

MADELEINE MYSTICISM STIGMAS BY PIERRE JANET.  
THE FAILURES OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL DISTANCING OF THE  
WORLD AS ANSWERS TO A CONGENITAL MALAISE?

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**Abstract.** Apparently, and at first sight, at least on the psychological level and not on the theological, or even empirical-physical level (as the parapsychological analysis of levitations does), the mystical hallucination and its stigmas of imitation would express the *non-dissociation* between the imaginary and the real within the synthesis *body-consciousness*. Thus, the Ego (composing the singular conative and cognitive synthesis and expressing itself through feelings (or judgments) of the I in the Self of the human world) focuses for long hours or even days, months, or years, on this non-dissociation or fixed point, a transcendental junction that forms the Absolute.

**Keywords:** hallucination, stigma, synthesis, conation, cognition, absolute

The Self embodies this *intersubjectivity* or “flesh”, said Husserl, “*of the body in act*”. This implies that when this Self deploys itself in the world (the *res extensa* of Descartes) it reasons, *thus* resounds, certainly, and at every moment. But it is not so simple because it is not a question of a “domination” in the sense of a clear caesura between the inertia and the action, but of the polyvalence of *positive* charges in the Comtian sense, and *negative* in the Hegelian way: since it is a question each time not only of unfolding or folding up, of preserving itself, but also of developing, refining itself to grow. Or the transcendence itself. The one linking the objective and subjective worlds. Except this *effort* (in the sense of Biran taken up by Janet) can (there) fail inevitably, especially if one makes a mistake in the diagnosis from the start.

Let us start, for example, with Janet's conclusion (1975 (1926), 38<sup>1</sup>) about her “Madeleine” (an assumed name for Pauline Lair Lamotte according to Jacques Maître reports Pierre-Henri Castel<sup>2</sup>):

(...) I adopted the hypothesis of a slowly evolving syringomyelia about a spinal cord malformation probably dating from early childhood.

What does this mean? Janet is reasoning as a doctor who reports an organic situation whose effectuation could have produced the ecstatic psychic state; which does not mean, however, that this one must be reduced to that one; that would be associationist, mechanistic materialism, which under the pretext of isolating a stem or source factor forgets to analyze also the various states of consciousness which allow to counter it. For the thing is there. What could Madeleine have done? Make herself dependent on her condition, on the doctors, by focusing on the physiological level, becoming a vegetative thing that would have been transported from the lecture hall of medicine to the cabinet of curiosities, whereas the Psyche of Madeleine makes something else of it, an ecstasy. This never ceases to intrigue Janet, in fact. And it is this first aspect that will interest us here, besides the phenomenological dimension perceived a second time.

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So made Janet her medical diagnosis. Three lines (*supra*). And yet he will devote hundreds of pages to the psychological aspect. Does this mean that he will underestimate the parapsychological aspect of Madeleine's mystical affirmations? This is not the problem. Some people, during this study day, have argued the opposite<sup>3</sup>. For example, considering that Janet would have been reluctant to admit certain connections in real-time, such as the transmission of thoughts (not to mention levitation) that he would have had with some of his patients (advising them to sleep while thinking about themselves, which was happening at that very moment, according

to those around them), Janet would have been hiding this parapsychological methodology *par excellence* of *remote* hypnosis for fear of seeing himself blocked in his institutional career. It is obviously impossible to deny or confirm such an assertion. And even if it were plausible, two major objections can be raised.

*Was Janet afraid to see himself as a self-aware "metapsychic" analyst?*

First, the epistemological state of the sciences, not only psychic but physical, did not allow in Janet's time to decide sufficiently in favour of Bohr rather than Einstein about the "non-separation of a wave function in a particle system" to state the question as Bertrand d'Espagnat did in *In Search of Reality*<sup>4</sup>. In other words, the EPR paradox. Janet could not, as it is, without this prior epistemological framework, prove in a way the *in situ* possibility of telepathy. Certainly, today, the probability that it can exist because of this non-separability is non-zero, also because of the analysis carried out on monozygotic twins showing that they can feel the same pains and even go through similar trials. But in Janet's time, it was not possible to scientifically insert these "new" problems of non-separability.

Secondly, and this is what will interest us most here<sup>5</sup>, Janet tries to define even more than Charcot, Ribot, and especially James, the properly psychological orb distinct from physiology as well as from medicine, a distinction from which a Freud will benefit (but with the ingratitude that we know<sup>6</sup>).

Basically, Janet does not attempt to ask whether the relationship to mysticism is plausible in "Madeleine", even if he expresses some doubts about the theological and poetic quality of her words (thus he judges the poems of another patient, Loetitia, to be more "interesting" (p.88); instead, Janet devotes all his observational effort to observing the various states of consciousness on the psycho-physiological, psycho-cognitive, and psycho-motivational levels, in short, he attempts to develop psycho-dynamic analysis to

its full extent. Thus, his scientific interest consists in observing how body and mind “manage” in a way their congenital deficiency, how they manage to compensate for the organic difficulties by a kind of effervescence of the mental conduct.

In fact, Janet takes the exact opposite view of the Romantic movement in philosophy and literature, considering that it is precisely this kind of physiological or psychic fault that would be at *work* in the emergence of *the work*. Thus, the creative genius of a Hölderlin would be the fruit of his "madness" whereas the opposite is more likely: in order to counter his crises, he writes a lot, in a more and more illegible way it seems, but thus compensates the gap by an overcrowding of concentration. This is reminiscent of Pinel's observations who, after having disenchanted them, advised to give work to the insane of his time, a method that is not well understood even recently when one can read the complete misunderstandings that Michel Foucault made in his *Histoire de la folie* (1966<sup>7</sup>); misunderstandings pointed out by Gladys Swain (1977<sup>8</sup>).

How does Madeleine compensate herself? By going towards states of consciousness which seem to relieve her, or even fill her with happiness, such as kindness - she is known to be very helpful from a very young age - empathy towards human suffering, but very little towards her own, and finally long meditations peppered with ecstasy. It is not a question of saying that without her organic deficiency noted by Janet, this acuity would not have been there, but of observing that a correlation can be envisaged between a given organic state and a hyper dynamization of such a state of consciousness whose endocrine hormonal mobilization, by bringing pleasure, not only compensates for the deficiency but also allows to forget it.

This is not just any reading. It would make it possible to understand why such a disposition of action, such a motivation, can also have at its root such and such a “pain” without reducing this one to that one; which is in any case foreign to the Janetian method, distancing itself from physicalism, associationism, and the mono-factorization supposed to explain such and such causality.

Madeleine thus allowed Janet to study in a clinical and also theoretical way the ecstatic behaviours noted elsewhere in a number of illustrious authors without, however, proposing any value judgement on their content (*Op. cit.*, 1975, pp. 119-120, T.1):

As I do not have to discuss in the least the objective truth of the ideas and feelings whose psychological mechanism I am analysing, as I do not have to look for whether Madeleine is really transformed into God, any more than I used to look, in connection with possession, for whether the body of poor Achilles was really inhabited by the devil, I can take the word delirium in the sense of a set of beliefs accompanied by complete certainty and opposed to the appearances which determine the beliefs of ordinary men. The ecstasy will be then in summary a crisis of optimistic and immobile religious delirium.

Is this conclusion sufficient on another level, the phenomenological, in the sense of identifying the human *dimension*, *i.e.*, the socio-cognitive and conative role of psycho-physical phenomena such as religious delirium? Janet is not concerned with this aspect but with the proper psychological side in the sense of observing how behaviour is modified and how the body justifies this.

But if we want to study the functional role of the absolute as an eschatological limit necessary for the delimitation of the Self<sup>9</sup>, let us define the search for the absolute as *being* what seems to be a *phase agreement* - or ecstasy - between the body/spirit *and* the world also filled with bodies/spirits. This agreement, also in the sense of the Platonic mediation - proportion - of the cosmological communion is the justice itself -that balance between the stable (good), the coherent (beautiful) and the exact (true) - whose dialectical reading is a "delirium", in the Platonic sense of having the feeling to be, if not the world itself, at least to "read" " all the geometry of the links that weave body/mind/world in so many *relations* ("no one enters here if he is not a geometer" was written on the pediment of the Academy).

Janet captures this *agreement*, for example in Magdalene's displayed sexuality with God (*Op. cit.*, T.1, p. 67):

Madeleine, who is, in reality and has been all her life the most modest and chaste of women, loses all modesty in certain crises of ecstasy and shows us

brutally that she is not only the daughter of God, the mother of God, but that she is also the mistress or, if you like, the wife of God and that she knows how to be him completely.

And all this desire of "union", this carnal actualization of the *mathesis universalis* - would say Leibnitz, reflecting with Plato - turns out to be also what Hegel delivers to us, delivers, also in the "absolute knowledge" itself prolonging, amplifying Kant and his transcendental synthesis or the original and synthetic unity of the apperception with the imagination - this was besides the real *starting point* of Heidegger "moving away" from Husserl. Now, the latter had succeeded in moving away from this too globalizing and speculative temptation (which can be spotted even in Heidegger, who moreover ethicises it by the "purified" historicity as analysed by Leo Strauss). Husserl has indeed developed a weighted method of observation of the Self (by *the epoche*) by considering that it is not necessary to speculate on the global combinations to observe their *restricted* application in the sense of delimiting for analysis local perceptive fields, anyway crossed by these global combinations, that it is necessary thereafter to weight by multiform verifications.

To realize this complexity, some of Madeleine's behaviours can help. Francesca Biagi-Chai<sup>10</sup> relates this:

It happened to Madeleine, in the presence of abnormal noises, such as the noise caused by new shoes or the grinding of a saw, to be taken of shivers and violent shakes, being able to go until the fainting.

How can we read this sequence? By positing this: if Madeleine flinches at the slightest sound not previously integrated into the ordinary, *i.e.*, in reality transcendental, setting of the world - in the sense of inserting each sound into a reading grid that is both local and universal -, this hypersensitivity would indicate an *absence of prior synthesis*, which forms the ego in Janet. This *Synthesis* has, as its object, to precisely hierarchize the order of importance of the interacted data according to the *hic et nunc* balance of the tendencies. This absence of synthesis implies either that the pressure of the

physiological failure from which Madeleine suffers would be the cause of it, or that its psychic compensation, namely the exacerbation of the mystical reading of the world, comes to phenomenize each sound in the sense of discovering its emergence each time and to startle when this last one tries to be integrated with the intimate synthesis of time, the circular temporality, its horizontality, in a word when an "abnormal" noise presents itself as a sensitivity, a vibration, of which it is necessary to give a sense in a local, syntactic, cultural frame, in a word global as presence also of the human world in every moment.

All this reading is possible, and it would be very fruitful from this point of view to decipher each symptom related, in this study, with Madeleine. We would then see that the phenomenological explanation, while being specific, profoundly reinforces the psychological analysis of the absence of synthesis which characterizes Janet's hysteria and of which the religious delirium can be one of the modes, which could moreover be studied in the study of fanaticism.

## NOTES

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