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Hypnosis in the art of Fernand Khnopff[1]

We have no intention of demonstrating that occultism, mysticism, spiritualism, Rosicrucianism or theosophy were the main drivers of fin-de siècle avant-garde art. Unlike Terence Harold Robsjohn-Gibbings,[2] we understand that the use by artists of practices borrowed from psychiatry, and often seriously vulgarised in the process, was not ubiquitous, had an obviously expressed personal rationale and, accordingly, cannot be considered evidence of the dominant role of occultism in avant-garde art of the turn of the century. Here Linda Henderson's thesis is more appropriate: she states that the basic differentiating factor of modernism is the openness of people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to mystical and occult ideas.[3] It is impossible not to agree with this opinion, as the heightened individualism which characterised the epoch was expressed not only in politics and economics but in artists' sharpened interest in investigating their own artistic self.

In order to ease the journey to self-knowledge, one could employ techniques that were actively used and no less actively popularised by psychiatry, which had been developing rapidly since the 1870s. The psychic conditions of sleep, hypnosis and trance were all subjects of intense research at the turn of the century. In allowing a person to weaken control over their consciousness, practising psychiatrists believed that such methods could open access to the unconscious. For artists, they presented a key to the hidden parts of the personality where creative inspiration is born, or even a way to open up access to the transcendental. The difference between the scientific and artistic approaches to evaluating the possibilities of hypnotic and other effects on personality is a consequence of the varying gnoseological bases of the psychiatrist and the artist at the turn of the century. Serena Keshavjee notes that: "[…] the goal for the symbolists was not so much to

[1] The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

[2] Terence Harold Robsjohn-Gibbings, *Mona Lisa's Mustache: A Dissection of Modern Art* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947).

[3] Linda Henderson, "Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art", *Art Journal*, 46 (1), 1987, 5.

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".[1]

Like the majority of the symbolists, Fernand Khnopff was relatively knowledgeable about the scientific, semi-scientific and pseudo-scientific practices which were popular at the time. He had a large circle of acquaintances who were familiar with the material. Among them, the most influential figure for Khnopff was Sâr Joséphin Péladan, who he met in 1884. Regardless of Russian art historians' scepticism regarding the figure of Péladan,[2] one must admit that he played a significant role in the formation of the aesthetics of symbolism. Largely thanks to him, the French symbolists got to know esoteric practices, tried out various methods of occultism, spiritualism and hermeticism, and became acquainted with the Kabbalah.

Joséphin Péladan had great hopes for Fernand Khnopff. He called him the equal of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, and Khnopff's countryman Félicien Rops, who was extremely popular in France at that time. Such comparisons undoubtedly flattered the young Belgian, who was little known in the mid-1880s. The most famous artistic result of this close relationship was Khnopff's pastel *After Joséphin Péladan, The Supreme Vice* (1885, private collection). The artist destroyed the first version at the Les XX exhibition on 22 February 1885. This public act was prompted by a complaint from the famous 1880s opera singer Rose Caron, who saw in the pastel's heroine her own likeness. In the same year, Khnopff made a new version of *The Supreme Vice* and exhibited it at Le Salon des XX in 1886.

From the artistic point of view, *The Supreme Vice* is not particularly interesting. The inexpressive use of colour, Khnopff's obvious inability to deal with space, and the lack of harmony of the figures do nothing to give semantic meaning to the work and, as a whole, match the poor quality of its literary source. However, in the context of a discussion of the proximity of Khnopff and Péladan's aesthetic and philosophical views, *The Supreme Vice* is extremely interesting. The point is not even that Khnopff had obviously read Péladan's extremely popular novel, where, using the life story of Leonora d'Este, the author demonstrates his knowledge of astrology, magic and spiritualism, but that the artist clearly shares these ideas, as can be seen in the visual structure of the work. He is equally "obsessed with androgyny, has a taste for the unexplained, esotericism and theatricalism, narcissism and a desire to cover his internal I with a shroud of secrecy" .[3]

[1] Serena Keshavjee, "L'Art Inconscient: Imaging the Unconscious in Symbolist Art for the Thèâtre d'art", *Canadian Art Review*, 34 (1), 2009, 62.

[2] Valentina Kryuchkova, *Simvolizm v izobrazitel'nom iskusstve. Frantsiya i Bel'giya* [Symbolism in Visual Art. France and Belgium] (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1994), 51–52.

[3] *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, exhibition catalogue (Brussels: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 2004), 198.

The spiritual and intellectual connection to Péladan would be particularly strong in the latter part of the 1880s. Whereas in 1884, regardless of his enthusiasm for Khnopff's work, the author preferred the more experienced Félicien Rops to illustrate *The Supreme Vice*, from 1888 onwards Khnopff regularly created frontispieces for Péladan's literary works. Here we might recall *Ishtar*, made for the eponymous novel of 1888;[1] *With Joséphin Péladan. Pallentis radere mores*, made for *Honest Women* in the same year;[2] and *Pantheon* for Péladan's eponymous novel of 1892.[3]

Khnopff did not even lose the connection to Péladan in the 1890s, when the writer broke with Papus and Stanislas de Guaita, left the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose-Cross and founded the Catholic Order of the Rose and Cross. Khnopff exhibited four times as an honoured guest at the Parisian Salon of the Rose and Cross (1892, 1893, 1894, and 1897). Péladan, seemingly in order to expand his territory of influence, began to visit Belgium regularly. In November 1892, he chaired a conference together with Khnopff as part of a meeting of the Pour l'Art artistic circle. The writer presented papers with the populist titles "On Art" and "On Art, Love and Secrets in Magic".[4]

Digressing slightly, it is worth saying something about the founder of Pour l'Art, Jean Delville, a literary mouthpiece for Péladan's ideas within Belgium and an artistic associate of Khnopff. In the literature one can find references to the fact that Delville and Khnopff met while studying at the Brussels Academy of Fine Arts. This information is doubtful, as when Khnopff joined the Academy, Delville was nine years old. It is more probable that they met in the mid-1880s, when Delville first attempted to exhibit his art works with L'Essor, published his poems in *La Wallonie* and wrote critical notes on the art scene in Belgium.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable information on how Péladan and Delville became acquainted. They most likely met around 1888. Péladan's spiritual influence on Delville had a devastating effect. From the late 1890s, the young artist began to study the Kabbalah, read hermetic texts, and translate their ideas via his critical articles. Accusing Belgian avant-garde art, and specifically the groups Les XX and La Libre Esthetique, of a lack of spirituality and a preference for materialism, Delville virtually declared war on Octave Maus and Edmond Picard.[5] To spite the latter, he formed the group Pour l'Art and, in 1896, opened the Salon of Idealistic Art, based on Péladan's Salon

[1] Joséphin Péladan, Istar (Paris: G. Edinger, 1888).

[2] Joséphin Péladan, Femmes honnêtes (Paris: C. Dalou Editeur, 1888).

[3] Joséphin Péladan, Le Panthée (Paris: E. Dentu, 1892).

[4] For more detail see Brendan Cole, *Jean Delville: Art between Nature and the Absolute* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 84.

[5] For more detail see Brendan Cole, "Jean Delville and the Belgian Avant-Garde: Anti-Materialist Polemics for 'un Art Annonciateur des Spiritualités Futures" in *Symbolism, its Origins and its Consequences*, edited by Rosina Neginsky (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 129–146.

of the Rose and Cross in Paris. However, by the mid-1890s, Delville had begun to be disappointed in Péladan. He openly criticised his former mentor, accusing him of reactionary occultism, elitism and a commitment to outdated ideas.[1] Delville continued his spiritual journey and, through the texts of Helena Blavatsky and Papus, moved towards theosophy.

In the 1890s, Khnopff was experiencing similar doubts. His formerly successful artistic and literary union with Péladan was gradually falling apart. His spiritual and intellectual closeness to Devlville was hidden from society's prying eyes. This was mainly due to his friends' behaviour. According to Émile Verhaeren, Khnopff was "severe, reserved, closed Briton who thinks more than he speaks and observes more than he explains ".[2] He could not but be nervous of Péladan's fervent Catholicism and monarchism, his provocative behaviour and socially unacceptable mode of dressing. Khnopff feared a repeat of the scandal of 1891, when Péladan's conflict with Bloy and Huysmans appeared in the Parisian press.[3] Delville's actions and statements were no less provocative. He stigmatised those whose friendship Khnopff held dear and with whom he actively exhibited, the artists of Les XX and La Libre Esthetique. Partly as a result of disappointment, partly having seen the flaws in the beliefs of his former friends and, possibly, not wishing to fall out with his Belgian colleagues or lose commissions, the artist moved away from them.

In the 1890s, Khnopff began a spiritual search for something more convincing, fundamental and less obviously radical. He found this outside Belgium, in England, which he had regularly visited since 1889. Here he became close to a Swedenborgian. Khnopff's interest in Swedenborg had a clearly expressed religious character and demonstrated a gradual refusal of the pure esotericism of the 1880s and 1890s. By 1916, Khnopff's acceptance of the doctrines of the New Church was expressed in a text in which he brought together Swedenborg's teachings in five postulates.[4]

Returning to the last two decades of the nineteenth century, we note that Khnopff's interest in occultism and his superficial attempts to employ occult practices sometimes led critics to use ambiguous epithets. In 1890, in a review of the annual exhibition by Les XX, Daland called Khnopff "the Bouguereau of occultism".[5] The critic referenced Bouguereau in the context of the viewer's inability to resist the beauty of Khnopff's academic drawing style. Occultism came to mind, it seems, because the artist's interest in the subject was well known. Jeffery Howe quotes the Viennese

[1] Brendan Cole, Jean Delvile: Art between Nature and the Absolute, op. cit., 52.

[2] Émile Verhaeren, "Silhouettes d'artistes, Fernand Khnopff", *Art Moderne*, VI (36), 1886, 281.

[3] For more detail see Joyce Lowrie, *The Violent Mystique: Thematics of Retribution and Expiation in Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Bloy and Huysmans* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1974), 107–108.

[4] Fernand Khnopff, "Quelques notes sur la chapelle de la station missionaire de l'Eglise de la Nouvelle Jerusalem à Ixalles (1 mars 1916)" in *Annexe de la Classe des Beaux-Arts, communications présentées à la Classe en 1915–1918* (Brussels: Hayez, 1919), 83–86.

[5] Daland, "Le Salon des XX, Bruxelles", *Mercure de France*, March 1890, 87.

critic Ludwig Hevesi who, in 1906, referred to Khnopff as "the arch-mystic of Brussels".[1]

Why did critics use such epithets for Khnopff? Above all, because of the artist's own work. One could name a whole series of works in which Khnopff demonstrates his interest in occultism. In playing with potential viewers, he often deliberately leaves clues that are understood as evidence of his involvement with Secret Knowledge. For example, at the bottom of the drawing *With Émile Verhaeren. Angel* (1889, private collection) we can see kabbalistic symbols among the columns of an ancient building, which have clearly been added to strengthen the symbolic weight of the work. In the second version of this work, *Angel* (1889, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), the symbols are readable, despite the fact they have been retouched. Khnopff often used text as a structural element of paintings. We can find kabbalistic symbols, which cannot be completely decoded, in the *The Supreme Vice* and also in the well-known painting of the mid-1890s, *Caresses* (1896, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels).

The iconographic construction of Khnopff's works of the 1880s and 1890s also openly demonstrates his close association with the idea of hermeticism and occultism. He regularly uses an image of the many-breasted Artemis of Ephesus, whose semantic ambiguity is characteristic of the fin de siècle. In the pastel *From the Animal World* (1885, private collection), the sanctuary of Artemis of Ephesus, decorated with columns of dark marble with many-breasted capitals and skulls, is transformed into a temple of base temptation whose only fruit can be death. However, in *Orpheus* (1913, Modern Art Museum, Liège) Artemis is the supreme manifestation of creative fertility.

The artist's interest in magic and clairvoyance can also be seen in a number of his works. A particularly good example is *With Georges Rodenbach. The Dead City* (1889, private collection). Khnopff made the work three years before Rodenbach's short novel *Bruges-la-Morte*, which would become one of the most important symbolist texts in Belgium. In the background we see Bruges, the city where Khnopff spent his childhood and to which he refused to return until the early 1900s. In Belgium at that time, Bruges had a reputation as an empty city devoid of its former glory, which had been forgotten for several centuries. The literature on this work usually states that the girl in the foreground is an embodiment of the city and the crown she is admiring is a symbol of the forgotten might of Bruges.[2]

However, in our view, the work demands a broader reading. The crown at which the heroine is so attentively gazing is bright azure. The same colour is reflected in the girl's eyes. Her connection with the object of her gaze is incredibly deep. In our view, the crown performs the role of a beryl or a crystal

[1] Jeffery Howe, "Les thèmes religieux dans l'art de Fernand Khnopff" in *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, op. cit., 31.

[2] Lynne Pudles, "Fernand Khnopff, Georges Rodenbach, and Bruges, the Dead City", *The Art Bulletin*, 74 (4), 1992, 643.

ball, an indispensable tool for scrying, which was popular throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and particularly in England.

It is important to underline the immense role that English visual art played in Khnopff's life. At the beginning of his career, he was a keen admirer and imitator of Whistler. However, by the mid-1880s, and with Péladan's blessing, Khnopff discovered the Pre-Raphaelites. He was fascinated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Here it was not simply the proximity of their artistic and aesthetic programmes which played a role. Khnopff appreciated Rossetti's interest in numerology, astrology, scrying and mesmerism. In the 1860s and 1870s, Rossetti had only a superficial and intuitive knowledge of these subjects. However, for Khnopff, they were an organic part of the image system which Rossetti developed for visual art and literature.

It is obvious that, while making *With Georges Rodenbach. The Dead City*, anglophile and dandy Khnopff recalled uses of beryl or magical crystals in English culture. A number of works come immediately to mind: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, Rossetti's *Rose Mary*, and a whole series of paintings, such as Edward Burne-Jones's *Astrology* (1865, private collection) or *The Days of Creation* (1870–1876, Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA) and Simeon Solomon's *Allegorical Self-Portrait* (1873, Minneapolis Institute of Art) or *The Acolyte* (1873, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane). As can be seen from these examples, this image was very common. By focusing their gaze on a beryl, a practising clairvoyant could go into a trance and predict the future or see the past. It is therefore entirely possible that Bruges, in the background of Khnopff's drawing, is seen by the girl as an unexpectedly revealed memory or as an indication of the ghostly future of the city. *With Georges Rodenbach. The Dead City* is not the only example of Khnopff's use of a beryl or a crystal ball. The same iconography can be seen in *Loneliness* (1890–1891, Newmann Museum, Zhingen, *By the Sea* (1890, private collection) and *Requiem* (1907, private collection).

The artist was particularly interested in borderline personality states as a means of touching the unconscious. Various means of entering a trance and the condition of trance itself are often found in his work. The most striking example of Khnopff's interest in hypnosis is the painting *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* (1891, Neue Pinakothek, Munich), which is his best-known work. In Russian texts, the painting is usually referred to as *The Recluse*, which we consider incorrect because the translation does not match the original title, reduces it considerably and distorts the meaning of the work. Also, the translation from English to Russian usurps Khnopff's right to use the original English text at the point of creating a single semantic field for the work. *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is a quote from Christina Rossetti's sonnet "Who Shall Deliver Me?" and brings to mind the literary allusion which Khnopff deliberately incorporated in the picture. Khnopff's heroine "locks the door upon herself", announcing her extreme escapism and immediately postulating the personal, emotional and spatial hermeticism of the work.

Without getting into comparative literary analysis (as it is not particularly helpful with regard to our theme) we note, however, that Khnopff always had

a dual position in relation to the titles of his works. He often included in the title a quote from the literary work that was his creative catalyst. The title often also incorporated a semantic expansion, which underlined the independent and detached position of the artist in relation to the text. Khnopff refused to play the role of illustrator, something he thought beneath him. He considered himself a co-author and reflected this in the title. For example, instead of "Mon Coeur pleure d'autrefois" he uses *Avec Grégoire Le Roy. Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois* (With Grégoire Le Roy. My Heart Weeps for the Past). Rather than "Pallentis radere mores" he gives the title *With Joséphin Péladan. Pallentis radere mores* (1888) or *With Émile Verhaeren. Angel* (1889) instead of "Angel". A single preposition at the beginning and lines of verse in the title are transformed from a primary source to a literary reminiscence with the function of an epigraph. The title *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* should be considered exactly this type of literary reminiscence.

Unfortunately, the story of the making of *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is not known. Nor is the name of the model. The simplest solution is to suggest that Khnopff used his sister Marguerite as a model, but a comparison of photographs and the work makes it clear that this is not the case. The literature also suggests that the model might have been one of the Maquet sisters, Elsie, who often posed for Khnopff after Marguerite married and left for Liège in 1890. However, there is no evidence for this. The most likely solution is that this is a collective image, created by Khnopff in homage to the Burne-Jones canon which he idolised: a rectangular face with sharp features, pronounced masculinity of figure, fiery hair and a thoughtful, distracted gaze.

In the context of our theme, the name of the model is not particularly significant. The objects with which she is surrounded are much more interesting. The most noticeable object is the bust of the pagan god Hypnos which stands on the shelf behind her. The fact that this is Hypnos is hinted at by the withered poppy which is also on the shelf, an attribute of the Greek god of sleep. The iconographic prototype of the bust of Hypnos in *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is the eponymous sculpture in the British Museum, which Khnopff visited during his trip to England in 1891. The museum's bronze bust of Hypnos dates to the 1st or 2nd century CE and is considered a copy of a work from the Hellenistic period. For Khnopff, this sculpture is transformed into an archetypical prototype to which he will return a number of times. He uses it in *A Blue Wing* (1894, private collection), in the drawing for *A Blue Wing* (Prints Department, Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels), in *Woman, Black and Gold* (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels) and in *Loneliness* (1890–1891, Newmann Museum, Zhingen). Of particular interest are two almost exact copies of the bust made by Khnopff around 1900 in bronze (1900, private collection) and plaster (not extant, known through photographs). While making the sculptures the artist was involved in appropriation, i.e. he virtually copied the ancient image, but was happy to apply his own signature – FK.

There is no strict iconographic regularity of the bust of the god Hypnos in Khnopff's art. The image changes from work to work. Khnopff slightly strengthens the chin, accentuates the lips, lengthens the oval of the face,

sometimes softens and sometimes strengthens the line of the complex hairstyle. Khnopff's Hypnos, which has obvious androgynous features, increasingly adheres to the Pre-Raphaelite, Burne-Jones canon, in which masculinity and femininity are of equal weight and successfully exist side by side.

Unfortunately, in those sources where Khnopff's own voice is heard, such as *The Studio*, we cannot find any comments which might help us to determine the semantic meaning of the head of the god Hypnos in his work. The opinion of experts differs significantly.

Some attempt to give a simple and accessible explanation, which might be applied to virtually any symbolist artist. Michael Sagroske states that "[In Khnopff's work] Hypnos played a particularly important role. He can be interpreted as one of the artist's signatures. According to Robert Delevois, Hypnos represents 'the image of desire. The desire to do, work, plan. To plan one's future. The desire to write'. Furthermore, for Khnopff sleep was the most welcome state. In this way, sleep could be connected with imagination, i.e. a concept connected with everything that 'could be used by the artist in the process of conceptualising a work of art'. One can consider it as an uncon scious state of the creative act. In this condition, the artist is inspired, generates ideas".[1] Accordingly, Sagroske asserts that in Khnopff's works Hypnos is a direct embodiment of sleep as a source of inspiration.

In our view, one can go further and read the image of Hypnos more directly, as the embodiment of hypnotic trance or hypnosis. As applied to *I Lock My Door Upon Myself*, this reading appears to us to be entirely plausible, as the artist gives us a hint in the small tiara which is hanging on a long chain at the centre front of the painting. It is interesting that most viewers do not notice this detail, even when carefully examining the work, which is on display at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich. The silver chain with a gold half-moon at the end appears to cut the canvas in two slightly to the left of the centre line. This detail ought to be immediately noticeable, but instead it remains unseen, blending in with the stem of the dried-up flower. The purpose of this object is, of course, not defined, but we can surmise that it can be used as a mechanical irritant, a pendulum with the help of which a person is put into a hypnotic trance.

The practice of hypnotising people in this way was common in the latter half of the 19th century. The method was first described in 1843 by James Braid, a Scottish surgeon who would become the father of hypnosis. Braid's experiments were well known in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His methods were employed in medical practice by professionals such as Jean-Martin Charcot in his work at the Salpêtrière Hospital, Hippolyte Bernheim, Sigmund Freud and Ivan Pavlov. They were also actively popularised by theosophists and occultists (such as Helen Blavatsky), with whose theories Khnopff was familiar.

[1] Michael Sagroske, "La Méduse dans l'oeuvre de Fernand Khnopff" in *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)*, op. cit., 63.

The 1880s and 1890s were the golden age of hypnosis. During these two decades it was recognised as an official science. In 1889, the First International Congress for Experimental and Therapeutic Hypnotism was held in parallel with the Exposition Universelle in Paris and attracted around 300 participants from across the globe. At this time a large number of scientific papers were published on the subject, including Charcot's "Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System" (1885), Pierre Marie Janet's "Psychic Automatism" (1889), Bernheim's "Suggestive Therapeutics: A Treatise on the Nature and Uses of Hypnotism" (1889), and Alfred Binet's "On the Duality of Consciousness" (1896). Hypnosis was regularly discussed in the press, in publications such as *L'Illustration*, *La Revue*, *Les hommes d'aujourd'hui* and *Revue des deux mondes*.

In *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*, Debora Silverman gives numerous examples in support of her argument that hypnotism and suggestion were conspicuous features of fin-de-siècle culture.[1] The image of the hypnotist and his dependent subject are often found in literary works. Examples include Guy de Maupassant's *The Horla* (1886), George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), and short stories by Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Parasite*, 1894), Anatole France (*M. Pigeonneau*, 1908?), and Bram Stoker (*The Lair of the White Worm*, 1911).

In visual art, the process of putting someone into a trance, i.e. the presence on the canvas of hypnotist and subject rather than the representation of a subject under hypnosis, is relatively rare. The best-known work demonstrating Braid's method in action is Richard Bergh's *Hypnotic Séance* (1887, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm). Created four years before *I Lock My Door Upon Myself*, this realistic Swedish work is of interest more as evidence of an epoch rather than as a key to understanding Khnopff's work. Nevertheless, *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is thematically related to Bergh's painting, as Khnopff depicts not only the object-irritant which is necessary to put the subject in a trance, but also the hypnotist, whose chimeric reflection is barely detectable at the lower right of the picture. With a composition carefully constructed using the principle of *mise en abyme*, Khnopff plays a game with us. He suggests that we, the viewer, take on the role of hypnotist. We are responsible for putting the heroine in a trance. We force her pupils to cloud over and gaze upwards, as with Mrs Stuart Merrill in Jean Delville's *Mysteriosa* (1892, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels).

The sum of symbols concentrated by Khnopff in the central part of the picture – the bust of Hypnos, the poppy, the gold tiara on a silver chain, the cloudy reflection in the right half of the canvas – allow us to suggest that the condition in which we see the heroine is one of hypnosis, during which the person is immersed in another world, in knowing themselves, and yet "switched off" from this mortal world. In this context, *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* can be read as a departure for another existence, a search for a new psycho-emotional state with no hope of return.

[1] For more detail see Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1989), 75–106.

As well as relatively obviously illustrating Braid's method, in a number of works Khnopff demonstrates his knowledge of other contemporaneous means of putting people into a trance, particularly meditation. Meditation, alongside images of a meditative state, is one of the main leitmotifs of Khnopff's work. The artist sees meditation as both the simple process of deep consideration of an issue in the calm of the domestic setting and the meditative practice of trance, which he may have practised himself or with the help of his sister.

The first type of meditation is illustrated in works made from 1881 to 1886. We usually find people who are close to Khnopff in such situations, often in the form of portraits or interior scenes: *Portrait of Mother* (1882, Modern Art Museum, Liege), *Listening to Schumann* (1883, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), *Portrait of Marguerite Khnopff* (1887, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), *Portrait of Marie Monnom* (1887, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), *Portrait of Father* (1881, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), and others. In each of these works, Khnopff deliberately accentuates silence, which was an important concept for him. Silence is treated as an element of the structure of the image, a state in which the model and artist employ meditation and together achieve the high state of concentration, lifting the veil of Secrecy.

Images of meditation as trance appear in Khnopff's paintings from the mid-1880s through the 1890s. Such paintings include *With Émile Verhaeren. Angel* (1889, private collection) and *Paganism* (1910, private collection). Of particular interest is a series of drawings entitled *The Dreamer*, which Khnopff made in 1900. These include *The Dreamer. Never Again* (1900, private collection), *The Dreamer* (1900, private collection), and *The Dreamer II* (1900, private collection). This series was created based on photographs of the artist's sister, Marguerite. While working on the drawings, Khnopff made major changes to the photographic image. He rejected the richly decorated satin garments and tenderly wrapped Marguerite in light fabric in her favourite colour, blue. He dissolved the objects in the background and transformed them into a wondrous mirage. The only thing which remained almost untouched were her closed eyes and her hands. This woman is fast asleep. However, she is not lying in bed, but seated, drowsing in a trance.

Jeffery Howe proposes the idea that the role of medium, in which Marguerite is shown here, is confirmed by her unusual clothing.[1] We tend not to agree with this, for several reasons. Firstly, the clothing is more like a chasuble, the ceremonial vestment of an Orthodox priest, which may have been borrowed by Khnopff from Simeon Solomon's works of the 1870s. Secondly, photographs of spiritualist seances of the late 19th century show the opposite. The medium's dress differs little from everyday attire. It may be that Khnopff borrowed the image from Pélandan or Les Nabis, whose theatre productions he could have seen in Paris. But this also not convincing, due to the series being dated 1900. By then Khnopff was no longer particularly associated with Parisian Rosicrucianism.

[1] Jeffery Howe, op. cit., 31.

More important as far as the series *The Dreamer* is concerned is the state which Khnopff depicts. Falling into a medium's trance does not required the presence of another person. The link which was important to the artist in *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* is absent here. Unlike a person who is in a hypnotic trance and submits to the will of the hypnotist, a medium can control themselves. In addition, doctors who practised dynamic psychiatry, which was particularly popular in francophone countries at the turn of the 20th century, believed that mediums in a state of trance could describe their visions, and use automatic writing and drawing.

If we apply this version to the series *The Dreamer*, we are able to reconsider the interpretation of one of Khnopff's most important works, *Memories (Lawn Tennis)* (1889, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels). The artist made this pastel in 1889. In the same year it was shown at the Exposition Universelle in Paris and awarded a second-class medal.

It is likely that the composition was decided upon after Khnopff saw *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886, The Art Institute of Chicago). Seurat's painting was exhibited at Le Salon des XX in 1887 and created a revolution in Belgian art. Khnopff turned out to be one of those more resistant to Seurat among the artists of Les XX. He was considerably less influenced by him than other members of the group. Nevertheless, much in *Memories* came from Seurat: the large format, the idea of creating a multi-figure composition, the delicate structural and rhythmic arrangement and the illusion of harmony on the brink of destruction. The quiet and still nature of the figures in Khnopff's work, as in Seurat's canvas, communicates a lack of freedom which the characters are unknowingly experiencing. Donald Kuspit compares the figures in *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* to petrified rocks painted to look alive and concludes that this is a deliberate reification and objectification of the characters by the artist.[1] Khnopff's characters are also objectified and do not belong to themselves. They are controlled by a force, the force of sleep, hypnosis, trance. This impression is strengthened by the airless, timeless space of *Memories*. Khnopff minimises the landscape, making it a boundless and silent green lawn for tennis. The girls, who are all alike, in imitation of Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs* (1876, Tate, London), endlessly multiply against a monotonous background where there is no shade and, accordingly, no indication of time of day. Despite their consciousness, they are sleepwalkers, indifferent to each other's fate. Their gazes are not destined to meet. Regardless of the title of the work, a game is impossible.

There are numerous examples of research which unlocks the secret meaning of *Memories*. Some refer to the artist's brilliant knowledge of the philosophical questions of his day, recall

Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and even use Bergson's quote about two types of memory as proof. Unfortunately, this work, which was key for the French avant-garde, was not published until 1896. One could refer

[1] Donald Kuspit, *Psychostrategies of Avant-Garde Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 90.

to Bergson's public lectures, which attracted a broad audience. But the philosopher began lecturing only at the beginning of the 20th century. Plus, lectures took place in Paris, which was an obvious constraint for Brussels resident Khnopff. The key to understanding *Memories* is more likely to be found outside the French philosophical, intuitive tradition, even though it formed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The literature includes a number of such attempts. A number of researchers suggest considering *Memories* as an illustration of Leibniz's teachings on monads or a reflection of Swedenborg's concept of correspondences. There are many other examples. Most of them are speculative theorisations, which are often the only accessible means of transcribing the complex symbolic meaning of Khnopff's work. And as Khnopff's art, with its semantic hermeticism, allows for freedom of investigative expression, we will allow ourselves the pleasure of putting forward our own theory.

In the context of heightened interest in borderline states of consciousness such as hypnosis, trance, clairvoyance and scrying, Khnopff could have been trying to reflect that which his sister Marguerite told him during meditation. This is why external reality is combined with the depiction of internal reality, born in the depths of the unconscious. This is why the space in which the scene take places looks derivative. This is why the characters multiply like reminiscences about regular summer games of tennis. Time contracts, temporal planes combine and mingle. The repeating nature of the composition does not prevent a feeling of disintegration because in *Memories* both time and space are phantoms born and existing in the unconscious.

Khnopff's interest in hypnosis and hypnotic states was not only reflected in visual art. In the early 1900s, he built a shrine to individual polytheism. It was the house built to his design on Avenue des Courses in Brussels. Like many of his contemporaries, Khnopff devised his own personal religion, which ruled his everyday life. Rare visitors to his home were required to be quiet. He drew a circle on the floor of his studio in which he placed his easel while working and into which only the artist could step. Near the bedhead, Khnopff placed a notebook in order to note down his dreams. Also nearby was an improvised altar to the god Hypnos, whose role in Khnopff's work, as we noted, is difficult to overestimate.