

The Application of Symbolism to Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande*

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The word "symbolism" derives from the Greek verb *symbolleîn*, which means "to throw together." Accordingly, the essential meaning of symbolism is concerned with the visible and the invisible worlds, or rather, "the drawing together of two worlds; it presents the concrete [visible] material world of roses, toads, caves, stars, etc., and through them reveals an otherwise invisible world,"¹ as Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto remark. When *symbolleîn* is used as a noun, it means "a half of something broken in two, and thus the word suggests not something that stands for something else, but something that is part of a larger unit,"² as Barnet and others state once again. When the symbol explicitly presents to us a real concrete world, on the one hand, it implicitly reveals, on the other hand, a higher eternal world of which the symbol itself is an integral part. Our everyday world according to the symbolist is no more than a transient portion of a more important and everlasting world. When he speaks of a concrete real thing like a rose, the symbolist also speaks of eternal beauty. In this case we can explain neither the part nor the whole as they are integrated into each other.

Symbols have been used for a long time. In literature for example, objects and concrete things owing to association and likeness, reveal certain ideas and abstractions. Thus the lion symbolizes courage, the dove peace, the flag patriotism, the whip authority, the cross suffering, the hearth homelife, the crow bad luck and the eagle power. These simple symbols are doubtlessly easier than the complicated symbols and they can picturesquely and easily explain things. In classical mythology symbols were widely used, for example Mars stood for war, the Muse for poetic inspiration, Cupid's arrows for the pangs of love, and Fortune for luck. Symbols were used as abstract allegorical personified characters in the morality plays. They express certain ideas, morals, trends, situations and general aspects. We have examples of such characters as Mankind, Humanity, Everyman, Good Deeds, Honour, Mercy and so on.

As for the appearance of symbolism as a modern genre, it came as "a literary movement in France in the 1880s with Stephane Mallarme, Paul Valery, and other poets,"³ as Mayron Matlaw points out. The other important French symbolists are Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Paul Claudel (1868-1955). Other modern symbolists are the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck and the Irish William Butler Yeats. However symbolism is sometimes called neo-romanticism or impressionism.

Symbolism is a revolt against realism. It was over by 1900, but its influence has continued and affected even realistic playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen in *The Wild Duck* and Arthur Miller in his masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*. Ibsen made the wild duck stand for many people and situations, while Arthur Miller made out of the seeds and the flutes many symbols. Even Shakespeare, who is not a symbolist, used symbolism, especially when he made the storm in *King Lear* express both an outer conflict in the universe and an inner conflict in Lear's head.

Like the realists and naturalists, the symbolists established their own theatres. Their first theatre, the Theatre d'Art, was founded by Paul Fort in 1890. It produced a lot of symbolist plays before it was taken over in 1892 by the Theatre de l' Oeuvre (theatre of the work of art) which was directed by Aurelien-Marie Lugne-Poe. It opened with Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and*

Melisande. However this theatre did not restrict itself to symbolist drama. It kept functioning until 1929.

Symbolists, like romantics, see drama as a literary art independent of theatricality. Thus detheatricalization was as important to them as language, whether it is spoken or expressed in pauses, silences and gestures. They use little décor, while their stage curtain is usually made of blue gauze to suggest remoteness and vagueness as they are mainly introverts. Drama to them expresses only inner state instead of external actions that can be felt, heard and seen by the five senses as the realists believe. They concentrate on internal values. Apparent shapes to them are less important than inner conflicts.

Truth is realized through intuition not through the external senses. It cannot be expressed in logical language, because it cannot be logically understood. Hence it can be only suggested by indirectness, correspondence and analogies by employing symbols. Through the symbols the actual depiction of the state of mind is revealed.

Action is static in symbolist drama. Moreover the symbolists avoid tackling social problems. They choose their subject matters from the past. Like the neo-classicists they deal with universal truth independent of time and place. But unlike them they do not believe that truth can be rationally or logically understood. Accordingly the symbolists are against any specific historical place and time not suggesting universal truth.

The atmosphere of symbolist drama is dream-like and therefore the symbolists demand magic from the stage and magic always depends on illusion.

As for the clothes in the symbolist play, they do not define a certain place and time. Colour as well as décor only suggest the play's mood and idea, not the play itself. Moreover the focus should be directed on the play's words, silences, gestures and pauses, not on the play in particular. It is worth quoting Haskell M. Block's comment on the variant aspects of the symbolist drama:

The symbolists... set forth a freer, more imaginative conception of the drama in keeping with a new awareness of the role of dream, reverie, and mystical experience in art....

Symbolist drama sought to replace the description of external events by the description or revelation of inner life. Suggestiveness and mood-creation displaced anecdotal linear narrative. Symbolist drama was generally indirect, evocative rather than referential, with little or no plot action.⁴

The symbolists are, unlike the realists, subjective not objective. In this regard Allardyce Nicoll states:

The impressionist [symbolist] is one who endeavours partly by stepping aside from reality, to establish an individual work of personal impressions. One kind of impressionism will differ from another, but in all there is the emphasis on the subjective reception of impressions of this kind, and in all there is an attempt to escape from the more terrible and tyrannous aspects of objective reality.⁵

Another thing about the symbolists is that they are not on good terms with the machine, because it is associated with the material life. They are not directly concerned with the local and social issues and problems. Their drama avoids topicality and deals only with universal varieties like life, death and love.

On the other hand the symbolists, because of universal approach to drama, they are on good terms with Richard Wagner's idea of the total art, or rather "the fusion of all the arts into a master art work: music drama,"⁶ as Oscar G. Brockett puts it. Richard Wagner (1813-1883) is a German musician, poet and playwright who tried hard to distance drama from real life by inserting music in it so that the pitches of words, especially if sung, can be easily controlled as there is harmony between words and music. Moreover, music is employed for suggestive,

indirect and evocative purposes. The aim of the fusion of total art to Wagner is to bring a universal harmony of correspondences which the symbolists share with him.

Wagner's theory is that we reach truth not by external observation as the realists do, but only when we free ourselves from the bonds of materialism. To achieve his aim he uses a double-proscenium stage with a curtain of steam. The auditorium lights are dimmed so that he can succeed in increasing the distance between the stage and the spectators who can now freely experience their illusion of fantasy through the accompaniment of dream-inspiring music. In this case he expects that the deep hidden truth and higher values can be felt by the audience whose emotions are now evoked.

It is time now to deal with Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) and his symbolist play *Pelleas and Melisande*. First a word must be said about his life and career. If England is proud of its famous playwright, Shakespeare, Norway of Henrik Ibsen, Ireland of George Bernard Shaw, and America of Eugene O'Neill, so is Belgium proud of Maurice Maeterlinck, who is often referred to as the Belgian Shakespeare.

Maeterlinck was born in Ghent, Belgium in 1862. His full name is Maurice Polydore-Marie-Bernard Maeterlinck. In 1932 he was made a count by the Belgian king and thus he was called Count Maeterlinck. He is a poet, playwright and essayist. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1911 for his dramatic masterpieces for the theatre. He wrote in French.

Maeterlinck's first poem, "The Rushes", was published in 1883 when he was only twenty-one years old. It is interesting to note here that his parents were not on good terms with poetry and for this reason they sent him to the University of Ghent to study law.

He was educated at the University of Ghent where he majored in law and he got his degree in 1885. He was admitted to the bar in Ghent in 1886. During his stay in Paris between 1885-1886 he met leaders of the symbolist movement like Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam and Stephane Mallarme. Consequently he abandoned law for literature. In 1889 his *Hothouses Blooms*, a verse collection together with his first play, *The Princess Maleine*, were published. In 1890 two plays, *The Interlude* and *The Blind*, were produced. His masterpiece, *Pelleas and Melisande*, was performed in 1892 in Paris at the theatre de l'Oeuvre directed by Aurelien Lugne-Poe. Claude Debussy's opera presented in 1902 was based on *Pelleas and Melisande*.

Other important plays written by Maeterlinck are *Monna Vanna* (1902) and *The Blue Bird* (1908). The last mentioned play, *The Blue Bird*, is the only play which shared the popularity with *Pelleas and Melisande*. It was Konstantin Stanislavski who first produced *The Blue Bird* at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1908. It ran in Moscow for almost a year.

Maeterlinck influenced many famous playwrights among whom are William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge and Eugene O'Neill. His plays have been extensively translated and have won a worldwide prestige. He spent a lot of time in France. He died on May 6, 1949 in Nice, France at the age of eighty-seven.

Concerning Maeterlinck's personal and private life, it is better to know something about it. It was in 1895 when he met Georgette Leblanc, an opera singer and actress. She could not get a legal divorce from her Spanish husband. Anyhow she and Maeterlinck lived together for more than twenty years. She enacted important roles in a lot of his plays.

We turn now to Maeterlinck's masterpiece, *Pelleas and Melisande*, and see how it serves as a true representative of the symbolist drama. The story of the play "resembles those of Tristram and Isolde and of Paolo and Francisca de Rimini (as related at the end of the fifth canto of Dante's *Inferno*)",⁷ as Matlaw tells us.

Outwardly the play is a melodramatic love story of a young wife who falls in love with her brother-in-law. The husband kills his brother, the lover; and the beloved dies of grief. Yet inwardly the play is about symbols, mysteries, unknown forces and destiny.

Maeterlinck used in this play a lot of devices, the most important of which is destiny, to show us the influence of symbolism. Destiny is as usual vague and unpredictable. It depends on chance or powers beyond us. It seems as if Golaud and Melisande were preordained to meet each

other in the forest by chance with no advance arrangement. The vagueness of the symbolist drama corresponds to the unpredictable and ambiguous meeting of Golaud with Melisande. The spectators do not know how Melisande came to the forest and why she was weeping, where she came from and how old exactly she was. Nevertheless, "in the wink of an eye the two are married,"⁸ as Bill Morelock remarks. It looks as if there were two or several destinies instead of one destiny as this ill-fated marriage will make Melisande predestined to love Pelleas, Golaud's half brother, later on. As a result of this illegal love, Pelleas is fated to be killed by Golaud. Consequently Melisande is finally doomed to die of grief, because the wound she sustained from her husband is so "little...; a bird would not have died of it,"⁹ as her physician confirms. The old servant already suspected that the wound was the cause of her death, because it was "a tiny little wound under her little left breast... a little wound that wouldn't kill a pigeon" (5.1.92). Certainly it is destiny, be it a wound or grief, that killed Melisande.

Arkel emphasizes the influence of destiny after knowing about Golaud's letter in which he said that he got married to Melisande. The king believes that Golaud must have been predestined by God to marry Melisande, a case he can neither prevent nor postpone: "I have never put myself athwart a destiny.... There happen perhaps no useless events" (1.3.77).

Again the first servant at the end of the play ascribes all that happened in the play to the work of fate: "It is the hand of God that has been stirring" (5.1.92). The characters are not strong enough to change their tragic end. They move blindly to their predestined doom. The old servant stresses the effect of this idea: "Yes, yes, it is not happiness that has come into the house" (ibid.). The second servant finds a purpose in what has been prearranged: "Yes, yes; all that did not happen without reason" (ibid.). Anyway all the women servants are crowded at the lower hall in the castle after having heard that Melisande has given birth to a girl and the old servant predicts Melisande's destined and imminent death, and that is why they gathered there: "It is she who is going to die" (ibid.). They entered the room where Melisande is lying in bed in order to witness her death; and thus "*all the servants fall suddenly on their knees at the back of the chamber*" (5.2.94) the minute they witnessed Melisande's death.

When the lovers saw Golaud watching them while they were kissing each other they predicted their doom. Hence Pelleas tells Melisande: "Pelleas: Oh! oh! All the stars are falling" (4.4.91)! She answers him: "Upon me, too! upon me, too" (ibid.)!

The whole play speaks of inexplicable forces directing human destinies. Arkel says destinies are not predictable and we might see only "the reverse even of our own [wishes]" (1.3.77). He first hoped that he would send Golaud "to ask the hand of the Princess Ursula ... to... put an end to long wars and old hatreds" (ibid.). Golaud feels sorry if he were the cause of Melisande's death. Yet he feels it was decreed to be done: "It is not my fault! ... It is not my fault" (5.2.94)!

Furthermore Melisande tells Golaud that she is tired of the castle and predicts her end: "I can live here no longer.... I shall die if I am left here" (2.2.79).

Pelleas reports that his father has told him he is destined to die soon: "Thou hast the grave and friendly look of those who will not live long.... You must travel; you must travel" (4.1.87). Thus Pelleas's fate prevents him from leaving and really he soon dies.

Again in his soliloquy while waiting to meet Melisande, Pelleas predicts that he is predestined not to see her once more: "It is the last evening... the last evening. It must all end" (4.4.89). When she comes he doubts he will see her any more. He tells her "It is perhaps the last time I shall see thee" (ibid.).

Also when Pelleas and Melisande meet for the last time and anxiously kissing each other, they predict that their end has come and they will both be killed by Golaud who has been watching them:

Pelleas: He has seen all!... He will kill us!

Melisande: All the better! all the better! all the better!

Pelleas: He comes! He comes! ... Thy mouth! Thy mouth!
Melisande: Yes! ... yes! yes! [*They kiss desperately.*]
Pelleas: Oh! oh! All the stars are falling! ...
Melisande: Upon me, too! upon me too!

(4.4.91)

Before Melisande dies, she is delivered of a female baby who will be destined to face misfortune just like her mother. To this effect Arkel remarks: "The child must not stay here in this room.... She must live now in her place.... It is the poor little one's turn" (5.2.95).

Destiny is not only restricted to human beings, but also it affects the sheep whose fatal end they quickly predict and they start crying when their route is changed towards the slaughterhouse. Thus, "they are like lost children,... they smelt the butcher already" (3.4.85). Later on these sheep stop crying and "they all keep still now"(4.3.89), because they are sure they are approaching the butchers and their direction "is no longer the road to the stable" (ibid.). It is worthwhile to quote S. Marion Tucker and Alan S. Downer commenting on the case of the ill-fated characters in the play by pointing out that the "characters are willless creatures of destiny, moving blindly toward a foreordained doom."¹⁰

The other situation in the play is concerned with its mysterious and ambiguous attitude. Mystery overshadows all parts of the play from its very beginning to its very end. The play starts with the maidservants who "have come to wash the threshold, the gate, and the steps" (1.1.75), because "there are going to be great happenings!... There are going to be fetes" (ibid.)! But the porter mocks the servants and makes the situation seem mysterious, since to him "all the water of the Flood... will never come to the end of it" (ibid.).

On the other hand the play shows us neither "fetes" nor "great happenings" for which the castle entrance had to be cleaned. We wonder now why all the water cannot clean the entrance, which seems very mysterious to us. We do not know what happened to the expected celebrations which never took place and were supposed to happen. Moreover, the occasions for these fetes are not mentioned at all.

Also Golaud's marriage is as mysterious as the washing of the gate entrance and the assumed fetes. He marries a girl he knows little about: "I do not know her age, nor who she is, nor whence she comes, and dare not question her.... It is now six months since I married her and I know no more about it than on the day of our meeting" (1.3.76). This young woman, when she is first seen, is upset and weeping and when asked why, she answers: "I will not tell! I cannot tell" (1.2.75). The only things we know about her are that she fled, got lost, "was not born here" (ibid.), and came "far away from here! Far away... far away" (ibid.). She will not tell who gave her the crown which fell at the bottom of the spring. She tells Golaud she does not want to have it picked up, either: "If you take it out I throw myself in itself" (1.2.76)!

Yniold is seen weeping when his father is still away and late from the hunt. His weeping is as mysterious as Melisande's weeping at the fountain in the forest. He predicts that his step-mother will "go away" (3.1.82). This means that he is suspicious of some unusual mysterious events.

It is very mysterious that the door near which Pelleas and Melisande are quarrelling "won't stay open" (3.5.85). Also truth is very vague. Golaud complains about not having extensive information about what Pelleas and Melisande do behind his back. His mysterious suspicions lead him nowhere: "I am here like a blind man searching for his treasure at the bottom of the ocean!... I am here like a new-born child lost in the forest" (3.5.85).

Again truth is not easily obtained as it is kept mysterious and hidden. The third woman servant at the end enquires about Pelleas' whereabouts, but she gets no answer: "Where is he?... No one knows" (5.1.92). Yet the old woman servant reveals: "Yes, yes; everybody knows.... But nobody dare speak of it.... One no longer speaks truth" (ibid.).

All the events and coincidences are ambiguous. Arkel concludes the play by saying: "My God! My God! ... I shall never understand it at all" (5.3.95).

Melisande's death itself is mysterious as her wound is so little that it would have not killed a bird, as we have already mentioned. Moreover, Pelleas' name plays a mysterious role as in reality it is neither related to a real history nor is it associated with modernity. It would be rather fit here to quote Don Luiz de Sousa's comment on this point:

[Maeterlinck's] choice of an Arthurian name [Pelleas] for his hero is not unimportant. It gives the key to the story as a whole. He needed an atmosphere remote from modernity and from old historic time, and, by using an Arthurian name, he gained an antique richness far beyond anything which could have come through a medium of his own imagination.¹¹

Melisande's birth and death seem so mysterious that the physician remarks: "She was born without reason... to die; and she dies without reason" (5.1.92).

The ideas are not expressed directly, but mostly through symbols. The most recurring symbols are water, light, darkness, height and depth. As for the water, its existence and allusion to are almost mentioned in every scene. The very beginning of the play is concerned with a lot of water required to clean the thresholds of the castle. We are left in suspense as according to the porter no matter how enormous quantities of water are brought, the thresholds will never get cleaned! This defeats the purpose of water which is always a symbol of cleanliness. It can clean everything except the entrance of the castle, which means the castle is either materially so dirty, or rather spiritually filthy that it is beyond getting cleaned.

The water is a symbol near which people meet each other and lovers have their assignations and rendezvous. Melisande is first seen by Golaud as Genevieve tells us of his letter to his family: "I found her by the spring" (1.3.76). Pelleas takes Melisande to the fountain in the park where she drops her ring into the water. The path to the grotto in which Pelleas and Melisande search for her ring "is very narrow between two lakes whose bottom has not yet been found" (2.4.80).

Pelleas and Melisande declare their love by the fountain of the park. Here the water is also a symbol of purity, especially when Pelleas tells his beloved: "Thy voice ... is cooler and more frank than the water is! ... It is like pure water on my lips! ... It is like pure water on my hands" (4.4.90).

The water can also be a symbol of death and disaster. It is "*at the brink of the fountain*" (4.4.91) where Pelleas falls dead after stricken by his brother's sword. Then his body "was found at the bottom of Blind Man's Spring" (5.1.92). Again water is a symbol of depth as underneath the castle there is deep water.

The sea itself serves a lot of symbols. It is always present. The ship that carried Golaud and Melisande came by sea. The sun sets and rises at the sea. The sea is an escape from the overwhelming darkness of the castle and its surrounding forest. It is a sanctuary which the swans fly to when they have a fight with the dogs. The sea is also associated with light, as it is lit by the sun, moon and stars. It is also lit by the light-house. Golaud in his letter wants his family to "light a lamp at the top of the tower that overlooks the sea" (1.3.76).

Light symbolizes safety, love, truth, joy, openness, frankness and cheerfulness. Darkness is a symbol of vagueness, fears, secrets, suspicion, misery and unknown fate. Most of the scenes in the play take place in the darkness. The castle itself is overwhelmed by darkness day and night. Melisande tells Pelleas: "You never see the sky here" (2.2.8). Even at dawn the porter thinks the castle is still dark. He does not want to open the gate "till it is light" (1.1.75). Outside the castle it is enjoyable, because "the sun is rising on the sea" (1.1.76)! When Pelleas forgets to bring a lantern with him to the grotto, he waits for the moon to show up through the cloud so that "it will light up the whole grotto, and then we can enter without danger" (2.3.80).

When Melisande first comes to the castle it is overshadowed by the trees and looks dark: "It is gloomy in the gardens What forests all about the palaces" (1.4.77). In the park "there is one linden where the sun never comes" (2.1.78). Through the light of the "innumerable stars" (3.2.83) and the "moon [which] is still upon the sea" (ibid.), Pelleas could see and kiss Melisande's "unbound hair" (ibid.), while she is leaning from the window towards him.

Depths and lights are used for symbols in the play. They are employed to express exaggerated thoughts, hard-to-reach situations and ambiguous places. Melisande's crown fell "to the bottom of the water" (1.3.76) in the forest. Her ring fell into the fountain in the park, which "is as deep, perhaps, as the sea" (2.1.78). Pelleas' body "was found at the bottom of Blind Man's Spring" (5.1.92) Melisande's falling hair from the window looks as if it "fell from heaven" (3.2.83) while Pelleas is kissing it. The way to the grotto is "between two lakes whose bottom has not yet been found" (2.3.80). Depths and bottoms mean that truth is so deep that it cannot be easily fathomed. Thus the suspecting Golaud says: "I am here like a blind man searching for his treasure at the bottom of the sea" (3.5.85).

Some of the love-affairs between Pelleas and Melisande take place near the tower of the castle. The window is too high for Golaud to see through it and watch the lovers. He hoists up his son to the window sill, because "it is too high for me, for all I am so big" (3.5.86). When Melisande drops her crown into the spring, Golaud looks at the bottom of the spring trying to find the truth about it. Then he looks deep into her eyes to have an idea about her inner and deep conflict.

Maeterlinck uses many other devices in order to achieve his aims in this play. Among these devices are contrasted and contradictory situations. The castle at the beginning of the play looks gloomy and dark inside even at dawn. Accordingly the porter asks the women servants to "wait till it is light" (1.1.75), but outside the castle facing the sea the first maidservant says: "It is light enough without; I see the sunlight through the chinks" (ibid.). When the castle is almost always associated with darkness, the sea is always equated with the light of the sun, the moon, the stars and the light-house. The grotto at night is dark, but it is soon lit by the moonlight.

The fountain in the park and the spring in the forest are contrasted. The bottom of the spring, where Melisande loses her crown, can easily be seen. Yet the bottom of the fountain in the park is "as deep ... as the sea" (2.1.78) and can never be seen.

The towers of the castle and top of trees are contrasted with its vaults, crypts and bottoms of the sea, lakes and fountain. This fountain itself is contradictory as on the one hand "it seems to have been a miraculous spring--it opened the eyes of the blind,--they still call it 'Blind Man's Spring'" (2.1.76). Nevertheless, "the King has been nearly blind himself" (ibid.) and it cannot cure him.

Golaud contradicts himself. He is both a jealous husband and a careless husband. He sees with his own eyes that Pelleas is holding, playing with and kissing Melisande's long dangling her in the park while she is leaning on the window at midnight. To the uxorious husband this is only a children's play: "Do not play so in the darkness.--You are children" (3.2.84). Later he kills his brother and wounds his wife when he gets them red-handed kissing each other near the fountain. He is reassured now that they have already kissed each other, especially when his son, Yniold, has already told him that he saw them "kiss each other; ... once when it rained" (3.5.86). Yet it is very contradictory when Golaud states after stabbing Pelleas and Melisande that he killed Melisande "without cause" (5.2.93). He also says: "They have kissed like little children.... They were brother and sister.... I did it in spite of myself" (ibid.).

There is also a contrast between hot and cold things. The weather "is too hot in the gardens. It is stifling today, even in the shade of the trees" (2.1.78), Pelleas tells Melisande in the park. Yet he adds at the same time that the water of the fountain in the same park "is as cool as winter" (ibid.).

The vaults and crypts under the castle are smelly and dark even at noon, but outside it is charming and light. Thus Pelleas tells Golaud: "There is a damp air there, heavy as a leaden dew,

and darkness thick as a poisoned paste And now, all the air of the sea!... The flowers have just been watered, ... and the smell of the verdure and wet roses comes up to us It must be nearly noon” (3.4.84).

Cries and silences are both used to express both outward and inward feelings. The sheep begin crying loudly when they smell the butcher, but soon keep quiet when they are desperately helpless after approaching the slaughterhouse feeling it is useless to cry any more.

There are still contradictory reports about the cause of Melisande's death. Is it exactly caused by mere grief or the sword or is it accidental? Only God knows.

Arkel thinks that “we never get but the reverse ... even of our own” (1.3.77) dreams. He means that man proposes, but God disposes, and sometimes what we wish for, Providence makes it something else. Things happen in contradiction to what we desire for. Man is a plaything in the hands of destiny.

The playwright employs correspondence, suggestiveness, analogues, juxtapositions and similarities in order to express his characters' mood. If there is a spring in the forest, there is a fountain in the park. When Melisande loses a crown in the spring, she loses her ring in the fountain. Golaud meets Melisande at the spring, while Pelleas meets her at the fountain. Golaud gets lost at the forest and Melisande is seen lost in the same place. The sea is unfathomed, so is the fountain. Melisande's existence and how she happens to be in the forest are as mysterious as is her marriage to Golaud. If Golaud and Pelleas are princes, Melisande is a princess as well. If Golaud falls in love with Melisande, so does Pelleas. Melisande's marriage is overwhelmed by mystery, so is her death.

Outward expressions are reflections of inward feelings. When the eyes weep, the soul itself is weeping. In this concern Arkel says of Melisande: “Her eyes are full of tears.—It is her soul weeping now” (5.2.94).

Characters can explicitly express themselves in spoken language. Yet they can do that implicitly in gestures, pauses and silences, which are more expressive sometimes especially when silence implies consent. Silence is also the union between two souls. Thus silence corresponds to language, and it is as suggestive as speech if not more persuasive, especially when spoken language is vague and disconnected.

Again if Arkel is weak-eyed and almost physically blind, there are others who are spiritually or mentally blind. This applies to Pelleas and Melisande who are blind to the fact that their love is illicit and fraught with danger.

Weeping expresses a state of discomfort and unhappiness. Hence not only Melisande is seen weeping, but also Pelleas and Yniold; not to mention how the sheep were crying when they approached the butchers.

If Golaud and Melisande get physically lost in the forest, the former is also mentally lost because of his suspicions: “I am here like a new-born child lost in the forest” (3.5.85).

The whereabouts of people are as vague as other things. The grotto and vaults are shrouded with vagueness and it is very ambiguous that a door “won't stay open” (ibid.) and why the Blind Man's Spring does not cure blindness any longer and has been “abandoned” (2.1.78).

Furthermore, there is some correspondence in the situation of certain places. We know that the grotto and vaults are plunged into darkness. The same is true with the castle which is always dark because of its long and thick trees.

As usual with symbolist drama, it abounds with suspense. The opening scene where we are told there will be fetes leaves us in suspense, because we are made anxious to witness them. The second thing is when the porter doubts if all the Flood's water will ever be enough to clean the castle entrance. Suspense is also created when Golaud first meets Melisande in the forest. We are eager to know what will happen after this meeting. Golaud's letter in which he restricts three days for his welcome back home after having got married, makes us eager to find out whether the couple will or not be welcome home, and the light-house will light up as a gesture for his welcome. Pelleas' kissing and fondling Melisande's long dangling hair in the garden increases

our suspense to see what will happen next. Golaud's watching the lovers kissing each other leads us to another suspense, making us curious to know how he will revenge himself on them. We are also left with suspense when doors close and "won't stay open" (3.5.85).

Juxtapositions, correspondence and suggestiveness make Maeterlinck juxtapose scenes and events that go simultaneously. While Pelleas and Melisande are kissing and embracing each other, their shadows are reflected elsewhere. Thus Pelleas tells Melisande that their shadows "embrace to the very end of the garden. Oh, how they kiss far away from us! Look! Look" (4.4.91)! Also while Melisande is combing her hair and singing in a room in the castle at night, her hair is reflected on the wall by the stars and moonlight. When she tells him: "I am doing my hair for the night" (3.2.83), he retorts with a surprise: "Is that I see upon the wall? ... I thought you had some light" (ibid.).

Moreover, Maeterlinck associates the willow tree with love when he makes Pelleas fondle Melisande locks and "tie them to the willow boughs" (ibid.). In this scene the doves are flying. Thus both doves and the willow tree are associated with love.

Another juxtaposed scene is created as while Golaud is lifting his son up to the window and talking to him outside the room, the son is spying on Pelleas and Melisande inside the room. One more juxtaposed and suggestive scene is when the sheep start crying while they are no longer on their way to the stable. They are heading for the butcher.

While Pelleas is playing with and kissing Melisande's hair, he asks her: "Hearest thou my kisses along thy hair" (3.2.83)? Again hair is, like the doves and the willow tree, associated with love. He wonders if her hair were communication lines carrying the sound of his kisses!

As for the general estimation of this symbolic play, it is against science, materialism and the machine. It is concerned with the immortality of the soul and the realization of wisdom. It has its own philosophy which is concerned with the human conditions. Arkel is the man of wisdom and philosophy. His wise idea is that if Golaud had married Princess Ursula, he "would have put an end to long wars and old hatreds" (1.3.77). His philosophy is to think twice and quietly before making a decision: "One always mistakes when one does not close his eyes" (1.3.76). He believes in destinies and that man cannot change his fate, and human beings are puppets in the hands of Providence. He is interested in the human soul. His wise words are still ringing into our ears when he says it is not easy to judge: "I am very old, and nevertheless I have not yet seen clearly for one moment into myself; how would you that I judge what others have done? I am not far from the tomb and do not succeed in judging myself" (ibid.). He is surprised about Golaud's second marriage: "He weds like a child, a little girl he finds by a spring.... That may seem strange to us" (1.3.76-77).

Now we come to the structure of the play. Its setting is "*in an imaginary kingdom suggestive of the Middle Ages*" (*Dramatic Personae*, 74), which is vague and mysterious, just like the other events in it. The exact time and place are not specified, which makes the situation more confused than clarified.

The play is divided into five acts which are subdivided into scenes. The scenes are independent structural units, as there is no tangible connection between them. Each scene stands for one given aspect and the events do not follow the cause-and-effect principle. The plot is loosely connected. It has some soliloquies and there is a song sung by Melisande and it is chiefly connected with her long hair and emotion.

Time and place of action are not clearly presented. The characters are more like puppets than individuals, because they are influenced by forces beyond their control. Its world is removed from the logical and realistic understanding, to the extent that it looks like a fairy tale with fantasy dreams.

Almost everything is vague in it. We do not know who Melisande is and why she escaped into the forest, nor do we know about her identity when we first meet her. Little is known about the other characters.

The ideas are not directly expressed, but only through motifs and symbols. The play has some suspense which is mostly dealt with through presentiment and premonition. The play abounds with inner conflicts, psychological actions, musical words, repeated ideas and suggestive symbols.

The language outwardly is easy and simple, although sometimes it is telegraphic, disconnected, repeated and brief. The simplicity of the language drives the audience to penetrate into the conflicted and deep inner ideas of the play. It is worthwhile quoting Maeterlinck concerning language:

Indeed it is not in the actions but in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies And indeed the only words that count in the play are those that at first seemed useless, for it is therein that the essence lies. Side by side with the necessary dialogue will you almost always find another dialogue that seems superfluous; but examine it carefully, and it will be borne home to you that this is the only one that the soul can listen to profoundly, for here alone is it the soul that is being addressed.¹²

Nevertheless the language of the play is always interspersed with a lot of discontinued passages, silences and pauses, gestures and staccato phrases. Sometimes silences are better expressive than words, especially when the soul is concerned. Moreover there are a lot of repeated words and phrases.

What holds the play together is its love story which is the linking element. Yet the ideas behind this story and the mystery surrounding this love story are what the playwright is after. The love story itself is initiated from the scene where Melisande loses her ring in the park fountain while she is meeting Pelleas. It develops when Melisande is leaning on the window and her long hair is falling down and being fondled by Pelleas. Yet this love is emphasized only at the end before Pelleas is murdered by his brother.

The heroine is child-like, always weeping and fragile. Her love is thwarted from the beginning. Her existence from first to last is mysterious. The other elements suggestive of mystery are: the castle, the grotto, the vaults, the crypts, the forest, the fountain, the towers and the sea.

The play is not concerned with a topical or contemporary social problem. It does not deal with external life, but only with inner ideas. Truth is not expressed by depicting and reproducing life on stage with detailed expositions and stage directions. There is a lot of prediction and unpleasant happenings. Destiny is emphasized, so is the state of the subconscious. The interest is in the internal conflicts and dream-like situations.

All events, coincidences and happenings are vague. Arkel concludes the play by saying: "My God! My God ... I shall never understand it at all" (5.2.95).

The characters love and die and have motivations, but they do not understand what happens to them, nor do they comprehend the overpowering forces controlling them. They are a plaything and puppets in the hands of fate.

The source of light is mostly dimmed. Grey gauze curtains are used to bring about a misty atmosphere and remoteness in time. The costumes of characters suggest medievalism. Some characters are without names like the porter, the physician, the maidservants, the shepherd, and others.

Finally *Pelleas and Melisande* has been considered one of the most accomplished symbolist plays. Maeterlinck has done his best to include most of the features of symbolism in the play. Critics unanimously agree that this play is the accurate representative of what it expresses. It has been popular since its first performance and will stay as it is. Although the age of symbolism has lost most of its vigour, its influence is effective in other works.

NOTES

- ¹-Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto, *Aspects of the Drama: A Handbook* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1962), 262.
- ²-Ibid.
- ³-Myron Matlaw, *Modern World Drama: An Encyclopedia* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972), 742
- ⁴-Haskell M. Block, "Symbolism," in John Gassner and Edward Quinn, eds., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1969), 828-829.
- ⁵-Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1964), 448.
- ⁶-Oscar G. Brockett, *The Theatre: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 293.
- ⁷-Matlaw, 591.
- ⁸-Bill Morelock, "Celebrating *Pelleas and Melisande* through Four Different Composers," in [http://minnesota. Publicradio. Org/](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/) February, 2005, page 3 of four pages.
- ⁹-Maurice Maeterlinck, *Pelleas and Melisande*, in S. Marion Tucker and Alan S. Downer, eds., *Twenty-Five Modern Plays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 5.2.92. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text between parentheses showing acts, scenes and pages numbers respectively.
- ¹⁰-S. Marion Tucker and Alan S. Downer, "Maurice Maeterlinck and His Plays," in S. Marion Tucker and Alan S. Downer, eds., *Twenty-Five Modern Plays*, 73.
- ¹¹-Don Luize de Sousa, "*Pelleas and Melisande*," in <http://www.kellsraft.com/meaterlinck3.html>, page 1 of eight pages.
- ¹²-Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Tragical in Daily Life," as quoted in www.amazon.com, page 1 of five pages.

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