PART II

FROM WORD TO SOUND:
NON-VOCAL MUSIC RESPONDS
TO A LITERARY TEXT

Maeterlinck's Death Drama in Two Musical Depictions

Death in the Works of Maurice Maeterlinck

The young Maeterlinck, the Symbolist playwright of the 1890s who inspired Bohuslav Martinů and Charles M. Loeffler among many other composers,[1] was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy. Like the German philosopher he believed that man has no power over his own fate; instead, his life is exposed to external, often inimical forces. While Maeterlinck scholars—with or without numerical implications in mind—like to group the seven Symbolist dramas into four "death dramas" (including *L'aveugle, L'intruse, L'intérieur,* and *La mort de Tintagiles*) and three "love dramas" (encompassing *Pelléas et Mélisande, Alladine et Palomides,* and *Aglavaine et Sélysette*), death is in some way or other present in all of them. Even within the "love" dramas, death is prominent: Pelleas is the victim of fratricide, Melisande seems to surrender to death, Alladine and Palomides succumb to the typhoid fever that results from the punishment for their betrayal, and Sélysette commits suicide. Death is the ever-present shadow for Maeterlinck; its influence is not limited to bringing about the end of life. Rather than a distant fate, death is an operative force that determines the quality and meaning of experience.

Only one of the seven Symbolist dramas mentions death in the title, and it is here, in *La mort de Tintagiles*, that death is for once not just the intangible, unfathomable force "out there," but a person of sorts. As in many ancient religions, Death is embodied as a woman here.[2] She is thus at once the giver and destroyer of life, an interpretation corroborated by Maeterlinck's specification that this queen who has already killed several men in the family is the siblings' grandmother, thus a woman who devours her own children and grandchildren. The crone, whom nobody

[1]For sketches on the poet's and composers' lives and brief discussions of their aesthetics, please refer to the appendix: Maeterlinck pp. 597-601, Loeffler and Martinů pp. 606-610.

[2]Romance languages know the word for death as a noun of feminine gender—*mors* (Latin), *la mort* (French), *la morte* (Italian) and *la muerte* (Spanish). Germanic mythology with its masculine noun—*der Tod*—has tended to prefer the imagery of the (male) grim reaper.

has ever seen, is not just a vicious harbinger of death; she *is* Death. Linn B. Konrad sums up the importance of this character as a dramatic device rather than as a typification:

> A silent invisible character who is responsible for the "real" action in the play dramatically solves the problem of representing death. Furthermore, this imperceptible presence on stage reveals the difficulty of intellectually approaching a force in motion. By refusing to give the figure of death human form and speech, Maeterlinck emphasizes the dramatic and tragic power of death. It remains a force which operates on a level not attainable by human consciousness, and yet it intervenes most decisively in everyone's experience of life. [...] It is the other characters in the play—through their intuitive reactions to death's dominant action—who make "le personnage sublime" appear in the observer's imagination.[3]

Maeterlinck's interest is clearly not with any concept of a "cruel female" but very particularly with the "terrible parent." This is evidenced in that the horrendous old queen is counter-balanced by the positive image of the two sisters—one weak, one brave though also ultimately powerless—who are capable of experiencing joy and love in what little exposure they are granted, and are ready to fight for the good within the gruesomely limited confines of their unarmed power. Especially Ygraine, the more valiant of the two sisters, is much more than a sibling. She is cast as the positive manifestation of the mother figure: appreciative and caring, protective and ready to endanger her own life to save that of the child. Whether the impending death is the result of the specific assault by the queen's servants that particular night, or rather a process the inevitability of which includes the child's unexplained return from abroad to the doomed castle, is left deliberately ambiguous; what is dreadfully certain is that this death is inescapable.[4]

---

[3]Linn Bratteteig Konrad, *Modern Drama as Crisis: The Case of Maurice Maeterlinck* (New York etc.: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 9-10.

[4]An American contemporary of Maeterlinck's, G. F. Sturgis, has dedicated a book to the symbolic decoding of the poet's early dramas. Unfortunately, Sturgis's somewhat simplistic psycho-medical reading of the drama as "a wonderful pathological study of the progressive stages of heart-disease as exemplified in the Child" misses many nuances that defy such a straightforward translation of symbols. Even more problematic are the embellishing details of unknown origin with which he first fleshes out the story only to then interpret them as key components in his analysis. See Granville F. Sturgis, *The Psychology of Maeterlinck as Shown in His Dramas* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1914); the Tintagiles drama is examined on pp. 128-143.

Like many of his Symbolist friends, Maeterlinck adopted the ideas about the *new theater* pronounced by Mallarmé. Mallarmé had demanded that as soon as the curtain rises, everything should immediately appear as though placed on a general, abstract, and atemporal plane. His quest was for a "work of different degrees," which would offer the non-initiated an accessible drama while concealing in its peak moments "for the elite of the spectators or the readers, a high philosophical signification."[5] Considering the efforts of the naturalists failed and Ibsen as their new hero, the Symbolists aimed at reestablishing the theatrical power of myth. (Marionette plays were deemed particularly apt vehicles as their "actors," utterly limited in their range of expressing human feelings in smooth body language, could be made to present highly symbolic gestures without risking to look ridiculous, as human actors might.)

Maeterlinck found further inspiration in Edgar Allan Poe with whose tormented questions regarding human destiny and death he resonated. In Poe's stories he encountered landscapes that are strange, unknown, and unknowable. People live in old castles or abbeys where disquieting events have happened in the past and where the rays of light, if they enter at all, cast desolate shadows, causing the tapestries to come to life as one approaches. Maeterlinck's dramas, too, are filled with dilapidated sunless castles, basements that smell of decay and death, and what Baudelaire observed in Poe, "a nature said to be inanimate that participates in the nature of the living and, like them, shudders with a supernatural and galvanic shudder."[6] Maeterlinck adopts Poe's technique of presenting an unfathomably unified scene in which every detail contributes to a single effect: that of communicating anguish. Spectators are led into anxious questioning through a progression of scenes in which everything seems to transform itself and where moods turn from disquiet to apprehension to panic. In his early works, death seems imminent almost from the beginning of each drama, anticipated both by the audience and, in a spontaneous understanding that remains closed to reason, by the characters.[7]

---

[5]Stéphane Mallarmé according to Marcel Postic, *Maeterlinck et le Symbolisme* (Paris: Éditions A.-G. Nizet, 1970), p. 39.

[6]Charles Baudelaire, preface to the French translation of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe.

[7]As Maeterlinck scholar Compère put it, "La mort, sous quelque forme qu'elle s'affirme, révèle le sense profond du drame et crée une atmosphère d'angoisse foncièrement invariable; car, chez Maeterlinck, la mort — surtout dans le premier théâtre — est toujours pressentie ou connue des spectateurs, sinon des protagonistes." Gaston Compère, *Le théâtre de Maurice Maeterlinck* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1955), pp. 12-13.

Tintagiles—Tintagel

The name of the child protagonist in Maurice Maeterlinck's mario-nette drama *La mort de Tintagiles* is strangely reminiscent of one known in a very different context. "Tintagel" is the name of a village and island on Cornwall's north coast that is renowned for its romantic castle ruin. Tintagel Castle, in turn, has been linked to the legend around King Arthur (and, subsequently, to the Knights of the Round Table, etc.) through Geoffrey of Monmouth[8] and, later, the poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Tintagel Castle today presents itself as "a jumble of slate-walled ruins of the thirteenth century, partly on the isolated headland called Tintagel Island, and partly on the adjoining mainland cliffside."[9] The castle, the ruins of which we see today, was built around 1230-40 by Richard, the Earl of Cornwall and brother of King Henry III. Conceived as a kind of coastal citadel, it existed as a functional strongpoint of questionable strategic value until about 1530. Since then, it has been perceived and repeatedly depicted as a spectacular ruin, crying out for the pens of poets or the brushes of painters. The Arthurian connections serve as an addi-tional benefit for the romantically minded. Another literary association, arguably more relevant as a backdrop for Maeterlinck's play, is that with King Mark and his "tragic queen"; I will get to that later.

As archaeologists inform us, the place-name *Tintagel* appears for the first time in the 12th century, linked to a fortress somewhere in Cornwall on the sea-shore which is reported as owned by Gorlois, Duke of Corn-wall. During an Easter celebration to which King Uther had summoned his provincial dukes and lords, the King falls madly in love with Gorlois's beautiful wife, Igerna. Gorlois leaves London in anger, upon which King Uther invades Cornwall. Duke Gorlois leaves Igerna at Tintagel, his most secure refuge, and then tries to divert his King by moving to another fort-ress, some twenty miles away. Uther besieges the fortress in which Gorlois is hiding but, after a week with no progress or hope to capture the Duke, finds that he cannot concentrate any longer on warfare since he is sick with love for Igerna. His friends advise him that any hope of breaking into the castle of Tintagel is vain since the access road is narrow and easy to defend. At this point, the wizard Merlin enters the story. He changes

---

[8]Geoffrey of Monmouth, Bishop of St. Asaph (1100-1154), *History of the Kings of Britain* (London: J. Bowyer, 1718; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966); written around 1135-38.

[9]According to Charles Thomas, *English Heritage Book of Tintagel: Arthur and Archaeo-logy* (London: B.T. Batsford/English Heritage, 1993), p.10.

Uther magically into a likeness of Gorlois, and himself and Uther's friend into Gorlois's companions. As such they arrive at Tintagel, are granted entry by the guards—and, as Geoffrey of Monmouth put it, "in that night was the most famous of men, Arthur, conceived." Meanwhile, Gorlois has left his other fortress and is slain, conveniently in time to allow Uther later to console Igerna, whom he marries, that this child was conceived in fact after her first husband's death and was thus not a bastard.

Fascinating and romantic as Geoffrey of Monmouth's account is all by itself, the problem with its relevance for linking the birth of King Arthur to Tintagel Castle is that the bishop enthralled with British history described all this a century *before* Earl Richard's castle was built. The solution to this seeming inconsistency is that, as archaeologists have now ascertained, "the outer masonry curtain-wall of the Lower Ward does indeed stand on top of an earlier rampart bank."[10] The link of today's romantic ruins with King Arthur stems clearly from Geoffrey, and it has even been speculated that Earl Richard was inspired to build his own eccentric castle because he had read Geoffrey of Monmouth.

The other early literary source mentioning Tintagel Castle is the twelfth-century verse drama *Tristran* by Beroul, more accessible to to-day's readers in the adaptation (as *Tristan*) by Gottfried von Strassburg.[11] Beroul's *Tristran* mentions *Tintajol, Tintaguel* in connection with the pre-Norman legend around King Mark. As Charles Thomas points out, "there have been—and there still are—many claimants to the original setting of Tristan and Iseult, but it can be stated that the male name *Drustanus* (Tristan) occurs in a sixth-century Cornish memorial inscription, and the female name *Eselt* (as *hryt eselt*, 'Iseult's Ford') in a west Cornwall charter boundary of 967. These remain the oldest recorded, as opposed to inferred, instances of the names." More recently, Thomas Hardy's verse drama, *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, at Tintagel in Lyonesse*,[12] also links Tintagel and its castle to King Mark and the story around Tristan and Isolde.[13]

---

[10]Thomas, *Book of Tintagel*, p. 25.

[11]Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan and Isolde* (New York: Continuum, 1988).

[12]Thomas Hardy, *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, At Tintagel in Lyonesse* (London: Macmillan 1923).

[13]The British composer and contemporary of Maeterlinck's, Arnold Bax (1883-1953), has been inspired by this connection. His programmatic symphonic poem, *Tintagel*, contains as its secondary theme a clearly recognizable quotation from Wagner's *Tristan*.
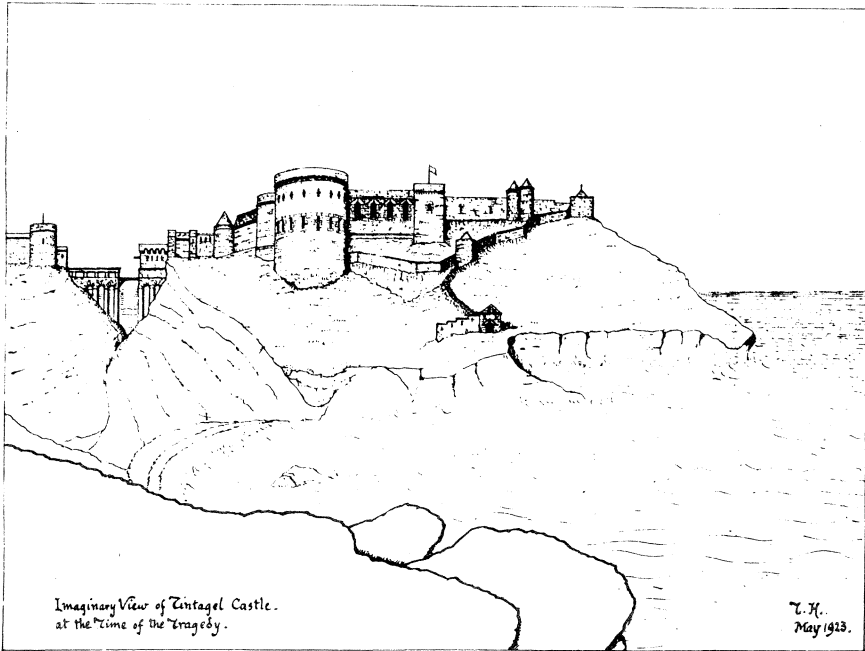
Imaginary View of Tintagel Castle.
at the Time of the Tragedy.

T.H.
May 1923.

PLATE 15: Thomas Hardy's frontispiece of Tintagel castle

The relevance of all this for Maeterlinck is, however, rather indirect. While the marionette play, *La mort de Tintagiles*, features the romantic castle on the shores of a violent sea, a queen, and even the strikingly reminiscent name (albeit as the name of a boy, not a place), there is no discernible link between Hardy's (or Beroul's) and Maeterlinck's plots. On the other hand, several Maeterlinck scholars have pointed out striking parallels between the Tristan-and-Isolde story and another drama Maeterlinck wrote during the same period of his life, *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

It seems doubtful to me that the link between the plots should help to understand *Pelléas et Mélisande*, or the link of names the identity of queen and castle in *La mort de Tintagiles*. Yet the literary-historical allusions no doubt served as a backdrop for both the Belgian poet and the widely-read audience whom he was addressing. If nothing else, the indirect allusion to legends dating back hundreds of years reinforces the impression Maeterlinck attempts to give with his dramas: that the developments he brings to the stage are paradigmatic rather than personal, and that they are meant to show the workings of timeless forces rather than deal with individuals and their fates.

Maurice Maeterlinck, *La mort de Tintagiles*

Maeterlinck's marionette play, *La mort de Tintagiles*, dating from 1894,[14] is laid out in five short acts. Here is a synopsis:

I   On the peak of a hill overlooking the imposing but dark island castle, the adolescent girl Ygraine is seen leading her little brother, Tintagiles, by the hand. She describes the place towards which they are headed and the life led there in anguished words. The place seems doomed in many respects, as is born out by the way nature is perceived: the sea is wild, the trees "complain—if they are not dead and poison the horizon." The castle, dilapidated to the point of falling into ruins, is black, built not onto a hill but into a valley, hardly ever reached by light and fresh air. There is only one tower, and it alone is not prone to devastation. The rest of the building is crouched in the shadow of this tower and its inhabitant, the queen, who lives behind red windows.

Regarding life at the castle, Ygraine tells her little brother (and us) that she has sometimes said to herself that she would simply like to be happy; but found that happiness seems an impossibility. Her father and two brothers have disappeared without trace, leaving her and her sister Bellangère as well as the little brother Tintagiles as the only survivors of the family, fearful and without confidence in the future. Ygraine and her sister have had to live at the castle since their birth, "without daring to understand anything that happens," as she confesses, and without knowing too well that other ways of life exist. Tintagiles had been sent to live abroad for some years, and while that separated him from Ygraine who feels like a mother towards him, it also gave her some hope that he might be safe. Now, however, he has been called back—nobody knows for what reason, except that "the queen wanted it."

The queen is all-powerful but invisible; although she is the siblings' grandmother, she never shows herself, and nobody knows what she does. She is old, suspicious and jealous, fearful that someone might take her place, "and people say that she is mad." Her attendants never leave during the light of day and thus cannot ever be questioned; her orders are executed nobody knows how. The only ally the two sisters have left against the queen is the old warrior and servant, Aglovale, who is wise and loves them but, one understands, is practically powerless. That is why, Ygraine urges her little brother, Tintagiles is never to separate himself from these three who will do all they can to protect him.

II In Ygraine and Bellangère's apartment inside the castle, Tintagiles has fallen asleep, exhausted from his travels or, perhaps even more, the castle's oppressive atmosphere. Bellangère tells Ygraine what she has overheard in the corridors. Voices muffled behind doors, but probably stemming from the queen's servants, were talking about a child who had arrived today, commenting that the queen wanted to see him. The young girl fears that the handmaidens of evil are planning to come this night. Ygraine, understanding in horror what this must mean, decides that this time, she will resist the dark powers, she will surprise them, they will not snatch her little brother without a fight. Aglovale reminds her that all who have disappeared before tried to resist, yet always in vain. Were the queen to call him today, he admits, he himself would climb the stairs into her tower, knowing well that nobody descends alive.

[14]My account of the drama is based on the text as it appears in Maurice Maeterlinck, *Théâtre* II (Brussels: Paul Lacomblez; 21ème édition, Paris: Lalmann-Lévy, 1908).

III   Ygraine has reassured herself that the doors towards her apartment are closed, and Aglovale vows to guard the one through which the queen's attendants are expected to enter. He promises to defend the siblings with his sword, although he predicts that this will be to no avail; in fact he expects it to break any time. Meanwhile, the sisters notice that Tintagiles is crying in distress and feeling ever weaker. He whines that the light in the room is getting darker, that there are wounds on the forehead and the hands of old Aglovale, and that Ygraine's heart is beating so strongly that it hurts him when she embraces him.

The boy is the first to hear steps approaching in the corridor, and faints in distress. The door begins to open silently and ever so slowly, yet even with joint forces Ygraine, Bellangère, and Aglovale seem unable to push it back. Nobody enters, however, nobody is seen, just a cold light. Then Tintagiles regains consciousness, emits a scream, and with this scream, the door suddenly gives way and brusquely slams shut. The mortal danger seems averted for this one time.

IV   In the corridor in front of Ygraine's apartment, the queen's attendants have waited for the siblings to fall asleep. They comment on how the three are so firmly embraced, clasping each other in such a way that it will be close to impossible to disentangle the little boy. After discussing how they might proceed—they will have to cut the sisters' hair in order to remove Tintagiles who is holding on to their locks—the women enter. After a long silence, one hears muted sighs; then the queen's attendants emerge with the sleeping Tintagiles in their arms. They hurry away, but the boy wakes up in time to give off a loud cry of agony.

Back in the apartment his sisters, alerted, notice that Tintagiles has been seized from their arms. Hearing another anguished scream, Ygraine runs out into the corridor to pursue the kidnappers. Bellangère wants to follow as well but faints on the threshold.

V   Ygraine is moving frantically in front of a large iron door. Guided by the golden locks on the floor which glistened in the light of her lamp, she has been able to keep track of the queen's attendants who have carried away her brother. Now she finds herself at what she feels is the most elevated part in the tower; you couldn't climb any higher, she muses. The door seems forbidding, it is icy cold and shows neither lock nor hinge, sealed into the wall as though it could never be opened. Suddenly, one hears little knocks from the other side of the door, and Tintagiles's weak voice, imploring his sister to open the door or else he will die. Frantic, Ygraine scratches the door in search of a means to open it, telling Tintagiles to hold on. He, however, warns that there is no time, they are coming for him, he feels "her" breath already behind him. Ygraine struggles desperately to find a way to open the door, in the process losing her finger nails, then two of her fingers, and finally breaking her lamp. In the ensuing darkness, Tintagiles is heard screaming that "she" is now there, that she has put her hand around his neck... and then we hear through the door his little body falling to the floor.

Ygraine, unwilling to accept that, after all her previous grief, she should have lost this little brother as well, curses and prays, alternating between pledges of total submission (in exchange for Tintagiles's release) and impotent rage (calling the queen a "monster" and expressing her helpless disgust by spitting). Finally, she collapses, weeping.

The story is conceived as an allegory fitted with the props of fairy tales: the somber castle, the tower in which unknown supernatural things are believed to happen, the innocent child, the cruel old queen (somewhat reminiscent of witches). Maeterlinck intensifies this impression when he has Ygraine, who traces her abducted brother with the help of the golden locks he has dropped on the floor like Hansel his pebbles, call him "Petit Poucet" (Thumbelino).

Death is portrayed as ugly and mean. Ygraine, when asked by her little brother what the frightening grandmother is like, describes her as "not pretty" and "very big," as jealous and small-hearted. Her power is vicious and base, too: the queen's servants fail in their first attempt to kidnap the boy, and have to resort to treacherous devices to achieve their goal of separating him from the arms of those who love him. When the final curtain falls over the annihilated Ygraine, we remain in powerless horror and intolerable pain at this perspective of the end of life. As Maeterlinck worded it in the preface to the edition of his drama, "This is an indifferent and relentless death, blind, groping haphazardly, snatching preferably the youngest and least unhappy ones, simply because they keep less still than the more miserable ones and because any too impulsive movement in the night attracts death's attention." The playwright continues to point out that the characters, and we with them, do our utmost to find some sense in destiny; we can only confirm its presence and prefer to believe in an intention, a design, refusing (consciously or subconsciously) to accept its absurdity.

In the fight against this blindly vengeful death, each of the characters plays a designated role. Postic has pointed to the use Maeterlinck makes in all his early dramas of a symbolism attached to gender and age, which seems to follow a recurrent pattern. Young and physically strong males accept their fate passively, occupying their mind with other questions to avoid facing the abject. In *La mort de Tintagiles*, Ygraine inquires from her brother whether the men who brought him to the castle, having hinted at the vicious queen, did not offer any help. "They busied themselves with the wind and the sails," explains Tintagiles, upon which Ygraine replies, "Ah! That doesn't surprise me...." As Konrad puts it, "there are young men whose reason, which depends on the physical senses, primarily sight, blinds them to the inward and the outward infinite reality."[15] Old males may appear as sages but ultimately turn out to be powerless, retired into resignation and passive reflection. (The old Aglovale, for instance,

[15]Linn Bratteteig Konrad, *Modern Drama as Crisis*, p. 10.

offers to use his sword to keep the queen's servants from entering Ygraine's room, but predicts that it will break. And it does—not surprisingly, since he does not use it as intended, pointing it at a living being, but places it across the door frame, as a barrier far too thin to hold back a heavy iron door.)

Young women may represent two different aspects of womanly qualities. One is emotionality, which results in weakness but also, as a particular alertness to the voice of the heart, in feminine intuition. It is the weaker sister Bellangère who, sensing the concrete danger and venturing into parts of the tower where she had never been before, overhears the conversation between the queen's attendants. The other is stronger, a motherly protectress—not a biological mother, but a mother by choice of heart. Since she is the only one who addresses the impending danger with behavior that is active and energetic, her complete failure symbolizes the impotence of all humans, even those who try, to escape their condition, to understand its reasons, and to bargain with fate.

Maeterlinck in this play avoids anything that might give even an illusion of security. The castle itself is decaying, i.e. sick and dying. Also, the subconsciously expected curve of dramatic action is here reversed. The first scene takes place on a hill overlooking the castle—thus in a physically elevated place. From there, the protagonists descend for acts II-IV to the lower rooms of the castle, only to ascend again in the final act. Konrad interprets this curve as a device to emphasize a lack of protection against death. Another way of reading Maeterlinck here is to view Tintagiles's "coming to life" on stage at the beginning of the play and his "coming to death" at the end as a symbolic presentation of his trajectory through life as far as the reader/spectator is involved. In this trajectory, the boy is not allowed—as we would expect dramatic heroes to be—an ascent to some heights of virtuous challenge, love experience, or moral judgment, from where he would recede as a result of nature or man-made catastrophe. By contrast, the trajectory into which Tintagiles is forced is depicted as a descent into a traumatic interim situation determined almost entirely by the anticipation of death, and a subsequent ascent towards his fate. Death meets him, it would seem from the vague specifications of locality we glean, at about the elevation where we first saw the little boy enter the world of doom that is epitomized by the castle. Konrad interprets psychologically that this ascent is significantly less steep for the boy than for the sister and her battle. "Ygraine's ascent in the tower, where the queen resides and which nobody has been able to enter, represents

soaring efforts to approach death in dramatic imagination and to understand its power."[16]

The various elements of the set design in Maeterlinck's dramas participate actively in the dramatic movement. As Konrad observes astutely, "in Maeterlinck's plays the stage design speaks a silent, symbolic language that is ignored by some characters, but vaguely understood by others."[17] In *The Death of Tintagiles*, too, several of the props used are invested with symbolic meaning prior to and outside the particular drama. The lamp, throughout Maeterlinck's work both a (literal) guide in the darkness and a (figurative) synonym of lucidity, acts as a symbol of the wish to penetrate all that is obscure and murky. When Ygraine follows her brother and his capturers, the fire in her lamp is extinguished neither by her rapid movements nor by the draft in the staircase leading into the tower. Only as she gives up her attempt to penetrate into the room where her brother is awaiting death and hits the door in blind rage is her lamp broken and she enveloped in complete darkness. The door represents the division between the known and the unknown, the fragile point in our defense against the intrusive power of fate. Even where it is solid and heavy, like the one behind which Tintagiles takes refuge with his sisters and Aglovale, it finally cedes without resistance. It is through a closed door that Bellangère overhears that the queen has sent for the little boy, and through another closed door that Ygraine witnesses the anguished Tintagiles in the last minutes of his life, and then his death. Where pious writers like Paul Claudel had used the door as a symbol of hope—something through which one would enter a new and better world—Maeterlinck presents doors as sources of menace: they threaten to open to let the unwelcome in, but the final door remains firmly shut. It symbolizes the impossibility of the mind to penetrate into the reality and meaning of death.

Symphonic Responses

The idea that the marionette play could be accompanied by music—in the form of an overture or of incidental music—is immediately convincing. That the drama might be turned into an opera might also be imagined. But how can a work that is so highly dramatic be rendered in the allegedly abstract medium of instrumental music? Two composers have in fact

[16]Linn Bratteteig Konrad, *Modern Drama as Crisis*, p. 31.

[17]Linn Bratteteig Konrad, *Modern Drama as Crisis*, p. 143.

reacted with symphonic music[18] to Maeterlinck's representation of the death of the boy Tintagiles. In 1910, the twenty-year-old Bohuslav Martinů wrote his *Smrt Tintagilova*, his first composition for full orchestra and later declared his official opus 1. He subtitled the work "Hudba k loutko-vému dramatu Maurice Maeterlinck" which, native speakers of the Czech language tell me, means music *to* or *towards* the marionette play by Maeterlinck. This wording does not seem to answer the crucial question, Was this intended as an overture, as the *Grove Dictionary* lists it, a prologue, as Brian Large translates,[19] or as an independent composition inspired by the drama? Martinů's primary biographer, Miloš Šafránek, himself of Czech origin, speaks of "a composition for orchestra on *La mort de Tintagiles*," thus not suggesting a subservient relationship of the music to the drama.[20] The case is less ambiguous in the second compo-sition on the drama, published in the United States only five years before Martinů was attracted by the subject. Loeffler left notes indicating that, while he did not explicitly "set the story," he intended it to give an independent musical account of its moods and the problems it treated, *not* an accompaniment. His official description sounds like a cautious dis-claimer: "My music starts in at the opening lines of the play. What, there-after, becomes of the play in my score? I do not know, and I believe it a good thing that I don't." But remarks like the following, quoted in the notes to the New York Philharmonic program of 1933, give him away:

> The epilogue to it all is not in the book, but in the 'scena dolente' of my score. ... I chose my themes in accordance with the play—in fact, I thought of the Evil Queen as typified by the menacing chief theme of the piece. I thought of the viole d'amour as the only instrument capable of expressing the spirit and mood of the doomed.

[18]In addition to Martinů and Loeffler, six other composers were inspired by the story and reacted in various genres. The English composer Adam Carse in 1902 and the Dutchman Alexander Voormolen in 1915 wrote overtures under this title, the French composer Jean-Charles Nouguès wrote an opera on *La mort de Tintagiles* in the same year that saw the birth of Loeffler's work, 1905; much after any of these, the year 1950 saw the single performance of another operatic setting of the text, created by the English conductor and composer, Lawrance Collingwood. Only the Italian Francesco Santoliquido in 1907 and Maeterlinck's Belgian compatriote Jean Absil as late as 1923-26 opted, like Martinů and Loeffler, for the symphonic poem. See Paul Griffiths's article "Maeterlinck" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980).

[19]Brian Large, *Martinů* (London: Duckworth, 1975), p. 16.

[20]Miloš Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů: The Man and his Music* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1944), pp. 8-9.

Bohuslav Martinů, *Smrt Tintagilova:*
Music to Maurice Maeterlinck's Marionette Drama

Martinů began with the composition of this, his first orchestral work, four days after his expulsion from the conservatoire in Prague owing to "incorrigible negligence." Ecstatic about the new-found freedom, he intended to use it to the best of his abilities. This meant combining what he felt were the strongest forces in him. On the one hand he had immersed himself, during the three years of his ostensibly unsuccessful musical studies in Prague, in the music of, above all, Debussy and the early Schoenberg—he heard repeated performances of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* after its Prague premiere in 1908, and of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and *Pierrot lunaire*—and in the poetry these composers preferred. On the other hand, one of his earliest compositions that showed the Czech untouched by the powerful French influence were three cycles of piano miniatures under the title "Loutky" (marionettes), in which he tried to incorporate folkloristic elements. The French Symbolist dramatist Maeterlinck thus came "recommended" both by the admired master Debussy who had set his words and by the "puppets" to which the young composer related—although it remains doubtful whether Maeterlinck and Martinů had a similar understanding of the symbolic implications of puppet plays.

Martinů's composition spans 563 bars, filled with an abundance of indications for tempo and mood. Counting only those instances in which the development of the musical material suggests a new beginning, I interpret Martinů to have conceived his composition in seven sections.[21] The piece is ambitious in its scoring[22] and as ambitious in the expressive variety of its performance indications, which average one every twelve bars but often follow each other at amazingly close distance. Among the tempo-based markings, *Grave* is important as the mood in which the initial section as well as sections VI and VII begin. *Allegro*, employed with various modifiers, launches another three of the sections (II, III, IV), with *Maestoso* reserved for the fifth section. With *Presto prestissimo* 17 bars before the end, followed three bars later by *stretto*, the piece threatens to conclude in an explosive rage, but the composer mercifully slows it

---

[21]I see these seven sections as beginning, respectively, with *Grave*, *Allegro* (p. 10), *Allegro commodo* (p. 24), *Allegro vivo* (p. 46), *Maestoso* (p. 58), *Grave appassionato* (p. 69), and *Grave* (p. 78).

[22]Woodwinds 3+3+3+2, brass 4+3+3+1, percussion, harp, strings.

down for the final nine bars. Even more interesting than the tempo markings are the youthfully exuberant indications concerning intensity and mood: *furioso* is used six times, *imperioso, risoluto,* and *deciso* add up to six more times, *feroce* appears twice, as do *strepitoso* and *infernale.*

The composition turns on two main motifs; at least three others make temporary appearances within single sections. The two principal motifs are themselves subjected to an inordinately large number of variations of all parameters, a technique Martinů was to retain for many compositions throughout his life. Yet while analysts of works from the composer's mature period have observed that it seems occasionally arbitrary to name one of the many variants the "basic form," this does not seem true here. In fact, the two predominant motifs are distinguished by features that, while repeatedly abandoned in the course of the work's development, invariably recur if not in letter, then in spirit, making them significant enough to be considered "basic forms."

The principal motif, which is never absent for long, is an amazing entity, not so much owing to its original features, but with regard to the truly remarkable amount of variation it will undergo without becoming unrecognizable to the listener. The five-bar form in which it is first introduced, consisting of two bars, their sequence, and a concluding ascent, is distinctly characterized in terms of rhythm, pitch contour, and tonal background. The rhythmic shape of its basic component—the only reliable part to continue throughout the composition—consists of a repeated dotted-note group followed by a two-note ascent to a beat-two syncopation. The pitch outline turns around a central C, which alternates with the tritone and the minor third below before ascending to the minor third above. The pattern is sequenced a minor third lower, focusing on the same four pitches, C E♭ G♭ A, the notes of a diminished seventh chord, which are further emphasized in the concluding fifth bar. By contrast, the little bridge connecting the model with its sequence progresses through a segment of the whole-tone scale *not* including C (see m.2-3: E♭-D♭-C♭-A). The result is a strong sense of C as a key-note, without any suggestion of a major or minor mode, with a cross-related link.

(bclar./bsn/vc/db)

EXAMPLE 1: Martinů, *Smrt Tintagilova,* principal motif

In the course of Martinů's highly imaginative developmental treat-ment of this motif, not one of the features will remain untouched. The tempo, of course, undergoes changes up to several times the original speed; the meter accommodates a six-eight softening of the dotted notes as well as a hemiolic rendering in three-four time. The rhythm itself appears several times in diminution, but also twice in a syncopating shift launched from beat 2 of a four-four bar. Similarly, the simple two-note ascent in the second bar undergoes all kinds of rhythmic variations. The pitch outline loses not only its characteristic intervals of tritone and minor third (adopting every interval between them, above all major third and perfect fourth) but frequently also the distinction of the two initial intervals, which then appear as a mere repetition. The "central" repeated tone, a fixture one would have thought, moves about, and the approach to the bar-2 syncopation may occur as a descent rather than an ascent. That Martinů manages such a degree of versatility without risking that we lose track of the principal motif confirms the young composer's skills. What extra-musical suggestions he intended to evoke can only be inferred. I do not, instinctively, associate this "non-leitmotif" with any of the characters in Maeterlinck's play. Rather, what comes to mind is Life and its multi-faceted, ever-different yet always basically identical nature.

This hypothesis, for which there does not seem to exist substantiation in verbal form of any kind, can be corroborated only indirectly by the equally conjectural interpretation of the secondary motif as Death. This motif is first presented at the opening of the second section (see *Allegro*, with cancellation of the original three-flats key signature; autograph score page 10). This section begins with a brief introduction during which the pedal note E that, together with an E-major pedal chord, will support much of what follows, is being established, while the remaining voices have not yet settled to meet this setting. A preliminary form of the sec-ondary motif is heard twice during these nine bars, preparing, as it were, the form of the motif that will determine the recurrences throughout the remainder of the composition.

This "basic form," originally presented with an immediate, unvaried repetition, is cast in a simple rhythmic shape: a downbeat chord followed by a dotted-note figure and climaxing in a half note, marked with explicit crescendo and clearly intended to sound triumphant. More characteristic than contour and rhythm, however, is the tonal substance. Each of the chords is squarely diatonic and will remain thus no matter what the sur-roundings in the course of the piece; however, the hinging E major which,

at both ends of the short unit, blends with the orchestra's underlying pedal chord, surrounds two triads that are jarringly cross-related with it. In the original form, the initial E-major chord is followed by a C-minor triad (whose E♭ and G thus clash with the preceding E and G♯); the return to E major is prepared with a B♭-minor triad (whose B♭ thus challenges the third pitch of the E-major harmony).

EXAMPLE 2: *Smrt Tintagilova,* secondary motif[23]

Significantly, the tonal design of this supposed Death motif has several forerunners in Czech music. The Death motif in Dvořák's *Rusalka* prefigures the cross-relationship of E major with C minor; in a similar context in Suk's *Asrael*, the second movement features, under a sustained note in the trumpets, an alternation of E major and B♭ minor in the strings. Any listeners Martinů would have hoped for when conceiving his first orchestral work in Prague would have been reminded of the two prominent forerunners for the tonal shaping of Death; the most erudite might even have grasped that the young composer had combined the keys paired by Dvořák and Suk to form his own semantic unit, which could thus function as a fully eloquent semantic entity despite the purely instrumental setting.

If this motif indeed symbolizes Death, as I wish to propose hypothetically, then its consistency in the every-varying surroundings into which Martinů places it in the course of the piece must be read as a trait he believed—or thought Maeterlinck believed—was representative for Death. The distinctly "sweet" impression created by the recurring harmony that frames the brief unit, and the drastic jarring directly next to the sweetness, can then easily be read as further attributes of the force Maeterlinck liked to refer to as "le personnage sublime."

The only segment of the composition during which both motifs are suspended for any longer period is the central (fourth) section. It is distinguished emotionally by an initial performance indication that does not recur within the composition, *Maestoso*, and technically by a sixty-bar fugato. Initiated by the unaccompanied double bass section which is joined in successively ascending sequence by the other strings before the wind instruments enter one by one, this passage stands out both from its surroundings as well as from any predecessors we associate with the genre

---

[23] See clarinets; score p. 11.

of a fugato section. While the gradual build-up of the ensemble from one voice to full participation abides by common rules, the amount of imitation in successive entries is minimal. The pronounced entrance gestures are different in each instrument, and what similarity of contour arises in subsequent measures appears submerged in the mechanical motion of 16 *Allegro-vivo* sixteenth-notes per measure. Such rhythmic monotony, of course, successfully defeats any impression of polyphony. This monotony is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the three sections preceding the fugato, and the three following ones, exhibit many examples of the rhythmic eloquence for which Martinů was to become so famous. The contrast underscores the deliberateness of this extraordinary means of rhythmic expression. What in Maeterlinck's drama may have induced Martinů to choose this image can only be guessed. Such hectic but apparently ineffective squirming are linked to scenes suggested in many "dance of death" depictions. Unsuspecting humans enter life, one by one, yet all end up thrashing about and writing feverishly. In this imagery, the basic assumption of helpless life being overshadowed by death is similar to that expressed in Maeterlinck's drama, and the dramatist's choice of puppets as "actors" may have provided the young composer with an additional association to humans as wriggling marionettes under the threatening eye of Death.

Charles Martin T. Loeffler, *La mort de Tintagiles:*
Poème dramatique d'après le drame de M. Maeterlinck

Gilman considers Loeffler's talent ideally suited for the particular task of expressing *La mort de Tintagiles* in music. "His distinguishing achievement," he judges, "is his consummate mastery of sorrowful speech. [...] I think that in this—in his power of expressing a peculiar and distinctive quality of sadness: a sadness burdened with wondering despair and haunted by a sense of mystery and terror—he is unequalled."[24]

Loeffler had become acquainted with Maeterlinck's play early in 1895 and completed the composition of his "dramatic poem" during the summer of 1897. The music, ninety-seven pages in the full score, is laid out in one single movement with numerous sections that, while running into each other, are clearly delineated. The scoring is for large orchestra

---

[24]Lawrence Gilman, in *Nature in Music and Other Studies in the Tone-Poetry of Today* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1914, repr. 1966), p. 216.

and two solo strings. According to witnesses, Loeffler conceived the two solo instruments to be two viole d'amore. Owning one such instrument himself, he explicitly purchased a second one and premiered the composition in this setting.[25] However, whether in compromise with the restrictions of concert-life reality or for other reasons—Ellen Knight believes he may have been distressed that critics had found the sound of two viole d'amore monotonous—he published a revised score (Schirmer 1905) that indicates only one viola d'amore, paired in the long and significant parallel sections with a solo violin.

Even more than in Martinů's work, the musical sections within the through-composed piece are distinguished: not only by tempo and meter, but significantly by timbre and volume, rhythmic features and thematic material, pedal tones and harmonic gestures. Together, these features communicate strikingly different expressive modes and moods. Despite the fact that the entire composition is built on only a small number of recurring motifs, the effect of each section is quite unique and allows listeners to link them with distinct aspects of the drama.

The composition begins with an *Allegro tempestoso*. An extended oscillation, created by means of a polyrhythmic interplay of tremoli in the central strings, ametric timpani alternations, and broken chords in the harp, establishes an inverted E-minor-seventh chord as a kind of background canvas before which the action can then unfold.[26] Rhythmicized, heavily syncopated repetitions in clarinets, bassoons, and horns support the same harmony. Within their respective *f* or *ff* registers, all instruments combine in two-bar waves of dynamic increase and decrease. Against the backdrop of these continuing "waves" and bold but uniform brush strokes, the first material presence emerges. The principal theme, marked *f sonoro*,

[25]See Ellen Knight, *Charles Martin Loeffler: A Life Apart in American Music* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 112: "The most arresting orchestral effect was the use of two violas d'amore to represent Tintagiles and Ygraine. Loeffler and Kneisel played the solo parts, using the instrument that Loeffler bought in Paris in 1894 and a second instrument Loeffler secured for the performance from Arthur Hill in London in the fall of 1897."

[26]While it may be hard for ears used to the music of the later 20th century to appreciate the following assessment, I find worth quoting the impression this beginning made on a contemporary listener. Louis Elson, writing in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* on 10 January 1898 about Loeffler's skillful capturing of the mood expressed in Maeterlinck's play, observed that "he begins with a dissonance that makes the first chord of the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony seem sweet by comparison, and, once launched, there are no stopping-places, no cadences of repose—all is restless, agonized, sorrowing." (Quoted in E. Knight, p. 112.)

sounds in a unison of oboes, English horn, clarinets, horns, first violins, and cellos. It is characterized by a swift but majestic descent in Dorian mode leading to an irregularly circling motion within three pitches. The theme's first complement, marked by initial repeated syncopations and full brass sound, actually remains confined within the same three-note limit. A second complement, although firmly linked to the main body as well as the general backdrop in its affirmation of the established E-G-B-D chord, gestures more independently. The lowest instruments (bassoons, celli, and double basses) emphasize the grounding E with a suspended sound before they rise in powerful crescendi, stressing several weak beats before breaking off on one of them. During their suspension, the highest instruments (piccolos with the other woodwinds plus first violin and harp for partial reinforcement) paint an even faster and steeper rise.

The musical language is clearly metaphoric here, and the message seems almost too obvious. The general mood is self-confident, thundering with raw force yet stagnant. As if to confirm this general impression, the first material presence portrayed before this backdrop appears powerful and assertive but locked into an ever-similar behavior; the details change while the oppressive repetitiveness persists. Were we to see Maeterlinck's marionette play performed (rather than, as most people of our times are more like to do, read the text without the benefit of any visual props), the curtain would no doubt rise to reveal a stage with a small island surrounded by the rough open sea. As our eyes become accustomed to the scene, we detect a castle nestled low against one ride of the island. The castle is sturdy but old, arrogant but exposed to mostly inclement weathers (with, as Ygraine will soon tell us, little sunshine and many dead trees). The only part of the castle to have proven impervious to the ravaging forces around it is the dark, overshadowing, light-blocking tower that houses "her," the Evil Queen. People who are forced to live here seem doomed by the very place, already before any concrete power rises to active intrusion. This scene, then, is what Loeffler seems to show us; example 3 gives the principal theme with its two complements.

Immediately after its completion, the three-segment principal theme is repeated with slight variations (still over the same chordal backdrop of E-G-B-D inversions). A thematic development engages the material very much along the lines of 19th-century symphonic techniques, enveloping the listener (and the protagonists?) in a treacherous sense of aesthetic well-being from which they are startled all the more drastically. The harmonic movement, which had departed from the E minor/E Dorian

EXAMPLE 3: Loeffler, *La mort de Tintagiles*, principal theme
(Castle with Evil Queen)

home key in the course of the development but returned for an inverted reminiscence of the principal theme, breaks out into sudden jerks before giving us an entirely unexpected resolution.[27] In the subsequent bars, the same alarming jerking motion takes hold of the tempo, which becomes volatile with bar-by-bar alterations of *tranquillo / animando / tranquillo / animando*. One's reaction to this disturbing turmoil in both vertical and temporal order may be analogous to the response experienced when reading Maeterlinck: even knowing that the old castle is depressing, its tower looming, and the weather violent, one is not necessarily prepared to learn about "trees that poison the horizon." There is an added element of horror in the presumed active interference of normally benign things (like trees) and the attribution of vulnerability to the supremely unperturbed and conceptual (the horizon, to which no-one—least of all trees —could do anything, least of all poison it; and yet the reader understands perfectly).

Having traversed this emotional eddy, the music settles on G as a new tonic and, after the unsettling *ff* is quickly hushed to *p dolce*, presents a secondary theme. The tempo is now slightly calmer (*Tempo I ma un poco tranquillo*), the texture much lighter than before, and the mood distinctly soft and gentle. The gesture of the three-bar motif hinges on B, the major third of the reigning key of G, adding to the impression of a thoroughly unthreatening, mild new presence on the musical stage. A first utterance in the high woodwinds (flutes, oboes, clarinets) elicits a reply in the middle register (English horn, French horn, cello in tenor clef); the first group then repeats its statement with emphatic embellishment, answered by the

---

[27]After rehearsal no. C, in the reestablished E-minor context, the succession of chords (G⁷-f⁶-G⁷-f⁶-...) seems to announce a plagal cadence into C. Yet that is not what happens, and even the sudden rallentando does not prepare us for the cross-related D-major-ninth chord offered as 'resolution'. (Loeffler alerts the players to this jerking shift with extra large warnings of "F♯, A♮" before the bar line. See RN C+5/6 on p. 13.) Philip Hale called Loeffler's harmonic progressions "sometimes jarring, almost disconcerting, but deliberately contrived, effective" (*Boston Journal*, 9 January 1898; quoted in E. Knight, p. 112).

second group with its own variation of the motif. This dialogue, reassuring but not too sure of itself, sensitive but not meek, reminds one of the first dialogue Maeterlinck's brother and sister have on the hill top outside the castle: Ygraine wants to reassure her little brother but warn him at the same time; she wishes to make him feel loved but communicates that there is a force that hates. Tintagiles joins her tenderly, without any initiative of his own, as in the play just responding to individual questions.

EXAMPLE 4:
La mort de Tintagiles, secondary motif: Ygraine's dialogue with and reassurance of Tintagiles[28]

   Into the atmosphere shaped by the continuing pedal on G, a modification of the principal theme enters as a soft reminiscence of the unremitting reality of the castle. First heard in the tranquil mood, with slower note values for the beginning, in a major-mode variant, and in *p*, the subsequent imitation soon abandons the augmentation and harmonic softening, picks up speed and volume, and with the help of successively increasing intensity and density in the surrounding orchestral voices, returns us to the initial *Tempo tempestoso* and its concomitant *ff*. The texture and rhythmic structure of the backdrop are different now, as is the tonal mold of the thematic phrase: no oscillations but unreserved power display, no inverted ninth chord but an uninflected minor-tonic harmony, no downward striding in gently distancing Dorian mode but the much more depressing falling minor triad. The castle as Tintagiles's future eerie home and the tower as the seat of the invisible evil ruler of all innocent life have become both more accessible and more threatening as the queen is depicted with tangible qualities: old, suspicious, jealous, ugly.
   This close-up picture in turn gives way to allow for a more panoramic view of the problem. "Gives way" is to be understood quite literally: the main theme, first reduced to a mere descent (now in the Lydian mode) and then ever further fragmented, nearly disappears as the volume diminishes and the ensemble vanishes, until only a single oboe leads over into a new section. Here we are treated to a very different intensity: neither commanding nor meek, but serene and composed. The tempo is *molto tranquillo*, the volume fluctuates around *f dolce* (!) and *mf*. The thematically active instruments are those among the orchestral voices that have

---

[28]See score p. 15.

often been called closest to the human voice: the English and French horns among the winds, viola and cello among the strings. In a perfect unison, accompanied only thinly like a monodic song, these four voices spin out a long cantilena (44 slow-paced measures). While we may expect a cantilena to privilege small intervals, the extremely restricted tonal range around middle C♯ and, later, around middle C (moving, in the first 39 bars, only within a frame defined by a major sixth) gives the listener pause. A reminder of what many refer to as Maeterlinck's philosophy— what we may wish to call more simply his view of the human condition— sheds light on this musical representation. This view hinges on the poet's fatalism, the belief that life is at every moment overshadowed by death, this "enigmatic character, invisible but present everywhere, who is, perhaps, nothing but the unconscious but strong idea which the poet holds of the universe and which gives his work a grander air, I don't know what which lives on after the death of all else."[29] This enigmatic character, to which the poet returns again and again in his early theater, is regularly called *Fatalité*.[30] The rather surprising narrowness of the cantilena's line appears as Loeffler's mimetic depiction of the constriction under which, according to the poet's overall dramatic message in this and his other early plays, life develops but weakly.[31] At the same time, it is this oppressive sense of fatality that gives mothers and motherly sisters like Ygraine their unique courage.

EXAMPLE 5: *La mort de Tintagiles*, beginning of the cantilena[32]

---

[29]Maurice Maeterlinck, *Théâtre*, Introduction, p. XVI; translation from the French mine.

[30]As Compère explains helpfully, this word is employed here exclusively in the sense of a pervasive belief in our being fatal, not in that of any theories attempting to explain how events are brought about, or with moral undertones. See Gaston Compère, *Le théâtre de Maurice Maeterlinck*, p. 11.

[31]As in the dialogical motif of the secondary theme, whose hinging pitch was the third of the underlying chord, so also is the C♯ around which this cantilena circles the third of the reigning tonic A. This could be Loeffler's way of linking both musical symbols to the same dramatic character and a significant emotion: Ygraine notion of impending danger to her brother's life, her motherly love for him, her pledge to protect him and fight for the very narrow margin she believes the cruel queen will allow: a few more days.

[32]See score pp. 24-25.

The following section is marked *Poco più moto*. Small, hasty figures, emerging in diminution from the last stage of the cantilena's development, chase one another's metrically irregular circling gestures. As witnessed by the hectic dynamic swells, emotion runs high; yet the general volume level remains hushed, as if in fear. A brief motivic dialogue develops, as if Ygraine and Bellangère were discussing how they can protect themselves and their brother, yet the impression of anguish lingers and increases throughout as the dynamic swells grow in amplitude. A sudden chain of syncopations, accompanied by a powerful dynamic surge, spells helpless insecurity and growing apprehension. And sure enough, the dreaded force approaches, drawing mightily nearer with a full-orchestra ascent in overpowering crescendo. As if to leave no doubt that this is the reigning authority, it announces itself with two measures of rolls in the timpani and military drums.

The audience of Maeterlinck's play first learns through the interchange between Bellangère and Ygraine of how the abduction and death of the various family members habitually happen: Bellangère has heard the queen's attendants refer laughingly to the child the queen desires to see, and Ygraine's reaction tells us that she interprets this as a sure death sentence for her little brother. At this point in the play's visible action, all we are witnessing is a brief conversation between two sisters. In terms of the dramatic tension, however, the knowledge we come to share, and the apprehension it raises, is of utmost intensity: as if we were allowed to foresee the future, the events that will, indeed, eventually take their course are all laid out in front of our inner eyes.

It seems crucial to understand Maeterlinck's device, on which, as I will want to show, Loeffler bases his unique musical reading of the play. The momentous actions of this drama as they follow the queen's order to "see the boy" happen as if twice consecutively: once as we comprehend the inevitable sequence—the queen's attendants will approach, they will force their way into Ygraine and Bellangère's living quarters, they will snatch the boy, bring him to the queen, and he will die—and then a second time when the real action on stage repeats all that our dismayed imagination has shown us.

Loeffler obliges his listeners (those of his listeners who seek awareness of the signification carried by his musical signs and symbols) to live through the horror twice. Interestingly but perhaps not so surprisingly once the emotional dynamics of Maeterlinck's dramatic device are understood, the time given to the unfolding of the dramatic action *as heard*

about, imagined, and anticipated is slightly longer than the time allotted to the actual playing out of the same action. Also, details vary: the actually unfolding story has, after all, both more practical obstacles and more mundane details to it than the course of events as the participating audience is led to foresee it.[33]

Having said this, I wish to stress that the approach of the terrible leader in full military style, which I described before my digression, is the one the sisters see in their minds—and which, as a consequence, we the audience see as well—after Bellangère has overheard a conversation not intended for her ears. In the music as in the drama, the queen's hand-maidens are evoked, but not actually seen, as haunting the corridors in pursuit of their macabre duties.

The section into which the dynamically exploding orchestral ascent leads is marked *Con ritmo* and *ff*, and is dominated entirely by combative sounds.

EXAMPLE 6: *La mort de Tintagiles*, the approach of Evil[34]

[33]In this part of my interpretation, I follow Michael Riffaterre who, analyzing and inter-preting a poem by Victor Hugo as paradigmatic for "the transposition from the auditory to the visual," argues convincingly that in certain cases, "the representation creates the thing represented and makes it verisimilar," and who proposes a reading that "shows how [the words and their possible collocations] are mutually 'triggered' one after the other, result-ing in a mimesis that is convincing because each of its components is strongly 'motivated' by the combination of verbal sequences that precedes it." (M. Riffaterre, *Text Production*, translation by Térèse Lyons of *La production du texte* (1979) [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983] pp. 184-185.) In other words, through Loeffler's composition we glean a fuller understanding of an aspect of Maeterlinck's drama that might not have captured an appreciator's attention, either because of its fleetingness within the staged action, or because the appreciator has learned that Maeterlinck's audiences always know about pending death long before the action moves towards it. The generality of the phenomenon in Maeterlinck's theater does not keep the composer from portraying the duplicate process of understanding what will happen, and seeing it happen; and it is through Loeffler's music that we are led to ponder this aspect.

The combination of characteristic drum rolls and march-like trumpet signals, accompanied by various percussive rumbling and tremolo pedals in the low strings, is almost pictorially suggestive of the advent of a military conqueror.[35] The harmony of this section develops as a stagnant chord which (at cue K) starts out as a simple inverted A-major triad over a pedal C♯, but two measures later has added an emphasized F♯. In this coloring, as C♯-E-F♯-A, this triumphant, menacingly oscillating chord is a transposition of the B-D-E-G on which the composition began. What was then the boldly drawn canvas of a dark castle in which horrors are known to happen repeatedly, is here even more pronounced. We are no longer thinking in the abstract what the queen who brings certain death to all whom she targets does habitually; we are now imagining with Ygraine what *will* happen, concretely and soon, to the little Tintagiles. The invisible tyrant is tangibly close.

But almost as quickly as it appeared, the gruesome presence disappears. During the brisk two-measure descent with its sudden diminuendo, several instruments drop out, and only a few voices complete the phrase with a hushed staccato sound. Ygraine refuses to see this new disaster as entirely inevitable. She tries to convince herself, the doubtful Bellangère, and the almost completely resigned Aglovale that she will resist. How unexpected this announcement is to all becomes tangible in the unprepared general-pause fermata—striking in so metrically regulated a piece.

With *Meno mosso e largamente* a new section sets in. A deep breath of relief, musically embodied by a swift gesture that in little over half a measure sweeps upwards through more than two octaves, breaks out into what I take as a symbolic representation of faith, be it faith against all odds or faith despite better judgment. The full forces of woodwinds, brass, timpani, and strings join in a chorale-like texture of half-notes and whole notes, in *ff* or, for the French horns, even *fff*. Only towards the end

---

[34]See score pp. 24-25.

[35]Loeffler received much praise for the composition particularly because of the "brilliancy and masterful skill of its orchestration." A critic, writing after the premiere, mentions particularly "the odd effects produced upon the cymbals (not unlike Wagner's rattling in the Venus-scene in *Tannhäuser*), the impressive tolling of midnight upon the harps..., the bold use of bass drum and of percussion generally, the muted horns, the 'ponticello' work of the strings, the short trumpet-blasts, ... prove what a master of scoring we have in Mr. Loeffler." (Elson, op. cit.). L. Gilman adds to this praise when he writes about Loeffler, "[h]e does not score with the witchery of the necromantic Debussy, nor with the overwhelming weight and plangency of Strauss; but he has discovered hues and perspectives that are unknown to them." (Gilman, *Nature in Music*, pp. 212-213.)

of this joyful hymn line does the listener discern that the leading strand in the homophonic texture actually intones the principal theme—the theme of the gloomy castle! Indeed, the depressing certainty of being doomed lingers immediately beneath the surface of this momentary feeling of new hope. After several partial imitations of the principal theme, in diminuendo and thinning texture, Loeffler reminds us that the light-blocking tower and its cruel inhabitant are still in place: the bassoon sounds a fragment of the principal theme's second complement, symbolizing the Evil Queen according to Loeffler; it is marked *pronunziato* and thus destined to catch at least our subconscious attention.

In the course of the following diminuendo, a broken-chord figure emerges in the harp that, as time and tempo change to a *Moderato* in six-four time, establishes a lilt evocative of a barcarole. Before this soothing sound backdrop, the two viole d'amore (or, the two solo strings, viola d'amore and violin) enter in extended parallel declamation. This is perhaps the most concretely allusive passage in the entire piece: the only explicit comment the composer made about the entire work regards his wish to represent the sweetly embraced brother and sister—Tintagiles and Ygraine —with a viola d'amore duet. A dramatist, whose typical audience would have a limited tolerance for stillness, is obliged to imply interior states like the siblings' tender love for one another in words and brief gestures.[36] By contrast, the musician can "show" this close relationship at length. Of the thirty measures encompassed in this section, all but two towards the end are supported by a protracted pedal note, a soft, multi-octave E. This E proves capable of sustaining varying phases or aspects of the love with which, we glean from the conversation we are allowed to overhear, the little boy is being surrounded. The broken-chord *barcarole* figure, having set out with a C-major triad, later modifies its line to a brief span in A minor followed by C♯ minor. This ostensibly slight change in the tonal environment proves pregnant with significance. The parallel thirds of the two soloists, whose initial beginning in long note values had blended with the C-major harmony around it, now get caught, when launching their second phrase, in the shift from A minor to C♯ minor. Consequently, the simple three-note ascent suddenly develops as if within an augmented triad while the floor below its feet glides into a new pattern, as it were.

---

[36]This is even more of a predicament for the writer of a marionette play. Significantly though, Maeterlinck's text contains only the scarcest directions for practicalities of the performance. The aspect I have been considering here, which one might have thought significant in a Symbolist play, is almost entirely left to the director.

EXAMPLE 7: *La mort de Tintagiles*, duet Tingailes/Ygraine[37]

Subtle as we may want to persuade ourselves this is, close attention reveals that this is by no means the only disturbing sign. The conclusion of the phrase is marked by a rhythmic rallentando in the timpani that will play a symbolic role in the remainder of the composition. After its initial slow-down soon interspersed with rests, it is eerily evocative of a heart that threatens to stop beating—an indicator suggestive of the physical side of approaching death. Next, the beginning of the solo instruments' second phrase is countered in the first French horn by a quotation of the principal theme's distinctive second bar, which is set in its original stark four-four time against the gentle rocking of the still reigning six-four meter. Yet the phantom of doom is repressed once more, and the plaintive declamation of the viole d'amore continues its second phrase without further interference. However, at the closure of this phrase, the ominous timpani figure is even more prominent, and when the musical representation of the closeness between brother and sister enters a third phrase, it does not get far. This time, the French horn's principal-theme fragment, reminder of the looming presence of the castle, sounds in accented *mf* and is prolonged in an imitation, *espressivo*, in English horn and violas. The tempo slows down (*rallentando . . . tranquillo . . . rallentando*) and the fateful timpani ritardando is heard a third time. At the same time, the lower of the two solo instruments (Ygraine, we must assume) is heard alone; the higher one (presumably epitomizing Tintagiles) is gone. Moreover, the sister's line changes: it falls into a six-four variant of the castle motif. Still holding on to her cherished conviction of a lasting closeness with her dear little brother in the barcarole's soothing sway, Ygraine is nevertheless overcome by the undeniable reality of the doom that pervades the place.

The short *Poco Adagio* that follows establishes no melodic or rhythmic patterns. Given the moment in the "story" which this section of the music occupies, it functions as a means of suspense. Only the large arpeggios of the harp, heard previously in the context of the "Cantilena of

[37]Beginning of the viola d'amore duet Tingailes/Ygraine, score pp. 39-40.

Fatality," prepare an interpretation of the situation in which, as we know from Maeterlinck, the old warrior Aglovale confirms that he, too, feels deep love for the little boy and will protect him as valiantly as his brittle sword and weak arms allow.

The subsequent *Andante con moto* is based on the prominent display of the secondary motif (refer back to Ex. 4). This was the music of Ygraine's original conversation with her brother, when she warned him but also promised her protection. And that is exactly what she is doing again here, having ascertained that her two allies are willing to support her defense of her brother. Her attempts to soothe and hearten him, however, are not entirely successful. As Maeterlinck tells us, Tintagiles appears very upset; he is crying pathetically and describes in sensory terms what we understand are his all-too-realistic apprehensions: the light in the room is getting darker, there are wounds on the forehead and the hands of old Aglovale, and Ygraine's heart is beating so strongly that it hurts him when she embraces him. Loeffler expresses this situation strikingly with a sorrowful melody of the first viola d'amore, accompanied by three string parts—violin I, violin II, and viola—each represented by what the score indicates as "4 soli." Very gradually, more instruments join, all of them *piano dolce*. Eventually, the violas, cellos, and clarinets intone once again the secondary motif of Ygraine's concern and protection for her brother, doubled in heterophony by the highly embellished viola d'amore that we hear as a timbral embodiment of Tintagiles.

viola d'amore

EXAMPLE 8: *La mort de Tintagiles*, Tintagiles's mournful melody[38]

This touching response is interrupted brusquely—without any form of closure in the viola d'amore part—as the orchestra is caught in a crescendo. A few bars later, the Evil Queen motif makes its reappearance in a single, accented unison statement. There is a startled hush in all voices, from which emerge the oboes and clarinets with a fragment of Tintagiles's mournful melody. This brings the frightened little brother back into the dialogue. In the subsequent *tranquillo* section, an elaborate, cadenza-like figuration in the viola d'amore is heard in sweet *pp*,

[38]See score pp. 45/46.

accompanied only very softly by occasional extended string notes. As a counterpoint, the Evil Queen motif is heard, and promptly causes the viola d'amore to stop. The process is repeated as the high woodwinds reclaim the fragment of the boy's mournful declamation. But this time, the ominous timpani rallentando recurs with a brief reminder. Tintagiles's viola d'amore cadenza resumes its eloquent figurations through three octaves, but as intrusions of the Evil-Queen motif become ever more frequent, it disappears. (One remembers that, as the poet told us, Tintagiles was the first to hear the approaching footsteps of what we glean must be the queen's attendants.)

Left to its own devices, the orchestra picks up tempo and leads into a new section, marked *Allegro leggiero e misterioso*. In six-eight time and beginning in *molto p*, without any distinct melodic units and in highly repetitive rhythms, the music conveys a feeling of foreboding. As more and more voices join the originally thin texture, the volume in each voice increases, sudden surges become ever more frequent, and as finally the tempo is carried along in *poco a poco stringendo*, apprehension becomes almost unbearable. In *Allegro molto* and *ff*, a new motif is presented. Its brief two-bar frame is characterized by violent dynamic swings and complemented by a trombone call with timpani reinforcement. The rhythmic design of this complement with its characteristic anacrusis, and the scoring with instruments that for many centuries have been linked with "last judgment" and similarly decisive spiritual situations, corroborates the association with the approaching powers of superior—albeit here not recognizably divine—judgment. Repeated, sequenced upward, and fragmented, this motif dominates the fourteen measures of this section until it breaks off suddenly. It is immediately followed by two of the composition's central themes: the trunk of the principal theme (the doom of the castle) in grand unison alternates—fights for priority, one is tempted to hear—with the secondary motif (Ygraine's concern and pledge to protect her brother).

What has happened? What is Loeffler musically depicting here? The foreboding evoked by the footsteps Tintagiles believes to hear, and his increasing distress and fear, are followed by the unheard-of: the securely closed door opens—not in secrecy, as the queen is known to operate normally, but while all are fully awake—yet nobody enters. Are these the actual attendants, or is the eerily opening door a creation of the shared fear and despair? Loeffler's trombone calls transcend the aspect of superstition to stress the spiritual dimension. And as the musical discourse

unfolds alternating the oppressiveness of the castle with the sisters' wish
to reassure their brother, no progress is made on the psychic level—the
door remains wide open. Finally, the French horns—which had been
playing all along, blended into the ensemble—stand out with a two-note
call and bring the section to an end.

If this is Tintagiles's anguished scream, which causes the mysteri-
ously moving door to slam shut, there is, thankfully perhaps, no mimetic
representation of the slamming movement or sound itself. However, most
instruments cease suddenly, the tempo slows down, the dynamic level
decreases to *Un poco più tranquillo* and *mf dolce cantabile*, and only a
few voices are heard with afterthoughts of the principal theme. For seven
bars, there is some respite, resembling the feeling the three concerned
defenders of Tintagiles's life have after the mysteriously opening door
closes so suddenly. For this time they got away! Yet thoughts about the
inevitability of that fateful force are now inescapable.

After these slightly soothing seven bars recurs what I have called the
"Cantilena of Fatality." The instruments, however, are (with oboe, vio-
lins, and violas) no longer those that imitated the human voice. Both their
color and their higher register—the octave built by the first and second F♯
above middle C—are more piercing than the earlier warm, middle-C-
range sound. The tonal center F♯, new in this composition, anticipates
what will later become the powerful F♯ pedal accompanying the actual
abduction of the child. What is more, it soon turns out that the cantilena
has not replaced the principal theme; fragments assert their presence all
through the section. Seven bars into the cantilena, the bassoons, horns,
and cornets take up the triumphant note repetitions, and the harmony, set-
ting out from A♭-F-G-B♭-D♭, plays with variants of the constellation that
was heard at the very beginning of the piece as part of the "backdrop"
canvas. We are, then, treated once more to an external view here. By
subtly reminding the listener of the castle's location in a rough and
"poisonous" landscape, and allowing the corresponding musical symbols
to supersede what presented itself as a slightly corrupted form of the
pondering in a larger perspective, Loeffler prepares us for what readers of
Maeterlinck know must come.

At *a tempo (poco animato)*, the principal theme's first complement
—a figure whose original circled inescapably and, as I observed earlier,
somewhat mockingly within the confinement of three pitches—is now
developed, for the first time in the composition. It is joined, three bars
later, by fragments of the second complement, reminding us *pronunziato*

of the menacing ruler of the tower. This emblem of terror soon takes over, *appassionato* and in accented *ff*. The little dialogical motif that, in an earlier *poco più moto* section, had suggested Ygraine and Bellangère's strategizing to protect their little brother, inserts a soft shade. However, it proves to be robbed of its dialogical dimension here, caught in renewed crescendo and a further *poco stretto*, and juxtaposed with ever more salient assertions of the Evil Queen motif (here heard in the trumpets). As we may have feared, this brings the explicit announcement of the arrival of the evil powers in the form of the already well-known combination of snare-drum rolls and trumpet calls, *a tempo (molto ritmico)*. It is followed by renewed, ever more overpowering statements of the Evil Queen motif which, especially in two augmented presentations of the entire brass group, leave no room for doubt that the power of death is now taking charge.

In *L'istesso tempo alla breve*,[39] combined with the six-four time of the well-remembered earlier *barcarole*, surprisingly softened versions of the Evil Queen motif set the tone for one strand of the drama's reality. The other is defined by a long quotation of the viola d'amore duet that, as before, speaks of the tenderly embracing siblings, particularly Tintagiles and Ygraine. Once again the composer shifts the accent set by the dramatist: while Maeterlinck, respectful of the laws of theatricality, had to relegate the siblings' tightly intertwined sleep to the space between two acts, referring to it only indirectly through the discussion of the queen's attendants for whom the laced arms present an obstacle, Loeffler can remain inside the chamber and show the slumber itself. Not for a moment does he have to change the narrator's allegiance to let us witness how the situation presents itself to the handmaidens of evil. Since he stays tuned to the sleeping victim and his sisters, he can present the self-servingly soft procedures of the abductors as gently swaying *dolcissimo* renderings of the originally very rhythmic Evil Queen motif.

While this changes the perspective, it does not, of course, change the outcome of the intrusion. Of the two viole d'amore, it is now the lower one (Ygraine's, I suggested; the solo violin of the later edition) which drops out—or rather fades away as Tintagiles is secretly being removed from the chamber. The boy's line continues, scarcely accompanied, and, having lost its parallel with the sister's line, changes its intervals until they gradually allow to take on the purposefully and ametrically placed

---

[39]This indication brings the much-inflected *Un poco più tranquillo* to a tempo very close to the *Moderato* in which the following material was first heard.

form of the Evil Queen motif. In this motif, Tintagiles's musical presence is doubled by an orchestral viola. The symbolic implication of this involuntary switch of allegiances is distressing: as he approaches his fate, he will not be accompanied by his loving sister, but by another guide (the queen's attendants, as we know from Maeterlinck). As if to confirm this interpretation, the ever softer but still very expressive wandering line of Tintagiles's viola d'amore is overlaid, in the following *Molto tranquillo*, with two short reminders of the ominous timpani rhythm (the "slowing heart beat"), corroborating that this feeble line—and the boy it epitomizes —are about to be extinguished.

Yet, as we know from Maeterlinck, Ygraine has noticed that her brother has been snatched from her arms and runs after him in desperate pursuit, eventually reaching the door behind which she hears his weakening voice. In the following *Andante*, this situation is musically portrayed in the most discreet manner. Tintagiles's viola d'amore is heard, *con tenerezza*, with a further variation of the Evil Queen motif, while the violins, later joined by the high woodwinds, recall very appropriately the secondary motif—the musical symbol of Ygraine's concern and protective efforts on her brother's behalf. The tempo slows down even further *(poco ritenente)*, the texture is momentarily reduced to strings only, and in this intimate atmosphere Tintagiles's viola d'amore intones the "mournful melody" of earlier (refer back to Ex. 8). One more time is he allowed to join with a parallel line in the second viola d'amore/solo violin, but this attempt at a reunion is countered unmistakably with the Evil Queen motif in the bass clarinet.

A sudden *stringendo* leads to a frantic *Allegro veemente*, and the viola d'amore is heard no more. Instead, hurried figures stir in strings and woodwinds. While in actual performances, these merely sweep by a listener, they reveal themselves to the reader of the score as diminutions four times the speed of the principal theme's first half, followed in *poco a poco più agitato* by similar diminutions of the cantilena—doom and fatality in mad acceleration. Four measures of *Allegro frenetico* present an emotional follow-up with raging surges and a final ascent into the highest register.

This wild play comes to an abrupt halt in the subsequent *Lento-grave* section. In this slow tempo, the Evil Queen motif, bounced from one instrumental group to the other in strongly accented *ff*, sounds more deathly than ever. It is juxtaposed, after five measures, with a line in horns and violins that derives from the development of Tintagiles's "mournful

melody" (a connection the composer emphasizes with the indication *molto dolente*), and, a little later, with Ygraine's secondary motif (*molto espressivo*), heard in English horn and cello. All three components linger for a while, generate single imitations in other instruments, but then fade and vanish. The Evil Queen motif alone, now individualized in the bass clarinet, carries over into a hazily gruesome *pp* passage in which, interrupting the harp arpeggios, the timpani sets four repetitions of its ominous ritardando. The audience, almost as paralyzed as the music appears to be, understands what this combination of the castle's death-bringing aspect with the slowing-down of the heart beat means.

Yet at this point, something strange and unexpected happens. Above the ongoing, depressing union of the two musical symbols of certain death, Tintagiles's viola d'amore rises once more. It rises quite literally: beginning in registers much lower than we have ever heard the instrument throughout the entire composition, it no longer forms gentle lines but sequences of double- and triple-stop chords, in pairs that are separated from one another by an octave jump. After two such jerky ascents, returned to its low register and now *molto dolente e tranquillo*, the viola d'amore gives in to one more version of the Evil Queen motif that dominates the surrounding voices. When it does so, it is doubled once again by an orchestral viola, as was the case shortly after it was disengaged from its sister viola d'amore, on occasion of its first adaptation to the reality of the menacing ruler of the castle tower. Once more now, Tintagiles's line soars to its highest register, where it lingers while the orchestra slows down with repetitive rhythms. Then it drops, in single-note utterances marked *sospiroso* and, on the final note, *morendo*. One after the other the instruments of the orchestra vanish, as if the world was retreating from the dying boy rather than he from the world. In the end, only the first viola d'amore's protracted last note is left. Then it, too, is cut short—by an attack of an ever so gentle, celestial harmonic in the harp.

Summary: Two Ways of Portraying the Incomprehensible

Maeterlinck's marionette drama about the relentless way in which the fatal power of the Evil Queen overtakes and destroys an innocent little boy has captured the imagination of many composers. I have limited myself to a discussion of two of the symphonic transmedializations. Martinů shows the forces at play in Maeterlinck's marionette drama but

not the structure in which the poet's rendition was cast; Loeffler ventures closer to the form of Maeterlinck's narrative, creating a musical ekphrasis that diverts from the literary source only when he makes use of the particular pictorial strength of his, the musical, medium. If Martinů's two motifs and the parameters chosen for the idiosyncratic fugato refer rather than paint, his performance indications express a desire of sensual depiction rather than conceptual presentation. Loeffler shuns all-too-drastic mimetic procedures of rendering the play's most dramatic moments; there are no onomatopoeic equivalents of the slamming door or the child's scream. Instead, the composer focuses on the internal, spiritual dimension of the story. Consequently, his attention remains with the protagonists and does not, as a dramatist is well advised to do if only for variety's sake, veer to secondary characters. Not surprisingly, there is more to be learned from the mature composer about the question that informs this study.

The composer can *show*—and make listeners experience in time and duration—what the dramatist had to *imply*: the protracted sleep in treacherous security, the imagined horror, the feeling of tender affection. Inasmuch as he thus expands certain aspects of the drama, he subsequently balances this deviation by merely implying what the dramatist had shown: the queen's attendants who prepare for the kidnapping, discuss among themselves, and finally carry out their dismal task. While Maeterlinck interjects his third act as one in which the victim of impending death and his sisters are presented from an external, pragmatically disengaged view—through the eyes of the queen's attendants whose interest is solely in overcoming the obstacle presented by the tender embrace that holds the child they are told to abduct—Loeffler retains the focus on the inside of the human drama. And while Maeterlinck subsequently stays with the sleepers, sharing in the shattering recognition of the sisters' loss once they wake from their sleep, Loeffler accompanies little Tintagiles on his frightening journey towards death. Maeterlinck's drama ends with Ygraine's lonely anguish, agony, grief, and pain; Loeffler's musical "poème dramatique" ends fully focused on the dying Tintagiles.