André Malraux

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André Malraux is one of the most misunderstood French writers of the twentieth century, both in his native land and in much of the Englishspeaking world. Despite numerous publications devoted te, him, he remains, somewhat paradoxically, an unappreciated and often maligned author. Eulogized in the most extravagant terms by his admirers ("the last Renaissance man," "the intellectual as man of action"), denounced in a most vehement manner by his detractors ("a mythomaniac," "the only authentic French fascist"), he is an enigmatic, elusive, contradictory figure. There are many reasons for this. First, as was the case with many of his contemporaries, particularly T. E. Lawrence, who in trigued Malraux to the utmost degree, his real significance, his originality, and his genius have been obscured by the legend surrounding his personal and political life: his adventures in Indo china, Yemen, Persia, and other parts of Asia, his polemic with the exiled Trotsky, his many anti Fascist activities throughout the 1930s, his leadership of the Escadrille Espana and the Escadrille

Malraux with his father, 1917
(Archives André Malraux)

André Malraux during the first seven months of the Spanish civil war, his roles in the Resistance, his political volte face in 1946, his special relationship with Gen. Charles de Gaulle, his career as minister of information and, later, minister for cultural affairs, his encounters with Nehru, Mao, Senghor and Picasso, and so forth.

Second, Malraux, who was an original and profound thinker, did not develop his ideas into a philosophical system. His writings defy conventional classifications, as the prefix in his title Antimémoires (1967; translated as Antimemoirs, 1968) clearly indicates, and, in addition to composing novels and essays, he contributed to a revival of such neglected genres as the preface, the epigram, the funeral oration, and the political speech. Most of the labels attached to him ai differing stages in his career cubist/surrealist, écrivain engagé (committed writer), art historien are clearly inadequate and merely heighten the confusion. Like one of his mentors, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, he preferred the aphorism, the epigram, and the essay to the logically coherent arguments of traditional Western philosophy, and his distrust of Cartesian reason was counterbalanced by an unrelenting appeal to lucidity, the cardinal Malraux virtue. An aversion to ideology, doctrine, and dogma, for closed systems in general, is a defining characteristic of Malraux's thought.

Third, Malraux's style is associative, evocative, and elliptical; its rhetoric has more affinities with the prose poem than with discursive logic, and, unfortunately, many of its subtle cadences virtually defy translation. Though Malraux has been well served by several translators, notably Haakon Chevalier and Terence Kilmartin, some of his most memorable sayings and pronouncements often seem sibylline when rendered into English. This barrier bas undoubtedly made his incantatory prose somewhat inaccessible to those who read no French, and it probably accounts, at least in part, for his relative unpopularity in Great Britain, in particular.

Fourth, because he wrote about the "absurd" (a word he reintroduced into the French language), "the death of God," and the subsequent death of given values, Malraux is often presented as a forerunner of the atheist existentialism that flourished in France in the late 1940s and 1950s. While this identification is partly correct, it has not always been beneficial to his reputation, as it tends to blur the distinctions between his thought and, for example, that of Jean Paul Sartre. In fact, the amalgam Malraux Sartre Camus tends to reduce Malraux to the status of a less gifted precursor of Sartrian philosophy whereas in fact his central preoccupations were not with freedom and bad faith, but with fraternity and metamorphosis. While the vogue for existentialism was at its height in France, Malraux was devising other responses to the absurd which, he often insisted, was not a philosophy or an answer to the human condition but, on the contrary, the starting point for a series of questions on the dichotomy between life and values, between being (être) and doing (faire).

Finally, Malraux's political evolution and his often contradictory allegiances he has been described as anarchist, anticolonialist, Marxist, antiFascist, liberal, Communist (first a Trotskyist, then a Stalinist), Fascist, nationalist, Gaullist, reactionary, conservative have generated much confusion and spawned many ephemeral but damaging pamphlets that have detracted from his stature as a writer of international repute. Though the man who defended Communist leaders imprisoned by Hitler may seem to have little in common with the minister who denounced communism just a decade later, the two positions are not necessarily incompatible. It would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that Malraux's reputation as a writer, both in France and in the English speaking world, rests almost exclusively upon the

six novels he published from 1928 to 1943. Nevertheless, in ternis of his total literary output (approximately thirty major works), this fifteen year period, in which lie wrote the two masterpieces most often associated with him, La Condition humaine (1933; translated as Mans Fate, 1934), and L Espoir (1937; translated as Mans Hope, 1938), represents but a brief and brilliant hiatus in a career devoted as much to the essay form as to fiction. When his first novel, Les Conquérants, appeared in Paris in 1928 (and was translated as The Conquerors in 1929), Malraux was primarily considered an obscure diagnostician of European decadence in the aftermath of World War I; and when fascism was finally defeated in the second conflagration to engulf Europe in a third of a century Malraux had abandoned the novel form and devoted himself to two ambitions projects on art and autobiography. On the other hand, from the early volumes of Psychologie de l'art (1947 1949; translated as The Psychology of Art, 1949 1950), a revised version of which appeared as Les Voix du silence in 1951 (translated as The Volces of Silence, 1953) clown to the volumes of La Métamorphose des dieux, originally published in 1957, translated as The Metamorphosis of the Gods in 1960, and substantially rewritten in the 1970s, Malraux developed his concept of the "museum without walls" and sought to embrace the arts of mankind in a totalizing synthesis made possible by the perfection of photographic reproduction. On the other hand, with Antimémoires, which was to become, after substantial additions and amendments, part of the two volume Le Miroir des limbes (1976), he defied conventional autobiography and re created the genre by raising it to the level of philosophical discourse. Furthermore, Malraux's posthumously published works L'Homme précaire et la littérature (Precarious Man and Literature, 1977), the only full length study he ever wrote on literature, his reflections on numerous individual authors and painters; and the long opus on T. E. Lawrence, soon to be published in a Pléiade edition are further proof of his predilection for the essay form.
Georges André Malraux, the only child of Fernand Malraux and Berthe Lamy Malraux, was born on 3 November 1901 at 53, rue Damrémont in the Montmartre district of Paris. His parents, who had married in 1900, were separated in 1905 and divorced ten years later. His father remarried and by his second wife, Lilette Godard (d. 1946), had two sons, Roland, who died in 1945 during the deportation, and Claude, who was executed by the Germans in 1944. Malraux's relationship with his younger half brothers is shrouded by the saine combination of privacy and discretion that was tocharacterize all his personal relationships with family and friends. Raised by his grandmother, his mother, and an aunt, the young Malraux grew up in relative comfort in the somewhat dreary Paris suburb of Bondy, where, in October 1906, he began to attend the Ecole de Bondy, a private school on the rue Saint Denis. There he met Louis Chevasson, who was to accompany him to

Malraux at the time of his military service in Strasbourg (Archives André Malraux)

Indochina in the 1920s, and who remained a lifelong friend. Malraux was an extremely precocious student whose omnivorous reading extended well beyond the orthodoxy of the school curriculum. At a very early age, he devoured the works of Hugo, Balzac, and Sir Walter Scott and years later he often acknowledged the impact that Les Trois Mousquetaires (by Alexandre Dumas père) and Bouvard et Pécuchet (by Flaubert) had upon his imagination. As of October 1915 he went to the Ecole Primaire Secondaire (renamed Lycée Turgot after World War 11) on the Rue de Turbigo and, when he was seventeen, found employment in the service of an entrepreneurial book dealer, publisher, and bibliophile, René Louis Doyon. Impressed by Malraux's already vast knowledge of literature, which by that time embraced Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont as well as such older contemporaries as André Gide, Paul Claudel, and André Suarès, Doyon employed him as a chineur, a sort of broker who combed the stalls along the batiks of the Seine and secondhand bookshops in search of first editions, out of print titles, and other rare items. Malraux's "pay" was determined by the value of whatever treasures he managed to unearth. It is interesting to point out that Malraux's passion for the printed word, first as chineur, then as author and editor, was his primary means of livelihood for most of his life, and that he never "worked" (in the pedestrian sense of the word) at anything else.
In 1920 1921 he helped Doyon launch an ambitious but short lived series of first editions called La Connaissance by editing two volumes of texts by jules Laforgue (1860 1887). Their excellence brought him to the attention of another publisher, Lucien Kra, whose

Editions du Sagittaire, a series of luxury books with woodcut illustrations, were intended to appeal to wealthy bibliophiles eager to find reliable means of combating the inflation and devaluations of the postWorld War I period. From 1920 to 1922, Malraux edited various books by poets: Remy de Gourmont, Laurent Tailhade, Alfred Jarry, Pierre Reverdy, and Max Jacob; in 1926 1927, after the Indochina adventure, in partnership with Louis Chevasson and the Greek born engraver Demetrios Galanis, he launched two series, A la Sphère, which published texts by François Mauriac and Paul Morand, and later, Aux Aldes, which printed luxury editions of works by Paul Valéry, jean Giraudoux, André Gide, and Valery Larbaud. In 1928 Gallimard appointed him director for special Nouvelle Revue Française editions; he worked intermittently on numerous Gallimard projects the most ambitious of which was an edition of the complete works of André Gide until the outbreak of the Spanish civil war.

As editor of several successful series of luxury volumes of literature, Malraux had displayed an extreme sensitivity to all the technical components of book production, notably design, typography, and the importance of illustrations. His knowledge of the profession was perhaps equaled only by an all consuming passion for art: "J'ai vécu dans l'art depuis mon adolescence" (I have lived in art since my adolescence), he reminded an interviewer in 1952. Though he had litde or no formal training in art history, he would attend lectures at the Musée Guimet (which houses France's most extensive collection of Asian art) and the Ecole des Etudes Orientales and assiduously visit the many museums and galleries of Paris. His contributions to the numerous avant garde literary magazines that proliferated in the French capital brought the young Malraux into contact with such writers as Pierre Reverdy, Laurent Tailhade, Blaise Cendrars, and André Salmon, and soon afterward he sought out several of the artists he most admired: James Ensor, whom he went to visit in Ostend; the fauvist painter André Derain; and the poet painter Max Jacob, to whom he dedicated his first book Lunes en papier (Paper Moons), which had appeared in 1921. This unusual tale, reviewed in the Nouvelle Revue Française and much appreciated by André Breton, leader of the burgeoning surrealist movement, had woodcuts by the cubist painter Fernand Léger and bore the following curious subtitle: "Petit livre où l'on trouve la relation de quelques luttes peu connues des hommes ainsi que celle d'un voyage parmi des objets familiers mais étrangers, le tout selon la vérité" (A little book in which are related some of man's lesserknown struggles and also a journey among familiar, but strange objects, all told in a truthful manner). Lunes en papier (which has never been translated into English) is a highly derivative piece of writing, which is understandable enough when one recalls that Malraux was nineteen when he wrote it. An indirect tribute to Max Jacob, the poet who had inspired it, it also bears the imprint of Hoffmann, Guillaume Apollinaire, and, more interestingly, Lautréamont, the subject of one of Malraux's earliest incursions into literary criticism. His article on Lautréamont's work, "La Genèse des Chants de Maldoror," appeared in the monthly review Action, and it was at a dinner celebrating the occasion that Malraux met the woman who was to become his first wife: Clara Goldschmidt, the daughter of a well to do Franco German jewish family. They were married on 21 October 1921.

"Si je ne vous avais pas rencontrée, j'aurais aussi bien pu être un rat de bibliothèque" (If I hadn't met you, I could have been just a bookworm), Malraux is alleged to have confessed to Clara, a highly intelligent, liberated woman who shared her companion's enthusiasm for art, literature, and the cinema. Together they discovered German and Flemish expressionism, Negro art, avant garde films, and together they exulted in the simple pleasures of living in

postwar Paris: frequenting cafés and restaurants, galleries, museums, and the stock exchange. The couple indulged their love of travel by visiting Italy,

Malraux, circa 1920 (courtesy of Bernard Grasse

Spain, Greece, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. However, their extravagant life style quickly exhausted the funds, mostly Clara's. They had invested in stocks, and when the market suddenly collapsed, and with it their shares in Mexican mining stock, they were ruined. It was shortly after this financial disaster that Malraux decided to live out the dream he had been nourishing for some time: a journey to Asia, to explore the vestiges of the civilizations that fascinated him, specifically the Khmer monuments in Cambodia. He had already done much reading and research, and it was in fact his amazing knowledge of Khmer civilization that prompted the minister of colonies, Albert Sarraut, to recognize his proposed expedition.

In the late fall of 1923 André and Clara Malraux left Europe, that cemetery of "dead conquerors," in search of adventure, archaeological remains, and financial gain. In December of that

same year, shortly after their arrival in French Indochina, where they joined their friend Louis Chevasson, they embarked upon an archaeological mission with some measure of official backing. Following the Ancient Royal Way that led through the jungle of Cambodia, from the Damreng mountains to Angkor, they eventually discovered, at Banteay Srei, a ruined Khmer temple from which they removed invaluable basreliefs. This act, by no means an uncommon occurrence, did not then have the saine stigma attached to it as it has today, but, all the same, in Malraux's case, it had many unexpected repercussions. Caught in possession of stolen sculptures, he was arrested, tried,and sentenced to three years of imprisonment, a sentence that was appealed and ultimately dismissed after he had been subjected to several months of "house arrest." Clara Malraux had played an important part in bringing about this turn of events. As she recounts in her memoirs, she feigned suicide and was allowed to return to Paris, where she enlisted the moral support of writers as diverse as Gide, André

Maurois, Mauriac, jean Paulhan, Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, Doyon, Jacob, and André Breton, who signed a petition published in the Nouvelles Littéraires on 6 September 1924. A short article by Breton, "Pour André Malraux," had appeared in the saine journal on 16 August.

The trial and the appeal had their share of farcical moments, with references to Rimbaud, poetic license, the immaturity and impetuousness of youth, Malraux's alleged Bolshevik connections and anarchist leanings, Clara Malraux's German origins, and so forth. At the saine time it became increasingly obvious to Malraux that, irrespective of his deed, he was being tried and judged by representatives of a corrupt colonial administration bent upon punishing him for a crime perpetrated by many of its own high ranking officials. In addition, the flagrant miscarriage of justice enabled Malraux to perceive a fundamental discrepancy between the so called ideals of colonialism, Europe's "civilizing mission," and the cynical betrayal of the saine ideals by the decadent French functionaries.

After a short visit to France in the winter of 1924 1925, mainly to raise funds and support for the struggle that lay ahead, Malraux returned to Saigon to found a newspaper, the Indochine: Journal quotidien de rapprochement franco annamite (17 January 14 August 1925), later called the Indochine Enchaînée (4 November 1925 24 February 1926), which, in championing Annamite nationalism, was one of the first opposition papers to combat the oppressive realities of French colonial rule. With the help of a highly committed French lawyer named Paul Monin, and in agreement with Paris weeklies such as Nouvelles Littéraires and Candide, Malraux assembled an array of articles covering many subjects, from politics to art. Though only in his mid twenties, Malraux wrote courageous, caustic editorials attacking and satirizing Maurice Cognacq, the unscrupulous governor of Indochina, and other influential officials. An important phase in the gradual awakening of his political consciousness had taken place.

When the Indochine Enchaînée finally folded in early 1926, Malraux vowed that he would never desert the Annamite cause, and, prior to his departure for Paris, he promised to continue the struggle in France. However, as most of his biographers have stressed, his promise was never
fulfilled, unless one interprets two articles an indictment of military atrocities inflicted upon the population of Indochina ("S.O.S. Les Procès d'Indochine" [S.O.S. The Indochina Trial], Marianne, 11 October 1933) and his eloquent preface to the French journalist Andrée Viollis's book Indochine S.O.S. (1935) as evidence of his continuing commitment. As was to be a pattern in his later life, Malraux was torn between two distinct, though not necessarily, incompatible, notions of engagement: that of the man of action, directly involved in a specific struggle, and that of the intellectual, more concerned with the origins and long term implications of that saine struggle. Prior to 1932, when Malraux's numerous antiFascist activities began to nurture (but never dominate) much of his writing, his political pronouncements were infrequent. During that saine period, however, after his initial encounter with Asia, he wrote two essays, La Tentation de l'Occident (1926; translated as The Temptation of the West, 1961), and "D'une jeunesse européenne" (About European Youth, published in a 1927 volume entitled Ecrits), three novels, Les Conquérants, La Voie royale (1930; translated as The Royal Way, 1935), and La Condition humaine, many book reviews and articles that appeared in the Nouvelle Revue Française, and, just as important, parts of the much neglected Royaume farfelu (Whimsical Kingdom, 1928), dedicated to Louis Chevasson.

It would be ill advised to dismiss Malraux's early attempts at writing short stories Lunes en papier, Royaume farfelu, and fragments from unpublished works conceived in a similar vein that appeared in literary periodicals in the 1920s as the frivolous failures of a precocious and ambitious yet inexperienced young author. After all, the two collections were republished with Malraux's consent in the handsome four volume edition of his (Euvres (1970), with original engravings by Marc Chagall, André Masson, and Alexandre Alexeieff. This distinction was not conferred upon Le Temps du mépris (1935), a minor yet well known novel translated into many languages (into English as Days of Wrath, 1936) and considered insignificant by both Malraux and his estate. The literary qualities of Royaume farfelu may be debatable, but, as Cecil jenkins has emphasized in André Malraux (1972), virtually all the components of Malraux's vision are already present in this brief piece: "The cosmic ring, the pessimism, the exoticism, the violence, the insects, the image of blindness, the suffering, and the immanence of death . . . and the story itself oddly fore shadowing Vincent Berger's Eastern adventure in Les Noyers de l Altenburg shows that Malraux's basic fable of arduous adventure and defeat is already in place." As much of Royaume farfelu was composed and parts of it already published in periodicals before Malraux's voyage to Indochine, one must beware of overstating the significance and relevance of that adventure to his basic fable. The voyage may be said to have crystallized, rather than determined, elements of his artistic vision.

In contrast, the intellectuel content of both La Tentation de l'Occident and "D'une jeunesse européenne" bears the distinct imprint of Malraux's confrontation with the cultures of East Asia, China in particular, which provided the backdrop to his first three novels. La Tentation de l'Occident, his first major work, which was dedicated to his wife "A vous, Clara, en souvenir du temple de Banteaï Srey" (To you, Clara, in remembrance of the temple at Banteay Srei) has been described by some critics as an epistolary novel. Essentially an exchange of letters between a young Chinese man, Ling, traveling in Europe, and a young Frenchman, A. D., traveling in China, the dialogue enables Malraux to compare and contrast the Western sensibility with its Eastern counterpart. The epistolary form provides him with flexibility in handling a wide variety of topics, and the two differing points of view obviate the subjective impressions of a diary or travelogue. Malraux is less interested, however, in events and places than in ideas, and, despite numerous passages of lyrical beauty, the book tends to be somewhat cerebral. A. D.'s contribution is much longer than Ling's, but the "dialogue" is less between an Easterner and a Westerner than between two disembodied voices that represent conflicting tendencies within Malraux's own mind.

Nevertheless, a fairly coherent line of reasoning may be distilled from the diversity of ideas expressed in La Tentation de l'Occident. Malraux's central concern is the moral and spiritual decadence of the West, whose values have been discredited, if not utterly shattered, by the debacle of World War I; and, in this respect, his general indictment of European civilization can be related to other intellectual, artistic, and social phenomena Dadaism, surrealism, the resurgence of Catholicism, the forging of a new society in the U.S.S. R. that marked the 1920s. Malraux's stance, however, was nonideological and nondoctrinal. He discerned in European man a fatal preoccupation with the individuel, with selfhood, with a new demon, the subconscious, that he quickly associated with the absurd. In a characteristically memorable epigram= `After the death of the Sphinx, Oedipus attacks himself " Malraux anticipates and deplores twentieth century man's obsession with "interiority," the modern abyss. Both antiFreudian and anti Proustian and explicitly so in his later pronouncements he

saw in his contemporaries' fascination with the self an inwardly spiraling, destructive force. Malraux's own position was certainly not dualistic. La Tentation de l'Occident is not a simplistic valorization of the Orient at the expense of everything Western, even though the possibility of looking to Asia as a model for spiritual resurgence is one of the temptations suggested by the title. Malraux expresses the saine idea more forcefully, in allegorical terms, when he prophesies the imminent reversa] of colonial practices: Europe shall no longer impose herself and her values on an unwilling world, but shall in turn be transformed by an influx of aesthetic values from other cultures, not just from China. A. D. points out that the variety of paintings assembled in the Louvre by Napoleon had already profoundly disturbed a generation of artists "who were most sure of themselves," and he predicts that this malaise will spread to Europeans, who are weary of themselves, their crumbling individualism, and their "delicate framework of negation," and eventually generate new forms from the ferment. "Mais ce n'est plus l'Europe ni le passé qui envahit la France en ce début de siècle, c'est le monde qui envahit l'Europe, le monde avec tout son passé, ses offrandes amoncelées de formes vivantes ou mortes de méditations .... Ce grand spectacle troublé qui commence, mon cher Ami, c'est une des tentations de l'Occident" (But it is not Europe or the past which is invading France as this century begins, it is the world which is invading Europe with all its present and its past, its heap of offerings of living and dead forms, its meditations . . . . This great, troubled drama which is beginning, dear friend, is one of the temptations of the West).

Les Conquérants marks a turning point in the history of twentieth century French literature: the exotic China of Claude Farrère, Pierre Loti, and Paul Morand gave way to the fermentation of prerevolutionary China, with its internecine struggles between nationalists and Communists, and the additional complications wrought by the machinations of terrorists, anarchists, and ideologically uncommitted adventurers.

Clam and André Malraux in Indochine,

1923 (Archives Clara Malraux)

The novel was inspired by the aftermath of an event that occurred in Shanghai on 30 May 1925 (when Malraux was still in Saigon). A group of Ghinese students, incensed by the existence of Europeandominated "concessions," demonstrated against the foreign controlled police of the International Seulement in Shanghai. After issuing warnings, the police opened fire, and the ensuing casualtiestwelve dead, numerous wounded had enormous repercussions: additional demonstrations, on a much vaster scale, against foreign usurpers, the boycotting of foreign gonds, a total boycott of Hong Kong, and, in the long run the mort damaging loss of all, the total discrediting of Western democratic institutions. A great revolutionary surge, which was mainly nationalist in inspirafion, swept through China, uniting every class behind it. Les Conquérants is set in the brief period from 25 June to 18 August 1925, when Malraux, as editor of the Indochine, was receiving dispatcher and communiqués on the Chinese government's decree to paralyze Hong Kong, bastion of British imperialism and Western capitalism. It is little wonder then that many of his contemporaries, struck by the many vivid passages of description, should have viewed the novel as a kind of reportage. This was a significant factor in the growth of the myth of Malraux témoin (the witness), merely chronicling events he happened to have observed.

Serialized in the Nouvelle Revue Française from March to June 1928 before Grasset published the novel later that year, Les Conquérants provoked widespread commentary, ranging from outright condemnation to effusive praise. On 8 June 1929, at thé Union pour la Vérité, it was thé object of a memorable debate involving jean Guéhenno, julien Benda, Emmanuel Berl, Gabriel Marcel, and Malraux. Two years later thé exiled Trotsky read thé novel on thé island of Prinkipo, just off thé coast of Turkey. His réactions to it and Malraux's perceptive reply, in which he clarified his intentions and defended his aesthetics, appeared in thé April 1931 issue of thé NRF. The debate over Les Conquérants was revived in 1949 when Grasset reissued a "définitive" version of thé novel, with thé addition of an important "postface" by thé author. Malraux, who had excised many political references, was singularly dismissive of "ce roman d'adolescent" (this young man's novel). He explamed that its success was due less to his portrayal of episodes of thé Chinese revolution than to his creation of a new hero "en qui s'unissent l'aptitude à l'action, la culture et la lucidité" (who combined a talent for action, culture and lucidity).

This new hero, or "new man," as both Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Emmanuel Berl described him, is Pierre Garine, and much of thé novel revolves around him. Garine, who was born in Switzerland, is "director of propaganda" and one of several Europeans who have sided with thé Chinese in their efforts to oust their colonial masters. Neither a revolutionary nor a nationalist he claims he is apolitical, in much thé same way as other people are asocial he can nevertheless sympathize with thé oppressed masses in China, precisely because they are exploited and downtrodden. His success as a propaganda agent stems as much from his efforts to rekindle in thé Chinese workers their sense of human dignity as from his appeals to liberty, equality, and justice. At odds with this strategy is thé orthodox Russian Communist Mikhail Borodine, an actual historical figure, who suives to impose thé successful Soviet model on Chinese society, but with scant regard for différent structures. Les Conquérants is not a morality tale pitting wicked European imperialists against innocent Chinese victime, nor is it primarily an account of thé Chinese people's struggle to eject their European conquerors. The main conflict is between Borodine, thé

doctrinaire party official who wishes to mass produce revolutionaries thé way Ford mass produces automobiles, and Garine, for whom life, all life, is meaningless and absurd. The three part structure of the novel "Les Approches," "Puissances," "L'Homme" (Thé Approaches, Powers, The Man) establishes a progression away from thé political events to thé portrait rendered in "L'Homme" of thé solitary individual whose illness, failure, and meaningless death are at thé antipodes of revolutionary optimism, or even a liberal belief in thé création of a better future.

The forging of a more equitable society is not what motivates thé two principal Chinese characters, Hong and Tcheng Dai, either. The former (a forerunner of Tchen in La Condition humaine) is a terrorist propelled into committing gratuitous acts of violence by a burning hatred for thé self respect and complacency that, in his eyes, define thé well to do. His political stance is basically Manichaean "Il n'y a que deux races, les misérables et les autres" (there are only two races, thé poor and thé others) and not predicated upon thé attainment of specific political objectives. In thé long term, his actions are ineffectual, as are those of Tcheng Dai, a sort of Chinese Gandhi who embodies thé ethical impérative in a self aggrandizing way. Tcheng Dai, a pacifist, prefers his actual role as defender of thé oppressed to thé virtual role of liberator of thé oppressed, and his suicide, thé supreme form of moral protest, valorizes thé self over revolutionary praxis.

In his brilliant rejoinder to Trotsky's objections to his portrayal of thé Chinese revolutionaries in Les Conquérants, Malraux made one of thé earliest, as well as most succinct and cogently argued, statements about thé functions of politics in his fictional world. In particular, he tried to dispel any uncertainty concerning thé problematic relationship between politics and metaphysics. In response to Trotsky's notorious remark that a good inoculation of Marxism would have spared Garine many of thé errors he had committed in Canton, Malraux issued thé following clarification, which is crucial to any understanding of his aesthetics: "Ce livre est d'abord une accusation de la condition humaine .... Ce livre n'est pas une `chronique romancée' de la révolution chinoise, parce que l'accent principal est mis sur le rapport entre des individus et une action collective, non sur l'action collective seule" (This book is first of all an accusation against thé human condition .... This book is not a "fictionalized chronicle" of thé Chinese revolution, because thé main stress is placed on thé relationship betweenindividual and collective action, not on collective action alone). These words apply as much to La Condition humaine as they do to Les Conquérants, but in between the two works set in China comes La Voie royale, where the stress is clearly on individual action.

Malraux and Louis Chevasson in Saigon, 1923 (Archives André Malraux)

When La Voie royale appeared in Paris in late 1930, after serialization in the August through October issues of the Revue de Paris, it was accompanied by an announcement of some promise: "La Voie royale consitue le tome premier des Puissances du desert, dont cette initiation tragique n'est que le prologue" (The Royal Way constitutes the first volume of The Powers of the Desert, te, which this tragic initiation is merely the prologue). Less than a year later, Malraux used a similar expression in a letter dated 29 September 1931 to the editor of the review Echanges, in which he mentioned that he was working on "un roman très étendu dont La Voie royale constitue en quelque sorte la préface" (a very extensive novel te, which The Royal Way constitutes a kind of preface). Most commentators have assumed that the projected novel, which never materialized, eventually became La Condition humaine, begun in September 1931, but Walter Langlois, the best informed of Malraux's biographers, doubts, in the 1978 publication International Conference on the Life and Work of André Malraux, that Malraux's masterpiece, published two years later, was the text in question. Similarly, in view of its classification as a tale of adventure an apparent regression from the originality of subject matter, narrative coherence, and political acumen that had characterized Les Conquérants many critics have concluded that thé actual writing of La Voie royale must have precedeu thé composition of Les Conquérants.

Recently this argument bas been revived and given additional weight by Christiane Moatti in "La Condition humaine" d'André Malraux (1983), after attentive scrutiny of thé pertinent manuscripts.
On thé level of plot, La Voie royale, a fictionalized elaboration of thé Indochina adventure, is

a fairly straightforward novel. A young Frenchman, Claude Vannec, encounters a legendary Danish adventurer called Perken aboard a steamship destined for thé Orient. Despite différences in age, éducation, background, and marital status, they soon discover that they have much in common, philosophically speaking, and decide to pool their resources. Claude, an amateur archaeologist with some semi official backing from thé French Institute, intends to explore a Buddhist temple on thé Royal Way that leads from Angkor Wat to thé lakes at Me Nam, but he bas no expérience in traveling in Indochina. Perken, who bas some familiarity with thé forests of Siam and thé indigenous peoples (Xas, Stiengs) who live there, agrees to act as guide. Whereas Claude is motivated mainly by thé desire to discover a small Khmer temple and remove its precious carvings, Perken wishes to seek out a masochistic exlegionary by thé name of Grabot, who had disappeared months before in mysterious circumstances in thé saine part of Indochina. After a harrowing trek through thé jungle, Claude's archaeological expedition succeeds, and he is able to appropriate thé sculptures he bas so eagerly sought. Deserted shortly afterward by part of thé native help they had requisitioned, Claude and Perken, in their quest for Grabot, are compelled to penetrate deeper and deeper into thé jungle and further away from any semblance of civilization. Eventually, when they locate him, they are confronted by a chilling spectacle of degradation: Grabot, completely blinded and totally dehumanized, is tied to a millstone. Though they are by now encircled by hostile Stiengs, Perken manages to arrange a truce and negotiate Grabot's release. However, Perken falls upon a poisoned dart, and thé novel ends with a description of hie slow, painful démise. Gazing at thé youthful features of thé now hateful Claude, he learns that death, a metaphysical abstraction, does not exist: "Il n'y a pas . . . de mort.... Il y a seulement . . . moi. . . . moi ... qui vais mourir ... " (there is ... no death . . . . There's only . . . 1. . . . 1 who . . . am dying).

Though it is obvious from this synopsis that Malraux bas exploited many of thé conventions of thé traditional novel of adventure thé trek through tropical forests in search of hidden treasures, thé pursuit of a legendary figure held captive by primitive tribes it is less apparent how he molded this unoriginal raw material (there are echoes of joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling) into a powerful statement of his own philosophical and metaphysical preoccupations. The suspenseful opening sentence of thé novel "Cette fois, l'obsession de Claude entrait en lutte" (Now Claude's obsession mastered him again) sets thé tone for what follows and suggests that one is dealing with more than just a simple tale. It soon becomes apparent that thé obsession that bas drawn Claude to Perken (and vice versa) is thé obsession with death=`thé irréfutable proof of thé absurdity of life" and thé circular structure of thé novel (death dominates thé opening and closing scenes) reflects its inescapable finality.

In emphasizing Perken's tragic awareness of thé inevitability and meaninglessness of death, Malraux bas created a fictional world that is darkly pessimistic. However, thé irremediable sense of solitude that pervades thé work is never a pretext for acquiescence, resignation, or thé passive acceptance of one's lot. On thé contrary, it is thé vert' consciousness of their own mortality that drives thé main characters to act, although their actions never have any concrete political objectives, as was thé case in Les Conquérants. It is possible to consider both Perken and Grabot as callous colonialiste, cynically exploiting thé vulnerabilities of indigenous peoples in order to satisfy their own inner cravings and desperate ambitions. Perken's oft quoted remark, ` Je veux laisser une cicatrice sur la carte" (I want to leave my mark upon thé map), can be interpreted as an expression of his imperialist dream, only partly

fulfilled by thé small kingdom he bas already carved out in Siam. By thé saine token, thé psychosexual leanings of at least two of thé main characters their désire to dominate, to imagine themselves as thé "other" during erotic acts suggest thé sadomasochism that characterizes thé colonial "master." Malraux's sympathy for thé aspirations of thé Chinese proletariat in LesConquérants makes it difficult to ignore thé political dimensions of La Voie royale, even if they are of secondary importance. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that it takes a novelist of considerable skill to shift the

Page front the manu script of Les Conquérants, Malraux's first novel (conrtesy of the Langlois Ford collection)

reader's attention away from these realities and on to the obsession with death that separates La Voie royale from the conventional tale of adventure. The novel won the 1930 Prix Interallié.

For both Claude and Perken death is not merely the antithesis of life, or the end of life; it is also a form of life based on acceptance and conformity, the craving for material comfort and success, the false security afforded by belief in established moral, intellectual, and spiritual values. In other words, the worst manifestation of death is the abject surrender to those forces that conspire to blunt man's apprehension of the "human condition." Perken and

Claude persistently denounce this danger in their dialogues, and their decision to test their wills to the utmost limit in extreme situations is carried out in defiance of accepted bourgeois norms. The double alienation they endure self banishment from decadent Europe and estrangement from Indochinese customs and beliefs is reflected in the jungle they choose to explore. Malraux describes the hostile background of the forests of Cambodia and Siam in terms of decay, disintegration, and decomposition; he emphasizes the prolifération of luxuriant vegetation, the prevalence of reptilien and insect life, the stifling atmosphere that envelops everything. In so doing, he bas created an effective objective correlative to the adventurers' sense of alienation and isolation. The lyricism of these passages provides a sharp contrast with the ellipses and terse, telegrammatic prose he used in Les Conquérants. However, in his following novel, La Condition humaine, Malraux succeeded in fusing these two styles into a forceful demonstration of his artistic skills. For this third novel, which was awarded the Prix Goncourt, Malraux returned to the raw material that had inspired Les Conquérants. La Condition humaine is set in Shanghai in the spring and summer of 1927, when General Chiang Kai shek finally broke with his Communist allies, thereby plunging China into a protracted civil war. These crucial events are conveyed with such powerful immediacy, such concreteness of detail, and such immense sympathy for the crushed revolutionaries that it was again assumed, quite wrongly of course, that Malraux had actually witnessed them and simply transcribed his observations. This misunderstanding can be interpreted as an indirect tribute to Malraux's artistic genius; at the saine time, it has detracted from a true appreciation of his creative powers. In 1927 Malraux was back in France, but, during the writing of La Condition
humaine (September 1931 May 1933), he embarked upon a second journey to Asia that took him to the chies Shanghai and Canton where revolutionary fervor had been most intense several years earlier.

La Condition humaine represents a major advance over the previous novels, mainly because none of its highly individualized characters is allowed to dominate the action as Garine had in Les Conquérants or Perken in La Voie royale and also because Malraux was more firmly in control of his subject matter. Abandoning the experimental approach adopted in Les Conquérants, he reverted to the omniscient third person narrative, which allowed him greater latitude in handling the philosophical themes that are so important in the novel. As the title (dreadfully rendered as Storm in Shanghai in a 1934 English translation) clearly indicated, the metaphysical dimension, or what Malraux called "l'élément pascalien" (Pascalien element), outweighs the historical and the political. The reference to "la condition humaine" inevitably brings to mind both Pascal and Montaigne, and, in many respects, Malraux's best novel may be viewed as an illustration of the allegory outlined in a famous pensée of Pascal (which is quoted verbatim in Malraux's 1943 novel Les Noyers de l Altenburg translated as The Walnut Trees of Altenburg, 1952): "Qu'on s'imagine un nombre d'hommes dans les chaînes, et tous condamnés à la mort, dont les uns étant chaque jour égorgés à la vue des autres, ceux qui restent voient leur propre condition dans celle de leurs semblables, et, se regardant les uns et les autres avec douleur et sans espérance, attendent à leur tout. C'est l'image de la condition des hommes" (Do but imagine a number of men in chains, all condemned to death, from whom some are taken each day to be butchered before the eyes of others. Those who remain see their own plight in that of their fellows and, looking at one another in hopelessness and grief, await their turn. In this image you see the human condition). In terms that evoke Dante and Goya as much as Pascal, this image is re created and updated toward

the end of part six, in which Malraux describes the fate of the defeated Communist revolutionary, burned alive in the cauldron of a locomotive. More so than in Les Conquérants, in La Condition humaine the setting and recent history of China provide Malraux with an original backdrop to his portrayal of man's tragic solitude and search for some form of transcendence in a universe without permanent values.

Malraux with Dutch poet Edgard du Perron, the friend to whom he dedicated La Condition humaine (Archives André Malraux)

All of the main characters and most of the secondary characters embody différent responses to the burden of what one of them, old Gisors, calls "leur condition d'homme." A former professor of sociology at the University of Peking, Gisors fends in his addiction to opium an artificial paradise that offers hem temporary release from the awareness of his own mortality and, at the saure tune, the wisdom with which to impart his insights to others. As the father of Kyo, mentor to Tchen, confidant of Ferral, and interlocutor to many others, Gisors bas a pivotal role in enabling the reader to perceive and understand the varions responses and their inherent limitations. Had Malraux not wished to subordinate his political acumen and visionary sense to the elucidation of "man's fate," it is probable that his weltanschauung would have been less Europocentric. Virtually all the main characters are European: Ferral and Clappique are French, May is German, Katow is Russian; or Japanese, like Kama. Kyo is Eurasian, and of the central figures only Tchen is Chinese but, as the product of a Protestant upbringing, he too is steeped in European values.
Clappique, Ferral, and Tchen each embody an extreme response to the inherent absurdity of human existence. The bizarre baron de Clappique, whose antics recall the irony and

whimsical humor of Lunes en papier and Royaume farfelu, is a mythomaniac, and undoubtedly Malraux's Most unusual, as well as only recurring, character. (He returns in the Antimémoires.) His discordant voice is distinctly at odds with the toue of the rest of the novel. Fact and fiction, the real and the imagined, past and present, the pathetic and the grotesque, all are chaotically blended together in that peculiar vision which marks the mind of the mythomaniac. The psychic complexity of this pathetic individual, who seeks compensation in the creation of an imaginary world, cannot be dismissed as "relief " from the "seriousness" of the novel. He is after all one of the few main characters to survive. In addition, there are grounds for interpreting him as a prototype of the artist, but, in the last resort, he lacks both the skill and the willpower to shape the projections of his riotous imagination.

The imaginative excess of another extreme character, Ferral, epitome of the successful Western capitalist, serves a different obsession the will to power. As president of the Franco Asian consortium, Ferral is accustomed to exercising authority, to imposing his ideas and his desires upon his subordinates. Ultimately Ferral's power is shown to be illusory. Not only is he unable to exert any restraining influence over Chiang Kaishek, but he is abandoned by the Paris banking community when the latter's repression leads to financial chaos. And, more important, Ferral's professional failures are echoed in the punishment he suffers at the hands of his strong minded mistress, Valérie, who refuses to submit meekly to the sado eroticism that marks their amorous encounters. Malraux here bas concentrated in a single character both the limitations of economic power and the precariousness of power based on sexual constraint.

Whereas Ferral tends to externalize his neuroses and his complexes by victimizing others, Tchen's most anguished victim is himself. The murder he commits in the opening pages of the novel (one of Malraux's most brilliant scenes) should have bonded him to the revolutionary group he is helping. Instead, Tchen comes away with a feeling of extraordinary solitude, tortured by the realization that his irrevocable deed has severed him, irremediably, from the rest of mankind. From that moment on, he succumbs to the mystique of terrorism and seeks both selffulfillment and self destruction in murder. However, not only does he fait to kilt ChiangKai shek (whose car he had attempted to ambush), but he is deprived of the satisfaction of suicide as well. The shot that kills him is not self inflicted but triggered by a blow dealt by one of Chiang Kai shek's bodyguards. Tchen's failure is total: he dies in vain, because Chiang Kai shek was not in his car that day, and, at the same time, he is unable to master the final moments of his life. Clappique and Ferral (who survives the insurrection) and Tchen (who is destroyed by it) are not the only characters to resort to extremes in their struggle to thwart destiny. Both K6nig, chief of Chiang Kai shek's police, who derives perverse satisfaction from the acts of torture, and Vologuine, a Party hack who utterly subordinates himself to the Comintern, have also found ways of denying the self consciousness that constitutes the "human condition." All of these tentative solutions mythomania, the will to power, terrorism, torture, self abasement are essentially destructive and dehumanizing. However, the tragic contours of La Condition humaine envelop the protagonists, too, with equal intensity. Kama, a Japanese painter and Gisors's brother in law, assuages his sense of solitude through artistic creation: May, Kyo's wife and a doctor in one of the Chinese hospitals, embodies a love that is "a partnership consented, conquered, chosen," but her single act of infidelity reminds both her and Kyo of its fragility; and, in a novel that vividly dramatizes the spirit of revolution, even the most active militants, Kyo and

Katow, cannot elude the grasp of solitude. Their failure, their suffering, their atrocious deaths confer upon the novel an aura of tragic finality.
Katow, one of the organizers of the insurrection, embodies the transcendental value of "fraternité virile." Condemned to be burned alive, along with several hundred captured comrades, in the boiter of a locomotive, he ennobles his dying moments by giving the cyanide he had carried with him inpreparation for such an eventuality to two younger militants whose fear exceeds his own. Katow's final act of sacrifice is a summation of his life, but its tenuousness is understood by the unforeseen: one of the anonymous prisoners, terror stricken, drops the precious capsules in the dark. For several suspenseful moments, it seems as if Katow's sacrifice has been in vain, destroyed by some cruel mocking destiny toying with human affairs. The cyanide is retrieved, and there are no further intrusions of fate. Nothing will alleviate the suffering of Katow.

In his 1938 review of L'Espoir, Graham Greene objected that Malraux had tried to make the events in La Condition humaine stand for too much, and that the horror actually drowned the scene: "It is not after all the human condition to be burnt alive in the boiler of a Chinese locomotive," he observed in the Spectator. Of course, this is much too literal an interpretation of a simple allegory. Earlier in the novel Malraux uses an equally powerful symbol of "man's fate" when Kyo, unable to recognize a recording of his own voice, which he hears for the first time, suffers a deep sense of alienation from himself. Almost twenty years later, in the concluding pages of Les Voix du silence, Malraux recalled that scene, which is crucial to an understanding of both his poetics and his metaphysics. "J'ai conté jadis l'aventure d'un homme qui ne reconnaît pas sa voix qu'on vient d'enregistrer, parce qu'il l'entend pour la première fois à travers ses oreilles et non plus à travers sa gorge; et, parce que notre gorge seule nous transmet notre voix intérieure, j'ai appelé ce livre La Condition humaine" (I have written elsewhere of the man who fails to recognize his own voice on the gramophone, because he is hearing it for the first time through his ears and not through his throat; and, because our throat alone transmits to us Our own voice, 1 called the book La Condition humaine). Man's fate, man's estate, the human condition, the human situation: ultimately it remains one of muted anguish, fundamental incommunicability, the tragic awareness of one's solitude, and inevitable death. The somber chords of La Condition humaine did not lead Malraux to the brink of despair; on the contrary: they heralded a decade marked by a passionate involvement in the struggle against fascism, Nazism, racism, the decade in which he wrote Le Temps du mépris and L'Espoir.
It was not so much his sensitive portrayal of Kyo and Katow (or even his sympathy for real Chinese revolutionaries) that deepened Malraux's political commitment, but rather events much closer to home: the consolidation of fascism in Italy, the rise of Nazism in Germany, and additional threats to peace from belligerent autocratic movements in other parts of Europe. At the saine time, as was the case with many of his contemporaries, notably André Gide, Malraux became increasingly supportive of the one force that then seemed most likely to stem the rising tide of rightwing totalitarianism communism, as exemplified in the U.S.S.R. Contrary to what many have claimed, Malraux never joined the Communist party, and if one bears in mind his treatment of Borodine and Vologuine, it is easy to understand why. To apply the crucial distinction made by Kyo in La Condition humaine, he saw in communism (Kyo had said Marxism) a sense of "fatalité" (destiny) and a sense of "volonté" (will); and, if Malraux was repulsed by the former, he was undoubtedly attracted by the latter. Though his

relationship with the Communist party was always marked by mutual distrust, he nevertheless extolled the efforts of the Soviet Union to create a new humanism in which bourgeois individualism (which he had decried in La Tentation de l'Occident) would be supplanted by greater confidence in mankind. In addition, as a fellow traveler, he participated in numerous anti Fascist organizations, most of which (though not all) were controlled or funded by the Soviet Union.

Malraux was an active member of the Amsterdam/Pleyel Peace Movement, as well as the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, an influential organization that provided a forum for leftist intellectuals; with Gide, he copresided over a committee to defend the rights of German Communist leaders and writers, such as Ernst Thaelmann and Ludwig Renn, imprisoned under fascism. Like many other leftist writers, Malraux publicly denounced the fire that destroyed part of the German parliamentary chamber known as the Reichstag as the work of agents provocateurs, and, in a widely published visit to Berlin on 4 January 1934, he and Gide attempted to intercede, on behalf of the Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov, with Hitler, who refused to see them. Malraux was a regular speaker at rallies organized by the Communist party, and he contributed many articles to Communist publications such as Commune, Regards, International Literature, Russie d'Aujourd'hui, and Avant Poste; he was a member of the International Writers' Association for the Defense of Culture; he participated in the League Against Anti Semitism; and, in the summer of 1934, with Paul Nizan, Louis Aragon, Vladimir Pozner, and jean Richard Bloch (all members of the French Communist party), he visited the U.S.S.R. as a member of the official French delegation to the Congress of Soviet Writers.

The interviews Malraux granted during and after his stay in Russia, in addition to the speeches he delivered in Moscow, testify to his admiration for the achievements carried out under Stalin on socioeconomic questions. It would, however, be wrong to infer from this that he abdicated his critical judgment and saw in Stalinist Russia a new "Utopia," a word later used by Gide.

Malraux at the time of his 1933 Prix Gonconrl for La Condition humaine (photo Gisèle Freund)

Two separate incidents indicate a reckless courage and a fierce independence of mind not usually associated with official guests of the U.S.S.R. During a banquet given in honor of the visiting writers, the author of La Condition humaine proposed a toast to the absent Trotsky, a brave but rash gesture that seems to have had no harmful consequences. And, more in keeping with his determination to champion the cause of artistic freedom, he launched a skillfully worded attack on the limitations of "socialist realism," the official literary doctrine sanctioned by Stalin. After outlining the deficiencies of realism, Malraux insisted that the artist, albeit "an engineer of the souk" was, like all engineers, above all a creator, and that artistic creation, which obeys its own logic, is predicated upon the notion of artistic freedom. Judgments such as these and they were admittedly rare were the price the Soviet leaders paid for their policy of a union of the
Left. Though Malraux's words undoubtedly shocked and offended, they should not have surprised, coming from an author whose first novel, Les Conquérants, had béen banned in the Soviet Union.

Le Temps du mépris, Malraux's first novel set in Europe, was formed in the crucible of leftwing politics. (The title of the American translation, Days of Wrath, fails to communicate the Fascists' contempt for mankind expressed in the original.) It is a novel Malraux himself scathingly dismissed ten years later as "un navet" (rubbish, "third rate"). In 1935 it was praised in the most lavish manner by virtually all orthodox Communist reviewers, mainly because its celebration of collective values and heroic idealism provided a useful corrective to the somber pessimism that had marked La Condition humaine. This judgment is not one likely to be repeated in contemporary criticism, and quite a few critics (Cecil jenkins, Thomas Jefferson Kline) have questioned Malraux's own assessment. Though clearly inferior to L'Espoir and Les Noyers de l'Altenburg, Le Temps du mépris is an important novel, as much as for what it represents historically it is one of the earliest works of fiction to reveal Nazi concentration camps as for what Malraux was trying to accomplish aesthetically, a modern reworking of the myth of Prometheus. Furthermore, it has a preface which was adopted at that time as a manifesto of left wing idealism and, somewhat paradoxically, as a succinct formulation of Malraux's philosophy, one he never repudiated, in spite of his later dislike for the novel. "Il est difficile d'être un homme. Mais pas plus de le devenir en approfondissant sa communion qu'en cultivant sa différence, et la première nourrit avec autant de force que la seconde ce par quoi l'homme est homme, ce par quoi il se dépassé, crée, invente ou se conçoit" (It is difficult to be a man. But it is not more difficult to become one by enriching one's fellowship with other men than by cultivating one's individual peculiarities. The former nourishes with at least as much force as the latter, that which makes man human, which enables him to surpass himself, to create, invent or realize himself).

The value of "fellowship with other men" is illustrated and celebrated in a tale of compelling simplicity. A legendary Communist agent named Kassner is captured and interrogated by the Nazis, imprisoned in a stone cell and beaten until he loses consciousness. When consciousness returns, he is assailed by horrifying nightmares which he tries to ward off by remembering music. Failing in this and fearing thé onset of madness, he contemplates suicide, but, in an adjacent cell, a fellow prisoner communicates with him by tapping out messages of hope and comradeship. After nine days of confinement, Kassner is suddenly released, because someone has surrendered in his place. (His interrogators had not succeeded in firmly establishing his réal identity.) He is flown out of Germany to Prague, where he joins his wife and child and continues thé fight against fascism. Malraux's

dedication "To thé German comrades who were anxious for me to make known what they had suffered and what they had upheld, this book which is theirs" dispels any doubt about thé origins of thé novel. The documentation had been provided by escapees from Nazi prisons and by such exiled German intellectuels and writers as Ludwig Renn and thé Jewish author Manès Sperber. As always, Malraux incorporated into his work several personal exper iences thé apparent reconciliation with family life after thé birth of his daughter Florence, and a near brush with death when thé airplane taking him back from his flight over thé Yémen desert in search of thé legendary capital of thé Queen of Sheba ran into a storm which he adapted to thé requirements of plot and thé psychological portrait of his main character. The simplicity of Le Temps du mépris, with its celebration of solidarity, forms a sharp contrast with thé epic vision of L'Espoir, Malraux's novel on thé Spanish civil war. Malraux's dedication to thé cause of Republican Spain in thé immédiate aftermath of thé 17 July pronunciamiento is probably thé most striking exemple of how thé Spanish civil war moved an entire generation of writers as no other war had done before, or as none has done since. In May 1936, after thé victory of thé French Popular Front in thé April elections, Malraux visited Spain, with jean Cassou and Henri Lenormand, as a delegate of thé International Association of Writers for thé Défense of Culture. The purpose of their visit was to extend greetings to, and help establish fraternal relations with, thé newly elected Spanish Popular Front government, and those intellectual and cultural organizations that had supported it. The three delegates were introduced to thé president of thé Republic, Manuel Azana; they conferred with ministers (Francisco Barnés, Bernardo Giner de los Rlos), deputies (Vicente Uribe, Julio Alvarez del Vayo, Marcelino Domingo), and intellectuals (Américo Castro).

Up until this point Malraux's engagement was little différent from that of many of his contemporaries Louis Aragon, Paul Nizan, André Gide, Romain Rolland who were equally active in thé anti Fascist struggle. The évents of July 1936 changed all that. Faithful te, the fighting and prophetic words he had uttered at thé Ateneo in Madrid on 22 May 1936 "We know that our différences with thé fascists will have te, be resolved one day with machine guns"Malraux arrived in Spain on 20 July some fortyeight hours after thé military rebellion began. There are few traces of this first visit, but thé second, which took place thé saine month, had a more official character. In his capacity as copresident of thé Comité Mondial des Intellectuels contre la Guerre et le Fascisme, Malraux was asked to visu Spain and draw up a firsthand report on thé situation. Conflicting interprétations of thé pronunciamiento transmitted by radio stations in différent parts of thé peninsula had led to great confusion abroad as to its success or failure. On 25 July Malraux sent a telegram (published in Humanité) denying propagande reports that Madrid had been encircled by thé dissident armies. In all likelihood, it was during his second stay in Spain that Malraux first glimpsed thé part he could play in stemming thé rising tide of fascism. The novelist who had displayed an intuitive understanding of, and deep sympathy for, thé aspirations of thé Chinese revolutionaries had thé opportunity not only te, observe but also to participate in a revolutionary situation south of thé Pyrenees.

Malraux quickly understood that thé Republicans would require assistance from other democracies if thé rébellion was to be checked. It was with this end in view that he undertook a series of actions that included: thé purchase abroad of aircraft for thé Spanish government; negotiations between thé Popular Front governments of Spain and France, on whose behalf he acted as intermediary and spokesman; numerous appearances at pro

Republican gatherings in France; and, most striking of all, thé leadership of an international air squadron of volunteers and mercenaries, thé Escadrille Espana, which was renamed thé Escadrille André Malraux when thé mercenaries were dismissed in November 1936. Malraux's leadership of thé international volunteer air force was an unparalleled achievement, especially for a writer with no military experience, and he displayed a shrewd understanding of thé crucial role aviation was to playduring the civil war.

Josette Clotis, with whom Malraux lived front 1937 until her death in 1944 (photo © Harcourt)

Many Republican historians and indeed some Nationalist spokesmen have paid tribute to Malraux's prescience during the early stages of the war. However, as resistance to Franco was organized on more efficient lines, it became increasingly clear that his initiative was more or less obsolete. The squadron's last major mission involved protecting the civilian population fleeing Mâlaga after its capture on 8 February 1937; soon after it was disbanded and those who chose to remain in Spain were integrated into other units. The Republican government then decided that Malraux's status as a writer of international renown would be more profitably employed in other capacities, and they sent him on a mission to North America.

The Republican cause had fared rather poorly in United States newspapers, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's determination to adhere strictly to a policy of neutrality in European affairs had deprived the Spanish government of a vital source of arms and equipment. Malraux could hardly be expected to help shift U.S. for
eign policy, but he could help influence public opinion and counteract an effective pro Franco propaganda machine wielded by the Catholic Church. As a Goncourt prizewinner and author of a recent Book of the Month Club selection (Days of Wrath), he was assured extensive media coverage, particularly in liberal and leftist publications.

Malraux arrived in New York on 24 February 1937, and his six week tour took him to Philadelphie, Washington, Cambridge, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, and Montreal. His visits were usually sponsored by local chapters of the American (or Canadian) League Against War and Fascism or the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Everywhere he went, Malraux outlined the saine ideas: he revealed Mussolini's expansionist policies with

respect to the Mediterranean and the extent of the military aid Italy and Germany were giving Franco; he inveighed against American neutrality which, he argued, isolated Spain and bolstered fascism; he contrasted the values of the Fascists "permanentes et particulières" and their exaltation of differences such as race, nation, and class, that are "essentielles, irréducibles et constantes" with the Republican values, "humanistes parce qu'universalistes"; he attacked the treaty of nonintervention and criticized the International Red Cross for its apathy and ineffectiveness; he prophesied the outbreak of a worldwide civil war; and, by way of conclusion, he invited his audience to make donations for medical aid to help victims of the fighting. To illustrate his indictment of Fascist militarism ar,' his defense of the Republican cause, Malraux would recount incidents the strafing of civilian refugees fleeing along the road from Mâlaga to Almeria, the fraternel union of Spanish peasants and wounded foreign aviators during the descent from the mountain near Teruel that he incorporated into L'Espoir, where they were invested with a poetical or mythical quality.

While fighting in Spain, or speaking on Spain's behalf in Europe and North America, Malraux continued to write. The experience of leadership and war he had acquired as commander of the International Air Force was transposed into L'Espoir, an epic novel that was published in Paris in late 1937 and appeared in the United States the following year under the title Mans Hope. Malraux's other artistic contribution to the antiFascist struggle was his only film, Sierra de Teruel (Teruel Mountains, 1938), made in well nigh impossible conditions in and around Barcelona during thé final stages of thé civil war. This creationan autonomous work and not a mere adaptation of L'Espoir was awarded thé Prix Louis Delluc in 1945. It has been described by some critics as one of thé finest French films ever made. Thus, as squadron leader, propagandist, novelist, and director, Malraux, in less than three years of créative activity, provided an exemplum of engagement that remains unsurpassed.

A contributing factor in thé defeat of thé Republican armies at thé hands of Franco was undoubtedly thé disarray that prevailed among government troops, especially during thé early stages of thé war. Though it would be simplistic to portray thé Nationalist forces as a homogeneous, highly disciplined unit, it is generally agreed that their army was better organized than thé government's. The numerous pro Republican groupe which included socialists, Communies, liberals, radicals, and anarchiste had to contend with fundamental ideological différences in their bid to create a united front. Even within thé extreme Left, bitter hostility pitted orthodox Communiste against Trotskyists and members of thé POUM (Partido Obrero Unificacïon Marxista, or Marxist Workers' Unification Party). The highlight of L'Espoir is thé victory in March 1937 at Guadalajara, a military success that ended thé séries of reversals suffered by thé government sideor so it was expected. This is obviously one of thé many hopes suggested by thé title, and though they were undoubtedly shared by Malraux, bc was not blinded by naive idealism or false optimism. The book is a rather unusual proRepublican work in that it focuses frequently upon thé weaknesses of thé government army.

Insofar as it is possible to reduce thé subtle political debates of L'Espoir to a single statement, Malraux's central argument may be summarized as follows: thé spontaneous outpouring of enthusiasm that characterized thé early weeks of thé fighting, thé "lyrical illusion," was by définition short lived; and, unless this enthusiasm could be integrated into a military strategy, Republican chances of victory were slim, if they existed at all. As thé Communiste were thé most disciplined group on thé Republican side, and as thé Soviet Union was both organizing thé international brigades and forwarding arms and ammunition to

thé government, thé Russians were seen as most capable of molding thé numerous loyalist parties and groups into a force that could achieve victory. It would surely be false to infer from this portrayal that Malraux had cynically subordinated ethics to politics, or that he had completely jettisoned morality. Garcia, an intellectual who is one of hie most eloquent spokesmen in L'Espoir, puts thé matter into proper perspective when he déclares: "On ne fait pas de politique avec la morale, mais on n'en fait pas davantage sans" (Though a moral code is not a concern of practical politics, it can't get on without one).

In fact, a distinguishing feature of L'Espoir is thé number of intellectuals who appear there: Garcia, Alvear, Scali, Magnin, Manuel, Ximénès, to naine thé most significant. Their main function in thé novel, aside from whatever responsibilities they may have as leaders, is to reflect upon many moral and intellectual issues at stake in thé conflict, and to this effect they confront one another in a series of dialogues arranged contrapuntally. Questions raised at one moment by one character are later analyzed, explored, or indeed answered by another, usually after a new set of circumstances bas entered into play. Many of these dialogues deal with concrete problems peculiar to thé immédiate historical situation for example, thé varions factors undermining thé Republican war effort. Others, without ever completely transcending thé specific context of thé war, examine questions of a more general nature and their application or relevance to thé events in Spain. These highly original deliberations on such timehonored subjects as thé end and thé means, thé antimony between politics and morality, thé relation of thé individual to a collectivity, thé function of art, and man's attitude in thé face of death have been praised unstintingly, even by right wing critics who did not hesitate to write disparagingly about other aspects of thé novel. There are, in thé pages of these dialogues, an acuity of perception, a refinement of expression, and a depth of understanding that are worthy of Shakespeare or Tolstoy.

As is usually thé case in Malraux's novels, scenes of dialogue alternate with scenes of action. Unlike La Voie royale or even La Condition humaine in which scenes of violence are described with a certain indulgence, L'Espoir is a moving indictment of thé pain and suffering inevitably caused by war. Though Malraux briefly recounts atrocious death scenes as, for example, when Mercery, bit by bullets from a fighter plane, falls into thé fire he was trying to extinguish, he also raises his voice in protest against thé folly of war. Alvear, distraught over hie sons blindness, remarks: "Rien n'est plus terrible que la déformation d'un corps qu'on aime" (Nothing's more horrible than the mutilation of a body that one loves).

Malraux with André Gide, jean Guéhenno, and Paul Vaillant Couturier at a public meeting, circa 1940(photo A.F.P.)

In one of the most moving incidents in the novel, Manuel, wandering throug'h a hospital room which resembles "un royaume éternel de la blessure" (the eternal kingdom of pain), hears the screams of a seriously wounded pilot and wonders: "Que valent les mots en face d'un corps déchiqueté?" (When the whole body is a quivering mass of pain, what use are words?) With its realistic accounts of the horrors taking place in Spain the systematic bombing of open cities, the machine gunning of refugees, the use of incendiary bombs, mass executions before open graves, acts of sabotage conducted by fifth columnists ready to welcome and collaborate with the enemy L'Espoir, a novel about one particular war, is also a novel about and against war in general.

The defeat of Republican Spain, abandoned by the two democracies that had the most to lose from further Fascist advances, marked not only the final collapse of the "lyrical illusion" but the end of an era; and the nonaggression pact cosigned by Hitler and Stalin on 23 August 1939 had a demoralizing effect upon most antiFascists, and many Communies. Shortly afterward, Malraux set out for Corrèze with the young writer Josette Clotis, who was to bear him two sons out of wedlock, Pierre Gauthier (October 1940) and Vincent (November 1943), and, at Beaulieu sur Dordogne, in full view of a Romanesque church known for its exceptionally beautiful tympanum, he resumed work on Psychologie de l'art, begun as early as 1935. It was a brief respite. When World War Il broke out, he returned to Paris to volunteer his services, but the air ministry, obviously unimpressed by his reputation as a squadron leader in Spain, rejected him out of hand. In November 1939, however, Malraux was accepted by the tank force. He was stationed at Provins, near Paris, where he endured the tedium and enjoyed the anonymity of being a private soldier, much as T. E. Lawrence had in 1922. On 15 June 1940 he was slightly wounded in a skirmish with a German patrol, taken prisoner, and interned in a camp halfway between Provins and Sens. Five months later he managed to escape to the free zone, the southern and central area of France presided over by Marshal Pétain after the signing of an armistice agreement on 22 June 1940. Four days earlier General de Gaulle had issued his famous appeal to the French to resist, and Malraux tried to establish contact with him. The message was intercepted, but, at the time, Malraux concluded that he had been ignored or rejected on account of his leftwing past. For the next three and a half years, until he joined the Resistance in Corrèze, he led a life of relative ease, given the circumstances, and devoted himself to his writings. Not only did he pursue his meditations on artistic creation, but he wrote a full length study of T. E. Lawrence, "Le Démon de l'absolu" (The Demon of the Absolute, published only in excerpted form under the title N'était ce donc que cela?, 1946), and his last novel, Les Noyers de l'Altenburg. This period of calm came to an end when the Germans invaded the free zone on 11 November 1942. Shortly afterward, Malraux and his family moved to the village of Saint Chamant in the Dordogne, not far from Corrèze, where the maquis supporters of the French underground were hiding.

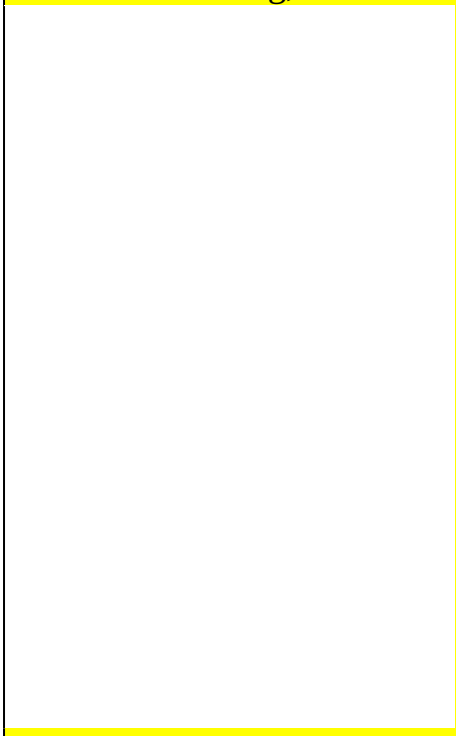
Though Malraux had been in touch with the maquis, mainly through his half brother Roland, he remained on the fringes of the Resistance until late March 1944, at which time a small group of men, including Roland, were caught in the act of establishing radio communications with London and arrested by a detachment of the Gestapo. Malraux then joined the Resistance movement, and it is surely one of the numerous anomalies of his life that, in a

matter of months, he was able to impose his authority on many of the small autonomous units operating in the Périgord and eventually unify them into a small force attached to the British networks of the Special Operations Executive. On 7 June, in conjunction with other commanders, Malraux and his men harassed the tanks and motorized infantry of the SS Panzer Division Das Reich and delayed its arrival in the north of France for the crucial battle of Normandy. In addition, he helped bring about what Gen. Colin McVean Gubbins, the head of the SOE, described as the most important parachute drop of the war, from Norway to Indochina. At the end of july the Citroën in which Malraux and four others were traveling was attacked by a German motorized column in the small town of Gramat. Because he was in uniform Malraux was pursued, captured, and imprisoned in the Saint Michel prison at Toulouse. He owed his life to an administrative error. His interrogators, having confused his file with that of his younger half brother, never realized they had a famous French writer in theirmidst. Shortly afterward the German tanks were forced to evacuate Toulouse, and Malraux returned to lead the two thousand men under his command.

The last stage in Malraux's military career was to be marked by success. Because of the prestige he had acquired as a résistant in Corrèze, he was asked to lead the Brigade Alsace Lorraine, which included a battalion led by another French writer, André Chamson. On 28 November 1944 the newly formed brigade captured the town of Dannemarie while the division of Gen. Philippe Leclerc took Strasbourg. From 20 December 1944 to 10 January 1945 the brigade helped defend Strasbourg against a mighty German offensive led by Field Marshal Karl Rudolf Gerd von Rundstedt. Malraux was decorated with the Légion d'Honneur by Gen. Jean de Lattre, and a fourth citation was added to his Croix de Guerre. The sense of triumph could not be shared by many of those closest to him. In addition to the friends and fellow combatants killed during the fighting, Claude Malraux died in a concentration camp in March 1944, Roland was killed %ve days before the end of the war, and, the cruelest blow of all, Josette Clotis was the victim of a ghastly accident. While attempting to alight from a moving train, she fell under the wheels and died, terribly mutilated, on 11 November 1944. It is perhaps because of these personal tragedies that the novelist who had conjured up vivid images of events in China and Nazi Germany, and who had written magnificently of his own experience in Spain was unable (or unwilling) to provide a fictionalized account of his twelve months in the Resistance. Les Noyers de l'Altenburg, his sixth and last novel, appeared in 1943, months before he personally encountered the "organisation de l'avilissement" (organized brutalization) of the Occupation.

Like La Voie royale, published thirteen years earlier, Les Noyers de l'Altenburg was originally conceived as the first part of a two volume series; and, like the earlier work, which was announced as the prologue to Puissances du désert, it bore a resoundingly ambitious title, with biblical associations, La Lutte avec l'ange (Jacob Wrestling); and, to pursue the parallel, the reason for its incompletion has not been positively established, in spite of Malraux's explanation that thesecond part had been destroyed by the Gestapo. Les Noyers de l'Altenburg first appeared in Lausanne in 1943, because Malraux refused to "collaborate" with the Germans by having any of his books published in occupied Paris. However, during the war, excerpts were smuggled out of France and printed in Buenos Aires (Lettres Françaises), New York (Twice A Year), Geneva (Semaine Littéraire), Algiers (Fontaine), and eventually in liberated Paris (Combat), before Gallimard published the entire work, with an accompanying note by the author, in 1948. Stating that "on ne récrit guère un roman" (novels can hardly ever be rewritten), Malraux claimed that "lorsque celui ci paraîtra sous sa

forme définitive, la forme des Noyers de l'Altenburg sera sans doute fondamentalement modifiée" (when this one appears in its final form, the form of its first part, The Walnut Trees of Altenburg, will no doubt be radically changed).



Malraux in October 1944, when he was leading the Brigade Alsace Lorraine under his nom de guerre, Colonel Berger (collection particulière)

Malraux's intentions at that time are not known, but when Les Noyers de l Altenburg did reappear in 1967 as part 1 of the Antimémoires, all that re mained of the original volume was the central section, the magnificent colloquium on "per manence et métamorphose de l'homme," together with the pages on Vincent Berger's suicide and Nietzsche's madness.

Unlike the previous five novels, Les Noyers de l'Altenburg is not based on current events, even though Malraux's own experience of imprisonment at Sens from june to November 1940 undoubtedly served as the inspiration for parts 1 and 5, which are set in Chartres. However, the question of transposing le vécu (the lived) is a less relevant and less fertile area of investigation in this transitional work. It begins on 21 June 1940 with an unidentified narrator recording his own observations and the remarks of his fellow prisoners as he gazes at the cathedral in Chartres, unrecognizable without its magnificent stained glass windows. The soldiers around him, Senegalese and Arab as well as French, are not only the victims of a specific historical conjuncture or an implacable fate but, more significantly, they represent a universal, timeless situation, "la mémoire séculaire du fléau" (the age old memory of the scourge). The idea of a continuum is introduced in the opening pages of the novel, in which the narrator evokes similar scenes of confinement through the ages. The prison is reminiscent of a prehistoric den, a Roman camp, and a Babylonian hovel, where captives with "faces gothiques" (gothic faces) are curled up like "les momies du Pérou" (Peruvian mummies). These associations suggest "la familiarité séculaire avec le malheur" (age old familiarity with misfortune). As the Chartres setting is intended to convey, many of the images and cultural references (Breughel, the fabliaux) recall the medieval period, which is favorably contrasted with the modern age, precisely because it undertook te, represent mankind, and not the individual. The narrator remembers a saying of his father, "Ce n'est pas

à gratter sans cesse l'individu qu'on finit par rencontrer l'homme" (It's not by any amount ofscratching at the individual that one finally comes clown te, mankind), and this position subsumes all of Les Noyers de l'Altenburg.

For example, in part 2, in which the narrator recalls his father Vincent Berger's involvement and eventual disillusionment with the Young Turk movement of Enver Pasha in 1913, and his rediscovery, upon returning te, Europe, of "le fondamental," the emphasis is upon the common essence of humanity. Vincent Berger's firm belief, shared by the narrator, that a man's significance depends more on the values that shape his life than on whatever secrets he may harbor within him, is in no way undermined by the suicide of Dietrich Berger, thé narrator's grandfather. In fact, this willful oblitération of "un passé de souvenirs et de secrets" (a past made up of memories and secrets) is not as much thé pretext for introspection as for reflection upon thé dead man's vision du monde (vision of thé world) and mankind's millennial inability to accept the finality of death: "Les millénaires n'ont pas suffi à l'homme pour apprendre à voir mourir" (Thé millennia have not been long enough for man to learn how to look on death).

To insist too much on thé finality of death is to run thé risk of a metaphysical truism, and, in thé central section of thé novel, Malraux obviates this danger by shifting thé discussion to thé area of anthropology. The debate at Altenburg focuses upon thé question: "Existe t il une donnée sur quoi fonder la notion d'homme?" (Is there any factor on which we can base thé notion of man?), and thé key speaker is an anthropologist named Môllberg, who is loosely modeled after Leo Frobenius (1873 1938). Môllberg is an Africanist who had attempted to produce a grandiose Hegelian synthesis of African cultures at a time when most of his colleagues opted for a pluralist approach to thé same phenomenon. However, thé results of his field work convinced him that every mental structure has its own absolute and that thé premises governing his research were false. Môllberg concludes his intervention at thé colloquium by conceding that if there are any universal values, or "permanence," it is "dans le néant" (in nothingness), at which point Vincent Berger interjects: "ou dans le fondamental" (in fundamental man). When Môllberg retorts that "L'homme fondamental est un mythe (Fundamental man is a myth), Berger can find no rejoinder. M&llberg's arguments are not refuted by another participant; they areundermined elsewhere in thé novel by thé choice of imagery, by numerous références to "timeless" occupations (that of thé woodcutter, for example), and by thé durability of thé walnut trees, thé principal symbols of "permanence." Similarly, Vincent Berger's expérience of fraternization between German volunteers and Russian soldiers during WorldWar I (thé main épisode of part 4) is elevated to thé value of a myth that illustrates man's capacity for triumphing over evil, in thé face of overwhelming odds. The German volunteers, horrified by experiments with asphyxiating gases, forge thé short term goals of thé fighting and, in an apotheosis of "fraternité maladroite et poignante" (pathetic,clumsy comradeship), rush to thé aid of their former enemies. In thé final short section of thé novel, "Camp de Chartres," thé narrator finds Pascal's allegory of thé human condition a frighteningly apt description of modern warfare, but thé prevalence of cosmic imagery points to some measure of réconciliation with thé world around him.

Image: thé word resounds like a clarion throughout Malraux's corpus ,f writing fiction, criticism, essays on art, and autobiography. In Les Noyers de l Altenbvrg a member of thé narrator's family, in thé course of a discussion on "le millénaire" (another key word in Malraux's vocabulary), expresses thé following sense of wonderment at man's genius for transcending thé temporal: "Le plus grand mystère n'est pas que nous soyons jetés au hasard

entre la profusion de la matière et celle des astres; c'est que, dans cette prison, nous tirions de nous mêmes des images assez puissantes pour nier notre néant" (Thé greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random between thé profusion of thé earth and thé galaxy of thé stars, but that in this prison we can fashion images of ourselves sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness). It is difficult to find a more adéquate statement of thé général principles governing Malraux's numerous books on art, from thé earliest, Psychologie de l'art (three volumes, 1947, 1948, 1949) to thé three revised volumes of La Métamorphose des dieux: Le Surnaturel (1977), L'Irréel (1974), L'Intemporel (1976). All of these works have lavish illustrations, and, consequently, they were rather expensive. In 1965 Gallimard published a revised and expanded version of Le Musée imaginaire (originally volume 1 of Psychologie de l'art and then part 1 of Les Voix du silence) in its inexpensive paperback collection Idées/Arts. As a result, Malraux's méditations upon artistic création were made available to a much wider audience. Those readers already acquainted with his novels were not surprised to find in LeMusée imaginaire more sustained analyses of ideas art as antidestiny, art as a humanization of thé world they had already encountered in La Voie royale, L'Espoir, and Les Noyers de l'Altenburg. Since Le Musée imaginaire is thé most accessible of Malraux's books on aesthetics, it is a fitting source for a général account of his main concepts.

"Le Musée imaginaire," thé imaginary muséum or "muséum without walls," is an extension of thé réal museum which, Malraux mentions, does not exist in lands where thé civilization of modern Europe is unknown.

Malraux with Gen. Charles de Gaulle, 1946 (photo Dorka)

The real museum had already caused a metamorphosis in perceptions of art because it estranged works from their original functions, which were usually religious or sacred in nature, and made them into "images." The opening sentence of the essay "Un crucifix roman n'était pas d'abord une sculpture, la Madone de Cimabué n'était pas d'abord un tableau, même lAthéna de Phidias n'était pas d'abord une statue" (A Romanesque crucifix was not regarded by its contemporaries as a work of sculpture, nor Cimabue's Madonna as a picture. Even Phidias' Pallas Athene was not, primarily, a statue) insists upon the museum's status as

a "confrontation de métamorphoses." Just as the traditional museum had imposed a new hierarchy of values, by juxtaposing neglected or unknown masterpieces from other cultures beside those (primarily European works) which had been canonized by time, so too "le musée imaginaire" of photographic reproduction reveals new forms and revolutionizes the viewer's manner of seeing. In
addition, it resurrects other forms (mosaics, stained glass windows, tapestries, frescos, much sculpture) excluded from the traditional museum and provides the "broadest artistic domain" man has never known. Unlike the real museum which is concrete, exclusive, restricted, the Museum without walls is imaginary, ail inclusive, unrestricted; or, to use Malraux's terms, the mutilated possible conjures up the whole gamut of the possible.
In Le Musée imaginaire, Malraux interprets the history of European art as a graduai evolution away from a form of expression limited to two dimensions, toward the secrets of rendering volume and depth. However, the conquest oftechniques of illusion and the creation of a semblance of reality that characterized both Flemish and Italian painting in the sixteenth century were as much a means for revealing the unreal as representing the real. During the next two centuries, art alternated between the maintenance of this "demiurgic power" (the creation of the real) and the representation of fiction. Malraux argues that the development and spread of photographic processes clearly demonstrate that, aside from a few centuries in which European artists aspired to capture thé third dimension, twodimensional painting is a universal phenomenon. In Europe, too, thé model eventually became thé basic material of an image, rather than thé image being a reproduction of thé model. In thé twentieth century thé représentation of fiction bas been appropriated by thé cinema, and, consequently, thé modern artist, indifférent to pictorial content and anthropomorphism, has reverted to a form of two dimensional painting, which is both selfcontained and autonomous. Malraux's striking synthesis, which owes something to Hegel and Nietzsche as well as to Walter Benjamin, combines religious ternis (purification, idealization, résurrection, transfiguration, transcendence) with military terminology (conquest, imposition, dominance) to evoke and extol thé artist's genius for transforming thé world independently of verisimilitude.
In 1948 Malraux was officially divorced from his Clara and married Madeleine Lioux, thé widow of his half brother Roland. It was during thé late 1940s and throughout thé 1950s that Malraux finally found sufficient time to develop his aesthetics and complete thé essays on art he had had to abandon at Beaulieu sur Dordogne in thé summer of 1939. However, prior to publishing thé three volumes of Psychologie de l Art and Les Voix du silence, Malraux had met de Gaulle in 1945 and had been appointed "conseiller technique" (technical advisor), then "ministre de l'information" (minister of information) in thé short lived Gaullist government of November 1945 January 1946. A year later thé Rassemblement du Peuple Français was founded, and until 1952 Malraux, as director of propaganda (following in thé footsteps of Garine), was ose of its most dedicated and eloquent spokesmen. The rest of thé décade lie devoted to writing (thé three volumes of Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale (1952 1954) and La Métamorphose des dieux; thé essays on Goya, Leonardo da Vinci, and Vermeer de Delft; important prefaces to works by Louis Guilloux and Albert Ollivier, for example), and traveling: to Egypt and Persia; to New York, where lie delivered a speech ai thé reopening of the Metropolitan Muséum; to Stockholm, where he participated in thé 350th anniversary of Rembrandt's birth. In 1958, with Sartre, Mauriac, and Roger Martin du Gard, he addressed a letter to thé French president, condemning torture in Algeria. Shortly afterward, when de Gaulle was returned to power in 1959 as president of thé Fifth

Republic, Malraux was appointed "ministre d'Etat chargé des Affaires culturelles" (Minister of State for Cultural Affairs), and from April 1962 to April 1969 he was first in thé hierarchy of ministers of State. The following excerpt from Mémoires d'espoir (Memoirs of Hope, 1970) by Charles de Gaulle describes thé spécial relationship between thé statesman soldier and thé writerminister. "A ma droite j'ai et j'aurai toujours André Malraux. La présence à mes côtés de cet ami génial, fervent des hautes destinées, me donne l'impression que, par là, je suis couvert du terre à terre. L'idée que se fait de moi cet incomparable témoin contribue à m'affermir. Je sais que, dans le débat, quand le sujet est grave, son fulgurant jugement m'aidera à dissiper les ombres" (On my right hand I have, and will always have, André Malraux. With this brilliant friend at my side, I somehow believed that 1 would be shielded from thé commonplace. The image of me that this incomparable witness reflected continuously fortified me. In a debate, I always knew that his lightning judgment would help me to dispel the shadow).

During his tes years in thé Ministry of Cultural Affairs Malraux found himself in a somewhat ambiguous position, an ambiguity that is reflected in thé wording of thé mandate entrusted to him: "to make accessible thé major works of mankind in general and of France in particular to thé greatest number of Frenchmen, to ensure thé largest audience for thé cultural héritage and to encourage thé création of thé works of art and of thé minds that enrich it." On thé ose hand, as minister, lie was responsible for a séries of short terni policy decisions that had to be implemented more or less immediately, and on thé other, as writer and thinker, he continued to elaborate and refine concepts of culture whose complexities he had already outlined as early as 1926, in La Tentation de l'Occident. The minister often talked in ternis of somewhat outmoded nineteenth century approaches to culture that had found favor again in thé 1930s, but these were often tainted by appeals to conservative nationalism (along thé lises of "enhancing thé glory of France," "restoring France to its position as thé world's foremost cultural nation," and so forth). The philosopher, however, had to contend with a more recent phenomenon (which lie had foretold in La Tentation de l'Occident) and its many implications: the growing awareness of the plurality of cultures in a world increasingly impervious to imperialist, Europocentric, and anachronistic notions of the word. To pose Malraux's dilemma in this fashion is neither to privilege the philosopher at the expense of the minister, nor to belittle his accomplishments, which were substantial.

Malraux and Marc Chagall viewing the painter's fresco for the ceiling of l'Opéra de Paris, 1963. Malraux commissioned the work while he was Minister of State for Cultural Affairs (photo Izis © A.D.A.G.P., 1986).

In spite of severe budgetary limitationsless than half a percent of the national budget Malraux's ministry will be remembered for the following innovations and achievements: the creation of Maisons de Culture, multipurpose arts centers at Amiens, Bourges, Caen, Firminy, Grenoble, Le Havre, Ménilmontant, Reims, Rennes, St. Etienne, Thonon, and other French towns; an inventory, to be completed by the end of the century, of French national monuments and artistic riches; the restoration, above all in Paris, of famous historical buildings (the Louvre, the Grand Palais); numerous initiatives in favor of contemporary art, particularly the commissioning of major works from Masson and Chagall; the organization of important exhibitions on treasures of India (1960), Persian art (1961), Mexican art (1962), Picasso (1966), Tutankhamen (1967), and the Spanish siglo de oro, or Golden Age; the establishment of the Paris orchestra; cultural exchanges between France and other countries, for example, Mexico (1960). In addition, Malraux frequently served as de Gaulle's special envoy to distinguished leaders such as Mao Tse tung and Nehru, and he was called upon to proclaim the independence of Tchad, Gabon, Congo, the Central African Republic, and other former French colonies.

On the negative side, the dismissal of France's most prestigious director, Jean Louis Barrault, for having supported the students who had occupied the Odéon, a leading State theater, during the riots of May 1968; a regrettable altercation with Henri Langlois, founding father and director of the Cinémathèque, France's film archives; and bis failure to help improve the quality of French television were highly publicized blemishes that detracted from an otherwise enviable record. When Malraux resigned in June 1969, several months after de

Gaulle, the tension between his two involvements with culture was resolved, and for the remaining seven years of his life he was free to meditate upon one of his key concepts: "metamorphosis."

In the concluding pages of Les Voix du silence Malraux had insisted upon the transforming power of the artist and his capacity for immortalizing some "supreme moment," not by reproducing it, but by subjecting it te, a metamorphosis ("S'il advient que l'artiste fixe un instant privilégié, il ne le fixe pas parce qu'il le reproduit mais parce qu'il le métamorphose" [If an artist happens to arrest a privileged instant, he does not fix it because he reproduces it but because he metamorphosizes it]). Many of the most illuminating passages of his writings illustrate this insight into how one culture selects and transforma the images of another in terms of its own values. In this respect, it is surely significant that the work Malraux revised most extensively in the 1970s was La Métamorphose des dieux, expanding it into three volumes, Le Surnaturel, L'Irréel, and L'Intemporel. Revised versions of other previously published writings on art (for instance, Saturne, le destin, l'art et Goya [1978; published in 1950 as Saturne: Essai sur Goya and translated as Saturn: An Essay on Goya, 1957]); the luxurious limited editions of volumes produced in collaboration with Dali (Roi, je t'attends à Babylone . . . [1977]) and Chagall (Et sur la terre . . . [1977]): and the moving filmed interview conducted by Pierre Dumayer and Walter G. Langlois and entitled La Métamorphose du regard (1973) provide further proof of Malraux's elevation of art to a form of secular religion.

During the saine fertile last seven years of his life that followed his retirement from politics, Malraux completed an additional venture, which had begun with the publication of the Antimémoires in 1967. This book was greeted with near unanimous praise from critics of all persuasions and became an immediate best seller in France. Scenes from previously published fiction (Le Temps du mépris and Les Noyers de l'Altenburg) are interspersed with reminiscences upon lived experiences, recollections of dialogues with illustrious historical figures, and numerous reflections upon art, history, philosophy, and death. Malraux subordinates the self, the principal subject of traditional, narcissistic autobiography, to an atemporal, somewhat discontinuous meditation on "la condition humaine." In subsequent volumes, despite the variety of subject matters, he pursued his interrogation in much the saine vein: Les Chênes qu'on abat . . . (1971; translated as Fallen Oaks, 1972) is a reconstruction of his last conversations with de Gaulle, on 11 December 1969, in the latter's library at Colombey; Lazare (1974; translated as Lazarus, 1977), based on his own near fatal encounter with death in 1973, evokes the transience of all human activity; La 7éte d'obsidienne (1974; translated as Picasso's Mask, 1976), a tribute to Picasso, both celebrates and questions the ability of art to ward off "le néant"; and Hôtes de passage (Passing Guests, 1975), which discusses the events of May 1968 and de Gaulle's fall from power, reveals among other things a fascination with the field of parapsychology. These four works were later reconstituted into La Corde et les souris (The Cord and the Mice, 1976), which, with a substantially revised version of the Antimémoires, became parts 1 and 2 of Le Miroir des limbes, published in 1976, shortly before Malraux's death from a pulmonary embolism on 23 November. As was the case with his key writings on art, Le Surnaturel (his most systematic book on literature) and the essay on Goya were published posthumously. L'Homme précaire et la littérature (Precarious Man and Literature, 1977) is Malraux's only major full length study on literature. "L'homme précaire" referred to in the title is twentieth century man, who enjoys the dubious distinction of living in a civilization, on a planet,

capable of self annihilation.

Malraux al work (photo
© Roland DourdinlRapho

Though at the time of writing, Malraux's health was precarious, L'Homme précaire et la littérature is a vigorously youthful work. It is characterized by a lucidity and a verve which utterly belie the author's struggle with death. It weaves together strands both old and new and reveals a mind that is often perplexing, to say the least. On the one hand, Malraux is sensitive to many contemporary phenomena, particularly the intrusion of the audiovisual into our world of perceptions; yet, at the sanie time, benignly indifferent to many recent developments, such as structuralism or semiotics, that challenge acquired norms for reading literature. The enigma is all the more bewildering when one realizes that the most modern authors to figure briefly in the book are James Joyce and Marcel Proust.

Malraux's own contemporaries do not exist. But L'Homme précaire et la littérature is not literary criticism in the usual senses of the word: it is, rather, a long philosophical essay, which refers to history and the plastic arts as well as to literature, and which asks as many questions as it answers. Arguments are buttressed by aphorisms and analogies more than by logical development, and provocative comparisons challenge many received ideas on specific authors, works, and literary movements. Like so many of Malraux's works, it resists efforts to classify it in ternis of a specific genre.

The cornerstone of L'Homme précaire et la littérature is Malraux's notion of metamorphosis, which had already provided a conceptual framework for his writings on art, from Les Voix du silence to L'Intemporel, and which is applied mutatis mutandis to the world of literature. Just as Giotto had discovered painting through the canvases of another artist, and not through the contemplation of a pastoral scene in Italy, so too the poet or novelist discovers literature not through sentiment or a fait divers (little incident) but as a result of reading poetry or novels. In both instances the pointer and the writer react to, and will eventually react against, other forms. Malraux dispels romantic misinterpretations of the creative mind

by making a crucial distinction between l'imagination (le domaine du rêve, the world of dreams) and l'imaginaire (le domaine des formes, the world of forms).

L'Homme précaire et la littérature is also a general indictment of certain critical approaches which were more prevalent when Malraux was writing than they have been in subsequent years and which, in Malraux's judgment, are mistaken precisely because they are content oriented. His hostility to Freudo Marxism and bis distrust of realism, be it socialist or bourgeois realism, had been expressed as early as the 1930s. He maintains that even novels such as Emile Zola's Germinal (1885), which have workers as heroes and deal with the class struggle, have ultimately to contend with "l'irréalité fondamentale de la fiction"; and, in one of those perplexing equations that are peculiar to bis thinking, Malraux adds that "les classes sont égales devant l'imaginaire comme les âmes devant Dieu" (classes are as equal before the imaginary as souls are before God). He rejects the myth of perfection in art, denounces subjective, impressionist criticism, and, in a more modernist vein, he stresses the shortcomings of criticism as interpretation.

In the first chapter Malraux identifies himself with those who attached "plus d'importance à l'art de La Fontaine qu'à sa biographie, sa morale, son temps" (more importance to the art of [seventeenth century poet and fabulist jean de] La Fontaine than to bis biography, bis ethics, bis times). The context makes it abundantly clear that he was protesting against the limitations of positivism the prevailing credo, during the interwar years, of the literary establishment, identified with the Sorbonne, the Académie Française, and the Revue des Deux Mondes on the grounds that positivism reduced the creative impulse to "une combinaison de réels" (a combination of realities). This "combinaison de réels," the tendency to quantify the different components of a literary text, is not only reductive, but it also fails to acknowledge that aulonomy to which the nineteenth century novel, in particular, increasingly aspired. Throughout L'Homme précaire et la littérature, Malraux compares and contrasts two different ways of reading a novel or of viewing film. For example, to read Flaubert's Madame Bovary or Stendhal's Le Rouge et le noir (The Red and the Black) in terms of "moyens d'information" (means of information) as opposed to "moyens de suggestion" is to ignore, or fail to see, not only "l'imaginaire de l'écriture" (the imaginary in writing) but that sense of the irrémédiable which great art seeks to express.

It is precisely this concern with the irremediable that prevents one from interpreting Malraux's concept of literature as an annexation of formalism, despite bis undoubted interest in forms and their transformations. What is enigmatic, unknowable, unfathomable in the human condition cannot be communicated by rational means what Malraux calls l'argumentation but rather by la contagion. And the saine holds true of literary criticism. Ultimately, the uniqueness of great literature, of Flaubert and Dostoyevski, for example, cannot be accounted for, even though the critic's analysis may illuminate such specific factors as the author's narrative techniques, use of plot, character, tropes, and so forth. Furthermore, in accordance with bis abiding interest in metamorphosis, Malraux considered the creative process as fruitful an area of research as the final product. For example, in claiming that the study of Balzac's proofs and corrections to bis manuscripts is more revealing than a scholarly article, he is projecting bis own fascination with the transmutation undergone by le vécu when it is subjected to the alchemy of artistic creation. That ibis very process should escape the writer is borne out by Malraux's contention that theories advanced by the novelist are less revealing of bis genius than those other works: the Correspondance in the case of Flaubert, the Notebooks in the case of Dostoyevski, in which

"le mécanisme createurqui se dérobe" (the creative mechanism, which escapes conscious control), is made manifest in lis pristine purity.

L'Homme précaire et la littérature also raises, in its own peculiar and pertinent way, the question of the value of literature in a world whose precariousness is more apparent with each passing day. For Malraux, despite the emphasis lie places upon form and metamorphosis, precariousness is indissolubly linked to the ethical imperative, and, in this respect, he is curiously consistent with the precocious youth who had written La Tentation de l'Occident some fifty years earlier. While conceding that literature both instructs and pleases, that it often edifies and uplifts, Malraux sees in the greatest works of art an expression of man's Promethean spirit. The precariousness of individual life is a metaphysical commonplace, but the precariousness of civilization is less so, and Malraux bas illuminated contemporary man's predicament by adapting Paul Valéry's warning of 1919, "Nous autres civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles" (We civilizations, we know now that we are mortal), as "Nous autres chrysalides, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes provisoires" (We chrysalises, we know now that we are provisional).

Literature too is provisional, like the literature and library of Alexandria, and precarious too if by that we mean of doubtful or uncertain duration. But the term precarious, precarius in Latin, also designates that which is obtained by entreaty or by prayer, and it is difficult not to relate Malraux's choice of title to his conviction that a profound spiritual metamorphosis is quite conceivable as a response to the aleatory and the absurd. In the final pages of the last work he wrote, he does not relinquish his choice of agnosticism, as far as religion is concerned, but L'Homme précaire et la littérature concludes with an unanswered question, "Nous souviendrons nous que les événements spirituels capitaux ont récusé toute prévision?" (Will we remember that spiritual events have challenged all foresight?). It is this very question, more than anything else, that separates Malraux's reflections on literature from those of the majority of his contemporaries.

In the last fifteen years of his life he received numerous honorary degrees from the University of Sâo Paulo (1959), the University of Benares (1965), Oxford University (1967), Jyvâskylân University in Finland (1969), and Rajshahi University in Bangladesh (1973). He was also awarded the Nehru Prize for Peace (1973) and the Mexican government's Alfonso Reyes Prize (1976).

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