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Trouvaille

**A Conversation About the Proofs of
Maurice Blanchot's
L'Entretien infini
at Houghton Library**

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and Leslie Morris**

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LESLIE MORRIS: The convergence of Maurice Blanchot and the Houghton Library may seem somewhat surprising to those who know the Library primarily for its antiquarian holdings, but the story of how the corrected proofs of *L'Entretien infini* (now Houghton MS Fr 497) ended up at Harvard illustrates the often serendipitous ways primary research materials end up in appreciative institutional hands. In this case, the story begins with a network of academic connections. Christie McDonald, Smith Professor of Romance Languages and Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard, has had close ties with the Library since her arrival at Harvard in 1994. She was a donor—of the papers of her aunt, the artist Anne Eisner—and latterly guest curator of an exhibition at the Library, *Images of Congo: The Art of Anne Eisner*.¹ On March 5, 2009, Ginette Michaud, a Professor of French literature at the Université de Montréal, urgently e-mailed Christie on behalf of the online scholarly community Espace Maurice Blanchot, of which she is a

member of the board. They had just learned that several Blanchot manuscripts were for sale—perhaps the only extant working materials left by the famously reclusive writer. Michaud forwarded the bookseller’s description of “the literary sale of the century,” and confirmed that this was an “exceptional and rare archive.” The Espace Maurice Blanchot board wanted a safe institutional home for the materials where scholars could study them, rather than see them disappear into a private collection. Could Harvard help save these manuscripts for scholarship? (Given the size of its endowment, Harvard is often assumed to have ample money to spend on acquisitions; but such, alas, is not the case. We must buy prudently.) Perhaps a word is needed here about Maurice Blanchot, for those who may not be familiar with Blanchot’s work.

CHRISTIE MCDONALD: Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003), novelist, literary theorist, philosopher, and journalist—though a reclusive figure in the literary word—had a profound impact on such twentieth-century thinkers as George Bataille, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy. In his literary criticism, he wrote about Beckett, Hölderlin,

Kafka, Mallarmé, Proust, Rilke, Sade, among others, and he asked the question: what is literature? In philosophical dialogue with Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, he analyzed ontological and ethical questions. He developed a theory of writing and the book that moved away from metaphysical truth toward a sense of absence and an ethics of the Other (‘community’) that was irreducibly plural. His career involved extreme changes: having disengaged from his right-wing political nationalist writings during the 1930s, Blanchot re-engaged on the left in 1958 with the Algerian War; he was one of three authors for the Manifesto of the 121 intellectuals who called on the French government to recognize the right to independence in Algeria and denounced the use of torture. Blanchot was also active during the political events of May 1968 in Paris. Blanchot is the author of *Awaiting Oblivion*, *The Book to Come*, *Death Sentence*, *The Madness of the Day*, *The Space of Literature*, *The Step Not Beyond*, *Thomas the Obscure*, *the Unavowable Community*, *The Writing of the Disaster*, and *The Infinite Conversation*, among other works.

LM: Upon reading Michaud’s plea for help, Christie immediately e-mailed me and Mary Beth Clack, the reference and research librar-

ian for Romance Languages, asking whether such a purchase might be possible. A plea from a senior faculty member and good friend of the Library of course needs a prompt response. Christie forwarded Ginette Michaud's e-mail, which gave me more details about the Blanchot material. Old Head Books & Collections in Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland, was offering for sale eight books from Blanchot's own library: these included the proofs of *L'Entretien infini*; proofs for *L'Attente, l'oubli*; and other materials. They were described by the seller: "[these] may be the only remaining materials reasonably describable as 'manuscripts' to have been preserved from among his effects at his death in 2003, and it was only by chance that these survived. They were salvaged from the rubbish-bin by the husband of Blanchot's long-time housekeeper." All were priced accordingly.

An appealing story, and sure to whet the collector's appetite with its claim of extreme rarity, a "last chance" to own a piece of one of France's most important literary theorists. Was it true?

I found the website of Old Head Books, but could not find on it any mention of the Blanchot materials. Michaud had heard of their availability through a post on a blog posted in March 2009;² perhaps they were already sold? I e-mailed

the dealer inquiring and, while waiting for a reply, did a little research on that claim of extreme rarity.

What I found, or did not find, supported it. I could find no *fonds* of Blanchot papers in any of the major European online catalogues, nor in the central place for American research libraries to describe their manuscript holdings, ArchivesGrid. I did find scattered correspondences, in the Marc Eigeldinger papers and in the Georges Poulet papers, both at the Swiss National Library, and what might be correspondence in The Review of Contemporary Fiction/Dalkey Archive Press records at Stanford University; and material about Blanchot in the Bellos Manuscripts and in the Cid Corman papers at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, and in the Jacques Derrida Collection and the Paul de Man papers, both at the University of California, Irvine. Of course, a large number of European libraries, and their American counterparts, do not have their manuscript holdings described in whole, or even in part, electronically. A search in Google did not reveal any news announcement of the acquisition of Blanchot's papers. It appeared that the seller's description that these might be the only working "manuscripts" to survive might be true.

In the meantime, the proprietor of Old Head Books, N.J., e-mailed a list of all of the Blanchot material for sale, stating that they were offering them on consignment. A few hours later, N.J. sent a second e-mail stating that, actually, the material was right around the corner from me, at Lane Duck Books in Cambridge! This was good news—it meant that a physical inspection of the proofs was possible, and Christie and I could judge for ourselves how important the materials might be for research—and I contacted John Wronowski, proprietor of Lane Duck Books, to request an appointment for myself, Christie, and Mary Beth Clack. This was arranged for 11 March. We met at the shop, and carefully examined each of the Blanchot items for sale.

It was soon clear that the *L'Entretien infini* proofs were the most important piece in the lot, and that they, in particular, had enormous research potential—it was also clear to me that, at the prices stated, we could not afford all, or even most, of the Blanchot *trouvaille*. After some negotiation over the price, the Library was able to purchase the proofs by combining its funds with those of the French, Italian, and Scandinavian Collections of Widener Library, supplemented by a generous gift from an anonymous donor.

Subsequent research has shed

additional light on the discovery story told in the bookseller's description.³ Upon Blanchot's death in 2003, his concierge was asked to clear his apartment which, as might be anticipated, was filled with books. She contacted Marie-Josée Béalu, widow of the well-known French poet and bookseller Marcel Béalu, and her partner Richard Conte, whose shop is located at the corner of rue Madame and rue de Vaugirard—in other words, the nearest booksellers to Blanchot's apartment. They bought the books in the apartment. Shortly thereafter, Richard Conte returned to the apartment and examined what the concierge had thrown out: papers (letters, corrected proofs, photographs, and personal papers such as a *carte d'électeur*) and Blanchot's personal effects (desk, clothing, etc.). Conte retrieved the papers from the rubbish; and he found some letters in the books he had purchased from the concierge. From Conte, they entered the book trade, and the proofs mentioned above, as well as corrected copies of *Le Dernier Homme* and *L'Arrêt de mort*, were purchased by the respected Nimes bookseller Jean-Yves Lacroix. He housed them in custom boxes made by the French binder Julie Nadot, and, in May 2006, sold them to John Wronowski of Lane Duck Books in Cambridge, Massachu-

setts. The Blanchot material appeared in two of Lane Duck's catalogues, but, when they failed to sell from there and his own website, Wronowski tried listing them on other web sites, where they were finally noticed by the author of the blog, and came to the attention of Espace Maurice Blanchot.

While these proofs had been circulating in the book trade for several years before they were purchased by the Library, it is only now that they are in institutional hands and part of the story has been documented. The announcement on the Houghton Library website of the purchase⁴ brought others forward to share what they knew about Blanchot's papers, including Blanchot scholar Eric Hoppenot:⁵

Sans être mandaté formellement et juridiquement par Cidalia Da Silva Blanchot, fille adoptive de Maurice Blanchot, héritière et ayant droit de l'auteur, je tiens à signaler que jamais ni Maurice Blanchot, ni sa fille adoptive n'ont vendu ou essayé de vendre, des brouillons, des manuscrits, des carnets, des tapuscrits, des lettres, des jeux d'épreuves ou tout autre forme de document personnel appartenant à l'œuvre de Maurice Blanchot.

["Although I am not formally or legally authorized by Cidalia Da Silva Blanchot, Maurice Blanchot's adoptive daughter, who is his heir and *ayant droit*, I would like to state that neither Maurice Blanchot nor his adoptive

daughter sold, or tried to sell drafts, manuscripts, notebooks, typescripts, letters or proofs, or any other kind of personal document belonging to Maurice Blanchot."]⁶

It is our hope that the publication of what Christie and I know at this point in our research will bring those with further facts forward, to have their accounts made part of the public record.

CM: There I was sitting in a bookstore, flanked by an experienced curator and librarian (Leslie Morris and Mary Beth Clack), looking page by page at the corrected proofs of Maurice Blanchot's *L'Entretien infini*. In a busy week of the academic year, all three of us had met, and what we found was quite moving: handwritten annotations, as well as typewritten sheets inserted into typeset proofs. As this happy find, this *trouvaille*, unfolded before our eyes, we became convinced that it would be important to make this precious document available to scholars. The word "*trouver*" in its etymology in French includes both searching and discovering something by accident, and the suffix "*aille*" indicates the result of an action and a collective. The search and rescue mission of this acquisition, and its safe arrival at Houghton Library (open to all scholars for consultation) was for us a *trouvaille* in all of these senses, and it has allowed us a

glimpse into the writing process of Blanchot in a crucial period of work.

Blanchot is well known for his difficult writing, and it was almost as if there was an understanding that, outside the intense dialogue among a group of writers (Bataille, Levinas, later Derrida and others), his work—like Mallarmé’s poetry—was bound to remain obscure—as if he were almost the theoreticians’ writer. I read Blanchot as of the 1970s, and a colleague at the Université de Montréal with whom I co-organized a colloquium around Derrida’s work, Claude Lévesque, had written beautifully about how Blanchot displaced the tradition of metaphysics in his work.⁷ But it was only when I looked at these proofs and reviewed some of the historical and critical literature, published in more recent years, that I began to understand how this work reflected change in Blanchot’s thought, in particular, and generational change within French writing more generally.

L’Entretien infini (*The Infinite Conversation*) is a book largely constituted from work written between 1958 and 1969. The book crosses disciplines (literary criticism, philosophy, and political thought) and genres, presenting a series of fragmentary dialogues (with anonymous interlocutors), meditations, and complex arguments. It is

widely considered his theoretical masterpiece, and the proofs bear witness to the reformulations of Blanchot’s thought during this period: his continuing search for a form through which to express them.

In 1969, Maurice Blanchot wrote to his longtime friend and Gallimard editor (as well as anonymous author of *Histoire D’O*) Dominique Aury that, some years before in 1965, he had finished a rather long volume from numerous articles published in the *Nouvelle Revue française* and some unpublished articles; he wondered if Gallimard would be interested in publishing it.⁸ This may have been the first of two typescripts to which Hoppenot alludes in an email. Blanchot continued to make changes in the set of proofs now at Houghton Library, including the addition of his preliminary “Note” in which he writes that, beyond the exhaustion of traditional literary genres (the novel, poetry, and criticism—even as they continue to be written), literature asks an important and compelling question: “What would be at stake in the fact that something like art or literature exists?”⁹ The text that engages this question—conditioned, he writes, by the possibilities of knowledge, discourse and political struggle—has emerged through language and writing. Writing puts

everything into question: the Self, the Subject, the Book, Truth, God, and Unity. Writing cannot simply be reduced to communication through whatever medium it might come, as Blanchot foresaw that the book would not remain the only form. "Writing in this sense... supposes a radical change of epoch... Writing becomes a terrible responsibility... [It] is the greatest violence, for it transgresses the law, every law, and also its own" [IC, xii; EI, viii].

Now, a number of scholars have meticulously traced the changes from the printed articles to the published version of *L'Entretien infini* (Leslie Hill, Michael Holland, Christophe Bident, among others),¹⁰ although none mentions having consulted these proofs. Why Blanchot made so many changes at this stage of the editorial process remains unclear, and my attempts to reach Gallimard's archives for information have not been answered. The proofs afford a remarkable opportunity to track changes in Blanchot's thought. A first inventory of the changes¹¹ turned up both single word changes and more extensive type-written inclusions that appear in the published French version, as well as a number of excisions. All point to the movement of Blanchot's thought—testing the limits of literary, philosophical and politi-

cal thought: the possibility or impossibility through language and writing to find ultimate truths about humanity, alterity, and community.

What can unpublished material tell us about an author? Some would say that published work represents the definitive thought of a writer and would discount preparatory sketches and drafts; others would say that the unpublished works might be more telling about the intention of an author. Scholars who have engaged in what is called Genetic Criticism (the European branch of criticism that works with the various drafts and marginalia of works by such authors as Proust and Flaubert where extensive material is available)¹² track the visible marks of the creative process. By exploring a work in progress, this kind of criticism has traced problems of uncertainty, putting unpublished and published texts on the same level for purposes of interpretation. Blanchot's writing poses a challenge, not only because of the great paucity of material available (manuscripts, correspondence, etc.), but also because he was reflecting theoretically on change even as he effected it in his writing: revising, adding, deleting. The transformation from written articles to the fragmentary form of *L'Entretien infini* became crucial to this development: consisting of dia-

logues set off by dashes without named interlocutors (unlike this dialogue!), and fragments marked by double daggers (±±). The disruptions, questions, and suspensions created by this fragmentary writing sculpt a deep-seated interrogation of the philosophical tradition of thinking through literature: who the subject of writing is, to whom writing is addressed, and how form reflects these questions as a performance.

I will give three brief examples of change in the proofs that I hope will be of interest to those who may want to consult them at Houghton Library, in particular, and to all those interested in how an author brings about change in his or her own work.

The first change concerns the way in which literature meets the Western philosophical tradition of thinking and deals with ontology as the science of being. Blanchot shifts the focus here from Heidegger's question of being to the ethical question of the Other (which became central for the work of his good friend, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas), and in so doing explores the limits of conceptual language. Blanchot concludes the section entitled "The Most Profound question," (Chapter II of the first part, *Plural Speech (the speech of writing)*), with a question in a footnote: "Must we not say: 'the

most profound question' is the question that escapes reference to the One? It is the other question, the question of the Other, but also the always other question" [IC, 440; EI, 34].

A little further on, we see the reworking of nearly an entire page, including the addition of six lines, in Chapter VII, "The Relation of the Third Kind (man without horizon)," within the same section, *Plural Speech (the speech of writing)* [IC, 71; EI, 101-2]. Blanchot asks just prior to the revisions: "if the question 'Who is *autrui*?' has no direct meaning, it is because it must be replaced by another: 'What of the human "community," when it must respond to this relation of strangeness between man and man" (IC, 71; HP, 101). Here **green** indicates the proofs, and the underscored words indicate the word changes requested by Blanchot for the published version:

HOUGHTON PROOFS [henceforth HP]:

...l'homme que l'expérience du langage conduit à pressentir, rapport sans commune mesure, rapport exorbitant? Et cette question ne signifie pas non plus que l'Autre — autrui — serait seulement une manière d'être ou une fonction [becomes "obligation"] que chacun remplirait tour à tour, à moins qu'il ne s'y dérobe, qu'il le sache ou non. Il y va d'infiniment plus. Dans ce rapport, l'autre — mais lequel de nous deux est l'autre? — est [becomes "serait"] radi-

calement autre, n'est que l'autre et, en cela, [addition inserted begins here: “*en cela, nom...“manque à son lieu”*] *présence de l'homme* [these three words deleted] (HP,101).

[A relation with common measure, an exorbitant relation—that the experience of language leads one to sense? And yet this question does not signify that the Other—*autrui*—would be simply a way of being, that is to say, an ~~function~~ obligation that each in turn would fulfill or avoid, whether knowingly or not. There is infinitely more at stake. In this relation, the other—but which of the two of us is the other?—[is] would be radically other.... (IC, 71, my modifications)]

In this passage, Blanchot shifts from a structural to an ethical vocabulary where “function” becomes “obligation” with respect to the other; he changes the certitude of the present tense (*est*) to the hypothetical conditional (*serait*) concerning who the other might be; finally, and perhaps most importantly, in deleting the words “presence of mankind,” Blanchot signals a philosophical decision to undo the existential position of “mankind”, as present to itself. This move away from an existentialist and phenomenological position of presence as consciousness of the self became increasingly important not only to Blanchot but to Jacques Derrida whose thought remained very close to Blanchot’s. The corrected final sentence of this para-

graph in the proofs reads: “*L’Autre: la présence de l’homme en ceci même que celui-ci manque toujours à sa présence, comme il manque à son lieu*” (EI, 101). [“The Other: the presence of man precisely insofar as he is always missing from his presence, just as he is missing from his place” (IC, 71)].

Blanchot adds a reference in the same segment to the important term he introduces in this text: the neuter or neutral (translator Susan Hanson’s choice in IC). This difficult thought indicates the intersection of presence and non-presence, meaning and non-meaning whose very complex co-existence enables meaning (a term similar to Derrida’s term *différance*); in a passage that will change slightly again by the final version, Blanchot links the neuter to the identity of the speaking/writing subject and the Other. The first sentence below serves also as one of the epigraphs to the entire book:

— The neutral, the neutral, how strangely this sounds for me.

— Me myself: can one then still speak of a self...

In what follows, Blanchot takes the discussion out of the theological realm and places it squarely in a secular tradition where responsibility falls to the writer in a human community. The Houghton proofs show an intermediary step prior to the final version, more declarative

and explanatory in showing the “presence of man” as an absence without God:

— *Il est donc temps de retirer ce terme d'autrui, tout en retenant ce qu'il voudrait nous dire: que l'Autre est toujours présence de l'homme, non pas autre comme Dieu ou autre comme nature, mais, en tant qu'homme, plus Autre que tout ce qu'il y a d'autre.* [HP, 101]

[It is time to withdraw this term *autrui*, while retaining what it has to say to us: that the other is always presence of man, not as other as God or other as nature, but as man, more Other than all that is other. (Trans. CM)]

PUBLISHED VERSION:

— *Peut-être est-il temps, aussi, de retirer ce terme d'autrui, tout en retenant ce qu'il voudrait nous dire: que l'Autre est toujours ce qui en appelle (fût-ce pour le mettre entre parenthèses ou entre guillemets) à l'“homme”, non pas autre comme dieu ou autre comme nature, mais, en tant qu'“homme”, plus Autre que tout ce qu'il y a d'autre.*” (EI, 102)

[“Perhaps, also, it is time to withdraw this term *autrui*, while retaining what it has to say to us: that the Other is always what calls upon ‘man’ (even if only to put him between parentheses or between quotation marks), not the other as God or other as nature but, as ‘man,’ more Other than all that is other.” (IC, 72)]

The second change I will flag extends the discussion of the “neuter” in its proximity to the Other; it occurs at the end of chapter IV,

“The Fragment Word,” in section III, *The Absence of the Book (the neutral, the fragmentary)*, just prior to the chapter titled “Forgetful Memory” (HP, 435; IC, 313; EI, 457). Blanchot adds a sequence of fragments [set off by double daggers, $\pm\pm$], titled “*Parenthèses*”, in which the key terms “*partenaire fictif*” (fictive partner, in relation to the Other) appear; Blanchot typed the terms in red ink, indicating roman type to distinguish the words from the rest in italics (HP, 435). Unlike other directives to cut, this passage (which would have been the third paragraph of the penultimate section) *was* placed by the author for inclusion, and repeats the words “*partenaire fictif*”. Was the cut an omission? A subsequent excision? We do not know, but assume that another set of proofs exists or existed.

The omitted part is as follows:

Le moi[x], dans sa corrélation à l'Autre où l'Autre est aussi l'absolu de ce rapport, “sait”, même s'il ne le sait pas, que, dès qu'il se fige dans une identité, il fige l'autre dans l'unité d'un autre moi, seulement plus inconsistant. Mais il ne peut savoir, même s'il le “sait”, que s'il se laissait [xxxxxxxxxxxx] désappareiller jusqu'à se saisir comme un “je” problématique, seulement posé par l'Autre comme le *partenaire fictif* que l'Autre se donne (tout en le recevant en don) afin d'exercer le rapport d'infinité qui est en jeu dans toute exigence de parole, il entendrait ce “mot de trop” qui ne

lui parvient que par l'oubli de la mort.
(HP, 435)

[The self, in its correlation to the Other, where the Other is also the absolute of this relationship, “knows”, even if it does not know, that, as soon as it is fixed in an identity, it fixes the other in the unity of another self, only less consistent. But it cannot know, even if it “knows”, that if it allowed itself to be uncoupled to the point of seizing itself as a problematic “I”, only set out by the Other as a *fictive partner* that the Other gives itself (even as it receives it as a gift) in order to exercise the infinite relationship at stake with the impossible demand of language, it would hear this “*mot de trop*” which reaches it only through the forgetting of death. (Trans. CM)]

The first two fragments in this section contain internal dialogue, an exchange about the neuter and transcendental unity in which the *fictive partner* is “already broken” (IC, 311). This passage deals with the question of knowledge: how one knows what one knows. Something in fiction, in the fictive and in that which is literary, knows without knowing and allows oblique access to what is inaccessible, enabling both dialogue and the force of fiction.

The devil, as the adage goes, is in the details with such changes, and there will undoubtedly be many ways in which to interpret the modifications found in these proofs. The final example of change

underscores the complexity of Blanchot’s task as he turned his own articles into a larger work. It involves an excision from the reworked sections about Nietzsche. In the 1960s Nietzsche became important to a generation of philosophers and writers interested in a perspectival approach to truth and value. In 1961, Heidegger published a book on Nietzsche, and I remember as a student in Paris in 1963 listening to the lectures of philosopher Jean Wahl in which he translated and glossed this work (I didn’t understand much at the time). Blanchot is interested in the history of Nietzsche’s publications, and in *L’Entretien infini* interweaves thoughts about the “falsified” edition of *The Will to Power* (a work compiled posthumously from Nietzsche’s unfinished papers by Nietzsche’s sister), which was used to promote Nazi ideology, and Martin Heidegger’s relationship to this text and to Hitler. “Where does the sort of trickery that permitted (not without good faith) an editor’s compilation to impose itself as the essential work arise from?” Blanchot asks [Chapter 1, “Nietzsche, Today,” *The Limit-experience*, IC, 138; EI, 205]. Yet the end of this sentence referred to Heidegger’s naming *The Will to Power* the “essential work”: “*le Hauptwerk, ainsi que le désigne encore Heidegger?*” [“the *Hauptwerk* as Heidegger still

calls it”] with a footnote to follow—both of which were struck out.

The Harvard Proofs shows the excised section on page 205; here is the text and my translation:

Cependant, en 1953, Heidegger prend bien soin d’indiquer que ce livre n’est que la compilation d’écrits posthumes et « qu’on lui a donné le titre de *Volonté de Puissance* ». Il faut ici préciser qu’avant la publication de Schlechta [an edition of Nietzsche’s works in 1953], les lecteurs de Nietzsche n’ignoraient nullement que cet ouvrage était le fait des éditeurs et constitué, dans son ordre, d’un désordre d’écrits de toute origine. Cependant, l’on pouvait croire qu’il s’agissait de matériaux hétéroclites, mais amassés par Nietzsche lui-même en vue d’un grand ouvrage où devait s’exprimer l’essentiel de sa philosophie. Or, il n’y avait rien de tel dans ses papiers. Si Nietzsche a eu parfois l’intention d’écrire un livre qui serait appelé *Volonté de Puissance*, mais aussi bien *L’Éternel Retour* ou *Transmutation de toutes les valeurs* (on a trouvé ces différents titres parmi les projets de publication), on ne trouve rien qu’on puisse avec certitude faire correspondre à ces dispositions. (HP: 205)

[However, in 1953, Heidegger carefully indicates that this book is only a compilation of posthumous writings and “that it had been given the title *Will to Power*.” It is important to note that before Schlechta’s publication [of an edition of Nietzsche’s works¹³], Nietzsche’s readers were in no way unaware that this work was the invention of editors and constituted, in

its order, a disorder of writings from many places. However, one might have thought that these were heterogeneous materials, collected by Nietzsche himself in preparation for a great work where his essential philosophy would be expressed. However, this was not the case in his papers. If Nietzsche sometimes had the intention of writing a book that would be called *The Will to Power*, as well as *The Eternal Return*, or the *Transvaluation of Values* (different titles were found in his publication projects), nothing was found that one could correspond with any certainty to these arrangements.” (Trans. CM)]

This argument about who knew what, when, continues three pages later in a two-page typescript addition of a much longer footnote, taking aim at Heidegger [HP, 208; EI 208; IC, 448, n. 2]. It may be that Blanchot in so doing is reviewing his own past writings on the extreme right, as Michael Holland argues in an interesting essay entitled “A Wound to Thought.”¹⁴ But Blanchot’s discussion of how Nietzsche’s scattered writings came to be a book he never intended—through editor-“forgers”—also makes a curiously compelling case for *the archive*, given the need Blanchot seemed to have had to do away with his own; in the scratched-out footnote, he makes reference to Nietzsche’s papers in order to prove that they do not correspond to the edited works. The betrayal of an archive by editors

concerns Blanchot for the subsequent interpretations and political use of Nietzsche's work. Were they also concerns for him about his own writing? He had been edited by his longtime friend Dominique Aury, and Jean Paulhan; together they shared a common "secret" (biographer David's hypothesis) in their ideological past. The archive could on the one hand restore the context for Nietzsche's writing, and even bring to literary glory such writers as Kafka, Simone Weil, Rimbaud, Musil and others. But on the other hand the very existence of an archive generates anxiety (about future interpretation) so great that Blanchot exhorts writers to "leave nothing behind, destroy everything you wish to see disappear; do not be weak, have confidence in no one, for you will necessarily be betrayed one day" [IC, 139].¹⁵ When Blanchot acknowledges the importance of the archive to undo falsification of Nietzsche's works, he raises the philosophical question of how much authorial intention and an ethics of responsibility come into play.¹⁶ Exquisitely alert to the contradictions of the fragmentary writing he was developing, with the near erasure of author and intention, Blanchot nevertheless leaves an ambivalent message concerning the archive in general and his own in particular—as though documents may provide self-incriminating evidence (of an

author, history and politics).

Angie David's biography of Dominique Aury and Christophe Bident's biography of Blanchot describe in careful detail the trajectory of a young intellectual who, on the extreme 'non-conformist' right in the 1930s (a nationalist, monarchist, and dissident position difficult to pigeon-hole), abandoned that position by 1943, and later became a writer of the extreme left. While David's biography refers to Blanchot's correspondence from the 1960s in private collections, thus incorporating archival material, Bident writes an intellectual biography based largely on the published works (eschewing psychobiography in line with Blanchot's thought).

For the reader, scholar and writer, archives offer a gateway to exploration of the past, but such archives have to be found and made accessible in order to be explored.

LM: Nietzsche's sister may have thought she was doing what her brother would have wanted, bringing his unfinished work to the world of philosophy in published form. At least she did not then destroy the papers; if the archive had not survived her editorial work, how would Blanchot or Heidegger know what had happened? Sometimes the archive does not survive.

Or it is kept in private hands, and made selectively available to a chosen few. Families and disciples often have an emotional commitment to the figure of the author that may cloud their judgment; just as some scholars may choose very selectively from an archive those letters or documents that support their particular theory, while ignoring others that contradict it. The important thing is for the archive to survive in a place where it is made available to all, without prejudice, and where things are not removed or added to falsify the record. In other words, the archive's integrity as a record of the author's work must be preserved.

Christie also mentions that she has been unable to get access to any editorial correspondence that might survive in Gallimard's files between Blanchot and Aury, his editor on *L'Entretien infini*. I do wonder, with Christie, if Blanchot's awareness of what had happened with Nietzsche's papers worried him enough that he ensured that nothing of his papers would survive that would aid such "falsification" of his own work. Or did he leave more than what was retrieved by the bookseller from the rubbish, and is there more out there to be discovered? Gallimard's files might provide additional insight; but of course Gallimard is a privately held company, whose aim is to pub-

lish new books and make a profit, rather than to devote time to answering reference questions. Again, the advantage of having material in a research library such as Houghton, whose mission is to make such material accessible, is clear.

CM: Yes, archives both private and public give access to the past at the same time that they contain in germ many stories and future narratives. In Blanchot's case, this is borne out by analyses decades later of his writings from the 1930s,¹⁷ and by his own publication of *The Instant of My Death* (1994), in which he reworks "material" of his archive from the past.¹⁸ As Denis Hollier has suggested for Blanchot's work in the 1930s,¹⁹ a change of politics may be contemporaneous with changes in form and content. So we glimpse in the proofs of *L'Entretien infini* Blanchot's struggle from the late 1950s to the late 1960s to make changes in his critical thought: the intellectual and writerly transition from journalistic writing to a more sustained—albeit difficult to categorize—genre.

One of Blanchot's anonymous interlocutors in *L'Entretien infini* reflects that "There are those who seek, looking to find—even knowing they will almost necessarily find something other than what

they are searching for” [“Speaking is Not Seeing”, Section I, *Plural Speech (the speech of writing)*], to which the next interlocutor responds, “To find is almost exactly the same word as ‘to seek’ [*chercher*], which means to ‘take a turn around” [IC, 25]. And: “To find is to seek in relation to the center that is, properly speaking, what cannot be found” [IC, 26; EI, 21]. These corrected proofs attest to a movement of searching, finding, and decentering, in which Blanchot dialogues with himself—as writers do when they rethink, redirect and turn around their thought. It is my hope that others will seek out these proofs, and find, as I did, some-

thing more than what is expected.

LM and CM: We are very grateful to the vigilant scholars who informed us about the existence of these proofs; and equally grateful to those who endowed the acquisitions funds at Houghton and Widener Library (Amy Lowell Trust, and the Patrick Grant Second Memorial Fund) and especially the anonymous donor whose generosity made this acquisition possible.²⁰ We are pleased that scholars will now be able to consult this unique set of proofs when they work on this important writer.

¹ Christie McDonald (ed.), *Images of Congo: Anne Eisner's Art and Ethnography, 1946-58* (5 Continents, 2005).

² <http://this-space.blogspot.com/2009/03/fragments-of-true-boss.html>.

³ We are indebted to bookseller Jean-Yves Lacroix, who told Leslie Morris of the earlier history of the Blanchot materials in an e-mail of 2 July 2009.

⁴ <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/houghtonmodern/2009/06/11/blanchot>.

⁵ See Eric Hoppenot, *Maurice Blanchot, de proche en proche dirigé par Eric Hoppenot et coordonné par Daïana Manoury* (Complicités, 2008); and Maurice Blanchot, *Écrits politiques: 1953-1993*, ed. Éric Hoppenot (Gallimard, 2008).

⁶ Eric Hoppenot, e-mail to Christie McDonald, September 29, 2009.

⁷ See Claude Lévesque, *L'étrangeté du texte. Essai sur Nietzsche, Freud, Blanchot et Derrida* (VLB éditeur, 1976); “L’écriture sous rature’ de Maurice Blanchot,” in *Le proche et le lointain* (VLB éditeur, 1994), 161-84. See also Christie McDonald (ed.), *The Ear of the Other: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida* (1982), trans Peggy Kamuf (University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

⁸ Letter to Dominique Aury, February 18, 1969, cited in Angie David, *Dominique Aury* (Éditions Léo Scheer, 2006), 380.

⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xi. Original French edition, *L'Entretien infini* (Gallimard, 1969), *Werke in sechs Bänden* vi. Henceforth IC and EI.

¹⁰ Leslie Hill, *Blanchot Extreme Contemporary* (Routledge, 1997); Michael Holland, “A Wound to Thought,” in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed.), *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing* (Routledge, 1965), 174-87; Christophe Bident, *Maurice Blanchot: partenaire invisible* (Champ Vallon, 1998).

¹¹ We are very grateful to James Goldschmidt for his meticulous work in cataloguing the changes within the proofs.

¹² For discussions of Genetic Criticism, see *Essais de critique génétique* (Flammarion, 1979).

¹³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Werke in sechs Bänden* (Hanser, 1980). Blanchot reviews Schlechta’s effort to undo the preceding “arbitrary fabrication” of Nietzsche’s work by returning for this edition to the manuscripts in chronological order, see EI, 202-4; IC, 136-139.

¹⁴ Holland, “A Wound to Thought.”

¹⁵ “On aimerait recommander aux écrivains: ne laissez rien derrière vous, détruisez vous-mêmes tout ce que vous désirez voir disparaître, ne soyez pas faibles, ne vous fiez à personne; vous serez nécessairement trahis un jour” (EI, 207).

¹⁶ Ernst Behler oversaw the beginning of a new translation of the complete works in which all of the fragments are published in chronological order (there is no work titled *The Will to Power*): *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Stanford University Press, 1995-. I thank Adam Vance (whose doctoral dissertation, titled *Nietzsche and Baudelaire: At the Threshold of our Esthetic Modernity*, was written under the direction of Behler) for his comments about Blanchot and the editions of Nietzsche’s work.

¹⁷ See “Lire Blanchot I,” *Gamma*, 3-4 (1976); Jeffrey Mehlman, “Blanchot at *Combat*: Of Literature and Terror” in *Legacies: Of Anti-Semitism in France* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Steven Ungar, *Scandal and Aftereffect: Blanchot and France since 1930* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

¹⁸ See Maurice Blanchot, *The Instant of My Death*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, 2000); also Ginette Michaud, *Tenir au secret (Derrida, Blanchot)* (Galilée, 2006).

¹⁹ Denis Hollier, “Fahrenheit 451,” *Critique*, 594 (1996), 934.

²⁰ Our thanks to Antoine Compagnon, Ginette Michaud, Jonathan Hulbert, and Loren Wolfe for their respective help in gathering information for, conversations about, and corrections on this manuscript.