**MISS JULIE
[Fröken Julie]
A Naturalistic Tragedy
(1888)**

**Extracted from**

**Miss Julie
and Other Plays**

*Translated with an Introduction and Notes by*
MICHAEL ROBINSON

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**PREFACE**

Like art in general, the theatre has long seemed to me a *Biblia pauperum*,\* a Bible in pictures for those who cannot read what is written or printed, and the dramatist a lay preacher who peddles the ideas of the day in a popular form, so popular that the middle classes which form the bulk of the audience can, without too much mental effort, understand what is going on. That is why the theatre has always been an elementary school for the young, the semi-educated, and women, who still retain the primitive capacity for deceiving themselves or for letting themselves be deceived, that is, for succumbing to illusions and to the hypnotic suggestions of the author. Nowadays, therefore, when the rudimentary and undeveloped kind of thinking that takes the form of fantasy appears to be evolving into reflection, investigation, and analysis, it seems to me that the theatre, like religion, is about to be discarded as a dying form of art, which we lack the necessary preconditions to enjoy. This supposition is supported by the serious theatrical crisis now prevailing throughout Europe, and especially by the fact that in England and Germany, those cultural heartlands which have nurtured the greatest thinkers of our age, the drama is dead, along with most of the other fine arts.

Again, in other countries people have believed in the possibility of creating a new drama by filling the old forms with new contents; but this approach has failed, partly because there has not yet been time to popularize the new ideas, so the public has not been able to understand what was involved; partly because party differences have so inflamed emotions that pure, dispassionate enjoyment has become impossible in a situation where people's innermost thoughts have been challenged and an applauding or whistling majority has brought pressure to bear on them as openly as it can do in a theatre; and partly because we have not yet found the new form for the new content, and the new wine has burst the old bottles.

In the following play I have not tried to accomplish anything new, for that is impossible, but merely to modernize the form according to what I believe are the demands a contemporary audience would make of this art. To that end I have chosen, or let myself be moved by, a theme that may be said to lie outside current party strife, for the problem of rising or falling on the social ladder, of higher or lower, better or worse, man or woman is, has been, and always will be of lasting interest. When I took this theme from a real incident\* that I heard about some years ago, it seemed to me a suitable subject for a tragedy, not least because of the deep impression it made on me; for it still strikes us as tragic to see someone favoured by fortune go under, and even more to see a whole family die out. But the time may come when we shall have become so highly developed, so enlightened, that we shall be able to look with indifference at the brutal, cynical, heartless drama that life presents, when we shall have laid aside those inferior, unreliable instruments of thought called feelings, which will become superfluous and harmful once our organs of judgement have matured. The fact that the heroine arouses our pity merely depends on our weakness in not being able to resist the fear that the same fate might overtake us. A highly sensitive spectator may still not feel that such pity is enough, while the man with faith in the future will probably insist on some positive proposals to remedy the evil, some kind of programme, in other words. But in the first place there is no such thing as absolute evil, for after all, if one family falls another now has the good fortune to rise, and this alternate rising and falling is one of life's greatest pleasures, since happiness is only relative. And of the man with a programme who wants to remedy the unpleasant fact that the bird of prey eats the dove and lice eat the bird of prey, I would ask: why should it be remedied? Life is not so idiotically mathematical that only the big eat the small; it is just as common for a bee to kill a lion or at least to drive it mad.

If my tragedy makes a tragic impression on many people, that is their fault. When we become as strong as the first French revolutionaries, we shall feel as much unqualified pleasure and relief at seeing the thinning out in our royal parks of rotten, superannuated trees, which have stood too long in the way of others with just as much right to their time in the sun, as it does to see an incurably ill man finally die. Recently, my tragedy The Father was criticized for being so tragic, as though tragedies were supposed to be merry.\* One also hears pretentious talk about the joy of life,\* and theatre managers commission farces as though this joy of life lay in behaving stupidly and depicting people as if they were all afflicted with St Vitus' dance or congenital idiocy.\* I find the joy of life in its cruel and powerful struggles, and my enjoyment comes from getting to know something, from learning something. That is why I have chosen an unusual case, but an instructive one, an exception, in other words, but an important exception that proves the rule, even though it may offend those who love the commonplace. What will also bother simple minds is that my motivation of the action is not simple, and that there is not a single point of view. Every event in life--and this is a fairly new discovery!--is usually the result of a whole series of more or less deepseated motives, but the spectator usually selects the one that he most easily understands or that best flatters his powers of judgement. Someone commits suicide. 'Business worries', says the business man. 'Unrequited love', say the ladies. 'Physical illness', says the sick man, 'Shattered hopes', says the failure. But it may well be that the motive lay in all of these things, or in none of them, and that the dead man concealed his real motive by emphasizing quite a different one that shed the best possible light on his memory.

I have motivated Miss Julie's tragic fate with an abundance of circumstances: her mother's 'bad' basic instincts; her father's improper bringing-up of the girl; her own nature and the influence her fiancé's suggestions had on her weak, degenerate brain; also, and more immediately: the festive atmosphere of Midsummer Night; her father's absence; her period; her preoccupation with animals; the intoxicating effect of the dance; the light summer night; the powerful aphrodisiac influence of the flowers; and finally chance that drives these two people together in a room apart, plus the boldness of the aroused man.

So my treatment has not been one-sidedly physiological nor obsessively psychological. I have not attributed everything to what she inherited from her mother nor put the whole blame on her period, nor just settled for 'immorality', nor merely preached morality--lacking a priest, I've left that to the cook!

I flatter myself that this multiplicity of motives is in tune with the times. And if others have anticipated me in this, then I flatter myself that I am not alone in my paradoxes, as all discoveries are called.

As regards characterization, I have made my figures fairly 'characterless' for the following reasons:

Over the years the word 'character' has taken on many meanings. Originally it no doubt meant the dominant trait in a person's soulcomplex, and was confused with temperament. Later it became the middle-class expression for an automaton, so that an individual whose nature had once and for all set firm or adapted to a certain role in life, who had stopped growing, in short, was called a character, whereas someone who goes on developing, the skilful navigator on the river of life who does not sail with cleated sheets but tacks with every change in the wind in order to luff again, was called characterless. In a derogatory sense, of course, because he was so hard to catch, classify, and keep track of. This bourgeois concept of the immobility of the soul was transferred to the stage, which has always been dominated by the bourgeoisie. There a character became a man who was fixed and set, who invariably appeared drunk or comical or sad; and all that was needed to characterize him was to give him a physical defect, a club-foot, a wooden leg, a red nose, or some continually repeated phrase such as 'That's capital'\* or ' Barkis is wilfin',\* etc. This elementary way of viewing people is still to be found in the great Molière. Harpagon\* is merely a miser, although he could have been both a miser and an excellent financier, a splendid father, and a good citizen; and even worse, his 'defect' is extremely advantageous to his daughter and his son-in-law, who are his heirs and therefore ought not to criticize him even if they do have to wait a while before jumping into bed together. So I do not believe in simple stage characters, and the summary judgements that authors pass on people--this one is stupid, that one brutal, this one jealous, that one mean--ought to be challenged by naturalists, who know how richly complicated the soul is, and who are aware that 'vice' has a reverse side, which is very much like virtue.

As modern characters, living in an age of transition more urgently hysterical at any rate than the one that preceded it, I have depicted the figures in my play as more split and vacillating, a mixture of the old and the new, and it seems to me not improbable that modern ideas may also have permeated down by way of newspapers and kitchen talk to the level of the servants. That is why the valet belches forth certain modern ideas from within his inherited slave's soul. And I would remind those who take exception to the characters in our modern plays talking Darwinism,\* while holding up Shakespeare to our attention as a model, that the gravedigger in Hamlet talks the then-fashionable philosophy of Giordano Bruno\* ( Bacon),\* which is even more improbable since the means of disseminating ideas were fewer then than now. Besides, the fact of the matter is, 'Darwinism' has existed in every age, ever since Moses's successive history of creation from the lower animals up to man; it is just that we have discovered and formulated it now!

My souls (characters) are conglomerates of past and present stages of culture, bits out of books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, torn shreds of once fine clothing now turned to rags, exactly as the human soul is patched together, and I have also provided a little evolutionary history by letting the weaker repeat words stolen from the stronger, and allowed these souls to get 'ideas', or suggestions as they are called, from one another, from the milieu (the death of the siskin), and from objects (the razor). I have also facilitated Gedankenübertragung\* via an inanimate medium (the Count's boots, the bell). Finally, I have made use of 'waking suggestion',\* a variation of hypnotic suggestion, which is now so well known and popularized that it cannot arouse the ridicule or scepticism it would have done in Mesmer's time.\*

Miss Julie is a modern character which does not mean that the man-hating half-woman has not existed in every age, just that she has now been discovered, has come out into the open and made herself heard. Victim of a superstition (one that has seized even stronger minds) that woman, this stunted form of human being who stands between man, the lord of creation, the creator of culture, [and the child],\* is meant to be the equal of man or could ever be, she involves herself in an absurd struggle in which she falls. Absurd because a stunted form, governed by the laws of propagation, will always be born stunted and can never catch up with the one in the lead, according to the formula: A (the man) and B (the woman) start from the same point C; A (the man) with a speed of, let us say, 100 and B (the woman) with a speed of 60. Now, the question is, when will B catch up with A?--Answer: Never! Neither with the help of equal education, equal voting rights, disarmament, or temperance--no more than two parallel lines can ever meet and cross.

The half-woman is a type who thrusts herself forward and sells herself nowadays for power, decorations, honours, or diplomas as formerly she used to do for money. She is synonymous with degeneration. It is not a sound species for it does not last, but unfortunately it can propagate itself and its misery in the following generation; and degenerate men seem unconsciously to select their mates among them so that they increase in number and produce creatures of uncertain sex for whom life is a torment. Fortunately, however, they succumb, either because they are out of harmony with reality or because their repressed instincts erupt uncontrollably or because their hopes of attaining equality with men are crushed. The type is tragic, offering the spectacle of a desperate struggle against nature, a tragic legacy of Romanticism which is now being dissipated by Naturalism, the only aim of which is happiness. And happiness means strong and sound species. But Miss Julie is also a relic of the old warrior nobility that is now giving way to the new aristocracy of nerve and brain; a victim of the discord which a mother's 'crime' has implanted in a family; a victim of the errors of an age, of circumstances, and of her own deficient constitution, which together form the equivalent of the old-fashioned concept of Fate or Universal Law. The naturalist has erased guilt along with God, but he cannot erase the consequences of an action--punishment, prison, or the fear of it--for the simple reason that these consequences remain, whether or not he acquits the individual. For an injured party is less forbearing than those who have not been harmed may be, and even if her father found compelling reasons not to seek his revenge, his daughter would wreak vengeance on herself, as she does here, because of her innate or acquired sense of honour which the upper classes inherit-- from where? From barbarism, from their original Aryan home,\* from the chivalry of the Middle Ages, all of which is very beautiful, but a real disadvantage nowadays where the preservation of the species is concerned. It is the nobleman's harakiri, the inner law of conscience which makes a Japanese slit open his own stomach when someone insults him, and which survives in modified form in that privilege of the nobility, the duel. That is why Jean, the servant, lives, but Miss Julie, who cannot five without honour, does not. The slave has this advantage over the earl, he lacks this fatal preoccupation with honour, and there is in all of us Aryans a little of the nobleman or Don Quixote,\* which means that we sympathize with the suicide who has committed a dishonourable act and thereby lost his honour, and we are noblemen enough to suffer when we see the mighty fallen and reduced to a useless corpse, yes, even if the fallen should rise again and make amends through an honourable act. The servant Jean is the type who founds a species, someone in whom the process of differentiation may be observed. He was a poor tied-worker's son\* and has now brought himself up to be a future nobleman. He has been quick to learn, has finely developed senses (smell, taste, sight) and an eye for beauty. He has already come up in the world, and is strong enough not to be concerned about exploiting other people. He is already a stranger in his environment, which he despises as stages in a past he has put behind him, and which he fears and flees, because people there know his secrets, spy out his intentions, regard his rise with envy, and look forward to his fall with pleasure. Hence his divided, indecisive character, wavering between sympathy for those in high positions and hatred for those who occupy them. He calls himself an aristocrat and has learnt the secrets of good society, is polished on the surface but coarse underneath, and already wears a frock coat with style, although there is no guarantee that the body beneath it is clean.

He respects Miss Julie but is afraid of Kristin because she knows his dangerous secrets, and he is sufficiently callous not to allow the events of the night to interfere with his future plans. With the brutality of a slave and the indifference of a master he can look at blood without fainting, and shake off misfortune without further, ado. That is why he escapes from the struggle unscathed and will probably end up the proprietor of a hotel; and even if he does not become a Romanian count, his son will probably go to university and possibly become a government official.

Moreover, the information he gives about life as the lower classes see it from below is quite important--when he speaks the truth, that is, which he does not often do, for he tends to say what is to his own advantage rather than what is true. When Miss Julie supposes that everyone in the lower classes finds the pressure from above oppressive, Jean naturally agrees since his intention is to gain sympathy, but he immediately corrects himself when he sees the advantage of distinguishing himself from the common herd.

Apart from the fact that Jean is rising in the world, he is also superior to Miss Julie in that he is a man. Sexually he is the aristoctat because of his masculine strength, his more finely developed senses, and his ability to take the initiative. His inferiority arises mainly from the social milieu in which he temporarily finds himself and which he will probably discard along with his livery.

His slave mentality expresses itself in his respect for the Count (the boots) and his religious superstition; but he respects the Count mainly as the occupant of the high position that he covets; and this respect remains even when he has conquered the daughter of the house and seen how empty that pretty shell is.

I do not believe there can be any love in a 'higher' sense between two such different natures, so I let Miss Julie imagine she loves him as a means of protecting or excusing herself; and I let Jean suppose he could fall in love with her if his social circumstances were different. I suspect that love is rather like the hyacinth, which has to put its roots down into the darkness before it can produce a strong flower. Here it shoots up, blooms, and goes to seed all in a moment, and that is why it dies so quickly.

Kristin, finally, is a female slave. Standing over the stove all day has made her subservient and dull; like an animal her hypocrisy is unconscious and she overflows with morality and religion, which serve as cloaks and scapegoats for her sins whereas a stronger character would have no need of them because he could bear his guilt himself or explain it away. She goes to church to unload her household thefts onto Jesus casually and deftly, and to recharge herself with a new dose of innocence.

Moreover, she is a minor character, and therefore my intention was only to sketch her in as I did the Pastor and the Doctor in The Father, where I just wanted to depict ordinary people as country parsons and provincial doctors usually are. And if some people have found my minor characters abstract,\* that is because ordinary people are to some extent abstract when working; which is to say, they lack individuality and show only one side of themselves while performing their tasks, and as long as the spectator feels no need to see them from several sides, my abstract depiction will probably suffice.

Finally, where the dialogue is concerned I have somewhat broken with tradition by not making my characters catechists who sit around asking stupid questions in order to elicit a witty reply. I have avoided the symmetrical, mathematical artificiality of French dialogue and allowed my characters' brains to work irregularly as they do in real life, where no subject is ever entirely exhausted before one mind discovers by chance in another mind a cog in which to engage. For that reason the dialogue also wanders, providing itself in the opening scenes with material that is later reworked, taken up, repeated, expanded, and developed, like the theme in a musical composition.

The action is sufficiently fecund, and since it really concerns only two people I have restricted myself to them, introducing only one minor character, the cook, and letting the father's unhappy spirit hover above and behind it all. I have done this because it seems to me that what most interests people today is the psychological process; our inquiring minds are no longer satisfied with simply seeing something happen, we want to know how it happened. We want to see the strings, look at the machinery, examine the double-bottomed box, try the magic ring to find the seam, and examine the cards to discover how they are marked.

In this regard I have had in mind the monographic novels of the Goncourt brothers,\* which have attracted me more than anything else in contemporary literature.

As for the technical aspects of the composition, I have, by way of experiment, eliminated all act divisions. I have done this because it seems to me that our declining susceptibility to illusion would possibly be disturbed by intervals, during which the spectator has time to reflect and thereby escape from the suggestive influence of the dramatist-hypnotist. My play probably runs for about an hour and a half, and since people can listen to a lecture, a sermon, or a conference session for that length of time or even longer, I imagine that a ninety-minute play should not exhaust them. I attempted this concentrated form as long ago as 1872, in one of my first attempts at drama, The Outlaw,\* but with scant success. I had written the piece in five acts, but when it was finished I noticed what a disjointed and disturbing effect it had. I burned it and from the ashes arose a single, long, carefully worked-out act of fifty printed pages, which played for a full hour. Consequently the form is not new, though it seems to be my speciality, and current changes in taste may well have made it timely. In due course I would hope to have an audience so educated that it could sit through a single act lasting an entire evening, but this will require some preliminary experimentation. Meanwhile, in order to provide resting places for the audience and the actors without breaking the illusion for the audience I have used three art forms that belong to the drama, namely the monologue, mime,\* and ballet, all of which were part of classical tragedy, monody\* having become monologue and the chorus, ballet.

Nowadays our realists have banished the monologue as implausible, but given appropriate motivation it becomes plausible, and I can therefore use it to advantage. It is perfectly plausible for a speaker to walk up and down alone in his room reading his speech aloud, that an actor should run through his role aloud, a servant girl talk to her cat, a mother prattle to her child, an old maid chatter to her parrot, or a sleeper talk in his sleep. And in order to give the actor a chance, for once, to work on his own and to escape for a moment from the hectoring of an author, I have not written out the monologues in detail but simply suggested them. For, in so far as it does not influence the action, it is quite immaterial what is said while asleep or to the cat, and a talented actor who is absorbed in the situation and mood of the play can probably improvise better than the author, who cannot calculate in advance just how much needs to be said, or for how long, before the theatrical illusion is broken.

As we know, some Italian theatres have returned to improvisation,\* producing actors who are creative in their own right, although in accordance with the author's intentions. This could really be a step forward or a fertile, new form of art that may well deserve the name creative.

Where a monologue would be implausible, I have resorted to mime, and here I leave the actor even greater freedom to create-- and so win independent acclaim. But in order not to try the audience beyond its limits, I have let the music--well-motivated by the Midsummer dance, of course--exert its beguiling power during the silent action, and I would ask the musical director to select this music with great care so that the wrong associations are not aroused by recollections of the latest operettas or dance tunes or by the use of ultra-ethnographic folk music.

I could not have substituted a so-called crowd scene for the ballet I have introduced because crowd scenes are always badly acted, with a pack of simpering idiots seeking to use the occasion to show off and so destroy the illusion. Since ordinary people do not improvise their malicious remarks but use ready-made material that can be given a double meaning, I have not composed a malicious song but taken a little-known singing game\* which I noted down myself in the neighbourhood of Stockholm. The words do not hit home precisely, but that is the intention, for the cunning (weakness) of the slave does not permit him to attack directly. So: no speaking buffoons in a serious play, no coarse smirking over a situation that puts the lid on a family's coffin.

As for the scenery, I have borrowed the asymmetry and cropped framing of impressionist painting,\* and believe I have thereby succeeded in strengthening the illusion; for not being able to see the whole room or all the furniture leaves us free to conjecture, that is, our imagination is set in motion and we complete the picture ourselves. This also means that I have avoided those tiresome exits through doors, particularly stage doors that are made of canvas and sway at the slightest touch; they do not even permit an angry father to express his anger after a bad dinner by going out and slamming the door behind him 'so the whole house shakes'. (In the theatre it sways!) I have likewise restricted myself to a single set, both to allow the characters time to merge with their milieu and to break with the custom of expensive scenery. But when there is only a single set, one is entitled to demand that it be realistic. Yet nothing is more difficult than to get a room on stage to resemble a real room, no matter how easy the scene-painter finds erupting volcanoes and waterfalls. Even if the walls do have to be of canvas, it is surely time to stop painting shelves and kitchen utensils on them. There are so many other stage conventions in which we are asked to believe that we might be spared the effort of believing in painted saucepans.\*

I have placed the rear wall and the table at an angle so that the actors have to play face on or in half profile when they are seated opposite each other at the table. In a production of Aida\* I have seen an angled backdrop which led the eye out into an unknown perspective, nor did it give the impression of having been put there simply to protest the boredom of straight lines.

Another perhaps desirable innovation would be the removal of the footlights. I understand that the purpose of lighting from below is to make the actors' faces fatter, but I would like to ask: why all actors have to have fat faces? Does not this underlighting obliterate a great many features in the lower parts of the face, especially around the jaws, distort the shape of the nose, and cast shadows over the eyes? Even if this is not the case, one thing is certain: it hurts the actors' eyes, so that their full expressiveness is lost, for footlights strike the retina in places that are normally protected (except in sailors, who cannot avoid seeing the sun reflected in water), and therefore we seldom see any other play of the eyes except crude glances either to the side or up to the balcony, when the white of the eye is visible. This probably also accounts for the tiresome way that actresses in particular have of fluttering their eyelashes. And when anyone on stage wants to speak with the eyes, the actor has sadly no alternative but to look straight at the audience, with which he or she then enters into direct contact outside the frame of the set--a bad habit rightly or wrongly called 'counting the house'.

Would not sufficiently strong side lighting (using parabolic reflectors or something similar) give the actor this new resource, of strengthening his facial expression by means of the face's greatest asset: the play of the eyes?

I have hardly any illusions about getting the actor to play for the audience and not with it, although this would be desirable. Nor do I dream of seeing the full back of an actor\* throughout an important scene, but I do fervently wish that vital scenes should not be performed next to the prompter's box, as duets designed to elicit applause, but rather located to that part of the stage the action dictates. So, no revolutions, simply some small modifications, for to turn the stage into a room with the fourth wall removed and some of the furniture consequently facing away from the audience, would probably have a distracting effect, at least for the present.

When it comes to a word about make-up I dare not hope to be heard by the ladies, who would rather be beautiful than truthful. But the actor really might consider whether it is to his advantage to paint his face with an abstract character that will sit there like a mask. Picture an actor who gives himself a pronounced choleric expression by drawing a line with soot between his eyes, and suppose that, in spite of being in so permanently enraged a state, he needs to smile on a certain line. What a horrible grimace that would be! And how can the old man get the false forehead of his wig to wrinkle with anger when it is as smooth as a billiard ball?

In a modern psychological drama, where the subtlest movements of the soul should be mirrored more in the face than in gestures and sounds, it would probably be best to experiment with strong side lighting on a small stage and with actors wearing no make-up, or at least a bare minimum.

If we could then dispense with the visible orchestra\* with its distracting lights and faces turned towards the audience; if we could have the stalls raised so that the spectator's eyes were on a line higher than the actor's knees; if we could get rid of the private proscenium boxes with their giggling drinkers and diners; if we could have complete darkness in the auditorium;\* and finally, and most importantly, if we had a small stage and a small auditorium, then perhaps a new drama might arise, and the theatre would at least be a place where educated people might once again enjoy themselves. While waiting for such a theatre, we shall just have to go on writing for our desk drawers, preparing the repertoire whose time will come.

I have made an attempt! If it fails, there will surely be time to try again!