
L'Art Inconscient: Imaging the Unconscious in Symbolist Art for the Théâtre d'art

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Résumé

Alors que l'institutionnalisation de la psychologie suscitait la fascination pour l'inconscient dans la France fin-de-siècle, les artistes symbolistes montraient leur vif désir de pictorialiser cet état. Les pièces de théâtre et les affiches produites pour le Théâtre d'art symboliste de Paul Fort tendaient à déstabiliser la pensée rationnelle en remettant en question la perception visuelle conventionnelle. Désigné par Jules Bois comme «l'art inconscient», le style des illustrations de théâtre des Nabis représentait la transcendance du moi et la pénétration de l'inconscient créatif à travers différentes métaphores visuelles de la dissolution.

In February of 1891 Paul Gauguin produced two drawings to help advertise the play *Madame la Mort* (*Lady Death*) (1891) by Rachilde for its performance at the Symbolist Théâtre d'art in March of that year. *La Femme Voilée* (fig. 1) appeared on the frontispiece of Rachilde's 1891 memoir *Théâtre*,¹ while a second drawing of a full-length, veiled figure of lady death (fig. 2) was published in the related periodical *Le Théâtre d'Art* during the same year (fig. 3).² Gauguin concentrated on illustrating the exciting second act of the play. In this act, the “nervous” protagonist Paul Dartigny smokes a cigar laced with poisonous *nerium oleander*, and then hallucinates a struggle between the personifications of death and life. This confrontation determines whether Dartigny lives or dies.³ The figure of lady death emerges victorious from the struggle, an event that introduces a principal theme of the Théâtre d'art's productions: exploring ways to engage the unconscious mind.

The plays performed at the Théâtre d'art focused almost entirely on topics that involved altered states of consciousness, extreme psychological distress, drug use, and near-death experiences. Playwright Pierre Quillard states that the Théâtre d'art was attempting to create a “pretext for a dream,” a space in which ordinary consciousness was transcended.⁴ The Symbolist dramas performed at the theatre attempted to alter the audience members' normal states of perception. Similarly, the theatre advertising and stage sets by the Nabis set out to dislodge the rational mind by challenging visual perception through the use of indistinct imagery. By examining two of the dramas, Rachilde's *Madame la Mort* and Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (*The Intruder*) (1890), and the accompanying illustrations produced for the magazine *Le Théâtre d'Art* in 1891, I will outline the effort by Symbolist artists and authors to mimic characteristics associated with the unconscious mind. The prints designed by Paul Gauguin, Paul Sérusier, and Maurice Denis for the Théâtre d'art dramas tend to feature nebulous, evanescent imagery. The style of these printed images and the content and staging of the plays they promoted, I believe, evidence an interest in the newly emerging field of psychology and in other scientific and pseudo-scientific efforts to understand the unconscious mind in the late nineteenth century.⁵ The indistinct visual quality of the prints paralleled the endeavours of the authors working at

Théâtre d'art to break down the barriers between the rational and irrational self.

It has been posited that modernity is characterized by the desire for an autonomous, fixed sense of self.⁶ Jan Goldstein has demonstrated that the French education system actively promoted the idea of an integrated notion of the self—a unified *moi*—in part to shore up the bourgeois social order.⁷ Despite this educational imperative, psychologists increasingly discovered, through experiments in hypnosis, mesmerism, somnambulism, and mediumship, that our sense of self can be fragmented. By the *fin de siècle*, psychologists had decided that a divided sense of self was a pathological state.

While doctors pathologized the fragmented model of the human mind, for others a dipsychistic, double mind suggested a hidden ego that was in communication with an extra individual realm.⁸ Artists perceived this divided mind as an opportunity to learn about creativity. For the Symbolists working around the Théâtre d'art, the contemporary fascination with dreams, the supernatural, and other ideas related to the unconscious mind reflected their efforts to break through or dissolve the barrier between the rational self of the bourgeois and the irrational self of the creative artist. However, the goal for the Symbolists was not so much to uncover the complexities of the layered human mind—as it was for psychologists such as Freud—but rather to uncover a path to universal and divine knowledge that they felt was buried deep in the recesses of human knowledge. For them, the double mind was a route to extra-individual knowledge and an enlightened self.

A literary application of the concept of a fragmented mind is demonstrated in the hallucinatory sequence in act two of *Madame la Mort*, in which Death and Life fight over Paul Dartigny in a foggy garden at dusk. In her production instructions, Rachilde stresses the nebulous, dream-like quality of the hallucination scene by stating that it takes “place entirely in the dream, in the brain of an agonized man.”⁹ Rachilde's description of the setting places the garden in an indeterminate light with a shrouding mist: “a garden on a spring day, in soft, hazy light. Banks of light-colored shrubs and rose bushes. Dominating the stage in the back, a cypress shrouded in gray mist.”¹⁰ Waking up in this garden, Dartigny is caught in that transi-



Figure 1. Paul Gauguin, *La Femme Voilée, Madame la Mort*, in *La Plume*, 1 September 1891, p. 292. Photomechanical reproduction. Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Acquired with the Herbert D. and Ruth Schimmel Museum Library Fund, 1991.0793.002 (Photo: Edward Foley).

tional space between sleep and death: “Am I only sleeping, or am I already dead?...The scent of these flowers has a disturbing subtlety: they try to dissuade me, they offer me their pious lies, and yet... I sense in them... a terrifying smell of earth.” Later he says, “The air here is as sweet as honey....I want to stay here, to get drunk from the sweetness all around...then sleep, I am very tired....I have walked for thirty years!”¹¹ In the dimly lit garden smelling sweetly of decay, with the antagonist heavy with sleep, colour alone is used to distinguish the figures of Life and Death from each other. The figure of Life is costumed in a “vibrantly” coloured fabric—one reviewer named the colour yellow, another pink.¹² The actress playing lady death, like the figure represented in Gauguin’s drawings, is swathed in dust-coloured veils, her limbs and face hidden, and her voice “mournful,” thereby heightening her ethereality and her otherworldliness. Rachilde insists that this figure accommodate herself to the dream-like quality of the garden.

Although Rachilde states that the Veiled Woman representing lady death is not a ghost, everything else about her description in the published version of the play utilizes the qualities of spectral materializations documented in popular Spiritualist journals.¹³ Her stage directions indicate that the Veiled Woman should be like an “apparition” of the imagination:

Young, lithe woman completely covered by a dust-gray veil over a long dress of the same gray. Mournful voice, but clear

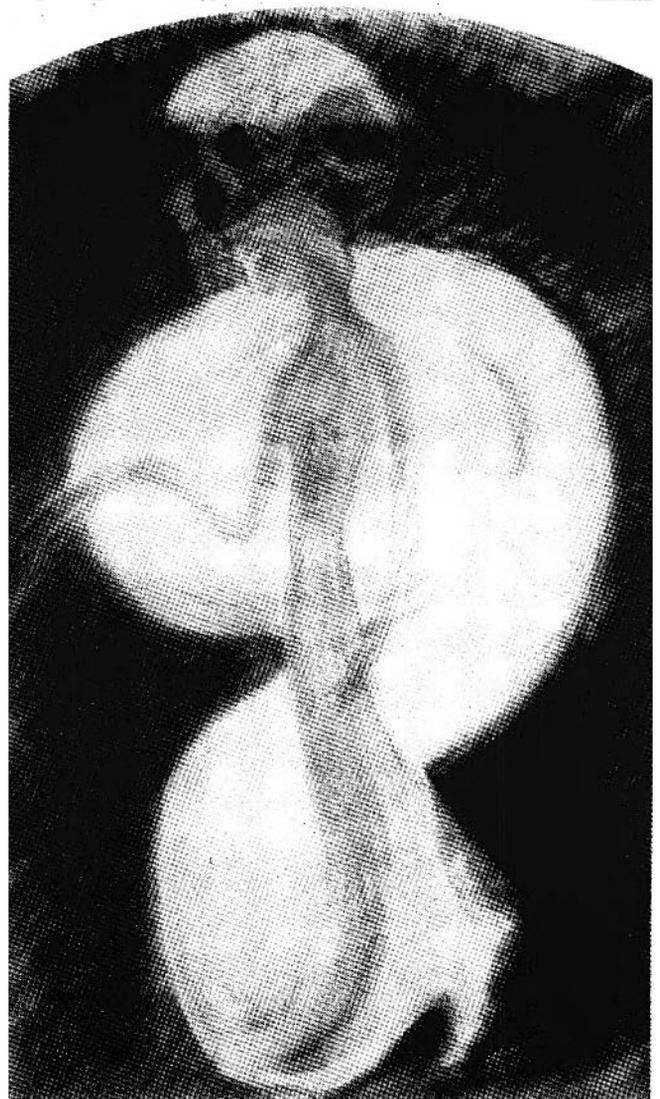


Figure 2. Paul Gauguin, *Madame la Mort*, in *Théâtre d'Art* (journal), ca. March 1891, n.p. Photomechanical reproduction. Josefowitz Collection (Photo: author).

and sharp. She never shows her feet, nor her hands, nor her face: she is an apparition. She walks, turns, moves, without a sound, like a shadow, but gracefully. She does not look like a ghost: she is not returning from the dead, she has never existed. She is an image, not a living being.¹⁴

The Veiled Woman, who is “much more the form of a dream than a living creature,” advances across the stage, emerging out of the mist, “slowly, slowly but not as if walking: she is gliding.”¹⁵ Gauguin’s figure of death parallels Rachilde’s description in the published play.¹⁶ Despite distancing herself from Spiritu-

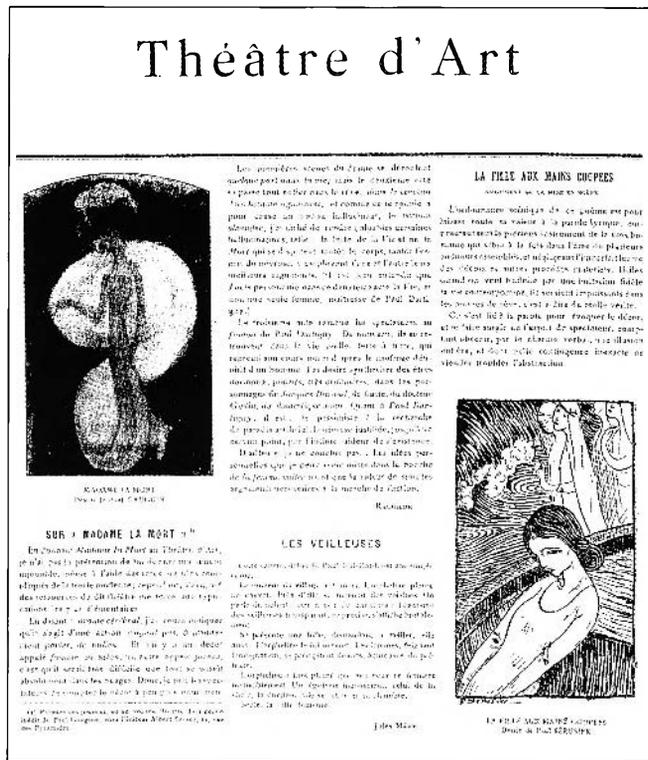


Figure 3. *Théâtre d'Art* (journal), ca. March 1891, n.p. Josefowitz Collection (Photo: author).

alist rhetoric, Rachilde's description and Gauguin's images rely on the iconography of Spiritualism, which stressed a dematerializing form.¹⁷ It is difficult to distinguish between Gauguin's woman swathed in veils and the atmospheric haze from which she emerges, which is how Spirit photographs portrayed materializations.¹⁸ Spirit photographs offered a tantalizing model of how to depict the "other" world (*au delà*) (fig. 5). The body of the woman in Gauguin's drawing consists of alternating zones of luminosity and obscurity that meld into the darkness of the ground. If one imagines the diaphanous figure set against the hazy atmosphere produced by the smoke of the drug-laced cigar and mist-shrouded garden, one can begin to get a feel for the pictorial devices adopted by Gauguin for the *Théâtre d'art* drawings: the lessening of the distinction between figure and ground, a decrease of the contrast between light and dark, and the employment of an overall dusky effect through manipulation of light and colour.¹⁹

This effect of indeterminacy in Gauguin's drawings created a sense of the dream-like world that Rachilde describes, but this evanescent style has also stimulated discussion among Gauguin scholars. The artist's drawings of *La Femme Voilée* have always stood out as being uncharacteristic of his *oeuvre*, and

thus unrepresentative of Synthetism, the mode canonized as the Symbolist style.²⁰ Yet when Gauguin's work from the winter of 1891 is viewed in the context of the *Théâtre d'art*, and his friendship with Symbolist painter Eugène Carrière during this period is considered, the alterity of these works, especially the deviations from Synthetism, make sense.²¹ Gauguin's drawings for Rachilde's drama are stylistically distinct from the main body of his work, yet they are entirely consistent with the art produced by the Nabis for Paul Fort's *Théâtre d'art* during the winter of 1891. By working in monochrome and by reducing the contrast between the figures and the ground, Gauguin was in fact adopting the principal style developing in conjunction with Fort's theatre during this period. This style, labelled "l'art inconscient" by Symbolist critic and playwright Jules Bois, was characterized by the manipulation of formal elements in an attempt to image the realm of the unconscious mind.²²

It is no surprise that *fin-de-siècle* authors and artists were fully absorbed in trying to understand the processes of the dream, the unconscious, and the associated concepts of creativity and transcendence. From the 1880s onwards, Paris was one of the most important centres in Europe for the study of the unconscious.²³ The well-known work done by Jean-Martin Charcot (fig. 4) and Pierre Janet at the Salpêtrière hospital, for example, is credited with legitimizing and popularizing the investigation into the "hidden mind."²⁴ The most common understanding of the unconscious or subconscious, as Janet labelled it during the late nineteenth century, was as a hidden part of the mind. Experimentation in hypnosis, somnambulism, and mediumship introduced the notion that this unconscious mind can affect the conscious mind, and it also seemed that researchers could get glimpses of the unconscious mind under certain conditions, for example, through an induced trance state. According to Debora Silverman's research, the unconscious mind was described in neuropsychiatric theories as "fluid," and "indeterminate," which matched the lay person's perception of his/her own dreams and episodes of altered consciousness. Similarly, artists depicted the dream state utilizing indeterminate formal elements.²⁵

The limits and the powers of the hidden mind were debated during the final years of the nineteenth century. Sigmund Freud promoted the influential view of the unconscious as a repository for forgotten memories and fantasies, but scientific theories still competed with pseudo-scientific theories. Henri Ellenberger's important book, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, explains that a key scientific debate of the nineteenth century was about whether the unconscious mind was open or closed.²⁶ The model of a "closed" mind—which would only contain memories, daydreams and fantasies—was accepted by Charcot, Janet, Theodore Flournoy, and Freud, among others, and came to direct how we view the mind in the twentieth century. However, other equally eminent professionals, such as

the physicist William Crookes, the astronomer Camille Flammarion, and later Freud's pupil Carl Gustav Jung, asserted that the unconscious mind was "open." The open unconscious was "virtually in communication with an extra-individual and mysterious realm."²⁷ The open mind concept embraced a range of metaphysical ideas, in particular, the notion of discarnate spirits known as "phantoms" or "ghosts," which was taken up by those who practised Spiritualism.

As Max Nordau notes in his 1892 book *Degeneration*, by the 1890s interest in séances had penetrated of all levels of Parisian society:

France is about to become the promised land of believers in ghosts. I am not now thinking...of the fine ladies who at all times have ensured excellent incomes to clairvoyants and fortune tellers, but only of the male representatives of the educated classes. Dozens of spiritualist circles count their numbers by the thousands. In numerous drawing rooms of the best society the dead are called up.²⁸

Séances, as Nordau describes them, offered the general public a highly entertaining, theatrical performance of the popular, quasi-religious practice of Spiritualism. Paul Fort's Symbolist theatre clearly assimilated ideas from these vibrant and thriving examples of popular theatre with its use of sight, sound, and touch.²⁹ The subject matter of the Symbolist dramas, the stylized acting, and the nebulous imagery of the prints, as introduced by Gauguin's drawings, all borrow formal elements from séances and the photographs that circulated widely of mediums and ghosts. There is plenty of documentation that Symbolists were interested in séances and Spiritualism during this period. We know from their own writings that authors within the Symbolist circle, including Theosophist Lady Caithness (Duchesse de Pomar),³⁰ J.K. Huysmans,³¹ and Maurice Maeterlinck all attended séances. James Jacques Tissot and Albert Besnard (fig. 6), artists close to the Symbolists, dabbled in Spiritualism by the mid-1880s.³² By 1903, Jules Bois gathered his acquaintances' opinions into a book regarding parapsychology, including séances, based on interviews with J.K. Huysmans, Alphonse Daudet, J.M. Charcot, Victorien Sardou, Jules Claretie, Max Nordau, Cesare Lombroso, and Albert Besnard.³³ Bois also published a collection of automatic images produced by mediums in a trance in his 1897 article on the Nabis, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes."³⁴ For Symbolists interested in supernatural phenomena, information and imagery abounded during the last years of the nineteenth century, especially through the conduits of Camille Flammarion, Jules Bois, and Maurice Maeterlinck.

Interaction with Spiritualism was not limited to literary figures; séances also attracted scientists who investigated these events to test for fraud. The credibility of Spiritualist doctrine

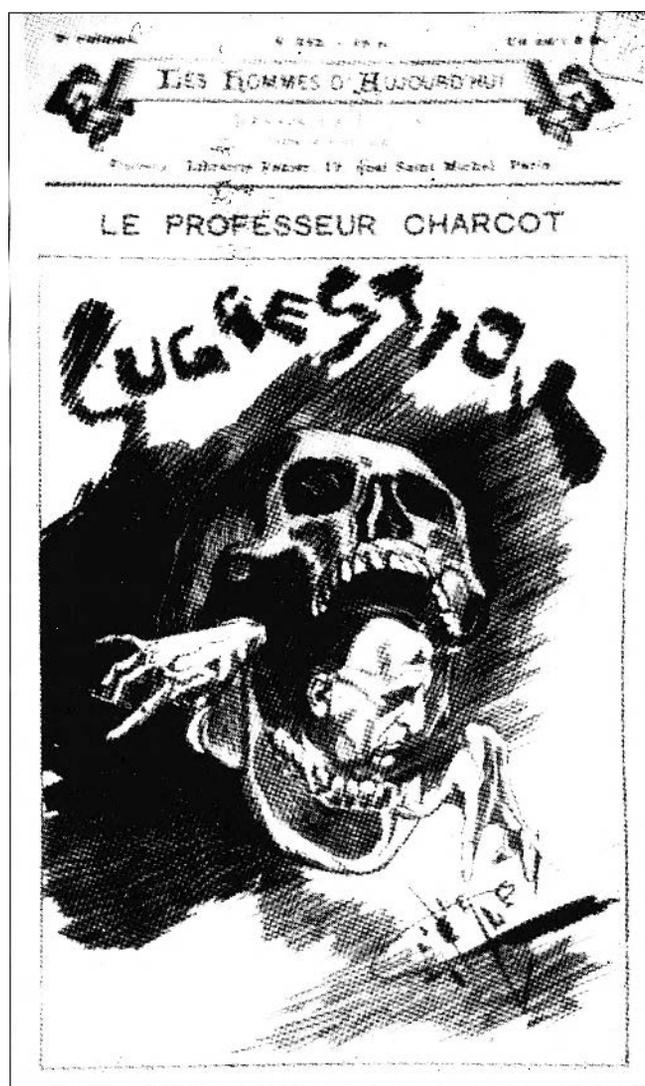


Figure 4. I. uque, *Le Professeur Charcot*. Cover for *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, vol. 7, no. 362 (n.d.) (Photo: author).

had been boosted through the 1860s and 1870s in Paris and London by a number of high-profile scientists and literati who publicly endorsed its tenets. The respected astronomer Camille Flammarion began investigating paranormal forces in 1865 with a monograph on the mediumistic Davenport brothers. At various times during his career, he photographed and tested mediums' claims. In 1898, he invited Jules Bois, the writer Jules Claretie, the playwright Victorien Sardou, and Charcot's colleague, an investigator of hypnosis and future Nobel laureate, Charles Richet to attend a series of well-publicized séances with the famous medium Eusapia Palladino.³⁵ In 1874, British naturalist Alfred R. Wallace and physicist William Crookes publicly

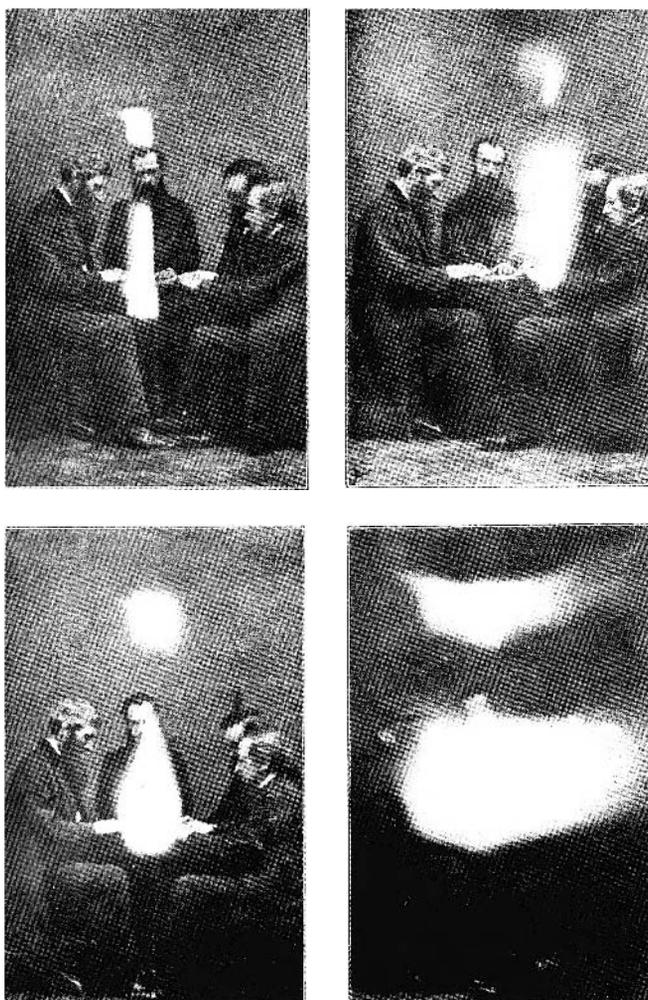


Figure 5. John Beattie, Spirit Photograph. Reproduced in Alexander Aksakow, *Animismus und Spiritismus* (Leipzig, 1919).

defended the practice of photographing spirits.³⁶ Despite fraud trials that went on during the 1870s against commercial Spirit photographers, scientific photographing of ghosts continued well into the twentieth century.³⁷

It was not exceptional during this period for an association to be made between mediumship, hysteria, and the unconscious mind. Mediums who channeled ghosts were understood to be using their unconscious minds as gateways to the supernatural realm. A medium's ability to induce a trance state was equated with Charcot's main characteristic of the hysteric: a susceptibility to hypnosis. Charcot and other scientists, such as the Janet Brothers, felt that hysterics and mediums who claimed to communicate with the dead through the trance were demonstrating

symptoms of an imbalance between the unconscious and conscious minds, such that the irrational side dominated:

Every person consists of two personalities, one conscious and one unconscious. Among healthy persons both are alike complete, and both in equilibrium. In the hysteric they are unequal, and out of equilibrium. One of the two personalities, usually the conscious, is incomplete, the other remaining perfect.³⁸

Both mediums and hysterics were thought to be ruled by their irrational, unconscious minds, and since these individuals were considered to reflect only a nominal mental illness, the creative possibilities believed to be inherent in hysteria and mediumship became widely accepted in *fin-de-siècle* France. Vincent van Gogh is characterized as a hysteric in Albert Aurier's laudatory article of 1890.³⁹ Émile Bernard describes Odilon Redon as using "automatic" methods in making art, and Tissot describes the production of his biblical pictures of the late 1890s as if he were a medium in a trance, receiving the images from God.⁴⁰ Like most of the Symbolists, Tissot equates the self-induced trance state of mediumship with creativity. Thus, by the 1890s in France, it was understood that there were a number of routes into the unconscious mind, and mediumship and hysteria were being explored by scientists and artists alike. The development of psychology offered a way of understanding the processes of creativity, and the perceived ability to penetrate the irrational mind and tap into the creative unconscious became more and more attractive during the *fin de siècle*. Not surprisingly this interest in the creative unconscious made its way into the arts.

Despite an impressive list of Symbolist writers whose plays were performed at Théâtre d'art, including Rachilde, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Jules Bois,⁴¹ it was Maurice Maeterlinck's (fig. 7) and his plays *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* (*The Blind*) (1890) that garnered the most critical attention when they were performed in May and December 1891, respectively. Both plays attempt to make the audience members uncomfortable through a build up of fear and anxiety, in order that they may become receptive to intuitive primary knowledge that Maeterlinck believed surfaces under conditions of duress.⁴²

L'Intruse and *Les Aveugles*, as well as *Pelléas and Mélisande*,⁴³ exhibit Maeterlinck's trademark characteristics of "static theatre." These included a paired down setting, dim lighting, ritualized acting with minimal gestures, and chanting, which mimic the ambiance of séances, and were knowingly used by Maeterlinck to unnerve the audience.⁴⁴ As Maeterlinck describes it, the actors "have the appearance of half-deaf somnambulists just awakening from a painful dream."⁴⁵ The goal of Maeterlinck's static theatre was to release the powerful forces of the unconscious mind, but he felt the potency of these forces

dissipate when the audience is faced with the materiality of the play on stage, with its awkward props and corporeal beings.⁴⁶ To achieve his goal of the “temple of dreams,” Maeterlinck set out to dematerialize not just the stage set, but also everything on the stage, including the actors:

Will the human being be replaced by a shadow? a reflection? a projection of symbolic forms, or a being who would appear to live without being alive? I do not know; but the absence of man seems essential to me. Whenever man penetrates a poem, the immense poem of his own presence snuffs out everything around him.⁴⁷

Maeterlinck’s central pursuit throughout his literary career was to dislodge the senses of his readers and spectators by forcing them to pass from the rational mind into the irrational, unconscious mind. He describes the unconscious as an open state offering a route to the divine: “[It is] our unknown guest, our superior subconscious which links us to immense invisible realities and which we may, if we wish, call divine or superhuman.”⁴⁸ For the author, the unconscious was a route to all knowledge:

This subconscious self, this unfamiliar personality, which I have elsewhere called the Unknown Guest, which lives and acts on its own initiative, apart from the conscious life of the brain, represents not only our entire past life, which its memory crystallizes as part of an integral whole; it also has a presentiment of our future, which it often discerns and reveals; for truthful predictions on the part of certain specially endowed “sensitives” or somnambulist subjects, in respect of personal details, are so plentiful that it is hardly possible any longer to deny the existence of this prophetic faculty. In time accordingly the subconscious self enormously overflows our small conscious ego, which dwells on the narrow tableland of the present; in space likewise it overflows it in a no less astonishing degree. Crossing the oceans and the mountains, covering hundreds of miles in a second, it warns us of the death or the misfortune which has befallen or is threatening a friend or relative at the other side of the world.⁴⁹

Maeterlinck sought evidence of this “Unknown Guest” by carefully observing behaviour in his well-known studies on bees, flowers, and termites, which qualified and categorized the unconscious by noticing the “intelligence” of their instinctual behaviour.⁵⁰ The power of instinct for Maeterlinck, and others, was that it served as evidence of the vital force—the progressive force that directed evolution.⁵¹ This teleological, anti-Darwinian view of evolution reinforced Spiritualist beliefs in a life force, and encouraged Maeterlinck’s lifelong interest in Spiritualism and human consciousness, resulting in a number of important books including *The Unknown Guest* (1917) and *The Great Secret* (1922), and an essay on death,⁵² in

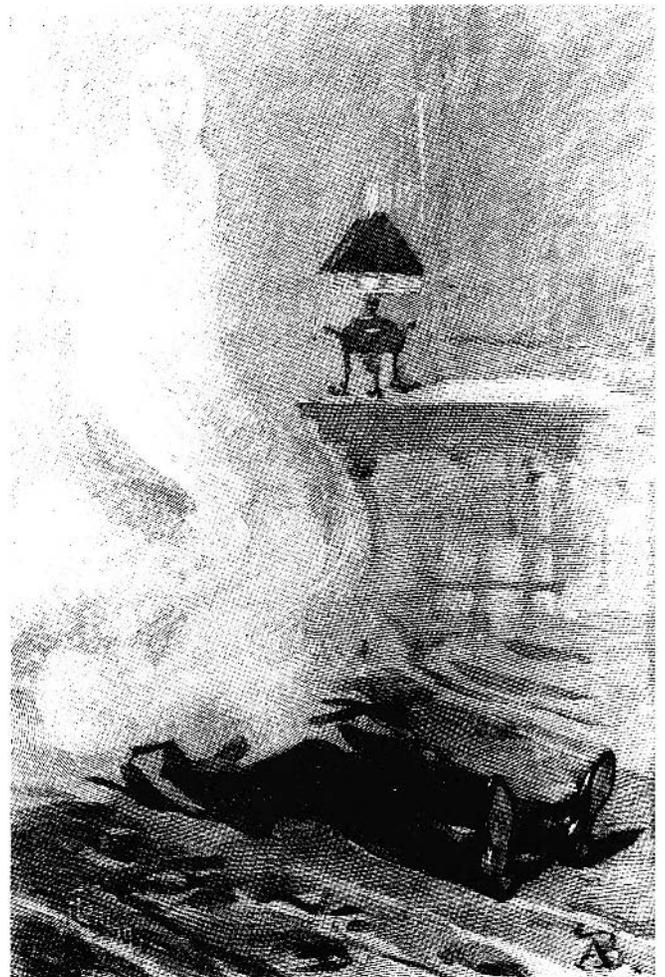


Figure 6. Albert Besnard, Illustration of a séance with artist James Jacques Tissot and medium William Eglinton. 1885. Wood engraving by Florian, published in Yveling Rambaud, *Force Psychique* (Paris, 1889).

which he displays his extensive knowledge concerning séances and mediumship.

In *L'Intruse*, Death is never seen, but is intuited by the audience through the senses of the blind grandfather, whose instincts have become sharp and who is a type of seer. The audience is given a clue that the invisible figure of death has entered the building through subtle signs such as the flickering of lights, the ominous and unusual silence on the part of the nightingales, and the trembling of leaves.⁵³ Maeterlinck’s goal to challenge habitual perception was achieved through stylized acting, but it was also reinforced through the set designs, specifically by lessening the materiality of the scene through the use of projections, lighting, and scrims. Maeterlinck’s instructions for *L'Intruse* reinforce recognition of the grandfather’s sightless-

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MAURICE MAETERLINCK

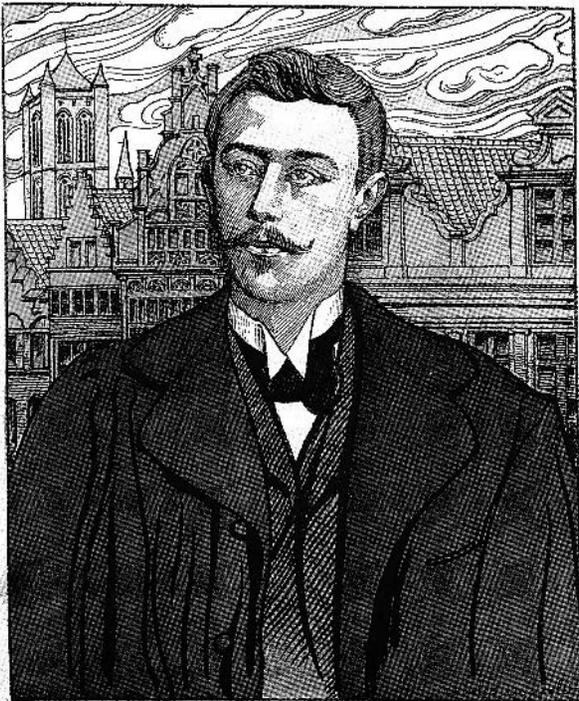


Figure 7. Charles Doudelet, *Maurice Maeterlinck*. Cover for *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, vol. 9, no. 434 (n.d.). Private collection (Photo: author).

ness by emphasizing obscurity in the sets. For example, for one scene Maeterlinck specifies that “a shaft of moonlight comes through one corner of the window and throws a few vague and ghostly streaks of light here and there and throughout the room.”⁵⁴ There is also evidence that for the Théâtre d’art production a gauze scrim was hung between the audience and the actors.⁵⁵ These scenes inevitably had the effect of diminishing the distinction between actor and setting, that is, between figure and ground.

Although not noted by scholars, Maeterlinck’s interest in ghosts and his absorption of the atmosphere of Spiritualist séances seem to have shaped his embryonic conception of static theatre and to have reinforced the Théâtre d’art in the choice of

the unconscious as the preeminent subject of the plays and *vers libre* poems performed there. More interestingly for our purposes, static theatre seems to have fashioned the manner in which the theatre illustrations used to promote the plays were created.

The Nabi artist Paul Sérusier designed the best-known theatre program for *L’Intruse* (fig. 8). Maeterlinck’s efforts to decorporealize actors and dematerialize stage sets to create a dream-like space, and Gauguin’s conflation of the figure and the ground for his *Madame la Mort* drawings, are paralleled in Sérusier’s drawing for Maeterlinck’s play. Sérusier used an intense linear patterning to blend the figure of the grandfather into the ground by replicating the lines of the old man’s shirt in the background, lessening the distinction between the subject and the background. The difficulty in discerning the figures, I propose, is meant to mimic the lack of clarity one experiences in altered states. The glazed eyes of the grandfather and the up-turned faces of the three young women seem to signify they are in an altered state. Silverman explains that visual fixivity and animated images were designated as characteristics of the interior mind, and both of these have been incorporated here.⁵⁶

Maurice Denis also drew an image for *L’Intruse* (fig. 9). The stylistic affinity between the images by Sérusier, Denis, and Gauguin, exhibited well in the double-page spread in *La Plume*’s September 1891 issue (fig. 10), is their overall indistinctness, which visually parallels Maeterlinck’s efforts to create a theatrical dream-space where audiences’ perceptions are obscured. Denis decorporealizes his figures by melding them into their surroundings. Indeed, the figure of the grandfather in Denis’s drawing is barely distinguishable from the background because of the repeated patterning and linear effect. The artist’s related painting, *Two Sisters* (Van Gogh Museum), appears similar to his theatre print, and is untypical of his Synthetist painting in that it resembles the all-over patterning of *Intimiste* work more often associated with the Nabis artists Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard.

Symbolist scholars Elizabeth Prelinger, Robert Goldwater, and George Mauner have long noted that Nabis prints were not produced in a Synthetist style.⁵⁷ Prelinger comments that the programs the Nabis produced for Fort’s dramas rejected Gauguin’s Synthetism, utilizing instead an “indeterminate” effect “reminiscent of the style of Redon or Eugène Carrière.”⁵⁸ In illustrating the plays, the Nabis, similarly to Symbolists Redon and Carrière, were attempting to depict the melding of the conscious and unconscious mind, reflecting contemporary scientific constructs. The intent of the theatrical prints was to create an uncertain, unclear image that paralleled the characteristics of the unconscious mind.⁵⁹ That the figures in the prints are difficult to discern is perfectly in keeping with the philosophy of the Théâtre d’art, to make the theatre an experience that challenges everyday perception.⁶⁰



Figure 8. Paul Sérusier, *L'Intruse*, in *Théâtre d'Art* (journal), ca. March 1891, n.p. (detail from the page). Photomechanical reproduction. Josefowitz Collection (Photo: author).



Figure 9. Maurice Denis, *L'Intruse*, in *La Plume*, 1 September 1891, p. 293. Photomechanical reproduction. Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Acquired with the Herbert D. and Ruth Schimmel Museum Library Fund. 1991.0793.002 (Photo: Edward Foley).

The well-known and respected Symbolist critic and playwright Jules Bois (fig. 11), who worked alongside the Nabis as a playwright and lecturer for the Théâtre d'art during these years, was one of the earliest critics to note that the unconscious was a topic of interest among Symbolists and to discuss how these artists were visually representing this state.⁶¹ Bois trained as a psychologist, and in “L’Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes” he compares the Nabis’s prints with “automatic art”—art produced by mediumistic artists while in a trance state.⁶² Although he preferred to call Nabis’s Symbolist style the “spirit aesthetic,” Bois also referred to it as *l’art inconscient*, making an important point regarding the association of this aesthetic with contemporary scientific information about the unconscious mind

According to Bois, the formal characteristics of *l’art inconscient* were transmitted “automatically” through the artists’ irrational minds, and thus their art mimicked the very structure of the unconscious mind. As he defined it, *l’art inconscient* rejected the principles of classical art, including symmetry and a harmonious composition, for effects of “excessiveness” and “spontaneity.” Paralleling Maeterlinck’s goals for the theatre, Bois states

that the intent of the theatre prints is to create an uncertain image: “The precise, firm line is destroyed, and replaced by an ambiguousness.”⁶³ *L’art inconscient* attempts to undermine visual perception through a merging of the foreground and background. The reliance on excessive linear marks also has the effect of making the image unclear: “the laws of rational balance are destroyed, a charming harmony results from this rupture of the primal elements and from the curious cacophony of lines.”⁶⁴ The difficulty in discerning the forms in the theatre images by Gauguin, Sérusier, and Denis was very much part of an *aesthetic* of the unconscious mind.

For Bois, producing art without premeditated thought, in an altered state, is not merely an exercise to create a style, but is a way of approaching a transcendental, divine state: “The unconscious is divine.... The unconscious is the Great Pan; Nature reveals the mysteries hidden at the heart of our universe.”⁶⁵ Bois’s defense of *l’art inconscient* is evident. The unconscious state is not just a lucid state, it is also a “natural” state. Comparisons with natural processes legitimized the Nabis’s art by connecting it with the laws of nature.



Figure 10. Paul Gauguin, *Madame la Mort*, and Maurice Denis, *L'Intruse*, in *La Plume*, 1 September 1891, p. 293. Photomechanical reproduction. Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Acquired with the Herbert D. and Ruth Schimmel Museum Library Fund, 1991.0793.002 (Photo: Edward Foley).

It was important to Bois that automatic drawings by mediums were presented as original art stemming from the unconscious mind, in order that the Nabis could be favourably compared with mediumistic artists. The writer claims that with *l'art inconscient* “for the first time art is life.”⁶⁶ As Bergman Carton notes, by valorizing mediumship, Bois linked these Symbolists to the phenomenon of prophesy, an association which they had suggested by their use of the term “Nabi,” based on the Hebrew word for prophet.⁶⁷ Bois was interested in demonstrating that a unifying, universal force was at the heart of the Nabis’s creative production, thus rendering their art prophetic. The 1890s, before Freud’s materialistic interpretation of the unconscious

became predominant, saw the final flowering of this “open” notion of the unconscious that ineffably linked it through nature to the divine.

Similarly to Jules Bois, Maeterlinck accepted the Romantic belief that the unconscious was the original and unique repository of all knowledge. The Belgian author writes, “As one progresses thus, with slow and circumspect steps...one is forced to recognize that there must exist somewhere, in this world or in others, a place where all is known, where all is possible, whither all goes, whence all comes, which belongs to all, to which all have free access, but whose ways, too long forgotten, we have to learn again, like lost children.”⁶⁸ Maeterlinck not only con-



Figure 11. Claude-Émile Schuffenecker, *Jules Bois*, 1896. Oil on canvas. Former collection of Patrick Roger Binet (Photo: Patrick Roger).

flated insect and animal instinct and human unconscious, as introduced earlier, he linked both with a universal unity directed through the process of evolution.⁶⁹ He understood that this evolutionary progress was directed by an “intelligent” vital force, or as he referred to it a “universal fluid”: “there are not any more or less intelligent beings, but a scattered, general intelligence, a sort of universal fluid that penetrates diversely the organisms that it encounters, according as they are good or bad conductors of the understanding.”⁷⁰

Maeterlinck came to believe in the vital force through his Spiritualist studies, where it was generally accepted that this force was utilized by mediums to animate ectoplasmic ghosts.⁷¹

Ectoplasm was considered by a number of prominent French scientists to be directed by “psychic forces” and thus analogous to the invisible, animating principle of life, the vital force.⁷² Maeterlinck knew about the scientist Karl Reichenbach’s experiments of the 1850s, in which he measured and photographed “effluves” emanating from animals, plants, and even crystals, and he clearly accepted these emanations as evidence of the life force.⁷³ Vitalists such as Henri Bergson and Camille Flammarion, both of whom studied Spiritualist claims, acknowledged that it was these forces that intervened in the mechanical transformation of evolution.⁷⁴ Maeterlinck felt that the universal fluid directs humanity and nature equally:

The spirit which animates all things or emanates from them is of the same essence as that which animates our bodies. If this spirit resembles us, if we thus resemble it, if all that it contains is contained also within ourselves, if it employs our methods, if it has our habits, our preoccupations, our tendencies, our desires for better things, is it illogical for us to hope, all that we do hope, instinctively, invincibly, seeing that it is almost certain that it hopes the same?⁷⁵

He anthropomorphized the evolutionary workings of the universe, as is evident when he states,

The genius of the earth, which is probably that of the whole world, acts, in the vital struggle, exactly as a man would act. It employs the same methods, the same logic....It makes great efforts, it invents with difficulty and little by little, after the manner of the engineers and artisans in our workshops.⁷⁶

For Maeterlinck everything in the universe was connected, and human beings were intrinsically part of nature: "It is, in fact, very uncertain whether we have ever invented a beauty peculiar to ourselves. All our architecture, all our musical motives, all our harmonies of colour and light are borrowed directly from nature."⁷⁷ The interconnectedness between all natural forms was ultimately the "great secret" of the universe.

There has been much scholarship regarding the critique of Positivism that developed in the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century, which resulted in the revival of hermetic philosophies, unorthodox religious sects, and, in the case of Maeterlinck, Bois, and Flammarion, a type of purposeful evolution.⁷⁸ The notion of common descent and unity for all forms in the universe was not an isolated worldview at the time. Commenting on Maeterlinck, Edwin Slosson points out that his views were part of a *fin-de-siècle* effort to "reanimate the universe":

Modern science, instead of killing mysticism, as was foreboded by despairing poets of the last century, has brought about a revival of it....The doctrine of evolution has given an intellectual basis and a richer content to the sense of the unity of nature, which is the force of mysticism....Maeterlinck has been a leader in that characteristic movement of the twentieth century which might be called the reanimation of the universe. Time was, and was not so long ago but that most of us can remember it, when, terrified by the advance of science, man did not dare to call his soul his own. Naturally he denied a soul to the rest of the world. Animals were automatons; plants, of course, unconscious; and planets and machines out of the question. Nature was subjected to a process succinctly to be described as de-anthropomorphization.⁷⁹

Slosson's feelings about the reanimation of the universe were shared by some Symbolists. Behind such "New Age" philosophies "there lay a strong desire to reconcile the findings of modern natural science with a religious view."⁸⁰ The desire to enchant science, or reanimate the universe, by seeking a transcendental goal for empiricist methodologies was a reactionary step in the face of rising secularization and growing capitalist urban centres. Griselda Pollock has described Symbolist art as a sublimated religious art in that the Symbolists sought a coherent and permanent anchor in transcendental metaphysics, which promised, if not delivered, a "guarantee on the truth" in a changing world.⁸¹

The representation of the conscious and the unconscious and the notion of the self and the non-self are integral to the development of modernity. The effort to transcend the bourgeois self was enacted in many different ways during the *fin de siècle*. For Spiritualists, it was the effort to pass through the realm of the living to that of the dead. For scientists, the loss of self was thought to victimize hysterics, mediums, and visionaries, whose minds were "unbalanced" toward the unconscious side. Most importantly for the purposes of an art-historical project, this loss or transcendence was inscribed within Symbolists' art through different visual metaphors of dissolution. In Symbolist prints the melding of the principle figures into their surroundings can be read as a depiction of the merging of culture and nature, of ego and the creative unconscious, that is, a move away from the notion of a fixed identity. The Symbolists' fascination with altered states of consciousness is a theme that continued into the twentieth century, in which painting the unseen, the unseeable, and the unconscious, propelled the emergence of both Surrealism and abstraction.

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Notes

- ¹ Rachilde described the character as "la femme voilée" in "Sur 'Madame la Mort,'" *Théâtre d'Art* magazine, Winter 1891, n.p. Also see Rachilde, "Notes pour servir à la composition des personnages," *Théâtre* (Paris, 1894). *Madame la Mort* has been translated into English by Kiki Gounaridou and Frazer Lively in *Rachilde, Madame La Mort and Other Plays* (Baltimore, 1998), 120–60.
- ² Regarding fig. 1, see Geneviève Aitken, *Artistes et théâtres d'avant-garde. Programmes de théâtre illustrés* (Paris, 1992), 43. The original

- drawing is in the Département des arts graphiques in the Louvre; fig. 2 is in the Musée d'Orsay. Besides being reproduced in *La Plume* and *Théâtre d'Art*, Sérusier's and Gauguin's images for Fort's theatre are also reproduced in *La Vie Moderne*, 15 May 1891. For a discussion of these images, see George L. Mauner, *The Nabis: Their History and Their Art, 1888–1896* (New York, 1978), 56. Robert Bantens suggests that Gauguin read *Madame la Mort* in January 1891, and finished the drawings by February 5th. See Bantens, *Eugène Carrière: His Work and His Influence* (Ann Arbor, 1983), 98–99. Claire Frèches-Thory agrees and dates *La Femme Voilée*, fig. 2, to February 1891, in Françoise Cachin et al., *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington, 1988), 198.
- 3 Rachilde, "Sur 'Madame la Mort,'" n.p.
 - 4 Pierre Quillard, "De L'Inutilité Absolue de la Mise en Scène Exacte," *Revue d'art dramatique*, 1 May 1891, 180–83, quotation 182. Quillard was influenced by the Belgium playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, who in his 1890s treatise stated that he set out to make the theatre "le temple du rêve." Maurice Maeterlinck, "Menus Propos-le Théâtre," *Jeune Belgique*, September 1890, 331–36. Regarding Théâtre d'art, Quillard's comments, and the effort by the playwrights to create a dream-like space in the theatre, see František Deák, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore, 1993), chapter five, esp. 145; and Patricia Eckert Boyer, *Artists and the Avant-Garde Theater in Paris: The Martin and Liane W. Atlas Collection* (Washington, D.C., 1998): 85–99. František Deák deals extensively with the staging of these Symbolist plays in his excellent book and the article, "Symbolist Staging at the Théâtre d'art," *Drama Review* 20, 3 (September 1977): 117–22. I disagree with Deák's conclusions that the Symbolist plays were stylistically influenced by Synthetism (Cloisonism). I believe the Nabis, and even Gauguin, moved away from Synthetism for their theatre work to better match the subject of the plays and to better imagine the unconscious mind. Patrick McGuinness traces in more depth how Maeterlinck evoked the theatre as a metaphor for a dream and for the unconscious; see McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford, 2000), 23–25. Neither Deák nor McGuinness mention the importance of séances to Maeterlinck's static theatre and Symbolist staging.
 - 5 I am using the term style here the way Meyer Schapiro defined it in his 1962 essay, suggesting that formal qualities used by artists can be expressive and meaningful, parallel to iconography. See Meyer Schapiro, "Style" (1962), in Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artists and Society: Selected Papers* (New York, 1994), 87.
 - 6 These contributions to Symbolist studies discuss Symbolism in terms of the concept of the self. See Susan Sidlauskas, *Body, Place and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Cambridge, 2000); Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago, 1999); and Donald Kuspit, *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art* (Cambridge, 2000). See also Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley, 1989).
 - 7 For an excellent review of the notion of self, see Jan E. Goldstein, *Post Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).
 - 8 Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York, 1970), 145–46.
 - 9 Rachilde, "Sur 'Madame la Mort,'" n.p. All translations from French are mine, unless otherwise noted.
 - 10 Gounardou and Lively, *Rachilde*, 142.
 - 11 Gounardou and Lively, *Rachilde*, 143.
 - 12 For yellow, see Georges Roussel, "Critique Dramatique: Théâtre d'art," *La Plume*, 1 May 1891, 156. Pink is from Georges Bonnamour, *La Revue Indépendant* (April 1891), 139–42. Rachilde's instructions note the dress should be pink, "Notes pour servir a la composition des personnages," *Théâtre*, n.p.; and Gounardou and Lively, *Rachilde*, 143: "my dress is pink: it was spun from dawn."
 - 13 See, for example, the articles and photographes in *Revue Spirite* (1857–1916), *Le Spiritisme* (1883–1895), and *L'Étoile* (1889–95).
 - 14 The translation of this passage is from Gounardou and Lively, *Rachilde*, 120–21. They accept "apparence" as apparition.
 - 15 Gounardou and Lively, *Rachilde*, 28–29, 145.
 - 16 Rachilde's, "Notes pour servir a la composition des personnages," *Théâtre*, n.p. Gounardou and Lively (*Rachilde*, pp. 28–29) note differences between the manuscript and published versions of *Madame la Mort*. The published version is much more "Maeterlinckian," and the descriptions of the veiled woman emphasize "ghostly" qualities. They suggest the actress's performance may have influenced Rachilde. I would add that perhaps Gauguin's drawings also helped shape her notion of lady death as an apparition.
 - 17 On the interaction of artists and Spiritualists, see Serena Keshavjee, "The 'Scientization' of Spirituality," in *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot*, ed. Katharine Lochnan (New Haven, 1999), 213–45.
 - 18 See a variety of ghost images produced in France in the catalogue Clément Chéroux et al., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven, 2005).
 - 19 Pierre Quillard explains that the drawing room setting of the play was shadowy and smokey: "the set represented the dark smoking room, draped in black, where Paul Dartigny died, so much did the sentences spoken make funeral veils float across his face, and thicken the mysterious, sacred shadow around him." Pierre Quillard, quoted in Gounardou and Lively, *Rachilde*, 22.
 - 20 John Rewald, Robert Bantens, and Françoise Cachin have dealt with Gauguin's images of lady death. See Rewald, *Post-Impressionism: From van Gogh to Gauguin* (New York, 1959); Bantens, *Eugène Carrière: His Work and His Influence*; and Cachin et al., *The Art of Paul Gauguin*, 197–98. All three authors observe that in these theatre drawings Gauguin moves away from the Cloisonist/Synthetist style. After Gauguin's return from Brittany to Paris in early November 1890, just as he was becoming involved with Théâtre

- d'art, he cultivated a close friendship with Carrière. See Bantens, 93; and Rewald, *Post-Impressionism*, 419, 425–26. While most authors have been unwilling to think that Gauguin's style was in any way informed by Carrière's, I would hold that Gauguin learned about depicting the unconscious, and the dream world—clearly requirements for illustrating Rachilde's play—from the Strasbourg artist. He would have done so while posing for Carrière during the winter of 1891, the same period during which Carrière was consolidating his characteristic foggy aesthetic, in works such as his 1890 *Portrait of Paul Verlaine*.
- ²¹ The images for *Madame la Mort*, *Soyez Symboliste: Jean Moréas* (1891), and *Portrait of Mallarmé* (1891) were influenced by Carrière and the Nabis's theatre programs during the winter of 1891.
- ²² Jules Bois, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes," *La Revue des Revues*, January–March 1897, 405–20. On Jules Bois, see Janis Bergman-Carton, "The Medium is the Medium: Jules Bois, Spiritualism and the Esoteric Interests of the Nabis," *Arts Magazine* 61, 4 (December 1986): 24–29; and Dominique Dubois, *Jules Bois 1868–1943: le reporter de l'occultisme, le poète et le féministe de la belle époque* (Paris, 2006). Also see Marie-France James, *Esotericism, Occultism, Franc-Maconnerie et Christianisme aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris, 1981).
- ²³ Research into the unconscious was also ongoing in England and Germany. On Germany, see Corinna Treitel, *Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, 2004).
- ²⁴ Frank Tallis, *Hidden Minds: A History of the Unconscious* (London, 2002), introduction; and Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*. Ellenberger, in chapter six, discusses the importance of Janet's research to twentieth-century psychiatry. Adam Crabtree has continued the excellent work of Ellenberger with his book *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, 1993). On Charcot's interaction and influence on Art Nouveau, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, chapter five.
- ²⁵ Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 10–11; Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, chapter three.
- ²⁶ Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 145–47.
- ²⁷ Ellenberger explains that the theory of the double ego, or two minds, was labelled dipsychism. The Romantic "open" unconscious concept was linked with a knowledge of the past and the ability to foretell the future. It was considered a route to extra-individual knowledge. This was definitely how Maeterlinck understood the unconscious mind. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 146.
- ²⁸ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, uncredited translation (London, 1895), 216. On the impact of Spiritualism, see Ellenberger *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 83–85; and Keshavjee, "Scientization of Spirituality." On the impact of hysteria, see Rudolph Rapetti's article "From Anguish to Ecstasy: Symbolism and the Study of Hysteria," *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, ed. Jean Clair (Montreal, 1995).
- ²⁹ Serena Keshavjee, "The Visual Culture of the Invisible: Science, Spiritualism and Symbolism in *fin-de-siècle* France," in *Initiated Artist*, ed. Marty Bax and Andrea Koons (forthcoming, Amsterdam).
- ³⁰ Lady Caithness was one of the most important Parisian Spiritualists, and her salon, as Jules Bois tells us, was a centre for Spiritualistic séances. See Bois, "Le Salon d'une dame mystique: Duchesses de Pomar," *Revue Hebdom*, August 1902, 524–43.
- ³¹ For Huysmans, see Gustave Boucher, *Un Séance de Spiritisme chez J.K. Huysmans* (Paris, 1908).
- ³² On these artists and their link with Spiritualism and their influence on the Symbolists, see Keshavjee, "Scientization of Spirituality."
- ³³ Jules Bois, *L'au delà et les forces inconnues: Opinion de l'élite sur le mystère* (Paris, 1903).
- ³⁴ Bois, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes." Bois's interest in automatic drawings is referenced in Charles Richet's *Thirty Years of Psychical Research: A Treatise on Metapsychics*, trans. Stanley de Brath (New York, 1923), 81–82. Richet also notes that automatic drawing and ghostly images were widely available during the *fin de siècle*. On parapsychology, see Bois, *L'au delà et les forces inconnues*. Other important illustrated books include Camille Flammarion, *Mysterious Psychic Forces: An Account of the Author's Investigation in Psychical Research, Together with those of other European Savants* (Boston, 1907); and Maurice Maeterlinck's *Death (La Mort)* (Paris, 1913). Bois, Flammarion, and Maeterlinck all attended séances.
- ³⁵ See Camille Flammarion, *Des Forces Naturelles inconnues: à propos des phénomènes produits par les frères Davenport et par les médiums en général* (Paris, 1865), and *Mysterious Psychic Forces*. Flammarion also attended a series of séances with Palladino held at Montfort-l'Amaury on 25–27 July 1897, organized by M. et Mme. Blech. Flammarion was friends with a number of Symbolists including Bois, Loïe Fuller, and Rodin. See Lynn Sharp's analysis of how the scientific community reacted to Flammarion's interest in Spiritualism in "Rational Religion, Irrational Science: Men, Women and Belief in French Spiritism, 1853–1914," PhD diss., University of California at Irvine, 1996, 318–19.
- ³⁶ Regarding William Crookes's role in the history of Spirit photography, see Cyril Permutt, *Beyond The Spectrum: A Survey of Supernormal Photography* (Cambridge, 1983), 19–20. For the story of Alfred Wallace and Frederick Hudson, see James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (New York, 1973), 37–41.
- ³⁷ See Clément Chéroux's article on the trials, "Ghost Dialectics: Spirit Photography in Entertainment and Belief," 45–56, in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven, 2005).
- ³⁸ Pierre Janet, "Les Actes inconscients et le dédoublement de la personnalité," in *Revue philosophique*, December 1886, quoted in Nordau, *Degeneration*, 111.
- ³⁹ G-Albert Aurier, "The Isolated Ones: Vincent Van Gogh," *Mercur de France*, January 1890.

- 40 See Emile Bernard, "Odilon Redon," *L'Occident*, May 1904, 223–34; and John Rewald, "Some Notes on Odilon Redon," *Studies in Post Impressionism* (New York, 1986), 215–43. Also see Cleveland Moffett, "J.J. Tissot and his Paintings of the Life of Christ," *McClure's Magazine*, March 1899; cited in Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (New York, 1984), 182, 184–85.
- 41 A sampling of the Théâtre d'art plays and dramatized poems that set out to challenge normal consciousness include *La Fille aux mains coupées* by Pierre Quillard, *Madame la Mort* by Rachilde, *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* by Maurice Maeterlinck, the free verse poem *Le Concile féerique* by Jules Laforgue, *La Geste du roi: Chanson de Roland* adapted by Merrill, *Théodat* by Remy de Gourmont, *Le Cantique des cantiques* adapted by Paul Napoléon Roinard, *Le Bateau ivre* by Arthur Rimbaud, *Vercingétorix* by Edouard Schuré, and *Les Noces de Sathan* by Jules Bois. For a more detailed explanation of these plays and poems, see Keshavjee, "'L'Art inconscient' and 'l'Esthétique des esprits': Science Spiritualism and the Imaging of the Unconscious in French Symbolist art," PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 2002, chapter four, esp. 261–96.
- 42 See W.D. Halls, *Maurice Maeterlinck: A Study of his Life and Thought* (Oxford, 1960), 11, 19; Henri Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley, 1994), 143; Macdonald Clark, *Maurice Maeterlinck: Poet and Philosopher* (New York, 1916), 85–86, 91; and Bettina Knapp, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (Boston, 1975), 139–41; and McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre*.
- 43 Although performed under the auspices of Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, *Pelléas and Mélisande* was commissioned by Fort and staged by a Théâtre d'art crew. In this context it will be considered to be a Théâtre d'art production.
- 44 For discussions of "static theatre," see Clark, *Maurice Maeterlinck*, 86; Knapp, *Maurice Maeterlinck*, preface, 41–42, and 175; and Mauner's description of the play in *The Nabis*, 61–62. For descriptions and explanations of séances, see Maurice Maeterlinck, *Unknown Guest*, trans. Alexander Teixeira (New York, 1914, Project Gutenberg, 2000), 103.
- 45 Quotation from Edwin E. Slosson, *Major Prophets of Today* (Boston, 1914), 21; and McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre*, 25.
- 46 According to Mauner, Mallarmé had similar ideas; see *The Nabis*, 55. Patrick McGuinness compares Maeterlinck and Mallarmé in *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre*, chapter one.
- 47 Dorra, *Symbolist Art Theories*, 145. See original in Maurice Maeterlinck, "Menus Propos sur le Théâtre," in *Jeune Belgique*, September 1890.
- 48 Maeterlinck, *Unknown Guest*, 103.
- 49 Maeterlinck, *Great Secret*, uncredited translation (1922; repr. N.Y., 1969), 237–38. Maeterlinck utilizes an "open" definition of the unconscious, which parallels Ellenberger's definition, 147.
- 50 Maurice Maeterlinck, *La Vie des abeilles* (Paris, 1900); *La Vie des termites* (Paris, 1926); *The Intelligence of Flowers*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (Toronto, 1907).
- 51 Peter J. Bowler describes teleological evolutionism as the concept of the vital force coupled with the neo-Lamarckian theories that thrived during the *fin de siècle*, in *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Chicago, 2001), chapter four. Robert J. Richards describes the older, pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories as Romantic evolution in *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago, 2008).
- 52 Maurice Maeterlinck, *La Mort* (Paris, 1913).
- 53 Jethro Bithell, *Life and Writings of Maurice Maeterlinck* (London, ca. 1913), 42.
- 54 Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Intruder," in *Five Modern Plays* (Boston, 1936), 96.
- 55 See Paul Fort's description in *Mes Mémoires: Toute la vie d'un poète 1872–1943* (Paris, 1944), 31. Among others, Henri de Ban described the curtain: "On salue le décor d'un tonnerre de bravos. Sur un fond d'or, encadré de draperies rouges, sont peints, à la façon des Primitifs, des anges multicolores, aux ailes déployées. Les artistes vont et viennent derrière un transparent de gaze qui leur prête des formes de rêve." Henri de Ban, *L'Encyclopédie contemporaine*, quoted in Rachilde, *Théâtre*, 278–79.
- 56 Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 237.
- 57 See Elizabeth Prelinger, "The Art of the Nabis: From Symbolism to Modernism," *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, ed., Patricia Eckert Boyer (New Brunswick, 1988), 96. Robert Goldwater makes this point in his article about the Nabis's prints created for Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, the closely related successor of Théâtre d'art. Goldwater describes Nabis's prints as in a "lithographic style with scattered colour, elliptical drawings and witty representation all put down with *apparent haste and casualness*," a far cry from the smooth, flat compositions of Synthetism (italics mine). See Goldwater, "Symbolist Art and Theatre: Vuillard, Bonnard, Maurice Denis," *Magazine of Art* 39, 8 (December 1946): 366–70, quotation, 368. Mauner, in *The Nabis* (p. 8), comments: "This distinction between the Pont-Aven painters and the Nabis is visually discernible in their works of the first joint exhibition in 1891, and becomes stronger with the passage of time." Also see Mauner, "The Nature of Nabis Symbolism," *Art Journal* 23 (Winter 1963–64): 96–103.
- 58 Prelinger, "The Art of the Nabis." 96.
- 59 For a thorough analysis of how the unconscious mind was understood during the *fin de siècle*, see Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*. Much of my argument about an aesthetic based on the unconscious mind is derived from Silverman's book, in which she documents the interaction between art and psychology during the end of the century. Jules Bois's article on *l'art inconscient* shores up Silverman's theories.

- ⁶⁰ See Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London, 2002), chapter five.
- ⁶¹ Bois also co-edited *Le Coeur* with Antoine de la Rochefoucauld, who collected art of the Nabis. Paul Ranson owned a dedicated copy of Bois's *Les Petites religion de Paris* (1894), which I have seen. Bois gave a series of lectures on occult topics sponsored by the Théâtre d'art and his play *Les Noces de Sathan* was performed in March 1891.
- ⁶² Bois, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes." On Jules Bois, see Janis Bergman, "The Medium is the Medium," *Arts Magazine* 61, 4 (December 1986): 24–29; and Dubois, *Jules Bois 1868–1943*. Also see James, *Esoterism, Occultism, Franc-Maconnerie et Christianisme aux XIXe et XXe siècles*.
- ⁶³ Bois, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes," 416, and Bois, *Le Miracle Moderne* (Paris, 1907), 154–57. The list of adjectives describing the "Spirit Aesthetic" are taken from Bois's characterization of the style in "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes," 416. Bois outlines the characteristics of the "Spirit Aesthetic":
1. Asymétrie. Le principe du binaire du ternaire, qui fait l'esthétique, des conscients, n'est jamais observé, pas d'équilibre, pas d'équivalence. Ce n'est laid pas pour cela, au contraire. Rappelez-vous certains visages dont le charme est fait d'irrégularité.
 2. Dissemblance dans les détails, création luxuriante, en quelque sorte inutile et immodérée; rien ne se répète, tout est nouveau, *ainsi que dans la nature où rien ne reparait identique.* (italics mine)
 3. La ligne précise, ferme, le *sens unique* sont détruits, remplacés par le trait équivoque, la signification complexe.
 4. Spontanéité, fourgue et irrégularité de la production.
- Bois attacks the classical paradigm of beauty—symmetry and balance—promoted by critics such as Nordau, and encourages artists to seek the "charm" of irregularity. See Bois, *Le Miracle Moderne*, 156–57. The characteristics of this style derived from the "unconscious" functioned to alter and disturb everyday perception through an excessive linear patterning.
- ⁶⁴ Bois, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes," 416.
- ⁶⁵ Bois, *Le Miracle moderne*, 157–58.
- ⁶⁶ Bois, "L'Esthétique des esprits et celle des symbolistes," 418.
- ⁶⁷ Carton, "The Medium is the Medium," 25.
- ⁶⁸ Maeterlinck, *The Unknown Guest* (1917 edition, 17); quoted in Halls, *Maurice Maeterlinck*, 112–13.
- ⁶⁹ Maeterlinck, *Intelligence of Flowers*, 145.
- ⁷⁰ Maeterlinck, *Intelligence of Flowers*, 175.
- ⁷¹ William Crookes was one of the first to make the connection between the vital force and ectoplasmic emanations: "I could scarcely doubt that the evolution of the psychic force is accompanied by a corresponding drain on the vital force." See this quotation in Nicholas Fodor, *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* (1934, repr. London, 1974), 310.
- ⁷² See, for example, Albert de Rochas, *Les Frontières de la Science* (Paris, 1902). Bois wrote the introduction for this book.
- ⁷³ Maeterlinck, *The Great Secret*, regarding the odic force, see pages 244–48. Maeterlinck mentions Karl von Reichenbach's *The Mysterious Odic Force* (1844, repr. Wellingborough, 1977), and Hippolyte Baraduc's *La Force vitale: Notre corps vital fluidique, sa formule biométrique* (Paris, 1893).
- ⁷⁴ Both men also served as president of the Society for Psychical Research: Henri Bergson in 1913, and Flammarion in 1923. See Fodor, *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*, 352.
- ⁷⁵ Maeterlinck, *Intelligence of Flowers*, 178.
- ⁷⁶ Maeterlinck, *Intelligence of Flowers*, 165.
- ⁷⁷ Maeterlinck, *Intelligence of Flowers*, 158.
- ⁷⁸ Peter Bowler discusses purposeful evolution, natural theology, theistic evolution, neo-Lamarckianism and other unorthodox interpretations of evolutionary theory in *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth Century Britain*. On the reaction against positivism, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Ecotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, 1988); Shearer West, *Fin de Siècle* (London, 1993); Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (New York, 1981); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984); and Filiz Eda Burhan, "Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth-Century Psychological Theory, the Occult Sciences and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France," PhD diss., Princeton University, 1979.
- ⁷⁹ Slosson, *Major Prophets of Today*, 13–15.
- ⁸⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1890–1935* (Wellingborough, 1985), 29. Also see Frank Turner, "Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion," *ISIS* 69 (1978): 356–76.
- ⁸¹ Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888–1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London, 1992), 53.