

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Dialogue artists-audience with Pascal Kirsch, July 15 at 16:30,
Site Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon
Encounters *Research and creation in Avignon* with in particular Pascal Kirsch,
ANR, July 11-12, Cloître Saint-Louis

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

For 2018 / 2019 season :

- October 2018, MC93 - Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis
- November 13, Le Parvis Scène nationale Tarbes Pyrénées, Ibos
- November 26-27, L'Équinoxe Scène nationale de Châteauroux
- December 11-12, La Passerelle Scène nationale de Saint-Brieuc
- Fall of 2018, MC2:Grenoble

THE PRINCESS MALEINE

"And they lived happily ever after." What if Maeterlinck followed that happy, open-ended conclusion by showing us all the anxiety that underlies it? Putting a twist on a fairy tale by the brothers Grimm to focus on what happens after the end, he has the lovers find each other again early in *Princess Maleine*. Their union brings about worry, illness, storms, and poison. Princess Maleine, determined to wed Prince Hjalmar in spite of the world's opposition, endures imprisonment, starvation, and the loss of her parents, all without batting an eye. But her getting her wish only triggers a time of terror. And like an opposite pole, Queen Anne, passionate and lustful, plays with forces that are as dangerous as they are unavoidable. Love is the engine that drives all of them to lose themselves, and it is what Pascal Kirsch chooses to focus on in this story influenced by magical realism. He gives a portrait of this family and its contradictions based on its doubts and hesitations that echo in the outside world. Here are people made young again by anger, who kill what they love to preserve it, and who laugh at their own impotence. The director wields tragic irony like a blade and plays with the fears that bring us closer together. The frame remains tightly focused on those characters and their tragic destinies, showing us a Princess Maleine who, "as long as she is on her quest for love, isn't afraid of death. Her fury may seem peaceful, but it's a form of absolute resistance."

PASCAL KIRSCH

After training as an actor at the Conservatoire de Tours, then at the Lucien Marchal's Ecole Parenthèses, Pascal Kirsch started performing under the direction of Marc François, notably in Maeterlinck's *The Blind* in 1994. He soon joined the other side of the stage, assisting directors like Bruno Bayen and Thierry Bedard, and well as Claude Régy. In 2001 he directed his first show, *Le Chant de la Meute (The Song of the Pack)*, based on texts by Büchner and Celan. In 2003, he founded, with Bénédicte Le Lamer in Le Mans, the company pEqUOd, which he directed until 2010. Pascal Kirsch then directed Naxos-Bobine, a cultural hotspot in Paris. Since 2014, he has been a member of the Collectif des quatre Chemins, a laboratory of artistic experimentation created by the Centre dramatique national La Commune, in Aubervilliers. In 2015, he directed Hans Henny Jahnn's dramatic poem *Armut, Reichtum, Mensch und Tier (Poverty, Wealth, Man, and Beast)*, a great story influenced by fairy tales. He has taught in schools such as that of the Théâtre national de Bretagne in Rennes, the Ensad in Montpellier, and the Ensad in Paris, directing the graduation show of the class of 2016.

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

A Flemish writer who wrote in French, Maurice Maeterlinck was born in Ghent in 1862. He first encountered success thanks to *Princess Maleine*, which was published in 1889 and directed by Lugné-Poe at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris. Lauded by Octave Mirbeau, that first play, based on *Maid Maleen*, a fairy tale by the brothers Grimm, was very rarely performed during the 20th century. It was followed by a series of more mysterious plays in which dark forces multiply and strengthen, among which *Intruder*, *Pelléas and Mélisande*, *Interior*, and *The Blind*, which made Maeterlinck a prominent figure in the Symbolist movement. He distinguished himself as a poet with works like *Serres chaudes* (Hothouses).

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INTERVIEW WITH PASCAL KIRSCH

Your first experience of Maeterlinck was as an actor in *The Blind*. Did that lead directly to your decision to direct *Princess Maleine*?

Pascal Kirsh: Working with Marc François was fundamental, as it introduced me to Maeterlinck and with him to a type of writing that proceeds by stacking layers one on top of the other. I'd been thinking of directing *Princess Maleine* for a while now. I also wanted there to be a continuity with Hans Henny Jahnn's *Armut, Reichtum, Mensch und Tier (Poverty, Wealth, Man, and Beast)* which I had just directed; it's a great story, a sort of staged novel, with a narrative part and elements of magical realism. Working on those situations, which start off as more or less realistic before taking a sharp turn into the dreamlike, made me feel that we had to keep working within that same field with the actors. Magical realism is a thread that runs throughout my work, not only in what it talks about but also in its relationship to form. Francis Bacon once said that photography had rid painting of its functional elements and that we could now focus on painting for painting's sake. Maybe the same is true about the relationship between cinema and theatre. At the theatre, you go through an inner journey, something very intimate, which also happens as part of a group. It implies narratives forms that are much freer, free at least from realism or naturalism, without falling into abstraction. I like narration, following a thread, the novelistic aspect of a story. I like it even more when it's full of magic, of developments that are, if not poetic, then at least dreamlike, when there is something of the unconscious, of the archaic, of the mythical.

Is that why you often come back to fairy tales, here with a play by Maeterlinck inspired by the brothers Grimm?

If, as René Girard said, fairy tales are degenerate myths, then I find fairy tales very interesting. A myth is born, grows, becomes so big that it can found even religions, then it grows smaller, its presence in society weakens, and then it becomes a fairy tale. What's even more interesting in *Princess Maleine* is that the fairy tale itself has eroded. Fairies and witches are no longer aware of their own nature; nor are the spirits who inhabit the forest, who become simple people again. The mythical basis of the story is there, but you have to go look for it. It's a reversal that I find particularly interesting nowadays. We're living through the same erosion of the myth, then of the fairy tale, in a sort of spiritual asceticism—in the negative sense of the word. Through those plays and stories, we can connect with our inner lives again. All that without being topical, which I always try not to be. What we do can help us understand what is going on around us and respond to what happens to us, but we need to develop those pockets of thought that are not the product of an immediate reaction, especially in contexts as violent as ours.

***Princess Maleine* is based on the fairy tale *Maid Maleen*. Hasn't the story also eroded in the very way it unfolds?**

The story of the fairy tale is only apparent in one part of *Princess Maleine*, which has the most narration of anything Maeterlinck ever wrote, far from the static

drama that came later. I like that it is his first play. His flair, his tempestuous and passionate personality will be more apparent in later works, but it will also quieten down. At the same time, as is the case in all his plays, the story folds upon itself: there are missing pieces and I'd like to open them up—without becoming too didactic—in order to follow every single step.

Why quote Hadewijch of Antwerp when she says “annihilation in love is the highest thing I know”?

That sentence is a reference to the Beguines, an extremely feminist movement that started in Flanders and spread throughout Europe, and in which Maeterlinck was very interested. That quote refers to something beautiful that reminds me a lot of Maleine. Some migratory birds aren't wired correctly and they aim straight for the North Pole just as others are leaving for warmer climates. That's Maleine's destiny. She is a startlingly strong person. As long as she's on her quest for love, she isn't afraid of death. Her fury may seem peaceful, but it's a form of absolute resistance. But when she's lying in bed after her betrothal, the idea of death becomes terrifying. I think it captures what makes us human perfectly: as long as we're working towards a clear goal, we can disregard our very needs, but once we have something, we're terrified of losing it, of dying. That quote from Hadewijch of Antwerp, who felt pleasure at the idea of suffering as a proof of her love, is a little extreme. But it isn't too far from the truth when it comes to Maleine. After a number of trials, she is able to find the prince again. And he's the exact opposite, he makes for a terrible prince. There is a comic side to Maeterlinck that I really hope to show. It's a very funny situation: in fairy tales, when the prince comes to the tower, it's to save the princess. Here, he wonders what the tower is, and continues on his way, missing it entirely. It's a game with the unconscious, this idea of “missing out.” You miss connecting with people, you miss out on your own life... With some distance, it becomes ridiculous, because it is so terrifying.

Does Maleine remain the hero of your show throughout, or does her family replace her?

The play follows several destinies. The prince, Maleine, the king, and Anne all go through a journey of love, as winding, unhealthy, murderous, or violent as it may be. So does the nanny. Anne's is fascinating because the bond that links her to Hjalmar is similar to that of Phaedra and Hippolytus. I don't see her as the witch, as the Machiavellian character she's often made out to be. And the prince sleepwalks through most of the play, only awakening at the end, when he realises what he's lost. Love—which I like to think about in the terms of Hadewijch of Antwerp, as it makes it much more unsettling—is felt by all the characters. The violent resolution, with the prince killing Anne then killing himself, is an explosion that was triggered much earlier. There's an erotic and sensual aspect to the play that is much more important than the verticality a strictly symbolic reading has long imposed. The only cliché about Maeterlinck I subscribe to is one that dates back to the late 19th century, the idea that strength comes from women.

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Interview conducted by Marion Canelas and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach