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Maurice Maeterlinck

Collected Works



Series Fifteen

The Collected Works of
MAURICE MAETERLINCK

(1862-1949)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Maeterlinck". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "M".

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Version 1

The Collected Works of
MAURICE MAETERLINCK



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Collected Works of Maurice Maeterlinck



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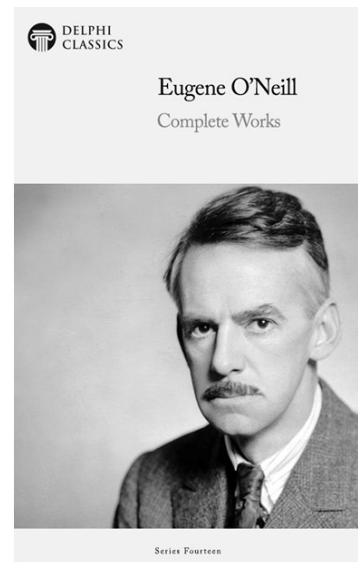
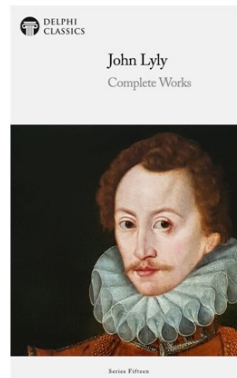
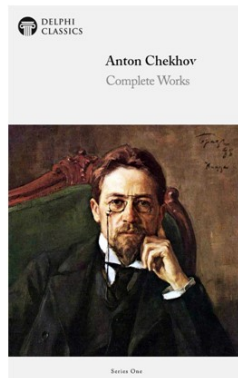
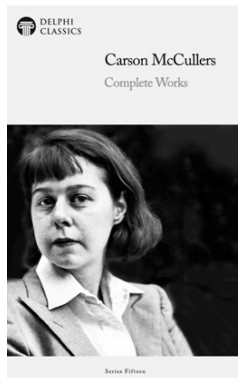
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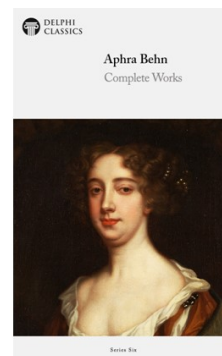
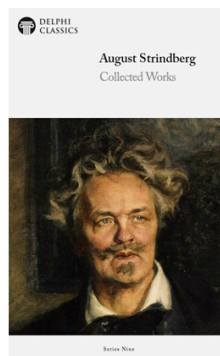
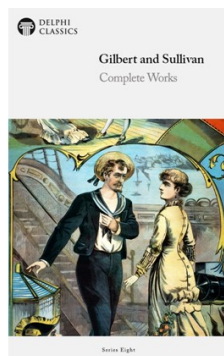
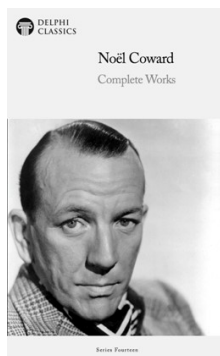
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Classic Drama



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The Plays



Ghent, a city in the Flemish Region of Belgium, in the early nineteenth century — Maurice Maeterlinck's birthplace



Ghent, today

Princess Maleine (1889)



Original French Title: 'La Princesse Maleine'

Translated by Richard Hovey, 1906

Maurice Maeterlinck was born in Ghent, Belgium, to a well-to-do, French-speaking family. His mother, Mathilde Colette Françoise (née Van den Bossche), came from a wealthy family, while his father, Polydore, was a notary that enjoyed tending the greenhouses on their property. For his initial education, young Maurice was sent to the Jesuit College of Sainte-Barbe, where works of the French Romantics were scorned and only plays on religious subjects were permitted. His experiences at this school influenced his distaste for the Catholic Church and organised religion. One of his companions at that time was the writer Charles van Lerberghe, who was a source of influence at the start of his Symbolist period.

Maeterlinck had written poems and short novels while still studying, but his father was keen for him to go into law. After gaining a law degree at the University of Ghent in 1885, he spent a few months in Paris, where he met key members of the new Symbolist movement; Villiers de l'Isle Adam in particular, who would exact a great influence on Maeterlinck's future work. With the release of his first drama, *Princess Maleine*, Maeterlinck instantly became a public figure. It was first published in serial form in *La Société Nouvelle*, a Brussels periodical. Since Maeterlinck wanted the play to be published in book form, his mother tightened her budget and gave him 250 francs. It was printed in December 1889. Maeterlinck mailed a copy of the play to Stéphane Mallarmé, from whom it was eventually passed to the leading art critic Octave Mirbeau, who wrote a warm review in August 1890 for *Le Figaro*. In the review, Mirbeau states the play was "superior in beauty to what is most beautiful in Shakespeare."

After this rapturous reception, two invitations were offered to produce the play in France in October 1890: first from Paul Fort, director of the experimental Symbolist 'Théâtre Mixte' – soon to become the 'Théâtre d'Art' – and second from André Antoine, director of the 'Théâtre Libre', associated with Naturalism on the Parisian stage. Maeterlinck gave permission, somewhat surprisingly, to Antoine rather than Fort, writing to him that 'Princess Maleine is yours, and, to my mind, always has been. You will put on the play this year or in ten years or never, as you wish. It will wait, and will belong only to you.'

Shortly afterward, Maeterlinck withdrew the offer, preventing any live stage production of his first play until well after his death. Paul Fort and his associate Lugné-Poë quickly penned a public letter insisting that Antoine or no-one would be the first director of *Princess Maleine*. As a result, Maeterlinck's first play wasn't performed by professional actors in France until 1962, although there were several puppet productions shortly after publication.

Princess Maleine is set in a vague time and place, giving the drama a fairy tale impression. The Princess Maleine is expected to marry Prince Hjalmar, whose father is old and senile. Her father King Marcellus and King Hjalmar have a misunderstanding. She refuses to abandon her love for Hjalmar and is locked in a tower while war erupts and her entire family is killed. She escapes with her nurse and, concealing her identity, she becomes a servant in the house of Hjalmar...

A salient theme of the drama is decline. Maeterlinck believed that man was completely powerless against a higher force, which exercised its will upon the world. Therefore, the characters are submitted to the will of their natural surroundings and seem unable to control the events in their own lives. Princess Uglyane is completely dominated by her mother, the Queen of Jutland, and barely has a voice in the play. Prince Hjalmer is a coward. King Hjalmer is an old, sickly, senile figure. He resembles other kings in literature that are feeble, like Shakespeare's King Lear. Of course, he personifies decline and the waning years of a weak authority. Chaos is also a recurring theme of the drama. As Maleine wanders through the woods, the forest symbolises chaos as it is dark and full of unseen predators. Whenever there is a juxtaposition of dark and light in the story, chaos ensues. The play even ends in chaos, for there is no moral or championing of social values.



Maeterlinck as a young man

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An original illustration of "La Princesse Maleine" by Léon Spilliaert, 1917

PERSONS.



HJALMAR, *King of one part of Holland.*
MARCELLUS, *King of another part of Holland.*
PRINCE HJALMAR, *son of KING HJALMAR.*
LITTLE ALLAN, *son of QUEEN ANNE.*
ANGUS, *friend of PRINCE HJALMAR.*
STEPHANO; *officer of MARCELLUS.*
VANOX; *officer of MARCELLUS.*
A CHAMBERLAIN.
A PHYSICIAN.
A MADMAN.
THREE POOR MEN.
TWO OLD PEASANTS, A COWHERD.
LORDS, OFFICERS, A COOK, A CRIPPLE, PILGRIMS, PEASANTS,
SERVANTS, BEGGARS, VAGABONDS, CHILDREN, ETC.
ANNE, *Queen of Jutland.*
GODELIVA, *wife of KING MARCELLUS.*
PRINCESS MALEINE, *daughter of MARCELLUS and GODELIVA.*
PRINCESS UGLYANE, *daughter of QUEEN ANNE.* MALEINE'S NURSE.
SEVEN NUNS.
AN OLD WOMAN.
MAIDS OF HONOR, SERVANTS, PEASANT-WOMEN, ETC. *A big black dog called PLUTO.*

The first Act is at Harlingen; the others at the castle of Ysselmonde and its neighborhood.

ACT FIRST.

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End of Sample