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ISOLATION AND LOSS IN FERNAND KHNOPFF'S
"I LOCK MY DOOR UPON MYSELF"

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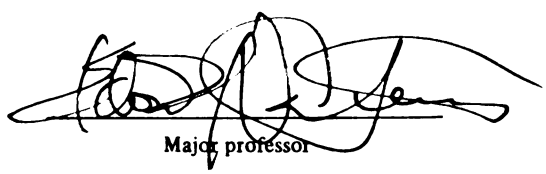

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ISOLATION AND LOSS IN FERNAND KHNOPFF'S "I LOCK MY DOOR UPON MYSELF"

By

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ABSTRACT

ISOLATION AND LOSS IN FERNAND KHNOPFF'S
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By

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The Belgian Symbolist Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) has remained in relative obscurity until the present decade. Much of the new interest has focused on his 1891 masterpiece, I Lock My Door Upon Myself. While other scholars have investigated the iconography of this painting, they have not focused on how it reflects Khnopff's personal aesthetic and philosophical beliefs and how these are linked through a complex arrangement of esoteric and symbolic imagery to his separation, in 1890, from his sister who had been an essential inspiration for his art. The artist's biography and a recent catalogue raisonné of his work were the most useful tools in the study. The essential documentation was the artist's work. The autobiographical aspect of Khnopff's work has heretofore been avoided and is addressed here for the first time.

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INTRODUCTION

The present study concentrates on a single painting by Fernand Khnopff, to see not only the aesthetic principles of the artist, but his reaction to what must have been a crucial event in his personal life--the marriage and subsequent departure of his sister, Marguerite, in 1890.

Fernand Khnopff, virtually forgotten after his death in a Brussels hospital in 1921, has resurfaced in the pages of art-historical journals during the last ten years. The response to this renewed interest is considerable and has led not only to the first major retrospective of Khnopff's work,[1] but also the publication of an impressive catalogue raisonné.[2] Much if the recent studies on this artist have been made by American art historians. Perhaps it is our own disenchantment with a world that is too immersed in material possessions and concerns, a condition that Khnopff also attempted to

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[1]Paris: Musee des Arts Decoratifs. Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts. Hamburg: Kunsthalle. Fernand Khnopff 1979-1970.

[2]R. L. Delevoy, C. DeCroes, and G. Ollinger-Zingue, Fernand Khnopff: Catalogue de L'oeuvre (Paris: La Bibliotheque des Arts, 1979).

escape, that has made us want to seek out and rediscover an artist from the past that, in many ways, shared our indignation against a world with an undue regard for the material, rather than the spiritual or intellectual, aspects of life.

Although there has been considerable interest in the work of Fernand Khnopff in recent years, there is still a substantial lack of concrete biographical information. Khnopff has left us very little in the form of personal letters and other correspondences, and only a very small body of sketchbooks have as yet surfaced. This poses an immediate obstacle to the art historian. Without the concrete evidence needed to construct a psychological portrait, how can one accurately and confidently do an iconographical study of a man's work which is unquestionably personal and symbolic? The answer lies in the careful use of available information in combination with diligent scrutiny of his work in order to find suggestions concerning the possible origins and ultimate meanings of his painting. Until more is known about Khnopff himself much of what we come to interpret in his work must remain speculative.

This study proposes to analyzed Khnopff's 1891 masterpiece, I lock my door upon myself as a statement of the personal sense of loss that the artist must have felt

after his sister's marriage. In order to accomplish this, it was necessary to build my theory on the material at hand--some of which is suggestive at best--but with the publication of a catalogue raisonné one is able to make judgments that were impossible before.

CHAPTER I

BELGIUM 1880-1900: THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

Before dealing specifically with the artistic climate in Belgium between the years 1880 and 1900, it will be necessary to review the concepts of the Symbolist movement. Symbolism was not a movement in the historical sense. It carried with it no official birthdate, style, school, or champion. Rather, it was a contagious mood, in this respect like Romanticism. Thus Symbolism as a movement is difficult to define precisely. At first a literary tendency in France in the 1880's, its concepts immediately found themselves expressed in the visual arts on an international scale. Symbolism, reduced to its lowest common denominator, can be seen as a "rejection of the modern world, particularly of industrialization and the pressure of the proletariat. Symbolism is tearful and nostalgic; it is aristocratic and faded . . .",[1] in short, an overly ripe form of Romanticism. Symbolism was "part of a philosophical idealism in revolt against a positivist, scientific attitude that affected (or

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[1]The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Belgian Art 1880-1914 (New York: The Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1980), p. 58.

infected) not only painting but literature as well."[2] The disdain for the modern world held by Symbolist artists threw them into a kind of self-proclaimed withdrawal from society in search of a new concept of reality based not on the objectivity of Courbet but on the realities behind the appearances of the world around them. Accordingly, the objective world is for the Symbolist a facade, a symbol behind which lay a higher hidden reality; art is for many Symbolists the mediator between the visible and invisible. Therefore the symbolist sought not to paint objective reality, but its effect; as the leading symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé proclaimed: "peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit."[3] These artists, while nurturing a disdain for the material, sought to paint pictures of the human soul in confrontation with the world in which they lived.

As mentioned before, each country had its own particular brand of symbolism and this was no less the case with Belgium. Just fifty years old in 1880, Belgium's democratic foundation allowed for the growth of artistic movements to test the newly founded aesthetic and political arenas. What was unique about Belgium was

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[2]Robert Goldwater, Symbolism (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), p. 1.

[3]Stephane Mallarmé, The Poems, trans. Keith Bosely (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977), p. 14.

that the successive aesthetic movements seemed to grow out of one another, all the while tending to be inclusionary rather then exclusionary in nature.[4] Both poets and painters in Belgium banded together in their newly formed spirit of natural pride. Robert Goldwater described the situation:

> Yet among themselves they formed a closely knit, cooperative group. As in France, writers were the spearhead of the movement, and the magazine L'Art moderne and La Wallonie, especially after 1886, furnished them means of its defense. But, unlike Paris, there was not only friendship, but close collaboration, between poets and painters, and the writers furnished the artists with immediate inspiration, comparable to the effect that the more removed work of Baudelaire, Flaubert and Poe had upon Redon.[5]

The artist in Belgium saw himself as a creative associate to the poet. Khnopff himself often drew his subject matter from the work of Belgian writers such as Verhaeren, Maeterlinck and Gregoire Le Roy using the French word "avec" (as in his work of 1896 entitled, Avec Gregoire La Roy, Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois) to indicate creative comraderie. Georges Minne, the Belgian sculptor once said of Maeterlinck that "Sometimes I have such intellectual communication with him that it really seems to me that I have made the Princess Malerne, with a modeling

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[4]The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Belgian Art 1880-1914 (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1980), p. 7.

[5]Robert Godlwater, Symbolism (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), p. 204.

tool or pen, I no longer know which myself."[6] However, these Belgians did not limit themselves to their fellow countrymen for inspiration. Khnopff, drew from the Frenchmen Josephin Peladan and Mallarmé, the English poets Christian Rossetti and Edmund Spenser, while his fellow Belgian Felicien Rops did illustrations to many of the works of Peladan and Barbey d'Aurevilly.

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the Belgian brand of symbolism is the preoccupation with the themes of withdrawal and silence.[7] Poets and painters alike immersed themselves in the silent world of the soul. They sought to capture its essence--silence, solitude, sleep, dreams, and death. The poems Le regne du silence (1888) by George Rodenbach and Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois (1889) by Gregorie Le Roy were expressive of a yearing toward the silence of the past with its dead cities, empty streets and barren rooms; the soul flourishing only in a state of quiet solitude. The hothouse metaphor used by Maeterlinck in his Serres Chaudes (1886) was likewise a symbol of the soul isolated from the material world, growing within a narcissistic realm of inner existence devoted to the Self. Only through complete withdrawal into the realm of one's soul could that soul achieve

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[6]Ibid., p. 205.

[7]Ibid., p. 204.

deliverance from the banalities of everyday life. This tendency in Belgian Art and literature was manifested in a statement made by Rodenbach when he said, "Ainsi mon ame, seule, et que rien n'influence: Elle est comme en du verre, enclose en du silence toute vouee a son spectacle interieur. . . ."[8]

If the preoccupation with the world of silence, solitude, dreams, and death are typical of Belgian art then its most important representative in the visual arts was Fernand Khnopff. These themes were expressed not only in his paintings, pastels, and drawings, but also in the figure he assumed and conveyed to society. To more fully understand the work of this self-proclaimed hermetic genius whose motto was "On n'a que soi"[9] (One has only oneself) we must review the facts of his biography and aesthetic philosophy.

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[8]Francine-Claire Legrand, "Fernand Khnopff--Perfect Symbolist," Apollo 62 (April 1967): 278.

[9]L. Dumont-Wilden, Fernand Khnopff (Brussels: G. Van Oest et Cie, 1907), p. 28.

CHAPTER II

FERNAND KHNOPFF: BIOGRAPHY AND AESTHETICS

Khnopff's earliest biographer Louis Dumont-Wilden traced Khnopff's family lineage to an aristocratic German family from Heidelberg in the sixteenth century. During that century Paul Khnopff established himself as the secular teacher to the sons of Maximilian II in Vienna. In the first years of the seventeenth century, Paul Khnopff was appointed as an aide to Cardinal Albert and followed him to Lisbon where he married one Anna de Moraijs. Their son Albert, named after his godfather the archduke Albert of Portugal, followed the archduke to the Netherlands in 1608 in the position of an aide like his father. This move served to permanently establish the Khnopff's in the Netherlands.

Fernand-Edmond-Jean-Marie Khnopff was born on September 12, 1858, to Edmond and Leonie Khnopff at the chateau of Grembergen, near Termonde in Belgium; followed by the birth of his brother Georges in 1860, and his sister Marguerite in 1864 in the city of Bruges.[1] Soon

[1]L. Dumont-Wilden, Fernand Khnopff, pp. 12-15.

after Khnopff's birth in 1858 his father accepted a job as a judicial magistrate and the family moved to Bruges, the "city of Memling." Although Fernand Khnopff only lived in Bruges for a period of about five years, this ancient city with its medieval buildings and silent canals left a lasting impression.[2] From Bruges the family moved to Brussels where Khnopff eventually pursued an education in law according to his father's wishes. However, he quickly abandoned those plans and sought formal training in art.

Before formally entering the Academie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, Khnopff studied briefly under Xavier Mellery whose paintings prefigured the themes of silence and withdrawal later seen in his students' work. In 1877 Khnopff's enthusiasm for art took him to Paris where he became interested in the paintings of Delacroix, Ary Scheffer, Rouseau, Troyon, Descamps and Ingres.[3]

As a young man Khnopff was reputedly a solitary figure who preferred his books over his friends. A serious student and diligent reader, Khnopff immersed himself

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[2]For more information on the importance of the city of Bruges in Khnopff's work, see Jeffery Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1979), pp. 189-218.

[3]Suzanne Sulzberger and Rose Houyoux, "Fernand Khnopff et Eugene Delacroix," Gazette des Beaux-Arts 64 (1964): 183-5.

in the works of Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle and the romantic poets.[4] Khnopff was known for his erudition and independence. Apart from being fluent in both English and French, he once was given an assignment by a professor of archeology to describe the history of Hellenic costume, which Khnopff completed entirely in Greek.[5]

In 1877 Khnopff entered the Academie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. It was at the Academie that Khnopff mastered the technical skills of realist clarity that are so outstanding in his work. Apparently he was an excellent student, winning first prize in historical composition and aesthetics and second prize in a torso competition held in 1878.[6] In that same year it is believed that Khnopff returned to Paris, attended the Universal Exposition where he discovered the art of Gustave Moreau, Burne-Jones, and Millais, and spent several months in the studio of Jules Lefebvre.[7]

Upon his return to Beligum, Khnopff exhibited with l'Essor in 1881 and 1882, and soon became recognized as a

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[4]Dumont-Wilden, Fernand Khnopff, p. 18.

[5]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 7.

[6]Ibid., p. 7.

[7]The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Belgian Art 1880-1914, p. 106.

leading realist painter with strange, romantic overtones. Both La Crise (1881) and En ecoutant du Schumann (1883) illustrate the cool precision of Khnopff's style and his preoccupation with the themes of isolation and silence. La Crise depicted a young man, Werther perhaps,[8] isolated within a romantically conceived landscape and En ecoutant du Schumann showed a woman seated in a chair turned away from a barely visible piano with her hand covering her face, lost in a deep state of reverie. This tendency to dwell on emotional states while maintaining an essentially realistic technique led one critic to call Khnopff "the Bourgereau of the occult."

The year 1883 was an important year for Khnopff for he became a founding member of Les XX, the antiacademic group of artists who exhibited their work together in Brussels during the period from 1883 until 1893. The official state of the arts in Belgium was much like the rest of Europe:

> In Beligum, as in the rest of Europe, art during the nineteenth century was regulated by the government-sponsored Academies and Salons. Artists who deviated from the artistic norm--embodied in precepts taught by the Academy--were either rejected by the juries of placement for the annual Salon or admitted and their works hung in obscure corners.[9]

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[8]Legrand, "Fernand Khnopff--Perfect Symbolist," p. 278.

[9]Brooklyn Museum of Art, Belgian Art 1880-1914, p. 18.

Les XX sought to discredit the aesthetic concepts held by the Academy and the leading critics of the time. They professed no aesthetic theory other than the desire to include anyone who had something new to contribute. They rejected all traces of officialdom, choosing only a secretary who was solely responsible for organizing their annual exhibitions, which were generally held in February. Les XX had no jury and tended to be inclusory when it came to questions of membership. Though most of the Vingtistes were Belgian some were from other countries, including Redon and Signac from France and Jan Toorop from Holland. Each year a list of Invites was drawn up, including such names as Cezanne, Gauguin, Pissaro, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, Whistler and a multitude of other artists from England, Germany, and the United States.[10]

The international character of Les XX not only enhanced Belgium's artistic ties with France and other countries, but helped thrust Belgian art firmly into the mainstream of the fin-de-siecle. In short, Brussels became a kind of artistic hub of European culture between the years 1883 and 1893. Les XX helped introduce the most avant-garde styles into Beligum: Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Symbolism. This group as a model

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[10]Ibid., pp. 36-38.

of a jury-free independent group spawned initators both at home and abroad.[11]

The 1880's continued to be successful years for Khnopff. The international character of Les XX combined with the unsigned articles by Emile Verhaeren published in l'Art Moderne in 1886 on Khnopff served to thrust the painter into the forefront of the Belgian avant-garde. Although Khnopff remained primarily a realist, emphasizing landscape and portraiture, he began to reveal a fascination with Symbolist literature and the creation of a pictorial equivalent for it. The exhibitions of 1884 and 1885 of companion drawings to Josephin Peladan's Le Vice Supreme "allied Khnopff with the vanguard of esoteric symbolism, leaving the admirers of his Realist scenes perplexed."[12] By 1889 Khnopff had a small, but international, following and in a Parisian review by Gustave Kahn in La Revue Independante Khnopff was compared with Gustave Moreau, Felicien Rops, Josephin Peladan, and Stephane Mallarmé.[13]

In 1889 Khnopff exhibited at the Universal Exposition in Paris, where he won a second-class medal and, the following year he showed at the Hanover Gallery in

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[11]Ibid., p. 34.

[12]Ibid., p. 10.

[13]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 10.

London. The Hanover exhibition established Khnopff's first connections with England, particularly the art of the Pre-Raphaelites Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Hunt. Khnopff was very much an Anglophile. His spoken and written English were perfect, and he acted as a foreign correspondent in Belgium by writing on English art for The Studio after 1894.[14]

The 1890's marked the pinnacle of Khnopff's art and reputation. Some of his finest work was produced during the period from 1890 to 1900 including: I lock my door upon myself (1981), l'Isolement (1890-1894), Une Aile Bleue (1894), and Art or The Caresses (1896). By this time Khnopff was exhibiting with Les XX (who disbanded in 1893), Peladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix in Paris, and frequent German exhibitions. Khnopff's international fame during the 1890's was also enhanced by his critical contributions to the German revue Pan and his exhibition with the Secessionist group in Vienna in 1898. In the first years of the twentieth century, Khnopff's work was not only seen in London, Berlin, Paris, and Vienna, but also in Munich, Budapest, Venice, and St. Louis.[15]

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[14]Ibid., p. 13.

[15]Ibid., p. 17.

Khnopff's career after 1900 has been neglected. We do know that he designed and built his own villa in Brussels in the year 1900,[16] continued to give lectures, designed costumes for theatrical productions, as well as painted, drew, and wrote for The Studio. Though uncertain, it is believed that he married Marthe Worms in 1908. For the years after 1918, no major works by Khnopff survive. It is believed that Khnopff, in failing health and eyesight, pursued his art historical interests and began teaching regularly at the Atelier Labor. On November 12, 1921, Khnopff died in a Brussles hospital after a short illness.[17]

Khnopff's aesthetic philosophy cannot be directly ascertained, for he left no deliberate statement of his beliefs, but certain deductions can be made from the philosophic circles in which he moved. Louis Dumont-Wilden informs us that Khnopff's aesthetic philosophy is closely tied to the pessimism of the German philosopher Schopenhauer.[18] Both Khnopff and Schopenhauer sought escape from the material world, considering it but a series of unrealities and representations. This tendency can be seen in virtually all of Khnopff's work. His

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[16]Ibid., pp. 264-279.

[17]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[18]Dumont-Wilden, Fernand Khnopff, p. 32.

figures defy contact with the outside world by existing within claustrophobic settings as seen most emphatically in I lock my door upon myself. This solitude, in the realm of the mind, was not static, but an "active silence, as a force that makes it possible to communicate with the Unknown."[19] Though this predilection towards solitude was inspired largely by Schopenhauer, together with the writings of Rodenbach, there was an important difference between Khnopff and the German philospher as Jeffery Howe explains: "Whereas Schopenhauer found escape from reality provided by art to be only temporary, and thus imperfect, Khnopff saw the promise of eternity in works of art, to him envoys from the Absolute."[20] In short, Khnopff sensed something of the divine in both the artist and art. The artist, through his work as a mediator between the visible and invisible, was able to transcend the transient appearances of reality to a higher spiritual realm.

The Symbolist interest in dreams, solitude, and the mystical powers of art as a mediator spawned a revival of interest in the occult and mysticism. Josephin Peladan, the art critic, novelist, and founder of the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose + Croix had a profound effect on Khnopff.

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[19]Legrand, "Fernand Khnopff--Perfect Symbolist," p. 204.

[20]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 21.

Khnopff, one is reminded, did several frontispieces for the novels of Peladan. Like Schopenhauer, Peladan had a disdainful view of reality, but unlike the philosopher recognized the role that art plays in overcoming the banality of everyday existence. He called for a return to idealism in art and the revival of the canons of religious art, particularly those of the Italians. His Rosicrucian sect was a strange mixture of Catholicism, Eastern philosophy, and occultism.[21] Francine-Claire Legrand summed up the affinities shared by both Khnopff and the "Sar" as Peladan referred to himself:

> He and the Sar has much in common. He, too, considered art as a half-way house between the visible and the invisible. Under the influence of Peladan, the sense of mystery with which he started out became a consciously conceived hermeticism and his taste which was already aristocratic, his aversion to the modern world, his penchant for legend were all of them confirmed.[22]

Concerning technique, Legrand continued:

> A cerebral art was his ideal: everything should be an act of will and thought. Khnopff accordingly was bound to censor any trace of spontaneity or unrehearsed effect.[23]

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[21]Raymond Rudorff, La Belle Epoque (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972), pp. 185-187.

[22]Legrand, "Fernand Khnopff--Perfect Symbolist," p. 286.

[23]Ibid., p. 286.

The emphasis that Peladan placed on control and technique and the notion of art as an expression of an idea are mirrored in Khnopff's own words:

> I always meditate on my subjects for a long time before attempting to translate them. I am not one of those who amuse themselves to take as a point of departure a slash of a crayon traced by chance. I want precision. I have increasingly one goal from which nothing shall deflect me. So that I am not distracted in spite of myself, it often occurs that I even take a pen and minutely describe my thoughts. Thus armed, I feel in a better position to translate my vision.[24]

The exalted position of the artist held by Peladan led him to proclaim, "Artist you are priest; . . . Artist you are King."[25] Khnopff must have shared, at least in part, the theories of the "Sar" for he participated in all but two exhibitions of the Salon de la Rose + Croix.

Though Khnopff was greatly influenced by the cultural climate within which he moved, his genius is found in the personal manner in which he incorporates a vast variety of influences into his work--creating then works of art that are wholly unique. It must be remembered that within a single work, Khnopff often milks several sources and combines them in a highly personal and often esoteric fashion. To more fully illustrate this tendency, we must take a look at Khnopff's masterpiece, I lock my door upon myself.

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[24]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 25.

[25]Ibid., p. 28.

CHAPTER III

I LOCK MY DOOR UPON MYSELF: ISOLATION

I lock my door upon myself (1891) is taut in its dimensions; it is nearly twice as long as it is high (Fig. 1). Within such a narrow format Khnopff has captured his sister Marguerite, a mournfully posed woman whose tilted head rests upon the backs of her gently clasped hands while her elbows rest upon what could be either a darkly draped table or coffin. Upon this coffin-like object there is, to the left, a division in the surface that could double as the image of an arrow; between her elbows lies a gauntlet. Immediatly in front of the gauntlet and parallel to the table surface is a piece of blue material that stretches to the right and fades just as it reaches an obscurely painted bird that sits in profile facing the woman. Directly in front of this coffin-like object spring up three stalks of pale orange lilies placed at regular intervals across the foreground; each bloom rendered in a different stage of maturity. The three lilies on the left seem as if they are about to open, the two in the center are in full bloom flourishing

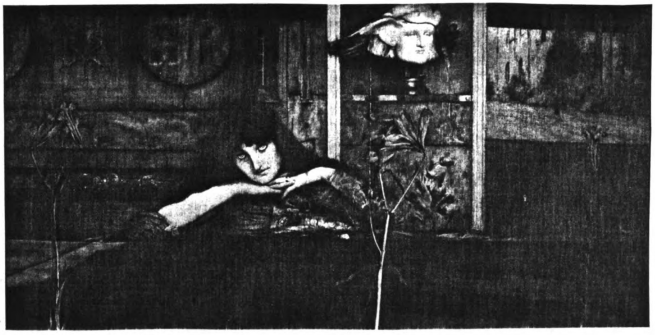

Figure 1.--Fernand Khnopff, I lock my door upon myself, 1891.

under the vacant gaze of Marguerite and the lone lily on the right is tightly closed as if dead or dormant. A golden chain, at the end of which is attached a broken circle from which sprout small leaves, hangs from the top of the picture plane from an unseen support while the broken medallion is lost in the tangle of blooms to the right of the woman's face. Behind the woman a series of wall-surfaces serve to enhance spatial ambiguities. The left panel consists of a rectangular motif upon which a stylized lily is placed flanked on either side by what appears to be circular mirrors with the right mirror reflecting what could be a set of French doors behind the beholder, serving to compress further the already claustrophobic composition. Directly behind the woman is a passageway that appears to lead behind a shelf upon which rests a bust of Hypnos, the God of Sleep, whose winged head faces slightly to the right. Across his forehead is a tendril and to the right a red poppy. On the right panel a gloomy cityscape with a solitary figure standing in the middle ground is rendered in such a way as to obscrue any distinction between reality and abstraction. Above this view through a window or painted landscape is a dark strip that runs behind the bust of Hypnos and across the mysterious passageway. This band is marked by three divisions that appear, upon close examination, to

be wire or chains as if the band is actually a shade which could easily be lowered to blot out the mysterious juxtapositions here revealed. Immediately below the landscape is a dense rectangular space within which appears a strange circular apparition. Within this circle we see what appears to be the hazy impression of a man's face.

The lilies together with the darkly shrouded coffin-table isolate and confine the woman, and also alienate the spectator. We cannot exist in her domain so we are compelled to visually wander through the painting by means of a complex system of relationships and associations among the various elements in the work itself. The lilies are instrumental in making us do this, in that they move us laterally across the foreground and, through their relationship to their respective backgrounds, pull us into the interior of I lock my door. Reading them from left to right they can be perceived as illustrating the life cycle: birth, life, and finally, death. The underdeveloped state of the first stalk of lilies suggests an association with the phenomenon of birth in that they are about to bloom, and the individual blooms are huddled closely together as if in a state of reluctance before opening. Likewise, they share an affinity with the simplistic and austere geometric motifs of the rectangle and circle that serve as their backdrop. In the

same way, the central stalk of lilies share an important association with their corresponding background. Open, mature, and writhing with life their searching petals are drawn open toward the luminous gaze of the woman as if their very nourishment and livelihood are dependent upon the woman's incandescent eyes. Thus a direct relationship between the woman and the lilies is established. This association is reverberated in the Hypnos-poppy combination on the shelf directly above and behind the foregound lilies. This formal bond is all important for it indirectly sets up a kinship between Hypnos and Marguerite. Finally, the solitary lily on the right is also related to its backdrop. Alone, closed, and lifeless it echoes the melancholic landscape that contains the solitary figure--conjuring images of death.

These visual relationships not only pull us into the chamber inhabited by the woman, but also tease us to seek the significance of the compositional affair between Hypnos and Marguerite. We must then assume that the central portion of I lock my door is the key to our understanding of the painting, as it appears to exist as a mediator between the birth portion on the left and the allusions to death seen on the right. This assumption is reinforced by the fact that the central area of this painting is the most vital, active, and alluring aspect of the

composition. The idea that Khnopff has created an image roughly divided into three parts with the sides supporting the central portion reminds one of a tryptych. As a tryptych, I lock my door carries with it religious associations. It is interesting to note that Khnopff was later to construct an altar to Hypnos in his villa in Brussels.[1]

The most immediate fascination of this painting is the triangularly posed image of Khnopff's sister whose mournful nature, suggested by the tilted head, is disrupted only by the slightest hint of a smile. Her electrified auburn hair that cascades down upon her shoulders serves only to heighten the embalmed effect of her pale skin. Only the faint smile and wedding band on her left hand suggest that she is, or at least once was, a part of our world. More importantly, it is her blind eyes that captivate our attention. Like, it seems, the lilies to the right, we too search these eyes for clues to her psyche. But they are empty. We are both attracted and repelled by them. She becomes then a kind of Symbolist Mona Lisa; both alluring and mysterious. Hence we are begged to search elsewhere in hopes that the meaning and significance behind both the woman and the painting might surface.

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[1]Ibid., p. 27.

Since we cannot arrive at a solid conclusion concerning the image of Khnopff's sister through isolated observation, we are urged through her compositional ties to Hypnos to question this God of Sleep and Dreams. In Ovid's rendering of the myth of Ceyx and Alcyone there is a descriptive passage of the abode of Hypnos:

> Before the door poppies bloom, and other drowsy herbs. Within, the God of Slumber lies upon a couch downy soft and black of hue.[2]

Leslie Morrisey asserts that the draped table found in the painting may refer to Hypnos's "couch" and that the single poppy next to the bust of Hypnos recalls the poppies that bloom before the door.[3] So it seems clear that Khnopff has isolated his sister within the domain of the God of Sleep and Dreams. What might this mean? The answer to this question lies in Khnopff's attitude toward his sister, the bust of Hypnos, and the poem, from which this painting gets its title, by Christina Rossetti, entitled Who Shall Deliver Me? Composed in 1864 and published in 1866 the poem reads as follows:

> God strengthen me to bear myself;
> That heaviest weight of all to bear,
> Inalienable weight of care.

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[2]Ovid, The Metamorphoses, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1960), p. 316.

[3]Leslie D. Morrisey, "Fernand Khnopff: The Iconography of Isolation and the Aesthetic Woman" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1974), p. 101.

All others are outside myself;
I lock my door and bar them out,
The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.

I lock my door upon myself,
And bar them out; but who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?

If I could once lay down myself,
And start self-purged upon the race
That all must run! Death runs apace.

If I could set aside myself,
And start with lightened heart upon
The road by all men overgone!

God harden me against myself;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go.

Yet One there is can curb myself,
Can roll the strangling load from me,
Break off the yoke and set me free.[4]

Rossetti's poem speaks of willful isolation and escape from the external world as keys to religious salvation. Though Khnopff has adopted these concepts, he has altered them to conform to his personal philosophy as Leslie Morrisey explains:

> . . . for the religious Miss Rossetti, death may be escaped through the Christian concept of salvation; even though "Death runs apace," "One there is can . . . break off the yoke and set me free." For Khnopff, on the other hand, one becomes purged solely through thought, through the mind; only death can overcome this. But ideas, the imagination, like memory are timeless and immortal. Thus both artists seek escape and salvation, but through

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[4]Christina Rosetti, The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 148.

> different avenues, intellectually vis á vis religiousity.[5]

With this analysis in mind, the overall meaning of I lock my door is made intelligible. The emphasis upon the idea, dreams, imagination, and solitude are the pathways to eternal liberation and immortality. The bust of Hypnos, derived from a fourth century B.C. Greek sculpture, presides over this works of sleep and dreams in which Marguerite is willfully consigned. It is in this world of sleep and dreams that one can escape the exterior world. Khnopff believed that sleep was the perfect state.[6] The lilies, symbols of the transitory world in their birth-life-death associations march unnoticed before the vacant gaze of Khnopff's sister. According to Sarah Burns the orange color of the lilies might be the "chromatic indicator of the intense self-aversion and the material and spiritual corruption from which the soul desperately longs to escape."[7] Everything flourishes under the sleepy protection of Hypnos while the left and right portions, designated by their birth-death associations, are mediated

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[5]Leslie D. Morrisey,"Isolation and the Imagination: Fernand Khnopff's 'I lock my door upon myself,'" Arts Magazine 53, December 1978, p. 96.

[6]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 27.

[7]Sarah Burns, "A Symbolist Soulscape: Fernand Khnopff's 'I lock my door upon myself,'" Arts Magazine 55, January 1981, p. 86.

and transcended only by the central domain of the imagination and dreams.

If the Rossetti poem enlightens us as to the main thrust of meaning inherent in this painting, we are curious as to the appearance of Khnopff's sister Marguerite. What is the role she plays in Khnopff's complex and personal iconography? Throughout Khnopff's vast body of work the most dominant image is woman, particularly the image of his sister Marguerite. Khnopff, himself, gives us a clue in an article he wrote for the Magazine of Art in 1896 entitled "Fashion in Art" when he stated:

> Can it be true, as skeptics say, that in any work of art there is nothing but what we ourselves find in it; that we admire it, not for its intrinsic merit, but because it answers to certain feelings of our own, and that we seek in it only a reflection of our soul?[8]

Khnopff believed in a mystical correspondence between an image and the person or thing portrayed and in all of Khnopff's portraits "the personality of himself as well as that of his sitter are displayed."[9] So, it seems, that Khnopff perceived a mystical connection between himself and his subject and this is even more so the case between Khnopff and his sister for she appears in most of

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[8]Fernand Khnopff, "Fashion in Art," The Magazine of Art 20, 1896, p. 241.

[9]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 28.

his important works. "Khnopff's dedication to his sister was noteworthy; it is certain that he saw in her a mirror image of his own personality and ideals."[10] Thus, Marguerite becomes what Mallarmé referred to as "the sister soul" in his poem entitled Sigh:[11] inseparably tied to the artist's soul. She became what modern psychologists refer to as the anima--the female personification of Khnopff's unconscious in the same way that D. G. Rossetti saw women as the visual embodiment of the artist's soul. So Khnopff's image of his sister in I lock my door is as much a portrait of himself as it is Marguerite; it is the personification of the artist's soul willfully existing in solitude and the land of dreams and ideas.

Khnopff's sister is the vehicle that carried Khnopff into a state of higher Ideals, much in the same way that Beatrice inspired Dante and that Elizabeth Siddal inspired Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Woman was the expression of the Ideal and, in turn, the Ideal was for the Symbolist the expression and purpose of art. This Ideal was promoted by the Sar Peladan, only in a slightly different manner. Peladan's Ideal state was that of the androgyne and in light of Khnopff's close ties with the Sar, we must assume that he also subscribed to the Sar's promotion of the

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[10] Ibid., p. 228.

[11] Mallarmé, The Poems, p. 91.

androgyne. The androgyne was, according to Peladan, the creation of art, the ultimate Ideal, the combination of the masculine and feminine,ideal and physical, and the supreme object of desire for those who find little satisfaction in reality. "It is precisely because it does not exist that the androgyne is so beautiful and so appealing. It is the product of pure art, the dream of the poet and painter, and consequently, far superior to anything that reality can offer."[12] Although Peladan's vision of the androgyne is not immediately visible in I lock my door we sense an allusion to this concept in the relationship between Khnopff's sister and the bust of Hypnos. Judging from extant photographs of Khnopff's sister in comparison to the fourth century B.C. bust of Hypnos in the British Museum a curious association exists between the two. Khnopff's sister's most outstanding feature was her overly square jaw and this trait appears to have been incorporated into the bust of Hypnos through artistic license by Khnopff. In other words, Khnopff modified the features of the original bust of Hypnos to conform to those of his sister, thus setting up the allusion to the androgyne through the facial features of his sister, a physical being, and those of Hypnos, the God of Sleep. The union of opposites has occurred.

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[12]William Olander, "Fernand Khnopff's 'Art or the Caresses,'" Arts Magazine 52, June 1977, p. 118.

Khnopff had been dealing with this theme of the androgyne for many years and I lock my door is not the first example in Khnopff's work. As early as 1887 in his Portrait of the Artist's Sister, the concept of this union of opposites is seen. In Khnopff's Portrait of the Artist's Sister (Fig. 2) the artist has captured his sister posed uncomfortably before a closed door. Clad completely in white with her head turned in a sideward glance, Marguerite's left arm wraps around the back of her waist while her gloved hand constrains her right arm at the elbow in a most unusual pose--suggesting an inner struggle between chastity and sexual provocation as William Olander explains:

> Yet, within this boyish solidity is also incorporated the hint of sexual provocation, as she at once holds herself back from and offers herself to the viewer. Thus within this early image, the suggestion of the androgynous ideal is clearly made: the combination of the masculine and feminine, sexual and asexual, virginal and virile, entirely removed from the world around it.[13]

It is also interesting to note that the theme of "looking oneself in" seen in his later work of 1891 is foreshadowed in this portrait by the half-turned key in the door lock immediately behind and to the right of Marguerite's left elbow.

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[13]Ibid., p. 116.

Figure 2.--Fernand Khnopff. Portrait of the Artist's Sister. 1887.

In still another work, entitled Un Ange (Fig. 3) of 1889, we see a tall androgynous image of Khnopff's sister clad in knightly armor; around her waist is a sash out of which blooms a white lily, symbol of virginity, while her gloved hand subdues a terrible sphinx that also bears a curious likeness to Marguerite. Once more the confrontation and assimilation of opposing forces is alluded to as Francine-Claire Legrand explains:

> Two types of woman are contrasted: on the one hand the incarnation of perversity where the absence of forehead betrays a being dominated by instincts, one incapable of thought-for-thought as the highest form of life, while on the other hand stands a tall asexual figure, dressed like a knight of the Holy Grail, the complete Wagnerian personification of virtue.[14]

In both the Portrait of the Artist's Sister and Un Ange, the overriding theme is the struggle between the intellect and the instinctual, chastity, and virility and the attempt to subdue the instinctual through sheer virtue and intellect.

We must bear in mind that the esoteric symbolism employed by Khnopff throughout his work is of a deliberate nature. The philosophical message he wishes to convey is certainly not intended for universal comprehension. We are forced to seek diligently and to decipher the meaning. One must be an initiate to Khnopff's private cult before

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[14]Legrand, Symbolism in Belgium, trans. by A. Kennedy (Brussels, 1972).

Figure 3.--Fernand Khnopff. Un Ange. 1890.

a full understanding of his work can be ascertained and "the initiate must be careful not to reveal the mysteries unveiled for him to the eyes or ears of the profane."[15] Khnopff in keeping with the Symbolist tradition saw images as emblems of a higher reality that were heiroglyphic in nature. One had to be an initiate to be able to penetrate the meaning that lies behind these images. Howe explains:

> To view the things of nature as though they were nothing but heiroglyphs or emblems of a higher reality means that one perceives all of the phenomenal world as mere shifting illusions, which may nonetheless, indicate realities in the same way that handwriting can concey a message. The forms of the world have meaning not in themselves, but in what they communicate. To comprehend the messages of the heiroglyphs of nature, one must first disengage one's self from the noise and flow of events and turn to inner contemplation. Solitude and contemplation are the eternal conditions of mysticism.[16]

It is worth noting that in Un Ange and several other works by Khnopff the appearance of heiroglyphic inscriptions is prominent. On the pilastered rostrum below the virtuous knight and sphinx Khnopff has complicated his esoteric symbolism with a strange vertical heiroglyphic inscription which to this day has remained undeciphered.

With the above analysis in mind, we can now return to I lock my door to further unravel some of the

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[15]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 140.

[16]Ibid., p. 141.

unexplained images present in the painting. In Un Ange and many other works by Khnopff we notice that the personification of the intellect and virtue is often the image of Khnopff's sister. Invariably she is fully clothed, almost to a hermetic extent, in either long gloves or dresses or, as in Un Ange, heavily armored. In almost every case Khnopff's sister appears to us gloved. The glove in combination with the armor suggests images of the protection that the will and intellect provide for the soul against the temptations of the irrational, sensual, and instinctual side of man or woman. Yet in I lock my door Marguerite appears to us ungloved with the gauntlet lying before her upon the table-coffin. This is as if to say that the protective function played by the glove in earlier works is no longer needed here, for in the domain of Hypnos, the world of solitude, sleep and dreams, the distinction between the intellect and passion dissolve and become one; the glove exists as a fading memory of her former self. The glove also may contain an allusion to the concept of androgyny in that the glove can be perceived as a combination of both male and female elements; male when it covers the hand, and female when left unused. One wonders if the suite of etchings done by the German artist Max Klinger that was concerned with the theme of the glove as a psycho-sexual

object of obsession could have, in any way, influenced Khnopff. The contacts between the two are not specifically documented, but we do know that Klinger was in Brussels in 1889[17] and that one of the books found in Khnopff's personal library was a monograph on Klinger.[18]

Another iconographic puzzle is seen in the figure of Marguerite. She has been rendered within the confines of a perfect triangle in such a way that begs investigation. We have already noted the important role that initiation plays in the work of Khnopff. The meanings conveyed in this work was not for the eyes of the profane. Marguerite, Khnopff's favorite model, can be seen as an initiate who has taken the vow of silence. In Khnopff's pastel of 1890 entitled Du Silence (Fig. 4) the themes of initiation and silence most prominently are depicted. Taken from a photograph of Khnopff's sister, Marguerite wears a pale blue gown and long leather gloves with one hand pressed gently to her lips in a gesture of hushed quietude. Scholars have searched for prototypes to this gesture in the tomb figure of Silence by the French sculptor Antoine Preault in the cemetery of Pere Lachaise in Paris as well as the figure of St. Peter the Martyr by

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[17]R. L. Delevoy, C. De Croes, G. Ollinger-Zinque, Fernand Khnopff: Catalogue de l'oeurve (Paris: La Bibliotheque des Arts, 1979), p. 421.

[18]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 286.

Figure 4.--Fernand Khnopff. Du Silence. 1890.

Fra Angelico in the church of San Marco in Florence and the images evoked by Rodenbach's poem of 1888 entitled Du Silence.[19] While these prototypes may have fed Khnopff's vision of silence, in all likelihood, this image of silence was taken from the widely read book, especially in Symbolist circles, by Edouard Schuré entitled The Great Initates (1889). In Schuré's chapter on Pythagoras he traces the steps of initiation in the Pythagorean cult. After passing the initial tests the Pythagorean novitiate was to mediate upon the teachings of Pythagoras. Schure wrote:

> They had no right to make any objections to their instructors, or to discuss their teachings. They had to receive the latter with respect, then to meditate upon them at length within themselves. In order to impress this rule upon the mind of the new listener, he was shown a statue of a woman covered with a long veil, her finger placed upon her lips. She was the Muse of Silence.[20]

Silence not only guarded the secrets of the mysteries from the profane; it also led to contemplation of the inner self, the soul and, hence, put the initiate into closer contact with the universal soul of which the individual soul is a microcosm. How does this relate to the triangular configuration of Khnopff's sister in I lock my door? The equilateral triangle in Pythagorean terminology stood

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[19] Ibid., pp. 134-137.

[20] Edouard Schure, The Great Initiates, trans. by Gloria Rasberry (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 305.

as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge.[21] Hence Marguerite becomes not only an initiate, but a kind of guardian priestess of the secrets of life. This theme is reverberated in a work by one of Khnopff's compatriot Jean Delville entitled Portrait of Mrs. Stuart Merrill (1892) (Fig. 5) where we see this Symbolist poet's wife, whose flaming red hair and ecstatic gaze that provokes a curiously demonic connotation, grasping a book upon which is inscribed this triangle of knowledge.

The ideas of silence, isolation, and solitude were integral to Khnopff's iconography. They were necessary conditions for those wishing to escape the material world. But there is another level of meaning in I lock my door--the artist's personal response to the "loss" of his sister Marguerite.

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[21]J. C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1978), p. 180.

Figure 5.--Jean Delville. Portrait of Mrs. Stuart Merrill. 1892.

CHAPTER IV

I LOCK MY DOOR UPON MYSELF: LOSS

We have seen how Khnopff's aesthetic and personal beliefs are embodied in I lock my door through compositional arrangement and symbolic allusion. Yet there exists a deeper, more personal, meaning inherent in Khnopff's painting. It is widely known that in 1890, one year before the completion of I lock my door, Khnopff's sister married and moved to Liége. The wedding band worn on Marguerite's hand in I lock my door is evidence of this fact. Noting that Khnopff emphasized the ring of matrimony, one may suspect that the painting as a whole or, in part, was inspired by Khnopff's response to the loss of his muse. With one exception, scholars have either failed to consider this interpretation, or have decided not to deal with it at all. Only William Olander has alluded to this interpretation, albeit in a cursory fashion by stating that I lock my door "may be interpreted as the artist's personal response to the loss of Marguerite."[1] But Olander's suggestion is much more a

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[1]Olander, "Fernand Khnopff's 'Art of The Caresses,'" p. 21.

posing of a question than giving an answer. He gives us no substantial justification for such a statement. This chapter will attempt to illustrate how Khnopff's response to the loss of Marguerite is incorporated into I lock my door. How Khnopff weaves his personal response to Marguerite's departure into the composition is both complex and subtle--creating an ingenious harmony of expression between his philosophical-artistic beliefs and his personal response to this event in his life.

The key to detecting Khnopff's response is found in the compositional triangular tie between Marguerite, Hypnos and the right-hand section of I lock my door. An iconographical analysis of this arrangement will shed light upon the nature of Khnopff's response to his sister's marriage and departure. Since we cannot adequately arrive at an interpretation of Marguerite, given the esoteric implications in relation to Khnopff, we will begin with the bust of Hypnos. Our knowledge of Hypnos comes principally from Ovid's rendering of the myth entitled Ceyx and Alcyone. We have already seen how some passages in the myth explain various images in Khnopff's painting, particularly the poppy beside the bust of Hypnos and the "couch downy soft and black of hue" may account, in part, for the coffin-table object upon which Marguerite rests. Yet scholars have failed to realize

that the myth of Ceyx and Alcyone has a particular iconographic relationship to Khnopff's painting. Briefly, the myth reads as follows: Ceyx, a King of Thessaly married to Alcyone, was to make a journey across the sea in order to consult the oracle. Alcyone, knowing the perils of such a journey, begged him not to go in vain. Ceyx departed and a storm broke over the sea, drowning Ceys and his entire crew. Meanwhile, Alcyone bided her time by weaving a robe against the safe return of her husband while praying to the goddess Juno. Juno, aware of the fate of Alcyone's husband, was so touched by her prayers that she dispatched Iris to Hypnos in order that he send a dream to Alcyone to reveal the awful truth concerning Ceyx's fate. Hypnos sends his son Morpheus in the apparition of Alcyone's husband to disclose his fate. Alcyone, stricken with grief, goes to the sea to join her husband, but instead of drowning, the gods turn both Ceyx and Alcyone into kingfishers.[2] Leslie Morrisey in her article adds arbitrarily that Hypnos often turned into a nightingale when fleeing from Zeus.[3] Though Morrisey realizes the aforementioned connections between elements in the myth and Khnopff's painting, she fails to see the most obvious, and consequently, most essential

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[2]Ovid, The Metamorphoses, pp. 311-319.

[3]Morrisey, "Isolation and the Imagination in Fernand Khnopff's 'I lock my door upon myself'," p. 95.

connection between the myth and I lock my door. The painting in effect visualizes the basic events that take place in the text of Ovid's myth. The rightward glance of Hypnos is not merely an arbitrary device used by Khnopff as a means of confusion. His gaze appears to be aimed directly at the bird who sits frozen with the deathly atmosphere of the right portion of the painting--creating a triangular kinship between Marguerite, Hypnos, and the bird. It is possible that this bird is Hypnos transformed into a nightingale. Corresponding with Ovid's myth, this formal arrangement represents the dream of death being delivered to Marguerite--Alcyone, only this time by Hypnos in the form of a nightingale. The dream of death delivered in reverberated in the small apparition of what looks like the image of a man's face that exists to the left of the dead lily. This image according to Howe, may represent the "earthly or transcendental bridegroom from whom the woman is separated."[4]

Once the connection between the narrative of the myth and Khnopff's painting is established several curious elements surface. Ovid's myth tells how Ceyx and Alcyone are transformed into kingfishers. It is certainly no accident that Khnopff has attributed to Marguerite the

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[4]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 174.

facial characteristics of a bird.[5] It may also be noted that kingfishers, when feeding, cover their eyes with a protective film or membrane which may account for the whiteness of Marguerite's eyes. Further, the stretch of material that runs along the darkly draped table top could refer to the robe that Alcyone, in Ovid's myth, weaves while waiting for the return of her husband.

With the idea of loss firmly established in I lock my door, we can now turn to another image used by Khnopff that may reinforce the suggestion that Khnopff is responding in a personal way to the marriage and departure of his sister. Many of the symbolic associations that we today attach to flowers have their roots in the Victorian period. Many books were published in the nineteenth century that deal with flowers and their symbolism. In this light, the pale orange day lilies that stretch across the foreground before us take on added significance. There is a distinct iconographic association attached to lilies and it seems certain that Khnopff was well aware of it. The lilies before Marguerite are in full bloom and seem to derive their very livelihood from Marguerite's gaze. Since the lilies exist outside Marguerite's chamber, they acquire a character of unreality or dreamlike

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[5]Paris, Musee des Arts Decoratif, Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts. Hamburg, Kunsthalle, Fernand Khnopff, 1979-1980. The author also saw Marguerite's face as bird-like, p. 37.

relationship to Marguerite. The iconographic implications of such a compositional arrangement may be found in the belief that "to dream of lilies in their season foretells marriage, happiness, and prosperity."[6] It is quite possible that this is what Khnopff meant to convey for, in the same way, the lily that exists before the right portion corresponds, by its lifeless appearance, to the death associations inherent in the background. It was believed that to "dream of this flower in winter indicates frustration of hopes, and the death of a beloved one."[7] It is interesting to note that the only painting, Pres de la mer (Fig. 6) of 1890, that scholars see as a compositional precursor to I lock my door also included symbolic associations through the inclusion of flowers. In Pres de la mer we see the same narrow format used by Khnopff in I lock my door. Within such a format Khnopff has, again, isolated his sister who pulls wisps of hair from her face within a vague setting. In the left background there appears a window with a view out to see--another allusion to Ovid's rendering of the myth? In the foreground before this window springs up what looks to be a tulip bud. It is interesting to note that tulips were

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[6]Stoddard A. Kull, Secrets of Flowers (Brattleboro, Vermont: The Stephen Greene Press, 1976), p. 23.

[7]Ibid., p. 23.

Figure 6.--Fernand Khnopff. Pres de la mer. 1890.

commonly viewed as the "floral offering made by a young man to his beloved."[8] Given the date of this painting, it is possible that the tulip is a symbolic reference to the promise of marriage bestowed upon Marguerite in that year. It would appear conceivable that Khnopff, in both paintings, used flowers and their symbolic associations as images that would aid in Khnopff's expression of Marguerite's departure.

Though it seems quite clear that Khnopff has made reference to his sister's marriage and departure, we still need to investigate the emotional tone of his response to this loss. Given the prominent role Marguerite played in Khnopff's life and work, we might assume that Marguerite's marriage was a source of great emotional pain to her brother. Though Marguerite continued to be Khnopff's favorite model after her marriage, certain iconographical devices seen in I lock my door suggest that Khnopff, perhaps subliminally, sought to prevent her marriage. First, there is the claustrophobic space within which Khnopff has isolated his sister. The oppressively narrow format in combination with the forbidding coffin-table and lilies firmly lock Marguerite within the protective domain of the God of Sleep and Dreams. Her only escape is through the opening in the deathly panel to the

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[8]Ibid., p. 11.

right, but even this avenue of escape is thwarted by the blind above, which threatens to discourage any flight. The opening and blind are reminders that escape may be found only through death.

In the central panel Khnopff has included a barely perceptible, and therefore, easily missed, object that gives us a clue as to how Khnopff responded to the loss of his sister. Hanging from the upper edge of the painting, left of the bust of Hypnos, is the previously mentioned chain at the bottom of which is attached a broken circle of gold with floral rays. The meaning of this pendant which is closer to the observer than all else in the painting has not been, heretofore, successfully explained. Jeffery Howe sees it as a symbol of incompleteness, doubtlessly owing to its affinity with the bust of Hypnos who, like the incomplete circle, is missing a wing. As to the missing wing of Hypnos, Khnopff, himself, noted that it represented "unfulfilled aspirations."[9] The fact that Khnopff is speaking about unfulfilled aspirations draws one's attention to a more personal iconographic interpretation. In other words, the meaning of the broken circle of gold may be an image that stands for broken purity or the loss of virginity. The chain from which this pendant hangs has been discussed by Sarah

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[9]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 175.

Burns. She notes that chain symbolism was alluded to by Walter Pater in Marius the Epicurean (1885)--a work that Khnopff as Anglophile may have read. Burns adds that the "image of the chain occurs frequently in world mythologies as a symbol of communication, particularly of the unseen ties between heaven and earth."[10] With this in mind, Burns sees the pendant as a reference to the onset of illumination.[11] If what Burns asserts concerning the pendant's meaning is true, why then does it seem to be broken as opposed to in a state of growth or even completeness? The pendant, therefore, must be seen as a symbol of broken or unfulfilled aspirations. This interpretation makes more sense when received in relation to another image that Khnopff has included to the left of Marguerite. On the table surface there exists what may simultaneously be seen as both an arrow and division on the table surface. In order to grasp the full meaning of this arrow motif, it will be necessary to view it in relation to its backdrop. This left portion, according to Howe, symbolizes the future through the device of the mirror--a common image of divination.[12] Such an

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[10]Burns, "A Symbolist Soulscape: Fernand Khnopff's 'I lock my door upon myself'," p. 85.

[11]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 175.

[12]Ibid.

interpretation seems unlikely, for reading both the lilies and their corresponding panels from left to right, this progression would appear to represent the life cycle from birth to death. If the left panel is seen as the birth portion then it must represent not the future, as Howe asserts, but the past. Seen in this way, the left panel may allude to Marguerite's virginal past. It has been suggested that the mirror may be what Panofsky was later to refer to as "the spotless mirror" of the Virgin Mary.[13] The use of the "spotless mirror" image by Khnopff should not surprise us given his familiarity with early Netherlandish painting. If we feel comfortable with attributing an interpretation of purity and innocence to the left panel, then the arrow might be similarly interpreted. Morrisey suggests that this arrow image "might be related to various saints martyred by the instrument."[14] With Morrisey's clue we only have to look to the city of Bruges, where Khnopff spent his childhood, to find a possible source for the arrow motif. In the hospital of St. John in Bruges there exists a series of paintings by Hans Memling illustrating episodes from the life of St. Ursula.

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[13]Ibid., p. 175.

[14]Morrisey, "Fernand Khnopff: The Iconography of Isolation and of the Aesthetic Woman," p. 129.

St. Ursula was a virginal saint who, along with her 11,000 handmaidens, was slaughtered by bowmen in Cologne. Her attribute is often the arrow.[15] It would seem quite possible that Khnopff's image is loosely drawn from the legend of St. Ursula via Memling's series of paintings dealing with her life. Morrisey relates that during Khnopff's childhood in Bruges there was a revival of interest in early Netherlandish painting and that the paintings of Memling found special favor in Bruges.[16] In this context the arrow in Khnopff's painting carries a dual significance in that it represents both chastity and martyrdom. Khnopff appears to be stating, in a sense, that during Marguerite's period of virginity she was somewhat a martyr and saint in accordance with his artistic and personal belief in the intellect's ability to subdue passion and sensuality. For it was only through sexual abstinence according to Khnopff, that one could transcend the physical world to the world of higher spirituality. The arrow could also be seen as a symbol for the death of virginity for immediately to the right begins the black shroud--itself an allusion to death, or, in this case, the death of the spirit. The change of

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[15]E. S. Whittlesey, Symbols and Legends in Western Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 344.

[16]Morrisey, "Fernand Khnopff: The Iconography of Isolation and of the Aesthetic Woman," p. 17.

events in the life of Marguerite, and hence, Khnopff himself, is seen in the iconographic changes between the left and central portions of I lock my door. The references in the left portion to purity and sainthood, change in the central portion, through the broken pendant and the disfigured bust of Hypnos, to incompleteness or broken purity.

Even after one sews together Khnopff's symbolic imagery, the exact meanings are still elusive, being largely esoteric in nature. One can only suggest what these images meant to the artist. The image of the arrow with its symbolic allusions to purity and martyrdom in juxtaposition with the broken circle of gold with its reference to broken fidelity creates a kind of inner tension in I lock my door. Khnopff's response to the loss of Marguerite seems caught between seeing his sister on the one hand, as a martyr who is a willing prisoner in the world of ideas and, on the other hand, as a woman who has broken the vows of hermetic silence and celibacy so essential for the soul to attain escape from the material world. Though Khnopff lamented the loss of his sister, he continued to see her as his muse and sister soul. In a later work entitled L'Isolement (Fig. 7) of 1890-1894 many motifs from I lock my door are repeated. By examining this work, we may reveal something further as to

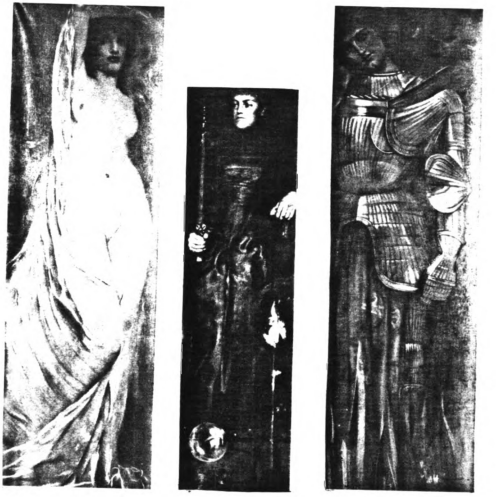

Figure 7.--Fernand Khnopff. L'Isolement. 1890-1894.
Left: Acrasia. 1890-1894.
Center: Solitude. 1890-1891.
Right: Britomart. 1894.

Khnopff's personal philosophy and the tone of his response to Marguerite's marriage

L'Isolement is a tryptych and, surprisingly enough, scholars have categorically failed to view it as such. Instead, attention has been paid almost exclusively to the central panel. In order to fully graps this tryptych's meaning, it is essential to view the parts in relation to the whole. L'Isolement consists indeed of three panels. The left panel, entitled Acrasia, depicts a semi-nude female, presumably Marguerite, turned slightly to the right with her right arm curled around the top of her head. Cascading down this arm while swooping across and around her bent thigh is a white transparent veil. The color scheme of Acrasia has been left monochromatic, making it clearly a support panel like the grisaille panels in a fifteenth century altarpiece.

The right panel, entitled Britomart, depicts Marguerite in full knightly armor. With her head tilted to the left. She confronts us while her right arm reaches over her head to grasp her gathered hair. The color scheme, as in Acrasia, has been left purposefully monochromatic.

The central panel is entitled Solitude. It is this panel to which most scholarly attention has been paid. Unlike the flanking panels, Solitude is abundant

in both imagery and color. Depicted is the androgynous image of Khnopff's sister dressed in black holding a scepter or sword upon which Khnopff, at the hilt, has placed two swans, and, at the top, a serpent that wraps around the blade. Here Marguerite does not confront us as she does in the side portions. Instead, with a stern tight-lipped expression, she looks off to the right intently with her auburn hair pulled closely to her head. In her left hand she holds a glove. At the base of her black dress, there appears a horizontal division that spans the composition. In front of this partition floats a crystalline bubble containing a nude image of Marguerite in the pose that she holds in I lock my door. To the right of this bubble springs up a lily stalk with its bloom also enclosed in a bubble. Approximately midway up the stalk we see a small image of Hypnos. In between and below these two bubble images and against a blue background there appears what looks to be a circle with a "Y" placed inside, and directly above, a barely perceptible Chi Rho symbol.

The imagery of the tryptych is, as in all of Khnopff's work, esoteric and highly problematic. Because of L'Isolement's iconographic affinities with I lock my door, we must assume that this work is a kind of companion piece to it. Howe has interpreted the central panel

of Solitude as an icon of willful isolation and that the sword she brandishes serves as her defense of her isolation. He also adds that Marguerite is placed within a church, emphasizing the sacredness of her isolation.[17] The swans that rest on the hilt of Marguerite's sword may have been inspired by the popularity of Wagner, who incidentally, was a favorite of Peladan, and his opera Lohengrin. The opera tells the story of Elsa, daughter of Henry the King of Germany, who is accused of killing her brother Gottfried to win the crown for herself. Turamund, the plaintiff, is forced by the king to combat any champion who will defend Elsa's honor. Lohengrin becomes Elsa's champion and betroths himself to her, first claiming her sole promise never to question him as to his real name or past. In combat Lohengrin is victorious. Elsa's curiosity grows and she finally questions Lohengrin's past. Lohengrin tells her that he is a knight of the Holy Grail. Upon these words a skiff drawn by a swan appears to carry Lohengrin away. The swan pulling the skiff suddenly transforms into Gottfried, Elsa's brother. Through Lohengren dies, brother and sister are reunited.[18] The swans, in this context, carry with them

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[17]Howe, "Iconographical Studies in the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," p. 177.

[18]Richard Wagner, Lohengrin, trans. Natalia McFarren (New York: G. Schermen, Inc., 1897), pp. 3-4.

allusions to death and the reunion of brother and sister --both attractive ideas for Khnopff's iconography. It is as if Khnopff is implying that death, like sleep, is a form of escape from the banalities of the material world, and, his allusion to reunion with his sister is an obvious quest for wholeness. The androgynous wholeness referred to here is reverberated in the spiralling snake, itself an androgynous image.[19]

If the seated image of Khnopff's sister represents Khnopff's ideals, how do we then account for the foreground imagery at the bottom of Solitude? Howe sees the juxtaposition of the foreground imagery with the seated image of Marguerite indicative of a dream state. In other words, the seated image of Marguerite is actually the dream of the young woman in I lock my door.[20] Howe tends to shy away from involving himself deeply in deciphering the meaning of Solitude. He might have discovered much more meaning in this work had he considered it as a whole and in relation to the personal implications inherent in both I lock my door and L'Isolement. A fuller and more definite interpretation of this typtych is possible if it is seen in its proper context.

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[19]Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, p. 150.

[20]Howe, "Iconographical Studies on the Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff," pp. 176-177.

The central panel of Solitude was begun shortly before I lock my door in 1890. The image of Marguerite as a willing prisoner and guardian of Khnopff's ideals of solitude and silence stands as a testimony to the artist's beliefs. We might assume that Khnopff began work on Solitude before his sister's marriage was consumated and that the lower foreground imagery was later added, after the competition of I lock my door, to document the loss he was experiencing. In other words, after Marguerite's marriage, Khnopff may have felt the need to revise Solitude by including imagery that corresponded to the subsequent events. After Marguerite's marriage, Khnopff may have felt it appropriate to include in Solitude imagery that would reflect the loss of Marguerite. He has done this by using the motif of his sister from I lock my door floating in bubble in such a way to illustrate her transmigration or departure. The inclusion of the lily, also in a bubble, as well as the small bust of Hypnos as a symbol of unattained aspirations retain the meanings seen in I lock my door. Khnopff has, here, gone back to an earlier work and included, or rather, superimposed these motifs upon an image, Marguerite as his priestess of solitude, which represented his image of Marguerite before her marriage and departure. With these symbolic implications in mind, we can now turn to the

circle-Y, Chi Rho symbol and side panels in order to see how they fit within Khnopff's scheme.

The two side panels date later than both Solitude and I lock my door. The left panel, Acrasia, dates between 1890 and 1894 while the right panel, Britomart, has a firmly established date of 1894. It seems as if Khnopff realized something about the soul's existence and dual nature of humanity. On the left he places Acrasia--a sensuous, tempting female. It is likely, in view of Khnopff's anglomania, that the title for this panel is drawn from the sixteenth century English poet Edmund Spenser's The Fairie Queene. Acrasia was the Circe-like mistress who lured men to their ruin in her world of debilitating luxuriance. In other words, she is the personification of passion. The right panel, Britomart, would also appear inspired by The Fairie Queene. In Spenser's epic, Britomart was the maiden knight, the heroine of chastity. Khnopff has placed these personifications of opposites on either side of Solitude and, by deliberately rendering them monochromatic he has made a statement concerning the nature of the ideal state of existence or wholeness seen in the central image of Solitude. Khnopff may be saying that wholeness must incorporate both the powers of the body, as personified by Arcasia and the powers of the will or intellect

as illustrated by Britomart, but seen as separate components these characteristics remain mere monochromatic shadows of ideal existence. The artist seems to state that in order to exist in the Ideal, one must blend these two opposites through spiritual will so as not to become a slave to either the passions or the intellect. This idea runs uncannily close to the writings of Edouard Schuré in his book entitled The Grand Initiates--a book that Khnopff, also interested in initiation, must surely have been aware of. In Schuré's chapter on Pythagoras he relates the Pythagorean ideal existence in terms of a harmonious blend of mind, body, and spirit. According to Schuré, Pythagoras believed:

> . . . real human freedom does not exist for those who are slaves of their passions, and it rightfully does not exist for those who do not believe in the soul or God, those for whom life is a lightening bolt between two vacuums. The first live in bondage to the soul, chained by passions; the second in bondage to the intellect limited to the physical world.[21]

The harmonized blend of these two poles of existence is detected in the androgynous, strong-willed treatment of Marguerite's face in Solitude. Unlike the images in the side panels, here Marguerite turns to the left--unaware of the outside world, lost in willful isolation in devotion to the Self.

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[21]Edouard Schuré, The Great Initiates, p. 348.

The relationship between these three panels is further enhanced by the inclusion of the, until now, esoteric circle-Y symbol that Khnopff placed in the lower portion of Solitude. The "Y" symbol appeared in various seventeenth century Flemish emblemata books. One in particular may have been known to Khnopff, Zacharias Heyns, Emblemata: Emblems Chrestienes et Morales (1625)[22] (Fig. 8). In Heyns' book an engraving of the Y of Pythagoras appears within a circle--foreshadowing the format used by Khnopff. Iconographically, the Pythagorean Y represented the choice of two paths that one must make between good and evil. Due to its position within Khnopff's tryptych, one arm of this Y points in the direction of Acrasia while the other points toward Britomart. It is as if Khnopff is saying that these are the two paths of life, the life of passion and vice on the left or the way of virtue, chastity and the will on the right. Yet Khnopff adds a curious twist to the Pythagorean Y. A small Chi Rho symbol appears above the Pythagorean Y suggesting that the ideal state of perfect existence is comprised of both good and evil, that one must be virtuous while listening and controlling one's darker side as well. The small Chi Rho carries with it the obvious allusion to Christ. This device enhances

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[22]Samuel C. Chew, The Pilgrimage of Life (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1962), pp. 177-178.

Figure 8.--Anonymous. The Choice of Two Paths. 1625.

the sacred nature of the symbolic implications of Khnopff's central panel of L'Isolement. The allusions to solitude, disdain for the material world, the androgynous fusion of male and female and the importance of the will and sacrifice seen in Solitude are all seen as converging in the figure of Christ in Khnopff's personal vision.

As with I lock my door, L'Isolement illustrates both the concepts of Khnopff's philosophical idealism as well as his response to the unattainability of those ideals through the loss of his sister--the artist's soul. The two side panels and the central image of Solitude represent, for Khnopff, parts of his hoped-for existence while the motifs from I lock my door that float across the lower portion of Solitude serve as reminders of the elusive nature of those ideas.

I lock my door upon myself, along with Pres de la Mer and L'Isolement represent an aspect of Khnopff's work that has rarely been investigated--the artist's personal response to his own idealistic philosphy and beliefs. What we see in these three works is the subtle admission of failure--the unattainability of Khnopff's hoped-for existence. Hence, these works remain quite personal to Khnopff. The personal nature of these works is found not only in the deciphering of Khnopff's esoteric brand of imagery and symbolism, but in the fact that these

few works were among the limited number of paintings for which the artist did not receive commissions.[23] In this light the case I have built supporting the suggestion that I lock my door is suggestive of the artist's response to the loss of his sister is all the more likely for these were private pictures, done solely for the purpose of expressing Khnopff's state of mind.

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[23]Legrand, Symbolism in Belgium, p. 72.

CONCLUSION

I lock my door upon myself is undoubtedly Khnopff's masterpiece. Though this analysis has devoted much attention to this painting, there is, I believe, much more to investigate in it. *I lock my door* is the kind of work that defies precise interpretation. Rich and complex in meaning, this painting is an image for contemplation in an almost religious sense. The genius of *I lock my door* rests in its ability to evoke divergent responses from the spectator. On one hand we sense the overwhelming yearning for transcendence and escape from the physical world through the sheer power of art, and at the same time, we sense an equally powerful frustration of hopes and unattained aspirations. What this painting illustrates is just how closely art and life can merge. With *I lock my door* it is impossible to separate the image from the man--both irrevocably tied to one another. What Khnopff accomplished was to bridge the past with the present, to retain the rich meanings of the past while at the same time expressing modern psychological and social problems, such as isolation, alienation, and the kind of sexual preoccupation arising from idealistic

repression that gave birth to Freud and modern psychology. In a sense Khnopff lives his life through his art. Yet, Khnopff's art was not a voyage in pure self-indulgence, it was didactic, moralistic, and at the same time hermetic. It begs us to look at ourselves more closely--to recognize the condition of humankind in confrontation with a material world that, in a sense, negates recognition of that which is most secret and human--the soul.

The tension we feel in front of I lock my door upon myself, the pull between idealism and hoped-for aspiration and the frustration of dreams stands as a harbinger of the twentieth century with its monumental contradictions. The despair and frustration of hopes that Khnopff weaves through I lock my door upon myself is best expressed in another poem by Christina Rossetti entitled Memory:

I nursed it in my bosom while it lived
    I hid it in my heart when it was dead;
In joy I sat alone, even so I grieved
    Alone and nothing said.

I shut the door to face the naked truth,
    I stood alone--I faced the truth alone,
Stripped bare of self-regard or forms or ruth
    Till first and last were shown.

I took the perfect balances and weighed;
    No shaking of my hand disturbed the poise;
Weighed, found it wanting; not a word I said,
    But silent made my choice.

None know the choice I made; I make it still.
    None know the choice I made and broke my heart,
Breaking mine idol; I have braced my will
    Once, chosen for once my part.

I broke it at a blow, I laid it cold,
    Crushed in my deep heart where it used to live.
My heart dies inch by inch; the time grows old,
    Grows old in which I grieve.

I have a room whereinto no one enters
    Save I myself alone:
    There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
There my life centers.

While winter comes and goes--oh tedious comer!--
    And while its nip-wind blows;
    While bloom the bloodless lily and warm rose
Of lavish summer.

If any should force entrance he might see there
    One buried yet not dead,
    Before whose face I no more bow my head
Or bend my knee there;

But often in my worn life's autumn weather
    I watch there with clear eyes,
    And think how it will be in Paradise
When we're together.[1]

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[1]Christian Rossetti, A Choice of Christina Rosetti's Verse, ed. Edizabeth Jennings (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 74-75.

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