

RESPONSES TO AUGUST STRINDBERG'S *MISS JULIE* IN SLOVENIA

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Abstract

Miss Julie (*Fröken Julie*) is one of August Strindberg's most popular and well-known plays. Today, almost 120 years after its first appearance, what Strindberg called the "first naturalistic tragedy in Swedish drama" is still being staged worldwide, with Slovenia being no exception. This article examines the critical response to *Miss Julie* staged in Slovene professional theatres from its first appearance in 1921 to its latest in 2008. It aims to establish to what extent critics' attitude towards the play and the author have changed over a time span of ninety years.

INTRODUCTION

The body of the article studies the critical response to productions of *Miss Julie* in Slovenia from its first appearance in 1921 to its latest in 2008. The sources of the reviews examined are the leading Slovene national dailies and in some cases local papers and magazines. The productions that have been taken into consideration were in most cases performed by institutional professional theatres and recorded in *Repertoar slovenskih gledališč. 1867 – 1967* (A Repertoire of Slovene Theatres. 1867 – 1967), *Dokumenti slovenskega gledališkega muzeja* (Documents of the Slovene Theatre Museum), published every five years, and *Slovenski gledališki letopis* (the *Slovene Theatre Annual*), all published by Slovenski gledališki muzej (the Slovene Theatre Museum)¹.

Miss Julie (*Fröken Julie*) was written in 1888 and, together with *The Father* (*Fadren*), it is one of Strindberg's major dramas. Strindberg called *Miss Julie* the "first Naturalistic Tragedy in Swedish Drama" (Törnqvist & Steene 2007: 62) and in a letter to his publisher Carl Otto Bonnier correctly predicted the future success of the play: "'*Ceci daterat!*' = this play will go down to the annals" (ibid.).

The subject of the play is the seduction of Miss Julie, the count's daughter, by the valet Jean, or as one might equally well put it, the seduction of Jean by Miss Julie. The action takes place one midsummer's eve in the kitchen of the count's house; Kristin the cook, and Jean's fiancé, is the only other character. After the seduction Julie sees her

¹ In the bibliographical compilations of the Slovene Theatre Museum the productions of the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (Akademija za gledališče, radio, film in televizijo) are included selectively. Consequently, some of the productions of *Miss Julie* at the Academy have been left out in this study, together with the productions of non-professional theatres or theatre groups.

terrible mistake and orders Jean to hypnotize her, so that she may go out with his razor in her hands and commit suicide.

Bonnier rejected the play because he deemed it too controversial. Strindberg was in fact too direct – the public was not yet ready for an open debate on sexuality on stage. After much trouble Strindberg eventually managed to have the play published by his old publisher Seligmann (the publisher of his breakthrough novel *The red room* [*Röda rummet*, 1879]), but the author had to compromise by allowing some changes to the text.

INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS OF *MISS JULIE*

At the time of its publication there was no theatre prepared to stage *Miss Julie*. Consequently, Strindberg decided to establish his own theatre, having in mind André Antoine's Théâtre Libre in Paris. On November 14, 1888, he started the short and turbulent life of the 'Skandinavisk Försöksteater' ('Scandinavian Experimental Theatre' later renamed 'Strindbergs Försöksteater' – 'Strindberg's Experimental Theatre')² in Copenhagen. Strindberg's wife, Siri von Essen, would be the theatre's prima donna and play Julie. However, one day before the planned premiere (March 2, 1889) the play was banned by the censors, which was a result of the brutal campaign towards Strindberg led by moralistic witch-hunters in Swedish and Danish newspapers. The play was performed on March 9, and it marked the end of Strindberg's experimental theatre. On March 14, *Miss Julie* was performed privately in the Copenhagen University Students' Union and two days later the performance was repeated in Malmö. Siri von Essen had the lead role, but according to Ollén (1986: 133) her performance was quite flat.

After the premiere in Copenhagen, the next theatre group that dared to perform *Miss Julie* was Freie Bühne in Berlin. The performance took place at the Residenztheater in 1892 and Ollén says that the critics' response was "predominantly positive" (Ollén 1986: 134). From 1902 a great number of stagings began to take place in Germany, among others Max Reinhardt's, who "had begun to show his lion claws as director and theatre leader at *Kleines Theater*" (ibid.)³.

In France the curtain went up for *Miss Julie* in 1893 at the Théâtre Libre itself. With this performance Strindberg's wish to become the first Swedish playwright staged in Paris came true. According to Ollén (1986: 144) "[t]he reviewers were bewildered and astounded but the general opinion was that the play was too pungent even for the Théâtre Libre"⁴.

The first staging of *Miss Julie* in the U.S. took place in New York in 1905, though the performance was in Russian. The English version found its way onto the American stage in 1913.

The British saw *Miss Julie* for the first time in 1912, at The Little Theatre in London. Ollén reports on the first reception:

² Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

³ "[...] som på *Kleines Theater* hade börjat visa lejonklon som regissör och teaterledare."

⁴ "Recensenterna var omtumlade och häpna men tyckte i allmänhet att det var en pjäs i fränaste laget även för Théâtre Libre."

[...] the critical response was, with some exceptions, quite unappreciative and Strindberg's view of life was called 'distorted and a waste of vital imaginative power'. The *Daily Telegraph* opined that the play 'proved with distressing strength that it is possible to be very unpleasant and yet remain boring' (Ollén 1986: 150)⁵.

In Sweden the play was boycotted for sixteen years. Only after all the productions across Europe were the Swedes ready to welcome *Julie* in 1904. However, the play was not staged in the capital Stockholm but in Uppsala and only as a private performance. In 1906 *Julie* came to Stockholm and since then the play has been popular and staged an enormous number of times. Ollén provides as an example the actor Olof Hillberg, who in the period 1922 – 1938 played in *Miss Julie* no less than 730 times. The play fascinated many Swedish, but also other renowned actors, theatre and film directors (such as Ingmar Bergman, who at the Residenztheater in München interpreted the play as a triangle drama in 1981), choreographers and musicians. As a result, the public could witness a number of theatre, film, radio and TV versions. *Miss Julie* entered opera houses and became ballet. In Sweden the play was even performed for the deaf in sign language (1981).

In the first years the general response to *Miss Julie* was quite negative because the public was not yet ready for such "boldness" on stage. In the course of time, however, the attitude towards *Miss Julie* changed and a positive critical response began to predominate. The reason for this, paraphrasing Ollén (1986: 132), was the change of sexual morality in the late 1920s in accordance with Freud and the new psychology. The times had caught up and unconscious instincts started to be a fashionable subject. Later, the sexual component of the play was toned down, only to become emphasized again in the 1960s. The class conflict was another motif in which the directors and the spectators gradually lost interest. What never changed was the universality of the play, the telling depiction of the characters and the "living humanity that all three actors conveyed in the play" (Ollén 1986: 133)⁶. Ollén (1986: 128) states that after the first critical response emphasizing the inadequacy of the play, the negative criticism mostly dealt with the final scene: Julie's suicide under hypnosis.

SLOVENE STUDIES ON STRINDBERG

Despite the rather frequent productions of Strindberg's plays in Slovenia, studies on the author have been rather scattered. A very valuable source of information regarding Slovene critics dealing with Strindberg is Tomazin's MA thesis from 1995, in which she studies the reception of Strindberg, focusing on the Slovene literary period of Modernism. Considering this, only the most important names are given in this study.

According to Tomazin (1995: 103), the first information for the Slovene public about Strindberg was provided by Josip Stritar in an 1894 Vienna lecture that was

⁵ "Kritiken var med något undantag mycket oförstående, man kallade Strindbergs livssyn "distorted and a waste of vital imaginative power". Daily Telegraph menade, att pjäsen bevisade med smärtsam styrka, att det är möjligt att vara mycket obehaglig och likväl förbli tråkig."

⁶ "[...] den levande mänsklighet som alla tre aktörerna i dramat förmedlade."

published in the magazine *Ljubljanski zvon*, “where he expressed his indignation over modern European literature, its naturalism and decadence and on this basis collectively condemned Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Ibsen and Strindberg” (ibid)⁷.

Around 1900 there began to appear more objective studies, which still considered Strindberg as a part of the German literary Modernist movement. The critics exposed in their studies Strindberg’s curious relationship to women. Their label of Strindberg as hater of women was predominant until World War II.

Tomazin conveys that the leading Slovene critics in the first decades of the 20th century were Adolf Robida and Fran Albreht, followed by France Koblar in the 1920s. The first two autonomous portraits of Strindberg were written in 1912, the year of the author’s death, by Fran Albreht and Vinko Zupan. In 1920 another study was written by Angelo Cerkvencik, followed by Janko Lavrin’s in the late 1920s.

From the 1930s until World War II the major critics were Bratko Kreft, Juš Kozak, Josip Vidmar, Anton Ocvirk, Vladimir Pavšič and Ivo Brnčič. After World War II the interest in Strindberg slowly began to decrease and the studies were mainly confined to theatre bills and new published editions of Strindberg’s plays (Tomazin points out that, as in the rest of Europe, Strindberg’s name was now associated only with drama). In this period the following leading critics are mentioned: Vladimir Kralj, France Koblar, Fran Zadavec and Dušan Pirjevec.

The authors of autonomous studies in the 1970s and 1980s are Mirko Zupančič, Bratko Kreft and Borut Trekman.

MISS JULIE ON THE SLOVENE STAGE

Miss Julie appeared on Slovene stages relatively late in comparison to the rest of Europe. The Slovene premiere took place on April 6, 1921 at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana (Narodno gledališče v Ljubljani, today Drama SNG v Ljubljani). (The very first play by Strindberg staged by an institutional theatre group was *The Father*, performed in 1909 by the Regional Theatre in Ljubljana (Deželno gledališče v Ljubljani).⁸ A rather short review of the first staging of *Miss Julie* is found in the monthly magazine *Dom in svet* (1921: 173), where France Koblar focuses mainly on the actors’ performance and not so much on the play as such: “We have seen in Julie (Mrs. Pregarc) and Jean (Mr. Kralj) a lot of ambition, but the roles were not fully developed” (ibid).⁹ Another short critical review was written by Fran Albreht and published in a prominent Slovene cultural magazine *Ljubljanski zvon*. He is of the opinion that the play is “live and real at its core” but “outdated in its details” and that the director should have “tamed the author’s [i.e. Strindberg’s] vehemently mel-low dramaticity and crossed out many an inessentiality” (Albreht 1921: 446)¹⁰. Albreht, however, does not specify which inessential elements he has in mind.

⁷ “[...] kjer je izrazil ogorčenost nad moderno evropsko literaturo, njenim naturalizmom in dekadenco ter na tej osnovi skupno obsodil Dostojevskega, Tolstoja, Ibsena in Strindberga.” Note: All the translations into English were made by the author of this article.

⁸ The Regional Theatre in Ljubljana is the forerunner of the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana.

⁹ “V Juliji (ga. Pregarčeva) in Jeanu (g. Kralj) smo videli mnogo ambicije, izčrpani pa vlogi nista bili.”

¹⁰ “V svojem osrčju živa in resnična, je v svojih detajlih Gosposdična Julija danes zastarela in režija bi morala krotiti avtorjevo vehementno sočno dramatičnost ter črtati marsikatero nebistvenost.”

Albrecht translated *Miss Julie* in 1938,¹¹ when the play, after seventeen years, was staged again at the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana. The play was reviewed in four Slovene dailies (*Slovenski dom*, *Slovenec*, *Jutro*, *Slovenski narod*), the most exhaustive and at the same time the harshest being the one in *Slovenski narod* by Fr. G. (Fran Govekar):

[...] Strindberg and his *Miss Julie* are today no longer revolutionarily horrifying, excitingly bold, but rather out of date, not really naturalistic in diction or form, barely interesting and, towards the end, plain long-winded and therefore boring (*Slovenski narod* 1938: 3)¹².

The author seems to repudiate the naturalistic features of the play as if he was expecting an adaptation or modernization. He claims that the play came to the Slovene stages too late and that naturalistic features (e.g. the hereditary burden of the characters) are archaic and forced. Strindberg's everlasting hatred of women is described by the author as "queerness" and his "funny attacks on feminism [as] open reactionary behaviour, which was so often repudiated by life (ibid.).¹³ The critic seeks a "sound" kind of art:

His [i.e. Strindberg's] extremely original, cold, decadent, destructive mind was without any doubt a genuine spirit of its time, but his works do not give us consolation or satisfaction, nor joy for life and work. During the war [i.e. WWI] he was still attractive for a certain kind of spectators; nowadays, however, the times require a different, sound kind of art (ibid.)¹⁴.

The author mentions also the scenery taking up the whole stage, contrary to Strindberg's instructions, which require an intimate setting. In his preface to *Miss Julie* Strindberg opts for a single set, "both to allow the characters time to merge with their milieu and to break with the custom of expensive scenery" (Törnqvist & Steene 2007: 71).¹⁵ He demands that the scenery be credible and as close to life as possible. Strindberg suggests also some other innovations in the theatre, which would suit the modern psychological drama: e.g. less make-up, the removal of the foot-lights and the introduction of strong side lighting, the removal of the proscenium boxes, the raising of the stalls and the introduction of complete darkness in the auditorium. He wanted an intimate kind of theatre, which he managed to open in Stockholm in 1907 under the name *Intima Teatern*.

F.K.'s (France Koblar's) review published in the newspaper *Slovenec* praises the scenery and labels it as "an architectural work of art" ("gradbena umetnina") (Koblar

¹¹ Both translations, the one made in 1921 by Ferdo Kozak, and Albrecht's in 1938 were from German.

¹² "Tudi Strindberg in njegova 'Gospodična Julija' nam nista danes prav nič več revolucionarno strašna, razburljivo predrzna, temveč zastarela, niti ne čisto naturalistična v diktaciji in formi, komaj še zanimiva, toda proti zaključku naravnost dolgovezna in zato dolgočasna."

¹³ "[...] a njegovi smešni naskoki na feminizem odkrito reakcionarstvo, ki ga je življenje že neštokrat blamiralo."

¹⁴ "Njegov silno izvorni, mrzli, dekadentni, destruktivni duh je bil brez dvoma pristen duh svojega časa, toda njegova dela ne prinašajo utehe in zadovoljstva, veselja za življenje in delo. Med vojno je bil še privlačen za neke vrste gledalcev, danes zahteva čas drugačne, zdrave umetnosti."

¹⁵ Translated by Egil Törnqvist.

1938: 7). As to the play itself, the author says that Strindberg's statement in the preface to *Miss Julie* that "theatre is a Bible for the poor (biblia pauperum) openly representing life itself, cannot hold true" for *Miss Julie* (ibid.).¹⁶ According to the author the reason is Strindberg's excessive hatred of mankind and his bitter preaching about the concealed human evil and man's proneness to crime. He says: "This 'biblia pauperum' teaches hatred of crime, but is at the same time its founder; it is moral and morally nonchalant at the same time" (ibid.).¹⁷

In the newspaper *Jutro*, too, the review is negative. The reviewer L.M. (Ludvik Mrzel) writes:

Miss Julie is interesting for today's modern man only as a pure psychological problem, but even here we might have just minor understanding for the stubborn, capricious whims of the humanly and socially uninteresting count's daughter. The lengthy and wordy wavering between the beginning and the end is today merely tiring for the spectator and Julie, as the ultimate victim, does not touch anybody's heart (Mrzel 1938: 7).¹⁸

The last review that deals with the staging of *Miss Julie* in 1938 appears in the paper *Slovenski dom* under the title "A. Strindberg: Gospodična Julija", where the anonymous author describes the play and its characters but does not comment on it.

Fifteen years passed until the next production of *Miss Julie* took place in 1953, this time by the newly graduated students at the academy of acting arts in Ljubljana. The director Boštjan Hladnik (then a student of directing, today a famous film director) used Albrecht's translation. The reviews, published in the newspapers *Ljudska pravica*, *Slovenski poročevalec* and *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, deal mainly with the actors' performance and the director's work. All three critics share the opinion that the actor Jurij Souček was excellent in the role of Jean and that the director Boštjan Hladnik could have done better. The anonymous reviewer in *Slovenski poročevalec* (1953: 2) points out that the director interpreted Strindberg in a singular and romantic way, but that he nevertheless managed to round up his interpretation in full. Jamar (pseudonym for Marjan Javornik), the critic in *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, on the other hand says that Hladnik's film concept of the play "expressed searching, preoccupation with new directing moves and absorption in work, but it did not fully mature" (Jamar 1953).¹⁹

In 1964 another staging of *Miss Julie* took place in Ljubljana, this time performed by the Drama Studio (Dramski studio), the former Ad Hoc Theatre Group (gledališka skupina Ad hoc). The director was Draga Ahačič, the founder of this alternative theatre,

¹⁶ "[...] je gledališče sveto pismo za uboge (biblia pauperum), da kaže v neprikritih podobah življenje samo, se prav ob tej igri zdi malo resnična."

¹⁷ "Ta biblia pauperum uči sovražstvo do zločina in ga obenem utemeljuje, je pravna in pravno brezbrizna obenem."

¹⁸ "Sodobnega človeka zanima 'Gospodična Julija' samo še kot čisti psihološki problem, a še na tem področju utegnemo imeti le malo razumevanja za trmoglave kapriciozne domislice, ki se porajajo v duši človeško, življenjsko, socialno povsem nezanimive grofovske hčere. Dolgotrajno, širokobesedno oklevanje med začetkom in koncem dandanes gledalca samo še utruja in Julijina poslednja žrtev ne gre skoraj nikomur do srca."

¹⁹ "Izražala je iskanje, skrb za nove režijske poteze in poglobljanje v delo, vendar pa v celoti ni dozorela."

who also played the role of Kristin. Critical reviews were found only in two newspapers. The author F. V. (France Vurnik) in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* wonders why this theatre had decided to stage *Miss Julie* and speculates that the reason might be the “scarcity of classic and older drama plays in the repertoires of professional theatres” (Vurnik 1964: 2).²⁰ The reviewer describes the play as poor, average: “The revival of Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* was realistically calm; had it not lack above all persuasion, it would not die away as a school-like, somewhat dry performance” (ibid.).²¹

Lojze Smasek is more thorough in his critical review titled “Neprepričljivo” (“Uncovincing”) in *Večer*. He points out that *Miss Julie* reminds us of Shakespeare’s plays such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello* because all these works are open to a number of interpretations:

The characters are conceived so openly or, let us say fully, that they do not impose just one staging possibility, but they give us material for many variants, which are not completely separated, but intertwined, the emphasis lying now on the one end and now on the other end (Smasek 1964).²²

Smasek (ibid.) claims that the easiest interpretation of *Miss Julie* is the class interpretation, where the class difference between Julie and Jean is the reason for their unfulfilled love. He points out that some interpreters have gone further and seen in Julie “a will to overcome this barrier” (“željo, da bi prerasla to pregrado”) (ibid.) and that there have also appeared interpretations of “Julie striving for a fall, for being trampled on and punished” (“o Julijinem prizadevanju, da bi padla, da bi bila pohojena, kaznovana”) (ibid.). Smasek points out that it is up to the director to choose an interpretation, according to their taste but also according to the requirements of the time in which one lives. His opinion is that the director Draga Ahačič did not succeed in staging a sovereign modern interpretation although she chose a “soft class variant” (“razredno nepotencirano varianto”) (ibid.) and she “avoided time bonds” (“izognila se je časovni vezanosti”) (ibid.). According to Smasek the modern *Miss Julie* of the 1960s should not be “a ‘classless’ battle of the sexes, but a testimony of the impossibility of fulfillment of integral beauty, a testimony of the discrepancy between big wishes and small achievements and of the disappointment that follows, but also of ‘better’ chances with a realistic approach...” (ibid.).²³

Smasek, too, like Vurnik in *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, believes that the play was performed quite flatly, the actors having too little force of expression. He states also that Ahačič did not form Julie’s character tragically enough and that a Julie like the one presented would never commit suicide.

Six years later, in 1970, *Miss Julie* was performed at the Slovene Folk Theatre of Celje (Slovensko ljudsko gledališče Celje) under the direction of Dušan Jovanovič.

²⁰ “[...] pomanjkanja klasičnih in starejših gledaliških del v repertoarju poklicnih gledališč”

²¹ “Oživitvev Strindbergove Gospodične Julije je bila realistično umirjena; manjkalo ji je predvsem prepričljivosti, sicer ne bi izzvenela kot šolska in nekoliko suha predstava.”

²² “Karakterji so zasnovani tako široko ali, recimo, polno, da ne vsiljujejo ene same upodobitvene možnosti, temveč dajejo gradiva za več variant, ki pa niso stoddostno ločene in se prepletajo, samo enkrat s poudarkom na tem, drugič na onem koncu.”

²³ “Ne ‘brezrazredna’ borba spolov, temveč pričevanje o neuresničljivosti integralne lepote, o neskladju med velikimi željami in skromnimi dosežki, o razočaranju, ki sledi, pa tudi o ‘boljših’ možnostih realnega računa...”

The new translation, this time from Swedish, was rendered by Janko Moder. The reviewer Marjan Javornik, in *Delo*, responds positively to Jovanović's work and praises the play as such. According to him Jovanović picked the main motifs from the "generally known naturalistic arsenal (wine, illness, crime, sex, etc.)" ("[i]z splošno znanega naturalističnega arzenala (vino, bolezen, kriminal, spolnost, itd.)") (Javornik 1970) and adapted them to the "perception of the world and life own to e.g. contemporary young theatre-goers" ("občutje sveta in življenja, kakršnega ima – recimo – sodobna gledališka mladina") (ibid.). This feeling expresses itself in "a stylized form of life [and] in a stylized theatrical idea of the basic motives of human existence" ("v [...] stilizirani formi življenja, v stilizirani gledališki ideji o osnovnih gibalih človekovega bivanja") (ibid.). In this interpretation the role of the dialogue as a story-telling feature is set aside. The dialogue functions mainly as an expression of the inability of communication between the characters and their loneliness. In this Javornik sees the modernity of Strindberg and labels him a forerunner of modern existential drama. Other features that made the performance "a new kind of theatrical hypnosis" ("nove vrste gledališka hipnoza") were the "colour component of the scenery, the colourful playing of the stage lights, the accompanying mood music [and] the pantomimic-dance inserts" ("barvni komponenti scene, barvnim igram luči, razpoložensko intonirani glasbeni spremljavi, pantomimično-plesnim sestavinam") (ibid.).

According to Javornik, Jovanović's main idea of *Miss Julie* was the battle of the sexes – "not a philosophical dispute but an inexorable and brutal play of violence" ("nikakršen filozofski disput [...] temveč neizprosna, brutalna igra nasilja") (ibid.). The social component of the play was deliberately blurred. Javornik sees in this the reason why the play, despite excellent directing, left the spectator unsatisfied and unengaged.

Just a few months after the performance of *Miss Julie* in Celje (April 1971), the audience could see the play again in Ljubljana, performed by the newly-graduated actors of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (Akademija za gledališče, radio, film in televizijo). The performance received little critical response; in fact, only a short piece of criticism appeared in the newspaper *Večer* under the title "The young put to the test" ("Preizkušnja mladih"). The author Borut Trekman gives a rather negative evaluation of the director's and of the actors' work.

Like the performance in 1971, the production of *Miss Julie* in 1980 also carried out by the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor (Drama SNG Maribor), was subject to negative criticism. The title of the article "Birth in distress" ("Rojstvo v stiski") reveals some external factors that influenced the staging of the play. The author Lojze Smasek accounts for the fact that the actress performing Julie, Hermina Kočever, was involved in a trial, looking for the right to act more and that the staging of *Miss Julie* came into being in a free, non-institutional manner. Smasek's opinion about the performance is rather negative:

We have seen a rather pale and superficial performance. *Miss Julie* was presented without any background, without undertones and without dualities [...]. Jean appeared most of the time to be annoyingly compliant, succeeding however in some of his harsher, more realistic and defying moments. Kristin, the third character of this play, was economically deleted (the play had a particular aim and was prepared for two actors); Julie

and Jean talked to her as if she was behind the stage, of course, without getting any replies.

The whole performance proves that it came into being in distress, that it is the consequence of special conditions and that it has a narrowly determined aim and meaning, which all lie outside the outlined theatrical sphere (Smasek 1980).²⁴

The staging of *Miss Julie* that attracted the most reviewers' attention took place in Ljubljana and in Klagenfurt (Austria) in February and March 1994, performed by The Slovene Youth Theatre in Ljubljana (Slovensko mladinsko gledališče v Ljubljani). The eight reviews were published in the main national dailies (*Delo* [twice, one for each of the two performances], *Dnevnik, Slovenec, Večer*), in the Austrian Slovene minority weekly *Slovenski vestnik*, in the magazine *Razgledi* and even in the daily tabloid *Slovenske novice*. The play was directed by Eduard Miler, who also made the translation, together with Tomaž Toporišič. The critical response was, with one exception, unanimously positive. According to the reviews the director omitted or minimized the main naturalistic features in order to focus on the battle of the sexes, where Julie and Jean "play with the forces of power and powerlessness, with subordination and control, with hope and hopelessness" (Kunst 1994).²⁵ According to Kardum, Miler appears to be on Julie's side, and labels him a "feminist" (Kardum 1994). With reference to Miler's former preoccupation with female roles, Kardum claims that Miler is "[u]ndoubtedly the most 'female' director in Slovenia at present day" (ibid.).²⁶ The author emphasizes the excellent rhythm of the play and the outstanding actors' performance (Nataša Barbara Gračner, Pavle Ravnohrib and Maruša Oblak), which is a point on which the other reviewers agree as well. Besides, they all seem to appreciate Miler's focusing on the relationships and the characters' detailed rendering of every move and every word.

The partially negative review is rendered in *Dnevnik* (17. 5. 1994), where the anonymous author writes that the play is "existentially unsatisfactory" ("eksistencialno nezadosten") because of Miler's indecisiveness about "two key questions: What really happened to the two main characters? and: How does this affect the performance" (ibid.).²⁷

As to the language of the new translation, opinions differ; on the one hand Ostrouška (1994) says that "the language [is] full and everyday, fitting into the associative and cognitive context of the purified scenes of the intensifying emotional states."²⁸ On the other hand the anonymous reviewer in *Dnevnik* (17. 5. 1994) calls the translation "problematic" but does not go into detail.

²⁴ "Videli smo precej blede in površinsko uprizoritev. Gospodična Julija se je predstavila brez ozadij, brez podtonov, brez dvojnosti [...]. Jean je deloval večinoma moteče maziljeno, toda nekaj trših, stvarnejših, upirajočih se trenutkov mu je kar uspelo. Kristin, tretjo osebo tega dela, pa so uprizarjalci kar ekonomizirajoče črtali (igra je bila pač pripravljena v poseben namen, samo za dva) – z njo sta se Julija in Jean pogovarjala kot da se zadržuje za odrom, seveda brez njenih odgovorov. /Vsa uprizoritev dokazuje, da je nastala v stiski, da je posledica posebnih pogojev in da ima ozko določen namen in pomen, ki so vsi zunaj širše začrtanih gledaliških razsežnosti."

²⁵ "[...] balinata s silami moči in nemoči, s podrejanjem in obvladovanjem, z upom in brezupom."

²⁶ "Nedvomno je najbolj 'ženski' režiser na Slovenskem danes."

²⁷ "[...] dvoje vprašanj: Kaj se je med obema protagonistoma v resnici zgodilo? in: Kaj to v uprizoritvi pomeni?"

²⁸ "[...] jezik je znova učinkoval plastično in vsakdanje, primerno asociativnemu in miselnemu kontekstu izčiščenih prizorov stopnjujočih se čustvenih stanj."

In 2005 two productions of *Miss Julie* took place, one in January at the Slovene National Theatre in Trieste / Trst in Italy (Slovensko stalno gledališče Trst) and the other in April at the Koper Theatre (Gledališče Koper). Neither of them seemed to be fully satisfactory to reviewers. Gombač (2005a) is quite harsh, direct, but at the same time amusing in his review of the performance in Trieste and notes a number of shortcomings. He starts with Janko Moder's translation from the 1970s:

The director Vinko Möderndorfer put on stage the classic drama of the classic Swedish author August Strindberg (1848 - 1912) using a three-decades-old, terribly sterile translation by Janko Moder. The bookish literary language turns the naturalistic drama into its opposite: the play becomes distinctively theatrical, bombastic and pathetic – something quite different from realistic. If an actor in the year 2005 on the stage exclaims “Ne kvasaj!” (“Don't drivell!”), Naturalism is over (ibid.)²⁹.

Gombač continues his criticism: “The chamber play receives a less gentle slap from the vast stage of the Trieste theatre, on which the three actors seem lost like in a desert” (ibid.).³⁰ The author believes that the directing was “clumsy and superficial” (“okorna, površna režija”) (ibid.) and criticizes the director's inability to create “the intoxicating midsummer night's atmosphere – the key detonator of Julie's tragic fate” (ibid.).³¹ Instead of the appearance of celebrating merry peasants, the director sends on stage “four masked dancers in red costumes, who [...] to the striking music of Jani Golob, carry out a kind of Indian dance” (ibid.).³² The reviewer is neither satisfied with the actors' performance, partly blaming again the translation. Besides, the reviewer notes a lack of blood on the stage, at least in the scene where Jean kills Julie's bird.

The other pieces of criticism regarding the performance in Trieste are not so harsh. They criticize above all the actors' performance and not so much the director's interpretation of the play. An interesting fact is that Mermolja's review in *Primorski dnevnik* (16.1. 2005) is diametrically opposed to Gombač's. He gives a very positive review of the performance and praises Möderndorfer's “accurate and clean reading” (“natančno in čisto branje”) (Mermolja 2005) of Strindberg's text. He is of the opinion that the director “created a compact and effective performance” (“kompaktno in učinkovito predstavo”) (ibid.). He also notes the actors' capable interpretation of the roles.

The staging of *Miss Julie* in Koper gave rise to three pieces of criticism. Two of them were written by the same reviewers (Gombač and Gorjup Posinkovič) that attended the performance in Trieste. Gombač (2005c) starts his review, like in his other one, with the language. Here, he speaks in favour of the modernization of Janko Moder's translation. He

²⁹ “Režiser Vinko Möderndorfer je klasično dramo švedskega klasika Augusta Strindberga (1849 - 1912) na oder namreč postavil v debela tri desetletja starem, obupno sterilnem prevodu Janka Modra. Papirnata knjižna slovenščina naturalistično dramo spreobrne v njeno nasprotje: igra postane izrazito teatralična, privzdignjena, patetična, vse kaj drugega kot realistična. Če igralec leta 2005 na odru vzdikne “Ne kvasaj!”, je z naturalizmom pač konec.”

³⁰ “Nič šibkejše klofuto komorni predstavi da prostran oder tržaškega gledališča, na katerem zgolj trije gledalci izgledajo kot v puščavi.”

³¹ “[...] opojnega vzdušja kresne noči, ključnega detonatorja tragične Julijine usode.”

³² “[...] štirje v rdeče kostume zamaskirani plesalci, ki na odru ob udarni glasbi Janija Goloba odplešejo nekakšen indijanski ples.”

points out that the director Dušan Mlakar reduced the naturalistic ideas to the minimum and emphasized instead the battle of the sexes. He compares this staging to the one in Trieste and states that even here the performance fails to represent “the intoxicating atmosphere of midsummer’s night” (“opojnega vzdušja kresne noči”) (ibid.). The author has a positive opinion of the actors’ performance and of the “intensification of the announcement of the tragic denouement” (“stopnjevanje napovedi tragičnega razpleta”) (ibid.).

Vida Gorjup Posinković (2005b) sees the staging as being true to the original and the director having a “calm and reliable hand” (“mirna in zanesljiva režiserjeva roka”). The greatest shortcoming of the play is, according to her, the disproportion between the two main characters (performed by Nataša Tič Ralijan and Gašper Tič), the attention shifting too much towards Jean.

Primož Jesenko, the reviewer in *Delo* writes that Mlakar’s production was “accurately measured from the beginning to the end” (“od začetka do konca natanko izmerjena”) (Jesenko 2005).

The most recent staging of *Miss Julie* took place in March 2008. The director Mateja Koležnik translated the play together with Gregor Fon and also adapted it. One of the major changes is Julie’s fate; she does not commit suicide, but comes out on the stage with a razor in her hands after having killed Jean. Julie decides to confess what she did to her father and to move on with her life. The play can barely be called a tragedy any more.

The reviewers in *Delo* and *Dnevnik* accept Koležnik's adaptation positively, whereas in *Gorenjski glas* the changed ending is not even mentioned. All three reviews are positive, but not very exhaustive.

The stagings of *Miss Julie* (*Gospodična Julija*) recorded by the Slovene Theatre Museum:

<i>Date of first performance:</i>	<i>Director:</i>	<i>Theatre:</i>	<i>Translated by:</i>
April 6, 1921	Emil Krajč	The Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana	Ferdo Kozak
January 8, 1938	Bojan Stupica	The Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana	Fran Albreht
June 24, 1953	Boštjan Hladnik	The Academy of Acting Arts in Ljubljana	Fran Albreht
May 11, 1964	Draga Ahačič	The Ad Hoc Theatre in Ljubljana	Fran Albreht
Nov. 26, 1970	Dušan Jovanović	The Slovene Folk Theatre of Celje	Janko Moder
April 2, 1971	Albert Kos	The Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television in Ljubljana	Janko Moder
Feb. 29, 1980	Branka Nikl	The Slovene National Theatre in Maribor	Janko Moder
March 10, 1994	Eduard Miler	The Slovene Youth Theatre in Ljubljana	Eduard Miler and Tomaž Toporišič
January 14, 2005	Vinko Möderndorfer	The Slovene National Theatre in Trieste / Trst	Janko Moder
April 9, 2005	Dušan Mlakar	The Koper Theatre	Janko Moder
March 21, 2008	Mateja Koležnik	The France Prešeren Theatre in Kranj	Gregor Fon and Mateja Koležnik

CONCLUSION

After going through the critical response that August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* has elicited in Slovenia, we see that the attitude towards the play changed in the course of time. On its first stagings the play was perceived as rigorously naturalistic, and as such rejected as being out of date. In the 1960s and 70s the attitude began to change, with the directors and critics beginning to see new possibilities of interpretation, while the battle of the sexes still remained the main idea. The naturalistic features were taken away or minimized in order to focus on the relationships between the characters and on their psychological complexity.

Another conclusion we can make after reading the reviews is that the play itself is still popular and interesting for the directors, the critics and the audience, but it still seems very hard to perform. The critics, while differing in their taste regarding the interpretation varieties, are unanimous on the character of Julie lacking greater psychological depth and complexity together with a more powerful expression.

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