

**SISTER BEATRICE, AND
ARDIANE & BARBE
BLEUE, TWO PLAYS**

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Sister Beatrice, and Ardiane & Barbe Bleue, two plays by Maurice Maeterlinck & Bernard Miall

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MAURICE MAETERLINCK & BERNARD MIALL

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SISTER BEATRICE
AND
ARDIANE AND BARBE BLEUE

Sister Beatrice
and
Ardiane & Barbe Bleue

TWO PLAYS

*Translated into English Verse from the
Manuscript of*

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

By

BERNARD MIALL

New York
Dodd, Mead and Company
1918

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Translator's Preface

I

"THESE two little plays," says the author, "are really librettos. Music is being written to them by M. Gilkas." The French version is in unrhymed alexandrines, if the term be permissible; that is, in unrhymed lines of twelve syllables. It is of course possible to employ this metre in English verse, but it is a medium as yet too little polished by use to *refract*, without theft or distortion, its immanent sense; it is, so to speak, one of your material metres, more ready to present itself in body than in spirit, being still in a primitive stage of evolution, and waiting the master-hand which shall teach it an easy delivery and self-effacement.

Translator's Preface

In short, it is a metre neither so far familiar nor so far developed as to justify its use by a translator, whose duty is to interpret his author, in some remote degree, as his author might wish, rather than to experiment as himself might please.

For myself, I had no envy to attempt it, and so, with my author's approval, I have turned his play into such blank verse as I might; holding, with him, that our English unrhymed verse of ten syllables, iambic in scheme, — trochaic, dactylic, anapæstic, catalectic, and what not by incident, — is an equivalent sufficiently near, and perhaps the most proper, of the French unrhymed verse of twelve syllables. But I do not pretend that the author's mood may not be betrayed by the staccato effect of the shorter line. To the French alexandrine, of all metres, is possible at times a "linked sweetness long drawn out," which by a shorter metre, or, indeed, by any metre consisting, as ours, very largely of accent, is rarely attainable.

Translator's Preface

Readers may miss in "Sister Beatrice" what they are used to call the glamour, the atmosphere, of the Maeterlinckian drama. They will miss it partly, no doubt, because I have translated it; but partly also because it is partly absent in the French; they may, perhaps, find more of it in the music, if they have the fortune to hear it. But the play unsung, unstaged, — it is, as I have said, a libretto — is the play of M. Maeterlinck's which most nearly approaches, in the matter of treatment, the avowedly obvious spirit of the English drama. That the story is all spiritual, or rather, that the spiritual in the play has a story, is no doubt the reason why the treatment may be material and articulate.

Other plays of this author might be described — he himself, I think, might so describe them — as belonging to static or potential drama: the plays were the dramas of a state of feeling. Here, I think, we have for the first time in M. Maeterlinck's theatre the treatment of a legend already crystallised: a legend in Eng-

Translator's Preface

land familiar to readers of Mr. John Davidson's poetry in "The Ballad of a Nun." It has also been treated by Miss Adelaide Anne Procter, and a singularly charming translation of the original Dutch version — for in Dutch we find it first told and first printed — may be found in the first volume of a publication called the "Pageant," issued some years ago. This version was translated by Mr. Laurence Housman and Mr. J. Simons; whether it be the oldest or the original version I am unable to say.

This to explain why "Sister Beatrice" is not most obviously by M. Maeterlinck, and by no one else.

LIDO, VENICE,
May 10, 1900.

Translator's Preface

II

IN translating "Ardiane and Barbe Bleue," which, like "Sister Beatrice," was written as a libretto, I have again used the ordinary "blank verse" line to represent the unrhymed French line of twelve syllables. But in the original text of this drama there are many passages in *vers libre*, both rhymed and otherwise. To make irregular metres readable in English requires no less than inspiration, and if inspiration is not always at the service of the poet it is still less often at the beck of the translator. In such passages I have therefore preserved, so far as possible, the original measures, but have in all cases, or nearly all, retained or added rhyme.

It was not easy to decide whether I should call our familiar hero-villain Bluebeard or Barbe Bleue. As children we connect him with Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves; but if he be anything less than universal he would appear to be French. Some would relegate him merely to