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The novels of André MALRAUX

A restatement of man's tragic dilemma in contemporary terms.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Some aspects of the novel in France 1918-1940

#### 1.

Writing about Eighteenth Century England, and more particularly about the age of Johnson, Trevelyan gives us an admirable definition of a classical age:

It is a 'classical' age, that is an age of unchallenged assumptions, when the philosophers of the streets such as Dr. Johnson, have ample leisure to moralise on the human scene, in the happy belief that the state of society and the modes of thought to which they are accustomed are not mere passing aspects of an ever shifting kaleidoscope, but permanent habitations, the final outcome of reason and experience. Such an age does not aspire to progress, though it may in fact be progressing; it regards itself not as setting out but as having arrived. (1)

To apply this definition of a classical age to the protean Nineteenth Century might, at first glance, seem impossible or at least dangerous. Yet it is only when we see this century - and more particularly the period 1871-1914 - as a truly classical age, as the classical age of the Bourgeoisie, that we can understand the direction and meaning of the revolt during the Twenties and Thirties of which Malraux' work is so representative.

One of the difficulties of seeing this apparently variegated and contradictory Nineteenth Century as a classical age in the manner defined by Trevelyan comes, I think, mainly from the fact that the period is still so close to us. Its asperities are still visible and have not yet been smoothed by the plane of time; its contradictions, its conflicts, its rich and profuse diversity still hide from our eyes the very real and fundamental unity underlying them.

Nineteenth Century France particularly appears to us, and not without reason, as just the opposite of an "age of unchallenged assumption"; in fact, it seems to us an "ever changing kaleidoscope" of régimes, governments and literary schools. Yet the conquests of 1789 are solid and permanent and have never been reversed. It is this which gives the period its stability and unity. The men of the "classical" Nineteenth Century felt on the whole, as did the men of the classical seventeenth century, that they were living in a solid stable world whose values and class structure would not change:

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.... les bourgeois d'alors se faisaient de la société une idée un peu hindoue et la considéraient comme composée de castes fermées où chacun, dès sa naissance, se trouvait placé dans le rang qu'occupaient ses parents, et d'où rien, à moins des hasards d'une carrière exceptionnelle ou d'un mariage inespéré, ne pouvait vous tirer pour vous faire pénétrer dans une caste supérieure.<sup>(2)</sup>

A Seventeenth Century Frenchman would not have looked differently on his society. And Ortega y Gasset, writing about Europe at the turn of the Century, says:

- ... Thirty years ago the (middle class) European believed that human life had come to be what it ought to be, what for generations previous it had been desiring to be, what it was henceforth always bound to be.<sup>(3)</sup>

It is perhaps significant also that one of the great specialists the Nineteenth Century, G.M. Young, describes the Victorian Age in England in terms almost identical to those of Trevelyan:

Society in the Mid-Nineteenth Century was still primitive Indo-germanic society with some slight speeding of cartwheels and looms of itself less as a departure than as a consummation.<sup>(4)</sup>

And in the same essay Young underlines the experience of unity and the sense of stability of the Nineteenth Century mind:

His (the educated man of the Victorian period) education, his religion, the sight of his fields, if he was a country man, of his streets if he was a towns man, all impressed upon his mind the antiquity and continuity of his civilisation, while the social order at home .... preserved and emphasised its unity.<sup>(5)</sup>

This classical age of the bourgeoisie with its all-pervading sense of security and permanence came to an end, as we know, with the First World War, which should be seen therefore less as a war than as a revolution. Yet - and this is only natural - the profound revolutionary nature of the events was not clearly seen or recognised at the time. It did appear at first that, after the bloody hiatus of four years of war, life would go on more or less as before. The structure, it was true, had been severely shaken, but it was still standing. This was, of course, an optical illusion. What remained standing after the war was an empty shell, a hollowed-out tree with withered roots which only looked as if it were still alive but which, in fact, was dead. A second less violent shock, the Great Depression and its sequellae, sent crashing down what remained of the "permanent habitation" of bourgeois classicism. These events, and more particularly the consequent sense of impermanence and insecurity, were to have a deep effect on the

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period's "Weltanschauung". Now suddenly lost in "un monde soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières"<sup>(6)</sup>, incapable of any belief, surrounded by the broken idols of Religion, Humanism, Science and Progress, man (and in particular the writer) finds himself naked, no longer protected by a "permanent habitation" in a hostile world of chaos and violence, a world raked by wars, dotted with concentration camps and threatened by death and destruction.

It is through this direct, immediate contact with nothingness that the writers of the Thirties and Forties re-discover the tragic nature of man's fate, the contingency of human existence and its ultimate meaninglessness. This will find its reflection in the literature of that time and particularly in the novel. It is obvious that in this context the personality and the work of Malraux are of the greatest importance. It was he who for the first time gave this renewal of the tragic vision its expression and its particular Twentieth Century tone. It was, to a great extent, he who pushed the novel into a new direction which has been the dominant one for two decades, the Thirties and the Forties.

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Let us now turn to the literary situation of the period between the two wars, and more especially to the novel. We find here an extraordinarily tangled skein of literary tendencies, groups and generations. Leaving aside the innumerable literary schools and chapelles, we find at least four (or three-and-a-half) generations of writers co-exist during this period. The generation of 1870, the middle-aged avant-garde, Gide, Claudel, Valéry; the generation (or what Henri Peyre calls in his Les Générations littéraires "une demi-génération"<sup>(7)</sup>) of 1880-90 which will dominate the novel of the twenties, Duhamel, Romain, Mauriac, Giraudoux, Morand. Then comes the all-important generation of 1900: Malraux, Saint-Exupéry, Céline, Giono, Drieu la Rochelle, Montherlant. And finally the old rear-guard, the writers born in or about 1850, Bourget, Prévost, Hermant, Bazin.

Yet in spite of this overlapping of generations there exists in

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this period a median line which divides it into two halves. Most critics who have dealt with this period, take 1930 as the crucial date.\*

The reason why 1930 was so widely chosen as the median date is, however, not quite clear. It was a year not marked by any really important literary or historical event. It is, of course, conveniently the end of a decade, but it would appear that 1933 is a better and a more significant date: that year is marked by one of the main events of contemporary history, the coming to power of Hitler, and by the publication of one of the key works of the period, La Condition humaine by Malraux. Similarly, from a literary point of view, it has little meaning to end the second half of this period in 1939. It would be more logical to make this period end ten years later in 1949 with the publication of the last volume of Sartre's Les Chemins de la liberté.\*\*

The period between 1918 and 1933 which Thibaudet describes so aptly as experiencing "une conscience de fin absolue, de désordre absolu et de libération absolue"<sup>(8)</sup>, this wild explosion of freedom in all fields is of obvious importance for us. Not only did Malraux begin his literary career at this time and his early books bear the unmistakable stamp of this period, but also the period 1933-1949, during which Malraux wrote his major novels, reacted strongly against the apparent frivolousness and levity of the Twenties. There is obviously no clear break between the Twenties and the Thirties; at the same time the intellectual, moral and literary atmosphere is strikingly different.

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\* Brodin (Présences contemporaines, Paris, Debresse, n.d. Tome III, p.21): "cette année charnière 1920". Claude-Edmonde Magny (Histoire du roman français depuis 1918, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, n.d., p.51): "Le 'saint Gothard' de cette période, le point où se départagent les oeuvres qui appartiendront, les unes à la première, les autres à la seconde génération, pourrait être choisi sans arbitraire plus qu'usuel, dans l'année 1930." Thibaudet (Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours, Paris, Stock, n.d., p.154): "Nous avons remarqué qu'après quinze ans en moyenne toutes les générations littéraires depuis 1789 ont passé par un tournant, une crise qui les diviserait plus ou moins en deux demi-génération. Mais les coupures n'ont jamais été aussi profondes qu'après 1914; la date médiane de 1930 garde bien, comme 1902, 1870, 1843, 1802 pour les générations précédentes, une importance capitale."

\*\* J.-P. Sartre, although his work is posterior to that of Malraux (La Nausée was published in 1938, a year after Malraux' last "real" novel, L'Espoir) belongs, in fact, to the same generation as Malraux, being born in 1905.

The Twenties is above all a period of experiment in all spheres of art. There is an almost dogmatic rejection of all dogmas and conventions. Claude-Edmonde Magny very aptly defines the experimental, modernistic literature of the Twenties as a "divertissement impertinent (Au sens étymologique du mot qui ne touche rien de ce qui importe)"(9).

A corollary of this obsession with technique is the almost total absence in literature of the Twenties of any social or political preoccupations. Even such a violently revolutionary movement as Dada remains curiously impermeable to even the most shattering political events: "Lorsque Dada II paraît, pas un mot de la chute de l'empire allemand et des désordres qu'elle provoque, pas plus qu'il n'avait été question de l'avènement du bolchévisme en son temps"(10). And Malraux himself, in whose life politics are to play such an important part, is according to Vandegans(11) totally indifferent to politics during the early Twenties. In this indifference to politics the literature of this period stands in sharp contrast to that of the following decade.

One more aspect of the literature between 1918 and 1923 must be considered for it is one which, in a different guise, we shall find again in the literature of the Thirties, and even in the Sixties (cf. beat poetry and pop art). The intellectual movement of these periods is characterised by a profound and paradoxical distrust of "intellectualism", while literature displays an equal distrust of littérature.

In his significantly entitled essay Sur un nouveau mal du siècle, written in 1923, Marcel Arland declares:

... rarement on eût autant de méfiance envers l'art; et je ne dis pas seulement envers les procédés artistiques, mais envers leur résultat, qu'on appelait autrefois la Beauté; méfiance envers les mots, les procédés d'investigation et de connaissance, envers l'intelligence comme envers la sensibilité, envers la personnalité.(12)

And Aragon expresses the same thought in a more virulent manner when he writes: "La besogne littéraire est une sale besogne que nous (the surrealists) n'avons jamais assumée".(13) Behind this attitude, behind this "méfiance" and rejection of literature which will push Malraux to Asia, lies the awareness that life is more important than literature,

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and man more important than the littérateur. The intellectual, the man of letters, is seen as ignorant of "real life": "M. Faguet, ce pédagogue crasseux, n'en savait pas plus long que moi qui avais onze ou douze ans, sur les passions que vécut Racine; mais la différence était que je devais moi aussi un jour vivre ces passions, tandis que M. Faguet ne les avait à aucun moment approchées."<sup>(14)</sup> They are seen as leading dusty, shut-in lives which are set in strong contrast with the real life led by the man of action:

... Alors ils (the professors) nous interrogèrent. Nous étions sortis de cette maison tiède dans la grande tempête de la vie, il nous fallait leur raconter le vrai temps qu'il fait sur la terre. Si vraiment l'homme qui aime une femme devient son esclave comme Pyrrhus ou son bourreau comme Néron. Si vraiment l'Afrique et ses altitudes et son ciel bleu répondent à l'enseignement du maître de Géographie.<sup>(15)</sup>

What is condemned here is less an intellectual attitude than a way of living, a mode of being. And while this assertion of life against literature is certainly linked to the anti-rationalist current which begins with Nietzsche, is continued by Bergson, Barrès and the last great symbolist wave of the generation of 1870, it has nevertheless its deepest roots in the still prevalent romantic attitudes towards life, literature and le bourgeois. For in the eyes of the generation of 1900 the littérateur was essentially a littérateur bourgeois: a slave of convention, unimaginative, hidebound who wrote not from life but from what he had read about life. That is how Lafcadio, that prototype of the young man of 1920, saw the novelist Baraglioul who, in contrast to Lafcadio, is incapable of really living. In fact, Baraglioul's attitude, and that of the bourgeois writers he represents, is not far removed from that of Axel's: "Vivre? Nos valets le feront pour nous". The bourgeois, and by extension the bourgeois writer is, as is well known, incapable of any real greatness, "il est celui qui pense basement", as Flaubert puts it.

Against this image of the fossilised, middle-class, middle-aged intellectual, the generation of 1900 sets the image of youth, morally and physically free, open always to life, and whose real predecessors were

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Nathanael and Lafcadio.\* Life in the eyes of this generation was not something one read about while others did the living; it was something immediate, concrete, physical and which had to find its expression in immediate, physical ways - hence the fascination of sport for this generation. Living with intensity on a physical plane was more important on the whole than any intellectual life, although characteristically it found its expression in highly sophisticated literary intellectual forms.

Finally it was felt that this physical life would be intensified if it contained an element of genuine risk. Writing about the change of the novel in the Thirties, R. Caillois remarks:

... ces raffinés et ces sages, sont relayés par de rudes combattants qui recherchent la fréquentation et le sérieux de la mort, ne désirant rien qui ne les entraîne entièrement.

Ils sont si pressés de mesurer leurs forces que les jeux mêmes, s'ils sont sanglants, les attirent. Ils descendent dans l'arène où courent les taureaux. D'autres, choisissant des métiers pénibles et périlleux, font l'épreuve de leur propre vigueur en luttant contre la nature et les limites de la résistance humaine. Il en est qui rejoignent la guerre partout où elle éclate sur le globe ou qui, conspirateurs et assassins, travaillent à creuser le 'tourbillon' qu'ils espèrent voir brasser les multitudes (et leur espérance n'est pas vaine).<sup>(16)</sup>

And Arthur Koestler writes in a similar vein:

With the "bourgeois novel" getting more and more exhausted as the era which produced it draws to its close, a new type of writer seems to take over from the cultured middle class humanist: airmen, revolutionaries, adventurers, men who live the dangerous life; with a new operative technique of observation, a curious alfresco introspection and an even more curious trend of contemplation, even mysticism, born in the dead centre of the hurricane.<sup>(17)</sup>

Both these elements - to live physically and to live dangerously - find one of their most characteristic expressions in Drieu la Rochelle, who makes one of his characters say (and one can, I think, be almost certain that this is also the voice of Drieu la Rochelle himself):

J'ai horreur d'un homme qui n'est pas un homme et qui n'est pas capable d'affirmer avec son corps et de pâtir avec son corps. Je ne pardonne cela qu'à certains hauts esprits qui ont poussé loin le risque moral; et encore l'Homme pour moi ne peut cesser d'être un guerrier de quelque manière.<sup>(18)</sup>

The links of Malraux' world with this outlook are obvious.

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\* It is ironical that the great formative influence of the generation was Gide, that most bourgeois and most literary of men of letters.

The literary, moral and intellectual climate of the years after 1933 offers a very different picture from that of the Twenties. If, as Claude-Edmonde Magny writes, literature between 1918 and 1933 was "obsédé par la technique", then literature of the Thirties was obsessed by politics.

For France the crucial date of that period was 6 February 1934, the date of the spontaneously attempted Coup d'Etat by the various Fascist groups and parties. Ever since that date till only very recently, France lived in something close to a cold civil war which briefly came into the open during the liberation. France was from 1934 as profoundly, although less bloodily, divided as was Spain.\*

The writer in this situation found himself faced with a set of problems different from those which preoccupied him before, not aesthetic, but political or rather politico-moral problems. From these very urgent and very real problems the writer felt he could not escape. He had to make a stand, he had to be for or against Fascism, for or against Communism.\*\* The writer was drawn towards politics like a moth to a flame, and even Mallarmé's disciple Gide found himself (perhaps to his own amazement) standing next to Stalin on the saluting base of Moscow's Red Square.

This political commitment of the writer during the Nineteen Thirties was obviously not something new and continued a well established tradition. Malraux, Aragon, Drieu la Rochelle followed in the footsteps of Lamartine, Hugo, Barrès, etc. There exist, however, between the political engagement of the writers of this time and that of their

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\* It is this which explains perhaps the very deep and very real echo which the Spanish Civil War found in France: Spain was also fighting France's Civil War.

\*\* It must be pointed out that this was not a sudden change. In the very heart of the "aesthetic" Twenties we find politically committed writers such as Barbusse, and we witness the Surrealists turning to politics as early as 1925. Conversely, in the middle of the "political" Thirties we have writers such as Montherlant who refuse to be drawn into the political arena.

predecessors important differences which must be brought out.

There is, first of all, a change in the nature of politics themselves. From 1917 onwards, followed by the rise of Fascism and Nazism, politics tend to become terroristic and violent. It is no longer a gentlemanly game played in Parliament by an elite of middle-class politicians and statesmen; the political game is being played now by professional revolutionaries and agitators; its means are violent, its victories bloody and the victor rules by means of purges and concentration camps. The revolutionary and his fellow-travellers, who are usually the committed intellectuals, often find themselves (or like to imagine themselves) in physical danger. Politics hold, in a way, the same attraction as bull-fighting, and the political commitment of the writers of this time is closely linked with the desire for a physically dangerous life to which I referred earlier.

This brings us to a second consideration. The political engagement of the writer of the Thirties has a peculiar edge to it. What is it that gives it that edge, that intensity or feverishness which we do not find in the political life of a Chateaubriand or a Hugo? It is, I think, the fact that ultimately the committed writers of the Thirties were driven less by political considerations (which, however, did determine their choice of sides) than by a kind of metaphysical Angst, an attraction to violence and danger and a profound desire to belong. In a paradoxical way this generation, obsessed by politics, is less interested in politics than its Nineteenth Century counterpart. What mattered in the Nineteen Thirties was less the belief than the action, and through this communal political action the writer hoped to find an antidote to his isolation. Already in La Tentation de l'occident Malraux sees in individualism a destructive force, but a man can break out of this individualistic call through becoming part of a community of belief and a community of action.

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I want now to take a brief look at the novel which during the Twenties and Thirties underwent a profound change. It is not my intention to treat this subject exhaustively, but only to discuss those aspects of the novel of this period which have a direct bearing on the novels of Malraux.

During the Nineteenth Century the novel seemed to have acquired its definite "form" and one can, I think, speak of a "classical" novel whose shape and even subject matter (the fate of an individual conscience in the frame of a clearly defined society or social group) seemed clearly and permanently established, just as the form and subject matter of Seventeenth Century tragedy seemed, at that time, to be fixed once and for all. Just like the classical tragedy, the "classical" Nineteenth Century novel is hemmed in by a tenacious, but invisible network of convention.\* And just as it was inconceivable for a Racine to write a tragedy in any other form but the one he knew, so it would not have occurred to a Bourget or a Bazin to write a novel in any other manner than that of Balzac or Flaubert. "Depuis cinquante ans", said ~~already~~ Brunetière, "un bon roman est un roman qui ressemble d'abord à un roman de Balzac". (19)

After the 1914-1918 war, however, the classical bourgeois novel begins to show signs of exhaustion. "Le roman est mort" proclaims a little prematurely Drieu la Rochelle, but it is obvious that a certain kind of novel is dying. And throughout the Twenties there is a distinct feeling that something is coming to an end, that the novel has come to an impasse.

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\* The hardy tenacity of these conventions is clearly shown by the fact that even today, after Proust, Gide, Joyce and Woolf, the so-called "New Novelists" still feel the need to attack those conventions. Speaking at a round-table conference on the novel, Robe-Grillet declared: "Quelques écrivains, et beaucoup de critiques, parlent aujourd'hui comme si, devant Le Père Goriot et Thérèse Raquin, il n'était pas possible de concevoir que le roman puisse s'écarter jamais de formules à la Balzac ou à la Zola. Ils admettent implicitement que ce genre littéraire a reçu sa forme définitive à un moment donné. Mes amis et moi nous pensons au contraire que le roman existe à tout moment, que sans cesse il doit se transformer et trouver chaque jour une forme nouvelle." (20)

As a natural result of this feeling of dissatisfaction there is then a desire to renew the novel and to reject those conventions which now are being felt as unnatural. Gide wants to take the novel out of its rut. And Virginia Woolf writes with a kind of controlled anger:

They (the Edwardian novelists) have developed a technique of novel-writing which suits their purpose; they have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But those tools are no tools and that business is not our business. For us those conventions are ruin. Those tools are death.  
(The Captain's deathbed, pp.103-4)(21)

Having turned their back on the conventional novel, the novelists find themselves faced with a number of temptations. The most radical and also the most negative one is to refuse to write any novels. This is the attitude taken up by Valéry and Breton (cf. André Breton, Les Manifestes du surréalisme, pp.17-22). And while it is true that neither of these writers is a novelist, we find that such novelists as Gide or Proust refuse equally to write such novelistic prose as: "La marquise sortit à cinq heures". In his Journal, six years after the publication of Les Faux-monnayeurs, Gide writes:

Quoi de plus facile que d'écrire un roman comme les autres! J'y répugne, tout simplement, et ne me décide pas plus que Valéry à écrire: 'La marquise sortit à cinq heures' ou, ce qui est d'un tout autre ordre, mais me paraît plus compromettant encore: 'X. se demanda longtemps si...' (22)

And Proust, in a letter to his friend Robert Dreyfus, declared: "pas une seule fois un de mes personnages ne ferme une fenêtre, ne se lave les mains, ne passe un pardessus, ne dit une formule de présentation." (23)

There is also a more constructive temptation and to which Gide yields in his Les Faux-monnayeurs, and that is to attempt to write a "pure novel", a novel which has been cleansed of all its impurities. (Gide calls them scories):

Dépouiller le roman de tous les éléments qui n'appartiennent pas spécifiquement au roman. De même que la photographie, naguère, débarrassa la peinture du souci de certaines exactitudes, le phonographe nettoiera sans doute demain le roman de ces dialogues rapportés dont le réaliste souvent se fait gloire. Les événements extérieurs, les accidents, les traumatismes, appartiennent au cinéma; il sied que le roman les lui laisse. (24)

It might be noted in passing that this dream of a "pure novel" seems

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seems to be a recurrent one. We find it in Flaubert in a letter to

Louise Collet:

Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire c'est un livre de rien, un livre sans attaches extérieures qui se tiendra par la force interne de son style ... un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet, ou du moins où le sujet serait invisible.<sup>(25)</sup>

We find a hundred years later in Nathalie Sarraute's L'Ere du soupçon à very similar idea.

Side by side with this desire to eradicate from the novel all the elements which do not belong to it, we find the opposite temptation to incorporate into the novel all sorts of techniques borrowed from the film, journalism, even to introduce photographs in order to replace descriptions: "l'abondante illustration photographique", writes André Breton in his avant-dire to Nadja, "à pour objet d'éliminer toute description".<sup>(26)</sup>

These techniques to which the novelist feels drawn, are obviously those which can be most readily assimilated by the novel. There are few writers of the Twenties who have not been fascinated by the film and especially the experimental and avant-garde films; and some have felt that an injection of film techniques into the novel might give it a new lease of life. Malraux' interest in the film is clearly shown in his Esquisse d'une psychologie du cinéma (1946). Moreover, the influence of film techniques on his novels is obvious and will be discussed later. But even older writers such as Gide or Mauriac\* feel the attraction of the film.

The Twenties also witnessed in France the development of the so-called grand reportage and that of its close relation, the documentary film. These have also exercised a great attraction on the novelist: "Je pense", writes Malraux, "qu'il est bien peu de romanciers de notre temps qui n'aient rôdé autour des reportages réunis en volume, qui n'aient senti que se préparait là une forme nouvelle de roman". And although Malraux

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\* "Thus in Thérèse Desqueyroux (1927) I used some devices that came from the silent films: lack of preparation, the sudden opening, flashbacks ... My novel Destins was likewise composed with an eye to film techniques."<sup>(27)</sup>

adds that the novelists soon abandoned this hope to renew the novel through the use of reportage techniques, it remains nevertheless true that a great number of the novels of the Twenties and Thirties and those of Malraux in particular (cf. L'Espoir), contain a heavy dose of reportage.

Behind the intrusion of these techniques in the novel we find at work the writer's desire to be "modern" and his attraction to non-literary forms. Although its real impact is felt only much later (cf. the influence of Hemingway on Camus and that of dos Passos on Sartre), it was nevertheless during the Twenties and Thirties that the contemporary American novel was discovered. It was its vitality, its robustness which attracted the novelists of the time: "Avec les Américains nous troquons des formes contre de la vie brute. Nous avons besoin de ces effluves de santé qu'ils nous envoient pour raviver nos formes."<sup>(28)</sup> The American novel was un-intellectual, it was not written by a man of letters in his cabinet de travail. The discovery of the American novel helped the French novelist of the Twenties and Thirties to break down the doors of the stuffy, dusty drawing rooms where the novels of Bourget and Co. were enacted.

The changes brought to the novel during the Nineteen Twenties seem to be almost purely technical or formal. In the Nineteen Thirties the novel and literature in general underwent a more profound change, which I shall only briefly deal with here. The change in attitude which took place during the Thirties has been clearly and briefly expressed by Jean-Richard Bloch when he wrote: "Nous avons quitté l'ère de l'esthétique pour entrer dans un âge tragique".<sup>(29)</sup>

For the novel, the rediscovery of the Tragic will have important consequences, since it will mainly become the novelist's task to try and give expression to this tragic vision.

Already in the Twenties a number of writers had felt that the conventional psychological novel had come to the end of its tether.\* In 1920

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\* It seems obvious that the Freudian ideas which, in the Twenties, began to gain a fairly wide currency in France also played a part in undermining the psychological novel.

Breton states flatly: "Les jours de la littérature psychologique à affabulation romanesque sont comptés".<sup>(30)</sup> The previous year, in his perceptive Le Roman, Mauriac had written:

Le romancier crée des femmes et des hommes vivants. Il les montre en conflit: conflit de Dieu et de l'homme dans la religion, conflit de l'homme et de la femme dans l'amour; conflit de l'homme avec lui-même. Or, s'il fallait définir en romancier ce temps d'après guerre nous dirions que c'est une époque où diminuent de plus en plus d'intensité les conflits dont le roman a vécu jusqu'à ce jour.<sup>(31)</sup>

And André Gide in his Journal reports a conversation in which significantly Malraux took part, during which almost the same ideas as those of Mauriac were being expressed:

L'on s'accordait à reconnaître que notre littérature contemporaine donnait une image peu exacte de l'état des esprits d'aujourd'hui. Berl(.....) prétendait que nos littérateurs d'aujourd'hui, singulièrement nos romanciers, peignent des sentiments conventionnels qui n'ont plus cours, et restent extraordinairement en retard sur leur temps.<sup>(32)</sup>

This feeling of malaisé crystallizes during the Thirties with a rejection of the psychological novel. Before the tragic fate of man, the individual fate of one person is no longer significant. The Individual, king-pin of the Nineteenth century novel, is now being dwarfed by Man. And the novel, or rather a certain kind of novel, will no longer attempt to show an individual/ psychological conflict, but will attempt to illustrate the insoluble and tragic nature of man: "Au lieu de décrire un objet limité - passion humaine, voyage d'aventures, problème social - dans un monde parfaitement équilibré, la littérature, à propos d'un fait divers - du même ordre d'ailleurs que les précédents, mais senti différemment à travers ses résonnances - rend sensibles les grands problèmes que l'homme n'a pas résolu".<sup>(33)</sup> Yet this new novel (i.e. new in the Nineteen Thirties), this metaphysical and cosmic vision of Man, this rediscovery of the tragic nature of Man's fate, all this places the novelist before an extremely difficult, if not insoluble, problem.

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In one of the marginal remarks in Gaëton Picon's book, Malraux par lui-même, Malraux wrote: "Le roman moderne est à mes yeux, un moyen

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d'expression privilégié du tragique de l'homme".<sup>(34)</sup> This clearly defines Malraux' aims as a novelist; and as I hope to show, this desire to make his novels the vehicle for the expression of the tragic nature of man, will to a great extent model the shape of Malraux' novels.

One question, however, arises: can the novel contain such a tragic vision? Can the novel become, as Malraux wants it, "un moyen privilégié du tragique de l'homme" ?

The tragic vision has been defined as an encounter with Nothingness. It sees man unprotected by history, society, reason, logic, order, all of which give a semblance of meaning to his existence. It faces us with the ultimately inexplicable nature of Man's situation and with his total contingency. Perhaps one of the purest expressions of such a vision is to be found in Pascal.

Such a tragic vision is a metaphysical one in that it goes beyond the world of historical, concrete and verifiable fact. It sees through the décor of daily life and activity which protects us against this encounter with nothingness.

But an important distinction must be drawn here. The tragic vision seems to be compounded of two closely interwoven yet separable elements. It is first of all the awareness of a situation and is therefore, at least in part, an intellectual and not purely an affective experience. One does not experience the absurd in the way that one experiences love, or the beauty of a painting. One becomes conscious of the absurd, one thinks it, but one cannot see or feel it. It is because of this perhaps that such an awareness is most adequately expressed in abstract philosophical terms. Yet, at the same time, becoming aware of the Tragic (or of the Absurd) brings in its wake the second component of the tragic vision: a feeling of vertigo, of which Pascal's gouffre is perhaps the best example. This experience comes partly from having looked into the abyss, partly from attempting to think the unthinkable; it is in this way akin to the vertigo a child (or an adult) might feel who tries to see the infinite. - It is obvious, and of great importance for their expression,

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that both the becoming aware of the tragic and the experience of le gouffre are not everyday, common or even "normal" experiences. They require a sudden heightening of perception, a great intensity of feeling, an almost anguished quickening of the intellectual and emotional pulse. We are dealing with a rare and frightening moment privilégié, far removed from our ordinary, quotidian life.

Although the two elements of the tragic vision are separable, one should be extremely careful not to make the division between them too sharp. The intellectual awareness of nothingness and the emotional experience accompanying it are different in kind, but nevertheless inseparable one from the other. And this is certainly true of Malraux in whose writing thought and emotion are never separated. It is a matter of degree. There can be no idea or thought which is not informed by some sort of feeling, nor can there be an expression of feeling which does not contain some idea or thought. But two writers, having a similar tragic vision, will tend to give expression to it either in predominantly intellectual terms or in predominantly affective terms. He will either be a tragic philosopher like Heidegger or a tragic poet like Sophocles or Racine. Both philosophy and poetry being essentially metaphysical means of expression, they are therefore the proper vehicle for what is, as we have seen, essentially a metaphysical vision or experience. (It can, and often does, also find its expression in myth.) Seen in this light, the novel appears to be the least adequate means to embody the tragic vision. The reason for this must be sought in the respective "natures" of the novel and the tragic vision, one of whose main characteristics, as we have seen, is to be unhistorical and divorced from our daily life. Now a tragic poem can and does show us such a reality. The world it represents, although intensely real, is not our world and its reality not our reality. Tragedy attempts to show us the ultimate, inexplicable and static condition of man. Therefore tragedy, although its writers may draw on history, is unhistorical. Antigone is not a chronicle of Vth

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Vth century Thebes, but Le Rouge et le Noir has quite properly as subtitle Chronique de 1830. Tragedy then is divorced from time and therefore also from daily living which is lived in time.

Also the tragic hero must be truly and constantly heroic. He is larger than life, but, just like the action of tragedy, divorced from it. The ordinary conditions of living which are so important in our daily life since they define and determine us to such a great extent, are immaterial in tragedy. The tragic hero has no job, no home, lives nowhere. He does not sit down to breakfast, and the moment he does, he ceases to be a tragic hero.

Moreover, the tragic hero is an exemplary hero. This means that he is not only a moral example to us, but also a sample of us. It is this exemplary nature of the <sup>hero</sup>~~tragedian~~'s character which interests <sup>the tragedian</sup>~~him~~ primarily. And this, in turn, determines the relative absence of psychology. This is obviously what Malraux meant when he wrote that the novel was "un instrument privilégié du tragique de l'homme et non une élucidation de l'individu" (My italics, C.J.G.). Obviously a tragedy cannot do without psychological insight. Psychology cannot be absent from it any more than living. But the tragedian does not appear to be primarily interested in the individual psychology of his characters. Nero, in Racine's Britannicus lives, of course, as a character. But he interests Racine less as an individual monster than as an example of the dark monster that lives in man.

The main reason then why the novel is such an unsuitable means to express a tragic vision, is that it cannot do the three things which are essential for the expression of such a vision: it cannot readily divorce the reality it shows from the material conditions of our daily life, nor can it contain characters who are truly and constantly heroic; and even less easily than tragedy can it do without a psychological content.

The novel is to a far greater extent than the tragic poem reliant on time, on history and on fact. It shows us an individual destiny placed in a carefully defined social and domestic framework. Madame Bovary tells the story of Emma as it was lived in a particular place in a particular time; Le Rouge et le Noir tells us the story of Julien Sorel, a young man from a

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particular social class, living at a particular historical period. And the list of novels telling stories is, of course, endless. All these stories of individual fates show a character evolving. But the tragic fate of man (as opposed to that of the individual), since it is a static, unhistoric and timeless state of being, does not become and therefore cannot easily be shown in a literary genre which, like the novel, is so bound by history and by time.

Moreover the novel is almost, as it were, by "nature" realistic. "The only reason for the existence of the novel", writes Henry James,<sup>(35)</sup> "is that it does attempt to represent life. And life in this quotation is spelt with a lower-case 'l', that is to say that it indicates life as we live it. Because of this, the novel - even those novels which attempt to embody a tragic view of life - are committed to a representation of our factual and actual reality. Like Defoe's castaways, the novelist will surround himself with a palissade of tangible facts. And Mary McCarthy writes more explicitly:

The distinctive mark of the novel is its concern with the actual world, the world of fact, of the verifiable, of figures, even, and statistics. If I point to Jane Austen, Dickens, Balzac, Eliot, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, the Melville of Moby Dick, Proust, the Joyce of Ulysses, Dreiser, Faulkner, it will be admitted that they are all novelists and that, different as they are from a formal point of view, they have one thing in common: a deep love of fact, of the empiric element in experience. I am not interested in making a formal definition of the novel (it is really a very loose affair, a grabbag or portmanteau, as someone has said) but in finding its quidditas or whatness, the essence or binder that distinguishes it from other species of prose fiction: the tale, the fable, the romance. The staple ingredient present in all novels in various mixtures and proportions but always in fairly heavy dosage is fact.<sup>(36)</sup>

Because of this inescapable presence of the factual concrete world in which we live, the novel, unlike tragedy, is continuous with our quotidian life. This means that the "heroes" in a novel must resemble people in real life: their actions and thoughts must be explained. The novel's world is one where cause is followed by effect, where effect is explained by cause. The novel's heroes can be mentally deranged, but they cannot be epically made in the way Ajax, Lear, Hamlet or Phèdre are.

It would seem fairly obvious then that the novel, always bearing in mind I refer here to its dominant "realist" form, had to be twisted or

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stretched in order to contain the tragic vision; rather in the same way as Joyce had to stretch the novel to breaking point so that it could contain his symbolic dream world of Finnegans Wake. A number of writers, both before and after Malraux, have struggled with this problem. Yet none removed the two main obstacles to the novel becoming an instrument for the expression of Tragic Man: its almost complete reliance on both history and fact.

Before considering Malraux' solution to this problem, I want to look briefly at the manner in which Dostoievski, Thomas Hardy and the existential writers of the Forties have tried to turn the novel into a means to express a tragic awareness of life.

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Dostoievski's The Brothers Karamazov is undoubtedly a novel bearing a close, if superficial resemblance to the traditional realist-psychological novel; yet it is in important respects very different, and not merely because of its size or its untidiness. The novel is in part, through the analysis of Ivan and Dimitri, a psychological study of hatred and jealousy. But to see only that side of the novel, as did such XIXth century critics as Vogué, is to miss its real meaning. The assassination of the father is the profounder and genuinely tragic theme of the novel, for by killing their father they seek to kill God. So that the novel is less about Ivan, Dimitri, their father etc., than about theocide and the situation of man without God; and that is one of the great tragic themes. Moreover Dimitri and Ivan are true tragic heroes, dispossessed kings, dispossessed of faith and innocence. But Dostoievski does not show how they have fallen. They have no history - the biographical sketch of the opening chapter tells us little except a few facts. A true realist novelist would have shown us the fall (Madame Bovary), but as a tragic novelist Dostoievski shows us their fallen state. Hence, in spite of the great number of events which take place, the curiously static impression the novel creates. In The Brothers Karamazov, as in most novels of Dostoievski, time seems absent. There is no clear

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chronology and no sense of historical time so essential in the realistic novel. Events are telescoped, everything seems to happen at the same time. The result is that, as in a tragedy, time is suspended. Dostoievski's novels are placed in a timeless present.

In the same way place is unimportant. In The Brothers Karamazov the action takes place in an anonymous and unidentified district, which is only fragmentarily described, which has in fact no real physical existence. This also separates the Dostoievskian novel from the realist tradition. One can draw a fairly accurate map of Yonville, the fictitious village where Madame Bovary is placed. It is totally impossible to visualise in the same way the Petersburg of Crime and Punishment or the village (is it a village or a town?) where the family Karamazov lives. The reason for this is, of course, that the metaphysical situation of Dimitri and Ivan is independent of time and space, and in no way determined by them; but Madame Bovary would have been different had she lived in Paris.

Moreover, the characters in The Brothers Karamazov, as in all Dostoievski novels, behave in an inexplicable manner: they weep, shout, insult each other, embrace each other, play the buffoon. They appear mad, and that is what they are, mad like Hamlet and Ajax and Phèdre. They have crossed into a world beyond reason where cause and effect cease to operate and which is consequently situated beyond the grasp of realistic psychology.

It is in this distortion, in the violence done to our normal way of living and feeling and behaving that Dostoievski reveals the depth of his dilemma. Through the exaggeration, the violent enormity of the action, the utter unpredictability of the characters, he tries desperately to convey in novelistic prose that experience of nothingness, that metaphysical fear and anguish which is properly speaking the domain of tragic poetry. Dostoievski's tragic vision makes the novel burst at the seams.

Thomas Hardy's Return of the Native is another attempt, though less violent and more formal, to reconcile the antithetical natures of the tragic vision and of the novel. In this novel Hardy wants to recreate in prose a fullblown tragedy on the model of the great classical and Shakespear<sup>0</sup>ean

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tragedies. And he gives us a number of obvious clues to his intentions. For example, he weaves into his novel two scenes which follow very closely two great scenes of our tragic literature. Mrs. Yeobright, like King Lear, has been cast off; like him she roams raving on the heath as lonely and as mortally wounded as Lear.- A small boy, simple, innocent and wise is her "Fool". The other scene shows Clym discovering the truth about his mother's death by questioning the boy who helped her. This scene is almost a carbon copy in prose of Oedipus' agonised but compulsive interrogation of the shepherd who will reveal to him the truth of his birth. Other pointers to Hardy's intentions are the presence of a "chorus" and the structure of the novel which, as J.W. Beach points out, follows closely the structure of a classical tragedy.<sup>(37)</sup> There is also the attempt to remove the action from normal living by placing it in a remote and wild place. And finally there is the treatment of the heroine Eustacia. The first description of her gives her a genuinely heroic stature ("Eustacia Vye was the raw material of divinity"). But later on the tone and texture abruptly change as Hardy is forced to leave the world of tragedy and come down to the world of the novel and of factual narrative. And what has happened here is that a heroine of the stature which the first descriptions suggest has simply no room in a novel: she is rather like an Alice whose arms and legs stick out at the windows and doors of the House of Fiction.

Now both Hardy and Dostoievski, each in a different way, are defeated in their attempts. Dostoievski is compelled to do violence to everyday reality and psychological plausibility in order to force them to contain the tragic reality. Hardy is forced by the "nature" of the novel to scale down the heroic proportions of his world in order to make them fit quotidian reality which forms the substance of the novel.

More recently, the existentialist novelists have tried yet another solution and have turned to philosophy as an ally. This, in itself, is not unreasonable, since, as we have tried to show, philosophy is one of the chosen media for the expression of a tragic view of life.

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The solution of these novelists is to abstract from the situation and the experience with which the novel deals, the tragic content which fits with such difficulty into a novel. This abstracted tragic content is given an abstract philosophical expression. The novels themselves, in order to be fully understood, should be read then in conjunction with these abstracts which give us the key to the novel's meaning. The novel in relation to this theoretical world has the function of an illustration. In that way L'Etranger is the illustrated supplement of Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Les Chemins de la liberté that of L'Etre et le néant. The existential solution then is not really a solution, but a means to get round the difficulty, and in the process the novel ceases to be an independent, autonomous work of art in order to become a form of allegory, a kind of philosophic puzzle which once solved dissolves and disappears. Both the nature and the causes of this transformation of the novel into allegory have been clearly analysed by William Troy who writes:

The existential novel continues to assume more of the character of treatise than that of the modern European novel as we have known it .... Although regarded in some quarters as perhaps the last word in the novel, they actually turn the clock back as far as fiction technique is concerned and cast aside nearly all the aesthetic gains which the novel has made in the last hundred years. It is rather paradoxical that these believers in "existence", in the superiority of the concrete lived experience over whatever abstract constructions our minds make of it, should be so little gifted in endowing their works with either reality or concreteness.... For the revival of allegory there are reasons enough to be sure, and the greatest of them is that we are in our time (The article is dated 1948 - C.J.G.) reduced, morally and spiritually to an "extreme situation". We, at last, have been forced to cut away the "accidentia" of our distressful historical situation and concentrate upon the inherent terror in the human substance. (This, clearly, is a tragic awareness. C.J.G.) This leads to an ever sharper definition of our plight; definition is abstraction; and abstraction spells allegory. In the XIXth century The Brothers Karamazov and Moby Dick were great works of literature capable of being interpreted on the allegorical plane. But Dostoevski and Melville were still interested enough in individual character in all its full-blooded contradictoriness to give us an image as well as a statement about life. In both of these the philosophical and the psychological are inseparable. The former grows out of the latter before our eyes. If none of the Existentialists has so far created a single character, it may be because our age demands not the unique, but the "extreme", not the individual but the typical. We require a diagram of our calamity. (38)

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Let us now turn to the novels of Malraux. Faced with a problem similar to that with which some of his predecessors and some of his contemporaries had to grapple, Malraux found perhaps the most viable solution. This does not mean, quite obviously, that he is a greater writer than Dostoievski or Hardy, but merely that he was more skilful in solving that particular problem. And this, in itself, is no mean achievement. He succeeded in keeping the abstract statement of the tragic awareness inside his novels, and he succeeded in keeping the heroic stature of most of his main characters constant and intact.

In order to retain the ideas in the body of his novels, Malraux had to create a world which in one important respect differed from our normal world. Gide once made Malraux the reproach: "Il n'y a pas d'imbéciles dans vos livres".\* Everybody in Malraux' novels, whether he be a retired university professor (Gisors), a revolutionary (Katow), a business tycoon (Ferral), an anarchist agitator or a policeman, is equally intelligent and equally articulate. So that his novels, and notably La Condition humaine, do not really deal with Man's Fate or Destiny as such, but with the individual destinies of people who talk about destiny and man's fate. They deal with people who transform into awareness and thence into ideas and words their tragic vision of life. This might well be the only way in which such a vision can be translated into novel-form. For it is simply not possible to write a novel about a tragic awareness of life with a hero who himself is not aware of it. If Camus' L'Etranger partly fails, it is precisely because of this. For Meursault is a character without unity or coherence. There is first the mediocre, indifferent and rather inarticulate and insensitive "petit employé" whom we find at the beginning of the novel, but at the end of the novel he suddenly and unjustifiably changes and gives proof of having very sophisticated and subtle thoughts which he translates with fluency, clarity and a lovely touch of lyricism. Now this sudden and awkward transformation of Meursault is, as it were, forced on

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\* To this Malraux replied: "Je n'écris pas pour m'embêter. Quant aux idiots, la vie suffit."(39)

Camus, who at the end of his novel reached the point where the meaning had to become clear. And he had no choice but to make dull and mediocre Meursault give voice to this meaning, thereby destroying the unity and vraisemblance of his protagonist.

Something not unlike this, as we shall see, happens in Malraux' novels. Malraux also tends to take over from his character, yet in a more subtle manner and one which does not break the homogeneity of either the character or the novel. In Malraux' novels the tragic substance is to be found rather in the dialogue and the reflections of the various characters than in the action which provides us with a concrete image of the ideas. Now, the dialogues of Malraux have very marked characteristics. To begin with, their function is not primarily to light up the character of the speakers, and they tell us less about what the speakers are and feel than about what they think. Moreover, all the characters express themselves in a similar manner. They speak with the same voice. Not only do they all share a same high degree of intelligence and <sup>not only</sup> do they all share the same (or ~~similar~~) obsession with death, solitude, etc., but also the tone of their thought is the same. The result is that we often get not so much a dialogue between two characters as a kind of monologue à deux voix. What is more important still, is that this voice shared by all characters belongs in fact to their creator. And, as a few examples will show, there is a striking resemblance between the manner of speaking of the characters with the voice of Malraux himself: they all talk as Malraux writes.

- I (a) -- Je crois, reprit Gisors, que le recours à l'esprit tente de compenser ceci: la connaissance d'un être est un sentiment négatif: le sentiment positif, la réalité, c'est l'angoisse d'être toujours étranger à ce qu'on aime.  
-- Aime-t-on jamais?  
-- Le temps fait disparaître parfois cette angoisse, le temps seul. On ne connaît jamais un être, mais on cesse parfois de sentir qu'on l'ignore (je pense à mon fils, n'est-ce pas, et aussi à ... un autre garçon). Connaître par l'intelligence, c'est la tentation vaine de se passer du temps..."
- (b) Sinon par vous, n'est-ce pas, par un autre. C'est comme si un général disait: avec mes soldats, je puis mitrailler la ville. Mais, s'il était capable de la mitrailler, il ne serait pas général qu'en sortant de Saint-Cyr. D'ailleurs, les hommes sont peut-être indifférents au pouvoir... Ce qui les fascine dans cette idée, voyez-vous, ce n'est pas le pouvoir réel, c'est l'illusion du bon

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plaisir. Le pouvoir du roi, c'est de gouverner n'est-ce pas? Mais, l'homme n'a pas envie de gouverner: il a envie de contraindre, vous l'avez dit. D'être plus qu'homme, dans un monde d'hommes. Echapper à la condition humaine, vous disais-je. Non pas puissant: tout-puissant. La maladie chimérique, dont la volonté de puissance n'est que la justification intellectuelle, c'est la volonté de déité: tout homme rêve d'être dieu.

- (c) -- Un des nôtres, dit enfin Hernandez avec le même sourire amer, évadé d'une de vos prisons, condamné à mort plus d'un mois m'expliquait que tout, dans la vie, peut être compensé; en parlant, il faisait ces deux lignes dont l'une représentait le malheur, si vous voulez, et l'autre sa compensation. Mais, que la ... tragédie de la mort est en ceci qu'elle transforme la vie en destin, qu'à partir d'elle rien ne peut plus être compensé. Et que -- même pour un athée -- là est l'extrême gravité de l'instant de la mort.
- (d) -- Notre art me paraît une rectification du monde, un moyen d'échapper à la condition d'homme. La confusion capitale me paraît venir de ce qu'on a cru -- dans l'idée que nous nous faisons de la tragédie grecque c'est éclatant! -- que représenter une fatalité était la subir. Mais non! C'est presque la posséder. Le seul fait de pouvoir la représenter, de la concevoir, la fait échapper au vrai destin, à l'implacable échelle divine; la réduit à l'échelle humaine. Dans ce qu'il a d'essential, notre art est une humanisation du monde.
- (e) Il n'y a de psychologie valable qu'en Occident, vient-on de nous dire? mais, d'abord, il n'y a de besoin de psychologie qu'en Occident. Parce que l'Occident s'oppose au cosmos, à la fatalité, au lieu de s'accorder à eux. Et que toute psychologie est la recherche d'une fatalité intérieure. Le coup d'état du christianisme, c'est d'avoir installé la fatalité dans l'homme.

- II.(a) Vous avez fait à la puissance l'offrande de votre vie. Vous vous confondez avec vos actions. Votre pensée même... A peine comprenez-vous encore que pour être il ne soit pas nécessaire d'agir, et que le monde vous transforme bien plus que vous ne le transformez.
- (b) L'Oriental irresponsable s'efforce à s'élever au-dessus d'un conflit dont il n'est pas l'enjeu. Le chrétien ne peut point s'en séparer; Dieu et lui sont désormais attachés l'un à l'autre, et le monde n'est plus rien que le vain décor de leur conflit.
- (c) Il n'est pas la représentation d'une vision, mais l'expression de valeurs. Le peintre byzantin ne voit pas en style byzantin, il traduit en style byzantin. Pour lui, être un artiste est précisément être capable de traduire ainsi personnages et objets. Il fait accéder les choses à un univers sacré: ses moyens, ceux du cérémonial, ceux du rituel convergent.

It is clear from the above quotations that the various statements of the characters quoted in I are so similar in tone that it is difficult to know who says what; they have all the same elliptic turn, the same, rather startling, abruptness. Gisors' pronouncement in I(a) could equally well have been said by Hernandez I(c) and so on. Moreover, there is no change of tone between the quotations from group I taken from dialogues in the novels, and from group II culled from Malraux' theoretical writings. They too are to a large extent interchangeable. Gisors could have said II(a)

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and conversely Malraux could have written I(d).

An important conclusion can be drawn from this similarity of tone. In the dialogue of the novels (and more especially, of course, in those dialogues dealing with ideas) it is not so much the character who is speaking but Malraux himself who in a way, but less obtrusively than Camus, "takes over" from his creatures and robs them momentarily of their liberty and their autonomy. Because of this the dialogues in Malraux' novel show a slight tendency to be, as it were, separate from the action. The dialogues turn into a sort of philosophic commentary by Malraux on the action.\* It is through them that the actions acquire their meaning and that the tragic vision is contained in the novels. They fulfil then a function not very different from that of the theoretical-philosophical writings of the existential novelists, and one could abstract Malraux' ideas by extracting the various pronouncements by the characters.

However, things are not quite as clear-cut as I have made out. For the sake of clarity I have **schematized** a matter which is rather more complex. For although Malraux tends to speak through his **characters**, the dialogues are nevertheless also firmly rooted in both the action of the novel and, what is more important, in the personalities of the characters. And although, as I suggested earlier, it is possible to separate them from the body of the novel, in so doing one does considerable violence to the novel as a whole. Malraux' novels are not like the existential novels mere "diagrams of our calamity". Moreover, not all dialogues are of this highly charged intellectual nature. The great majority of them have a more down to earth content dealing with personal relationships (cf. the dialogues between May and Kyo) or with political matters.

This, however, can be said: that the tragic vision in Malraux' novels is expressed through what could be termed unrealistic dialogues. Unrealistic, first of all, because in daily life one does not deal all the

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\* This could also be true of other novels. What makes Malraux' case different, as the quotations show, is that it is so obvious, almost explicit, that the author talks through his characters and takes their place.

time with people of such formidable intellectual calibre. Unrealistic also because of the uniformity of tone: very few people talk that way, even if Malraux himself does.

There are two other ways in which Malraux' intention to turn his novels into vehicles for a tragic vision, shapes his novels. All of them are set in foreign and often in exotic lands (La Voie Royale in Indochina, Les Conquérants and La Condition humaine in China, L'Espoir in Spain, Le Temps du mépris and Les Noyers de l'Altenburg in Germany), and all his novels deal with events involving violence and danger.

Let us consider first the settings of his novels. There are, to begin with, obvious biographical reasons for the choice of these settings. Most of his novels, with the exception of Le Temps du mépris and of Les Noyers, are linked to particular events in Malraux' life. But this alone does not explain his choice, nor does the desire for exoticism and dépaysement.<sup>\*</sup> For the foreign and exotic settings are treated with a curious indifference. They are not, in themselves, of any interest as they are in truly exotic novels, they have no real existence.<sup>\*\*</sup> The Canton of Les Conquérants is not really and individually Canton, but an anonymous oriental city. The same is true of La Condition humaine's Shanghai, which has a very shadowy existence and is not in any way particularised, as places in exotic novels usually are.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> The absence of this exotic particularisation reveals clearly the writer's indifference to them. It also helps us to discover the real reason for his using these foreign settings, which is linked with Malraux' attempt to write tragic novels. By situating his heroes in such unusual settings, Malraux tries to remove them from the ordinary conditions of living. In other words, he tries to create

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\* Albert Thibaudet in his article on contemporary literature in L'Encyclopédie française (Tome XVII, 1935) rather superficially classifies Malraux amongst the "écrivains exotiques".

\*\* This is equally true of the foreignness of Malraux' characters. And Drieu la Rochelle points out quite correctly that Malraux' "personnages sont chinois, comme les personnages de Racine étaient grecs".<sup>(40)</sup>

\*\*\* In this respect the error made by the Oxford Companion to French Literature is perhaps significant: it places the action of the novel not in Shanghai, but in Peking.

in this manner the same distance between us and his heroes as the one that exists between us and Lear or Oedipus.

To this must be added the second characteristic element we noticed earlier: the constant presence of violence and danger. There are obviously philosophical and psychological reasons for this, and we shall discuss these later. But this dominant role ~~violence~~ plays in Malraux' novels also has its roots in the kind of novel he wants to write and in the kind of hero he wants to show. In an interview Malraux established a link between himself and Corneille: "Les quatre écrivains français dont l'oeuvre est en ~~entier~~ postérieur à 1916 et qui ont à l'étranger l'audience la plus ~~étendue~~: Bernanos, Giono, Montherland et moi-même, sont liés tous les quatre à la tradition héroïque de la France, sa tradition cornélienne". It is significant that Malraux allies himself with the most heroic of French tragic writers.\*

Now it is obvious that it is only in extreme and extraordinary situations that the hero can reveal his true heroic nature. Thus Kyo face to face with violence, Hernandez before the firing squad, Kassner face to face with torture; these and only these will fit into the tragic-heroic scheme, and they alone can be shown in a tragic novel. The other everyday unheroic Kyo, the revolutionary bureaucrat, or Kassner, the apparatchik, have no place in such a novel. It is in this way that the presence of violence enables Malraux to show the heroic-tragic stature of his characters; at the same time he accentuates the distance between his tragic world and ours.

Moreover, by placing his novels in a world of violence, he is taking his characters at the moment of the vital and tragic crisis. He does in fact what Racine does in his tragedies, and this enables him to leave in the shade all that does not directly concern the crisis, all those things which the crisis dwarfs and now makes unimportant. On the whole, Malraux' characters have no past, no family, few personal

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\* And clearly not without reason. There are few characters in modern fiction whom Corneille would have understood better than Katow whose ultimate gesture, if we scratch away the Twentieth Century varnish, is essentially that of a "généreux".

relationships. Like truly tragic characters they have no life, no real existence outside the crisis through which they live. By making this violent crisis the sole focal point of his novels, Malraux can maintain almost throughout his novels the heroic stature of his characters, and since they lead no "normal" lives, Malraux is not forced, as was Hardy in The Return of the native, to scale his heroes down in order to fit them into an everyday scheme of things.

Finally, the remarkably strong and compelling focal point of all Malraux' novels (with the possible exception of L'Espoir) creates a number of what might be termed optical illusions, which make us experience the novel as somewhat different from what it actually is. The tension generated by the unrelieved presence of violence tends to make the novels more concentrated in both time and space than they are in reality. Thus, although the action of La Condition humaine is carefully charted and takes in fact a number of days, one has the experience that time in the novel, rather like in The Brothers Karamazov, is telescoped, that one has not a sequence of events, but that a number of events happen at the same time, or rather in a very short time. In this manner we get something approximating the unity of time: the illusion of a unity of time.

A similar illusion is created as to space in La Voie royale, in Les Conquérants as well as in Le Temps du mépris. Although Claude and Perken travel a considerable amount, the novel nevertheless creates the impression of them being locked up in one place: the forest. The action of Les Conquérants seems to take place only in the ill-defined Canton; in actual fact it takes place in a number of towns.

It seems clear then that the presence of some of the most characteristically Malrauxian traits of Malraux' novels: the highly charged intellectual dialogue, the heroic stature of the characters, the atmosphere of violence, are to a great extent determined by Malraux' intent to be a tragic writer.

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## Chapter I

### The World of Malraux

In his Panorama de la littérature contemporaine, Gaëton Picon writes: "Malraux est à la source et il demeure au centre des remous actuels". More than two generations have seen in Malraux not only a great and important writer, but also a kind of master and teacher, what the French call "un maître à penser".<sup>(1)</sup> In the Thirties and Forties Malraux took the place of Gide who in turn had taken the place of Barrès: he was "le contemporain capital". For their book Vingt ans en 1951, Robert Kanfers and Gilbert Sigaux asked a number of young men of twenty who their favourite authors were. "Les vingt écrivains qui arrivent en tête sont dans l'ordre: André Malraux, André Gide, Stendhal, Saint-Exupéry, Claudel ..."<sup>(2)</sup> (Sartre, curiously enough, if one takes into consideration the date of this enquête, only comes fifteenth out of twenty). In a similar investigation conducted by the weekly Carrefour<sup>(3)</sup> in 1950 which asked its readers "quels écrivains de notre temps lira-t-on en l'an 2000", we find Malraux in the third place preceded only by Montherlant and André Gide and followed by Colette, Claudel, Mauriac, Celine and Sartre. Camus comes fifteenth. And as late as 1963, almost twenty years after Malraux had published his last novel, in an investigation of the reading habits of young army recruits, Malraux still occupies the fourth place amongst those conscripts who had received a university education.<sup>(4)</sup> This popularity and prestige of Malraux, especially during the Thirties, is due, no doubt, in part to extra-literary causes. For Malraux is not merely a writer, an homme de lettres, but also a man of action who has taken part in some of the great political and historical events of his time. This involvement in his time, this "consonnance à l'époque", as Picon calls it, helped, unfortunately, to create a great deal of confusion about the nature of his novels which are often seen as a continuation, a prolongation of his life, but on paper. For example, Pierre-Henri Simon in his Histoire de la littérature française du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle writes:

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"Malraux tire ses romans (...) du journal de ses aventures".<sup>(5)</sup>

Garaudy, the Communist critic, in a similar vein writes: "Un roman de Malraux c'est un grand reportage".<sup>(6)</sup> And Picon writes:

Peu d'oeuvres romanesques où l'imagination ait si peu de part. Si Malraux prolonge, transpose, redistribue ce que son expérience lui a donné, il n'y ajoute rien. A tel point que devant cette oeuvre (...) on songe moins aux grandes oeuvres romanesques qu'à quelques grands livres d 'choses vues' ou de choses vécues.<sup>(7)</sup>

There is no doubt some truth in this, but one should be very careful not to confuse too readily the legendary figure Malraux with the writer Malraux; and he himself indirectly warns us in his article De l'artiste:

La critique de Stendhal par Sainte-Beuve repose sur le sentiment suivant: 'J'ai bien connu. M. Beyle. Vous ne me direz pas que ce plaisantin a écrit des chefs-d'oeuvres.' Restait à savoir si La Chartreuse avait été écrite par M. Beyle ou par Stendhal. Lorsque M. Beyle rencontrait Sainte-Beuve il voulait l'amuser, l'irriter ou le séduire. Lorsque Stendhal écrivait Le Rouge et le noir rien de pareil: il interdisait à M. Beyle tout ce qui n'appartenait pas au meilleur de son intelligence et de sa sensibilité.\*

Very much the same could be said of Malraux himself: Comrade (or Colonel) Malraux in battle or speaking at the Salle Pleyel or Monsieur le Ministre addressing a meeting at the Vel' d'Hiv', is not the Malraux writing La Condition humaine with the best of his intelligence and sensitivity. The legendary figure and the writer are distinct, and ultimately the one who counts is the writer, not the hero. This is the way Malraux himself feels about it as well: "Je crois que les légendes des gens n'ont, au bout du compte, aucun intérêt".<sup>(8)</sup> Yet some of the novels reflect some of the events in which he took part; but, in fact, of the six novels only two (La Voie royale and L'Espoir) are based on "choses vues". The others (with the exception of the prologue and epilogue of Les Noyers de l'Altenburg) describe events in which he did not take part or which he did not witness. To see then Malraux' novels as a mere "journal de ses aventures" is by no means

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\* Cf. also Proust: "Un livre est le produit d'un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vices".<sup>(9)</sup>

justified. Moreover, such an interpretation risks falsifying a true critical appraisal of the value of Malraux' achievement as a creative writer. For it seems that Malraux' novels, far from being mere reportages, are in fact imaginative fiction. The stature of Malraux as novelist is tremendously enhanced by this: he is not merely an author of fictionalized history, but he is a genuine creative writer.

The fact that Malraux' novels are almost all pure fiction has as a further consequence that it frees the critic from all biographical and historical considerations. It frees him from the vain search for the links which may exist between Malraux' novels and the actual historical reality. In the preface to Louis Guilloux' novel Le Sang noir, Malraux writes:

Ces scènes (those of Le Sang noir) nous montrent une fois de plus combien les problèmes du réalisme sont mal posés... discuter ce livre en fonction d'une réalité quelconque (est) à peu près demander si Madrid ressemblait aux caprices de Goya.

This statement of Malraux should be carefully considered since, as is almost invariably the case in Malraux' critical writings, he writes indirectly about his own novels when discussing the writings of others. So that if we hold, as it were, this statement against the light, we will read en filigrane that if it is absurd to seek real Madrid in Goya's Capricios, then it is equally absurd to seek Canton in Les Conquérants or Shanghai in La Condition humaine.

Yet, however much Malraux might want to dismiss his legend, there exists nevertheless a Malraux legend which has exerted an undoubted fascination. To the growth and proliferation of this legend Malraux has (wittingly?) contributed by his refusal to set the record straight\* and his penchant for mythomania.

We might at this point briefly try and establish what the facts are. To help us in this task we have at our disposal profile of Malraux Janet Flanner's/in The New-Yorker which is "une biographie très bien documentée - la meilleure selon Malraux".<sup>(10)</sup> For the later period we have a biographical

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\* "Malraux himself is hermetic where his private life is concerned. The confusing legends have swelled like balloons to fill in his silence. He assumes the position that his private life is actually his - a large and exclusive territory".<sup>(11)</sup> And Nino Frank in his Mémoires brisées writes: "Il (Malraux) est comme toujours, un bloc, sa vie entièrement close en lui: il ne laisse rien apparaître au dehors".<sup>(12)</sup>

(autobiographical?) sketch written for the German translation of Les Conquérants and a letter from Malraux to E. Wilson dated 2nd October 1933. The last period of Malraux' life from approximately 1934 to date is fairly public and therefore well known. - It might be added that Malraux' Antimémoires (1967) give us very little, if any, information about Malraux' childhood and formation.

Malraux was born in Paris in 1901 in a solid middle-class family which had its roots in the French Flanders. His father was either a business man or a banker. The young Malraux studied at the Lycée Condorcet. Whether after this he attended any institution of higher learning is not known. It is usually assumed that he attended the Ecole des Langues Orientales, but as Janet Flanner rightly points out: "At any event, with his swift precocity, he would have found the classrooms only an exasperating delay in the carrying out of his remarkably adult, far-reaching programme".<sup>(13)</sup>

In 1919, the eighteen year old Malraux links up with the bookseller and publisher René-Louis Doyon. He provides him with rare books and edits a number of texts for him, amongst others a collection of fragments and letters of Laforgue. Doyon also published a literary review called Connaissance, which printed Malraux' first piece of writing: "Des origines de la poésie cubiste".<sup>(14)</sup> He later contributes a number of articles to an ephemeral, avant-garde review called Action and was finally, as was almost inevitable, drawn into the magic circle of the N.R.F. His first contribution to the Revue is a review of Gobineau's L'Abbaye des Typhaines.<sup>(15)</sup> In 1921 his first book Lunes en papier is published by the Editions de la galerie Simon. The following year he married Clara Goldschmidt.

About the intellectual formation of Malraux during these yearly years we know little. Many years later he said this about the influences he had undergone as an adolescent:

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J'ai admiré Nietzsche et Dostoïevski, Anatole France et Barrès, Gide, Claudel et Suarès, et comme tous les adolescents de ma génération, les poètes ... Le tout premier choc, non, je ne le retrouve pas. Sans doute Hugo, comme tout le monde ... Mais je me souviens de deux chocs d'adolescent **très** violents: Michel-Ange à Florence et Michelet.<sup>(16)</sup>

Now this declaration, while saying little, is nevertheless revealing of certain intellectual attitudes of the young Malraux. His admiration for Anatole France and Maurice Barrès shows his aloofness from his iconoclastic contemporaries of the Dada movement who so violently condemned France and Barrès.\* It also indicates a certain attachment to aesthetic values which Dada so furiously rejected. This is also suggested by the fact that he felt more at home with an older generation of poets such as Salmon and Max Jacob who was a close friend of Malraux during the Twenties and to whom Lunes en papier is dedicated.

Finally, the reference to Michel-Ange and Michelet seems to foreshadow the two overriding interests of Malraux in his later years, especially since 1945: Art and History; for Malraux' involvement in politics (which will be discussed later) should really be seen as a desire to be involved in history: "La politique, vous savez... Ce n'est pas la politique qui m'intéresse. Sinon je serais allé au Parlement... Je vous l'ai dit: c'est histoire".<sup>(18)</sup>

However, it must be underlined that in the early years of Malraux' career, that is before 1925, he shows but little interest in politics. Malraux' main interests during this period were literature, art and, like so many writers of his generation, the film. At this time Malraux is already very much what he will always remain: essentially an aesthete, and his early works are often of a very self-consciously "artistic" nature, much more so than his later novels. Drieu la Rochelle writes this about the early years: "Il y a eu chez Malraux un esthète de la vingtième année qui n'est pas encore tout à fait mort: témoin Royaume

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\* "Loti, Barrès, France, marquons tout de même d'un beau signe blanc l'année qui coucha ces trois sinistres bonhommes: l'idiot, le traître et le policier".<sup>(17)</sup>

farfelu, recueil de poèmes en prose qui sentent l'opium littéraire".(19)

In 1923, Malraux who had always shown a marked interest in oriental and especially in Khmer art, set out with an ordre de mission of the French Government to Cambodia where he was to do archeological research in the region surrounding the temple of Bantaië-Srey. This episode will find its reflection in La Voie royale. It is from this period, especially after his second journey to Indochina in 1925, that date Malraux' first political activities. He works with the anti-colonialist movement Jeune-Annam and edits a political daily L'Indochine ("Journal du rapprochement franco-annamite"). This period is now fully documented by Walter G. Langlois' André Malraux, The Indochina adventure.<sup>(20)</sup> According to the biographical notice for the German translation of Les Conquérants, Malraux became then Commissar of the Kuomintang for the whole of Indochina (1924-1925), Deputy Commissar for Propaganda of the Nationalist Government during the period of Borodin.\* In his letter to Edmund Wilson, Malraux gives substantially the same information. However, the precise nature of his relationship with the Kuomintang and with Borodin and the importance of Malraux in the nationalist movement are extremely difficult to ascertain. Equally hazy are the exact dates of his sojourn in China. It seems fairly certain, however, that Malraux was not in Canton between June 25 and August 18, 1925, when the events which form the background of Les Conquérants took place. He might have arrived soon afterwards, however. Malraux returned to Paris in 1926 and did not return to China (this time as envoy of General de Gaulle) till August 1965. He was therefore not ~~either~~ a witness of the events described in La Condition humaine, which took place in 1928.\*\*

Malraux' activities after 1933 are better documented. It is from this time that Malraux' real involvement in politics dates. Before this

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\* Michael Markovitch Grussenberg, alias Borodin, was the Comintern's representative in China from 1923 to 1927.

\*\* cf. Nino Frank in Mémoires brisées: "Pourquoi La Voie royale, roman plaqué sur une entreprise qui s'est véritablement produite, n'a-t-il point le relief des Conquérants et de La Condition humaine, fresques de faits qui restent douteux. (Auxquels, nous le savons maintenant, M. n'a pu que rêver(...)) dans la projection de cette fameuse mythomanie qui a été le premier stade de son accomplissement progressif." (21)

date his view of politics, in spite of his active participation in the anti-colonial struggle, tends to be rather more philosophical and ethical. In 1929, for instance, he declared during the debate on Les Conquérants at L'Union pour la Vérité (8 June 1929): "pour moi la question (the conflict between the revolution and the bourgeoisie) n'est nullement politique, elle est éminemment éthique". And a little earlier he explained that for Garine "le bourgeois se définit essentiellement comme l'homme d'un certain mode de pensée liée à une éthique particulière". Towards 1933, however, he grows very much closer to the Communist Party. In 1929 he still kept his distances and could say, for instance, during the debate at the Union pour la Vérité: "Je me refuse absolument à substituer ici une idéologie prolétarienne à une idéologie bourgeoise. Ce que j'entends opposer à des valeurs de permanence, ce sont des valeurs de méthanorphose". However, In January 1934, he is the official envoy of the Communist Party (together with André Gide) to Berlin, bearing a petition which asked for the release of the communist leader Dimitrov. The same year he is in Moscow where he is invited to address the Congress of Soviet Writers. (Cf Commune, Nos. 13-14, 1934. "L'art est une conquête"). He is being published by the official publishing house of the Party, and he is one of the active members of the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires. He organises in 1935 the famous Congrès International des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture (June, 1935). The culminating point of Malraux' political action at that time is, no doubt, his participation in the Spanish Civil War where he led the international airforce squadron España.- During all this period, although never becoming an actual member of the Party, he nevertheless followed the Party line closely and faithfully. Ilya Ehrenbourg reports Malraux as saying during a meeting with him: "Si une guerre survenait, nous devons savoir que nous n'avons qu'une patrie: L'Union Soviétique. Notre place est dans les rangs de l'Armée Rouge." (22) And a speech such as the one delivered at the Salle Wagram (23 December, 1935) shows clearly to what an extent Malraux

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was then committed to the Communist Party:

Renn, vous avez dit: 'Tant que je serai un homme'; vous avez été un Homme, cette foule est ici pour l'attester. Pas seulement celle qui nous entoure; une autre, inconnue, qui depuis le dernier Soviet des Asturies jusqu'au premier Soviet chinois monte autour des prisons la garde que vous attendiez d'elle. Une foule qui entend de son silence faire action, de ses martyrs des chefs et pour qui votre place (that of Renn and Thaelmann) est aux cotés de Dimitrov et du Comintern.

In 1940, Malraux took part in the Flanders campaign and, after a short spell as a POW, joined the résistance. Under the name of Berger, Malraux leads the Maquis of Corrèze and Dordogne. He is made a prisoner by the Germans, but is freed by the Allied armies. During the latter part of the war he commands the Brigade Alsace-Lorraine which liberates Strasbourg.

Malraux' action after the war is less flamboyant. In 1945 he is Minister of Information, and in 1947 one of the most active leaders of the Gaullist Rassemblement du Peuple français. In June, 1958 he becomes Minister in charge of Cultural Affairs, a post he occupied till 1969.

Although after the war he became a fervent Gaullist and turned against Communism, Malraux still considers himself un homme de gauche which is quite possible in a country where (as Malraux himself said - Palais des Sports, 7 February 1967): "la gauche n'est plus la gauche, et la droite n'est plus la droite".

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Considering Malraux' immense prestige, it is curious that his very real originality was rarely recognised at the time when he wrote his first novels, and even his La Condition humaine was in many ways "misunderstood". None of the established critics of the time (Rousseaux, Jaloux, Souday, etc.) seems to have noticed that in his novels Malraux dealt in a contemporary idiom with age-old, very real and deeply disturbing questions. It is not that Malraux' early novels did pass unnoticed, but on the whole the critics did not see beyond the surface

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and simply did not perceive what Malraux was saying. For instance,

Edmond Jaloux who is often a perspicacious critic, writes about

Les Conquérants: "un roman à prétention documentaire (....) il nous offre uniment un bon roman à l'ancienne mode, même à la mode du roman exotique".<sup>(23)</sup>

Robert Kemp writes about the same novel: "Un excellent récit, une page d'histoire contemporaine, les portraits sont puissants et pittoresques".<sup>(24)</sup>

And Paul Souday writes about Les Conquérants as 'un demi-roman ou une étude d'histoire politique romancée. M. Malraux brosse un tableau coloré de la révolution, des agitateurs bolshévistes et terroristes, de l'insurrection contre l'Angleterre." <sup>(25)</sup> When La Voie royale is published, Robert Kemp writes: "Je ne vois pas où Malraux compte en venir. Veut-il seulement nous faire frissonner avec ce roman noir en pays jaune?" and later on calls Malraux "un prodigieux feuilletoniste".<sup>(26)</sup> André Rousseaux in an interview with Malraux says rather condescendingly about the same novel: "Oui, c'est un roman d'aventure fort bien fait, aussi bien fait par endroits que du Jules Verne".<sup>(27)</sup>

This almost total blindness to Malraux' originality is, no doubt, partly explained by the fact that externally the novels of Malraux are not strikingly different from the run of the mill novel. He is far from being an experimental writer, although, as we shall see, his narrative technique is original and new. But there are other explanations for this critical myopia. It should be noted that all the critics quoted belong to an older generation and are writing for the solid, middle-class press. The fact that they do not see what is new in Malraux is indicative of the permanence of what we called in an earlier chapter the "bourgeois classical age". These critics are so used to deal with the straightforward psychological or exotic or provincial novel that they automatically see all novels as psychological, exotic, etc. They are the heirs of those French critics like de Vogué who simply did not see Dostoievski's metaphysical dimension. It should be added that when Les Conquérants and La Voie royale were published, this bourgeois world to which the critics belong and for whom they write, had not yet been shaken by the

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great upheavals of economic crises, Fascism, etc. The world which Malraux describes is totally foreign and ununderstandable to them. Characters such as the rebel Garine or the adventurer Perken belong to another planet.

But not all the critics of the late Twenties and early Thirties were blind to Malraux' originality. The younger writers, those of Malraux' own generation whom a young German critic called les Inquiets recognised in Malraux' novels a new voice. Thus the Dutch writer Eddy du Perron, a close friend of Malraux it should be added in all fairness, writes in 1928 that "Les Conquérants is, after Gide's Les Faux-monnayeurs, the most important novel of the past ten years" and adds, what most critics did not see that "it has no resemblance with anything written by the young contemporary French writers".<sup>(28)</sup> Drieu la Rochelle saw that "Malraux, homme nouveau, pose l'homme nouveau. L'homme devant ses problèmes constants: l'action, le sexe, la mort, rajeunis par une nouvelle saison".<sup>(29)</sup> And Marcel Arland, who was during this period one of Malraux' intimates, puts his finger exactly on what was new in the vision contained in Malraux' novels:

Les valeurs sur lesquelles Malraux porte aujourd'hui l'accent sont des valeurs éternelles, par exemple le sens de la fraternité humaine, le culte du dévouement, le besoin même de définir l'homme par ce qu'il a non de particulier, mais de ce qu'il a de commun avec les autres hommes qui sont à la base du Christianisme. Mais c'est précisément l'intérêt de l'entreprise de Malraux que de reprendre ces valeurs en dehors de toute religion, de les placer 'sur terre', de leur donner par suite une justification, une valeur nouvelle".<sup>(30)</sup>

For Malraux was one of the first writers (not philosophers, perhaps) to see what is now obvious and commonplace, but was not so then, that "la Chrétienté a disparu en tant qu'armature du monde".

Two years previously Malraux had already written in D'une jeunesse européenne: "(l'église) construisit comme une cathédrale l'image du monde qui nous domine encore (...) et notre première faiblesse vient de la nécessité où nous sommes de prendre connaissance du monde grâce à une 'grille' Chrétienne, nous qui ne sommes plus chrétiens". And not only

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is Christianity dead, but also Reason and Science, as a means of 'salvation' have failed. It is precisely because during the Twenties, even if God were dead, the notions of Reason and Science still seemed alive and meaningful, that so many people, especially those of an older generation, who had been largely formed by the scientism of the Nineteenth Century, failed to see the radical and original nature of Malraux' vision; they failed to see that Malraux went beyond the conventions of their thinking, that in fact he was thinking differently. Malraux himself is aware of this. In his introduction to the debate about Les Conquérants, during which he met some of his critics and such representatives of conventional thinking as Brunshvieg, Malraux said:

Il se trouve qu'à une immense majorité les écrivains modernes, bien qu'ils ne soient plus eux-mêmes chrétiens ou qu'ils n'aient plus des sentiments profondément chrétiens, les sentiments d'une foi réelle, ont écrit de telle façon que les éléments fondamentaux du monde, ceux qu'on aurait appelé au moyen-âge les éléments sacrés, ne se trouvent en aucune façon mis en cause par eux. Ainsi un art qui prétend avant tout rejoindre de tels éléments et les rejoindre dans le domaine pur de l'humain, hors de tout sentiment religieux, doit-il trouver opposés à lui tous ceux qui ne veulent pas renoncer à Dieu."

This is why the critics did not understand Malraux: they thought they were reading a Twentieth Century Loti when, in fact, they were reading (toutes proportions gardées) a Twentieth Century Pascal.

The early critics of Malraux did not see this philosophical, metaphysical dimension of Malraux' work, and it was this which the handful of inquiets sensed. And it is partly for having given an age-old anguish a contemporary image that Malraux acquired later, in the Thirties and Forties, his enormous prestige amongst the young intelligentsia.

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At this point it might be well to consider, in a brief outline, this philosophic dimension of Malraux' work. This outline will, as it were, be filled in as we shall deal with each novel. Malraux' ideas are of two kinds. There are the historico-cultural ideas which find their expression mainly in the theoretical writing, but are also reflected in

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the novels, for instance in the discussions about art, civilisation etc. Then there are what we might call the affective (ethical) ideas born from the experience of life and the awareness of man's predicament which form the ideological frame-work of the novels.

For the purpose of this exposé I shall draw on Malraux' theoretical writing as well as on statements made by some of his characters. As a rule this is an inadmissible method and one which leads to misinterpretation. Adolphe, however closely he might resemble him, is not Benjamin Constant, Edouard is not André Gide, and Edouard's ideas on the novel are not those of Gide; they are close, but not identical. However, in the case of Malraux there is, I think, some justification in following this otherwise erroneous method. We have seen in a previous chapter how closely the tone of his theoretical writings resembles the tone with which his characters speak. A similar transference happens on the level of the ideas as well. For example in 1929, speaking at the Union pour la Vérité, Malraux said: "Nous entendons notre voix avec la gorge, la voix des autres avec les oreilles... Sur un plan plus grave, nous prenons conscience des autres hommes par des moyens qui ne sont pas ceux par lesquels nous prenons conscience de nous-mêmes". Four years later we find Gisors using the very same words in La Condition humaine. In 1936, speaking in London, Malraux said:

J'ai reçu un jour la visite d'un homme qui venait de passer plusieurs années en prison. Il avait donné asile à des anarchistes poursuivis. C'était un intellectuel et il me parla de ses lectures. "Voilà, me dit-il, il n'y a que trois livres qui supportent d'être lus en prison: L'Idiot, Don Quichotte et Robinson."

Je notai après son départ cette phrase qui m'avait intrigué et j'essayai de comprendre les raisons de ce choix. Et je m'aperçus que, des trois écrivains dont il s'agissait, deux, Dostoïevski et Cervantès, étaient allés au bagne, le troisième, Daniel de Foe, au pilori. Tous trois ont écrit le livre de la solitude, le livre de l'homme qui retrouve les hommes vivants et absurdes, les hommes qui peuvent vivre en oubliant que quelque part existent le bagne et le pilori.

Seven years later, Thirard in Les Noyers will echo these ideas:

Le barbu, comme un acteur qui vient de faire une fausse sortie, pointa un index menaçant, ajouta, catégorique:

- Il n'y a d'ailleurs de psychologie sérieuse qu'en Occident. Et se tut enfin, décidément hostile.
- On conçoit tout de même mal un grand art, une vraie pensée, à quoi

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toute psychologie serait étrangère! s'exclama Thirard.

Le barbu le regarda, hésitant. Un murmure, dont Thirard venait d'exprimer le sens, emplissait la bibliothèque: le même qui, un peu plus tôt, s'était élevé contre celui-ci. Il exprimait la même protestation passionnée qu'alors: d'un monde où la valeur de la psychologie eût été réellement mise en question, chacun de ces hommes se tût senti rejeté.

The ideas about art which Malraux puts in the mouth of Walter Berger in

• Les Noyers are those of Malraux himself. Thus we find Walter saying:-

"qu'est-ce que l'acanthé grecque? Un artichaut stylisé, stylisé, c'est-à-dire humanisé: tel que l'homme l'eût fait s'il eût été Dieu..." And

Malraux writes in Les Voix du silence: "tout artichaut porte en lui une feuille d'acanthé, et l'acanthé est ce que l'homme eût fait si Dieu lui eût demandé conseil..." Möllberg's ideas on 'le double' are really those which Malraux expressed in the first closing speech at the 1935 Writers' Congress. And the examples could be multiplied.

What this shows, however, is not only the identity of Malraux' ideas with those of his characters, but also that Malraux' ideas over the years do not change much; in fact, he thinks in 1943 very much as he thought in 1920. This permanence, the obsessiveness of Malraux' thought, must be stressed because it is an important characteristic. As early as 1928, Drieu la Rochelle wrote about Les Conquérants: "un roman solide, posé sur une base sûre mais étroite".<sup>(31)</sup> Malraux himself in a letter to Armand Hoog writes: "I think that you are right in insisting on my permanence. Not that I am particularly concerned with it: The evolution of a Nietzsche carries somewhat more weight in the history of ideas than the constancy of such and such".<sup>(32)</sup> And thus we sometimes see the same ideas re-appearing after a lapse of time of about twenty years. The formulation is perhaps a little different, but the basic idea remains unchanged. For instance, Walter Berger's proposition in Les Noyers: "Il n'y a besoin de psychologie qu'en Occident. Parceque l'Occident s'oppose au cosmos, à la fatalité, au lieu de s'accorder à eux" is, in a sense, a reformulation of what Ling wrote to A.D. in La Tentation: "Nous (Orientals as opposed to Occidentals) avons tout naturellement le sens de l'univers." The idea

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of Ling that for Western man not only God, but also man is dead, we find again in Les Noyers, when Möllberg answers negatively to the question: "La notion de l'homme a-t-elle un sens?"

Let us now turn to the ideas themselves.\* When attempting to give a systematic account of Malraux' historico-cultural ideas, one is confronted by the difficulty that Malraux himself has never given systematic expression to these ideas. They are scattered throughout his essays and his novels. Moreover, Malraux is not, nor does he pretend to be, a historian or a philosopher. And he has not, at least as far as we know, received any formal training in these disciplines. His theoretical writings consist of panoramic syntheses, of bold, brilliantly imaged statements; of broad ideas illuminated by a truly great intelligence and charged with a kind of prophetic or visionary intensity. To this must be added the peremptory tone and the extreme concentration of his style which, as ~~already~~ his earliest critics remarked, makes him at times difficult to understand. Drieu la Rochelle is quite right when he writes in Malraux, l'homme nouveau, that he has "un énorme défaut, sa concision qui tourne à l'obscur". (33) And André Thérive does, not wholly without justification, call La Tentation "presqu' illisible". (34)

In this brief exposé of Malraux' ideas I have followed fairly closely the very much more detailed and longer one of Dr. Joseph Hoffmann in his L'Humanisme de Malraux. It is obvious, to begin with, that Malraux' interpretation of man's evolution has clear Spenglerian overtones. But there is little point in speculating about a possible influence. Malraux does belong to that generation which discovered with the much older Valéry that civilisations were mortal. To this awareness Malraux is going to add the idea that each civilisation is closed and ununderstandable to the other:

Les états psychiques successifs de l'humanité (says Möllberg in Les Noyers de l'Altenbourg) sont irréductiblement différents, parce qu'ils n'affectent pas, ne cultivent pas, n'engagent pas la même part de l'homme. Sur l'essentiel, Platon et Saint-Paul ne peuvent ni s'accorder ni se convaincre: ils ne peuvent que se convertir. Un roi chrétien et un roi proto-historique lié aux astres n'ont pas deux idées du destin: pour que le roi chrétien ressente, conçoive le destin, il faut que le

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\* Some of these ideas will be dealt with in greater detail in the analysis of La Tentation de l'occident.

que le monde psychique de l'autre ait disparu. Je doute qu'il y ait un dialogue de la chenille et du papillon. Même entre l'Hindou qui croit à l'absolu et à la métempsychose, et l'Occidental qui croit à la patrie et à la mort, le dialogue est postiche..."\*

This argument, it might be noted in passing, applies the idea of the voice heard by the talker's throat, but by the hearer's ears, to the world of culture. We hear our culture with our throat, but we hear the culture of the East or of the Aztecs with our ears.

At first man is wholly and blindly tied to the cosmos. Möllberg gives during the Colloquium a haunting picture of man "dans un domaine cosmique, dans le domaine antérieur aux religions, antérieur même à la mythologie":

Les enfants nés pendant les jours sans lune étaient tués à leur naissance.

...

Les noces (sexuelles) du Roi et de la Reine - toujours sa soeur, toujours! - étaient célébrées sur une tour; les rapports sexuels du Roi et de ses autres femmes étaient liés au mouvement des astres. Comme la vie du Roi était liée à la lune, celle de la Première Reine l'était à Vénus - la planète, bien sûr.

Maintenant, attention: quand Vénus, d'étoile du soir, devenait étoile du matin, tous les astrologues étaient à l'affût. Si c'était l'époque d'une éclipse de lune, emmenait le Roi et la Reine dans une caverne de la montagne.

Et on les étranglait.

Ils ne l'ignoraient pas plus qu'un médecin urémique ou cancéreux n'ignore comment finissent l'urémie et le cancer: liés au ciel comme nous à nos microbes. Presque tous les dignitaires les suivaient dans la mort. Ils mouraient de la mort du Roi comme nous mourons d'une embolie.

Le cadavre du Roi était traité avec la tendresse la plus grande, jusqu'à ce qu'il ressuscitât avec le croissant sous la forme d'un nouveau roi.

Et tout recommençait.

Voilà.

Man now dwells in darkness, in a state of prostration ("l'immémoriale prostration de l'Orient") before an invisible, but inexorable Fate. We might note here in passing a curious resemblance between Malraux' vision and that of Vigny who wrote in Les Destinées (1849):

Depuis le premier jour de la création,  
Les pieds lourds et puissants de chaque Destinée  
Pesaient sur chaque tête et sur toute action.

Chaque front se courbait et traçait sa journée,  
Comme le front d'un boeuf creuse un sillon profond  
Sans dépasser la pierre où sa ligne est bornée.

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\* Once again, we find the same idea in the much earlier La Voie royale when Claude Vannec says to the director at L'Institut français: "En profondeur toute civilisation est impénétrable pour l'autre".

Ces froides Déités liaient le joug de plomb  
Sur le crâne et les yeux des Hommes leurs esclaves,  
Tous errant sans étoile en un désert sans fond;

Levant avec effort leurs pieds chargés d'entraves,  
Suivant le doigt d'airain dans le cercle fatal,  
Le doigt des Volontés inflexibles et graves.

Tristes Divinités du monde Oriental,  
Femmes au voile blanc, immuables statues,  
Elles nous écrasaient de leur poids colossal.

Even the ending of Vigny's poem where he shows the Oriental idea of  
la fatalité being taken over by Christianity, is very close to Malraux'  
ideas on Christianity.

Man is liberated from this enslavement to Fate and the Cosmos by  
the Greek miracle. The meaning and significance of Greece in Malraux'  
scheme of ideas is best expressed in an important passage in La Tentation.  
Ling is writing about a Greek sculpture which he had seen in the Acropolis  
Museum and which to him was like an allegory of the Greek genius, and he  
adds:

Sous ce visage inconnu, que n'avez-vous gravé le nom d'Oedipe?  
Son histoire est le combat contre le sphinx de toutes vos facultés.  
Le monstre: dragon, sphinx, taureau ailé, est un des miroirs de  
l'Orient; mais il l'est aussi de cette partie de l'âme que tenta de  
réduire la Grèce, et il reparait, à travers les siècles, chaque fois  
que les hommes demandent à la vie plus que ne peut leur donner la  
pensée.

A little later he adds:

A la conscience, je dirai presque la sensation d'être un fragment du  
monde... ils substituèrent la conscience d'être un être vivant, total,  
distinct, sur une terre propice où les seules images passionnées  
étaient celles des hommes et de la mer.

And in Les Noyers, Malraux returns to the same idea making clearer the role  
of Greece (Walter Berger is talking to his nephew Vincent):

Vous connaissez la tête du jeune homme du Musée de l'Acropole? La  
première sculpture qui ait représenté un visage humain; libéré des  
monstres... de la mort... des dieux. Ce jour là, l'homme aussi a tiré  
l'homme de l'argile.

Greece then is seen as killing the oriental monsters, of freeing man from  
his enslavement to a blind destiny: "En face de l'esclave pétrifié des  
figures d'Asie, le mouvement sans précurseur des statues grecques est le  
symbole même de la liberté". At the same time, by freeing man, Greece also  
laid the foundation of Western individualism. Man is distinct from the

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world, but each man now is also distinct from all other men.

The Christian civilization at one and the same time continues and deflects the Greek heritage. Malraux sees the highest point of this Christian civilization in the Romanic period: "Le Moyen-âge roman connaît aussi un humanisme véritable; il réalise un équilibre unique entre les deux dimensions de l'Etre (...) entre le domaine du créé et celui du sacré". Malraux expresses the same idea again when he writes: "Aucun art, dans aucune civilisation, n'a fait assurer autant d'humanité par le sacré, n'a exprimé si pleinement le sacré par l'humain".

But this harmonious equilibrium, this fusion of the human and the sacred, of God and Man, begins, according to Malraux, to break up towards the Twelfth Century, when religious experience becomes more and more personal and individual: "Le Christ ne s'adresse plus à tous mais à chacun". It is in this way that Christianity will reinforce the Greek individualistic heritage. The Christian religion becomes, as Ling writes in La Tentation, "une religion qui ne cesse de vous faire croire à votre existence particulière". And "quelque profonde que soit l'expérience chrétienne, elle aboutit toujours dans une solitude".

And now Christianity in its turn dies. Malraux here makes a clear distinction between "la chrétienté" and "le christianisme". "A quoi tient le malaise? A la fin de la chrétienté je ne parle pas ici du christianisme. Je parle de la fin d'une société que christianisme informa dans sa totalité". And Malraux sees the beginning of the disintegration of this Christian world not in the Renaissance, but in the Eighteenth Century:

La chrétienté a été atteinte beaucoup plus tard que nous ne le croyons. Le mythe de la Renaissance nous égare passablement. (...) De même que les révolutionnaires français sont d'abord, quoique révolutionnaires, monarchistes, de même ceux dont se réclamera l'humanisme sont d'abord chrétiens. C'est seulement au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle que se répand l'idée d'un monde sans Dieu. Alors naissent les grandes valeurs de combat: le peuple, la nation. Mais lorsqu'elles cessent d'être des valeurs de combat, elles ne deviennent pas, quoiqu'on en dise, des valeurs bourgeoises. Pas du tout. Car un monde sans valeurs fondamentales apparaît.

Now Malraux' idea that "la chrétienté a disparu en tant qu'armature du

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monde" should not be seen as a mere restatement of Nietzsche's "God is dead", although Malraux's idea clearly stems from there. But Nietzsche's concern was clearly an ethical one, while Malraux' is a cultural and historical one. Moreover, Malraux' position is perhaps in a way more radical since he sees the entire civilisation which Christianity had formed as dead. Yet, different from Nietzsche, Malraux should not either be confused with a Twentieth Century atheistic humanist. Here also, Malraux goes further. For, if the rationalists killed God, they lost no time to deify man and to turn science into a form of revelation. But for Malraux Man is not God and Science has failed. Ling in La Tentation writes: "La réalité absolue a été pour vous Dieu, puis l'Homme, mais l'homme est mort après Dieu et vous cherchez avec angoisse à qui vous pourriez confier son étrange héritage". And in Les Voix du silence, some twenty-four years later, Malraux writes:

Mais (l'espoir) dont Victor Hugo, Whitman, Renan, Berthelot avaient chargé progrès, science, raison, démocratie: celui de la conquête du monde, avait vite perdu son accent victorieux. Non que la science fut vraiment attaquée, son aptitude à résoudre les problèmes de l'existence le fut, par contre mortellement.

With the death of God and Christianity and that of Man and an anthropocentric civilisation, modern man finds himself alone before an anguishing abyss. It is here that Malraux rediscovers, as it were, Pascal; but, significantly, not the Pascal who writes L'Apologie de la religion chrétienne, but the one who imagines the intolerable anguish of man without God.

Je ne sais qui m'a mis au monde, ni ce que c'est que le monde, ni que moi-même; je suis dans une ignorance terrible de toutes choses; je ne sais ce que c'est que mon corps, que mes sens, que mon âme et cette partie même de moi qui pense ce que je dis, qui fait réflexion sur tout et sur elle-même, et ne se connaît non plus que le reste.

Je vois ces effroyables espaces de l'univers qui m'enferment, et je me trouve attaché à un coin de cette vaste étendue, sans que je sache pourquoi je suis plutôt placé en ce lieu qu'en un autre, ni pourquoi ce peu de temps qui m'est donné à vivre m'est assigné à ce point plutôt qu'en un autre de toute l'éternité qui m'a précédé et de toute celle qui me suit. Je ne vois que des infinités de toutes parts, qui m'enferment comme un atome et comme une ombre qui ne dure qu'un instant sans retour. Tout ce que je connais est que je dois bientôt mourir; mais ce que j'ignore le plus est cette mort même que je ne saurais éviter. (35)

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Now in this monologue Pascal is entertaining an idea which for Pascal is too horrifying to be possible, a world without God. For Pascal's "l'homme sans Dieu" is not merely an atheist, i.e. a man who does not believe in God, but who nevertheless lives in a world where God in fact exists. What Pascal wants to show is a man living in a world from which God is absent. And this is precisely the world of Malraux' novels. And so, behind the modern setting in which the action of the novels takes place, we recognize the dark world of Pascal's vision and anguish.

And at the centre of all Malraux' novels we find the awareness of this anguish. All the characters share in this awareness of their fate: they all know that they live in Pascal's cell of men condemned to death. It is this which makes Malraux' novels above all novels of consciousness, and the characters all seem to have listened to Garcia's advice in L'Espoir: "Transformer en conscience une expérience aussi large que possible". That is also why there are no imbeciles in his novels. To transform an experience into awareness requires intelligence, perceptiveness and an ability to formulate; hence all Malraux' characters are intellectuals. This elicits from Ilya Ehrenbourg the following criticism: "Les personnages de Malraux vivent d'une vie insolitement 'spirituelle'. Tout cela est très intéressant, parfois même convaincant, mais l'abondance d'une telle spiritualité détruit le réalisme des événements".<sup>(36)</sup> But this kind of realism was the last thing Malraux was aiming at when writing La Condition humaine.

This awareness of their destiny which all characters of Malraux' novels share to a greater or lesser extent is in its turn born from the awareness of death: "Le fond de l'homme", says Gisors, "est l'angoisse, la conscience de sa propre fatalité d'où naissent toutes les peurs". It is clear that the accent falls on de sa propre fatalité. It is therefore not the awareness of Death, which is merely the knowledge of a fact, but the awareness that I must die which obsesses the characters of Malraux. For, as Perken points out, Death itself does not exist and is a mere abstraction:

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"Il n'y a pas de mort ... il y a seulement ... moi ... moi qui vais mourir."

(Malraux' italics) It should be noted that this awareness of one's individual death is a peculiarly Western characteristic. The East sees death differently. Ling to A.D.:

Vous avez chargé l'univers d'angoisse. Quelle figure tragique vous avez donnée à la mort! Un cimetière, dans une grande ville d'Europe, éveille en moi des sentiments hideux. .... Les tombeaux innombrables où nous laissons, sans songer au sacrilège, gîter les lapins, fortifient en nous un sentiment qui n'a rien de commun avec votre sentiment de la mort. C'est une tendresse grave. C'est aussi la conscience de n'être pas limité à soi-même, d'être un lieu plutôt qu'un moyen d'action. Chacun de nous vénère ses morts, et les morts, comme les symboles d'une force qui nous enveloppe et qui est l'un des modes de la vie, bien qu'il ne connaisse d'elle que son existence.

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Malraux' view of Western man as an atomised individual condemned to live his anguished life in the solitary confinement of his individualism is at the root of two of Malraux' attitudes. First of all, the fascination with Eastern civilisation which does not measure "tout à la durée et à l'intensité d'une vie humaine". Through the East, Malraux wants to escape from his cell, jump out of his western skin and reach, beyond his Greco-Christian heritage, a civilisation where man is not one, but at one with the world, where one has "naturellement le sentiment de l'Univers", and where death is part of life and therefore does not exist.

Malraux' Weltanschauung also conditions his political action. Through action Malraux tries to break away from his individual life and to establish deep and real links with other men. Through action he is no longer distinct from the men with whom he acts: "tout homme qui agit se lie aux siens". Action becomes, in fact, a form of communion. This view of action he shares with a number of his contemporaries, such as Drieu la Rochelle or Saint-Exupéry and Silone. However, in the case of Malraux the question arises why should this action be directed against the bourgeoisie? The reason for this is that the Christian middle-class civilisation is based on individualism. And Malraux sees in the Russian Revolution not merely another politico-social upheaval, but the beginning

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of a wholly new, un-Christian, un-bourgeois civilisation no longer based on individualism. "Sur le plan métaphysique le bolchevisme admet que les plus hautes valeurs sont des valeurs collectives. L'essentiel devient donc de détruire l'individualité au profit de ces valeurs collectives".

And a little later during the same debate he says:

En Russie s'efforce de renaître un art sacré, un art qui fait appel à tous (...). La question essentielle me paraît être celle-ci: Allons nous continuer à assister à la vie d'une humanité morcelée (...) ou bien au contraire allons nous constater la naissance d'un grand esprit collectif qui balayera tous les problèmes secondaires et replacera l'humanité dans un domaine de préoccupations tout à fait différent.

On the basis of this communist civilisation would be built a New Man.

Thus there would be a Communist Man, just as there had been a Greek and a Christian Man.

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Chapter II

The beginnings (1920-1928)

1.

The early writings of Malraux, leaving aside his contributions to various periodicals, consist of two kinds of work of unequal importance and quality. There are the imaginative works, Lunes en papier, the fragments of Ecrit pour une idole à trompe and Le Royaume farfelu. These works, especially the first two, are in a sense marginal. Then there are the theoretical writings La Tentation de l'Occident and D'une Jeunesse européenne which are central and of great importance for an understanding of Malraux' later ideas and development. I shall treat these two groups of work separately.

It is difficult to assess the real importance of Malraux' early imaginative writing which, with their bizarre and weird fantasy, their slight preciousness, seem so far removed from his later work that it is difficult to find a link. The question also arises: had these texts not been by Malraux, would anyone today pay any attention to them? Lunes en papier was scarcely noticed at the time of its publication, but this might be due to the small number of copies (112) which were printed. \* In other words, the mere fact that these books are by Malraux might have given them an importance they should perhaps not have. There exists, because of this fact, also the great temptation to read into them some sort of prefiguration of the later novels of Malraux. Yet, at the same time, something of the later Malraux must be present in these Juvenilia. As we shall discover when we look into the chronology of this period, there is no clear break in Malraux' evolution. Nicola Chiaromonte sees, as it were, a negative link between the early and the later works:

"Lunes en papier has been repudiated by the author and never been reprinted.\*\* In themselves these pieces were not particularly significant. If they become significant at all, it is in the light of Malraux' later work, in so far as they help us to catch a glimpse of what he has consistently striven to keep away from: the realm of aimless sensations and day dreaming.<sup>(1)</sup>"

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\* It received two reviews both by close friends of Malraux, Pascal Pia and Georges Gabory.

\*\* Although writing in 1948, Chiaromonte does not seem to be aware of the existence of the Oeuvres Complètes published by Skira in 1945 where both Lunes en papier and Royaume farfelu are reprinted.

Vandegans at the end of his massive book arrives at a somewhat similar conclusion:

Quel sort réserve-t-elle à la fantaisie, au fantastique ironique, à l'art esthétisant? En gros, elle les récuse. Son propos éthique le lui ordonne. L'ironie est accusation, mais détachée: les romans engagent à l'action. La fantaisie est négation du monde: les romans réclament qu'on le transforme. L'art esthétisant est stylisation raffinée de l'expression, défi précieux au grossier chaos de l'univers: les romans se veulent expression nue, garante d'authentique intensité. .... Ainsi, l'oeuvre de la maturité repousse le farfelu fantaisiste.<sup>(2)</sup>

Yet, at the same time, Vandegans sees in the farfelu works an early expression of Malraux' tragic vision of life. This is based on the not wholly unreasonable assumption that during the years 1920-1927 Malraux had already elaborated, at least to some extent, his Weltanschauung. There is one further reason why the early imaginative writings of Malraux are important: they enable us to follow his evolution up to the point when he discovers his vocation as novelist. Now this does not appear to be a simple forward linear evolution, but a hesitant process with a number of retours en arrière.

Lunes en papier was published in 1921. The subsequent publications of Malraux (always excluding criticism, book reviews, etc.) belong to the same fantastic inspiration. They are Les Hérissons apprivoisés<sup>(3)</sup>, Journal d'un pompier du jeu de massacre<sup>(4)</sup>, Le Triomphe<sup>(5)</sup> and Ecrit pour un ours en peluche<sup>(6)</sup>. The significance of these dates lies in this, that as late as 1927, when Malraux was writing (or had already written) Les Conquérants, he continues to publish a text still belonging to the farfelu inspiration. Similarly, the writing of Royaume farfelu coincides with that of Les Conquérants, and Malraux' last farfelu work is published a few weeks after his first realist novel. Finally, as a note by Malraux himself informs us, Le Royaume farfelu was begun 1920. ("Cette histoire dont une partie a été écrite en 1920 ...") All this seems to indicate a groping evolution away from fantasy to the realistic novel. Between 1926 and 1928, the farfelu and the realist inspiration exist side by side. And although there is no clear break, it seems nevertheless true that after the crucial

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Indochinese episode the purely farfelu inspiration tends to dry up.

However, it will never disappear entirely from the work of Malraux, although it will now assume different forms. The farfelu inspiration will, as Nicola Chiaromonte points out, be used to create Malraux' gallery of bizarre, caricatural characters of which Clappique is the most perfect example. In Les Conquérants we still find clear traces of the fantastic, and a passage such as this one belongs obviously to the earlier, farfelu, vein:

Un médium m'a enseigné ceci: les esprits des morts, que la nuit prive du spectacle des vivants, s'ennuient à tel point que leur seul plaisir est de faire au clair de lune, avec le duvet des oreillers (dans lesquels ils se réfugient la nuit, comme vous le savez) des motifs semblables à ceux que les coiffeurs font avec les cheveux. Et c'est vrai, cher ami, très vrai! Ouvrez doucement votre oreiller, le matin, vous y trouverez nombre de petits tableaux de plumes: points d'interrogation, crosses, aigrettes, oiseaux... J'ai disposé moi-même des plumes, pour intriguer les esprits, ce qui est plus inquiétant que d'intriguer les savants, beaucoup plus.

It is perhaps significant that in the version définitive (1949) of Les Conquérants the entire Renski episode has been suppressed. Finally the farfelu inspiration will find its expression in the playful and impish drawings reproduced in Gaetan Picon's book Malraux par lui-même, and even leaves some traces in Les Noyers, as witness the farfelu animals modelled by Möllberg:

Sur tous les meubles étaient posés d'extraordinaires petits personnages, les uns de glaise, les autres de bronze qu'il avait pris d'abord pour des fétiches: ils avaient été modellés par Möllberg, qui les appelait ses monstres. Le mot leur convenait mal. C'étaient des animaux imaginaires: pingouins à face de chats, rapaces à corps de singes .....

The humour here is, no doubt, less gratuitous, less free; Möllberg's animals are born from his anguish: "il fait grimacer la nature", and there is a clear link here between these monsters and the faces pulled by Clappique (also a product of the farfelu creation) in front of his mirror.

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It is extremely difficult to give a coherent analysis of Lunes en papier, because it is a book without centre.

Lunes en papier is divided into four parts of roughly equal length. It opens with a prologue <sup>in which</sup> where we witness the appearance of the first protagonists, the balloons:

Ainsi qu'une annonce lumineuse, la lune jaune se colora successivement en rouge, en bleu et en vert; puis, ding! elle fut jaune à nouveau. Une note aiguë en tomba, comme une petite grenouille, et, sur le lac, les perspectives nacrées des jeux d'eau devinrent infinies.

Le bouchon qui flottait se changea en boîte à surprises: un Auvergnat barbu en sortit et s'envola, oubliant sur le lac l'angle de deux sillages analogues aux aiguilles d'un cadran. Quel était ce sorcier, dont la naissance vitrifiera l'eau du lac et obligea les pauvres jeux d'eau à cesser leurs farandoles? La lune même l'ignore. Peu lui importait, d'ailleurs: elle riait. Elle rit tant que ses notes qui étaient ses dents, se décrochèrent et tombèrent toutes ensemble. Elles voltigeaient dans la nuit ainsi que des étoiles trop lourdes; leur clarté, subsistant quelque temps après leur passage, s'étirait et formait des traînées pâles tandis que les notes, posées, s'ouvraient parmi les carillons comme des fleurs de papier lancées sur l'eau, et encerclaient deux yeux craintifs et ironiques de tout petits enfants de lune. Ces nouveau-nés ne virent d'abord que des ballons antipathiques qui roulaient mollement ça et là, évoquant un harem de sultanes épilées, un peu grasses.

These balloons, after invading a palace which they had previously put to sleep by reading "une pièce à thèse", meet their enemy in the "génie du lac qui était une pelote à épingles en forme de chat". The cat makes the balloons drunk and then strings them like a sort of chapelet and tries without success to hang them. Considering that, because of this, it has failed ~~its~~ life, the cat hangs itself "au bout du chapelet" and its added weight brings about the death of the balloons. In this Prologue little "happens"; it consists mainly of a whole string of metamorphoses. However, in Combats and the following parts we find a rudiment of plot and with it a certain slight heightening of tension.

In Combats we see the metamorphosis of the dead balloon into flowers, one of which "déhisca... projetant neuf personnages", seven white and two red. The white characters are the seven deadly sins (of which two - envy and avarice - burst). The two red characters are Hifili, a long-nosed magician, and a mandolin-shaped musician. These two now join the remaining five deadly sins and together they set off to kill death

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who lives in the Royaume farfelu.

The second part, Voyages, tells of their adventures on their journey to the Royaume farfelu. They follow a river which will conduct them to the kingdom of death. They spend the night at an inn where their room is invaded by mice and moles:

Des souris et des mulots, par bandes, couraient dans la chambre. Ils étaient d'or, et leur course traçait des lignes claires dans l'obscurité; ennuyés par la vie, ils se heurtaient le plus possible, car ils collectionnaient les carillons. Assis sur la barre d'appui, deux rats de corail rose exécutaient la toilette de leurs ongles et composaient des élégies amoureuses.

These moles and mice transform themselves into serpents who turn out to be bigotphones. These threaten to drive the Seven Sins mad by singing the most inane songs:

Nous savons par coeur un nombre de couplets ridicules et de chansons stupides tel que l'imagination ne peut se le représenter sans effroi. Nous sommes prêts à vous les chanter l'un après l'autre; notre nasillement célèbre ne laissera pas de les rendre particulièrement exaspérants. Avant dix minutes, vous vous enfuirez; sinon, vous deviendrez tous fous. Nous vous reconduirons jusqu'à la limite du Royaume-Farfelu.

The sins are saved by the musician who hypnotises the bigotphones with an old gramophone.

In the last part entitled Victoire, we find ourselves in le Royaume farfelu, and we meet death who is being attended by some "six coussinets sautillant". Death is ailing and consults a doctor who prescribes baths, five times a day, in "un liquide spécial". The doctor then reveals himself to be one of the deadly sins, and death's attendants are the six other sins. The special liquid in which death must bathe turns out to be a powerful acid which dissolves death who dies with some courage. At the end of the book, the seven deadly sins are together again, a little lost and puzzled:

"Excusez-moi, chers amis... Lorsque j'étais homme, j'étais sujet à l'anémie mentale... Ne vous étonnez donc pas de ma question: Pourquoi avons-nous tué la Mort?"  
Les péchés avaient pendu à leurs ceintures, comme des pense-bêtes, les morceaux de son squelette. Ils les touchèrent et répétèrent...  
"Oui, pourquoi avons-nous tué la Mort?"  
Puis ils se regardèrent. Leurs visages étaient mornes. Alors, ils laissèrent tomber leur tête dans leurs mains et pleurèrent. Pourquoi avaient-ils tué la Mort? Ils l'avaient tous oublié.

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If I have quoted at some length the opening paragraph of Lunes en papier, it is because it gives us a good idea of both the nature and the style of the book. To begin with, it is very obviously a book of a young man; it is rather forcé, but it is also extremely well written, and it betrays often a tendency towards a certain preciosity which we will find in all the farfelu books. It is shown in a liking for rare or obsolete words: "L'un des fruits déhisca..." (déhisser - verb does not appear in the Littre). In Le Royaume farfelu we come across "se musser" which is classified as "vieux" in the Larousse, "des rats tapés" in Lunes, the inhabitants of the palace "s'étaient établis là pour tâcher à des mosaïques".

More important, however, is the quality of Malraux' fantasy which is often laboured and always purely gratuitous and divorced from any reality. Let us take the opening paragraph: "Le bouchon qui flottait se changea en boîte à surprises: un Auvergnat barbu en sortit et s'envola, oubliant sur le lac l'angle de deux sillages analogues aux aiguilles d'un cadrai". Leaving aside the fact that the Auvergnat never appears again in the entire story, there is no reason why he should appear at all, there is no reason either why the cork should become a "boîte à surprises" and not a glass or a rucksack. The events and metamorphoses described in Lunes en papier have no cause, no predictable effect and no raison d'être. Why is the "génie du lac une pelote à épingles" and not a fountain pen or a beer glass? It is obvious then that Malraux' fantasy is not born from any real inner necessity to communicate something, and Lunes en papier is a piece of writing which displays a playful, but irresponsible imagination. In this irresponsibility it is very much a book of its period, the early Twenties. To see Malraux of this period as a "textbook case of surrealism"<sup>(7)</sup>, as does Frohock, is overstating the case, besides the fact that surrealism only begins to exist in 1924. To call, as does Chiaromonte, Lunes en papier "a kind of dadaist fairytale"<sup>(8)</sup> is much nearer the truth. Janet Flanner's description is the most perceptive: "a slim extravaganza, part Dada, part Hieronymus Bosch".<sup>(9)</sup> The links of Lunes with Dada are quite obvious, and

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although Malraux did not get involved in the Dada mouvement, he could not help, at his age, to be contaminated by the Dada atmosphere which pervaded the young literary circles at that time. However, there is as much Max Jacob as Dada in Lunes.<sup>\*</sup> It is the reference to Bosch which is particularly perceptive, for not only does it define the kind of fantasy Malraux displays in Lunes, but also and especially the visual quality of the book which foreshadows the peculiarly cinematic quality of Malraux' later writing. What we have in Lunes en papier is a series of intensely realised visual snapshots of a farfelu world, just as in La Condition humaine we have a series of images of a revolution.

Finally we find in Lunes en papier a feeling of speed and urgency, "events" follow one another at a breathless pace. This feeling of speed and urgency too we will find back in the great novels, particularly in Les Conquérants and La Condition humaine.

Lunes en papier then, although very different from Malraux' realistic novels, nevertheless contains already some literary and stylistic elements which are a permanent part of Malraux' genius.

Having looked at the outside of Lunes en papier, the question now arises: what does it mean? Malraux was careful to preface his book with the note: "Il n'y a aucun symbole dans ce livre". Now it is obvious that this is an ironic remark, and the few commentators of Malraux' early work have taken it as such. But one might ask in what manner it is ironical, to which end is the irony directed? Is it not perhaps to whet the appetite of the symbol-hunting reader and critic who after such an obviously ironic remark is sure to go hunting for symbols which are not there? May this not be a case of double irony? What he says is in fact true, there are

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<sup>\*</sup> A quotation from Le Cornet à dés will, I hope, make this clear: "Effacer les têtes des généraux de l'Empire! Mais elles sont vivantes! tout ce que je puis faire, c'est de leur changer de chapeaux: les chapeaux sont pleins de fulmicoton et ces messieurs de l'Empire ne plaisantent pas: le fulmicoton prend feu. Je ne savais pas que le fulmicoton fût un pigeon si blanc. Entrer dans ce paysage biblique! mais c'est une gravure sur bois: une ligne de maisons inégales, une grève derrière un filet d'eau, un filet d'eau derrière un palmier."

no symbols, in which case the joke will be on the symbol-hunter off on a vain and pointless chase. This would fit in with the dada-like desire to mystify and disconcert the reader.

Because it is well-nigh impossible to accept a piece of writing which is so gratuitous as to mean strictly nothing, most critics have attempted to ascribe a meaning to the fantasy world of Lunes en papier. Moreover, the presence of the seven Deadly Sins and of Death seem to indicate that the book has a meaning.

Vandegans who, beyond doubt, has made the closest study of the book, writes as follows:

Il reste que les Lunes, comme Cendrillon, enferment une signification, et que c'est même à elle que nous sommes devenus le plus attentifs, évidemment parce que nous lisons ces pages au travers de la grille que nous fournissent les romans de Malraux.

Le monde est le règne de la malice, de la cruauté, de l'absurde, du combat toujours renouvelé contre les forces ennemies. Il est dominé par la Mort. La banalité de l'univers, l'ennui qu'il engendre sont si insupportables qu'on peut imaginer que la Mort elle-même s'en lasse, au point d'accepter allégrement de disparaître. Si pourtant ses sujets réalisaient leur vœu suprême de puissance, qui est de la détruire, le sens de leur entreprise leur échapperait aussitôt. Car le comble de l'absurde est que sa suppression entraîne l'écroulement de cela seul qui conférerait une finalité à la vie: la volonté de le réduire.<sup>(10)</sup>

Moreover, he sees in both Lunes en papier and Le Royaume farfelu the typical Malrauvian theme of "le combat contre". This might well be so, but it should be pointed out that this is also the main theme of almost any fairy tale: the fight against the witch, the giant, the ogre. And, as Chiaromonte has so clearly seen, there is a strong link with the fairy tale world in Lunes: the enchanted wood, the obstacles to overcome, the witch in her castle and the victory over her.

Hartman, in a note, sees in Lunes the theme of the search for death (but why kill her then?) and writes about both Lunes and Royaume farfelu: "The theme of both is related to that of the mock or Pyrrhic victory..."<sup>(11)</sup> Hartman here, of course, refers to the fact that all Malraux' novels (with the possible exception of L'Espoir) end in defeat.

Finally, Lucien Goldmann gives the following, somewhat far-fetched interpretation of Lunes en papier:

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L'influence de la littérature d'avant-garde y est sensible, non seulement dans la forme, mais aussi dans le contenu; l'écrit raconte en effet la lutte des écrivains non conformistes contre le Royaume Farfelu, l'Empire de la Mort, la société bourgeoise de l'époque. A cette lutte, cependant, Malraux ne croit pas, et c'est sa vanité qu'il raconte par deux fois sur un mode symbolique et même allégorique.<sup>(12)</sup>

We have here a set of widely divergent interpretations, and if more critics had studied the early work of Malraux, we would have a greater variety of interpretations. The fact of the matter is that because of the gratuitous nature of the book one can make it say what one wants, not unlike, toutes proportions gardées, the poems of Rimbaud.

It is just as difficult to accept that a book means nothing as to accept that a book of a writer could be entirely divorced from his deepest preoccupations. And we know that at the time of Lunes, as early as 1920, some of the ideas which will find their expression in La Tentation de l'Occident (1928) were already germinating in Malraux' mind. And, as we shall see when we shall analyse La Tentation, we find there, albeit in embryonic form, some of the key-ideas which will be elaborated in Malraux' later novels. This being so, it is difficult to accept that these preoccupations with death and absurdity have not left some trace on Lunes. Yet it is impossible, I think, to give to the book a meaning and to see in it (and this is very tempting) an early and cryptic expression of Malraux' later ideas.\* To do this, as does Vandegans, is to read, as it were, backwards. It is not to read the book itself, but to read into it what we know about the later and maturer writer.

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\* One could, for instance, see in this arbitrary world of Lunes where anything can be changed into anything, where serpents become bigotphones and balloons turn into flowers, an imaginative expression of an absurd and contingent world not unlike the one evoked by Sartre in La Nausée:

"Cela peut arriver n'importe quand, tout de suite peut-être: les présages sont là. Par exemple, un père de famille en promenade verra venir vers lui, à travers la rue, un chiffon rouge comme poussé par le vent. Et quand le chiffon sera tout près de lui, il verra que c'est un quartier de viande pourrie, maculé de poussière, qui se traîne en rampant, en sautillant, un bout de chair torturée qui se roule dans les ruisseaux en projetant par spasmes des jets de sang. Ou bien une mère regardera la jous de son enfant et lui demandera: 'Qu'est-ce que tu as là, c'est un bouton?' et elle verra la chair se bouffir un peu, se crevasser, s'entr'ouvrir et, au fond de la crevasse, un troisième oeil, un oeil rieur apparaîtra. Ou bien ils sentiront de doux frôlements sur tout leur corps, comme les caresses que les joncs, dans les rivières, font aux nageurs. Et ils sauront que leurs vêtements sont devenus des choses vivantes."<sup>(13)</sup>

I think that Lunes en papier should be accepted for what it is: the first exercise of a spirited and talented young writer who has obviously not yet found his real self and his true road. And the links which exist between this first book and Malraux' mature work, must be looked for not in the 'contents', but in some of the stylistic characteristics.

2.

Royaume-Farfelu is published seven years after Lunes.<sup>\*</sup> In between we have the various episodes of what was to become (or not to become - no one knows for certain whether the book has existed or not) Écrit pour une idole à trompe. Nevertheless, in spite of the gap in time and the obvious differences that separate the two books, Royaume-Farfelu belongs still to the fantastic vein, but less so than Lunes. Its fantasy is less gratuitous, it is set in a more or less recognisable world which has recognisable links with reality, although not our daily reality.- Malraux in Royaume-Farfelu is clearly moving away from pure fantasy and imaginative irresponsibility; it tells a fairly coherent, if somewhat strange story, and it is possible to attach a meaning to the work. We find, therefore, some kind of correlation between the various interpretations. G. Hartmann, as we have seen, considers the pyrrhic victory as the central theme, and for this there is quite a lot of justification. Vandegans' interpretation is of a similar kind:

En fait, on ne saurait, une fois encore, et quoi que souhaite l'écrivain, ne pas s'attacher au sujet que sa fiction propose: la défaite totale d'un groupe d'hommes parties pour cueillir une facile victoire; la ruse sinistre d'un destin qui triomphera paradoxalement d'eux, d'abord par le silence et le vide, puis en les harcelant au moyen d'insectes toujours plus nombreux.<sup>(14)</sup>

And, although different in many respects, L. Goldmann's interpretation is nevertheless not so far removed from the other two:

Le contenu essentiel de cet écrit nous paraît être à la fois la conscience de la vanité et de la mort universelle des valeurs, et l'aspiration romantique à une valeur inconnue et inconnaissable. Dans la première partie, l'incarnation de celle-ci est la princesse de la Chine, à laquelle rêve le prince du pays -princesse qu'il n'a jamais vue et qui ressemble comme deux gouttes d'eau à la fleur bleue des romantiques allemands.<sup>(15)</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> An earlier version with a different title, Voyage aux îles fortunées, was published in Commerce, XII, été 1927.

This "mort universelle des valeurs" can surely be considered also as a defeat of these values.

Royaume-Farfelu is divided into three parts of unequal length which are not numbered and carry no title. The first part constitutes a sort of prologue. The ship on which the narrator travels is being abandoned by "les diables frisés" who take with them the sails of the frigate, which now drifts towards a fantastic city ... :

Le courant nous poussait toujours vers la côte en silence; au ras de l'eau plate, se précisa peu à peu une ville aux architectures peu humaines. Sur la grève se pressaient des ombres souples, dominées par des personnages coiffés de volumineux turbans de soie brochée, qui portaient de grandes barbes noires, ressemblaient à l'empereur Charlemagne, et étaient des Turcs. Ombres bleuâtres du bleu phosphorescent de la nuit, Turcs, fuite soudaine des diables; et cette ville au profil des crustacés et de champignons.

Here, after having visited the market, the narrator is arrested and put into prison, where he indulges in a sort of dream-like meditation. It is here particularly that we see very clearly the farfelu inspiration, as this passage shows:

Le flot trop lourd ne les balançait plus; des rats jaspés et des rats verts y traçaient de leur queue des signes dans la poussière des années. Des écureuils, des musaraignes jouaient dans leurs cordages; par les hublots, les tapirs curieux passaient leur nez; doctes, des autruches grandes comme des poussins marchaient au pas sur le pont; des hiboux en révolte contre leur race tenaient des discours frivoles, et il leur poussait des plumes d'or. Dans l'ombre des cabines et des salles, entre des amoncellements de bijoux et des pyramides de tortues endormies, passaient de grands chats; contre les vitres rondes, la blanche statue coulée et l'hippocampe épiaient ces souples fantômes...

Here we come right back to the world of Lunes and we should not forget that in his prefatory note Malraux himself informs us that "une partie a été écrite en 1920".

The narrator is now brought before "le petit Mogol" who is receiving from various messengers reports about the state of his domain and about the wedding of his daughter to "le tsar mangeur de poissons". He then dictates a poetic letter to "une princesse de Chine". Eventually, the narrator is ordered by "le petit Mogol" to join the army.

The narrator's adventures in the army form the central episode of Royaume-Farfelu. He becomes the historiographe of the Prince, and in this

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task he is being helped by a messenger called Idekel who had taken part in the previous campaign and who now tells the narrator about his first conquest of Ispahan which ends in a huge, apocalyptic fire.

The army to which the narrator is attached, is badly equipped and disciplined ("Nous avançons... comme bon nous semblait, mal vêtus, à peine armés".) Nevertheless, they reach the suburbs of Ispahan which are now deserted, the last war having reduced the population to such an extent that all the inhabitants can find refuge in the centre of the city.

Now begins a slow process of disintegration through idleness, while at the same time a growing number of soldiers die, bitten by scorpions. The army now finds itself trapped in the suburbs of Ispahan:

Les habitants, qui ne pouvaient songer à nous combattre puisqu'ils ne possédaient pas d'armée, avaient construit avant notre arrivée mille petits murs qui transformaient leur ville en labyrinthe, bouché toutes les portes, et sali habilement leur travail de telle façon que nous ne puissions distinguer les murs nouveaux des anciens. Nous rîmes beaucoup de cette défense et, par jeu, démolîmes quelques murs au hasard. De nouveau, la nuit s'allongea jusqu'à nous et monta lentement autour des cigognes indifférentes.

Idekel and the narrator now listen to the voice of their respective demons "qui n'ont pas de visage et qui vivent dans notre corps". One night, afraid of the darkness, the narrator walks to the officers' quarter and on his return to the camp he notices something amiss:

Inquiet, je m'appuyai sur mon coude, puis me dressai. Tout à coup, comprenant à la fois la terreur des animaux et la signification de cette large tache qui s'avancait vers nous, hors de moi, je hurlai: 'Les scorpions! les scorpions!' Tous se ruèrent sur les terrasses. En quelques minutes, ce mot, et la vue de l'immense nappe frangée de pinces nous soulevèrent d'une telle épouvante que l'armée se décomposa: en un vaste tourbillon, emportant officiers et princes, la terreur nous lança hors du faubourg, dans un tumulte d'armes, de clameurs, de hennissements.

The third part which is only a page and a half long, shows us the narrator at Trebizona selling shells and trying to sell two sirens to the local prince who, however, does not believe in their existence.

What makes Le Royaume-Farfelu a far more important work than Lunes en papier or the fragments of Ecrit pour une idole is that, firstly, we begin clearly to recognise a tone, a manner of writing which we will find throughout the later work and which is unmistakably Malraux' own;

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secondly, in Royaume-Farfelu begin to appear a number of themes which will form a permanent part of Malraux' world.

Royaume-Farfelu is set in an undefined, poeticised, but unmistakable East which is compounded by a number of elements of various Eastern civilisations: "Une certaine alchimie historico-géographique", (16) which has a kind of almost awe-inspiring cosmic sweep and an undeniable visionary quality. Together with this, the writing has an epic tone bordering on the rhetorical:

'Tu te souviens des villes de sacs, de tôle et de boue grise, que quittent des troupeaux d'antilopes conduits par de grands nègres dont luisent les fers de lance, le long des salines; de celles où quelques têtes coupées achèvent de saigner au centre d'une place torride, sous un arbre sans feuilles chargé d'échassiers; de celles dont l'arroyo boueux est bordé, à droite, de Chinois marchands de monstres et, à gauche, de tous les ciseaux des îles; de celles où l'écroulement des planches du bazar fait surgir de hautes pagodes abandonnées dont le fleuve entraîne un peu le reflet couvert d'étincelles, au chant des moustiques invisibles; de celles dont le matin équatorial éveille les canaux sonores, libérant tout un commerce d'orfèvreries, de paillons et de clinquants, et une floraison aquatique de pirogues qui se croisent, avec une grande nonchalance, garnies de fruits spongieux et roses; de celles que l'on ne voit qu'en proie aux armées, pleines de poussière, de tumulte et de reflets d'astres sur les boucliers, dominées par les pointes de leurs temples pâles; de celles qui sont semblables à des camps barbares, établies avec leurs charrettes renversées au coude de larges fleuves bordés de cocotiers, sous un grand ciel sans oiseaux.'

Now this kind of poetico-visionary writing is perhaps not wholly original, and one could point to a possible influence, that of Saint-John Perse whose Anabase was published in 1924.\* But whatever influences might be at play in the formation of this style (Caudel and Segalen could perhaps also be mentioned), it is all the same one of Malraux' own voices which, significantly, tends to disappear in the realistic novels, although

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\* Anabase evokes an imaginary migration through an imaginary and savage Asia. A passage such as this clearly illustrates the kinship with Malraux' Royaume-Farfelu:

"Tous-puissants dans nos grands gouvernements militaires, avec nos filles parfumées qui se vêtaient d'un souffle, ces tissus, nous établîmes en haut lieu nos pièges au bonheur.

Abondance et bien-être, bonheur! Aussi longtemps nos verres où la glace pouvait chanter comme Memnon....

Et fourvoyant à l'angle des terrasses une mêlée d'éclairs, de grands plats d'or aux mains des filles de service fauchaient l'ennui des sables aux limites du monde.

Puis ce fut une année de souffles en Ouest et, sur nos toits lestés pierres noires, tout un propos de toiles vives adonnées au délice du large. Les cavaliers au fil des caps, assaillis d'aigles lumineuses et nourrissant à bout de lances les catastrophes pures du beau temps, publiaient sur les mers une ardente chronique."

not entirely, and which we find back in the opening pages of La Tentation de l'Occident:

Dans le sillage du navire disparaissent les ombres des dernières hordes, élevant d'énormes crânes d'aurochs - enseignes ou trophées? - dont l'ombre courbe raye les plaines. Plus loin, tourbillonnent les armées de l'Asie Centrale. De hautes bannières dominant tout, ornées de caractères très anciens, et noirs, Jadis.

Au fond du harem, les Concubines. Près d'une baie, l'une d'entre elles (qui sera Régente) cause avec un eunuque aux yeux fermés. Dans le Palais violet, l'empereur examine les fossiles qu'il a fait rechercher dans tout l'empire. Il fait froid. Dehors, les cigales gelées se détachent des branches, et tombent sur le sol dur avec le son des cailloux. Des mauvais magiciens, au milieu d'une place, sont brûlés sur un bûcher odoriférant; les figurines de bois creuses dont ils se servaient pour envoûter les princesses éclatent et sont projetées comme des fusées.

And we find also the same tome in a slightly different key in Le Temps du mépris (1934) in a passage such as this:

Ainsi que lorsqu'il planait en rêve, ailes étendues, voici que dans un long mouvement de voile sous le vent il confondait peu à peu son corps épars avec l'interminable fatalité des astres, fasciné par l'armée de la nuit en dérive vers l'éternité à travers le silence. Ciel de Mongolie audessus des chameliers tartares prosternés dans la poussière du Gobi parmi l'odeur des jasmins desséchés, leurs hymnes soudains coupés par la psalmodie nocturne; ... et si cette nuit est une nuit du destin - Bénédiction sur elle jusqu'à l'apparition de l'aurore.

But even in as late a work as Les Noyers de l'Altenbourg (1945) the same voice continues clearly to be heard:

Et, redescendant du Pamir où les chameaux perdus appellent à travers les nuages, revenant des sables du Sud où des grillons plus gros que des écrevisses, dans les buissons d'épines, dressent au passage des caravanes leurs antennes sur leurs casques de chevaliers, il atteignait quelque ville couleur d'ossuaire. Sous la porte d'argile hérissée de poutres, rêvaient des cavaliers en haillons, jambes tendues sur les étriers; entre les habitations cachées comme les femmes, brillaient des crânes de chevaux et des arêtes de poisson micacées dans le sable des rues sans fenêtres. Dehors, pas une feuille, et dedans, pas un meuble: les murs, le ciel et Dieu.

It is necessary to draw the attention to the appearance in Le Royaume-Farfelu of a number of themes which will become part and parcel of the Malravian world.

The theme of the defeat has already been mentioned, but the defeat of the army is of a particular kind. They have not been defeated by another army, but by a deserted city, by boredom and emptiness, by a<sup>w</sup> inhuman and hostile world. The defeat of the army of Royaume-Farfelu is being echoed

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some twenty years later by the defeat of the anthropologist-cum-philosopher Möllberg in Les Noyers, who set out to Africa to write La civilisation comme conquête et comme destin, and who comes back defeated by the vastness and barbarity of Africa.

- Est-ce que le manuscrit de 'La civilisation comme conquête et comme destin' est enfin terminé? demanda respectueusement Hermann.
- Möllberg le regarda, ironique; mais son ironie était presque agressive:
  - Brûlé.
- Hermann, interloqué, se tut.
- Quand je dis brûlé, reprit Möllberg, c'est... synthétique. Ses feuillets pendent aux basses branches d'arbres d'espèces diverses, entre le Sahara et Zanzibar. Parfait. Selon l'usage, le vainqueur porte les dépouilles du vaincu.

Violence and cruelty which will be so overwhelmingly present in the novels of Malraux, is already clearly present in Royaume-Farfelu: there is "le chef sauvage prisonnier plongé dans la cuve aux serpents et qui mourait, brandissant ses mains pleines de vipères comme des noeuds rompus". And, still more striking, this episode told by Idekel:

L'empereur Basile II, me dit Idekel, que nous autres, historiens, appelons le Bulgaroctone, fit aveugler les innombrables combattants bulgares qu'il avait faits prisonniers. Il les rangea par files de dix, qui se tinrent par la main, et leur donna pour guide un onzième prisonnier auquel il ne fit arracher qu'un seul oeil.

We find also in Royaume-Farfelu for the first time the important theme of the cachot which Righter correctly sees as "one of the key images which are to dominate his novels<sup>(17)</sup>", and which has possibly its origin in Pascal's famous vision of "la condition des hommes".\* This theme of the cachot is to be found in one form or another in all the novels of Malraux: it is the dense hostile forest of La Voie Royale, the préau of the end of La Condition humaine. It is obviously Kastner's cell in Le Temps du mépris, but also the prison yard at Toledo in L'Espoir and the tank in which the narrator is trapped in Les Noyers de l'Altenbourg. But its first manifestation we find in the suburbs of Ispahan which its inhabitants had transformed into a labyrinth which holds the army prisoner, while daily before their

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\* - 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, attendant à leur tour. C'est l'image de la condition des hommes. (18)

comrades' eyes more and more soldiers die, bitten by scorpions.

Finally, we find in Royaume-Farfelu the crucial episode of the narrator's flight from the night:

Un soir, j'eus si peur de la nuit que je décidai de ne point dormir. Je me dirigeai vers les maisons des officiers. Nul ne les habitait. Au coin de la ruelle, une ombre se hâtait; son aigrette qui accrochait la lueur des astres me permit de la suivre.

Nous marchâmes longtemps. Nous parcourûmes des ruelles étroites, entre des murs dont la crête sinueuse et noire semblait rongée par quelque animal contemporain de la race ancienne, serviteur du Feu; nous traversâmes des places désertes dont les contours géométriques se perdaient en poussière. Et nous atteignîmes, dans la campagne, la grande avenue du roi Abbas, l'avenue des palais de mosaïque et des saules.

Silence! silence! Le vent faible et tiède détachait des petits fragments de mosaïque; les grenadiers et les églantiers étaient en fleurs: d'autres fleurs, qu'on ne voyait pas, embaumaient. Dans les longs bassins qui bordent l'avenue, les poissons merveilleux jadis apportés par Timour entouraient de rinceaux le reflet des étoiles. Il semblait que les hommes eussent disparu de la terre, et que plantes, animaux silencieux et pierres vécussent dans la liberté complète que donne l'irréparable abandon. L'officier que je suivais s'approcha de l'une des statues qui s'élevaient le long du bassin; elle se leva et le suivit. Stupéfait, je regardai plus attentivement: les masses grises qui se dressaient de loin en loin n'étaient point des statues, mais des hommes. Je longuai les bassins, caché par les arbustes: dans la brume légère, nos officiers vêtus de soie, aussi affamés que nous, pêchaient à la ligne les poissons centenaires...

Lorsque je revins au camp après cette nuit passée à oublier ma condition d'homme, les mercenaires du Gange étaient réunis autour d'un haut bûcher sur lequel ils brûlaient leurs morts.

Now this flight from the night through <sup>the</sup> deserted city to another realm, a better one ("Le quartier des officiers") which turns out to be equally filled with boredom and hunger, is, in fact, an attempt to flee from the cachot of death ("... je revins au camp après cette nuit passée à oublier ma condition d'homme"). At this point we find ourselves at the very threshold of the world of Les Conquérants and of La Condition humaine.

### 3.

Towards the end of the summer of 1923, Malraux left France for Indochina. He made two trips to the Far East. From the first he returned at the end of 1924. He embarked on his second journey in January 1925. This journey took him back to Indochina and also to China. He returned to France at the end of 1925.

Malraux' Asian experience is obviously important, if only for the reason that three out of his six novels have a Far Eastern background. But the years spent in Asia have a far deeper significance and importance for

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the evolution of Malraux. This contact with Chinese civilization acted as a precipitate, it helped him to clarify his own thought and to give it form. This, however, does not mean that the contact with Asia made Malraux think and feel in a radically different way than he felt and thought before. We know that Malraux' ideas had already taken their particular direction several years before his departure for Indochina. This meditation on Man and Civilization which finds its first expression in La Tentation de l'Occident, began in 1921, possibly even earlier since Vandegans sees traces of Malraux' philosophy in his farfelu writings. The importance then of Malraux' Asian experience lies in the fact that it helped him to crystallize his thought. Without this experience it is probable that he would have thought very much the same things, but perhaps in a different, less direct, less urgent manner. The Far Eastern experience enabled Malraux to live and not merely to think his ideas.

When Paul Valéry met Malraux for the first time, he asked him almost at once why he had gone to Asia. The question is clearly an important and a relevant one, and some attempt must be made to clarify the reasons (or possible reasons) for his action. Valéry's question should be divided into two questions: firstly, why did Malraux wish to leave Europe and, secondly, why go to Asia and not, say, to South America or, better still, to Africa?

There are, to begin with, the general personal reasons: Malraux' restlessness and his romantic urge for le dépaysement. But there are also more particular reasons at work, which Marcel Arland who was Malraux' closest friend during this period, attempts to elucidate. He sees in Malraux' departure from Europe, at least in part, a rejection of literature. In the prefatory note to the two fragments of Ecrit pour une idole à trompe Arland writes: "Dira-t-on qu'il renonce à la littérature? Pas même: lui qui est un des plus purs parmi les jeunes écrivains, il savait que la littérature ne pouvait pas le satisfaire; il la dédaigne sans grandes phrases, simplement parce que son angoisse ne peut plus se contenter de mots".<sup>(19)</sup> This is a significant statement and one which links Malraux to the moral climate of his

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time. For Malraux is also a very representative writer, and this rejection of literature is, as we have seen, one of the characteristics of this period.

But besides the personal reasons and those which he shares with his contemporaries, there were what might be called "philosophical" reasons which prompted Malraux to reject not merely literature, but the entire idea of Western European civilization which, he feels, is dead or moribund; and at the end of La Tentation de l'occident he describes Europe as a cemetery: "Europe, grand cimetière où ne dorment que des conquérants morts".

However, to say that Malraux rejects Europe is to simplify a very complex matter. Malraux has been "made" by Europe, however strongly he might feel la tentation de l'Orient. He stands in relation to Europe like a son stands in relation to his father, or a disciple to his master. He will rebel and revolt, but he will not be able to reject that which is almost physically part of him, his European cultural heritage. Like the prodigal son, he can leave his home in a state of rebellion, but he must return. In a paradoxical manner, Malraux' rebellion against Europe is born from an intense and genuine concern for Europe. But he feels at this stage, as Vandegans remarks so rightly, that he must see Europe from a distance: "L'une des causes du départ de Malraux est le besoin qu'il éprouve de mieux cerner l'Occidental, de prendre de ses problèmes une vue plus nette et un sentiment plus intense à partir d'un continent éloigné..."(20)

There remains, however the question: why did Malraux go to Asia? Here again, there are first of all obvious reasons. Malraux was interested in Asia and was familiar with its civilization. But there are other and deeper reasons. Malraux, at this stage of his evolution, finds himself in a position not unlike that of Camus' Caligula who wanted something which was not of this world. Malraux longed for something which was not of Europe. But it had to be something and not nothing. This ruled out Africa with its cultural vacuum, while America (both South and North) was ruled out because its old civilizations had been destroyed and had been absorbed by Europe. Asia alone had and still has a great and living civilization, but one which

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is radically different from that of Europe; it is this which fascinated and attracted Malraux.

Out of the Asian experience came Malraux' first important work, La Tentation de l'occident which, although he had started thinking about it in 1921\*, was in fact written in Asia. It was published in 1926 by Grasset. To this book should also be added a 20-page essay entitled D'une Jeunesse européenne, published in 1927 in Les Cahiers Verts (No.70). I shall not deal with this essay since it is merely a shortened restatement of the ideas contained in La Tentation.

The importance of La Tentation de l'occident cannot be exaggerated. Here for the first time we hear Malraux' true voice and we find present, albeit in a different and sometimes embryonic form, all the major themes of Malraux' later works. La Tentation is to the oeuvre of Malraux what the first part of Du côté de chez Swann is to A la recherche: a microcosm of his world. The whole of Malraux is already present in this early essays: ideas, episodes, scenes, images first appearing in La Tentation, will re-appear again and again in works written ten, twenty or more years later. A. D's analysis of eroticism ("Tout le jeu érotique est là: être soi-même et l'autre; éprouver ses sensations propres et imaginer celles du partenaire.") foreshadows already Perral's erotic relationship with his mistress Valérie: "Il s'imaginait elle, habitant son corps, éprouvant à sa place cette jouissance...". The analysis of the Greek apport to our civilisation ("mesurer toute chose à la durée et à l'intensité d'une vie humaine") finds its echo in the analysis of the terrorist Hong in Les Conquérants: "La seule chose que l'Occident lui eût enseigné avec assez de force pour qu'il lui fût impossible de s'en délivrer, c'était le caractère unique de la vie. Une seule vie, une seule vie...". Tchen's murder in La Condition humaine and its effects on him ("(Tchen) s'était jeté dans le monde du meurtre et n'en sortirait plus"), is already present in this reflection in La Tentation: "le meurtrier d'une vie ... peut se retrouver pénétré de son crime, ou du nouvel univers qu'il lui impose".

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\* The book is dated 1921-1925.

Ling's reflection: "Vous (he refers to occidental man) croyez qu'il y a dans l'homme quelque chose de permanent qui n'existe pas", will become one of the subjects of the Colloquium held at Altenburg in Les Noyers de l'Altenburg: "La notion d'homme a-t-elle un sens? (...) sous les croyances, les mythes ... peut-on isoler une donnée permanente ... sur quoi puisse se fonder la notion d'homme?" The statue of a "jeune homme aux yeux ouverts" in the Museum of the Acropolis, in which Ling sees "une allégorie du génie grec", re-appears some twenty years later in Les Noyers: "Vous connaissez la tête de jeune homme du Musée de l'Acropole? La première sculpture qui ait représenté un visage humain, libéré des monstres ... de la mort ... des dieux ...".

La Tentation then can in many ways be considered as a source book of Malraux' later thoughts and works. For Malraux, like a number of authors, Dostoievski, Conrad, St. Exupéry for instance, is an obsessive writer who works with a very limited set of ideas and insights, but which he explores and deepens in all his works, and to which he continually returns. So that Malraux, although he gains in depth and knowledge, does not really evolve between La Tentation and Les Noyers de l'Altenburg. There are, however, important differences in the accentuation of these ideas.

At the centre of La Tentation, for example, we find the Malravian notion of man's solitude, of his isolation. But at this stage, this is not yet seen as an integral part of the human condition as such, but a part of the condition of European man. Moreover, the notion of death and the awareness of life's absurdity have not yet clearly come to the fore. The idea of l'absurde does appear in La Tentation, but again only in a specifically European context.

L'homme passionné est en désaccord avec le monde qu'il a conçu, comme avec celui qu'il subit, et qu'il ait prévu la passion n'y saurait rien changer. L'homme qui veut aimer veut s'échapper, et cela est peu; mais l'homme ou la femme qui veulent être aimés, qui veulent faire perdre à un autre être, en leur faveur, sa soumission à cet accord me paraissent obéir à une nécessité si puissante que j'y trouve cette conviction: au centre de l'homme européen, dominant les grands mouvements de sa vie, est une absurdité essentielle. Ne le pensez-vous pas? (Malraux' italics)

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And again:

Il est au coeur du monde occidental un conflit sans espoir, sous quelque forme que nous le découvrons: celui de l'homme et de ce qu'il a créé. Conflit du penseur et de sa pensée, de l'Européen et de sa civilisation ou de sa réalité, conflit de notre conscience indifférenciée et de son expression dans le monde commun, par les moyens de ce monde, je le trouve sous chacun des sursauts du monde moderne. Noyant les faits et lui-même, il apprend à la conscience à disparaître et nous prépare aux royaumes métalliques de l'absurdité.

It is clear then that the central notions of Malraux' world: death and solitude, are only potentially present in La Tentation, but have not yet been crystallized.

But it is not only the ideas of La Tentation which are already so characteristically Malrauxian; the manner of writing, the style of thinking, the voice is already that of his later essays and that of the dialogues and of the analytical, reflective passages of his novels.

Ling in La Tentation, analysing for A.D. the differences between the occidental and the oriental ways of thinking, writes:

Ce qui vous arrête lorsque vous tentez de nous comprendre, c'est que pour nous, la pensée et l'émotion ne sont pas séparées. ... Connaître le monde n'est pas en faire un système, non plus que connaître l'amour n'est l'analyser. C'est en prendre une conscience intense. Notre pensée ..... n'est pas, comme la vôtre, le résultat d'une connaissance, mais l'armature, la préparation de cette connaissance. Vous analysez ce que vous avez éprouvé; nous pensons afin d'éprouver.

But in describing this Chinese way of thinking, Malraux has also given us a key to the working of his own intelligence and, consequently, also a key to his manner of writing.

Two things strike one in this analysis: the clear link between thought and emotion ("la pensée et l'émotion ne sont pas séparés") and the rejection of analytical thought. Now, Malraux tends to feel his ideas and hardly ever proceeds by logical argument: "c'est que l'idée loin d'être la conclusion d'un effort intellectuel désincarné, est la forme même de la passion". (21)

But the writer for whom "l'idée est la forme même de la passion" is essentially a poet, and this is what Malraux tends to be, always in his essays and sometimes in his novels; the former then should be read not as logical, methodical treatises, but as lyrical statements, as a series of poetic

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insights charged with intense emotion and supported by a great amount of erudition.

This manner of writing, however, is not without some drawbacks. Malraux' poetic prose has a marked tendency towards the oratorical and the oracular. And from time to time, Malraux seems to be carried away not by his own thought, but by the "sound" of his thought, and this leads him to write things which sound important and profound but which are, in fact, either obscure or even meaningless. The following two quotations, both from La Tentation, might illustrate this point:

- (i) Rome, lorsqu'on y a retrouvé les signes helléniques, n'est plus une tombe impériale, mais le lieu unique où la plus vaste pitié se réduit lentement à la force. Que l'individu s'exalte ou s'observe, les sept collines lui enseigneront à s'incliner. Peut-on mieux comprendre votre civilisation et son rythme qu'en écoutant le dialogue de la voix avide et de la voix hautaine qui s'élèvent de ces deux terres pleines de marbres brisés?
- (ii) Quelques jeunes hommes s'attachent à la transformation du monde qui se fait en eux. Elle leur donne la différence dont leur esprit a besoin pour vivre. Il devient son serviteur, et n'a plus d'autre action que de leur montrer les mouvements d'un monde sans attaches, que telle passion, tel geste ou telle pensée oblige à se plier, animal savant, selon des figures inconnues, les révélant ainsi; car la pensée, en devenant son propre objet, attaque le monde bien plus que la passion.

But this obscurity of Malraux' thinking and writing has other roots. In his essays, as well as in the philosophic-analytical passages of his novels, Malraux writes exactly as he talks. And Gide, in an unpublished article in the possession of M. Malraux, entitled André Malraux, l'aventure humaine, remarks on the link which exists between Malraux' writing and speaking.

"Malraux n'a pas, ne cherche pas le style lapidaire. Il écrit à plume abattue; et comme souvent dans sa conversation, on s'essouffle à le suivre. Et parfois sa phrase s'empêtre dans un trop abondant foisonnement d'image, de sensations, d'émotions et d'idées." And Malraux himself confesses: "Je n'écris pas pour m'embêter...". Anyone who knows Malraux, is aware that he likes nothing better than talking. However, he talks in a very particular way.\* He talks mainly for himself and therefore uses all sorts of short-cuts. He talks elliptically, in a kind of shorthand

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\* Janet Flanner's article on Malraux contains a remarkably accurate (and entertaining) description of a Malrauxian "conversation".

intelligible to himself, but sometimes rather obscure to others. André Gide in his Journal remarks about Malraux' manner of speaking: "André Malraux, de même que Valéry sa grande force est de se soucier très peu s'il essouffle ou lasse, ou 'sème' celui qui l'écoute et qui n'a guère d'autre souci... que de paraître suivre, plutôt que de suivre vraiment."<sup>(22)</sup> And this is what often happens to the reader of Malraux' essays.

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La Tentation de l'Occident consists of a series of eighteen (unnumbered) letters written by a Frenchman, A.D., who is visiting Asia and exploring the Chinese mind, and a Chinese, Ling, who is discovering Europe and its civilisation. It could be considered as a sort of philosophical Lettres persanes. Just as the oddities of Western social and political life are revealed to us through the virgin eyes and minds of Rica and Usbek, so is our European civilisation revealed to us through Ling's foreign Eastern mind.

This exchange of letters, however, has two peculiarities. First of all, the great majority of letters, 13 out of 18, are written by Ling. This would seem to indicate that, as we have already seen, Malraux is infinitely more interested in Europe which Ling is discovering and criticising than in Asia. Secondly, very few of the letters reply to one another. \* These facts have not escaped the attention of the critics. Claude-Edmonde Magny writes about La Tentation: "Ce livre si révélateur par le sujet et la technique même, puisqu'il fait dialoguer en des lettres dont jamais l'une ne répond à l'autre un occidental et un chinois".<sup>(24)</sup> This is an expression of "cette absolue impossibilité où sont les hommes de communiquer entre eux..." Joseph Hoffmann, on the other hand, writes: "La Tentation de l'Occident, ce dialogue de sourds, ces lettres qui se croisaient sans jamais se répondre: deux civilisations, deux univers incompréhensibles l'un pour l'autre."<sup>(25)</sup>

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\* It is therefore incorrect to say, as does Jean René Carduner that "La Tentation de l'Occident emprunte la forme d'un roman par lettres".<sup>(23)</sup>

Now both Claude-Edmonde Magny and Joseph Hoffmann are doubtless partly correct in their interpretation, but the prevalence of Ling's letters and the fact that the letters rarely answer one another might also have their roots in the personality of the author and in the very individual "speaking-manner" in which he writes. A conversation with Malraux is never (or rarely) an exchange of ideas, but ~~is~~ a monologue. Malraux does not need a person with whom to argue, he needs a listener. Gide talks rightly about "auditeurs-victimes". And even when this "auditeur-victime" interrupts, this interruption is either ignored or becomes the starting point of a new monologue. The structure of La Tentation follows a similar pattern; it is, in fact, a monologue by Ling/Malraux, interrupted occasionally by A.D.

There remains the question why this essay should have been written in letter form. It does give the book a kind of directness and liveliness. It also enables Malraux not to present a continuous, methodical argument of which his elliptic-poetic intelligence is, on the whole, incapable, but a series of insights and reflections on a great variety of subjects. For example, letter 4 deals with oriental and occidental attitudes towards death, 6 deals with the apport of Greek and Christian civilisation, 7 deals with love, 10 deals with art and music, etc.

However, all these various insights are in a way linked together by a central idea; they form not a continuous, but a fragmented argument. The title, however, gives little indication of the content of the essay and is moreover ambiguous. Does it signify that Asia is tempted by Europe or vice versa? It would seem the former; unfortunately, however, the only passage in which the term La Tentation de l'Occident occurs is rather obscure:

Le malaise européen, c'est celui que causent les découvertes à des âmes, hélas! de peu d'ingénuité. Vous connaissez la Conquête de la Nouvelle Espagne? Comme la voix de Sahagun, sous le vieux texte espagnol, semble vibrer gravement, lorsqu'il conte qu'à son entrée à Mexico, au Palais du roi, il visita 'des jardins qui ne ressemblaient à rien qui fut fait de la main des hommes, et, dans les salles basses, des collections de serpents et de nains tristes...'. La tristesse qui

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troublait le Père latin dans les yeux des nains des Indes Occidentales, nous l'avons retrouvée et vaincue dans les oeuvres antiques et dans les merveilles toscanes, puis dans ce Louvre où les tableaux réunis par Napoléon troublaient, par leur seule succession, les artistes les plus sûrs d'eux-mêmes. 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 présent et tout son passé, ses offrandes amoncelées de formes vivantes ou mortes et de méditations... Ce grand spectacle troublé qui commence, mon cher ami, c'est une des tentations de l'Occident.

The real subject of the essay to which the title does not refer, is a critique of European civilisation. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that it is a critique of individualism against which the European is beginning to revolt: "Les Européens sont las d'eux-mêmes, las de leur individualisme qui s'écroule, las de leur exaltation." This individualism, according to Malraux, has been the basis and the centre of our civilisation ever since the Greeks who "invented" it: it is they who first thought "de mesurer toute chose à la durée et de l'intensité d'une vie humaine". "Les Grecs ont conçu l'homme comme un homme, un être qui naît et qui meurt." Ever since Greece, the European mind cultivates that which is different, it is obsessed by the particular, by what Malraux, ten years later in his preface to Le Temps du mépris, called "le fanatisme de la différence". But this fanaticism the Chinese Ling, who is clearly Malraux' porte-parole, sees as something destructive. Discussing the influence of the West on the Chinese of his generation, Ling writes:

Comment exprimer l'état d'une âme qui se désagrège? Toutes les lettres que je reçois viennent de jeunes hommes aussi abandonnés que Wang-Loh ou que moi-même, dépouillés de leur culture, écoeurés de la vôtre... L'individu naît en eux, et avec lui cet étrange goût de la destruction et de l'anarchie.

In contrast to this individual-centred civilisation Malraux sets the Chinese, Confucian civilisation which is unable to see the individual as a separate entity;

Nous voulons ne pas prendre conscience de nous-mêmes en tant qu'individus. L'action de notre esprit est d'éprouver lucidement notre qualité fragmentaire et de tirer de cette sensation celle de l'univers, non comme vos savants reconstituent les animaux fossiles avec quelques ossements, mais plutôt comme nous voyons s'élever, à la lecture d'un nom sur une carte, des paysages inconnus rayés de lianes géantes; car la suprême beauté d'une civilisation affinée, c'est une attentive inculture du moi.

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The old Chinese sage Wang-Loh tells A.D.:

Qu'ont-ils (the Confucians) cherché pendant deux mille cinq cents ans? Une parfaite assimilation du monde par l'homme; car leur vie fut une lente capture du monde, dont ils voulaient être la conscience fragmentaire... La perfection vers laquelle ils tendirent, ce fut leur accord avec les forces dont ils avaient pris conscience, et aussi...

Je ne compris pas les mots qui suivirent. Je le lui dis. '... c'est ce qui s'oppose à ce que vous nommez l'individualisme.

Finally, in the important letter 13, the contrast between the Chinese and European civilisation and Weltanschauung is clearly established:

Entre l'esprit oriental et l'esprit occidental s'appliquant à penser, je crois saisir d'abord une différence de direction, je dirais presque de démarche. Celui-là veut dresser un plan de l'univers, en donner une image intelligible, c'est-à-dire établir entre des choses ignorées et des choses connues une suite de rapports susceptibles de faire connaître celles qui étaient jusque-là obscures. Il veut se soumettre le monde, et trouve dans son action une fierté d'autant plus grande qu'il croit le posséder davantage. Son univers est un mythe cohérent. L'esprit oriental, au contraire, n'accorde aucune valeur à l'homme en lui-même; il s'ingénie à trouver dans les mouvements du monde les pensées qui lui permettront de rompre les attaches humaines. L'un veut apporter le monde à l'homme, l'autre propose l'homme en offrande au monde...

And later on in the same letter Ling writes:

En face d'un monde dispersé, quel est le premier besoin de l'esprit? Le saisir. Nous ne pouvons le faire sur ses images, puisque nous sommes sensibles d'abord à ce qu'elles ont de transitoire; nous voulons le faire sur ses rythmes. Connaître le monde n'est pas en faire un système, non plus que connaître l'amour n'est l'analyser. C'est en prendre une conscience intense. Notre pensée (lorsqu'elle n'est pas au service de combats dogmatiques) n'est pas, comme la vôtre, le résultat d'une connaissance, mais l'armature, la préparation de cette connaissance. Vous analysez ce que vous avez éprouvé; nous pensons afin d'éprouver.

The last passage is clearly also a criticism of the European analytical mind which is contrasted with the Chinese mind which does not analyse, but feels at one with the world: "Nous avons tout naturellement le sentiment de l'univers comme vous avez celui de la patrie". And again: "Nous, Chinois, ne voulons concevoir notre vie que dans son ensemble. Non que nous puissions le connaître. Mais nous savons qu'il dépasse chacun de nos actes, et le doit dépasser."

Now La Tentation is not only the expression of Malraux' individual awareness and experience of Europe, it is also the characteristic expression of certain ideas and tendencies of the generation to which Malraux belongs.

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It clearly expresses what his friend Marcel Arland called "un nouveau mal du siècle" which is perhaps best described as the painful awareness of living in a world without centre and where it is no longer possible to hold any beliefs:

La connaissance que j'acquiers peu à peu des Européens me pousse à vous écrire ces mots, autant que votre lettre, qui m'en donne l'occasion. L'intensité que les idées créent en vous me semble aujourd'hui expliquer votre vie mieux qu'elles-mêmes. La réalité absolue a été pour vous Dieu, puis l'homme; mais l'homme est mort, après Dieu, et vous cherchez avec angoisse celui à qui vous pourriez confier son étrange héritage.

And the book ends on a similar note:

Pour détruire Dieu, et après l'avoir détruit, l'esprit européen a anéanti tout ce qui pouvait s'opposer à l'homme: parvenu en terme de ses efforts, comme Rancé devant le corps de sa maîtresse, il ne trouve que la mort. Avec son image enfin atteinte il découvre qu'il ne peut plus se passionner pour elle. Et jamais il ne fit d'aussi inquiétante découverte...

Il n'est pas d'idéal auquel nous puissions nous sacrifier, car de tous nous connaissons les mensonges, nous qui ne savons point ce qu'est la vérité. L'ombre terrestre qui s'allonge derrière les dieux de marbre suffit à nous écarter d'eux. De quelle étreinte l'homme s'est lié à lui-même! Patrie, justice, grandeur, vérité, laquelle de ses statues ne porte de telles traces de mains humaines qu'elle ne soulève en nous la même ironie triste que les vieux visages, autrefois aimés? Comprendre ne permet point toutes les démentes. Et, cependant, quels sacrifices, quels héroïsmes injustifiés dorment en nous.

At the root of this 'nouveau mal du siècle' lies a sort of nostalgia for a world (Thirteenth Century Europe?) where man could feel at one with himself and his world, where he could, like the Chinese, have "tout naturellement le sentiment de l'univers". This nostalgia for a lost paradise goes, I think, a long way to explain certain attitudes of Malraux and of some of the writers of his generation such as Saint Exupéry or Drieu la Rochelle. They all feel a desire to belong, to break the shell of isolation which the Nineteenth Century individualistic civilisation had spun around them. Malraux' rebellion against European individualism in La Tentation gives voice to a fairly widespread feeling which pushed him and some of his fellow writers to seek through communal action a link with other men. They wanted to strike root in a community of men linked together by a real purpose. Malraux' "Fraternité virile" as well as Saint Exupéry's feelings towards his comrades, all express a nostalgia for a form of communion.

NOTES.

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CHAPTER III

The first novels: "La Voie royale" and "Les Conquérants"

1.

Between 1928 and 1944, André Malraux has written six novels.

It is on these six novels, more than on his treatises on art, that Malraux' fame rests. And if anything of his work will remain, it will almost certainly be La Condition humaine and not Les Voix du silence. Yet, Malraux is not essentially a novelist; he has admitted as much himself. "J'ai écrit des romans, mais je ne suis pas romancier", he told Roger Stéphane in 1952\* in an interview.<sup>(1)</sup> This paradox of Malraux, the novelist, who is not a novelist should be elucidated.

Malraux' statement means, I think, two things. First of all, that he considers himself ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> to be a novelist like other novelists (Mauriac, Duhamel, Romain, etc.) and, secondly, that he is not primarily interested in novels, but in ideas.

Let us now look at the first of these two meanings. In a private letter (20th April 1929) to Eddy du Perron (of whom in his Anti-mémoires he says with simplicity: "C'est mon meilleur ami"), he writes:

Pour les critiques (je parle de ceux qui ne sont pas idiots de naissance) la vérité vraie est qu'ils aiment les romans et nous ne les aimons pas. Plus ça va et plus je me rends compte de notre indifférence foncière à l'égard de ce que les bonnes gens appellent 'l'art du roman'. Adrienne Mesurat est un chef-d'oeuvre, vous dit-on. C'est peu probable, mais si c'était vrai cela me ferait le même effet ... Il y a les gens qui ont quelque chose à exprimer et qui ne font jamais de chef-d'oeuvres (Montaigne, Pascal, Goya, les sculptures de Chartres) parce qu'on ne domine pas une passion qui attaque le monde; et il y a ceux qui 'font des objets'. Mais le critique au fond, c'est un homme qui aime 'les objets' et non l'expression des hommes. (Malraux' italics)

And in his preface to the French translation of Faulkner's Sanctuary: "Ce qui sépare Faulkner de Poe c'est la notion qu'ils ont l'un et l'autre de l'oeuvre d'art; plus exactement, c'est que l'oeuvre d'art existait pour Poe et primait la volonté d'expression - sans doute est-ce là qui provisoirement l'écarte le plus de nous. Il créait des objets." (Malraux' italics)

These statements are extremely revealing and show clearly how Malraux sees his novels: not as works of art (objets), but primarily as expressions, and it is clear that Malraux puts himself, together with Pascal

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\* The date when this statement was made might be significant since by that time Malraux had, in fact, ceased to write novels. Would he have said the same thing in 1933?

and Montaigne, amongst those people "qui ont quelque chose à dire et qui ne font jamais de chef-d'oeuvres". This indifference to the novel as work of art explains the, at times, chaotic composition of his novels and the off-hand carelessness of some of his writing: "Souvent", writes Gide, "trop souvent, il n'emploie pas les mots qu'il faudrait, et nombre de phrases restent si imparfaites, si ambiguës qu'on souhaiterait les récrire (...). Je pourrais citer maintes phrases d'une syntaxe indéfendable".(2)

The question now arises: to the expression of what is the work of art subordinated, and the answer is, in the case of Malraux, to the expression of ideas. During the debate held at the Union pour la Vérité Malraux declared: "Le romancier après le philosophe est devenu un homme qui propose, qu'il le veuille ou non, un certain nombre de modes de vie". In other words, the novelist has taken over from the philosopher. This dominance of Ideas over Art is clearly seen in what might be called Malraux' "circular evolution", in which the novels appear almost as a parenthesis.\* If we leave aside his youthful follies, Malraux' serious writings begin with two important essays, La Tentation de l'Occident and D'une Jeunesse européenne which, as we have seen, contain in a more or less developed form the ideas which we will find scattered in his novels and which will be concentrated and distilled in Les Voix du silence. It would appear that the domain of ideas is his true domain and that the essay is Malraux' natural form: he starts with the essay (a born, "natural" novelist would have started with a novel) and, when the novel-vein is exhausted, he quite naturally returns to the essay. There seems, however, to have existed between 1938 and 1945 a temptation to turn to the film as a kind of substitute for the novel. In 1938, he made L'Espoir and in 1945 he thinks of making a film about the Résistance. And how close this film would have been to his novels is shown by the scene he outlines to Roger Stéphane:

Je leur ferai des scènes de résistance, avec ces hommes étonnants qui traversèrent nus des marécages glacés, et qui les pieds gelés, le nez ou les couilles gelées, mais portant sur l'épaule leurs fusils-mitrailleurs et chantant le chant du maquis.(3)

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\* Malraux agreed with this idea when I put it to him during an interview in the spring of 1967.

However, Malraux resists the temptation of making films and, after Les Noyers de l'Altenburg, will only write essays. What made Malraux stop writing novels is a difficult question to answer. But a kind of disillusionment might well be at the root of this. In an interview with the present writer, Malraux said, perhaps a little wearily: "Comme technique narrative l'écriture n'existe plus".

An important question remains to be answered: if Malraux is not essentially a novelist, why did he write his novels? The answer to this question can only be speculative. I think two factors should be considered here. To begin with, there exists a certain order of ideas which are, strictly speaking, not ideas; they cannot readily be expressed in abstract terms since they are felt as well as thought. These ideas require a different kind of expression. Malraux' ideas are often of this order. While in his essays, from La Tentation to La Métamorphose des dieux, Malraux tells us what he thinks about Western civilisation, Christianity, art and the world, what he expresses in his novels is the affective quality of these ideas, a certain way of experiencing the world, of feeling life and ideas. In his preface to Faulkner we read something which is extremely revealing if we keep in mind Malraux' habit of writing about his own work when commenting on that of others:

Limitée à elle-même, l'intrigue serait de l'ordre du jeu d'échec - artistiquement nulle. Son importance vient de ce qu'elle est le moyen le plus efficace de traduire un fait éthique (....) dans toute son intensité. (My italics - C.J.G.)

The other factor which played a part in making Malraux a novelist is, no doubt, his intensely visual imagination which demanded an outlet and found this naturally in the novel.

If Malraux' ideas do not change much between La Tentation and his last treatises on art, one can nevertheless see an evolution in Malraux' novels. It is clear, first of all, that La Condition humaine is the culminating point of Malraux' work as a novelist. La Condition humaine is perhaps also the last novel Malraux should have written; the novels which follow seem to be born more from political circumstances than from an inner

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necessity. The novels that precede La Condition humaine should, I think, be seen as finger exercises: both La Voie royale and Les Conquérants develop, but in a fragmentary way, the themes which will find their final and definite form in La Condition humaine. One also finds sketches of certain characters who will receive a fuller treatment in La Condition humaine. Thus Hong, a little in the background in Les Conquérants, will become the tortured figure of Tchen, Renski, the clowning archeologist whom the narrator meets at Singapore<sup>re</sup>, is clearly a trial run for Clappique. There are, no doubt, also points of contact between Tchong-Dai and Gisors; both are sages, both are contemplative, but once again the treatment of Gisors is richer and fuller. La Voie royale could be considered as a thematic prelude to La Condition humaine. Both then are, in a way, preparations for the Great Novel. And that Malraux saw La Condition humaine as such is clearly shown in a letter of E. du Perron in which he tells his feeling on discovering that La Condition humaine was dedicated to him: "It gives me an odd feeling, because I know what enormous importance he attaches to the book: he told me he has for the first time the feeling to have written something about which he himself has no qualms, whatever the critics might say."<sup>(4)</sup> And the novel is indeed the fullest, the richest, the best worked-out of all those he had written and also of all those that will follow. With La Condition humaine Malraux had had his say as novelist. After this he begins to think seriously about his great work on the psychology of art. André Girard suggests a similar idea: "Le prestige de l'art ne cesse de grandir et celui de l'action de diminuer jusqu'au jour où le roman étant devenu impensable, Malraux se tourne vers d'autres moyens d'expression".<sup>(5)</sup> It is significant that La Psychologie de l'Art is dated 1935-1951.\*

However, if indeed Malraux turns away from the novel after La Condition humaine, how then are we to explain the existence of the other three novels which are published after 1933? I alluded earlier on to political circumstances. We know that with the coming to power of Hitler, together with

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\* The present writer remembers clearly an evening in April 1935 during which Malraux talked at length about his "new book", "La Psychologie de l'Art!"

the growing economic crisis, politics are going to exercise on French literary and cultural life, and more particularly on Malraux, a greater and greater pressure. The writing of Le Temps du mépris, a novel set in a German concentration camp, was not so much a creative as a political act. It is in fact a political pamphlet. Marius Richard, admittedly a political opponent of Malraux, writes quite rightly: "Je demeure persuadé que Malraux livré à sa seule sensibilité, à son imagination créatrice, eût fait plus humain ... (Le Temps du mépris) est fait, que Malraux m'en excuse, comme s'il avait été fait sur commande".<sup>(6)</sup> As for Malraux' own judgment on this novel, this seems, as its context indicates, to be a political as well as a literary judgment: "Je lui dis avoir fait lire ses livres aux communistes internés et que tous préférèrent Le Temps du mépris. - Naturellement c'est un navet."<sup>(7)</sup>

The culminating point of the politicised Nineteen-thirties, the great traumatic and emotional experience has been beyond doubt the Spanish Civil War. If this is true for most of those on the Left or the Right who lived through those years, it is even more true for those who, like Malraux, lived the war. The experience of this formidable, exalting, colourful and highly emotionally charged event had to find an expression, and an expression of a particular kind; and the result was that great, chaotic, hurried, lyrical, epic chunk of prose which is L'Espoir, but which is not really a novel. It is something of a different kind from La Condition humaine or Les Conquérants. To sum up then: my argument is that with La Condition humaine Malraux reached the peak of his development as a novelist and had intended to turn towards art, but that political events forced him, as it were, to write two more novels which, in a sense, he had not "planned" or intended to write. La Condition is present in embryo in Les Conquérants, but Le Temps du mépris is not present in La Condition humaine.

There remains the unique volume of La Lutte avec l'ange. Here the problem is slightly complicated in that we have not got the novel, but a fragment of a whole which was destroyed. Now, Les Noyers is a mixed bag of

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episodes, very loosely strung together, not in fact forming a whole, and with a very heavy dosage of ideas which are, at least many of them, those of La Psychologie de l'art. Les Noyers should, I think, be seen as a livre charnière, a farewell to the novel, in which Malraux empties the last crumbs of his novelist's bag, and the real beginning of La Psychologie de l'art whose elaboration had been interrupted.

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We have pointed out earlier that the originality of Malraux resided more in his ideas than in the form of his novels. This statement should now be qualified. Malraux' novels are, in fact, not like other novels; they have very marked and very original characteristics. Yet between the originality of Malraux' novels and those of the experimental writers of the Twenties such as Joyce or Gide or Woolf, there is a great and important difference. To begin with, these novelists, unlike Malraux, are essentially aesthetes (the great-grandsons of Flaubert). What they write and what Malraux refuses to write, are "des romans-objets". Behind the novels of Gide or Woolf lies the deliberate intention not to write according to the traditional cannon, there lies also an aesthetic conception of the novel. But no such intentions lie behind Malraux' novels; in fact Malraux' novels are conventional novels, but written in Malraux' own, very individual and very original way. It might even be said that this originality is not deliberate, and it is certainly not bolstered by any aesthetic ideas about the novel.\*

Malraux' originality has its roots in the intelligence and the personality of the writer. Now the most striking and, in this context, important characteristic of Malraux' intelligence is its essentially elliptic nature: "Mes propos sont élliptiques", Malraux remarked to

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\* It is possible to extract from Malraux' prefaces, lectures etc. an aesthetic theory (cf. Charles F. Roedig, Malraux on the novel, Yale French Studies, No.18, 1957). But this does not form a declaration of intentions such as we find in Gide's Journal des faux-monnayeurs or in Virginia Woolf's Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown.

Roger Stéphane. This elliptic turn of mind will manifest itself with great constancy and on a great number of levels. It will, I think, determine the shape of his novels, the nature of his style; in brief, his originality.

Two elements which seem to be part and parcel of the traditional novel, are absent from Malraux' novels: a continuous plot and a careful setting of the action by means of description.\* The absence of these traditional features is clearly linked to Malraux' elliptic mind. The elliptic mind which in Malraux' case is also an impatient one, cannot conduct a continuous and chronological narrative (just as it is incapable of conducting a continuous argument). Instead, it seizes on dramatically effective, but disconnected scenes (or on disconnected insights which find their formulation in aphoristic formulae). In narrative, this kind of intelligence goes immediately beyond and behind the "story" or the setting to what is essential. Hence the abrupt openings of Malraux' novels, where all preliminaries have been dispensed with, and of which the famous "Tchen tentera-t-il de lever le moustiquaire" is, no doubt, the best known and dramatically the most impressive.

Just as the elliptic mind cannot tell a story, it cannot either give an analytical, systematic description but will, as Malraux does, make an abrupt synthesis by grasping in one movement a great number of elements; for example:

Linoléum, murs blanchis à la chaux, large ventilateur, odeur de médicaments, d'éther surtout. La moustiquaire est à demi relevée: Garine semble couché dans un lit à rideaux de tulle. Je m'assieds à son chevet. L'osier du fauteuil glisse sous mes mains moites. Mon corps fatigué se libère; dehors, les éternels moustiques bourdonnent... Une palme descend du toit, rigide, silhouette de métal sur la nuit molle et sans formes. L'odeur de la décomposition et celle des fleurs sucrées du jardin montent ensemble de la terre, entrent avec l'air tiède, traversées parfois par une autre: eau croupie, goudron et fer. Au loin, la grêle des mah-jonggs, des cris chinois, des klaxons, des pétards; lorsque arrive, comme d'une mare, le vent du fleuve et que nous nous taisons, nous entendons un violon monocorde: quelque théâtre ambulant, ou quelque artisan qui joue, dormant à demi dans sa boutique close de planches. Une lumière rousse, fumée, monte derrière les arbres; on dirait que là-bas s'achève quelque immense fête foraine: la ville.

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\* cf. R.M. Albérès, André Malraux and the 'abridged abyss', Vale French Studies, No. 18, 1957.

We see clearly from this example how far removed we are from the meticulous, analytical descriptions en trompe-l'oeil of Balzac (The Pension Vauquer) or of Flaubert (the arrival of the wedding guests in Madame Bovary). Behind these fragmented and somewhat abrupt descriptions we find, however, not only Malraux' naturally elliptic manner of seeing and writing but also, I think, the literary parti-pris not to be literary and to be "modern". These descriptions are, because of this, very much period pieces. Yet, it must be added, not all Malraux' descriptions are of this synthetic, modernistic, a-literary kind; he can also be very and rather self-consciously "literary" in a very traditional manner, as in this description of Hong Kong:

Au-dessus, la masse du rocher fameux, puissante, d'un noir compact à la base, monte en se dégradant dans le ciel, et finit par arrondir au milieu des étoiles sa double bosse asiatique entourée d'une brume légère. Ce n'est pas une silhouette, une surface de papier découpé, mais une chose solide et profonde comme une matière vraie, comme une terre noire. Une ligne de globes (une route?) ceint la plus haute des deux bosses, le Pic, comme un collier. Des maisons, on ne voit qu'un semis de lumières incroyablement serrées, presque mêlées au-dessus du profil tremblant des restaurants chinois, et qui se désagrège, comme le noir du roc, à mesure qu'il s'élève, pour aller se perdre là-haut dans les étoiles éclatantes et lourdes. Dans la baie, très nombreux, des grands paquebots dorment, illuminés, avec leurs étages de hublots, dont les reflets en zigzag se mêlent dans l'eau encore chaude à ceux de la ville. Toutes ces lumières dans la mer et dans le ciel de Chine, ne font pas songer à la force des Blancs qui les ont créées, mais à un spectacle polynésien, à l'une de ces fêtes dans lesquelles les dieux peints sont honorés par de grandes libérations de lucioles lancées dans la nuit des îles comme des graines....

Finally, the cinematic nature of Malraux' novels which is so distinctive a characteristic, seems less due to an actual influence of a cinematic vision or optique than to the elliptic nature of the film which corresponds so exactly to Malraux' own turn of mind.\* This statement needs to be qualified. The novels of André Malraux are made up, like a film, by a series of separate sequences; the "conjunctive tissue" which in a traditional novel would link these scenes, has been suppressed. Thus we have in La Condition humaine: sequence 1: Tchen's murder; sequence 2: Tchen meeting Kyo and Katow at Hemmelrich's shop; sequence 3: Kyo and Katow doing the rounds of the "groupes de combat", etc. However, in individual

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\* Malraux writes in the preface of Indochine SOS: "Le cinéma est un art d'ellipse remplaçant cet art de la métaphore qu'est la littérature".

sequences, in the manner in which certain scenes are framed, one can also detect a deliberate attempt to transfer a cinematic optique into the novel.

For example:

La porte refermée fit osciller la lampe: les visages disparurent, reparurent: à gauche, tout rond, Lou-You-Shuen; la tête de boxeur crevé d'Hemmelrich, tondu, nez cassé, épaules creusées. En arrière, dans l'ombre, Katow. A droite, Kyo Gisors; en passant au-dessus de sa tête, la lampe marque fortement les coins tombants de sa bouche d'estampe japonaise; en s'éloignant elle déplaça les ombres et ce visage métis parut presque européen. Les oscillations de la lampe devinrent de plus en plus courtes: les deux visages de Kyo reparurent tour à tour, de moins en moins différents l'un de l'autre.

or:

Dix minutes après avoir quitté Kyo, Katow, ayant traversé des couloirs, dépassé des guichets, était arrivé à une pièce blanche, nue, bien éclairée par des lampes-tempête. Pas de fenêtre. Sous les bras du Chinois qui lui ouvrit la porte, cinq têtes penchées sur la table mais le regard sur lui, sur la haute silhouette connue de tous groupes de choc; jambes écartées, bras ballants, vareuse non boutonnée du haut, nez en l'air, cheveux mal peignés. Ils maniaient des grenades de différents modèles. C'était un tchon - une des organisations de combat communistes que Kyo et lui avaient créées à Shanghai.

But, however much we might have here an attempt to adapt a cinematic vision to the novel, this might not necessarily be due to an actual influence of the film; it must not be forgotten that Malraux' talent as a novelist is essentially a visual one. When Picon considers Malraux' novels as "choses vues", he is of course partly right. Malraux might not have actually lived or seen what he describes, but it has been seen by his imagination with extraordinary clarity and intensity, which is retained intact by his tense and abrupt manner of writing. He sees the revolt at Shanghai with directness and immediacy as if he had been there. Hence the tenacious misunderstanding that Malraux' novels are in fact reportages.\*

If the shape then of Malraux' novels, their tone and style, as we have seen, are to a great extent born less from a deliberate attempt to renew the novel than from Malraux' particular turn of mind, there is one very characteristic element of his novels which is born, if not from a theory, at least from an intellectual conviction, and that is the almost total absence of any psychology in his novels. We meet here, no doubt,

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\* In their technique Malraux' novels often are like reportages because, significantly, Malraux sees the reportage-technique as elliptic: "Si l'objet de l'art est de détruire l'objet, le reporter est battu; mais si l'objet peut être le rapprochement elliptique non de deux mots, mais de deux faits, cinéaste et reporter retrouvent leur force, et c'est la même." (Préface, Indochine SOS).

again his disdain and indifference to the novels as object, but something more than that as well.

In the preface of Le Temps du mépris he writes: "Les antagonismes individuels qui permettaient au romans leur complexité n'y figurent pas". What he says of Le Temps du mépris is, with the reservations we shall make later, equally true of all his novels. With this statement it would seem clear that Malraux intends to write a new kind of novel which will take the place of the traditional psychological novel. The use of the past tense ("permettaient") in the above quotation is significant.

Now behind the refusal to write a conventional psychological novel we find the important Malrauxian conviction that psychological knowledge is, in fact, useless. Thirard in Les Noyers de l'Altenburg says: "Quant à la psychologie elle enseigne la vie, ma foi, comme les tableaux de bataille à devenir général, ou les marines à naviguer". What is more, psychological knowledge is impossible. During the debate at the Union pour la vérité Malraux declared: "Nous entendons notre voix avec la gorge, et la voix des autres avec les oreilles, sur un plan plus grave, nous prenons conscience des autres hommes par des moyens qui ne sont pas ceux par lesquels nous prenons conscience de nous-mêmes". If this is so, "the other" will always remain outside our reach, he will for ever remain utterly ununderstandable. In fact, we cannot ever know another person: "Le temps seul", says Gisors to Ferral, "fait disparaître parfois cette angoisse, le temps seul. On ne connaît jamais un être, mais on cesse parfois de sentir qu'on l'ignore." Thus it is only with time and love (charity, adds Thirard in Les Noyers) that a person ceases to be the mere addition of the facts of his (or her) life. "Pour Kyo seul, elle (May) était autre chose que sa biographie", and Ferral believes "qu'aucun être humain ne s'explique par sa vie". The point then is that the real person behind his actions remains unknown and unknowable; all we can know are his actions, his biography, the facts of his life which, however, tell us nothing.

For a novelist who takes such an attitude, the consequences will be

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far-reaching. He will no longer be able to write, what a novel had always been, a biography of the main character, since that biography is a mere facade which does not reveal anything about the person who lived this biography. This will also help Malraux to free himself of the need to tell a continuous story. Moreover it explains the curious isolation of Malraux' characters. They have no background, no parents, no biography and seem to have lived no life before the brief moment which is shown in the novel. This psychological vacuum of Malraux' characters leads to this curious characteristic of his novels which Ilya Ehrenbourg noted: "l'auteur indique avec une insistance insolite quelle prononciation chacun donne aux sons".<sup>(8)</sup> Thus Katow "parlait français presque sans accent, mais en avalant un certain nombre de voyelles" ("Ça n'a pas dû aller t't seul"). Tchen "parlait français avec une accentuation de gorge sur les mots d'une seule syllabe nasale" ("Nong"). And we have Clappique's speech idiosyncrasies which are carefully recorded: "Magnifique, cette petite ma-gni-fi-que (....) perspicacité rre-mar-qua-ble". The reason for these carefully noted "tics" of language is, at least in part, to give some kind of individuality to characters who have no individual psychological traits; they are, as it were, used as tags, as means of identification.

The absence of psychology in Malraux' novels stems also from another factor. If for Malraux the novel is "l'expression privilégiée du tragique de la vie", if his novels are an attempt to create a tragic novel with tragic heroes, he can and indeed must, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, dispense with psychological analysis. Of this Malraux seems clearly aware himself; when talking about Garine during the debate on Les Conquérants, he says: "Il est certain que la création de Garine est pour moi une création de héros (au sens où le héros s'oppose au personnage)." The contrast which Malraux makes here in his elliptic manner is, I think, between the héros de la tragédie and the personnage de roman.

At the same time a novel, since it deals with people in relation to events and to other people cannot wholly be devoid of psychological

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content. So psychology does come into Malraux' novels, but, as it were, indirectly; it is not shown, but it is talked about. Whatever psychological analysis does exist, always exists in the form of dialogue. So that it is the characters themselves (not the author) who provide psychological insight as, for instance, in this passage from La Voie royale, where the motives behind the actions of Grabot are being analysed:

Je voudrais savoir contre quoi il se défend... c'est avec ses vieux rêves, avec sa déchéance que l'on chauffe ses passions...

- Reste à savoir lesquelles

- Je vous ai parlé d'un homme qui se faisait attacher, nu, par des femmes, à Bangkok... C'était lui. Ce n'est pas tellement plus absurde que de prétendre coucher et vivre - et vivre - avec une autre créature humaine... Mais lui en est atrocement humilié...

- De ce qu'on le sache?

- On ne le sait pas. De le faire. Alors, il compense. C'est sans doute pour cela surtout qu'il est venu ici... Le courage compense... Et pour que les petites hontes ne pèsent pas lourd, il suffit même de ceci...

And we find the same kind of analysis in this passage from La Condition where Ferral and Gisors are talking:

Connaître par l'intelligence, c'est la tentation vaine de se passer du temps...

- La fonction de l'intelligence n'est pas de se passer des choses.

Gisors le regarda:

- Qu'entendez-vous par: l'intelligence?

- En général?

- Oui.

Ferral réfléchit.

- La possession des moyens de contraindre les choses ou les hommes.

Gisors sourit imperceptiblement. Chaque fois qu'il posait cette question, son interlocuteur, quel qu'il fût, répondait par le portrait de son désir, ou par l'image qu'il se faisait de lui-même. Mais le regard de Ferral devint soudain plus intense.

## 2.

Although the publication of Les Conquérants (1928) precedes that of La Voie royale (1930), there is some justification for discussing La Voie royale before Les Conquérants. In his very complete La Jeunesse littéraire d'André Malraux, André Vandegans writes: "La conception et même l'ébauche de La Voie royale sont antérieures, on le sait maintenant, à l'élaboration des Conquérants", and he adds this footnote: "A. Mauriac nous a confirmé ce renseignement, qu'il tient de l'auteur lui même".<sup>(9)</sup>

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Moreover the novel in many ways bears the stamp of a first work.

Because of lack of experience and lack of confidence in his creative imagination, a young novelist will more often than not draw on his own life for his first novel. And La Voie royale is the most autobiographical novel of Malraux with the exception of Les Noyers de l'Altenburg with which La Voie royale has clear links. The first part of the novel follows closely Malraux' own adventures in Indochina in 1923. What is more, Claude Vannec's family background which we will find back almost unchanged in Les Noyers\* is clearly based on Malraux' own background in Les Antimémoires.

He writes :

Ce suicide est celui de mon père, ce grand-père est le mien, transfiguré sans doute par le folklore familial. C'était un armateur dont j'ai pris des traits plus ressemblants pour le grand-père du héros de La Voie royale et d'abord, sa mort de vieux Viking. Bien qu'il fût plus fier de son brevet de maître-tonnelier que de sa flotte, déjà presque toute perdue en mer, il tenait à maintenir les rites de sa jeunesse, et s'était ouvert le crâne d'un coup de hache à deux tranchants, en achevant symboliquement, selon la tradition, la figure de proue de son dernier bateau. Ce Flamand de Dunkerque est devenu Alsacien parce que la première attaque allemande par les gaz eut lieu sur la Vistule, et qu'elle m'imposait un personnage qui servit en 1914 dans l'armée allemande. Ces hangars où les clowns passent entre les troncs des grands sapins, ce sont les hangars où séchaient les voiles; la forêt a pris la place de la mer.

La Voie royale is also of all the novels of Malraux the one which in its form is closest to the traditional novel, as if Malraux had not yet found his own form and his own voice. This would explain why the critics, while remaining blind to the thematic originality, saw in it merely un roman d'aventures or un roman exotique. This it was of course. But it was not merely an exotic adventure story.

Finally La Voie royale is the only novel of Malraux which shows obvious signs of an influence, that of Joseph Conrad's The Heart of Darkness. Not only the setting, the oppressive forest which holds the heroes imprisoned, but also the plots of the two novels are similar. More particularly, in the second part of La Voie royale the search for Grabot is almost a carbon copy of the search of The Heart of Darkness' narrator for Kurtz.

It would seem then that in spite of the fact that La Voie royale

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\* Both Claude Vannec's grandfather in La Voie royale and Walter Berger in Les Noyers are lone wolves, formidable patriarchs. Both live in huge half-deserted houses. Both are non-conformist (they both receive a circus in their courtyard). They sometimes even make the same pronouncement, e.g.: "On ne change pas de religion à mon âge", etc.

was written after Les Conquérants, it belongs nevertheless to an earlier period and to an earlier inspiration.

Let us now turn to the novel itself. It is in many ways, and especially as far as its content is concerned, a more purely Malravian novel than any of the others, and it contains perhaps the purest statement of the Malravian ethos. Thomas Cordle is correct when he writes:

One might easily and reasonably say that what we are reading is the effort of a talented juvenile to project into a novel certain feelings he holds about man and life, but with no notion of how to lend them an air of plausible reality. Such a critique becomes doubtful when The Royal way is 'placed' in Malraux' work. Neither The Conquerors (...) nor Man's fate (...) exhibits quite the same remoteness from the passions and struggles of ordinary men. The force of Malraux' myth is discernible in both these novels, but it is attenuated by a recognition of human ills more pressing and specific than the obsession with death and ambitions, more coherent than of leaving a scar on the map. The myth is there, it simply does not appear in its naked glory as it does in The Royal way. (10)

Moreover Perken, the hero of the novel, is the purest incarnation of the Malravian adventurer: absolutely alone, involved in a solitary and gratuitous action which eventually proves to be in vain. He is in his total solitude very different from Garine, also an adventurer, but who is engagé. Garine's relationships with the revolution and the Communist Party might be loose and ambiguous; he is nevertheless linked to a collective action, however distinct this action might be from him. Defining, during the debate at L'Union pour la Vérité, the notion of aventurier, Malraux said:

L'aventurier est évidemment hors la loi: l'erreur c'est de croire qu'il est hors la loi écrite, hors la convention. Il est opposé à la société dans la mesure où celle-ci est la forme de la vie (...). L'aventure commence au dépaysement au travers duquel l'aventurier finira fou, roi ou solitaire.

Now, in La Voie royale, Perken is shown as outside all conventions and he is physically outside society; the exotic dépaysement of the novel makes this clear, and he is surrounded by a hostile body of men, the Moïs. Perken then is profoundly alienated. He is physically and morally heimatlos and belongs nowhere. And, significantly, he was born in a kind of no-man's land: in Schleswig which is both German and Danish. "Allemand ou Danois?

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Danois à cause de la rétrocession du Schleswig imposée par le Traité de Versailles", which means that he is both and neither.\* Perken, alienated, dreams of his kingdom, wants to be a king and dies in utter solitude: ("Il y a moi... moi... qui vais mourir").

La Voie royale is divided into four parts which correspond to the four movements of the action. In the first part which opens with characteristic abruptness, we see the meeting, on board an east-bound steamer, of Claude Vannec, whose background is briefly sketched, with Perken. Vannec is going to Indo-China as an archaeologist in order to discover certain "temples inconnus des Européens" and with the intention of robbing their art treasures. Perken is going to Indo-China to join his "kingdom" and to find one of his old companions, Grabot. Claude and Perken then decide to join forces. The second part deals with their travels through the jungle, the discovery and the robbing of the temples. In the third part, after having been deserted by their guides, Perken and Claude set out alone, through the territory of the hostile Moï in search of Grabot whom they find, blinded and enslaved, in a Moï village. After negotiating Grabot's release, the three of them set off. Perken who has been mortally wounded, decides to join "his" territory. The fourth part deals with Perken's last conflicts with the local chiefs. Eventually Perken dies and Claude returns to France. This then is the framework to which Malraux adds another kind of adventure, a metaphysical one.

The most striking characteristic of La Voie royale is the obsessive presence of death which surrounds the action of the novel. But death here is not shown as the exalted, heroic or violent thing we shall meet in the later novels, but as a passive and oppressive power.

If we leave aside the first part which serves mainly as an

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\* It is perhaps worth noting that Vincent Berger in Les Noyers, being an Alsatian, finds himself in a similar position. Vincent fights on the side of the Germans in the 1914-18 war; in 1939 his son, the narrator, is in the French army. Garine's national identity is equally ambiguous and, significantly perhaps, so is the spelling of his name. The police report which the narrator of Les Conquérants reads, says this: "Pierre Garin, dit Garine, ou Harine. Né à Genève, de Maurice Garin, sujet suisse, et de Sophia Alexandrovna Miski, russe". Similarly, Tchen is half-Japanese, half Chinese, Kyo was brought up in Japan, May is German-born in Shanghai. The adventurers like Perken and the tragic heroes like Tchen belong nowhere. Where was King Lear born?

exposition in which we meet the main characters and to introduce the action, the second part opens with this significant description of the forest:

Depuis quatre jours, la forêt.

Depuis quatre jours, campements près des villages nés d'elle comme leurs bouddhas de bois, comme le chaume de palmes de leurs huttes sorties du sol mou en monstrueux insectes; décomposition de l'esprit dans cette lumière d'aquarium, d'une épaisseur d'eau. Ils avaient rencontré déjà des petits monuments écrasés, aux pierres si serrées par les racines qui les fixaient au sol comme des pattes qu'ils ne semblaient plus avoir été élevés par des hommes mais par des êtres disparus habitués à cette vie sans horizon, à ces ténèbres marines. Décomposée par les siècles, la Voie ne montrait sa présence que par ces masses minérales pourries, avec les deux yeux de quelque crapaud immobile dans un angle des pierres. Promesses ou refus, ces monuments abandonnés par la forêt comme des squelettes? La caravane allait-elle enfin atteindre le temple sculpté vers quoi la guidait l'adolescent qui fumait sans discontinuer les cigarettes de Perken? Ils auraient dû être arrivés depuis trois heures... La forêt et la chaleur étaient pourtant plus fortes que l'inquiétude! Claude semblait comme dans une maladie dans cette fermentation où les formes se gonflaient, s'allongeaient, pourrissaient hors du monde dans lequel l'homme compte, qui le séparait de lui-même avec la force de l'obscurité. Et partout, les insectes.

It is obvious that this is the world of death in which the heroes are imprisoned, and the accent is clearly put on the notion of decay. The key words and phrases are: "décomposition", "décomposée par les siècles", masses minérales pourries", "monuments abandonnés comme des squelettes", "cette fermentation, où les formes (...) pourrissaient".

In the third part of the novel, death is embodied in the hostile Moïs with their lethal fléchettes de guerre, and the fact that these are being planted and not thrown again suggests an idea of passivity and not of action. It is significant that Perken will meet his death through one of these fléchettes. In the fourth part, death is present in a more direct way, yet again in the form of decay, through Perken's gangrenous leg <sup>high</sup> of which eventually he will die.

Moreover, what urges both protagonists to their desperately dangerous actions is also their intense awareness of death. Let us first of all look at Claude's motivation. Perken had asked him the key question: "qu'attendez-vous de votre vie?"

La question de Perken demeurait avec lui, tel un autre prisonnier. Et son objection. Non, il n'y avait pas tant de manières de gagner sa liberté! (...) Alors? Aucune envie de vendre des autos, des valeurs ou des discours; (...) ni de construire des ponts (...). Pourquoi

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travaillaient-ils, eux? Pour gagner en considération. Il haïssait cette considération qu'ils recherchaient. La soumission à l'ordre de l'homme sans enfants et sans dieu est la plus profonde des soumissions à la mort; donc, chercher ses armes où ne les cherchent pas les autres: ce que doit exiger d'abord de lui-même celui qui se sait séparé, c'est le courage. (....) L'austère domination dont il venait de parler à Perken, celle de la mort, se répercutait en lui avec le battement du sang à ses tempes, aussi impérieuse que le besoin sexuel. Etre tué, disparaître, peu lui importait: il ne tenait guère à lui-même, et il aurait ainsi trouvé son combat, à défaut de victoire. Mais accepter vivant la vanité de son existence comme un cancer, vivre avec cette tiédeur de mort dans la main ... (D'où montait, sinon d'elle, cette exigence de choses éternelles, si lourdement imprégnée de son odeur de chair?) Qu'était ce besoin d'inconnu, cette destruction provisoire des rapports de prisonnier à maître, que ceux qui ne la connaissent pas nomment aventure, sinon sa défense contre elle? Défense d'aveugle, qui voulait la conquérir pour en faire un enjeu...

Posséder plus que lui-même, échapper à la vie de poussière des hommes qu'il voyait chaque jour...

Claude Vannec emerges from this passage as a young bourgeois in rebellion against the ethos of his class\*, whose revolt has clear Nietzschean overtones ("Posséder plus que lui-même...") which we shall find back in Tchen. But what is also clear is that the awareness of his death is the mainspring of his actions. Now, in perfect accord with the visual representations of death in this novel, Claude sees it not as something, but as a process of decay. And the theme of ageing is very present in La Voie royale. There is Claude's mother: "Une femme abandonnée, obsédée par son âge jusqu'à la torture certaine de sa déchéance (that key word of La Voie royale) et qui considérait sa vie avec une indifférence désespérée". When Perken talks about himself and of what makes him act, the almost symbolic image of the ageing mother is again evoked in the significant context of decomposition:

L'odeur de décomposition des étangs enveloppait Claude, qui revit sa mère errer à travers l'hôtel de son grand-père: presque cachée dans la pénombre, à l'exception de la crosse de ses lourds cheveux où se plaquait le jour, regardant avec épouvante, dans le petit miroir orné d'un galion romantique, l'affaissement des coins de sa bouche et le grossissement de son nez, massant ses paupières avec un geste d'aveugle..."

Perken is motivated by a similar obsession with time and with growing old

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\* "Le bourgeois se définirait essentiellement comme l'homme d'un certain mode de pensée, lié à une éthique particulière. Pense en bourgeois tout homme qui met au premier plan les valeurs de considération". (Malraux at the debate at L'Union pour la Vérité.)

which he expresses in almost the same terms as Claude:

La mort est là, comprenez-vous, comme... comme l'irréfutable preuve de l'absurdité de la vie...

- Pour chacun.

- Pour personne! Elle n'existe pour personne. Bien peu pourraient vivre... Tous pensent au fait de... ah! comment vous faire comprendre?... d'être tué, voilà. Ce qui n'a aucune importance. La mort c'est autre chose: c'est le contraire. Vous êtes trop jeune. Je l'ai comprise d'abord en voyant vieillir une femme que ... enfin une femme. (...) Ensuite, comme si cet avertissement ne suffisait pas, quand je me suis trouvé impuissant pour la première fois...

Paroles arrachées, n'arrivant à la surface qu'en rompant mille racines tenaces. Il continuait:

Jamais devant un mort. Vieillir, voilà, vieillir. Surtout lorsqu'on est séparé des autres. La déchéance. Ce qui pèse sur moi c'est - comment dire? ma condition d'homme: que je vieillisse, que cette chose atroce: le temps, se développe en moi comme un cancer, irrévocablement.. Le temps, voilà.

Toutes ces saletés d'insectes vont vers notre photophore, soumis à la lumière. Ces termites vivent dans leur termitière, soumis à leur termitière. Je ne veux pas être soumis.

Now this similarity of preoccupation, of motivation and even, at times, of expression, draws our attention to the fact that Claude and Perken are not clearly differentiated as characters except, perhaps, by the purely external fact that Perken is older than Claude. They both exist and live by virtue of Malraux' intensity and their ideas are being informed by Malraux' intelligence. In fact, one cannot escape from the impression that of all the novels La Voie royale is the most personal, the one in which Malraux himself is most involved, in which he is most intensely present. The fact that it is Malraux' most autobiographical novel might in this respect be significant. One feels in La Voie royale a lack of distance, and the obsessions and fears of Claude and Perken with all their intensity are, I think, very close to Malraux' own preoccupations at that time. There is some proof of this. Julien Green notes in his diary (27 March 1927): "Malraux déclare redouter non la mort, mais la cinquantaine et l'impuissance sexuelle qui est signe de mort".<sup>(11)</sup> This finds its echo in the passage quoted above.

And in talking about the Indochinese period which she shared with him, Madame Clara Malraux told me: "Pendant un an André et moi nous avons été littéralement obsédés par la mort. On ne pensait qu'à cela".

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This lack of distance, this involvement of the author in his novel is clearly the fact of a novelist who is both inexperienced and young.\* And Malraux himself called Les Conquérants "ce livre d'adolescent" in the Postface of the édition définitive. This description could with equal, if not more, justice be applied to La Voie royale. The obsession with death and destiny in the particular way they are reflected in La Voie royale is also that of a very young man for whom growing old is the worst fate and who rebels against the idea of becoming something or somebody, of being fixed in life.

For the fear of an inexorable destiny is another driving force behind Perken's action:

Vous ne savez pas ce que c'est que le destin limité, irréfutable, qui tombe sur vous comme un règlement sur un prisonnier: la certitude que vous serez cela et pas autre chose, que vous aurez été cela et pas autre chose, que ce que vous n'avez pas eu, vous ne l'aurez jamais. Et derrière soi, tous ses espoirs, ses espoirs qu'on a dans la peau comme on n'aura jamais aucun être vivant...

It is in order to defend himself against both death and destiny that Perken has founded his kingdom. What he wants is:

Exister dans un grand nombre d'hommes, et peut-être pour longtemps. Je veux laisser une cicatrice sur cette carte. Puisque je dois jouer contre la mort, j'aime mieux jouer avec vingt tribus qu'avec un enfant... Je voulais cela comme mon père voulait la propriété de son voisin, comme je veux des femmes.

But, like everything else in this novel, Perken's kingdom is doomed and decaying: "Mon projet aussi est pourri. Je n'ai plus le temps". Time once more is the destroyer.

However, what Perken wants perhaps more than to exist in a great number of men, more than to leave a scar on the map is, paradoxically, his own death, and this Claude sees clearly: "Ce qu'il veut, ce qu'il veut c'est s'annéantir".\*\* Yet suicide does not interest him; what he wants is

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\* If we accept with Vandegans that the conception and ébauche of La Voie royale dates from 1925-1926 (cf. op.cit. p.255), Malraux was then 24 or 25 years old.

\*\* Malraux himself in his interview with André Rousseaux said about Perken: "(l'aventurier) se fuit lui-même, c.à.d. qu'il fuit la hantise de la mort en même temps qu'il court vers elle". (12)

to get killed. Here lies the meaning of Perken leaving the hut where he, Claude and Grabot are kept prisoner, and walking alone towards the armed and hostile Moïs. This is the climax of the novel, a moment of extraordinarily heightened tension. Perken is walking to meet his death:

Sa main vide maintenant se fermait, molle, aussi légère qu'une main de malade, comme s'il eût encore cherché une arme; et soudain, son regard rencontrant la cime des arbres où s'étendait longuement la dernière rougeur du soleil, tandis qu'au ras de terre l'immobile agitation continuait, la passion de cette liberté qui allait l'abandonner l'envahit jusqu'au délire. Au bord de l'atroce métamorphose qui l'obsédait, il se raccrochait à lui-même, les mains crispées s'enfonçant dans la chair des cuisses, les yeux trop petits pour l'invasion de toutes les choses visibles, la peau comme un nerf. Jeté sexuellement sur cette liberté à l'agonie, soulevé par une volonté forcenée se possédant elle-même devant cette imminente destruction, il s'enfonçait dans la mort même, le regard fixé sur le rayon horizontal qui là-haut s'allongeait de plus en plus, délivré de ces ombres sinistres et vaines dont l'affût se perdait dans l'obscurité qui montait de la terre.

The passage, like much in this novel, is clearly over-written, no doubt another symptom of its youthfulness; but it does nevertheless communicate very effectively a moment of extreme and almost unbearable tension.

However, the irony of the scene comes from the fact that Perken does not die his own death; instead, he stumbles and falls on one of the fléchettes de guerre, the wound is infected and later gangrene sets in. Perken's death sentence is read to him by a pompous Siamese doctor.

These then are the two or three basic drives that animate Perken: the awareness of death and destiny and an iron will "to do and die". But outside these drives Perken remains a character who is psychologically blank. It is this which makes it possible for him, as for so many of Malraux' characters, to become the embodiment of some idea or attitude; in the case of Perken the embodiment of what might be called a primitive form of l'homme absurde.

Before dying in his kingdom which is now threatened by destruction, Perken did succeed in finding Grabot, the man he had set out to find. In the first part, Grabot is merely mentioned by Perken and described in a tight formula as "un homme pour qui j'avais une grande sympathie et une grande méfiance". After this brief mention he disappears during the whole of the second part of the novel when Claude is the focal point of the

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action. He reappears towards the end of it when the focus will shift to Perken. Grabot is another image of the adventurer: the adventurer à l'état brut. He is a man of great courage and with a total indifference to life. It is this which isolates Grabot: "C'est un homme réellement seul - et comme tous les hommes seuls il est obligé de meubler sa solitude, ce qu'il fait avec le courage". Now it is clear that Grabot is in fact Perken, but without the latter's awareness and articulateness, and this enables him to go further than Perken. However when, in the end, Perken finds Grabot, Perken really finds himself. This is the meaning of this incident. This explains also the horror experienced by Perken when he finds Grabot blinded, turning a millstone in total darkness.

Perken avait reculé pour mieux voir en gagnant l'ombre, et Claude le suivait de côté, en crabe, incapable à la fois de rester où il était et de détourner son regard, pour marcher, de la lumière qui pénétrait dans la case comme un bloc de pierre. Mais Perken reculait toujours. Recul terrifié: Claude devinait la crispation de ses doigts qui cherchaient à s'accrocher, la stupeur d'un homme qui chavirait: il ne disait rien, ne bougeait plus.

Attaché à la meule, il y avait un esclave. De la barbe sur le visage. Un blanc?

Couvrant le hurlement du chien, Perken cria une phrase, si vite que Claude ne la comprit pas; il recommença aussitôt, haletant:

- Qu'est-ce qu'il est arrivé?

L'esclave se rejeta en avant, dans l'obscurité, avec un frémissement aux épaules. La clochette sonna encore, un seul coup, comme un timbre: mais l'homme s'arrêta.

"Grabot?" gueula Perken.

L'épouvante et l'interrogation de la voix s'écrasaient sur le visage tourné vers eux. Claude cherchait les yeux, mais ne distinguait que la barbe et le nez. L'homme tendit la main ouverte, les doigts écartés, cherchant à prendre quelque chose; il la laissa retomber contre sa cuisse avec un bruit de chair. Il était attaché par des courrois de cuir.

"Aveugle?" se demandait Claude incapable de prononcer le mot, d'interroger Perken.

This then is the end of the adventurer's adventure: the insoumis is enslaved and blinded, the revolt against a meaningless life ends by turning endlessly round and round in a pitch dark hut.\*

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\* A number of critics have attributed to this scene and more particularly to Grabot's answer: "Rien" in reply to Perken's question "qu'est-ce qu'il est arrivé?" a deeper and more "philosophical" meaning. For instance, Geoffrey Hartmann writes: "The lesson is clear. Claude, Perken and Grabot are impelled to solve the riddle of the sphinx, the riddle of a universe which denies the idea of man."<sup>(13)</sup> And Boak sees in it an all too obvious statement of the Absurd. In my opinion, what we have here in fact is not metaphysics but melodramatics.

A word now about the relationship which exists between Claude Vannec and Perken.

Claude Vannec is much younger than Perken; he feels not only fascinated by him, but also attracted to him by an obscurely sensed feeling of kinship. Eventually, when he suggests to Perken that they join forces the nature of this kinship becomes clear: "... Tout à coup Claude découvre ce qui le liait à cet homme qui l'avait accepté sans qu'il comprit bien pourquoi: l'obsession de la mort". This mutual and so fundamental an obsession explains the absolute nature of their loyalty and affection, the total acceptance of one another. ("Si j'accepte un homme, je l'accepte totalement, je l'accepte comme moi-même".) Clearly, what we have here is one of the first forms of the fraternité virile which is to play such an important part in the later novels. They live what Malraux will call later in L'Espoir: "un des plus beaux destins de l'homme: être aimé sans séduire".

The fact that Claude is younger and less mature than Perken is important and the relationship which this inequality creates is very typical of Malraux' world. Hartman in his book writes: "The Narrator-Garine, Claude-Perken type of relationship: the younger man absorbs the experience of the older and becomes his redemptive double".<sup>(14)</sup> In a sense we might see in Claude a "son" of Perken, and if we look at their relationship in this light, we discover a network of subterranean links. Perken is of the same kind, the same genus as Claude's grandfather:

Perken était de la famille des seuls hommes auxquels son grand-père - qui l'avait élevé - se sentit lié. Lointaine parenté: même hostilité à l'égard des valeurs établies, même goût des actions des hommes lié à la conscience de leur vanité; mêmes refus, surtout.

There exists also a parallel between the nature (if not the scale) of the activities of the grandfather and of Perken and between the fate of their achievements. They both want to survive in a great and lasting enterprise. "Sa jeunesse (mon grand-père) l'avait voué à édifier la Maison Vannec par quoi il entendait durer". Clearly, this Maison Vannec is to Claude's

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grandfather what his kingdom is to Perken. And both the kingdom and the Maison Vannec will be destroyed.

It would seem then that Claude and Perken are linked together not only by a shared obsession with death, but also by the fact that, almost literally, they belong to the same family. It is for this reason that it became necessary for the novelist to provide Claude with this stoic, non-conformist background dominated by the admired Viking-like figure of his grandfather whose successor Perken becomes. Finally, as we have seen, Grabot is the "brother" of Perken in the same sense that Claude is his "son".

These links between the various characters which tend to make them all of a sort, might well not have been created intentionally, in which case they would point to a certain poverty of the novelist's imagination which seems to be incapable of bringing to life characters other than those who belong to a certain psychological family and who draw their life from certain personal obsessions of the author.

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Let us now try and assess briefly Malraux' literary achievement in this novel. La Voie royale is by no means a flawless novel, but the kind of flaws which the novel reveals are interesting for they are born from youthfulness and inexperience. Malraux is not yet in full possession of his art.

There is, as we noted earlier, Malraux' lack of detachment and also his openness to influence. What is perhaps more striking is Malraux' lack of control over both his material and his language. For instance, the description of the removal of the statues from the temple is interminably long, interesting perhaps for Malraux himself who lived this, but wearisome for a reader and at times difficult to follow. It is clear also that in the description of the forest which I quoted earlier Malraux' language got out of hand, the accent on pourriture and décomposition is put on too heavily.

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Sometimes the writing acquires a shrill, almost hysterical edge which is born, one suspects, from a form of literary impotence:-

Il était fixé comme par un instantané, le regard perdu, la bouche ouverte, tous les traits affaissés. Plus rien d'humain dans la case: effondré dans son coin, Xa attendait, plié en bête; Grabot - qu'il continuât à se taire! - autour, ces gueules de fauves, cet instinct de sadiques, précis et bestial comme ce crâne de gaur à dents de mort; et Perken pétrifié. L'épouvante de l'être écrasé de solitude saisit Claude au creux de l'estomac, au défaut des hanches, l'épouvante de l'homme abandonné parmi des fous qui vont bouger.

Or again, when several attempts to remove the statues have failed:

De même que l'idée d'employer ainsi le marteau s'était imposée soudain, quelque autre idée ne s'imposerait-elle pas maintenant? Mais la fatigue, la lassitude, un dégoût de créature exténuée le pénétraient. Se coucher... Après tant d'efforts, la forêt reprenait sa puissance de prison. Dépendance, abandon de la volonté, de la chair même. Comme si le sang, pulsation à pulsation, s'écoulait... Il s'imagina là les bras serrés contre la poitrine comme par la fièvre, recroquevillé, perdant toute conscience, obéissant avec le sentiment d'une libération aux sollicitations de la brousse et de la chaleur; et soudain, il trouva dans la terreur le besoin de se défendre encore.

It is obvious that terms such as dégoût de créature exténuée, comme si le sang, pulsation à pulsation, s'écoulait are wholly out of proportion with the experience of discouragement and weariness they intend to convey.

Finally we find a similar lack of control over language when Malraux deals with ideas. This leads to portentous sounding passages which are very often, as the following quotation shows, in actual fact confused and almost wholly devoid of meaning:-

Toute ma vie dépend de ce que je pense du geste d'appuyer sur cette gâchette au moment où je suce ce canon. Il s'agit de savoir si je pense: je me détruis, ou: j'agis. La vie est une matière, il s'agit de savoir ce qu'on en fait - bien qu'on n'en fasse jamais rien, mais il y a plusieurs manières de n'en rien faire... Pour vivre d'une certaine façon, il faut en finir avec ses menaces, la déchéance et les autres: le revolver est alors une bonne garantie, car il est facile de se tuer lorsque la mort est un moyen... C'est là qu'est la force de Grabot...

La Voie royale is dominated by a kind of melodramatic, rather boyish imagination which comes out not only in the rather far-fetched idea of Perken's kingdom, even if this has its roots in reality (cf. Antimémoires pp. 375-472). It reveals itself also in such episodes as the one where Perken, having filled "une de (ses) balles avec le sang de son genoux"(!!),

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fires at the skull of a gaur which then begins to bleed. Such incidents belong clearly to the world of Les Aventures de trois scouts, and D. Boak is quite right when he remarks that "it is difficult not to smile when we read such details as the dying Perken's brilliant feat of shooting dead two natives through his pockets". (15)

Yet, at the same time, La Voie royale is an essential part of Malraux' vision of our reality. It is in the oeuvre of Malraux one of the key-books since in it we find, perhaps in their purest form, a number of the key-ideas that will be developed in his later books.

3.

Although La Voie royale was, no doubt, conceived and sketched out before Les Conquérants, the fact remains nevertheless that Les Conquérants was published first. It appeared serially in the Nouvelle Revue Française, March-July 1928, and in volume during the autumn of that same year. In 1949 Malraux published a "Version définitive avec une postface de l'auteur" in which, among minor changes analysed by D. Boak ("Malraux: a note on editions", Australian Universities Modern Language Association, May 1964), the most important modification is the removal of an entire episode: the Narrator's interview at Singapore with an eccentric archeologist called Renski. In the structure of the novel the episode is indeed unnecessary and slows down the action. The Postface which Malraux added to this version définitive and which is merely the verbatim report of a speech at a Gaullist rally (Salle Pleyel 5 March 1948) is totally inapposite, and one wonders why Malraux tacked it on to this new edition of his novel.

The book, when first published, was very widely reviewed in the daily, weekly and monthly press.\* It is then with Les Conquérants that Malraux' public literary existence begins. The earlier writings, even La Tentation de l'Occident, passed almost entirely unnoticed.

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\* With the exception of La Revue des Deux Mondes which manages the extraordinary feat during the Thirties never to mention Malraux' novels, not even when he won the Prix Goncourt in 1933.

Les Conquérants takes place in Canton during the revolutionary strikes of 1925 (25 June - 18 August). Its central character, Garine, was in his young days involved with a group of anarchists. He is tried and condemned for complicity in a case of abortion. During the war he fought in the Foreign Legion, deserts and finds refuge in Switzerland where he comes into contact with the Russian socialist refugees. When, after the 1917 revolution, his attempts to go to Russia fail, he is called by a friend to Canton where he becomes director for propaganda of the Kuomintang which at that time was closely linked with the Communist Party and the Comintern.

The novel is divided into three parts with almost self-explanatory titles. The first, Les approches, shows us the narrator approaching Canton, the scene of action. It also provides the reader with facts: the life story of Garine, the situation in Canton, the nature of Garine's action, etc. It also creates the atmosphere of tension which will, as it were, colour the entire novel.

The second part, Puissances, deals with a triple conflict of powers (hence the title) and with the struggle of Garine to obtain from the Nationalist Government a decree which would prohibit entry to the harbour of Canton to any ship having called at Hong-Kong. This, in the mind of Garine, would paralyse and strangle Hong-Kong and eventually the British Empire ("le ridicule petit gouvernement de Canton entraine en lutte contre l'Angleterre"). In his struggle for the decree, Garine has to face the opposition of the moderate wing of the Kuomintang (led by the elder statesman, Tcheng-Dai), the terrorists (led by Hong) and eventually (this is the climax of the action) an armed uprising by the reactionary General Tang. As was the case in La Voie royale, the actual action is by no means clear and the political motives are often obscure; one fails to see, for instance, why it is so necessary for Garine to destroy the terrorists.

The last part is called L'homme, and the focal point shifts from the events to Garine who now, undermined and weakened by illness, begins to talk about himself to the narrator and reveals himself not merely as a man of

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action, but as a man.

In comparison with La Voie royale, Les Conquérants is undeniably a better novel. It has a greater range and variety of characters, and while Garine is clearly the focal point, he is surrounded by a number of secondary characters who do have <sup>some</sup> individuality and substance. Such characters as Nicolaieff, Tcheng-Dai, Rebecchi and especially the terrorist Hong are very much present in the novel. Moreover the structure is more unified and Les Conquérants, unlike La Voie royale, does not break into two almost unrelated parts: Vannec's adventure and Perken's adventure. Also the pace, somewhat hectic and breathless, but very characteristic of Malraux' novels, is sustained throughout. Les Conquérants contains two other very characteristically Malrauvian elements, the political background and, more particularly, the obsessive presence of violence and horror. In fact Les Conquérants is, I think, the novel of Malraux most dominated by violence. It is because of this that I want, taking Les Conquérants as a starting point, to analyse briefly and in a general way this element of Malraux' work.

Although the presence of violence is very characteristic of Malraux' world, it is not present in equal doses in all his novels. One must first of all make a distinction between a generalised atmosphere of violence (civil wars, revolution, etc.) in which his novels bathe, and the particular scenes of violence which concretize the violent nature of war and revolution: murder, mutilation, torture, etc. If we look at such scenes, as it were, statistically in the novels of Malraux, we will see that there are none in La Voie royale, the horror being more passive. There are quite a few of them in Les Conquérants: the mutilation of the communist leader Klein, the attempted assassination of Garine, the cold-blooded shooting of a suspect; besides, we get a portrait of the torturer Nicolaieff, and there is a brief episode in Klein's life. In La Condition humaine which is considerably longer, scenes of violence are fewer; there

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is only one in Le Temps du mépris, the beating-up of Kasstner; in L'Espoir, although a war novel, there are hardly any, and none in Les Noyers.

Moreover, while violence is an important component of the world of Malraux' novels, it is obvious, nevertheless, that we find the portrayal of violence in other and older novels. The works of Zola are full of it (especially Germinal); we find it in Les Misérables and in Vallès' L'Insurgé, to name but a few. What is perhaps new in Malraux is the treatment of political violence, and a political violence of a peculiarly contemporary sort. Let us look at the scene of Les Conquérants where Garine shoots a suspected double agent:

- Dis au premier, exactement, que si dans cinq minutes il n'a pas donné les renseignements qu'il nous doit, je lui fous une balle dans la tête, moi.

Je traduis. Nicolaïeff a imperceptiblement haussé une épaule; tous les indicateurs savent que Garine est un "grand chef" et son moyen est digne d'un enfant. Une minute... deux...

- Tu as dit qu'il avait cinq minutes, dit Nicolaïeff, respectueux et ironique.

- Toi, fous-moi la paix, hein!

Il a pris le revolver sur le bureau. La main droite, en raison du poids de l'arme, est ferme; la gauche, qui sort de l'écharpe blanche, tremble de fièvre. Une fois de plus je dis au Chinois de répondre. Il fait un geste d'impuissance.

La détonation. Le corps du Chinois ne bouge pas; sur son visage, une expression intense de stupéfaction. Nicolaïeff a sauté et s'appuie au mur. Est-il blessé?

Une seconde... Deux... Le Chinois d'effondre, mou, les jambes à demi pliées. Et le sang commence à couler.

- Mais, mais, balbutie Nicolaïeff...

- Fous-moi la paix!

What strikes one first of all in this passage is the absence of any emotional or affective element. It is in a scene like this that the a-psychological nature of Malraux' novels is most effective. For nothing, no thought, no feeling comes between the act and us witnessing it. It is transmitted, as it were, en direct. What is striking about the writing of the scene is its spare simplicity. For, although the scene itself is, no doubt, "literary" and melodramatic, the writing is not. Malraux' originality might come out more clearly if we compared this passage with a similar one from an older writer. At the end of L'Education sentimentale, Flaubert shows us the former doctrinaire socialist shooting his friend Dussardier before

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the café Tortoni:

Entre les charges de cavalerie, des escouades de sergents de ville survenaient, pour faire refluer le monde dans les rues.

Mais, sur les marches de Tortoni, un homme, - Dussardier, - remarquable de loin à sa haute taille, restait sans plus bouger qu'un cariatide.

Un des agents qui marchait en tête, le tricorne sur les yeux, le menaça de son épée.

L'autre alors, s'avancant d'un pas, se mit à crier:

- Vive la République!

Il tomba sur le dos, les bras en croix.

Un hurlement d'horreur s'éleva de la foule. L'agent fit un cercle autour de lui avec son regard; et Frédéric, béant, reconnut Sénécal.

First of all, in this scene, Flaubert draws, as it were, a curtain at the moment when Sénécal, in fact, shoots Dussardier. What gives strength to Malraux' description is precisely the passage which records the death of the victim ("La détonation. Le corps du Chinois ne bouge pas; sur son visage, une expression intense de stupéfaction (...) Une seconde... Deux... Le Chinois s'effondre, mou, les jambes à demi pliées. Et le sang commence à couler"). Moreover, in Flaubert's text words such as cariatide, les bras en croix, hurlement d'horreur tend to get in the way; in this sense "words" are absent from Malraux' description, hence its dramatic tautness.

A little earlier I characterised the scene from Les Conquérants as "literary". This, I think, needs to be explained. Very often in these scenes of violence in Malraux' novels, as in the one quoted above, the violence is gratuitous and has no organic link with either the character or the intention or meaning of the novel. We knew, for instance, without this scene of shooting that Garine was hard and tough. Now, with this question of the "literary" nature of many of Malraux' scenes of violence we come close to an explanation of their disappearance from the later novels and notably from L'Espoir. If we accept that it is unlikely that Malraux, until L'Espoir, did participate in the violent events he describes, then all this violence with its adolescent overtones\* is not, as it were, "lived",

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\* There is an unmistakable touch of the imperturbable Phileas Fogg in Garine's reaction when a terrorist attempts to shoot him:

- 'Le type était brave, me dit Garine en descendant. Il aurait pu essayer de fuir. Il n'a cessé de tirer que lorsqu'il est tombé...

Pour descendre, il fait presque demi-tour, et je vois que son bras gauche est couvert de sang.

- Mais ...

- Ce n'est rien. L'os n'est pas touché. Et la balle est ressortie. Allons, c'est raté!

En effet, il y a deux trous dans la tunique.

but "made up" and sometimes made up with literary reminiscences. Thus, for example, the mutilation of Klein, "la bouche agrandie au rasoir", would appear to come from a poem by Segalen for whom Malraux had a great admiration:

C'est ici que nous l'avons pris vivant. Comme il se battait bien, nous lui offrîmes du service: il préféra servir son Prince dans la mort. Nous avons fendu sa bouche d'une oreille à l'autre (my italics, C.J.G.): il a fait signe, des yeux, qu'il restait toujours fidèle. (16)

But when Malraux went to Spain he came into contact with real violence and real horror which is no longer a literary game. Before reality, imagination loses its strength: "Devant les églises du Sud, où l'on s'est battu", says the art historian Scali in L'Espoir, "j'ai vu de grandes taches de sang. Les toiles ... perdent leur force". And thus we see this rather gratuitous display of violence disappear from the only novel of Malraux (with the exception of La Voie royale) which deals truly with choses vécues. However, in Les Conquérants violence is an important ingredient. Yet in spite of this death, if not absent, is not so obsessively, oppressively present as in La Voie royale. This is perhaps partly due to the gratuitous nature of this violence which robs it of its verisimilitude; these violent deaths are in a sense more theatrical than real.

But death very really is present in Garine: "Cet homme est gravement malade", says the police report. And it is clear that when Garine leaves Canton, it is not for further action but in order to die. Yet, unlike Perken, he is not constantly aware of death and he does not act in order to oppose it. The mainspring of Garine's thirst for power and for action is rather to be found in this awareness of the absurdity of life. What this notion means for Garine we shall analyse later.

As we have seen, violence in Les Conquérants (as in all his novels) is political, yet it would be a grave mistake to consider Les Conquérants as a political novel. Malraux at that time was not yet the "communist novelist". Les Conquérants was banned in the USSR (as well as in Fascist Italy). Undoubtedly he had been involved in the activities of Le Jeune Annam and of the Kuomintang; however, as a novelist he remains curiously detached. His

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communists are not heroes, and on the revolutionary side we find an unmistakable sadist and salaud in the chief of police Nicolaïeff. What is more important is the fact that in Les Conquérants (as in La Condition humaine) the political events are marginal, they form merely a dramatic, and very effective, backdrop against which the characters, and especially Garine, move. A political novel deals with politics; in that sense Lucien Leuwen is a political novel, but Les Conquérants is not.

In its narrative technique, Les Conquérants is both original and sophisticated and gives, to some extent, the lie to Malraux' assertion that he is not interested in the novel as "object". He seems, at this stage, to be sufficiently interested in it to evolve a new novelistic technique, and it is surprising that none of the innumerable critics who wrote on Les Conquérants remarked on this. The entire novel (with the exception of two episodes) is written in the present tense. It is through this that Malraux can give to his novel the feeling of directness and immediacy. The events are described as they happen and by a totally non-existent narrator who is being used merely as a recording instrument; he has no personality, no ideas and no feelings. Malraux uses deliberately in his novel the technique of the reportage which he describes in the preface to Indochine S.O.S. as "l'intrusion d'un personnage dans un monde qu'il nous découvre en le découvrant lui-même". This in itself is not really all that new; it is a technique which Zola in Germinal, for instance, also uses. But Malraux' originality lies in the fact that he makes the reader and the narrator discover the Canton revolution simultaneously through the use of the present tense. However, the use of this tense created for Malraux a problem. How could he, without an omniscient narrator whose view embraces both the past and the present, look back and provide the reader first of all with the background and history of Garine and, secondly, with the necessary political, historical information without falling back on the conventional narrative style: "in the hot summer of 1925, various forces were facing each other in Canton ... etc."

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The question of Garine's biography is solved by putting in the hands of the narrator the police file of Garine whom the narrator himself has known in his youth.\* In this file the salient facts of Garine's past are being recorded. On these facts the narrator will begin a kind of reminiscent commentary which will fill out the meagre facts provided by this file. For example:

Anarchiste militant. Condamné dans une affaire anarchiste à Paris en 1914.

Non. Il ne fut jamais "anarchiste militant". En 1914 - à vingt ans - encore sous l'influence des études de lettres qu'il venait de terminer et dont il ne restait en lui que la révélation de grandes existences opposées ("Quels livres valent d'être écrits, hormis les Mémoires?") il était indifférent aux systèmes, décidé à choisir celui que les circonstances lui imposeraient. Ce qu'il cherchait parmi les anarchistes et les socialistes extrémistes, malgré le grand nombre d'indicateurs de police qu'il savait rencontrer chez les premiers, c'était l'espoir d'un temps de troubles.

In this manner the characteristic directness of the novel is by no means interrupted. The technique is, in fact, the same as in the body of the novel. But in this case we do not see or hear with the narrator, but through this monologue intérieur we think with him and with him discover both the personality and the biography of Garine.

The political situation and historical background are given either in the form of news telegrams like the one with which the novel opens: "la grève générale est décrétée à Canton", and which plunges the reader straight into the centre of the situation; or in the form of dialogues of the narrator with people, like the special envoy of the Kuomintang in Indochina, who are better informed about the background, and thus once again we discover this background with him.

Considering that the narrative technique of Les Conquérants was deliberately copied from that of the reportage, it is very understandable that a great number of critics saw in it something of a reportage romancé.\*\* This misunderstanding is encouraged by the fact that the political events

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\* This is, no doubt, a little contrived, and one asks oneself the question: how does this revolutionary get hold of the fiches de la Sûreté de Hong Kong?

\*\* "Il ne m'étonnerait nullement si nombre 'd'hommes d'action' ne comprenait ce roman qu'à moitié et ne le considérerait que comme une forme supérieure de journalisme ou une excellente source d'informations..." (17)

shown in the novel did indeed take place and by the fact that the novelist put real people such as Borodin and General Gallen in his novel. One of the most extraordinary reactions to Malraux' novel and born from just such a misunderstanding is Trotsky's article La révolution étranglée.<sup>(18)</sup> Trotsky starts with this assumption: "Le livre s'intitule roman. En fait, nous sommes en face de la chronique romancée de la révolution chinoise dans sa première période, celle de Canton". From this point onwards, the entire argument of Trotsky is faussé, and he proceeds to analyse the political ideas and decisions of the various characters as if they belonged to real historical figures. For example: "Gariné s'embrouille désespérément dans les grands événements" or "Si Hong ne trouve pas sa juste voie c'est la faute de Gariné et de Borodine qui ont mis la révolution à la remorque des banquiers et des marchands." And Trotsky concludes: "Mais, si l'enquête n'est pas exacte, en revanche il montre admirablement comment la politique opportuniste de Staline-Borodine a préparé le terrain au terrorisme anarchiste en Chine". Malraux in his Réponse à Trotsky reacts, and rightly so, as a novelist and corrects Trotsky's false perspective. "Ce livre n'est pas une chronique romancée de la révolution chinoise, parce que l'accent principal est mis sur les rapports entre des individus et une action collective, non sur l'action collective".

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Talking about Les Conquérants during the winter of 1945, Malraux said: "(Gariné) est mon seul personnage dessiné (...) parce que Les Conquérants sont une monographie, sont le livre de Gariné. Même La Condition humaine n'est pas le livre de Kyo."<sup>(19)</sup> Gariné, then, is the key-character of the novel. He is also what might be called one of the archetypes of the Malrauvian world and has clear links with Perken and Ferral as well as, in a subterranean way, with Tchen.

What links him with Perken is his desire to build something which will resist time. If Perken wants to leave "une cicatrice sur cette carte",

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Garine wants to leave a scar on history. The decree which Garine wants so desperately see promulgated and which will ruin Hongkong and British imperialism, is the equivalent of Perken's desire for his kingdom. Garine, musing about his action, says:-

Tous ces hommes que je dirige, dont j'ai contribué à créer l'âme, en somme! je ne sais pas même ce qu'ils feront demain... A certains moments, j'aurais voulu tailler tout ça comme du bois, penser: voici ce que j'ai fait. Edifier, avoir le temps pour soi.

Behind these words, both in their meaning and in their tone, we hear clearly an echo of Perken's voice.

What Garine shares with Ferral, the banker and Empire builder in La Condition humaine, is an insatiable thirst for power. Ferral could have said with Garine: "... ces crétins-là veulent avoir raison. En l'occurrence il n'y a qu'une raison qui compte: l'emploi le plus efficace de sa force". Or again: "Diriger, déterminer, contraindre, la vie est là."\* In this thirst for power shared by many of Malraux' heroes we find another one of those curious correspondances with the world of Corneille whose heroes "cherchent la puissance. S'ils s'aventurent vers des conflits d'amour, d'ambition, d'honneur, de maîtrise de soi, de magnanimité, la puissance est le terme où ils consentent seulement à se reposer."<sup>(21)</sup>

Garine is a man without nation, without family, without beliefs. The dominant trait, in fact the only psychological characteristic which Malraux gives him, is the obsessive, the almost physical desire for power. This is the very first thing we learn about him:

Il savait que la vocation qui le poussait n'était point celle qui brille un instant, parmi beaucoup d'autres, à travers l'esprit des adolescents, puisqu'il lui faisait d'avance l'abandon de sa vie, puisqu'il acceptait tous les risques qu'elle impliquait. De la puissance, il ne souhaitait ni argent, ni considération, ni respect; rien qu'elle-même. Si, repris par un besoin puéril de rêverie, il rêvait à elle, c'était de façon presque physique. Plus "d'histoires"; une sorte de crispation, de force tendue, d'attente. L'image ridicule de l'animal ramassé, prêt à bondir, l'obsédait. Et il finissait par considérer l'exercice de la puissance comme un soulagement, comme une délivrance.

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\* With considerable foresight Bernard Groethusen foresaw the possible transformation of Garine into Ferral when he wrote: "Si (Garine) n'avait connu que le libido dominandi peut-être se serait-il fait banquier".<sup>(20)</sup>

Here the narrator is reminiscing about the young Garine. When we meet him on his way to Canton, he has matured, but the desire for power has remained with him unchanged, as comes across through the kind of taut intensity with which he speaks about it to the narrator: "Ma vie ne m'intéresse pas, c'est clair, c'est net, c'est formel. Je veux - tu entends - une certaine forme de puissance; ou je l'obtiendrai ou tant pis pour moi". It is only towards the end that this desire is seen with some kind of irony. Before the mutilated body of Klein he says: "Pendant des années... des années... j'ai désiré le pouvoir: je ne sais même pas en envelopper ma vie". The use of the past tense here gives this irony a melancholic overtone.

The conquest of power means action, and Garine's early association with the anarchists is significant, for anarchism with its belief in l'action directe is not merely a system of ideas, but an idea which must transform itself into action. However, Garine remains in the margins of the movement, he is by no means engagé; he is less than a "fellow-traveller" - an amateur. His life seems to have little direction, is not quite in focus yet. The crucial event which will help Garine to make him see clearly where he stands, which will make him a true man of action, is his trial. Malraux himself, in his exposé before the Union pour la Vérité, underlines the function and the importance of Garine's trial in Les Conquérants:

...qu'un homme prenne conscience de certaines injustices et de certaines inégalités (...) cela ne suffit pas à faire de lui un révolutionnaire. En face d'une souffrance il pourra devenir chrétien (...), il ne deviendra nullement un révolutionnaire. Pour cela il faudra qu'au moment où il voudra intervenir en faveur de cette souffrance il se heurte à une résistance.

The trial is precisely that résistance which will transform Garine.

Garine is being tried for having given financial help to enable some young women to have abortions. This is somehow linked with his anarchist leanings. But the choice by Malraux of this somewhat odd indictment is, no doubt, deliberate. It helps to bring out the disproportion between the deed itself and the trial: "son premier sentiment (that of Garine) fut la stupéfaction... le grotesque d'un jugement en cours d'assises appliqué à de

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telles actions le laissa désespéré".

The long-term effect of the trial on Garine is important; not only does it act as a kind of catalyzer in his life, but through the trial he discovers the absurdity of it all:

Au début, il fut intéressé à l'extrême: le jeu de la défense le passionnait. Mais il se lassa, et, pendant l'audition des derniers témoins, il songeait en souriant: "Juger, c'est, de toute évidence, ne pas comprendre, puisque si l'on comprenait, on ne pourrait plus juger." Et les efforts du président et de l'avocat général pour ramener à la notion, commune et familière aux jurés, d'un crime, la suite de ces événements, lui semblèrent à tel point dignes d'une parodie qu'il se prit un instant à rire. Mais la justice, dans cette salle, était si forte, les magistrats, les gendarmes, la foule étaient si bien unis dans un même sentiment que l'indignation n'y avait point de place. Son sourire oublié, Pierre trouva ce même sentiment d'impuissance navrante, de mépris et de dégoût que l'on éprouve devant une multitude fanatique, devant toutes les grandes manifestations de l'absurdité humaine.\*

The key-word in this passage is parodie, for it is this word which will, as it were, colour the notion of l'absurde in Les Conquérants. This particular meaning of Garine's experience of the absurd is made clearer when, in a half-delirium during an illness, Garine remembers the trial: "C'est bizarre, après mon procès j'éprouvais - mais très fortement (...) le sentiment d'une humanité menée par des forces absurdes". Right at the end, as Garine is on the point of leaving Canton, he comes back once more to the trial which he links with the rape of a young soldier which he witnessed during the war, and once more he uses together the words absurde and parodique.

It would seem then that Garine takes the term absurde in its normal colloquial meaning: "Dans le langage courant", says Le Robert, "qui heurte le sens commun". Life, then, is not so much meaningless as grotesque; the idea of parodie with which the notion of absurd is linked, accentuates this.

However, the "metaphysical" awareness of the absurd is also present in Les Conquérants and is experienced by Garine, more particularly towards the end of the novel. Here I should like to point out the importance of the communist Klein, the organiser of the Hong Kong strike. He is rather a

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\* It would seem quite clear that Meursault's trial in L'Etranger of Camus has been inspired by the trial of Garine.

shadowy figure, but in the novel it is his death that matters. Garine was linked to Klein by what, in Malraux' world, are the deepest ties, une amitié d'homme. Hence the impact of Klein's death on Garine; it makes him more intensely aware of his own death and sets off the series of self-explorations and explanations.

In one of his last conversations with the Narrator, Garine says:

Je ne suis pas un homme doux, mais il m'est arrivé d'avoir profondément pitié, de cette pitié qui serre la gorge. Eh bien! quand je me suis retrouvé seul avec moi-même, cette pitié a toujours fini par se désagréger. La souffrance renforce l'absurdité de la vie, elle ne l'attaque pas; elle la rend dérisoire. La vie de Klein appelle parfois en moi quelque chose comme... comme... (...) Allons, assez: comme un certain rire. Comprends-tu? Il n'y a pas de compassion profonde pour ceux dont la vie n'a pas de sens. Vies murées. Le monde se reflète en elles grimaçant, comme dans une glace tordue.

At this point Garine gives to the word a deeper meaning undoubtedly, but does at the same time retain the notion of absurd as farcical, as the words rire and grimaces seem to imply. The Malrauvian conception of l'absurde is therefore by no means as purely philosophical as the one which Camus and some of the existentialists will derive from it.

After the trial, and because of it, Garine discovers and formulates his système (if we can call it that) which circumstances had imposed on him;\*

Je ne tiens pas la société pour mauvaise, pour susceptible d'être améliorée; je le tiens pour absurde. (...)

Absurde. Je ne veux nullement dire: déraisonnable. Qu'on la transforme, cette société, ne m'intéresse pas. Ce n'est pas l'absence de justice en elle qui m'atteint, mais quelque chose de plus profond, l'impossibilité de donner à une forme sociale, quelle qu'elle soit, mon adhésion. Je suis a-social comme je suis athée, et de la même façon. Tout cela n'aurait aucune importance si j'étais homme d'étude; mais je sais que tout le long de ma vie je trouverai à mon côté l'ordre social, et que je ne pourrai jamais l'accepter sans renoncer à tout ce que je suis.

That this a-social attitude is going to be one of the constant elements in Garine's actions, is seen when he gives its true meaning to his decree. It is political in so far as it is directed against the politico-economic power of Imperialist Britain, but at a deeper level it is directed against society: "Abattre une ville", says Garine, "la ville c'est ce qu'il a de plus social au monde, l'emblème même de la société". Behind this total

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\* "Il était indifférent aux systèmes, décidé à choisir celui que les circonstances lui imposeraient".

rejection of society and his desire to destroy it (Garine's early links with the Anarchists are in this respect not fortuitous), what we find is a genuine Nietzschean nihilist.

Yet at the same time Garine is actively involved with the communists whose action is essentially directed towards a change in society. It might be well to look at Garine's political attitude. From the very start Garine keeps his distance. As a young man he talks "avec une ironie méprisante des hommes qu'il venait de voir (the anarchists) qui prétendaient travailler au bonheur de l'humanité". His attitude towards the Bolsheviks in Switzerland is equally distant. As he is about to leave for Canton, he clarifies his position: "Je n'aime pas même les pauvres gens, le peuple, ceux pour qui je vais combattre (...) ce qui est certain c'est que je n'ai qu'un dégoût honteux de la bourgeoisie dont je sors". But this hatred for the bourgeoisie has nothing to do with a political attitude. At the Union pour la Vérité Malraux said:

Pour Garine elle (the bourgeoisie) est une certaine attitude humaine. Le bourgeois ne se définirait certainement pas pour Garine comme l'homme d'une profession, ni même comme l'homme d'une certaine époque de l'histoire; le bourgeois se définirait essentiellement comme l'homme d'un certain mode de pensée lié à une éthique particulière. Pense en bourgeois tout homme qui met au premier plan les valeurs de considération."

Clearly, we are closer here to Flaubert ("le bourgeois est celui qui pense bassement") than to Marx or Lenin. And the narrator remarks of him: "Garine ne croit qu'à l'énergie. Il n'est pas anti-marxiste, mais le marxisme n'est nullement pour lui un 'socialisme scientifique'". Garine, then, appears as a man who, paradoxically, is committed while remaining uncommitted.

He is in fact, as the chief of police Nicolaïeff sees rightly, above all an individualist and an adventurer. And Nicolaïeff quotes with approval Borodin who said: "Il n'y a pas de place dans le communisme pour celui qui veut être d'abord lui-même, enfin, vivre séparé des autres". With his belief in energy and his thirst for power Garine might well, in fact, be closer to fascism. There is a very curious and revealing answer he gives to the Narrator who asks him: "Où diable voudrais-tu donc aller? - En Angleterre.

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Maintenant je sais ce que c'est que l'Empire. Une tenace, constante violente. Diriger. Déterminer. Contraindre. La vie est là .." .

But if Garine is not committed to the revolution, he is committed to his action. He is not a revolutionary, but a gambler ("Il entendait se jouer"). What he lives for is not the revolution, but his action which in a very real sense is his very lifeblood: "quand mon action se retire de moi, quand je commence à m'en séparer, c'est aussi du sang qui s'en va." Pure action, independent from any aims, is what keeps Garine going: "Mon action me rend aboulique à tout ce qui n'est pas elle, à commencer par ses résultats. Si je me suis lié si facilement à la révolution, c'est que ses résultats sont lointains et toujours en changement". In this way, when his action reaches its goal, when "his" decree has been promulgated and his action is therefore no longer necessary, Garine dies. And his death has intentionally been given this meaning, as Malraux himself makes clear in a reply to Julien Benda who, during the debate at the Union pour la Vérité asked: "On peut imaginer le cas d'un homme qui serait attaché par toutes ses fibres au prolétariat qui arriverait avec le prolétariat à prendre le pouvoir et qui, idéologiquement, viendrait à penser que le régime établi par ce prolétariat n'est pas le régime le plus propre à satisfaire ses aspirations. (...) Est-il possible d'admettre qu'il y ait un divorce complet entre la pensée et l'action?" A. Malraux: "Je crois tellement à un désaccord que Garine meurt, et il ne meurt pas par hasard."

Besides the novel itself we have in the debate around the novel a kind of commentary on Les Conquérants and on Garine by the author himself. Here, amongst other things, he explains in what way Garine is, in fact, a true revolutionary:

Il me semble que sous l'influence de Michelet, sous l'influence des disciples de Michelet qui ont parlé de révolution, on a pris en France l'habitude de ne concevoir le révolutionnaire comme véritablement efficace que dans la mesure où il ressemble à ce type de révolutionnaire créé par Michelet. Je ne prétends en aucune façon que le révolutionnaire de Michelet n'existe pas, je crois au contraire qu'il existe; mais il n'est nullement le seul type de chef révolutionnaire. Lorsque les archives de la Tcheka auront été suffisamment publiées en France, on verra qu'un grand nombre de commissaires bolcheviks, (...) n'avaient aucune

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orthodoxie révolutionnaire."\*

Malraux then answers the question "au nom de quoi (Gariné) se lie-t-il au mouvement révolutionnaire?" by re-defining the notion of revolution in the same way he had re-defined the revolutionary. He talks of "une certaine idée de la révolution très saugrenue (...) qui est née de l'idée de construction. Il faut, lorsqu'on veut concevoir un révolutionnaire, que ce révolutionnaire soit un homme qui a une doctrine préconçue, que cette doctrine ne soit pas une technique, si je puis dire; qu'elle ne tende pas à l'établissement d'une technique, mais qu'elle tende à toute autre chose, à l'organisation d'un sort idéal". Thus "Gariné ne se soumet pas à une image, mais à un mouvement proprement révolutionnaire (...)". "Saint-Just, au moment où a commencé son action, n'était pas républicain; et Lénine n'attendait pas le Nep de la révolution. Le révolutionnaire n'est pas un homme qui a un idéal fait; c'est un homme qui veut demander et obtenir le plus possible pour les gens qui sont les siens, pour ceux que j'appelais tout à l'heure ses frères d'armes".

If I have quoted at length from the debate on Les Conquérants, it is partly because the text is little known, but also because Malraux does seem to take Gariné seriously as a revolutionary, while the novel itself would tend to suggest, as I have tried to show, that Gariné is not a genuine revolutionary. Moreover, in his explanations Malraux gives us less a true picture of Gariné than a retouched portrait of his hero. Thus, when he says that "le sentiment essentiel de Gariné est la fraternité des armes", he says something which the novel itself does not say. On the contrary, one of the most essential traits of Gariné in the novel is the fact that he lives séparé des autres.

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On either side of Gariné and, as it were, framing him, we find

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\* As an example of this we find in Les Conquérants Nicolaïeff, before becoming the Chief of Police of the revolutionary power, was an informer of the Tsarist secret police.

two other representations of the revolutionary leader, the dedicated professional revolutionary Borodin\* and the terrorist Hong. To be sure, both are secondary figures, but not in the same degree. Borodin~~is~~ remains in relative darkness, while Hong does play a rather important part in the novel. In spite of the fact that we only see Hong twice in the course of the novel, he casts his shadow over the entire book.

Borodin~~is~~ is almost certainly present in the novel in order to give it a certain air of historical verisimilitude. But he also serves to light up, by contrast, the character of Garine. Right at the beginning of the novel when Gérard, the Kuomintang agent in Saïgon, briefs the Narrator about the situation in Canton, this contrast is made clear.

The conflict which grows up between the anarcho-nihilist Garine and the communist Borodine has got a political pretext, but is really a personal conflict. It turns indeed around the Communists' struggle against the terrorists, and the murder of Hong by the communists consummates the break<sup>w</sup> between the two men. But as we shall see later, Hong stands in a peculiar relationship to Garine.

The character of Hong has much more psychological substance than Borodin~~e~~, and we are shown something of the formation of this fanatical young man. In this formation the major part is played by the poverty of his childhood, it is this that gives his deeper drives a political form. There is also the influence of the old Genoese Rebecchi (also a friend of Garine), a strange, picturesque character who has some links with Malraux' farfelu fantasy. Rebecchi had been in his young days an active anarchist and a disciple of Jean Grave. He now lives in Canton and has a little shop "(où) il vendait aux chinois la pacotille des bazars d'Europe et, surtout, possédait des petits automates: oiseaux chanteurs, ballérines, chat-botté, qu'une pièce de monnaie mettait en mouvement, et dont il vivait". Rebecchi's life is a failure.

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\* With this description of Borodin~~e~~, Trotsky would certainly not agree and he talks about his having "le cynisme d'un fonctionnaire à tout faire". (22)

Now what Hong learns from Rebecchi is not so much the anarchist teachings, although he learns those as well, but also something more important, and which will have an immense impact on him: a western concept of life:

Hong médita le jugement confus que Rebecchi portait sur sa vie. La seule chose que l'Occident lui eût enseignée avec assez de force pour qu'il lui fût impossible de s'en délivrer, c'était le caractère unique de la vie. Une seule vie, une seule vie... Il n'en avait point conçu la crainte de la mort (...), mais la crainte profonde et constante de gâcher cette vie qui était la sienne et dont il ne pourrait jamais rien effacer.

Clearly, in this context the example of Rebecchi's vie manquée becomes important: "Et pensant aux confuses confidences de Rebecchi, (Hong) juge que trop d'hommes se sont laissés détourner de la seule vocation par l'ombre d'un idéal quelconque. Il (Hong) n'entend pas terminer sa vie en louant des oiseaux mécaniques". And hence the fierce and tense determination with which Hong pursues his vocation as terrorist.

But Hong is not only the representative of a certain very typical Malravian character; his true importance in Les Conquérants comes, I think, from the subterranean, but real links which tie him to Garine. For in a sense, Hong is Garine. Or rather, had Garine known hunger, humiliation and abject poverty, he might well have become Hong. They differ mainly in degree of intensity. The subject of both their hatreds is the bourgeois, and more especially their cult for la considération.\* They share a profound indifference to politics: "la politique ne m'intéresse pas", says Hong. And in his Réponse à Léon Trotski, Malraux writes about Hong: "Il ne représente pas le prolétariat, mais l'anarchie, il se fiche de l'avenir du prolétariat". The intellectual bourgeois counterpart of Hong, the anarchist, is Garine, the nihilist. Finally, both are against all societies, and Hong says this sentence which is the pure echo of Garine's: "Je suis a-social, tout état social est une saloperie". - After having given a sketch of Hong's development, Garine adds: "après un court silence: il est peu d'ennemis que je

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\*"C'est son dégoût de la respectabilité, vertu chinoise par excellence, qui l'a conduit dans les rangs des révolutionnaires", says Garine of Hong.

comprene mieux". Hence the importance of Hong's death which is the real reason of Garine's break with the communists. They have not only killed Garine's fraternal enemy, but also shown that there is no room for him in the world they want to create. He leaves Canton, alone and to die.

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Chapter IV.

La Condition humaine.

1.

It is beyond dispute, although some critics may prefer L'Espoir, that Malraux reached the highest point of his development as novelist with his third novel: La Condition humaine. The previous writings seem to converge towards this novel in which all the Malrauvian themes find their richest and deepest expression. We have seen Malraux' own attitude towards this novel: it might be said that he had himself the impression that he had now perhaps written his definitive novel.\*

La Condition humaine, like its two predecessors, was first published as a serial (La Nouvelle Revue française, 1932, Vol. 40, Nos. CCXXXII. CCCXXXII), it came out as a book in 1933, an "édition revue et corrigée" was published in 1946.

On its publication La Condition humaine was awarded the Prix Goncourt. This was in many ways an unusual award. The Académie Goncourt consisted at that time almost entirely of good writers of the second rank (with the exception perhaps of the formidable polemicist, Léon Daudet). The prize was usually given to nonentities (who remembers today John-Antoine Nan (1903) or Henri Malherbe (1917)?), or it was given to safe and sound craftsmen such as Georges Duhamel or Henri Pourrat. On the whole when faced with the choice between a great book and a mediocre one, the Académie Goncourt will choose the mediocre novel. For example, when in 1932 the Académie had to choose between Céline's Voyage au bout de la nuit and Guy Mazeline's Les Loups, it chose the latter novel. Only once before did the prize go to a truly great and unorthodox novel when it crowned Proust's A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleur.

The award of the Prix Goncourt to Malraux' La Condition humaine was therefore something of an accident, because it not only was a great novel, but also one which went almost certainly against the habits of thought of the Goncourt judges: it is not a "well made novel", and all the violence and sex must no doubt have shocked these

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\* See Chapter IV.

solid, middle class writers. Moreover the author himself had the reputation of being a communist.\* L'Humanité wrote with pride about the award: "Il y a un fait qui ne peut être nié. La bourgeoisie voulant consacrer une oeuvre littéraire, n'a pu trouver d'autre candidat qu'un homme qui salue l'Armée Rouge et la construction du socialisme".(2)

The last sentence of the quotation gives us perhaps a clue to the reasons behind the award. Toward this time France was beginning to feel the effects of the world-wide economic crisis, at the beginning of 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. The politicisation of French literature was beginning and of this the unusual award of the Prix to Malraux was undoubtedly an indication. At the same time, as appears from Billy's little historical footnote, the judges had also, if not mainly, been sensitive to the novel's literary qualities.

La Condition humaine is structurally the most complex of Malraux' novels, it is also the most ambitious one. In La Condition, Malraux set out to do what Drieu la Rochelle had predicted he would

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\* A great many years later, André Billy who was (and still is) a member of the Académie, tells us how the decision was reached:

La biographie de Malraux qui vient de paraître, écrite par un Américain, s'arrête avant le prix Goncourt qui couronna La Condition humaine en 1933. Dans ses Antimémoires, Malraux n'évoque pas cet événement auquel il a dû sa célébrité première.

On n'a jamais dit exactement comment les Dix désignèrent un lauréat dont il était difficile alors de prévoir l'extraordinaire carrière littéraire et politique. J'ai demandé à Dorgelès de rafraîchir pour moi les souvenirs qu'il avait gardés de l'événement.

La désignation du lauréat s'annonçait difficile. La Condition humaine n'était soutenue que par l'Indochinois Jean Ajalbert qui, précédemment, avait voté pour La Voie royale, et par l'auteur des Croix de bois. Décidé à faire couronner Malraux, Dorgelès alla voir le vieux président et doyen Léon Hennique, alité. Celui-ci était fermement opposé à Malraux dont il ne niait d'ailleurs pas le talent. "Il s'agit, dit-il, d'un bon livre d'inspiration révolutionnaire. Cela m'ennuie. Et puis on dit que ce jeune homme est communiste." Dorgelès lui répondit textuellement: "Communiste, il ne le sera peut-être pas toujours, mais grand écrivain, il le restera certainement." Ce raisonnement persuada Hennique, qui promit de voter pour Malraux. Dorgelès n'eut plus ensuite qu'à se rendre au quartier Latin chez le cher Raoul Ponchon qui votait toujours avec son vieil ami Hennique. Les deux autres voix furent celles de Gaston Chérau et de Pol Neveux.

Quand Dorgelès annonça le résultat à la presse, car il était alors secrétaire, les journalistes applaudirent. Ce fut pour Malraux un succès retentissant.(1)

not be able to do: to write a complex novel with a number of leading characters: "Je ne crois pas néanmoins que Malraux fasse des romans à action complexe, fournis de plusieurs personnalités égales."<sup>(3)</sup>

But this is precisely the kind of novel La Condition humaine is.

Malraux now abandons the unilinear novel with one dominant character and writes a novel with no less than five main characters: Gisors, Tchen, Kyo, Clappique, Ferral and a number of important secondary characters: May, Hemmelrich, Valérie, etc. Most of the main characters meet one another, their various lives intersect, forming thus a complex network of relationships.

La Condition humaine is made up of a chain of scenes and episodes. The narrative technique in that way is not very different from that of the previous novels. But because of the greater number of characters and the greater complexity of the action, the scenes (or sequences) tend to be rather shorter and more disconnected. The plot such as it is, is even more broken up than in Les Conquérants; it is therefore almost impossible to give a résumé of the action. The accumulation of brief episodes which, as it were, tumble over each other is effective in that it creates an atmosphere of tension and breathlessness. At the same time the continuous shifting of scenes, even though they are carefully dated and timed, tends to make for confusion. La Condition humaine, although an absorbing novel, does not read easily. What adds to the confusion is that there is no attempt to place the various events geographically or topographically. They take place in a curiously anonymous Shanghai and in what seems to be an extremely limited space. Not only, therefore, do events happen on top of one another in time, but also in space. In short, La Condition humaine shows us historical events which take place in an unreal city. Yet although this telescoping of time<sup>(\*)</sup> and space tends to confuse the reader, it is dramatically effective in that it creates within the framework of a novel, the kind of claustrophobic effect we find in classical tragedy.

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(\*) The action of the novel takes twenty-four days, yet the reader gets the impression that it is all played out in a few days.

The framework of the novel is provided by the events which took place in Shangaï during the Spring of 1927. The city is about to fall into the hands of the Southern Nationalist army of the Kuomintang, and with the fall of Shangaï the whole of China is now in their hands. At that time the alliance of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party is still operative. But the right-wing of the Kuomintang, led by Tchang Kaï Shek decides not only to break with the Communist Party, but to suppress the Communist movement by force. "Le 3 avril 1927 (Malraux is slightly out with his dates, since he places these events on April 12) au petit jour, à Shangaï des camions chargés d'hommes armés s'arrêtaient devant chacun des locaux occupés par des cellules ou des sections communistes et, à coup de mitraillettes et de grenades les "nettoyaient". Les principaux leaders communistes étaient arrêtés et, peu après, fusillés dans des conditions atroces".<sup>(4)</sup>

La Condition humaine then deals with three actions:

1. The uprising in Shangaï, timed to coincide with the arrival of the army from the South, in which Kyo, Tchen and Katow are involved.
2. The anti-communist activities of the Western capitalists (Ferral) and some members of the Kuomintang.
3. The crushing of the Communist Party in which Katow and Kyo find their death.

The political events which form the background of the novel have, as we have seen, a historical basis and all the characters of the novel are involved in these events, yet politics are almost entirely absent from La Condition humaine. This is not as paradoxical as might appear at first sight. The revolution is very much present with its violence and horror, but it is present as a picturesque event, not as a political event. Politics as politics are much more important in Les Conquérants than in La Condition humaine, and the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenbourg criticises Malraux for this absence of the Revolution as a political event: "Quant aux autres Chinois, ceux qui faisaient la Révolution, ils n'apparaissent que rarement, tels des figurants, et seulement pour que leur passivité mette en valeur la volonté révolutionnaire des

héros /....

héros du roman. Ses figurants sont à tel point timides et insignifiants qu'une question se pose parfois: 'qu'ont à faire ici les bombes, les syndicats et la prise du pouvoir' (...) La Révolution qu'a vécu un grand pays devient l'histoire d'un groupe de conspirateurs. Les conspirateurs (...) raisonnent énormément. Certes ils s'occupent beaucoup de distribuer des fusils, mais il est difficile de dire à quoi servent ces fusils."<sup>(5)</sup> This criticism, which is not unlike that which Trotsky made of Les Conquérants, is in a way not really justified, for what interests Malraux as a novelist is not the political revolution, but the plastic and dramatic aspects of the revolution. Moreover it provides him with an ideal extreme situation in which to imprison his characters.

2.

The proud and striking title of the novel is justified by the fact that in La Condition humaine Malraux presents us with a rich panorama of attitudes towards man's fate. During the twenty-odd days the action takes, each main character (with the exception of Gisors whose dialogue with nothingness is clearly one of long standing) lives through a crucial experience which brings each one of them brutally face to face with one or other element which makes up our human condition. Tchen comes face to face with death, Kyo with the dark mystery of sex and love, Clappique with reality, Ferral with humiliation. In other words, all the characters live through a moral or spiritual crisis.\* And because of this they have considerably more psychological weight and substance than the heroes of the preceding two novels. It seems as if Malraux' parti-pris against psychology has partly broken down, or that he discovered that if he were to write a "roman à personnages multiples", he had to give some sort of psychological content to this novel.

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\* The Marxist Ehrenbourg remarks with obvious disapproval: "Les personnages de Malraux vivent d'une vie insolitement 'spirituelle'."<sup>(6)</sup>

Now in Les Conquérants and La Voie royale he could do almost without psychology since these novels dealt with the relationship of individuals with events. In La Voie royale it is Perken's relationship with action and adventure which is important, not his relationship with Claude. Similarly, in Les Conquérants, if Garine meets people (Borodin, Tcheng Dai, Hong etc.), it is only on a political plane, that is to say only as they are related to the event. Moreover this event (adventure or revolution) being so urgent and dominant, there was, so to speak, no room for psychological subtleties. No doubt the event is also present in La Condition humaine and all characters are, in one way or another, tied to it, yet their relationship with the revolution is more personal. Tchen's attitude to and relationship with the revolution is psychologically different from that of Kyo or Katow. Moreover the characters are also in many instances linked to each other: Gisors is linked to Kyo, Kyo is linked by love to May, by friendship to Tchen, Tchen is linked to Gisors. This establishes a network of human, personal and therefore psychological relationships. Yet in spite of the fact that the psychological content of La Condition humaine is higher than that of the preceding or following novels, it would be wholly wrong to look upon La Condition humaine as a psychological novel; it remains essentially a Malrauvian novel: a mixture of action and ideas.

The novel opens with the terrorist Tchen who is by far the most complex character of the novel, but also the one who, although he plays a very small part in the novel,<sup>\*</sup> seems nevertheless to dominate. When Malraux tells Roger Stéphane: "... La Condition humaine n'est pas le livre de Kyo", he is undoubtedly right. It could, in fact, perhaps with more justification be called "le livre de Tchen". Part of the dominance of Tchen over the novel comes from the fact that he is linked with the more spectacular events such as

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<sup>\*</sup> Out of a total of approximately 37 sequences Tchen only appears in 8.

the dramatic assassination with which the novel opens, the attack on the police station, the attempt on <sup>Tchen</sup>~~Chien~~ Kai Chek's life. But it comes mainly from the fact that right from the start we become aware that he is profoundly disturbed and surrounded by a mysterious aura of tension and moral inquiétude. "Tchen découvrait en lui (...) non le combattant qu'il attendait, mais un sacrificateur. Et pas seulement aux dieux qu'il avait choisis: sous son sacrifice à la révolution grouillait un monde auprès de quoi cette nuit écrasée d'angoisse n'était que clarté". The indication is clear: underneath the political and public act lies hidden an intensely personal and involuntary act. The political assassination suddenly reveals to Tchen this other, darker self who sinks into an "ivresse écrasante" and who finds himself outside life. "Rien de vivant ne devait se glisser dans la farouche région où il était jeté". There are clearly in Tchen marked Dostoievskian overtones.

Tchen, in spite of his isolation, has nevertheless a number of ties with his fellow terrorists for example, but more particularly with Gisors and with Kyo. Gisors is clearly Tchen's spiritual father: "Gisors avait été pendant des années son maître au sens chinois du mot - un peu moins que son père, plus que sa mère; depuis que ceux-ci étaient morts Gisors était sans doute le seul homme dont il eût besoin." It is this close and deep link which makes Tchen turn almost instinctively, to Gisors after his encounter with murder. The conversation with Gisors and the subsequent meditation of Gisors on the differences between Kyo and Tchen enable Malraux to give us, without himself intervening, a close look into the dark and tortured mind of his character. The close son-father relationship between these two characters has other consequences and establishes a secondary relationship between Kyo and Tchen who in a sense become "brothers". In a way it can be said that Tchen is to Kyo what Grabot was to Perken, the embodiment of a possible fate. Tchen is also what Kyo might have become.

Tchen /....

Tchen has been equipped with one of the fullest biographies of any of Malraux' characters. What is more, Malraux has given him an intellectual and spiritual background. As we have seen, we know nothing about Perken. Claude was given a picturesque background, but no more; and we only know the main facts about Garine's life. But of none of these characters do we know what made them what they are. Now in a way, and especially as far as Garine and Perken are concerned, this matters little; since they are indistinguishable from their action. And since the novels are solely concerned with them and that action, it matters little what they were, or how they came to this point. But, as we have seen, Tchen has another dimension, is a personnage à double fond, and we need a bit more than the bare outline of dates and facts if we are to understand this "monde de profondeurs", this "ivresse écrasante", this "farouche région" which he discovers after the assassination.

The manner in which we get to know the life and evolution of Tchen is characteristically Malrauxian. The story is not told as a narrative written by the author, but is told indirectly through a kind of interior monologue of Gisors who, after Tchen has told him about the murder of Tang-Yen-Ta, meditates about the differences between Tchen and his son Kyo.

The most important fact about Tchen is that his very first formation was a religious one ("la première éducation de Tchen avait été religieuse"). In this Tchen is unique among the characters of Malraux all of whom are, as it were, naturally agnostic, for them God does not die, but simply does not exist. This is not true of Tchen. Admittedly he loses his faith without going through a spiritual crisis; yet the early religious phase of Tchen's life left an indelible mark on his mind, and Gisors, significantly, thinking about the present Tchen, talks of his "esprit religieux".

This early religious influence was a Lutheran one, and this helps us to understand two important facets of Tchen's

character/....

character: his fierce independence and individualism and the strong puritanical streak in his personality. His teacher was an elderly clergyman devoured by religious inquiétude, and who made great spiritual demands on himself. This is also something which Tchen takes over from him, he owes this moral rigueur, this uncompromising rectitude to his early training. Finally we are afforded a glimpse of the young Christian Tchen which shows us a young man believing with genuineness and intensity: "L'Enfant qui rencontrait le Christ et non Satan ni Dieu - l'enseignement du pasteur lui avait enseigné que les hommes ne se convertissent jamais qu'à des intercesseurs - s'abandonnait à l'amour avec la rigueur qu'il portait sur tout". The importance of Tchen's early religious formation is also brought out in the scene where, just before Tchen's first attempt to kill Chang-Kai-Chek, he meets the pasteur. This chance meeting at this climactic point of Tchen's life is undoubtedly contrived, but, as often happens with such passages, they are contrived because they are necessary. The passage, first of all, serves to tie Tchen in a concrete manner to the Pasteur, that is to say to his religious past. Tchen's attitude towards his old teacher is ambiguous, but he remains close to him: "Il gardait de l'affection pour son ancien maître, mais non sans rancune". And he can share and understand the clergyman's moral anguish: "C'était avec sa souffrance que Tchen était entré en communion". The passage also serves to give to Tchen's action its metaphysical "colouring". It is significant that minutes before Tchen's terrorist act, questions of peace, pride and faith should be raised. For, as we shall see, Tchen's action does have its roots in pride, and terrorism is for him a faith: "Tu veux faire du terrorisme une espèce de religion?" asks a fellow terrorist, and Tchen replies: "Pas une religion, le sens de la vie". But what is faith for the believer if not the very meaning of life?

During the next step of his evolution Tchen, while at the University of Peking, falls under the influence of Gisors.

"Quand, /....

Quand, au christianisme, son nouveau maître avait opposé non des arguments, mais d'autres formes de grandeur, la foi avait coulé entre les doigts de Tchen, peu à peu, sans crise. Détaché par elle de la Chine, habitué par elle à se séparer du monde, au lieu de se soumettre à lui, il avait compris à travers Gisors que tout s'était passé comme si cette période de sa vie n'eût été qu'une initiation au sens héroïque: que faire d'une âme, s'il n'y a ni Dieu ni Christ?

Here then we have Tchen without faith and faced with an unanswerable question. This question with its Dostoievskian overtones, but its typical abrupt Malrauvian phrasing is, of course, the fundamental question which the whole oeuvre of Malraux asks and to which Les Voix du silence gives a possible answer. As far as Tchen (and perhaps also Malraux) is concerned, to be left face to face with an unanswerable question is to be left face to face with nothing. And the loss of his faith leaves in Tchen a spiritual, metaphysical void. This is not explicitly stated but is, I think, clearly implied, and only the need to fill this void can explain the very last stage of Tchen's evolution when he becomes the sacrificed sacrificer. Finally, and this too is important for an understanding of Tchen's fate, his Christian belief had detached him from China. We know from La Tentation de l'Occident that for Malraux the main characteristic of the Oriental mind is the ability to be at one with the universe: "nous avons tout naturellement le sens de l'univers".\* The loss of this sens de l'univers which could have filled Tchen's spiritual void, will contribute to Tchen's anguish and isolation.

The third stage of Tchen's development is his choosing political action. This is dealt with very succinctly, almost as if it were (as it is, in fact) of secondary importance in comparison to his early religious formation:

Tout le précipitait à l'action politique: l'espoir d'un monde différent, la possibilité de manger quelque misérablement (il était naturellement austère, peut-être par orgueil), la satisfaction de ses haines, de sa pensée, de son caractère. Elle donnait un sens à sa solitude."

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\* In a similar way the terrorist Hong of Les Conquérants, who is clearly a first sketch of Tchen, is detached from the oriental view of life through having met the Western attitude towards life.

The type of political action which Tchen chooses is, of course, significant. He does not, like Kyo, become a party member, but a terrorist working alone or in small tightly knit groups. Moreover terrorism is a more extreme form of action than political agitation and organisation. One can clearly see that Tchen's rigueur and exigence would not let him be satisfied with becoming an apparatchik. What is also at play here, of course, is, once again, his puritanical formation together with his silent insolence which gives a touch of Saint-Just to the character of Tchen. In this proud, tense isolation in which he lives, Tchen is very close to Garine, and if Tchen is condemned by the Revolution, and he knows this,\* it is very much for the same reason as the one which excluded Garine from the communist world: "Il n'y a pas de place dans le communisme pour celui qui veut ... d'abord être lui-même, enfin, exister séparé des autres". There is a difference however: Garine wants to live a separate life, but Tchen does not; on the contrary, he wants to feel linked to his comrades, but he is cut off from them, and of this he is painfully aware, especially during the attack on the police station which is a communal action: "Il n'était pas des leurs. Malgré le meurtre, malgré sa présence. S'il mourait aujourd'hui, il mourrait seul", and again: "Malgré l'intimité de la mort, malgré ce poids fraternal qui l'écartelait il n'était pas des leurs".

But Tchen is not only isolated, not only does he want to be himself, he wants to be more than himself, to go beyond himself. In a sense he wants to fill the void left by the lost faith:

Il se tuera", pensa Kyo. Il avait assez écouté son père pour savoir que celui qui cherche aussi âprement l'absolu ne le trouve que dans la sensation. Soif d'absolu, soif d'immortalité, donc peur de mourir: Tchen eût dû être lâche; mais il sentait, comme tout mystique, que son absolu ne pouvait être saisi que dans l'instant. D'où sans doute son dédain de tout ce qui ne tendait pas à l'instant qui le lierait à lui-même dans une possession vertigineuse.

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\* "Le monde qu'ils préparaient le condamnait, lui, Tchen autant que celui de leurs ennemis. Que ferait-il dans l'usine future embusqué derrière leurs cottes bleues?"

Here we come to the burning centre of Tchen and the key-words of the passage which are "soif d'absolu" and "mystique". It is partly this mystical side of Tchen that makes him spiritually so restless. When the Pasteur exhorts him to find peace, Tchen replies significantly: "Je ne cherche pas la paix, je cherche le contraire". There is a kind of natural mystic who does not seek quiet and peace, but on the contrary exaltation and ecstasy; to this kind Tchen belongs. But he is a mystic without God, and because of this he is forced to find the object of his exaltation - the Absolute - not outside himself, but in himself, and it is precisely this which condemns him to self-destruction. The words "possession vertigineuse" suggest a fall - it is the fall of an Icarus consumed by the fire of his own sun. Tchen, the godless mystic, unable "de s'abîmer en Dieu" can only "s'abîmer en lui-même" in a vain attempt to possess himself in one ecstatic moment which is his death. That is why his death had to be so fulgurating and so bright. Tchen literally had to explode. At the same time this desire or need to be his own Absolute reveals Tchen's pride which the Pasteur, during the meeting before the first attempt to kill Tchang-Kaï-Chek, sees quite clearly, and which makes him say to Tchen: "Tchen, je prierai pour que Dieu vous délivre de l'orgueil, s'il vous accorde l'humilité vous êtes sauvé". And what the clergyman says here is, absolutely true. Gisors also recognises in Tchen this same pride which he calls l'ambition. (Garine might in this context have talked about puissance: these three notions: orgueil, ambition and puissance are, of course, of the same order).

- Je serai bientôt tué.

N'est-ce pas cela surtout qu'il veut? se demandait Gisors. Il n'aspire à aucune gloire, à aucun bonheur. Capable de vaincre, mais non de vivre dans sa victoire, que peut-il appeler, sinon la mort? Sans doute veut-il lui donner le sens que d'autres donnent à la vie. Mourir le plus haut possible. Amc d'ambitieux, assez lucide, assez séparé des hommes ou assez malade pour mépriser tous les objets de son ambition, et son ambition même?

This analysis of Tchen has, so far, not yet taken into account the murder of Tang-Yen-Ta, which, together with his religious upbringing, is the most important event in Tchen's life. It is when these two

elements /....

elements, as it were, cross that Tchen's destiny is sealed.

It is this murder which pushes Tchen into a still deeper solitude. The assassin is literally rejected by life and is totally isolated. This is visually shown, and with great effectiveness, in the opening pages: Tchen, in the hotel room, alone with the dead man is outside life, only on the other side of the window life exists.

Au-dessous, tout en bas, les lumières de minuit reflétées à travers une brume jaune par le macadam mouillé, par les raies pâles des rails, palpitaient de la vie des hommes qui ne tuent pas. C'étaient là des millions de vies, et toutes maintenant rejetaient la sienne; mais qu'était leur condamnation misérable à côté de la mort qui se retirait de lui, qui semblait couler hors de son corps à longs traits, comme le sang de l'autre? Toute cette ombre immobile ou scintillante était la vie, comme le fleuve, comme la mer invisible au loin - la mer ... Respirant enfin jusqu'au plus profond de sa poitrine, il lui sembla rejoindre cette vie avec une reconnaissance sans fond, - prêt à pleurer, aussi bouleversé que tout à l'heure.

Tchen now enters a region where he will be irremediably alone and from which life is banned: "rien de vivant ne devait se glisser dans la farouche région où il était jeté". He is condemned to solitary confinement. ("Il entrait dans le terrorisme comme dans une prison".) Metaphorically he will never leave the hotel room where he is alone with death.

But what is more important is that through murder Tchen discovers in himself "ces profondeurs grouillantes", and what he finds in these depths is indeed profoundly disturbing: When Gisors asks him: "Tu n'as pas eu horreur du sang?", Tchen replies: "Si. Mais pas seulement horreur" (italics in the text). What he means here is that he felt horror and attraction. He feels before death a kind of vertigo; a mixture of fear, compulsion and fascination. He tells Kyo that he thinks about his own death with ecstasy, "mais une extase vers le bas." (My italics CJG.)

From the moment then that he kills, death becomes the main pole of attraction of his life towards which he is irresistibly drawn. His action now ceases to be political and acquires that metaphysico-hysterical edge we noted earlier. The first murder is

practical /....

practical and political: he had to seize some important papers. The attempted murder of <sup>↑</sup>Chang-Kai-Shek is of a wholly different kind: it is an intensely personal and exalted action which he merely uses for a political end. \*

I have, for reasons of clarity, analysed separately the elements which make up the personality of Tchen. In the novel these are inextricably mixed, making him one of the most complex and most fascinating characters of Malraux' world. He is also one of the few characters that move the reader.

3.

It seems likely that Malraux saw in Kyo the protagonist of his novel. But we have seen that this dominant role in the novel has been partly usurped by Tchen. Kyo is nevertheless important, and the two characters are closely linked: La Condition humaine is, to a great extent, the novel of the two half-brothers Tchen and Kyo.

Like so many of Malraux' heroes, Kyo has a mixed background: he is half-Chinese, half-Japanese. The early years were spent in Japan, the later in China. There are good reasons for giving his protagonists such mixed backgrounds. One we have already pointed out (cf Ch. III.p.93): as tragic heroes they belong nowhere. But the mixed nature of their origin and background serves also to

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Tchen's murder of Chang-Kai-Shek could also be interpreted in the same way as Bernard Masson interprets the tyrannicide of Musset's Lorenzaccio (7)

Mr. Masson sees in Lorenzaccio's murder a means to unify and integrate a hopelessly divided and scattered personality: ("Ainsi écartelé, Lorenzo conçoit la nécessité d'une synthèse de lui-même ou plus exactement d'un acte assez puissant pour opérer 'à chaud', si l'on peut dire, cette reconstitution intérieure"... , p.21). Now Tchen could also be seen as a divided personality, divided between his past (which comes to haunt him significantly on the very moment of his first attempt to murder Chang-Kai-Shek) and his revolutionary present self. Tchen's murder will become, as for Lorenzaccio, "l'instant qui le lierait à lui-même dans une possession vertigineuse". And he himself is aware of this when during the exalted discussion with his fellow terrorists he explains what terrorism meant to him: "Tu veux faire du terrorisme une espèce de religion?" asks Souen. "Non", (replies Tchen). "Pas une religion. Le sens de la vie. La possession complète de soi-même. Totale. Absolue. La seule."

emphasise that they are not the products of a background, the children of their childhood, they have no childhood.\* They are rootless and therefore they are not what they have become, but what they have done and do: Perken is his adventure, Garine is his action, and Kyo is his revolutionary action. In this way Kyo is a simple character: "Les questions individuelles ne se posaient pour Kyo que dans sa vie privée". And so we are shown two Kyos. The simple Kyo who lives his public revolutionary life and the Kyo who lives a much more complex private life. The first one obviously holds little interest for the novelist for the simple reason that individual problems do not arise in his relationship with the revolution and the Party. He is totally at one with them, he serves the cause with a total devotion so that his individuality is, as it were, dissolved in the communal action. It is significant that in contrast to Tchen who because of personal problems is pushed into political action, Kyo chooses his political action:

Ici Gisors retrouvait son fils, indifférent au christianisme mais à qui l'éducation japonaise (Kyo avait vécu au Japon de sa huitième à sa dix-septième année) avait imposé aussi la conviction que les idées ne devaient pas être pensées, mais vécues. Kyo avait choisi l'action, d'une façon grave et préméditée, comme d'autres choisissent les armes ou la mer: il avait quitté son père, vécu à Canton, à Tientsin, de la vie des manoeuvres et des coolies-pousse, pour organiser les syndicats."

There is in Kyo's decision a determination which is totally lacking in Tchen's. The words which describe Tchen's engagement: "Tout le précipitait à l'action politique" suggest a sort of blind urgency. He is being thrown into the revolution, admittedly not against his will, but neither because of his willing it. Moreover Kyo is quite clear about what he wants, what he is fighting for:

Il n'était pas inquiet. Sa vie avait un sens, et il le connaissait: donner à chacun de ces hommes que la famine, en ce moment même, faisait mourir comme une peste lente, la possession de sa propre dignité. (.....) Il n'y a pas de dignité possible, pas de vie réelle pour un homme qui travaille douze heures par jour sans savoir pour quoi il travaille. Il fallait que ce travail prît un sens, devînt une patrie.

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\* This might perhaps have autobiographical roots. In an interview with Michel Droit Malraux declared: "(mon enfance) ne m'intéresse pas et je la déteste". (8)

And much later, after his arrest, he explains to the police chief König why he is a communist:

- On m'a dit que vous êtes communiste par ... Comment, déjà? dignité. C'est vrai?

(.....)

- Je pense que le communisme rendra la dignité possible pour ceux avec qui je combats. Ce qui est contre lui, en tout cas, les contraint à n'en pas avoir.

What comes through in both these quotations is a kind of quiet, objective altruism which stands again in strong contrast to Tchen's very subjective motivation: "L'espoir d'un monde différent" is vague and is significantly mixed with "la satisfaction de ses haines, de sa pensée, de son caractère." (My italics C.J.G.) Finally in contrast to the solitary and isolated Tchen who, as we have seen, at the height of the revolutionary struggle feels cut off from his comrades ("Il n'était pas des leurs"), Kyo is completely at one with them:

Il était des leurs: ils avaient les mêmes ennemis. Metis, hors-caste, dédaigné des Blancs et plus encore des Blanches, Kyo n'avait pas tenté de les séduire: il avait cherché les siens et les avait trouvés.

Kyo fights with his comrades and he will die with them. Tchen dies alone an ironically useless death (~~T~~chang Kaï Chek is not killed) and he dies in a cruel, messy way which is described in a very detached manner:

On s'approchait. Il se souvint qu'il devait prendre son revolver. Il tenta d'atteindre sa poche de pantalon. Plus de poche, plus de pantalon, plus de jambe: de la chair hachée. (.....) Il ouvrit enfin les yeux. Tout tournait, d'une façon lente et invincible, selon un très grand cercle, et pourtant rien n'existait que la douleur. Un policier était tout près. Tchen voulut demander si Chang-Kaï-Shek était mort, mais il voulait cela dans un autre monde; dans ce monde-ci, cette mort même lui était indifférente.

De toute sa force, le policier le retourna d'un coup de pied dans les côtes. Tchen hurla, tira en avant, au hasard, et la secousse rendit plus intense encore cette douleur qu'il croyait sans fond. Il allait s'évanouir ou mourir. Il fit le plus terrible effort de sa vie, parvint à introduire dans sa bouche le canon du revolver. Prévoyant la nouvelle secousse, plus douloureuse encore que la précédente, il ne bougeait plus. Un furieux coup de talon d'un autre policier crispa tous ses muscles: il tira sans s'en apercevoir.

But Kyo dies surrounded by his comrades; he dies, as it were, a fertile death to which, significantly, Malraux gives a lyrical

expression /....

expression:-

Pourtant, la fatalité acceptée par eux montait avec leur bourdonnement de blessés comme la paix du soir, recouvrait Kyo, ses yeux fermés, ses mains croisées sur son corps abandonné, avec une majesté de chant funèbre. Il aurait combattu pour ce qui, de son temps, aurait été chargé du sens le plus fort et du plus grand espoir; il mourrait parmi ceux avec qui il aurait voulu vivre; il mourrait, comme chacun de ces hommes couchés, pour avoir donné un sens à sa vie. Qu'eût valu une vie pour laquelle il n'eût pas accepté de mourir? Il est facile de mourir quand on ne meurt pas seul. Mort saturée de ce chevrottement fraternel, assemblée de vaincus où des multitudes reconnaîtraient leurs martyrs, légende sanglante dont se font les légendes dorées! Comment, déjà regardé par la mort, ne pas entendre ce murmure de sacrifice humain qui lui criait que le coeur viril des hommes est un refuge à morts qui vaut bien l'esprit?

Let us first consider Kyo, the revolutionary, since it is he whom we meet first at Hemmelrich's record shop where Tchen goes after the murder. Kyo, the man of action, is almost always in company with Katow, and Katow is the dominant person: it is he, for instance, who instructs the groupes de combat how to destroy tanks, it is he who leads the raid on the ammunition-carrying cargo boat. It is obvious that Katow is older and much more experienced than Kyo. But this dominance of Katow over Kyo helps also to establish a contrast between Katow, the real professional revolutionary whose entire life is lived in the revolution, and Kyo, who, in spite of his dedication, has nevertheless another life which does not belong to the revolution. The fact that "les questions individuelles ne se posaient que dans sa vie privée" shows that unlike Katow, he has individual problems, and that he has a private life which is kept separate from his revolutionary life; Kyo is by no means a middle-class young man who "plays" at being a revolutionary, but he is not either in the class of the true professional revolutionaries such as Borodin or the fictional Katow.

In the scene where we meet Kyo for the first time, Malraux has placed one of the key images of the novel. Some recordings of Kyo's voice had been made; now in Hemmelrich's shop he is listening

to /....

to the play-back, but does not recognise his own voice.\* The meaning of the experience is gradually made clear. First the purely physiological phenomenon is explained ("C'est sans doute une question de moyens: nous entendons la voix des autres avec les oreilles. Et la nôtre avec la gorge.") It acquires its deeper symbolic meaning in two parallel meditations of Gisors and Kyo. To both the episode of the records comes back to mind after crucial experience. Kyo thinks about it when he has heard that May went to bed with another man; Gisors when, after Tchen's confession, he discovers that he cannot really understand Tchen. To both the experience acquires the same meaning: it illustrates the utter isolation of each man:

(Kyo) s'enfonçait en lui-même comme dans cette ruelle de plus en plus noire, où même les isolateurs du télégraphe ne luisaient plus sur le ciel. Il y retrouvait l'angoisse, et se souvint des disques: "On entend la voix des autres avec ses oreilles, la sienne avec la gorge." Oui. Sa vie aussi, on l'entend avec la gorge, et celle des autres? ... Il y avait d'abord la solitude, la solitude immuable derrière la multitude mortelle comme la grande nuit primitive derrière cette nuit dense et basse sous quoi guettait la ville déserte, pleine d'espoir et de haine.

And Gisors:

Comme Kyo, et presque pour les mêmes raisons, il songea aux disques dont celui-ci lui avait parlé; et presque de la même façon, car les modes de pensée de Kyo étaient nés des siens. De même que Kyo n'avait pas reconnu sa propre voix parce qu'il l'avait entendue avec la gorge, de même la conscience que lui, Gisors, prenait de lui-même, était sans doute irréductible à celle qu'il pouvait prendre d'un autre être, parce qu'elle n'était pas acquise par les mêmes moyens.

It is when we leave the world of action and when we see Kyo and May together that we enter into the world of the questions individuelles - which from the novelist's point of view, whether he wants to or not, is the only valid world. We do not see him now engaged in action, but we see him feeling, meditating: we get inside Kyo.

The relationship between Kyo and May is of great importance in making clear one of the meanings of the novel. Kyo without May

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\* It is perhaps significant of Malraux' indifference to the "novel" that the practical purpose of those records never becomes clear (at least not to this reader), that the scene is quite gratuitous. But this matters little; Malraux needed the episode in order, at a later stage, to give it meaning, and therefore puts the episode in.

would not have come face to face with his human condition. He would have fought and died in a world without anguish and without problems. ("Il n'était pas inquiet. Sa vie avait un sens, il le connaissait...") It is through May that suffering and anxiety will come into Kyo's life, and this anxiety will grow into a form of meta-physical Angst. It is also with the couple Kyo - May that love, almost the only time, finds its place in the world of Malraux. A love devoid of sentimentality, almost devoid of words, those vehicles of sentimentality. In Malraux' world the language of affection and the endearments are reserved for dogs and children. (May talking to her Pekinese: "chien velu, chien moussu, chien touffu". And Kassner's wife in Le Temps du mépris talking to her child: "Mon petit printemps, bouchonnet, poussin".) The affection which exists between May and Kyo is nevertheless very real, in a sense it is so real and profound that it need not be expressed. Yet the non-verbal, non-sentimental quality of their feelings comes also from the fact that their love has a kind of toughness which somehow is not wholly convincing, but which brings it very close to the fraternité virile. This is accentuated by the virile characteristics which Malraux has given May: "May entra, son manteau de cuir bleu, d'une coupe presque militaire, accentuait ce qu'il avait de viril dans sa marche et même dans sa démarche". Yet in spite of their deep affection, in spite of this "entente charnelle entre eux", they both retain their sexual freedom. This is, of course, very much in keeping with the then current ethos of the communist intelligentsia. It is the exercise of this freedom by May that sparks off Kyo's personal crisis. When May tells Kyo casually: "Il faut que je te dise quelque chose qui va peut-être un peu t'embêter (....) J'ai fini par coucher avec Lenglen, cet après-midi", Kyo's reactions are first of a psychological nature, hurt and bitterness, and pain at the thought of Langlen's possible contempt for May: "L'idée qu'ayant couché avec elle (...) il peut penser d'elle: 'cette petite poule' me donne envie de l'assommer". But the reaction reaches deeper

levels /....

lovels and finally reveals to Kyo his and Man's total solitude:

"la solitude immuable derrière la multitude mortelle".

Just before he dies, Kyo's thoughts turn to May: "Depuis plus d'un an May l'avait délivré de toute solitude." Now what is important is that after May tells Kyo she went to bed with Lenglen May in a very real sense dies for Kyo:

Rien, pourtant, ne prévalait contre la décoloration de ce visage enseveli au fond de leur vie commune comme dans la brume, comme dans la terre. Il se souvint d'un ami qui avait vu mourir l'intelligence de la femme qu'il aimait, paralysée pendant des mois; il lui semblait voir mourir May ainsi, voir disparaître absurdement, comme un nuage qui se résorbe dans le ciel gris, la forme de son bonheur. Comme si elle fût morte deux fois, du temps, et de ce qu'elle lui disait.

And again more explicitly:

L'essentiel, ce qui le troublait jusqu'à l'angoisse, c'est qu'il était tout à coup séparé d'elle, non par la haine - bien qu'il y eût de la haine en lui - non par la jalousie (ou bien la jalousie était-elle précisément cela?); par un sentiment sans nom, aussi destructeur que le temps ou la mort: il ne la retrouvait pas.

With this "death" of May disappears also the person who had freed Kyo from solitude; now he becomes suddenly and profoundly aware of this solitude. It is at this stage that Kyo discovers the true meaning of his strange experience when listening to the reproduction of his own voice.

Towards the end of the novel Kyo and May are reunited. When <sup>te</sup>Chang-Kaï-Chek is preparing to crush the Communist Party, Kyo goes off to join his comrades and also goes towards his almost certain death, May wants to accompany him. But Kyo, out of vengeance, refuses her the right to share his death with him. He leaves alone, yet "he comes back for her (...) offering as a complete token of love his willingness to lead her to death".<sup>(9)</sup> Seen in this light this scene has, as we shall see, a certain resemblance with the scene where Katow shares his cyanide with his two comrades.

At the antipodes of Kyo we find the minor character Hemmelrich who in the organisation of the novel has nevertheless a certain importance. His function is linked to the dichotomy

dignity/....

dignity/humiliation which is so important in the characterisation of Kyo. If Kyo is dignity, Hemmelrich is humiliation. There is a close resemblance between Rebecchi in Les Conquérants and Hemmelrich. Rebecchi is obviously a preliminary sketch. The young Italian anarchist who, defeated by poverty and life, now sells mechanical toys in Saïgon, becomes a Belgian (with a strangely German sounding name) with a background of poverty: "d'un bout à l'autre (son souvenir) n'était que misère". He drifts to Shangaï where he marries a Chinese woman: "qui s'était accrochée à lui d'un amour aveugle de chien martyrisé, soupçonnant qu'il était un autre chien martyrisé". He has a child who, when the novel opens, is dying. The misery and miserableness of Hemmelrich is a little overstressed which makes him not quite convincing as a character. One feels that Malraux is ill at ease with him, partly because he is not an intellectual who verbalises his predicament, but an instinctive révolté in rebellion against the poverty and the humiliation to which he is condemned. Moreover his family obligations (he is the only character in La Condition humaine who has a family) rob him of his freedom, and he cannot join his comrades in action which is another source of humiliation. Eventually Hemmelrich will be set free. When Tchang-Kaï-Chek moves against the communists, Hemmelrich's record shop which had been a communist meeting place is "nettoyée à la grenade comme une tranchée", and his wife and ailing child have been killed. The irony of the incident lies in the fact that for once death, the enemy, becomes an ally: "Pourtant, cette fois, la destinée avait mal joué: en lui arrachant tout ce qu'il possédait encore elle le libérerait". The ironic accent in this sentence clearly falls on "cette fois". At the end of the novel Hemmelrich's life of poverty and humiliation is redeemed by working in the Soviet Union. "J'ai vu hier H Hemmelrich", writes a co-refugee to May, "qui pense à vous. Il est monteur à l'usine d'électricité. Il m'a dit: 'c'est la première fois de ma vie que je travaille en sachant pourquoi, et non /....

non en attendant patiemment de crever.'" This redemption of Hemmelrich through communism is too edifying and too moralising to be convincing.

Katow, as we had already occasion to remark, is the true professional revolutionary. He might be seen as a more worked-out version of Borodin in Les Conquérants. Katow appears only in scenes of action. One of the most interesting of these is the defence of the Communist permanence by Katow and Hemmelrich. Its interest derives partly from the fact that it is the counterpoint of the attack on the police station at the beginning of the novel: The Revolution triumphant and the Revolution defeated. The scene is also interesting because it reveals so clearly the resemblance of the world of Malraux with the world of the romanticised, melodramatic war pictures of the XIXth century, for what we have in this scene of the last stand of Katow is a modernized version of the well-known pompier picture of the Franco-Prussian war: "Les Dernières cartouches".

Katow has been equipped by Malraux with a meagre and significantly a purely political "biography":-

Katow condamné à cinq ans de bagne en 1905, lorsque, étudiant en médecine, il avait participé à l'attaque - puérile - de la prison d'Odessa. (....)

Réfugié en Suisse de 1905 à 1912, date de son retour clandestin en Russie, il parlait français presque sans accent, mais en avalant un certain nombre de voyelles, comme s'il eût voulu compenser ainsi la nécessité d'articuler rigoureusement lorsqu'il parlait chinois.

The peculiarity of Katow's speech is not without interest. It is, as we have already seen (Chapter III p.97), a rather artificial means to give in the case of Katow some degree of individuality to this character. The psychological content of Katow is almost nil, yet he must come

across /....

across in the novel as a living and convincing person and not as an abstraction: The Professional Revolutionary. It is by giving him this speech mannerism that Malraux tries to put Katow within our reach.

Yet to say that Katow is only a political man of action would be to simplify things. He has a "human" side to him which suddenly and unexpectedly is revealed in a conversation with Hemmelrich who is devoured by guilt for refusing to harbour Tchen in his house:

- J'ai connu ça, ou presque. Et aussi ton espèce de ... rage... Comment veux-tu qu'on comprenne les choses autrement que par les souvenirs... C'est pour ça que tu ne me vexes pas. (....)

- Un homme qui se fout de tout, s'il rencontre tellement le d'vouement, le sacrifice, un quelconque de ces trucs-là, il est perdu.

- Sans blagues! Alors qu'est-ce qu'il fait?

- Du sadisme, répondit Katow, le regardant tranquillement. Le grillon. Des pas, dans la rue, se perdaient peu à peu.

- Le sadisme avec les épingles, reprit-il, c'est rare; avec les paroles, c'est loin de l'être. Mais si la femme accepte 'bsolument, si elle est capable d'aller au delà.. J'ai connu un type qui a pris et joué l'argent que la sienne avait éc'nomisé pendant des années pour aller au san'torium. Question de vie ou de mort. Il l'a perdu. (Dans ces cas-là, on perd t'jours.) Il est revenue en morceaux, 'bsolument écrasé comme toi en ce moment. Elle l'a regardé s'approcher de son lit. Elle a tout de suite compris, vois-tu. Et puis, quoi? Elle a essayé de la consolider...

The passage shows that Katow is capable of friendship, it also shows a Katow who has suffered, for it is quite clear that in the rather self-consciously **D**ostoievskian scene of the gambler he talks about himself, although he will deny it. Later on in the same passage a further and more important touch is added to this "human" side of Katow:

- Il ne faut demander aux cam'rades que ce qu'il peuvent faire. Je veux des cam'rades et pas des saints. Pas confiance dans les saints...

- C'est vrai, que tu as accompagné volontairement les types aux mines de plomb?

- J'étais au camp, dit Katow gêné: les mines ou le camp, ça se vaut...

The importance of this exchange lies in linking Katow's action with the idea of saintliness.

These human touches, Katow's warmth, his generosity, above

all /....

all his disregard of himself were, of course, absolutely necessary for they prepare the reader for Katow's last and greatest sacrifice of which the action to accompany his comrades to the lead mines is a prefiguration. This scene with which La Condition humaine comes to its climax and, in a way, to its end is beyond doubt the finest scene in the novel. Its meaning is wholly contained in the concrete representation. There is no intrusive symbolism, nothing is explained. It is also in this scene that the taut, terse style of Malraux and especially the extraordinarily intense visual quality of his writing are used with the greatest effectiveness: nothing is described, yet everything is shown and seen.

The scene takes place in the courtyard of a school when the defeated communists have been assembled waiting to be burned alive. Katow, wounded, finds himself next to Kyo (this coincidence is rather contrived) and next to two terrified Chinese one of whom, Souen, was a companion of Tchen:

Malgré la rumeur, malgré tous ces hommes qui avaient combattu comme lui, Katow était seul, seul entre le corps de son ami mort et ses deux compagnons épouvantés, seul entre ce mur et ce sifflet perdu dans la nuit. Mais un homme pouvait être plus fort que cette solitude et même, peut-être, que ce sifflet atroce: la peur luttait en lui contre la plus terrible tentation de sa vie. Il ouvrit à son tour la boucle de sa ceinture. Enfin:

- Hé là, dit-il à voix très basse. Souen, pose ta main sur ma poitrine, et prends dès que je la toucherai: je vais vous donner mon cyanure. Il n'y en a absolument que pour deux.

(....) Les gardes masquaient la lumière, qui les entourait d'une auréole trouble; mais n'allaient-ils pas bouger? Impossible de voir quoi que ce fût; ce don de plus que sa vie, Katow le faisait à cette main chaude qui reposait sur lui, pas même à des corps, pas même à des voix.

The cyanide is lost in the darkness, then found again:

O résurrection! ... Mais:

- Tu es sûr que ce ne sont pas des cailloux? demanda l'autre. Il y avait beaucoup de morceaux de plâtre par terre.

- Donne! dit Katow.

Du bout des doigts, il reconnut les formes.

Il les rendit - rendit - serra plus fort la main qui cherchait à nouveau la sienne, et attendit, tremblant des épaules, claquant des dents. "Pourvu que le cyanure ne soit pas décomposé, malgré le papier d'argent", pensa-t-il. La main qu'il tenait tordit soudain la sienne, et, comme s'il eût communiqué par elle avec le corps perdu dans l'obscurité, il sentit que celui-ci se tendait. Il envoyait cette suffocation convulsive. Presque en même temps, l'autre: un cri étranglé auquel nul ne prit garde. Puis, rien.

What /....

What we have here is the ultimate expression of what Malraux calls (perhaps out of a certain pudeur) la fraternité virile, but which is, in fact, love. The greatest gift which man can give ("ce don de plus que sa vie") is his death.

4.

One of the reasons why La Condition humaine is so much richer a novel than the preceding ones and particularly Les Conquérants is the fact that it gives fuller treatment to those who oppose Kyo, Katow and their communist comrades. In Les Conquérants the enemy was both distant and abstract, it was the British Empire. But in La Condition humaine the enemy is concretely and very much present in the shape of the head of the Security Branch of the Kuomintang, König and the capitalist Ferral.

König is, no doubt, a very secondary character and appears only in two scenes, but he is not devoid of interest, and he has undoubtedly a part to play in the novel. What characterises König is his cruelty and his ferocious hatred of the Communists. But this hatred is not gratuitous and has deep roots in König's humiliation at the hands of the Reds during the Russian Civil War:

- En Sibérie, j'étais interprète dans un camp de prisonniers. J'ai pu en sortir en servant dans l'armée blanche, chez Semenov. Blancs, rouges, je m'en foutais: je voulais retourner en Allemagne. J'ai été pris par les rouges. J'étais à moitié mort de froid. Ils m'ont giflé à coups de poing, en m'appelant mon capitaine (j'étais lieutenant) jusqu'à ce que je tombe. Ils m'ont relevé. Je ne portais pas l'uniforme de Semenov, aux petites têtes de mort: j'avais une étoile sur chaque épaulette....

- Ils m'ont enfoncé un clou dans chaque épaule, à travers chaque étoile. Long comme un doigt. Ecoutez bien, mon petit Toto.

Il le prit par le bras, les yeux fixés sur les siens, avec un regard trouble:

- J'ai pleuré comme une femme, comme un veau... J'ai pleuré devant eux. Vous comprenez, oui?

It is interesting to note that König basically is apolitical ("Blancs, rouges", he confesses, "je m'en foutais") so that he is not so much against communism as against communists. By trying to kill as many of them as he can, he wants to wipe out the inradicable humiliation

when /....

when he cried "comme une femme, comme un veau" before his communist torturers. It is this which condemns Kyo: The man who lost his dignity avenges himself on the man who is communist "par dignité".

However, if König plays but a minor part in the novel, Ferral, the capitalist, the virtual master of the French concession of Shanghai, is one of the key figures of La Condition humaine. He dominates the second half of the novel, so that immediately after having seen the successful uprising we meet the Enemy. After the revolution, the counter-revolution. And at the very moment Katow, Kyo and the communists triumph, Ferral begins his negotiations with the envoy of the predominantly middle-class Kuomintang.

Yet, although Ferral is the "Enemy of the Heroes", Malraux' treatment of him is by no means unsympathetic. There is no false melodramatic contrast between black and white. Ferral has real gifts, he has a perceptive intelligence, as we see in his discussion with Gisors, he has the kind of lucidity which prevents him from being taken in by words: he has an "intégrité orgueilleuse". And in the last scenes when his Consortium, his huge empire collapses through the timorousness and mediocrity of a group of civil servants and bankers, he displays a stoic courage which brings him close to a certain greatness. In short, he is shown as a man of genuine stature, not to be confused with a run of the mill banker: he is a lone wolf, a twentieth century capitalist <sup>t</sup>condotiere:

Pas marié: histoire de femmes. Soupçonné de fumer l'opium. Il avait dédaigné la Légion d'honneur. Trop d'orgueil pour être, soit conformiste, soit hypocrite. Peut-être le grand individualisme ne pouvait-il se développer pleinement que sur un fumier d'hypocrisie: Borgia n'était pas pape par hasard... Ce n'était pas à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, parmi les révolutionnaires ivres de vertu, que se promenaient les grands individualistes, mais à la Renaissance, dans une structure sociale qui était la chrétienté, de toute évidence...

It is clear then that Ferral, although on the other side of the barricade, is nevertheless a typical ~~Mal~~ Malrauvian hero. He has close links, for example, with Garine whose "déterminer, diriger, contraindre, la vie est là" is obviously echoed by Ferral's definition

of /....

of intelligence which reveals his own idea of himself: intelligence for Ferral is "la possession des moyens de contraindre les hommes". He shares with Garine the same thirst for power. Like Perken, Ferral also wants to leave a permanent scar on the world. He is, like Garine and Perken, essentially a man of action and can feel a certain kinship with the organisers on the other side: "Pour la première fois il y avait une organisation de l'autre côté. Ces hommes qui la dirigeaient il eût aimé à les connaître. A les faire fusiller aussi". But all the same, as the last sentence indicates, he is, in spite of Malraux' sympathetic treatment, the Enemy. The devil can have great qualities. But curiously, he is the Enemy not so much because of his economic or political power, although this does play its part, but for moral reasons. It is not because he is a capitalist that Ferral is the enemy, but because he is essentially a moral "fascist".

Let us first examine the surface of his ambitions and of his power. His consortium consists of "deux établissements de crédit, quatre sociétés de cultures, trois sociétés minières, cinq sociétés industrielles, etc." All this is slightly larger than life, and it needs to be since Ferral himself is a kind of epic character. The same is true of his political ambitions. He has dictatorial ambitions:

(...) il ne pensait qu'à Paris. Rentrer en France assez fort pour acheter l'agence Havas ou traiter avec elle; reprendre le jeu politique, et, parvenu prudemment au ministère, jouer l'union du ministère, et d'une opinion publique achetée, contre le Parlement. Là était le pouvoir.

Beyond this he wants Absolute Power, what could be called in a sense metaphysical power, the kind only God can have. The kind of power Garine was reaching for: "De la puissance (Gariné) ne souhaitait ni argent, ni considération, ni respect, rien qu'elle-même". But it is obvious that because of its very absolute nature, this power will always be beyond reach: "sa volonté de puissance n'atteignait jamais son but, ne vivait que de se renouveler".

In /....

In the long run Ferral is condemned to be defeated. Here lies, I think, the meaning of the final collapse of Ferral's huge empire. There is an obvious irony here: Ferral triumphant over the revolution is in his turn defeated. His defeat is also an echo of the defeat of the Chinese C.P.

It might be apposite at this point briefly to discuss Hartmann's contention that all the novels end in defeat. Malraux himself in a discussion answered half as a boutade: "quand on décrit une bataille, il faut bien qu'il y ait des vaincus". And this is obvious enough. But there might be a deeper reason linked to the nature of the drives behind Malraux' heroes and to the problems by which they are faced. For these are in fact insoluble: Perken, the rebel against death, cannot be victorious; neither Garine nor Ferral can acquire Power; Tchen cannot be God, etc. As for the defeat of the Communist Party in Shanghai in 1927, this is an historical fact Malraux could not very well ignore.

But Ferral is not only a "Fascist" in his thirst for power, but more especially and more profoundly in his total egotism ("la seule chose dont il était avide était lui-même") and its consequent ruthless disregard of the existence of other people. Ferral humiliates everyone he comes in contact with by simply denying their individual existence: "Lui seul existait dans un monde de fantômes". More than anything else, this need to humiliate which makes Ferral the natural enemy of Kyo and of those who, through communism, want to give to each man "le sentiment de sa propre dignité".

It is in this context of Ferral's need to dominate and humiliate that should be seen the two erotic scenes of the novel: Ferral in bed with his mistress, the fashionable couturière Valérie, and Ferral with the Chinese courtisane. In the latter scene, Ferral refuses the ritual preliminaries:

Il la savait stupéfaite: il n'est pas d'usage de coucher avec une courtisane sans qu'elle ait chanté, causé, servi à table ou préparé des pipes. Pourquoi, sinon, ne pas s'adresser aux prostituées?

But /....

But this is what he wants, to humiliate her by using her as a prostitute, and Ferral muses: "L'érotisme c'est l'humiliation en soi ou chez l'autre, peut-être chez tous les deux. Une idée, de toute évidence". (Italics in the text). But the idea of humiliation is not always sufficient for Ferral, the sexual act itself is, in his eyes, a humiliation of his partner.

Son plaisir jaillissait de ce qu'il se mît à la place de l'autre, c'était clair: la l'autre contrainte; contrainte par lui. En somme il ne couchait jamais qu'avec lui-même, mais il ne pouvait y parvenir qu'à la condition de n'être pas seul. Il comprenait maintenant ce que Gisors n'avait pas soupçonné: oui, sa volonté de puissance n'atteignait jamais son objet, ne vivait que de le renouveler; mais, n'eût-il de sa vie possédé une seule femme, il avait possédé, il posséderait à travers cette Chinoise qui l'attendait, la seule chose dont il fût avide: lui-même.

This passage very clearly links Ferral's eroticism with the central driving force of his life and makes it, as it were, its natural expression.

Ferral's mistress, however, is not the kind of person who submits, who will be humiliated, who will be negated (Ferral to Gisors: "L'homme (...) doit nier la femme"). She writes to him after she breaks with him:-

Je ne suis pas une femme qu'on a, un corps imbécile auprès duquel vous trouvez votre plaisir en mentant comme aux enfants et aux malades. Vous savez beaucoup de choses, cher, mais peut-être mourrez-vous sans vous être aperçu qu'une femme est aussi un être humain.

Because of this pride and this refusal to submit to his will, there exists between them a state of undeclared hostility; tenaciously they both aim at dominating the other. In the only scene when we see them together - and the sole function of Valérie in the novel is to bring out this side of Ferral's character - they are in bed:

... il n'avait jamais couché avec elle que dans l'ombre. Mais à peine, de la main, écartait-il doucement ses jambes qu'elle éteignit. Il ralluma.

Il avait cherché l'interrupteur à tâtons, et elle crut à une méprise; elle éteignit à nouveau. Il ralluma aussitôt. Les nerfs très sensibles, elle se sentit, à la fois, tout près du rire et de la colère; mais elle rencontra son regard. Il avait écarté l'interrupteur, et elle fut certaine qu'il attendait le plus clair de son plaisir de la transformation sensuelle de ses traits.

Valérie /....

Valérie is right, of course: Ferral wants to see this transformation which he wills, he wants to see her "éprouvant cette jouissance qu'il ne pouvait ressentir que comme une humiliation". Valérie is defeated by the pleasure which he arouses in her and submits to him, but will never forgive him:

Elle choisit cette tiédeur et, le serrant contre elle, plongeait à longues pulsations loin d'une grève où elle savait que serait rejetée tout à l'heure, avec elle-même, la résolution de ne pas lui pardonner.

Valérie will eventually avenge herself with the very weapon of

Ferral: humiliation:

Elle l'avait atteint à son point le plus sensible, comme si elle lui eût crevé les yeux pendant son sommeil: elle le niait.

For a brief, but unbearably painful moment, Ferral with his power, his wealth and his will has become one of the despised fantômes.

It might be apposite at this point to consider in a more general way the role of eroticism in Malraux' world. Here we come up against a paradox. Although sex and eroticism seem to loom large in the Malrauxian world, they play in actual fact only a minor part in his novels and in his writing in general. Statistically, the erotic scenes or discussions on eroticism are few. There is the discussion which opens La Voie royale, and later we will find Perken making love to a Chinese prostitute. In Les Conquérants we catch a glimpse, but no more, of Garine in bed with two (excusez du peu!) girls. In La Condition humaine we have the bedroom scene with Ferral and Valérie which we discussed above, to which we might possibly add the fact that May goes to bed with Lenglen.\* In the three last books the erotic element is totally absent. As far as Malraux' critical writings are concerned, we have only the preface to Lawrence's Lady Chatterley and his study of Laclos in the Tableau de la littérature française which deal with eroticism.

Let us first look at the treatment of sex in La Voie royale

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\* We might mention here that the Chapitre inédit de la Condition humaine (Marianne, 13 December 1933) deals mainly with the erotic adventures of Clappique.

which is, in fact, characteristic of its treatment in most novels of Malraux.

Elle s'étendit, déshabillée, son corps sans poils et flou dans la pénombre marqué par l'infime naissance du sexe et les yeux auxquels il restait attaché, pas encore las d'y chercher en vain la prenante déchéance de la nudité. Elle les ferma pour fuir la domination qui naissait de ses sentiments inexplicables; habituée au désir des hommes, mais fascinée par l'atmosphère qui naissait, dans cet absolu silence, du regard qui ne quittait plus le sien, elle attendait. Contrainte par les coussins à desserrer légèrement les jambes et les bras, la bouche entrouverte, elle semblait créer son propre désir, appeler l'assouvissement par la lente ondulation de ses seins. Leur mouvement envahissait la chambre: répété, semblable à lui-même, plus actif chaque fois qu'il recommençait. Il descendit en vague, remonta peu à peu; les muscles se tendirent, et tous les creux d'ombre s'élargaient. Dès qu'il passa le bras sous elle, et qu'elle dut l'aider, il sentit que la crainte la quittait; elle prit appui sur sa hanche pour se déplacer légèrement: l'accent jaune de la lumière, une seconde, entoura la croupe comme un coup de fouet, disparut entre les jambes. La chaleur de son corps le pénétra. Soudain elle mordit ses lèvres, accentuant à l'extrême, par cette infime intervention de sa volonté, l'impossibilité où elle était de réprimer l'ondulation de sa poitrine.

Now what strikes one at once in this description is its straightforwardness, its simplicity and its directness. It is this directness which is perhaps most original. Other, earlier writers - I think here more especially of Zola - have dealt "frankly" with sex, but they have done so nevertheless by allusion and suggestion. Contrary to what we generally believe - we have here a kind of optical illusion - Zola always manages to draw the curtain just at the right moment. The scene in Germinal of Maheu making love to his wife is a good example of this:

Il l'empoigna de nouveau, et cette fois ne la lâcha plus. Toujours le bain finissait ainsi, elle le regaillardissait à le frotter si fort, puis à lui passer partout des linges, qui lui chatouillaient les poils des bras et de la poitrine. D'ailleurs, c'était également chez les camarades du coron l'heure des bêtises, où l'on plantait plus d'enfants qu'on n'en voulait. La nuit, on avait sur le dos la famille. Il la poussait vers la table, goguenardant en brave homme qui jouit du seul bon moment de la journée, appelant ça prendre son dessert, et un dessert qui ne coûtait rien. Elle, avec sa taille et sa gorge roulantes, se débattait un peu, pour rire.

- Es-tu bête mon Dieu! es-tu bête! .. Et Estelle qui nous regarde! attends que je lui tourne la tête.

- Ah! ouiche! à trois mois, est-ce que ça comprend?

Lorsqu'il se fut relevé, Maheu passa simplement une culotte sèche.

But in the passage of Malraux we find a full description of the sexual

act /....

act yet without a trace of Lawrence's mysticism and without any of the sly winks of a Marcel Prévost (one of whose novels has the revealing title Les demi-vierges). Malraux' description is factual, but the language has a kind of poetic precision; this language does not hide or blur the facts, but gives the action described another dimension. Here (as in the erotic scene of La Condition humaine) we see Malraux as erotic writer at his best. But he can also be, for instance in the brothel scene told by Perken, both "literary" in the worst sense of the word, and contrived.

If eroticism is an essential part of Malraux' world, love is not. For Perken, for instance, love is something from which a man must free himself: "Jusqu'à la quarantaine, on se trompe, on ne sait pas se délivrer de l'amour". We see here perhaps a sign of the general reaction of the intelligentsia of the Twenties against what Montherlant calls with contempt L'Hamour. This is, of course, very much a post-war phenomenon; it is directed against the sentimentality of "romantic love" and against middle-class attitudes towards sex. We find this also reflected in the novels of Drieu La Rochelle, in those of Montherlant, etc. These writers like the opposite sex, but do not like women. Malraux, more particularly, believes that man is naturally a misogynist.\*

But there are other factors at play. In the world of Malraux women are not only the second sex, they belong to another world. "Et c'était une femme", reflects Kyo about May. "Pas une espèce d'homme. Autre chose." Once again, La Tentation de l'Occident gives us a valuable clue.

Les jeunes Chinois qui lisent vos livres, sont d'abord étonnés par la prétention que vous y faites paraître de comprendre les sentiments des femmes. Outre qu'un tel effort serait, à leur avis, digne de mépris, il serait nécessairement voué à l'insuccès. L'homme et la femme appartiennent à des espèces différentes. Que penseriez-vous de l'auteur qui viendrait vous exposer les sentiments de l'oiseau? Qu'il vous propose une déformation

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\* During an interview with L'Express (24 October 1963) Madame Clara Malraux declared: "Je suis tombée sur un mari profondément misogyne". And Kyo (who need not necessarily express Malraux' views) talks about "la misogynie fondamentale de presque tous les hommes".

des siens. C'est ce que nous pensons de l'écrivain qui nous parle de ceux des femmes.

If this is so, if man and woman really belong to a different species, and Ling seems to express Malraux' own ideas, then it is clearly impossible for a novelist to portray women except as sexual objects.

Finally, the absence of love from Malraux' novels might be explained by the fact that love (not sex) is perhaps the sole means to break these "rapports de prisonnier à maître" of which Perken speaks and which are those of man with his fate. As Rachel Bernaloff points out: "Malraux ne se contente pas de situer ses personnages dans l'aire de la mort, il leur retire jusqu'à la dernière chance d'évasion."<sup>(10)</sup> But precisely love could, if only temporarily, give to Malraux' characters this "chance d'évasion".

However, to say that love is totally absent from the novels of Malraux is not altogether true. We do find it, as we have seen, in the couple Kyo-May in La Condition humaine and also in the brief scene between Kastner and his wife at the end of Le Temps de mépris. Moreover, we are afforded in Les Conquérants and in L'Espoir brief and sometimes touching glimpses of womanly tenderness and affection such as this vignette of a woman helping the stretcher-bearers during the famous scene of L'Espoir when the wounded airmen are being carried down the mountain:

Depuis quelques minutes, elle suivait la civière avec le désir brouillon d'être utile, mais aussi avec une tendresse délicate et précise de gestes, une façon de caler les épaules chaque fois que les porteurs, dans une descente très raide, devaient assurer leurs pieds, où Magnin reconnaissait l'éternelle maternité.

Let us now turn towards the meaning of eroticism in Malraux' novels. First of all for him, as for his characters, eroticism is above all an idea. In his preface to Lady Chatterley's Lover Malraux writes: "D'abord, à la Renaissance surtout, la technique psychologique: les hommes de race blanche découvrent que par eux, une idée peut-être plus excitante qu'un instrument, et même que la beauté d'un corps." Similarly Perken remarks to Claude that

French /....

French prostitutes "appellent les clients irréguliers des cérébraux (...). Et elles ont raison. Il n'y a qu'une "perversion sexuelle", comme disent les imbéciles c'est le développement de l'imagination, l'inaptitude à l'assouvissement". And Ferral, on the point of going to bed with a prostitute, muses: "L'érotisme (...) c'est l'humiliation en soi ou chez l'autre, une idée de toute évidence"(italics of A.M.). And we shall find Ferral's idea echoed by Malraux himself in his study of Choderlos de Laclos: "Il y a érotisme dans un livre (but obviously in life as well) dès qu'aux amours physiques qu'il met en scène se mêle l'idée d'une contrainte. (...) Tout au long de cette célèbre apologie du plaisir, pas un couple, une seule fois, n'entre dans un lit sans une idée derrière la tête. (...) Et cette idée c'est, presque toujours, la contrainte."

To this knot of allied notions, contrainte, humiliation, domination, one constantly comes back in Malraux' erotic world. There lies the meaning of the bordella scene which opens La Voie royale: "La patronne avait poussé vers Perken une fille toute jeune, qui souriait: 'Non, dit-il; l'autre là-bas. Au moins ça n'a pas l'air de l'amuser'". Ferral, as we have seen, also links sex with the idea of humiliation.

Eroticism, then, is for Malraux' characters and for Malraux himself, an idea. But while the idea of humiliating the prostitute or Valérie might well arouse Perken or Ferral, clearly this idea is grafted on<sup>L</sup> the more fundamental fact of sexual desire.

Now, when discussing the function of sex in Malraux' novels, we must return to the notion we discussed earlier, that woman is another species, that she is "irréductiblement différente de nous", and therefore forever beyond man's reach: "La sexualité féminine", writes Malraux in La Condition humaine, "échappe (à l'homme), l'expérience sexuelle étant intransmissible d'un sexe à l'autre";

yet /....

yet in spite of this the characters in Malraux' novels copulate - make love with a kind of frenzied intensity. What lies behind this frenzy, what meaning has it got in Malraux' world? The sexual act appears, in this context, to be seen as an attempt to break for one brief moment the unbreakable shell of individual life. To be one with another person. Malraux mentions that "la femme est avide d'une unité". But man shares that avidity with her. Behind sex lies what might be termed a nostalgia for being One. Malraux' attitude towards sex is very close, I think, to the idea outlined by Georges Bataille in his book L'Erotisme:-

Les êtres qui se reproduisent sont distincts les uns des autres et les êtres reproduits sont distincts entre eux comme ils sont distincts de ceux dont ils sont issus. Chaque être est distinct de tous les autres. Sa naissance, sa mort et les événements de sa vie peuvent avoir pour les autres un intérêt, mais il est seul intéressé directement. Lui seul naît. Lui seul meurt. Entre un être et un autre, il y a un abîme, il y a une discontinuité." ...

Nous sommes des êtres discontinus, individus mourant isolément dans une aventure inintelligible, mais nous avons la nostalgie de la continuité perdue. Nous supportons mal la situation qui nous rive à l'individualité de hasard, à l'individualité périssable que nous sommes. En même temps que nous avons le désir angoissé de la durée de ce périssable, nous avons l'obsession d'une continuité première, qui nous relie généralement à l'être. (...) cette nostalgie commande chez tous les hommes les trois formes de l'érotisme. (12)

But this desperate attempt to break our isolation is doomed to failure; Valérie will be thrown back on herself and Ferral, watching her sleep, thinks: "un être humain, une vie individuelle, isolée, unique comme la mienne". The lovers must part and fall back into separate lives: "Malgré la contraction des commissures des lèvres, ce corps affolé de soi-même s'éloignait de lui sans espoir; jamais, jamais, il ne connaîtrait les sensations de cette femme, jamais il ne trouverait dans cette frénésie qui le secouait autre chose que la pire des séparations."

5.

Let us now turn back to La Condition humaine. In Clappique Malraux has created a character who is radically different from all

the /....

the other characters of La Condition humaine, all of whom are men of action (with the exception perhaps of Gisors, <sup>who</sup> but he thinks). Clappique is passive and to his fundamental anguish he opposes not action or thought, but a form of bizarre fantasy and humour. And this fantasy belongs to the earlier farfelu inspiration. In a passage such as this one we clearly see the filiation of Clappique with the farfelu country. Clappique in a night-club talks to two prostitutes:

- Parfaitement, chère amie, parfaitement! Chang-Kaï-Shek entrera ici avec ses révolutionnaires et criera - en style classique, vous dis-je, clas-sique! ainsi que lorsqu'il prend des villes: "Qu'on m'habille en talapoins ces négociants, en léopards ces militaires (comme lorsqu'ils s'asseyent sur des bancs fraîchement peints)! Semblables au dernier prince de la dynastie Leang, parfaitement mon bon, montons sur les jonques impériales, contemplons nos sujets vêtus, pour nous distraire, chacun de la couleur de sa profession, bleu, rouge, vert, avec des nattes et des pompons; pas un mot, chère amie, pas un mot, vous dis-je!

But while the farfelu world of the early books was, as we have seen, quite gratuitous, this is not the case of the farfelu creature Clappique. He is a buffoon. The very first time we see him, Malraux tells us of "la voix bouffonnante inspirée de Polichinelle". This voice is qualified a little later in a significant way: "nasillarde mais amère". And this bitterness we taste behind Clappique's constant clowning, eventually we will find behind this bitterness fear and solitude: "Il était parvenu à échapper à presque tout sur quoi les hommes fondent leur vie, (...) non à la peur. Elle surgissait en lui comme une conscience aigüe de la solitude". Clappique is not the classical sad clown, he is a frightened one; he is closer to Ubu Roi than to Charlie Chaplin. E. du Perron situates him accurately "somewhere between Hoffmann and Jarry". It is in keeping with this ubu-esque side of Clappique that he often appears to be a puppet; Malraux talks about his "silhouette maigre et désordonnée", and his words and his action appear to be both unmotivated and unpredictable:

Lorsque tu n'es pas lié à un homme, Kyo, tu penses à lui pour prévoir ses actes. Les actes de Clappique...

Il montra l'aquarium où les cyprins noirs, mous et dentelés comme des oriflammes, montaient et descendaient au hasard. Les voilà.

Yet /....

Yet behind this clowning, behind the unpredictable actions lies nevertheless a psychological logic, which makes him, with Tchen, the most complex character of the novel.

There are in fact two Clappiques who are drawn in two opposite directions: "celui qui voulait vivre et celui qui voulait être détruit". Let us note that he wants to be destroyed which does not mean necessarily that he wants to die. "Le suicide?" Clappique asks himself, only to answer: "tu ne veux pas mourir, p'tit salaud". And later on during his flight from Shangaï: "Portés par le vent il lui semblait que les coups de feu s'approchaient de lui, et la mort avec eux. 'Je ne veux pas mourir, disait-il entre les dents, je ne veux pas mourir'". There is a touch of Ubu-esque cowardice in Clappique and a lack of moral fibre which stands in such contrast with Kyo, Katow or even Ferral's stoicism.

But if Clappique cannot or dares not commit suicide, he develops another system of defence: la mythomanie. He fabricates imaginary lives, he gives himself a noble Hungarian background, transforms himself into a Belgian homme du milieu. He feels at one stage that he is "repu de mensonges". Gisors in talking to Kyo says this:

- Sa mythomanie est un moyen de nier la vie, n'est-ce pas, de nier, et non pas d'oublier. Méfie-toi de la logique en ces matières ... (....)

Tout se passe comme s'il avait voulu se démontrer que, bien qu'il avait vécu pendant deux heures comme un homme riche, la richesse n'existe pas. Parce qu'alors, la pauvreté n'existe pas non plus. Ce qui est l'essentiel. Rien n'existe: tout est rêve. N'oublie pas l'alcool, qui l'aide...

But although it is undoubtedly true that Clappique wants to "nier la vie", it is above all himself whom he wants to negate. Not having the courage to kill himself, he attempts a kind of moral suicide. He is all simulation and thus in a way ceases to exist himself. This creates around him an aura of unreality which contaminates all that surrounds him: "auprès de lui la réalité s'affaiblissait". And Gisors sees in him "un des rares êtres qui n'eussent aucune réalité".

What /....

What adds to Clappique's ghostlike unreality is his passivity. He does not act; and action, in the world of Malraux, be it that of Kyo or Ferral is a défi to a meaningless life, and it is through this defiance that the man of action acquires a concrete, positive existence. Kyo, Ferral, Tchen are there as men, but Clappique "pouvait cesser d'exister, il ne pouvait devenir un homme". In this, Clappique is the direct opposite of Ferral. Ferral who alone "existait dans un monde de fantômes", is negatively echoed by Clappique who exclaims: "Fantomas vous salue" and who describes himself as "le seul homme de Shangai qui n'existe pas". Moreover he spends his life in a kind of no man's land, the anonymous world of night-clubs, the dubious and shifty twilight world where "les policiers (sont) toujours des adversaires à demi-complices." Clappique has a foot in both camps, he knows both König and Kyo.

In the end Clappique does succeed in this strange form of moral suicide. Mythomania is not really a solution since in the eyes of the others he does not change. For a while he might be a Belgian pimp for the prostitute, yet the moment he leaves her to join his cronies in the "Black Cat", he becomes again "Toto" Clappique. But when, in order to escape from Shangai, he dons sailor clothes, he is suddenly transformed into a real sailor in the eyes of the others, and Clappique is, in fact, destroyed:

Depuis qu'il avait changé de costume, les regards, autour de lui, n'étaient plus les mêmes. L'habituel interlocuteur de sa mythomanie était devenu foule.

En même temps, - instinct de défense ou plaisir - l'acceptation générale de son nouvel état civil l'envahissait lui-même. Il rencontrait, tout à coup, par accident, la réussite la plus éclatante de sa vie. Non, les hommes n'existaient pas, puisqu'il suffit d'un costume pour échapper à soi-même, pour trouver une autre vie dans les yeux des autres.

One last word should be said about the treatment of Clappique, because it creates a rather paradoxical literary situation. Clappique, who is supposed to have this kind of phantomlike half-existence in the world created in La Condition humaine, emerges from the novel as one of the strongest and most memorable characters. \*

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\* Malraux' attachment to Clappique is shown by the fact that he emerges again in the Antimémoires where he tells the story of Mayrena on whom Perken was modelled.

Clappique may, morally, be a void; physically he is very present in the novel.

Exactly the reverse is true of old Gisors whose thought permeates the entire novel, but who, at the same time, is curiously absent as a person.

Gisors shares the same anguish with all the main characters of La Condition humaine, at the root of which we find the painful consciousness "qu'on reste toujours étranger à ce qu'on aime" and the intense awareness of solitude and death. Gisors finds a means to defend himself against this awareness in opium: "Cette solitude totale même l'amour qu'il avait pour Kyo ne l'en délivrait pas. Mais s'il ne savait se fuir dans un autre être, il savait se délivrer: il y avait l'opium". And after the death of Kyo, it is again to opium that he turns:

La pipe était là; la paix. Avancer la main, préparer la boulette: après un quart d'heure, penser à la mort même avec une indulgence sans limites, comme à quelque paralytique qui lui eût voulu du mal: elle cesserait de pouvoir l'attendre: elle perdrait toute prise et glisserait doucement dans la sérénité universelle. La libération était là, tout près.

Opium then for Gisors is, not unlike Clappique's mythomanie, a means to negate, a means to destroy one's self ("tout ce qui le détruisait trouvait en lui un accueil avide"), and with the destruction of this self the consciousness of solitude and death, of man's predicament is dissolved.

Yet there is another and more positive side to the attraction which opium has for Gisors. It should not be forgotten that Gisors belongs to an older generation, who has still links with the "old", traditional, non-westernized oriental attitudes to life which Ling describes in La Tentation de l'Occident and which are based on this natural "sentiment de l'Univers", on the "sensation de l'existence d'une force plus grande que celle des hommes", and this power is not God. Opium is also for Gisors a means to reach a world beyond the grasp of intellect, to recover that oriental "sentiment de l'Univers" which, no doubt, Gisors' contact with the West had made

him /....

him lose, and in his last conversation with May, when he refuses to follow her to Moscow ~~and~~ to a life of intellectual action, he alludes to this particular meaning opium has for him:

Il sembla à Gisors que ce vent passait à travers lui comme un fleuve, comme le Temps même, et, pour la première fois, l'idée que s'écoulait en lui le temps qui le rapprochait de la mort ne le sépara pas du monde mais l'y relia dans un accord serein. Il regardait l'enchevêtrement des grues au bord de la ville, les paquebots et les barques sur la mer, les taches humaines sur la route. "Tous souffrent, songea-t-il, et chacun souffre parce qu'il pense. Tout au fond, l'esprit ne pense l'homme que dans l'éternel, et la conscience de la vie ne peut être qu'angoisse. Il ne faut pas penser la vie avec l'esprit, mais avec l'opium. Que de souffrances éparses dans cette lumière disparaîtraient, si disparaissait la pensée...

Yet, although essentially contemplative, Gisors is also, in a way, a man of action; it is this which makes him a morally more positive character than Clappique. He is "with" the revolution; it was he who through his teachings has formed the leadership of the C.P.; yet his commitment has its roots less in politics than in his attachment to Kyo. One gains the impression that he is a Marxist (if he is one) mainly because he is Kyo's father, and when Kyo dies he feels that "le marxisme a cessé de vivre en moi". And after his son's death Gisors returns to his first love, art, so that the Marxist period in his life appears as a parenthesis which lasted as long as Kyo was alive.

The relationship between Gisors and Kyo gives to La Condition humaine its true affective dimension, for the relationship between May and Kyo is, as it were, corrupted by May's sleeping with Lenglen and Kyo's jealousy and vengeance. Gisors' attachment to Kyo is whole, undisturbed and, as it were, organic. Old Gisors, detached from life by his intense solitude, is only linked to it through Kyo; he meditates before Kyo's body on "ce corps qui l'avait relié à l'univers". And when Kyo dies, Gisors discovers that man's deepest suffering is born from being man:

Il sentait trembler en lui la souffrance fondamentale, non celle qui vient des êtres ou des chose mais celle qui sourd de l'homme même et à quoi s'efforce de nous arracher la vie; il pouvait lui échapper, mais seulement en cessant de penser à elle;

et /....

et il y plongeait de plus en plus, comme si cette contemplation épouvantée eût été la seule voix que pût entendre la mort, comme si cette souffrance d'être homme dont il s'imprégnait jusqu'au fond du coeur eût été la seule oraison que pût entendre le corps de son fils tué.

On this moving, but restrained note which corresponds, in a graver key and in a less self-consciously 'literary' way to the last pages of La Voie royale, La Condition humaine in fact ends. The seventh and last part of the novel mainly ties up the last few strings and rounds the novel off by telling us of the fate of the surviving characters: May, Gisors, Hemmelrich, etc.

If Gisors, as a character, is not very strongly drawn, he has nevertheless an important function in the novel. He is the psychological and metaphysical centre of the book; here both his contemplative nature and his intelligence come into play, and this intelligence is essentially that of Malraux. For this close identity of this character with the author there are reasons. It is true that all <sup>the</sup> characters, as we have seen, have something of Malraux' intelligence. But Gisors has more than most. This, however, does not mean that Gisors talks or thinks for Malraux, but it means that Gisors does Malraux' job. For in writing La Condition humaine, Malraux was faced with a problem. He did not want to write a conventional psychological novel where the author from time to time, through a disquisition, analyses the inner motivations of the character's actions. Moreover, he rejects the leisurely "normal" narrative technique in favour of a more direct technique which does not tell, but shows. Yet at the same time he has on hand a number of characters, particularly Clappique, Tchen and perhaps Kyo in his relationship with May, who have a certain psychological substance which has to be explained and elucidated. Also the reader must be provided with some kind of necessary biographical detail in order to make these characters understandable. In a "normal" novel, all this would have been provided by the author; in La Condition humaine it is provided by Gisors, hence his central position; he

knows /....

knows all the characters of the novel and through his insights, explanations and meditations ~~to~~ we get to know the inner world of Tchen, Clappique or Ferral. Gisors then is a mirror which reflects some of the main characters. He is also in one important episode a kind of chorus which gives its significance to the action of the novel. This is the meaning and the function of the dialogue between Gisors and Kyo which otherwise would have had little raison d'être in the novel. Just before the novel comes to its climax with the death of Tchen and the arrest of Kyo, Malraux, by means of this dialogue, extracts the wider metaphysical meaning not only of La Condition humaine, but of all Malraux' novels. Here we hear again so very clearly Malraux' own voice talking through Gisors who tells Ferral:

"D'ailleurs, les hommes sont peut-être indifférents au pouvoir... Ce qui les fascine dans cette idée, voyez-vous, ce n'est pas le pouvoir réel, c'est l'illusion du bon plaisir. Le pouvoir du roi, c'est de gouverner, n'est-ce pas? Mais, l'homme n'a pas envie de gouverner: il a envie de contraindre, vous l'avez dit. D'être plus qu'homme, dans un monde d'hommes. Echapper à la condition humaine, vous disais-je. Non pas puissant: tout-puissant. La maladie chimérique, dont la volonté de puissance n'est que la justification intellectuelle, c'est la volonté de déité: tout homme rêve d'être dieu."

NOTES

1. Le Figaro Littéraire, 15 October, 1967.
2. Jacques Fréville, L'Humanité, 12 December, 1933.
3. Drieu la Rochelle, Sur les écrivains, p.283.
4. J.J. Brieux, La Chine, du nationalisme au communisme, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, n.d., p.89.
5. Ilya Ehrenbourg, Gide, Duhamel, Malraux, etc., p.193-194.
6. Idem, p.195.
7. Bernard Masson, Lorenzaccio ou la difficulté d'être, Paris, Archives des Lettres Modernes, 1962, p.35.
8. Le Figaro Littéraire, 2 October, 1967.
9. Micheline Herz, Woman's Fate, Yale French Studies, No.18, 1957.
10. Rachel Bepaloff, "Notes sur André Malraux", La Nouvelle Revue Française, October, 1933.
11. Georges Bataille, L'Erotisme, Paris, Ed. de Minuit, n.d., pp.19 & 22.
12. E. du Perron, Verzameld Werk, Vol.2, p.639.

CHAPTER V.

The political novels: "Le Temps du mépris" and "L'Espoir".

1.

The two novels that follow La Condition humaine, Le Temps du Mépris (1935) and L'Espoir (1938), are of unequal value and importance. The first comes very close to being a failure, the second one is undoubtedly a fine literary achievement which some critics such as Picon put above La Condition humaine.<sup>\*</sup> Yet none of the later novels of Malraux add anything significantly new to Malraux' view of life. It had found its definitive expression in La Condition humaine which, at least up to 1933, was the only one of his novels to satisfy him. On October 2, 1933, he writes to the American critic Edmund Wilson: "Vous dites très justement que La Condition humaine développe certaines idées implicites dans Les Conquérants. Et aussi que le livre est meilleur (à la vérité, du moins, c'est le seul que j'aime)".<sup>(1)</sup> Yet Malraux does not, as a writer, remain static; he is not merely content to repeat himself, and we find that in his later books, within the framework of his Weltanschauung, there are a number of significant shifts of emphasis. These shifts are to a great extent due to the political events of the Thirties. The arrival to power of Hitler and the rising of the 6th of February 1934 which marks the beginning of the invisible civil war which will divide France for the next <sup>two</sup> decades. Thanks to these

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<sup>\*</sup> cf. also for example Montherlant's high opinion of this novel.

"Mon cher Malraux,

Votre livre est un livre admirable. On ne devrait pas en parler comme d'un roman ordinaire, car il dépasse toute littérature. J'ai rarement lu un livre qui portât autant, par la seule force de l'intelligence et du fait... (illisible). Tout ce qu'on a lu, tout ce qu'on a écrit soi-même, sur la guerre, vous apparaît vicié par le sentimentalisme et le "style", après vous avoir lu. Et il semble que dans votre atmosphère les idées et les "fois" se volatilisent: quelqu'un qui, comme moi, n'a pas de base bien solide pour des convictions, s'y sent à l'aise sans cesse.

Si je devais "repartir" un de ces jours, je voudrais emporter votre livre. Il est un des deux livres, parmi ceux que j'ai lus depuis un an, que je voudrais avoir écrits. Je n'aurais d'ailleurs pas pu l'écrire, c'est sans doute pourquoi il m'impose tant.

J'ai toujours plaisir à respecter un confrère. Je vous (illisible) mes sentiments de sympathie et de respect."

19 mars 1938. <sup>(2)</sup>

events, politico-moral preoccupations tend to play an increasingly dominant part in the intellectual and literary life of France. It is only natural that these political preoccupations will be reflected in the novels of Malraux who was so deeply involved in some of the movements of this time, with the result that the political events which formed a picturesque and colourful backdrop in Les Conquérants and La Condition humaine now become the central themes of his novels. One of the results of this shift of accent is that what might be called the metaphysical content of Malraux' novels, diminishes. In Le Temps du mépris it is replaced by a kind of oratorical lyricism, a strain which is very strong in Malraux (cf the end of La Voie royale or the peroration of his speech at the transfert des cendres of Jean Moulin<sup>(1)</sup>); in L'Espoir by discussions and meditations on political leadership and military tactics.

As we have seen (cf Chapter I pp.38-39), during the years between 1934 and 1940 Malraux is as close to being a communist as is possible without actually joining the Party, and during this period it would seem almost as if his literary work were a by-product of his political activities. Malraux at this time, when he is at the height of his career and of his prestige, can be considered as a communist writer, and his novels are those of a partisan. This can be seen in the shift which the notion of the fraternité virile undergoes, which in Le Temps du mépris, as we shall see, acquires political overtones. It can also be seen in the treatment of the "Enemy". In Les Conquérants he was a vague and abstract entity. In La Condition humaine he assumed a more concrete form in Ferral. But Ferral, if he was a capitalist, was not the Capitalist. Moreover, Malraux' treatment of Ferral, as we have noted, was by no means unsympathetic. And it is perhaps significant that in La Condition humaine the Marxist sociologist Gisors can meet Ferral, the capitalist, and that they talk very much the same language. But in Malraux' political novels of the Thirties the enemy is the Fascist, and he is seen in the

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(1) 19th December 1964.

simplistic, rather garish or melodramatic manner of propaganda  
images d'Epinal.

x                      x  
x

After having obtained the Prix Goncourt, Malraux, together with the pilot Corniglion-Molinier organises an airborne expedition with the aim of finding in the Yemen the lost capital of the queen of Sheba. This expedition was in part sponsored by the daily L'Intransigeant, which published (3 May to 13 May, 1934) Malraux' reportage on the expedition. It is generally felt that Malraux' claim to have discovered the mysterious capital of the queen of Sheba are unsubstantiated.

Politics are now going to dominate. In June 1934 he goes on a political mission to Berlin, he helps to organise the Ligue mondiale contre l'antisémitisme, a reaction against the persecutions in Germany. Malraux is also, according to Aragon, "depuis deux ans la tête et le cœur du Comité Thaelmann". (3)

These activities will, no doubt, help to orientate Malraux' thoughts towards the new Nazi Germany. To this should be added the fascination which held for the Left not so much the victory of the Nazis as the total defeat of the mighty Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, the most powerful Communist Party in the West and looked upon until then "as the most likely to succeed". Finally the publication of the Brown Book with its record of Nazi violence and oppression had a great impact on the French left intelligentsia and created a genuine courant de sympathie for the victims of Hitlerian oppression. It is against this background that Le Temps du mépris must be seen: it could be considered as a kind of fictional complement to the Brown Book and in a way it was intended to be this. This might explain the fact that the book was, on the whole, well received by the critics. That the left-wing literary reviews such as Commune and Europe

were /....

were on the whole uncritical can easily be understood, but that a politically neutral, but perceptive critic such as Marcel Arland, or a Catholic writer like Gabriel Marcel praised the book can, I think, only be attributed to a sympathy with the subject matter of the book which blinded them to its obvious faults. It should be added that not all critics were so blind to its flaws: for example John Charpentier wrote some harsh things about it which were by no means unjustified: "La fausseté du ton m'en a paru choquante (....). C'est contre l'artifice d'une nouvelle 'tempête sous un crâne' que l'on s'insurge. M. Malraux déçoit dans Le Temps du mépris autant par son insincérité que par la faiblesse des moyens qu'il emploie".<sup>(4)</sup>

The book seems not to have satisfied the author himself readily. This, I think, is indicated by the great changes the novel undergoes between its form as a serial in the NRF (March, April, May 1935) and its final publication in book form. These changes are not merely matters of stylistic detail, but we find that whole episodes have been added, and that other passages have been radically changed, more often than not, for the better.<sup>\*</sup> What also seems to indicate the minor place it occupies in the oeuvre of Malraux is the fact that it was only reprinted once in 1944, and that it was not included in the Pléiade edition of the novels. Finally we have Malraux' own judgement: he refers to his novel, rather slightly, as "cette nouvelle"; later, as we have seen, he calls it "un navet". This is, no doubt, a boutade, but Le Temps du mépris is certainly the least characteristic of Malraux' novels.

Le Temps du mépris is preceded by a preface to which Malraux still attached great importance in 1944: "De cette préface je ne retirerais pas aujourd'hui une virgule".<sup>(5)</sup> This preface had a great

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<sup>\*</sup> For example, the "flashback" about Kassner's arrest (approximately 5 pages) does not appear in the serialised version. But a long passage analysing Kassner's reaction to enforced inaction disappears from the first version. The passage which describes the mass torture of communists at Essen has been considerably shortened in the published book.

impact at the time, greater perhaps than the novel itself. Gide refers to it in his opening address to the Congrès International des écrivains pour la défense de la Culture as "une préface toute récente et déjà célèbre". The impact which this preface had can be explained partly by the fact that for the contemporary reader Malraux was first and foremost a novelist, and that his early theoretical writings (La Tentation, D'une Jeunesse européenne) were hardly known, so that to him the ideas contained in the preface seemed wholly new, while they were, in fact, already contained, sometimes in embryo, in the earlier writings.

In this preface Malraux presents two sets of ideas which are, however, closely linked. He starts off by defining the kind of novel he is attempting to write in Le Temps du mépris, and in so doing makes explicit what might be termed his aesthetic of the novel:

Le monde d'une oeuvre comme celle-ci, le monde de la tragédie, est toujours le monde antique; l'homme, la foule, les éléments, la femme, le destin. Il se réduit à deux personnages, le héros et son sens de la vie; les antagonismes individuels, qui permettent au roman sa complexité, n'y figurent pas.

In fact, this could be said with more justice of Les Conquérants and more especially of La Condition humaine rather than of Le Temps du mépris which is too slight to carry the heavy load of "le monde de la tragédie". This statement should be read in conjunction with Malraux' marginal note in Picon's book which I have already quoted: "Le roman moderne est à mes yeux un moyen d'expression privilégié du tragique de l'homme, non une élucidation de l'individu". (6)

Here we find an important key to the very individual character of Malraux' novels and the unconventional method of narration. As Lucien Goldmann points out: "L'abandon du héros problématique entraîne naturellement l'abandon de la structure proprement romanesque". (7)

From this point Malraux goes on, via not too clear a train of reasoning, to a criticism of Western bourgeois individualism with

which /....

which we have already become familiar in La Tentation. Against this "fanatisme de la différence", Malraux sets the notion of the fraternité virile:

L'histoire de la sensibilité artistique en France depuis cinquante ans pourrait être appelée l'agonie de la fraternité virile. Son ennemi réel est un individualisme informulé; épars à travers le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et né bien moins de la volonté de créer l'homme complet, que du fanatisme de la différence.

But, significantly, this fraternité is seen in a political context. It is, in fact, through Communism that man finds his true self and his true humanity:-

Aux yeux de Kassner comme de nombre d'intellectuels communistes, le communisme restitue à l'individu sa fertilité. Romain de l'Empire, chrétien, soldat de l'armée du Rhin, ouvrier soviétique, l'homme est lié à la collectivité qui l'entoure; Alexandrin, écrivain du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, il en est séparé. S'il l'est sans être lié à celle qui la suivra, son expression essentielle ne peut être héroïque. Il est d'autres attitudes humaines...

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 au moins que la seconde ce par quoi l'homme est homme, ce par quoi il se dépasse, crée, invente ou se conçoit.

This dépassement will not be possible in a society which is based on humiliation.

It is in this context that must be seen the title of the novel which is explained in one of the reminiscences of the hero Kassner during his captivity. He is describing a parade of young people in Moscow which he sees from the balcony of a theatre:-

Et à chaque entr'acte nous redescendions, et les types continuaient à passer, et nous remontions vers cette pièce qu'on avait écoutée jusqu'à la Caspienne et jusqu'au Pacifique, parce qu'elle donnait au travail son sens et sa dignité. Je me souvenais de la cloche, et des mineurs serrés autour, solitaires dans l'indifférence jusqu'au fond de la nuit allemande... Et quand tout fut terminé, en regardant la multitude qui nous empêchait encore de sortir je pensai qu'elle avait moins de vingt ans. Et qu'il n'y avait donc pas une homme, voyez-vous bien, entre tous ceux-ci qui depuis des heures et des heures convergeaient vers la place Rouge, pas un seul de ces hommes qui eût connu le temps du mépris...

What we find here again in a disguised way is the notion of L'Homme Nouveau; communism makes possible the birth of this new man, untarnished by contempt and humiliation.

Before looking at Le Temps du mépris in greater detail, it might be as well to look into the reasons why the book is a partial /....

partial failure - Le Temps du mépris is obviously a livre de circonstance. However concerned Malraux was with the fate of his German comrades, this concern is not comparable to the deep and dark obsessions with life and death which we find at the back of the other novels and which give them their density and substance. Although a number of familiar Malrauvian themes are to be found in Le Temps du mépris, they have not here the same resonance as in the previous novels. Moreover, the propagandistic intentions as well, no doubt, as the narrow frame of the novel lead to over-simplification and a lack of nuance. In his conversation with Roger Stéphane, Malraux interrupts Stéphane who said: "Dans Le Temps du mépris vous avez voulu prouver..." with: "Je n'ai rien voulu prouver du tout. J'ai simplement voulu peindre un communiste autrement qu'à la manière des images d'Epinal".<sup>(8)</sup> But in point of fact this is what Malraux does not do. His novel is a partisan novel. Kassner is too obviously the communist Héros (sans peur et sans reproche) who, it is clear, will sacrifice his life for the Cause, and who faces torture with "fermeté". The Nazis on the other hand, when they are seen, have escaped from propaganda posters. They are shown as sub-human. "Quatre SA entrèrent, deux restèrent dans le couloir. Tous bras en avant, tête en avant, éclairés seulement par une lampe que l'un d'eux avait posée sur le sol." (The very lighting of the scene is melodramatic). Later on the SA are compared to chimpanzees; later still Malraux talks about the SA guard's "regard d'acheteur d'esclaves". These are propagandistic clichés.

But there is a deeper reason which explains the partial failure of the novel, and this is to be found in the subject matter. The world of Malraux' novels, as we know, is a world of violence. This violence is almost always violent action, it has also often an exalting quality and is born from a kind of passion. In short, Malraux' violence is highly coloured and romantic, and this makes it valid from a novelist's point of view: such violence is (or can

be /....

be) a rewarding subject. Torture is not. And although torture is a constant presence and menace in Malraux' novels, actual torture is never shown. We see, for instance, Grabot and Klein after their ordeal. Therefore when Malraux writes in his Antimémoires: "J'ai beaucoup écrit sur la torture...", this is not quite correct. Malraux is in fact by temperament ill-equipped to deal with this passionless, impersonal violence which is torture. Torture is not exalting. It is a slow, messy, unheroic business which humiliates both victim and torturer. Finally, there is nothing heroic or dramatic about life in a prison. In other words, the world which Malraux chose to describe in Le Temps du mépris or which the events "forced" him to choose, was not his world, it was a world foreign to his imagination and sensibility. This explains, I think, why the novel fails. It also explains the odd fact that, although it is a novel "about" Nazi concentration camps, the nine days of the prison experience occupy fewer pages than the few hours of the flight to Prague. And of these pages devoted to the prison experience by far the greatest part is taken up with Kassner's fantasies, reminiscences, speeches etc.

Finally, the uncongenial nature of the subject might explain the flaws in the writing of the novel. We have noted that Malraux in spite of his pose of indifférence to literature, is, in fact, a highly self-conscious writer. But nowhere in the novels of Malraux do we find more self-conscious littérature than in Le Temps du mépris. It ranges from striking images ("picturesque speech and patter"), such as "le brouhaha des bottes s'enfonce dans la laine du silence" or "la folie avec son mol appel de crapaud" to highly melodramatic, but meaningless images such as "Kassner se sentait avancer comme un squelette brisé par le chant". Part of the novel being set in a dark cell, it is devoid of action, and Malraux therefore cannot show, but must express, and this expression of feelings and ideas is often melodramatic, sentimental and grandiloquent, as, for instance, in an imaginary speech which Kassner addresses to his absent party

comrades /....

comrades:

Vous, mes compagnons de Chine enterrés vivants, mes amis de Russie aux yeux arrachés, mes amis d'Allemagne autour de moi avec leur cordes, toi qu'on vient peut-être d'assommer, c'est ce qu'il y a entre nous que j'appelle amour.

Je sais ce qu'il faut de force pour faire une bonté qui compte. Je sais aussi que rien ne compensera ce que tant d'entre nous souffrent ici, sauf des victoires. Mais du moins, si nous sommes victorieux, chacun des nôtres trouvera-t-il enfin sa vie. Et chacun de ceux qui savent qu'ils sont seuls, qu'ils rentreront le soir dans une chambre où ils seront encore seuls; et qu'ils y rapporteront le mépris et l'indifférence de tous, et l'inutilité de leur vie, toujours derrière eux comme un chien. Et qu'alors ils iront chercher une femme avec qui vivre parce qu'il faut vivre avec quelqu'un; et ils coucheront ensemble et feront des enfants qui ne seront pas choisis non plus, avant d'aller pourrir avec la multitude des grains qui n'auront pas germé. A cette heure, s'il fait nuit dehors comme ici, dans toutes les maisons s'assied ou se couche en silence une foule traquée. Car l'amour est choix, et on n'a rien à choisir quand on n'a rien à donner.

This is not only sermonising, but has also, especially the end of the first paragraph, a marked hysterical trémolo which makes the sincerity of the statement unconvincing. And, lastly, because of the relative absence of physical action, the overwriting, of which, as we have seen, Malraux is sometimes guilty, stands out more clearly in this novel. Now while some degree of overwriting is in harmony with scenes of violence, or perhaps the violence of the action itself makes the overwriting less visible, it becomes much more noticeable and disturbing in actionless scenes, like in the scene where Kassner has succeeded in deciphering the code of knocks with which his neighbour is trying to communicate:-

La joie le secoua, avançant de nouveau son esprit. Il retenait sa respiration, suffoquant pourtant, ses doigts tout à coup autonomes enfoncés dans ses cuisses. Il chancela, rejeté à toute volée aux ténèbres: un nouveau son se mêlait aux coups; une fois de plus, le garde arrivait.

The tone here is out of proportion to the experience, the secoua, suffoquant, chancela are too much with the result that nothing more than words <sup>are</sup> communicated.

2.

Le Temps du mépris opens in the reception office of a nameless concentration camp. After a brief interrogation by the SA,

Kassner /....

Kassner, the protagonist whose real identity the Nazis do not know - an important factor in the plot - is thrown into a cell; later on he is beaten up<sup>\*</sup> and put into solitary confinement in a totally darkened cell.

Kassner is an intellectual and much more than a fellow-traveller, if a little less than a professional revolutionary. The biographical details are, in typical Malraux fashion, given with extreme brevity and indirectly, i.e. they are not told by the novelist but by means of the file which the SA officer has in front of him:

Fils de mineur; boursier de l'Université, organisateur de l'un des théâtres prolétariens; prisonnier des Russes, passé aux partisans puis à l'armée rouge; délégué en Chine et en Mongolie; écrivain, rentré en Allemagne en 1932 pour préparer les grèves de la Ruhr contre le décret Papen, organisateur du service illégal d'information, ancien vice-président du Secours Rouge.

Once in solitary confinement, the most urgent and absorbing task of Kassner is to prevent himself from going insane. This immediate threat of insanity is highly improbable and therefore unconvincing. It serves merely as a pretext in the novel. For, in order to fight against this threat of madness, Kassner has recourse to three means: his memory of great music, his memories of the Civil War and a long speech which he addresses to an imaginary audience. Now of these three means, only music is not connected with politics. It is perhaps when Kassner evokes these musical memories, that the novel comes closest to acquiring a "metaphysical" dimension. Kassner's position in his cell, threatened and surrounded by pain and death, could be seen as an image of man's fate. And at times, it would seem that Malraux hints at this:-

La nuit finirait-elle bientôt? Un garde ouvrit et referma un instant un judas dans la porte: à la lumière du couloir, Kassner vit dans le mur du fond de sa cellule une grille qui semblait protéger un trou d'aération étroit, profond comme ceux des machicoulis. Muré, ce trou ne reliait pas la cellule au monde, il vivait d'une vie autonome et suffocante; il rendait seul sensible l'écrasante épaisseur de la pierre. Kassner était dans un caveau, séparé du monde comme par le sommeil, par la folie;

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\* These were still the very early and amateurish days of the concentration camps.

mais le trou faisait vivre d'une vie de carapace cette pierre épaisse, étouffante et criblée d'alvéoles où marchaient comme d'inlassables mille-pattes ceux des prisonniers qui pouvaient encore marcher.

Kassner here is the blind Grabot in his dark hut, he is man living inside death. But he is freed from this servitude by music, by art:

(....) le cachot s'enfonçait sous une lourde cascade de chant funèbre jusqu'à une communion inépuisable où la musique perpétuait tout passé en le délivrant du temps, en mêlant tout dans son évidence recueillie comme se fondent la vie et la mort dans l'immobilité du ciel étoilé... .

In this liberation of Kassner through art we find adumbrated an idea which we will find developed in Les Noyers de l'Altenberg and which will become the basis of Les Voix du silence. Walter Berger, one of the characters of Les Noyers, has described how on the train journey from Turin the now insane Nietzsche, in the darkness of a tunnel, suddenly burst into song, and he concludes:

Je venais de découvrir quelque chose. Quelque chose d'important. Dans la prison dont parle Pascal, les hommes sont parvenus à tirer d'eux-mêmes une réponse qui envahit, si j'ose dire, d'immortalité, ceux qui en sont dignes. (....)

- 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... \*

Kassner, after nine days in prison, is suddenly freed: an unknown comrade, having assumed Kassner's identity, is killed in his stead. About this episode Gabriel Marcel writes: "Un inconnu, pour de mystérieuses raisons a prétendu qu'il était Kassner, sauvant ainsi du supplice celui dont il a pris la place". (10) We shall see that the reasons for this action are by no means mysterious, and it might be useful to look a little closer at this episode.

The sacrifice of the unknown comrade (who becomes something like a communist version of the Unknown soldier) is an obvious

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\* Etienneble rightly shows that behind this prophetic tone we find, in fact, not exactly a new idea:

"(...) Malraux souffle en milliers de pages une banalité qui ne mérite pas ce ton - car enfin, nous nous rappelons un petit poème publié voilà cent ans, et signé Théophile Gautier; le buste, là aussi, survit à la cité; là aussi, l'art et l'éternité se mettent en ménage ..." (9)

parallel with Katow's sacrifice in La Condition humaine. But there are important and significant differences. Katow acted out of human feelings, although these were never expressed; behind his gesture was genuine pity and a kind of ultimate and impossible générosité. But behind the unknown comrade's gesture we find not so much the fraternité virile as political "expediency". For it is obvious that Kassner was fairly high up in the hierarchy, as was indicated in the biographical facts: organiser of the illegal information service of the Party and vice-president of the Secours Rouge. These are important posts. It is also clear that he was a much wanted man: "Tous savaient que nous le (Kassner) cherchions. Et que nous ferions ce qu'il faudrait pour le retrouver", says one of the policemen to Kassner after he is freed. This necessity to get hold and rid of Kassner gives an idea of his importance. So that, if the unknown communist sacrifices himself, it is because he knows that Kassner's life is more useful to the Cause and to the Party: "dans l'espoir de faire libérer un camarade plus utile que moi". What is involved here is not fraternity, but devotion to a cause.

Yet, paradoxically, the main theme of the novel is explicitly the fraternité virile. This theme, as we have seen, was already present in the other novels; it linked together Perken and Claude, Garine and the narrator; it was behind Katow's sacrifice. But this theme was in a sense marginal to the main theme of man's predicament. In Le Temps du mépris it moves towards the centre, and in doing so, gets inevitably coloured by the central political theme of the novel.\* The fraternité virile is expressed in four different scenes all of which are political, and their tone is slightly too highly pitched, as in this passage where Kassner suddenly understands

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\* This makes it possible for Aragon to interpret the notion in the following way: "L'expression de Malraux, (la fraternité virile) qui rend compte, au plus court pour lui, de quelque chose qu'il a ressenti, est-elle l'expression achevée de cette solidarité prolétarienne qu'elle veut rendre? Peut-être que non. Faites mieux si vous pouvez. Mais, assurément, elle décrit un ordre de sentiments, une réalité que nous avons connue dans la rue le 9 février, quand les premiers socialistes sont venus se joindre à nous, boulevard Magenta, dans ces meetings où se sont matérialisés Front unique et Front populaire, et qu'on retrouve dans toute l'histoire magnifique et ensanglantée des ouvriers et paysans de Russie et de Chine, et d'Espagne, et d'Allemagne, et de France." (11)

the word tapped out by his neighbour:

Dans les ténèbres, ils frappaient ensemble ce mot: camarade, sûrs maintenant qu'ils se comprenaient, et pourtant ni l'un ni l'autre ne s'interrompirent; ils allaient jusqu'au bout, chacun entendant à la fois ses coups et ceux de l'autre, comme ils eussent entendu les sourds battements accouplé de leur coeur.

Curiously enough, the expression of an experience very akin to love ("c'est ce qu'il y a entre nous que j'appelle amour"), because of its political overtones, tends to become rather impersonal. Since it does not really involve people, it cannot be shown; therefore it must in a way be "sung": hence the lyrical and oratorical tone of so many passages of Le Temps du mépris.

After Kassner is freed from the camp, he flies in a light plane to Prague through very bad weather. This episode which is a long one, has only the most tenuous links with the novel, and its presence can only be explained by the fact that Malraux wanted to incorporate his very recent experiences during his flight over Arabia.\*

When he arrives in Prague, Kassner is at last truly free, and almost literally returns to life. Yet the expression of this experience is a little out of proportion. Kassner spent a little over a week in prison, yet his feelings have the intensity of those of a man who for years had been separated from life and from his fellow-men:

Il ne parvenait pas à reconnaître ces cravates, ces valises, ces bonbons, ces charcuteries, ces gants, ces pharmacies, cette vitrine de fourreur avec un petit chien blanc qui se baladait au milieu des peaux mortes, s'asseyait, repartait: un être vivant, aux longs poils et aux mouvements maladroits, et qui n'était pas un homme. Un animal. Il avait oublié les animaux. Ce chien se promenait avec tranquillité au milieu de la mort, tout comme cette chair à cachots et à cimetière, passants, en marche vers la place.

Here, once more, we find the overstatement ("il avait oublié les animaux") which is so characteristic of this novel. The episode

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\* This episode of the flight through the tempest is taken over word for word in the Antimémoires. Yet in how far fiction is introduced in the world of fact, or fact in the world of fiction, is very difficult to ascertain. It is perhaps significant that not a word about this epic fight against the cyclone appears in Malraux' reportage for L'Intransigeant.

must nevertheless have deep roots in Malraux' experience since he will return to it eight years later in the much more plausible episode of the return of Vincent Berger to Europe, in Les Noyers de l'Altenberg.

The novel ends with Kassner being re-united with his wife, while at the same time already preparing to go back to Germany to continue his underground work: "un retour à l'ombre d'un départ futur". About this last chapter Marcel Arland makes a very significant remark: "Le livre tend tout entier vers le dernier chapitre et n'est écrit que pour ce chapitre." (12) Now Marcel Arland is, as his novels prove, a conventional novelist, and he has seen rightly that this episode is, in fact, a piece of conventional novel-writing. At this point Malraux' attempt to write a novel where "les antagonismes individuels qui donnent au roman sa complexité" do not appear, breaks down. The novel now becomes a conventional one and this was perhaps inevitable. Ultimately, Malraux as novelist had to show people, personal relationships, personal feelings. Kassner had to become a person if we were to believe in him, and not merely the mouthpiece for lyrical and oratorical expressions of the fraternité virile. Marcel Arland is right: only when we see Kassner and his wife together, when we feel the tension between these two people, when we see the conflict between happiness and political duty, that the novel briefly comes to life.

3.

L'Espoir was written and published in 1937 while the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) which is at the centre of the novel, was still being fought. It is Malraux' longest and perhaps most ambitious novel with its fifty "sequences"<sup>\*</sup> and its forty-odd

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<sup>\*</sup> In a revealing passage about T.E. Lawrence's narrative technique in The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, Malraux defines his own narrative technique which he uses not only in L'Espoir, but most effectively in that novel; "Son livre n'était pas un grand récit. L'histoire de la technique du récit depuis trois siècles, comme celle de la peinture, suit essentiellement la recherche d'une troisième dimension; de ce qui, dans le roman, échappe au récit; de ce qui permet, non de raconter, mais de représenter, de rendre présent. La narration exprime un passé, dont la mise en scène - en scènes - fait un présent. Comme les peintres ont inventé la perspective, les romanciers ont trouvé dans le dialogue, l'atmosphère, les moyens de cette métamorphose; l'art du récit moderne est, lui aussi, fait d'une perspective juste entre ce qui est représenté et ce qui est conté. Dostoïevsky n'eût-il pas fait de tels souvenirs une succession haletante de scènes?"

characters. This abundance of characters and scenes does create a certain confusion. The novel gives the impression of being rather disorderly; yet, as we shall see, this is only partly true. Nevertheless, aesthetic considerations seem to have played little part in the elaboration of L'Espoir and are overshadowed by Malraux' desire to bear witness as effectively as possible. Behind this refusal to write a "work of art" lies Malraux' rejection of the novel as object and also perhaps the conviction that before certain events a work of art loses its validity. Scali, one of the characters of L'Espoir, an art historian turned pilot, says in a discussion: "J'ai vu en face des tableaux des grandes taches de sang. Les toiles (...) perdent leur validité", and again a little later: "L'art est peu de chose devant la douleur et malheureusement aucun tableau ne tient devant des taches de sang". In the same way, Malraux may have felt that no novel could hold against that immense "tache de sang" which was the Spanish Civil War. In spite of this, L'Espoir remains Malraux' greatest literary achievement since La Condition humaine. But in a different key: L'Espoir succeeds mainly on a visual level, it is not like La Condition Humaine an anguishing evocation of man's fate, but an admirable evocation of war, and the novel contains some of the most memorable war scenes written by Malraux.\*

In L'Espoir we find again the familiar elements of the Malrauvian world, but with a difference. We find ourselves plunged into a world of violence, but which is less oppressive, less claustrophobic than that of the previous novels. People die, but they die, like Hernandez "dans l'air lumineux", and not like Katow in a dark closed courtyard. The men who die in this novel, die with hope - the title itself is significant - and they die with their comrades. L'Espoir is situated in "le monde où les hommes meurent ensemble en chantant, en serrant les dents comme ils voudront". The fraternité virile now finds its true climate of the warm fraternal world of a hopeful combat.

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\* (The death of Hernandez; the wounded airmen being carried down the mountain; the truce at Toledo).

There are other differences between L'Espoir and Malraux' previous novels which will be noted in due course. One, however, might be mentioned here: the absence of women and the erotic element so important in La Voie royale and La Condition humaine. It is true, eroticism is absent from Le Temps du mépris, but the woman is very present, especially towards the end of the novel where Kassner's wife is the dominant figure. In L'Espoir, there are no women; we catch at most a glance of a milicienne, a waitress or an old peasant woman.

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On July 16, 1936 a number of Spanish generals led by Gnl. Sanjurjo, rose against the Popular Front government, and thus began a three-year long civil war, which for the European intelligentsia of that time was a profound traumatic experience. Here at last the two great ideological forces, Fascism and Communism, clashed. But it was not only the political content of the war which fascinated the intelligentsia both of the Left and the Right, but also the highly dramatic character of the war. It was a war passionately fought with passionate cruelty, for beliefs passionately held. And Spain with her magnificently somber, inquisitional, gold-black Catholicism, with its flamboyant revolutionary tradition, its Catalonian anarchists and Asturian dinamiteros impressed her character on the war. It was perhaps the last of the great romantic revolutions, the heir of 1848 and of the Commune of 1871.

Given Malraux' political sympathies and also the very marked romantic strain in him,\* it was impossible for Malraux not to get involved in this war, and it was equally impossible for him not to write L'Espoir. The Spanish Civil War was, as it were, made for him. André Rousseaux writes, I think, rightly: "Malraux est

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\* Malraux is obviously thinking of himself when in Le Temps du mépris he writes about Kassner: "Il savait tout ce qu'il y avait en lui de romantisme et s'en défiait à l'extrême", with this difference that Malraux, being a writer, does not distrust this romantic tendency. On the contrary.

révolutionnaire parce que la révolution lui fournit le climat nécessaire pour écrire".<sup>(13)</sup> And the atmosphere of the Spanish War was particularly attuned to Malraux' mind and world.

The Spanish Civil War is the only revolutionary event in which we know for certain that Malraux participated. It seems unlikely, however, that, as Hoffmann says ,

that Malraux was in Spain two days after the outbreak of the war.<sup>(14)</sup> It seems more likely that at that time he was buying war material on behalf of the Spanish Republican Government. (cf. Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, n.d. p. 225). He did later on organise and lead the international squadron of the Republican Air Force and saw action during a number of sorties, one of which is mentioned in Hugh Thomas' history of the war: "A section of (Gnl.) Asensio's column (which was marching on Madrid from the South-West) was nearly destroyed by Malraux' French air squadron."<sup>(15)</sup> This episode is described in L'Espoir (pp. 514-525) and is called, not quite accurately, "la première victoire de la guerre".

One of the consequences of Malraux' participation in the events he describes is that the revolution and the war are living presences in L'Espoir and not, as they are in Les Conquérants and La Condition humaine, mere dramatic backdrops against which the characters act out their destiny. Indeed, the roles are reversed: the revolution and the war occupy the forefront of the stage; behind them appear, often more as shadows than human beings, the innumerable characters that populate L'Espoir.

Another consequence of Malraux' direct involvement in the Spanish Civil War is that we find in L'Espoir, rather curiously considering the ferocity of the war, far less cruelty and sadistic violence than in the previous novels. Let us recall the disfiguration of Klein, the blinding and castration of Grabot, the nails driven into König's shoulders, the burning alive of Katow. Now, as we have seen,

sadism /....

sadism and cruelty in these novels are "literary" devices and are treated in a "literary" way. This is, no doubt, due to the fact that Malraux had to imagine these violent scenes, and in the domain of cruelty and violence the imagination tends to be excessive, tends to overreach itself, perhaps because cruelty is in fact unimaginable. But when Malraux wrote L'Espoir, he had seen real war, real violence and cruelty, he had lived with it, and its treatment in L'Espoir, in contrast to its garish "literary" treatment in the other novels, is restrained and discreet. It is, in fact, deliberately un-literary and factual. This sets it apart from fiction. The descriptions of the horrors of war are therefore either taken from intelligence reports, as in the case of the shooting of republicans at Badajoz, or they are reports of newspapermen which the intelligence officer Garcia is vetting:

Pour Paris-Soir: Avant de venir au Central, - lisait-il - je viens d'assister à une scène d'une atroce beauté.

On a trouvé cette nuit près de la Puerta del Sol un enfant de trois ans qui pleurait perdu, dans les ténèbres. Or, une des femmes réfugiées dans les sous-sols de la Gran Via ignorait ce qu'était devenu son enfant, un petit garçon du même âge, blond comme l'enfant trouvé dans la Puerta del Sol. On lui donne la nouvelle. Elle court à la maison où l'on garde l'enfant, calle Montera. Dans la demi-obscurité d'une boutique aux rideaux baissés, l'enfant suce un morceau de chocolat. La mère s'avance vers lui, les bras tendus, mais ses yeux s'agrandissent, prennent une fixité terrible, démente.

Ce n'est pas son enfant.

Elle reste immobile de longues minutes. L'enfant perdu lui sourit. Alors elle se précipite sur lui, le serre contre elle, l'emporte en pensant à l'enfant qu'on n'a pas retrouvé. (....)

Pour Reuter: Une femme portait une petite fille à peine âgée de deux ans à laquelle manquait la mâchoire inférieure. Mais la petite fille vivait encore, les yeux grands ouverts, elle semblait demander avec étonnement qui lui avait fait cela. Une femme traversa la rue - l'enfant dans ses bras n'avait plus de tête...

Now these are obviously choses vues and are not the product of a novelist's imagination. And shifting these scenes from the plane of fiction to the plane of fact, makes the impact of the horror much greater, and this in turn serves the purpose of the novel as a piece of propaganda. For L'Espoir is even more than Le Temps du mépris the book of a partisan in which the Fascists are pitch black and the

Republicans /....

Republicans, and especially the communists, are pure white. For example: "Les prisonniers politiques fascistes (sont) délivrés sains et saufs, les miliciens et suspects arrêtés (by the Fascists) sont passés par les armes." In fact, according to Hugh Thomas, prisoners were regularly shot on both sides. There is also frequent mention of the German help to Franco, but no mention of the help the USSR gave the Republicans, and which began as early as September 1936. There is no mention either of the Russian Gnl. Berzin (cf. Hugh Thomas p.323) who directed the defence of Madrid.

Malraux' partisanship also leads him sometimes to write passages in the worst tradition of 1914-18 bourrage de crâne style, like the soldiers saluting the wounded in the middle of a battle:

Les voilà tous dans l'odeur de mousse et de souvenirs d'enfance. Les premiers blessés à la face redescendent, le visage caché par des doigts déjà couleur de sang. Les soldats se soulèvent malgré les balles pour saluer le poing levé; les blessés ne les voient pas, sauf un, qui découvre, pour répondre de son poing sanglant le visage même de la Guerre.

Sometimes these passages are close to the ridiculous, such as this scene of a wounded airman, trapped in a crashed plane: "Le bombardier regarda Leclerc et Sérurier, sans même hausser les épaules promena (sur les membres de l'escadrille) qu'il dominait un regard royal, et ordonna: qu'on aille me chercher L'Huma". This is false heroics and therefore rings false.

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L'Espoir covers the period of the civil war which begins with the Battle of Barcelona (19 July 1936) and ends with the great republican victory at Guadalajara (18 March 1937). It is by ending this book with this victory that Malraux was perhaps justified in calling it L'Espoir. The novel also deals with the early battles of Alto de Leon and Somosierra: "the first real conflicts of the Civil War",<sup>(13)</sup> the siege of the Alcazar of Toledo and the fall of Toledo (27 September 1936), the Battle of Madrid, and more especially the

battle /....

battle of 9 November 1936; it deals extensively with the siege of Madrid and the defence of the University City, and finally it describes a number of raids by the International Squadron on Meddelin, Toledo, Badajoz, Guadalajara, etc. All the main events and some of the minor ones are historically true. For example, the brief fraternisation between Franquists and Republicans during the siege of the Alcazar did in fact take place, as did the use of flame throwers during that siege (cf. Hugh Thomas, op.cit. pp. 280, 283). Even the opening of the novel where we find one of the main characters, Manuel, phoning various stations from the Central Station of Madrid to find out who is in power, seems, at least according to Hugh Thomas, to be historically correct.\*

The Government in Madrid discovered its defeats by telephone, as in Morocco; a rebel commander would answer insultingly, crying 'Arriba Espana!' in place of the Civil Governor or the loyal Military Governor. News travelled in this way also to the unions and political parties, who would telephone to their comrades in other towns and discover enemies in control, say, of the railway station or the post office. André Malraux has vividly described these exchanges: 'Allo Avila' said Madrid, 'comment ça va chez vous? Ici la gare.' 'Va te faire voir, salaud. Vive le Christ-Roi!' 'A bientôt. Salud!'(14)

The part of fiction then in L'Espoir is extremely small, even some of the characters are thinly fictionalized portraits of some of the participants in the war. Colonel Ximenez who, with the help of the Anarchists, wins the Battle of Barcelona, is in real life Colonel Escobar, Commander of the Civil Guard; Enrique Lister, commander of the communist 5th Regiment is recognisable as Manuel; Shade, the American journalist from the Mid-West is clearly Hemingway; Guernico, the catholic poet loyal to the Republic, might well be José Bergamint, etc. Yet, in spite of this closeness to historical

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\* If Mr. Hugh Thomas is correct, we find here a curious example of life imitating art. For Malraux had already used telephone conversations in a similar way in La Condition humaine as a device to map the advance of the approaching Southern Army on Shanghai. Ferral is in Martial's studio: "La Gare du Sud est tombée", Ferral raccrocha le récepteur. (...) Le téléphone sonna de nouveau: "Le conseil municipal est tombé". (...) Le téléphone de nouveau: Martial prit le récepteur: "Les ponts sont pris".

reality, it is not purely a reportage, and we find Malraux using skilfully some purely novelistic devices. For example: the battle of Guadalajara is first seen from ground level, then the perspective changes, and it is seen from above by Magnin who flies over the battle field. Similarly, when describing the attack of the Sierra, the perspective constantly and abruptly changes from the men in the armoured car who, through their field glasses see the battle from afar and as a whole, to the men engaged in the battle and who see only confusion and disorder. Skilfully, Malraux combines the Waterloo of Victor Hugo with that of Stendhal. It is true nevertheless that the novel is at times top-heavy with fact and that, at times, "the character element in L'Espoir is dwarfed and pallid". (F.W. Dupée, André Malraux, Partisan Review March 1938, p.31). But the character element in La Condition humaine is, in a way, also dwarfed, not by historical facts, but by the brooding presence of Man's predicament.

When Roger Stéphane remarks that L'Espoir is not "composé" and Malraux concurs coquettishly "volontairement, croyez le bien" (Roger Stéphane, op.cit. p.57), this is in fact not wholly true. The first impression indeed is one of confusion, yet if one reads the novel attentively, some form of order does emerge. To begin with, while it is true that the novel has no plot in the conventional manner (but nor has La Condition humaine), it has nevertheless a central core which holds together the innumerable episodes: this is the forging of the Republican Army. F.W. Dupée is quite right when he remarks: "The real hero is the Republican Army, taking shape from the workers' militias and coalescing by degrees into a single big organisation, under unified command". (op.cit. p.31). Moreover, each of the three great divisions, L'Illusion lyrique, Le Mazanarès and L'Espoir, has a focal point. The first one, Barcelona and the Battle of Toledo, the second one Madrid, the third one the Battle of Guadalajara. There is, no doubt, inside each section a fair amount of coming and going, but the focal point is there. Some kind of

continuity /....

continuity is also provided by the fact that most of the main characters, Manuel, Garcia and Magnin, are always there during all the main episodes. This, it should be added, does not go without a certain amount of artificiality and contrivedness. The end of L'Espoir, when all the leading characters are "on the stage", is faintly reminiscent of the last scene of an 18th century comedy and just as artificial. Finally, on the level of meaning and of characters (such as they are), the novel has also three central themes which, however, do not correspond to the main division. There is the political theme which centres around the squadron leader Magnin and the communist Manuel. There is the moral (or human) theme which has as centre the loyalist officer Hernandez and there is the intellectual theme which centres around the professors Alvear, Garcia and Unamuno. These themes, but more especially the last one, are elucidated in a series of discussions and conversations which alternate with the scenes of action. Thus we find the Catholic commander Ximenez and the Anarchist Ping discussing religion and anarchism after the Battle of Barcelona. The American journalist Shade and the Spanish artist Lopez talk about art and revolution. There is a whole series of discussions on the necessity and nature of leadership, on the necessity to organise the militia. These discussions always involve the presence of Garcia, a former professor of ethnology and communist and now an intelligence officer. Garcia is very much a novelist's creation and a rather clumsy one. The fact that he is an intelligence officer justifies in part, but only in part, his ubiquitous presence at the most divergent points of the novel. In fact, wherever he is needed by Malraux, Garcia is there. Whether at the siege of the Alcazar, the battle of Madrid, the battle of Guadalajara, Garcia is at hand to discuss with one character or another a great variety of subjects. It is he who clarifies the meaning and portée of Unamuno's famous protest against the Franco régime during the Festival of the Race at Salamanca

University /....

University (October 12, 1936)<sup>\*</sup>. Garcia also discusses the difference between Communism and Anarchism, the nature of Spanish Catholicism, the attitude of the intellectual towards action, etc. Finally, we find a young art historian, now a pilot, and an old sage Alvear discussing Man, Art, War and the Intellect. There are altogether sixteen such dialogues and discussions in L'Espoir.

It is clear that, rather like in the previous novels, these conversations are used not so much to throw light on the characters, as to work out certain, in this case, political and philosophical questions. These discussions are central since they take place inside the action and are held between characters taking part in the action; yet they never quite dissolve in the main body of the novel, they remain, as it were, as intellectual lumps. And in that way they are detachable from the novel. Quite a number of these discussions, for instance the elucidation of Unamuno's protest, could be lifted out of the novel without causing irreparable damage. We would then be left with a thinly fictionalized reportage of the Spanish Civil War. By putting them in, Malraux has not only given meaning to the real and fictional events which he shows, but he has also given his book its intellectual weight.

Now one of the reasons for the marginal nature of these intellectual discussions is, no doubt, the fact that they are conducted not by people, but by disembodied voices. This is true of the conversations between protagonists because they exist so little as people; it is even truer of discussions between secondary characters. Sometimes a character is brought in to act merely as a conversational foil. For example, Hernandez has a ten-page long conversation about Destiny and Death with a fellow-officer Mereno who, after this, disappears. And Garcia discusses Unamuno with a Dr. Nieburg who comes from nowhere and then vanishes. The ideas these characters express tend, therefore, to be rather detached, they have

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<sup>\*</sup> Cf Hugh Thomas, op. cit. pp. 353-355.

no roots in personality. This was also the case in La Condition humaine, but nevertheless they were rooted to a greater extent in the characters. The ideas of Ferral are those of Ferral, the ideas of Gisors and Tchen were part of their persons.

If these discussions have no roots in the characters, they do have roots in the events described in L'Espoir. Most of them (10 out of 16) deal with immediate political and military problems important at that time. The remainder, although set against a political background, deal with the familiar Malrauvian themes of death, destiny and art. The overwhelming presence of politics in L'Espoir weakens the portée of the novel. For, although at the time these questions were of the utmost importance and urgency, it is unlikely that all this will have any relevance for a young reader for whom the Spanish Civil War is already history.

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L'Espoir has three geographical focal points: Toledo, Madrid and Guadalajara. These correspond roughly to three stages in the evolution of the Republican Army; and the making of this army, as we noted, is one of the main themes of the novel. This birth of an army finds its human counterpart in the making of a commander: the Communist Manuel.

The novel opens in Madrid. By means of a number of telephone calls to various provincial towns we get a "direct" picture of the situation in Spain on the night of July 18, 1936. The scene then shifts from Madrid to Barcelona. This shift is a necessary one, for it is only now on July 19 that, with the arming of the people, the Civil War and Revolution begin. And they begin a picturesque and chaotic period of flamboyant courage in an atmosphere of hope and fraternity ("La nuit n'était que fraternité"). The Battle of Barcelona gave Malraux an opportunity to show the chaos, confusion and courage from which the Republican Army will eventually

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be made. And the main political-military theme of the novel is adumbrated by the remark of the Commander of the Guardia Civil, Ximenes, to the Anarchist Ping: "Vos hommes savent se battre, mais ils ne savent pas combattre".

These early Barcelona episodes also enable Malraux to bring the Anarchists to the foreground, since it was they who dominated these events. They briefly lived the lyrical illusion that the free, egalitarian and fraternal society of which they had dreamed, had at last arrived. For the anarchist Ping "Barcelona était enceinte de tous les rêves de sa vie". But the individualism of the Anarchists, their lack of discipline and their rejection of it will, as the war goes on, have to make room for a more organised resistance. The difference separating the Communists from the Anarchists in these early days of the war is expressed by one of the minor characters when he says: "Les Communistes veulent faire quelque chose, les Anarchistes veulent être quelque chose". And the Russian journalist Golovkine foretells that the Anarchists are "condamnés à changer ou à mourir". The tragic dilemma of the Anarchists is embodied in the character of the Anarchist leader nicknamed "le Négus". At first he is carried by the great intoxicating wave of l'Illusion lyrique, but as the war goes on, loses this illusion, yet will continue to fight, but alone and without hope: "Depuis un mois il ne croit plus à la Révolution. L'Apocalypse est finie. Il reste la lutte contre le Fascisme". And so:

Depuis le lance-flammes de L'Alcazar, le Négus s'est réfugié dans ce combat souterrain qu'il aime, où presque tout combattant est condamné, où il sait qu'il mourra, et qui garde quelque chose d'individuel et de romantique. Quand le Négus ne se tire pas de ses problèmes, il se réfugie toujours dans la violence ou dans le sacrifice; les deux à la fois, c'est mieux encore.

In this choice of a lonely fight which condemns him to death, "le Négus" comes close to that other lonely terrorist, Tchen, but without the latter's metaphysical anguish.

In the early days of the Civil War when the fight against

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the Nationalists was improvised by the parties and the unions, each party, each union had its own militia. Officers are elected, soldiers come and go and are unreliable. The situation in those days is, perhaps, best illustrated in this exchange at Toledo between Hernandez and Garcia who asks: "'Qui commande ici?' - 'Qui voulez-vous qui commande ... Tout le monde .. Personne.' 'Vous souriez'... - 'Je souris toujours, c'est un tic nerveux. Qui donne les ordres?' - 'Les officiers, les fous, les délégués des organisations politiques, et d'autres que j'oublie.'" Against this "peuple sans chefs et presque sans armes", the Nationalists wage war: "(Ils) bombardaient, nettoyaient, puis envoyaient leurs hommes sur un terrain préparé". And Ramos reflects: "Ils font la guerre, ceux d'en face, et pas nous".

In a dialogue between Magnin and Garcia, the military dilemma is most clearly evoked. The conversation takes place just after Magnin's successful raid on Medellin.<sup>(1)</sup> They are in Garcia's office; outside "la vie nocturne de Madrid, l'hymne républicain de toutes les radios, des chants de toute sorte, des salud hauts ou bas suivant qu'ils étaient proches ou lointains, mêlés comme des notes de piano, toute la rumeur d'espoir et d'exaltation dont était faite la nuit emplît de nouveau le silence. Vargas hocha la tête." Against this, Garcia outlines the problem:

Mon cher monsieur Magnin, nous sommes soutenus et empoisonnés à la fois par deux ou trois mythes assez dangereux. D'abord, les Français: le Peuple - avec une majuscule - a fait la Révolution française. Soit. ; De ce que cent piques peuvent vaincre de mauvais mousquets, il ne suit pas que cent fusils de chasse puissent vaincre un bon avion. La révolution russe a encore compliqué les choses. Politiquement, elle est la première révolution du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle; mais notez que, militairement, elle est la dernière du XIX<sup>e</sup>. Ni aviation, ni tanks chez les tsaristes, des barricades chez les révolutionnaires. Comment sont nées les barricades? Pour lutter contre les cavaleries royales, le ; peuple n'ayant jamais de cavalerie. L'Espagne est aujourd'hui couverte de barricades, - contre l'aviation de Franco.

And finally he concludes:

Quant à ce que nous entendons par la fenêtre, monsieur Magnin, c'est l'Apocalypse de la fraternité. Elle vous émeut. Je le

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(1) This would place it somewhere around August 25, 1936, i.e. still in the early stages of the war.

comprends bien: c'est une des choses les plus émouvantes qu'il y ait sur la terre, et on ne l'y voit pas souvent. Mais elle doit se transformer, sous peine de mort.

This then is the task to which the Communists, as the most disciplined party, had to address themselves. After the defeat of Toledo, we see how Manuel and the Communists transform a mob of demoralised and leaderless soldiers into a group of responsible and disciplined soldiers. The episode has a bit too much of the propaganda fairy tale about it to be convincing. It is a little bit too sudden. But we can see in this episode a microcosm of the evolution of the Republican Army. It is significant that this episode opens the second section of the novel, Le Mazanarès, which shows the beginnings of the new army which, stiffened with the dedicated International Brigades, repulses the Fascists before Madrid at the Casa del Campo. And we see finally the emergence of the true Republican Army at Guadalajara. The three geographical focal points as steps of the evolution of the army are brought together at the beginning of the description of the battle of Guadalajara: "Les Italiens tout chauds de Malaga n'avaient pas trouvé devant eux cinq mille hommes. Mais à Malaga, les Milices s'étaient battues comme à Toledo, ici l'armée se battait comme à Madrid." And what Magnin saw beneath him, "c'était la fin de la guerilla, la naissance de l'armée".

This evolution of the army finds a human parallel in the evolution of Manuel. We catch a brief glimpse of him in the opening pages, where he is seen together with his comrade Ramos in the Central Station. In this early episode, Manuel stands clearly in the shade of the union leader Ramos. It is he who dominates and leads, and it is he who will guide Manuel's first steps on the road to leadership. In characteristic Malravian fashion, Ramos, having fulfilled this function, will disappear without a trace from Manuel's life and from the novel.

Later Manuel fights in the Sierra where he acquits himself well; but the real discovery of his responsibility comes when he

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sees a young boy writing Meure le Fascisme on a wall with the blood of executed enemies. It is then that he realises that his responsibility (and that of his party) is to curb and direct the hatred and the power which lay behind this gesture; Manuel is now on his way to true leadership. And his party "(1) avait intelligemment placé auprès d'un des officiers de qui il pouvait le plus apprendre". This officer is the Catholic colonel of the Civil Guard, Ximenez. Between the two men will exist the typical Malravian father and son relationship: manly and affectionate. Ximenez will teach him the philosophy of leadership: "un officier doit être aimé dans la nature de son commandement - plus juste, plus efficace, meilleur - et non dans les particularités de sa personne". And later on he adds: "Il est toujours dangereux de vouloir être aimé (...). Il y a plus de noblesse à être un chef qu'à être un individu". Let us note in passing that this philosophy of leadership comes very close to that of Rivière in Saint-Exupéry's Vol de nuit who advised: "Aimez ceux que vous commandez mais sans le leur dire".

A major step in Manuel's development is his encounter with a suspected traitor, Alba, whom he dominates and, in a sense, tames by showing absolute trust in him: "On ne peut pas commander sans faire confiance". And later on: "Manuel sentait une sourde confiance entre cet homme et lui, comme il sentait parfois des bouffées de sensualité entre sa maîtresse et lui". The sensuous edge which the experience has for Manuel, comes from the enjoyment of his control over Alba and of the ability he discovers in himself to have this confidence. Manuel's evolution is completed when he rallies round and organises the ragged, defeated, demoralized troops after the fall of Toledo. It is interesting to note that Ximenez, the mentor, is absent from these episodes, and that from now on he recedes to the background. Once again, like Ramos, he is no longer needed. Their last meeting takes place after the battle of Guadalajara, when Manuel discovers that "une autre vie avait commencé pour moi avec le combat".

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This, then, is the end of Manuel's road, his new self: "Peut-être avait-il trouvé sa vie. Il était né à la guerre, né à la Révolution".

Yet, before reaching this point, Manuel lives through an agonizingly painful test of his leadership. A number of soldiers of his regiment are about to desert to the Fascists, they are caught, tried and condemned to death. As he leaves the court-martial, the condemned men cling to his legs and plead for their lives. This is one of the most moving passages of the novel; it is also one of the rare passages where Malraux manages to let Manuel come to life and to make him a convincing character. For these reasons the passage may well be quoted almost in extenso. It is also a good example of Malraux' skill at "lighting" a scene in a dramatic and cinematic manner:

Dans la lumière pleine de pluie des torches électriques aussitôt allumées par Gartner et ceux qui le suivaient, deux soldats de la brigade, à genoux dans la boue épaisse, enserraient ses jambes. Il ne voyait pas leur visage.

- On ne peut pas nous fusiller! criait l'un d'eux. Nous sommes des volontaires! Faut leur dire!

Le canon s'était tu. L'homme ne criait pas le visage levé, mais vers la boue, et ses cris étaient enveloppés dans le grand chuchotement de la pluie. Manuel ne disait rien.

- On peut pas! On peut pas! cria l'autre à son tour. Mon colonel! (....)

"Je ne suis pas le conseil de guerre", faillit répondre Manuel; mais il eut honte de ce désaveu. Il ne trouvait rien à dire, sentait qu'il ne pouvait se délivrer du second condamné qu'en le repoussant du pied, ce qui lui était odieux, et restait immobile devant le regard fou de l'autre qui haletait, et sur la face de qui descendaient maintenant les rigoles de pluie battante, comme s'il eût pleuré de tout son visage.

(....)

- Faut... leur dire! cria le nouveau celui qui le regardait. Faut... leur dire!

Que dirais-je? pensait Manuel. La défense de ces hommes était dans ce que nul ne saurait jamais dire, dans ce visage ruisselant, bouche ouverte, qui avait fait comprendre à Manuel qu'il était en face de l'éternel visage de celui qui paie. Jamais il n'avait ressenti à ce point qu'il fallait choisir entre la victoire et la pitié. Incliné, il tenta d'écarter celui qui enserrait encore sa jambe: l'homme se cramponna furieusement, la tête toujours baissée comme s'il n'eût plus connu du monde entier que cette jambe qui l'empêchait de mourir. Manuel faillit tomber et pesa plus fort sur les épaules, sentant qu'il faudrait

plusieurs /....

plusieurs hommes pour détacher celui-ci. Tout à coup, l'homme laissa retomber ses bras et regarda Manuel, de bas en haut, lui aussi: il était jeune, mais moins que Manuel ne l'avait cru. Il était au-delà de la résignation; comme s'il eût tout compris - non seulement pour cette fois mais pour les siècles des siècles. Et, avec l'amertume indifférente de ceux qui parlent déjà de l'autre côté de la vie:

- Alors, t'as plus de voix pour nous, maintenant?

Manuel s'aperçut qu'il n'avait pas encore dit un mot.

This episode is also important because it draws our attention to another change which Manuel has quite unconsciously undergone. The last words of the condemned man: "Tu n'as plus de voix pour nous maintenant" are going to echo deeply in Manuel. The accent, of course, falls on "maintenant". Now the traditional defender of the oppressed and the condemned, of "celui qui paie", is silent and has lost his voice. This loss is the outward sign of another and deeper loss: he is no longer himself, he is the Commander. The political Commissar Heinrich makes this clear when he tells Manuel: "Du jour où tu acceptes un Commandement dans l'armée du prolétariat, tu n'as plus droit à ton âme... ton coeur tu peux garder. (This refers to Manuel's pity) Mais tu dois perdre ton âme. Tu as déjà perdu tes cheveux longs et le son de ta voix." (My italics. C.J.G.)

There is a final irony in Manuel's evolution. When we meet him first, we see him surrounded by that warm night "où tout n'était que fraternité". After the encounter with the condemned men, he suddenly realises that he is no longer part of this fraternal world, the organisers of L'apocalypse de la fraternité are now excluded from this fraternité. And Manuel is alone, and he says sadly to Ximenez: "Il n'est pas un échelon que j'ai gravi dans le sens d'une efficacité plus grande qui ne m'écarte davantage des hommes".

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Although the professional officer Hernandez fits into the political spectrum of L'Espoir, (he is the Liberal) he is not solely  
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and wholly defined by his political attitude. Hernandez is perhaps the character of L'Espoir with the most human substance. Because of this, he tends to assume in the mind of the reader an importance which, so to speak, 'statistically' he has not. Hernandez appears only during the scenes dealing with the siege of the Alcazar, is shot when Toledo falls, and disappears off the scene. Yet, in spite of this, because of his greater psychological substance, Hernandez occupies in L'Espoir a place similar to that of Tchen in La Condition humaine.

What gives greater human substance to Hernandez is the fact that, alone of all the characters, he is torn by personal and moral problems brought to a climax by political events in which he is involved.

Hernandez is a professional soldier not by choice ("il a été officier par décision paternelle"), and while he is perhaps not an intellectual in the sense that Alvear or Garcia are, he is above all a man who thinks, and "pour un homme qui pense, la révolution est tragique. Mais pour un tel homme la vie aussi est tragique". The particular tragedy of Hernandez is that as a moral man ("chacun des problèmes que vous posez est un problème moral" says Garcia) he finds himself engaged in an action that is purely political and where morals do not play a part. The sole duty of any man engaged in a war is simply to win: "du moment que vous acceptez une responsabilité (dans cette guerre), says Garcia to Hernandez, vous devez être vainqueur. C'est tout." This is the obvious categorical imperative which Manuel discovers and accepts after the episode of the condemned soldiers. He realises that "il fallait choisir entre la victoire et la pitié". He chooses "la victoire". Hernandez would, perhaps, have chosen "la pitié". He will, for instance, defend the thief although his actions could ("objectively", the Communists would say) be harmful to the Revolution. During the siege of the Alcazar he accepts, out of générosité, to transmit the letter of the besieged commander /....

commander to his wife. But, however morally laudable such actions are, they do not help towards victory. Hernandez must choose between being, i.e. retaining his moral integrity, and doing, i.e. waging an a-moral political war. If he chooses to act, he will have to "renoncer à ce qu'on a aimé et pour quoi on a vécu". This, ultimately, he will be incapable of doing. He continues to fight the war, but with an "indifférence désespérée". And, when finally he is shot after the fall of Toledo, it is clear that Hernandez' death is a suicide. Finally, he is "exténué et aussi de la vie". The death of the Liberal Hernandez should be seen as a counter-point of the birth of the Communist commander Manuel. Of the two, Hernandez, no doubt, emerges as the nobler figure, but Manuel as the more efficient. The contrast between these two characters is linked to a major theme of L'Espoir, the uneasy relationship of the Intellectual with the world of political action. The theme finds one of its expressions in a discussion between Garcia and Scali. Garcia is a shadowy character everywhere present, yet always as a mouthpiece, never as a person. A former professor of Ethnology, therefore an Intellectual, he has chosen, at least "for the duration", the course of political action. He has none of the doubts or hesitations or scruples which beset Hernandez. He is the dedicated Communist intellectual in action. Scali, the Italian professor of history of art, stands midway between the yogi Hernandez and the Commissar Garcia, he is a "temporary Commissar". He does fully participate in the war, but knows some of Hernandez' hesitations, yet they do not paralyse him and lead him through "une indifférence désespérée" to suicide.

The basic reason for the intellectual's inability to be effective in political action is that such an action must deal in gross simplification and overstatements: liberty or tyranny, du pain ou du plomb, Fascism or Communism. Black or white, "il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée", the intellectual prefers to

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leave it ajar and to say: "yes, but". But, as Gnl. de Gaulle said, "on ne gouverne pas avec des mais". In other words, it might be said that the politician has something of l'esprit de géométrie and the intellectual something of l'esprit de finesse. This is perhaps what Garcia expresses when he says:

Le grand intellectuel est l'homme de la nuance, du degré, de la qualité, de la vérité en soi, de la complexité. Il est par définition, par essence, antimanichéen. Or, les moyens de l'action sont manichéens parce que toute action est manichéenne. A l'état aigu dès qu'elle touche les masses; mais même si elle ne les touche pas. Tout vrai révolutionnaire est un manichéen-né. Et tout politique."

Moreover, the true intellectual tends generally to be a liberal, i.e. he tends to be in opposition. There is a natural affinity between the intellectual and the anarchist, and it is not without reason that Garcia links Hernandez with them. But the opposition of the intellectual is essentially "passive", he opposes with thoughts and words. When Unamuno wants to oppose the Franco régime, he does so by a speech. When he has made this speech, he has exhausted his capacity for action and retires into a cell. The intellectual, like the anarchist, wants to be something and not to do something. It is this which makes the real intellectual (Alvear, Gisors, Unamuno) a faintly old-fashioned figure in Malraux' world. He belongs to another age: "toute la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle a été passive; la nouvelle Europe semble bien se construire sur l'acte. Ce qui implique bien des différences", says Garcia. And the différences are those that exist between the old sage Alvear who is surprised to see the intellectual Scali in uniform,<sup>\*</sup> and the young men who wear the uniforms. Victor Brombert in his article, Malraux, A passion and Intellect<sup>(15)</sup>, has some harsh things to say about the ineffectiveness and passivity of these sages and scholars. And, although factually he is right, Gisors does seek refuge in opium, Unamuno does retire in his cell, his criticism nevertheless betrays Malraux' intentions and his attitude towards the old

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\* "Voir un homme qui pense dans ce costume me surprend toujours".

scholars. Malraux does not expect them to act. They belong to another century. Dr. Neuburg, telling of his last visit to Unamuno, says: "quand je l'ai quitté dans ce lit, amer et morose, entouré de ses livres, j'ai eu l'impression de quitter le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle."

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that, although they did not act, all of them are fathers and teachers: Gisors, Alvear, Unamuno, all have formed the contemporaries of Kyo and Jaime. And both sons of Unamuno are fighting on the Republican side. As the fathers and teachers of the heroes, the sages have undoubtedly Malraux' respect. The figure of old Alvear waiting for death in besieged Madrid is not without grandeur. At the end of La Condition humaine, Gisors is not only an opium-addict, but also a moving image of profound grief. And there is certainly greatness in Unamuno's stand against Franco. Moreover, as intellectuals they are too close to Malraux himself for him not to feel kinship with them. Ultimately, their values are also his, or at least in part, for Malraux is, after all, only a part-time commissar, but a full-time intellectual.

If, then, the political-military theme is focussed on Manuel and the ethical theme on Hernandez, what might be termed the visual theme of the novel has its focal point in Magnin. As a character Magnin has little substance; if he is present, it is, rather like Garcia, in a kind of transparent way. For if Garcia is mainly, but not wholly, Malraux' voice, Magnin is Malraux' eyes. There is an obvious and close link between Malraux and Magnin; in spite of Malraux' attempt to dissociate himself from the characters he has created by giving him a totally different background and appearance, it is clear that the scenes in which Magnin appears are closest to observed and lived reality. They are also among the scenes which are most memorable, not only because they have been "observed", but also because they have been recreated and relived with all Malraux' intensity. These scenes are, from the point of view of writing, Malraux' greatest achievement in L'Espoir. If, after closing the book, one thinks back on it, what one's memory brings back besides, perhaps, /....

perhaps, the scene of Manuel and the condemned men, are such scenes as the one of the plane caught in the search-light with its lovely, if a little oratorical, ending:

Le premier obus. A trente mètres: l'avion bondit. Les canons antiaériens vont rectifier. Magnin arrache l'oreillette du serre-tête d'Attignies.

- Orage! crie le pilote, montrant le mouvement de la main.

C'est la manoeuvre qu'on emploie pour se libérer du vent d'ouragan, quand les commandes ne répondent plus: piquer de tout le poids de l'avion.

Magnin proteste frénétiquement des moustaches, dans le fracas du moteur et la lumière blanche: le phare suivra le piqué. Il montre, de la main aussi, la glissade sur l'aile, suivie d'un virage.

Comme s'il tombait, Attignies semble dérapier avec un bruit de ferraille et de chargeurs qui roulent dans la carlingue. Il tombe jusqu'à la nuit, tourne, file en S. Au-dessus et au-dessous, le phare coupe, coupe, comme un aveugle qui tâtonnerait avec un sabre.

L'avion est maintenant au-delà de toute action du phare, - perdu de nouveau dans la nuit protectrice. Comme dans le sommeil, l'équipage qui a repris sa place s'enfonce dans la détente qui suit tout combat, dans l'obscurité glacée de la mer sans phares; mais chacun est habité par les visages fraternels un instant apparus.

Then there is the beautiful lyrical scene of the dead and wounded airmen being brought down the mountain. Here, welded into one perfectly natural scene, we find all the familiar themes of Malraux: death, suffering and fraternité virile:

Le soir ne venait pas encore, mais la lumière perdait sa force. Magnin, statue équestre de travers sur son mulet sans selle, regardait le pommier debout au centre de ses pommes mortes. La tête en blaireau sanglant de Langlois passa devant les branches. Dans le silence empli tout à coup de ce bruissement d'eau vivante, cet anneau pourrissant et plein de germes semblait être, au delà de la vie et de la mort des hommes, le rythme de la vie et de la mort de la terre. Le regard de Magnin errait du tronc aux gorges sans âge. L'une après l'autre, les civières passaient. Comme au-dessus de la tête de Langlois, les branches s'étendaient au-dessus du roulis des brancards, au-dessus du sourire cadavérique de Taillefer, du visage enfantin de Mireaux, du pansement plat de Gardet, des lèvres fendues de Scali, de chaque corps ensanglanté porté dans un balancement fraternel. Le cercueil passa, avec sa mitrailleuse tordue comme une branche. Magnin repartit. (....)

Les femmes noires, fichu sur la tête et panier au bras, s'affairaient toujours dans le même sens autour des blessés, de droite à gauche. Les hommes, eux, suivaient les civières sans jamais les dépasser; ils avançaient de front, très droits comme tous ceux qui viennent de porter un fardeau sur l'épaule. A chaque relais, les nouveaux porteurs abandonnaient leur marche rigide pour le geste prudent et affectueux par lequel ils prenaient les brancards, et repartaient avec le han! du travail

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quotidien, comme s'ils eussent voulu cacher aussitôt ce que leur geste venait de montrer de leur coeur. Obsédés par les pierres du sentier, ne pensant qu'à ne pas secouer les civières, ils avançaient au pas, d'un pas ordonné et ralenti à chaque rampe; et ce rythme accordé à la douleur sur un si long chemin semblait emplir cette gorge immense où criaient là-haut les derniers oiseaux, comme l'eût empli le battement solennel des tambours d'une marche funèbre. Mais ce n'était pas la mort qui, en ce moment, s'accordait aux montagnes: c'était la volonté des hommes.

Here we have Malraux at his best. The writing is without flourishes, but restrained. It has precisely the right kind of gravity, without ever becoming pompous or oratorical. This is, undoubtedly, together with Katow's death, one of the finest scenes Malraux has written.

NOTES

1. Edmund Wilson, A Literary Chronicle, p.178.
2. Henri de Montherlant, Va donc jouer avec cette poussière, Paris, Gallimard, n.d., pp.53-54.
3. Commune, August, 1935.
4. Mercure de France, 1 August, 1935.
5. Roger Stéphane, Fin d'une jeunesse, p.60.
6. Gaëton Picon, Malraux par lui-même, p.66.
7. Lucien Goldmann, Pour une sociologie du roman, p.129.
8. Roger Stéphane, Fin d'une jeunesse, p.60.
9. Etiemble, Hygiène des lettres III, Paris, Gallimard, n.d., p.29.
10. L'Europe Nouvelle, 8 June, 1935.
11. Commune, August, 1935.
12. La Nouvelle Revue Française, July, 1938.
13. Le Figaro, 1 January, 1938.
14. J. Hoffmann, L'Humanisme de Malraux, p.3.
15. Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, n.d., p.248.
16. idem, p.201.
17. idem, p.139.
18. Partisan Review, March, 1938.
19. Yale French Studies, No.18, 1957.

CHAPTER VI.

The epilogue: "Les Noyers de l'Altenburg".

1.

André Malraux fought during the Flanders Campaign in 1940 in the Tank Corps. He was made prisoner in June and was sent to a P.O.W. camp in Sens. He escaped in November and reached the so-called Free Zone. According to Hoffmann's chronology, Les Noyers de l'Altenburg was written between 1940 and 1943. It was published in Switzerland as Part One of a series of novels entitled La Lutte avec l'ange. The same title appears in the Skira edition of the Oeuvres complètes, but in the French edition of 1948 the book is published under the sole title Les Noyers de l'Altenburg. This edition is preceded by a note by André Malraux which says: "La suite de La Lutte avec l'ange a été détruite par la Gestapo. On ne récrit pas un roman. Lorsque celui-ci paraîtra sous sa forme définitive, la forme des Noyers sera sans doute fondamentalement modifiée". However, La Lutte avec l'ange, like Les Puissances du désert of which La Voie royale was part, will never be written. It is also possible that the destruction of the sequel of Les Noyers by the Gestapo never really took place. Boak suggests as much in his article on Malraux and T.E. Lawrence. "The parallels in the two legends are equalled by parallels in attitudes: Lawrence lost, or claimed to lose, the manuscript of The Seven Pillars of Wisdom while changing trains (a story disbelieved by various acquaintances and critics from that time onwards), while Malraux' sequel of Les Noyers was seized by the Gestapo during a raid. Or was it?..."<sup>(1)</sup> Malraux' mythomanie might well be at play here. It is also possible that Malraux used (or invented) this raid as an alibi for his inability to complete the projected series of novels. It is unlikely we shall ever know the truth about this matter. Nor is it ultimately important.

Les Noyers de l'Altenburg opens with a prologue which takes place in 1940 and which is written in the first person; here we meet the narrator who is a writer and a P.O.W. This narrator

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who remains, as it were, faceless, like the narrator of Les Conquérants, proceeds in the following sections to tell three episodes of the life of his father, Vincent Berger, an Alsatian. In the first of these episodes we see him in the service of Enver Pacha, leader of the Young Turks who dreams of creating the Touran, "l'unité de tous les peuples turcs depuis Andrinople jusqu'aux oasis chinoises".

Disillusioned, Berger returns to Europe. The second episode describes a colloquium of intellectuals in which Vincent Berger participates and which takes place at Altenburg in a disaffected Romanesque priory owned by Walter Berger, Vincent's uncle. The third episode, dated 11 June 1915, describes a German experimental gas attack against the Russians on the Vistula front. This attack is being witnessed by Vincent Berger who will die, at least this is implied and not shown, of gas poisoning. The novel ends with an epilogue in which the narrator, in the first person, describes a tank battle during the 1940 campaign.

As can be seen from this brief résumé, Les Noyers is the most disjointed of all Malraux' novels which, although broken up in "sequences", nevertheless retained some kind of unity. But here, in Les Noyers, we have five wholly independant episodes, in fact five separate short stories, three of which - the most important ones - are held together only by the presence in each of them of Vincent Berger. But this central character, partly because of the discontinuity, never emerges strongly or clearly. What also binds these episodes together is the underlying idea which these five episodes illustrate.

Now the extreme disjointedness of this novel might well be a symptom of creative exhaustion, as well as a sign of Malraux' inability to create a coherent whole. For we should not forget that Les Noyers is Malraux' last novel; whether he himself knew this at the time of its writing is immaterial. We, with a quarter of a century hindsight, might well see in it the characteristics of a

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last novel, written by a novelist who has had his say and is no longer able to renew himself. The novel might be considered as consisting of the novelist's left-overs which somehow had to be used up. This would also explain the fragmentary nature of Les Noyers. Obviously the haunting episode of the gas attack had to be written before Malraux put an end to his career as a novelist, also the return of Vincent Berger to Europe. An episode which has obvious autobiographical roots and the experience on which it is based seems to have made a deep impression on Malraux.\* It was equally necessary that he had to "write out" his war experiences, just as he had to "write out" his Spanish Civil war. The presence of the colloquium episode is less necessary, and it is also the least successful of all the episodes. One other thing which our hindsight makes very clear is that Les Noyers looks back to a very much earlier inspiration while at the same time it looks forward to Les Voix du silence.

Les Noyers de l'Altenburg, although different from the preceding novels, bears a very close resemblance to La Voie royale. This return at the end of his career to his earliest inspiration might also be seen as a symptom of exhaustion. The autobiographical background of both novels is the same. There is also a clear resemblance between Vincent Berger as agent of the Touran in the first episode and Perken, and behind both we find the shadow of T.E. Lawrence. Vincent Berger's need for action has the same roots as that of Perken. Perken's "je veux laisser une cicatrice sur cette carte" is exactly echoed by Vincent Berger's "désir fanatique de

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\* "C'est là (after having battled through a hurricane during his raid with Corniglion-Molinier) que j'ai rencontré pour la première fois l'expérience du "retour sur la terre", qui a joué dans ma vie un grand rôle, et que j'ai plusieurs fois tenté de transmettre. Je l'ai transposée directement dans Le Temps du Mépris. C'est aussi celle de tout homme qui retrouve sa civilisation après avoir été lié à une autre, celle du héros de l'Altenburg à son retour d'Afghanistan."

laisser sur la terre une cicatrice". Also Perken's vision of man as an ant living its life in an anthep, finds its direct echo in Möllberg's pessimism: "Depuis que derrière l'homme (...) nous ne voyons plus le singe que commençons-nous à voir apparaître? Une sorte de fourmi." And again: "Rien de meilleur que de regarder longtemps les termitières pour être fixé sur l'homme".

At the same time, the ideas expressed by Walter Berger on the nature of art, and which we quoted earlier (vide supra Chap. V), will form the basic idea of Malraux' work on art. More particularly, Vincent Berger's ideas on art and some of those of Möllberg will find their way word for word into La Psychologie de l'art. It would appear then that when writing Les Noyers, Malraux was at a crossroad. He was writing his last novel (which resembles one of his first), and he is at the same time writing his Psychologie de l'art.

Yet, in spite of its drawing on an earlier inspiration, Les Noyers is nevertheless a very different novel from Malraux' other books: firstly the key in which it is written is very different. Secondly Malraux' vision of Man's fate which forms still the core of this novel, has undergone some significant changes.

To begin with, in Les Noyers Malraux abandons the contemporary urban scene which, with the exception of La Voie royale, forms the "décor" of all his novels. The action is set in pre-1914-1918 days (except the gas attack) and takes place in Reichbach, a small village in Alsace, in the deserts of Tripolitania and Afghanistan and on the banks of the Vistula.

The prologue and the episodes set in Alsace have a curious medieval aura surrounding them. The prisoners, in the prologue, are herded together under the majestic ogives of the cathedral of Chartres, and the prisoners, as their boards grow, acquire "des visages gothiques". The Berger family is deeply rooted in this region<sup>\*</sup>

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\* A striking contrast with the cosmopolitan rootlessness of Katow, Clappique, Kyo, Perken, Garine, etc.

"toute couverte des vestiges de la 'Sainte Forêt' du moyen âge".

The Berger clan itself with its hierarchical structure has a feudal air about it, and old Dietrich, the formidable head of the clan, who sets off on foot for a pilgrimage to Rome, suggests the image of a medieval patriarch. The colloquium takes place in an old priory in a room decorated with gothic sculptures, and outside "des hommes chargeaient des troncs semblables à ceux que mon grand-père avait pendant quarante ans fait empiler devant la mairie de Reichbach, semblables à ceux qu'empilaient les bûcherons de la Sainte Forêt du moyen âge".

This all-pervading presence of the middle ages tends to suggest a sense of continuity and gives a concrete image of the permanence of Man. The gothic-looking soldiers are not merely the descendants of their medieval forefathers, they are these forefathers:

Celui-là a un de ces visages gothiques de plus en plus nombreux depuis que les barbes poussent. La mémoire séculaire du fléau. Le fléau devait venir, et voici qu'il est là. Je me souviens des mobilisés silencieux de septembre, en marche à travers la poussière blanche des routes et les dahlias de fin d'été, et qui me semblaient partir contre l'inondation, contre l'incendie; mais au-dessous de cette familiarité séculaire avec le malheur, pointe la ruse non moins séculaire de l'homme, sa foi clandestine dans une patience pourtant gorgée de désastres, la même peut-être que, jadis, devant la famine des cavernes. "J'attends que ça s'use..." Dans notre tanière engourdie sous le grand soleil de toujours, murmure une voix préhistorique."

It is, no doubt, in order to accentuate this permanence of the fundamental man that Malraux has housed his prisoners in a cathedral.\* Like Proust's church of St. Hilaire; the cathedral has a fifth dimension, that of Time \*\* It is both present now and in a very distant past, which is thus made contemporary with us. What is more, "le moyen âge n'a pas de temps, le moyen âge est un présent

\* It is quite possible that in real life Malraux and his fellow prisoners were in fact herded together in the cathedral of Sens. However, this event acquires its full significance only in the novel.

\*\* "un édifice occupant, si l'on peut dire, un espace à quatre dimensions - la quatrième étant celle du Temps, - déployant à travers les siècles son vaisseau qui, de travée en travée, de chapelle en chapelle, semblait vaincre et franchir non pas seulement quelques mètres, mais des époques successives d'où il sortait victorieux; dérobant le rude et farouche XI<sup>e</sup> siècle dans l'épaisseur de ses murs"..

éternel", points out one of the speakers at the colloquium. We, through these "visages gothiques", through the cathedral and the gestures of the woodcutters, are linked to this eternal present.

The need for permanence and continuity which this "medievalism" of Les Noyers seems to reflect, is something new in the world of Malraux and might well be, at least in part, a reflection of the mood of the time. Les Noyers was written during one of the darkest periods of recent French history, when the very texture of France and of Europe seemed to disintegrate.\* We find a similar kind of harking after a feeling of permanence reflected in St. Exupéry's Pilote de guerre which was written at the same time.

What also differentiates Les Noyers from Malraux' other novels is the absence of violence. It seems that, as Malraux encounters more and more real violence in Spain and during the 1940 campaign, imaginary, literary violence disappears from his novels. Instead, we find in Les Noyers a much more effective, almost Goyaesque horror, especially in the description of the gas attack. For example:

Le sentier obliqua davantage vers les positions allemandes. Au milieu, un homme bondissait à quatre pattes, d'un mouvement si spasmodique qu'il semblait projeté. Nu. A deux mètres l'apparition leva son visage gris aux yeux sans blanc, ouvrit comme pour hurler sa bouche d'épileptique: mon père s'effaça. Folle de douleur avec les mouvements de tous les fous, comme si son corps n'eût plus été habité que par un supplice, en quelques sauts de grenouille, elle s'enfonça dans la purulence.

Finally, again with La Voie royale as a significant exception, politics, contemporary revolutionary politics play no part in Les Noyers. The activities of Vincent Berger in Turkey and Afghanistan are, as it were, sterilised by time and space, and

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\* The defeat of France is of crucial importance in the evolution of Malraux. Then the Communist dies and the gaullist became possible. In his Antimémoires he recalls saying to de Gaulle, not without some Barrès-like emphasis: "Puis il y eu la guerre, la vraie. Enfin est arrivée la défaite, et comme beaucoup d'autres j'ai épousé la France".

Malraux takes no sides. This a-political nature of Les Noyers, especially when seen in comparison with the preceding novel L'Espoir, reflects a dramatic change. The partisan, deeply engaged novelist seems to have disengaged himself in Les Noyers. A possible explanation for this change might be found in the traumatic experience of the Left, and more especially of the fellow-travelling or committed intelligentsia: the signing of the Russo-German pact in 1939. We have no record of Malraux' reaction. But it is safe to surmise that he who had seen in Soviet civilisation a total renewal, must have been profoundly shocked and disillusioned. This might well explain the importance of the theme of disillusionment in Les Noyers. The ideal of the Touran to which Vincent Berger was wholly devoted, dies on his hands. He discovers that "le Touran n'existait pas". The anthropologist Möllberg loses faith in his own ideas and destroys his book, the result of fifteen years of work. The shattering of the belief in L'Homme nouveau might also have brought Malraux to revise his ideas: man cannot be reborn, his nature is constant and unchanged, and hence the discovery of the permanence of man which informs the whole of Les Noyers.

The lack of partisanship and politics in Les Noyers results in, what might be termed, a broadening and mellowing of Malraux' attitude. Les Noyers is the only book in which the ordinary man, the peasant and worker, le petit peuple <sup>is</sup> ~~are~~ really present. In Les Conquérants we see an anonymous and amorphous mass which for Garine has no real existence except as a political force. In La Condition humaine we catch a fleeting glimpse of a few members of the workers' militia, but they are mere shadows. In Le Temps du mépris we only see the intellectual Kassner. Finally in L'Espoir we do meet a number of ordinary members of the International Brigades and a few anonymous peasants. But in all his books the centre of the stage is held by articulate intellectuals. This is undoubtedly still the case of Les Noyers, but it contains other elements as well.

The /....

The whole of the prologue is dominated by ordinary men who are no longer seen as anonymous <sup>N</sup>man, but as alive and real. We see them as prisoners listening to and believing in rumours ("Pétain a tué Weygand en plein conseil des ministres"), we see them painstakingly writing letters home: "les doigts crispés sur le papier comme s'il allait leur être arraché". Before this common humanity, the narrator who at this point can be wholly identified with Malraux himself, exclaims: "Ecrivain par quoi suis-je obsédé depuis dix ans sinon par l'homme. Me voici devant la matière originelle". There is an unmistakable feeling of discovery behind this exclamation. As if after ten years of writing about Man, the narrator only now discovers the humble, tough, persistent reality that exists independently of the abstraction Man. This discovery might well be, in part, that of Malraux himself. During his days of militancy he had, no doubt, more dealings with the leaders and the intelligentsia than with the rank and file. He fought the war in Spain in a corps d'élite of which moreover he was the commander. But during the campaign of 1940 he was, if Hoffmann is correct, a simple deuxième classe, and it is then, no doubt, that he came into real, living, intimate contact with the ageless humanity of which he writes in Les Noyers. Yet in spite of this identification the narrator realises the distance which remains between him, the bourgeois (Malraux is very much un grand bourgeois) intellectual, and "them". Describing the prisoners writing home, the narrator reflects:

Combien de jours les ai-je vus ainsi dans la chambrée, emplissant page après page... Redisent-ils une fois de plus qu'il faut reviser la lieuse, profiter du temps entre la moisson et le battage pour réparer les gouttières, - avec les répétitions sans fin qui sont leur mode instinctif d'expression?

The distance here is clearly indicated by "leur mode instinctif d'expression". And later on, in what is, no doubt, an oblique reference to the days when he thought he could identify himself with "the masses", the narrator underlines what separates him from them.

J'ai /....

J'ai cru connaître plus que ma culture parce que j'avais rencontré les foules militantes d'une foi, religieuses ou politiques; je sais maintenant qu'un intellectuel n'est pas seulement celui à qui les livres sont nécessaires, mais tout homme dont une idée, si élémentaire soit-elle, engage et ordonne la vie. Ceux qui m'entourent, eux, vivent au jour le jour depuis des millénaires.

At the same time this awareness of difference is, paradoxically perhaps, accompanied by a greater awareness of the existence of these men and also by a feeling of sympathy for them. When Malraux describes the soldiers looking at the photographs of each other's wives, the description is tinged by a kind of protective tenderness:

Lequel tira le premier de son portefeuille la photo de sa femme, pour la regarder à la lueur clandestine d'une lampe de poche? Cinq minutes plus tard, entre petits groupes, les images circulaient, quatre ou cinq calots autour d'une sourde lumière, les photos d'amateur tombant des gros doigts dans la paille sous les engueulades. Chacun d'ailleurs se fichait des femmes des autres, ne les regardait que pour montrer la sienne. Et pourtant, dans cette lumière de confiance, elles apparaissaient comme des secrets, les robes suggérant tout à coup la vie des maris mieux que ne l'eussent fait leurs photos en civils. La femme de Pradé est une ménagère en bois dur, aux bandeaux plats; Bonneau, seul entre tous, possédait quatre photos, plus putains l'une que l'autre. Et le petit Léonard au nez de betterave, - notre radio, - réticent et se faisant prier, finit par tirer une carte postale, une très belle fille en éblouissant costume de plumes. Quelques lignes étaient écrites au bas. Et les copains, têtes collées l'une à l'autre sous le nez de Léonard fantastiquement éclairé par dessous, déchiffraient en approchant l'ampoule: "A mon petit minet Louis", et la signature d'une des gloires du music-hall.

The same tenderness, mingled perhaps with pity, gives its poignancy to the passage which shows the German soldiers, whose conversations Vincent has just overheard, going into battle:

Les compagnies reconstituées cessèrent d'avancer. Mineur pour qui la lampe était le Bon Dieu, sous-officier qui allait au temple pour se souvenir, fossoyeur dont l'enfant n'avait appris le prénom qu'à cause du chien, ajusteur, comptable, coiffeur, tueur de cochons, cantonnier, lecteur de Trois Boys-Scouts, et celui qui n'avait pas épousé sa femme pour sa beauté et celui dont la femme n'était pas bien jolie non plus, hommes semblables à tant d'autres, entre tous les hommes morts et tous les hommes tués! Et avec eux seraient tués leurs sentiments impersonnels et poignants, leur destin qui avait cherché son sens dans ces tarots sur quoi maintenant cheminait un rayon de soleil bienveillant; leur résignation toute d'expérience comme si tant de fosses communes n'eussent été créées et dispersées que pour aboutir au timbre d'une pauvre sagesse: ... Très haut, la grande migration des oiseaux continuait; et sous elle, l'espèce humaine plaquée sur ces prés livides dans l'attente du pilonnement russe avait l'unité complexe des nuits d'été, cette unité de cris lointains, de rêves, de

présences, /....

présences, d'odeur profonde d'arbres et de blés coupés, de sommeils inquiets à la surface de la terre sous l'immense nuit immobile.

We come here across an attitude and a tone which are wholly new.

Perhaps it was to give expression of this discovery of the reality of man that Malraux wrote Les Noyers de l'Altenburg.

2.

While a P.O.W. the narrator, in the prologue, thinks of his father and of his memoirs which his death from gas poisoning prevented him from writing:

A quel point je retrouve mon père, depuis que certains instants de sa vie semblent préfigurer la mienne! J'ai été blessé le 14, prisonnier le 18; son sort dans l'autre guerre - de l'autre côté... - a été décidé le 12 juin 1915. Il y a vingt-cinq ans, presque jour pour jour... Il n'était pas beaucoup plus vieux que moi lorsqu'a commencé de s'imposer à lui ce mystère de l'homme qui m'obsède aujourd'hui, et qui me fait commencer, peut-être, à le comprendre. Ses Mémoires, que quelques-uns attendent encore et qui ne paraîtront jamais - ils n'ont jamais été rédigés - n'étaient qu'une masse de notes sur ce qu'il appelait "ses rencontres avec l'homme".

The three episodes that follow are, in fact, the memoirs of Vincent Berger, but written by his son, and each episode shows, perhaps a little mechanically, a "rencontre avec l'homme".

Vincent Berger, then, is Malraux' last hero, and he seems almost a résumé of all the previous Malrauvian heroes: like Garine and Claude he feels the need to leave Europe; like Perken he wants, as we have seen, to leave a scar on the world; like Kyo he seeks the warm comradeship born from communal action; his last action, the attempt to carry back to the German lines a gassed Russian soldier, resembles Katow's last, generous and fraternal gesture. The composite nature of Vincent Berger is undoubtedly due to the failing of Malraux' creative and imaginative powers.

Let us now look more closely at the three episodes which make up the body of Les Noyers. The first one is rather peculiar in structure and different from the other two which are straightforward narratives. This first episode begins with the suicide of Dietrich Berger, a few days after the arrival of his son Vincent from the East;

the /....

the episode ends with these words: "cinq jours après mon père se suicidait". Let us remark in passing that this suicide has no real function in the novel, since it is the suicide of a character who plays no part in the action. It is there because it happened to Malraux' father, and it also gives a starting point to the very important conversation between Walter Berger and his nephew Vincent.

The first episode then, beginning and ending with Dietrich Berger's suicide, has a circular structure. Inside this circle we find a description of the Berger clan dominated by the formidable patriarch Dietrich; we also find the story of Vincent Berger's activities in the Middle East for the formation of the Touran. In the building of this dream Berger also participates with passion, not for the Touran itself, but because it would enable him to leave his mark on history:

Sa passion, mon père m'en avait guère mis en question l'origine. En elle se mêlaient son besoin de s'écarter de l'Europe, l'appel de l'histoire, le désir fanatique de laisser sur la terre une cicatrice, la fascination d'un dessein qu'il n'avait pas peu contribué à préciser, la camaraderie de combat, l'amitié...

We see Vincent Berger setting out to win over to this ideal the Turks of Central Asia, the Kurds, the Turks of Bokhara and of Afghanistan. He wanders through the bleak, barren Afghanistan desert talking to chiefs. In the bazaar of Ghazin a madman, sensing a European beneath the Eastern clothes, beats him up:

Mon père regagna sa maison furieux, rompu et inexplicablement délivré d'un charme: tout à coup la vérité était là, abrupte: le Touran qui animait les nouvelles passions turques, qui avait peut-être sauvé Constantinople, le Touran n'existait pas.

One does not see quite the link between this beating and the discovery that the Touran does not exist. The fact remains that Vincent Berger now returns to Europe. He is later described as "**ruiné**" (morally) or as "battu à ses propres yeux". But one is not convinced, because we are merely told about his being "à ce point intéressé personnellement dans le touranisme", "passionné", etc., but we are not shown, we are not made to feel the involvement of Vincent as we are made to feel Kyo, Tchen and even Ferral's engagement;

and /....

and it is therefore hard to see that the discovery of the emptiness of the Touran ideal had such profound repercussions on Berger's life. Now, if Kyo had discovered that Communism was a false god....

When Vincent Berger returns to Europe, after so many years in the East, he has an experience which will deeply affect him and which will echo throughout Les Noyers: In Marseilles, where he lands, through the shock of this dépaysement, he suddenly sees Man. The experience is akin to the one described in both Le Temps du mépris and the Antimémoires and which Malraux called "le retour à la terre"; in the case of Vincent Berger it is rather a return to Man:

Jeté à quelque rive de néant ou d'éternité, il en contemplait la confuse coulée - aussi séparé d'elle que de ceux qui avaient passé, avec leurs angoisses oubliées et leurs contes perdus, dans les rues des premières dynasties de Bactres et de Babylone, dans les oasis dominées par les Tours du Silence. A travers la musique et l'odeur de pain chaud, des ménagères se hâtaient, un filet sous le bras; un marchand de couleurs pesait ses volets arlequins où s'attardait un dernier rayon; la sirène d'un paquebot appelait; un commis en calotte rapportait un mannequin sur son dos, à l'intérieur d'un étroit magasin plein d'ombres, - sur la terre, vers la fin du second millénaire de l'ère chrétienne...

There is something very Pascalien about this passage and especially about this idea expressed a little further that man can only live in "un état de distraction tout-puissant", which comes very close to the notion of the divertissement. "Les hommes n'ayant pu guérir la mort ont résolu de ne plus y penser". Later, Vincent Berger's mind will return again and again to this experience, elucidating and deepening it:

L'aventure humaine, la terre. Et tout cela, comme le destin achevé de son père, eût pu être autre... Il se sentait peu à peu envahi par un sentiment inconnu, comme il l'avait été, sur les hauts lieux nocturnes d'Asie, par la présence du sacré, tandis qu'autour de lui les ailes feutrées des petites chouettes des sables battaient en silence... C'était, beaucoup plus profonde, l'angoissante liberté de ce soir de Marseille où il regardait glisser les ombres dans une odeur ténue de cigarettes et d'absinthe, - où l'Europe lui était si étrangère, où il la regardait comme, libéré du temps, il eût regardé glisser lentement une heure d'un lointain passé, avec tout son cortège insolite. Ainsi sentait-il maintenant devenir insolite la vie tout entière; et il s'en trouvait tout à coup délivré, - mystérieusement étranger à la terre et surpris par elle, comme il l'avait été par cette rue où les hommes de sa race retrouvée glissaient dans l'heure verte...

And during the colloquium, as he listens to the ethnologist Möllberg

describing /....

describing the pre-historic civilisation ("Nous sommes ici dans le domaine antérieur même à la mythologie"), Vincent Berger "retrouvait sous ces phrases une expérience qu'il connaissait lui aussi, celle où l'homme cesse d'être privilégié, l'angoissante virginité de regarder l'humanité comme une espèce parmi d'autres". In Marseilles, then, takes place the first of these "rencontres avec l'homme" which is the main theme of the novel.

After his father's suicide which takes place five days after his return to Reichbach, Vincent goes to Altenburg to attend the colloquium organised by his uncle Walter on the subject: Permanence et métamorphose de l'homme. In this episode there is no action and a great deal of talk. It is obvious that the "philosophical" centre of gravity of the novel lies in these debates of which Roger Caillois writes rather haughtily, but rightly nevertheless: "les discussions abstraites ont l'air d'avoir été introduites par l'auteur pour satisfaire on ne sait quel goût de philosophie".<sup>(2)</sup> In these scenes lies also the great flaw of the novel. The philosophical pretensions of Malraux are not so much at fault ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> the fact that these ideas are formulated separately from the action. This has always been a weakness of Malraux' novels, for example the dialogue of Ferral and Gisors in La Condition humaine, or the dialogues in L'Espoir which, as we have noted, could be lifted out of the main body of the book. But these dialogues were nevertheless, however tenuously, linked to the action; they were to some extent woven into the texture of the novel. But in Les Noyers we find in the middle of the novel an episode which has, so to speak, no links with the preceding and following episodes, and which consists solely of abstract ideas. In a very sharp critical note on Les Noyers, André Gide makes this very acute remark: "L'emploi abusif des termes abstraits nuit souvent beaucoup au réel d'une action. Il ne faut pas chercher à la fois à faire voir et à faire comprendre".<sup>(3)</sup> Here Gide touches on Malraux' greatest weakness as a

novelist /....

novelist. In not one of his novels Malraux, <sup>did</sup> succeeded in wholly fusing into one organic whole thought and action. Perhaps he did not in his life either: the squadron leader in Spain was not Malraux, the writer; and the author of L'Espoir was not the leader of the squadron Espana.

The central episode of the colloquium is divided into three parts of which the third is undoubtedly the most important, since it is here that we will find the ideas which inform the novel. The first part consists of a discussion between Walter Berger and his nephew Vincent. This discussion deals mainly with the suicide of Dietrich and its motives. We have here not only a clash of ideas, but also a clash of two types of men, the dyed-in-the-wool bourgeois intellectual Walter who believes that "pour l'essentiel l'homme est ce qu'il cache (...), un misérable petit tas de secrets", and the intellectual man of action, Vincent, who replies "presque avec brutalité: l'homme est ce qu'il fait". This is clearly an echo of the clash between Malraux and Léon Brunschvicg during the colloquium on Les Conquérants at the Union pour la vérité. Moreover, during this discussion Malraux expresses, through Walter, the ideas on art which will form the basis of his Voix du silence.

The second part is a kind of interlude which gives us, through a vaguely Clappique-like character Hermann Müller ("gigolo vieilli à cravate frivolette") an ironic picture of Walter and of life at Altenburg and of the kind of discussion Vincent is to expect:

Tu as été surpris qu'il (Walter) t'accompagne à pied: c'était pour te contraindre à marcher à son pas. Ce colloque-ci, c'est la même chose...

Les autres, bien entendu, lui font le coup de l'éléphant: "La métamorphose, l'art, le haricot germé? L'art et le haricot germé, Messieurs, se distinguent de l'éléphant en ceci: l'éléphant est un animal de grande taille, lourd de poids, etc." Discours sur l'éléphant.

- Alors pourquoi des hommes éminents viennent-ils ici?

- Et pourquoi ailleurs? Ils vont bien à l'hôtel: ici, les gens sont plus intelligents! Ils vont bien au café: ici, les fauteuils sont meilleurs!"

This /....

This ironic detachment from the high-powered intellectual phalanstère is, of course, also that of Malraux himself and of Vincent Berger; hence the kind of complicity which exists between the ironic, caustic Müller and Vincent. This second part also serves to introduce the ethnologist Möllberg who will dominate the colloquium.

The colloquium itself is the subject of the third section. Here we find a number of earnest and conventional intellectuals who are debating the theme "permanence ou métamorphose de l'homme". Vincent Berger's position in their gathering is an ambiguous one: he is and he is not one of them. He is looked upon by the sedate intellectuals with awe: "les intellectuels sont comme les femmes, mon cher bon", says Müller, "les militaires les font rêver". He is also the object of great curiosity: "Les intellectuels n'aiment pas qu'un des leurs touche à l'action, mais s'il y réussit ils en sont plus curieux que les autres". Vincent has no intentions of entering the debate. He is determined to keep his distance from this world which rejects the world of action, and where "une idée ne naissait jamais d'un fait: toujours d'une autre idée". But slowly, almost instinctively, he is drawn back into this world of the intellectuals of which, in spite of the years of action, he is nevertheless part: "Mon père s'était cru amputé de la culture: il la retrouvait aussi familière que lors de son premier cours à Constantinople." Vincent Berger, the prodigal son of the intellectual family, has come back.

This ambiguous attitude of Vincent Berger is also that of Malraux towards the gathering he describes. His intentions are partly, but unmistakably, satirical, the intellectuals are all a little grotesque or at least ridiculous, yet their ideas are not. These are, in fact, to a great extent the ideas of Malraux himself. Some contributions to the colloquium come straight from earlier writings of Malraux himself. Thus Thirard's idea that "trois

livres /....

livres tiennent en face de la prison: Robinscn Crusoe, Don Quichotte, L'Idiot" comes from Malraux' speech to the Sécrétariat de l'Association Internationale des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture (21 June 1936), and Möllberg's ideas on "le double" can be found in Malraux' closing speech of the Congress of 1935. So that, if the participants of the colloquium should not be taken seriously, the ideas they express should.

The colloquium itself is in reality one long Malravian monologue broken up, for the sake of the novel, into a series of dialogues and short monologues punctuated by interruptions. And like a Malravian monologue, it follows no logical, systematic sequence, but goes from insight to insight according to the laws of a mysterious chain reaction. Time and again, the original theme is lost out of sight and the arguments go off at a tangent. It is true also that in discussions of this kind this tends to happen.

The debate seems to turn around three unrelated questions or assertions, all three of which shock the participants. It is this which creates in the debate a kind of dramatic tension. The first one is put by Thirard:

Mon fils avait à peu près quinze ans, et je venais de lui dire, imprudemment, à propos de je ne sais quoi: "Ce n'est pas comme ça qu'on connaît les hommes!" A quoi il m'a répondu: "- Ah? c'est comment?" ...

- La question, avait repris Thirard, n'est pas de celles à quoi l'on répond en cinq minutes? Tout de même, elle avait la force de l'innocence; imaginez que vous soyez en face d'elle...

Il parcourut la salle de son regard ironique derrière ses gros sourcils:

- Allons, je vous la pose!

Une protestation générale monta jusqu'au bruit de la pluie sur les hautes vitres, dans un envol de mains et de carnets. Tous les noms illustres, Molière, La Rochefoucauld et Pascal, Hegel et Goethe, Bacon et Shakespeare, Cervantes et les autres, se mêlaient sous la passion fanatique de gens qui défendaient ce à quoi ils avaient donné leur vie. La culture est une religion. Mais beaucoup reprenaient conscience du banal mystère humain, tel qu'ils l'avaient rencontré dans les cliniques, les maternités et les chambres de mourants.

There is clearly a satirical edge to the description of the reaction, yet at the same time Thirard's question upsets age-old habits of

thinking /....

thinking which are so ingrained as to appear natural. Western civilisation is so rooted in a psychological conception of Man that it seems a law of nature that we know man through introspection and psychology. The debate now turns to art: "on conçoit tout de même mal un art (...) à quoi toute psychologie serait étrangère". At this point Vincent Berger decides to enter the debate. His arguments, on the one hand, hark back to Malraux' ideas expressed in La Tentation; for example:

Il n'y a de psychologie valable qu'en Occident, vient-on de nous dire? mais, d'abord, il n'y a de besoin de psychologie qu'en Occident. Parce que l'Occident s'oppose au cosmos, à la fatalité, au lieu de s'accorder à eux.

On the other hand, his ideas on art are those of Les Voix du silence:

Notre art me paraît une rectification du monde, un moyen d'échapper à la condition d'homme. La confusion capitale me paraît venir de ce qu'on a cru - dans l'idée que nous nous faisons de la tragédie grecque c'est éblouissant! - que représenter une fatalité était la subir. Mais non! C'est presque la posséder. Le seul fait de pouvoir la représenter, de la concevoir, la fait échapper au vrai destin, à l'implacable échelle divine; la réduit à l'échelle humaine. Dans ce qu'il a d'essentiel, notre art est une humanisation du monde.

Finally, after a break, the discussion is resumed, and the main speaker now is Möllberg who is a character parallel to Vincent Berger. Like him, he is an intellectual and a man of action. He was at work on an immense Spengler-like synthesis:

... servi par un style massif, aux répétitions empilées, il semblait devoir fonder, sur la saisissante documentation qu'il avait découverte, une synthèse d'une ampleur hégélienne. Et c'était précisément à l'époque où le pluralisme des civilisations touchait déjà nombre d'esprits (et en particulier mon père, qui vivait dans l'Islam), que Möllberg, obsédé d'ordre et d'unité, commençait à tirer du domaine le plus fertile en différences: l'ethnologie, une notion de l'homme d'une rigoureuse continuité, une structure de l'aventure humaine.

At the basis of this work lies then "une notion de l'homme d'une rigoureuse continuité". However, a long contact with primeval Africa makes him lose faith in the fundamental idea of his enterprise and destroys his life-work:

Ses feuillets pendent aux basses branches d'arbres d'espèces diverses, entre le Sahara et Zanzibar. Parfait. Selon l'usage, le vainqueur porte les dépouilles du vaincu.

To /....

To Vincent Berger's Asia corresponds Möllberg's Africa. Like Vincent, Möllberg has only recently returned, and both return defeated.

Möllberg now raises the fundamental question:

La notion d'homme a-t-elle un sens?

Autrement dit: sous les croyances, les mythes, et surtout sous la multiplicité des structures mentales, peut-on isoler une donnée permanente, valable à travers les lieux, valable à travers l'histoire, sur quoi puisse se fonder la notion d'homme?

After having posed the question, Möllberg begins a series of haunting evocations of ancient civilisations ("nous sommes dans un domaine cosmique") which show "des civilisations qui ignorent: la première, notre sentiment du destin; la deuxième, notre sentiment de la naissance; la troisième, notre sentiment de l'échange; la dernière, notre sentiment de la mort". What Möllberg wants to show is that what we might consider as some of man's most natural fundamental feelings, have been unknown to some men and have been foreign to some civilisations. There is, therefore, not a permanent notion of Man. Human civilisations are born and die and are impermeable to one another:

Les états psychiques successifs de l'humanité sont irréductiblement différents, parce qu'ils n'affectent pas, ne cultivent pas, n'engagent pas la même part de l'homme. Sur l'essentiel, Platon et Saint-Paul ne peuvent ni s'accorder ni se convaincre: ils ne peuvent que se convertir. Un roi chrétien et un roi proto-historique lié aux astres n'ont pas deux idées du destin: pour que le roi chrétien ressente, conçoive le destin, il faut que le monde psychique de l'autre ait disparu. Je doute qu'il y ait un dialogue de la chenille et du papillon. Même entre l'Hindou qui croit à l'absolu et à la métempsychose, et l'Occidental qui croit à la patrie et à la mort, le dialogue est postiche.

Eventually, Möllberg can "concevoir une permanence de l'homme, mais c'est une permanence dans le néant".

It is obvious that some of the ideas of Möllberg are Malraux', but one should be careful here. The identification of Möllberg with Malraux is only partial. What Möllberg represents is the most extreme point of Malraux' thought. Möllberg pushes this thought to its ultimate and desperate conclusions. He travels much further than Malraux and arrives at a sterile, haughty and stoic

pessimism. /....

pessimism.

When Möllberg says that the permanency of man is in nothingness, Vincent Berger counters by suggesting "une permanence dans le fondamental". On this question Möllberg and Berger are clearly divided. Vincent Berger believes in man, in a fundamental man, the nihilist Möllberg believes, if that were possible, in nothingness. This faith of Berger in man and in his ability to draw out of nothingness the protest against it, his man-made art, are expressed in the description of the walnut trees of Altenburg, which Berger goes and contemplates after the colloquium:

La plénitude des arbres séculaires émanait de leur masse, mais l'effort par quoi sortaient de leurs énormes troncs les branches tordues, l'épanouissement en feuilles sombres de ce bois, si vieux et si lourd qu'il semblait s'enfoncer dans la terre et non s'en arracher, imposaient à la fois l'idée d'une volonté et d'une métamorphose sans fin. Entre eux les collines dévalaient jusqu'au Rhin; ils encadraient la cathédrale de Strasbourg très loin dans le crépuscule heureux, comme tant d'autres troncs encadraient d'autres cathédrales dans des champs d'Occident. Et cette tour dressée dans son oraison d'amputé, toute la patience et le travail humains développés en vagues de vignes jusqu'au fleuve n'étaient qu'un décor du soir autour de la séculaire poussée du bois vivant, des deux jets drus et noueux qui arrachaient les forces de la terre pour les déployer en ramures.

Here we have the central image from which the novel derives its title.

Here we find expressed, for the trees are man, the ideas of will and of endless metamorphosis. And the trees frame another "tree", this one made by man, the cathedral of Strasbourg.

The last episode of Les Noyers should be seen as an answer to Möllberg's nihilism. Vincent Berger, now an intelligence officer in the German army, is an observer of the first experiments with gas on the Vistula Front. The experiment is being conducted by the inventor, Professor Hoffmann. We find here another form of the intellectual, the intellectual dehumanized by his discipline. For him, man does not exist (another form of nihilism), or rather exists only as far as he reacts to his gas:-

- On a essayé d'employer des poisons. Mais c'est parfaitement idiot! L'acide cyanhydrique, l'oxyde de carbone sont des poisons parfaits, qu'est-ce qu'ils ont donné? L'acide cyanhydrique demande un demi-gramme au mètre cube d'air: le sujet entre en

convulsions /....

convulsions et tombe mort dans une rigidité tétanique. C'est parfait. En lieu clos ... Mais qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Le champ de bataille, figurez-vous, se permet d'être à l'air libre! ....

- Ensuite, quoi? On a essayé de l'oxyde de carbone. En laboratoire. Toxique redoutable, présentant toutes les qualités requises, facile à préparer, bon marché. Il fixe l'hémoglobine du sang, l'empêche de s'unir à l'oxygène de l'air. Mais il y a toujours le problème de l'air libre!

While there is here a touch of the "mad scientist", nevertheless Hoffmann's scientific inhumanity is made perfectly clear. Some thirty years later, another "Hoffmann" will invent Zyklon B.

The attack takes place the day after Hoffmann's arrival.

While waiting for the attack to begin, Vincent listens to the soldiers talking in the trenches. Here Berger finds an answer to Möllberg. The soldiers talk of the age-old obsession of unfaithful wives, then talk of the gas which, they believe, will freeze men in whatever position they were at the time: man's ancient dream, embodied in The Sleeping beauty. This scene should be read together with the P.O.W. scene of the prologue of which it is the counterpart. Vincent Berger, like his son will twenty-five years later at Chartres, finds himself before "la matière originelle", before pre-historic, but fundamental and indestructible man:

- Quand même, vous voyez ça, le maréchal-ferrant avec son marteau au-dessus de l'enclume, qui bouge plus! Des trucs comme ça, c'est des blagues, le marteau tomberait, vu qu'il est trop lourd. - L'électricité, elle, a' doit rester allumée...

Mon père se souvint de la ville des Mille et une nuits où tous les gestes humains, la vie des fleurs, la flamme des lampes ont été suspendus par l'Ange de la Mort... Il était là tout près, avec ses têtes de bonhommes. Mais la coulée du temps mène si bien à la mort, elle aussi, que le vieux rêve du destin suspendu reparait comme s'il eût été le secret de la terre, tapi dans ces hommes aux casques à points recouverts de toile grise, comme il l'avait été sous les heaumes des soldats de Saladin. .... L'obscurité était de nouveau tout habitée de voix, voix d'indifférences et de rêves séculaires, voix de métiers - comme si les métiers seuls eussent vécu, sous les hommes impersonnels et provisoires. Les timbres changeaient, mais les tons restaient les mêmes, très anciens, enrobés dans le passé comme l'ombre de cette sape - la même résignation, la même fausse autorité, la même absurde science et la même expérience, la même inusable gaîté, et ces discussions qui ne connaissaient que l'affirmation de plus en plus brutale, comme si ces voix de l'obscurité ne fussent jamais parvenus à individualiser même leur colère.

The description of the gas attack is undoubtedly one of the

great /....

great scenes written by Malraux. After the gas has been released and the wind has pushed it to the Russian lines, the German soldiers go in to mop up the trenches. Vincent Berger follows. But the gas not only killed men, it rotted and putrified all it touched:

Mon père avançait lourdement, mais il avançait. Isolé dans la solitude comme pour veiller le cheval gazé, était un arbre mort; non pas moisi de gaz, mais toutes ses branches nettes, anguleuses, ossifiées, avec la poussée tragique de tous les arbres morts de la terre. Et cet arbre pétrifié depuis tant d'années semblait, dans cet univers de pourriture, le dernier vestige de la vie. Une pie passa d'un vol ralenti, ses plumes blanches découpées dans ses ailes noires; et tomba comme un oiseau des ronces et des aubépines doubles était fauché, gluant lui aussi, de ce roux livide de bête crevée qui devenait noir à vingt mètres. Mais les ronces ne s'accrochaient plus: avec la troublante sensation d'avoir retrouvé sa force, mon père avançait sans résistance à travers une barrière épineuse en déliquescence sous ses genoux, sous son épaule, sous son ventre. Seules piquaient encore les longues épines des acacias, dont les branches ne se rompaient pas au premier contact; leurs feuilles semblaient seulement commencer à se flétrir, touchées par un début d'automne. Au-dessus de sa tête, toutes les autres feuilles devenues semblables - chêne, bouleau, mélèze, peuplier - pendaient comme des salades cuites, avec çà et là une araignée morte au centre de sa toile où perlait une rosée verdâtre. Le lierre agglutiné pendait aux troncs suppurants. A chaque pas, des buissons écrasés montait une odeur amère et douceâtre, celle des gaz sans doute.

The gas is not merely a gas, it attacks the very spring of life, it becomes in fact Death. This is where the achievement of Malraux in Les Noyers lies. A writer can without difficulty show the death of an individual (cf La Mort du père in Les Thibault or The Death of Ivan Illitch); death itself cannot so easily be represented without falling into allegory. In the novels of Malraux, so obsessed with death, we had up to now found only individual deaths (Perken, Tchen, Kyo, Hernandez). But here, in the form of the lethal gas, we have death itself as an inescapable plague that kills everything that lives.

Soon Vincent Berger sees the German soldiers running back towards their lines. Overcome by horror and pity, they carry the horribly suffering Russian soldiers on their backs and try to bring them to the German ambulances. There is, in the description of this, no trace of sentimentality, no trace of the usual Malrauvian flamboyance and heroics. In fact, the writing is rather flat and

therefore /....

therefore all the more effective:

Le Russe allongé sur le dos entre eux, fit un effort pour se retourner sur le ventre, y parvint enfin. Les deux Allemands se redressaient lentement, les jambes encore à demi ployées, stupéfaits comme mon père de retrouver cette vallée de Terre Promise. Le sous-officier dit entre ses dents quelque chose que couvrit le bruit de ses bottes pompant des feuilles.

- Quoi! demanda mon père. Son compagnon progna de nouveau. Il eût voulu montrer du doigt, mais ses doigts étaient enfoncés dans la capote de celui qu'il portait.

- Il se débène, leur gars! répéta-t-il enfin..

Le grand vent s'engouffrait dans les chemises des porteurs que le repos abrutissait; derrière eux, le gazé essayait de ramper vers les lignes russes. Plus de cent mètres le séparaient du bois; à chaque effort, il avançait dérisoirement de vingt centimètres, retombait; remontait vers sa tranchée, vers l'étroite fosse à gaz où se décomposaient les siens. Et le plus inhumain n'était pas ce mourant qui rampait, les bras dans la boue jusqu'au-dessus des coudes, et les yeux en face des bouillons-blancs gainés d'essaims morts, c'était le silence.

Les porteurs avaient enfin vu le mouvement du Russe. Ils firent les deux pas qui les séparaient de lui; l'un lui botta les fesses, puis tous deux le hissèrent de nouveau sur leurs bras, et ils repartirent.

Vincent Berger, terrified by this evidence of evil ("sans doute les croyants appellent-ils présence du démon une semblable visitation de l'épouvante"), also feels he must act against it:

L'Esprit du Mal ici était plus fort encore que la mort, si fort, qu'il fallait trouver un Russe qui ne fût pas tué, n'importe lequel, le mettre sur ses épaules et le sauver.

Cinq ou six étaient épars dans les buissons, au-dessous d'une capote accrochée par le col, et qui oscillait sur ce délire comme un pendu; mon père se jeta sous le premier, s'arcbouta dans les ronces molles et se releva avec lui ... Mon père, paupières serrées, tout son corps collé à ce cadavre fraternel qui le protégeait comme un bouclier contre tout ce qu'il fuyait, marmonnait sans arrêt: "Vite, vite", sans savoir ce qu'il voulait dire par là, et n'avait même plus conscience de marcher.

Later on he reflects on what lay behind this spontaneous action of the men saving their enemies:

La pitié? pensa-t-il confusément, comme lorsqu'il avait vu revenir les compagnies; il s'agissait d'un élan bien autrement profond, où l'angoisse et la fraternité se rejoignaient inextricablement, d'un élan venu de très loin dans les temps - comme si la nappe des gaz n'eût abandonné, au lieu de ces Russes, que des cadavres amis d'hommes du quaternaire... Jusqu'au ciel miroitant et bleu, le coteau montait avec son odeur retrouvée d'arbres, l'odeur des buis et des sapins qui ruissellent sous l'averse. Tout à coup le souvenir de l'Altenburg traversa l'obsession de mon père: il était en face de vastes bouquets de noyers.

Here /....

Here we find the final answer to Möllberg: What is fundamental in man is this "élan où l'angoisse et la fraternité se rejoignent", this solidarity of man against death. Here lies the true meaning of Malraux' last novel and not, as some critics have thought, in Vincent Berger's wild longing for happiness as he is dying.

And so, Vincent Berger, the last of Malraux' heroes, dies a death which we shall not witness; not any more than we witnessed Katow's death - but both sharing the stubborn conviction that this fraternité (or love) can justify a human life which means nothing, but which we must live to the end with all its despair and happiness.

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NOTES

1. Denis Boak, André Malraux & T.E. Lawrence, Modern Language Review, October 1966.
2. Roger Caillois, Circonstantielles 1940-1945, Paris, Gallimard, n.d., p.122.
3. André Gide, Journal 1939-1949, p.272.

Select Bibliography

An enormous amount has been written on Malraux. The bibliography of Miss T. White (University of London School of Librarianship, occasional publications Vol.12, 1963, Item 54) lists 440 books and articles devoted to his work. This bibliography does not go beyond 1957 and according to Dr. Schult of the University of Berlin shows important lacunae as far as the French material is concerned.\*

I have listed in this select bibliography the works of Malraux, all the books on his work that, to my knowledge, have been published in French and in English and a few of the most important or interesting of the innumerable articles and reviews.

\*) For example, the very important article on Les Conquérants by Leon Trotsky is not listed.

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