

ANDRÉ MALRAUX AND COMMUNISM:  
A STUDY IN POLITICAL MYTH

by

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B. A., William Jewell College, 1968

M. A., University of Missouri, 1974

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A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

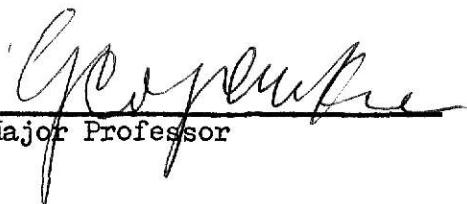
MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1976

Approved by:

  
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## INTRODUCTION

No intellectual-adventurer-novelist of his generation was more closely involved with the major events of the first half of the twentieth century than Georges-André Malraux.<sup>1</sup> Although too young to have participated in World War I, this one man's philosophical and political odyssey mirrored the disappointment and desires of a whole generation of Europeans who were so profoundly affected by the debacle and consequences of that war. Malraux's quest centered on formulating a renewed concept of man capable of dealing effectively with the problems facing postwar Europe. To this search, Malraux committed his life. He made parts of twentieth century history his own.

Malraux's life and activities reflect a unique and challenging web of fact and legend. He steadfastly refuses to comment on what he considers his "private life" (vie privée). Rather he chooses to dwell only on his novels and other writings--his "public life" (vie public). Certainly Malraux's politics places him in a position of intellectual influence and leadership. A founder of the Young Annam (Jeune Annam) movement in Indo-China, Paul Monin and he published two anti-colonial newspapers in Saigon

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<sup>1</sup>For the purpose of this study, an intellectual is one who exhibits a vital interest in the problems of man and society, and functions as a critic of society in this respect. Further, he engages in abstract thought to the extent of applying theoretical arguments to the solution of practical problems, and thereby gains a living based on such intellectual or artistic endeavors.

during the mid-1920's.<sup>2</sup> According to legend, he also participated in both the Canton and Shanghai uprisings in China as a member of the Kuomintang.<sup>3</sup> This legend rapidly gained adherents upon his return to France with the publication of two seemingly autobiographical novels. The Conquerors published in 1928 utilized the 1926 uprising in Canton as a theme while Man's Fate concerned a group of communists caught up in the Shanghai rebellion in 1927.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly the Soviets looked upon Malraux as a spokesman for the Left.<sup>5</sup> He spoke at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers held in Moscow in August 1934. Malraux added to this legend throughout the Thirties by participating in a variety of Popular Front organizations.<sup>6</sup> With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Malraux went to Spain and fought for the Republican cause. In 1937 he toured the United States and Canada to

<sup>2</sup>Paul Monin was a well-known lawyer, newspaperman and politician from Saigon. He was also a member of the Colonial Council and a vocal opponent of the Colonial Administration's suppression of civil liberties.

<sup>3</sup>The Kuomintang was the Chinese Nationalist Party organized in 1898 by the revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen. For a brief discussion of the Kuomintang, see Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, The Rise of Modern China (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 604-628.

<sup>4</sup>Les Conquérants (Paris: Grasset, 1928). Published in English as The Conquerors, trans. by Winifred Stephens Whale (New York: Random House, 1929). La Condition humaine (Paris: Gallimard, 1933). Published in English as Man's Fate, trans. by Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Smith and Haas, 1934).

<sup>5</sup>Although the Soviets made much of him, it was by no means clear that he was an orthodox communist. Ilya Ehrenburg reported that Malraux was something of a dilettante, but that his heart was in the right place: see Ilya Ehrenburg, Duhamel, Gide, Malraux, Mauriac, Morand, Romain, Unamuno: Vus par écrivain d'U.R.S.S. (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), pp. 189-202.

<sup>6</sup>Along with André Gide, Malraux organized the International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture. He was also one of the founders of the World League against Anti-Semitism and a member of the International Committee to aid the Victims of Nazism.



raise money for the Spanish Republic, and upon his return to France published Man's Hope based on his war experiences in Spain.<sup>7</sup> With the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939, Malraux ceased the espousal of the communist cause as attributed him by his activities and his legend.

Malraux joined the free French tank corps in 1942 because, as he indicated several years later, it was the only means of protecting those values he sought to defend since the early 1920's. He fought as a member of the French Resistance and ended the war as leader of the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade under the nom de guerre of Colonel Berger.

After the Allied victory Malraux turned from novelist to art critic. Still politically motivated, he joined with General Charles de Gaulle in his brief rise to power in 1946 serving as Minister of Propaganda. With de Gaulle's ouster in 1948, Malraux left politics and returned to art criticism publishing the first volume of his monumental Psychology of Art in 1947.<sup>8</sup> When de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, Malraux followed and became Minister of Culture. The fact that Malraux's political activity after World War II mirrored the political fortunes of de Gaulle added to the Malraux legend (le cas Malraux) and evoked a debate that continues to the present day. The debate ensued from a special issue of l'Esprit published in October 1948 entitled "Interrogation of Malraux."<sup>9</sup> Europe's leading intellectuals addressed

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<sup>7</sup>L'Espoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1937). Published in English as Man's Hope trans. by Stuart Gilbert and Alistair MacDonald (New York: Random House, 1938).

<sup>8</sup>La Musée Imaginaire (La Psychologie de l'Art, Vol. I) (Geneva: Skiva, 1947).

<sup>9</sup>"Interrogation à Malraux," l'Esprit (October 1948): 448-534. This issue included articles by André Rousseaux, Albert Béguin, Gaëtan Picon, Pierre Debray, Roger Stéphane, Emmanuel Mounier, and C.-E. Magny.

the question of whether Malraux as spokesman for the Left in the 1930's had turned from communism to fascism. To anyone seriously interested in Malraux, his legend remains a point of concern. Unfortunately, Malraux has never offered to confirm or deny the legend. His evasiveness in this matter surfaced in a discussion with Haakon Chevalier when Malraux indicated that he was perfectly willing to accept that nothing in the legend was true, if he were also able to say that nothing was untrue.<sup>10</sup>

What was the nature of Malraux's political loyalty from 1925 to 1946? Thus far historians and literary critics have demonstrated little concern in this aspect of his career. Indeed, most have indicated only a passing interest in Malraux's politics, in particular his close working relationship with communism. Although much has been written on him, there is no satisfactory biography of Malraux. The only two attempts at a full-scale biography are Robert Payne's A Portrait of Andre Malraux and Pierre Galante's Malraux.<sup>11</sup> Largely unsuccessful, Payne's tedious journalistic style did nothing to enhance a collection of material based almost entirely on secondary

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<sup>10</sup>Haakon M. Chevalier, "André Malraux: The Legend and the Man," Modern Language Quarterly 14 (June 1953): 204.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Payne, A Portrait of André Malraux (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970); Pierre Galante, Malraux, trans. by Haakon Chevalier (New York: Cowles Book Company, 1971). Of the many literary studies of Malraux few offer even a brief biography of Malraux. Several of the better studies are: Gaëtan Picon, Malraux par lui-même (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1953), the marginal notes in this volume are by Malraux, hence the title; Edward Gannon, The Honor of Being a Man, the World of André Malraux (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1957) offers a Jesuit interpretation; Charles D. Blend, André Malraux, Tragic Humanist (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1963); Denis Boak, André Malraux (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Joseph Hoffmann, L'humanisme de Malraux (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1963); Cecil Jenkins', André Malraux (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972) is the best of this group in English. The best general literary study is Henri Peyre's French Novelists of Today (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), see pp. 210-93.

sources. It does offer an excellent portfolio of photographs, but little analysis or documentation. On the contrary, Galante's study offers an excellent if antedotal picture of Malraux. The analysis is there, but it lacks the necessary ingredient of documentation. Janet Flanner's brief biographical sketch of Malraux remains the best overall view of Malraux's career, yet it too lacks the necessary scholarly apparatus.<sup>12</sup>

Limited studies of certain aspects of Malraux's career have achieved greater success. Two of the best are Walter Langlois' Andre Malraux, The Indochina Adventure and David Wilkinson's Malraux, An Essay in Political Criticism.<sup>13</sup> Langlois chronicles and untangles the events and activities of Malraux's Indochina sojourn. Based on primary sources, Langlois argues convincingly that the key to Malraux's career was his experience in Indochina from 1923 to 1925. His Far East adventure began as a revolt against Western tradition and gradually involved him in colonial politics which, according to Langlois, influenced greatly his later intellectual position with regard to literature, the arts and politics. Wilkinson's essay remains the single attempt to deal with Malraux's politics as a whole. Well reasoned, it relies mainly on the inner dialogue of his novels, his public addresses, and to a lesser extent on a few identifiable endeavors. His title is somewhat misleading for he attempts only "to present the principal themes in the development of the thought of André Malraux; to tease out of his works his philosophy of life in its evolution, in its final and complete form . . ."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Janet Flanner, Men and Monuments (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947).

<sup>13</sup>Walter G. Langlois, André Malraux, The Indochina Adventure (New York: Fredwick A. Praeger, 1966); David Wilkinson, Malraux, An Essay in Political Criticism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>14</sup>Wilkinson, p. ii.

Professor Wilbur Frohock's André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination remains the only attempt to unravel the Malraux Legend.<sup>15</sup> Primarily a literary analysis, the discussion of the vitally important legend is confined to several pages in a brief chapter on the life of Malraux.<sup>16</sup> The discussion does offer a starting point for analysis, but Frohock ends by intimating that the legend is not really that important to his study. Whether or not Malraux actually participated in the Chinese Revolution remains unimportant to Frohock for he posits that such, true or false, does not detract from Malraux the novelist which is his main concern.

Of the many short articles on Malraux, all make at least passing mention of Malraux's allegiance to communism, but only two are worth special mention: Nicola Chiaromonte's "Malraux and the Demons of Action" which offers several suggestions as to the nature of Malraux's intellectual motives and F. W. Depee's review of Man's Hope which raises several questions concerning Malraux's generally accepted leftist leanings.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, one searches in vain through the myriad of Malraux criticism for a complete view of Malraux's politics. Except for a few illuminating articles and studies, the nature and motives for Malraux long attachment to communism remains a mystery.<sup>18</sup> The explication of this mystery is the

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<sup>15</sup>Wilbur M. Frohock, André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-19.

<sup>17</sup>Nicola Chiaromonte, "Malraux and the Demons of Action," in Malraux, edited by R. W. B. Lewis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 96-116; F.W. Depee, "André Malraux," Partisan Review, 4 (March 1938): 24-35. Dupee's main contention is that Malraux was a "revolutionary child of the petty bourgeois intelligensia." (p. 25).

<sup>18</sup>Although less than satisfactory as a total explanation of Malraux's communism, the commentary is varied as evidenced by the following: Frederick

raison d'être of this paper.

This study proceeds on the assumption that André Malraux's role as an intellectual leader is of considerable importance in understanding the interwar period, and that the nature of his admitted communist sympathies deserve attention because of the influence he exerted on his fellow intellectuals, especially during the decade of the 1930's. This study is not a biography of Malraux, although consideration will be given to details of his life, since his political ideas and communist collaboration can be understood only in light of historical events in relation to his own actions and reactions to certain circumstances. Neither is this study primarily concerned with Malraux's novels and art-treatises except as they relate to and help explain his political involvement with communism. As a political novelist, much of his own ideological stance is necessarily imputed to the characters of the novels as well as serving as a basis for his own overt political action.

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R. Benson in Writers in Arms, The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War (New York: New York University Press, 1967) maintains Malraux was a communist because he was against fascism (p. 296); Germaine Brée in The French Novel from Gide to Camus (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957) asserts that he was "... never philosophically a Marxist, and never a communist." (p. 16); David Caute sees Malraux as a close sympathizer in his Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960 (New York: Macmillan, 1964); Claude Delmas' article, "André Malraux et le communisme," L'Age Nouveau, February 1953, pp. 51-62 is very disappointing in that he concludes Malraux was not a communist, for he never wrote a communist novel (p. 51); Joseph Frank argues that although Malraux was willing to fight and die with the communists, he did not fall for their "childish social optimism" in his article "Malraux and the Image of Man," New Republic, August 30, 1954, pp. 18-19; H. Stuart Hughes in The Obstructed Path, French Social Thought in the Years of Desperation, 1930-1960 (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) asserts he was a play-acting semi-revolutionary communist (p. 140); and finally Charles C. Wertenbaker in "DeGaulle's Idea Man," Life, June 7, 1948, p. 124 maintains that although Malraux had little sympathy for communist ideology he felt that communism embodied a struggle for all mankind.

My primary concern has been to trace and explore the political ideas set forth by Malraux in his novels, essays, speeches and actions, and to determine on this basis a more precise analysis of the nature of his long association with and sympathy for the communist cause as exemplified by the Popular Front tactics of the 1930's. Utilizing both primary and secondary sources, some never brought together before, a base exists from which to begin an exploratory study of Malraux's "communism." The format is roughly a mixture between the chronological and topical in an attempt to present an organized analysis of Malraux's politics as a unified whole. The most important primary sources are, of course, Malraux's own writings followed closely by the views of his contemporaries. In the latter case, critical use had been made of Ilya Ehrenburg's Memoirs: 1921-1941, Gustav Regler's Owl of Minerva, Stephen Spender's World Within World, and Alfred Kazin's Starting Out in the Thirties.<sup>19</sup>

Finally it is worth noting that unlike Plato, Malraux has written no Politics. At present only the first volume of his memoirs, Anti-Memoirs, and a portion of the second volume on de Gaulle, Felled Oaks: Conversations with de Gaulle have been published.<sup>20</sup> The remaining volumes are to be published after his death and he has stated that at this time his activities in China finally will be clarified.

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<sup>19</sup>Ilya Ehrenburg, Memoirs: 1921-1941, trans. by Tatania Shebunia (New York: World Publishing Company, 1963); Gustav Regler, The Owl of Minerva, trans. by Norman Denny (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959); Stephen Spender, World Within World (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951); Alfred Kazin, Starting Out in the Thirties (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962).

<sup>20</sup>Antimémoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1967). Published in English as Anti-Memoirs, trans. by Terence Kilmartin (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968); Les chenes qu'on abat . . . (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). Published in English as Felled Oaks, Conversations with de Gaulle, trans. by Irene Clephane (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

Writing on a person still living is at best dangerous and limited in perspective, but this study is an attempt to gather all relevant facts and arrive at an objective appraisal of one aspect of André Malraux's many-faceted career, while awaiting his own final comments and declarations. All quotations are from the standard English editions of his works where available. All other translations are those of this author and are so noted.



## CHAPTER I

### Malraux and the Twentieth Century

A certain amount of knowledge of the twentieth century is necessary both to understand the political ideas of André Malraux and the nature of those ideas to which he reacted and those to which he gave allegiance. Growing to maturity in the period immediately following the Great World War, Malraux, though too young to have fought in the war, did not escape its devastating influence. The World War emerged as the decisive experience for the European intellectual.

The mood of postwar Europe reflected a complete disenchantment with Enlightenment ideals--a profound pessimism in the face of dissolving certainties. Harry Slochower best expressed the temperament of that age when he observed that:

If Spengler sees our age as the sunset of a 1000 years of Faustian culture, Unamuno speaks of it as the passing of Christianity, Berdiajev as the end of rational mysticism, and the Marxists as the final phase of capitalism. The view of a unified world moving in progressive stages has been abandoned for notions of irregularity and doctrines of decline.<sup>21</sup>

For the European intellectual the Great War had assumed the shape of a vast destructive force aimed at European culture. Gone was the nineteenth century optimism and along with it the concept of man, transcendental religion and faith in progress and science--a crisis of the mind. Although viewed as a sudden rupture, the 1914-1918 war represented the culmination of a

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<sup>21</sup>Harry Slochower, No Voice is Wholly Lost (New York: Creative Age Press, Inc., 1945), p. xviii.



crisis that had its roots in the latter half of the nineteenth century and coincided with the rapid rise of industrialization. Although confirming bourgeois hegemony, industrialization also brought to a head a basic conflict. The traditional bourgeois emphasis on the sanctity of the individual came into grave conflict with the effects of industrialization and the influx of the masses. The emphasis on science and the infallability of human reason resulted in the general destruction of myth--there was no need for it as man in a sense had become God and the master of his destiny. This atmosphere, as Arthur Koestler notes, fostered the growth of Marxian Scientific Socialism which was to exert a profound effect on the European mentality only after World War I.<sup>22</sup> Devoid of myths and unable to face or solve the reality of their era, the bourgeois society generally chose a return to the romantic past. This "reaction" was expressed both in Romantic literature and in historical writing which still maintained a fairly ambiguous position between pure art and pure science. This "historical conscience" should not be slighted in that it was to be the basis of a general anti-historical trend among intellectuals of the interwar era. Although suspect in its role, history was still conceived as a "teaching by example." This concept was to be a crucial point of criticism after World War I. Equally important were the "prophets of doom" decrying a dead culture (e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler). These concepts had their roots in the nineteenth century, but only became forceful motivating factors after the destruction of war.

Confronted with the realities of the post-war era, Europe's leading intellectuals accepted the Nietzschean axiom that "God is dead" and felt

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<sup>22</sup>Arthur Koestler, The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 120.

deeply Spengler's judgment of a moribund West. The war confirmed the general insolvency of European culture which was shared by all intellectuals.

They differed only with respect to the remedy. As Professor Hayden White points out, the war seemed to validate what Nietzsche had stated two generations earlier:

History which was supposed to provide some sort of training for life, which was supposed to be 'philosophy teaching by examples,' had done little to prepare men for the coming of war . . .<sup>23</sup>

Further it had not taught them what to expect, and even after the war, ". . . historians seemed incapable of rising above narrow partisan loyalties. . ." and consequently, they were able to make little sense out of the war.<sup>24</sup> Overall, it seemed that the historians admitted that no explanation was possible—it had "just happened." Historical studies prior to the war formed the center of humanistic studies, but in the postwar era were sharply criticized by those intellectuals who had lost faith in any ability to derive sense from history. Thus was fostered an anti-historical attitude which, according to White, "underlay both Nazism and Existentialism that would constitute the legacy of the thirties to our time."<sup>25</sup> The question for both groups was not how the past was to be studied, but whether or not it was to be studied at all.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," History and Theory, 5 (April 1966): 120.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. The contention was that historical consciousness must be destroyed to enable one to seriously examine the present realities of the human experience.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>26</sup>The term "both groups" refers to Nazi intellectuals such as Martin Heidegger, and the existentialist enemies of Nazism in France (i.e. Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus). For a full analysis of this problem see White, pp. 121-123.

Due to the destructive nature of the war, the postwar era was one of both debunking and rebuilding. Although the character of that debunking assumed the aspects of an anti-bourgeois revolt, there was also a search for a renewed concept of man that would give life the meaning that historical studies and nineteenth century myths could not provide. Basically, the emphasis was on the present condition of man, and as stressed by Stuart Hughes, yielded but two choices--debilitating pessimism or action.<sup>27</sup> This quest for new myths was spurred on by a fear that man might become the victim of his own intellect. The needs of the present were primary and reflected a "return to the faith" in the form of fascism and Soviet Communism. In this situation the tendency among intellectuals was expressed by extreme political polarization.

The appeal of Marxism to the postwar intellectuals was greatly enhanced by the Russian Revolution and the subsequent Soviet experience. As Professor Sidney Hook argues, there was widespread enthusiasm for the ideal of equality and human liberation as broadcast in the early Soviet decrees.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the early success of the Soviet experiment coincided nicely with the debunking activities of the European intellectual and found strength in the inability of parliamentary democracies to solve postwar problems. Add to this the courting of the intellectuals by the Third International

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<sup>27</sup>H. Stuart Hughes, The Obstructed Path (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), pp. 105-106.

<sup>28</sup>Sidney Hook, "Communism and the Intellectual" in The Intellectuals, ed. by George Huszar (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 356. Hook also notes that there was a tendency during the interwar period to take "words" for "actualities" in regard to the Soviet Union, p. 357. On this matter see also Koestler, p. 136, who feels this tendency reflected both ignorance based on lack of factual information and fear of disappointment that might be manifest if the real facts were known. He concluded that such a phenomenon reflected and "unconscious willingness to be deceived."

between 1921 and 1928 (this attitude was concurrent with the period of the New Economic Policy), and again by the Popular Front in the mid-'thirties, and the resultant general leftward movement of the intellectuals is understandable.

In the 1930's the attraction of communism was further amplified by the real crisis of that era. To those intellectuals who held bourgeois culture and politics responsible for World War I, the continued inability of parliamentary democracies to find a solution to economic problems and their failure to face up to fascism coupled with a non-interventionist policy during the Spanish Civil War added considerable credence to the Soviet myth which seemed to incorporate a truly human utopia over against the apparent decay of capitalism.<sup>29</sup> From this vantage point the leap was small indeed to concluding that fascism represented the last dying gasp of capitalism even for the non-communist intellectuals. For many of the best minds in Europe, the only choice remaining involved the either/or of fascism versus communism. As Arthur Koestler argues, after years of defeat for the Comintern and betrayals followed by the rise of fascism, Russia remained ". . .the one thing left to live and die for."<sup>30</sup> Even so, both the number and quality of European and non-European intellectuals

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<sup>29</sup>See David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960 (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1964). Caute maintains that such a view was possible for "Stalinism--and its cultural satellite of socialist realism--had not yet hardened to the extent of imposing a rigid 'for us against us' choice on the intellectuals" (p. 98). Even after Stalinism hardened, those intellectuals could still opt for communism and extol its virtues. It was easy for those who did not come under Soviet jurisdiction in their own day-to-day life.

<sup>30</sup>Koestler, p. 129.

who either temporarily or permanently embraced the revolutionary idea and identified it with the Soviet cause is staggering.<sup>31</sup> Outside the positive accomplishments of Russia, the so-called "Marxist myth" proved equally attractive. It involved, according to Victor Brombert, the belief that the bourgeois intellectual could save his soul by sharing the suffering of the proletariat, that present sacrifices were "eschatalogically justified," and prescribed a "quest for holiness by martyrdom."<sup>32</sup> Probably most important, communism offered a sense of immediate participation, of belonging and what Germaine Brée calls the "privilege of sharing common risks," in short, the "mythology of revolution" that was widespread in the 1930's.<sup>33</sup> Such an "engagement" in the historical moment reflected, as Brombert notes, the climate of that era. He further asserts that the intellectual caught in the "nightmare of history" sincerely felt traditional humanist values to be invalid, resulting in a desire to ". . . transmute anguish to action" within, in many cases, the confines of the Soviet myth

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<sup>31</sup>Briefly, this "grouping" included among others: Anatole France, George Bernard Shaw, Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, André Malraux, Julien Benda, Jean Guehenno, Paul Nizan, André Gide, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Sean O'Casey, Panait Istrati, Martin Andersen Nexø, Ludwig Renn, Johannes Becher, Theodor Plievier, Halldor Laxness, Ignazio Silone, Cesare Pavese, Elio Bittorini, Vasco Pratolini, Carlo Levi, John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, E. E. Cummings, Richard Wright, and W. H. Auden. For a penetrating analysis of this phenomenon see Leopold Labedz, "The Destiny of Writers in Revolutionary Movements," Survey, No. 82 (Winter 1972), pp. 8-46.

<sup>32</sup>Victor Brombert, The Intellectual Hero: Studies in the French Novel, 1880-1955 (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 154.

<sup>33</sup>Germaine Brée and Margaret Guiton, The French Novel from Gide to Camus (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1957), pp. 181-183. The "myth of revolution" provided the setting for a generation of intellectuals bent on "action" while providing an appealing intense experience--the primacy of the moment.

of revolution.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the literature of this period expressed a violent militancy creating a very real conflict between ". . .the vocations of creative artist and militant thinker" giving rise to the political novel.<sup>35</sup>

Of those intellectuals who chose communism over fascism, some, like Romain Rolland, did so with certain qualifications, while others such as Henri Barbusse showed no such scruples. The emphasis remained centered on man's natural dignity. Unfortunately, the intellectual espousing communism faced a tragic dilemma--how could one assert individual dignity in face of the threat of fascism while at the same time integrating oneself with Marxist historical necessity? As Professor George Mosse observes, the characteristic response was a "Marxism of the heart" which stressed "ethics" rather than "dialectics."<sup>36</sup> Mosse also asserts that ". . .for these communisants, communism meant compassion for a suppressed and suffering humanity."<sup>37</sup> Such a position was idealistic in that a true revolutionary had a moral purpose which could not be compromised. Thus, for many, communism proved temporarily attractive for certain abstract values imputed to the proletarian struggle. The essential question to which communism seemed to offer an affirmative answer had been raised by Nietzsche more than two generations earlier: Ist veredlung moglich? ("Is it possible to ennoble man?" The intellectual of the interwar years represented the

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<sup>34</sup>Brombert, pp. 137-138.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 138

<sup>36</sup>George L. Mosse, The Culture of Western Europe, the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York: Rand McNally, 1961), p. 382.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

conscience of Europe, and that anguished preoccupation with man and his destiny was no where more profoundly felt than in France by virtue of her position of cultural leadership in the European community.

Significantly, and traditionally, intellectuals in France had been linked with the political left, the party of progress and revolution, as opposed to the right, the party of tradition and privilege.<sup>38</sup> In this context, they subsumed and cultivated what Raymond Aron terms the "myth of the left" which derived its impetus from French revolutionary tradition.<sup>39</sup> More specifically, it involved those

. . . traditions springing from 1789, 1848, 1871, from the Dreyfus case, from Marxism, Proudhonism, syndicalism, from the teaching of Jaures, and from broad idealism fused in a common front of l'esprit (spirit) against militarism.<sup>40</sup>

Equally important, this prevailing myth also entailed both the myth of a "unified left" and an "oppositionist left." According to Aron, these concepts emerged due to the continuous opposition of the left during the nineteenth century which led to a confusion of terms, resulting in the equating of "left" with "opposition"--a unified left en bloc.<sup>41</sup> Thus, in light of the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, the French left symbolized the "struggle against the forces of reaction."

The "Manifesto of the Intellectuals" (1898) at the height of the Dreyfus Affair greatly strengthened the political bond between the intellectual and

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<sup>38</sup>See Hervert Lüthy, "The French Intellectuals," in Huszar, The Intellectuals, pp. 444-445 on this judgment.

<sup>39</sup>Raymond Aron, The Opium of the Intellectuals. Trans. by T. Kilmartin (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957), p. 5.

<sup>40</sup>Caute, p. 64.

<sup>41</sup>Aron, p. 17. For the most part, the unity of the left occasioned by 1848, the Dreyfus case and syndicalist strikes proved to be short-lived.



and the French left. Not only did it "subjectively confirm a moral-political role" for the intellectual as Caute asserts, but in the words of Herbert Lüthy, by declaring war on the supporters of tradition and authority, the manifesto ". . .fixed the meaning of intellectual."<sup>42</sup> Given the position of the intellectual in French society as a supreme oracle on public affairs, issuing ". . .authoritative dicta on political and social questions," the left not only gained immense prestige, but created a political alliance.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Aron states quite forcefully that this joint mission of the "artistic/intellectual avant-garde" and the "political avant-garde" for the liberation of mankind formed the basis for the post-war surrealist movement.<sup>44</sup> Thus, art and politics, united in hatred of the established "disorder", gave rise to the interwar literary phenomenon of the political novel. Also, this coalition between the intellectual and the revolutionary left fomented a desire for revolution rather than reform. The intellectual, according to Aron, began to look upon revolution as the "lost, lyrical illusion."<sup>45</sup>

Because of France's economic and political state in conjunction with the cultural crisis, the intellectuals tended to polarize at the political extremes in the 1920's and 1930's. The movement to the extreme left after 1917 was both an outgrowth of traditional revolutionary violence and the Soviet example. As a direct result of that movement, the French Communist

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<sup>42</sup>Caute, p. 11; Lüthy, p. 444.

<sup>43</sup>Lüthy, p. 445.

<sup>44</sup>Aron, pp. 43-44.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 43.



Party (Parti Communiste Français, PCF) was founded at the Tours Congress of the United Socialist Party (SFIO) and the General Trade Union Organ (CGT) in December 1920.<sup>46</sup> Working closely with the Third International which in 1921 advanced United Front tactics in hopes of a general European-wide revolutionary upheaval, the PCF sought both the cooperation and support of the intellectuals.<sup>47</sup> The French communist leaders were proud of their national heritage and the party as a whole was able to maintain a patriotic line from its inception in 1920 until it was outlawed in 1939. This patriotic stance added to the PCF's attractiveness for the intellectual--again the importance of the revolutionary tradition. Moreover, in the eyes of the early French communists, as David Caute convincingly points out:

. . .the theory and practice of Leninist Bolshevism were absolutely compatible with the sacred legacy inherited from the Jacobin Committee of Public Safety, 1848. . .the Commune of 1871, the Marxist wing of the Socialist party. . .the anti-capitalist revolutionary syndicalists, ad infinitum.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Marxism of the Soviet type provided the major link between the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution.

The attractiveness of the PCF for the intellectual lasted until 1928 when the victory of Stalinism forced the Sixth Congress of the International to abruptly abandon its United Front tactics. Thus, the intellectual became

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<sup>46</sup>Caute, pp. 23-24. As Professor George Lichtheim has observed, it is necessary to remember that from the first, French Marxism was a doctrine of the revolutionary workers movement. George Lichtheim, Marxism in Modern France (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1966), p. 12.

<sup>47</sup>Coinciding with the formation of the PCF and its cooperative effort with other leftist groups under the banner of the Third International, rightist leagues were being formed as a counter measure. Three of the more important rightist groups were Charles Maurras' "Action Française," Colonel La Roque's "Les Croix de Feu," and George Malois' "Le Faisceau."

<sup>48</sup>Caute, pp. 12-13. See also Lichtheim, pp. 10-12.

suspect and was barely tolerated as a "camp-follower." Consequently, the PCF was held in hostility by the intellectual left (i.e. the idealistic democratic left and the socialist left), and membership declined greatly. However, this mutual dissatisfaction was of short duration, for in November 1933, Maruice Thorez, the Secretary-General of the PCF, in a speech before the Chamber of Deputies called for the union of intellectuals and workers against fascism.<sup>49</sup> Finally, at the seventh congress of the International in 1935, the policy of a Popular Front was officially endorsed, and again the intellectuals of leftist persuasion filled the ranks of the several anti-fascist organizations sponsored by the PCF and cooperated closely with the communist movement, if not as party members then as sympathizers or fellow-travelers.<sup>50</sup>

Overall, the somewhat unique position and function of the French intellectual predisposed them to accept, on whatever terms, the call of communism through the "myth of revolution" to a seemingly new beginning for man. However, it should be noted that the attraction of communism in the 1930's was not due merely to revolutionary tradition or the rise of fascism, but also by the lure of a Russia of the first Five Year Plan as portrayed in Soviet films and books.<sup>51</sup> Although the tendency was to take "words" for

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<sup>49</sup>Caute, pp. 26-28.

<sup>50</sup>A fellow traveler was one who accepted and supported the essential party line yet remained outside the party while the sympathizer might include anyone from the democratic left (i.e. socialist type) to the liberal idealist. They all displayed a marked anti-capitalist stance, but the latter group differed in that they could never accept a dictatorship of the proletariat even though paying at least lip-service to the idea that the liberation of mankind some how depended on the liberation of the proletariat.

<sup>51</sup>Caute, p. 108.

"actualities", the so-called mystique of revolution seemed all persuasive even to the point of "necessary acceptance" of the Moscow trials. Although the Spanish Civil War shattered the unity of the French intellectual left, the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939 effectively destroyed whatever unity remained. In 1939 self-deception was no longer possible--the choice was clear.

It was in this milieu that young André Malraux grew to maturity, and became one of the leading European intellectuals of the interwar era. Subject to the uncertainties of his era, he opted for a life of action that was to involve him in many of the major upheavals of the twentieth century. Throughout his career Malraux never lost sight of his one basic concern--the dignity of man in a seemingly agnostic culture. This ideal served as a major motivating force in his many activities and runs as an unbroken theme through all of his writings.

Little is known of the first twenty years of Malraux's life, due primarily to his reticence to speak of it and clouded by his ever present legend which has also staked a claim to his early years. Nevertheless, a number of incidents related to Malraux's youth stand out because they helped shape the course of his later life and, to a large extent fostered the early formulation of his basic philosophical, artistic and political ideas.<sup>52</sup>

One of the few known facts of Malraux's early life is that he was born on 3 November 1901 in Paris. There is no official biography, and even the

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<sup>52</sup>This survey of Malraux's early life is based largely on a synthesis of the work of Janet Flanner, Men and Monuments (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), pp. 5-14; Wilbur M. Frohock's discussion of the Malraux legend in André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination, p. 4; and David Wilkinson's brief introduction in Malraux, An Essay in Political Criticism, pp. 2-3.

history of his family is obscure. According to Janet Flanner, the accepted version of his background says the family was from Dunkirk where Andre's family was connected with the maritime service. His father Ferdinand-Georges made his living as either a Parisian businessman or banker. The legend indicates that both his father and grandfather committed suicide. According to Flanner, this view originated from the suicide discussed in one of his novels.

More germane to this study is Malraux's early interest in art and archaeology. According to the Malraux legend, he attended the Lycée Condorcet and received a baccalauréat. Then he studied at the famous École des Langues Orientales Vivantes and maybe at the Sorbonne. In any event, he managed to leave no records. What is apparent is that sometime between 1916 and 1923 Malraux had gained an expertise in the plastic arts and archaeology, specializing in Orientalism. Whether he gained this knowledge by attending lectures at the Louvre or the Paris Musée Guimet of Oriental art or whether he was self-taught remains to be explained. He apparently received no degrees.

It is known that Malraux procured rare books for René-Louis Doyon, a small-time Parisian Bookseller.<sup>53</sup> By 1920 Malraux had begun to write for Paris avant-garde magazines.<sup>54</sup> His first book was published in April 1921 and dedicated to the poet Max Jacob. Entitled Lunes in papier (Paris: Simon, 1921), Flanner notes that it was ". . .a slim extravaganze, part

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<sup>53</sup>See René-Louis Doyon, Memoire d'homme souvenirs irreguliers d'une ecrivain qui ne l'est pas moins (Paris: La Connaissance, 1952), pp. 76-83.

<sup>54</sup>Of the several surrealist pieces that he penned were: "La Genese des Chants de Maldoror," Action 3 (Avril 1920): 33-35; "Les Champs Magretiques. . .La Negressel du Sacre-Coeur," Action 5 (Octobre 1920): 69-70; and "Les Herissons Apprivoises: Journal d'une Pompier du jeu de Massacre," Signaux de France et de Belgique 4 (Août 1921): 171-177.

Dada, part Hieronymus Bosch, about midget monsters who turned into the seven deadly sins."<sup>55</sup>

This brief survey shows clearly Malraux's early interest in art and his involvement with surrealism. Both are important in the context of Malraux's own reaction to the experiences of postwar Europe and in relation to his trip to Indochina in 1923 in search of Khmer sculpture along the Cambodian "Royal Way" near the site of Angor Wat. Due to his early interest in art and archaeology, at some point between 1921 and 1923, Malraux became convinced that perhaps the greatest place to search for Khmer art would be along the Royal Way around the ruined temple of Bantrei Srei. At age twenty-two, Malraux gained the permission of the French government to conduct an official search there.

According to legend, Malraux's motives were not merely those of discovery of valuable sculpture, but involved an agreement to bring back certain sculptures for sale to a collector in the United States. Further it seems that Malraux seriously believed the site he had chosen was legally abandoned property and that he would encounter no difficulties in removing the sculptures he found. Whatever his true motives, the recently married Malraux and his wife set sail for Indochina in October 1923. Thus Malraux embarked on an adventure that was to have repercussions on his own life style and to a great extent provide the basis for his later writings and political views. Indochina proved to be the crucial experience for André Malraux--the intellectual-in-action. He returned from the Far East committed to social and political reform.

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<sup>55</sup>Flanner, p. 7. For a comprehensive view of Malraux's early writings from this period see André Vandegans, Le Jeunesse Littéraire d'André Malraux, Essai sur l'inspiration farfêlée (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1964).

## CHAPTER II

### Malraux's Indochina Experience

In late November 1923, André Malraux arrived in Indochina and embarked on an adventure that proved to be a major impetus in the development of his political ideas. Except for a few weeks spent in France in late November and December 1924, Malraux remained in the turbulent Orient until sometime in 1927. His experiences provided the material for his first four novels and are a key to his later speeches, newspaper articles and political activities in the 1930's.<sup>56</sup> As Walter Langlois convincingly demonstrated in Andre Malraux, The Indochina Adventure, Malraux had two adventures in Indochina. The first was his trial before a colonial court on the charge of attempted theft of government protected statuary in Cambodia; the second was his revolutionary involvement in the Annamiti nationalist movement and his co-editorship of two anti-colonial political newspapers in support of this movement.<sup>57</sup> Equally important with respect to Malraux's politics, the Malraux legend seemingly began with the mass of rumors and misinformation

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<sup>56</sup>The four novels are: Temptation of the West (1926), The Conquerors (1928), The Royal Way (1930), and Man's Fate (1933).

<sup>57</sup>Langlois, Andre Malraux, The Indochina Adventure, pp. vii-viii. This study remains the best treatment of Malraux's activities during these years. Cf. Payne, Portrait of Andre Malraux, pp. 61-117 which suffers by comparison on all levels of analysis.

which clouded the details of his arrest and subsequent trial at Pnom Penh.<sup>58</sup> Thus without a knowledge of his activities during these years, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain the intellectual development of Malraux from his avant-garde, quasi-surrealist writings of the early 1920's to his deeply committed political novels of the late 1920's and early 1930's.

### Bantrei Srei Affair

Malraux arrived in Indochina in late November 1923 and proceeded immediately to Hanoi where his search permit was validated by officials of the École Française d'Extrême Orient which had jurisdiction over archaeological finds within the colony. After approximately ten months in the Cambodian jungle, he found the ruined temple of Bantrei Srei and returned to Pnom Penh with several bas-reliefs. Upon arrival at Pnom Penh, the local police searched Malraux baggage, found the small pieces of statuary and arrested him, his wife Clara and Louis Chevasson. The sculpture was also confiscated as government property.

Apparently the temple of Bantrei Srei lay within jungle territory designated by the École Française d'Extrême Orient as classé and protected as an historical monument not subject to removal. The question involved centered on Malraux's instructions as to whether he was to report his findings or take possession of them. Malraux's trial took place on 16-17 July 1924 and on 21 July, the Pnom Penh Court sentenced him to three years

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<sup>58</sup>For an excellent example of the rumor-reportage, see the New York Times AP article, September 21, 1924, Section IX, p. 6 under the headline "French Sleuth Trails Man to Annam Jungle, Drops His Disguise and Arrests Robber of Paris Museums and Native Temples." Langlois states that although "virtually every fact" is incorrect in this article, it represents a major part of the legend of Malraux's Indochina adventure (p. 3). For details of the rumors circulating in Parisian literary circles, see Flanner, Men and Monuments, pp. 8-11.



in prison, prohibited his residence in Indochina for five years, and granted the Colonial Administration control of the sculpture.<sup>59</sup> Malraux felt the sentence was severe and unjustified. He immediately sought to bring his case before the Court of Appeals in Saigon.

Malraux's appeal was heard by the Saigon court on 22 September. Despite a brilliant defense, the court merely reduced Malraux's sentence to one year in prison and upheld the Phnom Penh ruling allowing the government control of the statuary. Further enraged by what he felt to be a miscarriage of justice, Malraux appealed to the Court of Cassation (the highest appeal court in France) in Paris. He left Saigon 1 November to return to Paris and prepare his case.

The trial at Saigon justified Malraux's anger and decision of appeal to Paris. According to Langlois, the legality of Malraux's right to remove the sculpture surfaced during the trial but was disallowed on very thin, technical grounds. It evolved that the Parisian authorities had no legal right to grant the École Française d'Extrême Orient jurisdiction because Cambodia was merely a French protectorate and not French territory. Only the king of Cambodia could legally bring suit against Malraux. The colonial authorities conceded that the area in question was ceded Siam by order of the Governor-General of Indochina and later confirmed by presidential decree. However, the prosecution argued that since only the French legislature could legally dispose of French territory, any later decrees could only affect its "political" status. Legally, the area remained subject to

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<sup>59</sup>Langlois, pp. 35-37; Flanner, pp. 8-9. Chevasson received a sentence of eighteen months in prison for his part in the affair.



French law and not to directives of the Colonial Office.<sup>60</sup> Despite his extensive research, Langlois found no record as to the final disposition of the case. He surmised that it either was dropped entirely sometime in the 1930's or that the sentence was reduced and suspended.<sup>61</sup>

The possible motives of the colonial authorities in expending such a concerted effort on a seemingly minor case deserve analysis in relation to Malraux's return to Saigon in January 1925. Langlois concludes that (1) Malraux was merely exhibiting his youthful exuberance, making his removal of the sculpture an unavoidable indiscretion, and that (2) the authorities exaggerated the incident for either personal or political reasons.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, his analysis proceeds no further.

The question can be raised concerning the possible political motives on the part of the local administration. A reasonable motive, offered by both Flanner and Professor Wilbur Frohock, stems from a variant of the episode incorporated in the Malraux legend. According to the legend, the charge against Malraux was rigged by colonial officials who suspected him of subversive political activity in connection with the Annamite nationalist movement and wanted him out of Indochina.<sup>63</sup> As Frohock notes, this version coincides nicely with Malraux's return to Indochina in January 1925 when he worked openly with the Annamites.

Equally feasible, Malraux's brush with colonial justice may have been a sufficient motive to return to Indochina and to spearhead the Annamite

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<sup>60</sup>Langlois, pp. 36-38; Flanner, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup>Langlois, p. 51. Flanner states affirmatively that the case was dismissed but offers no supporting evidence, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>63</sup>Frohock, Malraux and the Tragic Imagination, pp. 3-4; Flanner, pp. 9-10.

movement for dominion status. Certainly the injustice he suffered occasioned, as David Wilkinson argues, a break with the bourgeois life style to which he was accustomed.<sup>64</sup> The basis of Wilkinson's contention rests on a passage from The Conquerors published in 1928. The hero of this novel, Pierre Garine, underwent a similar experience in a Genevan court over an equally trivial matter and reacted to the absurdity and humiliation by rejecting the social order and ended a revolutionary:

I do not consider society bad . . . but I consider it absurd . . . . The possibility of reforming society is a question which does not interest me. It is not the absence of justice from society that strikes me, but something deeper; my incapacity for adhering to any social order whatever. I am a-social, just as I am a-theist . . . . I know that I shall have society by my side all my life, and that I shall never be able to enter it without renouncing all that I am.<sup>65</sup>

Like Garine, Malraux embarked on an anti-colonial, "revolutionary" career several months after his own trial. The only snag in this argument is that until December, 1925 Malraux, if one can judge by his editorials in Indochine and Indochine Enchaînée, still felt that reform was possible. In any event Malraux left for Paris in November 1924 only to return to Saigon in January 1925—dedicated to reforming the injustices he perceived in the Colonial Administration.

If his first Indochina sojourn was crucial to Malraux's politics, the second gave him a platform from which to develop his political ideas and allegiances.

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<sup>64</sup>Wilkinson, Malraux, An Essay in Political Criticism, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup>The Conquerors, p. 56.

Indochine/Indochine Enchaînée

Several days after the Saigon Court of Appeals rendered its decision in the Malraux-Chevasson case, Malraux left for Paris ostensibly to prepare his appeal to the Court of Cassation. However, he also had other business. During his stay he had experienced first-hand the oppressiveness of the colonial system, and had made his feelings known. Langlois states that in conjunction with others, both French and Indochinese, Malraux decided that an opposition newspaper would be an effective weapon against the abuses of the colonial regime. Just prior to the court decision, Malraux had met his future collaborator, Paul Monin, who had been "among the most vociferous opponents of the Colonial Administration's suppression of civil liberties."<sup>66</sup> Also convinced of the necessity of an oppositionist newspaper as a prelude to colonial reform, Monin had Malraux make publishing arrangements for the proposed paper upon his return to France.<sup>67</sup>

During his brief stay in France, Malraux may have met with other groups interested in colonial reform and perhaps even some government officials, but the exact nature of these probable contacts is unclear. Malraux did obtain material for the proposed newspaper, and after barely seven weeks in France, returned to Indochina.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Langlois, p. 52. The Malraux legend is mute on this aspect of his career, dwelling instead on his supposed activity in China after his return to Saigon in January 1925.

<sup>67</sup>Langlois states that Monin's Annamite supporters contributed a large amount to the enterprise, and that Malraux was to raise any additional funds in France. See pp. 53-54.

<sup>68</sup>See Langlois, p. 54, for details. Malraux was able to gain distribution rights for some newspaper supplements including the right to reprint all texts from the weekly Candidate.

Malraux and his wife Clara arrived in Saigon in mid-February 1925. Little is known of his activities during the first four months after his return. However, it is certain that during this time, Malraux became increasingly involved in the widespread political discontent spearheaded by local Annamite intellectuals. Apparently Malraux was on the best of terms with the local dissidents, for his commitment to the Annamite nationalist program resulted in his founding the Young Annam movement. Little is known of this organization, but Langlois cites a letter written by Malraux from Saigon in the autumn of 1925 in which he refers to himself as the "head of the Young Annam Party,"<sup>69</sup> In a letter to critic Edmund Wilson several years later, Malraux said in relation to his political activities in Indochina that: "I went to Asia when I was twenty-three in charge of an archaeological mission. Then I abandoned archaeology [and] organized the Jeune-Annam movement. . . ."<sup>70</sup> Involved actively in the Annamite agitation for reform,

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 58. The letter is dated 4 October 1925 and is in Langlois' possession, p. 239, footnote 19.

<sup>70</sup>Letter to Edmund Wilson, 2 October 1933, in Edmund Wilson, The Shores of Light (New York: Sloan, 1952), pp. 573-74. One of Malraux's few pronouncements on his Asia activities, only Flanner (p. 15) and Langlois (p. 58) have bothered to cite it. Frohock makes no mention of this letter although his own study was published the same year as Wilson's. Payne (p. 114) not only ignores any reference to this letter, but he insists that the Young Annam left "no trace on the revolutionary movement of Indochina," when in fact it was a forerunner of the communist Vietminh. Payne further states that Malraux and his wife became members of the Cholon (Saigon) branch of the Kuomintang in 1925 (p. 114). Unfortunately, he offers no proof. The only other reference to the Malraux's membership in the Kuomintang is in Boak's André Malraux, p. 9. In this instance Boak cites Malraux's wife's Memoirs as evidence which is apparently Payne's source as I have no other reference to it. See Clara Malraux, Nos Vingt Ans, Vol. II of Le Bruit de Nospas (Paris: Grasset, 1963-1969), pp. 179-80. As to the occasion for the letter, Malraux had written to Wilson, then a contributing editor to New Republic, in reply to the latter's review of Man's Fate. Wilson was the first American to take critical notice of Malraux's work. His review appeared originally in the

Malraux's marked anti-colonial stance soon took the form of a series of biting editorial attacks with the establishment of an oppositionist newspaper, Indochine.

The first issue of Indochine appeared on 17 June 1925 with an initial run of 5,000 copies. Paul Monin, Malraux's co-editor, was the "real driving force" behind the creation of the newspaper. Published six times a week, the paper continued publication until 14 August 1925 when the Colonial Administration pressured the papers' printer and forced it to close. Of the many editorials, Malraux contributed approximately half. Concerning Malraux's editorial campaigns, Langlois argues correctly that:

It would be a mistake to dismiss this aspect of Malraux's campaign as little more than a personal vendetta by an embittered young man seeking revenge for a personal humiliation. If he was angry, it was not so much because of what had happened to him; it was because of what was being done to the hapless Indochinese. If he felt the bitterness of frustration, it was not so much because he was unable to exact personal revenge; it was because he was powerless to correct the abuses and injustices that he saw all about him.<sup>71</sup>

The anti-colonial tone of the paper emerged from the start. The Indochine's title banner read "newspaper for Franco-Annamite Reconciliation." Colonial censorship was rigidly applied especially to local, native publications. Malraux and Monin were able, however, to circumvent this censorship by printing articles originally intended for the officially forbidden Annamite newspapers.<sup>72</sup>

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New Republic, August 9, 1933. Both Wilson's review and Malraux's reply are in editor R. W. B. Lewis' Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 25-30.

<sup>71</sup>Langlois, p. 73.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid. For a full discussion of the censorship directives vis-à-vis Indochine, see pp. 111-115.

Overall, the non-governmental reaction to the paper was favorable as evidenced by a letter to the editor from a local Annamite, T. Tan, in the 26 June 1925 issue:

The pro-Annamite Frenchmen who—true to the generous ideas of France—work for the reconciliation of the protector and the protected peoples, are called anti-French by the false Frenchmen, by those masters of the destiny of a weak people, those authoritarians who want to free themselves from the metropolitan government in order to reign as all-powerful despots. They label anti-French those who are concerned about the Annamites, who remain independent, who defend Indochina against sharks.<sup>73</sup>

Reform aimed at correcting local grievances reflected the aims of the Annamite movement. Politically Malraux's views supported this aim. From the substance of his many editorials, Langlois demonstrates that although Malraux was essentially conservative on political and economic issues, he was much more liberal on social matters. His attacks against the system stemmed in part from what he saw as their unsound basis, but to a larger degree, from his humanistic concerns. According to Langlois, "He wanted the French and the Annamites to live together not as masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited, conquerors and conquered, but as equals, because as men they were equals."<sup>74</sup>

Malraux's editorials focused sharply on colonial injustice inflicted on the native population. Administrative graft and corruption constantly drew his sometimes playful yet serious comments. The pages of Indochine were filled with dramatic and skillful editorial sword-play. Malraux waged verbal battle with every pro-government newspaper in Saigon, giving rise to sometimes crude name-calling. Almost invariably, Malraux was labeled a traitor, anti-French, and a "Bolshevik agitator." Indochine regularly

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<sup>73</sup>Indochine, June 26, 1925 as cited by Langlois, p. 115.

<sup>74</sup>Langlois, p. 126.



carried news of China by an unidentified "special correspondent." Events in China had reached a boiling point in Canton, and the Colonial Administration viewed Indochine's reportage of the day-by-day events as a positive link to sources there. Thus, Malraux and Monin were soon regarded as agents for the "communist Kuomintang." In an editorial in the 14 August 1925 issue of Indochine, Malraux warned the administration of the future dangers of their policy, unless reforms were forthcoming:

Our policy in Cochinchina and in Annam at the present time is very simple: it affirms that the Annamites have no reason whatsoever for coming to France, and it immediately creates against us a coalition of the noblest characters and the most tenacious energies of Annam. It appears that politically motivated and financially greedy idiots are applying themselves with rare perseverance to destroying what we have been able to create, and to awakening in this old land--sown with great memories--the sleeping echoes of more than six hundred revolts.

[Let us show] that we know how to do something besides direct against ourselves--thanks to an ingenious system--one of the finest, one of the purest, one of the most perfect streams of energy that a great colonial power could turn upon itself.<sup>75</sup>

The 14 August issue proved to be the last. Unable to stop Malraux and Monin by other means, the Colonial Administration, with the aid of the local Surete cajoled the local printer of the newspaper into a refusal to print Indochine. With the remainder of Saigon's printers firmly under governmental control, publication ceased.

Secretly, Malraux and Monin were able to construct a makeshift press with local Annamite help. In order to procure suitable type, Malraux sought support in Hong Kong. As the head of the Young Annam and a member of the Cholon (Saigon) branch of the Kuomintang, Malraux probably received aid from Kuomintang agents in Hong Kong. Soon after he arrived, he located and purchased the needed type. Unfortunately, the only type available was for

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<sup>75</sup>Indochine, August 14, 1925 as cited by Langlois, p. 153.

printing in English only. Thus upon his return to Saigon a search for the accents required to print French was initiated. The needed accents were soon procured through the generosity of a group of Annamites who worked in the government printing plants in Saigon. With the needed type-set, publication resumed in November and continued through eighteen issues until the press ceased functioning early the next year. The "new" paper was renamed Indochine Enchaînée ("Indochina in Chains") and published as a "temporary edition of the Indochine."<sup>76</sup> After the 24 February 1926 issue, publication ceased completely.

In contrast to the earlier Indochine, the new paper was physically smaller and concentrated solely on local issues in a renewed effort to effect a general reform of colonial policy toward the native population. Only the last five issues which appeared in late February 1926 were dated, all previous issues bore only a volume number. Malraux continued his editorial effort on behalf of the Annamite nationalists until late December 1925. His concluding thoughts as expressed in a final editorial entitled "What Can We Do?" bear examination:

The great voice of the people must be raised to ask the leaders for an explanation of all this heavy affliction, of this devastating anguish that hangs oppressively over the plains of Indochina. . . .

Will we obtain freedom? We cannot know yet. At least we shall obtain a few freedoms.

This is why I am leaving for France.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Langlois, p. 159.

<sup>77</sup>Indochine Enchaînée, 16, p. 6 as cited by Langlois, p. 158. From 1926 to 1935, Malraux spoke out only twice publicly on the colonial problem: the first was an article entitled "S.O.S." which appeared on page 3 of the 11 October 1933 issue of Marianne, and the second was in his preface to André Viollis' Indochine S.O.S. (Paris: Gallimard, 1935) where he recounted the difficulty he met in trying to obtain type in Hong Kong in 1925.



Malraux left Saigon in December 1925, but did not return to France until 1927. Neither the reason for his departure nor his activities during these years can be fully documented. With the publication of The Conquerors in 1928, The Royal Way 1930, and Man's Fate in 1933, most critics assumed the novels were autobiographical in nature, and that he had participated in the events described.<sup>78</sup> Indeed The Royal Way was a thinly guised fictional chronicle of his earlier archaeological expedition into the Cambodian jungle. However, the other two novels were set in China: the Canton general strike of June-August 1925 was the theme of The Conquerors while the abortive Shanghai revolt of 1927 served as the backdrop for Man's Fate. Had Malraux traveled north from Saigon and participated in the Chinese Revolution so vividly described in the two novels? He had been in Hong Kong in August 1925 to obtain needed type. Did he return in December 1925 and from there work his way north to Canton and Shanghai? Unfortunately the facts are sketchy, the legend persuasive and Malraux's critics divided.

The influence of the Malraux legend has been far reaching in that it corresponds closely to the facts as known. In its most embellished form, the legend has Malraux taking charge of Kuomintang propaganda in Indochina at the behest of Mikhail Borodin, Comintern advisor to the left-wing of the Kuomintang. After the Canton Coup, he left Saigon to work side by side with Borodin as director of propaganda in Canton. He soon rose to the position of secretary to the Kuomintang Committee of Twelve. Serving also as director of propaganda at Kwangsi and Kwangtung, Malraux left China after

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<sup>78</sup>Temptation of the West is basically an attack on Western culture and will be discussed later in this chapter.

the victory of Chiang Kai-shek at Shanghai in 1927 to return to France.<sup>79</sup> The legend vis-à-vis the facts is further complicated by Malraux's two political novels based on his Asian (China) experiences—The Conquerors and Man's Fate.

In the summer of 1925, the Nationalists (Kuomintang) in Canton organized a general strike in an attempt to force the British shipping trade from Hong Kong. Amid the bloodshed, the local Kuomintang army was routed by Chinese mercenaries in the pay of the British. Only with the help of Borodin's newly organized Chinese Red Army did the Kuomintang avert total collapse. Malraux utilized this uprising as the theme of The Conquerors, and even made Borodin one of the main characters. Not only was it an account of the Canton uprising, but in general terms, the novel dealt with the larger question of power politics between East and West—the awakening of modern China determined to throw off the yoke of Western (British) imperialism.

The hero of the novel is Pierre Garine (Malraux?) a Swiss-born international adventurer. Intellectually disillusioned, he is intolerant of Marxist doctrine even though a paid propaganda chief of the communist wing of the Chinese Revolution. With the help of Borodin, Garine organized the Canton strike.

As stated previously, Garine is tried by a Genevan court on a charge he finds trivial (providing abortions for a fee). Although he is later reprieved, Garine reacts to the absurdity of the situation by totally rejecting society and becoming a revolutionary. A few months following his own trial, Malraux embarked on a revolutionary career first in Indochina

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<sup>79</sup>The best sources on the Malraux legend are Frohock, pp. 6-8 and Flanner, pp. 14-16. See also Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) pp. 211-214 for a brief summary of the legend.

then in China. This seeming correlation of experience between Garine and Malraux was not taken lightly by the literary critics and thus added greatly to the already fanciful legend. Like Malraux, Garine became alienated from Western society and used the Chinese revolution as a pretext to strike out at the values of that society.

The theme of Man's Fate centered on the abortive Shanghai revolt of 1927 when the communist members of the Kuomintang attempted to oust the pro-foreign police regime. With the aid of smuggled arms, the insurrectionists temporarily gained control of Shanghai. Chiang Kai-shek, about to break with the communist wing of the Kuomintang, ordered them to surrender their arms. This they reluctantly did, and were promptly massacred. Although no Malraux-correlative character appears in Man's Fate, it was assumed that Malraux had participated in the events described just as he apparently had in The Conquerors. Thus sandwiched between the legend and the novels are the known facts concerning his activities in China.

Inexplicably, Malraux's official position in China remains one of the few events of his revolutionary period on which he has ever spoken publicly. In 1933, in a letter to Edmund Wilson, Malraux stated that after organizing the Young Annam movement he ". . . became a commissioner of the Kuomintang in Indochina and finally at Canton. . . .," and he added parenthetically that "At Canton in 1927. . . , there were more revolutionary adventurers than there were Marxists."<sup>80</sup> The fact that he was in both Canton and Shanghai during these years (1925-1927) was further corroborated in his volume of memoirs,

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<sup>80</sup>Letter to Edmund Wilson dated 2 October 1933 in Wilson, The Shores of Light, p. 574.

**THIS BOOK  
CONTAINS  
NUMEROUS PAGES  
WITH MULTIPLE  
PENCIL AND/OR  
PEN MARKS  
THROUGHOUT THE  
TEXT.**

**THIS IS THE BEST  
IMAGE AVAILABLE.**

Anti-Memoirs, published in 1967.<sup>81</sup> In recounting his trip to mainland China in 1965, Malraux made passing reference to being in Shanghai and Canton. However, the extent of his role in China emerged during his meeting with Chou En-lai that year:

Chou: We haven't forgotten that you are familiar with Marxism, and with China. Nor have we forgotten that you were on the run at the same time as Nguyen-Ai-Qoc [Ho Chi Minh]. You wanted dominion status for Indochina; the French would have been well-advised to endorse you.

Malraux: I am grateful to you for remembering. The more so because the other founder of the Young Annam movement, Paul Monin, died in Canton.<sup>82</sup>

Although Malraux never indicated exactly when he was first in Canton, one of his friends, the author and world traveler, Paul Morand, wrote that in August of 1925 he (Morand) arrived in Hong Kong from the north of China on "exactly the same date that Malraux arrived at Canton from Saigon."<sup>83</sup> Upon this statement, Langlois argues that prior to Malraux's leaving Hong Kong with the type for Indochine, he "made a visit to Canton, headquarters of the new nationalist government of China" and "probably met and talked with Borodin and other organizers of the strike"—a contact that "contributed significantly to his vivid recreation of the historical event" in The Conquerors.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Anti-Memoirs is the first volume of Malraux's memoirs to be published. Other volumes are to be published after his death.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 347-48.

<sup>83</sup>"exactement à la même date, Malraux arrivait à Canton, venait de Saigon." Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 10 November 1928, p. 1 as cited by Langlois, p. 248.

<sup>84</sup>Langlois, p. 157. Cf. Pierre Galante, Malraux, p. 43 who states that Clara Malraux told him André was not in Canton and did not meet Borodin, but that Paul Monin knew Borodin.

All of Malraux's critics with the exception of two discount the fact that Malraux was in Canton at the precise historical moment described so vividly in his novel.<sup>85</sup> Rather they see him as arriving no earlier than the middle of August 1925, while The Conquerors covers chronologically the period from 25 June to 18 August. Frohock in André Malraux, the Tragic Imagination has been the most adamant in this regard. He argues persuasively that the events in Canton as recorded by Malraux were based on daily reports in the Saigon papers. During the period covered by the novel, Malraux wrote signed editorials that appeared almost daily in Indochine. Further he asserts that the editorials could not have been written from afar in that invariably they were replies to editorials and articles appearing in various Saigon papers as few as two days before. Frohock also states that he has found no list of Kuomintang members that includes Malraux's name or the name of any European. Thus he concluded that even Borodin seemed to have played officially the role of advisor—a brilliant deduction. If Borodin is not listed, one would not expect Malraux to be. The true "literary" critic, Frohock concludes that "what is important is that the novels cannot be direct transcriptions of experience."<sup>86</sup>

Despite Professor Frohock's "proof" that Malraux could not have been in Canton during the actual strike, the question remains problematic and largely

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<sup>85</sup>The two that give Malraux full credit in Canton are Joseph Hoffman, L'humanisme de Malraux, p. 201 and Roger Garaudy, Literature of the Graveyard: Jean-Paul Sartre, François Muriac, André Malraux, Arthur Koestler (New York: International Publishers, 1948), p. 39. Garaudy's work is interesting in that he is the only communist critic to assign Malraux a major role in the Chinese Revolution outside of Trotsky. Trotsky's role will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>86</sup>Frohock, pp. 15-19. On the presence of unnamed European advisers to the Kuomintang, see Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, The Rise of Modern China, pp. 618-620.

unanswered. Janine Mossuz's interview with Malraux on 18 August 1967 in preparation for his study entitled André Malraux et le Gaullisme is a case in point. When queried concerning his role in Canton in 1925, Malraux evasively replied that both he and Paul Monin assured the publication of Indochine and therefore one of them could easily have absented himself.<sup>87</sup>

Given that Malraux was in Canton as late as 1927, did he participate in the Shanghai revolt the same year? Unfortunately both the facts and speculation are almost nonexistent on this aspect of the Malraux legend. The only thread of evidence indicating Malraux was in Shanghai in the late 1920's is a passing reference in his Anti-Memoirs. Malraux states that during his trip to China in 1965, he heard again some of the stories that he heard in Shanghai prior to 1930.<sup>88</sup> Hardly conclusive proof that he was in Shanghai in 1927, it does indicate that he was in Shanghai at some time during these years. Frohock asserts that Malraux could not have been in Shanghai in 1927, but offers no proof to support his statement.<sup>89</sup> Galante states that he was not in Shanghai in 1927, but that he was there in 1929. Unfortunately he offers no supporting evidence.<sup>90</sup>

In any event, Malraux had returned to France by 1927. His Asian experience had not only gained him a reputation as a revolutionary adventurer, but it had also proved to be the decisive event in the development of his political and philosophical ideas. From a young archaeologist and art historian, he was transformed into an anti-authoritarian revolutionary.

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<sup>87</sup>Janine Mossuz, André Malraux et le Gaullisme, "Cahiers de la fondation nationale des sciences politique, no. 177" (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970), p. 246.

<sup>88</sup>Anti-Memoirs, p. 325.

<sup>89</sup>Frohock, p. 18.

<sup>90</sup>Galante, p. 49.



As Malraux later told Pierre Galante:

The origin of my whole revolutionary commitment is colonialism, and not the proletariat. Indochina was the touchstone. I became involved in the revolutionary movement when I found that it alone was ready to come to the aid of the Indochinese, to grant them a liberal status. My Marxist, self-taught education, too, is linked to Indochina.<sup>91</sup>

His subsequent novels, numerous speeches and political activities reiterated the one important message, according to Langlois, that he brought back from Asia:

. . .that the selfish, oppressive policies of the fascist state so violently deny the deepest needs of men everywhere that they must inevitably engender revolt. . . .the more brutally it is opposed and suppressed, the more aggressive it becomes, until finally its nationalist and liberal elements are swallowed up by the more disciplined Communists. Then a new tyranny comes to take the place of the old.<sup>92</sup>

Malraux emerged from his Asian sojourn as an ideal example of the engage intellectual—a man of action. Certainly, he became the most acclaimed political novelist of the interwar years, and the first of the postwar intellectual generation to come into contact with the Chinese Revolution. To ascertain the level, extent and nature of Malraux's political commitment, one must look to his novels—the artistic expression of his Asia adventure.

#### Malraux's Politics and the Novels

Of the four novels based on his Indochina/China adventures, only three

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 29. Galante gives no date or place for this conversation. See also Guy Suarès Malraux: Past, Present, Future, trans. by Derek Coltman (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), pp. 68-69 where Malraux states: "I think Indochina played an all-important role in my life. When the Indochinese defended me, something shifted inside. Not that I was on some other side before. The other side was indifference. But the bond with, well, it's a simplification but let's say social justice, was born at that moment."

<sup>92</sup>Langlois, p. 229.

are relevant to a discussion of Malraux's developing political ideas: The Temptation of the West (1926), The Conquerors (1928), and Man's Fate (1933). The fourth novel, The Royal Way (1930) will not be discussed for it falls outside of the context of the other three.<sup>93</sup> Although The Temptation of the West is not concerned with politics per se, it stands as Malraux's accusation of European culture and places him solidly within the intellectual milieu of the postwar period. The themes developed will reappear in the remainder of his writings, and in a large sense, this work helps to explain the why of his Asian adventure—a key to the development of his political ideas and involvement with communism. For these reasons it will be examined first.

The Temptation of the West was published in 1926 while Malraux was still in Asia. In a general sense, the novel is a comparison and evaluation of Eastern culture as opposed to Western culture. It takes the form of a series of letters exchanged between a young Chinese named Ling W. Y. and a Frenchman, Monsieur A. D., who are visiting each other's continent for the first time. As Henri Peyre notes, the title retains a double meaning: (1) the temptation of the West for China which is just beginning to assert its independence, and (2) the more tempting attraction after World War I of the East for Western man.<sup>94</sup>

Twelve of the fifteen letters that compromise The Temptation are written by the Chinese Ling who offers a pertinent diagnosis of the sickness that afflicts Europe. Ling's first perception of Western culture forms

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<sup>93</sup>The Royal Way is an adventure novel based very loosely on Malraux's search for sculpture in the Cambodian jungle.

<sup>94</sup>Peyre, p. 218. To many French intellectuals, the East included Bolshevik Russia and extended as far Westward as the Rhine. Among other writers toying with the opposition between the East and the West were Hermann Keyserling, Paul Morand, Pierre Giraudoux, Romaine Rolland and Aldous Huxley.

the basis of Malraux's philosophical attitude toward postwar Europe. Ling writes that ". . .at the core of European man, ruling the movements of his life is a basic absurdity" reflected in his "anguished search for unity."<sup>95</sup> To Ling (Malraux) Western man seeks action to impose order on a chaotic world rather than be a part of it. This perception not only gives rise to an absurd individualism, but it reflects the basic difference in the two cultural traditions: (Ling to A. D.)

You desire conquest. What do you find behind your meager victories?

. . . . .

We Chinese try to grasp only the entirety of life. Not that we are able to do this. Still, we know that this entirety is, and must be, greater than any one of our individual acts. . . . Life is a succession of possibilities from which we secretly desire to select and embellish a few. . . .<sup>96</sup>

Ling continues and offers an analysis of the source of European man's obsession with the individual and his acts. He states that this obsession with action stems from "an intelligence which is careless" and "poorly trained by a religion that never ceases to make you believe in your own individual existence."<sup>97</sup> Thus, the Christian religion is responsible for the undue emphasis on individual suffering which gives rise to the consciousness of self. In this context, Ling finds it difficult to imagine "meditations in which all the intensity of life is concentrated on a lacerated body."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Temptation of the West, pp. 40-41.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

The European's obsession to ". . .measure all things by the duration of a single human life," represents for Ling the heritage of the Greek emphasis on the individual as transmuted to Europe by Christianity. It is in direct contrast to the Oriental nation where "mankind was quick to conquer that of man."<sup>99</sup> For the Eastern man, this structuring of man vis-à-vis the cosmos is unintelligent, for as Ling states, "If I worshipped order, I should want it to be made for me, not be for it. . . ."<sup>100</sup>

In Western man's attempt to construct a plan of the universe and give it an intelligible form, the will to subordinate the universe has given rise to a sense of pride which has taken the form of excessive individualism. According to Ling, this very individualism brought the death of God leaving man dependent upon himself to construct a coherent myth by which to live. But man having reached the limit of his efforts finds little solace in his achievement--only death. European man has discovered, according to Ling, that he can "no longer be enamoured of the vision he has at last achieved."<sup>101</sup> Monsieur A. D. concurs with Ling's diagnosis and adds that:

Europeans are weary of themselves, of their crumbling individualism, of their exaltation. . . . Capable of action to the point of self-sacrifice, but disgusted by the will to act which today contorts their race, they would seek to discover a more profound meaning in their actions."<sup>102</sup>

Ling's reply reiterates the essence of Malraux's twentieth century quest:

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

For you, absolute reality was first God, then man; but man is dead, following God, and you search with anguish for something to which you can entrust his strong heritage.<sup>103</sup>

The importance of this work in understanding Malraux's politics is evident, and to a large extent, it offers a clue to Malraux's Asian experience. As Malraux later indicated: "The object of the young Westerner's search is a new notion of man. Can Asia supply us any lesson? I do not believe so. Rather a particular discovery of what we are."<sup>104</sup> Certainly Malraux's experiences gave him new insight into intellectual ailments of twentieth-century Europe, and helped him to formulate his analysis of those ills. The Temptation also showed the extent of Malraux's estrangement from his own cultural heritage.

As the first intellectual product of his Asian adventure, The Temptation perhaps best explains his political shift from an advocate of reform in Indochina to a revolutionary adventurer in China. His reform activity in behalf of the Indochinese represented the last vestige of his attachment to the bourgeois culture he so passionately indicated in The Temptation. The failure of the Colonial Administration to effect needed reforms in response to his political agitation resulted in his subsequent involvement in the Chinese Revolution. This profound but abrupt change in his thinking can be directly linked to his subsequent search for a new notion of man as outlined in The Temptation. The search for a new coherent myth to give man's life

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98.

<sup>104</sup>"André Malraux et l'Orient," Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 31 July 1936, as cited in Hoffman, p. 113. "L'objet de la recherche de la jeunesse occidentale est une notion nouvelle de l'homme. L'Asie peut-elle nous apporter quelque enseignement? Je ne le crois pas. Plutôt une découverte particulière de ce que nous sommes."

meaning was to assume a variety of forms through the remainder of his life-- political activism was merely the first avenue of approach. His basic philosophical quest also explains why he tolerated working closely with the communists in the 1930's without ever becoming a communist. For Malraux, communism embodied the myth of the dignity of man within the mythical vehicle of revolution--it promised a new concept of man endowed with dignity and nurtured by a strong fraternal bond. Man would no longer be isolated by his individualism, but rather he would become a part of the community--a defense against the absurdity of life. Thus the themes explored in The Temptation find subsequent expression in all of his future activities, novels and public statements.

The Conquerors published in 1928, represents Malraux's first overtly political novel, and the first to be based on his activity in China. Pierre Garine, the hero, can best be described as anarchistic-revolutionary-adventurer. Although the paid chief of propaganda for the left-wing of the Kuomintang, Garine harbors neither faith nor even interest in the Marxist doctrine espoused by his comrade in arms, Borodin. An account of the Canton general strike of 1925, the title again is ambiguous. It refers not only to revolutionary agitators plotting against European imperialism, but also to an Asia in ferment attempting to turn against European domination. The political content emerges from the juxtaposition of Garine, the prototype adventurer, with Comintern agent Borodin, a Marxist, who are more or less united in a heroic struggle for change--albeit for different reasons.

The setting is Canton where the local Chinese are incited to call a general strike at the behest of Garine and Borodin. The novel focuses on the leaders of the insurrection with the masses serving merely as a background

blur upon which the machinations of Garine and Borodin take place. Although allied with the Kuomintang, Garine is not under the discipline of the Comintern as is Borodin. In a series of discussions placed in the midst of the revolutionary activity, the politics of Garine emerge vis-à-vis those of Borodin and elucidate Malraux's own political views.

The nature of Garine's political commitment to the Chinese Revolution unfolds gradually in a series of tête-à-tête discussions by a number of minor characters. The first estimate of Garine emerges in a discussion of the organization of the revolution between the unidentified narrator of the novel and Rensky, a local art dealer. Rensky, discussing the takeover of the Kuomintang by Bolshevik agents, adds that a man like Garine is far from being a true Bolshevik:

In what way?

Well, my friend, if by Bolshevik you mean revolutionary, then Garine is a Bolshevik. But, if you mean, as I do, a particular type of revolutionary, who among many other characteristics, is distinguished by a belief in Marxism, then Garine is no Bolshevik. . . .<sup>105</sup>

While Borodin's propaganda rested on Marxist dialectics, Garine's message told them something quite different. He taught them "to believe in their own dignity--their own importance."<sup>106</sup> The two leaders are further contrasted in that Borodin is a man of action while Garine "Is a man capable of action at a given time."<sup>107</sup> In his own words, Garine craved power, but not for the wealth or notoriety it might bring. He regarded the "actual exercise of power as a kind of relief, a deliverance" from the absurdity

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<sup>105</sup>The Conquerors, p. 8.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.



of life.<sup>108</sup> As to societal reform, he expressed no interest:

I do not consider society bad, in light of being capable of improvement; but I consider it futile. . . . 'Absurd!' No, I should say 'irrational.' . . . It is not the absence of justice from society that strikes me, but something deeper; my incapacity for adhering to any social order whatever. I am a-social, just as I am a-theist. All this would not matter. . . but I know I shall be up against society all my life, and that I shall never be able to enter it without being false to my inner-self.<sup>109</sup>

Garine never subscribed to any body of ideas, not even Marxism. Although he admired the Bolsheviks passion for revolution, "the revolutionary spirit must come from a revolution in being, one of those for whom revolution is a state."<sup>110</sup> He devoted his life to the cause of the people, but felt no love for either mankind or the poor for whom he fought:

One thing is certain, that I utterly detest the middle class into which I was born. But, as for the others, I am well aware that as soon as we have triumphed together, they will become contemptible. . . . All we have in common is our struggle. . . . but all that is not the revolution is even worse.<sup>111</sup>

In contrast to Garine, Borodin devoted all of his obedience to the party. According to Garine, "he is dominated by this insufferable Bolshevik mentality, this stupid glorification of discipline." As to Borodin's revolutionary tactics, "he wants to manufacture revolutions as Ford manufactures cars."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

With Garine as a defeated hero, Malraux created the adventurist-revolutionary that worked for revolution on his own terms much as Malraux had apparently done in China. This same use of a movement also characterized Malraux's later collaboration with Communism in the 1930's. He later explained his intent with regard to his creation of the characters of Garine and Borodin, and as such his statement also elucidated his attachment to the revolutionary situation:

The level on which Garine interests me more than Borodin is not that of the chief revolutionary. It's simply the human level. Borodin is almost mechanical; Garine operates on a very important plane: the fundamental sentiments which in my eyes account for the grandeur of man, in particular the comraderie of arms and virile fraternity. Also Garine represents to a high degree the tragic sense of human solitude, which scarcely exists for the orthodox communist. If the sense of human solitude exists so little for Russian communists, it's because Russia is essentially, since 1918, a country mobilized to defend itself. Of course, it is at first necessary to conquer, but it remains to be seen if, the victory obtained, man will not find himself again facing his own death and what<sup>113</sup> is perhaps more serious, facing the death of those he loves.

The importance of this novel in the development of Malraux's thought should not be overlooked. Like Garine, Malraux revolted against his bourgeois upbringing and turned to the comraderie of arms and virile fraternity encompassed in the revolutionary myth. Whether or not Malraux's activities in

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<sup>113</sup>"André Malraux nous parle de son oeuvre," Monde, 18 October 1930, p. 4. "Le plan sur lequel Garine m'intéresse plus que Borodine n'est pas celui du chef révolutionnaire. C'est simplement le plan humain. Borodine est presque mécanisé; chez Garine reste un plan très important: les sentiments fondamentaux qui font à mes yeux la grandeur de l'homme, en particulier la comraderie des armes et l'amitié virile. D'autre part Garine représente à un haut degré le sens tragique de la solitude humaine, qui n'existe guère pour le communiste orthodox. Si le sens de la solitude humaine existe si peu pour les communistes russes, c'est que la Russie est essentiellement, depuis 1918, un pays mobilisé qui se défend. Bien entendu, il faut d'abord vaincre, mais il reste à savoir si, la victoire obtenue, l'homme ne se retrouvera pas en face de sa mort, et ce qui est peut-être plus grave, en face de mort de ceux qu'il aime."

China coincide exactly with those of his hero Garine is a moot point. The central conflict of the novel between the doctrinaire Marxist and the individualistic revolutionary committed to action shows Malraux's developing ideas on politics as a means of transcending man's destiny giving meaning to his life. The theme of virile fraternity is to remain one of Malraux's key defenses against the absurd. As expressed in the above quotation, Malraux remained aware of the possible failure of this defense mechanism once victory had been obtained. However, victory is denied in both The Conquerors and Man's Fate. In this sense Malraux's characters become tragic heroes whose conquest of the absurd is temporary and dependent upon the failure of the enterprise in which they are engaged. Garine is the prototype of this defeated adventurer-conqueror. In the marginal notes to Gaëton Picon's Malraux par lui-même, Malraux expounded upon this concept of the adventurer:

Around 1920 the word [adventurer] had great prestige among literary circles. . . . The adventurer is outside the law, outside conventions. He is opposed to society insofar as society is a form of life: he is not so much concerned to combat reasonable conventions as to combat the nature of society. Triumph kills him.<sup>114</sup>

The adventurer-revolutionary concept was precisely what Leon Trotsky objected to in his review of The Conquerors in 1931. Trotsky termed the novel a fictionalized chronicle of the Chinese Revolution during its first period. Although he left Malraux showed uncontested sympathy for insurrectionist China, the novel was "corrupted by excesses of individualism and esthetic caprice." He concluded that all Malraux needed was a "solid inoculation of

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<sup>114</sup>Gaëton Picon, Malraux par lui-même, p. 78 as cited by Payne, p. 62.

Marxism" which would have "protected the author from mistakes."<sup>115</sup> In his reply to Trotsky which appeared in the same issue of Nouvelle Revue Française, Malraux stated that The Conquerors was not a fictionalized chronicle, rather the stress was placed on "the relationship between the individual and collective action, not on collective action alone." Further, the novel was an "accusation against the human condition." As to his need of Marxism, Malraux replied that "He thinks Gerine is wrong; but Stalin thinks that he, Trotsky is wrong."<sup>116</sup>

With the publication of Man's Fate (1933), the second political novel based on his Asia adventure, Malraux's emphasis shifts from the conqueror-adventurist hero to what David Wilkinson terms the Bolshevik hero, "a human type who combines enormous energy with a humanitarian ideal."<sup>117</sup> In contrast to the Garine type who utilizes the revolutionary situation as a means to give his individual acts meaning, the Bolshevik hero also escapes the absurd by his action, but his aim is to give his own life meaning and by doing so bestow the favor on all men. The new Malrauvian hero is guided by a political commitment—a "political-utopia myth" as opposed to the hero myth.<sup>118</sup>

The central theme of Man's Fate focuses on the doom of the Shanghai insurrection after General Chiang Kai-shek's order that the insurrectionists

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<sup>115</sup> Leon Trotsky, "The Strangled Revolution," trans. by Beth Archer in Malraux ed. by R. W. B. Lewis, pp. 12-13. Originally published as "La Revolution Etreanglée" in Nouvelle Revue Française, No. 211 (1 April 1931).

<sup>116</sup> André Malraux, "Reply to Trotsky," trans. by Beth Archer in Malraux ed. by R. W. B. Lewis, pp. 20-21. Originally published as "Réponse à Trotsky" in Nouvelle Revue Française, No. 211 (1 April 1931).

<sup>117</sup> Wilkinson, p. 71.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

turn in their arms. The novel opens with a coup d'etat against the pro-foreign police regime in Shanghai led by Kyo Gisors, a young communist revolutionary and the Russian Katov, a comrade-in-arms. Gisors and Katov divert an arms shipment and distribute the weapons and thereby gain control of Shanghai. In an effort to transform the coup into a general revolutionary uprising, Kyo and the terrorist Ch'en travel to Hankow to enlist Comintern support. Prior to the coup, General Chiang Kai-shek broke with the communist wing of the Kuomintang and threw his support to the right. Chiang's first order was that the revolutionaries in Shanghai turn in their arms. In view of this development, the Comintern hierarchy in Hankow refuse to support the Shanghai insurrectionists. Kyo returns but refuses to submit to Chiang. He and his comrades await the General's arrival aware of the executions that will follow the end of the revolt. In this setting, Malraux places his politically committed hero Kyo Gisors.

Ostensibly Kyo works with the communist wing of the Kuomintang, but like all of Malraux's heroes, his obedience to the party is not total. He finds in Marxism the sense of fatality and also an exaltation of the will, but "every time fatality comes before will I'm suspicious."<sup>119</sup> Kyo's goal is not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but human dignity: "I think Communism will make dignity possible for those with whom I am fighting. What is against it, at any rate, forces them to have none." Dignity for Kyo is a negative concept—"the opposite of humiliation."<sup>120</sup> As opposed to

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<sup>119</sup>Man's Fate, p. 136.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

Garine, Kyo's struggle is for human dignity rather than my dignity. This commitment to human dignity enables man to endure his fate as a man, for as Kyo's father emphasizes:

. . . all that men are willing to die for, beyond self-interest, tends more or less obscurely to justify that fate by giving it a foundation in dignity: Christianity for the slave, the nation for the citizen, Communism for the worker.<sup>121</sup>

As in The Conquerors, defeat is also necessary for the politically committed hero. Though condemned, Kyo and the other insurrectionists do not die in vain, for in their common struggle toward a better future "each of these men had wildly seized as it stalked past him the only greatness that could be his"--human dignity.<sup>122</sup> For Malraux's new hero, virile fraternity was not only possible in battle, but also in death for a cause. In the words of Kyo, "It is easy to die when one does not die alone."<sup>123</sup>

In Man's Fate, Malraux's political ideas have progressed past the uncommitted revolutionary-adventurer to the politically-committed hero. Only through a common effort can man find meaning for his life in an absurd universe. For Kyo and his comrades:

Marxism is not a doctrine, it is a will . . . . the will to know themselves, to feel themselves as proletarians, and to conquer as such; you must be Marxists not in order to be right, but in order to conquer without betraying yourselves.<sup>124</sup>

Thus for Malraux, revolutionary communism remains a means or vehicle through which man can defend himself against the absurd by finding at least a

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

transitory meaning to his life. Only through political action and its resultant fraternal bonds can man hope to transcend the meaninglessness of his existence.

To summarize, Malraux's Indochina adventure marked a turning point in his life both philosophically and politically. His archaeological expedition into the Cambodian jungle in 1923-24 brought him face to face with quasi-facist policies of the Colonial Administration in Indochina and served as a pretext for his return in 1925. Malraux returned to Saigon to actively spearhead the local Annamite push for colonial policy reform and dominion status. He organized the Young Annam and further pleaded the Annamite cause by establishing with Paul Monin an anti-colonial newspaper, Indochine and Indochine Enchaînée. Through his connection with the Young Annam, he became involved with the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Movement) and eventually served the Kuomintang as propaganda agent in Canton and Shanghai. His activities in behalf of the Annamite Nationalist movement in Indochina and Kuomintang during the Chinese Revolution provided the basis for his later novels, speeches and activities.

More important, Malraux's Asian sojourn marked the beginning of his philosophical search for a renewed concept of man and provided the basis for his entry into the political arena and the development of his political ideas. He emerged from this experience as an intellectual-in-action committed to political activity via revolution. Finally, this adventure with all of its ramifications served as the touchstone for his later political involvement in the fight against fascism as the leading intellectual spokesman for the Left in the 1930's.



### CHAPTER III

#### Malraux and the Fascist Threat

In 1933 with Hitler's ascent to power, Malraux embarked on what can be termed the European period of his writings and political experience. From 1928 to 1933, Malraux had not been actively engaged politically but with the growing danger of German fascism he energetically entered what was to be a life and death struggle between rival twentieth-century political faiths in Europe. During the next decade and a half when the Second World War dominated the world scene, Malraux was to be as his critics have noted, successively, a communist backed spokesman for the Left, a republican aviator in the Spanish Civil War, a private in the French tank corps, a brigade commander and war hero, and unexpectedly a cabinet minister in General de Gaulle's provisional French government in 1946.

Because of his two novels on the Chinese Revolution, The Conquerors (1928) and Man's Fate (1933), and his active involvement in that revolution, Malraux was automatically regarded, in Janet Flanner's words, as the "most authentic pro-communist literary French voice by nearly everybody . . . ." <sup>125</sup> Despite the fact that he never joined the Communist Party and was suspect with regard to his brand of Marxism, Malraux was accepted as literary spokesman of the Left primarily to his violent antifascist stance. In examining his activities and utterances as the Leftist spokesman of the 1930's, the continuing development of his political thought can be clearly discerned, especially with regard

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<sup>125</sup>Flanner, p. 35.

to the nature and extent of his attachment to the communist cause.

### The Fascist Threat: 1933-1935

In the years immediately preceding the Spanish Civil War, Malraux's itinerary of activities reads like a biography from a Who's Who Among Anti-Fascists. Along with Andre Gide, Malraux became a featured speaker at a variety of leftist mass meetings. This period also occasioned the resurrection of the united front concept first espoused by the Comintern in the early 1920's before Stalin's victory shifted the emphasis to a policy of socialism in one country. Unofficially, as early as 1933, the French Communist Party began to enlist the intelligensia of various leftist persuasions into a common bloc against the danger posed by the rise of fascism. In August of 1935 this open-arms policy gained the stamp of approval of the Seventh World Congress of the International, and the short-lived banner of the Popular Front was raised over a Europe cowering under the shadow of Nazi Germany. Despite his suspect politics, Malraux entered into a mutually pragmatic relationship with the French Communist Party under the Popular Front banner.

Malraux's basic political position during these years can best be described as that of a negativist. He worked willingly, within limits, in the Popular Front vanguard because he was totally against fascism in all of its forms. By a judicious selection and examination of several of his more important activities during these years, the limits of his cooperation with the communist supported Popular Front can be delineated and justified in the context of his earlier experiences in the Orient.

In January 1934, Malraux and Andre Gide undertook a journey to Berlin on behalf of the Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov, accused of setting fire to the Reichstag. Arrested at the time of the fire, Dimitrov was acquitted

after a long trial but remained in prison. Malraux and Gide intended to present a petition for the liberation to Hitler himself. Failing that, they hoped to meet with Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels. Unable to meet with any high Nazi official, Malraux and Gide left the following letter of protest and returned to Paris:

To Minister for Propaganda Josef Goebbels

Thursday, January 4, 1934

Sir:

On behalf of the delegates of the Dimitrov Committee, of which we have accepted the presidency, we have come today from Paris to ask for an audience with you. Having learned at the Ministry of the circumstances which called you to and which detain you at Munich, we ask your permission to write what we had hoped to discuss with you in person.

The Dimitrov Committee was established in several countries after the Leipzig verdict, and is based on the judgment of the imperial tribunal. We should like to make clear that we have accepted the mission of representing it before you only on the clear assurance that in doing so we would be representing neither a nation nor a political party. The great number of letters received from all nations by our committee makes clearer every day the uneasiness which your prolonged indecision has occasioned throughout all of Europe; we feel ourselves obliged, apart from all political considerations, to share with the authority best qualified to understand them the sentiments which these communications express. We would like to be able to report to those who have commissioned us an answer from you relative to the decisions of the Reich with regard to Dimitrov, Tanev, and Popov, hoping that it will be of a nature to appease their anxiety.

It is in this hope that we beg you, sir, to accept the expression of high consideration.

André Gide  
André Malraux<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>David Littlejohn, (ed.) The André Gide Reader (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 807-808. Littlejohn gives no source for this letter, and this author has found no other source. Apparently it was a part of Gide's personal papers and printed for the first time in this work.

The Dimitrov Committee referred to was formed in November of 1933 with Malraux and Gide as co-presidents. The importance of quoting the latter at length hinges on the phrase "we have accepted the mission . . . only on the assurance that . . . we would be representing neither a nation nor a political party." Malraux's decision to go to Berlin appears to be based not so much on Dimitrov, but rather serves to illustrate his distaste for Nazi justice in general.

The next test for Malraux came with his acceptance of an invitation to speak at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers held in Moscow, August 17-31, 1934. The purpose of the congress was well-known: Stalin had decided to launch his socialist realism campaign complete with directives for all Soviet writers to obey. All European writers sympathetic to communism gathered in Moscow for the event.

Malraux attended the Congress with about thirty other left-wing writers from western Europe including Ernst Toller, Klaus Mann, Gustav Regler and Louis Aragon. After speeches by Andrey Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee, and Maxim Gorky, who was resurrected for the occasion, Malraux rose to give his speech. There was widespread apprehension that he would take issue with Stalin's new policy which he did. His speech was entitled "Art is a Conquest"—a direct attack on socialist realism. Malraux insisted that art was not an act of submission while Stalin demanded all writers submit to the party line:

We read Tolstoy, but for Tolstoy there was no Tolstoy to fall back on. What he gave us he had to invent for himself. When we hear that writers are 'the engineers of the human soul,' do not forget that the chief function of the engineer is to invent.

Art is not an act of submission, but a conquest.  
 The conquest of what?  
 The feelings, and the way to express them.  
 Over what?  
 Over the unconscious, nearly always, and over logic very often.<sup>127</sup>

Malraux's speech infuriated the doctrinaire communists with his attack on social realism. He was then asked to speak again with reference to his political position. Malraux's response was short, and to the point:

If I had thought that politics were inferior to literature, I should not, with Andre Gide, have led the campaign in France for the defense of comrade Dimitrov and, in the last resort, should not be here.<sup>128</sup>

While in Russia, Malraux made several trips outside Moscow, including a visit to Leningrad to see art collections housed there. He was also interviewed by the Soviet press. One interview in particular is important for he amplified certain points made in his earlier speeches. When questioned concerning the reasons why many prominent French writers had so recently joined the fight for a Socialist society, Malraux replied first by distinguishing between what he termed the "two sorts of writers: sentimental writers turned revolutionary and the so-called 'pluralist' writers who consider individual happiness impossible with contact with the surrounding world."<sup>129</sup> Malraux, of course, placed himself in the second group. Both types of writers joined the cause, according to Malraux, for two fundamental reasons: (1) the recent world economic disaster, and (2) the growing threat of fascism. As to why many of these writers remained restrained in their involvement, Malraux

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<sup>127</sup>"L'art est une conquête," Commune No. 13-14 (September-October 1934): 68-69 as cited by Payne, pp. 188-189.

<sup>128</sup>Ehrenburg, Memoirs: 1921-1941, p. 274.

<sup>129</sup>"Malraux in Russia: An Unknown Interview," Melanges Malraux Miscellany 3 (Spring 1971): 9.

replied that it was primarily "a desire to retain the cultural values generally of bourgeois society." The problem for the intellectual involved a choice "not between Democracy and Communism but between Fascism and Communism."<sup>130</sup> Concerning the defense of the USSR, Malraux stated that it was "a direct result of the very existence of the USSR which is the living embodiment of their [the intelligensia's] hopes."<sup>131</sup> Further the USSR represented "the creation of a new society based on values for which many of us are also fighting . . ."<sup>132</sup>

Malraux's interview in Moscow, more than any other of his public pronouncements during this period, show clearly that his close attachment to Soviet communism found its basis in his search for a renewed concept of man. In particular, Popular Front communism seemed to hold the brightest future for man vis-a-vis fascism.

Upon his return to France, Malraux presented his views of the Congress of Writers in a speech given October 23 before a mass leftist audience at the Palais de la Mutualite in Paris. Basically, he reiterated and refined the essential points of the speech he made at the congress, and offered his views on emerging Soviet society. In his conclusion, Malraux presented succinctly the development of his political ideas to that time and their intimate relationship to his basic philosophical quest. In 1934, Soviet communism seemed to embody all of the political and cultural ideas he held as necessary to construct a new concept of man—a tragic humanism embraced and sustained by a common effort toward a common goal, virile fraternity bringing human

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 12

dignity and thus meaning and purpose of all of mankind. What Kyo in Man's Fate gained only through a revolutionary commitment resulting in his death, the emerging Soviet society held out to all who would join them in their fight against fascism. In his conclusion, Malraux stated:

I feel . . . that the basic consequence of the Soviet society is the possibility of creating a new humanism; I feel that humanism well may be man's fundamental attitude toward a civilization which he accepts, just as individualism is his fundamental attitude toward a civilization which he refuses; that the important thing from now on is not that which distinguishes one man from another, but the depth of his humanity and his readiness to fight, not for that which separates him from his fellows, but for that which will enable him to come to them on a terrain that lies beyond their individualities.

It is high time to show that the union of mankind is something other than a first-communion souvenir. I feel that, just as Nietzsche took what was then known as the brute attitude and elevated it into a Zarathustra, so we should set up once again, in a realm beyond all ridiculous sentimentality, those values that bring men together and restore a meaning to the idea of manly brotherhood.<sup>133</sup>

In the year after the Moscow congress, Malraux's anti-fascist activities increased to the point of occupying all of his time and energy and remained unabated until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War when he again became a man of action. The two principal Malrauvian events of 1935 were the publication of Days of Wrath, his fifth novel, and the organization of the first International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture.

With the publication of Days of Wrath, Malraux comes close to writing a propagandistic novel.<sup>134</sup> In fact, all of his critics regard this work as little more than a piece of communist propaganda. The novel revolves around a single character, the German communist, Kassner, and his imprisonment,

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<sup>133</sup> André Malraux, "Literature in Two Worlds," trans. by Samuel Putman, Partisan Review 2 (January-February, 1935): 19.

<sup>134</sup> Le Temps du Mépris (Paris: Gallimard, 1935) trans. by Haakon Chevalier as Days of Wrath (New York: Random House, 1936).



torture and miraculous escape. The novel begins with Kassner deliberately springing a Nazi police trap to save his comrades. Kassner is the organizer of the German communist underground and is unique among all of Malraux's heroes in that he stands as an "organization" man as opposed to the adventurer-hero found in The Conquerors and Man's Fate.

After his arrest, Kassner is interrogated and undergoes a variety of tortures. Though beaten badly his "will" enables him to remain silent and thus save his comrades from the same Nazi cruelty. Just when his solitary confinement seems able to overcome his will and drive him to insanity, he is released. A comrade turns himself in as Kassner, thus he emerges from captivity to begin the struggle again.

Superficially, Days of Wrath closely resembles communist propaganda--the good communist versus the evil Nazis. However, on a deeper level, the novel remains within the framework of Malraux's basic political and philosophical concerns. Alone in his cell, Kassner faces the absurdity of death: "How could he make his death useful? In this hole, it was impossible to help anyone. To have had so many opportunities to die . . . How badly fate chose."<sup>135</sup> The theme of dignity through virile fraternity permeates the confinement scenes of the novel. To overcome his solitude Kassner attempts to tap a message to whoever might be in the next cell, for:

. . . the essential thing was that communication should be established: he was freeing his companion, he was freeing himself, from nothingness as effectively by listening as by knocking . . .<sup>136</sup> they were tapping out together that word: Comrade . . .

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<sup>135</sup>Days of Wrath, p. 73.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

Days of Wrath illustrates quite clearly Malraux's belief that communism could supply human dignity through the union of men committed to a common goal. Not only could dignity give meaning to one's life in a meaningless universe, but in the words of Kassner, ". . . dignity alone, perhaps, could offset pain."<sup>137</sup> Certainly, as Wilkinson states, the Comintern's short-lived (1934-35) "humanist" outburst suggested that their goal might not be far from his own.<sup>138</sup>

In his preface to Days of Wrath, Malraux again expounds on the themes expressed in his Moscow speech in 1934. Concerning the work of art, Malraux for the first time defines art as it will be defined later in his monumental art studies: art is "an attempt to give men a consciousness of their own hidden greatness." Further, he establishes the connection between virile fraternity and artistic sensibility which is the key to understanding the emergence of what might be called the "cultural hero" concept in his later art studies--the artist who through his creations subdues the absurdity of life by remolding reality to give a sense of collective meaning to man's life. The real enemy of a meaningful life and thus of art and virile fraternity is:

. . . an unformulated individualism which existed sporadically throughout the nineteenth century and sprang from a fanatical desire to be different. The individual [also the artist] stands in opposition to society, but he is nourished by it. And it is far less important to know what differentiates him than what nourishes him.<sup>139</sup>

Equally important in understanding both Malraux's political and artistic ideas remains his particular conception of virile fraternity--a continuing

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>138</sup>Wilkinson, Malraux, A Study in Political Criticism, p. 75.

<sup>139</sup>Preface, Days of Wrath, pp. 5-6.

theme for Malraux. The problem for twentieth-century man in his search for meaning centers on the isolation of the individual and his relationship to the fraternity of mankind, and Malraux casts his lot with the latter:

It is difficult to be a man. But it is more difficult to become one by enriching one's fellowship with other men than by cultivating one's individual peculiarities. . . . The former nourishes with at least as much force as the latter that which makes man human, which enables him to surpass himself, to create, invent or realize himself.<sup>140</sup>

In this context, communism restores, in Malraux's view, to the individual all the creative potentialities of his nature. Thus, Days of Wrath represents much more than a propagandistic novel, it shows Malraux's continued, yet refined, attachment to those ideals presented in his earlier novels. Victory is still not in sight, thus the difficult political questions with regard to the value of fraternity do not arise in Days of Wrath.

Continuing his energetic anti-fascist crusade, Malraux and André Gide organized the first International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture which met in Paris 21-25 June 1935. Subsidized with Comintern funds, the Congress consisted of ten open sessions chaired jointly by Malraux and Gide. Among other writers attending were Alexey Tolstoy, Henri Barbusse, Aldous Huxley, Bertolt Brecht, Isaak Babel, Louis Aragon, Boris Pasternak, Ernst Toller, and Anna Seghers. Unable to attend, greetings were received from Ernest Hemmingway, Theodore Dreiser and James Joyce.<sup>141</sup>

Malraux delivered the opening address, and again, the subject was art and not politics. The importance of this speech, "The Work of Art," lies in

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>141</sup>Ehrenburg, p. 302. See also Jürgen Rühle, Literature and Revolution, A Critical Study of the Writer and Communism in the Twentieth Century, trans. by Jean Steinberg (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), p. 421.

Malraux's discussion of the work of art as anti-destiny--again a key element in his later writings on art. Gradually from the Moscow congress onward, Malraux developed the bare outline of those concepts he would later expound fully in The Psychology of Art (1947-1950).

The importance of these ideas in the development of Malraux's politics is apparent if viewed in the context of his gradually changing conception of the hero and heroic action as a means of extracting meaning from an essentially absurd universe. The change from the "political-utopia" hero of Man's Fate and Days of Wrath to the "cultural hero" concept first implied in his Moscow speech explains to a large extent his post-World War II affiliation with De Gaulle and will be dealt with at greater length later.

In his Paris speech, he placed what was to become the "cultural hero" or cultural myth on firm footing. Malraux said:

Art, thought, poems, all the old dreams of mankind--if we have need of them in order to go on living, they have need of us that they may live again. Need of our passion, our longings--need of our will. They are not mere sticks of furniture, standing about for an inventory after the owner's death; rather, they are like those shades in the infernos of old, eagerly awaiting the approach of the living. Whether or not we mean to do so, we create them in creating ourselves. His very impulse to create leads Ronsard to resurrect Greece; Racine, Rome; Hugo, Rabelais; Corot, Ver-Meer. There is not a single great individual creation which is not enmeshed in the centuries, which does not trail after it the slumbering grandeurs of the past. Our inheritance is not handed down; it is one to be achieved.

For every work of art becomes a symbol and a sign, but not always of the same thing. A work of art implies the possibility of a reincarnation. And the world of history can only lose its meaning in the contemporary will of man. It is for each of us, in his own field and through his own efforts, and for the sake of all those who are engaged in a quest of themselves, to recreate the phantom heritage which lies about us, to open the eyes of all the sightless statues, to turn hopes into will and revolts into revolutions, and to shape thereby, out of the age-old sorrows of man a new and glowing consciousness of humankind.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> André Malraux, "The Work of Art," trans. by Samuel Putman, Partisan Review, 2 (October, November): 42-43.

Although Malraux was developing the idea of a cultural myth as the basis of a new concept of man, he was not yet ready to cast aside the political-utopia myth. In fact, Malraux never did completely reject the latter. However, his commitment to the universal validity of this myth underwent what might be termed a metamorphosis, to use one of his terms, as a direct result of his experiences in the Spanish Civil War.

#### Spain: The Politics of Hope, 1936-1939

If Malraux's Indochina experiences were crucial in the development of his politics, his experiences in Spain as chronicled in Man's Hope marked the beginning of the final transition in his political thought. Spain, immersed in a violent civil war proved to be a testing ground of his political commitment to revolutionary action.

Three days after Franco's military pronunciamiento of 17 July 1936 which marked the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Malraux arrived in Spain. Joining the Republican cause against Franco, Malraux was instrumental in procuring the needed planes and in organizing the antiquated Loyalist Air Force. The head of the Loyalist Air Squadron, the "Escadre Espana," from August 1936 until February 1937, Malraux flew sixty-five combat missions even though he was not a licensed pilot.<sup>143</sup> In his honor, the unit was later renamed the "Escadre Malraux." By February 1937, Malraux ceased to be actively engaged in the Spanish Civil War, and in March 1937 toured the United States and Canada in an effort to raise badly needed money and supplies for the Republican cause in Spain.

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<sup>143</sup>It is uncertain just where Malraux learned to fly.

Politically, Malraux's experiences in the Spanish Civil War marked the beginning of his gradual disassociation with the communist cause. With the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 23 August 1939, the choice became clear and Malraux forever severed his ties with the communist movement. Man's Hope, published in 1937, chronicled Malraux's experiences in Spain and is his most overtly political novel. In order to understand the nature of his break with communism, it is necessary to examine the political content of Man's Hope.

Chronologically, Man's Hope covers the Spanish war from its beginning in Madrid to the Battle of Teruel early in 1937--the last engagement for the Escadre Malraux and for Malraux. The prospects for a victory by the Loyalists still seemed possible in February 1937, hence the title. Of approximately twenty main characters, the most important are: Manuel, A Spanish communist leader; Magnin, commander of the International Air Force; Garcia, a former anthropologist turned intelligence chief; Hernandez, an idealistic military officer; Scali, a former art historian; and Zimenes, a Spanish Catholic and loyalist. As the action of the war unfolds, the main characters engage in intellectual discussions on a variety of topics both aesthetic and political. Of fifteen major conversations ranging from art to anarchism, three deal specifically with the inherent political problems that arise within a revolutionary movement when success seems possible as it did during the first year of the Spanish Civil War.

Man's Hope reads like a combat diary and the problems raised were probably ones Malraux himself faced in this the most clearly autobiographical of his novels. The underlying theme is one of disillusionment and serves as the pretext for the three major political debates of the novel: (1) Garcia and Hernandez explore the relationship between the individualistic revolutionary

and the organizational revolutionary; (2) Garcia and Scali become immersed in a discussion of the problem of the intellectual vis-à-vis action; and (3) Garcia and Magnin reflect on the roles of fraternity and discipline in the revolutionary contest. For the first time in his political novels, Malraux is forced to deal with what might be termed the "menace of victory." Revolutionary political action is no longer an untarnished good, for with victory comes solitude and a return to the old order--the absurd.

Garcia and Hernandez dwell at some length on the problem of being versus doing. As Garcia explains:

The communists, you see want to get things done, whereas you and the anarchists, for different reasons, want to be something. That's the tragedy of a revolution like this one. Our respective ideals are so different; pacifism and the need to fight in self-defence; organization and Christian sentiment; efficiency and justice--nothing but contradictions. We've got to straighten them out, transform our apocalyptic vision into an army--or be exterminated. That's all.<sup>144</sup>

In this context, Malraux's heroes fall in the category of those who want to be something, and Hernandez can be said to represent their viewpoint in the discussion. Garcia concludes by characterizing Hernandez as one who hopes to find in the apocalypse a solution to his own problems, but who is doomed to failure by his very idealism.

Just as Malraux's myth of revolution became suspect in light of his Spanish experience, his commitment to violent action, as a means of extracting some meaning from life, also fell prey to the very reality of the revolutionary struggle. By definition, action stood in opposition to the intellectual hero. As Garcia subsequently explains to Scali:

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<sup>144</sup>Man's Hope, pp. 174-75.



The great intellectual is a man of subtleties, of fine shades of evaluations; he's interested in absolute truth and in the complexity of things. He is . . . 'antimanichean' by definition, by nature. But all forms of action are manichean . . . . Every true revolutionary is a born manichean. The same is true of politics, all politics.<sup>145</sup>

The final and perhaps most serious question raised in Man's Hope embodies both of the preceding conflicts: can values won by force survive their own victory? Again Garcia speaks for Malraux:

For me, Monsieur Magnin, the whole problem is just this: a popular movement, or a revolution, or even a rebellion can hold on to its victory only by methods directly opposed to those that gave it victory. Sometimes opposed even to the sentiments from which it started out . . . . It's in the very nature of the apocalypse to have no future. . . .<sup>146</sup> Our humble task . . . is to organize the apocalypse.

Man's Hope posited two types of revolutionaries: (1) the individualist or anarchist, and (2) the organizer, but Malraux never really made a choice.

Malraux left Spain in February 1937 and embarked on a fund-raising tour of the United States and Canada. The reason for his departure is only partially clear. The Spanish Loyalists were indeed in need of money and supplies to continue their fight and Malraux's trip was financially successful. However, if Man's Hope is considered, Malraux could very well have left rather than submit to the discipline demanded by the Communist organization. Certainly, discipline or the need to "organize" the apocalypse or revolution figures prominently in the pages of his novel. Malraux as an intellectual-adventurer would have been hard pressed to submit to any kind of regimentation, communist or otherwise.

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 96-97.

For Malraux, revolution was a myth, a way for man to transcend, however hopelessly or temporarily, his human condition and to give some meaning to his life. Secondly, his emphasis was on the individual in the present, the future played no part for the Malrauvian revolutionary. As previously stated, the hopelessness of the revolutionary situation remained the key to his use of the vehicle of revolutionary activism. In Spain the situation at least foresaw the hope of victory and thus ran counter to his vision of the merits of virile fraternity. In the face of certain defeat, revolutionaries could remain individualistic and imbued with the fervor of virile fraternity. The situation changes remarkably if there is still a chance for victory--the cause must be organized if that glimmer of victory is to become a reality.

In Spain, Malraux finally realized the ramifications of his utilization of the myth of revolution on a strictly emotional or virile fraternity basis. It seems certain that his cooperation with the Spanish communists hastened this realization. This awareness coupled with the undeniable fact that to hold power once achieved necessitated tactics that ran against the grain of what might be characterized as his romantic glorification of political action.

Spain represented for Malraux the beginning of a disillusionment toward the tactics of communism which seemed to negate the pronounced idealism of their slogans. Also significant were the Moscow trials that led to Stalin's consolidation of power in the Soviet Union. The fraternity of the faithful engendered by the short lived Popular Front could be said to have died for Malraux on the windswept plains of Spain.

Although Malraux continued his fight against fascism by attending and speaking at Comintern sponsored activities, his subject matter continued to be art as a conquest--another means of structuring a new concept of man

without the dangers involved in political action. Malraux never gave up the idea of virile fraternity through political revolution, rather he discovered a new means to the same end. The artist in his individual rebellion against reality formulated his own particular style. By transforming reality in his own image, by way of his particular creation, the creative artist in a very special sense restructured his own destiny. In creating a world of his own, the artist escaped the absurdity of his human condition. Art for Malraux became anti-destiny. It was this theory that Malraux was to extend and embellish in his later art studies when the totality of past art could be called forward and used by all men to gain some meaning for their lives in an absurd universe.

The final philosophical position of Malraux has been termed by David Wilkinson as a liberal humanism derived from man's cultural heritage.<sup>147</sup> As Malraux noted in his discussion with James Burnham, political liberalism leads to "eternal national fronts," while "cultural liberalism" leads toward the greatest possible freedom even if it is also a myth. "The ideals of artistic freedom and social freedom fused in a world which itself seemed heroic and apocalyptic."<sup>148</sup> Malraux realized in the first year of the Soviet experience that there was a break between the two myths. Further, the idea of a "democratic culture" is feasible, according to Malraux, due to the techniques of reproducing works of art. This idea became his "myth of the masterpieces." For Malraux, "cultural democracy" meant democracy in the sense that it "creates

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<sup>147</sup>Wilkinson, pp. 153-54.

<sup>148</sup>André Malraux and James Burnham, The Case for De Gaulle, A Dialogue Between André Malraux and James Burnham, section by Malraux trans. by Spencer Byard (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 61.

a facility which invites use by anyone who cares to take advantage of it, but does not force the masses through another political rolling mill."<sup>149</sup> Man's highest ideal remains to "transform the widest possible experience into consciousness."<sup>150</sup> Art thus joined with political action as a means of engendering virile fraternity--both were a revolt against man's fate.<sup>151</sup>

Malraux's break with Communism came in 1939, with the Hitler-Stalin pact. As Nicolas Chiaromonte remarks, there, unmistakably, was "betrayal: the official notice served to the world that from then on the Soviet Union (and its agencies, the Communist parties) meant the Soviet state, and no longer a universal cause."<sup>152</sup> In the marginal notes of Gaeton Picon's Malraux par lui-même, Malraux addressed this very problem indicating his reasons for breaking with the Communists in 1939:

It's the banal problem of all those who have battles at the side of the Communists for ethical reasons (like fighting in 1941-44 for patriotism): it is for them also a moment of history. Socialist ideology--Marx first--has never, that I know of, transmitted justice to the ash can. When the Communist party asked me to go to Berlin with Andre Gide, the accumulated protests in Europe against the trial of Dimitrov, it did not itself act exclusively on behalf of the proletariat. Perhaps the actual evolution of Stalinism was inevitable, but we did not fight to replace capitalism by what was to become the police state.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-69.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>151</sup>André Malraux, Les Voix de Silence (Paris: Gallimard, 1951) trans. by Stuart Gilbert as The Voices of Silence (New York: Doubleday, 1953), p. 639.

<sup>152</sup>Nicolas Chiaromonte, "Malraux and the Demons of Action," p. 109.

<sup>153</sup>Picon, Malraux par lui-même, p. 97. "C'est le problème banal de tous ceux qui ont combattu aux côtés des communistes par éthique (comme de 1941 à 1944, par patriotism): il est, lui aussi, un instant de l'histoire. L'idéologie socialiste--marx d'sbord--n'a jamais, que je sache, envoyé la

After the outbreak of World War Two, Malraux enlisted in the French tank corps in 1942. He fought in the Resistance, commanded the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade and received the famous "Croix de guerre" for his efforts. After the war he joined with General Charles de Gaulle and came to be noted for his violent anti-communism stand.

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justice à la poubille. Lorsque le parti communiste me demanda de porter à Berlin, avec André Gide, les protestations recueillies en Europe contre le procès de Dimitroff, il ne s'agissait pas exclusivement du prolétariat. Peut-être l'évolution actuelle du stalinisme était-elle inévitable; mais nous ne combattons pas pour remplacer le capitalisme par ce pouvoir qu'est devenue la police d'Etat."

## CONCLUSION

The intellectual odyssey of Georges-André Malraux can best be described as one man's search for a renewed concept of man. From his abrupt political awakening to the realities of colonial injustice in Indochina to his participation in World War Two, Malraux sought a means by which man might enoble himself in a world seemingly devoid of any meaning.

Clearly Malraux was a precursor of the post-World War Two existentialist movement, but he cannot be considered an existentialist. He recognized the inherent absurdity of his life, but failed to face the reality of that nothingness. Rather, he sought to transform reality rather than face it squarely as did Jean-Paul Sartre. Malraux's quasi-quixotic quest for meaning involved a rather elaborate mythomaniacal resurrection of man and culture on his own terms. The means utilized in this resurrection were founded first on violent political action and secondly on art as a conquest.

For Malraux, politics existed as an occasion--an occasion for action. His emphasis on political action lay not with the reality of a pre-established goal, rather, with the effect of the struggle itself on the participants. Malraux's concept of virile fraternity hinged on the actual struggle. Man acting together toward a common goal exuded a certain unity or comradeship, "virile fraternity," which temporarily gave meaning to their lives. For Malraux, revolutionary action offered the best possibilities for such a fraternity. To a large extent, the international communist movement of the interwar years offered the means to such an end, and equally important, seemed to incorporate in the beginning, the basis on which to construct

a new concept of man. In this sense, as David Wilkinson demonstrates, Marxism of the Leninist variety was for Malraux a vehicle for action and a myth. Such would appear to be the extent of Malraux's long attachment to communism.<sup>154</sup>

Malraux, the romantic-adventurer, accepted which might be termed a Marxism of the heart without regard to the political reality and consequences of his choice. It was enough that communism embodied a universal humanistic quest to restore to men a semblance of their own innate dignity and thereby give new meaning to their lives. Only in Spain working with the communist organization did Malraux come to realize the manichean nature of his choice. With the prospect of victory in Spain, he faced the problem of attaining a compromise between virile fraternity as a motivation to revolutionary action and the need to organize the apocalypse. As evidenced in Man's Hope, Malraux was seemingly unable to compromise and left Spain rather than submit to the discipline necessary for victory. Nevertheless, Malraux never discarded the idea of virile fraternity in a revolutionary situation. Instead, he turned increasingly toward art as a more untroubled basis for the establishment of a truly universal humanism. In contrast to political action, art, according to Malraux, could more effectively transcend reality giving man a new cultural myth to live by.

Art for Malraux can best be described as anti-destiny. Both the individual creative artist and the political activist sought to transform reality in their own image to give meaning to their human condition. Although Nietzschean in his emphasis on the transcendence of contemporary values, Malraux retained what might be termed a Pascalian pessimism; hence, a tragic

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<sup>154</sup>Wilkinson, pp. 104-105.



humanism. Essentially art offers hope for man. If the artist could capture a part of reality common to all men and transform it by way of the creative object, all men could partake of this victory over destiny by identifying with the artist's vision and thus transcend reality. Certainly another myth, but Malraux felt that this "cultural myth" embodied a universalism as opposed to Christianity which, although offering a valid myth, was limited to co-religionists. Art offered the means to a more truly universal humanist community of man united against a common destiny. Again, virile fraternity emerges as perhaps the key philosophical position and thus his involvement in politics vis-à-vis the development of his political ideas.

In relation to communism, Malraux's position or alignment was essentially practical. He made use of a movement not on an ideological level, but on the level which appeared most capable of realizing his goal. Idealistic, yes, but he never allowed rhetoric or reality effectively to interfere with his basic world-view—a new or renewed concept of man that would at least temporarily give meaning to an essentially meaningless existence. Man remained Malraux's major concern. Perhaps the best statement by Malraux on his communist activities emerged in his interview with Theodore White:

It happened . . . several years ago, that Andre Gide and myself were asked to protest to Hitler the condemnation of Dimitrov who was innocent of the Reichstag fire. And—when Dimitrov in power hands Petkov, who is innocent—who has changed? Myself or Gide? Or Dimitrov?<sup>155</sup>

As his friend Gustav Regler stated: "There is no need for any involved, ideological explanations for joining the Communist Party. It can all be

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<sup>155</sup>Theodore H. White, "The Three Lives of André Malraux," New York Times Magazine, 15 February 1953, p. 13. For similar remarks, see Henri Lefebvre, "Writers in Politics: A conversation with Malraux," New Republic, 24 June 1936, pp. 218-219.

summed up--things can't go on like this."<sup>156</sup>

A final note on Malraux's post-World War Two alliance with the political fortunes of General Charles de Gaulle is in order. Malraux's political shift from the communist left to de Gaulle's right-hand man has been viewed as a definite change in his philosophical position. Superficially, one might draw such a conclusion, but on a metaphysical and mythical basis, there has been no dramatic change, merely a shift of emphasis.

Janine Massuz's perceptive study of Malraux's long association with de Gaulle bears this out.<sup>157</sup> For Malraux, de Gaulle represented the hero-type that characterized his early novels. The General was indeed an intellectual man-of-action with a vision--to restore the grandeur of France. From his activity in the Resistance to his election as French president, de Gaulle was able to rally the masses toward a common goal. This goal was national unification and proved for Malraux to be a fertile ground for a community of man--the myth of nationalism. Fraternity was not limited to violent political action and art, but permeated the French revival under de Gaulle's leadership.

The key to what appears to be a clearly defined shift of philosophical position and thus political position rests on a basic misunderstanding based in part on the Malraux legend. Although Malraux's image was intimately connected with revolution and communism, he never joined the party even though he fought with it against fascism. Conversely, the image of Malraux as a governmental minister of the right resulted in the confusion of Gaullism with fascism by communist and other left-wing French political

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<sup>156</sup>Regler, The Owl of Minerva, p. 143.

<sup>157</sup>Mossuz, pp. 243-264 in particular.

parties. Stalinism threatened the world with political tyranny and cultural barbarism. In this situation Malraux opted for a strong French government under de Gaulle as opposed to traditional political liberalism which had proved so disappointing in face of the fascist threat.

Malraux's political stance has always been linked with myths capable of creating a virile fraternity. New creative myths were needed to establish a renewed concept of man—a man with dignity. Political alliances aside, Malraux's basic concern was for man and the need for a universal humanism to save man from himself. As Vincent Berger, the main character in his last novel, The Walnut Trees of Altenburg, stated:

We must have a world we can understand. . . . If humanity's fate is a story with a point, then death is a part of life: but if not, then life is a part of death . . . . And what meaning can there be in history.<sup>158</sup>

Malraux's quest pre-empted any political attachment and continues to be the goal of his life and work.

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<sup>158</sup> André Malraux, The Walnut Trees of Altenburg, trans. by A. W. Fielding (London: John Lehmann, 1952). Malraux's last novel, Walnut Trees represents a transition between political action and art in his thought. It was published in Geneva in 1943 and is not essential to a discussion of his political ideas.

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ANDRÉ MALRAUX AND COMMUNISM:  
A STUDY IN POLITICAL MYTH

by

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B. A., William Jewell College, 1968

M. A., University of Missouri, 1974

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1976

# ANDRÉ MALRAUX AND COMMUNISM:

## A STUDY IN POLITICAL MYTH

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### ABSTRACT

André Malraux and Communism: A Study in Political Myth provides a detailed history of both the actual and attributed political activities, the speeches and addresses, and the political novels of André Malraux from his own desperate struggle with the colonial authorities in Indochina in the mid-1920's to his final break with Communism in 1939 and his subsequent participation in the French resistance. As a study in political myth, major emphasis is given the development of Malraux's political and cultural ideas especially in relation to his long association with the communist movement and his often quixodic crusade against the fascist threat of the 1930's. Communism offered revolutionary political action which Malraux utilized as a myth—a myth by which man might better face the uncertainties and chaos of the twentieth century.

Malraux's Indochina adventure of the mid-1920's marked a turning point in his life both philosophically and politically. His activities in behalf of the Annamite Nationalist movement in Indochina and the Kuomintang during the Chinese revolution provided the basis for his later novels, speeches and activities and marked the beginning of the so-called Malraux legend. The development of Malraux's "politics" is graphically illustrated in the three overtly political novels based on his Asian experiences: The Temptation of the West (1926), The Conquerors (1928), and Man's Fate (1933). For Malraux, revolutionary communism became a means or vehicle through which man could

attack the absurdity of existence and find meaning for his life--- revolution elevated to an all-embracing myth. Thus, Malraux's Asian sojourn marked the beginning of his philosophical search for a renewed concept of man, and provided the basis for his entry into the international political arena and the development of his political ideas. He emerged from this experience as an intellectual-in-action committed to political activity via revolution. Finally, this adventure with all of its many ramifications served as the touchstone for his later political involvement in the fight against fascism as the leading intellectual spokesman for the Left in the 1930's.

With the rise of Hitler in 1933, Malraux embarked on the European phase of his writings and political experience. During the 1930's Malraux emerged as a communist backed spokesman for the Left, a Republican aviator in the Spanish Civil War, a private in the French tank corps, and later as a brigade commander and war hero. Despite the fact that he never joined the Communist Party and was suspect with regard to his brand of Marxism, Malraux became the leading literary spokesman for the Left due largely to his extreme anti-fascist stance and to his Asian experiences as chronicled in The Conquerors and Man's Fate.

Malraux's various activities and speeches during the 1930's show clearly that his close attachment to communism was, in essence, utilitarian. In particular, Popular Front communism seemed to hold the brightest future for man vis-à-vis fascism while providing a vehicle for Malraux's search for a renewed concept of man.

Just as Malraux's Indochina experience was crucial in the development of his politics, his experiences in Spain as chronicled in the novel Man's Hope (1936) marked the beginning of the final transition in his political thought. The Spanish Civil War occasioned the beginning of Malraux's gradual

disassociation with the communist cause. Although Malraux never gave up the idea of virile fraternity through political revolution, his "revolutionary myth" was gradually replaced by a cultural myth--art as anti-destiny. In transforming reality in his own image by way of his creative effort, the artist in the manner of the revolutionary restructured his own destiny. By creating a world of his own, the artist escaped the absurdity of his human condition.

For Malraux, politics existed as an occasion--an occasion for action. His emphasis on political action lay not with the reality of a pre-established goal, rather, with the effect of the revolutionary struggle itself on the participants. Thus, Malraux's long association with communism can best be viewed as the hand-maiden to the development of his basic philosophical stance---the search for a renewed concept of man. Malraux's Marxism of the heart elevated revolutionary communism to the level of a myth by which man might regain some semblance of his own dignity. In Spain Malraux realized the manichean nature of his revolutionary political choice, and he turned increasingly to art as a cultural myth more capable of bringing about a truly universal humanism than revolutionary activity. In contrast to political action, art, for Malraux, more effectively could transcend reality and give man a new myth by which to live.

In relation to political action and especially communism, Malraux's position or alignment was essentially pragmatic. He made use of a movement not on an ideological level, but on the level which appeared most capable of bringing the realization of his goal---a renewed concept of man endowed with his natural dignity. Man remained Malraux's major concern.