ANDRÉ MALRAUX

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André Malraux

A Reassessment

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For Michèle, Sonia and Julian
and all at *L'Ami Pierre*

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Chronology

- 1901 Georges André Malraux born in Paris.
- 1905 Parents separate, Malraux lives with his mother, her sister and his maternal grandmother over their grocery store in the northern suburbs of Paris.
- 1909 Accidental death of paternal grandfather.
- 1912 Birth of Roland Malraux, André's first half-brother.
- 1915 Begins to buy books from second-hand bookstalls and sell them to specialist second-hand bookshops.
- 1918 Rejected by *lycée* Condorcet. Abandons formal education.
- 1919 Earns living buying books for bookseller-publisher René-Louis Doyon.
- 1920 Birth of Claude Malraux, André's second half-brother. Malraux frequents Parisian literary and artistic circles. Well-known in Paris publishing circles for editing rare and limited editions.
- 1921 *Lunes en papier*. Marries Clara Goldschmidt.
- 1922 Continues publishing fragments of his own prose work. Begins reviewing for *La Nouvelle Revue Française*.
- 1923 First Indochina adventure: Malraux, his wife Clara and Louis Chevasson indicted in Pnom Penh on Christmas Eve for damaging and pillaging temple of Banteay Srei.
- 1924 Newspaper campaign on Malraux's behalf by literary circles in Paris. Appeals court in Saigon reduces Malraux's initial three-year sentence to a one-year suspended jail term. Returns to France in November.
- 1925 Second Indochina adventure: Malraux returns to Saigon to become co-editor of French-language newspaper whose enlightened editorial policies help establish his reputation as left-wing revolutionary.
- 1926 By February Malraux back in France. *La Tentation de l'Occident*.
- 1927 'D'une jeunesse européenne'.
- 1928 *Les Conquérants* and *Royaume-Farfelu*.
- 1929 Artistic director for Gallimard.
- 1930 *La Voie royale*, wins *Interallié* prize. Father commits suicide.
- 1933 Active antifascist campaigner appearing on the *Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires* platform. Preface

- to William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. *La Condition humaine*, wins Goncourt prize.
- 1934 The Queen of Sheba adventure.
- 1935 *Le Temps du mépris*. He becomes identified as one of the foremost antifascist intellectuals in France.
- 1936 Organises and commands international Republican air squadron in Spanish Civil War.
- 1937 Fundraising for Spanish Republican cause in North America. *L'Espoir*.
- 1939 Completes Spanish Civil War film, *Sierra de Teruel*. Enlists in French tank corps in first months of Second World War.
- 1940 Taken prisoner, he escapes to south of France. Joins Josette Clotis. Birth of their first son in November.
- 1943 *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*. Birth of second son.
- 1944 Joins Resistance in south-west France. Captured by Germans in July. Escapes as Germans flee Toulouse. Commander of Alsace-Lorraine brigade. Nazis execute Claude Malraux for Resistance activities. Accidental death of Josette Clotis.
- 1945 Death of Roland Malraux deported for Resistance activities. Becomes de Gaulle's advisor, then Information Minister until General resigns in January 1946.
- 1947 *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* created. Malraux in charge of propaganda. First of three volumes of *La Psychologie de l'art* (1947–49).
- 1950 *Saturne: essai sur Goya*
- 1951 *Les Voix du silence*. First of three volumes of *Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale* (1951–54).
- 1957 *La Métamorphose des dieux*.
- 1958 *Coup d'état* in Algeria. De Gaulle becomes premier and Malraux his Information Minister.
- 1959 Minister of State for Cultural Affairs.
- 1961 His two sons die in automobile accident.
- 1965 Clinically depressed, Malraux undertakes long journey to the Far East.
- 1967 *Antimémoires*.
- 1969 De Gaulle withdraws from presidency. Malraux resigns as minister.
- 1970 *Le Triangle noir*.
- 1971 *Les Chênes qu'on abat . . .*
- 1972 Seriously ill at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris. *Antimémoires* (amended edition).

- 1974 *La Tête d'obsidienne; Lazare; L'Irréel*, second volume of *La Métamorphose des dieux*.
- 1975 *Hôtes de passage*.
- 1976 Malraux dies on 23 November. *La Corde et les souris* (second volume of *Le Miroir des limbes*, the amended version of *Antimémoires* [1972] being the first); *L'Intemporel*, third volume of *La Métamorphose des dieux*.
- 1977 *Et sur la terre; L'Homme précaire et la littérature; Le Surnaturel*, first volume of *La Métamorphose des dieux* (first published in 1957).
- 1978 *Saturne: le destin, l'art et Goya*.
- 1993 *La Reine de Saba: une 'aventure géographique'*.

Preface

This volume presents an overview of André Malraux and his work. Given that the man was something of a legend in his own lifetime and that his work spans some fifty years, it would be presumptuous to claim that all dimensions of Malraux's career and writing are fully explored here. Having said that, I evoke all the major landmarks in what by any standards is an extraordinary life and have attempted as complete a survey of Malraux's works as possible within the parameters of a study such as this. If more attention is paid here to Malraux's writing than to his life, this is not only because he maintained that an artist's biography is his biography as an artist, but also because he was an exceedingly private person. What is known about Malraux's life is known about his public life and this information is widely available.

On a more cautionary note however, it is advisable to bear in mind that Malraux's life is a peculiarly public one. Although he was an adventurer-turned-newspaper-editor in south-east Asia in his early twenties, an internationally renowned novelist by 1933, the organiser of a Republican air squadron in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, a French Resistance hero, a champion of Gaullism from 1945, and although he wrote a series of controversial art studies published between 1947 and 1977, became a Gaullist minister of state from 1959 to 1969 and authored a number of (anti)memorialist essays between 1967 and 1976, Malraux nevertheless felt the need to embellish, stage-manage and sometimes rewrite what to many must appear to have been the fullest of lives. Passively, if not actively, he encouraged the emergence of a parallel legendary existence in which, for example, he was to the left of Ho Chi Minh in Indochina in the twenties, participated in the Chinese revolution in 1925 and, some ten years later, rediscovered the long-lost capital of the Queen of Sheba. The correlation between Malraux's life as Malraux – virtually nothing is known about André – and the highly imaginative treatment of history in *Le Miroir des limbes* is striking. Malraux shaped his public life very much as he shaped the existence of his heroes, be the latter in his novels or among his 'men of History'.

While I seek to expose the myth for what it is when it becomes

intrusive, this study is in no way intended as what could only be a misguided attempt to debunk a literary and political figure who, even when his mythical dimension has been dispersed, remains one of the most fascinating personages on the French cultural scene of this century. He is also one of the great writers of the twentieth century whose work, although never far removed from the domain of the irrational, was a seminal influence on the evolution of existentialist thought in France, having a considerable impact on the imagination of a whole generation of French writers including Camus and Sartre. Not that Malraux is not controversial. For many he is a dual if not contradictory figure who betrayed an initial left-wing revolutionary stance to embrace a rabidly anti-Communist brand of Gaullism in the forties, an about-face which was almost simultaneously paralleled by a renunciation of the novel for the essay. But Malraux as a binary figure in political or literary terms is largely a caricatural figure and one which does not withstand close scrutiny. Never a Communist or a revolutionary, his post-Second World War anti-Communism reflects not so much a change in Malraux's outlook as in the position of Communism on the international scene in the early years of the Cold War. As for his discarding of the novel-form, none of his subsequent essays is ever totally divorced from fiction and the two volumes of (anti)memorialist essays collected together as *Le Miroir des limbes* afford a greater insight into Malraux's transfiguration of reality and chronological time than any of his fiction.

Not always easy to follow in French – although this is less true of his novels than of his early essays, the art studies and *Le Miroir des limbes* – Malraux's work, when translated into English, can lose much of its emotionally-loaded, lyrical dynamism and at times appear dangerously close to empty verbalizing. To a degree this is a consequence of Malraux's often elliptical, sometimes aphoristic discourse which has proved disconcerting for some of his English translators. Much of his work has been translated into English but the translations are variable in quality. For the sake both of clarity and consistency, all the translations into English of quotations from Malraux's work in this study are my own unless otherwise stated and I accept full responsibility for them. This also applies to all other English translations of French sources quoted.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Henriette Colin, of the Comité National André Malraux, David Bevan, Angus Easson

and Walter Langlois for their help and generosity during my tour of the complex Malrucian archipelago. I am also heavily indebted to Elaine Kelly, Joanne Leather and Heather Roberts for their good-humoured efforts to bring their invaluable skills to bear on my hieroglyphics.

G. T. H.

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I am grateful to Les Editions Gallimard for permission to quote from Malraux's works.

List of Abbreviations

The abbreviations listed below are those used throughout this study. The dates given are the original dates of publication and not necessarily those of the editions used in this study. Any work by Malraux not listed here will be referred to by its full title. For fuller bibliographical details consult the Bibliography.

OPC	'Des Origines de la poésie cubiste' (1920)
LP	<i>Lunes en papier</i> (1921)
TO	<i>La Tentation de l'Occident</i> (1926)
AMO	'André Malraux et l'Orient' (1926)
JE	'D'une jeunesse européenne' (1927)
C	<i>Les Conquérants</i> (1928)
RF	<i>Royaume-Farfelu</i> (1928)
ADC	'Autour des Conquérants d'André Malraux' (1929)
VR	<i>La Voie royale</i> (1930)
RAT	'Réponse à Trotsky' (1931)
CH	<i>La Condition humaine</i> (1933)
TM	<i>Le Temps du mépris</i> (1935)
E	<i>L'Espoir</i> (1937)
N	<i>Les Noyers de l'Altenburg</i> (1943)
PFC	'Postface aux Conquérants' (1949)
S	<i>Saturne</i> (1950)
VS	<i>Les Voix du silence</i> (1951)
MISM	<i>Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale</i> , I, II, III (1952–54)
TN	<i>Le Triangle noir</i> (1970)
OF	<i>Oraisons funèbres</i> (1971)
A	<i>Le Miroir des limbes</i> , I, <i>Antimémoires</i> (1972, revised and expanded version of 1967 edition)
IR	<i>La Métamorphose des dieux</i> , II, <i>L'Irréel</i> (1974)
CS	<i>Le Miroir des limbes</i> , II, <i>La Corde et les souris</i> (1976)
IN	<i>La Métamorphose des dieux</i> , III, <i>L'Intemporel</i> (1976)
SUR	<i>La Métamorphose des dieux</i> , I, <i>Le Surnaturel</i> (1977, republication of 1957 edition of <i>La Métamorphose des dieux</i>)
HP	<i>L'Homme précaire et la littérature</i> (1977)