yansira bu güç savaşında üst kattan mutfağa inen Julie'nin trajik düşüşü diğer yanda adeta sabahın ilk ışıklarında yükselen bir güneş gibi yerini Jean'in gücü eline alan bir yükselişe bırakır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışmanın amacı oyunda sosyal ve kişisel güçlerin çarpışmasına farklı bir açıdan bakarak üst sınıfa mensup Julie'nin bu statüden aldığı sosyal gücün alt sınıfa mensup Jean'in kendinden emin, kibirli ve hırslı doğasının verdiği kişisel bir güçle nasıl el değiştirdiğini gözler önüne sermektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Biçembilim, Güç, Sınıf, Cinsiyet, Strindberg, Farklılık.

Introduction

Miss Julie is a drama written in 1888 by Swedish playwright, novelist and short story writer August Strindberg. It remains the writer's most famous play combining the issues of sex, class roles and power struggles. *Miss Julie* is a one act play, set in a kitchen and consists of three characters named Miss Julie, Jean and Christene. A brief look on the play includes the young woman of the title who tries to escape the social norms and have a little fun, dance with the servants one of whom becomes a footman named Jean. However twenty-five year old heroine of the play, Miss Julie is the daughter of the Count and is revealed to have just broken off an engagement. Although she is raised by her mother like a man and instructed to enslave men, she cannot escape Jean's undeniable attractiveness and her desire to be with him. Over the course of the play, the flirtatious contest ends with Jean's convincing Miss Julie to commit suicide in a scene of hypnosis. By making use of stylistic features and discourse analysis, a closer look on how the strength gained by social status or personal characteristics clash and change hands in the course of the play could be revealed with reference to power in various forms as Miss Julie's power over Jean because she is from upper class clashes with Jean's power over her as he is confident and proud.

1. Julie in Power

The battle between the sexes has always been and still remains the most entertaining and absorbing of all literary and artistic subjects. August Strindberg presents it on stage more violently than any writer and it is foregrounded at the beginning of the novel. Raised by her late mother like a man, Julie displays a character of peculiarities or wildness as put forward by Jean right at the beginning of the play. The word "wild" (1963, 197) becomes a foregrounding element in the way of uncovering Julie as she seems like inherited the primitive passion of her mother and aristocratic tendencies of her father.

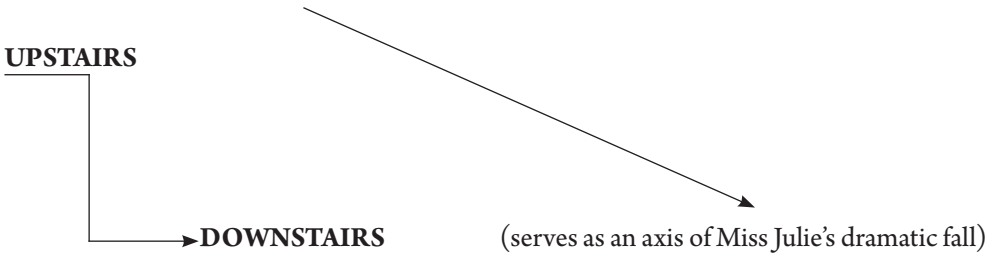
The play takes place in the kitchen of the Count's manor house on a Midsummer's Eve. Midsummer's Eve is a popular time of the year as it signifies drinking, dancing and singing. At that point it is possible to consider that Julie, with the influence and magic of that special occasion, acts in a non-conformist manner defying the social values expected from her as the daughter of the Count. So her behavior is internally deviant in the text and so markedly foregrounded. In that festive mood of the night and absence of her father, Julie lets herself free, seems like acting without proper thinking. On the other hand, in spite of his pride and extreme actions during the play, normally Jean is in awe and terrible fear of the Count, his master. Whenever he talks about the Count, he immediately takes a ready position as reflected in his words:

Jean. I only need to see his gloves lying on a table and I shrivel up. I only have to hear that bell ring and I shy like a frightened horse. I only have to look at his boots standing there so stiff and proud and I feel my spine bending. (1963, 216)

However the charm of the night and absence of the Count contribute him to act freely, have candid words and strong standing which could be another internal deviation helping to build a look on the shift of power relations in the play.

According to an old explanation, Midsummer's Eve is also a ritual symbolizing an axis linking the world of the living to the underworld. Similarly Julie begins her own life experience going from upstairs which is her life zone, to the downstairs which becomes the kitchen. In that unfamiliar zone she goes through a test which ultimately leads to her tragic doom. The fact that Miss Julie belongs to upper class as the daughter of a Count and Jean as a servant comes from lower class is an important detail in initiating the battle of power between them.

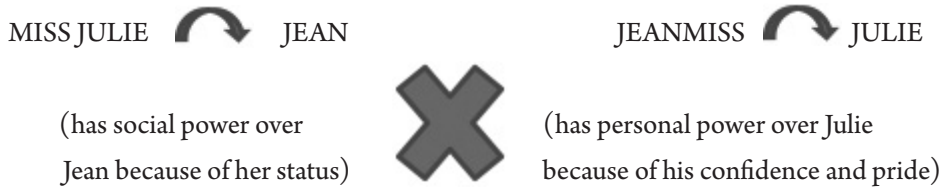
Figure 1: From Upstairs to the Kitchen



The play allows exploring how power relations between characters are indicated in the turn-taking and other features of conversational structure especially uncovering who is in control or how one builds up power over one another. At the beginning of the play, power relation in a conversation is determined by social statuses of the participants. Of many different kinds of power in dramatic texts, the power relation between Jean and Miss Julie is an example of social power. Miss Julie, who belongs to upper class as the daughter of a Count, employs social power over Jean who is a servant and comes from lower class. In the first half of the play the effects of that social power is felt in her way of treating Jean especially with acts of commanding. However in dramatic texts exceptions may occur because of clashes between two different kinds of power as Julie's social power over Jean clashes with Jean's personal

power of confidence and pride over Julie which is highlighted especially in the second half of the play.

Figure 2: The Exchange of Power



2. Speech Acts, Turn taking and Jean's Rise

Speech acts, presuppositions and conversational implicature are significant stylistic devices that are closely related to each other in a play. That is to say, 'Speech acts' are of importance since the characters not only utter words but also perform them while 'presuppositions' form a part of the preconditions for the felicitous production of speech acts" and conversational implicatures infer interpretation of the conversations within the frame of maxims (Short 145). Thus, observing speech acts, presuppositions and conversational implicatures in a verbal interaction give clue about the interactants and pave the way for making inferences about the relationship between them thus renders contextual inferences possible. In regards to speech acts, it is seen that they are mainly divided into three as "interrogative, imperative and declarative" in the grammatical structure level, in the speech act level they can change according to context. Thus, a declarative statement can sometimes be a 'command' which depends on the contextual conditions that is called 'felicity conditions'. At the beginning of the play Julie seems in command of the situation against Jean in that she is the one giving orders and Jean is in the position of obedience.

Jean. [polite and charming]. Are you ladies sharing secrets?

Miss Julie. [flipping her handkerchief in his face]. Don't be nose-y!(1963, 200)

... ..

Miss Julie. [flirting with him]. Don't be impudent! And don't tell me you're an expert on perfumes, too. I know you're an expert dancer.-No, don't look! Go away!(1963, 201)

It is observed that the way Miss Julie treats the servant Jean includes heavy use of commands. But it is also worth noting that the pattern of negative structures in many of those commands increases the feeling that she treats him like an infant and makes her superiority felt. This is because negative commands are a common feature of parent-child interaction. In such interaction the child is the inferior one and is bound to obey. In return of that imperative act, Jean's politeness is a remarkable element that hints the power relation in the verbal interaction. At this early stage of the play, the stage direction emphasizes Jean's polite use of language, appropriate terms of address which will be replaced by a domineering attitude.

Miss Julie..... Jean, come and dance a schottische with me.

Jean. [hesitating]. I hope you don't think I'm being rude, but I've already promised this dance to Christine. (1963, 201)

Although Julie continues her commanding acts, Jean is more hesitant trying hard not to be misunderstood which is reflected in his apologetic words. However towards the middle of the play, it is observed in the following extract how the roles have the potential to change between Miss Julie and Jean as they start drinking and talking in the kitchen while Christine is sleeping.

Jean. Take my advice, Miss Julie, go up to your room.

Miss Julie. When did you start giving me orders? (1963, 213)

It is even questioned by Julie herself as she cannot hide her bewilderment that Jean dares to talk to her in such a tone. However as the play proceeds, Jean manages to turn the situation around and gain power over Julie with his native wit and self-confidence gradually asserting itself in verbal battles.

Looking at the conversational behavior of the play Jean has the most turns. Turn taking process, which refers to a participant's "taking an opportunity to speak" within an interaction (Herman 19), is one of the indissoluble elements of drama since plays are based on conversations of dramatis personae. There are three participants in the conversation but the turn-distribution between Miss Julie and Jean seems pretty even. While Miss Julie has the upper hand at the beginning of the play, Jean manages to take control and has the conversational dominance in general statistics in the end.

Table 1: Turntaking Statistics

	Number of turns
JEAN	254
MISS JULIE	217
CHRISTENE	65

As the dream world brought by the Midsummer's Eve comes to an end with the rise of the sun, Jean starts to possess more authority over Julie and begins his own rise. It is implied that the intercourse between them is beyond what a conscious Julie can cope with and as the daughter of the Count, humiliation and bad reputation that it would cause terrifies her to such an extent that she tries to convince Jean to elope together.

Miss Julie [in anguish]. My God, what are you? Don't you have any feelings?

Jean. Feelings? Nobody's got more feelings than I have. But I have learned how to control them.

Miss Julie. A few minutes ago you were kissing my shoe- and now-!

Jean. Go away, travel, get away from here. (1963, 217)

In the light of what precedes it, this sequence marks an abrupt turn-around as Jean is endorsed with stronger lines. Jean, seemingly confident and acting as if his role is ratified by authority shifts the balance of power and manages to turn Julie into a subversive woman. The complex power struggle between Miss Julie and Jean is also embellished with the element of dramatic irony in some cases. In the following extract which mirrors Julie's complete submission to Jean is not only an exertion of dramatic irony but also an important point contributing to Miss Julie's fall.

Miss Julie. She had taught me to distrust and hate all men- you've heard how she hated men- I swore to her that I'd never be slave to any man. (1963, 225)

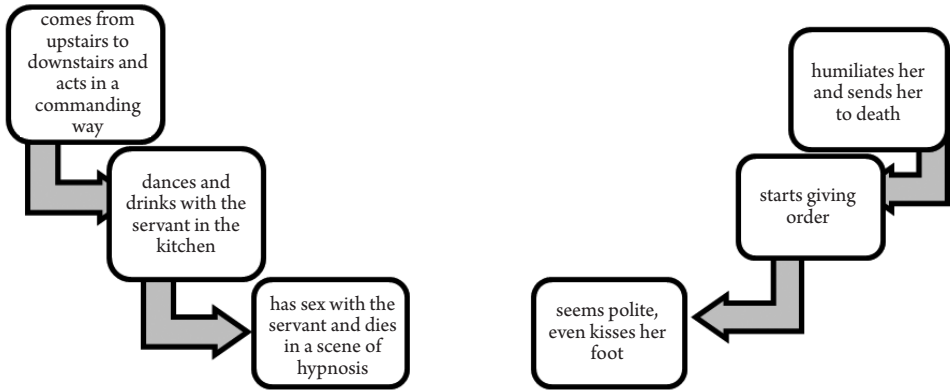
Although she displays a disregard for class and gender conventions by associating with the servants, she actually confesses how she was raised by her mother not to be a slave to any man. Given her upbringing, Julie is in a manner of hating men as her mother used to do. The best example of that can be seen in the incident with her fiancé as he abandons Julie after she attempts to train him, making him jump over a whip in the barnyard as she beats him at the beginning of the play. This interesting and bizarre detail becomes a sign pointing to her exertion of enslaving men as in another example she makes Jean kneel and kiss her foot.

However the readers or the audience are quite aware that she ironically becomes a slave to Jean in the end.

Miss Julie. Can't repent, can't run away, can't stay, can't live... can't die. Help me Jean. Command me, and I'll obey like a dog. (1963, 241)

Besides commanding attitudes and despite the influence of her mother to disgust men, Julie allows herself to be seduced by her father's servant Jean. By sleeping with Jean, Julie degrades herself and is confronted with a sin and embarrassment. She begs Jean to help her, saying she will obey him like a dog would if he saves her from father's disgrace. After making love, her position is compromised and she becomes totally compliant. As the night ends and things turn to normal she realizes that she is a fallen woman with the burden of a sin and submitted to the total authority of a servant who manages his own rise against her. Strindberg provides the readers with a dramatic text containing rich indications of power based on different levels as fear of facing shame after having sex with a servant prevails and leaves death as the only sensible solution for Julie.

Figure 3: Fall of Miss Julie and Rise of Jean



Conclusion

Considered by many to be one of the leading manifestos on naturalism in theater, *Miss Julie* is a rich and complex story especially with its two main characters who are motivated by a variety of emotions and social constraints. In this regard, when the discourses of the characters are analyzed within the frame of stylistic analysis techniques such as speech acts, dramatic irony, turn taking mechanism and politeness, it is seen that characters' discourses

change in accordance with the participants of the conversation. Jean might be appearing as the voice of reason who keeps warning Julie of disastrous consequences that both of them would have to face if she gets intimate with him who is much inferior to her in the class hierarchy. Nevertheless paying no heed to his warnings, Miss Julie urges Jean and finds herself in the role of mistress and command of him. The verbal interactions between Miss Julie and Jean bear a clash of Miss Julie's social power with Jean's personal power. As the daughter of the Count, Julie's status is higher and she reflects that in her speech acts of commanding toward the servant Jean who seems polite and obedient at the beginning. Nevertheless, as exemplified by dramatic irony or dominance of turn taking, Jean turns the situation around, builds an authority over Miss Julie with his personal power endorsed by his self-assurance. Although there is a general inclination to view the play as one of the manifestos of class and gender conflict accompanied by a look on Julie's psychological situation, within a stylistic analysis, an emphasis could be put on the exchange of powers between Julie and Jean and in what ways they were comprised of not only their status but also character.

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