



# Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy

By Gerald L. Bruns

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As a novelist, essayist, critic, and theorist, Maurice Blanchot has earned tributes from authors as diverse as Jacques Derrida, Giles Deleuze, and Emmanuel Levinas. But their praise has told us little about what Blanchot's work actually says and why it has been so influential. In the first comprehensive study of this important French writer to appear in English, Gerald Bruns ties Blanchot's writings to each other and to the works of his contemporaries, including the poet Paul Celan.

Blanchot belongs to the generation of French intellectuals who came of age during the 1930s, survived the Occupation, and flourished during the quarter century or so after World War II. He was one of the first French intellectuals to take a systematic interest in questions of language and meaning. His focus in the mid-1930s on extreme situations—death, madness, imprisonment, exile, revolution, catastrophe—anticipated the later interest of the existentialists. Like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Adorno, Blanchot was a self-conscious writer of fragments, and he has given us one of the most developed investigations that we have on the fragment as a kind of writing.

In a series of close readings, Bruns addresses the philosophical and political questions that have surrounded Blanchot and his writings for decades. He describes what is creative in Blanchot's readings of Heidegger's controversial works and examines Blanchot's conception of poetry as an inquiry into the limits of philosophy, rationality, and power.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"A broad, erudite knowledge of the many literary and intellectual lines of force which criss-cross Blanchot's substantial *oeuvre*."

(Ian Pindar *Times Literary Supplement*)

"Bruns' study is the first in-depth study in English devoted to Blanchot's thought and, for want of a better word, theory. It is overdue and most welcome."

(Michael Bishop *Dalhousie French Studies*)

"Bruns's landmark study illuminates not only Blanchot's complex *oeuvre* but the entire intellectual horizon of French thought during the last half of the 20th century."

(*Choice*)

"As the first full English language study of Blanchot, this book is a fine introduction to the major work of this oft overlooked French master."

(Thomas Lecky *Review of Contemporary Fiction*)

"Through careful analyses of this shadowy author's writings on literature, the community, interpersonal relations, and the 'disaster,' Bruns allows us to decipher for the first time the logic of Blanchot's anarchism. Beyond the obvious importance of stressing Blanchot's anarchism as a way of clearing up much of the confusions concerning the intellectual origins of current theories of the 'postmodern,' Bruns provides the reader with a most useful explication of the real starting point for Blanchot's theory: the essay 'Literature and the Right to Death.' His scholarship is absolutely sound."

(Allan Stoekl, Pennsylvania State University)

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### About the Author

**Gerald L. Bruns** is William P. and Hazel B. White Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. His books include *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* and *Heidegger's Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings*.

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