Ancient Mythology in "La Princesse Maleine" by Maurice Maeterlinck: Intertextual Analysis

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the reconstitution of the mythological worldview of the well-known European Symbolist writer Maurice Maeterlinck based on his famous drama 'Princess Maleine' that made a great impact on the development of the 'new drama' in the end of the 19th century. This analysis is performed in the context of the study of the symbolist semiotic system in French-speaking tradition. The lingua-poetic and mythopoeic intertextual analysis done, we have found that the mythological model in the play is functioning with a large system of mythological structures and semantic patterns. The locus of 'Princess Maleine' is marked as Hades World and its inhabitants are connoting the mythical concept BAD LUCK. Only two actors, the protagonists Maleine and Hjalmar are connoted not only by the morbid semantics but also as the correlates of the astral world. Their death in Hades makes possible the eschatological catastrophe leading to the neutralization of the killers whereas the infernal semantics is neutralized and the cosmos tends to the restoring of harmony symbolized by the coming of the new day and of the new year. Besides, the protagonists are considered to be the sacred sacrifice to change the semantics of the mythological concept BAD LUCK to the harmonized GOOD LUCK. Three mythological models are reconstructed: LIFE with positive connotation, LIFE with negative connotation and DEATH with positive connotation. The projection of the play is modeled by the movement from the positively and negatively connoted concept LIFE to the positively connoted concept DEATH that is a distinctive sign of Symbolist conception of 'tragic optimism' developed by Maeterlinck.

Keywords: myth, intertext, symbolism, conceptual system, concept, image, worldview.

Introduction

The work of Maurice Maeterlinck, Belgium's only Nobel Prize winner for literature, was a landmark in the cultural life of the late 19th century, and yet his theatre is still very much part of the contemporary literary landscape. His symbolist writing inspired both Antonin Artaud and Eugène Ionesco, his fairy tale 'Bluebird' is still on the school syllabus today, and his texts are studied by a considerable number of researchers around the world (collected in the voluminous Maeterlinck bibliography compiled by Arnaud Rykner in 1998). However, certain dramas, certain aspects (however important) have not yet been studied by our colleagues, and the aim of this article is to fill a gap, namely the analysis of ancient mythology in the play 'Princess Maleine'. Maeterlinck's first dramatic work earned him the eulogistic article by Octave Mirbeau in Le Figaro of 24 August 1890, which made the young writer from Ghent famous: 'Maurice Maeterlinck has given us the most genial work of this time and the most extraordinary, and also the most naive, comparable and, dare I say it? superior in beauty to the most beautiful in Shakespeare' (Gorceix 4). A seminal text for Maeterlinck's aesthetics, 'Princess Maleine' therefore requires an in-depth analysis, and it is indeed a mythopoetic analysis that is needed to uncover the profound structures that generate the conceptualization of the dramatic universe.

It is true that Maeterlinck, a disciple of the Collège Sainte-Barbe in Ghent, was familiar with Greek and Roman antiquity, particularly through Leconte de Lisle's translations of Greek playwrights (in this article we use the translations available in the 19th century), as his contemporaries Charles Van Lerberghe and Albert Mockel pointed out. That said, it is surprising to find that few studies analyze this mythopoetic intertextuality, or that they do so only in passing. More often it involves the identification of several mythical figures. For example, Ginette Michaux has evoked the resurgence of the myth of Antigone (Michaux 177), Gaston Compère has spoken of the 'dream of the androgynous' (Compère 181), and Sebastian Piotrowski has asserted that the symbol of the asphodel evokes death (Piotrowski 14), Maryse Descamps identified the image of the nymph (Descamps 70), Mariangela Mazocchi Doglio pointed out that Maeterlinck's aquatic topics had the features of ancient Hades (Mazocchi Doglio 69). This inventory of mythical figures undertaken by researchers has the merit of demonstrating that mythopoetic intertextuality does indeed seem to generate the deep structures of Maeterlinck's theatre, but a synthetic study seems necessary to us.

Intertextual theory has come a long way in analyzing ancient mythology. While in Gérard Genette's 'Palimpsestes' (1982) myth is still a vague structure that is only realized in later hypertexts, Marc Eigeldinger in his 'Mythology and intertextuality' (1987) already uses the term 'mythological intertext'. For the researcher, this discursive form embodied in mythical themes takes place in a specific socio-cultural context. It is this kind of analysis that we find in most intertextual research (Raymond Trousson, Marie-Catherine Huet-Brichard), as Marcin Klik's meticulous study of francophone mythography attests. However, the inventory of mythical themes cannot reveal the whole of the 'mythical substratum', to use Nathalie Piégay-Gros's more concise term (Piégay-Gros 89), which generates intertextuality in hypertext. We support Jacqueline Bel's view that each mythological tradition should have its own characteristics, its own image of the world, which should be decoded in later literary works. Furthermore, Suzanne

Saïd (Saïd 95) and Claude Calame (Calame 12), following on from the research initiated by Jean-Louis Backès, were right to draw attention to the need for a diachronic mythopoetic analysis to delimit mythical structures on the basis of the semantics of the texts. It is in line with this conception that Dmytro Chystiak (Chystiak 73–80) has reconstructed the Greek mythopoetic world image, taking into account the diachronic principle. This work is based on the integration of the anthropological school, the Cambridge circle, the studies of James George Frazer and Ernst Cassirer, the semantology of Olga Freidenberg and Alexei Losev, Jungian psychoanalysis, the structuralism of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss, thematology, semiology, the myth analysis of Gilbert Durand, the mythocriticism of the school of Pierre Brunel and poststructuralist intertextual research. It should be noted that this integrative approach is based primarily on studies of the classics in order to provide a diachronic overview of the formation of the mythopoetic world image. Before turning to the analysis of Maeterlinck's text, let us summarize the key ideas of this method.

Despite a great deal of research, the mythical stage of Greek civilization is still difficult to pin down. However, researchers such as Ernst Cassirer and Yuri Lotman rightly point to a slow disintegration of the identification between the thing, its image and its qualities, between the united and the individual, nature, and society, the real world and the ideal. The quasi-static space and time favored interaction between language, society, and the world of spirits, notably via magical actions. This mythical syncretism disintegrated very slowly, with the formation of the concept of the afterlife and cosmological beliefs, notably via a proto-conceptualization of Light emerging from Darkness (concept of Life) versus Earth (concept of Death) and the idealization of the Astral Hero who is born in Heaven (myth of Elysium). This polarization is at the root of the mythopoetic binary oppositions studied by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vyacheslav Ivanov, with a positive semantics of the Elder, Straight, Dry, Near, Visible, White, Celestial, Diurnal, High, Young, Clear (Life), and disapproval of the Younger, Left, Aquatic, Far, Invisible, Black, Terrestrial, Lunar, Forest, Nocturnal, Low, Old (Death). The structure of the mythopoetic proto-narrative would be based on the interaction between the oppositions between Life and Death (for example, the myth of the Dying and Reborn God reconstructed by James George Frazer), between the human world and the increasingly distant afterlife (this communication is reserved for the priestly class and man's spiritual double, the Daimon).

The sacralization of primordial unity analyzed by Mircea Eliade was intended to re-establish harmony through a system of rituals, including mythopoetic narration, which mediated between binary oppositions, using a system of signs and rituals. Lyrical, epic and dramatic genres were part of these sacred rituals, which exposed the interaction between humans and the afterlife, with the gradual appearance of metaphorical characters (Death = Darkness = Blind Old Man; Life = Clarity = Youth = Virgin Prophetess), stable metaphors (Life = Flame = Love; Death = Cloud = Anger), mythopoetic topoi (Hades with asphodel flowers and erynias, etc), poetic clichés ('sea of steel'). This diversification is becoming increasingly complex, particularly as a result of contamination with the semantics of earlier periods (for example, Euripides' happy afterlife in Elysium coexists with impenetrable Hades). Intertextual analysis could therefore highlight the different stages of the Greek mythopoetic substratum in order to identify the particularities of its operation in Maeterlinck's text.

In poststructuralist intertextual and semantic research (Julia Kristeva, Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Louis Hébert, and François Rastier) the text appears as a structure that generates the inter semiotic polylogue grafted onto the mythical substratum that could generate the semantic-structural core of Symbolist dramatic narration. The method of mythopoetic analysis developed by Dmytro Chystiak (Chystiak 81–94) consists of several levels, which we will summarize before applying it to the text under analysis. First, we draw up a list of lexemes with possible mythopoetic connotations: for example, the phrase 'dark woods' could actualize the image of Hades linked to the metaphor Forestier = Death. The next stage involves a comparative analysis of the Greek intertexts with Maeterlinck's text, with the possible identification of images and mythopoetic schemes in the hypertext. The third stage could uncover the deep structures that generate intertexts, including stable metaphors, mythopoetic topoi, actants, clichéd formulae, binary oppositions and proto-concepts of the mythopoetic image of the world. Enfin, dans la quatrième étape prévoit la synthèse des analyses précédentes permettant de découvrir les isotopies sémantiques qui constituent le noyau de l'image du monde mythopoétique dans le drame maeterlinckien.

'Princess Maleine' begins in the castle of King Marcellus, Maleine's father, on the night of her wedding to Prince Hjalmar. The topos is characterised by the following images: 'big clouds' (Maeterlinck 15), 'the strangely red moon' (Maeterlinck 18), 'Hjalmar with the horses', 'Marcellus will go on his knees through his marshes', 'Hjalmar with all the crows of Holland' (Maeterlinck 19). The locations cited are linked to the mythological complex of Hades. In 'Odyssey' we find the following characteristic: 'the people and the city always shrouded in mist and clouds' (Homer 160). In Virgil's 'Aeneid', Hades is similarly described: 'In the dark twilight, the night star is seen peeping through the clouds' (Virgil 395). Furthermore, the moon in 'Aeneid' appears as an attribute of the Queen of the Underworld Hecate (Virgil 377), while the Horse in the 'Homeric Hymn to Demeter' is associated with the god of the Underworld Hades (Homer 441). The image of the marsh is linked to the Styx, one of Hades 'topics (Virgil 383), while in Aristophanes' 'The Frogs' crows are one of the attributes of the Underworld (Aristophanes 283). These examples attest to the infernal potential of the kingdom of Marcellus. The rest of the plot further accentuates this semantics. The image of the great war that breaks out after Maleine's failed engagement could be linked to the archaic metaphor of the type of Death = War = Sea (present in the locution 'the waves of foreign men' in Aeschylus' tragedy 'The Seven Against Thebes' (Aeschylus 148) also actualizing the semantics Foreign = Death). This same semantics is revealed in the characteristic 'a foreign queen' (Maeterlinck 21) linked to Anne, Maleine's murderer.

During the war, Maleine is locked up in a black tower, which connotes this topo's both as negative (myth of the Virgin Imprisoned, Antigone and Electra linked to Death in the Darkness) but also as a positive metaphor for the High, particularly in the image 'a ship on the sea, with white sails' (Maeterlinck 33) correlated with Light. After the tower, Maleine passes through 'a black forest' where 'a little moonlight passes through the trees' (Maeterlinck 35), where she meets three beggars. Here again, we find the Hecate myth, while Misery and Hunger are ancient metaphors for Death, notably in Virgil where they become the inhabitants of Hades (Virgil 379).

Infernal semantics are developed in the topics of Ysselmonde, the kingdom of Hjalmar. Here, we find the traditional images of death (cemetery, darkness, autumn), but some have correlates in Greek mythology. In addition to the marshes, there is the 'black pond' linked to the Styx and Cocytus' myths in Hades (Virgil 315), while the image of the 'poisonous castle' (Maeterlinck 46) evokes the 'deadly vapors' (Virgil 375) of the Avernus cave at Virgil's entrance to the Underworld. Death is suggested by the image of the stranger knocking at the door, also found in Euripides' 'Electra' (Euripides 314). The cypress tree that 'makes signs to the king' (Maeterlinck 75) and knocks on the door with the wind (Maeterlinck 78) is also one of the attributes of Hades in Virgil (Virgil 373). King Hjalmar is described as 'poor' (Maeterlinck 57), 'sick' (Maeterlinck 57) and 'old' (Maeterlinck 57), like the inhabitants of the Underworld in 'Aeneid', where 'pale Sickness, and sad Old Age, and Fear, and Hunger, and tattered Indigency' reside (Virgil 379). Other characters with infernal characteristics include Queen Anne, linked to 'the shadow' (Maeterlinck 59), the 'simulacrum of air' that dwells in Euripides' afterlife (Euripides 208), while the comparison of Maleine's murderess with the dog (Maeterlinck 79) evokes the image of Cerberus, guardian of Hades (Sophocles 218) or the totem animals of Queen Hecate (Virgil 377). Another character, the Fool, who 'goes out every night to dig pits in the orchard' (Maeterlinck 67), is also linked to death, updating the archaic metaphor of Death = Madness found in Sophocles' 'Oedipus the King' in the image of the madmen-murderers (Sophocles 77). Note also that the characteristics of 'mad' and 'possessed' (Maeterlinck 101) are also linked to the character of King Hjalmar, Maleine's murderer.

As for Maleine, she is described several times as 'sick' (Maeterlinck 19), which updates the archaic semantics of the Disease = Death type. Moreover, she is described as 'a young girl who chases in the moonlight' (Maeterlinck 62): this would seem to be an update of the ancient myth of Hecate, known for her moonlit hunts with dogs. What's more, one of Maleine's companions is 'a big black dog called Plouton' (Maeterlinck 85) with 'burning eyes' (Maeterlinck 86). This image can be interpreted as a contamination of the myths of Pluto (the Roman equivalent of the King of the Underworld), Cerberus, the huge dog that guards the entrance to Hades, and the old man Charon, the drowning man on the marshes of Acheron, whose 'eyes shine with dark fire' (Virgil 381). The character of Maleine is also linked to the positive semantics described above. To this we can add the following image: 'Maleine's hand hot as a small flame' (Maeterlinck 76), where we find the metaphorization of the type Life = Fire, which has many correlations in the Greek philosophical tradition, notably in the metaphor 'soul = fire' found in Democritus and Heraclitus, as well as in Book VII of Plato's 'Republic' in the image of the Divine Good which 'in the visible world produces light and the star from which it comes directly' (Plato 70).

Prince Hjalmar, Maleine's fiancé, has several characteristics in common with her. He too is considered 'ill' (Maeterlinck 27), updating the archaic metaphor of Illness = Death. It is compared with 'the weeping willow' (Maeterlinck 30) and could be related to the 'barren willows' (Homer 157) that we find at the entrance to hell in The Odyssey. Moreover, a similar characteristic is found in connection with Maleine: 'the weeping willows seem to weep on her face' (Maeterlinck 48), which might suggest the infernal semantics of the character. On the other hand, the epithet 'with a little girl's face' (Maeterlinck 24) would seem to be a reference to the prince's androgynous nature, which transcends infernal semantics and links him to the mythopoetic conceptualization of Light = Love. In Plato's dialogue Phaedrus, we find an

evocation of this myth of the being eager for primordial unity, while in 'The Banquet' we note the lunar nature of the androgyne: his body 'is composed of the la moon, which participates in the earth and the sun' (Plato 273), which could also explain the semantics of Hjalmar and Maleine linked to the star of the night, a mediator between the material world and the afterlife symbolized by the sacralization of the divinity of Love.

Kelmendi's work (i.e., "Love Finds itself Everywhere") studied by Hakak and Wiener; Hakak finds that Life outside of time, as an alien among humans, convinces that he is living in a mythological landscape. Weiner observes that Kelmendi's words are like floating in an unknown sphere of visions, out of space, and time, and his words are in an unconscious myth of cosmic reality (Cited in Morve 2024). It would be logical to assume that the mostly negative semantics of Maleine and Hjalmar would imply an infernal connotation of the intertexts. The images of rain, cold and wind that are the attributes of their first rendezvous (Maeterlinck 49) evoke numerous mythopoetic intertexts relating to Death. In Sophocles's 'Oedipus the King' we find the image of 'a rain of blood' (Sophocles 125), while in Aeschylus's 'Seven Against Thebes' we find 'the wind of lamentations' (Aeschylus 134), updating the archaic metaphors of Death = Cold = Water. Moreover, the symbolism of dead leaves recalls the imagery of shadows in Hades, Virgil's 'leaves torn by the winds' (Virgil 381), while 'the leaves of the weeping willow fall on the hands' of Prince Hjalmar near the fountain (Maeterlinck 51). The infernal semantics suggested by the symbolism of the moon, the weeping willow, the heavy clouds and the fountain would imply the archaic metaphorization Death = Water. This symbolization is actualized by the actions of the characters: Hjalmar throws earth at Maleine, Maleine's nose bleeds, she cries, the fountain also cries, before raining down on the lovers.

It should be noted that Hjalmar's rendezvous with Maleine accentuates the theme of love with a positive connotation. The prince says that his 'eyes have opened in the evening' (Maeterlinck 52), he feels 'in heaven to the core', and he has 'risen from the grave' (Maeterlinck 56). This symbolization of love finds correlates in Platonic aesthetics in the image of fire, which is at the same time an avatar of the human good and the divine good, as Plato explains in Book VII of The Republic (Plato 67): a man in love with someone leaves this 'tomb called the body' (Plato 57) and frees his imprisoned soul (similar considerations can also be found in the dialogues 'Gorgias' and 'Cratylus'). For Plato, love is a means of liberating the human soul through the emanation of Beauty: 'When man beholds beauty on earth, he is reminded of true beauty' (Plato 56), which has celestial roots, and the lover soars to heaven on wings (Plato 48). Clearly, this Platonic intertext in the images of leaving the tomb, aspiring to heaven and clairvoyance updates the archaic semantics of the type of Heaven = Light (also found in the myth of Eros imagined as a bird with golden wings in Aristophanes' comedy 'The Birds'), unlike the metaphorization Earth = Tomb.

In Maleine's murder scene, we discover the contamination of several mythopoetic images. Let us recall the archaic image of 'the wind of lamentations' (Aeschylus 134) in Aeschylus' 'Seven Against Thebes', transcoded in Maeterlinck's work into the following locution: 'we hear the wind moaning' (Maeterlinck 87), once again updating the Neolithic semantics of Cold = Death. We also find 'the shadow of the cypress' (Maeterlinck 87) and 'the wind in the weeping willows' (Maeterlinck 87), these plant attributes of Hades also present in Homer (Homer 157). As the

image of the weeping willow is associated with Maleine and Prince Hjalmar, it would be appropriate to interpret the action 'one of the old weeping willows has fallen into the pond' (Maeterlinck 88) as a foreshadowing of the death of these two characters. This omen is coupled with the image of a lily that has fallen to the ground (Maeterlinck 96) as 'the moon enters the room' (Maeterlinck 87), which updates the myth of Hecate, the Queen of the Underworld whose attribute is the moon (Virgil 377).

Meteorological markers accentuate the morbid semantics of the murder. For example, 'the glow of lightning' (Maeterlinck 87), and 'lightning on the head' (Maeterlinck 98) could suggest the image of the main deity of the Greeks, Zeus, the master of lightning (Sophocles 214), while in Euripides' 'The Suppliants' lightning appears as an attribute of the god of the Underworld, Hades (Euripides 438). Another attribute of Zeus, hail (found in Sophocles' tragedy 'Oedipus at Colonus'), also comes into play during Maleine's murder: 'hail suddenly crackles' (Maeterlinck 95), 'whole sky bursts with hail' (Maeterlinck 98). Thus, the image of the storm (Maeterlinck 96) with the metonymic attributes of Greek divinities implies the archaic semantics of the Water = Death type: the marine storm is a very widespread topics in ancient tragedy. This symbolization becomes clearer in the image of 'a large black ship in the harbor' (Maeterlinck 110), actualizing the archaic metaphor of Ship = Life, as opposed to Water = Death, which is concretized by another image, 'three ships in the storm' (Maeterlinck 116), the numerical symbolism of which is linked to the number of people killed in the drama (Maleine, Hjalmar, Anne).

Maleine's murder shakes the cosmic order, so many manifestations of natural cataclysms lead to a gradual harmonisation that evokes the rebirth of a regenerated world. This is why biblical apocalyptic symbolism (with the imagery of the Last Judgement and the Flood) goes hand in hand with the very pronounced markers of the Hades mythical complex. For example, the image of 'sheep lying on graves' (Maeterlinck 116) suggests the ritual of sacrifice to subterranean divinities, which is found in both Aeschylus' 'Agamemnon' (Aeschylus 206) and Euripides' 'Andromache' (Euripides 421), actualizing solar rebirth after death in the night. Maeterlinck's image of the 'river of lightning' (Maeterlinck 114) refers to the Phlegethon intertext described by Virgil, the river of the Underworld that 'runs like a torrent of flames' (Virgil 403). On the other hand, Maeterlinck's images of 'the clouds that make the castle tremble' and 'the dreadful eclipse' (Maeterlinck 114) are linked to the archaic semantics Night = Death.

However, we would also like to note the transcendent semantics of death, which could actualize the metaphorical links Heaven = Light found in the image of 'a dead swan' (Maeterlinck 112) associated with Maleine's death. Moreover, his relationship with the swan is suggested by the rather special images of her 'white eyelashes' (Maeterlinck 19) and her 'gaze like a great canal of fresh water' (Maeterlinck 26). In the Platonic dialogue 'Phaedo', we find the image of the swan song 'foreseeing the happiness enjoyed at the end of life' (Plato 249): life in the afterlife, freed from the material tomb, is presented as happiness in which the soul rediscovers its essence. If we consider this interpretation and the Platonic conception of love outlined above, we will see that a positive semantics of death is also accentuated in 'Princess Maleine'. The image of the soul symbolized by the swan actualizes the animist metaphorization of Heaven = Light. The regeneration of the cosmos after the murders of Maleine, Anne and Prince Hjalmar are symbolized by images with a positive connotation: 'the sun enters' (Maeterlinck 139), 'a cock

crows at the window' (Maeterlinck 141) suggesting the start of a new day and the inauguration of a new life cycle.

The analysis we have just carried out shows that Maeterlinck's drama 'Princess Maleine' updates multiple mythopoetic structures. The Hades mythological complex is the most accentuated in the text: it is found in the topics Ysselmonde, the kingdom of Marcellus, and in most of the scenes describing the story of Maleine and Prince Hjalmar. This semantics is linked to the images of the big clouds, the ravens, the black tower, the black forest, the cypress, the marshes, the sea, the black pond, the river of flames (myths: Cimmerians, Hades, Persephone, Hecate, Cocytus, Ocean, Avernus, Phlegethon). The narration takes place in a setting connoted as Life in Death (concepts of Water and Darkness), where the correlates of the mythopoetic concept of Misfortune are at work: the shadows (actant Anne, Hades mythos), the possessed and the old (actants the Fool and King Hjalmar), the madmen (actants King Marcellus, Prince Hjalmar), the sick (actants Maleine, King Hjalmar, Prince Hjalmar), the wretched (actants Maleine, the Beggars, King Hjalmar), the hungry (Maleine and the Nourrice), the rebels (Maleine, myth of Antigone), the sacrifices (the sheep, myth of Hades), the black dog Plouton (myths: Cerberus, Hades, Charon), the foreigner (actants Anne and Maleine) updating archaic metaphors of Death. In Maeterlinck's text, the mythopoetic concept of Misfortune generates the war between King Marcellus and the Kingdom of Ysselmonde and the conceptualization of Love as Expiatory Death represented by the actants Maleine and Prince Hjalmar, as well as the myths of Hecate (images of the Moon and the Black Dog) and Persephone (images of the cypress and the weeping willow associated with the actants Maleine and Prince Hjalmar).

The positive semantics in the mythopoetic topos Hades is represented by the image of the tower (correlated with the Axis of the World) where Maleine recovers her sight. This act is coupled with the Princess's identification with the image of the ship, an archaic metaphor for 'Life linked to the semantics of Divine Light. The initiation in the tower is extended in the image of the fountain, near which the meeting with Prince Hjalmar takes place and love is discovered. This meeting suggests the transcendent symbolism linked to the Platonic images of Love-Bird and Soul-Bird, the myth of the Androgyne, and the symbols of the Swan and the Lily correlated with the god Apollo. In this way, the characters Maleine and Hjalmar actualize the infernal but also transcendental semantics, linked to the archaic conceptualization of Heaven = Life = Light. Maleine's murder and Prince Hjalmar's suicide, which seem to be linked to divine forces (images of storms, myths of Zeus and Apollo), provoke a pre-apocalyptic cataclysm evoking the wrath of the forces of nature. It is only after the assassination of Queen Anne that harmony is restored, ushering in a new cycle.

We would like to emphasize that the mythopoetic level of the drama 'Princess Maleine' connotes the following image of the world: the topics of the play are marked as infernal, with a strong presence of the mythological complex Hades, while its inhabitants are affected by the mythopoetic concept Bad Luck. An exception is made for the characters Maleine and Prince Hjalmar, who generate infernal semantics while actualizing transcendent astral symbolism. Their death results in the neutralization of the infernal semantics of Hades-Ysselmonde: after a quasi-eschatological catastrophe and the punishment of the criminals, the negative semantics of the topics are canceled, while the harmonization of the cosmos implies the regeneration of life. This

consideration leads us to interpret the Maleine and Hjalmar actants at the mythopoetic level as purifying expiatory sacrifices (the pharmakos) to deconstruct the concept of Bad Luck and replace it with Good Luck. The mythopoetic imagery in 'Princess Maleine' accentuates the following isotopies: that of the concept Life with a negative connotation (the topics of Ysselmonde), that of the concept of Infernal Life with a positive connotation (the topics of the Ideal Love of Maleine and Prince Hjalmar), that of the concept Death with a positive connotation (Platonic imagery of the Liberated Soul). In this way, the main characters follow the transcendent pattern, moving from Infernal Life via Ideal Love to Death-Liberation.

The intertextual mythopoetic analysis of the drama 'Princess Maleine' opens up prospects for an in-depth study of the mythical substratum that generates the semantic-structural core of Maeterlinck's world image. Although in his handwritten notes for the 'Cahier bleu' (1889) and the 'Carnets de travail' (1881–1890) the future Nobel Prize winner set out the premises of what would become his conception of tragic optimism, it is in his first play that we find its most striking expression. Françoise Grauby rightly pointed out that Symbolist mythology owed a great deal to Arthur Schopenhauer, in particular his idea of the liberation of the soul in death (Grauby 27), but it is precisely through the transcendence of human vanity in 'Princess Maleine', through its mythopoetic ethic of harmonisation, that it attracts our attention. Indeed, in this first drama, which Octave Mirbeau described as 'a masterpiece that is enough to immortalize a name for all those who hunger for the beautiful and the great' (Gorceix 4), we find the source of Maeterlinck's imagination, which would continue to gush forth for almost six decades before passing to posterity, which is still discovering the genius of the Belgian Shakespeare.

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