

## The Flowers of Tarbes

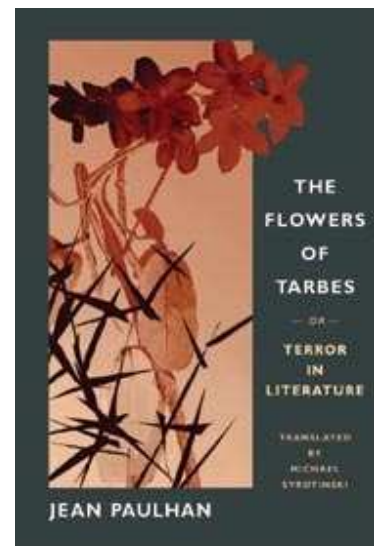
Translation and critical edition of Jean Paulhan by Professor Michael Syrotinski [\*Les Fleurs de Tarbes, ou la terreur dans les lettres\* \(\*The Flowers of Tarbes, or Terror in Literature\*\)](#). Includes critical introduction and glossary of names and terms. (University of Illinois Press, 2005).

- [Click here for a review in \*The Guardian\*](#)
- [Click here for a feature on Jean Paulhan by Professor Michael Syrotinski on the popular literary weblog, \*ReadySteadyBook\*](#)

### Introduction to Paulhan's *The Flowers of Tarbes*

Although he is largely unknown to an anglophone readership, Jean Paulhan was a central figure in the literary landscape of twentieth-century France, both as an influential editor and as an often polemical essayist. Paulhan himself considered [\*The Flowers of Tarbes or, Terror in Literature\*](#) to be his most important work, and a distillation of his thinking about language and literature. Like many of Paulhan's related texts on the theory and practice of literature, [\*The Flowers of Tarbes\*](#) has a deceptive naïveté and period charm about it, and ostensibly owes more to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers and critics who had long been unfashionable, even by the time Paulhan was writing, than to what we usually take as the major points of reference of linguistic and literary theory in the twentieth century. To read *The Flowers of Tarbes* is to be drawn into this other rather arcane and archaic world. It was written at a time when literary critics were still highly respected professionals with a visible public profile, and even though the predictable and well-ordered literary world was a far cry from the cut and thrust of our contemporary theoretical arena, there was no less intensity and urgency in the stakes being contested. Paulhan was certainly not afraid of engaging in head-to-head polemics, and in many ways this text could be seen to define a critical moment in the history of criticism. In taking on the "establishment," as it were (the great figures of his own and the previous generation, such as Rémy de Gourmont, Antoine Albalat, Marcel Schwob, Pierre Lasserre, and so on), Paulhan was already performing a subtle, but radical, destabilization of the activity of reading (and writing) literature. My intention and hope in appending a glossary of basic information on writers, critics, and other less familiar names either directly quoted or alluded to by Paulhan in his narrative is to bring to life the half-forgotten, now rather neglected world of his time. It seemed useful to contextualize *The Flowers of Tarbes* in this way in order to create a sense of this cultural milieu, and to underline the sheer diversity of references that would probably have been more or less immediately recognizable to Paulhan and his contemporaries.

It would be fair to say, though, that Paulhan had read more widely than most, even though his erudition is often well disguised by his celebrated modesty. Indeed, his better-known role as editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, and as an extremely influential figure in the French publishing world, very much determined the range of writers that came into his line of vision. It



also accounts for his approach to the activity of reading and writing, and his sense of how literature works, or does not work. His objective in packing his text so full of literary allusions was not simply an exercise in erudite name-dropping. The point he is making about literature is that one can observe certain invariant features across the infinite range of its historical manifestations, the constants which could allow one to formulate a quasi-scientific law of the literary act itself. In this sense Paulhan would want his text ultimately to mirror, or to mimic, the very timeless and universally applicable quality he finds in commonplace expressions, proverbs, maxims, literary clichés, and other hackneyed uses of language. [The Flowers of Tarbes](#), which derives its central allegory of the “literary flowers” in the public park in Tarbes from the most well-worn of metaphors (the “garden” of literature), essentially offers itself to us with all the enigmatic doubleness of a cliché: are we to read it as a revelation of some immutable, eternal truth about literature, as an attempt to wrest some hitherto hidden secret from its depths? Or is it really nothing more than a soon-to-be outmoded running commentary on a series of already-outmoded views about literature which, like proverbs in their more banal and parochial guise, merely signal an attachment to that place, at that time? Although it may appear to be aimed at a specialist target audience, Paulhan’s text engages with much broader questions. Paulhan attempts to identify, within the literature and criticism of the previous century and a half, a core set of fundamental beliefs about the way language works, which he then proceeds to interrogate with unremitting tenacity. His ensuing discussions of the nature of the act of literary creation, and the relationship between language, meaning, context, intention and action, are highly original, and extraordinarily prescient. This is a book that, like the public park in Tarbes, is open to everyone, and is at the same time a well-kept secret waiting to be discovered, or rediscovered.

### **In Which the Author Artfully Arranges His Flowers**

The present text is a translation of the 1941 Gallimard edition of *Les fleurs de Tarbes*, its first publication as an independent volume. Paulhan had begun to compose his text as far back as 1925, when he first mentioned it in a letter to Francis Ponge. Several sections of the text were published, in modified form, in journals and anthologies between 1926 and 1938, and an earlier, shorter version of the text as a whole appeared in serial format in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from June to October 1936. Paulhan promised a sequel to [The Flowers of Tarbes](#), which he planned to call *Le don des langues* [*The Gift of Languages*], although he never in fact produced it<sup>1</sup>. The task of a genetic critic wanting to reconstruct the composition of this text is, however, potentially endless, since to those bits and pieces which are reproduced in some form, one would have to add almost the entirety of his oeuvre, which could be seen as one long and infinitely patient attempt to answer the same question: How do language and literature work? Or, as Maurice Blanchot would put it in the title of his famous essay on [The Flowers of Tarbes](#): *How is literature possible?*<sup>2</sup>

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the nuts and bolts of the construction of [The Flowers of Tarbes](#). The text itself has a pleasingly symmetrical arrangement of chapters and sub-sections, but the narrative itself is anything but polished and seamless. It has the feel, instead, of an ongoing work in progress, something put together by an amateur craftsman who is content for us to watch him as he proceeds, slowly and haltingly, through the trial and error of his labor. While much of the text consists of a rather loosely assembled collage of quotations from other writers, it also exemplifies the process of continuous self-quotation that marks Paulhan’s writing more generally, where the same turns of phrase and stylistic tics, the same clichés, the same

little illustrative tales, reappear in different guises and different contexts.<sup>3</sup> This is perhaps a necessary effect of his constant (and constantly thwarted) attempts to isolate specimens of language in order to show how language as a whole works. As he puts it, in one of the many proverbial formulations generated in the text, “Run away from language and it will come after you. Go after language and it will run away from you.”<sup>4</sup> When this linguistic elusiveness is mapped onto the larger narrative sequences of the text, what happens is that the very process of narrating surprises the narrator, continually catching him unawares. His investigation ends up taking him in completely unexpected directions. As he says on the first page of [The Flowers of Tarbes](#): “These are not the problems I was thinking of—far from it—when I undertook this study.” He is ultimately, he admits, in no more privileged a position than we are to anticipate the outcome of his experiment. Likewise, if the text is read as a kind of roman à clef, based on the model of the mystery or detective novel Paulhan refers to at the end of [The Flowers of Tarbes](#), it is unclear whether the “exemplary” little narratives which constantly interrupt the course of his investigation (the soldier on leave, the monk in Assisi who invents catastrophes in order to announce them, the butcher who takes years to “discover” how blood circulates, different methods of controlling mosquitoes, the public park in Tarbes, and so on) stand in a relationship of assured analogy or of uncertain contiguity to the main narrative.

There is certainly one historically determined reason why Paulhan’s text gravitates toward those moments when language breaks down, or the inevitability of Terror falling victim to the Rhetoric it condemns. The period of Terror during the French Revolution is seen as a crucial marker of discontinuity, as if literary history itself had taken a traumatic wrong turn at some point around then, and as if one could return to that point of rupture to work out exactly what went wrong in the hope of repairing the rift. In *The Flowers of Tarbes*, though, the weight of this responsibility is borne with a disarming lightness of touch, and with characteristic irony and subtle humor. The chapter titles indeed consciously mimic a picaresque adventure novel (“In Which Terror is Not Entirely Implausible”), and hark back to an age when language and meaning were not so threatened, or threatening, and writers felt secure enough to revel in them freely. So how seriously are we to take Paulhan’s text? Is it, after all, just a fanciful literary exercise (“... let’s just say I have said nothing”)? Or does it indeed achieve something of major importance, such as “The End of Terror in Literature,” as the final words of the book performatively declare? Where does Paulhan ultimately situate himself with respect to Terror and Rhetoric?

### **Of Terror and Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is, for Paulhan, based on the premise that language is essentially in no need of change. In an earlier text more explicitly concerned with rhetoric entitled *Traité des figures* [*Treatise on Figures*], a commentary on Dumarsais’s *Traité des tropes* [*Treatise on Tropes*], Paulhan discussed the eighteenth century’s obsession with classifying rhetorical figures and tropes, and saw the need to catalog figures in this way as consistent with the stability of rhetoric, which he associates with commonplace expressions, lieux communs (lieu in French being a more neutral and specifically linguistic term than “commonplace” in English). [The Flowers of Tarbes](#), however, starts out by discussing an opposing tendency within literature, which Paulhan refers to as “Terror.” Although the term is by the 1940s situated in a far broader philosophical context—that is, the French reception of Hegel’s account of the dialectical unfolding of European history, with the French Revolution as the decisive “end” of this history—there is only one explicit reference in [The Flowers of Tarbes](#) to the period of Terror, represented by one of its most fanatical figures, Joseph Lebon:

*We call periods of Terror those moments in the history of nations (which often follow some famine), when it suddenly seems that the State requires not ingeniousness and systematic methods, nor even science and technology—no one cares about any of that—but rather an extreme purity of the soul, and the freshness of a communal innocence. Consequently citizens themselves are taken into consideration, rather than the things they do or make: The chair is forgotten in favor of the carpenter, the remedy in favor of the doctor. Skill, knowledge, and technique, however, become suspect, as if they were covering up some lack of conviction.* (Flowers, 24)

Terror, then, stands not so much for the historical events themselves, but rather for a decisive turning point in French history, and more specifically in French literary history. This is described by Paulhan as a shift from the rule-bound imperatives of rhetoric and genre to the gradual abandonment of these rules in Romanticism and its successors, with the consequent search for greater originality of expression. This opposing imperative is what Paulhan terms Terror. Terrorist writers are those who demand continual invention and renewal, and denounce rhetoric's codification of language, its tendency to stultify the spirit and impoverish human experience. Paulhan finds examples of the Terrorist dismissal of rhetoric in, for example, Rémy de Gourmont's condemnation of "moral clichés," or Antoine Albalat's scorn for "picturesque clichés," or Flaubert's ironic dictionary of received ideas. In fact, everywhere he looks, Paulhan sees evidence of Terror in action: For Hyppolite Taine, Racine was "the epitome of verbalism" (Flowers, 28); for Renan the entire classical literary tradition was "an abuse of rhetoric" (Flowers, 28); and Brunetière discredited Malherbe's poetry for similar reasons. When Paulhan turns his attention to more contemporary examples, he comes across the (dangerously seductive) "power of words," and broadens his discussion beyond the realm of literature by including personal anecdotes, amusing little stories, and popular journalism (the clichés of the time being, for example, "ideological warfare," "the youth of today," "freedom," "popular opinion," and so on). Henri Bergson is seen by Paulhan as the supreme "anti-verbalist" critic of the first half of the twentieth century, and is described as Terror's own philosopher. Bergson's challenge to literature is "without doubt the most serious reproach made in our time: that the author of commonplace expressions gives in to the power of words, to verbalism, to the influence of language, and so on" (Flowers, 20).

The opposition between Terror and Rhetoric appears, then, to polarize two conflicting ideologies of expression, which seem to be mutually exclusive and irreconcilable: on the one hand the aspiration toward originality, and on the other the attraction to the stability of the commonplace, and this is seen by Paulhan as something that is a universal characteristic of literature and language, and not limited to any particular historical or cultural context. After he amply demonstrates the persuasive power of Terror's arguments, Paulhan proceeds to cast doubt on the validity of its philosophy: "Not that I find the mystical possession or the self-effacement of critics or scholars—nor, earlier in the text, the revolution—in the least bit contemptible. Far from it. I'm simply suspicious of a revolt, or a dispossession, which comes along so opportunely to get us out of trouble" (Flowers, 15). He then dismantles Terrorist claims by showing that they are the victims of an optical illusion: "These days when we come into contact with literature and with language, we are only able to know them, to appreciate them, and therefore also to continue them ourselves, thanks to a series of errors and illusions as crude as an optical illusion" (Flowers, 65). Terrorist writers are, as he shows, paradoxically enslaved to language, since they spend all their time trying to bypass it, or rid it of its clichés:

*For Terror is above all dependent upon language in a general sense, in that it condemns a writer to say only what a certain state of language leaves him free to express: He is restricted to those areas of feeling and thought where language has not yet been overused. That is not all: No writer is more preoccupied with words than the one who at every point sets out to get rid of them, to get away from them, or to reinvent them. (Flowers, 76)*

Terror's "optical illusion," then, takes the form of a kind of blindness to its own rhetorical status. According to Paulhan, both Terrorists and Rhetoricians are justified in their conceptions of literature, and therefore are both equally unjustified. The problem is compounded in that the two "sides" in this exchange are in fact opposing perspectives on the same literary or linguistic object. What appears to some as verbalism ("just words") appears to others as authentic expressiveness (ideas or thoughts), and this becomes the central enigma of *The Flowers of Tarbes*: How is it possible to tell whether an author intended his or her words to be read as literary clichés or as original expressions? Commonplace expressions thus reveal a deep-seated tension within language and literature. They are "janus-faced" forms of language, as Blanchot puts it, which "subject the reader to equivocation."<sup>5</sup>

How does Paulhan attempt to resolve this tension? Paulhan's solution to the paradox is a revalorization (or a "reinvention") of rhetoric, a redoubled Rhetoric he will distinguish from the accepted understanding of the term by capitalizing it (and which he will also refer to as Maintenance). He suggests that writers should recognize clichés as clichés, and thereby establish a communally agreed-upon Rhetoric in order to remove the perplexing ambiguity that characterizes commonplace expressions:

*Clichés may once again take up residence in literature the day they are at last deprived of their ambiguity and their confusion. Now all it should require, since the confusion stems from a doubt as to their nature, is simply for us to agree, once and for all, to accept them as clichés. In short, we simply need to make commonplace expressions common ... (Flowers, 79)*

Blanchot compares this solution of a "reinvented" Rhetoric to a Copernican revolution, in which thought, if it is to rediscover its authenticity, needs to be controlled by the gravitational force field of language. This granting of a kind of residence permit to clichés allows them to re-enter literature, in that they become publicly acceptable and quotable, and are marked by a communally recognized citationality. Paulhan often sets apart such expressions within his text precisely by marking them with italics, and is aware of similar conventions in literature: "In terms of writing conventions, we should also mention the italics, the quotation marks and the parentheses, which we see proliferate in Romantic writers as soon as rhetoric is invalidated" (Flowers, 80n3).

The problems are far from over, though, since Paulhan's solution of a communally agreed acceptance of clichés is not the end of the book, which in fact closes with the surprising retraction: "There are thus glimmers of light, visible to whomever sees them, hidden from whomever looks at them; gestures which cannot be performed without a certain negligence ... In fact, let's just say I have said nothing" (Flowers, 94). This seems at first to be an example of the kind of playfulness and modesty typical of Paulhan. It takes the form of a proposed mutual agreement ("let's just say") that is expressed as an optic metaphor. We can no more fully comprehend the solution than we can look squarely at the sun, and the negligence he suggests could be described as the passivity involved in just seeing, as opposed to the effort involved in

looking. The ending seems to be an example of this kind of negligence. However, this disavowal casts doubt on our very ability to come to any decisive judgment, or in short, to read: in Paulhan's own terms, this final sentence is strictly undecidable or unreadable. What we are left with is no longer simply a rather intriguing theory about literature, because in submitting his own language to the same uncertainty or undecidability, the whole book is put into question. The book is thus a performance of the very radical ambiguity that it talks about, an ambiguity which is not simply an equivocation about what the book is saying, but which suspends it between saying and doing, stating and performing, original and commonplace.

### **How Reading This Book Could Change Your Life**

Paulhan's concern, though, is to find a way to keep language working, in spite of its inherent tensions and endless aporias. Indeed, his efforts to establish a common and more fully-inclusive agreement that would cover all words and expressions reflect a deeper anxiety about our capacity to function together effectively as a society, or to form something like a consensual democracy.<sup>6</sup> While he was critical of the notion of politically-committed literature that dominated the post-war literary scene in France, he certainly did not follow Blanchot and others in divorcing literature from any immediate social relevance, even though this was a prevalent misconception about Paulhan, particularly in light of his defense of collaborationist writers after the Second World War. One of the powerful undercurrents of his thinking, which is continually reinforced by the constant recourse to a legalistic terminology in [The Flowers of Tarbes](#) (finding evidence, being on trial, seeing justice is done, passing sentence, and so on), is for language and literature to somehow recover their ethical responsibility, a concern that is foregrounded early on in the text: "We have, to all intents and purposes, given up on knowing what literature owes us" (Flowers, 2). In this respect he is perhaps close to Jacques Derrida, especially the latter's recent work on democracy, justice, chance, hospitality, and the openness to the other in thinking through the implications of performative effects in language. Indeed, Paulhan's argument about "the power of words" in many ways anticipates Derrida's early critique of speech act theory. It might be said that Paulhan's use of Rhetoric "against" Terror involves a very similar reversal to the one Derrida brings into play in "Signature event context," his reading of JL Austin's philosophy of performative language (and later in his reply to John Searle in "Limited Inc.")<sup>7</sup> The thrust of Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of pure, successful or "felicitous" performatives (and the corresponding unsuccessful, improper, or "infelicitous" instances they are anxious to exclude from their theories), is to argue that the priority of purity/impurity, or original/secondary, should be the other way around. What he means is that "pure" performatives are always already contaminated or infected by a prior and necessary impurity, insofar as they are open to the possibility that they might not perform, or do what they say they are going to do. In typically deconstructive style, Derrida shows how performative language requires a principle of iterability in order to function, and I would see this as akin to Paulhan's insistence on the citationality of a "reinvented" Rhetoric. Just as Derrida stresses that he is not denying that there are instances of successful performatives, so Paulhan is concerned to safeguard language (and by extension literature, politics, ethics, and history).

If [The Flowers of Tarbes](#) revels in drawing attention to slippages of language, including its own, and to the essential undecidability between the constative and performative functions of language, it is anxious at the same time to stabilize these slippages. As we saw, if Revolution and Terror meant the loss of a sovereign, unifying power, then this brought with it the corresponding loss of a stable linguistic system. What Paulhan is trying to do beyond simply

narrating this loss, and cataloguing its effects, is to secure the means of protecting language from constantly falling back into the same abyss into which it has collapsed, or of falling back into the same illusions it is denouncing. This is the crux of his argument about “the power of words.” This was not his term, but was the title of a regular column before the Second World War in the journal *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*. Contributors to the column included influential contemporary writers and intellectuals, such as Brice Parain, Denis de Rougemont, and Simone Weil. Their intention was to awaken readers to the dangers of how terms in common political currency, such as “democracy,” “class,” “war,” “violence,” and so on, were being misused, but with the idea that these terms could be made to signify correctly if we were more careful in applying them correctly. Paulhan’s point was that consensual agreement cannot be achieved by stabilizing meaning once and for all, since this would merely imply reasserting the power of some new repressive force (like that of a monarch), or having one’s freedom similarly constrained by the imposition of rhetorical rules and codes. Cementing the relationship between language, intention, and action would be in effect to elide the distinction between performative and constative language.<sup>8</sup> While Paulhan is keen to establish something similar to a consensually agreed upon legislation about performative language, his argument is that if there is no allowance made for slippages of meaning, for performatives misfiring, for interruptions in communication, and the like, then abuses of linguistic power will continue to operate unchallenged.

Again, this is a way of understanding the relationship of a performative utterance to its context which is close to Derrida’s in “Limited Inc.” As J. Hillis Miller puts it in his commentary on Derrida’s text:

*The context is there already, but it becomes a context only when the speech act intervenes within it, however weakly and without power to saturate it. The speech act nevertheless transforms the context it enters, even though in retrospect that context seems to have been there already as the ground of the speech act’s efficacy. This power to intervene in the context, even if not to dominate it, is the emancipatory chance opened by a speech-act theory based on iterability.* <sup>9</sup>

There is thus a certain necessary contingency about how language works, how it enters the context in which it performs, and how it transforms this context, all the while giving the appearance that this context preceded it as its ground or frame. [The Flowers of Tarbes](#) relates performative language and ethics in a similar way, and the text could be read as a sustained effort on Paulhan’s part to articulate something like an ethical imperative of language and literature. A deliberate openness to unpredictable contingency is what Derrida has more recently theorized as hospitality, and as certain unconditional laws of justice and democracy. “Reading” [The Flowers of Tarbes](#) is thus more and less than understanding cognitively the twists and turns of Paulhan’s unsettling arguments. It is only once we begin to respond to the text’s performative self-awareness that we can be said to begin to read it, but by then we are already on very slippery ground, especially since the book challenges fundamentally what we thought we understood to be the ground we were standing on. Reading (and, a fortiori, translating!) [The Flowers of Tarbes](#) in fact involves abandoning the illusion of any meta-narrative security from the text and the linguistic tensions it grapples with, but by accepting the terms of the book’s contract with us, by entering into its contexts, and participating in its transformation, we are at the same time altered or transformed.

### A Few Words on Translating Paulhan

Jean Paulhan has a singular French prose style, full of subtle wit and playful irony. Although humor is a matter of personal taste, and does not always travel well, this is a text that is at times very funny, and I sincerely hope that not too much of this is lost in translation. It was a formidable challenge when translating this text to match Paulhan's combination of an informal, casual, even conversational tone, and his extremely erudite references, or to capture the graceful ease with which he elaborates his ideas, but at the same time the quirky contours of his rather awkward, discontinuous syntax. To stay too close to the original, of course, is to run the risk of coming across simply as poor translation, but to render it more fluent in English than it is in French would be to ignore the unique qualities of Paulhan's style. I have tried to guide the English carefully through this narrow strait, and tidied it up only where necessary for minimal intelligibility. So the reader can be forewarned that stylistic features such as ellipsis and anacoluthon, anaphora and other repetitive sequences, sudden interjections, unannounced shifts from direct to indirect discourse, a blurring of his narrative voice within the fictionalized apostrophes to the many writers he is in dialogue with, and inconsistent punctuation, are all there (intentionally or not) in the original. Another problematic consideration is the question of gender. Whenever Paulhan refers to writers, critics, or readers in a generic sense, it is always masculine in French. The initial temptation is to assume his usage is not intentionally gender-exclusive, and to try to correct it accordingly so as to produce a more gender-inclusive English text. It very soon becomes apparent that this is not only unworkable in practice, since it would bear too heavily on the language of the text, but it would also be something of a cultural distortion. One has to simply accept that the literary world in France at that time was a largely masculine domain, and that when Paulhan was thinking about writers, he probably was thinking almost exclusively of male writers.

Apart from the difficulty of conveying adequately the elusive quality of his style and tone, there is one other strictly untranslatable feature that goes to the very core of what *The Flowers of Tarbes* is saying: clichés and commonplace expressions. Anyone who speaks another language knows that clichés, proverbs, idioms, commonplace expressions, and so on, are all highly resistant to translation, since they are those parts of language that are most linguistically and culturally specific. Paulhan himself was well aware of this, having translated an anthology of proverbs from Malagasy to French, as well as having reflected at length on his difficulties in learning Malagasy proverbs and applying them successfully. As he points out, clichés and proverbial language always strike us as more colorful and imaginative in a foreign language than in our own, so translation always brings to the fore precisely the point he is making about the conflicting but equally valid dual perspectives of Rhetoric and Terror. One passage where this is evident is the discussion, in the section "In Which the Author Uses a Cliché," of Paul Bourget's and Francis Carco's hackneyed phrases, which Paulhan highlights in order to show how metaphors and figures of speech are distorted and lose the original force of their meaning over time. He points out that any phrase can potentially solidify into a set sequence of words, such as "mysterious-languor" or a "habit-which-governs." Clichés thus occur, according to Paulhan, whenever semantics shades over into syntax in this way, when the mechanical aspect of language overrides its meaning aspect. A lot of the time a translated cliché can hold its own as a cliché in another linguistic or literary cultural context, but when I have felt it clearly does not, I have retained the French in parentheses, particularly when Paulhan plays on the French word or expression itself. So the work of translation remains intentionally visible, and this mirrors the way in which Paulhan himself constantly draws attention to the composition of his text. Both



processes are essentially engaged with the same questions of reading and writing, of trying to determine linguistic effect or performative force, and ultimately giving in to a certain mechanical necessity of language, which is not in any sense an admission of failure. If anything, translation participates fully in the kind of reading that the text invites us to engage in, a reading that is ethically responsible precisely to the extent that, to borrow Paulhan's phrase, we "yield to its imperatives" (Flowers, 69).

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## Notes

1. The earlier avatars of what would become *Les fleurs de Tarbes* are "Défaut de langage," *Anthologie de la nouvelle prose française* (Editions du Sagittaire, 1926); "Sur un défaut de la pensée critique," *Commerce* 16 (summer 1928); "Commentaire sur Bruno Latini," *Mesures* (15 January 1937); "Lettre aux Nouveaux Cahiers sur le pouvoir des mots," *Les Nouveaux Cahiers* 22, 23–24, 25; "Le secret de la critique," *Mesures* (15 juillet 1938); and "Éléments," *Mesures* (15 octobre 1938). Paulhan did publish a text called *Le don des langues* towards the end of his life, but this should not be confused with his promised "conclusion" to *Les fleurs de Tarbes*. He added several notes and documents to the main body of *The Flowers of Tarbes*, which were intended to provide further proof and illustration of his ideas. I chose not to translate these in the interests of containing and identifying the main project called *The Flowers of Tarbes*. Interested readers are referred to the 1990 Folio edition of *Les fleurs de Tarbes*, edited by Jean-Claude Zylberstein, which gathers together many of the above texts in a very useful appendix.
2. "Comment la littérature est-elle possible?" *Journal des débats*, 7 Dec. 1941, reprinted in *Faux Pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943). Translated into English by Michael Syrotinski as "How Is Literature Possible?" in Michael Holland, ed. *The Blanchot Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 49–60. For a fuller discussion of this article and its resonances, see the chapter "Blanchot Reading Paulhan" in Michael Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1998), 77–104.
3. In the "Notes and Documents" to *Les fleurs de Tarbes*, Paulhan literally includes a quotation by himself in a long list of contradictory opinions about the same novel. Following his example, I have included a brief biography of Paulhan in the "Names Mentioned" section.
4. *The Flowers of Tarbes*, 82. References are all to the present translation, and will be given subsequently with the abbreviated title *Flowers*, followed by the page number in parentheses.
5. Blanchot, "How Is Literature Possible?" 52.

6. The political implications of this position, particularly in terms of his highly original thinking about the concept of democracy, will be developed more extensively in his post-war texts on the literary purge, such as *Of Wheat and Chaff* (trans. Richard Rand, University of Illinois Press, 2004). Anna-Louise Milne performs an excellent analysis of *The Flowers of Tarbes* along these lines in her monograph on Paulhan, *The Extreme In-Between (Politics and Literature): Jean Paulhan's Place in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Legenda, forthcoming).

7. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context" and "Limited Inc.," trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

8. Anna-Louise Milne, in her study *The Extreme In-Between*, demonstrates how this dynamic echoes Judith Butler's thinking around the question of speech acts in political discourse, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), and the problems inherent in attempts to legislate against certain injurious acts of language, for example, hate speech, racist slander, pornography, and so on. Butler demonstrates the danger of placing faith in the apparent neutrality of a law as a means of sanctioning against offensive language, if such laws are imagined to replace the function of a kind of sovereign power, since the "law," in a Foucauldian sense, is anything but discursively neutral.

9. J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 111.

Michael Syrotinski (03/02/2006)

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