



## Last Steps: Maurice Blanchot's Exilic Writing

*By Christopher Fynsk*

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Writing, Maurice Blanchot taught us, is not something that is in one's power. It is, rather, a search for a nonpower that refuses mastery, order, and all established authority. For Blanchot, this search was guided by an enigmatic exigency, an arresting rupture, and a promise of justice that required endless contestation of every usurping authority, an endless going out toward the other.

"The step/not beyond" ("le pas au-delà") names this exilic passage as it took form in his influential later work, but not as a theme or concept, because its "step" requires a transgression of discursive limits and any grasp afforded by the labor of the negative. Thus, to follow "the step/not beyond" is to follow a kind of event in writing, to enter a movement that is never quite captured in any defining or narrating account.

Last Steps attempts a practice of reading that honors the exilic exigency even as it risks drawing Blanchot's reflective writings and fragmentary narratives into the articulation of a reading. It brings to the fore Blanchot's exceptional contributions to contemporary thought on the ethico-political relation, language, and the experience of human finitude. It offers the most sustained interpretation of The Step Not Beyond available, with attentive readings of a number of major texts, as well as chapters on Levinas's and Blanchot's relation to Judaism. Its trajectory of reading limns the meaning of a question from The Infinite Conversation that implies an opening and a singular affirmation rather than a closure: "How had he come to will the interruption of the discourse?"

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"The itinerary of *Last Steps* is unique and initially surprising: the ethico-political import of Blanchot's postwar writings, and particularly *The Step Not Beyond*. But in the course of this brilliant and compelling reading, Christopher Fynsk demonstrates that Blanchot's political engagement is central not just to his thinking about resistance or community or the events of 1968 but to everything from his views on freedom, justice, and messianic hope, to his practices of reading, critical vigilance, and fragmentary writing. No one is more capable than Fynsk of taking on these difficult subjects, and no one writes on Blanchot with this degree of erudition, rigor, patience, and sensitivity to the complexity and nuances of Blanchot's writing as well as to everything that resists interpretation and must remain unspoken within it. This is a remarkable work of criticism about one of the twentieth century's most remarkable writers." (Michael Naas, DePaul University *DePaul University*)

"Christopher Fynsk in *Last Steps* offers a strikingly original and subtly captivating account of some of Maurice Blanchot's most challenging work and demonstrates with acute sympathy and incisive intelligence its far-reaching significance for philosophy and literature today." (Leslie Hill *University of Warwick*)

#### About the Author

Christopher Fynsk is Director of the Centre for Modern Thought and Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Thought at the University of Aberdeen. He is the author of *The Claim of Language: A Case for the Humanities*; *Infant Figures: The Death of the Infans and Other Scenes of Origin*; *Language and Relation: . . . that there is language*; and *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*.

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