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Living Transcription: The Poetry of Jean Tortel

Abstract

With the publication of six new books of poetry since 1979, Jean Tortel has joined his contemporaries, Francis Ponge and Guillevic, as one of France's leading materialist poets. His writing, recounting the process of its own unfolding with voluptuous precision, is meant to bear witness through its figurations to the forces of chance and mutability governing the natural order. As such it constitutes a place of passage or verbal garden, both sumptuous and ordinary, where reading and formulation merge.

Keywords

poetry, 1979, Jean Tortel, Francis Ponge, Guillevic, France, materialist, poets, chance, mutability, natural order, verbal garden, garden, sumptuous, ordinary, reading, formulation

LIVING TRANSCRIPTION: THE POETRY OF
JEAN TORTEL

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I suppose that “modernity” is in each one of us, in our own way, and that it is impossible to separate ourselves from it, thus useless to call upon it as such, since it declares us.¹

Jean Tortel, who celebrated his eighty-fourth birthday on the fourth of September, 1988, has published six new collections of poetry since 1979: *Bodies Attacked*; *Discourse of the Eyes*; *Contingent Solutions*; *Leaves, Fallen from a Discourse*; *Arbitrary Spaces*; and *The Seasons on Trial*.² His work to date includes some twenty books of poetry and an important body of criticism on contemporary and pre-classical literature. Born in Avignon, the oldest son of elementary school teachers of peasant origin, he began writing under the guidance of his wife’s uncle, the symbolist poet, Jean Royère, while earning a living as a functionary in the Finance Ministry, a job whose only virtue seems to have been that it gave him enough time to write. After being transferred to Marseille, Tortel joined the staff of the *Cahiers du Sud*, where he was a regular contributor and member of the editorial staff from 1938 until the journal was discontinued in 1966. His retirement to an old farm house in Avignon, on a road fortuitously named “Chemin des jardins neufs” (“New Gardens Road”), coincides with a surge of creativity which has brought him belated recognition as one of France’s most respected contemporary poets.

Highly regarded by a younger generation of poets at least since the 1960s, Tortel has, with the publication in 1984 of Raymond Jean’s study in the Seghers “Poètes d’aujourd’hui” series, joined the officially recognized list of contemporary poets alongside of Jean Follain, Guillevic, and Francis Ponge, with whom he has important

affinities. In 1987, Tortel was awarded “Le Grand Prix National de la Poésie,”³ and four days were set aside to honor his achievement during the Avignon festival in July. Although there is a growing body of criticism on Tortel’s poetry in France, he is still thought of by many as a “poet’s poet” and is virtually unknown abroad. In what follows, I will try to summarize Tortel’s poetic program, to situate him within a post-war context and to capture the experience of reading his difficult, paradoxical writing.

Although there appears to be a fundamental consistency in Tortel’s position since his earliest statements on poetics in *Markers* (1934),⁴ the “garden” poetry written after his retirement in 1966 in many ways constitutes a *corpus* of its own and represents Tortel’s most successful work.⁵ The recent publication of *The Clover Sidewalk* in 1985,⁶ containing his essays on poetry written between 1946 and 1985, and taking its title from the 1946 text, would support the view that Tortel himself sees no discontinuity between his present work and the concepts underlying his practice in the early years. From the beginning, he has conceived of poetry as the linguistic embodiment of an order resulting from the apprehension of nature by the poet’s gaze:

Everything, rich in diverse elements: trees, houses, tilled land, hedges, plays of shadow, of water and sun, reveals itself as necessary and the expression of an ineluctably constructive law. It is because it is constructed with order that it is solid and gives the impression of a permanence so great that it seems eternal. . . . I can, in complete security, lean with all of my force on nature, use it as my base, my spring-board, my subject: it will not cave in under my feet. . . . The earth and all her ornaments, or rather, because the word “ornament” suggests something superfluous, the union of her lines and her colors, is herself rhythm and language. (*Markers*)⁷

But, whereas that order appears to reside in nature itself in the early writing, in Tortel’s later work it seems to depend entirely upon the will of the writer, struggling against ever greater odds to enact the transfer from one domain to the other. The titles of his most recent works, beginning with *Bodies Attacked* and ending with *The Seasons On Trial*, compared to those of the 1950s and 1960s (*Births of the Object, Explanations or Careful Gaze, Elementals*), bear witness to

this shift, symptomatic, perhaps, of a philosophical move from a symbolist to a materialist world view.⁸ The force of his most recent poetry springs from the sense one has of a pure intentionality, struggling to bring word and image together, so as not to lose the material density of either. But poetry is not linguistic theory, and Tortel has always known that his work is generated out of the fundamental incompatibility of experience and its expression:

The instant of qualification
 Being the one, by arbitrary ways,
 Audible or not, sinuous
 Against the obstacle,
 Game or fall, in the passage
 Of the image into the figure,
 The image is always mistreated. (*Qualified Instants*)⁹

Modern poets, especially, write despite what they know about language; their figurations constitute systems of value proffered against meaninglessness, their writing both a refusal and an affirmation of “physical law.”

As his title-essay, “The Clover Sidewalk,” implies, Tortel understands poetic writing to be a place of passage between the self and the physical world, a materialized space within which the ephemeral, retinal images of nature are being translated, or “transferred” as he prefers to say, into permanent figures of their transformation:

Writing will be in small portions in a space composed of rectangles, the boards that connect and separate the hedges. And these, cutting off the view and the wind, allow, in implying the passage from one to the other, alternate rest periods for the eye and the air through a unique territory where they would be lost if the high borders. . . . (*Discourse of the Eyes*)¹⁰

His writing constitutes a body or structure recounting the progress of its own unfolding (*Leaves, Fallen from a Discourse*) to the reader who enters it. Tortel has maintained that writing, which is constant differentiation, is actually closer to reality, always in a state of physical transformation, than seeing, which gives one an illusion of unity. Thus his poetry is always in motion, always attentive to its own effort as it inscribes what has been seen into material signs of that

seeing, into a *Discourse of the Eyes*. Despite striking differences in form amongst collections, one might say that his work is one continuous text or manifestation of that self-critical process. Every word is qualified and a qualifier, every line modifies what precedes. Always caught up in an effort of differentiation and transformation, it is a poetry which cannot be stopped and remembered because it never comes fully to rest.

But unlike much contemporary writing, the process of modification in Tortel's texts is also one by which things are endowed with a quality (*Qualified Instants*) that saves them from insignificance: "It is through literary language, and *through it alone*, that we can learn that in fact nothing is without meaning," he writes in *Keys For Literature*.¹¹ Occasionally (although more and more rarely) an object or group of objects emerges in a haiku-like moment, suspended from the flux, gathering time into itself as if for a picture:

Plumage of grey pigeon
Immense pearl
Probable metamorphosis.

Let's exchange that: very small
Drops suspended
Too fine and sky

To fall, to stream down,
Immobile then,
Wing open but calm. (*Qualified Instants*)¹²

The world that Tortel's poetry presents is not sacred, however, as it became for Reverdy or certain surrealist poets such as René Char, for example,¹³ nor is it a Platonic world of essences, as it was for Royère. It is rather a banal, flat, ordinary natural order, "sumptuously" there: "Don't glorify too much this garden," Tortel says in an interview with Henri Deluy. "It gets weeded, hoed, watered. . . . It's flat, it's simple. . . . Nothing is more sumptuous than a row of thistles, when the violet flowers have burst out; nothing more sensual than a red pepper."¹⁴ The words he chooses for the transcription or qualification of that world are ordinary as well, not charged with special poetic value. Since language is a way of giving evidence in a material sense, it should not present itself as mystical or esoteric, but

should belong to the lexicon of simple, communicable, every-day existence. Tortel seeks, in his meticulous choice of words, tools for seeing the physical world with precision rather than catalysts for the imagination. He combines scientific exactitude with the passionate, one might say voluptuous, recording of the most minute details of natural change:

Three yellow leaves, in August, isolated today in the dark green mass of the cherry tree, almost at the base of the mass, outlining a triangle (scalene) in the foreground, almost outside of the leafy mass, ahead of time in their opacity and, in fact, ready to detach themselves from it, the first ones deprived of sap. . . . (*Discourse of the Eyes*)¹⁵

He feels no urge to impose a unity on the untidy garden lying directly outside of his window as an extension of his own "quotidian." The somewhat erratic use of punctuation expresses that haphazardness poetically. He accepts nature in its diversity and without any hierarchies¹⁶—the branch, or the leaves, or the fruit rather than the whole tree—all elements (*Elementals*) which will follow the inevitable passage of rotting and dying, but which "assure him of his own living presence in the world, *hic et nunc*."¹⁷

Since his return to Avignon the basic elements of Tortel's poetic universe have not changed: eyes open, turned toward the light and the garden on the other side of the window; the garden as "image-making flux," with individual objects—rose, leaf, pepper, branch—occasionally and fleetingly distinguishing themselves when an accident of light touches them; borders of cypress hedges ("to see means to see that there are limits");¹⁸ the ever-present threat of a storm which can destroy the precarious balance presenting itself to the eye. His project has not changed: "To found a certain number of satisfying relationships (*Relations*)¹⁹ between the strangers that we are. . . . and the object separated by glass. . . . to accentuate a face to face."²⁰ The poet's function is to confront the world in an act of authentication, placing a seal, as he puts it, on the scene of metamorphosis taking place in nature. To qualify means to impose one's own order.²¹

Thus Tortel refuses to admit any absolute break between nature, self and language, whatever he may know about the arbitrary nature of signification (*Arbitrary Spaces*). That refusal is translated by the paradoxical significance of the storm, which Tortel dreads in nature,

because it destroys the delicate balance outside of the window, but which he adopts as a metaphor for the creative act by which the natural garden becomes a linguistic one. As in Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* the storm is a reminder of the poet's necessity and of the radical force of his gesture:

It's not symbolically that I fear the storm. When a storm threatens, when it gets a little heavy like today, I don't feel well. . . . Naming things begins to bring a little order by interrupting the disturbing flux. . . . I have to interrupt it. I can only do it by dumping it over onto the page, in the form of writing. . . . These are psycho-sensorial events that disturb me, that would suffocate me, that prevent me from breathing. . . . We have found the arbitrary, we live with the arbitrary, we make a truth out of the arbitrary. . . . That is where history comes in, that is where poetry is contemporary.²²

The poet's will to fabricate objects into a system for their representation inhabits writing and vivifies it as metaphor:

The most essential desire is the desire for metamorphosis. . . . but we know very well, rationally, when we are in the domain of the law, that metamorphosis is impossible. Baucis will never become Lime Tree, Philemon will never become Oak Tree. So we need to act as if metamorphosis were possible, and to act as if metamorphosis were possible is to make metaphors. . . . We spill over onto the plan of language the impulse that pushes us to demand metamorphosis, which we know to be impossible.²³

Despite the fact that his verse frequently refers to the material limits that constitute physical existence (*The Limits of the Gaze*),²⁴ he sees poetry as a challenge to limit: "Otherwise, it is in vain that we write."²⁵ This challenge to the laws of language is a sign of the writer's freedom, and, in this sense, an ethical commitment. Not a break, then, but a passageway forged out of the materials of common language for the sake of returning significance to both the forging self and to the things that present themselves to his eye.

It follows that Tortel understands his function as intensely artisanal, as the "gesture of the peasant, of the sailor, of someone who has a trade, who shapes wood, who lifts a burden."²⁶ In speaking of his

own life, this child of school teachers always insists upon his peasant origins: "I am from the Vaucluse . . . of peasant stock. A hundred years ago, the peasant engendered the teacher, who did not forget his rootedness in the land."²⁷ To be didactic (*Didactics*), as most of the titles of his collections are, is not necessarily to lose touch with the earth and common things; it is part of the poet's precision.²⁸ Writing is the tool out of which he fashions the space of passage; it is his wood, his spade, his pruner, the soil of his garden: "Avoid pursuing the text anywhere except in its materiality . . . reduce the great disturbing presence . . . of the writer to corporeal relationships . . . , an instrument for the act of qualifying."²⁹ There are no rules for this process, which takes place arbitrarily (*Contingent Solutions*), according to the unique relationship of desire to will to image, within the space of the writer's most fundamental daily existence, at ground level, between the desk with its furl of cigarette smoke, the window, and the garden. The drama, he tells us in 1951 in "The Problem of the Art of Poetry," is "of a manufacturing type" ("d'ordre manufacturier"); the only question is "how" to realize the transfer of dirt to words.³⁰ For this reason Tortel's verse must be "free"; it cannot submit to the already established laws of traditional prosody because those laws belong to a different history. Henri Deluy asked Tortel to comment on the changes that have taken place in the construction of his poetry "in its actual building" ("dans son bâti même"), and Tortel's answer reflects his belief in the connection between his own body, that of nature, and the body of writing, all of which share in the laws of physical necessity:

As for my own verse . . . if it is affected, in its structure, by successive mutations, that is doubtless . . . because the body is a living thing submitted to desiring action. . . . *Bodies Attacked* is thirty years older than "The Body" in *Births of the Object*.³¹

Mallarmé is the great predecessor who taught his heirs the signifying force of the materiality of language with *Un Coup de dés*. But Tortel, like Guillevic or Ponge, does not try to use that linguistic material as a way of transcending the emptiness of a lived reality; rather, he sees writing's corporality as a structure which reproduces the world's fullness. He frequently invokes Mallarmé as a precursor for his own views: "The universe chosen is one which never exceeds the human glance . . . 'the island which the air loads / With sights and

not with visions' ('l'île que l'air charge/De vues et non de visions') is a turning toward the concrete. . . ."³² But, without ever acknowledging their difference, he also notes what seems to be a crucial distinction: "Mallarmé's language is only a look, but his look is only language . . . there is thus no more Nothingness. In its place, only language?"³³ Whereas for Mallarmé the white spaces that invade his verse are a reminder of the emptiness outside of writing and consciousness, for Tortel the white spaces that define his poetic texts are "the thing which surrounds me" or the "perfectly real," "spots of dark chance." They stand for an uncharted, unapprehended phenomenal reality waiting for the act of "qualification" by the poet. All of the liberties that he takes with the poetic line—splitting of words, odd punctuation, ungrammaticalities—procedures that he has in common with the shaped verse of modern poetry inspired by Mallarmé, are meant to affirm the corporeal nature of both his model and its figuration. The movement of his verse is not an ascension away from the earth, as in Mallarmé, but an application downward, in a passionate gesture of love toward the earth:

To require it here
In this way and as
Will obey the animal-wrath.

Or else the branch
Pulled from high up bends down
Black the leaves. (*Qualified Instants*)³⁴

In his poems Tortel maintains the capital of the beginning word only as a sign that the ceremonial act of challenging the unapprehended has begun again. The period at the end of the line of verse prevents something from getting lost in the white, as he puts it.³⁵ This "material exhibitionism" of his poetry, Deluy points out, has replaced, in a sense, the rules of prosody as a means of self-definition. "To exist, the line needs to show itself."³⁶ In his most "minimalist" text to date, *Arbitrary Spaces*, each line begins with a capital and ends with a period; each line is meant to affirm its identity as verse, as "a kind of phonetico-figurative unity" independent of what precedes or what follows.

This exploitation of the materiality of language has produced some of Tortel's most powerful writing and seems to be a source of

continuing vitality, even, or especially, as he faces the degeneration of his own physical powers. One can, I think, discern in Tortel's career a move away from language as a medium for seeing the outside world and toward language as a kind of stumbling block affirming a will to presence against impossible stakes.

The poetry written before the mid-1960s, even as it insists upon the physical process of its own transcription, retains in its rhythms, syntax, line or stanzaic organization, and punctuation a connection with a lyric tradition. It is a poetry that can still be sung:

Beautiful to say beautiful one says
 Flower or else space or feather.
 Happy and to say it one says
 Flower or else space or feather.
 I lead my desire where I wish
 Which disturbs things and raises
 Another fire.
 An unknown flame springs up
 I name as I will its color
 The flame is green if I wish
 It to lie down and transform itself into leaf.
 (*Explanations or Careful Gaze*)³⁷

In 1965, Tortel very consciously broke with this tendency, which risked lapsing into effusiveness, as he puts it, and, with *Opened Cities*,³⁸ began writing the more resistant, unforgiving verse that made it impossible for him ever to become a popular poet—in fact which accounts in large measure for what one might call his unpopularity. Emilie Noulet wrote of *Opened Cities*: “This verse does not sing; no rhythm nor even any assonance, no pause or accented syllable. . . . It is difficult to discern the reason for the line divisions, or stanza breaks . . . a deaf, hard, dry reading tone. . . .”³⁹ Jean Laude, on the other hand, whose own poetry registers the catastrophic collapse of language as a significance-making system, had identified a new “music” in Tortel’s verse as early as 1961: “The music is no longer in the pleasing sonorities of a sustained melody, but in the internal organization, in the syntactic connections. . . . He wants to found a diction and a tone of voice which can respect the basic nudity of the emotion and what aroused it.”⁴⁰ In the collections of the late sixties and early seventies Tortel pursues this anti-lyrical tendency, which

ultimately leads to the minimalism of *Arbitrary Spaces*. In *The Limits of the Gaze*, for example, he writes:

Calm here To write
Calm is not
To appease nor, tough surface
Opaque and terrible for the nails,

To cut into this thing
Which names itself calm and proof
Of the unsayable.

Palm at the top of a sky
Received. Shining and green
The width of a hand.⁴¹

Or in *Qualified Instants*:

There.
Withdrawn but just right.
Don't call.

Without glory
Nor waste
At the heart of what
Concerns me.

A red ball
Accords with its night.⁴²

The difference between Emilie Noulet's view and that of Jean Laude points to an important shift in expectations concerning lyric poetry which had already found an expression in the work of Pierre Reverdy around World War I and which would be exacerbated by the despair felt by many poets concerning the impotence of language in the face of the catastrophe of the two World Wars. The place of civilization has been blown apart and the self seeks reorientation amongst the shards. In Reverdy's work that homeless voice wanders on the outside of gaping windows or vacant thresholds. The condition

of place is similar to the condition of the self—in search of a significance which was there once just days or years or minutes earlier.

In the 1950s this sense of solitude is still more extreme, for even the nostalgia is missing. As Jean Paris asks in his introduction to *Anthologie de la poésie nouvelle*, published in 1956: “Where does one find the inspiration for new affirmations, when the times belong to disaster?” “Every authentic work is born today from a retreat,” from lyricism.⁴³ The poetry of the generation of writers who began writing after World War II (Laude, Giroux, Du Bouchet, Dupin, for example) registers the difficulty or the outrage of its being at all, and, as Paris points out, the poet’s relationship to the world is often presented as a uniquely physical struggle. This heightened sense of the overwhelmingly material nature of existence is also registered by some poets who had already begun writing in the thirties, but came into their own in the forties—Guillevic, Tortel, Ponge, for example—not in order to despair of its force, however, but to participate in its transformative power by founding a new rhetoric. Ponge would call this concentration on the means by which language is produced an “activism without illusion.”

For these poets language and morality are inseparable: “Materialism: moral knowledge founded on natural laws,” Tortel writes in the *Cahiers du Sud* in 1947. This new materialist poetry, even in the violence of Guillevic, who sometimes seems to hurl words onto the page like stones, seeks to deliver language from the kind of failure which many younger contemporaries were registering. Words, like rocks or pieces of wood, are placed side by side until they form a line against chaos. As Laude observed of Tortel, these poets are founding a diction, a tone, and a syntax for a new world, and as their poetry evolves, they may even assimilate techniques from their younger contemporaries’ more desperate figurations to do so. Thus Tortel’s link to the generation of poets who began writing in the sixties.

Like Ponge, Tortel, who is a scholar of the pre-classical lyric, identifies with Malherbe and other early seventeenth-century poets, who sought to found a rhetoric that would reflect an understanding and control of the material possibilities of language.⁴⁴ This new, more demanding poetry, bearing constant witness to its own processes, is synonymous with the unearthing of a lost or buried civilization:

When I came to live here, after having written *The Opened Cities*, which are, I think, texts of excavation, I realized that the work of turning over that the spade performs is analogous to the one which unearths buried cities; and that “culture” is exactly that: making reappear what has been buried in the night. . . . Digging in order to know what is happening underneath, bringing to light, dislodging a “that” from its obscurity, this was work of the same order that I had attempted in opening up (to their words) buried cities. I noted, in spading, that to act on language was an attempt at breaking similar to the one which a tool performs when it digs in. But I do not know which one of the two is the figure for the other.⁴⁵

Poetry is a job of linguistic exactitude, the work of a peasant-teacher, who seeks minimal lyrical effects and maximum lucidity, a *poésie-critique* of the most demanding sort. Unlike other modern heirs to Mallarmé, such as Michel Deguy or even Beckett, for example, who would reveal language as part of an infinite discourse dense with the resonances of other texts, Tortel empties language of literary reference, using only the most unadorned, neutral vocabulary to lead it back painfully, word by word, sometimes even syllable by syllable, to its most elemental existence, as the paradoxical figuration of a mute world which gives it meaning:

The trace co
Ming back to the left turned over

By the diligent hand

Against the originary nothing

Which will wake it up. (*Contingent Solutions*)⁴⁶

By doing this he seems to be seeking to reconnect all aspects of material existence: that of the self, that of writing, and that of nature. Thus when he writes *Bodies Attacked*, we understand “bodies” to mean leaf, eye, hand, and word, all caught in the same necessity. Hence the passionate intensity of this poetry which, as it sees itself writing, sees itself living—an affirmation of life against death.

Reading Tortel’s work requires, for this reason, a total commit-

ment, an abnegation of any critical independence from the text; it is like a type of spiritual exercise. Through him, one enters perception—its hesitations, its choices, its delineations—in a series of texts with no obvious end. The increasingly strained tension between apprehension and interpretation accounts, at least in part, for the challenge to readability posed by some of Tortel’s most recent verse. The individual lines of *Arbitrary Spaces* seem to be spoken by the voice of an explorer in a place so unstable that uncertainty, expressed in one short breath at a time, is the only qualifier that remains:

I do not know.
 If I am integrating myself.
 It is there still not only.
 Here where the arbitrary blanks.
 Denounce the vibrations.
 That I do not situate.
 When that moves I say.
 It is the branch the trembling.
 Of a light the haze the noise.
 A body anything at all. (*Arbitrary Spaces*)⁴⁷

While visiting Tortel recently, I asked him what these last three words of his most recent work—“anything at all”—which seem to abandon the effort of naming, signified. His answer revealed the integrity that exists for him between living and writing and reminded me of the “Three yellow leaves, in August” of the *Discourse of the Eyes*:

Jean Tortel: To end by saying “It’s anything at all,” do you know what that avoids? It avoids anguish. It avoids anxiety, what makes us uneasy; people ask themselves questions all the time, in order to know what it is: “Is it a unity?” “Is it a plurality?” “Is it an order?” “Is it to create?” “Is it to chance something?” If I have the courage or the laziness—it boils down to the same thing—to say that it is anything at all, then I avoid all that. What I want is to manage to suppress this sickness which is the anguish.

Suzanne Nash: Isn’t that sickness the poet’s vocation?

Jean Tortel: Not necessarily! No! If I were not anxious, I wouldn’t write; if you were not anxious, you wouldn’t ask me

questions. If Jeannette were not anxious, she wouldn't worry so much, and she would live less. But all the same, I must know, myself, that I can refuse this anxiety, and that I can say: "It is this, it is this, it is that, it is *anything at all*," without concluding the pathetic absurdity of everything, without losing myself. . . . It's easy to get lost.

NOTES

1. Jean Tortel, interview with Henri Deluy, in Raymond Jean, *Jean Tortel*, Coll. "Poètes d'aujourd'hui," (Paris: Seghers, 1984), p. 69. English translations throughout the article are my own.
2. *Des Corps attaqués* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); *Le Discours des yeux* (Marseille: Editions Ryôan-ji, 1982); *Les Solutions aléatoires* (Marseille: Editions Ryôan-ji, 1983); *Feuilles, Tombées d'un discours* (Marseille: Editions Ryôan-ji, 1984); *Arbitraires espaces* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986); *Les Saisons en cause* (Marseille: Editions Ryôan-ji, 1987). Hereafter these texts will be cited in the notes as *CA*, *DY*, *SA*, *FT*, *AE*, and *SC* respectively. *Les Saisons en Cause* was written before *Arbitraires espaces*, but, because of delays in printing, published later. The chronology of the actual writing of his work is important to Tortel for reasons that will become apparent.
3. A prize initiated by the Mitterrand government which has been awarded to Francis Ponge, André Du Bouchet, and Guillevic, in that order, before Tortel.
4. *Jalons*, Coll. "La Phalange" (Paris: Messein), hereafter cited in notes as *J*.
5. For a study of the poetics of the work written between 1964 and 1986, see Alain Pailler's excellent dissertation, "Figures d'un monde végétal," Montpellier III, 1985.
6. *Le Trottoir de Trèfle* (Marseille: Editions Ryôan-ji), hereafter cited in notes as *TT*.
7. *J*, pp. 81,91.
8. *Naissances de l'objet* (Paris: Cahiers du Sud, 1955); *Explications ou bien regard* (Lausanne: Mermod, 1960); *Elémentaires* (Lausanne: Mermod, 1961), hereafter cited in notes as *NO*, *EBR*, and *E*, respectively.
9. "L'instant de la qualification / Etant celui, par des voies arbitraires, / Audibles ou non, sinueuses / Contre l'obstacle, / Jeu ou chute, du passage / De l'image dans la figure, / L'image est toujours maltraitée." *Instants qualifiés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 47, hereafter cited in notes as *IQ*.
10. "L'écriture sera parcellaire dans un espace composé en rectangles, les

planches que relie et sépare des haies. Lesquelles, coupant la vue, le vent permettent, en impliquant le passage de l'une à l'autre, les repos alternés du regard et de l'air à travers un territoire unique où ils se perdraient si les bordures hautes. . . ." *DY*, p. 91.

11. *Clefs pour la littérature* (Paris: Seghers, 1965), p. 50, hereafter cited in notes as *C*.

12. "Plumage de pigeon gris / Perle immense / Métamorphose probable. // Echangeons cela: très petites / Gouttes en suspension, / Trop fines et ciel / Pour tomber, ruisseler, / Immobile donc, / Aile ouverte mais calme." *IQ*, p. 83.

13. See Pailler, p. 25.

14. Jean, p. 70.

15. "Trois feuilles jaunes, en août, isolées aujourd'hui dans la masse vert sombre du cerisier, presque à la base de la masse, dessinant un triangle (scalène) au premier plan, presque hors du volume feuillu, en avant de son opacité et, en effet, prêtes à se détacher de lui les premières privées de sève . . ." *DY*, p. 67.

16. Jean, p. 70.

17. Cited by Pailler, p. 219.

18. *DY*, p. 35.

19. *Relations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

20. *DY*, p. 11.

21. *DY*, p. 12.

22. "Entretien de Jean Tortel avec Suzanne Nash," *Poésie*, 29 (1984), 94–95.

23. "Entretien de Jean Tortel," p. 96.

24. *Limites du regard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), hereafter cited in notes as *LR*.

25. Jean, p. 75.

26. *TT*, p. 19.

27. Jean, p. 56.

28. *Didactiques* (Paris: La Répétition, 1978).

29. *TT*, p. 120.

30. "Le Problème de l'art poétique," *Cahiers du Sud*, 306, 182–88.

31. Jean, p. 77

32. *TT*, pp. 89, 90.

33. *TT*, pp. 91–92.

34. "L'exiger ici / Telle et comme / Obéira la colère animale. // Ou bien la branche / Tirée de haut s'incline / Noires les feuilles." *IQ*, p. 11.

35. Jean, pp. 73–74.

36. Jean, p. 76.

37. "Belle pour dire belle on dit / Fleur ou bien espace ou plume. / Heureuse et pour le dire on dit / Fleur ou bien espace ou plume. / Je mène où je veux le désir / Qui déränge les choses et lève / Un autre feu. / Une flamme inconnue surgit / Je nomme à mon gré sa

couleur / La flamme est verte si je veux / Qu'elle se couche et se transforme en feuille." *EBR*, p. 13.

38. *Les Villes ouvertes* (Paris: Gallimard).

39. *Synthèses* (Mars 1966), p. 289.

40. *Critique* (Août-Sept. 1961), p. 703.

41. "Le calme ici / Ecrire / Calme n'est pas / Se désarmer ni, dure paroi / Opaque et redoutable aux ongles, // Entamer cette chose / Qui se dit calme et preuve / De l'interdit. // Palme au sommet d'un ciel / Agrégé. Rayonnante et verte / Largeur d'une main." *LR*, p. 70.

42. "Là. / En retrait mais juste. / N'appelle pas. // Sans gloire / Ni débris / Au coeur de ce qui / Me concerne. // Une boule rouge / S'accorde à sa nuit." *IQ*, p. 7.

43. (Monaco: Editions du Rocher), pp. 21, 30.

44. See *Le Préclassicisme français*, special issue of the *Cahiers du Sud*, edited by Tortel in 1951, and his "Le Lyrisme au XVIIe siècle," in *Histoire des littératures III, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 337-403.

45. Jean, p. 70.

46. "Le trait rev / Enant à gauche renversé // Par la main diligente // Contre l'originnaire rien // Qui le réveillera." *SA*, p. 102.

47. "Je ne sais pas. / Si je m'intègre. / C'est là toujours pas seulement. / Ici où des blancs arbitraires. / Dénoncent les oscillations. / Que je ne situe pas. / Quand cela remue je dis. / C'est la branche le tremblement. / D'une lumière la vapeur le bruit. / Un corps n'importe quoi." *AE*, p. 124.