

## A MESSAGE FROM PLAYWRIGHT JULIE TEPPERMAN...

Thank you for taking the time to read *The Stronger* and *What Doesn't Kill You...*

Both monologues premiered as part of Convergence Theatre's immersive production *The Unending* in the summer and fall of 2016. *The Stronger* was performed in a 1960s style café, and *What Doesn't Kill You...* was performed in a residential backyard garden.

The impetus for writing these two pieces began when I started reading different adaptations of *The Stronger* – a 15-minute monologue, written in 1890 (for Strindberg's own wife, an actress, to perform) with the premise that a "Wife" confronts her husband's "Mistress" at a café. It was controversial at the time, not only because of the taboo theme of infidelity, but also because only the wife speaks, the mistress remains silent.

Though I'd be hard-pressed to deny that every adaptation I read was drowning in misogyny and melodrama, I was intrigued by the construct. "Who is your character talking to?" is a basic question any monologist must grapple with. And I was especially curious to more deeply explore what it means to have the other character there, but not utter a word. Why does Y not interrupt X? And how does Y's silence impact X's state of mind?

I set out to write a re-imagining of *The Stronger* that more deeply and rigorously explores the two women's histories and fractured friendship, in an effort to move beyond those "catty female" clichés so that it might become more emotionally rich and complicated. Not to mention, every adaptation I read felt stilted and awkward to speak. Mostly, this is a consequence of translation and the time in which it was written, but I wanted to write something that could more easily roll off an actor's tongue.

Also, stories about "the other woman" are few and far between. I was drawn to the challenge of taking these trope characters of "Wife" and "Mistress", invented by another playwright in a specific circumstance and time, and exploring how I might re-imagine them, re-invent them, excavate and expand them, in ways that are not repetitive in form and style, and that could resonate emotionally with a modern audience.

My impetus for writing *What Doesn't Kill You...* came from my intense curiosity of what the mistress might say if she were allowed to speak, and if she were living today. Furthermore, in this Ashley Madison age of infidelity, which feels far more casual and way less scandalous than in Strindberg's age, I was curious to explore what is it about affairs that people find compelling and complicated today, and how I might move this piece beyond, "*You stole my husband, you bitch!*".

The monologue's intense misogyny and hetero-normativity irked me – two women pining after the same man, who they have allowed to define them. This led me down the path of researching different polyamorous relationship models, and exploring female friendship, love, and intimacy through that lens.

At its core, I continue to be interested in exploring the messiness of relationships. And the emotional hoops we all jump through at one time or another by trying to live the way we think we're *supposed* to live. And the consequences of allowing shameful secrets to fester. And the mental anguish we put ourselves through by obsessing and replaying our transgressions and unrequited desires, again and again and again.