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TOWARDS A REHABILITATION OF THE COMMONPLACE

NOTES ON THE ROMANIAN READINGS OF JEAN PAULHAN'S *FLEURS DE TARBES*

Only recently translated in other international languages (English – 2006, German – 2009, Spanish – 2010), Jean Paulhan's book, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou La Terre dans les lettres* (1941), has the merit of having identified, at its time and with lucidity, the limitations of modern aesthetics and of the idea of “revolution”, defined through the prism of some negative categories that establish an irreducible opposition to the past and tradition in general¹. Not so long ago a Romanian version of Paulhan's famous book has also been published (Jean Paulhan, *Florile din Tarbes sau Teroarea în Litere*, Iași, 2015), signed by Adrian Tudurachi, a refined theorist and critic from Cluj, who also delivers an insightful analysis of the great French essayist's work. The latter has been remembered by the history of Western thought owing to his reflections on cliché and his nuanced plea for the rehabilitation of rhetoric. In what follows, I intend to highlight some ideas which, in my opinion, might also be interesting to today's readers.

The world-wide travelling of this text written in the fashion of an essay-poem, which places it closer to literature and journalism than to the rigorous profile of academic style (the note on the edition warns us that, when he does not fabricate things all together, Paulhan often quotes from his memory), is, without any doubt, the result of the increasingly vivid interest in cliché, convention, and stereotype manifested throughout the post-modern era, as it is known that post-modern writers have been trying to renew their connection with literary tradition and its specific rhetoric. In brief, starting from the observation that the modern evolution of literature led to the autonomization/ purification of language (Paulhan talks of “impoverishment”) and, indirectly, to a pathological lack of trust in the word (*souci*), that is to say, to Terror, the illustrious French thinker puts forth “maintenance” as a solution to help come out of this crisis, *i.e.*, a technical-engineering attitude towards language and its clichés meant to ensure its good functioning with no emotional investment whatsoever and without the illusion of radical transformations. What is more, in this exquisitely fine-tuned essay,

¹ See Hugo Friedrich's reflections on the negative categories of modern aesthetics in *Structura liricii moderne* [*The Structure of Modern Poetry*]. Translated into Romanian by Dieter Fuhrman, București, Univers, 1969.

Paulhan's observations about literature are accompanied by the reflections of the political and social thinker, who is constantly paying attention to the echoes of the aesthetic phenomenon in the conscience of the masses.

The substantial introductory study which accompanies the translation reveals numerous details about the writer's intellectual biography – a forefront figure of the French cultural life during the century past, as a linguist, amateur ethnographer, professor, literary critic, journalist, and a political thinker who was very close, at a given moment, but only during its peak stage, to the avant-garde movement. Later, he became an academician and the director of the *Nouvelle Revue française* (1925-1940, 1946-1968), with a gap of only a few years, during the war, when Paulhan was an active member of the Resistance movement. However, before he made himself known in the Parisian literary life, the young scholar went to Madagascar, aiming to experience a way of life that was radically different from the Western one and to study carefully the culture and customs of the Madagascan people. Just as passionate about ethnography and linguistics, he declared himself thrilled by the presuppositions of semantics, a relatively new discipline², which analysed the distortions that emerge in language as a result of the mechanical use of words – hence the surprising mutations at the level of meaning.

After having studied the language of primitive African peoples with the scientific diligence of a linguist but also with the sensitivity of a decadent artist, fed up with literature (for a while, he was a member of anarchist circles), Paulhan returned to France a few years later with a collection of proverbs and traditional songs which were enthusiastically received by modernist writers (such as Apollinaire, for instance) because of their obscurity. Adrian Tudurachi emphasizes that, far from leaving the impression of a treasury of wisdom, Madagascan proverbs proved to be some cliché formulas that had lost their initial meaning, being perceived as some sort of absurd expressions that were nevertheless used by people in common practical situations of daily life. Nonetheless, being preoccupied with the previously unexplored ways of renewing the language, the Parisian literati noticed only the semantic incoherence of those proverbs, but not their social functionality nor the reassuring feeling produced by their use (*i.e.*, the feeling of being integrated into a given society, with its specific vocabulary and laws)³.

² Adrian Tudurachi claims that the rediscovery of cliché in literature “is linked to the birth of semantics as a scientific discipline”, as Remy de Gourmont was the first to mention “cliché” within a theoretical context, in the last chapter of *Esthétique de la langue française* (1899). However, unlike Paulhan, Gourmont sees cliché as a spoiled form of language, owing to its overuse.

³ From the doctoral dissertation that he had begun writing under the supervision of the famous linguist Antoine Meillet on the *Semantic of the proverb*, Paulhan managed to finish only an essay, which is nevertheless essential in order to understand his ideas – *The Experience of the Proverb*, published in 1925.

The brief experience as an ethnographer revealed to the author of *Les Fleurs de Tarbes...* that it is also possible to contrive a new language using elementary forms of expression, ignoring the romantic-idealistic prejudice of originality. This is why, Paulhan says, literature does not need to avoid stereotypes, as it has done so far, but to cultivate cliché in a programmatic fashion, in order to destroy once and for all the illusion that it is only accessible to a small group of connoisseurs. Taking over his idea, but changing its meaning, avant-gardists would have preferred for literature to be exempted from the prerequisite of being “literary”⁴ – more precisely, they would have wanted for it to get mixed up with life itself and, as a result, become accessible to everyone. So, here you have it, a foreshadowing of the premises that led to the extinction of the writer as a “subject” on the literary stage, the “author’s death” being claimed, once, with much satisfaction by the Western intelligentsia (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, etc.). Much more cautious and much less “democratic”, Paulhan, the “bourgeois” with terrorist sympathies, did not see cliché as a way of de-structuring and disintegrating authorial identity, as the avant-gardists did (the latter did not hesitate to get involved in extremist political movements) but rather as a means of conciliation between the individual and the community, a type of conciliation which is always carried out based on conventions and a common language.

As a result, it is wrong to see Jean Paulhan as a conservative thinker, as Adrian Tudurachi is right to notice, insofar as the rhetoric he upholds is not a mimetic-reproductive one but, on the contrary, a “maintenance” one, which aims to support the functioning of literature as an institution for as long as possible, even if in emergency mode. Indeed, the author of *Les Fleurs de Tarbes...* considers that, far from being restricted, individual freedom (at the social and creative level) is conditioned by the existence of cliché itself, which provides it with a series of possibilities (even if limited) to manifest itself and thus become relevant at the community level⁵. “We have pushed Terror as far as it will go, and have discovered Rhetoric”, says the French writer, completely aware of the need to move on from the moment of revolution in the dynamic of every evolution. In brief, the rhetoric celebrated by Jean Paulhan is one that arises from its own ashes after the virulent criticism of the avant-garde. Therefore, pleading in favour of a

⁴ Paulhan does not share the avant-gardists’ view and upholds the idea that literature should not give up its status of an art.

⁵ In this respect, see Kant’s considerations on *taste* in his *Critique of Judgment*. To mention only one aspect that seems to be important in this context, I will only say that the German philosopher saw taste as a kind of *sensus communis*, and this “common sense” as – “a necessary condition of the universal communicability of our knowledge” (Immanuel Kant, *Critica facultății de judecare* [*Critique of Judgement*]. Translated into Romanian by Vasile Dem Zamfirescu and Alexandru Surdu, București, Trei, 1995, p. 79). Should I also mention that “common sense” goes hand in hand with cliché?

continuity that is critically and lucidly assumed, Paulhan declared himself a “terrorist” so as not to be taken for a conservative retrograde thinker, a reactionary, when he talked of the need to revive the commonplace and rhetoric in modern times (is it just a coincidence that he experienced the “artificial paradises” induced by the use of hallucinogen drugs very late in his life, at the age of patriarchs, and not in his youth, as it is usually the case?).

The same type of critical thinking motivates the French essayist’s complex reaction to cliché when we take into account his political attitudes. Coming from a bourgeois family with Huguenot roots (his father, Frédéric Paulhan, was a well-known scholar of his time and brought important contributions to the history of logic and psychology), the famous director of the NRF participated in the two wars, experiencing courage in the face of death and being decorated for his heroism. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the former combatant did not judge at all those who had not followed his example and remained on the other side of the barricade. It is here that the deeply moral dimension of his reflections about cliché is to be found: by deliberately rendering his heroism banal, Paulhan sanctioned the vindictive reactions of his bloodthirsty fellow countrymen from the Resistance, taking the side of those accused of having been collaborationists. And this because he refused to see things in a Manicheist fashion, being right to doubt the vigilante motivations of the accusers. The moral of this kind of behaviour is that the use of cliché is a good remedy against pride, as it forces people to adopt a balanced, good sense attitude, which makes them forgive and forget and without which dialogue is not possible. Therefore, accepting the commonplace implies understanding the conventional nature of literature and, not in the least, of daily life, as the respect for the form (in literature and art) is an aesthetic analogon of politeness in social practice⁶.

Just as he separated, after the war, from his vengeful former fellows from the Resistance, the young scholar distanced himself – I repeat it – from the ideological radicalism of the numerous avant-garde movements, in which he unambiguously identified the indelible mark of Terror. At a certain point, Adrian Tudurachi quotes an answer – only apparently “Dadaist”, I believe – given by Paulhan in an interview, in which he claimed that the power needs to be given to the first who come, regardless of their qualities and competences. The essayist tried to show that only a precarious society attaches importance to the one who exercises power, i.e. the leader-“player”. Otherwise, in a truly balanced world, as the one in which the “terrorist” Paulhan would have loved to live, the exercise of power should leave

⁶ Among others, see Toma Pavel, *Arta îndepărtării. Eseu despre imaginația clasică* [*The Art of Distance. Essay on The Classical Imagination*]. Translated into Romanian by Mihaela Mancaș, București, Nemira, 1999.

the impression of an immutable ritual, meant to depersonalize and render banal, through stereotype, the meticulously prescribed gestures of the actors on the political stage. The excessive valuing of individual qualities (“originality”) in the playing of a social role gives away the weakness of that society – a weakness that becomes increasingly visible along with the accelerated modernisation and democratisation of the European world⁷.

As Paulhan says: “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 – 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 favour of the carpenter, the remedy in favour of the doctor. Skill, knowledge, and technique, however, become suspect, as if they were covering up some lack of conviction”⁸. In relation with this subtle and very insightful observation, it is time to discuss another aspect of Paulhan’s reflections. I consider here the relation established between cause and effect, the so-called phenomenon of “projection”, defined as an intellectual mechanism through which we attribute to “an object, animal, or person” the feelings that they actually elicit in us. The phenomenon of projection is specific, in general, to infantile thought, as the children often punish the door against which they hurt themselves, blaming it for the pain it caused. The same holds for cliché. “If our experience has any meaning”, Paulhan says, “it is to show that the flaw we take clichés to task for – with all the wisdom in the world – ceases to exist as soon as we stop criticizing them. [...] Terror seems to be a way of doing things rather than an observation and it is not because commonplace expressions are despicable that Terror proscribes them; it is because it proscribes them that they become despicable”⁹. For this reason, the insightful thinker is eager to show, the Rhetorician is currently seen as someone who looks for his words before he thinks.

Not by chance, noticing the growing influence of the masses on the historical stage, Gustave Le Bon signalled, in *La Psychologie des foules*, the modern man’s increasing receptivity to words that have affective connotations, and mainly to clichés. In a similar fashion, the effect of words on the behaviour of the mass-man

⁷ One of the classics of conservative thinking, Michael Oakeshott, believed that we are dealing with a conservative penchant when activity turns into a ritual (patriotism and the pleasure of conversation require such a penchant as a necessary condition). See Michael Oakeshott, *Raționalismul în politică* [*Rationalism in Politics*]. Translation and foreword by Adrian-Paul Iliescu, București, ALL, 1995.

⁸ Jean Paulhan, *Florile din Tarbes sau Teroarea în Litere* [*The Flowers of Tarbes: or, Terror in Literature*]. Translation, foreword and notes by Adrian Tudurachi, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2015, p. 45.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

is comprehensively discussed by Paulhan too; he says that social errors are caused by the influence of language, rather than by human stupidity, as the “power of words” is at the root of all contemporary forms of manipulation. As a result, with the modernization and democratization of the European society there has emerged a true de-semantization of public language, noticed by several thinkers – this is why, Paulhan concludes, repeating, in turn, a cliché: “after the French Revolution, any democratic society possesses a set of stereotypes that have long been devoid of any content but are still able to move and muster the masses”¹⁰.

Thus, the phenomenon of projection leads to a surprising overturn of the causal relationship, as it determines the emancipation of the word and verbal expression from their presupposed pre-extant meanings¹¹. Consequently, words are no longer called upon to “translate” preconfigured cognitive contents, as it is commonly believed – but, on the contrary, they begin to function as outside stimuli that move our thought and sensitivity. Or, if clichés emerge in the natural order of words, they get to play an essential role, as, in time, they make us speak alike and get the illusion that we understand each other.

Therefore, applying the law of reverse causality to his reflection about cliché, Paulhan depicts it in a paradoxical light of amazing complexity, which also has some Freudian echoes (see the theory of “slips” or the powerful observations from his studies on the comic and humorous words). Here is a paragraph that is, I hope, edifying in this respect: “Whether it is literary or banal, a commonplace expression is an event of language which, from its very first appearance, delights our mind. It seems to lend itself to countless different meanings, which get progressively more profound, so incommensurable is its spiritual dimension with the part of it that is made up of words and matter. It appears to escape for a moment from the servitude of language, and we escape along with it. Which explains no doubt why it makes such a strong impression on our memory, being the sign of a triumph”¹².

The French essayist captures here with finesse the suggestive capacities of cliché, which, on the one hand, gives the impression of infinite semantic richness and, on the other, of a puzzling lack of meaning. Despite its strong connection with (affective) memory and the unconscious, cliché should be nevertheless taken, as in

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

¹¹ In a remarkable study on Lovinescu’s novels (*Cuvintele careucid. Memorie literară în romanele lui E. Lovinescu [The Words that Kill. Literary Memory in E. Lovinescu’s Novels]*, Cluj-Napoca, Limes, 2010), Ligia Tudurachi noticed the mechanism of this reverse causality, identifiable in the manner in which the character was built and theorized by the modernist critic in his article *Expresia creatoare de realități [The expression that creates realities]*. The article was published in 1931 and republished in vol. 2 of his *Memoirs* (Chap. XXXIV. 1. *Creațiunea muzicală a ideilor mele. 2. Expresia, principiu de creație a ideilor*). For further details, see chap. *Reminiscente: figuri uzate, reveniri livrești, stereotipii verbale [Reminiscences: worn-out figures, livresque come-backs, verbal stereotypies]* in Ligia Tudurachi’s study, pp. 59-143.

¹² Jean Paulhan, *Florile din Tarbes*, p. 92.

Rimbaud's verse, *littéralement et dans tous les sens*. The so-called "material" side, the aspects which point to the concrete part of life cannot be eluded without seriously hurting its ambivalent-reconciling functionality. Words make us think, it is true. But when we think, we also do it with words. Not with images or sounds. Or with who knows what obscure sensations. If what Borges says is true, i.e. that, ultimately, there are two broad categories of thinkers, the Platonic and the Aristotelian, the only way we can picture the author of the book at hand is walking in the gardens of the Lyceum¹³ – with flowers in his hand, of course. The discrediting of the word never fails to give away the action of a utopian, anti-humanistic way of thinking. In exchange, the resurrection of rhetoric marks, as a counterweight, the emergence of a cognitive-existential paradigm that is humanistic in nature¹⁴.

Unsurprisingly, Paulhan fights directly Bergson's (who is called the "Terror's philosopher" *par excellence*) radically pessimistic remarks about language, sanctioning (indirectly) the complaints of those who claim that words are unable to adequately describe the soul's inner life, unlike music and images. A significant fact is that the author of the *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* saw cliché only as an expression of the laughable par excellence, when he defined comedy as an effect of that "mécanisme plaqué sur du vivant". Therefore, in Bergson's view, life is the realm of spontaneity and unpredictability, of unleashed energy, and the appearance of clichés signals the imminence of death and of all the limitations that make man a creature with no freedom. Influenced by Bergson's philosophy, modern writers (the "terrorists") reject rhetoric on the grounds that it presumably puts language before thought – however, as the French essayist finely observes, they prove to be much more interested in language and more receptive to cliché than the Rhetoricians have ever been. Yet, they do not dream to reinvent the old language, but to invent an original one, beyond language, a language that is innocent and pure, free from the tyranny of stereotypes and syntax, i.e., ultimately, a language in which words would resemble things in the most authentically Platonic way possible. Indeed, Bergson takes over some suggestions from Plato's and Schopenhauer's philosophy, accrediting the idea that music translates the

¹³ Ioan Petru Culianu highlighted Aristotle's brilliant intuition, who (unlike Plato) identified a middle element between the soul and the body – the Spirit (*pneuma*) –, which was deemed to perform the function of "first instrument (*proton organon*) of the soul in its relationship with the body". Through the "pneuma", then, the soul "transmits to the body all the vital activities, and mobility", while, in turn, the body opens to the soul "a window to the world". It is thus that the Stagirite solved the "corporal/not-corporal contradiction", since he allotted to *phantasia* (the inner sense) the role of transforming "the messages transmitted by the five senses into phantasms perceptible by the soul" (see Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere. 1484 [Eros and Magic in Renaissance]*. Translated into Romanian by Dan Petrescu, foreword by Mircea Eliade, afterword by Sorin Antohi, București, Nemira, 1994 – the chapter *Istoria fantasticului*, pp. 23-55).

¹⁴ A detailed account of the links between rhetoric and humanism is provided by Vasile Florescu in the book *Retorica și neoretorica [Rhetoric and Neo-rhetoric]*, București, Editura Academiei, 1973.

obscure life of the unconscious, the depths of the spirit that literature can only capture in a mediated way, through an analogous language in which words function as pure signifiers, as some kind of de-materialized sounds. This is why, Paulhan says, the Terrorist is so obsessed with authenticity, why he mixes up a “constant concern (*souci*) with language and expression” with everything, with love, with freedom.

In the light of the things discussed above, I cannot ignore the influence Paulhan had on a well-known French professor and theorist of our time, William Marx, who, in his relatively recent study, *L'Adieu à la littérature* (2005), describes in similar terms the process of the artist's segregation from the wide audience and of the progressive devaluing of literature in modern society, a phenomenon which may be explained by the increasingly pronounced autonomisation of artistic language, up to its complete separation from the common language, the “words of the tribe” that Mallarmé rejected with much disdain. As a matter of fact, it is known that, in modern times, all the arts tend to annul the traditional distinction between “form” and “content” (see Croce's theories about poetic expression) and to follow the example of music – a symbolic art *par excellence*, which claims it does not represent phenomenal reality, but leaves the impression that it is able to reach the deepest strings of the unconscious and to capture the deep structure of the universe, the world as idea¹⁵. After a tradition that is rooted in Ancient times and has survived for almost two millennia, becoming modern, literature no longer follows Horatio's mimetic principle “*ut pictura poesis*”, steering, in a decisive manner, towards an analogical type of creativity, poetical-musical in nature (“*ut musica poesis*”), theorized in its canonical form by symbolism. Not by chance, just as Paulhan, William Marx considers Bergson the most representative philosopher of modern times, because the ideas of the great French thinker explain the fundamental mutation occurring at the level of artistic expressiveness, identifying the causes that made literature steer more and more towards the irrational, dreaming, and the unconscious.

Coming back to Paulhan, it should be noted that, gliding incessantly from one perspective to another, always confronting the Revolution with the Reaction, Modernity with the Classical Age, Terror with Rhetoric, the essayist ends up by explaining them, in a metaphorical manner, as necessary and interchangeable stages in the dialectics of love, impetuous when it is born, torn up by love and hatred, only to be tamed later on, with the passing of time, when the life of any couple gets to be ruled by the beneficial routine of matrimonial love. Spiritually, Terror is a disease of the youth (as Platonism is too), and it is only natural that it be cured sooner or later, as men become wiser and wiser. However, this is not always the case.

¹⁵ They are the “*universalia ante rem*” – primordial elements which configure Plato's model of the universe, musically structured.

“However banal a commonplace expression may be”, Paulhan says in his demonstration, “it is always possible that it was invented by the person uttering it”. In other words, cliché could also be understood as a phenomenon of subjective, suspicious projection, as we have previously mentioned, not as an inescapable linguistic reality which is supposed to immediately enter dictionaries. Flaubert’s ambition to catalogue received ideas in a monumental *Sottisier* was an utter failure that taught us an important lesson: it is not possible to build an exhaustive inventory of all commonplace expressions, just as it is impossible to summarize our life in a single book. The ideal of a book about nothing gets configured, as it is easy to see, on the background of a failure. As a result, by exiling clichés out of literature, the haughty writer, who deems himself clever, becomes artificial and unauthentic, losing any connection with reality and life. “It is not without a certain sense of pleasure that we discover a commonly held opinion to be wrong”, the much tried essayist warns us; he recommends that all the authors of literature who come to a dead end fathom cliché, not avoid it (something that Flaubert also understood, to a great extent); he advises that they become young again, just for a moment, as “poetry is also seeing with fresh eyes what everyone always sees”¹⁶. Yet here freshness is not the effect of the beholder’s ingenuity, as one might think, but of a long cohabitation with clichés. Only he who feels already old yearns for youth. As a result, ultimately, Terror seems to be a Bovaristic projection of old age itself.

Therefore, from what we have discussed so far, to the best of his knowledge (who could suspect him of innocence?), Paulhan rejects scientific criticism and its empty methodological presuppositions (see the ample section of *Notes and documents* at the end of the book), opting to present his thoughts in the infinitely more difficult form of an essay (in spite of all appearances of spontaneity, the book was carefully written over more than a decade) – a type of discourse that is deliberately drawing on ambiguity and paradox, and the dramatic confrontation of ideas. The rhetorical technique rooted in the humanistic-Epicurean tradition is to be found, in Romania, in the rationalistic-bourgeois movement of inter-war essay, from Ralea, Călinescu and Zarifopol, to Eugen Ionescu (the acid criticism in *Nu* is ambivalent, like Paulhan’s Terror), N. Steinhardt or, especially, Alexandru Paleologu. Not by chance, Paulhan’s most daring ideas, and especially the specific means through which they are discussed, with their brilliant plays upon nuances, seem to have already been translated in the books of the Romanian essayists who belong to the same spiritual family, from the apologia of bourgeois ethics and moderation, claimed by Montaigne’s lineage, up to the complex analysis of cliché and paradoxical good sense – of which we know, now, that is not nearly as widely spread among people as “terror”.

Therefore, placed within a major culture, which gives him an advantage, Paulhan managed to talk about literature and the man in a more direct, simpler, but

¹⁶ Jean Paulhan, *Florile din Tarbes*, p. 173.

also more insightful way, I believe, than the system critics, the scholars, have ever managed to do it. This is why, if the purpose of this book was to cure us of naivety, as Adrian Tudurachi rightfully says, it is not less true that, when finishing it, we are experiencing a strong feeling of regret for this lost naivety, with all its youthfulness and terrors. Paleologu used to quote quite often an aphorism from La Rochefoucauld, his favourite, which is perfectly suited to end our demonstration: “Qui vit sans folie n’est pas si sage qu’il croit”. Let us render unto wisdom the things that it deserves. *Vive La Terreur!*

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(Abstract)

The metaphor of "Terror" in Literature expresses the obsession with originality, rooted in Romanticism, and matched, in modern times, by the (anti-literary) cult of authenticity. Nevertheless, in an age of multiple radicalisms, Paulhan rehabilitates literary tradition, with all its conventions and clichés, showing how it can be made to assume new functions from a contemporary perspective without falling into conventionalism and routine. This lenient attitude towards cliché (reactivated out of the wish to rediscover a common and intelligible language, rather than out of inertia) reflects here a definitive rejection of any kind of fanaticism, which made the French essayist criticize both the "rightist" political extremism of the inter-war period and the "leftist" extremism of the post-war age. In what follows, I intend to develop these observations and demonstrate that Paulhan's reflections draw on a humanistic model that prevailed amidst dramatic historical circumstances, which favoured dogmatic thinking, the "terror" in Letters and life alike.

Keywords: cliché, rhetoric, authenticity, avant-garde, tradition, modernity, humanism, Bergsonism.

PENTRU O REABILITARE A LOCULUI COMUN.
NOTE PE MARGINEA LECTURILOR ROMÂNÊȘTI ALE
FLORILOR DIN TARBES DE JEAN PAULHAN
(Rezumat)

Metafora „Terorii” în Literatură exprimă obsesia pentru originalitate, provenită din romantism, reprezentată în vremurile moderne de cultul (antiliterar) al autenticității. Cu toate acestea, într-o epocă a radicalismelor multiple, Paulhan reabilitează tradiția literară, cu toate convențiile și clișeele ei, arătând cum anume – evitând convenționalismul și rutina – i se pot atribui noi funcții dintr-o perspectivă contemporană. Această atitudine indulgentă față de clișeu (reactivată nu din inerție, ci din dorința de a redescoperi un limbaj comun și inteligibil) reflectă refuzul definitiv al oricărei forme de fanatism, eseistul francez criticând deopotrivă extremismul politic „de dreapta” din perioada interbelică și pe cel „de stânga” al epocii postbelice. În cele ce urmează, intenționez să dezvolt aceste observații și să demonstrez că reflecțiile lui Paulhan au conturat un model umanist devenit important în circumstanțe istorice dramatice, care favorizează gândirea dogmatică și „teroarea” în domeniul Literelor, la fel ca în viață.

Cuvinte-cheie: clișeu, retorică, autenticitate, avangardă, tradiție, modernitate, umanism, bergsonism.