

DISSOCIATING PSYCHOLOGY:
RELIGION, INSPIRATION AND T.S. ELIOT'S SUBLIMINAL MIND

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The raised hands, the eyes turned towards the heavens, the tilted head bathed in an unseen light: these features of ecstasy are offered up as symptoms of pathology in the Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière (1876-1880).¹ This volume, prepared by the students of the great doctor of hysteria, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) – and from which the photograph above is taken – lies at the intersection of medicine and technology; the elusive stages of a shadowy disorder were fixed on photographic plates, then developed, collected, and published in a reference work to which medical professionals and enlightened members of the public could then refer.² The pose struck by the patient, as Charcot and his disciples were well aware, was familiar from religious paintings. In L'hystérie dans l'art (1885), a document used at the Salpêtrière and compiled by one of Charcot's associates, reference is made to Giovanni Lanfranco's Ecstasy of St. Margaret of Cortona (1622), where the central figure also raises her hands and eyes, while tilting her head towards a Christ descending from the heavens.³ Indeed, the similarity between the hospital photographs and religious iconography gave Charcot the warrant to embark upon the retrospective diagnoses of the great saints and mystics of the Roman Catholic Church, a key pillar of the medical profession's struggle for power and status in Third Republic France.⁴

The visual relationship between the photograph of the anonymous subject and the images of St. Margaret, a reformed sinner in the tradition of Mary Magdalene, was not established accidentally.⁵ The sexual connotations are carried over from the precursor to the patient insofar as the anonymous young woman is as undressed as she is distressed, her thin

nightgown riding up to expose her naked thighs and slipping down, too, at the shoulder – her performance coaxed and captured by the male photographer for the perusal of his peers.

This complex of sex, religion, and pathology provided one of the contexts for the categories of mysticism T.S. Eliot developed in his Clark Lectures, delivered in 1926 at Trinity College, Cambridge, and posthumously edited and published by Ronald Schuchard as The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry (1993). In his sixth lecture, Eliot described what he saw as the tendency of the sixteenth-century vernacular mystic, St. Teresa of Ávila, to “substitute divine love for human love, and for the former to take on the characteristics of the latter.”⁶ This “romantic” mysticism was contrasted unfavorably with the “classical” monastic Latinist mysticism of the twelfth-century figure, Richard of St. Victor, in which Eliot detected “the development and subsumption of emotion and feeling through intellect into the vision of God.”⁷ These categories draw on the account of the creative process Eliot outlined earlier in his career in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and pertain to his ongoing and very public dispute with John Middleton Murry – himself a one-time Clark Lecturer who had recommended Eliot for the role – conducted on the pages of their respective periodicals, the Criterion and the Adelphi.⁸ Donald J. Childs has presented Eliot’s personal struggle with the aforementioned religious categories as a central personal and creative challenge negotiated throughout the poetry and the essays.⁹ Here I note that one reason Eliot found it so easy to condemn the sensuality of St. Teresa – despite his previous distaste, as I explain below, for not “sensuality,” but rather “sensibility” – was the cultural significance of Charcot’s program of retrospective diagnosis and the interlinking of the pathological, the sexual, and the religious, observable in the photograph at the head of this paper – a subject that has been explored in greater detail elsewhere in important studies of the hysteria diagnosis.¹⁰

This essay will have a sharper focus on the significance, for Eliot’s life and work, of the intertwining of religion and psychology in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century

thought. These twin concerns informed both Eliot's disdain for aspects of psychology and his often unacknowledged recourse to other psychological sources. Both elements come together in Eliot's claim, made in a lecture on the early modern dramatist George Chapman in Cambridge in 1924, that psychology is a halfway measure: "Psychology must lead you in the end, either to glands or to theology."¹¹ Eliot's distaste for "psychology" here principally means "psychoanalysis." The work of Sigmund Freud was, too, bound up with the complexes surrounding the opening photograph: Freud had been a student of Charcot's at the Salpêtrière; he began his career with a study of hysteria; and shared his teacher's antipathy towards religion.¹² Totem and Taboo (1913) in many ways channels the energies of the aforementioned photograph. In the context of Eliot's talk, the criticism of psychoanalysis was prompted by the burgeoning trend, encouraged by Freud himself, of applying psychoanalytical principles to the analysis of literary creations.¹³

Eliot accepted that psychology had a therapeutic function – he himself benefited from such treatment in 1921, as I explore later – but he was unconvinced by the proposition that a psychological science, no matter how developed, could play the cultural, and even artistic and emotional, role in society that religion once had played.¹⁴ Indeed, in opposition to Charcot and Freud, and far from using psychology to re-evaluate religious phenomena, Eliot was more likely to use religious tropes to expose the limitations of psychological discourse. In this, Eliot is in line with a number of early twentieth-century figures who sought to respond to Charcot's materialism with new accounts of religious phenomena: the philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910), the philosopher of religion Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925), and the writer on mysticism Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), among them.¹⁵

Eliot's distaste for psychoanalysis did not extend to all psychology. He was fascinated by the alternative trajectory of psychological thought he encountered while a student at Harvard, beginning with Pierre Janet (1859-1947) and then running through the work of the

psychic researcher, Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901), James, and Underhill; this essay opens with an exploration of Eliot's engagement with Janet in particular before going on to consider how Myers, James, and Underhill adapted Janet's ideas. The psychology of the subconscious or subliminal mind provided a basis for thinking through extraordinary phenomena, including the religious illumination caricatured in the photograph above and the creative process. I offer an example of how this worked in practice for Eliot in a reading of "The Hollow Men" (1925). Thus, in keeping with work by Jan Goldstein, Mark S. Micale, Judith Ryan, and Sonu Shamdasani, I outline an alternative route for the influence of psychology on both modernism and writing about modernism; not, that is, the well-known path Charcot's concerns took through Freud and Jacques Lacan, but a different itinerary taking in Janet and Myers.¹⁶

By drawing on recent work exploring the impact on modernism of various religious cultures, my study aims to provide an alternative take on Childs's claim that for Eliot, "scepticism" is "as much part of his nature as his mystical impulse."¹⁷ Far from being his personal quirk, the doublemindedness in evidence throughout Eliot's oeuvre can be understood as at once a reaction to and an exploration of the porous boundaries between religion and science at the turn of the twentieth century. In this reading of Eliot, the poet-critic's midlife commitment to Anglo-Catholicism and his advocacy for the claims of institutional religion did not issue in a repudiation of his earlier fascination with the more experimental aspects of religious thought that characterized his student years; such experiments are an informing context as much for his famous essay, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), as for the later lectures published as The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933).

I. Civilization and its Dissociations: Janet and "The Metaphysical Poets"

Pierre Janet, like Freud, had been a student of Charcot's. While Janet, in his treatment of traumatized patients, employed hypnotism as a therapeutic tool – the technique having for a time been given a respectable sheen by Charcot's very public demonstrations of its effectiveness – the relationships of the two Frenchmen with their respective patients couldn't have been more different.¹⁸ Charcot felt able to diagnose those in his care on the basis of the physical symptoms they manifested alone; he outlined a systematic account of the behaviors a hysteric could be expected to exhibit.¹⁹ In many ways, for Charcot, there was no difference between diagnosing either a living patient or a pictorial representation of a long-deceased mystic; the stages of the disorder were fixed, the onlooker simply had to know what he was looking for. This practice underlines the significance of Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière for Charcot's project. Janet, in contrast, did not merely look at his patients; he talked to them too.²⁰

Unlike Charcot, Janet did not conceive of the shadowy disorders he studied as possessing the patient, rendering everything she said disease-inspired babble. Talking to patients enabled Janet to study traumatic memories and the subsequent effect of these memories on consciousness. What he discovered received high praise from William James:

I cannot but think that the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science is the discovery, first made in 1886, that, in certain subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual center and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs.²¹

The phenomena of doubling or of having two selves had long been a feature of the hysteria diagnosis.²² Janet, however, did not picture a single, simple personality subject to replacement by or alteration with the sick self, but rather conceived of multiple levels of personality within the subject in complex interaction with each other. James's own terminology for describing this multiplicity, "extra-marginal," is discussed later. Janet understood these multiple levels through the idea of "dissociation."²³ In line with leading theories of his time, Janet considered consciousness to consist of a continuous chain of fields of attention: what James terms "the ordinary field, with its usual center and margin." A "dissociated" personality, in Janet's thought, was caused by the rupture of this continuous chain by some form of trauma. Thereafter, the patient's consciousness became divided with two or more distinct, discrete chains of attention running parallel to each other. In Janet's view psychological disorders were the product of interference between these chains.²⁴ Hypnosis, as a therapy, was used as a way of returning to the site of personal trauma and of offering some means of resolution to the traumatized self.

Eliot learnt about the effects of this trauma in his reading, as a graduate student, of Janet's Névroses et idées fixes [Neuroses and obsessions] (1898). His notes to the volume are held at the Houghton Library, Harvard, one of which translated phrases from the following text:

Observation 51: la dissociation cérébrale [...] il fut évident qu'il accomplissait une foule d'actions absurdes. Il prenait des soins excessifs de sa toilette, prenait deux bains par jour et changeait de chaussettes toutes les deux heures. [...] C'est l'Esprit qui avait eu l'obligeance de prendre la direction de son hygiène, qui l'accusait de malpropreté, le forçait à ces lavages continuels. [...] l'esprit se vengeait, il lui déchirait ses vêtements, lui cassait ses meubles, mettait le désordre dans ses

papiers. [...] dernièrement on a retiré de l'eau ce pauvre homme, qui s'était jeté dans la Seine et il est rentré tout mouillé à la maison, dans un état pitoyable. [Observation 51: cerebral dissociation [...] it was evident that he was performing many absurd actions. He took excessive care of his personal cleanliness, taking two baths a day and changing his socks every two hours. [...] It was the Spirit who had been kind enough to direct his hygiene regime and which had accused him of being dirty and forced him to wash constantly. [...] the Spirit avenged disobedience: the Spirit tore his clothes, broke his furniture, and muddled his papers. [...] Recently, this poor man had to be removed from the water after throwing himself into the Seine; he returned to his house soaking wet and in a pitiful state.]²⁵

“The spirit” here in Janet’s diagnosis is the result of “cerebral dissociation.” The man’s dissociated consciousness, split off from the mainline of his personality at some point hidden in the past, has begun to interfere with the functioning of his primary consciousness. The patient can hear what Janet considered a “secondary self” making exaggerated demands for and about his personal cleanliness. In his doctoral dissertation, Eliot was struck by the difficulties facing both patient and doctor in such situations. For Janet, to inform the patient that this was a case of dissociation did not make the demands of the spirit seem any less real; and likewise in order for the patient to appreciate Janet’s idea he would need to undergo a course of successful therapy, at which point he would no longer see the world the way he saw it previously. The point of view of the sick patient, on the one hand, and the points of view of the doctor and the cured patient, on the other, approach the irreconcilable. Eliot used such cases in his doctoral thesis to challenge the account of the transmutation of error offered by the British idealist philosopher F.H. Bradley.²⁶

Nancy Gish has established the significance of Janet's work for one of Eliot's major critical essays: "When Eliot famously wrote of the 'dissociation of sensibility' in 'The Metaphysical Poets' [...] he was drawing on a widely held and pervasive theory of consciousness, the original texts for which he had read and two of whose authors – William James and Morton Prince – were well known in the Boston of his college years."²⁷ Murray McArthur has also noted that Janet lectured at Harvard in 1906, when Eliot was a college freshman, and explored some of the continuities between the lectures and Eliot's subsequent work.²⁸ I note below the use made of Janet's ideas in the psychology of religion, and suggest that a major impact that Janet's ideas had on Eliot's work was through their unsettling of the relationship between science and religion. In line with this and before moving on to subsequent reinterpretations of Janet, I want to tease out some of the complexities involved in what Gish terms Eliot's "drawing on" Janet's insights.

While "dissociation of sensibility" represents a special use of the term Eliot shared with Janet, the phrase is out of step with the ways in which Eliot typically used either "dissociate" or "dissociation." In Eliot's lexicon, for the most part, the terms refer to the judicial separation of ideas in critical analysis: "literary standards help us to [...] dissociate the social and the histrionic from the unique" or "The Criterion is interested, so far as politics can be dissociated from party politics, from the passions or fantasies of the moment, and from problems of local and temporary importance."²⁹ "Dissociation" was the word that Ezra Pound chose, too – recognizing the significance of the French equivalent for the critical practice of the subject of his essay – when he wanted to praise a work by Remy de Gourmont, writing: "we find in it typical dissociation."³⁰ Criticism as practiced by discerning critics thus involves the breakup of complex ideas into their constituent parts, with "dissociate" and "dissociation" functioning as synonyms for "distinguish" and "distinction," respectively. "Distinction" appeared in the essay on Bradley that Eliot included in his Selected Essays, where Eliot

argued for the superiority of the idealist philosopher's cultural criticism when compared to that of Matthew Arnold. This was an argument Eliot based on the philosopher's insistence upon the "distinction [...] between the individual as himself and no more, a mere numbered atom, and the individual in communion with God."³¹ Arnold, according to Eliot, failed to dissociate the needs of the many from the needs of one – an age-old philosophical quandary and a central concern for late-nineteenth-century idealist philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic – and ran together the different needs of both, bringing into question his claim to the title of "critic."

The inspiration for the phrase the "dissociation of sensibility" – as Louis Menand has noted – came from de Gourmont's essay on the French poet and great model for Eliot, Jules Laforgue:

Son intelligence était très vive, mais liée étroitement à sa sensibilité.
[...] Mais à force de vivre, on acquiert la faculté de dissocier son intelligence de sa sensibilité: cela arrive, tôt ou tard, par l'acquisition d'une faculté nouvelle, indispensable quoique dangereuse, le scepticisme. Laforgue est mort avant d'avoir atteint cette étape. [His intelligence was very keen, but closely linked to his sensibility. [...] But by dint of living, one acquires the ability to separate the intelligence from the sensibility. This happens, sooner or later, through the acquisition of an essential, if nevertheless dangerous, faculty: skepticism. Laforgue died before reaching that stage.]³²

De Gourmont was interested in the tensions between the activities of the mind and those of the senses; the argument itself is a model of the critic's power of dissociation – his ability to see the differences between "l'intelligence et la sensibilité [the intelligence and the sensibility]" – even though he concerns himself with the fact that Laforgue never lived to

dissociate the two. Eliot shared de Gourmont's fascination. Yet, where the French critic contemplated with pleasure "la lutte perpétuelle [the perpetual struggle]" between "l'intelligence et la sensibilité" in the mature work that Laforgue, had he lived, might have produced, Eliot rues the fact that such distinction ever became necessary: "something happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning."³³ Dissociation here has become pathological, and is no longer evidence of maturity. In this sense, the essay takes a place between Max Nordau's Degeneration (1892) and Freud's Civilization and its Discontents (1930) as a psychobiography of the times, which complicates claims that Eliot's backward glance towards Elizabethan England is simply a matter of "nostalgia."³⁴

Eliot's decision to break a stylistic habit might well be explicable on the basis of the different contexts in which Eliot and de Gourmont use "dissociation." For Eliot, it is a word that relates to critical practice – it is the job of the man of letters to dissociate adequately – while the poet's task, according to "Tradition and the Individual Talent," involves "fusion."³⁵ In this case, "The Metaphysical Poets" carries with it an implicit criticism of de Gourmont's willingness to see "dissociation" reflected in poetic practice, too. Nevertheless, Eliot's "mind of England" indicates that "dissociation" is not only unnatural, at least in poetry, but also a historical event distinct from questions of personal development. Eliot turns back to a pre-modern paradisiacal moment at which point poets were, he claims, able to: "feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose."³⁶ The very fact that a critic can or needs to dissociate intelligence and sensibility is a mark of underlying trauma; in a healthy society, thought and feeling would work together in a single activity, he opines, and there would be no need to distinguish between the two. The critical function itself is an outcome of a more virulent pathology. In "The Metaphysical Poets," too, sensibility and the intelligence seem, like Janet's primary and dissociated consciousnesses, to have become two distinct states with the

dissociated sensibility liable to interfere with the work of the intelligence. Thus, Janet's understanding of "dissociation," which is tied to psychological illness, nudges out Eliot's habitual usage of "dissociation" as evidence of a well-functioning critical brain.

An explanation for this shift can be seen in the way "The Metaphysical Poets" brings together both therapeutic – Eliot insisted "psychology is [...] justified, if at all, by its therapeutic value" – and poetic concerns. The "dissociation of sensibility" was something that tantalized Eliot and his readers alike in its claim to be both an ongoing dilemma that faced the practicing poet – Eliot's Poems (1920), collecting his terse, metaphysical-inspired quatrain poems, had been published the previous year – and a historical phenomenon that had further-reaching consequences than poetry alone. The two were not necessarily distinct for Eliot: "The problem of nationalism and the problem of dissociated personalities may turn out to be the same," he cryptically suggested elsewhere.³⁷ "Sensibility" walks the line between the claims of perception and those of history insofar as it denotes not only "power of sensation or perception" (OED, 2a), but also the "capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art" (OED, 6). The first citation of "sensibility" in the latter sense is more or less contemporary (1756) with Rousseau's Julie, or the New Heloise (1761) and Emile, or On Education (1762). Eliot's word choice identifies both a local problem – the creation of two distinct faculties – and the societal implications, as a faulty poetic consciousness overflows into the cult of sensibility – a testament to the burgeoning of romanticism.

The possibility of a cure remains. The symptoms of the disorder, in Eliot's diagnosis, are evident in the slippage between his use of the word "feel" ("feel their thought") – where tactility is at the forefront of a poet's mind and indicative, too, of a particular way of experiencing one's feelings – and the emphasis on "emotions" in the cult of sensibility. The issue at stake is not only the proportion of intellect and sensation in a given perception, but

also a change in the way one encounters the world: one does not “feel;” one has the “capacity for refined emotions.” Eliot’s diagnosis implies that the new modernist aesthetic – the self-consciously “difficult” poetry he mentions elsewhere in the essay – could serve as a course of treatment for this pathology: a means through which one could, if not feel one’s thought, at least bypass the cult of sensibility. A poet, he reminded readers later, is “always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing.”³⁸

Yet, Eliot’s mind is itself divided over such therapeutic claims. On the one hand, there was the possibility of the new art reconfiguring society’s collective understanding and, on the other, there was a concern with the historicity of that “something” that happened “between” certain dates. This historicity attracted scholars associated with F.R. Leavis’s journal, Scrutiny, such as L.C. Knights, who sought to identify the economic conditions that facilitated pre-dissociation-of-sensibility society:

The economic organisation from which the bulk of Elizabethan social morality derived was that of the small, local community in which “human problems can be truly perceived” – an organisation, then, that was not merely “economic” – not merely determined by “economic” motives.³⁹

Jason Harding, too, noting this tendency, adds: “It was left to Eliot’s Cambridge followers, such as Basil Willey, who had attended his Clark Lectures, to ransack seventeenth-century intellectual history in an attempt to substantiate the ‘dissociation of sensibility’ as an historical fact.”⁴⁰

Leaving the historical research to his “followers” wasn’t necessarily a matter of choice on Eliot’s part. He applied for a research fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford in order to develop his Clark Lectures – an expansion of the themes and arguments of the canonical essay, “The Metaphysical Poets” – into a three-volume critical work. He described the project as:

A study, focused upon a definite point, of the temper and mind of the period from Henry VIII to Cromwell, and [which] must take account of influences and interests political, philosophical, theological and social.⁴¹

“Mind” has a psychological resonance – as in “losing one’s mind” – but the list of “influences and interests:” “political, philosophical, theological and social,” overtly omits the psychological. The omission is underlined by Eliot’s decision to replace the “dissociation of sensibility” with the “disintegration of the intellect” in the text of his lectures.⁴² Eliot wanted to write an intellectual history that identified the moment of rupture in time and explained its causes; that is, to establish the “historical fact” of the “disintegration of the intellect,” as the “dissociation of sensibility” had then become.⁴³ Despite Gish’s wish to suggest the term’s equivalence with “dissociation,” “disintegration” has either a technical sense in Eliot’s vocabulary – “I have always agreed (in the rough) to Mr. Robertson’s ‘disintegration’ of the Shakespeare Canon” – or else marks social processes – “it will appear that English literature is in a state of disintegration into at least three varieties of provincialism –” or political ones:

It is not particularly the Treaty of Versailles that has separated nation from nation; nationalism was born long before; and the process of disintegration which for our generation culminates in that treaty began soon enough after Dante’s time.⁴⁴

“Disintegration” is not a word with overt psychological associations for Eliot. Thus, if Janet’s account of “dissociation” enlivened Eliot’s reading of de Gourmont’s essay on Laforgue, Eliot remained uncomfortable with the presence of Janet in his work, even at times attempting to eject that presence. The poet-critic was not in any way trying to implement a program derived from Janet. The mediations between the two were far more complex.

II. “The Frontiers of Consciousness:” Poetry and the Subliminal Mind

The complexity of the relationship between Eliot and Janet is occasioned by the fact that Eliot did not encounter the French psychologist’s ideas in Janet’s work alone. Janet’s ideas were repurposed by subsequent interpreters in a way that took them outside the mainstream of psychological discussion, but proved influential in the psychology of religion. Eliot encountered the adapted ideas in the writings of William James and Evelyn Underhill, and these figures had, in turn, been inspired by Frederic W.H. Myers, the classicist, inspector of schools, and leading figure in the Society for Psychic Research, who coined the term and identified the phenomenon known as “telepathy.”⁴⁵ Alongside numerous contributions to the proceedings of the Society for Psychic Research, Myers is best known for Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death (1903), published, fittingly for a book so titled, posthumously. Within this monumental two-volume work and drawing on Janet, Myers developed an account of human consciousness that would be popularized by James and Underhill.

Myers followed Janet’s argument as to the multiplicity of personality without accepting the French psychologist’s assumptions that multiplicity was always a symptom of an underlying disorder.⁴⁶ Instead, Myers argued that various levels of personality were a constitutive part of human life; an increased capacity for making contact with other layers of consciousness, he suggested, was in fact an example of what would later be recognized as evolutionary change.⁴⁷

Myers’s exposition of his ideas was hindered, as Jeffrey Kripal argues, by his counterintuitive terminology. While he wanted to overcome the vertical organization of the subconscious or dissociated selves model with a primary personality on top and a dissociated self running beneath, Myers chose terms that invoked such a relationship. Consciousness was

marked by a “threshold,” or a limen, with normal consciousness above the threshold – “supraliminal” – and everything outside this termed “subliminal:” the classical suffixes, “supra” and “sub,” invoking the above-and-below dynamics at the same time as this model attempted to distance itself from this understanding.⁴⁸

Looking beyond these verbal difficulties, Myers saw consciousness as a continuum with normal consciousness accounting for only a fraction of the total consciousness available. He considered his findings to be comparable with the contemporaneous discoveries of portions of the electromagnetic spectrum – radio waves in 1886 or x-rays in 1895 – and the realization that the human eye was only able to see a fraction of the light available.⁴⁹ Unlike the eye, however, Myers saw consciousness as being shaped by two very different needs: the “naturalistic and social way via our supraliminal self” and the “spiritual and transcendental way via our subliminal self;” as the human race evolved, he argued, it might develop in either direction with the former limiting the functioning of the mind to an even smaller portion of the consciousness spectrum and the latter expanding it.⁵⁰

Myers summarized the situation in Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death:

There exists a more comprehensive consciousness, a profounder faculty, which for the most remains potential only [...N]o self of which we can here have cognisance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger Self, revealed in a fashion at once shifting and limited through an organism not so framed as to afford its full manifestation.⁵¹

Psychical research was an important activity, in Myers’s view, because it provided rare examples of the subliminal gaining ascendancy – becoming more than “potential only,” even in “an organism not so framed as to afford its full manifestation” – over the supraliminal consciousness; it thus enabled access to other modes of encountering the world.

Myers's notion of consciousness influenced James, following their work together – albeit on different sides of the Atlantic – in the Society for Psychic Research, and led James to modify the views he had expressed in his foundational textbook, Principles of Psychology (1890).⁵² In particular, James's later work on religious psychology is lit by the account of the mind recorded in Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death, but to which James was introduced, through the 1890s, via Myers's working papers.⁵³ James's work was one of the conduits, to Eliot, for this model of mind. In his *Notes on Philosophy*, Eliot fastened onto a passage that demonstrated James's debt to the English writer:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.⁵⁴

James's "potential forms of consciousness entirely different" recalls Myers's multiplicity of consciousness, while the "filmiest of screens" dramatizes the arbitrariness of Myers's "limen." James's description of different forms of consciousness "all about" rational consciousness, as if normal consciousness were under siege, confers a degree of agency on these "potential forms." These levels of consciousness might well be part of an individual's capacity for seeing the world, but they are so distant from the rational mind that they strike one with the force of new knowledge. The "limen" and the "filmiest of screens" anticipate, though delineated with greater technical precision, what Eliot would later refer to as the "frontiers of consciousness," beyond which he envisioned the poet working.⁵⁵ To venture into these new regions, already surveyed by Myers and James, is to encounter another world, a world that lies, strictly speaking, outside oneself, and at the very least requires a re-designation of the self's borders and boundaries.

James argued that, if God were to act through men and women, he would most likely do so via interaction with the subliminal mind, an insight that helped Evelyn Underhill better understand the mystics with whom she worked. Underhill was a popular writer on religion whose first major work, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness (1911), went through twelve editions between 1911 and 1930; it remains an important and oft-used introduction to the field to this day. In Mysticism, Underhill argued that the transformation of the life and perspective of the mystic was achieved by God's acting through "that 'spiritual spark,' that transcendental faculty which, though the life of our life, remains below the threshold in ordinary men." The term "threshold" is borrowed from Myers.⁵⁶

Eliot picked up on this debt. In his reading notes, Eliot responded to Underhill's locating of the mystic's transformation in the subliminal conscious by recording aspects of her comment on visions:

If we would cease, once for all, to regard visions and voices as objective, and be content to see in them forms of symbolic expression, ways in which the subconscious activity of the spiritual self reaches the surface-mind, many of the disharmonies noticeable in visionary experience, which teased the devout, and delighted the agnostic, would fade away.⁵⁷

"Visions and voices" in Underhill's account are the result of uprushes from the subliminal mind with which the conscious mind has struggled. Her noting of the "symbolic" potential of visions, with the implicit comparison between the visions of the poet and of the mystic, is an important corrective to Charcot's yoking of mysticism and hysteria. Yet in her attempt to defend the reputations of saints and mystics, Underhill comes close to explaining such religious visions away. She suggests that because modern psychology has identified the

origin, within the human psyche, of “visions and voices,” their value can be ascertained more clearly. James, however, insisted that the origin revealed nothing about the value of “visions and voices;” the worth of “visions and voices” could only be determined on the basis of the behavior these experiences encouraged and the lives lived in response to such moments. It remained possible to use even this form of psychology to explain away challenging aspects of religion, a charge that Eliot repeatedly leveled at liberal Christianity or Anglican theological modernism, even noting that the mere mention of The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) invited readers to brace themselves for such interpretative maneuvers.⁵⁸ Nevertheless – and whatever Eliot’s differences with Underhill on religion and “symbolic” importance may have been – the movement between “subconscious activity” and the “surface-mind” was a subject in view throughout The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933).

This comes to the fore in Eliot’s account of what the act of poetic “invention” meant to John Dryden. Responding to the dictionary definition of “invention” – which included the word “devising” – Eliot wrote:

The word “devising” suggests the deliberate putting together out of material at hand; whereas I believe that Dryden’s “invention” includes the sudden irruption of the germ of a new poem, possibly merely as a state of feeling (UPUC, 616).

While “invention” does not exclude the “deliberate putting together out of materials at hand,” it includes something like a “Eureka!” moment: “the sudden irruption of the germ of a new poem,” an unexpected and revealing arrival. “Irruption” was a word favored by Myers; he used the word to describe the invasion of the normal waking consciousness, often triggered by moments of stress, by deeper and darker movements from the other side of the threshold, as in the “irruption of subliminal into supraliminal life.”⁵⁹ The OED, however, neglects this psychological usage, offering only: “The action of bursting or breaking in; a violent entry,

inroad, incursion, or invasion, esp. of a hostile force or tribe” (OED, 1). The word was picked up, in Myers’s quasi-technical sense, by James, Underhill, and Eliot.⁶⁰

During the term of his Professorship at Harvard in 1932-1933 – where he had read about the subliminal mind twenty years earlier – Eliot’s return to what Gilbert Murray in an article for the *English Review* described as the “mysticism of the subliminal soul” involved a revisiting of his earlier accounts of the production of poetry.⁶¹ Eliot would later draw attention to the relationship between the lectures he delivered at Harvard and published as The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism and earlier critical essays like “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “The Metaphysical Poets” (UPUC, 575). The emphasis in these early essays had fallen on technique and the transformative nature of the artistic process: “it is not the ‘greatness,’ the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts.”⁶² Eliot may well have felt that he had overemphasized the degree to which poetry was produced from a “deliberate putting together out of materials at hand” (UPUC, 616). In the later lectures, Eliot thus fell back upon the notion of the subliminal mind in order to bring out the sense of shock, uncertainty, and newness in the writing of poetry that he felt he had underemphasized at the beginning of his career.

Eliot, nevertheless, supplemented rather than replaced his earlier assumptions. In his penultimate Harvard lecture, Eliot used arguments taken straight from “Tradition and the Individual Talent” to challenge the Jesuit scholar of mysticism, Henri Brémond. In Poetry and Prayer (1927), Brémond had established what he considered the equivalence between poetry and mystical experience. Eliot refuted the idea that a poem could be called an “experience:” “By the time [the experience] has settled down into a poem it may be so different from the original experience as to be hardly recognizable;” a change instituted by the combining and fusing pressures of the aforementioned artistic process (UPUC, 678). The move between the

early and the mid-career Eliot involves reassessment; not a resignation of the iconoclastic emphasis on technique that energized his early criticism, but rather a willingness to admit that the source of poetry is more elusive than he had previously allowed.

The reassessment is ultimately clinched in a moment of striking candor:

That there is an analogy between mystical experience and some of the ways in which poetry is written I do not deny [...] I know, for instance, that some forms of ill-health, debility or anaemia, may (if other circumstances are favourable) produce an efflux of poetry in a way approaching the condition of automatic writing – though, in contrast to the claims sometimes made for the latter, the material has obviously been incubating within the poet, and cannot be suspected of being a present from a friendly or impertinent demon. [...] To me it seems that at these moments, which are characterised by the sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which presses upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it, what happens is something negative: that is to say, not “inspiration” as we commonly think of it, but the breaking down of strong habitual barriers – which tend to reform very quickly (UPUC, 686).

The critic who claimed, in the manifesto he printed at the beginning of his carefully curated Selected Essays, that a poet is best considered a highly wrought creative intelligence, of unified mind and attention, here recognizes the importance, to his work, of weakness and vulnerability in the form of “ill-health, debility or anaemia,” just as “the sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which presses upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it” contrasts with the earlier single-minded emphasis on bringing together a variety of feelings into new and arresting combinations.⁶³ In a way that sets this insight apart from the

work of Charcot, Eliot retrospectively discovers the presence of disease and illness in his conception of the creative process, but refuses to issue a condemnation; the possibilities of illness and insight sit side by side. There are thus clear comparisons here with the model of the subliminal mind I trace through this essay: the filial relations between “barriers” and James’s “filmiest of screens” or the Myers-Underhill usage of “threshold;” the importance of stress and illness in instigating the movement between the different layers of mind; and the sense of a long “incubation,” a topic discussed at great length in James’s Myers-inspired account of conversion in The Varieties of Religious Experience.⁶⁴

The psychological theories that lie beneath the surface of the “dissociation of sensibility” break through here. Eliot’s recourse to the subliminal mind – an important working hypothesis for psychic researchers at the turn of the twentieth century – as a means of understanding the creative process thus provides a complement to his famous earlier analogy, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” of the platinum catalyst as a way of representing the poet’s mind at work.⁶⁵ The Society for Psychic Research and Eliot’s interest in chemical reactions not only bring out two facets of the scientific practice surrounding and at times inspiring literary modernism, but also reveal how close the relationship between religion and science was.

Mysticism, in particular, for Myers’s great collaborator, William James, was a major focus of The Varieties of Religious Experience, not because James considered it antithetical to scientific study, but owing to the fact that mystical experience was an aspect of religion that could be recorded and measured using methods drawn from the sciences.⁶⁶ Thus, alongside James Longenbach, I recognize the importance of “mystical knowledge,” “transcendent moments,” and “visionary ability” to Eliot’s life and thought, and note that, at times, Eliot himself and his subsequent critics have underplayed these facets of his work.⁶⁷ Longenbach argues – at least partly as a way of unsettling accounts of the “classical” Eliot, who was

committed to order and a particular understanding of tradition – that this aspect of the poet-critic’s work should be located within “a Romantic tradition.”⁶⁸ I nevertheless suggest that Eliot’s engagement with mysticism should not only be construed as a retrospective turn broadly in keeping with his much-discussed nostalgia for Elizabethan Anglicanism, but also an exploration of the porous borders between science and religion that were very much an element of modernist religious culture.

III. Aboulie and the Other Kingdom in “The Hollow Men”

The porous boundaries between science and religion provide a context for Eliot’s claim, made in the talk on Chapman delivered in Cambridge in 1924 and discussed earlier, that “psychology” and “theology” are intimately connected, a facet of Eliot’s thought that is not immediately apparent from his emphasis elsewhere on the significance of Christian dogma.⁶⁹ The Cambridge talk dovetailed with Eliot’s creative concerns. In a letter to Ottoline Morrell, Eliot explained, speaking of poems that went on to appear in “The Hollow Men” (1925), that “they are part of a longer sequence which I am doing – I laid down the principles of it in a paper I read at Cambridge, on Chapman, Dostoevski & Dante.”⁷⁰ The central insight of the paper was the idea of a character inhabiting multiple planes of existence: “that more or less consciously the personages [in a given literary work] are acting, and accepting, inevitable roles in this world, and that the real centre of their action is in another Kingdom.”⁷¹ This “another kingdom” has a familial relationship with the various kingdoms of “The Hollow Men:” “death’s other kingdom,” “death’s dream kingdom,” “the twilight kingdom,” the “lost kingdom,” “death’s twilight kingdom” and that of “For Thine is the Kingdom” to which the verse looks and from which it shrinks.⁷² The lyric voice – with its yearning for alternative worlds – shares William James’s fascination with the possibility of there being “potential

forms of consciousness entirely different” just out of our reach. Our way of seeing the world – in both James’s account and the lyric sequence – is forever on the cusp of being transformed by incursions from these other worlds, be they construed in religious or scientific terms.

In the context of Eliot’s Cambridge lecture, the idea of “another kingdom” as a center of action left Eliot dissatisfied with psychoanalytic readings of literary characters. Eliot wrote: “I question the legitimacy of applying psychology to a fictitious character: apply it to the author if you like, but not to his world – once you are in it.”⁷³ Eliot’s contention was that the application of psychology to fictional characters obscures the designs an author may have for his or her creations, designs a reader should be willing to explore once in the world the author has created. The complicating factor is that these designs may not be immediately apparent to authors themselves. Characters are driven, Eliot explained, by longing, on the part of authors and to different degrees of consciousness, for “another kingdom” that results from “nostalgia for spiritual life amongst peoples deadened by centuries of more and more liberal protestantism.”⁷⁴ The acts of literary creation, the development of authors’ own worlds, are refracted through this wider spiritual need. This historical-religious context, Eliot argued, precipitated the psychological tensions that he examined throughout The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry.

The spiritual deadness Eliot identified weighs on not only “The dead land” of “The Hollow Men,” but also the “deadness” of the language of the sequence: the repetitions of “death,” “dead” and “dying” – the words appear nine times across the five sections and two epigraphs; the diction, which with a few notable exceptions is ruthlessly pared down in comparison to the verbal abundance of The Waste Land and in the lifeless staccato declarative statements that open the first and third sections (TSE, 79; 81). Christopher Ricks, for instance, finds the poem “drained of all affect” and, more recently, Katherine Ebury has compared this linguistic deflation to the entropic activity of a dying star.⁷⁵

This historical situation, Eliot noted, had psychological ramifications for authors: modern writers were unable to focus on the task at hand. Chapman, Dostoevsky and others try to write the plots they have planned and the characters they have considered, but drift off inadvertently into explorations of “another kingdom.” While the Cambridge paper was dedicated to the exploration of characters in fiction and drama, the idea was central to Eliot’s criticism of Donne in his Clark Lectures:

I wish only to indicate how often we feel that there is something else, some preoccupation, in Donne’s mind, besides what he is talking about; his attention is not only often dispersed and volatile; perhaps it is so because it is really distracted.⁷⁶

In Eliot’s view, psychoanalytic readings of texts were limited because they couldn’t give an adequate account of this “distraction.” Indeed, focus on the “preoccupation” in a character’s mind, rather than the historical and theological situation in which the author operated, made the “preoccupation” under consideration impossible to understand.

Eliot himself had been, on his own account, pathologically preoccupied in the years leading up to the composition of “The Hollow Men.” In 1921, Eliot suffered from what he considered a bout of “neurasthenia,” brought on not only by the strain of a visit from his mother and brother, but also – according to Robert Crawford – the pain of their departure.⁷⁷ Having secured a three-month leave from his bank job, Eliot first sought a rest cure at Margate; after this failed to help, he travelled to Lausanne to put himself under the care of Dr. Roger Vittoz.⁷⁸ Vittoz’s treatment program, set out in Traitement des psychonévroses par la rééducation du contrôle cerebral (‘Treatment of Neurasthenia by means of Brain Control’) (1911), included practical activities that sought to increase a patient’s concentration and reduce distraction and indecisiveness.⁷⁹ These techniques were predicated on the notion of multiple layers of consciousness. In particular, Vittoz argued that the two levels of

consciousness he identified within the mind needed to work in harmony with each other; disharmony led to neurasthenia, a condition that Vittoz characterized as a disease of the will and which prohibited sufferers from making firm decisions.⁸⁰ Vittoz's approach, insofar as it is attentive to different levels of consciousness, is comparable to the psychological systems surveyed earlier in this essay, all of which conceived of the mind as something more complex than everyday waking consciousness alone. Yet Myers's own work challenged the idea of a tightly controlled relationship between different levels of mind and the quest for harmony. What makes his notion of the subliminal mind so compelling is that incursions into the waking mind can happen anytime, anywhere. Myers and James were both fascinated by individuals within whom the waking mind seemed extraordinarily open to irruptions from the subliminal mind – irruptions that provided flashes of insight into what these other forms of consciousness might be like and the new world they might usher in. This interest feeds Eliot's ambiguous accounts of both distraction in Chapman, Donne, and Dostoevsky, and the “dissociation of sensibility.” While the historical processes that led to the loss of focus Eliot examined are to be regretted, this division of mind is necessarily a feature of the work – other than that of Dante, of course – that Eliot most admired, and the dividedness of such work is a condition of its openness to the possibility of spiritual transformation.

The fact that Eliot was drafting portions of The Waste Land while under treatment in Lausanne has encouraged a number of studies pairing the 1922 opus and Vittoz, but the preoccupation of both Eliot and Vittoz with “aboulie” or a lack of will power also informs the opening of “The Hollow Men.”⁸¹ The limpid figures of the sequence take their color – or lack of it – from this nexus of concern:

We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

(TSE, 81)

“Leaning together” shapes up as an adverbial clause, but the anticipated action never comes; “Headpiece filled with straw” reveals the grammatical function of both lines as adjectival phrases that like “hollow” and “stuffed” elaborate on the lackluster condition of these scarecrows of men, while ensuring that the figures remain static. The opening declaratives are, too, oddly uncertain of themselves. Does emphasis fall on “are” so as to insist with weariness on the permanence of the attribution of these men as “hollow,” “stuffed?” Or does the reader emphasize the communal “we” to bring out the shared nature of the fate recounted in what follows? In part, this turns on the degree of self-consciousness one imagines the lines imbibing: are they asking for sympathy or disgusted with themselves for their self-pity? In his 1947 recording of these lines, Eliot moves from a relatively high-pitched and measured delivery of “Headpiece filled with straw,” which sounds almost robotic, to a deeper, richer voicing of “Alas!;” he also elongates the second syllable so that the pronunciation rhymes with “farce” (matched with “grass” two lines later in the rhyme scheme).⁸² Here, Eliot indicates vocally the incommensurability between the plight and the pity; what is so pitiful about the hollow men is their inability to elicit pity. All the elaboration on the lives of these figures leads to nothing. The first four lines do not simply fail to move forward; they write themselves off.

This inertia is a product of both the psychological distress Eliot endured in the early 1920s and the “spiritual deadness” the opening lyric can’t bring itself to name, but which he discussed as an invited lecturer in Cambridge. The struggle mimed by the language of the poem brings the concerns of the Cambridge lecture into relief. The author of “The Hollow Men” intuits a pervasive spiritual crisis and wrestles with words in order to give shape to his account while also mulling over the possibility of this crisis having pathological origins; by

contrast, the ease with which Eliot-the-lecturer speaks of the “spiritual deadness” of the entire post-medieval world gives reason for pause. He sounds all too glib. A phrase like “death’s other kingdom” remains impossible to parse; the phrase not only refuses the historical arguments that Eliot mulls over in his prose, but also remains capable of travelling in a number of directions. The “death” of “death’s other kingdom” is freighted with the “spiritual deadness” Eliot discussed in his talk on Chapman without shying away from Vittoz-inspired pathology. Yet it also anticipates – insofar as this is an “other” kingdom rather than this one – a different understanding of death. This is what Eliot would later call “the belief [...] in holy living and holy dying, in sanctity, chastity, humility, austerity;” “dying,” here, serves not as the opposite to all that is living, but rather as a necessary stage within a life, capable, too, of instigating transformation.

While dramatizing the “spiritual deadness” Eliot lectured on, “The Hollow Men” remains open to spiritual possibilities. The most notable example appears in the fourth lyric:

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom

The hope only
Of empty men.

(TSE, 83)

The Latinity of the polysyllabic “multifoliate,” drawing on and fine-tuning the note struck with “perpetual,” sounds out against the muted vocabulary of dead, death, and dying. The Roman origin of the term in a poem with a preference for words of Anglo-Saxon derivation

highlights its otherness. A. David Moody cites one such other world insofar as he presents the phrase as evidence that the entire poem is structured around the “very modes of Dante’s sensibility:” “multifoliate rose” ascending away from the austere world of the opening of the sequence and into “the phantasmagoric and the visionary.”⁸³ “Multifoliate rose” comes from somewhere else and it is precisely an elsewhere – albeit of questionable status – that the phrase offers the “empty men” with whom the stanza closes. The religious vision has more in common with the work of Myers and James than with Vittoz. While Eliot’s treatment with the Swiss psychologist feeds the lethargic lyric voice, the willingness of the poem to explore the faint glimpses of alternative worlds owes more to the momentary ruptures of insight explored in accounts of the subliminal mind.

A similar approach is evident in the vision of a very different kingdom captured in the third lyric:

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.
(TSE, 82)

The sensuality of “Trembling with tenderness” is felt in the tailing off of “tenderness,” while the dactylic rhythmical arc of the line promises a luscious ease in a stanza in which the preponderance of monosyllables makes choosing stress and rhythm a difficult task. It promises what is just out of reach as the near miss of a rhyme between “tenderness” and “kiss” realizes, but this eroticism – the potential for a human, bodily connection – presents an

alternative to what is otherwise dead, death, and dying. Sex, like the religious vision encapsulated in the “multifoliate rose,” offers a potential, if only momentarily envisioned, escape route. The visionary flashes of the sequence – the willingness to explore brief yet powerfully conceived alternatives to the prevailing aboulie – reveal the driving force behind Eliot’s reading in mysticism and his particular penchant for psychological theories of irruption.

The different worlds of sex, medicine, and religion juxtaposed in “The Hollow Men” came together, too, in disturbing fashion in the image from Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière with which I opened. In the poem, neither the spiritual nor the sexual worlds replace the paralyzed present, but their presence arguably transforms that present; by the close of the sequence, the shapeless malaise that infuses the poem has been imprinted with the contours of these alternatives. The shift sideways from despair to one of the other kingdoms and back again, rather than the march forward towards an endpoint, is the characteristic movement of the poem; the famous refusal to end with a “bang” is, at least partly, a comment on the work’s method of proceeding (TSE, 84).

In examining Eliot’s relationship with strands of psychology that began with Charcot, I have sought to avoid the suggestion that Eliot simply lifted an idea from one area of discourse and applied it in his poetry and criticism. Such an approach jars with the method of “The Hollow Men.” I have explored some of the ramifications that the previously discussed theories of mind had upon Eliot’s work, but Eliot did not undertake what he termed in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” the “great labour” of working himself into Janet’s orbit as the poet-critic did first with Laforgue and later with George Herbert.⁸⁴ I have described instead aspects of the intellectual and cultural background that informed his life and work. This background is not monolithic. The psychology of religion as developed by Myers-James-Underhill not only makes a case for religious experience – a case to which a man of mystical

sensibilities like Eliot could not help but respond – but also offers a far-reaching re-reading of such phenomena that means that the skepticism so long associated with Eliot is never far away. Eliot’s interaction with this divided thought world helped shape the rapid shifts of tone in the poem – that movement between kingdoms – from the hobbled opening of the sequence to the visionary potential of “multifoliate rose.”

Thinking back to the images with which I opened, the poem affords a lens through which one might view the Ecstasy of St. Margaret of Cortona, the baroque oil painting in which Charcot and his disciples found visual evidence of hysteria. “The Hollow Men” records moments of almost unbearable suffering, and one would have found countless examples of comparable struggles, often exacerbated by the conditions of treatment, on the wards of the Salpêtrière. Charcot, the great doctor of hysteria, attempted to read the visual history of religious phenomena as a continuation of the disorder that occupied much of his professional life, and Eliot’s poem enacts its own diagnostics: the opening “Ah!” has more contempt than sympathy for the hollow men. Yet the sequence does not stop there. “The Hollow Men” surveys alternatives to its current state, including those that would genuinely transform the perspective it offers on the world or worlds. With this approach in mind, there is no reason why one should not find, with Charcot and his collaborators, something disturbing in paintings like the Ecstasy of St. Margaret of Cortona, but also remain open to the possibilities of religious illumination for which others hope.

IV. Eliotic Conversions

Two years after publishing “The Hollow Men,” Eliot was baptized in a Church of England chapel. Despite making a declaration of faith in midlife, Eliot avoided speaking of his religious life in terms of conversion.⁸⁵ Barry Spurr suggests that this reluctance was a result of

the association of the practice of “conversion” – often accompanied by an emotional reorientation and moral reversal of aspects of one’s previous life – with Methodism.⁸⁶

Methodist conversion narratives played an important role, too, in the development of the psychology of religion; the emotional nature of many of these experiences enabled a number of researchers to exclude semantic content from their studies of religion – this, in Spurr’s analysis, was precisely what Eliot was attempting to distance himself from.⁸⁷ Conversion experiences became something like hysterical attacks, and religion could be once more explained away as the preserve of those who, in some way or other, were weak-minded. In The Varieties of Religious Experience, James used the idea of the subliminal mind to counter such notions. The forces behind a conversionary experience might build up over time as the religious consciousness developed in parallel with one’s existing way of seeing the world, but when this new consciousness burst in on the waking mind it struck with the force of new knowledge.⁸⁸

Conceived of in this way, James’s understanding of conversion and religious phenomena more widely makes room for both mysticism and skepticism. James explores origins, but does not – unlike Charcot – equate those origins with value.⁸⁹ The development of the subliminal mind is a way of explaining a certain type of conversionary experience, but this explanation does not encode a judgement as to its worth. One could see the activity of the subliminal mind as the activity of God or a result of pathology. This tradition in the psychology of religion remains properly skeptical about religious phenomena, but nevertheless open to the possibility of religious illumination; it is in this context that two well-documented, if apparently antithetical, aspects of Eliot’s thought and work – mysticism and skepticism – can be brought together.

The accommodation necessary for writing about Eliot and religion, given his fascination with mysticism as well as his ingrained skepticism, was not in evidence in the way

in which he initially presented his new-found faith to his reading public. In the preface to For Lancelot Andrewes (1928), Eliot infamously declared: “I am a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and a Catholic in religion.”⁹⁰ He lived to regret the comment. If this creedal statement served as a dividing line, at least in the public imagination, between his pre- and post-baptismal work, I have, instead, explored the continuities between the periods: the same model of mind is in view in “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921) and The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933), albeit configured somewhat differently. Ideas recounted in Janet, Myers, James, and Underhill informed and even encouraged the faith Eliot acknowledged in 1927, while also shaping his understanding of the creative process and feeding into his own creative output.

There is a nexus of related concerns here: aesthetic, religious, and scientific among them. In exploring the intersection of these factors in Eliot’s work, I endeavor to respond to Charles Taylor’s characterization of a life of faith within modernity as being shaped by the very visible presence of other religious options, be that no faith, an idiosyncratic spirituality of one’s own, or another faith.⁹¹ The awareness of selecting one of these religious options over another is thus an integral part of the religious condition in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Taylor’s notion is distinct from the idea, popularized by a range of secularization theorists, of religion as a consumer choice, and instead he insists that the visible presence in the modern world of other possibilities – regardless of one’s willingness to pursue them – marks the limits to and the complications of one’s own faith. Eliot’s penchant for both mysticism and skepticism that looks, at times, like a personal quirk – the critical attitude most readily associated with modernism, combined with a nostalgic or even romantic sensibility – can instead be seen as an exemplar of a broader religious condition.

1. ‘Extase (1878)’, photograph by P. Regnard, in D. M. Bourneville and P. Regnard Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière (Paris : Delahaye, 1876-80), plate 23.

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2. See Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 150-155. For a more general account of the topic see: Tim Armstrong, Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-11.
 3. Paul Richer, Études cliniques sur la grande hystérie ou hystéro-épilepsie (Paris: Delahaye, 1885), 914-956, 955; Martha Noel Evans, Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 35. Giovanni Lanfranco, Ecstasy of St Margaret of Cortona, 1622, oil on canvas, 230 x 185 cm, Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence.
 4. See Noel Evans, Fits and Starts, 13.
 5. As a young woman, Saint Margaret of Cortona lived as the mistress of a nobleman and accounts of her life have provided the occasion for exhortations to sexual purity. See Antonio Francesco Giovagnoli, The Life of Saint Margaret of Cortona (Philadelphia: Cunningham, 1888), 7-16; Alban Goodier, S.J., "St. Margaret Of Cortona: The Second Magdalene—1247-1297," in Saints for Sinners (Garden City, N.Y., Image Books, 1959), 20-32.
 6. T.S. Eliot, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, ed. Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), 275.
 7. Eliot, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 104, 103-104.
 8. See David Goldie, A Critical Difference: T.S. Eliot and John Middleton Murry in English Literary Criticism, 1919-1928 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 69-127; for Murry's nomination of Eliot see Schuchard, Introduction to The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 6-7.
 9. See Donald J. Childs, T.S. Eliot, Mystic, Son and Lover (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 152-185.

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10. See: Cristina Mazzoni, Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts*; and Showalter, The Female Malady.
11. T.S. Eliot, "A Neglected Aspect of Chapman," in The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926, ed. Ronald Schuchard and Anthony Cuda, vol. 2 of The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, ed. Ronald Schuchard, 8 vols., Project Muse, Web, <http://muse.jhu.edu/about/reference/eliot/index.html>, 553. This paper was previously thought to have been lost. Schuchard, Notes to The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 152n.
12. See Sigmund Freud, 'Charcot,' in Early Psycho-Analytic Writings (1892-1893), vol. 3 of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud, translated and edited by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, and assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 9-24.
13. See Eliot, "A Neglected Aspect of Chapman," 553.
14. See Eliot, "A Neglected Aspect of Chapman," 553.
15. For a study of the formative years of the psychology of religion, see Ann Taves, Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 251-347.
16. See: Jan Goldstein, "The Advent of Psychological Modernism in France: An Alternate Narrative," in Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, ed. Dorothy Ross (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 190-209; Mark S. Micale, Introduction to The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940, ed. Mark S. Micale (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-21; Judith Ryan, The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 6-24; Sonu Shamdasani, Introduction to From India to the Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages, by Théodore

Flournoy, with a forward by C.G. Jung and commentary by Mireille Cifali (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), xi-li.

17. For recent studies of modernism and religion, see: Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908-1932 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Scott Freer, Modernist Mythopoeia: The Twilight of the Gods (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Suzanne Hobson, Angels of Modernism: Religion, Culture, Aesthetics 1910-1960 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Margaret Mills Harper, Wisdom of Two: The Spiritual and Literary Collaboration of George and W. B. Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Helen Sword, Ghostwriting Modernism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Pamela Thurschwell, Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880–1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Erik Tønning, Modernism and Christianity (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Lara Vetter, Modernist Writings and Religio-scientific Discourse: H.D., Loy, and Toomer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Childs, T.S. Eliot, Mystic, Son and Lover, 200.

18. See Taves, Fits, Trances and Visions, 249-260.

19. See Noel Evans, Fits and Starts, 24.

20. See Noel Evans, Fits and Starts, 58-59.

21. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Longmans, 1902), 233. I follow Taves in identifying Janet, rather than Myers, as the figure with whom James credits the breakthrough. Ann Taves, “The Fragmentation of Consciousness and The Varieties of Religious Experience: William James’s Contribution to a Theory of Religion,” in Re-experiencing Varieties: William James and a “Science of Religions,” ed. Wayne Proudfoot (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 51. Taves distinguishes her position from that of Eugene Taylor, who argues that the theory of secondary selves came to James primarily

through Myers. William James on Consciousness beyond the Margins (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 87.

22. See Ian Hacking, Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 159-170.

23. Elton Mayo, The Psychology of Pierre Janet (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1951), 30.

24. See Taves, Fits, Trances, and Vision, 257.

25. F. Raymond and Pierre Janet, Névroses et idées fixes, 2 vols. (Paris: Alcan, 1898), 2:176-178. The translation is mine. For Eliot's notes see: T.S. Eliot, Notes on Philosophy, T.S. Eliot Papers, 1878-1958, MS Am 1691.129, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

26. See T. S. Eliot, "Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley," in The Apprentices Years, 1905-1918, ed. Ronald Schuchard and Jewel Spears Brooker, vol. 1 of The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot, 332-340. For an account of Bradley on error see: W.J. Mander, An Introduction to Bradley's Metaphysics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 135-156.

27. Nancy K. Gish, "Discarnate Desire: T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Dissociation," in Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot, ed. Nancy K. Gish and Cassandra Laity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112-113; T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets (1921)," in Selected Essays, 3rd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 247.

28. See Murray McArthur, "Symptom and Sign: Janet, Freud, Eliot, and the Literary Mandate of Laughter," Twentieth Century Literature, vol. 56, no. 1 (2010): 1-24.

29. T.S. Eliot, "Style and Thought: An unsigned review of *Mysticism and Logic* and Other Essays, by Bertrand Russell," in The Apprentices Years, 690; T.S. Eliot, "A Commentary (June 1928)," in Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929, ed. Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Ronald Schuchard, vol. 3 of The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot, 417.

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30. Ezra Pound, “Remy de Gourmont,” in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 351; See Remy de Gourmont, “La Dissociation des Idées” [The Dissociation of Ideas], in Les Culture des Idées [The Culture of Ideas] (Paris: Mercure de France, 1900), 73-110.
31. T.S. Eliot, “Francis Herbert Bradley (1927),” in Selected Essays, 453.
32. Remy de Gourmont, “La sensibilité de Jules Laforgue” [The Sensibility of Jules Laforgue], in Promenades littéraires [Literary Excursions] (Paris: Mercure de France, 1904), 105-106. The translation is mine. For the link between Eliot and de Gourmont’s essay, see Louis Menand, Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 170.
33. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” 247.
34. Jason Harding notes Eliot’s “nostalgia for Elizabeth Anglicanism and for a pan-European Catholic Christendom.” The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81.
35. T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent (1919),” in Selected Essays, 8.
36. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” 247.
37. T.S. Eliot, “Religion without Humanism,” in English Lion, 1930-1933, ed. Ronald Schuchard and Jason Harding, vol. 4 of The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot, 41.
38. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” 248. T.S. Eliot, “The Music of Poetry,” in On Poetry and Poets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), 17.
39. This became an “established orthodoxy” in cultural criticism. See Stefan Collini, “Where did it all go wrong? Cultural Critics and ‘Modernity’ in Inter-War Britain,” in The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate, ed. E. H. H. Green, D. M. Tanner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011),

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- 249; L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), 8.
40. Harding, The Criterion, 81.
41. T.S. Eliot, "To Geoffrey Faber (24 January 1926)," in The Letters of T.S. Eliot, 3:141. This letter is attached to Faber's letter to All Souls and is printed out of sequence. Geoffrey Faber, "To the Warden, All Souls College, Oxford (11 April 1926)," in The Letters of T.S. Eliot, 3:136-140.
42. Eliot, [Author's Preface to] The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 41.
43. Harding, The Criterion, 81.
44. Gish is willing to admit the terms are "not quite" the same, but the difference between "dissociation" and "disintegration" is not explored substantively. "Discarnate Desire," 114. T.S. Eliot, "Mr Robertson and Mr Shaw," in The Perfect Critic, 781; T.S. Eliot, "A Preface to Modern Literature," in The Perfect Critic, 485; T.S. Eliot, "Dante (1929)," in Selected Essays, 240.
45. In The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, Eliot placed Myers among "all the more eminent critical names" of the late Victorian era. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, in English Lion, 669. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated UPUC.
46. Taves, Fits, Trances, and Visions, 279.
47. See Jeffrey J. Kripal, Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 66-70.
48. Edward F. Kelly and Emily Williams Kelly, Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 77.
49. See Kripal, Authors of the Impossible, 60.
50. Kripal, Authors of the Impossible, 67-8.

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51. Frederic W.H. Myers, Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death, 2 vols. (London: Longmans Green 1903), 2:12, 2:15, quoted in Kelly and Kelly, Irreducible Mind, 73.
52. For a full account of these modifications, see Taylor, William James on Consciousness beyond the Margin, 40-96.
53. See Taylor, William James on Consciousness beyond the Margins, 79.
54. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 388. For Eliot's note see Notes on Philosophy, Houghton Library.
55. T.S. Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me (1950)," in To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 134.
56. Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 3rd ed. (New York: Dutton, 1911), 112. Works by Myers and James are listed in the bibliography of Mysticism.
57. Underhill, Mysticism, 325. For Eliot's note see Notes on Philosophy, Houghton Library.
58. T.S. Eliot, "Popular Theologians: Mr. Wells, Mr. Belloc, Mr. Murry," in Literature, Politics, Belief, 68.
59. Myers, Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death, 2:132.
60. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 173, 176, 235; Underhill, Mysticism, 468.
61. Gilbert Murray, "A Pagan Creed: Sallustius's 'De Diis et Mundo,'" English Review 4, no. 13 (December 1909): 24.
62. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 7.
63. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 8.
64. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 217-258.
65. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 7.

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66. For an introduction to the historical processes that shaped James's interest in mysticism and religious experience, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Making of Modern 'Mysticism'", Journal of the American Academy of Religion 71, no. 2 (2003): 279-281. James's use of mysticism has been much criticized over the last thirty years. For representative studies, see: Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Nicholas Lash, Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1988); Grace Jantzen, Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a more sympathetic re-imagining of James's work, see Ann Taves, Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3-53.
67. James Longenbach, Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot, and the Sense of the Past (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 220, 212-213.
68. Longenbach, Modernist Poetics of History, 220.
69. See Erik Tønning, "Old Dogmas for a New Crisis: Hell and Incarnation in T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden," in Modernism, Christianity and Apocalypse, ed. Erik Tønning, Matthew Feldman and David Addyman (Brill: Leiden, 2014), 236-259; Eliot's concern for dogma was notable in the years immediately following his 1927 baptism, but it had formed part of his criticism of liberal Christianity from 1916 onwards. See Ronald Schuchard, "Hulme of Original Sin," in Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art: Intersections of Life and Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52-69.
70. T.S. Eliot, "To Ottoline Morrell (30 November 1924)," in The Letters of T.S. Eliot, 2:546.
71. Eliot, "A Neglected Aspect of George Chapman," 552. The idea informed The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry and was later recycled in "John Marston (1934)," in Selected Essays, 229.

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72. T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in The Poems of T.S. Eliot: The Annotated Text, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols. (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 1:79-84. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated TSE.
73. Eliot, "A Neglected Aspect of George Chapman," 553.
74. Eliot, "A Neglected Aspect of George Chapman," 554.
75. Christopher Ricks, T.S. Eliot and Prejudice (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 219; Katherine Ebury, "'In this valley of dying stars:' Eliot's Cosmology," Journal of Modern Literature, vol. 35, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 152. See also David Spurr, Conflicts in Consciousness: T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Criticism (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 52.
76. Eliot, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, 149.
77. See Robert Crawford, Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Waste Land (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 388.
78. See: Matthew K. Gold, "The Expert Hand and the Obedient Heart: Dr. Vittoz, T.S. Eliot, and the Therapeutic Possibilities of The Waste Land," Journal of Modern Literature; vol. 23 no. 3/4 (Summer 2000): 522-523; Crawford, Young Eliot, 389-399.
79. See Amanda Jeremin Harris, "T.S. Eliot's Mental Hygiene," Journal of Modern Literature, vol. 29, no.4 (summer 2006): 47-48.
80. See Dr. Roger Vittoz, Treatment of Neurasthenia by means of Brain Control, trans. H.B. Brooke (London: Longmans Green, 1913), 1-3.
81. See: Harris, "T.S. Eliot's Mental Hygiene," 44-56; Crawford, Young Eliot, 388-399.
82. T.S. Eliot, Reading of "The Hollow Men" in The Waste Land and Other Poems, read by T.S. Eliot (Caedmon: New York, 1971), CDL 51326. This is a recording of the Morris Gray

Poetry Reading, Harvard, 13 May 1947. The vocal difference between “Headpiece filled with straw” and “Alas!” is greater in this later recording than the one he produced in 1933.

T.S. Eliot, Reading of “The Hollow Men,” Recorded, Harvard, 1933, Harvard Vocarium Records (March 1934).

83. A. David Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 125.

84. See Ronald Schuchard, “‘If I think, again, of this place:’ The Way to ‘Little Gidding,’” in Eliot’s Dark Angel, 175-197.

85. T. S. Eliot, A Sermon Preached in Magdalene College Chapel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 5.

86. Barry Spurr, “Anglo-Catholic in Religion:” T.S. Eliot and Christianity (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2010), 112.

87. See Taves, Fits, Trances and Visions, 269.

88. See James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 217-259.

89. See Taves, Fits, Trances and Visions, 277-279.

90. T.S. Eliot, Preface to For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays in Style and Order in Literature, Politics, Belief, 513-514, 513.

91. See Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 13-14.