

Poésie et vie mystique chez saint Jean de la Croix by Max Milner. Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1947.

The Poems of St John of the Cross. The Spanish text with a translation by Roy Campbell. London: Harvill Press, 1951.

Saint Jean de la Croix et Le Problème de l'expérience mystique by Jean Baruzi. Second edition. Paris : Librairie Félix Alcan, 1931.

Le Sens de L'Existence selon S. Jean de la Croix by Georges Morel. Three volumes. Paris : Aubier, 1960-61.

The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross. Doctor of the Church. Translated from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. and edited by E. Allison Peers. Three volumes. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, 1933-35.

Numerous editions and translations of the work of St John of the Cross have been made as well as innumerable studies. Nonetheless, the five works reviewed here remain some of the standard texts necessary for understanding the background to Lacan's interest in the saint. Lacan refers to John of the Cross in S1, S3, S14 and S20. Allison Peers' three volumes is a masterful translation and has excellent introductions which mix fascinating everyday bits of information with serious textual scholarship as well as some deep insights. The introduction to the third volume amounts in great part to a refutation of various ideas in Jean Baruzi's reading of John of the Cross. Baruzi had taught Lacan philosophy at the Lycée and later they formed a friendship. Baruzi went on from the Collège Stanislaus to teach at the Sorbonne (1926-1928) and at the Collège de France (1933-1953) where Michel de Certeau, one of half a dozen Jesuits associated with Lacan, was among those who attended his last seminars on mystical literature. These proved to be an inspiration for de Certeau, one to which he would feel in debt when developing his own reading of John of the Cross.

The works of the saint form a connected whole in terms of mystical teaching. This includes, importantly, the idea that the soul is cleansed through a 'night without senses' in which it is detached from all sensible devotion, maintaining itself in faith. After a period of rest this is followed by a second purification 'the night of the spirit' when the soul is further spiritualised. This second cleansing is accompanied by great suffering in order for it to be transformed through a union with the divine described as a living flame.

Baruzi had been greatly influenced by Husserl's notion of experience, and was a student of Bergson, as well as being an authority on Leibniz's philosophy of salvation. *Saint Jean de la Croix et Le Problème de l'expérience mystique* is his doctoral thesis, which was the result of research he had been carrying out since 1910, but only published in 1924. It is an extremely sophisticated and erudite study, which attempts to analyse the mystical writings of John of the Cross according to a Neoplatonic metaphysical framework. As a work of scholarship, it belongs to a tradition that could be called philological, and consists of a rigorous and historical analysis of the vocabulary and the thought of John of the Cross. The documents being placed in their time, in order to reveal the philosophical implications of the mystical language of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But although an exceptionally influential book, it was widely criticised. By adopting a phenomenological stance, Baruzi positioned himself with the

new wave of Catholic philosophers and theologians, which included Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, both of whom he cited in his thesis. They were leading figures in the revival of Thomism, which focussed on returning to Thomas' sources in the philosophy of Aristotle, setting Thomas within the medieval context, and rigorously applying the methods of historical critical research on texts. However, it was not only neo-scholastic scholars that found fault with Baruzi's approach. Even Maritain, who considered himself a friend of Baruzi, was critical of fundamental aspects of the work which he characterised as Leibnizian. Baruzi's works on John of the Cross also included a substantive entry in 1948 in the *Histoire générale des religions* (Paris: Aristide Quillet), and informed much of the lengthy study on the mystic in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953: LIII: 408-47).

Baruzi also contributed an interesting preface to Max Milner's *Poésie et vie mystique chez saint Jean de la Croix*. While the second half of this small volume is devoted to a French translation of some of the poems of John of the Cross, the first half is a discussion of the relationship between language and the unspeakable. Can poetry, that is to say, somehow put into words that which cannot be symbolised? The fact that the author even asks this ambiguous, impenetrable question suggests that he thinks poetry and the mystical share the same territory. Although his complete poems add up to less than three thousand verses, two of them, the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Dark Night of the Soul*, are widely considered masterpieces of Spanish poetry, both for their formal style and their rich symbolism and imagery. The theological works of John of the Cross often consist of commentaries on the poems. All the works were written between 1578 and his death in 1591.

Georges Morel's study aimed to make sense of the conception of human existence, as it is found in the work of John of the Cross, in terms of Heidegger's thought. In each volume Morel, at that time still a Jesuit, examines the question from a different perspective. Namely, the problematic, logic and symbolic.

The lives of Baruzi, Gilson and Maritain, and indeed of Milner and Morel, intersected with Lacan. All had a long-standing interest in mysticism. Roudinesco noted the influence that Gilson, through his association with Baruzi, had on Lacan.

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