



# **Levinas, Blanchot, Jabes: Figures of Estrangement (Comparative Studies in European Literature and Philosophy)**

*Gary D. Mole*

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"Philosopher Lévinas, novelist and essayist Blanchot, poet Jabès, all three constitute the rich intellectual soil from which more visible thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault have emerged. . . . A user-friendly essay on a very difficult subject. . . . All students of literary theory will want to have this book."--Jean-Michel Rabaté, University of Pennsylvania

"Among the best things written in English on [these writers]. . . . Presents a lucid and intelligent reading of all three authors, centering on their relationships to Jewish themes and concerns. It demonstrates the intimacy and near-complicity that connects them, but also the distance that separates them from one another. . . . A major work of scholarship."--Steven Shaviro, University of Washington

In the first critical study to consider together the work of Emmanuel Lévinas (Lithuanian Jew, philosopher), Maurice Blanchot (French Catholic, novelist and literary theorist), and Edmond Jabès (Egyptian Jew, poet), Gary D. Mole demonstrates and compares the ways in which these writers have been instrumental in raising those issues of Jewishness that have been so central to contemporary postmodern thought.

The questions of writing and exile, the opposition between ethics and metaphysics, and the central disaster of the Shoah emerge as the dominant themes of each writer, and Mole explores the ways in which they borrow from, respond to, and challenge each other in a rich intellectual dialogue. Specifically, Mole traces their engagement with Jewish tradition and thought, exploring their overlapping considerations of the *étranger*; of Revelation and the Law through the figure of Moses; and of ethics, dialogue, and silence in the story of Abra(ha)m. Finally, he looks at the ways each identifies the imperative of responding to the Shoah and its repercussions for philosophical, fictional, and poetic discourse.

In the case of each of these four chapter topics, the author includes separate discussions of all three writers, allowing them to resonate with and against one another in a dialogic (even Talmudic) fashion but without ever forcing them into a false, totalizing unity. Judicious close readings and an accessible style help to render the work of these important thinkers intelligible to the specialist and nonspecialist reader alike while clearly situating them in their postmodern context and revealing their tremendous influence on a generation of philosophers and writers.

Gary D. Mole is a lecturer in modern and medieval French literature at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. He has published articles on Lévinas, Blanchot, Jabès, Charlotte Delbo, Micheline Maurel, and François Villon and is translator, most recently, of Emmanuel Lévinas's *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures* (1994).

### SIDEBAR:

Lévinas: "Questioning one's Jewish identity is already to have lost it. But it is still to hold on to it, since otherwise one would be avoiding the question."

Blanchot: "Whoever writes is in exile from writing: this is his own country where he is no prophet."

Jabès: "Faced with the impossibility of writing which paralyzes every writer and the impossibility of being Jewish which for two thousand years has rent the people of this name, the writer chooses to write and the Jew to survive."

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