



Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin

By Professor Peter Tracey Connor

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When Sartre referred to Georges Bataille as a "new mystic," he meant the label as an insult. Sartre considered mysticism to be a less rigorous mode of inquiry than philosophy -- especially dangerous where the writings of mystics adapt philosophical terminology for different purposes. In *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, Peter Connor argues that literary scholars, eager to represent Bataille as a philosopher or as an early deconstructionist, have tended to neglect or misunderstand Bataille's interest in mysticism. Connor's study corrects this distorted view of Bataille, giving us a more complete picture of the complex and influential writer.

With careful attention to Bataille's historical and intellectual context, Connor raises many important questions: What drew Bataille to the mystics? How did he conceive of their thought in relation to his own? And what is the connection between mysticism and morality? This last question raises an especially interesting issue for Bataille, an atheist whom readers generally associate with images of transgression and sin. Through examination of Bataille's writings -- including *Inner Experience* and his underappreciated final book, *Tears of Eros* -- Connor shows the surprising connection between Bataille's mysticism and his sense of personal and political ethics. Mysticism, Connor argues, lies at the heart of Bataille's double identity as an intellectual and as a kind of anarchic prophet.

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Review

"This book will contribute to the study of ethics by opening up a new field of writing, Bataille's mystical writings, for study." -- Virginia Quarterly Review

"Peter Tracey Connor's *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* is three books in one: a sure-footed analysis of Bataille's notion of 'inner experience' and its distinction from experiences of mystical transport, an equally astute appraisal of a central conception of language, morality, and politics for contemporary critical thought, and a vivid implied history of the reasons why literary theory is practiced and resisted today... an elegant and concise book... indispensable for a wide range of scholars in the fields of religious studies, French studies, and art history." -- Ulrich Baer, MLN

"*Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* does a commendable job of demonstrating the extent to which Bataille's Sadean corpus remains indebted to Christian mystics such as Meister Eckert and Jakob Boehme." - Richard Wolin, Bookforum

"A careful study of Bataille's 'inner experience' and a sensitive analysis of the ways in which the ecstatic experiences Bataille describes inflect the author's style, his political engagements, and his ethical convictions." -- Milo Sweedler, French Review

Review

"In its clarity of exposition, in its eloquence, and in its awareness of the larger sweep of literature and philosophy, Connor's book is clearly one of the best on Bataille. In its careful isolation of problems and extremely rigorous and systematic elaboration of themes, it is in a class by itself. It will be a standard reference on Bataille." -- Allan Stoekl, Pennsylvania State University, author of *Agonies of the Intellectual: Commitment, Subjectivity, and the Performative in the Twentieth-Century French Tradition*

About the Author

Peter Tracey Connor is an associate professor of French and comparative literature at Barnard College, Columbia University.

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