

## Pelléas et Mélisande.

(1) Opera (*drame lyrique*) in 5 acts, 12 *tableaux*, by Debussy, comp. 1893 – 5 and 1901 – 2 , being a nearly complete setting of the text of Maeterlinck's play of this name ( 1892 ). Prod. Paris 1902 , NY 1908 , London 1909 .

(2) Sym.- poem after Maeterlinck, Op.5, by Schoenberg, comp. 1902 – 3 and f.p. 1905 (Vienna). F.p. in England 1930 .

(3) Incidental mus. to Maeterlinck's play by Sibelius, Op.46, comp. 1905 for prod. in Helsinki. Suite of 9 items for small orch. pubd. 1905 .

(4) Incidental mus. to Maeterlinck's play by Fauré, Op.80, comp. 1898 for London prod. (cond. Fauré). Suite of 4 items for orch. pubd. 1900 and f.p. 1901 (also arr. for pf. solo, and pf., 4 hands).

## Pelléas et Mélisande

### (‘Pelléas and Mélisande’).

Opera in five acts by [Claude Debussy](#) after [Maurice Maeterlinck](#)'s play; Paris, Opéra-Comique (Salle Favart), 30 April 1902.

Arkel <i>King of Allemonde</i>	bass
Geneviève <i>mother of Pelléas and Golaud</i>	contralto
Pelléas <i>grandsons of Arkel</i>	baritone (‘Martin’)
Golaud <i>grandsons of Arkel</i>	baritone
Mélisande	soprano
Yniold <i>Golaud’s son from a former liaison</i>	boy treble or soprano
The Doctor	baritone
The Shepherd	baritone

Unseen chorus of sailors (male voices); serving-women, paupers (silent)

*Setting* The kingdom of Allemonde and its surroundings; the time unspecified but presumably medieval.

Maeterlinck established his reputation as a leading exponent of symbolist theatre in the early 1890s; his launch on to the Paris literary scene came with his play *La princesse Maleine* (1890). Debussy had considered setting this play, the first in a series of symbolist works set loosely in medieval times and praised by *Le Figaro* as ‘superior in beauty to what is most beautiful in Shakespeare’.

Published in May 1892, Maeterlinck's *Pelléas* was first performed at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens on 17 May 1893. Debussy attended the single matinée but had already read the work, as he recounted in a short article, ‘Pourquoi j’ai écrit *Pelléas*’, in 1902. In this article he

also explained his attraction to the play, revealing his confirmed allegiance to the tenets of symbolism: The drama of *Pelléas* which, despite its dream-like atmosphere, contains far more humanity than those so-called 'real-life documents', seemed to suit my intentions admirably. In it there is an evocative language whose sensitivity could be extended into music and into the orchestral backcloth ['*décor orchestral*']. Debussy had obtained Maeterlinck's permission to use the play in August 1893, and the following month he began work on the opera, starting, curiously, with the climactic love scene between Pelléas and Mélisande in Act 4 scene iv. The initial process of composition, when he worked mainly on one act at a time, lasted until August 1895.

It was probably relatively early on that Debussy decided to cut four scenes from the play, a procedure endorsed by Maeterlinck. The opening, with its perhaps over-obvious symbolism of the serving-women trying to open the door of the castle and wash an indelible stain from the entrance, is difficult to imagine as the opening of an opera. The other cut scenes cause some detail to be lost but do not affect the essence of the drama. Perhaps the most notable effect of the transition from play to opera is the reduction of the serving-women to one silent appearance in the last act.

In addition to the excised scenes, Debussy made many cuts in Maeterlinck's text, several times eliminating repeated phrases, and also reducing the descriptive details that Maeterlinck intentionally incorporated into the dialogue rather than into the almost non-existent stage directions; in Act 1 scene ii of the opera, for example, Geneviève's description of Mélisande as 'always dressed like a princess, even though her clothes were torn by brambles' is removed, although it is clearly the sort of detail that stage designers can incorporate into the visual aspect of a production.

Throughout the early period of intense composition Debussy revealed to several correspondents the difficulties he found in portraying the mysterious and elusive nature of Maeterlinck's characters. To Ernest Chausson, he wrote of the difficulty of capturing the 'nothingness' ('de ce "rien"') he found in Mélisande's character, and the 'beyond-the-grave' ('*outré-tombe*') impression made by Arkel (originally spelt Arkël), as well as his 'gentleness', which is 'of those who are going to die'. Such ideas clearly reveal Debussy's deep response to the text; they also reflect Maeterlinck's ideas as expressed in his essays, which first appeared while Debussy was working on the opera and were later published in the collection *Le trésor des humbles*. Other letters from the period of composition reflect Debussy's personal identification with the characters. He saved Act 2 until last. Here he found new challenges, more to do with communicating the impending sense of mystery and catastrophe than with characterization. On 17 August 1895 he could claim to have finished the opera.

In accordance with his normal method of working, he had written the initial text in short score with ideas for orchestration indicated, often in coloured inks. It was not until its acceptance at the Opéra-Comique in 1898 that Debussy was spurred on to produce the vocal score necessary for rehearsal purposes and the full score. In these he continued to make revisions, on occasion adding and subtracting the appearances of principal motifs.

More radical revisions became necessary when the work went into rehearsal. It emerged that several of Debussy's original interludes were too short for the stage to be reorganized between scenes. Under pressure, and with some reluctance, Debussy hastily extended several of them. The original interludes are preserved in the first vocal score, in French only, published by Fromont in 1902, while the full score and the French-English vocal score give

the newer, longer interludes. Also from the rehearsal period date several cuts, notably an exchange in Act 3 scene iv where Golaud asks Yniold, who is spying on Pelléas and Mélisande, if the couple are near the bed. Despite the publication in 1905–6 of a full score, Debussy continued to refine the orchestration. Some alterations were incorporated into a second published edition (the study score in 1950 and the full score in 1966), but further alterations are preserved only in Debussy's personal copy.

At the première, Mary Garden sang the role of Mélisande and Jean Périer that of Pelléas (originally a baritone role but later adapted for tenor). André Messager conducted and Albert Carré was the producer. The realistic, detailed sets were by Lucien Jusseaume and Eugène Ronsin. At the dress rehearsal a brochure satirizing the plot was distributed and this caused much levity during the performance. Mary Garden claimed that Maeterlinck himself, angered by Debussy's refusal to allow his mistress Georgette Leblanc to sing the role of Mélisande, was responsible.

Critical reaction to the première was divided. One critic found the music 'sickly' and 'lifeless'. Others criticized the 'impressionism' of the work. Among the most perceptive reactions were those of Dukas and d'Indy. Dukas found that 'each bar exactly corresponded to the scene it portrayed ... and to the feelings it expressed'; while d'Indy elaborated on Debussy's own comments on his work, finding in it 'simply felt and expressed *human* feelings and *human* suffering in *human* terms, despite the outward appearance the characters give of living in a mysterious dream'.

Until 1914, *Pelléas* was revived almost every year at the Opéra-Comique. The casts included, from 1908, Maggie Teyte as Mélisande. Owing to the difficulty of finding a boy treble for Yniold, a precedent was soon established (contrary to Debussy's wishes) of giving the part to a woman. The first performances outside France took place in Brussels and Frankfurt in 1907. The following year the work was given in New York (with the Paris cast), at La Scala under Toscanini, in Prague, Munich and Berlin, and at Covent Garden. After 1918 the work was many times revived, but it hardly accorded with the anti-symbolist Cocteau-esque aesthetics of the interwar era. In the 1930s Valdo-Barbey produced a new, less realistic set, merely suggesting where Jusseaume had defined. Possibly drawing his inspiration from Maeterlinck himself, his décors paved the way for many future productions in laying stress on the symbolic significance of everyday or natural objects: windows, doors and trees.

A significant event in the opera's history was the 1942 performance under Roger Désormière, captured in the classic recording that many consider unsurpassed. Irène Joachim sang the part of Mélisande and Jacques Jansen Pelléas. Postwar productions have often treated Maeterlinck's setting with considerable freedom, transferring the setting to the present day or, as in the 1985 Lyons Opéra production, to the Edwardian era (with a short-haired Mélisande).

The performances and recording under Pierre Boulez were the first consciously to break with the accepted, somewhat muted approach to the score. Rhythms were tightened up, contrasts enhanced. Since the 1960s, several conductors – for better or worse – have revived the original shorter interludes, among them two ENO productions conducted by Mark Elder. In 1985 John Eliot Gardiner incorporated some of the changes in Debussy's manuscript full score into the Lyons Opéra performances.

Act 1. *A forest* The orchestral prelude outlines three principal themes: the first – modal and ecclesiastical with its bare 5ths and plainsong-like outline – is allied not to a character but

rather to the sense of timelessness, or perhaps the forest itself (for illustration see [Debussy, Claude](#)). Mainly confined to the first act, it contrasts with the following two, which are clear character motifs pervading the whole opera: that of Golaud, with its distinctive dotted rhythm, and that of Mélisande, a pentatonically curved phrase. Rhythmic and harmonic transformations mirror the actions and symbolic development of the play.

Golaud has been out hunting but has lost his hounds and the boar he was pursuing. He lights upon a maiden weeping by a well. She is nervous and rebuffs Golaud's approaches ('Ne me touchez pas! Ne me touchez pas!'). Debussy captures the scene with the three motifs of the prelude, submitting them to harmonic and rhythmic variants appropriate to the detailed emotions and symbols of the text. Golaud's energy for hunting is captured in the dotted rhythm which marks his motif, while the loss of his quarry is reflected in the motif's loss of its dotted-rhythm element ([ex.1](#)). The sadness and fragility of Mélisande are suggested by the harmonizing of her essentially pentatonic motif with half-diminished ('Tristan') chords ([ex.2](#)). The awakening of Golaud's desire is represented by more conventional added-note harmony ([ex.3](#)). It is more through the questions that are posed than by the answers given that Mélisande's character is developed: we learn that someone has done her wrong ('Tous! Tous!') but we never learn who it was, nor from where Mélisande has come ('Je me suis enfuie! enfuie! enfuie!'). Here Debussy's attention to pacing becomes evident. To underline important dialogue, he could stretch the declamation towards *arioso*, while leaving more mundane remarks to be quickly declaimed. He uses whole-tone chords in predominantly tonal surroundings to convey her sense of being lost or confused.

### Ex.3

Maeterlinck stresses the contrast between Mélisande's youth and Golaud's age: Golaud is taken with Mélisande's eyes, which never close, while she is repelled by his grey hair and giant-like quality. Her oblique answers to his questions increase her air of mystery: 'Quel âge avez-vous?', ('How old are you?') he asks. 'Je commence à avoir froid' ('I'm beginning to feel cold'). The orchestra, too, contributes to the feeling of mystery, with an inverted pedal note high in the strings. Golaud bids Mélisande accompany him; she agrees only reluctantly, after a comment whose significance – like many such remarks about the weather – clearly goes deeper than its literal meaning: 'La nuit sera très noire et très froide' ('The night will be very dark and very cold'). Debussy throws this into relief with a *ritardando* and *tenuto* singing. The scene ends with Golaud's admission that he too is lost, and his motif is for the first time imbued with the white-note modality of the opening one: the strongest forces are not those of the characters but in some power above and beyond, contained perhaps within the dark forest itself.

In the first interlude, highlighted on a trumpet, comes a motif hinted at only once before, when Golaud announced that he was Arkel's grandson. Its importance is evident, but it extends beyond the idea of a mere character-motif, demonstrating how Debussy could extend Maeterlinck's theatre of implication rather than direct expression by adding recurrent motifs intentionally unspecific in their frame of reference ([ex.4](#)).

1.ii *A room in the castle* Geneviève reads Arkel a letter from Golaud to Pelléas, telling him that he has married Mélisande. In depicting her character he adds to her mystery: 'some great terror has evidently befallen her', he writes, going on to recount how she will 'suddenly

burst into tears like a child'. Debussy sets the scene with utter simplicity, using Locrian and Phrygian modes on E. Arkel, the silent sage, listens without interrupting. At the end of the letter, as Mélisande's motif is heard, Golaud expresses his anxiety about Arkel's acceptance of her. If Arkel accepts, a lamp must be lit.

Emphasizing the character's inner strength, Debussy prepares for Arkel's first statement with the trumpet motif of the interlude, now played in the cellos 'avec une grande expression' and harmonized with a half-diminished chord at once linking Arkel's musical language with Mélisande's ([ex.5](#)). His response to Geneviève's question 'Qu'en dites-vous?' ('What do you say about this?') at the end of the letter clearly marks him as a man who is passive when faced with the force of destiny. The E modes have now opened out to a clear E major and Debussy literally underscores the import of Arkel's utterances with held pedal notes: 'Je n'en dis rien' ('I have nothing to say') is his response, and he goes on to point out that human beings can only ever see 'the underside of fate'.

Pelléas enters and Arkel, emphasizing his paradoxical blindness (since metaphorically he sees more than most), asks who has come in. Geneviève explains that it is Pelléas, remarking that 'he too has been in tears', linking him in our minds with Mélisande. Initiating a symbolic framework that will become increasingly important, Arkel asks Pelléas to 'move into the light'. The final phrase of the scene forms a link between the external events of the play and a more symbolic level: 'Aie soin d'allumer la lampe dès ce soir' ('Take care to light the lamp before this evening'), Geneviève reminds Pelléas, alluding to the prearranged signal to indicate Arkel's acceptance of Golaud's new wife. But we surmise from Debussy's setting that the remark has a deeper significance.

1.iii*Outside the castle* Prefaced in the interlude by appearances of Mélisande's motif, a different level of response is required. Almost nothing happens. Instead there is a dialogue about darkness and light, seeing and half-seeing, with objects appearing as mists clear or disappearing as night falls. The gardens and forests are dark, and are portrayed with the key of C major, while the coast where Geneviève and Mélisande have been seeking more light is portrayed with its diametrical opposite, F# major. A ship passes, with a chorus of sailors, but cannot be seen clearly in the mist. Mélisande sees a guiding beacon out to sea. It grows dark, and she fears a shipwreck. Geneviève leaves Pelléas and Mélisande alone for the first time: they see more guiding beacons, but the wind rises and they have to leave. As we learn that they have a steep path to descend, and that Pelléas must support Mélisande by the arm, we may again suspect a symbolic significance. The act cadences, as yet tentatively in F# major, as Mélisande perhaps flirtatiously expresses her hopes that Pelléas will not go away. The key is significant. It has formed a link between the 'light' and the growing bond between Pelléas and Mélisande.

Act 2.i*By a well in the park* The well's magic powers are remarked upon by Pelléas: 'it used to cure the blind', he observes, extending the symbolism of 'seeing' initiated in the first act. Mélisande leans over from the cold marble beside the well, and her hair, longer than herself, dangles into the water. Pelléas notices, and it seems to awaken a desire in him to know about Golaud's first meeting with her. Did Golaud try to kiss her, he asks, and did she want him to? She answers with a simple 'Non'. Suddenly distracted, she plays with her wedding ring above the water. As inevitably it falls in, a harp arpeggio is heard, outlining a half-diminished chord on A#. It is the chord that had introduced the weeping Mélisande in Act 1. By using it here, Debussy subtly indicates that a chapter in her life has been closed. 'The ring is lost', she remarks, 'nought but a circle of water remains'. Pelléas innocently remarks

that if it cannot be recovered they can get another one. Mélisande persuades herself that she lost it 'in spite of herself', 'throwing it up too high into the sunlight'. Pelléas remarks that it was striking noon as it fell; to Mélisande's question as to what they should tell Golaud he replies 'the truth'. In an interlude, Golaud's motif interrupts the flowing semiquavers which have permeated the scene.

2.ii*A room in the castle* Golaud is wounded (as the dislocation of his dotted rhythm portrays: as noon struck, his horse inexplicably bolted, ending up on top of him. He felt his 'heart had been torn in two'). Debussy introduces chiming discords perfectly capturing both the bells and Golaud's stifling pain (ex.6). Mélisande is tender to Golaud, offering him water and a change of pillow. Suddenly, as the music continues with the plaintive oboe phrases and half-diminished harmonies of her first-act weeping, Mélisande dissolves into tears. By no means the cardboard villain, Golaud is sensitive and compassionate, understanding Mélisande's complaint about the darkness and antiquity of the castle. But suddenly the mood is broken as he notices that her ring is missing. He erupts, demanding that she go and find it at once. He adds that she should take someone – Pelléas – with her. She leaves, weeping.

2.iii*Outside a grotto* Pelléas and Mélisande enter the grotto, and the music, in contrast to the scene by the well, moves to the 'dark' areas of C and F, with minor-key A $\flat$ s. The triplets that oscillated diatonically in the outdoors in Act 2 scene i are now filled with an eerie tension: chords of C major are uneasily juxtaposed with chords of D $\sharp$  minor. But as the moonlight floods into the cavern, a luxuriously orchestrated burst of the 'light' key of F $\sharp$  is heard (notated as G $\flat$ ). Its beauty is, however, short-lived, giving way to stark 5ths reminiscent of *Nuages* from the *Nocturnes*. Three paupers can be discerned in the moonlight, and this time, as they leave, Mélisande rejects Pelléas's offer of a helping hand.

Act 3.i*One of the towers of the castle* After a grooming-song reminiscent of a *trouvère* chanson, Mélisande lets her hair down from the tower. She has opened the window to let in the warm night air. Pelléas has never seen so many stars. Noticing her hair, he tells her that he finds her beautiful, for the first time addressing her with the familiar 'tu'. He wants to kiss her hand, since he has to leave the next day. A fleeting symbol appears, a rose: Mélisande sees it, but Pelléas cannot. As her hair cascades over him, Debussy gives us the nearest we have had to an aria, but the melody is in the orchestra. The vocal lines curve more lyrically than before, more like an expressive *mélodie* than a real aria. At the end of the scene Mélisande notices that her doves have flown away. Pelléas must leave her, she remarks, 'or else they will never come back'. A long pedal note C (the tonic of the 'dark' key) heralds their disturbance by Golaud. It is nearly midnight, he points out, underlining the contrast with their previous midday meeting. Angrily he warns them to stop behaving like children.

3.ii–iii*The castle vaults* The key of C forewarns of the symbolic darkness of the scene (which Debussy considered particularly original). Golaud leads Pelléas down to the stagnant water where he may 'smell the stench of death'. Encapsulating, for the second time, the 'dark-light' contrast in immediate juxtaposition, the interlude directly portrays his escape into the sea air: 'Je respire enfin'. As he remarks that the gardens have been watered, the music moves into F $\sharp$  major. But Golaud now warns Pelléas that he suspects there may be something between him and Mélisande and tells him to avoid her.

3.iv*Outside the castle* Yniold is introduced for the first time. Considerable dramatic tension is built up as Golaud gradually increases his physical and emotional pressure on the

child to tell him what he knows of Pelléas and Mélisande's activities together. As he becomes increasingly frustrated by Yniold's innocently uninformative answers, the music rises to a feverish pitch, mirroring the dramatic irony of the situation. At its climax, Golaud remarks that 'he is like a blind man searching for treasure on the ocean bed'. He recovers, and begins to interrogate Yniold afresh. He asks him whether he has seen Pelléas and Mélisande kissing. Yniold replies that he has, and shows Golaud how with a peck on the mouth, but recoiling at the prickliness of his beard as Mélisande had done when she first met Golaud. Finally, employing a sinister ruse, 'Veux-tu voir petite mère?', he gets Yniold to spy into the room where Pelléas and Mélisande are gazing silently at the light.

Act 4.i *A room in the castle* To the sound of the semiquavers that had accompanied the 'hair' scene (3.i), but now with more foreboding harmonies, Pelléas and Mélisande make an assignation to meet again by the well. 'It will be [our] last night', Pelléas remarks ominously.

4.ii *The same* Arkel enters with Mélisande, his music clearly in E major. He foresees the return of joy and light to the kingdom and remarks that Mélisande will be the agency of renewal. However, he has been watching her, and explains that he has pitied her, for she has seemed like 'someone waiting for some dreadful doom in the sunlight of a beautiful garden'. In a scene of great poignancy he explains the need of an old man 'to touch the brow of a maid or the cheeks of a child': 'one has a need for beauty alongside death'. The rich added-note chords, in unusual orchestration, are the closest to conventional cadences of operatic love music thus far in the opera.

Again, Maeterlinck used the poignancy of the scene to contrast with the violence of what happens next. Golaud enters, at once angry with Mélisande, whom he will not have touch him. He takes his sword from the prayer stool, inspecting the blade as the music nervously hints at motifs without any real continuity, jumping from feigned calm to outbursts of violence. He looks into Mélisande's eyes, remarking, with heavy irony, upon their innocence: 'You would think that the angels of heaven were bathing there'. He bursts out that her flesh disgusts him and seizes her by her hair, forcing her to her knees. As he regains his composure, he tells Mélisande that she may do as she pleases: he will not play the spy. Arkel, in a line weightily set by Debussy, remarks 'If I were God, I would have pity on the hearts of men'. His utterance resonates into an interlude of extended power, full of double-accented passing notes and middle-register brass.

4.iii *By a well in the park* Again in direct contrast, this scene is a symbolic one, with Yniold playing. Debussy responds with a lightly scored, playful, off-beat rhythm to unify it. Two symbols are introduced: first, Yniold's golden ball is trapped and he cannot move it – a hopeless struggle against destiny, perhaps; secondly, a flock of sheep passes. The shepherd remarks that they are not on their way to the stable. 'Where will they sleep for the night?', asks Yniold pathetically.

4.iv *The same* In this, the final love scene, Pelléas, suddenly eloquent in his imagery, realizes 'I have been playing and dreaming with the snares of destiny round about me'. As he remarks that he has not yet really looked at Mélisande, her motif is heard for the first time. If he does not look, it will be like 'fetching water in a muslin bag'. Several times, perfectly capturing the nervous intensity of their tryst, Debussy withdraws the orchestra: they meet, as it were, in total silence. Immediately the dialogue returns to questions of light and dark. The couple hesitate, not knowing whether to seek the light and shun the dark or vice versa. It is Pelléas who first declares his love: a moment where again Debussy refrains from any



orchestral accompaniment. 'We have broken the ice with red-hot irons', he exclaims. With a new motif characterized by a quintuplet figure, Debussy again introduces a quasi-aria, clearly in the 'light' key of F# major. But ominous shadows threaten, and the sound of the drawbridge closing is heard. Debussy's portrayal of the contrary emotions experienced by the couple is masterly: 'All is lost! All is won!', says Pelléas, 'How beautiful it is here in the darkness'. The two embrace passionately; but then Golaud falls on Pelléas with his sword and kills him.

Act 5 *A bedroom in the castle* The act begins at once with a new sound. The harmony is bare, using diminished intervals and plangent wind, and hinting at the octatonic scale. Mélisande is dying and the doctor is in attendance. He raises hopes of her recovery but Arkel knows better, sensing that those in the room are quiet in spite of themselves. Golaud is full of remorse, persuading himself that the love between Pelléas and Mélisande was like that 'of little children'. As Mélisande asks for the window to be opened, a triplet motif from the opening of the act is heard, floating in on the curious harmonic basis of an unprepared second-inversion chord. 'Which window?', asks Arkel. Mélisande replies, significantly, that she means 'la grande fenêtre'. The 'light-dark' imagery is now to be resolved, since the sun she and Pelléas sought is now to set. United with Arkel, 'she knows, but she does not know what she knows'. Golaud is again doubting and, soon after she realizes his presence, his desire to interrogate her again overcomes him and he asks Arkel and the doctor to leave. His first intense question – 'do you pity me as I pity you?' – is again highlighted by silence in the orchestra. He asks whether she loved Pelléas. 'Mais oui', she replies, innocently asking whether Pelléas is there. Golaud has learnt nothing, and Arkel and the doctor return. Mélisande is cold and asks if the winter is coming. She has recently given birth to a little girl and Arkel asks her to hold her daughter. Suddenly the serving-women enter in silence, not answering when Golaud demands to know why they have come. Mélisande speaks no more; her eyes, too, are full of tears. Golaud still wants to speak to her, but Arkel, accompanied by the final appearance of his motif ([ex.4](#)) has his last utterance (see [ex.7](#)). The serving-women fall to their knees. 'They are right, they know', says the doctor. Golaud sobs, and Arkel remarks that it is now the turn of the little child. Finally, as the curtain falls, the music moves into the key of C# major – sharper still than the F# major associated with light and love. The slow four-beat rhythm of the opening completes the tragic circle of life, love and destiny as the curtain falls.

#### Ex.7

However it is produced or performed, the external events that form the plot of *Pelléas* are only part of the point of the play. Maeterlinck's symbolism, couched in seemingly insignificant dialogue, demands a response far removed from that required for conventional 19th-century opera. A more central question is the opera's debt to Wagner. Whatever Debussy claimed, there are strongly Wagnerian elements in *Pelléas*, notably in the harmony, which reflects procedures found in *Tristan* and *Parsifal*, and in the system of leitmotifs portraying characters, themes and symbols. In an article in *Le théâtre* in 1902, Debussy himself wrote out motifs, identifying one of them as the 'thème initiale de Mélisande', and in a rare technical comment about his opera, he interestingly referred to his conscious treatment of Mélisande's motif to emphasize the view he held of her character: Notice that the motif which accompanies Mélisande is never altered. It comes back in the fifth act unchanged in every respect because in fact Mélisande always remains the same and dies without anyone – only old Arkel, perhaps – ever having understood her.



# Richard Langham Smith

Ex.1

GOLAUD

et mes chiens ne me re - trou-vent plus —

Golaud's motif with dotted rhythm

hns *pp* en s'éloignant

je vais re - ve - nir sur mes pas.

without dotted rhythm and curtailed dotted rhythm but curtailed (as in bar 3)

str *p* vc *più pp* va

['and my dogs can no longer find me ... I'll retrace my steps']

Ex.2

en animant

str *sf*

Ex.3

MÉLISANDE

Ne me tou-chez pas!

GOLAUD

Oh\_ vous é - tes bel - le

str *mf*

[Golaud: 'Oh how beautiful you are' Mélisande: 'Don't touch me!']

Ex.4

grave et expressif

tpt *p* *cresc.* *f*

Ex.5

Lent  
avec une grande expression

*p* *très expressif*

Ex.6

GOLAUD

je croy-ais a-voir tou-te la fo-rêt sur la poi-tri-ne.

*mf*

vc db

Je croy-ais que mon cœur é-tait dé-chi-ré.

*f*

[I thought the whole forest had fallen on my chest. I thought my heart had been torn in two.]

Ex.7 Lent et grave

ARKEL

Vous ne sa-vez pas... ce que c'est que l'â-me...

*p* *dim.* *pp*

[You do not know what the soul is ...]