

VICTORIAN OPERA

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

PELLEAS AND MELISANDE



Education Resource

Pelleas and Melisande

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is designed for school students in Years 7-12. All the activities can be used in the classroom alongside or separate to Victorian Opera's production of *Pelleas and Melisande*.

The activities for Years 7-10 suggested in this resource align with the following Australian Learning Areas:

- The Arts – Music and Visual Arts
- Languages – French
- English

The table below outlines how the activities designed around each Learning Area align to the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

CAPABILITIES	Literacy	Numeracy	ICT	Critical and Creative Thinking	Personal and Social	Ethical Understanding	Intercultural Understanding
THE ARTS - MUSIC							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓			✓
Activity 2	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 3		✓		✓			✓
Activity 4		✓	✓	✓	✓		
THE ARTS - VISUAL ARTS							
Activity 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
LANGUAGES - FRENCH							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓			✓
Activity 2	✓			✓	✓		✓
ENGLISH							
Activity 1	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Activity 2	✓		✓	✓			✓
Activity 3	✓			✓	✓		

Activities for Years 11-12 have been devised in accordance with the Victorian Certificate of Education Study Design for:

- Music Performance
- Music Investigation
- Music Style and Composition
- English and English as an Additional Language
- Literature
- French
- Studio Arts

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GLOSSARY

Act – A component of the total work, consisting of its own partial dramatic arc.

Aria – An elaborate composition for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment.

Arioso – A recitative of a lyrical and expressive quality.

Baritone – The male voice between the tenor and bass.

Bass – The lowest male voice.

Castrato – Historically, a singer who was castrated as a boy to retain the boyish quality of the voice. The pitch of castrato singers was similar to a soprano.

Choreographer – The person who designs and creates the movement of the performance, usually in dance form.

Chorus – In opera or music theatre this refers to a large body of singers.

Chorus master – The person responsible for the rehearsal and preparation of the chorus prior to production.

Coloratura – A rapid passage, run, trill or other virtuoso-like feature used particularly in music of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Composer – The person who writes the music.

Concertmaster – The lead violinist of the orchestra.

Conductor – The person who interprets and leads the orchestra or musical performance, coordinating the performers and keeping the time through the technique of hand movements.

Contralto – The lowest female voice.

Countertenor – The highest male voice.

Designer – The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets.

Director – The person who is in charge of the artistic features of the production.

Duet – A composition for two performers of equal importance.

Ensemble – A group of performers performing together.

Fairy tale – A story that involves the fairy realm, often including fairies, goblins, giants, dwarves and witches where magic or enchantment exists. These are common in most cultures, for example the writings of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen.

Finale – The last movement of a work that contains more than one movement.

Grand Opera – A large-scale serious opera without spoken dialogue.

Hero / Heroine – In its modern form, the hero/heroine is a protagonist character who fulfils a task and restores balance to the community. He/she is a born leader, whether they know it or not, as well as a real survivor who has faith in good. Others are willing to believe in this hero and will follow him/her.

Interlude – A section of music between acts.

Key – The tonal centre around which a composition is based, often indicated by a key signature.

Leitmotif – The representation of characters, typical situations and recurring ideas by musical motifs.

Libretto – The text of an opera or music theatre work.

Mezzo-soprano – The second highest female voice.

Mise en scène – The arrangement of the scenery, props, etc., on the stage of a theatrical production.

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- Opera** – A staged drama set to music, made up of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment and usually with orchestral overtures and interludes.
- Opera buffa** – Also known as ‘comic opera’, an opera with a large mixture of music, on a light subject with a happy ending, including comic elements.
- Opera seria** – Also known as ‘serious opera’, an opera with dramatic, serious content often with a tragic ending.
- Orchestra** – A large ensemble of instruments divided into four main sections: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.
- Orchestration** – Utilisation of the instrumentation of an orchestra in the writing of a composition.
- Overture** – An instrumental composition intended as an introduction to an opera or other music theatre work.
- Principal** – One of the main characters.
- Proscenium** – A large rectangular arch that surrounds the stage and gives the appearance it is framed.
- Recitative** – A vocal (singing) style designed to imitate the natural inflections of speech, used in opera where dialogue might be used in other forms of music theatre.
- Rehearsal** – Where the performers and the creatives develop the production, shaping lines, songs, movements etc.
- Rhythm** – The regular and irregular pattern of notes of different length in the music.
- Repetiteur** – A pianist who works as an accompanist and vocal coach for opera.
- Scale model box** – A scale miniature of the set design.
- Score** – The notation showing all the parts of a work, both instrumental and vocal.
- Solo** – A piece of music performed by a single performer either alone or with accompaniment.
- Soprano** – The highest female voice.
- Soubrette** – A light operatic soprano.
- Sound Designer** – The person who designs the additional sound used in a production.
- Stage Manager** – The person who manages the running of rehearsals and performances, managing all the components of the production during performance.
- Surtitles** – A translation of the words being sung on stage projected onto a screen above the stage.
- Synopsis** – A summary of the story.
- Tempo** – The speed of a composition.
- Tenor** – A high male voice.
- Tessitura** – The general range of vocal parts.
- Tutti** – A marking in a score that indicates the use of the whole orchestra and/or all the vocal parts.
- Vibrato** – A very slight fluctuation of pitch in rapid succession to create warmth in the sound.
- Villain** – Often the antagonist. In literature, this is the evil character in the story, the character who has a negative effect on the other characters.
- Vocal range** – The human voice falls into a range from the lowest to highest notes they can reach. The normal range is around two octaves and is traditionally broken into seven voice types, (from highest to lowest) soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone and bass.
- Workshop** – An exploration of a new work (production, text, music, design).

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PELLEAS AND MELISANDE – ABOUT THE OPERA

Composer

Claude Debussy

Text

Maurice Maeterlinck

Characters and Cast

Pelleas, Grandson of Arkel

Angus Wood

Melisande

Siobhan Stagg

Golaud, Elder brother of Pelleas

Samuel Dundas

Arkel, King of Allemonde

David Parkin

Genevieve, Mother of Pelleas and Golaud

Liane Keegan

Yniold, Son of Golaud by a former marriage

Sophia Wasley

Doctor/Shepherd

Stephen Marsh

Creative team

Conductor

Richard Mills AM

Director

Elizabeth Hill

Set and Costume Design

Candice MacAllister

Lighting Design

Joseph Mercurio

Orchestra

ANAM Orchestra

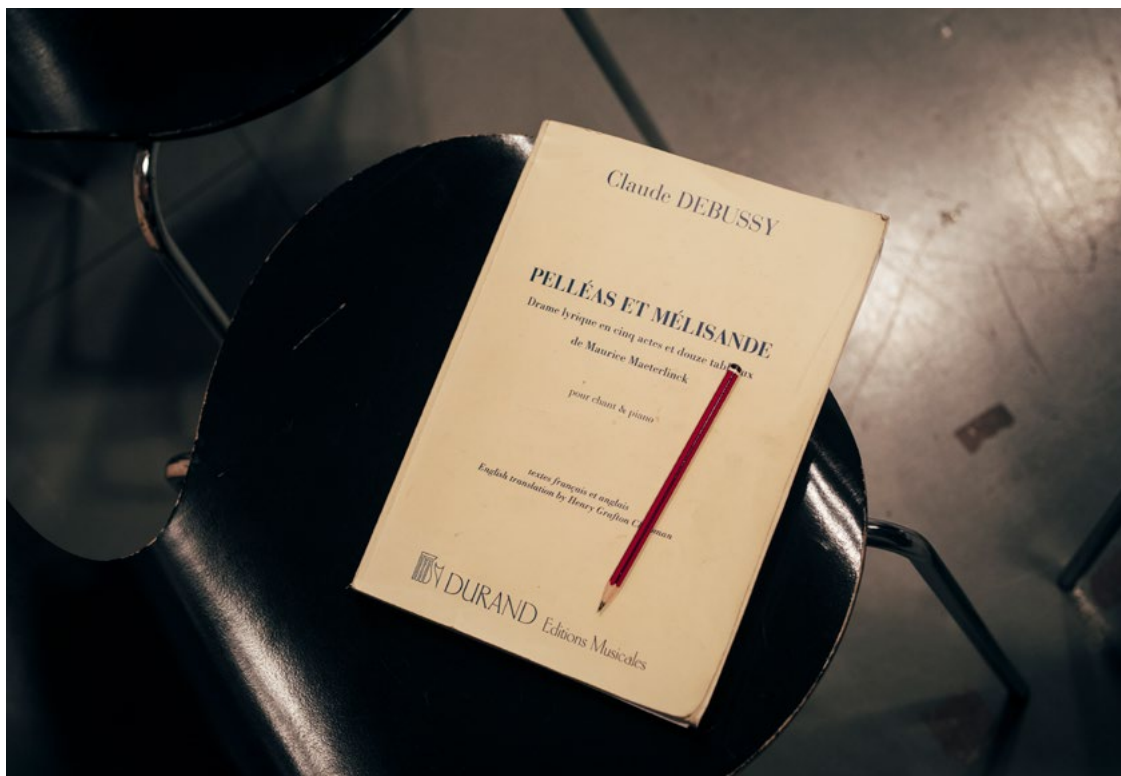


Photo: Charlie Kinross

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SYNOPSIS

Mythical kingdom of Allemonde

Act One

Golaud, King Arkel's grandson, is lost in the forest when he comes upon a strange girl weeping at a fountain. She cannot or will not reveal anything of her past, but Golaud manages to draw out her name – Melisande – and persuades her to follow him out of the dark woods.

King Arkel and his daughter Genevieve read a letter written by Golaud to his half-brother, Pelleas. Golaud has been married to Melisande for six months but he still knows nothing of her past. He is worried that his grandfather won't accept his marriage because Arkel has other marriage plans in place for Golaud. Arkel decides to forgive him and tells Pelleas to give Golaud the sign to return. Pelleas wants to leave the castle to visit a dying friend but Arkel urges him to remain to attend to his sick father and to await his brother's return.

Melisande arrives at the castle and is struck by its gloominess. She is comforted by Genevieve who assures her that she will get used to it. Pelleas and Melisande watch the ship that brought her to the castle as it disappears into the distance.

Act Two

Pelleas and Melisande sit by a well. She plays with her wedding ring and it slips through her fingers into the depths of the well.

At the same moment, in another part of the kingdom, Golaud is thrown from his horse. Melisande later tends to him by his bedside and she weeps, telling him that she feels ill living in the cold, dark castle. As Golaud comforts her, he notices her ring is gone. She lies and says she lost it in a sea grotto. Angrily, he sends her out into the night to look for it with Pelleas.

In the dark grotto, Melisande is frightened by three sleeping beggars.

Act Three

Melisande combs her hair in the window of the castle tower. Pelleas comes to the base of the tower to say goodbye, as he is leaving the next day. As she leans over, her long hair covers Pelleas and he plays with it. Golaud catches them and scolds them for their childishness.

Golaud leads Pelleas down to the castle vaults, a chilling place with the suffocating atmosphere of death. After exiting the vaults, Golaud tells him that Melisande is expecting a child and, as she is very fragile, Pelleas must stay away from her.

Golaud interrogates his son, Yniold, about Pelleas and Melisande's relationship and is frustrated by the boy's childish responses. Golaud asks him to spy on Melisande in her room and Yniold reports seeing Pelleas in the room, but observes nothing untoward.

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Act Four

Pelleas tells Melisande that he must talk to her as, now that his father's health has improved, he is setting off on his travels the following day. They arrange to meet by the well.

Arkel tells Melisande that he pities her unhappiness, but he hopes her youth and beauty will bring on a new era. Golaud enters, angrily challenging Melisande's innocence, and throws her across the room. Yniold is trying to retrieve his ball from behind a boulder when a shepherd passes by.

Realising it may be the last time he sees her, Pelleas confronts his feelings and tells Melisande all the things he has left unsaid. They confess their love for each other and share a brief moment of happiness. Golaud appears from the shadows. He kills Pelleas, and Melisande flees in terror.

Act Five

As Melisande lies gravely ill, the Doctor tells Golaud that her death will not be caused by the insignificant wound inflicted by him. Golaud feels remorse for killing his brother and he reflects on the pair's innocence. He asks Melisande for her forgiveness but continues to press her for the truth about her relationship with Pelleas. Arkel carries in Melisande's baby daughter but she is too weak to hold the child.

Melisande dies and Arkel observes that the cycle will continue with the next generation.



Director Elizabeth Hill in rehearsal with Samuel Dundas and Siobhan Stagg. Photo: Charlie Kinross.

THE ARTS - MUSIC

What is opera?

Opera is a European art form that has been in existence since the 1600s and became especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today there are many styles of opera performance, but they all have one thing in common – an opera is a play that is sung.

The four main languages of opera are Italian, French, German and English.

The main difference between opera and music theatre is amplification. Music theatre is usually amplified while opera is not. In addition, music theatre usually includes spoken dialogue as well as music and dance. Opera, on the other hand, uses recitative; a singing style designed to imitate natural speech.

Where did opera come from?

The roots of opera can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks who lived over 2,000 years ago. They invented and created all sorts of things like beautiful sculpture and remarkable architecture, were profoundly influential in the discovery of science and maths, and formed philosophies that argued about how to live the best life possible. They also loved the theatre and wrote wonderful plays. Some of these plays, written by Homer, Cicero and Gluck for example, are still performed today.

In the following thousand years, after the height of the Greek civilisation, many of the skills they had were lost, especially in science and art. While the art in what we call the Middle Ages was still very beautiful, it had lost some of the scientific application that made it so lifelike.

In Italy, from about the 1300s, scholars set out to rediscover many of the achievements that had been lost. This period was called the Renaissance, which means “rebirth”. All sorts of scientific discoveries were made and incredible new art works were created.

One art form these scholars were particularly interested in was Greek theatre. They had the texts but they did not know how they were performed. They knew from writings by philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato that the plays were accompanied by music and this helped raise the emotional moral tone of the works. But how? What did the music do? How were the lines sung?

A group of thinkers and musicians from Florence called the Florentine Camerata met regularly to try to work this out. They invented a new art form in which the dialogue in a play would be sung. They decided to call the new art form “Opera”, which simply means “a work”. The first truly successful opera was called *L’Orfeo*. It was composed by Claudio Monteverdi and is still performed today.

Following the great success of this work, opera became popular all over Europe and then the world. The style of opera and the way it was performed developed over the centuries to reflect the culture of the time. At its height in the 1800s, opera was performed regularly in theatres in every major city.

Voice types and singing styles

There are seven voice types in opera, each of which is defined by the range of notes they can sing and their vocal quality.

There are three female operatic voice types, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo-soprano roles.

- Soprano - the highest sounding female voice with a vocal range from middle C up to the C two octaves above.
- Mezzo-Soprano - slightly lower than the soprano with a vocal range from the G below middle C to the A two octaves above.
- Contralto - the lowest sounding female voice and rarely used in opera today. The vocal range for this voice type is from the F below middle C to a high F one octave above.

There are four male voice types, although the countertenor voice is usually only used in operas from the Baroque period (1600-1750).

- Countertenor - the highest sounding male voice with almost the same vocal range as a mezzo-soprano; the G below middle C to a high F one octave above.
- Tenor - a high sounding male voice that usually takes the leading male role. The vocal range for this type is roughly from the C below middle C to the C above.
- Baritone - the middle sounding male voice with a vocal range from the second G below middle C up to the G above.
- Bass - the lowest sounding male voice which has a vocal range from the E above middle C to the E two octaves below, however some bass singers can sing even lower.

There are further categories of voice defining the kind of voice quality and the type of music they can sing. The composer will consider voice types to highlight the different characters – for example, to differentiate between a King and a Servant or a Princess and a Witch.

A few of these are:

- Coloratura - a very high range with the ability to sing complicated parts with agility.
- Dramatic - a heavy sounding, powerful voice.
- Lyric - an average sized voice with the ability to sing long, beautiful phrases.
- Heldentenor - The 'heroic tenor', a very big role that requires a powerful sound.

Follow the links below to hear examples of what these voices sound like.

Classical Female Voices - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U>

Classical Male Voices - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23Wcw>

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Voice types in *Pelleas and Melisande*

Pelleas	Tenor
Melisande	Soprano
Golaud	Baritone
Arkel	Bass
Genevieve	Mezzo-Soprano
Doctor	Bass
Yniold	Soprano
Shepherd	Baritone



Angus Wood and Siobhan Stagg in rehearsal.
Photo: Charlie Kinross.

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About the composer - Claude Debussy

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) is recognised as one of the leading composers of the twentieth century for his advancement of both orchestral and piano composition.

At the age of nine he demonstrated a talent for the piano and was encouraged to pursue playing by his first teacher Madame Mauté de Fleurville, a former pupil of Frédéric Chopin and mother-in-law to the French poet, Paul Verlaine. He began his studies in piano at the Paris Conservatory at the age of eleven and later switched to composition. When he was twenty-two he won the Prix de Rome which entitled him to a three-year stay at the Villa Medici in Rome to spend time pursuing his creative work.

Debussy was innovative in his compositional work, breaking away from tradition and changing the way music was composed. In his works, he explored unusual harmonies and exotic scales, such as the whole-tone or pentatonic scale, scored his works for instruments that would create a different musical colour, applied large unresolved chords, such as the 9th, 11th and 13th chords, wrote chords in parallel motion, a technique frowned upon in Western music composition, never settled on one tonality creating ambiguity around the key, and, in his piano works, called for the heavy use of the pedal.

While composers such as Richard Wagner and Jules Massenet, as well as the Gamelan traditions of Java influenced his use of exotic scales and untraditional harmonies, it was the rhetoric of the French Symbolist poets that had the greatest influence on his compositional style. This influence is evident throughout his works, and the techniques and compositional choices listed above allowed him to recreate the indirect and subtle nature of Symbolism through music.

Debussy died of cancer in 1918, at the age of fifty-five. His works influenced many composers that came after him, such as Béla Bartók, Olivier Messiaen and jazz pianist and composer, Bill Evans.



Portrait of Claude Debussy. Taken by Atelier Nadar in Paris, 1908. Source: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b531188424/fl.item.r=Debussy>

The music of *Pelleas and Melisande*

Pelleas and Melisande was the only opera Debussy completed. It took him around ten years to compose the work with revisions to the score taking place up until opening night. With this work, Debussy set the tradition of French Opera on a new path, changing the language of opera and music completely.

The Symbolist movement was very much underway in literature throughout France and Belgium at the time this work was being composed. The idea behind Symbolism is that absolute truth should be represented but only indirectly. Therefore, writers, artists and musicians would compose using symbols to evoke an emotion or truth they were trying to convey. To read more about Symbolism in literature, turn to page 30.

The composer, poet and writer, Richard Wagner, was the first to apply Symbolism to music. He recognised that the relationship between the sensory and spiritual was stronger in music because of the inexplicit nature of the art form. Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande* is based on the play of the same name by Maurice Maeterlinck who, after Charles Baudelaire, was recognised as the leading Symbolist writer of the movement. The text of this work plays such a significant role that it is considered more a play with music rather than an opera. The music can be described as a representation of the streams of consciousness against which each of the characters' stories unfold.

To convey the Symbolist nature of the play in the opera's music, Debussy employed alternative modes and compositional techniques that would reflect and recreate the sensuous quality of the text. There is no clear tonality throughout the whole work, with moments of tonal clarity occurring very infrequently, usually when the character of Yniold appears. Some of the techniques he makes use of include:

- whole-tone scales
- inversions on seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords
- non-major and minor modes
- progressions by mediant
- tri-tones
- triadic parallels
- appoggiaturas as a harmonic decoration

Another key feature of *Pelleas and Melisande* is the way in which it has been structured and the use of a ratio found in nature and common to architecture called "the golden section". In design, this ratio is used to create a sense of beauty through harmony and proportion, satisfying the human eye. Debussy incorporated the golden section ratio throughout the work, building every scene, every act and the entire work on this principle.

An interview with Artistic Director, Richard Mills on the music of *Pelleas and Melisande*

What was it about Maeterlinck's play that enticed Debussy to set it to music?

Debussy, I think, wanted to find another narrative mode for opera. Something that I think reflected his preoccupation with the flux of consciousness and the flux of time, and the subtleties of that in relation to musical composition. This play deals in the unspoken so much, every line of text can be interpreted on many levels. I think the kind of restrained tone of the drama suited his hatred of Germanic bombast, although interestingly, when he heard *Parsifal* he came back and threw out a bit of *Pelleas and Melisande* because it sounded too much like it. But, I think also, the sense of form that Debussy displays in his music, it's a form which reflects the unfolding of nature. I mean, each of the Acts is so beautifully structured in terms of the pacing of events. I'm currently working on Act Five and we have all this interaction at the beginning and then Golaud's impassioned outburst at the end of which he is no wiser, and then the whole thing draws so beautifully to a close, finishing in this wonderful C-sharp major cadence and long sustained harmony. It has just such an incredible feeling of rightness about the proportions that it is really, very subtle. There is a key to it, I'm still trying to work out what it is. It's got to do of course, with the golden section and where the golden section comes in each act and each scene.

Debussy was very, very conscious of the need for formal exactitude that makes up part of the whole French tradition. It's very much there but it's an immensely subtle thing. In Act Five for example, it seems to me to start when the servants come on. That is the point at which the Act turns. You have this impassioned outburst that really comes to nothing, and then the servants enter and it builds towards a focal point, reflected in the stage action, and then proceeds to its conclusion. So, there are always these apex points in every Act and in every scene and not necessarily in the most obvious points, but they give the thing a kind of poise and balance, and an internal rightness so that the shape of the whole Act feels so perfect. It's an immensely subtle thing, it's not necessarily obvious. There's nothing obvious about this opera.

How do you think the music that Debussy has written for this opera differs from his predecessors in the operatic tradition?

Gosh! In almost every respect so totally different. That's what makes it such a unique utterance. It dispenses completely with the old Italian tradition of numbers in opera, with duets and trios etc., and so on. Hardly anyone ever sings together in this opera, and that in a sense is Wagnerian because you find the same in later Wagner: there are very few ensembles. It's basically one character at a time expanding on an interior monologue and it's the same with this. Although, in *Pelleas and Melisande* it's very interesting to look at what is interior and what is exterior. I mean, again in Act Five, the doctor says, "From this little wound she's not going to die", and he tells Golaud not to be so guilt-ridden. And then Arkel says "It seems to be that we are keeping too quiet despite ourselves in her room. It's not a good sign.", and the kind of dialogue goes on in a very indirect way. Then Golaud says, "Well I killed her despite myself." Each character has their own kind of thread through the Act. Golaud is wracked with guilt and is still no wiser to the truth of Melisande's relationship with Pelleas. In the end, Melisande can't actually tell him what happened, she's completely un-self-aware. Arkel goes through in this kind of philosophy as a kind of hapless commentator and then there's always the atmosphere of the castle and its surrounds.

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So, it'll be interspersed with lines like, "Isn't the sea air too cold this evening", and then there's this idea of the elements coming in and the indifference of nature. The sea is a character and the shadows of the garden are a character as they are throughout the opera, so you've got it going on, on so many levels. I'm digressing a bit because this music is so profoundly different to anything in the operatic tradition. It couldn't probably have existed with Wagner and yet it takes the Wagnerian essence in a way and makes it completely unique. There's no bombast. There are some motives which recur, but they're not like the flow of the motives in any of the later Wagnerian operas. It's immensely subtle.

What is different also is the harmonic language and that makes it completely Debussy-ian. It takes individual chords that we know quite well, but juxtaposes them in a way that makes fresh revelations about them. If you just look at the beginning for example, there's nothing new about any of these chords. The chords follow one another and they're not necessarily related by tonality and then of course there's the use of the tritone. It's actually impossible to tell what key this part [opening of Act Five] is in! It doesn't really have a tonality except it's within the range of a perfect fifth but the intervals don't conform to any notion of tonality at all. And again, between the first note of this Act and the seventh chord, which is essentially a B-flat seventh chord, you once again have this tritone which doesn't commit to anything. Then out of this ambiguity comes these wonderful islands of certainty, so it's an immensely varied harmonic palette. A harmonic palette of great subtlety and variety, which is part of the expression of this opera. It's not through melody, it's through harmony and declaration.

Does the lack of tonality make it more challenging for you when it comes to interpreting the work?

No, because the direction of it in terms of the form is so clear and the music flows so beautifully. Previously in opera, melodic and rhythmic structures held sway. Here it's another world. It's the progression of harmony, the flux of harmony, the flux of immensely subtle chordal progressions and declamation that has the rhythm of ordinary speech which makes the process of continuity, so that's what's different about it. It doesn't depend on these formal structures that were related to rhythm, stanza forms etc. and so on. It has the flow of consciousness. Of course, this is like the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé for example, that Debussy was so interested in, because in Mallarmé, the sound of the words is as important as any meaning they may have. So, again, it becomes an expression of the flow of consciousness that is ultimately very, very mysterious.

You've talked about how the work has a conscious flow throughout the music. The text is quite disjointed in a way in that at the end of one act it feels like a lot of time has passed before the beginning of the next. Is that conveyed in the music or is it kept entirely separate?

I think it's suggested in the music. I think the notion of suggestion is a very important part of what happens in this opera. It suggests things without stating them and that's why this piece has always fascinated musicians because it opens doors but never quite allows you in to see what's inside. But at the same time, there is so much possible meaning and I guess it lives with that ambiguity. That ambiguity is part of it.

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Do you think there are themes in *Pelleas and Melisande* that are relatable to modern-day society?

The whole notion of the ambiguity of experience of its moral ambiguity? It's a very dark piece. There's not much hope in it. It's grimly fatalistic about human beings and their capacity to enact moral choices, to triumph above circumstances. It's actually very modern in that way, it's very existential, it's like Sartre or Camus. It deals with a kind of powerlessness of agency that people experience in life. The only thing that has validity is the flux of sensation which the music underlines so exquisitely with its orchestral and harmonic palette. It's a kind of metaphor for the human condition.

Did French opera continue down the path that Debussy had set after him or did it change again?

Well not really. You see, the French operatic tradition in the twentieth century sort of went kind of sideways. I mean, what did opera do post-*Pelleas and Melisande*? Well that's a very interesting question. Obviously, it was a hugely influential piece on the second Viennese school, for example, on Berg and both his operas, because neither of *Wozzeck* or *Lulu* would probably have been possible without it and without that particular kind of expressive aesthetic. Of course, Debussy was very influential on the whole of twentieth-century opera, but not so much of the important things in twentieth-century opera happen in France post-*Pelleas and Melisande*.

Do Fauré and Schoenberg's compositions set to Maeterlinck's play differ drastically to what Debussy has done with it?

Well Fauré and Schoenberg's compositions are not dramatic works, they're symphonic works. Whereas, this, despite its refined nature, is still a very dramatic work. At the end of it, it's a play which is transformed into music but the singers still have to play it like a play and that's the challenge of conducting it, you don't have structures. What the conductor has to do is follow and underline the unfolding of the drama with respect to the composer's intentions. It's like one long recitative, although a highly structured recitative, but it still has that spontaneity that the interpretation of the spoken word will have as well.

How does the Symbolist nature of the play feature in the music?

In some ways, it's a direct transference of the Symbolist aesthetic in that Symbolists fractured grammatical hierarchy. But with Mallarmé for example, in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (*Prelude to the afternoon of a Faun*) – which was so influential on Debussy – the old syntactical structures of nineteenth-century poetry ceased to exist and something else happened in relationship to that. I mean the whole notion of clauses and clausal tendency that you find in nineteenth-century poetry were fractured by the French poets of the Symbolist school and it was a new way of approaching the notion of language. Language as sensation rather than language of meaning. If you look for example, at the difference between Baudelaire and Mallarmé, it makes dramatic grammatic sense even though there's an abstractness about it. If you compare three authors, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé you'll see what I mean and let me just give you an example. Here we have Baudelaire, "My child, my sister, thinking of that sweetness to go and live there together. To love at leisure, to love and to die, in a country which resembles you." Although that's a very abstract meaning, it still has a grammatical structure.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

I mean, it's an imperative, dream of the sweetness, etc., and so on. And then if you look at Verlaine, the famous "The skies there above the roof, so blue and so calm. An arbourer above the roof, sends forth its palm. The bell in the heavens in the sky that one sees, delicately chimes, and a bird on the tree that one sees, sings its song." They are all quite comprehensible statements. But then when you get to the *Prelude to the afternoon of a Faun* of Mallarmé, it's quite different: "Those nymphs I want to reproduce them. So clear their light incarnation how it flies through the air." I mean, it's completely different. It's not grammatical in the sense of subject, verb, object. Again, this is stream of consciousness. It's a supposed stream of consciousness of what a faun is thinking. That's the genius of impressionism. It takes objects, verbal objects, musical objects, sounds that formally existed in hierarchies, takes them away from those and finds new relationships with them.

So, from a music point of view, what should audiences or school students listen out for?

I think you just enjoy it. The interesting thing is, to some extent, it renders philosophy or intellectuality superfluous. Debussy himself said, "There is no principal guiding my choice of harmonies, other than my pleasing myself". So, it's not as though there's any preconceived big rational structures. It proceeds on intuition, albeit an intuition that's very carefully crafted and ordered with a great awareness of the flow of time, but it's still intuition.

What was it about this opera that made you want to include it in this season?

Well it's the centenary of Debussy's death and it's an opera that's very, very rarely performed. In fact, because of its abstract nature, it's an opera that is better done without production. So, it was quite good that we made a very simple production, not one with a whole lot of stuff in it. Something that leaves room for the imagination and doesn't anchor it in any kind of specific place. The best productions of *Pelleas and Melisande* are the ones without a lot of hardware. The ones that just do what the composer says and stage the symbols: the darkness in the garden, the lighthouses, the flux of the air, the notion of the continuity and indifference of the sea. All these things underline the process of the drama.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Orchestration

The orchestra for *Pelleas and Melisande* consists of 62 players and is made up of the below instruments.

The orchestra for Victorian Opera's production of this opera is made up of members of the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) Orchestra.

Instrumental Family	Instrument
Woodwind	2 Flutes 1 Piccolo 2 Oboes 1 Cor Anglais 2 Clarinets 3 Bassoons
Brass	4 Horns 2 Trumpets 3 Trombones 1 Tuba
Strings	18 Violins 6 Violas 6 Cellos 4 Double Basses 2 Harps
Percussion	Timpani Suspended Cymbal Triangle Glockenspiel Bell

ACTIVITIES

Year 7-8

Activity 1: Research



Write a 300-400 word essay on one of the instruments featured in the above diagram. Include when and where the instrument was originated, how it developed as music progressed and any other interesting facts you come across.

Use at least three different references.

Activity 2: Listening

Find 2-3 different musical examples that feature the instrument you chose to research in Activity 1. Out of these, pick your favourite and write down a short explanation that includes:

- Who the composer is
- Who the performer is
- Three reasons why you like the piece of music

Present an excerpt of the recording and your findings to the rest of the class.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Years 9-10

Activity 3: Learn the modes

Debussy often made use of modal systems that pre-date the major and minor modes common to Western music.

Learn how to play each of the modes listed below on either a piano/keyboard, tuned percussion instrument or an instrument that you're learning. Choose any natural note to start on, i.e. b-natural rather than b-flat, and move up by the interval patterns listed in the table below.

Try starting on different notes and listen to the different characters you create.

Mode	Interval Spacing
Ionian	tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone - tone - semitone
Dorian	tone - semitone - tone - tone - tone - semitone - tone
Phrygian	semitone - tone - tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone
Lydian	tone - tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone - semitone
Mixolydian	tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone - semitone - tone
Aeolian	tone - semitone - tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone
Locrian	semitone - tone - tone - semitone - tone - tone - tone

Activity 4: Compose using modes

After exploring the modes in Activity 3, choose your favourite and compose a short 16 bar melody. Don't forget to add a time signature!

Years 11 -12 VCE

Activity 5: Interpretation

Look for three different recordings of "Je ne pourrai plus sortir de cette forêt" from Act 1, Scene 1 of Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*.

Write 200-250 words on each recording highlighting:

- The orchestra
- The conductor
- The opera company that produced the work (where applicable)
- The singers
- The year of the performance
- Any stand-out stylistic features
- The delivery of the text and melodic lines

Write another 200 words comparing the three recordings, and explain why you chose each recording.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Activity 6: Composition

Compose your own version of an accompaniment for the melody below that Melisande sings in Act 3, Scene 1 from the opera. It can be written as a piano accompaniment for voice or rearranged for a small ensemble.

Try to incorporate some of the compositional techniques Debussy used, as listed on page 13 of this resource.

Mélisande, opening of Act III Scene I

Claude Debussy

Modéré et librement (Moderate and freely)



Mes long che - veux des-cen-dent jus-qu'au seuil de la tour; Mes che-veux vous at-ten-dent tout le long de la
(My long hair reaches to the base of the tower; My hair is waiting for you the whole length of the tower,



tour, Et tout le long du jour, Et tout le long du jour... Saint Da - niel et Saint Mi-chel,
and the whole day long and the whole day long... Saint Daniel and Saint Michael,



Saint Mi-chel et Saint Ra-pha - ël, Je suis née un Di-man-che, Un Di-manche à mi - di...
Saint Michael and Saint Raphael, I was born on a Sunday, a Sunday at noon...)

To load this excerpt directly into Sibelius, download the file from Dropbox: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xm2jhrqd51s3ks5/AAC8yIbBwLmajSaj89kjc1oAa?dl=0>

THE ARTS – VISUAL ARTS

The ambiguity around the storyline and within the musical score allows for a diverse range of interpretations when it comes to staging Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*. Director Elizabeth Hill, and Costume and Set Designer Candice MacAllister chose to keep their interpretation of the work simple so that the audience's focus remains on the sensuous qualities of the music.

In the interview below, Designer Candice MacAllister discusses her designs for both the sets and the costumes, and where she drew her ideas from.

An interview with Designer, Candice MacAllister on the costumes and set

This is your first design for a mainstage production at the young age of 23. What steps did you take to get to this point so early in your career?

I was very lucky as a teenager to be given the opportunity to design small shows for the drama department at High School. I had done a lot of extra-curricular music and thought that's what I wanted to pursue, but by the time I hit year 12 I had discovered that designing gave me more joy than anything else I did at school. My drama teachers encouraged me to pursue Design at university, so I applied and was accepted into the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the Victorian College of the Arts. I really enjoyed my time there and was immersed in Melbourne theatre and arts while developing my skills. When I completed my degree, I made the difficult decision to put my design career on hold to gain any experience in the industry that I could and took a job at Victorian Opera as Artistic



Boreas – John William Waterhouse. Image retrieved from <http://www.jwwaterhouse.com/view.cfm?recordid=50>

Administration Assistant. Within three months a design opportunity became available within the company and I was given the chance to design my first professional show. It was a steep learning curve but one I learnt a huge amount from. After that, I designed a further four productions for the company and completed an internship with the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, London. I think because I made the decision to do what I love so early I was able to work hard and take risks.

Where did you draw inspiration from for your designs of *Pelleas and Melisande*?

The piece has so many references to nature and light. It draws heavily from the atmosphere of the ocean and the darkness of the forest, creating strong visuals. It also seems to come from a place of myth and legend, which for me, sits in a kind of medieval time frame. I had a lot of fun looking at folklore and fantasy from the Scottish Highlands of *Macbeth* to the detailed fantasy costumes of *Game of Thrones*. Both the director, Elizabeth Hill and I were drawn to the artwork of Waterhouse, whose use of fabrics and hair gave us a very textured beginning for the design to grow from.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Having designed both the set and the costumes, which element did you design first?

This process happens differently each time I design a show. After I've listened to the opera and read the libretto I usually have a discussion with the director about the kind of images that come to mind. For me, usually the world comes to my mind before the costumes. I think about where we are, then once that has been decided it becomes a lot clearer what the characters should wear and why. Then usually the set and costumes inform each other as the process continues.

How much of a role did the music to this opera or its libretto play when it came to your designs?

The libretto presents some very clear symbols and themes. The story is almost always in darkness, the sense of time is lost, and there is a strong presence of water throughout each scene. These gave me a great place to draw from aesthetically and along with listening to the emotive score, it became clear where the visual world should begin.

Did Director Elizabeth Hill give you any ideas on how she planned to stage the production before you began working on your designs?

This will be the fourth production Elizabeth and I have worked on together so we have a great understanding of how we each work. When Elizabeth approached me, she had an idea of the feeling and simplicity she wanted to bring to this production. She comes from a strong dance background which is great for a designer as she thinks as visually as I do. She knew that she wanted to use fabric to represent the water and the flowing hair of Melisande. From there, we collaborated to develop the ideas and form the design which you will see on stage.

Joseph Mercurio is designing the lighting for this production. How closely have you had to work with him when creating the world of *Pelleas and Melisande*?

I've only worked with Joe once - on *Cinderella* in 2016 - and like Elizabeth, he comes from a dance background and therefore has a strong understanding of space. The lighting is key to this production, so earlier this year we had an intensive three-day workshop where we discussed the set, transitions and mood with Joe. He is now based in Shanghai, so we've tried to stay in touch via email and Skype until he can join us again for rehearsals.

What did you enjoy designing most in this production and why?

I have a deep love for Debussy. His music has inspired so many visual artists in the past and holds a key place in the advancement of the Impressionist era. Being able to draw upon the harmonies he created to visualise his only opera has been such a privilege. I've loved creating a 'look' for the costumes that aren't bound to a historical context and can have a contemporary feel to them.

It's also the biggest production I have designed for and we've bought the most beautiful fabrics that I can't wait to see come to life!

To read more about Candice's designs, visit <https://www.victorianopera.com.au/behind-the-scenes/designing-debussys-liquid-tones>.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Set Design

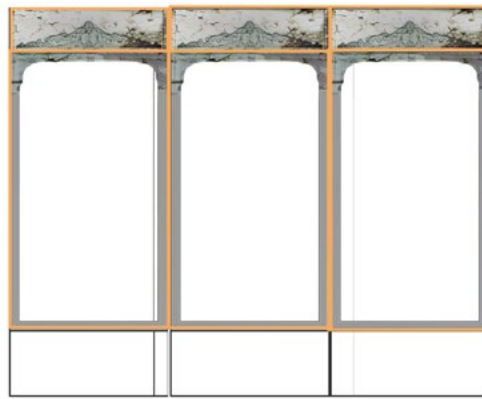
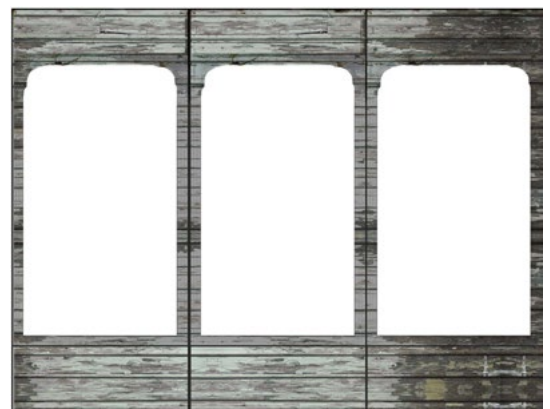
The set for *Pelleas and Melisande* consists of three towers in front of hanging drapes. Each of the three towers represent the three characters of Pelleas, Melisande and Golaud, and the relationships between them. The towers spin on a central axis and represent the change of scenes throughout the opera. The drapes in the backdrop signify water, a prevalent symbol throughout the work.

The images below illustrate the set design and the influences behind the final design.

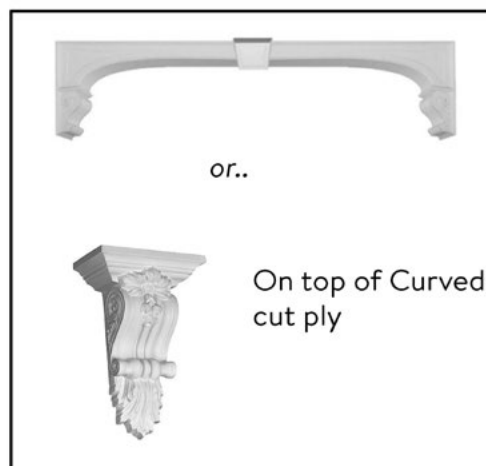
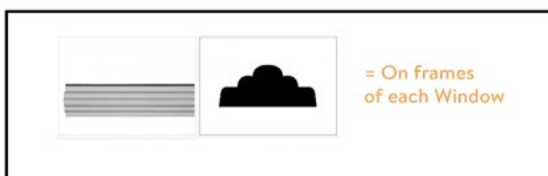
Exterior of the towers



Weatherboard and Beams



Interior of the towers - what is seen when the towers have been spun.



Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Set design continued...



Act 1
Scn 2

A photo of the scale model box that illustrates what the set will look like on stage.



Computer generated images of what the set and lighting will look like in Act 2, Scene 1.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Costume Designs

The below illustrations display the costumes for the characters of Pelleas, Melisande and Golaud. In the play, there is no clear indication of the period in which the story is set. As the opera progresses, the costumes for Melisande's character represent the character's personal journey and her disintegration.

The reference photos that accompany each of the sketches below demonstrate the styles that Candice MacAllister drew her motivation from.

Melisande

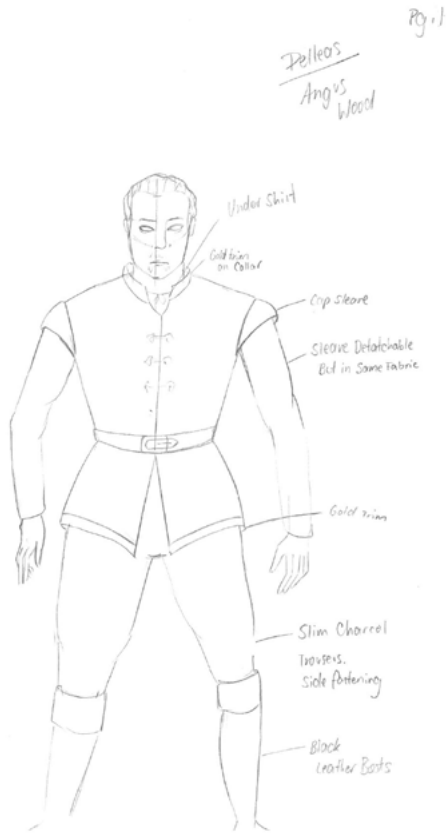


Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Pelleas

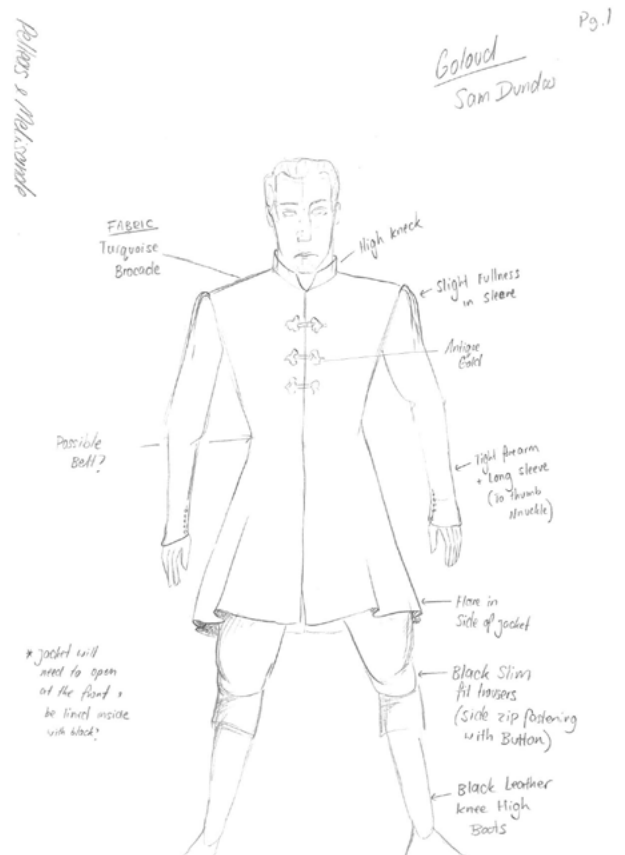
Pelleas & Melisande



Golaud



Pelleas & Melisande



ACTIVITIES

For Years 7-10

Activity 1: Design a costume

Design the costumes for three of the characters of the opera. Include a paragraph with each of the designs that explains where you drew your inspiration from and provide some of the reference photos that you came across and utilised.

For Years 11 – 12 VCE

Activity 2: Research

Research two past operatic productions of Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande* and two theatrical productions of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande*. Identify and describe:

- The name of the designers and directors
- The year they were performed on stage
- Any obvious styles used and if they conformed to the time in which the production was staged

Provide any available images of the designs.

Activity 3: Set design

Read the play *Pelleas and Melisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck and design the set for either an operatic or theatrical production.

Alongside your designs, submit an essay that explains your design choices and who or what the motivations are behind your design.

Include visual reference photos that you found particularly inspirational throughout the process. Visit <http://www.fullbooks.com/Pelleas-and-Melisande1.html> for an English version of the text.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

LANGUAGES - FRENCH

About the playwright - Maurice Maeterlinck



Photo of Maurice Maeterlinck from 1903 taken by Gerschel, Paris. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Picture_of_Maurice_Maeterlinck.jpg

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was a Belgian Symbolist poet, playwright and essayist whose works were often written in French.

He initially studied law at the University of Ghent and was later admitted to the bar there in 1886. He turned to literature after meeting Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam and other leaders of the Symbolist movement in Paris in 1885.

In his plays, Maeterlinck used poetic speech, gesture, lighting, setting and ritual to create images that would reflect the moods and dilemmas of his protagonists, often waiting for something that would bring about their destruction. The plays of his early period, such as *L'Intruse* (1890; *The Intruder*), *Les Aveugles* (1890; *The Blind*) and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1892) were lacking in action but dealt with fatalism and mysticism, and often featured a foreboding presence of death. Maeterlinck also spent time composing prose in which he further explored some of the themes present in his earlier plays; the immortality of the soul, the nature of death and the attainment of wisdom.

In his later years, Maeterlinck became known for his philosophical essays that dealt with his ideas around the human condition. He set out his beliefs in works such as *La Vie des abeilles* (1901; *The Life of the Bee*) and *L'Intelligence des fleurs* (1907; *The Intelligence of Flowers*).

Maeterlinck was recognised for his work throughout his life, winning a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911. He was also made a Count by the King of Belgium in 1932.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Symbolism in French Literature

“The word symbol...is a sign that as such demands deciphering, an interpretation by whoever is exposed to it or is struck by it and who wishes to understand it and savour its mystery. This sign represents or evokes in a concrete manner what is innate within it, the thing signified and more or less hidden.”

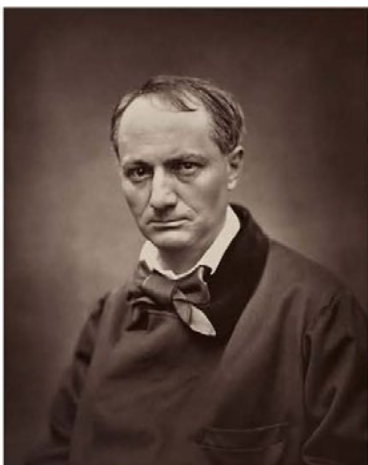
- Henri Peyre

Originating in France, Symbolism is a literary and artistic movement from the late nineteenth-century. It came about as a reaction against the rigid techniques and themes prevalent in the French poetic tradition. The poets who led the change wanted to liberate the poetic form so that they could more freely express mystical ideas, emotions and states of mind.

There are a number of features characteristic of the literature written throughout the Symbolist movement. Poets would compose prose poems utilising free verse to allow greater room for fluidity, metaphors and word play. Particular images or objects were endowed with a symbolic meaning depicting the effect produced rather than the thing itself.

Charles Baudelaire is considered the poet that brought about the movement with his collection of poems *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). He inspired the connection between scent, sound and colour, and combined this with Wagner’s belief that by synthesising the arts, the musical qualities of poetry are enhanced. Symbolists therefore chose specific words that would manipulate the harmonies, tones and colours of the underlying theme within a poem.

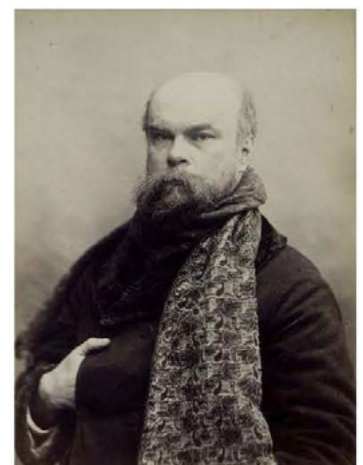
The Symbolist movement in poetry reached its peak in 1890 and had fallen out of favour by 1900. The works produced throughout the movement however, would go on to influence writers of British and American literature of the twentieth-century. The techniques developed by Symbolists such as Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, are evident in the poems of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, and novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, demonstrating the importance of this movement in progressing literature.



Portrait of Charles Baudelaire taken by Etienne Carjat circa 1862. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C3%89tienne_Carjat,_Portrait_of_Charles_Baudelaire,_circa_1862.jpg



Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé taken in 1896 by Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (aka Nadar). Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mallarme.jpg>



Portrait of Paul Verlaine taken by Otto Wegener in 1893. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Verlaine.jpeg

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Examples of poems of the French Symbolist movement

L'Invitation au Voyage (The Invitation to the voyage) by Charles Baudelaire

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traîtres yeux,
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Des meubles luisants,
Polis par les ans,
Décoreraient notre chambre;
Les plus rares fleurs
Mêlant leurs odeurs
Aux vagues senteurs de l'ambre.
Les riches plafonds,
Les miroirs profonds,
La splendeur orientale,
Tout y parlerait,
A l'âme en secret
Sa douce langue natale.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Vois sur ces canaux
Dormir ces vaisseaux
Dont l'humeur est vagabonde;
C'est pour assouvir
Ton moindre désir
Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.
- Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière,
D'hyacinthe et d'or;
Le monde s'endort
Dans une chaude lumière.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

My sister, my child
Imagine, exiled,
The sweetness, of being there, we two!
To live and to sigh,
To love and to die,
In the land that mirrors you!
The misted haze
Of its clouded days
Has the same charm to my mind,
As mysterious,
As your traitorous
Eyes, behind glittering blinds.

There everything's order and beauty,
Calm, voluptuousness, and luxury.

The surface gleams
Are polished it seems,
Through the years, to grace our room.
The rarest flowers
Mix, with fragrant showers,
The vague, amber perfume.
The dark, painted halls,
The deep mirrored walls,
With Eastern splendour hung,
All secretly speak,
To the soul, its discrete,
Sweet, native tongue.

There, everything's order and beauty,
Calm, voluptuousness and luxury.

See, down the canals,
The sleeping vessels,
Those nomads, their white sails furled:
Now, to accomplish
Your every wish,
They come from the ends of the world.
- The deep sunsets
Surround the west,
The canals, the city, entire,
With blue-violet and gold;
And the Earth grows cold
In an incandescent fire.

There, everything's order and beauty,
Calm, voluptuousness and luxury.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

Examples of poems of the French Symbolist movement continued...

Sonnet by Stéphane Mallarmé

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui!

The virginal, living and lovely day
Will it fracture for us with a wild wing-blow
This solid lost lake whose frost's haunted below
By the glacier, transparent with flights not made?

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

A swan from time past remembers it's he
Magnificent yet struggling hopelessly
Through not having sung a liveable country
From the radiant boredom of winter's sterility.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
Par l'espace infligé à l'oiseau qui le nie,
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

His neck will shake off this whitest agony
Space inflicts on a bird that denies it wholly,
But not earth's horror that entraps his feathers.

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,
Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris
Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.

Phantom assigned to this place by his brilliance,
The Swan in his exile is rendered motionless,
Swathed uselessly by his cold dream of defiance.

Après trois Ans (After Three Years) by Paul Verlaine

Ayant poussé la porte étroite qui chancelle,
Je me suis promené dans le petit jardin
Qu'éclairait doucement le soleil du matin,
Pailletant chaque fleur d'une humide étincelle.

Opening the narrow rickety gate,
I went for a walk in the little garden,
All lit up by that gentle morning sun,
Starring each flower with watery light.

Rien n'a changé. J'ai tout revu: l'humble tonnelle
De vigne folle avec les chaises de rotin...
Le jet d'eau fait toujours son murmure argentin
Et le vieux tremble sa plainte sempiternelle.

Nothing was changed. Again: the humble arbour
With wild vines and chairs made of rattan...
The fountain as ever in its silvery wpattern,
And the old aspen with its eternal murmur.

Les roses comme avant palpitent; comme avant,
Les grands lys orgueilleux se balancent au vent.
Chaque alouette qui va et vient m'est connue.

The roses as then still trembled, and as then
The tall proud lilies rocked in the wind.
I knew every lark there, coming and going.

Même j'ai retrouvé debout la Velléda,
Dont le plâtre s'écaille au bout de l'avenue,
- Grêle, parmi l'odeur fade du réséda.

I found the Velleda statue standing yet,
At the end of the avenue its plaster flaking,
- Weathered, among bland scents of mignonette.

ACTIVITIES

Years 7-8

Activity 1: Research

Write a 300-400 word essay investigating one of the below Symbolist poets.

- Charles Baudelaire
- Stéphane Mallarmé
- Paul Verlaine

Years 9-10

Activity 2: Analysis

Read the poems on pages 31 and 32 and identify some of the symbols or features that make it a Symbolist work.

Year 11-12 VCE

Activity 3: Conversation Practice

Prepare some information on one of the below topics for a 5-10 minute conversation in French with your teacher.

- The music of Claude Debussy
- Symbolism in French Literature
- The plays of Maurice Maeterlinck

Activity 4: Letter writing

Watch the following video of Act 3, Scene 1 from Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbWydoVn8oo>

In French, write a letter to a friend telling them about the opera you saw and what you thought. Include some background information on the work, including the play it is based on. Talk about the music, as well as the singing and acting of the singers in the clip you viewed.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

ENGLISH

Themes

The opera and play present themselves with a number of themes central not only to the text, but also the music and how it accompanies the characters of Pelleas, Melisande and Golaud, and their end states.

Cycle of creation and destruction

From the outset of this work, each of the main three characters are sent on a downward spiral towards their own individual destructions. Pelleas is killed by his older brother, Golaud is driven mad by jealousy, and Melisande is wounded both mentally and physically, by the gloomy and decaying state of the castle she is brought to live in, and by the sword yielded by Golaud during his murderous rage. Upon Melisande's death after giving birth to her baby daughter, Arkel announces that the cycle begins once again.

Moral ambiguity

Pelleas, Melisande and Golaud display ambiguity when it comes to doing the right thing morally and their doing so leads to their individual destructions. Pelleas and Melisande both pursue their love for each other without any consideration of the effects it is having on Golaud. The jealous-driven Golaud loses all morality when he employs his son Yniold to spy on Pelleas and Melisande as a means to confirm his suspicions.

The Human Condition

The story of *Pelleas and Melisande* explores the human condition and how humans react to or deal with trying situations. It demonstrates how people can deteriorate or are driven to destruction by their internal states and extreme emotions, especially when they are in such an altered state that they cannot see the effects of their actions.

Symbols

The keys symbols in this work are:

Water

This appears in several forms during the play. Golaud finds Melisande by a fountain and later takes her to live in Arkel's Kingdom by the sea. At the beginning of Act Two, Melisande loses her wedding ring in the well. Melisande is also seen crying and makes mention of her tears throughout the work.

The Forest

Golaud finds Melisande in the forest at the beginning of the opera. It is also the place in which he is thrown off his horse and injured in Act Two.

The Fountain and Well

The places where Melisande drops her crown and loses her ring, respectively.

The Sea Grotto

Where Melisande tells Golaud that she has lost her ring and where he instructs her to go to look for it, accompanied by Pelleas.

The Vaults under the Castle

In Act Three, Golaud confronts Pelleas and tells him to stay away from Melisande.

Pelleas and Melisande

Education Resource

ACTIVITIES

Years 7-10

Activity 1: Character Analysis

Write a character analysis for the characters of Pelleas, Melisande and Golaud. Analyse the individual characters and how they and their actions each impact the other.

Years 9-10

Activity 2: Research

Find three examples of Symbolism in English literature of the twentieth century. Then, in a 500 word essay, discuss what makes each of your examples Symbolist, and point out some of the symbols employed by the author.

Activity 3: Poem writing

Compose a free verse poem on a topic of your choosing. For a challenge, write it in the Symbolist style.

Years 11-12 VCE

Activity 4: Essay

Write a 1000 word essay on one of the topics below.

- Identify the symbols in Maeterlinck's play, *Pelleas and Melisande*, and what they each represent. Consider how he incorporates them into the text through the language used.
- Melisande is innocent throughout the opera and mistreated by both Pelleas and Golaud. Discuss.
- Explore the idea of the human condition and consider how it alters the action that takes place throughout the opera.

Visit <http://www.fullbooks.com/Pelleas-and-Melisande1.html> for an English version of the text.

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