

Mélisande

A Theatre-piece In Four Acts

Tony Rothman

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Author's Note

Anyone reading *Mélanide* will immediately realize that it does not intend to be a realistic biography of any of the persons involved. To compress thirty years and half-a-dozen lives into an evening's entertainment has required every trick at my disposal. Characters have been combined, other important people left out; time has been compressed, expanded and, more seriously, I have had to resort to some minor rearrangement of chronology. Finally, I've introduced a totally fictitious character into the action as an attempt to weave my triple fugue together.

Nevertheless, the major events in the play actually occurred—in one way or another—and I have attempted to portray the characters as honestly as possible. I have made liberal use of their own writings—often edited and rewritten to make them speakable—as well as other contemporary accounts.

For the interested reader, I list in the Appendix the principal sources I relied on while writing *Mélanide*. However, anyone consulting them should be advised that several are not immune to a certain distasteful partisanship that their subjects seem to inspire.

T.R.

Boston, May 1991

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Critic—A young, late twentieth-century or early twenty-first century American.

Always searching for *le mot juste*, occasionally finding it. He walks with a cane, though it is not clear he needs one.

Mélisande*

The Older Erik Satie—(SATIE1) Composer as he appeared around 1925, the year of his death. “He was very much like a satyr...”

The Younger Erik Satie—(SATIE2) Composer and cabaret pianist, as he appeared around 1891, when he was 25, and somewhat later.

Joséphin Péladan—Self-proclaimed High Priest, or Sar, of the Rosicrucians.

Resembles Rasputin a bit, given to ceremony. See portrait by Séon.

Claude Debussy—Composer, pianist, singer, conductor.

Woman interviewer.

Guiraud—One of Debussy's professors at the conservatoire

Princess Maleine*

Gaby Dupont—Debussy's mistress

Suzanne Valadon—Painter, about 25, mother of Maurice Utrillo. Briefly Satie's mistress.

Maurice Maeterlinck—Belgian writer, author of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Tall and broad shouldered, like a peasant. “His gaze could never bear the weight of another's.”

Georgette Leblanc—Singer and actress, in the Sarah Bernhardt mold. Maeterlinck's mistress.+

Lilly Debussy—Debussy's first wife

Golaud**

Sonia—A Russian Girl

Translator—“A small, dandified man, shrunken and bilious.” With a derby.

Mary Garden—Opera singer, the first Mélisande*

Pelléas

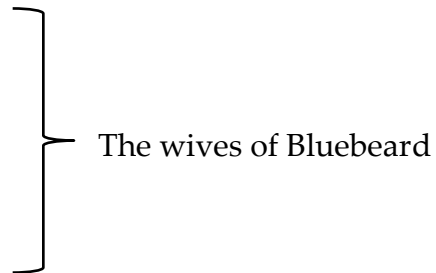
Bluebeard**

Ariane+

Selysette

Bellangère

Ygraine



Dancers, public, servants, guests etc.

*To be played by the same actress

+To be played by the same actress

**To be played by the same actor

Other roles can and should be doubled or tripled.

The action takes place mostly in Paris between 1891 and 1925, though not necessarily in chronological order. Although I have divided the script into scenes for convenience in reading (and writing), within each act they are meant to be played without a break.

Note On The Sets

If possible, the set should include a second stage, referred to as Stage Two. On this stage will take place dances, art exhibits, movies etc., to illustrate the influences that are being discussed on the Stage One. The theatre should also be decorated with period artwork, in particular the fairy-tale paintings of Edward Burne-Jones, Walter Crane and Arthur Rackham.

Note On The Music

Music is an integral part of the production. Conveniently, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra under Charles Dutoit has recorded on CD virtually all the music by Debussy used here. Unless otherwise noted, timings refer to MSO recordings. The required music and my sources, where available, are listed in Appendix A.

References

Principal References are listed in Appendix B.

Act I, Scene 1

Prelude

The play begins with the opening of Debussy's music for his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The lights gradually go up, just enough to reveal a dense forest. At about bar 10 (bassoons) the first hints of a flashlight beam appear, shining through the trees and the mist. Over the next few bars we see glimpses of a person behind the trees. At bar 14 someone is obviously struggling to make his way forward. He carries a smartphone and a cane, the latter apparently as much for ornament as necessity. By bar 24 he leans against a tree, exhausted. He is a CRITIC, lost. The music must fade out by bar 29 of the score (the voice entrance in the opera), at which point the CRITIC sighs deeply.

CRITIC: (Very slowly, in spirit of the music) My God, where in the world...? (Shaking his smartphone) No signal...Ah—
(He stuffs it into his pocket, sighs.)
How could I have gotten into this...? Strange. I tracked the beast day by day. I had it in my sights—Gone! Somehow I've been...sidetracked. Damn...

(The lights go up farther and the CRITIC spies MÉLISANDE, with golden hair, dressed as a storybook princess. She sits weeping at the edge of a fountain.)

CRITIC: Wait a minute, a girl...No, a woman.

(He coughs but MÉLISANDE takes no notice. He goes nearer and touches her on the shoulder.)

MÉLISANDE: (Springing up)
Ne me touchez pas! Ne me touchez pas!

CRITIC: Don't worry, I won't touch you...won't hurt y—God, you're beautiful.

MÉLISANDE: Don't touch me! Do not! Or...I'll throw myself into the water...

CRITIC: I won't touch you. My word. (He backs up to a tree.) Has someone hurt you?

MÉLISANDE: Oh yes, yes...yes...(She weeps profoundly.)

CRITIC: Well...who?

MÉLISANDE: Everyone! Everyone...

CRITIC: (Trying not to sound confused) Yes, *je comprends*...I'm with you...But what have they done?

MÉLISANDE: I...cannot say. I...will not say...

CRITIC: We should find some help...Where have you come from?

MÉLISANDE: I've escaped! Escaped...

CRITIC: From where?

MÉLISANDE: I am lost...

CRITIC: (Sighing) Indeed...

MÉLISANDE: I am not from here...I was not born there...

CRITIC: But where are you from? Where were you born?

MÉLISANDE: Oh, far from here...Very far...

CRITIC: (Peering at the fountain) What is that, sparkling in the water?

MÉLISANDE: Where? Oh, that is the crown he gave me. It fell, when I was...weeping.

CRITIC: Who gave you a crown? Let me get it for—

MÉLISANDE: No! I don't want it anymore. I'd prefer to die at once.

CRITIC: Really, the pool isn't deep.

MÉLISANDE: No! I don't want it. If you touch your hand to the water,
I'll throw myself in.

CRITIC: (Raising his hands) All right, *pace*. A shame, though; it's an elegant
crown...(softly) seriously stylish...Is it long since you escaped?

MÉLISANDE: Yes, yes...Who are you?

CRITIC: I've begun to wonder.

MÉLISANDE: Why do you look at me like that?

CRITIC: Your eyes...you never seem to shut your eyes.

MÉLISANDE: No, you're wrong, I close them at night...Why did you come here?

CRITIC: I was stalking a kind of beast...(Showing her his phone): My
navigator...failed.

MÉLISANDE: I begin to feel cold...

CRITIC: Please, you'd better come with me...How old—What is your name?

MÉLISANDE: Mélisande.

CRITIC: Mélisande. Yes, it rolls from the tongue, it hints of—I like it. Well,
Mélisande, let's get away from here.

MÉLISANDE: *Je reste ici...*

CRITIC: *Je reste ici*. That's unfortunate. Look, you'll freeze to death in this
forest. Give me your hand—

MÉLISANDE: Don't touch me!

CRITIC: I'm sorry, I was being...insensitive. As you will,
Mélisande, I hope to see you again. (He turns to leave.)

MÉLISANDE: Where are you going?

CRITIC: I don't know. By ill luck I am...misplaced.

Act I, Scene 2

He walks away. The lights go down on MÉLISANDE. As the CRITIC wanders about talking to himself (below), the lights come up on a cafe front. At a typical French cafe table is sitting the older ERIK SATIE (SATIE1). He wears a goatee, a pince-nez and a bowler hat while he smokes a cigar and drinks cognac. SATIE's umbrella lies next to him on the table. During the following monologue the background music can be a vamp from 0:40-1:06 on the recording of Debussy's *Danse Extatique et Final du Première Acte* from *Le Martyre de saint Sebastian*.

CRITIC: Mélisande, a unique name...ineluctable girl. How is it that she ends up here? For that matter, how is it that I, with global positioning, find myself—

SATIE1: —wandering on the tangent plane between zero and infinity, Monsieur?

CRITIC: (Not hearing, addressing phone) Yes...

(Music here.)

Strange, I was methodically stalking the latest trend. Birthplace—recorded; date of birth—noted; direction—north by northeast; growth—soon to be viral...And suddenly—! (Scratching his head): Vanished without a trace. (Cheering): But, you know, only one thing saddens me more than the disappearance of a new trend—a trend that has outlived its instant. (Reflectively): Not much chance of that these days. The cause of the problem is simplicity itself: the new world is too old. You know I am right (Like a rap): Me-ism, we-ism, neoromanticism, post-modernism; skylines, shopping malls into pastel popsicles. Love it. Minimalism, expansionism, rainbow eclecticism, gansta-ism, hip-hopism...beanie babies? Sentimentalist cyborgism, revivalist militarism triumphs over

capitalist socialism, a country returned to neoprimitivism. (Perhaps with 1% doubt) Yes! (Sighing) Damn, I misfiled Reaganism.

My apologies, I've been hijacked by adrenalin, an occupational hazard. You see, even for a Man of All Trends, it's become impossible to stay ahead. The transmutation of trends is now proceeding with such velocity that the only salvation for the professional trend-tracker is to study trends in trends—metatrends, you might say. Groovy. Oops, too late, no one will understand such arcane and archaic language. I'm obsolete. I know it. Time has frozen my words even as they fall from my *soigné* lips. (He freezes, comes alive, shrugs). That's kismet. Things change. (Looks around.) Where am I? I've obviously fallen through some paradigm-onic shift—

(Hearing SATIE loudly swat a mosquito, the critic looks towards him.)

Ah, perhaps my quarry...

(He walks over to SATIE.)

SATIE1: (Puffing on his cigar) Mosquitos.

CRITIC: (Swatting himself) Hardcore.

SATIE1: Undoubtedly sent by the Freemasons.

CRITIC: (To himself) Curious pre-digital reference.

SATIE1: (Tracking a mosquito) They remind me of Wagner—

CRITIC: (To himself) Another. Tonight's screenplay is full of surprising plot turns.

SATIE1: —unavoidable. (He swats.)

CRITIC: Sir—

SATIE1: (Examining the dead mosquito) One less Valkyrie.

CRITIC: (To himself) No trend-setter here. This fellow is too far-out to be followed. With a dustoff he might do well in a Vaudeville revival... (To SATIE) I salute you, sir, could you perhaps tell me where I am?

SATIE1: Perhaps, but although my information may be inaccurate, it is not guaranteed.

(SATIE continues puffing. CRITIC waves away smoke, waiting impatiently, gesturing for SATIE to continue. No response.)

CRITIC: Sir, has this been some breach of civility on my part?

(Still no response.)

CRITIC: Is this old-fashioned rudeness on your part?

(Still no response.)

CRITIC: (To himself) Perhaps a case of neo-Me-ism?

(SATIE begins to laugh hysterically, then suddenly covers his beard with his hand.)

Sir, consider putting childhood behind you.

SATIE1: An interesting suggestion, Monsieur. But you see, I have had the misfortune to be born very young in a world that is very old.

(CRITIC waves his hand in frustration and begins to walk off.)

SATIE1: In my experience, Monsieur, where you are invariably depends on where you have been. It is a law of nature, very much like the survival of the fittest: those who arrive have traveled.

CRITIC: (Returning) That's quite...very...high concept. Monsieur? *Répétez s'il vous plait.*

SATIE1: Monsieur.

CRITIC: A remarkably authentic accent, where did you pick it up? And your clothes, definitely...Eurocentric. But if I may, Eurocentrism is *passé* along with nuclear fission...À propos clothes, you might invest in some new ones. Poverty has never been fashionable.

- SATIE1: Once more you are right, but I've always preferred to live with my thoughts in poverty than in comfort without them.
- CRITIC: Thoughts? Were they a trend? Well, this has been a pleasant detour into retro-futurism, but I must go. If you would, please point me in a significant direction.
- SATIE1: (Pointing) Five kilometers that way—Arcueil. Five kilometers that way—Paris.
- CRITIC: Paris! (Reflectively) I am seriously off course. (Trying his phone again) No signal. Tell me, what year is this?
- SATIE1: Logic would dictate no later than 1925.
- CRITIC: 1925! (Counting on his fingers) Before Elvis. But the forest I passed through...not Paris.
- SATIE1: Forest, Monsieur?
- CRITIC: Yes, I met someone crying...Mélisande.
- SATIE1: Ah.
- CRITIC: You know of her?
- SATIE1: Everyone knows of her.
- CRITIC: (Shaking his head) I don't.
- SATIE1: No one knows her. What do you wish...?
- CRITIC: She's alone—
- SATIE1: Forget her.
- CRITIC: You are harsh. Some terrible misfortune has befallen her and she's a mere girl...a woman; pre-woman.
- SATIE: You hesitate.
- CRITIC: (Offhandedly, but with a little doubt) It *is* important to use contemporary terms in the counterhegemonic attack on existing paradigms.
- SATIE1: Would you speak in some...terrestrial language.

- CRITIC: I just meant that it's difficult to say how old she is. With such hair...(He shrugs.) But she's alone and... (sympathetically) not hip to the Zeitgeist.
- SATIE1: Strange, every word that leaves your mouth sounds as if it flew from someone else's.
- CRITIC: Marketability equals conventionality.
- SATIE1: An eternal truth, but it could be spoken with such concision only by an American.
- CRITIC: Absolutely. In fact the sound bite is surely the ultimate achievement of the past century. Imagine, the time allotted to express a thought has become less than the time physically required to utter it. (He demonstrates) : In my opinion—the economy—speaking with us from Har—the—matter of national—that was—of course you—we bring you now—to a—always—commercial interruption—
- SATIE1: I approve.
- CRITIC: I'm surprised.
- SATIE1: *Mais non*, the American spirit has from time to time tapped me on the shoulder and I have been delighted to feel its ironically glacial bite...Now, since you seem so displaced, why don't you join me for a drink. Cognac?
- CRITIC: Mineral water, if you don't mind.
- SATIE1: (Into cafe) Garçon! (To CRITIC) Tell me how you ended up on the road between Arcueil and Paris.
- CRITIC: (Raising his arms in puzzlement) I was tracking a new artistic trend—so new it didn't even have an proper "ism"—and it led me into the forest—. Something tells me you have very little interest in art.
- SATIE1: I shit on art.
- CRITIC: I suspected.
- SATIE1: And what is your stance on this new trend? Pro or con?

CRITIC: Two thumbs up. The latest trend is always the best and (knowingly) most profitable.

SATIE1: I take it that you consider yourself—

CRITIC: —the spirit of the age, a—

SATIE1: —some sort of—

CRITIC: —cultural overseer. A—

SATIE1: In other words, a—

CRITIC: —critic.

SATIE1: (Simultaneously)—critic!

(He sits there blinking his eyes regularly, as if stunned.)

CRITIC: Do you have a nervous tic, Monsieur?

SATIE1: To the contrary, I am always dazzled by the presence of a critic. He shines so brightly that I am forced to blink an hour or more at a time.

CRITIC: We are pleased to acknowledge your tactile humility. Still, what word has prompted this?

SATIE1: Monsieur, you misunderstand. I have always wanted to be a critic—a tiny one of course.

CRITIC: Why keep your sights so low? There's zero virtue in half measures.

(Enter WAITER.)

SATIE1: Garçon, Perrier for our guest and more cognac for me.

(Exit WAITER.)

(To CRITIC) Allow me to explain. There are three kinds of critics: the important ones, the middle-sized ones, and the insignificant ones. The last two categories do not exist.

CRITIC: Ah, the conceit dissolves: a satirist who feigns sincerity.

SATIE1: *Mais non*, I am your ally. In fact, one can't sufficiently admire the first critic who ever appeared in the world. The rude inhabitants dwelling in

that ancient Time of Night undoubtedly received him with a kick in the pants. Not realizing, of course, that he was a mere forerunner to a great species.

CRITIC: (Archly) I think you are bored with *ennui*, Monsieur.

SATIE1: Physically, the species has come to resemble a double bassoon. I refer to the critic's serious countenance, which results from the burden of knowledge he is forced to carry. His brain is a department store. It contains everything—orthopaedy, science, bedding, the arts, travel rugs, optical instruments...The critic sees everything, hears everything, touches everything, and yet somehow manages to go on thinking. Not merely thinking, but knowing; in fact he knows everything. What a man—!

CRITIC: Enough! The tensions of the new are about to explode into a virtual slugfest. What is your *roué* vocation, Monsieur?

SATIE1: I? I am a phonometrician.

CRITIC: (Checking phone) Oh, I see, a hack—phonometrician?

SATIE1: Can it be? A trend you haven't cataloged? Allow me, Monsieur, to demonstrate.

(SATIE goes offstage and wheels in a large contraption. It should probably have a large horn, as on an ancient gramophone player, several knobs and dials, springs and scales.)

SATIE1: Behold the phonometer. With it I measure sounds. *La*, please.

(The CRITIC is silent.)

La, I repeat the request. Are you deaf, Monsieur?

(CRITIC sings a note.)

SATIE1: Yes, deaf. *Fa*, very well. (Twiddling dials) Twenty-five, 24, 22—no—23 grams. Insubstantial.

CRITIC: Very clever, a saint in the guise of an anarchist.

SATIE1: Do you know, the first time I used a phonoscope, I examined a B-flat of average dimensions. I assure you I never in my life saw anything so repulsive. I had to call my servant in to look at it. Garçon!

CRITIC: I must admit the kinetic elements of your contraption have a certain constructivist appeal.

SATIE1: A wanderer awash in alliteration is warned to wade ashore without—There was also the time I measured an F-sharp at 93 kilograms. Ninety-three kilograms! It came out of a very fat tenor.

CRITIC: And you're wearing very thin.

SATIE1: What haven't I measured with a phonometer? All Beethoven, all Verdi. Rimsky-Korsakov even—ugh. Weightless.

(Enter WAITER.)

SATIE1: More cognac, please. Phonology is far superior to music. It's more varied and more remunerative—I owe my fortune to it entirely. (He reveals empty pockets.) With a motodynaphone, almost anyone can note down more sounds than the most skillful musician. That is why I have been able to write so much. There is a great future in it. I offer you one word: philophony.

CRITIC: How dare you accuse me of extraterrestrial vocabulary when I note with pleasure that your excesses equal my own.

SATIE1: *Vous rigolez*, Monsieur, mine are far worse. You have yet to hear my “Electric Vocations”—

(They begin to circle each other.)

CRITIC: Mere playful significations of power disruptions—

SATIE1: But “Everlasting and Instantaneous Hours”—

CRITIC: —can only trivialize—

SATIE1: —“Crustaceans with Sessile Eyes”—

CRITIC: —the pervasive historical modes—

SATIE1 —from my “Dessicated Embryos.”

CRITIC: —and one is left with—

SATIE1: “Chapters Turned Inside Out” —

CRITIC: —and a strange—

SATIE1: “Mysterious Waltz of the Kiss in the Eye.”

(SATIE kisses CRITIC in the eye.)

CRITIC: —lingering sensation of...

(They sit down again.)

Those words...titles?

SATIE1: Astonishing perception.

CRITIC: You are a musician.

(Enter WAITER.)

SATIE1: (Accepting a cylinder of cognac) Another Perrier.

(Exit WAITER)

SATIE1: (To CRITIC) A misanthrope, a hypochondriac, the most miserable of men. But a musician—never.

CRITIC: A composer.

SATIE1: (He bows) Erik Satie, Monsieur, with a “k.”

CRITIC: I see.

SATIE1: No, “k.”

CRITIC: Actually your name is familiar to me. You wrote those *Gymnopédies* so momentarily fashionable in the sixties.

(The 3rd *Gymnopédie* for piano begins.)

SATIE1: How can that be? They were only composed in 1888 when I was 22.

CRITIC: The 1960s— fifty years ago. Strange, you occasionally still hear them.

SATIE1: Ah, you are a man of the future. Yes, that was obvious... And after a century, you say, my *Gymnopédies* are still my only works to receive attention? Aah, I am hardly surprised. Shortsighted by birth I have always been long-sighted by nature. The world will never catch up with me.

CRITIC: Yes, Erik Satie, a minor turn-of-the-century composer—

(SATIE slams his umbrella down on the table, jumps up and begins to beat the CRITIC, who retreats, protecting himself with his cane. The music fades out.)

SATIE1: You miserable piece of shit, not fit to slither in the slime of this earth...Crass word-stringer, ignorant of the sacred character of Art—

(The WAITER appears and disappears in fright.)

SATIE1: (Making lunging motions at the CRITIC) I challenge you to a— (He begins to cough.) I challenge you—

(Breaking in to a coughing fit) I— Ah, I am too old...

CRITIC: (Trying to help him) Are you all right?

SATIE1: Don't touch me, vile ignominious traitor to the sublime!

CRITIC: Please, accept my apologies. My remark was inexcusably...dilatatory, conventional wisdom from the hip—

SATIE1: (Straightening his jacket) Unsurpassed boorishness...The decadence of your age has recoiled upon you. In my younger years for such an insult I would have had you shot, vain terrorist...

CRITIC: (Stiffening) I'm sorry, I repeat myself. (Twisting his leg) Ow.

SATIE1: You have a bad leg?

CRITIC: Rarely. An old accident.

SATIE1: Well, that's too bad. Nevertheless, Monsieur Critique, do you not realize that I, Erik Satie, am responsible for every musical "ism" of the twentieth century and beyond?

CRITIC: Please, infinity is a large number.

SATIE1: I speak seriously, Monsieur. I am the spirit of your age.

CRITIC: No, I am, I have said it. The spirit that accepts, a perfect blank to be written on, two thumbs always up.

SATIE1: A wager then. By evening's end, I shall prove to you beyond a shadow of a doubt that I invented the twentieth century.

CRITIC: And I will prove to you that nothing you may have invented remains, that all is erased.

SATIE1: And he who remains standing shall win—?

CRITIC: Modern life.

SATIE1: What a prize! I forfeit—

CRITIC: (Simultaneously) I give up...No, this won't do. Make it a free trip for two to Hawaii, airfare not included.

SATIE1: Very well, where to begin? First things first. Which is closer to the spirit of your age, that *Gymnopédie* or this, written only a year later?

(We hear a suitably bombastic excerpt from Mahler's First Symphony. During musical excerpts actors should behave appropriately; i.e. conduct, pretend to play instruments, pace, etc.)

SATIE1: Concede.

CRITIC: Never. You might as well claim this is the spirit of the age:

(We hear a few seconds of a currently popular piece of rock music.)

SATIE1: Hmm. Discouraging... There is of course *Mélisande*—

CRITIC: What?

SATIE1: Here I claim only to have been midwife—

CRITIC: You—?

SATIE1: I'd advise you to forget her.

CRITIC: I already had. But someone should help her, out of unflavored decency...

SATIE1: There's nothing for it. Her fate is sealed.
CRITIC: Why?
SATIE1: The past is a closed book to you, isn't it? Mélisande inspired a generation.
CRITIC: Not mine. Concede.
SATIE1: What has inspired yours?
CRITIC: The quickness of time.
SATIE1: I might have guessed.
CRITIC: Where is she from?
SATIE1: She is a dream.
CRITIC: Yours? No.
SATIE1: The world's.
CRITIC: Stop. Your world is gone.
SATIE1: I'd say yours is.
CRITIC: Where is she from?
SATIE1: Mystery must be respected.
CRITIC: Narrate, or the game is mine.
SATIE1: You will not be satisfied. You cannot know her
CRITIC: Narrate. Time has stopped.
SATIE1: It is a long story...
CRITIC: The wager. Begin.
SATIE1: The year was 1891 and I was playing in Montmartre at the infamous
Chat Noir...

(The scene changes to a Parisian nightclub in 1891. There should be men and women standing around several tables and a piano, at which is seated the younger SATIE (SATIE2). Also prominent in the background is JOSÉPHIN PÉLADAN, dressed in a flamboyant ceremonial robe, surrounded by admirers.)

SATIE1: No, I had quarreled with the owner and had moved down the hill to the *Auberge du Clou*. Ah, they were the same devil. This was during my Rosicrucian period—

CRITIC: You were a Rosicrucian? I thought they only existed in science-fiction magazines, along with the Scientologists.

SATIE1: I assure you, at the time everyone was a Rosicrucian. But to continue, at the cabaret I played second piano.

Act I, Scene 3

The younger SATIE now begins to play *Le Picadilly*. The scene becomes animated, lots of laughter.

SATIE1: (Out of SATIE2's eyesight) Meet my younger self, at the piano.

CRITIC: (Walking over) Scott Joplin?

SATIE2: Erik Satie.

CRITIC: A classic, no question about it.

SATIE1: Allow me to introduce you to Joséphin Péladan, high priest of the Church of the Rose Cross...

(They walk over but PÉLADAN does not deign to greet them. They retire to Stage Two. PÉLADAN raises his hand.)

PÉLADAN: Artist, you are a priest.

(Applause.)

Art is the supreme mystery. When your efforts result in a masterpiece, a divine ray beams down as onto an altar.

(Applause.)

O real presence of the Divinity, shining forth under these sovereign names: da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Beethoven...Wagner.

(Applause.)

(The Love-Death music from *Tristan* fades in.)

The Sar, who is the incarnation of fearless ideality on earth, has made the pilgrimage to Bayreuth and has seen the light—

(Enter HAWKERS carrying shirts, gowns and handkerchiefs. They may walk among the audience.)

HAWKER1: Lohengrin and the swan. Record your pilgrimage to Bayreuth with this wonderful shirt. *Gnädiger Herr*, only 25 marks for a lifetime of memories.

PÉLADAN: Wagner is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the guide who illuminates the path—

HAWKER2: Leitmotifs! Your favorite leitmotifs: Siegfried, Parsifal, Tristan, all embroidered on silk handkerchiefs. Only 15 marks. *Gnädige Frau*, surely your elegant nose deserves a Wagnerian handkerchief...

PÉLADAN: We reject the mundane, the ugly, the day-to-day animal existence...

HAWKER3: *Hochverehrtes Publikum!* Search no further for the Holy Grail. We have an unsurpassed dressing gown... On a background of blue silk, the maestro's theme of the Last Supper embroidered in red and gold...

PÉLADAN: The Chaldean fraternity rejects the world of the real. Obey our command! Grasp at dreams, reach for the ideal, strive for the pure...

(CRITIC and SATIE1 are on Stage Two, which is still dark.)

SATIE1: I believe your Mark Twain said of Bayreuth, "I felt like the one sane man in a community of the mad."

CRITIC: What a trend! Inexcusable that I should have missed it.
But I don't understand, what does this have to do with our wager?

SATIE1: (Handing him a rose) Shhh. Dreams must be born.

(The lights now go up on DEBUSSY, about 29, but only enough to keep him in shadows.)

CRITIC: Who is that fellow in the corner?

SATIE1: Debussy.

CRITIC: Claude Debussy, the composer?

SATIE1: Inversely. His name was Achille-Claude, but in a fit of suffocation he switched the order and dropped Achille. At the time he was in ill-repute with the artists on the left because he had won the *Prix de Rome* and everyone avoided him.

[CRITIC: Apparently not.

(The lights go fully up on DEBUSSY, who is alternately drinking, smoking and fussing with a silk necktie as he gives an interview to WOMAN.)

WOMAN: What is your favorite virtue, M. de Bussy?

DEBUSSY: That's Debussy, at the advice of my mis—uh, Mme Vasnier.

WOMAN: Oh, excuse me.

DEBUSSY: Pride.

WOMAN: Ah yes, virtue. Your favorite qualities in men?

DEBUSSY: Will.

WOMAN: Your favorite qualities in women?

DEBUSSY: Charm.

WOMAN: Your favorite occupation?

DEBUSSY: Reading...while smoking rare mixtures of tobacco.

WOMAN: (Writing) Reading while smoking...Your idea of happiness?

DEBUSSY: To love.

WOMAN: And your idea of misery?

DEBUSSY: To be too hot.

WOMAN: M. Debussy, if not yourself, who would you be?

DEBUSSY: A sailor, who lived...outside the world.

WOMAN: Hmm, your favorite authors?

DEBUSSY: Flaubert, Edgar Poe... Baudelaire.

WOMAN: Of course. Painters and composers?
DEBUSSY: Botticelli, Gustave Moreau, Palestrina, Bach and Wagner.
WOMAN: Wagner...Your pet aversion?
DEBUSSY: Dilettantes...
WOMAN: Dilettantes—
DEBUSSY: ...Women who are too pretty.
WOMAN: (Blushing) For what fault do you have the greatest tolerance?
DEBUSSY: Errors in harmony.
WOMAN: And what is your present frame of mind?
DEBUSSY: Sad, as a seeker often is, but not at this moment.
WOMAN: (Blushing) Monsieur...
DEBUSSY: Now you know everything about me. Oh, I also enjoy coffee.
Would you do me the honor...?
WOMAN: Oh no, M. Debussy, I have taken enough of your time. Our readers will be very pleased. Thank you ever so much, *au revoir*.

(Exit WOMAN.)

DEBUSSY: Charming...

(The younger SATIE begins playing again as DEBUSSY remains alone.)]

SATIE1: As for me, I did not hold Debussy's success much against him, though I consider aspiring to the *Prix de Rome* very nearly as bad as achieving it. Do you know, the moment I saw him, I felt drawn to him and wished I might live at his side forever...

(SATIE2 breaks off playing and looks up. Catching sight of DEBUSSY, who is alternately drinking, smoking and fussing with a silk necktie, he walks over.)

SATIE2: It is perhaps a good idea not to win prizes, M. Debussy, they are such a burden. I'd advise you to misplace yours as soon as possible.

DEBUSSY: The idea has occurred to me often, regretfully...

SATIE2: (Motioning to empty seat) May I?

DEBUSSY: A pleasure...Your playing has brightened these frightful evenings, M. Satie.

SATIE2: One must pay the rent.

DEBUSSY: The supreme burden. Dreadful...

SATIE2: (Slightly inflated) I have tried making gold, but my soul is tarnished.

DEBUSSY: I have also failed. You are a member...?

SATIE2: Official composer to the Court of the Rose Cross.

DEBUSSY: Then let me show you this lovely scarab I found in a curio shop.

SATIE2: Has it paid the rent?

DEBUSSY: No. Rent. Indeed the supreme burden.

SATIE2: (Raising a finger) Wagner is greater.

DEBUSSY: God yes, what bores those leitmotifs are!

(SATIE sings a famous leitmotif from the *Ring*, DEBUSSY follows suit. They laugh.)

Don't misunderstand, Monsieur, *The Ring* contains passages that astound me, but in the end—a contraption. It even causes my dear *Tristan* to fade. You know, I fear I am detaching myself from it...

SATIE2: Detach! Why should We be composing French monuments to Wagner? We should be building our own monuments—preferably without sauerkraut.

DEBUSSY: It is not so simple, my friend. [Ah, I wish I were a sailor who lived outside the world...]¹ Where does one go after *Tristan*?

¹ This should be cut if previous [] is used.

SATIE2: Look here, does God require an orchestra to grimace every time a character walks on stage? Does He ask the trees in the scenery to grimace? No, only Wagner makes such demands. We should... create instead a musical scenery, a climate where the characters move and speak—and not in couplets or leitmotifs.

DEBUSSY: Yes...

SATIE2: Listen, why not take over the atmosphere of Puvis de Chavannes? And the methods of Monet, Cezanne, Toulouse - Lautrec. Just transpose them to music. Nothing simpler...

DEBUSSY: Nothing simpler...

(On Stage Two the lights go up to Satie's *Première Pensée Rose+Cross*, preferably arranged for brass. The CRITIC and SATIE1 are strolling through an art exhibit, which is indicated by a large poster *SALON ROSE CROIX* (See *Symbolist Generation*). There are paintings of Puvis de Chavannes (recommended: *The Bathers*, 1890; *Vision of Antiquity*, 1887; *Au Clair de la Lune* 1885), Monet, Moreau (*Eve*, *Prometheus*) and Albert Ryder (*The Temple of the Mind*.)

SATIE1: (To CRITIC) And thus it was that I determined Debussy's artistic development, and the whole of modern music... This painting of Ryder was inspired by your Edgar Poe's "Haunted Palace."

CRITIC: I see, weighted by the passage of endured time....Perhaps it was Poe who determined the course of modern music.

SATIE1: Puvis de Chavannes was the one who captured our imaginations.

CRITIC: Hmm, I can almost see Debussy's faun in that setting...distance....

SATIE1: You reveal hidden depths my friend. This painting by Puvis is called "Au Claire de Lune." I have often wondered whether it informed Debussy's work.

CRITIC: You don't know?

SATIE1: (Curtly) No, he never told me.

(The lights go down on Stage Two and come up on Stage One. SATIE2 and DEBUSSY are still in place. Standing nearby is Professor GUIRAUD.)

DEBUSSY: Nothing simpler...

GUIRAUD: Actually, Debussy had been thinking along those lines for several years. In 1889 my old pupil returned from his pilgrimage to Bayreuth with tears in his eyes, a liberal Wagnerite.

DEBUSSY: Not at all, my dear Professor, since then I have written *La Damoiselle Élue*, which you will agree sounds nothing like Wagner.

(We hear introduction from *La Damoiselle Élue* .)

GUIRAUD: (To Audience) Nothing like Wagner, thus demonstrating once again Wagner's profound effect on him.

DEBUSSY: As always, you misunderstand me. I am not tempted to imitate Wagner, though aspects of his work appeal to me. And what about the Russian Musorgsky? No more splendid conjurer of the mysterious has appeared among us.

(DEBUSSY goes to the piano and plays the three lines beginning "Kak budto vnov" to "...zabluzhdenii" (bars 17-24) from "Okonchen prazdni den'," the third song of Musorgsky's *Sunless Cycle*. He sings the voice part.)

DEBUSSY: Or what would you say to the heavenly Gamelon music from the last Exposition?

(The lights go up on Stage Two to reveal a Javanese dancer, dancing to Gamelon music. It should not be the flashy Gong Kebyar style, dating from this century, but the older, more stately style.)

GUIRAUD: Primitive, yes? Where is the key? Where is the melody?

DEBUSSY: Key? My friend, music is not major or minor—

GUIRAUD: No? (He sits at the piano and plays:)

That must resolve.

DEBUSSY: *Pourquoi?*

GUIRAUD: All right then, what is your theoretical system?

DEBUSSY: There is no theory. I know only the law of...pleasure.

Listen...(listening to the gamelon music), can you not hear? So lovely...so hypnotic. That is what opera should be.

(The Gamelon music fades out.)

GUIRAUD: What do you mean?

DEBUSSY: I...I don't know exactly. But should not music begin at the precise point where words becomes powerless? Music is made for the inexpressible. I want it to have an air of...to feel as if...as if it is emerging from the shadows. And at times it should...return...

GUIRAUD: What kind of poet could possibly supply you with such a libretto?

DEBUSSY: I have no idea, but one who in saying things by halves would allow me to graft my dream onto his. One who could conceive a story set in no time and no place, who would not impose on me this or that scene to be painted in his colors, who would leave me free now and again to complete his work...

GUIRAUD: That is asking much of a writer.

DEBUSSY: Why should he fear me? I do not intend to take the usual path of opera, where music predominates so...insolently and where poetry is relegated to second place. No, in opera they sing altogether too

much anyway. Nothing should impede the drama... any music not suggested by the words is a mistake. A painting rendered in grey...

GUIRAUD: And what else do you dream of?

DEBUSSY: I dream of...No dramatic unities, no libretto that will burden me with long, heavy acts, but a text with short, changing scenes which vary in place and mood...

GUIRAUD: And?

DEBUSSY: ...characters who do not scream and argue with one another, but who are at the mercy of...life and...destiny.

(He sits down with SATIE2.)

DEBUSSY: Nothing simpler...

(Exit GUIRAUD.)

SATIE2: Of course not. We have no need of Wagner.

DEBUSSY: Purveyor of false religion and morality.

SATIE2: What are you working on?

DEBUSSY: A symphony based on Edgar Poe's wonderful *Fall of the House of Usher*—but I have not been able to get anywhere with it.

SATIE2: How would you characterize the style?

DEBUSSY: (Sighing) Wagner...And your present occupations?

SATIE2: Music for Péladan's play, *The Son of the Stars*.

DEBUSSY: The style?

SATIE2: (Sighing) Wagner.

(Satie goes to the piano and plays beginning of *Préludes du Fils des Étoiles*. He continues to play off and on until end of scene.)

DEBUSSY: My friend, that does not sound a wit like Wagner to my ears, which are renowned.

SATIE2: Péladan's ears are less so. A Chaldean Wagner, shall we say.

DEBUSSY: So, you have not been infected after all.

SATIE2: (Shaking his head) I write under the guidance of a 12th-century monk, whose incarnation I am.

DEBUSSY: Ah yes, the chants are plain.

SATIE2: Their distance appeals to me—my guiding spirit.

DEBUSSY: Of course. What else are you preparing?

SATIE2: I have been thinking of setting a play, *Princess Maleine* by Maeterlinck, but I do not know how to get his authorization.

DEBUSSY: *Princess Maleine*? Maeterlinck? I have never heard of the play—or the author for that matter.

SATIE2: You must read it. Maeterlinck is the only genuine mystic of our generation.

DEBUSSY: Then I must, without delay. I'll go buy a copy tomorrow at the Flammarion.

(Gets up to leave.)

We shall be friends, M. Satie?

SATIE2: Of course. Remember the number 58.

(Exit DEBUSSY.)

I have spoken.

Act I, Scene 4

The lights go up on Stage Two, where the CRITIC and the elder SATIE are still at the exhibit.

SATIE1: Not a week later the good Claude wrote to Maeterlinck for permission to set *Princess Maleine*.

CRITIC: Friendship above all, but art above friendship, is that it?

SATIE1: Truth in Art. What an idea! Truth in Life. Altogether absurd. But I do not hold it against Jupiter for writing to Maeterlinck. He would have done a better job on Maleine than I. Alas. In any case, Maeterlinck had already authorized our elder Vincent d'Indy and that was the end of it.

CRITIC: Bad luck, the immortal culprit.

SATIE1: I prefer to call it destiny.

CRITIC: In any case, M. Satie, so far there is not a trace of Mélisande and you have failed to prove you invented anything. Concede, forfeit the wager. Your day is done.

SATIE1: Patience. The name Maeterlinck does not speak to you?

CRITIC: Not a whisper.

SATIE1: Strange, he is now living in America. He wrote several scenarios for Sam Goldwyn—they were never produced.

CRITIC: A failed screenwriter then.

SATIE1: Yes, a failed screenwriter. Somewhat earlier he won a Nobel Prize.

CRITIC: For what?

SATIE1: Literature, a genre that once existed. *The Blue Bird*—

CRITIC: (Checking on phone) Ah, reception! There was such a film, with Elizabeth Taylor. One star.

SATIE1: Will you concede an echo if not a whisper?

CRITIC: Only a whisper's echo. And Maleine?

SATIE1: Would you care to meet her?

CRITIC: Face to face? How twentieth century. What would I say to her?

SATIE1: Have no fear, the lines are written.

CRITIC: I don't understand.

SATIE1: You are in love with Maleine but unwillingly betrothed to the haughty Princess Uglyane.

CRITIC: Who? I don't understand.

(SATIE pushes CRITIC onto center stage. The setting is similar to that of Scene I: a park with a fountain. It is very dark and gloomy. Enter PRINCESS MALEINE/MÉLISANDE. The background music here is Debussy's *Nuages*, however appropriate stretches will probably have to be spliced or repeated. The timings below are suggestions. In any case, it should begin at 00:47 with the main theme, which is taken from the Musorgsky song played earlier.)

MALEINE: Where are you, my lord?

CRITIC: *Je ne comprends pas.*

MALEINE: My lord?

CRITIC: Here.

MALEINE: But where, I cannot see.

CRITIC: Here, by the fountain.

(MALEINE gropes forward.)

We'll be able to see each other by the water's light. How strange it is here this evening.

MALEINE: Yes, I am afraid. Oh there, I have found you.

CRITIC: Why are you trembling?

MALEINE: *Je ne tremble pas.*

CRITIC: I can't see you. Come, there is more light here...You are
(1:20) strangely beautiful tonight, Uglyane. Come.

MALEINE: Not yet.

CRITIC: Uglyane, come.

(Cut music by 1:35. He strokes her hair and attempts to guide her away. The fountain,
agitated by the wind, splashes them.)

(2:30):

MALEINE: Oh, what have you done?

CRITIC: It is the fountain.

MALEINE: Oh!

CRITIC: It's just the wind.

MALEINE: I am afraid.

CRITIC: There is no reason to be afraid. We're within a park.

MALEINE: Are there walls?

CRITIC: Yes, of course.

MALEINE: And no one can enter?

CRITIC: No one. But there are many unknown things that enter in
spite of...walls.

MALEINE: My nose is bleeding.

CRITIC: Your nose is bleeding?

MALEINE: Yes, where is my handkerchief?

CRITIC: Here, let's go to the fountain.

MALEINE: Oh, my gown is already stained with blood.

CRITIC: Uglyane, has it stopped?

MALEINE: Yes.

CRITIC: Why are you...silent?

MALEINE: I am sad.

CRITIC: *Pourquoi?*

MALEINE: I am thinking of princess Maleine.

CRITIC: You know princess Maleine?

MALEINE: I am princess Maleine.

CRITIC: You're not Uglyane?

MALEINE: I am princess Maleine.

CRITIC: But she is dead.

MALEINE: I am princess Maleine.

(The moon comes out to reveal princess Maleine.)

(Cut music by 3:10.)

CRITIC: Maleine! O God, O God! What I have escaped today!

(The fountain sobs strangely and expires. Use the sigh from the 6th door of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*.)

MALEINE: Oh! What is happening here? What is going to happen? Let me go away! Let me go!

CRITIC: Don't cry.

MALEINE: Take me away.

CRITIC: The fountain is dead. Let us go...

(Exit.)

SATIE1: (Seriously) One might guess how the story ends.

(Enter CRITIC.)

SATIE1: How do you feel?

CRITIC: Dated. You cannot appreciate how alien Maleine appears to a citizen of my time. I am unable to recognize her as flesh and blood.

SATIE1: Perhaps she is not meant to be.

CRITIC: So much the worse.

SATIE1: You see nothing at all?

CRITIC: Nothing. The role no longer exists. Period. Give her a sword— maybe. And forget the symbols. (He hands SATIE the rose and takes out his phone.) They're all filed. Rose, name of; color of in literature—

SATIE1: Monsieur, the purpose of the past is to enter it.

CRITIC: You are wrong. The purpose of the past is to forget it.

SATIE1: Who is speaking, you or your age?

CRITIC: Me...my age.

SATIE1: Is there no difference?

CRITIC: Assuredly not. I have said it before: I am the absolute conformist. Art, food, politics; left, right, center—I'm for it.

SATIE1: This cannot be. The person you describe would be drawn and quartered by paradox and contradiction.

CRITIC: You understand nothing. Not only is your world gone, but ours as well. No two trends last long enough to contradict. Haven't you noticed that both the 60s and the 80s have gone from "good-old" to "bad-old," which proves the coexistence of incompatibles. That small cars are "fuel-efficient" when the price of gasoline is up but "dangerous" when the price of gasoline is down? That the greatest film ever made is made every year. It's all good. It is all OK.

SATIE1: You frighten me.

CRITIC: M. Satie, find beauty in the ephemeral. The world's refresh button is pressed every ten seconds, make that 9.4. To expect meaning

after 100 years—astonishing! Puvis de Chavannes, Maeterlinck,
Maleine—

(They stop before Puvis' *Vision of Antiquity*.)

Your world is as far over the horizon as that one.

(He picks up a paint roller and begins painting over it.)

SATIE1: The world as a perfect amnesiac.

CRITIC: A hundred times yes. Memories are for electronics.

SATIE1: If all that you say is true, Monsieur, can one not discover the world
anew every ten seconds?

CRITIC: Absurd to think so. Memory may be gone, but progress remains.

SATIE1: Ah, so something beyond mere trends exists after all—

CRITIC: What could that be?

SATIE1: Progress, you just said it.

CRITIC: Hmm, there are indeed trends in progress.

SATIE1: Ahah!

CRITIC: But generally speaking the only trend is trend itself.

SATIE1: The only trend is trend itself. I see I shall have to impale you
with a memory. Name the defining trend of your time.

CRITIC: There is none, how often must I say it? Forfeit.

SATIE1: Name an "ism."

CRITIC: Any "ism"?

SATIE1: Any "ism."

CRITIC: "Anyism" or just any "ism"?

SATIE1: Any.

CRITIC: Any...any...any...

SATIE1: Any already!

CRITIC: I suppose any would have to be minimalism.

SATIE1: Meaning?

CRITIC: Music, art and literature have become smaller than life.

SATIE1: I am not surprised. An example, please.

CRITIC: Any?

(We hear the section about 20 seconds into Act II of Philip Glass' *Einstein on the Beach* or something by Steve Reich.)

SATIE1: That, M. Critique, is not minimalism. That is maximinism.

CRITIC: Ah, an innovative new term. (He begins to enter it into his phone.)
What does it mean?

SATIE1: Maximal means to achieve zero ends. *This* is minimalism:

(We hear the orchestral version of *Tempo de Marche* from *Cinq Grimaces pour Le Songe d'une Nuit d'Été*. It lasts 17 seconds.)

CRITIC: That's all?

SATIE1: *C'est la vie*. Short, to the point, does not overstay it's welcome.
Also, note the foreshadowing of Stravinsky's neo-classical style.

CRITIC: When did Strav—?

SATIE1: To continue, what you call minimalism more closely resembles the following:

(*Vexations* for piano begins.)

CRITIC: That strikes me as more medial than minimal. Where does it go?

SATIE1: Absolutely nowhere, Monsieur.

(The piece continues softly until the end of the scene.)

After a preparation of austere silence and reverential stillness, it is
to be repeated 840 times.

CRITIC: 840 times!

- SATIE1: Yes, at one and one-half minutes per repetition, that is exactly 21 hours—though I do allow the performer some flexibility in interpretation.
- CRITIC: Definitively American. Hmm, I may be forced to concede you a point. What do you call it?
- SATIE1: *Vexations*.
- CRITIC: It could hardly be otherwise.
- SATIE1: I wrote it in 1893, but those who have attempted a full performance invariably report the onset of hallucinations. Nevertheless, the absence of bar lines imparts a certain *élan* to the piece, don't you think?
- CRITIC: (Dubiously) So, Erik Satie, foreshadower of minimalism. Anything else?
- SATIE1: Allow me to introduce Gabrielle Dupont Debussy's mistress. She mysteriously appeared out of nowhere at about the time I met him.
- (SATIE hands CRITIC a photograph.)
- CRITIC: It's difficult to make her out. Do you have a better photo?
- SATIE1: (Shaking his head) Time erodes much, Monsieur. Do you regret it?

Act I, Scene 5

The lights come up on the *Auberge du Clou*, two years after Scene 3. DEBUSSY, the younger SATIE and SUZANNE VALADON are sitting at a table. DEBUSSY is disengaged, stroking a Siamese cat. PÉLADAN stands surrounded by admirers.

PÉLADAN: Artist, you are a priest...

(Applause.)

The future of the world is in your hands. Nothing can stop the transformation of the world by Art—

OFFSTAGE

VOICE: *Vive l'anarchie !*

(A big black bomb is hurled through the window. Everyone dives for cover except DEBUSSY, who continues stroking the cat, and VALADON, who throws the bomb out the window. Explosion.)

VALADON: Your bombs are wasted, Monsieur! We have nothing but anarchy here already!

(Enter GABRIELLE DUPONT through the smoke.)

DEBUSSY: (As if waking up) My darling Gaby, I'm so glad you dropped by.

DUPONT: (Nervously) Do you have any cigarettes, Claude?

DEBUSSY: Not a one. Suzanne Valadon, have you met Gaby Lhéry, my companion?

VALADON: No, I haven't. Suzanne, Erik's friend.

SATIE2: Allow me.

(He gives DUPONT a cigarette who fumbles with it nervously until he can light it.)

CRITIC: (Whispering) I thought you said her name was Dupont.

SATIE1: She changed it.

CRITIC: Were none of you people satisfied with who you were?

(SATIE1 looks at him but refuses to answer.)

VALADON: What a lovely hat, Gaby.

DUPONT: Oh, it's getting old...I made it myself.

VALADON: Really?

DUPONT: (Nods.) Hats are a little like bombs, aren't they? After they've done their work nothing remains.

DEBUSSY: Cheer up, Gaby, what's happened?

DUPONT: Nothing that does not happen every month, Claude. In the paintings of Puvis de Chavannes are there landlords?

DEBUSSY: Ah, *petite amie*, how good it would be to step into that canvas.

DUPONT: Claude, the landlord insists loudly...Here are three francs from the shop. (She puts them on the table.) One of my hats turned a hag into a queen.

DEBUSSY: (Searching his pockets) Ah, it's enough to convert one to anarchy. Here are four from that dreadful copying job—

DUPONT: I sold some lace—

DEBUSSY: I gave a piano lesson—

DUPONT: From some laundering...

DEBUSSY: Oh yes, the transcription...(Counting) We're still short, 50 centimes.

SATIE2: Allow me. What better cause?

DUPONT: Erik! We must celebrate! Garçon, beer for everybody!

SATIE2: (To VALADON) Biqui, why don't you show them the portrait you've done of me?

(VALADON politely demurs.)

EVERYONE: Please.

Come now.

Absolument.

(VALADON unveils a portrait of SATIE. See Myers, facing page 101.)

DEBUSSY: Superb, really.

DUPONT: Erik, you must hang on to this Mme Valadon. She's very talented.

SATIE2: Yes, she has taken all of me. Biqui, chérie, I want to kiss your heart.

(He leans over to kiss her.) You know, I've learned much more about music from painters than from musicians—(with noticeable condescension) as I'm certain Claude will in due course.

VALADON: (To DUPONT) Gaby, let me sketch you—for posterity.

(DUPONT nods, VALADON takes out a pad and begins to sketch her.)

DEBUSSY: Yes, musicians are such—

SATIE2: Imbeciles. When that bastard at the Opera did not deign to acknowledge receipt of my ballet, We demanded satisfaction and he promptly agreed to meet—but the shit still refuses to stage it.

DUPONT: Erik, you didn't tell us.

CRITIC: (Walking over) May I?

DUPONT: Please.

CRITIC: (Sitting down) Stage what, if I may?

SATIE2: My ballet *Upsud*. The Persian Upsud finds a Christian Church on the beach. He hurls stones at it but they turn to globes of fire. His fury. Demons in the form of animals set upon him. He resists. His conversion to Christianity. The demons tear him to shreds and he rises to heaven to the embrace of Christ.

CRITIC: How...reborn.

SATIE2: (Archly) Monsieur?

CRITIC: Nevermind.

VALADON: Crin-Crin, what do you expect from them after the way you treated Saint-Saens?

DUPONT: Erik...?

SATIE2: When the imbeciles refused Our candidacy for the Academy, We told Saint-Saens...

DUPONT: You told Saint-Saens...

SATIE2: We declared to M. Saint-Saens before Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus: the fires of hell await you, your aberration is a refusal to accept the ideas of this century, the Academy's base standards are due to an ignorance of God, and—

VALADON: Erik, enough.

SATIE2: And that in the name of Jesus Christ We pardon you—

CRITIC: (To VALADON) He's surprised no one plays his music?

VALADON: Shh. Erik, I told you I couldn't take any more of this.

SATIE2: —and that God accepts you in his embrace.

VALADON: Erik, are you deaf? Do you ever listen?

SATIE2: Compromise is impossible—*anathema*.

VALADON: *You're* impossible. People laugh at your music.

SATIE2: They are imbeciles and should admit it.

VALADON: Ah, *il est fou*. You think of nothing but yourself, you—

SATIE2: Biqui, this is unfair. I see nothing but your eyes, your hands, your little feet. When you are gone, there is only emptiness. (He touches his chest.)

VALADON: Then why do you behave like this? Just as you break with that ridiculous Péladan, you start preaching salvation and raining curses on everyone you meet—

CRITIC: He's apparently entering his Christian period.

DEBUSSY: Very perceptive.

SATIE2: Don't you like the music I write for you?

VALADON: Why are you changing the subject? Don't you like the paintings I do for you? You never say a word—

SATIE2: Your painting is right here.

VALADON: I can hardly imagine why. When is the last time you spent a few moments with my son?

SATIE2: Yesterday. Biqui, what does Maurice have to do with this?

VALADON: Everything...nothing...Oh, I'm sorry...

SATIE2: Ah—

DEBUSSY: Erik.

DUPONT: Suzanne, come.

VALADON: No, I'm fine. I...

DUPONT: Are you sure?

VALADON: Yes, it's just so difficult to live like this...

DUPONT: *C'est vrai*, very difficult.

VALADON: Claude tell us about what you've been writing.

DEBUSSY: Well, yes, nothing nearly so ambitious as a ballet. Just a little prelude...to the Afternoon of a Faun.

VALADON: After Mallarmé?

(DEBUSSY nods.)

I so love that poem.

(VALDON begins to recite as DEBUSSY's music begins. On Stage Two some of the ballet can be performed—one dancer, choreography à la Nijinsky.)

I would perpetuate these nymphs.

So clear,

their light carnation, that it drifts on the air
drowsy with tufted slumbers.

So I loved a dream?

How I was cutting here the hollow reeds
tamed by my talent; when on the glaucous gold
of distant verdues dedicating their vines
to the fountains, undulated an animal whiteness,
reposing: and to the slow prelude whence the pipes
are born, this flight of swans, no! of Naiades
goes scampering off or dives...

CRITIC: You are a set of completely unknown people.

(VALADON strokes the CRITIC's cheek. The music jumps to 5:47 on the recording.)

VALADON: [Piercing the reeds, my eyes speared each immortal neck,
that drowns its burning in the water
with a cry of rage flung to the forest sky;
and the splendid bath of tresses disappeared
in shimmering and shiverings. O jewels!]
I rush up; when at my feet entwined (bruised
by the languor drunk from this harm of being two)
girls sleeping in each other's perilous arms;
I seize them, not untangling them, and run
to this clump, hated by the frivolous shade,
of roses exhausting all their scent in the sun,
where our frolic should be like a squandered day.

(She leans on DUPONT's shoulder and pretends to sleep. The music fades out.)

DEBUSSY: (After a long silence) Well?

SATIE2: (In shock) Without warning, we have entered a new world of sound. Wagner, Musorgsky, gamelon music have all vanished...You have made a total break with the past.

[CRITIC: (Consulting phone) Actually, I find it has the flavor of...*Scheherazade*--

SATIE2: By Rimsky-Korsakov, that pedant of pedants?

CRITIC: Yes, number 58 on the all-time hit list.

SATIE2: Philistine!

(CRITIC's computer begins to sing the theme from "The Young Prince and Young Princess." The music comes on. If it is properly switched back and forth with the part of the *Prélude* beginning at 6:05, the pieces are almost indistinguishable.)]

SATIE2: Ah, you're imagining it!

DUPONT: It's a beautiful poem, Claude.

DEBUSSY: I've dedicated it to you, Gaby...

(She stares at him for a long time then throws her arms around his neck.)

DEBUSSY: (To SATIE) Seriously, my good, gentle friend, who broke with the past some time ago, what do you think?

SATIE2: I think...I think I must go home.

DEBUSSY: Erik, please, a word.

SATIE2: A word? Do not dare alter a single note!

(He begins to leave.)

VALADON: Crin-Crin, I'll come with you.

SATIE2: (Angrily) No, leave me alone.

(Exit SATIE. A long awkward silence.)

DEBUSSY: Well, Chausson is expecting me. I must also be going.

DUPONT: Let me come with you, Claude.

DEBUSSY: Gaby, you know he doesn't approve...I'm sorry, *petite amie*, forgive me, I beg of you.

(Exit DEBUSSY.)

VALADON: Impossible...

CRITIC: (After a silence) Gaby, if the question is not too...why did you change your name?

DUPONT: Dupont, it is so common, no? Lhéry, now that has a bit of something, don't you think? Do you like blondes, Monsieur?

CRITIC: Well yes, blondes are so...blond. But you have dyed your hair.
(He reaches out his hand.)

DUPONT: Of course. Now I look like I'm from a painting by Lautrec.
And it goes with my green eyes, no?

(She peers at him closely. He starts.)

Do you not approve? Green eyes are the rage.

CRITIC: Not at all. I mean of course. Why are you asking for my approval?

DUPONT: I'm not. Do you have a cigarette, Monsieur?

CRITIC: Uh, sorry, it's not recommended.

(VALADON gives her a cigarette.)

DUPONT: *Pardon*, I'm addicted.

CRITIC: I...wanted to ask, how is life with a composer?

DUPONT: Not so comfortable as with that disreputable Comte de Villeneuve I lived with for three years...I see disapproval darting across your lovely eyes, Monsieur.

CRITIC: Why no. Many people live together.

DUPONT: I came from the provinces to lead a free life in Paris, Monsieur, and lead a free life I have. One pays a high price for freedom, perhaps the highest.

CRITIC: Yes...but what does the artistic life bring you other than poverty?

DUPONT: It is not easy, Monsieur, you have witnessed the painful scenes that result. But you will never know how it feels to have a masterpiece dedicated to you. No count ever presented me with such a gift.

CRITIC: Tell me, how does it feel?

DUPONT: Monsieur, please, some things are not meant for words.

(CRITIC begins to speak but DUPONT puts a finger to his lips.)

Perhaps when you have sung for your mistress you will understand me.

CRITIC: I'm sorry, mistresses are not chic where I come from.

DUPONT: Then who do you sing for, Monsieur?

(He makes no response.)

VALADON: (Putting her hand on his shoulder) You are very inquisitive for a stranger.

CRITIC: Yes...no. There's a wager. It's just that you people are so unlike—I must prove there is no trace of you...

DUPONT: That should not be difficult.

CRITIC: (To VALADON) Where did you learn to paint?

VALADON: Oh, here and there. I modeled for Puvis de Chavannes, Renoir, Lautrec...Degas has encouraged me.

CRITIC: Perhaps we have met in a museum.

VALADON: Only if you have blown away the dust, Monsieur.

CRITIC: You said you had a son.

VALADON: Yes, Maurice Utrillo—his father's surname. He is a difficult one—
ten now.

CRITIC: You never married?

VALADON: Monsieur, how could you suggest it? I was so young...

CRITIC: I see...Your affair with Satie seems...difficult.

VALADON: Yes...we are two...(She brings her fists together.) You understand.

CRITIC: What is it like, a nineteenth century love affair?

VALADON: Monsieur, history is replete with love affairs; they are all alike. I
will tell you this, Erik and I are not destined to be cast by Rodin in
bronze.

CRITIC: I'm sorry.

VALADON: Why? For a brief moment we loved each other. You cannot expect
more of life...I think, Monsieur, you must learn to value the beauty
of fleeting things...Gaby, the evening is late. It is time to go.

DUPONT: Yes.

BOTH: *Au revoir, Monsieur.*

(Exit.)

CRITIC: *Au revoir.*

(He walks to Stage Two, where SATIE1 is waiting.)

CRITIC: How did you let her get away?

(SATIE shrugs.)

CRITIC: How did it end?

(SATIE thinks, counting on his fingers.)

SATIE1: There are three versions circulating. The best—voilà:

(The lights go up on an open second floor window or balcony. VALADON and
SATIE2 are arguing violently.)

SATIE2: What am I to think? You move next door—

VALADON: I promised you nothing. Stop demanding—

SATIE2: Viper!

(SATIE pushes VALADON out the window and turns away without witnessing the result. VALADON dives for an awning pole, does a loop or two, lands on her feet, bows to the audience and exits.)

SATIE1: I reported myself immediately to the police as her murderer. However, I had forgotten that before she was a painter she had been a circus acrobat...

CRITIC: You are twisted beyond belief—especially if you merely invented that story. (He begins to walk off.)

SATIE1: Of course, in another version, she threw me over for a banker. Masterpieces evidently did not suffice.

CRITIC: (Turning) Valadon? Never. (He begins to walk off again.)

SATIE1: (To Audience, ignoring CRITIC. CRITIC gradually begins to listen.)

The play by Maeterlinck, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, saw its premiere in 1893. Not twenty people in Paris knew of the poet from Ghent. Not one knew his kingdom of Allemonde. The story he told was simple: The older prince Golaud finds Mélisande in a forest. She refuses to tell him where she is from or why she is weeping by the fountain. Golaud takes her back to the castle and marries her. She meets his younger half-brother Pelléas and they fall in love. Alas. You can imagine the rest.

The critics condemned it without exception. “Maeterlinck shows a pigheaded bias toward absolute simplification.” “A play for marionettes.” “Not designed for the stage but for the painted canvas.”

Debussy was intoxicated.

CRITIC: What is your opinion of love, M. Satie?

SATIE1: I find it comical, a sickness of the nerves.

CRITIC: Agreed, a trend that has outlived its instant. Goodnight, M..

(The CRITIC walks onto Stage One. The lights go up to reveal MÉLISANDE sitting by a fountain or well in a park. It is daytime but the dense foliage makes it very gloomy.

Background music: first 1:20 or so of Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Sections will have to be lifted.)

MÉLISANDE: (After opening phrase of music dies away) How lonely it is here...One hears nothing.

CRITIC: Yes, an extraordinary silence.

(Music continues.)

MÉLISANDE: Why do you look at me like that?

CRITIC: You do not remember me, do you?

MÉLISANDE: No.

CRITIC: We met in a forest...some time ago.

MÉLISANDE: Oh yes, now I remember.

CRITIC: Where do you come from, Mélisande?

MÉLISANDE: I will lie down on the marble. I should like to see the depth of the water.

CRITIC: By now I should be learning.

MÉLISANDE: What?

CRITIC: Questions have few answers in these parts.

MÉLISANDE: The water is very deep.

CRITIC: Yes. You know, in some ways you are not so different from those who surround you. Their silence is merely...of another quality.

MÉLISANDE: Where do you come from?

CRITIC: Far away.

MÉLISANDE: You are sad.

CRITIC: No. I am happy with the way things are.

MÉLISANDE: If something sparkled at the bottom of the water...perhaps one could see it.

CRITIC: Who do you sing for, Mélisande?

MÉLISANDE: I would like to touch the water.

CRITIC: Who does anyone sing for? Be careful, Mélisande, the stones are slippery. I'll hold your hand.

MÉLISANDE: No...no. I would like to plunge both my hands in...They seem sickly today. (She bends over the fountain.)

CRITIC: Take care, Mélisande, your hair...
(MÉLISANDE draws back.)
Your hair...it glistens.

MÉLISANDE: Yes, it is longer than my arms.

CRITIC: I have never seen such hair.

MÉLISANDE: It is longer than I am.

CRITIC: Mélisande, after I left you in the forest, what happened?

MÉLISANDE: Golaud found me.

CRITIC: And?

MÉLISANDE: Nothing, I no longer remember.

CRITIC: Nothing?

MÉLISANDE: He wanted to embrace me...I did not wish to.
(She takes off her ring and begins to play with it.)

CRITIC: What is that you are playing with?

MÉLISANDE: The ring he gave me.

CRITIC: Careful, don't throw it—

MÉLISANDE: How it catches the sunlight!

(The ring falls in the water.)

Oh!

CRITIC: (He peers into the fountain.) Nothing but a circle in the water.

MÉLISANDE: I thought I had it in my hands...It's gone forever. What will I tell Golaud?

CRITIC: Tell him the truth...wherever that is.

(He gets up to leave.)

MÉLISANDE: You have hurt your leg.

CRITIC: Years ago. It is no longer important. Goodday, Mélisande.

(MÉLISANDE stares after him as the lights go down on her. SATIE is waiting on Stage Two.)

SATIE1: If a man is convinced that the only trend is trend itself, what could make him so sad?

CRITIC: I don't know. All of you.

SATIE1: How odd. When does "all" include me? Let me cheer you up. Many years later, realizing that music to be listened to was no longer fashionable—

CRITIC: Yes, time is too short to concentrate.

SATIE1: The annihilation of time came long after the saturation of the senses. What few faculties remained intact after the Industrial Revolution and Wagner, were utterly destroyed by Schoenberg. But to continue, many years later I was commissioned to write some music to accompany a picture exhibit. Realizing that the skill of listening had vanished from the face of the earth, I decided against writing real music. Instead I would pen *musique d'ameublement*.

CRITIC: Furniture music?

SATIE1: An adequate translation. The musical equivalent to an old armchair. It is meant to be ignored—

CRITIC: (Nodding) Muzak, you invented muzak.

SATIE1: Call it what you will, the greatest invention of the century.

CRITIC: No, third after the sound bite and personalized advertising. But I concede, a great invention—and it still exists.

SATIE1: To continue, I am at the exhibit, the music begins...

(We hear the original *musique d'ameublement* for two pianos, three clarinets and trombone. This music has never been published. The ms. is at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. A copy is with the author.)

Furniture music, you understand, is meant to be endlessly repetitive, no more intrusive than a wallpaper pattern. And yet how strange! I wander about the gallery, urging people to talk, to mingle, to pay no attention to it whatsoever. And what happens? They insist on listening. A total failure. Catastrophe absolute. Well...what are you waiting for, you imbeciles? Its intermission!

End Act One

Act II, Scene 1

Night. The elder SATIE is standing under a streetlamp on Stage Two writing in a small notebook. The CRITIC enters but SATIE does not see him.

CRITIC: Ah, there you are.

SATIE1: (Not hearing CRITIC, he takes a hammer out of his vest pocket.) Mosquitos...

CRITIC: You've been avoiding me.

SATIE1: (Not hearing) Perhaps they are reincarnated Academicians...

(He strikes a mosquito with the hammer, then catches sight of CRITIC and threatens him.)

CRITIC: (Stepping back) What are you doing!

SATIE1: Oh, it's merely you...I'm composing.

CRITIC: (Indicating hammer) There is software for that.

SATIE1: The neighborhood is dangerous.

CRITIC: Then why compose under streetlamps?

SATIE1: *Simplement*, en route from Arcueil to Paris the streetlamps are conveniently spaced a phrase apart. I think in the dark and write when enlightened.

CRITIC: Is this how you work, then, walking from Paris to Arcueil?

SATIE1: And back. However, before composing a piece I usually walk around it several times accompanied by myself.

CRITIC: A peculiar route.

SATIE1: (He puts away hammer, takes a pipe with a *very* long stem out of his pocket and lights up.) Well, to maintain productivity an artist

must regulate his life quite closely. As I mention in my *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*—

CRITIC: *Répétez s'il vous plait.*

SATIE1: *Memoirs of an Amnesiac.*

CRITIC: M. Satie, earlier you expressed incredulity bordering on ...chartreuse that our world could lose its memory. You threatened to impale me on a memory. Do you now concede there is none of same?

SATIE1: My lack of memoirs is purely personal. I concede nothing. Yet, surely you cannot believe your generation was the first to forget?

CRITIC: Earlier generations may have had forgettable memory lapses. But if my generation is unable to remember even the loss of memory itself, then grant: we have raised amnesia to an entirely new level—amnesia of amnesia.

SATIE1: One of your metatrends?

CRITIC: Precisely.

SATIE1: So, where were we?

CRITIC: (Scratching his head) I've forgotten. Do you recall?

SATIE1: No. Ah yes...As I have written in my *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*, an artist must regulate his life quite closely. I rise at 7:18, am inspired from 10:23 to 11:47. I lunch at 12:11 and leave the table at 12:14. A healthy ride on horseback around my domain follows from 1:19 to 2:53 P.M. Another bout of inspiration from 3:12 to 4:07. You see how it is. I go to bed regularly at 10:37. Once a week—on Tuesdays—I awake with a start at 3:14 A.M. Ah, we have reached my estate. Goodnight.

CRITIC: May I see it?

(SATIE stares at him.)

CRITIC: May I see it?

SATIE1: Do you know what you are requesting, Monsieur?

CRITIC: May I see it?

SATIE1: I have lived in this flat for over 25 years. I have allowed no other living soul to set foot in it.

CRITIC: Ah, but I am not among the living.

SATIE1: Good point. Come in. You understand I was looking for a thirty-room mansion; I have so many ideas to accommodate. This was the closest...

(We enter a small dark room with a single window. Two grand pianos stand atop one another. The upper one is overflowing with hundreds of letters and packages.

Clothing, including seven identical maroon velvet suits, hundreds of stiff collars and bow ties, is heaped up on the lower piano and above an empty wardrobe. Paintings on the wall are covered with newspaper. A small desk similarly overflows with bric-a-brac.)

CRITIC: It's a prison...(Picking up a suit) They're indistinguishable...Velvet. (He sorts through several letters from the piano.) Unopened... You've sent this one to yourself...

SATIE1: (Grabbing the letter and pushing him out of the way) Do not touch anything, you imbecile! Everything is filed, precisely...Now, if you'll excuse me, it's time for my meditation...

CRITIC: Wait, we have not decided—

(SATIE climbs into the wardrobe and begins to shut the doors.)

CRITIC: You are the loneliest man I have ever met.

SATIE1: Tell that to Jupiter. A few months after reading *Pelléas et Mélisande* he was on his way to Ghent.

(SATIE closes the doors. The lights go down on Stage Two and go up on Stage One to reveal a sitting room in Ghent. MAETERLINCK sits in an armchair leaning forward. He holds a rifle upright with its stock on the floor and its barrel pressed to his forehead. The offstage voice of a SERVANT is heard.)

SERVANT: A pen.

MAETERLINCK: No!

SERVANT: Wait, it's coming. Your pipe.

MAETERLINCK: No!

SERVANT: Something with round edges...A bowl.

MAETERLINCK: (With increasing annoyance) No!

SERVANT: Hmm. A statuette.

MAETERLINCK: No!

SERVANT: Your rifle.

MAETERLINCK: Yes!

SERVANT: That's it!

MAETERLINCK: Yes...

SERVANT: Ah, M. Debussy. Yes, he's expecting you. This? We have been demonstrating the existence of telepathy...

(Enter SERVANT and DEBUSSY.)

SERVANT: M. Maeterlinck, allow me to present M. Claude Debussy.

(They shake hands. There ensues a long silence during which they timidly glance at each other.)

DEBUSSY: Y...you cannot know how grateful I am that you have agreed to receive me.

MAETERLINCK: (Looking at floor, then at SERVANT) Uh, yes, would you like some tea?

DEBUSSY: If it is not inconvenient.

(MAETERLINCK motions to SERVANT, who exits.)

DEBUSSY: I am forever in your debt for allowing me to set *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

MAETERLINCK: (Taking out his pipe) Hmm, do you smoke?

DEBUSSY: I have my own. (Takes out cigarettes.)

MAETERLINCK: (Giving him a light) You come highly recommended. I was happy to give you my...authorization. Set the play...(shrugs) any way you like.

DEBUSSY: When you refused *Princess Maleine*, I felt like a man cast adrift. Truly, I did not know what I would do.

(Enter SERVANT.)

MAETERLINCK: Ah, the tea. That was...circumstance. Sugar?

DEBUSSY: Please. But now that I have *Pelléas*...You know, I have been searching for such a text for years...

MAETERLINCK: (Dismissing him) It is a mediocre play. No better, no worse I suppose than any other. Sit down...please.

DEBUSSY: You are quite wrong, M. Maeterlinck, it suits my purposes exactly. Not a month after this summer's performance I began to set the love scene...If you have a piano, I should feel obliged...

MAETERLINCK: No. I know nothing of music. When it comes to Beethoven, I...I am like a...blind man in a museum.

DEBUSSY: Really? You are a lawyer by profession?

MAETERLINCK: (Chuckling) No more of that. I invariably send my clients up the river. (Makes a gesture with his finger across his neck.)

DEBUSSY: Then in the name of the mother of us all, you must devote yourself to literature.

MAETERLINCK: More tea?

(DEBUSSY refuses.)

MAETERLINCK: Try these biscuits; they're superb.

DEBUSSY: You will continue to write?

MAETERLINCK: Ah, I have had enough of this empty blind-horse labor. *Pelléas* took the blood out of me and all I am left with is a bout of neurasthenia. I reckon on a long journey...

DEBUSSY: Surely you must get some happiness out of having created a masterpiece.

MAETERLINCK: Do you?

(DEBUSSY is silent.)

I told you, it is a mediocre play...As for happiness, I don't know that I've ever believed in it.

DEBUSSY: Love?

MAETERLINCK: Please. I keep several mistresses. They mean nothing to me. The pleasure is merely...physical. You have always been a musician?

DEBUSSY: Oh yes. Ten years at the conservatory—quite enough—then a horrible sojourn in Rome, now poverty. I am certain *Pelléas* will change that.

MAETERLINCK: May it bring you riches...God, I would not have my life over again because of those seven years at college.

DEBUSSY: Which, if I may ask?

MAETERLINCK: Ste. Barbe, a Jesuit school. You know, the walls were so high they blotted out the sun...A completely bleak and changeless

existence...The chimes of the hour fell on us so plaintively
that...they might have been shadows...a rain of iron and ashes...

Do you go in for cycling, M. Debussy?

DEBUSSY: No, I am afraid not.

MAETERLINCK: Fencing?

DEBUSSY: Fencing! I'd be terrified...Perhaps, M. Maeterlinck, you have work
to do—

MAETERLINCK: The autumn is glorious. We should go for a ride.

DEBUSSY: I wished to inquire about some delicate surgery. I hate to
touch a word, you understand, but opera is a practical—

MAETERLINCK: Cut anything you like. Cut the opening scene. It doesn't
have anything to do with the rest. Begin with the forest...

DEBUSSY: Yes, of course I shall...

MAETERLINCK: There are also some longwinded speeches that should be
trimmed—and the repetition...

DEBUSSY: No, the repetition is hypnotic.

MAETERLINCK: Hypnosis, an interesting subject. But in rereading my plays I must
admit my characters sometimes sound like...somnambulists who
have suddenly stumbled against a tree...How long do you reckon
the work will take?

DEBUSSY: Starting a new work is always like throwing oneself off
a cliff...You pray not too many bones will be shattered.

MAETERLINCK: Yes...

DEBUSSY: A year, two depending on the obstacles.

MAETERLINCK: Ample opportunity to shatter bones.

DEBUSSY: I always marvel that a creation of one's own soul can be such an
opponent.

MAETERLINCK: The soul is a complicated thing, Monsieur, rarely passive.

DEBUSSY: Yes. But be assured, your play shall receive my best efforts...(Getting up) Well, I must say this has been most helpful. (Catching sight of a painting above the mantle) You admire Puvis de Chavannes?

MAETERLINCK: Very much. [You recall Baudelaire:

I prize the memory of those naked epochs,
When Apollo pleased himself by gilding marbles,

DEBUSSY: And whose agile men and women

Lived in joy without delusion or anxiety...

Yes...Yet] somehow his is serenity at sunset...

MAETERLINCK: Of course.

DEBUSSY: Well, let me thank you again for the authorization.

MAETERLINCK: To the contrary, I should be thanking you. You must stay for lunch...

(They exit as the lights go down on Stage One and go up on Stage Two. CRITIC and SATIE are facing in opposite directions.)

SATIE1: (Concentrating) A clay pipe.

CRITIC: No.

SATIE1: A painting by Puvis de Chavannes.

CRITIC: No.

SATIE1: A mixture of exotic tobacco.

CRITIC: No.

SATIE1: The Fall of the House of Usher.

CRITIC: No.

SATIE1: I give up.

CRITIC: (Opening his hands.) Boredom. It is the prime mover, the cause of all causes. Writers write, composers compose for fear of boredom.

SATIE1: (With curiosity) I beg your pardon.

CRITIC: Boredom produces trends; without it everyone would be complacent. The greater the concentration of boredom in the world, the more quickly fashions change. The world of course, is saturated in boredom.

SATIE1: (With a hint of approval) An interesting stand.

CRITIC: Why else would Maeterlinck waste his time with telepathy? Boredom explains everything. If you people were alive today, you'd be sitting on street corners chanting out of boredom: Krishna, Krishna, Hare Krishna...Still, if shyness weren't so cost ineffective, I'd call theirs endearing.

SATIE1: (Pointing to Stage One) Those two?

(CRITIC nods.)

SATIE1: You are a poor judge of character, M. Critique.

CRITIC: Is that so?

SATIE1: (Indicating Stage One.) Observe.

Act II, Scene 2

About a year later. DEBUSSY's flat, late one morning. The furniture is sparse and functional, although there is a piano. DEBUSSY is sitting at a table cluttered with paper. DUPONT, having apparently gotten up not long ago, is making tea.

DUPONT: Claude, you've been inhabiting the night again.

(She opens a window shutter.)

DEBUSSY: I am found out.

DUPONT: You are becoming a vampire who fears the light, yes?

DEBUSSY: Just a ghost. Dreams are terribly shy. They summon the courage to speak with you only in the stillness and shadows.

DUPONT: (Handing him some tea and kissing him) Well, are your fancies behaving?

DEBUSSY: Not at all. Pelléas and Mélisande have been sulking and don't want to come down from their tapestry, so I have been toying with other ideas.

DUPONT: Really? Tell me.

DEBUSSY: I call it *Nuages*.

(DEBUSSY goes to the piano and plays the opening of *Nuages*. There is banging on the wall.)

OFFSTAGE

VOICE: Shut up! It's Sunday morning!

(DEBUSSY breaks off.)

DEBUSSY: You see what I mean.

DUPONT: Will your *Nuages* be a success, Claude?

- DEBUSSY: Darling Gaby, God and the public make successes. I shall count a victory if I finish it.
- DUPONT: Of course you shall.
- DEBUSSY: I wish I could be sure. You know how many projects have defeated me. Besides, now Mélisande's gotten a little jealous. Last night she bent over me and said in that soft, silky voice she has, "Drop these little follies, the longing for public acclaim, and save your dreams for my hair."
- DUPONT: Your princess of Allemonde is a bit of a temptress, isn't she?
- DEBUSSY: Very beguiling.
- DUPONT: She makes all the men jealous.
- DEBUSSY: Golaud at least.
- DUPONT: A brute. Finding that innocent girl in a forest, not even knowing who she is, and marrying her—just for her hair. Then treating her as he does.
- DEBUSSY: Yes, he's too jealous for his own good, of course, but an upstanding fellow otherwise.
- DUPONT: And Pelléas, a bit naive, don't you think? He doesn't even realize when he's falling in love.
- DEBUSSY: Quite. He's a bit mystified at what is going on about him, but he's full of life, a fine young man all the same.
- DUPONT: You're a little in love with the inhabitants of Allemonde, aren't you, Claude?
- DEBUSSY: I can't deny it. If you do not love your characters—even when they are naughty—then there is no pleasure at all amid the torture.
- DUPONT: But why is pretty Mélisande so opposed to success?

DEBUSSY: She well understands that dreams are beginnings and successes are endings. Now, Gaby dear, tell me, which are more important?

DUPONT: Both. With a little success we could at least buy a new chair, no?

(They both laugh. A knock on the door.)

(As she answers) Still, prince Golaud doesn't have much to recommend him —

(Enter SATIE2.)

DEBUSSY: Ah, the gentle medievalist who landed in the wrong century.

[SATIE2: There are twenty-one paths to the alchemical citadel, of which twenty are false.

DEBUSSY: The alchemist's soul must be purified by the sacred fire before the esoteric knowledge can be his...] Come in.

DUPONT: What news, Erik?

SATIE2: (Imitating Camille Saint-Saens' lisp) "Satie is a lunatic. His music evokes the strange advance of a drunken stiltwalker across some barren lunar landscape. One can only conclude from it that his teachers were correct in all respects to dismiss him from the conservatory."

DEBUSSY: You proposed yourself to the Academy again? Erik, dear friend, what is the point? You know that Saint-Saens falls into a dead faint when he hears your music.

DUPONT: What did you tell him this time, Erik?

SATIE2: As I told him before: my candidacy, authorized by God, should be accepted by you. I have the right to have my existence acknowledged and I can only be reproached for not knowing Me as I know you.

DUPONT: Erik, you go too far, no? You want people to consider you *fou*, then continue to behave like this. You want your music to be played, then you must compromise—

SATIE2: Never.

DUPONT: I know how painful it is. But believe me, Erik, in this world you compromise whether you like it or not.

DEBUSSY: Erik, I showed some of your works to the *Société Nationale* for their winter concert—

SATIE2: My dear friend!

DEBUSSY: Do not, I beg of you, allow your hopes to be raised.

SATIE2: What did the heathens say?

DEBUSSY: Chausson nearly fainted. But let us see.

SATIE2: Will you have anything performed?

DEBUSSY: (Hesitantly) My string quartet.

DUPONT: It is your best work, don't you think, Claude?

(The music fades in.)

DEBUSSY: We were speaking of Golaud, weren't we Gaby?

DUPONT: Y...yes. Horrible man.

DEBUSSY: What is your opinion of Golaud, Erik?

SATIE2: Perhaps he should be played by Saint-Saens...Your quartet sounds ruled by bar lines.

DEBUSSY: It is.

SATIE2: What a bore. Conventional. When you get down to it that is Golaud's problem. He is unable to rise above convention—

DEBUSSY: I've done my best for you, Erik.

DUPONT: I think I'll go out and get some bread. We'll have a feast, yes? Erik, don't go away. I'll be back soon.

(Exit DUPONT. The second movement of the quartet comes on. SATIE sits transfixed.)

SATIE2: You wrote this?

(DEBUSSY nods.)

(SATIE begins to speak but fails.)

DEBUSSY: (Getting up and beginning to pace) Still, Golaud is a fine man all the same, because he shows that it is not necessary to be entirely frank, even with little girls.

SATIE2: What are you saying?

(The third movement of the quartet fades in.)

DEBUSSY: I'm engaged.

SATIE2: To Gaby? It's about time. In the name of *l'Église Métropolitain d'Art de Jésus Conducteur*, I congrat—

DEBUSSY: Not to Gaby.

SATIE2: What?

DEBUSSY: To Thérèse Roger.

SATIE2: Thérèse Roger...The singer?

DEBUSSY: Yes.

SATIE2: When?

(DEBUSSY shrugs.)

SATIE2: Gaby?

DEBUSSY: Gaby doesn't know.

SATIE2: (After a long pause) My good Claude, I would not be in your shoes for...a post at the Academy.

DEBUSSY: What am I to do?

SATIE2: The usual solution is bank notes.

DEBUSSY: (Ruefully) Lend me some.

SATIE2: (Putting a coin on the table) My fortune is yours.

DEBUSSY: Save me, I cannot bear this torture.

SATIE2: Jupiter, this time you have hurled your lightning in the wrong direction.

DEBUSSY: Don't desert me.

SATIE2: (Pointing heavenward) He may; I shan't. But why in the name of Salvation throw over Gaby for this...this...?

DEBUSSY: (Softly, with frustration) *Je ne sais pas.*

SATIE2: Claude Debussy, exalted thirty-third Grand Master of the Priere de Sion—

DEBUSSY: Shh.

SATIE2: Shh. I beg to inform you, my friend, that in distinction to Masonic orders engagements are meant to be announced...

DEBUSSY: Oh God, is it necessary?

SATIE2: In the considered opinion—(pause)

DEBUSSY: —of—?

SATIE2: —the Parcier de l'Église Métropolitain d'Art de Jésus Conducteur—

DEBUSSY: Yes?

SATIE2: —In order to mend your ways—

DEBUSSY: It's difficult...

SATIE2: —and distance yourself from the spirit of the Evil One, you shall—

DEBUSSY: I shall—?

SATIE2: —tell her. (Prepares to leave.)

DEBUSSY: Please...

SATIE2: By order of the Definitory Erik Satie.
(Exiting) *Bonne chance.*

DEBUSSY: Wait...

SATIE2: (From offstage) I have spoken.

(During the following exchange on Stage Two, Stage One is set for the next scene.)

CRITIC: Why the hegemonic bastard.

SATIE1: There you go again.

CRITIC: You can't dismiss like a...a chambermaid someone you've lived with for two years, who's shared every hardship, simply because you've grown weary of...dyed blond.

SATIE1: Endearing, isn't he? Well, you might be quoting his friends. They discovered your self-righteous sentiments one hundred years earlier.

CRITIC: What happened? Did he tell her?

(We suddenly hear offstage screaming, throwing of pots, etc. DUPONT runs across Stage One to Stage Two.)

CRITIC: Gaby, are you all right?

(She slaps him and continues off. CRITIC scratches his head.)

SATIE1:: But to continue...All his friends deserted him —

CRITIC: Except you.

SATIE1: And one or two others. Chausson wouldn't speak to him for two years. Ysaÿe, Bréville, Godet...

CRITIC: Ladled him his just deserts.

SATIE1:: Other people always deserve what they get. Monsieur, no one would claim the good Claude was right. But life is too much like death as it is.

CRITIC: Meaning?

SATIE1: He was a friend. *En tout cas*, as I have said, love is comical.

CRITIC: Do you always cloak yourself in comedy to avoid tragedy?

(SATIE gestures towards Stage One.)

(Enter DUPONT and DEBUSSY arm-in-arm, as if strolling down a boulevard. CRITIC is stunned.)

SATIE1: You did not think any self-respecting family would marry off their daughter to an impoverished composer with a mistress, did you?

DUPONT: Ah, M. Critique, I am so sorry to have slapped you, but I was so upset. Forgive me, won't you? (She strokes him on the cheek.)

CRITIC: Uh yes, of course.

(Exit DUPONT and DEBUSSY.)

SATIE1: Now, in regard to our little wager, Monsieur.

CRITIC: Later, I am too *outré* to talk about it now.

(He walks to Stage One, where MÉLISANDE is sitting before a gloomy castle. Music: Sibelius, second movement of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, beginning after English horn solo.)

CRITIC: Hello, Mélisande.

MÉLISANDE: Hello, lord.

CRITIC: It is good to see you again. You lighten up this place.

MÉLISANDE: Allemonde is very dark. There are places where one never sees the sun.

CRITIC: It looks as if there will be a storm tonight.

MÉLISANDE: It always looks that way here.

CRITIC: (Sitting down next to MÉLISANDE) Did you tell Golaud what happened to the ring?

MÉLISANDE: No, I lied. I told him it fell in the grotto while I was collecting shells.

CRITIC: Was he angry?

MÉLISANDE: Yes, very angry. He told me to find it with Pelléas.

CRITIC: Ah, Mélisande, I am beginning to think you cause a lot of trouble.

MÉLISANDE: Why do I cause trouble?

CRITIC: Call it...intuition.

MÉLISANDE: I feel cold.

CRITIC: Do you think, Mélisande, that every age believes that all that came before was merely preparation? I mean, does each generation believe it is...unique..? I'm sorry. This is the wrong conversation.

(MÉLISANDE begins to sob.)

What is wrong? W...why are you crying?

MÉLISANDE: *Je suis malade ici.*

CRITIC: But why?

MÉLISANDE: I do not know...I am not happy here.

CRITIC: What has happened? Has someone hurt you?

MÉLISANDE: No...no. No one has done me the least harm.

CRITIC: Then—?

MÉLISANDE: It is something beyond me. I feel that I cannot live here any longer. I...I should not live long.

CRITIC: Ah, Mélisande, perhaps you need someone to sing for.

MÉLISANDE: Who should I sing for?

CRITIC: I think that is not so important.

MÉLISANDE: Oh, I am not happy.

CRITIC: I see.

(She begins to cry again. CRITIC reaches out his arm to her, then withdraws it. Enter DUPONT.)

DUPONT: Why do you hesitate?

CRITIC: I can hardly say...She'll misunderstand.

DUPONT: The moment, Monsieur, it will not last long.

(CRITIC reaches out his hand again. Not seeing him, MÉLISANDE gets to her feet and rushes off weeping.)

MÉLISANDE: Oh! *Je ne suis pas heureuse! Je ne suis pas heureuse...*

CRITIC: Yes, not long...

(He absently walks to Stage Two where SATIE1 is waiting near a cafe table. The lights go down on Stage One. CRITIC should remain unfocused throughout the following dialogue.)

SATIE1: Each time you return from Allemonde, Monsieur, you seem out of sorts. To cheer you up I shall tell you of another significant invention: Maurice Ravel.

CRITIC: (Distractedly) What?

SATIE1: Who, Monsieur, who. Conventional wisdom has it that Ravel was an invention of Debussy. Indeed, if you listen to the scherzo of Ravel's string quartet, you will recognize a certain similarity...

(We hear a bit of the scherzo from Ravel's quartet.)

CRITIC: (Trying to focus) Yes, I've heard something like that before.

SATIE1: Not ten minutes ago. Memory, Monsieur! The world's may be gone; do not allow yours to be erased so quickly. Now, Debussy:

(We again hear some of the second movement from Debussy's quartet.)

CRITIC: Remarkable.

SATIE1: Indeed. In fact the identity is often said to have caused the falling out of the two titans. But in fact, it is I, not Debussy, who invented Ravel. Monsieur, are you listening.

CRITIC: Uh...yes.

SATIE1: We met in the early 90s, about the same time I ran across the good Claude. Ravel was a mere youth. His famous *Pavane* dates from 1896.

(We hear the piano version of the *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, bars [TK].)

Note the resemblance to my “Heroic Gate of Heaven” dating from 1894—a piece I liked so much I dedicated it to myself.

(We hear *Prélude de la Porte Héroïque du Ciel*, which continues until next scene.)

Monsieur, *attention*, I request it again.

CRITIC: (Distractedly) Yes, striking. So what?

SATIE1: I see you are not in the mood to discuss our wager. I shall come back to the ring-leader of the sub-Debussyists later and for the time being turn to something less abstract: Georgette Leblanc.

(Calling to WAITER). Garçon!

(SATIE pushes CRITIC down on the shoulders to seat him at the table.)

Georgette Leblanc was a curious creature. Totally unreliable in everything she said. The world revolved around her. Too bad for the rest of us, alas!

CRITIC: Too bad? She sounds like Erik Satie’s twin sister.

(SATIE slams his umbrella on the table and jumps up. Enter WAITER with drinks. He gently eases aside the umbrella to place the drinks on the table.)

SATIE1: *Merci.*

CRITIC: Is this non-alcoholic?

(WAITER dumps drink over CRITIC's head and exits.)

SATIE1: According to her own account, she ran away from home at the age of 17 to pursue an acting career in Paris, offering her dowry to the first suitor who agreed to a marriage that should never be consummated. The result was a drunken Spaniard, she says.

CRITIC: (Shrugging) A green-card marriage—

(Enter LEBLANC on Stage One, which is still dark. She is dressed extravagantly, but still within the bounds of reason. LEBLANC will be narrating events from her memoirs and playing them. The role can be divided into a younger and older LEBLANC.)

SATIE1: Why she should possess a dowry after running away from home—
Qui sait ? She claimed the fellow was on the verge of being
gunned down for gambling debts and that he beat her for a year.
But she never divorced him. After a physician's affidavit, the courts
removed her to a sanitarium where she made a remarkable
recovery and developed a passion for...Maeterlinck...

Act II, Scene 3

LEBLANC: M. Satie, I'll have you know that pseudo-marriage was indeed never consummated, and the only reason I never divorced was that the brute was, ah, Catholic. Now, since you are recounting this story in such a dry and defamatory manner, I'll tell as it happened in real life. It began in my salon. I was twenty, fully recovered from my trials, the rage of Paris. Everyone called on me: The Rosicrucians, the composer Fabre...the most diverse artistic sorts...

(A salon comes to life on Stage One with PÉLADAN holding court.)

PÉLADAN: Just as Religion has made itself into art in order to speak to the masses, so Art must make itself into a religion in order to speak to the few...

(Applause.)

GUEST: (Walking forward) Allow me to present to you, Madame, a copy of Emerson's essays in the latest translation...

LEBLANC: I am most grateful and shall read it with pleasure...

(GUEST retires.)

(To Audience.) Read it I did, that very evening. Yet, it was not Emerson's essays that changed my life, but the preface—by Maeterlinck! I discerned in it a tendency of mind, a vision, and even a being whose inner existence corresponded perfectly to my own...I knew immediately—I felt—that no obstacle between him and me could ever arise. I was in love... Fate the all-seeing intervened—only a few hours after the sun rose the next morning—

(Enter CALABRESI.)

CALABRESI: Mme Leblanc, we are proud to steal Paris' most unusual artists. On behalf of the Théâtre de Monnaie, I am authorized to offer you 800 francs a month to appear in Brussels.

LEBLANC: You realize, of course, that I am paid more than double that sum by the Opéra-Comique in Paris.

CALABRESI: A thousand pardons, Madame, the offer is unworthy. I withdraw —

LEBLANC: No! Don't you dare!

(Exit CALABRESI.)

(To Audience) Brussels! A mere thought, a gesture away from Ghent! I moved to Belgium, staking my life on a purely spiritual intention. The Belgian public adopted me. Each day I dreamed—and inquired. I began to frequent the salon of the famous lawyer, Edmond Picard. Everyone called...

(The lights go up on a salon. Same cast as above.)

PÉLADAN: Between the harmonious Puvis de Chavannes and the subtle Gustave Moreau, the intense Felicien Rops closes the cabalistic triangle of Great Art.

(Applause.)

LEBLANC: Six months passed while I, receiving applause nightly, was immersed in my dreams. At last my opportunity arose—Maeterlinck! Picard requested I be the last to arrive. If you will excuse me while I change...

(Exit LEBLANC.)

CRITIC: Hollywood, you are nothing. Concede, hers is a fashion wiped from the face of the earth.

SATIE1: Indeed one rarely sees such impulsive behavior these days.

CRITIC: Heroically impulsive.

SATIE1: Yes. It is gone. Too bad. However, Monsieur, the true question is not whether her like still exists but whether her like ever existed.

CRITIC: It would be difficult to be bored with her in proximity.

SATIE1: A propos boredom, Monsieur—

PICARD: Messieurs et Mesdames, allow me to present the celebrated actress Georgette Leblanc.

(Enter LEBLANC wearing the gown described below.)

LEBLANC: All eyes turned toward me. For so great an evening I had arrayed myself in a costume highly Mélisandesque and harmoniously absurd. On my forehead blazed brighter than ever the diamond which had already scandalized Brussels. Like wood shavings, my hair quivered in curls about my head, and my trailing gown of gold-flowered velvet prolonged my person indefinitely. Thus decked, like Cleopatra embarking on her galley, I advanced upon the conquest of my fate, outwardly assured but inwardly trembling.

(PICARD leads LEBLANC over to MAETERLINCK, who is standing by the mantle, smoking a pipe.)

PICARD: Georgette Leblanc...Maurice Maeterlinck...

LEBLANC: (To Audience) What luck! He's young!

MAETERLINCK: (Flustered) Ah, if you will excuse me, Madame.

(Exit MAETERLINCK.)

LEBLANC: But when we sat down to supper, Maeterlinck was opposite me and I could examine his face without embarrassing him, for his

eyes were always lowered—they have never borne the weight of another's gaze. Later, we talked...

(Enter MAETERLINCK.)

LEBLANC: M. Maeterlinck, I understand you are a lawyer by profession.

MAETERLINCK: Ah, no more of that. I...I'll never appear before the bar again...I inevitably send my clients up the river.

(Makes gesture across his neck.)

PICARD: Madame, perhaps you would honor us with a rendition of one of Fabre's songs.

(LEBLANC nods and walks over to the piano, at which is seated FABRE.)

LEBLANC: (To GUESTS) Mélisande sits in a tower window. Putting her hair up for the night, she sings mournfully. (Pause.)

"Chanson de Mélisande" by M. Fabre (indicating FABRE), on words of Maurice Maeterlinck.

(Fabre's song is available at NY Public Library. A copy is with the author. It is not exactly a masterpiece. LEBLANC sings it. Applause.)

GUESTS: Bravo!
Magnificent!
A work of genius!
Author!

(LEBLANC and FABRE bow.)

LEBLANC: (Approaching MAETERLINCK) Do you approve of my interpretation, M. Maeterlinck?

MAETERLINCK: Absolutely...delighted. But you must understand...I am... totally ignorant of music. When it comes to Beethoven... I...I am like a blind man in a museum.

LEBLANC: But the poetry, Monsieur, have I captured the meaning?

MAETERLINCK: Meaning? There are no...meanings in my poems. They are...only...exercises in the juggling of harmonious sounds...

LEBLANC: Nothing? Nothing in all that marvelous world?

MAETERLINCK: Nothing...Well, Mme Leblanc, it has been...uh, delightful. I must catch a train. (He kisses her hand and turns to leave.)

LEBLANC: (Clutching at his sleeve) I should love to see Ghent.

MAETERLINCK: Uh, yes, I...I was just going to suggest it.

LEBLANC: Then let us exchange telegrams.

MAETERLINCK: Very well...yes...agreed. *Au revoir*, Madame.

(They exit in different directions. The lights go up on Stage Two. Evening at the cafe. The CRITIC is sprucing up.)

SATIE1: You are undoubtedly anxious to discover Leblanc's role in this affair —

CRITIC: Dying to know. But can't talk now. Must be off to Debussy's. He's celebrating the completion of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

SATIE1: You have been invited?

CRITIC: Why yes, I received a note from Gaby during the last scene.

SATIE1: Boredom, Monsieur, I wanted to comment. And our wager.

CRITIC: I've not forgotten. Can you direct me to his new address?

SATIE1: Not until you hear the end of this episode.

CRITIC: Really, there's no time.

SATIE1: I hold the address in ransom.

CRITIC: Very well, be quick about it.

(Lights go up on a house decorated as described below. LEBLANC addresses the audience.)

LEBLANC: The second meeting with destiny took place on my territory. I lived in an old house with high windows and a warped floor,

but with the idea that Maeterlinck would come, the most ordinary objects assumed an importance which increased with every moment.

(Indicating decor) I had transformed the room in which I planned to receive him—black tulle walls and silver ornaments. I fancied this lugubrious effect was made for him. Unfortunately to reach my lair, he had to cross the salon. I could not bear the thought of him seeing my old armchair covered with puce velvet, and was just about to remove it when—

(An electric doorbell rings. Enter MAETERLINCK wearing a Macfarlane and derby. He kisses LEBLANC's hand.)

Thus greeting him, I lifted the curtain of the little room from which waves of incense were escaping.

(To MAETERLINCK) Come this way, it will be far more...pleasant.

MAETERLINCK: (Peering in and sniffing the incense) What is that mausoleum? I wouldn't go in there for...anything on earth.

(He sits on the puce armchair. LEBLANC raises her hand to object but relents.)

I prefer the light.

LEBLANC: Thus installed we talked with an intensity that lasted five hours. From that day on we met regularly. At each subsequent meeting one of us brought a book and read aloud. This was the spiritual tuning fork that put us in accord. When my performances of Carmen—a role the directors forced on me against my strenuous protestations—took me abroad, we exchanged letters. They were our life's blood. Had there ever been a love like this? It appeared like the Divinity, piercing the

clouds and inundating the earth with rainbow-colored rays. I
was delirious, in paradise. Then one day, the bubble burst.

MAETERLINCK: Will you marry me?

(LEBLANC stares at him in shock. Blackout on Stage One.)

Act II, Scene 4

CRITIC walks along a street looking for DEBUSSY's flat while he grumbles to himself.

CRITIC: The puce is extremely...organic. But Satie is mistaken if he thinks any of that milieu remains except in the farthest gulag of cyberspace.

(He looks at something his hand and pauses before a door prominently marked "58." While he stands there, a piece of paper falls out of an upper window—a note. He picks it up and reads it aloud.)

 "We will discuss marriage again once Pelléas is performed.
 Catherine." This has gone too...

(He runs into the apartment brandishing the note. DEBUSSY, SATIE, DUPONT and several GUESTS are arrayed round the piano. SATIE is dressed in a maroon velvet suit. [DEBUSSY is playing bars 49-56 of the 2nd movement of Beethoven's last piano sonata, Op. 111.]

CRITIC: (Somewhat puzzled) That's quite a boogie-woogie. Pine Top Smith?

DEBUSSY: Beethoven.]

DUPONT: So good to see you again, M. Critique. (She kisses him on both cheeks.) We are celebrating—

DEBUSSY: Exhausting, darling Gaby. I have no more strength.

DUPONT: Two years of work—

DEBUSSY: Of agony. No, of pleasure as well. I'm sorry it's done. To finish a work, isn't it a little like watching the death of someone you love?

DUPONT: Monsieur, what is that in your hand?

CRITIC: Oh this, just some lecture notes. I may immortalize you—for an instant.

(He stuffs paper in his pocket.)

DUPONT: Let me get you something to drink.

CRITIC: Uh, Perrier.

DUPONT: Perrier? Only cheap wine, Monsieur.

DEBUSSY: You know, I had thought the little second act would be a trifle for me. But it was pure hell. Music and words are so different. Try carrying on a conversation with a melody.

(He begins to play opening of second act.)

Soon Pelléas and Mélisande will come to sit by the fountain and she will lose the ring.

(He continues to bar 17 and sings Pelléas' entrance, then stops.)

Ah, the piano decapitates everything...If you could only hear it as I do.

(We hear the same fragment again in the full orchestral version. After it ends, there is silence. Finally, one guest speaks up.)

GUEST1: I confess I can't make anything of it.

SATIE2: Imbecile.

GUEST1 Monsieur!

DEBUSSY: Erik, he's right. It is best not to play fragments. They only result in...confusing impressions. Listen everyone, I received a letter from Maeterlinck. "Sorry I cannot join you. A...as for *Pelléas*, please be assured that, um, it belongs entirely to you and that you can have it performed when and where you want." A good man, this Maeterlinck.

(SATIE takes the score from the piano and walks away examining it.)

GUEST2: Very fine. I'm sure you'll have a great success in no time.
(Raising his glass) To the man of the future, the conquering hero!

(The others follow suit, including CRITIC as he accepts a glass from DUPONT.)

DEBUSSY: With luck we'll see it staged at the Opéra-Comique within a few months.

GUEST1: Claude, will you write the incidental music they want for the London production of the play?

DEBUSSY: Inconceivable. I have just spent two years writing an opera. Be assured, if I could have written *Pelléas* in any other way, I would have.

CRITIC: (To SATIE) What do you think?

SATIE2: (Looking up from score) I think if I do not find a new direction I'm done for.

CRITIC: (Examining SATIE's suit) Is this velvet? I've seen these before. Quite...tousured.

DUPONT: Yes, Monsieur, it's all he wears these days, since giving up his church.

CRITIC: You have abandoned that endearing "We"?

SATIE2: Yes, I am not on good terms with God these days.

DUPONT: (Whispering to CRITIC) Saint-Saens rejected his candidacy again.
(CRITIC holds up three fingers. DUPONT nods.)

SATIE2: I've now entered my velvet period. With seven identical suits, I calculate that it will last precisely...seven years.

CRITIC: Economical.

SATIE2: Exactly. Poor me, I am so broke that I'll have move to Arcueil.

GUEST2: Dreary place. Nothing but the smell of tanning factories.

SATIE2: And smokestacks. A delightful suburb, really.

GUEST2: Well, let's not speak of such dismal prospects. M. Satie, why don't you play us your wonderful *Gymnopédies*.

SATIE2: (Muttering) You'd think I'd written nothing else.
(He sits and plays.)

GUEST2: Strangely beautiful. Claude, all that remains is for you to orchestrate them and I'll conduct them at the Salle Érard.

DEBUSSY: Erik, do you mind sharing the glory?

SATIE2: Would you?

DEBUSSY: I shall be happy to start tomorrow.

(SATIE gets up, visibly moved. DEBUSSY takes him to the side.)

SATIE2: Thank you, Claude.

DEBUSSY: It is my pleasure...But Erik, as a rule your music...it is somewhat shapeless. You should think just a little more in terms of structure. Perhaps something longer than one minute and a half.

(SATIE walks away pensively. DEBUSSY watches, uncertain as to whether he has offended him.)

CRITIC: (To DUPONT) Red wine gives me headaches.

DUPONT: It is high time to surrender, Monsieur, no? After all, we are not in your time; you are in ours.

CRITIC: Perhaps you are right. Well, I just wanted to pay my respects and offer my congratulations. I'm looking forward to the premiere...

(They kiss each other goodnight. CRITIC and GUESTS exit. DUPONT AND DEBUSSY remain. CRITIC walks to Stage Two.)

CRITIC: Who was Catherine?

SATIE1: Catherine? I've forgotten. It was so long ago. And there were so many. What difference does it make?

(CRITIC glowers at him but SATIE doesn't budge.)

CRITIC: All right, when will the premiere take place? Soon? I don't have my tux.

SATIE1: Soon? Are you joking, Monsieur? Years and years went by while Jupiter's score languished on the shelf.

(One Stage One the passage of seasons is indicated. While CRITIC and SATIE talk, a DIRECTOR comes, discusses the opera with DEBUSSY in mime and leaves. After some time, exit DEBUSSY, frustrated.)

No one wanted to stage *Pelléas et Mélisande*. How could they? An entire opera in *pianissimo*. Who ever heard of such a thing? No Verdi...Not Wagner.

CRITIC: Why didn't he write the incidental music? With a little marketing, fame, fortune could have been his...

SATIE1: The practical American. It wasn't in his blood. And you know, fame is so fleeting, Monsieur, like pollen. In the end Fauré got the commission.

CRITIC: Ah.

SATIE1: You have heard his music before. A bit old fashioned...

(We hear the opening of Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* again. It continues into intermission.)

CRITIC: But too sublime for words.

SATIE1: Yes. By now, the entire world was beginning to fall in love with *Mélisande*. Not only Fauré, but Sibelius would pen music to her, the Englishman Cyril Scott...Her spell captured Arnold Schoenberg—

CRITIC: A 12-tone Mélisande. You can't mean it.

SATIE1: Even Schoenberg was young once. Nevertheless, he totally misunderstood the play. Only Debussy knew what he was doing...

(On Stage One DUPONT is prowling about the apartment. She finds a note in DEBUSSY's coat pocket. She reads it, begins to cry, to pace, to work herself into a rage. Finally, she takes a revolver out of a drawer. She continues to pace with it in her hands. Enter DEBUSSY.)

DEBUSSY: Gaby! What are you doing?

(He lunges for the gun. She resists. They struggle. She runs offstage with the gun. He follows. A shot.)

End Act II

Entracte

MÉLISANDE sits in a tower window (see Act III, Scene 1) and sings to orchestral accompaniment "The Three Blind Sisters" from Gabriel Fauré's (not Fabre's) incidental music to *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

Act III, Scene 1

Throughout the successive scenes of this Act the tension should rise to higher and higher levels before subsiding each time until scene five. We begin several years after the previous. Evening. A Boulevard. The CRITIC encounters DUPONT strolling arm-in-arm with a COUNT.

DUPONT: Monsieur, so nice to see you again.

(She kisses him on both cheeks.)

CRITIC: Gaby! We heard a shot. Everyone thought...

DUPONT: The senses are deceiving, Monsieur. You wouldn't have a cigarette, would you? No, of course, you don't smoke, abstainer from all pleasures. Have you heard? Claude finally got married.

CRITIC: No, to whom?

DUPONT: Lilly.

CRITIC: Lilly? An actress? A singer?

DUPONT: A dresser's model, I think. I've forgotten. She is very nice.

CRITIC: You're not angry?

DUPONT: No...We remain...As I recall...

CRITIC: Yes?

DUPONT: (A little coyly) I may have introduced them.

CRITIC: You...confound me.

DUPONT: Monsieur?

CRITIC: The desertions...like water from a muslin bag. I'm surprised you didn't shoot him instead.

DUPONT: How do you know I didn't?

CRITIC: Who left whom?

DUPONT: (Shrugging) I see you don't remember what I told you...
The song was over...Oh, I'm sorry, I have not introduced you. This is my dear friend, Comte de Balbiani. Comte, this is M. Critique. I have never slept with him.

COUNT: (Shaking hands) I am sorry for your sake, Monsieur; you have missed something very special.

DUPONT: Well, we are off to a concert. *Au revoir* Monsieur.

CRITIC: *Au revoir, Gaby.*

(He walks over to Stage Two where SATIE1 is waiting at a cafe table.)

Why did Lilly marry Debussy?

(SATIE takes a drink, disinterestedly indicates Stage One, where DEBUSSY is pacing agitatedly before LILLY.)

DEBUSSY: Lilly, if you refuse to marry me, I...I'll...(Seizing a revolver) shoot myself.

LILLY: (Grabbing the revolver from him) Claude! Don't. Please...I'll marry you.

(They exit.)

CRITIC: I see.

SATIE1: Love is comical. What a waste our lives are.

CRITIC: They amount to nothing.

SATIE1: Yes.

CRITIC: Occasionally you sound like me.

(Lights go up on Stage One as we hear the opening of Act III from the opera.

MÉLISANDE is sitting in a tower window, combing her hair and singing the following song to the accompaniment of the orchestra.)

MÉLISANDE: *Mes longues cheveux descendent jusqu'au seuil de la tour;*
Mes cheveux vous attendent tout le long de la tour,

*Et tout le long du jour,
Et tout le long du jour,
Saint Daniel et Saint Michel,
Saint Michel et Saint Raphael,
Je suis nee un Dimanche,
Un Dimanche a midi.*

(CRITIC walks over.)

CRITIC: Hello, Mélisande.

MÉLISANDE: Who is there?

CRITIC: It's just me. Have you found someone to sing for?

MÉLISANDE: I'm arranging my hair for the night.

CRITIC: Is that what is shining so brightly?

MÉLISANDE: I opened the window. The night is fine; it is too hot in the tower.

CRITIC: You seem in better spirits than last time we met.

MÉLISANDE: I am frightful this way.

CRITIC: Let me see.

(She leans out the window.)

Hardly frightful. I have rarely seen such beauty. It seems strange to say it.

MÉLISANDE: What do you mean?

CRITIC: Give me your hand, Mélisande; I somehow doubt we will see each other again.

MÉLISANDE: Why?

CRITIC: Soon I must be on my way and I think...you will have other visitors.

MÉLISANDE: Why must you go?

CRITIC: Ah, Mélisande. We should thank music for destroying time.

MÉLISANDE: *Je ne comprends pas.*

CRITIC: Otherwise...there would be altogether too much of it between us.
Give me your hand, Mélisande. Someday I should be glad to see you in an opera.

MÉLISANDE: I won't give you my hand if you go.

CRITIC: I'll stay just a moment longer. Allow me to kiss your hand.

(MÉLISANDE leans over. Suddenly her hair tumbles down over the CRITIC.)

What hair! It is a truly a miracle of nature.

MÉLISANDE: Let me go! You'll make me fall.

(CRITIC takes her hair in his hand, puts it to his lips and kisses it.)

MÉLISANDE: Oh, you're hurting me.

CRITIC: I'm sorry. Here, you are free.

MÉLISANDE: (Lifting her head) I hear footsteps. Golaud has heard us.

CRITIC: Wait, your hair is still caught.

(Enter Prince GOLAUD, dressed as in the opera.)

GOLAUD: What are you doing here?

CRITIC: Just saying farewell. Don't go orbital.

GOLAUD: Two children. Mélisande, don't lean so far from the window.
You'll fall. Don't you know how late it is? Almost midnight.
Playing like this in the dark. What children!

CRITIC: Ah, if it were possible.

(Exit GOLAUD.)

Adieu, Mélisande. Sing for me.

(He walks to Stage Two.)

SATIE1: You wish to stay.

CRITIC: I don't belong here.

SATIE1: She has captured your heart. How quaint.

CRITIC: Oh shut up. Your sarcasms...She's not of my time.

SATIE1: But you have become of hers. The absolute conformist, who believes in nothing, reveals himself to be a romantic. Almost a cliché.

CRITIC: Retract those words, Monsieur.

SATIE1: Retract? Why? An absolute conformist is by definition a cliché, the cliché of all clichés—

CRITIC: —which is then exceptional, unique. My stated position is that change is inevitable. You cannot go back to fairy tales.

SATIE1: You just have.

CRITIC: That is a misinterpretation. I am merely...interested. In any case one must sometimes suspend one's—

SATIE1: —principles—

CRITIC: —disbelief—

SATIE1: —for a moment—

CRITIC: —only.

SATIE1: Hypocrite.

CRITIC: Retract!

SATIE1: Never.

(The dialogue is interrupted by the beginning of the next scene.)

Act III, Scene 2

(The lights go up downstage One. MAETERLINCK and LEBLANC are staring at each other as at the end of Act II, Scene 3.)

MAETERLINCK: Uh, might you marry me?

LEBLANC: (Coming out of shock) Darling, why should we marry? Marriage is for other people. It is a precaution for the fearful. But against whom should I take it and why?

MAETERLINCK: I—

LEBLANC: (To Audience) He agreed immediately. At that moment we swore an oath never to fall into the trap which awaits all lovers—jealousy, domination, the curtailing of liberty. We wrote to each other incessantly. He made me the heroine of his new play, *Aglavaine and Selysette*. But instead of a triumphant conclusion for Aglavaine, it was practically a defeat. I hated it. So did he.

MAETERLINCK: I couldn't do what I wanted to do... But I promise, I will do it yet.

LEBLANC: (To Audience) The demands of my theatrical career often took me to France and forced our separation, which was unendurable. What's more, I wanted his fame to be worldwide. The inevitable transpired—we moved to Paris where we would live together.

(The lights come up behind them on their Parisian house. A large ground-floor window opening onto a street should be prominent, as well as a grand piano with candelabras on it. The piano should face away from the audience.)

LEBLANC: I decided at once to live exclusively on the proceeds of my own work. Maeterlinck's fortune was beginning and he agreed to pay his share of the living expenses...

MAETERLINCK: Seven francs a day?

LEBLANC: The next few years proceeded quickly. He wrote. I wrote. He pronounced me one of the world's great writers. I was thrilled. Of course, he borrowed my thoughts and when I saw them appear in print I naturally protested. He offered to cease publishing for seven years, so that I might establish my own literary career. Needless to say, I gracefully declined. He dedicated his *Wisdom and Destiny* to me...

MAETERLINCK: (Handing her a book) It is, in a manner of speaking, your work.

[LEBLANC: Another career began about that time...

(The doorbell rings. LEBLANC answers. A poorly dressed RUSSIAN GIRL stands at the door.)

LEBLANC: Yes?

GIRL: Oh, Madame, please help me, please.

LEBLANC: What is it, child?

GIRL: I have no money, my parents—they died building the railway across Siberia. My brothers and I—we have wandered all over Europe. My shoes, you see. I...I have nowhere to turn. *Bozhe moi*. I was about to throw myself in the river, but I passed by the home of the great Maeterlinck and I thought...*Spasi menya*...

LEBLANC: Come in for a moment, child.

(GIRL comes in and faints. LEBLANC and MAETERLINCK drag her to a sofa and lay her down. During following, GIRL gets up and exits.)

LEBLANC: (To Audience) Sonia stayed for weeks. She spoke seven languages and smoked two hundred cigarettes a day. I provided her with references for a job as a mannequin and interpreter at a famous dressmaker's. A week later...

(Enter SONIA. She drops a purse. Gold pieces scatter over the floor.)

LEBLANC: Sonia! What is this?

SONIA: (Gathering up money) Oh, Madame, I...I only stole...stole them to repay you...

(SONIA runs out of house as LEBLANC raises her fist. MAETERLINCK watches LEBLANC chase away SONIA, then enters.)

MAETERLINCK: Darling, what is the point...That peasant girl who became rich by investing—

LEBLANC: —my money.

MAETERLINCK: The cowherd, the orphan, the serving girl...Such...useless deliverances. One can only rescue oneself, you must know that.²

(A cat has been persistently meowing outside the ground-floor window.)

LEBLANC: Oh, the poor thing.

MAETERLINCK: I hate cats.

(He takes a revolver off the mantle and shoots it. LEBLANC reacts in horror. She is about to speak but the doorbell rings.)

LEBLANC: It must be Debussy. He wants to play *Pelléas* for us.

MAETERLINCK: Oh my God, save me. You know how I feel about music. Why couldn't it just be a social call. It would be a pleasure to see him...

(LEBLANC answers door. Enter DEBUSSY. He kisses LEBLANC's hand.)

MAETERLINCK: Good to see you, Monsieur Debussy.

LEBLANC: You must be pleased that Carré is staging *Pelléas* at the Opéra-Comique.

DEBUSSY: Quite...I have awaited this moment...six years. I had ceased to believe it would come.

² This section should be cut if Act IV, Scene 2 is cut.

LEBLANC: How is your wife?

(DEBUSSY shrugs.)

DEBUSSY: (To MAETERLINCK) Your works are now being produced on every continent.

MAETERLINCK: Yes, the money is good...but these symbols—I think they have given me throat cancer. I am certain I'm gone for this world.

LEBLANC: It's nothing but your imagination, Maurice. See a doctor.

MAETERLINCK: As you wish, dear. Still, it would be good to say something directly for a change.

DEBUSSY: (To LEBLANC) I saw you in *Carmen*. Your violence...made me shudder.

LEBLANC: That was Carmen, Monsieur, not Georgette.

DEBUSSY: Of course.

LEBLANC: Well, we are dying to hear your divine creation. I have had the piano tuned specially for the occasion. Please, I can't wait any longer.

(She lights the candles over the piano. DEBUSSY sits facing away from the audience, so he cannot see what is happening behind his back. LEBLANC and MAETERLINCK take chairs. DEBUSSY begins to play the opening of the opera.)

DEBUSSY: (Approaching bar 12) Here is Golaud's motif, to be played by the flutes and bassoons.

(At bar 14) And here is Mélisande's theme, on the oboe.

LEBLANC: Leitmotifs!

DEBUSSY: (At bar 22) Now the curtain rises and Golaud enters lost in the forest...(He sings a bit.)

Now here is an interlude before Act II, Scene 3.

(He begins to play.) This is after Mélisande has lied to Golaud about the ring. They are about to enter the grotto where he has sent them to find it.

(During this interlude MAETERLINCK begins to fidget and make helpless signs to LEBLANC, who waves him off. Finally, MAETERLINCK falls asleep.)

DEBUSSY: The opening of the last Act.

(He begins to play.)

(At bar 15 (curtain) LEBLANC gets up and addresses the audience. DEBUSSY continues playing softly.)

LEBLANC: At this first hearing of *Pelléas*, many of its beauties escaped me. But with the prelude of the last act, I felt that special, that unique emotion that we undergo in the presence of a masterpiece. Our life seems to part from us, something stops. Words, tears, even emotion...everything within us which is at the service of our great moments suddenly becomes insufficient. We are suspended in an unknown world where our presence no longer has any meaning.

DEBUSSY: It is getting late. (He gets up.)

MAETERLINCK: (Coming alive) Uh, yes. Wonderful, M. Debussy, you have done it.

LEBLANC: You must let me sing Mélisande. I won't allow you to refuse.

MAETERLINCK: Absolutely, you must. Georgette is made for the part.

DEBUSSY: I...I'd be delighted.

MAETERLINCK: Done.

LEBLANC: (To Audience) We decided on the spot that I should begin to study Mélisande at once and arranged for the first rehearsal. (To DEBUSSY, ushering him out) Monsieur, this will be the

culmination of my career. You cannot know how this evening has made me feel. *À bientôt, Monsieur, à bientôt.*

DEBUSSY: *À bientôt.*

(Exit DEBUSSY.)

LEBLANC: (To Audience) There followed two or three rehearsals at my house and two at his, 58 Rue Cardinet, where he had moved a few years earlier to an extremely modest flat which he shared with his wife Lilly.

Debussy approved of my interpretation. At first he had doubted me because of *Carmen*, but he had not known to what extent I could adapt myself. While we worked our understanding was perfect. But when we stopped to rest, we found it difficult to talk. Debussy was walled in by his pride. We circled each other like two savages, each one drawing back from the other's presence. Yet, I was in a continual state of bliss because I knew I would have the privilege of bringing Mélisande into the world. And what greater privilege could one imagine?

(Exit LEBLANC. The lights go up on Stage Two. SATIE1 is snoozing at the cafe table. He wakes up with a start.)

SATIE1: I have been meaning to comment on your words about boredom.

CRITIC: Yes?

SATIE1: You claim that the world flees boredom.

CRITIC: In a panic.

SATIE1: To the contrary, the public venerates boredom. Boredom is mysterious and profound. The listener is defenseless against boredom. How else can you explain the success of your minimalism?

CRITIC: *Your* minimalism.

SATIE1: Precisely. It therefore follows that I am the inventor of boredom, in your own words the cause of everything. Forfeit the wager.

CRITIC: No wonder they booted you out of the conservatory. Your logic is more...ultraviolet than a politician's—

SATIE1: That is inexcusable. Retract, Monsieur!

CRITIC: Never!

(The dialogue is interrupted by the beginning of the next scene.)

Act III, Scene 3

DEBUSSY's flat. DEBUSSY is alone, sitting at the piano and improvising. The improvisation should contain hints of *La Mer*. A knock at the door. He ignores it. Enter SATIE2, wearing his maroon velvet suit and carrying a score. He listens for a few moments. DEBUSSY breaks off. They stare at each other. Finally, DEBUSSY speaks.

DEBUSSY: Nothing.

(SATIE remains silent.)

DEBUSSY: I am not getting...anywhere.

SATIE2: Why not, my friend?

DEBUSSY: If only I knew. How was your walk?

SATIE2: As yesterday, ten kilometers.

DEBUSSY: Arcueil. I can hardly imagine a more wretched place for human beings.

SATIE2: They have grown accustomed to me.

DEBUSSY: (Chuckling) What have you brought?

SATIE2: You have criticized M. Satie's work as lacking in form. However, you will find it impossible to criticize these delightful compositions on those grounds.

DEBUSSY: How can you be so sure?

SATIE2: They are written in the form of a pear and therefore cannot be shapeless.

DEBUSSY: (Laughing) In the form of a pear?

SATIE2: Absolutely. The author is convinced they are superior to anything he has written up to now. Perhaps he is wrong, but if you tell him so, he wouldn't believe it.

DEBUSSY: Let's have it.

(SATIE hands it over.)

A duet? Very good. Sit.

(They play the "*Manière de Commencement*" [3 minutes] from *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*.)

DEBUSSY: Delightful, really. You've remembered our beloved Gamelon music, you've broken the two-minute mark—and it's far less turgid than those silly Rose Cross exercises.

SATIE2: God pardons you. They are the only worthwhile thing I've done in twelve years.

DEBUSSY: Twelve years? Are we so old, Satie?

SATIE2: No longer prodigies. Alas. But that may be a temporary phenomenon.

(DEBUSSY stares at him quizzically.)

I am thinking of returning to school.

DEBUSSY: School! You're on the road to forty. It's too late to change one's skin.

SATIE2: We'll see about that. Anyway, there is no other choice.

DEBUSSY: Why?

SATIE2: Claude, I am in total eclipse. Since the premiere of Debussy's *Gymnopédies* five years ago, what has come my way? That bitch poverty, that's all. She's very fertile—she gives birth to an endless stream of monstrosities. Do you know what I received this year in performing rights?

(DEBUSSY shakes his head.)

Seventy-six centimes!

DEBUSSY: Where do you want to enroll?

SATIE2: At the Scola Cantorum of course.

DEBUSSY: What a mistake. They'll ruin you.

SATIE2: Jupiter, I'm fed up with this empty stomach and parched throat. Even God nibbles now and then. Decrepit at this age. Unless I do something I'll have to lay down my arms sooner than I expected. Ah, not that I give a damn.

DEBUSSY: I do. The future is in your music.

SATIE2: No, you are too kind. The future is in your hands. *Pelléas*—

DEBUSSY: *Pelléas*. It is part of an epoch that is ending.

SATIE2: (Wistfully) Epochs do.

(On Stage Two the lights come up halfway to reveal CRITIC and SATIE1 examining paintings of Monet, Renoir and Turner.)

DEBUSSY: Always...You'd think the critics at least would know which exhibitions are shutting down. But no. They have begun to call me an impressionist, lumping me with the precious Monet and Renoir. Have you seen an impressionist in the past twenty years? They call Turner an impressionist. The greatest creator of mystery in art—an impressionist! Idiots. Soon they'll call you an impressionist.

SATIE2: Why should we care what they call us?

DEBUSSY: *Je ne sais pas*. But I've begun revisions. Wagner casts his shadow on every page. Harmonically, *Pelléas* isn't the future; it's a regression.

SATIE2: The work will be a great success. There's never been anything like it. No arias, no spear carriers, no—

DEBUSSY: Nearly ten years this albatross has hung around my neck...I do nothing but worry about how the world will greet those two poor little beings. When I've played the end of the opera for...our friends, no one is moved.

SATIE2: They are imbeciles.

DEBUSSY: People do not understand that one can have had enough of this planet and leave discreetly, to a more tranquil place.

SATIE2: The opera is assured of success. Who have you cast?

DEBUSSY: (Ignoring the question) Ah—one must eventually make an end. I have written practically nothing for five years. Can you believe it? Nothing since I married that woman...

SATIE2: Marriage is for amateurs.

DEBUSSY: She understands nothing... She suffocates me...She closes doors noisily...I don't know what can be done. Sometimes...Sometimes...

SATIE2: Yes?

DEBUSSY: I don't know.

SATIE2: (After a pause) What?

DEBUSSY: It is just that...Ravel's followers are immolating me. Everything he learned he learned from *Debussy*—

SATIE2: What an idea!

DEBUSSY: Oh please, don't you have ears?

SATIE2: If you were anyone else—

DEBUSSY: —you would call your seconds. I know.

SATIE2: Have you forgotten how Ravel sought me out?

DEBUSSY: If he's yours, why does his flock attack me? I copy from him?

SATIE2: Don't you?

DEBUSSY: Please, I cannot believe you are party to this.

SATIE2: Poor Claude! Ravel steals from—He admires you—

DEBUSSY: Ah, to hell with the little imp. If the jury would finally award him the Prix de Rome, perhaps he would fall in love with that city and stay there—eternally.

SATIE2: Ravel—what an argument! If I were you, I'd be happy to have an opera performed at the Opéra-Comique.

DEBUSSY: Write one.

SATIE2: Write one. (Reflecting) I am better at writing postcards to myself.

DEBUSSY: Postcards; that's exactly it. You have never put yourself through the agony—

SATIE2: Jupiter, do you know what I would give to create canvases instead of postcards? Now even my tiny efforts peter out after four or five bars. Everything I begin fails with a certainty I've never known. What do I do? I turn to God and point the finger at him. Of course He never answers. I end up thinking the old man is not as powerful as he is stupid. And each time I attempt to write for an orchestra—

DEBUSSY: —you sound like a bad version of Debussy.

SATIE2: (Pausing) Yes.

DEBUSSY: Why do you try to imitate me?

SATIE2: Do not flatter yourself. By my scribbling I expunge you.

DEBUSSY: Good. Find your own path. Nothing worse than second-rate imitations...

(SATIE turns away.)

DEBUSSY: Oh, I am sorry...(After a long pause) What is happening to us?

SATIE2: It has been many years.

DEBUSSY: Yes.

SATIE2: Our paths...

DEBUSSY: (Nodding) Yes.

SATIE2: And your dream is about to descend to earth.

DEBUSSY: Where I can touch it.

SATIE2: Frightening prospect.

DEBUSSY: Unbearable. I shan't attend.

SATIE2: Oh, come. I wouldn't miss it for the world...Say, do you have any of your cheap wine?

DEBUSSY: For you—always.

SATIE2: Well, what are you waiting for?

(DEBUSSY brings a carafe and pours two glasses, handing one to SATIE. SATIE motions to the piano. DEBUSSY nods and they sit down and play the “A” section of “*Enlevé*” from the *Trois Morceaux* [40 seconds]. On Stage Two CRITIC and SATIE1 are talking.)

CRITIC: You hypocrite and plagiarist. You were arguing my position.
“Epochs end.”

SATIE1: Your chronology is weak; you haven't yet been born. How could I be arguing your position?

CRITIC: Nevertheless, I demand you forfeit the wager. You have conceded.

SATIE1: No. I merely acknowledged that epochs end. Some things live on.

CRITIC: From the sunset tone of that conversation—You were on the verge of capitulation.

SATIE1: On the verge...

CRITIC: Unfortunate too.

SATIE1: What, Monsieur?

CRITIC: Noth—

(The conversation is interrupted by the beginning of the next scene.)

Act III, Scene 4

(MAETERLINCK's flat, as before. Enter LEBLANC singing MÉLISANDE's song from the opera (same song used in this play in Act III, Scene 1). The doorbell rings.

LEBLANC answers. Enter TRANSLATOR, agitatedly.)

TRANSLATOR: (Speaking rapidly in German) *Madame Leblanc, ich muss unbedingt mit Monsieur Maeterlinck sprechen. Es handelt sich um eine dringende Angelegenheit — die deutsche Ausgabe —*

LEBLANC: I'm sorry, my German is not very good. You are his translator?

TRANSLATOR: (Pushing his way past her) *Ich muss ihn wirklich sofort sehen. Es geht eine gehörige Summe geld.*

LEBLANC: (Trying to stop him) Please, do not interrupt his lunch, Monsieur, this is sacrilege.

(TRANSLATOR stops before table. MAETERLINCK continues eating and reading paper.)

TRANSLATOR: *Monsieur Maeterlinck, ich muss mit Ihnen über die deutsche Übersetzung sprechen. Die Finanzen sind durcheinander geraten. Wie Sie wissen legte der Vertrag fest, dass die deutsche Ausgabe in sechs monaten erscheint. Sie sollten —*

(MAETERLINCK rises, opens the ground-floor window, and picks the man up.)

—achtzig Prozent der Tantiemen erhalten und ich zwei; nun hat es sich der verleger aber anders überlegt und bietet nur eine Pauschalsumme —

(MAETERLINCK throws the man out the window and closes it. He sits down at his meal again and continues reading the paper. Suddenly his eyes light up.)

MAETERLINCK: What's this! I...I can't believe it! The Opéra-Comique has engaged another singer for Mélisande.

LEBLANC: Maurice, what are you saying? (She goes over to look at paper.)
Mary Garden, that...twig!

MAETERLINCK: This is...inadmissable.

LEBLANC: I don't understand. How could Debussy betray us like this? After all the rehearsals and compliments.

MAETERLINCK: Yes...How many rehearsals?

LEBLANC: Three or four here. Three at his house.

MAETERLINCK: I...I will take this up with the Society of Authors this very minute.

(He puts on his derby and Macfarlane and storms out. LEBLANC begins to cry. Enter MARY GARDEN opposite Stage Two. The scene she describes is mimed on Stage One. The set need not be changed. Although GARDEN can be played by the same actress who plays MÉLISANDE, she should *not* be dressed as MÉLISANDE. A double will then be used on Stage One for this scene. GARDEN speaks with an American-Scotch accent.)

GARDEN: It happened like this. One day M. Carré, the director of the Opera, said, "Mary, we're going to do a new opera by Debussy and I want everyone to come over to André's to hear it." So we gathered at André Messager—the conductor's home. We were only there for a short while when the door opened and in came Debussy. After we were presented to him he sat down at the piano without saying another word and played and sang the whole opera from beginning to end.

While Debussy played I had the most extraordinary emotions I have ever experienced in my life. Listening to that music I seemed

to become someone else, someone inside of me whose soul was akin to mine. When Debussy got to the fourth act I could no longer look at my score for the tears. As he played the final scene, I burst into the most awful sobbing and Mme Messenger began to sob along with me. Both of us fled into the next room. I shall never forget it. There we were crying as if we had just lost our best friend, crying as if nothing would ever console us again.

We returned to the drawing room just as Debussy finished playing. Before any of us could say or do anything—

DEBUSSY: (Indicating GARDEN) *Mesdames et messieurs*, there is my Mélisande.

(All on Stage One exit.)

CRITIC: (Puzzled) But he hadn't heard her sing.

DEBUSSY: (Sticking his head back onstage) In my opera, Monsieur, everyone must forget they are singers. (Disappears.)

CRITIC: This is puzzling. When did the scene with Leblanc take place?

(Before SATIE1 answers, enter LEBLANC and MAETERLINCK.)

LEBLANC: What do you mean you have no rights?

MAETERLINCK: The law gives precedence to the composer. And Debussy showed them my letter.

LEBLANC: Letter?

MAETERLINCK: I told him to play the piece...how and where he liked.

LEBLANC: Your generosity has undone us! This cannot be.

(To Audience) Justly annoyed to find himself stripped before the law, Maeterlinck brandished his cane and—

(Enter DEBUSSY.)

GARDEN: (Interrupting) Everything was going smoothly 'til one day
Maeterlinck arrived at the Opéra-Comique—

(MAETERLINCK walks onto Stage One.)

MAETERLINCK: I don't wish Miss Garden to sing Mélisande.

DEBUSSY: (With great surprise) Why not?

MAETERLINCK: Because I want someone else to create the part. Her name is
Georgette Leblanc.

DEBUSSY: You are mistaken, Monsieur, it is Miss Garden who will create
Mélisande, my Mélisande.

CRITIC: (To SATIE) Leblanc was unknown at the Opéra-Comique?

LEBLANC: How dare you suggest it, Monsieur? I was a member far longer
than Garden.

(Exit.)

GARDEN: (Interrupting) To spare himself and the company any further
mischief, Debussy called together a jury of musicians and had
Leblanc sing an act from Pelléas. Their verdict was swift and
decisive—

(MAETERLINCK is pacing nervously. A SERVANT opens a door to let in LEBLANC.)

MAETERLINCK: How was the audition?

LEBLANC: (Crying) They chose Garden.

MAETERLINCK: Over my objections? Who?

LEBLANC: Debussy and Carré of course.

MAETERLINCK: I won't permit this! (Motioning to SERVANT) You, come here!
(Handing him a card) Take this to Debussy and tell him I expect his
seconds in the morning.

(Exit SERVANT.)

(To LEBLANC, taking an epee from the wall) You, stand there. Pretend you are Carré! (He lunges at her several times, then breaks off.) Maybe a pistol. (He takes a pistol from the mantle and points it out the window. He fires.) I hate cats.

(Enter SERVANT.)

SERVANT: Monsieur, Debussy declines to accept your challenge.

(MAETERLINCK, speechless, grabs his cane.)

LEBLANC: (To Audience) Justly annoyed to find himself stripped before the law—

MAETERLINCK: (Brandishing his cane) I'm going to give Debussy a drubbing that he'll...he'll take with him to the grave!

LEBLANC: (To Audience) My love had none of the stoic quality of the heroines of antiquity—

(She clings to MAETERLINCK as he attempts to jump out the ground-floor window. After some struggle she releases him and he disappears. CRITIC spreads his arms to SATIE in a questioning manner. SATIE points to opposite side of the stage, where lights reveal DEBUSSY, who is standing by an armchair. LILLY is nearby.

MAETERLINCK storms in brandishing his cane. DEBUSSY faints at the sight of him and collapses into his chair.)

LILLY: Claude!

(She rushes over to him. MAETERLINCK makes frustrated gestures with his cane and exits. The lights go down on LILLY and DEBUSSY. The scenery on Stage One now begins to change to that of Act IV, Scene 4 in *Pelléas et Mélisande*—a fountain in the park. Several members of the cast should be planted in the audience, presumably in modern dress so as not to attract attention. We start hearing music: an orchestra warming up, punctuated by bits of the opera. SATIE hands one of his velvet suits to the CRITIC, who begins changing clothes. He remains dressed in velvet until end of play.)

GARDEN: Rehearsals went on for four solid months, every afternoon except Sunday, and there were forty orchestra rehearsals—something unheard of! Debussy was feverishly adding music to his interludes to give enough time for scene changes and while they were being rehearsed none of us was allowed to talk or move. One day Debussy would accompany us; the next day we would take it with the orchestra.

DEBUSSY: (From the wings) *Piano, piano* ! Less loud, I beg you.

GARDEN: No opera I know of was given such infinite study and attention. It was new in every sense. As far as the harmony was concerned, it was almost another language. And Debussy's orchestra was something miraculous. Its role was to speak to the public, letting them know what was happening. It was the orchestra that gave me my *Mélisande*, not the play—

MAETERLINCK: (From the wings) Damn woman, how dare you!

GARDEN: It was Claude Debussy I created, not Maurice Maeterlinck.

MAETERLINCK: (From the wings) I curse you woman! Just wait!

DEBUSSY: (From the wings) Don't worry, Mary, Maeterlinck has become pathological, but there are still mental hospitals in France.

GARDEN: If you'll excuse me, we have an opera to perform.

(Exit GARDEN. SATIE1 and CRITIC stroll across stage as if going to the opera. Other members of the cast are also crossing the stage, including SATIE2 in his maroon suit.)

CRITIC: I'm looking forward to this.

SATIE1: (Surveying the audience) All of Paris seems to have turned out.
(He tips his hat to two men as they pass.)

PASSER-BY: Camille, you have not left town for your holiday.

SAINT-SAENS: (Lisping) No, I am staying in town to speak ill of *Pelléas*.

- SATIE1: (As SATIE2 approaches.) Ah, my younger self.
- SATIE2: (Shaking hands) You look familiar.
- SATIE1: Someday we'll meet...
- SATIE2: (To CRITIC, examining his suit) You also look familiar.
(As a thin young man approaches.) Ah, Maurice, glad you could make it.
- RAVEL: Glad! I've bought tickets for all thirty performances.
- SATIE2: (To CRITIC and SATIE1) Have you seen *Le Figaro* ? Extraordinary.
- SATIE1: (Taking the paper.) "The performance of *Pelléas* will take place in spite of me, for MM. Carré and Debussy have failed to recognize my most legitimate rights...I would have settled the matter in the courts...M. Debussy, after having agreed to my choice of the interpreter whom I thought uniquely capable of creating the role of Mélisande decided, in the face of unjustified resistance by M. Carré to deny me the right to intervene in the selection of artists.
- CRITIC: (Taking paper) "Not only did they take advantage of a letter I had written him too confidently six years ago, but they crudely predated the registration in order to establish that our protests had been lodged too late...They have imposed arbitrary and absurd cuts, which make it incomprehensible...In a word, the *Pelléas* at issue has become a stranger to me, almost an enemy. And deprived of all control over my work, I am reduced to hoping that its failure will be prompt and resounding."
(Looking up) This is not minimalist anger...
- SATIE2: Ah, who is Georgette Leblanc? A mediocre singer. She belongs in a cabaret, not an opera.

PASSER-BY: (To COMPANION) Have you heard, Mary Garden's wig cost her
6,000 francs!

CRITIC: (To SATIE1) Where's Debussy?

SATIE1: I believe he's hiding in the director's office.

HAWKER: Programmes! Get your Programmes!

(CRITIC buys one. HAWKER examines the money skeptically but accepts it. CRITIC and SATIE1 sit down together on Stage Two as orchestra begins tuning up. The noise level rises as the beginning of the opera is faintly heard. As SATIE1 speaks below there is a background of music, cheering, boos, hissing, laughter. In addition, two members of the cast can stand on each side of the stage and instruct the audience to participate with cue cards. PELLÉAS is in place on Stage One for Act IV, Scene 4 of the opera.)

SATIE1: (To Audience, above the noise) As you have undoubtedly
surmised, the premiere turned out to be a pitched battle.
Passionate and unrestrained partisans, mocking laughter. You
might well have thought you were at the Folies Bergère...

(The noise level goes down and the climax of the opera begins.)

Act III, Scene 5

For convenience, I include below the libretto from certain parts of Act IV, Scene 4 of the opera in both French and English. These excerpts should be performed as an opera on stage in French with the music, if no singers are available then by lip-sync with the recording. Original dialogue is inserted in the middle and end of the scene.

(Disc 2, Track 10 of recording. [3:47])

PELLÉAS: *C'est le dernier soir...le dernier soir. Il faut que tout finisse. J'ai joué comme un enfant autour d'une chose que je ne soupçonnais pas...J'ai joué en rêve autours des pièges de la destinée...Qui est-ce qui m'a réveillé tout à coup? Je vais fuir en criant de joie et de douleur comme un aveugle qui fuirait l'incendie de sa maison. Je vais lui dire que je vais fuir. Il est tard; elle ne vient pas...Je ferais mieux de m'en aller sans la revoir. Il faut que je la regardé bien cette fois-ci...Il y a des choses que je ne me rappelle plus...On dirait, par moments, qu'il y a cent ans que je ne l'ai plus vue. Et je n'ai pas encore regarde son regard...Il ne me reste rien si je m'en vais ainsi. Et tous ces souvenirs... C'est comme si j'emportais un peu d'eau dans un sac de mousseline. Il faut que la vois une derniere fois, jusq'au fond se son coeur...Il faut que je lui dise tout je n'ai pas dit...*

[It is the last evening...the last evening. Everything must end...I have played like a child around a thing I did not suspect was there. I have been playing in a dream around the traps of destiny. Who has suddenly awakened me? I shall run crying with joy and sorrow like a blind man running from his burning house. I shall tell her I mean to fly.

It is late; she does not come. It would be better if I left without seeing her. I must look at her well this time... There are things I no longer remember...One would think a hundred years had passed since I last saw her. And I have not yet looked at her full in the eyes...I shall have nothing if I go away like this. And all those memories...as if I were carrying away water in a muslin bag. I must see her one last time, to see the bottom of her heart...I must tell her all I have not told her...]

(Enter MÉLISANDE.)

MÉLISANDE: *Pelléas?*

PELLÉAS: *Mélisande! Est-ce toi, Mélisande?*

[*Mélisande! Is it you, Mélisande?*]

MÉLISANDE: *Oui.*

[*Yes.*]

PELLÉAS: *Viens ici: ne reste pas au bord du clair de lune. Viens ici. Nous avons tant de choses à nous dire...Viens ici dans l'ombre du tilleul.*

[*Come here: do not remain on the edge of the moonlight.*

We have so many things to say to each other...Come here in the lime tree's shadow.]

MÉLISANDE: *Laissez-moi dans la clarté...*

[*Let me stay in the light...*]

PELLÉAS: *On pourrait nous voir des fenestres de la tour. Viens ici; ici, nous n'avons rien à craindre. Prends garde; on pourrait nous voir!*

[*They might see us from the tower windows. Come here; here we have nothing to fear. Take care; they might see us.*]

MÉLISANDE: *Je veux qu'on me voie.*

[*I want them to see me.*]

PELLÉAS: *Qu'as-tu donc? Tu as pu sortir sans qu'on s'en soit aperçu?*
[What's the matter? Were you able to get out without being noticed?]

MÉLISANDE: *Oui, votre frère dormait.*
[Yes, your brother was sleeping.]

PELLÉAS: *Il est tard — Dans une heure on fermera les portes. Il faut prendre garde. Pourquoi es-tu venue si tard?*
[It is late — In one hour they will close the gates. We must take care. Why have you come so late?]

MÉLISANDE: *Votre frère avait un mauvais rêve. Et puis me robe s'est accrochée aux clous de la porte. Voyez, elle est déchirée. J'ai perdu tout ce temps et j'ai couru...*

[Your brother had a bad dream. And then my gown got caught on the nails of the gate. See, it is torn. I lost all this time and I ran...]

PELLÉAS: *Ma pauvre Mélisande! J'aurais presque peur de te toucher...Tu est encore hors d'haleine comme un oiseau pourchassé. C'est pour moi que tu fais tout cela? J'entends battre ton coeur comme si c'était le mien. Viens ici, plus près de moi.*

[My poor Mélisande! I am almost afraid to touch you...You're still breathless like a hunted bird...Is it for me that you have done all this? I can hear the beating of you heart as if it were my own. Come here, closer to me.]

MÉLISANDE: *Pourquoi riez-vous?*

[Why are you laughing?]

PELLÉAS: *Je ne ris pas — ou bien je ris de joie, sans le savoir...Il y aurait plutôt de quoi pleurer.*

[I am not laughing—or else I laugh for joy without knowing it...There is really more reason to cry...]

(Track 11 [1:56]; Rehearsal Number 41.)

MÉLISANDE: *Nous sommes venus ici il y a bien longtemps. Je me rappelle.*

[We came here a long time ago. I remember.]

PELLÉAS: *Oui...Il y a de longs mois. Alors, je ne savais pas...Sais-tu pourquoi je t'ai demandé de venir ce soir?*

[Yes, many months ago. I didn't know then. Do you know why I asked you here this evening?]

MÉLISANDE: *Non.*

[No.]

PELLÉAS: *C'est peut-être la dernière fois que je te vois. Il faut que je m'en aille pour toujours...*

[It is perhaps the last time I shall see you. I must leave forever.]

MÉLISANDE: *Pourquoi dis-tu toujours que tu t'en vas?*

[Why do you always say that you must go away?]

PELLÉAS: *Je dois te dire ce que tu sais déjà? Tu ne sais pas ce que je vais te dire?*

[I am bound to say what you already know. Don't you know what I am bound to say?]

MÉLISANDE: *Mais non, mais non; je ne sais rien...*

[No, no, I don't.]

PELLÉAS: *Tu ne sais pas pourquoi il faut que je m'éloigne...*

(Il l'embrasse brusquement.)

Tu ne sais pas que c'est parce que je t'aime...

[You don't know why I must go away. (He embraces her brusquely.) You don't know that it is because I love you...]

MÉLISANDE: *(À voix basse) Je t'aime aussi...*

[(With lowered voice) I love you too.]

PELLÉAS: *Oh! Qu'as-tu dit, Mélisande! Je ne j'ai presque pas entendu!*

[Oh! What have you said, Mélisande! I hardly heard it.]

(End Track 11. Rehearsal number 43. Music can continue but is soon drowned out.)

MEMBER OF

AUDIENCE1: That's the climax of the opera? You can hardly hear it!

MA2: Quiet! We certainly can't hear it with you yapping!

SATIE1: Imbeciles! Shut up!

(Hissing, cheering and booing grow louder.)

MA1: (To Neighbor) Leitmotifs? Of course not, there're no motifs at all!

MA3: I tell you, the whole thing's a joke. This isn't an opera, this is an extended lullaby.

MA2: This behavior is scandalous.

MA4: Retract that, Monsieur!

MA3: Only if you can wake me up! MA1: Three hours—no

MA4: Easily done! rhythm, no melody,

(They begin to fight.) no harmony. The end of music.

SATIE1: I'm absolutely bowled over.

CRITIC: At the opera?

SATIE1: Of course. It is extraordinary.

CRITIC: The reception is extraordinary. As the gentlemen suggests (indicates MA3), in my age everyone would be bored.

SATIE1: (Standing) How dare you, Monsieur?

CRITIC: You who claim to have invented boredom must admit—

SATIE1: This is a masterpiece!

CRITIC: (Shrugging) Masterpieces are irrelevant without master audiences.
SATIE1: (Standing) Idiot!
CRITIC: (Standing) I have had more than enough of your unjustified insults.
SATIE1: You are still an idiot.
CRITIC: Retract, Monsieur.
SATIE1: Never.
CRITIC: (Striking SATIE's umbrella with his cane) Retract, Monsieur, concede finally the impermanence of the world.
SATIE1: (Striking back) I have proven to you I am the father of Ravel.
(They begin to duel.)
CRITIC: Disputed—
SATIE1: Neoclassicism—
CRITIC: Yet to be established—
SATIE1: Phonometry—
CRITIC: It never existed—
SATIE1: Minimalism—
CRITIC: A towering achievement.
SATIE1: Muzak—
CRITIC: The asymptote to zero—
SATIE1: Boredom—
CRITIC: It's continuation.
SATIE1: Accept it, spirit!
CRITIC: Yes, the inventor of the twentieth century—Nothing...
(They run offstage as the opera picks up on track 13 of the recording [4:16].)
PELLÉAS: *Quel est ce bruit? On fermé les portes!*
[What is that noise? They are closing the gates!]
MÉLISANDE: *Oui, on a fermé les portes...*

[Yes, they've closed the gates.]

PELLÉAS: *Nous ne pouvons rentrer! Entends-tu les verroux? Ecoute, écoute, les grandes chaines! Il est trop tard, il est trop tard!*

[We won't be able to enter. Do you hear the bolts?

Listen, listen, the great chains! It's too late, too late!]

MÉLISANDE: *Tant mieux! Tant mieux!*

[All the better! All the better!]

PELLÉAS: *Tu? Voilà, voilà! Ce n'est plus nous qui le voulons! Tout est perdu, tout est sauvé! Tout est sauvé ce soir! Viens, viens...Mon coeur bat comme un fou jusqu'au fond de ma gorge...(Il l'enlace.) Ecoute! Mon coeur est sur le point de m'etrangler...Viens! Ah, qu'il fait beau dans les ténèbres!*

[You. Well, there it is. Things no longer depend on our wish!

All is lost, all is saved! Everything is saved this evening! Come, my heart is beating like a mad thing right into my throat. (He takes her into his arms.) Listen! My heart is almost choking me...Come! Ah, how beautiful it is in the dark!]

MÉLISANDE: *Il y a quelqu'un derrière nous!*

[There is someone behind us!]

PELLÉAS: *Je ne vois personne.*

[I don't see anyone.]

MÉLISANDE: *J'ai entendu de bruit.*

[I heard a noise.]

PELLÉAS: *Je n'entends que ton coeur dans l'obscurité.*

[I hear nothing but your heart in the darkness.]

MÉLISANDE: *J'ai entendu craquer les feuilles mortes.*

[I heard the rustling of dead leaves.]

PELLÉAS: *C'est le vent qui s'est tu tout à coup. Il est tombé pendant que nous nous embrassions.*

[The wind suddenly dropped. It dropped while we were kissing.]

MÉLISANDE: *Comme nos ombres sont grandes ce soir!*

[How long our shadows are this evening.]

PELLÉAS: *Elles s'enlacent jusqu'au fond du jardin...Oh, qu'elles s'embrassent loin de nous! Regarde! Regarde!*

[They enfold each other to the end of the garden...Oh, they are kissing far off! Look! Look!]

MÉLISANDE: *(d'une voix étouffée) Ah! Il est derrière un arbre!*

[(In a stifled voice) Ah! He's behind a tree!]

PELLÉAS: *Qui?*

[Who?]

MÉLISANDE: *Golaud!*

PELLÉAS: *Golaud? Ou donc? Je ne vois rien.*

[Golaud? Where? I don't see anything.]

MÉLISANDE: *La...au bout de nos ombres.*

[There...at the end of our shadows.]

PELLÉAS: *Oui, oui; je l'ai vu...Ne nous retournons pas brusquement.*

[Yes, yes, I saw him...We must not turn around quickly.]

MÉLISANDE: *Il a son épée.*

[He has his sword.]

PELLÉAS: *Je n'ai pas la mienne.*

[I don't have mine.]

MÉLISANDE: *Il a vu que nous embrassions...*

[He saw us kissing.]

PELLÉAS: *Il ne sait pas que nous l'avons vu. Ne bouge pas; ne tourne pas la tête. Il se précipiterait. Il nous observe. Il est encore immobile. Va t'en, va-t'en, tout de suite par ici. Je l'attendrai...Je l'arrêterai...*

[He doesn't know that we've seen him. Don't move, don't turn your head. He would rush out at once. He is watching us. He's still not moving. Go away, go off this way at once. I'll wait for him...I'll stop him...]

MÉLISANDE: *Non, non!*

[No, no!]

PELLÉAS: *Va-t'en! Il a tout vu! Il nous tuera!*

[Go! He's seen everything! He'll kill us!]

MÉLISANDE: *Tant mieux! Tant mieux!*

[All the better! All the better!]

PELLÉAS: *Il vient! Ta bouche! Ta bouche!*

[He's coming! Give me your mouth! Your mouth!]

MÉLISANDE: *Oui! oui! oui!*

[Yes! yes! yes!]

(They embrace passionately.)

PELLÉAS: *Oh! oh! Toutes les étoiles tombent!*

[Oh! Oh! All the stars are raining down!]

MÉLISANDE: *Sur moi aussi! sur moi aussi!*

[On me too! On me too!]

PELLÉAS: *Encore! Encore! Donne, donne...*

[Again! Again! Give me, give me...]

MÉLISANDE: *Toute! Toute! Toute!*

[All of me! All of me!]

(GOLAUD, sword in hand, rushes upon them and strikes PELLÉAS, who falls at the edge of the fountain.)

MÉLISANDE: *(Fuyant) Oh! Oh! Je n'ai pas de courage! Je n'ai pas de courage! Ah!*
 [(Flying in terror) Oh! Oh! I have not the courage! I
 have not the courage! Ah!]

(GOLAUD pursues her in silence.)

Curtain.

(As the curtain falls, there is a tremendous amount of booing and cheering mixed with applause, etc. MÉLISANDE takes her curtain call. DEBUSSY appears with flowers for her. They exit together. A gunshot.)

End Act III

Intermission Feature

Actors distribute contemporary reviews of *Pelléas et Mélisande* . Some of these are excerpted in Nicolas Slonimsky's *Lexicon of Musical Invective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975)

Act IV, Scene 1

The entire act is to take place in semi-darkness. It is now about fifteen years later, during World War I. Paris is undergoing heavy bombardment. The sky is trembling with the light and noise of explosions. The lights reveal the obelisk at the Place de la Concorde. SATIE1 is lying at the base of it, immobile. Enter CRITIC, wandering. He spies SATIE.

CRITIC: M. Satie? Is that you? (No response.) Satie, you *passé* fart.

(Getting no response, he kneels and begins to shake SATIE.)

Mein Gott.

(SATIE, after making grumbling noises, wakes up and peers at CRITIC.)

SATIE1: Do I know you, Monsieur?

(CRITIC nods.)

Ah, my faithful enemy, I thought I had trounced you at the premiere.

CRITIC: I believe you have that vice-versa.

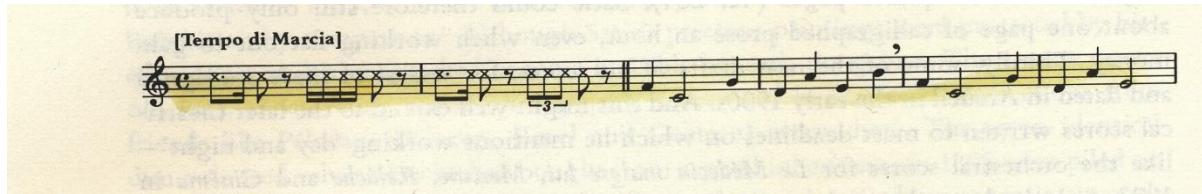
SATIE1: Poor me...What time zone are we in?

CRITIC: Not the last one...But what are you doing outside? You should be in a...reinforced subterranean enclosure.

SATIE1: (Getting up) Yes...In fact I was on my way to a shelter but this thing (indicating obelisk) shot up into the air and I said, "Well, since it's protecting me, I should write some music for the lady pharaoh buried below —"

CRITIC: Cleopatra?

SATIE1: Is that who it is? No one ever thinks of her. So I wrote this little march. (He sings:)



CRITIC: Very nice.

SATIE1: Then I must have fallen asleep.

CRITIC: I've been intending to ask, the gunshot—I thought I imagined...

SATIE1: You don't know?

(CRITIC shakes his head.)

The good Claude ran off...

CRITIC: (Soberly) ...with Mary Garden.

(They walk to Stage Two. As they talk, a piano is wheeled onto Stage One.)

SATIE1: Life often imitates art, but rarely so perversely. No, Garden, she says, refused his proposal. He eloped with a rich singer. Lilly seriously wounded herself. The bullet entered beneath the breast, passed downward—

CRITIC: Please—

SATIE1: Jupiter is still bound up in litigation.

CRITIC: What was his excuse?

SATIE1: At the divorce hearing he said, "She closes doors too noisily."

CRITIC: I ask again: why didn't she shoot him?

SATIE1: Ah, Monsieur, the world would have been deprived of such great music. *La Mer* had yet to be born...

CRITIC: Her story?

SATIE1: She never told it. She is...

CRITIC: ...erased.

SATIE1: Yes, we are pollen; the wind scatters us to infinity.

CRITIC: So, you continued to see him.

SATIE1: Every Friday, the only friend — practically — who did not abandon him. After all, he stood behind me for many years.

CRITIC: Before you is more like it.

SATIE1: You suggest it! Retract, Monsieur! (He raises his umbrella.)

CRITIC: (Shaking his head) It's become clear who invented the twentieth century.

DEBUSSY: (Walking onto Stage One to the piano) *Merci*, Monsieur.

SATIE1: Silence, Claude, or I shall tell him about how Ravel discovered me.

CRITIC: As I understood it, you discovered him.

SATIE1: I invented him; twenty years later he discovered me.

DEBUSSY: Sold you.

SATIE1: (Bowing to CRITIC) Excuse me. (He walks to Stage One.)
(The time is now c. 1911.)

DEBUSSY: You know I plan to conduct your little *Gymnopédies* at the *Salle Gaveau* in March.

SATIE1: I'm grateful.

DEBUSSY: It is a concert of my music. But as I orchestrated your tidbits, I think I can get away with including them.

SATIE1: My tidbits seem to be all the rage since Ravel began playing them last month.

DEBUSSY: Yes, the "precursor of modern music," he called you, wasn't it? Charming.

SATIE1: Strange, ten years ago I was accused of being "unschooled." Now I'm "ahead of my time."

DEBUSSY: Well, M. Precursor, I do hope your tidbits won't get lost in the rest of the program.

SATIE1: Great Claude, spare me. Just rehearse the morsels like a good fellow and let the audience judge.

DEBUSSY: They won't require any rehearsal—

SATIE1: (Angrily) If you'd rather not—

DEBUSSY: I've agreed. But, M. Precursor, you understand what is going on here. Little Ravel has dug you up after twenty-five years and is putting you on display only to prove to his critics that he's not a reduced Debussy.

SATIE1: He's made no secret of my influence on him. You could have avoided all this if you had done the same—

(DEBUSSY snorts.)

You wish to claim you invented the twentieth century?

DEBUSSY: Didn't I?

SATIE1: Your music is of the past; ten years ago you said it yourself.

DEBUSSY: Erik, you have composed nothing I have not composed better.

SATIE1: What an idea! (To CRITIC) You, come here! We'll settle this wager at last.

(CRITIC walks over.)

Listen to this, from Ravel's *Mother Goose*. Jupiter, sit.

(They play opening of piano four-hands version of *Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bete*.)

CRITIC: That indeed recalls familiar aural...vibrations.

SATIE1: By now only a deaf ass wouldn't recognize it.

(He pushes DEBUSSY off piano bench and plays opening of piano *Gymnopédie* No. 3.)

Ravel called it the fourth *Gymnopédie* and dedicated it to me.

And what about this? The Great Claude's Sarabande:

(He plays opening of Debussy's *Pour le Piano* No. 2: Sarabande.)

And my second Sarabande, composed seven years earlier:

(He plays main motif, bars 11-12,)

That's how he broke free of Wagner.

CRITIC: One cannot deny the genealogy—

DEBUSSY: Nonsense, listen to this. (He pushes SATIE away from the piano.) My Prelude.

(He plays final three bars of *Pour le piano* No. 1: Prelude.)

Now your *Regrets des enfermés*.

(He plays ending of Satie's *Chapitres tournés* No.3: *Regrets des Enfermés*.)

A direct steal.

SATIE1: That's nothing old man. (He pushes DEBUSSY to the side.)

My first *Gymnopédie*. (He plays a few bars.) Now Stravinsky.

(He directs DEBUSSY to sit. They play the opening of first variation of Stravinsky's duo piano sonata. SATIE repeats the second piano part. This should be feasible on one piano; if not use recording.)

Voilà.

[CRITIC: Hasn't the twentieth century grown bored with these *gymnopédies*?

SATIE1: The world loves boredom—

CRITIC: Satie's *Gymnopédies*, the world's most boring—

SATIE1: Why—!]

DEBUSSY: (Stomping) À propos! Stravinsky took everything from me, even his opening night scandal. Listen to his *Rite of Spring*—no, better, his *Nightingale*.

(We hear opening of *Le Rossignol*, full opera version.)

All this is clearly from my *Nuages*.

(We hear main them of *Nuages*.)

CRITIC: (Soberly, after the audience gasps.) The resemblance is...electrifying.

SATIE1: Merely humidifying.

DEBUSSY: Hah. Little Erik, even you lifted *Nuages*.
(He sits at the piano and slowly plays the opening of SATIE's *Chapitres tournés* No.3: *Regrets des Enfermés*.)
This is where modern music came from.

SATIE1: (Stumped) Aaah. (He crosses his arms and turns away.)

CRITIC: His case is peerless e—

DEBUSSY: Concede, Erik.

CRITIC: Except—

DEBUSSY: Concede.

CRITIC: Except—

DEBUSSY: —what?

CRITIC: We have heard this before.

SATIE1: You say? DEBUSSY: Where?

CRITIC: The Musorgsky song of twenty-five years ago.
(DEBUSSY halts.)
Excuse the amnesia lapse. Play it.
(DEBUSSY reluctantly plays the piano part to the same eight bars he played in Act I, Scene 3.)

SATIE1: (Slapping CRITIC on the back) Well done and QED!

CRITIC: Ergo, all modern music sprung from eight bars of a Musorgsky song.

DEBUSSY: One moment! SATIE1: You can't mean it!

CRITIC: You two prove my case completely. One tries a new chord, another erases bar lines, Stravinsky puts a piano in an orchestra—

DEBUSSY: —and gets all the credit.

CRITIC: The world forgets.

DEBUSSY: —he took the idea from Rimsky-Korsakov—

SATIE1: I can hardly believe it.

DEBUSSY: —who borrowed it from Glinka.

CRITIC: All is erased.

SATIE1: —except boredom.

CRITIC: Thank God memory exists only in computers. Without memory revolution is continuous.

SATIE1: Did I not tell you that when we began?

CRITIC: Did you? I've forgotten.

DEBUSSY: (Musingly) No revolutions, only evolutions.

CRITIC: Concision fit for a sound-bite. I approve.

(SATIE and CRITIC walk to Stage Two, swinging umbrella and cane in tandem. The lights go down on DEBUSSY.)

SATIE1: Boredom alone remains. The listener is defenseless—

CRITIC: --against it. We're repeating ourselves. Where is Debussy?

SATIE1: Conducting his concert, no doubt.

(DEBUSSY is seen far upstage conducting the end of orchestral *Gymnopédie* No. 1.

Tumultuous applause. He is shocked. Exit. The stage is set for *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*.)

CRITIC: How did it go?

SATIE1: As you hear, a great success—to his everlasting chagrin. Satie, the unschooled, suddenly famous. (He begins to giggle and puts his hand in front of his mouth.) It's his own fault. Why can't he allow me a small place in his shadow? I have no use for the sun.

CRITIC: You haven't left him on good terms.

SATIE1: No.

CRITIC: You sided with Ravel.

SATIE1: Ravel is a fool; he disgusts me by his superior manner.

CRITIC: He promoted you—magnanimous.

SATIE1: Oh yes, Ravel refuses the Legion of Honor but all his music accepts it. Please, you think I didn't know what he was up to?

CRITIC: You concede Debussy was right?

SATIE1: I concede nothing. But I never criticize Debussy.

CRITIC: Make it up to him.

(SATIE is silent.)

CRITIC: You two should be sent to the moon with that Rosicrucian, Pel—

SATIE1: Péladan? He died of a tainted oyster.

CRITIC: For Christ's sake, the two of you have put up with each other for decades. Make it up to him.

SATIE1: Compromise is impossible.

CRITIC: Pigheaded...this is just not...transactional.

(SATIE is silent. CRITIC moves off, turns around.)

What happened to Mélisande?

SATIE1: The critics destroyed it; time immortalized it.

CRITIC: That's not what I meant. Mélisande, what happens to her?

SATIE1: Do you really need me to tell you?

CRITIC: (Shakes his head.) I...never quite understood her.

SATIE1: Of course not.

CRITIC: Where was she from?

SATIE1: The pen of Debussy, leave it at that.

CRITIC: Maeterlinck?

SATIE1: She lives because of the music.

CRITIC: Agreed. Otherwise, there is li—She is such a mystery.

SATIE1: I warned you.

CRITIC: It's just not...Hollywood to leave mysteries unsolved.

SATIE1: Why so concerned, Monsieur? She is the creation of a—what was that delightful word you used?—a hegemonic generation.

CRITIC: Absolutely correct. Let's forget her; we have yet to tally up the score—

SATIE1: On the other hand...

CRITIC: Yes?

SATIE1: There is a clue.

(CRITIC motions for him to continue.)

SATIE1: I suppose it is fair to reveal as much as Maeterlinck revealed himself.

CRITIC: Absolutely fair.

SATIE1: You may recall Leblanc's penchant for useless rescues. You undoubtedly also recall the tale of Bluebeard, who incarcerates his wives, one by one, until two, three, four sit in the dungeon.

CRITIC: Debussy?

SATIE1: Bluebeard, who takes a fifth wife, Ariane, and as a bridal gift gives her seven keys to seven doors...?

(The scene segues without pause into Scene 2.)

Act IV, Scene 2

Stage One is dimly lit to resemble a dungeon with the outline of seven doors. Enter ARIANE/LEBLANC.

CRITIC: (Reading from his phone) Ariane is permitted to open only six of them.

SATIE1: Of course.

ARIANE: (Searching for a door) There is only one key that matters. I'll throw away the rest.

CRITIC: Her fate is sealed.

SATIE1: (Taking a drink of cognac) Ariane's nurse is hardly so idealistic and one by one they open the doors. Behind each is a treasure more incredible than the last: amethysts, pearls, sapphires, emeralds, rubies...

(We hear the magnificent "first-door" music from Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* as the stage is lit with the glittering of jewels. ARIANE ignores them and steps back.)

ARIANE: Only one door interests me. We never learn anything through what is permitted. And I must hurry—and the time for sinning is fleeting and rare.

(She opens another door to the "sixth-door" music of Dukas. The radiance is even greater than before.)

ARIANE: Ah, luminous diamonds! Pour over my hands, shine on my arms, make my flesh dazzle. But, no, what I like is more beautiful than the most beautiful gem of all.

(She shuts the door and the lights dim. To the song "Five Maids of Orlamonde" from Dukas' opera, ARIANE opens another door. The lights come up, barely enough to

illuminate the outlines of four previous wives of BLUEBEARD: YGRAINE, SELYSETTE, BELLANGÈRE and MÉLISANDE.)

ARIANE: (Grasping the others) Ah, I have found you! I thought you would be corpses, but you are full of life and gentleness. Here are flashing eyes and the breath of lips passing over my hand...How beautiful you must be. What floods of hair! Is it fair, is it dark? How strangely you look at me. Why do you step back? Are you still afraid?

TWO OR THREE

TIMID VOICES: Selysette.

ARIANE: Which of you is Selysette? Come here.

(Kissing her) How long have you been in this tomb?

SELYSETTE: I can no longer keep count but I think for more than a year.

ARIANE: Have you never tried to escape?

SELYSETTE: We could not. Everything is bolted—

BELLANGÈRE: —it is forbidden.

ARIANE: Forbidden! He shall come with tears in his eyes to free us. But it is better to free oneself. Come—Who is that staring through a frozen frame of hair?

SELYSETTE: Mélisande.

ARIANE: Mélisande. Well come, have you forgotten the sun, the dew-filled leaves, the smiling sea? We must climb.

(The “climbing music” from Act II of the opera as ARIANE leads them toward daylight. Covering their eyes, the WOMEN emerge on a cliff against the outer walls of the castle.)

SELYSETTE: The sea!

MÉLISANDE: I can see the sky!

YGRAINE: Who is singing like that?

MÉLISANDE: The birds...

ARIANE: Mélisande, how pale you are!

MÉLISANDE: Oh, don't look at me.

SELYSETTE: Our dresses are rags, you can see through them.

BELLANGÈRE: And our hair, it has grown so long.

ARIANE: Come, there is no way down. Into the castle, all of you.

(They enter the castle. Gems are scattered over the floor. Chests are open and overflowing with dazzling gowns. Distant gunfire is heard.)

ARIANE: The place is deserted. What is happening? But come, make yourselves beautiful; you are about to be free.

(The WOMEN begin, choosing gems, dressing themselves and putting up their hair.)

ARIANE: (Stopping at MÉLISANDE, who has been putting up her hair)
Is that how you prepare yourself? Your hair is the most beauty-filled miracle I have ever seen. It lit up the shadows down there and would smile in the recesses of a grave, yet you extinguish each one of its flames.

(She loosens MÉLISANDE's hair, which tumbles toward the floor and lights up the hall.)

YGRAINE: Oh! Where does it come from?

(Enter several PEASANTS, leading BLUEBEARD, who is tied up.)

PEASANT1: We are bringing you the murderer.

(The WOMEN hide in fright behind the columns.)

YGRAINE: (Looking offstage) There he is...He's staggering.

SELYSETTE: He's bleeding.

PEASANT2: He won't harm you anymore.

(They throw him to the floor and the WIVES gather around. PEASANT2 Gives ARIANE a dagger.)

Be careful.

ARIANE: (To PEASANTS) Thank you, heroes, but we can take care of him now.

(Exit PEASANTS.)

MÉLISANDE How pale he is! He must have suffered.

YGRAINE: Bring us some water to wash these wounds.

SELYSETTE: Oh, those peasants are horrible.

BELLANGÈRE: Let me loosen those ropes. He must be suffocating.

YGRAINE: Should I raise his head? He doesn't seem monstrous now.

(ARIANE takes the dagger and cuts his bonds. BLUEBEARD slowly sits up and gazes at each of the women in turn.)

ARIANE: Farewell.

MÉLISANDE: You are going?

ARIANE: Yes.

MÉLISANDE: Where?

ARIANE: Far away. To where they are waiting...

MÉLISANDE: When will you return?

ARIANE: I shall not. Will you come, Mélisande?

(MÉLISANDE shakes her head.)

Selysette? Bellangère? Ygraine?

Then I shall leave alone. Farewell, be happy.

(ARIANE moves off. BLUEBEARD growls. The closing music of Dukas' opera.)

Act IV, Scene 3

SATIE1: *Ariane et Barbe Bleu, or the Useless Deliverances*, opera by Paul Dukas, libretto by Maurice Maeterlinck. Of course Leblanc has claimed co-authorship.

CRITIC: Did Mélisande flee from the castle to the forest?

SATIE1: (Shrugging) You decide; and find what morals you'd like. After all this was the symbolist generation.

CRITIC: What happened to master and mistress?

SATIE1: Maeterlinck and Leblanc? They leased a great abbey, Saint Wandrille. They staged his works there. Leblanc played the leads. The place was enormous! One could...skate through the cloisters.

(Enter LEBLANC and MAETERLINCK waltzing on rollerskates. Music: Prokofiev waltz from *War and Peace*.)

Of course they eventually got bored...

(After taking a few turns around the stage LEBLANC and MAETERLINCK release each other and exit oppositely.)

Her career declined. He married; he moved to America; he erased his dedications to her.

CRITIC: She survives only in this opera—

SATIE1: —which is never performed. *Sic transit gloria*.

CRITIC: *Répétez.*

SATIE1: *Sic transit gloria.*

CRITIC: At last. You have been fully won over. Concede.

SATIE1: Never.

CRITIC: This is plain ol' unremuneracy. Behind your wit, what is there?

(SATIE is silent. Enter GARDEN.)

GARDEN: Many years later, after a performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in New York, Maeterlinck came backstage to greet me.

(Enter MAETERLINCK with a camera and portfolio. He can be accompanied by his young WIFE.)

En fin, Maeterlinck, and in America, not France.

MAETERLINCK: (Bowing) I had sworn never to see the opera *Pelléas*. I have finally violated my vow and I am...a happy man.

GARDEN: I am glad to hear that.

MAETERLINCK: For the first time I have understood my own play, and because of you.

GARDEN: You cannot know how happy that makes me.

MAETERLINCK: Mlle Garden, will you allow me to photograph something of you that has never been photographed before?

GARDEN: But M. Maeterlinck, there isn't a part of me that has escaped the photographer's lens.

MAETERLINCK: Ah, but there is...your soul.

GARDEN: My soul, M. Maeterlinck! But I should like to keep that for myself.

MAETERLINCK: Then I shall not...insist. (He bows.)

GARDEN: Do you really photograph souls?

MAETERLINCK: It's my hobby. (He removes a photograph from his portfolio—a black piece of paper with a large white smudge on it. He hands it to GARDEN.)

GARDEN: (Examining it from all angles) *Pardon*, Monsieur, I'll pass.

(The lights go down on MAETERLINCK and GARDEN.)

CRITIC: If Maeterlinck could have made his peace, why can you not do the same?

(SATIE remains silent.)

You have not transformed, infantile—

SATIE1: After *Parade*, Monsieur?

(CRITIC looks at him questioningly. During the following narration a small piece of *Parade* is heard. The section from about 1:40-3:40 is appropriate for its sound effects and repetitiveness. Ideally, that bit of the ballet should be performed on Stage One.)

What a collaboration! Scenario by Cocteau, sets and costumes by Picasso, choreography by Massine, ballet courtesy Diaghilev, music by...It was revolutionary, the break with the past absolute. None of this impressionist sugar to make the medicine go down. Picasso's costumes—the apogee of cubism. Absolutely realistic! The score: objective, unemotional, an architectural masterpiece, stripped to the bones, no sauce whatsoever. Believe me, the world had never been anything like it, never!

(Towards the end of the section, the booing and hissing rise. Audience can be cued.)

DEBUSSY: (From the extreme side of the stage, to dancers.) Get off the stage, you're too ugly! (To SATIE) The Krauts are bombing the hell out of us and you stage this contraption. How dare you!
Kraut!

(The noise and music abruptly stop.)

SATIE1: I never saw him again.

CRITIC: Never?

SATIE1: (Drinking and shaking his head) He died of rectal cancer the next year.

(CRITIC begins to walk away. The third part of Satie's *Socrate* begins and continues.)

You are not satisfied with the end of the story...How would you like it to end? Like a fairy tale?

CRITIC: I don't know... (Turning) What is that beautiful music?

SATIE1: My *Socrate*.

CRITIC: Yours. Impossible. Let me listen.

SATIE1: We can't. It's forty minutes long.

CRITIC: (Staring at him) When did you write it?

SATIE1: Let me tell you about my greatest invention.

CRITIC: When did you write it?

SATIE1: (Reluctantly) About that time.

CRITIC: About that time...When did—When Debussy died?

(SATIE is silent.)

(Nodding) He stood before you.

(He begins to walk away again.)

SATIE1: Let me tell you about my greatest invention. You will be forced to concede the wager.

CRITIC: I'm no longer interested.

SATIE1: (Raising his umbrella) But you must be! This is the ultimate expression of your time. The ultimate!

CRITIC: (Sadly) Please.

SATIE1: Realizing that music to be listened to was no longer fashionable—

CRITIC: (Sadly) Yes, time has become too short to concentrate.

SATIE1: The annihilation of time came long after the saturation of the senses. What few faculties remained intact after the Industrial Revolution and Wagner, were utterly destroyed by Schoenberg and Debussy.

CRITIC: We're repeating ourselves.

SATIE1: But to continue, I was commissioned to write some music to accompany a picture exhibit. Realizing that the skill of listening had vanished from the face of the earth—and that anyway the patrons senses were already saturated by the gallery photographs—I decided against writing real music. Instead I would pen *musique d'ameublement*.

CRITIC: Furniture music, yes.

SATIE1: An adequate translation. The musical equivalent to an old armchair. It is meant to be ignored—

CRITIC: (Nodding sadly) You invented muzak, we know.

SATIE1: The greatest invention of the century! (He coughs.)

CRITIC: (Sighing) I would have to place it third—

SATIE1: To continue, I am at the exhibit, the music begins...

(We hear the original *musique d'ameublement* again.)

Furniture music, you understand, is meant to be endlessly repetitive, utterly forgettable. For this reason, of course, I incorporated Saint-Saens' *Danse Macabre*. And yet how strange! I wander about the gallery, urging people to talk, to—

CRITIC: The trick doesn't work twice. Repetition has its limits.

SATIE1: (Ignoring him.) My invention received further expression in the pinnacle of my career, the creation of *instantaneism*—

CRITIC: Please.

SATIE1: A trend that lasts for no time whatsoever.

CRITIC: (Nodding) You've agreed with me all along.

SATIE1: Instantaneism lasted precisely the length of time required to stage a single ballet: *Relache, No show*. The audience arrived for the performance and—the theatre was closed! What an idea! But the

scandal had just begun. The real opening night put Debussy's premiere to shame. A backdrop of giant gramophone records! Men undress on stage! A dance with a crown! a dance with a revolving door! a dance with a wheelbarrow! a...

(The overture and projectionette sequence [1:42 total] is played while the corresponding bit of René Clair's film *Entracte* (*Cinéma*) showing Satie shooting a cannon from the roof of the Theatre des Champs-Elysees is projected on Stage Two. (Film available from Museum of Modern Art, NY. Several copies on YouTube.) During this SATIE runs offstage. As the film sequence ends, SATIE drives back onstage in a tiny car, preferably a Citroen. He bounds out, greeting the audience. There is a tremendous amount of booing and hissing, throwing of tomatoes, etc. Even SATIE joins in.)

CRITIC: (Shaking his head sadly) Definitely meaningless...

SATIE1: Of course, Monsieur, an instantaneous ballet must be nothing else. We are pollen, a transitory irritant in the world's eye. Nothing remains, you were right. I forfeit the wager.

CRITIC: It's transparent now. Minimalism—not much. Boredom—the persistence of zero. Muzak—absolutely Nothing, capital “N,” Nothing. I was correct about Nothing. But Nothing seems to be something. In fact it is apparently... Everything. I concede the wager.

SATIE1: (Stubbornly) No, I shan't allow it. Nothing remains.

CRITIC: Indeed, Nothing remains. (Lightly, almost as a joke) You invented me, Satie. I hate you.

SATIE1: (With irony) Don't take it so hard. Nothing is Everything.

[CRITIC: Does it noth?

SATIE1: An interesting verb. Strange I hadn't thought of it...]

CRITIC: Very well, Monsieur Satie, it's time for me to be off. (He shakes SATIE's hand.)

SATIE1: Are you certain you'd rather not stay?

CRITIC: (With certainty) No.

SATIE1: Goodbye then. May you find your way back.

CRITIC: May I.

SATIE1: Let me ask a small favor. If you ever meet Suzanne Valadon again, be so kind as to give her these.

(He hands CRITIC a bundle of letters.)

I forgot to send them.

CRITIC: And a favor in return. Tell me truthfully, you were never reconciled with Debussy?

SATIE1: (He drinks and coughs.) One must remain intransigent to the end.

CRITIC: At all costs.

SATIE1: I did send him a letter.

(Lights go up on DEBUSSY, who lies on his deathbed. He is reading a letter and begins to cry. He crumbles it up. Music: Part three of *Socrate* with violin taking voice line, pianissimo. Continues until final tableau.)

DEBUSSY: *Pardon...* (He drops letter and dies.)

(CRITIC glances at SATIE and runs over to pick up letter, but it blows out of reach. He wanders along and meets DUPONT outside a theatre. She is dressed as an usher and is scourging the streets for cigarette butts.)

CRITIC: Gaby?

DUPONT: (Startled) Oui. (Peering at him) M. Critique, is that you?

CRITIC: Yes.

DUPONT: (Kissing him on the cheeks) You haven't changed at all.

CRITIC: No.

DUPONT: A cigarette?

CRITIC: (Shaking his head) Are you doing all right, Gaby?

DUPONT: You see how it is, Monsieur. The high life is over. But I have a little work here at the theatre.

CRITIC: I...I'm sorry. Can I give you...(He hands her some dollars)
I suppose dollars aren't of much use here and now.

(During the exchange DUPONT drops a parcel.)

Permettez.

(He picks it up and reads the contents.) Prelude to the Afternoon of—; Pelléas..."To my dear Gaby, princess of the mysterious kingdom of Allemonde...Your devoted..."
(He looks up.) Gaby, these must be worth a fortune. You should sell them.

DUPONT: Ah Monsieur, what fortune is worth a memory? Please excuse me now. The performance is about to...begin...*Adieu.*

(Exit DUPONT.)

CRITIC: *Adieu.*

(The CRITIC stands alone. Enter VALADON, now old. She is waving, as if hailing a cab.)

CRITIC: Suzanne Valadon?

VALADON: Monsieur?

CRITIC: You probably do not remember me. We met briefly...some time ago...Erik Satie asked me to give you these.

(He hands her the bundle. She opens a few of the letters and reads them with great agitation and tears.)

VALADON: Can you hold them for a moment, Monsieur?

Appendix A

The following is the list of musical excerpts required for the play. An asterisk (*) indicates excerpt to be performed on stage:

Act I, Scene 1:

1. Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Charles Dutoit, MSO, London CD 430 502-2.

or

Herbert von Karajan, Berlin Philharmonic, EMI CD 7 49350 2.

Act I, Scene 2:

2. Debussy, *Danse Extatique et Final du Première Act* from *Le Martyre de Saint Sebastian*, Charles Dutoit, MSO, London CD 430 240-2.

3. Satie, *Gymnopédie* No. 3 for piano, Angela Brownridge piano, EMI

CDM 7 620172.

4. Mahler, *Symphony* No. 1.

5. A contemporary piece of rock music.

Act I, Scene 3:

6. Satie, *Le Picadilly*, on recording No. 3. *

7. Wagner, Love-death music from *Tristan and Isolde*.

8. Satie, *Première Pensée Rose+Cross*, Aldo Ciccolini piano, EMI CDC 7 49703.

9. Debussy, *La Damoiselle Elue*, Edo deWaart, San Francisco Symphony, Philips

CD 410 043-2

10. Musorgsky, Sunless Cycle No. 3, "The Festive Day is Ended," Evgeny Nesterenko,
Columbia LP M 35141.*

11. Javanese Gamelon music,

12. Satie, *Prélude du Fils des Etoiles*, on recording 7.*

Act I, Scene 4:

13. Debussy, *Nuages*, Charles Dutoit/ MSO, London CD 425 502-2

14. Bartok, *Bluebeard's Castle*, Janos Ferencsik, Budapest Philharmonic
Orchestra, Hungaraton, LPX 11486.

15. Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*, Philip Glass Ensemble, Tomato 4-2901.

16. Satie/ Tempo de Marche from *Cinq Grimaces*, Michele Plasson,
Orchestre du Capitol de Toulouse, EMI CDC 7 49471 2.

17. Satie, *Vexations*, Alan Marks piano, London CD NL 425 221-2.

Act I, Scene V:

18. Debussy, *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, on recording 2.

19. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade*.

20. Faure, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Charles Dutoit, MSO, London CD 421 440-2.

or

David Zinman, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Phillips CD 420 707-2.

21. Satie, *Musique d'ameublement*, unpublished. (Available from Bibliotheque
Nationale, Paris.)

Act II, Scene 1:

22. Debussy, *Nuages*, piano reduction.*

Act II, Scene 2:

23. Sibelius, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, David Zinman, Rotterdam Philharmonic,
Philips LP 6769 045.

24. Debussy, String Quartet, Alban Berg Quart, EMI CDC 7 47347 2.

25. Ravel, String Quartet, *ibid.*

26. Ravel, *Pavane pour une infante défunte* for piano, Robert Casadesus,
CBS Oddyssey 32 36 0003.

27. Satie, *Prélude de la Porte Héroïque du Ciel* for piano, on recording 7.

Act II. Scene 3:

28. Fabre, *Chanson de Mélisande* for voice and piano, NY public library.*

ActII. Scene 4:

29. Beethoven, piano sonata op. 111, last movement.*

30. Satie, *Gymnopédie* No. 3 for piano, on recording 3.*

31. Faure, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, on recording 18.

Act III, Scene 1:

32. Debussy, *Mélisande's* song from Act III of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, on recording 1.*

Act III, Scene 2:

33. Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, piano reduction of opening of opera, interlude before
Act II, Scene 3 and opening of last Act.*

Act III, Scene 3:

34. Improvisation by Debussy.*

35. Satie, *Maniere de Commencement* from *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*,

Yuji Takahashi and Alan Planes, pianos, Denon CD 32C37-7487.*

36. *Enlève*, *ibid.*

Act III, Scene 4:

37. Debussy, opening of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, on recording 1.

ActIII. Scene 5:

38. Debussy, Act IV, Scene 4 of *Pelléas et Mélisande* on recording 1.*

Act IV, Scene 1:

39. Satie, Cleopatra's march, see text.*

40. Ravel, *Les Entretiens de la Belle et de la Bette* from *Ma Mère l'Oye*, on

recording 25.*

41. Satie, *Gymnopédie* No. 3 for piano, on recording 3.*

42. Satie, Sarabande No. 2, Reinbert de Leeuw, piano. Phillips CD 420-472-2.*

43. Debussy, Sarabande and Prelude from *Pour le Piano*, Tamas Vasary, piano, DGG

CD 429 517-2.*

44. Satie, *Regrets des Enfermes* from *Chapitres tournés en tous sens*, Aldo

Ciccolini, piano, EMI CD 7 497142.*

45. Stravinsky, Sonata for two pianos.*

46. Stravinsky, *Le Rossignol*, Pierre Boulez, BBC Symphony, Erato CD 2292-45627-2

47. Debussy, *Nuages*, on recording 12.

48. Musorgsky, "The Festive Day is Ended," from *Sunless*, on recording 9.*

Act IV, Scene 2:

49. Paul Dukas, *Ariane et Barbe Blue*, Armin Jordan, Chorus and Nouvelle

Orchestra Philharmonique de Radio France, Erato CD 2292-45663-2.

Act IV, Scene 3:

50. Prokofiev, Waltz from *War and Peace*.

51. Satie, *Parade*, on recording 15.

52. Satie, *Rélâche*, on recording 15.

53. Satie, *Socrate*, Pierre Dervaux, Orchestre de Paris, EMI CZS 7 62877 2.

54. Satie, *Musique d'ameublement*, see note 20.

55. Debussy, closing music of *Pélleas et Mélisande*, on recording 1.

APPENDIX B

Principal References

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