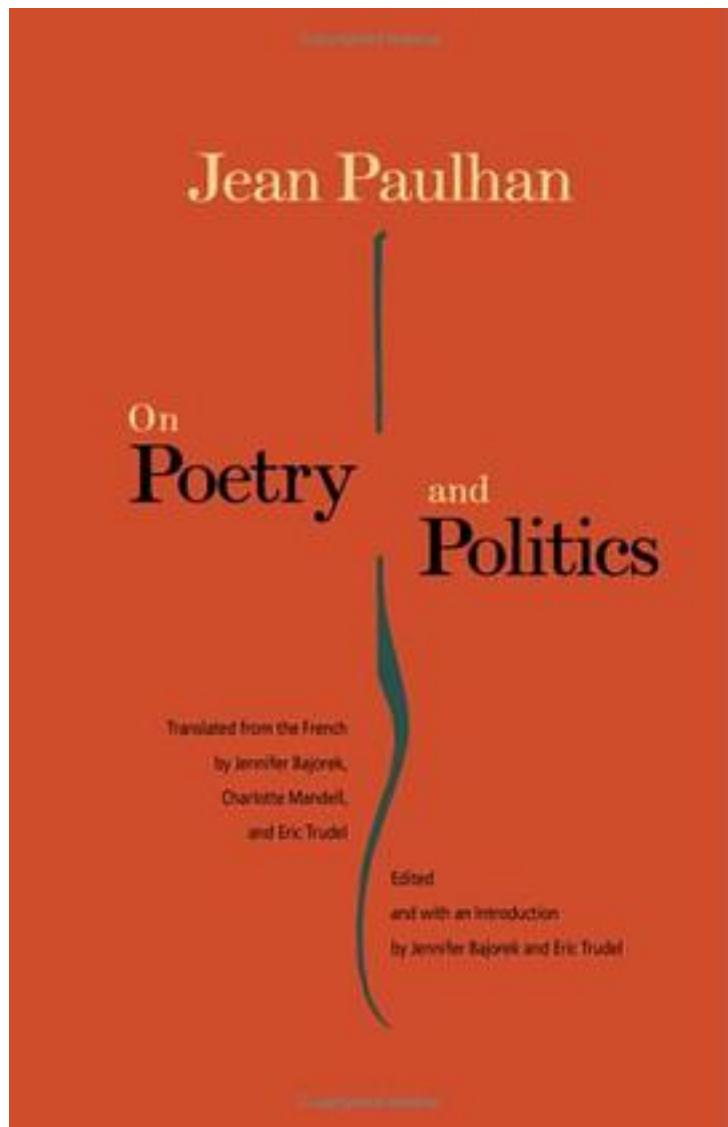


On Poetry and Politics



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Jean Paulhan was a legendary editorial figure of twentieth-century French literature, assisting and publishing many of the most important writers of his lifetime. He was also the author of several volumes of fiction and numerous essays dealing with literature, art, rhetoric, and language. Yet he published his own work in a manner that deliberately kept it inconspicuous, or as Maurice Blanchot put it, "in the margins". A critics' critic, he gave his texts the same scrupulous attention he gave to others, and was recognized as a discreet master. But when he was sufficiently upset or angry, as he was when French politics endangered the intellectual freedom of French writers and writing, he published ferociously. This volume is the first English translation of these major essays, presenting in one book the development of his thinking on his most studied subject: how language works, or, to echo Blanchot again, how literature is possible. Much of contemporary literary theory finds its modern antecedents in Paulhan's essays. He reflected on large questions such as the philosophy and psychology of literature, while at the same time showing a concern for detail and aesthetic accomplishment. He constantly emphasized the act of reading as an activity and literature as the engagement and provocation of such activity. Beloved by writers because he took the problems of writing with the utmost seriousness, his own personal style was marked by self-effacement and irony.

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