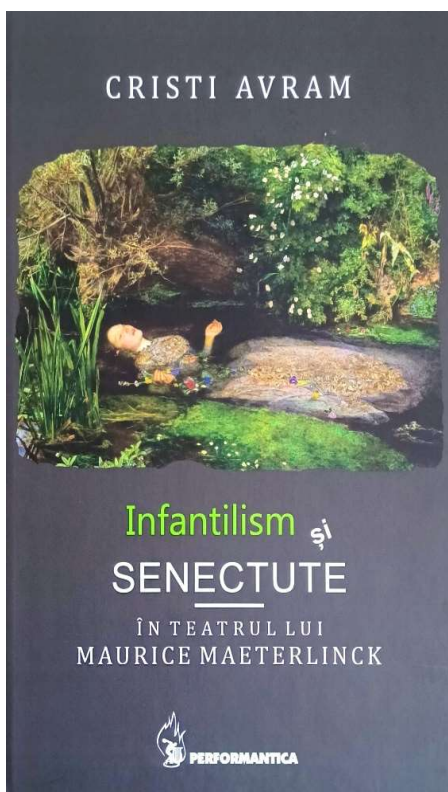


Researches in Maurice Maeterlinck's Theater Works

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Abstract: In 2023, Performantica Publishing House issued the study dedicated to the dramaturgy of Maurice Maeterlinck, a book signed by Cristi Avram. More than 450 pages constitute, in fact, a detailed, thorough analysis, approached from multiple perspectives, of the theater texts, but also of the Belgian writer's prose or poetry. At the same time, the author's constant preoccupation with searching among the performances, not so many and not too easy to access, for Maeterlinck's plays is a direction that completes the integrative discourse. Moreover, the encounter between literary critical commentary and their stage readings makes *Infantilism and Elderliness in Maurice Maeterlinck's Theater* an important and necessary reference book for the landscape of studies under Thalia's dome.

Keywords: Maurice Maeterlinck, Belgian dramaturgy, mise en scène explorations, infantilism, elderliness

In his book, *Infantilism and Elderliness in Maurice Maeterlinck's Theater*, Cristi Avram once again carries out an analysis focused on detail, a cellular level search in the sign of the text, a deepening in the word and in the

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(seductive) non-word. Even more pleasant is the fact that the speech is integrative, that the detail is rather a reason to open the perspective. The analysis is done from specific to general. Therefore, we do not speak of isolation, not even when we semantically map the silence. The themes nuanced in the title are on the one hand the core of the rigorous research, but they also become pretexts to introduce other topics of interest: the recurrence of Pre-Raphaelite feminine ghostly images, the oppressive absences from a dramaturgy in which the static and dissolution of time seem to define the whole. A whole that is not so easy to bring to the stage in a formula both appropriate to the text and close to the current audience. However, Cristi Avram manages to offer practical interpretation tracks, not just conceptual ones.

The researcher benefits from both the theorist's methods and the theater director's flair. Other sides intersect here – perhaps at a stone table between two doors behind which we do not know who or what it is. I am now referring to the reflexive temptation that shows the seeker in the pages of philosophy, psychology or anthropology of the imaginary. It was natural for the meeting between the characters to take place, since the very subject of the whole project demands it. During the six chapters, the portrait of the Belgian playwright is initially outlined in the context of Symbolism, other movements that circulated in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and the rediscovery of the medieval imaginary. Then the analysis of the two notions - infantilism and old age - maps Maeterlinck's writings, up to the less known texts (such as *Serres chaudes*, *Le Miracle de Saint-Antoine*, *Alladine et Palomides* or *La Vie des fourmis*), discussed for the first time in research in our country. And the dramatist's figure is completed in the last chapters in which the productions from the famous collaboration with K. S. Stanislavski, the projects of Lugné-Poe, Paul Fort and Vsevolod Meyerhold and the newest signatures of Mihai Măniuțiu or Botond Nagy are presented. It is important to point out that the author looks involved and, in a way, protective of his main subject, saving Maeterlinck from possible prejudices and projecting on him a rational, revealing light: "At a first reading, Maeterlinck's theater may seem like a repetitive pleading for assuming a bad destiny, every time the same. However, in essence, the universe of his plays is always different and polymorphous. It is fascinating to find several worlds compressed into one, worlds that communicate with each other and send signals to which man responds unconsciously" (p. 253).

Along with the "dissection" of Maeterlinckian silence - an operation through which Cristi Avram distinguishes between introspective silence, disturbing silence, silence as a harbinger of non-being, awakening and several others -, one more important discussion is identified. The one of the bridge on which the different aspects of silence in the Belgian playwright's texts create

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it between reality and theatricality (or a stage imaginary). It is outlined a picture of the lines emerging from different directions and meeting (perhaps precisely) to separate, in a continuous movement of rediscovering meanings and separating or deviating them. Carefully, the researcher evokes the main theme of his study related to infantilism and old ages, without being blinded by it or seeing it everywhere, gratuitously. Likewise, if we still submit the insight not to fall into the traps of hermeneutics, the author also has critical comments to some scholars who are also concerned with Maeterlinck's dramaturgy, but to whom the restrictive areas of interpretation are pointed out. The commentator launches into inspired intertextualities, a constant preoccupation throughout the entire research. From Ibsen, to Chekhov, but also to the avant-garde of French literature or to the strange presence of Villiers de l'Isle Adam, the literary space diversifies, shrinks and reconstructs itself in familiar or unexpected encounters. Thus, Maeterlinck becomes the fascinating universe in which the Shakespearean Ophelia, with the mask of a Melusine female character, recalls the presence of the sirens of Scandinavian mythology. With the help of a magnifying glass of the anthropology of the imaginary, as well as with the help of psychoanalytic criticism, it is possible to descend between these creatures with paradoxical manifestations: the silent song, the meaningful gaze, the seduction of a barely doubted space. Stepping on these levels, the defining triad for the Belgian writer's theater takes shape: silence-sleep-water.

As a reader of these pages, I allow myself an exercise of imagination, rather with the aim of entering the inexhaustible game to which we seem to have been invited from the very beginning. Therefore I see Cristi Avram as an eager explorer in the world of the Belgian playwright, himself seeming like a character who would easily slip in his own phrase, as a spectator. Like in this paragraph, where I perceive the idea between the lines: "The text is the creation fundament of the theater performance, and an understanding of the subtext leads to the imposition of a certain direction in the stage construction. Without the discovery of hidden meanings, the roots of which are often found in the essays and mystical-philosophical writings of Maeterlinck, the theater does not seem to overcome the barrier of the written text towards its becoming concrete - the performance" (p.398).

The book has a solid structure and has appropriate hermeneutical methods. It has a representative bibliographic corpus for the subject, in a diversified palette. The directorial, pragmatic and enlightening look at some texts that would have the fate of those belonging to minor literature is effective and favorable. Moreover, after the reader has consumed the last pages of *Infantilism and Elderliness in Maurice Maeterlinck's Theater*, he could run to the theater – curious, restless and perhaps dreamy.