

Kristin in Miss Julie

Kristin's name suggests that she plays a role: the tolerant Christian who knows what suits her and that only the poor and downtrodden should be blessed.

In the foreword to *Miss Julie*, Strindberg describes the cook Kristin as a secondary person, habitual Christian automaton. "She goes to church to unload her household thefts onto Jesus casually and deftly and recharge herself with a new dose of innocence." But there he is wrong. In the theatre nothing is unimportant or random. She is not an automaton: She is cruel. Kristin is in many ways the engine of the play. By displacing her Mistress and standing above her, she prepares the way for the play's tragic ending.

Take, for example, Kristin's entrance after Jean and Julie decide to escape. She comes in with the hymn-book and hits Julie in the head with Jesus' words about the Last Judgment in Matthew 19:30: "God's no respecter of persons. There the last shall be first."

What is happening here is a role reversal. Kristin now considers herself above her Mistress, whom she despises. Julie begins to realize that she is now below her cook and belongs to the first herself.

Unless it's clear that she somehow enjoys humiliating her Mistress, the end becomes difficult to understand. The whole play is a game of humiliation:

Julie enjoys humiliating Jean, who in turn enjoys her position when the roles are reversed. Jean can play aristocrat in front of Kristin but becomes lackey in front of Julie.

No wonder Jean Genet took *Miss Julie* as his starting point when he wrote *The Maids*!

Julie's final line in the drama is precisely "And the first shall be the last!"

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