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CHANGING PERSPECTIVES  
ON  
THOUGHT AND ACTION  
IN  
ANDRÉ MALRAUX'S MAJOR NOVELS

Submitted in partial requirement  
for honors in French

by  
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28 May 1974

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NOV 25 1975

## INTRODUCTION

In a letter written to Gaeton Picon in 1933, André Malraux stated that "the basic problem lies in the conflict between two systems of thought: the one which questions man and the universe, the other which suppresses all questions by a series of actions."<sup>1</sup> The idea of such a conflict may certainly be said to have been born from experience, for nowhere, perhaps, is the intellectual as man-of-action better exemplified than in Malraux's career.

In 1923, the young writer, heretofore known to the Paris literary community only as the precocious author of various "surrealist" short-stories and an essay in defense of cubist art, pulled up stakes and set off for Indochina in search of relics and artifacts of the ancient Khmer civilization. This expedition into the heart of the Cambodian jungles may have at first appeared to be the fulfillment of a romantic dream, but it soon became a harsh reality for Malraux and his companions, when they were arrested for pillaging an historical monument. The writer, after a trial which was to have profound effects on his political leanings, was convicted by the colonial government. If it had not been for an outcry among the most prominent literary figures in France, Malraux would have served a term in prison.

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Quoted in Victor Brombert, "Passion and Intellect," in Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. R. W. B. Lewis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964) pp. 144-145.

Far from having learned his lesson, Malraux was to pit himself directly against French colonial power and, on a larger scale, against Western colonialism in the East, for several years following the Cambodian incident. After a brief return to France in 1924, Malraux went back to Indochina, this time to Saigon, where he worked in collaboration with the "Jeune Annam" in publishing a newspaper, L'Indochine, which favored Indochinese independence from the yoke of French colonial rule.

Later, as legend has it, Malraux was summoned to China by Mikhail Borodin to participate in the Canton insurrection. Whether actually called by Borodin or not, he established himself as a good undercover agent, serving particularly in the area of propaganda, and worked as secretary of the Kuomintang Committee of Twelve. In 1927, following the rupture between Chiang-Kai-Chek and the Communists, Malraux returned to France, deeply troubled by the state of his own culture and even moreso with man's condition in the twentieth century.

La Tentation de l'Occident, on which Malraux worked from 1921 to 1925, is his first work resulting from these early contacts with the East and his first serious effort in philosophical fiction. It is extremely important in that it contains many of the ideas which were to preoccupy the writer in his later works. The book is in epistolary form, consisting of a series of letters exchanged between a young Oriental, Ling, who is touring the European continent, and "A. D.", a young Frenchman visiting the East for the first time.

Although at times contrasting the West with the East, Ling, as does A. D., restricts the majority of his observations to a penetrating commentary on Western man and his civilization, and the ills that plague both as a result of his basic psychology and outlook on life.

Thus, through the voices of these young intellectuals, Malraux presents his views of the West in an apparently disorganized series of observations. Taken as a whole, however, his remarks present a detailed critique of our civilization, from its origins in Greek thought onward. Indeed, Ling emphasizes these origins when writing to A. D. concerning Greece: "L'Occident naît là, avec le dur visage de Minerve, avec ses armes, et aussi les stigmates de sa future démente" (pp. 68-69). There are two aspects of Greek thought at the origin of certain ideas, which, after developing in the West, have given rise to the predicament in which Western Man now finds himself.

First, Ling states that, for the Greek, "tout s'ordonne par rapport à lui" (p.67). For the modern European, who has adopted this attitude, the burden becomes immense, for he is forced to pit his intellect against the universe and derive from it a natural, rational order, in which he can fit the concept of Man comfortably. Ling describes the first part of this ordering process in somewhat ironical terms:

(L'esprit occidental) veut dresser un plan de l'univers, en donner une image intelligible, c'est-à-dire établir entre des choses ignorées et des choses connues une suite de rapports susceptibles de faire connaître celles qui étaient jusque-là obscures. Il veut se soumettre le monde, et trouve dans son action une fierté d'autant plus grande qu'il croit le posséder davantage. Son univers est un mythe cohérent. (p. 155)

Herein lies a contradiction of great magnitude. For, if one accepts this notion as the basis of Western thought, then one is forced to realize that those notions of the universe which the Westerner is unable to find in himself, he will replace with rational constructs. Thus a fundamental discrepancy ensues; for what part is actually "real", and what part is merely a fictitious construct of the intellect? As Ling would have it: "Qui dira ce que (l'univers cohérent) doit à votre esprit?" (p. 112).

The problem is only complicated when one attempts to fit Man into this



questionably "coherent" universe. In trying to explain Man the individual, the Westerner attempts to classify, label and limit other people; he goes along "myope et attentif, cherchant des différences"(p. 109). But in evolving this concept of Man he eliminates himself from this rational construct: "Si nous jugeons assez communément autrui sur ses seuls actes, nous ne le faisons pas de nous-mêmes; l'univers réel, soumis au contrôle et aux nombres, n'est que celui ou se meuvent les autres hommes. La rêverie hante le nôtre . . ." (p. 94). Thus, "pour cette conscience, nourrie, avec les promesses ou les espoirs d'une vie humaine, de toutes les richesses du délire, être ne peut s'abaisser à devenir: être quelqu'un" (p. 101). For Western man, having evolved such an irrational concept of what Man is, is unable to reconcile himself with this ideal, or even with the outside world. This discrepancy proves itself to be devastating. Oedipus having destroyed the Sphinx turns on himself; the intellect attacks itself, and the universe becomes absurd. What sustains Europeans, then is "moins une pensée qu'une fine structure de négations" (p. 139).

The other aspect of Greek thought which was to affect Western man so deeply is contained in the statement "mesurer toute chose à la durée et à l'intensité d'une vie humaine"(p.66). Thus, for the Greeks the span of a single life becomes the major truth of the universe.

Two important postulates, perhaps challenges, are contained in this idea. First, an exalted individualism is apparent. Secondly, a will to act, a desire to conquer, indeed a Will to Power must dominate the spirit of the man who accepts this thought as fundamental truth. Both ideas, so fervently praised by Nietzsche, have, according to Malraux, become cornerstones of the Western psyche. But these two ideas, so desperately needed in 19th century Europe, according to Nietzsche, are to Malraux the curse of 20th century Europe. Perhaps, if one is to accept Ling's view as Malraux's own, they have always been a curse

but only in the 20th century have they been exposed as false ideals. Whether false or not, they have become exhausted. For when Ling visits Rome, perhaps the greatest monument to Western man's exalted will to power, he is not awed and ventures the following remark: "Je comprends bien . . . ce que disent ces fragments: Celui qui se sacrifie participe à la grandeur de la cause à laquelle il s'est sacrifié. Mais cette cause, je ne lui vois de grandeur que celle qu'elle doit au sacrifice. Elle est sans intelligence. Les hommes qu'elle dirige sont voués à la mort, qu'ils la reçoivent ou la donnent. Pour être puissante, la barbarie est-elle moins barbare?"(p. 59).

To Ling there is nothing behind such hollow conquests. Western man has offered himself up to power but in doing so he has confused himself with his action and even his thought. Thus with no truth but power, his actions are compulsive and meaningless, and yet he cannot help but act, for it is now a part of him and his race, "une race soumise à la preuve du geste, et promise par là au plus sanglant destin" (p. 104). A.D. goes further. He lucidly defines and amplifies the problem: "Les Européens sont las d'eux-mêmes, las de leur individualisme qui s'écroule, las de leur exaltation. . . Capables d'agir jusqu'au sacrifice, mais pleins de dégoût devant la volonté d'action qui tord aujourd'hui leur race, ils voudraient chercher sous les actes des hommes une raison d'être plus profonde" (p. 139).

In La Tentation de l'Occident the stage has been set, for the central conflict in Malraux's later works has been presented in detail in this brief book. The conflict arises from the dichotomy of thought and action. Neither one alone will suffice. According to Nicola Chiaromonte: "Dreams breed dreams indefinitely. Only the jolt of choice, action, can put an end to the pestilence of desire. After which, what was inane foolishness becomes bloody madness."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Nicola Chiaromonte, "Malraux and the Demons of Action," in Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. R. W. B. Lewis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964) p. 98

It is my purpose in this study to explore the dichotomy of thought and action and to seek if possible a resolution to the conflict that arises from it in Malraux's three major novels: Les Conquérants, La Condition humaine, and L'Espoir.

## CHAPTER I

Les Conquérants was published two years after La Tentation de L'Occident and, while not a sequel, it appears to be closely related to "La Tentation" in the sense that Malraux has chosen to illustrate his ideas concerning Western men in the person of Pierre Garine. While the novel deals with the people and events surrounding the Canton insurrection of 1925, the main thrust of the novel appears to be the elucidation of Garine, the adventurer and revolutionary. For, as the novel progresses, Garine appears to dominate the action of the novel more and more. Indeed the last section of the novel, dealing mainly with Garine, is entitled L'Homme.

The first insights into the character of Garine are provided when the anonymous narrator of the novel, who is traveling towards Canton to participate in the insurrection, speaks with an agent of Garine's in Saigon. According to this agent, Garine is among "ceux qui sont venus au temps de Sun en 1921, en 1922, pour courir leur chance ou jouer leur vie, et qu'il faut appeler des aventuriers." ( p.<sup>63</sup>63) Garine has apparently gambled and won. For, after having gained control of a weak ministry, he has consolidated power there by making it financially independent through levying clandestine taxes on opium importers, as well as on gambling houses and owners of brothels. Garine has also made the ministry important to the cause by effectively arousing in the Chinese workers, a sense of their own dignity;

"La propagande nationaliste, celle de Garine ... a agi sur eux d'une façon trouble, profonde ... et imprévue ... avec une extraordinaire violence, en leur donnant la possibilité de croire à leur propre dignité." (p.62)

As the narrator continues on towards Canton, his thoughts dwell on Garine, on Garine's past and on conversations that the two have had. Through the use of this technique Malraux delves deeply into the character of this cynical "aventurier" and the events which gave rise to the ideas which now determine Garine's actions. One learns that, as a young man, Garine had used his inheritance to pay for abortions for young girls, a cause to which he strangely enough did not even adhere ("tu penses bien, que je ne me faisais pas d'illusions sur la valeur de la 'cause', et pourtant, je savais que le risque était grand: j'ai continué malgré les avertissements.") (p.172) Although, apparently already somewhat of a "joueur," Garine was deeply affected by the trial which followed his arrest for complicity in the illegal abortions. It left him with "le sentiment de la vanité de toute la vie," (p. 145) and above all, a sense of the absurdity of society itself;

"Je ne tiens pas la société pour mauvaise, pour susceptible d'être améliorée; je la tiens pour absurde." (p.88)

It is from this "sensation profonde d'absurdité" that, according to the narrator, Garine draws his strength. Having found society absurd and life mere vanity, Garine involves himself more and more with various revolutionary groups in the hope of

finding "un temps de troubles." Unlike the other revolutionaries however, Garine makes no pretense of working for the betterment of the human condition. There is no need to justify such a drive for power. Those who wish to be right, those who believe in a cause, he labels as "crétins." (p.86) To Garine, power is an end in itself;

"De la puissance, il ne souhaitait ni argent ni considération, ni respect; rien qu'elle-même ... Il finissait par considérer l'exercice de puissance comme un soulagement, comme une délivrance." (p.86)

Garine comes to consider himself to be a "joueur" with power as the stakes. He will stop at nothing to gain it (indeed, after he fails to get Russia with the Bolsheviks with whom he is associated, he likens himself to a desperate gambler; "si je pouvais tricher, je tricherais ..." (p.90) and he knows that "toute perte est limitée par la mort". (p.85)

Garine is given the chance he has waited for when an acquaintance invites him to come to Canton and work at the Ministry of Propaganda. Before his departure, he visits his friend, the narrator, at Marseille and once again affirms that which motivates him;

"Je veux--tu entends--une certaine forme de puissance, ou je l'obtiendrai, ou tant pis pour moi.  
--Tant pis si c'est manqué?  
--Si c'est manqué, je recommencerai là ou ailleurs.  
Et si je suis tué, la question sera résolue ..." (p.93)

Indeed, far from believing in the insurrection, he dislikes the people for which it is being fought; the Chinese;

"Je n'aime pas les hommes; je n'aime pas les pauvres gens, ceux, en somme, pour qui je vais combattre." (p.92)

For Garine "... se lier à une grande action quelconque et ne pas la lâcher, en être hanté, en être intoxiqué ..." (p.92)  
is reason enough for going to Canton.

When the narrator arrives in Canton the insurrection has gained considerable momentum; a general strike is in effect in Hong Kong as well as Canton, terrorism is rampant, and the various political factions are battling for control. A Chinese army supported by British funds is marching on Canton. At the center of all this is Garine, who along with Borodine is directing the Communist drive for power. As the novel progresses the obstacles to the attainment of their goals are gradually eliminated; the most potent political opposition in the person of Tcheng Dai is eliminated by assassination, Hong the terrorist, who originally worked with the Communists, is arrested and executed after he has become a detriment to the Communists, and finally the opposition army of Tcheng-Tiung-Ming is repelled in its attempt to seize Canton.

As the insurrection moves in this manner towards a successful conclusion the image of Garine becomes more and more that of a

tragic hero. For, although dying of dysentery and jungle fever, Garine is unable to free himself from his action and leaves for Europe, where he could have recovered. As he puts it "il me semble que je lutte contre l'absurde en faisant ce que je fais ici ..." but as the sickness overcomes him, he finds that "... l'absurde retrouve ses droits". (p.145)

Earlier in the novel, Garine has told the narrator: "Si je me suis lié si facilement à la révolution, c'est que ses résultats sont lointains et toujours en changement." But now that too is changing; the revolution is no longer a tool which Garine uses to achieve his ends, it is now a prison for him. For powerful individuals are no longer necessary; what is necessary is obedience, and consequently a subjugation of the individual will. This, Garine can not accept; when Borodine asks him to deliver a funeral oration for the fallen revolutionary fighter, Klein, making him a martyr to the cause, Garine is furious: "Je n'ai pas laissé l'Europe dans un coin comme un sac de chiffons ... pour venir enseigner ici le mot d'obéissance, ni pour l'apprendre." (p.179)

This refusal to bow down to party discipline makes Garine no longer valuable; Nicholaieff tells the narrator that in the eyes of Borodine "Garine est du passé." (p.176)

Garine, for his part, is no longer interested in the revolution. Like a gambler with nothing left to play, he is no longer interested in the game; when he receives word of Red Army



victories, he no longer cares: "Ça m'est égal. Maintenant ça m'est égal. Qu'ils s'arrangent, tout ça ..." ( ). At the end of the novel, Garine, dying, has decided to leave the scent of his greatest victory. The times have changed; Garine has not. Ironically enough, he wishes to go to England.

---Où diable voudrais-tu donc aller?

---En Angleterre. Maintenant, je sais ce que c'est, l'Empire.

Une tenace, une constante violence. Diriger. Déterminer. Contraindre. La vie est là ... (p.187)

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There is one other character in Les Conquérants who needs to be mentioned; Hong the terrorist. For, he is not only important in his own right but also as a precursor of one of Malraux most fascinating characters; Tchen of La Condition humaine. Due to the first person narrative style of Les Conquérants, one is given only brief fragments of conversation and second-hand discussions of ideas concerning Hong, a person who like Garine, has a "besoin d'action" but who unlike Garine, is not motivated by a need for power.

As a child Hong had come under the influence of the old Italian anarchist, Rebecchi from whom he was to gain one gripping realization; "Le caractère unique de la vie. Une seule vie, une seule vie." (p.72 )

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But for Hong, there can be no sense of personal dignity to be derived by this realization. For he grew up "parmi les

hommes, dont la misère formait l'univers, tout près de ces bas--fonds des grandes villes chinoises, hantées des malades, de vieillards, des affaiblis de toute sorte ... Sentiments, coeur, dignité, tout s'est écroulé." (p.136)

As Hong puts it <sup>136</sup> "Un pauvre ne peut pas s'estimer." (p.137) <sup>137</sup>  
 Unable to find dignity for himself, he comes to hate those who are rich and powerful not because of their wealth or power, but because they are capable of self respect. ( ) Society, because it is dominated by the rich and powerful and because it has made him, a product of those degraded by society, incapable of self respect, is also an object of disdain;

"Tout état social est une saloperie ..." (p.139) <sup>139</sup>

Hong then, finding no other value but hatred, makes hatred his God. Only action in the service of this hatred is worthwhile; "Seule l'action au service de la haine n'est ni mensonge, ni lâcheté, ni faiblesse." (p.138) <sup>138</sup> Thus Hong, like Garine, is a captive of his action and he too becomes a victim of it; for when his assassinations and his terroristic acts becomes unacceptable to the Communists, he is executed.

Malraux does not appear to have found any positive human values between the time of the writing of La Tentation and Les Conquérants, nor does he seem to have found any solution to the problem of thought and action. The two main characters of the

novel, or at least the two discussed here, seem to act compulsively; one out of a desire for power which alone gives him respite from the sense of meaninglessness and vanity of human existence and the other, out of no other sentiment but hatred. Neither one dies for what he believes, for neither one believes in anything. Both have merely sacrificed themselves to the "demon of action." Neither finds comfort in such simple human values as love and friendship. For Garine, women inspire only an erotic thirst, (again in a way a need for power) which must be quenched and then forgotten. Neither finds a camaraderie in fighting with other men; for in both cases "the cause," if there is one, is an individual exaltation. Although the death of his friend Klein temporarily makes Garine question what he does, it finally only re-affirms his exalted individuality and moves him further away from his fellows: "il y a tout de même une chose qui compte dans la vie: c'est de ne pas être vaincu." (p.169)

Once again Malraux confronts the reader with a universe devoid of meaning; a universe in which action becomes a compulsive attempt to negate this fundamental absurdity, but in the attempt, becomes only a fatality leading to death.

It is only in La Condition humaine that this picture is somewhat modified.

## CHAPTER II

La Condition humaine is a much more ambitious and widely acclaimed novel than Les Conquérants. It well deserves this acclaim, for it does not deal solely with the metaphysical quandaries of one individual; the scope is broadened to include those of many men, each one unique and convincing. The first-person narrative style, although quite effective in Les Conquérants, would be inadequate in La Condition humaine. Malraux uses instead the third person narrative, which allows him to deal more intimately with each character while giving the action of the novel greater impact by dealing with it firsthand.

The effectiveness of the technique is immediately apparent, for the reader feels himself to be almost a participant in Tchen's assassination of the arms agent. Malraux involves the reader so deeply in Tchen's thoughts that one wonders along with him whether the mosquito netting should be raised before the stabbing, and one feels the conflicting emotions of anxiety at being discovered and relief at being reunited with other men just as Tchen does when he is approached by the drunken admirer of the "dancing girl."

If the style allows Malraux (and the reader) to involve himself directly in the thoughts and emotions of the character, it also allows him to detach himself from the character and analyze objectively those events in the life of the character which have made him the way he is, or simply to recount the

character's actions and words during the course of the novel. This is accomplished by describing other peoples' thoughts or discussions concerning the character in question or simply through relating events in which the character is involved.

In the case of Tchen, the reader learns a great deal about his background and the events and persons responsible for forming his mentality through his discussions with old Gisor and Kyo, and through Gisor's solitary reflections concerning the youth.

Following his assassination of the arms agent, Tchen goes to meet his companions to give them the paper releasing the arms, for which he has killed the agent, and then goes immediately to visit old Gisors to speak with him about the murder he has just committed. Gisors, his former teacher and now his confidant, discusses with Tchen the latter's feelings after having committed murder. Above all, the reader discovers that Tchen feels himself to be "extraordinairement seul" (p.356). But this is not all. As opposed to Hong, who hates those men who can take pride in themselves, Tchen explains to Gisors that it is pride which he feels for his act. "Qu'as-tu éprouvé après? demanda Gisors. Tchen crispa ses doigts, --De l'orgueil." (p.358). Tchen's pride in committing murder is so great that he tells Gisors that he has come to scorn those who have not killed. It is at this point that Gisors understands that "l'action dans les groupes de choc ne suffisait plus au jeune homme, le terrorisme devenait pour lui une fascination." (p.358).

After Tchen leaves, Gisors reflects on the young man's

past, hoping to understand his solitude and his fascination with such absolutes as murder, terrorism and death. For he sees in all of Tchen's actions a constant movement towards death: "Il n'aspire à aucune gloire, à aucun bonheur. Capable de vaincre mais non de vivre dans sa victoire, que peut-il appeler sinon la mort? Sans doute veut-il lui donner le sens que d'autres donnent à la vie, mourir le plus haut possible." (p.359).

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As a child, Tchen had been sent by his uncle to learn English and French at a Protestant mission. While there, he had come under the influence of the Reverend Smithson, an aging intellectual who was so obsessed with sin and the shame of the flesh that even the attainment of God was sacriligious. What he communicated to Tchen was his own deep, boundless anguish. Led by Smithson into a life of solitary contemplation and a search for absolute values, but at the same time repelled by that contemplation and "la vie intérieure" which had caused Smithson's immense inner anguish, Tchen "ne pouvait vivre d'une idéologie qui ne se transformât immédiatement en actes." (p.361).

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Thus action becomes a mode of transcending of the self, and because of Tchen's need for absolutes, it becomes an end in itself, an absolute. In this light Gisors earlier thoughts take on added meaning. ( ). For action as a means to an end, working with others, has no meaning for Tchen:

Le monde qu'ils préparaient ensemble le condamnait, lui Tchen, autant que celui de leurs ennemis. Que ferait-il dans l'usine future embusqué derrière leurs cottes bleues. (p.384).

This becomes all too apparent to Tchen in the attack on the police station. For when the human chain is formed, even in the face of death Tchen is aware only of his isolation: "Malgré l'intimité de la mort, malgré ce poids fraternel qui l'écartelait, il n'était pas des leurs." (p.385).

Thus, isolated and thirsting for a more absolute form of action Tchen turns to that action which alone gives him a sense of exaltation: murder (or as Kyo would have it, "La destruction seule le mettait d'accord avec lui-même." (p.41)). After Chiang-Kai-Chek's treachery, Tchen decides that Chiang must be killed. After the first attempt on Chiang's life has failed, Tchen and his companions, disheartened, discuss other means of dispensing with the Kuomentang leader. But now the murder of Chiang no longer satisfies Tchen. While in Hangkow, Tchen had tried to explain to Kyo a certain feeling of ecstasy that he felt:

---Je cherche un mot plus fort que joie....Un apaisement total....Plus près que ce que vous appelez extase. Oui. Mais épais. Profong. Non léger. Une extase vers...vers le bas.

---Et c'est une idée qui te donne ca?

---Oui, ma propre mort.

The meaning is now clear. Not even the murder of Chiang will satisfy Tchen: "La possession complete de soi-même" can be achieved only through the supreme act ... the taking of one's own life; Tchen will throw himself beneath the car of Chiang holding the bomb ... When the time comes, it is with a "joie d'extatique" that he carries out his plan.

If Tchen's actions arise from an ambiguous and somewhat mystical desire for complete self-possession, Ferral, the financier's actions arise from a simpler, less complicated desire: power. All of Ferral's energies are directed towards an affirmation of the powers he already has, or the attainment of greater power. Even the box of cigarettes which Ferral keeps on his desk illustrates his obsession: "Cette boîte, depuis qu'il avait décidé de ne plus fumer, était toujours ouverte sur son bureau, comme pour affirmer la force de son caractère." (p.390).

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Opium, although he smokes measured amounts of it, is not a source of pleasure to him, but "un moyen d'action sur les femmes." (p.463) with whom he smokes. Indeed, Ferral's view of the world is so distorted by his lust for power that, as he tells old Gisors, intelligence is "la possession des moyens de contraindre les choses, ou les hommes." (p.464).

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Although motivated like Garine by a desire for power, Ferral has chosen to work within society to gain this end. After his political downfall, Ferral has come to the East to amass a fortune which he hopes will allow him to return to power in his native France.

"Même avec le projet d'une nouvelle société chinoise dans chaque poche il ne pensait qu'à Paris. Rentrer en France, assez fort pour acheter l'agence Havas ou traiter avec elle; reprendre le jeu politique, et, parvenu prudemment au ministère, jouer l'union du ministère et d'une opinion publique achetée, contre le parlement. Là était le pouvoir. (p.375).

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The ultimate expression of Ferral's will to power, or at least that aspect of it which Malraux decides to deal with most closely, is Ferral's eroticism. For Ferral "...un corps conquis avait ... plus de goût que tout autre corps" (p.457) and a woman is not a fellow human being but "une adversaire vivant" ... "Son orgueil appelait un orgueil ennemi, comme le joueur passionné appelle un autre joueur pour le combattre et non le paix." (p.457).

This game of exotic conquest is illustrated in the novel through Ferral's liaison with Valerie, an equally egotistical dress shop owner. According to Boak, "depends on his domination of her body, so that her orgasm depends entirely on his will." (p. 80). In order to enjoy this domination to the fullest, Ferral, in the only lovemaking scene described in the book, insists on having the lights on so that he may more closely observe her pleasure. Valerie, humiliated, vows to herself that she will take revenge on Ferral, and when Ferral arrives at the hotel, for their next proposed meeting, she humiliates him in turn by standing him up. Ferral's vanity is so wounded that he now feels that he must retaliate; after he leaves the hotel, in need of an object of retaliation, he finds a prostitute for whom he shows disdain by ignoring the rituals that are a part of her trade.

Since there are no feelings except pride involved in Ferral's relationship with Valerie (or any other woman),

and since she is merely an object of his own egotism, Ferral's exotic thirst is never satisfied. For although he dominates her body physically, he never, in fact, possesses her:

"En somme il ne couchait jamais qu'avec lui-même...sa volonté de puissance n'atteignait jamais son objet." (p.468).

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Thus, Ferral's actions at least in the realm of the erotic, become compulsive; for although he may gain a temporary domination over a body, he can never obtain that which his desire for power calls for; the possession of another.

Whereas Tchen and Ferral are both men of action, Gisors, the aging intellectual, is a man of inaction or perhaps a man incapable of action. For, being a student of art, Gisors sees the vanity in life, and finds action futile. Indeed, this sense of the futility of action or perhaps this apathy towards action, is so strong that it transmits itself to others who come into the presence of Gisors:

"Dès que Kyo entrait là, sa volonté se transformait donc en intelligence ... et il s'intéressait aux êtres au lieu de s'intéresser aux forces. (p.346).

Although outwardly giving the appearance of serenity, Gisors is nonetheless a man filled with anguish. The source of this anguish is Kyo, Gisors' son; for Kyo has chosen a life of action in which Gisors cannot participate and into which his love for his son, cannot enter:

"Lorsque son amour ne pouvait jouer aucun rôle, lorsqu'il ne pouvait se référer à beaucoup de souvenirs, il savait bien qu'il cessait de connaître Kyo. (p.359).

Because Kyo is the only object of Gisors' love, and thus his only link with the world of action and men, Gisors is thrown back on his own anguished solitude. But if Gisors cannot live in it, he knows how to escape it:

"Il se sentait pénétrer avec sa conscience intrusive dans un domaine qui lui appartenait plus que tout autre, posséder avec angoisse une solitude interdite où nul ne le rejoindrait jamais. Une seconde, il eut la sensation que c'était cela qui devait échapper à la mort ... Cette solitude totale, même l'amour qu'il avait pour Kyo ne l'en délivrait pas. Mais s'il ne savait pas se fuir dans un autre être, il savait se délivrer: il y avait l'opium." (p.363).

But if opium gives Gisors a passivity and an acceptance, it also gives him a vision of something else ...

Les yeux fermés, porté par de grandes ailes immobiles, Gisors contemplait sa solitude: une désolation qui rejoignait le divin en même temps que s'élargissait jusqu'à l'infini ce sillage de sérénité qui recouvrait doucement les profondeurs de la mort." (p.364).

Thus, life holding no meaning for Gisors except through his son, from whom he feels tragically isolated, Gisors' mind turns tranquility to a contemplation of death.

After Kyo has been killed, Gisors' final link with the world is broken. Although temporarily ceasing to use opium, Gisors goes to live with his brother-in-law in Japan and there once again loses himself in opium. But now, his separation from the world of men is complete as he tells May: "Je n'ai jamais aimé beaucoup le monde. C'était Kyo qui me rattachait aux hommes, c'était par lui qu'ils existaient pour moi." (p.533). Freed from everything, even from being a man, Gisors has found that music alone comforts him; for "La musique seule peut parler de la mort". (p.534).

In the characters of Tchen, Ferral and Gisors, Malraux has created three exceptionally diverse fictional characters. In none of these three characters, however, does the reader find any suggestion of a resolution to the problem of thought and action, nor does Malraux seem to have represented through any of the characters a value which, at least, for them, counterbalances the meaninglessness of their lives, the absurdity of their plight as human beings. Tchen, in his thirst for absolutes, finds only the idea of his own death to be adequate. Ferral's thirst for power, at least in the realm of the exotic, remains unquenched, and he finds himself, when in the company of the prostitute, to be longing only for the peace of sleep: "Dormir c'est la seule chose que j'aie toujours souhaitée, au fond, depuis tant d'années." (p.468). Old Gisors finds himself in Japan, enjoying the oblivion of opium and solitary contemplation of death.

It is perhaps poetic justice that both Tchen and Ferral, whose lives have been devoted to action, should both be led by their actions to an absurd downfall.

Tchen's supreme act - that of attempting to take his own life along with that of Chiang-Kai-Chek, is in failure. For, when Tchen throws himself under Chiang's car, Chiang is not in it. What is even more humiliating is that, after the bomb had exploded, Tchen is denied even the taking of his own life. Although Tchen sticks a pistol in his mouth, it is the

kick received from the soldier which causes a muscular contraction, and thereby caused the gun to go off.

Although Ferral's actions do not lead to death they lead to what amounts to death for him; for all of his ambitions are shattered by a group of colorless unimaginative financiers who refuse to back his massive Chinese interests simply because they despise him for having shown disdain from their way of life. (Ferral is unmarried, his sexual profligacy is known, he smokes opium, and worst of all, he has declined an invitation to become a member of the Legion of Honor.)

Gisors life of contemplation has also ended in failure; for opium alone can allay his anguish, and the only thought that truly interests him, at the end of the novel, is death.

Thus, in the case of these three characters, the absurd is indeed triumphant. For, through neither an incessive devotion to thought nor action, Malraux seems to tell the reader, can man escape his destiny. Indeed, the message seems as pessimistic in La Condition humaine as it was in Malraux's earlier works. Garine's earlier statement in Les Conguerants is brought to mind: "Les gens qui veulent lâcher la terre s'aperçoivent qu'elle colle à leurs doigts." (p.179).

If however Tchen, Gisors and Ferral are reminiscent of Malraux's earlier tragic solitary figures, Kyo and Katow are not. For, although both are led by their actions to death,

their death does not seem futile or meaningless. Neither is motivated by a sense of exalted individualism. Neither is obsessed by his actions (as is Ferral who tells old Gisors "Un homme est la somme de ses actes ... Rien d'autre," (p.466) and neither's actions represent an attempt to escape his "fate" as a man. For Kyo and Katow have found values which tie them to other men, values which to them are worth fighting for, and, more important, worth dying for.

As to Kyo, that which sustains him is a belief in human dignity. As a young man, Kyo had gone to live and work among the oppressed; day workers and coolies to whom all sense of human dignity was denied. There he had found a cause to which he would devote his life:

"Sa vie avait un sens et il le connaissait: donner à chacun de ces hommes que la famine, en ce moment même, faisait mourir comme une peste lente, la possession de sa propre dignité." (p.362)

Raised according to the Japanese tradition that ideas should be lived, Kyo had devoted himself to a life of action, finding in revolutionary activity a means of obtaining dignity for the masses oppressed by capitalism and Western imperialism.

Finding a sense of human solidarity among the men fighting for the cause, Kyo has also found release from personal solitude through the love he feels for May. Indeed, he realizes that: "si elle mourait, il ne servirait plus sa cause avec espoir mais avec désespoir, comme un mort lui-même." (p.351)

Thus, in human dignity, solidarity and love, Kyo has found values for which to fight. Katow, a veteran of the Russian revolution as well as the fighting in China, has also found in human solidarity a justification for revolutionary action. Indeed his desire to allay the sufferings of his companions is so great that he gives his cyanide to two of them, thereby resigning himself to a horrible death. Even at the moment of their deaths, deaths to which action has led them, neither feels that his life, or death, is futile.

Is a reconciliation between thought and action achieved in the persons of Kyo and Katow? The answer appears to be yes, at least as it applies to the individual. For both have put their beliefs and ideas into action, and have achieved a balance which satisfies them.

But while the problem appears to be resolved at the personal level, there are still other aspects of the conflict of thought and action which must be considered ... The question of political expediency and the problems it raises as concerns such a personal resolution is taken up in L'Espoir.



### CHAPTER III

In L'Espoir, Malraux has broadened the scope of his fiction to include not just a small-scale political insurrection, but a much more extensive conflict - the bloody Spanish Civil War of the 1930's. Consequently, he is no longer, as in La Condition humaine, dealing mainly with a small group of revolutionaries (and other characters associated with the events), but with a bewildering array of anarchist partisans, pilots, professors, journalists, mercenaries, professional Spanish soldiers, and foreign volunteers who have come to fight on the side of the Republic. It is to be expected then, that the characters "are less important as individuals than for what they exemplify; principally they are vehicles for ideas and attitudes, rather than roundly drawn personalities in the traditional manner." (Boak, page 116).

While the characters may discuss at broad a range of subjects at christianity and the Catholic church, the Communist Party and art, the main topic of their conversations usually centers around the familiar problem of thought and action. But, whereas in Malraux's earlier novels, the problem was treated on a personal level (can an individual find intellectual justification for his actions?). In L'Espoir the problem seems to be dealt with on a more political level, or at least Malraux seems to have extended the problem to include the question of political expediency.

This is not to say, however, that Malraux ignores the question of thought and action on the personal level. Indeed some of the characters in L'Espoir are very reminiscent of those in La Condition humaine, showing similar motivation for action, or as the the case may be, showing a similar distaste for action on intellectual grounds. There is however one important "type" from Malraux's previous work missing in L'Espoir: the terrorist to whom action is an end in itself. In Hong and Tchen, Malraux seemed to have found characters worthy of consideration and analysis. No such character appears in the pages of L'Espoir. Malraux's thought seems to have progressed to a point where these characters are no longer relevant and worthy of consideration as regards the problem of thought and action. Indeed Malraux now seems to condemn them. For, when Manuel sees a youth writing "Death to Fascism!" on a wall with the blood of the executed Falangists, he decides that: "Il faut faire la nouvelle Espagne contre l'un et contre l'autre, pensa-t-il et l'un ne sera pas plus facile que l'autre." (pg. 653).

If Hong and Tchen, and their mode of coping with their personal anguish through terrorism are dismissed, such characters as Kyo and Katow, and their motivations of human dignity and solidarity are not. Indeed Kyo and his notion of human dignity seem to be reborn in the person of the Negus, the anarchist. For his motivation, like Kyo's is a belief that the downtrodden masses must have dignity:

quand les hommes sortent de prison ... leur regard ne se pose plus. Ils ne regardent plus comme des hommes. Dans le prolétariat aussi, il y a beaucoup de regards qui ne se posent plus. Et il faut changer ça pour commencer. Tu comprends?" (p. 734).

The solidarity among those fighting for a cause is seen throughout the book; among the pilots, among the soldiers of the International Brigade, among the people of Madrid. It is perhaps best exemplified in Moreno's statement: "Il tombe des centaines d'obus, il avance des centaines d'hommes. Tu es seulement un suicidé, et, en même temps, tu possèdes ce qu'il ya de meilleur en tous." (p. 854).

Malraux has also orchestrated the discussion of thought and action with another familiar figure: the aging intellectual who is incapable of action (or who refuses action) by virtue of his intellectuality. Alvéar, a professor of art, and father of Jaime, the blinded aviator, refuses to leave Madrid during the Fascist assault. When Scali asks him if it is out of indifference that he will not leave, he responds: "Pas par indifférence ... par dédain." (p. 818). For Alvéar knows that only a small part of a man is tied up in his actions, and that part does not interest him. Economic oppression does not interest him, either. What interests Alvéar in "La qualité de l'homme ..." (p. 822). Human solidarity, virile fraternity, a group of men fighting together for a cause, also leave Alvéar cold. For after Scali has described the nobility he found in fighting in such a group,

Alvéar remains unconvinced, and sees the individual as being the essential thing. Indeed he is disdainful of "ideal" for which men will fight. "Eh! que le terre soit Fasciste et qu'il [Jamie] ne soit pas aveugle." (p. 822).

Unamuno, too, is not interested in the solidarity among those fighting for a cause. When the fighting begins, Unamuno closes himself off in a small room surrounded by books. He too seems indifferent to death; for he, like Alvéar, will not compromise his values so as to take part, to choose sides in the battle.

Whereas in La Condition humaine, the inactive intellectual had merely seemed futile, in L'Espoir, he is not only futile but to be condemned (if we are to accept Garcia's thoughts as Malraux's own). Because of his disdain for action and solidarity, he is considered immoral.

"For the lack of such a sense of solidarity, Unamuno in L'Espoir is called immoral [by Garcia] ; he has turned his back on a just war because no armies can be just. He has refused action. If the word intellectual - which occurs so often in the work of the author - has pejorative connotations, it is precisely because of this separatist tendency, this unwillingness to be with'(Brombert.)" (p. 135).

If Malraux seems to have rejected the inactive intellectual

and the terrorist, he has also rejected that side of Kyo and men like him, the hero who sacrifices himself to a cause. This is indeed a change; for at the conclusion of La Condition humaine, one sees the self-sacrifice of Kyo and Katow as a glorious tribute to the beliefs for which they fought, and both deaths seem to be victories over the absurdity of their plight as men. In L'Espoir, however, such glorious self-sacrifice seems only futile. When Hernandez is shot at the end of the first part of the novel (entitled, appropriately enough, Illusion Lyrique) his death, although quite tragic, is entirely futile. For what good are his noble sentiments (such as forwarding letters to the wife of the embattled Fascist officer trapped in the Alcazar, out of "générosité" if he willingly sacrifices himself, when he is sorely needed for the fighting?) Indeed Hernandez has chosen to remain in Toledo, although defeat and death are certain. Perhaps this is best summed up in a discussion between the Negus and Garcia:

"Pas d'histories; les hommes résolus à mourir, on finit par les sentir passer. Mais pas de <<dialectique>>; pas de bureaucrates à la place des délégués; pas d'armée pour en finir avec l'armée, par d'inégalité pour en finir avec l'inégalité, pas de combines avec les bourgeois. Vivre comme la vie doit être vécue, dès maintenant ou décéder. Si ça rate, ouste. Pas d'aller-retour.

L'oeil d'écureuil aux aguets de Garcia s'alluma.

Mon vieux Negus, dit-il cordialement, quand on veut que la révolution soit une façon de vivre pour elle-même, elle devient presque toujours une façon de mourir. Dans ce cas-là, mon bon ami, on finit par s'arranger aussi bien du martyre que de la victoire." (p. 735).

While Kyo's and Katow's values of solidarity and human dignity may well be meaningful, they do not justify an empty self-sacrifice to a cause or an idea. That which matters is victory. While noble sentiments may well be a reason to fight, they are unimportant to the new form of 'hero' among Malraux's characters, such as Garcia, who says: "Dans les circonstances comme celles-ci, je m'intéresse moins aux raisons pour lesquelles les hommes se font tuer qu'à leurs moyens de tuer leurs ennemis." (p. 674).

One senses throughout L'Espoir that human solidarity is a beautiful thing, and in the first part of the novel, the Republican victories, especially the defense of Madrid, must be attributed to it. It is however, insufficient. A glorious, unorganized uprising may well win battles, but it cannot win a war.

What is necessary to Garcia is to transform this "apocalypse" into an efficient fighting machine. But efficiency, too, demands its sacrifices. For when Manuel refuses to help the two soldiers who are to be shot, he realizes that: "... il n'est pas un des échelons que j'ai gravis dans les sens d'une efficacité plus grande, d'un commandement meilleur, qui ne m'écarte davantage des hommes. Je suis chaque jour un peu moins humain." (p. 880).

Indeed Heinrich was to foreshadow this view several pages earlier "Nous sommes tous peuplés de cadavres ...: tout le long du chemin qui va de l'éthique à la politique." (p. 873).

Again it is Henrich who sums up the problem later; "Dans toute victoire il y a des pertes ... Pas seulement sur le champ de bataille." (p. 883).

## CONCLUSION

Malraux has expressed his ideas concerning thought and action in many forms. He has explored the conflict between thought and action through various characters on both personal and political levels. He has evaluated "pure" thought and "pure" action through his fictional personages, and he has, in the case of those figures devoted to a life of action analyzed their motivations in great detail.

The resulting picture, as seen in the major novels, is extraordinarily diverse and appropriately bewildering. He has chosen, as his medium, human conflict, in the form of insurrection and revolution. For it is in the face of death, both the giving and taking of it, that the dichotomy of thought and action is of the utmost and can be most dramatically presented.

In Les Conquérants, Malraux had concerned himself chiefly with one character, Garine, and his personal motivation for action, the desire for power. For it is only through power that Garine feels he can negate his nothingness, can triumph over the absurdity of his plight as a man. Garine, then, obsessed by his will to power, becomes a victim, a captive of his own actions and finds that after all "l'absurde retrouve ses droits." )p. 145).

In La Condition humaine, Malraux broadened the scope of his



reflections on thought and action to include not only a consideration of men whose actions are motivated by the desire for power (Ferral), but various other types as well. In *Gisors* he explores the man of pure thought who is incapable of action. In *Tchen* the terrorist he explores "pure action": that is, Malraux presents the man to whom action is an end in itself, a man who, through action alone, feels that he can "possess himself". In *Kyo* and *Katow*, Malraux considers the political idealist, whose beliefs in human solidarity and dignity motivate him to revolutionary action.

Finally, in *L'Espoir*, Malraux takes on another aspect of the dichotomy of thought and action; the problem of ends and means at the political level. To such characters as Garcia and Manuel action is only important if it will result in victory for the cause. Men's reasons for fighting are unimportant. Personal heroism and sacrificing oneself to one's beliefs are futile. But a refusal to act on intellectual grounds is worse; it is immoral ...

Is there, then, a solution to the problem of thought and action as originally laid out in *La Tentation de L'Occident*? Apparently not, for no one resolution is possible to the many aspects of a problem which Malraux has so vividly illuminated in *Les Conquérants*, *La Condition humaine* and *L'Espoir*. Through the sheer depth of his insight, however, André Malraux has made a lasting contribution to contemporary man's knowledge of himself in the realm of one of the most basic problems that confront him.

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