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Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud and Jean-René Valette, eds., *Le discours mystique entre Moyen Âge et première modernité.* Vol. 1, *La question du langage.* Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019. 578 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. €85.00 (pb). ISBN 9782745349644; €85.00 (eb). ISBN 9782745349644.

Review by Rachel J. Smith, University of Villanova

This volume of essays offers a wealth of perspectives on mystical discourse across a significant span of figures, periods, genres, from the fifth through the eighteenth centuries, from scholastic theology to secular love poetry to monastic practice, from medievalists and modernists, historians, philosophers, theologians, phenomenologists and literary scholars. The volume opens by venturing the premise of the conditional "*if* it is true" that mysticism was born in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was rendered a substantive, then following Boileau, the "mystics are moderns" (p. 9). However, it seeks to move between a "before and after" relative to this modern formation of mysticism to consider its antecedents, or as it says, to articulate a "history of the development of mysticism before the history of mysticism" (p. 9). This history is one of ruptures and continuities, of influence and the transformation of inheritance, a movement from finding the hidden mystery of God in scripture through hermeneutic practices exercised upon the text, to the contemplation of the life of Christ and participation in the sacraments that reinstitute it and form the mystical body of Christ, to an early modern emphasis on an experiential encounter with divinity (p. 17).

The theoretical patron saint overseeing this venture is Michel de Certeau. His oversight comes in two forms. First, there is his insistence that one can only speak *"la" mystique* as an historical formulation, "a historically circumscribed object" (p. 13). (De Certeau uses the noun *la mystique* rather than *le mysticisme. La mystique* refers to those figures and writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who understood themselves and were considered to be "mystic" by their contemporaries. By avoiding the generic term "mysticism," de Certeau limits his inquiry to a discrete and coherent historical phenomenon. What application his work has for the wider study of "mysticism," if any, is a question this volume seeks to address.) Second, there is his insistence, not unrelated to the first, that mysticism is a matter of language. Mystical thought is "fundamentally a manner of speaking" (p. 14). The implications of such an approach are many. But here is a big one: although the introduction approvingly quotes Jean Baruzi's statement that "at its core, mysticism escapes history as it escapes language, but history and language constitute its body, and if the projection is faithful the depths of the soul may perhaps be divined" (p. 13) and continues to use the metaphorics of soul and body in relation to language and mysticism (e.g., p. 14), the volume does not articulate an understanding of the "mystical" as constituted by the perennial function of unveiling, a revelation of a timeless inner secret that is *shrouded* by

historical phenomena. To render such a view in linguistic terms would be to equate mystical discourse with the apophatic, requiring an understanding of unsaying as an act untethered to cataphasis. Mystic speech would then become a tool by which one simply transcends language and history--an apophasis figured as a tool entirely independent and innocent of time and culture. Instead, the essays explore the various ways that mystical discourse emerges in the tension between and the play of saying and unsaying, voice and silence, history and timelessness.

Invoking Jacques Le Brun, the editors Gomez-Géraud and Valette note a second important consequence of a Certeau-inspired approach: the undoing of the "illusion that a word refers to a thing," the "thing" being a living reality rendered available by means of language but ultimately standing independently of it (p. 25). Although the linguistic turn in the study of mysticism has been called reductionistic--reducing experience of the divine to a discursive formulation which it does not and cannot transcend--for Le Brun and the editors, it allows readers of mystical works to apprehend the richness and performative power of language in mystical discourse. Le Brun, for example, argues that Theresa of Avila is a writer for whom the work of writing is "never a passive means of translation," but rather an invitation to "situate the location of [mystical] experience in the work of the writer" (p. 25). Thus this is not only an articulation of the view that what scholars of mysticism have access to are texts, not experience proper, but that writing--language--is not the concession to the human condition of embodied finitude or a dilution of an intensity of originary experience and so that which the mystic should, properly speaking, seek to transcend. Instead it is the historically rooted space and activity in and through which mysticism occurs, a space of play, discovery, invention. "Mystical experience is a work of language" (p. 23).

The book is divided into three parts, each with a number of chapters. The first, "Mystical Languages," is organized according to the language of mystical texts and considers the historical contexts of particular linguistic forms. It begins with Jean-Yves Tilliette's study of Latinity in significant authors (including Hildegard, Bonaventure, Abelard), then offers essays on Gallic languages from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, including studies of Clémence of Barking by Françoise Laurent, the possibilities of a French lexicon for mystical discourse in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Marie-Pascale Halary, a study of French mystical discourse at the end of the Middle ages by Geraldine Veysseyre, and an essay on the sixteenth-century poem *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* by Marguerite de Navarre, the first mystical poem printed in French, by Isabelle Garnier.

The second section of the first part of the book treats other vernacular languages in Europe. It begins with a study by Maxime Mauriège of Middle High German in Rheinland mystics, especially Eckhart. Mauriège opens with a concern about the validity of the epithet "rhenish" to describe a group of mystics (he decides it is indeed a licit category). More interesting in my view is his examination of the use of the terms *Lesemeister* and *Lebemeister* to describe the different sides of Eckhart's work. He quotes Alain de Libera who argues that between 1300 and 1360 Ekchart, Tauler and Suso "upset the way of thinking and living Christianity" by inventing a type of intellectual that had not yet been known in the medieval world. This is the figure of a "master of reading" who is simultaneously a "master of life" (p. 154). (I would note that this formulation hearkens back to a venerable tradition in Christianity, and figures such as Origen, desert ascetics like Evagrius, and Gregory the Great for whom reading is an ascetic and transformative practice not subject to a notion of the intellectual endeavor as separable from spiritual progress). What was particular to this fourteenth-century context was that these masters, intellectual professionals, also spoke in the vernacular to lay audiences that did not have expertise in

philosophy or systematics (p. 154). Moreover, the content of the teaching in each context was differently framed. In one, the Latin, it was overseen by supervised reading; in the other, the vernacular, the authority was an inner light, or as Saying 8, attributed to Eckhart, says, if I am seeking a master of scripture, I go to Paris; if I am seeking the perfect life, I need to go nowhere but live out of a "naked and free nature." This difference has been used to shore up a distinction between scholasticism and mysticism and construct an image of Eckhart for whom his extensive Parisian learning was entirely separable from (and disposable with regards to) his teaching about the spiritual life, a difference that was, in various sayings and authors that are roughly contemporary with Eckhart, hierarchized such that it is said that a single *Lebemeister* is "worth a thousand *Lesemeistern*" (p. 156). (Such a valorization of learning through experience, the wisdom of the poor, of women, is continuous with trends begun in the twelfth century in which a gospel principle of inversion--the first shall be last, the last first--can be seen in the turn to the witness of poor women documented in many hagiographies, and figures such as St. Francis in his devotion to Lady Poverty, and thus is not surprising here, especially in a Dominican context). Mauriège argues ultimately that it is false to create a rigid opposition between the master of life and the master of reading, between the Latin teaching travelling under the adjective "scholastic" and the German as "mystical." We could see such a view, I would argue, as a retroactive imposition of a notion of the mystical that emerges in early modernity, as documented extensively in this volume. Mauriège shows that Eckhart often preaches in German what he also taught in Latin, and that he often extended spiritual teaching to his university students. Moreover, for Mauriège, Eckhart's mystical vernacularity demonstrates not only a transposition of Latin into German, but a creative regeneration of the possibilities of Latinity in a new context that allows for new kinds of thought through different modes of language. This is testified to by the neologisms generated in German through the transposition of Latin philosophical terms into German and the context of the *cura animarum* (165), as well as a rhetorical and stylistic transformations of theological discourse. (168)

Joost Roger Robbe examines the relationship between Latin and Middle High Dutch in the *devotio moderna*, noting two important elements that emerge from its treatment. First, he examines the understanding of Latinity and vernacularity in the movement's founder, Geert Grote. Grote was trained in Latin and translated Latin into the vernacular and vice versa. In writing about the nature of translation, he exalts clarity and simplicity. He also described using Dutch as a sensual experience, like eating or musical harmony. Latin, in contrast, is described as intellective. In the former, one digests with the senses; in the latter, with the spirit. It is the digestion of the senses that is more immediate. However, this difference is ultimately subsumed under the larger issues of pragmatic concern rather than becoming caught up with deciding how to rank the spiritual essence of a language. For Grote and those who followed him, all language is simply a vehicle and all languages have a capacity to communicate transcendent realities. The ethical corollary of this is that vernacular translations of the bible are not illicit. However, despite this ontological flattening of languages, later authors of the *devotio moderna* whom Robbe calls mystics also pick up on Grote's understanding of the sensuality of the mother tongue, and appeal to the language of the senses to describe and facilitate "intimate communion" with God. Grote's views about Latin and Dutch thus bequeath to the *devotio moderna* a "dynamism and equilibrium between rationality and affectivity" (p. 180). Following Robbe, there is a study of poetic aspects of the Spanish of Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Fray Luis de León by Bernard Darbord.

The second part of the book considers some key thematic issues in mystical discourse. The first is silence. This includes a study of the Christian discourse of interiority in relation to silence from

Gregory the Great to Peter Damien (Patrick Henriet) and Anne Mantero's examination of the role of voice and silence in French lyric of the seventeenth century. Henriet's essay pushes back against an imagining of mysticism as "essentially" arising in the twelfth century when, he argues, a notion of that which lies *beyond* language in silence becomes dominant. His essay is significant in its insistence that monastic forms of life based on a Rule that enjoins silence is on the one hand not the same thing as high medieval mystical silence, but it is not unrelated to it either. He thus pushes back against a construction of the mystical as independent of discipline or communal existence under a Rule. Henriet argues that medieval silence was silent not by virtue of a contrast with sound or vocal prayers, but rather in contrast to the "noise of the world" (p. 206). It was "possible to fill silence without compromising it," he writes (p. 206), offering a helpful understanding of the acoustics of liturgy, as it were. The essay then turns to a detailed study of Gregory the Great's notion of the "wall of silence," which image Henriet tracks through Paul to Bernard and turns to a substantive consideration of Peter Damien.

A second theme is love. Jean-René Valette writes about *mystiques courtoises* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the transformations of discourses of love in that context. He invokes A. Guerreau-Jalabert who argues that, if love is a *grande affaire* that relies upon the regulation of sexuality, what one sees with the aristocratic construction of courtly love is a form that serves to legitimate the aims and structure of that class. In particular, its purpose is "to evaluate the respective weights of carnal bonds and spiritual bonds in the organization of society" (256). The ideology of love that emerges to control sociality and sexuality in this context is a product in large part of Christian ideals, and many scholars have noted how "mystical" the troubadours are, emerging at a time when, as per Jacques le Goff, heavenly ideals "descended from heaven to earth," or Certeau's claim that from the twelfth century, "a slow demythification of religion seems to have accompanied a mythification of love" (p. 255). Valette shows how Chrétien de Troyes articulates, through a blending of erotic and religious codes, a vision of "spiritual flesh" through the union of Lancelot and Guinevere's bodies in the context of a poem that is concerned with establishing the difference and relation between the inside and the outside, the spiritual and the carnal. The moment of the lovers' union is, he argues, the "privileged moment in *fin amor*," yet one that is "difficult to hold" and happens in the "obscure night," following upon Lancelot's adventures that are patterned on familiar religious themes (p. 264). Valette names this vision subversive. I wondered if he meant subversive of a construction of spiritual flesh one finds in many ascetic texts, wherein the spiritual flesh is the *spiritualized* flesh that attains to erotic union with the divine beloved but only at the cost of a bodily mortification that demands almost everything (not unlike a courtly knight's travails in service of his beloved). I think, for example, of the contemporary Aelred of Rievaulx's *Rule for a Recluse*. How does Chrétien's scene refigure this ascetic pattern and allow for the "eminent value" of physical pleasure in such a way that the poem is not merely reversible as an allegory of the spiritual path as understood by his contemporaries? How might we articulate these pleasures as different enough to not be collapsible into one another through allegorical interpretations?

Véronique Ferrer continues attention to the discourse of love in a study of that poetry that has been termed representative of the "conversion of the muses" from approximately 1570-1630, when the poet's object of adoration shifted from woman to God. Does the conversion of the heart, she asks, demand a conversion of language? Her study is richly contextual, including consideration of philosophical frameworks, the historical context of the Reformation, and biblical models of writing.

The last section of this part of the book explores "mystical language and the mysticism of language" with, first, a study by Isabelle Fabre of the complexities of the motif of illumination in the writings of Marguerite Porete, Marguerite de Navarre, Jean Gerson and Jean Thenaud. She outlines the literary strategies and rhetorical pathways by which these writers shed light on the question of illumination; reading them as connected despite their varied aims--didactic, polemical, and panegyric-- she also shows how their writings shed light on one another.

Bruno Petey-Girard's essay looks at royal statutes and other texts by Henry III. The ascetic king there encouraged a devotional life of disciplined interiority, and the language of his works "testifies to the force of its evocation as much to its trivialization" (p. 316). Josiane Rieu's essay explores the performative power of language as a temporal medium, considering the "temporality of poetic language," particularly in the poetry of P. de Croix. The theological premise of the essay--one that supports the Certeaulian hermeneutic outlined at the outset of this review--is that despite the impossibility of speech defining the divine or an experience of God, biblical tradition presents God as revealed through language, whether that be in dialogue with God, the communication of the decalogue, or the incarnation of the word. Thus, language itself not only defines the gap between infinite divinity and finite humanity, but it offers itself as the living bridge between them. "Poetic time" is a space of celebration and praise through which a transformation occurs in both reader and the words of the poem (p. 332).

A chapter by Cédric Giraud and François Trémolières, written in two voices yet emerging from long conversation between the authors, speaks to the historical wager that underlies the volume; they ask whether Certeau would have agreed with the notion of a "diptych" to which the volume appeals (the conversation between medieval and modern in the question of mystical language). This is a question of how to understand the "mystical" in relation to Certeau's periodization according to which the mystical is constituted in the sixteenth century. At this time, rather than treat mysticism as an adjectival supplement to a variety of substantives (think here of "mystical theology"), it becomes an autonomous science with texts, procedures, itineraries, and experiences proper to itself. The authors argue that Certeau provides not only this genealogy but tools and ways of approaching materials that allow us to apply and question his own model according to other time periods, as this volume seeks broadly to do.

The third part of the book contains studies of particular authors placed next to one another, though written by different scholars. The editors offer them as "diptychs" by virtue of how they are placed in the volume. Comparisons are not made explicitly by the scholars, and this allows the reader to consider figures together that typically would be held apart, whether by periodization or linguistic home. Bernard of Clairvaux is placed next to Calvin, by Anne-Marie Pelletier and Olivier Millet respectively. The second diptych is of Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross (Pierre Gire and Jean Canavaggio), and the third is Bonaventure and Francis de Sales (Laure Solignac and Hélène Michon).

The final essay in the book, poetically located under the heading of "Ouverture"--offered as both the opening and closure of the book--is by the late Jean-Louis Chrétien. As a phenomenological portrait of mystic speech, it occupies a different place from the other essays in the volume. If the book has offered a thick historicism for scholars of mysticism, the presence of this essay demonstrates that it yet does not buy into a historicism that rules out the quest for a divine knowledge. The essay articulates the demand, here historically unmarked, to speak not as an analysis or description of an encounter with the divine, but as response that can only ever emerge

from human finitude and thus is always both citing the habituated language of human life and yet, in the attempt to adequately respond to a divine interlocutor, "doing violence" to it. It is thus a form of critical speech, a speech suspended in the tensile space between "legality and the illegal," between the point of focus and the unseen (p. 518). What is notable in Chrétien's portrait is the vulnerability of such a speaker and the fragility that comes of speaking. The heroics of the spiritual master is not for Chrétien's mystic. One who ventures a word of response to an encounter with God wrestles with ordinary language and, like Jacob, takes on woundedness, but under a sublime sign of power and blessings.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud and Jean-René Valette, "Avant-propos : Le diptyque, le carré et le discours"

Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud and Jean-René Valette, "Introduction: Entre histoire et langage, le discours mystique"

Part One, Langues mystiques

Jean-Yves Tilliette,"Latin mystique"

Françoise Laurent, "Une version anglo-normande des noces mystiques de Sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie par Clémence, nonne de Barking"

Marie-Pascale Halary, "Parler de Dieu en français au tournant des XIIe et XIIIe siècles: l'émergence d'un discours mystique dans une langue nouvelle?"

Géraldine Veysseyre, "Langue d'oïl et spiritualité: conditions et attestations d'un discours mystique en français à la fin du Moyen Âge"

Isabelle Garnier, "*Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* de Marguerite de Navarre: le premier poème mystique imprimé en vernaculaire français (1531)"

Maxime Mauriège, "Spécificités du langage de la mystique allemande dite 'rhénane'"

Joost Roger Robbe, "La place du latin et du vernaculaire dans le mouvement de la *Devotio moderna*"

Bernard Darbord, "Les mystiques espagnols (XVIe siècle): quelques aspects de leur expression poétique"

Part Two, Du silence au dire mystique

Patrick Henriet, "*Murus silentii*: La construction de l'intériorité par le silence, de Grégoire le Grand à Pierre Damien"

Anne Mantero, "Voix et silence mystique dans le lyrisme français du XVIIe siècle"

Jean-René Valette, "Mystiques courtoises: la *fin'amor* et le Graal (XIIe-XIIIe siècle)"

Véronique Ferrer, "De la 'Muse charnelle' à la 'Muse Éternelle': deux langages en miroir"

Isabelle Fabre, "L''Espartissement des nuées': l'expression littéraire de l'illumination, du *Miroir* de Marguerite Porete aux *Prisons* de Marguerite de Navarre"

Bruno Petey-Girard, "Henri III et la tentation mystique, ou les marges incertaines d'une langue"

Josiane Rieu, "La temporalité du langage poétique comme mystère"

Cédric Giraud and François Trémolières, "Qu'est-ce qu'une fable mystique? Lectures croisées de Michel de Certeau entre Moyen Âge et époque moderne"

Part Three, Diptyques d'écrivains mystiques

Anne-Marie Pelletier, "Saint Bernard lecteur du *Cantique des cantiques:* un moine au 'jardin des métaphores'"

Olivier Millet, "Calvin mystique?"

Pierre Gire, "Transcendance et langage chez Maître Eckhart"

Jean Canavaggio, "Entre tradition et création: le *Cantique spirituel* de Jean de la Croix"

Laure Solignac, "De l'*Ekstasis* dionysienne à l'*Excessus* bonaventurien: une incarnation du langage mystique"

Hélène Michon, "La langue de la mystique selon François de Sales"

Jean-Louis Chrétien, "La parole perdue et retrouvée"

Rachel J. Smith
University of Villanova
rachel.j.smith@villanova.edu

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