

AN  
INTERPRETATION OF  
MAETERLINCK'S  
BLUE BIRD

BY  
LIDA MORSE STAPLES

WITH A MEMORIAL NOTE  
BY ANNA B. NEWBEGIN



SAN FRANCISCO  
JOHN J. NEWBEGIN

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## IN MEMORIAM

*She was clothed in spiritual truth. The light of her understanding shone upon souls as the noonday sun, bringing unfoldment, joy, and peace. Pure as dew upon the petals of roses in the flush of dawn, was her thought to all mankind. Her lips spoke never censure or blame, for beneath the surface and under veils hidden from the material eye, she saw the divine in every soul. Strong as the Ivy did her love cling to those committed to her care. Within that fragile form breathed a soul so great! Many times have I heard her exclaim, "Ah! I could mother the Earth if it were possible." Greater love than this can no one give. She lived for others. The Saviour's command, "Feed my Lambs," she hath fulfilled. Ever they shall call her blessed. Many shall read this little book in wonder and silence. The tree is known by its fruit: and her reaping shall be through all Eternity.*

ANNA B. NEWBEGIN.

January 12, 1914.



The first part of the document is a letter from the Secretary of the  
 Board of Education to the Board of Trustees of the University of  
 the State of New York. The letter is dated the 10th day of  
 January, 1885. The Secretary states that he has the honor to  
 acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 27th inst. and in  
 reply to inform you that the Board of Education has no objection  
 to the proposed plan of the Board of Trustees, and that the  
 same may be carried into effect. The Secretary also states that  
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 of Trustees, and that the same may be carried into effect.

Wm. C. Calkins, Secretary

Board of Education

AN  
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I HAVE given this interpretation, feeling that it holds a message for those who can read between the lines; and I wish to give to others what it has given to me. I feel that Maeterlinck, our great Mystic, has put into this fairy tale some of the greatest truths of life. Nearly every line is teeming with mystic meaning. Every time I read it I get a clearer insight. To me it is one of the deepest works of the present time, and comes very close to our every-day life.

It is usually called "A Search for Happiness," but to me it seems to be "A Search for Truth." The title "Blue Bird" implies this. Blue, the color which represents Truth, is the Temple of Light through which Divine Intelligence descends and ascends to all parts of the Universe, to the inner as well as to the outer plane of life, carrying with it the awakening principle of intelligence. Bird is a symbol of thought, upon whose wings all truth is carried.



Surely in the last analysis happiness is the result. Let us call it an individual search for Universal Truth.

If the reader will lose sight of personality, and will look upon the characters of this fairy tale as powers, principles, or qualities, obtaining in his own life, he will better understand the import of each.

In speaking of the intellect I do not intend to disparage in any way that most valuable and necessary attribute of our human existence, but wish rather to interpret what I think the author of the "Blue Bird" intends to imply; that without the aid of the inner consciousness, the outer, or intellect, cannot comprehend the truths of life essential to real happiness.

## ACT I

The story introduces, in a simple but comfortable home, two wood-cutter's children, Tytyl (Intellect) and Mytyl (Intuition). It is Christmas eve, the time that commemorates the birth of Christ, or Truth in the soul. The mother has tenderly tucked these little ones in for the night, and retired, first extinguishing the light which stands on the table.

: After a few moments of darkness, a light

filters in through the shutters, and the lamp on the table lights again of itself; but the light is of a different color from that which Mummy Tyl put out (the awakening of consciousness).

The children have awakened and discovered that Mummy Tyl has forgotten to put out the lamp. This gives Tytyl an idea. The intellect always realizes that it has an idea when touched by the light of the Spirit.

They get up and run to the window to watch a party given by rich children on the opposite side of the street, feeling the contrast between their simple surroundings and the brightness opposite. Mytyl complains that she cannot see, and Tytyl, who is taking up the whole stool upon which the children have climbed, informs her that she cannot see because she is looking at the wall. She replies that she is looking at the wall because she has no room. When intellect usurps all power, intuition always feels that it has no room and is looking at a wall.

At the height of their joy a rap is heard at the door, which opens to admit a little old woman, dressed in green with a red hood on her head. She is humpbacked, lame, and near-sighted, and walks bent on a stick. She is obviously a fairy whom we will call Life Urge;

that within each of us which urges us on to higher things, to gain spiritual knowledge.

She asks the children if they have the grass that sings, or the bird that is blue. (Grass that sings—Hope in the human breast; and the Blue Bird—Truth.) She tells them that she can do without the grass that sings “at a pinch” (often in despair one discovers a great truth), but she must have the Blue Bird. It is for her little girl who is ill, and cannot be well or happy until she has the Blue Bird (Truth). Tytyl acknowledges that he has a bird, but he cannot give it away because it is his. Intellect is never inclined to give up a truth of its own; that is, he does not recognize that any of it belongs to Intuition, who is ill and powerless, because he does not share it with her. She cannot express herself while Intellect claims all truth as his own. But Life Urge tells him she does not want it; it is not blue enough; that they will have to go in search of the one she wants.

She asks them if they will go out by the chimney, the window, or the ceiling. Tytyl chooses the door, whereupon she informs him that that is impossible; they must go out by the window (progression through perception). In starting on our journey in search of the truth,



we must take a new departure. It would never do to go in the same old way. She asks what they were doing when she knocked. When they tell her, she assures them that the same joy and beauty that they are envying in others, is in their own life. But Tytyl cannot see it. (Intellect always judges by appearances. He can "see all that is n't hidden".) She gives Tytyl a little green cap with a shining diamond in the front (symbol of intelligence adorned with the power of perception). When he has this on his head and turns the diamond (perception) toward the left (his heart or his love nature), it will open his eyes to the truth. It is all she can give him for his search for the truth. The flying carpet and the ring that makes its wearer invisible she knows would be more useful to him; but she has lost the key of the cupboard in which she has locked them. These are the symbols of black magic, for which Life Urge has no use. By using the diamond intelligently, he will be able to behold the past and the future and understand the truth which exists in each.

He turns the diamond under the direction of Life Urge, and the souls of all the animals and things are revealed to him. Each character

introduced in this act is typical of some phase of human nature. Here, Maeterlinck through the Fairy gives some deep philosophy in explaining to the little ones a few of the characters as they appear. When the Hours come forth dancing, Tytyl asks, "Who are all those pretty ladies?" She replies, "They are the hours of your life and they are glad to be free and visible for a moment." It causes one to imagine how joyous life will be when one's thoughts are so pure that they can be free and visible to the world without fear. When he asks if the walls are made of precious stones, she is made to say, "All stones are alike, all stones are precious; but man sees only a few of them." Stones are a symbol of truth, and all truth is precious, however insignificant it may seem; but man sees only a few and misses the most important because they look ugly to him.

Again, when he asks, "Who are those ugly little men?" she replies, "They are merely the souls of the Quatern-loaves, who are taking advantage of the reign of truth to leave the pan in which they were too tightly packed." (Bread symbolizes Universal Substance. Jesus used it as a symbol of himself—"I am the bread of life." He is the truth expressed in substance.) In his

dress Bread wears the scimitar, a symbol of protection. The figure is carried out by his important attitude, and by his being all things to all men. Many of us, whose ideas are too tightly packed in the narrow limits of conservatism, are glad to take advantage of a truth when it is presented to us, to get into a broader field of thought. Dog represents the faithful or positive side of our nature, and Cat the treacherous or negative side, ever working against each other; and if we look closely into our natures we shall see fire, water, sugar, and milk constantly playing their parts in our lives. Light, the most important of all, is a symbol of that "Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This is the Christ consciousness within, which guides and directs us, and to which every truth as discovered must be brought to prove its purity. No truth is legitimate, unless it is the offspring of Intellect and Intuition, united in holy bonds, a veritable marriage in Cana.

Three loud knocks on the door at the right cause an alarm, and Tytyl turns the diamond too quickly from left to right, and the souls of the animals and things have not time to get back to their places, and the children are obliged to take them with them on their journey.



## AN INTERPRETATION OF

(Through fear we fail to keep things in their places, so they become an annoyance to us while we are on our life journey in search of truth.) The Fairy tells them that all that accompany the children will die at the end of the journey. When we have finished our search for any truth, and have gained an understanding of it, then will the annoyances which have accompanied us return to their places "or die," that is, their power over us is gone. We shall have dominion, and they will be our willing servants.

In taking their departure, the Fairy tells Bread to carry the cage in which the Blue Bird will be put, when it is found. It is to be in his charge. Nothing exists that has not a truth underlying it. And whatever truth we find in Substance must also be reflected in the symbol. As Bread symbolizes Universal Substance, Truth when it is found will be placed in its keeping. All truth is limited when it reaches its ultimate expression or its symbol. Therefore the cage.

## ACT II

This act finds them at the Fairy's palace, where each dons a costume suited to his character, the most significant being that of Light. In the controversy between the animals and



things about the different garbs, Bread is made to say, "But the great thing was the dressing of Light! The Fairy thought her so lovely that she did not want to dress her at all! Thereupon I protested in the name of our dignity as essential and eminently respectable elements; and I ended by declaring that, under these conditions, I should refuse to be seen with her." Life Urge does not want to dress her, but Substance knows that, when soul is fully expressed, he will have no individuality. For "we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Life Urge sees Light as she is, and wishes to express her in her fullness; but Substance realizes that he will lose his identity in Light. Here material substance dominates soul. — SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE

But Light settles the question by choosing the moonbeam dress, that is, she clothes herself with the intellect. When Life Urge hits us on the head and the stomach, — when she arouses our intellect and intuition, and causes us to realize the important part that Light plays in our lives, — then are we willing to be convinced to a certain extent; but the intellect must still play its part as a covering for the Soul, preventing its full expression.

When they are ready, Life Urge decides to send the children to the "Land of Memory," to visit their late grandparents and spend the evening in the bosom of their dead family. They are to go alone, as it is proper that only they who believe in the dead should visit them, that is, the family. Light cannot go, and Life Urge has not been invited. In these few lines, Maeterlinck has revealed the import of these two characters, Light and the Fairy, and he has also caused the Fairy to utter a deep truth which would be a blessing to humanity could it be realized; but "men do not know this secret, because they know so little." It is only when we have the power of inner perception (the diamond) that we *know* that they who have gone before are not dead while they live in our memory; and later, in their visit to the graveyard, although they did not find the Blue Bird there, the children discovered the beautiful truth that there really are no dead. *immortality of the soul*

As they approach the Land of Memory, Mytyl can see nothing in the fog that lies between. She loses sight of her feet (understanding), and her hands (powers), and is cold. Intuition always becomes cold and powerless when Intellect is searching in the past. "Now is the

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accepted time. *Now* is the day of salvation." *Now* is Truth hanged upon the cross between the Past and the Future. The Past railed and scoffed at him; but the Future called upon him for deliverance, and his promise was *NOW*. "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The Past and the Future are the two thieves that rob us of our legitimate Paradise, which we regain only by turning to the present and recognizing the truth.

During their conversation in the Land of Memory, it is Intuition who calls attention to the Bird. Whereupon Intellect recognizes that it is Blue (Truth). In leaving the Land of Memory she asks, "Where is Light?" When he acknowledges that he does not know, the bird is no longer blue. Then does Intuition cry out, "Give me your power, little brother. Your lack of confidence in me makes me 'frightened and cold'."

### ACT III

The description of the Palace of Night is deeply significant. Night symbolizes intellect or ignorance; that ignorance which comes from a lack of knowledge of the inner and higher planes of life. The rays, emanating from the



black marble and ebony, being its only light; the irregular shape of the hall; the basalt steps, divided into three successive stages (physical, intellectual, and spiritual planes of life); and Night, seated on the second plane with the two children, Sleep and Death, beside her—produce a true picture of our intellectual existence.

Night (Negation), who is the guardian of the mysteries of life, has the co-operation of Cat (symbol of the negative or seemingly treacherous side of our nature, which is always afraid of losing something that belongs to the realm of the intellect, and usually goes in advance and warns). He it is that discloses the fact that when the Blue Bird (Truth) is found, mystery will no longer exist, and all things will be at the mercy and under the conscious dominion of man; that when Light is guiding our intelligence, we shall learn that the real truth, the one that can live in the light of day (Spirit), is hidden in the truth of our dreams, which truth, fed by the light of the intellect, dies as soon as exposed to the light of the Spirit.

Light cannot cross the threshold of Night, but she sends the lesser intelligences to find the secrets which Night holds.

When they discover the real truth there, then



will Light enter and take possession. "The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there." When Intellect catches all the truths that belong to his realm, and brings them to light, he discovers that they have no life. They cannot live in the light of day (Spirit).

As the children and their attendants are heard approaching the Palace, the Cat tells Night that all are friendly excepting Dog, who is the only one not on their side, and that it is impossible to keep him away. The positive side of our nature is ever on the alert to help and protect, if Intellect will allow it to express itself. Night is unwilling to give up her keys to Tytyl until he has shown her the sign—"Behold the Diamond!" Ignorance always yields to the sign of Intelligence. When Intellect desires to have the keys to the mysteries of life, it is only through the use of the powers of perception (Diamond) that he can obtain them. When he has this, he has the courage to open all the doors, and investigate along every line of life; a "peep through the key-hole" will not suffice. When the ghosts are released, Night is afraid of losing them, because they have felt bored since man has ceased to take them seriously. Whenever we cease to take the ghosts of our lives seriously they will

trouble us no more. They are held in captivity only by the lower senses (the whip of snakes).

In opening the cavern where the giant Silence is confined, Maeterlinck makes Tytyl show great fear and trembling. The Intellect realizes that under the influence of silence its own powers become useless. Its "hands are frozen." It cannot comprehend the fullness of command. "Be still and know." When Tytyl approaches the great middle door, Night through fear of her own loss warns him, at the risk of his life, not to open that door; but Tytyl, although a little shaken, is determined. So she asks him to wait until she has sought refuge in her windowless tower.

The key has hardly touched the door before its tall wide leaves glide apart, and disappear in the thickness of the walls, revealing a dream garden bathed in nocturnal light, where, among stars and planets, fairy-like blue birds fly from moonbeam to moonbeam, illuminating all that they touch. The "great middle door" is the door of the intellectual realm, through which all must pass to reach the higher spiritual stage of life. Behind this door, within this realm, are thousands, millions of truths which feed only on the moonbeams (Intellect), which, when brought

to the light of Spirit, "die." The one great Truth, the only one that can live in both realms, is too high to be reached in this stage of development. When this door is fearlessly thrown open, Ignorance (Night) seeks her windowless tower (Nonperception).

*Scene 2.* After their experience at the Palace of Night (the Realm of Ignorance) the children, by natural sequence, resume their search in the forest (Nature). It is night; the moon is shining. This indicates that we are still working under the light of intellect alone, and Cat, the negative side, is dominant, deceitfully planning to destroy and make futile all attempts to seek further for the truth in this wonderful, interesting domain. His suggestion to Tytyl to stand in the moonbeam, that he may see better when he turns the diamond, takes from Tytyl the power to reason from the higher consciousness; and although Dog (the positive) stands faithfully by, he too is bound and gagged through Cat's insistent demand. But even then, he comes to the rescue when we are in trouble through listening to the treacherous side of our nature.

Among the trees which represent the principles of life in nature, Tytyl discovers the



Blue Bird perched upon the Oak's shoulder, the Oak being one of the most ancient symbols of nature's principles. In the conversation between the Oak and Tyltyl, Maeterlinck has given us a clew to the object of the children's search. He makes the Oak say, "Yes, I know that you are looking for the Blue Bird, that is to say, the great secret of things and of happiness," showing that it is the secret of happiness, and not happiness itself, that they are seeking. No real happiness is obtained without a full knowledge of the truth regarding happiness.

Maeterlinck, in his "Wisdom and Destiny," that book of books, which is music to the soul of all who read it understandingly, says: "To be happy is only to have freed one's soul from the unrest of happiness. It were well if, from time to time, there should come to us one to whom fortune had granted a dazzling, super-human felicity, that all men regarded with envy; and if he were very simply to say to us, 'All is mine that you pray for each day: I have riches, and youth, and health; I have glory, and power, and love; and if today I am truly able to call myself happy, it is not on account of the gifts that fortune has deigned to accord me, but because I have learned from these gifts to



fix my eyes far above happiness. If my marvelous travels and victories, my strength and my love, have brought me the peace and the gladness I sought, it is only because they have taught me that it is not in them that the veritable gladness and peace can be found. It was in myself they existed, before all these triumphs; and still in myself are they now, after all my achievement; and I know full well that had but a little more wisdom been mine, I might have enjoyed all I now enjoy without the aid of so much good fortune. I know that today I am happier still than I was yesterday, because I have learned at last that I stand in no need of good fortune in order to free my soul, to bring peace to my thoughts, to enlighten my heart.'"

Also, he has made the Oak say that through this power of perception, this "talisman stolen from the powers of Earth," we are able to take possession of this truth, and to snatch from Nature the secrets which she has kept since the origin of life. We allow the things of nature to torment and harm us, but if we could only remember to turn the diamond of Intelligence upon them, then would we have the power to put them all in their places, and have full dominion over them. But if, in our search in nature, we de-

pend upon its negative or treacherous side (the Cat) for information and guidance, we forget; and in our struggle, it is the positive (Dog) who comes to our rescue. It is also he who announces the approach of Light, who reminds us, when she is come, to turn the diamond. It is dangerous to awaken the forces of nature, when we have not the light of Intelligence to control them.

## ACT IV

The new act which Maeterlinck has introduced into the play is not so deeply mystical, but exquisitely beautiful in portraying the gospel of duty and love, and also in showing the proximity of misery and happiness, separated only by "vapor or a fine veil." In this act the Blue Bird is not seen; for here, as in the Kingdom of the Future, only the Great Truth counts, and those figuring in the Palace of Happiness cannot comprehend. When we allow eating, drinking, idling of time, or any of the luxuries of life, to control us, we lose our respect for the higher things and even tamper with the Soul. But when we turn the diamond, or throw upon all this ignorance the light of our inner perception, the luxuries fade into insignificance, and life takes on a different aspect. We have not moved, but our eyes

see differently. We now behold the truth of things, and this brings to us the soul of the Joys that endure the brightness of the diamond. "There are many more Happinesses on earth than people think; but the generality of men do not discover them."

Even the higher Joys are not ready for the Great Truths; for, as with the Great Joy of Loving, "do what you will, you are ever so much too small to see her altogether." And the beautiful tender touch that Maeterlinck has put into Maternal Love must make every mother heart who reads it feel grateful to the author for showing the sacred truth which she cannot always make manifest. "I always wear it, but people do not see it, because people see nothing when their eyes are closed."

To me this whole passage, given by Maternal Love, is the deepest and tenderest idea of mother love that has ever been written; and I think that here, perhaps, more than in any other part of the play, Maeterlinck shows the true character of Light, for all of the great Joys, beautiful and noble as they are, are not great enough to behold Light unveiled. Maternal Love, dear as it is, must expand into Universal Love; the Joy of Being Just, into Justice itself; the Joy of Seeing



what is beautiful, into the expression of Beauty only; and the Joy of Understanding, into the Joy of Knowing.

Then will Light stand unveiled and will not have to say with the Master as of old, "Mine hour is not yet come." Intellect cannot understand the tears of joy shed by those who have come so close to Light as to receive the kiss of respect. In this sacred hour the only response to him is, "Be still and know," or "Hush, dear."

### ACT V

In the Kingdom of the Future, the Azure Palace, like the Palace of Night, has its deeper meaning. Everything seems unreal and mystical except the plinths and capitals of the columns, the keystones, and a few seats and circular benches, which are of white marble. The Future, although in the main vague and unreal to mankind, still holds for us those pure, white truths which are the foundation stones and supporting principles, without which our present existence would be drear indeed. The few resting-places, some of which we recognize as eternal (Circular), stimulate our hope, and are essential to our ongoing. The animals and things cannot enter here: "they would know the future and



would not obey." Neither is it well that our positive nature (Dog) even should know what awaits in the course of the ages. Light locks them all up in the vault of the church.

The Church — that symbol of the foundation principle of life, that firmament in the midst of the waters, created on the second day, ancient as time itself, and essential to our freedom and progress — always has its vaults (the lower dark places) where our animal natures, which cannot grasp the higher beautiful truths, are confined. Our spiritual understanding (Light) will never allow our lower nature to enter this Kingdom, lest it would know the truth and refuse to obey. The cherubim and the flaming sword ever keep the way of the tree of life.

Light assures the children that it is from this Kingdom that all children who are born upon our earth come; and the little blue children teach Tytyl that none can come to this earth empty-handed, and that they must be ready when Time stands on the threshold and calls. In the Land of the Future everything is subject to Time, who alone determines when each shall come into expression. The Blue Bird is not seen there, because Light has it under her mantle. The Intellect hides the real truth, until it is

brought into the Present, when it is pink, symbolizing Life and Love.

## ACT VI

The return home is beautifully significant. The stage represents a red wall and a little green door. It is the break of day. Light has to remind Tytyl that this is really his home which he left one year ago. The red wall represents the physical, the little green door the astral or mental, and the break of day the dawn of the Spiritual, which comes to all after an earnest search for the truth in the different phases of life. In every realm we find a truth which belongs exclusively to that realm; and, as we have said before, this dies or changes, when brought to the light of Spirit. But the truths of the Future cannot be grasped by the Intellect, which always hides them ( signified by the mantle ) until Light brings them into the present. Then they appear to us as real Life and Love.

This brings us to the break of day, the dawn of the Spiritual truth in our minds, which always places us in that ecstatic mood causing us to forget the lower phases of life (the red wall and the little green door); until Light (the Christ consciousness) calls our attention to them again,

ETRURIA  
ITALY

reminding us that they too play their part in our lives. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." When, after a conscious search for the truth, we return to our old conditions, we scarcely recognize ourselves or our environment. Everything is more beautiful, and we are happy. Everything takes its place, and becomes our willing servant.

Eight o'clock, the hour when Light leaves the children, represents the beginning of a new cycle, that is, taking up the old life again with new ideas and a deeper understanding. Light watches over us until we need her again, for another search into still deeper truths of life. "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end."

*Scene 2.* The awakening has the same setting as Act I, but the objects on the walls, and the atmosphere, all appear more beautiful. Daylight penetrates through the closed shutters. Tytyl and Mytyl are asleep in their little beds, and the animals and things occupy the same places as before the arrival of the Fairy. When Mummy Tyl awakens them, she is surprised and alarmed at their joy over the changed conditions, which she cannot see, in their home. When we have a spiritual awakening and realize that a new joy has come into our life, we are often misunder-



stood by our nearest and dearest, who have not yet reached the understanding that we have.

After every search for the truth, we find that we had it right at home within ourselves all the time. We shall ever find within ourselves the truth that we are seeking. There is no other place, and when we find it so, we are willing to share it with others. When Intellect (Tytyl) finds the truth within himself, he gives it willingly to Intuition, who immediately becomes stronger and more powerful. Then it is that he sees her resemblance to Light (the Soul). He is now timid in her presence, because he recognizes her superiority. She will keep the truth until he again wishes to feed it, when they will both lose it. This is what we call back-sliding. But he will get it again.

*“If any of you should find him, would you be so very kind as to give him back to us? . . . We need him for our happiness.”*

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