

MAETERLINCK'S STATIC DRAMA  
IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

OKLAHOMA  
AGRICULTURAL & MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
LIBRARY  
OCT 27 1939

MAETERLINCK'S STATIC DRAMA  
IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

By

Louise Greer

Bachelor of Arts

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1937

Submitted to the Department of Foreign Language

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

1939

OKLAHOMA  
AGRICULTURAL & MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
LIBRARY

OCT 27 1939

APPROVED:



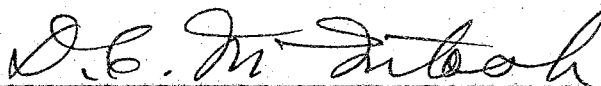
---

(In Charge of Thesis)



---

(Head, Dept. of Foreign Language)



---

(Dean, Graduate School)

119498

Foreword

The writing genius of Maurice Maeterlinck includes many types: lyric verse, drama, philosophical essays, and descriptions of animal and plant life. But there is one part of the literary production of this author which stands out from the rest of his writings, known as his "Static Dramas". The purpose of this thesis is to determine of what this unit of his work consists, what combination of factors made possible its existence, what characteristics it contains that so sharply distinguish it from previous or subsequent literary productions, what its import may be, and what its results.

Masterlinck's Static Drama  
In Theory And Practice

Contents

Foreword	--iii
Chapter I: The Static Drama in Theory	--1
Chapter II: The Static Drama in Practice: Techniques	--11
Chapter III: The Static Drama in Prac- tice: The Plays	--26
Chapter IV: Evaluation of the Static Drama	--53
Plays	--58
Bibliography	--59

## Chapter I

### The Static Drama In Theory

Maurice Maeterlinck was born in Ghent in 1862, of an old Flemish family, and passed his early life in this city. His earliest environment and training were bilingual, but he chose French as his means of literary expression, although it was to him really the more foreign of the two tongues. His early education was received in a Jesuit school, where he spent seven unhappy years under strict regulations, and he has said that he never forgave his teachers for what he calls poisoning his childhood. His parents had planned for him a career as a lawyer and although he did practice at the bar, his legal career was very brief.

At the age of twenty-four he went to Paris, apparently to continue his law study, but in reality with his mind full of literary aspirations. Here he came under the influence of the famous symbolist of the time, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, who was prominent in the revolt against naturalism. After a year in Paris, Maeterlinck returned to Ghent, where he spent the greater part of the next ten years, years very important in the formation of his literary career. He lost a few legal cases and from that time on devoted himself almost entirely to literature.

During this time there appeared two collections of poems and several plays.

Maeterlinck had been called by some critics a Belgian Shakespeare and even accused of imitating Shakespeare in some of his early dramas (particularly in la Princesse Maleine), in leading characters, in certain striking scenes and in numerous minor devices and details. Maeterlinck is a genuine admirer of Shakespeare and he had borrowed generously from him. This criticism, although somewhat unjust, was a practical lesson for Maeterlinck, causing him to cultivate, perhaps with more ardor, his own native genius, which was at its best in creating the symbolical atmosphere of active silence by the use of successive images drawn from his environment as a youth.

During his early years of literary formation Maeterlinck is said to have watched day after day the Flemish peasants around his father's house. Their every-day speech of child-like simplicity held a peculiar fascination for him, because of their odd way of repeating what others had said, as if some were a little deaf or needed constantly to be awakened from a painful dream. It was an environment of atmosphere rather than action, it created a mood by the use of successive images, and it was an impressionistic development of active silence upon the mind of this growing young man. Such an environment helped to give a mystic tinge to his mind and is

perhaps almost directly the source of one phase of his dramatic production.

The scenes of many of his dramas are set in old ruined castles, by broad, sleepy canals, under skies which rarely open to the sun and in a vague and often gloomy atmosphere. They appear to be a mere accumulation of beautiful words, which scarcely convey anything as important as an idea. But careful reading convinces us that to Maeterlinck, at least, they conveyed a meaning, and that one central theme runs through them all: the conception of the soul as something helplessly inactive in a hot-house whose doors are closed forever.

His plays which illustrate this hot-house conception of the soul, may be divided into two classes: plays in which the real drama is entirely the play of unseen forces, which the visible characters reveal through their simple dialogue, and plays containing some scenes of this type. The former group includes, L'Intruse (1890), Les Aveugles (1890), Intérieur (1894); the latter, la Princesse Maleine (1889), Les Sept Princesses (1891), Pelléas et Mélisande (1894), Alladine et Palomides (1894), La Mort de Tintagiles (1894), Aglavaine et Sélysette (1896).

Maeterlinck's artistic intuition made him feel that it was his duty as a dramatist to reveal the fleeting intangible truths, and to make visible that which we cannot see. For him, the unseen and the unfelt influences



about us are the great realities of life and material things are only the stepping stones and the temptations along the way. With such views in mind his dramatic production is a complete transformation of the ordinarily accepted drama. He uses the age old form as a medium for transmitting, through the revelation of the everyday facts of life, his new conception of an inner drama. His characters, describing in trivial language seemingly ordinary occurrences, manage to convey to the reader the play of unseen forces of which they, themselves, seem to be ignorant. No dramatic author, before Maeterlinck, had ever succeeded in presenting effectively the impressions which he has made so vividly significant. He replaces the ordinary external aids and mechanical contrivances with atmosphere and situation, in order that the spiritual significance of the action may predominate. This transformed system of dramatic production is known as the "Static Drama", which is explained by Maeterlinck, himself, in his essay on Le Tragique Quotidien, which begins:

"There is an every-day tragedy which is more real, deeper and more in keeping with our true existence than the tragedy of great adventures....

Is it while I am fleeing before a naked sword that my existence attains its most interesting point?.....

I admire Othello but he does not seem to me to live the august life of a Hamlet, who has the time to live because he does not act. Othello is admirably jealous. But is it not perhaps an ancient error to believe that the moments when such a passion, and others of equal

violence, rule us are those in which we most truly live? I have come to think that an old man, seated in his armchair, simply waiting beside the lamp, listening, without knowing it, to all the eternal laws that reign about him, interpreting, without understanding it, what there is in the silence of the doors and windows and in the small voice of the light, undergoing the presence of his soul and of his destiny, leaning a little his head, without suspecting that all the powers of this world are intervening and watching in his room like attentive servants, not knowing that the sun itself sustains the little table on which he rests his elbows and that there is not a planet in heaven nor a power of the soul which is indifferent to the dropping of an eyelid or the disclosure of a thought--I have come to think that this motionless old man was living in reality a deeper, more human and more general life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who wins a victory or the 'husband who avenges his honor'.

It will be said perhaps that a motionless life would hardly be visible, that life must needs be animated by certain movements and that these various movements which are acceptable are to be found only in the small number of passions that have been utilized up to the present. I do not know if it is true that a static theatre is impossible. It seems to me even that it exists."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Maeterlinck has uniquely made his static theater exist and throughout his essays and philosophical works he has expounded the philosophy which is the basis of his tragic system. In his essay on Le Silence in Le Trésor des Humbles he brings out the inadequacy for real living of mere words and of action. He tells us not to believe that words could ever serve as a means of true communication among human beings. If we truly have something to say, we are obliged to be silent. He

---

1. M. Maeterlinck. Le Trésor des Humbles, Le Tragique Quotidien, (Translation by H. A. Smith), pp. 168-169.

tries to impress upon us that we must not resist these invisible orders of silence, for in so doing we are taking an eternal loss that the greatest powers of human wisdom cannot replace, because we have lost the opportunity of listening to another soul and of thus giving an instant of existence to ours. He also assures us that similar occasions do not present themselves a second time in most lives, for when the first opportunity is rejected we become unable to recognize others, but if we have listened for a little while we accept other occasions as they arise naturally and almost without realizing it.

In this same essay on Silence, Masterlinck tells us that although there are two forms of silence, "active silence" and "passive silence", it is only the "active silence" whose felt presence will have left a worthwhile mark in our lives. "Passive silence" is composed merely of the day dreams, inexistences, and sleep which are no more worthy than words. He tells us that under the influence of active silence, all men are equal, that the silence of a king or of a slave, in the face of death, grief, or love takes the same form and each hides under his impenetrable cloak the same identical treasures. He assures us that there is no silence more receptive than the silence of love or the silence where good-will reigns, because no other is truly known to our souls. And that the human beings who love very deeply have found secrets

that others with shallow feelings shall never know, because there are thousands and thousands of things that silence the lips of the profound and true love or friendship which mere human feelings can never know.

Indeed, only in the moments of deepest inner silence do noble men accomplish the things that make their countries great and civilization progress, do lovers discover that they truly love each other, and that a soul learns to recognize and have contacts with the divine and highest power, God. Yet, in silence, it is not necessarily the moments of great emotion, but moments in which we seem to become aware of everything about us, such moments as everyone knows and has experienced in work, play, love, or religion, that we truly come to know anything worth knowing. It is this deep philosophy that Maeterlinck presents to us in his "static Dramas" without really seeming to express anything more than simple statements.

Maeterlinck tells us that only by experiencing the deepest silence does true beauty of soul develop. In one of his essays he says that true beauty can be found only in beauty of soul.

"It takes so little to encourage beauty in a soul. It takes so little to awaken the sleeping angels. Perhaps there is no need of awakening them ....it is enough that we lull them not to sleep."

---

2. M. Maeterlinck. Le Trésor Des Humbles, la Beauté Intérieure, p. 251.

Surely beauty of soul, that inner spark of the divine, is a thing to be desired by all men, yet in all walks of life we find men who appear to shun it. But they have never learned to make silent communications with other souls or with a supreme power. The author says that the average man has a strange fear of silence and that most of us never understand or admit real silence more than two or three times in our lives. Yet he says:

"There is nothing in the whole world that can vie with the soul in its eagerness for beauty, or in the ready power wherewith it adapts beauty unto itself."<sup>3</sup>

Why then do we not have more beautiful souls since they are so eager for beauty? Can fear of silence, alone, keep souls from becoming beautiful and from knowing God? We might examine ourselves in this respect. Have we known real silence? Who could have studied Maeterlinck's ideas and philosophy and not have experienced a few moments of the most profound silence? Since true silence is not foreign to us we might ask ourselves if we have a beautiful soul in the eyes of others. This, of course, we do not know, but in seeking to make our inner selves more beautiful we shall always meet a beautiful soul, for Maeterlinck says:

"A thought that is almost beautiful--a thought that you do not speak, but that you cherish within you at this moment--will irradiate you as though you were a transparent vase. Others will

---

3. M. Maeterlinck. Le Trésor des Humbles, La Beauté Intérieure, p. 251.

see it, and their greeting to you will be very different than had you been meditating how best to deceive your brother."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand he points out that there are individuals of a very different type:

....."There are so many beings in this world who do not think of anything except discouraging the divine in their souls. We must give an instant of consideration, however, for the divine transforms itself, and the most wicked even are always on their guard; and this is why, without doubt, so many of the wicked are good without anyone's ever seeing it, while some wise men and saints are not invisibly good."<sup>5</sup>

We wonder if Maeterlinck has been speaking in riddles.

Why can souls so eager for beauty still remain degraded and base? He wants to make clear to us that no human being is wholly wicked and low nor any person wholly perfect. There is a spark of the divine in everyone and that spark is the soul. In another of his essays he asks:

....."What would happen if our soul should suddenly become visible, disclosing all of our thoughts and wearing the most secret acts of our life.....For what would it blush? What would it wish to conceal? Would it go, like a modest woman, throwing the long mantle of its hair over the numberless sins of the flesh? It has not known them, and these sins have never touched it. They have been committed a thousand leagues from its throne; and the soul even of the Sodomite would pass through the midst of the crowd, without suspecting anything, and carrying in its eyes the transparent smile of the

---

4. Ibid., p. 257.

5. M. Maeterlinck. Le Trésor des Humbles, La Bonté Invisible, p. 208.

child."<sup>6</sup>

Maeterlinck's deep philosophy is the same as that taught by the Nazarene in Palestine twenty centuries ago, yet it is as vital today as then. Wholly interested in the workings of the Supreme Power, which in various places in this article is called Fate, Destiny, or unseen forces, the author has woven it into many types of literature, lyric verse, drama, philosophical essays, and descriptions of animal and plant life. But this thesis will be concerned only with its application and various methods of effective representation in the author's dramatic creation, the "Static Drama".

---

6. M. Maeterlinck. Le Trésor des Humbles, La Morale Mystique, (Translated by H. A. Smith), p. 63-64.

## Chapter II

### The Static Drama In Practice: Techniques

The techniques and means that Maeterlinck employs to bring before the eyes and ears of his readers the infinite, the invisible, and the intangible are many, varied, and unusual. Yet his plays are not written on the ordinary, accepted lines. He has created his own method, a method so difficult that it discourages imitators. However, in analyzing his style simplicity appears to be the basis of the successfulness of his plays yet it is the deep underlying philosophy which his simple manner drives home that has made his works live.

We believe that his most important method is his creation of an atmosphere. The philosophy and ideas he wishes to bring out require this background in order to produce a frame of mind that will receive them. In creating the atmosphere he wants to convey, Maeterlinck has employed numerous other techniques. Those most commonly found are: repetition of simple child-like language, symbols, an inner dialogue, suspected action, and strange mystical settings.

Simplicity of language is found in all of his plays but that which makes it most effective is the use of continued repetition of some simple statement in the form



of a question, a response, or of an agitated or uneasy verification conveying the ideas he wishes to make vivid and intensifying the unusual predominating atmosphere. The following examples of this style are representative of that found in all his "Static Dramas".

Here the blind grandfather through his continued worried remarks begins to create a feeling of uneasiness and fear in the group.

The Grandfather: "You are there, Ursula?"

The Eldest Daughter: "Yes, grandfather, by your side."

The Grandfather: "And who is that sitting there?"

The Daughter: "Where do you mean, grandfather? Here is no one."

The Grandfather: "There, there--in the midst of us!"

The Daughter: "But there is no one, grandfather."

The Father: "We tell you there is no one!"

The Grandfather: "But you do not see, any of you!"

.....

The Grandfather: "Are the windows open, Ursula?"

The Daughter: "The glass door is open, grandfather."

The Grandfather: "It seems to me the cold is entering the room."

The Daughter: "There is a little wind in the garden, grandfather, and the rose leaves are falling."

The Father: "Well, shut the door, Ursula. It is late."

The Daughter: "Yes, father. I can not shut the door, father."

The Two Other Daughters: "We cannot shut the door."<sup>1</sup>

In Aglavaine and Sélysette, the repetition of thoughts in simple language gives us an inner forewarning of the impending catastrophe. We note Sélysette's sudden change of spirits from despair to almost radiant happiness warning us of her secret plan, and her refusal to reveal her plan or to admit that she plans to go away, makes us believe that her plan must be drastic.

Aglavaine: "My fear is lest you should go before I do, Selysette--I am wondering whether that can be the idea you spoke of..."

Sélysette: "No, for there would be sorrow in that, and my idea now is full of gladness... I had thought, I too, of going away without saying a word, but now...."

Aglavaine: "Now you will not go?"

Sélysette: "No, no, Aglavaine mine; I shall not leave the castle..."

Aglavaine: "You promise me that, from the depths of your soul?"

Sélysette: "From the depths of my soul, and by my eternal happiness."<sup>2</sup>

In La Princesse Maleine, from the repetition of simple language in simple sentences, we perceive the nervousness and fears of the king, which make the atmosphere strange and weird.

King: "I am ill.....Do not mind me....."

Hjalmar: "You are ill, father?"

---

1. M. Maeterlinck. L'Intruse, pp. 41, 20.

2. M. Maeterlinck. Aglavaine et Sélysette, Act III, Scene III.

King: "Yes, yes."

Hjalmar: "What ails you?"

King: "I do not know."

Anne: "It is this fearful night!"

King: "Ay, a fearful night!"

.....

Anne: "Be seated, be seated. You cast a gloom over everybody."

King: "Is any one touching the tapestries?"

Hjalmar: "Why, no, father!"

King: "There is one piece that...."

Hjalmar: "It is the wind."

King: "Why has that tapestry been hung there?"

Hjalmar: "Why, it has always been there; it is the 'Slaughter of the Innocents'."<sup>3</sup>

Maeterlinck's extensive use of symbols is an important technique which he employs to create atmosphere and situation, so that the approach of unavoidable Fate is made almost real in the mind of the reader. He has used symbols so cleverly in his creation of atmosphere that his method of using them should be called individualistic. In Les Aveugles the priest has gone away and the various blind persons of the group are recalling the things that happened when he left, or something unusual he mentioned to them, at the time, that might give them

---

3. M. Maeterlinck. La Princesse Maleine, Act V, Scene II.

some clue as to his return. All the things of which they talk seem to symbolize that he may have gone away for always and to intensify the growing fear of the group.

The young blind girl: "He took my hands when he left; and his hands shook as if he were afraid. Then he kissed me...."

The first blind man: "Oh! Oh!"

The young blind girl: "I asked him what had happened. He told me he did not know what was going to happen. He told me the reign of old men was going to end, perhaps..."<sup>4</sup>

The priest, an old man, had ruled over the blind persons as their guide for many years, when the young blind girl remembers that he had said that the reign of old men was going to end, it symbolizes that Death may end his governing power. The following dialogue, from L'Intruse, symbolizes the approach of Death and although its coming is invisible even the nightingales and swans sense its presence.

The Grandfather: "I do not hear the nightingales any longer, Ursula."

The Daughter: "I believe some one has come into the garden grandfather."

The Grandfather: "Who is it?"

The Daughter: "I do not know; I see no one."

The Uncle: "Because there is no one there."

The Daughter: "There must be some one in the garden; the nightingales are silent all at once."

---

4. M. Maeterlinck. Les Aveugles, p. 69.

The Grandfather: "I hear no footsteps, though."

.....

The Daughter: "It must be that some one is passing near the pond, for the swans are frightened."

Another Daughter: "All the fish of the pond are rising suddenly."

The Father: "You see no one?"

The Daughter: "No one, father."

The Father: "But yet the pond is in the moonlight..."

The Daughter: "Yes; I can see that the swans are frightened."<sup>5</sup>

The following quotation from La Mort de Tintagiles symbolizes the inability of man to stop the coming of death with any material thing or human force.

Aglövale: "Yes, ---yes---I was sure of it---Wait. (He posts himself, with raised sword, on the last step. To the two sisters:) Come! Come, too! (A silence. The door opens a little. Trembling like the needle of a compass, Aglovale puts his sword across the opening, sticking the point of it between the beams of the door-case. The sword breaks with a crash under the ominous pressure of the folding-door, and its fragments roll echoing down the steps. Ygraine leaps up with Tintagiles, still in a faint, in her arms; and she, Bellangere and Aglovale, with vain and mighty efforts, try to push back the door, which continues to open slowly, although no one is heard or seen. Only a brightness, cold and calm, pierces into the room. At this moment, Tintagiles, suddenly straightening up, comes to himself, utters a long

---

5. M. Maeterlinck. L'Intruse, pp. 17-18.

cry of deliverance and kisses his sister, while at the very moment of this cry, the door, resisting no longer, shuts abruptly under their pressure, which they have not had time to interrupt.)<sup>6</sup>

In all his "Static" plays Maeterlinck has used a "double dialogue", an "outer" and an "inner dialogue". The former constitutes the spoken words, while the latter is composed of the unspoken ones. For Maeterlinck only the "inner dialogue" has real value. In other words the chief significance of his dialogue lies between the lines. Indeed, it is this "inner dialogue" that produces in the mind of the reader the successive images which make the impressions of an invisible power and the decisions of a hostile Fate almost a vivid reality. Through this strange manner of dialogue, made more effective because of its background of simple speech, we are able to see that his helpless victims of Destiny have no real action. They are interested in their interior lives, their thoughts, hopes, and fears yet they are pushed about helplessly by something powerful and unseen. This "inner dialogue" may be found in almost every speech his characters utter. Seldom is it ever missing although in some instances it is more easily found than in others. But even though this inner meaning may sometimes be difficult to interpret, and his readers may interpret it in various ways to suit their own realm of thought,

---

6. M. Maeterlinck. La Mort de Tintagiles, Act III.

it is this hidden dialogue for which his admirers search. In Les Sept Princesses the death of Ursula (the most beautiful of the seven sisters and the betrothed of Marcellus, the prince) is never mentioned, yet gradually and overpoweringly everything else is driven from our minds. The following selections illustrate Maeterlinck's conception of the "inner dialogue". The intense conversations of the characters imply that their intuitions make them afraid, yet we perceive that they do not know why they are particularly anxious.

Prince: (Going to another window) "I see her no better----It is very difficult to see her. One would say she was hiding...."

Queen: "The face is almost invisible...."

Prince: "I see the body very well, but I do not make out the face. I think it is entirely turned heavenward...."

.....

Prince: "I cannot see yet. It is too light...."

Queen: "There is something changed in the hall!"

King: "I see nothing at all."

Prince: "It is brighter than before...."

Queen: "It is not the same; there is something changed in the hall....."

Prince: "My eyes are not yet used to the light...."

Queen: "They are no longer all in the same position!"

Prince: "Yes, yes; I believe they have made a little movement. They were holding Ursula by the hand. They have let go her hands. They have turned the other way...."

Queen: "We have come too late! We have come too late!"<sup>7</sup>

In L'Intruse he has accomplished the same thing with a different setting, different characters, and a different story, yet the presence of death is so realistically vivid that we feel as if we had almost seen it come and go. Indeed, we find that in all of these plays almost every line carries another deeper thought and altogether different than what it seems to say. From the following quotation we sense that the unknown visitor perhaps is Death, although it appears very natural that the fears of the group are unfounded, because the various signs, which to us indicate Death's presence, are not valid:

The Father: (To the Maid-servant) "No one came in just now?"

The Maid-servant: "No, sir."

The Father: "But we heard the door open!"

The Maid-servant: "It was I shutting the door, sir."

The Father: "It was open?"

The Maid-servant: "Yes, sir."

The Father: "Why was it open, at this hour?"

The Maid-servant: "I do not know, sir. I had shut it."

The Father: "But then who was it opened it?"

The Maid-servant: "I do not know, sir. Some one must have gone out after me, sir."

---

7. M. Maeterlinck. Les Sept Princesses, pp. 135-142.



The Father: "You must be careful. Don't push the door; you know what a noise it makes!"

The Maid-servant: "But I am not touching the door, sir."

The Father: "But you are. You push as if you were trying to get into the room."

The Maid-servant: "But I am three steps away from the door, sir."<sup>8</sup>

In Les Aveugles, the young blind girl says that she has had a feeling, a very natural occurrence, that she was going to see. Maeterlinck's hidden meaning is that the young blind girl, who comes nearer being able to see (physically speaking) than any of the others of the group, also is most able to see the invisible profound truths about her which the others never suspect, until she has pointed them out:

The young blind girl: "Oh, how cold your hands are!"

Third blind man: "What are you doing?"

The young blind girl: "I was putting my hands on my eyes; I thought I was going to see all at once..."<sup>9</sup>

In the following, it is the young blind girl who keeps increasing the fear of the group through her intuitions, which she herself doesn't understand, and through her anxious inquiries.

---

8. M. Maeterlinck. L'Intruse, pp. 33-34.

9. M. Maeterlinck. Les Aveugles, p. 107.

(A sudden gust sweeps the dead leaves around in a whirlwind)

- The young blind girl: "Do you hear the dead leaves? I believe that someone is coming toward us..."
- The second blind man: "It is the wind; listen!"
- The third blind man: "No one will come now!"
- The oldest blind man: "The terrible winter cold spells are going to come..."
- The young blind girl: "I hear some one walking in the distance."
- The first blind man: "I hear only the dead leaves!"
- The young blind girl: "I hear some one walking very far away."
- The second blind man: "I hear only the north wind!"
- The young blind girl: "I tell you that some one is coming toward us."
- The oldest blind woman: "I hear a noise of very slow steps."
- The oldest blind man: "I believe that the women are right!" 10

We know that action is more vivid than narration, but the action which is suspected by far exceeds the visible action in vividness and in its ability to play on the imagination and the emotions of an individual. Maeterlinck's rare utilization of this dramatic technique is one of his most effective methods.

"Victor Hugo has said that nothing is more interesting than a wall behind which something is happening. This tragic wall is in all of M. Maeterlinck's poems and dramas; and, when it is

not a wall, it is a door; and, when it is not a door, it is a curtained window."<sup>11</sup>

In L'Intruse, the true drama (the inner drama) is taking place behind a closed door. A sick mother is lying in her room very ill. The characters we see and hear are sitting in the next room just outside her closed door, and from their conversation we feel intensely sure that Death is entering the sick chamber, although they are not aware of it and never mention it. In Intérieur the real drama is taking place behind the windows through which we are looking. The characters, to which we listen, tell us that the happiness and peace behind the windows are being crowded out by an overpowering Fate. In Les Aveugles Maeterlinck has, indeed, very skillfully made use of this suspected action. There are no closed doors, curtained windows, or high walls. In this play all of the characters are blind and, although we are able to see and hear all that they do and say, we can see that the priest, whose return they are expecting, is dead in their midst. We realize that the real drama is the inner suspense, that becomes more and more intense as we see the blind persons of the group slowly become aware of the death of their guide among them. In Les Sept Princesses Death is entering a spacious castle hall in which the princesses have locked themselves in

---

11. Jules Lemaitre. Impressions de Théâtre, Huitième série, p. 153.

order to take a nap. The characters we see, and whose conversation makes us aware of the presence of Death, are watching the seven sleeping princesses through great glass windows. Here the true drama is the play of unseen forces, behind the misty panes, which the characters seem to be ignorant even though they are afraid. The preceding examples make us aware that Maeterlinck's use of suspected action has been worthwhile and when coupled with his various mystic backgrounds, his strange tragic plots, and his inner dialogue it forms a combination which we believe to be one of the key stones to the successfulness of the "Static Drama". All of his plays which are wholly static are built on this method although the longer plays La Princesse Maleine, Pelléas et Mélisande, Aglavaine et Sélysette, and Alladine et Palomides, which contain only certain static elements are not constructed in this manner.

The settings of Maeterlinck's plays are important factors in his creation of atmosphere and situation which make the inner drama of his plays effective. He has made vital use of this important element in all of his static plays. We find that the settings of his one act plays are usually at night or in the deepening twilight of the day while his longer ones (his three and five act plays) are usually set in old dark castles in the midst of thick towering forests where there are mysterious smells and sounds and an atmosphere of gloom. In his four one

act static plays we find that L'Intruse takes place at night, beginning early in the evening and concluding at mid-night. Les Aveugles occurs in the twilight of day, but since all of the visible characters are blind the play seems to take place at night. Intérieur, also takes place at night, and, although the characters to whom we listen are in a dark garden, they are watching a happy family, which every one else knows is marked by Destiny for a great impending sorrow, around an evening fire. Les Sept Princesses takes place in early evening. The King, Queen, and prince (the visible characters) can barely see through the misty glass panes because of the deepening twilight. In the five longer plays we feel that the author does not miss one point in his creation of setting for making the prevailing atmosphere play its designed role. In Pelléas et Mélisande the scene is set in an old gloomy castle surrounded by a dense dark forest. Odors, sounds, shadows, flowing fountains, and dangerous rocky paths add to the effectiveness of this weird background. In La Princesse Maleine Maeterlinck has included practically everything which a writer would use in making his atmosphere strange, gloomy, and exceedingly mystical, and he has succeeded in making us extremely conscious of its effect. There is a massive old castle with its surrounding moat and marshes, tall trees, flowing fountains, and strange sounds. Throughout the play most of the scenes occur on a still night,

in the twilight, in the shadowy moonlight, or on stormy nights, all of which make atmosphere predominate. In Aglavaine et Sélysette the setting is in a huge and almost empty old castle with a towering forest behind it and a murmuring sea, swarming with sea gulls, hundreds of feet below its rocky cliffs. The setting in La Mort de Tintagiles is a decaying old castle, on a small island, almost hidden in a deep valley and surrounded by tall trees. Passers-by on the top of a near by hill can barely distinguish one lone tower above the tall trees. The old castle seems to be falling to rack and ruin from lack of sunlight among the towering dark trees. The setting in Alladine et Palomides is in another of Maeterlinck's huge old castles. It is built over some strange massive subterranean caverns and surrounded by a deep dark moat and an endless forest.

When considering Maeterlinck's dramas as to techniques, we find that he has combined them so harmoniously that they have the appearance of having been written with the greatest ease. Indeed, he is such a master of the techniques in which he excels that his plays appear to be simple and almost fairy-like little tragedies.

### Chapter III

#### The Static Drama in Practice: The Plays

##### 1. Purely Static Plays

Intérieur is the only play in which Maeterlinck has made every condition comply perfectly with his conception of the "Static" system. We find that action is altogether absent and that the main drama is not in the actual dialogue spoken but in the train of thought that it constantly suggests, which represents the perfect inner-dialogue.

The real characters here, those in whose destiny we are interested, are not seen and heard. We are able to see only their shadows through the windows, moving about in the room from time to time. A young girl has drowned and the real drama is suggested by the conversation of the persons who stand in the garden just outside the windows and who have to inform the family inside of this tragic event. Their sympathetic feelings make them lack the immediate courage to destroy the contentment and happiness of the family they are watching. The sorrow and suffering, which we see so unavoidably closing in on this happy family, are evoked in the minds of the spectators by the ideas suggested in the conversation. The audience or the reader is made intensely conscious

of the approaching fate and can in no way alter the cruel and inexorable tragedy that is surrounding its helpless victims. From the following dialogue we find no mention of the approaching Destiny or the present happiness of the innocent victims, but we find both implied, as well as the grieved feelings of those unable to prevent the tragedy.

- Marie: "The oldest girl isn't smiling anymore, grandfather...."
- The Stranger: "They are going away from the windows..."
- Marie: "They are embracing their mother..."
- The Stranger: "The oldest girl is playing with the curls of the baby, who isn't waking up...."
- Marie: "Oh! Here is the father, he wants some one to embrace him, too...."
- The Stranger: "Now there is a silence...."
- Marie: "The girls are returning to their mother's side."
- The Stranger: "The father is following with his eyes the big pendulum of the clock...."
- Marie: "One might say that they are praying without knowing what they are doing."
- The Stranger: "One might say that they are listening to their souls...."
- (A silence)
- Marie: "Grandfather, don't tell them to-night!"

L'Intruse, a simple appearing little one-act play, is one of Maeterlinck's best examples of "Static Drama",



as well as one of his most effective plays. We learn from the conversation of a family group, sitting around a table in their living-room at night, that a sick mother is lying very ill in the next room. Her family, husband, children, brother-in-law, and blind father, are the visible characters to whose conversation we listen. The doctor has assured them that she is better, yet the grandfather is troubled and uneasy. After much repetition his anxious inquiries arouse the fears of the others. The family has expected a Catholic sister and all the suppositions pertaining to her coming are skillfully used to make the approach of the "intruder", Death, a reality. After a profound suspense has been created in the mind of the reader, by the grandfather's continued anxious remarks, an attendant nun opens the door and makes the sign of the cross to indicate the mother's death. At last, we realize that our fears and our premonitions, founded on the intuitions of the grandfather, were valid.

The chief significance of the dialogue of this drama, as is characteristic of Maeterlinck, lies between the lines and consequently here we find an example of the "inner dialogue". Death is never mentioned or referred to, yet gradually and irresistibly the feeling of its presence drives all else out of our consciousness. We find symbol after symbol used to announce the approach, as well as the identity of the intruder, such as: the

sudden silence of the nightingales, the noises on the stairway, the sharpening of a scythe outside, and the obstinacy of the window which refuses to be closed. The effectiveness of these symbols lies in the fact that all of them are explainable by perfectly natural means, except the sharpening of the scythe (which is explained only by the fact that the Father had noticed that the grass near the house was very high and since the next day would be Sunday the gardener was cutting the grass that night); yet even that fact gives them a distinct suggestion of mystery and of the supernatural. Through the constant repetition of simple sentences in the form of troubled inquiries by the grandfather, the dramatist develops the growing uneasiness of the group and reveals the unseen and intangible influences about them. The grandfather is blind and because of this affliction he appears to have a profound insight into the super-human destiny, which is approaching, yet he is helplessly inactive in his hot-house, the doors of which are closed because of his human inability to interpret his intuitions.

The following dialogue will illustrate how Maeterlinck has brought together in this play some of his techniques in order to transmit to us the knowledge of the constant workings of a super-human power about us:

The Grandfather: "Did she come in?"

The Father: "Who?"

The Grandfather: "The servant."

The Father: "No, she went downstairs."

The Grandfather: "I thought that she sat down at the table."

The Uncle: "The servant?"

The Grandfather: "Yes."

The Uncle: "Why, that would be unthinkable."

The Grandfather: "And your sister is not here?"

The Uncle: "Our sister did not come."

The Grandfather: "You want to deceive me!"

The Uncle: "To deceive you?"

The Grandfather: (To his granddaughter) "Ursula, tell me the truth, for God's sake."

.....

The Father: "It is the gardener going to mow."

The Uncle: "He mows by night?"

The Father: "Is not tomorrow Sunday? Yes. I noticed that the grass was very high about the house."

The Grandfather: "It seems to me his scythe makes as much noise....."

The Daughter: "He is mowing near the house."

The Grandfather: "Can you see him, Ursula?"

The Daughter: "No, grandfather; he is in the dark."

The Grandfather: "It seems to me his scythe makes as much noise....."<sup>2</sup>

In Les Aveugles we learn from the conversation of a group of blind patients (six men and six women, old and young, some blind since birth and other almost able to

see) that they have all come from various places across the sea and that they now live in a convent on a small island. They reveal that an old priest, their guide for many years, has taken them into the forest, yet close enough to the sea, so that they are able to hear the water splash against the rocky cliffs. While seated in the woods their guide has fallen dead, without their being aware of it. They believe that he has left them alone to grope helplessly before an approaching storm, while he has gone to get bread and water for the insane blind woman. Finally, they perceive that during all the time that they have waited for his return he has been dead in their midst. Little by little, in the night their ears sense from the vibrations of the silence that some one else has entered. Who can it be? They know now that it cannot be their guide, yet when they call, no one answers. The author does not reveal the identity of the new-comer, but it is apparent that it is Death who is in their midst. This play has also been given an allegorical explanation. Humanity (the group of blind patients) is groping for truth and light, which is everywhere around it, but because humanity is blind, it is impossible to find the truth and the light without a guide to interpret them. The guide, who is the priest, represents the church, which is able to make clear the mysteries of the spiritual world.

Les Aveugles may be classed as entirely static and there is no action because even death has already come. Throughout the play we find numerous symbols which create the atmosphere necessary to appreciate the drama. Also contributing to this atmosphere is the use of inner-dialogue, especially effective in this play.

(The mad woman's child is the only one that is able to see among the group.)

The very old blind woman: "Which way is he looking?"

The young blind girl: (Holding the child) "He keeps following the sound of the steps. Look! Look! When I turn him away, he turns back to see. He sees, he sees, he sees! He must see something strange!"

The very old blind woman: " (Stepping forward) Lift him above us, so that he may see better."

The young blind girl: "stand back, stand back. (She raises the child above the group of blind folk.) The footsteps have stopped amongst us."

.....

(A flight of night birds alights suddenly in the foliage.)

The second blind man: "Listen! listen! What is up there above us? do you hear?"

The very old blind man: "Something has passed between us and the sky!"

The sixth blind man: "There is something stirring over our heads; but we can not reach there!"

The first blind man: "I do not recognize that noise. I should like to go

back to the Asylum."<sup>3</sup>OKLAHOMA  
AGRICULTURAL & MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
LIBRARY

OCT 27 1939

## 2. Plays Containing Static Elements

In La Princesse Maleine Princess Maleine, the daughter of Marcellus, king of one part of Holland, and Prince Hjalmar, son of the king of another part of Holland, are betrothed. Although these two have seen each other only once, they believe that they are in love. Anne, Queen of Futland, and her daughter Uglyane have come to live in the castle with King Hjalmar, and under Queen Anne's crafty influence, King Hjalmar breaks his son's betrothal vows and wages war against King Marcellus. King Marcellus's whole kingdom is burned and destroyed except Princess Maleine and her nurse, who had been locked in an old tower. They escape from the tower and finally wander into King Hjalmar's kingdom. Queen Anne has, in the meantime, succeeded in betrothing her daughter with Prince Hjalmar but when Princess Maleine, now a hand-maiden to Queen Anne, discloses her identity to Prince Hjalmar, he breaks his betrothal with Uglyane, because he knows now that he is in love with Maleine. Queen Anne's plans are thus broken, but with King Hjalmar in love with her and completely under her domination, she makes new plans. She gives to Maleine a poison,

---

3. M. Maeterlinck. Les Aveugles; pp. 114, 76.

which makes her very ill. The Queen locks the sick Maleine in her chamber claiming that the doctor has said that she is too ill to have any company and needs complete rest. Queen Anne, with the King, goes to Maleine's chamber one stormy night and strangles the helpless little princess. When the body of Maleine is found, the King, whose mind seems to be wandering because of the probings of his conscience and the domination of the Queen, confesses that the Queen with his help slew the innocent Maleine. Prince Hjalmar stabs the Queen because she has caused Maleine's death and has accused his father of being out of his senses; then he stabs himself.

Throughout the drama Maeterlinck presents the powerful and inescapable undercurrent of evil which threatens the innocent and mystical little Princess Maleine. These approaching forces he vividly suggests by very natural happenings: an eclipse; the flight of a number of swans, all of which fly away but one and that one has blood on its wings; and the extremely unnatural actions of nature as if some monster were appeasing his wrath.

- The servant: "An eclipse! An eclipse!" (Lightening and violent thunder)
- All: "The lightening has struck the castle."
- A peasant: "Did you see the castle shake?"
- Another peasant: "All the towers tottered!"
- A woman: "The large cross over the chapel moved! It moves! It moves!"

Several: "Yes, yes, it is going to fall! it is going to fall!"

Others: "It is falling! It is falling, with the roof of the turret!"

.....

The servant: "Look at the swans! Look at the swans!"

All: "Where? Where are they?"

The servant: "In the moat; under Princess Maleine's window?"

Several: "What ails them? Look! What ails them?"

Others: "They are flying away! They are flying away!" They are all flying away!"

A pilgrim: "There is one that does not fly away!"

A second pilgrim: "There is blood on its wings."

A third pilgrim: "It is floating on its back."

All: "It is dead."<sup>4</sup>

.....

Others: "I will not look out any more."

Lord: "All animals have taken refuge in the graveyard! There are peacocks in the cypresses. There are owls on the tombstones. All the sheep of the village are crouching on the graves."

Another Lord: "You would say it was a festival in Hell!"

A Maid of Honor: "Draw the curtains! Draw the curtains!"

An attendant: (Entering) "One of the towers has fallen into the pool!"

---

4. M. Maeterlinck. La Princesse Maleine, Act V, Scene I.



A Lord: "One of the towers!" 5

Les Sept Princesses is a weird little play that makes you feel, after having read it, as if you are recalling a sweet but somehow tragic dream. In an imposing old castle in a dark marshy country beside the sea, and surrounded by towering trees that keep back the sunlight, we find seven beautiful princesses waiting with their grandfather and grandmother, the King and Queen, for the return of their cousin, Marcellus, the prince. The prince arrives to find the seven princesses asleep on marble steps in a spacious hall surrounded by glass windows. They have grown very pale and frail because the marshy dark country has given them the fever and the tall trees never allow them any sunlight. Because they are ill with the fever the Queen is afraid for them to be awakened even at the arrival of the prince. From the conversation of the prince and his grandparents, as they watch the sleeping princesses locked behind great glass windows, we learn that Ursula, the princess who sleeps in the middle, seemingly in sleep more strange than the others, and over whom there appears to be a shadow passing, is the one who, of the seven princesses, has waited for the prince day and night for seven years. The Queen becomes disturbed from the restless and unnatural sleep of Ursula and from the strange indistinct mist which

---

5. Ibid., Act V, Scene II.

seems to be stretching over her. She tries to awaken them by knocking on the glass panes, but cannot. At last, Marcellus, unable to unlock the door, takes the underground passage through the royal burying chamber, where his own parents are buried, and enters the hall where the princesses sleep. On entering the room all of the princesses, except Ursula, awaken and get up. From the terrified conversation of the helpless King, Queen, and people of the chateau, watching through the windows, we realize that a powerful Fate, the approach of which we had sensed, has taken the life of Ursula, the most cherished of the seven princesses.

Maeterlinck has worked in numerous signs to make us aware of a distinct unusual quality about Ursula: the appearance of a strange shadow over her, the strange unnatural position of her arm, and the arrangement of her hair different from that of the others as if she had intended to go out.

The voices of the sailors of the departing ship on which Marcellus arrived, repeating:

"Far-away voices: 'We shall return no more! We shall return no more!'"<sup>6</sup>

fill the atmosphere with a feeling that something very dear to us is leaving never to return. These quotations are examples of Maeterlinck's use of repetition of simple

---

6. M. Maeterlinck. Les Sept Princesses, (Translation by Richard Hovey), p. 146.

phraseology, in which there is inner dialogue, intensifying an atmosphere, as well as the presentation of signs forewarning us of the death of Ursula.

Prince: "I think it is the shadow of a column--I shall see her better soon, when the sun has wholly set..."

Queen: "No, no; it is no shadow of the sun..."

Prince: "We shall see if the shadow moves away..."

King: "I see what it is; it is the shadow of the lamp."

.....

Prince: "She is holding one of her hands strangely."

Queen: "Who is?"

Prince: "Ursula."

Queen: "What is that hand? I did not see it just now."

Prince: "The others concealed it."

King: "I do not know what you mean; I do not even see the mirrors..."

Queen: "She will be hurt! She will be hurt! She cannot sleep so; it is not natural--I wish she would put down her hand a little. My God, my God, grant that she put down that little hand! Her little arm must ache there so long!"

Prince: "I see nothing to sustain it..."

.....

Prince: "I cannot be clear what it is. It might be her hair."

Queen: "But why has she not bound up her hair? All the others have bound up their hair....Look.

Prince: "I tell you it is her hair! It stirs. Oh, her hair is beautiful! It is not the hair of a sick woman.

Queen: "She does not arrange it so for sleeping. You would say she had intended to go out."

Prince: "She said nothing to you?"

Queen: "She said this noon as she closed the door. 'Above all, do not wake us.' Then I kissed her, not to see that she was sad..."<sup>7</sup>

In Pelléas et Mélisande we find Melisande, an innocent creature with a divine soul to whom sin and corruption are unknown, representing the spirit of beauty. Prince Golaud, returning from a hunt, finds her lost in the forest, weeping beside a fountain, Golaud, whose wife has died recently, falls in love with this beautiful young girl, who appears to be a princess, but of whose history he knows nothing. Pelléas, Golaud's younger brother, and Mélisande are thrown together frequently at Golaud's insistence. Later to avoid admitting to himself that he realizes the bond of affection between them, Golaud dismisses it by calling them mere children, who play games, though his laughter betrays a certain apprehension. Pelléas and Mélisande fall in love, but never openly reveal their mutual emotions until the night Pelléas learns that he will leave in the morning. During this time Golaud has become more and more jealous. He is not able to verify his suspicions, in spite of using every effort to make Yniold, his young son, tell him how Mélisande and Pelléas act, or of what they talk when

---

7. Ibid., pp. 133-143.

alone together. He even holds Yniold up to the window to report on their actions, but without satisfaction. Melisande and Pelleas meet in the park on the night before Pelleas departure. They confess their mutual love and suddenly aware that Golaud is hiding near by, intending to kill Pelleas, they kiss for the first and last time just before he is slain. Mélisande, an innocently beautiful spirit apparently not made for this world, dies soon after the birth of a daughter. Without her the world remains much as it was except for the remembrance of an exquisitely beautiful soul.

This drama is an inner-spiritual drama, and is treated without any moralistic emphasis to hinder its pure artistry. Maeterlinck was entirely sincere in his doctrine of the moral unconsciousness of the soul. It was a part of his philosophy and it is the basis of the love story in this drama. The critic, H. A. Smith, has said that Pelléas et Mélisande is Maeterlinck's most beautiful play and comes nearest to being his one real masterpiece. We believe this judgment was passed because it presents real characters. Yet it is classed as a play having static scenes because at various places it conforms to our conception of the static system as previously defined. His characters, describing in trivial language seemingly ordinary occurrences, convey to the reader the play of unseen forces of which they, themselves, seem to be ignorant. In the following quotation, the

tiny child, Yniold, reveals his anxiety for his "petite mere", caused by his intuition of the intenseness of the elements about him:

- Mélisande: "What is the matter, Yniold? What is the matter? Why are you weeping so suddenly?"
- Yniold: (sobbing) "Because---Oh! Oh! because..."
- Mélisande: "Why? Why? Tell me..."
- Yniold: "Little mother--little mother--you are going away."
- Mélisande: "What has come over you, Yniold? I have never dreamed of going away."
- Yniold: "Yes, yes; little father went away--little father isn't coming back, and you are going to go away, too. I've seen it. I've seen it."
- Mélisande: "But there has never been a thought of that, Yniold. What is it that you have seen that makes you think I am going away?"
- Yniold: "I've seen it. I've seen it--you told my uncle something that I wasn't able to hear."
- Pelléas: "He is sleepy--he has been dreaming--come here, Yniold; you are asleep, already? Come to the window to see the swans fighting the dogs..."<sup>8</sup>

The setting and the story of Pelléas et Mélisande have too much in common with ordinary plays for us to think that they are of prime importance to Maeterlinck. But he uses characters, action, and dialogue to show us a spiritual life, fuller and more beautiful than that to which we are accustomed. Maeterlinck believes that to love anyone is beautiful and here he reveals, in a

---

8. M. Maeterlinck. Pelléas et Mélisande, Act III, Scene I.

love story of a type which has commonly been misconstrued as something illegitimate and therefore evil, the spirit of God at work.

In Alladine et Palomides we find the white bearded old king, Ablamore, who has grown very sad, in a mystically echoing old castle. One by one he has seen six of his seven devoted daughters die and one by one he has built a fountain in his courtyard as a remembrance to each. In the murmuring voices of the fountains he has learned to distinguish the voices of his departed daughters. The King, perhaps because of his deep grief, falls in love with Alladine, a beautiful little Greek slave with a simple child-like soul. Ablamore grows more and more sad because Alladine does not return his love. He realizes that she is capable of deep love because of her love for her pet lamb and the way she looks at babies, birds, and flowers. Palomides, a young prince from a distant country, comes to the castle to marry Ablamore's last daughter. Almost at Palomides' first meeting with the little greek slave they fall in love. Ablamore, realizing that he will never be able to gain Alladine's heart and that Palomides is in love with her, experiences moments in which his mind wanders. He locks Alladine, who has fainted, in her room bound and tied in her own hair. His daughter, Astolaine, whose deep inner beauty has made her able to acknowledge and accept the fact that she and Palomides were not made for each other, rescues Alladine

with Palomides' help. Thus hindered in an attempt to avenge his loss, the King locks the lovers, bound hand and foot, in his subterranean caverns under the castle, leaving them to grope helplessly in the dark. Finally, losing his mind completely, Ablamore wanders into the forest and is lost. Alladine and Palomides, frightened by their rescuers, fall into a deep pit of water. They die, from the effects of their fall, in two separate palace chambers, calling to each other. Their pitiful deaths leave the impression that although thwarted, by a powerful smothering Destiny in their desires of having an earthly existence together, their souls are meeting for an eternal and more beautiful comradeship.

In this mystical and fatalistic little drama with static scenes Maeterlinck has woven and inter-woven his philosophy of the beautifulness of soul yet coupled with it the idea that there is a Supreme Being whose unseen power has previously designed the fate of our lives no matter how beautiful the soul. Yet, beautifulness of soul is important, because the soul goes on living and loving and communicating with other souls after mere human existence has ceased.

Again, Maeterlinck has made his play successful through the prevalence of atmosphere. The drama is set in an immense old castle with so many rooms that little Alladine, when lost, opened thirty doors before she was able to find her whereabouts. The huge castle is



surrounded by a deep dark moat which sweeps whatever may fall into it, away into the subterranean caves under the castle to be lost forever in the debris of centuries accumulated there. In the following quotations the author has combined his techniques to produce the atmosphere which makes this play effective.

Alladine: (turning and looking at the blue water which lights them) "Oh!"

Palomides: "It seems as if the heavens had flowed hither."

Alladine: "It is full of motionless flowers."

Palomides: "It is full of flowers motionless and strange. Have you seen the largest ones that spread beneath the others? It seems as if they lived a cadenced life. And the water. Is it water? It looks fairer and purer and bluer than all the water of earth."

Alladine: "I dare not look at it any more."

Palomides: "Look about us at all it illumines. The light dares hesitate no longer, and we embrace each other in the outer courts of heaven. Do you see the precious jewels of the caverns, drunk with the life which seems to smile upon us, and the myriads upon myriads of burning blue roses which climb along the pillars?"<sup>9</sup>

.....  
Voice of Palomides: (very feebly, inside the other chamber) "Alladine!"

Second Sister: "Yes, yes; hinder her from calling any more."

Third Sister: "She is already the cause of all this trouble."

Astolaine: "Don't go in! or else I shall go into Palomides' room. She has a right to life, too; and she has done nothing more than live. But how stifle in their passage these mortal words of theirs? We are defenceless, my poor sisters, and hands cannot stop souls!"

Voice of Alladine: "Palomides, is it you?"

Voice of Palomides: "Alladine, where are you?"

Voice of Alladine: "Is it you I hear sorrowing far away from me?"

Voice of Palomides: "Is that you I hear calling me without seeing you?"

Voice of Alladine: "Your voice seems to have lost all hope."

Voice of Palomides: "Yours seems to have traversed death."

.....

Voice of Palomides: "You are thinking of something you are not telling me."

Voice of Alladine: "They were not jewels."

Voice of Palomides: "And the flowers were not real."

One of the sisters: "They are raving."

Astolaine: "No, no; they know what they are saying."

Voice of Alladine: "It was the light that was pitiless."

Voice of Palomides: "Alladine, where are you going? It seems as if you were going farther away."

Voice of Alladine: "I regret the rays of the sun no longer."

Voice of Palomides: "Yes, yes; we shall see the gentle green things again!"

Voice of Alladine: "I have lost the wish to live."  
(Silence, then more and more feebly.)

Voice of Palomides: "Alladine."

Voice of Alladine: "Palomides....."<sup>10</sup>

In La Mort de Tintagiles the tiny little boy Tintagiles has been brought to a small island through the order of the treacherous old Queen, who lives in the ancient and decaying castle in the depths of the valley. Tintagiles, a sweet innocent little creature, is the only heir to the throne of this jealous old Queen. He has been brought to the humble rooms of two Catholic sisters and an old priest, who live in this gloomy castle and who knew him as a baby. Because they realize the terrible possibilities of the actions the Queen may take, their intuitions and anxiety are almost unbearable. They warn Tintagiles to be cautious and never to get out of their sight. The three sisters have only their frail bodies, and the tottery old priest has only his sword (which he is scarcely able to handle) with which to defend the precious little Tintagiles, although they are all willing to give their lives for his sake. With their rooms locked as securely as possible, Tintagiles in one of the sister's arms, and the old sword on the priest's knees, they await the crisis they sense approaching. Tintagiles, very alarmed, because he keeps hearing sister

---

10. Ibid., Act V, Scene IV.

Ygraine's heart beating loudly, faints in her lap. Then there is heard the noise of many people in the corridor and the door is unlocked from the outside. In attempting to defend the door, the priest breaks his sword, and as Tintagiles utters a cry on awakening, the noise leaves abruptly and door closes silently. Later the handmaids of the Queen slip in at night to steal Tintagiles as he sleeps. They find him between the two sleeping sisters, with their arms tight around him and his hands clinched fast in their hair. The handmaids cut the sisters' hair, which Tintagiles still grips, and carry him away. The sisters and the priest awaken and Ygraine follows the scattered hair to an iron door which has no latch and refuses to open. Beating the door frantically, she stops when she hears a tiny knock on the opposite side. It is Tintagiles. Trying desperately to open the door, she hears Tintagiles saying that someone whom he feels is terrible is about to reach him and that she (although he doesn't know who she is) is taking hold of his throat. Soon his feeble voice can scarcely be heard and then his little body is heard falling behind the iron door. Poor Ygraine is helpless to do anything.

Tintagiles' death is never mentioned, but its approach is vividly apparent even very near the beginning of the drama. His death is horribly real behind an iron door, because we cannot see and are not sure. In the following selections the author uses every natural

occurrence to suggest the coming of the greedy and jealous old Queen and the terrible death of Tintagiles: the rapid beating of their hearts (perhaps due to intense fright), the noise of someone in the corridor, and the unnatural way in which the sisters and Tintagiles sleep.

Tintagiles: "Yes--I don't know why I hear thy heart beat sister Ygraine..."

Ygraine: "Thou hearest it beat?"

Tintagiles: "Oh! Oh! it beats, it beats, as if it would..."

Ygraine: "What?"

Tintagiles: "I don't know, sister Ygraine...."

Ygraine: "Thou must not be alarmed without reason, nor speak in riddles. Stop! thine eyes are wet. Why art thou troubled? I hear thy heart beat, too...You always hear it when you kiss so. It is then it speaks and says things the tongue knows not of...."

Tintagiles. "I did not hear it just now...."

Ygraine: "Because then...Oh! but thine! Why, what ails it? It is bursting!"

.....

Aglovale: (the priest, rising abruptly, sword in hand). I hear too; ....someone is walking in the corridor."

Ygraine: "Oh!"

(A silence--they listen)

Aglovale: "I hear---- There is a crowd of them."

Ygraine: "A crowd! What crowd?"

Aglovale: "I do not know; you hear and you do not hear. They do not walk like other beings, but they come. They are touching the door.

Ygraine: (Clasping Tintagiles convulsively in her arms.) "Tintagiles! Tintagiles!"<sup>11</sup>

.....

First Handmaid: "Take care; they are aware of something. They are all three struggling with a bad dream. (the two handmaids enter the room).

Third Handmaid: "They are always aware; but they do not understand."

(A silence. The first two handmaids come back again from the apartment.)

"Well?"

Second Handmaid: "You must come too; we cannot detach them."

First Handmaid: "As fast as we undo their arms, they close them on the child again."

Second Handmaid: "And the child clings to them harder and harder..."

First Handmaid: "He is resting with his forehead on the elder sister's heart..."<sup>12</sup>

In Aglavaine et Sélysette, Sélysette is Meleander's sweet, little girl-wife whose past is vague and strange, although we know her grandmother and little sister as characters in the play. Aglavaine, a beautiful woman, who represents strength and wisdom to Sélysette, comes to live in the big old castle, the happy home of Sélysette and Meleander, after the death of her husband, Sélysette's brother. Aglavaine and Meleander come to

---

11. M. Maeterlinck. La Mort de Tintagiles, Act III.

12. Ibid., Act IV.

love each other with a love that they assure themselves is not of this world. Sélysette, in the depths of despair, begs Aglavaine, whom she feels is so much wiser than she, to tell her what she should do. Aglavaine gives her no really satisfactory answer, but as a result of her deeper ideas Sélysette's beautiful little soul strives for the moral strength to do the one thing that will leave the man she loves and the woman she admires free to love each other without pity for her. Daily, she plans to make this one great sacrifice and daily her inner-beauty and moral courage begin to take such outward expressions that the others see her change, and wonder, but are not deep-sighted enough to prevent the approaching catastrophe. Sélysette, inwardly more happy than ever before, because she thinks she can bring happiness by such a sacrifice, jumps over the castle wall and on her death-bed refuses to admit that her death is not the result of an accident.

The author's real characters are present and in them we see lofty souls endeavoring to find the true deep inner-beauty, the divine power that Maeterlinck assures us is within us all. We find strange little recurrences of idea and phraseology, pale sunlight sometimes seen in the gloom, little Sélysette smiling through her tears, all of which help to create the necessary atmosphere and situation.

The characters are struggling blindly and helplessly, against Fate and although we find the age old triangle, two women in love with one man, there is no overpowering, dramatic action so commonly caused by such a situation. Maeterlinck shows us that we can have little influence over exterior events, the powers of Fate, but that we are able to use these events for forming elements of strength and beauty in our character, and it is these elements that determine our happiness. The following extract impresses upon us the prevailing atmosphere of the play and makes us aware that under such conditions tragedy is behind the next corner, ready to strike the most innocent victim:

Meligrane: (the grandmother of Selysette) "No, no, Sélysette mine, it was you who did not abandon me...."

Sélysette: "No, no grandam.... I know full well that it is you who stayed on for my sake..."

Meligrane: "You are strangely serious this afternoon, Sélysette, and for all that you do not seem sad."

Sélysette: "I have always been very happy, grandam, and now I know the meaning of happiness."

Meligrane: "You do not mean that it has gone from you, Sélysette?"

Sélysette: "Far from that, I believe I have found it, grandam....And tell me, have you been happy?"

Meligrane: "When, Sélysette?"

Sélysette: "In the time that has gone, grandam..."

Meligrane: "Of what time do you speak, my child?"

Sélysette: "The time when life was....."



Meligrane: "There have come to me days of sorrow even as they come to all that live on this earth, but I may truly claim to have been happy, since you have never once left me..."<sup>13</sup>

---

5. H. B. Clark, The Continental Drama of Today, p. 183.

## Chapter IV

### Evaluation of the Static Drama

Maeterlinck is the unique creator of the "Static Drama" and has maintained his position as the only representative of this "genre" because it is drawn from his own peculiar genius. In the words of the critic Barrett H. Clark "He is a writer singularly apart and independent-- he might be classified as a Symbolist; yet, considering his total output, he is of no school. He occupies a unique position in modern drama and literature, as playwright, mystic, symbolist, and philosopher. Briefly, he has tried to express moods, sub-conscious and half-realized feelings, and in order to do so he has created the so-called "static" drama, the drama of situation and atmosphere."<sup>1</sup> Although plays have been written in a similar manner and concerning corresponding subjects, his profound philosophy has been presented so effectively and impressively in his plays by such unusual means (sympathy, strange impressions, and intuitions) that would-be imitators are discouraged at the outset.

These dramas are so profound that they bear study and many readings. With each reading new meanings are brought to mind. But, only as literature have they as

---

1. H. B. Clark. The Continental Drama of Today, p. 182.

yet exerted any influence, because the difficulty of staging them effectively has been so great that they have not been particularly successful in the theater. We find too, that this type of drama does not cater to the great general public, but only to the intellectual. The average person goes to the theater to be entertained and not to think, and in this respect we also find that it was not Maeterlinck's intention to please the masses. From the study of the author's philosophy, his manner of writing, and from the inter-play of these two, we come to believe that his fundamental ideas of the laws of life are not drawn from the apparent circumstances of life, but from the inner perception which comes to the inspired, and they are to be appreciated by intuition. In seeking to know his ideas of the laws of life we must experience a deep and profound silence. Then, words, deeds, or external influences can mean but little. His motive, which becomes more and more apparent, is to express philosophical truths. His "Statis Drama" is a product of the urge which makes it imperative for him to express the feelings within him, the truths he has sensed and the strange visions over which he has meditated. On the other hand Maeterlinck has not created a "pièce à thèse" to teach or give a moral lesson by pointing out social injustices and ways by which society can best be reformed. As a dramatic artist he felt that he was being used by a force greater than he and outside himself to

bring forth these creations, and when he had finished a piece, having satisfied that inner urge to express the emotions he experienced, he wondered if the effect achieved were enough like his inner vision to justify its existence.

"I finished my drama yesterday morning. It is not such as I wished it, this poor drama, and when I see it again, in my mind as a whole, I do not like it at all anymore. It was to have been the triumph, and actually the force of things has made it be almost the defeat of Aglavaine."<sup>2</sup>

The qualities which make the "Static Drama" stand out so sharply were imparted by factors drawn entirely from the author's spiritual make-up and his mystical views of life. Visioning a dramatist with such an outlook on life and who felt it his duty to make the emotions be experienced live, we can understand why it is inevitable that any change in his views should be reflected in his writings. It is beyond the purpose of this thesis to analyze the next phase of his literary production or go into detail as to what caused it. But Maeterlinck, himself, attributes his abandoning of the "Static Drama" to the change in his conception of life, due to his association with the actress, Georgette Leblanc, to whom he wrote, in 1895:

"When I think now of the things that I wrote before knowing you, all those little works seem dead to me and without value compared to what they should be! I had only some presentiments of the true life and I had never believed that it could exist. I do not

---

2. Georgette Leblanc. Souvenirs, Aglavaine et Sélysette, p. 91.

know why it was given me to have been sometimes right in my darkness, but all I said, I said without seeing anything, and almost without believing it (or at least I thought that I did not believe it), and it is only since your coming that I have seen that the things I said about the soul were a thousand times more real yet than what I believed I said, and it is since that day that I have been truly converted to myself."<sup>3</sup>

Later, in another letter, he reaffirms his new conception of life:

"But what filled me with joy above all, is that many even among those who know nothing of our association, (in England for instance), have noticed that there must have been in my life a tremendous and luminous change. One of them wrote me. 'What has happened to you? I seem to hear Lazarus....' These are things of which we are not easily made aware, because we live in the midst of them, but it is certain that our love must pierce with its rays all that we do, and that it has had on me an influence of which I am aware only now that those outside point it out. I have noticed that happiness, trust, peace and security, the feeling and the certainty of a refuge of the soul, always open, always immutable, has so entered into my life that the whole axis of my thoughts has moved in the direction of the light which is, truly speaking, the will of the soul; and I, for example, who was all impregnated with the blind force of destiny, have come to write things in which I cannot fail to affirm that Inner Destiny does not exist, that there is no inevitable drama, and that all moral destiny, (the only true destiny), depends solely on the power of wisdom accumulated in us."<sup>4</sup>

From the preceding quotations it is apparent that Maeterlinck abandons as unhealthy the "static Drama", the form which he had created, in which he had excelled, and which he had thought to be the only true drama. He

---

3. Ibid., Échanges, p. 74.

4. Ibid., pp. 95-96.

became less dogmatic, more liberal, and demanded only that drama be a work of art. By 1913, he had freed himself completely from the limitations of the "Static Drama", although it is not to be inferred that his experience in this form was wholly without influence on his later work; for as a seasoned dramatist he says,

"Whether a play be static, or dynamic, symbolistic or realistic, is of little consequence. What matters is that it be well written, well thought out, human and, if possible, superhuman, in the deepest significance of the term. The rest is mere rhetoric."<sup>5</sup>

---

5. H. B. Clark, The Continental Drama of Today, p. 183.

Plays

## Plays Purely Static

Intérieur (1894).

L'Intruse (1890).

Les Aveugles (1890).

## Plays Containing Static Elements

La Princesse Maleine (1889).

Les Sept Princesses (1891).

Pelléas et Mélisande (1892).

Alladine et Palomides (1894).

La Mort de Tintagiles (1894).

Aglavaine et Sélysette (1896).

## Later Plays

Ariane et Barbe-bleue (1901).

Sœur Béatrice (1901).

Monna Vanna (1903).

Joyzelle (1903).

L'Oiseau Bleu (1908).

Mary Magdalene (1913).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

For

MAETERLINCK'S STATIC DRAMA  
IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

(Primary Sources)

Plays

Maeterlinck, Maurice

L'Intruse et Les Aveugles, Introduction by H. W. Church, The Century Co., New York, 1925.Pelléas et Mélisande, et Intérieur, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1929.The Intruder, The Blind, The Seven Princesses, The Death of Tintagiles, Translated by Richard Hovey, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1920.Princess Maleine, Translated by Richard Hovey, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1894.Aglavaine and Sélysette, Translated by Alfred Sutro, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1915.Alladine and Palomides, in Poet-Lore, VIII, Edited by G. Porter and H. A. Clark, Poet-Lore Co., Boston, 1895.Essays

Maeterlinck, Maurice

La Mort, Bibliothèque-Charpentier Fasquelle Éditeurs, Paris, 1913.La Sagesse et La Destinée, Bibliothèque-Charpentier Fasquelle Éditeurs, Paris.



Le Trésor des Humbles, Pub. Mercure de France, Paris,  
1931.

L'Intelligence des Fleurs, Bibliothèque-Charpentier  
Fasquelle Éditeurs, Paris.

L'Hôte Inconnu, Bibliothèque-Charpentier Fasquelle  
Éditeurs, Paris, 1914.

Leblanc, Georgette. Souvenirs, Grasset, Paris, 1931.

(Secondary Sources)

Bever, A. Van. Les Célébrités d'Aujourd'hui, Bibliothèque  
Internationale d'édition Sansot et Cie Éditeurs,  
Paris, 1904.

Bithell, Jethro. Life and Writings of Maurice Maeterlinck,  
Scribner, London, 1913.

Clark, B. H. The Continental Drama of Today, Henry Holt  
and Co., New York, 1915.

Colorado College Publication, Lang. Series 18, II, The  
Evolution of Maeterlinck's Drama Theory. Colorado  
Springs, Colorado, 1907.

Hale, E. E. Jr. Dramatists of Today. Henry Holt and Co.,  
New York, 1911.

Lemaître, Jules. Impressions de Théâtre, Huitième série,  
Ancienne Librairie Furne Boivin and Cie Éditeurs,  
Paris, 1894.

LeMaître, Jules. Impressions de Théâtre, Onzième série,  
Ancienne Librairie Furne Boivin and Cie Éditeurs,  
Paris, 1893.

Smith, H. A. Main Currents of Modern French Drama, Henry  
Holt and Co., New York, 1928.

Joy Adams, Typist