DOMINANT THEMES IN REPRESENTATIVE ESSAYS
OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

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Menchaca, Cheryl L., Dominant Themes in Representative Essays of Maurice Maeterlinck. Master of Arts (French), August, 1972, 100 pp., bibliography, 35 titles.

The problem with which this study is concerned is that of citing the themes which occur most often in the essays of Maurice Maeterlinck, and of tracing the development of these themes in selected representative essays. Since no detailed study of the essays has appeared since the time of Maeterlinck's death, the major sources of information are the essays themselves.

This study has been arranged chronologically rather than thematically. The essays are divided into four groups: the early essays, the nature studies, the metaphysical ones, and the Pascalian series. The essays chosen to represent each group are treated in the order of their dates of publication. In this way, the themes are discussed in relation to each essay, and changes in Maeterlinck's attitudes from early to later essays may be seen. In the interest of clarity, the themes are treated separately according to type in the final chapter.

In the introductory chapter a general biographical sketch of Maeterlinck is given, since he is not a widely-known author. The essays are then discussed, and the most important themes of each one are pointed out.
In the early essays (Le Trésor des humbles and La Sagesse et la Destinée) the main themes relate to the interior life and the importance of the soul. Maeterlinck's early pessimism is evident in Le Trésor, but he begins to show a slight change toward optimism in the second volume of the group. The third chapter involves two essays in which Maeterlinck analyzes and describes certain phenomena of nature. These are La Vie des abeilles and La Vie des termites. He uses the essays as a vehicle for expressing his ideas on the defects in human society. La Vie des termites, having been written several years later than La Vie des abeilles, shows the bleak pessimism of Maeterlinck's later works.

The third group of essays includes those which are philosophical in nature. The group includes Le Temple enseveli, Le Double Jardin, L'Intelligence des fleurs, La Mort, L'Hôte inconnu, Les Sentiers dans la montagne, and Le Grand Secret. Major themes such as the importance of the inner reality, death, man's obligations to society, and Maeterlinck's search for the nature of God are discussed at length. Because the essays were written over a rather long period of time, a development in Maeterlinck's attitudes can be seen. In the first three essays, he becomes optimistic, but with La Mort he begins to return to his early pessimism.

This pessimism becomes deeper in the last group of essays. These have been called the "Pascalian series." Two titles
(Avant le grand silence and Le Sablier) have been chosen for discussion. These essays show the despair of Maeterlinck's last years in the negative attitude which he shows toward man's fate. The concluding chapter traces the development and changes in Maeterlinck's ideas through all the essays. The significance of the essays seems to lie in the relentless search of the author for the meaning of life.
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OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas
August, 1972
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) wrote twenty-four volumes of essays which appeared between 1896 and 1942. These volumes span a period of forty-six years. Some of them are dedicated to one single subject, and different aspects of that topic are treated in the individual chapters. Others are collections of shorter essays, the first of which in each case gives the volume its title. Because of the long period of time which they cover, as well as the tremendous range in subject matter, they form the vastest ensemble of the essay genre ever written in Belgium.¹ The essays give an overview of an entire generation, of the events which occurred, and of the concerns of the thinking people of that time. They also reveal the attitudes and preoccupations of Maeterlinck himself. Maeterlinck is better known for his poetry and drama, but the essays were important to him as a writer.

...C'est à leur construction que l'auteur a travaillé jusqu'à son dernier souffle; c'est vers eux qu'il s'est dirigé, comme vers une Terre promise; c'est vers eux qu'il est revenu à chaque méditation, à chaque bonheur, à chaque orage.²

¹Alex Pasquier, Maurice Maeterlinck (Bruxelles, 1963), p. 130.
²Ibid., p. 139.
Although Maeterlinck treated serious, metaphysical subjects, he did not set out to write philosophical treatises; thus, while most of the essays deal with philosophical problems, they are scrutinized en passant, in "the grand voyage of his developing thought." He did not develop a metaphysical system of his own. The greatness of his essays is due to the fact that he spoke to the public of his time about timely questions of their period.

It is important to have a conception of the life of Maurice Maeterlinck, because the events in his life are linked inseparably to his changing thought. Since Maeterlinck is not a widely-known author, a brief biography seems appropriate before beginning the study.

As a boy in Ghent, he attended the Jesuit College of Saint-Barbe, and the stern warnings of the tortures of hell given by the priests at the school began his great preoccupation with death. He attended law school, but after he failed in his law practice, he went to Paris. There he drifted into the literary circle headed by Villiers de l'Isle Adam. This group consisted of young poets who were the

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4Pasquier, p. 142.


early members of the Symbolist school. They published a short-lived review called *La Pléiade*, in which Maeterlinck's first literary effort was published. His career as a writer was hindered because of the objections of his family, but in 1886 he made a final break and devoted himself entirely to literature. This first period of his career, in which he wrote his early Symbolist plays and his poetry, was shadowed by the pessimistic idea of man's struggle with the hostile forces of fate. In 1889 his only volume of poetry, *Serres chaudes*, was published. In the same year his first play, *La Princesse Maleine*, appeared and was an immediate success. During the period between 1890 and 1895, other Symbolist plays were written. These included *L'Intruse* (1891), *Les Aveugles* (1891), *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893), and *Intérieur* (1894). These early plays were well received by the Symbolists of his time. Maeterlinck's originality was a result of "... the new twist he gave to the age-old belief that men are puppets of Fate, manipulated in a context of unfathomable mystery." He created a Symbolist tragedy which expressed the terrifying mystery of life by stripping away external considerations from his characters.

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7Ibid., p. 83.  
8Thomas, p. 5.  
As has been stated, Maeterlinck's plays earned for him a place in literary history, but he preferred metaphysical discussion. In 1896 he published his first volume of essays, *Le Trésor des humbles*, and for many years he interspersed his writing of plays with that of philosophical essays. In that same year he met the actress Georgette Leblanc, who was to share his life for the next twenty years. This meeting began a trend toward optimism in his works which was first shown in the play *Aglavaine et Sélysette* (1896). Such optimism was also evident in another volume of essays, *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (1898). The optimistic tone continued until approximately 1910, and this period was a very productive one for Maeterlinck. He published several volumes of essays, including *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), *Le Temple enseveli* (1902), *Le Double Jardin* (1904), and *L'Intelligence des fleurs* (1907). He also continued writing plays, and those of this period were mature, allegorical works. These included *Soeur Béatrice* (1901), *Monna Vanna* (1902), *Joyzelle* (1903), and his most famous play, *L'Oiseau bleu* (1909).

The period after 1910 has been called the beginning of the decline in Maeterlinck's life. In 1911 he was awarded the Nobel Prize, but the works written after that time added little to his literary reputation. His relationship

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11 *Hall*, p. ix.
with Georgette Leblanc had deteriorated, and he slipped back into the pessimism of his early plays. In 1913 he published *La Mort*, an essay which reflects the beginning of this pessimistic outlook. The coming of World War I served to deepen his pessimism, and during the years 1916-1935 he wrote a series of bleak, rather uninspired essays. These include *Les Débris de la guerre* (1916), *L'Hôte inconnu* (1917), *Les Sentiers dans la montagne* (1919), *Le Grand Secret* (1921), *La Vie des termites* (1927), *La Vie de l'espace* (1928), *La Grande fée* (1929), *L'Araignée de verre* (1932), and *La Grande Loi* (1933). He married Renée Dahon in 1920, but his bleak outlook continued. The culmination of this period of decline occurred between 1934 and 1942, when the Pascalian series of essays was written. This group of essays shows the utter pessimism of Maeterlinck's last years. During these years he published several plays, but they lacked the creative power of his earlier ones. In 1948 he published his memoirs, a volume called *Bulles bleues*, and he died in 1949.

At the time of Maeterlinck's death, no up-to-date study of his life and works existed. Since that time, only three major works of criticism have appeared, as of

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13 Ibid., p. 95.
14 Ibid., p. 155.
15 Ibid., p. x.
this writing. The lack of critical study may be attributed to the fact that he was largely forgotten by the public and by critics after his period of greatness which ended around the time of World War I.\textsuperscript{16} The three works include a study by Robert Beachboard of Maeterlinck's drama as it was received in the United States, a study by Gabriel Compeyre of the plays of Maeterlinck, and a general résumé of his life and works by Alex Pasquier.

It is evident, then, that there has been no critical work devoted exclusively to the analysis of Maeterlinck's essays since his death. The studies and articles which appeared early in his career lacked the perspective needed for an accurate review of the essays as a whole. The Pasquier study analyzes them according to the general nature of Maeterlinck's philosophy, but they are not treated individually. Since these essays include a huge volume of writing done by "... le plus grand écrivain belge de langue française qui ait paru de notre temps,"\textsuperscript{17} a study of them seems to be needed to complete the critical material available on Maeterlinck.

A complete study would be beyond the scope of this work; accordingly, the essays will be examined solely from a thematic point of view, and style, as well as other

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17}Lanson and Tuffrau, p. 745.
considerations, will not be discussed. The purpose of the study is to cite the themes which occur most often in the essays, and to trace the development of these themes throughout the major ones. In identifying the themes, an order will be established from the diverse, seemingly unrelated groups of ideas. Pasquier says that a division of the essays into six groups can be justified, according to the changes in Maeterlinck's thoughts and ideas. Pasquier's divisions are thus largely chronological as well as topical. His six types are as follows: the early essays, those inspired by the natural sciences, the philosophical ones, the psychological ones, those which discuss Einstein's theory of the fourth dimension, and the last ones. For the purpose of limiting the discussion to major essays which are representative of each period in Maeterlinck's life, the groups have been slightly modified. The philosophical and psychological essays have been combined into a group called metaphysical. Those treating Einstein's theory have been omitted, since they discuss a topic of which Maeterlinck knew and understood very little. Thus, as stated above, the major themes will be traced through essays chosen to represent the four groups, and the development of Maeterlinck's thought will be shown. In demonstrating this.

18 Pasquier, p. 32.
19 Ibid.
development, it is hoped that the reader will have a clear idea of Maeterlinck's beliefs and attitudes. In short, the approach will be chronological rather than thematic. The essays will be discussed in groups which are arranged in chronological order. In the interest of clarity, the themes will be treated separately, according to type, in the final chapter. The reader may find it helpful to refer to the appendix listing the essays included at the end of the study.
CHAPTER II

EARLY ESSAYS

Le Trésor des humbles and La Sagesse et la Destinée make up the first group of Maeterlinck's essays. Le Trésor contains several short ones on different subjects, such as "Le Silence," "La Bonté invisible," and "La Vie profonde." La Sagesse is one long essay which occupies the entire volume.

Le Trésor des Humbles

The main theme of Le Trésor des humbles is Maeterlinck's faith in an interior reality which is more real than the physical world. He believed that what is most important is not external fact, but the world other than the one perceived by the senses. Maeterlinck says that what one knows is not interesting, but that the interesting things are those which one can only divine. This essay is permeated by a feeling of mystery, and such mystery exists in human beings. The idea of the enigma surrounding the existence of man leads Maeterlinck to examine the soul, since it is the opposite of the physical reality of the body.

1Alex Pasquier, Maurice Maeterlinck (Bruxelles, 1963), p. 75.

Maeterlinck calls the interior reality in man the life of the soul, or "... la troisième vie." All certainty is to be found in this region, in the sense that the essence of life is found here. Maeterlinck discusses the soul and his concept of its nature in several of the short individual essays which make up the volume. In an essay called "Le Silence," for example, he brings out his theory that the souls of people speak only in silence. He says that thought, which is the expression of this interior life, works only in silence, and that speaking destroys thought. Real communication between two people occurs only when their souls speak, and this communication happens only in moments of silence. The real essence of man's being is perceived in silence.

Les lèvres ou la langue peuvent représenter l'âme de la même manière qu'un chiffre ou un numéro d'ordre représente une peinture, par exemple, mais dès que nous avons vraiment quelque chose à nous dire, nous sommes obligés de nous taire...

The first real silence between two people will usually determine how their souls blend. This blending of souls

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5Maeterlinck, Le Trésor, p. 15.
6Ibid., p. 10.
7Ibid.
8Ibid.
9Ibid., p. 17.
through a silence of real understanding is part of his concept of the nature of love.\textsuperscript{10} The idea of the soul speaking only in silence, and thus of the irrelevance of speech, is a good example of the basic theme of the volume, which is that the physical reality is unimportant when compared with the interior reality.

Maeterlinck discusses the communication of souls in greater detail in another of the short essays in \textit{Le Trésor}, "Le Réveil de l'âme." He believed that in the early twentieth century, when he was writing these first essays, the time had finally arrived when the souls of men were rising to the surface, and men were beginning to communicate without the intermediary of the senses.\textsuperscript{11} He describes the soul at that time as "... comme un dormeur qui, du fond de ses songes, fait d'immenses efforts pour remuer un bras ou soulever une paupière."\textsuperscript{12}

Maeterlinck, therefore, views the soul as the important side of man's existence. The body is seen as a sort of hindrance to what is real and exciting about life. He says, for example, that the sins of the body are insignificant and do not affect the soul.\textsuperscript{13} All goodness is contained in the soul and every soul contains goodness.\textsuperscript{14} This internal basis for morality is an important part of his ethic.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 23.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 27.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 167.
In discussing the communication of souls, Maeterlinck expresses the idea, which is certainly not an original one, that the word soul is a collective noun, and in several essays he discusses the linking of souls. The idea of the souls of all men being connected by some mysterious bond is important in his later discussions of the universal consciousness and the reincarnation of individuals from a universal pool of souls. The invisible bonds between souls are indefinable, but very strong. The most important link is beauty, "... qui est le seul langage de nos âmes. ..."15

The soul recognizes beauty in others and gravitates toward it. Maeterlinck expresses the idea in this way: "Il n'y a rien au monde qui soit plus avide de beauté, il n'y a rien au monde qui s'embellisse plus aisément qu'une âme."16 He says also that all men recognize beauty in their souls and admire it.17 In this way, the actions of each person are important, because no one is alone, and one's actions may influence anyone.18 This type of relationship between men is the basis for later essays on man's obligations as a member of society. Maeterlinck believed that the soul has infinite power to strengthen and sustain others, depending upon how much beauty it contains.19

15Ibid., p. 204.  
16Ibid., p. 201.  
17Ibid., p. 204.  
19Ibid., p. 209.
Maeterlinck views love in these early essays as the strongest way that souls can be linked. He calls love simply a meeting of souls. Love is the best way to a beautiful soul, because love itself is made up of such noble, unselfish elements. "N'est-ce pas dans l'amour que se trouvent les plus purs éléments de beauté que nous puissions offrir à l'âme?" This concept of love is very idealized and abstract, and Maeterlinck does not mention the physical aspects, since he considers that part of life unimportant and, for the most part, a hindrance to the soul's functions. He says that true love occurs when two people can be silent together, and their souls are truly communicating.

A very important and recurring theme throughout all of Maeterlinck's series of essays is his concept of God, which changes as he grows older and closer to death. It was stated that his early training was in a Catholic home and in Jesuit schools, but he renounced organized religion during his young manhood. However, his religious upbringing left its mark on his thought. He realized a need for a god, but since he had abandoned the religion of the church, he felt compelled to search for God in his own way. His search for God haunted him all his life. He does not always use

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20 Ibib., p. 17.  
21 Ibib., pp. 215-216.  
22 Ibib., p. 20.  
23 Halls, pp. 5-8.  
24 Ibib., p. 43.
the word God, but even if he calls it "la première cause" or "l'infini," it is God that he seeks to understand. God is, for Maeterlinck, simply the unknown. He needed a god, but he could not accept the teachings of religious faith. He has been described as "... une âme profondément religieuse, dont le malheur était d'être privée de foi." In Le Trésor, he shows that he wants very much to live in the realm of religious belief, but he cannot. He sees that one must believe in something higher that orders the world, but he lacks the confidence in the God of religion that he needs. Maeterlinck shows that he longs for his lost faith, or a substitution for it, when he says in his essay "Sur les femmes" that he admires women because they, more than men, are able to have confidence in what they do not understand. He believed that each man must seek to communicate with the infinite, whatever it is, in order to have a higher, more spiritual life than the daily existence.

"Il faut vivre à l'affût de son Dieu, car Dieu se cache; mais ses ruses, une fois qu'on les a reconnues, semblent si

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26 Maeterlinck, Le Trésor, p. 197.
27 Pasquier, p. 48.
28 Doneux, p. 95.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Maeterlinck, Le Trésor, p. 69.
souriantes et si simples!" The smallest daily event can reveal God's presence, and not one day is trivial, since everything can give clues to God's existence and purpose.

A significant theme in Le Trésor is that of fate or destiny. In this volume, Maeterlinck views fate as the ruling force in men's lives. This idea of fate is connected with the mystery which he sees around everything in life, because the concept of fate involves an unexplained, remote force which rules man's every action. His early attitude toward fate is rather pessimistic. As Doneux says, "Le destin: c'est le malheur." The unknown force is bad, but man's fate is lightened somewhat by his own inner resources. This idea, as has been shown, relates to the interior reality which is the most important element in Maeterlinck's early philosophy. "Il est peut-être vrai que notre âme, à mesure qu'elle s'élève, purifie le destin . . . ", he says at one point. A predestination of man's actions does exist, then, but can be altered. Man may recreate the outward circumstances of his life by looking inward and finding the good in his soul. Therefore, he sees fate as a combination

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32Ibid., p. 192.  
33Ibid., p. 193.  
35Doneux, p. 46.  
37Taylor, p. 141.
of external events which are bound to happen and the instincts of the soul, which can alter the outcome if not change the event itself. Man cannot change fate, but he can soften the blows it deals him by the attitude of his soul toward the events. The idea that man can influence the way in which fate affects him personally is an optimistic note, but the basic premise that what fate decrees is always bad does not change. Maeterlinck says that "la misère est une maladie de l'humanité comme la maladie est une misère de l'homme. . . . Le malheur est sorti de l'enfance depuis des centaines de siècles. . . . Le bonheur dort encore dans les langues." Fate is a true prison of life, and Maeterlinck says that man can never escape its decrees. "La destinée ferme parfois les yeux, mais elle sait bien que nous lui reviendrons le soir, et que c'est elle qui doit avoir le dernier mot." The concluding theme in Le Trésor is death. Fate is closely connected in Maeterlinck's thought with the problem of death, as the latter is seen as the ultimate dictate of fate. Death was a real preoccupation for Maeterlinck. He first began to think about it during his early religious

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38 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 65.
training with its horrible pictures of the Christian hell, as has been stated earlier.\textsuperscript{41} "For Maeterlinck it is no exaggeration to say that his schooldays impressed themselves upon his writing in two ways: the one, a haunting preoccupation with death; the other, the no less haunting search for God."\textsuperscript{42} Later he was deeply influenced by the drowning of his younger brother Oscar, and he saw death as another facet of the predestination of the events of life.\textsuperscript{43} He calls death the "... guide de notre vie,"\textsuperscript{44} and says that life has no ultimate goal except death, according to the inexorable laws of fate.

\textit{La Sagesse et la Destinée}

Maeterlinck's second volume of essays, \textit{La Sagesse et la Destinée}, is composed of only one long essay, instead of several shorter ones as in \textit{Le Trésor}. Therefore, it does not contain as many different themes. Its main one is indicated in its title, and this theme is another treatment of the dominant one of fate seen in the earlier volume. Briefly, this volume brings forth the idea that wisdom, which he tries to define in the first section of the essay, can conquer fate. "... or at least protect the soul against its blows."\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41}Halls, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 28.
\item \textsuperscript{44}Maeterlinck, \textit{Le Trésor}, p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{45}Halls, p. 62.
\end{itemize}
This attitude is more optimistic than that of Le Trésor, because the overall conclusion in that volume, as was stated, was that fate is misery and can only be slightly deflected by one's attitude toward it.

In defining sagesse, Maeterlinck is very vague, a characteristic that is not surprising in view of the general nature of such a term. He does say that wisdom is not merely reason, but goes beyond that. Wisdom is equated throughout the essay with love and is a sort of self-knowledge which leads to understanding for all men. Wisdom is a good, powerful force in man only when it leads to this general love for mankind, and only wisdom that is human and feeds on people is good. Thus, he seems to use the terms wisdom, love, and even goodness as one, and these comprise the beautiful qualities of the soul. This wisdom has a much happier tone than the beauty of soul described in the first essay, because it brings inner happiness and great satisfaction.

Happiness, then, is a part of the wisdom which can overcome fate. It is an inward happiness and has nothing to do with success, since Maeterlinck passes over the

48 Ibid., pp. x-xi.
49 Ibid., p. xi.
physical aspects of life. Happiness comes with inner love
for people and goodness, and the three qualities (happiness,
love, and goodness) intertwine and reward each other. Happiness involves a certain attitude toward life, and this
attitude is a glad acceptance of what may come. He says,
in direct contrast to the ideas in Le Trésor, that all works
out for the best according to a reason higher than man's.
"Ce qui aura lieu sera le bonheur."\(^{51}\)

Maeterlinck discusses love in this essay, but in a very
general sense. As has been mentioned, he had just begun
what was to be the greatest love affair of his life, with
the actress Georgette Leblanc, and so new love inspired, at
least partly, the optimism in the essay.\(^{52}\) As has been stat-
ed, love and wisdom are the same thing in the essay, and the
truly wise man is one who has a deep love for mankind.

Also, general love (or wisdom) has a great influence
on destiny. "Il est vrai que la présence du sage paralyse
le destin..."\(^{53}\) The soul of man can rise above the
events that fate sends. He says that what happens to men
is molded into the shape that they choose.\(^{54}\) One cannot

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. xii.


\(^{52}\) Halls, p. 62.

\(^{53}\) Maeterlinck, Le Sagesse, p. 34.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 111.
avoid these external events, but one can control what these events become in one's own life. Since he believed that the soul is the only important reality in man, it follows that if one does not let one's soul be influenced by what happens, the event never really happened at all. External events, therefore, are very unimportant. He describes the influence that one can have on these events sent by fate in the following metaphor:

L'événement en soi, c'est l'eau pure que nous verse la fortune, et il n'a d'ordinaire par lui-même ni saveur, ni couleur, ni parfum. Il devient beau ou triste, doux ou amer, mortel ou vivifiant, selon la qualité de l'âme qui le recueille.

For example, adventures happen to people every day which contain a bit of heroism, but most persons do not take advantage of them. Maeterlinck cites Jesus Christ's meeting with the Samaritan as an example of a person who seized an event and made it significant. If a person has such inner wisdom, he can overcome anything that does not kill the body; and there is no inner fatality, but only external disaster.

This volume of essays, according to Maeterlinck's changed attitude toward fate and what man can do to influence its dictates, indicates a definite move toward an optimistic outlook on life. Maeterlinck says, "Il n'y a rien de déplacé à

56Ibid., p. 27.  
57Ibid., pp. 24-25.  
58Ibid., p. 25.  
59Ibid., p. 36.
s'adresser à elle [l'humanité] comme si elle se trouvait toujours à la veille d'un grand bonheur ou d'une grande certitude." He seems to believe that man was meant to be happy rather than to struggle in vain, as his attitude in the first essay indicates.

Maeterlinck continues his search for God in La Sagesse. Again, he does not succeed in finding a satisfactory answer to the question of what the nature of this creative force may be, but he now sees God as a part of that inner beauty in man. He says that God, whoever or whatever He is, must be "... aussi haut que l'idée la plus haute qu'il a mise dans l'âme des meilleurs d'entre nous. ..." He views the human soul as the seat of something vast and mysterious which, if it is not God Himself, then it is certainly a clear manifestation of Him.

In both of these first two essays the main themes relate to aspects of the interior life, and to Maeterlinck's conception of it. Existence is described as being molded by an exterior power known as fate, but existence can be recreated by the force of the soul, which is this interior life. In Le Trésor Maeterlinck describes the soul as being more real

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60 Ibid., p. 6.
61 Ibid.
than the physical world, and he concludes that fate is an evil force which can be only slightly altered by the power of the soul. The attitude toward fate is considerably more optimistic in *La Sagesse*, in which Maeterlinck affirms that the soul can, after all, change the course of destiny in a person's life. These two volumes treat several of the same themes, and a change in some of Maeterlinck's attitudes is clearly seen in the different treatments of the themes. In general, the development from a rather pessimistic to an optimistic point of view can be traced through them. Some of these themes will next be examined in several essays dealing with the natural sciences.
Maeterlinck wrote several essays dealing with different phenomena of nature. He analyses and describes these facets of nature very carefully, and relates them to aspects of human existence. Two of these studies will be discussed in this chapter: *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), whose subject is the habits of bees; and *La Vie des termites* (1927), a later volume which treats termites.

*La Vie des Abeilles*

*La Vie des abeilles* is the result of an interest Maeterlinck had in beekeeping since boyhood. He did his field-work on his country estate at Gruchet, and even when he lived in Paris, he set up a glass observation hive in his study and placed saucers filled with honey on his desk to attract bees.¹ He did not, however, set out to write a scientific study about bees.² He said in the introduction to the essay, "Je n'ai pas l'intention d'écrire un traité d'apiculture ou de l'élevage des abeilles... Je ne dirai presque rien..."

¹Halls, p. 69.

qui ne soit connu de tous ceux qui ont quelque peu pratiqué les abeilles.”

The essay is not intended to impart exact knowledge concerning the bee, but instead he uses information about a phenomenon of nature to explain the phenomenon of man. The essay is more than a scientific study which traces the life of the honeybee through the seasons of the year; it is also a skillful comparison of man and the bee. The hive is merely a tool used in expressing his ideas about the society of man.

The main theme in *La Vie des abeilles* is the comparison of the societies of man and the bee. In discussing society, Maeterlinck begins with the premise that the bee, like man, is a social creature. He calls the bee "un être de foule," and says that bees cannot live alone. The bee may leave the hive to gather pollen from flowers, but it must come back to the hive very soon. "Isolée, pourvue de vivres abondants et dans la température la plus favorable, elle expire au bout de quelques jours, non de faim ou de froid, mais de solitude." He then implies that man is also essentially a social being, and that one of man’s greatest problems is that

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4 Moses, p. 307.

5 Halls, p. 69.

6 Maeterlinck, *Vie des abeilles*, p. 22.

7 Ibid.
he attempts to show individuality and thus is constantly clashing with his natural social inclination. 8

The importance of the society to the species is discussed at length in the essay. The bee is shown as being "... the epitome of unselfishness and social solidarity." 9 Maeterlinck's theory that the ideal way of life is socialistic is evident in this idea of the supreme importance of the social whole. The law of the hive dictates that the individual is of no importance, and that he is merely an organ of the society. 10 The bee's entire life is a sacrifice to the whole of which it is a tiny part. W. D. Halls describes the society of the apiary in this way: "In the human sphere is there any polity so faithfully reflecting the general will, any democracy whose independence harmonizes so perfectly with the renunciation of individual rights?" 11 The bee as an individual is totally merged into the society, and each has his own particular task to perform for the benefit of that society. 12 Such perfect division of labor is another aspect of the socialistic point of view. Maeterlinck believed that the bees have mastered communal work beautifully, but that man is too individualistic to allow the division to function

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8 Halls, p. 69.  
9 Ibid.  
10 Maeterlinck, Vie des abeilles, p. 23.  
11 Halls, p. 69.  
12 Maeterlinck, Vie des abeilles, p. 22.
properly.\textsuperscript{13} Probably the best example of the sacrifice of the bee to the group is shown in the yearly swarm, when most of the bees leave the hive for which they have labored all year to make room in the hive for a future generation.\textsuperscript{14} Maeterlinck calls the swarm a "... renonciation héroïque ..."\textsuperscript{15} and expresses doubt about man's ability to show a similar love for his species. Man's obligations to his society are based on the linking of souls discussed earlier, and Maeterlinck does not believe that man fulfills these duties.

In Maeterlinck's essay, man as a whole does not seem to have the great direction and unity of purpose of the bee.\textsuperscript{16} The life of man is aimless in comparison to that of the bee, whose only goal is the survival of the race. Maeterlinck even comments that the societies of man have no logic behind them, since the tasks and rewards are distributed so inequitably.\textsuperscript{17} Workers in man's society appear to be punished by wretched poverty, while the idle and useless members of society are wealthy.\textsuperscript{18} Maeterlinck thus questions the human race and asks how it has been able to survive with this unfair structure.\textsuperscript{19} He attributes many of man's problems to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13}Malls, p. 69.  
\textsuperscript{14}Maeterlinck, \textit{Vie des abeilles}, p. 30.  
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 39.  
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 40.  
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.}
this unequal distribution of tasks and goods and points out that the bee has overcome these problems by blotting out the will of the individual.\textsuperscript{20} Since all are united toward one goal, each bee performs the task for which nature has suited it, and each one is completely devoted to its task.

Maeterlinck's idea of the importance of the species as a whole goes still further. He states that the aim of nature is to improve the race, and that this aim is accomplished at the cost of the liberty and perhaps even the happiness of the individual.\textsuperscript{21} He says, "A mesure que la société s'organise et s'élève, la vie particulière de chacun de ses membres voit décroître son cercle."\textsuperscript{22} Progress can be made only by the sacrifice of the individual to the general interest.\textsuperscript{23} In so doing, the bees ignore their own desires for the good of the race of the future.\textsuperscript{24} Not only does the bee sacrifice itself to its own society, but also to that of the future. He says that bees regard the future of their race much more seriously than does man.\textsuperscript{25} A good example of this devotion to the future is the way in which each bee reveres the queen of the hive, simply because she represents the future of the group.\textsuperscript{26} In comparison to man, Maeterlinck says, "Elles aiment en avant d'elles et nous aimons autour de nous."\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 23-24.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 65.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 66.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 91.
\end{itemize}
In summary, the society of the bee seems more admirable than that of man. Maeterlinck does not, however, condemn man's society. He seems merely to suggest that his society could be perfected if man would behave in a way that is in harmony with nature instead of in conflict with it. It can be seen that this attitude does not represent a total condemnation of society, but rather a suggestion as to how it could be improved.

The theme of love is treated in La Vie des abeilles in a way similar to that of the essays studied earlier. The concept of love is related again to the nonphysical. Even among the bees, Maeterlinck views the physical uniting of male and female as a spiritual, emotional union, which is equated with the human feeling of love. When the queen leaves the hive to seek her mate, the mating is described in a very lofty, idealized way by Maeterlinck. He calls this union the high point in the life of the hive, and love is thus a very positive, all-important factor in the life of the bee.

The process of mating is described in this way:

Chaque jour, de onze heures à trois heures, quand la lumière est dans tout son éclat, et surtout lorsque midi déploie jusqu'aux confins du ciel ses grandes ailes bleues pour attiser les flammes du soleil, leur horde empanachée se précipite à la recherche de l'épouse plus royale et plus inespérée qu'en aucune légende de princesse inaccessible . . . parmi ces mille, un seul

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28 Ibid., p. 170.
29 Ibid.
sera choisi, pour un baiser unique d'une seule minute qui le mariera à la mort en même temps qu'au bonheur. 

Because she represents love and thus future generations in the colony, the queen is the ruler of the city. The bees do not, however, revere her person, but the destiny that she represents. Furthermore, Maeterlinck shows his positive attitude toward love when he says, "Mais toujours la nature est magnifique quand il s'agit des fonctions et des privilèges de l'amour." 

It was stated earlier in this study that Maeterlinck placed the interior life above the physical exterior. A manifestation of his theory of the importance of the inner being is his preoccupation with the question of intelligence versus instinct. He devotes many pages to proving that bees, as well as people, possess a degree of intelligence, and that their actions are not merely the result of instinct. He is interested in the inner motivations of the actions of bees. He gives two outstanding examples to show that bees do possess intelligence. The first is the bees' means of intercommunication, which he states positively is the result of their intellect. There can be no doubt that they do communicate, and since their communications sometimes seem to

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30 Ibid., p. 166.  
31 Ibid., p. 63.  
32 Ibid.  
33 Ibid., p. 167.  
34 Ibid., p. 159.  
be rather complex, he says that some power of intelligence is required.\footnote{Ibid.} His second example is the perfectly hexagonal shape of each cell in the hive. He did not believe that this shape results from mechanical necessity, but that the bee sees the advantage of the shape and builds the cells in this way for a definite reason.\footnote{Ibid., p. 101.}

Maeterlinck carries the theory of the intellect of lower beings even further. He says that even the amoeba and the flower possess intelligence.\footnote{Ibid., p. 159.} The flowers use bees for the purpose of cross-fertilization, which they need for their species to survive, and this comes from a kind of intellect.\footnote{Ibid.} Phenomena such as these are not accidents, but are acts of intelligence.

Maeterlinck finds great importance in the theory that lower creatures do have intelligence. It is important because the bees must then contain at least an atom of the matter which organizes intelligent life, and man also contains this matter.\footnote{Ibid., p. 102.} It is vital to understand that since man is not the only being endowed with an intellect on this earth, there is "... toute une catégorie d'êtres, où elle [la nature] atteint un but à peu près identique."\footnote{Ibid., p. 117.} Man
can thus see his own destiny in miniature in the hive, since
the hive contains all the elements that man's society does.

Another theme that reappears in *La Vie des abeilles* is
that of the nature of God. God, fate, and nature are dif-
f erent names applied to the same mysterious force. Instead
of being different forces, as in previous essays, God and
fate are combined in *La Vie*. This mysterious ruling force
is called "l'esprit de la ruche."\(^4_2\) The force regulates
everything concerning the hive, and as Maeterlinck says,
"Il dispose impitoyablement ... des richesses, du bonheur,
de la liberté, de la vie de tout un peuple ailé."\(^4_3\) From
the above quotation it is evident that the spirit is a form
of fatality, an example of which is the yearly swarm men-
tioned previously. According to Maeterlinck, "l'esprit de
la ruche" sets the hour and the day for the great sacrifice,
and the hive is scattered in obedience to such law, which
is superior to the happiness of the members.\(^4_4\) Even the
queen, who is the sovereign of the hive, obeys the myster-
rious laws of this spirit.\(^4_5\)

Maeterlinck is greatly puzzled by the question of the
origin of this spirit.

Ici donc, comme partout en ce monde ... c'est du dehors, d'une puissance inconnue que vient l'ordre suprême,

\(^4_2\)Ibid., p. 26.  \(^4_3\)Ibid., p. 27.

\(^4_4\)Ibid., pp. 28-29.

\(^4_5\)Ibid., p. 26.
et les abeilles se soumettent comme nous au maître anonyme de la roue qui tourne sur elle-même en écrasant les volontés qui la font mouvoir.\textsuperscript{46}

The question raised here refers not only to the origin of the spirit of the beehive, but to the law or fate that governs man. At this time in his life, Maeterlinck believed that the best theory was that such a force could be found within the soul. He says that "l'esprit de la ruche" is found within the bee, as God can be found within the soul of man.\textsuperscript{47} The idea that God is located in the inner being is carried through from an earlier essay. Thus, man's brain is an atom of the "substance mystérieuse qui asservit et organise la matière. . . ."\textsuperscript{48}

Maeterlinck is passionately concerned with finding the nature as well as the origin of this spirit. The quest was to occupy his thoughts for the remainder of his life, as evidenced in his essays. He says that man's obstinate search for the final cause or God is merely "un petit bruit . . . au fond de l'inconnu. . . ."\textsuperscript{49} In spite of its apparent futility, Maeterlinck is very certain that the quest must continue. It is ". . . un de nos devoirs les plus certains . . .,"\textsuperscript{50} and man must not be discouraged although it is useless. Whatever the unknown force may be called (God, providence, fate, nature, the infinite) man should devote all his efforts

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 124.  \textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 71.  \textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 72.  \textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 130.  \textsuperscript{50}Ibid., p. 72.
to the search for its nature.\textsuperscript{51} Even if the search may be futile, Maeterlinck sees the quest as its own justification, and this adds an optimistic flavor to the idea of the endless search for the ultimate origin of life.\textsuperscript{52}

The progress of the species is the final important theme in the essay. Maeterlinck examines the progress that has been made by man as well as by the bee. He questions whether the bee as a species has progressed or has remained at the same level from its origin.\textsuperscript{53} He gives several examples to demonstrate that the species has changed, an application of the Darwinian theory of the evolution of the species. The race has evolved from simple, individualistic bees to the complex society of modern bees.\textsuperscript{54} Some of these changes include the external protection of their community, their political ideas, and their division of labor.\textsuperscript{55} Maeterlinck says that the bee has evolved just as man has, and that their evolution has been a slow progress toward a more socialized existence.\textsuperscript{56} He believed that man has not yet reached the state of social perfection of the bee.\textsuperscript{57} Progress of the race is a part of the purpose of the spirit that governs the world. As the goal of the bee is to make honey, the purpose of man is to create "puissance cérébrale,"\textsuperscript{58} or thought.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 158.  
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p. 184.  
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p. 204.  
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., pp. 373-382.  
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 228.  
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., p. 217.  
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., p. 217.  
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., p. 236.
Maeterlinck says that man must seek to fulfill this duty, from wherever it comes and for whatever ultimate purpose it is intended. He sees the progress of the species as a means of fulfilling such responsibility. Since he believed that some progress has been made, an optimistic view of man and the world is indicated.

La Vie des Termites

La Vie des Termites is very similar thematically to La Vie des Abeilles. The main theme is once again a comparison of man's society to that of an insect. However, La Vie des Termites was written twenty-six years later than the first nature study, and a change in Maeterlinck's attitudes is clear. The ravages of time since he last wrote about the subject of nature are only too evident. There is no thread of optimism as in La Vie des Abeilles, and the tone of the entire essay is one of deep despair. Maeterlinck himself says in the introductory chapter, "Le livre fera, si l'on veut, le pendant de La Vie des Abeilles, mais la couleur et le milieu ne sont pas les mêmes." The change is shown in the difference in the descriptions of the bee and the termite. The bee is associated with words such as light, spring, sun.

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59 Ibid., p. 237.
60 Halls, p. 138.
space, wings, and flowers. The world of the termite, however, holds only darkness, cruelty, filthy conditions, and a prison-like atmosphere.  

The society of the termite is a fierce, sinister, repulsive civilization, but it is suited to their needs. Maeterlinck goes to great lengths to describe the ugliness of the society, and then predicts that man's will some day be similar. "... Ces malheureux insectes, bien plus que les abeilles ou que tout autre être vivant sur cette terre, [sont] les précurseurs et les préfigurateurs de nos propres destins." Maeterlinck advises man to study the termite and to take warning, so that he can react to this possible doom before it is too late. Maeterlinck gives a complete picture of the society of the termite. He says that there are few creatures so poorly equipped for life, because termites possess no sting, usually no wings, no eyesight, and they live only in warm regions, but cannot survive in the sunlight. "En un mot, presque autant qu'envers l'homme, la nature, à son égard, s'est montrée injuste, malveillante, ironique, fantasque, illogique ou perfide." He says that he studied termites for the reason that they are the only beings who have succeeded in surviving, coming from "... une misère égale à la
These remarks clearly indicate the pessimistic attitude toward man's society that characterizes Maeterlinck's later essays, others of which will be examined in this study.

One reason for the bleakness of the termites' society is the fact that they dwell completely underground. Maeterlinck equates this actual darkness with a hopeless, bleak attitude. The termite, like the bee and man, is a social being, but his society is much harsher than that of either of the latter two. The society is characterized by an absolute communism. There is no waste, and each member shares everything in the society. There is a total subjugation of the individual will, as in the hive, but it is even more inexorable. The bee has some bit of happiness and freedom in the sunshine, but complete oppression characterizes the termitary. All the inhabitants are merely slaves. He says, "Les dieux de communisme y deviennent d'insatiables Molochs." The individual knows only complete darkness and misery. Maeterlinck believed that this type of communistic society has evolved from socialism, and that the most highly evolved species are the most enslaved by their own society. He asks whether man might be tending toward such a society, which

68 Ibid., p. 21.
70 Ibid., p. 66.
72 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
continues to place more and more restrictions on the individual.

The controversy involving intelligence and instinct is reopened in this essay. Maeterlinck defines the two terms, although he admits that the point of difference between them is very hazy.\textsuperscript{75} He states that instinct includes everything that is done blindly, as dictated by fate; and that intelligence includes the ability to consciously grasp a new situation and to deal with it.\textsuperscript{76} He says also that instinct is even a result of intelligence, since most instincts originate from one reasoned and conscious action which gradually becomes automatic.\textsuperscript{77} As he did in the case of the bees, Maeterlinck gives concrete examples of the intelligence of the termite. Their digestive system is very well adapted to their way of life, and he believed that they chose this method of digestion. Termites digest by means of protozoa which live in their intestines and in turn digest the food. If they had not developed this method, they could not digest the cellulose which is their staple diet.\textsuperscript{78} He says further that social insects must have a certain type of intelligence because their lives are complex, and they need to deal with extraordinary occurrences which could not be handled by blind instinct.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., p. 181. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{76}Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., p. 187. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{78}Ibid., pp. 57-58. \\
\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., p. 180.
Not surprisingly, in view of the early essays, Maeterlinck connects instinct with the collective soul of insects. The population of these insects is seen as having one soul that has a collective memory, which is the source of the instinct which the insects possess. He carries the idea further and says that all beings belong to one central unity, and that the universal soul includes all forms of life, as he stated in earlier essays. Thus, termites possess both instinct and intelligence, but Maeterlinck attempts to repudiate those who deny intelligence to lower beings.

The nature of God is once again an important theme. In this essay, God or fate is called "la puissance occulte." Maeterlinck continues his search for the nature of God, but now his viewpoint of God's purpose is completely pessimistic. He says that there must be a central power which controls everything, but that man knows nothing about its nature. He says, "... Nous ne comprenons rien et... l'origine, le sens et le but de toutes les manifestations de la vie nous échapperont longtemps encore et peut-être à jamais." The emphasis is placed on the hopelessness of the quest for the unknown, and the search seems more futile than in La Vie des abeilles.

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80 Ibid., p. 188.
81 Ibid., p. 189.
82 Ibid., p. 132.
83 Ibid., p. 138.
84 Ibid.
Maeterlinck discusses a slightly different form of fatality in the essay, which is social in nature. Such fatality is absolute, when no rest is permitted, illness is not tolerated, and feebleness is punished by death. The individual is worth absolutely nothing, and this seems to be Maeterlinck's bleak conception of God's ultimate plan for man, as man's society evolves in this direction. He says that God has organized individuals in a society for the purpose of subjecting them to more and more rigorous discipline as the society develops. Thus, God's plan does not include any happiness for the world. "On dirait que ces cités d'insectes qui nous précèdent dans le temps ont voulu nous offrir une caricature, une parodie anticipée des paradis terrestres vers lesquels s'acheminent la plupart des peuples civilisés." 

Maeterlinck thus speculates on the ultimate future of the human race. He says that God will take all that He can from the species and then will destroy it. According to Maeterlinck's bleak point of view, there has been no progress since the world began, but only retrogression and vain effort. The idea that man has not progressed at all is directly opposite to the positive progress shown in La Vie des abeilles.

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85 Ibid., p. 143.
86 Ibid., p. 153.
87 Ibid., p. 154.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., p. 155.
He further says that since no advancement has been made, none will ever occur.

N'est-il pas raisonnable de croire que s'il y avait jamais eu quelque chose de souverainement intelligent, de souverainement bon et heureux dans l'univers, les conséquences finiraient par s'en faire sentir de monde en monde? Et si cela ne s'est jamais fait, pourquoi pourrions-nous espérer que cela se fasse?\(^90\)

Maeterlinck links the fate of the bee or termite to man's ultimate destiny. Since all their unselfish, heroic acts have produced no beneficial progress, nothing can be done, and nothing can prevent this eventual destruction.\(^91\) He even gives a definite prophecy as to what will become of man. As the termites probably went underground to escape the Ice Age, man will be forced to do the same many years from now, but man will not be able to survive as well as termites have done.\(^92\)

Maeterlinck finishes the essay on still another pessimistic note. He states that man can never have a good life, because the perfect one would be spiritual.\(^93\) This life is impossible to achieve since everything in man's sphere is composed of matter. Man's situation is thus tragic. His great enemy is matter, but it is all he has around him.\(^94\) His only hope is to try to deal with things as they are. This outlook is certainly not a hopeful one, since one can only

\(^{90}\)Ibid., p. 156.  \(^{91}\)Ibid., p. 158.  \\
\(^{92}\)Ibid., p. 169.  \\
\(^{93}\)Ibid., p. 192.  \\
\(^{94}\)Ibid., p. 193.
try to adjust and look forward to death, which is the only ultimate goal in life.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{95}Ibid., p. 194.
CHAPTER IV

METAPHYSICAL ESSAYS

The third major group of essays is composed of those which have been termed metaphysical.\(^1\) Obviously, they treat themes which are philosophical in nature. Many of the themes are carried over from the earlier essays, but they are expanded and developed in these works. The group consists of seven volumes, the dates of which extend from 1902-1921. Because the essays were written over a rather lengthy period of time, several changes in Maeterlinck's attitudes can be traced throughout them. Since they will be discussed in chronological order, the changes will be reflected in the various ways in which Maeterlinck treats the same themes.

The essays discussed in this chapter are: *Le Temple enseveli* (1902), *Le Double Jardin* (1904), *L'Intelligence des fleurs* (1907), *La Mort* (1913), *L'Hôte inconnu* (1917), *Les Sentiers dans la montagne* (1919), and *Le Grand Secret* (1921). The first one (*Le Temple enseveli*) followed *La Vie des abeilles* by one year; and the last essay in the group (*Le Grand Secret*) preceded *La Vie des termites* by six years. Thus, it can be seen that this third group of essays includes the period between the two nature studies discussed in the last chapter.

\(^1\) Pasquier, p. 138.
Le Temple Enseveli

Le Temple enseveli was written during a rather optimistic period in Maeterlinck's life. Since the themes treated in the volume are deep and serious, the tone is not light, but the overall impression is one of a hopeful attitude. Since this volume involves all of the major themes in Maeterlinck's works, its scope is very great. Pasquier calls the book "... son chef-d'oeuvre, le plus vaste, le plus généreux, le plus harmonieux de ses essais philosophiques."

The themes of Le Temple enseveli revolve around an idea which, as was seen in the second chapter, is central to Maeterlinck's philosophy: namely, that interior reality is the basis for all that is important in life. In "Le Passe,"

one of the short essays in this volume, Maeterlinck expresses the idea in a slightly different way. In discussing the significance of past events, he says that the events themselves are unimportant; it is man's reactions to them that give them their significance. He expresses his belief in this way:

Ce qui importe à chacun de nous dans le passé, ce qui nous en reste, ce qui est partie de nous-mêmes, ce ne sont pas les actes accomplis ou les aventures subies, ce sont les réactions morales que produisent en ce

2Halls, p. 94.
3Pasquier, P. 82.
Thus, the insignificance of external events and the supreme importance of man's inner being are evident.

Maeterlinck's conception of morality is a direct result of this belief in the inner reality. As has been stated in the second chapter, Maeterlinck's conviction about the interior life or the life of the soul led him to a morality which has no relationship with external events. He discusses a morality based upon an inner justice. The justice in man's world is not dealt out by God, as man has believed. Justice has no external existence, and man performs the right action because of some inner drive. In this discussion, Maeterlinck again reveals his contempt for revealed religion, since he dismisses God or some other higher being as a source of man's sense of right and wrong. He says that it is erroneous to credit nature or God with moral intentions, and with rewarding good and punishing bad. Good and bad do exist, but they are derived from within man's soul. 

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5Ibid., p. 207.  
6Ibid., p. 4.  
8Maeterlinck, Temple angevai, p. 4.  
9Ibid., p. 5.  
10Ibid., p. 32.
les choses, c'est en nous que se trouve la justice des choses." Maeterlinck further states that man ascribes to the universe, or to some other fatal, unintelligible principle, a part that he himself plays in his own life. The only mystery in this concept is that inner justice is always present in every person and is the basis for all of man's good qualities. An optimistic view of the nature of man of necessity accompanies this type of morality. As Maeterlinck says, "C'est parce que l'esprit et le caractère de l'homme, tout son être moral, en un mot, ne peut vivre et agir que dans la justice." Thus, man is seen as being essentially good, and the triumph of justice is assured, since it already dwells within man.

The discussion of personal morality leads Maeterlinck to certain conclusions about the individual's obligations to society. In the second chapter, it was stated that the concept of the linking of souls is the basis for Maeterlinck's views on man's role as a member of society. In the same vein, it has been shown that in *La Vie des abeilles*, Maeterlinck says that man does not fulfill his obligations to his group because he is so individualistic. In this

11 Ibid., p. 34.  
12 Ibid.  
volume, he states that the individual possesses a sense of justice toward his fellows, but that mankind as a whole is unjust. Injustice comes about because of the ruthless need for the preservation of the species, and the selection of the ablest members of the society. As in the nature studies, he points out the inequities of man's society. He says, "Il n'est personne... dont les efforts n'obtiennent trop ou trop peu, personne qui ne soit privilégié ou frustré." Poverty is given as an example of society's injustice. Maeterlinck believed that poverty is a condition caused not by some mysterious fate, but by mankind. The individual, then, must attempt to extend his own sense of justice beyond himself. In spite of man's failure at this point to correct the faults of his society, Maeterlinck sees hope in the fact that there remains in each person a spark of this inner unfailing justice.

16 Maeterlinck, Temple enseveli, p. 53.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 75.
19 Ibid., p. 23.
20 Ibid., p. 82.
21 Ibid., p. 94.
Maeterlinck's view of man's social obligations is the first indication of later socialistic tendencies, as evidenced in the nature essays.

The nature of God, or fate, or whatever power may lie behind the workings of the universe, continue to occupy Maeterlinck's thought. The idea contained in *La Vie des abeilles* that God is a power found within the soul of man is developed further in *Le Temple enseveli*. In the essay "La Chance," in this volume, Maeterlinck says, "Puisqu'il s'agit de nous, de notre vie étroite, c'est, je pense, en nous-mêmes que se trouve la clef du mystère, car il est vraisemblable que tout être porte en soi la meilleure solution du problème qu'il propose."\(^{22}\) Thus, man's own subconscious or inner life is viewed as the probable source of the mystery of life.

Maeterlinck's early obsession with fate and its mysterious dictates is repudiated in this volume. He even discusses his early ideas on the subject.

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... On y avait foi à des puissances énormes, invisibles et fatales, dont nul ne devinait les intentions, mais que l'âme ... supposait malveillantes, attentes à toutes nos actions, ennemies du sourire, de la vie, de la paix, de l'amour.\(^{23}\)
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Then in *La Sagesse*, he shows a change in that man can alter his fate by means of his inner resources. The idea is developed even further in this essay. He says that there is no

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 255.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., pp. 112-113.
personal God, or any kind of direct intervention by a power from above in people's lives. There are only "... éléments indifférents, énormes et aveugles, qui passent sur nous et en nous, nous pénètrent, nous façonnent et nous animent, sans se douter de notre existence, comme le font l'eau, l'air, le feu et la lumière." He believed at this time in his life that events happen because of the indifference of those elements to man. As in La Sagesse, events can, however, be completely changed by a person's reaction to them.

En réalité, à moins que le hasard ne prenne la forme irrésistible d'une maladie cruelle ou de la mort, il rend ce hasard presque impuissant, et suffit à maintenir ce qu'il y a de meilleur et de plus propre à l'homme dans le bonheur humain.

Maeterlinck thus holds a rather optimistic viewpoint on life itself, since man can turn events to his own advantage.

Thus, Maeterlinck's quest for God continues in this essay. He says that man may not be able to solve life's mysteries, but that the aim of human thought is to discover what the truly insoluble mysteries may be. In so doing, he will strip from them the additions that have been made by the errors and fears of man, and he can see the essential mystery. Man's duty, then, is to search for the essential truth.

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24Ibid., p. 109.  
25Ibid., p. 133.  
26Ibid., p. 233.  
27Ibid., p. 251.  
28Ibid., p. 28.  
29Ibid., p. 105.
Maeterlinck himself continues to do so throughout the remaining essays.

An important theme in Maeterlinck's works is that of death. As has been shown, in his early life Maeterlinck viewed death as the ultimate goal in life, inevitable and awesome. In *Le Temple enseveli* his discussion of death leaves a hopeful impression. He says that death itself is not terrible, but "... ce que nous craignons le plus en elle, c'est la douleur qui l'accompagne ou la maladie qui la précède."\(^{30}\) Death is no longer the dreadful goal of life, but is merely the longed-for rest and peace after life on earth.\(^{31}\) This optimistic viewpoint results from his idea that man can be the controller of his own destiny.

**Le Double Jardin**

The next volume of essays, *Le Double Jardin*, fits well into a framework of optimism. In fact, Pasquier has said that this volume was written at the very height of Maeterlinck's optimistic period.\(^{32}\) The subjects treated, quite trivial and light in nature, point out the optimistic, happy frame of mind of the author.

The theme of the importance of the interior reality is used to give depth to several of the light, rather jovial

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\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 155.  
\(^{31}\)Ibid.  
\(^{32}\)Pasquier, p. 82.
essays in this volume. A good example is the essay "The Modern Drama." Maeterlinck expresses his opinions on the appropriate subject matter for a modern playwright. He says that external action on the stage should not be emphasized, but rather the analysis of the human soul. In his own plays, the action always revolves around one or more themes which are more important than the action itself. Thus, the unimportance of externals and the importance of the inner being is shown once again. The essay "In an Automobile" repeats this theme in an unusual way, as Maeterlinck speaks of his automobile as though it were human. He describes its inner qualities in the following whimsical paragraph:

I have had its heart and soul laid bare, I have looked into the profound circulation of its life. Its soul is the electric spark, which, seven or eight hundred times to the minute, sends fiery breath through the veins. And the terrible, complex heart is composed, first of all, of the carburetter[sic]...

Maeterlinck thus emphasizes the importance of the interior reality, even in the case of an automobile.

Several of the essays in this volume are concerned with love, another recurring theme in Maeterlinck's work. As in earlier essays, love is nonphysical and idyllic. In the second chapter, love was described as the meeting of two souls.

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33 Le Double Jardin was not available in the French edition, thus, the English version was used.


In a short essay entitled "Sincerity," in the volume presently under consideration, love is again depicted as existing on a high plane, with no mention of physical aspects. In "Portrait of a Lady" Maeterlinck describes an idealized lover. The man's attraction to the woman is not based on any physical traits, but on his "... instinct, unconscious, or subconscious . . .," which tells him that her soul is the best mate for his own.

Maeterlinck's optimistic outlook on life is shown most clearly in several of the essays which describe the beauty of nature. He links nature's beauty with the enjoyment of life, in that man should simply enjoy his being on such a beautiful earth. In complete contrast with both his very early and his later essays, he describes life's goodness and believes that it can be beneficial. In speaking of flowers, he says, "They live but for a season; they have no past and no traditions and they know nothing, except that the hour is fair and that they must enjoy it." The beauty and natural goodness of life is evident in "Old-Fashioned Flowers," in which he again says that the flowers understand that the secret of life is to love it as it is.

36 Ibid., p. 289.
37 Ibid., p. 312.
38 Ibid., p. 197.
39 Ibid., p. 267.
The dominant theme of the search for God appears in *Le Double Jardin*, and the optimism of the period permeates his ideas on this quest. He says that man is making definite progress in his pursuit of the ultimate truth, and that the unknown will someday be found. Religion, which Maeterlinck views as a barrier in the way of truth, has been virtually removed. He calls religion "the fallacious axis upon which humanity believed itself to revolve . . . .", and says that men do not use this crutch as frequently as they formerly did. Since its removal, man is freer to seek the truth, and Maeterlinck states positively that the quest will be successful.

We no longer believe that this world is as the apple of the eye of one God who is alive to our slightest thoughts; but we know that it is subjected to forces quite as powerful, quite as alive to laws and duties which it behoves us to penetrate. That is why our attitude in the face of the mystery of these forces has changed. It is no longer one of fear, but one of boldness. It no longer demands that the slave shall kneel before the master or the creator, but permits a gaze as between equals, for we bear within ourselves the equal of the deepest and greatest mysteries.41

**L'Intelligence des Fleurs**

*L'Intelligence des fleurs* continues in the same vein of optimism. The volume, which is composed of only the title essay, presents the idea that flowers possess a degree of

40Ibid., p. 320.

41Ibid., p. 348.
intelligence. The essay is the same general type as the nature studies in the third chapter, but it falls into the category of abstract philosophical meditation because there is very little actual observation of nature involved.\textsuperscript{42} Maeterlinck uses flowers as a vehicle for thoughts on various themes, rather than using them as a comparison with man as in \textit{La Vie des abeilles} and \textit{La Vie des termites}.

The question of intelligence versus instinct has been explored in the nature studies. As was shown, Maeterlinck believed that forms of life other than man do possess intelligence. In \textit{L'Intelligence des fleurs} he says, "S’il \[l'homme\] se rencontre des plantes et des fleurs maladroites ou malchanceuses, il n'en est point qui soient entièrement dénues de sagesse et d'ingéniosité."\textsuperscript{43} He further states, "... Dans la plante entière, tiges, feuilles, racines ... on découvre, si l'on veut bien s'incliner un instant sur leur humble travail, maintes traces d'une intelligence avisée et vivante."\textsuperscript{44}

Maeterlinck gives many examples to prove that flowers are intelligent. One is the water lily, which has developed an ingenious device to sustain its life. These plants cannot

\textsuperscript{42}Halls, p. 91.

\textsuperscript{43}Maurice Maeterlinck, \textit{L'Intelligence des fleurs} (Paris, 1907), pp. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p. 12.
be fertilized under water; thus, they blossom on the surface, being supported and fed through an endless stalk, which lengthens as the water level rises.\(^5\) Another could be the various means of defense which plants have developed. Plants in dry areas often have thorns, as though the plant knew that it is more difficult to survive there since its enemies have less choice of prey.\(^6\) Other plants, such as the geranium and the mint, have distinctive odors which serve to keep animals away.\(^7\) The outstanding example of the intelligence of the flowers, however, is the extraordinary way in which they use cross-fertilization.\(^8\) Maeterlinck says that flowers use deliberate, carefully-planned tricks to lure insects, and then the insects fertilize them by going to another flower and carrying pollen.\(^9\) He believed that the various means of cross-fertilization have evolved, and that flowers have developed their own inventions as the centuries have passed.\(^5\) He calls this intelligence "le genie de la fleur,"\(^5\) as he gave that of the bee and the termite similar names.

The theme of love is treated briefly in this essay, and it is again nonphysical. Even though the subject is flowers, Maeterlinck uses the word love to describe the union of

\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 18. 
\(^{46}\)Ibid., p. 40. 
\(^{47}\)Ibid. 
\(^{48}\)Ibid., p. 43. 
\(^{49}\)Ibid. 
\(^{50}\)Ibid., p. 52. 
\(^{51}\)Ibid., p. 41.
certain plants. For example, he gives a description of the mating of male and female water plants:

La fleur femelle déroule lentement la longue spirale de son pédoncule, monte, s'élève lentement, vient planer et s'épanouir à la surface de l'étang. D'une souche voisine, les fleurs mâles qui l'entrevoient à travers l'eau ensoleillée, s'élèvent à leur tour, pleines d'espoir, vers celle qui se balance, les attend, les appelle dans un monde magique.  

It is evident that he presents an idealized and imaginative account of this union, as he did in the case of the bee.

As in the third chapter, Maeterlinck discusses the advancement made by the species. He says that evolutionary progress is the only evidence of a true intelligence. As befits the optimistic attitude of the essay, he says that flowers have evolved, and further that the different types of flowers are probably representatives of one flower which continues to modify its organs. Evolution, as Maeterlinck views it, establishes clear evidence of the intelligent, calculated progress of the species.

The notion of intelligence leads to the question of the ultimate source of these intelligent acts. The question, of course, involves Maeterlinck's continuing search for God. He sees the flower as the bearer of God's beauty, and man as the bearer of God's intelligence in the world. Thus,

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52 Ibid., p. 22.  
53 Ibid., p. 85.  
54 Ibid.  
55 Ibid., p. 86.  
56 Ibid., p. 93.  
57 Ibid., p. 99.
man may not understand God, but he does have a kinship with Him.

Il ne serait pas, j'imagine, très teméraire de soutenir qu'il n'y a pas d'autres plus ou moins intelligents, mais une intelligence éparse, générale, une sorte de fluide universel qui pénètre diversement, selon qu'ils sont bons ou mauvais conducteurs de l'esprit, les organismes qu'il [le fluide] rencontre.58

Man, then, is the best conductor of the universal fluid, since he is the most similar to God in spirit. However, this same fluid flows in animals and flowers. His conclusion about the nature of God is that the same spirit controls and animates all of life, and that this spirit is contained within man.59 The idea of God in man reappears, then, in this essay. His view of God is quite hopeful, because he says that this spirit pursues happiness and goodness in the world.60

La Mort

La Mort marks a turning point in Maeterlinck's outlook on life. Beginning with this essay, he expresses a more pessimistic viewpoint which continues through the later essays.61 Previously, an evolution from his early pessimism to optimism has been shown, but in La Mort he begins to turn back to a pessimistic outlook.62

58Ibid., p. 105.  
59Ibid.  
60Ibid.  
62Ibid.
In *La Mort*, Maeterlinck examines the problem of death, which has been a fundamental question for him throughout the essays. As has been seen, he was preoccupied with death from his early life, and in this essay he attempts to analyze and explain it as an enigma. He treats each of the explanations which he finds possible as to what happens after death, and chooses the only one which he can accept.

Maeterlinck first discusses the importance that man attaches to death itself. He says, "Il n'y a pour nous, dans notre vie et dans notre univers qu'un événement qui compte, c'est notre mort." He describes the fear that people have of death: "Si nous ne croyons plus aux supplices des damnés, toutes les cellules vitales du plus incrédule d'entre nous baignent encore dans l'effroyable mystère du Chéol des Hébreux, de l'Hadès des païens ou de l'enfer chrétien." He says further that each person must decide upon his own idea of death during his life, so that he can face it without this terrible fear.

In discussing death, Maeterlinck dismisses the fear that people have concerning the actual final moment. He says that one's thoughts on death should not include the pain and

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64 *Maurice Maeterlinck, La Mort* (Paris, 1925), p. 3.
suffering of the last hours, because this anguish is a part of life, rather than a part of death. Physical suffering causes much of man's horror of death, and it should not even be considered. "Ce n'est pas l'arrivée de la mort, c'est le départ de la vie qui est épouvantable."67 The uncertainty about what will happen after death is the only fear which is legitimate.68 Maeterlinck then gives his theories on what happens after death. He presents five possible explanations and discounts all but one of them as being implausible.

Maeterlinck first completely dismisses any religious explanation of the afterlife, because there is no proof for the theories of organized religion.69 He further says that if God gave man intelligence, He must desire that man should seek truth, and He cannot expect man to accept a belief which has not been proved.70

If the religious idea of heaven and hell is rejected, Maeterlinck sees four other possible solutions. These include total annihilation, survival with man's present consciousness, survival without any kind of consciousness, and survival with a universal consciousness different from that which man possesses in this world.71

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67 Ibid., p. 19.  
68 Ibid., p. 22.  
69 Ibid., p. 25.  
70 Ibid.  
71 Ibid., p. 34.
The first three of these explanations are rejected for various reasons. He says, for example, that total annihilation after death is impossible because in infinity nothing perishes, and everything that has ever existed continues in the eternal cycle. Survival after death with man's present consciousness is not probable. Man's present consciousness has a body, and Maeterlinck says that it could not be the same without that body. "Lorsqu'elle [notre pensée] n'aura plus de corps, qu'emportera-t-elle dans l'infini pour s'y reconnaître, elle qui ne se connaissait que grâce à ce corps?" Survival with no consciousness at all is the easiest solution because there is nothing to fear or dread, since body and mind would be extinguished and only a great peace would remain. Maeterlinck calls this "... une solution qui berce la paresse," and he believed that it was too simple to be true.

The only solution which is acceptable to Maeterlinck is survival with a universal consciousness. This idea is related to the one regarding the linking of souls previously mentioned. Man does not survive as he is, but some particle (particule) of him does survive, and is mixed with particles.
of all other people in a continuous universal renewal process. Death, then, is not to be feared, since an exciting new form of life begins after it. Life after death must be a happy life, as Maeterlinck says, because "... il est presque inimaginable qu'une pensée ne survit pour se mêler à la substance de l'Univers; c'est-à-dire à l'infini qui, s'il n'est pas une mer d'indifférence, ne saurait être qu'un océan de joie. ..." And he says further, "En tout cas, il semble assez certain que nous passons ici le seul moment étroit, avare, obscur et douloureux de notre destinée." He finishes by saying that life beyond the grave could not exist for the purpose of being unhappy, and so it is not to be feared.

Thus, Maeterlinck ends a rather somber discussion of death on a hopeful note. His pessimism has not yet become as bleak as it does in later essays, but the tone of La Mort is still more gloomy than that of the several essays which preceded it.

L'Hôte Inconnu

The themes in L'Hôte inconnu are related to the concept of the interior reality. The subject matter in this volume

\[76\text{Ibid., p. 195.} \quad 77\text{Ibid., p. 139.}\]
\[78\text{Ibid., pp. 191-192.} \quad 79\text{Ibid., p. 198.}\]
\[80\text{Ibid., p. 245.}\]
of short essays is the unknown faculty which causes certain inexplicable events. Maeterlinck had a great interest in psychic phenomena and the supernatural, and he takes many of the accounts in this essay from the records of the English and American Societies for Psychical Research. He examines the smaller mysteries of life rather than the great enigmas which usually occupied his thoughts. For example, anecdotes are given relating to hallucinations, apparitions, haunted houses, premonitions, and the telling of the future. He attributes such mysterious phenomena to an unknown faculty which is found within man: namely, the subconscious.

Since the mysterious unknown is found within the inner self, the idea of the unimportance of the external part of life is once again emphasized. The physical body is viewed by Maeterlinck not only as insignificant, but even as a hindrance to the solution of the mysteries of life. He states his opinion in this way: "Mais nous sommes dans notre corps des prisonniers profondément ensevelis avec lesquels il [l'inconnu] ne communique pas quand il veut."

In attempting to explain psychic phenomena, Maeterlinck offers three possible solutions. As is usual in his works,
the first one, religious in nature, is immediately set aside since it calls for a blind faith which Maeterlinck cannot accept. The reader will recall that this is the same reason for rejecting the religious theories on life after death, as seen in La Mort. The second possible explanation is a spiritualistic one in which the dead do not completely die, so that their spirits remain around those who are living. Maeterlinck decided that this explanation is merely speculation, and that it cannot be proved. The solution which he adopted, as has been stated, is that the unknown ability which causes such phenomena resides within man. More specifically, this faculty is contained in man's subconscious. Thus, the interior reality of the human soul contains the mystery of these manifestations which are not yet understood. Maeterlinck says, "En attendant que les désincarnés attestent leur existence d'une façon irrefragable, il n'y a nul avantage à aller chercher, dans leurs tombes, la clef d'une énigme qui paraît bien se trouver au fond de notre vie."
The pessimistic mood of this volume is most evident in Maeterlinck's attitude toward fate. In *L'Hôte inconnu*, he returns to the attitude on fatality of his earliest essay. In discussing the foretelling of the future, he reasons that if future events can be foreseen, then they must be predetermined. The idea is reminiscent of the undeniable, irrefutable fatality of *Le Trésor des humbles*. He calls fate

\[ \ldots \ \text{l'avenir préétabli, inconcussible, [sic] inaltérable, que nous avons appelé destin, fatalité, que sais-je, qui supprime dans l'homme toute indépendence, tout libre arbitre, et qui est le plus inconcevable, le plus désespérant des mystères.} \ldots \]

He says further that fate is that "\ldots contre quoi se brisent tous les efforts, toutes les pensées des hommes."\(^92\) Therefore, man cannot alter his destiny, since future events are predetermined by fate or God.

Still another recurring theme in this group of essays, reminding one of previous findings, is the intelligence of animals. In the one called "Les Chevaux d'Elberfeld," Maeterlinck describes in detail his visit with a German who had trained four horses to solve mathematical problems, to spell, and even to speak independent thoughts by means of hoof-tapping.\(^94\) Maeterlinck was convinced that the horses did possess a great intelligence. As in *La Vie des abeilles*, he points

\(^{92}\) Ibid., pp. 131-132.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., p. 132.

\(^{94}\) Halls, p. 112.
out that the significance of this discovery is that man is not alone in the universe. He says,

Il s'agit simplement d'avoir un peu moins d'orgueil et de se pencher un peu plus fraternellement sur des existences beaucoup plus fraternelles que nous ne l'avions cru. Il s'agit simplement d'avoir un peu plus de patience, de confiance et de respect envers ceux qui partagent notre sort dans un monde dont nous ignorons toutes les intentions.

The quest for the unknown source of life continues in L'Hôte inconnu, and Maeterlinck reaffirms his belief that man is the source of the unknown. "Mais c'est au fond de nous, dans le silence et la nuit de notre être, où il ne cesse de s'agiter et mène notre destin, que nous devons nous appliquer à le surprendre et à le découvrir." He also repeats the thought that man's greatest duty in life is to attempt to solve the mystery of this unknown. Even though he has not found a solution, it is good to have made the attempt.

... C'est du moins un silence traversé de murmures inquiets et de chuchotements attentifs qui valent mieux que la morale ignorance sans espoir à laquelle il faudrait bien se résigner si l'on ne s'efforçait malgré tout, comme c'est le grand devoir de l'homme, à surprendre une étincelle dans les ténèbres.

95 Ibid.
96 Maeterlinck, L'Hôte, pp. 228-229.
97 Ibid., p. 301.
98 Ibid., pp. 263-264.
99 Ibid.
Les Sentiers dans la Montagne

Concerning the next group of essays, W. D. Halls has said that in Les Sentiers dans la montagne, Maeterlinck's thought begins to move into its final phase. The themes are the same as those of earlier essays, but the attitudes are those which are found in the last ones. This volume is a collection of essays which were inspired by World War I, and his growing pessimism was deepened by the tragic events of the years 1914-1918.

The concept of the collective soul which was introduced in Maeterlinck's first essay is further developed in "L'Ame des peuples," one of the essays in this volume. Men's souls are linked by an unknown bond, and each nation possesses a distinctive collective soul. He believed that even though individuals may seem to be petty and mean, a nation as a whole is good and noble. He cites the unity of France and Belgium during the war as an example of such collective greatness.

Maeterlinck continues to show a bleak attitude toward the fate of man. The idea of the predetermination of future events reappears in this essay. In discussing heredity, he

100 Halls, p. 121.
102 Ibid.
states that descendants will suffer because of the faults and profit by the virtues of their ancestors. He says, "Le fils d'un alcoolique portera toute sa vie, de sa naissance à sa mort, dans sa chair et dans son esprit, le poids du vice paternel." He further says that predetermined events occur because each person's life is the sum of all the existences accumulated within his soul. Thus, fatality comes from within a person's being, and is only a part of his inner reality. This belief closely relates to his conviction that God, or fate, can be found within man's soul. The idea also is connected with the collective-soul concept, since each person is made up of all past and future influences. He says, "Il n'est qu'une vie dans la foule des vies qui nous ont précédées et viennent revivre en nous; et toutes ces vies passées et futures forment l'ensemble de la notre." Thus, each man is not an isolated being, but he is a part of the collective pool of souls, which was mentioned in the second chapter. From this idea follows the theory of reincarnation, which Maeterlinck explores in several of his later essays. With him, reincarnation is simply an absorption into the collective soul.

103 Ibid., p. 203.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., p. 208.
106 Ibid., p. 213.
107 Ibid., p. 184.
Maeterlinck briefly discusses the theme of death in *Les Sentiers*. He again asserts that annihilation after death is impossible, and that there must be some type of immortality. However, in this essay he is less certain about the nature of being after death, and he says that it is unknown whether or not death is accompanied by a continuation of man's present consciousness. He mentions reincarnation as a possible type of life after death, but does not make any positive assertions about its probability.

The war caused Maeterlinck to consider again the future of mankind, and whether any progress has been made. As in *La Vie des termites*, his view of man's progress is very bleak. He says that man's future will be the same as his past, because "tout ce que fera cet univers, il doit déjà l'avoir fait, attendu qu'il a eu autant d'occasions de le faire qu'il en aura jamais." Thus, no progress can ever be made. He even calls the earth an experiment of nature which has not succeeded, since suffering and evil are dominant over happiness and goodness. As has been mentioned, his later pessimistic viewpoint of man's situation was in part caused by World War I, which had a great effect on Maeterlinck's attitudes.

108 Ibid., p. 178.  
109 Ibid.  
110 Ibid., p. 159.  
111 Ibid., p. 160.  
112 Ibid., p. 162.
The search for the unknown is discussed in one of the essays in this volume, "Espoir et Désespoir." Maeterlinck gives some reason for mild hopefulness in this quest, which is the only hope that mankind can have. The reason for hope lies in the vast area of the unknown, and he says, "Il est possible qu'il y trouve aussi, en fin de compte, le désespoir, mais c'est peu probable, car on ne saurait imaginer un univers qui ne serait qu'un acte de désespoir." Accordingly, as long as man's search for God continues, he has some reason for hope. This search, as Maeterlinck has said in other essays, is man's reason for being. "Nous n'avons pas autre chose à faire en cette vie qu'à chercher à savoir où nous sommes."114

Le Grand Secret

The last volume in this group of essays is Le Grand Secret, which is a historical study of the religions and cults of history.115 The main theme is that all of man's religious endeavors have led to the conclusion that God is unknowable.116 Maeterlinck cites the ancient Indian and Egyptian religions, which he considers to be the greatest of all.117 He believed

113Ibid., p. 186.
114Ibid., p. 187.
115Malls, p. 134.
116Ibid.
these to be the best because their followers recognized that God cannot be known, while later religions have struggled against this truth. He says of the Indian religion, "Cette explication de l'incompréhensible univers, qui n'explique rien parce qu'on n'explique pas l'inexplicable, est plus admissible que toutes celles que nous pourrions donner. . . ."118

A pessimistic view of man's quest for God is demonstrated by such a statement. Maeterlinck further comments that man has not progressed at all in his search for the ultimate cause, because it is still just as unknowable as ever.119

A slight optimism grows out of the belief that God cannot be found. God may be unknown, but He does exist. As Maeterlinck has stated earlier, God could not exist for the purpose of unhappiness, and thus there is a glimmer of hope for man.120

In this final essay in the metaphysical series, Maeterlinck advises man to learn to accept the fact that some things cannot be known, and to be content with searching for a limited amount of knowledge. He says that man does know that all things exist in God and therefore must end in happiness, and that the only divinity that man can hope to understand is the part found within himself.121

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118 Ibid., p. 42.
119 Ibid., p. 43.
120 Ibid., p. 319.
121 Ibid.
This third group of essays shows a definite development in Maeterlinck's attitudes. Major themes such as the importance of the inner reality, death, man's obligations to society, and particularly Maeterlinck's search for the ultimate source of being, are discussed at length. His optimistic outlook on life becomes noticeable during the first three essays, but with *La Mort*, he begins to return to his early pessimism. Each essay after *La Mort* shows a deepening pessimism and a bleak attitude toward man's existence. His unhappy outlook is caused by the belief that the unknown cannot be found after all. A further development of this realization will be seen in the last group of essays.
CHAPTER V

THE PASCALIAN SERIES

The last essays written by Maeterlinck have been called by critics the "Pascalian series." The group consists of six volumes, and the thoughts are presented by the author without a plan or a logical order. For that reason, they have been compared with Pascal's unfinished series. The form of the volumes leads to a certain amount of incoherence, because each page consists of notes which are not arranged according to subject or any other logical order. Maeterlinck claims that a natural order will emerge from all these diverse thoughts. The order emerges from the repetition of the same themes, which helps to link all the fragmentary pieces of writing. The essays were written during the years preceding World War II. The group consists of the following titles: Avant le grand silence (1934), Le Sablier (1936), L'Ombre des ailes (1936), Devant Dieu (1937), La Grande Porte (1939), and L'Autre Monde (1942). Since these were the last essays which Maeterlinck wrote, they sum up his philosophical position and give his ultimate conclusions. They treat the

1 Pasquier, p. 142.
2 Ibid.
3 Halls, p. 144.
same themes as most of the earlier essays, but the tone is very serious and utterly pessimistic, as would be expected from the evolution to pessimism that has been shown in his works. Since the themes and even the words used are very similar in all six essays, two have been chosen to be examined in detail. The themes and subjects treated in these two volumes will indicate those of the entire group. Thus, *Avant le grand silence* and *Le Sablier* will be discussed as typical examples of the "Pascalian series." Since the two essays were written only two years apart, there is a great deal of repetition of similar ideas, which will be discussed to help the reader follow the development of thought.

**Avant le Grand Silence**

An important theme in *Avant le grand silence* is the nature of man. As is typical of Maeterlinck's later thought, his view of man is very pessimistic in this essay. He believed that man is worthless, and that it follows that life itself is also of no value. He discusses the fundamental stupidity of man and says, "The key to all the misfortunes of the peoples is their stupidity." He further says that this stupidity has not been improved since the world began.

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4 The French edition of *Avant le grand silence* was not available to this writer.

He gives the following harsh judgment of man: "...[Humanity] is already but a semi-putrid manifestation of life, for our digestive apparatus is essentially no more than a putrefaction-motor."\(^6\) In a similar vein, he says, "All that we think, all that we know, all that we are, is born of a little food that rots in our intestine."\(^7\) Thus, it can be seen that he had a very low opinion of man, and little hope for his improvement. The reader will recall that this type of theorizing is a great contrast to the optimistic ideas about man's capabilities found in earlier essays such as *Le Double Jardin*. In discussing the nature of man, he describes what a typical person would answer if one should ask him what he is thinking:

> If he attempts to reply sincerely and immediately, he will almost always be terribly embarrassed; sometimes by the baseness or indecency, more often by the futility, puerility, or imbecility of the idea that he was revolving in his mind.\(^8\)

Maeterlinck even has a cynical view of love, which is a result of his bleak attitude toward man. He says that love is only "... a multiplication, by scissiparity, of his [man's] incurable egotism, which occurs because it is organically necessary."\(^9\) In short, it can be concluded that man is a base,

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\(^6\)Ibid., p. 75.

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 120.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 130.

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 55.
totally wretched creature. This concept marks a definite change in his outlook, and Maeterlinck himself points out the nature of this change. He says that in his youth he pitied man, but that in his old age he is only ashamed of him.10

Since Maeterlinck considered mankind to be basically bad, man's society must also be bad. He believed that the society of his time was deplorable, but that it would later become even worse, and would eventually destroy itself.11 He says that in several generations, there will be no more individual existence, but only "a collective and almost coprophagic life"12 like that of the termite. One may recall that similar ideas of the future of the human race are expressed in La Vie des termites. Maeterlinck has no confidence in man's ability to govern himself and to organize his society: "Make laws as though all men were good: the wicked triumph, the good are crushed. Make laws as though all men were evil: the wicked slip through them or circumvent them. Only the good obey them and suffer."13 Maeterlinck's final judgment of man's society is that he never has made and never will make any progress, and that the development of the species only serves to increase its suffering.14

10Ibid., p. 32.  
11Ibid., p. 20.  
12Ibid.  
13Ibid., p. 22.  
14Ibid., p. 153.
A somber view of life is a result of the condemnation of man and his society. Human life is worth nothing, and the man who understands life would have to be "... a great melancholic, a great sceptic, a great desparer. ..."15

In fact, life is so useless that "... the majority of human beings live only in order not to die."16 Man's life means nothing, because he forms a useless link in the chain of humanity, and the chain as a whole seems to serve no purpose.17 Maeterlinck says, "We do not know what will be tomorrow; but let us be assured that it will be nearer the end and sadder than today."18

In discussing man's life, the subject of fatality is mentioned. In accordance with his pessimistic view of life, he believed that fate cannot be changed, and that everything is predetermined. It has been seen that as he changed to a more pessimistic outlook during his life, he became more and more certain that nothing can alter a person's fate.

He describes fate in this way:

We believe that the event is unfolding before our eyes, whereas it is only a film unreeling; and all the wills, the prayers, the objurgations of thousands of spectators are powerless to alter by a hair's breadth a single gesture of the thousands of images fixed on the celluloid

15Ibid., p. 29.
16Ibid., p. 31.
17Ibid., p. 33.
18Ibid., p. 185.
of the reel, just as all our acts are congealed in the marble, granite or porphyry of Destiny.\textsuperscript{19}

Even the moment of a man's death has been predetermined. If one should take precautions and seem to avoid death, even the delay has been foreseen.\textsuperscript{20}

Death, then, is still an important subject for Maeterlinck. His attitude toward it is similar to the attitude in \textit{La Mort}. He does not see death as a dreadful event. Since life is such a dreary experience, he views death as a relief from life. "Let us sometimes think of the good fortune of being dead."\textsuperscript{21} Death is a more beautiful form of existence than life. He says, "It is death that gives life its weight, its importance, its dignity, its meaning, and its infinite perspectives."\textsuperscript{22} Death is man's only possible goal, and it gives his life its only meaning.\textsuperscript{23}

Maeterlinck again contemplates the nature of existence after death. As in \textit{La Mort}, he affirms that complete annihilation is impossible.\textsuperscript{24} His reason is that nothing is ever lost in the universe, since all things are part of an eternal cycle of living. He gives the following example: "When we cut the throat of a lamb we divert a stream of which not a drop is lost."\textsuperscript{25} He also says, "Nothing has ever ceased,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19}Ibid., pp. 138-139.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 194.
\item \textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 72.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 190.
\item \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 39.
\item \textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 43.
\end{itemize}
nothing will ever cease to exist.\textsuperscript{26} Since annihilation is discounted, he describes life after death as an absorption into a universal cycle. This theory, expressed in \textit{La Mort}, was the explanation which he adopted at that time. He says, "After all, life and motion without beginning or end are much less astonishing, much more comprehensible than nothingness. Well, there is no mean; one or the other has to be accepted."\textsuperscript{27} In this eternal cycle the dead still live, since they are accumulated within each person and are transmitted in turn to his children. ". . . We add to the common fund what we have acquired in life, to hand it down to our successors, in whom they \[the dead\] will live as they lived in us."\textsuperscript{28} The collective soul and universal pool of souls which have been mentioned earlier are related to this idea of the cycle of life, which contains all life and takes a part of all people who have ever lived.

The nature of God is a major problem for Maeterlinck in this volume. As in all earlier essays, he ridicules revealed religion. He says that humanity has blindly accepted for 2000 years the " . . . puerilities and absurdities . . ."\textsuperscript{29} which belong to the God of the Jews, Christians and Moslems. He cannot believe in this God, but he does believe in a God

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 68.  \hspace{1cm}  \textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 187.
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 31.
contained in man's soul. The idea was first presented in La Vie des abeilles, one may remember. Each man, then, creates his own God within his heart. He describes God in this way:

God. He is the blossom of our soul, of our Ego, more Ego than all the rest of our Us. He is our incessant creation. He changes from century to century, from age to age, from day to day. The man whose God in old age is like the God of his childhood or youth is not a man but a corpse. He lives, grows, develops, perfects, and uplifts and nourishes Himself by our strength, our intelligence, our virtues. Your God is you—what you were, what you are, and above all what you hope to become. Around you, as around Him, is all space, all time, all infinity, all the unknown that you are able to absorb into yourself.30

The search for God once again occupies Maeterlinck's thought. His deep pessimism is clearly reflected in his comments concerning this quest. He says that nothing at all has been accomplished in the pursuit of truth.

But all our efforts, all our conquests, have never resulted in anything but a deeper and deeper ignorance; and all that we have learned regarding the why and the how, the origin and the end, time and eternity, matter and spirit, life and death, has always been more and more negative. We have contributed to the common fund only zeros. . . . It is not by heaping nothing upon nothing that we can hope one day to discover or establish something.31

He sees no hope for future progress, because man will probably never find what has eluded him for so long.32

30 Ibid., p. 18.
31 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
32 Ibid., p. 109.
However, the only ray of optimism in the entire volume is contained in his insistence upon the continuation of the quest. He says, "One must never cease to act and think as though the unknowable might be known, although we are aware that it is infinite and beyond our reach." Even though man knows nothing, Maeterlinck says that the search has value because it is fascinating and gives life its interest. "What idle despair should we not suffer in a Universe in which we knew everything?" He challenges man to continue to perform his duty in the search for the source of life. "Let us never weary of questioning, we know not what or whom."

Le Sablier

Le Sablier treats essentially the same themes as Avant le grand silence. Maeterlinck's view of man and his life on earth is again a very bleak one. His position is shown in this remark: "... Le sort de l'homme sur cette terre n'est qu'une tragédie qui finit dans les larmes, la douleur et la mort." Life is completely sad and people are unhappy most of the time. "On ne serait heureux que s'il était possible d'oublier que presque personne ne l'est." The undesirability of being alive is shown in the following

33Ibid., p. 25. 34Ibid., pp. 117-118.
37Ibid., p. 74.
example: "On vous tire d'un profond et bienfaisant sommeil
pour vous replonger dans les tourments de la vie, comme on
réveille le condamné pour le plonger dans la mort."38 Life,
then, is nothing more than a journey toward death, with lit-
tle or no happiness to relieve that journey. "Que fait mon
chien, que fait mon chat? Il dort les trois quarts de sa
vie pour oublier qu'il vit ou qu'il se rapproche de la mort.
Est-ce un exemple? est-ce une leçon?"39 Man's life is fur-
ther afflicted by the pains of his body. The theme of the
hindrance of the external part of life has been presented
in the first two essays. The central idea is that man's body
prevents him from concentrating on the more important spiritu-
al side of life. He says, "Que peut-il subsister d'une âme
qu'alimentent seules les grandes misères et les petits plai-
sirs de notre corps?"40

As in Avant le grand silence, the wretchedness of society
is a result of the dismal condition of man's life. He dis-
cusses society after World War I and says that the leading
nations are ruled by the most mediocre men. The war has elim-
inated the elite, and only the worst people were left.
"
... L'inferiorité, également collective, d'â présent"41
is explained by the ravages of the war. He says that people

38 Ibid., p. 179.
40 Ibid., p. 24.
41 Ibid., p. 146.
were beginning to improve before the war, but that after it was over, they were once again "... dans la boue des bas fonds et des commencements. ...".42 Thus, man's progress has been erased, and he will probably never improve his lot.43 He does believe that the individual has social obligations, but that people have failed in these duties. Man's society is not as solid as that of the bee or the termite, because men cannot sacrifice themselves for the good of the group.44 This idea was mentioned in the discussion of *La Vie des abeilles*. Other people should not be regarded as separate entities, but as part of the whole. "Chacun de nous n'est pas seulement un homme, il est l'humanité entière."45 Since man has not accepted this premise, his society has failed and will continue to fail.

Maeterlinck's ideas on fate are also similar to those in the other volume of the series. Everything in each person's life is predetermined, and the young child already has imprinted on his soul all that he will do and think. "Rien ne lui adviendra qui n'y soit préfiguré et il le déroulera sur l'écran du temps, dût-il vivre centenaire, jusqu'à la dernière seconde de sa vieillesse."46 People may have the

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42Ibid., p. 233.  
43Ibid., p. 18.  
44Ibid., p. 92.  
45Ibid.  
46Ibid., pp. 73-74.
appearance of being free to make choices, but every choice that they make was already decided by fate. He says, "À quelqu'un qui lirait trois jours ou trois ans avant nous dans notre avenir, nous semblerions tous prisonniers de notre volonté ou esclaves de notre liberté." Man's very will makes him even more of a prisoner of his predetermined destiny.

Maeterlinck's fascination with death continues to be evident in *Le Sablier*. He even says, "La mort peut devenir un sujet de méditation si intéressant qu'on s'ennuie quand on n'y pense plus." He has stated as early as 1896 that death is the only goal and purpose of life. Again in this volume he says that every person spends his life merely waiting for death. He describes this wait in the following passage:

À partir de l'enfance, les hommes passent leur vie à attendre on ne sait quoi qui, à leur gré, tarde trop à venir. Ils pressent les heures comme on les presse avant le premier rendez-vous d'un grand amour. Ce n'est qu'au dernier moment qu'ils s'aperçoivent que l'on ne sait quoi, le n'importe quoi tant désiré, n'est autre chose que la mort. Les uns l'attendent en ne faisant rien, les autres en ayant l'air de faire quelque chose, et ce sont les moins malheureux. Mais le fond de leur vie est le même.

He once again discusses the question of what happens after death. The survival of the soul in an eternal cycle of being

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48 Ibid., p. 95.  
49 Ibid., p. 22.  
50 Ibid., p. 17.
is his favorite solution. Each human being is only a part of a gigantic universal process of renewal.

Le germe ou l'invisible dont je suis né était porteur de milliers d'invisibles qui tous vivent dans mon corps et dans mon esprit, que je transmettrai à ceux qui me suivront, qui, à leur tour, les transmettront à leurs enfants et aux enfants de leurs petits-enfants, et ainsi indéfiniment, jusqu'à l'extinction de la race ou la mort de la terre.⁵¹

He is not certain as to the nature of the afterlife, but he is certain that it must be happier than life on earth.⁵² Death, then, is not to be feared, since it will be better than life. "Rassurons-nous, la mort ne peut rien nous réserver de plus fâcheux que la vie. Elle n'est qu'une vie sans malheurs, sans tristesse, sans souffrances."⁵³ The reader may recall that all of these ideas concerning death and the nature of the afterlife are similar to those expressed in La Mort, written some twenty years earlier.

Maeterlinck is also still concerned with the nature of God. In these last essays, he does not use words such as nature or the infinite to denote God; he uses the word itself. His idea of God is the same as in earlier essays, in that he describes Him as existing within man. He says, "Inutile d'aller au loin interroger le Sphinx pour lui demander son secret. En nous, ce secret se trouve bien plus vivant que dans le

⁵¹Ibid., p. 70.
⁵²Ibid., p. 165.
⁵³Ibid., p. 123.
Sphinx, tout aussi grand, aussi inaccessible."\(^{54}\) He again states that God is created by man within his own soul. "Nous n'aurons jamais d'autre Dieu que celui que nous créons ou que créent les meilleurs d'entre nous."\(^{55}\) God exists only in man's soul, and the soul is the same thing as God; they are equivalent names for the unknown.\(^{56}\) There is, then, no God such as the one of the Bible.

Thus, Maeterlinck again repudiates revealed religion, but his attitude toward it shows a change in his outlook. To the end of his life he refused to accept religious faith, but in these last essays he demonstrates a wistful, nostalgic longing for the faith of his childhood. He regrets the loss of his religious faith and calls it a real tragedy. He says that the loss of faith has been widespread, and describes its effects.

Il semble qu'avec elle \([\text{la tragédie}]\) s'effondre un des derniers refuges de l'homme. Je voudrais qu'il en fût autrement. Je cherche partout dans l'histoire, dans la raison, dans le fond de mon cœur, un argument sérieux en faveur de l'incomparable légende. J'avoue humblement, à mon très sincère regret, que je n'en ai pas trouvé jusqu'ici.\(^{57}\)

The search for the nature of the unknown continues through his final volumes. He again must conclude that man

\(^{54}\) Ibid., pp. 20-21.
\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 248.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 36.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 190.
knows nothing, and that he has been unable to discover anything in his search. "Jusqu'ici, je ne l'ai [la vérité] pas découverte; c'est pourquoi, je la cherche encore à droite et à gauche, devant et derrière moi, dans la lumière et dans les ténèbres."\(^{58}\) He also says, "À mesure que nous croyons apprendre, creusons d'autant notre ignorance."\(^{59}\) As in *Avant le grand silence*, man's only glimmer of hope is to continue the quest, however futile it may prove to be. "La seule prière digne de l'homme, la seule qui ait quelque chance d'être exaucée, c'est la recherche, l'étude passionnée de l'inconnu."\(^{60}\)

As shown in the discussion of these two volumes, the "Pascalian series" of essays encompasses Maeterlinck's attitudes at the end of his life. The tone is one of almost unrelieved pessimism, since the question of the ultimate secret of the universe is not solved. The only spark of optimism in the entire series is the possibility of personal fulfillment in continuing this search.\(^{61}\) God remains the central enigma for Maeterlinck, and the revealed religions are regretfully dismissed. Maeterlinck's God is identifiable with the soul, and may be sought within man. The only certainty in man's life is his death, and the nature of the afterlife is another.

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\(^{58}\)Ibid., p. 7.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., p. 170.

\(^{60}\)Ibid., p. 150.

\(^{61}\)Halls, p. 145.
enigma. He concludes that some part of man may survive, but not in the form of a personal immortality. Survival is possible only in that atoms of each person serve in the creation of other persons in an eternal cycle. Man's life on earth is bleak and desolate, and he is not even free to decide his own fate. All of his pessimistic thoughts lead to the conclusion that man can know nothing, and can do very little to make his existence worthwhile.

62 Ibid., p. 147.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In spite of the diversity of subject matter of Maeterlinck's essays, several dominant themes can be traced through most of them. Also, as Maeterlinck's attitudes changed from early pessimism to optimism, and after 1910 back to an even greater pessimism, a change can be seen in the way in which he discusses the same themes and ideas.

The importance of the interior reality and the insignificance of the external part of life is a theme which is the basis for most of his ideas. Since the interior life is most important, it follows that a person's spiritual life and his thoughts are the vital part of his existence. Thus, Maeterlinck says that man's life centers around his thoughts and attitudes, and this idea is reflected in all the essays. The interior reality is the dominant theme of *Le Trésor des humbles* (1896). If the interior reality is of supreme importance, then the soul of man is his most vital part. This idea leads to a discussion of the soul and its importance, and to how people relate to each other by means of a linking of their souls. *La Sacré et la Destinée* (1898) contains similar ideas, since the unimportance of the external part of life is discussed. The significance of the inner qualities
of an individual is also mentioned, and a person is considered to be good if his soul possesses beautiful qualities. The interior reality is discussed in a different way in *La Vie des abeilles* (1901). Maeterlinck believed that animals possess intelligence as well as instincts, and in his treatment of this idea it is evident that the inner life is more important than the physical exterior. The same idea is discussed in *La Vie des termites* (192?), and he even says that an insect's instincts are a result of the linking of souls, because the instincts of a species are derived from a collective pool of their souls. He also treats the related idea that physical matter is a hindrance to the beautiful spiritual existence which would be ideal. The interior reality is also the main theme in *Le Temple enseveli* (1902). In this essay, he discusses the insignificance of events and says that it is a person's inner feelings about events that give them their importance. The same idea is mentioned in several of the light essays in *Le Double Jardin* (1904). For example, his theory of modern drama involves the belief that drama should concern interior analysis rather than external events. The question of intelligence versus instinct is again discussed in *L'Intelligence des fleurs* (1907), and Maeterlinck states his idea that even flowers have inner qualities. The interior reality is also a central theme in *L'Hôte inconnu* (1917), one of the later essays. In this volume man's subconscious is
probed, and Maeterlinck shows the great power of the mysterious internal side of man. The theme of the inner reality is given a different tone in the essays of the "Pascalian series." In Avant le grand silence (1934), Maeterlinck says that although the inner part of man is most important, man's instinctual qualities are bad, and thus man is a worthless creature. This thought reflects the pessimistic outlook of these last essays.

Maeterlinck's ideas on love reflect his interest in the inner part of life. Throughout the essays, love is shown as being a relationship between souls, rather than a physical one. For example, in Le Trône (1896) he states that love is a meeting and communication between two souls. Even in La Vie des abeilles (1901), the mating of bees is treated as nonphysical. The love between two people is described in a similar way in Le Double Jardin (1904). Love is based on mental rather than physical attraction. In L'Intelligence des fleurs (1907), Maeterlinck says that even the union of flowers is an idealized relationship. His idea of love in the "Pascalian series" is more cynical, but it is also nonphysical. He believed at that time that love is merely a result of man's need to bolster his ego, but this attitude still indicates a mental type of love.

Maeterlinck's conception of man's relationship to other men is based on the linking of souls. Morality has inner
goodness as its basis, and the interaction between two souls provides the basis for society. In Le Trésor (1896) he says that this relationship is the reason for man's obligation to other members of his society. The discussion of man as a member of society is expanded in La Vie des abeilles (1901) and La Vie des termites (1927). The basic idea in both volumes is that man neglects his duty toward his society because of his selfish individualism. The society of man is thus seen as being inferior to that of the more unselfish bee.

In La Vie des termites, Maeterlinck's judgment of man's society is much more harsh than in La Vie des abeilles. This notion reflects the change in his attitudes during the years between the two essays.

The idea that morality is based on an inner justice is discussed in Le Temple enseveli (1902). This morality once again leads to an obligation to one's fellowmen, and in this optimistic period, Maeterlinck says that man's inner sense of justice will lead him to correct the faults of his society. However, this optimistic attitude is not present in the "Pascalian series." As in La Vie des termites, Maeterlinck deplores the condition of society, and says that it is completely hopeless and cannot be helped. In Le Sablier (1936), he discusses the state of society after World War I, and concludes that man has never progressed and can never improve his society.
Maeterlinck is preoccupied with the question of man's place in the universe. He often mentions fatality and discusses the effect that a blind, unalterable fate could have on people's lives. In *Le Trésor* (1896), his early pessimism is reflected in his attitude toward fate. The attitude is the same one which motivated the writing of his Symbolist plays during the same period. Fate is an absolute tyrant which rules the lives of everyone, and its blows can be softened but not changed. Fate is treated in a different way in *La Sagesse* (1898), and a growing optimism is evident. He says that fatality is a force that can be changed by means of a person's inner qualities. Beginning in *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), fate is combined with God as a ruling force in people's lives. In *Le Temple ensanglant* (1902), Maeterlinck reaches the height of his optimism, and he repudiates his early concept of fate. He says that there is no power which intervenes directly in men's lives, and that events can be changed by one's attitude toward them. A change back to pessimism is seen in *L'Hôte inconnu* (1917). In this and in later essays, he returns to the attitude on fatality of his early pessimism. He believed then that all events are predetermined, and that nothing can alter them. The same idea is continued through the last essays. In *Avant le grand silence* (1934) and in *Le Sablier* (1936), he says that everything in life is predetermined, even a person's thoughts and the moment of his death.
The problem of the nature of life after death, and of the meaning of death, preoccupied Maeterlinck's thought from his earliest days. His attitude toward death in *Le Trégor* (1896) reflects the pessimistic mood of his ideas. It is also connected with fatality, because he says that death is life's only goal, and that this goal is determined by fate. In his more optimistic period, his attitude toward death is somewhat less fatalistic. In essays such as *Le Temple onseveli* (1902), his discussion of death leaves a hopeful impression. Death is not to be dreaded, but is simply a time of peace and rest. After the time of *La Mort* (1913), his ideas on death remain very similar to those in that essay. In *La Mort* he discusses the possible explanations of what occurs after death, and decides that only survival in a universal consciousness is possible. The essay is rather bleak, but his attitude toward death is not completely pessimistic, because he views the afterlife as a pleasant experience. In *Les Sentions* (1919), his outlook has become somewhat more somber, because he is less certain about the nature of existence after death. The "Pascalian series" gives his impressions as he approaches death. He views death once again as life's only possible goal, but he also views it as a welcome release from life's miseries. Thus, the ideas of *La Mort* are carried through the essays for the next thirty years.
In his search for the meaning of man's existence, Maeterlinck expresses his ideas concerning the nature of God. In his first essay, it is evident that he felt the need for a belief in some ultimate source of being, but he cannot accept the religious ideas of his early life. The concept which was to remain consistent through most of the essays is first discussed in *La Sagesse* (1898). He describes God as a force found within man. The same idea is found in *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), as God (or nature) is contained within the bee.

In *Le Temple enseveli* (1902), he again rejects organized religion, and says that God is a power found within the subconscious of man. In *Avant le grand silence* (1934), he ridicules religion and expresses the same concept of the nature of God. However, a change in attitude occurs in *Le Sablier* (1936). He still believes that God exists within man, but he returns to the longing for religious faith which was seen in *Le Triomphe* (1896). At the end of his life, then, he continues to reject organized religion, but he desires at least to have the faith which his reason will not allow him to accept.

Finally, a related theme is his great search for the nature of the source of life. This search begins in *La Vie des abeilles* (1901), and continues through all the remaining essays. He views such a quest, which is essentially also a search for God, as man's most important function in life. In the essays of the optimistic period, he views the quest
in a hopeful way. For example, in Le Double Jardin (1904) he says that man is making progress in his search, and that the unknown will be found. L'Intelligence des fleurs (1907) continues in the same vein. Even in later essays which are basically pessimistic, he sees the continuation of this quest as the only hope for mankind. In Les Sentiers (1919) he says that the unknown may never be discovered, but that as long as the search continues, man has a reason to hope. Even in Le Grand Secret (1921), although he says that the secret of life is unknowable, he advocates the pursuit of even a limited amount of knowledge. However, a deeper pessimism is evident in the "Pascalian series." For example, in Avant le grand silence (1934) he states that man has never learned anything from all his efforts, and that they have been futile. In spite of this complete pessimism, he continues to insist upon the pursuit of the search for God, in order to give life some meaning.

In short, and to conclude, this last theme seems to give the entire group of essays their significance. Maeterlinck's life as well as his works can be viewed as a quest, as a seeking to explain the unknown. All the other themes can be related to his attempt to analyze and to understand life and man's position in the world. Although Maeterlinck failed in his search to penetrate the mysteries of life, he sees the
quest itself as enough justification for his life.¹ Thus, the search as it is revealed in his essays is justified by the attempt itself.

¹Halls, p. 172.
APPENDIX

THE ESSAYS OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le Trésor des humbles</td>
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<td>1939</td>
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<tr>
<td>L'Autre Monde</td>
<td>1942</td>
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