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978-1-107-67462-2 - The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968

Edward Baring

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THE YOUNG DERRIDA AND FRENCH PHILOSOPHY, 1945–1968

In this powerful new study Edward Baring sheds fresh light on Jacques Derrida, one of the most influential yet controversial intellectuals of the twentieth century. Reading Derrida from a historical perspective and drawing on new archival sources, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy* shows how Derrida's thought arose in the closely contested space of postwar French intellectual life, developing in response to Sartrean existentialism, religious philosophy, and the structuralism that found its base at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. In a history of the philosophical movements and academic institutions of postwar France, Baring paints a portrait of a community caught between humanism and antihumanism, providing a radically new interpretation of the genesis of deconstruction and of one of the most vibrant intellectual moments of modern times.

EDWARD BARING is Assistant Professor of Modern European Intellectual and Cultural History at Drew University. Educated at the University of Cambridge and Harvard University, his work was awarded the Harold K. Gross Prize by Harvard University in 2010. He has won fellowships from the DAAD, ACLS, and Mellon Foundation.

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The books in this series will discuss the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related new disciplines. The procedures, aims and vocabularies that were generated will be set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions. Through detailed studies of the evolution of such traditions, and their modification by different audiences, it is hoped that a new picture will form of the development of ideas in their concrete contexts. By this means, artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature may be seen to dissolve.

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Acknowledgments

I have been very fortunate in the research and composition of this book. Archives opened up as if on cue during my research, including the Derrida letters held at the IMEC archives. The team at IMEC, especially José Ruiz-Funes, Yves Chevretil-Desbiolles, and Catherine Josset, made me feel enormously welcome. One could not imagine a more pleasant introduction to archival research: pétanque on their lawns, cycling around the beautiful grounds, and convivial conversation over what must be the best food served at an archive in the world. My sole criterion for future research projects is that they must take me back to the Abbaye d'Ardenne. When I was not so lucky with timing, I benefited from the generosity of archivists: Catherine Goldenstein allowed me access to letters at the Paul Ricoeur archives before they were ready, and Françoise Dauphagne permitted me to rummage through the unsorted boxes that will become the Hyppolite archives at the ENS. For perhaps my greatest archival find, a picture of Derrida sporting a cravat and Converse trainers which graces the cover of this book, I would like to thank Marianne Cayette, who guided me through the archival holdings at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, and Mikaël Schinazi, who rushed around Paris to obtain a high resolution scan of the photograph. Where written archives needed to be explained, and queries answered, Marguerite Derrida, Maurice Caveing, Richard Macksey, and Pierre Nora were both generous with their time and knowledge and patient with a British historian who had much to learn.

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A note on translations and reproductions

Throughout the book and where possible, I use and modify standard translations for the major texts I discuss. In doing so, I hope that a broader group of scholars will be able to engage substantively with my argument. All other translations are my own. I would also like to thank the editors of *Modern Intellectual History* for permission to reproduce “Humanist Pretensions: Catholics, Communists, and Sartre’s Struggle for Existentialism in Postwar France,” which appears here in revised form.