A Dreamer and A Painter: Visualizing the Unconscious in the Work of Arthur B. Davies, 1890-1920

by

Emily Willard Gephart

BA, Art History and Studio Art
Oberlin College, 1991

MA, History of Art
Tufts University, 1997

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Signature of Author:

Certified by: Caroline Jones
Professor of the History of Art
Thesis Co-Supervisor

Certified by: Michael Leja
Professor of the History of Art
University of Pennsylvania
Thesis Co-Supervisor

Accepted by: Takehiko Nagakura
Associate Professor of Design and Computation
Chair of the Committee on Graduate Students
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Emily Willard Gephart

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Dissertation Committee:

Caroline Jones
Professor of the History of Art
History, Theory and Criticism of Art and Architecture Section
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Michael Leja
Professor of the History of Art
University of Pennsylvania

Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture
Associate Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Christopher Capozzola
Associate Professor of History
MIT School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
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ABSTRACT

The paintings of U. S. artist Arthur B. Davies (1863-1928) spoke to his viewers in terms of the emergent discipline of psychology, creating visualizations of dreaming. This dissertation examines his work and its reception between 1890 and 1920, exploring the diversity characterizing American beliefs about dreams and their function in the unconscious. Painted during a period in which shifting, coalescing disciplines contested the understanding of the inner world of the modern psyche, Davies’s art uneasily blended figuration and looser forms of representation, calling up the ambivalence with which his contemporaries greeted profound socio-cultural changes in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

As I show in five chapters that parallel the trajectory of the artist’s career, the discourses of Symbolism, science, spiritualism, psychoanalysis, and various forms of modernism all laid claim to the value of dreams and to Davies’s art in wide-ranging, even contradictory ways. Reading Davies’s paintings in light of critical responses and popular sources, I examine his varied reception across the art world. First, Sadakichi Hartmann’s arguments for Davies’s ability to capture suggestive, visionary meaning of Symbolist dreams in the 1890s asserted his paintings’ significance as transcendent forms of creative imagination. Then, as psychology emerged as a discipline, Davies’s paintings were reinterpreted in light of newly scientific approaches to the unconscious. These claims were paralleled by the competing and overlapping tenets of Spiritualism, the pursuit of psychic research, and the foundation of new religions and forms of popular psychotherapy. After 1909, views of the subconscious began to coalesce under the psychoanalytic approaches offered by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, which nonetheless blended with the philosophies of Henri Bergson, to extend and also challenge prior interpretations of dreams. In the teens when Davies explored Cubist form after his involvement with the Armory Show, Havelock Ellis’s ideas about the synaesthetic operation of dreams provided yet another framework by which critics interpreted the artist’s hybrid interests. Despite his popularity in his own time, Davies’s is largely absent from art historical narratives today. I argue that epistemic changes shaped his art’s perceived quality, relevance, and even its visibility.

Thesis Co-Supervisor: Caroline Jones
Title: Professor of Art History, History, Theory and Criticism Program, Department of Architecture
Thesis Co-Supervisor: Michael Leja
Title: Professor of the History of Art, University of Pennsylvania
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Preface and Acknowledgements:

During the College Art Association conference in New York in February, 2013 I had the chance to visit the Montclair Art Museum’s newly-opened centennial exhibition *The New Spirit: American Art in the Armory Show*. I boarded a bus with a small group of art historians, and we made our way to New Jersey, where we were given a special tour of the exhibition led by the show’s curators Laurette McCarthy and Gail Stavitsky. They had assembled many of the American artworks featured in 1913, among them Arthur Bowen Davies’s (1862-1928) *Seadrift* (figure 5.3), which had attracted particular praise for the artist in *Hearst’s Magazine*. At the time, critic Charles Melzer felt it was a demonstration of what made the American work in the Armory Show exemplary; he acclaimed Davies as a “positive genius,” and he called *Seadrift* a “daring composition” that “charmed by its splendid color, no less than its rare imagination.”

A century later, Montclair’s curators sought to demonstrate that American painting in 1913 was not just a representative sample of weak, derivative, or provincial art in slavish imitation of European precedent, but reflected vital currents in an emerging transatlantic modernist practice; their tour emphasized how favorably viewers regarded the many different varieties of modern American art presented at the Armory Show. But, aside from the lauded efforts Davies devoted to orchestrating the European paintings exhibited in 1913, alongside co-organizers Walter Pach and Walt Kuhn, his role as a painter seemed relatively unimportant to my fellow historians. When we stood in front

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2 Charles Henry Meltzer, “New York Sees Things,” *Hearst’s Magazine*, 23 (April, 1913), p 636. Davies exhibited six pieces at the Armory Show, alongside the work of his fellow Americans. Other than the mention in *Hearst’s Magazine*, *Seadrift* was not extensively discussed in the art critical press: too many other sensational works in the Armory Show captured the attention of art writers, whether they laid praise or blame on Davies for including them in the controversial exhibition. Consequently, little can be determined about how most viewers responded to Davies’s entries in the Armory Show. For some analysis of the ways in which the American art in the show was generally presented, see William Glackens, “The American Section—The National Art,” and Frederick James Gregg, “The Attitude of the Americans,” *Arts and Decoration*, 3:5 Special Exhibition Number, (March, 1913), pp 159- 167.

of *Seadrift*, the comments I heard surprised me: “Huh,” said one viewer; “how weird,” chimed in another. “Well, he was one of those Symbolists,” said a third. I was informed that, “he doesn’t have an archive, and therefore nobody ever works on him.” And then came the words I have grown to expect: “he had two wives, you know.”

Initially I found this response disappointing, but on further reflection it proved extremely instructive. These historians heartily acknowledged Davies’s important and devoted promotion of European and American modernism at the Armory Show and beyond, but as has become customary they downplayed his painting in light of the sensational scandal surrounding his personal life, or wrote it off as impenetrable ‘Symbolist’ obscuration that will never submit to analysis; his work is commonly consigned to marginal status or overlooked.⁴ Time was limited and our tour guides moved on. I didn’t: I was intrigued. Here was a group committed to asserting American art’s significance in the spread of modernism, and yet they apparently found Davies’s work profoundly confusing and unfathomable, almost to the point of invisibility.

This incoherence lies at the heart of Davies’s persistent status as a “problem” in American art history.⁵ But it also relates to Davies’s attempts to give esthetic form to one of the most mysterious and contested psychic phenomena of his day: dreams. If today we believe that dreams arise from the unconscious, in Davies’s heyday this was not yet entirely self-evident, nor was the meaning of that connection clear. Situated between the scientifically studied psyche and the spiritual soul, the world of

dreams in the early 20th century was a site of struggle where many Americans located their deepest anxieties and fondest hopes. Embracing this duality along with the inherent paradox of attempting to render the interior phenomena of dreams visible, Davies invited his viewers to partake in a complex effort to come to terms with the powerful abilities of the unconscious. Painting dream-images that arose from his own mind and in his viewers’ imaginations, as well as visions of his slumbering subjects, his work’s incongruities are nodal points around which compelling stories about the power of interior vision took shape.

Davies’s paintings can be bizarre, peculiar, whimsical, baffling—some of them are hauntingly lovely, while others seem irredeemably awkward. Davies’s work refuses a conventional art history tracking ‘progress’ through successive phases. Addressing these properties, many discussions of Davies still present him in the terms that set him apart from his peers, securing his reputation in his own time as a dreamer, a visionary, and a dedicated painter of the imagination’s interior world. Indeed, describing Davies’s work as ‘dreamy’ can permit a historian to sidestep some expansive and problematic questions about his ambiguous, equivocal representational habits. Like an individual’s subjective world of private dreams, Davies’s paintings can seem difficult, if not impossible, for another person to ever see, to truly understand, or adequately explain.

Seadrift demonstrates some of the provocative strangeness in the artist’s work, and as is true of many of his paintings, it resists ready comprehension. It certainly did not stand out in the room; its narrow range of muted hue and value do not demand the viewer’s attention. The amorphous figures in this equally ill-defined space seem incomplete, their poses are hard to make out: one figure at center arising from the waves—or perhaps two—is strangely elongated, showing a puzzling number of limbs. At far left, two large, inverted male wrestlers tumble one over the other in a strenuous pose, their musculature oddly emphasized by highlighted brushstrokes. The landscape is all surface and texture, revealing almost no depth for these figural groups to occupy; the paint was applied in an array of diverse marks that do not readily appear in reproduction,

6 See, for example, the recent exhibition of Davies’s work at New York’s Spanierman Gallery, and the exhibition catalog by Lisa Peters, Arthur B. Davies (1862-1928), Painter, Poet, Romancer & Mystic, (New York: Spanierman Gallery, March 29 to April 28, 2012).
scraped, stippled and smeared in sticky globs. Its subtle pastel shades and heavily rubbed-in substance allude to the formal habits of one of Davies’s favorite French Symbolist artists, Odilon Redon, but it lacks the glowing color and redolent atmosphere of some the Redon paintings hung at the Armory Show, such as Roger and Angelica, purchased thanks to Davies’s encouragement by his close friend and patron, Lillie Bliss. In other ways, as I will explore later, Seadrift owes a debt to Cezanne’s bathers and Matisse’s raw, primitive bodies inhabiting equally crude natural spaces. It was seen by at least one critic as an able demonstration of Davies’s best work despite—or because of—this amalgamation of many esthetic concerns increasingly identified as modern: it shows evidence of advancing autonomy of creative expression, dissolution of distinct, concrete form, and idiosyncratic handling of line, color, and facture. But whereas Davies’s supporters found these qualities interesting and satisfying—giving important if perplexing form to the mind’s amazing abilities—my fellow historians seemed so confounded that they all but ignored this example of his work.

Because Davies’s paintings can appear derivative—or even slightly ridiculous because of their ready embrace of folklore and fantasy—and because many seem to offer little evident contribution to the avant-garde concerns which have come to define a canonical story of modernism’s ascendance, the group of scholars with whom I stood are not alone in finding his work somehow irrelevant. Since many museums don’t put Davies’s paintings on show—or, in the case of the Art Institute of Chicago, have been de-accessioning pieces—the scope of his career’s work isn’t commonly recognized. The artist’s last major retrospective, entitled Dream Vision: the Art of Arthur Bowen Davies took place at Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art in 1981. Indeed, my experience reflects some of the difficulties that unavoidably come with working on Davies—it is certainly true that he did not leave much archival material for a scholar to investigate, but this should not deter anyone from examining how his work spoke to his contemporaries, as I have tried to do.

7 In 2009, the Art Institute of Chicago sold five paintings from their permanent collection: Summer and the Mother-Hearted; Leda and the Dioscuri; Evening Among the Ruins; Dirge in Spring; and Lake and Island, Sierra Nevada.

I contend throughout this dissertation that Davies is at his most interesting and valuable to us now when he is hard to see. That many viewers today cannot readily recognize his work’s contribution to a *modern* form of art demonstrates how major changes in the configuration of epistemological fields create margins and centers, and define visibility itself. Whereas Davies was once America’s foremost painter of the dreaming unconscious, the inner world to which he gave vision is one that we can no longer readily access or understand. I have envisioned this dissertation as a study in what it was once possible for a viewer not unlike myself to believe: about dreams, about science and about faith; about the metaphysics of consciousness; about esthetics and the power of art. And over and above all, about the modern mind: these were intricately interwoven and often antagonistic issues that gave rise to Davies’s most usefully ‘difficult’ images.

The bemusement his painting generates also indicates why I think it is important for us to continue to interrogate it. I do not seek to challenge the widespread acknowledgement that Davies’s work presents ‘a problem’ to historians. Rather, I see these problems as generative lessons in how American painting of the early twentieth century can and should be understood in multiple, divergent, and even paradoxical ways. Indeed, we are lucky as art historians when we investigate artists whose careers provoke such hermeneutic questions. His ‘failures’ are as instructive as his successes: neither securely vanguard nor quite conservative, he serves as a lesson in his moment’s greatest tensions, negotiations, and instabilities. During a phase of great transition during which American viewers of art struggled to make sense of profound upheavals reconfiguring their society and culture, the hybridity of Davies’s art made him extremely popular; he became an artist whose work spoke to a broad segment of middlebrow American culture.9

It is unusual to encounter an artist important to his peers whose work recedes from legibility so thoroughly. Indeed, a major question motivating my study concerns the failure of viewers today to understand why Davies’s art was so popular and well-regarded by his contemporaries that in the words of at least one critic, “in expressive power,

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Arthur B. Davies is probably our greatest American painter.10 Although evaluating an artist’s popularity is not equivalent to arguing for his work’s enduring quality, the fact that so many of his viewers found Davies’s painted dreams convincing—if we believe his critics—shows his ability to give form to the period’s understanding of the unconscious mind’s habits. Therefore, and especially because it appears so impenetrable now, Davies’s art offers a fascinating framework through which social and cultural shifts forged in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era should be examined, as these gave rise to deeply conflicted feelings about modernity and modernization shared by the artist and his viewers. In the introduction and chapters that follow, I chart a course through some of these profound tensions and adjustments.

The story I tell has benefited from a wide variety of disciplines informing my research, within and well beyond the history of art; I have investigated the history of science and psychology, cultural studies, literature, dance, music and the performing arts, which has taken me on a far-reaching adventure, and my approach to this moment in art and intellectual culture has been guided by a number of prior contributions. Michael Leja’s case studies of perception, skepticism and illusion in Looking Askance have been essential, but his thoughts on psychology and art and primitivism in Reframing Abstract Expressionism also offered crucial guideposts.11 Sarah Burns’s study of American artistic cultures in the Gilded Age, and Kathleen Pyne’s investigation of evolutionary thinking in that same period in Art and the Higher Life provided deep contextual background in and against which I evaluate the first years of Davies’s career, while Pyne’s consideration of the dynamics of gender and psychology in the Stieglitz circle in Modernism and the Feminine Voice brings her prior research into greater dialogue with the early 20th century.12

Recent scholarship on the plurality of modernism has enhanced and motivated my project. JoAnne Mancini’s examination of this era’s multiple historical contingencies has

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11 Michael Leja, Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993);
revealed how “entire ways of making, understanding and seeing art can be forgotten, lost and rendered invisible with the passage of time, even when those art worlds remain.”\textsuperscript{13} Thus, although we are no longer equipped with the visual, critical and intellectual habits that allow us to see Davies’s painting as modern in the ways his viewers did, attending to his cultural context grants us powerful tools that help us to understand their responses to it.

Elizabeth Johns has argued that Davies, alongside his friend and fellow visionary Albert Pinkham Ryder, “were the best marchers to a prominent drumbeat lost only to us, and their paintings powerfully capture convictions and hopes that many of their fellow artists also caught up.” Yet, despite her observation that “Davies may have tried to be a modernist in ways we have not yet analyzed,” few scholars have yet attended sufficiently to his work, interrogating why it lent itself so readily to interpretation in light of the discourses of the dream.\textsuperscript{14} While Brooks Wright and Bennard Perlman have written valuable biographies of Davies, completed with the participation of his family, his oeuvre deserves much more study, and these psycho-biographical approaches to ‘personal symbolism’ in his art is often disappointingly limited.\textsuperscript{15} In response to Johns’s challenge, Robin Veder and Christine Oaklander have each offered promising new ways in which to envision his work in its wider cultural context, while my project addresses the modes of artistic production and consumption that made Davies an exemplary artist of the psyche to his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{14}For quotations see Elizabeth Johns, “Arthur B. Davies and Albert Pinkham Ryder: The ‘Fix’ of the Art Historian” \textit{Arts Magazine}, 56:5, (January, 1982), pp 70 and 74. The importance of psychology in Davies’s work was observed by his biographer Brooks Wright in 1978, but has not been thoroughly investigated. See Brooks Wright, \textit{The Artist and the Unicorn: The Lives of Arthur B. Davies, 1862-1928}, (New City, NY: Historical Society of Rockland County, 1978), pp 111-116. Wright traced dreams as important elements in Davies’s “Themes and Symbols;” but sees them primarily in terms of the artist’s personal dreams.


\textsuperscript{16}Robin Veder, “Arthur B. Davies’ Inhalation Theory of Art,” \textit{American Art} 23:1 (Spring, 2009), 56-77 and Christine Oaklander, “Arthur B. Davies, William Fraetas and ‘Color Law,’” \textit{American Art} 18:2, (Summer, 2004), pp 10-31, both provide wider interpretations of Davies’s work within the context of his modernist circle, Veder addressing his interest in giving form to various ‘body cultures’ in turn-of-the-century America, and Oaklander attending to how his work demonstrates his interest in musical analogies, mysticism and color theory.
Preface and Acknowledgements

Mark Jarzombek’s study of German psychological theory’s influence on twentieth century aesthetics offered essential background in the historiography of art and its criticism, as did Caroline Jones’s *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg’s Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*.17 Jones’s approach to the relationship between the psychology of perception, positivist philosophies and art criticism in the mid-twentieth century helped me understand the vagaries of Davies’s posthumous reputation. Vital discussion of epistemic problems in the practices of science and art is offered in Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s *Objectivity*, which underlies my study’s conceptual framework.18 In examining the strata of intellectual culture as well as its visual correlates, my methodological debts also engage the work of Michel Foucault and the social history of Michael Baxandall and T. J. Clark.19

In my ongoing study, I have not only been inspired by prior scholars, but equally surprised by some conspicuous absences in the literature. The most extensive assessment of the thematic content and influence of Symbolism in America remains Charles Eldredge’s *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting*. Aside from Wanda Corn’s important examination of American Tonalism, insufficient work has been done to evaluate American Symbolism beyond Eldredge’s largely iconographical model.20 Similarly, although the history of psychology has been amply studied, in its pre-Freudian moment by Henri Ellenberger and in light of Freud’s pervasive influence by Nathan Hale, Jr., very little investigation of the significance of dreaming in American culture has taken shape; two noteworthy exceptions are Merle Curti’s 1966 survey of “The American

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Exploration of *Dreams* and Dreamers,* and Katherine Roeder’s dissertation on the role of dreaming in the work of Winsor McCay.* Sally Promey’s observations on “The ‘Return’ of Religion in American Art” motivated some of my interests in spiritualism, and Rachel Ziady DeLue’s book on the intersection between art, spiritualism and science in the art of George Inness offers an equally helpful example of outstanding scholarship that lies in disciplinary intersections; both point towards issues that are worthy of more attention in American art history.

Despite endorsing the project of giving more attention to this formative moment in American painting, many of my peers remain slightly puzzled why I want to work on an artist one of them has denigrated as “that unicorn painter” (see figure 1.2). Davies persisted in painting fantastic subject matter that ostensibly appeals to the Romantic fantasies of pre-teen-aged girls, or other supposedly unsophisticated viewers. This is bound up with his reputation as an artist out-of-touch with the preoccupations with the modern world that motivated his fellow artists such as Robert Henri and other realist artist-illustrators of what is known colloquially as ‘the Ashcan School,’ with whom he exhibited at Macbeth’s Gallery in 1908.* His evident ‘failure’ thereafter to break through to an eroticized, intellectualized, or theoretically rigorous kind of abstraction also easily becomes emblematic of his work’s larger failure to be sufficiently modern. Even as the Armory Show’s legacy in the United States submits to pressure, emerging as a vastly enriched story of many multiple ‘modernisms’ existing before it and expanding

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thereafter, Davies remains an aberration, a relic and a curiosity (sometimes an embarrassment), whose work’s importance has been overlooked for its deeply ‘anti-modern’ sentiment.24

I seek to reevaluate that formulation, looking closer at the uncertainties and hesitations defining modernism’s early development as a set of esthetic priorities and responses to cultural change. Davies’s work’s diversity ably reflects the many possibilities for modern art’s appearance and function existing in his own time. His paintings refuse to fit securely into any existing framework for modern art’s linear progress. In fact, although I hope to enrich our understanding of this productively diverse moment, I also hope that his work continues to elude facile analysis—it inhabits a tremendously fertile conceptual ground that reveals how dynamic and contradictory the turn of the century decades were. Examining the circumstances that contributed to his centrality in the art world and his middlebrow popularity also helps us to consider his work’s subsequent fortunes in later decades, leading to the profound ‘unseeability’ of his work today.

The fact that so many of his critics resorted to the metaphor of the dream in describing Davies’s paintings is as informative as my own peers’ failure to ‘see’ his work in New Jersey. My own study has allowed me to understand the ways in which his work spoke to his audience. It embodied what his viewers understood about dreaming so thoroughly that they communicated in similar ways: directly, immediately, and with little apparent need for more complex translation. And like dreams, their strangeness, ambiguity, and inexplicability emblematized an experience of modern selfhood: the world they depicted was equally familiar and unfamiliar, recognizable and foreign. In giving vision to the dream, Davies set forth across the newly-discovered territory of the unconscious, and invited his viewers to partake in that journey.

24 Davies’s institutionalization as an ‘anti-modern’ painter is best demonstrated by the fact that T. J. Jackson Lears used Davies’ ca. 1906 painting Unicorns—Sea Calm as the cover illustration for the paperback edition of his book No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), a point that fellow Davies scholar Robin Veder has also noted (see note 36). The case for multiple overlapping versions of American modernism has been made by many scholars; Joanne Mancini’s approach to the institutions through which modernisms were forged at the turn of the century has been particularly useful. See Mancini, Pre-Modernism, (2005); on the broader cultural terrain for American modernisms, see the assembled essays of Neil Harris, Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
This dissertation has been a long time coming. It started, paused, began again, sputtered out, spent a long time at the bottom of a drawer, and finally was hauled out and flared to life again; its completion still comes as something of a surprise. Over the course of this project's convoluted trajectory, I have assembled a host of people to whom I owe my heartfelt thanks. First and foremost, I thank the members of my committee, who have all shown remarkable forbearance and given me great encouragement. Michael Leja’s steadfast belief in this project has been essential; his inspirational seminars on the visual and cultural history of utopian thinking and America at 1900 instigated many of these ideas and I owe to him a sense of the fun of this historical moment, as well as the joys of far-ranging scholarship. The creativity of his research and clarity of his writing have ever been examples to which I aspire. To Caroline Jones I owe inestimable thanks for her patience, wise guidance, frank advice, and productive counsel to “get it right”—a goal towards which I will ever strive. Beyond that, her willingness to bear with sea changes in my life and her always grounded common sense have been equally valuable.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

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“Man has known since antiquity that in dreams he encounters what he is and what he will be, what he has done and what he is going to do, discovering there the knot that ties his freedom to the necessity of the world.”

Michel Foucault, *Dream, imagination and existence*, (1954)

A curious, almost comical image demonstrating Arthur Davies’s stylistic experimentation, his 1912 painting *The Jewel Bearing Tree of Amity* (figure 1.1) shows an idyllic landscape peopled by stately, elegantly posed, enigmatically gesturing nudes, their bodies and surroundings animated by proto-abstract decorative effects and even a harlequinade of figures in “Cubist” attire. The title gives little hint of meaning beyond the tree’s designation, and its eccentricities stymied Davies’s critics; as his devoted supporter Henry McBride observed in the *New York Sun*, “it is a picture that cannot be described,” but he also attested, “it is the best thing Mr. Davies has publicly shown in several years, and in consequence it will become a necessary part of our educations.”

In the artist’s typical fashion, it evokes arcane pre-modern rituals as the six figures—three seated at left and three standing on the right—resemble participants in some inscrutable ceremony enacted around and beneath a tree. The glowing autumnal landscape reflected in a body of water at middle distance is lush with color and stunning in its pattern; the figures compete for attention with the almost Byzantine appearance of the artist’s spots and squares, lines and planes applied to discrete objects. At the same time, the artist pays tribute to prior traditions ranging from bucolic Barbizon landscapes to Classical sculpture and Renaissance pastorals. These mingle uneasily with the artist’s references to popular pastimes and modern design: the titular jewel-bearing tree resembles a twisting column adorned with glittering Coney Island festival lights, while a female figure in the immediate foreground stands with her back to us, allowing our

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inspection of her multi-hued, crazy-quilt robe.³ The image dazzles and confounds in equal measure, demonstrating the artist's greatest strengths, as well as some of his undeniable, luxurious incongruity.

These qualities were not new to the artist in 1912. When the young, aspiring critic Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944) described Davies as “a dreamer as well as a painter,” in his “Art Gossip” column, published in the newly founded journal The Art Critic in 1894, he set up an interpretive paradigm that endured throughout the artist’s lifetime and beyond.⁴ Rather than attempting to explain the artist from the vantage point of his unconventional biography or his promotion of modern painting in America, strategies occupying many previous writers, I aim to situate Davies in the wide-ranging contexts of his reception as a dreamer and a painter attuned to the unconscious.⁵ I contend that his art’s eclecticism and ambivalence offers a fascinating opportunity to examine a formative moment in the development of America’s plural modernisms,⁶ and to consider the

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³ The artist had visited Constantinople in 1909-1910, where he was impressed by Byzantine mosaic art. There is no conclusive evidence linking the artist to Architecture, Mysticism and Myth (1891), a text on the mystical symbolism of ancient, medieval and non-Western architectural form written by William Richard Lethaby, professor of design at London’s Royal College of Art, but this book did contain a chapter on the ancient symbolism of the “Jewel Bearing Tree,” a celebrated feature of the Palace of Constantinople, written about in medieval literature and poetry. Davies's interest in the symbolism of occult spirituality and comparative religion would have attracted him to such texts, and may have inspired the painting’s title, as well as its Byzantine formal elements. Lethaby, Architecture, Mysticism and Myth, (New York: Macmillan, 1892), p 94. Davies did own a copy of a similar book by Richard Payne Knight, The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology, (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1892).


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similarly diverse ways in which his contemporaries struggled to conceptualize the mind’s imaginative capacities.⁷

Alternately praised or condemned for his formal and thematic hybridization, Davies seems to stand alone as an artist (figure 1.4). Critical response to his work has commonly determined that it possesses “private, and therefore baffling vision,” circumventing any question of broader significance it may have offered his viewers.⁸ Even his devoted supporter, gallery owner William Macbeth (1851-1917) admitted “none has seemed to know exactly what to do with him or where to put him but, somehow, none seemed willing to let him alone.”⁹ Indeed, the psychology of dreaming itself occupied similarly unfixed epistemological terrain paralleling Davies’s work and its refusal to conform to ready categorization; this rich network of disciplinary intersections offered fertile, multivalent, and perhaps even rhizomatic territory upon which Americans built their understanding of the modern psyche.¹⁰ Americans could, and did, hold contradictory beliefs about the mind and about Davies’s painted dreams.

Although Davies was not alone in being designated a dreamer, his work sustained this reputation more than any other of his peers.¹¹ Hartmann’s characterization of Davies

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⁷ Dario Gamboni’s very provocative evaluation of the role of ambiguity in the construction of a modern esthetic has been influential to my argument. See Gamboni, Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art, (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).


¹⁰ For the philosophical and conceptual model of the rhizomatic structure of knowledge, and the ways in which an epistemic network can sustain multiple alternative meanings, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus (1980), translated by Brian Massumi. (New York: Continuum, 2004). My interest in envisioning this time period in light of these theories is inspired in part by Deleuze’s own fascination with Henri Bergson, whose philosophies lie at the heart of my project in chapter 4. See Gilles Deleuze, Bergsonism, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

¹¹ In addition to Davies, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Thomas Dewing, John Twachtman and Ralph Blakelock were all occasionally called ‘dreamers,’ or painters whose work possessed dream-like qualities. See, for example, Elliott Daingerfield, “Albert Pinkham Ryder, Artist and Dreamer,” Scribner’s Magazine 62, (March 1918), p 380; Sadakichi Hartmann referred to the “dreamlike tendencies” of Dewing’s paintings of women, “Thomas W. Dewing,” The Art Critic 1:1, (November, 1863), p 35; Giles Edgerton [Mary Fanton Roberts], “Pioneers in Modern American Art” The Craftsman 14:6, (September, 1908), p 598, called Twachtman “a dreamer of mysteriously beautiful dreams;” and Raymond Wyer reported “Blakelock was
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informed the artist’s supporters, but it also colored the commentary of his harshest critics. A review of Davies’s 1897 solo exhibition at New York’s Macbeth’s Gallery noted connections between his painting and his creative imagination but commented, although “Mr. Davies's catalogue speaks his dreams, it says nothing about nightmares,” followed by a critique of the artist’s nearly comical inability to master both draughtsmanship and color.12 Similar arguments about the virtues or vices of vague, ‘suggestive’ painting were made about fellow artists such as J. A. M. Whistler, whose work pushed at the traditional goals of art and boundaries of mimesis, and nurtured the growing influence of Symbolism.13 But Davies’s expansive reputation as a dreamer also situated him at the heart of coalescent beliefs about the variable nature of the mind, and even about consciousness itself.

Many of the terms I employ throughout the dissertation warrant definition, but as my research will show, these were neither fixed nor consistently employed as they arose and gained currency in America. For example, various kinds of Symbolist art and poetry, offering important precursors to the autonomous esthetic values of formalist modernism, were devoted to the exploration of how art can communicate meaning directly to the mind via essential, symbolic elements such as line, color, shape, and texture. These were not incompatible with the persistent iconographic references to Romantic and Neo-Classical traditions and the myth, fantasy, and folklore that shaped Symbolist painting. But as Symbolism took shape in Europe in the 1880s, emerging in the United States in the next decade, the strains of philosophical and scientific belief undergirding the movement’s origins were in dynamic flux, and were occasionally self-contradictory, thus the movement remains hard to delimit and poorly understood.14


13 Whistler’s art, now often characterized as representative of the loose movement defined as ‘Tonalism,’ also was seen in its own time as closely related to Symbolism. The parameters of Whistler’s Tonalist formal priorities and its reception are examined in the exhibition catalog, Like Breath on Glass: Whistler, Inness, and the Art of Painting Softly. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). I address further aspects of Davies’s relationship to Whistler in Chapter Two.

14 The problems of working on Symbolism have been widely acknowledged by many scholars, most helpfully in the recent summary textbook by Michele Facos, Symbolist Art in Context, (Berkeley, CA: 26
In similar fashion, and emerging at roughly the same time at the turn of the century, the concepts of ‘psyche’ and ‘psychology’ conveyed variable, unstable meaning. Pertaining equally to the deepest desires and hopes that Americans maintained about the soul, the science of ‘psychology’ as it took shape held out the promise that understanding the ‘psyche’—conjoining the perceiving mind and the mysteries of consciousness—would reveal enduring verities that transcended the period’s radical cultural, social and economic shifts. By the late 19th century, scientists and philosophers acknowledged the existence of an interior or secondary layer in the mind, variously called the doubled conscious, the unconscious, the subconscious, or in William James’s terms “The Hidden Self,” but its true function remained uncertain. Dreams, however, were a major means of access to this mysterious realm. As Symbolism and psychology expanded—in parallel and occasionally in concert with one another—these unstable terms acquired significance that maps onto an evolving episteme of the modern mind.

Fascination with the self and consciousness was a fundamental condition of modernity; examining the philosophical constructs underwriting the emergence of psychology in the 19th century, Mark Jarzombek observes how the new science of the mind “represents not only mankind’s liberation from uncritically accepted moral and pedagogical systems, but also the attempt to reclaim the power of the autonomous ego.” Critical responses to Davies’s work—situated historically between Symbolist assertion of the value of dreaming as a mode of transcendent and psychologically mobilized creativity and emerging psychoanalytic approaches to the dreaming unconscious — allow us to take

University of California Press, 2009), although her focus is on European Symbolism more than its American developments. Similarly, Patricia Mathews, Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender and French Symbolist Art, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), provides vital European cultural context as does Sharon Hirsh, Symbolism and Modern Urban Society, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). More work deserves to be done on American Symbolism, and I hope this present study makes a contribution to its expansion.

15 Deborah Coon, “Testing the Limits of Sense and Science: American Experimental Psychologists Combat Spiritualism, 1889-1920,” American Psychologist, 47:2, (1992), pp 143-151, examines the ways in which psychologists faced the problem of disambiguating the scientific goals of their discipline from the force of popular belief.


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a closer look at the manifold currents of thought circulating about the interrelated power of art and the mind.

Davies’s viewers encountered references to scientific theories about mind’s interior in a variety of ways that I examine in this project: in the analysis of Symbolist literature and poetry in American journals; in discussions in the popular press; and even in nascent forms of mass culture, spanning literature, comics, film and the world of high art. Many Americans were particularly fascinated by dreams in the decades spanning the century’s turn: artists and poets plumbed their nocturnal visions for new sources of creative inspiration, while representatives of the emergent science of psychology charted their causes, conducted statistical analysis of their content, and speculated upon dreaming’s evolutionary function. Akin to mesmeric trances or visionary hallucinations, dreams were a topic ripe for psychological speculation, but they pertained equally to philosophical theories about the metaphysical nature of consciousness itself.

A remarkable array of turn of the century scientists and philosophers explored the meaning of dreams: not only William James and Sigmund Freud, but also Edward Titchener, Havelock Ellis, Carl Jung and Henri Bergson. For psychology’s American founders such as James, dreams offered strong evidence of the mind’s fundamental duality, but they could also be transcendent mental states, occasionally bearing messages from the divine hereafter. After Freud, dreams became one of the most important

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therapeutic tools of psychoanalysis, containing fundamental keys to self-knowledge. Bergson saw them as powerful conduits through which one might comprehend humankind’s deepest memories and intuitive drives; Ellis believed they indicated an essential form of unconscious problem-solving. A kind of vision produced in the mind via the most formative of subjective experiences, dreams could nonetheless be charted, analyzed and studied scientifically, offering a map or guide to the mysterious territory of the psyche and even perhaps the eternal soul. Davies created work that occupies the conceptual space around and between these dynamic spheres of interchange.

Popular interpreters of scientific theories presented dreams as a powerful vehicle for understanding the self, but also saw them as a means to address para-scientific phenomena, to envision the world of the future, and/or a potential way to access the mysterious realms of collective human memory. Writing on “Dreams, Beliefs and Facts” for Overland Monthly, essayist Frank Medina argued that “all beliefs about the supernatural have arisen out of the dream experiences of primitive man;” his fellow journalist Elizabeth Bisland attested in the North American Review that in dreams when “the barrier between past and present melts away, all his ancestors are merged with the individual.” She further stated, “the tireless brain, forever turning over and over its heirlooms in the night, is seeking here an inspiration or there a memory to be used in that fierce and complex struggle called Life.” Perusing sources such as these which were


23 In 1911, one popular magazine promoted the new science of psychoanalysis as “Freud’s Discovery of the Lowest Chamber of the Soul,” Current Literature 50, (May, 1911), p 513, while another promised that dream interpretation would offer “Real Mind Reading,” The Independent 71, (December 7, 1911), p 1258.

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readily available to Davies’s viewers in contemporary magazines, and which constituted a vital kind of authority for American readers, I consider an equal measure of science fact and science fiction in the construction of a field of knowledge that constituted modern ‘reality,’ a force spanning science and faith that James termed “The Will to Believe.”25

Art critics, establishing their own professionalism and disciplinary purview, were as responsive as the artist to these currents in American intellectual culture, and therefore I rely upon their commentary as a means to comprehend how they invited Davies’s viewers to approach his work. Although his 1894 review did not identify any specific painting by Davies, Hartmann pointed to some of his frequent interests: the artist’s desire to capture the innocent wonder of childhood; his fascination with mythology, legend and folklore; and his depiction of female figures, many of them nudes, occupying nonspecific pastoral landscapes. All of these are demonstrated by one of Davies’s best-known works, his 1906 painting Unicorns, originally titled Legend—Sea Calm (figure 1.2); the painting’s mingled modernity and archaism typifies the characteristic style upon which Davies settled—before adopting Cubism briefly—in the early 20th century. A hauntingly spare seascape, the still and mirroring waters express a curious flatness against which mythic figures stand out. Two women inhabit the foreground shoreline, next to a grove of fragile, stippled trees; one stands in quiet attendance, wearing an antique robe while the other, naked and seated, entertains a herd of white unicorns. For an artist whose images were commonly described via musical analogies, this is a strangely silent painting.

Many kinds of art designated as modern at the century’s turn invited consideration of the relationship between their distinctive, unusual or abstract aesthetics and individual creative autonomy; the expanding liberation of painting from the dictates of mimesis courted investigation of art’s psychological effects. Hartmann identified exemplary qualities in Davies’s unconventional form as well as his evocative subject matter; he referred to the “hidden symbolical meaning” in his art’s “lawless composition,” and “the color and suggestiveness of the drawing.”26 Other critics also remarked upon the enigmatic, distinctive and significant aspects of Davies’s paintings. A summary essay of

26 Hartmann made these claims in two essays, “Art Gossip” (1894), and in The Daily Tatler, (November 18, 1896).
critical opinion about Davies published in 1918 included the observation of Guy Pene du Bois, writing for the New York Evening Post, who claimed, “Mr. Davies is forever routing interior thoughts [...] that come into [our life] in a rare moment which the next one will dissipate;” with “mysticism in full bloom,” his was “an art as personal as handwriting.”27 As historian Sarah Burns has proposed, beginning in the Gilded Age, “The currency of individualism rose in direct counterpoint to the encroachment of corporate culture,” and the quality of an artist’s imagination was a sign of his or her “healthy and specialized subjectivity.”28 Dreams were the most subjective of mental phenomena.

But Davies’s paintings did not merely convey images arising from his own dreaming imagination: critics and viewers saw reflections of their dreams in his work and examined his figures for signs that they might also be dreaming. His suggestive, sometimes awkward, and often inscrutable forms facilitated his work’s ready slippage between the multiple possibilities presented by the dream metaphor. As Mieke Bal has proposed, art is also often experienced in terms likened to dreaming: between nightmare and reverie, our encounters with objects explore forms of sensation and cognition that can be surprising and unsettling in equal measure.29 Art’s tripartite conversation between artist, viewer and object takes place in the inner space of our sensing mind as much as in the material world. Granting pictorial structure not only to the strange content but also to the experience of dreaming, Davies offered his viewers ways to understand how perception and imagination mutually inform one another in the construction of consciousness.

Davies’s formal habits, especially when they are odd, beckon, lure, and draw a viewer towards them, eliciting interrogation of their peculiarity. Through attention to visual detail I argue for layers of potential meaning his paintings may have offered in conjunction with his reception. Yet just as dreams offer themselves to multiple analytical approaches, the fact his paintings could attract confusion as well as praise shows that

27 Quoted by an anonymous reviewer in “The Visionary Adventures of Mr. Arthur B. Davies,” Current Opinion, 64:3, (March, 1918), pp 204-205.
28 Sarah Burns Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp 41 and 120.
within his own time Davies’s art offered diverse, and sometimes oppositional possibilities. Building a contextual framework that evaluates the conceptual tools viewers might have used to understand his work, I provide analysis of popular essays on dreams, painting, parapsychology, spiritualism, psychology and psychoanalysis, published in mainstream magazines and in professional publications, in order to observe how in light of these many discourses, Davies’s painting worked on and in dialogic collaboration with critics and viewers.30

A rich intellectual culture informed his broad audience: many of his patrons were middle-to-upper class, educated, and urban Anglo-Americans such as Lillie Bliss, one of the co-founders of the Museum of Modern Art, who was an affluent, well-respected daughter of a prosperous and politically connected New York textile magnate.31 The artist had numerous female patrons. But Davies maintained a professional network that bridged this social world and the bohemian enclaves of Greenwich Village’s artistic and literary culture; Mabel Dodge, John Sloan, Floyd Dell, Rockwell Kent, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Clara Potter Davidge of the Madison Gallery were all friends of the artist.32 Davies similarly attracted followers from many facets of the American critical spectrum. Royal Cortissoz, conservative critic for the New York Tribune, wrote with some initial hesitation in the 1890s but eventually became devoted to his work. More middle-ground critics and patrons such as Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. and Duncan Phillips also favored Davies, as did promoters of avant-garde painting such as Hartmann and New

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30 Discussion of dreams and psychology appeared in the pages of many mass-market magazines in America, such as the Century, Scribner’s, The Forum, The Arena, McClure’s, The Independent, Current Opinion and The Nation. In addition to these, widely circulated art magazines such as International Studio, Arts and Decoration and Vanity Fair presented discussions and examples of modern art intended to reach a broad audience of readers, and helped to establish the canon of modern painters in America.

31 Cornelius Bliss, Sr. was also Secretary of the Interior in McKinley’s cabinet. Bliss and Davies were close friends, sharing a love of music as well as art. Bliss had one of the largest collections of Davies’s works, as well as an extensive collection of modern painting that she assembled under his guidance, which formed a crucial core of the Museum of Modern Art. Upon her death, Bliss’s bequest assured that Davies’s works entered every major American museum. For more on Bliss and her legacy, see Rona Rooh, "A Noble Legacy," Art in America, 91:11, (November 2003), pp 73–83; and Alfred Barr, Jr., The Lillie P. Bliss Collection, (New York: Plantin Press, 1934). For Davies’s influence on Bliss, see Judith Zilczer, “Arthur B. Davies: The Artist as Patron,” American Art Journal 19:3, (Summer, 1987), pp 55-83.

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_York Sun_ critics James Gibbons Huneker, Henry McBride, and Frederick James Gregg.33 Many fellow artists wrote admiringly of his contributions to modern painting: William Glackens, Guy Pene du Bois and Marsden Hartley.34

Davies embarked upon his career at the height of the Gilded Age in a particularly fraught historical moment, as many scholars have shown. Delineated in very broad strokes, this was a period during which many of his viewers—members of the intellectual, bourgeois elite whose purportedly ‘anti-modern’ impulses Jackson Lears and Kathleen Pyne have studied—expressed deep anxieties about rising materialism, the loss of spiritual certainties, the rapid advances of modern technology and the upheavals brought about by profound demographic shifts: urbanism, immigration, industrialization, rapidly changing gender roles and economic disparity were on the minds of many of Davies’s viewers.35 These offered great challenges to Americans’ sense of emotional and psychic stability; the prosperous patrons who fostered Davies’s early successes and the young, intellectual radicals of Greenwich Village expressed equally grave concern over the problems represented by the fragmented self.


But enforcing a model of antagonism between 'modern' and 'anti-modern' forces
doesn't adequately capture the rich, complex and contradictory fabric of American
society in these transformative decades. Genteel 'anti-modern' escapism met progressive
modern science in the study of the mind. In the decades of the early 20th century,
American anxieties and sapped energies paralleled a spirit of energetic reform, aimed at
social control and regulation by means of enhanced education, improved and rationalized
institutions and the benefit of scientific knowledge. Amid these drastic changes and
contradictions, Davies's viewers sought both solace and certainty: the former in models
of utopian sentiment, therapeutic introspection, spiritual transcendence, or psychic
release, and the latter by means of the knowledge offered by scientific fact.

Examination of what Davies's beholders knew—or thought they knew—about
dreams illuminates the intersections in which art, scientific knowledge and contemporary
social issues meet: taken together the varied sources I examine constituted a modernity
equally focused on the subjective interior realms of dreams, introspection, and the
unconscious mind, and the ostensibly more objective realms of rational science and the
professionalizing world of art criticism. Davies’s art and its reception also illustrate the
inherent variety of intellectual culture; his viewers and critics alternately embraced and
resisted change. While I take Davies’s paintings and drawings as my most valuable
primary documents, the stories that emerge from the disparate, even eclectic textual and
visual sources I examine are about the fluid transmission of ideas across and between
interrelated fields, and help us comprehend his work's surprisingly broad appeal.

Examining the early history of psychological approaches to the dream alongside
their discussion in art allows me to evaluate two proposals: one concerning dreams in
terms of their objective perceptual relationship to unconscious vision and the other
concerning the more idiosyncratic, experiential exploration of consciousness. In an

36 Studies of the progressive spirit animating the turn of the century, and the quest for rationalization and
reform are offered by Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*,
Wang, 1967). A compendium of essays on the progressive era is provided by Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore

37 Although his work encompassed a wide range of media, spanning paintings and drawings, and in the
‘teens exploring prints and sculpture and even textiles in his plans for decorative tapestries, I limit myself
to his paintings: works to which the majority of his viewers would have had ready access, those that were
shown in his exhibitions and those that his critics most frequently addressed in their reviews.
interesting parallel, as Caroline Jones has shown, these two separate but paired interests also correspond loosely to the critical discussions of artistic modernism which became dominant in the mid-20th century, positing Greenberg’s perceptual analysis of rigorously intellectualized formalist practices on one end of a spectrum of critical responses to modern art and polyvalent, embodied experiential practices at the other. 38 Whereas the first, and more dominant, was concerned with a disciplined, rational approach to understanding form and vision, the other explored unified and multi-sensory approaches to the experience of art; conjoined together in the earlier responses to Davies’s work, these dynamics reveal how his viewers saw him as an artist with a profound interest in the relationship between soma and psyche, body and mind, objective reality and subjective self.

A measure of Davies’s success in his own time lies in how his work could resist the drive towards increasing modern regimentation of sight and rationalization of the body. His interior vision refused to be easily disciplined. In the face of the rising mechanistic forces governing modern science, technology, economy and society which came to dominance by mid-century and induced Davies’s lapse into obscurity, many viewers in the early decades welcomed pictorial models of the interior self’s productive hybridity and indeterminacy. Attending to the complexity with which Americans regarded Davies’s role as a dreamer helps us see how the negotiation of terms was at stake for his critics and his viewers, just as it helps us see the artist and his work in light of its intellectual context.

Of course this explanation is a fabrication convenient for the purposes of historical categorization, whereas in the actual practices of reading reviews and examining art few of Davies’s viewers would have made any such distinctions. But as much subsequent mid-20th century art criticism seemed to organize itself around bifurcated poles of sensory regimentation versus embodied expression, just as psychological research into dreaming organized itself relative to the divergent goals of behaviorists, advertisers, and psychoanalysts—not to mention other developments

shaping the discipline’s unruly course—we might regard this early moment as one that was especially formative. In American art it marks a point of dynamism and contradiction in juxtaposition to the more firmly regulated modernist categories created and upheld by a later generation of professional critics whose aspirations for their own field paralleled efforts for definition within psychology.

The temptation to assert fixed boundaries for these overlapping discussions is strong; ‘context,’ however, doesn’t simply exist, but is constantly produced and negotiated. It emerges in the selection, rejection, absorption, and interpretation of various sources of influence, as I do here. My desire is not to posit a new ‘intermediary’ phase between 19th and 20th century ‘mindsets’ as if these could be ascertained with fixity, but to examine the ideas that emerged, flourished, interacted and evolved within the span of an individual’s professional career. Nor do I intend to ‘rescue’ an unfairly maligned artist; deep changes in the structure of knowledge about the mind and its relationship to faith and consciousness offer explanations for why Davies’ enigmatic, transcendent, and metaphysically evocative fantasies seem strange to so many viewers today, and why his work fell so deeply out of favor as modernism was defined by ever more finely crafted categorical boundaries. But Davies’s art and its reception provides an excellent representative demonstration of the overlapping epistemologies during his moment—between art, science and intellectual culture—and let us witness the making of one generation’s compelling vision of the modern American inner self.

Davies embraced his developing reputation in the 1890s, reading psychological texts on emotion, states of mind and the nature of the unconscious, such as Alfred Binet’s *On Double Consciousness* (1896) and *The Psychology of Reasoning* (1899) and keeping brief records about the content of his dreams. He jotted down quotations, words, short phrases or ideas about images that he evidently planned to make use of in his work in a small book in which he formulated his beliefs. One passage observes: “Art is nature seen through the prism of an emotion,” and stating, “this flower of the consciousness is not to be felt under [...] cool examination, but in sleep—a dream or an intoxication.”

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39 Davies’s notebook, although undated, probably was begun in the 1890s. On one of the back pages, scribbles in what appear to be a very young child’s hand suggest that one of Davies’s children was given the notebook to keep him entertained while the artist was busy sketching; as his children were born in 1893 and 1895, respectively, this indicates a date of roughly 1895 or 96, which corresponds with the publication
Paraphrasing Belgian painter Alfred Stevens, Davies added to his fellow artist’s observations about the power of art by referencing the equal power of dreams.\footnote{Alfred Stevens’s comment “painting is nature seen through the prism of an emotion” had initially been made in his small book, Impressions sur le Peinture, published in an English edition as Impressions on Painting, (New York: G. J. Coombes, 1886).}

As Davies’s own words attest, ‘Dream’ was a multivalent term: readers consulting The Century Dictionary in the 1890s learned that to dream meant being partially conscious, and “with confusion or incoherence,” aware of thoughts and images during sleep. But the entry also traced connections to “visionary thought or speculation,” to “indefinite thought or expectation,” and “that which is presented to the mind by the imaginative faculty.”\footnote{The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopedic Lexicon of the English Language, Volume II (New York: The Century Co, 1895 (1889)), p 1765.} As dreams existed on a continuum of psychic phenomena alongside nightmares or delusions, their meaning was negotiated in complex ways by scientists and laypersons, by artists and their viewers. While a dream could be a site of generative creative reverie, conjuring aspirations, wishes and hopes, it could also give rise to dark terrors and uncontrollable urges that spoke to our primal, even animal nature as Francisco Goya’s 1799 etching The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters demonstrates so powerfully; the inner experience of dreaming encompassed the entire gamut of emotional possibility.\footnote{Davies admired Goya, collected postcards of his images as inspirational material for his own work, and owned a copy of his Tauromachy etchings; a print of this etching from the series Los Caprichos was donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1918 by the Knoedler gallery. The full epigraph for this image is: “Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels.” For Goya’s influence on Davies, see Bennard Perlman, LLA, pp 101 and 119. For his personal collection of books, see Anderson Galleries, Books on the Fine Arts: The Library of Mr. Arthur B. Davies, to be sold by his order, (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1926).}

Davies did not only paint pleasant escapist fantasies and childhood reverie: as I will show, some of his work such as Wild Wind of Vision (figure 4.8) traded in the dark or bizarre realms of nightmare while other paintings flirted with the problematic stimulation of sensual or erotic fancy, as in Sleep Lies Perfect in Them (figure 3.2). His paintings helped viewers understand the panoply of dream-encounters and reckon with their necessity to an understanding of the full extent of human experience. Yet, they commonly resisted critical evaluation as erotic fantasy or intoxicated hallucinations,
which is a measure of the meaning that critics found in Davies’s art’s indeterminacy. Its main stream appeal was secured by this inherent interpretive flexibility that allowed some viewers to ignore issues that seem obvious today, finding alternatives to insane delusions and suggestive eroticism in his work’s exploration of perception.

If Davies registered the ambivalence his viewers and critics both felt coming to terms with modernism’s changing relationship to the perceiving subject, in labeling Davies a dreamer, Hartmann presented subsequent writers with a powerful and flexible tool that secured his paradoxical success; the construct of dreams provided seemingly self-evident answers to the paradoxes his work presented, it explained both his psychological sophistication and perplexing naivete, as these contradictions were not incompatible in the world of the unconscious self. Dreaming also explained his mysterious public persona; it permitted critics to explain his inscrutability, his changeability, his paradoxical modernism and archaic primitivism; and it spoke equally to his work’s compelling fascination and popularity.

Moreover, in a period when the terms of formalist criticism were not yet well established, the trope of the dream enabled critics to reference his work’s vague subject matter and idiosyncratic form without having to give specific language to what that meant. Reference to Davies’s dreams helped critics attend to the unusual, novel or even ‘poor’ formal properties they observed in the artist’s paintings, and articulate their affective power. They concluded that both what and how Davies’s painting communicated was via reference to dreams, an interpretive construct to which they could then bring their own subjective conclusions, seeing in his work, just as in their own unconscious visual cerebration, the possibility for individual meaning. Extending the metaphor to include the viewer’s dreams enabled productive play with his imagery and its esthetic means. Like a dream, his work at its best lay just beyond ready comprehension, which facilitated personal responses to it.

The phenomena of dreams met and intersected with unfolding scientific and philosophical investigations of optics and perception, between physiological explanations of the mechanisms of inner sight and their psychic and philosophical correlates. In the nineteenth century, questions pertaining to vision and representation had taken on enhanced significance as the observing subject was newly regarded in terms that differed.
from earlier centuries’ focus on the objectivity of seeing. As Jonathan Crary has shown, investigations into physiological optics attended to the subjectivity of embodied sight; vision became a heterogenous mode of knowledge, one dependent upon the body and its diverse operations. Jarzombek also addresses this dynamic, noting how for many early psychologists, “perception [...] was not a hapless encounter with the outside world through the passive senses, but a form of consciousness actively engaged with the world and working collaboratively with it.”

But if the eye was the organ of seeing, it was the totality of the mind and brain that provided the evidence of knowing. Forms of perception that took shape entirely within the mind—like dreams and imaginative visualization—were of necessity linked powerfully to consciousness and subjectivity. Occupying the interstitial space where art met the science of interior imagery, paintings of dreams or dream-like inner visions could offer imaginative escape into an immaterial world of spiritual possibility, but also could be regarded as a valuable kind of research: demonstrations of the mind’s fundamentally beneficial creative potential, and evidence of deep connections with our evolutionary origins. Davies’s particular gift was his ability to grant an equivalent to a dream-experience; when removed from the space of the mind and rendered on canvas, the conceptual distance between physiological and psychic explanations of dreams was collapsed, just as the distinction between physiological sight and psychological vision was complicated. Davies’s trade in ambiguity is once again crucial to that dynamic.

Although widely acknowledged as a common human phenomenon, one’s dreams could never be truly shared with another, giving rise to many essays attesting to extensive curiosity about how the dreaming psyche worked. Therefore, however much it may at times seem out-of-step with the work of his American peers, Davies’s work is a symptom, a product, and stimulus of the widespread interest the artist shared with his American audience regarding the operations of the human mind, and the insights they hoped to discover via scientific exploration of imagination, perception and consciousness. Helen Keller wrote about her dreams in the Century Magazine in November 1908, noting

readers’ fascination with her unique inner world: “it is assumed that my dreams should have peculiar interest for the man of science [...] they should reveal the world I dwell in to be [...] a vast solitude of soundless space.” Not so, she assured them: her imagination was much more vivid than that, as she observed, “a dream [...] should have a warp of substance woven into the woof of fantasy.” She also observed, “Beyond the border-line of slumber the investigator may not pass with his common sense rule and test [...] but once across the border we feel at home, as if we have always lived there.” With an apparent scientific desire to understand dreams, but aware of the need to use imaginative tools appropriate to the task, Davies gave representation to this vivid sense of plausibility and import Keller describes as common experiences of dreaming, even when their imagery is illogical, strange and patently un-real; his work’s value lay in its ability to evoke and communicate what was otherwise entirely hidden within the individual mind and explore its perceptual capacities.

Despite a potential focus on personal experience implied by dreams, interpretation of Davies’s painting in these terms also presented critics with some unavoidable problems, as it does to scholars today: contemporary viewers were equipped with very little information about the artist as he guarded his privacy fiercely and did not like to talk about his work’s meaning. To understand his reason for this one must know a bit more about the artist’s biography. Born in Utica, New York to a devout Methodist shopkeeper and minister, Davies studied briefly with a local landscape painter, Dwight Williams, before his family moved to Chicago, where he took classes at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts beginning in 1881. This enabled him to spend the next two years working as a draftsman for the Santa Fe Railroad in New Mexico Territory and Mexico; after a brief return to Chicago, he moved to New York by 1888, where he found work producing magazine illustrations for The Century and Saint Nicholas. He met Hartmann around that time, and began nurturing his connections in the art world.

In 1890, he met and courted Lucy Virginia Meriwether, resident physician at the New York Infant Asylum. A formidable woman, she was one of the first to be granted her own independent license to practice medicine. Impressed by her ambitions as well as their shared passion for music, the two married in 1892, after buying a farm in Congers,

New York, located about an hour outside of New York City by train. Davies intended to pursue a career as a farmer and painter, but this did not prove a success. Despite his love of landscape Davies had little aptitude for farming, and he missed the city’s many cultural pleasures: he was an ardent fan of music, theater and dance. Even before the birth of his first child in 1892, Davies took an apartment in the city and enrolled at the Art Students League, returning to the family on weekends. A second son was born in 1895, followed by two children who did not live beyond infancy, but this separate domestic arrangement would continue throughout the artist’s life. Lucy stayed on the Farm, and Davies lived in town, especially after he met Edna Potter, his model and an accomplished dancer. When their working relationship became a sexual affair, he went to great lengths to conceal it from family, friends and patrons; he refused to subject his reputation to the damaging influence public admission of infidelity might have represented. Without divorcing Lucy, Davies convinced Edna to enter a bigamous relationship at some point between 1902 and 1905 when the couple took up residence in the city as man and wife, living under an assumed name: Mr. and Mrs. David A. Owen. Alfred Stieglitz’s only purchase of American art from the Armory Show was Davies’s drawing of Edna (figure 1.3). After his initial critical success at his first group show at Macbeth’s Gallery in 1894—a newly opened exhibition venue at 450 Fifth Avenue devoted to promoting American art—Davies became a regular exhibitor there. Macbeth nurtured his career, introducing him to department store magnate Benjamin Altman who funded Davies’s first trip to Europe in 1895. A second trip followed in 1897. Davies supplemented his shows at Macbeth’s with more exhibition opportunities in New York and further afield throughout the 1890s, and his critical reputation grew. After attracting attention in 1908

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46 Throughout her life, Lucy asserted that she knew nothing about his second relationship, although one speculates that she must have had suspicions, given how much time he spent away from their farm. According to Edna’s letters, written long after Davies’s death, he refused to divorce Lucy because she had threatened to cut him off from any contact with their children, or possibly to do violence to them. Lucy had a violent past, having killed her first husband during a domestic dispute in which he threatened her safety. The question of how much one should trust any of the parties in this story remains unresolvable; Edna’s letters, written when she was trying to gain financial support from Lucy, are emotionally overwrought. See Davies Papers, Box 5; Folder 2, (Davies Collection).

by participating in ‘The Eight’ show, widely hailed as a demonstration of a new modern spirit’s emergence in American art, his reputation as an insurgent and independent was secured, and he took part in other exhibitions of young moderns; he co-organized and showed in the 1911 "Independent Exhibition of the Paintings and Drawings of Twelve Men," alongside Rockwell Kent. Nonetheless, he also continued to court recognition at more established exhibition venues, showing Legend—Sea Calm at the National Academy of Design annual in 1908, just one month after the Macbeth show. These far-ranging connections in the art world made him an ideal facilitator among its various coalitions; in January 1912 when J. Alden Weir resigned from the American Association of Painters and Sculptors, an organization devoted to the promotion of patronage for American art, Davies assumed its presidency and took charge of many of the tasks preparing for the Armory Show; in the fall of 1912, after Edna gave birth to his daughter Ronven Owen, he traveled to Paris and London in the company of Walter Pach and Walt Kuhn, selecting the works of art slated for inclusion in the 1913 exhibition. The responsibilities of organizing and promoting the Armory Show in New York—and its subsequent venues in Chicago and Boston—occupied most of his time during those two years. However, he exhibited some new work informed by the formal language of Cubism between 1912 and 1914, when he commenced work on a mural commission for Lillie Bliss’s music room, in which his Cubist experimentation emerged fully-fledged. Davies also advised fellow artists and collectors such as Bliss and John Quinn on their purchases, and he became a collector of modern art in his own right, assembling the work of an impressive selection of artists: Cezanne, Picasso, Seurat, Brancusi, Leger, and Gris, as well as Americans Ryder, Hartley, Weber, Dove, and Marin. But Davies’s exploration of Cubism and non-representational form in his own painting was short-lived; like many of his fellow artists, he retreated from the most advanced investigation of avant-garde abstraction after World War I, during a period of rising inward focus in American culture.48

In his efforts to maintain separation between his private life and his public persona, Davies was unwilling to reveal too much, or for that matter to assert his own ideas in public as forcefully as some of his peers. While he nurtured many connections with patrons in New York's prosperous society, as well as friendships with intellectuals, bohemians and critics, he cultivated a reputation for remoteness and mystery, declining interviews. Very few of Davies's associates knew of his domestic circumstances; visitors were seldom allowed in his studio, and never without prior planning. Henry McBride later noted the artist could be "excessively furtive. Expansive enough [...] with a few chosen intimates," but he "dreaded contacts with the public at large." The few documents illuminating Davies's opinions that survive —mostly letters to patrons and friends—reveal sparse data about the nature of his personal beliefs and intellectual pursuits. Despite his knowledge about modern art, and his devotion to its patronage, he published very little about it. Moreover in the wake of the scandalous revelations made after Davies's sudden death abroad in 1928, at which point Edna informed Lucy about the couple's 26-year relationship, clandestine marriage, and the existence of their daughter, Davies's family and friends attempted to cover up or destroy evidence of this situation. Lucy tidied up what remained in Chelsea Hotel studio and destroyed much that might have illuminated the artist's life; in 1930 she held a bonfire of 61 of the artist's 'lesser,' unfinished or preparatory works. In 1929, a few exhibitions distributed his remaining work, and a sale of 450 objects dispersed his collection; a final memorial exhibition was held in 1930 at the Metropolitan Museum. The best existing archival

49 According to Perlman, Lillie Bliss, William Macbeth and Walt Kuhn are the only associates who knew about Edna. Many details about Davies's studio habits were provided by Wreath MacIntyre, who began posing for the artist in 1914 when she was fourteen, continuing to do so until 1928, just prior to his final trip to Europe. She did not know anything about Davies's private life until after his death, but shared many recollections of their working partnership in letters to Wright and Perlman. Copies of these are now in the Arthur B. Davies Manuscript collection; Box 11, series 7 and Box 14, folder 13, (Davies Collection).


51 Documentation of his work on the Armory Show consists mostly of administrative and bureaucratic records, revealing very little personal information.

52 Davies published only two essays, “Explanatory Statement: The Aims of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors,” Arts and Decoration 3: Special Exhibition Number, (March, 1913), pp 149-150, an articulation of his categorization of modern painting, (which Wright proposes was probably written by Guy Pene du Bois); and the foreword to Elizabeth DuQuene-Van Gogh, Personal Reflections of Van Gogh, translated by Katherine Dreier, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).

53 His letters with Lillie Bliss were burned according to the instructions she left in her will.

54 The event was noted as a great loss for the art world; "Bonfire," Time, 15, (January 27, 1930), p 40.
documents that remain are thus Davies’s letters to William Macbeth, the small notebook in which he jotted his thoughts and quotations about what he was reading, and a handful of sketches and dream-notes, found in his studio after the artist’s death but undated.55

Davies’s works themselves remain the best evidence of his interests, ambitions and philosophies, but they can be very difficult to analyze. Critics discussing his paintings were often imprecise in their references to specific work by title. Davies himself was inconsistent in how he labeled and dated his work, and Lucy posthumously assigned titles and dates to his paintings based upon her very incomplete knowledge of his career’s trajectory. Many of the works his critics discussed remain unknown or missing; in 1940 a fire in a barn at the Congers farm where the family stored his remaining unsold work caused the loss of drawings, paintings, tapestries and prints and an unknown number of corroborating materials. To make matters more complex, the artist often re-titled or even re-painted his early works, placing figures in previously unoccupied landscapes. If Davies ever kept a consistent diary, it was lost following his death, and when he wrote about his ideas in letters, he expressed them in terms that to present-day readers seem as enigmatic, circular, and imprecise as his work. Motivated by the obscure, hermetic language of Symbolism, he was more often cryptic or poetic than specific in his descriptions of fellow painters’ work and their shared interests.

Considering five roughly chronological episodes that map onto the stages of Davies’s career, each chapter addresses a different aspect of the productive contradictions underlying Davies’s work. Chapter two examines Davies’s early critical reception in light of Hartmann’s Symbolist claims for the artist and addresses the artist’s career between 1894-1897, when he began to attract public recognition for paintings such as *Music in the Fields*, (ca. 1893-95) and *Flora* (ca. 1897). Evaluating Symbolist art and poetry in terms of musical analogies, sensory confusion, correspondences between the material and immaterial realms—and above all with penetrating psychological acuity—Hartmann introduced this movement to his readers. Asserting that imaginative states of mind such

55 The Macbeth letters and other documents pertaining to Davies are housed in the Archives of American Art, Washington DC. Scrapbooks from the Macbeth and Ferargil galleries contain exhibition reviews, letters to Macbeth and Frederick Newlin Price are on microform reels numbered N68-15; D23; NMc6-37 in the satellite Archives offices. Davies’s small leatherbound notebook, letters to his wife Lucy, a few sketches and dream notes reside in the Davies Collection, Delaware Art Museum.
Introduction: “A picture that cannot be described”

as dreams were fundamental Symbolist themes, Hartmann provided evidence of Davies’s affinities with this still largely European movement. For Hartmann, the characteristic that particularly distinguished Davies as a Symbolist and psychologically astute artist was the artist’s grasp of the power of ‘suggestion’ in form, rather than the direct depiction of material fact. Emphasizing the vague but evocative qualities in Davies’s work, the critic staked a novel and radical claim in the mid-1890s for art’s psychological value, and placed the painter of dreams at the heart of this development.

As psychologists took up the study of the human mind’s normal and abnormal functioning, attempting to understand the nature of the ‘unconscious’ and its role in modern selfhood, Hartmann’s assertion that Davies’s dreams were psychological, offered a link between the artist and the professionalization of modern psychology. Chapter three connects Davies’s work to what American viewers believed about dreaming from the vantage point of scientific fact and fiction, examining the development of psychological knowledge relative to the artist’s work between the late 1890s and 1910. Creativity and dreaming were closely linked not only to art but also to modern science as psychologists such as Edward Titchener, George Trumbull Ladd and William James undertook research into dreams and the imagination, shaping the discipline in pivotal ways. In this chapter, I examine popular explanations of dreams presented in Scribner’s, Harper’s New Monthly Magazine and Popular Science Monthly alongside Davies’s works such as The Voyage (n.d.) and Sleep Lies Perfect in Them (ca. 1908), and I argue that the artist’s work sustained multiple interpretative possibilities onto which viewers and critics projected shifting beliefs about dreaming, the unconscious and the scientific value of psychology itself.

The fourth chapter considers the connections that Americans made between dreaming, new religious movements and various forms of Spiritualism between 1895-1910, addressing the ways in which psychic and spiritual research overlapped with scientific knowledge and art. Many Americans did not perceive firm boundaries between the different approaches to the dream proposed by psychologists, spiritualists and psychic researchers, although these may seem deeply incompatible today. Dreaming also inspired the foundation of new religions such as Christian Science and Theosophy, and new mental therapies such as New Thought. Davies’s biographers have shown how he was
steeped in the culture of spiritualism and the turn-of-the-century quest for transcendent, mystical knowledge; his interest in the psychology of dreams was part of the same preoccupation that led him to participate in séances, pursue astrology and cultivate interest in Theosophy.56 Davies, along with James and Theosophy’s founder Helena Blavatsky, hoped that the secrets of the unconscious might reveal ineffable kinds of knowledge—even, perhaps, proving the existence of a realm of reality beyond the limits of the tangible world. I argue that Davies’s enigmatic paintings were readily affiliated with the quest for spiritual and philosophical meaning in the realms of the unconscious; his attention to interior perception allowed him to be equally attuned to material and ethereal ‘reality.’

Davies was still hailed as a dreamer in the wake of new approaches to the dream introduced in America after 1909, when Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung visited and lectured in the United States. Thus, the fifth chapter sets the artist’s work in dynamic interaction with new psychoanalytic currents of thought about primitivism, the libido and the liberating power of the unconscious. In his Interpretation of Dreams, first published in an English translation in 1913, Freud presented dream-interpretation as a vital therapeutic tool and an essential key to understanding the human psyche. While it would take several more years for the public to embrace psychoanalysis, the years between 1909 and 1916 saw a marked increase in discussion of dreaming as a means to greater self-knowledge in the popular press, as many Americans accepted psychoanalysis in terms that accommodated or mitigated its problematic emphasis on sexuality, blending Freudian and Jungian theories with ideas promoted by French philosopher and psychologist Henri Bergson.

In 1913, Bergson also published two essays concerning the operations of dreaming in The Independent, arguing for a profound connection between perception, intuition and memory, and tracing the methods through which physiological sensations

56 Brooks Wright and Bennard Perlman’s research gleaned much from what little archival materials are available on Davies, and I have been indebted to their work, although each is occasionally somewhat vague about the sources of their information. Both scholars worked closely with the Davies family, and pored over boxes of letters and scraps once housed at the family farm; Perlman donated much of this material, his own research files, as well as those given to him by Wright, to the Delaware Art Museum, where they are housed in the Helen Farr Sloan Library. Wreath MacIntyre also proved a vital source of information to Perlman on the artist’s habits, but much of the information that she offered, as well as that of the Davies family, is anecdotal.
merge with the transcendent, unconscious wishes of the soul. He maintained that investigations of the worlds of the dream might yet unify rational science with the ongoing quest for mystical meaning, nurturing human intuition and inspiration. Essays on dreams published in the years during which Davies was preparing for the Armory Show of 1913 influenced his ongoing exploration of psychological phenomena, as he sought a means to investigate the continuities linking ancient and modern minds in collective effort for self-realization. I argue in this chapter that Davies and his critical reception were closely bound up in these shifting discursive parameters, and measure the competing and intersecting interpretations of Freud, Jung and Bergson against Davies’s depictions of peacefully promenading or vigorously struggling primitive bodies in archaic settings, created between 1909 and 1914.

The final chapter investigates yet another significant configuration of overlapping beliefs that informed Davies’ reception as a dreamer, and demonstrates the contradictions accompanying the development of abstract art in the United States. Seeking a new pictorial ‘harmony,’ Davies used Lillie Bliss’s invitation to decorate her music room to unite his Symbolist interests in musical correspondences with Cubist geometric faceting, creating a hybrid new style that attempted to equal to the abstract communicative power of music, and the disjointed, dissociative experience of dreaming. Drawing on his legacy as a Symbolist dreamer, he tapped into another compelling interest he shared with many Americans: the psychological phenomenon of synaesthesia. Linked to dreams in a 1910 essay in Popular Science Monthly entitled “The Symbolism of Dreams,” Havelock Ellis argued persuasively for synaesthetic connections between sensory perception, musical references, symbolic language and the ‘dissociative’ effects of dream-imagery.57

Embracing the influential Symbolist metaphor of synesthetically intertwined senses in his musically-inspired, hybrid painting, Davies also strove for a synthetic form of art that spoke to the viewer’s perception, mind, and spirit simultaneously. As he attempted to arrive at unity between abstraction and representation that would become a galvanizing form of American modernism, critics championed him as a painter whose pictorial dreams were a kind of visual music.

Yet, the incomprehension with which some writers greeted these ambitions presages the shift in his identity that would result in his growing irrelevance, as he became an inscrutable ‘anti-modernist.’ Critics defined the moderation of avant-garde experimentation in Davies’s work after World War I as ‘return’ to an idyllic portrayal of transcendent fantasies and a retreat into hermeticism. In his paintings of the later 20s, Davies re-covered previously well-established ground, offering his viewers the comforts of Arcadian classicism and reassuring predictability; the mural cycle he painted between 1924 and 1926 in the lobby of International House, a New York graduate student residence, was the culmination of his aspirations, beliefs, and ideas. But falling deeply out of favor as critics by mid-century celebrated more abstract, libidinally expressive, politically radical and intellectualized forms of modern painting, the murals were removed in 1949, and Davies’s work fell into obscurity.

Subsequently, psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis diversified, expanded and acquired new institutional applications in America; new priorities instituted by behaviorism took hold in psychological science, and different associations between psychology and art took shape. Beginning in the 20’s, amid the rise of Dada and Surrealism, American art critics and viewers explored the unconscious in art by emphasizing cathartic release, subjective symbolism, and more embodied models of expressivity. Surrealists in the 30s invented a new iconography of dreams, drawing upon later Freudian theory, and as these took hold in American art and mass culture, Davies’s Arcadian fantasies looked less convincingly dream-like, and insufficiently expressive of the psyche’s unfettered creative energies. A later modernist model of the dynamic, irrational and libidinal unconscious mind was no longer congruent with Davies’s evocation an inner realm of transcendent spiritual reverie, eternal myth, fluid imaginative potential, suggestive formal habits and discursive ambiguity; the contradictions he had fruitfully exploited in his form and iconography became liabilities whereas they once had been his signature strength. By the middle of the 20th century, his art no longer communicated a ‘modern’ understanding of the mind, and his once-transparent dreams became opaque.

But in his heyday, Davies’s critics had been acutely sensitive to the ways in which his work related to his moment’s priorities and contingencies, registering his useful
inconsistencies even in their praise. Henry McBride, reviewing *The Jewel Bearing Tree of Amity* in November 1913, subjected Davies’s painting to an almost clinical analysis; “to have post-impressionism, cubism, dynamism and even disintegration suddenly appear all in one picture by Davies is surprising, to say the least. Yet the new picture [...] exhibits all of these symptoms and even some new ones as yet undiagnosed [...] Be not alarmed. The picture is a good one.” The critic found great merit, even scientific value, in Davies’s playful interrogation of form and fantasy; in his 1928 obituary of the artist, McBride explained both his work and his character by claiming that his “mannerisms are easily explained in modern psychology. Davies’s brain teemed with ideas and he wished to give himself up to realizing them.”

By 1952, Forbes Watson charted the path of Davies’ rise to popularity and subsequent ‘decline’ as an artist when he lamented, “Although he collected modern French paintings and was one of the first American buyers of cubist paintings, he did not, to judge by his own efforts, understand cubism […] he had no sympathy with the world he had created.” And as Brooks Wright firmly concluded in 1979, “His mind, which always remained flexible, open and catholic, could aspire to forms of art that his hands could not realize.” The discrepancy between these opinions leads me to wonder: whose was the failure to understand? Perhaps it is not Davies’s but our comprehension of how it was possible to be modern in 1913 that now lacks sufficient flexibility. His work’s power to reveal meaning emerging and proliferating from the dreaming imagination lies amid these divergent attitudes to emergent modernist esthetics and cultural priorities that define the ways in which Davies’s reputation fluctuated. Between the 1890s and 1920, dreaming engaged differing—even seemingly incompatible—constructs of subjectivity and objectivity; their exploration held out the possibility of enhanced understanding of modern identity.

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Introduction: “A picture that cannot be described”
Introduction illustrations

1.1 *The Jewel-Bearing Tree of Amity*, ca. 1912 (Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute of Art, oil on canvas, 18 3/4 x 40 1/2")

1.2 *Unicorns*, formerly *Legend—Sea Calm*, ca. 1906 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 18 ¼ x 40 ¼)
Introduction illustrations
Introduction illustrations

1.3 *Reclining Woman*, 1911, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, pastel on gray paper, 8 3/8 x 11 ½”)

1.4. Arthur B. Davies, ca. 1905, (Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum)
Introduction illustrations
Chapter Two:

“A suggestion of a higher ideal:” Davies and the psychology of Symbolism, 1894-1900

“A work of art contains always a suggestion of a higher or ideal existence as a child suggests a perfected woman.”

Arthur B. Davies

In identifying Arthur B. Davies as “a dreamer and a painter” in 1894, Sadakichi Hartmann (1867-1944) responded to his work both strategically and intuitively, attending equally to content and form. Hartmann noted how Davies’s frequently mythological subjects were dream-like, but he also observed some distinctive formal qualities differentiating the artist’s work from more conventional narrative or allegory; he argued that Davies’s “figures merely form [...] a part of the surrounding landscape, of no more importance than a tree or a bit of sky or water,” and that “his nudes are mere decorative spots,” capturing the spirit of Davies’s indeterminacy. But Hartmann also specified some of the artist’s manifest objectives: “to render childhood (the conventional emblem of purity) more sensuous, and to chasten the temptative qualities of womanhood, which are considered sensual in this hypocritical world of ours.” Addressing the ways in which the figures in Davies’s paintings—nude or otherwise—engaged the realms of sensory response and imagination, Hartmann identified one of the great virtues of the artist’s work: his strategic ambiguity. The artist’s ability to paint dreams was the key to his distinctive gifts.

These descriptive indications set Davies’s work apart from mainstream painting in contemporary America: monumental landscapes; grandiose, Classically inspired figural

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1 Note scribbled on a prescription slip from Hunt and Gregorius, Apothecaries. Undated. Series 1: Box 1; Folder 7. Arthur B. Davies Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum. (hereafter Davies Collection.)
2 Sadakichi Hartmann, “Art Gossip” The Art Critic, 1:2, (January, 1894), p 40, unsigned review.
3 Ibid.
4 Dario Gamboni, Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art (New York: Reaktion Books, 2002), evaluates the widespread impact of ambiguity in late nineteenth century painting, and argues that this kind of art, leading towards formal abstraction in the twentieth century, engaged the viewer’s mind and perception in an active way, inviting viewers to employ their imagination in determining meaning in art. Gamboni finds evidence for this trend in a broad range of artists’ work, especially painters associated with symbolism such as James Ensor, Odilon Redon, and Paul Gauguin.
subjects of the American Renaissance; and anecdotal realist works, all of which had been featured in the recently concluded Columbian Exposition of 1893; Davies had visited the exhibition the previous May. 5 His own paintings, exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1891 and 1893, at the Water Color Society’s annual exhibition in 1892 and 1893, and featured more prominently at William Macbeth’s gallery in April 1894, seemed of a different character; they were fiercely individual, imaginative, romantic and novel. 6 Hartmann believed they revealed Davies’s acutely modern sensibilities: his appreciation of contemporary currents in art and literature as well as in the theory and practice of painting, and his awareness of the visionary power of the imagination as demonstrated increasingly by modern science and philosophy. European Symbolist painters and poets also showed these modern interests, but their work was just beginning to earn recognition in America in the 1890s, and they were accepted with caution and careful negotiation: their connections to the parallel Decadent movement in art and literature generated a measure of hesitation for some viewers. 7

Dreams, because of their distinctly subjective and immaterial properties, were common subjects favored by Symbolists; they espoused the visions of the imagination as purely interior forms of perception that could nonetheless be expressed in art. This

5 Indeed, Hartmann also wrote about the works of art on view at the previous year’s Columbian Exposition in the same volume of The Art Critic that contained his first reference to Davies. He determined that the “Art Exhibition was a mediocre one,” and that in the American section in particular, “an over-abundance of imagination does not seem likely to inflict brain-fever on American artists.” Although he visited the fair, Davies did not exhibit there. For more on the art selected to represent the standard of excellence and ‘national’ concerns at the Columbian Exposition, see Carolyn Kinder Carr, ed. Revisiting the White City: American Art at the 1893 World’s Fair, (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1993). Sarah Burns’ analysis of the controversies surrounding the forms of narrative versus idealist art exhibited at the fair also offers an insightful presentation of many of the issues dividing American critics and viewers in the 1890s, especially consideration of nudes. See her chapter “Populist Versus Plutocratic Aesthetics,” in Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp 300-327.

6 Hartmann’s “Gallery Notes” in the third and final issue of Art Critic called attention to Davies’ inclusion in a show of Independent artists mounted at Leavitt’s Gallery on Broadway from February to March 1894, which was followed by another exhibition opportunity in a group show at Macbeth’s Gallery in March of that year. William Macbeth included five of the artist’s works in an exhibition of “Figure Subjects by Seven American Artists;” Davies also exhibited at the American Water Color Society Annual that year.

7 Decadent artists and poets were linked to widespread fears about cultural decline proposed by German physician and cultural critic Max Nordau in his sensational book Degeneration. An English translation of Degeneration, containing his condemnation of Symbolist currents in culture, was published in February 1895, and it immediately generated heated debate. Most American critics disapproved of the negativity of the book, and they did not uniformly see art and culture as symptomatic of cultural decline, according to Linda Maik, “Nordau’s Degeneration: The American Controversy,” Journal of the History of Ideas, 50:4, (Oct.-Dec., 1989), pp 607-623.
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chapter examines Davies’s work and early reception between 1894-1900 in light of Hartmann’s affiliation of the artist with Symbolism; during these years, Davies began to hold regular solo exhibitions at William Macbeth’s New York gallery and gained critical recognition in the press beyond Hartmann’s initial favorable mention. Hartmann not only established important commonalities between the painter’s art and European Symbolist iconographic motifs by labeling Davies a dreamer, he also connected the artist’s formal experimentation to investigation of the mind’s fundamental operations. I argue that Davies’s paintings epitomized this goal: his work, like Symbolist art and poetry, explored realms of immaterial truth; sought spiritual and material ‘correspondences’ and investigated inter-medial relationships between different forms of art. Above all, it demonstrated the imaginative power of allusive evocation.

Hartmann was quite clear about the link he set forth between Davies and Symbolism; in a subsequent evaluation of Davies, published in 1896, the critic praised the artist’s “musical intensity” and “highstrung talent,” claiming that “he may be like the French Symbolists,” referencing their shared propensity towards vagueness, musical correspondences, and the incipient abstraction of their ‘decorative’ painting. In Hartmann’s promotion of Davies, the artist’s affinities with French Symbolism also offered benefits to the emergence of a distinctly American art, expressing the particular virtues of individualism and inventiveness. Hartmann articulated the qualities he esteemed most highly in March 1894 in his essay, “A National American Art.” He argued in favor of “the true artist who creates his own atmosphere wherever he goes;” for “individuality” in the promotion of “an American art, which would be characteristic of our country;” and for painters who “will test their talents in new realms.”

8 Davies’s very first one-man show was in Chicago at Frederick Keppel’s gallery in 1895; he had solo shows at Macbeth’s in 1896, 1897 and 1901, while his work was also exhibited in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia in 1896, and in London in 1899 at the International Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers.

9 Hartmann, [unsigned], “A Word About Mr. Dodge and Mr. Davies,” The Daily Tatler, (November 18, 1896), p 7.

10 Hartmann, “A National American Art,” The Art Critic, 1:3, (March, 1894), pp 44-49. Employed in his late teens as an occasional assistant and translator for Walt Whitman, Hartmann shared the goal of establishing a distinctively American form of art with the eminent poet. Writing in Boston, Hartmann mentioned a diverse range of artists in this essay specifically, especially ones with local appeal: Childe Hassam, Edmund Tarbell, Frank Benson, and Joseph DeCamp. Although endorsing Symbolist precepts, he did not mention Davies in this essay nor did he list the names of any Symbolist individuals.
his prototypical artist, who might be “an idealist, a dreamer, a mysticist,” to embrace not only the imaginative poems and stories of Edgar Allan Poe, but also the writing of Charles Baudelaire and the tenets of Symbolism.\textsuperscript{11} Hartmann’s concurrent praise of other Symbolist-inspired artists in addition to Davies—such as Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, James Abbott McNeil Whistler, Albert Pinkham Ryder and Thomas Dewing—similarly called attention to musical, poetic idealist and decorative properties in their painting, and sought to nurture the associational value between their ostensible content and their increasingly expressive, intuitive, evocative and abstracted form, in art and poetry alike.\textsuperscript{12}

But beyond endorsing the artist’s thematic, literary and musical connections to Symbolism, Hartmann also sought to define the formal qualities that make Davies’s painting seem peculiar, malleable, mutable, idiosyncratic, enigmatic and decorative. Amalgamating Symbolist precepts that he derived from his knowledge of European painting and poetry, Hartmann proposed something valuable and new resided in Davies’s work—something vital, American and above all, “suggestive.” Hartmann’s preference for modern, proto-abstract, Asian-inspired esthetic principles came to the fore in a review written in 1896, when he distinguished Davies as “one of the leading representatives of that branch of modern art of Japanese origin, the suggestive sketch.”\textsuperscript{13} Although Hartmann doesn’t mention Whistler, a parallel with the established expatriate is implied.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{11}] Demonstrating the cross-pollination of ideas that took place between America and Europe, Poe’s Romantic, gothic imagination provided incitement for many of the French and Belgian Symbolists to pursue occult and mystical themes. Baudelaire published translations of Poe’s stories and poems in 1852 and 1857; subsequently, more of them were translated and published by Stéphane Mallarmé in the 1880s and 90s.
  \item[\textsuperscript{12}] Hartmann, [unsigned], “Thomas W. Dewing,” The Art Critic, 1:1, (November, 1893), pp 34-36; “Puvis de Chavannes,” The Art Critic, 1:2, (January, 1894), pp 30-31; and numerous brief references to Whistler dispersed throughout a number of the critic’s other essays and reviews.
  \item[\textsuperscript{13}] Hartmann, The Daily Tatler, (1896), p 7. (Italics are in the original.) Hartmann, born of a Japanese mother and German father, was a devoted advocate of Asian art and Japanese esthetics, publishing a book on the topic, Japanese Art, in 1903. He became a friend of Ernest Fenollosa, curator of Asian art at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, and a promoter of Arthur Wesley Dow’s emerging art and pedagogy, which would substantively shape the work of abstract American painters in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, such as Georgia O’Keeffe. Hartmann perceptively identified ‘oriental’ esthetic qualities in the work of Thomas Dewing, Abbott Handerson Thayer, John Twachtman and Dwight Tryon, all of whom share many of Davies’s formal habits: simplified compositions, soft color tonalities and emphasis on suggestive vagueness. In his criticism, Hartmann was an ardent supporter of these values in distinction to what he perceived as the limitations of “occidental mankind;” specifically, he opposed all forms of moribund traditions, stale allegory and conservatism. While many of these influences stemmed from broad trends in art and craft production initiated by the Aesthetic movement, Hartmann’s heritage and upbringing made him especially attuned to these forces shaping American modern art. On the importance of Hartmann’s
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Despite his considerable praise, Hartmann was not blind to how some aspects of Davies’s painting seemed discomfiting, awkward or otherwise unconventional. In the same 1896 review, Hartmann observed: “his technique is often amateurish, his color is nearly always muddy, seldom realizing tone and hardly ever color, his drawing is negligent; of composition one cannot speak, as he never attempted any composition, but seems satisfied with turning out hundreds and hundreds of scraps and fragments.”14 Once again, Hartmann refrained from identifying a specific work, but made general comments that his readers were invited to measure against memories of paintings they may have seen at the artist’s first New York solo exhibition held at Macbeth’s Gallery in March of that year.

Yet, these apparently disapproving comments paradoxically identify those qualities Hartmann found significant and ultimately praiseworthy, distinguishing Davies as a leading representative of the new “suggestive, ultra-individual art.”15 Referencing his forthright modernity, Hartmann called further attention to the artist’s exploration of form; his “experimentation fever” resulted in “obscure depth” and a trend leading towards “disconnected, partly visible figures.” Hartmann remarked how Davies showed a “new individuality [...] whose efforts unmistakably bear the traces of a remarkable talent, if not of genius.”16 The critic arrived at the conclusion that Davies—along with two other distinctly individual American painters Julian Alden Weir and John Twachtman—was among “our most intelligent artists.”17

Davies was not merely an ethereal Symbolist visionary: in Hartmann’s opinion his astute means of picturing the imaginative power of the human mind lay in his

15. In 1936, Meyer Schapiro commented upon the trend in modern art towards value of such hermetic ‘individuality,’ that Hartmann participated in fostering, and the pervasive, reflexive assumption that this was a form of ‘liberation,’ noting: “An individual art in a society where human beings do not feel themselves to be most individual when they are inert, dreaming, passive, tormented, or uncontrolled would be very different from modern art.” See “The Social Bases of Art,” published in Schapiro, Worldview in Painting—Art and Society, (New York: George Brazillier, 1999), p 128.

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suggestive, ambiguous images that captured both the form and phenomenal experience of dreaming, and they expressed something important about the conditions informing modern consciousness. By highlighting provocative and captivatingly enigmatic properties in Davies’s paintings—deliberate awkwardness in his spaces and figures, compositional anomalies, indistinct contours and unconventional color harmonies—Hartmann affirmed an essential connection between the artist’s formal pursuits and modern psychology: the critic proclaimed with authority, “the striking characteristic of his suggestiveness is of psychological origin.” 18 In fact, Davies’s penetrating insight into the source of creative inspiration—his ability to tap into the ‘inner voice’ of his subjective imagination—was what most distinguished Symbolist art about dreaming and Davies’s art as an extension of dreaming. I contend that by setting forth Davies as an explorer of unconscious visionary experience, Hartmann asserted a vital connection between psychology and the subconscious, celebrating and nurturing modern, psychologically attuned aspects in the artist’s painting, and establishing important precedents for the formalist esthetics he would later promote as a member of Alfred Stieglitz’s circle of artists and critics in the early years of the 20th century. 19

Observing Symbolist inspiration in Davies’s art is not at all new; yet although prior writers have registered this connection, few have sought to evaluate the specific ways in which it related to the artist’s form operating in tandem with his subject matter, or have considered how crucially these matters relate to the emergent conceptualization of psychology. 20 I propose that a thorough understanding of Davies’s significance for his

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18 Ibid.
20 The foremost authority on American Symbolism remains Charles Eldredge, whose introduction to his important study American Imagination and Symbolist Painting, (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979) examines some of the ways through which American readers and viewers were introduced to this movement. Yet, Eldredge does not engage formal connections to the psychology of dreaming, as I propose to do here and throughout the dissertation. Wanda Corn, The Color of Mood: American Tonalism, 1880-1910, (San Francisco: M. H. De Young Memorial Museum, 1972), provides a more nuanced examination of the formal properties of American art’s connections to psychology by means of its emotional affect, and discusses associations with Symbolism, but does not discuss Davies.
viewers lies in this crucial conjunction: his art reciprocally informed and was informed by intersecting Symbolist discourses concerning psychology, imaginative painting and the abstract potential of suggestion. In the sections that follow, I present an interwoven story. I first establish Hartmann’s awareness of European Symbolist fascination with the transcendent, immaterial experience of dreaming, and determine its connection to psychology. Next, I explore how he and others introduced Symbolism to American audiences, situating Davies’s growing reputation as an ‘Idealist’ dreamer in relation to ‘Decadence’ on the one hand, and the promotion of imagination as a vital property of the human mind on the other. Lastly, I discuss the ways in which Hartmann’s endorsement of “suggestion” in Davies’s painting allied its vague content with its psychologically engaged form, engaging the viewer’s active, creative participation in determining its significance.

Hartmann’s initial critical support stimulated Davies’s early career. The exact circumstances under which the two met in New York around 1889 are unknown, but the artist and critic were both young and motivated, seeking public recognition, patronage and financing for their art and their credentials, respectively. They recognized shared interests, and forged a friendship nurtured in the heady world of New York’s art societies, clubs and exhibition venues. Both possessed a burgeoning appreciation for emerging Symbolist ideas about immaterial and abstract values in art. Nixie, painted around 1893 (figure 2.1), gives a fair indication of the kinds of images Hartmann referenced in his

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21 Hartmann arrived in the United States in 1882, and worked for a period as an assistant for Walt Whitman. He returned to Europe for several extended stays in the later 1880s and 1890s, during which time he continued his education in literature, the arts, music and the theater, and familiarized himself with the cultural milieu of many European cities: Belgium, London, Munich and Paris in particular. He had sound connections in America’s publishing world, spoke several languages and demonstrated his credentials to speak with authority on a wide variety of art movements. For more biographical details, see George Knox, *The Life and Times of Sadakichi Hartmann, 1867-1944*, (Exhibition Catalog, University of California, Riverside, 1970), which establishes a useful trajectory for Hartmann’s unusual family and upbringing; Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, (1991), also provides important cultural context that sheds light on Hartmann’s particular interests, if not his many eccentricities and antagonistic personality.

22 Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, (1996), pp 26-30, attests to the value of the clubs, associations and opportunities for networking in New York, including the Art Students’ League, where Davies took classes in the early 1890s.

23 Hartmann composed a Symbolist-influenced poem in 1890, which he dedicated to Davies; *The Hours of Midnight*, unpublished mss. (Special Collections, New York University); as cited by Bennard Perlman, LL.A, (1998), p 73.
criticism of Davies, works he might have seen in visits to the artist’s studio. It provides an important example of the artist’s formal ambiguities, as well as referencing longstanding connections between female figures and the immaterial properties of the unconscious mind, a tradition in American art that Kathleen Pyne has valuably discussed.

Featuring a lithe, nude, dark-haired water sprite—an alluring trickster familiar in Northern European folklore—the painting renders this creature of fantasy in very physical terms. She sits on the banks of a body of contrastingly dark water; a spray of delicate, stippled vegetation at right partly conceals her lower limbs. She rests her left elbow on a rock and adopts an attitude of contemplative reflection, made literal in the reflection of her body in the water below. Its murky color suggests layers of hidden depths and alludes to the Nixie’s seductive threat, as she is poised to lure unwary victims to a watery death. But the water’s mirroring surface denies us visual access to the dangers that lie beneath. We attend instead to the painting’s orchestration of compositional lyricism: as the figure leans to the right, her arm extends to the painting’s left, creating a surface line that gracefully echoes her body’s contours at hip and waist, and invites our eye to follow the long silhouette established by her body’s pale color against the dark vegetation and water.

Although visibly naked, her body is not uniformly rendered, varying between the tight edges at her neck and shoulder, and regions of less distinct softness at her groin; these inconsistencies invite sustained effort to see her clearly. We strive to perceive her through the affective power of dreams to make us feel their reality as we inspect her form, pondering its strangeness. Working to bring the figure out of the hazy dimness, we linger on passages of blurry insubstantiality: her face, her left breast, and her slightly parted legs. The water’s reflection awkwardly echoes the pose of her crossed ankles at the painting’s lowest edge, but as her toes barely touch its surface, her duplicated lower limbs generate odd effects, bidding us to examine these supple, elongated limbs and realize the tantalizing references to the figure’s sexual allure. It is hard to see how

24 Perlman, L.L.A., (1998), p 72, suggests that Girl at Pool, now known as Nixie, was the most likely among the paintings in Davies’s studio that Hartmann evaluated.
Davies’s invitation to dwell on the eroticized figure’s ostensible sensuality “chastens the temptative qualities of womanhood,” as Hartmann claimed, unless the experience of looking is displaced into the realm of the dream, where it can be both explained and contained as a product of imaginative fancy.

The painting is typical of Davies’s muted, shadowy palette during these years, and has undoubtedly darkened over time; it is hard to verify the rich color harmonies that many critics celebrated. However, it ably demonstrates the artist’s compositional emphasis and handling: Davies’s technique favored manipulation of thickly layered paint, harmonized tonal values and smeared or rubbed-in marks that to Hartmann expressed a refreshing lack of literalness. The warm, dark colors imply a saturated atmosphere, but the glowing, light-filled background is indistinct, and it is thus difficult to imagine this figure occupying real space. What Nixie most calls to mind in its smudged facture and ambiguous spatial setting is a psychological mood—the temperament of which is hard to put into words; Hartmann identified this as the ‘decorative’ force of the lone figure in nature, a “soul atom of the material universe.” According to Hartmann, these interests characterized Davies as an artist uniquely qualified to render the imaginative aspects of dreaming as a form of “thought which underlies all his work.”

Hartmann was indeed qualified to discern and describe the Symbolist themes he perceived in Davies’s paintings, as well as their connotation with dreams. Born in Japan and raised in Europe, he began his career as an art critic writing essays for the

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26 Joseph Czechstokowski, “Introduction,” *Arthur B. Davies: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Prints*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), pp 11-48; Perlman, LLA, (1998), pp 55-56. As Davies embraced the goal of becoming a painter in emulation of the artists already acknowledged as ‘great’ in Gilded Age America, he experimented with many different approaches to technique, including emulation of Albert Pinkham Ryder’s notoriously unstable methods. As a result, as Perlman notes, many of his early works, coated with resins and varnishes, have darkened considerably. Davies did not easily settle upon a ‘signature’ style or palette; he experimented with technique, form and medium throughout his career.

27 ‘Decorative’ was one of the key terms that were associated with Symbolist painting, after being employed by French critic G.-Albert Aurier in 1891 to reference works that spoke immediately to the mind, via the pure language of form, composition and color. See his 1891 treatise on Gauguin, “Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin,” *Mercure de France*, (March 1891), pp. 155-165, quoted in Henri Dorra, ed. *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995). Aurier’s concluding summary of symbolism’s five basic tenets offered crucial definition to the movement’s visual interests. He called for Symbolism to adopt a mode of painting that was “Ideist, Symbolist, Synthetic, Subjective and Decorative,” by which he meant that Symbolism should communicate immediately to the conjoined mind, senses and spirit.

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Philadelphia newspapers in the mid-1880s, and he became a well-known figure in Boston’s literary circles between 1887 and 1889. Moving frequently between East Coast cities, Hartmann spent several years in New York, but returned to Europe often to complete his cultural education at museums, galleries and salons, and to write for American journals. Hired by the McClure's magazine syndicate to serve as a roving reporter addressing French trends in art and culture, Hartmann spent the winter of 1892-93 in Paris, familiarizing himself with its heady circles of avant-garde art, music and poetry, and the topics that most animated their salons, such as emergent psychological theories.29

Hartmann was acquainted with Symbolist artists and critics—especially those affiliated with its idealist variant—through Stéphane Mallarmé, who became a good friend to the young American.30 Beginning in the 1880s Mallarmé had become the center of a group of vanguard French artists and writers; his Tuesday literary salons attracted Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Odilon Redon, James Abbott McNeill Whistler and Auguste Rodin, as well as Hartmann.31 The young American would subsequently champion the

29 McClure’s was an inexpensive mass-market magazine, appreciated for its price and lavish illustrations; soon after being founded in 1893, its circulation rivaled the more well-established magazines as Century and Scribner's. See Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850. v. 4. 1885-1905, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), pp 589-607. Hartmann’s education in Symbolist belief was extensive, however rapidly obtained; on assignment, he interviewed many of the most prominent artists, writers, and poets of the day, including J. A. M. Whistler, Claude Monet, and Maurice Maeterlinck, Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, all of whom he discussed in The Art Critic in 1893-94. Hartmann also familiarized himself with the work of artists he did not personally meet but whose ideas were widely discussed in Symbolist magazines, newspapers and art circles, including Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Paul Gauguin, and Maurice Denis; his interest spanned the resolute idealism that distinguished the art of Puvis, the introspective fantasies of Khnopff and the morbid perversities of Felicien Rops. Hartmann and Samuel McClure quarreled and severed their ties before the critic could make much of a contribution to the magazine. A biography of Hartmann is provided by Jane Calhoun Weaver, in her introduction to the critic’s collected work; see Weaver, Sadakichi Hartmann, (1991), pp 1-48.

30 Mallarmé introduced Hartmann to many formative concepts and European writers of Symbolist poetry, but the sophistication of his criticism of Symbolist poetry and the climate of the fin de siècle suggests that he had been already investigating these themes. Hartmann, “A Tuesday Evening with Stéphane Mallarmé,” The Art Critic, 1:1, (November, 1893), 9-11, described this literary salon as the place where Mallarmé held forth on Symbolist precepts in “mysterious and harmonious words,” and credits Mallarmé with introducing the French Symbolists to the work of the British Pre-Raphaelites, artists who were also favored by Davies. In this essay, Hartmann also set forth some of his earliest pronouncements on the meaning of symbolism in poetry, describing the hallmark of Mallarmé’s style as “intelligible unintelligibleness,” a paradoxical statement which Hartmann hoped would express the individual and poetic meaning that Symbolism demonstrated.

31 Weaver, Sadakichi Hartmann, (1991) p 2. Merrill had tried to establish a following for Symbolism when he lived in New York between 1887 and 1890, years in which he made the acquaintance of Hartmann. He was a fellow admirer of Walt Whitman, and a central figure not only at Mallarmé's salons, but also in the
work of many of these artists in his critical writing in the United States. This diverse
group of artists and their literary colleagues shared a range of approaches to modern and
Symbolist ideas, from the suggestive and proto-abstract nocturnes of Whistler’s paintings
to Rodin’s sculptural expressions of poetic imagination. Davies was also familiar with
these artists, and was equally well aware of trends in Symbolist poetry and ‘decadent’
literature: but as Hartmann somewhat defensively attested in 1897, “being [...] just as
well acquainted with decadent literature as he [...] I am in the position to trace the origin
of his work.”

When he returned to the United States, Hartmann was determined to found a new
magazine devoted to promoting modern concerns in American art, in which he could
share the valuable lessons he had learned about Symbolist art and theory. Settling in
Boston after soliciting support for his publication, he released the first issue of The Art
Critic in November 1893. The magazine was unfortunately destined to last only three
issues, running from November 1893 to March 1894; although short lived, its influence
reached far into the American art world and thus it brought Davies’s work and Symbolist
art to an audience of well established artists and critics. His list of subscribers was
limited to only 750 people, but it included the most important and well-recognized artists
and critics in America, representing a wide sampling of trends in painting and sculpture:
Augustus Saint-Gaudens, (Davies’s former instructor at the Art Students’ League), Albert
Bierstadt, William Merritt Chase, Childe Hassam, Thomas Dewing, Albert Pinkham
Ryder, George Inness, Robert Henri and Ernest Fenollosa numbered among the

occult circle of Sar Peladan, whose exhibitions of symbolist art at the Salons of the Rose + Croix were a
major spectacle in Paris in the 1890s. Merrill was also instrumental in introducing Americans to a variety
of forms of new French poetry via his translations of the work of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Joris-Karl
Huysmans, among others, for which William Dean Howells wrote the introduction: Stuart Merrill, Pastels
in Prose, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890). See Eldredge, pp 19-21, for the spread of Symbolist
influence in America, particularly in Boston.

32 “The Echo,” Art News 1:4 (June, 1897), pp 4-5.
33 Hartmann wrote nearly all of the essays in The Art Critic himself.
34 The publication of The Art Critic was brought to a halt by Hartmann’s disastrous ruin following his
performance of his controversial and sexually charged play Christ—and his subsequent arrest and
indecency trial. But during its brief run, The Art Critic introduced readers to a remarkably broad range of
artists and interests that found a growing receptivity both in America and abroad. See Weaver, Sadakichi
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magazine’s supporters. Hartmann’s inspiration, his energetic prose, opinionated writing and devotion to modern art in America had a lasting impact on its artistic culture.

Although his may not have been the very first introduction to the tenets of Symbolism to Americans, Hartmann was one of the earliest critics to dedicate himself specifically to its exploration and promotion, both in The Art Critic, as well as in later freelance commentary in the 1890s for Art News, Musical America and other cultural journals. His later critical writing for Alfred Stieglitz’ journals Camera Notes and Camera Work, which he began in the early 1900s, is also distinguished by a commitment to Symbolist concerns. Hartmann was also one of the first to emphasize Symbolism’s manifestations beyond literature in the visual arts—although the language he used could be circuitous—and to address the ways in which intermedial analogies and correspondences between distinct forms of art constituted an important part of Symbolist belief. Most significantly, he was the most consistent critic to trace crucial networks between imagination, psychology, dreaming and Symbolism, and the only one to explore how these related to pictorial form, establishing Davies as an important exemplar of modern American painting.

35 Weaver, Sadakichi Hartmann, p 2.
36 A few passing references to Symbolism had been made in earlier American essays such as the reviews of the Salon of 1876 written by Henry James, who tentatively praised proto-Symbolist tendencies in the work of Gustave Moreau. Henry James, “Art in Paris,” New York Tribune, June 5, 1876,1-2; and Nation, June 29, 1876, 415-416. See also Adeline Tinter, “Henry James and the Symbolist Movement in Art” Journal of Modern Literature, 7:3 (September, 1979), pp 397-415. Tinter observes that the ‘dream-like’ and idyllic landscapes of Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones were also profoundly influential for James.
37 A select audience of readers who sought out Symbolist art could indulge their curiosity in a few other specialized publications in addition to Hartmann’s, and these appeared in roughly the same years. For example, essays and poetry expressing Symbolist ideals, as well as reproductions of some examples of the work of Symbolist-influenced European artists and illustrators such as Aubrey Beardsley were distributed to a small audience of New England readers via The Chap-Book, published by Kendall and Brown in Boston beginning in 1894. Issues of the Chap-Book contained poetry by Bliss Carman, illustrations by Claude Bragdon, and essays on Mallarme and Maeterlinck. Although the magazine ceased publication in 1898, like Hartmann’s The Art Critic it helped familiarize readers with the poems of Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and their North American followers. Dreams were a common topic for contributors to this magazine: its very first volume contained a series of symbolist-influenced short stories by Percival Pollard, entitled Dreams of Today, a sequence of related tales published every few months between May and November, see Percival Pollard, “Dreams of Today,” The Chap-Book, Volume 1, (May-November, 1894). Within a few years, more magazines had embraced, if somewhat tentatively, the cause of explaining Symbolism in art, such as Louis Prang’s journal Modern Art, which published a brief definition of “Modern Symbolism” in its Autumn 1894 issue.
38 Weaver, Sadakichi Hartmann, (1991), pp 10-11 and 34-35.
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I. Symbolists and the Dream.

Davies partook in his fellow Symbolists’ drive towards authenticity and transcendence, both of which related to the movement’s fascination with psychology. Although it did not emerge as a distinct force in European painting and literature until the 1880s and 90s, Symbolism’s origins derive from the questing, Romantic spirit of the mid-nineteenth century; even when established it remained eclectic and loosely defined. Reacting with anxiety and a sense of loss to the perceived failures of prior nineteenth century certainties, currents of anti-materialist thought took hold in both Europe and the United States. Pervasive philosophical questions about the nature of the self and the immaterial realms of the spirit resulted in growing doubt about the answers that materialist science could provide, influencing the philosophical and scientific investigations of modern consciousness.\(^{39}\) Positivist philosophies buttressing earlier 19\textsuperscript{th} century scientific investigations of the mind and body were undermined in the rising climate of uncertainty. Pursuit of verifiable, rationally-ascertained truth mingled with irrational belief, as a young generation of artists, writers and their public embraced immateriality, ambiguity and contradiction; many gravitated towards explorations of interiority, expressions of perversity and all kinds of mysticism.

Symbolism’s earliest influence was in literature; Davies was most likely introduced to the movement and its many variants through poetry and prose. If Hartmann’s essays in The Art Critic offered readers some of the first discussions of Symbolism in the visual arts, followers of European poetry had been previously introduced to elements of Symbolist esthetics by literary journalist Aline Gorren. Her

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\(^{39}\) Patricia Mathews, “The Symbolist Aesthetic,” in Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender and French Symbolist Art, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pages 8-9, evaluates mysticism and its influence on the Symbolists. However, Jean Pierrot, The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) p 8, is careful to note that despite their opposite goals, the distinction between naturalism and Symbolism is not as sharp as some would emphasize, as in the 1880s they shared in common a fairly bleak view of the reality of the material world. This idea has also been explored in its American context by Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), who addresses the ‘crisis of cultural autonomy’: the failures of the rationalized, materially-driven market economy to deliver on its promises, and the perception of ‘unreality’ which drove Americans in search of authenticity and reaffirmation of spiritual consolations. However, my present study seeks to challenge any firm distinction between Modernism and Antimodernism. Whereas the drive towards therapeutic and imaginative escapism among American middle-class genteel elites may represent an attempt to overcome widespread anxieties as Lears argues, the parallel investigation of the mind was not necessarily ‘evasive,’ but could be equally modern and progressive.
essay “The French Symbolists” appeared in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1893; in this extensive summary of the work of Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Jean Moréas and Arthur Rimbaud, she traced explicit affinities between Symbolism, psychology and philosophy. As her essay appeared in the mass-market journal *Scribner’s*, she reached a far larger and more diverse audience than Hartmann’s *Art Critic*. 40

While Gorren stressed the mystical, esoteric and even medieval affinities of Symbolist poetry, as did Hartmann, she also found reason to define it as a manifestly modern movement in tune with as well as reacting to contemporary science. Gorren traced explicit connections between Symbolism, philosophy and her understanding of metaphysical trends in nascent French psychological theory; “In a recent French work on Psychology,” she claimed, “the last word of the science at present is summed up in the assertion that we are all evanescent expressions of an eternal unity.” 41 Hartmann concurred with her observation about Symbolists’ embrace of this new and as-yet-indeterminate science of the mind; “[Symbolists] delight in analysation [sic] of all psychological phenomena, and at times, their always mellifluous but hopelessly obscure and illogical language becomes a mere […] association of thought,” he affirmed. 42

This was a sentiment and a goal that Davies shared. Seeking a ‘signature’ means of distinguishing his work, he explored a variety of ways to express transcendent unity; he painted tranquil, atmospheric landscapes (figure 2.2), musical subjects such as *The Violin Lesson* (figure 2.3), and mythological figures such as *Nixie* and *Arethusa*, (figure

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40 Mott describes the popularity of *Scribner’s* in *A History of American Magazines, Volume 4*, (1957), pp 717-732, and he estimates the circulation figures of its very first issue in 1887 at about 100,000. It is likely that readers of American popular magazines were far more familiar with literary Symbolism than pictorial Symbolism in the 1890s, due to efforts such as hers. Indeed, Gorren’s essay was also not the first discussion of literary Symbolism in American magazines, as one year earlier, in *The Cosmopolitan*, T. S. Perry had written on “The Latest Literary Fashion in France” and Theodore Child, writing for *Harper’s Magazine* had briefly introduced “Literary Paris” in August of 1892; hers was, however, the most comprehensive and well-informed. See Rene Wellek, “The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History” *New Literary History*, 1:2 (Winter, 1970), p. 255, who summarizes the range of introductions to literary Symbolism American readers were offered in the popular press in the early to mid 1890s.

41 Gorren, “The French Symbolists,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, 13:3 (March, 1893), p 339. She continues “French modern metaphysics and science deny the duality of matter and spirit, and...all forms and phenomena [are] the manifestations of one eternal essence...” While she regards this as a form of science, she also sees in this trend a distinct rejection of materialism in favor of more profound and intangible forms of knowledge.

Chapter 2: “A suggestion of a higher ideal”

2.4). However formally varied, each reveals an artist figuring out how to express the compelling necessity of his inner vision, and shows Davies investigating the esthetic precedents set by others: Landscape pays direct homage to George Inness’s evanescent pastorals, while the Violin Lesson takes its cues from Whistler’s austere, formally balanced musical compositions. A more tightly-rendered but no less spare counterpart to his Nixie, Davies’s mythological nereid Arethusa shows a debt to established European precursors such as Ingres. Although not a direct copy of the French neoclassical artist’s Small Bather, of 1823, (figure 2.5) Arethusa reveals Davies’s efforts to demonstrate the standards of artistic achievement, even without training in Europe; mastery of the nude was an important qualification.43

Sitting half-naked on the banks of a river with her back to the viewer, Arethusa is nude but does not invite an eroticized gaze as intensely as Nixie; her averted concentration, looking off to the right at some unseen object, captures a delicate sense of the figure’s exclusive, inner world. A study in reflective mood as well as form, the painting’s mythological reference gestures towards the artist’s erudition, but the painting tells no readily identifiable story.44 The evocative form, rather than clearly established content, does the primary work of communicating: the solitary riverside figure conveys the layers of meaning that we wish to ascribe to her via its delicate color, subtle patterning and sinuous composition.


44 Nonetheless, in minimizing the figure’s eroticism, Davies may well further indicate his knowledge of mythology, as according to the story, Arethusa tried to maintain her chastity despite the sexual advances of the river god Alpheus; transformed into a fountain by Artemis, she attempted to remain pure, but Alpheus, being water, found a way to mingle with her in the end.
Chapter 2: “A suggestion of a higher ideal”

Mythological and literary references in Davies’s art—delivered by novel indeterminate form rather than legible storytelling—helped secure his reputation as a Symbolist. Hartmann’s 1893 introduction of Symbolism to American readers, and his subsequent evaluation of Davies, aimed to encourage the spread of the many esthetic priorities he saw emerging in fin de siècle France. He recognized that the poetry of Charles Baudelaire—whose poem *Correspondences* was published in 1857—had been a crucial precedent for artists and writers; Baudelaire’s investigation of the realms of the immaterial world set an example Hartmann believed would enhance the arts in both America and Europe.45 In *Correspondences* the French poet and critic argued for transcendent potential in sensory intermingling, such as in the rare condition of synaesthesia, and suggested that synthesis between different forms of the arts, such as painting, poetry and music, would lead towards ever more intensified forms of subjective expression. The language Hartmann used in *The Art Critic* in 1894 to urge the further enrichment of American art was deeply inspired by sensory and intermedial correspondences, as he claimed Symbolist art was like “soft singing, like cataracts heard in the distance, endlessly beautiful and suggestive, mysterious and powerful, which has been found an echo all over the globe...given rise by the help of Baudelaire to the French school.”46 Praising these sonorous, synaesthetic qualities in French art, he held it up as a model for modern Americans to emulate.

Invoking in his titles Swedenborgian investigation of a hidden double realm in which consummate meaning circulated, Baudelaire’s poetry also stressed the value of philosophical idealism above realism; he emphasized the communicative power of emotion and the power of the imagination to harness legends, mythology and dreams to the creation of art.47 By the 1880s, visual artists had adopted these Symbolist themes and

47 The 17th century scientist, philosopher and mystic theologian Emmanuel Swedenborg believed in a metaphysical plane of ‘correspondences’ between the material and immaterial world. Swedenborg kept a dream-journal in which he sought evidence of spiritual communion, and his ideas about how worldly substances and perceptual experiences revealed spiritual truths were profoundly influential to many Symbolist artists and writers, and their associates. Charles Baudelaire, for example, read Swedenborg avidly, while American landscape painter George Inness, an influence on Davies, was devoted to the organized religion of Swedenborgianism. For the influence on Inness and Symbolism, see Sally Promey,
pursuits; although he may not have known much about the work of his French contemporaries as yet, Davies's *Nixie* and *Arethusa* adhere to nearly all of Baudelaire's recommendations, while his musical compositions and harmonious landscapes explore synesthetic correspondences.

Setting important precedent for Hartmann's appreciation of 'suggestive' painting, Baudelaire also endorsed obscurity and vagueness in literature and the visual arts alike, encouraging use of recondite symbols to capture the immaterial exploration of meaning, a product of purely mental experience; in 1859, he lamented: "More and more, art is losing in self-respect, is prostrating itself before external reality, and the painter is becoming [...] inclined to paint, not what he dreams, but what he sees," ascribing greater value to imagination than mere visual perception. In the hallowed spaces conjured by art's dreamy properties, viewers would see beyond external reality, and envision a boundless world of possibility. Baudelaire established deeper fascination among Symbolists in the subjective value of the dream when he wrote in *Les Paradis Artificiels* (1860), "common sense tells us that the things of the earth exist only a little, and that true reality is only in dreams." This controversial book was popular with a later generation of artists and writers, particularly those drawn to its perversity or degeneracy, as the text also celebrated the liberated inspiration resulting from inebriation and smoking opium or hashish. It correlated poetic inspiration, dreaming, hallucinations and other purely interior mental states, the kind that Davies referenced when in his notebooks he compared dreams to intoxication. When Davies painted in a manner that was recognizable but


49 For more on Baudelaire's embrace of obscurity and symbols, and the influence of his writing on the Symbolists who emerged in the 1880s see Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp 47-48. Aside from the artists' general predisposition to anti-naturalism, their archaic style and iconography, and their broad interest in mythology, imagination, syncretism and religious mysticism, very little specific information was available about Symbolist art in America in the 1880s when French critics began to address its growing influence more readily.

50 Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination*, (1981), pp 24-33, discusses the influence of Baudelaire on the decadent spirit that, in his opinion, preceded and then paralleled the spread of Symbolism.

51 "The Art and Philosophy of Arthur B. Davies." Box 1; Folder 6. As mentioned in my introduction, Davies's undated, unpaginated notebook contained the following passage about the emotionally expressive properties of his art: "this flower of the consciousness is not to be felt under … cool examination, but in sleep—a dream or an intoxication" (Davies Collection). Hartmann, who died an alcoholic, had a reputation
Chapter 2: “A suggestion of a higher ideal”

blurred or distorted, as in his handling of space and contour in Nixie, he called forth relationships not only with dreams but also with other altered, and perhaps superior, visionary conditions.

Given Baudelaire’s encouragement, subsequent Symbolists devoted themselves to subjectivity and irrationality, and they wholeheartedly explored the capabilities of the unbounded unconscious and dreaming mind. As a purely interior and deeply subjective mental process, the idiosyncrasies of dreams offered challenges to traditional 19th century hermeneutic structures that the Symbolists also esteemed highly. Before they were understood by the nascent science of psychology, their unique illogic and peculiar visual qualities—as well as their similarity to the altered perceptions of drug-induced transports—seemingly thwarted any explanation of meaning located firmly in tangible fact and empirical reality. Their manifest strangeness even mocked the configuration of traditional narrative or poetics, and slipped between the boundaries separating different perceptual experiences.

The scientific study of dreaming was, in fact, gaining ground at this very moment. Extending beyond Hermann von Helmholtz’s influential studies of the perceptual capacities of the eye, published in the 1850s, scientists and their amateur followers paid increasing attention to seemingly visual phenomena that took place entirely in the mind. French studies of dreams by Alfred Maury, such as his Le Sommeil et les Reves, (1861), and Marquis Hervey de Saint-Denys’s anonymously published Les Reves et les moyens de les diriger, (1867) were particularly influential with artists as well as psychologists and neurologists. Although neither writer was a medical authority, their books were

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as a heavy drinker, while Davies’s letters to his wife occasionally reference her efforts to guide him towards a life of temperance.

52 See Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp 67-96, on Schopenhauer, Müller and other philosophers and scientists of perception whose studies of compartmentalized perceptual experiences were often confounded by the subjectivity of interior vision. Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Representation (1818) was later profoundly influential to many Symbolist artists.

53 Maury, Le Sommeil et les reves (Paris: Didier, 1861) minimized creativity and fantasy, but these properties were emphasized in the study by Hervey de Saint-Denys, Les Reves et les moyens de les diriger, (Paris: Amyot, 1867), a rare book containing detailed discussion of the lifetime of research that this linguist and archivist devoted to his own dream activity. In Germany, similar research was conducted by Karl Albert Scherner, who published his theories about the esthetic function of dreams in Das Leben des Traums, (Berlin: Heinrich Schindler, 1861). This book was less influential on the French Symbolists than those written in their own language. For more on the impact of Scherner and his visual emphasis, see
based upon careful, first-hand analysis; they not only found a wide readership, but were important to emerging psychological research. Maury, a professor of history and morals at the Institut de France, attended closely to the ways in which dreams made the memories of experience and the rules of ordinary life seem uncanny or strange, but also entirely plausible. He promoted the idea that in the slumbering imagination, dreams followed their own laws or unconscious logic, a postulate later promoted in scientific journals. His insistence on the function of memory in dreams became a central feature of contemporary psychological discourse, shaping experimental study, as it integrated with investigation of wholly internal forms of perception.

Hervey de Saint-Denys attributed dreams less to memory and more to sensory stimuli than Maury, and thus proposed an alternative model of dreaming. His book was also useful to artists; illustrating his repertoire of dream-visions pictorially in the engraved frontispiece (figure 2.6), he juxtaposed a scene of a dinner party attended by a naked woman with a series of panels of abstracted colored designs. These sketches alluded to mythic symbols, hieroglyphs and patterns; some loosely resemble the growth of mold, others are more angular, like the patterns seen behind closed eyelids. The illustration offered abstract formal analogies for the dissociative way that dreams work visually, as well as addressing their perplexing narratives. Artists inspired by his example, such as Odilon Redon (whose work Davies would soon discover), subjected traditional depictions of figures in space to modes of increasing abstraction; they explored the means by which pattern, distortion, smudging and blending of line and intensified color combinations might evoke dreaming’s paradoxical familiarity and peculiarity. Although it is not likely Davies would have seen Saint-Denys’s book,

paintings like *Nixie* shared aspects of its abstract visual language of interior perception, particularly in the stippling he employs to convey the abundant lushness of vegetation at the painting’s lower right.

Following the preliminary research these books inspired, in the 1870s and 80s, American and European scientists began to study dreams more deeply, publishing some of the first reports about their conclusions in the 1880s; but few as yet ventured much firm speculation about what dreams ‘meant;’ their very resistance to stable interpretation was part of their charm for Symbolist artists. Moreover, there were many different kinds of dreaming for scientists to investigate, beyond those that took place during nocturnal slumber: day-dreams, nightmares, idle reveries, childhood fantasies, sacred visions, intoxicated delirium, and many, varied intermediary ‘hypnagogic’ states that appeared when the conscious mind loosened its judicious control. Davies’s willing acceptance of his identity as a dreamer partook in this fruitful indeterminacy.

Despite their anti-materialist inclinations, Symbolists by no means abandoned the modern objectives of scientific inquiry. As the “discovery of the unconscious” came together in interrelated scientific and philosophical fields, artists and poets were fascinated by contemporary developments in psychology, neurology and psychopathology, but were in many cases equivocal about what science could prove conclusively. Many maintained faith in the mind’s occult powers, as studies of ‘double consciousness’ alluded to a fascinating duality in the self. French psychologist Alfred Binet’s research was typical, blurring the line separating neurology from metaphysics.

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1890s, but he certainly knew of him by the time he put together the Armory Show in 1913, at which Redon was featured heavily.

56 Julius Nelson, “A Study of Dreams” *American Journal of Psychology*, Volume 1 (May, 1888), p 367-401, is representative of such early American studies of dreams, as Nelson reported extensive data about their vividness, frequency and memorability, but was not concerned at all with their content.


58 Alfred Binet’s *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies* was published in an English translation in 1899, (Chicago, Open Court Press). Ellenberger considers the many interwoven threads of philosophical thought that gave rise to the widespread fascination with the modern self and its many layers that arose in the late 19th century. While the pursuit of mysticism is the topic of a later chapter,
Chapter 2: “A suggestion of a higher ideal”

Davies read and adopted his ideas; although Binet did not write specifically about dreams, Davies’s notebooks quote Binet’s publications liberally, especially his ideas concerning the mind’s duality, perception, mental imagery and the nature of the self. Davies copied or paraphrased observations that had the greatest bearing on Symbolist belief in the difference between external and internal visual stimuli: “Sensations and the phenomena of the outer world are different, sensations are not the real copies or images proper of things,” he scribbled. 59

But as much as scientific study of the mind and perception interested Symbolists, many also sought answers to the questions that science couldn’t solve definitively in forms of mysticism and spirituality. They turned to fields dynamically allied with psychology—such as philosophy and theology—in the hope that metaphysical or even forthrightly spiritual speculations might mingle with emerging scientific attitudes towards the phenomena of consciousness. 60 Dreams, crossing freely between occult belief and the sciences of consciousness, submitted equally to disciplined observation, rigorous analysis and riotous metaphysical speculation. Their strangeness, their visionary properties and their supernatural potential challenged many entrenched sources of authority, from empirical scientific fact to the institutional forms of religious doctrine that seemed increasingly irrelevant in an ever-more secular world. The discourses of psychology, Symbolism and mysticism were thus not separate but parallel occupations, part of the same wholly integral fabric of Symbolist culture. All pursued answers to the larger questions about the definition of reality, both the inner reality of the human mind and the

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59 Davies’ notebook, (Davies Collection). Many of the quotations that Davies copied into his notebook appear to derive not only from Binet’s writing, but are the psychologist’s theories as quoted and interpreted by Paul Carus, who wrote about Binet extensively in his Fundamental Problems: The Method of Philosophy As a Systematic Arrangement of Knowledge, (Chicago: Open Court, 1889). For more, see Chapter 4.

60 This topic is comprehensively addressed by Filiz Eda Burhan, Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth century Psychological Theory, the Occult Sciences, and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1979. Burhan’s argument, regarding the productive interrelationship between psychological science and the establishment of Symbolist priorities in art, informs my own, yet her focus on France is very specific to European forms of symbolist thought, few of which reached American viewers without significant challenges and alteration.
outer reality of the material world. As Hartmann noted in his analysis of the ‘fin de siècle’ spirit in France, the leading artists and poets of the age “are introducing a new religious worship and make the boldest investigations into all sciences and in particular into psycho-physiology.”

Artists whose work explored their own psychological interiority attempted to give the creative mind’s hidden complexity exterior form; Davies’s investigation of these themes puts him in good company with European peers such as Ferdinand Hodler, Odilon Redon and Maurice Denis, each of whom sought to enhance the dreamy vagueness of their work through enticing color, veils of heavily-worked pigment, odd juxtapositions of scale, indistinct contour, and increasingly abstracted, sometimes rhythmic repetition of shapes. Although it is unlikely he would have been very familiar with these painters’ work until their international reputations grew beyond Europe, Davies’s overseas travels in 1895 and 1897 brought him to Amsterdam, Paris and London, where he visited museums and galleries, writing home with particular enthusiasm about the Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti whose work was praised by Hartmann and favored by Symbolists.

Many Symbolist artists and poets believed that discoveries about the unconscious might unlock the mysteries of protean creativity; they also had a stake in evaluating how the strange but normal visions common in ordinary slumber related to the macabre hallucinations, fantasies and irrational apparitions of diseased minds. Artists took particular interest in the developing discipline of dynamic psychology, the definition of

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61 Linda Dalrymple Henderson introduces many of these ideas in “Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art” Art Journal, 46:1, (Spring, 1987), pp. 5-8. This entire issue of Art Journal was devoted to exploring symbolist themes in modern painting, and their overlap with other cultural manifestations.


63 For the influence of scientific models and metaphors on symbolism and Art Nouveau design, see Debora Silverman, Art Nouveau in Fin de Sibcle France: Politics, Psychology and Style, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Silverman observes, for example, the complex ways in which French artists such as Emile Galle turned to scientific knowledge as the basis of some of his designs for functional objects, suitable for display in a modern home.

64 Davies’s European travel was a crash course in art history; in letters to his wife he mentioned visiting the Rijksmuseum and the Louvre, and particularly noted his appreciation for Whistler, Albert Moore, Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George Frederic Watts. Letters from Arthur to Lucy; August-September, 1895, Niles M. Davies, Jr. Family Archives. See Perlman, LLA, (1998), pp 83-84.

65 Facos, Symbolist art in Context, pp 16-23, 84-89. Facos examines attempts by German graphic artist Max Klinger and Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler to capture the experience of nightmares in their work; she also addresses the mingled fascination/repulsion that attended Symbolists' endorsement of madness.
madness, and the experiments in hypnotism demonstrated by Jean-Martin Charcot and his
disciple Pierre Janet in Paris. Charcot researched the mental apparitions and
hallucinations of his ‘hysterical’ patients in his clinic, and many of his lectures were open
to the public. Whereas he had endorsed a ‘mechanical’ model of the brain’s
compartmentalized neural perceptual structures prior to in the 1880s, thereafter he
embraced the far more ambiguous terrain of the mind: using hypnosis and forms of
unconscious ‘suggestion’ as tools to access the elusive interior self by means of inciting
visionary trance states, Charcot’s investigations explored this still poorly-understood part
of the human psyche.

Symbolist artists saw aberrant states of mind as signs of the current state of fin de
siècle cultural crisis, as well analogies for their own kind of creative release. Charcot’s
categories of hysteria resembled Symbolist understanding of creative inspiration as a
state of mind that could involve visions, hallucinations, loss of conscious control and
embrace of emotional passions. Indeed, among supporters of Symbolism, some critics

66 “Dynamic” was a term that applied to the poorly-understood psychic nature of some forms of mental
illness, as opposed to the “organic” conditions that could be readily traced to lesions or injuries in the brain.
Press, 2004), pp 140-143.
67 Charcot’s weekly soirees at his home were also attended
by artists and poets as well as philosophers and
scientists. See Gamwell, Exploring the Invisible, pp 133-134, offers a thorough analysis of how emerging
modernist artists embraced the sciences of the mind, including the books on dreaming. On Charcot’s
influence among Symbolists also see Barbara Larson, “Mapping the Body and the Brain: Neurology and
68 Ellenberger, Discovery of the Unconscious, (1970), pp 89-101, discusses the value of hypnotism for
Charcot’s investigations of the mind, and the influence he had on contemporary artists and writers as well
as fellow scientists. Charcot became a widely known public figure, earning the nickname “Napoleon of
Neuroses,” and he influenced numerous students in addition to Binet and Janet: Sigmund Freud and
American psychologist Morton Prince both studied the techniques of Charcot at the Salpetriere. See also
Rosemarie Sand, “Pre-Freudian Discovery of Dream-Meaning: The Achievements of Charcot, Janet and
Krafft-Ebing,” in Toby Gelfand and John Kerr, eds. Freud and the History of Psychoanalysis, (Hillsdale,
NJ: The Analytic Press, 1992), pp 215-230. See also the essential discussion of Charcot and regulation of
the body in Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: Introduction, (New York: Random
69 As hysteria was newly categorized as a psychopathological disease, Charcot believed that the
unconscious part of the brain related to lower neurological functions and was ‘feminine’, meaning in his
terms that it was prone to impulses and weak, reflecting many of the Victorian era’s constructs about
fundamental categories of gender difference and inequality. Hypnotism, which he commonly used to access
the unconscious, allowed the relaxation of conscious ‘masculine’ control, and could thus enable access to
these elemental aspects of the mind. On Charcot’s death, his research into various kinds of psychological
automatism, including visions and dreams, was continued by Pierre Janet; both had American colleagues,
students and correspondents. For more on the associations between hysteria, gender, symbolism and
and artists alike upheld the inherent creativity of inspired 'madness' as an asset in their struggle to reconfigure the rational, positivist emphasis of the modernizing world. Charcot's research intimated that the eccentric visions of dreams were of a kind with mental aberrations. Yet, whether or not they might be considered irrational or 'absurd,' the dreams that many Symbolists used as a source of inspiration were not necessarily abnormal; arising entirely within the slumbering mind, they were emblematic of other kinds of 'authentic,' subjective inner experiences that Symbolists embraced without hesitation, such as hypnotic trances and intoxication.

While Hartmann made direct and frequent reference to the intersection between the methods of art, psychology and Symbolism in *The Art Critic,* he avoided direct association with studies of mental irregularities, stressing instead the value of research in perception and heightened scientific knowledge; for example, his analysis of "tachism" [pointillism] published in his essay on "Modern French Painting" singled out these artists' study of "decorative and psychological qualities" and perceptual phenomena, while his previous assessment of "the fin de siècle movement" in art and literature noted how Symbolist poets conducted "all manner of experiments" with the power of words to convey "color, sound or perfume." He assured his readers, "This is not as absurd as it may seem," directing their attention to the "psychometrical experiments to measure the time required by our own senses to realize color, light, etc.," studies conducted at German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt’s recently established laboratory in Leipzig. Hartmann’s comment bespeaks his readers’ growing awareness of the deepening contact between American and European scholars of the mind.

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Mathews, *Passionate Discontent,* (1999), pages 9-10, discusses the fascination many symbolists had with hypnosis and mesmerism, which many artists and poets believed would put a sympathetic mind into a state of spiritual discovery of the truths underlying nature. In a later chapter, pp 46-63, she also explores the deep but problematic associations that Symbolists pursued between ‘divine madness’ and the less elevated diagnosis of hysteria, often ascribed to female patients and artists.


Hartmann, “Notes,” (1893), p 7. The work of Wilhelm Wundt, who had founded the first institute for experimental psychology in Leipzig in 1879, was translated and published in America in 1897. Wilhelm Wundt, *Outlines of Psychology.* Translated, with the cooperation of the author, by Charles Hubbard Judd. (Leipzig, W. Engelmann, and New York, G. E. Stechert, 1897). E. B. Tichener, associate editor of the *American Journal of Psychology* and professor of psychology at Cornell University, was one of his most influential students.
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Nonetheless, while Symbolist artists’ interest in psychology expanded in Europe, in America the immediate connections between art and psychological science were less widely recognized or openly discussed. Some artists, particularly painters of enigmatic or suggestive landscape such as George Inness could be regarded as ‘scientists’ who explored vital aspects of perception, but painters like Davies who explored literary themes, mythological figures and allegory were less often immediately linked with the autonomy, discipline and rationality of scientific analysis, at least by critics in the early 1890s. Nonetheless, the slippage between ‘suggestive’ form and imaginative perception in Davies’s work enabled critics such as Hartmann to find layers of psychological discernment in his work, and reference to his dreams was essential to this narrative.

Taking shape in the inner domain of subjective authenticity and visionary illusion, dreams were presented as potentially limitless resources for Symbolists to mine; many artists rose to the challenge, both iconographically and in their painting’s incipient abstraction. Although he was ambivalent about the connections to Symbolism others established for him, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes exhibited his evocative painting *The Dream* (figure 2.7) in 1883 at the *Salon des Artistes Francais*, granting inspiration to many younger Symbolists via its pictorial configuration of mythology, slumber and inspiration: the closed eyes of the reclining dreamer and weightless, flying muses in the night sky were all common to Symbolist representations of dreams, but so were the

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73 This blending influenced artists from Pierre Puvis de Chavannes to Claude Monet and Odilon Redon, and inspired proponents of their work such as critic Félix Fénéon, who was a leading critical supporter of Symbolism. For discussion of the struggles between science, spirituality and Symbolist art in America, see Michael Leja, “Monet’s Modernity in New York in 1886” American Art, 14:1 (Spring, 2000), pp 50-79, whose discussion of Monet explores the art criticism of Celen Sabbrin (Helen Abbott), a plant chemist and amateur but insightful art critic. Sabbrin published a pamphlet that proved influential to Symbolist critics in France, entitled *Science and Philosophy in Art* in conjunction with the first exhibition of Impressionism in the United States. Leja argues that the scientific, philosophical and perceptual emphasis of Abbott’s discussion of Monet—qualities valued by Fénéon—made her essay on impressionism’s link to symbolism seem out of step in America, but these were the very aspects of her writing that European symbolists particularly admired. Yet, although connections between art and the science of the mind were not extensive, viewers were interested in depictions of emotion in art; see Lubin, “Modern Psychological Selfhood,” (1997), pp 133-166, on Eakins’s insightful portraits.

artist’s soft contours, spare landscape, diffused light, gentle pastel colors and oddly configured tree.\textsuperscript{75}

In one of his very first articles introducing Symbolism to American readers published in 1893, Hartmann recalled a visit to Mallarmé’s salon, and described their brief chat about the Symbolist qualities of Puvis de Chavannes.\textsuperscript{76} Hartmann appreciated his compellingly ambiguous form as well as his elevated religious sentiment, spiritualism and medievalism. Within the next few years, American viewers learned to recognize Symbolists’ fascination with archaic and ‘primitive’ religious expression and equally time-honored forms of Classical art, demonstrating interchangeability between modern and traditional tendencies in Symbolist art and literature.\textsuperscript{77} In the 1890s, Puvis was one of the most well regarded representatives of Symbolism’s ‘Idealist’ variant, not only in France but also more widely abroad.\textsuperscript{78} Davies himself could well have witnessed some of these currents; art enthusiasts on the East Coast welcomed opportunities to view the work of Puvis de Chavannes in 1888, when his first American exhibition took place at the National Academy of Design; a show devoted to his art was held in New York at the

\textsuperscript{75} The influence of Puvis de Chavannes on a broad range of followers in the fin de siècle Parisian art world, is examined by Jennifer Shaw, \textit{Dream States: Puvis De Chavannes, Modernism, and the Fantasy of France} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Puvis’ Symbolism, unlike that of peers such as Jean Delville or Alexandre Seon who demonstrated similar formal habits, was less evidently perverse and esoteric.

\textsuperscript{76} Hartmann, “A Tuesday Evening at Stéphane Mallarmé’s,” (1893), pp 9-11. Influential critics representing different segments of the art press, from conservative to more adventuresome voices, were all among the early promoters of Puvis de Chavannes in America, including Will Low, Kenyon Cox and Charles Caffin. See Bailey van Hook, \textit{The Virgin and the Dynamo: Public Murals in American Architecture, 1893-1917}. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), pp 76-86.

\textsuperscript{77} Kathleen Pyne, “Resisting Modernism: American Painting in the Culture of Conflict” in Gaeghtgens and Ickstadt, eds. \textit{American Icons: Transatlantic Perspectives on Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century American Art}, (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities, Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1992). Pyne discusses the ways in which American painters and critics in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century reframed the concept of the modern to incorporate aspects of archaism, Classicism, medievalism and anti-modernism, or resistance to the avant-garde forms of modernism that were sweeping across Europe.

\textsuperscript{78} American artists studying in Paris in the 1890s, even the most hide-bound and conservative ones, could not help but discover compelling evidence of the growing force of Symbolism in French painting. For American artists working abroad, see George Hardy, ed. \textit{Americans in Paris, 1850-1910: the academy, the salon, the studio, and the artists’ colony} (Exhibition Catalog, Oklahoma City Museum of Art: Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 2003); H. Barbara Weinberg, \textit{The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-century American Painters and their French Teachers}, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991); and Lois Marie Fink, \textit{American Art at the Nineteenth Century Paris Salons}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
gallery of Durand-Ruel in 1894. Within two years of Hartmann’s essay, the French artist’s mural for the Boston Public Library was unveiled to great acclaim.  

In his critical estimation of Puvis de Chavannes, Hartmann distinguished the French painter’s work in terms that strike a profound chord with his critical response to Davies, admitting that the French artist’s work “haunts me in my waking dreams with its muddy and chalky colors,” but then he declared, “if one is bent on classifying Chavannes, one might term him a colorist of striking originality […] Chavannes solely strove to fathom the psychological qualities of color, the poetry and sentiment that it is capable of, in short, its musical charm.”  

Interpreting those qualities for his American readers, Hartmann put a psychological spin on what he regarded as the artist’s ‘decorative’ and thus fundamentally Symbolist work. Praising his “decorative lyricism,” the critic noted: “Chavannes is a Liszt in colors, who in ‘striking’ a color, strikes the nerves […] he does not care to tell a story […] but is determined to extort revery [sic] from the looker on, to call forth an association of thought.” Although he did not directly associate their names in 1894, Hartmann nurtured connections between Puvis de Chavannes and Davies, writing about both artists in the same issue of The Art Critic. In 1896, the anonymous critic for the New York Post did establish resemblance between them, claiming Davies’s Demeter was ‘reminiscent’ of Puvis.  

Picking up the growing line of musical relationships between Puvis and Davies, a fellow critic writing about the young American in the December 1898 issue of The Art Collector emphasized his ability to see “a color-nerve strung to the last intimate harmony.”  

These comments resonate with Davies’s Music in the Fields, (figure 2.8) painted in the mid-1890s, which may correspond with the work once titled “Young Musicians,” a now-unknown picture Davies included in his 1894 group exhibition at Macbeth’s

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79 Davies thus could have seen Puvis de Chavannes’s work in person the same year in which Hartmann wrote about both of them. Early mention of the work of Puvis de Chavannes, especially descriptions of his works owned by American collectors had appeared in 1890-1891 in Art Amateur magazine; Roger Riordan, “Puvis de Chavannes,” Art Amateur 24 (December, 1890), 5-7 and (January, 1891), p 34. His Boston murals were written about by Ernest Fenollosa in Mural Painting in the Boston Public Library, (Boston, 1896), and “The Boston Public Library Decorations,” Art Amateur 34: 2, (January, 1896), p 48. For more on his influence, see van Hook, The Virgin and the Dynamo, (2003), pp 76-81.  
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Gallery. Featuring a group of girls and boys playing piano, violin and viola (or cello) in the foreground of a deep, sweeping landscape, the painting offers a slightly incongruous presentation of an outdoor concert; these young, intent performers seem entirely unconcerned by their audience—a flock of sheep—or the peculiarity of playing a piano outdoors, and attend to their task with dedication. It calls to mind outdoor pageants, concerts and dance performances that were a staple in summer art colonies, such as Augustus’ Saint-Gaudens’ Cornish, NH retreat, at which Davies’s peer Thomas Dewing was a frequent attenant. On the left, a white-clad adolescent, her shoulder bared to us, holds her bow and instrument delicately; she is ready to lead her fellow players, and gazes out at the viewer with inviting and inquisitive directness. The other children face her and ignore our presence. The pastel tones of their peach and green garments set up rhythms of color echoed by their limbs and bodies; they seem modern, innocent re-enactors of Puvis’s archaic ‘pastoral concerts’ in honor of the gods; employing a horizontal orientation akin to the format of a painted mural, here Davies’s contemporary pianos and violins replace Classical lutes, pan-flutes and lyres.

The painting’s focus on Symbolist equivalence between musical and pictorial harmony attests to the power of art to inspire pleasant moods and offer imaginative escape. The bucolic setting could be located virtually anywhere in Northeastern America: the composition leads one’s eye from a road at far left, heading towards a distant farmhouse and trees, past the undulating hills and a far lake in the background, towards a group of sheep who lie and listen at far right. One of several contemporary paintings featuring outdoor music, Davies also investigated this subject in the undated Boy Playing a Flute and in The Horn Players, 1893, (figures 2.9 and 2.10). Music in the Fields also demonstrates the pictorial anomalies on which Davies’s critics increasingly commented: an admixture of disjointed locations, shifts in scale, and a strangely compressed space (even though the scene takes place outdoors). These peculiar compositional phrases may evoke the decorative harmonies called forth by musical analogy, but they evince manifestly new kinds of polyphony.

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A Symbolist meditation on the expressive, abstract power of music to inspire the mind, made curious by unsettling formal choices, this painting emblemizes what distinguished Davies as “a symbolist in the true sense of the word,” in Hartmann’s later estimation. The unexpected and oddly intimate configuration of large children, deep landscape, parlor instruments and farmyard animals invokes the perplexing mysteries of pleasant dreams. But like many dreams, it raises questions rather than providing ready answers. Davies’s increasingly adept handling of ambiguous form and enigmatic content produced a powerful sense of possibility; in form and content alike it was abundantly “suggestive.” In adopting these as his signature traits, Davies also associated himself with James McNeill Whistler, and Hartmann endorsed this development.

Although Whistler’s work could be as readily associated with Symbolism as Puvis de Chavannes, the American expatriate was a contradictory figure. Alternately regarded as an enlightened prophet of art or pugnacious radical malcontent, Whistler’s conspicuous advocacy of formal purity and promotion of individuality in art had divergent connotations for his American audience. He presented his ‘gospel’ of esthetic autonomy in his infamous 10 O’Clock Lecture, published in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* in 1890, establishing his authority on the virtues of elevated, autonomous esthetics. Admiring his intransigence, Davies was a devotee of his work when he viewed it in London, emulating his style in several pastels. In fact, the younger artist’s very first public recognition in the press was made in conjunction with Whistler. Still seeking the best means of generating his own distinctive vision in 1898, Davies was

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86 Burns, “Old Maverick to Old Master: Whistler in the Public Eye in Turn-of-the-Century America,” (1990), pp 29-49. Burns observes the discrepancy between Whistler’s reputation for pugnacity, his flamboyant public persona and his ethereal painting. The vagaries of Whistler’s reputation may have served as an important model (or anti-model) for Davies to follow. Burns also usefully addresses the spread and influence of art criticism and the press in the Gilded Age.


89 In the fall of 1893, a few of Davies’s lithographs were mentioned alongside Whistler’s ‘Songs on Stone,’ which were in process at the same time, in a brief note in “Art Notes,” *The New York Times* (October 9, 1893), p 2.
unabashed in his appropriation of Whistlerian form, as seen in his small drawing
*Mysterious Barges* and undated *Portrait of a Young Girl* (figures 2.11 and 2.12).

Davies must also have known of Hartmann’s regard for Whistler, as the critic praised both artists’ refined esthetic sensibilities, enigmatic, soft handling of paint, and intellectualism, qualities the critic desired to nurture in American art.\(^{90}\) In Whistler’s distilled landscapes, Hartmann saw poetic truth and formal harmonies blending in the advancement of abstract ideals; the critic upheld Whistler’s spare, refined Japanese esthetic principles, as well as his general Symbolist desire to transcend the visible. Hartmann was far from alone in his regard; John van Dyke, in his 1893 treatise *Art for Art’s Sake*, also advocated art’s ability to speak directly to the mind through vague, allusive and highly refined compositions, revealing the “hidden beauties of nature and life.” He continued, claiming if paintings “be pictorial in the full sense of the word, they will reveal themselves without comment [...].”\(^{91}\) A review of Davies published in *The Critic* in July 1897 echoed these sentiments and endorsed the artist’s Whistlerian connections, asserting, “His imagination is first and mainly pictorial [...] form and color awaken ideas and emotions of other sorts,” alluding to Davies’s ability to capture unconscious, inner perceptions and experiences in visible but indeterminate means.\(^{92}\)

*Viola Obligato*, (figure 2.13) painted around 1895, shows the combined influence of Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes’s in Davies’s supple, gauzy handling of paint, smooth contours, balanced composition and resonant color. The subject matter and moody atmosphere recalls Whistler’s modern ‘arrangements’ but also evokes the archaism of Puvis de Chavannes. The painting’s obscure title made use of Whistlerian musical terms such as his ‘nocturnes’ and ‘symphonies,’ and recalling Whistler again, Davies’s hazy brushstrokes cause precise details to remain indistinct. These, alongside the balanced composition and harmonious color, capture the evocative ‘suggestiveness’ and dreamy ambiguity that Hartmann recommended.

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\(^{90}\) While he referenced his name, preeminence and intellectualism many times in passing in his criticism, Hartmann’s most thorough discussion and advocacy of Whistler came in his *A History of American Art*, (1901) and in *The Whistler Book*, (Boston: L. C. Page, 1910).


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Undoubtedly, the painting’s contingent form matched its inscrutable content: in Davies’s evasive manner, no direct narrative clues are offered the viewer who must provide her own story and interpretation. A recumbent, Classically-inspired central figure, dressed like many of Whistler’s in a filmy white garment and veil, stretches across the foreground, flanked by two naked, cherubic children who stroke her arm and arrange a blue cloak around her lower limbs. Above the figures—and perhaps arising out of the reclining maiden’s imagination—a town nestles amid gently rolling hills, its red tiled roofs and arched bridge crossing the river suggest a European setting, while atop the scene a star winks in the crepuscular sky, drawing the viewer’s attention towards the heavens. The painting’s address to the viewer, made via the woman’s direct and inquisitive outwards gaze, invites us to enter the painting’s space as if we can pass through her and into a waking dream, and challenges us to generate resonant meaning.

If Whistler and Puvis helped set up conjunctions between musical themes and redolent form in Davies’s art, they were not the only artists with whom Hartmann compared him, nor were they the only artists he praised for Symbolist attributes such as imaginative, individual and suggestive qualities that evoked dreaming. In 1897, Hartmann published his recollection of visiting Albert Pinkham Ryder’s studio, in which he posed valuable similarities between Davies and the older, reclusive American painter by reference to their common formal and thematic habits. Hartmann first called his reader’s attention to Ryder’s physical characteristics, “a dreaminess in his eyes, a certain softness, with a touch of awkwardness,” before describing the artist’s famously cluttered studio and its impressively filthy contents.93 Undeterred by this state of chaos and disorder, Hartmann found much to admire in Ryder’s work, “a fairyland of imaginative landscapes [...] peopled by beings that seem to be all poetic fancy and soul.” In Hartmann’s analysis, Ryder’s gift as an artist was located in his distinctive and unconventional “creative faculty,” his ability to unify medieval and literary references and poetic subjects through his irregular technique (the critic mentions muddy brush work, weird colors, and strong contrasts), ultimately arriving at expression of “the

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93 Unsigned [Sadakichi Hartmann], “A Visit to A. P. Ryder!” Art News, 1:1, (March, 1897), pp 1-2. In noting the extremes of Ryder’s eccentric lifestyle and even anti-social behavior, some readers might have correlated his circumstances with fragile mental stability, but this was not a detriment in Hartmann’s opinion.
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radiance of the innermost, the most subtle and most intense expression of a human soul.”94 Such allusions had not only Symbolist but metaphysical value, asserting Ryder’s ability to paint the interior states driving his creativity. Identified by his most devoted critics and followers as a distinctly imaginative, poetic artist, Ryder was labeled a “Painter of Dreams” in 1905; thereafter he was also associated with Davies as an essential precursor of modern, abstract and psychically affective art.95

Davies, like Hartmann, had visited the reclusive Ryder in his studio in the 1890s, and owned a Ryder painting entitled Oriental Landscape.96 His own work showed deep regard for Ryder’s formal habits, as well as his methods, and in his painting Siegfried’s Death, ca. 1893 (figure 2.14), and the undated Flying Dutchman (figure 2.15) Davies’s desire to learn from Ryder’s example occupies the unstable borderlands between homage and outright copying. Depicting a scene from Richard Wagner’s The Ring Cycle, which was performed in New York in 1893 (which Davies likely saw during one of its well-publicized performances, as he mentioned in one of his undated letters to Lucy), Siegfried’s Death envisions an elegiac procession through an atmospheric landscape, the dead hero of Die Gotterdamung borne to his resting place on the shields of his warriors.97 In composition, palette, laden brushstrokes and somber spirit—even in the turbulent, snake-like limbs of the dead tree that dominates the composition’s right hand side—Davies’s painting resembles Ryder's Siegfried and the Rhine Maidens (figure 2.16) which the older artist had exhibited in New York in 1891. Ryder did not seem to mind this kind of pictorial homage, as like many Symbolists, both he and Davies venerated

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94 Ibid.
97 See Davies to Lucy, undated, Box 4, Folder 5, (Davies Collection). While working for The Century Magazine in March 1888, Davies was pleased to illustrate an essay concerning the music of Franz Liszt and his students, and was a frequent concert-goer throughout the early 1890s. According to Wreath McIntyre, Davies’s model in the later ‘teens, Davies “never missed a Wagnerian opera if he could help it.” Letter from Wreath McIntyre to Bennard Perlman, (March 1987), See Perlman, LLA, (1998), pp 65 and 288. In November of 1892, Scribner’s Magazine had reproduced the set design by Josef Hoffman for Wagner’s original Bayreuth Festival scene depicting Siegfried’s confrontation with the Rhine Maidens; Davies subsequently painted several images seductive female creatures from Germanic mythology, throughout the 1890s, including his ca. 1893 Nixie.

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Wagner. The ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or amalgamation of different art forms to create a ‘total work of art’ was strongly associated with Wagner; painters and poets were also inspired by Wagner’s insistence that music was a comprehensive, direct and pure form of expression that antedated and surpassed all other modes of communication. Wagner’s ideas spoke to many artists who shared a utopian desire to mobilize the human spirit’s ascent towards transcendence, in the inherently abstract terms of music that stimulated the listener’s intellect and emotions simultaneously. Using art to unify sense, mind and spirit was a goal Davies shared with Puvis, Whistler and Ryder equally; bringing into concert the emotional resonance of music and the pictorial values of art in a psychologically activated, quasi-synaesthetic whole became one of Davies’s greatest aspirations as I will address more deeply in Chapter 6.

In these various guises, and by means of proliferating reference to a variety of artists’ work—Europeans and Americans alike—Symbolism in art and literature could thus be understood in complex ways; its contingent relationship to psychology was part of its complexity for American viewers. Yet, when associated with behavioral peculiarity, mental instability or madness, Symbolism could all too easily merge with its dark counterpart ‘Decadence,’ showing signs of depraved preoccupations that might reveal incipient cultural degeneration and debasement. Yet, in its ‘Idealist’ guise Symbolism

98 Davies retained a life-long passion for both Wagner and Ryder, featuring the older artist’s work prominently alongside that of French Symbolist Odilon Redon at the 1913 Armory Show, and next to other European painters who were heralded as “old masters;” Davies enjoyed the great honor of escorting a frail Ryder through the Armory Show when it opened, and demonstrating to him the Symbolist qualities Davies felt Ryder’s work embodied. Elizabeth Broun, Albert Pinkham Ryder, (1989), p 4 and 166, notes that Ryder was an inspiration to Davies in ways that exceeded the older artist’s formal habits and pictorial interests. She sees Ryder’s hermetic, private lifestyle and isolation as a model of artistic dedication that enabled Davies to create a similar aura of hermetic privacy for himself. Broun also observes that by granting Ryder a space at the Armory Show devoted to ten examples of his work alongside well-established artists, and within the context of Symbolism, Davies insured that Ryder was seen in terms that were congruent with modern, avant-garde trends in art that the younger artist most strongly promoted.

99 Laurinda Dixon, “Art and Music at the Salons de la Rose + Croix, 1892-1897” in Gabriel P. Weisberg and Laurinda Dixon, eds, The Documented Image: Visions in Art History, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p 168. Dixon comments, “Wagner believed that sound was capable of bypassing the veneer of acquired human culture, reaching the emotions directly.” Wagner had written about the Gesamtkunstwerk in two 1849 essays espousing this model of artistic synthesis as the key to achieving his ideal: a universally significant kind of musical theater. These essays are “Art and Revolution” and “An Artwork of the Future.” Both were first translated into English by William Ashton Ellis and published in London in 1895 as part of a multi-volume set of Wagner’s prose works. Jack M. Stein provides a rich evaluation of the themes essential to Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk in Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960).
could just as readily indicate cultural evolution towards a higher, even utopian state. As both idealist Symbolists and their ‘decadent’ counterparts favored exploration of the potential of the human imagination, anti-illusionism and the realm of the dream, the inspiration Davies delivered to his viewers as a dreamer possessed radically divergent vectors. Hartmann’s endorsement of the artist’s work after 1894 moved circuitously across this unstable cultural terrain; taking his lead, other critics could be equally equivocal in their estimation of his work, observing its flaws and praising its virtues within the same short paragraphs.

II: Symbolism, ‘Decadence’ and the elevating power of the imagination

Hartmann’s second major review of Davies made the connection between the painter and Symbolism explicit, albeit in ambivalent terms, while he reiterated his comment about dreams:

Davies is a dreamer that [sic] has evolved his own ideas on evolution, love, sexuality, maternity, childhood, etc. and [...] if Davies will be great this will make him so. [...] In this respect he may be like the French Symbolists [...] It would be desirable if, like Mallarmé, he would now and then destroy 90 per cent of all he has done.100

The reference to Mallarmé (and his self-critical methods) implies Hartmann expected his readers were increasingly familiar with Symbolism, in poetry if not yet in art. While doubt enters into Hartmann’s discussion of Davies, flavoring his recommendation that the artist destroy most of his work, the critic was equally effusive in his praise, claiming for the artist the status of an “indispensable pathfinder” and “road builder” for American art. Championing Davies’s significant role, Hartmann resolved that a modern form of art must evolve on home soil, to offer more nurturing institutional support to American painters and to sustain such cultural diversity as he had seen in European cities.101

Davies’s Symbolist-inspired individuality was crucial to this goal; another critic’s praise in 1895 similarly claimed, Davies “is a new man, his is also an original man, and paints

100 Hartmann, The Daily Tatler, (1896), p 7. The list of thematic concerns that Hartmann claims for Davies reads like a litany of Symbolist preoccupations.

things according to his imagination. In his technic [sic] and his conception he is equally original."\textsuperscript{102}

Notwithstanding Hartmann's endorsements, the label 'Symbolism' retained variable meanings in the 1890s, not only in America but also among the European artists and poets who embraced it. In his 1886 'Symbolist Manifesto' published in the widely-read Parisian newspaper \textit{Le Figaro}, poet Jean Moreas set forth the fundamental and contradictory tenets of the movement he saw emerging around him in poetry and literature. Symbolism, he said:

\begin{quote}
endeavors to clothe the Idea in a form perceptible to the senses, [...] The Idea, in turn, must not allow itself to be deprived of the sumptuous trappings of external analogies [...] these are but appearances perceptible to the senses destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial ideas.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

While Moreas made no direct reference to dreaming, to painting, or to psychology, his emphasis on the preeminence of the non-corporeal 'Idea,' asserted the wholly internal world of the human imagination was the most fitting place for Symbolist poetry or art to take shape. The mind was the space where—by analogies and their realization in sensory but anti-materialist terms—pure ideas acquired subjective form. Davies agreed with this principle; as he jotted on a scrap of paper, preserved in the remaining assembled detritus from his studio, the artist observed, "The ideas and ideals of man have been formed in his brain through experience + in preserving them we preserve the human soul."\textsuperscript{104} The diverse currents of Symbolist thought entering the American milieu, as well as his commitment to understanding how 'ideals form in the brain through experience,' inspired Davies's pursuit of pictorial poetry, hidden meanings and the 'superior reality' of abstract thought.

\textsuperscript{102} Springfield Republican, (January, 1895), quoted in Perlman, LLA, (1998), p 78.
\textsuperscript{103} Jean Moreas, "Le Symbolisme" published in Supplement litteraire du Figaro, September 18, 1886, p 150, translated and excerpted by Dorra, Symbolist Art Theories, (1994), p151. Despite Symbolism's introduction in the mainstream venue of \textit{Le Figaro}, its appeal to popular taste and cultural mood and wide-ranging impact, it was always confusing, even to its followers. Obstacles to widespread rapid acceptance and codification of Symbolism came in the form of the obscure or hermetic language used by Symbolists themselves to describe their objectives. In Europe as well as America, explanations of Symbolist art and poetry were typically vague and allusive, in keeping with its practitioners' espousal of ambiguity and concurrent rejection of concrete or limiting definitions.
\textsuperscript{104} "Art and Philosophy of Arthur B. Davies" Box 1; Folder 6, (Davies Collection).
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Symbolist poetry, like Symbolist painting, did not reject subject matter outright, but decried overly realist concerns. Instead, it embraced evanescent explorations of purely inner experience, seeking alternative approaches to form through which traditional understanding of reality itself could be reconfigured. Mallarmé, like many of his fellow Symbolists, disdained the vulgar, corrupt materialism of the prior generation of writers, whose interests had held sway in French literary circles in the middle of the 19th century. According to emergent theories in the 1880s, the task of both poets and painters was to crystallize the significant essences, analogies or correspondences between the material and immaterial worlds, by using the form and sound of words in poetry or the form, color and composition of images in art. Hartmann extolled Mallarmé’s significance when he commented for his American readers, “he represents the symbolical idea of a perfect poet.”

Davies’s parallel goal of creating a poetic Symbolist art took allegorical form in some of his paintings of the 1890s, such as the presently un-located *At the Source*, (figure 2.17) exhibited in 1897 at Macbeth’s Gallery, which attracted the attention of several critics. Although the only known image of this painting is a photograph made in the artist’s studio, permitting no evaluation of its color or finer detail, it appears typical of this still-early phase in the artist’s work. Showing two adolescent female figures standing beside a gurgling rustic spring, Davies evaluates ‘Ideas’ measured against ideals by comparing and contrasting a clothed figure at right, who gazes at her reflection in a mirror, with her nude companion. Although we can see the full naked body of this young woman, posed as if just about to bathe in the flowing water, her indistinct limbs and facial features make her a more ethereal counterpart to the more tightly rendered, but only partially visible foreground figure. Two airborne birds, flying between the girls, invite the viewer to trace a direct line from one to the other and back. An admirer in 1897 singled this painting out as the “most beautiful as a composition” of all the images in the exhibition; “if it were exhibited abroad,” the critic glowed, it “would win for the artist

105 These ideas are discussed by Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp 81-116, and helpfully correlated with the emergence of abstract painting in Europe.
106 Baudelaire’s poetry had been essential in establishing this as a goal.
107 Hartmann, “A Tuesday Evening at Stéphane Mallarmé’s,” (1893), pp 9-11.

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immediate recognition as a painter of uncommon natural powers.”\textsuperscript{108} Another journalist commented on the artist’s rendering of an “idealized nude figure in [a] purely American, but exquisitely appropriate setting.”\textsuperscript{109}

In the early 1890s Davies situated this setting, and the pursuit of Symbolist ideals, close to home and in his own experiences. The artist wrote to Lucy, then his fiancé, recalling an evening’s private excursion; “I do not know of anything more exquisite than the rocking on the river last night. [...] Everything wove an air of inevitable poetry + there were hidden meanings everywhere—there were grander forms—more than interpreted.”\textsuperscript{110} Inspired by the mysteries of the commonplace as well as more esoteric realms, Davies invested scenes and images he would have seen around him every day with Symbolist significance, writing in another letter, “The symbolism of all things, objective, in nature, presents to me a basis and an untold wealth of beauty and possibly good to the world. Or at least an evolution of things as we now know them into a higher significance.”\textsuperscript{111} His landscapes rendered the countryside around the Congers, New York farmstead he and Lucy bought in 1892, and when his first son Niles was born early the next year, Davies explored motherhood in works such as \textit{The Throne} and two versions of \textit{Mother and Child} (figures 2.18-2.20).\textsuperscript{112} But Davies retreated from family life almost immediately, taking a studio apartment in the city even before Niles was born. Rather than more conventional celebrations of maternity, Davies granted his paintings a measure of indefinite tension, concealing the face of the mother in both paintings behind the body

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\textsuperscript{110} Arthur B. Davies to Lucy Meriwether Davis, undated letter (1890s), Series IV: Correspondence. Box 4. Folder 5: (Davies Collection).
\textsuperscript{111} Arthur B. Davies to Lucy Meriwether Davis, November 25, 1890, addressed to “My Dear Friend,” Series IV: Correspondence. Box 4. Folder 5: (Davies Collection).
\textsuperscript{112} While Perlman sees ‘personal symbolism’ in all of these works, his evaluation of that concept is purely iconographic; he interprets Davies’s paintings of mothers as portraits of Lucy, and attributes their formal strategies to the artist’s increasingly conflicted feelings about his wife, family and farm life. I find other aspects of the work far more interesting in terms of establishing cultural context. For example, in 1903, Henry James, who had written an early appreciation of the work of Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau for American audiences in 1876, was photographed carefully examining \textit{Mother and Child} in the studio of photographer Alice Boughton, who had bought the painting from Macbeth’s Gallery. When Davies was informed about James’s appreciation of his work, he demonstrated his familiarity with the journalist’s art criticism, speaking knowledgeably about James’s writing on Daumier for \textit{Harper’s Magazine}. Henry’s awareness of Davies’s work also establishes a line of association between Davies and psychologist William James. For details surrounding the creation of this photograph, see Perlman, L.L.A. (1998), pp 56-59. See also Henry James, “Art in Paris,” \textit{New York Tribune}, June 5, 1876,1-2; and \textit{Nation}, June 29, 1876, 415-416.
of the child she presents before her, as if hiding from our inquisitive eyes, heightening their elusive but unsettling implications.

Bucolic pleasures of rural life and childhood informed Davies’s wistful canvas, *Little Lamb, Who made thee?* (figure 2.21), whose questioning title derived from a poem by William Blake, another poet and artist whose visionary work lent ready inspiration to Symbolists. Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) became a source of inspiration for Davies in the 1890s; the poet’s contrast of the innocent, pastoral world of childhood with the greater moral complexities and contradictions of adult life seems analogous to Davies’s engagement with duality, as he investigated in *At the Source*. Developing this motif more deeply in his work, Davies studied the experiences and psychic complexities defining childhood and adulthood alike. In images Davies devoted to picturing children, Hartmann recognized the artist’s desire to grant “sensuous” value to childhood while the critic also commended his attempt to “chasten” the sensual properties of adult women, thus playing upon ambiguities and contradictions that Davies increasingly took on as his subject matter as well as in his form.

In rendering children’s imaginative reverie, Davies not only alluded to dreaming but also fostered its experiential reenactment in ‘sensuous’ terms: those that spoke to the viewer’s senses while simultaneously appealing to the mind’s capacity for memory. *Visions of Glory*, (figure 2.22) represents a youth leaning up against a tree; clad in a costume of armor, his helmet rests upon the ground to the left, and a red cloak falls from one shoulder in an elegant drape. Although his antiquated garments possibly convey a medieval setting, this figure is much too small and delicate to be a real knight; the child seems to wear a costume that glows in late afternoon light as he gazes off to the left at some invisible image. He (or indeed she, as the gender of the feminized figure is impossible to verify) is captured in a private moment of dreamy imagining that appeals to our senses and sympathies; his features are soft, his enlarged eyes are downcast, and his attitude conjures a meditative pause in the midst of an autumn-toned landscape. He is

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113 While the influence of Blake was stronger on the British decadents and Pre-Raphaelites, both movements were closely tied to Symbolism as it emerged in France and Belgium, as discussed by Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, (2009), pp 41-42. Hartmann also recognized the general affinities between Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelite painters in “A Tuesday Evening at Stéphane Mallarmé’s,” (1893), p 10; and he commented upon Davies’s affinity for Pre-Raphaelite painters in 1897.
alone; we can see the limbs and leaves of the tree rising above, a few more behind him and a distant horizon, but in the direction of his gaze the space is entirely obscured. Echoes of objects and spatial layers almost perceivable beneath these warm colors and textural strokes connote the compelling force of his daydream, but shrouded by heavily-applied horizontal brushstrokes, whatsoever glorified visions he may indulge in are thoroughly veiled to us.

The solicitation of memories of childhood’s uninhibited pleasures calls forth a viewer’s emotional response, while Hartmann would readily have characterized their suggestive form as ‘sensuous,’ calling for perceptual analysis alongside our feelings. The painting’s imaginative enticement welcomes us into this child-like world where ideas and ideals, fantasy and reality interact. Fellow artist Sophia Antoinette Walker recognized this quality in his work, and observed “he studies the way little children draw and makes himself as a little child that he may enter into the kingdom.” Several critics of the day, commenting upon these properties in Davies’s work, praised his “naïvete that makes one think of William Blake,” his intuitive, dreamy “sympathy with child life,” as well as his “fine feeling and marked individuality.” These were all commended as entirely salutary developments for American art.

Yet, if many artists under the sway of Symbolist ‘Ideals’ sought formal means through which art might move viewers to connect with elevated sentiment and purely interior planes of existence, the dreams, memories and visions of a healthy creative mind were not the only kind of mental states associated with the movement. In his manifesto, Moreas had taken some pains to distinguish Symbolist pursuit of pure ‘Ideas’ from ‘Decadence,’ which shaped the content of art and poetry in both France and England, such as the work of novelists Joris-Karl Huysmans in Paris, and Oscar Wilde in Britain, as well as the scandalously erotic illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley. Unlike sanctioned

116 Wilde, who toured America in 1882, had many fans and just as many adversaries, as his flamboyant behavior and fervent endorsement of the British Aesthetic movement in art was often associated with British decadent literature. His Symbolist play Salome was published in 1893, accompanied by sensationnally erotic illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley, verifying his ‘decadence’ for many Americans; when his conviction for homosexual activities was publicized in 1895, his endorsement of Symbolism and Aesthetic movement principles of autonomous beauty in art were unavoidably contaminated. See “Oscar
visions of childhood, ‘Decadent’ artists celebrated perversity, excessive artifice and erotic themes in an attempt to subvert the banality and materialist focus of bourgeois morality radically; but so did some Symbolists as well, adding to the general confusion of viewers.

Both Symbolists and ‘Decadents’ also employed pictorial strategies that stressed immaterial insubstantiality and chose subjects that transmuted, transformed or challenged art’s traditional forms and iconographic content; thus visions, fantasy and dreams could be readily associated with either idealism or decadence. Since some research in clinical settings like Charcot’s asylum implied that hypnotic visions or dreams—like hallucinations—might be construed as irrational fabrications arising out of the undisciplined, hysterical unconscious, dreaming and the creative imagination could, like Symbolism itself, be linked as readily to base human instincts as to lofty aims. Some viewers suspected that preoccupation with dreams might even show profound tendencies to lead society into a state of morbid introspection, such as the self-scrutiny envisioned in *At the Source*. Echoing Hartmann’s ambivalence, Davies’s reception was increasingly inconsistent in the mid 1890s, as critics attended to the peculiarities of his form. What some observers regarded as an artist’s pleasant dreams, others could all too easily perceive as delusional apparitions; in the words of one critic, “many of his conceptions are deemed unwholesome and depressing,” while another recommended that “less morbid introspective vision might make his message clearer.”

Stoking the pervasive American anxieties about the state of human social evolution sparked by Herbert Spencer’s “Social Darwinism,” German physician and cultural critic Max Nordau believed unambiguously that Symbolism represented a dangerous threat. In his 1892 text *Die Entartung (Degeneration* in its English

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117 Unidentified review, Chicago Sunday Herald, (June 1, 1901); “Arthur B. Davies,” *The Art Collector*, (December 15, 1898), p 54.

118 Herbert Spencer’s ideas were initially published in 1874-75 in his *Principles of Sociology*, (reprint New York: G. Appleton, 1883), and they had tremendous impact on American intellectual and artistic cultures in the 1890s, as did Nordau’s *Degeneration*. See Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, (1996), pp 17-25; and Lois Fink, “Nineteenth Century Evolutionary Art,” *American Art Review*, 4 (January, 1978), pp 74-81, also examine the widespread late nineteenth century fears about how American society might be entering a state of evolutionary decline.
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Nordau opined that art could be evaluated as a symptom of a culture’s relative health or sickness; paintings, poetry and music were like the signs of disease racking a human body. Associations between Symbolism and Nordau’s criticism were so well established that in 1897, one review of an exhibition by American artist Pinckney Marcius-Simons asserted that his Symbolist identity was one of his “unpardonable sins,” calling to mind “recollections of Nordau.”

When art dealt directly with matters of the potentially unbalanced dreaming imagination, the questions most readily put to hand addressed the sanity of the artist and thus the mental hygiene of his cultural context.

Nordau, like Davies, studied the psychological theories of Binet, as well as the clinical research of Charcot, and concluded that modern artists’ preoccupation with states of mind, emotion, imagination and aberrant subjectivity was unambiguously dangerous. Much was at stake, therefore, in determining whether Symbolist-inspired dreams like Davies’s were the product of a healthy or diseased mind, the signs of an unusual but normal kind of perception, or pathologies brought on by bouts of deranged hallucination.

A 1901 New York Times journalist played at the edges of this fragile distinction in Davies’s art, pondering, “What though his drawing is weird and his tones unearthly! What though his grass is the grass of the nether regions, and his skies the skies through which the nightmare fares!” before he concluded that this was all a part of the artist’s imaginative charm, as “he leaves the deadly level of the commonplace and seeks

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119 Richard and Henriette Hovey, “Symbolism and Simons’s Pictures,” Time and the Hour, 4:13 (March 6, 1897), p 17. Time and the Hour was a small pamphlet publication dedicated to the arts in Boston, and is representative of the ways in which Symbolism had earned common familiarity in art circles across the East coast. The artist in question, Pinckney Marcius-Simons, was an expatriate who was the only American to be embraced by Sar Josephin Peladan’s Rosicrucian salons, and thus his exhibition in Boston was guaranteed to raise the eyebrows of conservatives. The critical comment also demonstrates the fluid interchange between the emerging science of the mind and the popular pseudo-science of phrenology.


121 See Charles L. Dana, “Are We Degenerating?” Forum, Vol. 19, (June, 1895). Rachel Ziady DeLue, “Diagnosing Pictures: Sadakichi Hartmann and the Science of Sight,” American Art, 21:2 (Summer, 2007), pp 42-69, provides an invaluable assessment of how well Hartmann was familiar with Nordau’s ideas. Although Nordau was not translated into English until 1895, Hartmann could have read his text in the original German, and would have been introduced to the major preoccupations of his book through his Symbolist acquaintances in Europe.
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the realm of dreams.”122 Referencing the disquietingly vibrant color in works such as *Earth’s Secret*, (figure 2.23), the critic echoes Hartmann’s equivocal explication of Davies’s unconventional form. In contrast to the armor-clad dreamer in *Visions of Glory*, the nude youth in this painting gazes out at the viewer, inviting rather than ignoring our inspection of his indistinctly rendered body and its equally obscure surroundings.

Critics of art and culture had an obligation, according to Nordau, to use their analytical skills in a scientific manner, identifying and thus calling to attention the psychological or medical origins—and potential cures—of pathological social ills such as Symbolism’s deviance. But as Linda Maik has suggested, American audiences were resistant to Nordau’s negativity and obsession with cultural decline. Some American writers, such as the unnamed *New York Times* journalist, tailored their promotion of Symbolism more carefully to the tastes and expectations of American audiences, tempered their references to mental instability, and emphasized Symbolism’s imaginative and idealist aspects more often than those associated with decadence: the occult and medieval fantasies, eroticized androgynes and monstrous temptresses that Nordau regarded as a sign of incipient cultural collapse.

American critic Theodore Child, for example, may have lamented the tendency he noted in decadent French writers’ “disposition to dreaminess and perverse meditations over the past,” for readers in *Harper’s Monthly* in 1892, but sought ways of asserting positive value to Symbolism’s alternate, idealist variant.123 Child praised Puvis de Chavannes, whose work, “enriched with a dreamy veil of vaporous color,” was “truly modern,” in spite or because of how “abstract as his ideas are, metaphysical and profound as his work may be.”124 Child also recommended the work of the English Pre-Raphaelite painters and poets, such as Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. But Child more cautiously endorsed the work of Whistler, whose idiosyncratic and ‘suggestive’ works were as inscrutable as dreams and thus equally modern, but also were potentially dangerous, “for sometimes they reach the very limits of the painter’s art, and even

123 Theodore Child, “Literary Paris,” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, 85: 508, (September, 1892), p 490. Child’s essay concerned trends among French novelists and dramatists, more than the Symbolist poets such as Hartmann discussed. Nonetheless, his characterization of these cultural forces would have reached a wider audience than Hartmann.
penetrate beyond into the artificial paradises of Poe and Baudelaire.”\textsuperscript{125} Child, like many fellow American critics, located the radical Aestheticism of Whistler’s ‘art for art’s sake’ principles in his European and Symbolist cultural context, and thus regarded it with ambivalence.\textsuperscript{126}

Thus, critical analysis of Davies’s work, as well as the American and European artists with whom he was affiliated, occasionally showed the degree of uncertainty that surrounded Symbolism, its positive or negative connotations. Although the New York Sun critic castigated Davies’s “apparently absurd symbolisms” in 1896, a review published in The Critic in July 1897 avowed with equal vigor, “he cannot be classed as a symbolist, or a literary painter.”\textsuperscript{127} Davies’s inscrutability foiled many critical attempts to ‘solve’ Davies’s art, as some found him “a constant puzzle” and his work impossible to classify satisfactorily.\textsuperscript{128} Although many of their comments register confusion, most of Davies’s critics showed general unwillingness to dwell upon signs of Symbolist or Decadent morbidity, dark eroticism or deviance in his painting.

Yet, recognizing the growing “perversity of taste” among the “will-o-the-wisps” of fin de siècle art in 1893, Hartmann tended to conflate Symbolism’s divergent

\textsuperscript{125} Child, Art and Criticism, p 90.
\textsuperscript{126} Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist, (1996), pp 79-85 and 300-327, discusses the ongoing debate over popular esthetic values versus elite, and often implicitly foreign influences, that raged in the 1890s, particularly concerning the art exhibited at the Centennial Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and its appeal to viewers. Well into the 1890s, some critics and viewers maintained hostility towards any art that seemed too European, elitist and potentially decadent, and many viewers of the art at the Exposition expressed their preferences for art that was anecdotal, narrative and realist in execution. A growing number of critics, however, expressed distinct preferences for art that showed evidence of European sensibilities, including the appearance of symbolist themes. Burns also observes how readily the radical formalism of Whistler’s principles could be associated with dangerous currents in European art, even with Nordau’s ‘Degeneration’. A corrective to this association was provided by George Bernard Shaw, whose book The Sanity of Art (New York: Boni and Liverwright, 1895) was a direct rebuttal to Nordau. Whistler’s elitist advocacy of formalism separated the esthetically uneducated tastes of the general public from the more lofty perceptual capacities of those trained to appreciate art’s autonomously communicative capacities; for more, see Robert Slifkin, “James Whistler as the Invisible Man: Anti-Aestheticism and Artistic Vision,” Oxford Art Journal, 29:1 (2006), pp 53-75.
\textsuperscript{128} “Group Exhibition of Artists,” The New York Times, (July 7, 1894). Interest in puzzles, riddles, games and visual illusions was rampant in Gilded Age America, and lasted into the early 20th century; many responses in to the Armory Show in the mass media attended to the ‘puzzles’ presented by such works as Duchamp’s notorious Nude Descending A Staircase. See Michael Leja, Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), particularly pp 21-247.
branches. In the critic’s opinion, decadence was not necessarily a bad quality for Symbolist art to exhibit, nor was it incompatible with evocative ‘suggestion.’ Decadence was rather a sign of an artist’s heightened attention to states of mind and sensitivity to modern esthetic values beyond the Academic habits defining an American mainstream. Praising the “decadence” and “morbidity” of French taste, Hartmann acknowledged Davies’s familiarity with “decadent” literature in 1897, coloring the painter’s vibrantly imaginative idealism with shades that were potentially less salubrious. Hartmann further muddied the waters concerning the artist’s psychological state when he identified Davies as a potential “genius,” and a “highstrung talent.” Nordau, an advocate of ideas promoted by Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, correlated genius with insanity; the same psychological states that gave rise to outpourings or frenzies of creative inspiration were perilously close to mental aberration. While Nordau distinguished healthy forms of genius from the excesses that inspired the ‘degenerate’ Symbolists, Hartmann intimated that Davies’s ‘highstrung’ psychological, Symbolist tendencies might even be neurotic.

Indeed, the critic affirmed that suggestive art such as Davies’s was “highly fascinating but [...] at the same time insipid, vainglorious, morbid, badly nourished and absolutely unworthy of what occidental mankind has hitherto called art.” In Hartmann’s critical estimation, “occidental” tastes were unprepared for Davies’s brand of suggestive Symbolism. But, nodding towards the strange equivocation in Davies’s

129 He claimed, for example, that poet Paul Verlaine was initially a leader of the ‘decadents’ while characterizing Stéphane Mallarmé as a leader of the subsequent Symbolists. “Notes on the fin de siècle in art and literature,” (1893), p 7.
130 “The Echo,” Art News 1:4 (June, 1897), pp 4-5.
132 Nordau dedicated Degeneration to Lombroso, whose extensive research into the mental states of criminals demonstrated that neurotic tendencies were the source of their ingenuity. Lombroso’s book was published in an English version in New York in 1891, and thus available to corroborate the claims of both Nordau and Hartmann; Both Lombroso and Nordau published impassioned defenses of their ideas in American periodicals in the 1890s. See Cesare Lombroso, The Man of Genius, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons and Walter Scott, 1891). But, as Linda Maik has shown, both Lombroso’s and Nordau’s ideas and their psychological accuracy generated considerable resistance amid American readers, art critics and cultural theorists. See Maik, “Nordau’s Degeneration,” (1989), 607-623.
133 Whereas in the wake of Freudian psychoanalysis ‘neurosis’ was a mild—and treatable—disorder curable by therapeutic treatment, in the 1890s this term retained more pathological connotations as a form of insanity.
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paintings—especially the tempered, dreamy eroticism in his paintings such as *Nixie*, or *At the Source*—Hartmann claimed Davies could attend simultaneously to the “sensuous” innocence of childhood and the complex eroticism of nudes. He hoped his nuanced and polysemous assessment of Symbolist influences might capture the true spirit of psychological insight and ‘genius’ in the artist’s work. By designating Symbolism’s vanguard modernity, and referencing the scientific value of psychological expertise for artists (albeit in a somewhat idiosyncratic way), Hartmann established a context through which Symbolism’s spread in America was seen as expressly advanced, independent-minded and beneficial to its culture. Even if ‘decadent,’ he promoted it as a forward-looking and progressive development, rather than a sign of cultural decline.

Thus, while Symbolists might show distinguishing characteristics that associated them with mental fragility, they also possessed a valuable kind of insight. Their work attested to vital dimensions of self-knowledge, which Hartmann and fellow critics championed as both modern and American. As Rachel Ziady DeLue has persuasively argued, Hartmann eagerly embraced psychological theories as tools informing his own analysis of works of art; these enabled him to claim unique perceptual skills for himself, establishing significant parallels between art criticism and the scientific diagnosis of neurological disorders, just as he set up essential resonance between Davies’ pictorial vision and psychological awareness. DeLue suggests that for this critic, art constituted

135 Writing his first review of Davies in Boston, where Symbolism enjoyed a broader cultural acceptance than elsewhere in America, his subsequent reviews were colored by the context Hartmann hoped to generate for Symbolism. For example, Boston Publisher Copeland & Day distributed the decadent British literary journal *The Yellow Book*, and an American edition of Oscar Wilde’s play *Salome*, two paradigmatic Symbolist publications. F. Holland Day, one of the partners in this firm, became a devoted representative of Symbolist photography, asserting the poetic and suggestive value of this as-yet insufficiently explored artistic medium. Photography was insufficiently developed as an art form until the united efforts of Alfred Stieglitz and the members of the Camera Club of New York devoted themselves to the cause of pictorial photography in the years bracketing the turn of the century. Many of the artists involved in the Camera Club of New York (and subsequently the Photo-Secession), whose work was published in the club’s journal *Camera Notes*, were also devoted to and influenced by artistic and literary symbolism. Hartmann, Stieglitz, Day, Clarence H. White and Edward Steichen all shared a passion for Symbolist esthetics, which became a prime concern of this journal and its frequent contributors. For more on F. Holland Day see Patricia Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008). See Eldredge, *American Imagination*, (1979), pp 20-21, for Symbolism’s endorsement in Boston.

136 DeLue, “Diagnosing Pictures,” (2007), pp 51-55, analyzes an essay on visual perception that Hartmann’s wrote for Stieglitz’s journal *Camera Work* in 1903, but the seeds of this interest were sown much earlier. See Hartmann, “The Influence of Visual Perception on Conception and Technique” *Camera
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a record of an artist’s unique habits of vision united with his powers of creative imagination; it was thus akin to a scientific model of an abstract concept.

Hartmann’s very first claim to make a critical ‘diagnosis’ of art was in his 1896 reference to Davies in *The Daily Tatler*. Davies’s enigmatic painting not only called forth psychological experiences in viewers, it seemingly necessitated such diagnostic critical approaches, providing impetus for the critic to practice and hone his analytical proficiency, drawing together Symbolism, psychology and keen artistic perception. By observing points of uneasy congruence between the two emergent variations of Symbolism—its decadent and idealist modes—Hartmann provided a framework for evaluating Davies’s ambiguity and duality as psychologically informed and thus inherently beneficial. Recognition of Davies’s ability to paint dreams was not only an endorsement of the artist’s penetrating self-awareness, but demonstrated Hartmann’s own perceptual skills as well as his knowledge of the physiological processes of inner vision.

Distinguishing Davies’s Symbolist dreams as akin to modern psychological science also enriched Hartmann’s broader endorsement of the movement’s emphasis on imagination, creative autonomy and subjectivity in art. Other critics who picked up Davies’s cause stopped short of Hartmann’s diagnostic claims; nonetheless, a few did attempt to bring evidentiary scrutiny or scientific practices to bear on analysis of Davies’s work. Some of his supporters endorsed his art as a kind of experiment or scientific investigation; in 1898, the anonymous ‘Town Traveler’ praised, “the equipment Arthur Davies brings to his job,” and stipulated that the artist “invites life in the modes of his own research.” Fellow observers of Davies’s habits negotiated this novel approach to artistic practice by merely referencing his original imagination and interiority: “The key to it all,” said Samuel Swift, “is that Mr. Davies’s inspiration comes from within.”

Esteemed authorities such as eminent landscape painter George Inness also encouraged psychological and introspective qualities in American art; he argued

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*Work 3* (July, 1903), pp 23-26, and “The Value of the Apparently Meaningless and Inaccurate,” *Camera Work 3* (July, 2003), pp 17-18 and 21. Although written after the artist and critic had ceased their friendship, both essays nonetheless resonate with claims Hartmann had made previously about Davies.  
137 Hartmann, *The Daily Tatler*, (1896), p 7, claimed “Davies suffers from the experimentation fever, and it is very difficult to make a diagnosis of his art.”  
139 Samuel Swift, untitled review, *New York Mail and Express*, (December 8, 1900).
persuasively in favor of painting that was, like his own, primarily concerned with a subjective and impassioned connection with correspondences between perceivable natural forms and intangible layers of elevated, spiritual meaning. Inness, like the Symbolists, condemned the limited focus and materialism of overly-realist forms of art, establishing his chief criterion for art when he exhorted, “you must suggest to me reality—you can never show me reality.” Only art that had the power to surpass the limits of the tangible world was deemed worthy for American viewers, in Inness’s judgment. These goals are well demonstrated by the unspecific pastoral landscapes behind Davies’s Symbolist allegories and myths: the glowing colors and spatial ambiguity of Nixie and the farmland of Music in the Fields.

Esteemed critic Royal Cortissoz, writing on “Some Imaginative Types in American Art” in 1895, expressed equivalent sentiment:

> imagination is expected not only to control but to color a poet’s thought, a painter’s design, to lend a special character of strangeness to the work it has informed [...]. Confounding imagination with fancy, the power to invent a phantasy with the spiritual insight that draws an organism [sic] of thought from a chaos of experience, we often see this highest gift [...] in the external outlines of an imaginative production.\(^{142}\)

Referencing the “faculty of creative genius” that was the hallmark of imaginative artists, Cortissoz singled out for praise a diverse assortment of work that would have increasingly read as Symbolist, thanks in large part to the efforts of Hartmann: “We find imaginative art to mean, broadly, the curious art of the Renaissance, fruitful of scenes from Olympus and visions of heaven or hell, or it is the art made in our own time by the

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\(^{141}\) The force of Inness’s reputation and personality in the 1890s had considerable weight in determining the nature of American artists’ devotion to extramundane concerns, the pursuit of ideals and imaginative painting. Although he was not a Symbolist, the preoccupations of his late years establish significant commonalities with their concerns both in Europe and in the United States. See Corn, *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism*, pp 4-9. See also more general evaluations of Inness by Nikolai Cikovsky, Jr., *George Inness*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993); and Adrienne Baxter Bell, *George Inness and the Visionary Landscape*, (New York: National Academy of Design, 2003).

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Amalgamating his own formal influences from these diverse sources, Davies explored the true synthetic abilities of the imagination. Evidence of Davies’s debt to the Pre-Raphaelites—conflated with Symbolists by many viewers—can be seen in the resemblance of his work to some of Watts’ nudes, such as the American painter’s ca. 1900 painting Real and Imaginary (2.23) or his mid-90’s Bather (figures 2.28 and 2.29). The former painting is a contemplative, semi-draped nude in a woodland landscape, viewed as in Arethusa from the rear; it offers another demonstration of Davies’s desire to moderate his painting’s erotic appeal by channeling it into the dreamy, poetic imagination, a process specified deliberately by its title.

Cortissoz did not mention Davies in this article, focusing instead on the imaginative principles of more well established artists: the enigmatic, attenuated outdoor figures of Thomas Dewing, the atmospheric landscapes Dwight Tryon and the spontaneous design of sculptor Frederick Macmonnies. But the critic knew how essential imaginative qualities also informed Davies’s work, and he composed a brief but favorable acknowledgement of the younger artist’s inclusion in the American Water Color Society annual show of 1895:

Cortissoz enthused, “[his] spirit is poetic, the sentiment is really tender, the tones is that of a new man, developing a new art.”

Hartmann’s mention of Davies alongside Dewing and Tryon in his own criticism, and increasing commendation of Davies’s evocative, dreamy formal habits nourished congruities linking Davies, Dewing, Troyon, Inness and other equally imaginative individualists, whose art pointed the way towards future developments in art’s inspired idealism and creative autonomy. By stressing the value of such subjectivity, Hartmann

143 Ibid.
144 Cortissoz did note that these more established artists were “imaginative without saying so in forms of dream or in weird abstractions,” which set their work apart from the risk-taking of the younger artist Davies, but he also observed some commonalities, claiming “in them is witnessed that instinctive uplifting of the senses to a higher plane which is of the essence of imagination and is a personal possession.” Some Imaginative Types, p 165-66. On contemporary interpretations of Dewing’s imaginative painting, see Susan Hobbs, The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); on Dwight Tryon, see Linda Merrill, An Ideal Country: Paintings by Dwight William Tryon in the Freer Gallery of Art, (Washington, DC: Freer Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1990).
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nurtured a context in which insurgent, independent and modern painting found a ready audience in the early 20th century.

Analogous recognition of the relationship between imaginative creativity and dreams appeared in an 1894 book by Frederick Greenwood, *Imagination in Dreams and their Study*. An amateur dream-observer rather than a scientist, the author recorded his own dreams and made a convincing endorsement—based upon his study of contemporary European psychological research by Alfred Maury and Francis Galton—of the fact that imagination and dreaming were both forms of creative thought; one conscious and the other ‘unconscious’ thoroughly unfettered by the limits of wakeful restraint.\footnote{Frederick Greenwood, *Imagination in Dreams and their Study*, (New York: Macmillan, 1894), p 117, stressed “the unconscious suppressions, exaggerations, importations of an excited fancy.”} American psychologist E. B. Titchener, reviewing this book for *The Dial*, noted that Greenwood’s “account of personal experiences is the most valuable thing to the psychologist […] it is good raw material which can be used with advantage for the theory of visual images and their projection-modes.”\footnote{E. B. Titchener, “Side Paths of Psychology,” *The Dial*, 18 (June 1, 1895), p 325. Titchener noted that Greenwood’s dreams, like those of Alfred Maury, showed a particular tendency towards “visualization or visual imagination,” which accorded with his own research into the shape and imagery of abstract thought.} Affirming “dream phenomena are memories cast in some strange form by the imagination,” Greenwood noted that the only bounds to creativity are provided by the waking mentality. He observed, “dream visions […] are creations of the mind, and if so then the limits of the imagination […] are overleapt in sleep.”\footnote{Greenwood, *Imagination in Dreams and their Study*, (1894), pp 10 & 14.} While he noted how artists and poets alike may have been limited in their capacity for conscious imagination, he confirmed that in dreams the mind’s true fanciful and inventive powers were given free rein. Dreams were thus characterized as a liberated product of the imagination’s most creative inner core, and an artist’s true imaginative gifts were revealed in his ability to dream. In the unconscious, the power of ‘suggestion’ was unlimited, and Symbolists readily played in this fertile arena.

III. The Power of Symbolist Suggestion and the Symbolism of Suggestive Dreams:

In like measure, Hartmann’s criticism repeatedly stressed the power of the visionary imagination and the advantages of ‘suggestive’ form; he thus extended
connections between art and emergent research into the psychology of perception. These observations competed with but also paralleled his advocacy of musical analogies, poetic references, mystical associations and the spiritual aspirations of Symbolist artists.

_Evensong_ (figure 2.25) dates from approximately 1898, and in it Davies demonstrated intertwined Symbolist subjects and habits: he made musical references, invoked pictorial harmonies and depicted graceful female figures in a pastoral landscape. In organizing these elements in ensemble, Davies shows his debt to the inspiration provided by Dewing, Inness, Whistler, and Puvis de Chavannes all mingled liberally together.

Appearing in the foreground of a landscape amid abundant summer greenery (although, once again, darkening pigment and varnish grant the painting an overall tawny yellow murk that probably does not reflect the painting’s original state), two women, in ambiguous relationship to one another, command the viewer’s attention. They are in intimate proximity with the viewer, and yet seem utterly unaware of any spectator’s presence.

In the immediate lower right, one woman strums a guitar, her face in profile, intent on her musical inspiration. Although we can’t see her whole body, she wears an antiquated gown whose abundant folded fabric threatens to fall from her sloping shoulders and expose her torso. Observing this mildly titillating detail, however, the viewer must also notice that the proportions of her limbs and body seem odd; her massive right arm is out of scale with her more delicate head and neck. This apparently inept rendering might offer discomfiting distraction if it did not also call our attention to the deft precision of her hand on the guitar’s strings. Like many observers before us, we are as much engrossed as disturbed by the peculiarity, striving to understand the sound produced by this performer’s rapt engagement with her instrument.

The musician’s companion is equally conspicuous, although once again not unpleasantly so: clad in a filmy, fluttery gown that reveals and enhances as much it conceals her body’s form, she occupies a pasture behind and to the left of the musician, but seems spatially disconnected from her companion. Bending to pick wildflowers, she strikes a graceful pose. Towering summer clouds fill the skies above, and she is framed by lushly growing trees, their foliage and the painting’s lustrous colors calling to mind fêtes galantes of Watteau, and the Arcadian fantasy landscapes of Maxfield Parrish. The
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Ruffled edges of her pale dress create animated arabesques of line evoking the rhythmic gestures of a dance, setting up thematic resonance with the music played on guitar. But can she hear this soft strumming, or is she in a separate landscape space entirely apart from our foreground musician? Appearing behind and beyond the head of the musician, but invisible to her as the guitarist is rapt in musical reverie, we might wonder whether the meadow and its sensual pleasures are merely dreamy visions arising in the mind of the player. Davies offers little conclusive clarity to these questions: to do so would spoil our own propensity to lose ourselves in a dream, here. It is left to the viewer to provide whatever imaginative narrative might enhance our immersion in color, contour and composition.

Indeed, the awkwardness of the musician’s enlarged arm can be seen as a deliberate strategy on the part of the artist—who was otherwise an accomplished draftsman, as his many sketches and drawings demonstrate—to use provocative deformation deliberately in his work. He knows his anatomy,” asserted an admirer, “yet willingly sacrifices an articulation to a sweeping line.” Davies invites the viewer’s consideration of metaphorical and anti-material layers of meaning in the painting’s form and structure; in order to disrupt us and make us work to arrive at meaning, he makes a viewer look, and then look again. We must not only see but also see beyond his drawing, and what we then observe is more than merely a pleasant outdoor fantasy. The ideal of achieving musical harmony, made apparent through paradoxical allusion to formal abnormality in the outsized arm, is addressed in Symbolist terms through the artist’s employment of subtle incongruity. These allusive properties engendering interpretive effort in the viewer’s perceiving mind are characteristic of what Davies’s critics found equally odd, compelling, dream-like, and suggestive in the artist’s habits.

Davies created thousands of preparatory drawings and sketches, many of them figural studies of models, and used them for inspiration in constructing his subsequent dream-inventions. Many of these have been collected by Mac Cosgrove-Davies, the artist’s great-grandson, who exhibited a choice sample of his favorites in the exhibition and related catalog, Modern Movement: Arthur Bowen Davies Figurative Works on Paper from the Randolph College and Mac Cosgrove-Davies Collection, (Lynchburg, VA: Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College, 2013). This assembly of work proves the artist’s skill as a draftsman, but most of his critics did not have the benefit of such evidence, and their opinion of his talents varied widely. Some argued that he was exceptionally proficient, while other reviewers seemed less certain about his perceptual gifts.

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Hartmann’s criticism also pointed out the ways in which suggestive art worked by combining poetic metaphors with the elements of pure formal arrangement of color, line and facture; poetry itself was crucial to this transmigration. By 1897, critical commentators in addition to Hartmann were able to take a more informed stance relative to Symbolism’s influence in America. Two Boston writers professed, “symbolism stands today justified of her children and needs no apology. What is it, indeed, but the renascence of the poetic? Poetry is creeping back into painting.” In Davies’s subsequent critical reception, several critics responded to his dreamy work by calling it equally ‘poetic.’ The New York Sun review of his Macbeth’s Gallery show in 1896 singled out one work as “a veritable little poem indeed,” while the next year in the Art Amateur, the anonymous critic specified Davies “has outgrown the faults which we remarked in his earlier efforts, while he has gained proportionally in color and in composition […] the poetic intention which underlies all his work of course comes out all the clearer for these technical gains.”

Dreams, for Mallarmé, played a powerful role in accessing this realm of elevated significance; as reported in the Atlantic Monthly in 1903, he once commented, “dreams have as much influence as actions.” In his Symbolist poetry and prose, Mallarmé endorsed the suggestive power of the unconscious mind, its dream realities more vivid and meaningful than concrete fact. In an often-discussed interview published in 1891, Mallarmé described the suggestive power of poetry: “Immersion in things, the image distilled from the dreams called forth by things—that is poetry. To name thing directly is to suppress three-quarters of the poem’s joy, which consists in the delight of gradually

151 R. and H. Hovey, “Symbolism and Simons’s Pictures,” (1897), p 18. Although not a major publication, and not addressing Davies’s paintings, this quotation from a Boston literary magazine speaks to the growing spread of Symbolist influence, and acknowledgement of its recognizability for readers. While he doesn’t mention Time and the Hour, Charles Eldredge does address the ways in which members of the literary community in Boston were early adopters of Symbolist poetry and drama; see American Imagination and Symbolist Painting, pp 20-21.
152 The New York Sun, (March 14, 1896); Untitled review, The Art Amateur, 37:1, (June, 1897), p 127, reviewing Davies’s second solo show at Macbeth’s Gallery.
divining it. To allude, to suggest—therein lies the dream." Thus Hartmann’s ready comparison of Davies with Mallarmé in 1896 sustained lasting value.

Moreover, the kinds of artistic synthesis Mallarmé’s literary work generated made it a model of intermedial correspondences between the arts—between poetry, music and painting—as well as between the human states of illusion, perception and consciousness that the Symbolists subsequently advocated. Bridging the realms of sensation and imagination, the potent metaphor of dreams in Mallarmé’s poetry sought to translate one form of experience into another, and one form of art into another, thereby calling forth the human mind’s ability to generate visions and imagery that exceeded the limits of the world perceived by the eye alone. Like dreams, Symbolist poetry called upon interlinked perceptual and conceptual abilities.

But the perversity and strangeness of dreams undermined the idea that ‘meaning’ in art was in any sense stable, predictable or unitary; an embrace of meaninglessness was newly regarded as part of the creative process for Symbolist poets. Painters such as Odilon Redon were also inspired by these motivations and Mallarmé’s words. They increasingly abandoned the dictates of mimetic representation in their paintings, or evoked the autonomous, creative power of the human imagination to envision layers of deep, personal meaning in formally ambiguous passages. Seeking the productive inspiration generated when the mind is liberated from routine reliance upon tradition,

154 Mallarmé, as quoted by Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*, (1999), pp 9-10. The original passage was quoted as part of a series of interviews with contemporary literary figures conducted by Jules Huret, and published in *L’Echo de Paris* between March 3 and July 5, 1891.

155 Thomas Munro, “‘Afternoon of a Faun’ and the Interrelation of the Arts,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 10:2, (December, 1951), discusses the pervasive influence of this poem, which revolved around the central trope of a dream, on the cooperative and synthetic spirit of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as Mallarmé’s interest in exploring ‘correspondences’ through poetry.

156 Recent re-evaluations of Mallarmé’s poetry presented by French Philosopher Quentin Meillassoux investigate the reason that his work, particularly the poem *Un Coup de Des*, has proven so troublesome for translators. Meillassoux argues that this incomprehensibility is the result of Mallarmé’s hidden, hermetic symbolism, a facet of his work with which many subsequent writers have struggled, often with frustrating results. Whether or not a numerological system underlies Mallarmé’s symbolism, the poet was adept at playing with form, and appreciated the work of artists whose pictorial exploration mirrored his own abstruse experiments. See Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren: A Decipherment of Mallarmé’s Coup de Des*, translated by Robin Mackay, (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2012); see also Hartmann, “A Tuesday Evening with Stéphane Mallarmé,” *The Art Critic*, 1:1, (November, 1893), 9-11.
many saw great opportunity for art and literature alike to expand the limits to which literal, visible or tangible form could be pushed, and even surpassed.

The deep investigation and even destabilization of traditional formal structure in art and poetry meant, however, that Symbolist art lacked a typical or unifying style and even seemed to some mystified, troubled viewers to lack fundamentally requirements of ‘form’ itself. Instead, for many of its practitioners Symbolism was like an attitude, an outlook or a process through which meaning might be conceived, challenged, and negotiated all at once.\footnote{Symbolist scholar Sharon Hirsh has observed that the commonalities linking Symbolist ‘style’ are ones located not in shared iconography or standardized formal properties, but in the artists’ embrace of process and approach; she has helpfully posited the term ‘dematerialization’ as a definition of practices shared by artists and poets in their exploration of form and its communicative limits. But even into the late 1890s the movement remained stylistically eclectic, often vague and poorly defined, not only for its audience, but also for those who were its key participants, artists and poets alike. This contributed to its relatively slow and erratic dissemination, both in Europe and among American audiences, who may have identified common immaterial and spiritual trends in art, but did not embrace the term ‘Symbolism’ comprehensively or with any collective understanding of its meaning. Sharon Hirsh, “Symbolist Art and Literature,” \textit{Art Journal}, 45:2, (Summer, 1985), pp 95-97.} In Hartmann’s criticism, reference to the properties of ‘suggestion’ in form and subject alike became a powerful equivalent to and substitute for the term ‘Symbolist,’ and when applied to Davies, it singled out his particular contribution to American art; the journalist reviewing Davies in \textit{The Critic} in July 1897 vigorously concurred, “we cannot but think that this quality of suggestiveness constitutes another claim to our regard […] something over and above what we have a right to expect.”\footnote{"The Fine Arts: Arthur B. Davies,” \textit{The Art Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts}, 27: 806, (July 31, 1897), p 63. The writer mentioned that in 1895 Davies had ventured abroad to study from European precedents, and also commented upon his rigorous explorations of form, arguing “he would probably as little think of excusing faults of drawing or composition on the score of poetic intention, as a poet would of insisting that we should accept word-painting as a substitute for rhythm,” thus demonstrating that Symbolist influence, while spreading rapidly, was very inconsistently interpreted.}

The pivotal concept, which Hartmann employed to describe the integrated formal and thematic production of meaning in art, was its ‘suggestive’ ability, as Jane Calhoun Weaver has observed.\footnote{Weaver, \textit{Sadakichi Hartmann}, (1991), pp 26-31.} In common parlance, the word ‘suggestive’ not only meant Symbolist art’s ability to generate ideas and their visionary equivalents, but it referred to the direction offered to the entranced subjects of hypnosis, their unconscious minds producing mental experiences while activated by psychological researchers or spirit
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mediums. Although readily connoting erotic titillation today, it did not immediately signify these properties in the 1890s. What was salient and particularly useful to Hartmann was its equal emphasis on product and process; the idea that was called to the viewer’s mind in the work of suggestive American artists was generated by theme and style, concept and form working in equal partnership. The power of ‘suggestion’ lay in its ability to engage the mind in a process of negotiation, causing the mind to visualize, and think and free-associate all at once, as in one’s dreams.

Davies was not the only artist whose work merited this distinction; Thomas Wilmer Dewing, like Davies, was a painter whose reputation rested on his work’s visionary dreaminess and inscrutability. Hartmann used words and phrases reminiscent of those with which he praised Davies when, in an 1893 review in The Art Critic, he observed, “[Dewing’s] instinct of beauty, poetic expression and mystic grace satisfy my desire to forget every-day life completely.” Hartmann paid particular attention to Dewing’s graceful female figures; “all have a dreamlike tendency,” he said, commending how Dewing “does not merely get their esthetic elegance but succeeds in making them express psychological suggestions.”

The emotional states of Dewing’s figures retained longstanding fascination for Hartmann, but his praise for Davies’s suggestiveness concerned the artist’s intuitive, wholesale integration of figure and landscape alongside conspicuous, decorative formal effects. In his 1896 review for The Daily Tatler, Hartmann repeated his observation that the artist’s most distinguishing features were his “suggestive sketches,” and then remarked, “Students and lovers of art [...] have come to the conclusion that these suggestive sketches represent a higher form of art than finished pictures [...] as the pictures did not preserve the spontaneity of the original inspiration.” The more indistinct, evocative and puzzling his work could be, as in Earth’s Secret, the better it demonstrated the priorities Hartmann valued most.

Suggestive art operated automatically, instinctually, and unconsciously. The term was thus vital to Hartmann’s claims that Davies’s art was psychologically attuned: in

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162 Hartmann, The Daily Tatler, (1896). Indeed, Hartmann credited Davies with “a remarkable amount of insolence,” and reminded his readers that, “Whistler, Manet, Courbet, etc. have also slapped the public’s face with their debuts.”
1901, he reiterated his prior assertions, stating, “Davies’s power of suggestiveness is psychological in its origin.”\textsuperscript{163} In an essay written for Camera Work in 1904 on “The Technique of Mystery and Blurred Effects,” Hartmann was still extolling the psychological and scientific virtues of suggestive art, praising the poetry of Symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck, “with whom the suggestion of mystery amounts almost to a science,” and observing that he “appeals to the mind of the reader to assist him in his fantastic explorations.”\textsuperscript{164}

Suggestive painting was not only metaphorical but also inherently dreamlike, as it operated by means of free interplay between form and content, between external sensory stimulation and inner vision, and between concrete reference and vague allusion, in a manner akin to Symbolist poetry. Davies fervently adopted these metaphysical and psychological goals as his own; on one page of his notebook he observed, “Art is nature seen through the prism of an emotion” while on a separate page, above a rough sketch of a landscape, he scrawled a note urging himself to “put over your work a spell of suggestion”\textsuperscript{165} (figure 2.26). When he implemented this mandate in his work, Davies’s comment was not only directed towards himself; in creating a ‘spell of suggestion’ through the form and content of his work he offered an invitation to the viewer. His provocation of his or her own subjective, suggestive response to his work is significant; Davies’s unique perceptual gifts were made apparent in his vague, anomalous, associative and unconventional handing of form; it encompassed his ability to create an equivalent experience to some purely internal visionary states.

On the back of an apothecary’s prescription slip, Davies scrawled: “A work of art contains always a suggestion of a higher or ideal existence as a child suggests a perfected woman,” a sentiment which he literalized in his ca. 1897-1900 painting Flora (figure 2.27). Depicting a young girl emerging into adolescence, the half-draped figure sits amidst a spring landscape, one breast revealed by her falling garment.\textsuperscript{166} Yet, as a

\textsuperscript{163} Hartmann, A History of American Art, (1901), p 268.
\textsuperscript{164} Hartmann, “The Technique of Mystery and Blurred Effects,” Camera Work, 7 (July, 1904), p 25.
\textsuperscript{165} Undated piece of drawing paper, Box 1; Folder 7; (Davies Collection).
\textsuperscript{166} Davies note. Box 1; Folder 7. (Davies Collection.) Although according to period dictionary definitions in 1893, ‘suggestive’ did not connote sexual innuendo, the association springs readily to mind to viewers today.
suggestion of an ideal, *Flora* is quite strange as she is depicted imperfectly and eroticized unusually: multiple formal anomalies challenge a viewer to ascertain either her purity or her sensuality. Typical of a host of Davies’s images rendering isolated youthful nudes in nature, such as his *Bather* (figure 2.28), *Flora* vacillates between dematerialized and sensual attitudes towards the beauty of the female bodies they depict. *Flora* is, in fact, an early demonstration of the formal habits Marcia Brennan has termed ‘embodied formalism,’ a hallmark emerging in modern painting promoted by Alfred Stieglitz and his circle in the early 20th century, in which Hartmann was an active participant; Davies’s painting encapsulates the gendered connections between female bodies, formal purity and the elevated spiritual content associated with dreams.\(^{167}\)

As some critics at the time observed, Davies owed a growing debt to Italian Renaissance ‘primitives,’ “suggesting the early Italians in simpleness of motive,” and his work was thus linked as well to Pre-Raphaelite inspiration; the title recalls Botticelli’s *Primavera*, as does the pale, semi-transparent garment she wears, and the shady sylvan setting.\(^{168}\) She rests one hand on a bed of white flowers, their petals strewn like crumbs across the carpet of grass. While the foreground is crisply rendered, with meticulous dots of paint suggesting the mottled texture of the delicate spring plants, the background is indecipherable. At upper left and right, above and behind her head, Davies applies thick dots, dappled blobs and fat streaks of yellow-tinged white paint in a scintillating array, evoking the soft, shadowy quality of forest light falling through trembling leaves. Against this dim background, the figure is brightly illuminated; the rich warm creamy tones of her flesh and dress make her almost glow.

Except where it falls from her shoulders, her body is so swaddled by her garment’s profuse layers and folds that we cannot quite tell where and how her torso bends at the hips; under these layers, the figure generates odd proportional anomalies and inconsistent focus. The slender right arm on which she rests her weight is elongated, almost brittle in its fragility, and she leans back at an awkwardly uncomfortable angle. Her left arm must be somewhere beneath the drapery; yet, as her hand appears atop her thigh, it comes to rest improbably far from her shoulder. Beneath the chaste white dress,

the artist barely indicates the contours of her legs by bold, broad and visibly textured paint, delicately highlighted by the barest golden highlight line. These limbs, however, do not seem as though they could possibly match up with her torso. Or if they do, she must have a body stretched and disjointed to the point of dismemberment. Despite her sensual bodily presence, she is almost dissolved by this manipulation: a veiled abstraction, a febrile figment of vernal fancy.

As Charles deKay observed in a later review of Davies, his “nudes are used like flowers for their color and grace, one thinks less of the person than the spot of sweet soft color...in melting outline, sometimes hard and out of tune with the background.”69 This dissonant figural mis-match is made even more strange by the peculiar inconsistencies in focus in Flora: the texture of the paint defining the substance of her dress is thick, conspicuous and pasty—almost tarry despite its light hue—and her body contrasts starkly against the dark landscape space. And in Davies’s characteristically curious juxtaposition, her hair and face are so smudged that she is nearly indecipherable; her ruddy hair becomes a vapor merging with the somber, almost black background behind her, and her improbably large eyes seem ghostly.

The artist’s interest in the discrepant fluctuation between sensory appeal and imaginative transcendence is apparent in small but jarring elements: just below her nebulous head, one visible nipple comes to a sharp point, creating an odd, provocative focus at the painting’s center. While these ambiguities may operate, as Hartmann claimed, to “chasten the temptative qualities of womanhood,” the sexual implication of this detail undermines the otherwise innocent sentiment of the painting. But immediately above this crisply-rendered feature, Davies has smeared, rubbed and softened her face into obscurity: her large, blurry eyes—and our eyes made to blur by Davies’s painterly effects—are equally confounded and allured by these perceptual anomalies; our physical perception retreats into a world inspired by Davies ‘suggestive’ vision, and he makes us partake alongside him in this dream.

Viewers of Davies’s images such as this one, told that he was a dreamer, learned to equate his painting with visionary experiences. They lingered on their mystical and

transcendent properties, and his keen attention to psychological effects. By 1901, the anonymous critic for the *New York Times* celebrated Davies’s resistance to crass materialism in terms that showed the influence of Symbolism, commenting:

The strain of realism has been so hard during the last three decades that one turns with a sense of relief to an artist who is not so overwhelmed by the pressure to make things real that he has no vitality left to follow higher paths [...] leaving it to the observer to get into relations with him as best the observer may, putting on him, indeed, the burden of overcoming those inaccuracies of perspective, of drawing and coloring which are liable to stand as obstacles between the observer and perfect enjoyment.170

Davies’s art may not have demonstrated the kinds of easy formal habits this reviewer favored most highly—his awkward drawing and coloring remain ‘obstacles’ a viewer must overcome—but the artist’s methods were nonetheless ideally suited to his message. Indeed, what is striking about this critic’s comments, and their relationship to Hartmann’s previous discussion of Davies, is his assertion that it is up to the viewer to come to terms with Davies’s dreaming, making the viewing experience into a valuable quest, a search to arrive at the viewer’s own understanding of the work’s higher meaning.

Between Davies’s ethereal Symbolist themes and mutable, even ‘inaccurate’ form, the significance of his work and its psychological insights lay in its imaginative possibility and its inherent variability. Encouraged to arrive at their own solutions to the mystery of understanding dreams, a growing number of observers found lasting value in Davies’s work. For Hartmann, Davies’s art was thus truly ‘suggestive’ in that it did not merely capture the artist’s subjective experiences, it actively engaged the viewer’s own, and invited him or her to consider how art produces psychological responses. Able to capture not only the subjective vision of his dreaming but also to convey the experiential property of dreams to others, Davies demonstrated that his uniquely refined talents attended to both sensory and metaphysical dimensions of perception.

An artist’s ability to paint interior and exterior vision alike—making the deeply hidden and mysterious operations of dreaming concrete on the canvas—was not only a quality of modern painting that Hartmann particularly celebrated, it was one that the critic

believed he had the particular acuity to discern. Moreover, as Hartmann’s criticism asserted repeatedly, by giving concrete form to something inherently unseeable—because neither imagination nor inner vision of dreams can ever literally be seen by our eyes in waking life—Davies embraced the most desired yet elusive Symbolist objective: painting the unpaintable.

Conclusion: “The Echo”

Within a few years of his initial acclaim for Davies however, Hartmann abandoned his unbridled support, criticizing the artist’s painting as derivative rather than truly imaginative. The similarities that Hartmann observed between Davies and other artists proved to be a stumbling block. Whereas his ability to learn from the work of others, amassing and amalgamating their influence had seemed a virtue in 1894 and 96, to Hartmann this resembled a vice by 1897. In his unsigned review entitled “The Echo,” Hartmann lashed out, castigating Davies for borrowing, imitation and appropriation. “In the whole history of art,” he announced, “I do not know of another man who is such an expert plagiarist as Mr. A. B. Davies. That’s something. It is at present his individuality.”

Hartmann commented upon Davies’s omnivorous quest for inspiration, deriving from diverse sources which the critic identified: Pre-Raphaelite figures; Edgar Degas’s drawings; George Inness’s light effects; Walter Pater’s ideas; Botticelli-like figures; Edouard Manet’s style; Albert Pinkham Ryder’s skies; Abbott Handerson Thayer’s subjects; Ruskinian embellishments and Japanese reminiscences. In amassing this

171 DeLue, “Diagnosing Pictures,” (2007), pp 42-69, see especially her discussion of ‘seeing sight’ on p 55. Hartmann’s endorsement of Japanese esthetics, his growing awareness of psychology and his immersion in Symbolism provided his distinctive ‘credentials’ for this discerning observation.

172 Hartmann [unsigned], “The Echo,” (1897), pp 4-5. Despite its positive conclusion, this provocative and uncomplimentary review marked the bitter rupture that ended the friendship between Davies and Hartmann.

173 “The Echo” (1897), pp 4-5. The essay’s resentful tone seems to be the result of a private dispute between the former friends. The irony in Hartmann’s venomous accusation only became apparent later, as Hartmann’s own A History of American Art was substantially plagiarized from the work of a previous writer, Samuel G. W. Benjamin. See Weaver, p 18. In another interesting parallel, Theodore Flournoy distinguished some forms of plagiarism as characteristic of the unconscious mind’s propensity towards ‘cryptic memory’ or cryptomnesia: forgotten memories which resurface in dreams or in unconscious ‘borrowing’ of ideas. Théodore Flournoy, From India to the Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1901). Carl Jung also devoted a 1905 essay to exploration of the phenomenon.
impressive list of references, Hartmann cast his own catholic taste in a very favorable light, demonstrating his own expertise as an informed critic. But he then glibly dismissed Davies's work as, "A pudding of Watts, Leighton and Titian, or anything else you like." While on the one hand Hartmann decried Davies's imitative habits, on the other his observations also credited the artist's devouring intellect. "Mr. Davies is always on the go," Hartmann wrote, registering again the artist's restless experimentation; he was ever "in search of something, rummaging through some private library or perusing vagrom magazines in some garret."

Despite his harsh criticism, Hartmann could not conceal his lingering regard for Davies: he ended his final, caustic review with a characterization that echoes his estimation of Ryder: "And one drop, however muddy it may be, that rises from the depth of your soul, Mr. Davies, would be more valuable than hundred bucketsful of crystal water flowing from other sources!" Both artists, painting from the inspiration arising from their innermost mental states, revealed the defining tendencies of their very souls. Thus, "if I had money, I would buy several of his pictures," Hartmann finally admitted. The description of Davies as " supersensitive to every impression he receives from the work of others" was reiterated in Hartmann's 1901 text, _A History of American Art_, yet was followed by the observation, "if Davies develops into a great painter, his deep culture will have made him one."

The truculent tone and unkind frankness of Hartmann's pointed observations brought the friendship between the artist and critic to an abrupt end, causing Davies thereafter to be extremely reticent with critics about his intentions, interests and practices. But thanks to Hartmann's influence, other writers had already picked up on the key connections he established. Ignoring Hartmann's sniping, most of them endorsed Davies as a patently individual artist, they celebrated his perceptual abilities, praised his color repeatedly, and above all they attended closely to his form. While some observers in the late 1890s still criticized his experimentation with draftsmanship or his clumsy composition, and a few credited the obvious sources of his influence, most came to the

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174 "The Echo," (1897), pp 4-5.
175 Ibid.
176 Hartmann, _A History of American Art_, (1901).
agreement that Davies’s work set him apart from his fellow American painters, and they saw in his suggestive and evocative paintings powerful evidence of an active imagination and a propensity to dream.

Although the exploration of common Symbolist themes in his work is as much an echoing response to pervasive cultural interests as it is an gesture of outright artistic theft, in seeking to arrive at a personal style, Davies was often doing exactly what Hartmann claimed: restlessly borrowing from many sources of inspiration. Indeed, many patrons seemed to appreciate Davies’s versatility, as William Macbeth so often claimed in his brief exhibition catalogs, published in conjunction with the artist’s work. But in Davies’s borrowing we also witness the artist doing what some contemporary writers endorsed as vital to one’s dreams—filling the vast “storehouse of the mind” with material from which to derive imaginative motivation. In fact as the next chapter will show, Davies’ variety and indeed his work’s eclecticism was vital to how it reflected the manifest connections his viewers made with dreaming.

Davies’s dreams therefore arose from his “deep culture,” his voracious acquisition of influence and memories, his familiarity with Symbolism and its psychological investigations. A broader embrace of Symbolism in America in the 20th century, and rising awareness among viewers of the virtues of ‘suggestive’ and imaginative art was not only due to Hartmann; it was also thanks to the small exhibitions of Symbolist artists hosted by Alfred Stieglitz at his gallery 291 beginning in 1907. Thus, within the first

177 Macbeth Gallery, Art Notes, 1, (October, 1896), p 6. Macbeth’s in-house publication offered his patrons regular reports of his artists’ activities, detailed summaries of his exhibitions, and quotations by noted artists, critics and literary figures. In this issue, he commented on Davies’s busy summer activities, and the perennial “variety” of his work, claiming, however, that he is now “far past the experimenting stage and with growing confidence more than fulfilling the promise of his early work.”

178 “The storehouses of the mind are of incredible vastness,” one American writer on dreams argued, “nothing that they eyes have seen [...] is ever let go.” Dr. Louis Robinson, “What Dreams Are Made Of,” North American Review, CLVII: 445 (1893), p 690

179 Alfred Stieglitz’ very first exhibition of non-photographic work at 291 presented the paintings of little-known symbolist Pamela Colman Smith in 1907. See Alfred Stieglitz, “The Editor’s Page” Camera Work, (January, 1907), 37-38; and Melinda Boyd Parsons, To All Believers—The Art of Pamela Colman Smith, (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1975). Stieglitz, thanks in part to his friendship with Hartmann which outlasted the critic’s friendship with Davies, was particularly attuned to the nuances of European Symbolist esthetics, both its mystical and proto-abstract variants, and he devoted himself in the early years of the twentieth century to the promotion of these formally avant-garde trends in the work of his favored American protégés, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove and Max Weber in particular. The source material on Stieglitz and his promotion of modern and Symbolist art is extensive. See particularly William Inness Homer, Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1983). On Stieglitz’s interest in
few years of the new century, Davies and his viewers alike would negotiate these currents of Symbolist thought more completely, and by 1908 he finally arrived at a more distinctly personal style epitomized by *A Measure of Dreams* (figure 4.1). Never abandoning his pursuit of dreams, nor the productive ‘suggestion’ that Hartmann had identified, he found ways to distinguish his work that avoided obvious references to other painters.

What endured in the minds of Davies’s critics was his ability to invite beholders to enter into his dreams in the spirit of investigation, innovation, and experience, finding layers of vitally important meaning, whatever the sources of his inspiration may have been. The result of this liberal exchange of associations, memories and formal habits was a model of art that spoke powerfully to viewers’ growing fascination with visions and reverie, with dreams and perception and their relationship to the visualization of ideas.

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2.21 *Little Lamb, Who Made Thee? Dost thou know who made thee?* 1893, (unlocated, oil on canvas, 13x 12" image courtesy Juley & Sons Collection, Smithsonian Institution

2.22 *Visions of Glory*, 1896, (Phillips Collection, oil on canvas, 10 ¾ x 16")
2.23 *Earth's Secret*, before 1901, (Private Collection, oil on canvas, 15 x 8 ¾")

2.24 *Real and Imaginary*, ca. 1900. (unlocated, image courtesy Juley and Sons collection, Smithsonian Institution)
2.25 *Evensong*, ca. 1898, (Smithsonian American Art Museum, oil on canvas, 22 x 17”)

2.26 Untitled Davies Drawing, (Davies Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum)
2.27 *Flora*, ca. 1897-1900, (Maier Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 16 x 13 ¼")

2.28 & 2.29 Left: Davies, *Bather*, ca. 1896, (private collection, dimensions unknown)  
Right, George Frederic Watts, *Eve Tempted*, ca. 1884 (Tate Gallery)
Chapter Three:

“The Subtle Complexity of the Apparatus:” Davies’s dreams and the psychology of the unconscious mind, 1900-1908

“Object lessons:
A triumph for the artist to see that the observer feels a lively pleasure of the exercises of their his senses.”

Arthur B. Davies, undated note

“[T]he subtle complexity of the apparatus which is at work in the manufacture of dreams [...] show[s] us how many abnormal phenomena—possession, double consciousness, unconscious memory, and so forth—which have often led the ignorant and unwary to many strange conclusions, really have a simple explanation in the healthy normal experience of all of us during sleep.”

Havelock Ellis, 1899

By the early years of the twentieth century, Symbolism in art had acquired some currency in America, thanks to its growing influence on painters such as Davies, as well as to the promotion of its supporters such as Hartmann and Stieglitz. Critics continued to locate psychological meaning in Symbolist art and literature alike, and this was often linked to dreaming. As suggested by the rising tide of poems, stories, essays and articles about dreams in American periodicals, viewers and readers embraced the visionary imagination; this fascination was demonstrated equally by their concern with representations of dreams, interest in the psychological functions of the unconscious, and curiosity about the ways in which the mind could be accessed, studied and explained. Symbolist painting and poetry offered Americans one kind of evidence of what could otherwise only be verified in the subjective, self-contained space of the mind, mass culture offered others, and the developing field of psychological science offered still more. Creating a bridge that critics identified between the suggestive, Symbolist esthetic of the dream and scientific explanations of the phenomenon, Davies’s tantalizing

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1 “Art and Philosophy of Arthur B. Davies” undated sketch and note. Box 1; Folder 7, (Davies Collection.).
3 For example, the anonymous reviewer of Arthur Symons’s book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1908 noted the author’s numerous references to psychology, consciousness, visionary habits, insanity and dreams. “The Significance of the French Symbolist Movement,” *Current Literature*, 44; 6 (June, 1908), pp 621-623. While Symons’s discussion was limited to Symbolist literature, repeated references to imagery and imagination produced associations with Symbolist painting.
glimpses of dream-worlds granted the still unstable configuration of the unconscious imagination profound cultural significance.

But, as psychological science was still very young in America, explanations of dreams and their role in the unconscious were far from unified. Some neurological researchers emphasized their purely somatic origins, arising from stimulation of the senses while the conscious intellect was at rest. Other investigators were far more interested in the emotional and metaphysical properties of dreams: what they might reveal about the mind's capacity for storing memories, problem solving, and fostering imaginative creativity. More questions and problems were provoked by attempts to understand the many different kinds of dreaming that were possible: imaginative reverie, inspired visions, childhood fancies, erotic fantasies, and nightmares. I argue here that Davies's eclectic work, which matured in the first decade of the twentieth century, not only spoke to these diverse forms of dreams, he depicted their operations on canvas in ways that attended to the soma and the psyche equally; his work demonstrated the dreaming mind's varied capacity for generating purely interior perceptual experience. By providing his viewers the "lively pleasure of the exercises of [their] senses" located in the spaces of their unconscious, he offered them the chance to indulge in a waking dream.

Whereas viewers today may believe we have a firm grasp on the definitions and practices of psychology, and a sound if still incomplete understanding of the operations of the unconscious, at the time in which Davies was creating his paintings, the configuration of these epistemes could be quite different. In fact, a large measure of his appeal to viewers—the primarily white, educated professionals who were informed enthusiasts of art, culture and popular science—consisted in his ability to address emergent and divergent models of how psychology explained dreams. He explored what they represented as an aspect of the mind's true functions, what they looked and felt like, and what they revealed about the modern self. One reason that Davies's paintings—and their popularity—are so hard for modern beholders to understand is that they map uneasily and incompletely onto how we now regard psychological science and the dreaming mind. They can seem equally out-of-step with the emergence of vanguard
modernism in American art, and to many remain deeply ‘anti-modern’ in their escapism.\(^4\) But of course, Davies’s viewers came to an appreciation of his work by means of very different conceptions of all of these inter-related discourses, and in fact, his work produced such knowledge.

Thus, while I contend that Davies’s work served an important function for viewers in his day, I also argue that it constitutes a different kind of evidence for viewers in our own: his dream-like images painted at the century’s turn capture the spirit of energetic diversity and disparity with which America’s middle-class readers—committed intellectuals and dilettantes alike—cultivated knowledge not only about art but also about the world of the inner mind. Indeed, in their diverse subject matter and style, his paintings explored the variety of ways in which contemporaries understood the motivation and function of dreaming. The selfsame weirdness, vacillation and inconsistency that makes Davies’s work seem irredeemably puzzling to many observers now is a fitting demonstration of the artist’s sensitivity to the moment in which his art was produced: it not only echoed the strangely jumbled visionary experiences of dreamers, but it mirrored the disorderly state of the discursive fields onto which ideas about the unconscious could be mapped. Through his paintings, viewers saw the visionary imagination as a locus where, according to British psychologist and physician Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) writing in *Popular Science* in 1899, “we ourselves and our beliefs are to some extent ‘such stuff as dreams are made of.’”\(^5\)

Two very different paintings bracket the time period and the issues I address in this chapter, and demonstrate the artist’s ability to inspire dreams: *The Voyage*, an undated work (figure 3.1), and *Sleep Lies Perfect in Them*, ca. 1908 (figure 3.2). Each call to mind a different kind of dream—one evokes a disquieting nightmare while the other seems a pleasant, even seductive fantasy—but together both reflect the strangeness

\(^4\) See my previous discussion of these dynamics in my introduction and Chapter 2.

\(^5\) Ellis, (1899), pp 721-739. Although a British psychologist and qualified physician, Ellis was a frequent contributor to this American publication, who was creating a name for himself as an important scientist in the field of psychology, publishing his formative study of gender, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* in 1894, followed by the first volume of *The Study of the Psychology of Sex, Volume 1*, (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1897). Ellis’ books, published not only in England but issued in American editions, were reviewed in American professional journals such as the *American Journal of Psychology, The Monist, American Anthropologist* and the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods.*
that made Davies’s art both compelling and confounding. *The Voyage* seems to have been painted around 1900, based on its dark palette and heavily textured surface which recall such paintings as *Nixie* and *Flora* (figures 2.1 and 2.26), but it is quite different in subject than these prior works, conveying a sense of agitation and energy. It serves as an apt demonstration of Davies’s sundry sources, just as it shows his investigation of the comingled power of the artist’s mind and hand.\(^6\) At first look it summarily illustrates a spare nocturnal seascape: from the deck of a ship whose surface and limits cannot be seen clearly, we witness a storm’s roil. Although its murky and cracking appearance indicates layers of varnish that have darkened over time, it was undoubtedly always a dark painting, in mood and atmosphere alike.

The shifting space, time and scale that many dreamers reported are captured by the painting’s spatial and figural anomalies; “In dreams, time and space are annihilated” noted Andrew Lang in 1897, “we are present in places remote; we behold the absent […] all these things […] are familiar to everybody who dreams.”\(^7\) Four glowing female forms move along the barely-discernable rail of the vessel’s foredeck. Painted in golden hues, these girls are set apart from the surrounding darkness. They link arms companionably, and proceed in swaying rhythm towards the painting’s right hand side. Rising in height from left to right, the tallest figure gestures with an upraised arm towards the edge of the canvas and a destination that we cannot see. The water, sky, and atmosphere offer striking contrasts in painterly treatment and surface. While the folds of the figures’ pale garments create demure echoes of the turbulent waves behind them, the soft outlines of their bodies and features are oddly inconsistent with the vigorous handling of paint.

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6. This painting was acquired by the Phillips Collection in 1927, and my estimation of this painting’s date is conjectured. But, given that the artist’s palette and handling of varnish both lightened considerably after about 1903, it seems unlikely that it dates much later than 1905. It is, unfortunately, not mentioned by name in any reviews of the period, nor was any work bearing this title exhibited at Macbeth’s Gallery. However as previously mentioned, establishing firm dates and titles to some of Davies’s early works can be a challenge, and there are quite a few works in Macbeth’s exhibition checklist that are unknown today, suggesting that their titles may have been changed by the artist, or even after the artist’s death.

7. Andrew Lang, *The Book of Dreams and Ghosts*, (London and New York: Longman’s, Green and Co, 1897), p 3. Although written by a British poet, psychic researcher and amateur anthropologist, Lang’s investigation of both para-psychological and folkloric approaches to dreams, apparitions, hypnotic trances, wraiths and phantoms had transatlantic popularity, and his book was reviewed in American periodicals. Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p 5, notes the pervasive interest that many modern writers had in matters of the unconscious and the world of the spirit, among which Lang’s publication was one of the most extensive.
above, behind, and beyond them, and they seem indifferent to the tempest that arises immediately above their heads, as if it is merely a figment of their—or our—imagination. They stand out, a conspicuous and off-center focal point against the somber background, but look insubstantial, like flickering, phantasmagoric illusions in a magic-lantern show.

In some ways *Voyage* seems a clever pastiche of other artist's styles and ideas, a quality that Hartmann had decried in his scathing 1897 review of Davies’s “marvelous capacity of appropriating other men’s work.” Hence, the painting’s tonality and robust texture call Albert Pinkham Ryder immediately to mind, as Ryder’s sea views are an obvious origin for the mood of disquiet Davies conjures, but his palette otherwise evokes Ralph Blakelock’s moonlight landscapes, and the painting’s rhythmic structure and spare composition sound distant notes of Whistlerian influence. The figures reveal yet other sources: youthful and innocent, their graceful charm is allied to Thomas Dewing’s drapery-clad American goddesses, or Abbott Thayer’s more robust virginal angels, or even Puvis de Chavannes’s archaic goddesses. Davies’s liberal borrowing notwithstanding, the painting’s imitations and inconsistencies play an important role in its affective power.

Lines of ascending rigging immediately behind the girls’ bodies lead towards the upper right-hand corner of the canvas; where the ropes meet its edge, the tilting angle of their grid traces the unbalance of the pitching ship. Despite this vertical and directional pull—indicating the motion of the storm-tossed vessel—the viewer’s eye and mind are forcefully drawn to the left by Davies’s startling handling of thick, restless paint. Brown, gray, black and darkest green brushstrokes animate the water’s agitated peaks, meeting one another at choppy, uneven angles. Much of the depicted sea is strangely undifferentiated in color and application from the substance of the indistinct foreground deck; but the paint Davies applies to indicate the crest of the waves is radically different. Here, darkly milky tones capture the movement and texture of wind-driven ocean spray. The jagged horizon, near the uppermost edge of the canvas, merges with the inky sky, across which a pale cloud scuttles in the force of the gale; its thick surface texture registers the dryness of a paintbrush’s bristles. In its appeal to the senses, *The Voyage* arises from a dream to awaken uncomfortable memories of nature’s paramount force.

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In marked contrast, *Sleep Lies Perfect in Them* (1908) typifies Davies’s pleasant reveries, and demonstrates many of the conjoined habits that personalized his work by the first years of the twentieth century: frieze-like compositions; lush and idyllic but unidentifiable landscapes; soft yet enticing pastel colors; and robustly healthy and semi-naked female bodies, whose peculiar proportions and figural anomalies are provocative, but only mildly perplexing.⁹ Depicting a group of six women arranged in various poses of sleep across the foreground of a horizontally oriented canvas, the tranquil space and atmosphere establish an indulgent frame of mind for viewing. One distant figure raises her arm in a leisurely stretch, extending it above her head; her elbow points up towards mountains beyond, and mimics the shape of a knobby hill in the middle distance.

Drawn deeper in to the space by this gesture, and kept there by the contentment Davies’s color sensibilities and soft textures inspire, viewers are likely to become entranced by the painting’s lush sensuality. Any puzzlement generated by these large, somewhat oddly proportioned bodies—whose purpose here is not explained—is forgotten for the moment in the pure pleasure of vision. Youthful, beautiful and perfectly passive, these sleepers embrace the realm of dreams without inhibition, and their sensual repose invites us to share this experience, confounding any attempt to discern whether Davies shows us his dream, their dream, or our own; as viewing continues, the painting presents oscillating alternatives.

The figures lie amidst a welter of vegetation: a thicket of blobby, succulent vines and flowers seems to burst up amidst them, the vigorous growth almost threatening to overtake the passive forms. The landscape that rises directly above their sleeping bodies seems almost to emerge from out of their slumbering minds; as my vision ascends the canvas surface, my imagination enters into the terrain behind them, which is described in luminous hues of green, blue and an almost intense shade of violet, suggesting an edenic location permeated by a soft and fragrant haze. The sky is not blue but a strangely

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⁹ Elisabeth Sussman, “Rhythm and Movement in the Frieze Paintings of Arthur B. Davies,” *Dream-Vision: The Work of Arthur B. Davies*, (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1981), np, claims that Davies based the composition of *Sleep* on Swiss Symbolist Ferdinand Hodler’s painting *Night* (1889-1890), but offers no evidence of where or how Davies might have seen this work. Hodler’s influence on Davies’s later work seems considerable; a different work by Hodler, entitled *Eurhythmy*, was exhibited in Paris at the Salon de Champs de Mars in 1895 when Davies was visiting that city, yet no evidence proves that he attended that show.
compelling golden peach contrasting vibrantly with the purple horizon; Davies renders the hour just before sunset or after sunrise on a warm summer’s day, and may refer to memories of his 1905 travel throughout the American west, a journey which brought him through Colorado, California, and Oregon, and inspired a host of paintings. When the work was exhibited in 1911 at the Independent exhibition, its presence did not secure any critical notice, but it was subsequently purchased by Lillie Bliss, who became Davies’s most devoted collector.

Heads resting upon bolsters the color of stone, the sleeping girls’ bodies in the foreground echo the contours of the distant horizon, and merge with the landscape’s soft hues; its enticements seem to refer back to the inner world inhabited by these dreamers. A network of fine fretwork lines ascends above them on the left hand side of the painting, indicating they may rest beneath a vine-covered garden bower, but it is too vaguely rendered to signify any solid architectural structure. As in so many of the artist’s works, details are elusive; the figures overlap, and their limbs are hard to define. The shadows on these forms are inconsistent, and incompatible with the painting’s presumed light source. Davies copied the poses and lighting on some of the figures from preliminary sketches he made in his studio (figure 3.3), but here in the painting these seem peculiarly un-integrated with the imagined setting.

The girls are covered by little except their loose garments—roughly half of these fall open to reveal naked chests; the body in the left foreground is slightly distorted, her exposed breast strangely far from her head. In their slumber, the sleepers are unaware of the close scrutiny of the observer, who is invited to let her eyes linger on the form beneath their dresses. To access this space visually, our eyes must ascend past and across their sensually rendered bodies: we cannot see the landscape without confronting their slumbering presence, wondering at their complete surrender to the realm of their dreaming imagination. In this, Davies partakes in a long tradition of granting viewers’ unacknowledged and voyeuristic visual access to sleeping nudes in emulation of artists

10 Many images of this period, such as Pastoral Dells and Peaks, Redwood Grove, Hosanna of the Mountains, and A Double Realm show California landscapes and tall trees.
11 See Perlman, L.L.A., (1998), pp 193 and 296, who notes the confusion regarding Davies’s works in the 1911 ‘Rockwell Kent’ independent exhibition. After the work was gifted to the Tate Gallery following Bliss’s death, and the bequest refused, it was given to the Worcester Art Museum by Lillie Bliss’s brother.
from Titian to Courbet. But, as comparison with fellow painter Frederick Carl Frieseke’s similarly titled 1903 painting Sleep shows (figure 3.4), by rendering the terrain of a dream, Davies sequesters his sleepers from the kind of erotic, even prurient gaze Frieseke invites, and transposes them into a more distant and complicated conceptual space. Davies invites us to look at these appealing figures, employing their physical abandon as a metaphor for succumbing to the power of the image, and I indulge willingly in his fantasy.

As Hartmann and other critics had established the parameters of his reputation by 1900, Davies took on the direct representation of sleep, reverie and dreamers more frequently in the first years of the new century, not only in works such as Sleep Lies Perfect in Them, but also in A Measure of Dreams (figure 4.1), Springtime, the Dreamer, (ca 1906) and Aurora, Hill of Dreams (ca. 1905). Following his early critical success at solo shows at Macbeth’s gallery in 1896, 1897 and 1901, the artist acquired growing recognition beyond New York, winning a medal for Full Orbed Moon, (figure 3.16) at the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition of 1901; he held his first solo show outside of New York in Boston in 1905. Critical success came with this exposure; his work was well received in 1904 at the National Arts Club exhibition, alongside that of his friend and supporter Robert Henri. Persistent references to the dreaminess of his art positioned Davies—alongside Ryder, Dewing, and other ‘imaginative’ painters—well beyond the interests of contemporary ‘realists’ like Henri who grappled with empirical observations of daily life in America. Davies’s dreaming confounded many critical attempts to understand where and how he fit next to Henri and his anti-academic peers. However, this was also one of the artist’s virtues, inherently related to the variable explanations of the psychology of dreams.

Certainly some critical confusion is understandable, since to many viewers, Davies’s painting seemed vigorously opposed to the materialist, urban emphasis of the artists with whom he exhibited in the well-publicized “Eight Painters” show, hosted by devoted supporter William Macbeth in 1908. Although he was considered patently independent and not firmly affiliated with the well-established but conservative types of

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art supported by the National Academy of Design, one anonymous reviewer of Macbeth's exhibition wondered "why [Davies] should show with the apostles of paint who make up the other seven is hard to see, and it is difficult to discuss his work with theirs [...]". In distinction, Davies and his work were commonly described as 'visionary,' alongside Ryder and Blakelock; he had steadily been building his reputation as "This seer of visions, this poet who would penetrate the earthly envelope and surprise the secret fevers of the soul," as a Philadelphia journalist described him. However, Davies exhibited his painting Legend—Sea Calm (figure 1.2) at the National Academy the very same year.

Vital debate at this moment concerned whether dreams came from the mind or the soul, and what was normative in their unconscious realm, as well as how inner vision related to ocular sight. During a period of widespread interest in perceptual psychology which Jonathan Crary has richly investigated, the vividly real yet illusory experiences of dreams presented a paradox giving rise to profound curiosity. If the educated and inquisitive middle-class viewers I envision for Davies were particularly enterprising—or were medical professionals—they would have found increasing authoritative explanations of dreaming and the unconscious mind in journals devoted to the emergent discipline of experimental psychology. The artist's wife, Lucy Virginia Meriwether Davies, was one such professional, having trained under Emily Blackwell at the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. In her own family practice, dreams related to common medical problems like nightmares and sleepwalking; it is likely that she had at least a basic understanding of the prevailing psychiatric and neurological explanations of dreams. Many physicians believed that

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13 "This Month’s Exhibitions," The Independent, vol. 64, February 27, 1908, p 464.
16 Few of the most available diagnostic guides and compendia of remedies for a physician in the Northeast addressed disorders of sleep, which were the province of more specialized medicine; those that discussed ordinary dreaming fell back on a time-honored connection between bad dreams and overindulgence; see for example the description of nightmares in The Cottage Physician for Individual and Family Use, with an
overly vivid or disturbing dreams were a sign of some underlying physiological disorder, as explained in Dr. William A. Hammond’s text *Sleep and Its Derangements* (1869).\(^\text{17}\)

Yet, characterizations of dreams and dreaming appeared not only in specialist publications aimed at scientific professionals, but also filled the pages of periodicals such as *Scribner’s*, *Harper’s*, and *Popular Science Monthly*, nourishing fascination with this topic for their American readers.\(^\text{18}\) Between 1890 and 1900 over 55 feature articles and short stories in American periodicals concerned the general theme of dreaming, and over 95 poems referred to dreams, dreaming and dreamland in their title.\(^\text{19}\) In the pages of these popular publications, readers were invited to consider the contributions to the study of dreams made by many different disciplines in terms that went beyond their medical investigation, blending liberally with literary or artistic application.\(^\text{20}\)

The device of the dream was also well established in late nineteenth century fiction and literature.\(^\text{21}\) In fact, it had become so commonplace in nineteenth century

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\(^{18}\) For essential discussion of the typical readership and distribution of these magazines, as well as many others that distinguished the cultural field of publishing at this moment, see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, Volume IV, 1885-1905*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957). In 1900, roughly 5,500 periodicals served American readers; *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, *The Century*, and *Atlantic Monthly* led the field not only in terms of their extensive circulation, but also in the literary quality, scope and seriousness of their very general contents, as well as offering new visual entertainments as illustrations and advertisements expanded in their pages. Addressing an educated and largely middle-class but geographically far-flung readership, their journalistic tone was both professional and erudite.

\(^{19}\) According to the results in the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Sources*. Reviews of books or plays on dreams are omitted from this number, as are references to Shakespeare and international politics such as the “Monarchical Dreams in France “ or the “socialist dream” which concerned several writers.

\(^{20}\) See, for example, Dr. Louis Robinson, “What Dreams Are Made Of” *North American Review*, 157:445 (July, 1893), 687-697, freely linking the writing of Robert Louis Stevenson, the *Journal of the Proceedings of The Society for Psychical Research*, the current state of psychological study with his own personal experiences.

\(^{21}\) It was particularly popular as a metaphor with Romantic novelists and poets and their Symbolist descendants, but employed by contemporary realist writers and journalists as well. Literary references to the power of dreams were deeply embedded in the mid-19th century Romantic tradition, and the leitmotif of the dream was as common in America as it was abroad. Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Jack
writing that literary critic Frank Foster commented on this state of affairs in the July 1898 issue of Arena, reviewing contemporary treatment of the topic in “Dreamland in Fiction.” He found the profligate employment of dream-motifs “lamentable,” noting that “those who play with fancy, and wind it into ingenious knots and tangles for our pleasure, in most cases so fatally err when they take for material the ‘jumbled rubbish of a dream.’”

Decrying the haphazard and routine way many writers fell back upon the theme, Foster argued for a more nuanced and creative yet also ‘scientific’ approach to dreaming in contemporary literature, taking current progress in dream research into account.

Foster’s recommendation attests to advances in popular knowledge about the science of dreams. As Nathan Hale has shown, articles devoted to the unconscious and dreaming, written from diverse viewpoints, multiplied in the two decades prior to Sigmund Freud’s arrival in America and the subsequent popularization of his controversial theories; such essays flourished in American magazines in the early-to-mid 1890s, declined briefly, then increased dramatically just after 1900. Books about the
mind and the unconscious reflected a wide range of expertise and authority in their authorship; some such as Alfred Binet's *On Double Consciousness* (English edition, 1899-90) were the result of personal research conducted in clinical settings, others like William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) were comprehensive summaries consolidating diverse knowledge of international research, theory and laboratory experiments. Still others were purely speculative philosophical exercises. Explanations of dreams arose from all of these sources, and some, such as Greenwood's *Imagination in Dreams and Their Study* (1894) indulged in wilder forms of pure conjecture; the lay public did not necessarily know or dwell upon the nuances of these distinctions.

Moreover, for these readers, belief about what it meant to claim the authority of 'science' was both broad and vague, as were the qualifications by which individuals demonstrated their fitness to contribute to scientific research and theory; these circumstances generated an inclusive, discrepant and diverse intellectual framework for understanding the science of the unconscious. Davies's own awareness of Binet's theories about double consciousness, demonstrated by his notebook jottings, suggests he had at least superficial familiarity with the growing body of knowledge devoted to the unconscious mind and its faculties. But his idiosyncratic interpretation of Binet's ideas demonstrates the flexibility that marked their application. Discussions of dreams and explanations of dreaming not only proliferated in fiction, but also in essays promising to unlock their mysteries, and in pamphlets suggesting simple interpretation of their common symbolism; images of dreams and references to dreams appeared in illustrated stories, comics, advertisements, and in the nascent technology of film. While scientists the goal of ascertaining how these texts were central to the American cultural context. Also see Nathan G. Hale, Jr. *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), who addresses the popularization of dreaming in pre- and post-Freudian psychoanalysis in American magazines, especially pp 113-115 and pp 397-411.

As Davies's small notebook attests, his interest in dreams and psychology suggests that he was a likely reader of both scientific and non-scientific publication on dreams and dreaming, although it is unlikely he was thoroughly versed in all of the new turn-of-the-century publications approaching the study of the mind and brain from the disciplines of medicine, neurology, psychopathologies and psychology, such as the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, which was founded in 1906.

In the spring of 1890, for example *Scribner's Magazine*, Volume 7, not only published William James's essay "The Hidden Self" (March, 1890) concerning some early discussion of his inquiry into spiritual matters and the unconscious operations of the mind, but such stories as T. R. Sullivan's "Through the Gate of Dreams," (February, 1890) and Frank Dempster Sherman's sentimental poem, "Backlog Dreams" (May, 1890).
embraced the rigorous, objective study of the human mind’s normal and abnormal functioning, attempting to understand the nature and existence of the ‘unconscious,’ Americans also arrived at more subjective and disparate answers to the question of how Davies’s dreams might be understood.

Little conclusive clarity was offered by the competing and often interrelated disciplines, which is just as well: despite advances made by science, the allure of dreaming lay in the fact that this phenomenon continued to elude concrete clarification, and this also explains Davies’s viewers’ mingled attraction and perplexity. This instability yielded a rich site in which readers and viewers indulged a host of overlapping, even occasionally contradictory ideas: ones about vision, perception, imagination and consciousness itself. Dreams could be regarded as a phenomenon encapsulating some or even all of these mental processes; critics connected Davies’s work to a variety of interior states through which modern subjectivity took shape. In what follows I chart popular psychological knowledge about dreaming by addressing the common terms in which the character of dreams was presented to readers; I discuss emergent psychological science and the arguments research proposed about the origins of dreams; I examine explanations of their function; and lastly, I discuss how their imagery—whether disturbing or appealing—was conceptualized. Davies’s imaginative evocations revealed the paradoxical qualities of dreaming equally in the uncanny visions called up by The Voyage as well as in the languid ecstasies of Sleep Lies Perfect in Them. The artist invited his viewers to relive the visionary experiences through which we establish a sense of our compelling interior lives.

I. Dreamland—between fiction and fact

If the diversity of dream-experiences remained difficult to encompass, a growing body of evidence suggested that most had common origins, mechanisms and features through which the unconscious might be charted; popular essays provided viewers an increasing variety of tools for calibrating their own dreams, as well as those Davies presented in paint. I take three articles published in popular American magazines as exemplary, here; spanning the pivotal decade during which psychological science was institutionalized nearing 1900, they consolidated a disparate mass of data into a rough
‘taxonomy’ of dreams, and established guidelines with which a turn-of-the-century beholder could assess their own dream-vision.

The first, published in 1895, was a charmingly personal essay penned by novelist and literary critic William Dean Howells (1837-1920). “True, I Talk of Dreams” appeared in Harper’s Magazine, for which he worked as editor, and summarized many popular theories about dreaming, without ascribing scientific meaning to them. Examining his own dream-habits, Howells offered rumination on the appearance, function and significance of dreaming, writing with wry amusement that, “Everyone knows how delightful the dreams are that one dreams one’s self, and how insipid the dreams of others are.” Howells’s desire to explain the peculiar vividness of his own personal imagery appears both indulgent and entirely understandable. Reading his narrative inspires memories of one’s own dreams, as did Davies’s paintings: products of the artist’s subjective vision, they originated from his own introspection, but, upon leaving the studio and engaging the imagination of his viewers, his work fluctuated thereafter between his own dream-visions and those he provoked in the minds of his viewers. Howells’s essay similarly invites measurement of his description against experience.

Even though he did not reference artists’ inspiration specifically, Howells’s imagery is engaging and vivid. Enumerating many of the typical forms of nocturnal fantasies—dreams of flying, floating, appearing suddenly on a stage, or traversing foreign landscapes—Howells captured the imaginative whimsy of dreaming: its playful juxtaposition of objects and people; its compression of time and space; and its liberal mingling of rationality and irrationality. Whereas he observed their strongly personal nature, he also argued that some nocturnal experiences were universal ‘race dreams,’ such as ones of soaring or hovering. Viewers would have recognized these phenomena in


Davies’s paintings; many figures in his work summon the dreaming experience of floating or suggest weightlessness. In *Springtime Ecstasy*, (figure 3.5) or the presently un-located *After Rain*, (figure 3.6), the bodies appear to arise, glide or drift, their feet not quite securely planted on the ground.29

But if such buoyancy was strangely pleasant, Howells alluded to other common experiences and beliefs, ascribing nightmare grotesqueries to the body’s retributions for gluttony, and pondering the shameful awkwardness inspired by dreams of nakedness. As some pictures showed nudity and others nightmares, Davies’s paintings addressed these disquieting phenomena, although he mitigated the shame of nudity by means of pleasing formal harmonies in *After Rain* and *Sleep*. Other paintings conformed more closely to Howells’ observation that dreaming was akin to the wanderings of the human soul, as suggested by the meandering figures in *Meadows of Memory*, or *Redwood Grove* (figures 3.7 and 3.8). Howells likened dreams of the dead to consolations emanating from the spirit world, and although he claimed no personal experience, he also proposed great significance to prophetic dreams, such as those in which dreamers solve riddles or identify their own maladies before being consciously aware of any physical disease. He ascribed great value to the creative lessons dream imagery might offer; yet, while he asserted that some novelists turned to their dreams in their own creative process, he stopped short of professing that they served as a vehicle for his own.30

Addressing the morality of disturbing dreams, Howells connected these to contemporary conjecture about how they revealed purportedly ‘primitive’ human traits: “The dreamer is purely unmoral; good and bad are the same to his conscience [...] he is reduced to the state of the merely natural man; and perhaps the primitive men were really

29 Both latter paintings are currently known only in un-dated photographic slides taken in Davies’s studio by Peter Juley and Sons, housed in the Smithsonian Institute’s collection.
30 Robert Louis Stevenson, a British writer perennially popular with American readers, discussed the unconscious origins of his creativity in “A Chapter on Dreams,” included in his 1897 memoir *Across the Plains*. He commented upon how his creative process was profoundly shaped by dreaming, and attributed his sources of inspiration to the “little people” who visited during his nocturnal ramblings. Stevenson attributed the basic parameters of his novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, whose exploration of the powers of the latent unconscious was informed by contemporary psychological research, to the dreaming operations of his unconscious mind, and humorously referenced the ‘brownies’ of his imagination who shared some of his creative work. Stevenson observed, “There is no distinction on the face of our experiences...but which of them is what we call true, and which a dream, there is not one hair to prove.” Robert Louis Stevenson, *Across the Plains*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897), p 229.
Chapter 3: “The Subtle Complexity of the Apparatus”

like what we all are now in our dreams.” In paintings such as *The Flood* and *A Greater Morning* (figures 3.9 and 3.10), Davies played with such primal, archaic or even Biblical analogies, a theme that would acquire greater currency in the artist’s work in forthcoming years, as I discuss in Chapter 5. But Howells also unsettlingly implied that such ‘primitive’ dreams might be associated with insanity; “the man in his dreams is really lower than the lunatic in his deliriums,” he claimed. He did not follow this statement with any psychological theories about the unconscious, but observing the illogic that dreamers take for reality, Howells commented on their strange yet vivid ‘double effect,’ and intimated they had as yet untapped layers of meaning. Paintings made in the wake of Davies’s 1905 California journey such as *A Double Realm* (figure 3.11), took on the premise of duality in dreams, but rendering his enticing landscape in halcyon terms, Davies offered viewers no hint of the stigma of insanity.

Like Howells, Havelock Ellis recounted the contents of his own dreams in his 1899 essay, “The Stuff that Dreams Are Made Of,” written for *Popular Science Monthly*, and he similarly provided a list of typical dream-experiences, associating them with both rational and irrational explanations. Observing their characteristic form and imagery,

31 Howells, (1895), p 838.
32 Charles Crow, “William Howells and William James, ‘A Case of Metaphantasmia’ Solved” *American Quarterly* 27:2 (May, 1975), pp 169-177, argues that Howells’s extensive musings about dreams owed a debt to his friendship with William James, whose own interests in the dream spanned science and spiritual investigations, a topic I address in my next chapter.
33 Davies was well aware of the variable, unpredictable fortunes that accrued to an artist who earned this label. Ralph Blakelock, with whose work his was compared, suffered from depression that caused unstable periods and he suffered a complete schizophrenic breakdown in 1899, resulting in institutionalization for the rest of his life. However, the popularity of his work actually increased after 1900; he was made a member of the National Academy of Design in 1916, and his landscape paintings earned fantastic sums. Blakelock’s insanity was effectively linked to his ‘genius’ and artistic sensibilities, and his fortunes were in many ways tied to his reputation as a dreamer; in 1905, *Brush and Pencil* published a profile and biography of the artist, in which the author uses terms very similar to descriptions of Davies. He claimed Blakelock “dreamed strange dreams, and told them in remarkable color schemes, till the thread of reason broke under the strain.” See Frederick W. Morton, “Work of Ralph A. Blakelock,” *Brush and Pencil*, 9:5 (February, 1902), pp 257-269. See Abraham Davidson, Ralph Albert Blakelock, (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996); and Glyn Vincent, *The Unknown Night: The Madness and Genius of R.A. Blacklock, an American Painter*, (New York: Grove Press, 2002) for biographies.
34 Ellis, “The Stuff that Dreams Are Made Of,” *Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. 54 (April, 1899), pp 721-739. *Popular Science Monthly* was noted specifically for its scientific, rational approach to sociology and psychology. The editorial aim of its early years was “to meet the broadening conception of science as analysis of mind,” and to that end German Romantic philosopher Eduard von Hartmann’s “Philosophy of the Unconscious” was translated and excerpted for the second volume in 1873, and C. S. Peirce published “Illustrations of the Logic of Science” in its pages between 1877 and 78. At a cost of $5.00 a year for a full subscription, circulation hovered around 12,000 even after 1900 when the annual cost decreased, under the
Ellis also discussed common dreams of buoyancy or flying, the relationship of unpleasant dreams to physical overindulgence and the manifold visual and sensory 'confusions' dreams produced. But writing with the benefit of medical authority, Ellis—in distinction to Howells—focused on the growing body of scientific explanations for dreams, deriving from his familiarity with both American and European psychological publications.  

Arguing that the dreaming mind works via association and analogy, blending imagery and emotion into an integrated whole, Ellis echoed Hartmann's endorsement of Davies's Symbolist habits of interwoven formal and conceptual suggestion. But in addition to the peculiarities of dreaming the psychologist also accounted for their connection to intellect, a concept several art critics recognized in Davies's work: as the New York Times critic declared, "Davies makes an appeal to the mind [...] his compositions are exceedingly intellectual. His intricate rhythms...have no message at all for the lover of that only which is easy to understand."  

While Ellis observed that even at their most intellectual, dreams can seem like the delusions of the insane, he affirmed "in dreams the doubling of personality is a normal and constant phenomenon in all healthy people."  

Ellis's ready assertion of their normalcy tried to counterbalance lingering beliefs even among some psychological authorities that dreams were abnormal, and offered even the strangest dreams a reassuring explanation, as Davies tried to do in his images. 


"The New Divination of Dreams" was both popular and scientific in its outlook. In his blithe prose, Peterson, also an amateur poet, blended the scientific summaries that new editorial guidance of psychologist James McKeen Cattell. Initially published by Appleton's until 1900, thereafter by the McClure's syndicate, Philips and Co for one year, then by Science Press 1901-1915. For a fuller history of the magazine, see Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Volume III, 1865-1885, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1938), p 497  

Ellis's essays demonstrate that he was well versed with American developments in the field of psychology alongside their European counterparts. In addition to publishing on dreams in Popular Science Monthly. Ellis also wrote essays on the psychology of color perception The Psychology of Red, (1900); The Psychology of Yellow, (1906), and the effects of mescal Mescal: A Study of a Divine Plant, (1902), for Popular Science Monthly.

37 Ellis, (1899), p 732. 
interested Ellis with more speculative meditations that echo Howells, in his attempt to make dreaming seem eminently reasonable and indeed worthy of modern investigation. “The worlds of dreams is the same as the workaday world,” he said, “but seen in a dimmer and hence mysterious light;” the kind, perhaps, illuminating the interior domain of Davies’s imagination.39

Following the trajectory of these essays, between 1895 and 1907, the focus in American popular magazines shifted from speculative fiction to more verifiable fact, in step with the advances in psychological knowledge made possible by increasing empirical research and experimentation. And as his reputation as a dreamer grew, Davies’s critics and viewers registered the shifting values that could be connected to his dreaming, alternately praising or condemning his enigmatic subject matter and evocative but indistinct handling of form. Whether seen as reveries or nightmares, Davies’s paintings offered compelling correspondences with the inner phenomenon of dreaming.

These essays were surely not the only popular sources of information about dreams from which readers might have gleaned understanding, nor were Davies’s paintings the most prevalent visual presentation of their common aspects: his viewers and many other Americans would have seen Winsor McCay’s imaginative weekly comics such as the colorful, exuberant child-dreams of Little Nemo in Slumberland which debuted in The New York Herald in 1905, or his Dream of the Rarebit Fiend, appearing in the Evening Telegram beginning in 1904 (figure 3.12).40 Both offered readers a weekly exploration of the slumbering protagonists’ free-associating minds, although the imaginative nocturnal journeys of the young Nemo were commonly more playful than the retributive dreams of the Rarebit-eaters, which explored adult phobias, nightmares and cryptic fantasies.41

39 Peterson, (1907), p 448.
In both of these innovative comic series, McCay showed supple, clever creativity; his interest in the endlessly creative imagination and its visual depiction shared much with contemporary Symbolist art, especially in conjuring psychological effects through pictorial form. Depicting the illogical arrangement of disparate mundane objects, fantastic exploration of size and scale, and the irrationality of dream narratives, McCay’s illustrations were extremely daring in their approach to the unconscious mind and esthetically advanced in their pictorial habits. McCay’s dreams also had fitting parallels in other media; his *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend* gave rise to an inventive 1906 Edwin S. Porter film of similar name, in which the dreamer’s tribulations provided a chance for the filmmaker to demonstrate his ingenious cinematic tricks, sight gags and illusions.

While the vigorous color, bold line, and sequential narrative motive distinguishing the comic world of Winsor McCay—as well as the temporal and visual effects of the new medium of cinema—may both seem far removed from the placid, ethereal and ideal realms of Davies’s visions, the artists maintained common concerns: they not only explored the psychological effects of dreams but also shared intersecting motifs readily associated with Symbolism, among these the experiences of childhood, fascination with the mind’s occult potential, and the extremes to which the stimulated imagination might transport a dreamer. Connecting emergent psychological discourse, fine art and the arena of mass media and expanding visual culture, together these sources aggregated a wide range of popular beliefs about dreams, and sustained viewers’ vigorous interest in the topic.


43 While the relationship between avant-garde painting such as cubist or futurist art and early cinema has been well established, the associations between earlier, proto-modernist Symbolist art and film that viewers might have made is less well-charted territory. Tom Gunning has written extensively about the associations between cubists, futurists and Dadaists and early film, “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde” in Elsaesser and Barker, eds., *Early Film*, (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp 56-62; see also Gunning, “The Non-Continuous Style of Early Film” in Roger Holman, ed. *Cinema 1900-1906*, (Brussels: FIAF, 1982), pp 213-60.

II. Between soma and psyche: the origins of psychology

Ellis addressed this interest in 1899, writing, “In our sleeping emotional life we are much more like ourselves than we are in our sleeping intellectual life [...] it is these characteristics which make dreams a fit subject of serious study.” As scientists, both he and Peterson were informed by the growing attention medical professionals gave to the unconscious. Yet, just as considerable diversity characterized popular reckoning with dreams in visual culture, disciplinary interchange shaped both ‘science’ and the study of the mind at this transitional moment, opening up the possibility for art to become a site on which disparate ideas could be mapped.

Many historians credit Wilhelm Wundt’s Leipzig laboratory, founded in 1879, as the first academic research department to be officially devoted to psychology, studying and verifying the mind’s underlying psychic structures and the nature of perception. E. B. Titchener (1867-1927), associate editor of the American Journal of Psychology and professor of psychology at Cornell University after 1892, was one of Wundt’s most influential students. But studies of the mind in late nineteenth America were conducted from several competing vantage points: psychiatrists or alienists, many of whom had medical degrees, worked in asylums treating extreme cases of mental derangement. Neurologists, most of whom also possessed the benefit of medical training, studied physiology, seeking material explanations for milder and common mental disorders, such as the pervasively diagnosed condition of ‘neurasthenia.’

But these sciences overlapped extensively with philosophical speculation and study of the ineffable nature of consciousness. And much research into the normal operation of the mind maintained parallel epistemic goals: locating the seat of

45 Ellis (1899), p. 735
46 The work of Wilhelm Wundt was translated and published in America in 1897. Wilhelm Wundt, Outlines of Psychology. Translated, with the cooperation of the author, by Charles Hubbard Judd. (Leipzig, W. Engelmann, and New York, G. E. Stechert, 1897).
47 As Eli Zaretsky observes, while the term ‘neurosis’ had been invented by early neurologists in the 18th century, it was not commonly employed relative to the ‘unconscious’ until medical scientists began studying disorders such as hysteria in the 1860s and 70s. Zaretsky, The Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis, (New York: Knopf, 2004), pp 22-23. The significance of neurasthenia to emerging psychology is also considered by Francis Gosling, Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
knowledge; examining the ‘primitive’ or instinctual drives that underlay emotion, impulses, and fantasies; and even proving the existence of the soul. Scientific knowledge about the mind was therefore pursued within medical schools and departments of physiology, but could also be approached from more speculative or theoretical vantage points. As academic departments devoted to psychology were founded in the United States, they were housed, both conceptually and literally, in the intersecting disciplinary terrain between medical science, philosophy, theology and even aesthetics. For example, Titchener’s methodical research on the visual and kinesthetic properties of the imagination established important parameters for understanding of how internal imagery was a fundamental aspect of cognition as well as creative imagination. Critics of Davies’s eclectic paintings argued for many ways in which his works also cultivated similar objectives.

Titchener’s structuralist interests were complemented by the work of others such as William James (1842-1910) and George Trumbull Ladd (1842-1921), whose research was more inclusive of philosophical speculation and tolerant of metaphysics. When James began teaching the very first classes in psychology at Harvard in 1872, there were no established departments devoted to the topic in American universities. But this soon changed; studying unconscious processes such as dreams and mesmeric trances as part of their research, a group of psychologists—many initially centered in Boston—institutionalized the systematic study of psychology in the 1880s and 1890s. James’s 1890 publication of the Principles of Psychology established him as a leader in the study

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48 For a rich and rewarding discussion of how these fields intersected with aesthetics, particularly attending to the development of theories of empathy in understanding the function of the imagination, see Susan Lanzoni, “Empathy in Translation: Movement and Image in the Psychological Laboratory,” Science in Context, 25:3, (September, 2012), pp 301-327.
49 See, for example, George Trumbull Ladd, Philosophy of Mind: an essay in the Metaphysics of Psychology, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895).
50 Morton Hunt, The Story of Psychology, (New York: Anchor, 1994), p 146-47, Hunt observes, “James himself had never taken a course in the New Psychology because none was available; as he once joked, “The first lecture in psychology that I ever heard was the first I ever gave.”
51 For more on the pivotal role played by “The Boston School of Psychopathology” among whom James Jackson Putnam and G. Stanley Hall (who later became friends and advocates of Freud) is included as well as William James and Morton Prince, see Eugene Taylor, Shadow Culture, (Washington, DC: Counterpoint Press, 1999), pp 174-176; see also Eric Caplan, Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p 98-110. The American Journal of Psychology was established in 1887 by G. Stanley Hall, its first issue came out the following year, and in 1892, Hall became president and one of the founding members of the American Psychological Association
of the science of the mind, but his former student, colleague, and rival G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) founded what is often regarded as the first active experimental research laboratory devoted to psychological research at Johns Hopkins in 1883, where Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was also conducting some investigations in psychology, particularly the psychology of perception.\textsuperscript{52} Departments devoted to the empirical study of the mind were founded thereafter at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Wisconsin, Indiana University, Clark University and the University of Nebraska in the last few years of the 1880s; many researchers at these schools emulated the experimental rigor displayed by the German and French scholars whose methods they adopted, adapted and promoted.

In their approaches to dreams and the unconscious, American psychologists sought to distinguish their methods from contemporary folkloric practices of fortunetelling and dream divination, as well as the theatrical demonstrations of unconscious mental abilities provided by psychics and spiritualists, a topic I address in my next chapter.\textsuperscript{53} Most scientists held fine art separate from these popular pursuits, as it was a venerated cultural product; the unconscious aspects of perception and aesthetic response even entered into some psychological studies.\textsuperscript{54} However much they may have related to mass cultural fascination with dreaming, Davies’s painted dreams could therefore also be worthy, even intellectual demonstrations of the mind’s unconscious capacities.

Scholars on all sides of the often-illusory borders delimiting psychology, philosophy, psychopathology, and neurology addressed the interior world of dreams; they

\textsuperscript{52} Saul Rosenzweig, \textit{Freud, Jung and Hall the King-Maker: The Historic Expedition to America} (1909), (Seattle: Hogrefe and Huber, Publishers, 1992), pp 14 & 85. Hall had worked closely with James at Harvard, earning the first PhD in psychology in 1878, but he was more attracted to clinical experimentation than James, who preferred reading, speculation, observation and other research methods. Hall later challenged James over which of them founded the first ‘true’ systematic research laboratory; Hall founded his at Johns Hopkins in 1888, before moving to Clark University. Hall was also a longtime skeptic of psychical research, which occupied James’s interests in the later 1890s.


\textsuperscript{54} For example, Joseph Jastrow, \textit{The Subconscious}, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), p 111, considered how automatic and integrated an individual’s aesthetic response became, whether a result of training and exposure to ‘good taste’ in art, or a temperament high in “sensitiveness to subtle differences of aesthetic effect.” Interestingly, however, at least one contemporary study investigated the unconscious power of comic images, Lillien J. Martin “Psychology of Æsthetics. 1. Experimental Prospecting in the Field of the Comic,” \textit{The American Journal of Psychology}, 16:1 (Jan., 1905), pp 35-118.
offered a window into the unconscious psyche and a model of neurological activity. But, taking place entirely within the mind’s interior, dreams were one of the most elusive of research topics, and some believed they had little real merit as a subject of quantifiable investigation. Dreamers only reported their experiences when fully conscious, and thus the recollection of dreams necessarily imposed some interpretive and subjective structure on their unconscious spontaneity. Many American dream researchers relied upon disciplined self-analysis, following in the footsteps of their French predecessors Maury and Hervey de St-Denys. Titchener urged such meticulous introspective methods in his own studies of the visual conceptualization of thought. He maintained attentive self-monitoring was the only reliable means through which a scientist might verify the accuracy of his or her observations of inner mental states, since ascertaining the content of other people’s minds was difficult to accomplish with adequate rigor; this was doubly true for the study of dreams arising in slumber. Yet, this approach reflected an acknowledged problem in dream research: the tendency towards subjective bias in the study of true nocturnal dreams, as opposed to the more clinically regulated investigation

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55 Ellenberger observes, “the era of positivism brought the notion that dreams were a meaningless byproduct of automatic and un-coordinated brain activity occurring during sleep.” Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious, (1970), p 304.

56 In these French studies, assistants would stimulate a dreamer’s senses by introducing sounds, smells or touch to the dreaming subject. Maury employed assistants to interrupt his slumber at intervals during the night, or early in the morning, and scrupulously recorded his immediate impressions of the content of his dreams upon waking. The most interesting results, according to these researchers, were generated in the early stages of sleep, when the images were clearest and most readily accessible upon waking. See L. F. Alfred Maury, Le Sommeil et Les Reves, (Paris: Didier, 1861); and Hervey de St-Denys, Les reves et les moyens de les diriger: Observations pratiques, (Paris, 1867).

57 Edward B. Titchener, Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought Process, (New York: Macmillan, 1909), pp 7-22; Titchener’s chapter on mental imagery and empathy extensively discussed the powers of the mind to produce imagery alongside abstract thought and conceptualizations. His introspective method had shown him that his “mind, in its ordinary operations, is a fairly complete picture gallery.” For quotation see p. 13.

58 While the results may have reflected some bias towards their expectations, generating ‘autosuggested’ dreams, American dream researchers tried to be meticulous about setting up the contexts for their dream experiments, and did not rely upon their own experiences alone, but interrogated students, friends and willing participants about their own dreams, nightmares and nocturnal visions. See Julius Nelson, “A Study of Dreams” American Journal of Psychology, Vol. 1, (May, 1888), pp 367-401; E. B. Titchener, “Taste Dreams,” American Journal of Psychology, 6:4, (January, 1895), pp 505-509; and Mary Whiton Calkins, “Statistics of Dreams,” American Journal of Psychology, 5:3, (April, 1893), pp 311-343. Although a rigorously objective scientific method opposed to such introspection was in development, truly ‘mechanical objectivity’ was impossible to produce in dream research. For more, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, Objectivity, (New York: Zone Books, 2007), pp 115-190.
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of mesmeric trances and other hypnotic visions which similarly addressed the unconscious.\textsuperscript{59}

Fastidious analysis and record-keeping was thus crucial to scientific investigation of dreams. In one of the earliest American studies, published in the very first volume of the newly established \textit{American Journal of Psychology} in 1888, biologist Julius Nelson turned to his own dreams for preliminary evidence, and emphasized his thoroughness: after recording their content, he detailed their classification, discussed methods of retaining dream imagery after waking, recalled childhood nightmares, and speculated on the reasons for certain vivid or violent mental images and narratives.\textsuperscript{60} In light of this emphasis on attentive self-knowledge, Davies’s own note-taking about his dreams, scribbled on drawings and in the pages of his notebook, appears like a valuable form of psychological as well as pictorial research (figure 3.14).\textsuperscript{61} Since his methods were essentially the same as scientists’—if not quite so rigorous—his results could be trusted to reveal something fundamentally true about dreams. Critics in the wake of Hartmann also found Davies’s work psychologically revelatory and ‘scientific,’ such as the \textit{New York Times} columnist who described his work as “a mystic ideal united to the method of science;” their opinion testifies to what was possible for viewers to think about art and psychology alike at this moment.\textsuperscript{62}

But if disciplined study could identify shared episodes, sensory phenomena, and strong feelings that correlated the dreams of different individuals, every person’s dreams remained unique and appeared to each person in distinct ways that no-one else could ever witness. In dream research, tension between subjective experience and objective study

\textsuperscript{59}Milton Kramer, \textit{The Dream Experience: A Systematic Exploration}, (New York: Routledge, 2007), p 6, discusses the lingering effect of this bias on systematic dream studies. He notes “the focus moved from a first person data source to a third person one, from a study of subjective states to the study of objective states that were not dependent on the vagaries of the experimental subjects’ reporting.”

\textsuperscript{60}In Nelson, “A Study of Dreams,” (1888), p 375, the biologist claimed, “I took up the study of dreams as a convenient portal to the general subject of hallucinations, and with the hope of adding to our knowledge of this most fascinating field of psychology,” although he averred, “a tendency to view one’s own states with a special bias is readily and unavoidably given. There is a tendency to be interested in the matter of the dreams, in its aesthetic effects, much as we react towards ideas and events of real life in relation to our well-being.” Not all of his research concerned himself, as he also tried to assess the quality and character of the dreams of his subjects: he tried to research the impact of women's ovulation and menstruation cycles on their dreams, and the impact of seasonal change, suggesting a fundamental connection between dreaming and the imperatives of nature on the human body.

\textsuperscript{61}Davies’s Notebooks; (Davies Collection).

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paralleled the ways in which Davies’s painted dreams were not merely his own, but could be examined and shared with viewers; his paintings flourished in the unstable conceptual space between scientific objectivity and the vagaries of subjective reporting. Havelock Ellis commented upon this common “objectivation of subjective sensations,” as despite their strange images and confused analogies, many dreamers commonly projected their own emotions and feelings on to those of other people: the friends and strangers who populated the mind. Ellis noted “a large part of all progress in psychological knowledge […] lies in realizing that the objective is really subjective,” attesting to the profound instabilities defining psychology into the 20th century.63

III. Between nightmare and reverie—the origins of dreams

Despite Ellis’ endorsement of ‘subjectivity,’ much initial dream research avoided the more difficult, personal or even superstitious question of what the images or symbols of dreams signified—the province of fortunetellers more often than scientists—and attended instead to their underlying materialist causes, ignoring as well their psychic function or powerful imagery, which occupied later psychologists. These efforts both paralleled and supported the professionalization of psychotherapeutic medicine and the rise of psychology.64

Biologist Nelson’s 1888 study broke important ground, attributing basic physiological causes to all dreams. Arising in the mind from their own imaginative logic, dreams in his account were the direct result of some stimulus, whether some discomfort

63 Ellis (1899), p 733.
64 Hale, Freud and the Americans, (1971), pp 47-68, discusses the pervasive and lasting influence of ‘the somatic style’ on American psychology. The emphasis on the so-called ‘somatic style’ in psychology had been established in America by physician and popular writer Silas Weir Mitchell, along with others, and by a new group of similar neurological scientists who sought to establish their credentials as leading medical professionals in the wake of the Civil War. It was in part Mitchell’s experiences working as a physician during the war, studying and treating mental disorders and the functioning of the brain, that led to his subsequent authority in all matters relating to neurology. An advocate of the ‘rest cure’ for disorders such as hysteria, and an expert on the catch-all diagnosis of neurasthenia, he believed in an ‘energy conservation’ model of the human brain’s operation, whose depletion resulted in manifestations of disorder. See Silas Weir Mitchell, “Rest in the Treatment of Nervous Disorders,” A Series of American Lectures, Volume I, Number IV, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s and Sons, 1875). Many of the concerns over the inability of modern minds to retain control over their subconscious, leading to diseases like hysteria, were equally motivated by the ideas of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and the evolutionary model of human development, a topic I address in a subsequent chapter. The aberrations in the brain that gave rise to mental diseases were commonly attributed to flawed hereditary origins.
felt within the body and experienced as a vision, or some other, subtler external sensation such as a noise or light. In 1895, psychologist Titchener also wrote about the sensory origins of dreams in “Taste Dreams,” observing that while “most of our dreaming is in terms of vision,” strong impressions from other senses could motivate the scope of the images produced. Sound, such as music, and the sensation of heat or cold, pleasure or pain could generate particularly vivid results, although these tended to express themselves to the dreamer in terms of visual imagery: “tones are sung by some person seen, heat is sensed amid certain visual surroundings.” This research was corroborated by amateur psychologist Hiram Stanley, writing about his own experiments in *Science* in 1899. He subjected his students at Lake Forest University to tests in which their dreams were influenced by scent and taste: salt water applied to the tongues of dreamers produced dream-images of eating olives, while a low octave tuning fork striking the note of C produced dreams of fog horns. However physiological in origin, such demonstration of the productive interchange between the senses and the psyche in dreams confounded any simplistic explanation of their operations, and validated an artist’s creative interpretation of dreaming in terms of synaesthetic correspondences to music or scent.

A somatic argument even governed the observation that lack of customary sensation could produce dreams. Some research attributed the dream of flying, floating or weightlessness to physiological origins: the absence of gravity acting on the feet. While

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66 Titchener, “Taste Dreams,” (1895), p 506. Providing meticulous discussion of his scientific methods, in which he argues for his thorough preparations for self-evaluation, Titchener once again relies upon his own experiences to determine the scientific focus of his recollections. His sense-dream of eating plum-cake is described with a minimum of literary flourish. He ascribes the vividness of his dream to the fact that it took place in the morning, just before being awakened, and the force of his auto-suggestion.
67 Hiram Stanley, “Artificial Dreams,” *Science* 9 (February 7, 1899), pp 263-64. Such studies were explicitly modeled on those conducted by earlier French scholars and scientists, who reported upon their own sensory experiences and visions while dreaming. Maury, *Le Sommeil et Les Reves*, (1861), was convinced that all dreams were caused by external stimulation, and his tests were designed to show that even in sleep the senses can convey messages to the brain, and that the brain responds with appropriate imagery. Seeking a physiological reason for this phenomenon, biologist Julius Nelson proposed that the powerful, even disquieting imagery of vivid dreams were the result of an increased flow of blood to certain ganglia in the brain, caused by an “irregularity in the relations of controlling centers, or stimuli from diseased or uncomfortable organs.” Nelson, (1888), p 373.
68 Howells, (1895), p 839. Ellis commented that while a few scholars believed the sensation was due to a muscular contraction in the inner ear, a far more common explanation might arise from the absence of
observers readily knew such locomotion is impossible in real life, the very effectiveness of the sensory illusions sustained in dreams sustained seemed to demonstrate that dreams and waking experience were not fundamentally separate from one another, but rather showed the cohesion of our interior and exterior worlds, our sensory and perceptual apparatus. Davies’s ability to make his dreams—however personal and odd—seem powerfully real for his viewers became a commonly repeated critical observation: “in the lambent light in which these figures move,” one noted, they “belong to a world in which we dream, yet dream true.”

The chief purpose of dreams, this line of research concluded, was to keep the sleeping body asleep even in the midst of the continuous flow of data provided by our nervous system. Thus, despite the occasional provocation of their imagery produced by the faulty conclusions of the slumbering mind, they were not meaningless delusions; they served a valuable role that could be linked to the rest necessary to the preservation of the body’s mental energies. In light of these beliefs, pleasant or whimsical dreams had positive merit, providing restoration of the over-taxed senses and imaginative uplift towards a higher plane that could also be experienced by viewing art, as Sarah Burns and Kathleen Pyne have both argued.

Sustaining a parallel between art and dreaming was indeed a way to assert art’s therapeutic properties. In paintings such as *Sleep Lies Perfect in Them* and *A Greater Morning*, the recumbent women Davies painted reflect beneficial quietude, while their harmonious color and sinuous line propelled the viewer towards a state of ideal harmony. In this context, the pleasant emotions inspired by the painting’s sensory form and sensual content suggest a link between art, spiritual elevation and the discourses of Social Darwinist thinking.

normal upright pressure on the soles of the feet, and the “disturbance of the internal equilibrium” that is the natural result of sleeping in a prone position. Ellis, (1899), pp 728-729.


70 Sarah Burns discusses the ways in which some psychologists regarded tonalist paintings such as those by Dewing, Tryon, Whistler and Daviess as offering a kind of pictorial equivalent to the states of repose that were recommended cures for the anxieties provoked by modern change, in her chapter “Painting as Rest Cure,” in *Inventing the Modern Artist*, (1996), pp 120-156; Kathleen Pyne traces significant connections between such similar painting and the evolutionary discourses surrounding Herbert Spencer’s ‘social Darwinist’ thought, which was enormously influential to elite Anglo-American audiences, who saw in their beauty and refinement both a sign of their culture’s complex developmental achievements and a form of art that soothed anxieties about their diminishing cultural authority amidst a moment of profound social change. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, (1996), pp 17-25.

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In light of rampant anxieties over modernization and evolutionary forces, many Gilded Age Americans were preoccupied by what historian Barbara Sicherman has termed ‘mental hygiene:’ the proper maintenance of effective control over the emotions resulting in “a kind of idealized calm,” onto which they could map their understanding of the positive therapeutic value of dreaming. But the members of the northeastern elite who constituted most of Davies’s audience were also absorbed by questions regarding the boundary delimiting mental health from degenerative mental aberration. Fascination with dreams thus had a dark counterpart: without proper control of the senses when conscious, an undisciplined viewer’s imagination could all too easily let sensory stimulation go too far in their nocturnal visions. Thus, the primary explanation for somatically induced dreams didn’t account for their pleasures as often as it did their horrors. Ellis granted; “All the internal organs, when disturbed or distended or excited, may induce dreams, and especially that aggravated kind of dreaming which we call a nightmare.”

As nightmare images were often attributed to common indiscretions in one’s habits, they were therefore potentially associated with poor self-regulation of impulses and instincts. When provoking disturbing nightmare imagery—even making forbidden behavior seem real—unpleasant somatic sensations could be linked to the mind’s punishment for faulty self-control, intemperance and overindulgence. Howells proposed that “everyone has had dreams of finding his way through unnamable filth and of feeding on hideous carnage; these are clearly the punishment of gluttony, and are the fumes of a rebellious stomach;” Peterson similarly concluded in 1907 that bad dreams could arise from both indigestion and overindulgence in alcohol.

Winsor McCay’s comic Dream of a Rarebit Fiend traded on these associations, mining them for whimsy and subtly moralizing humor; the success of his comic imagery relied as much as Davies’s paintings on the viewer’s presumed familiarity with these.
psychological explanations of dreams. The provocations inspiring flights of bizarre visions in McCay’s sleepers were linked each week to overindulgence, customarily in the rich, cheesy rarebit supper—consumed with beer—that was a popular post-theater meal. In the sequences of events that unfolded, McCay experimented with extremely expressive graphic means of conveying a dream’s true strangeness: his exaggerations, distortions and juxtapositions are clever, funny, and unsettling. His visual excursions into slumber’s somatically induced terrors enabled newspaper readers to enjoy both the pleasures and paradoxes of viewing while also indulging in mild opprobrium for intemperate behavior—or recognizing their own with regret. But although some of Davies’s paintings, such as After Rain, traded in manipulations of scale, distortions of form and peculiar activity, their lack of clear narrative denied viewers the convenient or reassuring somatic context such as the one McCay provided. Trading in deeper layers of ambiguity, Davies and his critics tried to maintain a distinction between his culturally elevated—if sensual—dreams and the province of popular sensationalism. An 1898 review noted that Davies’s attempt “to get the sublimation of the movement of this country on canvas is surely not a matter to be undertaken between drinks.” While making light mockery of the popular association between drinking and hallucinatory visions, the critic’s recognition of Davies’s interest in capturing ‘the sublimation of the movement of the country’ is very significant.

Yet popular forms of visual culture like comics and film capitalized on the uneasy reputation of dreamers for imaginative and consumptive excesses, locating humor rather than mere mystery in the unlikely flights of fancy they generated. An Artist’s Dream, a film created in collaboration between Edwin Porter and artist J. Stuart Blackton in 1899, derived its inspiration from a popular vaudeville conceit, in which ‘paintings’—tableaux

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74 Rarebit was championed by humorist Randolph C. Lewis in McCay’s 1905 book Dreams of A Rarebit Fiend as “a thing of dreams. Clothed in gold and breathing a fragrance that fills the nostrils with a charm more bewitching than woodland odors [sic], it is, to a soul attuned to its beauties, a thing of glorious reverie by day and matchless dreams by night.” Quoted in Winsor McCay, Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend, (New York: Frederic A. Stokes, Co, 1905), np. According to this opening page of McCay’s book, the dish was particularly consumed by theater-going men, and resulted in general instability because of the doubly intoxicating effects of the ale in the dish and the ale consumed while eating this salty snack. A fellow contributor to the book assessed his own ‘scientific’ study of the effects of Rarebits in the companion segment, entitled “Concerning the Symptoms.”

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vivants of posed figures—come to life.76 In this short sequence, a devilish creature intrudes upon the studio of a sleeping painter—reclining in a chair beside a conspicuously placed bottle—and with a wave of his hand causes pictures of diaphanously clad young ladies to emerge from their static poses and move about the room.77 They flirt playfully with the artist in his befuddled dream, vanishing suddenly as he tries to embrace them. Upon waking, as the distracted young artist finds his paintings returned to their original state, he resorts to drinking straight from the bottle beside him.78 Capitalizing on the early ‘special effects’ of film to envision people and objects spontaneously appearing and vanishing, levitating and changing into other objects at will, the film shows a compendium of dream-like visual gags, all of which are attributed to the artist’s alcohol-fueled creative imagination. When they assured readers that Davies’s eminently sober paintings partook in no such folly, the artist’s critics tried to secure the respectability of his dreaming and his personal behavior alike.

Following the somatic model, the excesses characteristic of nightmares could be distinguished from insane hallucinations if nightmares were merely the mind’s reaction to some external sensory stimulus or distress—like fever or indigestion—that derived from elements of ordinary conscious perception. But for others the undisciplined imagination was equally related to the realm of insanity: “Healthy mental life is so nearly related to normal mental life, that our illusions frequently lead to hallucinations almost as well

76 Nancy Mowll Mathews, “Art and Film: Interactions,” in Moving Pictures, American Art and Early Film, Exh. Cat. Williams College Museum of Art, July 16, 2005-December 11, 2005 (Hudson Hills Press, 2005). Pp 145-158, observes the prevalence of films made around 1900 in which images ‘come to life’ and generate uncanny, often dream-like results, suggesting some of the ways in which this medium offered viewers new ways to think about art, especially in these years during which radical changes were introduced into pictorial practices, heralding the arrival of modernism.

77 Ian Christie notes the popularity of such Faustian figures in many early films, which sustained connections not only to operatic and theatrical productions, but also to paintings by Delacroix based upon Goethe’s writings. Ian Christie, “Painting and the Visual Arts” in the Encyclopedia of Early Cinema, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009).

78 The notion that an artist might well be a dissolute drinker and womanizer was fostered by the climate of scandal surrounding some legendary artists’ misconduct and excesses, such as Stanford White’s notorious ‘Pie Girl’ dinner of 1895, at which some of the artists with whom Davies’s work was associated participated in what the press reported as a night of drinking and debauchery: J. Alden Weir, Willard Metcalf and John Twachtman. Davies was not there, but the sensational nature of the event, and the 1906 murder of Stanford White over dancer and model Evelyn Nesbit, made such stories linger in the popular imagination. See Paul Baker, Stanny: the Gilded Life of Stanford White (New York: Free Press, 1989), p 251; also see contemporary reports such as “The Story of an Artist’s Model,” New York World, (October 13, 1895), and “Girl Was Baked in a Pie,” New York Herald, (April 1, 1896).
marked as those occurring in insanity, but when the mind is normal...the illusions are fugitive, whereas in abnormal states certain false ideas become fixed and persistent by the suspension of judgment and reflection,” one writer asserted. This journalist cautioned his readers about the dangers of the unfettered imagination: “if we habitually allow our imagination to become overheated, the best of us are liable to illusions; but if we live in a healthy atmosphere, and keep free from mental excitement, we can look upon the occasional failure of the mechanism of the mind as an inseparable accompaniment of its general efficiency.”

As some studies such as those in psychologist Joseph Jastrow’s 1905 The Subconscious categorized all dreams as a kind of ‘abnormal’ visual phenomena, the distinction between dreams and insanity was not at all secure. The disturbing imagery of dreams or nightmares—particularly ones in which a dreamer acted out criminal, illicit or immoral impulses—remained a provocation, as these visions seemed so readily associated with the unconscious mind’s lack of moral regulation; such loss of control, associated with ‘moral insanity’ and hereditary degeneration, signaled potential weaknesses lurking in the human psyche. Therefore, while some critics may have written about Davies’s dream-visions in the 1890s with approval, others greeted these qualities with skepticism or distaste, registering unease about the ways in which dreaming might parallel deranged, nightmarish delusions. When Davies exhibited with The Eight, an anonymous review signed by “The Gilder” claimed “Arthur B. Davies is on a slightly different plane [than his fellow artists], that plane which leads you in doubt

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79 Anonymous writer, “Dreams and Perceptive Illusions,” Ballou’s Monthly Magazine, (April, 1893), p 318. Published in Boston, Ballou’s, which marketed itself at various times in its publication history as “the cheapest magazine in the world,” sought to divert, educate and entertain its readers in equal measure.
80 Joseph Jastrow, The Sub-Conscious, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co, 1905), p 175-266. All discussions of dreaming in Jastrow’s book are within the section devoted to ‘abnormal’ forms of consciousness. This has bearing on Blakelock’s fortunes as well, as his reputation only thrived once he was safely contained in an institution.
81 For a valuable discussion of the late-century concern with ‘moral insanity’ and the responsibility of mentally aberrant individuals for criminal behavior, see Charles Rosenberg, The Trial of the Assassin Guiteau, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Rosenberg considers the historical moment just prior to the institutionalization of psychology departments in the United States, but his analysis of what was at stake in the trial of President Garfield’s assassin offers an excellent summary of the beliefs about insanity, morality and criminal responsibility in the Gilded Age.
between genius and insanity." Although he didn’t argue the artist was definitively insane, the ‘doubt’ he referenced stressed caution from viewers.

The imagery of hallucinatory nightmares might readily correspond with the dream expressed in Davies’s *The Voyage* or his terror-driven figures in *The Flood*: his pictorial anomalies, murky color, coarse scribbling marks, agitated brushstrokes and unsettling vision could be seen on the one hand as impulses arising from highly sensitive sensory inspiration, or on the other as the potentially dangerous products of an unbalanced mind. As one critic asserted in 1894, “he is a dreamer in whom the sense of form and the forms of sense are deficient.” Equating Davies’s dreaming with loss of control and with abandonment of ‘sense,’ this writer was convinced neither by the innovative way that Davies handled his materials, applied his vigorous marks, nor the manner in which he pursued the subject matter of unbridled imagination. Another critic described Davies’s formal experiments as “a state of mild artistic frenzy,” while yet more observers called readers’ attention to his “odd peculiarities” or “eccentric” habits, and several writers noted the artist’s “intense feelings.”

But just as no one proposed that nightmares could be cured, merely avoided by adhering to moderation and temperance, critics didn’t seek to ‘fix’ Davies—they merely observed that viewers would either like him or not: “Concerning the work of Arthur B. Davies, most art lovers are quite decided; they either ridicule or wholly admire.” Davies’s fantasies placed the burden of successful interpretation on the conjoined eyes and minds of his viewers; “that he has ever been capricious cannot be denied,” one writer claimed, but “if beholders see in his pictures all that Mr. Davies has sought to represent they would be given true visions [...]” His paintings tested his viewers’ mettle; their interpretation as worthy science or irresponsible fancy was a matter of personal response.

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82 “Town Topics,” clipping from an unidentified newspaper review of The Eight exhibition, cited in “Brooklyn Revives Memories of the Eight,” *Art Digest* 18, (December 1, 1943), p 12.
83 Anonymous review, *New York Sun*, (March 24, 1894).
84 “Paintings by Arthur B. Davies,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1897; See also Davies’s reviews in the *New York Sun*, 1894; Samuel Swift credited his “intense feelings” in the *New York Evening Mail and Express*, (December 1898).
86 Untitled Review, *Chicago Sunday Herald*, (June 1, 1901).
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Given the broad, popular and amusing incitement to speculate about dreams, however, the question of their sanity and salubrity still provoked scientists in 1907. Peterson presented the conundrum to his readers, when he noted that:

Dreams have a close relation to delirium and insanity, so close that insanity has been described as a long dream, and dreaming as a brief insanity. Sometimes insanity manifests itself in dreams though the mind may be normal by day. Such dreams are then the precursors of aberration.\(^{87}\)

He also observed, “dreams are also at times the cause of so-called imperative ideas or impulses [...] frequent in neurasthenia,” and then stipulated; “There is nothing in the phenomena of dreams that may not be encountered among the wide-awake patients of an asylum ward.” Such lasting uncertainty about the ontological status of dreaming paralleled the general unease some Americans felt about their own identity as modern subjects: the rapidly-changing modern world was one whose future could be envisioned equally via wonderful daydreams and disquieting nightmares of possibility. Yet, Peterson reassuringly concluded, “Dreaming is common to healthy persons, and in itself is not evidence of disorder.”\(^{88}\) In like measure, the critic for the Chicago Times Herald insisted that Davies was “one of the strongest and sanest idyllists American art has known.”\(^{89}\) In the sanctioned spaces of galleries and supported by the growing weight of scientific interest in understanding the psychology of dreams, Davies’s paintings provided his viewers with the opportunity to indulge in the kind of imagination and self-scrutiny that was entirely reasonable and modern.

IV. Dreams and the Psyche

Despite the widespread and popular acceptance of a somatic model for dreams, this explanation was challenged by advancing studies in the 1890s devoted to understanding not only the origins of dreaming in the brain’s complex physiology, but what it might reveal about the underlying purpose of unconscious visualization, provoking deeper speculation about ‘interiority,’ the self and the powers of the

\(^{87}\) Peterson, (1907), p 451.
\(^{88}\) Peterson, (1907), p 450.
\(^{89}\) Untitled review, Chicago Times Herald, (April 19, 1896).
imagination. Thus, in producing their own kind of knowledge about the mind, Davies’s paintings continued to intersect with scientific analysis in provocative ways. According to Hermann von Helmholtz, whose *Treatise of Physiological Optics* (1856-67) was influential in the developing American psychology of perception, attention, and consciousness (cited frequently, for example, by James), many qualities of vision were profoundly subjective. They were not separate from the mind but the result of complex interior processes involving the eye and consciousness operating in concert. Therefore, cognition about what we see necessarily engaged other processes as well: memory, impulse, intuition, emotion, and even yearning, in addition to rational logic and inferential deduction. These unconscious processes—in short, the stuff of dreams—took place in the same domain of pure thought that gave rise to their visible properties, and thus, as at least one commentator observed in 1893, “the sleeper feels he has been the actor in scenes no less real than those of waking moments although the sights and sequence of events are of an unknown realm.”

Notwithstanding the diversity, dynamism and even rivalry within the emergent discipline of psychology, the existence of “an unknown realm” in the mind—a part operating independently of the conscious mind’s control—was widely recognized, if given various and inconsistent labels: sometimes conflated with the soul, at other times this inner world was called the subconscious, a ‘double consciousness’ or a ‘secondary self.’ Davies attested to his familiarity with the concept sometime in the 1890s, jotting

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93 Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, (1970), is the authoritative source on the evolution of this idea, particularly in Europe. Writers, philosophers and artists of the Romantic generation had placed emphasis on the elevated secular value that the imagination could provide to humanity’s self-knowledge, laying the groundwork for the later, nineteenth-century fascination with the unconscious. Consideration of the confusion surrounding the distinction between spiritual and secular understanding of the unconscious occupies a later chapter of my research. For an example of the diversity of labels, Alfred Binet, *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies*, (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1896), pp 38-40, employed both the terms subconscious and unconscious to define the sense of a secondary personality that was discernable in hypnotic and hysterical states. Joseph Jastrow’s 1905 book *The Subconscious* repeated
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on one of his sketches: “The present individualisms are small—the unconscious Soul grand divine personality...Art a pointing towards a consummation of personality—absorbed in the unconscious truth of being a supposed self.”94 Although these personal ruminations are difficult to parse, as is the meaning towards which Davies grasped, alongside scientists, the struck-through words reflect the artist’s ongoing exploration of the dynamics of consciousness and the duality of the mind. He was, moreover, acutely aware of how his own work could mediate between perception and the dreaming experience, writing to William Macbeth in 1904 about his conjoined sight and insight during a trip, he recalled “such people, gardens [...] grand hills I have never realized except in my pictures and dreams.”95

Davies’s notes and letters, however gnomic, imply he pursued an understanding of how the unconscious imagination—the ‘supposed self’—nurtured both the creation and reception of art. His comment suggests he believed his own work might facilitate a viewer’s understanding of his or her own interior subjectivity, enabling a ‘consummation’ or recognition of self in the contemplation of his dreams. Although from one vantage point A Double Realm, (figure 3.11) is merely a pleasant and fairly conventional landscape, made after his California travels, within the context of Davies’s dreaming it inspires meditation on the doubled consciousness engendered by looking at art. We recognize the familiarity of viewing an inspiring vista at the same moment that we encounter the very material fact of the artist’s own re-enactment of his own experience in paint, arising from the interior space of his mind. The ‘doubleness’ in this realm is thus both conscious and unconscious, in his mind and ours alike. Exhibited at Macbeth’s in 1908, A Double Realm offered compelling evidence to a critic for the Philadelphia Press that sight and insight came together in Davies’s work, when he commented that Davies is “A man of vision who has [...] ceased to see things as they are and perceives them only

many of Howells’ and Ellis’ observations in his chapter on the ‘abnormal’ half-light of dream consciousness, as well as elaborating—at length—on its many variations.

94 Unpaginated notebook, (Davies Collection).
95 Davies to William Macbeth, from Cazenovia, New York, (September 18, 1904); Macbeth Gallery Records; Davies Correspondence files, 1894-1928; Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, NMc6.
when they are painted to interpret the inner vision by frank modifications of outer fact." 96

Echoing a prior critic’s observation, “To Arthur B. Davies […] one must look in these prosaic days for the fantastic and imaginative in landscape,” the Philadelphia writer found Davies’s sweeping views apt demonstrations of the powers of the artist’s psyche as well as his senses.

James’s theories and research nurtured such meditations on the nature of consciousness and perception. Nocturnal dreams appeared as a mere footnote in his Principles of Psychology, but James, making essential contributions to the interwoven disciplines of scientific psychology, philosophy and spiritual investigation, maintained abiding interest in the most enigmatic properties of the mind’s interior world which he believed might foster understanding of the unconscious’s deepest perceptive faculties. 97

In fact, in Principles of Psychology, James argued against conceptualizing the unconscious as an entity separate from the totality of consciousness, refuting claims of that nature made by fellow psychologists, physiologists and neurologists point-by-point, concluding that the innermost mysteries of the mind might well someday prove the existence of the soul. 98 According to the research James undertook in the later 1890s, visionary states permitted access to realms and phenomena that might be supernatural, which to him were equally significant components of modern ‘reality.’ 99 While I consider

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97 Although his own clinical investigation of dreaming was scant, two of James’s students went on in the mid-1890s to study dreams more intensively: Mary Calkins and Robert S. Woodworth both conducted extensive and rigorous research into the phenomena of dreaming. Calkins and her students at Wellesley conducted extensive experimentations on themselves, demonstrating systematic and statistical evaluations of the kinds of experiences reported by dreamers, including investigation of their emotional component and rational problem-solving that related to daily life. See Calkins, “Statistics of Dreams,” (1893), pp 311-343; and Robert S. Woodworth, “Note on the Rapidity of Dreams,” Psychological Review, 4:5, (September, 1897), pp 524-526. He pursued his subjects’ use of language and motivation in the dreams they recorded, analyzing the content of the ‘images’ they observed. His later discovery that dreams were caused by desires or interests sparked during the day shared much in common with Freud’s ideas, developing concurrently.


99 James’s psychic research, begun in the late 1880s and continuing into the early 1900’s reflected the parallels between spiritualism, psychology and the broad investigation of consciousness that was a cornerstone of much late 19th century philosophy and psychology. It reflecting the fluid disciplinary interweaving that was a characteristic of this moment’s attitudes towards matters of the mind and spirit as professional and academic boundaries were not often rigidly defined between these branches of thought and research. For example, George Trumbull Ladd, who taught at Yale between 1881 and 1901, held a professorship in metaphysics and moral philosophy, into which the study of psychology was classed.
James’s contributions to the study of unconscious states from the vantage point of allied science and spiritualism in the next chapter, I raise his example here to demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of psychological study in America at the turn of the modern century.

James’s growing willingness to speculate about the deeper role dreams and visions might play in consciousness did not deter journalist Elizabeth Bisland from informing her readers in 1896 that “the modern revolt” against superstition had given rise to “the foolish fear of attaching any meaning or importance whatsoever to the strange experiences of sleep, and an unscientific avoidance of the whole topic which is no less superstitious and puerile.” In his prior research, Julius Nelson had refused to acknowledge any scientific interest in the unconscious significance, visionary meaning or imaginative content of dreams:

The fact that a person dreams much or little is of more significance than what one dreams. A curve representing the variations from day to day in the amount of dreaming has scientific interest, while the hobgoblins that we [see] are of interest to children.

Nelson, seeking to secure his professional respectability, was disinclined to ascribe any meaning to dreams beyond their relative vividness. But for others, the ‘strange experiences of sleep’ and ‘hobgoblins’ in the imagination were exactly what made them interesting to anyone seeking to understand the full capabilities of the mind.

V. The purpose of dreams

Many investigators of dreams were devoted to probing their function in consciousness, especially in light of their frivolity, lunacy or potential moral dangers; focus upon the belief that dreams do something, whether that was ultimately beneficial to the dreamer or not, reflects a prevalent aspect of the late-nineteenth century Victorian mentality; the idea that dreams might serve no purpose at all was nearly unthinkable. The fantasy life and sensual preoccupations of some dreams played into many lingering fears.

Similarly, the departments in which William James lectured at Harvard University spanned philosophy, the medical discourses of anatomy and physiology, as well as the newly established field of psychology.

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of fantasy run wild and the imagination’s dark side unleashed, thus making the pursuit of dream imagery subject to as much suspicion as curiosity. But if dreams could be shown to do something deeply useful, then their occasional sensual excesses could be excused. Thus scholars of psychology in the 1890s made investigation of dreaming’s purpose a more prominent part of their study of the mind’s division into conscious and unconscious realms, arguing for the peculiar operation of imagery in our dreams and their relationship to the deep structures of memory. In his 1899 essay, Ellis took some trouble to argue for the function of dreams and observed that they could be divided into two basic groups: some founded on physical stimulation and others arising purely from memory. Both helped the mind cope with the constant inflow of sensory and intellectual stimuli competing for our attention.

Fascinated by the relationship between experience, imagination and memory and how these related to both painting and dreaming, Davies jotted the following enigmatic comment on a scrap of paper retrieved alongside his assorted notes and sketches: “The ideas and ideals of man have been formed in his brain through experience + in preserving them we preserve the human soul...Certain forms of impulses [are] conditioned by experiences of the past and on the other hand by the [indecipherable word] the future.”

Forging a connection between stimulus and memory in the unconscious, or indeed with the soul, Davies pursued the ways in which visions and memory in the mind could be realized in paint and delivered in dynamic encounters with viewers.

Echoing this claim, but backing it up with developments in the field of dream research, Peterson argued in 1907, “We must look upon the brain as the repository of all...

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102 Sicherman, “The Paradox of Prudence: Mental Health in the Gilded Age,” (1976), p 896, notes how in particular many American physicians in the late nineteenth century maintained skepticism or fear regarding the excess of fantasy, emotion and introspection that too much self-scrutiny might provoke, especially if it led to “sexual indulgence.” Despite his scientific credentials, Havelock Ellis’s growing reputation as an authority on sex might have colored his readers’ reception of his writing about dreams.
103 Hale, Freud and the Americans, (1995), p.113. Both Ellis and Peterson used the term ‘ego’ in this way, before the term acquired more fixed meaning relative to the topographical theories of the mind’s processes proposed by Freud, organized into its conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious operations, had fully taken hold in America. Freud’s model of the topography of the unconscious was developed more fully in the 1920s.
105 Davies’s Notebooks, (Davies Collection).
our past experiences, a vast storehouse filled with pictures of past scenes and faces and things [...] and all traced and recorded [...] amongst the billion tiny cells that compose the gray matter of the brain. Placing new emphasis on the neurological structures that make this memory possible, Peterson articulated the advancing belief that dreaming served as a locus of all gathered sensory data, conscious and unconscious alike. For Peterson, memories are all held together in the networks of the brain, resulting in "countless associations," governed by "consciousness, judgment and will" when we are awake, but when the "habit of sleep turns low the light of consciousness [...] this is the domain of dreams."

Peterson's description of cellular networks shows his advancing familiarity with the discoveries of the brain's neural framework made by Camillo Golgi and Santiago Ramon y Cajal, who shared the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1906. Although the editor reporting on this award in The Independent commented that their "names are not popularly known [...] outside of medical and psychological circles," their models of the brain's underlying structural composition had been gaining acceptance since the 1890s.

In a number of American journals, descriptions of the brain's neural networks—and of the illustrations Golgi published in 1885—attended to their branching, mossy, reedy and tree-like structures, and their teeming, vibrating, electrical modes of communication; at least one essay attempted to explain how these performed during sleep, relaxing or 'retracting' into relative inactivity. And one journalist, examining Golgi's plates, was moved to extremes of literary fancy in his evaluation of the "newly explored continent" of the "special senses" in the brain's integrated neural composition. "Filled with strange
fauna and flora, inhabited by pigmies [sic] and man-eaters [...]” he raved, “this new land [...] has hidden within its bony walls the veritable microcosm of the universe.” Artists, given such license by popular science, were well equipped to conceptualize the mind in extravagant, improbable or even bizarre terms.

Davies’s paintings attend with particular and inventive attention to these kinds of descriptions of the brain’s structure and its electrochemical interactions; visualizing the ‘storehouses’ in which memories and experiences lodged, waiting to be accessed in dreams by the dynamic unconscious. In paintings such as Springtime Ecstasy (figure 3.5) and Springtime of Delight (figure 3.13), his quivering, brushy trees and their bristly dendritic branches resemble popular explications of neurons, and the burgeoning, globular vegetation swelling up between the figures in Sleep Lies Perfect in Them appears as a ganglionic tangle of energetic growth. Wilder, more speculative fantasies find their equivalent in the vibrating, freely-interacting, nebulous blotches of pure color at the center of Hosts of Faery (figure 3.15), which capitalizes on the as-yet-untapped potential of the mind’s microcosmic universe. It captures qualities Hartmann previously had identified as Davies’s best suggestive habits, summoning “a few disconnected, partly visible figures,” that flicker and waver, “with a few lines and dots and some crosshatching.” In light of this energetic mutability, Davies’s dreams were as unlimited as thought, and their patent heterogeneity showed viewers how he was able to convert the diversity of human visualization, dream, and memory into material form. The function of his paintings, as with the functions of dreams, was profoundly confluent: sorting and organizing the totality of interior and sensory experience into a consciously comprehensible experience.

Ellis also attended to the peculiar ways in which the wide range of memories manifest in dreams, but rather than held all together as in a neurally-dense storehouse, he saw them as:

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110 “The House of the Mind: Revolutions in the Physics of Thought,” Current Literature, 20:5, (November, 1896), p. 430. The writer’s excesses might be excused in light of the enthusiasm he applied to the task of making their research interesting for the general readership of Current Literature; but his presumption of the sophistication of his readers is also considerable, as he distinguished both Golgi and Cajal as “the Helmholtzes of the physics of thought.”

111 I am extremely grateful to my advisor, Caroline Jones, for her insight about the resemblance in Davies’s works to dendrites, ganglia and the illustrations of Golgi’s neural structures.

112 Hartmann, The Daily Tatler, (November 18, 1896).
two irreconcilable groups of impressions [that] reach sleeping consciousness, one flowing from a recent stream of memories, the other from an older stratum [...] Consequently, the two conflicting streams of memories break against each other in restless conflict, and sleeping consciousness endeavors to propound some theory that will reconcile them.¹¹³

Ellis’ comments resonate with Davies’s paintings in provocative ways. At the physical and emotional center of The Voyage, and repeated again behind the rigging at right, rapidly drawn eddying lines made with the end of the brush incise the thick paint; their snarly vigor describes waves, like Ellis’s memories, “breaking against each other in restless conflict,” and dissipating ocean foam moving across the heaving water’s sullen surface. The scribbles lie atop the painting’s layers, their material tactility denying for a moment any illusion of space, capturing instead the emotional intensity of the act of painting: they are vivid reminders of the drive with which the paint was applied, made analogous to the intense imaginative experience of remembering a storm in one’s mind. A viewer might grow almost seasick discerning and describing it.

While some of Davies’s work evoked memory via implication, Meadows of Memory (figure 3.7) explores the mind’s capacity to merge past, present and future directly. A woman in contemporary dress (for 1905) occupies the foreground; passing lightly towards the left through a wildflower-strewn lawn, she establishes the painting’s introspective mood. Although her face is an emotionless mask, her semi-closed eyes—characterizing many painted daydreamers in art such as the introspective maidens in John White Alexander’s 1903 painting Memories (Brooklyn Museum of Art)—seem focused on some interior vision; we are encouraged to look similarly inward, in concert with her own imagining. But we find no storytelling in the painting to help us negotiate these memories. Several observers noted how the artist’s work posed challenges to facile narrative; one writer in the Nation noted; “It is when critics come to Arthur B. Davies that they are most wholly at a loss,” since his works have “an entire disregard for that sort of meaning that degenerates into anecdote.”¹¹⁴ Meaning instead is purely a matter of association and memory: the artist’s and ours alike.

¹¹³ Ellis (1899), p 722-3.
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There may be no story in Meadows of Memory, but as in many dreams there is allusion to motion. Delicately rendered wildflowers sway as they brush the hem of the figure’s pale blue dress, beneath which we see no feet; she appears to glide spectrally across the meadow. Her raised knee and the leftward-leaning angles of her skirt’s folds indicate the movement and tempo of her progress. Keeping to a foreground plane defined by a gently undulating line and dark-green hue, the woman is separated from the deeper layers of landscape unfolding behind her; she turns her back on this vista, as if it only exists in her imagination. A second figure, farther back, occupies the right hand side of the canvas, her pose and directional motion mirroring the progress of the first. But we can see little of her clearly. She walks beside a barely-visible stream or river, beyond which a hillside rises towards even more distantly visible mountains.

By ascribing value to the ways in which dreams “take us back into an earlier world,” Ellis’s description of the strata of dreams suggested not only that we venture into our own memory when dreaming, but also back to the deepest layers of ancestral time. Beyond the foreground meadow, the deep setting is divided into separate planes which, ever more distant, beckon to the viewer to traverse the space visually. Jagged, thickly applied paint defines the texture and substance of trees: we see branches, scrubby undergrowth, rocks and leaves, rendered in heavily applied marks in shades of green, turquoise, yellow and gray, in vivid contrast to the earthy tonality of the ground. At the very center of the landscape and the painting, a rough shape describes an indistinct object: rocky outcropping, recumbent figure or strange hybrid combination of the two. A figment arising from deep layers of space and memory, it is a curious focal point, but even upon repeated viewing it refuses to resolve into a recognizable object.

Meadows of Memory: the painting’s poignant title evokes Proustian meditations on memory’s many triggers—tactile, auditory and gustatory. But in this visual recollection, Davies stimulates us to wonder where we might find such a place, and the questions that follow swing once again between multiple possibilities: is this meadow a

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115 Ellis derived this idea in part from the studies of G. Stanley Hall, who although not primarily a dream researcher, did study how they related to some aspects of personality development. In his study of fears, Hall suggested that dreams or nightmares about flying are the result of our deepest biological memories, “some faint atavistic echo from the primeval sea,” deriving from a prior stage of human development when we did not walk but swam. See G. Stanley Hall, “A Study of Fears,” American Journal of Psychology, 8:2, (January, 1897), pp 158-159; and Ellis (1899), p 729.
picture of the *space* in which she experiences a memory, or is what we see an echo or image itself but a memory? Or yet still, do we register the difference between foreground and background space as akin to the reconciliation of conflict that Ellis noted was a signature effect of memory in a dream? Davies muddles consciously recalled and unbidden memories here: the artist may reveal his own reminiscences but he raises apparitions of our own as well.

To be sure, in my own enactment of verbal description, I call upon memories of not only lived experience but pictorial elaborations of landscape I have seen before: the ethereal spirit of George Inness or John Twachtman’s moody fields, the handling of paint in Winslow Homer’s vigorously delineated seascapes, and even the primordial improbabilities of Thomas Moran’s candy-colored western buttes. Hartmann’s jibe about Davies’s echoing ability to imitate other artists acquires more positive valence; whether deliberately summoned or spontaneously arising, memories of images flow like the water Ellis’s metaphor referenced in my viewing encounter. And in constructing a multilayered rendering of deep landscape space, Davies also alludes to the layers of the strata out of which Ellis describes our memories flooding in dreams. As our own memory and imagination takes hold, it molds the figures, shapes, color and shape into a circumstance that applies our own personal interpretive logic to the structure of the image.

In other paintings depicting languid figures wafting through landscapes, such as *Redwood Grove* (figure 3.8), Davies crafted plausible spaces in which the vagaries of his personal memory of California travel might mingle with his viewers’ memory—or even deeper memory—and create pictorial unity, however inscrutable or subjective in their meaning. Unlike vivid remembrance of lived experience, however, the memories we have of all but the most potent dreams are often hard to capture, and slip away upon awakening, like a figure moving just beyond our field of vision. “Anyone who has ever been subject to the hypnagogic imagery sometimes seen in the half-waking state...knows that it is absolutely impossible to fix an image. It is this factor in dreams which causes them so often to baffle our analysis,” wrote Ellis. Yet, of course, Davies’s dream-memories do not evanesce, but stay put, remaining visible on the canvas and thus his paintings, dream-like though they may have been, blur the distinction between the dream

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116 Ellis, (1899), p 724.
and its waking recollection. His paintings were not the same as dreams themselves, but only suggested memoires of dreams; they were similarly baffling to contemporaries’ purposes of simple analysis.

Nonetheless, the ‘dreamy’ properties of Davies’s paintings—their dislocated spatial encounters and bodily distortion, their inconsistencies in execution and their uneasy mingling of clear detail and fuzzy mystery—were noted by so many observers that they amounted to a kind of verification of common perceptual properties of dreams and visions in the mind. This critical commonality is a measure of Davies’s value to contemporary viewers, since his paintings ably register the fact that, far in advance of any imaging technologies that showed the neurological activity of the sleeping mind in action, no observer could say conclusively what the experience of the dream truly was: they could only attempt to express what a dream was like. In a manner akin to explaining the idiosyncratic visual nature of one’s dreams, identifying and attributing significance to Davies’s formal eccentricities—such as the indistinct shape at the center of his Meadows of Memory—remains a challenge, now as much as to his contemporaries. His dream-landscapes of the mind remain both familiar and strange, like memories of familiar faces and places made peculiar by our mind’s “artful confusion of ideas and images.”

However distinctly individual, and dependent upon subjective memory, dreams were at the same time a phenomenon common to everyone: in explaining their operations, scientific opinion coalesced around the idea that the imagery seen in dreams followed its own logic, and was therefore impossible to pin down with perfect objectivity. Yet Ellis stressed the essential work that went on in dreams, despite their apparent incongruities, wild associational leaps, and sensory conflation: “All dreaming is a process of reasoning,” he asserted, “that artful confusion of ideas and images which [is] the most constant feature of dream mechanism is nothing but [...] a perceptual effort to argue out harmoniously the absurdly limited and incongruous data present to sleeping consciousness.” He continued, “It is founded on perception itself,” and he concluded, “this establishment of new associations, this construction of images [...] precisely what

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117 Ellis (1899), p 733.
Chapter 3: “The Subtle Complexity of the Apparatus”

takes place in dreaming, is reasoning itself.” Tracing his sources to Alfred Binet’s research, Ellis noted that dreaming renders a sense of “the very texture of thought.”

Ellis and Davies both evidently referenced a translation of Binet’s On Double Consciousness, available in 1890, as Davies jotted words written initially by Binet in his own notebooks: “Art [is] a creation of thought, a dominion of its own."

The kind of reasoning that Ellis assured his readers was conducted by the dreaming mind was a reconciliation of its capacity to bring dream-worlds and reality closer to a state of valuable congruity for modern consciousness, blending intellect and emotion into a totality surpassing everyday waking experience. Davies’s paintings of dreams enacted these fundamental operations of unconscious cognition, exploring the relationship of delineated form to the configuration of imaginative thought itself. “Form and color awaken ideas and emotions […] and Mr. Davies is not indifferent to this,” as one of his critics noted.

Ellis asserted the fundamental rationality of dreams, and Peterson also claimed that “the critical faculties do play their legitimate part” in governing the content of dreams, although only more research would reveal “some such theory [making] it possible to explain the remarkable dream-work that is sometimes accomplished, the solution of difficult problems and the creation of poems, music and romance.”

Davies’s paintings performed just this kind of useful, creative, problem-solving work, and facilitated similar states in the minds of his viewers, enabling them to forge unconscious associations even while in waking states like pensive reverie; thus his innovation merited particular distinction. Fellow artist and historian Samuel Isham, describing Davies in his 1905 book The History of American Painting, placed him in a special, highly refined category as a ‘romantic:’ such artists attempt “to make a world […] where one may enter as into a walled garden suited to his mind and there enjoy his

118 Ellis, (1899), p 733.
119 Davies’s Notebooks, (Davies Collection). Although subsequent passages in the notebook suggest that Davies arrived at his familiarity with Binet through the books of Chicago philosopher Paul Carus, as I explore more thoroughly in the next chapter.
121 Peterson, (1907), p 452.
vision [...] into the realm of dreams.” 122 Isham found particular justification for this categorization in Davies’s paintings of children.

However capricious they might be, children’s vividly real dreams affirmed the mind’s prodigious creative capabilities. Pictures showing children at play and in dreamy fantasy remained staples of Davies’s work in the early 1900s, just as they became ubiquitous in American books, magazines, advertisements, and comics; Kenneth Grahame’s 1902 edition of his children’s book *Dream Days*, with illustrations by Maxfield Parrish, was a runaway best-seller. 123 In *Springtime of Delight* (figure 3.13), painted around 1906, viewers found a worthy demonstration of how Davies expressed childhood’s boundless pleasures and visions. Presenting what Isham described as one of his “bosky groves peopled by youth and childhood,” Davies fills the frieze-like forest with vernal saplings and their fluttering leaves. 124 Dense trunks and slender branches in seasonally-appropriate tones of tawny green prevent both his figures and our eyes from investigating the depths of this copse. The shallow space, akin to the light musing of a day-dream, limits the play of this crowd of children to the immediate foreground, spread evenly across the painting’s surface, where we can vicariously indulge in their activities: from left to right, some stand, some sit and some walk; one hunts insects while another fishes; one climbs a tree; and two pairs gather flowers and skip rope.

Two of them are evident dreamers: one seated girl at left turns an uplifted face towards the canopy of stippled leaves, while her companion, prominent at the very center, reclines along the ground, one arm stretched beyond her head. Directly above her, a boy with a butterfly net and a child in the upper reaches of a tree draw our eyes aloft, but the draping arm of the tree-climber points us back down to her slumbering form, suggesting

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122 Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting*, (New York: Macmillan, 1905), p 483. Isham, a member of the National Academy, was effusive in his praise of Davies, categorizing him among a select group of ‘romantic’ figure painters, “who stand for a revolt against the commonplaceness of life,” which included J. Humphreys Johnston, Albert Herter, and Bryson Burroughs, all of whom are poorly known today.


reciprocity between what we see and what she may envision. In the painting’s light-hearted enumeration of typical games, we are invited to share Davies’s evident sympathies for children’s pastimes and their vibrant inner worlds; but the dreaming figures also imply that in his own mind, as well as in the evidence offered on canvas, Davies had a praiseworthy capacity to re-experience the inventive mental states of childhood.

Isham commented that Davies’s “is a world that touches the real world only remotely;” moreover, the artist “choos[es] from it bits with the odd, impulsive likes and dislikes of a child,” setting up complementarity between the artist and his subject. The historian further avowed, “Never once does [Davies] wander from his dream, his vision. His enchanted forest is not visited at rare intervals […] it is his home, his retreat from which he never departs.” Seemingly unaware of the artist’s darker visions in The Flood and The Voyage, Isham finds Davies’s dreams of childhood refreshing and eminently restorative, his delicate handling of paint and festive color in Springtime of Delight well matched to the motif of play. In these dreams, unlike the equally appealing Sleep Lies Perfect in Them, the unfettered imagination sustained no obvious or unsettling connection to eroticism. It is the kind of painting that rewarded the sustained attention of viewers who linger in “this wonderful land,” and like Davies, share “a belief in his own imaginings.”\textsuperscript{125} Such faith in the dreaming mind’s manifold abilities was essential to understanding its role in the important, productive work of the psyche. However romantic, to Isham Davies’s dreams reflected a distinct and even modern kind of perception; linking creativity with dreaming’s fundamental value for greater self-knowledge, neurologist Peterson also affirmed, “the modern diviners of dreams […] claim there are no dreams, however trivial as to contents, that are without significance.”\textsuperscript{126}

VI. Art and the imagery of dreams

Regardless of what function they served the mind, or how well their imaginative capabilities might be rendered in paint, the question of what physiological structures
produced the vividly real, inner visions of dreams remained compelling to artists and scientists alike. As they produced a particular kind of sight located entirely within the embodied mind that was not only imaginative and subjective but fundamentally internal, some psychologists wondered in what terms could it really be ‘visual’ at all. Yet the force of collective experience indicated that it seemed visual, and according to the sense of convincing ‘reality’ that dreams generated, seeming was tantamount to being: the “wild jumble of useless and foolish pictures” dreamers visited every night amounted to a “Kingdom of Seeming” in the mind.127

Even some metaphysically inclined psychologists sought verifiable somatic explanations for the visions we perceive when our eyes are closed and our unconscious produces illusions. For example, Yale psychologist George Trumbull Ladd analyzed dreams from the point of view of “Eigenlicht,” or the color and retinal images produced by the eye in absolute darkness.128 Considering the work of such phosphenes on “inducing visual phantasms,” Ladd explored his own experiences of nocturnal visions, and asserted:

By far the purest, the most brilliant and most beautiful colors I have ever seen, and the most astonishing artistic combinations of such colors, have appeared with closed eyes in a dark room. 129

Ladd focused on the mechanics of retinal images, attending closely to their physiological origins. He remaked, however, “I by no means intend to depreciate the part played in the drama by the psycho-physical activity of the central organs. It is to occult processes which go on within the cerebrum that we must look for the physiological antecedents of the elaborated, associated meaningful and memorable character of the visual shapes of

128 George Trumbull Ladd, “Contribution to the Psychology of Visual Dreams,” Mind 1:2, (April 1892). Although Mind was a British publication, important essays by such Americans as William James were published alongside those of British contributors. The contents of the journal reflected the span of exchange between American and European interests in psychology, philosophy and metaphysics.
129 Ladd, “Contributions to the Psychology of Visual Dreams,” (1892), p 300. Once again using himself as an experimental subject, Ladd attempted on waking, without opening his eyes, to measure the images of his dreams against the ‘schematic phantasms’ which he “objectively observed and localized in the retinal field.” He hoped to avoid over-reliance upon subjective experience by considering his imaginative fantasies as separate from his study of the ‘pure’ imagery of the “retinal schemata,” he argues that he “arrests the impish phantasms before they can get off the stage of my dream.”
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our dreams.”130 Just as Davies’s paintings—even his nightmares—could not be interpreted purely in terms of their physiological origins or somatic effects, separating the metaphysical operations of the creative imagination from the physiological phenomena of ‘retinal dust’ proved impossible.

While Ladd’s primary audience was a fairly specialized group of psychological professionals—among them very few, if any, artists—his ideas about the ability of the visual imagination and its relationship to particularly vivid qualities of art, such as color and skilful composition, offer tantalizing parallels. He called particular attention to the relationship between the creativity of dreamers and artists when he commented, for example, “Someone has declared that the secret of the painter’s art is to represent everything with two strokes and a dot. Whether this be so, or not, in the finished product of art, when it is to be brought under the eye of the wide-awake critic […] is indeed the secret of the retina’s art in sleep.”131 Just as art could produce dreams, dreams could produce art, in an endlessly complementary and fluctuating exchange in which Davies found his inspiration.

Critics who praised Davies’s skills as a colorist alongside his visionary imagination attended not only to his keen perception and his powers of composition, but also commended his ability to bring to the canvas emotionally resonant states of mind like the ones that Ladd describes. Some even ascribed the rigor of scientific vision to him: the critic for The Independent claimed in 1909 that Davies had “the chemist’s capacity for extracting essences from Nature […] for it would seem that colors as handled by Davies have a physiological effect, and the artist is able at will to force us to our knees in terror, curdle our blood or thrill us with the sound of unheard murmurs.”132 By virtue of these heightened gifts, in paintings like Hosts of Faery (figure 3.15), Davies created a site of interchange between unconscious and conscious experience, convincingly mimicking some visual aspects of brilliant dreams, albeit in a static and two-dimensional pictorial form that was clearly distinct from the temporal effects of true dreaming.

130 Ladd, “Contribution to the Psychology of Visual Dreams,” (1892), pp 301-302. His quotation continues, “the data of sense to be discovered in the retinal field, when considered with a cool, scientific and objective consciousness, are thin, pale and almost senseless schemata.”
Philosopher William Romaine Newbold also discussed the peculiarly vivid imagery of dreams, hallucinations and illusions at length in *Popular Science Monthly*, September 1896. Explaining the sensory clarity of the images produced by the mind, Newbold determined:

> occasionally we meet with experiences which are certainly originated largely or entirely from within and must be classed as ideas, and yet resemble sensations so closely that they can be discriminated from them only upon reflection. These are what we term illusions and hallucinations.

In dreaming vision, he noted, psychological research had shown that the perceptions we recognize from waking life are altered by the unconscious, and transform into emotions as well as pictures: "In sleep...the internal images, on the other hand, feeble and rapid during the state of complete wakefulness, become intense, distinct, colored, steady and lasting: there is a sort of ecstasy, accompanied by a sense of expansion and comfort. Architecture, landscapes, moving figures, pass slowly by, and sometimes remain with incomparable clearness of form and fullness of being." Davies explored this joyous, expansive release in many of his works.

Newbold observed how art could readily approximate unconscious visionary states; "Most of our sense organs send in very complex currents: from the eye, for instance, we get currents which taken alone, would cause sensations of color, touch and movement [...] thus the technical part of painting consists in so imitating the ordinary sensory determinants of vision by means of colors on a flat surface as to produce that cortical process which is usually produced by a real thing." Painters, in his experience, could train themselves into the ability to visualize clearly pictures of things or people that are not there, and thus following his logic, art works like our unconscious minds, assembling perceptual data into an organized picture that, while unreal, evokes the quality of realness.


135 Newbold, quoting William James, "Illusions and Hallucinations," (1896), p 633.

136 Ibid.
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Seen in light of Hartmann’s discussion of Davies’s ‘suggestive’ formal habits, the comments of Ladd and Newbold both seem apt and prophetic. They resound with the artist’s indistinct form, willful distortions and incipient abstraction—anticipating non-objective trends soon to emerge in American art—that distinguished his work in the first decades of the twentieth century, even before his explorations of Cubism began in the teens. Davies himself commented upon these properties in his notebooks, when he wrote, “The work of art is good by reason of its being itself not because it is like some other thing but by the inherent virtue of its own abstract qualities.”

The rarity of Davies’s imaginative gifts was linked to his pictorial habits and anomalies, as even within a single painting, he could demonstrate inconsistencies of vision, facture and resolution, and his work could recall pleasant dreams and nightmares at the same time. These habits were, however, entirely in keeping with many reports about the strange dissociations of dreams, thus linking his subjective visions with objective analysis—or at least with collective agreement. Indeed, such recognition arose as Davies found broader exhibition options for his work: his award-winning Full Orbed Moon, exhibited in the Pan-American Exposition of 1901 (figure 3.16), captures the pleasures and perturbations of dreams alike. Under a hazy orange summer moon, a statuesque nude stands in the mid-ground of a very dark landscape. Aglow in a light from an unknown but eerily bright source, she raises her arms up and behind her head, revealing her naked body for our inspection; we are welcomed to gaze at the ‘full orbs’ of both the moon and her exposed breasts. She stands in stark contrast to the deep, purple and blue tinted landscape behind, her feet in a shallow pool of spring-fed water reflecting the night sky. Just behind her, a pathway or road leads to the right and into the distance, where a scattering of delicate white pinpoints suggest far-off lights or the scintillating

137 Davies’s Notebooks, (Davies Collection).
138 While Perlman maintains that the painting’s title derived from a poem written by Albert Pinkham Ryder, [see L.A. (1998) p 124], it is also compellingly related to the opening stanzas of a poem dedicated “to Helen,” written by Edgar Allan Poe, which reads: “It was a July midnight; and from out/A full-orbed moon, that, like thine own soul, soaring,/Sought a precipitate pathway up through heaven,/ There fell a silvery-silken veil of light,/With quietude, and sultriness, and slumber,/ Upon the upturned faces of a thousand/Roses that grew in an enchanted garden [...]” See The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume 7: Poems (New York: AMS Press, 1979). An edition of Poe’s complete works was published in 1902; an illustrated version, published in London in 1882, contains an illustration of a moonlit landscape with more than passing resemblance to Davies’s painting, although no firm connection can be established between the artist and this book.
luminescence of fireflies. The background is otherwise too indistinct to see its features, other than the looming contours of trees; in its apparitional, nocturnal imagery, it conveys a dream-experience between the disquieting vision of *The Voyage* and the sensual allure of *Sleep Lies Perfect in Them*.

Another nude figure, half-hidden in the dark space, sits beneath a weeping willow in the middle distance, her presence called to our attention by the angle of the standing figure’s right elbow. But no stable relationship can be established between either of these bodies, nor is their nudity explained in juxtaposition to the three other clothed figures occupying the painting’s far left hand side. Painted much more coarsely than the prominent naked woman, their bodies and features cannot easily be seen. This perplexing difference in facture is made even stranger by the figures’ discontinuity in scale: two of them can only be identified by their heads and hairlines. Arising on the painting’s surface each one above the other, they seem to extend not only back but also to rise up in space, and thus they confound the viewer’s apprehension of the central nude’s position in this landscape; either they don’t quite belong, or she doesn’t. In fact, no figure seems to have a clear reason for being here, other than that provided by the artist’s forceful creative will and the viewer’s interpretive imagination.

Equally strangely, the figure in the most immediate left foreground—apparently an adolescent girl—is half cut off by the painting’s edge. Her visible body and limbs are unusually large and broad, compared with the lithe elegance of the standing nude to whom she is implicitly compared. The heavily textured application of paint makes her face and figure seem not only crude but also formless, as if she struggles to become visible. She is materially present in the substance of paint, but at the same time in the ghostly moonlight she seems phantasmal—an apparition alongside the equally unearthly nude. The two figures seem to occupy slightly different yet contemporaneous spatial and temporal realms, recalling what journalist Bisland called “our double existence in the dark.” Establishing the context of a dream by reference to the painting’s night-time circumstance as well as its characteristic formal strangeness, Davies’s enthralls the viewer, demanding both sustained, bemused gazing and determined creative analysis.

\footnote{Bisland, “Dreams and their Mysteries,” *North American Review*, (1896), p 716.}
As dreams were experienced not just in terms of imagery, but also in terms of their wholly immersive reality, they transcended the merely physiological properties of vision. In addressing their psychic properties, imagination and sensation were readily conflated in art criticism and nascent psychological science alike. Some critics praised Davies for his analytical visual abilities, but seasoned their comments with equal, and lyrical, praise for his imaginative execution: “Davies brings a knowledge of the ways of color that places him with the masters; his sketches of the human figure show him as one of the draughtsmen of the age […] his work has quality, that fine equation […] between actuality and a perfect execution—that exquisite mathematics that is perfume,” claimed one effusive observer. 40 Such speculation about the hybrid nature of Davies’ perceptual and purely imaginary vision—even synaesthetically equating vision with scent—suggested that dreams wove, combined and juxtaposed prior experiences into something new, if occasionally incoherent or inexplicable. In capturing the sensation of dreaming, Davies revealed the lack of fixity between reality and illusion in similar ways, playing feely with scale and space, color and form.

In their comics and films, Winsor McCay and Edwin Porter participated in the same valuable work, channeling the multi-sensory experience of dreams into clever visualizations. But in distinction to the phantasmagorical extremes to which McCay and Porter’s humorous dreams subjected their audience, many critics assured viewers of Davies dream-paintings that they would not be subjected to anything too foolish, unsettling or alien; for example, The New York Times critic, writing in December of 1908, argued “Davies makes an appeal to the mind, ” but also (as quoted earlier) asserted “his compositions are exceedingly intellectual. His intricate rhythms […] have no message at all for the lover of that only which is easy to understand.” Stressing Davies’s unique habits of mind, he continued, “his reasonable genius has a kind of classic vitality and freshness united to its mystic suggestions that make it real and in a sense familiar, at least, as […] it stimulates the imagination.”141

Scientists also verified that, however creative, all dreamers were unable to envision something truly, completely alien or unimaginable. As Frederick Peterson

140 “Arthur B. Davies,” The Art Collector, (December 5, 1898), p 54.
remarked, “the stuff of dreams is then of the same fibre as the stuff of our waking state. Into it enters no material save that of our own experience.”\(^{142}\) Thus however strange, disquieting or provocative, dreams derived from events and perceptions that had been initially acquired in conscious perception. Davies’s visions, however strange, were thus also safe; regardless of their uneasy stimulation or sensual allure, they were in the end only dreams.

Peterson also attended to the disparate ways in which the conscious mind interpreted perceptual data, channeled memory and organized its thoughts versus the incoherent, unbridled pictures of dreams, when he observed, “it is a curious feature of dreams that they are largely made up on visual pictures […] While the waking mind thinks ordinarily in word-images and speech, the dreaming mind employs optic illusions or hallucinations to express its thoughts.”\(^{143}\) This was in fact a process that critics of art faced every time they attempted to translate their visual encounter with pictures into words. Falling back upon the metaphor of the dream may have been a convenient way for them to circumvent this challenge. But regarding this analogy as merely expeditious marginalizes a much more important idea that critics conveyed to their readers, eg: that Davies’s work in some crucial way bridged the distance between perception and imagination in dreams, and produced dream-equivalence.

Davies was well aware of the discrepancy between true unconscious dreams and the ‘dreamy’ states he evoked so strategically, and he capitalized upon the tension between what can be rendered in paint consciously via iconography and metaphorical association and what is possible in the mingled emotional, perceptual and imaginative properties of the dreaming mind. In the interrelationship of his odd form and enigmatic content, viewers were similarly invited to make the leap between what can be understood consciously via language and symbol, and the more intangible forms of knowledge produced by dreams. Despite Peterson’s repeated insistence upon the connection of dreams to lived reality, Davies’s productive fusion of inexplicable form and peculiar content generated a sense of what the neurological researcher called the ‘mysterious

\(^{142}\) Peterson, (1907), p 448.
\(^{143}\) Ibid.
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light’ of dreams, what one art critic called “a light that never was on sea or land.” Only such an impossible light could cast the inconsistent illumination on the faces of the girls in Sleep Lies Perfect in Them.

Rendering such a wholly interior light in his works, even those that seem the most connected to visible reality, Davies’s paintings invited a viewer’s integrated response: one that translated their sensory appeal via color and form, and even via erotic or disturbing content, into a unified viewing experience. The way to truly apprehend the dreaminess in Davies’s art was not through conscious effort alone, but through perception combined with intuition, embracing emotion and surprise as a vital aspect of regarding art, alongside the properties of critical intellect. One review of Macbeth’s 1908 group show urged such a viewing encounter, observing that some “will wonder at first at Davies’ pictures, but if they study them and get to know them they will by-and-by feel the color in them...and if they continue to wonder they will ere long understand.”

Wonderment and feeling led to recognition, in dreams and art alike. Davies’s true measure lay in his ability to suggest each individual’s propensity to dream without being too literal, without representing a specific dream in terms too concrete to be truly artistic; his merit was in his work’s psychological attunement to the subjectivity of perception and imaginative inspiration alike.

VII. Conclusion: the value of eclecticism

But as Hartmann suggested, however subjective in inspiration, Davies’s art could demonstrate the mind’s wholly autonomous visual capabilities, bestriding any distinction between his own dreams and the dreams in the mind of the viewer. The dream-like qualities in his paintings granted viewers a common site upon which they could assemble their collective knowledge about dreams, their dangers and their benefits alike. He was indeed an ‘echo’ as Hartmann had remarked, since his visions corresponded with viewers’ visions, and produced new visions, in ostensibly endless reverberation.

Considered as an ensemble, the diverse paintings discussed in this chapter offer a means through which distinctions between various forms of dreams and their bizarre

145 Peterson, (1907), p 448.
operations could be realized. Their reception engendered the productive interchange that sustained broad interest in the parameters of the visionary unconscious, and set forth the stakes in which such investigations were transacted. Davies painted all kinds of dreams, and his paintings are both whimsical and uncanny, innocent and dark, inventive and unfettered: "It is in such characteristics as these—at once primitive, childlike and insane—that we may find the charm of dreaming," wrote Ellis. Aligning dreams with instinct, fantasy, caprice and mental instability all in one brief concluding statement, Ellis ably captured the heterogeneous nature of the most widely influential conceptualizations of dreaming. Indicate enthusiasm for the epistemological fields on which the discipline of psychology had set up its claims for the significance of dreaming, Ellis also pointed towards the rich seams of knowledge about dreams that remained to be unearthed.

Therefore, the diversity of Davies’s work not only mirrored the confusions in public discourse about the mind, it was a significant aspect of the artist’s success, as it enabled viewers to project many of their own interests in dreams freely onto his visions. Whether dreaming was seen as a by-product of the healthy, thriving imagination or a sign of some aberrant disruption in the mind’s ordinary, rational functioning, Davies’s art allowed these divergent ideas to co-exist productively in the pictorial spaces he generated on canvas. Even if critics showed some skepticism about where these visions might be headed, they nonetheless regarded the artist as a keen observer of the mind, and a few of them posed their own creative answers to the provocative questions raised by dreaming in Davies’s work.

Although he didn’t and couldn’t provide viewers with any conclusive resolution about the myriad ways in which dreams worked, or what they might ultimately reveal about their necessity to the modern human psyche—as such answers remain elusive to this day—Davies seemed to dip his brush into the substance of the mind’s unconscious perception, and deliver a sense of its potency on canvas. The nature of this substance, whether it arose from the mind’s psychological processes or was mobilized by some divine, ethereal agent existing on a plane only accessible in the mind is a topic I address in the next chapter, examining the wholesale integration of psychological and spiritual approaches to the dreaming unconscious.

146 Ellis (1899), p 735.
Davies guided his viewers in their attempt to chart an expedition across the sea of information that constituted popular knowledge about dreams, and in light of this, his *Voyage* seems all the more fitting: in addition to offering a formally experimental investigation of how painting, through facture and color, texture and space, can generate a dream-like illusion, it is at the same time a pictorial vessel on which we embark upon a journey into the mind. The surprising lack of concern or fear demonstrated by the girls on deck—turning their backs on the sublime attraction of the storm—suggests the dreaming mind’s illogical habits. Our imaginative propensity to dream in front of paintings is also invoked, albeit differently, by *Sleep Lies Perfect in Them*. The painting’s sensual appeal and emotional effects call up one’s potent engagement with a vividly enjoyable dream, its ability to seduce the mind and the senses into accepting as real a patently ethereal or erotic illusion. Unlike the obscure, churning seascape summoned by Davies’s *Voyage*, this lush paradise is an enthralling space to envision resting, entering into its mingled visceral and sensory pleasures.

Pondering again the strange discrepancies in both paintings, my eyes are drawn to the dark, looming lines of the rigging in *The Voyage* at right, and the delicate lines on the far left, depicting the trellis in *Sleep*. When imagined side-by-side, with *Sleep* positioned on the left and *The Voyage* at right, the webs of lines bracket and contain the figures and their surroundings. Evoking in their structure and their metaphorical role the brain’s neural framework, the images that arise between these articulating forms convey not just pictures, but the immersive reality that is the essence of dreaming. As I follow these indicative marks rising up and away from the heads of the figures, as if pointing in the direction of the mind’s actively envisioning space, I meet the edge of the canvas and the limit of the picture plane. From this tenuous boundary point I have no place else to go but into the metaphorical gap between the world conjured in the paintings and the one in my own head. There, in the realm of instinctual experiences called forth by the paintings’ sensual and emotional effects, I am free to let my mind and emotions explore the oceanic expanse I find there and, as Ellis commented in 1899, “In our dreams ... we know the fearful joy of freedom.”

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147 Ellis, (1899), p 735.
Chapter 3: “The Subtle Complexity of the Apparatus”
Chapter 3 Illustrations

3.1 *The Voyage*, no date, (The Philips Collection, oil on canvas; 13 ¼ x 16 ¼""

3.2 *Sleep Lies Perfect in Them*, ca. 1908, (Worcester Art Museum, oil on canvas, 18 x 40")
3.3 Sketch for ‘Sleep,’ ca. 1907-08, (Mac Cosgrove-Davies collection, pastel on paper, 12 x 16 ¼")

3.4 Frederick Carl Frieseke, Sleep, 1903, (Watkins Collection, American University, 35 x 45")
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3.5 *Springtime Ecstasy*, 1906, (Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA, oil on canvas, 17 3/4 x 29 3/4")

3.6 *After Rain*, ca. 1897, (Present location and dimensions unknown, Photograph courtesy Peter Juley and Son Collection, Smithsonian Institution)
Chapter 3 Illustrations
3.7 Meadows of Memory, ca. 1905-07, (Cincinnati Art Museum, oil on canvas, 18 x 23”)

3.8 The Redwood Grove, also known as Redwoods, 1905, (Toledo Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 26 x 40”)

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3.9 *The Flood*, formerly *A Mighty Forest—Maenads*, ca. 1903, (The Phillips Collection, oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 30”)

3.10 *A Greater Morning*, ca. 1900-05, (Smithsonian American Art Museum, oil on canvas, 23 ¼ x 28 ¼”)

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3.11 *A Double Realm*, ca. 1905-06, (Brooklyn Museum, oil on canvas, 15” x 29”)

Chapter 3 Illustrations
3.13 *Springtime of Delight*, ca. 1906, (The Phillips Collection, oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 40 1/8")

3.14 One of Davies’s dream-sketches, no date, (Davies Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum)
Chapter 3 Illustrations
Chapter 3 Illustrations

3.15 *The Hosts of Faery*, no date (private collection, oil on canvas, 12 \(\frac{1}{4}\) x 14 \(\frac{1}{4}\)"

3.16 *Full-Orbed Moon*, 1901, (Art Institute of Chicago, oil on canvas, 23 x 15 \(\frac{3}{4}\)"

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Chapter Four:  
“A man for whom the invisible world exists:” Dreaming from science to spiritualism and back, 1900-1909

“Davies is a man for whom the invisible world exists—a world which flows harshly or rages serenely about us, soundless, pervasive, puissant as magnetic waves that beat upon the shores of an electric ocean. But endowed with acute organs of observation and a master of technique, he is enabled to record upon canvas his dream of the visible and invisible.”

--James Gibbons Huneker, New York Sun, (June 4, 1908)

As Davies embarked upon a voyage into the invisible world of dreamland, traversing “the shores of an electric ocean” on the vessel of his pictures, he provided his viewers with the invaluable opportunity to visualize and experience dreams while awake. The artist’s work, demonstrating his “acute organs of observation” and his “masterful technique,” thrived in the interstitial space between two different meanings of ‘vision:’ the ability to see and the insight that was beyond mere physical perception. In 1905, one observer remarked, “As a seer of visions, a seeker for the beauty that dwells in the realm of pure imagining, Davies is akin to [Albert P.] Ryder, but he also accepts and interprets aspects of veritable nature.” The Boston Globe critic concurred, expressing strong approval for Davies’s distinctive skills in his claim that “his pictures are of a visionary cast,” noting “Mr. Davies in his own way works out the problems that confront him.”

Such problem solving—whether conducted in artistic or scientific terms, or a combination of both—was useful to viewers who strove for an understanding of dreams. The authority of psychological research granted such unconscious visionary experience enhanced value, as the study of the mind offered one way that the pressing questions raised by modern experience could be addressed. But proponents of psychological ‘science’—still striving to delimit their proper domain—could only be as convincing to readers as the evidence they offered, and competing invocations of scientific authority

1 James Gibbons Huneker, “Arthur B. Davies” New York Sun, (June 4, 1908), p 6. Although his writing may not be very well-known today, Marcia Brennan identifies Huneker as “arguably the most influential fine arts critic in America,” during his heyday in the early 20th century. See Brennan, Painting Gender: Constructing Theory, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p 9.
3 “Art and Artists,” The Boston Globe, (February 16, 1905).
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proliferated in other fields throughout the 1890s and well into the opening years of the twentieth century. A writer for Ballou’s Monthly Magazine suggested the extent of interchange among disparate claims in his essay “Dreams and Perceptive Illusions.” He distinguished the fundamental autonomy of inner experience, since “dreams form a world of their own with no discoverable links binding them to the other facts of human experience.” Rather than stressing their psychological explanations, he continued; “the very name suggests something far distant and shrouded in mystery; to the memory phantoms and apparitions are conjured up.” Ultimately, he assessed the fundamental inscrutability of the dream world, regardless of advances made by science, when he reported, “the power which cements into a coherent mass our disconnected dream-images is called ‘creative fancy,’ and this is said to be derived from the fantastical force of the soul.”

Psychological research into the normal functioning of the unconscious mind was undeniably growing at the turn of the century, but psychologists were not the only experts charting the territory of the dreaming imagination in America or grappling with its operations. Representatives of other discourses paralleled their efforts: theologians, psychic researchers and various explorers into the realms of the spirit; proponents of therapeutic mind-cure practices; and popular seers all embraced dreams as a means of accessing transcendent states and revealing ‘the fantastical force of the soul.’

The advertising pages of many of the most widely-read magazines and newspapers were filled with lists of “clairvoyants, magic healers, magnetizers, palmists, astrologers and various kinds of spirit mediums,” promising to address the interrelated workings of the mind and

5 Mitch Horowitz, Occult America: The Secret History of How Mysticism Shaped Our Nation, (New York: Bantam Books, 2009), examines the complex history of how pervasive mystic and occult thought were in the formation of American culture. For many Americans, investigations of psychic phenomena were understood not only as a form of spiritual concerns, but a branch of psychological inquiry. The deep significance of mysticism and spiritualism on American culture is also explored in R. Laurence Moore, In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and in the anthology of essays edited by Howard Kerr and Charles Crow, The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983). For a fascinating study of the relationship between American feminism and spiritualism, see Ann Braude, Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth Century America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). The number of books on spirituality and psychic phenomena written during the period in question is far too vast to summarize here, but one of the most authoritative texts was Frank Podmore, Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism, 2 volumes, (New York: Scribner’s, 1902), written by a leading member of the Society for Psychical Research.
spirit, as one observer noted in 1904. Dreams and visionary states of mind also informed the establishment of new religions, such as the mid-century coalescence of various forms of Spiritualism, as well as the more doctrinally focused faiths of Theosophy and Christian Science, established in 1875 and in 1879 respectively.

Yet the esteem conferred upon psychological science also underwrote the ways in which even the most abstruse pronouncements about the significance of dreaming aspired to scientific validity: the founders of Theosophy and Christian Science both argued that their religions were based upon scientific methods, while Spiritualists sought scientific proof of the existence of ghosts, spirits and ethereal forces. This fluid interchange between science, psychology and spiritual matters also fed popular crusades devoted to the improvement of American mental and physical well-being, such as the positive-affirmation and visualization practitioners of New Thought, a movement which rose to prominence in the mid-1890s.7 Davies’s dream-paintings addressed beholders conversant with this state of cultural and intellectual flux.

The proponents of psychic phenomena, therapeutic healers and mystical authorities came from diverse backgrounds; in fact, many claimed they were scientists on equal footing with the psychological researchers and neurologists who studied the mind in academic settings. Psychologists such as William James (1842-1910) substantiated their assertion as he also researched spiritualism and psychic phenomena alongside “exceptional mental states,” such as dreams.8 James’s interests straddled psychology and the metaphysical philosophies devoted to explanations of consciousness; he embraced an inclusive range of unconscious experience to ascertain the ways in which the study of the

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7 These far-ranging movements, many of them related to 19th century religion and personal faith, were an offshoot of early progressive emphasis on the general reform and amelioration of American society. For historical summary of the interrelationship between psychic phenomena and scientific psychology in America, see Eugene Taylor, Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America, Washington, D. C.: Counterpoint, 1999; Eric Caplan, Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Mitch Horowitz, Occult America, (2009), particularly Chapter 4, pp 80-99, “The Science of Right Thinking”, in which Horowitz examines how forms of mind cure in particular crossed disciplinary boundaries.
mind might provide a key to understanding anti-materialistic forces. Yet, some of his peers expressed dismay at the ways in which poor boundaries separated the proper sphere of science from the undisciplined speculation of lay spiritualists and amateur mind-cure therapists; the divide between these spheres would widen after James’s death in 1910 and in the subsequent decades of the 20th century.

But around 1900, many individuals hoped that revealing the secrets of the visionary mind might substantiate belief in an invisible supernal realm, perhaps even generating proof of its underlying ‘reality’ and the existence of the soul. By 1908, some critics felt it was not enough to merely observe that Davies was a dreamer; James Gibbons Huneker (1857-1921), one of his most dedicated supporters, called attention to the ways in which the artist’s devotion to painting dreams brought him into contact with metaphysical realms, and granted him a contradictory identity. According to Huneker, Davies was “a realist, though a mystic he is in temperament […] his vision embraces the minute and magnificent things of the world about him. And equally real is the life of the spirit.” As Davies explored the soul’s habitat in his painted dreams, Huneker asserted a metaphorical association between the invisible spiritual territory and the modern forces of electricity and magnetism, addressing the artist’s thorough blending of scientific observation and unearthly fancy.

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9 The literature on William James’s interests in metaphysical philosophy, spiritualism and psychic phenomena is extensive; the most useful for the purposes of this study have been Eugene Taylor, William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); for other basic general sources on James and his philosophies of the self and consciousness, see Richard Gale, The Divided Self of William James, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Daniel Bjork, William James: The Center of His Vision, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Wesley Cooper, The Unity of William James’s Thought, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002).

10 Huneker, “Arthur B. Davies,” (1908), p 6. In addition to writing insightful analysis of contemporary developments in art and music, Huneker was himself the author of poetry and fiction strongly influenced by Symbolist literature. A well-traveled journalist and advocate for modern art, he nonetheless was skeptical of some forms of avant-garde practice, occupying the same kind of middle ground between Romantic idealism and more rigorously analytical, avant-garde modernism that Davies himself inhabited. See Charles Eldredge, American Imagination and Symbolist Painting, (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979), pp 21-23, for Huneker’s Symbolist affiliations. Useful although not recent evaluations of his ideas have been presented by Peter Plagens, “The Critics: Hartmann, Huneker, De Casseres,” Art in America 61 (July/August, 1973), pp 66-71; and more valuably by John Loughery, “The New York Sun and Modern Art in America: Charles FitzGerald, Frederick James Gregg, James Gibbons Huneker and Henry McBride,” Arts Magazine, 59:4, (December, 1984), pp 77-82. Huneker was also well-versed in modern trends in psychology and philosophy, writing informed critical essays on the metaphysical beliefs of James and Henri Bergson in his 1913 book The Pathos of Distance, (New York: Scribner’s, 1913), pp 347-385.
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In warranting the paradoxical status of ‘realist and mystic,’ Davies embodies an age in which spiritual and scientific matters thoroughly converged. His investigation of interior perception shows the artist grappling with the potential of dreams to realize both corporeal and intangible ways of apprehending the world, seeking material and spiritual ‘reality’ equally. He not only consulted psychological texts, but he also immersed himself in the eclectic cultures of supernatural investigation that had taken shape in the last decades of the nineteenth century, embracing astrology and esoteric religion alongside the quest for verifiable proof of transcendent states of mind and the forms of purely interior knowledge provided by the unconscious. In his studio, Davies mused about mystical and spiritual matters, jotting notes from which he drew inspiration for his paintings: he wrote, “Mans [sic] soul is the organized totality of his ideas and ideals,” and he explored the longing of psyche and spirit to escape into dreams, noting how often “The mind is occupied inspires conspires to free itself from the body” [strikethrough in original].

Thus, although the disparate, unruly beliefs associated with spiritualism and mysticism may seem incompatible today with the hard empiricism of modern science, at the turn of the twentieth century, competing and reciprocal spheres of thought characterized this period’s heterogeneous psychological beliefs about the unconscious mind’s potential. In fact, Davies’s painted dreams reflect the disciplinary fluidity of this historical moment, and reveal how Americans’ understanding of ‘science’ at the turn of the century could operate in terms quite different from those with which 21st century viewers are familiar. In this chapter, I contend that the categorical confusion surrounding critical assessment of Davies’s imagination and perception—his ‘acute observation’ paired with his visionary capacity—mirrors the state of dynamic interchange with which philosophers, scientists, spiritual authorities and proponents of therapeutic mind-cure practices alike approached their explanations of dreams. Examining roughly the same

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11 “Art and Philosophy of Arthur B. Davies” unpaginated, undated notebook and assorted sketches. Box 1; Folder 6, Arthur Davies Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum, (Davies Collection).

12 For the productive value of interdisciplinary practice at this pivotal moment, see Francesca Bordogna, William James at the Boundaries: Philosophy, Science and the Geography of Knowledge, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.) I extend thanks to Susan Lanzoni for pointing me in the direction of this book. The intellectual culture examined by Louis Menand, The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), was equally inspirational.
historical period as the previous chapter, from the late 1890s to the close of the first 20th century decade, I consider how Davies’s dream-like paintings took shape amid these discourses, showing the artist’s traversal of the conceptual space occupied by his own integrated psychological and spiritual interests. His art and its reception illustrate the productive contradictions informing American understanding of consciousness and the self. In the following pages, I propose three spheres of exchange in which Davies’s painted dreams illuminate the pervasive turn-of-the-century quest for religious and philosophical meaning in the unconscious. I first discuss the generative if contested correspondence between psychological science, spiritualism and psychic phenomena; second, I explore the ways in which the compelling powers of the mind were alternatively explained as a product of psychology, spirit and the divine soul; lastly, and briefly, I present a few of the means through which these intersections gave rise to ‘productive contradictions’ at the boundaries where science, religion and art met and mingled.

Many of Davies’s productive contradictions are demonstrated by *A Measure of Dreams* (figure 4.1) whose very title points towards tension between science and the dream-experience: how does one measure a dream? Which of its many aspects can be quantified and what instruments would one use to complete that task? Well aware of this paradox, Davies rendered an embodiment of the unconscious dreaming spirit, making the ineffable experience of a dream physical through his strategic and now familiar blend of specificity and vagueness, clarity and obscurity, focus and blur. Created in 1908 or 1909, in the wake of his success in ‘the Eight’ exhibition, it shows one of the artist’s most direct attempts to capture an inner visionary experience in the material substances of paint and canvas. Soon after its purchase from Macbeth’s Gallery in 1909, this painting was donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was a great honor for an insurgent artist whose reputation was still developing.¹³

As in prior images, Davies not only inspires an experience that is like the process of dreaming, it also resembles the inner vision characteristic of a dream. He leaves

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¹³ The painting’s public exhibition record is not known beyond the provenance establishing its purchase from Macbeth’s Gallery in 1909 by Mr. George Hearn, who donated it to the museum that year. For provenance see the Metropolitan Museum of Art collections database, [http://metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/20011021](http://metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/20011021), accessed May 17, 2013.
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touches and clues that invite us to consider his imaginative thought-process as he brought this image into being. In places, the pigment is applied so thinly that it reveals the weave of the canvas below, lying above its fabric surface like a fragile veil of illusions that threatens to disintegrate in the full light of day. Yet, in other regions the paint is thick and tactile and in others it is heavily rubbed into the canvas. Despite such indications of the artist’s vigorous physical engagement, the image leaves the obvious question of whose dream we witness unclear: it could equally reveal the artist’s, our own, or one in the mind of the large nude woman posed just to left of center in the immediate foreground of this curious landscape. The ‘measurement’ referenced by the title is conducted in reckoning all of these possibilities.

Rendering a journey of the soul across a landscape of the interior imagination, Davies confounds his viewer’s expectations: surely, if this is a soul or spirit in a dream, she is a very embodied one. She emerges distinctly from out of the substance of the paint, but is strangely out-of-scale here, almost too large for this outdoor space. Although to some viewers she might call to mind the embarrassment of dreams of being naked, this robust and monumental figure is nude but not self-conscious, demonstrating her utter absorption in the moment. Utterly unaware that our eyes linger on her contours, the lone figure’s sensual form—outlined with relative precision against the brushy ground—invites a sustained look at her hearty physique. Despite, or even because of our proximity, we may feel like an intruder on this private moment, but our eyes are nonetheless invited to linger on this body; the figure’s conspicuous nudity once again makes reference to the defenselessness of the dreaming soul, and the sense of vulnerability to which a dreamer submits under the force of the unconscious.

The figure is arrested in time, pausing like a sleep-walker in the midst of her passage, engrossed in a somnambulistic state. Despite this stasis, the painting references motion: although we cannot see her feet, her legs are posed as if she has just been moving across this landscape. She lifts her delicately-rendered face up towards the sky, but her eyes are closed as if she experiences some compelling inner sight. We witness a moment of intense subjectivity, yet the painting speaks simultaneously of experiences shared by all dreamers, fluctuating between clarity and vagueness, concrete reality and ethereal illusion. The evident power of her imagined vision inspires the sense that we might as
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well be generating a vision of our own, immersed our exploration of this image. In fact, the distinction between literal and metaphorical ‘vision’ itself is subtly undermined here in this dream world. Her closed eyes prevent her from viewing the landscape that we can see all around her, but she appears to reach out with her inner sight as she gestures hesitantly with her slightly raised right arm, indicating the direction of her physical and mental journey. However, just as she cannot see what we can, we cannot see what inspires this pause in the space of her mind: her face conveys an expression of contentment, as if her imagining consciousness connects with some lovely apparition that we can never access. Silhouetted against the dark shape of a promontory rising behind her, the dark but nebulous vegetation at its top almost resembles a cloud arising from her mind: her dreamland may be the expanse through which her slumbering spirit wanders.

But if this is her dream-scape, we are invited to wander here, too. Although the painting cannot move, our vision generates gentle motion as our eyes take in the rest of the composition, venturing across and through its space. The artist employs the horizontal format that became his hallmark in these years, lending itself to a viewing encounter that ‘reads’ spatially from left to right following the landscape from foreground to distant view. Engaging the duality of consciousness that dreaming engenders, however, the figure’s legs and raised arm indicate her prior movement was in the opposite direction, from right to left. Davies gives his viewer free reign to interpret this ambiguity, offering no narrative or even spatial closure that might disrupt the reverie that his image inspires.

The landscape itself also evokes dreaming: while she provides an obvious focal point, the field around her otherwise lacks clarity and precision—no vivid colors demand our attention, nor do any other details distract us. Behind the figure, space extends into the distance. It is spring or summer: trees, vines and shrubs are in full leaf, but they are just barely discernable, executed in bristly marks that hover above the thoroughly rubbed-in ground. In the sky above, glimpses of bright blue appear between breaks in a bank of scudding clouds. A body of water to the right and behind the figure stretches across a bay towards a far shore, while to the left a short, steep hill ascends, preventing our eyes from traveling much deeper. Defined by textural, scruffy strokes of dark green, brown and gold pigment, the ground here is indistinguishable from the plants growing upon it, as if we can’t quite bring the space into focus. Silhouettes and smudges in dark, earthy tones
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create the hazy contours of plants and trees in the immediate foreground, but their specific features also escape ready identification.

If this is a fantasy landscape, it is surely far from a lush or idyllic setting, unlike Maxfield Parrish’s sumptuous contemporary panorama Dream Castle in the Sky (figure 4.2).14 Davies’s landscape is bleak in comparison, and its odd qualities call for close inspection of its evocative form: the soft facture and texture, the blurry lines and the muted colors of a hazy, atmospheric murk all imply that the terrain we see is as impermanent and illusory as the one this figure envisions. The veiled trees and patchy foliage function like the vague recollections of dream images upon waking, mental pictures we strive to put into words; the contours of the hills loom and undulate. The absence of enumerated detail makes us call upon our other senses to help measure this dream-landscape: clouds in the sky, swaying grasses, even the nude’s elevated head and chin call to mind how sound, sensations and smells can linger in dream-memory, compelling but indistinct echoes of lived experience. Davies mobilizes our own remembrance of dreams, and A Measure of Dreams persists in the imagination once the viewer turns away.

I. Interdisciplinarity: spiritualists, scientists, mystics & visionaries

Such images encompassed the paradoxical goal of rendering an invisible world perceivable, blending scientific observation with esoteric mystery; Davies’s pictures met and matched his viewer’s own subjectively derived beliefs, and echoed the parallel discussion of the adjacent scientific, symbolic and spiritual vectors of dreams in print. In his 1908 New York Sun review, penned about the same time A Measure of Dreams was in process, Huneker further stressed the intermingling of rational scientific and spiritual discourses informing Davies’s painting, claiming that the artist was a “Clairvoyant in spiritual matters [...] the very intensity of this inward vision when applied to the mundane affairs enables him to solve problems which puzzle others. All great men of

14 Parrish’s panel was commissioned for a private home in Lincoln, MA, thus it is unlikely many viewers would have made a comparison between this image and Davies’s.
action are great dreamers.” Invoking the ‘problem solving’ fundamental to art and
science, Huneker’s reference to clairvoyance and spirits would also immediately have
called to viewers’ minds ‘Modern Spiritualism.’ A faith spawned in the mid-19th century,
Spiritualism was based upon the widespread presumption that one could, through the
efforts of mystics, mediums and their interpreters, communicate with the unseen realm of
the supernatural beyond. Arising from a cultural context sparked by Victorian desire for
the consolations of mourning, pervasive curiosity about human mortality, and the
existence of the soul, it expanded throughout the final decades of the 19th century to
encompass all kinds of psychic phenomena: telepathy and thought-transference,
automatic drawing and writing, ectoplasmic manifestations, table-rapping, spiritually-
guided divination, hypnotic trances, visions, hallucinations and prophetic dreams.

As a loosely coherent but un-dogmatic movement, Spiritualism crossed
boundaries separating different religious sects, and was practiced in both private séances
and public demonstrations. It spawned numerous publications, and it became a vastly
influential, ecumenical form of religion with followers numbering in the millions by the
end of the century. But more broadly speaking—and when un-capitalized—
‘spiritualism’ animated American culture in a variety of ways, re-investing a world that
seemed increasingly materialistic and secular in focus with new layers of immaterial,
transcendent significance. As one observer remarked in 1904, “Astrology, chiromancy,

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16 Although loosely speaking Spiritualism was a Christian movement, many upheld the virtues of its
inclusive and basically pantheistic premises. An extremely useful discussion of many manifestations of
Spiritualism in nineteenth-century America and pervasive concern with evidence of life after death is
offered by Molly McGarry, Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-
Century America, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), but the literature on this topic is
extensive. See also Moore, In Search of White Crows, (1977); Kerr and Crow, eds. The Occult in America:
New Historical Perspectives, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), and Robert Fuller, Mesmerism
17 Among the most important publications were the weeklies The Banner of Light (Boston), The Religio-
Philosophical Journal (Chicago), and Mind and Matter (Philadelphia). The height of interest in
Spiritualism arose in the aftermath of the Civil War and its widespread casualties; various estimates of the
believers in Spiritualism suggest the followers numbered over two million by 1870, according to Barbara
Goldsmith, Other Powers: the Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull, (New
York: Knopf, 1998), p 79. See also Ruth Brandon, The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the
Nineteenth Century, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Robert S. Cox, Body and Soul: A
insightful analysis of Spiritualism’s relationship to modernity and literature more broadly, see Helen
theosophy, and the occult sciences occupy a large place in modern thought, literature and polite society, [...] a source of wonder to scientific men. The reason is not so difficult to divine. It is a reaction against the rampant materialism of the times." 18 This writer, evidently disaffected as were many fellow Americans by the rising force of commercialism, industrialism, and mechanization, endorsed the possibility that realms of spirit and ‘the occult sciences’ might counteract the potentially degrading forces of modernity’s encroaching materialism.

Nonetheless, despite Spiritualists’ faith in invisible realms of incorporeal experience, their aspirations towards scientific proof of life beyond mortal limits crossed freely between secular and sacred domains, between the approaches of empirical science and the yearning that fostered irrational belief.19 Seeking verifiable contact with the extramundane world of incorporeal forces and supernatural agents, the religion from its inception claimed the authority of scientific proof; many of its proponents saw the para-psychological phenomena associated with the spirit world as conclusive confirmation of the existence of a parallel realm beyond the limits of the material one.20 The terms used by spirit mediums and their promoters often relied upon the language of modern science and technology; Margaret Fox claimed that the rappings she and her sister produced beginning in 1848 were “spiritual telegraphs,” while other clairvoyants spoke of spiritual ‘ether,’ electrical fields and currents. Spiritualists embraced new scientific methods, models, and modern tools such as photography to deliver tangible evidence of life after death in the domains of immaterial reality.21 So too did opportunistic charlatans seeking

18 Evans, “Madame Blavatsky,” (1904), p 387.
19 For more on the question of when and whether ‘spiritualism’ should be capitalized, as well as important discussion of the parallels between spiritualism and science, see Sheri Weinstein, “Technologies of Vision: Spiritualism and Science in Nineteenth Century America,” in Jeffrey Weinstock, ed. Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp 124-140
20 The Spiritualist movement was initiated by the Fox sisters in 1848, when they claimed to be able to communicate via table-rapping with the spirits of the dead. Their spectacular demonstrations of disembodied knocking, interpreted as messages from diverse spiritual sources, were performed before enthusiastic audiences until they were debunked in 1888; this revelation notwithstanding, various other forms of Spiritual communication via clairvoyant spirit mediums took off in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, lasting in influence well into the 20th. The Fox sisters’ abilities to communicate with the dead were subjected to many different kinds of scientific scrutiny during their successful years, none of which could disprove their abilities. See Weinstein, “Technologies of Vision,” (2004), pp 124-140.
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to capitalize upon the desires of the gullible, which led to increasing demands in the 1880s for scientific expertise to determine the authenticity of true as opposed to fraudulent spiritual contact.

Thus, as Spiritualists embraced the ‘proof’ of scientific methods, the legacy of 19th century psychological authority sparked a parallel desire to know, verify and delimit the metaphysical properties of the mind seeking evidence of spiritual contact. Dreams offered a means to access the realm where communication between souls and spirits was transacted in the mystical language of the mind: through visions and vague forms, and by means of obscure symbolism. In fact, psychology’s objective, rational investigation of the psyche’s mysterious inner workings seemed to promise that the secrets of the unconscious once reavealed would substantiate the significance of dreams—even, perhaps, generating proof of the spirit world’s reality. The potent sense of authenticity and insight conjured by dreams seemed to indicate that the physiological networks linking the mind to the sensing body also contained the soul, an argument William James had proposed in Principles of Psychology.2

Beginning in 1900, Davies not only took on the topic of dreams more overtly, but he also devoted more work towards spectral and spiritual concerns in his subjects and style, creating paintings such as Hosts of Faery (figure 3.15), Children of Yesteryear (ca. 1900, Brooklyn Museum), Phantasie Hill (ca. 1910), A Dirge in Spring (private collection, ca. 1900) and exemplified in particular by Psyche (figure 4.3). Painted between 1906 and 08, Psyche depicts another young female nude seated in a landscape. Although its nearly indecipherable surface suggests unfortunate darkening, its somber coloration also calls to mind nocturnal visions. The space behind the figure is only barely visible as a thickly foliated grove of trees and bushes. Dim highlights catch in the figure’s russet hair, and the gentle curve of her body, although poorly visible, traces the outline of her back as she kneels on the ground, facing left, bending over to look at an insect cupped in her hands. Her softly painted skin almost glows against the shadowy background; the

remains an essential authority on the overlap between psychological science and Spiritualism. I discuss spirit photography in greater detail later in this chapter.

2 William James, Principles of Psychology, New York: Henry Holt, 1890, p 181. James proposed that the existence of the soul in the totality of consciousness was the argument presenting the “least logical resistance,” thus demonstrating his liberal fusion of psychology and metaphysical philosophy.

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faintest lightening of the space around her head suggests a spectral aura. But her face is in shadow, her features illegible as she bends her head in rapt attention, examining the butterfly whose delicate, fluttering white wings are indicated by soft touches of the artist’s brush. Their contrasting color seems almost an illumination against the dark green ground. Whereas fellow artists used the pretext of the myth to render Psyche as a sentimental, eroticized pre-teen, as William Sergeant Kendall did in 1909 (figure 4.4), Davies’s focus on the figure’s interiority deflects our attention from her body alone, and invites us to consider her mind and spirit.

His choice of this mythic reference facilitated multiple coincident and propagating associations as it makes a triple pun playing upon the title’s multiple meaning. Ancient Greeks, inspired by the caterpillar’s power of transformation into a butterfly, used the same word to mean the winged insect, the human soul and the ‘breath of life.’ Referencing these conflated terms as well as the mythological story of Cupid’s love object, Davies strategically employs Neoplatonic allusions to the mystic union of body and soul. The subtle interplay of shadow and illumination also makes oblique allusion to the myth’s spiritual resonances. In the story as told by Apuleius, Psyche reveals the form of the god of love by holding up a light, and thus implicitly suggests the mediumistic practice of lychnomancy, a mystical kind of divination made by means of candle-flames. The intensity of the figure’s attention to the fluttering butterfly in her hand evokes a trance-like communion with a fragile, flickering spiritual force; in her obscurity she embodies the “hidden self” that constituted the spiritual core of consciousness.

By the end of the 19th century, Spiritualist practitioners saw themselves making important contributions to the scientific study of the subconscious in the name of enhanced knowledge and pure spiritual communion. Some psychologists found great virtue in their efforts to study the mind’s power: in the same year that his Principles of Psychology was published, establishing his authority on matters of the perceptual faculties of the mind, James’s essay “The Hidden Self” also introduced a broad cross-section of American readers to his parallel and expanding interest in the mysterious, indeed immaterial aspects of consciousness and the unconscious.23 James advocated the rational study of inexplicable mental phenomena such clairvoyance, divination, occult

practices, spiritualism, faith healing and hypnosis. These topics, a product of what he called the “unclassed residuum,” were ripe for investigation, and, as he noted, “In psychology, physiology and medicine, wherever a debate between the Mystics and the Scientists has been once and for all decided, it is the Mystics who have usually been right about the facts, whereas the Scientists had the better of it in respect to the theories.” But, as he observed, few topics had been “treated with a more contemptuous scientific disregard than the mass of phenomena generally called mystical.”

Whatever aspect of mental function he subsequently pursued, from unconscious visual perception, “exceptional mental states,” and ordinary dreaming, James’s research demonstrated that significant layers or states of consciousness lay beyond the rational experience of waking; he insisted that scientific methods—experiments, disciplined introspection and rigorous analysis of his observations—could be used to discover the insights to which they granted access. Conducted as an outgrowth of his psychological study, James pursued research into the supernatural aspects of consciousness in his laboratory and in correspondence with and observation of various spiritual practitioners. His experiments focused on the realms of unconscious processes and visionary experiences that could be accessed through the methods used by Spiritualists: hypnotism, crystal gazing, mediumistic trances and automatic writing. He also followed reports of

24 James, “The Hidden Self,” (1890), p. 361. It was lamentable, he continued, that, “Physiology will have nothing to do with them. Orthodox psychology turns its back on them. Medicine [...] at most, when in an anecdotal vein, records a few of them as ‘effects of the imagination,’ a phrase of mere dismissal whose meaning, in this connection, is impossible to make precise.”

25 Ibid.

26 James’s interest in psychic phenomena was sparked in 1885, after his mother-in-law visited Leonora Piper, a psychic medium who became one of the psychologist’s longtime research subjects. Piper’s exceptional abilities intrigued James for the rest of his career, provoking many of the insights about the nature of faith, scientific evidence, hypothesis and free will that he explored in such later books as A Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy. (New York: Longman’s, Green and Co., 1896). A thorough discussion of James’s introduction to parapsychology and his psychic research, alongside his fellow members of the American SPR, is provided in an engaging narrative by Deborah Blum, Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death, (New York: Penguin Press, 2006). For biographical background information about William James, see Robert Richardson, William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 2006).

prophetic or revelatory somnolent states, hallucinations and visions in which fantastical knowledge was revealed to dreamers.

Despite his rising authority on matters of the mind, James ran the risk of opprobrium for his experiments, as growing debate over the scientific validity of mysticism, Spiritualism and other forms of supernatural manifestations arose throughout the 1890s concerning which disciplines should most accurately and authoritatively address the operations of the visionary imagination.28 Even as some psychologists sought to distance themselves from Spiritualism, proponents of ‘spiritual science’ amplified the public’s interest in affairs of the unconscious and dreaming mind; since popular interest in Spiritual matters was so extensive, it encouraged the pursuits of psychologists.

Evaluating the movement’s diverse American manifestations in a systematic way, noted psychic Cora Richmond (1840-1923) addressed a sympathetic audience in The Arena in “The Spiritualism of Today,” published in 1899. Attempting to bridge a growing divide between Spiritualists and scientists, Richmond charted out the intersections between religious, philosophical and phenomenal forms and approaches to the unseen, inner and transcendent forces of the soul.

According to Richmond pursuit of spiritual contact from a scientific vantage point was a distinctly modern, even uniquely American kind of practice reflecting the “spiritual light of this age.”29 Just as “material science has proved the indestructibility of the atom,” she wrote, thus “Spiritualism proves the immortality of the individual soul by bases, deductions and proofs as undeniable as the principles of mathematics.”30 Richmond endorsed the essential contributions to such knowledge of the spirit made by psychologists, commenting “A step has been taken which opens up a new realm even to the ordinary student of psychology, and to one really interested in the continued life

30 Asserting the phenomenal focus of spiritualism, however, she called upon scientists to provide a “restatement of scientific terms, and a broadening of scientific bases, to meet the facts as proved.” The thorough study of the operations of the mind to account for phenomena regarded as ‘psychic’ could provide just such a necessary restatement, “opening up for investigation a vast inner realm, including the latent possibilities of the human spirit while in the earthly environment.” Yet, she continues two pages later “One thing is notable, however...science has been compelled to investigate and deal with an independent intelligence acting upon substances in a manner entirely at variance with—or beyond—those methods known to science.” Richmond, “The Spiritualism of Today,” (1899), p 362 and 366.
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beyond the change called death, there is absolutely a new atmosphere surrounding the entire subject of a future existence.”

Although it is impossible to assert he was aware of them, Davies would readily have endorsed Richmond’s views. Raised in a devout Methodist family, in the 1890s Davies supplanted established religion with various forms of spiritualism, mysticism and occult beliefs. His friendship with Lucile du Pré, a musician, amateur artist, and close associate of his wife introduced him to many forms of alternative belief, Theosophy and Eastern metaphysical philosophies such as Taoism. The well-connected du Pré also introduced him to many of her friends in New York, and encouraged his explorations of spirit, believing that he was “a genius, working among earth’s most spiritual forces,” as she wrote to Lucy. Much later, fellow artist William Zorach recalled Davies’s devotion to spiritual practices; alongside his friends the Fitch-Taylors, Davies participated in séances, pursued mystic writings and consulted with clairvoyants regarding their horoscopes. The loss of two of his children in infancy, his daughter Silvia in 1989 and a son Alan in 1901, may have inspired the artist to seek the consolations of spiritual practices more fervently in the ensuing years.

Regardless of the extent of any personal interest in matters of spiritual communication, critical reception of Davies’s work between 1900 and 1910 shows how his viewers saw his work in terms of spiritual and mystical associations. The Hours and the Freedom of the Fields, ca. 1905 (figure 4.5) for example, was exhibited in a 1905 solo show at Macbeth’s Gallery. Davies conveys a spirit of summer reverie in his painting’s verdant color and tone, showing a group of girls at center-left seated in a meadow below a forested hillside. On the cusp of adulthood, their lengthening limbs and hemlines showing a range of adolescent years. However, unlike many of Davies’s increasingly common fleshy, hearty naked figures, these young women are clothed; their pastel dresses are depicted in such hasty, tenuous brushstrokes that they seem like ghosts or spirits rather than fully corporeal children. One at far left is even transparent, indicating

that the figures may have been added to a previously unoccupied landscape. Gazes focused to the right, these spectral girls observe a pair of their peers running freely into the distance; Davies captures the energy of their liberated play in his animated, textural marks. Comparing wistful watching with vigorous action, attendant waiting and jubilant motion, the artist invites the viewer’s dreamy recollection of childhood’s varied pleasures: contemplative idle interludes alternating with opportunities for unfettered physical release.

Davies’s lush, vivid colors and dynamic handling of paint caught the attention of progressive critic Charles deKay, fan of ‘The Eight,’ who reviewed the exhibition for The New York Times in his essay “Songs of Sunrise and Color Dreams.” DeKay was enchanted by the works on view, among which were included *Aurora, Hill of Dreams* (ca. 1905), and the currently unknown *Invocation, October*, and *Dryad Hill*. Noting Davies’s resemblance to Swiss Symbolist Arnold Böcklin as well as Albert Pinkham Ryder, De Kay called Davies a “rhapsodist in paint,” referring not only to the artist’s associations with poetry and music, but also to rhapsody’s other meaning: the impassioned expression of feeling. Evoking the artist’s ability to capture something vital about the inner force of the soul, he observed that the works on view had “just enough reality about them to please, and yet fancifulness enough to suggest the supernatural.” His equation of Davies’s paintings with the qualities of enhanced emotion and vision exceeding the limits of the real augmented the linkage between Davies’s perception and his transcendent mind. But DeKay’s allusion to the supernatural called to mind more occult associations with visionary dreaming: the possibility of psychic and para-psychological contact. The titles of several of Davies’s contemporary paintings, such as *Night Magic* (unlocated, pre-1910) and *Enter These Enchanted Woods, Ye Who Dare*, (unlocated, exhibited in a solo show at Macbeth’s in 1901) made reference not only to the spiritual properties of memory and the life force of the soul, but seemed to invoke

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35 According to Davies’s letters to William Macbeth, the artist was particularly impressed by Böcklin during his second European visit in 1897. See letters from ABD to WM, dated August-October, 1897, Macbeth Correspondence, reel NMc6, frames 287-303, Archives of American Art. Davies also obtained a framed copy of Böcklin’s haunting 1880 painting *Island of the Dead*, an image popular with many Symbolists, as well as with Alfred Stieglitz. See Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p 187.
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unearthly vision and paranormal mysteries, evoking arcane and even magical kinds of psychic phenomena. 36 Despite their occult associations, Davies’s rising popularity with patrons such as Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan, and Mrs. Charles C. Rumsey, both respectable and progressive women active in New York society, suggests the pervasive appeal of these themes. 37

Whereas a viewer today might perceive the quest for psychic and spiritual truth as a marginal or countercultural movement, the endorsement of the New York Times critic shows how readily psychic and supernatural phenomena was embraced by the mainstream at the century’s turn. Similarly, while the interior realm of pure fantasy could strain the boundaries of credibility, conjuring magic, ghosts or demons as well as memory some psychologists also welcomed explorations of psychic phenomena. Manifestations of supernatural forces in the mind like dreams indicated the uncanny potential of the unconscious to demonstrate transcendent abilities and plumb the soul’s unfathomable depths. In James’s essay “The Hidden Self,” he commented upon the uncanny properties of the internal psychic world, its many mystical abilities “lying broadcast over the surface of history. No matter where you open its pages, you find things recorded under the name of divinations, inspirations, demoniacal possessions, apparitions, trances, ecstasies, miraculous healings and productions of disease, and occult powers possessed by peculiar individuals over persons and things.” 38

Although acclaimed for his scientific outlook, James was equally influential in his investigations of the mysterious ways in which the mind’s operations challenged science’s hard, rational boundaries. While he was at work researching and composing his Principles of Psychology, James was also becoming aware that the mind showed properties seemingly beyond the measures that scientific methods could measure. In fact,

36 Neither of these paintings is known today, so one can only speculate on what figures and imagery they contained.
37 Mary Harriman Rumsey, daughter of railroad magnate E.H. Harriman and sister to W. Averell Harriman, former New York State Governor and United States Diplomat, was a progressive reformer and socialite, who founded the Junior League of the City of New York; Mary Quinn Sullivan was a co-founder, along with Lillie Bliss and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, of the Museum of Modern Art, and was equally well-placed in New York’s society. Both women owned Davies paintings from this early period, as demonstrated by the list of works and their owners in Royal Cortissoz, Arthur B. Davies, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1931).
38 James,”The Hidden Self,” (1890), p 361.
as his research and his own experiences demonstrated, he recognized—and increasingly argued—that many aspects of human consciousness lay just beyond the scope of materialism. Although science could be used to verify their manifestations, they co-existed in the unconscious with elusive, idealist and immaterial forces. He became interested in these mysterious habits of the mind, and their rational study, as a means of coming to terms with the full range of the psyche's diverse capabilities, spanning quotidian and paranormal experience.

James had many cohorts who also pursued these interests, revealing insights about the existence of a 'subliminal self' and the true vastness of the unconscious. To help monitor and verify the proliferating claims of spiritual mediums and charlatans alike, The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 in Britain, devoted to the scholarly exploration, verification, or debunking of various experiences and phenomena today described as 'paranormal;' when an American branch of the Society was founded in 1885, James was a charter member and its first president. Seeking scientific evidence for the spiritual affinities of the unconscious mind, such as the existence of the soul and

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39 James was surely not alone in these interests; he corresponded with Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy, whose own psychologically grounded research in 'spiritism' and psychical research paralleled James's. Flournoy's thorough examination of a psychic medium's claims, entitled From India To The Planet Mars (1899) echoed James's study of Leonora Piper. Flournoy, like James, sought to distinguish the difference between the romantic wishes of the subject's 'subliminal imagination,' and more rational products of the unconscious mind. In his later text, Spiritism and Psychology (1911) Flournoy asserted that spiritual contact could be explained by suggestion and telepathy from the medium's subconscious mind and that there was no concrete evidence for exceptional phenomena or true spiritual presence. See Robert Le Clair, ed. The Letters of William James and Theodore Flournoy, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966). James was also an associate of British psychologist and psychical researcher Frederic Myers, although the American was somewhat more skeptical of the true psychological merit of Myers's conclusions. Myers's willingness to embrace psychic phenomena was close to James's own open-minded outlook. He maintained that the entire scope of an integrated model of consciousness must make room for a full, inclusive variety of abnormal and "supernormal" phenomena. Myers's posthumously published two-volume book, Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death (1903) presented an extensive compilation of Myers's research into the unconscious mind. For more on James's involvement with fellow spiritualist and psychic researchers outside of America, see Moore, In Search of White Crows, (1977), pp 133-168. Among James's fellow psychological researchers in psychic phenomena, Carl Jung also pursued the occult properties of the mind. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 1902, concerned psychic research: "On the Psychology and Pathology of So-called Occult Phenomena," was completed while he was working at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Clinic under Eugen Bleuler.

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proof of life after death, dedicated skeptics and adherents of spiritualism alike used the most scientific and modern means possible to conduct their research into the validity of true psychic phenomena and spiritual contact, including the employment of rigorous experimental procedures. In its first year, many charter members of American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) were also the nation’s emergent leaders in the new field of psychology, as well as philosophers and some professors of medicine: Joseph Jastrow, G. Stanley Hall, Morton Prince, Christine Ladd-Franklin and James Jackson Putnam were founders, as was Charles Sanders Peirce.

The goal of these interdisciplinary organizations was not only to investigate the claims of the proliferating spiritual mediums, but in more general terms, to ascertain proof of the transcendent realm’s existence, or to deny it once and for all, revealing such matters as definitively psychological rather than occult in origin. Hoping as well to rein in some of the unbridled popular enthusiasm for matters of the spirit, distinguish the insight of ‘genuine’ psychics from fraudulent ones and ascertain the true distinction between the mind’s psychological powers and the potential of psychic contact, the ASPR studied all manner of evidence of psychic phenomena. They applied rigorous, disciplined experimentation and analysis to the existence of ghosts and haunted houses; prophecy and fortunetelling; hallucinations, visions, and mediumistic trances; and all forms of communication that was transacted in a realm beyond the material, via thought-transference and automatic drawing and writing. Somnolent dreams and hallucinations were a focus for some of the members of these professional associations—articles on the study of clairvoyant, prophetic or apparently telepathic dreams occupied the pages of their Journals and Proceedings spanning the turn of the twentieth century. An equally

41 On the attempts of psychologists to combat the spread of rampant spiritualist mania, see Rhodri Hayward, “Policing Dreams: History and Moral Uses of the Unconscious,” History Workshop Journal 49, (Spring, 2000), pp 142-160, discusses the many ways in which dreams, both hypnotic and those produced in slumber, were evaluated by members of the SPR using scientific methods to disprove the validity of psychic phenomena, often from the desire to impose control on a topic that seemed liable to spin out into anarchic license for all kinds of radical or antisocial behavior. Although his study focuses on the British SPR more than its American counterpart, the methods used by both were similar.
42 Although charter members, many of these psychologists withdrew from the SPR around 1900, as greater attempts to bring more disciplinary focus to the study of the mind arose.
43 British SPR member Andrew Lang assembled the contents of many of these articles and combined them with his own research and insight into dreaming, in his 1897 Book of Dreams and Ghosts, (New York and London: Longmans & Co, 1897), p 3, in which he observed “in dreams, space and time are annihilated, and
powerful goal, however, was registering disciplined opposition to the “malevolent ghost preventing public confidence in scientific naturalism,” as historian Deborah Coon has written.\textsuperscript{44}

Visual culture had an important place in spiritual and psychic research: the first volume of the \textit{Proceedings} of the ASPR, published in 1885, contained a special section on “thought transference” via pictures (figure 4.6).\textsuperscript{45} The crude line drawings, scribbles and suggestive lines created by purportedly ‘adept’ subjects are far from the distinguished works of fine art that viewers might have seen in galleries, but the ambiguity and abstraction of the forms suggests ways in which viewers of Davies’s paintings might well have been inclined to see his own indistinct marks as the products of a psychic or spiritually guided dream. Automatic drawing, or ‘graphic automatism’ was also a topic that interested James; having studied to be an artist in his early academic career, James was fascinated by perception in his psychological study, and by the visual manifestations of psychic contact in his paranormal research.\textsuperscript{46} James’s 1904 report on automatic drawing, published in the pages of \textit{Popular Science Monthly}, illustrated the creations of a young man whose pictures were attributed to unconscious, perhaps even psychically stimulated operations.\textsuperscript{47} James ascribed the subject’s enigmatic, dreamy and indistinct
pictures to “the slumbering faculties of the automatist’s mind, and a cosmic environment of other consciousness of some sort which is able to work upon them.”

The murky, ambiguous pencil drawings of fanciful figures with smiling faces created by James’s research subject (figure 4.7) do not look much like paintings: cut out from their original sheets of paper when reproduced in the magazine, they are crude, occupy no landscapes, and do not interact with one another. Since they were produced in an experimental setting, and did not attempt to be artistic, James treats them as scientific demonstrations of what a dreaming (or at least unconscious and entranced) mind produces as imagery. But there are similarities between these figures and Davies’s paintings, as the whimsical creativity and distortion of form in these drawings is abundantly evident: the bodies and faces bulge, waver or seem to transform—some have peculiar non-human or monstrous structure with multiple limbs and faces. And when examined alongside Davies’s roughly contemporary paintings, such as *Wild Wind of Vision* (figure 3.8), other layers of affinity suggest a connection viewers might have made: Davies’s bodies adopt peculiar and occasionally contorted poses, their actions are peculiar and inexplicable, his contours are indistinct, and his background is blurred. As with the illustrations of telepathically transmitted pictures published by the SPR, these automatic drawings establish a context in which pictorial crudity, peculiarity and ambiguity communicated psychical and spiritually attuned perception.

*Wild Wind of Vision*, nd, (ca. 1906-1909) expresses the turbulence and somber tonality of Davies’s darker moods and fantasies, and suggests psychic or supernatural correspondences. The subject and context for this work are cryptic; it shows a group of naked figures conducting some ill-defined but discordant activity, offset by the swirling energies of a stormy sky. Davies employs the brushy, textural strokes seen in prior works...
like *A Measure of Dreams*, but whereas they previously signified gentle ethereality, here they conjure qualities of conflict and emotional turmoil.

At right, Davies paints the hearty, dominating physique of a large, monstrous and headless male nude, and his darker but equally sinister opponent who falls to the ground behind him, clutching an eye-catching red weapon or staff. Evoking preternatural forces, these two male figures set up a provocative mismatch with two naked female bodies at left, whose distinctly artificial and slightly uncomfortable poses and lifted limbs suggest some mysterious ritual dance; their diminished scale relative to the men, although they seem to occupy the same plane, establishes an odd spatial and physical disjunction across the intervening middle ground. More appealing than their grotesque male counterparts, these women are stopped awkwardly in the midst of motion; their static gestures contrast with the wind’s energies, captured in the paint strokes rendering the tumultuous stormy sky. Davies’s title offers no known story or context that might provide interpretive help here, but rather he invites the viewer to partake in an uneasy spectatorship; this painting imparts a visionary encounter with a mind held in thrall to the ‘wild wind’ of imagination’s unfettered and arcane powers.

It seems to capture the kind of “exceptional mental state” that intrigued James, and structured the content of his 1896 Lowell Lectures. Although dreams only appear as a footnote in James’s *Principles of Psychology*, as his psychological and psychical research proceeded, he became more interested in what they might reveal about the visionary activities of the human mind; they operated on the continuum of psychic phenomena alongside trances and other visionary tendencies that he investigated more thoroughly. James specifically mentioned dreaming and nightmares in the Lowell Lectures; according to James, “We do not regard dreaming as morbid because it is

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51 James’s first presentation in these lectures on ‘Exceptional Mental States,’ addressed *Dreams and Hypnotism*, followed by discussions of related topics such as *Automatism, Hysteria, Multiple Personalities, Demonical Possession, Witchcraft, Degeneration, and Genius*, demonstrating the range of mysterious psychological phenomena he felt deserved serious scrutiny. Although the Lowell Lectures of 1896 were not officially published until they were later compiled by Eugene Taylor in 1982, these talks were publicized for readers as they were reviewed and excerpted in the *Boston Globe* and *Boston Transcript* “On Dreams and Hypnotism” *Boston Globe*, Oct 22, 1896, “Professor James’ Lectures,” *Boston Transcript*, Oct 31 1896. See Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States, the Lowell Lectures, 1896*, (1982).
52 For a thorough evaluation of James’s beliefs about the scope of consciousness, see Taylor, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin*, (1996).
customary, but if it were not, it would be the subject of much medical wonder,” and he continued, “Dreams don’t interfere with our waking life, they only engage our knowledge of it.”

As his lectures on unusual mental phenomena proceeded, James explored the distinction between dreaming and the mental visions of hypnotic trances, arguing that the latter was merely a partial or imperfectly realized state of the former. Dreaming, he asserted, was a state in which the dreamer’s attention narrows, the senses retreat, and ideas are dissociated from their normal, waking consorts; but while the dreamer’s consciousness narrows its focus, the imagination’s images become more vivid and intense. Echoing some of the claims of Symbolist poets and painters, he continued, “In dreaming, the whole of knowledge is brought to bear, and associations are complete […] when we dream, as any image before the mind can have many associations with other ideas or images, both directly and indirectly related to the dream content […]”

Recognizing how dreams also create associations between separate epistemes—crossing from reality to illusion and back, and from physiological explanations to psychic mysteries—James’ endorsement of dreaming captures the utopian aspirations of many seekers of equally psychological and transcendent truth: dreaming produced its own distinct form of knowledge.

In like manner Davies’s paintings offered a means of insight about the psychic self and the world of dreams, rendered ‘real’ through the artist’s ability to bring them from the mind onto canvas. His dream-like paintings brought the “whole of knowledge” to the depiction of the mind’s visionary potential, linking by association the spirits of memory with those possessing more occult possibilities. In fact, by 1898 James endorsed the efficacy of dreams, regarding some as proof of clairvoyance and the reality of psychic knowledge. A 1907 essay published in the Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research—based upon research conducted nearly ten years earlier—related the strange, sad story of a young girl who went missing from her Lebanon, NH home.

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54 Taylor, Exceptional Mental States, (1892), p 17.
55 James, quoted in Taylor, Exceptional Mental States, (1982), p 16.
While the girl’s family presumed her dead, her lost body was only located after a local clairvoyant envisioned its location in a divinatory dream. After extensive correspondence with the psychic and local witnesses, and finding no other explanation for this woman’s psychic claims, James concluded that the story constituted an authentic demonstration of communication with the world of spirit. In 1909, James averred, “in good mediums there is a residuum of knowledge displayed that can only be called supernormal, the medium taps into some source of information not open to ordinary people [...] found in her dream life as it expresses itself in a trance.”

James’s acceptance of dreams as evidence of the reality of psychic phenomena, and indeed the extent of the interdisciplinary boundary-crossing he demonstrated in his 1902 book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, made some of his peers distinctly uncomfortable. James approached visionary states and the power of the unconscious imagination from a disciplined, rational point of view, and yet he gave powerful encouragement to the metaphysical force of these states in his book: “The deliciousness of some of these states,” he wrote of saintly visions, “seems to be beyond anything known in ordinary consciousness.” While James repeatedly insisted upon the scientific validity of psychic and spiritual research, others including G. Stanley Hall were not as thoroughly convinced, and certainly not all psychic or spiritual research was conducted from the point of view of science. Some was more forthrightly mystical, and some was downright half-baked. In the rising debate over the validity of spiritual investigations, the legitimacy of science was negotiated, but not at all solidified. The number of books substantiating their scientific approaches to spiritual matters is itself impressive evidence of this dynamism: Frank Podmore’s *Studies in Psychical Research*, (1897); Dr. R. Osgood Mason’s, *Telepathy and the Spiritual Self: An Account of Recent Investigations Regarding Hypnotism, Automatism, Dreams, Phantasms, and Related Phenomena*, (1897); Lilian Whiting’s *The Spiritual Significance*, (1900), and Dr. James H. Hyslop’s *Science and a Future Life*, (1905) are just a few.

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Despite the ubiquity and popularity of such books, many skeptics challenged their assertions. Joseph Jastrow (1863-1944), a student of G. Stanley Hall, studied dreaming in the late 1880s, spending particular time assessing the necessity of their visual component by researching the dreams of the blind. Jastrow was devoted to debunking the psychic phenomena towards which James maintained an open mind. Jastrow lambasted the ways in which “Psychic Research forms of conspicuous feature in modern mind-lore,” in two related essays he wrote for *The Dial* in 1897 and 1898, followed by another examination of the fundamental psychological truth of psychic phenomena in *Popular Science Monthly*. Although he did not single out James’s research, Jastrow cast scorn on the general topic of the scientific validity of psychic research when he claimed, “however interesting, [it] is hardly science.” For Jastrow, the true merits of psychic research lay in what it revealed about the fabulous capabilities of the ordinary mind, absent any psychic or spiritual motivation. What distinguished popular interest in ‘Psychic Research’ from the rigorous, clinical study of the mind was, as he notes, an unwholesome “interest in the unusual, the apparently miraculous, the possible exception to recognized physical laws, he possible discovery of means of transcending the limits of this mortal coil.” His conclusion was that “the phenomena of spiritualism” may be enticing, but in the ultimate analysis they were entirely “fraud, eked out by some hallucinations.”

Despite their increasing popularity, some of Davies’s paintings pushed at the boundary at which dreams became ludicrous flights of absurd psychic fancy or

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59 Joseph Jastrow, “The Dreams of the Blind,” *New Princeton Review*, 5, (1888), pp 18-34. One of Jastrow’s subjects in his research was Helen Keller, who reported detailed analysis of how her unconscious mind operated during her dreams in the absence of any visual perceptions from which to draw.

60 Jastrow, “More Psychic Research” *The Dial*, Vol 22: 258, (March 16, 1897) and “Modern Phases of Mind-Lore” *The Dial*, Vol. 24-25, (March 1, 1898), p 147. Jastrow was a noted observer of the psychology of illusions, and an equally well-regarded revealer of pseudo-scientific claptrap and fraud. He had previously made a name for himself in the late 1880s writing on “The Psychology of Deception” in *Popular Science Monthly* (December, 1888) and went on to address *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901) in a well reviewed book that engaged a thorough debunking of the psychological claims of all kinds of occultists and metaphysicians, including Spiritualism, New Thought, Theosophy and Christian Science. He did much work policing the boundaries of science and throughout the early years of the twentieth century he continued to subject the claims of psychic researchers to intense scrutiny.


preposterous delusions; a few even alluded to unbridled credulity. *Wild Wind of Vision* may have generally called to mind strange, mystical visions, but the title of *The Sorcerers*, ca. 1900-1909 (figure 4.9), specified practices allied with sinister magic or seductive witchcraft, ominous forces far surpassing the benevolent uplift of ‘spirituality.’ The arts critic of *Current Literature* in 1908 referenced the “wizardry of Davies,” proclaiming him “the most ‘remote’ and mystical of all our American painters.” To be sure, the only way for a viewer to reconcile the painting’s bizarre juxtapositions may be by conjuring magic, spellbound visions and hallucination: how else should one make sense of the unfathomable activities of the naked, gymnastically cavorting male and female figures at center, in nonsensical proximity to a drove of rooting pigs in the immediate foreground? What condition other than enchantment offers itself as readily to comprehending this seemingly ritual space, defined by the vine-bedecked arbor and flowing fountain next to which these tumbling figures enact the extremes of their peculiar physical rite? Even if explained as a hallucinatory dream, this painting takes its place among Davies’s works that most provoke consideration of the mind’s cabalistic potential.

While Jastrow decried the extremes of psychic experiences, finding them either unsuitable for science, or proving their fatuity, others in addition to James found great merit in the intermingling of disciplinary concerns, locating scientific potential in psychic phenomena. Some of these individuals might well have endorsed Davies’s ability to evoke the spiritual or even transgressive psychic possibilities of the visionary mind. B. O. Flower, spiritual-minded editor of the religious and reformist magazine *The Arena*, challenged Jastrow’s dismissive conclusions about psychic phenomena in 1898. Although he was himself a skeptic, in his essay “Science and Psychical Research,” Flower arrived at the determination that some visions and hallucinations were simply beyond the scope of science to explain, and could therefore be evidence of something truly spiritual.

By 1909, James had concluded “most of the phenomena of psychical research are rooted in reality,” as he claimed in a lecture one year before his death. Inclined towards a

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faith in a “panpsychic” view of the universe, in which a “cosmic consciousness” would at some point be proven to exist, in the same year he published “Confidences of a Psychical Researcher” in the *American Magazine*. After 25 years of psychical research, he wrote, he was still unsure about the existence of spirits, desiring more fact and more proof, but he was instinctively inclined towards the deep reality of spiritual phenomena, thanks to the “dramatic probabilities of nature […] to picture the situation as an interaction between slumbering faculties in the automatist’s mind and a cosmic environment of other consciousness of some sort.”

Investigations into visions, apparitions and other imaginative phenomena did not diminish, however much they were increasingly excluded from psychological science after James’s death; they continued to enhance the ongoing discussion of dreaming, illusions, visions and hallucinations published in the mainstream press. The public nature of this debate over psychic research and spiritualism did little to clear up readers’ deep confusion about the connections between normal psychological operations and the mystical properties of the imagination, although it certainly fed the general interest in the topic. Davies capitalized upon this valuably unfixed circumstance, giving material form to dreams, psychic visions or even hallucinations with increasing awareness that his audience was aware of the extent and richness of the generative interdisciplinary dialog: his critics gave voice to opinions his viewers’ shared. The anonymous *The New York Times* writer, for example, observed in 1909, “His pictures posses the subtle authority springing from a mystic ideal united to the method of science, the pleasure given by them

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65 James reported he had “been tempted to believe that the Creator has eternally intended this department of nature to remain baffling, to prompt our curiosities and hopes and suspicions all in equal measure […] messages from the spirits, are always seeming to exist and can never be explained away, they also can never be susceptible of full corroboration.” He concluded, “I personally am as yet neither a convinced believer in parasitic demons, nor a spiritist, nor a scientist, but still remain a psychical researcher waiting for more facts before concluding.” James, “The Confidences of a Psychical Researcher,” (1909), p 588.

66 Such general interest is demonstrated by a full-page 1901 *New York Times* essay by Lillian Whiting, a notable Boston psychic researcher, who commented with approval that “Modern science, both that of the physicists and that of the psychic researchers, is penetrating into the nature of the stars and all the sublime secrets of the universe.” An example of both forthright mysticism and eccentricity is demonstrated by Whiting, who insisted in her book that science had proven “the universe in which man finds himself here is two-fold in its immediate nature. Interpenetrated with this physical world is the ethereal world, with which the ethereal (or spiritual) body of man is in correspondence, and with whose inhabitants he can hold communication…which we draw upon in increasing degree in our utilization of electricity, and of air currents, and in wireless telegraphy.” Lilian Whiting, “Miss Whiting’s The Spiritual Significance,” *New York Times*, (February 16, 1901), p BR4.
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is a pleasure differing in kind as in degree from that given by the recognition in art of familiar experiences interpreted in a familiar and contemporary idiom.” 67 Davies’s unification of mystic ideals and ‘scientific’ methods became a site in which the opposing sides of the debate over spiritualism and science might reconcile, using art’s suggestive form and imaginative properties to test the waters of transcendent possibility.

II. The mysterious powers of the dreaming mind

Hypnagogic states and Mesmeric trances

One way Davies approached this goal was by exploring the limits and meaning of ‘suggestion’ demonstrated by hypnosis. Systematic study and verifiable evidence were essential to psychological research into the unconscious as well as psychic phenomena, but a major question concerned how scientists might gain access to ‘the hidden self.’ Early methods of the mind’s study, conducted in the 1890s in newly established psychology departments in Germany, France and America, often revealed the duality of consciousness through hypnosis or ‘mesmerism:’ the closely monitored production of hypnotic trances in which the unconscious mind’s reactions to directed instruction were then meticulously observed. 68 But these methods of unleashing the mind’s power were used as often by psychic mediums and growing numbers of opportunistic charlatans who sought to capitalize upon the widespread interest in psychic phenomena. 69

Although scientists acknowledged hypnotic trances were distinct from dreaming, the experience of hypnotized subjects came reasonably close to approximating the visions of dreams; one researcher determined that however different, hypnosis was “the state of

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69 A number of popular books written around the turn of the century delighted in exposing the tricks and frauds of charlatans, including Isaac Funk, The Widow’s Mite and Other Psychic Phenomena, (New York: Funk and Wagnall’s, 1905) and David Abbott, Behind the Scenes with the Medium, (Chicago: Open Court, 1908). See also Deborah Blum, Ghost Hunters, (2006), pp. 28-30.
mind most like dreaming.” For their part, hypnotized subjects often described their
entranced states of mind as ‘dream-like;’ that hypnotic states were so close to true dreams
suggested that they might be an equally valuable means for understanding the gamut of
interior visionary phenomena and the metaphysical states made possible by both.

“Physiologically, hypnoses are best likened to states of natural sleep,” claimed George
Trumbull Ladd in his 1895 book Philosophy of Mind: An Essay in the Metaphysics of
Psychology. The productive cross-pollination generating popular confusion about matters of
the psychological mind and mysterious, psychic spirit also related to the overlap between
scientific methods and the spectacular presentations of psychic phenomena. Hypnotism
could just as easily operate as a popular entertainment and a pseudo-scientific spectacle
as genuine ‘science;’ traveling hypnotists like ‘Mildred and Rouclere’ entertained eager
audiences across the country with performances featuring stunts of entranced subjects
(figure 4.10). George du Maurier’s exceptionally popular 1895 novel Trilby concerned
such theatrical employment of hypnotism; the hypnotist Svengali placed the title
character under a trance and thereby exploited the miraculous powers of her voice. In
similar fashion, Spiritualists also spoke for the voiceless spirits through hypnotic trances,
and transacted communication with the immaterial realms via ‘suggestion;’ medium Cora
Richmond, who argued so eloquently for the convergence of science and spiritualism in
1899, was merely one exceptionally articulate representative of this phenomenon.
Touring the country beginning in the 1850s, Richmond dispensed messages from the
beyond to astounded audiences of thousands; she later wrote extensively about her life’s

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1905), p 2. Jewell determined however that unlike true dreams, which are autonomous, “in hypnosis [...] only
the beginning of any certain mental content can be brought about by suggestion—once induced, association takes its natural course, and repeated suggestions are necessary to direct it along desired lines.”

71 George Trumbull Ladd, Philosophy of Mind: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Psychology, (New York:
Scribner’s, 1895), p 168. Although he was not as adventuresome in his investigations of psychic
phenomena as James, the title and content of Ladd’s book shows that he was willing to explore some of the
ineffable layers and properties of the mind and consciousness, and that he believed as a science,
psychology should willingly embrace more abstruse questions about the relation of mind to body and to
spirit.

72 Trilby was serialized in Harper’s Weekly in 1894; when it was released as a book in 1895, it sold
200,000 copies in the US. For more, see Phyllis Weliver, ”Music, Crowd Control and the Female
(Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp 57-80.

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experiences in hundreds of essays and books published into the first decades of the 20th century. Viewers marveled at the feats mesmerized or entranced subjects performed, doing and saying things of which they reported no conscious knowledge upon waking, as they similarly were astonished by the revelations made possibly via experiments in automatic writing and other demonstrations of the unconscious mind’s autonomous power.

Not only Spiritualists (and their less respectable counterparts), but psychic researchers also practiced hypnosis in their experiments, as a means of understanding the diverse para-psychological capacities of the unconscious. Hypnotized subjects created automatic drawings and writing in laboratory settings, and reported contact with invisible speakers, who might be spirits or merely distant but psychically attuned minds. Whether witnesses envisioned them as demonstrations of the interior power of the soul or of true contact with superior realms of divine truth, the feats of the entranced appeared to the products of dual consciousness. Hypnotic dreams seemed, therefore, to unleash the true transcendent power of the mind. Yet although hypnosis may have been the most valuable tool for gaining access to the unconscious, hypnotic states were not truly autonomous like dreams; whether used by scientists or spiritualists, a hypnotized subject needed the influence of guided ‘suggestion’ to perform activities, make drawings or write words, memorize texts or recall concealed memories, most of which were not later acknowledged by the conscious mind. Sadakichi Hartmann’s prior references to Davies’s ‘suggestive’ habits thus associated the artist with hypnosis as much as with dreams, and established the possibility that art might offer similar access to the mind and its spiritual universe, or indeed, that the artist might possess the power to hypnotize his viewers.

73 See McGarry, Ghosts of Futures Past, (2008), pp 32-41, on the popularity of hypnotism and the role of women in this phenomenon. Richmond’s life story and an extensive bibliography of her writing were published in Cora L. V. Richmond, My Experiences While out of My Body and My Return after Many Days, (Boston: Christopher Press, 1915).

74 For more, see Fuller, Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls, (1982).

75 However revelatory they may have been, true dreams were less easily studied in the laboratory, when compared to the scientific objectivity a trained hypnotist could bring to observation of an entranced subject, thus many members of the American Society for Psychical Research paid equal if not more attention to hypnosis than to dreams. The Society’s ‘Committee on Hypnotism’ was led by James, James Jackson Putnam, head of the Outpatient Department for Nervous and Mental Diseases at the Massachusetts General Hospital and Morton Prince, a leading researcher into abnormal psychology; all brought their dispassionate scientific authority to understanding these demonstrations. For the methods of laboratory experiments on psychic phenomena, see Eugene Taylor, Shadow Culture, (1999), pp 164-165.
Scientists and spiritualists alike distinguished between true dreams and the visions of hypnotic trances guided by ‘suggestion,’ yet all who employed hypnotism agreed that it revealed valuable insights about the ‘invisible’ operations of the mind. In fact, the imaginative, visionary experiences possible in the full breadth of all ‘hypnagogic states’ occupied a continuum of psychic perception along which dreams, day-dreams and hypnotic trances were all located. In his study of day-dreams published in 1904, psychologist Theodate Smith allied “all those reproductive and imaginative mental states in which there is a greater or less degree of automatism in the images which come before the mind.”

Davies capitalized upon this confusion regarding the visionary potential of hypnagogic states. Day Dreams (figure 4.11) is an undated work by Davies whose content and facture allude equally to dreams and trances, however much the title suggests the pleasant reveries of an idle semi-conscious moment when one’s mind wanders freely. Resembling the earlier painting Psyche, but painted more broadly and almost crudely, the painting shows the artist’s increasing exploration of fragmented space and abstracted form that emerged towards 1910. At center, a crouching nude gazes in captivated attention at an inscrutable object, towards which she reaches out her hand towards the left. The intensity of her attention is made all the more apparent by the looseness with which Davies has rendered her surroundings. A landscape, lush with vegetation defined by bright color and vigorous textural marks, seems to grow abundantly behind her, but as this resembles the inscrutable scribbles, free lines, and eclectically vague marks characteristic of automatic drawing made by mediums in spiritual trances, the viewer must interpret these allusive formal elements as best we can.

This central figure is watched, as are we, by one just beyond the foreground. Her dark hair and gently sloping, rounded contours are all that is clearly visible; she seems female, but Davies provides no more detail. We are invited to gaze with all of our focus on the psychic interaction of the foreground figure whose body and face are more precisely delineated; our attention on her mirrors hers on the object of her mesmerized concentration. The woman in the foreground—guided, perhaps, by her wraithlike

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companion—strives to bring the object she sees into clearer focus in her mind, just as we are invited to do; the powers of our imagination as well as our conscious vision allow us to make sense of Davies’s loose forms, marks and lines, seeing a body and a landscape where there is only paint.

Some psychologists eagerly embraced the mind’s capacity to perceive and resolve illusions, seeing what is not literally there, at the turn of the twentieth century. Therefore, critical insistence upon the autonomous and ‘suggestive’ properties of Davies art—attention to how form operated in combination with content to produce a seamless and indeed ‘unconscious’ visible experience—emphatically asserted the value of painting as a means of accessing similarly hidden significance, one that was potentially fundamental to a thorough and spiritually enriched understanding of consciousness. If as Hartmann had determined, ‘suggestion’ was the key to understanding the artist’s psychologically astute work, viewers might readily find layers of meaning therein by allowing themselves to be ‘mesmerized’ by an image’s haunting form, transported into an experiential equivalent to the dream. Yet, those who did not wish to become so entranced might find different value in Davies’s dreams, if they explored his other occult properties, seeking divinatory or prophetic significance in their mysteries.

Prophetic Dreams and Divination

Visions produced by dreams and hypnotic states—and perhaps those stimulated by paintings—were not only regarded as messages from departed souls in the beyond, but could serve important prophetic functions, too. While psychologists such as Havelock Ellis and Mary Calkins stressed their utility for the mind’s unconscious problem solving, ancient and cross-cultural traditions of fortune telling and divination using dreams had Old and New Testament precedents, and they could be powerfully associated with supernatural powers.⁷⁷ A variety of books and almanacs devoted to dreams and their importance, largely written from a folkloric and non-scientific vantage point were

⁷⁷ Not only did God visit Abraham in a dream, but he also delivered messages to Solomon, Jacob and especially Joseph; the reputation of biblical prophets with skilled dream-analysis aligned them with the pervasive ancient practice of Oneirocritica or dream-interpretation. The antique world’s expert on prophetic dreams was Artemidoros of Ephesus, who was not only a diviner himself, but who published a five-volume study of the tradition of prophetic dreaming in the second century AD.
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published in America throughout the nineteenth century. However, in the century’s late decades amid the rising tide of scientific authority about psychic and psychological phenomena, greater need for scientific justification of divinatory practices arose.

Prophetic dreams were merely one kind of psychic phenomenon given intense scientific scrutiny, but because a remarkable number of them had demonstrable outcomes, they led to particular interest; members of the ASPR studied instances in which complex problems were solved by entranced subjects or sleepers. Evidence of the success of prophetic dreams—about finding money and the foreknowledge of death—was presented in B. O. Flower’s essay “Glimpses of the Prophetic Faculty of the Mind Revealed in Dreams,” published in Arena in 1902, complete with details “which cannot be dismissed as the phantasms of the brain running riot while reason sleeps; dreams which give us glimpses of the occult power of the soul.” Flower saw such predictive dreams as offering scientific proof of the slumbering mind’s exceptional properties beyond the neurological mechanisms of the brain; his task, as of any modern thinker, was analyzing and classifying prophetic phenomena in ways that “stood the test of modern scientific methods.”

But the scientific explanation of prophetic dreams was still debated in 1911, as H. Addington Bruce took on the topic in his essay “Dreams and the Supernatural,” arguing “subconscious mentation and subconscious perception are [...] sufficient to account for by far the greater number of dreams that smack of the supernatural.” Contending that dreams were merely important means by which the unconscious mind conducted problem solving, he invoked a painter’s visual means of comprehending the world when he noted

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78 Merle Curti, “The American Exploration of Dreams and Dreamers,” Journal of the History of Ideas, 27:3 (Jul-Sep, 1966), pp 393-400. Many 19th century compendia of dream-knowledge derived their focus and structure from earlier almanacs devoted to dream interpretation and divination, such as The Universal Interpreter of Dreams and Visions, a collection of popular wisdom about dreams which was originally issued in Baltimore in 1795. A very few prominent early nineteenth-century medical professionals, such as Dr. Benjamin Rush, had considered the study of these kinds of dreams, seeking to provide more conclusive medical evidence of their physiological function in the face of the widespread and time-honored traditions of oneirocritical divination and prophecy, but these were not based upon methodical research or extensive study. Curti notes the discussion of dreams, especially biblical or prophetic ones, had a significant history in 18th century America, including Tom Paine’s 1795 article “Dream” published in New York, later incorporated into his Examination of the Prophecies. But although Dr. Rush devoted considerable energy to the investigation of dreaming, he ultimately concluded (in contrast to Paine) that they were “incoherent ideas.”

79 Flower, “Glimpses of the Prophetic Faculty of the Mind Revealed in Dreams,” (1895), pp 123-129.
that to solve their pictorial problems “the artist will subconsciously think of subjects, colors, combinations.” However, he also muddied the waters between psychological science and parapsychology when he argued a few pages later that telepathy or thought-transference might still yet account for dreams that came true. While Davies’s images did not set out to inspire any specific prophecy or divination, critics intimated that the artist demonstrated the intuitive or psychic problem-solving skills of a visionary seer. Huneker alluded to Davies’s uncanny, nearly prescient ability to solve pictorial and psychic problems in 1908, declaring “the very intensity of this inward vision when applied to mundane affairs enables him to solve problems which puzzle others.” And in 1909, characterizing Davies more directly as a mystic ‘Painter-Visionary,’ Huneker ascribed quasi-occult properties to the artist’s method of creative inner sight, through the aid of his “transfiguring imagination.”

Mention of how dreams enabled divination, problem-solving and prophecy not only obliquely referenced the abilities of an artistic prophet like Davies, they also made direct associations with cheap and ubiquitous ‘dream books’—short pamphlets promising to ‘decode’ dream ciphers, symbols and imagery—which were readily available in the latter decades of the 19th century and into the 20th. These were often distributed as souvenirs or promotions offered by distributors or patent medicines (figure 4.12). Used for everything from household divination to gambling, many were ostensibly written by “Gypsies,” witches, soothsayers or magicians, their enigmatic titles implied the exotic origins of their apparently arcane wisdom, such as Old Gypsy Madge’s Fortune Teller and Key to Lucky Dreams (Baltimore, 1889), or The Witch Doctor’s Illustrated Dream-Book (1891)— in their manifold mysteries, Davies’s Sorcerers partake of the occult sources of knowledge such dream-interpreters offered.

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82 Huneker, “A Painter Visionary,” in *The Pathos of Distance,* (New York: Scribner’s, 1913), p 112. This essay was a revised and expanded summation of the comments he originally published in his prior essays for the *New York Sun.*
83 Henry B. Weiss, “Oneirocritica Americana” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library,* LVIII (1944) is the most comprehensive source on these dream interpretation books in an American context. For their popularity, especially among young women, see Maureen Perkins, “The Meaning of Dream Books,” *History Workshop Journal,* No. 48 (Autumn, 1999), 102-113. I am grateful to my colleague Diane O’Donohue for pointing me in the direction of these sources.
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Customarily presented as an alphabetical list of symbolic terms, these books and pamphlets promised an easily-consultable key to self-analysis of dream images. They affiliated typical symbols to conventional prophetic meaning and numerical significance, promising to interpret the messages many readers presumed came from the imaginary realm of the unseen. Americans from nearly all social, cultural and economic strata consulted dream divination books: used in parlor games and especially by young ladies seeking assurance of success in love and marriage, they were also employed in numbers gambling, which had become a thriving if illegal activity in cities by 1890, popular with poor residents, African-Americans and newly-arrived immigrants. Guides to dream divination books showed that rudimentary dream analysis could be practiced by anyone who possessed the metaphorical ‘keys’ to unlocking their meaning.

Dream-interpretation books suggest ways in which viewers might have scrutinized Davies’s paintings for such mysterious knowledge and insight, but the messages were not uniformly useful to revealing his mysteries. *Mother Shipton’s Gipsy Fortune Teller and Dream Book* (1890) dispensed this opaque wisdom to its readers: “Meadow: To dream of being in a meadow is a good sign for working men or shepherds; to others it signifies embarrassment in their business.” As an interpretive guide, this offers little help to viewers of Davies’s *Meadows of Memory* (figure 3.7) or *The Hours and the Freedom of the Fields* (figure 4.5). The entry for nakedness, however, offered

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84 Some dream books were ostensibly written from a more academic point of view, even if science was not touted as part of their appeal. James Monroe, an eccentric writer in Peoria, Ill, published the *Dream Investigator and Oneirocritica* in 1884 as a short-lived periodical, in which he advocated his method as a guide to interpreting dreams and their “common language” and symbolism that followed rules that he himself had derived. Encouraging his readers to submit examples of their own dreams, he promised to unlock their meaning, via brief narratives of key words. His work was marketed to a broad audience, but the imagery his book contained featured young, white middle-class dreamers. See Ann Fabian, Card Sharps and Bucket Shops: Gambling in Nineteenth-century America, New York: Routledge, 1999), p.148.

85 The titles of these books, as well as their symbolic content and reference to numbers, were targeted towards specific communities. Some of the dream books, such as *Aunt Sally’s Policy Player’s Dream Book*, a slender pamphlet first published by Wehman Brothers in 1889, were specifically intended as an aid in ‘policy play,’ a form of numbers gambling, targeted immigrants and African-American readers, but many others were designed to appeal to a white, middle-class audience. Despite, or perhaps because of their ubiquity, many dream books had at least mildly unsavory or potentially objectionable associations. These derived from their mass-market connections to advertising, their sensationalized trade in exotic forms of knowledge, and especially their use in gambling.

86 To insure their continued success, most dream interpretation books offered several alternative possibilities to the significance of images. In this, the dream interpretation books shared with the early forms of discussion-based psychotherapies a focus on discursive engagement with mental images and visions.
reassurance to anyone worried by the potentially erotic aspect of Davies’s unclothed figures, or their own dreams, since “to dream of walking about naked signifies disappointment through your friends and relations; to see a naked woman means honor and joy.”87 Thus the true significance of A Measure of Dreams for viewers perhaps lay not in its embodied or erotic possibilities, but in the transcendent emotion it inspired.

Some viewers did pore over Davies’s work in search of layers of personal significance; Frederick James Gregg, writing later about this still-early phase in Davies’s work, noted “he has an almost uncanny gift for creating a sort of reaction between his figures and their surroundings, which starts those who are imaginative […] on the track of all sorts of hidden meanings.”88 Yet, however his viewers may have sought such “hidden meanings” or attempted to interpret his images via dream books, Davies generally frustrated such facile references; his suggestive habits, enigmatic figures, and obscure settings rarely employ the dream-symbols found in these books in a manner that would lend itself to simplistic interpretation.89 Rather, as a critic in the Christian Science Monitor observed in 1912, “in the delightful way of symbolism, [his] singular pictures appear elastic enough […] to fit the ideas of all men who are willing to look at them with a little patience and allow them to grow in the imagination.”90 Between the private, subjective imagery of dreaming and the public world of their discussion and interpretation, dream analysis was becoming a part of everyday life, in which the content and symbolic imagery of dreams were significant, beyond what scientists were able to assert about their physiological origins or somatic functions. In this context, offering windows into problem-solving and personal ‘divination,’ their status as a product of the mind’s occult potential placed dreams on a plane distinct from quotidian consciousness. Davies participated in a broad discussion about the mind’s hidden transgressive abilities.

87 Mother Shipton’s Gipsy Fortune Teller and Dream Book, (Baltimore: I. & M. Otterheim, 1890)
89 These common symbols were often used by illustrators, such as Maxfield Parrish, whose popular pictures explored many dimensions of fantasy and reverie, and who frequently depicted stories about childhood dream-experiences. See also Leja, Looking Askance, (2004), pp. 179-183, who examines a selection of paintings and literary references in which bubbles and other ‘illusory’ objects were symbols of hidden or elusive knowledge, such as dreams.
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The therapeutic power of inner vision: Christian Science and New Thought

In light of the popular forms of divination enabled by dream books and the proliferation of psychic phenomena, fellow scientists’ ambivalent response to James’s embrace of spiritual pursuits seems understandable. It reveals the nature and depth of their struggle around 1900 to establish their professional specialty in study of normal mental functions. They not only resisted competing claims of psychiatrists, ‘alienists’ and even general physicians who sought to ‘medicalize’ the mind, but stood against the growing variety of spiritualists, new forms of faith healing and ‘mind cure’ practitioners who began to flourish especially around Boston in the 1880s. Yet these amateur, spontaneous, or local forms of psychological treatment emerged out of the same context sustaining the diverse forms of metaphysical and para-psychological investigation. These concerns also served to nurture the widespread popularity of Christian Science and New Thought, interrelated religious and therapeutic mind-cure movements that offered important prototypes for later psychotherapeutic practices.

Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) and the secular leading mind-cure advocates with whom she disputed over matters of dogma both addressed the spiritual function of dreams. They were metaphors for accessing higher truth as well as topics worthy of scientific and philosophical evaluation. Eddy argued for a subject’s ability to cure themselves of their mental and physical ills through the power of positive thinking, imaginative imagery and effective employment of dreams. According to her writing, the operations of nocturnal dreaming were analogous to the ways in which consciousness itself was envisioned as a dream, an imperfect or partial illusion that obscured the ‘Truth’ of her fundamentally spiritualist Christian beliefs. In her 1889 book *Science and Health*, Eddy asserted “Mortal existence is a dream without a dreamer […] The dream — not the sleep of this mortal existence — is nearer the fact of being than the waking thoughts. The dream has less matter as its accompaniment. It throws off some of

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our material fetters. It falls short of the upper skies, but makes its mundane flights quite ethereal.” 93 In her doctrine, the function of the dream is to bring the dreamer closer to the plane of reality. Eddy queried her readers, “Is there any more reality in the waking dream than in this sleeping dream?” And she answered: “There cannot be, since there is no mortality, either of mind or body, and whatever appears to the material sense is a mortal dream.” According to Eddy, the nightmare of mortal existence was only destroyed by the “higher testimony of Spirit” that could be envisioned by the dreaming, visionary mind; the mind in the physical body was trapped by matter, but the transcendent soul was in direct contact with the divine. 94

In the parallel and competing movements that developed out of the same intellectual currents inspiring Eddy’s Christian Science, close connections were made to the study of contemporary psychology as well as psychic phenomena. Advocates of the therapeutic self-help crusade termed New Thought, for example, argued that it was possible for Americans to bring their dreams to reality through the power of positive visualization. Founded in the mid-nineteenth century by religious nonconformists, faith healers and metaphysical seekers Phineas P. Quimby (1802-1866) and his follower Warren Felt Evans (1817-1889), New Thought was less doctrinaire and exclusionary than Christian Science, but it promoted a similar belief that one’s mind had acute powers that transcended the material world. 95 These dynamic promoters of self-cure for anxiety and neurosis upheld the power to use dreams and visualization to bring about changes in mental outlook. To devoted amateur therapists, dreams showed evidence of the power of the divine spirit in man taking shape in the modern, subconscious mind. Indeed, most of them believed “a person could literally think his dreams to life.” 96

94 Ibid.
95 Eddy had been an early adherent of Quimby’s beliefs in the positive power of visualization to cure psychic ills, but she took Christian Science in a different direction, insisting upon the fundamental split between the physiologically situated human mind, located in the corrupt body, and the ‘divine mind’ which existed on a more purely spiritual plane. Before the term “New Thought” was widely known in the 1890s the movement initiated by Quimby was called by various terms, including “New Age” and even “Christian Science.” Eddy later took pains to claim this term for her own use, just as the subsequent followers of New Thought took equal care to distance themselves from the rigidity of her beliefs.
96 Horowitz, *Occult America*, (2009), p 82; For a thoughtful analysis of how the mind cure movement intersected and diverged from contemporary somatic arguments about the operations of the neurological
Among the creators of New Thought, Warren Felt Evans was devoted to the metaphysical theology of Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose strong influence on Symbolism and American art I have earlier remarked. Evans helped popularize Swedenborg’s ideas about dreams and correspondences between the realms of matter and spirit through books such as *The Mental Cure*, published in 1869, which spread New Thought’s positive doctrine across America. New Thought books and pamphlets emphasized the power of the willed, conscious mind to bring about positive results; nonetheless, the ideas they popularized about the equal power of the unconscious—including dreams—brought a new dimension to discussion of the mind’s curious properties, both those that could be studied rationally and those that continued to elude science’s grasp.

Like dream-divination books, New Thought’s influence expanded wildly in the early 20th century years immediately preceding Freudian psychoanalysis’ rise to ascendance, promising many of the same kinds of therapeutic benefits: greater self-knowledge, cure of neuroses and understanding of the powers of the mind. Dreams played an important role in some of these texts, such as Thomas Jay Hudson’s 1902 *The Laws of Psychic Phenomena*, which advanced important connections between hypnosis, positive suggestion and dreaming, stressing their value for therapeutic treatment of the soul. Most influential New Thought texts minimized overt references to traditional religious symbolism, distinguishing their popular practice of creative visualization from mind, see also Eric Caplan, *Mind Games*, (1998), pp 61-88. A more contemporary and detailed discussion of the movement’s origins provided by Horatio W. Dresser, *A History of the New Thought Movement*, (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1919). A devoted follower of New Thought, Dresser introduced his readers to the movement’s wholesale integration of faith and science, claiming: “Spiritualism is a protest against the materialism of the nineteenth century. It is one of the signs of the times. […] What we want is a better philosophy than that which psychical experiences ordinarily seem to imply. Psychology in the sense in which we now employ the term did not exist when the New Thought movement began. We are now so accustomed to the psychological point of view of every subject of public interest that we forget how recent it is. Modern science in general had to come first, then the theory of evolution, with the attempt to explain mental life on a biological basis, and the gradual transfer of interest to the inner life. The terms 'suggestion,' "subconscious," and the other words which we employ so freely are very new indeed.”

Journals, conferences and clubs of followers of New Thought took hold, especially in the mid-1890s, originally around Boston and more widely spread thereafter, thanks to journals such as *The New Thought*, published from Melrose, MA beginning in 1894.

Hudson argued that pleasant dreams were a sign of the body’s good health, and unpleasant ones an indication of underlying physical as well as psychic distress. Citing the authority of the Society for Psychical Research, he observed as well that since communion between souls had been proven, an individual agent desiring to cure an ailing body or soul could bring about such an outcome by projecting positive spiritual visualization through their dreams. Thomas Jay Hudson, *The Law of Psychic Phenomena*, (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1902), pp. 178 & 190.
the greater doctrinal rigidity and forthright mysticism of Eddy. Instead, New Thought proponents such as Evans, Henry Wood and Thomas Jay Hudson emphasized the projection of positive images in the mind as a psychic and ecumenically spiritual component of the practice.

Wood’s 1896 book *Studies in the Thought World, or Practical Mind Art* employed painting as one of its central metaphors, comparing the properties of the mind to a limitless museum of images. “Thought is the artist,” he claimed, and asserted, “Man is mind [...] he is an uncommon artist, dwelling in the midst of an endless variety of mental pictures. His time is spent...taking impressions from his thoughts and ideas.” But the mind’s collections was better than those of an actual, worldly museum, as Wood then observed, “mental art museums are incomparably more extensive and varied,” calling them “immaterial palaces of art.” Whereas the concrete reality of a physical museum or gallery was limited, the mind had unlimited creative ability, and Wood unambiguously championed the visionary potential of art, suggesting essential connections to the eclectic work of Davies as he celebrated the “expert delineation of the imaginary faculty of the mind.”

Critics who praised Davies’s visionary faculties alluded to his limitless source of inspiration. Davies himself seemed to credit this potential, writing in an undated letter to Lucy, “Renaissance, Archaic or a hybrid as most of the modern work: [art] expresses a design, it satisfies a craving and builds unconsciously a world of imaginative reason.”

New Thought practitioners, mind cure promoters and faith healers, ranging from devoted amateurs to outright con artists, advertised in the backs of popular newspapers or magazines devoted equally to psychology and spiritualism, such as the *Banner of Light*, published in Boston between 1857 and 1907. But as in their approaches to psychic phenomena, psychologists divided over the value of these forms of mental self-help and

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100 Arthur B. Davies to Lucy Meriwether Davies, undated letter addressed “My Darling,” (circa. early 1890s, probably before their marriage); Box 2, Folder 5, (Davies Collection).
101 Boston was a center of interest in mental activity, mind cure, spiritualism and various forms of psychic research, fostering a community of herbalists and aura readers, mesmerists and phrenologists, suggesting the shelves of a New Age bookstore as much as a bastion of rigorous education. *The Banner of Light* catered to this community.
psychic healing. Although skeptical of some of New Thought’s more radical claims, James supported New Thought, as it corroborated many aspects of his belief in the power of the mind. Others, staking a firmer claim on the grounds of the demonstrable science of their psychological research, saw these lay therapies as quackery, their practitioners untrustworthy, their theories unscientific and their unbridled endorsement of spiritual agents a potential threat to the legitimization of psychology. Although certainly some of the rapidly propagating mind-cure ‘experts’ were frauds, others were credentialed and sincere counselors, offering succor to those who felt themselves at the mercy of profound anxiety in the modernizing world, suffering from various ailments commonly identified as symptoms of neurasthenia.

Since many New Thought advocates recommended affirmative imaginative mental images a means of alleviating neurasthenic symptoms, dreams and art could have equally beneficial roles to play. Historian Sarah Burns has explored how, in Gilded Age America, art acquired a new role relative to the stresses produced by the modern world, becoming a form of therapy, a tonic or even a ‘rest cure’ in paint. While the proponents of the many flavors of mental therapies, faith cures and psychological remedies for

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102 James, seeking middle ground between physiological medicine, philosophy and psychic research within the professional associations, was inclined to embrace mind-cure and the results possible via New Thought, he also endorsed its democratic appeal, making control over the mind accessible beyond the increasing medicalization of mental therapies. He was equally critical of the growing monopoly that neurologists held over the practice of therapeutic treatment of the mind’s mild disorders, and as well as the rigidity of some of his fellow psychologists and philosophers, whose policing of the boundaries between spiritualism and science reflected the anxiously disciplinary entrenchment of psychology as a professional field in academia. See Caplan, *Mind Games*, (1998), pp 83-88.


anxieties recommended the power of uplifting imaginative imagery, advocates of therapeutic art saw painting as similarly restorative. Paintings soothed the mind and spirit through the eyes, offering examples of visions through which the suffering, anxious soul might release itself into a realm of esthetic balm. Ones that represented the states of mind that these promoters regarded as wholesome—such as positive reveries and inspirational visualizations—could be doubly beneficial. Davies’s pacifying harmonies, soft form, and reposeful visions transported the viewer’s imagination into a realm where the stresses of the day and age could be overcome, their beauty was the property that enabled the smooth transition from one state of mind to another. In paintings such as God Walked in the Garden in the Cool of the Day, (figure 4.13) Davies’s chords of lush color and formal ambiguity offered such positive and spiritually elevating form, while the title’s reference to the deity also granted a troubled soul balm. Providing no jarring forms or colors, and making no narrative demands, Davies’s restful landscape is a model of the kind of art critics and therapists recommended as a pictorial delight in which agitated eyes, minds senses might bathe in a gently inspirational, unified visual tonic.

The divine properties of unconscious imagination

But whereas New Thought placed secular emphasis on the mind’s capacity to inspire and heal itself from within, for others in addition to Mary Baker Eddy, dreams had more directly sacred associations. In 1894, the New York Times had weighed in with its summary of the mind’s unconscious operations in an essay entitled “The Mystery of Dreams,” and in the process alluded to their potentially celestial origins. In sensational terms, the headline championed the work of “Scientific men who believe that they afford proof of the soul’s independent activity.” The writer acknowledged most up-to-date research showed that dreams were products of a divinely-inspired imagination, arising from sensory stimulation and unconscious association, claiming:

106 Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist, (1994), p 139-143, discusses the many professionals who endorsed art’s therapeutic potential: psychologists, medical authorities, art critics and mind-cure promoters.
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They seem to demonstrate the power of the soul, during sleep, to evolve clear ideas and new developments of thought [...] To those who have faith in Providential interpositions the agency of dreams will scarcely seem improbable. They are a mystery which the human mind may not solve, but that constitutes no objection to their acceptance of one of the Almighty's methods in His direct dealings with His creatures. [italics added for emphasis] 107

Invocation of the sacred property of dreams may reveal resistance to the secularism of psychology, but it also surely resonated with concurrent interest in comparative religion, a pursuit motivating diverse scholars across a variety of fields. It inspired psychologists like James to turn towards study of the visionary minds of saints and mystics in The Varieties of Religious Experience, published in 1902. 108 And it also informed anthropologists such as Sir James G. Frazer, whose first volumes of his extensive study The Golden Bough, were first released in 1890; Frazer's investigation of 'primitive' culture, parallel religious belief and cross-cultural syncretism inspired many Symbolist artists. 109

Davies was an avid scholar this topic; he read Frazer, and was so impressed by its observations regarding the universality of myth and spiritual belief that he and Lucy chose to name the farm that they purchased shortly before their wedding after the book's title, fancifully hoping that they might create their own harmonious agricultural utopia.

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107 “The Mystery of Dreams: Theories As To the Action of the Mind During Sleep” New York Times, (February 4, 1894), p 19. The continued, arguing that although sensation or bodily discomfort provoked dreams, “there is authority as eminent for the belief that all dreams cannot be satisfactorily explained on the grounds of the above stated: that there is something left out which is of the highest consequence to understand... dreams are facts which afford direct proof that the percipient principle is independent of the organs of sense, and lead to the inference that the material organization of the brain ...must be distinct from the power that receives and retains these impressions...”

108 James, Varieties of Religious Experience. (1902). This was a compilation of the lectures on the topic of ‘Natural Theology’ he delivered in Edinburgh in 1901, edited and published in 1902. James’s interest in esoteric, mystic faiths and transcendent realms may derive in part from his father’s Swedenborgian faith. For the influence of Swedenborgian and transcendentalist thought on William James, see Taylor, William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin, (1996), pp 12-13.

109 Dorothy M. Kosinski, “Gustave Moreau’s "La Vie de l'humanité": Orpheus in the Context of Religious Syncretism, Universal Histories, and Occultism” Art Journal, Vol. 46, No. 1, Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art (Spring, 1987), pp. 9-14, discusses the philosophical interest in religious and cultural syncretism that impacted fin-de-siecle culture, involving proto-symbolist artists such as Moreau as well as theologians, historians and anthropologists.
outside of New York City. Although Davies’s abandoned the life of farming, as well as fidelity to his wife shortly thereafter, the pursuit of communal spiritual experience and collective faith to which the books alluded motivated the creation of at least one of the artist’s painting in the opening years of the 20th century: no specific date is provided for Davies’s *Under the Bough* (figure 4.14), but based upon its stylistic similarities to other dated works it was likely painted between 1905 and 1912; it was exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago’s 27th Annual Exhibition in 1914, and at the Corcoran Gallery of Art biennial exhibition in 1915. Although Davies makes no specific reference to J. A. M. Turner’s 1834 painting *The Golden Bough*, referenced on the opening pages of Frazer’s book, or the passage in the *Aeneid* that motivated the English Romantic painter, he nonetheless explores the spirit of sacred, mythic and mystic themes that inspired Frazer.111

As is typical of Davies’s dream-landscapes, he situates *Under the Bough* in a bucolic forest retreat far from the urban setting in which social pressures, material concerns, crowding and ‘nervous stimulation’ created sites of modern neurasthenic anxiety.112 Depicting four figures distributed across the middle ground, the image is a sylvan setting where “Diana herself might linger,”113 a sanctuary where archaic ritual and the primitive pursuit of the symbolic hunt demonstrate veneration of nature’s fundamental forces. Although in relatively close proximity to one another on the canvas, none of these figures interact: three female and one male, they are generically mythic,

110 See Perlman, L.I.A., (1998), pp 49-51. Davies and his wife intended to establish their farm as a space of pastoral retreat far from the urban setting in which they had embarked upon their respective careers in art and medicine; in the face of the hardships of actual farm life, Davies, soon abandoned this fantasy of rural harmony and shared effort, re-establishing a life in the city and returning to the Golden Bough only on the weekends. He did not participate actively in any of the farm labor, to which he left his wife.

111 Frazer’s poetic text began, “Who does not know Turner’s picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision [...] Diana herself might still linger by this lonely shore, still haunt these woodlands wild.” See James Frazer, “Chapter 1. The King of the Wood,” *The Golden Bough*, Part 1, Volume 1. (London: Macmillan, 1890), p 1

112 Although he would not have known Georg Simmel’s critical 1903 study *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, as it was not published in English until much later, Davies does seem to respond to issues Simmel raised about the psychological turmoil of city living, offering via his dreams a palliative escape that his realist peers disavowed in their forthright embrace of urban settings. See Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

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rather than referencing a specific ancient hero or deity. Each seems preoccupied by their distinctive—and peculiar—activities, and all of them look intently at some unseeable realm. The varied directions of these figures’ oblique stares help the viewer’s eye move from one to another, across the painted surface, but they also serve to isolate the individuals from one another. Establishing a dream-like or visionary context, like the central figure in *A Measure of Dreams* they invite speculation about what compelling sight has commanded the intensity of these fixed gazes, but offer no conclusive answer. Instead, the viewer is asked, in evaluating each one’s arcane gesture and activity, to imagine a world of private reverie and isolated veneration of nature’s driving forces in this sacral outdoor space.

In the subsequent editions and volumes of Frazer’s study, published every few years between 1906 and 1915 as his research continued, he made many references to the power and function of dreams; like several fellow scholars of comparative religion and mythology including James, he observed that in numerous ancient and ‘primitive’ cultures dreams were commonly understood as journeys of the disembodied soul, venturing in search of divine inspiration or wandering lost in the bewildering terrain of the immaterial spirit-world. He discussed the prophetic powers associated with these dreams and visions, in which spiritual agents provided sleepers with insights, revelations and arcane knowledge. Davies’s quasi-mythical figures suggest the sacred space appropriate to an inner journey of the soul, a sanctified grove where the pursuit of spiritual meaning and the elemental nature-worship of ancient Celtic cultures took place; this was an ancient heritage to which he, as a Welshman, laid distant claim.

Not only did Frazer’s research inform Davies, the quotations in the artist’s notebook shows he was also an avid reader of the work of Paul Carus (1852-1919), philosopher and scholar of comparative religion. A theologian as well as a philosopher, Carus was a polymath and interdisciplinary thinker in the same vein as James; he upheld

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114 Huneke commented upon this propensity towards general and individual myth-invocation in Davies’s work in 1913, observing. “For motive he has gone to myth. But […] his myths are his own, though he reads the poets.” *The Pathos of Distance*, (1913), p 119.

a deep belief that psychology provided an essential link to metaphysical philosophy. Carus was the first editor of the Open Court Publishing Company and its journal *The Monist*. Founded in 1887, Open Court published numerous books on comparative religion, logic, history, metaphysics, anthropology and philosophy, including texts on psychology and philosophy by Alfred Binet and Charles Sanders Peirce; under Carus’s editorship, the press facilitated a wide forum for discussion of how philosophy, science, and religion intersected. Carus’s own 1889 book *Fundamental Problems: The Method of Philosophy as a Systematic Arrangement of Knowledge* was one of Davies’s guides to psychology as well as the philosophy of ontology and consciousness. Through Carus’s discussion of Binet, Davies learned the French psychologist’s primary approaches to the study of the mind and its division into conscious and unconscious states.

Carus, like Frazer and James, believed that religions evolve over time; comparison between them revealed parallel threads of spiritual conviction whose underlying metaphysical value underwrote a collective will to belief. A strong sympathizer with Eastern philosophies, Buddhist ideas and the new religion of Theosophy, Carus rejected the oppositional dualism in Western philosophy and religion that severed matters of the body from those of the mind and spirit, but he stopped short of committing fully any single faith himself. Instead, he ceaselessly promoted a rational, pantheistic belief, which he termed the “religion of science,” hoping that this secular faith might foster holistic integration of all forms of knowledge. Ultimately, Carus maintained that science’s rationality would reveal an ultimate form of truth whose

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116 During his lifetime, Carus published 75 books and 1500 articles, mostly through Chicago’s Open Court press; he corresponded with many of the leading authorities in the disciplines of philosophy, psychology and science, befriending William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey and Thomas Edison, among others. Although much less well known than many contemporary thinkers, he established essential connections between them. For more see Carus, *The Point of View: an Anthology of Religion and Philosophy, selected from the works of Paul Carus*, Catherine Cook, editor. (Chicago: The Open Court Pub. Co., 1927), and Taylor, *Shadow Cultures*. (1999), pp 192-197.


118 Carus named his philosophy ‘Monism,’ and edited the journal *The Monist: An International Quarterly Journal of International Philosophical Inquiry*, whose pages were filled with essays on psychology, theology, spiritualism, metaphysics and general science. Carus’s ideas are expressed in *The Religion of Science*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1893) and *Philosophy as a Science: a Synopsis of the writings of Paul Carus*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1909).
universal and cosmic validity would integrate all traditional religion in one faith; the power of the unconscious mind was a valuable force for achieving such unity.

Davies found such a vision of utopian harmony deeply appealing, and quoted Carus extensively in his notebooks, exploring the distinction between ‘reality’ and the realm of ideas with which his own visionary work was increasingly associated: “Idealism starts from thoughts and sensation, from the subjective aspect of phenomena [...] Realism starts from real existence, from the objective side of phenomena” he scrawled. Believing as Carus did that the opposition between material reality and visionary truth was an illusion based upon the abstraction of thought, Davies tried to resolve duality in his own painting. Awareness of the value of ‘abstraction’ in art surely motivated Davies’s burgeoning interests in the boundary between material representation and immaterial expression.

Although some works created in this pre-Armory Show period show incipient leaning towards abstracted form in Davies’s work, as in the background of Day Dreams, Hosts of Faery and God Walked in the Garden, within a few years, Davies’s exploration of the elementary abstraction possible in both art and the interior world of thought would lead towards an interest in more radical formal experiments with pictorial abstraction and fragmentation, such as in the work of such European avant-garde artists as Matisse, Picasso and Kandinsky. The groundwork for his interest in these artists, which expanded as he prepared for the Armory Show, as well as his appreciation for their art’s spiritual and psychic meaning, was established in this period of philosophical study and investigation of the possibilities the unconscious, intangible power of visualization.

Carus’s 1911 book The Philosophy of Form offered Davies further incitement to pursue the dynamic interaction between art, psychology and religion, when he observed: “Art, like religion, is a powerful factor in man’s spiritual life. Art is possessed of a deep significance, for every piece of art reflects the mind of the artist, and with it his world-

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119 Davies notebooks, nd., np. (Davies Collection). Carus’s original quotation reads, “Idealism starts from thought and sensation, from the subjective aspect of phenomena, and in its most consistent form, as spiritualism, denies the existence of matter. Realism starts from real existence, from the objective aspect of phenomena, and in its most consistent form, as materialism, denies the existence of spirit. Now, as a matter of fact, neither spirit nor matter exist of themselves: they are abstracts.” See Carus, Fundamental Problems: The Method of Philosophy as a Systematic Arrangement of Knowledge (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1889), p 176.
conception [...] in this sense it may be said that art is the expression of a philosophy.\textsuperscript{120} Davies’s ‘world conception,’ and the ultimate expression of his philosophy arose from his faith in his inner, unconscious mind and its manifold capabilities; in the same letter to Lucy cited earlier, Davies wrote to her, “In the practice of ‘an apparent truth’ surely know [art] is the whole truth when the ‘apparent’ is also real.”\textsuperscript{121} Carus and Davies shared faith that art could reveal essential powers of the mind; an art that explored the integrated duality of conscious and unconscious states at the same time, however paradoxical, captured the unity that both men believed was vital to the integration of science and faith.

III. Productive contradictions

_ Spirits and illusions in the mind’s eye—envisioning the invisible_

His attempt to reconcile fundamentally discrepant material and immaterial forces makes Davies’s work representative of the productive contradictions possible in American intellectual culture at this moment, which manifested themselves in diverse ways in the world of visual culture. As historian Sheri Weinstein suggests, the cultural trend towards spiritual matters lent itself readily to discussions of visibility and visuality, and thus paralleled developments in art, particularly the Symbolist artists’ pursuit of pictorial terms through which to render ‘correspondences’ with spiritual or intangible knowledge.\textsuperscript{122} Yet, the materiality of their paintings and their representational visual vocabulary demonstrated further inconsistencies: Symbolists made tangible, static and ‘real’ the most subjective, immaterial and ephemeral experiences.

Nonetheless, pursuit of scientific proof caused many seekers in the realm of the spirit to desire such solid, visible evidence. Although the most immediate way to ‘see’ spirits at work was by attending public or private séances—at which evidence of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{120} Carus, _The Philosophy of Form_, (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1911), p 39. Since this book was an expanded reprint of his introduction to his 1909 text _Philosophy as a Science_, it may be that Davies had encountered these ideas prior to 1911.

\textsuperscript{121} Arthur B. Davies to Lucy Meriwether Davies, undated letter; Box 2, Folder 5, (Davies Collection).

\end{footnotesize}
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encounters with the spirit realm were demonstrated by ghostly apparitions, materializations and flashing lights, in mirror and crystal ball gazing, and in the public performances of entranced psychics—seeking more concrete substantiation of ethereal souls, Americans were also fascinated other kinds of material objects demonstrating ‘proof’ of transcendent or ghostly agency. They scrutinized Ouija boards, perused automatic writing produced using spiritually guided planchettes, and pored over spirit photographs. Such photographic demonstrations of spiritual presence were seemingly incontrovertible, thanks to the authority photography possessed as a technological tool.  

Taken under purportedly rigorous conditions, monitored by clairvoyants, spirit photographs superimposed focused pictures of individuals—many with closed eyes, suggesting inner sight—next to blurry, ghostly double-exposed figures who seem to rise and communicate with the sitter and, by association, with the living viewer (figure 4.15). Some spirit photographers argued that their proprietary technologies were especially sensitive to the substance of ectoplasm or ether, the immaterial stuff in which departed spirits traveled, thus invoking the authority of industrial or mechanical as well as scientific proof. While efforts to debunk the authenticity of such photographs had been mobilized in the sensational 1869 trial of William H. Mumler, undertaken in the name of science as well as in effort to rein in the rampant fleecing of the gullible, interest in spirit photographs persisted well into the early twentieth century. Even if viewers knew

123 In his Parisian clinic, Jean-Martin Charcot had recorded the physical manifestations of the psychic states of his hysterical patients by means of drawings and photographs; the latter proved fascinating not only to fellow scientists but to Symbolist artists in the 1890s, and constituted one of the best kinds of ‘evidence’ that gave proof of the power of the unconscious—if abnormally agitated—mind. His treatment for these conditions involved hypnosis as a vital form of both diagnosis and therapy, and his tools and methods substantially influenced the developing fields of neurology and psychology in America. Charcot’s photographs of psychotic and neurotic patients were published in Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière, Service de M. Charcot, (Paris: Adrien Delahaye & Co., 1878). Many books on spirit photography were published late nineteenth century America: for the period in question, see Walter Woodbury, Photographic Amusements, (New York: Scoville and Adams, 1898).  

124 Boston-based Mumler was one of the earliest and best-known spirit photographers, and thus was a ready target for skepticism, but he had hosts of imitators. See the discussion of the highly-publicized Mumler trial offered by Michael Leja in Looking Askance, pp 21-58. The trial may have given rise to widespread speculation regarding how well photographs, or any visual evidence, revealed the ‘truth,’ but it also extended the broad discussion about what constituted trustworthy evidence of any spiritual encounter. This discussion was still going after the turn of the century, as evidenced by Edward Steichen, “Ye Fakers,” Camera Work 1 (January, 1903), and James Coates, Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and Other Rare But Allied Phenomena, (London: L. N. Fowler & Co, and Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Company, 1911). For more, also see Louis Kaplan, The Strange
themselves to be deceived, the whimsy and wonder of spirit photographs did not diminish, and some still refused to abandon the possibility of such proof, as novelist Arthur Conan Doyle demonstrated in his book *The Case for Spirit Photography*, written in 1923.\(^{125}\)

Davies’s paintings capitalized upon the spiritually resonant properties of the common elements in these photographic objects: the comparisons and juxtapositions that became a signature aspect of his style. *Figures at the Seaside*, nd (figure 4.16) for example, shows a nude woman in the foreground at the edge of a rocky cliff. She bends towards the right as she exits the water, reaching out her arms to steady her ascent, as gentle waves break at her feet. But immediately to the right and above her, a second figure appears, draped in brilliant white against the dark blue and green of a surrounding landscape. If a viewer presumes this painting shows a ‘real’ space, and tries to make rational sense of its logic, he or she might surmise that this second figure is a fellow bather, descending to swim; we are invited to enjoy the juxtaposition between nude and clothed female bodies and the grace of their respective, physically vigorous poses. But Davies confounds distinctions between the real and unreal again here; the upper figure’s arms reach skywards and she leans back at an impossible angle bearing little regard for gravity or any relation to a ground on which she might stand. Emerging as if out of the foreground bather’s head, she seems a spectral companion or spiritual echo.

Notwithstanding the technological proof offered by spirit photographs, many followers of spiritual practices also sought visual experiences that went beyond merely what the eyes could verify, seeking a model or equivalent to physical vision that was exceeded the limits of the ordinary visible world, the kind of vision that could only be seen with closed eyes in ‘the mind’s eye.’\(^{126}\) Such models of sight were paradoxical, calling for heightened means of investigating inner vision; the kind, perhaps, that art could offer best. But whereas spiritualists regarded the spectral vision made possible by

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\(^{125}\) *Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), on the enduring appeal of spirit photographs beyond

\(^{126}\) See, for example, the comment of spiritualist advocate Uriah Clark: “If one sees with the eyes closed, he demonstrates the existence of a spiritual sense of sight.” Clark, *Plain Guide to Spiritualism*, (Boston: William White, 1863), p 93.
ethereal forces in the imagination as exceptional and mystical, psychologists arrived at other conclusions. Writing in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1899, psychologist Jastrow discussed “The Mind’s Eye,” examining how illusions and visions are commonly produced by ordinary visual experiences thanks to the activity of the imagination. Like the New Thought promoter Henry Wood, Jastrow employed the metaphor of photography in his discussion of vision, but, he noted, that unlike the products of the camera lens, in the habits of the mind, “the pictures may be taken but many remain undeveloped and evanescent [...] stacked up [...] in the pigeonholes of our mental storerooms.” He wrote about the common propensity of the mind to invent and ‘see’ things that are not there, such as faces in clouds, claiming that this happened “Not only when the sense-impressions are ambiguous or defective, but when they are vague—when the light is dim or the forms obscure—does the mind's eye eke out the imperfections of physical vision.”

Jastrow noted how spiritualists capitalized upon this habit; “The vague conformations of drapery and make-up that are identified and recognized in spiritualistic séances illustrate extreme instances of this process.” But he distinguished the true science of perception and illusions from the kinds of vaporous imaginings in which Spiritualists saw ghosts. In his paintings of the mind’s illusions, Davies complicated the distinction that Jastrow sought to establish, capitalizing upon the imagination’s ability to engender visions, and he used his technique of ambiguity to suggest spiritual sight beyond the visible. In their increasingly frequent abstractions, their scumbled forms and indistinct contours, many of Davies’s paintings not only superficially call to mind the appearance of spirit photographs, but exceed the bounds of ‘reality’ that these objects apparently proved. Rather than mimetically duplicating the world of natural appearances to generate a sense of the ‘reality’ of the spirit world, Davies’s attempted to capture the deeper, purely imaginary content of the mind’s eye; exploring the paradoxical nature of

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127 Jastrow, “The Mind’s Eye,” *Popular Science Monthly* 54, (January, 1899), p 300. He continued, “it is not quite true [...] that in our waking hours we all have a world in common but in dreams each has a world of his own, for our waking worlds are made different by the differences in what engages our interest and attention.”

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the kind of knowledge provided by inner sight, he enabled his viewers to embrace and transcend the hard evidence of science at the same time.

Unknowable knowledge: Theosophy and the ‘Maya of Illusions’

Whereas psychologists like Jastrow were fascinated by what disciplined study of illusions might prove about the mind’s apparently limitless but scientifically grounded creativity, the quest for knowledge about perceptual phenomena just beyond the boundaries of scientific comprehension drove many in the direction of more esoteric traditions. Some gravitated towards magic, folklore and more occult practices, embracing astrology and numerology, soothsaying, divination and the mysteries of the Kabbalah in search of answers to profound spiritual and ontological questions. These interests in America paralleled those taking shape in Europe, where many Symbolist artists and writers were also attracted to occult knowledge.129

In a 1904 essay published in Carus’s journal The Monist: A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Philosophy of Science, journalist and amateur magician Henry Ridgely Evans (1861-1949) attempted to explain Americans’ expanding interest in mystical matters.130 Evans explained the widespread and growing preoccupation with occult or mystical faiths as a motivated desire to understand the spirit-world, thinking, consciousness and emotion: experiences which lay beyond material fact, “on the other side, on the inside” where, “the only place ... we do get beyond physical phenomena, viz., in the brain, we find psychical phenomena.” Yet, he noted that in America this had led towards two divergent models of understanding: a materially grounded, but exceedingly secular scientific one, and an overly-esoteric spiritual one, to which, as he claimed, “weak minds with a mystical trend are prone to fall victims to the psychical epidemics of the age.” Finding the new faith of Theosophy one of the most provocative of these currents, and one that spanned the divide he established, Evans explained its tenets with

129 Occult traditions had important corollaries in entirely new faiths, that addressed the interests of those who “yearned for a spiritual synthesis attuned to the expansive, idealistic and increasingly pluralistic temper of the day,” according to Robert S. Ellwood, “The American Theosophical Synthesis,” in Kerr and Crow, eds. The Occult in America. (1983), p 111.
130 Evans, “Madame Blavatsky,” (1904), p 387.
sensitivity to the scientific aspirations of its founder, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891).  

Notwithstanding Evans’ characterization of Theosophy as a “psychical epidemic,” it was a rapidly growing faith, whose followers included Davies. The Theosophical Society was founded in New York City in 1875 with the goal of promoting the heady stew of mystical, spiritual and transcendental beliefs, Eastern philosophies and Western metaphysics shared by its enigmatic leader Blavatsky, and her partners Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge. The motto adopted by the society was "There is no Religion higher than Truth," thereby establishing both a philosophical and evidentiary ground upon which to establish their claims.

In Blavatsky’s first masterwork, *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology,* she presented complicated explanations of human consciousness, attempting to integrate psychology and spiritualism with the higher spheres of hermetic truth to which she believed all souls aspired. This text, and subsequent volumes in which she elaborated upon her ideas, proved deeply influential to many modern artists, from Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky to Davies’s fellow American painter Marsden Hartley. As suggested by the reference to science in the

131 Biographical sketches of Madame Blavatsky are fascinating, but often incomplete, as she was a complex, contradictory figure. The most recent is Gary Lachman, *Madame Blavatsky: Mother of Modern Spirituality,* (New York: Jeremy Tarcher, 2012); a summary of the context in which Theosophy took hold in America is offered by Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America,* (New York: Schocken, 1996).

132 Blavatsky claimed she was chosen vessel of the wisdom of the East through her reputed contact with the spectral, ancient soul of a Tibetan mystic philosopher, who unveiled a Hidden Brotherhood located in the Himalayas and Egypt to her. The Theosophical Society attracted a wide following with its amalgam of Hinduism, Buddhism and occultism. Judge latter helmed the group after Blavatsky and Olcott left the United States for further study in India, after which their movement acquired world-wide significance whose influence extended into the art world via such later texts as Annie Besant and Richard Leadbeater’s 1901 book, *Thought Forms;* many of Besant and Leadbeater’s basic premises about the philosophical properties of art echo those of Paul Carus.

133 According to the first principles of Theosophy, ‘Truth’ is a fundamental yet essentially unknowable force governing our sense of reality that transcends time and place; human consciousness, the soul and the unconscious exist in dynamic equilibrium on a plane that is both corporeal and spiritual. A model of progressive evolution is basic to Theosophical beliefs, but is articulated as the evolution of human consciousness, moving towards a state of completeness that will unify the opposing forces of spirit and matter. Ellwood, “American Theosophical Synthesis,” (1983), pp 118-119, provides a well-articulated explanation of many of Theosophy’s central tenets, explaining the paradoxes of Blavatsky’s deeply anti-material approach to science, even as she insisted that her ideas could be proven by scientific laws.

134 Theosophy’s influence on European painters such as Vassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Frantisek Kupka and Kasimir Malevich has been demonstrated, but less has been written about the reach of
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lengthy sub-title of Isis Unveiled, seekers of transcendent meaning did not reject science outright, but sought to promote a different model of scientific proof.

Blavatsky and her followers affirmed rational but often non-positivist explanations for how the operations of the natural and material world might have analogous counterparts in the invisible realm of spirit. A product of the widespread, international drive to unify science, theology and philosophy in a comprehensive doctrine, Blavatsky synthesized a vast range of beliefs. She and her collaborators integrated Eastern and Western philosophies, ancient as well as modern sources for how the world functioned on both the material and spiritual plane, and she employed scientifically informed language, claiming that progressive, modern evolution was leading towards a state of completion when spirit and matter would unify.

Despite Blavatsky’s insistence upon Theosophy’s scientific emphasis, she was ambivalent about what science could prove; she rejected the positivist focus of much contemporary psychic and psychological research into spiritual matters, refuted proof of purely physiological and neurological functions, and scoffed at the prevalent drive to provide concrete ‘evidence’ for the esoteric truths she professed. She nonetheless regarded her comprehensive writing as a kind of ‘research,’ one that would reveal its own kind of revelatory manifestation, insisting that Theosophy granted the world a previously undisclosed ‘science’ of esoteric knowledge. In fact, despite denying some psychological claims, she was unwilling to discard any idea’s underlying merits; she studied

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Blavatsky subsequently expanded upon the beliefs that would become the core of Theosophy in the two volumes of The Secret Doctrine, published in 1888. Blavatsky’s subsequent letters, interviews and essays were compiled in a vast reference The Complete Writings, documenting her extensive literary activity up to 1889, shortly before her death in 1891. See Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: the Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy, (London and New York: Theosophical Publishing Society; Path Office, 1888-1897).

Blavatsky referenced Darwinian ideas but refuted his claim that humans descended from primates, insisting upon our purely spiritual origins.
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spiritualism, philosophy and psychology equally for the ways in which her new faith might benefit from them.\(^{37}\)

The unconscious dimension of the human spirit was a frequent topic for Blavatsky, and she addressed the phenomena of dreams, albeit obliquely, in both *Isis Unveiled* and her following text, *The Secret Doctrine*. The existence of a realm of deeper truth that surpasses the illusion of the material plane (for which Blavatsky used the Hindu term ‘Maya’) was a key idea in her precepts. These planes were accessible in unconscious states such as dreams: “There is a transcendental set of causes put in motion — so to speak — in the occurrence of these phenomena, which, *not being in relation to our narrow range of cognition*, can only be traced to their source and their nature, and understood by the Spiritual faculties of the Adept.” [italics in original]\(^{138}\) She asserted moreover, that dreaming and visionary mental states are “‘incorporeal corporealities’ — such as ‘appear in the mirror,’ and ‘abstract forms’ that *we see, hear, and smell*, in our dreams, and visions. […] *ergo* they are as much *realities* to us in our dreams, as any other thing on this plane of Maya.” Echoing Huneker’s claim that Davies was ‘a realist and a mystic,’ Blavatsky’s “incorporeal corporealities” was an oxymoronic means of reaching towards the mind’s combined psychological and spiritual properties made accessible through the dreaming imagination.

Davies was a devoted follower of Theosophy, well versed in Mme. Blavatsky’s beliefs.\(^{39}\) He had met her and read her books, especially her *Collected Writings*, published in 1889, which contained further references to the transcendent, spiritual power

\(^{37}\) Blavatsky’s Theosophical beliefs, as recorded in her collected writings, are in her typical fashion largely opaque. She used psychological terminology about the ‘ego’ and ‘subconscious’ in an idiosyncratic way, and she presented her ideas in circular, meandering prose, referring to the precepts of Theosophy by means of indirect language and unspecific metaphor. Part of her strategy was to challenge her reader to search his or her own souls for the relevance of her pronouncements, which makes her ideas difficult to read and understand conclusively. In fact, in order to be mystical, occult knowledge could not be obvious; to become a Theosophical Adept meant accepting the fundamental illogic and internal contradictions of her statements. Similarly, in his roundabout writing, in granting his paintings allusive but confoundingly obscure titles, as well as in some of his indecipherable formal habits art, Davies seems to have borrowed quite heavily from Blavatsky’s example.


\(^{39}\) The influence of Theosophy on Davies and fellow artist Henry Fitch Taylor is discussed by Oaklander, “Arthur B. Davies, William Fraetas and ‘Color Law,’” *American Art*, 18:2, (Summer, 2004), pp 10-31. How much Davies may have known of the European spread of Theosophy in the pre-Armory show years is debatable, but closer to home, and Davies’s own circle of acquaintances, fellow insurgent modern painter Marsden Hartley was a devoted follower, but this influence probably dated from the time he spent in Germany, which post-dates Davies’s Theosophical beliefs.
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of dreams. Symbolists and their more avant-garde followers of the next generation sought new formal strategies for giving visible form to numinous meaning in ways that echoed Blavatsky’s quest for verifiable demonstration of mystical truth, turning increasingly to non-objective abstraction in the early decades of the 20th century to facilitate this paradoxical goal. Davies did as well, although it might seem he approached abstraction more cautiously than his European contemporaries. Revealing his thorough investigation of Theosophical ideas, Davies devoted himself to painting Mme. Blavatsky’s concept of Maya directly in a work dating from around 1909 titled Maya, Mirror of Illusions (figure 4.17).

In a 1909 review, Huneker wrote about Maya, Mirror of Illusions, calling it a “large, symbolic picture” in which “ten elect virgins with mauve dappling their nude backs and thighs gaze wistfully into the mirror of Maya; Maya the great mother of illusions [...] the coloring is rather pallid, the mood chilly, but as ice burns, so is there spiritual heat in this enraptured parable.” But Huneker’s figure count was wrong: we are presented with a line of only five gracefully posed, naked female models stepping slowly and rhythmically, moving as if hypnotized in procession from left to right. Huneker’s confusion lies in the fact that in Maya, Davies grappled with the problem of how to give visible form to Blavatsky’s contradictory “corporeal incorporealities,” by embracing her metaphorical reference to the reflective properties of the parallel mirror; all the figures are duplicated in its flat surface, except the artist’s, or our own.

Here, Davies explores psychic and embodied doubleness both literally and metaphorically as he depicts a range of physical action: some of the figures stride, others step more cautiously, and one stands nearly still. However, as in A Measure of Dreams, their apparent sequential motion is arrested; the figures are captured in a moment in time, stopped before the mirror in which not only their bodies but also a distant mountainous landscape and placid lake are reflected. The smooth surface of the mirrored and mirroring

140 Perlman, LL, (1998), p 64. The archival documents do not ascertain precisely when this meeting had occurred, although it may have been between 1873 and 1882, when Blavatsky lived in the United States and founded the Theosophical Society. Other scholars suggest that Davies had encountered Theosophy through the influence of Lucy’s friends such as Lucile du Pre. See also Brooks Wright, The Artist and the Unicorn, (New City, NY: Historical Society of Rockland County, 1978) p. 121.
141 Wassily Kandinsky paraphrased Mme. Blavatsky in his 1911 book Concerning the Spiritual in Art, excerpts of which were published in the United States in 1912 in Alfred Stieglitz’ journal Camera Work, in which he wrote about the autonomous capacity of line and color alone to express spiritual truth.
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water introduces yet another reflection into the image, duplicating and inverting the horizon’s contours, the dusky pink sky and rugged, empty terrain. The luminous colors suggest an environment where the figures’ nakedness is not uncomfortable. Although they are posed so that we can enjoy the prospect of so much lusciously rendered flesh, as in A Measure of Dreams, these women do not seem aware of being looked at. Nor do they seem to look at their own reflections; most of their faces and features are not as carefully delineated as the contours of their limbs and gestures. The one figure whose face turns towards the viewer closes her eyes, demonstrating once again the self-possession of her purely inner vision. Thus it is not these women but the viewer who gazes into this mirror, and confronts the force of its multiple, proliferating reflections.

These questing material bodies meeting their astral projections as if in a dream are simultaneously real and illusory. The seemingly ‘present’ and indeed modern figures before the mirror, whose health and vigor are captured in their lean, athletic physicality, express the necessity of living minds to be housed in corporeal form. On closer inspection, however, some of the reflections in the mirror don’t quite correspond to the poses of the figures: on two of them, the angles of rising arms or turning legs fail to match their mirrored counterparts precisely, while the contours of the reflected bodies distort and smear. The blurry faces of the mirrored figures are phantasmagorical, despite the palpable physicality of their bodies immediately before us in the shallow foreground. When multiplied in their reflections, however, and set against the deep landscape, Davies’s pictorial strategies tell us that however physical they may seem, none of these bodies are in fact real. He invites his viewers once again to consider the nature of embodied and interior vision, employing the painted mirror’s deceptive surface as a metaphorical meditation on the function of contemplative ‘reflection.’ After all, the doubly-painted figures alongside their spectral reflections remind us that we perceive these forms in our minds as well as with our eyes, conjuring the sense of their physicality purely in our own imagination.

Davies utterly confounds reality and illusion, raising multiplying questions for his viewer about the uncertain relationship between physical, material truth and its deeper layers residing wholly in the interior, mystical world of the psyche. In confronting these questions, he invites us to venture into this mirror-world, however spatially ‘shallow’ it
may be; fellow artist Marsden Hartley noted Davies’s capacity to transport the mind when he wrote that Davies’s “paintings lead one away entirely into the land of legend, into the iridescent splendor of reflection. They take one out of a world of didactic monotone [...] They are essentially pictures created for the purpose of transportation.”²³⁴ Davies entices us into this inner, iridescent conceptual territory via his ambiguous yet compelling spatial and figural play, and allows us to wonder there.

IV. Conclusion: A ‘realist and mystic’ again

If Davies’s dreams seemed very real at the dawn of the twentieth century’s many modern upheavals, reality at times was experienced as profoundly dream-like. For Huneker, the productive contradictions of Davies’s mystically oriented realism were grounded in his ability to give concrete form to visionary experience: to the critic, Davies was “a searcher as well as a dreamer, an ardent American,” who offered his viewers the virtues of positive visualization; “one feels uplifted in the presence of the Davies’s pictures,” Huneker declared. Calling attention to Davies’s singular ability “to interpret the American landscape and American ideals in his own individual speech—the speech of form and color,” Huneker asked his readers to ponder the paradox he set forth in denomenating the artist a “realist and a mystic.”¹⁴³ Perhaps any individual’s understanding of reality was always mediated by the mysterious form and content of their unconscious dreams?

But more than just pictures of the artist’s fancy, Davies’s paintings reflect many of his viewers’ preoccupations with dreaming, offering a means to collect and contain the various epistemological models of dreaming presented in American magazines, newspapers and scientific journals. Describing and defining dreams, these texts contributed to the cultural literacy of Davies’s American viewers, while his paintings offered a visual counterpart to the body of information they assembled as part of their interpretive tool-kits. These rested equally upon viewers’ unique past experiences of

dreaming, reading about dreams and thinking about their relevance to modern consciousness.

During a significant phase of transition in which academic psychologists strove to delineate the scope of their discipline in America, artists and their critics were also trying to establish their own professional identities and appropriate purview. But, in their disciplinary and epistemological struggles, the stakes for artists’ professional claims were different than those of psychological scientists, however they might be situated in an intellectual and cultural space that was adjacent to these scientific debates, engaging in a preliminary way the philosophy of aesthetics and the phenomena of perception that would preoccupy later 20th century artists and critics. Thus, painters such as Davies and critics such as Huneker sought to carve out their own authoritative position relative to the modernity of psychology. They had a new and ambitious vision for what art could do for the advancement of American science, philosophy, psychology and even faith. While some of his peers occupied themselves with securing their place in an art world still dominated by contests between realist modernists and classical traditionalists, Davies strategically chose to avoid that polemical distinction, and instead embraced aspects of both. By turning towards problems seemingly extrinsic to the art world, but ones inherent to the realms of science and philosophy, Davies charted territory appropriate to his interest in dreams, enhancing his reputation as both a visionary and a skilled, materially grounded artist. He thus presented viewers a form of art that was no less modern for its individuality and evident romanticism. For an artist like Davies, already identified by his critics as impossible to categorize, productive possibilities offered themselves at the epistemic boundaries between the emerging fields of art, psychology and faith.

However, unlike the scientists and researchers who increasingly strove to demarcate their ‘proper’ spheres of knowledge about the mind, embracing some ideas and rejecting others, no restrictive limits on thought about the potential of the unconscious were at issue for Davies; this freedom enabled him to be ‘a realist and a

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mystic, ‘embracing psychological science, psychic phenomenal and mystical faith with equal passion. And indeed, a substantial measure of his fascination lay in his address to viewers who were witnesses to (if not participants in) the growing arguments over disciplinary limits. Davies was an informed but non-specialist interlocutor amid these disciplines, whose work generated critical amazement at his ability to reveal the operations of the mind, granting equal attention to psychological, spiritual and psychic experience.

The very dynamic of these inter-related debates makes any linear, categorical historical narrative hard to fix in place. Such fixity might well be undesirable, for that matter, as it is the very fluidity of the exchange in the establishment of disciplinary limits that makes the examination of this productive moment in art and intellectual culture interesting. That is perhaps why the sphere of art, otherwise still somewhat tangential to the discourses of the unconscious in this immediate pre-Freudian period provides a useful lens for understanding how viewers negotiated these ongoing debates. I take up the topic of Freud and his contributions to the interpretation of dreams in the following chapter. Davies laid important groundwork for Freud’s ideas, as well as those competing models of dream interpretation offered by fellow psychologists and psychoanalysts.

Equipped with knowledge deriving from science and the disciplines of the spirit equally, Davies not only explored his own subjective unconscious, he attempted to provide an arena on which an educated but non-specialist viewer might come to their own terms with the value and benefit of dreams. Davies’s paintings were a site for viewers to freely explore the territory of the unconscious. They were, as one critic observed, like the country of dreams where “his point of view is peculiar and personal;” but however this space might be foreign, “it is refreshing to travel abroad with him.”

Huneker agreed: “We walk with the ‘tender and growing night’ in the symbol land of Davies.”

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Chapter 4: “A man for whom the invisible world exists”
4.1 A Measure of Dreams, ca. 1908, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 18 x 30")

4.2 Maxfield Parrish, Dream Castle in the Sky, 1908, (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, oil on canvas, 70 ½ x 129 1/8")
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4.3 *Psyche*, ca. 1906-08, (Brooklyn Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 15.2 × 11.3”)

4.4 William Sergeant Kendall, *Psyche*, 1909, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 37 ¼ x 29")
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4.5 The Hours and the Freedom of the Fields, ca. 1905, (private collection. Oil on canvas, 18 x 30")


4.8 *Wild Wind of Vision*, no date, ca. 1906-1909, (private collection, Oil on canvas, 18 x 30")
4.9 *The Sorcerers*, ca. 1900-06, (private collection, oil on canvas, 17 ⅜ x 22 ⅝")


'Mildred and Rouclere' toured the country beginning in May 1892, demonstrating the hypnotic powers of Rouclere, who entranced his wife and then took suggestions from his audiences about what feats he should make her perform.
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4.11 *Day Dreams*, ca. 1905-09, (private collection, oil on canvas, 22 ¾ x 40 ¼”)

4.12 *Your Dream Book*, ca. 1904, (New York Public Library)
Chapter 4 Illustrations
4.13 *And God Walked in the Garden in the Cool of the Day*, no date, (private collection, oil on canvas, 18" x 22")

4.14 *Under the Bough*, ca. 1908-09, (LACMA, oil on canvas, 26 3/8 x 40 1/16")
Chapter 4 Illustrations

4.15 *Spirit Photographs*, 1901-05, (Library of Congress)

4.16 *Figures at Seaside*, ca. 1900-1910, (private collection, oil on canvas, 17 x 22")
Chapter 4 Illustrations
4.17 *Maya, Mirror of Illusions*, ca. 1910, (Art Institute of Chicago, oil on canvas, 26 1/8 x 40 1/8")
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

Chapter 5:
“Stirrings of the past of the race:” Davies’s dreams, psychoanalysis and primitivism in America, 1909-1914

“Dreams seem to be stirrings into unusual activity of this sub-conscious; remembering, in all its cells, the past of the race [...] if we gave these stirrings due attention, we should learn extraordinarily much.”


In January 1913, the critic for the New York Times reviewed an important exhibition of Davies’s early work, noting; “What distinguishes the artist who feels and dreams from others who are like him is his ability to give form and color to his dreams and emotions, to put them into recognizable shape.” Praising the artist’s ability to integrate feelings with form, the writer of the favorable comment continued: “If the observer has himself been in this particular place of dreams and emotions he recognizes the symbolic landmarks with joy, and really enters into the feeling of which the art is a partial expression. All of which takes us dangerously close to metaphysics.” Notwithstanding some evident hesitation over associated ‘dangers’ of metaphysics, the critic invoked a host of ideas newly in circulation in 1913 about the psychological, psychoanalytic and philosophical value of dreams, and their necessity in coming to terms with modern consciousness.

Observing Davies’s many sources of inspiration, the writer determined that even in his early work, he emerged as “an artist whose ardent vitality [...] found expression in the forms of an older art, yet foreshadowed a new attitude of mind.” Here he alluded not only to the debt to Renaissance precedent that prior critics had noted, but also to the artist’s more recent discovery of Greek and Roman art, made during his 1910 journey to Italy, Greece and Constantinople. Marsden Hartley later commented on the effect of Davies’s paintings, “Often you have the sensation of looking through a Renaissance window upon a Greek world—a world of Platonic verities in calm relation with each

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other. These interests associated him with an emergent American understanding of the value of 'primitivism' in art, demonstrated in his iconographic references to ancient rituals in Arcadian landscapes; his naked, dancing and striving bodies; his child-like naïveté and simplicity in form; and his seemingly intuitive, spontaneous handling of paint and color.

Such properties also suggested motivations arising from the deepest layers of the artist’s unconscious mind. The 1909 essay quoted in my epigraph was published the same month in which Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) made his first and only journey to the United States; its un-credited writer affirmed his growing conviction that “the best way to know that sub-conscious self of which we hear so much is to know it through our dreams.” This chapter places Davies’s paintings created and exhibited circa 1909-1914 in dynamic interaction with the new currents of thought about dreams that arose in the wake of Freud’s landmark visit. Amid a rising tide of popular interest in psychoanalysis, Freudian theories were measured against and combined with ideas about imagination, intuition, and dreaming proposed equally by Carl Jung’s (1875-1961) ideas about the libido and Henri Bergson’s (1859-1941) élan vital. Thus, in order to see how Davies and his work played a vital role in this volatile moment when American beliefs about the unconscious changed rapidly and radically, I measure his work in terms of the American reception of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, explore the ways in which he harnessed libidinal energies to emerging beliefs about the primitive unconscious, and investigate the significant role of Bergson’s theories about dreams and intuitive, primordial memory.

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5 Consequently, and notwithstanding this important reputation within the medical and psychological community, Jung’s influence on the early popularization of psychoanalysis in America is much less well established than Freud’s. Given Freud’s growing prominence and reputation in the American academic and popular press in the postwar years, Jung’s vital contributions of the early ‘teens were commonly offset by the proliferation of Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, such that Jung has often been subsequently misinterpreted in the United States as a ‘follower’ of Freud. However, many of Jung’s ideas were developed independently, and their dissemination in American psychological publications helped set the stage for the ways in which Freud was alternately welcomed and resisted, as well as the ways his approaches to psychoanalysis were understood. For more on the ways in which the American reception of Jung conditioned the reception of Freud, see Sonu Shamdasani, Jung Contra Freud, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
Mingling evocations of primitive psychic unity with his modern investigations of dreaming, Davies traced a line of association between the contemporary present and the deep pre-modern past, suggesting his work’s enduring validity, and indeed its layers of metaphysical meaning. The inner realms given body, form, color, and feeling in Davies’s paintings gave vision to a ‘mythic modernity;’ I contend that these interwoven conceptualizations of the unconscious served as a new means of understanding the human psyche, and informed Davies’s ongoing exploration of psychological phenomena as he investigated the continuities linking ancient and modern minds in a collective effort towards self-realization.

Indeed, 1913 was not only the year of the legendary Armory Show with which Davies was intimately involved, it was a watershed for discussion of dreams and dream-interpretation in American culture: it saw the publication of the first English translation of Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams, and many subsequent reviews of this text, both critical and laudatory; and it also was the year in which Bergson’s parallel but distinct discussion of dreaming was first published in two installments in The Independent. Bergson’s first visit to the United States took place in February of 1913 as well, just a few weeks after Davies’s Chapman Collection exhibition, and a few more weeks in advance of the New York opening of the Armory Show. Bergson enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the United States, such that his New York lectures generated the first documented traffic jam on Broadway as attendees struggled to reach the Columbia University auditorium where his talk was held. The confluence of these historical events suggests the rich context in which viewers made sense of Davies’s pictorial dreams.

In works created during these years, such as Avatar (figure 5.1), exhibited in 1909 at Macbeth’s Gallery, Davies depicted close-knit groups of bodies tightly bound together, as if engaged in primal struggles. These nude or semi-covered figures embody forces fundamentally necessary to human striving as they wrestle, pose, promenade in ritual processions, and mingle tightly with one another in bucolic landscapes or vaguely archaic spatial surroundings. In other contemporary works like Gates of the Morning—Release

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(figure 5.2), Davies’s vital, athletic figures adopt graceful, dance-like poses. Their upraised and outstretched arms suggest obscure ceremonial rites as they move across a horizontal plane, and even spiritual elevation and uplift: at far right, a few of them ascend into the air.\(^7\) Although similar elements had appeared in his work before 1909, Davies rendered nudes in nature in a more deliberately pagan context after his 1910 journey. The figures inhabiting Davies’s paintings of the early ‘teens belong in a primitive place and primeval era, a context in which their perception, emotion and behavior was presumably integrated, spontaneous and ‘innate;’ they called up associations with humankind’s deepest evolutionary and psychic origins. They are expressive and transcendentally free, living in a state of nature where they appear to behave instinctually.

But as rendered by Davies, these artfully posed, densely-packed and sometimes crudely-delineated bodies were also manifestly modern in their form; they spoke to an early 20\(^{th}\) century longing for liberation of the psyche, and reflected the era’s quest for authenticity in creative expression. This was a value Davies shared with fellow promoters of modern painting such as Alfred Stieglitz. Circumventing problematic associations between non-Western, colonized, or pre-industrial societies and racial identity—such as the racialized Colonial fantasies that preoccupied European artists such as Paul Gauguin, whose work was featured prominently at the Armory Show—Davies nonetheless tapped into a current of early 20\(^{th}\) century interest in un-alienated, primitive states of being.\(^8\)

Whereas Stieglitz had begun to exhibit “Primitive” African art at his gallery 291, Davies’s pagan primitivism, located in some non-specific Classical past, addressed the presumed cultural origins of the people Davies saw as his primary audience:

\(^7\) Robin Veder links these gestures to Davies’s growing interest in human motion, dance and the discourses of various ‘body cultures’ in which Americans were increasingly invested in their growing appreciation of physical health and fitness. See Veder, “The Joy of Breathing: Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Uplift in the Art of Arthur B. Davies,” in Mary D. Edwards and Elizabeth Bailey, eds. *Gravity in Art: Essays on Weight and Weightlessness in Painting, Sculpture and Photography*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2012), pp 198-211.

predominantly Anglo-American, sophisticated, urban viewers well-versed in art’s longstanding pastoral traditions. 

Although his primitivism did not explore racial alterity, Davies did tap into the discursive conflation regarding the innate properties of instinctual or child-like creative instinct, capitalizing upon critical endorsement of his work’s ‘naïve’ qualities. Historian Mark Jarzombek has usefully articulated the nature of the fascination Davies shared with his fellow modernists in his observation:

turn-of-the-century psychologically oriented artists and art critics [...] recognized the theoretical advantages inherent in African and children’s art, for it was precisely in the overlapping discourse of the primitive and the innocent that psychology could identify a space of production that was both aesthetically and historically legitimate.  

Seeking to reveal the psychologically grounded authenticity arising from the deepest recesses of the human unconscious, Davies demonstrated his art’s avant-garde credentials and their connection to emergent psychoanalytic concepts.

While prior scholars have offered useful ways of understanding psychoanalysis in early 20th century American art and culture, very few have adequately addressed the ways in which Freud, Jung and Bergson’s theories were thoroughly interwoven, and equally few have related these tendencies to Davies or the allure of Arcadian primitivism in art. 

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11 A sampling of some of the most valuable of these discussions have been provided by Kathleen Pyne, Modernism and the Feminine Voice: O’Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Marcia Brennan, Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001); and Ann Douglas, Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995). The relationship between Davies and primitivism has scarcely been addressed, although Robin Veder’s discussion of Davies and modern dance does suggest useful associations between modern dance in America and primitive, instinctual motion. See Veder, “Arthur B. Davies’s Inhalation Theory,” American Art, 32:1, (Spring, 2009).
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For Davies, the spontaneous emotion, psychic wholeness and instinctual response towards which he and so many others aspired was not displaced to some exotic Colonial outpost, but thanks to popular psychoanalytic theories could be located within the embodied and dreaming American mind of his patrons and viewers. Davies’s images of the ‘teens helped his viewers come to terms with concurrent discussion about the significance of dreams for understanding modern selfhood.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate that Davies had first-hand awareness of the heated debates over psychoanalytic theories taking place in medical and psychological circles, these new approaches to the dream entered broadly into his American cultural milieu between 1909 and 1915. Interest in psychoanalysis was particularly nurtured in the circles of Greenwich Village intellectuals among whom Davies counted his friends and colleagues, including Mabel Dodge whose regular salons nurtured New York radicalism. But in addition to such supporters, Davies’s patrons also were members of the nation’s more conservative cultural and economic elite, such as lumber magnate Martin A. Ryerson, Jr., trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago, who owned Avatar and a number of the artist’s other early 20th century works, or the eminent collector of European modernism, Dr. Albert Barnes. These were the kinds of educated, upper- and middle-class Americans whose ambivalent and idiosyncratic acceptance of psychoanalytic theories paralleled the treatment of these topics in the mainstream press.

12 Michael Leja has offered many useful ways of understanding how the discourses of ‘primitivism’ in the mid-20th century United States derived from a conflation of primitive and archaic metaphors and associations with myth. While he is concerned with the influence of such ideas on Abstract Expressionist painters of a later generation these trends were well under way in the ‘teens, when Davies was painting. See “The Mythmakers and the Primitive” in Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940’s, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp 49-120.

13 Davies became a friend of Dodge through their mutual promotion of the Armory Show. Dodge had provided financial support for the exhibition, and in thanks, Davies had excerpted a letter she had written praising his efforts, printing her words out on cards that he handed to visitors. The note read, “I think [the show] the most important thing that ever happened in America [...]. What is needed is more, more and always more consciousness, both in art and in life.” Through Dodge’s salons, and because of his own occasional contributions to the socialist journal The Masses, Davies was also acquainted with Floyd Dell, Max Eastman and other members of the intellectual circles inhabiting Greenwich Village. See Mabel Dodge Luhan, Movers and Shakers, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1936), pp 36-37.

14 The readers of such periodicals as The Nation, Current Opinion, The Outlook and The Independent—all of which published essays on psychoanalysis—were interested in the kinds of informed opinions in which these publications specialized; their editors solicited essays by professionals and journalists whose expertise demonstrated a range of political and social affiliations, but few could really be considered radicals. Thus they helped to create what I consider to be the broad swath of ‘mainstream’ attitudes. See Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1885-1905, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957),
Yet psychoanalytic dream interpretation promoted ongoing, vigorous interest in the topic among readers of popular newspapers and magazines and viewers of art, suggesting the understanding of unconscious activity would enhance self-knowledge and general mental health. In the offices of analysts or within their own homes, a growing number Americans scrutinized their own dreams, as well as those of others, seeking keys to deeper understanding of subjectivity. Even *Good Housekeeping* promoted the practice in “Diagnosis by Dreams:” “This new therapy is decidedly scientific, and its message is one of distinct optimism,” one author assured his readers.15

Challenging the misconception that dream analysis was a form of mysticism on the one hand, or a frivolous and a folkloric superstition on the other, Freud contended that interpretation of dreams was a true science: it was rigorous, and offered a significant means of accessing unconscious motives and desires in the treatment of neuroses. Under the guidance of a trained analyst, an individual’s dreams were examined for their latent symbolic content, and revealed unfulfilled, personal desires and long repressed sexual wishes. But these theories, especially given Freud’s emphasis on sexuality, were also hotly contested; to some radicals his emphasis on sexual liberation held enormous appeal, whereas to more conservative Americans these were deeply troublesome ideas. Davies’s paintings of primal bodies—whether regarded as dreamers or images of dreams—attracted viewers from both groups, and the extensive middle ground that lay between these polarized attitudes.

No evidence shows that Davies pursued psychoanalysis himself. Whether or not he ever sought dream-interpretation, or was inclined to think about how his viewers might have thought about psychoanalysis when examining his art, it is tempting to imagine that desire, repression, liberated sexuality, and its moral consequences were very much on his mind. Between 1902 and 1905, he had become deeply enmeshed in his relationship with his model Edna Potter, an aspiring artist as well as a dancer. They may

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have met in classes at the Art Students' League in the 1890s. Edna's dance-toned body was not only his physical ideal, she was extremely cultured and well-read; Davies's 1911 drawing (figure 1.3), exhibited at the Armory Show, depicts her reading while reclining in a pose that showed her eroticized physique. Under her influence, Davies developed new interests and explored new themes: he rendered naked bodies in jubilant motion, showing the liberating potential of modern dance. When around 1905, he and Edna took up residence in the city and traveled together as a married couple, the artist rigorously maintained his clandestine second identity and family. Davies's fierce protection of his privacy, the aura of mystery he cultivated and his pictorial retreat into a world of transcendent, archaic and utopian ideals seems very much a necessary part of his careful maintenance of a public persona and reputation whose influence on his work should be measured, albeit with care.

Given the transcendent, utopian spirit of Davies's work, Jung and Bergson's hypotheses about dreams offered interpretive tools to his viewers that enhanced and surpassed Freudian psychotherapeutic models, circumventing Freud's problematic insistence upon the sexual origins of dreams by enhanced reference to the 'libido' or 'life force.' Yet as Freud's name became the one with which most readers associated dream-analysis, many Americans accepted his ideas in terms that excused or mitigated their emphasis on sex in favor of more uplifting or euphemistic alternatives. Indeed Freud's

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16 Edna is fascinating in her own right; she later wrote two books on the topic of dance, Greek movement and the importance of breathing. See Veder, “Arthur B. Davies's Inhalation Theory,” (2009), pp 66-68.

17 According to Perlman, only Macbeth, Walt Kuhn and Lillie Bliss knew about the relationship and the child. Edna later claimed that it had taken Davies five years to convince her to consummate their affair, but this is contradicted by the established dates at which they were setting up a household together. Letter from Edna Potter to David Davies, the artist’s second son, June 2, 1929. Davies Correspondence, Arthur B. Davies Collection, Helen Farr Sloan Library and Archives, Delaware Art Museum, (Davies Collection).

18 The sensational way in which Davies's relationship with Potter is treated in most brief surveys of the artist's work attests to the prurient interests extramarital relationships inspire in viewers today, just as they did in Davies's own time: viewers seem more intrigued by an artist when there is a scandal involved, but this offers little focus on their work. Around 1900, many popular stories about the 'bohemian' lives of artists indulged in titillating speculations about the loose morals and sexual misconduct between artists and their models; especially in light of the shocking revelations about the relationship between Stanford White and Evelyn Nesbit following the architect's murder in 1906. Davies wanted to avoid any compromising questions about his morality. For more on the morals of artistic cultures of Gilded Age and Progressive Era New York, see Sarah Burns, Inventing the Modern Artist, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp 85-88; and Joanna Levin, Bohemia in America, 1858-1920, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). For more on White and Nesbit, see Michael Madconald Mooney, Evelyn Nesbit and Stanford White: Love and Death in the Gilded Age, (New York: Morrow, 1976).
enduring popularity and name recognition was, I would argue, in large measure due to the emphasis his early psychoanalytic theory placed on dreams; since references to dreaming in its many manifestations were ubiquitous in America, Freud’s attempt to provide a scientific means of analyzing their content beyond mere folklore and fantasy had profound allure.

Davies’s enchanting figure-filled landscapes allowed viewers to negotiate these competing ideas and arrive at their own understanding of dreaming’s true significance. His obscure narratives, archaic spaces, vigorously interacting bodies and vague symbols resisted interpretation in light of the artist’s deeply personal psychological motives, and instead were readily associated with a collective impulse, a utopian yearning to achieve a state of spiritual and psychic wholeness in a remote natural world. As Kathleen Pyne has noted, artists in step with the spirit of the modern age demonstrated innate responsiveness to experience, a sense of “intuitive access to the unconscious mind” that owed much to Jungian and Bergsonian thought. Davies displayed his modernity paradoxically, capturing this elusive goal in his paintings of ancient or primordial humans, behaving instinctually. “Davies is archaic. His art is a ‘becoming.’ [...] the memory is full of their spiritual repercussions and overtones,” declared James Huneker in 1913, asserting that he is “in tune with the universal. [...] Great art is in an instant arrested in eternity.” Jung and Bergson’s ideas nourished these associations, suggesting ways in which a fundamental connection linked all peoples across space, time and culture.

Davies became familiar with how such interests also shaped the Arcadian fantasies of some of his modern European peers as President of the American Association and Painters and Sculptors, a position he assumed in 1911. Davies’s tasks intensified in 1912 first selecting, then organizing and finally promoting the European art exhibited at

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21 Bergson’s metaphysical theories about modern consciousness were introduced to Americans largely through the 1911 translation of his book Creative Evolution, but had previously been endorsed by William James in 1909. Bergson’s ideas about ‘collective memory’ which had been articulated more thoroughly in Matiere et Memoire (1896), were not published in English until after Creative Evolution. See Tom Quirk, Bergson and American Culture: The Worlds of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).
the Armory Show; his involvement in this effort has been extensively documented. Because of the extensive, time-consuming work that was involved, Davies exhibited little of his own art at the Armory, but nearly all of it showed the evolution of his concerns with fantasy, imagination and the unconscious on which his reputation had been built, as well as evidence of Davies’s newfound exposure to avant-garde formal trends. As I have previously observed, one painting, *Seadrift*, (figure 5.3), had been recently completed; illustrated in the April 1913 issue of *Hearst's Magazine* in a review of the Armory Show, Charles Henry Melzer felt it was an example of what made the American work in that exhibition exemplary. 

*Seadrift* is a heavily impastoed painting representing figures in a shallow, spatially indefinable natural landscape; its layers suggest an irregular cliff face topped by vegetation, abutting an ocean’s sandy shore. Some of the figures are naked and others only scantily attired in loincloths, but all are in complex physical interaction. At the immediate left, the prominent, nearly-nude wrestlers act out the prevalent conflicts common to animal instinct, and show a measure of Davies' growing fascination with

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23 Charles Henry Meltzer, “New York Sees Things,” *Hearst's Magazine*, 23 (April, 1913), p 636. Davies exhibited six pieces at the Armory Show, amidst the work of his fellow Americans: in addition to the aforementioned *Seadrift*, he also showed two other paintings, *A Line of Mountains*, and the unlocated *Hill Wind*, two pastels, *Design*, *Birth of Tragedy*, and *Reading Woman*, and another unidentified drawing. Despite this seeming wealth of new work, Davies’s studio had been relatively inactive during the prior year, as he had been planning, selecting, promoting and then hanging the European works of art on view at the Armory Show. Other than the mention in *Hearst's Magazine*, *Seadrift* was not extensively discussed in the art critical press: too many other sensational works in the Armory Show captured the attention of art writers, whether they laid praise or blame on Davies for including them in the controversial exhibition. Consequently, little can be determined about how most viewers responded to Davies’s entries in the Armory Show. For some analysis of the ways in which the American art in the show was generally presented, see William Glackens, “The American Section—The National Art,” and Frederick James Gregg, “The Attitude of the Americans,” *Arts and Decoration*, 3:5 Special Exhibition Number, (March, 1913), pp 159-167.
robust, athletic figures; they reveal his attempt to embody consciousness in idealized human form.

Aside from these clearly male bodies, the rest of the figures in the painting are loosely delineated and androgynous. They appear as contour but have little else to distinguish them, evoking a primordial state of matter striving towards coalescence in human form. Emerging from the waves like hybrid sea-creatures, they arise to walk upright from right to left across the middle distance, and ascend the terra cotta colored escarpment behind them. The amorphous bodies give form to the deepest layers of the human soul, suggesting in Jungian and Bergsonian terms the animating spirit that propels evolutionary struggle, and the efforts of the individual human anima to make itself known. 24

In this, his ambitions echoed those of Europe’s modern vanguard artists whose work Davies promoted. Preparations for the Armory Show in the Fall of 1912, including travel to London and Paris, familiarized Davies with the work of both Paul Cezanne and Henri Matisse; their combined influence shaped Davies’s subject matter and handling of form in Seadrift. But he also likely encountered both artists’ work at Alfred Stieglitz’ gallery 291 between 1908 and 1911. The French fauve painter’s coarsely-rendered nudes in raw nature, such as Nude in A Forest (figure 5.4) which was shown at 291, as well as his heavily laden brush-work and forcefully individual color provided Davies with substantial inspiration. 25 So did Cezanne’s tightly integrated groups of bathers. 26 A few

24 Lisa Peters, Arthur B. Davies (1862-1928), Painter, Poet, Romancer & Mystic, (New York: Spanierman Gallery, March 29 to April 28, 2012), observes the ways in which the figures arising from the ocean “imply successive motion” in a manner that she likens to the trajectory of motion in Edward Muybridge’s photographs and Marcel Duchamp’s Nude Descending A Staircase, (one of the most sensational paintings to win public attention at the Armory Show), and she observes Davies’s contemporary interest in motion studies. However, in Seadrift’s palette, handing and thematic content, the work of Redon makes a more convincing formal comparison. She also notes the ways in which evolutionary discourses were part of the “broad range of associations” viewers would have brought to their scrutiny of this painting. Although I do not disagree with Peters, I think more focused attention to Bergsonian ideas about “creative evolution” offers an equally rich interpretive context. While the term ‘anima’ in reference to the inner, underlying personality and feminine principle pertains to Jung’s later beliefs, not those in circulation in America in 1913, it seems an apt way to allude to the drive towards a more metaphysical understanding of human consciousness that inspired Davies, Bergson and Jung alike.

25 Matisse’s drawings, watercolors, lithographs and one painting were on view in April 1908 and March, 1910 at 291; their critical reception in the press was discussed in Stieglitz’s journal Camera Work in 1908. For more, see John Cauman, “Henri Matisse, 1908, 1910 and 1912: New Evidence of Life,” in Greenough, ed. Modern Art And America, (2001), pp 83-97.
of these had been exhibited as lithographs at 291 in 1910, and were included in the Armory Show; Davies also might equally have seen them visiting the collections of Gertrude and Leo Stein in Paris.\textsuperscript{27} Works like Cezanne's \textit{Large Bathers} (1900-05) and \textit{Bathers at Rest} (1876-77), both now in the Barnes collection (figures 5.5 and 5.6), affirmed Davies's own tendencies towards Arcadian subjects, while the crude physicality of Cezanne's figures and their freely expressive, simplified shapes encouraged the American artist's desire to generate equivalence between liberated form and an equally liberated natural setting.\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Seadrift}, in its subdued tonality and harmonized, rhythmic figural representation, moderates Matisse's jewel-toned fragmentation of space and summarily rendered figure, but Davies nonetheless captures a sense of similar incipient abstraction in his spaces and bodies alike that spoke to their primordial state of being.

In its stippled facture and rich color, \textit{Seadrift} also strongly resembles the pastels and oils of Odilon Redon, an artist whose work Davies featured prominently at the Armory Show.\textsuperscript{29} Redon's images became immediate favorites with the show's visitors and buyers: he was one of the 'modern' European artists whose work was heralded with nearly universal acclaim, while the paintings of other European modernists, like Matisse's \textit{Blue Nude}, were received with doubt, derision or scorn.\textsuperscript{30} By borrowing from

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{26} The influence of Cezanne on American art is considered by Sylvia Yount, \textit{To Be Modern: American Encounters with Cezanne and Company}, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
    \item \textsuperscript{29} Davies had visited Redon's studio in Paris in late fall 1912 during his travels assembling the work for the Armory Show along with Walter Pach and Walt Kuhn; see Milton Brown, \textit{The Story of the Armory Show}, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p 50, see also McCarthy, \textit{Walter Pach (1883-1958)}, (2011), p 35.
    \item \textsuperscript{30} Kenyon Cox, one of the most vocal opponents of the radical art at the Armory Show, was more favorably disposed to Redon. See Cox, "The 'Modern' Spirit in Art," \textit{Harper's Weekly}, (March 15, 1913). Cox associated him with the 'Post Impressionists,' an artist who "is no longer to occupy himself with the problem of how things look—he is interested only in how he feels about things;" the critic also noted with approval that Redon was "a dreamer in lines," thus tracing some critical commonality between the
\end{itemize}
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Redon’s palette and intensely worked surfaces, Davies associated himself not only with the French artist’s esoteric and hermetic Symbolist mysticism, but also with his unique blend of art, philosophy and science.\footnote{Just as Redon had exploited the microscopic imagery revealed by meticulous examination of plants and single-celled organisms, invoking biological metaphors as source material from which he derived his otherworldly spiritual visions, noted collector Edward W. Root saw affinities between Davies’s symbols, his perceptions and microscopic imagery, writing in 1924, “To be an artist one must be governed by an extraordinary need (and consequent desire) for correlation; one must wish to see the multitudinous revelations of the microscope blending with the constellations to form a single stitch in the divine fabric of the universe […] A passion for correlation appears unmistakably in Davies’s work. His thoughts, his dreams, his sensations are all governed by it […] It is this passion which makes his symbolism moving even when it is most obscure...” Quoted in \textit{Arthur B. Davies: Essays on the Man and His Art}, (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection, 1924).} Whereas Redon had tapped into biomorphic and microscopic forms as a means of calling evolutionary analogies to mind, Davies addressed similar progressive aims by imagining the mysterious operations of the human unconscious, probing developmental commonalities in all human minds.

Davies’s art securely established a fantasy of modern humanity’s ancestral origins in a context acceptable to his American viewers.\footnote{For more on the ways in which Davies’s European peers promoted a utopian fantasy of Arcadian escape, see Margaret Werth, \textit{The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), particularly pp 145-220. Whereas Davies attracted praise from his critics for these explorations of pastoral escape, or at worst faint disapproval, his European peers such as Henri Matisse attracted much more scorn when his idyllic paintings were first exhibited in 1906.} Amalgamating influence from Redon, Cezanne and Matisse, Davies was regarded as an important modern painter who was at the same time not too alienating. Even though his work embraced some modernist experiments with form and style it also explored what one observer labeled “ideals that have endured a dozen centuries and more”\footnote{“Art at Home and Abroad,” \textit{The New York Times}, (February 21, 1909).} Davies secured this favor not only in his Arcadian themes, but in his acute psychological perception; his paintings seemed to bridge time and space, giving visible form to modern psychological circumstances while expressing enduring pastoral virtues.

dreaming soul’s essence, and offered a vision of worthy self-knowledge. As Marsden Hartley later observed:

In the work of Davies [...] there is the splendid silence of a world created [...] for the reflection of self [...] he is the highly sensitized illustrator appointed by the states of his soul to picture forth the pauses of the journey through the realm of fancy.34

But these were not just fantasies emerging exclusively from his own mind and spirit; just as psychologists and philosophers recognized the ways in which the uncanny imagery of dreams might mediate between memory and desire, and between experience and imagination, they argued that dreams inhabited a psychic terrain between the individual and the collective. Davies attempted to reconcile these many contradictions in a pictorial setting located between the fanciful visions in his mind and the dreams in the mind of the viewer.

Eventually, as psychoanalytic dream-interpretation acquired more focused definition and cultural authority in the later decades of the 20th century, and as Freud’s own ideas came into greater focus, American critics began to use more doctrinal Freudian psychoanalytic terms in their analysis of art, and veneration of the kinds of vague elegiac dreaming represented by Davies was replaced by keener scrutiny of later artists’ latent psychological motives. Yet, in these very early years in which Freudian theory was introduced, his contributions to psychology proliferated across the cultural landscape in unpredictable ways, merging with competing ideas and alternate theories. Becoming popularized in America, psychoanalytic concepts were used to project a scientific utopia of the future in which self-knowledge would lead towards a universal, objective understanding of reality.35 Davies helped facilitate such developments.

I. Psychoanalysis in America: from Freud to Jung

When Freud came at the invitation of G. Stanley Hall to lecture at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, accompanied by Jung, he spoke on the origins of

psychoanalysis, the association method, and his ideas about how the interpretation of dreams could cure many prevalent neuroses.\textsuperscript{36} His lectures were delivered alongside others by Jung, Sandor Ferenczi, Franz Boas, Adolf Meyer and Edward Titchener. Leading representatives of the emergent practice of psychotherapy A. A. Brill and Ernest Jones also participated.\textsuperscript{37} And in the audience, psychologists William James and James J. Putnam listened intently;\textsuperscript{38} even the anarchist and free love advocate Emma Goldman (from the sidelines, uninvited) heard the lectures, reporting back on them to her Greenwich Village associates.\textsuperscript{39}

Psychoanalysis had already attracted some followers in America by this time, thanks as much to Jung as to Freud, but given the reputations of this illustrious company, psychotherapeutic practices and dream interpretation expanded widely during the teens; Freud led the field, having published the first edition of \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams} in

\textsuperscript{36} The preeminent source on Freud's reception and influence in America is Nathan G. Hale, Jr., \textit{Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). Also useful are John Burnham, "The New Psychology" in Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick, eds. \textit{1915: The Cultural Moment}, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991). Sonu Shamdasani, "Psychotherapy, 1909: Notes on a Vintage" in John Burnham, ed. \textit{After Freud Left: A Century of Psychoanalysis in America}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), notes that amid the many important meetings concerning the development of psychoanalysis that took place in 1909, the Clark Conference was actually relatively insignificant, overshadowed by the far more well-attended and documented meetings, congresses, symposia and conferences that took place. The Sixth International Congress of Experimental Psychology, held in the summer in Geneva, for example, received extensive mention in the New York Times, while in May, Yale University hosted the meeting of the American Therapeutic Society, at which the methods of hypnosis and suggestion were still presented as the most effective ways to bring about cures of neuroses. He comments that at both of these events, the ideas and methods of Carl Jung were far more widely discussed than those of Freud.

\textsuperscript{37} Later a skeptic of Freud, G. Stanley Hall, an expert on the psychology of the adolescent mind, had by this time already begun experimenting with the use of psychoanalytic practices in his clinic and in his psychological experiments at Clark. The effects of the Clark conference are thoroughly examined by Richard Skues "Clark Revisited: Reappraising Freud in America," in John Burnham, ed. \textit{After Freud Left: Centennial Reflections on His 1909 Visit to the United States}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

\textsuperscript{38} James was not favorably disposed towards Freud's ideas, in part because of Freud's disdain for New Thought and other domestic psychotherapies that were achieving great successes in America. Nonetheless, he did feel that there was great promise in psychoanalysis, and he was much more inclined towards the methods, approaches and philosophies of Jung. For more on the Freud-James connections, see also Robert L. Simon, M.D., "Great Paths Cross: Freud and James at Clark University, 1909" \textit{American Journal of Psychiatry}, 124:6 (December, 1967), pp 831-834; Eugene Taylor, "William James and Sigmund Freud: 'The Future of Psychology Belongs to Your Work,'" \textit{Psychological Science}, 10:6 (November, 1999), 465-469

\textsuperscript{39} Emma Goldman, \textit{Living My Life}, (New York: Knopf, 1931), p 173. Goldman had not gone to Worcester to hear Freud, but was on tour as a speaker on her own political beliefs, and she had actually heard Freud lecture previously when she was a student in Vienna. While much has been made of Goldman's presence and her subsequent promotion of Freudian psychoanalysis as a tool of liberation, the question of whether or not she actually heard Freud in 1909 is raised by Skues, "Clark Revisited," 65,
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1899. According to his meticulous methods, the imagery, symbols and stories within dreams seemed worthy of evaluation as a means to reach a more profound and rationalized understanding of modern selfhood. Based upon insights gained recording the content of his own dreams (a practice he began in the 1890s), Freud recommended that dreamers recount their visions to an analyst through free association, providing the first interpretive layer. Although Freud agreed with many neurologists that "nerve stimulus" and "bodily stimulus" could provoke dreams, he felt that it only influenced this initial, superficial or ‘manifest’ content of dreams, which was not at all the same as their ‘latent’ meaning, which lurked in the deeper strata of the unconscious mind and memory. The ostensible content of nightly visions were rendered into symbols or distorted images by the censoring conscience, and ‘hidden’ from waking awareness.

By means of such ‘editorializing,’ potentially disturbing thoughts—such as ‘inappropriate’ desires and sexual urges—were concealed from direct view, lest the dreamer’s sense of moral order be violated and the night’s essential rest disturbed. To divine the latent symbols that revealed the meaning of their dreams, a trained professional equipped with Freud’s psychoanalytic would provide the next stage of analysis. All dreams revealed fundamental but repressed developmental drives and unconscious erotic wishes, Freud argued, and thus were an important tool for treating neuroses; once a
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patient’s inhibited desires were released, acknowledged, and accepted, and his or her dreams explained, neuroses would resolve in a cathartic moment of self-discovery.

In his original text, Freud noted many instances of dream-analysis in the Western tradition for whom “Success remains a matter of ingenious conjecture, of direct intuition, and for this reason dream interpretation has naturally been elevated to an art, which seems to depend upon extraordinary gifts…” But for Freud, the practice of dream analysis was not an apparently intuitive ‘art,’ however creatively applied. “I must insist,” he said, “that the dream actually has significance, and that a scientific procedure in dream interpretation is possible.”45 Insisting upon a professional role for trained psychoanalysts, this assertion challenged or contradicted many folkloric practices of dream interpretation, as only a skilled interpreter could successfully disentangle latent symbolism from manifest imagery. Therefore dream-symbol dictionaries or other guidebooks were of little use in accessing the underlying content of a dreamer’s personal memories, as the meaningful symbols in dreams were neither standardized nor universally applicable. Although Freud noted some dream-symbols referenced common human experiences, especially in regard to psychic and sexual development, the ultimate use of dream-interpretation as a therapeutic tool came from comparison of an individual’s dream-imagery to his or her unique, intimate and personal developmental history.

According to Freud, “[d]reams which are conspicuously innocent invariably embody coarse erotic wishes […] But many dreams which appear indifferent, and which would never be suspected of any particular significance, can be traced back, after analysis, to unmistakably sexual wish-feelings, which are often of an unexpected nature.”46 Freud would later arrive at more nuanced additions to his theories, acknowledging that sexual symbols did not account for all possible dream experiences. But his insistence upon their sexual origins were the ones on which most Americans focused in the early interpretation of Freudian theory, whether praising or condemning his analytical process.

Many established members of the medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic communities were surprised— and some incensed—by the rapidity and extent of

Freudian influence. Essays about psychoanalytic techniques and theories, as well as the kinds of knowledge they enabled, filled the issues of the *American Journal of Psychology* throughout 1910, supplemented by extensive editorial reviews and commentary. Some saw Freud’s methods as a threat to still-evolving psychological and neurological discourses, not only by promising cure through the seemingly ‘unscientific’ method of dream-analysis, but also because of their attention to sex. Noted psychotherapist and mind-cure specialist Boris Sidis lamented the “mad epidemic of Freudianism now invading America” at the December meeting of the American Psychological Association in 1909. In May 1910, Joseph Collins spoke to the American Neurological Association, protesting the amount of time his fellow scientists spent on Freudian theories, which for him amounted to “pornographic stories about pure virgins.” He continued, “it was time the Association took a stand against transcendentalism and supernaturalism and definitely crushed out Christian Science, Freudianism and all that bosh, rot and nonsense,” conflating many rising Spiritualist and psychotherapeutic practices as was common.

While the audience for most of these diatribes was limited to established professionals, some general American magazines expressed similar hostility to Freud’s apparently prurient concerns. *The Nation* published a negative review of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in May 1913: “our author has given evidence of a morbid tendency to over-emphasize the potency of erotic influences in all experience […] leading him to improbable and revolting explanations,” argued the reviewer, claiming “the layman certainly must see in this conception much that will appear to him fantastic.

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47 The *American Journal of Psychology* had been founded and was edited by G. Stanley Hall, who was in 1910 still a major promoter of Freudian ideas. See particularly *American Journal of Psychology* 21 (April, 1910), for a number of essays on dream-analysis and psychoanalytic methods, including Sandor Ferenczi, “The Psychological Analysis of Dreams;” Carl Jung, “The Association Method;” Ernest Jones, “Freud’s Theory of Dreams;” and even Freud himself, writing on “The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis.”

48 Sidis exemplifies the psychologists whose objections to Freud originated not only in his focus on sexuality, but also in his ‘negative’ outlook regarding the unconscious forces that determine consciousness. Sidis had studied with William James and James Jackson Putnam, both of whom advocated a more ‘transcendent’ or spiritual model of the unconscious mind than Freud. Sidis’ main objections were couched in these sexual terms, however. He argued that Freud’s methods approximated those of many “pious sexualists,” with whom he lumped members of the Oneida Colony and Mormons. See Hale, *Freud and the Americans*, (1971), p 300.

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if not absurd." The following year, Current Opinion published “An Indictment of a Great Scientist” in a review entitled How Psycho-Analysis has Obsessed the World With Sex. According to this author, Freud and his followers “[trace] everything in life to sex. The effect has been a world-wide delusion even in minds with a pretense to scientific attainment.” Condemning all Freudian approaches to dream interpretation as similarly absurd and reductive, “In all these dreams” the essayist wrote, “great use is made of symbolism; but the impression left on one’s mind by reading books on psycho-analysis is that a given object may be symbolic of anything one may want to make use of in interpreting the dream.” Psychoanalysis was little better than dirty parlor dream-divination, according to this critic.

Others associated psychoanalysis with a broad array of hostile, foreign forces that posed a threat to the fabric of traditional genteel American society. In a sweeping condemnation of contemporary trends in art and culture penned in 1914, F. X. Dercum somewhat frantically (and with much confusion) opposed all “advanced” movements such as psychoanalysis when he linked it with other trends: “occultism, symbolism, cubism, futurism, modernism [...]and the problem play.” Dercum’s hostility relates to endorsement of these developments among the American radical avant-garde; as his Symbolist tendencies were well established, and his promotion of Cubism and Fauvism at the Armory Show was highly publicized, Davies’ was strongly affiliated with that group. His art, however, resisted the censure Dercum’s attitude typified. In a 1913 review of his work at the Carroll Gallery, the New York Times praised Davies’s work for its “color values that stimulate the dullest mind and space composition that enlarges the mental

50 Review of The Interpretation of Dreams in “Science,” The Nation, (May 15, 1913), pp 503-505. In this reviewer’s analysis, part of what Freud’s book and method lacked was a sufficiently scientific outlook; “his mode of thought as displayed in this book is indicative of a total lack of the characteristics which lead to scientific advance. In it he portrays himself as one whose scientific judgment cannot be trusted, and this must lead even his most enthusiastic followers to question whether they are not overestimating the value of his work.”

51 “How Psycho-Analysis Has Obsessed the World with Sex,” Current Opinion, 56, (June, 1914), pp 441-442. In an extremely amusing juxtaposition —giving rise to wonder whether entirely unintended—the article on sexual obsession is illustrated with pictures of phallic submarines, which relate to the previous page’s essay concerning “Dreadnoughts of War.” The fact that the editor did not apparently realize the sexual connotations in this arrangement, or chose to ignore them, indicates how unaccustomed readers were to seeing images in terms of Freudian symbolism.

horizon.”

Although the individual pieces aren’t mentioned by name, one envisions images such as *Air, Light and Wave* (figure 5.7), in the journalist’s estimation of “figures in a rhythmical grouping […] seen through a veil of abstract lines and angles,” one of the artist’s early experiments with proto-Cubist form.

Dercum’s strident objections to psychoanalytic interest in sexual matters, as well as his disparaging remarks about modern art, took shape amid “the repeal of reticence.” As examined by Rochelle Gurstein, who borrowed the title of her book from sex-education reform advocate Agnes Repellier, this movement shaped many aspects of American culture in the progressive era, reflecting a changing cultural climate in which public attitudes favored a more candid discussion of sex, particularly among reform-minded intellectuals in New York and elsewhere.

Promotion of psychoanalysis in the mainstream media, and the caution with which its more radical ideas about personal liberation and sexuality were adopted, facilitated the rapidity with which psychoanalytic methods of dream interpretation were actively taken up by young intellectuals and the

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54 Although this piece is presently dated to 1914, Davies’s late 1913 exhibition at the Carroll Gallery, which inaugurated this new exhibition space, has not widely been recognized; although it is hard to determine which works were shown, the critic’s description of *Air, Light and Wave* is a reasonable match.
55 See Rochelle Gurstein, *The Repeal of Reticence: A History of America’s Cultural and Legal Struggles over Free Speech, Obscenity, Sexual Liberation, and Modern Art*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); and Agnes Repellier, “The Repeal of Reticence,” *The Atlantic*, (March 1914): 207-304. An increased willingness to talk about sex took place in the spirit of Progressive Era reform. Purity campaigns initiated in the late nineteenth century met and mingled with ‘social hygiene’ movements of the early twentieth, sharing the goal of ridding the world of vice by inviting more public discussion of sexuality. Reform groups whose interests were amalgamated in the 1914 establishment of the American Social Hygiene Association soon realized their advocacy of more candid discussion of sexuality had broad support from unusually diverse coalitions of interests. Feminists advocating birth control, social radicals and Greenwich Village intellectuals who endorsed ‘free love,’ medical professionals seeking to eradicate venereal diseases and church officials hoping to rid the world of the evils of prostitution all had a stake in greater frank talk about sex, overturning the previous century’s taboos and the ‘conspiracy of silence’ that had been maintained about sexuality. While the ostensible means many of these movements embraced was ‘education,’ and the growing discussion of sex took many manifestations, there was such widespread attention to the topic that one writer in 1913 announced that it was now “Sex O’Clock in America:” the essayist observed, “A Wave of sex hysteria and sex discussion seems to have invaded this country. Our former reticence on matters of sex is giving way to a frankness that would startle even Paris,” which caused the author to wonder, “Is this overemphasis on sex a symptom or a new moral awakening or is it a sign that the morbidity of the Old World is overtaking the New?” “Sex O’Clock in America,”*Current Opinion*, 55, (August, 1913), p 113. For a thorough analysis of the effect of Purity campaigns and other Progressive Era reforms, see Burnham, “The Progressive Era Revolution in American Attitudes Towards Sex,” (1973), pp 885-908; Hale, *Freud and the Americans*, (1971), pp 250-273, examines the various ways in which these campaigns embraced psychoanalytic ideas and methods.
members of the avant-garde in Greenwich Village. Mabel Dodge and her associates Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, and Sherwood Anderson all sought psychoanalytic treatments, hoping to gain a release from various inhibitions and neuroses; many wrote persuasively about their experiences. Dodge, a fellow promoter of the Armory Show, was initially treated for depression by psychoanalyst Smith Ely Jelliffe, and she felt great joy at learning about "the inner workings of my own nature" as she later recalled.

Stieglitz was also a vigorous advocate of Freudian psychoanalysis, recognizing how important it was for modern painters to address the new dimensions of psychologically defined reality, and he also read works by Havelock Ellis, Henri Bergson and Carl Jung extensively, endorsing their views on vitalism and sexual liberation. He intended his gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue to be, "a splendid laboratory to study psychology," fostering discussion of new ideas about dream-interpretation and analysis.

In the early 'teens, Stieglitz read The Interpretation of Dreams alongside his protégé Katharine Rhoades, and he encouraged her to explore her feelings by writing down her dreams. He later published an account of three of his own dreams in "One Hour's Sleep: Three Dreams" in his short-lived magazine 291 in March 1915. Stieglitz had planned to devote an issue of Camera Work to the art of mental patients who had undergone treatment with prominent psychoanalyst A. A. Brill, using the art in a manner analogous to dream-interpretation, to describe symbols of underlying desires and suppressed trauma. This, unfortunately, was never assembled or published.

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57 Dodge also sought treatment with A. A. Brill, with whom she engaged in a deep exploration of her dreams; translator of Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams, Brill was perhaps "the most famous psychoanalyst in New York" and was also a featured guest at several of her legendary Salons. See Sanford Gifford "The American Reception of Psychoanalysis," (1991), pp 134-135. Dodge published her own accounts of psychoanalytic treatments in articles she wrote for the Hearst newspaper syndicate. See Mabel Dodge Luhan, Movers and Shakers, (1936), pp 505-512. For more on Davies’s illustrations created for The Masses, see Rebecca Zurier, Art of the Masses: A Radical Magazine and its Graphics, 1911-1917, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

58 For the ways in which Alfred Stieglitz interpreted Freudian psychoanalysis in terms congruent with Henri Bergson and Havelock Ellis, consult Pyne, Modernism and the Feminine Voice, (2007), pp 126-128


60 For more on Stieglitz’ dreams, his understanding of psychoanalysis and his complicated relationship with Rhoades, who he was trying to seduce as much as promote, see Pyne, Modernism and the Feminine Voice, (2007), pp 131-135.
But other radical periodicals did devote attention to psychoanalysis. Eastman, editor of the socialist journal *The Masses* to which Davies contributed figural drawings in 1916 became a rapid convert to psychoanalysis, endorsing it not only as a means to self-knowledge, but also as a tool that could be used to foster liberation and social justice. In April 1915, Eastman exhorted his readers to look at Freud’s writing as a vital tool through which modern consciousness could be understood. He urged, “it is long past time to say that his working hypothesis of the Unconscious Mind, and the effects of repressed impulses that linger there, forms the ground plan, not only of the psychopathology, but of a great part of the Wisdom of Life for future men.”

When he arrived in Greenwich Village, essayist and literary critic Floyd Dell found that many forms of popular psychoanalysis had firmly taken root, from word-assocation games to amateur dream-interpretation. Indeed in 1915 he helped popularize these ideas even more, writing “Speaking of Psychoanalysis, the New Boon for Dinner Table Conversationalists,” for *Vanity Fair*. Given the popular reach of this publication, which stretched beyond the sophisticated enclaves of Greenwich Village bohemia to address readers in more middlebrow settings as well, dream-interpretation inspired a growing number of Americans, and psychotherapeutic professionals drew more patients.

Although Davies may not have been aware of the Clark conference and its immediate aftermath, it is likely that he encountered at least a few of the many references to the new methods of dream analysis in such magazines and newspapers that followed. Between 1910 and 1914, four articles were published on Freud alone and eleven

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61 A Davies drawing featuring a nearly nude male figure graced the cover of *The Masses* in August, 1916.
63 Floyd Dell, “Speaking of Psychoanalysis: The New Boon for Dinner-Table Conversationalists,” *Vanity Fair*, (December, 1915), p. 53. Calling psychoanalysis the “greatest discovery made by intellectual conversationalists since Bergson and the IWW,” Dell argued, “The psycho-analyst has a method, savoring somewhat of witchcraft. He has the patient tell him his dreams, and in them he reads the workings of those suppressed impulses, and inhibitions. It is more accurate to say that he makes the patient follow the various trains of thought suggested by the dream, until they lead to their goal—the suppressed desires which are fantastically symbolized in the dream itself […] which have been interfering with the health and happiness of the patient’s soul.”
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

concerning psychoanalysis in general; within the next four years that number expanded to 39 articles concerning its rising influence in American culture. The overwhelming majority of these involved explications of dream-analysis. Some were actively hostile to the sexual emphasis of strictly Freudian ideas, but many were favorably inclined towards dream-interpretation, emphasizing the novelty, rigor and modernity of the method: a rough sample of these includes Edward M. Weyer expanding on “The New Art of Interpreting Dreams” in Forum, (May 1911); H. Addington Bruce discussing “The Nature of Dreams” and “Dreams and the Supernatural” in two 1911 issues of Outlook (August and December); the Reverend Samuel McComb, co-founder of the popular therapeutic Emmanuel Movement, addressing “The New Interpretation of Dreams” in The Century (September 1912); and Edwin Tenney Brewster presenting “Dreams and Forgetting: New Discoveries in Dream Psychology” in McClure’s one month later (October 1912). Reaching a broad audience of educated, predominantly middle-class American readers, these feature stories spoke in easygoing, informal language to a presumably mainstream audience, rendering the more radical aspects of psychoanalytic theory palatable and safe. Most of these were somewhat vague about Freud’s more complex ideas, and were euphemistic about sexual drives and instinct. Aside from few references to ‘libidinal impulses,’ sexuality was commonly played down, or framed in terms of romance, love and the family.

65 For these figures, see Hale, p 397. If Freud was not given direct credit for these ideas, his significance is invoked in many essays. For valuable overviews of the ways in which Freudian theories were accepted and adapted for American audiences, see F. H. Mathews, “The Americanization of Sigmund Freud: Adaptations of Psychoanalysis before 1917,” Journal of American Studies 1:1 (April, 1967), pp 39-62.

66 The authors of these essays demonstrate a range of interests and professional affiliations: Edward Moffet Weyer, professor of philosophy and psychology at Washington and Jefferson College, published texts on the psychology of sleep; H. Addington Bruce was a well-regarded journalist and psychological adviser to the Associated Newspapers, specializing in psychic phenomena in addition to academic psychology; Rev. Samuel McComb was co-founder of Boston’s Emmanuel Movement, a self-help oriented popular psychotherapy akin to New Thought; and Edwin Tenney Brewster was a writer of diverse books about popular science, and a frequent contributor to McClure’s.

67 Forum, for example, under the editorial guidance of Mitchell Kennerley from 1910-1916, was a magazine devoted to “serious interests of the American mind,” with an appeal to a general readership and an emphasis on literature and art; it published some of the younger Greenwich Village modern writers and maintained a reputation for excellence in its writing, a devotion to reform and embrace of liberal causes. It was recommended in school and college libraries for the clearness of its writing. See Mott, A History of American Magazines, pp 511-519.

68 Attempting to frame Freudian ideas in terms more acceptable to American audiences who remained uneasy with sexuality, A. A. Brill made a distinction in Freudian language when he “reproache[d] Freud’s
As Davies continued to attract the attention of favorable critics in and beyond the environs of New York, readers continued to encounter numerous references to his identity as a painter of dreams, sometimes in the very same newspapers and magazines that discussed psychoanalytic methods. But as they commonly addressed the diverse and creative functions of memory and the human ‘imagination,’ references to psychoanalytic dream interpretation in popular magazines had greater bearing on how Davies’s viewers approached his paintings than strictly Freudian methods. Weyer’s 1911 *Forum* article, entitled “The New Art of Interpreting Dreams,” is typical, condensing material that the writer, a practicing psychologist, had gleaned from the pages of the *American Journal of Psychology*, as well as his own apparent familiarity with Freud’s *Die Traumdeutung*. Minimizing references to sex, the writer championed Freud’s scientific scrutiny of dream content, and encouraged readers to put their own dreams to the test, keeping dream-diaries in search of self-knowledge through acceptance of concealed memories and their wishes. Weyer noted that dreams:

> are composed of fragments that are preferably either very recent in origin or else very old and very familiar. The old often emerge from our early childhood; the familiar are derived from that common fund of experiences whence come our proverbs, myths, legends and such other symbolism as each succeeding generation inherits from its forbears.

Dreams are like metaphors, he commented, that conceal their true nature in the ‘disguise’ we choose to bring to them, latent content fusing with dramatic tropes and familiar themes. He observed, how dreaming collapsed real memories with obscure references, to create novel stories—ones that resembled staged dramas—out of the daily activities of consciousness. Davies’s frieze-like, even theatrical arrangements of figures such as *Isle of Destiny* (figure 5.8) echo in response to such a description of dreaming’s nightly showcase of memory and myth.

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American critics for failing to understand that by “sex” he means all that we mean by “love.”” Quoted by Warner Fite, “Psycho-Analysis and Sex Psychology,” *The Nation*, 103, (August 10, 1916), p 127.  
69 *The New York Times* frequently contained short mention of Davies’ exhibitions, and discussion of his role in the Armory Show was particularly extensive throughout 1913. But mention of his identity as a ‘dreamer’ also appeared in *Current Opinion, Forum* and other magazines devoted to analysis of cultural issues in America.  
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

In establishing a deep cultural ground for the role of the ‘collective unconscious,’ Weyer cast psychoanalytic theories in more ostensibly metaphysical terms, fusing Freud’s ideas with those advocated by Jung, as did many other popularizers of psychoanalysis. In fact, the very first references to the new methods of “psychanalysis [sic],” as it was called, were not made in discussion of Freud, but appeared in a 1912 *New York Times* profile of Jung, who returned to the United States three years after the Clark Conference, lecturing on his own psychoanalytic methods at Fordham University. While Freud’s name and influence was undeniably growing by this time, Jung’s ideas about the psychotherapeutic value of symbolic ‘association’ were perhaps even more widely accepted among American psychological professionals, not only before 1909 but lasting until his break from Freud in 1913.

In his lectures and the *New York Times* profile Jung suggested ways in which Americans could benefit from the spread of psychoanalysis, setting his beliefs in distinction to Freud’s. While the two shared many common interests and methods, employing discursive ‘associations’ in therapy, Jung differed from Freud in his views on the significance of sexual ‘trauma’ in early childhood: Jung believed that Freud’s initial theories about the unconscious were far too limited, too focused on sex, and too negative. Rather than merely addressing how repressed emotions and desires generated...

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71 Jung’s ideas about the psychological meaning and operations of mythological images in the phylogenetic layers of the unconscious were in the process of formation between 1909 and 1913, initially published as *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* in 1911 and 1912, although he did not begin to use the term “collective unconscious” until later in his career. For more on this issue, see Shamdasani, *Jung Contra Freud*, (2011), p xiv. Jung was deeply inspired during these years by his introduction to Bergson’s thoughts about the élan vital, which Jung likened to the post-Freudian libido. See Pete Gunter, “Bergson and Jung,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 43:4, (Oct.-Dec. 1982), pp 635-652.


73 Jung’s book on psychoanalytic methods in the treatment of schizophrenia, *The Psychology of Dementia Praecox* (1906), translated by F. Peterson and A. A. Brill, (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publ. Co.1909), was translated and published four years before Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*. Given the highly specialized medical audience towards whom this book was oriented, however, this text had far less appeal for lay readers. A. A. Brill went on to become one of the foremost practitioners of psychoanalytic therapies in New York. See Eugene Taylor, “Jung Before Freud, Not Freud Before Jung: The Reception of Jung’s Work in American Psychoanalytic Circles Between 1904 and 1909,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 43 (1998), pp 97-114, who notes, “Articles by and about [Jung] appeared in every volume of either the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* or the *Psychological Bulletin* beginning in 1905.” And he discusses the ways in which “Jung was the foremost exponent of the symbolic hypothesis in the twentieth century [...] in the tradition of the late nineteenth century psychologies of transcendence.”

74 Taylor, “Jung Before Freud, Not Freud Before Jung,” p. 98, argues that Jung’s ideas found a more ready and willing audience among many American psychological professionals because he was less strident about the sexual content of dreams. Moreover, Jung insisted more fervently than Freud that the symbols in
neurotic symptoms, Jung believed that psychoanalysis might reveal deeper, more universal and collective aspects of both conscious and unconscious experience. Like William James, he emphasized mythic and visionary aspects of the mind’s psychic realm, deriving in part from his doctoral research on occult phenomena. Despite his own personal biases and limitations, Jung’s was at root an optimistic and even transcendental model of the unconscious; Americans were encouraged to seek evidence of ‘hidden motives and impulses’ as a form of both personal and collective empowerment. For Jung, both individual and collective self-knowledge offered the greatest benefit of the psychoanalytic method, and was its primary goal: “I study the individual to understand the race, and the race to understand the individual,” he claimed. Davies shared such interests, scribbling in his notebooks about the transcendent emotional power of art, which “contains all of the experience of the giver—if spontaneous—the sum of all his culture.”

Jung also offered more useful approaches to Davies’s dreams than Freud as he regarded mythic dreams as signs of profound connection between ancient and modern minds; their symbols and stories originated equally in the ‘primordial images’ that came from universal themes in allegory, folklore and collective fantasy. “All the fruits of literature, all the myths of the ancients, serve to reveal the hidden influences of man and society,” Jung argued in his Times profile. Dreams were deeply meaningful, he argued, as they had the potential to show the primitive, libidinal instincts that underlie our deepest human behavioral motives—ones from which modern Americans were becoming...
all too distant. But as Jung eventually would argue, universal archetypes prevailed over any individual symbols, as they accounted for common underlying psychic and emotional phenomena; they were ‘sexual’ only in the loose term that might be called ‘generational,’ or relating to a life force, and to the soul’s ideal and complementary form in the animus and anima. ⁸⁰

Moreover, in Jungian thought, dreams do not ‘disguise’ their meaning, as they are complete in themselves. Instead of dwelling on fragmentary symbols, Jungian approaches addressed the entire dream-trajectory; they might well be personally relevant, but in their deepest function, dreams were an imaginative form of unconscious cognition shared across culture and time. This had bearing on how Jungian ideas might relate to a figurative painting that attempted to unify its ambiguous form with equally ambiguous content, such as the war-like combat depicted in Davies’s *Girdle of Ares*, (figure 5.9). Here, an archetypal struggle for survival is conducted via a profusion of male bodies enacting schematized, ritualized gestures that allowed Davies to explore the nearly-naked human form from many angles and vantage points.

Freud had different views about the role dream-analysis might play in revealing our deepest evolutionary origins. Although he asserted that the imagery and symbolism that “lie behind our myths and legends,” possessed universal significance for humankind, he insisted that dreams were fundamentally subjective. ⁸¹ In his approach—at least at this early stage—Freud acknowledged that certain common motifs in dreams were the result of ‘archaic residue,’ but were meaningful only when no other incident in the dreamer’s life (as consciously recounted in analysis) could explain ambiguous elements. Myth nonetheless informed many of Freud’s ideas, demonstrated via skillfully employed analogy and metaphor. References to themes in literature with which many readers were familiar—such as his elemental theory of the Oedipus complex in human psychological

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⁸⁰ Jung was developing, discussing and publishing many of these ideas in 1911 and 1912, in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, translated into English in 1916. In this work, Jung argued for the presence and influence of longstanding myths on the imagination, suggesting powerful connections between the imagistic thought of children, ‘prehistoric’ peoples and contemporary individuals. While he distinguished between directed thinking and fantasy, the former being more logical, scientific and ‘advanced’ than the latter, his ideas alluded to universally valid psychological principles based upon shared mythic themes. See C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle, (New York: Yard and Co., 1916).

development—legitimated Freud’s approach to understanding the unconscious. Thus, while analysis of mythic aspects of dreaming suggested some elements of continuity with—but developmental growth beyond—prior stages of human development, it also asserted the cultural value of psychoanalytic dream-analysis.

Davies also demonstrated his erudition and established broad cultural significance for his work by deriving some subject matter from Classical myth, in works such as *Hylas and the Nymphs* (figure 5.10). But rather than grounding these in common narratives, Davies’s mythical interpretations remained elusive and individual: “For motive he has gone to myth,” observed Huneker in 1913, wondering “But what myth? [...] his myths are his own.” 82 As meaningful form in his art was situated within Davies’s visionary world, he and his critics sought ways of encouraging his viewers to share that experience, deriving their own meaning from his ambiguities; evoking the timeless eternal verities and collective value of myth was an essential way to nurture such a response.

Freud’s primary concern with myth was similar: he did not attend to their unfolding drama as much as their symbolic cultural resonance. Thus in his approach to dream analysis it was not the totality of any linear story that held his particular interest; rather, he considered the separate parts of the dream the most significant: the images, objects and actions that detailed analysis would scrutinize, seeking symbolic keys to unlocking memories, particularly of childhood desires and their deep repression. Thus, the first layer of Freudian analytical ‘dream work’ involved understanding the mechanisms by which the meaningful aspects of dreams were generated in the unconscious through the operations of displacement, condensation, visual representation (symbolization) and revision (the narrative presentability of a dream in the waking state). 83

Some of Davies’s paintings seemed to demonstrate analogous mechanisms in the mind in order to analyze them visually: in *Hylas and the Nymphs*, considerable spatial and temporal confusion engenders a dream-like viewing response that renders it difficult

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82 Huneker, *The Pathos of Distance*, (1913), p 119.
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

to bring into a coherent whole. At upper left, we view a distant ship in full sail at the horizon of an ocean, as if we look across the surface of the sea at Hercules’ legendary vessel, but swirling, decorative arabesques of paint make the vista more schematic than real; fish hover, apparently in mid-air, at lower left. Above and to the right, Hylas appears in an extremely inelegant pose, face down on a rocky outcropping: his face is invisible as he attends to the allure of a beckoning naked naiad below. She gestures up to him, but is proportionally much larger, and the limits of the canvas cut off her lower legs. No clear relationship to gravity or perspective allows us to understand how these two figures relate according to logical rules; in like fashion, a group of dancing naiads at right is also inexplicably arranged. Raising their arms in graceful poses, their swaying bodies suggest the undulations of water, yet they stand firmly anchored on the ground as if on a stage; more fish hover in the air—or water—above them.

Davies reduces the story to a schematic diagram of constituent parts, calling upon our knowledge of the myth’s context to resolve his imaginative but somewhat awkward spatial solutions. Yet, showing no clear linear sequence and no intelligible spatial rules, the painting exemplifies the condensation of time, collapsing of discrete elements, and symbolization typical of Freudian descriptions of dream experiences, demanding from viewers the interpretive effort of solving its compositional puzzles. The fatal erotic allure of nymphs and mermaids—their attraction ever compromised by the impossibility of living and breathing underwater—is evoked in the painting’s irreconcilable oddities. But what this reference might mean for a viewer was left up to his or her individual determination. Such creative problem solving was essential to effective psychoanalytic dream-interpretation, but exceeded the limits of any simplistic or conventional mythical correspondence.

Although Jungian and Freudian approaches both offered means by which art could be evaluated for psychoanalytic content, albeit in differing terms, few critics applied these theories directly to their interpretation of Davies’s work or its symbolism; psychoanalytic analysis of art did not become widespread until after Surrealist artists had made Freudian theory a more direct part of their creative process.4 Examination of

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4 Artists in the Stieglitz circle embraced psychoanalytic concepts like the libido, as did their associated critics, but Freudian terminology only emerged more distinctly in art criticism as his ideas were articulated.
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

Freudian symbols seemed particularly unsuited to an artist who was so remotely idealistic, hermetic and private. Yet the rich complexity of Jungian theories did offer the potential of some helpful tools: a few critics commented upon the ways Davies’s work seemed to resist any kind of simple analysis or interpretation. In his review of the artist’s 1909 exhibition at Macbeth’s Gallery, Huneker observed, “Transfiguring imagination Davies possesses [...] His art is often a glass obscure for us, but there is no sign of faltering.”

Similar issues regarding the inscrutability of artistic temperament and the imagination, and the vital creative importance of “The Unconscious in Art,” were taken up by critic Benjamin de Casseres in 1911 in Alfred Steiglitz’ journal Camera Work. While he does not directly discuss Davies, De Casseres forcefully stated, “A work of art that we can understand on sight is mediocre or worse. Genius stirs our ignorance first. That which comes out of the deeps must make its appeal to the deeps.” In a manner congruent with Davies’s paintings, and in terms that strike a chord with the ‘depths’ of Jungian psychoanalysis, he commented:

Imagination is the dream of the Unconscious. [...] Out of the head of the artist issues all of the beauty that is transferred to canvas, but the roots of his imagination lie deeper than his personality. The soul of the genius is the safety vault of the race... And the product of genius overwhelms us because it has collaborated with the Infinite.

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86 By this stage of his career, Davies had become an acquaintance of Steiglitz, a frequent visitor to 291, and was very likely an avid reader of Camera Work, the leading American journal in which discussions of contemporary currents in modern art, philosophy, criticism, and aesthetics were published.
87 Benjamin De Casseres, “The Unconscious in Art,” Camera Work, 36, (October, 1911), p 17. This same issue of Camera Work contained an excerpt from the writings of Henri Bergson in which he discusses the role of ‘intuition’ in the creative process, setting up important affinities with the content of Davies’s paintings.
88 De Casseres, “The Unconscious in Art,” (1911), p 17. He also noted that the dream was “the realm of the gorgeous, monstrous hallucinations of the Unconscious,” which sits less easily with Davies’s work; nonetheless, the emphasis in his essay was on imaginative art’s fundamental beauty rather than any ‘monstrous’ qualities.
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

The conflation of imagination, creativity and genius was one with which Davies was profoundly associated. By 1913, James Gibbons Huneker was associating very comparable ideas more directly with Davies in his essay in *The Pathos of Distance*, claiming, “The mental processes of an artist at work [...] always contain an incommensurable quality.” 89 These references invited readers to consider how Davies’s dreaming imagination might be best analyzed for signs of the deepest, mysterious operations of consciousness, rather than scrutinized for personal symbolism. 90 Addressing these layers of human experience—by looking at art or by entering psychoanalysis—offered new ways in which American culture might find release from its limitations and restrictions.

II. Puritanism, Primitivism and Paganism

Many young radicals believed psychoanalysis—in its comingled Freudian and Jungian terms—offered the best means to combat the forces of materialism and the cultural backwardness of American philistinism. 91 While discussion of Freudian methods in psychological journals focused on the treatment of neurosis by cathartic revelation of dreaming’s hidden symbolic meaning, Jung took a broader approach, diagnosing not just individual ills but America’s cultural problems, making recommendations for its ‘cure.’ “America is Facing Its Most Tragic Moment,” ran the 1912 *Times* headline, followed by Jung’s observation: “It will either master its mighty forces or be mastered by them [...] Control prudery and you will be the greatest nation the world has known.” 92 For Jung, ‘prudery’ was equivalent to Americans’ self-

89 Huneker, *The Pathos of Distance*, (1913), p 112.
92 “America is Facing Its Most Tragic Moment,” *New York Times*, (September 29, 1912). Jung’s New York lectures were subsequently published in English in various installments between 1913 and 1915, largely in the specialized journal the *Psychoanalytic Review* which had been founded by Smith Ely Jelliffe, one of the leading proponents and practitioners of psychoanalysis and dream interpretation in New York. A thoroughgoing analysis of the American reception of Jung in the medical establishment and the popular press has yet to be written, but Jung’s prominent profile in the *New York Times* suggests his growing reputation, one that was for a moment at least, on par with that of Freud, and anticipated the American reception of Bergson on the occasion of his lectures the following year. See Shamdasani, *Jung Contra Freud*, (2011), xviii.
censorship, the lingering Victorian moral strictures of the nineteenth century, traits American cultural critic Van Wyck Brooks labeled in 1908 as "Puritanism." In his 1910 essay "Puritanism: Its Grandeur and Its Shame," published in Stieglitz' journal Camera Work, Sadakichi Hartmann expressed comparable misgivings about the repressive effects of American reticence, propriety and prudery: "Puritanism deals out [...] punishment to unfettered poetic souls," he claimed. "It is the old fight of reason against imagination." This state of affairs was not only "destructive to art and all higher intellectual pursuits," but it tainted any allusion to natural passions and sensual bodies with lewdness, such that "The painter does not dare to paint a nude." Davies, painting hundreds of nudes in natural settings, demonstrated opposition to restrictive, disapproving Puritan sensibilities by exploring 'primitivism' in many guises. Nonetheless, he tempered any reference to his figures' unbridled sexuality, clothing some of his male nudes in loincloths.

If he was cautious about fully sexualized bodies, Davies shared with Jung, Brooks, and Hartmann opposition to American reticence about sensual, emotional and 'natural' instincts, and the drive towards self-denial that seemingly governed the country's character and threatened its overall mental health. As the New York Times journalist observed in the 1912 Jung profile, "America is the most emotional country, and the country of the greatest self-control. The effort to maintain self-control in the face of brutal instinct makes us a land of neurasthenics." The writer implied that all 'psychanalytic' methods—which predominantly focused on dream-analysis in the popular literature—would serve to reveal the underlying unconscious motives that lie "below the threshold of that part of the mind which we recognize as conscious," releasing the stranglehold of 'prudery.'

For Jung, the key to this release was by seizing the "libido." But, as just as Davies moderated the raw sexuality of his figures, Jung distinguished his own use of this concept from Freud's explicitly sexual terms, capturing its dynamism when he declared; "There is

95 "America is Facing Its Most Tragic Moment," (1912).
96 "America is Facing Its Most Tragic Moment," (1912).
only so much vital energy in any human being. We call that in our work the libido.”97 Davies’s nudes exist in a timeless realm of fantasy where they can be safely contained and explained by means of myth and the Jungian ‘libido.’ Indeed, this was a key to the persuasive appeal of Jung’s ideas and Davies’s art alike. Whereas a cornerstone of Freudian theories about dreams involved the mechanism of ‘repression,’ in which instincts, desires, memories and thoughts, particularly sexual ones, were forced out of consciousness because of the shame they produce, Davies’s dreamy nudes—demonstrating liberated nakedness as well as refined aestheticism—did not readily foster shameful associations. His pictures of healthy, mature bodies in close proximity—male and female—celebrate natural, unself-conscious physical interaction.

Jung also argued that Americans would free themselves from the fear, the obsessions and the unequal emotional relations between the sexes that served to make people neurotic and unhappy, their marriages unequal and their lives unfulfilled only by acknowledging ‘brute’ instincts and innate drives. These ideas extended profound interest to many Progressive-era “New Women,” such as the progressive female collectors who were some of Davies’s most ardent patrons, and it resonated with many of the free-thinking intellectuals in his artistic and intellectual circles. Mary Mowbray-Clarke, co-founder of New York’s Sunwise Turn bookstore, was one such woman, whose anarchist political sentiments made her an advocate of free love and equal partnership in marriage.98 A good friend of Davies, she hired the artist to coordinate the ‘post-impressionist’ decoration of the shop’s interior in 1916.99

97 Indeed, Jung carefully distinguished his methods and theories from Freud, claiming “If I ... recognize the complex mechanisms of dreams ... it does not at all mean that I ascribe to sexual trauma in youth an exclusive significance, as Freud apparently does; still less does it mean that I place sexuality so preponderantly in the foreground, or that I even ascribe to it the psychological universality which Freud postulates under the impression of the very powerful role that sexuality plays in the psyche.” Jung, The Psychology of Dementia Praecox, (1909).
99 See Perlman, L.L.A., (1998), pp 205-07, on Davies’s friendship with Mary and John Mowbray-Clarke, who were neighbors of the artist in Congers, New York; and pp 277-278 on the decorations of the Sunwise Turn. Perlman speculates that Davies and Mary Mowbray-Clarke had a longstanding affair, dating from her days at the Art Students’ League, which was corroborated in conversation between myself and Niles Meriwether Davies, Jr. in June, 2012, although this is based on no concrete evidence that I have been able to find.
But her artistic tastes and endorsement of sexual liberation distinguished her as a member of the revolutionary fringe; promotion of the Jungian ‘libido’ could be equally suspect. Just as Freud’s psychoanalytic ideas could be received with skepticism and scorn as they entered into mainstream American discussion on the grounds of their ‘improper’ obsession with sex, so were many of Jung’s. Professor of Philosophy Warner Fite, writing in *The Nation*, reviewed Jung’s recently translated *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido* in August 1916, with the attention-grabbing headline “Psycho-Analysis and Sex-Psychology.” Fite condemned Jung’s “theory of myth and poetry” in which every symbol, and each instance of artistic or poetic imagery is “the expression of a motive not merely sexual, but incestuous,” and he dismissed all psychoanalytic methods—confusing Jung’s ideas with Freud’s—on the grounds that “their illustrations of the motive fundamental to all human wishes are of the same order: not merely sexual, but immoral or obscene.”

Yet, for many others Jungian ideas represented science, professionalism and the leading edge of modern ideas, ones that specifically challenged Fite’s seemingly repressive ideologies and outmoded Victorian morality: the ‘prudery’ that Jung vigorously denounced. Floyd Dell also wrote about Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious* in 1916 in *The Masses*, promoting it as an important means of understanding the soul’s personal symbolism. He affirmed the value of knowing one’s dreams beyond the limitations of Freudian analysis; “With the revisions of Jung we have in sharper outlines cleared of the labyrinthine detail of dream-interpretation and the monotonous insistence on sexual matters a revolutionizing science of man’s psychical life: a science which explains the obscure causes and effects of his acceptance or refusal of the difficulties of life.” Individuals like Dell hoped to find a pathway to greater “health and happiness” by confronting “the truth about oneself” and embracing the libidinal “animal instincts” that governed all human desires, not just sex. In their crude outlines and jagged passages of paint, such as its coarse handling in *Primitive Man*, (figure 5.23) Davies’s images alluded to these underlying forces.

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102 Dell, “Speaking of Psychoanalysis,” *Vanity Fair*, (1915) used all of these phrases.
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But even supporters of psychoanalysis saw an undercurrent of salacious interest in people’s private lives in the interpretation of dreams.\textsuperscript{103} Author Hutchins Hapgood, a habitué at Dodge’s salons, later recalled, “psychoanalysis had been overdone to such an extent that nobody could say anything about a dream [...] without his friends’ winking at one another and wondering how he could have been so indiscreet.”\textsuperscript{104} This has bearing on the ways in which Davies went to great lengths to conceal his own unconventional marital circumstances, as well as the veiling of some of his figures. If analysis of dreams necessitated discussions of concealed sexual impulses, many people, not just Davies, might have been tempted to self-censor, or to hide any potentially revelatory material behind layers of obscurity.

The artist thus offered critics and viewers little help interpreting his dreams, preferring to maintain his aura of guarded remoteness, enhancing his work’s cryptic meaning in oblique titles such as \textit{Gates of the Morning—Release} (figure 5.2). Here, in front of a deep Cezannesque landscape, the loincloth-wearing male figures in the foreground point their arms towards the sky and distant mountain, one holding up a delicate blossoming branch. The urgency of their gestures beg our sympathetic understanding of their conduct, as we marvel at their companions who float in the breeze; the painting’s lush pastoral setting and golden color sustain a long, lingering look. As a 1915 review of Davies acknowledged, in the creation of his work the artist “took a deeply personal view of life, brought to us gifts of what had pleased him and stirred his emotions, looked into his soul before he created and [...] entered into the region of the painted myth with his own ideas to establish.” But the nature of this ‘personal view’ is sidestepped, as the critic observed, the obscure subjects, “[mean] something to the artist and to the public is a cryptogram. Yet that public has no difficulty in responding to the imaginative appeal of the lovely work.”\textsuperscript{105} The curiosity engendered by the painting’s ‘cryptic’ imagery fed an innate drive towards human connection and understanding; we

may long to feel the weightless freedom that the bodies on the right enjoy, but can only ever do so in our own dreams.

Davies continued to tread carefully into matters of sexual license, taking care not to let his viewers venture too far into the dangerous waters of uninhibited erotic outpourings, as he negotiated the fragile boundary between conservatism and innovation in evolving modern taste. In many works of the ‘oughts and ‘teens, he depicted similar groups of nude figures, but was extremely cautious about how he chose to represent and contextualize them: while some figures show supple physicality and vigor, others remain ethereal figments of the imagination. Works like *Forest Bathers* (figure 5.11), and *Moral Law, A Line of Mountains* (figure 5.12) demonstrate degrees of the artist’s caution, rendering lithe, nude male bodies in graceful but artificial poses as highly estheticized elements of design. Despite the formal debt they owe to painters such as Cezanne—a precedent recognized by Huneker—the large and prominently naked males in *Forest Bathers* seem not-quite-real, as if pasted onto the surface rather than standing firmly anchored in the landscape, they adopt seemingly effortless poses. Despite the title’s weighty, provocative allusion to stricture and consequence, in *Moral Law*, the naked male figures are too distant to be seen clearly; their stately poses conjure the ‘law’ Davies invokes by juxtaposing their compositional rhythms with the landscape’s contours. One wonders how the artist evaluated the morality implied by these figures against his own behavior.

In *Crescendo* (figure 5.13), Davies similarly emphasized abstract rhythm as much as physicality in his line of posing female nudes; painted around 1909, it demonstrates the frieze-like compositions that had become characteristic of his signature style. Here, seven slender, naked female bodies are positioned across a shallow foreground plane; behind them a darkening, distant mountainous landscape rises towards a cloud-filled sky. Two of the women are seated, while the other five lift up outstreched arms, extend their legs, pivot their torsos and arch their backs, exploring a range of embodied motion. Disposed unevenly across the canvas, like syncopated beats, each figure adopts a different pose, momentarily arrested as if in the midst of a continuous, rhythmic pageant. Their slightly elongated proportions not only call to mind the graceful gestures of dance, but arranged as they are to heighten the rising and falling lines of the composition, they
evoke the cadences and melodies of a musical phrase, an association enhanced by the title’s reference to intensifying volume. Huneker called these “radiant creatures, unclothed and in their right mind, moving in processional rhythms to some unknown goal.” Yet, Huneker also praised the artist’s keen attention to bodily form; “his studies of the nude display a mastery of tactile values and of [...] movement that are astonishing.”106

The compositions of all three works also show the influence of Swiss Symbolist Ferdinand Hodler (figure 5.14) an artist favored by Huneker and by members of the European avant-garde.107 Stressing the formal value of lyrical beauty, the linearity of Davies’s graceful nude bodies makes for a diverting composition; these diversionary tactics do not encourage his viewers to linger over-long on their erotic allure, although it is unquestionably present. Their stately tempo of their strangely aimless gestures evoke and long-forgotten ceremonies, while their silhouetted poses seem lifted off of the sides of a Greek vase; Davies collected books on Red- and Black-Figured pottery, as well as on other Greek art and sculpture, to which he seemingly turned for inspiration (figure 5.15).108 Deflecting attention away from any impropriety, but rendering a subject still daring for the time,109 Davies’s nudes found favor in the eyes of a growing number of

107 Perlman claims that Davies became familiar with Hodler during one of his European excursions, although offers no corroborating evidence; several of Davies’s friends, such as Huneker, were familiar with the Swiss artist, however, as his influence was growing in Europe. See Huneker, “Max Liebermann and Some Phases of Modern German Art,” in Ivory Apes and Peacocks, (New York: Scribner’s, 1915).
Hodler’s work was included in the 1912 Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne, which Davies used as a template for the Armory Show. Although Davies was unable to travel to see the show in Germany, he obtained a copy of the exhibition catalog, and used it to select the work of German artists for the New York exhibition. At the Armory, two works by Hodler were shown as well as Davies’s Moral Law—A Line of Mountains. See 1913 Armory Show: 50th Anniversary Exhibition, (1963), pp 33 and 192.
108 Anderson Galleries, Books on the Fine Arts: The Library of Mr. Arthur B. Davies, Sold by his order, Tuesday afternoon, October Fifth, (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1926). This auction catalog lists at least three books on Greek painted vessels, and many more on Greek and Roman art that constituted part of the artist’s personal library, sold before he gave up his studio. Davies often—but not always—followed Greek convention by presenting female figures in a paler color than males.
109 Nudes, while increasingly visible in American art, were subject to occasional censorship and could still provoke scandal. In 1906, for example, Anthony Comstock, a postal inspector and founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, raided the offices of the Art Students’ League and confiscated all copies of its journal, in which ten paintings of nudes were reproduced. He arrested a female clerk for “‘giving away, showing, offering to give away, or having in her possession a certain obscene, indecent, filthy and disgusting book’ in violation of the act for suppressing the trade in improper literature and pictures.” See “Art Students League Raided by Comstock And its Magazine Seized by the Purifier as ‘Indecent,’” The New York Times, (August 3, 1906).
progressive female patrons, such as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who purchased *Crescendo*.\(^{110}\)

In 1913, the *New York Times* critic praised Davies’s show inaugurating the new Carroll Gallery—co-founded by two of the artist’s devoted patrons, John Quinn and Mrs. Charles C. Rumsey—soundly endorsing Davies’s moderate, estheticized eroticism; he noted especially the “intensity of the artist’s interrogation of the human form.”\(^{111}\) Addressing work like *Design—Birth of Tragedy*, (figure 4.16, exhibited at the Armory Show) he wrote that Davies’s “drawings of men wrestling cannot be surpassed for vitality and movement of line,” while in his nude women “the breath of life seems truly to inform the learned modeling.”\(^{112}\) Alfred Stieglitz, full of the spirit of sexual liberation that psychoanalysis sanctioned, disagreed, and in frankly sexual terms: in a letter he wrote to Georgia O’Keeffe, he later recalled, “the show gave me the creeps. I felt as if I heard whisperings coming from the wall […] felt a painful sensation of suppression […] an incomplete erection.” Observing Davies’s strategic use of loincloths—which he found extremely amusing—he commented, “Davies originally had virility,” but lamented how “America had kept it from developing.”\(^{113}\) Stieglitz particularly remembered how the show demonstrated the limitations of Davies’s patronage. He wrote “I roared with laughter & knew at once what ailed the art of Davies—Males nude the ‘police’ would not permit in ladies’ society and Davies is supported by women primarily—A male with all that makes a man male would have kept the women—the type supporting Davies—

\(^{110}\) Gertrude Whitney would have been fully aware of this lingering controversy. One of the wealthiest and most well-connected women in America, was an artist as well as dedicated patron of American modern painters; she owned a large number of Davies’s works in addition to *Crescendo*, many of which formed a key part of the collection she assembled as the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1931. The museum was an outgrowth of her Greenwich Village exhibition space and salon, *The Whitney Studio Club*, founded in 1914.


\(^{112}\) Ibid. Given its inclusion of a Greek sculptured torso, the title of this work may derive from Friedrich Nietzsche’s book of the same name, issued in an 1886 edition, in which his theories regarding Athenian drama and its ability to transcend the nihilism of a meaningless world were articulated. Other art historians suggest that the drawing is an allegorical representation of mankind’s fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. See Emma Acker, “Arthur B. Davies” in Charles Brock, ed., *American Modernism: The Shein Collection*, (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2010), p 34.

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away." In Stieglitz’ opinion, popular bourgeois taste—as much as Davies himself—was to blame for his work’s timidity.

Davies was indeed careful not to alienate his viewers at the Carroll Gallery, given that its co-founder Mrs. Rumsey was a well-regarded progressive reformer, active in the Junior League. But he courted more radical sentiment and risked potential disapproval in other works, as he did not limit himself to painting all-female or all-male assemblies of stately posing nudes: in the early ‘teens, many of his paintings show vigorously mingling mixed-gender groups, or clusters of tightly-knit androgynous figures as in Welcome (5.17). But, catering to the tastes of his audience again by rendering these as slightly unreal, abstracted bodies, he clothed many of his naked figures in the metaphorical modesty provided by the ‘lofty imagination.’

Other works, however, seem more closely associated with darker, primal forces: Jungian ideas about the formative role of brute instinct and libidinal motivation. Although Jung’s work was not made widely public until after 1912, his influence seems at the very heart of Avatar, exhibited first in 1909, and again at the-Pennsylvania Academy of Art Annual in 1914. Avatar shows a highly dense and complex group of naked figures arrayed across a deep and well-populated landscape—in the far distance, the columns of an antique city can just barely be discerned. While some figures in this archaic setting show peaceful, harmonious or playful gestures, the ones in the immediate foreground command the viewer’s immediate attention, establishing a foundation of physical exertion and atmosphere of strife; smaller clusters of similar ambiguously struggling figures occupy the background in contemporary works such as Builders of Temples or Pastoral Dells and Peaks (figures 5.18 and 5.19). But here, the large and undulating mass of bodies rises to crest like a wave. Indistinctly gendered figures writhe and lean on one another in embraces that are equally erotic and combative: one figure kicks at another, crouched on the ground in the immediate foreground. Davies’s unrefined, even coarse facture—dark and chaotic lines tracing ill-defined contours between figures—echoes the raw passions he illustrates, as in the similar Girdle of Ares (figure 5.9).

Beyond and behind this throng in Avatar’s foreground, many more bodies occupy the dark-toned blue landscape: some figures lie as if exhausted in a riverbed, their
psychic energies draining out and mingling with the flowing water; clusters of pale, marmoreal women perform arcane sacraments at far left and far right; a quartet of dancers above a small waterfall at middle right reach towards some elusive and invisible goal. Beneath dark green trees that fill the background, crowds of oddly radiant, sex-less figures and a few lone dancers celebrate the occasion that compels a group—barely visible in the distance—to ascend towards a far temple. Looking closely, among the four dancing figures at middle right, the viewer can see two who strike a particular tandem; their bodies echo and invert one another’s poses as they intersect and cross, calling to mind time-honored chiastic symbols of intersecting forces. Among his dream-notes, Davies recorded one vision that conveys the goal of his striving figures: “The golden light of a happy soul streaming across the dark critical mass of a struggling humanity.”

One critic similarly identified this painting’s allure in *The New York Times*, commenting, “The emotion by which we are moved is that of awe at beholding the human in its first estate. [...] The dawn of reason has lightened the first darkness of the world, and the men and women assume gestures that are symbolic without ceasing to be human.”

Davies’s work demonstrates how some of our collective dreams—in allegory and myth—bring to mind more than pleasant or wistful memories: the primitive instincts of the human race co-mingle dark and light.

Engaging in various forms of stylized effort, interactions, and dances, the figures seem true “avatars”—embodied Jungian libidinal archetypes that manifest our deepest primitive urges, instincts and desires. Connecting allusions to the mysteries of the ancient world with currents of modern psychological thought, Davies offers his viewers a meditation on elemental human nature.

But this painting spoke equally to other, equally primitive associations. W. H. de B. Nelson, reviewing the Pennsylvania Academy Annual in the *International Studio*, described the striving, close-knit bodies in *Avatar* glibly as participants in “a tango tea,” referring to a popular and mildly scandalous new

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114 Undated scrap of dream notes, Box 1; Folder 7, (Davies Collection).
116 Davies’s painting echoes some aspects of Henri Matisse’s *Joie de Vivre* (1905) in its timeless setting and thematic content—archaic nudes in nature. Yet, Davies’ figures show little of the jubilant release depicted by the Frenchman. The pyramid of interlocked, wrestling forms in the immediate foreground suggest more strenuous, intense or even aggressive forms of human interaction than the sweet, playful and sensual indulgence of Matisse’s blobby, curving bodies dancing and making music.
fashion in modern couples dancing—emerging just prior to World War I—which had strong connections to primitivism.\footnote{17} His commentary stressed connections to music and dance, albeit with some evident bewilderment about the nature of Davies’s archaism; “Allegories bear many constructions and it is immaterial what Mr. Davies in his medieval conscious [sic] has really evolved, but as an arabesque it is bizarre and attractive in line and rhythm.”\footnote{18}

Such descriptions resound with international currents in modern dance and music, such as the sensational 1913 premiere of Stravinsky’s ballet *The Rites of Spring* in Paris, at which the audience’s discomfited uproar nearly interrupted the performance. Matching the new rhythms and atonality of his score to the primitive ritualistic stomping and jumping of the *Ballets Russes* dancers, Stravinsky’s music seems to provide an apt soundtrack to Davies’s earlier painting.\footnote{19} Although *Rites of Spring* was not performed in the United States until 1922, modern dance’s influence was growing in America, and was of particular interest to Davies. Whether demonstrated in new social dances like the tango or in staged performances, many modern dance forms featured free, improvisational movement rather than proscribed steps; modern dance—liberated from storytelling—required no intermediary translation by means of written or spoken language. The uninhibited movement of modern dancers such as Loïe Fuller, Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan invited viewers to feel as well as witness the dancer’s subjective, physical and

\footnote{17} Tango, whose origins lie in African slave cultures in Haiti, Cuba and Argentina, was perceived as both musically and physically intense and erotic. Introduced in Europe in the first years of the twentieth century from Argentina, it crossed back to the United States in the early teens and became a sensation; the pages of *Vanity Fair* in 1914 are filled with stories about Tango’s rising influence. Trendsetting ballroom dance sensations Vernon and Irene Castle, who performed in spectacularly successful Broadway shows, popularized and purified the Tango of its coarser associations in the teens. The influence of Tango Teas shaped women’s fashion in these years; harem pants and tulip dresses, which wrapped around and split in the front, enabled the close physical proximity that was called for by tango’s formulaic movements. For the history of tango, see Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), for its influence on fashion and gender roles in the teens see Julie Malnig, “Athena Meets Venus: Visions of Women in Social Dance in the Teens and Early 1920s,” *Dance Research Journal*, 31:2, (Autumn, 1999), pp 34-62.


emotional experiences. Moreover, because dance was seen as an outpouring of unfettered human feeling that flowed from the spirit through the body, it was upheld by turn-of-the-century artists and critics as the achievement of a Platonic ideal—a transcendent form of art that brought together mind and soul, eyes, ears and limbs in the ultimate expression of pure and comprehensive meaning. It harnessed the fundamental ‘life energies’ of the Jungian libido.

While themes of dance had captivated Davies since the 1890s, his particular interest in learning more about dance intensified in the early years of his relationship with Edna Potter. Davies studied the poses of dancers closely, sketching them repeatedly and using these to compose his finished paintings (figure 5.20). In 1915, Macbeth’s Gallery hosted an exhibition devoted to Davies’s drawings of dancers, which bolstered his reputation as a keen scholar of the human body. Exploration of dance was also nurtured by rising interest in Duncan that he shared with several artists of his acquaintance and members of the Stieglitz circle. Although her body, barely-concealed by gauzy costumes, caused some concern over her unbridled sensuality, many considered Duncan’s movements to derive from her embodied spirituality; critic Charles Caffin likened her work to translations of Henri Matisse’s art into fluid, undulating motion.

Duncan was an advocate of principles of body, movement, health and rhythmic expression deriving loosely from “Greek” principles, an idea she gathered from the aesthetic theories of Richard Wagner, whose music she interpreted in performances between 1908 and 1914; she featured her own Greek revival form of dance in Orpheus, which premiered in 1911.

121 See the review of Davies’s show in “How Modern Art Attempts to Interpret the Dance,” Current Opinion, 58, (May, 1915), pp 354-55.
123 Wagner’s ideas, enduringly popular with Symbolist artists, had been significant for Davies since the 1890s; the German composer insisted that the poetry of the ancients—Greek lyric verse—spoke a universal
Davies’s familiarity with Duncan and the ideas she promoted is suggested most directly in his 1914 painting, *Isadora Duncan Dancers*, (figure 5.21) a simplified, rhythmic and elegant study of seven figures arranged in arrested swaying poses. Davies, having discovered the beauties of Greek paintings and sculpture in books and in his travels, found Duncan’s ideas especially congruent with his own. While visiting Pompeii, the artist had the chance to see newly excavated murals, including ones featuring monumental, dancing, naked female figures enacting mysterious Dionysian rituals. Davies wrote from Italy to William Macbeth that the Greek paintings he saw “were perfectly thrilling—the very finest things I have ever seen—as fresh as if painted yesterday.” He claimed to have felt an ‘intuitive’ response to the ancient sculpture of the Greeks, and he hailed the work of the Greek painters as “so archaic—so great—so modern,” in a subsequent letter, declaring he felt “capable of far greater expression because of my own ‘entente cordiale’ with Greek painters.” At the upper right in his pastel *Design—Birth of Tragedy* (ca. 1912) Davies included a pale sketch of an Early Classical torso.

When he returned to the United States, Davies turned his experiences into inspiration, painting a host of ‘pagan’ settings filled with cavorting or bathing nudes, such as *Golden Sea Garden* (figure 5.21), a lush seaside confection of bodies basking in warm sunlight and soft atmospheric haze; a distant blue temple provides the connection to the antique Greek past, as well as suggesting the artist’s own pleasant memories. In reviewing works of the period, most of Davies’s critics seem entirely unperturbed by the

language of the soul, but was at the same time deeply dependent upon the body; he maintained that these precepts underlay all Greek art and culture. “The lyric and dramatic artwork,” Wagner wrote, “[was] the speech-enabled spiritualizing of this body’s motion, and the monumental plastic-art was finally its open deifying.” Richard Wagner, “The Arts of Poetry and Tone in the Drama of the Future,” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, Volume II*, translated by William Ellis, (London: Paul, Trench, Truebner and Co, 1893), p 240. Davies’s interest in dance, movement and breathing, is richly considered by Robin Veder, “Arthur B. Davies’ Inhalation Theory of Art.” (2009), pp 56-77. Veder’s ideas about the significance of body cultures, theory and embodied movement in Davies’s art trace a fascinating and valuable line of interpretive possibility.

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125 Letter from Davies to William Macbeth dated December 6, 1910. William Macbeth papers, Archives of American Art, reel NMc6 37, frame 1128.

126 Davies to William Macbeth, January 5, 1911, Macbeth papers, Reel NMc6 37, Frame 1121, Archives of American Art.
artist’s representation of bodies, not mentioning any concern regarding possible veiled allusions to immorality or corruption that they might inspire. Instead, Davies’s nudes were hailed—in the words of Huneker—as evidence of his great sympathy for “the vital impulses of nature;” this influential critic went as far as any critic in praising the libidinous force of Davies when he asserted that “The virility of Davies is unmistakable, but it never takes the questionable grimace of conventional voluptuousness […] It is clear and sweet, this conception of sex.”

If they revealed ‘the vital impulses of nature,’ dreams provided windows into humanity’s fundamental origins, but they remained obscure and maybe even dangerous, sensually stimulating portals whose meaning could be variously interpreted: whereas the polyvalence, the true “multiplicity” of dream-symbols was for many psychoanalysts a sign of their highly revelatory function, for others the apparent random bizarreness of dreams was an indication of their fundamental atavistic qualities, indeed their threatening ‘primitivity.’ Davies harbored great fascination with ‘Primitive’ cultures and their beliefs, nurtured by his interests in comparative religion; his library contained books on Maori cosmology, the cave paintings at Altamira, South Indian mythology and iconography, and West African sculpture. But in his art, he limited himself almost exclusively to an exploration of his own deepest cultural origins. For the writer of the 1909 Scribner’s essay on dream analysis, the modern self traced its origins to an ethnically European and presumably ‘white’ racial past. Like Davies, he assumed his viewers shared a common ancestral identity with links to ‘Celtic’ peoples. “There is something in the Celtic race” he wrote, “that tells us what were the bygones of that group

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129 Among the books from his library auctioned in 1926 were: W. Dittmer, The Tohunga: The Ancient Legends and Traditions of the Maori, (London, 1908); James Ferguson, Tree and Serpent Worship: Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the first and Fourth centuries After Christ, (London, 1868), extensively consulted as its pages were reported damaged and soiled; Charles Read and Ormonde Dalton, Antiquities from the City of Benin and from other parts of West Africa, (London, 1899); and a comprehensive guide to antique mythology, Richard Payne Knight, The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology, (New York, 1892). See Anderson Galleries, The Library of Mr. Arthur B. Davies, (1926).
130 In an interesting detail, both Perlman and Wright assert that Davies only hired one man as a model; an Algonquin named Tahamet or Tahomet who also worked as a model at the Art Students’ league. Yet in his final paintings, Davies showed little to no evidence of conspicuous non-Caucasian identity. See Perlman, LLA, (1998), p 143; and Wright, The Artist and the Unicorn, (1978), p 55.
of humanity to which we belong.” And making a further connection to artists like Davies, who was particularly proud of his Welsh heritage, the author called it “the oldest of the European civilizations,” suggesting that Celtic peoples are particularly attuned to the force of art, music, fantasy and dreams as they have “least embraced reality and been taught by it, least has kept step with the changes of progress […] and receiving the lessons of life apparently only through the medium of the intuitions, all its channels of receptivity seem to be turned toward the voices of the inside.”

Many paintings Davies created during these years explore the continuities that anchored Anglo-Americans’ cultural origins in the ancient past—whether Celtic or Classical—with the contemporary spirit of the age, and the affinities or even primal ethnic ‘memories’ that link the two. The artist believed primitive, uninhibited, and impulsive traits characterized the best qualities of art, as well as all human nature, writing in his notebook, “The thinking subject is a part of its objective world […] whatever differences obtain between them, they possess many features in common and one feature common to all nature is its spontaneity. Or the Hellenic spirit in Art.” Davies stressed the durability and continuity of these principles; “Thus the beginning of everything is created in itself + the motion is that which moves itself. This can never be created can never perish.”

Allusions to Greek myths, allegories and mythological figures were a staple subject for established traditional and insurgent modern painters alike. For the former, such as American Renaissance leaders like Kenyon Cox or Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the depiction of Classical themes alluded to their enduring standards; Davies had taken classes with both Cox and Saint-Gaudens at the Art Students’ League in the 1890s. But

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133 “Art and Philosophy of Arthur B. Davies,” undated sketch and note, Box 1; Folder 7, (Davies Collection). While he is partly quoting from Binet here, the connection to the “Hellenic spirit” is his own contribution.
134 Both Cox and Saint-Gaudens had been instructors of Davies at the Art Students League in the 1890s when they were at the peak of their influence. Yet there was also some resistance among a few American art critics to the excessive valorization of the Antique tradition, as it could be connected to European decadence on the one hand, and the cultivation of ‘foreign’ influences and values on the other. But attitudes towards Classical influences underwent a marked change in the decade between 1895 and 1910. In his 1907 book The Story of American Painting, (New York: Frederick Stokes Company, 1907), p 174, Charles
in the intervening years, the meanings associated with Classicism underwent important changes. For self-consciously modern artists working in the ‘teens, Classical subjects recast in ‘Arcadian’ or pagan terms captured a longing for a lost golden age, and a nostalgic desire to forge a connection with a very deep past as a means of anchoring rapidly changing and mutable modern ideals to eternal verities. Pagan and pastoral themes—whether envisioned in the guise of Greek, Roman, Celtic or some hybridized cultural origins—symbolized a simple, harmonized existence in the world before the complexities of modern civilization wrought their anxious alternations upon the human psyche. These were popular subjects with many artists whose work was exhibited at the Armory Show, American and European alike: paintings by Agnes Pelton, Paul Gauguin, Henri Manguin, Katherine Dreier and Henri Matisse all explored the virtues of primitive Arcadia.

Modern Arcadia was also a space of healthy, vigorous athletic celebration of the body, a Pagan Eden lacking sin, shame, or problematic attitudes towards sex fostered by Christian morality. It was a conceptual space of utopian fantasy where human behavior was reputedly driven by natural instinct as well as pantheistic reverence for nature, thus it was a space where nudity was not inappropriate, but wholly anticipated and suitable. But as Hartmann remarked in an essay written on the subject of the nude for Camera Work in 1910, images of uninhibited bodies needed to be handled with discretion; “The mystic, psychological note alone can save us from animalism in the representation of the nude. It will enable us to wrest [...] the deeper significance which reigns beneath the external.”

Caffin described the lingering Classical influence in American art as a ‘graceful affectation,” while an essay by William L. Price in The Craftsman 15 (February, 1909), pp 516-520, inquired, “Is American Art Captive to a Dead Past?” Caffin also suggests that this continued emulation of Classical precedent was potentially detrimental to modern American art, in that it helps to “foster a wrong conception of the ‘ideal.’” In America, these themes were only very rarely located in the remote Colonial outposts that characterized the European ‘primitivist’ trends For more on the proliferation of Classical ideals and their transformation between late nineteenth sensibilities and those of the twentieth century, see Bailey Van Hook, Angels of Art, 99-100; The American Renaissance, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), and David C. Huntington, ed., The Quest for Unity, (Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983); and Michele Bogart, Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890-1930, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). For the influence of Classical precedent in modern art beyond America, see Werth, The Joy of Life, (2002) and Rishel, Gauguin, Cezanne, Matisse, (2012).


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Davies’s Arcadian nudes like *Forest Bathers*, attending carefully to the poses of the physical body, deliver what Hartmann demanded: they “follow a human body in all its actions, its slightest gestures, its almost insensible movements and most delicate external signs,” but do so with mystery and suggestive potential in the service of showing “a continual motive for emotions and dreams.”

Pagan primitivism in art, like its counterpart fascination with pre-industrial and non-Western societies, also offered a model of spontaneity and authenticity, expressing fundamental psychological experiences. Since psychoanalytic discourses suggested, in Kathleen Pyne’s words, “a hidden primitive self as a constituent of the modern psyche,” any reference to the liberating force of elemental creative impulses was congruent with heightened regard for ‘paganism’ in art. In 1911, in an essay concerning the exhibition of Rodin’s nude drawings at Stieglitz’ 291, entitled “Rodin and the Eternality of the Pagan Soul!” Benjamin de Casseres asked, “What is pagan ecstasy?” and answered: “the perception of the mystery of surfaces, the delirious delight of touch, the transports of joy bred of the melodies of motion, [...] the adventure of the mind in matter, the adventure of the senses in air, water and sunlight, the deliria of creation; the divinizing of the sensual and the materializing of the sensuous.” He could be describing many of Davies’s works as well: in ‘materializing the sensuous,’ paintings such as *Golden Sea Garden* (5.22) invite an ‘adventure of the mind in matter.’

“Pagan” primitivism sustained other psychoanalytic values as well: Freud and Jung, sharing the Eurocentric bias common to many scholars of their day, believed in an evolutionary model of human social development that paralleled Spencerian social-Darwinist beliefs. For Freud, the primitive unconscious was analogous to an early, unfinished or juvenile stage of human social development, just as the healthy conscious mind was likened to mature, sophisticated culture. If modern European culture was situated at the top of an evolutionary ladder, so-called primitive cultures, whether historically situated in some distant ‘prehistoric’ past or demonstrated by some non-

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139 For more on the ways in which creativity was cast in terms of unconscious motives and powerfully associated with ‘pagan’ instincts amid the modern American artists of the Stieglitz circle, see Kathleen Pyne, *Modernism and the Feminine Voice*, (2007), p 82-85 and 118-119.
Western exemplar of ‘incomplete’ phylogenetic development, were like young ‘children’ whose behavior, beliefs, and rituals revealed their ‘primitive nature.’ Thus Freud and many fellow psychologists regarded ‘archaic’ dreams—the kinds of visionary experiences that were the stuff of myth and creation stories—as symptomatic of culture’s prior stage of development. If, as Freud suggested, the wishes expressed in dreams are infantile, then the perverse desires of the entire human race were revealed in mythic dreams; by association, modern dreams unlocked more than an individual’s childhood desires, they might reveal long-repressed cultural instincts.  

Art by children—or an artist with child-like sensibilities—could thus be regarded as material evidence of their innate creative impulses. The ‘naïve’ pictorial habits that some of Davies’s critics identified as his childlike sympathies or even his shortcomings as a draftsman, were thus readily connected to ‘primitive’ affinities. In his review of a 1909 show of “Ideals of Antiquity, Primitive Myths and Greek Tragedy in the Davies collection at the Macbeth Galleries,” the New York Times critic celebrated Davies’s “simple” art, calling forth his “rudimentary simplicity of the child and the childish person, the simplicity that can recognize and convey ideas by means of symbols […]” *Primitive Man*, (figure 5.23) gives pictorial form to some of these ideas such observations called to mind.

141 Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), makes the analogy between child development and civilization’s maturation several times as on page 447, where he states “What once ruled in the waking state when the psychic life was till young and unfit seems to have been banished into the sleeping state, just as we see again in the nursery… the discarded primitive weapons of grown-up humanity.” Freud shared these attitudes with many others who attended the Clark Symposium. G. Stanley Hall, for example, also espoused the concept that human psychological development followed loosely ‘evolutionary’ models.

Freud’s ideas about primitivism, his investigation of comparative religious belief and the analogies he traced between primal unconscious urges and the rationality of civilization are more fully fleshed out in later books like *Totem and Taboo*, (translated into English by A. A. Brill in 1918), and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which was not published until 1930. Thus, the valuable ways in which Freudian ideas about primal instinct and dreams were connected more directly to Bergsonian and Jungian thought were not widely addressed by the first wave of popularizers of Freud in the mainstream media, and were not as readily accessible to viewers of Davies’s art between 1909 and 1915.

142 In 1912, Alfred Stieglitz featured the first of four exhibitions of drawings, water-colors and pastels by children at 291, and published these experiments in *Camera Work* demonstrating the seriousness with which he regarded their instinctual creative efforts.


144 Although dated to 1903 by Royal Cortissoz in his 1931 monograph on the artist, the work closely resembles the form and facture of his later Armory Show entry, Seadrift, albeit with a robust and dark palette of ochres and browns that recalls his debt to Albert Pinkham Ryder.
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Here, an amorphous naked male figure stands on a rocky outcropping above a stream. Lacking a deep space to occupy, his body is pinned in a narrow ledge, his back against a rocky cliff, forcing him to the water’s edge. Leaning forward, his arms on his knees, he gazes into churning waters below him as if contemplating his liquid origins, and examines its rippling surface in search of a self-image revealed in nature’s elemental forces. Davies’s thickly scumbled application of paint makes the figure blend with his equally textured surroundings; he is a solitary soul inhabiting a newly-forged world, and we are witnesses to his moment of discovery: a primordial Narcissus falling into rapport with his own reflection. Exploring humanity’s primitive aspects revealed valuable psychological insight into the motivations that drive our deepest instincts and the valuable self-knowledge that arises from their recognition.

III. Henri Bergson and the vitalist dream

These pictorial interests were not only informed by psychoanalysis, they also resonated with Henri Bergson’s popular philosophies, just as many of Freud and Jung’s theories about dreams, primitivism, the libido and the collective unconscious were interpreted for American lay readers through the lens of Bergson’s books and essays. Sharing as much affinity with the psychology of William James as well, Bergson’s ideas stressed personal liberation, self-knowledge, and the value of intuition. As Davies tried to reconcile the pressing interests of the modern moment with the timeless realms of the transcendent imagination, his critics saw pictorial equivalents to Bergsonian ideas in his paintings. These works, like Bergson’s philosophy, helped Americans accommodate themselves to many troubling aspects of the rapidly changing twentieth-century, enabling a centrist embrace of new art and new psychological theories.

145 If William James had been somewhat skeptical about Freudian theory, he was an ardent advocate of Bergson’s philosophies. James wrote, “Oh, my Bergson, you are a magician and your book is a marvel” to Henri Bergson after reading Creative Evolution (1907). James to Bergson, (June 13, 1907), quoted by Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), 345-46. In an essay published as A Pluralistic Universe (1909), James expounded on the intellectual debt he owed to Bergson, whose blend of science and metaphysical thought captivated the older psychologist. He claimed, “The lucidity of Bergson’s way of putting things... seduces you and bribes you in advance to become his disciple. It is a miracle, and he a real magician.” Quoted by Quirk, “Bergson in America,” (1987), pp 453-490.
Indeed, whereas Freudian and Jungian ideas caused some Americans discomfort, Bergson’s ideas about the positive, creative and evolutionary force of the *élan vital*—drained of erotic references—were far more palatable to hesitant or conservative readers. Although very similar to Jung’s interest in the collective life-instinct of the ‘libido, they were far more accessible than Jung’s writing: more extensively translated and published, reviewed in American journals, and promoted beyond the fairly constrained world of academic psychology or psychotherapeutic medicine. Davies’s popularity with a diverse audience is also analogous to Bergson’s; the French philosopher’s ideas about memory, transcendence, and spirit spread widely through American artistic and intellectual culture at the very moment in which the artist arose to his greatest period of prominence.

But in fact, the origins of Bergson’s thinking about dreams and the unconscious had been strongly influenced by psychoanalytic ideas; Bergson had not only studied Freud’s early work, he felt free to combine Freud’s ideas about dream interpretation and symbolism with Jung’s theories about the libido. He freely conjoined these to his own analogous beliefs in the *élan vital*, as well as to his speculations about the relationship between memory and perception in the experience of duration. Bergson believed, “to explore the more secret depths of the unconscious [...] will be the principle task of psychology in the century which is opening.”

Like Freud and Jung as well, Bergson believed in the paramount importance of dreaming; his essays and subsequent book about dreams put him at the cutting edge of leading science, psychological research, and psychoanalytic theory. In the first of two influential essays, “Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On,” published in *The Independent*

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147 Gunter, “Bergson and Jung,” (1982), pp 635-652, thoroughly examines the resonances between elements of Bergson’s thought and the beliefs of Carl Jung regarding the ‘collective unconscious.’ Gunter summarizes many of the key ways in which Bergson, Freud and Jung were all intricately interwoven in the early decades of the twentieth century, and discusses how his knowledge of Bergson’s ideas led to Jung’s separation from Freud. In 1914, Jung wrote “I realize my views are parallel with those of Bergson, and that in my book [the Psychology of the Unconscious] the concept of the libido which I have given is a concept parallel to that of *élan vital*.” Jung, “The Content of the Psychoses, Part II, 1914” quoted by Gunter, p 638.

in the fall of 1913, Bergson observed in his typically economical yet poetic prose that the reason dreams seemed so real to the dreamer is that “the dream creates nothing,” arising out of the workings of human perception and “indestructible memories.” Interweaving neurological and psychological explanations of dreams that had previously appeared in other American magazines, Bergson asserted that memories, whether acknowledged or repressed, give visual form to the raw stimuli that are provided by touch, sound and even sight, in the “visual dust” of phosphenes: “When this union is effected between the memory and a sensation, we have a dream.”

Bergson cited Freud at the conclusion of his essay, noting that the Viennese scholar’s work interpreting “repressed desires” promised to be extremely useful in the ongoing understanding of dreams and their relation to “general sensibility.” But whereas at this stage Freud saw dreams as a key to unlocking the underlying symptoms of neuroses, Bergson’s ideas followed Jung, James and Havelock Ellis more closely, stressing the necessity of dreaming to normal, robust health and sanity, as well as the larger philosophical construct of consciousness. Bergson’s ideas would have had considerable attraction for Davies considerable, as the philosopher prioritized creativity and the role of the imagination in dreams as central aspects of the \textit{élan vital}, the life force that animates all human experience. A dream was thus a powerful, alternative and metaphysical form of consciousness.

Many modern artists took up Bergson’s cause; he was especially favored by Alfred Stieglitz and members of his coterie and his theories were featured twice in Stieglitz’ journal \textit{Camera Work}: first in 1911 when excerpts from \textit{Creative Evolution} were published, and again in 1912, when passages from \textit{Laughter} were published under the heading “What is the Object of Art?” Quoting from \textit{Creative Evolution} Bergson’s brief paragraphs in \textit{Camera Work} begin with the claim that “Instinct is sympathy.” In distinction to the valuable but static ‘intelligence’ of positivist science, “it is to the very inwardness of life that intuition leads us […] instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely.”

\textsuperscript{149} See Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{150} Henri Bergson, “Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On,” \textit{The Independent}, (October 23, 1913), p 163.
\textsuperscript{151} “An Extract from Bergson” \textit{Camera Work} 36, (October, 1911), p 20.
followed, Bergson argued, that man has “an aesthetic faculty along with normal perception,” which when properly aligned with intuition, can lead him towards an appreciation of the deeper, more profoundly meaningful “intention of life.” This elusive goal is one which, “the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy,” and thus “breaking down...the barrier that space puts up between him and his model.”

For Davies, the goal of collapsing the space between artist and ‘model’ was not only about capturing his or her bodily presence—which he would have done when studying the dance-like poses of Edna and his other models in works like Air, Light and Wave (figures 5.20 and 5.7)—but was also about collapsing the distance between the externalized self and its interior correspondent. His forays into proto-Cubist faceting suggest he was exploring how these techniques might harness the ‘sympathetic’ force of the unconscious. Hartmann’s 1910 demand for modern artists to stress the psychological aspects of the nude reflects similar focus on emotional and intuitive response; in 1913, Huneker also maintained, “[Davies’s] ideas may be philosophical, but they are emotionally set forth.”

In his excerpted text, Bergson continued: “Intuition may enable us to grasp what it is that intelligence fails to give us [...] but the sympathetic communication which it establishes between us and the rest of the living, by the expansion of our own consciousness which it brings about, it introduces us into life’s own domain, which is [...] endlessly continued creation.” And in a subsequent excerpted passage from Laughter published in Camera Work in 1912, he continued this line of thought proposing: “Could reality come into direct contact with sense and consciousness, could we enter into immediate communion with things and with ourselves, probably art would be useless, or we would all be artists, for then our soul would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature.”

Davies was in search of this elusive goal of painting the soul’s vibration and thereby embodying the vital energies of modern life. John Cournos remarked in 1914;

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152 Ibid.
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“Nude in soul as well as in body, [Davies’s] figures are made to respond to complex modern emotions in a simple, primitive way.” 156 In his many figural works, such as *Welcome*, (figure 5.17), the artist explored various means of granting esthetic form to the human spirit via representations of the body; his strategies fluctuated between emphasizing their corporeal presence and enhancing their spiritual equivalents. In their physically demanding if weightless poses, light-footed but no less present and dense in their interaction, the figures exist between Bergson’s oppositional poles of intellectual fact and imaginative fancy, between the materiality of ‘scientific’ study of form and the ineffability of intuition. Davies’s figures give physical embodiment to such contradictions, as critics observed: “Mr. Davies is a universalist,” said one in 1914, who “does not deal with individuals at all—he deals with ideas,” asserting Davies’s art “has a soul [...] sensitive, irritable, sympathetic, nervous, arrogant and modest, manly and feminine—a soul on fire.” 157

Bergson’s ideas about art, imagination and creativity were as contradictory as Davies’s bodies; indeed they also lent themselves to wide-ranging interpretation, because they addressed what were perceived as paradoxes inherent in the historical moment, ones that psychoanalysts similarly hoped to resolve. While praised for the rationality of his ideas, some writers hailed Bergson as a “Prophet,” and others as a “Mystic,” in terms which resonate with the popular critical reception of Davies. Huneker called him a “Playboy” and the influential reporter and commentator Walter Lippman labeled him “the most dangerous man in the world;” most widely, however Bergson was championed as one of the leading thinkers of the new century. 158 A brief mention in the *New York Times* in 1912 claimed, “Bergson is the popular philosopher of the day. He is the pet of the Intellectuals,” before the writer cautioned readers that Bergson “is really at bottom an irresponsible modern mystic” whose work exemplified an idealist spirit “against the

158 American periodicals were filled with essays about Bergson around the years of his 1913 visit to America, in which editors and writers interpreted his ideas to match their own ends. To cite just a few: Walter Lippman, “The Most Dangerous Man in the World,” *Everybody’s Magazine*, 27 (July, 1912) “Bergson’s Reception in America” *Current Opinion* 54 (March, 1913); James Gibbons Huneker, “Playboy of Western Philosophy,” *Forum*, (March, 1913); John Burroughs, “A Prophet of the Soul” *Atlantic*, (January, 1914); and Albert L. Whittaker, “Bergson: First Aid to Common Sense,” *Forum* (March, 1914). Few of the debates over Bergson’s philosophies challenged his influence in America, they did disagree, however, over how best to frame his growing cultural significance.
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gross materialism that is apparent in all the works of later nineteenth-century philosophers.159

Much of his authority came from Bergson’s unique fusion of science and metaphysics; he spoke the language of biology, psychology and Darwinian evolution and had impeccable credentials as a scientist as well as a philosopher.160 Blending the logic and language of rationality with the poetry of romantic mysticism, Bergson’s writings and lectures were popular in a way that belies his foreign identity. During a pre-war period of rising nationalist sentiment in which many cultural imports from France in the realms of poetry, art and ideas were treated with some wary suspicion, if not outright rejection for their sensual, libertine, degenerate, or occult qualities, Bergson in contrast was welcomed and treated with adulation.161 While the strange forms of modernist abstraction exhibited at the Armory Show were labeled dangerously foreign, Bergson, speaking clearly about metaphors of universality, was widely embraced.162 Bergson’s ideas were equally attractive to those who sought a philosophical ground on which to build a secular system of belief amalgamating the best aspects of scientific materialism and utopian, wishful idealism. But like James, with whom he felt kinship, Bergson made allowances for the deep spiritual and psychological value of religious faith. And like James he was scientific but not inflexible in his metaphysical concerns, abundantly attuned to the mysteries of existence. Bergson was known as well to maintain great sympathy for spiritualism and occult forms of metaphysics, the study of which he, like James, regarded as a legitimate branch of science. After lecturing in the United States in the spring of 1913, Bergson’s next lecture stop was in London at the Society for

160 Given his liberal integration of philosophical and psychological research, as well as his emphasis on biology in his pursuit of Creative Evolution, Bergson’s ideas had particular sway with American scientists and psychologists such as James Jackson Putnam, who promoted a strongly metaphysical model of Freudian psychoanalysis. See Nathan Hale, ed. James Jackson Putnam and Psychoanalysis: Letters Between Putnam and Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones, William James, Sandor Ferenczi, and Morton Prince, 1877-1917 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p 94.
162 Teddy Roosevelt, writing about the art that shocked so many American viewers at the Armory Show, such as Marcel Duchamp’s Nude Descending a Staircase, called the radical forms of cubistic fragmentation the work of “European extremists.” Theodore Roosevelt, “A Layman’s Views of an Art Exhibition,” The Outlook, (March 22, 1913).
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Psychical Research, where he gave the Presidential Address on “Phantasms of the Living and Psychical Research.”

Bergson’s ideas were hard to categorize, as was Davies’s art, and both traced a middle-of-the-road set of possibilities for interpretation; they were consequently widely embraced by many Americans from many different paths of life. Charles Leonard Moore, writing in *The Dial* in 1912, “The Return of the Gods,” said of Bergson:

> He invites us to leave the too stony, dusty roads of intellectualism and naturalism and follow him across country. The grass is springy beneath us, flowers bloom around, the air is fresh and sweet [...] It is a delightful adventure.

In much less flowery terms, but espousing similar beliefs, journalist Charles Johnston wrote on Bergson for *Harper’s Weekly*, remarking that the French philosopher was a “bridge builder” between the 19th and the 20th centuries. He had devised a way to escape the limits of the “philosophic materialism” that had accompanied the prior century’s embrace of empirical science, without completely abandoning any of the grounded precepts of proven scientific thought in a rush to endorse the “epoch of spiritual thought and life” marking the advent of the 20th century. In *The Pathos of Distance*, Huneker’s essays praised both Davies and Bergson, observing that the artist “knows the secret of ‘life-enhancing values.’” Bergson’s thought comfortably occupied the middle ground between the poles of epochal change Johnston observes. In terms that echo some of Huneker’s pronouncements, Bergson himself acknowledged that “I place myself in a position mid-way between realism and idealism,” and his approach towards the past and the future seemed a fit metaphor for the spirit of the turn-of-the-century age.

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166 Huneker, “Arthur B. Davies: A Painter-Visionary,” (1913) p 120-121
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Just as Bergson’s ideas had been adopted by Stieglitz for Camera Work in 1911 and 1912, his 1913 talk at Columbia was readily associated with art and creativity.168 His lecture was quoted in the New York Sun on February 4: “Our souls shall vibrate continuously in unison with nature. [...] Our eyes, aided by our memory, would cut out in space, and fix in time inimitable pictures. We would hear singing in the depths of our soul, like music.”169 Davies’s Crescendo resonates with this statement; it “fixes time” in its rhythmic yet static presentation of musical souls; the manner in which we perceive consciousness as a ceaseless flow was a metaphysical experience that Bergson identified as ‘duration.’ Using the lyrical language and metaphor that was part of his charm, Bergson contended, “All this is around us, all this is in us, and yet nothing of all this is perceived by us distinctly. Between nature and us [...] between us and our own consciousness a veil interposes, a thick veil for the common man, a thin veil, almost transparent, for the artist and the poet.” Such language suggested that painters such as Davies could see beyond the ‘veil’ obscuring the fundament of consciousness, but he could also give it substance in works like Air, Light and Wave, whose nascent Cubist explorations of abstraction impose spatial and temporal distance between us and his carefully composed figures. For Bergson, carefully attuned intuition was the key to finding personal resonance with the “stream-like flow of consciousness, in which there are no breaks, but a ceaseless interpenetration of past and present.”170 In a similar manner, Davies’s critics suggested the best way to appreciate his works was through a instinctual or intuitive response; Huneker tried to put into words the subtle power of Davies’s art, its “sense of something vanishing, like music overheard in sleep, elusive but more real than the noises of the naked day.”171

As an aspect of his metaphysical thought, Bergson also espoused the idea that life itself functions as an ‘oceanic’ totality; the experience of consciousness was defined by a

168 An appreciative review of his talk on “Spirituality and Liberty” at Columbia contained this listener’s recollection: “the tones of his voice are exquisite, and as he speaks one feels as if listening to a dry-point artist in words. For, just as in making a dry-point picture it is impossible to erase any line once made, so Professor Bergson, in talking, impresses the listener as never using a word which he would afterwards want to replace with another.” Quoted in “Henri Bergson,” The Outlook, (February 15, 1913), p 336.
170 Bergson, quoted in “Twelve Major Prophets of To-Day,” The Independent 70 (June 8, 1911), p 1256.
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union of memories and perceptions that find their most creative outlet in the dream. Strong philosophical affinities if not direct connection link Bergson’s lectures and writing to roughly contemporary paintings by Davies, such as *Homage to the Ocean*, and an image that could readily be its pendant, *Shining Oceansides*, (figures 5.24 and 5.25, the former exhibited at Macbeth’s Gallery in 1909 and the latter in 1912).\(^{172}\) These seem exercises in giving pictorial form to Bergsonian ideas about the timelessness of duration and the ‘oceanic’ experience of consciousness, which the philosopher once described as being like “an immense wave in which past and present [form] an organic whole.”\(^{173}\)

In both works, a group of nude figures gather by the side of a Northern sea, their poses capturing a sense of reverent, primal worship of some invisible puissant force: in *Homage to the Ocean*, two bend forward and one stretches her lean body towards the sky. Showing deep seascapes, the foreground in both is shallow and barely distinguished by detail. In contrast, the skies overhead are conspicuous: turbulent with gray clouds in *Homage* and nearly empty in *Shining Oceansides*. Here the sky and sea are dark as if we witness a nocturnal vision, yet strangely illuminated by an unseen and mysterious overhead source: its raking rays hitting the ocean surface suggest it should be visible. But denied a clear perception of this light, we wonder, as do a few of the figures, at its supernatural properties. In *Shining Oceansides*, a few of the figures have waded into the water, where they swim in the scintillating waves towards a distant mountain, following a path of reflected light. Seen primarily from behind, the naked foreground figures are backlit and shadowy in this strange light, whose invisible power alludes to elemental power; in this shallow and bleak space, we are invited to imagine ourselves one of their company. But the crudely-rendered figures once again seem equivalent to primordial entities; they have no individual identity but share a collective experience, expressed by curiosity and the wonderment of one figure who raises his arms towards the invisible light source in a gesture of adulation. These paintings express ancient and enduring

\(^{172}\) According to Wreath Maclntyre, Davies’s model in the ‘teens, *Homage to the Ocean* was one of the landscapes to which Davies returned subsequently, adding bodies to an earlier non-figural composition around 1913. See Perlman, L.L.A. (1998), pp 251-255. Such an addition not only shows Davies’s growing interest in movement and body cultures, as Robin Veder has shown, but additionally suggests the pervasive influence of Bergsonian vitalist thought.

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respect for nature’s vast mysteries—an experience arising from the collective unconscious—evoking deep awe for forces beyond mere physical comprehension.

Bergson’s complex philosophical ideas, developed sequentially in his books *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Matter and Memory* (1896) were most widely popularized in America in his third book, *Creative Evolution*, first published in 1907 and subsequently issued in an English translation in 1911. In this book, Bergson expressed his “metaphysics on a grand scale” transforming his ideas about the role of memory in the unconscious into a “suprapersonal” argument for memories that transcend our individual experience, encompassing the innermost strata connecting us with our biological history. For Bergson, the issue of memory had particular philosophical and psychological interest, well beyond its role in the creation of vivid mental pictures during sleep. Memory linked the present to the past; like Freud and Jung, Bergson believed memory was durable, and constituted the basis of our unconscious. Indeed, as it gave motivation to all of our actions and governed our perceptions, memory could be tied to all consciousness and human creative enterprise, as well as to our experience of reality as expressed in ‘duration.’

According to this line of Bergson’s thought, which owed a heavy debt to Jung, we share with all other living creatures a dormant but powerfully influential ‘unconscious:’ fundamental animal ‘memories’ that have evolved over the long span of time, and which govern our deepest impulses. Indeed, these endow us with the capacity for instinctual imaginative energies. While we may be governed by intellect, and our unconscious subjectivity is shaped by our personal memories, it is the *élan vital*—provided by these deeper collective memories—that governs our drive to exist, evolve and continually create. Evolution itself was thus envisioned as a powerful, spiritually animated, inherently ‘creative’ force that could be likened to the activity of a metaphysical artist. Figures in Davies’s work who seem to coalesce, arise or evolve, as in *Seadrift* and *Homage to the Ocean*, gave vision to these ideas.

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174 My reading of Bergson’s complex philosophies is informed by Gunter, “Bergson and Jung,” (1982), pp 635-652, particularly the resonances that he establishes between elements of Bergson’s thought and the beliefs of Carl Jung regarding the ‘collective unconscious.’ Gunter summarizes many of the key ways in which Bergson, Freud and Jung were all intricately interwoven in the early decades of the twentieth century, and discusses how Bergson’s thought led to Jung’s separation from Freud. I also thank Dan Selcer for helpful guidance regarding Bergson’s philosophies.

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In his second essay on dreaming, entitled “The Birth of A Dream,” published in *The Independent*, Bergson wrote with lyrical imagery about the relationship between body and soul that is expressed in the imagery of dreaming, and called to mind Davies’s primordial bodies. “Souls inhabit the world of ideas” he wrote, “they float beyond space and beyond time.” They took anchor, however, in the body which:

rises towards the soul which might give it complete life; and the soul, looking upon the body and believing that it perceives its own image as in a mirror, and attracted, fascinated by the image, lets itself fall. It falls, and this fall is life. I may compare to these detached souls the memories plunged in the obscurity of the unconscious [...] our nocturnal sensations resemble these incomplete bodies. The sensation is warm, colored, vibrant and almost living, but vague.175

Davies’ figures match this final description ably. His lyrical painting, *Dweller on the Threshold*, (Figure 5.26) exhibited in 1918 but probably painted earlier (between 1910 and 1915, based upon its strong resemblance to the related painting *Maya, Mirror of Illusion*, see Chapter 4), shows just such an example of the “mirroring soul” that Bergson references. The large but delicately balanced posing body in the foreground meets its corresponding image of the soul in the mirror, and they converge in a duet of balance and rhythmic form; the embodied mind looks upon its mirrored counterpart and sees a spirit given corporeal form. Together, they make the whole that is consciousness.

In his book on Davies, published three years after the artist’s death, esteemed critic Royal Cortissoz (1869-1949) recalled the artist’s work with a degree of nostalgia for the pre-war years in which Bergson and Davies were most popular, using language that seems borrowed from Bergsonian philosophies. He noted with approval Davies’s peculiar ability to negotiate inconsistencies, when he observed the artist’s “fusion of tangible and intangible things” through which he was able to make a “transcript of an episode in the visible world” that is at the same time “vibrant with some mysterious spiritual overtones, flowing from a spring deep in the artist’s soul.”176 Yet, in the same passage, Cortissoz asserted the artist’s firm ground in reality: “I cannot too strongly emphasize the fact that what he did was based as much upon knowledge as upon

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intuition.” For Cortissoz, this ability lay in Davies’s keen insight and talent for physical form, rendered with equal attention to spiritual significance. Sensitive to this paradox, he claimed that the artist pursued eternally valid beauty:

in a domain intensely imaginative, infinitely removed from the tone of everyday life. At the same time he “kept his eye on the object” with a deep solicitude for measurable truth. Form was ever with him, articulated and substantial. He [...] is all the time aware of the truth and paints or draws the human body with realistic force. Indeed, the realist might be said to have been doubled in him with the romantic... 177

Davies, like Bergson, tried to be both a pragmatist and a romantic, a realist and an idealist; he desired to amalgamate the trust that many put in scientific fact and psychological verities, while also making room for the ephemeral, subjective ineffability of faith, metaphysics and all that was true about the mysteries of existence—things that were fundamentally un-provable by any scientific measure. The true value of psychological or even psychoanalytic insight, in Bergsonian thought, was its ability to sustain such valuable contradictions.

IV. Conclusion: “Let your true artist dream a dream”

Davies’s viewers sought answers to these contradictions in Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, and followed Bergsonian philosophy avidly for its estimable metaphysical consolations, but they also looked for these answers in art. In a 1924 essay on Davies, Cortissoz said, “Let your true artist dream a dream and it matters not what incongruities he may fling upon the canvas. It is enough that he invests the factors of his design with the mystery that has invaded his imagination. It is enough that he bids his figures and animals, his buildings and trees to come into existence. They spring into being and take on a heightened reality. [...]” 178 What the popularity of Davies’s paintings like Seadrift demonstrates most powerfully are the ways in which these cultural shifts, new philosophies, psychological concepts and psychoanalytic theories could be idiosyncratically understood and diversely interpreted by his critics, viewers and patrons.

177 Royal Cortissoz, Arthur B. Davies, p. 10.
Chapter 5: “Stirrings of the past of the race”

in the pre-World War I years. The overlapping, proliferating and competing discourses regarding dreams that clamored for the attentions of American audiences—psychoanalytic and philosophical alike—facilitated this exchange.

According to Freud’s American supporters, dreams were formative mental spaces, produced via common mechanisms, by which one could, through analysis, locate modern forms of self-discovery alongside innate, ‘primitive’ instinctual urges. For Jung, dreams were one aspect of the collective unconscious that linked all human experience to common archetypes and fundamental truths. For Bergson, they were an important form of perception that revealed how deeply intuition and memory operates in consciousness. Given his reputation as a dreamer, these explanations enabled Davies’s paintings to function as manifestations of modern consciousness that traced the origins of its deepest, most primordial lineage. His work conceptualized the positive potential of dreaming as a means to apprehend modern selfhood in light of ancient continuities as well as the most advanced modern psychoanalytic theories.

Yet, if some of Davies’s pictorial strategies echo Freud’s descriptions of the mechanisms of dreams—the displacement, condensation and symbolism that have become commonplace terms—his works were not painted to invite Freudian psychoanalytic interpretations. The best means of understanding their debt to contemporary understanding of psychoanalytic theory may be through their connection to the libidinal instincts they explore, and the collective archaic memory they address. Through an underlying dynamic of repression, struggle, and catharsis, they invite personal meditation before speculation about the artist’s personal symbolism. Pursuit of clumsy Freudian symbol-analysis has too often generated a psycho-biographical construct for his work that has little bearing on how Davies’s critics and viewers made sense of his pictorial manifestations of dreams.179

Rather, Davies’s paintings offered his viewers the chance to explore their own evolving understanding of the value of psychoanalysis for universal as well as individual revelation. While Stieglitz saw Davies’ figures as indications of his female patrons’

179 This is the unfortunate habit of both of Davies’s primary biographers, Perlman and Wright, who tend to see every ‘symbol’ in Davies’s painting as simplistic terms as a key to his complicated personal relationships; every blonde-haired model becomes a surrogate for Lucy, and every brunette a figure of Edna.
repression, many others found great virtue in the artist’s attention to primitive instinct, his celebration of nudes in Arcadia, and his exploration of contradiction and duality, rendering embodied psyches and corporeal spirits. However pervasive Freudian psychoanalysis of art became later in American 20th century culture, in the teens, Davies’s paintings offered a very different model of the function and power of dreams. In the wake of this growing influence, one of Davies’s critics cogently made the distinction in 1939, “These are Daviesian, (not Freudian) dreams,” in his review of a posthumous exhibition of the artist’s work.\(^{180}\) The artist’s painted dreams of pagan utopias served as a vehicle for collective pre-World War I wish fulfillment: they are a pictorial realization of the struggles to define the modern self that reveal the deepest desires of the early 20th century soul.

In this period of rich utopian promise, Davies envisioned the wishes and ideals he and his viewers shared and hoped to achieve as they explored the subjective experience of modernity and collectively looked towards the future with optimism. By referencing antiquity and modernity equally, the former via Arcadian settings and obscure mythology and the latter in his address to modern psychological and philosophical concerns, Davies bridged late 19th and 20th century models of consciousness, a pursuit he would continue in his Cubist experiments of the mid-teens which I consider in my next chapter. Davies didn’t merely give form to his own dreams, he used the human form as a means to visualize collective aspects of the modern unconscious, the instinctual behavior and carefree nakedness of his ‘primordial’ bodies revealing the dreaming human soul laid literally bare.

\(^{180}\) "These Are Daviesian (Not Freudian) Dreams," *Art Digest* 13, (April 15, 1939), p 15. The critic attends to Davies’s work’s mysticism and its resistance to Freudian symbolism, but does not mention any indication of lingering Bergsonian influence; by this period in American culture, Bergson’s metaphysical philosophies had lost much of their pre-war allure.
Chapter 5 Illustrations

5.1 *Avatar*, ca. 1909, (Private collection, oil on canvas, 18 x 40")

5.2 *Gates of the Morning—Release*, ca. 1910, (Private collection, oil on canvas, 26 ¼ x 40")
5.3 *Seadrift*, ca. 1912, (Spanierman Gallery, oil on canvas, 28 x 23")

5.4 Henri Matisse, *Nude in a Forest*, ca. 1906, exhibited at 291 in 1908, (Brooklyn Museum)
Chapter 5 Illustrations
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5.5 & 5.6 Paul Cezanne, *Bathers at Rest*, 1875-76, and *Large Bathers*, 1900-06, (both in the Barnes Foundation)
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5.7 *Air, Light and Wave*, ca. 1914, (High Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 26 x 40”)

5.8 *Isle of Destiny*, ca. 1910-12, (Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, oil on canvas, mounted on wood, 18 x 40 ¼”)

5.9 *Girdle of Ares*, ca. 1908-14, (Metropolitan Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 26 x 40 1/8”)
Chapter 5 Illustrations

5.10 *Hylas and the Nymphs*, ca 1910, (New Britain Museum of Art, oil on canvas 17 x 19”)

5.11 *Forest Bathers*, ca. 1910, (Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 20 ¼ x 42”)

5.12 *Moral Law—A Line of Mountains* ca. 1910, (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, oil on canvas, 18 x 40”)
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5.13 *Crescendo*, ca. 1910, (Whitney Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 18 x 40”)


5.15 Classical Greek, *Red-Figured Kylix with Athletes*, ca 500 BC, (Ashmolean Museum)
Chapter 5 Illustrations

5.16 *Design—Birth of Tragedy*, ca. 1913, (Colby College Museum, pastel on paper, 18 x 34 ½ “)

5.17 *Welcome*, ca. 1910-15, (Ulrich Museum of Art, oil and graphite on canvas, 38 x 57 ¾”)
Chapter 5 Illustrations
Chapter 5 Illustrations

5.18 *Builders of Temples*, ca. 1910, (private collection, oil on canvas, 26 ½ x 40")

5.19 *Pastoral Dells and Peaks*, ca. 1908-11, (LACMA, oil on canvas, 18 ¼ x 30 5/16")
Chapter 5 Illustrations
Chapter 5 Illustrations

5.20 Drawing of a Dancer, no date, (Mac Cosgrove-Davies collection, pastel on paper, 19 1/4 x 13 1/2”)

5.21 Isadora Duncan Dancers, ca. 1914, (private collection, oil on canvas, 28 x 20”)

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Chapter 5 Illustrations
5.22 *Golden Sea Garden*, ca. 1912, (Art Institute of Chicago, oil on canvas, 16 3/8 x 21 3/8”)

5.23 *Primitive Man*, ca. 1903, (Maier Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 28 1/4 x 23”)

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5.24 & 5.25 Homage to the Ocean, ca. 1908, (Brooklyn Museum, oil on canvas, 28 x 23 1/8")
Shining Oceansides, ca. 1909-12, (Private collection, oil on canvas, 24 3/4 x 19 1/2")

5.26 Dweller on the Threshold, ca. 1912-1915, (Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, Florida, oil on canvas, 17 x 22 3/4")
Chapter 5 Illustrations
Chapter Six:
A Dream of Hybrid Harmony: Synaesthesia and Synthesis in the Bliss Music Room Murals, 1914-1918

“[Davies] may be already endowed with a mystic means of getting his dreams expressed to his own glad relief [...] The rhythmic, rippling lines of the nymphs of Davies are the grateful tribute he pays in the coin of modern art to the decorative linear imagination.”


“Although American art is necessarily synthetic, it has begun to master the synthesis; it has begun to play with the results of its lessons and influences from abroad; it has begun to create vigorously and boldly instead of imitating dully and dutifully.”

-Michael Williams, “A Pageant of American Art”

Inspired by his Armory Show experiences, Arthur B. Davies commenced an ambitious new project in the summer of 1914. He spent several hot months working in the New Jersey studio of his colleague and fellow show organizer Walt Kuhn, creating a set of murals to decorate the music room of his close friend and patron Lillie Bliss (1864-1931). Each of the thirteen panels was planned to fit within the confines of Bliss’s third floor sanctuary in the apartment she shared with her mother at 29 West 37th Street, and were installed by the following year. Davies designed his paintings to fill the available wall space, wrapping around a marble mantelpiece, between windows and doors, and taking into account the room’s bookshelves (see figures 6.1-6.5).
The private chamber was designed to be a decorative Gesamtkunstwerk: a self-contained ‘total work of art.’ Davies envisioned an esthetically coherent environment in which Bliss’ collection of objects could be shown to their best advantage and one where she might nurture her musical tastes and talents, expressing interests shared by the two friends. The murals were meant to engage Bliss’s sensorium, providing the ideal surroundings for a coordinated, enthralling intra-sensory experience. Exercising his newfound investigation of modernist abstraction’s formal language, but retaining visible elements of figuration, Davies attempted to equal the abstractly expressive properties of music in the room’s integrated design, color and content: it was a room devoted to the unified, synthesized and synaesthetic possibilities of modern American painting.

This chapter sets Davies’s ambitious project in the context of many overlapping discourses regarding modern art’s expressive capabilities in the years immediately following the Armory Show. Musical and synaesthetic analogies provided some viewers with help in comprehending and even welcoming the new pictorial principles of modernism, but to others were little more than an excuse for esoteric Symbolist decadence. Davies provided assistance, accommodation and negotiation of these competing claims by investigating the middle ground between pure abstraction and representation. Adopting this kind of mediation between oppositional critical approaches to modern art as his particular project, and using his own work as his means, Davies

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(Endnotes)

5 In his 1916 review of the room published in Vanity Fair, critic Frederick James Gregg commented that Bliss intended to fill the room not only with musical instruments, but to place her collection of Chinese objects and furniture there. He noted, “Mr. Davies even goes so far as to say that you might hang a picture on a real decoration without harming it. In the same way, if you imagine a properly decorated room full of people, the moving figures will not interfere with the general effect.” See “A Room Made by Arthur B. Davies, and explained by Frederick James Gregg,” Vanity Fair, 5, (January, 1916), pp 70-71.

6 In her essay “The Mediated Sensorium,” Caroline Jones describes this concept as a set of experiences that are “the subject’s way of coordinating all of the body’s perceptual and proprioceptive signals, as well as the changing sensory envelope of the self.” While Jones was evaluating and dismantling the mid-century ‘bureaucratization of the senses’ which accompanied the institutionalization of Greenbergian formalist art criticism in light of contemporary investigations of sensory integration, the Bliss music room murals seem a fitting demonstration of the ways in which many earlier 20th century artists pursued a similar goal: the creation of art that nurtured such inter-mingled sensory experience. Quoted in Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology and Contemporary Art. Exhibition at the MIT List Visual Art Center. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p. 8.

7 When Bliss moved in 1925, she brought the murals with her and reinstalled them in her new apartment; they were donated to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in 1960 by her niece, Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb, and have rarely been shown together. Four panels were exhibited in 1981 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and discussed by Nancy Miller, “The Bliss Music Room and Modernism,” in Dream Vision: The Work of Arthur B. Davies, (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1981). np.
Chapter 6: A Dream of Hybrid Harmony

employed a variety of sources to help him bridge the gap between theory and practice. Davies’s prior reputation as a spiritually attuned dreamer was once again crucial to his ability to negotiate these strains of critical ambivalence.

Capitalizing on his existing reputation for psychologically insightful work, Davies reconfigured his dreaming in his mural project and the related paintings he created in the teens, hoping to fuse his form and content in new ways in order to speak to his viewers’ intertwined senses. I argue that Davies, devoted to the general promotion of modern art on the one hand, and the promotion of his own experiments in modern abstraction on the other, tried to create unity out of hybridity and heterogeneity by exploring the condition of synaesthesia. Three broad conceptual spheres informed the artist’s goal: the first concerned Havelock Ellis’s proposal that dreaming was a form of synaesthesia; the second arose from popular analogies between color, music and art; and the last involved the pervasive influence of synaesthetic metaphors, inspiring Davies’s mingling of Cubism with figural representation. As a paradigm of unlikely synthesis, the conjoined sensory perceptions of synaesthesia offered the artist an effective tool.

A neurological anomaly generating intertwined sensory experiences, synaesthesia could readily be identified by most psychologists in 1914, having been extensively described by Victorian polymath Francis Galton in 1883 in his *Inquiry into Human Faculty and its Development.* While scientists like Galton recognized that synaesthetic correspondences could manifest in many of the senses, the earliest and most consistent identifications of synaesthetic perception combined color and musical tone: many synesthetes described ‘seeing’ music in terms that suggested a visual symphony of abstract form and dazzling hue.

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8 See Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development,* (London: Macmillan, 1883), although Galton didn’t coin the term, nor was he the first to identify it, he conducted first detailed psychological study of synesthesia examining color-hearing, associations between colors and vowels, and other diverse visionary forms of sensory experience, thus leading the way towards a broad correlation between involuntary visions and synesthetic sensory perception.

9 Sean Day “Some Demographic and Socio-cultural Aspects of Synesthesia” in Robertson and Sagiv, eds. *Synesthesia: Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 15, charts the commonality of forms of synesthesia in his research into 572 reported cases. His research reflects typical statistical analysis of synesthesias, and also confirms the fact that more women than men report true synesthetic perception. Some ‘higher order’ synesthetes also experience more than one kind of synesthetic perception. While synesthesia is ‘normal’ in those who are predisposed to it, instances of synesthetic perception can also result from illness or brain injury, and are reported in seizures. See also V. S. Ramachandran and E. M. Hubbard, "Synaesthesia: A window into perception, thought and language,"
fundamentals of pictorial form led easily towards integration of terms between psychology and art in the early twentieth century. Because of the pervasive fascination it held, many lay readers in the teens—including artists and their viewers—would also have known about synaesthesia. They probably would have referred to it by its most familiar and appealing variation, “colored hearing;” associations between color, form, musical harmonies and enhanced sensory perception were fundamental tenets of Symbolist belief, and synaesthetic metaphors were common in the culture of modern art and its criticism. No critic identified Davies or his art as ‘synaesthetic’ directly, but his reception was frequently associated with strong musical analogies, and he shared with many Symbolist artists, critics and subsequent promoters of modernism the ideal of a form of art that communicated in musical terms, fusing and con-fusing diverse sensory stimuli. While it is doubtful that Davies was authentically synaesthetic, he claimed some of these integrated sensory gifts for himself: he once observed that when listening to music, “Certain lovely phrases in a composition bring different colors before my vision,” suggesting this was an involuntary response that enhanced or inspired his painting.

When he was offered the chance to see the murals in 1916, critic and collector Duncan Phillips (1886-1966) noted that Davies “has done something in the new Cubist manner which [...] reveals the workings of his mind.” Moved to lyrical heights in his detailed description, Phillips observed:

The wonderful room in a New York home which owes its wonderfulness to its Davies decorations gives such sensations of form and hue, of light and volume, as we receive in looking through a prism of multicolored glass. Incidentally, we catch hints of fair young limbs and faces, with

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12 As recalled by Davies’s model in the teens, Wreath McIntyre, who reported the quotation to Bennard Perlman in a 1987 letter. See LLA, (1998), p 288.
shreds and patches of beautiful, harmonious color, all amid a barbaric welter of well-executed design.\textsuperscript{13}

He continued his analysis in similar vein, extolling the room’s particular virtues when Bliss put it to its intended purpose; “the lady who gave her artist friend a free hand is a musician and she finds her rooms actually restful” he noted, announcing “she enters a realm of music where one is not confused by the chaos because one is not searching for meaning.”\textsuperscript{14} One did not need to search: meaning arose spontaneously.

Yet, Phillips was simultaneously cautious about the emotional and esthetic impact of the room’s “barbaric welter,” almost overpowered by the novelty of Davies’s new stylistic direction and its want of obviously discernable narrative or content: “The effect of such decoration [...] is after all only a suggestion of rhythm, like the dream-visions of former years.”\textsuperscript{15} As so many critics had already done, Phillips resorts to describing Davies’s art as dream-like; but in his analysis of the room’s forceful impression, the new kind of dreaming Phillips sees is profoundly different. He finds Davies’s abstraction both psychologically and musically resonant, as it explores the pure expressive rhythms of form as much as the inner visionary content typical of his earlier work. In the years following the murals’ completion, Phillips went on to become one of the artist’s most dedicated collectors and supporters.

Despite what seems somewhat hesitant support of Davies’s forays into the ‘shattered fabric’ of Cubism—a movement he did not favor—Phillips’s comments encapsulate Davies’s aspirations, and address the stylistic and thematic dimensions his painting adopted between 1912 and 1917. He ardently endorsed what Davies was attempting in his project—creating a kind of art that unified pictorial and musical form:

Having explored the realm of the subconscious and enjoyed suggesting its glamor [...] Davies turned to the idea of symbolizing music itself. But still the forms were too remindful of the actual world, which music leaves behind. Then came the deliberate distortions and arbitrary alterations preparing us for the inevitable break with all pictorial traditions, in


\textsuperscript{14} Phillips, “The American Painter,” (1916), p 175. Although no photographs exist demonstrating the appearance of the music room once Bliss filled it with her possessions, one imagines a piano occupied a prominent position in the midst of the furnishings and fine art objects she reportedly placed on display.

Phillips’s observations demonstrate how discourses about the unconscious, music, non-objective painting and artistic synthesis were intricately interwoven in the art criticism of the teens, particularly in the reception of many modern forms of abstract painting and their inherently musical, ‘decorative’ capabilities. Davies, alongside European artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, tapped into widespread belief in non-objective art’s power to communicate emotion, spiritual value and transcendent meaning directly to the mind. Phillips celebrated this new possibility for modern art.

While Davies has been duly recognized for his efforts to promote modernism, it has proven difficult—perhaps even impossible—for historians to adequately assess the extent of Davies’s success or failure in his Cubist-informed work of the teens; his work’s critical reception encountered both lavish praise and harsh censure. As I will show in this chapter, some critics loved his new developments, others hated them, and some gave his work a mingled reception within the very same pages of their reviews. I contend that Davies’s abstracted Cubistic experiments in creating a synthetic art that equalled the unconscious mind’s synaesthetic dreams are as interesting for their ‘failures’ as for their successes. His characteristic formal inconsistencies defining much of his earlier work—the awkward or amorphous posing bodies, inconsistent spaces and ambiguities, now

17 Phillips was not an immediate enthusiast of modern abstraction, and was especially hesitant about Cubism. Phillips met Davies in 1916 and despite the artist’s association with Cubism he admired and respected his visionary, idyllic spirit. Under Davies’s guidance, Phillips adjusted his attitude toward Cézanne, van Gogh, and Gauguin, although Matisse remained too challenging to his tastes. By the time he opened the Phillips Memorial Art Gallery in 1921, he had come to terms with Cubism and Fauvism and had become a leading champion of modernism. See David W. Scott, "The Evolution of a Critic: Changing Views in the Writings of Duncan Phillips," in Erika D. Passantino and David W. Scott, eds., The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
18 Although it is true that Davies did ‘retreat’ from Cubism in some ways, the reasons for this are complex, and not necessarily due to the artist’s ‘failure’ to master the style. Yet, this is the ways in which his choices have commonly been framed. See for example Joseph S. Czestochowski, The Works of Arthur B. Davies, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p 12, who concludes “By 1915, Davies began to recognize the futility of his experiments with cubism,” despite the fact that he continued to experiment with Cubist form and other abstraction in paintings and especially in his prints into the mid 1920s, and gathered as much support for them as censure. Another recent essay determines that after 1918 Davies “returned to his earlier romanticized approach, finding modernist methods too avoidant of subjective feeling,” despite the fact that some critics endorsed precisely this aspect of Cubist his work. See Lisa Peters, Arthur B. Davies: Painter, Poet, Romancer & Mystic, (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2012), p 14.
treated to prismatic fragmentation—could readily be regarded as a continuation of his prior interest in the psychology of inner perception.

In fact, Davies's reputation afforded him great license in his task; in his experiments with what Duncan Phillips called "significant forms which contain the essence of the ideas expressed," Davies tried to give pictorial structure to dreaming's dissociative effects and the unconscious mind's propensity to symbolic communication in a manner analogous to modern psychological explanations of the phenomenon. Fellow critics described him as a rebellious individual, an "ultra-radical" and a "recognized leader amongst modernists," but to most he still embodied the role of a visionary risk-taker. In this guise, he could reconcile dissimilar or even oppositional forces and could remain "a realist and a mystic," as his art was both "a vision and a truth." Thus, continuing to grapple with the 'real' ways in which dreaming worked in the modern unconscious imagination, as Marsden Hartley claimed, "Davies feels the visionary life of facts as a scientist would feel them actually."

By the teens, Davies had secured his reputation as a leading advocate of European modernism and was recognized for his own work's contributions to the vanguard art of the United States; Hartley observed, "Davies is almost a propagandist in his feeling for and admiration of the ultra-modern movement." During his efforts preparing for the Armory Show, Davies had developed a keen eye for many forms of modernist abstraction, including the viscerally expressive work of artists such as Henri Matisse and Wassily Kandinsky as well as the Cubist paintings of Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp; he admired and collected work by Jacques Villon, purchasing his 1912 painting *Puteaux: Les fumes et les arbres en fleur* from the Armory Show (figure 6.6), as well as a gouache by Picasso and two lithographs by Cezanne. Davies's shrewd advice

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Chapter 6: A Dream of Hybrid Harmony

guided patrons such as Bliss, whose purchases later helped establish the Museum of Modern Art’s impressive holdings, as well as noted collector John Quinn.24

In the aftermath of critical attention that surrounded the show, positive and negative alike, ‘Cubism’ was an elastic term that critics applied to a very wide range of practices: critic Henry McBride noted in 1914, “America has a fine dashing way of naming things to suit itself and over here when we say “cubism” we mean everything and anything that is unacademic. As a matter of fact, very little […] corresponds to what the French call “cubism,” involving the four dimensions.”25 While a very small group of viewers might have recognized the distinction between the ‘salon’ Cubism of the French Puteaux group and the more hermetic explorations of form characteristic of Picasso and Braque’s analytic Cubism, in more common usage it was synonymous with many kinds of post-impressionism, fauvism, or futurism; any work that prioritized individual expression and abstraction.26 Introducing elements of ‘Cubo-futurist’ form to his own painting, Davies hoped to foster greater appreciation for such work, even amidst the rising nationalist sentiment and confusion—or outright hostility—that had characterized many Americans’ first exposure to artists labeled “European extremists” in the words of Teddy Roosevelt. 27 The pictorial synthesis at which he arrived, assembled from diverse

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24 John Quinn put together an unsurpassed collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and European art. A corporation lawyer who began collecting books and prints about 1900, Quinn’s fortune derived from his successful legal practice. The Armory Show was enabled by the pro bono legal advice he gave the AAPS. For John Quinn’s influence on modernism the United States, see Zilczer, "The Noble Buyer: John Quinn, Patron of the Avant-Garde" (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1978).


27 Although many of these debates were not only instigated by the Armory Show, but had arisen in the critical responses to exhibitions of avant-garde art on view in New York’s galleries such as “291,” the vast range of work on view in 1913 came as a revelation for many viewers, who were unsure of how to react. See Theodore Roosevelt, “A Layman’s Views of an Art Exhibition,” The Outlook, (March 22, 1913), p
influences, was akin to an interest he shared with Symbolist artists as well as with contemporary viewers in the interwoven perceptual effects of synaesthesia. Davies’s mural for Bliss is a prime example of a heterogeneous practice, one that attempted to establish ‘middle ground’ on which critics and viewers could forge agreement about the need for a new, modern form of art to take root on American soil, a goal he and Bliss shared.28

Bliss and Arthur Davies were well matched in their common interests and tastes, as both were devoted to music as well as to modern art. Lacking the spectacular wealth of some of her fellow female art patrons, Bliss nonetheless devoted her affluence to support of the arts and amassing a remarkable collection of modern painting, largely thanks to Davies’s advice. Encountering his work first around 1909, when she paid a visit to Macbeth’s Gallery and saw his one-man exhibition, Bliss went on to become his most ardent and sustained supporter; upon her death her will stipulated gifts of Davies’s works to museums across the nation.29 The precise nature of the friendship between Davies and Bliss remains unknown, as at her request their correspondence was burned after her death, but their mutual regard was commonly recognized.30 Many contemporaries observed the particular affinity between the artist and patron; they visited museums and galleries together and communicated often.31

718; despite his apparent hostility towards most European avant-garde painting, Roosevelt was an admirer of Davies.

28 On Bliss’s desire to encourage the spread of modern art, see MoMA Oral History Program; Series II, Trustees and Donors; Transcript of an interview with Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb [Lillie Bliss’s niece], July 6, 1988. (MoMA Archives).

29 As Davies’s grandson observed to me, “there is a painting by Davies in every museum in the country.” Niles Meriwether Davies, Jr., in conversation with the author, July 2, 2012. One of Bliss’s obituaries noted, “Though many names of fame and worth were represented in Miss Bliss’s collection, her loyalty and faith in the work of Arthur B. Davies in particular did much to advance knowledge of him among collectors.” See Bulletin of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, n.d. Clipping in Bliss Scrapbook, MoMA Archives.

30 A 1931 tribute to Davies commented, “He was more than Miss Bliss’s friend and adviser. He was, in the things of the mind, a compelling inspiration to her. She loved his work, and her devotion to it shines forth with particular intensity.” Bulletin of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, n.d. Clipping in the Lillie Bliss Scrapbook, MoMA Archives.

31 Their visits to ‘291’ were documented by Davies’s friend and colleague Jerome Myers, writing anonymously in the guise of an unidentified female painter for Arts and Decoration, who noted that Davies visited the gallery frequently, often in the company of Bliss. See “Confessions of an Errant Artist” Arts and Decoration, (March, 1913), p 370.
Despite her celebrated modesty and reserve, Bliss’s musical taste and talents were well known.\textsuperscript{32} Among her philanthropic commitments, she helped found the Kneisel Quartet, a highly esteemed group of performers based in Boston, and supported the Julliard School; her niece recalled that her appreciation for music was diverse.\textsuperscript{33} She reportedly taught Davies how to play the piano, and cultivated his range of musical expertise by visiting his studio and playing for him: a 1931 \textit{Brooklyn Times} review of an exhibition of Bliss’s collection commented, “from the great store of her musical knowledge she opened new vistas to him, disclosed to him the rhythm of sound and broadened his scope.”\textsuperscript{34} In the murals, Bliss and Davies indulged their fascination with the equivalence between painting and musical expression. According to critic Henry McBride, when Bliss discovered the art of Davies, she determined “what Davies was doing in paint was precisely what musicians were doing.”\textsuperscript{35} She found his work’s dynamic complexities powerfully analogous to her experience of the expressive, intellectual and emotional power of music.

A feast intended to delight the eyes, the mind and the integrated senses, Bliss’s murals made a curious argument in favor of a new and synaesthetic form of art. They juxtaposed recognizable, prismatically fragmented female figures and figural groups with regions of abstract pattern, bold contour, and faceted planes of pure color. Although they depict no specific instrument or performance, they call to mind complex musical analogies; a profusion of sharp angles, ascending lines and brittle shapes evoke the bright notes of a melodic line, offset by the harmonies of bold, broad geometries and hard-edged fields of pure color; larger, darker echoing forms convey complex chords and the guiding

\textsuperscript{32}Roob, “A Noble Legacy” \textit{Art in America} 91:11 (November, 2003), p 73, notes that as a single woman, Bliss was very careful about maintaining propriety, simplicity and decorous public conduct, dressing conservatively and behaving with reticence. Yet, beneath this guarded demeanor, she had confidence in her own judgment and was very passionate and articulate about her aesthetic sensibility and support of the arts. In addition to her musical gifts, she was also an aspiring playwright.

\textsuperscript{33}She studied briefly with the Kneisel Quartet; specializing in chamber music, they primarily performed the work Baroque and Romantic composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Grieg; they debuted Dvořák’s American Quartet in January 1894. Although her taste was not initially radical, she had a discerning ear and appreciated modern musical developments. Her niece reported, “When she died we found lots of letters from composers--some of whom I really don’t think I’d ever heard of--who used to send her their music.” Transcript of an interview with Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb [Lillie Bliss’s niece], July 6, 1988, (Museum of Modern Art Archives).


rhythms of tympani and bass. Yet, critic Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. (1868-1953) later described seeing the murals, and recalled; “Overt musical suggestion there is none. The figures [...] live in a purely mental world [...] waiting for the first chord of a music in which they are to join.” This is a kind of music that exists purely in the imagination.

The murals’ musical properties sprang readily to mind for those critics who were allowed to visit, photograph and write about the murals in periodicals. Although they were not readily accessible to the general public, a small group of friends of Davies and Bliss saw them installed, including a few critics. They were not only enticingly praised by Duncan Phillips in *Art and Archaeology* in 1916, but were also discussed by advocate of modernism Frederick James Gregg (d. 1928), who had played a key role arranging the publicity for the Armory Show. Writing for *Vanity Fair* in 1915 and 1916, he illustrated the murals in photographs showing the room, unfurnished, with the panels installed in place (figure 6.6).

Painted separately, when installed each of the mural panels related to one another, creating a coordinated statement that moved the eye around the room from its corners to the adjacent walls. In photographs, no figure or panel stands out or dominates but one can nonetheless discern separate but interrelated “phrases,” like movements in a symphony: a group of supplicant figures; a stately parade towards a pillar; a woman bending before a cherubic child whose arms rise in a gesture of benevolence (figure 6.7). They vary in scale, from one large torso on the south wall, to smaller, slenderer and more insubstantial forms whose truncated or overlapping limbs defy any attempt to disentangle them from their surroundings. Attentive viewers can discern architectural elements in some panels—a blue pillar rising on the west wall, for example—but they present no systematically ordered space. The murals meet the stipulated requirements for a room whose purpose was ‘decorative:’ meant to enhance the owner’s esthetic experience while complementing her collection. Entirely non-narrative, many of the figures seem to sway or march in dignified processions; they pose gracefully and interact quietly. A few are

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37 The teetotaling Bliss did entertain regularly, hosting “formal, wineless soirées” for musicians, artists including Davies, and actors such as Walter Hampden, Ruth Draper, Ethel Barrymore Bliss Obituary, *Time Magazine*, May 25, 1931, clipping in the Bliss scrapbook, MOMA Archives.
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semi-naked, wearing transparent garments whose draping folds trace the complex geometries of mathematical diagrams; still others recline, their bodies’ contours merging with syncopated designs that reflect the streamlining of Art Nouveau, and anticipating the geometric emphasis of Art Deco.

Despite their density, the figures and groups express a composed and exultant stillness, as if they attend in expectation, rather than suggesting the festive clamor of a noisy crowd. Yet, although the figures are tranquil, the color and dynamism of the forms around them are not; this is not a sedate rondo, but a complex contrapuntal fugue, approaching dissonance. Strikingly vibrant, vivid hues are offset against the modulated background shades of muted purples, browns, and golds in vigorous orchestration. When assembled in their original setting, illuminated by windows facing South and West, the lively, engrossing design must have glowed and pulsed.38

Viewers and critics had readily associated the attenuated, sylphic and weightless bodies in Davies’s earlier works with the artist’s exploration of the transcendent terrain of the unconscious, but in the Bliss murals Davies’s figures take on a more ostensibly symbolic, non-objective function, evoking what Henry McBride called “the purer music of the cubistic works.”39 They created an environment fit for the kinds of emotional, intellectual and imaginative mental states one enters when hearing music, a topic some American psychologists researched in the early teens.40 But if in his new work Davies remained a dreamer to his critics, the Bliss murals capture a very different quality of dreaming: their geometric facets and arrangements of nonobjective color, texture, shape and scale not only invoke musical comparisons, but also approximate the mind’s occasionally jarring juxtapositions of dissimilar elements when in a state of unconscious visualization. Davies’s mural figures are patently modern muses who abjure the storytelling of dreams, generating more ‘dissociative’ effects: the occasionally surprising

40 See Harry Porter Weld, “Experimental Study of Musical Enjoyment,” American Journal of Psychology, 23:2, (April, 1912), pp 245-308. Among other issues, Weld, who was not only a musician but also a professor of Psychology at Clark University, studied the ‘Auditory Imagery’ of music listeners, attempting to come to terms with the many ways in which music was apprehended by all the faculties of the mind, not merely the emotions.
jumps across space and time that our unconscious minds take as entirely normal, and the odd symbolic analogies that are produced by the imaginative work of dormant creativity.

They also address the dreamer’s playfully interwoven senses—our dreaming mind’s fusion of imagery, sensation, and kinesthetic motion—in their polychromy, energetic rhythms and stimulating arabesques. These aspects of the mural parallel what some contemporary scientists identified as the mechanisms by which images and symbols arise in dreams: in his 1915 defense of Freudian psychoanalysis Isidor Coriat identified and explained their typical features of spatio-temporal ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement.’ Havelock Ellis had described similar qualities in 1910 as the “falling apart of the constituent groups of psychic centers,” which “contributes [...] to render our dreams vivid and interesting.” Discussing the essentially synaesthetic properties of the dreaming imagination in his essay, republished in his book on dreams in 1916, Ellis remarked how the unconscious mind works via integrated activity, transgressing sensory boundaries and conjuring symbolic imagery from sensation and language.

Whether or not he had first-hand knowledge of the neurological definition of synaesthesia provided by the growing amount of research devoted to the phenomenon, exploring the ‘synaesthetic’ properties of pure line and color in generating a ‘harmonious’ mural offered Davies the chance to create what was widely regarded as a particularly modern mode of painting: one that, like music, had the power to express meaning and emotion directly to the mind. In the Bliss murals, as well as in the works he created in the following years, Davies used his painting to forge a doorway allowing viewers to glimpse the realm of synaesthetic free association and non-objective perception.

I. The synaesthetic symbolism of dreams

Davies embarked upon his mural project at a time when the phenomenon of synaesthesia enjoyed rising currency in American culture, serving as a valuable metaphor

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43 On the metaphor of synesthesia in the arts, and the ways in which art transcends language to ‘speak directly to the mind,’ see also Ernst Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p 22.
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for the arts as much as a topic of psychological investigation. Synaesthesia, etymologically linked through its Greek prefix to both the meaning and the object of 'synthesis' in the arts, was readily adapted and broadly applied to widely differing forms of art pursued by Symbolists and their immediate followers. After the first identification of synaesthesia by G. T. L. Sachs in 1812, synaesthetic analogies circulated in fiction, philosophy, theology and art; invoking synaesthesia was a way to explain how many different forms of art had the ability to express meaning via several simultaneously activated sensory modes. 

References to synaesthetic perception addressed the auditory effects of spoken poetry compared to its appearance on the printed page, or described the ability of pure shape, line and color to communicate in painting and sculpture, or even enabled discussion of the expressive and embodied immediacy of music itself. While none of these phenomena is truly synaesthetic, the term was expansively understood and accommodated a range of inconsistent applications.

Many Symbolist artists and poets were beguiled by the idea that some people’s perceptions fuse color, shape, letters and/or sound in glorious free-association; they adopted synaesthesia as a model of liberated consciousness equivalent to their own enhanced perception and creativity. While Charles Baudelaire’s pursuit of correspondences between different forms of art had some synaesthetic associations, Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud was one of the first to popularize synaesthetic metaphors, conjoining color, language and sound in his 1883 poem Voyelles. Borrowing from the scientific assertion that synaesthesia was both exceptional and involuntary, Rimbaud adopted the identity of a gifted seer and claimed such ability for himself, integrating it with the common Symbolist belief that heightened creative insight revealed metaphysical connections between the material and immaterial realms. Synaesthesia, 

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45 Rimbaud not only associated visual and acoustic sensations, but connected these with established symbolist imagery and emotional states as well: black with horror, white with innocence. See John E. Harrison, Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p 119-120, on the distinction between synaesthesia as a poetic metaphor claimed predominantly by male writers, and true synaesthetic perception. Statistical analysis of synaesthesia’s commonality shows it appears more frequently in women.
along with other forms of involuntary and visionary states such as dreams and hallucinations became an exemplary if mysterious form of consciousness.

Descriptions of synaesthetic perception validated the popular Romantic belief that the human imagination was chiefly important in creating sense out of the profusion of stimuli with which human minds must cope, and alluded to the possibility of transcendence. Synaesthetes reporting upon their experiences with colored hearing and visual music seemed to describe a kind of enchanted liberation in their senses, apparently in free play with one another, which promoted a model of creative freedom and license that easily translated into a model for all artistic production.\footnote{On the allure of synesthesia as a metaphor for Romantic thinkers and artists, Rimbaud's implementation of synesthetic metaphors, as well as a valuable discussion of the widespread conflation of psychological sciences and Symbolist art in France in the 1880s and 1890s, see Dann, \textit{Bright Colors Falsely Seen}, (1998), pp 17-51. Dann challenges the longstanding belief that synesthetes have access to a 'transcendent' state of elevated spiritual access, but does think that synesthesia has important lessons to deliver to science about the nature of consciousness and the function of thought.} Symbolists and their followers such as Wassily Kandinsky welcomed the uniqueness of synesthetic visions as examples for their own subjective practice to emulate, prioritizing personal insight and its expression via autonomous form.

Beyond merely identifying the existence of colored hearing or other kinds of synaesthesias—such as those between colors and letters or numbers—much early psychological research tried to establish a clinical definition of synaesthesia, and distinguish 'true' synaesthetes from many study participants who merely had vivid imaginations, creativity or skill with metaphor. True synaesthetes were compelling to artists and psychologists alike in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of the ways in which their involuntarily interwoven perception liberally mingled “real and illusory sensory experiences,” thus calling attention to the nature of subjectivity and objectivity in psychology and the philosophies that were foundational to art and science at the turn of the century.\footnote{See Randolph Blake, et al, “On The Perceptual Reality of Synesthetic Color,” in Robertson and Sagiv, \textit{Synesthesia: Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp 47-73, on the various ways in which the 'reality' of colored synesthesias are measured, and the linguistic confusions that make such studies a challenge. See John Gage, “Making Sense of Color—The Synaesthetic Dimension,” in \textit{Color and Meaning}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp 261-268 for a discussion of the ways in which science's treatment of synesthetic perception changed between Galton's identification in 1883 and later twentieth century neurological explanations.}
These issues were also closely affiliated with the study of dreaming; many scientists who explored the unconscious and dreams also studied synaesthesia, as it was a mysterious kind of perception that took place entirely within the mind. Identifying “The Problem of Color-Hearing,” in an essay published in America in *The Chautauquan* in 1893, Alfred Binet explored the ways in which colored perception was associated with auditory phenomena in his research subjects, from spoken language to musical tones. Two years later the concept was circulating in American psychological literature, in the research of Mary Calkins. While some scientists proposed that synaesthetic perception was a more highly evolved model of subjectivity, one that might become ever more common in the modern world, others regarded it with suspicion as a sign of regression to a prior, less well-regulated sensory state. As Richard Cytowik’s research attests, these nineteenth and early twentieth century psychologists maintained “undifferentiated theories speculat[ing] that synaesthesia was caused by an immature nervous system […] a form of atavism or sensory incontinence.” The condition’s rarity caused a few psychologists to label all synaesthesias as forms of degeneration or mental instability. But many other researchers also noted its high correlation with artistic traits, imagination and particularly with intelligence because of common synaesthetic perceptual anomalies with aesthetic experiences, such as attention to the emotional charge of color. Binet’s primary research subjects were a science teacher and watercolor painter, both of whom were inspired in their careers by their synaesthetic perceptions.

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48 Because of its pervasive use in Symbolist art and poetry, some psychologists speculated that synaesthesia was not an ‘authentic’ psychological phenomenon; Binet granted it more credibility, attempting to define it as ‘real’ as opposed to a psychosomatic or fantasized mental condition.

49 Mary Calkins, ‘Synaesthesia’, *The American Journal of Psychology*, 1, (1895), pp. 90–107. As Kevin Dann observes, between 1892 and 1893, 26 different articles on color-hearing were published. See Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, (1998), pp. 32–33. The condition was also commonly referred to as “chromesthesia” or even “pseudo-chromesthesia.”


51 Since synesthesia was a rare condition, and one most commonly connected to a peculiar visionary kind of perception, it could also be readily associated with insanity or social decline. During a year in which psychological research into synesthesia hit a peak, Max Nordau’s book *Degeneration* appeared, and in its widely-read pages Nordau condemned both true synesthetes and those Symbolist artists, poets composers who aspired to or claimed synesthetic perception as living examples of the modern condition of ‘mental decay.’ Nordau, *Degeneration*, (London: William Heinemann, 1898) [1892]), p 142. Dann comments that French psychologist Theodore Flournoy, who studied 1, 076 subjects, concluded that while synesthesias were ‘normal’ they were nonetheless potentially linked to degeneration, in a manner similar to the prevalence of hallucinations.

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Ellis’s 1910 essay, “The Symbolism of Dreams,” made important claims for the close association between synaesthesia and dreaming, suggesting that these were strongly related mental processes. Writing as he had previously for the diverse audience of Popular Science Monthly, Ellis called attention to the common symbolic experiences of dreamers and synaesthetes. Observing that the mind possesses an “automatic impulse towards symbolism,” he confidently attested, “there is even a normal sphere in which symbolism has free scope and that is in the world of dreams.” He clarified his ideas:

It will be seen that a synaesthesia [...] causes an impression of one sensory order to be automatically and involuntarily linked to an impression of a totally different order. [...] In this way, things in the physical order become symbols of things in the spiritual order. This symbolism penetrates indeed the whole of language [...] our verbs are equally symbolical.

According to Ellis, the brain’s underlying propensity towards symbolism in dreams (both linguistic and iconic) translates sensory stimuli and our associated emotions into “vivid and interesting” reconfigurations of imagery and motion. He also claimed, “sensory symbolism rests on a very fundamental psychic tendency [...] for a symbol—which is literally a throwing together—means that two things of different orders have become so associated that one of them may be regarded as the sign and representative of the other.” In his essay, Ellis equated synaesthesia with the kinds of visually-based creative problem-solving that he argued takes place in the slumbering mind; “that confusion of ideas and images which may be regarded as the most constant feature of dream mechanism is nothing but a process of reasoning, a perpetual effort to argue out harmoniously the absurdly limited and incongruous data presented to sleeping consciousness.”

Since “language is largely the utilization of symbols,” Ellis explained dreaming as the unconscious mind making involuntary associative links in synaesthetic fashion between words, sensations, concepts, and symbols—the analogy he employed recalled

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feeling a mosquito bite and dreaming about a lobster. He also noted an “instinctive association between sounds and visual imagery” that results in ingenious and unlikely visualizations; as he put it “when the impressions derived from one sense are translated into those of another sense there can be no question of realism.” Synaesthesia in dreams was equated with the mind’s expressive ability to generate imagery via intertwined cognitive and sensory faculties.

While Ellis did acknowledge the rarity of true synaesthesia, he attested that dreaming employed an everyday kind of synesthetic association that everyone possesses; in fact, if dreaming and synaesthesias were in this crucial way psychologically similar, then anyone might be able to perceive synaesthetically, if only when one is dreaming. Psychologist F. L. Wells argued as much when, in his study of “Symbolism and Synesthesia,” he argued:

synesthesias [...] form associations foreign to the waking consciousness of ordinary life [...] But whereas the thought of awareness is in the normal mind mainly governed by the logic of experience, that below the level of awareness is quite free from these restrictions.

He remarked that in such thoughts, “associations and symbolisms are formed which are not present to the conscious level of the mind [...] They also come to the surface in the dream...” While he was careful to argue that the sensory patterns experienced by fully conscious synaesthetes were not precisely the same as the sequence of logically interpreted symbolisms created by dreamers, he nonetheless suggested that the two phenomena worked in concert in the unconscious imagination.

Moreover, as another commentator noted, our intertwined images and sensory perceptions seem peculiarly magnified in dreams, since when asleep we are “Lacking free and co-operative use of [our sense organs] we are compelled to provide a satisfactory

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60 Ibid.
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explanation by the exercise of imagination, a process greatly furthered by the fact that in
sleep, the sensations which reach us […] seem far more massive and intense than
ordinarily.”61 A similar kind of sensory conflation made dreams into “a weird, absurd and
disconnected phantasmagoria,” as another psychologist concluded.62 But the ‘weirdness’
and the amplification of our sensory experiences could both find rational explication and
even positive benefit if some of the effects were demonstrated to arise in symbolic form
from the relaxation of sensory boundaries that happened when one sleeps, resulting in a
liberal con-fusion of sensory experience that echoed if it did not duplicate synaesthesia.

For many critics, Davies seemed particularly attuned to these experiences; one of
them attested to the “modernism [of his] tremulous attenuation of human figures that so
singularly lends itself to symbolistic rhythm [and] design.”63 The artist captures the
compelling intensity of these ‘disconnected’ nocturnal fantasies in works such as the
proto-Cubistic Figures in a Landscape, (figures 6. 9) a painting from 1912 in which he
began his analytic investigation of the communicative properties of abstracted space and
form. Davies dismantles his pastoral Arcadia; coarsely painted, elongated and seemingly
boneless bodies spread out across and through an amorphous space, alternating with
bright wedges and agitated gestural marks applied in vivid, verdant green.

These transform what might otherwise seem a tranquil landscape into the
incoherent and ‘phantasmagorical’ setting of the free-associating mind, an internal space
that Ellis described as “a new infinity” where “Time and space are annihilated, gravity is
suspended, and […] we are brought into a deeper communion with nature.”64 Here we
find no beginning and no end, no clearly defined foreground or background, and no limit
to the associations we are invited to imagine between these crudely painted bodies and
the raw forms next to which they are arranged. While some of the figures seem to lie on
the ground, others appear to float, their bodies arching, rising up towards that state of
free-associating communion that Ellis regarded as entirely natural to the dream.

Ellis, of course, was not writing about art in any deliberate manner, and beyond a
brief reference to Baudelaire’s correspondences, his references to the synaesthetic

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'symbolism' of dreams were not meant to refer to Symbolism as a movement in painting or poetry. The 'symbols' Ellis mentions pertained more closely to discussion of their linguistic signification circulating in cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis. In fact Ellis took some pains to point out the limitations he saw in Freudian theory. His argument invited dialogue about the mind's inherent tendency towards symbolism with Freudian psychoanalysts, posing synaesthetic symbolism as a way to understand dreams in ways distinct from their interpretation in sexual terms. But Ellis also seemed aware of how his ideas about language, dreaming and perception might echo evaluations of modern painting and music—the potent interrelationship of these art forms in the visualizing mind, and their synaesthetic possibilities; for example, he remarked, "some melodies of Handel suggest a giant painting frescoes on a vast wall space."66

Not only did Davies attempt to do what Ellis proposed, painting music on Bliss's walls, the psychologist's analogy between synaesthesia and dreaming had additional relevance to the murals; lending credence to his analogy's sophistication, Ellis avowed, "the natural tendency to symbolism, which may be compared to the allied tendency in dreaming, is furnished by another language, the language of music." 67 As much as dreams operate in synaesthetic and symbolic terms, he claimed, music has a similar power to transgress sensory boundaries, evoking "sensorial correspondences" and mental imagery. Calling attention to the ways in which symbolic associations moved fluidly between words, sounds and images (and even touch or scent), he singled out music's inherently symbolic capacity: "music is a representation of the world—the internal or external world" he claimed, "which [...] can only be expressive by its symbolism." He explained: "our minds are so constructed that the bass always seems deep and the treble

65 In fact, while Ellis recognized the important contributions that Freud was making to dream interpretation in his Popular Science essay, he also felt Freud had gone too far in asserting that every dream-symbol was a disguised wish. He claimed "in ordinary sleep the images that drift across the field of consciousness, though they have a logic of their own seem in large cases to be quite explicable without resort to the theory that they stand in vital but concealed relationship to our most intimate self." Ellis, The Symbolism of Dreams, p. 52.
67 Ellis, "The Symbolism of Dreams," (1910), pp 43 and 45. Ellis's ideas resonate deeply with 21st century interests, such as French philosopher Michel Serres's belief that "music is the substratum of all meaningful language." For more see Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley, "Sense and Sensibility: Translating the Bodily Experience" introduction to their translation of Michel Serres, The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies, (New York: Continuum Books, 2008).
high;” and observed that in the visualizing mind “pointed forms produce light photisms,” while “bright lights and pointed forms produce high phonisms [and] low phonisms are produced by opposite conditions.” D68 Davies’s mural seems keenly attentive to ideas such as these, symbolizing music as an external representation of the internal world of the mind; his acute angles, gentle curves and orchestration of colors are his attempt to equal such photisms and phonisms.

Ellis’s approach to synaesthesia and dreams also raised important issues concerning the human propensity towards symbolism in general terms, crossing the boundaries between normal, synesthetic and unconscious forms of perception, between rational definition and imaginative expression, and particularly between perception and language. D69 An early 20th century analysis of the synaesthetic associations between literary metaphors, language and meaning was proposed by comparative linguist Hanns Oertel in his 1901 Lectures in the Study of Language, but he noted “The phenomenon of synaesthesia has received rather full treatment at the hand of the psychologists, but its reflection on language has not yet received adequate treatment by lexicographers.” D70 Yet, many early 20th century psychological studies of synaesthesia also recognized the subjective variability of language in discussions of sensory phenomena, such as the perception of color in general and the terms used to describe it. D71 Descriptions of color and musical tone both lent themselves readily to poetic metaphor and synaesthetic analogy.

Although it has not yet been possible to establish that Davies had firsthand knowledge of Ellis’s writings, the marked correspondences between the scientist’s observations and the artist’s pictorial experiments attest to growing modern American

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69 As John Gage has more recently observed in his studies of color, the perception of color “has always lent itself to association and symbolizing, whether on the general level of identifying the sensuous, unstable, indeterminate characteristics of colour as such [...] or grouping individual colours into categories such as ‘warm’ and ‘cool’; or characterizing colours as [...] ‘cheerful’ or ‘sad.” Gage, Color and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p 262
71 For an enlightening discussion of the many ways in which linguistic definitions influenced scientific attempts to understand color and color perception in America, see Michael Rossi, The Rules of Perception: American Color Science, 1831-1931, (PhD Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011). I am grateful to Mr. Rossi for many insights about color, perception, cognition and the general problems relating to subjectivity in scientific and artistic debates.
familiarity with synaesthetic ideas and metaphors. An artist whose work was already so powerfully associated with artistic Symbolism, with psychological forms of internal ‘symbolism,’ with music and with dreaming, Davies could readily have welcomed scientific justification for his new sensory experiments in the expressive properties of form. Indeed, a few writers singled Davies out as an artist whose perceptual gifts and capacity to conjoin dissimilar elements transcended the limitations of painting, symbolism or language alone. In 1917, one critic writing about an exhibition at Knoedler’s Gallery praised Davies’s capacity to “borrow” from parallel arts, blending pictorial form and language into a pleasing whole. While the critic felt that “abstractions carried to the limit, intellectually or emotionally, unconnected by sympathetic or recognizable things of general knowledge, would seem to be [...] as footless as they are inefficient,” Davies managed to surpass these clumsy efforts of his peers, offering “proof of cultivated objective faculties above others,” which enabled him to “arrive at expression with borrowings from pictures and at individuality through the application of [...] matters of language.”72 Just as Ellis referred to the symbolism of dreams as a fusion of symbolic language and sensory stimulus, Davies strove for a similar sense of synaesthetically blended representation and form, especially in his exploration of the relationship between music, movement and dance.

Davies’s jubilant mural-sized canvas Dances (figure 6.9), begun four years after Ellis’s essay was written, seems almost a literal interpretation of the psychologist’s analysis of the conjunction between dreaming, synaesthesia, and music: observing the similarity between kinesthetic properties of dreaming and the unconscious imagery of music, Ellis wrote “there is sometimes a tendency for music to arouse ideas of motor imagery,” and he pronounced, “music is fundamentally an audible dance, and the most primitive music is dance music.”73 Ideas such as these were given visual form by Francis Picabia in his Armory Show entry, Dances at the Spring, a work Davies had helped to select for exhibition. Davies also visualized these cross-wired associations; exhibited under its original title, New Numbers, Decoration, Dances as part of a “Special Exhibition of Modern Art Applied to Decoration”—a show of decidedly abstract art held

73 Ellis, (1910), p 44.
at Montross Gallery in the Spring of 1915—the work attracted the praise of critics who expressed wonderment at his “most successful and gratifying interpretation of the dance.” Although few of his viewers would have appreciated these qualities in the black-and-white illustration accompanying Frederick James Gregg’s review of the show, published in *Vanity Fair* in April 1915, the painting employs a prismatic array of brilliant hue, applied to forms that convey both the liberated motion and exuberant emotion of freely expressive modern movement.

Depicting two robust, naked female figures, Davies’s expressive painting shows their bodies composed of richly colored, sharply angled planes and curving contours, as if assembled from long scintillating shards of broken glass. Their gesturing arms and uplifted knees emerge brightly as they meet, posed against a background of dark brown; behind each of them, colored shapes eddy and spin, as if visible echoes of their bodies’ rhythmic and vigorous motion. Although static, the painting seems to excerpt a single moment out of a continuously unfolding performance, such as the spectacle of color, sound, light and dance in Loïe Fuller’s *Ballet of Light* that had enchanted audiences at the Metropolitan Opera in 1909-1910. Davies’s dancers have discernable heads and arms, legs and breasts, but at the same time they seem peculiarly disembodied, as if what the artist shows are the rhythms and cadences of music taking momentary shape in human form.

While Davies’s earlier painting, *Crescendo*, (figure 5.13) rendered figures posed as if in the midst of a stately ballet, *Dances* is an outpouring of more primal, vigorous motion and emotion. The figures are rendered in a manner that indeed seems ‘primitive,’ in the sense that they are somehow incomplete or unformed: not only do their broad gestures and naked bodies make oblique reference to some ritual, they are almost too large and too jubilant to be contained by the limits of the canvas. Like the Bliss music room murals, this painting comingles abstraction and representation: fractured cubistic surfaces are applied to the figures’ recognizable contours. Rather than the scrutiny and

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76 The painting was so pleasing to Davies that he completed a second, smaller version of it for Lillie Bliss in 1915, which he titled *Day of Good Fortune*. 
play with perspectival space that is typical of Picasso and Braque’s ‘analytic’ Cubism, which Davies might have seen at ‘291’ in 1911, Davies’s Cubism is expressive, emotional and experiential—a formal amalgamation that shows his familiarity with the dazzling color of Robert Delaunay’s Cubism or Orphism and the ornate, elegant ‘salon’ Cubism of Albert Gleizes, whose Man on a Balcony (figure 6.12) was exhibited at the Armory Show.77

It is also fitting to its subject: dance itself could also be considered an interwoven art form amalgamating distinct sensory responses. Stimulating a viewer’s vision and hearing, and performer’s integrated perception and movement, dance engaged the kinesthetic imagination, and thus possessed strongly synaesthetic associations; Fuller’s integrated color, movement and music was particularly effective.78 Many viewers also considered Isadora Duncan’s fluid dancing gestures to be corporeal yet spiritual equivalents of music, spontaneously and intuitively delivered movements that spoke to music’s emotional and communicative properties; Duncan, a fellow believer in Theosophy, called her performances the “dance of the future” and explored its possibilities to weave together interrelated strains of modernism and spiritual thought.79 Writing in Camera Work in language that echoes Ellis, critic Charles Caffin observed that Duncan’s moving “figure becomes a symbol of the abstract conception of rhythm and melody” which “by some miracle seem to have been made visible.”80 He described her movements as spontaneous gestures from the soul that conveyed music’s embodied and emotional properties. As much as Davies’s painting suggests watching the dance, the naked forms and broad gestures also call to mind the physical sensations of dancing;

77 Davies favored Delaunay’s colorful, animated painting La Ville de Paris (1910-1912), which was meant to be in the Armory Show and was sent to New York, but its dimensions proved a challenge to the hanging committee, who left it out of the exhibition. Picasso’s La Femme au Pot de Moutarde (1910), was also included in the Armory Show. In some respects, Picasso’s Armory Show entry is also like Davies’s figures: a solitary and identifiably human form occupies the foreground, cubist faceting applied to the still-recognizable contours of her body, which although fragmented, is physically distinct from the space around her.

78 For more see Caroline J. Kappel, Labyrinthine Depictions and Tempting Colors: The Synaesthetic Dances of Loie Fuller as Symbolist Choreography, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ohio, 2007).


Chapter 6: A Dream of Hybrid Harmony

Davies’s interest in motion and dance proceeded in parallel with his exploration of synaesthetic pictorial form.81

As Caffin’s observation suggests, the free confusion of sensory stimuli experienced by synaesthetes was equally attractive to artists as a model of spiritually attuned consciousness. Just as Symbolist writers and artists in the 19th century had conflated the scientific and spiritual dimensions of synaesthetic perception, many 20th century artists who similarly hoped to express spiritual values in their work embraced the synaesthetic ideal of integrated or sensory associations because of its transgressive resonance.82 Not only was he an advocate of connections between Symbolist art and music, an interest he pursued well into the teens in his writing for Camera Work, Sadakichi Hartmann had also personally experimented with creating synaesthetic forms of art. At the conclusion of his 1898 Symbolist play about the life of the Buddha, he envisioned a “concert of self-radiant colors” bursting across the audience in a display that evoked the state of Nirvana. “A color revery [sic] takes place in the universe,” he wrote, describing the final spectacle, is “to be represented by pyrotechny, brought by chemistry, electricity and future light-producing sciences, to such perfection and beauty that it becomes the new Optic Art in which Color will rival Sound as a vehicle of pure emotion.”83

In a further experimental spirit, Hartmann continued exploring forms of art and performance that mingled different sensory perceptions in the 20th century. In July 1913, in Forum Magazine, he detailed the complexities of his ‘Perfume Concerts,’ imaginary travelogue lectures during which coordinated odors were wafted across the audience by means of large fans. Hartmann believed that just as arrangements of pictorial form and


color could evoke harmonies or silences, “aesthetic enjoyment in the realm of smells can, at present, be [...] so arranged that their sequence forms an artistic unity, vaguely resembling a melody.” And he continued, “Descriptive fragments carrying out an idea, analogous to a ‘musical thought’ can be expressed easily.” For example, in his opinion, “Neroli-oil [...] having quite a different smell from that of the natural orange blossoms from which they are distilled, arouses in many the vague sensations of sadness, a desire to dream.” Presenting his ideas just after the Armory Show, Hartmann tapped into the growing discussion of synaesthesia and art, and its spiritually transcendent potential; Davies’s music room murals also invoked the powerful, transformative properties of conjoined sensory and emotional stimuli that addressed the embodied mind and soul.

Among the immediate successors of Symbolism in the 20th century avant-garde, synaesthesia operated as a kind of ‘sixth sense’ offering the fortunate the chance to see transformative truth with an enhanced set of perceptual skills. The profusion of the metaphor led to a general confusion in terms, whereby the perceptual anomalies of true synaesthetes were often ascribed to non-synaesthetic artists; some believed the products of their minds and hands might generate a kind of vision in non-synesthetic beholders that approximated true synaesthetic perception. The preeminent advocate of such synesthetic associations between spiritualism, music and non-objective painting was Wassily Kandinsky.

Although Kandinsky’s ideas about analogies between color, form and music were only just beginning to influence American artists and critics in the teens, Davies was well versed in many of the strains of thought that the Russian artist interwove in his art and theory, as many of his ideas had been in circulation in Symbolist and spiritualist circles since the late nineteenth century. After having seen his work in the catalog for the 1912

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84 Hartmann, “In Perfume Land,” The Forum, (July, 1913), p 218
85 Although according to much contemporary speculation Kandinsky was not, actually, a true synesthete, he was enormously influential to American artists such as Marsden Hartley, who was a friend and colleague of Davies. Both Kandinsky and Hartley were proponents of Symbolist philosophies, adapted for use in the goals of their non-objective painting. For Kandinsky’s influence on other American artists, see Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz, Theme and Improvisation: Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde 1912-1950, (Boston: Little Brown, 1992).
Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne, Davies felt a kinship with the Russian painter and theorist, and selected Kandinsky’s 1912 painting *Improvisation #27* for exhibition at the Armory Show. Alfred Stieglitz purchased it, hoping to use it to promote Kandinsky’s ideas among his friends and patrons.

Kandinsky was an articulate promoter of his belief in the intra-sensory potential of non-objective painting; his text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is filled with references to synaesthetic correspondences between color and sound, as well as associations between color’s ability to connect directly with spiritual meaning. Alfred Stieglitz had previously published a brief translated excerpt from Kandinsky’s original 1910 text in *Camera Work* in July 1912, later translated into English as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* in 1914. In his book, Kandinsky summarized some of the psychological studies of synaesthesia with which he was familiar, and concluded that synaesthetic perceptions of color “would seem to be a sort of echo or resonance, as in the case of musical instruments which, without themselves being touched, vibrate in sympathy with another instrument being played. Such highly sensitive people are like good, much played violins [..].”

Music, described by Kandinsky as “the least material of the arts today,” conveyed expression through the intangible but powerfully moving element of sound waves, which in his belief were analogous not only to light waves but also to the ethereal energies of thought. Equipped with both a scientific and non-illusionistic reference to form, Kandinsky’s ultimate desire was to realize a wholly abstract art, one that would be intuitively created and perceived uniting sensory, spiritual, and psychological responses.

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87 Although Davies was unable to visit the Sonderbund exhibition of modern art, he used it as a model for the Armory Show, as it had assembled an unprecedented range of modern movements; Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Munch and Signac had all been represented in addition to Kandinsky and fellow members of Der Blaue Reiter. For the influence of the Sonderbund exhibition via Martin Birnbaum’s New York Gallery on American collectors in addition to Davies, see Zilcer, *The Noble Buyer:* (1978), p 26.

88 *1913 Armory Show 50th Anniversary Exhibition*, Munson Williams Proctor Institute, Utica New York, (New York: Henry Street Settlement, 1963), p 195. Although he had planned one, Stieglitz did not exhibit a solo show of Kandinsky’s work.


90 Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, translated by K. C. Lindsay and P. Vergo, (New York: Da Capo press, 1994), p 158. Although he was highly attuned to the resonances of color and claimed synesthetic experiences, art historians and psychologists continue to debate whether Kandinsky was a ‘true’ synesthete, or whether his admiration for synesthetic metaphors merely governed his wish to achieve such states of perception.
to color and shape.\textsuperscript{91} Addressing what he called “inner need,” Kandinsky urged fellow artists to use the fundamental forms of art to transmit spiritual insight via intra-sensory means, an idea he and Davies shared in common.

When publicized further, Kandinsky’s ideas expanded in their influence in the teens. In a review dated June 21, 1914, issued during the summer in which Davies was at work on the Bliss mural, \textit{The New York Times} highlighted Kandinsky’s ‘idealistic’ work and his theories. The author distilled the artist’s precepts, arguing, “Kandinsky has been carried very far towards the ideal of musical composition freed from crass imitation,” and furthermore insisted:

\begin{quote}
Kandinsky is a logical and clear thinker [...] He places his stress on spiritual expression, on the communication of the artist’s inner feeling. The outer form must grow in art as in religion out of the inner spiritual necessity. A man must paint his most subtle emotion as a musician plays them [...] He must use his knowledge of construction to compose patterns and color schemes that shall give pleasure [...] because of their harmony.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

In addition to his emphasis on harmony and musical analogies, Kandinsky’s particular attraction for Davies was located in his amalgamation of different authoritative sources with which he was already familiar: Wagnerian philosophies, beliefs about psychology and spiritualism, and the enduring power of folklore and myth, all merged with well articulated color theories which he demonstrated in his expressive painting.

Like Davies, Kandinsky was also a follower of Theosophy, but while Davies was devoted to the philosophy of Helena Blavatsky, Kandinsky’s ideas about Theosophical precepts and their connections to color came equally through the popular ideas of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, Theosophy’s most ardent promoters who took over leadership of the movement in the early 1900s. Their concepts about the relationship between color, form and spiritual insight were published as \textit{Thought Forms} in 1901, from which Kandinsky derived many of his own beliefs about the spiritual associations of

\textsuperscript{91} Kandinsky, \textit{The Art of Spiritual Harmony}, (1914), p 40.
\textsuperscript{92} “Art at Home and Abroad: Cubists, Post-Impressionists and Other Rebels Against the Conventional in Painting...” \textit{The New York Times}, (June 21, 1914).

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specific colors. Striving for objective measures that would ‘prove’ their data, *Thought Forms* opened with a diagram assigning specific emotional value to color, and closed with a chapter concerning “Forms Built By Music,” arguing for strong analogies between music and thought: they argued, as vibrations in matter create patterns and waves, so can the energies of thought create forms in the aura or ether of spiritual consciousness.

In the colored plates which accompanied Besant and Leadbeater’s text, abstract thought in the mind was granted discrete shape and color and illustrated by simple diagrams, whereas the more complex thoughts delivered by music assume forms rendered in intersecting colored lines, shapes, rings, coils and swirls. Whether or not Davies turned to *Thought Forms* to guide his composition, some of the discrete shapes and elemental forms in Davies’s mural and *Dances* echo Besant and Leadbeater’s illustrations; his colors in the mural suggest their designations of rose pink with ‘unselfish affection,’ and pale green with ‘sympathy.’ Figure 6.11 shows conceptualizations of ‘Peace and Protection’ and ‘Definite Affection’ in *Thought-Forms,* their abstract but discrete shapes standing out against a neutral, dark background, like Davies’s bodies in *Dances.* Although neither *Thought Forms* nor *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* said anything direct about dreaming, each book promoted beliefs about the psychological and spiritual function of art could be interpreted in terms of the mind’s autonomous interior world; as Kandinsky observed, “any realization of the inner working of color and form is so far unconscious.” Thus, synaesthetic perception called into fundamental question the nature of perceptual reality, interior visualization, consciousness and subjectivity.

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93 Sixten Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual:’ Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 29 (1966), 386-418. Ringbom believes it was in fact Rudolf Steiner who synthesized the wide variety of sources that informed Kandinsky’s basic beliefs, all filtered through the lens of Theosophy. But Kandinsky also read Blavatsky, Besant and Leadbeater directly. In Kandinsky’s own philosophical beliefs, Goethe’s ideas about color correspondences, Swedenborgian thought, French Theosophist and Symbolist Edouard Schure’s occult philosophies and more general Symbolist precepts about the fundamental unification of art, science, religion and life mingle freely. Although Kandinsky did not accept all of the ideas of Theosophy without some critical evaluation of their usefulness for his own esthetic program, he did quote from Blavatsky extensively in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art.*


95 Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony,* (1914), p 46.
Yet, although synaesthetic blending of sensory stimuli was compelling to some, offering a model for the development of future forms of art, not everyone endorsed this goal, nor the synaesthetic metaphors proliferating in descriptions of abstract art's appeal to the senses. If some critics lauded the stylistic and formal amalgamation in Davies's painting as an indication of its greatest strength, others saw it as a great weakness and threat to culture. Moreover, just as some psychologists saw synaesthesia as a form of psychological degeneration, some cultural critics perceived artistic fusions as a threat to the discrete qualities of differing art forms, undermining the standards and boundaries by which artistic excellence was measured.

Davies's desire to dream up a pictorial form that conveyed the psychological equivalent of visual music could be regarded an symptom of the problems inherent in artistic comingling that Irving Babbitt decried in his 1910 polemic, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*. The conservative cultural and literary critic lamented the ways in which he saw American art and culture in a state of retreat from reason, of which the fascination with synaesthetic correspondences and romantic appeals to the imagination were the most conspicuous symptoms. Babbitt was especially hostile towards the seductive sensual appeal of art and "unity of instinct" that much contemporary art, such as Davies's, was trying to inspire in viewers; he favored a much more disciplined, rational and intellectual "unity of insight." Yet, the music room remained the best place for Davies to test out his ideas about the power of the integrated senses and their instinctual appeal to an enchanted mind. For Lillie Bliss, who was not (as far as we can discern) a synaesthete, her music room offered her the kind of viewing experience that approximated the enlightened perception that comingled senses enabled: her eyes and mind, spiritually attuned and musically inspired, achieved a state of psychic wholeness all too rare in an increasingly technocratic world.

II. Musical analogies, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the color-music ideal

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96 Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion in the Arts*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), p 122, and 172-185. Babbitt was especially skeptical of the value of "color-audition" promoted by Symbolist poets and endorsed by proponents of modern painting, suggesting that it demonstrated aberrant neurological structure. "Color-audition" was endorsed "only in those who may belong to what we term the neurotic school," he wrote.
Although critics like Babbitt were profoundly skeptical of any form of art whose chief appeal was made to the senses rather than the intellect, for many American supporters of modern art, synaesthetic perception became a way to understand modern art’s spiritual properties as well as its frequent comparison the expressive and communicative power of music. If some critics lamented the ways in which modern art—such as Kandinsky’s radical departure from any representational aims—was confusing, jarring or downright weird, other reviews of new movements strove to explain their novel formal approaches in terms that American readers could readily grasp. References to harmonious color, complex rhythms and compositional inspiration helped critics create a conduit linking the proliferating forms of non-figural abstraction with more familiar conceptual territory, even suggesting scientific or psychological terms through which art might be apprehended in the extensive overlap between synaesthesia and musical metaphor. To cite only one example, Francis Picabia’s Cubo-futurist paintings, such as his Armory Show contribution Dances at the Spring (figure 6.12), were endorsed as efforts to render ‘absolute music’ in abstract form in an admiring profile published in the New York Tribune in March 1913. The geometric and cylindrical fragmentation in Davies’s mural, and in related works such as Mountaineers (figure 6.17), suggest that Davies was learning from Picabia’s example, as well as linking it to his own exploration of color harmonies and clearer figuration.

Attempting to define Picabia’s novel, hybrid style, the reporter observed essential connections between the artist and modern composers. Just as they increasingly broke free of limitations imposed by sterile musical traditions, the writer noted that “modern painters have begun to feel the same need of a freer, an absolute method of expression. Hence ‘post-impressionism,’ which refuses altogether to be bound by objectivity, by

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literal reproduction of the object seen.” Ultimately, he remarked on Picabia’s desire to capture the scientific and emotional properties of music, “express[ing] it in sound waves, he translates it into an expression of an impression, the mood.” The painter was quoted, claiming “[just] as there are absolute sound waves, so there are absolute waves of color and form. Modern music has won its way […] modern painting too, will find appreciation and understanding.” Whereas ‘objective’ painters are little more than copyists, the author stated, true subjective painting captures “what dreams may come.” 100 In the creation of his own idiosyncratic style of painting that similarly slipped between the categorical and stylistic distinctions being established for modern art—between Cubism, Futurism, Orphism and new as-yet-undefined movements—Davies could easily have been inspired reading such insightful criticism and commentary.

In his effort to deliver an equivalent to musical reverie, Davies’s Bliss murals engaged with the growing authority of such musical analogies. These had been gaining ground as rationales for painting in formalist criticism since the days of Whistler’s art-for-art’s sake pronouncements; Whistler remained one of the most respected artists whose ‘symphonies’ and ‘nocturnes’ spoke to viewer’s integrated perceptions and emotions. Whistler had written persuasively on the relationship between artistic autonomy and the purity of musical expression, which he hoped to emulate; “As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or color.” 101 Yet whereas Whistler nominally adhered to the precedent of natural appearance or inspiration in his paintings—however reduced, simplified and abstracted—many of the new forms of modern art seemed to require more elaborate justifications, theories or laws to explain their complete departure from the world of appearances. Whistler, moreover, had not necessarily advocated a kind of art that thoroughly integrated painting and music; he merely aspired to creating work that would equal music’s abstract expressive ability.

100 “A Post-Cubist’s Impressions of New York,” (1913), illustrates two paintings Picabia in response to his subjective sensory and emotional ‘impressions’ of the city, one entitled “What Dreams May Come,” which the artist discussed with the reporter. Picabia asserted, “as there are absolute sound waves, so there are absolute waves of color and form. Modern music has won its way […] modern painting too, will find appreciation and understanding.”

But many American art viewers in the early 20th century found ample evidence of Whistlerian musical analogies in their encounters with new formalist esthetics. Art educator Arthur Wesley Dow’s 1899 book *Composition* fused references to Symbolist thought, Asian design principles and Whistler’s pictorial rhythms and harmonies. In the introduction to his book, Dow claimed he “believed music to be, in a sense, the key to the other fine arts, since its essence is pure beauty [...] art may be called ‘visual music,’ and may be studied and criticized from this point of view.” In making his pronouncements, Dow “advocated a radically different idea, based as in music, upon synthetic principles,” and thus created a system of instruction that did not stress representation, but the fundamental of design, a “progressive series of synthetic exercises in line, dark-and-light, and color” aimed at achieving balance and harmony in composition. Although Davies had reached his own maturity as an artist when Dow began teaching at Pratt and then at Teacher’s College at Columbia University, the art educator’s ideas were widely discussed and deeply influential to many American artists of Davies’s acquaintance.

For Sadakichi Hartmann, writing in *Camera Work* and other magazines devoted to art and music in the early decades of the 20th century, the musical metaphors employed by Whistler and Symbolist art in the 1890s were no longer sufficient to account for the mounting force of expression and abstraction. Defining newer forms of modern painting and sculpture in musical terms—stressing music’s emotionality, feeling and tonality—Hartmann also suggested the abstract properties of music could be analogous to art’s emphasis on intellectualized form. Writing on the sculptor Rodin in *Camera Work* in the April-July issue of 1911, he wrote, “In our age music is the grand source of instant inspiration—no wonder that the other arts try to exercise many of the same sensuous, emotional and intellectual gratifications. Color turns musical when painting becomes

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102 Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition*, 13th edition, with a new introduction by Joseph Masheck, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p 65. Dow credited and celebrated Ernest Fenollosa as the originator of his ideas, a promoter of Japanese esthetics and once the curator of Japanese art at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts. As head of the Fine Arts Department at Teachers College, Columbia University, between 1904 and 1922, Dow had extensive influence on a group of younger American artists in the early 20th century, such as Georgia O’Keeffe.

103 For Hartmann’s deep investment in ‘integrative’ models of modernism that fused different art forms into a unified whole, see Lauren Kroiz, *Creative Composites: Modernism, Race, and the Stieglitz Circle*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
decorative or when the illusion of form is neglected and a more precise division of space is emphasized."\(^\text{104}\)

Recognizing music’s conjoined intellectual and emotional appeal to the mind, Hartmann’s pronouncements resonate with an editorial published the following year in the *New York Times*, in which Arthur Farwell, Supervisor of Municipal Concerts for the City of New York, endorsed new psychological studies of the psychology of music. He praised Harry Porter Weld’s recent “Experimental Study of Musical Enjoyment,” conducted at Clark University, which had proven that “music appeals to the human consciousness [...] and the ‘emotional,’ as commonly understood and meant, is but one among many ways of that appeal.” Moreover, “Music is an all-human symbol,” he observed, offering its gifts to any regions of the consciousness that will receive them.\(^\text{105}\)

Echoing ideas proposed by Ellis, Farwell recognized an inherent connection between the most fundamental aspects of the unconscious mind’s perceptive capacities and music.

By the early teens, the essential connection between the ‘universal’ expressivity of music and pictorial form was also gaining ground thanks to the rising influence of such authorities as British formalist critic Roger Fry, who strenuously advocated what he termed ‘visual music.’ In his ‘Essay on Aesthetics’ written in 1909, Fry asserted (following ideas initially proposed by Walter Pater) that music was the archetype to which all art should aspire; it could only realize its full expressive potential by rejecting the mimetic impulse, and embracing autonomous emotional properties like line and color. These emulated music’s ability to communicate abstractly by fundamental elements such as rhythm, tone, timbre, key and pitch. In terms that resonate with Davies’s mural, he argued a new painted language equaling the power of music would arise when “emotional elements are combined with the presentation of natural appearances, above all with the appearance of the human body."\(^\text{106}\)

Serving as curator of modern art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art between 1904 and 1910, Fry was instrumental in introducing his ideas among New York’s cultural

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cognoscenti, and a growing number of American critics promoted his formalist aesthetics. Fry was also an admirer of Davies, whose painting *A Measure of Dreams* had entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in 1909; Davies in turn was an enthusiast of Fry’s Grafton Gallery exhibitions, promoting the artists he grouped together as ‘post-impressionists:’ Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Matisse. Their influence—particularly Cézanne’s and Matisse’s—shaped Davies’s work such as *Figures in a Landscape* in the years immediately surrounding the Armory Show; he and Walt Kuhn visited the second of these in preparation for the show in late 1912, and thus surely knew about Fry’s influential analysis of art.

Yet, just as synaesthetic metaphors were negotiated in divergent ways, musical analogies with modern art were not accepted universally or with any consistency. Davies’s supporter James Gibbons Huneker, for one, was initially opposed to the notion that modern abstraction operated in musical terms. Although he appreciated how music’s mathematical rigor could also inspire emotional effects, he stated in a review of the Grafton Gallery show in 1912: “Mr. Fry’s idea of ‘visual music’ is but emotional geometrising.” Huneker missed out on the Armory Show, as he was in Europe working as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, but in his opinion, the abstract art of the Cubists and the Fauvists was not yet capable of delivering the suggestive subtlety of music, Symbolist poetry or its lyrical equivalent in Symbolist painting. Nonetheless by 1919 Huneker had arrived at a change of heart; writing on “Painted Music,” he praised art that explored “the abstract music of design.” Huneker also had always favored musical analogies in Davies’s work, writing “to the last spot of color, he develops his subject like a musician building up a symphony.”

Critic John Cournos provided perhaps the most enthusiastic and sustained endorsement of Davies’s musical ambitions and synaesthetic dreams in 1914, writing,

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"Granted that Davies’s painting expresses with subtle suggestion ‘the condition of music,’ the recognition of this fact brings with it a revelation of the painter’s symbolism.” For Cournos, Davies’s fusion of representation and abstraction enabled the ready translation from one art form’s emotional resonance to another, in a manner recalling Ellis’s discussion of dreaming:

the figures—musical symbols, as it were, expressed in line—have fallen in with the latent rhythm of Davies’s color […] Beneath all this portent, there is structural quality, the units are perfectly related and the various rhythms co-ordinated as in an orchestral composition.112

Although he was not writing about the Bliss murals specifically, Cournos’s words strike a powerfully resonant chord with their thorough fusion of figure, rhythm and color, seen especially in the processional beats of his West wall panel (figure 6.2). The artist’s true ‘symbolism’ lay in his ability to convey a musical ideal in terms that integrated the disparate goals of imagery with its dissolution in the service of music’s autonomous expressive force. Arguing that ultimately “the pleasures his pictures afford does not depend on their subject matter, but upon their intrinsic merit as painting,” Cournos concluded that Davies’s work was profoundly spiritual: he “may be listening to the music of his own soul” when creating his work.113

Long before meeting Bliss, Davies had established his convictions about music’s significance for his painting, and from his earliest reception, critics had previously commented upon the musical qualities of Davies’s art.114 A 1895 profile in The Independent quoted Davies, who argued, “painting is like music, with contrast and harmony and syncopated time; it can no more tell a story or be translated into words than can music at its highest.”115 By the early teens, these ideas were thoroughly integrated in paintings such as Choral Sea, ca. 1911, which Davies showed that year at the Art

114 Early paintings by Davies, such as The Horn Players (1893), or Viola Obligato, (1895) reflect his strong musical inclinations, but it is paintings such as Crescendo, and Rhythm, both executed around 1910, (both painted after Davies and Bliss had become acquainted), that show Davies’s interest in making musical analogies more overt in his work. These images, expressing increasing emphasis on strong rhythmic contour, suggest the ongoing and pervasive extent of musical and Symbolist references in his work.
He brought to canvas a delicate, tuneful image of graceful female figures standing, lying, dancing, and bathing on a tranquil summer beach reminiscent of the seaside fêtes of Maurice Denis, which Davies would exhibit at the Armory Show. The frieze-like painting is musical only in terms of its closely concordant color and carefully orchestrated figural arrangement; its pastel colors, combination of clothed and naked female figures and halcyon mood captures the spirit of summertime pleasures but no story intrudes on the spirit of almost entranced relaxation it captures. The title, however, calls forth a desire to hear the music of the ocean, its waves in rising crescendo and falling diminuendo, and the lilting notes of laughing bathers enjoying its cool water.

While the Bliss music room murals, painted only a few years later, also don’t show any specific musical performance, their emphasis on stronger rhythms of line and bolder harmonies of color creates a fitting context for the kinds of music that Bliss and Davies favored. Bliss’s niece recalled her sophisticated connoisseurship, while Davies’s letters of the 1890s mention Brahms, Beethoven and Chopin; under Bliss’s guidance, his taste surely broadened. Both were also fans of opera, and particularly Wagner. Like Kandinsky, who credited Wagner with particular synaesthetic inspiration, Davies was well-versed in Wagner’s philosophical ideas. The composer’s published autobiography was one of Davies’s most treasured books.

116 Although the Art Institute of Chicago currently assigns this work a date of 1915, its prior exhibition history challenges this designation.

117 Although no specific composers are mentioned, Bliss’s niece remarked her far-reaching musical interests in the most modern composers. See, Transcript of an interview with Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Cobb, July 6, 1988. (Museum of Modern Art Archives). Davies’s undated letters to Lucy attest that their mutual attraction was based in part upon their shared musical preferences. See Davies’s Correspondence, (Davies Collection).

118 Jerome Myers (writing anonymously), “Confessions of an Errant Artist,” Arts and Decoration, (May, 1917), p 370, linked Bliss and Davies together in his columns, and then comments, “Mr. Davies ... he has painted many pictures which are known for their intelligence. ... I am so glad Mr. Davies is comfortably off; he can afford the opera.”

119 Kandinsky’s desire to create a form of pictorial art that could equal this powerful emotional and perceptual experience was born at a performance of Lohengrin in 1896, which he later recalled as a defining moment, as the music had generated vivid visions of color and “wild, almost crazy lines” in his mind; in 1909, he had begun work on his own Wagnerian spectacle fusing music, colored light and drama entitled Der gelbe Klang, (the yellow sound), but it was never realized. For his account of attending Wagner’s opera, see Kandinsky’s Reminiscences/Three Pictures, (1913), in Complete Writings on Art, translated by K. C. Lindsay and P. Vergo, (New York: Da Capo press, 1994), p 364.

120 During the preparations for the 1911 Independent Exhibition, Davies lent his copy of this book to fellow artist Rockwell Kent to grant inspiration to Kent’s endeavors. Letter from Rockwell Kent to Brooks
Davies desire to give form to ‘visual music’ paralleled Richard Wagner’s goal of bringing disparate elements together, fusing art, drama and music to create a Gesamtkunstwerk: an esthetic whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, Davies was also motivated by the psychological associations of Wagner’s belief in music’s pre-verbal and inherently communicative power; “as pure organ of the Feeling, it speaks out the very thing which word-speech in itself can not speak out […] that which, looked at from the standpoint of our human intellect, is the Unspeakable.”

In painting dreams, Davies aspired to generate art that possessed such instinctual, unconscious and integrated authority. While he had painted Wagnerian themes in emulation of Ryder in his Symbolist art of the 1890s, Davies’s interest in creating a new, modern and psychologically acute Gesamtkunstwerk took on deeper and more deliberate significance in the teens.

When Davies began to exhibit his more radically abstracted work, critical response to these explorations varied widely. Some ascribed his interest to ‘scientific’ habits of analysis, and found particular merit in the rhythmic and linear qualities of his designs, such as the investigation of the musical properties of more austerely geometric form he presents in Intermezzo (figure 6.14). More closely consonant with the varieties of Cubism Davies featured at the Armory Show than his hybrid form in the music room, this is an intellectualized exercise in reducing human figures to their sparsest, almost skeletal elements. Davies disperses the barely-visible limbs and heads of nine bodies across a field of crosshatched planes and angular lines in a far more daring approach to analyzing space and form than the Bliss murals; he approximates the staccato meters and uneven tempo of modern music in sharp, asymmetrical angles and edges. In her 1918 review of a Davies’s exhibition Chicago critic Louise Bargelt found that “the effect of music which his canvases give” conveyed to her “a powerful sense of rhythm which dominates.”

Critic Elizabeth Luther Cary also singled out Davies’s abilities stating, “He could explain

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122 Louise Bargelt, “Davies Collection to be Exhibited at the Arts Club,” Chicago Daily Tribune, (February 10, 1918).
to you with diagrams and rhythm of voice how [music] could be traced—not vaguely, but with precision—in linear design.”

Whereas Bargelt and Cary were enthusiasts of this development, in his 1918 analysis of such work, critic Royal Cortissoz believed that Davies’s scientific objectives had turned his work sterile. He was “searching after a new rhythm, no longer the rhythm of nature, but that of a cubistic laboratory.”

While these writers attended to Davies’s rhythm, other critics identified greater musical and scientific significance in his color. In 1914, Cournos identified Davies as “above all a rare colorist,” and claimed, “it is easier to rhapsodize over his color than to describe it. It is as abstract as a piece of music, and of the same unforgettable intangibility.”

*Dust of Color*, ca. 1915 (figure 6.15), is as intellectual in its analytical strengths as *Intermezzo*; here Davies subjects his figures to similarly rigorous dismantling, reducing their contours to sketchy outlines seemingly eroded by the ‘dust’ his title references. Dispersed across a greenish-brown field, they emerge in ghostly outline against gently curving wedges and lines. The sharper geometries of *Intermezzo* melt and soften somewhat here, awakening images of sonorous phrases instead of bright, precise beats, the edgy timbre of horns merging with the complex melodic lines of strings. Dwight Williams, Davies’s early instructor in the foundational principles of art, later recalled, “he seemed instinctively and from the outset to have been conscious of a scientific analogy between color and sound. Even his early pictures showed […] a delicate adjustment of harmonious tones. The result has been those beautiful color harmonies which […] in his subjective pictures of his dream life, have found themselves.”

Despite Davies’ desire to generate an integrated form of visual music by fusing representation and abstraction, the result could as often be cacophony instead of harmony; if it can be hard to see what some critics hated in these works, it can be equally difficult to understand what the others loved. His muted hues in *Dust of Color* do not seem quite resonant or emotional enough to deserve the praise that one 1918 reviewer

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125 Cournos, (1914), p 770.
ascribed to Davies’s habits: “The rich tonality of its depths of sensuous and satisfying color achieves [...] the emotional equivalent of music in similar harmonies of sensitive interpretation.”\textsuperscript{127} Nor does the deconstruction of space in \textit{Intermezzo} quite seem to merit Guy Pene du Bois’s condemnation of Davies for having “studied the European experimentors [sic] and, in the cold complications of their lessons, lost himself” amidst what he described as, “extraneous intellectual or, especially, mathematical processes.”\textsuperscript{128}

But for a few critics, music at its best was intellectual and mathematical as well as emotional, and Davies work showed the virtues of both: not dissuaded by the inscrutability of Davies’s handling of form, for Cournos there was, “danger of reading too much into the pictures of Davies, but that is the great virtue of his art. The more wrong we are the more right the artist is, since in usurping the abstractedness of music, he has lent his art to the same possibilities of diverse interpretation.”\textsuperscript{129} The value of vague analogies between abstract music and art that many critics brought to bear on their discussion of Davies was that, like their manifold references to dreams, they depended upon the subjective interpretation of readers.

In his experiments creating Cubist visual music, Davies seemed quite sensitive to modern European composers’ more radical challenges to musical tradition, conveying new dimensions to emotion through atonality, jarring, unfamiliar syncopated rhythms and unconventional combinations of sounds. In 1924 Phillips recalled how the murals make one “[think] first and last of ultra-modern music, of its curious intervals, its fused and fascinating dissonances, and this, of course, is what the patron and the painter desired.”\textsuperscript{130} Although Davies, like many American music aficionados, may not have had the chance to hear much as yet, in January 1913 his favorite critic James Huneker reviewed the work of Arnold Schoenberg in a full-page essay for the readers of \textit{New York Times} and offered curious insight into the new atonal music emerging from Europe. Describing the Austrian composer as “a musical anarchist,” whose atonal work took shape in the first

\textsuperscript{129} Cournos, (1914), p 773.
few decades of the twentieth century and “aroused the ire and indignation of musical Germany,” Huneker confessed that at first he “loathed the music with intense interest.”

Nonetheless, he felt utterly convinced by “the very ecstasy of the hideous” in the music’s new territory of “the borderland between pain and pleasure;” he described hearing a Schoenberg symphony as “a new land through which I wandered [...] the ear, like the eye ‘accommodating’ itself to new perspectives,” reaching an understanding of the sound like “delicate china shivering into a thousand luminous fragments.” He came to the conclusion—in terms that are interestingly visual—that “the old tonal order has changed forever. There is no melodic or harmonic line, only a series of points, dots, dashes or phrases...” And ultimately, Huneker admitted: “to be hooked or netted by the stronger volition of the artist is the object of all the seven arts,” while Schoenberg could be “truthfully described as a musical symbolist.” Whether or not he would have taken the chance to witness what Huneker described in the first performances of Schoenberg’s work in the United States later that year, Davies would surely have taken note of these comments.

Just as Huneker described Schoenberg’s new dissonant compositions in vividly visual terms, many modern musicians were also looking for ways to unite art and music in an expressive and integrated works of art. As Cretien van Campen’s extensive study of synaesthesia and color-music has revealed, technological innovations creating artificial light proliferated around the century’s turn and sparked a wave of inventions and compositions—new kinds of musical instruments fusing color, sound and light emerged. After British inventor Alexander Rimington patented a sophisticated ‘color organ’ in 1893, his ideas reached a large and appreciative audience thanks to his writing...
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and public performances. In 1895, Rimington published his beliefs about the modern potential of a wholly new art form, as Color-Music: The Art of Mobile Color, later reissued in an expanded edition in 1912. Rimington was not only a composer and inventor but also an artist; he hoped that his invention would give rise to entirely new, modern and revolutionary art forms, unifying divergent arts such as painting and sound. He argued for a radically simplified form of modern painting when he asserted, “In painting colour has been used only as one of the elements in a picture, although perhaps the greatest source of beauty. We have not yet had pictures in which there is neither form nor subject, but only pure colour.” Rimington’s invention was celebrated in American newspapers and propelled many similar experiments in the teens. His proposals thus addressed American readers at the very time when Davies was newly establishing himself in New York City, exploring its diverse musical opportunities and experimenting with his own harmonic compositions in painting; given Davies’s abiding interest in music and synaesthesia, he must have followed these publications ardently.

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135 Van Campen, (2008), pp 49-51. Rimington had a highly systematic and scientific approach to creating color-music: he calibrated the color spectrum to the octave of musical tones, attributing particular notes to colors and then modulating their value and intensity along the keyboard, from dark low tones to light high ones.


137 Indeed, the spectacular potential of uniting color, light and music in a manner analogous to Rimington’s performances had previously been advocated by Richard Wagner. On the many ideas informing the creation of color-music performances, including Rimington’s, see James Baker, “Prometheus in America: The Significance of the World Premiere of Scriabin’s Poem of Fire as Color-Music, New York, 20 March 1915,” in Over Here! Modernism, the First Exile, (Providence: David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, 1989), pp 90-109. Wagner had expressed interest in a Rimington-style instrument, although he died before Rimington’s invention was patented.

138 Alexander Wallace Rimington, Colour-Music, The Art of Mobile Colour, (London, Hutchinson and Co., 1912) p 43. Although his color-organ produced no actual sounds, he believed that by liberating color from the dictates of form, he was able to create a kind of art performance on a screen that was akin to non-objective painting, fused with the element of change over time. The visual effects of his invention resembled those possible in cinema but with the addition of color and without governing narrative content.

139 American pianist Mary Hallock Greewewalt, inspired by Rimington, invented her own variation of the color organ, and gave performances of ‘color music’ to great acclaim in Philadelphia in 1911. See “Invents a Color Organ,” The Cincinnati Enquirer, (March 28, 1914), for one such article, which illustrated Rimington’s device and explained its use. For more on Mary Hallock Greewewalt and her ideas about color correspondences, see Judith Zilczer, “‘Color Music’: Synaesthesia and Nineteenth-Century Sources for Abstract Art,” Artibus et Historiae, 16 (1987), p 122.

140 Judith Zilczer’s research has productively demonstrated the ways in which American audiences were as familiar as Europeans with synesthetic experiments in light, color and music. She has pointed out that an American edition of Rimington’s book actually pre-dated (by one year) its more familiar British edition. See Zilczer, “Music for the Eyes” (2005), p 71.
Creative inventors of instruments were not the only artists touting the synaesthetic potential of new forms of art some modern musicians also endorsed new compositions integrating the expressive potential of color and music when conjoined. In 1915, one American magazine noted that Russian composer Alexander Scriabin “stands with Schoenberg and Stravinsky in the front ranks of the tonal evolutionists of the present day [...] he, like Wassily Kandinsky, the Munich artist who attempts ‘to paint music,’ is a Theosophist and a mystic.” Scriabin claimed to be a synaesthete; his ideas about music and color, combined with his adventuresome, occasionally discordant music, reached their widest audiences when his composition *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* was performed before an audience in New York in 1915.

Written in 1910 with an optional part composed for a Rimington-style color-organ, the piece’s first successful public demonstration of the ‘mystical show’ unifying color, light and sound as Scriabin had intended was in New York, just a month before the composer’s death. A newly-invented instrument dubbed the *chromola* was used during this performance to illuminate a screen at Carnegie Hall with brilliantly colored light, coordinated with the musical score. In a brief article “Music by Colors Made by Machine,” the *New York Times* reporter noted the “intoxicating,” almost hallucinatory effects of the *chromola*, and he continued, “The system of color music as far as it is advanced, is founded on psychology, the dreams of Scriabine [sic] the theosophical doctrines of color and the scientific work in this field.” The publicity surrounding this performance fueled interest in synaesthesia, music and art in New York’s cultural circles. Indeed, some of these reviews made references to listeners’ dream-like or visionary experiences.

If Davies attended this performance, he left no record of his observations or feelings, but the *New York Times Magazine* observed that among the attendees, Isadora

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141 “Scriabin’s Attempt to Compose a Color Symphony” *Current Opinion* 58:5, (May, 1915), p 332.
142 Zilczer, “Music for the Eyes” (2005), pp 25-82. Zilczer notes that the New York performance, just like the 1911 premiere, was not quite as Scriabin would have liked, as some reviewers apparently felt disappointed by the effect of colors on a fairly small screen. Nonetheless, as van Campen comments, Scriabin’s score was more subtle and thus more effective than Rimington’s color-organ performances, because whereas Rimington had ascribed a different color for each note, producing an overwhelming display, the color produced by Scriabin’s piece only changed its tonality when the orchestra shifted from one key to another. See van Campen, *The Hidden Sense*, (2008), p 53.
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Duncan was particularly impressed by the effects. Davies must have read about it and discussed it among friends and fellow artists; a review of Davies’s 1915 exhibition at Macbeth’s Gallery in which Dancers was shown appeared in the same issue of Current Opinion featuring notice of “Scriabin’s Attempt to Compose a Color Symphony.” The piece caused a sensation in New York’s art world, and discussions of the performance were filled with references to color-music and its potential for other forms of pictorial and plastic art. Identifying Scriabin as “a modern futurist,” The Times reporter observed that once the performance began, a gauze screen “became animated by flowing and blending colors,” and the audience, focusing its attention on “all tints and shades in the spectrum, and varying in intensity,” found itself “receiving two sensory interpretations of the piece—by sound harmony and by light harmony.”

Although the Times critic was hesitant about the work’s overall success, another reviewer remarked on the value of the experiment, since Scriabin “aims like Wagner at a union of the arts which shall work together to induce an effulgent spiritual ecstasy, leading mankind to a genuine view of the higher spiritual planes.” If Wagner remained an inspiration for Davies’s paintings, his music room murals sought to emulate the German composer’s ideal in forms more congruent with Scriabin’s angular and edgier—though no less expressive and even mystical—musical experiments. Complicating ready distinctions between figure and space, atmosphere and discrete object, lines of contour and those of texture or modeling, the hard edges and bright colors Davies painted for Bliss replaced Wagner’s swelling symphonic phrases with agitated rhythms and clashing, inverted chords.

The cautious praise Scriabin’s work attracted did not diminish the passion with which artists picked up on the potential of further color-music analogies, or the ability of intertwined forms of emotional and sensory perception to generate future works of artistic synthesis; fascination with color-music readily extended from musical and theatrical performances into the realm of painting. In his 1915 book Cubists and Post-

147 “Scriabin’s Attempt to Compose a Color Symphony,” (1915), p 332.
Impressionism  American art collector and critic Arthur Jerome Eddy included an entire section on the topic of ‘Color Music’ and its future potential for art.148 Devoting a portion of this discussion to the extensive influence of Rimington’s color organ and similar instruments, Eddy conjoined the efforts of the inventor and modern artists when he observed, “while painters are beginning to paint color harmonies that are independent of the representations of natural objects, others are seeking the same emotional effects with colored lights,” and he noted that “man has devoted ages to developing harmonies [but] only of late has anyone made any attempt to understand the science of light and color music.”149 In a New York Times review of Eddy’s book, the critic recalled “Among those who have been present at these color concerts, one, at least, a London physician confessed himself [...] so responsive to this color music that it gave him the greatest mental pleasure he had ever experienced.”150 Such enthusiastic responses to ‘synaesthetic’ art, whether they approximated ‘true’ synaesthetic perception or merely gave audiences the illusion of synaesthesia, retained a powerful allure.

Eddy devoted a considerable portion of his 1914 book Cubists and Post-Impressionism to discussing the work of Kandinsky, explaining his musical metaphors and observing the ways in which his disavowal of mimetic representation served higher, more spiritually attuned goals than those of many other artists.151 Optimistically, Eddy felt that the increasing fusion of art and music was leading towards just such a newly meaningful form of art, and that its best demonstration would ultimately be in ‘decorative’ painting: art created to enhance, enliven and complement architectural space by means of effective, integrated design.152 While easel painters were wasting their time

148 Arthur Jerome Eddy, “Color Music” in Cubists and Post-Impressionists, (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, 1914); and Eddy, Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler, (Philadelphia, 1903). Eddy’s credentials to discuss color and music had been established in this previous publication concerning Whistler, his art and its musical sensibilities, in which Eddy had called for the creation of a modern, synesthetic form of art.
149 Eddy, Cubists and Post-Impressionists, (1914), p144.
151 Kandinsky, The Art of Spiritual Harmony, (1914); Kandinsky’s ideas are explained by Eddy, Cubists and Post-Impressionism, (1914).
152 Appreciation for “decorative” art was sparked by the Columbian Exposition and the American Renaissance, and gave rise to the mural movement in America, a widespread endorsement of public art’s ‘democratic’ ability to generate unity through effective design. The movement lasted well into the progressive era, inspiring the creation of a host of important public projects, including Puvis de Chavannes’
in the pursuit of duplicating natural appearances, ‘decorators’ had long held the upper hand in pure, free expression. But, Eddy wrote:

The use of line and color imitatively to depict objects is one thing. The use of line and color freely to produce pure line harmonies and pure color harmonies with no reference to objects is quite another, and in a sense, a far higher art—a more abstract art. It is towards the development of this more abstract art that the modern experiments are tending. The net result in the long run will be the education of a considerable fraction of the public to the appreciation of pure line and color music, and a consequent demand for paintings that are simply [...] line and color compositions.\footnote{Eddy, \textit{Cubists and Post-Impressionism}, (1914), p 195.}

Eddy nonetheless did not reject representation out of hand: he commented that “objects need not necessarily be eliminated from a picture, but they should be used not for the sake of forcing their photographic likenesses upon the observer, but solely to more perfectly express the inner, the spiritual significance of the work.”\footnote{Eddy, \textit{Cubists and Post-Impressionism}, (1914), p 146.} In his discussion of American painters feeling the influence of European decorative painting and abstraction, a movement Eddy termed “Virile Impressionism,” the critic praised Davies for his efforts in this direction: “Purely creative work is done in a masterly manner—in his best things—by Arthur Davies.”\footnote{Eddy, \textit{Cubists and Post-Impressionism}, (1914), p 134.}

\textbf{III: Harmony, ‘decoration,’ and the principles of artistic synthesis}

As an artist whose mural demonstrated productive and ‘decorative’ fusion in his quest for a synaesthetic color-music, Davies had every reason to feel gratified and encouraged by this praise, whatever label critics wanted to grant to his style. Those favorably inclined towards modern art like McBride and Eddy recognized that however conflated with one another they might be, many abstract modern movements shared a desire to find novel ways of achieving direct, immediate, intuitive, and unified communication of ideas: a synthesis that brought together form and perceptual psychology, painting and music, abstraction and representation. Eddy, Frederick James murals for the Boston Public Library, and those painted in the Library of Congress in 1897; See Bailey Van Hook, \textit{The Virgin and the Dynamo}, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), pp 67-98.
Gregg and Duncan Phillips identified these qualities in “decorative” painting: works that exceeded the limits of the easel by extending their formal properties across walls or ceilings, integrating and unifying good design with architectural space.

Interested readers who had been offered previous vague allusions to Davies’s mural project in the press were rewarded when Gregg described the artist’s efforts in detail in Vanity Fair in January 1916, illustrating the Bliss music room in photographs. He predicted:

That the room made for a woman collector of New York by Arthur B. Davies will prove to be of great importance in the development of decoration on this side of the Atlantic seems obvious. It is the first indication of a change of attitude here towards what used to be, in France and Italy, one of the most important of the arts.\(^\text{156}\)

According to Gregg, Davies’s mural would re-invigorate moribund trends in American painting because his work followed in the footsteps of Puvis de Chavannes’s murals, but with a more robustly modern appreciation of the “radical change in taste” going on, and an awareness of form’s autonomous and direct expressive value.\(^\text{157}\)

For Gregg, the murals were not only effectively “decorative” because they enhanced Bliss’s architecture, but they also prioritized design, using pure form to address her mind and spirit equally: the term connoted their ability to communicate to the viewer’s comingled intellect and senses without the distraction of narrative decipherment. They worked in a manner that recalled Ellis’s discussion of synaesthetic dreams. Indeed, as the murals blended figuration and abstraction, emphasizing pictorial rhythms and abandoning the literal dictates of storytelling, they led the way for potential followers towards greater modern unity and expressivity in art.

Gregg believed Davies’s emphasis on ‘decoration’ was an important step that all modern art should take. He asserted:

Davies has taken a leading part in the recent movement here to rescue decoration from neglect, commercialism and vulgarity. Though for years


\(^{157}\) For more on Puvis’s murals see van Hook, The Virgin and the Dynamo, (2003); also see period endorsements of decorative murals such as “Decorative Painting in America,” Scribner’s Magazine, 19, (January, 1896); Selwyn Brinton, “Modern Mural Decoration in America,” International Studio, 42, (January, 1911), pp 175-190; and Edwin H. Blashfield, Mural Painting in America, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913).
most of his canvases were small, all of them displayed qualities which are essentially decorative. They had rhythm and austere vigor of line. Though a title often had fancy and suggestiveness you always felt that another would have done equally well.\footnote{Gregg, “A Room Made by Arthur B. Davies,” p 71.}

In effect, Gregg suggested that the artists’ earlier imaginative ‘fancies’ and dreams had finally found the perfect outlet for their realization in his monumental new kind of painting, unifying form and content in the creation of a true Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk. Davies’s musical integration of means and meaning demonstrated their ‘rhythm and austere vigor’; his abstraction and his decoration were interchangeable terms that spoke to an ultimately\textit{ synthetic} as well as\textit{ synaesthetic} goal.\footnote{The terms ‘abstract’ and ‘decorative’ were often fluidly interchanged in art criticism in the early 20th century. ‘Abstract’ most commonly indicated any form of art that demonstrated simplified or distilled form, planar or geometric emphasis, and conspicuous design, but did not specifically refer to the wholesale rejection of representation. Entirely non-objective painting, such as Kandinsky’s work in the teens, was so rare as to be largely un-defined according to the categorical the labels now familiar to art historians. Similarly, the term ‘decorative’ generally indicated any form of art whose formal principles, composition, color and line were emphasized, competing with the ostensible content for pictorial priority and interest. Both terms referred to art that accentuated and experimented with formal principles. Thus the many variants of modern painting seen in New York in the early decades of the twentieth century were often described in very similar, if not synonymous terms, despite what we might now regard as distinct differences in their approaches to the still-preeminent goal of ‘representation.’}

Wagner’s insistent call for an esthetically and spiritually integrated form of art with the power to bring humanity together appealed strongly to Davies. In his 1850 essay \textit{The Artwork of the Future}, Wagner had claimed:

\begin{quote}
Artistic Man can only fully content himself by uniting every branch of Art into the common Artwork [...] The true endeavour of Art is therefore all-embracing: each unit who is inspired with a true art-instinct develops to the highest his own particular faculties, not for the glory of these special faculties, but for the glory of general Manhood in Art.\footnote{Richard Wagner, “The Art-Work of the Future” in \textit{Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, Volume I}, translated by William Ellis, (London: Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, 1893), p 183.}
\end{quote}

Davies, striving to reach a broad audience by integrating figure, form, and color, conjoining composition and music, aspired to such unity and universality, even if his work did not always reach his goal in terms critics or viewers immediately understood.

Some attempted to smooth the way: Phillips laid out the critical precepts of ‘decorative’ painting in his 1914 book \textit{The Enchantment of Art}. Writing in terms that are
immediately applicable to the fusion of qualities demonstrated in Davies's music room, the critic devoted a chapter to the topic of "The Decorative Imagination." Hoping to settle the argument over whether representation or abstraction was the more important quality shaping modern art, Philips wrote:

Painting should, according to the painter's temperament in the matter of comparative emphasis, be both representative and decorative [...] Furthermore, the two functions are interdependent. No pictorial representation can hope to attain greatness if it disregards such decorative principles as unity of design and harmony of colour. On the other hand no pictorial decoration can safely maintain its legitimacy among the representative arts if it represents nothing and is expressed merely by abstract colour and line. 161

Although written before Phillips would have known about Davies's work on the murals, the critic set forth his beliefs about the ways in which 'decorative' art would ideally speak to the intellect and the emotions simultaneously, prioritizing neither.

"Representative and decorative painting should really be regarded as one and the same art," he claimed, and then continued:

The difference is merely this, that representative painting, however decorative it may be, appeals [...] through the agency of sight to the mind and its associations, and only thus, through the mind to the emotions. Painting on the other hand that is purely decorative acts directly upon the emotions through the independent agency of the aesthetic sense.

For Phillips, perfectly unified 'decorative' art fused two different ways of understanding the world: like the conjoined symbolism, sensory stimuli and imagery of a dream in Ellis's definition, it spoke by means of pictures to the consciously active 'mind' but also spoke directly to the viewer's unconscious capacity to sense and feel. He concluded, "After all, decoration is not merely a sensuous beauty of pattern made to please the eye. In the last analysis it is Imagination; the indefinable spirit that rejoices in beauty of pattern or beauty of sentiment; the very personal impulse that selects a dream or a design and cherishes it." 162 In the interior space of the unconscious and the imagination's kinship with dreaming, decorative art communicated synthetically.

The European Symbolist artists, critics and writers whose ideas had won greater familiarity in the New York art world by the first decades of the 20th century had previously endorsed such belief in the inherent artistic value of decorative art’s synthesis. G.-Albert Aurier had disseminated the artistic precepts of the post-impressionist painters most closely identified as ‘Symbolist’—such as Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh—throughout the French art world in 1891. According to Aurier, modern art at its best was foremost “Ideaist, Symbolist, Synthetic, Subjective and Decorative:” it should express the significant ideas of the artist directly and immediately through form, by generating a ‘synthetic’ mode of universally comprehensible communication.163 Gauguin and fellow artist Emile Bernard proposed ‘Synthetism’ as their variant of Symbolist autonomy of form. Denis and other subsequent interpreters of Symbolism in the early 20th century advocated a strongly decorative, simplified esthetic for painting, featuring strong colors and strongly emphasized contour which they hoped would be able to connect directly with viewers’ emotions and spirits through the artists’ subjective, creative imagination.164

Not only did he bring his prior interest in Symbolism to bear in his work of the teens, but Davies also implemented newly-discovered theoretical justifications for it. In their preparations for the Armory Show, fellow organizer Walter Pach became one of Davies’s primary informants about contemporary European esthetic theory. Fluent in

163 Although Aurier’s incisive description of Symbolism had not been translated into English in 1910, Davies’s fellow Armory Show organizer Walter Pach would have encountered Symbolist ideas about the fundamental abstract, decorative and communicative nature of art filtered through the beliefs of the Nabi group and the Académie Ranson. On the impact of Symbolist esthetics on the ideas of Maurice Denis, see Paul Bouillon, “Mauric Denis: Four Stages in the History of French Landscape, 1889-1914” in Richard Thomson, ed. Framing France: The Representation of Landscape in France, 1870-1914 (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp 119-146. Bouillon traces the successive phases in Denis’s beliefs and their effect on his painting style.

164 Aurier’s final Symbolist tenet—that it should be above all ‘Decorative’—had great influence on subsequent artists such as Denis and fellow painters who adopted the mantle of Gauguin and Bernard’s Synthetism for their own work (whether openly acknowledged or not). In his own theoretical writing, Denis advanced the proposition that “a picture—before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote—is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.” Denis never created work that was as completely non-objective as his statement implies, preferring to retain elements of figuration with which his viewers could connect familiar, spiritual and symbolic associations. Denis’s oft-repeated quotation demonstrates some of the ways in which French Symbolist priorities, first promoted in the 1890s, made their way into the modernist esthetic theories with which Pach would have been familiar; from Pach, they entered into the creative efforts of Davies. On the influence and evolution of Gauguin’s Synthetist ideas, see the collected essays in Belinda Thomson, ed. Gauguin: Maker of Myth, Exhibition Catalog, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), and Gauguin’s Vision, (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 2005).
several languages that Davies could not speak well, Pach translated numerous essays for Davies in the years leading up to the Armory Show.165 Having studied in Paris with Henri Matisse and with Maurice Denis at the Académie Ranson, Pach was well qualified to share the tenets of new French movements and their Symbolist theoretical foundations, contributing to Davies’s already well-established basis in modern art, philosophy, esthetics and psychology.166 In the theories promoted among the artists Pach knew and favored, the ‘decorative’ properties of art were held in particular regard as vehicles for the direct transmission of ideas and ideals.

If the influence of French esthetic theory was important to Davies, Americans also advocated such synthetic and ‘decorative’ precepts in art. Color theorist Hardesty Maratta established an equally compelling connection to Davies’s compositional habits in his essay “A Rediscovery of the Principles of Form Measurement,” published in the aptly-named journal *Arts and Decoration* in 1914. Maratta claimed to have found a mathematically provable basis for the harmony of artistic form in Greek sculpture, from which he could extrapolate a set of laws governing the achievement of perfect rhythm and balance in any art form. Given Davies’s regard for Greek art, this would have offered a pleasing comparison. According to Maratta, “All arts—in which intelligent progress has been made—have science as a foundation,” and he opined, “visual objects such as lines, surfaces, solids and colors may be measured and proportioned scientifically, as in the musical interval called the octave.”167 Maratta also argued for a set of laws defining color harmonies, which he had previously published in *Scientific American *in 1909, in

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166 Pach lived in Paris first in 1907, and again between 1910 and 1912. During these stays, he befriended many American expatriates and art collectors, including the Stein family (with whom he was particularly close), and numerous artists: Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque Henri Matisse, Odilon Redon, Francis Picabia, Jean Metzinger, Robert Delaunay and the Duchamp brothers in particular. Pach was the only American who was closely involved with the Puteaux group of Cubists, and in addition to befriending Marcel Duchamp and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, was close to Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes, who were instrumental in establishing and then promoting the theoretical justifications for Cubist experimentation. See Laurotte McCarthy, *Walter Pach (1883-1958): The Armory Show and the Untold Story of Modern Art in America*, (University Park, PA: Penn. State University Press, 2011) pp 35-36.

the form of a color dial to which he aligned twelve distinct hues and twelve notes on the chromatic scale. Believing that the laws of science alone cannot produce a work of art, Maratta stated that “it is also true that our ‘feelings or emotions’ cannot produce one” in the absence of science [italics in original]. True esthetic synthesis conjoined scientific analysis of perception with intuitive use of its lessons. The essay boasted, “In our day, Arthur B. Davies who, most of all our painters, is admired for the harmony and rhythm of his compositions, has been most benefitted from the Maratta system of proportions and of color.” Although the existent documentation has yet to show the full extent of Maratta’s influence, Christine Oaklander’s discussion of the confluence between color-theories and esoteric doctrines in Davies’s Cubist painting posits the artist at the heart of these discussions animating the New York art world.

As much as he espoused the way synaesthetically conjoined senses inspired dream-like or visionary states of inspiration, Davies’s search for the underlying principles governing formal unity and harmony was a process consonant with his previous psychological investigations; he hoped to find or generate a ‘key’ to achieving perfect, instinctive musical correspondences between line, color, shape, rhythm and proportion. Indeed, Phillips addressed Davies’s experimental approach directly when he claimed, “Even in the latest, chaotic experiments, one thinks more of his mind than of his method. In fact the sensitive, bizarre line of Davies is so adequately expressive of his conception [...] that it is difficult to think of the drawing apart from the dream, and the dream apart from the drawing.”

Although some critics like Cortissoz and duBois objected to the intellectualism governing the underlying ‘mathematics’ in Davies’ Cubist experiments, scorning his scientific work in the ‘cubistic laboratory,’ for the artist himself such connections were fundamental. They informed his attempt to derive musical ratios and formal rules from

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168 “Maratta System of Color: Painting on a Scientific Basis,” *Scientific American Supplement*, (November 13, 1909), p 311. From this work, Maratta produced a commercially available line of pigments that were popular with American painters. Among Davies’s acquaintances, Jerome Myers was a user of Maratta’s premixed pigment set. See “Confessions of an Errant Artist,” *Arts and Decoration*, (May, 1917), p 370.


170 Introduction to Hardesty Maratta’s “Rediscovery,” *Arts and Decoration*, (1914), p 231.


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his examination of color as well as linear rhythm. His Cubo-futurist paintings, varying in their approach to abstraction, are once again kinds of formal research in which he explored his art’s affective power on the mind and spirit. *Mountaineers*, (figure 6.17) for example, painted around 1914, exhibited at Montross Gallery, and purchased by John Quinn, is an extremely energized, almost searingly vibrant configuration of assorted rainbow-hued shapes in which he pushes his broken form and its innate expressivity towards a limit. Strewn like confetti across vaguely distinguishable seated, posing bodies, the small angled facets and dots of brilliant hues convey loud noise rather than gentle harmony; they awaken and stimulate the viewer’s mind in emulation of clashing cymbals and brash horns rather than lulling it via the soft tonalities of more euphonious instruments. Here his musical experiments push the form he played with in the mural to new, more strenuous and vigorous heights of expression.¹⁷³

The imitative capacity Hartmann had identified early in Davies’s career is also evident here as he attempts to integrate the formal techniques of European modernist peers with his own interests. His omnivorous taste for experimentation emerges in his exploration of the broken arcs and gradations of color falling across semi-solid geometric form, distantly resembling Picabia’s Cubo-futuristic *Dances at the Spring*. But as had been true previously, this habit was not necessarily a failing but one of Davies’s deliberate strategies, playing an important role in his desire to arrive at synthesis.

Not only did his viewers and patrons encounter varied stylistic labels and references to other artists in descriptions of Davies’s art, they read reviews of his post-Armory work that interwove many diverse strains of thought concerning music, art, imagination and the goal of creating a synthetic, decorative form of painting—an objective he shared with many others. Gregg led his fellow critics in establishing a lineage for Davies’s painterly experiments when he referred to their ‘significant form,’ which he then set firmly in the context of the rise of European Post-Impressionism. Referring to the rise of these forms of “new art” which still caused some viewers

¹⁷³ Emma Acker, “Mountaineers,” in Charles Brock, ed, *American Modernism: The Shein Collection*, (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2010), pp 34-37, sees the rightmost figure as male and the leftmost figure as female, but I find no compelling evidence of these gendered identifications, beyond the likely associations with masculine/activity and feminine/passivity that would have reflected the prevailing ideological beliefs of the moment.
confusion and apparent distress, Gregg again asserted the connection between ‘decorative’ art and avant-garde modernism, in a passage worth quoting at length:

The whole process, begun radically in our time by Cezanne, continued by Gauguin and Van Gogh, carried farther by Matisse and Picasso, has resulted in a realization of the temporarily obscured importance of design or pattern. Impressionism had worn itself out with pseudo scientific theories about color and atmosphere and light, whereas the true painter might be interested in the light that never was on sea or land, as long as he had the inspiration of the poet’s dream. Instead of the appearance of the thing that affected him, the new painter or sculptor tries to convey to the spectator the quality of the object that produced his creative emotion or impulse—in a word, significant form—form that may be quite outside nature, or experience [...] It is for the artist, with his own end in view, to choose his own means and his own synthesis.174

Here, Gregg made use of English theorist Clive Bell’s newly circulating concept of ‘significant form,’ discussed in his 1914 book Art, which Davies had immediately purchased. For Bell, such a distillation of form, divorced from the demand for representation or imitation of nature, resulted in a more spiritually attuned form of art, a concept coinciding well with Davies’s interests.175

In September 1915, even before he ‘unveiled’ the music room murals to the readers of Vanity Fair, Gregg had lauded the “new direction” that Davies work was taking, illustrating Façades (figure 6.17) in an essay praising “The Ever-Youthful Work of Arthur B. Davies:” kind praise for the 55-year-old artist. Gregg endorsed Davies’s formal experimentation, identifying this “new decoration” as he called it, as “an admirable composition, and an interesting study in the management of intersecting planes of light.”176 Applying bright, carnivalesque color and lively pattern to his figures, Davies conducts a ‘study’ of light hitting and breaking against form, becoming a polychromatic

174 Gregg, “The New Art Applied to Decoration” Vanity Fair, (May, 1915)
175 See Perlman, LLA, (1998), p 277 on Davies’s purchase of Bell’s book. In his discussion of Davies published in 1917, Phillips also noted how deeply indebted Davies and his fellow Cubists were to the influence of Cezanne. Recalling a lesson Davies gave him in the ways in which representational figuration could easily give way to abstraction, towards a concentration on ‘significant form,’ Phillips related how Davies had taken an early painting of a girl with a violin, and sketching its basic structure on a pane of glass, arrived at a work that was “not unlike a Cubist masterpiece.” Phillips came to the conclusion that if a nearly unintelligible drawing of “irresponsible scribbling and scrawling can move us to ecstasies of emotion then there must be something in Cubism.” Phillips, “Fallacies of the New Dogmatism in Art,” The American Magazine of Art, 9:2, (December, 1917), p 45
bazaar of playful visual encounters. Light, which renders both objects and spaces dimensional, is broken into many different configurations here as it hits the surface of an array of sculpturally posed, androgynous bodies—some are rendered in broken shards of color and line while others remain more conventionally modeled in self-contained dimensions.

The painting is another exercise in the analysis of form made possible through differing kinds of abstraction; it resembles some of the interwoven figuration and fluid abstraction of Gleizes’s *Man on a Balcony*, but also some of Delaunay’s Orphic exercises as well. Less radically destabilized and less jarring than *Mountaineers*, space remains fairly traditional here; the foreground and background are distinct, and the bodies dispersed within show accordingly predictable proportions. Standing on raised pillars, the foreground figures resemble circus acrobats, while a cluster of smaller bodies in the background enact a ring-dance vaguely reminiscent of Matisse. The imaginative delights this painting calls forth once again resonate with both musical and kinesthetic experience.

But however much such work delighted and pleased critics like Gregg, if true sensory unity was his goal, Davies surely fails to achieve it. The painting’s hybridity may reflect a ‘synthesis,’ but it does not truly arrive at an art form that delivers a synaesthetic response, nor do any of his Cubistic works. Like many of them, *Façades* reveals multiple awkward moments and inconsistencies; Davies’s application of diamond-patterned faceting to the contours of a body in the immediate foreground, evoking Harlequin in a staged pantomime rather than a truly dismantled spatial exercise, remains an obstacle to true unity in composition and harmony in design. The painting’s title, referencing the superficiality of appearances, seems an apt metaphor for its shallow approach to Cubistic deconstruction of linear space and time. Even if we choose to see it taking part in Davies’s larger artistic experiments, it does not quite seem to live up to the profuse praise Gregg and others lavished upon his efforts.

Since Gregg, like Davies, was deeply concerned with nurturing future developments in art, his observations participate in a larger promotional project for American modernism, in which Davies’s work played a significant role. In a prior review of an exhibition of decorative and Cubist-informed art at the Montross Gallery, penned for *Vanity Fair* five months earlier, Gregg alluded to Davies’s unique ability to conjoin
rhythm and design, auditory and visual experience, and argued strongly in favor of his individuality. “It is for the artist, with his own end in view, to choose his own means and his own synthesis,” the critic concluded. Although this intermingled form of art may have been an adventure in “going to extremes, in the search of whatever secret thing may be that he is after,” he asserted, “whatever [Davies] gives out is only an arch through which [...] gleams an untraveled world.” And he concluded, “while many of the new things done by men who are, openly and avowedly, under recent ‘influences,’ already look rather old-fashioned, Davies’ new things are always fresh and miraculously new.”

Similarly, critic Henry McBride’s review of Davies’s work exhibited at Montross, particularly Peach Stream Valley which was illustrated in an accompanying photograph, established the critic’s unflagging regard and recognition of Davies’s popularity: “No matter how abstract this artist may be he holds his audience. He has the power of interesting people and whatever manner he assumes, the essential fact is that it is Mr. Davies who is assuming it. The moral is: to hold fast to yourself.”

Despite Phillips, McBride, and Gregg’s collective efforts to anchor the work of Davies with reference to synthesis, unity and the ‘decorative’ properties of art, the American dreamer’s halting, inconsistent and experimental movement towards abstraction proved a stumbling-block to other critics, some of whom were otherwise favorably disposed towards his work. In particular, Davies’s model of hybridized Cubism provoked some to generate some truly circuitous feats of critical equivocation. In his 1918 review of Davies, Leo Stein objected to the artist’s abandonment of “the echoes of sweet dreams” in favor of “the chilly heights of intellectual formulations,” claiming, “What happened to Picasso happened in turn to Davies. Both left the measure of their native feeling, in order that they might rise to standards of more impersonal ideal attitudes. The thing that was [...] in essence foreign and unreal, became the object of a

179 McBride, “What Is Happening in the World of Art,” (1914), Section 7, p 2. The section featured a photographic portrait of William Merritt Chase, at the center of a collection of paintings shown in the Montross exhibit, with the amusing caption “Chase Surrounded by Cubists.” In his review, the critic exhorted his readers that “nature apparently accepts cubism as she accepted all the other things, with complacency, so why shouldn’t we? There is nothing in it to be frightened of or bewildered by. Don’t worry if you find you don’t like it. Why should you? Perhaps you’ll have other consolations. One of the most deplorable attributes of the modern mentality is its breadth. Breadth is essentially inartistic. If you find you don’t like cubism, cheer up. You’ll be rather distinguished, upon the whole.”
fascinated attention.” Yet, this criticism notwithstanding, for Stein the artist’s work retained underlying merit: “The distinctive value of form in Davies’s pictures comes from their balance and their unity.”

When Davies was at his best, his work ably demonstrated these qualities; mobilizing the ideal of ‘unity’ once again alluded to Davies’s synthetic interests.

Striving for this unity by driving form towards the expressive language of music—indeed by inviting a viewer’s involuntary synaesthetic response to his work—Davies also attempted to direct his modern abstraction away from growing problematic associations, to which Stein alludes, with the potential danger of ‘foreign’ influence; he hoped to steer it towards music’s non-verbal and thus universal communication. While Stein’s criticism of ‘foreign’ influence may have meant ‘foreign to art’s inherent goals,’ many of readers would likely have associated this word with the contaminating influence of ‘foreign’ modernism and European decadence that rose in emphasis during the First World War: a trend Cortissoz lamented as the growing influence of “Ellis Island Art” in America. Cortissoz wrote, “The United States is invaded by aliens, thousands of whom constitute so many acute perils to the health of the body politic. Modernism is of precisely the same heterogeneous alien origin and is imperiling the republic of art in the same way.”

Although suspicious of Davies’s modernist ‘sophistication’ as “a change has come over his dream” when it became “enmeshed in the theories of a modernistic hypothesis,” Cortissoz yet found reason to praise Davies’s innate ‘primitive’ talent. His work “gain[ed] in power in proportion to the fullness with which creative genius wreaks upon it all the forces of human thought and feeling.”

References to musical analogies and psychological insight both ‘domesticated’ the formal qualities distinguishing modern non-objective painting and sculpture, making them not only more personal to the artist but also more native to America. Indeed, some suggested that art which stimulating synaesthetic states of mind might enable modes of unconscious communication that crossed the ethnic boundaries threatening American cohesion in the pre-war years. For these observers, the diversity demonstrated in

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American art—and the hybridity of Davies’s synthesis—were signs of the nation’s thriving, dynamic heterogeneity, in culture as well as ethnic or regional composition.

In 1915, California art critic Michael Williams, reviewing the works displayed at the Panama-Pacific Exposition, celebrated the Bergsonian ‘vital urge’ he saw in all American art, and commented, “although [it] is necessarily synthetic, it has begun to master the synthesis.”183 The nature of this synthesis in art reflected the changing demographics of the nation; “in a face made up of the fusion of so many racial strains, it is idle to see for a uniqueness that is not the uniqueness of individuals […] art is bound to be eclectic in America, in its bases, its influences and its forms; but from this common soil of commingled cultures individual ideas will flourish richly.”184 Although Davies was not exhibited in the Exposition proper, a follow-up show held in March 1916 featured his work prominently, including *Sacramental Trees* (figure 6.18). A return to more prominent figuration in which the abstracted, Cubistically faceted elements are minimized, pushed to the margins in favor of a more harmoniously integrated whole, such work showed Davies’s continuing efforts at hybridization. But its somewhat confounding amalgamation prompted Gregg to comment that Davies, “believes that a form of expression […] is at its strongest when it is not quite understood, for when a work of art is quite understood, it has ceased to disturb; it has become classic and passed out of its living and into its museum period.”185

Amid the increasing xenophobia that greeted America’s entry into World War I, which influenced Phillips’s 1917 diatribe against the crudity and evils of European modernism “The Fallacies of the New Dogmatism in Art,” Davies continued his efforts to realize a synthesized form of modernism that reconciled abstraction and figuration into the teens and early twenties.186 But he cannot have been insensitive to the hostility surrounding ‘foreign’ modernism; praise of his work increasingly cleansed it of any indication of involvement with such contaminating influence.187 Davies, therefore, while

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184 Williams, (1915), p 343.
187 Phillips, for example, used Davies as an example of an artist swayed by Cubistic temptations, and lauded his work when it stepped away from the brink of the extremes of art that “make[s] us think of
continuing to experiment with his blend of abstraction and figuration, favored the latter over the former. By 1920, he was hailed in the Christian Science Monitor as “a recognized leader amongst modernists” yet “no other native painter of modernist persuasion comes readily to mind who has been so little influenced by foreign movements as this same Davies. Countless divergences of mood, style and motive mark his progress, yet the man behind them all remains fixed and faithful to some one vision of intellectual beauty without definition or name.” The un-credited critic concluded, “figure fugues and symphonic picture poems are of such stuff as dreams are made of, so far as their composition and atmosphere are concerned,” but Davies shows “not one wholly vague abstraction, not a hint of willful obscurity or pedantic affectation. It is the sort of thing to be liked, and no questions asked.”188 Reviewing a show of Davies’s works at the de Zayas gallery, McBride also concluded, “what seemed to some in the last few years as a deliberate distortion of the surface [...] is now explained [...] the final simplification has come. They synthesis is complete.”189

Conclusion: “A tumult in your imagination”

Despite Davies’s secure reputation as a leader in the art world, and the favorable critical references the Bliss murals received from Phillips, Gregg and McBride, they led to only one subsequent mural project, and their stylistic fusion of Cubo-futurist faceting and representational imagery remained awkward to many.190 What several critics, even some of Davies’s fiercest advocates registered with some degree of skepticism seems particularly conspicuous today: their ‘Cubism’ is inconsistent and idiosyncratic, and presents a peculiar amalgamation of representation and abstraction, uneasily juxtaposed, seldom truly unified and often paradoxical. Yet, in the context of its moment, and within these overlapping discourses set forth here, the Bliss mural and the stylistically related sleepers struggling with delirious dreams, or madmen in the frenzies of delusions,” in “Fallacies of the New Dogmatism,” (1917), p 46.

190 Passing references to other murals by Davies are made by various critics between 1914 and 1918 to murals and mural-sized paintings he planned, sketched or executed as panels, but few of these has survived: Shepherd Kings, (ca. 1913-1914) and Dances, (1914-1915) are known.
Chapter 6: A Dream of Hybrid Harmony

paintings Davies created in these potent years emerge as curious and determined experiments combining dissimilar formal habits to generate a new modern American painting. They also show his ongoing interest in the power of form acting on the mind and imagination: Davies’ reputation as a visionary dreamer was essential to his success with some critics, while it also allowed others to excuse his “aberrations.”

While he surely had detractors, enough positive responses suggested that Americans were ready to embrace these new forces and influences. As Eddy observed, “The truth is there is more of Cubism in great painting than we dream, and the extravagances of the Cubists may serve to open our eyes to beauties we have always felt without quite understanding.” 191 During the opening years of the First World War, Davies retained belief in the great liberating potential of art that provoked creative, imaginative states of mind that unleashed the modern human spirit, and aspired to a state of psychic unity. The jubilant, comingled sensory dreams that his hybrid color-music called to mind shared his ecstatic, indeed deeply utopian vision, even as he and his supporters realized with increasing horror what the consequences of war could mean: as Phillips observed, Davies was deeply committed to his quest; “In every age such dreamers seem unsatisfied, preferring evocations of the past and intimations of the future to sensations of the present hour.” 192

One of the chief paradoxes of Davies’s work lies in Phillips’s critical description. Although he did seek to address the very contemporary questions that he and his patrons, critics and friends were asking about the modern mind and spirit, his art nonetheless evoked intra-sensory experiences that resided in some other time and place: in the past, the future or secreted away in the exceptional imaginations of visionaries. Davies’s paintings—and those of artists like Kandinsky—were the closest most viewers could get to these inspiring, uplifting but anomalous states of mind. Making the ‘extravagances’ of the abstract dream acceptable to many viewers—by exploring synaesthetic resemblances between different kinds of abstract painting and musical analogies, and opening viewers’ eyes to the ways in which modern, abstract dreams could be simultaneously beautiful,

scientific, harmonious, symbolic and transcendent—Davies offered a road towards such understanding of both modern art and modern consciousness.

But in the wake of the First World War, Davies and many of his fellow artists such as Hartley, Max Weber and John Marin gradually retreated from their most adventurous experimentation. Some have seen this as a capitulation, acknowledgement of the ‘failure’ of his Cubism. In fact, Davies did not entirely ‘retreat’ from experimentation, as during these years he also tried out many new media—lithography, etching, woodcut and sculpture—in which his figural forms are variously manipulated, bent, faceted and broken. Davies even loosened his emphasis on painting for a few years, experimenting extensively with printmaking between the late teens and the mid-twenties. He continued to explore Cubo-futurist spatial dismantling and other forms of more experimental abstraction extensively in his prints (figure 6.21), as Joseph Czestochowski has shown in his catalogue raisonné.\(^{193}\)

In the late teens and twenties, and even in the midst of rising hostility towards some of the extremes of modernism, Davies’s staunch supporters continued to champion his successes. But some of them, responding to changing currents in the New York art world, not only observed but also encouraged Davies’s withdrawal from what Phillips called “the fortress of abstract expression.”\(^{194}\) As Davies had never entirely abandoned figuration, his continued representation of allegorical, pagan and dream-like motifs was not seen as out of character in his later work. But a host of writers on Davies in the later 20\(^{th}\) century followed this line of thought initiated by Davies’s critics, claiming that his foray into Cubism and abstraction had been an unfortunate anomaly, a departure from the ‘true path’ he had set for himself as a painter of fantasy, mythology and genteel dreamy escapism. Many of these later authors have argued, moreover, that Davies didn’t really ‘understand’ Cubism at all, and that this resulted in his ultimate ‘failure’ as a modernist, an abstract artist and even as a truly worthwhile painter.\(^{195}\) They saw the gradual end to


\(^{195}\) Forbes Watson, “Arthur Bowen Davies,” The Magazine of Art, 45:8, (December, 1952), addresses the vagaries of Davies’s shifting reputation.
his formal experimentation, his diminishing use of ‘cubistic lines and angles’ as recognition of a career nearing its end.

Stories insisting upon Davies’s ‘retreat’ from modernism back along an apparently linear path towards a ‘tamer’ model of painting also seem to misconstrue the evidence, as during the years in which he was creating his more adventuresome ‘synthetic’ paintings and murals, he had never abandoned painting or exhibiting the suggestive pastoral works for which he had become famous. Castalias, (figure 6.20) painted sometime in 1915, is just such a work: a 42” long mountain vista peopled with naked dancing youths, a scepter-bearing goddess and goats. It won Davies the Corcoran Gallery Gold Medal when it was exhibited in December 1916. Comparing this painting with the fragmented, cubistically geometric space depicted in Mountaineers, painted about the same year is useful: both depict naked bodies, both capitalize upon the emotional effect of resonant, harmonious color and both evoke some aspects of the inner visions of dreaming. But they reach those goals from very different directions, and could almost be the product of two different minds and hands. Throughout all of his many explorations, one objective remained constant: creating forms of art that linked figures, landscapes, archetypes, symbols and myths with psychologically and spiritually attuned states of mind, perception and consciousness. As Cortissoz commented in 1926, “Davies enlarges your experience, and makes a tumult in your imagination.”

This ‘tumult’ — the deformation and eclecticism which made many critics and viewers uneasy, despite their praise of Davies—was crucial to his aim of helping American viewers embrace the avant-garde forms that he most ardently advocated, even though some of their painting, such as Kandinsky’s non-objectivity, may seem quite far from Davies’s own. Davies appreciated and understood the multivalent influences that shaped Gauguin’s synthetic Symbolism, Picasso’s Cubism, Matisse’s jubilantly two-dimensional fauve decoration, Redon’s hermetic mysticism and Kandinsky’s visual music. One can find aspects of all these painters’ work in Davies’s art, and his paintings can seem like weak imitations or uneasy mash-ups of theirs. Yet, he perceived how many of his peers had integrated their avant-garde formal practices, Symbolist philosophies, synaesthetic metaphors and theosophical beliefs in idiosyncratic ways in their own

theories as well as their work. And if we understand Davies’s painting in light of his ambition to promote a particularly American kind of modernism, training his viewers’ perceptual abilities to appreciate the potential of non-objective painting by mobilizing synthetic and synaesthetic properties of form—and with a growing awareness of contemporary issues in psychology in mind—the awkwardness in his own work seems more intelligible. By confusing music and color, representation and abstraction, figures and facets, in his synaesthetic, decorative painting, Davies arrived at a unique solution to some of the problems modern art seemed to raise for American viewers.

Ultimately, what the determination of Davies’s ‘failure’ as an abstract painter fails to recognize is that his interest in finding a truly synthesized form of art that blended irreconcilable elements met many of the demands made of art in this unstable, transitional moment. His work had always necessitated idiosyncratic negotiation of the rules governing abstraction, Symbolism, form, ‘decorative’ painting, and the desire to give form to a purely interior kind of experience. His foray into modern movements like ‘Cubism’ was an integral part of these investigations. His was not a failure to understand avant-garde art, but an exploration of its diverse potential to generate a modern, progressive and distinctly American kind of painting that could speak to his existing audience, in terms with which they were comfortable and familiar, and which addressed contemporary interest in integrated, intra-sensory models of experience. Attempting to simulating synaesthetically conjoined sensory perceptions via art offered an example of just such a state of unity: it spoke to an active modern mind in a sensory-aware body.

The ambivalence that greeted Davies’s goal of pictorial synthesis is also a measure of what was at stake: despite its progressive agenda, Davies’s hybrid art did not and could not speak to viewers in the same terms across all the social, political and economic factions delimiting the scope of American art and culture. For some observers like Irving Babbitt, the kind of synthesis such as Davies hoped for muddled the important traditional distinctions between differing values in art, for others, Davies’s goal of synthesis was too bourgeois, reflecting the growing force of the art market in his efforts to compromise, rather than pure, radical, and worthy artistic merit. Davies’s ambitious synthesis was ultimately as impossible as it was for art to ever truly deliver synaesthetic experience; it remained merely a dream. But if, in historical retrospect, his project seems
Chapter 6: A Dream of Hybrid Harmony

in some ways deeply antithetical to avant-garde modernism and predestined to fall short of his goal, this was not at all clear to Davies, nor to many of his critics. As a hope for the future of the American art world, Davies’s idealistic and utopian project remained an entirely plausible goal he maintained until the end of his life.
6.1. Study for Bliss music room murals, (ca.1914), East wall, mantel surround, photographed by Peter Juley & Sons (Smithsonian Institution Collection)

6.2 Bliss Mural panel, ca. 1914, West wall, (Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, oil on canvas, 55 x 67 1/8" photograph courtesy Lori Eurto, MWPI)
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6.3 Bliss Murals, South wall (Munson Williams Proctor Institute, oil on canvas, 57 ¾ x 55 ½" photograph courtesy Lori Eurto, MWPI)

6.4 Bliss Murals, West wall (Munson Williams Proctor Institute, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, photograph courtesy Lori Eurto, MWPI)
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6.5 Bliss Murals, North wall, (Munson Williams Proctor Institute, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, photograph courtesy Lori Eurto, MWPI)
6.6 Jacques Villon, *Puteaux: Les Fumes et Les Arbres en Fleur*, 1912, (private collection, oil on canvas, 44 7/8 x 58 1/8")

6.7 Bliss murals, (Munson Williams Proctor Institute, oil on canvas, 31 x 46, photograph courtesy Lori Eurto, MWPI)
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6.8 Photograph of the Bliss Murals installed before the room was furnished, view of north wall, published in *Vanity Fair*, (January 1916), p 70.

6.9 *Figures in a Landscape*, ca. 1912, (Spanierman Gallery, oil on canvas, 23 ¾ x 28 ¾")
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6.10 Dances, ca. 1914-1915, (Detroit Institute of Arts, oil on canvas, 84 x 138")

6.11 Illustrations from Besant and Leadbeater, Thought Forms, (New York: John Lane, 1905), p 43. Peace and Protection above, Definite Affection below.
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6.12 Francis Picabia, *Dances at the Spring*, 1912, (Philadelphia Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 47 ½ x 47 ½")

6.13 Albert Gleizes, *Man on a Balcony*, 1912, (Philadelphia Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 77 x 45 ¼")
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6.14 *Choral Sea*, ca. 1911, (Art Institute of Chicago, oil on canvas, 17 x 39 3/8“)

6.15 *Intermezzo*, ca. 1914, (Private collection, oil on canvas, 14 x 28“)
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6.16 Dust of Color, ca. 1915, (Hirshhorn museum, oil on canvas, 28 x 23 ¼”)

6.17 Mountaineers, ca. 1914-15, (private collection, oil on canvas, 18 x 40")
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6.18 Façades, ca. 1914-1915, (Naples Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 23 x 28”)

6.19 Sacramental Trees, ca. 1915-1916, (Art Institute of Chicago, oil on canvas, 25 ½ x 41")
6.20 Castalias, ca, 1915, (Hirshhorn Museum of Art, oil on canvas, 20 x 42")

6.21 Doorway to Illusion, 1919, (private collection, soft ground etching with aquatint, 12 x 9")
Chapter 6 Illustrations
Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

“Curiously it has lately been impossible to find a work of [Davies’s] on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum which in 1930 accorded him a vast memorial exhibit.”

Sidney Geist, Arts, (February, 1958)

In this dissertation I have argued that Davies’s painted dreams had been ones many of his contemporaries shared, as his mythic, neo-pagan, Arcadian idylls were satisfying to viewers who sought psychic alternatives to the forces driving the modernizing, industrializing, and standardizing material world of the early 20th century. But his transformation from exemplary to obscure began even during his lifetime, as these forces gained in strength in later decades. In the art world, they shaped the rise of complex and intellectualized formalist analysis; the embrace of more physical and embodied metaphors for ‘spiritual’ art; polarization of political affiliations in the post-war years; increasing hostility towards ‘foreign’ influence; institutionalization of a ‘canonical’ history of modernism’s origins; and esthetics favorable to rising popular culture and industrial standardization, to identify just a few narratives that fellow scholars have traced. By the late 20s, both Davies’s art and the epistemological fields that had nurtured his popularity changed, such that his paintings no longer mapped successfully onto diverging American models of spirituality, psychology or psychoanalysis.

I contend that the very productive contradictions that made his work speak in terms of the dream to viewers in the pre-World War I years proved deeply confusing to those who came to maturity after its conclusion. The diversity and hybridity that had been a great strength at his career’s apex became a liability, appearing weak and indecisive rather than productively unfixed. Similarly, the adaptable reputation Davies had earned in

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1 Sidney Geist, “Month in Review,” Arts, 32, (February, 1958), p 47.
Conclusion: "Son of No Man's Land"

his early reception as a psychologically-attuned Symbolist, one he sustained through his attempt to generate Cubist musical analogies, was no longer in tune with subsequent constructs of the perceiving subject that arose in the later 20s and 30s. Conceptualizations of modern consciousness shifted in response to changing cultural forces that propelled new approaches to psychology.

As Ann Douglas has suggested, William James’s optimistic, pluralistic philosophies had set in motion models of the dynamic self that fostered the adventurous, modern sensibilities of outspoken individuals such as Gertrude Stein; these gained in influence as the refinement and spread of Freudian ideas fostered ever more liberated models of subjectivity. While ‘modernism’ may have remained dynamic and heterogeneous, America’s rising transatlantic cultural authority nurtured less equivocation in its cultural products. Even amid great social and political upheavals, doubt and anxiety were replaced by assertiveness, confidence, even optimism. Where once it had been an asset to viewers seeking multiple ways of comprehending the unconscious, Davies’s eclecticism became a detriment; while he may have retained the identity as a visionary dreamer, his modernity was put in question and his visibility suffered.

Davies was not entirely alone: the crucible of the First World War’s devastations and the equally world-changing social, economic, and political events of the thirties resulted in a conceptual and historical gulf beyond which much art of the prior decades could no longer be seen as sufficiently ‘modern.’ Many of the artists whose work was celebrated at the Armory Show are no longer well-known; Davies’s fellow Symbolists as well as their supporters also shared this fate. Because Davies had been so firmly allied

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4 Few people are aware of the work of Middleton Manigault, Kenneth Hayes Miller, or Agnes Pelton, who share some of Davies’s formal and thematic interests, and even well-known artists such as Stieglitz are sometimes seen as anti-modern. For Stieglitz’s Symbolism see Rosalind Krauss, “Alfred Stieglitz’s ‘Equivalents,’” *Arts Magazine*, 54 (February 1980), pp. 34–37; on his spiritualism see Corn, *The Great American Thing*, (1999), pp 3-40; Corn shares the argument of some scholars that Alfred Stieglitz’s early endorsement of Symbolist strains in art and criticism limited their later relevance. She argues that Stieglitz, who maintained a desire to promote transcendent, universal and spiritual values in art, was insufficiently modern in a way that resonates with Davies. On p 23, Corn labels Stieglitz and critic Paul Rosenfeld as emblematic “modernists against much of modernity,” for their rejection of many of the daily concerns of their contemporaries, such as mechanization, industrialization and mass culture.
Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

with an unstable and metaphysical model of the unconscious whose configuration changed in light of post-War developments in art and culture, the value of being a ‘dreamer’ took on profoundly different meaning. In securing his status as a hermetic mystic, a reputation less readily affiliated with the science of the mind in the later 20th century, Davies and his work were written out of one rising narrative of systematic, rational, or rigorously analytic modernism, along with many other Symbolists. Despite persistent efforts to demonstrate the push-and-pull of spiritualism, mystic thought, and occult traditions in the struggle to give form to modernism, ‘canonical’ stories continue to relegate these currents of belief to the sideline, contain them within separate categorical limits, or regard them as antagonistic to a ‘dominant’ construct of modernism.

Yet while some hint of the changes to come can be located in the hesitation—or outright rejection—of some responses to Davies’s Cubist abstraction, these were not uniform, nor did his career wane immediately after the First World War. Some of his patrons, such as John Quinn, wrote that they “prefer[red] the later work.” Shortly after the war’s conclusion, however, Davies did turn away from his experiments with synthetically fusing Cubism and figuration. As he had never entirely abandoned making or exhibiting idyllic Arcadian fantasies, Davies’s return to these themes sustained a broad appeal, and he secured the designation of Henry McBride as “our greatest American painter.” In January 1918, Davies enjoyed the honor of his first retrospective exhibition at Macbeth’s Gallery—his last show there, as William Macbeth died just prior to its

5 Linda Dalrymple Henderson has offered several useful correctives to this model, finding important space for the currents of esoteric belief that drove so many artists in the early 20th century, but the process of re-evaluating the mystical elements in modernism’s origins is far from complete. See for example Henderson, “X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp and the Cubists,” *Art Journal* 47, (1988), pp 323-40; and *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983);


7 Letter from John Quinn to Davies, (January 6, 1918). John Quinn Correspondence, Quinn Ledger, Archives of American Art.

8 “The Visionary Adventures of Mr. Arthur B. Davies,” *Current Opinion*, (March, 1918), p 204.
opening—and in a glowing review Henry McBride claimed “in view of the modern quality of half of the work it must be regarded as one of the art sensations of the winter.”

Davies’s distinction as a dreamer also didn’t ebb: Frederic Newlin Price, writing about “Davies The Absolute” in the *International Studio* in 1922, urged his readers to “Come with Davies! Drink the drams of Dreams!” after which he made the expansive claim, “To dream and make your dreams come true […] that is art.” Price, who ran the Ferargil Gallery where Davies exhibited starting in 1921, was not un-biased; he hoped to secure a vibrant market for Davies’s work well into the next decade. The gallery owner’s effusive acclaim nurtured Davies’s ongoing support among America’s elite art world patrons, some of whom still regarded him as an avant-garde upstart; Price fostered this identity by exhibiting some of his Cubist-informed pieces, such as *Façades*, alongside his figural pastorals, in a show devoted to the “Later Tendencies in Art” at the Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings in 1921.

Despite this promotion, critical isolation of Davies from his moment began in the 1920s. Even when praising his work, some critics suggested his sensibilities were becoming outmoded by emphasizing his charm or “preciousness,” tainting it with Victorian sentiment. In a 1923 essay, Guy Pene du Bois commented “he has distinctly expressed the sentimental […] side of the American character,” noting “he has returned sweetness in a very artfully designed package” to his American viewers.

Description of Davies’s remoteness also took him out of place and time; in a 1929 obituary, curator and painter Bryson Burroughs mourned the loss of an artist whose “detachment from the vicissitudes of every-day existence” meant he was “separated from the common run of

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11 Davies tried several galleries before settling on Ferargil. He exhibited briefly at Marius de Zayas’s gallery in 1919 and 1920, and showed a large selection of his prints at the Weyhe Gallery in the same years. Price sent his work to exhibitions in Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Pittsburgh, Chicago and Dallas; thanks to the efforts of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Davies also showed his work more abroad. He exhibited in the Venice International in 1920.
12 Elizabeth Johns observed this trait in Davies’s critical assessment, identifying it as part of a moment in the 20s when “Americans were self-consciously debating new forms of artistic expression appropriate to modern technology and the egalitarian spirit, critics […] turned their back on Victorian painting as hopelessly traditional…” Johns, “Arthur B. Davies and Albert Pinkham Ryder: The ‘Fix’ of the Art Historian,” *Arts Magazine,* 56: 5 (January, 1982), p 71.

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men. [...] Within his outer shell of correctness and conformity, everything he did [...] and said were peculiar to him alone."

Davies's popularity lasted only a handful of years beyond the artist's death in Florence in 1928. Although he was eulogized eloquently, and his memorial exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1930 generated lavish praise, the ascendance of very different forms of modernism in art—as well as the increasing contention between critics and growing professional authority of criticism—rendered both his work and its reputation seriously in question by the 40s. Despite the influence he had exerted upon Lillie Bliss, John Quinn, and other collectors, helping to forge a 'canonical' model of modernism in America, his own work was excluded from that story. The narrative of his 'decline' into becoming a “hopelessly dated” artist out of touch with his time became art historical dogma by the 1950s. Davies had lapsed into such irrelevance that in 1952, when critics of seven art magazines collaborated on an exhibit to support the Whitney Museum of American Art’s purchasing fund, none endorsed Davies’s work as important to the history of the nation’s artistic fortunes.

Writers who followed in the 1950s and 60s described Davies as a ‘typically’ Symbolist hermetic isolé, whose paintings offered an escape from the crass materialism and ‘ugliness’ of the advancing modern world. As Harold Rosenberg characterized his

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work: “The silent landscapes in which he posed his familiar penumbral nymphs are, like Symbolist art generally, a refuge contrived from the history of art, beyond the reach of events.”\(^{17}\) Such observations condemned Davies’s art to irrelevance in the story of modernism’s rise, however much he had once engaged with issues that were central to his peers. Whereas his work had formerly nurtured both interactive and inter-disciplinary interpretations, these lost their credibility as esoteric or mystical spiritualism itself was written into the margins of art history and psychology; it had been possible to be an incongruous ‘realist and a mystic’ in 1908, but by mid-century this contradiction seemed inconceivable.

Davies was not merely a passive witness to his reputation’s changing fortunes. As he tempered his experimentation with fragmented, geometrical abstraction after the war—limiting it largely to printmaking—he also abandoned the productive formal instabilities that had generated his most vital association with dreams.\(^{18}\) Some of Davies’s staunchest supporters celebrated this development. In 1922 Duncan Phillips, relieved by what seemed to be a retreat from foreign extremes in the artist’s new painting, wrote to fellow critic Frank Jewett Mather that he found it “entirely normal, free from affectations and confusions of all kind.” Moreover, the collector believed, “unraveling the fabled skein of his mental process will give us a picture of this pure artist’s nature.”\(^{19}\) To that end, Phillips proposed a major publication celebrating the artist’s accomplishments in 1922.\(^{20}\) But nearing his sixties and after an attack of angina in 1923, Davies painted new work less often, spent more time on his printmaking, drawings and watercolors, and he re-worked older pieces.\(^{21}\) He also increasingly chose to spend long stretches of the year abroad, living in Paris or Italy.

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\(^{19}\) Letter from Duncan Phillips to Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., November 29, 1922. Phillips Collection Archives.


\(^{21}\) *Afterthoughts of Earth*, an earlier Nevada landscape to which he added clusters of toga-clad figures, won a gold medal at the Carnegie Institute annual exhibition in 1923.
Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

Despite critical insistence upon Davies’s continued importance, the artist’s increasing absence from New York’s art world networks also fostered his reputation as a hermetic mystic. For Royal Cortissoz, whose conservatism favored Davies’s middle-ground approach to abstraction via figuration, isolation made Davies distinctive. Labeling him a “Son of No Man’s Land,” Cortissoz wrote a glowing summary review of Davies’s oeuvre for Scribner’s in 1924, calling attention once again to his ability to make unreal visions seem real: “his feet are upon the solid earth. He paints what he has seen. But [...] he has seen something only existent in No Man’s Land.” The key to this rare ability, according to Cortissoz, lay in his approach to form: “Davies has become more and more abstract in his ideas, more and more recondite in his symbolism [...] But he never loses his hold upon the truth of form, he is never so imaginative but that he brings the very warmth and fragrance of [...] consciousness.”22 Although he asserted the value of Davies’s art for understanding consciousness, he stressed that Davies’s ‘abstraction’ resided in his own mind as much as in his painting; Cortissoz thus diminished the potential of viewers to discover their own meaning in “No Man’s Land.” These dreams were increasingly exclusive to the artist.

When it came out in 1924, Phillips’s encomiastic book confirmed Mrs. John D. Rockefeller’s choice to hire Davies to paint murals decorating the reception lobby of International House, a New York residence for international students. Davies accepted the commission gladly as it would be his first public mural project in America; he completed it over the next two years. After they were installed, critic Edward Alden Jewell commended their new stylistic elements as “figments of a poet’s brain; symbols minus the frequently laborious and fatiguing tags of symbolism,” thus demonstrating the growing disfavor accruing to obscure Symbolist art. Although in their return to figuration they forswore the Cubistic abstraction in the Bliss murals prior critics had termed ‘musical,’ to Jewell these new panels also epitomized music: “the salient thing about these murals [...] is their fundamental harmony [...] you are sure to find yourself moved by the rhythm of the color forms across the surface.”23

Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

It can be difficult to understand what Jewell liked so much about the International House murals (figure 7.1 & 7.2). Very different from the musical synthesis Davies provided to Bliss, they show the artist’s attempt to generate timeless allegories about “Mother Earth receiving the Peoples of the World.” The daring, if not always satisfying Cubo-futurist experiments in Davies’s earlier exuberant color and form give way here to a rehashing of his Arcadian fantasies, as if the artist from whom he now borrows is himself. The energies of his abstraction and occasionally willful distortion are replaced by a sense of solemnity and forced, polite rhythms; his figures, some wearing draping togas and others in modern suits, look like guests at an awkward outdoor dinner-party.

In their Classical aspirations, the murals relate to the appeasing ‘Return to Order’ demonstrated by many French painters whose work Davies admired. Yet they lack the playful re-evaluation of Classicism, the clarity of purpose or intellectual rigor in approach to form and the interrogation of style that distinguished the work of European artists like Picasso in the 20s.\(^\text{24}\) They also shed the productive instabilities that had lent themselves so readily to interpretation as products of the unconscious. Some, such as Cortissoz, regarded this as an indication of his final maturity and reconciliation of ambivalence. Cortissoz claimed his work continued to “oscillate between realistic and idealistic keys, or to imply a combination of the two,” because “Davies is in his work a perfect illustration of exactly this complexity. There is for him nothing in the least ambiguous about the blending of nominally antipathetic elements […] his lovely dreams, so fresh, so original, are amazingly vitalized […] he gives us a poet’s dream, and it is a dream humanized.”\(^\text{25}\) But in reconciling ambiguities, his work’s perplexing fascination also diminished.

Endorsing an expansive but poorly-defined utopian faith in the power of art to bring about unity through esthetics, the artist shared his thoughts in a brief statement explaining the murals’ intent. In this “Credo,” Davies wrote he believed that his


\(^{25}\) Royal Cortissoz, “The Field of Art,” Scribner’s, 80:3, (September, 1926), pp 351-352.
decorative panels “breathe subjective aspiration,” demonstrating his desire “to present the unity and identity of all peoples through the Maternal Life [...] to visualize the ideas of perfection and blessings of God [...] drawing nations into closer harmony [...] Love is unity.” The longing reflected in such ingenuous wishfulness is poignant. But Davies also insisted that deeper psychological and philosophical layers underlay his agenda: “As a living organization we exist for each other without conscious arrangement. The subjective identification of ourselves with beauty is to be caught up by the feeling it invites and one forgets to think. Nature is pre-conscious.”

Although here he claimed to strive for a primitive, spontaneous, inner connection with universal consciousness, his mural does not seem to encourage such intuitive responses: although ostensibly pursuing themes familiar in his earlier work, it shows little of the commanding strangeness, pliable form, provocatively ambiguous space or loose handling of paint through which he had pursued similar goals in earlier decades.

The murals reflect the directions his painting had taken generally in the 20s. Still in pursuit of metaphysical ideals located in pastoral landscapes, his painting lost its flexible ‘suggestiveness’ as it became formulaic and harder-edged. His compositional rhythms more stylized; the productive instabilities that made his work hauntingly strange and powerfully evocative of inner vision gave way to different demands. As demonstrated by *Stars and Dews and Dreams of Night*, from about 1927 (figure 7.3), his attenuated bodies became physically commanding and larger in relationship to the landscape around them. Similarly, his unformed and primeval spaces resolved in clearer depictions of Arcadian groves and Classical, ‘pagan’ settings. In paintings like *An Antique Vision* (figure 7.4), his figures abandon any primal struggles—and consequent expressive freedom—and the poses of his dancers discard their naïve vigor and weightless delicacy in favor of more affected if still graceful poses; they are more obvious in their emulation of Botticelli’s archaic maidens. The occasional inelegant distortion Davies sometimes showed in the delineation of his earlier figures is lost in newfound emphasis on exaggerated poise. Conspicuous brushstrokes—the agitated

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jagged marks of his immediately pre-Cubist period or the delicate stippling in his earlier rendering of plant life—are eliminated.

As Robin Veder has suggested, this later work was not entirely devoid of exploration of new ideas. She sees modern value of a different kind in his promenading nudes whose arms and torsos lift with the ‘breath of energy;’ she examines his embrace of theories about breathing in emerging modern body cultures as a parallel to his fascination with dance.27 While I don’t dispute this valuable line of interpretation, I believe that his ability to conjure the experience of a dream that had once captivated and engaged his audience diminished, replaced by somewhat conspicuous demonstration of physicality in his artificial posing bodies. He remained for some (but a dwindling number) a psychologically acute intellectual, but to others the hermeticism and resolute escapism of Davies’s dreams put him behind a wall of isolation, especially once the horrors of modern mechanized warfare and its aftermath became apparent: Davies’s poetic idylls appeared almost obstinate refusals to acknowledge that reality, or its corollary in the growing force of machine-age industrialization. By the late twenties, indulgence in Arcadian fantasies—once a sign of intransigent resistance to artistic conservatism—made him seem ever more outmoded.

By 1949 Davies could no longer be regarded as significant; his work had become ‘unintelligible’ and ‘unforgivably dated.’ His once celebrated International House murals were taken down, donated to the Munson Williams Proctor Institute, put in storage, and have never been shown again. The currents of change that served to occlude Davies’s art so thoroughly are as complex as those that gave rise to his centrality; I can do no more here than raise suggestions about how and why disciplines shifted their boundaries, posit some possible reasons for the transformation of his paintings from important to incomprehensible, and propose future lines of inquiry. But in what follows, I suggest that Davies’s mainstream popularity, his appeal to the esthetic tastes of elite women, the shifting stakes of his critical reputation amid newly reconfigured art world relationships and changes in psychology and psychoanalysis are clues that help us understand his

Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

changing identity, securing his legacy as an impenetrable—and thus ultimately failed—modernist.

Embodied spirituality and Arcadian fantasy

Even in the midst of Davies’s promotional activities, directing buyers towards important purchases, the pre- and immediately post- World War I years were uncomfortable for modern art; they witnessed the dispersal of some of Davies’s networks of patrons and associates. The coalition over which he had presided as president of the AAPS in the teens came apart, influencing not only his work’s continued success but also the community in which modern art thrived. In 1917, Alfred Stieglitz’s gallery 291 closed after Camera Work had folded; in 1919, Mabel Dodge departed for the American southwest, where she hosted a new ‘salon’ of former Greenwich Village friends and associates. The Arensbergs, Manhattan’s other great supporters of modernism at the Armory show, left for California in 1921. After the deaths of James Huneker in 1921, John Quinn in 1924 and Lillie Bliss in 1931, three of Davies’s staunchest advocates were also gone.

While he appreciated the role Davies had played in the advancement of the cause of modernism, Stieglitz’s subsequent endorsement of a more nativist, intuitively expressive and autonomous practice of painting made Davies’s work seem out-of-step. When Stieglitz reemerged as a gallery owner in 1925, he refocused and redirected his energies to a tightly knit group of exclusively American artists, and the critics whose embrace of new models of embodied subjectivity were informed by a growing embrace of Freudian psychoanalysis. Stieglitz’s support of these artists gave a different spin to

28 Davies contributed to the final issue of Camera Work, penning a very brief entry for the “What 291 means to me” series in Camera Work 47, (1915); for Dodge, see Lois Palken Rudnick, Utopian Vistas: the Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
30 For more on the later theories informing Stieglitz’s promotion of these modern painters, see Celeste Connor, Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
the spiritualist discourses that had motivated his prior promotion of European painters such as Kandinsky, with whom Davies had shared affinities. Stieglitz promoted a purified, streamlined and abstracted model of spiritual expression in art, and turned Symbolism towards platonic ideals located in abstracted nature, the American landscape and the American body of Georgia O'Keeffe. He encouraged the careers of critics who shared his vision and his new emphasis on the natural, libidinal energies of feminine creativity.32

Yet there are cracks in this story that reveal possibilities for further investigation of the stakes of Stieglitz's role in promoting an embodied spirituality. Although Marsden Hartley wrote in 1920 that Davies's paintings “arrive at a scheme of absolute spiritual harmony,” he insisted upon their incorporeal force: “Human passion is for once removed, unless it be that the mere humanism of motion excites the sense of passion. You are made to feel the non-essentiality of the stress of the flesh in the true places of spiritual existence.”33 But whereas the lack of bodily passion in Davies’s work was cause for Hartley’s praise, others found this retrograde. Seeds of this attitude were evident in Stieglitz' recognition of Davies's timid approach to the nude in 1913; they sprouted and grew in 1921 in Paul Rosenfeld’s observation that “Davies is the painter preferred of the American woman [...] who fears her own sexuality and hates the male who appeals directly to it, [she] finds in the art of Arthur B. Davies the man she wants men to be.”34 Applying a rudimentary psychoanalytic approach to Davies’s art, Rosenfeld proposed that the painter and his female patrons shared a fundamental repression. As both he and Stieglitz endorsed a more liberated—if problematically essentialized—vision of emancipated sexuality in the work of O’Keeffe, Davies’s apparent reticence appeared deeply resistant to changing modern understanding of the unconscious.35

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35 For O’Keeffe’s modernity and the problematic discourses surrounding Stieglitz’s promotion of her gendered expressivity, see Kathleen Pyne, Modernism and the Feminine Voice: O’Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Anne Wagner, Three Artists
Davies had positioned himself and his work strategically by displacing sexuality and sensuality to a realm of artificed, imaginative fantasy; his images addressed his female patrons' erotic sensibilities with care and caution. His naked figures in An Antique Vision (figure 7.4) are materially present in their large scale and their fit, muscular, dancers' physique. But they are also stylized, dematerialized, and relegated to Arcadia. This may have made sense to some viewers—as I imagine them—who were still just beginning to embrace sexuality in art and life alike. In favoring Davies, such a viewer might feel herself to be progressive without having to embrace the extremes of radical experimentation with embodied form, or challenges to social and behavioral norms that were often seen to accompany other modern pictorial experiments. But Davies's success at this venture was double-edged: the appeal of his stylized eroticism was not to last long as viewers soon acclimatized to changing cultural priorities. Attitudes towards sex continued to liberalize in the 20s, linking imagination more freely with openness about sexuality; Davies's bodies seemed unforgivably prudish to dismissive observers like Rosenfeld who actively promoted a more virile, sexually liberated agenda for modern art. In the force of the increasing prominence of sex in public culture, art and criticism, his artificed nudes could be labeled repressed and Victorian.

The problem of traditional figuration

If Davies's attitude towards sex and the body was an advantage among some of his female patrons that proved a limitation by the later 20s, for other critics his fusion of realism and idealism, and his attempt at pictorial synthesis between modernist abstraction and iconographical archaism could also seem like unacceptable compromise. While Guy


36 Davies was the product of a culture in which sexual issues were coming increasingly to public attention in tense and ambivalent ways; his own choice to conceal his marital infidelity rather than endure the possible scandal of divorce was shaped by the realization that such revelation might have threatened his career with the very patrons to whom his modest eroticism spoke.

Pene du Bois and Leo Stein had objected to the ‘chilly,’ overly-intellectual currents in Davies’s formal explorations of Cubism, preferring his obscure figural fantasies, other critics like Willard Huntington Wright never found room in their models of avant-garde painting for the artist’s adherence to figural representation. In his 1915 text *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* Wright argued forcefully for painting’s complete autonomy and against any comingling with literature, music or other art forms. While exploring the possibilities of a hybridized abstraction, Davies perpetuated the kind of imagery Wright disdained: he thus characterized Davies’s as a popular but “shallow” Cubist.38

As Davies gravitated away from Cubist abstraction, the selfsame inconsistency and ambiguity that had generated dynamic interpretive possibility became a stumbling block to later viewers. Symbolist models of transcendent hybridity and synthesis between the arts that had been dear to Davies also fell out of favor as rising attention to clear, legible realism on the one hand, or nonfigural expressivity on the other, supplanted vague, suggestive or ambiguous meaning in figural painting.39 By the early 30s, stylistic contradictions were out of step with the divergent strains in American painting observed by such opinionated critics as Thomas Craven, who posited regionalist realism firmly against the ‘foreign’ influence of abstraction.40 By 1936 Alfred Barr’s *Cubism and Abstract Art* created firm genealogies for modernism’s origins, and streamlined the earlier moment’s confusing overlaps and hybridity: Davies was nowhere in sight in his legendary diagram.41

In his ‘Credo’ Davies had stressed the value of unity in a viewer’s “pre-conscious” comprehension of his work, but its reliance upon traditional iconography also did not sustain this kind of response in the light of the kinds of more thorough non-figural

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39 Irving Babbitt had written strenuously against the kind of ‘mingling’ of different art forms that Davies had endorsed, arguing that formalism was an important antidote to such confusion and degeneration in the arts. See Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910); later critics adopted his stance.
40 See, for example, the arguments Thomas Craven makes in *Men of Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1931), p 506, concerning the foreign influence of the Stieglitz circle artists.
41 Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936). Barr’s famous diagram of modernism’s origins was published in association with this landmark show; whereas Davies’s favored artist Odilon Redon secured a place in this lineage, the American painter was excluded.
Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

abstraction later critics endorsed. These subsequent priorities valued a purified and disciplined approach to esthetics as formalist language and goals came together in the criticism of Clement Greenberg and his rise to authority in the art world at mid-century. As Caroline Jones’s study of Greenberg’s ascendance has shown, his advancement of art’s autonomous expressivity policed the boundaries of discrete perceptual sciences in the creation and apprehension of art alike, fostering a delimited model of ‘bureaucratization’ of the senses and regulation of distinct esthetic values between differing art forms.42

But the developments in Davies’s late work do not in themselves explain why his earlier work also fell out of visibility by the middle of the century. This relates to later critical rejection of synthesis that turned Davies’s goals of unity and universality against him, finding evidence there for sensory confusion, weakness and middle-ground accommodation, rather than truly radical, intellectually stimulating potential. In fact, whereas his stylistic diversity had been a paradoxical strength in one historical phase, showing his taste, perception and adaptive skill—even when he was characterized as ‘an echo’—Davies’s willful, if derivative experimentation with style became a liability during a later period in which autonomy, subjective expressivity and uniqueness were afforded distinct value by critics.

Davies’s devotion to archaic mythology and legend in the face of the changing energies of visual culture also became an insurmountable problem to his visibility as modern. Whereas even amid the rise of abstraction, some artists like Joseph Stella, Stuart Davis and Charles Demuth found ways to integrate elements of representation in their work, responding to and integrating aspects of mass culture with wit and sophistication, Davies’s retreat into an antiquated world of his own making anchored his dreams in a realm far from the free-play of the market.43 While this could be seen as an effort to rise

above and separate his art from the maligned arena of what would soon be labeled ‘kitsch,’ it also made him seem insensitive to its pleasures and the force of advertising and commercial art on the modern psyche.

A useful comparison between Davies and Maxfield Parrish also serves to delineate the stakes of Davies’s apparent ‘retreat’ into an isolated world of private dreams. The commercialization of fantasy begun in the early decades of the 20th century was in full force in the mass media of the 20s and 30s. As Michele Bogart has demonstrated, some artists who similarly dealt in escapist themes found success by harnessing their work to the market more closely: creating advertisements as well as paintings, Parrish embraced this vital new arena for reaching a broad and diverse audience. His images linked imagination and wonder to the sale of modern marvels like light bulbs and car tires. Davies remained apparently aloof from this modern material world, as he continued to paint ever-more rarified Classical idylls. But despite this separation, his work’s trade in a similar language of myth and legend eventually caught him up in the same discursive net that contained and debased Parrish’s products as ‘popular’ and thus insufficiently ‘authentic’ art forms. Whereas the popular appeal of his fantasies secured Parrish’s lasting visibility, Davies’s absence from the commercial market contributed to his lapse from public attention.

Politics and art world networks

Another deep challenge to Davies’s lasting status as an important modern painter concerned his evident lack of interest in examining, critiquing or challenging the social order. Holding up a mirror to the unconscious bourgeois mind rather than indicating any desire to alter its ideological configurations, Davies’s paintings failed to demonstrate sufficient commitment to social or economic reform; his dreams were utopian but did not offer a road-map to change. His reputation as a radical had been tempered in the same Greenwich Village fire that nurtured the New York Dada and the Stieglitz Circle artists in


the teens, he and his work never fully participated in its conflagrations, remaining above, beyond or to the side of them.

In the 20s, Marcel Duchamp and his colleagues took over aspects of the promotion of modern art, but Duchamp found much American art disappointingly out-of-date. Although the backgrounds of Duchamp and Davies share some often overlooked commonalities, including an interest in esoteric doctrines, Duchamp did not find much in common with Davies when the French artist arrived in the United States in 1915, after the course of his career had already radically changed.\(^5\) In his own work with readymades, Duchamp had embraced the contradictions of modern materialism, and abandoned the kind of hybridized figuration in Cubist painting that had provided inspiration to the American artist when Davies encountered it in preparation for the Armory Show.\(^6\) As Davies continued relentlessly to strive for unity, paring away the formal instabilities that might had made his work potentially interesting to Duchamp, Davies’s sincerity seemed humorless to the French Dada artist, who found greater potential in subversive wit and strategic irony than irresolute ambivalence.

Moreover, as he was already a successful artist, Davies was not sufficiently ‘outsider’ to deserve renewed attention to his work, or its re-evaluation in new terms. Louis Eilshemius did attract such interest. He shared many qualities with his near-contemporary Davies: fascination with occult mysticism and a dedication to pictorial fantasy.\(^7\) But his work was less securely connected to the kinds of elite ideals and cultural values that Davies continued to promote. Duchamp, hostile to the dictates of “taste” in art found the slightly lugubrious female nudes in nature of Eilshemius sufficiently interesting and strange to warrant an exhibition at the Société Anonyme in

\(^{45}\) Duchamp’s occult and esoteric beliefs, such as his interest in alchemy, are discussed by John Moffitt, *Alchemist of the Avant Garde: the Case of Marcel Duchamp*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003).


1920. However, Eilshemius’s rather desperate self-promotional eccentricities which gave him the reputation for mental instability—such as his self-published pamphlets and vitriolic denouncements of fellow artists in letters to newspapers—resulted from conspicuous lack of success; Davies was too tasteful, mainstream, and well-established to resort to such measures, and consequently he merited neither Duchamp’s endorsement nor his censure.

As Davies’s art world networks slowly dissipated, room opened up for new ones to form. In the 20s, new leaders of a reconfigured avant-garde took hold in New York; in founding the Société Anonyme Katherine Dreier, alongside Duchamp and Man Ray, promoted the anarchist energies of Dada and an abstract esthetic more clearly emblematic of a new age. While his Cubist experiments might have found a home alongside the artists they promoted, Davies’s had given up that possibility; his promenading bodies of the 20s were not in keeping with this divergent spirit. Like Davies, Dreier had been an advocate of Theosophy, and had exhibited enigmatic figural works such as *The Blue Bowl* in the Armory Show. But Dreier’s interest in the purely abstract potential of spiritual communication shaped her own work thereafter, as well as her subsequent promotional activities, such as the organization of the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926. Inspired by Kandinsky, Dreier supported kinds of modern art that gave more formally experimental, distilled vision to these esoteric ideals; she complained, "[America] has developed along the material rather than the immaterial, the concrete rather than the divine." While still open to multiple ‘modernisms,’ Dreier’s vision of true esoteric immateriality was not congruent with Davies’s efforts to reassert the value of traditional figural iconography. Thus, Davies’s work became equally out of

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step with the anarchic spirit and spiritually attuned exuberance Dreier advocated as well as with Stieglitz’s celebration of the sexual body.\(^\text{52}\)

Since Davies fit into no ready political category, his reputation as a remote visionary also segregated both the artist and his work from the increasingly heated world of inter-war politics. While in the teens he had been briefly and tangentially affiliated with the intellectuals running the Socialist journal *The Masses*, Davies’s reliance upon the support of his wealthy patrons like the Rockefellers in the twenties made it more strategic to maintain an apolitical attitude. Although in 1924 the *New York Herald Tribune* still called him “A rebel in art whose nonconformist ideas public appreciation has vindicated,” to younger and more forthright radicals, as a darling of the daughters of robber barons, he could not successfully represent avant-garde intransigence.\(^\text{53}\)

Davies' dreams were neither outwardly focused enough on a collective vision of reform or capitalist overthrow, nor inwardly focused enough on the deeper, subjective layers of the Freudian unconscious; in neither case did radicals have any interest in using his work to their advantage, or claiming his subsequent legacy after his death. In the 20s leftists of different varieties had increasingly endorsed new movements in art: first Dada, and then its unruly offspring Surrealism, or the activist impulses of socially informed kinds of realism. Right-leaning conservatives and art world elites went to ground in various other kinds of realist or 'nativist' objectives, favoring art whose debt to 'foreign' influence was either less obvious than Davies’s, or played down in favor of apparently home-grown abstraction.\(^\text{54}\) By the mid-century decades increasingly characterized by hostility between the left and right and profound anxiety about events on the world stage—as well as internal focus on political and economic crises in the nation—Davies’s fantasies communicated stubborn indifference to the central preoccupations of a new generation.


Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Surrealism

Another major thread in the tangled knot surrounding Davies’s shifting reputation involves changes shaping the course of psychology; the possibility that Davies’s art had offered scientific ways to approach the unconscious wore off as academic psychologists in America turned to newly rigorous means of understanding the mind beginning in the teens. The open-ended research into spiritualism and the metaphysics of consciousness that had provoked and inspired William James was already contested when John Watson proposed his new behaviorist approach to the study of our inner drives and impulses in 1913. James’s interdisciplinary psychology had not only failed to demonstrate the existence of the spirit world, intensifying defenses of psychology’s scientific authority in America caused leaders in the field to abandon or redirect efforts to understand the soul or consciousness. Widespread acceptance of rigorously positivist approaches to psychology went hand-in-hand with intensifying progressive era attention to social reform and order. While the aims of psychology remained disparate, even conflicted, as it continued to struggle for self-definition, there was less room for the kinds of vacillation about spirituality, parapsychology and mysticism it had once supported.

Published the same year in which Freudian psychoanalysis and Bergsonian philosophies had each respectively laid claim to the significance of dreams, Watson’s endorsement of behaviorism set forth his beliefs about the aims and methods of psychology with all of the force and clarity of a manifesto, writing “Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its

56 While many of the members of the Society for Psychical Research had been leading psychologists in the 1890s, most of them distanced themselves from this interest by 1900, even if their activity had been in the service of disproving the validity of spiritual and psychic phenomena; James’s continued involvement proved an embarrassment to some of his friends and colleagues. See Deborah Coon, “Testing the Limits of Sense and Science: American Experimental Psychologists Combat Spiritualism, 1880-1920,” in Pickren and Dewsbury, eds. Evolving Perspectives on the History of Psychology, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2002), pp 121-139.
theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior."58 Challenging the subjective, introspective methods of Titchener alongside psychology’s previous concern with psychic phenomena and spiritual matters, Watson synthesized currents of belief that been growing in strength since earlier in the century; his proposal had a major influence on a younger generation of psychologists who took the institutional reins in the twenties and thirties.59

Behaviorism, attending closely to well-defined experiments, quantifiable data, and repeatable outcomes became a newly dominant academic science of the mind in the 20s. In the following decades, popular psychology took on different identity as it found more practical applications. In light of the wartime need for testing of intelligence and mental fitness, psychologists took advantage of the growing emphasis on pragmatic solutions, honing new tools for measuring psychological issues like cognition and perception; in the post-war years, such evaluation was used in industry to study and organize the work force.60 Practical psychology was also linked to the rising force of consumer society; advertising agencies turned to the expertise of psychologists in the quest for new ways to stimulate commodity desire.61 Amid these diverse shifts, Davies’s attempt to use art to understand the science of consciousness and vice versa found no home in a world of hard scientific data and unambiguous proof.

If questions about the relationship between human consciousness, the soul, or its mysterious counterpart the unconscious were shunted away from science in academic and practical psychology, they found a ready home among later and vocal advocates of Freudian psychoanalysis. Acquiring firmer definition in his later writing of the teens and

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58 Watson, “Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It,” (1913), pp 158-177. Hoping to distance the science from the subjective methods of prior psychologists like Titchener, he continued: “Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. The behaviorist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behavior of man, with all of its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviorist's total scheme of investigation.”


61 After being fired because of his affair with his research assistant, Watson went on to work for the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency; for a biography of Watson, See Kerry Buckley, Mechanical Man: John Broadus Watson and the Beginnings of Behaviorism, (New York: Guildford, 1989).
twenties, Freud’s ideas seeped into American culture’s deep strata, such that by mid-century Freud’s terminology, his beliefs about dreams and the ideas about the topography of the unconscious that he developed more fully in the twenties were widely accepted and familiar. Jung, who suffered a major psychic and spiritual crisis after breaking from Freud in 1913 went through a period of soul-searching; his ideas about dreams, mythic archetypes and the collective unconscious did not re-emerge with force in America until the middle decades of the twentieth century, leaving plenty of room for Freud’s developing authority.  

Although the climate of hostility towards foreign influence, especially suspicion of Eastern European and Jewish intellectual currents tempered Freud’s reception somewhat during World War I, the aftermath of the conflict also validated some of Freud’s ideas and certainly proved the efficacy of his therapeutic methods; as soldiers returned from the war traumatized by ‘shell shock,’ some turned to psychoanalysis as a therapeutic means of treating their neuroses.

In the art world, Freud’s theories concerning primitive instinct and the sources of creativity took hold in other ways that served to exclude Davies. Developing and refining his ideas about the relationship between the unconscious and art, Freudian theories began to influence how paintings could be analyzed using psychoanalysis as a governing principle. Lingering secrecy surrounding Davies’s private life combined with his work’s growing remoteness prevented it from being interpreted in these new terms; the distinction between “Daviesian” and Freudian dreams became ever sharper. In contrast, Freudian theories expanded radically in other movements and artists’ work, shaping the

62 Although Sonu Shamdasani has noted that the reception of Jung in America between the teens and the forties is inadequately studied, his own work proposes some important dimensions to the way his early reception and the thorough interpenetration of his ideas with Freud set up his later re-emergence. See his introduction to C. Jung, Jung Contra Freud: Jung contra Freud: The 1912 New York Lectures on the Theory of Psychoanalysis, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), and Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: The Dream of a Science, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).


65 “These Are Daviesian (Not Freudian) Dreams,” Art Digest 13, (April 15, 1939), p 15. Although a few people may have discovered it, Davies’s double life remained largely a secret until Brooks Wright’s biography was published in 1978; it is not mentioned in the centennial exhibition held in 1962 at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, organized by curator Harris K. Prior, who involved the Davies family extensively in organizing this show.
production as well as criticism of art. When Andre Breton and the Surrealists adopted and manipulated Freudian ideas to serve diverse agendas, beginning with Breton’s manifesto in 1924, they considered his theories’ applicability to the production of art in new ways. However problematically, inconsistently and idiosyncratically they interpreted his ideas, Surrealists heartily welcomed Freud’s exploration of the darkest layers of the unconscious; Breton endorsed “psychic automatism” as a preeminent goal for art. Other Surrealists, most conspicuously Salvador Dali for American viewers, also turned to his *Interpretation of Dreams* in celebration of its emphasis on repressed wishes, abject instinctual urges and sexual symbols. Seeing in Freud’s theories the opportunity to subvert and destroy bourgeois morality, to embrace the anarchic power of irrationality and even, in the interpretations of Andre Breton, the possibility of overturning capitalism, the Surrealists looked inward to their own unconscious minds and found unspeakable but artistically expressible images and impulses.

Surrealism’s arrival in the United States in the late 20s and early 30s was negotiated in ways as complex as the initial arrival of Freud’s ideas. American Surrealists, many of them devoted to the movement’s potential for social agency and reform, voiced tension and ambivalence about of Dali’s hermetic and disturbing subjectivity as well as the authenticity of Breton’s radical political agenda, but the changed terms for art whose primary task probed the unconscious made it impossible for Davies’s dreams to remain viable as a vehicle for its exploration. Davies was too incomplete in his exploration of the unconscious and too calculatedly rational to serve as an expressive painter of the mind’s energies; his work demonstrated neither Breton’s automatism nor Dalí’s perversity. Other Surrealists who embraced the creative potential of new media and the vibrant visual appeal of mass marketing were highly attuned to the contradictions as well as the possibilities of consumer culture: the rapid proliferation of

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Conclusion: “Son of No Man’s Land”

Surrealism into mass culture linked the irrationality of the unconscious mind to commodity desire as well as its critique.⁶⁸

But in other ways the underlying ties to the subjective imagination and fantasy in Davies’s work could be equally problematic. As Surrealism—especially that highly illusionistic and very disturbing variant demonstrated by Dali—redefined the fevered imagery of the unconscious as almost exclusively subjective, many perceived the fundamental interpretation of his pictured dreams lay in the artist’s sole possession.⁶⁹ Whereas once Davies’s work might have fostered the dual exploration of the viewer’s mind as well as his own, in the wake of Dali’s unsettling, hermetic dream symbolism this was no longer a viable interpretive option for later critics or viewers.⁷⁰

When the kind of ‘psychic automatism’ linked to subjective expression and symbolism emerged in abstract expressionism at mid-century, it engaged the viewer almost entirely by non-representational means. By 1943, Adolph Gottlieb, a member of the first abstract expressionist generation, publicly voiced his distrust of some contemporary surrealists’ focus on picturing their dreams in illusionistic terms. In a 1943 radio interview he claimed: “The Surrealists have asserted their belief in subject matter but to us it is not enough to illustrate dreams,” explaining that he favored their exploration by other means—exploring obscure mythic symbols and Jungian archetypes in primitive art that did not represent the unconscious so much as mobilize its energies and echo its mechanisms in very personal ways.⁷¹ While these may sound like refrains of interests Davies could have shared, the earlier artist’s depiction of dreams remained

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⁷⁰ Miller, “With Eyes Wide Open,” (2007), pp 68-70 on the “monstrous extremes” of Dali’s subjectivity and the “dangers of subjectivism.” Shows of Davies’s work were held every two or three years throughout the 30s until 1945 and sporadically thereafter; a centennial retrospective was held in 1962.

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grounded in the fundamentally ‘illustrative’ paradigm of Symbolist art. By giving representational form to figments of the unconscious while attempting to explore its mutable ambiguous form, Davies remained tied to Symbolism’s hermetic obscurity, rather than Surrealism’s iconographic, easily commercialized model of fantasy.

Conclusion:

Taken together, these densely knotted strains of cultural change marginalized Davies in ways that were neither tidy nor linear. None of the dynamics that altered the art world in the 20s have been sufficiently explored by prior historians, which offers possibilities for ongoing scholarship. While I have tried in my previous chapters to highlight some of the threads that generated Davies’s paradoxical success within his career’s foundational phases, re-weaving them here into a story that accounts for his latter exclusion, like most snarls of entangled ideologies and philosophies, these interrelated issues are stubbornly resistant to smoothing and alignment. America didn’t become any less complex between the early years of the twentieth century and its mid-point, and the art world continued to support multiple visions of modernity, but the spheres of disciplinary overlap shifted, changed dimension, and rearranged their boundaries, so that work that once had occupied the center was more than just peripheral: it was in some cases entirely occluded.

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored not only what Davies’s paintings are but what they did when they worked to create a model of the unconscious. He gave vision not only to the content but also to the experience of dreaming, and thus he set in motion an open-ended conversation between a maker, his objects and his viewers. When it engaged most fully with his audience, the visual language Davies employed was not merely delivered to viewers but produced a dynamic give-and-take with them. The provocative instabilities in his art had offered rich opportunities for viewers to participate in this conversation, moderated by observant critics who guided its course. But grammar and syntax change in painting just as much as in writing and speech; in Davies’s art, as his later work shed its potential for ambiguity and flexibility, what had once communicated via an open interchange of shared ideas became foreign to viewers whose expectations were informed by new language, terms and phrases. Examining how this
conversation began in the arena of psychology and perception, and how this field changed, helps us apprehend the stakes of our own moment’s most pressing dialogues in art.

Thus, in a general way, I hope that my research makes a contribution to our deeper understanding of an important, transitional phase in American art and culture; one that is all too often overlooked in favor of later phases of modernism’s complex development in which cohesive beliefs, theoretical objectives and esthetic form were more clearly articulated by artists and critics alike. But in a more focused way, I hope that attending to what made Davies exemplary of his moment’s heterogeneous and conflicted currents of thought about the unconscious yet perceiving mind helps us understand the stakes of artistic popularity. Rather than being out-of-touch with modernity, in his career’s prime Davies had been incredibly responsive to the many contradictions with which his contemporaries struggled to come to terms with its contours; examining his work we can see the challenges of negotiating conflicting interests and contradictory belief as artists and viewers make sense of a new episteme as it takes shape.

By exploring the psychology of the unconscious, producing an experience his viewers were willing and able to see as analogous to a dream, Davies invited his viewers to engage actively with this kind of negotiation. In doing so he set important groundwork for subsequent developments in modern American art: the mind-body metaphors in the abstraction of Stieglitz’s second circle artists; the embrace of liberated irrationality in those who embraced Dada’s anarchic energies; and the Freudian mechanisms of repression and catharsis in the dreaming subjectivities of the Surrealists. But Davies’s own work resembled none of these movements. The form and subject in Davies’s art that had once offered open-ended possibility for mediation between contradictory currents in art and culture later appeared feeble and indecisive: it was interpreted as willful ignorance, stubborn retrenchment, and obstinate escapism. Whereas viewers in the first two decades of the 20th century had been willing and able to enter into this conversation, finding evidence the fantastic, heterogenous powers of the unconscious mind in his work’s layers of ambiguity, later viewers could not see the same properties in Davies’s work. His dreams were no longer readily shared; they belonged to Davies alone.
Conclusion Illustrations

7.1 International House Lobby with Murals, 1924-26, (Photograph Courtesy Smithsonian Institution)

7.2 International House Lobby Murals, 1924-26, (Photograph Courtesy Smithsonian Institution)
Conclusion Illustrations

7.3 *Stars and Dews and Dreams of Night*, ca. 1926-27 (Corcoran Gallery of Art, oil on canvas, 26 x 40")

7.4 *An Antique Vision*, ca. 1926, (Detroit Institute of Art, oil on canvas, 38 x 46)
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