

Traumatic Effects of Social Stratification and Class Conflicts and the Shadows of Marxism in Strindberg's play "Miss Julie"

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ABSTRACT

By the beginning of modernity, a new horizon was composed by the middle class who abrogated hierarchy and monarchy by viewing social identity through the lens of the economy, hence capitalism emerged and social identity became vitally dependent on economic power. Traumatic effects of social stratification and social conflicts leading to tremendous endeavor to bridge a gap between high and lower classes of society were of the most important purposes of Marxist writers. It should be mentioned that Carl Marx defined the scaffolds of the society in relation to struggle between high and lower strata of the society. Marxism is defined during the history as a plethora of conflicts between major classes of the society who are suppressing majority and suppressed minority to at conflict leads to a social change. Strindberg's play "Miss Julie" is a naturalistic tragedy but it also includes social stratification and social conflicts between two classes of the society with symbolic characters in a symbolic setting. Court's house, the setting of the play, symbolizes a capitalist society in which Miss Julie and John belong to different classes of the society. John is a waiter and Miss Julie is the mistress of the house and symbol of a high-class person. What is outstanding in this play is the hidden structure of the play, emerging through detail and tone, is based on the special relationship between class and sex. Strindberg juxtaposes these two characters who are the symbol of different classes by strings of Marxism in the play. Strindberg also put strings of the idea that if a person from aristocrat family makes a relationship with a lower class one, it would be taken as her fall down and if a person makes relation with a higher class of the society it works as a ladder to better his position in society. As in the play, John who is aware of his position always warned Julie about the dangers of their relation and always care about his position when he refused to call Julie "Dear". As John used this relation as a mean to improve his status in society, he symbolically rebelled against the capitalist society which led to another capitalism at the end of the play. This paper respectively is going to delve into the Marxism, social stratification and shed light on the social conflicts in Strindberg's play "Miss Julie".

A new scaffold was created by the middle class of the society in which everything was intertwined with identity, therefore capitalism emerged and social identity became vitally and inevitably dependent on the economic power of the people. As a matter of the Social conflicts, Marxist writers decide to write enthusiastically to bridge a gap between the classes of the society therefore within modern societies in growth of two antagonistic classes and their struggle, which eventually absorb all social relations. Furthermore, class conflicts emerging from such

authoritative roles are struggles over state power so the class that controls the state controls everything (Rummel, 4).

Marxism as a revolutionary voice for the equality and deliverance of the dominated people by breaking the chains of injustice and oppression and also the political and economic philosophy of Carl Marx and Friedrich Angles in which the concept of class struggle play as a star in the cast of actors in understanding societies allegedly inevitable

development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and ultimately classless society (Huma 2).

Because at the end of 19th century, and into much of the 20th, most of Europe was divided into upper and lower classes based on one's birth and wealth therefore, class conflict becomes a motivating force in Strindberg's drama of *Miss Julie* (class clash, url).

This paper peruses the Traumatic Effects of Social Stratification and Class Conflicts and the Shadows of Marxism in Strindberg's Play *Miss Julie* and also defines and evaluates the characters and elaborates on the shadows of Marxism in the application section. This analysis was taken into account in a way that Julie, like her mother tries to overthrow the oppressive rules concerning the meager and unjust women's social standing and Jean, not satisfied with his petty job and struggles to become a first class man first by getting united sexually to his noble and highbred mistress, then by desiring a well-paid job which can be materialized by his rich mistress in another capitalist society. At the end, Julie and Jean find the ideologies so powerfully implanted in the structure of the society that their permanent union becomes an illusion. The injured Julie finally gets that, superiority to men is never possible in this disorganization and her unscrupulous desires which are for her the means of gaining equality and freedom only makes her a slave and a tool in the hands of the men whom she hates.

August Strindberg is one of those authors who embodied the notion of art as a product of torment and neurosis. Strindberg exerted a comparable influence on modern drama as a source for naturalism, expressionism, and various experimental models on the modern stage. To quote Eugene O'Neil: "Strindberg was the precursor of all modernity in our present theater." (Singh 18). *Miss Julie* is a naturalistic play whose building blocks are shaped with the knitting of class struggle and social stratification by silhouetting symbolic character in a symbolic setting which portrays a Capitalist society in which Miss Julie and John belongs to different classes of the society. As Aman Deep Singh mentioned "Miss Julie is a modern character", "half woman".(4) As a critic and creator, Strindberg has effectively dictated the direction of discourse surrounding his play, and has dealt with the serious issue of class and gender in a rich and complex manner. At the very core, all of Strindberg's plays, whether realistic or anti-realistic, attempt to embody the essential conflicts of life and a search to uncover universal motives. However, both of the main

characters (Jean and Julie) are dismissed as types of representatives of their classes.

Strindberg's biographical influence is evident in this play. *Miss Julie* presents an interminable comparison between high and low class. John reminds his audiences of different lines of the play that Miss Julie has fallen down from her status at the beginning of the play. He narrates an incident to show her shoddiness. She snatched Foster away from Anna and asked him to dance with herself. "We wouldn't behave like that, but that's what happens when the gentry makes them cheap". (Strindberg 22) Strindberg juxtaposes these two characters that are the symbol of different classes by strings of Marxism in the play. Strindberg also put strings of the idea that if a person from aristocrat family makes a relationship with a lower class one, it would be taken as her fall down and if a person makes relation with a higher class of the society it works as a ladder to better his position in society.

"A Marxist critic is simply a careful reader or viewer who keeps in mind the issues of power and money" (Huma 1). This quotation clearly, delineates the purpose of the Marxist critic. To elaborate on the basic meaning Marxism is an economic and social system based on the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Social conflicts and the reverberation of the social stratification abetted Marxist writers to write with the penchant to bridge a gap between the classes of the society.

Marxism is rooted in a plethora of conflicts between dominated majority and dominating minority. It should be mentioned that Marx sees the building blocks of the society in relation to its major classes, and the struggle between them as the engine of change in this structure (Rummel 1).

The best way to understand Marx is through his Class definition; a Class is defined by the ownership of property. In relation to property there are three great classes of society: "the bourgeoisie (who own the means of production such as machinery and factory buildings, and whose source of income is profit), landowners (whose income is rent), and the proletariat (who own their labor and sell it for a wage)" (Rummel 1). Therefore, the Class is determined by property not status and the relationship between individuals is also defined by the property. By shaping these classes, *class interest* has become the source of class conflicts out of which, individuals come to act similarly or develop a dependency and create a community, or rather, to create a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or of wages (Rumme 1). The struggle between

classes was at first confined to individual factories but as class consciousness is increased, common interests and policies are organized, and the use of and struggle for political power occurs and Classes become political forces.

Carl Marx bolded the role of property and ownership (of either land or means of production) in dominance and power. To be more precise, he saw primary social relations, culture, and ideology as reflecting property relationships. In the beginning of *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx declares: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (qtd. in Davari 1). Classes are the distinguished layers of the capitalist societies whose members do different functions based on the desires and needs of those in power. They can be defined as distinct groups which consist of the people who, based on their different capabilities and requirements, are divided (whether intentionally or unintentionally) in favor of or against their will into different strata which are dominated and controlled by the bourgeoisie.

Marxism and social stratification can be defined as an economic and social system based on the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels along with the plethora of conflicts between the high and low strata of the society. It is the political and economic philosophy of Carl Marx and Friedrich Engels in which the concept of class struggle play as a star in the cast of actors in understanding societies allegedly inevitable development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and ultimately classless society.

"A Marxist critic is simply a careful reader or viewer who keeps in mind the issues of power and money" (Huma 1). Marxism is rooted in copious conflicts and struggle between the dominated majority and the dominating minority. Social conflicts and the reverberation of the social stratification made Marxist writers write with a penchant to bridge a gap between the classes of the society. *Miss Julie* is a naturalistic play which plays as a star in the cast of Marxist literary works. Its building blocks are shaped with the knitting of class struggle and social stratification by silhouetting symbolic characters in a symbolic setting which portrays a Capitalist society in which Miss Julie and John belong to different classes of the society. *Miss Julie* depicts a fierce battle between a man and a woman, a struggle for power and dominance enacted through a cruel and compulsive game of seduction and repulsion (Ullman 3).

"Strindberg was the precursor of all modernity in our present theater" (qtd. in Singh 18). August Strindberg

equips the reader with an insight to search for the answer in every ideology from Darwinian determinism to Rousseauistic progression. The most spectacular characteristic about Strindberg which is patent in the play is that he was an admirer of authoritarianism, at the same time he is a supporter of women's suffrage and social democrat (Khanna 413). In an attempt to modernize the old genre of tragedy Strindberg simultaneously presented two philosophical stances named tragedy and naturalism. Strindberg openly admits his morality towards women through the portrayal of Miss Julie, and he gives an equivocal and complex account of women (Huma 19). This play is written at an age in which old beliefs were tumbling and new dogmas were making the way. Therefore, *Miss Julie*, in which the battle for sexual mastery takes on profound, universal meaning, was banned throughout Europe in the late 19th century as it dealt with situations and attitudes which seem morally and socially offensive. At the very core, all of Strindberg's plays, whether realistic or anti-realistic, attempt to embody the essential conflicts of life and a search to uncover universal motives.

To locate the shadows of Marxism and class struggle and spot the gender conflict in *Miss Julie*, this paper aims to analyze the text to uncover the clues and shed light on these very concepts. Moreover, it is continued with the application of such concepts in it. *Miss Julie* presents an interminable comparison between high and low class. Strindberg narrates an incident to show Julie's shoddiness. She snatched Foster away from Anna and asked him to dance with herself: "We wouldn't behave like that, but that's what happens when the gentry make themselves cheap" (Strindberg 22). Little by little as the story goes on by the dialogues between Julie and Jean it becomes obvious that the relation between Jean and Julie is similar to the flip-flop because of the absence of any balance in it. Strindberg juxtaposes these two characters that are the symbol of different classes by cords of Marxism in the play and also shows that if a character of the play or a person in real life makes relation with a higher class of the society it works as a ladder to better his position in society.

Strindberg delineates Miss Julie as a tragic type, continuously fighting and losing the battle against nature (Khanna 415). Julie's tragedy also goes hand in hand with the fact that she refuses to accept the naturalistic destiny as an aristocratic woman. Julie is destroyed and Jean survived because they were different in their perspective in waging a revolution against social constructed class. Julie completely abandoned her role as an aristocratic woman on the other hand Jean aspires to move up in the hierarchy

but he differs from Miss Julie in that he does not seek the total rejection of social structure rather he wants to rise within it (Chung 6). In the first half of the play, Jean symbolizes reason and keeps warning Julie of the cataclysmic consequences of their affair. By these warnings, Jean wanted aware Julie of their differences, "Don't come down Miss Julie, take my advice" (Strindberg 12). Paying no attention to warnings, she always prompts Jean to forget the class difference between them and consider himself equal to her. Strindberg deftly portrays the differences of the two characters through their dreams. Julie makes an explicit declaration to ruin herself when she asks "the ground to open for me to sink" (Strindberg 26). To be succinct while Julie climbed down the hierarchical ladder, Jean climbs up to the top step by step.

Jean's romanticism revealed to be his opportunism, he always waited for a moment to act: "I haven't reached yet, but I will reach it, well, in my dreams" (qtd. in Khanna 417). Even he concocted a story about his love because he knew that social advancement for him is only possible when he sleeps with his mistress. For Jean love is not an emotional connection but is a sort of sickness needs to be cured on the other hand Miss Julie seeks love and begs him to love her after sexual episode. In the concluding sequence of the play when the ringing of count's bell is heard Jean quickly changes his coat and goes to the speaking tube but Julie was not able to do anything and her inability to act in the given situation indicates her giving into the naturalistic forces which precluding her will to act.

To wrap it up in the battle between Jean's determinism and Julie's romanticism it is the former that emerges as an overpowering force, it is better to say Julie wanted Jean to play the role of the Count. At the end of the play, the reader finds that Julies downfall is inevitable and becomes predictable because she succumbs to the deterministic view of life. All in all, the paper concludes that the blame is on the capitalist society that makes Julie inevitably anarchist and Jean a fake and dishonest person. In such societies, the subjects inevitably follow their individualistic desires and abusing others for personal benefits is not only something usual and ordinary but also supported by the society. Therefore, At the end of the play, the reader finds that Julie's downfall is inevitable and becomes unavoidable because she succumbs to the deterministic view of life in such a society.

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