

Pelleas and Melisande

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"A superior variation on the admirable old melodrama", said Mallarmé about Pelléas. The plot does seem conventional: Prince Golaud meets Melisande, a timid, shy and enchanting girl that is lost in a forest. He takes her to his castle and decides to marry her. But Melisande falls in love with his brother, Pelleas ...

Pelleas and Melisande Details

Date : Published June 1st 2006 by IndyPublish.com (first published 1892)

ISBN : 9781428008410

Author : Maurice Maeterlinck

Format : Paperback 220 pages

Genre : Plays, Cultural, France, Fiction, Drama, Theatre, Classics

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From Reader Review Pelleas and Melisande for online ebook

Nicholas Whyte says

<https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2872453.html>

This is one of Maeterlinck's earliest plays, first performed in 1893, and must have contributed richly to his reputation. The title of the play makes it easy to guess the plot. Although Golaud falls in love with Mélisande in the second scene and marries her, in fact she and his brother Pelléas end up fatally attracted to each other, and Golaud kills them both when he finds out. (Actually it's not clear if the wound or childbirth is the cause of Mélisande's death, but basically he stabs her and she dies.)

It's a pretty basic narrative - doomed adulterous love is one of the oldest clichés in the book, but I guess it resonated well in the 1890s. I wasn't overwhelmed by its elaboration in the script. Mélisande literally comes out of nowhere (she is cited in TV Tropes as a classic Fragile Flower); she seems to exist purely as an object of romantic interest for the two male leads. Pelléas is not much better. Golaud is more interesting than either of the title characters, as he works through disbelief, revenge and ultimately repentance, but that's not saying much. At the same time there's a lot of symbolism, especially around water (and Mélisande's entangling hair), that a good director could turn into something pretty memorable, especially if armed with Sibelius' incidental music.

Trounin says

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(c) Trounin

Emerson Vieira says

Qui est Mélisande? Un enfant? Un changeling? Une des nymphes des eaux? Une princesse? Une reine? Une fée? Une folle? Mélusine? Un succube? On peut dire qu'elle est tout et rien au même temps...

Amandine says

J'ai eu un peu de mal à comprendre l'histoire de cette pièce et où Maeterlinck voulait en venir. L'intrigue est assez simple, mais comme souvent avec les œuvres symbolistes, j'ai préféré délaissé le sens à rechercher et me laisser charmer par la musicalité des mots, la beauté des images. J'ai particulièrement aimé le jeu entre

clarté et ombre, lumière et obscurité qui traverse toute l'œuvre. Le style de Maeterlinck est absolument magnifique, savoureux: un véritable délice et bonheur de lecture pour moi.
(première lecture: 01 mars 2011)

Relue avec le même plaisir que la première fois, mais en occultant moins la part de compréhension cette fois. La narration me semble toujours aussi elliptique et entourée de mystère malgré tout : beaucoup de choses semblent passer par les regards, les gestes, et il y a énormément de non-dits. J'aimerais voir cette pièce sur scène pour voir comment seraient traduits ceux-ci et si je comprendrais davantage. Après les motifs de la lumière et de l'ombre qui m'avaient marqué la première fois, c'est celui de l'eau qui m'a particulièrement attiré pendant cette lecture-ci : elle est sans cesse présente, partout, reliant les personnages les uns aux autres. Enfin, mon avis reste le même quant à ce style symboliste : il me plaît toujours autant et est pour moi un véritable délice à lire.
(deuxième lecture: 06 juin 2011)

Leslie says

Maeterlinck was an important part of the Symbolist movement in literature and it is important to realize that when reading this play. Here is a brief synopsis of Symbolism from Wikipedia:

"Symbolists believed that art should represent absolute truths that could only be described indirectly. Thus, they wrote in a very metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning."

Thus, do not expect that the characters and action of the play will behave in a realistic or natural manner -- everything is symbolic.

Perhaps when I have time to think over what all these symbols are trying to say, my rating of the play will change. Based on my first gut reaction, this is a tragedy a la *Romeo and Juliet* about a doomed love between the King's grandson Pelléas and his brother's wife Mélisande. That is the surface story; what it represents I have some suspicions but am not sure.

*later, updated rating to 4**

Thoughts:

Mélisande seems to be an undine, a female mythological water sprite, as she is discovered near a pool of water and water references abound. Pelléas and his brother Golaud are definitely land creatures, perhaps they are what they appear to be. So one interpretation is that they represent the relationship between nature and society/civilization.

The famine of the people of Allemonde that manifests after Golaud and Mélisande marry could be a symbol foreshadowing the tragedy to come. Or maybe it's a sign of the fact that this marriage is wrong. There is no indication that Mélisande ever cared for Golaud; in fact, at first she shrinks from him. Another symbol indicating problems with the marriage is Mélisande losing her wedding ring into another pool of water, as if the water spirits were trying to reclaim her.

Czarny Pies says

Pelleas and Melisande is the first canon shot in the war of the avant-garde against the tediousness of realism and naturalism. Mélisande is a water spirit from traditional French Folklore who is discovered next to a pool of water by Prince Golaud who promptly resolves to marry her. Melisande agrees but subsequently falls in love with Golaud's brother Pelleas. When Golaud learns of the truth he kills his brother Pelleas and mortally wounds Melisande who survives long enough to give birth to a daughter. The cycle of life associated with water has been perpetuated.

Ten years later, Debussy's opera Pelleas and Melisande would debut giving enormous visibility to Maeterlinck's symbolist aesthetic.

Greg says

This play, one of his best, brought Maeterlinck to international fame. There is much different about Maeterlinck's poetry and drama. Heavy in symbolism, rich in dialogue, there is always a tension in his work. Maeterlinck's dialogue makes great use of repetition. This can be both criticized and studied – criticized for its simplicity and studied for the impact it has on the play. The repetition adds a tense, nervous feel. "When once misfortune enters a house, silence is in vain." That single line will tell you about this play.

Arkel, the voice of wisdom, declares, "Unless we close our eyes we are always deceived." He does so at the beginning of the play and the line is repeated later. Maeterlinck could not be clearer. As Montrose Moses states in the introduction, "All that Maeterlinck requires in his dramas is for us to recognize that there is an intimate beauty, an interior value, an essence, more real and more true than the object which symbolizes it." Part of this belief is a theory I don't fully comprehend. Maeterlinck said, "I believe that poems die the moment they are outwardly expressed." It is the truth that is left behind, the words and masterpieces of theatre and literature or symbolic representations of that truth.

This work is a masterpiece. It deserves study. It is difficult. I liked it very much.

See my other reviews here!

Nikita Svetlov says

I really felt love between characters

Lisa says

What am I?

Reading Maeterlinck's play feels like engaging in a beautiful, magical, and mysterious riddle.

What am I? A classic play?

Yes, maybe. I do have five acts, a plot, characters and a deadly end, so I guess I could be tragedy. My content suggests it: old man marries young woman, who falls in love with his younger brother. Discovery leads to death. But somehow I lack the action of a classic drama. There is no determination, time is floating, settings change, my characters do not fully understand what they are doing, and why. I do not I think I have the passion of a Greek drama, and I do not feature the complicated, intricate humour of Shakespearean dialogue. Nor do I busy myself with the ideas of Enlightenment theatre. So maybe I am not a drama, after all.

What am I? A fairy tale?

Yes, maybe. I do start in a dark forest, with a young princess in distress who is rescued to an imposing castle on the border between the dark, dark woods and the wide, wide ocean. She loses rings and crowns and falls in love with a young man. I could be a fairy tale. But I lack the moral message in the end, and there is no fight between good and evil, just between indecision and lethargy. So maybe I am not a fairy tale, after all.

What am I? A dream?

Yes, maybe. Almost all that happens remains vague, dreamlike, open-ended, incomprehensible to all characters. I could be a dream. After all, I was born in 1893, at the beginning of the era Freud. I might very well be a subconscious mind, dreaming about symbolic myths. I contain all ingredients. But all my settings are so clear. They are described with loving detail, showing exactly what the castle, the garden, the woods look like, and how my characters are arranged around the scene. If I were a dream, not only thoughts and actions would remain undefined, the surroundings would be cloudy as well. So maybe I am not a dream, after all.

I KNOW WHAT I AM!

I am a tableau vivant! Changing every scene, creating a symbolic picture of a feeling, a constellation, a floating impression. I take care to arrange light and shadows to be aesthetically appealing and evocative of the drama that does not unfold entirely. I create one beautiful picture after the other, and fill each scene with paintings of situations that are accompanied by voices.

And what a beautiful tableau vivant I am. One of the best. L'art pour l'art is celebrated in my eclectic beauty. I am maybe not the reason Maeterlinck won the Nobel Prize, but I deserve to be read and admired for the evocation of the era's strange dichotomy between scientific and social development and its fatalistic, dreamlike resignation and passivity.

I am a child of my time!

tanisha says

i enjoyed reading this but i think it had more to do with an easy style (donc, not having to check a french dictionary every three words) than the actual play. still, v excited to have finally finished a piece en français, it's about time!

Yulia Pomarina says

I saw an opera Pelleas and Melisanda by Claude Debussy on a libretto by Maeterlink. Decadence. It is very good to see mood in which people lived before WWI. It seems that they were very unhappy.
