

signed, Malraux

Also by Jean-François Lyotard

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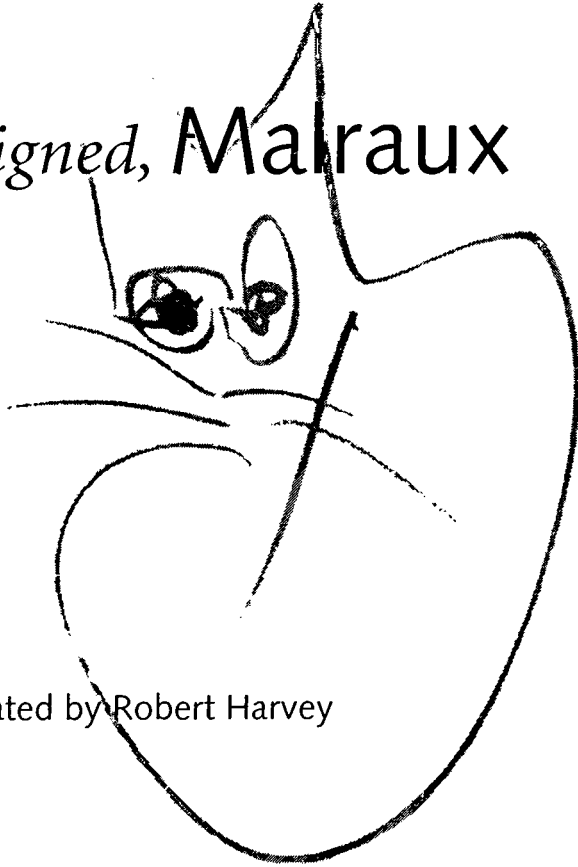
Afterword by Wlad Godzich

Postmodern Fables

Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele

Jean-François Lyotard

signed, Malraux



Translated by Robert Harvey



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Abbreviations

* Published translation modified

† Translation by Robert Harvey; no extant English translation

Works by Malraux

<i>AM</i>	<i>Anti-Memoirs</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>La Condition humaine (OC)</i>
<i>Co/E</i>	<i>The Conquerors</i>
<i>Co/F</i>	<i>Les Conquérants (OC)</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>Le Démon de l'absolu</i>
<i>DW</i>	<i>Days of Wrath</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>L'Espoir</i>
<i>FO</i>	<i>Felled Oaks</i>
<i>HPL</i>	<i>L'Homme précaire et la littérature</i>
<i>Int.</i>	<i>L'Intemporel</i>
<i>Ir.</i>	<i>L'Irréel</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>"D'une jeunesse européenne"</i>
<i>Laz.</i>	<i>Lazarus</i>
<i>LP</i>	<i>Lunes en papier (OC)</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>Man's Fate</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Man's Hope</i>
<i>MISM</i>	<i>Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale</i>
<i>ML</i>	<i>Le Miroir des limbes</i> (Translations from this work that appear in the main text are mine. In <i>ML</i> , Malraux made many emendations and added many passages to the original texts that he included in that work.)
<i>NA</i>	<i>Les Noyers de l'Altenburg</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Œuvres complètes</i>
<i>PM</i>	<i>Picasso's Mask</i>
<i>RF</i>	<i>Le Royaume farfelu (OC)</i>
<i>RW</i>	<i>The Royal Way</i>
<i>Surnat.</i>	<i>Le Surnaturel</i>

VIII ABBREVIATIONS

TM	<i>Le Temps du mépris (OC)</i>
TN	<i>Le Triangle noir</i>
TO	<i>La Tentation de l'Occident (OC)</i>
TW	<i>The Temptation of the West</i>
VR	<i>La Voie royale (OC)</i>
VS/E	<i>The Voices of Silence</i>
VS/F	<i>Les Voix du silence</i>
WTA	<i>The Walnut Trees of Altenburg</i>

Works about Malraux

Bevan	David Bevan, <i>André Malraux: Towards the Expression of Transcendence</i>
Cate	Curtis Cate, <i>André Malraux</i>
Chantal	Suzanne Chantal, <i>Le Cœur battant</i>
Clara	Clara Malraux, <i>Le Bruit de nos pas</i> (Citations that do not include a volume number refer to the English translation, <i>Memoirs</i> .)
CPD	Maria Saint-Clair Van Rysselberghe, <i>Cahiers de la Petite Dame</i>
Desanti	Dominique Desanti, <i>Drieu la Rochelle</i>
Friang	Brigitte Friang, <i>Un Autre Malraux</i>
<i>Girafe</i>	Jacques Poirier, <i>La Girafe a un long cou</i>
Grover	Frédéric Grover, <i>Six Entretiens avec André Malraux</i>
Lacouture	Jean Lacouture, <i>Malraux, une vie dans le siècle</i>
Langlois	Walter Langlois, <i>André Malraux: L'aventure indochinoise</i>
Louise	Jean Bothorel, <i>Louise, ou la vie de Louise de Vilmorin</i>
<i>Marronniers</i>	Alain Malraux, <i>Les Marronniers de Boulogne</i>
Mercadet	Léon Mercadet, <i>La Brigade Alsace-Lorraine</i>
MMM	<i>Mélanges Malraux Miscellany</i>
Mossuz	Janine Mossuz, <i>André Malraux et le gaullisme</i>
Owl	Gustav Regler, <i>The Owl of Minerva</i>
Penaud	Guy Penaud, <i>André Malraux et la Résistance</i>
Peyrefitte	Alain Peyrefitte, <i>C'était de Gaulle</i>
Picon	Gaëtan Picon, <i>Malraux par lui-même</i>
PPF	Guy Suarès, <i>Malraux: Past Present Future</i>
RAMR	<i>Revue André Malraux Review</i>
RLM	<i>Revue des Lettres Modernes</i>
Sauvageot	Marcelle Sauvageot, <i>Commentaire</i>
Stéphane	Roger Stéphane, <i>André Malraux: Entretiens et précisions</i>
Thornberry	Robert Thornberry, <i>André Malraux et l'Espagne</i>
Vandegans	André Vandegans, <i>La Jeunesse littéraire d'André Malraux</i>

Berthe, or the Spider

1

THE SLIM YOUNG WOMAN with violet eyes veiled beneath a *capeline* had enveloped him in her own bereavement on that day in March 1903. And, from the hearse heading down by way of Place Clichy, the little guy could look out with his big peepers and see a hackney coach going by, a bearded man in a derby, an omnibus, bare-headed errand girls with their basket on their arm, a white percheron hauling milk cans, ditch-diggers with their trousers held up by Zouave's sashes, steaming piles of horse manure, a cabriolet automobile, quarry stone facades decorated with nymphs, haberdashery signs and those of café concerts. All these sights were bounced about by the conveyance, and he felt that none of this agitation was real, that all was but decor, *farfelu*¹ cinema. Maman's bosom smelled sweet of quality soap. She spoke to him of things bleak. Sunken in dolefulness, he sat with his nose crushed up against the window.

Beyond the bourgeois apartment buildings were the low stucco houses with their mansard pulley windows: the hearse was presently passing through the Charenton gateway. The toddler could feel the "passing-of-things," that inixture of well-being and ill-being "which has no name in the West," as he would put it shortly before his own death (*Laz.*, 115) — a passing that does not pass, one that a tollhouse can stamp but not stop.

1

In his fifties, Malraux wrote that the same indescribable feeling procured from the works of “the Primitives” emanates from *L’Octroi de plaisance*, the painting that Rousseau (alias the Customs Officer) was making around 1903. It is a feeling both of the spectacle of the monotonous Redundant One,² the “eternal cycle of the Seasons,” and of the “escape from the Wheel of history, giving us, too, a sense of liberation” (*VS/E*, 512*).

He had barely begun to walk when Maman placed him on the ground for a moment at the entrance of a deserted Saint-Maur-des-Fossés cemetery to catch her breath. The casket was placed atop others already inside the ample grave. Things startled by the light were moving in there: earthworms, ghastly larvae, arachnids. A blind fauna that he couldn’t see but that saw him: “the earth was peopled with hands, and perhaps they could have lived alone, acted alone, without men” (*DW*, 140). Berthe sat him on a chair in the caretaker’s stifling loge. His legs dangling, he kept an eye on the tomb-granter’s hairy hand: “simple, natural, yet alive like an eye: death was this” (*RW*, 284*; *VR*, 503).

She inscribed into the register that having died this 18 March “at his brother and mother’s house,” Raymond-Fernand Malraux, born 25 December (sweet Jesus) 1902, had just been inhumed here, in this cemetery, in the Lamy family vault, before Berthe, married name Malraux, his mother, and Georges-André, aged eighteen months, the brother of the deceased. André understood nothing of all this: that his father was absent from the ceremony, that the bereavement his young mother bore was overwhelming, that the little three-month-old brother was gone forever, and that by his mute presence at this very instant of farewell he himself had just countersigned the first exploit of his own life.

His world would remain colonized by women veiled in black, by mothers lamenting dead children, by widows. In an instant he conjured up forever the picture of women silently weeping over graves, waiting for men lost and then returned when it was too late, and laughing up their sleeves. Such is the scene that the minister, at his desk in 1968, sketches for himself: “While attending the national funeral held for Anatole France, I imagined what one for Verlaine, born the same year, might have been like. But I could only think of the terrible funeral he had in actuality with his mistress screaming over the grave, ‘Paul, all your friends are here!’” (*ML*, 589†). The bell of failure impressed itself upon him from this beginning. His entire work would strive to toll this knell. In one stroke, the vision of his mother prostrated over the little casket determined the bad timing of a son never present at rendezvous. Still, why did they persist in giving birth, only to find themselves making the sign of the cross over

graves? Spouses, lovers, sons all gone off to measure themselves against an idiotic destiny, to wrest some meaning from it, only to return the only present they could offer to the women: their remains. The little guy knew nothing of this eclipse or of the “passing-of-things.” But now that knowledge had come to him, he knew that he would have to play out the scene of this exile and carry out this work far away. He knew that he would be vanquished there and that, in his turn, he would have to come back and present his dead countenance before the *dolorosa*.

Yet they were obstinate and went on engendering, never understanding. Either that or they had always already understood the futility of it all, that they doomed whatever they brought into the world and repeated the suffering as beasts have done for millennia. Life to be repeated, life to be surmounted: here lay the ferocious misunderstanding between men and women. This was their exchange. These were the wrong scents that they put each other on, blindly, like two races forced to unite in order to perpetuate some nonexistent species, one race celebrating under the name of life what the other officiated unto death. “The mystery of life appears to each one of us as it appears to almost every woman when she looks into a child’s face and to almost every man when he looks into the face of someone dead” (*AM*, 2). At sixty-five, André was still striving to assign roles by dividing them into these two groups. But at the age of one, he had witnessed, through Berthe’s eyes, the appalling blur between the face of a dead child and clay swallowing it up.

Fernand, the father, had already more or less given her the slip. He would soon leave her altogether. But Berthe already had it figured out and had decided, this time, that she’d had enough. She didn’t want any more children by this man: she simply could no longer. So now, when he approached her womb, she screamed that she had had it with stillborn children. She knew he was cheating and thoughtless. Already dead for her, he could only produce the dead in her. Still desiring to use her long, amber body, he too screamed that it was his right and her duty. André plugged his ears: a sense of horror fomented revolt in him and a sense of the ridiculous arose from the redundancy of their *différend*.³ And, impatient for some sort of resolution, the kid ended up screaming as well, saying that if they went on fighting he’d call the village police. Suddenly, his parents burst into uncontrollable laughter. Those crazies could go on laughing: he had a village of his own — his madness — to police.⁴

So, to go seducing elsewhere, Fernand ended up taking off for good from Rue Damrémont. Next, he would live with Lilette Godard. There

had never been any shortage of women for this strapping, handsome Fleming. But he would always give his women the short shrift. He finally decided to marry Lilette in 1922 when their first son, Roland, was ten and Claude was two. Yet he went missing from the second conjugal bed too, courting and seducing Lilette's sister, Gaby. Or did he just let himself be seduced by her? In the end, having taken all things into consideration, he turned on the gas and killed himself cleanly. By this time, 1930, André was certainly at an age to recognize this bent of a man: habitual leave-taking, obstinate absences, or simply powerlessness to belong to anyone.

Everything congealed, however, at the age of four when a forsaken Berthe left number 53 in Rue Damrémont with her little guy to take refuge at her mother's place in Bondy. Adrienne had a house there in Rue de la Gare where, with her second daughter, Marie (the other virgin, the widow of Lamy, the baker from Saint-Maur), she managed the small grocery store situated at street level. Everybody squeezed in. André felt stifled. In winter, a pair of gaslights could barely brighten this village where dark, severe women held vigil, recounting their misery, chatting about neighbors, clients, nothing much, a bit of the past, a little future. But their talk was animated, they knew how to turn a tale and feign shock. A certain eloquence made its way into the child through his big ears. His father's betrayal was passed over in silence. Attempting, perhaps, to go on wooing Berthe, he saw his son once a week in Paris. Much would have to be tolerated. These women would get on without a man, lending a hand to each other, protecting the orphan. With God's help. Religion there was: one never knows. "I was formed by Christianity" (PPF, 62).

Grandmother acted as master of the house and Maman took her mother for a man. All in vain. André knew that their arrangement couldn't work, that it was an imposture as well as an unseemly tutelage. The true law is one that imposes a flight. The orphan knew that, as a man, Papa left because beckoned by something about which women pretended to understand nothing even though the paths of conduction toward it were necessarily they themselves—their bosom, the channels of their flesh, their beseeching or mirthful eyes. In women, men were to become mired so that they could leave. The kid would, in his turn, follow that rule. The women laughed, weeping, at all this. "Off Crete. . . I escaped"—thus begins his *Anti-Memoirs* (AM, 1). With Crete off in the distance, the young cock begins his escape from the henhouse.

The Lamy household — “that lonely halfway house which we call life” (*AM*, 1) — smelled too much of the refuge and good old down-home soup. He had no alternative but to pack up and leave, making it known that he was not part of nor did he have any need for their hovel. He wasn’t going to have his life set to the rhythm of that sour bell that tinkled the same way whether someone was entering or exiting the store. In that surplus of sweetness, petticoat promiscuity, and incestuous attentions, a peculiar terror was brewing — one that André would never manage to dissipate although he would devote himself to facing it in all its forms, whether through images or roles created. He dreaded the thought of remaining a girl in the midst of women, of one day being made pregnant by a man doomed to failure with a son equally doomed to failure, and of having to weep over that son lying in a pit of clay. “Men do not have children” (*DW*, 170). Unknown to the child, a sense of anguish was congealing into phobias — so-called feminine phobias — about spiders and octopuses, bugs, snakes, and rats. Everything that squeezes you fishily and penetrates you from behind: figures of gentle violation. Like his mother, he was born on 3 November.

He later recognized this inner dread whose name is woman in an engorged Goya and in T. E. Lawrence. He would put that dread to the test in the tropical forest — that environment so abundant in the base things that obsessed his character, Kassner, in *Days of Wrath* — the novel that he deemed a miserable flop with such defiance that he sometimes managed to have his editor strike it from his list of “other works by” (precisely because it said too much about its author). Only at the end of his life would he name this dread. At the instant when Lazarus believes or at least claims that he has eliminated this dread by slipping beneath it and discovering a “consciousness of existence” delivered from all images and purified by the serene realization that there is, simply, *nothing*, he declares that “no religion, no experience has taught us that dread is *within us*. . . . I encountered it in the way that a psychiatrist discovers within himself the spiders and octopuses of his patients’ nightmares” (*Laz.*, 92). That dread was hatched in Bondy while he lay snagged in the web woven by Berthe’s beautiful hands. That dread as well as a terror of penetrability, of being a woman’s womb and remaining, like them, the hostage of that womb. The abhorrence of possible humiliation and the humiliation of experiencing that abhorrence. The child swore to himself that he would be impenetrable. And by this promise made unknown to himself, André decided that he would give birth to himself and so owe nothing

to women. He thus believed, as he later said to Clara, that he was obeying the true law of men, which was to forge their own statue, bypassing gestation. As much as you may hate what has had you, André hated his childhood because it was female.

Yet for the thing that has had you and that you hate, for the mother, there is an attachment rendered so powerful by its denial that one is compelled to be had by her many times. One thus tries one's skill and blunders endlessly with wombs and gluttonous spiders only to escape again. Women and nightmares will crop up all along, then, and the facial twitches to shake off the glue, childish fears and a spasmodic snorting that constantly works itself up to clear those nasal passages congested by the millenary asphyxiation: "We dream about the same octopuses and the same spiders as the Babylonians did. And the spider of nightmares is one of the most ancient animals on earth" (*PM*, 38). So you believe that by hawking you can extirpate the sticky stuff left in you by the matrix and driving you nuts? Throughout life, but beginning in the depths of Bondy, he was choking.

Grandmother Adrienne was not without a certain loftiness. Born under the name of Romagna (and harsh like a Romagnese), she had married a certain Jean-François Lamy, a journeyman baker born in 1848 in the Jura. He came to Paris as a young man, perhaps around 1870. Was it because of France's defeat? Was it for the Commune? Whatever the case, at less than thirty years of age, at the time of his marriage, he supported his world—the mother and two daughters—by baking in Saint-Maur. What was he when he died? Had he had to part with certain anarchosocialist hopes? Or was he simply reveling on the verge of seeing his business set up? He was forty-three at the time. His widow completed the bakery and became a grocer in Bondy. André was witness to his mother managing the house, his aunt the grocery store, and his grandmother overseeing the whole. And she was quite a reader. In the summer of 1924, when Clara went to Boulevard Edgar-Quinet (where they had moved after selling the Bondy property) and visited the three women whom André had hidden from his own wife for five years, she found the stern ancestor reading Crevel. She would occasionally react to the misfortunes and disorders of the period by declaring, "In my days, we'd be out in the streets." With his big ears, André heard that the street "out there" might deliver him from the mire "in here." In the street or through some book, people part company. Better yet, the book is a street and the street a sort of book: this is the lesson he would grasp from the old, odd grocer woman.

Thus, by the same path as the dread that was depositing itself in him in the form of phobias, a resolution arose: to get out. He could go anywhere: all that mattered was to leave. He was sure that blocks of words extracted from a book were in no way different from paving stones and that—revelation or revolution, by letters or by arms—either way out was equally acceptable. One could bring out a book or one could draw a pistol: either way, he had to escape. Panic, flight. Toward whom? Toward what? Adrienne told him that neither “who” nor “what” mattered. Nor would the direction (from above or from below) by which one gets there. All that mattered was to head out. This much he knew and he didn’t want to know that he knew it from her because, after all, she was nothing but a womb, the genetrix of his mother—his own great womb—and, as such, had not been able to bound away as one should on account of that uterus.

In the meanwhile, he stayed. It is easy to imagine Adrienne having him placed, at the age of five, in a nearby private school in Bondy’s Rue Saint-Denis. The Dugand establishment was run by two teachers for twenty-odd students. And perhaps it was also she who sent him off, at eleven, to join the Bondy scout troop. Baden Powell’s movement was barely four years in existence then. One can see how much these women wanted him educated and wished him to take a bit of distance from the petticoats. Inside there was only trivial gush for the boy: too many mothers, too much protection, a mush of attention. He was sent out for the purpose of inculcating pluck and guile. He was, however, to remain singularly awkward, unable either to drive an automobile or fly an airplane, disinclined to the manual and material worlds. A spoiled boy, certain that either someone would do for him or else he would manage without (except for the revolver: the guy thing). Useful hands would always be the hands of others: working hands, that is, kitchen and service hands, hands allied with the constraints of objects, wedded with them, committed to survival—that is, to death. André would reserve his hands, however, solely for exploits, for lending emphasis to his speech or his silence with gestures, for hurrying the end of the cigarette perpetually lodged between his index and middle fingers, for pointing out a shape or a color or an idea not to be missed—and of course for tickling the trigger. He probably first acquired his attention to clothing, which he would always wear ostentatiously, from the hands of those seamstress-mothers eager to have him look smart. But he would pervert its meaning: elegance would not suffice, he would have to show himself to be arrogant, trimmed for death. To Clara’s shock, he considered it altogether

appropriate that the officers of August 1914 be killed in their shako plumes and white gloves. Was it not Brummell who died banished and wretched for having dared to give a lesson in fastidiousness to His Majesty, King George IV, and his court?

André made his first friend at the Dugand School: a certain Chevasson. And he kept this friend his entire life despite the fact that Louis was modesty itself. Or perhaps for that reason. Clara called him The Colorless One. This was nonetheless a quality: that of water or of a mirror—the virtue of a witness. Through his friend’s unpretentious eyes André was able to gaze upon himself to ensure that he was unrecognizable. “Claude followed Perken’s gaze; it was riveted on Claude’s reflection in the glass. For an instant he, too, scanned through alien eyes his forehead and projected chin” (*RW*, 51–52). He retained Louis, involving him in a few doomed expeditions because, in addition to being his companion, he had been witness to his beginnings as a man. There were the usual initial curiosities shared by young males, but also, together, these two kids learned to read and write. Henceforth endowed with the power of letters and books, André could equal his grandmother in freeing himself from the glue of the present, from the onrush of hours, and from the gossip. Weary of outliving itself, Death (*Paper Moons*) paints a Boschian image of humans as eggcups: “Just look at them haphazardly granting the title of God of the Eggcups, committing their eggcup misfortunes to him. And listen to the female eggcups boasting, ‘The harmonious figure of the female eggcup is, without doubt, superior to that of the male.’ How they simper!” (*LP*, 24†). A picture of human vanity without doubt, a picture of the cackle of the Parisian literati and, notably, that of the Prix Femina bluestockings. But it is perhaps also the prattle heard in the Lamy grocery store.

The child could soon turn what he read—the legend—against the tutelage of women and objects. He set himself to reading as one fights, to escape, to travel, as one takes vengeance. He was d’Artagnan, Robin Hood, and the Last of the Mohicans, just as he would later be Julien Sorel, Bonaparte, Hoche, and Saint-Just. A humiliated hero, an oppressed people, a queen forsaken in the sands: all causes were valid as long as they demanded of him his life and his willpower. Take a look: the Trotsky of Alma-Ata, Solomon’s Balkis buried in the Sa’ada Desert,⁵ Israelis and Bengalis—at seventy years of age the asthmatic kid could still be seen reassembling some brigade or other to go off and save them. It’s always a brigade, since against beasts of oblivion one can only plunder. As he told Suarès in 1973, glory was already something that derived from

“a life *outside life*” (PPF, 20). Thursdays, with the scouts, in accordance with their rule, he practiced memorizing at a glance all of the varied objects placed on the table by his troop leader, Henry Robert, so that it would be revealed that he could name them without mistake when the scarf that hid them was suddenly lifted. Trained in Bondy at Kim’s game, that infallible glance would later grasp the paintings, drawings, engravings, and sculptures of the entire world. In wonderment would Clara recognize that same flash in the eyes of their daughter, Florence, the first time she led her into a gallery. On Sundays, in the Villemomble woods, he organized assaults, prepared ambushes with his patrol, discovered that he was never afraid and that he knew how to command. In the backyard of the house in Rue de la Gare, he tried his hand at the popgun.

Back under the maternal lamp he fell silent, ate his prisoner’s soup, nourishing thoughts of his exile. Or else, exalted and inexhaustible, he would recount his own sword fights and tug-of-war games or add apocryphal chapters to the adventures of Robin Hood. While the women laughed at seeing him so far elsewhere, he despised their display of good nature. They would dress him as a British seaman or disguise him as musketeer. On holidays, they took him to the roving cinema in the town square to see *Les Misérables*. Later, he would go with Chevasson to see the Tramp and the westerns. He haunted the “popular” library to borrow and read Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Alexandre Dumas, and, soon, Flaubert’s *Salammbô* and Balzac’s *Les Chouans*. All means toward exoticism were necessary since he hungered to get away. Like a veteran patron, the boy authorized himself to have the library order any books that were lacking: the library became his home — both house of culture and shepherd’s refuge.

In the depths of his suburb, André was practicing the gesture out of which would emerge the museum without walls: loading himself up with their bounty, he was gathering all available possibilities in order to face the poverty of the given. The lost schoolboy found himself, inventing himself through his books at his desk in Bondy’s Rue Saint-Denis, his head in those hands that were good only for holding that head just so that it could go off to war — a war against the humiliation of being born in this state, of having come from this place, of not having wanted what he got: this *he* that he happened to get. He burned to be what he was not. His will took on the permanent characteristic of separation: his father’s bent.

So well, in his panic, did the little man anticipate this separation that it immediately and definitively took form under the guise of an intractable

silence. As if he had never had a mother, he would no longer say anything about her side of the family. At twenty, half-heartedly, he tried to make Clara believe that Berthe lived at the Claridge Hotel. We don't even know if in March 1932, in the midst of writing *Man's Fate* in Paris, he bothered to bury his mother when she succumbed to an embolism. He often repeated that he disliked his childhood, that he had hated it, in fact, and still did. Besides, he heedlessly would add, he had no memory of it. As if hatred had a faulty memory.

A few scenes escape, nevertheless, from this resolute amnesia. In 1935, he has the following words fall from the lips of Kassner, the hero of *Days of Wrath*, and then, in 1967, in his *Anti-Memoirs*, he quotes himself as saying:

I had heard it said that the lines on the hands of the dead fade, and as if to see this last manifestation of life again before it disappeared, I had scrutinized my dead mother's palm for a long time; although she was hardly more than fifty [Berthe died at fifty-four], and her face and even the back of her hand had stayed young, her palm was almost that of an old woman, with its fine deep lines intersecting indefinitely [here, Kassner had added: "like all destinies"]. And now it began to merge with all the lines on the earth below me, devoured by the mist and the gathering darkness [Kassner's insistence: "and assuming the features of fatality"]. (*AM*, 64–65; *DW*, 134)

Twice erasing Kassner's reference to destiny, André's tableau only reaffirms the fate of erasure. Beneath its appearance of vital freshness, the maternal palm revealed its funereal truth not from the mere fact of death itself but because the mother, like the earth, belonged for all time to the realm of the forces of oblivion. "The earth suggests death by its age-old torpor as well as its metamorphosis, even if this metamorphosis is the work of man," he reminds us at the opening of his *Anti-Memoirs* (*AM*, 1). Having come to witness the final living act of a dead woman, the son saw another kind of life — one that death could not alter, one that death could not cheer: this life was dead before death. In that patient palm he read that those who believed (as one opens paths to adventure in earthly forests and deserts) that they could engrave upon time the trace of their designs were simply mythomaniacs or fools. He further saw that the earth scoffs at such undertakings and ends by swallowing up the whole thing.

Upright like some ignored violet iris, this Berthe whom Clara met as a young woman had been culled long before, as Cora was by the master

of hell, and had then been secretly wedded to him. She dwelled in the depths of all tombs. This, her son read in the lines of her hand. And it would be with a kind of love and gratitude that he wrote and rewrote what he had read there. Thus, secreting her glair, Berthe awaited him in the center of her alluringly open black web. And were he to raise his eyes toward the heavenly web, the night would return him the imprint of an indifferent palm: “with death, lying in wait up there among its stellar plains, which caused the network of the veins of the living earth to appear to me like the lines on my dead mother’s hand” (*AM*, 69). He expected that she was everywhere lying in wait for him. And, concerning the void, with which they were both perfectly conversant, they were in complete agreement.

Here’s another exhibit for the file relating to their complicity. No need for me to confess that it’s a fake, though, because mythopoesis, as we shall see, fictionally constructs this putative “life.” What is authentic is not what some third party verifies or confesses, but what this “life” signs. This piece of evidence is inspired by two scenes signed Malraux. He was ten or twelve years old. He went upstairs one winter evening and Maman’s door was ajar. Without bothering to turn on the light, he glided toward the vanity that could be seen by the light of the hallway. What was he to do with himself? There were too many heroes and he would never believe in anything. At church, during the exaltation, he muttered to himself, “You’re lying.” Why not finish it all right now?

“Which leaves suicide, I tell you. But you don’t want to die. You don’t want to die, you little bastard! And yet look at yourself—a fine face to use for a dead man . . .”

He drew still nearer, his nose almost touching the glass; he twisted his face, mouth open, into a gargoyle’s grimace . . . :

“Everyone can’t be dead? Obviously: it takes a little of everything to make a world. . . .”

He made a different face, mouth shut and drawn towards the chin, eyes half-opened, like a carnival samurai. And immediately, as if he had found a way of expressing directly in all its intensity the torment which words were not adequate to translate, he began to make faces, transforming himself into a monkey, an idiot, a terrified person, an apoplectic, into all the grotesques that a human face can express. This no longer sufficed; he used his fingers, drawing out the corners of his eyes, enlarging his mouth for the toad face of the man-who-laughs, flattening his nose, pulling out his

ears. Each of these faces spoke to him, revealed to him a part of himself hidden by life; this debauchery of the grotesque in the solitary room, with the night mist piled against the window, was assuming the atrocious and terrifying humor of madness. He heard his own laughter — a single note, the same as his mother's. (*MF*, 217–18)

Standing at the door, having gone up silently, Berthe laughed along with him — a single outburst of laughter, like him. Was it for having caught her Dédé in a moment of such madness? Or was it for his having discovered her secret — that we don't exist?

An odor of corruption wafted from the stagnant marshes hung on the air. A picture rose before Claude's eyes: his mother wandering forlornly through his grandfather's old house, almost invisible in the half-light but for the bulge of her heavy hair dully glinting in the gloom; he saw her peering into the little mirror crested with a galleon in full sail, staring aghast at the sagging corners of her lips and her swollen nose, stroking her eyelids with blind, automatic gestures. (*RW*, 87–88)

So they shared the same spasm that she recognized right away: a convulsion that rattled her throat whenever the unutterable certainty of her superfluousness rose up. Furious, André dashed passed her. She put out the hallway light. They returned downstairs.

He was furious at having been tricked by the spider lurking behind him. He would seek revenge. "Not a word," repeated Clappique, to whom *Man's Fate* assigns this scene of devilry. Not a word about his mother; not a word to his mother. And, even more solemn: like his mother, not a word to the living, not a word about the living. That nothing matters: this produces a laugh from the depths — an altogether dry laugh. That of Valéry interjecting at the end of a development written later with "furthermore, who gives a damn?" Berthe least of all. André loved the fact that she was the very figure of deception, mockery, and sadness that is life — a life that collaborates surreptitiously with death. He both loved and hated her mauve beauty. He would owe to her his trepidation, his eagerness to break up relationships, his hunger for adventure. In vain would he protest this debt and deny the creditor; his lifelong denial itself marked how much he was a tributary of that palm — that petal forever crushed — and of that laugh that in one burst struck down any faith one could stake in the success of insurrection. A neutral surface, an inert support: for him, the sumptuous undifferentiation between the liv-

ing and the deceased would extend out onto the world and history like a veil of mourning thrown over anything that might appear to distinguish itself. This night that defied his will and would later stimulate it, this Asia: his mother was all this. She was the inalterable womb of the seasons and the laughter of their cycle, the voracious Redundant One. It was thus that she trained her son to feverishly seek what she could never dissipate.

The mother — the three mothers — expected just one thing from their little guy: that he would refuse submission to them. In order to glory in his achievement of achieving glory at their expense, they threw him into the world of men early. They prodded him into expounding against their sorry cause, against the grocery store, against abandonment, against infertile maternity, against the trappings of gossip and sanctimony, against their atheistic laugh. They wished for this man — yet so small and born to die — to become so enraged by their tender inanity that he would go out once and for all into the street, shut the door that jingled like laughter, and forget them. And to forget them so effectively that he would even forget that everything he would do or write would, in fact, be rendered back to them, since it was from them that he had negatively received the mission. They felt no bitterness in the knowledge that he had to renounce them and, through them, all women: they helped him do it and loved him for it. When the Indochinese endeavors left him down and bankrupt (yet unyielding — miles from a loser like Clappique), the three mothers mended his clothes and fed him and Clara throughout the spring of 1926. Clara was shocked by his parasitism. The child in André was surprised at her shock. He hadn't asked for any favors: he simply counted on their kindness. He had left for good long ago and he wasn't coming back. He had just taken temporary shelter. Yet despite appearances, a certain indebtedness crept in. His whole life long, he would thus strive to style away the stickiness that they inadvertently caused him to fear. His love for the Lamy ladies forced him to ceaselessly break off with people. No doubt he was unsuccessful in these many breakups. In an aside, between two sentences written in La Salpêtrière Hospital, he confessed: "Mothers don't just haunt the shadows" (*ML*, 911†). Where else do they haunt us? In a shadowy inversion that would not be governed by man's will or by his lucidity — simply the shadows inverted, "an irrationality of the caves," fraternity, love. In *Mirror of Limbo*, Torrès says: "Tenderness is clearly the most important thing that exists between men and women" (*ML*, 600†). Not genitivity or sexual liberation. Mothers haunt tenderness, too.

The Malraux

2

ON THE MALRAUX SIDE, there is much more to say. Born to a mother who became a stranger, the child saw his father almost every week. Sometimes he spent the summer at the family home in Dunkirk. André built his family saga upon the patronymic alone—a patronymic associated with outward-bound men. This mark of prestige haloed Fernand, the father, from the outset. He was never malicious when taking leave, and, once departure was accomplished, he maintained a good distance from the forsaken women. Content with being elusive, there was no resentment. He dreamed of obtaining patents for ingenious contraptions, and he lived on the stock market and his success with women, as was still the practice at the beginning of this century when an end to such easy ways was already on the horizon. Smoothing his mustache, he was simply pleased to please. At the town hall of the sixteenth arrondissement where André's marriage with Clara was thrown together (Fernand called her Claire because Clara was the name of a girl with whom he had, let us say, certain habits), the bride's mother was smitten by the dapper gallant. "You ought to have picked the father. He is much nicer than the son," her Aunt Goldschmidt whispered to her (Clara, 192). The Lamy ladies did not attend this civil ceremony: the union was rubbish—a bit of rotten luck that

deprived them of the great destiny they expected for their darling. At the time (1921) Clara said that her true mother-in-law was not Berthe but Lilette, who greeted her as an emancipated woman.

A minor, not yet twenty years old, André was initially denied Fernand's permission to marry: you're too young, it's too hurried, and to a German who's older than you (he was very "*bleu horizon*").¹ But, soon, to please Lilette, he gave in. And then he liked their carefree attitude, the extemporaneousness of the two youths' decision, their style that said, "What's an institution, anyway? We'll be divorced in six months!" In André's offhandedness, he could see himself and loved it. Experience taught him that in regard to the business of life he was impertinence itself. He received the young couple at Bois Dormant ("Sleeping Beauty"), his house near Orléans. They chatted easily. Between his son and himself, there was tacit agreement that one is never fully really here and that it's better this way. They shared the belief that when people break up for the evening, it's not certain that they'll find each other again in the morning. And who cares? "So, we'll never see each other again, right?" was the send-off Alain heard in 1966 at the threshold of André's residence in Versailles — Alain, André's nephew whom he took as his son. "Even though our lunch date for the following week had already been arranged," the young man adds (*Marronniers*, 287). Was suicide haunting Malraux ever since the accident that had killed his two sons outright five years before? Rather, this was an expression of that ever-legendary evanescence of his. Was it only about Lawrence that Malraux wrote in 1943, "He had made it a point of honor to never say when or where he would be off to" (*DA*, 743†)?

He shares with his father an affinity for vanishing and an innate sense — cultivated in André's case — for all that is precarious. As if the only promise one can make to oneself and be sure to keep were that separations from others are inevitable because we are born separate. Women we have, or else we don't; money we possess, or else we lose it; we've lived long enough so we shove off. In January 1925, André leaves again for Saigon, where he was convicted two months before. His purpose: to establish a newspaper defending the colonized. Fernand gives him a large sum of money (fifty thousand francs at 1925 value) with the simple warning: don't fail. In 1930, the already famous son is in the polemical heat surrounding *The Conquerors* and *The Royal Way*. His father hangs a sign on the door of his son's bedroom that reads: "Please put out your cigarette before entering." He keeps a pistol within reach just in case. He writes out the instruction that his death should be veri-

fied by sticking him with a lancet. (André, incidentally, will duly carry out this prescription.) He turns on the gas and resumes his reading of *La Doctrine bouddhiste*. “Were I to be reborn, I would like to be Fernand Malraux once again,” he had said upon leaving his children. André places just such a declaration in the mouth of Dietrich Berger in *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*.

And so, Papa would go through the whole routine all over again: he would take Gaby as his mistress, she would entrust him with managing her fortune, she would take that fortune away from him because he was ruining her, she would threaten him in order to recover her property, and she would denounce him to the authorities for having legitimized Roland, Lilette’s firstborn son, while he was still married to Berthe. Then, finally separated from Lilette, at long last, harried by it all, he would attempt suicide again. This was his happy variation of the “who cares?” attitude, a version of the eternal return as cooked up by some poilu in an amusement park: a bit of courage, little merit, lent but never given, shoving off.

Judging from the portrait of Vincent Berger sketched by his son in *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*, this is how André saw Fernand:

As a child, I loved to watch the wings of gliding gulls: I was more attracted by their double scythe-like blades than by the window of a cake-shop. One day I was with a group of fishermen standing round a dead frigate bird — perhaps it had been killed, perhaps it had died a natural death — which lay flattened on the pier at Bornholm: the stunted body of a hen between two huge, superb wings. For me my father’s physical appearance has always been associated with the word “frigate”: with the bird and even with the boat, which I cannot distinguish from a corvette and which I have probably never seen. (*WTA*, 37)

Signed Berger and nothing more, the son lost his first name: “I always forget that my name is not André” (*AM*, 173). The narrator of the Bergers’ story is the patronymic, that emblem of lineage: his name in majesty: “The dichotomy probably applies to most of the great men of history, and to most great artists; Napoleon is not Bonaparte. . . . The statues of the future have already, willy-nilly, taken possession of the men who are worthy of statues. Charles is modeled by life, and De Gaulle by destiny” (*AM*, 105). “There is nothing of Charles in his *Mémoires*” (*FO*, 22).

And there will be nothing of André in the *Anti-Memoirs*. “I shall sculpt my own statue,” he would say to Clara (*Clara*, 3: 166). By seizing the patro-

nymic, the son transforms himself into the father's father. He sculpts the dashing Fernand as a frigate bird brought down on a Baltic pier. He carves armorial bearings with crossed sabers in the granite of Bornholm for him. (What is this name? Island of birth, born in isolation or born helmeted? And what about the frigate bird? Was it killed or did it dash itself against this remote stone?) The obituary signed by the son, in any case, furnishes the outline of a heraldic Malraux.

This proud homage rendered unto Fernand by the Malraux is not incompatible with a real affection in André for his father. Far from it: "I failed to see the important side of his character which everyone always fails to see in his own people. . . . Did I love him because he was my father? The love of parents for their children is universal, and filial love is rare. But since I had a father I was happy, and sometimes proud, that it was he" (*WTA*, 38).

An altogether peculiar, man-to-man affection where authorization works in both directions, each man responding to the other. "The one man in the world, my father reflected bitterly [that man was Vincent], the one man to whom my few moments of success really brought some joy or pride [this moment was when Vincent discovered his father's, Dietrich's, suicide]" (*AM*, 19). When Fernand commits suicide on 20 December 1930, Malraux's name is on everyone's lips: filiation is assured, the eponym honored.

To the mother, there will never be any monument, no funerary crest. She's the one, after all, who buries, who is the Gravedigger. But we may also suppose that she is the Donor and the Gracious One to whom are rendered true lives and the élan of works. As Victory of Samothrace, having lost her arms, Berthe also lost her palms for forcing compliance. A feminist interviewing Malraux comments maliciously: "She lost her head, too." To which André rapturously replies: "Who cares? She has wings."²

At age forty, his son was drawing on the paternal gay science to lend *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* their substance. But Lamy style—that is, tragically. He would be prohibited Fernand's ease with separation. His mothers had told him that one doesn't take off so easily, that something had to give—oneself and others had to be ripped apart. He learned from them that things were screwed up from the outset, that the Buddhism Papa was skimming over while asphyxiating himself brought absolutely no remedy to annihilation, that a dead André wouldn't come back a second time to play out André's life, that the weepers would be waiting for him and the earth, laughing along with the spiders, would simply shove

him into a hole. Death only demanded from the father an inveterate competence for evacuating issues concerning life. And André inherited some of this. But, from the Lamy branch, he also got the notion that passing is not death: that life is already death. Merely confirming the inertia of life, suicide made no sense. Doomed to presume, one simply had to act clever and question things. If he was forced to build a legend out of his patrilineage (to which Fernand adapted with unassuming dignity: “You are worthy of being a Malraux,” he said to Clara one day. “My people have always lived between Calais and Dunkirk and they have always been proletarians” [Clara, 346]), it was because as a youngster André contracted an illness that his father didn’t have: the mothers’ illness, an illness much worse than realism, the illness of reality, nihilistic dread. Not nihilist thinking, rather a heart devoured by nothing. By the women’s “what does it matter?” attitude he was motivated into a retrenched “all the same,” whose result was his fiction. In his books and in his life, he fabricated a legend of fathers. As he would later say, no one can act like a prince and remain fully conscious of the bluff. So who’s going to announce to the world that he’s the son of a grocer woman? Right? Hence the fable.

Fernand went to Dunkirk in 1909 to bury his father. André, then age eight, began to think up the novel of the ancestor’s death. The clumsy blow of the battle ax with which, it was said, the old carpenter of ships and barrels wanted to finish the prow figure on one final trawler (his flotilla had sunk, he was ruined) and which split his head open when it bounced back made a direct hit on the grandson’s fabular talents. André now had the myth of his own origins. He fictionalized this scene because it had all the elements he needed for his filiation of heroes: the old Flemish Morold’s ax,³ his failed venture, a legacy of suicide, the prow timbers wrecked in the high seas, the ancestor’s prowess lasting to his last day, the vanity that prowess brings, the flotilla of whalers perished in the waters of Newfoundland, the insurance companies’ refusal to cover the calamity because enterprises must be undertaken unassisted and out in the open, a powerful family’s decline.

At the age of forty, he put to paper the imaginary truth of this filiation from which women were, of course, banished. A genealogy arose in deafening silence—a dead tree: generations of dead fathers, all filled with pride and despair. *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* thus recounts the Berger epic: veritable guardians of virile *virtù*; vain and valiant shepherds. And in that handful of earlier novels between 1930 and 1936 that André bestowed on the little epic valor perhaps still left in the modern narra-

tive, figures of such fathers proliferated—figures that arose only to be felled in the same gesture, figures cut out of the community by the ax, lending example and space to the prowess of their sons. Later, as “felled oak,” de Gaulle would be included among them. The transmission would always take place silently, from man to man, at the deathbed: Gisors smoking his hemp at his Kyo’s bedside, Vincent meditating upon Dietrich’s death in the bedroom yet to be opened and tidied up where the father poisoned himself, Claude recounting the final days of his grandfather, Vannec, the Dane, to Perken. And the endless wake for dead men will spread out over the entire oeuvre all the way through Malraux’s meditations on artistic creation: the museum without walls is a mausoleum of moving parricides. In the funerary orations delivered as minister, Malraux found the voice demanded by his truth as imaginary son and grandson: the exaltation of the *andréia*, the ancient Greek celebration of citizens fallen in combat. Thus would be transmitted the message, the old testament of men’s separation, their mission endlessly swallowed by the shadows and relayed. He pronounced ten funerary homages between 1958 and 1975 to the invulnerable virtue that wrests an oeuvre or a struggle from the octopuses of history, from perpetual injury.

In Dunkirk, the child wandered aimlessly in the hallways of the Malraux house: that great brick structure composed of three masses arranged like a mouth opened onto the courtyard where, not so long before, timbers had lain drying. He pushed open the door to the lineage-master’s office and, in the summer evening’s half-light, dim and golden like a Rembrandt, he inspected the racks of files and drawing portfolios, the seascapes hanging on the wall, the dog-eared photographs; he touched the models and the thick tuck-and-roll leather covering the couch; he breathed in the spindrift of carpet and tobacco, and stopped before a bizarre statue. This was the summer of 1909. He heard the men talking business outside. Grandfather was in the idle workshop. He would die in November of that year. In order to indulge in a few final parodies, he had gotten some good out of his bankruptcy, so it was said when the child was around: he had opened his courtyard to a circus prohibited from setting up in the city, then the animals had roamed around in the ark of the shipwreck and ended up scattering into the surroundings; he had sheltered a Jewish community to which nobody in the area wanted to provide a venue for the celebration of their sorcery. And can you imagine? The kaddish had been heard resounding at Alphonse Malraux’s place. The child marveled at the story of the wanderers setting up camp in Rome. Talk about taking leave in style! Talk about bringing an

enterprise to its completion *à la farfelu*, as it should be done. The tiny empire built of massive timbers, extending to faraway ports and perilous channels, and whose headquarters served, in the end, as shelter for transhumant flocks: rough glory passing on like a snapshot. He admired misfortune as if it were a success and admired the fact that no Malraux was bothered by it. “No epoch will have understood as well as this one the extent to which it was transitory and the extent to which it marked the end of a world: for us, every morning is equal to Alaric’s entry into Rome. . . . The new civilization resembles a series of empty apartments or is at least waiting for the last movers” (*ML*, 595†).

So, as he unfolded the maps of the Northwest Passage, he was also taken in by the wondrous stratagem of real commerce, of a grocery of epic proportions like the one that opened its royal way in the deserts and forests of Asia. But at what price? And to gain what? The answer: to add a bit of cumin and turmeric to the bland tables of western princes. Grandfather had always been such a trader in fragrances, a pillager of ambergris, resolved to lose his life and wealth just to add some pungency and, of course, to conquer a name. He was the same haggard hunter that André would see in Melville’s Ahab. We know that Alphonse left his book-keeping to Grandmother. No way could he keep order in it himself. No, the tally sheet of profits and losses, reproductive concerns, the cash drawer that jingles like the bell in Bondy—women’s business. And truly, Clara did not imagine (or knew only too damned well) what she was doing when she drew up a tally sheet of her relationship with André in the form of an “Accounts Book.” Nothing could have stirred up Malraux’s anxiety and hatred more than this inventory of secrets. After reading it in 1939, he threw it across Clara’s salon. In order to get rich or to survive, trading—even trading in emotions—was out of the question. Papa could tot up neither his own investments nor those of the lovely Gaby. And André, in turn, would lose Clara’s fortune by investing in obscure Mexican stocks. Nothing should be saved. Women’s holdings were no more than accumulations of nothingness. A man’s exploits required all-out expenditure—at a loss, if possible, in order to demonstrate his pricelessness. Venture one minute and sell everything off in the next. That’s all. One might even sell women. The passion for both business and gambling demanded it. And, as civilizations had always wished it, prostitutes—those wombs finally cured of the malady of reproduction—would be tolerated or even honored. Years later, in the midst of circumstantial confidences made to Emmanuel Berl, André, shy with women, would still be nourishing a fable in claiming to his buddies that he had used

women in just this way (*Marronniers*, 321–22). And his work will not lack its courtesans, its young girls put up for sale in Khmer or Somali villages or in the streets of Chinese cities, its houses of tolerance and of pleasure. All to express this: that the energy expended by men to render salt unto the earth could reach the point of altering the cycle of women and putting the moon off its course.

Dealer in Wonders

3

BENEATH THE RAFTERS OF the Théâtre Français, standing on his bench in the peanut gallery, his ears and eyes straining over the handrail so he'd miss none of Andromache's cruel acts, André continued to investigate separation and compile statistics of the crimes that are its price. Chevasson, the suburbanite whom he dragged at age thirteen to this theater in the center of Paris, observed how tall and thin his pal was, his complexion as pale as a fennec, the shadow of his sprouting mustache, and especially his inexplicable eagerness. André was bored to death at the Dugand School, where he was learning nothing. The resources of the Bondy reading room were drying up; having proceeded to the theater shelf—*Hernani*, *Julius Caesar*—he had nothing much more to devour. He had received his elementary school certificates: he was elsewhere. His true master was the Roman dictator who cut straight through the womb in labor to pull himself out—he who, to the world as to his mother, dictated his own law, he who spilled his guts on the knife of a son he hadn't even sired himself. Even Racine on the live stage paled before Shakespeare read in the silence of the imagination. That *pompier* theater hall, that tone for familiar company, nothing so French as the alexandrine, and then, those indecencies of the flesh, the excessive presence of the actors' bod-

ies—Pyrrhus was too hairy and Hermione too chubby—all this prevented devoted attention to the imaginary. At the theater, André would always pick up a smell of leeks and promiscuity. It all wreaked of the honest old troupe nursing time-tested recipes for princely behind-the-scenes tragedies, then serving up their soup of blood night after night. Always on the run, in the train back to Bondy or on the deserted sidewalks, André explained to Louis this aversion of his. They'd never escape like this, he said: the theater was just the corner shop all over again. For his mad inspiration and all the panting, the only grace point for French theater, in his eyes, would be Claudel. "The theater is not serious," Gisors says to Clappique, "but the bull-fight is" (*MF*, 219). Nor is the novel serious, but mythomania is.

Either books or the street. The real trafficking, the truly tragic, the adieu lies in one or the other but not in the theater. For God's sake, war was on the prowl all around them! Only a few kilometers away, on the Ourcq River, men were fighting and dying for keeps. This was in September 1914, and the wind, so he claimed, blew the ashes from their burned bodies into the eyes of this delighted and terrified boy scout. One morning, well before sunrise, he pretended to have heard the thousand-odd G7 taxis requisitioned by Gallieni bringing the Seventh Division out to the Nanteuil-le-Haudoin front. In the dark, while Louis galloped along, André improvised between two gas lamps. Gesticulating, he was defending a right and a duty: the Malraux, the Bergers. His mothers were still where home was located, but he no longer belonged to them. They would soon send him off to further his studies in Rue Turbigo, at the upper primary school that would later become the Lycée Turgot. He was fourteen, was getting "good grades," but was getting nothing out of the masters' discourse, out of the disciplines, methodological cautions, or rules of composition. Of course the ever-good Adrienne and Berthe then thought they could get him going with private lessons given in Bondy. He was once again overcome by the disgust felt, as at the theater, at having to put up with the closeness of the flesh glimpsed in Mademoiselle Thouvenin's neckline, with having that odor of the well-kept woman right under his nose, with that oh-so-proper teacher's voice—he who knew much more than she about dread and didn't care one bit about composing the way the French Republic's school said he should. Moreover, he would never take first prize in composition.

Fed up with the Turbigo School, he applies to the prestigious Lycée Condorcet, which serenely ignores the kid. Exit, thus, from schooling, the only signatory of an oeuvre that university students the world over

would carve up on the way to their careers, as well as the only minister of culture without a *baccalauréat*. *Man's Hope* was placed on the program for the *agrégation* in literature four years after the author's death. But, with one final shove, that author had the time to parry the gesture that would embalm him. In 1975, Martine de Courcel heads out to the four winds to collect twenty-odd texts under the title *Malraux: Être et dire*.¹ He himself contributes with an epilogue entitled "Neocriticism," in which he writes: "What should we call books like this one which we see more and more frequently these days? . . . Let us call them *colloquia*." This is a new literary genre that appears when the Payot "littérature" series replaces Gallimard's, that is, when the book machines, the "Publishers," annex "Letters." Now, as "resolutely as Cubism broke with Leonardo's perspective," this genre breaks both with the erudite monograph and with the exhaustive biography. No representation. Assemblages, instead, of clippings taken either from an oeuvre or a life and mounted as a "picture" that imposes stylistic silence upon discourse. Malraux, after Braque, will repeat that "the most important thing in a picture is what cannot be said." Argued theses and "serious" biography aim to circumscribe their subject; the "colloquium's" Cubist ellipsis will protect his breakaway.

He took another pal — a second mirror — Marcel Brandin, away from the *lycée* with him. And, instead of going to the woods with the scouts on Thursdays, his team of funambulists went into Paris. The wartime capital gave André a preliminary plan for how the story might unravel, an answer to his question, "How do I get out?" The book and the street rolled in one: the riverside second-hand book dealers. An incredible text warehouse fringed the Left Bank from La Tournelle to Quai Voltaire, a treasure trove of possibilities with free admission, accessible from the standing position, just as one strolled by. In those large green boxes with their covers lifted like caskets before the burial, "in the cemetery of the riverside bookstalls" (*AM*, 58), he sniffed out everything the municipal library didn't have: left along the trail by other runaways, he stumbled haphazardly upon the moderns and the contemporaries, Dostoyevsky, Barrès, Verlaine, Stendhal, Leconte de Lisle. He had never had any doubt that this would happen, but he took a deep breath: at last, the open sea. And atlases and cartographs of dreams.

He scoured the quays. It was 1917 and his father was in the tanks: the epic drama of mechanized warfare, and André was sixteen years old with three sous that Fernand and Grandmother had put in his pocket. He bought and he read: Barbusse, Michelet. He bought a Laforgue title, inscribed with a dedication, found among the throwaways. Should he col-

lect these rare wonders? He was tempted—and this temptation would prove definitive—to become a conservator of windfall gems, a librarian of imaginary works. So, as if they were outward-bound cargos of plots that mustn't be left at dock but towed out and set to sail, he started collecting numbered copies, out-of-print titles, illustrated and limited first editions. The Malraux ancestor, who had died at this game, inspired him to become a privateer of books. He bought and sold. There were new explorations: Right Bank, Left Bank, specialized and bibliophilic bookstores. He shoved the doors open like a pirate ready to set sail, unpacked his booty, coldly negotiated: the paper quality, the rarity of the printing, the author's inscription, the copy saved from being pulped. Being rebuffed in this left him as indifferent as when the Lycée Condorcet refused his application: he'd just dress to the nines, speak with authority, make his appearance, and impress. He practiced winning people over—their opinions, their desires—provoking something more than a conviction in the customer: the gesture to buy. With the same coolness that he would later apply to inciting a crowd of listeners to take some evil object by storm: now colonization or fascism, now Franco or Stalin. This became his apprenticeship as rhetorician. Formulas for pleading a case, argumentation by means of verisimilitude, appeals to examples and stupefying analogies, management of “proofs,” emotion as well as humor: the glib speaker tried out every tool he could find and applied them liberally. Moreover, whether at the book exchange or at the Brogniart Palace, nothing prevented him from fomenting an event by starting a rumor or fabricating exhibits.

Twelve years later, in March 1929, in his preface to the *Catalogue of First Editions and Illustrated Books* that he put on exhibit at the Gallimard Gallery, André (catlike) addresses a bibliophile thus:

All of this is authentic and that's why one must become a forger. I'd adorn your copy of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* with some clever inscription to . . . let's see, to Lord Queensbury. And your copy of Corneille with a quatrain to the Marquise. A few books dedicated to the Citizen-General Bonaparte would be desirable. After reading all those insights in Mallarmé's articles on painting, I'd draw a selection of objects in the margins of your Mallarmé and sign them “S.M.” Mystification is eminently creative.²

Confession and homage disguised as a provocation: under the 1927 title, *Années de Bruxelles*, handwritten notes Baudelaire had taken in Belgium, and now miraculously discovered, were published in 150 deluxe

copies with a pen-and-ink self-portrait by the poet, a detailed preface by Georges Garonne, and the testimonial written by the printer (who dies in the meantime). Every line of this copious unpublished piece came from the hand of Pascal Pia, master counterfeiter, with the admiring complicity of his friend, André Malraux. Connoisseurs wrangled over this “rarity,” and this is how the two of them made a living. A speculator is a mythomaniac who exploits his madness laughingly.

Enough motionless lying in wait, though. A little feline had taken the place of the fennec. André was entering and leaving, entering in order to leave. Cats being animals of the threshold, starvation-level solitude was giving way to a dealer’s buffoonery that paid off. André’s first writings — his first outward signs — would be forgeries, apocryphal signatures in accordance with the principle that, since it impels it, pretense is truer than the authentic. A way out of the anxiety of being anything like a cemetery-bound Lamy infant was now clear: he had to dare and disappear through semblances. Books and the Malraux taught him how to make virtue out of the void. By trafficking written legends, he was already writing his life as a trafficker’s legend. The riverside stall covers opened the Saint-Maur grave for him. The play between the opened and closed door: threshold between presence and absence. Clappique leaves Gisor’s place saying: “Good-by, my dear. The only man in Shanghai who does not exist — not a word: who absolutely does not exist! — salutes you” (*MF*, 164). Then he opens the door once again, his big nose poking through: “Baron de Clappique does not exist” (*MF*, 165).

What need did André have of existing? Was that really necessary? The palm, both sweet and damned, had already prophesied that everything was already dead. Wouldn’t writing simply add to death? He would, of course, have exalted moments of mourning, reading, observing, and actuating appearances, of drawing them (he drew well), of sewing their imaginary lining into them. But what is this? Still consigning nothingness like some cemetery caretaker. This was still too great a concession to the imbecility of existence. At seventeen, however, he decided to give the weakness known as writing a try: the first drafts of *Paper Moons* are from 1918. Yet the cat long remains wary of making the first move: standing in the hallway of a train speeding toward Austria or Bavaria in 1921, André continues to tell Clara: “I shall not be a writer. The man who loves what is created is superior to the man who has done the creating. The Chinese knew that, for they put the man capable of appreciating the garden on a higher level than the gardener. The man who knows how best

to delight in life and in the creations of other men is the supreme artist” (Clara, 197).

Will he ever get over this rather dilettantish and hair-splitting European view of Chinese wisdom? Will having actual opportunities to take pleasure in possessing things ever be worth less than proposing them? Exhausted, with his back already turned on the anticolonial struggle that he had led for a year, in a corner of a sorry second-class sitting room of the ocean liner bringing him back to Marseilles, André pulls up to a table, distributes roles, and, at full speed, completes the draft for a manuscript promised two years before to Grasset. What will eventually be called *The Temptation of the West* is a long vigil at the bedside of the Great Asian Non-Will combined with a harsh acknowledgment of Western Will’s insolvency. It is January 1926. Behind him, he already had published some essays and a book, *Paper Moons*—all cubist. From the reading room and book dealing (whether the books were authentic or false) to the writing table, the step seemed to have been taken, the passage passed through. Still, a touch of the dilettante was to be found in Monsieur Ling’s words in *The Temptation* when addressing his French friend: “The artist is not the man who creates, but the one who feels. Whatever may be the qualities, or the quality, of a work of art, it is minor, for it is no more than one proposition of beauty. All the arts are decorative” (*TW*, 15*). It’s as if André couldn’t resist the temptation to revel in the decor without touching it except for overseeing its preparation, except for furnishing it with the exalting force that transfigures the traveler into a seer and appearances into apparitions. Better to transubstantiate the world than to transform it.

He would forever suffer from this infantile repugnance toward existence, toward being present and part of it all. Sometimes he sublimates that repugnance into wisdom in the name of an Asia that he knows, moreover, is doomed to succumb to modernity. But what a spectacle! Sometimes, like the modern European that he is, he modulates his melancholy by bustling about excessively or through exploits or commitments that are all the more flashy for being without any other objective than to cause wonderment. The increasing frequency of his various actions will not diminish how actively he believes that he doesn’t exist. On the contrary, that belief lends him a temperament favoring bursts of enthusiasm, epic illusions of the will, and, first and foremost, his faith in “[artistic] creation.” This will become the spring of his “lucidity,” that is, the screen that the night of women throws over the illusory refulgence of artworks and empires. André will frequently quote Stalin’s saying that “in the end,

it's always death that wins out." Berthe had already inculcated this chilling lesson. Be it the victory at Stalingrad or a Rembrandt self-portrait, how could any exploit become a wonder if it were not snatched from the certainty that one is already dead? Loyal to the void, impassioned by everything, melancholic child eager for all that marvels, it was under the guise of the connoisseur that André held his despair in check.

A book's rarity is measured by how much childhood it contains. Commerce in rare books means dealing in illuminations. A book may have been published long ago, there may have been a hundred thousand copies printed or only a hundred, it might be authentic or a forgery: it is rare if it causes a fairy-tale world to emerge or reappear. "Once upon a time, there was . . ." began the picture book or the poem, and at the instant that opening phrase was read, the child's dull life entered into time immemorial. Not only the time of the story told, but, for the little reader, the clock stopped. Childhood would forever be of the pressing present, intermittently available, occasionally suspending the course of "life," care-free and invulnerable. Until the very end of his life, Malraux would also produce picture books, striking illustrated works. With his gang, in 1918, he enters the Louvre to take a look at the works from Degas's studio that the museum was exhibiting for its reopening before putting them on public auction. "I understood with difficulty 'what it all meant,' but knew very well that it was mysteriously entering my life" (*Int.*, 115). The rare book was a never-forgotten forgotten time, the episodic conjunction between a hero, a landscape, and a reader. The connoisseur enjoyed this beginning as the "decor" and "ornament" of a bygone moment of joy that rang much truer to him than any grown-up plot.

Malraux's life and work will be devoted to repeating the wonder of artworks. Not in order to estimate or determine their date of origin (that is, as historian or archaeologist) but as a child eager to be enraptured. And sometimes the mere intensity felt in seeking out a work sufficed to make it a wonder: no matter what, the ruins of Marib and the capital of Saba are true since his flight over the desert was exalting. By the same token, the fright felt by kids making their way by candlelight through a mysterious underground passageway establishes indubitably the existence of the lost castle. André will fill the drawers and display cases of his memory, the pages of his books, not with precious objects, but rather with all variety of clues retained for their initiatory power. In August 1924, when Clara hastily liquidates their collection to pay off the couple's debts, Breton and Doyon, who help her out, are astonished by the number of fakes (Clara, 345). And Kassner, having escaped from the S.A.

prison,³ walks through a Prague to which he has returned: “His sharpened senses lent to the dazzling jumble of the shop-windows he was passing the fancifulness of scenes he had imagined as a child after seeing fairy-plays” (*DW*, 139). In his prologue to the *Anti-Memoirs*, where he explains that there is henceforth no place, literally, in which to confess, he questions Father Magnet about his practice as confessor. In the priest’s answer, he underscores the following words: “The bottom line is that *there’s no such thing as a grown-up person*” (*AM*, 1*).

A soul’s initial encounter with a work or a situation puts it in a state of wonder. The soul had been sleeping. Suddenly it is awakened. It will go back to sleep. Such is the force of “the flow of time,” as André calls the night—gob, glutton, glue. This picture will be seen again and the book reread, the situation relived. But neither will ever again be encountered. “That special joy one takes in discovering unknown arts ceases with their discovery, and is then far from being transformed into love” (*TW*, 77). The loss of childhood and our deliverance will be bemoaned: in Malraux’s work as in his life, this obsession with precariousness can be heard in his celebration of the immortality of saints and heroes. The capacity of a work or a situation to awaken us may exhaust itself: unforgettably though, for an instant, it appeared. But that initial encounter is passed. “I doubt if there’s any communication between the caterpillar and the butterfly” (*WTA*, 113).

Collecting is a futile activity: awakenings cannot be captured any more than encounters may be capitalized upon. We may serve the strange power by giving it opportunities for encountering new souls so as to provoke similar miracles in them. Besides being a way to make a living (and there are others), dealing in rare books was, for André, like promising others a return to childhood. The same went for editing, for organizing an exhibit, for opening houses of culture and of youth, the same went as well for inaugurating the museum without walls.

As for the extreme or borderline situations into which André rushed to test himself and into which he threw the heroes of his novels, Shade, of *Man’s Hope*, gives the final word:

And I must say I like the way the men here are just like kids. There’s always a touch of the child, more or less, in everything I like. You look at a man, somehow you get a glimpse of the child in him, and you fall for him! Do the same thing with a woman, and you’re sunk! Yes, look at them! They usually try to disguise their childishness—now it’s coming out. (*MH*, 43)

“Eyes shrunken, lips swollen.” As he clenches the direction-stick of his plane rendered helpless by the hurricane, Corniglion’s face transforms into that of a child: “It was not the first time I had seen the mask of childhood overlay a man’s face in the presence of danger” (*AM*, 63).⁴ At death’s door, we stay right where we are and show off. All in order to be reborn a child.

Transport agent dealing in encounters, traveling bookseller and art dealer, broker in adventures and battles, and, consequently, minister of culture (it is, after all, the same profession); Malraux will everywhere be on some mission to collect and distribute awakening opportunities, to share “first times” with others, and to get them to share theirs. That is why the connoisseur in him, the child that could never be spoiled enough, the good buddy — that part of him that was always impatient to be marveled — would always prevent the militant, the soldier, the politician, and probably first of all the writer he appeared to be to fully enter any of these roles and fulfill their offices. At bottom, he didn’t believe any more than Berthe did in these matters of life. Against Berthe, he only believed in the incredible.

MEANWHILE, HE WAS READING everything, and quickly: the late symbolists, the cubists, the romantics, stories of Byzantium, of Chinese and Mesopotamian empires, Barrès and Maurras. He was examining everything, too: Venetian, Japanese, and Tuscan paintings; Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, and Braque. He read as one looks. And looking taught him to read, to discern just how stagings were devised, to ferret out their styles and powers. He said to Clara, two years later, before Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* at the Uffizi Gallery, "‘Look at this picture as though there were no anecdote in it at all,’ [and] with his hand a little way from his eyes, he hid part of a [Titian] from his view. ‘Do like this: you’ll see that it is a better composition’" (Clara, 181). And so, the cautious, self-taught connoisseur begins to imagine that composition is "the trick." Taking scenes apart and reassembling them, he recomposed them. What was the inner secret of writings and images that lent them their power—that magnetism that had gripped the boy at his reading table in Bondy? Decisions about a writing's syntax or the way color relations are organized were absolutely crucial, he thought. The painter or the writer had judged decisively concerning the material of sentences and the continuum of tints. But why and how was it that these decrees gave rise—arbitrarily, of

course — to unknown worlds that were preferable to reality? And he marveled at how pure emanations of nothingness — the whiteness of paper or the light tawny of canvas — could occasion beings of word or of color that were still more powerful than things of the world. Tosses of the dice in the night, he thought. For, in the end, there is nothing; then, suddenly, something occurs, something else, out of limbo.

He grew older within childhood and learned that his contemporaries had become masters of this power and exercised it through exhibition — painters and writers, filmmakers a bit later; Kandinsky, Mallarmé, and Max Jacob, Picasso and the whole crew that wandered around the Bateau-Lavoir. Objects no longer served any other purpose than to provide opportunities for breaking adrift from the aforementioned reality. A banjo, a newspaper, an ashtray, a face, a fish on a platter: all were blasting caps for exploding this world and liberating another one made entirely of bizarre visions. As Max Jacob had put it, they were “situating” or “styling.” They were contriving a lunacy tailor-made to treat the nullity of appearances with irony, to celebrate the power of colors, words, and forms freed from the tutelage of likeness. The adolescent’s vision was rapidly being trained by his seniors. And the seniors — heedless of epochs, cultures, or schools — piloted him to the four winds. Contemporary artwork was awakening the insurgent kernel in the artwork of yesteryear. Influences, relationships, and the stupidity of heritage were all skipped over in one giant step. Works from the four corners of the artistic and literary galaxy that had heretofore been thought dormant were suddenly lighting up. More recent ones got a jolt by ricochet. A Cycladic figurine was brought before our eyes by a Picasso drawing, the Christ of Ravenna found its truth in an old king by Rouault, an Ellora divinity was found hidden in a Matisse odalisque, Cézanne’s last watercolor resonated with those of China’s Sung period. The arts and literature of the new masters rose above their time and heritage and broke with the principle of tradition. A historiography based on genres now seemed incapable of explaining this initiatory disturbance. André saw his seniors as classics: they were demonstrating the recurrence of an eternal gesture in arts and letters that defied nothingness. “In ceasing to subordinate creative power to any supreme value, modern art has brought home to us the presence of that creative power throughout the whole history of art” (*VS/E*, 616). In order to harvest all the signs of this gesture, André rummaged through the riverside stalls, but also the libraries, galleries, and museums, bringing images together and comparing them.

And, by dint of barging in to the likes of Crès & Compagnie for the purpose of bearing witness to this gesture of gleaning, the book jokester ended up intriguing one of those bibliophilic booksellers who ran “La Connaissance” in a corner of an arcade near La Madeleine. Doyon agreed to ask André to supply him regularly with quality rare books. He had buyers investing in book collections as a precautionary measure, the franc was fragile, and he was reediting some works in small printings. They made contact and Doyon put André on a salary. After a few weeks, they concluded that it would be a good idea to launch their own journal (yet another one) — a serious one: *La Connaissance*, by Jove! Doyon meant for the journal to combat ambient decadence. “The time has come for constructors,” he announced in the issue dated January 1920. In that first issue, with a tense, balanced pen, André signed “The Origins of Cubist Poetry,” his first published text. And, in February, he published a review of three books by Laurent Tailhade.

Was he thus passing over into the realm of writing and thereby exposing himself to the risk of being compared? Doyon’s journal was no more than a somewhat lateral opportunity for getting published. André had gone for his aptitude test elsewhere, two months earlier, in November 1919. When the boy, barely eighteen, went knocking at Max Jacob’s door, in Rue Gabrielle, he had only the first pages of a long prose poem written in the cubist manner in his pocket. This mattered little, for he came, as all eager novices in writing did, to deposit before the master his request to be ordained in the Society of Letters. He had read *Saint Matorel* (1911), with its four Picasso etchings, edited in 1911 by Kahnweiler, as well as *Les Œuvres burlesques et mystiques de Frère Matorel* (1912), illustrated by Derain a year later in the same collection. *La Défense de Tartufe* (1919) had just appeared. What had struck him in each was the tone, the humor, and the despair. The Jesus narrative had appeared to Max on a wall of his digs in Rue Ravignan in 1909: a modern Pascalian ecstasy written with bite. Libertine and mystical: André thought he would rediscover in Max the most intimate versions of “who cares” and “come along.” One evening in 1950, Malraux and Picasso go out from the Grands-Augustins studio: “It was a beautiful night — just as beautiful as the time Max Jacob had first shown me the Bateau-Lavoir berthed in a summer night: the trees; the street lamp in front of Juan Gris’s window; not a soul in the small square, which was as intimate as a dream” (*PM*, 144).

Jacob was part of the sordid and magnificent confraternity of painters and writers who were inventing a new modernity in that big ramshackle

house in Montmartre's Rue Ravignan. He had lent the nickname of "Bateau-Lavoir" to a labyrinth of studios and abandoned rooms. And André could imagine him working along with the others, speculating, chewing each other out, drinking with them: Picasso, his buddy from day one, the Braques, Apollinaire, Salmon, Laurencin, Léger, Derain, Reverdy. In André's eyes they were a whole civilization ahead of everyone else: "a culture that sets up no claim to self-consciousness; a culture that is not categorical but explorative. In this quest the artist, and perhaps modern man in general, knows only his starting-point, his methods and his bearings, and follows the uncharted path of the great sea-venturers" (*VS/E*, 604*). They had lifted anchor and had been spotted sailing before the wind at the Salon des Indépendants in 1911. Together, in room 41, the painters had hung the sampler of their views on space and color that appeared so facetious that the nickname of cubist stuck. While strolling through Paris in search of books and images that might nourish his legends of anchor-weighing, André had found Apollinaire's "Chroniques d'Art" and his *Méditations Esthétiques* published in 1913. Cubism was thus, finally, that stylistic insurrection against imitation and expression, that disjuncture of the artwork and life, that he'd been looking for. Ignoring nature (which is death), "making oneself inhuman," deconstructing narratives, turning one's nose up at virtually all data, conceiving with absolute lucidity objects of color and words, taking both together in one piece, simultaneously with themselves, here and now, in a timeless presence: in this quasi-mystical discipline, André immediately perceived a means available for his desire for flight.

With Apollinaire gone in 1918, it was at Max Jacob's place that André showed up, having found in *Le Cornet à dés* (1917)¹ amazing jewel-worded prose poems cut into facets, and in the book's preface, dated September 1916, insights into a poetics that struck him like shards of crystal: six compact pages told him that art means liberating oneself from the world and showed him how to do it. Studies, novels, films, speeches, essays, even actions: everything from Malraux, right to the very end, will bear a cubist signature. He appeared at Saint Matorel's place to honor the apparition. He dressed as handsomely as he could, fitted himself out as a "beau": walking stick, gloves, pearl tiepin. We might even imagine him with a silk cape thrown over his shoulders the way he would enjoy doing with his coats, later on, in memory of the musketeers of childhood. But here, as we know, the attire was for paying homage to these words from *Le Cornet à dés* that he quoted in his article: "With madcap on, the

knifegrinder (death) parts a folded mantlet of cherry-colored silk to sharpen a long sword. A butterfly on the wheel stops him.”²

Surrounded by devotees, a little rogue clothed in serge, a sort of inspired hobo, observed him and, in an instant, gave him to understand that André would not be one of his group. In a letter of 26 February 1916, Max wrote Tristan Tzara the following self-portrait:

At the age of twenty, I wrote a tale that was a book for children’s prizes (already) (there’s an untranslatable pun here, but you’ll be able to translate it if you like me enough). I was really suffering some at that time of my life. I met Picasso in 1901. I had already been university student, chic preceptor, retail employee, art critic for official journals, then street-sweeper, then rich young wag, then graduate and connoisseur of theater wings. But it was only in 1905 that I became a poet. In 1909, I saw our Lord on the wall of my room; since then, I’ve learned that several people also saw Him in Paris that day. Among others, Ortiz de Savate, the painter: a saint, but a bit of a drinker. Picasso has been my friend for sixteen years: we have on occasion hated each other and have done as much harm as good to each other. But he’s essential to my life. In 1906, we met Apollinaire, who was blond and resembled both Hercule Farnèse and an English aesthete. He was an improviser: now he’s at the front. You know, I know many people and much about the world. When I wrote *Saint Matorel, which is a masterpiece* (I swear) of mysticity, of pain, of meticulous realism and bereft of affectation, I was the dancingest little jokester on earth.†³

How, then, did butterfly Max—the droll little fellow—manage to momentarily stop the grindstone of death? He was going to take flight, that’s all, and art was nothing else. Least of all would he express life—that’s only good for grinding. Rather, he would work toward its “distraction,” as Baudelaire once said, enjoying it at unexpected moments. The secret of the artwork was entirely dependent upon “the realization of the materials,” the realization, that is, of the lived experience, and upon “the composition of the whole.” The poem gave nothing up to charm and seduction or to the connoisseur’s sense of surprise. On the contrary, the less it allowed premature attachment, the more an artwork it was. Writing had to resist its reader like some meteorite that remains at a distance. Jacob called what separated the work “style” and lent it “the sensation of being closed.” The writing of a poem owed nothing to the

artist's idiom or to what Buffon called style, which was nothing more than man himself. And to reinforce the foreignness — the estrangement — of the work, Jacob added "situation" to what he called style: a "spiritual margin," a Christic halo it gave off that forced the connoisseur to recognize that it was untouchable even though he claimed to derive pleasure from it. The poem was the body of Christ. Writing meant wanting transcendence, but without symbols, a transcendence grasped uncompromisingly in the ordinary aspect of the most humble things. "Will . . . plays the leading role in creation, the rest is only the bait in front of the trap."⁴

André could hear his own desire to clinch things resonating in this poetics of willful detachment that opposed the rule of secession to the complacency associated with man's age-old acquaintance with the world. And it mattered little that God was dead, that Christ had not been resurrected, and that the flesh, despite the poem, remained a cadaver. In his *La Connaissance* article, he praised Max Jacob for having reestablished the poetic object to its sacred exteriority, to its distance from the "subject," from content and "development," and for having reactivated, to the point of primordial violence, the act of ungluing. Greater devotion still went to Reverdy for his even more severe, almost willfully mute rigor and the "surgical simplicity" of his works — a Saint-Justian rigor applied to literature. Between Jacob and Reverdy a decide had occurred. In his preface to Ollivier's 1954 *Saint-Just*, André quotes the Jacobin turning toward La Gironde in order to explain his vote. He pointed to the king, simply saying, "This man must reign or die." Reverdy's poetics demanded that a clean break be made with thematic authority, which had, until then, been the prince of the arts. Writing and painting owed their virtue only to their own gesture. Representation, imitation, interpretation, description were tantamount to submission. Owing nothing to the given, art was pure "conception," pure creation. No man (not just *this* man, Louis Capet) could reign over works: he had to die. Apollinaire had said, "Artists, today, must become inhuman."

Are there several ways to the state of inhumanity? As to a godless and humanless desert, Reverdy retreats in 1925 to Solesmes Abbey; in 1921 and then, once again, in 1936, Jacob retreats to Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire to worship far from man — the god-made-man. The former, like a flame deprived of air, dies peacefully in 1965; in 1944, at the Drancy concentration camp where the Gestapo deported him because this Catholic is a Jew, Max lets himself die the death of a saint or that of the Last of the Just. For Cubist intransigence one pays the highest price no matter what livery is worn to play it. This is how André understood it.

This is why he didn't care for the persistent penchant, in both Max and his writing, for buffoonery, for the "exasperating puns" that, despite what anyone else thought, lent themselves to the short-term success of follow-the-leader *épaté-bourgeois*. In Max, there was the clown who was all too tempted to mock himself. And he just couldn't help succumbing to this corruption every week at La Savoyarde, Mère Anceau's bistro in Rue Lamarck, where he'd have all the little buddies dying of laughter at those endless impersonations. André, standing in the corner, didn't laugh a bit. For him, the time had passed when an artist could be content to mime the world's imbecility as well as his own. Enough of that tawdry finery. Presently one needed to lay all tolerance aside and be a thinker devoted to unleashing ideas as a poet does words. And Jacob didn't like the fact that André didn't like him: "Ideas are only good for armchair critics. They should be thrashed about at the dinner table," he writes to Leiris in March 1923, "or at tea with Henri Valensi or whatever Malrauxish fellow happens to be around."⁵ In fact, even if he was for a time a frequent visitor, André was only passing through the circle of the Enchanter, as Max Jacob was called. Disenchantment was, with him, a principle.

So much so that three years later, in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (August 1922),⁶ when he reviewed Jacob's *Art poétique*, he respectfully but without hesitation and a bit haughtily corrected a few of the old master's blunders: arbitrary subtitles, errors concerning Christian art, and so on. By this time, André had read Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, Stendhal and Gide. For the March 1922 issue of *Action*, he wrote a study titled "Aspects of André Gide" in which he made it known to Max that any serious meditation on art should (in step with Nietzsche's declaration that he'd never learned anything about "psychology" except from Stendhal and Dostoyevsky) henceforth be called a "psychology" of the artistic feeling. As for Christian art, far from "disapproving of the passion," he would surely make allowances for expressions of the love of God—perhaps even immoderate ones. And the poetician might do well, the greenhorn advised, to take a peek at Ruysbroek, Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, or Catherine Emmerich.⁷ If, as Jacob had claimed, all one needed was "bearing" to be Christian in art, then Chénier would be blessed and Dante banished. In two brief, cold pages, André held the lesson of separation he remembered from *Le Cornet à dés* over and against a manner of being and of writing that—beneath its superficial hardness—was virtually reconciled and pardoned.

André was not breaking off relations (he continued to see Max despite his disgust), but this was a relief (*relève*). Flemish, Spanish, and Rhenish

mysticisms had been summoned in to testify that if there was one object whose bearing was so high that it caused the believer to lose countenance, an object so close yet out of reach, a "situated" object in the best cubist manner, that object was Christ in the old days. He is no longer venerated in the modern West, you say? Perhaps, but that vacant spot is no less an index of a tension that is still current. "The sign of all intelligence and all true faith," we read in the *Action* article, "is the effort we make toward an imprecise goal while measuring our current value and possibilities for increasing it." To make up for Jacob's poetic shortcomings, a Nietzschean Gide thus became André's pretext for a mysticism of will and intelligence.

In 1920, André got Doyon's permission to have *La Connaissance* edit the unprofitable *Passion de Jésus-Christ*, which contained the visions of the nun from Dülmen (Anne-Catherine Emmerich, to be precise). He also planned the publication of selections, translated into French, of *Die christliche Mystik* (1836–42) by Görres, who, in addition to being something of a warlock and theosophist, was a visionary and a bitter romantic.⁸ Prudently, Doyon turned him down.

But there would be no appeasing André. God may no longer exist, but the struggle with his angel would continue. For a few months, this slim young man, the spendthrift dandy who hung out in chic restaurants and shady nightclubs and who loaned works by Sade to Gabory (a connoisseur in erotica and the other great young critical hope, along with André and Raymond Radiguet), who pretended to pick up chicks at the Tabarin and now lived in Paris either in a furnished room or at the Hôtel Lutetia, who played the stock market and believed in nothing, this upstart who was drunk at the mere thought of having left Bondy behind was able, thanks to his tough-guy appearance, to hide the anchorite that was rebelling inside him. Fools (and perhaps he, himself) may have been taken in by his free-spirit airs, but, as in Bondy, it was in complete solitude that he read and went to look at artworks. Already since the grocery-store days he knew that God was altogether dead, or that death was the modern God. He now wondered if Man could perhaps take his place. He read Anatole France, Barrès, and more Gide. But it was too late for Man: there had been too much killing in the clay fields of Flanders and the Marne.

He returned to Mallarmé and Laforgue, convincing himself that something might hold fast, all the same, in face of debasement and vulgarity: a Mallarméan throw of the dice or something cubist to supply the en-

ergy to do something with nothingness, to make him a d'Artagnan of artworks and with no known cause to defend. And, like a fool—perhaps like all artists—he fretted about learning how to pull himself out of the grave-pit. He knew a lot: the grandfather's businesses, the father's dealings, trafficking—both big-time and petty—playing the stock market and playing at the game of life. These were all roundabout ways for ending up with nothing left. Yet a throw of the dice that could elude the ordinary course of fluctuations and that would not be annihilated after thirty years, the miracle of an artwork, that is, whose value would escape the auctioneer's gavel—André wanted to know how in hell he could get *this* combination to spill out of luck's dice box. This was the power that he sought.

As for outside appearances, by God, there would be finery and bluff; fabulation would be required. Was it not necessary, in the meanwhile, to act as if it all could come true and deck oneself out in order to show off the falsehood of appearances? “No, men do not exist, since a costume is enough to enable one to escape from oneself, to find another life in the eyes of others” (*MF*, 247). He stuck a rose in his lapel and a pistol in his pocket. As time went on, the eternal master of disguise would try out every hat—colonel here, minister there, trafficker, resistance fighter, orator's dangling lock, worker's cap, beret with stripes, leather helmet of tankmen and pilots, gangster's fedora—knowing that cover is all any of them provide. So many deceptions on fake stages: reality being worthless. Though truth may have fled beneath these roles, that was precisely where he sought the truth—a truth that consisted, as I've said, in confronting dread and paying the true price of separation. In this particular period, André was trying to get it cheaply through dandyism—the absolute's small change, which he spent as fast as he could. And to withdraw from this ordeal around 1920, he acted out gestures of cold denial.

With the speed of a galloping fugitive, he would leave *La Connaissance* just as he was publishing a collection of previously “unpublished” pieces by Laforgue. This was his first act as an “editor” in the English sense of the term: a scrupulous and learned profession that André practiced at breakneck speed. He pulled together texts scattered in undiscoverable journals that somehow he discovered: a column in the *Revue Indépendante*, prose poems, short stories, remembrances and studies taken from *La Vogue*, *La Vie Moderne*, and so on. He grouped these into two volumes, entitled *Chroniques parisiennes* and *Dragées*, and had the whole thing printed in 1920 without corrections or references as to origins. In the following year, Doyon (under his own name) added to this mess a

third volume, entitled *Exil, poésie, spleen*. Then, Jean Ambry, a Laforgue specialist who was preparing the edition of *Berlin, la cour et la ville* and a severe character, as erudites can be, denounced all this sloppy work as a hoax. Doyon polemicized; André heard none of it: he was already off on another front. It's a fair bet that he knew nothing of the contempt that François Ruchon, in his *Jules Laforgue*, rained upon *La Connaissance* publishers three years later.

André's new deal was the Librairie Kra, in Rue Blanche. Without batting an eye, he took control of the literary sector as well as responsibility for the layouts to be used in the editions he'd just invented. These were to appear under Sagittarius, the approximate zodiac sign of his birth and the exact one of his death. Between July 1920 and the middle of the following year, Kra was spurred into publishing a Tailhade volume, Baudelaire's *Causeries*, two Rémy de Gourmont titles, *Cœur à prendre* by his friend Gabory, a Reverdy, a Jarry, and a Max Jacob, each adorned with woodcuts and drawings. Some of the artists — Derain, Max Jacob — had firm reputations; others — Galanis, Moras, Drains — were building reputations on quality work. With distracted coolness, André sought to impose all his desires all at once on reality. "Running things. Making decisions. Controlling men. That's where life is" — with three preterites, Garine dashes off a portrait of one of the various Malraux (*Co/E*, 173). He was commissar of culture or, rather, the wise prior of a wealthy abbey church: bringing order and supervising everything; collecting works from which arises the throaty voice speaking disaster and resistance; ensuring that this voice is illustrated by images so that it reverberates in otherworldly visions; organizing, all alone and with the care of a great scribe, the composition of colored prints with desperate orations; editing the texts, thus enriched, as if they were books carrying forth some impossible piety; circulating them just as the best workshops of yesteryear had done when providing erudite sanctuaries with treasures of writing. More than anything else, he was a stubborn child bent on converting disappointment itself into wonderment. He planned to publish a Radiguet title: *Jouets du vent*. But it was too late: Lucien Kra had had enough of this bookstore Bonaparte's costly projects. They had it out, then split.

With that horse worn out, André was soon seen running down game on another. Again in 1920, Florent Fels (with three sous, his military discharge bonus) and two friends, Max Jacob and Salmon, founded a little journal called *Action*, whose initial tendency was anarchoindividualist and in which, straightaway in February, Gabory published the altogether

provocative “In Praise of Landru” (1920 was the year that madman was to go to trial). Just when the review was being reoriented, André was introduced to *Action* by either Salmon or Jacob. “To reveal ardent and innovative works that guarantee our vital force,” “will to power,” “virility of style, combating all forms of decadence, and above all creative” the new market price was set at this level in July 1920. There was nothing here to put off someone like André, who paid no heed to political orientation and who, we might note, knew nothing of the Tours Congress of the same year, which would lead to the French Communist Party. The vague virility paraded around in the journal’s editorial made him smile. He nevertheless understood it to harbor a resolution to confront the general rout.

As indifferent as he was to postwar world issues and even though he consigned his harried devil-may-care attitude to the craziness of the roaring twenties, the urgency to confront dread nevertheless gripped his jaws: he needed something firm to grasp in order to escape the general (and his own) sinking. Among the possibilities that the crisis freed up, he needed to discern those that could thwart it. He needed what was dry, hard, cubical. He wanted easy, nonsensical life to come crashing down against the hard bone of some discipline. Reverdy had written that “poems must be square, constructed like blocks.” To slip away, once again, but do so toughly, like Nietzsche. To escape not into the beyond, but right here, by means of “works that reintegrate with life by detaching themselves from it because they themselves exist beyond the evocation and reproduction of things and life.” In 1917, Reverdy added: “rather than a represented anecdote, each poem is the presentation of a poetic fact.” And Braque noted in his *Cahiers*: “The painter does not strive to reconstitute an anecdote but to constitute a pictorial fact.”

Cendrars, again in 1920, wrote a letter to Jean Epstein concerning his study entitled *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état de l’intelligence*. That letter was published, along with the book, by Editions de la Sirène in 1921. There can be no doubt that André read it. It served as an announcement to him that the time for another break had come:

You trace the general psychosis of the end of a generation rather than that of the more mature among us who have already gone beyond the stage that you indicate. . . . Are you certain you have distinctly marked the end of the old crisis and the beginning of the new one? . . .

Clean break, fresh departure along the line of steel.

There is the epoch: tango, Russian Ballet, cubism, Mallarmé, intellectual Bolshevism, insanity.

Then the war: a void.

Then the epoch: construction, simultanism, affirmation. Banner: Rimbaud: change of owner. Posters. The facades of houses eaten away by letters. The street trodden upon by the word. The modern machine that man cannot do without. Bolshevism in action. World.

In his *La Connaissance* article on cubism, André had, after Reverdy, cited as an example Cendrars's *Vingt-neuf poèmes élastiques* (so called ironically) published that year. These interested him because they were made of steel: pieces of tanks and armored trains that had fallen off, sparks from the mechanized factory in which — from Ford to Lenin — society was tempering its afterwar. Passing straight between Max and André, that fracture line broke them apart.

Manufacturing Secret

5

HOW, HE WONDERED THEN, could one acquire such junkyard writing? Certainly not by leaving its manufacture to the rebuses of the unconscious, to automatic writing, to the claptrap of the dada repertoire. Malraux will distance himself from *Littérature*, created three years before by Breton and his friends, and will prove resolutely hostile to the strategy of come-hell-or-high-water nonsense that Tristan Tzara (who arrived from Zurich in 1920) later tried (without success, moreover) to inject into the journal. André would come into contact with the dadaists through his friend, Marcel Arland, whom he met at Galanis's studio in late 1920. However, coming just when dada's attempts to regroup around a series of new periodicals (*Sic*, *Dés*, and so forth) fail one after the other, his contact with them will prove without conviction. The approximative Freudianism that Breton espoused for revolutionizing literature appeared to Malraux to be mere flattery for their nonchalance. "I hold what we call the unconscious to be confusion itself," he notes in 1956 in the margin of a book by Picon.¹ And, just before this: "If, as it has been affirmed, the novelist created in order to express himself, things would be simpler. But you know I believe that, like all artists, he expresses himself in order to create."² He retained the cubist conviction that the art-

work comes about by means conceived, then dominated. But rather than a “jewel,” it is a spark of steel that flies off from an assault on the Formless.

He paid perfection no heed. In a letter of 20 April 1929 to his Dutch friend, Eddie du Perron (to whom *Man's Fate* is dedicated), he writes: “There are those (Montaigne, Pascal, Goya, the Chartres sculptors) who have something to say and who never make masterpieces because a passion that attacks the world cannot be dominated. Then there are those who ‘make objects.’ . . . A critic is actually a man who loves ‘objects’ and not man’s self-expression.”³ The sporadic revival of neoclassic harmony appeared futile to him: the interpenetration of nature and culture, the union of light and discourse, the whole basis of great pagan Mediterranean classicism had disappeared with the gods. Just because the forms that were created then still leave us in wonder is not reason enough to recreate them: to do so would be to lie in the face of their present desertion. We should only retain from that epoch the principle of lucid rigor during the creative act. *The Temptation of the West* will name this discipline “negative classicism” (TW, 79): a discipline, that is, of limpidity maintained even when no divinity or nature capable of accepting the offering is present but simply nothingness to defy. In 1923, Florent Fels asked André to preface his edition of Maurras’s *Mademoiselle Monk*.

Maurras was then defending a purely pagan Apollonism against various northern forms of romanticism and Christianity. But as soon as the Dreyfus Affair broke, his poetics of order had found its concomitant politics. Individualist democracy—both expression and cause of decadent disorder—had to be destroyed and permanent authority restored in its place. Hereditary monarchy would alone safeguard the national community by protecting its Latin culture. Founded eight years following the publication of *Enquête sur la monarchie* (1900), Action française brought together Léon Daudet, Jacques Bainville, and Jules Lemaître; attracted, besides Paul Bourget, Maurice Barrès and Georges Sorel; influenced, for a time, Jacques Maritain, Pierre Gaxotte, Henri Massis, and Robert Brasillach; and tempted even Georges Bernanos. In the name of an Athenian or French ideal of a grand century, a party entirely made up of intellectuals was quite simply favoring reactionary politics. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and this party loudly applauded the invasion in the name of civilization, Malraux, in his “Réponse aux 64,” administered a biting lesson in historical intelligence and cultural ethics to the “reactionary intellectuals.”⁴

When he agrees to preface *Mademoiselle Monk* in 1923, André knows very well who he's dealing with in the person of Maurras. He had at least read *Anthinéa* while accompanying Clara to Florence by sleeper car: "the man who could say 'Salut, belle guerrière!' could only be my enemy by mistake," the ingenuous girl wrote (Clara, 175). But that monarchist's writings allow André to more accurately determine what it is he's looking for: the power of discipline. "His system is based on theories. The power represented by their application constitutes part of their value. . . . For his oeuvre and for him, what does the elimination he desired matter?! . . . Charles Maurras is one of today's greatest intellectual forces."⁵ Needless to say, André could not have cared less about those theories and in no way subscribed to the ideal of harmonious balance of which France was supposed to be the depository. Next to an African mask, a Khmer Buddha, or a painting by Juan Gris, the Versaillais art of a Le Brun or a Le Nôtre left this cubist sniper indifferent. Next to Shakespearean cruelty, Racinian elegance smelled mainly of good courtly manners. As for the absurd idea of a classical Latin restoration, Malraux generously discerned an effort at a certain "construction," a "thankless," even "painful" task of trying to rise above the moment's facile solutions. What interested him was the power of separation, not that of reparation.

In the catalog he wrote in March 1928 for the exhibit of Galanis paintings, André defends the firmness of the treatment in his friend's work. The whole of its value lies in the discipline applied to the stroke. The color expresses a "pictorial temperament," but its charm is extremely elusive. On the other hand, in the "simplicity" of his treatment and the "balance" of his composition, Galanis bears comparison with the greatest masters—Giotto, for example. But also with the contemporaries, for in no way did the cubists invent the "desire for discipline": they are "a magnificent consequence" of that desire. Art always comes from disciplining one's powers. It is not Maurras whom this requirement of a rule evokes so much as Mallarmé (whose *Afternoon of a Faun* is cited) and Valéry (the meridional magnificence of whose *Charmes* is surpassed by the determination of *Monsieur Teste*).

In Valéry's *Note et digression*, published in 1919, André read the following: "My mania consisted of loving only the functioning of beings and, in artworks, their generation. I knew that these were always falsifications or arrangements: the *author*, fortunately, was never the *man*."⁶ The reader of Reverdy had his own understanding of this poetic ethics based on the erasure of pathos. In 1917, the sensuality of *La Jeune Par-*

que had been deduced according to the principle that Poe put forth in “The Philosophy of Composition.” Charm itself should derive from a total conception, for the seduction of spontaneous beauty emanating from the given, from the night, from the heavens, from women, was something felt at the very moment one gave expression to it, after which it would return to nothingness. Empty lamentation — which nothing can equal — and humiliation were all that remained.

The same held for ideas: he would shun their fascination and the allegiance to which they give rise. Valéry said that “only oysters adhere.” An idea that was important only insofar as the intellect could exercise the power of possibilities within it. “To invent a character capable of making many works,” we read in *Note et digression* (96): such is what André — incapable, perhaps, who knows? of ever making a work — wanted to make of himself. In the meanwhile, for lack of a thought good enough for writing, he overflowed in thoughts “good for speaking” (63). And he spoke abundantly, sometimes with Valéry, during those dazzling jousting matches that eventually, a few years later, would bring paralysis upon the NRF office. Of course these discussions were actually more like monologues confronting each other — jousts meant to test the capacity of the various minds for constructing models for all kinds of things and to give rise, in those minds, to the sort of drunkenness that comes from feeling all-powerful.

André was exercising his intelligence in the exploration of possibilities. Slyly, in 1928, he explained to Simone Martin-Chauffier: you see, my dear friend,

“when I’m walking down the street, for example, I reflect on a precise subject that I chose before going out. . . . I never daydream: that’s just wasted time. . . . I identify a subject I want to reflect upon and when that one’s exhausted, I switch to another. When exterior reality imposes itself, I put it aside for a moment, then take it up again.”

“Where you left off?”

“Where I left off, of course.” (Clara, 4:82†)

Clara, who reports this exchange, remembers that in 1933 André commented on his liaison with Josette Clotis (which he had just revealed to her) in much the same “Monsieur Teste” manner: “The trouble with such matters is that they lead one to daydream” (Clara, 4:83†). Conceit sufficient to give the ex-mistress reason to snigger, and to avenge herself for the newcomer.

Valéry was thirty years ahead of André in life: with “Nuit de Gênes” in 1892, he had already come to the decision that thought was content to exercise itself with lucidity, “mechanically” upon any object that came along. All works, consequently, are futile: the word “idleness” is often found written by A.D., the interlocutor in *The Temptation of the West* (TW, 51). Even Mallarmé’s “Book,” in which he foresaw the end of all things, was still too metaphysical. Valéry allowed three hours every morning for the “physical” exercise of his intellect, whose performances he consigned to his *Carnets*. After which he dragged his affable idleness around with him to the salons and to meetings where his eloquence—hesitant, yet sharp—took pleasure in stupefying countesses, generals, and academicians. André saw Valéry as a reclusive master of despair, yet could not agree with this pure disenchantment. It was simply not true that all was said and done.⁷ He reproached the author of “Crise de l’esprit” for his Spenglerism: we of the civilized world now know that we are mortal . . . It is precisely in the “death” of the West that André would go searching for the motif for an immortalization of the artwork.

And, as for the exercise of the intellect, he needed a partner. There will be more than one: Arland—too gentle; Groethuysen—too systematic; Raymond Aron—too insensitive to passion; Pierre Drieu la Rochelle—so talented, so perfectly attuned to the anguish hidden beneath André’s dandyism. Jean Giono told Jean Amrouche that around about 1930 or 1931 he was invited with Gide and Drieu to lunch at the *Rôtisserie Périgourdine*. André wanted to have witnesses for a conversation with Drieu.

The subject of the debate was an extraordinarily intelligent one—so intelligent that the conversation between Malraux and Drieu la Rochelle got under way right at half past twelve and lasted until six in the evening. . . . Cups of coffee and various alcohols were served, cigarettes were smoked. And I noticed that Gide didn’t say a word. When the conversation was over and we went back outside, I took my leave and both Malraux and Drieu la Rochelle shook our hands. They went off each in his own direction. I accompanied Gide a little way and apologized to him, saying:

“I didn’t say a word because I must admit that I understood absolutely nothing in what transpired and I didn’t understand a single word in the whole conversation.”

At that instant, Gide, no doubt out of the greatest kindness, touched my arm and said:

“If it’s any reassurance, Giono, I myself understood nothing.”
 Then, after a few more steps, he added:
 “And I don’t think they understood anything either.”⁸

Drieu was a good duelist and shared with André his pleasure at oral jousting as well as his hatred for stupidity. There was also, in Drieu, under the guise of resolve, the same confusion. In fencing with each other, they never aimed at establishing any particular truth with which to convince the other: the combatants were simply testing their skills at making ideas work, whatever ideas they might be, at putting together word machines and taking them apart. Speed with the feint, endurance: with the word, each tests the other’s subtlety and the strength of his understanding. This was a martial art consisting wholly of “lucidity.”

Gide and Giono were right to play dumb: both cherishing sincerity, what could they get out of this shadow boxing? Alain Malraux (Madeleine and Roland’s son, whom André brought up as his own) notes that Malraux quite simply got a kick out of Drieu (*Marronniers*, 149–51). He was one of the few people whom that vertiginous orator considered his equal. But he was his master in despair. Drieu’s advantage over him was his ability to run very rapidly through all aspects of a question — its ins and outs — not in order to make something from it through writing or action, not out of love for possibilities, like André, but out of hatred for life’s exiguity and in order to destroy all alternatives. André perceived in Pierre the primordial conviction that everything was lost before the game got started. Drieu’s speech transformed the triumph of death into discourse and deferred it by means of virile intellect. The figure of the mother mediated André’s attachment to Drieu. The mother: Berthe driven crazy by her own impatience with the nullity of life that she, moreover, hastened. It came as no surprise to Malraux that Drieu sided with the Nazis during the war: theirs was the party of nothingness. Nor was he surprised when he committed suicide.

The intellect that possesses no object to cling to, other than its own workings, is obsessed with cultivating a process in everything. Various acting devices, the play of his fingers around the cigarette, the adjustment and perfection of his facial expressions, irrefutable sartorial habits, the impassive face tortured by spasmodic warning signs, either silent or verbally impassioned and ironic, prone to thunderous entrances and exits — André was already in full control of the presence that he would concede to others. He was never a regular at *Le Lapin à Gilles* or *Chez Azon*, or at *La Closerie des Lilas*, *Le Dôme*, or *La Rotonde*, or at Gertrude

Stein's salon in Rue de Fleurus, or in Puteaux, where the Villons' and Duchamp's studio was, or at Gleizes's studio in Courbevoie—all places where various bands of cubists hung out. André kept his distance from all of them. Courteous to the extreme, it certainly wasn't out of haughtiness. It was just that in Chevasson and Gabory he had his own pals. But most of all, there was that consort awaiting him in the museums, galleries, and libraries: solitude. Certain that one learns more from artworks than from men, never will he mingle in the Parisian intellectual milieu (*Marronniers*, 86–90).

However, in the early 1920s, the self-taught man almost succumbed to the temptation of processes. Let us use the term *process* to designate that flaw of intellect which, whenever it confronts anything—a passion, an ecstasy, and especially something obscure—asks itself, How is this made? What can I do with it? And then proceeds to pursue all possible means for exploiting it. This is the very same artifice that he will find so admirable in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. It is not realism but rather the contrary: a mechanistic imagination, ballistics applied to literature. The intellect relies solely on its own resources. And, far from ignoring its own limits, it pushes them to the limit. Like Merteuil, it has to educate itself on its own.

André had retained little from his schoolmasters. Try as they might to teach him how to demonstrate the workings of a poem or a prose piece, he had already learned before them. So he passed the time drawing droll and wicked little *dyables*⁹ in his copybooks or, under his desk, read some book by an author not on the curriculum. What could he learn from others? Either answers would come to him before he was questioned or else his own question would render futile those posed to him. He was not self-taught because of social misfortune but because he could only learn from himself. He talked to himself, addressing his own question—always the same one. It's with one's ears that one hears others, he would repeat to himself. But one hears oneself through one's throat. Like a frog in the throat,¹⁰ his own question choked him. On the verge, in 1920, of entering active life, he was gripped by the anguish of knowing he had no vocation and no particular interests and of wishing he were not suited for any so-called function. Only his curiosity about processes impassioned his sense of possibilities. To loosen the grip of disgust, would it not suffice to exercise this lucidity? It was a Valéryan moment.

He tended to read works, the way maps for a military campaign and troop positions are read at the École de Guerre, in order to determine

an author's tactics and identify their weaknesses. The occasionally quite shrewd reviews that he wrote during those few months, either for *Action* (on a Salmon book in October 1920) or the *NRF* (on a Comte de Gobineau in July 1922) displayed that turn of the military report. In three sentences, the young general explained the enemy's disposition and how he had breached it.

A certain arrogance of an intellect determined to silence whatever necessary humiliation writing might harbor became enmeshed with his tenacious phobia of burial pits. The value of writing lay entirely in its having conceived its own powers and having dominated them: that was how writing managed to surrender nothing to the expression of reality. The misery of life may be common to all, but the process, when it is powerful, is singular yet irreducible to any particular context. It was not unknown countries that had invited Baudelaire to voyage: it was assonance and dissonance, word choice, syntactic decisions, rhythmic breaks perpetrated. "Toward awful shipwrecks does my soul weigh anchor," assuredly, but because of the inversion. Stiff in his dandy's collar, the impetuous youth was determined to not let himself be fooled, even by dreams of escape, and thus strove to take inventory of his arsenal. The result was that he read without reading and started writing spiritlessly, as one might examine the contents of a special effects store with the intent to utilize them. In his 1932 presentation of the "Jeune Chine" documents, he writes that "the function of Western thought is to transform the world through man's efforts. . . . All European thought can be reduced to a manufacturing secret."¹¹ He himself was passing through this stage in 1920. Escape does not become possible because one loves freedom, but rather when one has conceived a precise plan and mustered, right down to the most minute detail, the power to take to the open sea. He repeats Bonaparte's statement that "war is a simple art consisting entirely in its execution." Why not writing as well? If a work could be disarmed in order to figure out its moves, a work could also be fomented.

The surrealists were discovering Lautréamont at the time. In 1920, Breton assembled Ducasse's *Poésies*.¹² This was a golden opportunity for André to kill two birds with one stone: he could show those devotees of the unconscious the extent to which little Ducasse had duped them and reveal the fact that the *Chants de Maldoror* were simply the product of a forgery. André thus put his strategist's lucidity to work reviewing *Maldoror* for *Action* in April 1920. When Lautréamont got about to the middle of his work, he stressed, he "got the idea for a PROCESS which lent his book its originality: he replaced *all of the abstractions with nouns for*

objects or, preferably, for animals which had no LOGICAL relationship to the poems." The proof of this trickery could be found by comparing the 1874 version with that of 1868. This comparison revealed an even more disturbing stratagem: the name of Satan had been systematically substituted for that of God. André conceded that the effect gave the impression of a visionary or a madman, yet, he wondered, wheedling, "Even when a process gives such curious results, what is its literary value?"¹³

As to a process's critical value, there was, at least, no doubt in the mind of the signatory: he was jubilant. If ever there was a time-tested process, it was that of accusing the other of resorting to a process. Yet, in the given context, this rather common retorsion was nearly a rights violation. André was reducing the impact of a work plainly exemplary of the crisis that literature had been in since Baudelaire to the mere invention of two or three ingenious dodges. Did everything that was so evident in Lautréamont (to André as well, I think) — the Crisis of Verse, the Question of the Book, various poetics (and cubist poetics, to begin with) conceived in order to come to grips with this confusion — did all that proceed from a little technique?

As for Satan, was not his ability to pass himself off as God precisely the linchpin of André's own woe? Was this not, again, the dreaded thought that life might simply be death in disguise? the Hell in Rimbaud's *Season*? Didn't the suspicion of that very confusion haunt his favorite writers? From Dostoyevsky, the Claudel of *Partage de midi* (1906)¹⁴ and Max Jacob, to Bernanos who was just finishing *L'Imposture* (1927)? That this was indeed what staggered André, one need only consider for a moment the review of that Bernanos work that he wrote in 1928 for the *NRF*. By then, the temptation of the process had passed and, in Abbé Cénabre's distress, Malraux was recognizing the confusion at the foundation of both all modern writing and of his own discomfort.

"Suddenly the character realizes that he has made a momentous move that he had been trying to prevent himself from making: he expresses what he had been hiding within himself. Here begins Satan's intervention."¹⁵ Malraux is referring to himself. He also made a move, irreducible to any process, that unveiled the dread that his mechanistic intellect of five years before had tried to mask. That move escaped him, as it did Bernanos's abbot. The intellect's assumption that it could govern the maneuver had not disappeared. But instead of the enemy being the confusion caused by stupidity, as Valéry had thought, it was Confusion itself — the all-too-real omnipotence of evil infiltrating works of virtue — and the Redundant One who slithers into every venture of the intellect. The

enemy was assuredly the Asia of letting-be, but it was also the West of the will to dominate.

This poetics or ethics of suspicion was clearly expressed in the very same March 1928 issue of the *NRF* in which the first prepublication excerpt of *The Conquerors* appeared. This novel of terror was Malraux's "momentous move": he consented, for the first time, to let his writing confess not only that reality, of course, was gluey but that gluiness even pervaded the acts that rose up to combat it. Glue, as we know, represents the futility of conquest in the face of history; it is also proportional to the sticky reality of the words necessary to express it without trickery. In this awkward work—the first that shunned the easy refuge of cubist *farfelu*—the aesthetics of the process, the subtle strategy of making-as-if, gave way to a severely realist discipline of language and to the violence of writing as close as possible to the twin disaster of life and venture.

And, in reviewing *L'Imposture*, André zeroed in on this poetics of evil combined with poetic illness that he had denied Lautréamont: "The author is more obsessed by the crisis than he is by the Abbé Cénabre case. I refer to obsession intentionally." The obsessive question is: Am I dead or alive? A question that processes, which are incapable of providing a "reason for living," can hardly answer.¹⁶ And it is not the character who asks the question but, rather, this question that sets and casts the characters. Characters are "factors" in a drama played out on the stage of conflict where Satan and God switch roles. In relation to this real that is more real than any reality, in relation to the inextricable entanglement of good and evil, individuals can hardly be individuated and are just barely interchangeable. "In the first notebook of *The Idiot*, the assassin is not Rogozhin but Myshkin."¹⁷ "It isn't reality that Mr. Bernanos tracks but a particular reality reduced to essential characteristics—and, for this reason, quite different from the former—a reality analogous to that which Claudel expresses in his dramas."¹⁸ And these characteristics amounted to the terrible uncertainty as to whether it was not death itself that had whispered to the abbot that the greatest virtue was to elude death. Would not a writing that confronts the disaster be fomented by the disaster itself?

At La Salpêtrière Hospital where he thought he was dying in 1972, Malraux will repeat Bernanos's remark that faith consists, today, in the belief in Satan rather than God. In the mystics' constant fear at being mystified by the object of their passion André had immediately recognized that the will to make a work was merely bait put out by the inevitability of death to make it seem as though one could triumph over

it. Reading and rereading Chateaubriand's *Mémoires*, "with Michelet as antidote," revived in him the ancient axiom that we are born posthumously and that Satan alone—the void—had signed all exploits in advance.

But by the year 1920, this horror (or this wisdom) had not found its powers of expression: that would have seemed dead simple. So it was forgotten beneath his decision that the madness of a Lautréamont was mere literary pantomime and that the racket set off by *Les Chants* was a ruse of war. And that he, André, a cleverer strategist than the author he was treating, was not going to let himself get caught up by it. It was at about this time, however, and in this frame of mind, as we have said, that the connoisseur in processes tried his hand at writing his first work of fiction. *Paper Moons*, with its woodcuts by Fernand Léger, was published by Kahnweiler in 1921 at Éditions de la Galerie Simon (who had been Kahnweiler's associate and had replaced him during the war) and was marked by the laborious workmanship of a beginner. The work's title said it all: nothing more than fantasies with no consistency, bits of paper good for crumpling. "Glory from café audiences," Malraux will decree in 1972. So that everyone would know that the signatory meant for himself to be categorized a cubist, a note placed directly under the dedication to Max Jacob stressed that "there is no symbol in this book." Yet, still not satisfied with underscoring his allegiance, the purveyor in forgotten works began his prologue with an epigraph consisting of two verses by Claude d'Esternod, a seventeenth-century burlesque writer whose work had recently been exhumed in an article by Gourmont: "Thus we witness a Net / The necks of woodcock throttle" (*Ainsi qu'on voit une Panteine / Des bécasses serrer le cou*). *Pantène* or *pantière* is the net that hunters stretch out vertically to trap flocks of birds in flight.

But the practical joke consisted merely of trapping in its net all the hoaxes of which the most modish literary imagination was capable and of thus being able to boast (humorlessly) that it had mystified its readers' bird-braininess (*bécasserie*). André could not have been unaware that his prose was so stiff and passably overdone that he twisted his neck, strangling his throaty voice in his own net (*pantène*). It was *farfelu*, he would say in self-defense. Rather than *bizarre*, however, it was *farfelu* in the original sense of pumped, as in the exaggeration of an incident or the revving of an engine.¹⁹ One might say that it told a story. But mostly it laid out, as in a display case, a series of detailed episodes in which Messrs. Cardinal Sins, under the direction of Pride, set out on an expedition to

hunt down Death and kill her. The apprentice thought that he needed to do something very strange, strangissimo. So he went fishing around for his themes in the treasure-chest of “rarities” that he had been plundering for the past two years: thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *fatrasie* writers and *rhétoriciens* from the north, the puppeteers from whom Ghelderode would borrow *La Farce de la mort qui faillit trespasser*, James Ensor of the funerary carnivals and *Christ à Bruxelles*, Cyrano and Rabelais, a moon from Max Jacob, monsters from Hieronymus Bosch, the facetious fantasy of a Méliès.

“I hereby warn writers of the prose poem about precious stones that are so brilliant that they distract the eye from the whole. The poem is an object with a certain structure and not a jeweler’s display window. Rimbaud is the jeweler’s display window, not the jewel: the prose poem is a jewel.”²⁰ Despite this warning that Max Jacob held up in 1916, the second-hand book ferret had put everything he had at hand on display in *Paper Moons*. The result was soulless and flashy because its only motivation, under the pretext of style, was to avoid appearing stupid. We are still under the regime of the process, and André was exaggerating the turn.

Now, in spite of the fact that he’d explicitly prohibited his prose from signifying anything, here and there, some suffering or other—a stifled cry—was getting through. Death was figured as a languishing skeleton of aluminum and brass (a Cendrars-style death), and Pride was dressed up as a doctor who, under the pretext of revitalizing her, administered nitric acid baths that resulted in her perishing in the tub. Something was finding expression through these laborious and derivative farces: death is alive, life is death’s dummy, and willpower strives to destroy it. And in contributing to her own disappearance, even after being warned of the plot, Death said to her confidante: “Yes, my dear, I’ve had quite enough. The world . . . is bearable thanks only to our habit of bearing it. It is imposed upon us when we’re too young to defend ourselves. And then . . .” (*LP*, 24). Was this not the successively subordinate then insubordinate child of Bondy lending her the accent of his fatigue? At first, André had written: “Too young to defend ourselves—think of it! We’re not even conceived yet! And then . . .” (*OC*, 863). He crossed this cry out, but it returned, later, in 1941, at the rendezvous of memory, in *The Struggle with the Angel*: “We know that we did not choose to be born, that we would not choose to die. That we did not choose our parents. That we can do nothing about the passage of time” (*WTA*, 96). Still too young, already too old, dead as soon as we’re born: “I am called Death, but you know

very well that I am only the Accident,” the accident of being born, that “crevice,” André continues in *The Struggle*, which lies “between each of us and universal life,” the illusion of thinking that each life is distinct within the redundancy of the living and the dead. Childhood is vanquished in advance; it is, as Gisors says, “the submission to time, to the flow of things” (*MF*, 262*). In *Paper Moons*, Death was playing its last card: “even slow destruction is nothing more than one of my disguises” (André had at first written “slow wearing away”). Old age was an illusion as well. In 1953, he says to Picon that the feeling of getting older is unknown to him.²¹ Not that he always felt as young as he looked but because that bearing he was able to keep to the end was an ordinary prestige, a sleight of hand in the face of death that, since he said he had never been young, kept him from aging. From *Paper Moons* all the way to *Lazarus*, his work will have been nothing more, nothing more than future perfect, than memoirs from beyond the tomb. “You can’t imagine what it means,” Perken says to his young companion, “that feeling of being penned in by destiny. . . the certainty that . . . when you die you will have been *that* man and no other” (*RW*, 87).

At the end of *Paper Moons*, the young fool who would hear nothing of what terrorized him and only wrote of it in order to mock it, nevertheless had an outburst:

Death was dead.

“And now, to work!” cried Pride.

“To work,” the Sins echoed.

“What shall we start with?” Hifili added. Followed, a long silence. . . . [The Sins] looked at each other with gloomy looks on their faces. Then, their heads dropped into their hands, they wept. Why had Death been killed? They had already forgotten why. (*LP*, 25)

An evangelical stroke — in reverse — the gloom of an impossible *mourning*,²² that of *Finnegans Wake*, Death putatively vanquished by a vain-glorious exploit, then resurrected during the victory’s amnesiac aftermath. *Paper Moons* has “Anemia” where *Anti-Memoirs* will have “torpor” and *Lazarus* “sleeping sickness.” To work? What work? the idle one asks.

So the other thing — the horrifying clay and the slipping into nothingness — was showing through the process and the net (*pantène*). The little literary upstart strove forth, nonetheless: we see him tensed over his writing copy in his Rue Brunel bachelor pad, determined to prevent words from speaking, to instead vanquish their glue, champing at the

bit to get outside, to go lord it over Kra or lend impetus to *Action*, to drag Chevasson to the galleries and studios or to Le Tabarin, to go have a cocktail with Gabory at La Petite Chaumière, the “fairy” hangout in Place Ravignan. Lock hanging over his forehead, shirt sleeves rolled up over that feverish wrist, a butt stuck in his mouth, he endeavors to make decisions in a language that says too much, to let himself be half taken in by it. The beasts from Saint-Maur have a long reach: cut off their arms and they grow back, they’re like suction cups on writing paper and they stick to the pen. He revises, he crosses out, he seeks the words that say no to these monsters, finesses a kingdom of *farfelus* who thumb their noses at all verisimilitude. He rigs up a loony bit of pageantry. And damn it, with all his talent, that Max Jacob gets on his nerves. It’s not going the way he wants. Pack it in for today: he gets up, shaves, brilliantine, a clean pressed shirt, jumps into those slacks, grabs his sports jacket, checks his cash, lighter, cigarettes, the vest-pocket hanky, the revolver, the watch-bracelet, a quick polish on those lace-up shoes, the walking cane.

He flies down the stairs, goes by to pick up Chevasson to quick check out the stock exchange rates at his bank or the ancients at the Louvre. Louis falls for a poor-quality Roman *putto* and André kindly finds this error interesting. He has lunch with Gabory at Chez Larue (tip of princely magnitude), then they go up to Rue Cortot, in Montmartre, to see their friend, Galanis. They find the artist—twenty years their senior—surrounded by pals: they all chat, drink too much, go out to take the village air. They enter Le Panorama—“immense ramshackle” across from Sacré-Cœur where a washed-out Christ has long been subjected to his Passion “on two hundred meters of canvas.” Painters squatting in the hovel, they gossip with Elie Lascaux (who will give him an entrée with Kahnweiler), they hear noises, it’s rat-infested, they gropingly take a look; descending a ladder by the light of a kerosene lamp, they find a bunch of blind men, Montmartre beggars who come to sleep there, and:

I can once again see the shape of those men leaning one against the other, our own silhouettes barely appearing from out of the shadows and, under the light, the painter, stupefied, hair disheveled, grasping in his fist a foil that he picked up blindly in order to arm himself. That foil caught a thin, straight line of yellow light.²³

A small picture captured, the painter and the blind men, a Brueghel, later he would say it was a La Tour, the light and the night, the blade edge that slices through the inconsistency of the shadows. Dark mothers and paper moons? Not again! They go back to Demetrios Galanis’s place

where he sits down at the harmonium that he built and decorated with his own hands: the painter plays Bach. Now we have it: this scene that André tacks onto the end of the 1922 catalog was meant to express that the painter's secret is the art of the fugue. In 1949, André has a "Tombeau de Jean-Sébastien Galanis" printed for Reverdy.²⁴ And *Man's Hope* ends with Manuel at the organ and piano.

Whom did he see? Everyone and no one. Did he see the nameless care-free shop girl that he used and who, so Gabory says, "had the childish grace of a monkey"?²⁵ Or his ever-faithful Chevasson, with whom he said "tu," or Gabory, a tad perverse, expert in places of debauchery, who kept him amazed for a couple of years? Or the artists and writers that filed through Florent Fels's place in Rue Feydau: Derain, Vlaminck, Léger, Marie Laurencin, Delaunay, and Chagall; or the others: Paul Derdée, Artaud, Marcel Arland, Pascal Pia? Or the habitués at Max Jacob's place: Picasso, Juan Gris, Henri Laurens, and Braque — the latter two who were also friends of Galanis — and Cendrars (sometimes), Reverdy, Salmon? Who, in all this, could hook him in his flight? People, almost never; works, sometimes; only wonders. He crisscrossed Paris in Gabory's company come rain or come shine. In the empty streets at dawn, they would declaim Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Laforgue, Hugo, Vigny.

The only exception was Pascal Pia, who was two years his junior and possessed, in his casualness and predilection for the erudite practical joke, an upper-middle-class stature next to which André felt plebeian. They became immediate accomplices in the search for rare texts and images, in the discovery of forgotten authors, in editing and marketing the libertines, in various counterfeits, in fantastic hypotheses — both being obstinately derisive. There was also another figure, this one very discreet and quite the opposite of Pia. He affected André so much that, eight years later, he dedicated *The Conquerors* to him. A small silhouette of misery, an employee in Clichy-la-Garenne, a pal of Gabory's who introduced them: René Latouche. He walked with a limp, loved one woman, and dreamed of literature. I imagine him like that tram conductor in *Man's Hope* who was gunned down by mistake because his satchel made his jacket shoulder shine as if it had been rubbed by a rifle strap. Having lost his job and his love, this Latouche individual drowned quietly, swept out by the tide on a Norman islet. To limp in pursuit of writing and confidence, then tire of it all and, without fanfare, put an end to this prison: André's despair could well vibrate before this truth. Suicide would, after all, be his father's dignity and that of the conquered. We read in *The Royal Way* that "a man who's poor can't choose his enemies" (RW,

52). But his death, yes. Latouche was the suburbs, all that crushed a person, but relieved (*relevé*) *in extremis* by a diversion without rejoinder. The conquest in *The Conquerors* was placed under the aegis of the defeat that is conquered. “When [a suicide] kills himself he does it with an eye to — survival” (*RW*, 17). Escape, in other words, for want of something better.

Clara's Entrance

6

THEREUPON EITHER GOD OR SATAN (who knows which?) sent this Bonaparte a woman. She was not a Beauharnais. Not at all. It was Clara of Magdeburg, between Prussia and Saxony, born in France, of the Goldschmidt branch, established in Auteuil, Avenue des Chalets, twenty-odd years ago. A very candid woman (*claire*), four years his senior, who let him know in no uncertain terms that she would be his equal. He let her talk . . .

Let's get a better look at that little one over there with that nose that's too long and that mouth placed too high above the chin. Her look is intrepid, though, and she's got elegance, beautiful hair and jewelry. And she keeps her eye steady on her friend, Jane, with whom he's been dancing for the last hour, here, at Le Caveau Révolutionnaire. Invited for a tango that he had no idea how to dance, Clara can hear this gawky guy pouring a bit of poison in her ear to try his luck: Jane has been trying to ditch Clara.

It was an evening in spring, 1921. Thirty or so guests had dined at Le Palais-Royal: Florent Fels was treating the *Action* team. André had used his gift of gab. Both peremptory and *farfelu*, he proffered unquestionable diagnoses as if they were final judgments and recounted a thousand clever and amusing anecdotes. Seated next to him, a spellbound Jane kept bursting out laughing.

Bored stiff at the other end of the long table, Clara leaned forward to see what was causing her friend so much enjoyment: a tall skinny guy with pale skin, beige hair, big two-toned greenish eyes, hands graceful and agile but like butterflies, disheveled shock of hair. Don't know that genius. At the end of the meal, at Jane's insistence, four or five of them slip away to dance at the aforementioned Caveau.

Nothing further to add about Jane in all this: too futile a prey. But what's this that he notices the following Sunday at the Goll's place in Auteuil? (He knew the Golls through Fels, and Sunday was "their day.") It's the brazen little one examining him while he again inspects the Jawlensky and the Delaunay on the walls and the Archipenko above the mantle. She is taken aback by his look and subjects it to a detailed inventory: "his eyes move at top speed and are too big; their pupils don't quite fill their immensely arching globes; a white line shows under the washed-green iris"; it's as if "he can't look people in the eye" (Clara, 154–55*). But that's not quite true. They both sit down in the recess of a window and he turns on his machine for shutting everyone else up: the dense formulation, the amusing outburst, the precise erudition. He unpacks the whole kit and caboodle framed with "as you know" and "I will now explain," the eleventh-century poets, the *satiriques*, his beloved mystics, Nietzsche, El Greco, Dostoyevsky, the ambient nihilism. But the little one, with that voice of hers that jumps from eclipse to éclat, holds her own: Haven't you read Storm and Kleist? And the great romantics, Novalis, Hölderlin? (So that's what the accent was: she's German and she's doing translations.) And Heine and Tolstoy? Gide's *Nourritures*, of course, Laforgue and Nietzsche again. To André's Spain, she replies with her Italy—Giotto, Fra Angelico, the Siennese. She's already been to Florence on her own. She's returning in August. André finds himself saying: Good, I'll go with you.

He calls her up the next day. Sprawled out on the bed of an increasingly annoyed Maman Goldschmidt, the woman he called for spends a radiant hour on the telephone. He goes to her room to pick her up the following day. They go out to the Musée Gustave Moreau: Ensor albums, Toulouse-Lautrec. In turn she shows him the lesser-known corners of the Musée du Trocadéro: the plumed serpent from Mexico, the French folklore section, "dusty dummies, their heads adorned with coifs, grouped in the familial environment of provincial kitchens" (*ML*, 756†). He laughs delightedly along with her at the possibilities and improbabilities: "I like *farfelu* museums, because they seem to be playing a game with eternity. None of them could come close to our old Trocadéro, where you

had to crouch down and use your lighter to see the icons from Abyssinia" (*AM*, 38*); "the old Trocadéro, where dummies in exotic costumes stared at some sort of hanged dead bird attached to a wire with clothespins, and which had been Montezuma's diadem" (*PM*, 43). They go to the Bois de Boulogne. Just for her, the klutz tries his hand at rowing. At the Auteuil racetracks, she has more money to place wagers than he does. Together, they wander through their library and museum without walls, they cite and recite whole passages learned by heart, they paint battles and Pietà with hand strokes made in the air (Clara, 158–60).

He can't believe it: a flapper, and a cultivated one. Almost as intelligent as Max Jacob, he declares to her, and as cosmopolitan as Cendrars. A woman who is not a womb. When they make love, she discusses it in its smallest details, not like a libertine but in childlike manner — curious about all pleasures and making known that curiosity without blushing. As if she were out to dislodge the big ninny's virginity of the soul. She had been engaged: she broke up. This Jean character had been her lover, but hadn't really fallen head over heels. Her attitude was this: too bad if she couldn't find quality, quantity would do — cheekiness of a young lady bent on being with the times. She will always remain that way. She was a most modern Frenchwoman for the time. Laughing, she tells him: You see, at the Lycée Molière, where I spent four months, a vice-principal would press a piece of paper to our mouth to make sure we weren't wearing lipstick. Whereas in Germany, we had coed schools, girls were free to go out alone, there were "engagements" that lasted a few weeks, and openly sold contraceptives. And then, in old Jewish families like ours, the boys are traditionally entrusted with businesses in order to expand on inheritances and pass them on in that improved state, whereas girls devote themselves to the culture of literature, the arts, ideas — for everyone's pleasure at table, for the after-dinner chat, and for the honor of the name. And what a name: goldsmith . . . My father died ten years ago and my mother put me in his place. Would you believe that during the war our family was threatened with a denaturalization proceeding because we were krauts? And worse: Jews. The case was dropped because Maman knew just how to weep in the judge's chambers. What Clara did not tell him was that it was she who, at seventeen, and on her own, had hunted down the necessary lawyers and prepared the case with them (Clara, 132–36). And you, André? Do tell.

Embellishing, he recounts the Malraux story, inventing a mother who lives in a suite at the Claridge — nothing too believable to tell a rich kid who's been around. He knows that she senses his evasiveness regarding

his family but he proves precise, ordered, and incisive on the problematic of the contemporary world, on literature and the arts. One night he takes her to a *bal-musette* in Rue Broca, near La Mouffe, a more up-to-date¹ area than La Bastille. They both look like rich bourgeois out slumming for the evening. She accepts a tough's invitation to dance. They leave in the wee hours and a few hooligans who go out right after them pass them. Suddenly they turn and pull a gun out on the bejeweled young lady in the sumptuous white coat. André's left hand, extended before her, takes the bullet. But with his right, he pulls out his pocket revolver and fires. The gang flees. A bandaging at Maman's in Auteuil. No undue outpourings, but it definitely looks as if this sad-eyed, yackety bookworm has no fear of rows (Clara, 164–66).

Yet, did Clara understand this? Did she ever get it?

“He had prepared some poison, I'm told, in case the veronal had . . . no effect?”

“His revolver was under the bolster, with the safety catch off.”
(AM, 19)

Walter Berger carping with his nephew, Vincent, at Altenburg, about his brother Dietrich's suicide. When André writes this in 1942, he is reflecting on his own father's suicide. The latter was still alive in 1921. But there was also the grandfather supposedly killed by his own ax. And if André kept his revolver “under the bolster” or in his back pants pocket, it was because his hope was to cross the desert in such cross-dress. In case he didn't get through, the barrel of this faithful friend would be aimed at his temple or his mouth. He got wicked joy and a poor man's revenge getting Clara to believe he was a bully or a knight yet to misinterpret the destination for the firearm. But who doesn't misinterpret—starting with Malraux himself—the destiny of firearms for Malraux?

This is the same type of gesture we see in the train that whisks them off to Florence. Madame Goldschmidt had barely seen Clara off from the platform at Gare de Lyon when André sneaks into the sleeper compartment reserved exclusively for her. Then, the night past, there is the train rolling through Italy in the early morning—such joy!—and the conductor knocking at the door telling Clara that the gentleman in the next compartment is asking him for the list of travelers in order to verify Mademoiselle's identity, and that he has exclaimed: Now isn't that just awful: a young lady from such a good family! Starting to worry, Clara asks to consult the register as well: he turns out to be a slight acquaintance of her brothers; he'll spill everything back in Paris; now she's dis-

traught: what will Maman say, poor thing, and her two brothers? And the uncles? And the one who's managing their fortune? And everything, and what would my father say from his grave in Montparnasse Cemetery? Unflustered, André suggests: if we got married, would that fix things? Of course, she says, exasperated. So, he replies, let's do it. My father can't still be opposed to it. Fernand had said no two weeks before: André, young blood, Clara, a German, and, let's face it, family life was not Fernand's forte. Humiliated, Clara accepts, then minimizes: we'll get divorced in six months. Very well, André says, then: "I'm going to clear up this business with the fellow next door." He comes back: "What a fool, with his half-witted, mistimed curiosity!" (Clara, 178). He explained to him that they were engaged and had been given their parents' permission to travel together. "But first I suggested a duel" (Clara, 179). At bottom, Clara told herself, he doesn't give a damn. He gave a damn about flashing his revolver, though.

Once in Florence, she cabled the news of their engagement to her mother. She presents Florence to André, she introduces him to the grand decor at close range—Uffizi Gallery, Piazza della Signoria, the Giotto, Uccello, the churches, the facades, the evening light and that of morning—she gives him the gift of her Italian: he speaks no foreign language. "He ran about a gallery the minute he was inside, as though he were in danger" (Clara, 181*). He brings her back the booty of his flash inspection, gives an explanation of the three works which out of a hundred are worth the bother. He compares, juxtaposes what they are seeing with works that they have seen before and some they haven't: the cubism of the San Geminiano towers with the geometry of New York seen from the harbor (neither of them have ever been there). He takes her in his arms up into the Hotel Moderne, he carries her with him into the feverish montage of a world museum, unconcerned with place or time. He doesn't visit the earth as a tourist, like Morand, nor does he trek about it like Cendrars, so as to find himself or lose himself: he remakes it. Geography and history are both sacked as if they were formal treasures. And these forms are inspected not for the pleasure they afford but from the perspective of the various singular, violent emotions that each of them engenders even after millennia have passed. He inquires into the enigma of this strange fecundity that renders these forms forever present in their possibilities. Clara strongly feels that, cut loose in Tuscany, with this giant museum of cities, palaces, and hills at his disposal, André is seized by a sort of panic, "as though he were in danger." What danger?

Lying down next to each other near the cemetery of San Miniato, he says, "How happy we are." Adding, "If you were to die, I should kill myself." Repeating, "I should kill myself. And you?" (Clara, 182). She consults herself scrupulously: now, yes; later, I don't know. Her doubts: "I was afraid of the words he said; I didn't know whether he believed in them or not; I didn't know the meaning of some that he used, not all of them, and I was going forward as you do in *Blind Man's Bluff*, my arms stretched out, my hands seeking, my hands filled with tenderness" (Clara, 183). But he says "we," he says "happiness," and he says "suicide," at the edge of the cemetery of San Miniato. "I thought you were affectionate," she will write, "you were only kind" (Clara, 214). Kind of nice to be here especially when one is always elsewhere.

Happy for the first time, nevertheless, in this sepulchral moment. Does his archaic horror of the grave pits suddenly seem surmountable? Does his phobia of women weeping and laughing at the grave's edge suddenly dissipate? Does the promise of escape from dead life begin to realize itself? This is the promise that André pursues while dashing through the halls of Florence and that promise he will seek while dashing the world over. And, far from wanting to collect works or ensure that he was capable of making one himself, he pursues it to find out how the miracle of works is possible in the midst of the futility that marks things and lives, to find out why, unpredictably, that miracle persists. In Florence, he is able to sense, directly, that this promise can be held. And big time. Hand in hand with his happiness, however, goes something he has never known: sharing it without reserve (or so he believes; but he is mistaken: already Clara is having second thoughts) and, precisely, with a woman. Of course, he will have to place her in a tomb, then commit suicide over her body in order for her to measure the intensity of his new joy. Are they not lying in proximity of a cemetery? True life is not possible unless it is adjusted to the imminence of death, no exaltation without the threat of relapse. The ordeal of despair persists in testing the value of joy. Nevertheless, a woman, here and now, is responsible for this remission. "For him our love was like a conversion" (Clara, 185*). Suddenly the figure of the feminine that André carries within him is turned upside down by her intelligence, her culture, her alacrity, her violent and loquacious sensuality, her curiosity for everything, her little-girl curiosity. From Clara, he learns that not every woman dooms every man to the vanity of survival, that woman is not of necessity either deadly mother or frivolous whore, that she may be his sister or his mistress in the insurrection of

the soul and of the body. She may sustain the promise of childhood instead of dashing it.

The Florentine moment was perhaps the only moment of grace in Malraux's disgraced life. As short as that moment was (Clara began already in 1924 to keep her "Accounts Book," which is not to say how much André disappointed her but rather how much disappointment was ripe within her, in her own narcissism, her jealously inflamed by forever having to play second fiddle), as precarious as this staggering moment was, it caused a hidden truth to issue forth from Malraux's life and work: a truth relating to the sexual.

Malraux confides to Grover, referring to Drieu la Rochelle: "He was definitely not misogynous at the primary level, like some who believe woman to be inferior, but he was so at a secondary level: he had it in for women because he couldn't do without them . . . like me."² Actually, Drieu was misogynous in two ways: he needed women and, as he himself said, he needed them to be soulless. As for this fluke of Malraux admitting his dependency on sex, perhaps he betrays his true desire. The conversion of every love episode into its contrary will punctuate André's relations with all his women partners, whoever they are and whatever they do. Beginning with Clara herself. He is the first victim of his own compulsion to kill women. Without his realizing it, and sometimes to his great despair, he almost always manages to carry out this compulsion. "What have I been obsessed by for so many years? By women. Well now, when I think about all those I have loved—many are still alive—I think of a cemetery, Malraux. I forget half of their names" (*ML*, 366). Méry, who was "met" in Singapore and will be dead himself before the month is out, counts up his mistresses while drinking whisky at the Raffles bar. "Malraux" indulgently listens to "this subordinate voice [which] leads the derisive millenary procession through the night" (*ML*, 366). Yet, he adds, "there should be another procession: that of the women we've broken off with if, that is, they died while we still loved them" (*ML*, 367–68). Procession of failed abandonments: I would have broken off, but she died first. The separation was preinscribed in the attachment. Inevitable: as one is taking, one has already rejected. And then the beloved's death happens along and deprives you of the rejection's accomplishment. "If you were to die," Clara, "I should kill myself." Contrition at having been passed out by some contingency or stroke of destiny that causes one to have to undergo the break. In a low voice, Méry emphasizes: "The death of a beloved woman . . . is . . . a thunderous calamity, Malraux" (*ML*, 369).

André is just so thunderstruck in November 1944 when a ghastly accident takes Josette from him. He was commanding the Alsace-Lorraine brigade then in action on the Vosges front. He made a quick detour to the Corrèze to bury her, then returned to combat. Tried to get himself killed there. He loved her. Not incompatible — quite the contrary — with the fact that he had sought to protect himself from her. Living and already dead, loved and already set aside. Whether it awakens real tenderness or merely calms the irritation caused by phantasms, a feminine existence unfailingly activates major ambivalence and anguish. Women are agents of necessity: the will fails to repel their seduction. And that is why the will strives to exert itself. Always already, they inhabit you and you're worm-eaten. On his deathbed at La Salpêtrière in 1972, André concocts this parallel: "Dread independent of fear, like sexuality independent of any object (except ourselves)" (*Laz.*, 92). Sex is like the old beasts. "Woman always ends up coming to some sort of understanding with the beasts" (*ML*, 367). In the izba of a kolkhoz somewhere in the Russian plains where Malraux's airplane had to make an emergency landing, men are gabbing late into the night about life in general, drinking, smoking. Wise comments are being tossed about. His large hands on the table but his look elsewhere, a muzhik collects in three words everything he knows about sex. André's wisdom (or folly) amounts to about the same.

Except that Clara, in 1921, was an exception. Not for one second in Florence (even when the allusion to their death was made) did André feel "able to do without her." This was because he saw her bodily and spiritual flesh then as indistinguishable from the flesh of artworks. I use a theologian's term, "flesh," so that it be understood that Clara's presence was a grace for André, just as the presence of the innumerable works in the Tuscan sanctuary was. He will use the term "metamorphosis." Clara was the name of this first escape: the one during which the escapee, for an instant, forgets the prison he is fleeing. He was escaping from women, and it was under the aegis of a woman that he escaped this time. He suggested the name Florence for the child that she bore against his will in 1933. The hour of their separation was already at hand. Why, then, would he give the child the name of their union?

This much can be concluded from the paradox: in his lifelong pursuit, through acts and writings, of the signs of a creative force both immanent and transcendent to the ordinariness of things already dead and of which Florence was the first name signed upon a body, Malraux sought solely to distinguish a feminine figure that *he would not attempt to do without*. In history, in writings, in the arts, he sought to invent an elective

dependence, an allegiance to the Fecund One. But in the real, it would be a perpetually dissatisfied desire, perpetually denied beneath masks, perpetually cloaked in respect for fathers and “virile brotherhood” — a blind and helpless yet immutable desire to be placed under the tutelage of the True Genetrix: she who can grant life to works over the death that pervades the centuries. To become the adopted son of the mother of creations: this is how femininity was “present” in André’s case — much more hidden than it appeared to him, more hidden than he let it appear. He separates himself and flees the deadly mother and the mother’s mother on their orders. Thus he believes he is accomplishing his male will, his virility. But the escapee from both the familial and the final resting places runs after the bosom of grace. For a long time he thought that he was signing his life as if it were one of his works. But, in the end, he was seeking the countersignature of the unknown donatrix.

Madame Goldschmidt answered Clara’s telegram: “Return immediately without your companion.” Her daughter departs for Venice with the companion. He devours the *Serenissima* just as he had gobbled up Tuscany. We imagine him instantly fixing in his mind the Z-shaped stroke that Tintoretto imparts on the *Climb to Calvary* painted on the wall of San Rocco: fifteen years later, in the film called *Sierra de Teruel*, the procession of international aviators shot down in the mountains from which Aragonese peasants bring them down using improvised stretchers repeats the same gesture, but in reverse. “And all that long line of black-clothed peasants,” Malraux had written for the novel, *Man’s Hope*, “the women with their hair hidden beneath the scarves which they had worn from time immemorial, seemed more an austere and mysterious triumph than preparations for a funeral march.”³ Correcting the proofs, he changed the end to: “[it] seemed more like an austere triumphal march than a relief party bringing out wounded men” (*MH*, 484⁺). The correction makes the essential stand out: here, as at San Rocco, the mysterious triumph awaits the pitiful victim and sanctifies her. The holy women and Simon of Cyrene don’t make up a funeral procession, either. What Malraux hallucinates in the Z is the zigzag of a thunderbolt joining the invisible to the visible. It matters little whether it descends or rises. Under our eyes it inscribes not the mystery of the Crucifixion, but that of revolt and of art — an agnostic Golgotha that the thunderstruck aviators ascend as they are transported downward.

For her part, Clara opposes the oversumptuous colors, what she will call Venetian baroque, the seductions of the permanent show⁴ for the

eyes put on by the City of Doges. Her soul remains attached to the clear design of Tuscany through which grace was signed for them and between them. Venice is already the interference, the erasure, and the betrayal of this grace. André's unflagging appetite for Arabo-Gothic architecture and Byzantine mosaics, for gold, ornamentation, curved spaces and the mannered lighting of certain painters — all this Clara experiences as an abrogation of the pact made at San Miniato, as bulimic indifference. For him, the Florentine miracle, though no doubt the first, would be no more than one of many. He would now proceed in his mad dash forward, seeking out all cases, works, and gestures in which he recognizes the "presence" of an intractable creativity. "Every stage of our journey," she writes, "meant a desire for the next" (Clara, 185). No. Traveling forth toward the hidden signatory that turns every masterpiece into a simple sample of the signature is alone his desire.

They return to Paris and get married.

Clara's script of the episode seems inspired by Chaplin:

Mama was waiting for me at the station with Aunt Jeanne, the one whom carnal matters interested so intensely and so vainly.

Aunt Jeanne said to me, "Is it worth it?"

Mama said to me, "Are you happy?"

My brother Maurice did not ask me whether I was happy. Sitting there on his bed, trying to force a clumsy foot into a shoe that was too small for it, he said, "You have dishonored us. I am leaving for America."

I said, "Put on your shoes first." . . .

"Your uncle is a beggar and you are only a poverty-stricken girl," said my uncle when I asked him to hand over my patrimony. "I'll put the matter in the hands of a lawyer," said I. Upon this everything was settled, after I had once more refused the offer of a really considerable allowance, for my uncle could be open-handed when it was a question of keeping people under his control. . . .

"Your uncle looks like a mustard pot," said my fiancé. It was perfectly obvious, but it had never occurred to me. . . .

"I've ordered a black velvet suit trimmed with squirrel at Poiret's for the civil wedding," I said. Then, rather ashamed, I added, "Couldn't we do something else, something in the religious line, I mean — it doesn't matter what religion. You know, like Laforgue. After his marriage he went and spent ten minutes in the darkness of a church with his wife."

"All right," he said, "but in that case we'll make the rounds of all the places. We'll go to the Protestant church, the synagogue, the Catholic church, to a mosque, a pagoda if we can find one, to the Christian Scientists and the Antoinistes." . . .

"What do we do with these?" said my husband, walking down the town-hall stairs. (Clara, 189–92)

"These" were the wedding rings. The swap was made: the little fortune that Clara's father's brother managed for her passed into the couple's hands. Without batting an eye, André made speculative investments at the stock market. They will live the life of the independently wealthy until the summer of 1923 when not only the shares of the Pedrazzini mines in Mexico but also the Pedrazzini themselves (whom André claimed he had met at one of the company's board of directors meetings) go up in smoke. But before this, the couple had crisscrossed Europe. In their hotel room at the Chapeau Rouge in Strasbourg, Clara forgets a volume by Sade, *Le Bordel de Venise*, illustrated by Derain and which André, with Clara's benediction, edited under the counter in his series of erotic texts. They take an airplane to Prague.

First flight: still an extremely rare and adventurous event. André jubilates. Peering over Bavaria and Bohemia which he can make out through the clouds, he thinks: Well! There's D'Annunzio, there's futurism, there's Fonck and Guynemer. And here comes Saint-Exupéry whose wings wind around the western Sahara coast toward Port-Juby; and Malraux himself, with Corniglion-Molinier and Maillard, in a Farman 291, making a flyover of the Yemeni desert in search for Saba; and here comes Kassner, from *Days of Wrath* flying from the Nazi jail near Prague, encountering the same hurricane that André sustains in the skies above the Constantinian region while returning from Arabia; and, soon, Magnin aboard the España squadron plane during the battle of Teruel. The child in him jubilates at feeling he's grown up so tall, so fast; the seer, at being able to take in so much area at once with his eyes. And the hero in him flouts the abyss below, the warrior imagines the firepower of such a machine, the runaway measures its potential use for escape, and the conqueror its use for invasion. From La Salpêtrière, he will write: "My strange vertigo obsesses me. Real vertigo is something I have never experienced. The phrase *to lose one's foothold on life* keeps running through my head, linked to the image of an aircraft sideslipping in an air pocket" (*Laz.*, 91).

Returning from a lark — twenty-five thousand kilometers round trip in a Farman equipped with a souped-up Gnome et Rhône Titan Major

engine— across the desert northeast of Yemen, André takes down a few thoughts, entitled “L’Homme et le moteur” for the April 1934 issue of *Gnome et Rhône Journal*. Between man and motor, he explains, the relation is not one of person to instrument, but an interpersonal one. “Strange union . . . nearly sexual relation” (he had noted already in the scene over Bône), the puffing motor is experienced as a pulsation of the heart. All senses on the alert— sight, touch, and hearing, as well as “that rising and falling sense that yet has no name”— the pilot dwells in the machine and the machine dwells in him. A breakdown, as between long-time lovers, is always possible, but that thought no longer causes fear. “I believe that courage destroys ideas.” First flight: first coitus: “The passenger thinks of every reason that might cause a fall. But by the hundredth time, he has ceased thinking about it. Not that the possibility has dissipated, but because only a corporeal habit is more powerful than a mental notion.”

Habit: the formation of a pilot-motor body— more hermaphrodite or centaur than cybernetic machine. “To the point that after twenty-five thousand kilometers without engine trouble when a storm forces the airplane into a dive and suddenly the earth is seen vertically, there is something within us that says that it’s not the plane’s wing that has dipped but the earth that has gone crazy.”⁵ A definition of art and of writing here: the object gone crazy under El Greco or Chagall’s brush; the forest that begins to walk under Shakespeare’s pen, all without any stylistic misfire being at cause. At La Salpêtrière, he will discover a “consciousness that I exist” that will be as invulnerable to falling as the aircraft-called-body. At the heart of the vertigo in which André lets himself be engulfed and then gropes, in his room, fear is not what grips him, rather the earth is no longer in its place. The lower brain is like a good motor or like love or style: it holds up even when all is slated for destruction. Appearance is what’s out of whack.

The director of the Gnome et Rhône company, Paul-Louis Weiller, had said to Malraux: “If you come and visit our testing factory, I’ll show you a whole cemetery of valves.”⁶ André tells himself that for every valve that goes to the pit, that’s one man saved. We sacrifice “steel offerings” to the gods, then, so they will spare us. We practice a “modern mechanical magic” on test benches, picking out what is resistant to the passage from ordinary life. This text is from 1934: André is busy with various antifascist struggles, he is in love with Josette, he is organizing exhibits. Nevertheless, the young airplane-airman suddenly clenched both childhood and modernity. The flying machine is the steel of Cendrars, the

aerolite in *L'Homme foudroyé*, the contrary of the inner landscapes of a Gide or of the surrealists: willpower denatures destiny. A kind of cubist object, Max Jacob's butterfly, yet motorized: Trotsky's revolutionary armor-plating. A life of one's own choice entrusted to the completely conceptual artifact that a motor is — suspended from it, and piloted. In a word: signed.

Arrival in Prague, 1921. Clara brings him to the old Jewish cemetery, to the places of prayer, introduces him to the sweet old men with peyes. André tells her, "Be as much of a Jewess and a woman as ever you can: that's the side of you that interests me" (Clara, 195). The sad and tyrannical child wants to be entertained. He needs the unknown, the strange, something that endures. Every culture is a wonder, each defies dead life, each is an inexplicable oeuvre. André treks the world over to gorge himself with signs proving that civilizations can provide the power to say no. And, more than any other culture, the Jews — expelled, scattered, everywhere persecuted — are in his eye the very example of a resistance that lasts through millennia to the "what does it matter." And this, by virtue of one book that they will never finish reading. A rarity for this period: there is not a trace of anti-Semitism either in Malraux's work or in his life. In 1955, he prefaces a series of excerpts assembled by Nicolas Lazar from a text by André Néher and entitled *Israël* that is composed with images by Isis and Chagall. In June 1960, at UNESCO, he celebrates the centenary of the *Alliance israélite universelle*:⁷ "Rationalism did not destroy a dying Hebraic spirituality; it revived it" (*ML*, 973). In 1956, during the Suez crisis, he prepared to mobilize a brigade of Jewish volunteers to serve an Israel threatened by the Arab deluge.⁸ In that same year, he dedicated a text on the resurrection of this "courageous people" to Jenka Sperber (*Marronniers*, 293). And, even if he made no public statement to this effect, it was known that the minister was deeply hostile to President de Gaulle's anti-Israeli policy, especially during the Six Day War in June 1966 (*Marronniers*, 293–94).

From Prague, they go through a Vienna deep in postwar misery, then head up to Nuremberg and Magdeburg to see grandfather Goldschmidt in his fief. It is December 1921 and, to go to the museum, they cross the snowed-in city on foot. Admiringly, André says: "What a solid old oak he is, your grandfather!" (Clara, 200), enveloping him with a look that inserts him into the fable of fallen oaks — old intrepid (and condemned) entrepreneurs. In the evening, at the hearth, the ancestor solemnly reads Heine in German. Clara translates. General contentment. The couple hop to Berlin, capital of film and expressionist painting, of cabarets, transves-

tites, Blue Angels, Doctor Caligaris, Spenglers, and Keyserlings. Here, the arts and thought give themselves without restraint to the exploration of the anguish rife in a Europe of impending doom. Death, tired of carrying on in *Paper Moons*, finds an echo in *Müde Tod*, weary death, by Fritz Lang. Here, unlike Paris, distress and nihilist guiness are not forgotten. They are confronted, works are made out of them. And, recognizing immediately the strength in this darkest of separations, André inoculates himself from its violence with French insouciance. Back in Paris, they buy copies of works by F. W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, and Robert Wiene, with the intention of getting them put on movie-house programs. But they fail to obtain the distribution rights.

Writing or Life?

7

SO, HERE HE IS, at the beginning of 1922, back living on the first floor of Villa des Chalets, once again a prisoner in the house of women. Silk-lined prison: Clara's fortune affords the couple a life in high style. But financial ease or not, wasn't this a dead end following the escapade into Europe and love? There was no question of allowing his resolve to weaken. But what would be his new escape route? Works, of course. But what kind? And by what means? The oeuvre of his life or that of his pen? Or would it be uncovering works by others, editing them, dealing in them? Or, again, would it be some great global quarrel in which to take sides, or an action to sign?

He had a second piece of writing in the works since the beginning of 1921: a "*farfelu*" tale whose title remained uncertain, which would never be completed or published. Yet André will persist until 1927 in getting excerpts of this tale placed in various avant-garde journals, although *The Temptation of the West* and his essay "D'une jeunesse européenne" will have by then revealed just how much his writing had recovered from cubist pastiching. During a stopover in Djibouti while en route to Indochina in October-November 1923, he asks Paul Budry (director of *Écrit nouveau* in Paris and a collaborator on *Action*) if he would bring the manuscript of

one of these excerpts to his mother-in-law's house, apologizing: "I have no copy." Even if it was occasionally jeered at, it seemed that the book project was far from abandoned: shouldn't one "keep proof of one's errors," as Tartuffe says, "in order to correct oneself"? A false admission that André signed by a cravatted cat.

"Written for a Teddy Bear" or "Written for an Idol with a Trunk" — the title for these youthful blunders remained uncertain; certain, on the other hand, was his intention (or incantation) to futility. *Signaux de France et de Belgique*, edited by Franz Hellens and André Salmon (André's friend since they met in Max Jacob's circle), published an excerpt, entitled "Tamed Hedgehogs," in August 1921. *Action* took another: "Diary of an Aunt Sally Fireman," subtitled "Whence Go the Cats We See at Night?" In April 1922, Marcel Arland was publishing the first issue of *Dés*: an homage to Mallarmé and Jacob. This toss was the only one to emerge from the dice box. Three months earlier, Arland had taken badly the slanderous maneuvering with which Breton had dumped the dadaists from the *Aventure* team. During that period, the chief surrealist was plotting hard and fast in order to master the means of imposing his own doctrine and muzzling the competition. Arland united Tzara's supporters and invited Malraux — whom he had just met and whose independent spirit he valued — to contribute something to the new journal. In his lead article, Arland flogged away at the only tendency the young contributors to *Aventure* had in common — "ruthless ambition." "Only attempts and contradictions are to be found there," he wrote. He called for an anarchism devoid of principle: "Ideas are of too little importance for one to cling to them. I am not responsible for the crime I committed yesterday — no more than I am for this preface." On that account, André nourished a similar skepticism: I was ready to adopt whatever doctrine, so long as it carried me further along. Tzara, of course, was one of the chosen, along with René Crevel, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, André Dhôtel, Georges Limbour, and even Eluard. Falsely radical where language is concerned, André did not care for dada. But he had to get published. He offers "Pneumatic Rabbit in a French Garden," a text taken from "Diary of an Aunt Sally Fireman." In 1924, while Malraux and Chevasson get ready to appear before the appeals court in Saigon, having been sentenced to prison in Phnom Penh for attempted art theft, the journal *Accord* publishes yet another two excerpts from the phantom book: "Interlude," which is the same as the text published earlier in *Action*, and "The Triumph," which appeared introduced by an Arland text vehemently

defending his friend. Finally, in the summer of 1927, the Franco-Italian journal *900* publishes a revised version of “The Triumph” under the title “Written for a Teddy Bear.”

Was Max Jacob’s disciple still persisting? In truth, it was too late for laboriously *farfelu* writing. The separation desired by cubist poetics and by a Christian ethics in support of the decision no longer measures up to the anguish that Europe and Malraux are now suffering. Paris glosses over the malaise with elegance and dissipation. But in Vienna and Berlin, André felt the crisis less superficially: the material and moral misery of the conquered (which will soon be that of the conquerors), the collapse of humanistic values incapable of striking back in the midst of the disaster. Their avant-gardes are not fantasies: they seek ways of signing the state of distress, how to testify to it and resist it, that is. When an entire civilization, horrified by the liquidation of millions of people in just four short years, witnesses the annihilation of its ideals, the hour is not ripe for the manufacturing of little poetic “jewels” of prose or for opening the exhibit doors on the trinket shop of whimsy. In the night that is falling upon Europe, it’s not the moons that will prove to be of paper, but the treaties and constitutions.

Clara and André discovered *The Decline of the West* in Berlin. She translated it from the original for him. André saw in it his own despair, but also a manner of thinking that fully acquiesced to the course of events to the point of abrogating them. It didn’t take any lengthy reflection before his hidden phobia of dead life identified in Spengler the enemy par excellence. His refutations of Spengler will, for their very constancy, aggravate the threat. His anatomy of civilizations viewed as organisms subjected completely to the forgetful redundancy of life and death will find an implacable medical expert in the character of Möllberg in *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*. But Malraux will immediately formulate his response to nihilism in “D’une jeunesse européenne,” the 1927 essay that already contains an outline of resistance’s twin themes: works, at least, do not perish along with the cultures from which they appear to emanate; and, because the modern West has rendered itself incapable of any beliefs or any symbolics, because it ignores man’s purpose, it can accept all forms attempted and can imagine still others. Modern art can be thus understood as a question — a question without an answer. Both museum and laboratory for creation, it is the first civilization whose destiny eludes the fate of the living. From the obvious and disastrous truth that nothing is to any avail, a new history can begin. Dostoyevsky’s “if

God is dead, everything is possible” must be understood as a promise of adventure as well as cry of despair.

Having taken *Littérature* away from the dadaists, the surrealists took on *Aventure* with Marcel Arland ceding the territory and founding *Dés* with Tzara’s help. It was with a sustained collaboration in mind that this journal got more amply acquainted with André, who was fundamentally hostile to spontaneism and still reticent about dada buffoonery. He is soon meeting Arland in the narrow hallways of the *NRF* in Rue de Grenelle where he begins, once again, to be a frequent caller. He introduces Arland to Clara in Avenue des Chalets. “Later he was to prove the truest friend that we had as a married pair, and a real friend, too, to each of us when our marriage broke up” (Clara, 205). Arland is a plump, sweet man who carries the world’s despair with a dreamy sort of wisdom. This anarchist is the opposite of an *enragé*. The two young men debate endlessly over what art and literature can be worth in the face of the disaster of all the senses. If it is given that the forms and genres inherited through tradition are now annihilated, at what price can art and writing preserve a modicum of legitimacy? And on what can this legitimacy be based? Would it not be better, when all is said and done, to give up writing for so-called direct action?

In February 1924, while the Malraux are champing at the bit under house arrest in the Hôtel Manolis in Phnom Penh, Marcel publishes, in the *NRF*, “Le Nouveau Mal du siècle,” a short essay that takes stock of “the disorder and tumult of minds” that are prey to the time’s uncertainties. It was a compendium of the discussions the signatory had had with his friend. Occasionally, André’s voice can be heard distinctly, echoing certain others: Max Jacob, something of Gide, Cendrars and Reverdy, Drieu, and a prelude to Bernanos: “Dostoyevsky’s topicality is a very clear sign; never before in France have we felt so close to certain heroes of *The Possessed* or *Karamazov*; the anguish of these characters, the tragic aspect of their actions, the evangelical mysticism that the novelist sometimes shares with his heroes are so many characteristics found in certain works by our contemporaries.”¹

Arland concluded, however, on the tone of “a new harmony” — not a classic one, of course, but one that would integrate, without fanfare, contemporary man’s drama “with the five miseries of his five senses, with the heady misery of thinking and being moved.” A literary ethics made up of skeptic despair and stoic resolution: a program presented without a lot of conviction, a bit muddled, quite stiff. Jacques Rivière thought it

best that the journal he directed not publish the manifesto of these *enfants du siècle* without a response. He thus reprimanded them, in the same issue, in "The Crisis of the Concept of Literature." "Young writers . . . are floundering in a deplorably romantic conception of their role. If it seems to them that to write is derisory, it is because they still believe that writing is important." They turn themselves into major prophets of a God that they nevertheless claim has disappeared; they have literature replacing some epiphanic rite, all the while considering revelation to be impossible. No less than a mystical experience, the literary practice must not balk at annihilating the illusion of the ego so that the miracle of a true presence may take place. And yet they despair. Rivière concluded by going to the quick of the *double bind*: either one goes the route of religious faith or else it's suicide. The choice appeared clear, but it was to save literature from extremism. "An intermediary attitude is possible: it consists precisely in distracting one's mind from this question, in taking notice of certain possible pleasures, in pursuing them, in letting life within us do as it will."² Today, the fate of writing should cease being considered either in terms of religious revelation or, on the contrary, that of its discouragement. Take another look at Proust's modesty, he ventured to say, look at relativism in the sciences: that's what's modern.

Rivière was to die in the following year. It's easy to imagine that this testament to literary and artistic morality remained a dead letter for Malraux. Let life take its course as if we ignored what it does and where it heads when we let it! When life and reality are irrevocably worthless, the task of writing and of art becomes, to the contrary, that of striving toward the impossible. Published three years later, "D'une jeunesse européenne" will serve as a kind of point-by-point refutation of the moderate position. Rivière, however, had only opened the *NRF* doors for André so that he could contribute short reviews. In truth, however, they are simple models of laconic precision.

The Malraux are still exploring Europe in this year of uneasiness: Greece and often Belgium, where they have friends. André leaves Clara and Arland in Bruges to go visit James Ensor in his studio in Ostend. The scandal precipitated by *L'Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles* was over thirty years old: bedlam of colors, silence of haggard masks, bourgeois bastards side by side with proles, armed troops, socialist and anarchist banners, a joyless Brueghel kermis with the damned from a Boschian hell scattered through the streets of modern Jerusalem because a derisory Savior has been announced. With this painting on that background of the end of

Christianity and humanism that was now motivating German expressionism, Ensor had signed the anguish in advance. André recognized in it his despair transformed into a work.

So, between Galanis and Ensor, where was his aesthetic nestled? It seemed eclectic and “tasteless,” as Clara said, even nonexistent. Indeed, André paid absolutely no heed to taste — his own least of all. Henceforth an outmoded affection, taste had once served to regulate sensibilities and had been a way of measuring the acceptability of forms. Courtly societies, communities of the faithful, villages and tribes, the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie had had taste. But curious about everything, today’s Europe had no taste for anything. And from works, Malraux felt no more than anyone else that quivering sense of peace or that promise of happiness that the feeling of the beautiful supposedly afforded. He ran around everywhere, as has been said, comparing incessantly, striving to improve his grip on precisely that which he did not care for, in order to grasp and master the very means by which the Absolute got itself “taken in” there. Galanis’s power of lucidity, Ensor’s power of the masquerade: great works are sisters, so why choose between them?

One evening in the beginning of 1923, Alfred Salmony, the conservator of the Museum of Cologne, unpacked from his briefcase and spread out on the Malraux’s table some reproductions of Thai sculptures, Han heads, and Roman faces that he was assembling for an East-West exhibit. He then combined them (“with the dexterity of a cashier,” notes Clara [Clara, 220]) in order to bring out their hidden kinship, and André immediately recognized his own spontaneous “method.” When he went rummaging through the second-hand bookstalls, collecting rare editions, editing the most eclectic artists and writers, all questions of schools pushed aside, he had been proceeding no differently. Salmony had, however, considerably widened the landscape by throwing in a whole Asia full of wonders. André had often visited the Musée Guimet and his eye was already attuned to Buddhist sculptures and Persian miniatures. But now he saw what he would do in *The Voices of Silence*: he could place the Reims angel and a fourth-century Gandhara head side by side, on facing pages. Not, of course, to extract some essence of a man-who-smiles or to imagine some influence leading from one work to the other, but to show an insistent kinship between all forms — one that is nonthematic: “They impose the presence of another world. Not necessarily an infernal or paradisiac one and not only an afterworld, but *a present beyond*” (*Surnat.*, 7; my emphasis).

Writing a history of art or an aesthetics was not at issue and never would be. The objective was to render visible or, rather, audible “the meaning taken on by the presence of an eternal response to the query that man’s share in eternity directs to him when this query rises up in the first civilization that is conscious of its own ignorance of man’s meaning” (*Surnat.*, 35). A disabused modernity is the only modernity possible for these “men for whom art exists and to whom the odd name of ‘connoisseur’ continues to be attributed because their civilization has not yet found its own name” (*Surnat.*, 1). “It is neither their refinement nor their eclecticism that brings [these connoisseurs] together, but their common recognition of the mysterious power which, transcending history by means which are not beholden to the notion of ‘beauty,’ renders certain prehistoric paintings *present* before their eyes” (*Surnat.*, 1). The point was to display this enigmatic and recurrent “presence” by means of montage, as Salmony had done. And so, in art books, the text would merely serve as support for the photographic reproductions, like a guide (albeit metaphysical) that intervenes to serve our vision of pieces reproduced in a museum catalog. A service rendered to the eye so that it may escape appearances and see the apparition. To perform this service, the power of language would of course be necessary. For the apparition is appearance under threat of disappearance, and only speech can threaten with inexistence the existent of which it speaks. Certainly of no lesser importance were the photographic framing procedures, the sequential cutting and reassembling that are the writing of the visual media. From this writing should rise up that which, in its visible immediacy, no single piece could present before the connoisseur’s eyes: the invisible that it adduced, the other thing—other than its subject, its object, and its cultural context.

In setting his images out on André’s table as if setting up for a game of solitaire, Salmony revealed to him the sense of a practice he had only been exercising before, when he was running around the Paris bookstalls and the Tuscan museums. The connoisseur was becoming a creator of creations—a sort of meta-artist. A vocation was taking shape: composer of images, a possible response to the anguish caused by the crisis. The longing to see everything could perhaps now be satiated without, for all that, causing one to forget (on the contrary) that the modern eye is wanting in idols.

In the evenings my companion would often spread out papers covered with printed letters, typographical ornaments, and illustra-

tions on an immense tray. . . . having done this he would take a pair of scissors and a pot of paste and run up a book as a dressmaker runs up a frock. (Clara, 220–21)

This is how he worked for Doyon, Simon Kra, Florent Fels, and Kahnweiler. He had undoubtedly been influenced by the very first collages—the prewar Braques, Juan Gris, and Picassos. But now, at the beginning of 1923, he caught a glimpse of something more: that his role, as visionary connoisseur, would not be confined to cutting out and inserting bits of “real” objects into works; it would be, rather, to take scissors, paste, and the works of the entire world and make a montage that would provide contemporary civilization with the only oeuvre that suited its idleness, the only exhibit appropriate for a world that called upon all worlds past and present to come participate in the exhibit. But before getting to that, of course, and as if to test his infancy, he would have to set his ability to marvel to the dual trials of novelistic writing and lived exploits. All in all, though, his overdecorated biography will never—even in its most desultory aspects—be more than a preparatory sectioning for some masterpiece of haute couture.³

Whose body did he have it in for, to go snipping away and pasting appearances back together? Did the “little hands” from Bondy yet inhere to his own fingers, tailoring set costumes for the child so that they could see him climb to the world’s stage as a musketeer, boy scout, or navy man? Was it Berthe’s body he was executing, dismantling, reassembling, in order to disenchant the power of submission that emanated from her charm? Just look at André standing there before the carpet of illustrated cuttings strewn on the floor of the great room in Boulogne around 1950 when he is preparing *The Voices of Silence*: he’s overjoyed like a kid who’s just put together a puzzle out of every album in the house. Or was it rather that he was assembling remnants pilfered from appearances in view of tailoring the pattern for a royal gown as an offering to the mother of wonders?

His writings occasionally allow to filter through the admission that just such a demand for love was at stake in André’s impassibly feverish agitation. Take this passage, for example, at the very end of *Le Surnaturel*, on the mask of Djoser, the pharaoh, sculpted three thousand years before Christ: “With the author of this statue, we do not even share the same feeling of love or of death, perhaps not even the same way of contemplating his work. Yet when we see this work, the sculptor’s accent—now forgotten for five thousand years—seems to us as invulnerable to the

succession of empires as the accent of *maternal love*” (*Surnat.*, 33; my emphasis).

The accent of that maternal tongue which André claims said nothing to him is paradoxically what the visionary’s work strives to equal. Through the visible, an inaudible mother calls out, whispering that he must escape from it. Her murmur animates masterpieces and exempts them from death. “Always, however brutal an age may actually have been, its style transmits its music alone; our Museum without Walls is the song of history, not its newsreel” (*VS/E*, 624*). True life, that of artworks, is “as if it were the libretto for some unknown music” (*AM*, 2). Muffled within the song of the sirens that seduces dead life and drowns it in history, a sweet and still chime beckons the ear toward another harmony. This is just what Galanis’s drafted forms show as they open the compact space of the visual prison: they let us hear a Bach fugue. The royal gown that André composes is the score for a cantata.

In the spring of 1922, Clara reminds him that they had agreed, during their honeymoon, to divorce six months later. Time was up. Clara was enjoying the pleasures they shared but hated ambiguity. André thinks only of slipping away somewhere: listen, what if we used the money for the divorce to go see El Djem, Kairouan, Carthage, and Syracuse? New escapades to Sicily and Tunisia. A year later, in June 1923, André is called into active service at Strasbourg. Before the medical examination board, two years earlier, having gulped a good dose of caffeine, he had pleaded rheumatic fever (true) in order to be invalidated. “In 1918, I was a pacifist. But I was waiting impatiently to be old enough to enlist” (*ML*, 453). After the war, his doctrine had become rather more like Ch’en’s: “It’s not through obedience that men go out of their way to get killed — nor through obedience that they kill. . . . Except cowards” (*MF*, 123). He was declared fit for auxiliary service. Now, in Strasbourg, the military authority turned him over to the Robertsau hussar regiment. Ubuesque decision:⁴ André was about six feet tall, while a regulation hussar was never more than five feet four inches: “on him the uniform trousers were turned into breeches” (Clara, 241). Clara came to live near the base and sent her younger brother, Paul, running around Strasbourg to hunt down some acquaintance of the Goldschmidts, whose firm had a branch in the Alsation capital, who could intervene with the major. No sooner was he freed than André suggested to Clara a little boat trip on the Rhine. As they pass the Lorelei — a subject the boy cherished: sirens gobbling up navigators — she recites Heine to him. While André expounds on the mys-

ticism of the Rhenish Dominicans—the Admirable Ruysbroek, Meister Eckhart and his student, Tauler, Suso the Blessed⁵—Clara muses about her father, now deceased, who used to bring her to this river, before the cliff. They listened to the chant of the other: this, he thought to himself, is how one resists the spell. Very well, thought Clara, but how shall we weather the threatened shipwreck?

Travel and reap, collect and compose, sniff out and edit, play the stock market, cloister oneself to reach mystic ecstasy? It seemed to him that one need not, in any case, seriously contemplate the alternative to writing. Before written language, André remained as timorous as the self-taught man. Barely more than a whit proud of his strained *Paper Moons* or of his incompletable “Diary of an Aunt Sally Fireman.” He had no problem seeing the difference between his heavy pastiches and the fulminating accuracy of the poetic prose of a Max Jacob, a Cendrars, or a Reverdy. Even his book reviews, which are quite intelligent, were afflicted with a rather strained dryness. When he discovers Gide, through the *Morceaux choisis* published by Gallimard in 1921, André is overwhelmed: what an art of writing! His syntax both classical and sinuous, gifted with an immense and rare vocabulary, a sentence structure that ventures into linguistic surprises without being flashy, without posturing, but with humor, Gide is able to make language say what it had never said before. His delicately weighed seemliness was used to lend voice to the unseemliness inherent in all souls, and especially in the soul of the immoralist. André adored *Paludes*. But he defends himself also: what narcissism! What patience with self-examination! what attention paid to one’s own failings! All to turn the ordinary dust of passing days into this jewel! André lacks the love of language necessary to carry off such a delicate mounting, he flees himself too much to dwell on such introspections.

He will soon rid himself of this resentment by classifying Gide alongside Proust among individualistic and intimist writers. Following Anatole France, they will be the last heirs of the bourgeois and “humanistic” psychological novel. He will also set aside his reticence to write and play the card of the new generation: believing in the ego, Gide is still part of the nineteenth century; because nihilism has worsened, we young Europeans are no longer part of that. Vast vision of a West doomed to deepen its lack. But the breadth of the picture cannot hide the true motif, which is, once again, the fear of language. One cannot get out of language by writing: on the contrary, one enters it, and one cannot escape or overcome it. There may be plenty of stylistic tools, but they can never

be fully mastered and must always be negotiated. Malraux's writing trembles with haste and insubordination. As Gide writes in 1945: "he writes flat out."⁶ He lacks the patience required to let language become unsettled and arrange itself on the paper so that it ends up saying what there is to say. As if his pen knew already this — this, and that there's nothing to say except to say (the) nothing — and thus jostled words and sentences so that it may be said right away. Malraux treats language as a means, and a means is an obstacle. He writes in order to act upon the reader, as an orator sounds prophetic to stir up an audience. Or as d'Artagnan works a horse to death to catch up with Milady. His brusqueness thus limits his idiom to four or five tones: the military proclamation, the newspaper dispatch, evocations from beyond the grave, preaching, the anecdote — either tragic or droll or both: edifying, that is — these tones are repeated all the way through from the first novels to the last writings on art and literature.

All this is because one must be striking, cause to act, move: to touch and lend movement. His stroke is rhetorical rather than literary. He writes at full gallop, with a view to winning over his audience, whether speaking on the podium in Moscow or Paris, in a taxi or a Rue Vaneau salon. Few French writers are less perverse than Malraux: the comtesse de Ségur is a monster next to him. André thus reads Gide while adjusting him to his speed and believes he can do him no greater honor than to position him as spiritual leader, as mentor of a lost generation. "Aspects d'André Gide" appears in the April-May 1922 issue of *Action*, and "Ménalque" in *Disque vert*, February-April 1923. André limits his praise to the "action" of emancipation that the author of *The Fruits of the Earth* exerts upon "the intellectual conscience" of youth: "Yours is not so much an influence as it is an action." Malraux strives, perhaps not without malice (there's no way, really, that he can like him), to celebrate the master of life, the immoral moralist, the French Nietzschean. Henri Albert, who has been translating Nietzsche for *Mercure de France* for the last twenty years and whom André has met, prefaces Gide's *Œuvres choisies* in the same tone: "What Schopenhauer was for the young Nietzsche, in around his twentieth year, Nietzsche himself can become for us: a marvelous educator."

The truth was that it bothered Gide to discover in the "philosopher with the hammer" an ethical overturning that he, independently and through scrupulous attention to serene integrity, had drawn from his own distress. And nothing more than the boisterous proselytism of *Zarathustra* could repulse this extremely classical — one might say whispering —

modernist who entrusted the perfectly policed accuracy of his language with the task of having *his* truth be heard. He stressed that if Ménélaque's truth seemed exemplary to the young generation, it was in spite of himself. To him, "Throw out my book, Nathaniel" echoed Montaigne's "Adieu, then, reader." *The Fruits of the Earth* no more opened a line of succession than the *Essays*. If lesson there was, it did not reside in a message: rather, the progressive polishing of language alone would attest to the work upon the self that is at the foundation of ethics. Each individual should, with his own voice, render homage to the language necessary for him. Gide was altogether Protestant when it came to writing: each individual strives toward his own truth and no one is exemplary. Miserable is the writer who believes he is delivering a message!

In the commentary on *Later Fruits of the Earth* that Malraux publishes in the December 1935 issue of *NRF*—in the heat of his antifascist activities—he will feign yielding to this demand. He declares that he has always been much more affected by Gide's "tone of voice" and the "tone of [his] style" or the "flavor of [his] intelligence" than by "the work itself." What would become of the work without this flavor? Probably, once again, a message. Thus, kind André explains, we reject the truth of a Pascal or a Nietzsche (I repeat that we are in 1935) while their tone maintains its hold on us. By this time Malraux already has four novels and his adventures behind him, in addition to his celebrity as a writer. Beneath the terms "style" and "truth," he still seemingly makes out tone and message—but it is to the advantage of the first. Did his writerly craft and practice of language teach him patience? Did they teach him to put up with the clamor of words just enough to enable him to negotiate his own tone both with and against them? And, finally, to recognize these virtues in the books of others?

Not yet. First of all, he maintains, a writer's oeuvre effectively performs an action. He adds, however, that the power to perform the action is to be found in the "particular obsession" haunting the author. While certainly not the expression of a compulsion, writing is at least the metamorphosis of a compulsion, its conversion into a weapon for affecting readers. Obsession belongs to the destiny one endures alone; writing transcribes this destiny, rendering it exemplary to others while wresting the author from his schizophrenia. Let us anticipate a bit, all the way to the *Anti-Memoirs*: "The proud shame of Rousseau," we read at the beginning of this book, "does not destroy the pitiful shame of Jean-Jacques, but it brings him a promise of immortality. This metamorphosis of a fate undergone into a fate transcended is one of the most profound that man

can create” (AM, 4). So it is with the worn-out confessions that Gide’s *Journal* constitutes.

This being granted, what about *Later Fruits of the Earth*? Malraux’s diagnosis is equivalent, in turn, to a poetic confession. Gide had been publishing installments of his *Journal* in the *NRF* for several months when the composition of his book began to come under the attraction of the *Journal*. This writing adheres to petty day-to-day factuality, to encounters, to the anecdotal. The tone was inflected by this adherence toward a sort of realism that is quite distant from the exaltation found in *The Fruits of the Earth*. The change is in no way due, affirms André, to the antifascist political activity in which Gide, along with Malraux, has been engaged for many years. No: it is the “Journal tone” that puts its stamp on all of his writing at present. It nullifies the lyricism of the first *Fruits of the Earth* and makes outmoded as well any recourse to novelistic fiction, so much so that all other writing than the *Journal* now appears useless. In this genre, Gide’s “particular obsession” had located the authentic means of its metamorphosis.

Does this mean that the *Later Fruits of the Earth* is composed of simple excerpts from the journal? That’s not far off. And “this notion,” writes Malraux, “is one that I value very much: all art is grounded on a system of ellipses.” Consequently, “the most pressing action” in Gide’s latest book “is situated in the blank spaces.” Here, we see André attributing to his homonym (and not without spite) his own poetics of decoupage and montage. Now, this poetics is deemed all the more effective in that it functions directly from a grounding in everyday life and the realities of which the work is constructed are obliquely recognizable. Disjointed, then reassembled, “life” allows a breeze to pass through clefts left by successive disjunctions and reassemblages — a breeze not of some other world but of ours, animated by a power that surpasses it — a power that, as we have seen, Malraux calls “a present beyond.”

Assuredly, it was following this system of ellipses, by this art of cutting and assemblage, that Malraux’s particular obsession became effectual in his novels — and with a certain level of perfection in *Man’s Fate*. “Uncle” Gide must have been bewildered, however, at seeing himself being taken hostage by the votary of the anacoluthon. Nothing was more foreign or more redoubtable to him than this segmental politics: beneath it, he detected a sectarian ethics. Following three prepublications between March and May 1935 in the *NRF* journal, *Days of Wrath* appears with Gallimard on 15 May. Gide had read it a week later and confided to the “little lady,” his friend and close neighbor, Maria Van Rysselberghe:

I have no doubt that he [Malraux] has the stuff of a great man—his prestige, to my eyes, is very great and very real—but I do not think he'll become a great writer. His language is less than good. He doesn't know his craft from instinct. And he ends up, nonetheless, with an artist's pseudowriting. On that account, I give him all the advice I can. But there are things that cannot be conveyed and one must limit oneself to constructive criticism. One always senses, in him, an author's intellect, but for me, this nullifies the emotion that he wishes to produce.⁷

Verdict without appeal: take action he might, but he will never write. Will he attempt to take action through writing? Yet he hasn't made the choice between art and life. He tailors his style with a saber. Yet language is water and cannot be slashed: one must glide, dive into it naked and swim.⁸ No one less cubist than Gide. As for the disaster of the contemporary West in the 1930s—the millions of unemployed and millions more dead, anemic democracies, redemption through totalitarianism—Gide is far from remaining insensitive. In a July 1934 entry in his *Journal*, he writes:

The work of art will henceforth be out of the question for a long time. To be able to lend an ear to the new and barely audible accords, one will have to guard against being deafened by the lamentations. There is nothing in me anymore that does not function through compassion. Wherever I look around me, I see distress. He, today, who remains contemplative reveals the inhumanity of his philosophy, the monstrosity of his blindness.

Here again, Gide gives testimony the way Montaigne did, plunged as he was in interminable wars and massacres between Christian factions and making his contribution to forced French unity through monarchic despotism. Personal minutes, observations taken down for oneself or for others, without distinction. But not in order to act upon the reader (“Adieu!”), rather to maintain oneself in the exact rhythm of a certain manner of being. This ultimate expedient in no way stopped Montaigne from commending the *Contr'un* by his friend, La Boétie, while nonetheless removing the latter from the crucial position he had reserved for him in his book. Nor did it stop Gide—who was right to be less prudent—from publishing (against Malraux's advice) that contemporary *contr'un*: the *Return from the U.S.S.R.*

All in all, Gide doubted whether Malraux was capable of that instinctive and pampered manner, that free manner of being that writing with itself as sole virtue is for him. He doubted if he could incubate *his* language and hatch it. What he did not doubt was that doubt was with Malraux: to be a great man or to be a great writer. Or else to slash into things with resolute intelligence or, again, to accept the adroit absurdity of squatting on the egg of words like a mother hen to nurse the wonder along. But André, Gide said, brought the blade down upon language as man of action and thereby revealed that indecision of his, typical of a hasty child.

As 1922 rolls into 1923, André's doubt is turning to anguish. The noose strangling him seems inextricable. As dealer in wonders or "connoisseur," his childhood could be shared with that of others. This wrenched him from his melancholy but did not constitute a work. A writer, then? He would have to agree to engage in a protracted struggle with words and sentences—those beasts that inhabit language—without hope of escaping them, would have to agree to making trenchant decisions. Man of action, as the phrase goes? As soon as an action is carried out, it fades into oblivion unless a piece of writing happens to give relief (*relever*) to its virtue and metamorphose it into an artwork . . .

No surprise that uncertainty weighed heavily on the *biography*, on the relationship to be established between a body deemed to be living—the *bios*—and writing, which is the *graph*. The roots of the "Malraux" equation begin to be exposed. Life—everything that's here and given before any choice is made, life and its intrigues—has no meaning other than going and throwing oneself to the putrid bottom of the pits only to rise up, amnesiac, from one's own putrefaction. Identical, nullified as if by a scale that returns to its position of perfect balance. And, in this equation to be solved, death is not one's demise, because this, on the contrary, is a moment of life: that of the return to zero. No, true death is the repetition of the whole movement, reproduction, the Great Redundant One that life would seem to counteract with all those intriguing little stories that it makes up but whose uproar, in truth, simply shelters and covers up the cycle's silence.

So much for the *bios*, worthy body needlessly standing erect, innocent fodder destined for the earthworms. In the human species as in all the others, the agent of death is the womb of reproduction, the female. Consequently, Malraux hates his time as a child spent under the tutelage of women. Deep, steely silence on the maternal genealogy.

The virile filiation that he opposes to the latter functions by sole virtue of the exploit: it owes nothing to the *bios*. Men are charged with transmitting the enigmatic power of the *graph*. Any passion whose corresponding act has a chance of escaping the Redundant One is called writing. Not the act itself, truthfully speaking, for the act will necessarily get carried away into oblivion with the rest. But a *trace* of the mad act. The enigma lies in the power of traces: it inscribes the artwork in the *bios* while affording it a chance to ex-scribe itself. “I want to survive for many men, and perhaps for a long time; I want to scar the map of Asia” (*RW*, 89*). Virile filiation takes place through *graphic* legacy: whatever he may be in the biological order of things, a father is he who attempts the gesture of resigning this order and thereby transmitting the trace. The strange power is still called “will”: as demented as it may be, it requires knowledge of its means and their domination.

The equation seems easy to solve: sacrifice one’s body to writing, says Monsieur Teste. This, however, is not the “Malraux” solution. For the *graphè* can call its virtue to witness only if it agrees to expose itself to the bestial Redundant One. Barring this test, it is mere leisure, dissipation, a tiny intrigue fomented out of the illusion that one is an I-who-lives, an author. It forgets the existence of that devouring oblivion. No, the *graphè* must *get itself signed*, bled (*saigner*) by the *bios* and its tiresome funereal repetition. It must get itself consigned to the dread of true death. Then and only then can it make a trace *against* itself by touching, then exempting itself. Countersign it.

A bit abstract? With Malraux, this equation is exposed, as we have seen, through the theme of hands: the palm is the dead hand, death in the crux of the hand; the fingers hold the pen or the weapon that signs, the index finger designates the present beyond within the present. Upon one’s demise, the palm retracts the fingers into itself: the spider grips its prey. But the shadow of the index—still pointing up—suspended as it is in limbo, perhaps escapes from the hold.

FORTUNE WOULD COME to the indecisive one's rescue in that early summer of 1923: it ruined him. Once Clara's stock portfolio evaporated, André was faced with having to decide what to do. Did he decide? Claude Vannec answering Perken: "It's not I who choose; it's something in me that resists." The heroes of *The Royal Way* become acquainted in the cabin of the liner carrying them off to the Far East. The older Perken is about forty, while Claude is the age André was when he began, in Saigon, to jot down the outlines of some scenes for a novel he would write, perhaps. The older character summarizes his contempt for biography thus:

"No one ever makes anything of his life."

[To which Claude retorted:] "But life makes something of us."

"Not always. What do you expect from yours?"...

"I think I know best what I do *not* expect of it." [Lots of "I"s and denials here.]

"Whenever you've had to choose between alternatives, surely..."

"It's not I who choose; it's something in me that resists." [The "I" is eclipsed: affirmation.]

"Resists what?"

"Being conscious of death."

“Actual death is degeneration. . . . Getting old is so much worse. Having to accept one’s destiny, one’s place in the world; to feel shut up in a life there’s no escaping, like a dog in its kennel! A young man can never know what death really is.” (*RW*, 52–53*)

Here, at the end, they’re almost in unison. What do we spend our lives doing? Killing off possibilities. No need to get old to learn that. Before he was ten, André knew it: life is dead. And that resisting what awaited you was what it was all about. That’s willpower. “What he who feels himself cut off must demand from himself is courage” (*RW*, 54*). I demand my *virtù*, yet what offers it to me as a gift is not me but something more tenacious in me than me: a loathing of the given.

André was living off the Goldschmidt fortune as if he were a young man of means. Clara’s darling elder brother, Maurice (whose real name was André), a quite determined boy, denounced this loser who had dishonored his sister and was now setting her on the road to ruin. Still a bit of a punk, André really didn’t care. The two young men met and decided that of the three of them it was Clara, all things considered, who was the craziest. But, hey! he wasn’t going to go on practicing his character by meeting all the big names and by plotting little coups d’état in publishing and in the world of elitist bookstores. The good life was beginning to sap his energy. As for his literary essays, whether good or bad, they couldn’t satisfy the violence that inhabited him. For all time, it was the Gravedigger who held the key to that satisfaction. Short of being signed directly upon dread, writing would authenticate nothing. A nice stroke of talent, perhaps. But, like all the rest, it was destined for the vermin.

As they pass the tip of the Malaysian peninsula, Claude Vannec looks out toward Sumatra through his binoculars:

the monstrous green tangle of the forest billowing down towards the foreshore, topped here and there by palm-trees, black against the colorless expanse. Here and there on the high summits pale fires flickered, capped with heavy plumes of smoke; on the lower slopes the tree-ferns stood out clearly against dark gulfs of shadow. He could not take his eyes off the dark abysses that seemed to swallow up the foliage. Could a man possibly force his way through that serried undergrowth? Others had; so could he. Against this nervous affirmation the lowering sky and the impenetrable tangle of the leafage, teeming with insect-life, countered with their silent menace. (*RW*, 57*)

Billowing of plants and revolting beasts down “to the level of the decomposed water” under the “wan light” of a sun strangled in low clouds: the first and last day of the earth. All forms of life sink into this putrescence to be decomposed and recreated. Larvae lend their rhythmic emphasis to the perpetual redundancy of things that knows nothing of man and bears no meaning for him. The only exception to the tiresome repetition is willpower.

In October 1924, Malraux will appear in the Saigon appeals court and Arland will publish “Written for an Idol with a Trunk” in his journal, *Accords*, arguing that Malraux “is one of those whom literature cannot satisfy.” Many are those who are content with “gestures and words” or the “minuscule scandals” that agitate Parisian cafés. Malraux, on the other hand, is of that generation of writers who are so suspicious of the literary object that they give it up. Europe’s shipwreck, announced by Rimbaud and proven by the massacres of war, does not require one to sit one’s backside down at a table and sharpen one’s pen. Civilization’s bankruptcy must henceforth be *acted* and its debris turned into deeds. The age of the Gides and the Prousts is over. Drieu la Rochelle will say that the disaster’s immensity cannot be inscribed with ink: we owe it blood instead. The black blood procured from the horror at the bottom of the trenches, Malraux adds. Gide can go on judging him a paltry writer: the problem is not one of writing well but of finding a writing that is initiated to the abominable. As we know, the body alone can attest to this initiation, as the spirit nimbly heals up its wounds. But what body?

Already by the 1920s calls for “action” abound. They all call upon the body—sometimes the most reserved body, the one most liable to dread—to testify to the breadth of decomposition. The capacity of willpower or *virtù* to defy corruption will only be proven when it is put to the test. Nothing whatsoever would be understood in the terrible struggles to come or in what are called (futilely) the ideologies—communist, fascist—that confront each other in those struggles if we fail to grasp that, from all sides, leaders and thinkers alike—in order to convince, in order to conquer—call for bodies to be exposed to terror. This impetus takes on a quasi-sacrificial aspect in the very first texts by Georges Bataille (five years Malraux’s senior). Written around 1926, *History of the Eye* is published clandestinely in 1928. Its sexual violence culminates in the bullfighting scene where bestial strength is exalted to the point of being absorbed by the bacchante that confronts virility. Anxious, some ten years later, to lend literary writing the “authenticity” of an act, Michel Leiris will assign to *afición* the model of the corrido in

his dustcover comments for *L'Age d'homme* (written in 1939 and to whose 1945 edition he will add an introduction entitled "Of Literature Considered as a Bullfight"). Just as the "etiquette" of the kill within the arena increases the mortal danger of the matador (and thereby increases the authenticity of his gesture), so the writer must expose his work to the inner brute who desires sex and death. Likewise, it is by means of a "ceremonial" of the strictest style that he allows the work to approach expression in hopes of conquering it.

In 1932, Malraux composes *Man's Fate*, in which he has old Gisors say: "There are those who need to write, those who need to dream, those who need to talk. . . . It's all the same thing. The theater is not serious, but the bullfight is; novels aren't serious, but mythomania is" (*MF*, 219). The imaginary is nothing unless it is incarnate. And the sign that it constitutes—its "seriousness"—lies in the fact that it exposes life to the throes of inner death. Malraux is probably much more indebted to Picasso for this bullfighting theme, which in *Man's Fate* arises incidentally (and I believe uniquely in his entire work), than he is to the surrealist writers or to the philosophers of the Sacred who will shortly come together in the Collège de Sociologie.

André's obsession with morbidity—a swarming of repulsive larvae—cannot be faced as one does a bull. He cannot authenticate his writing through some public solar ceremonial of the taurobolium borrowed from the cult of Mithras that causes blood to flow in order that regeneration result. The beast of death to which he knows himself to be indebted is not some beautifully phallic monster: it is a blind vermin that one smashes under heel but that will inevitably and without fail transform you into carrion one day. What etiquette could keep this vile creature at bay? Terror is not conducive to confrontation. A modest Khmer statue that has for centuries withstood vegetal putrefaction and insectival gluttony attests to *virtù* much more effectively than an estocada delivered in a suit of lights or some parade on Nuremberg's Zeppelinfeld. No sacrificial regression—I mean in the sense of totalitarian religions—is permitted André. His personal beasts can gobble up any Riefenstahl extravaganza in no time. His antifascism will not be grounded in humanism but in probity toward his own phobias. What he sees behind those standards, beneath those shining helmets, is that vile Thing. Later, he'll be anti-Stalinist out of the very same loyalty.

Meanwhile, a ruined Clara is beginning to get alarmed. At a very young age, in the midst of a right-thinking and calmly *antidreyfusard* bour-

geoisie,¹ she came to know the humiliation of being Jewish. But she had never experienced poverty. And she now especially fears the hostility that her brother and mother harbor toward her union with the gigolo. She's worried: What to do without means, without a profession? André's answer: "You don't really suppose that I'm going to *work*, do you?" (Clara, 244). Then he lights a cigarette between his slender hands. She waits. It's easy to figure, my dear: no longer being anything, no longer having anything, we are in a state of absolute availability. So, let's go grab a few choice pieces of little-known Khmer art lost in the forest north of Angkor whose sale "will give us enough to live quietly for two or three years" (Clara, 245). Jubilant twitches followed by a bright childlike smile.

The shipowning grandfather in him, Rimbaud the Abyssinian, and the Asian demon are all part of what suddenly decided and resisted within him. The spice route, the pilgrims' itinerary, the trail toward archeological digs, the way of the larvae: everything leads out there. "Why Asia?" Valéry asks him. For the time being André will dodge the question. But will he ever know why? In 1953, on the occasion of Picon's essay, he declaims: "The obsession with other civilizations . . . lends a certain accent to mine, and perhaps to my life" (Picon, 18). Perhaps. But what about the Orient, specifically, obstinately? Something in him sniffs out the right trail: the one that opens onto his arena, the one without a bull, his field of millenarian empires collapsing and rising up like the vegetal seasons and the generations of insects: repetition of the same, region of the Mothers. It is the signature appended to this destiny as well. In André's eyes the enigma of Asia lies not in its subservience to the Redundant One (that is universal); it lies, rather, in its being welcomed with veneration and dealt with wisely. In Asia, if the will pretends to upset or efface destiny, then that will is folly. But what is still more improbable and opaque to the European intellect (and to André's, especially) is that works of the mind and art forms could actually come to fruition at the heart of interminable patience. Neither vulgar subordination nor insubordinate willpower, the distance in Asia between the given and what is returned to the given is simultaneously the narrowest and the most immeasurable that one can imagine. Malraux places the image of a "Fertility Goddess" sculpted by a Sumerian artist five thousand years ago at the very beginning of *The Voices of Silence*. The plump, speckled abdomen, the jaws opened wide, the prehensile rear legs—all details he makes sure are highly visible—evoke a doodlebug stalking prey from the bottom of its funnel. André leaves the title of the work with a question mark. This mark questions Life's duplicity: the Provider twinned with the Gravedigger.

In his readerly peregrinations, he would cross the Orient over and over again. Since he first learned to read he has devoured libraries. One title calls forth another; one name awakens another name. Could I become that hero? go to that country? But Asia returns: it's his nightmarish homeland, his love dazzled by terror, his temptation. For hours on end, in the reading rooms of the Bibliothèque Nationale, of the École des Langues Orientales, of the Musée Guimet, he props his elbows on the great communal tables beneath the double tulips of their green opaline lamps. Electricity had been installed not long before. This dandy is a Dominican. Within those great walls of books that discourage dead spirits he needs studious silence, to be enveloped in erudite display cases. They help him grow wings like those of that old goateed prof over on the other end, with his celluloid collar, absorbed in taking notes on an old Jesuit edition of the *Tao Te Ching*. Mysteries are revealed here and celebrated in the same odor of violet ink that one smells around the elementary school desk. It is the winter of 1922–23. Place d'Iéna. On its rotunda's first floor, the creaking parquet floor of the Guimet reading room shines forth like a Rembrandt.

André shuns the schools: he's bored there. He wears semi-supple-collared shirts and striped ties. Parisian men will soon be sporting the tweed jacket and flannel pants as if they were off on a world tour or a game of cricket. André embarks for the library of Babel. When he doesn't find the treasure he's looking for, he gets up and asks some pointed question or another of a librarian or a casual patron. He is piloted to the card catalogs. Joseph Hackin, who will later become the museum's conservator, places his knowledge in the service of the child. His pal Pascal Pia recounts: "Even before he got himself to the Far East, Marco Polo, Guillaume Rubruquis, and Plano Carpini maps nourished his dreams. Leaving the BN, we went on speculating—half-serious, half-comical—about the identity of Prester John. What had he been: prince or *dyable*? Grand Mogul or Negus? What if we went to find out on the spot?"² Ten years later, in March 1934, André goes to find out. He gets himself sent to Yemen. On Place de la Concorde, veterans and fascists attack the Chambre des Députés on 6 February. On the twelfth, various parties on the Left unite at Place de la Nation, and the Malraux are among them, ready to engage this war of civilization. Ten days later, the comrades learn that André flew off for Arabia in a flimsy crate with a pilot and a mechanic. *L'Intransigeant* of 28 April announces that "the story of this perilous expedition" will appear in its columns. The plane was not at all up to the

adventure, even though Corniglion-Molinier, the pilot, had souped up the motor. Furthermore, the tribes of the Sanaa Desert remain undefeated.

The Arabian raid repeats the 1923 gesture of transforming what he dreamed while reading into in situ action: Queen Balkis's fabulous suite at the court of the all-powerful king of Israel. And the Negus? Marco Polo situated Prester John's kingdom on the borders of India and China. In the seventeenth century, the Portuguese navigators put it in Ethiopia. Thanks to the crew's forced stopover near Djibouti, Haile Selassie, in his Addis Ababa palace, grants audience to the "inventors" of the legendary house of his ancestor, Sheba.³ And, five days later, the child will be paid back a hundredfold for this exploit. On the way back, over the Aures mountains, the wheezing monoplane gets caught in a hurricane. Corniglion-Molinier lets the aircraft free-fall six thousand feet through the black hail porridge and pulls it out, skimming the hilltops at sixteen hundred feet. So much for the bonus paid out in fear. Is André not now authorized to write? Terror, at least, ought to suffice in authenticating the archaeological discovery. Would the specialists really contest it? However, from the airplane, André would identify no site: like Claude Vannec, he just had the experience of that something in him that resists. The earth is a pretext for terror and, therefore, like a book for children, a pretext for wonders. The connoisseur couldn't care less about the truth of experts: mythomania disabuses it.

Pressed by his 1923 stock market failure, he has a ready plan of attack. An unexplored corner of Asia awaits him — in the Cambodian marshes north of the Tonle Sap, at the edge of the forests rising up toward Siam. The plan: to locate documented remains of admirable preclassical Khmer temples left to decay in the rotting pits full of slimy animals. Rescue the gods and dancers from the vermin, bring them back to Kahnweiler, who would sell them in America. Does this way of making a living seem a little twisted to you? It is in the straight line of his obsession. This, Clara reads perfectly and has no objection. Ready to take up this challenge as she has the others, she just wonders how far the lunatic will go.

This is what André had found in books he read: a culture has just been identified in northern Cambodia that is chronologically situated somewhere between the brick temple of the Funan kingdom of the earliest centuries and the grand ninth-century ensembles of Angkor. A French officer sent in 1914 by the geographic service to map the region had discovered, by chance, the ruins of a sanctuary northwest of Angkor Wat, in a place called Benteaï-Srey or Bentay-Srei. The École Française d'Ex-

trême-Orient (EFEO), created in 1898, then sent an archaeologist, Desmazure, to study the site; he disappeared. The Great War breaks out in Europe. In 1916, the director of the EFEO's archaeological service, Henri Parmentier,⁴ completes the preliminary measurements and publishes the first monograph on the temples in the *Bulletin de l'EFEO* (1919), complete with supporting photographic evidence, under the title: "The Art of Indravarman," from the name of the sovereigns of these intermediary kingdoms — later called Chen-La — dating from 700 to 1000. Parmentier deplores the neglect to which this splendid monument has been left.⁵

Escheat auspicious for exploits and for exploitation: a more perfect objective could not have been wished for. A note he tracked down in the *Revue archéologique* (1922) confirms it: Harvard's Fogg Museum has just "procured" a splendid bodhisattva head from Angkor Wat. One can very well go ahead and pillage, then. What's more, Benteaï-Srey is not a protected site. It isn't even certain whether it belongs to the king of Cambodia or falls under the jurisdiction of the French protectorate. André scours the official bulletins. A 1908 order of the governor-general of Indochina, dated 1908, had classified all edifices "discovered or to be discovered" in the western provinces of Cambodia as protected monuments. And he is reminded of this order once he arrives. But in a recent speech before the Chamber of Deputies, Daladier, then minister of colonies, said he judged this procedure of preservation by decree to be "flagrantly illegal." And now, in August 1923, a measure of the general government has just created a commission for the preservation of sites. He'll have to act quickly, before the EFEO's exclusive rights over Khmer treasures become law. Upon his arrival in Hanoi in mid-November, André will learn that the king of Cambodia had just signed an act protecting the sites scattered throughout the jungle. The idea of defying princes and governors enchants André.

Things are getting desperate. The Malraux are penniless. And then the desire for Asia won't wait any longer. Moreover, half the excitement in the art of war (and all of its pleasure) lies in prompt execution. André flies into action. On 1 October, he walks out of the Ministry of Colonies with orders for a mission in hand: he is authorized to go to Cambodia in order to explore the sites in the northwest. He has to cover his own expenses. When he presents his orders, the EFEO will furnish mounts and hitched carts. In all, hardly more than a laissez-passer. But one that let him get into the field directly.

At Marseilles, on 23 October, the Malraux — an anxious Clara, André exalted — proceed up the gangway of the *Angkor*: destination Haiphong,

Hanoi's port, where the headquarters of the EFEO is located. The passage will take some four weeks. They plan to meet up with Chevasson in Saigon at the end of November. Their last pennies went to purchase equipment, instruments, and the two one-way first-class tickets. Fernand (and perhaps Berthe) helped finance them. What does it matter?! In three months we'll be rich. Or lost.

Clara is decidedly scared. That she would be party to the adventure was never even discussed. A good sign? Friends and acquaintances are hardly surprised: they envy but are also suspicious of the audacity. Max Jacob sniggers in a letter to Kahnweiler: "A Malraux mission . . . Oh well, he'll find himself in the Orient. He'll become an orientalist and end up at the Collège de France, like Claudel. He's the type to have a chair."⁶ The poet knew from the first time they met that André would never stay with writing — the only truly holy mission in his eyes. Max believes that Malraux loves his century. Wrong: the way sought by André in the Orient certainly does not lead to the Académie. And for the time being, his baggage contains a dozen handsaws. And the seven sandstone sculptures that will be seized from his trunk when he arrives at the mouth of the Mekong the following Christmas will get him not some academic chair but a three-year prison sentence. Everything of value escapes and, recaptured by routine, must rot in jail. Real books are written in a cell: Dostoyevsky, Cervantes, Defoe, says *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*.

At the Hanoi headquarters of the Institut Français, Léonard Arousseau was expecting the official representative announced by the ministry. There were torrential rains, endless monsoon, the courtyard walls blue with mildew. With the titular director gone on a mission to Siam, Arousseau has replaced him. In the École tradition, he's more philologist than archaeologist. He receives Monsieur Malraux with civility and assures him that he will have the promised requisition orders for his passage into the jungle. Your baggage is, in any case, rather light, isn't it? What about the stones? Monsieur Malraux frets. The orders are that they are to remain where they are — in situ, says the scientist. In situ? André echoes. That's his motto: Max Jacob's "situation" taken literally. It is further ordered that you submit a report, if need be, of any possible findings. I shall appoint Monsieur Parmentier, the head of our archaeological service, to assist you. (Well, well, thinks André.) You should be aware, finally, that the region of the Dangrek people is dangerous. These undefeated tribes have already killed two researchers out on mission. André smiles: that's my problem. He had read in some detail the writings of Odend'hal and Maître, the scientist-victims.⁷ Their books and

contributions to specialized bulletins and journals will provide the horrific material for *The Royal Way*.

Who's smiling? André or Claude from that novel? In it, Aurousseau's name becomes Ramèges — ramifications and remex feathers: arpeggios before takeoff?⁸ Claude has set out to reconnoiter the ancient northwest Khmer route toward Siam that cuts through the Dangrek chain in the middle of Thai country. Discovering unknown sanctuaries that punctuate the trail or along lost byways effaced by the jungle, he will merchandise the forgotten wonders. Claude is not André: he is Malraux dreaming himself. The peoples who killed Odend'hal and Maître dwell, in fact, in Cochin China, east of the Mekong, not on the royal way. The writer also shifts the Moï to the northwest where he needs them. In Vietnamese, their name means savage (*RW*, 60–68).

In his libraries, André had done his spadework on the *Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* (What is a painter? Someone who looks at paintings), published in 1911 by Lunet de Lajonquière. Clara had been initiated as well. With the voice of the comparatist, André explained to her. Look, it's simple: between Flanders or the Rhineland and Compostella, you follow a route dotted with abbey churches and cathedrals: stages where the pilgrims rest and listen to sermons. Imagine, now, what France was like at the time: covered with virgin forest. I'd bet there were oratories and chapels that were erected on the byways off the main road. So, let's locate those byways of the Khmer royal way; let's ferret out the sanctuaries and we'll make a fortune.

That's what André said to Clara. Claude develops quite another argument before Ramèges: nothing less than the thesis of the museum without walls, twenty years prior to *The Voices of Silence*. Why, asks Ramèges, has Claude come to Cambodia? (Why Asia?) The answer:

It would seem, in art, that time does not exist. You must understand that what interests me, personally, is disintegration, the transformation that grips these works — their innermost life which is part and parcel of the death of man. . . . For me, museums are places where the works of the past, having now become myths, lie dormant — surviving on the historical plane — waiting for a day to come when artists will wake them to a real existence. . . . In the last analysis, of course, each civilization is impenetrable to the next. But objects remain — only we are blind to them until our myths come into line with them. (*RW*, 61–62*)

Claude has come to explore the Khmer jungle to refute Spengler and Valéry: there are perhaps as many humanities as there are cultures; or worse, the spirit of each is undoubtedly inaccessible to that of the others. On their own, the various humanities would be like the animal species, without even some common instinct for adaptation to the environment to which each belongs. Civilizations, however, leave traces—their works—which lie dormant, unknown, incomprehensible, like the reserve collection of the museum that this planet is. To awaken any one of these traces—that is, to render it sensible to us—the work of one of today’s artists must intervene. We may then snatch it back from oblivion and exhibit it; then, we may see it—at least for a time.

According to an earlier version of the scene, preserved in the Langlois-Ford manuscript,⁹ Claude even outlines the major theme found in the future writings on art—the theme of mourning. Later, it will be called metamorphosis:

“It’s the artist’s pride that strikes out one of the poles intrinsic to the life of the artwork: the pole of civilization through which it develops . . .”

“The medium . . .” [Ramèges begins to comment]

“ . . . of the *spectator*, not that of the author [specifies Claude]. To sum up, I should say that the artwork tends to become its own myth.” (OC, 1:1205*)

Written in the frenzy of his final days and published posthumously, *L’Homme précaire et la littérature* recalls, in passing, the axiom of metamorphosis: “A myth is what I call the style of an artist, of a man, of an event, when we turn its specific value into a supreme structuring value” (HPL, 71). Invaluable definition: here, the proud cubist poetics extends its influence into the realm of the ethics of “action” and of “adventure.” According to Malraux, the Max Jacob style—all “situation” and “separation”—can and must grip writings as well as persons and circumstances. Its effect on writing is no less wondrous than elsewhere. The aforementioned Indochinese “expedition” is a prose poem, but one that stylizes and situates the event on the plane of life, and not merely in language. Thus generalized, the cubist axiom divulges the secret of biography according to Malraux—biography is in no way the faithful narration of a life; it is the legend right within this life that fictions itself in actuality. Truth of style, not of adequacy.

If ever André were a Nietzschean, it was in this way. The “mythomania” that Gisors holds up in contrast to the novel (like the bullfight vis-à-vis theater) acquires the virtue of artistic gesture. A maniacal syndrome, from the clinical point of view, it wields the power of mythopoesis: capable of stripping life from any historical context, rendering it exemplary, and saving it from the ordinary putrescence to which it is condemned, it turns life into an artwork. “One man, one event”: when “willpower” makes the slightest amplification of style, not only does mere sight turn into vision, not only do words turn into poems, but the reality of the given, character, genetic or cultural heritage, conjuncture, all that’s dull and flabby in matters of individual and communal existence is transformed, inevitably, into wonders. Literature is thus deposed from the position of privilege that, from Flaubert and Mallarmé onward, the Gides, the Prousts, and the Max Jacobs continue to grant it. Yet we still *write*—we only write—when we sign a gesture of even the most everyday variety, when we metamorphose a deed into an event by that gesture, even when that gesture consists of ceasing to write and, like Rimbaud, taking leave. When they forced the life of the destitute to become legend, were Alexander, Gandhi, Trotsky, or de Gaulle less writers than Dostoyevsky or Shakespeare?

Between writing and “acting,” it was thus resolutely wrong to choose. The opposition artwork/life was a false alternative. Rather, the decision to be made was this: either let time flow along, indifferently burying works and lives, or else make incisions so deep in the skin of reality that they just might endure the test of effacement. Scars, says Perken. But without the test, the marks fade. Borderline encounter at the outer limits of terror: Malraux’s work life continually tests itself in a “What does it matter?” flaccid-lipped brush with the spider.

Around 1911, a rather young Oxford archaeology student claimed the following: the supposed Saracen influence upon military architecture left in the Levant by the crusaders is false; quite the reverse is true. Interesting, responds Hogarth, the Ashmolean Museum director. Prove it. Having researched all his locations, “the young deadpan type, by turns timid and brutal” (*DA*, 743), embarked for Syria without a word and proceeded to travel up and down the desert, on foot, without escort or money, in the hot season, dressed like an Arab, in order to photograph the thirty-seven fortified castles he had inventoried in support of his thesis. He needed one more photo. Before he could take it, Kurdish bandits attacked him, stripping him of his possessions and leaving him for dead a thousand miles from Aleppo, which is where he turned up a month later

with his pictures, having walked across reg and erg. Back at Oxford, he successfully defended his thesis. Seven years later, the same madman, dressed in turban and white *gandoura*, held out the keys to the city of Damascus to the future King Faisal and General Allenby: Turkey was giving up the Near East, Arabia was being born (under British tutelage), Lawrence disappeared.

When did Malraux read his work? In any case, he set to writing the colonel's biography in 1942–43, between his escape from the prisoner-of-war camp and his entry into a resistance network. He never completed it. He intended it to be a sort of threnody to the demon of the Absolute who leads some to throw themselves body and soul into human conflicts in order to expose the body to the most depraved of failings and to train the ego in deprivation. I, wrote Lawrence, who am incapable of acquiring any technique, "have been thrust into action by chance, with its perverse sense of humor, and this afforded me a place in the Arab revolt . . . , which in turn offered me an opportunity in literature: the art without technique."¹⁰ The art of being openly defeated: Lawrence had wanted to equal *Moby Dick*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Zarathustra*.

As for the child from Bondy, he loved books as if they were firearms and the street as if it were an adventure novel. A few years older than Lawrence was then, the young gentleman who wandered through the Khmer forests in jungle gear, uncomfortably saddled on his little Cambodian horse with his leggings that dragged in the crawling muck and the back of his neck assailed by everything that falls out of the vines, resolved in his decision to take possession of a few mythic divinities—this young gentleman writes. He's writing a legend directly on the jungle itself, manufacturing a rare book, a child's picture book: Robin of the Larvae. Horrified, he marvels. It already bemuses him that this life will be taken for "the life of Malraux," whereas it is the life of a style: lucid obsession, "deferred anguish," he will also call it (*ML*, 871). Kyo's steps as he crisscrosses Shanghai can be considered a definition of the metamorphosis: "Since he had started to prepare the insurrection, over a month ago, working from committee to committee, he had ceased to see the streets: he no longer walked in the mud, but on a map. The scratching of millions of small daily lives disappeared, crushed by another life" (*MF*, 23). In the forest, André walks on cartographic plottings (*relevés*). A lovely word, this outcry (*levée*). It casts the mud out (*relègue*) while stirring it up (*soulève*); it organizes the insurrection against (and on the basis of) the morbid swarming.

Aurousseau-Ramèges answers Claude, who has been expounding on the mythification of the work of art, like a disenchanting scientist: “Basically, you’re not sure of yourself. The truth is you’re not sure of yourself. Oh, how well I know how hard it is to keep one’s self-confidence” (*RW*, 63*). He shows the young man a decorated shard of pottery: archaic Greece, from at least six centuries before our era. Now, what do you see on the shield of the kouros? A little dragon that is perfectly Chinese. Pretty much have to modify our notions about the relation between Europe and Asia, won’t we? “Ah, well. When science shows us that we were wrong, we just have to start over.” Aurousseau thought he had established that Shanghai was the protohistorical site of the Annamese people. The scientific community did not go along with this theory: it held, with Henri Maspéro, that the first Annamese appeared in that very same Tonkinese delta where they are to be found today. Was André aware of this scientific blunder? He claims that, on his way through Hanoi, he accompanied the philologist to see a fortune-teller, who told Aurousseau, “What I can predict for you is uninteresting: you’re going to get yourself killed.” To this, Malraux adds, “He got himself killed” (*ML*, 347). Claude had said of Ramèges, “Will his institute and, indeed, will France still be in Indochina in thirty years?” Often Malraux will seem able to anticipate the future: he simply trusts the omnipotence of the old “What does it matter?” (*Laz.*, 99). No power, even in this century, can resist it for long. Is he already contemplating the eventuality of a native insurrection?

Clara and André leave Hanoi, pick up Chevasson in Saigon, sail up the Mekong, cross the Tonle Sap, reach Siem Reap. “Parmentier, the professor at the École Française who went with us to Angkor, was adorned with a white goatee, a rather gay, Bohemian beard” (Clara, 261). Leaning on the ship’s rail, he shares with Clara his admiration for André, his youth, his success, and, he adds quite seriously, his selflessness. Same prudence, same duplicity seven months later in Phnom Penh, where he will appear at the trial as a witness for the prosecution. As the person in charge of the Khmer patrimony, there is no way he can tolerate its being pilaged—especially by a Parisian unknown to the inner circle. All the same, this adventurer paid homage, in his own way, to the skill shown by Benteaï-Srey’s “inventor.” Parmentier will condemn but not damn.

Crémazy, the local delegate to the Résidence at Siem Reap, who receives André, has no name in *The Royal Way*. He’s a tall mustachioed fellow, his hair (gone gray) in a crewcut, who moans and stammers like a “senile marshal”—the caricature of an old *blédard*.¹¹ Doesn’t like trou-

ble. In his hands are the requisitions dispatched by the institute in Hanoi. Doesn't like the greenhorn with his mission orders. Advises him to hold his horses. Of course he doesn't threaten: hasn't the authority, you know, just saying this to keep the young gentleman from running into problems. Of course he'll furnish the guide, the buffaloes, the carts, and the coolies to which he's entitled. But, let's face it, the bush is the bush. "So, see here, I'm going to give you a tip, M'sieu Vannec, and a pretty good tip at that—straight from the horse's mouth, what? You mustn't go up into the bush! You'd be wise to call it off!" (RW, 75*).

For the first time in his life, André sees himself through the eyes of the underdog. Crémazy isn't a mean man: he's the banality of evil—Don't make waves. Don't get yourself noticed by the higher-ups. Especially in the brush out toward the Siam border: that's "their" business, big-shot business. André catches himself coming straight out with this bit of popular wisdom: that the die is cast elsewhere, that your life doesn't need you in order to construct itself. André is divided between humiliation and anger. Still determined, of course, to see his project through... but he has just *witnessed* subordination.

In 1937, the colonel of the España squadron was on a U.S. tour to gather support for the Spanish Republic. May Cameron interviews him for the *New York Post*. And what of Indochina in your political training, Mister Malraux? "If a country is fascist, all right: you expect fascism in its colonies. But France is a democracy! And when I arrived in the colonies, I found myself face to face with fascism."¹² The political categorization is cursory, but we must remember that, in 1937, decisions had to be made fast. Fascism proclaims its name: it is a political program and it makes no bones about its goals and the means that it will employ to achieve them. Through Crémazy's rumblings, André was picking up quite another voice: the law of silence. The administration in Indochina, like the Chicago Mafia, rules by buttoned lips. Before the tribunal at Phnom Penh, the witness Crémazy will accuse "M'sieu Malraux" with all he's got: his position in the eyes of the masters is at stake.

André always despised those who demand servility. But for the humiliated, he feels a kind of sympathy. Garine, in *The Conquerors*, seeks to understand why:

"I don't love mankind. I don't even love the poor, in other words the people I'm going to fight for."

"You like them better than the others, and it comes to the same thing..."

“I prefer them, but only because they’re the down-trodden. On the whole, yes, they have more heart, more humanity than the others — the virtues of the conquered. I’m sure of one thing, all I feel for the bourgeoisie I came out of is hate and disgust. And I’m also sure the others will turn rotten when we’ve won.” (*Co/E*, 48–49)

Profession of faith by a disillusioned politician. A first draft of the same passage reveals another theme:

I have been bothered, for quite some time, at having discovered in me a rather singular love for the conquered. . . . I knew that it couldn’t just be pity. . . . It’s during the process of their defeat that I love them, not when defeat is consummated. How remarkable is that passionate interest that people now have for all the arts that consecrate man’s defeat! (*OC*, 1:929†)

Remarkable moment, indeed: the hero disarmed, his back to the wall, the civilians frozen by impending terror, the human at the very instant when his humanity becomes prohibited. Goya seizes these instants of terror at the threshold of the night, between a final laugh and lamentation. Thus it soon will be with a Europe already on the verge of collapse. In this instant, André adores the factual test necessary for the signature. In truth, as Claude said to Ramèges, to reach its true life the artwork requires “men’s death.”

In the meanwhile, crooks are humiliating and despoiling indigenous peoples in the name of a yet “enlightened” Europe. Under the guise of the republic’s interests, the petty colonial civil servants are taken hostage and the colonial authority corrupts or stamps down anything that rises up. André detests those conquerors and always will. He will return to Saigon in 1925 to found a newspaper that openly attacks them. He knows, however, that their true strength is not head-on but proceeds, rather, from the resignation of the conquered. Their force is no more than that of gravity as it works upon souls. With no resistance left in them, the little people end up yielding, acquiescing to the course of things, allowing themselves to be dragged along with things into the pauper’s grave. The revenge of the beasts in the Saint-Maur pit is the success of the privileged — their abjection.

Led by Xa, a young ex-con who had done time for theft (Crémazy had done his stool-pigeon research and André, in full knowledge of the facts, appointed Xa with royal flourish), the Malraux caravan leaves Siem

Reap in mid-December 1923. Once past the last hills above the Angkor basin, the band is swallowed up by the tropical forest cesspool:

Like a slow poison, the ceaseless fermentation in which forms grew bloated, lengthened out, decayed, as in a world where mankind has no place, wore down Claude's stamina insidiously; under its influence, in the green darkness, he felt himself disintegrating like the world around him. And everywhere, the insects . . .

Elusive, rarely visible, the other animals came from a cleaner world where the high foliage did not, as here, seem glued by viscid air to the moist leaves on which the horses trod; they belonged to that more human universe glimpses of which appeared now and again in a burst of dazzling sunlight, a blaze of sparkling motes, traversed by the sudden shadows of swift birds. But the insects lived by and on the forest—from the globular black creatures which the cart-harnessed oxen squashed under their hooves, and the ants in their frenzied crawl up the porous tree-trunks, to the spiders hooked by grasshopper-like claws to the centers of their huge webs, four meters across, whose silken filigree caught up the light that lingered near the soil and masked the formless tangle of the undergrowth with never-changing forms of shining symmetry. Amid the welter of the leafage heaving with scaly insects only the spiders kept steadfast vigil, yet some vague resemblance linked them, too, with the other insects—flies and cockroaches, the curious little creatures with heads protruding from their shells crawling upon the moss—with the foul virulence of bacterial life seen on a microscopic slide. The high gray anthills, on whose surface the termites never showed themselves, towered up through the dusk like mountain-peaks on some dead satellite; they seemed bred of the corruption of the air, the stench of fungus, the swarms of tiny leeches glued together like flies' eggs beneath the leaves. Claude was growing aware of the essential oneness of the forest and had given up trying to distinguish living beings from their setting, life that moves from life that oozes; some unknown power assimilated the trees with the fungoid growths upon them, and quickened the restless movements of all the rudimentary creatures darting to and fro upon a soil like march-scum amid the steaming vegetation of a planet in the making. Here what act of man had any meaning, what human will could conserve its staying power? Here every-

thing frayed out, grew soft and flabby, assimilated itself with its surroundings, which loathsome yet fascinating as a cretin's eyes, worked on the nerves with the same obscene power of attraction as the spiders hanging there between the branches, from which at first it had cost him such an effort to avert his gaze. (*RW*, 100–102*)

Too applied, this literature? Perhaps, but good for the “biographer.” Malraux writing about André. Or, rather, *I* writing about *that*.¹³ *Days of Wrath* will also be criticized for the unacceptably overlong passages placed in an action novel: through what appears to be a report of Kassner's nightmares while held in an SA prison cell, André is in fact confessing his own greatest fears. Jungle and jail are the thresholds of dread, artwork-life is put to the test and perhaps receives its authorization there. These “overlong passages” last as long as it takes writing to let itself be approached by its own truth: the pause of an incarceration, a slight delay while steeping in filth.

There is an early version (Langlois-Ford manuscript) of the scene of Khmer putrescence, probably written already in 1924. The repulsive detail is slightly less overdone. *The Royal Way* will be released by Grasset in October 1930, after *The Temptation of the West* and *The Conquerors*. It catches the critics off guard, just as *Days of Wrath* and *Man's Fate* will. A place in the republic of letters had been readied for the novelist, André Malraux, and a new political epic novel was expected. In its stead appeared *Heart of Darkness*, but a much less suggestive one, they said. Gide had translated *Typhoon* in 1903 and, in December 1923, just as Malraux was out seeking his temple in Cambodia, the NRF honored Conrad with a special issue. On 3 August 1924, the very day when the author of *Lord Jim* died, *Le Matin* and *Le Journal* report, in most insulting terms, Malraux's guilty verdict in Phnom Penh. It remains that the way is only royal if it leads to the heart of darkness. Colonial exoticism offers both authors the same opportunity to display a Western soul tempted and colonized by its own inner decay.

In July 1928, at Pontigny, Malraux confides to Gide, while they stroll beneath the trees in the park:

“Conrad is a great mood novelist, in spite of his Flaubertian rhythm. But I must confess my admiration for a lifelong obsession whose origin I cannot put my finger on: that of the irremediable.”

[To which Gide responds:] “Verrry innnteresting . . . As to the question of its origin, I think I can picture it . . .”

[Malraux throws him a questioning look. Gide takes his arm and, in a diabolical tone of voice:] “Have you ever met Mrs. Conrad?” (*ML*, 299–300†)

This anecdote is recounted to the French ambassador to Malaysia by a certain Malraux, whom he meets when the latter passes through Singapore in 1965 accompanied by a putative Clappique. The Pontigny scene is set within the Singapore scene, which in turn is set in the theater of the *Anti-Memoirs*—the most well-wrought work by the cubist dress-maker-filmmaker and former forger. As fictive as the (homosexual) “diabolism” attributed to Gide may be, it is no less revealing for what it says about André: women are, like the jungle, figures of the irremediable.

After dinner, “Clappique,” inspired by that simultaneously sinister and gay eccentricity worthy of *Rameau’s Nephew*, unravels for “Malraux” the synopsis of a film on Mayrena,¹⁴ that adventurer who sought to carve himself a kingdom out on the borders of Siam and Cambodia and who lends Malraux inspiration for *The Royal Way*:

“I’ll have to sort things out with the forest as well. Big problem! A stifling atmosphere, few breaks, Annam a thousand meters below. Swarming everywhere! Villages like pentastomes! Leeches, transparent frogs! A perfectly stripped buffalo skeleton crawling with ants. You get the picture?”

[To this, “Malraux”:] “Crystal clear. To me, that’s the forest in its vastness: insects and spider webs.” (*ML*, 323†)

After a few days of crawling about in the depths, the Malraux team stumbles upon Banteai-Srey. “Virgin’s fortress” is Clara’s translation; like “Magdeburg,” in German: “a pink, decorated, ornate temple; forest Trianon.” The halt in wonderment, “as silent as children who have just been given a present that utterly fulfills their hopes” (Clara, 273). Then, just as quickly, they get on to the work with the saws. These break, however. So they grab the stonecutters to get some leverage. Three days later, seven sculpted blocks have been removed in good condition. Now that’s writing! They’re sent off to Phnom Penh, where a firm will export them to France. Following a dispatch from Crémazy, the ragamuffins are arrested in the middle of Christmas night aboard the launch carrying them down the Mekong, charged with the theft of cultural treasures, and placed under house arrest pending a full investigation in Phnom Penh.

What to do in the chic Hotel Manolis? The Cambodian capital, a sub-prefecture, dozes as it awaits the night. Ventilators mill the muggy tor-

por. Judge Bartet will for once conduct the investigation under strict respect for home law, which prohibits all publicity. The colonial mafia outlines an offensive all the same. On 5 January 1924, *L'Écho du Cambodge* and, on the eighth, *L'Impartial*—newspapers in the pay of the local colonial interests and its administration—denounce the “vandals and pillagers of ruins” and call for exemplary punishment. Bartet has the damage at the site assessed. Parmentier goes to the scene along with Finot, the director of the École in Hanoi, and Goloubev, his assistant. They decide to completely restore the sanctuary—I will have at least served that purpose, the future minister of culture says to himself. The police report that Bartet requests from Paris characterizes Master Malraux as a regular Parisian bohemian: cosmopolitan, cubist, dada, most probably Bolshevik. His wife is German (and Jewish?). Kahnweiler, a German immigrant, and Gide, notorious homosexual, are among his friends. Nothing in this file, concludes Bartet, that would lead to a presumption of guilt in the Khmer temple case. The judge is inclined to dismiss the case from which he will soon be discharged. A much more docile magistrate then closes the inquiry without further ado and calls for a guilty verdict against the three rogues. The true grievance is not even the suspicions against Malraux; it's simply that he's not part of the local mafia. An exemplary sentence now awaits him: not for any offense but rather for interference.

When we come back the next time, we'll be better prepared and we'll win. After Eylau, Napoleon prepares Friedland. Impassible, Malraux observes the scheming, conducts inquiries concerning the enemy, consults with lawyers. It is decided that Chevasson, in case of a guilty verdict, will take full personal responsibility for the offense so that André can keep his hands free: no room for failure.

AT THIS POINT, the valiant Clara loses her pluck. The expedition into the jungle exhausted her and house arrest humiliated her. They're now penniless and the hotel bill is growing. They send a telegram to Maman Goldschmidt, who replies with a money order and the demand that they get divorced as soon as possible. Her daughter can imagine the level of worry back there, in Avenue des Chalets, as well as the fraternal furor. What has the Goldschmidt girl, their gem, done? What is she doing with that madman? Plundering the world's wonders? "There was a risk that this trip of ours to everywhere and nowhere in particular was going to come to a stop here" (Clara, 286).

Then, suddenly, before she knows it, Clara is infected. She begins to make "as if." They make love to each other as in Paris; as in Paris, they read to each other. School classics, short travel narratives about Cambodia, administrative reports, the entire Phnom Penh library streams through the Hotel Manolis. No poetry to be had? From memory, they declaim passages to each other, as they'd done in Paris, from Apollinaire or Rutebeuf. Clara becomes Clara's memory. Just as before, they discuss and solve the world's problems. But she feels him trying out his arguments on her. He's no longer with her. Had he

ever been? Disenchantment, suspicion, the wretched novel of everyday life. He's auditioning before her.

Something's got to be done to get out of this. I've got an idea, she tells him one fine morning: a fake suicide. Phenobarbital. A measured dosage. You flush the rest down the toilet. What do you think? André is in admiration. The solution has a certain elegance. But I beg you, dose it right. He hasn't an inkling of the bereavement out of which her "idea" arose. Clara is brought to the emergency room and hospitalized. For a minute, André is worried: Has she overdosed? He settles in at her bedside. In a large room with a gallery-like balcony overlooking an inner courtyard, they find themselves fed and sheltered on credit for a while.

Beneath the covers, between visits and treatment, unbeknownst to André, Clara begins to write out the bitterness disgusting her in order to rid herself of it: "Like water that seeps through the ground and falls drop by drop on the same piece of rock, for ten years on end I defined the uneasiness of which I was almost ashamed, writing it down in brief, abstract phrases" (Clara, 211). This writing will become the "Accounts Book," published by Paulhan fifteen years later and that will infuriate André. Not because she complains, but because she published that "little pile of secrets." Purely biographical: to be relegated among things unspeakable. She knows ahead of time what he will think of it. So much the better. She's preparing her war of independence. With André tirelessly pursuing his notes on the relationships between Asia and Europe, however, the release hoped for as a result of the "suicide" does not materialize. Those notes will be poured into *The Temptation of the West*. They serve also to arrange scenes and bits of dialogue that will feed into *The Conquerors* and *The Royal Way*. Scenes, in the plural? No, always the same one: the crisis in which dread and willpower confront each other, in which Satan and God tangle—immutable drama upon which the writer needs only to cast faces, gestures, and names to turn it into a "novel."

Clara buries herself in the desertion: she nurtures it. She is fussed over by the head nurse, Madame Elisabeth, a kind of mother figure, and by the very desirable Touit. An Annamese nurse, Bah, tries to seduce her at bath time. Unsuccessfully: her hips are no match for Touit's. This *gynaecium* is nevertheless conspiring behind André's back. Like those who have lost their past, Clara feigns amnesia: strange that Maman hasn't come since the house is only twenty minutes from the station. Like someone who has lost her appetite for life, she suffers from anorexia. The nasty brat has just enough strength to say to herself: hey, this distaste for every-

thing might just be propitious for a real hunger strike. She sets herself to it immediately. The hospital staff doesn't know what to do: fretting, supplications, injunctions, serum injections. Her obstinacy deserves little credit, really: she's not at all hungry. Her weight drops to eighty pounds. André paces back and forth in the vast room, talking to himself aloud: "The essence of the matter, don't you think, is to know how the Oriental will adapt himself to the necessity of becoming an individual" (Clara, 304). His haranguing actually provides Clara with a bit of light in the night where she is hiding away. All the same, one day, when her distress has her in tears and he can muster "Don't lose heart: I'll certainly end up by being Gabriele d'Annunzio" (Clara, 304) as his only words of comfort, she loses all grip and screams: What a clown! What an imbecile! I don't give a shit! Then she falls back. And the judge finally dismisses the case against her for lack of evidence: as the law prescribes, Madame Malraux was simply following her spouse wherever he went. Not guilty.

Clara stifles a faint laugh. No point in having attempted suicide. She will return to Paris; Touit will drive her to Saigon in an ambulance. "When the vehicle drove off, I saw him with his pith helmet, his semistiff collar, his white summer suit, standing there in the middle of the road with his arms hanging limply at his sides, standing there cut off from the others, an orphan" (Clara, 307*). The skeletal doll is packed off shaking with malaria, an all-too-pretty dress (the others are shot) over her emaciated shoulders, down-at-the-heel dancing shoes (the only ones left). She feels guilty for slipping away from the trial and — who knows? — anguished, especially by the fact that she no longer loves the orphan.

Everybody on the liner's deck — colonials, their families, civil servants, merchants big and small, high society — is keeping their eyes on the stock market quotes. The fall of the franc is making them rich. Toward the prosperity that a good depression promises them, they glide delighted across the smooth ocean. The spouse of the temple robber is shunned: You see, those arrogant metropolitans understand nothing about the colonies. A Clara with no dinner company refuses the one-person table off in a corner that she's given. Reeling with fatigue, she goes and locks herself in her cabin. "There was tiredness. How seldom people speak of it" (Clara, 313). Following the call at Singapore, she goes up on deck all the same to take a look at the great Malaysian hive of activity fading in the distance. Someone approaches her, speaks to her, she hears herself answering. Charles G., returning from China where he was on a French education mission for the past five years, tells her of autumn and springtime in Peking, explains ideograms. She laughs, catches her breath.

He takes her along while he shops for his wife when they call in Ceylon. He knows who she is; he's familiar with the story: "Noble souls have taken it upon themselves to inform me" (Clara, 319). Like Cendrars, his right hand was taken by a shell during the war. He is tactful yet hardy and tells her that what he thought as soon as he saw her was, What is that charming little wreck all about? They read to each other and chat late into the night. They take each other, one evening, as if out of mutual gratitude. Just to celebrate a resurrection. Thanksgiving: the opposite of an affair. "He was capable of being a lover without ceasing to be a friend" (Clara, 322). No liaison will result. She will hide none of it. Clara is beginning to find Clara again. What to do to help André, the orphan, back there? Charles advises her to contact the Saigon lawyer for the indigenous: Guess what? he's on board ship — right over there. Paul Monin listens to Clara attentively. An appointment is made for as soon as they arrive in Paris.

Clara will fight. That's her business. That of a Jewess, a German, an immigrant, a woman, a fatherless daughter, the companion of a delinquent mythomaniac. I'm not very good-looking, though, she tells herself, except for my ankles. It's not that she's looking for her true place, since her challenge is to occupy all places and to excel. Translator and transit agent, four languages speak in her mouth. A German woman in France, a Frenchwoman in Germany, nowhere a Jewess, woman everywhere. Not for a fling, but one who is bent on forcing the way through.¹ After her father's death, she transformed herself into her mother's mother. And, when her older brother heads off to war, his sweetheart: "He was built like Apollo [she writes of Maurice, whose real name was André], he had David's courage and Siegfried's face. . . . He was the young male, dominating and wrapped in his own privacy, the man who would never show his gentleness to any but his own mate. [And if I could not be his mate,] I was [nonetheless] of the same blood" (Clara, 94–95). Private blood? For four years, she writes him every single day on the lines. He never answers this teenager's diary except when she threatens to stop it. Then, in three words, he begs her continue. Returned from the front, he takes on the role of paterfamilias, watching over little sister's virtue and preparing her future.

Clara became a young woman of her generation, expertly mature (to the point of zealousness) regarding the licentiousness that a violent and curious spirit can bring upon itself when it cohabits with the enigmatic feminine body. She will devote herself to the cause of liberating that body,

of liberating herself. One of the very first feminists, it was in this mode of persistence that she took hold of André. Yet the institution is one thing; the real question is inside. Her moment of weakness in Phnom Penh (which is also her strength, from which she will draw her strength), the fatigue that she hands over on the boat to Charles as she had, before, to her mother, to her brother, everything she gave to André, that she will give to their daughter, Florence, now seven years old, whom she will look after alone throughout the Occupation, during which she will foil the anti-Jewish militia, all the while working in a Resistance network: in brief, her inability to give up, her refusal (to the point of vindictive meanness) to forget, all inhere to her well in advance of any ideological considerations. Her ankles then, do indeed merit her paying them homage.²

Everybody in Phnom Penh — nurses, orderlies, attendants — all of the voiceless people took her into their confidence: all the men in the village were taken and shipped off in cattle cars to serve as cannon fodder on the Marne; a poor peasant whose land was expropriated without even a court order opened fire on the governor; a colonial big shot ordered mutinous convicts to be buried to their neck, then had a swarm of red ants released on their heads; someone's bungalow-managing uncle was slapped with a huge fine for having lodged an Annamese; a cousin hired by a trafficker in hired hands disappeared; a girlfriend's son, *baccalauréat* in hand, was refused entrance to the University of Saigon; an indigent child with no next of kin or resources was whipped for having stolen a bowl of rice at the market; and every day, having to step off the sidewalk to let the White Man pass by. The history of a people deprived of history consists of anecdotes.

André's sole preoccupation is style. André can stand an oppressed people only when it is in a state of revolt against its defeat — like Clara when she “commits suicide.” Humiliation affects him. But because it does so too deeply, it aggravates his nightmares of abjection. Quick, a “gesture” to sign it and turn adversity into virtue. Rehashing misfortunes merely stirs up the filthy beasts. Is André holding his ground? No, something in him raises defilement to the status of test. Clara, the rich kid, is, quite to the contrary and quite simply, waging battle against misery with its nobodies. Her grandeur, unrecognized by André, was in her acceptance of being affected by all manner of misfortune. A woman of passion — sharing it with others and revealing it in them as well — her vehement compassion stood in contradiction to the way André would bridle. He had appreciated this distance between them. Be as much of a

Jewess and a woman as ever you can. The way he came to terms with this difference was to turn it into a rationale for travel, for seeing. “A woman. Not some type of man. Something else” (*MF*, 47*).

In Clara, the story of the convict buried alive and eaten by ants or the one of the whipped orphan resonates with the same violence as Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* or the account of a psychoanalysis. Just as she translates Kafka’s conversations with Janouch³ and the diary of a little girl psychoanalyzed in Berlin, she renders direct translations of life’s trifling episodes: Xa, the guide-informer, who comes to the hospital with the gift of two Khmer heads out of the blue; or the orderly who balks at killing a scorpion scurrying around the room because Buddhist law teaches that one must respect all living things. A child of the old established bourgeoisie, adored by her “Grossmama,” both whimsical and sensualist (in her own words) but always open to the woes and mercy of others and to sharing in their ordeals. André’s mythomania both dumbfounded and amused her. She adores his flighty, avid, and deadly serious relationship to reality and to works. Yet mythopoesis remains inexplicable to her. In her inquisitive, gleaming eyes, life turns itself into a work: that’s it, no distance — the work emerges from the womb of life. She doesn’t give a damn about great men or their “embellishments full of pathos.” “Even funnier perhaps is that he really has become Gabriele D’Annunzio” (Clara, 304). The strength of a womb when it rises to the head and makes her understand what she doesn’t understand. Precisely that naturalness that repulses André. For him, everything that goes from the guts to the head is tantamount to death.

This is how they found themselves separated, already, by the end of 1923. Even just as they made the discovery of colonial misery together and suffered their first failure, she learned that her love for him would remain unrequited. Meanwhile, he learned precisely nothing other than what he already knew: that one had to sign and that to do so, one had to move forth toward terror. Clara: “I never saw him learn to do anything he didn’t already know.”

They haven’t got a case, he had asserted as he got her into the ambulance, I’ll be out of here before you get to Marseilles. And he believed it.

He couldn’t really imagine what form such a judgment might take. . . . The legal confrontation was of no interest to him; he denied nothing. . . .

One day when the judge asked him a question, he answered, "What difference does it make?"

"Well," the judge said, "it can be important in passing sentence."

That shook Garine again. The notion of a genuine verdict and sentence had not yet sunk in. (*Co/E*, 42)

A prison term for being an accessory to an abortion? Garine will not tolerate giving up even a few months to his enemies for such a trifle. Nor will André, for simple attempted statue larceny. Garine mobilizes his relations. In Phnom Penh, André has none. After a six-month investigation, the trial in magistrate's court opens on 16 July 1924.⁴ Eight o'clock in the morning, torrid heat, packed courtroom, everyone fans himself and chatters away. The Cambodian capital's French "socialites" are all there in cocktail attire to see the pirate with the ready tongue get himself trounced by the judge. Jodin has just been transferred to Phnom Penh. He is said to be embittered by a mediocre career. His family problems (bogus divorce, shacking up) foment gossip. Here, before his new bosses, the confirmation of his nomination is at stake.

According to the strategy agreed upon, Chevasson, the first defendant heard, inculpates himself as much as possible. He understands all charges and takes sole responsibility for them. A waste of breath, for when his turn comes, André cannot refrain from flexing his eloquence. With minute detail and brilliantly exhibiting his knowledge of Khmer archaeology, he refutes each of the charges. A raider of ruins, they call him? He can recite Virgil to you by heart and catch Jodin on the history of Cambodia. He wishes especially to let you know he prefers his own insolence to your indulgence, and that he's not one of yours. "To pass judgment is obviously not to understand, because if you understand, you couldn't judge" (*Co/E*, 43). The tall, thin boy with the pale eyes, devoured by twitches and gesticulations (Clara's quick sketch upon leaving him behind: "His complexion had never been up to much, and now it was disagreeably close to the color of mustard" [Clara, 306]), smiles as he sits back down: he knows he has lost, but the child in him has won. These "morons" were now going to make him waste months in prison.

He carefully listens to the witnesses for the prosecution: the police commissioner, the coolies, the bungalow manager from Siem Reap. Crémazy refers to a coded dispatch that the Minister of Colonies sent to the governor and to the director of the EFEO identifying Malraux as "a suspect to keep an eye on." The defense demands that it be entered into ev-

idence. Objection: state secrecy. So, courting the powerful, Judge Jodin holds back Crémazy's deposition. Follow the prosecutor's outrageous conclusions: eighteen months without parole for Chevasson, three years for Malraux with five years *interdiction de séjour* from Indochina. And, of course, both of them are stripped of any rights over the sculptures.

It is 21 July 1924. The defense appeals the sentence on the grounds that, due to the fuzzy legal status of the temple at Benteaï-Srey, the defendants might well have believed the monument to be *res delicta*. Sentencing is set for 22 or 23 September before the Saigon court of appeals. End of July: André settles in with Chevasson in Saigon. He compiles notes and drafts for future books and writes little *farfelu* stories in their room at the Hotel Continental at the corner of Rue Catinat, the main thoroughfare. On the eve of their sentencing date, *L'Impartial* publishes a report of the trial in Phnom Penh. *L'Impartial* is the Saigon newspaper directed by a certain Henri Chavigny (who adds "de Lachevrotière") under the heel of the colonial interests and their administration. Chavigny's game is a standard in the colonial repertoire: a shady past gets cleared in exchange for good offices and an admirable eagerness to serve the French presence in Indochina. One must stand ready and willing to denounce anyone as a Bolshevik or a British agent who raises his voice against the reign of the arbitrary. There can be absolutely no doubt, wrote the paper's special correspondent in Phnom Penh: the Benteaï-Srey theft, like so many others in the region, was sponsored by an international network of amateurs and art dealers. Malraux could have expected "a respectable figure in dollars." In his editorial in the same issue, Chavigny feigned the noble soul: our duty is "to protect the artistic and archaeological treasures of Indochina," the future of tourism in the region is threatened, all too often "unscrupulous vandal collectors" of Malraux's ilk reap fortunes from plundering monuments: an example must be made. The whole thing was illustrated by four photographs of said treasures. To spice up the scandal, one of these depicted a sculpture from . . . Angkor Wat.

How else could the Paris newspapers have been informed of the case as early as 2 August if the files deposited with the Ministry of Colonies were not leaked? The general government office at Hanoi had cabled only the sentence from Phnom Penh and surface mail took at least three weeks. Violently hostile articles appear, nevertheless, on 4 August in *Le Journal* and *Le Matin*. The title in *Le Matin* sets the tone: "The Man with the Rose in His Buttonhole Sentenced to Three Years in Prison." This article becomes the editorial for an early September issue of *L'Impartial* in

Saigon. For the same number, the editors offer space for an interview with said man with the rose.

Smelling a ploy, André riposted as a Bonapartist. So, the enemy is preparing to surround you by forming a pincer? Break through, then, by charging up the middle. He charges. He has full confidence in the strength of his speaking ability. Ah, war is lovely! But the printed word—especially when printed by the enemy—is neither a cannon nor is it speech. Horrified, André reads the single-column summary of the interview in the 16 September *L'Impartial*. It remains the only record of what was said. There are so many idiocies in what was said that it is difficult to attribute the words to the young man. Impetuous he was, but never base. He is made to say: Benteai-Srey? Just a pile of rocks not more than four feet high. The loot? A few truncated bas-reliefs. His collection in Paris? Not even an Angkor copy, a few cubists that are not the least bit extraordinary. His standing? “Since I am rich, I can afford to write literary essays and collaborate on a few journals.” On their end, moreover, his Parisian friends launched a petition of support. *L'Éclair* and *L'Intransigeant* set up a campaign calling for a retrial. His family? My father directs “one of the largest oil companies in the world.” So why, in your opinion, has local justice been so severe? I’ve been mistaken for an international trafficker: you understand, my financial dealings on the stock market, my German wife . . .

A bit flattered, nonetheless, by this first interview of his, and he was determined to disconcert his adversary. To thumb his nose, he tried out ubuesque tactics. He fabricated a small forgery to see if its effect would authenticate him. There had also been what amounted to a wink at the court of appeals: he had no need whatsoever for that plundered money, you know. Unfortunately, Chavigny knows just what to do with these subtleties: he takes the *farfelu* parlance and translates it into printed boastfulness. General dismay: on the part of the German wife, the friends in whose hands the text fell, and on André’s part. Then Chavigny, too confident with his advantage, makes a foolish mistake: the campaign Monsieur Malraux has announced calling for a retrial is quite obviously an attempt to exert pressure on the court of appeals. Defamation, retorts André. And he obtains the right to equal time in the 17 September *L'Impartial*. His response, altogether ironic, attempts to be mean and is actually quite funny: *L'Impartial* is the very model of integrity, has “never attempted to imply that the statues recovered were recovered at Angkor, . . . is not on this very day entitling its interview ‘the affair of the Angkor statues,’ and will not, in replying to this response, attempt to foment a

new, and obviously disinterested, polemic.” In his turn, Chavigny professes the impartiality of *L’Impartial* and points out the excellent capitalization Malraux is obtaining from his condemnation. We shall soon see how eloquently he will recount “the adventures of an art connoisseur within the Angkor group.” Riposte on the eighteenth by Monsieur Malraux: “I will not be recounting the adventures of an art connoisseur within the Angkor group, first, because the connoisseur of whom you speak had no adventures within the Angkor group and, second, because I do not write adventure novels.” And he of course did not miss the opportunity to ask Chavigny if he would have been as delighted with the way the local press reviled him had he known that the honorable and impartial editor had, eight years prior (in 1916, in point of fact) been brought before the courts for corruption and blackmail.

Not a happy camper, Chavigny. On the eve of the appeal (22 September), he republishes the Phnom Penh trial summary under the obstinately fallacious title “Theft of the Angkor Bas-Reliefs” and has the text delivered directly to the public prosecutor’s office. Objectionable maneuver. In order to safeguard the rights of the defense, the bench defers the hearing until 8 October. Arguments focused on the legal status of the Benteaï-Srey site, the defense demonstrating that it was under the sole jurisdiction of French legislative authority, which had never expressed its will in the form of a vote. As to the monument’s protected status, this remained uncertain in the absence of a decree in due form passed down from the French executive. The defendant’s character? Malraux’s lawyer had the petitions, letters, and articles in his client’s favor bearing the signatures of the biggest names in French literature read to the court: these documents constituted the little treasure that Clara had assembled in Paris and dispatched immediately. For André, the sentence was reduced to one year, and for Louis to eight months—both suspended. But the decision demanding restitution of the sculptures was upheld. Following the restoration, in 1925, of Benteaï-Srey, the *devatas* and *apsaras* deposited at the Phnom Penh museum were replaced. The defendants lodged an appeal in Paris, where in fact the Phnom Penh ruling was quashed, but because of a legal irregularity. For lack of funds, the condemned parties were unable to pursue the procedure and therefore never obtained legal reparation. In November, when André reembarks with Louis for Marseilles, rather than having his statues in storage and a fortune made, he has nothing but accounts to settle.

Back in Paris in early October 1924, Paul Monin, the Saigon lawyer summoned by Clara, had contacted André. Sympathy and confidence.

They plan to launch an independent newspaper in Saigon — one that would take up the cause of the humiliated, says Paul. No, replies André, to sign the impossible.

I don't see society as bad, as susceptible of improvement. . . . I don't care about transforming society. It's not the general absence of justice that bothers me, but something deeper, the impossibility of pledging my allegiance to any social order, whatever it is. . . . There's a passion deeper than all the others, a passion in which the obstacles to be overcome are utterly unimportant. A perfectly hopeless passion — one of the strongest props of power. (*Co/E*, 44)

One recognizes the theme that rises out of such sentences written by Garine: since they are all equally destined for the cycle of decomposition, societies of men are no more interesting than societies of red ants or of ferns. One must act within history, not for it. History is incorrigible. It can merely offer opportunities for the will to prove itself — within and without — against infamy. In the forest, then in the court of law, in 1924, a tiny amount of black blood beaded up: perhaps writing would be permitted.

Clara had arrived in Marseilles on 7 August without a penny in her pocket. Informed by cable, her father-in-law, Fernand, was not on the pier. Charles G. lends her a few francs, with which she hops onto the first train to Paris. A night at Jeanne's (the former Goldschmidt family chambermaid who now lives in a tenderloin hotel [*hôtel de passe*] near Place Clichy), Clara appears before the court at Avenue des Chalets. The case has already been decided and the sentence is without appeal: divorce that hoodlum immediately, Maurice says, echoed by the mother. Her daughter's dissolution had aged Madame Goldschmidt by ten years. Diagnosis: the rest home. Say, the doctor suggests to Clara, why don't you go along with her? That would be most beneficial to her. The entire family gets itself to said clinic. Clara deduces that it is she who is about to be shut in. She refuses to sign her own hospitalization. After two hours of resistance, she is released.

At the Chalets home she had found a letter from André Breton, offering whatever help he could give, a "nice one" from Florent Fels, one from a former lover offering to marry her. A night filled with nightmares at Jeanne's, once again: they're coming back to get her, André will waste away for years in his cell in Phnom Penh, he'll be finished off on the sly because he's believed to be in cahoots with the autonomists, he's cut

down in an attempted escape . . . She escapes at dawn with three francs twenty-five centimes in her pocket: "Place Clichy: six o'clock in the morning . . . Dawn was breaking when I got into the cab. I checked the address André Breton had written on his letter: Rue Fontaine. If it was a long way, I should stop the driver when the meter showed three francs. He would have to put up with a twenty-five centimes tip" (Clara, 334). She pushes her way past the concierge, who protests that Monsieur Breton isn't to be awakened at this hour! She hoists her eighty pounds up to the fifth floor and rings the bell as one might the moment before drowning. "I am Clara Malraux," she murmurs before falling faint in Simone Breton's arms (Clara, 335).

Revived two hours later, she immediately learns that the Overlord forgave her and that the passage to come will, exceptionally, not have to be a forced one. Whosoever saw her dashing about Paris in those days from summer all the way to autumn realized what love (or pride?) can make a person do when it is pardoned. For a short while, the suspicious pontiff Breton was transfixed by it. And he was just the opposite of a friend for Malraux. He and Simone administer first aid to Clara, feed and clothe her, dispatch her telegrams to Fernand Malraux and Marcel Arland, put her in telephone communication with Paul Monin. Of his son's fate, Fernand knew only what the newspapers reported. He thought the trip to Indochina was just one of a thousand that the children would make, and he was completely unaware of their financial ruin. He arrived the same day that he got the cable. "Swear to me that he's innocent." Clara allayed his suspicions in no time at all. Besides, Monin was there to certify that André's gesture was as pure as crystal in the midst of the colonial mire. Arland, who returned to Paris just for this matter, confirms Monin's assessment. "The Holy Ghost was hovering over me, as nearly two thousand years before it had hovered over a little gathering of men of my race" (Clara, 337). It gave Clara the idea of gathering at the bottom of a petition all the great names in French literature. And the Ghost also dictated to her, under the three men's watchful eyes, the text of the petition, which she wrote in one sitting:

The undersigned, deeply concerned at the sentence which has been passed on André Malraux, trust in the consideration with which the law customarily regards all those who help to increase our country's intellectual heritage. They wish to vouch for the intelligence and the real literary worth of this writer whose youth and whose already published works give rise to the highest expectations. They

would profoundly deplore the loss resulting from the application of a penalty that would prevent André Malraux from accomplishing what we can all rightfully expect from him. (Clara, 337)

Who could have done better? “Consideration” must necessarily have been whispered by the Ghost. “Heritage,” “our country,” “expectations” plucked patriotic strings at precisely the right moment. “Loss,” “penalty,” “rightfully expect” combined nobility with modesty. The petition genre had not quite come into its own yet. Arland headed right off to Pontigny, where a *décade* that was in session enabled him to gather in quick succession the signatures of Gide, Mauriac, Paulhan, Maurois, Martin du Gard, Edmond Jaloux, Charles Du Bos, Guy de Pourtalès; the Gallimard brothers and Rivière add theirs; there were the friends, of course, as well — Max Jacob, Pascal Pia, Florent Fels — and even the surrealist adversaries, Soupault, Aragon, Breton. It was a cleverly composed sampler to which were added sympathetic newspaper and review clippings all sent off by cable to Maître Béziat, André’s defense attorney in Saigon, who used the material in the manner that we know. Next, Clara dashes off to the Galerie de la Madeleine to embrace Doyon, who was the very first to defend André in the 9 August issue of *L’Éclair*. This done, she suddenly remembers how urgent it is to pay off the debts incurred at the Hotel Margolis in Phnom Penh and to cover a check written with insufficient funds. She sends Breton and Doyon to Avenue des Chalets to grab up everything she owns. She sells off her pearl necklace, the paintings, the rare books — their entire fortune: not much. Breton, the voice of the true connoisseur, remarks that there are a number of forgeries. She breathes a sigh of relief: André will have enough to survive on in Saigon.

Breton wishes to publish one of Malraux’s texts in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. She takes out his manuscripts higgledy-piggledy. Unedited pages of “Diary of a Fireman” are jumbled together with a translation of Hölderlin’s *Hyperion* that Clara had drafted three years before. All typed on the same typewriter. On 26 August, the famous “Adieu, Prudence!” appears in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. The text begins with “Everywhere you look there lies a buried joy” and ends with “brother of chance, the wind” — phrases by Hölderlin that Breton attributes to Malraux (Clara, 342). All this kitsch is quite opportune, the Goldschmidt woman tells herself, as she writes to mother Malraux that she is ready to inform her as to her son’s fate. Two days later, Berthe awaits her in the hotel lobby: “she was tall, slim, pretty, young-looking, and she had a girl’s voice. . . . I loved her

from that day on” (Clara, 343). Signatures at the bottom of the petition continue to multiply and Marcelle Doyon sews Clara a couple of dresses from remnants on sale. Sundays, Fernand receives her like a daughter at Bois Dormant, his house in Orléans. It was on one such occasion that he declared: “You are worthy of being a Malraux.” Never in the past three years had she been as little that as now: alone, Clara felt blessed — radiant as well at having got André out of a bad spot and at having indebted him to her so generously. (He will never sign that IOU.)

The manna continues to rain down. A letter from Mauriac that is so beautiful that Clara wishes to have it published. Jean Painlevé, brother of the *président du conseil*, signs the petition. Their friends, the Golls, put Clara up. Then, the Lamy ladies make room for her in the little apartment in boulevard Edgar-Quinet that they acquired from the sale of the Bondy grocery store: “two comfortless rooms with no bath or shower, carpets or armchairs; and without a maid. The lack of these amenities [was] normal enough to them” (Clara, 347). His family envelops André’s wife with the same tender care and modesty that had exasperated the little hero. Lamy kindness causes Clara to cry, in secret, over Goldschmidt sanctimoniousness. The letters that arrive from Saigon are good: tender, *farfelu*, occasionally reticent where her initiatives taken in Paris are concerned. Then comes the telegram: “One year suspended sentence” (Clara, 351*). Twenty-three days more to wait. “All at once nothing more was expected of me” (Clara, 348). Having worked through her as medium, the Holy Ghost fades away. “I think, decidedly, that I love human beings” (Clara, 323*).

On stepping down from *Le Chantilly* in Marseilles at the end of November, André recalls the radiant woman to his somber law. “What have you been doing assing around with my mother?” (Clara, 355*). The fact that she trespassed into the Lamy group will never be forgiven her. He then recounts to her the banquet given him and Monin by the Annamese on the eve of their departure. Here she had thought he’d been abandoned by everyone! Was her diligence misplaced? “In a month you and I are setting off again for Saigon. . . . The Annamese need an independent newspaper: Monin and I are going to edit it” (Clara, 357*). Clara will later catch him out responding to a question from Louis Guilloux as to how he got out of Indochina free: “It was the result of the activities of the Annamese on my behalf” (Clara, 349). Stricken with one stroke.

He gets her to try some of the Indian hemp that he brought back. Horrible hallucinations, deadly disquiet. She takes the opportunity to

blurt out that she slept with Charles G. “Why did you do that? If you hadn’t saved my life, I would leave you.” Then, later: “With that cretin!” “He’s not a cretin.” He grabs her wrist. “You’d better not defend him.” “And why had I better not?” He sits down on the edge of the bed. “To think that now this fellow imagines he has the right to despise you. . . . I know what a man thinks of a woman he has had” (Clara, 364). She can’t believe her ears — appropriation and wounded vanity: Is that what masculine love is? Such a level of self-importance leaves Clara indignant, “sickens” her. The separation felt not long ago in Phnom Penh is heretofore sealed. Now it’s war.

But does she understand that this war pits André against himself? Against his mother and his birth, against everything he never wanted? He says to Marcel Arland when he asks him to take care of Clara, who, at the beginning of the Occupation, is living alone with her daughter: “No one has humiliated me as she has.” Humiliated? She takes a lover, she links up (*passe alliance*) with the maternal side of the family, she’ll give him a child against his will. She keeps accounts as if she and he were free and equal partners united by a contract. For André, however, love stands outside the domain of rights: it’s a test of dependence, one that is perhaps shared, but which is without reciprocity. Love consists of an unbearable violence in which sexual difference is played out with the most intimate yet isolated intensity — without transaction.

They lodge upstairs from the Lamys in Montparnasse. They often visit the Doyons, even the Bretons. This all makes for more than one humiliation. “Why did you go to those people? They are my enemies” (Clara, 365). The two André’s meet, say nothing of any value to each other, observe each other. They arrange to meet a second time. But this time it’s in Rue Fontaine, on a day when an automatic writing session is taking place. The door remains locked. Fine, André says as he walks back down, I want nothing to do with their idiotic aesthetics. As if the unconscious were capable of signing! He will hold steady with willpower and cubist methodology. They return to Bois Dormant to see Fernand, who puts down fifty thousand francs on the projected newspaper. “And this time, succeed,” he demands. Both father and son like to gamble, but not at the same game. From Orléans, André pays a visit to Max Jacob (who has retired to the Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire Abbey) to get himself confirmed in the order of “situation” and “style.” He has just been tested on both, in the realm of acts. Not a word about the adventure to Max, who is taken aback at hearing André hold forth about nothing other

than Asian art and religion and at being invited to join him on a lecture tour.

Then, as promised, he prepares his return to Indochina. He negotiates with Parisian publishing houses — Fayard, Payot, Hachette — the rights to reproduce articles from *Candide*, *Le Canard enchaîné*, and *Le Merle blanc* in the prospective newspaper. Grasset offers him a contract for three books, at ten thousand copies each and with an advance of three thousand francs on the first. It is 13 January 1925. The next day André and Clara embark for Singapore, where Fernand's fifty thousand francs await them in a bank. Difficult going in the jam-packed third-class cabin. They end up blowing Grasset's entire advance buying champagne for the lower-class people around them. Standing on a table, André concludes their binge by reading from Maurice Magre in his incantatory voice (Clara, 370–72). A three-day train trip up the Malaysian peninsula to Bangkok:

Train car full of Chinese eating, drinking, hawking, spitting, blowing their noses without handkerchiefs, not sitting like us with legs and thighs at right angles, but squatting up on the benches with their feet under their buttocks. They nibbled away, crunching dried fruit, munching little cakes. . . . Tamils, toward the back, packed in like flowers of the flamboyant tree. . . . Some wore shirts, leaving their legs bare; others wore loincloths that left their torsos bare. The Chinese were satisfied to wear 1900-style underwear. The Tamils spoke as much as the Chinese, but faster. (Clara, 3:17–18†)

Run a cane as fast as you can across the bars of an iron gate, André suggests, beaming; you'll see that they'll understand what you mean. Taken, once again, Clara is overwhelmed with anticipation of the pleasure of desiring, admiring, and haggling, as they stroll around in unknown Bangkok. Their boat is smashed open by a storm on the Gulf of Siam and they nearly perish. They laugh together. Monin awaits them on the pier at Saigon. They begin straightaway to size up the situation: the terrain to be reconnoitered, the alliances to be made, how to gather the men and means to engage the press battle. At least the enemy position is not difficult to pick out. Clara gets used to keeping pace again with André's hectic activism. What guides them, however, is Monin's knowledge of the territory, of struggle, and, rooted in him like a nature intolerant of injustice, his rebelliousness.

The time to bring the oppressed peoples of Indochina together is now. The Great War not only signaled the disaster of the values of bourgeois

democracy in the West; it also shook the foundations of imperialism the world over. Before any question of ideology or propaganda, the October Revolution made an unforgettable promise to the peasants, workers, and intellectuals crushed and humiliated by the West: they too will achieve freedom. At the 1920 Socialist Congress in Tours, where the hardline tendency secedes to create the French Communist Party, Ho Chi Minh (whose name is still Nguyen Ai Quoc), who represented the Annamese at the Peace Conference the year before, leads the Indochinese immigrant community in France toward the newly founded party. Summoned to Moscow, he is sent to Canton to organize Annamese refugees within the Thanh Nien. Within a few months, in May 1925, Canton will establish an independent Chinese government. Sun Yat-sen had died in March. By 1923, his party, the Kuomintang, had allied itself (*a passé alliance*) with the Chinese Communist Party. The republican general, Chiang Kai-shek, is head of the Whampoa military academy, whose cadets will save the Cantonese insurrection from being crushed in May 1925. Old Asia is giving birth that year to a new China at the expense of severe convulsions. Still united, Nationalists and Bolsheviks are far from settling the question as to whose baby it will be. That decision will take twenty years.

Fascinated and skeptical, André looks on. Might history produce a work? Not a chance: China will recreate the West in its own fashion, and no more. Or maybe it will recreate the Soviets. The issue is not what it can do, since history, anyhow, does nothing but follow its revolutions like so many planets spinning or vegetation under the law of seasons: blind necessity. Especially in Asia: the empire of cycles. Perhaps, though, on some particular occasion, some will, for an instant, can impose its power and lend to the repetition of the same a semblance of exception: a grandeur that will not pass (*ne passera pas*). Thus, ten years later, the Long March; thus, already Gandhi's nonviolent resistance in India; thus, tomorrow, de Gaulle's lifting of a humiliated France.

Paul Monin is a man with a noble heart. The motivation for his political resolve derives from unconditional solidarity with the victims of imperialist domination's affront to humanity. He is an authentic republican who wants all freedoms for all peoples. With her affinity to this universalism, Clara adds women's liberation. She does not come to understand the Annamese condition, which the lawyer helps them discover, the way one learns sociology; it is rather through her flesh—body and soul—which suffers in that of others. To her, anticolonial “politics” is a task leading to delivery/deliverance, a flight from Egypt. The people must, in the end, force its way through that passage bolted shut (*forcer le passage*

verrouillé) by French power and burst forth, out into the open, shouting its dignity as a human community!

Nothing is more foreign to André's way of thinking than this obstetrics and Paul's progressivism. It is not out of ingratitude or denial that he declares to Jean Lacouture in 1972 that Monin played no decisive role in his training (84–85). André comes to Indochina to stamp the humble movement of the crushed masses with the seal of a style that will perhaps help that movement to rise up out of its larval fate. And, since a work of art is conquered over and against imbecilic filiation—Picasso's *Demoiselles* canceling out Titian's (and even Manet's) nudes—the young journalist's stylet will sign the natives' silence by sweeping away the rhetoric of the appropriators. All in all, it comes down to imposing upon reality the asceticism of a possible that it renders impossible. As a good cubist, André knows that he possesses this style, this situational mode. He still needs to “take possession of the means,” which are doubtless to be found in writing but which, in these circumstances, are also to be found in publicity. Whence the newspaper whose power he learned at his own expense.

The nuance may appear slim: Paul educates a people, Clara serves as its midwife, André signs it. Differing frames of mind, yet not so much so that they cannot function together. Yet the divergency between these manners of proceeding remain invincible. It is one thing to let oneself be guided by the principle of emancipation, while quite another to engage in the daily practice of affective intelligence. As for the gesture of style, in no way is this a politics; it is rather a theology, an existential metaphysics or a poetics of action extending to the human community. It may well be that a project's principle or the after-imagery of a sentimental disposition becomes inscribed on a continuum; it remains that the signature upon an artwork is punctual. In two years, Paul will return from Canton to die in Saigon. Clara, during the Occupation, will weave in secret the same fragile network of emotional confidences that she always needs in order to bandage her life when she is defenseless, as in Phnom Penh. As for André, hardly had he arrived back in Europe in late 1925 than the page on Indochinese “politics” apparently had already been turned. Garine comes back to mind: “The transformation of society does not interest me. . . . A perfectly desperate passion—one of the strongest supports of strength.” André is not the hero of *The Conquerors*, but Garine is one of the possible figures for Malraux.

The press battle in the colonies is by definition an unequal one. One organ has at its disposal all of the power that the colonial interests and

their administration can provide to protect them and maintain the status quo. That mouthpiece is Chavigny's *L'Impartial*. Facing it are a few independent shoestring operations, subject to extreme pressure, constantly under threat, often taken off the stands. They attempt to make public what everyone, in fact, already knows: abuses of power, travesties of justice, fraud — the run-of-the-mill colonial thing.

Who ventured into such enterprises in Saigon? Nguyen Pham Long and Bui Quang Chien at *La Tribune indigène*. Also Nguyen An Ninh, but his *Cloche fêlée* (The cracked bell) still tolled liberty much too loudly and the governor of Cochin China had just had it closed down. *L'Écho annamite*, run by a man of quality, a good and courageous journalist, remained. Dejean de La Batie, born of an Annamese mother, had received from his father the education that a French diplomat can afford his son. Entreated by his friend, Monin, the métis did not hesitate joining the team of metropolitans who were putting *L'Indochine* together — so great was his confidence in the lawyer's rectitude and resolve, so entirely did Malraux's gift for the gab subjugate him.

They soon met regularly at Monin's place in Rue Pellerin. With the shutters still pulled shut against the evening heat and the ventilator pushing the leaden air, the young Asians and Europeans crossed each others' experiences, aspirations, and opinions. They drank, they smoked, they evaluated the temptation of Indochina, its twin impasse: either take up the West's tradition of liberty and turn it against the West (but without the power to cultivate it) or else fall back on oriental heritage even though the West had already violently weakened, ruined, and discredited it. Day after day the newspaper charged itself with publishing and denouncing the various scandals, exactions, and defamations; it investigated political crises in Paris; it remained vigilant on events in China. Suddenly Clara would make her entrance, throw her wide-brimmed straw hat on the sofa, and read aloud the dispatches received from Singapore. Often a young man named Vinh would accompany her. This delicate and cultivated soul was transfixed by the destiny of his people.

The Rue Pellerin circle attracted yet another companion, named Hinh, who proved as trenchant as Vinh was subtle. One day in the spring of 1925, he declared straight out that he was going to snuff Montguillot, the interim governor, right in the street, during his upcoming visit to Saigon (Clara, 3:177–81). Madness, certain failure, suicide, and for what result, really? An even worse repression would ensue, everyone cried out in indignation. Hinh stuck stubbornly to his plan. A wealth of arguments were marshaled to change his mind. Everyone did his best to play the

role in that classic scene in which the desire for direct action crashes up against civic responsibility: Antigone . . . and everyone felt a certain pleasure. Clara felt some tenderness for the young hero. André took down a number of exchanges: they would form the substance of Hong in *The Conquerors* and Ch'en in *Man's Fate*. As for the governor, his tour was postponed, at the very last minute.

Evenings, Malraux was seen strolling with Monin along some avenue off the beaten track: tie of the dandy, walking-stick in hand, holding forth. They practiced with foils together in case of the eventual duel: men of the pen perpetuated this means of settling matters of honor. André rejoiced at the idea of playing the role of d'Artagnan. Clara watched him, disappointed.

The Breaker 10

THE VERSAILLES PEACE TREATY in no way settled the accounts of World War I. The so-called crisis — a lethal convulsion — will continue to spread out upon the world for more than twenty years. Malraux will be seen volunteering at all the hot spots — lending his pen, his oratory, and his gesture to the defense of oppressed liberties. His own anguish magnanimously echoes the anguish of the times, his will echoes popular resistance. To the assaults of the aggressors he exposes himself as a condottiere more than as a leftist intellectual. What an opportunity the general disaster is for testing his invulnerability and offering it as example! Reality's unrest unleashed his passion for adventure.

His ordinarily brilliant ability to analyze a situation was not without its weak points: he could be wronged and he could be wrong. But, short of these errors, the drama of those years lay elsewhere. Malraux almost always denied that the roles were reversed. He made as if he were taking initiatives and facing everything, but the tide of violence ceaselessly assailed him, carrying him off here and there, pulling at him from behind. Of course, he swung around to confront it, but there was no way he could avoid being on the defensive. Whatever may have been his successes, those twenty years of unbridled death will carry the melancholy of recurrent defeat.

He is seen taking off, once again, for Indochina in 1925, believing that he can unite legend and history, keep up the initiative. He was nonetheless succumbing to the lure of exoticism. If his work was really in need of signing the horrible, why this step out into the world? And why so far out? There were plenty of horrors right at his doorstep in the early twenties: groups of SA were openly practicing their violence in Bavaria and, with the Catholic Center's benevolent neutrality, extending their grip out to Saxony and Prussia. General Ludendorff¹ was already compromised by Hitler with the failed Munich putsch. *Mein Kampf*, written in prison, appears in 1925. Brown terror is openly programmed. Yet when André passes through Berlin, at the end of 1921, he apparently sees nothing of this crisis except the effect it is having on art and literature. Shall we give him the benefit of the doubt? . . . But what about Florence in 1920?

As far as the disaster of liberalism was concerned, Italy was well in advance of the rest of Europe. The great movement of worker and peasant councils that led to occupied factories and land was only a year old. Already, in 1919, Gramsci had founded *L'Ordine Nuovo* and, in prison, would elaborate his theses on hegemony and the organic intellectual. Did André have even the slightest knowledge of his work? The dandy only had eyes for D'Annunzio! And while he was playing the forlorn lover at the San Miniato cemetery, all Italy knew that the fascist *squadriste* were stepping up their punitive missions against the men of the councils. And that when they were caught off guard in the middle of the night on committee premises, the small Venetian wine grower and the grease monkey from Modena would be forced by the squadrons in black to swallow liters of castor oil. Was this scatophilic cruelty sufficient to arouse the young writer's loathing, these humiliations to incite his revulsion and his signature?

True, the government general at Hanoi could hardly be outdone when it came to violence, whether committed directly or left to their henchmen or to the settlers to mete out—camouflaged, in any case, under the name of the republic. Were they really any more delicate than Mussolini's gangs? One should take another look at Andrée Viollis's *Indochine SOS*, which Malraux prefaced and had published in 1935. And, in 1933, the disgust with which, in *Marianne*, he inventories the abject crimes committed by the representatives of French power in the distant colony.² The Foreign Legion combs through suspect villages in central Annam, blowing off people's heads like clay pipes at a shooting range, sawing off others, sinking hacked-up bodies in rice paddies. The courts, meanwhile, acquit the men convicted of such horrors on the grounds that they were

obeying orders handed down from their superiors. At the same time, any brawl or settling of accounts among locals earns the guilty native a life sentence, hard labor, sometimes the death penalty. Certainly this accusatory text arrives late—eight years late, when the antifascist struggle is already engaged in Europe and the Left has an already powerful organ in *Marianne*.

It remains that the man who lands in Saigon in February 1925 is no longer the adolescent who had come a year before to take up the challenge that he had set for himself: take whatever you wish. His passion, at the time, was the Asia of fables and Khmer was its name. As for his ethics, three maxims defined it: all value is hollow; only desire is absolute; satisfy it without concession. And if it requires that I die? “My life doesn’t interest me. That’s clear, straightforward, categorical. What I want . . . is a certain form of power. Either I’ll find it, or too bad for me” (*Co/E*, 49). André snatched up the gods of Benteai-Srey just as one might believe one is grabbing hold of one’s own naked truth. His words and gestures were those—precise, yet mad—of a sleepwalker. It was a daydream with the perfect means of becoming a reality. Malraux would remain this efficient sleepwalker. This quality can be witnessed already at the trial of 1924. The judicial ordeal did not effect his determination one bit, it merely extended his notion of what might hamper him: he discovers that in the colony, instead of crawling around sneakily, the hideous beasts of his nightmares cynically occupy the seats of power and exert it from behind. That trial struck him at the heart of his phobias of an *a tergo* penetration. As illustrated by the strange “association of ideas” that he imputes to Garine on the subject of his own trial: “No, I don’t think about my trial anymore. And what I’m telling you is not something one thinks about: it’s a recollection stronger than memory itself” (*Co/E*, 153*). No need to recall the traumatic scene: it returns by itself:

“It was during the war, behind the lines. About fifty Legionnaires shut in a big room, a little light coming through a barred window. Feels like rain. They’ve just lit candles stolen from a nearby church. One of them, dressed like a priest, is officiating at an altar made of crates covered with shirts. In front of him comes a sinister procession: a man in a frock coat with a huge paper flower in his button-hole, a bride between two bridesmaids from an Aunt Sally and a lot of other weird characters in the shadows. Five o’clock. The candle-light is dim. I hear, ‘Hold her up! Don’t let the little darling pass out!’ The bride’s a young soldier who reported in yesterday from

God knows where, and bragged that he'd bayonet the first man who tried to rape him. The two carnival bridesmaids pin him in place; he can hardly move, his eyelids are half shut, he's probably been beaten almost unconscious. The mayor takes the priest's place, they douse the candles, and all I can see then is men's backs humping in the deep shadow near the floor. The guy screams. Naturally they raped him until they were groggy. There were a lot of them. Yes. That's haunted me for a long time. Not because of the way it ended; because of the absurd parody that began it."

Again he muses. "It's not too different from what I felt during the trial. A remote but real connection." (*Co/E*, 153*)

The perverse parody of justice to which he was subjected awoke the phantasm of this abject wedding party. At his trial, André fell victim to an unexpected violence, but one that he soon recognized. For the jungle's gluttony he had been prepared, but here he found himself forcibly taken by the revolting sensuality of the authorities, all united to seize and immobilize him. He was the young raped soldier and so was the Indochinese people. From the piers on the port to the remotest village, in the streets and in the courtroom: crime everywhere reigned unpunished—misery, incrimination, humiliation, bold lies, barely disguised sadism. An entire people and its culture were the objects of the basest scheming. All in the name of the same French civilization for which his father had risked his life eight years before and for which millions of young men had died. One can only, once again, be stunned: Was not the Europe of survivors—a hopeless Europe following the disaster of the Great War—on the verge of or already giving itself over to the same vermin? Why go to the other side of the world to seek this experience? Merely a persistent desire for exotic adventures?

Asia being the homeland of his desires, it was through Asia's anguish that he began to feel Europe's. Only Asia knew the unvarying return of declines and new beginnings. Only Asia had successfully achieved the metamorphosis of indifference into works of thought, into sanctuaries and ways of living. Western anguish had to be both reflected and put at a distance by the mirror of this more ancient wisdom. Eastern willpower had not attempted to blindly oppose the plans laid by the Redundant One: it instead became its friend and disciple. Equaling the world's silence, the spirit, out there, had renounced heroism. In China and Persia, André adored the mystery of desire espousing that which

negates it, not through intelligence or theoretical discourse, but by placing itself in a state of welcome and reserve—a way of being. Asia, to him, figured the mystery of a “passive imagination” (*TW*, 53) rendering its civilizations invincible: “China,” says Tcheng-Daï of *The Conquerors*, “has always conquered her conquerors. Slowly, it is true. But always” (*Co/E*, 83). In the East, the young conqueror had sought out what he lacked: the ability to eschew conquering. This was a metaphysical problem. The Chinese man of *The Temptation* writes to the Frenchman: “Time is what *you* make it; we are what it makes us” (*TW*, 22).

Yet, in the colony, André came nowhere near fathoming this fabled patience. What he did encounter was native wisdom abundantly sullied by the conqueror, already in a state of indignation, destined sooner or later (and in spite of itself) to an uprising. He completely missed his rendezvous with Asia. An early symbol of this was when the administration seized the Banteaï-Srey divinities. Instead of some true Asia, what did he find? Imperialism. And this had its aftereffect, its shock wave. Malraux conceives *The Temptation of the West* between two trials and writes it on the run as soon as he leaves Saigon at the end of December 1925. The book gives a rundown of his comings and goings in Asia. The double misunderstanding is exchanged through letters between a Chinese man in Paris and a Frenchman visiting China. The book’s composition does not result from stylishness: rather, it opens onto a cross-navigation between respective disappointments and a sense of their ebbing.

Europe is reaching the end point of its madness, observes Monsieur Ling, from Paris: your Western values—heroism of the ego, the will to rule the world, the individualist cult of love—all of that is now sapped by “idleness” (*TW*, 51). Your “actions” being anemic, all that is left of your acts is their imitation. And where have your great voices gone? Recorded on your phonographs. Without a moment’s hesitation, A.D. concedes from the East: “a race subject to the test of action, and thus destined to a most bloody fate” (*TW*, 53). In 1926, when this is written, André is not so deaf to what awaits Europe. As to the orientalist dream, he turns on the seduction as he should, connoisseur and haggler that he is. Until the day that A.D. meets a witness of the Chinese catastrophe in Shanghai’s grand hotel in the person of Wang Loh:

“Our current play has a special power,” the old master observes impassively. “The Theatre of Anguish. It’s about the destruction,

the annihilation of one of the greatest human systems, one which succeeds in existing without the support of gods or men. The annihilation! China wavers like an edifice on the point of collapse, and her anguish comes from neither uncertainty nor conflict, but from the weight of that trembling roof. . . . Europe thinks she has conquered all these young men who now wear her garments. But they hate her. . . . Her effect on them falls short of seduction, and only succeeds in making them realize the senselessness of all thought.” (TW, 102, 104)

The West and the East consider the differences that separate them and give themselves over to a mirrory play of mutual temptation. Nothing is left now but a China whose wise foundations have been eaten away. Before this ruin stands an acephalous Europe that can only generate effects. What do they have to envy each other or to learn from one another anymore? From the shards of the mirror, hatred emanates. For Malraux, this marked the instant that the signal shone. A great surf would soon break over the world. Celebrated by Claudel thirty years before, the “knowledge of the East” that Malraux had admired so much is now bankrupt. “Can Asia convey to us any lessons? I do not think so.” Except, perhaps, this: “A discovery of what it is that we are.”³ The relativity of cultures, that is, and the knowledge that ours is no less arbitrary than Chinese culture. The only advantage young Europeans have is that of being conscious of this fact. As for the East, worn down as it is by the West, it will have to become the object of revolutionary forcing—Chiang, Borodin,⁴ Mao all judged suitable for building an astute, modern sensibility. André repeatedly tells Clara in 1925 that the whole problem boils down to converting the East to individualism.

Hypothetically speaking, and besides the fact that the destiny of revolution in general is to be thwarted, no socialist revolution can accomplish this. All his novels—even *Man’s Hope*—will say so. They are all populated by those figures “for whom revolution is primarily action” and in no way a promise (Co/E, 46). “Revolutionary fervor does for these men what a taste for army life does for Legionnaires—they’re men who’ve never been able to conform within ordinary society, who’ve asked a great deal of life, who wanted to lend some meaning to their own lives, and who now, at the other end of all that, *serve*” (Co/E, 11*). Giving up one’s personality. Some have seen in this gloomy hero of “useless service” (greatly appreciated by Henri de Montherlant) a “portrait of the adventurer.” But he is actually the figure of the true modern: a kind of heav-

enless, enterprising stoic, without any illusion as to the outcome of what he undertakes.

On this dark course toward the shipwreck, true virtue is incarnated solely in the artist. André returns to this topic in his 1927 essay, “D’une jeunesse européenne,” right after *The Temptation*. On a tone of pathos, it inventories the ruins: Christianity impossible, the idea of man massacred, the ego transformed into a “deserted palace” where ghosts wander about, the pathetic parade of heroism. Upon this decomposition, however, contemporary art has an opportunity for rebirth. When truth cannot be present in what is, it takes refuge in what can be done. “European youth is more affected by what the world can be than by what it is. These young people are less sensitive to the way the world affirms its reality than to how much it loses it” (*JE*, 151†).

Unlike the other one, the artistic “revolution” may be permanent because artworks are not subject to the proof of reality. They are subject only to the threat of being institutionalized, embalmed, of becoming cult objects, “arts of delectation,” material good for making doctrines (*VS/E*, 516, 528, 530). Art gains by knowing that it is unfinished, just as the artist gains by the knowledge that his attempt leaves a remainder of possibilities, indefinitely. New artworks displace and reform the “world” formed by made artworks. Creation is not a response to generalized anguish as much as it takes it on and elaborates it. André sometimes finds himself dreaming that society will someday adopt values that are in a perpetual movement similar to that of measurement in relativist physics (*JE*, 152–53). Next to this tireless and weightless lucidity, the promises of political revolution—the promise, that is, of an end to unhappiness and the gullibility that it requires in order to proceed—are quite simply appalling.

Yet with a war to be waged, how does one avoid such servitude? Young Malraux would find it easy to picture himself as a political artist, a D’Annunzio of the Left, an artist whose material would be the humiliated masses. Art is perhaps the sinews of war: “Where Prometheus is mere literature, Spartacus is vanquished in advance” (Picon, 107). Both tap the same insurrectional force. However, as we know, art is not war. To toil with and against words in order to extract the dazzling scene in which an exemplary destiny will take shape is one thing; quite another is to struggle alongside the downtrodden against the oppressors.

His return to Saigon in 1925 was supposed to afford him a lesson in realism. He confided to Guy Suarès in 1974 that “when the Indochinese

defended me, something shifted inside” (PPF, 68). He indeed felt the tension mounting, the groundswell that was already raising Asia. But it would be hard to believe that what he felt, out there, turned his life upside down. In any case, the effects of transformation were not immediate. André knew nothing about matters of society or how to get involved. At the time he believed that resolution, whimsy, and intelligence could do the trick. It would be years before his actions and writings would accredit a “commitment on the Left.”

And even then, the motive that he will allege for this commitment will remain suspect in the eyes of his chums. Malraux claimed that, far from being a humanist virtue, the “virile fraternity” that he put forward as pretext gets tested this side of consciousness. It is as indestructible as anguish or amorous passion, and no more controllable, either. Giving oneself over to the practice of this mystic communion instead of preparing a brighter future was a rather weird reason for militantism.

Ten years later, at the end of his preface to Viollis’s *Indochine SOS*, when he evokes the episode with the Annamese typesetter, the comrade sounds like a lover: “This is how I remember you: when you came to me, governmental action had put an end to the only revolutionary newspaper in Indochina and the Baclieu peasants remained stripped of all their possessions in the greatest of tranquil silences.” Threatened by the colonial administration, *L’Indochine’s* printer had to stop his collaboration. André and Clara headed off to Hong Kong to buy type for a makeshift press. These were seized at customs in Saigon. Another set gets through the mail. But the typeface is English, thus without accents. “You drew from your pocket a handkerchief tied into a purse: ‘Nothing but *ê*s . . . What about the grave and circumflex accents? . . .’ Then you opened up the handkerchief and emptied out onto the marble all those characters jumbled like jackstraws and you aligned them with the tip of your printer’s finger, without adding a thing.” That type, those scattered die on which a nation’s destiny is played out — they resemble the queen’s diamond studs: “‘I like *The Three Musketeers*,’ de Gaulle reveals to Malraux (if we are to believe the latter). ‘It is as good as your friend *Puss in Boots*. But their success comes from the fact that the war with England has nothing to do with Richelieu’s policy, and depends altogether on d’Artagnan’s recovery of Anne of Austria’s diamond studs” (FO, 25). Never will the boy from Bondy (in a state of wonderment since reading Dumas) grow old. It is 5 March 1948, and the individual responsible for RPF propaganda asks a group of dumbfounded “intellectuals,”²⁵ “Must I remind you that in *The Three Musketeers* Richelieu is important not for

his influence on France but because he warns that Anne of Austria's diamond studs, gift of the King, are missing?" (*Co/E*, 183). The romantic aspect of thwarted love is at least an even match for a nation's history. Not only is it inseparable from it: it may even lead to it. Through his typesetter's action, the gentleman in the service of legend discovers a new cause, a no less adventurous one, a solidarity. In the accent marks lined up by the Annamese, André suddenly hears the voice of a people rising out of his own throat.

This does not mean that his writing shows signs of a straight-out conversion to the political declaration or the declamatory genre. Even while he is engaged in the anticolonial struggle and even more so following his return to France, he persists in writing fantasy stories. Not surprising, really. But if one reads the narratives of this period, one quickly becomes aware that they are altogether different from the early fables. This series of short texts, hardly known except to specialists, was written and published between 1925 and 1928: "Isfahan Expedition," "Voyage to the Fortunate Islands," "Prester John's Letter to the Emperor of Rome," and *Farfelu Kingdom*. The first is published under a pseudonym in the 6 August 1925 issue of *L'Indochine*; the second, in *Commerce* (number 12, 1927); the "letter" by the legendary priest, prefaced by Malraux and "adapted" by Chevasson, appears in *Commerce* (number 17, 1928); and in that same year, Gallimard edits the last work in a *plaque* volume. The series is, therefore, a sort of doublet in a minor key of the great texts of the same period—*The Temptation of the West*, "D'une jeunesse européenne," *The Conquerors*—as if reflective writing and the historical novel were not enough to dry up his spring of fantasy.

His first tales of the 1920s were pure whimsy; these are sketches of epics in the negative. Death triumphs over the human enterprise, high civilizations, and revolutionary expeditions by subjecting it all to the indifferent return of the same. Melancholy no doubt provided the universe of *Paper Moons* with that unreality that André liked in the cubists and the *fatrassiers*. That *farfelu* world, as fabled as it be, can at present be localized and dated in an East now lost; what protects it from being reconquered is a creeping fauna. Willpower is elevated to the stature of major theme; its failure as well. Imaginary overload is given greater license in *Paper Moons*, where it is forced into a circus parade in which the rarest treasures, anthropoidal monsters, an extravagant bestiary and flora are all invited to participate. Droll and dismal legends are told. Under a dust evoking the end of the world, desire, like a threatened little boy, hurriedly exhibits its collection of fetishes. The carnival of Garine's

delirium is in the same vein (*Co/E*, 120). And so is the treasure of automa-
 tous toys that constitute the only booty brought back by the pillagers of
 Isfahan from the imperial palace (*RF*, 325–26). Thus remain certain as-
 pects of *Man's Hope*: the cardboard tanks, the appearances by Mickey
 Mouse and Felix the Cat, that whole party thrown for the refugee chil-
 dren by the Valencia unions. The fascist squadron bombards the city at
 night and “in time with the explosions, . . . trembling in the rain, the an-
 imals nodded their heads above the sleeping children” (*MH*, 430). We
 should add to the picture of these machinelike processions Wang Loh’s
 suggestion, in *The Temptation of the West*, to make the Chinese national
 holiday that “evening when the intelligent soldiers of allied armies rushed
 out of the Summer Palace, carefully carrying the priceless mechanical
 trinkets which ten centuries had offered up to the Empire” (*TW*, 105).

The “mechanical extravaganza” is a recurrent theme with Malraux.
Paper Moons was entirely built on it. But the theme is treated more sen-
 sually, more tautly in the period 1925–26: sensuality is exacerbated in
 direct proportion to its loss. And, if one may say, loss is the crowning
 touch in an essay on an aborted conquest. In *Paper Moons*, the Sins led
 a campaign against Death and killed her, forgetting why. Same frame-
 work here, only the adventure is political, imperial — and death resolutely
 wins out. A Bolshevik commando out of Afghanistan besieges Isfahan.
 Without success. Not that the attack is thwarted: there was no fighting,
 “the city defended itself.” Already dead, the Mecca of Iranian “purity”
 was indifferent to ventures. A labyrinth of alleyways and aimless avenues,
 the capital is inhabited by “the demons of ruins whose faces are un-
 changed and who live in our own bodies” (*RF*, 330). The narrator hears
 the devil within him announce: “You shall not remember Isfahan, for
 Isfahan is guarded by beasts. Its abandoned crown is fully capable of de-
 livering it from your luckless companions and from their officers doomed
 to a vile demise. Nothing can prevail against those born of the sand: their
 image reigns among the constellations” (*RF*, 331†) It is perhaps not ne-
 gligible that the invaders came straight from the Soviet Union: Red as
 it may be, any political project dies off when faced with stellar creepy
 crawlies. One morning, the horses, dogs, and cats become agitated and,
 seized with panic, bolt. Anxious, the narrator goes up onto a terrace and
 what does he see? “A great, wide stain” that is black, absolutely black,
 “spreading out toward us,” submerging the city. He yells out, “Scorpi-
 ons! Scorpions!” Then, finally: “Within moments, that word along with
 the sight of that immense expanse fringed with pincers moved us with
 such dread that the army fell apart” (*RF*, 331†).

That word? What word? Scorpion, dread: the thing from Saint-Maur, the word from *Lazarus*—a single phobia spanning seventy years. The abject tide is already swarming over the East and is on its way to attack Europe. From the hills of Catalonia in January 1939, André spots General Yaguë's Moroccan soldiers hurtling down onto Barcelona: "Moors! Moors!" he murmurs. This is it: the wave now breaks that once rose out of the Asian ruins.⁶ After an extended detour, the Saint-Maur ditches are discharging their vermin. Decomposed and fetid, the East returns. Its stench stunk up the Vistula front beginning with the "first" gas attack in 1917; at Bolgako, it putrefied woods, men, and animals alike. "I am haunted by the struggle against the poison gas, . . . that crazed, bloodless struggle. . . . gas is the Scourge—the harbinger of death" (*Laz.*, 93).

Henceforth deprived of a horizon, without sense or measure of the challenge that its wise Asian rival held up to it, disoriented and idle, Europe continues to strive forth—like an automaton. November 1937: Madrid is pulverized by weeks of fascist bombs. A telegram from Shade, special envoy, to his New York newspaper: "Fellow Americans, . . . we're through with old Uncle Europe telling us what to do: he's gone out of his mind with his savage passions and that face of someone who's been gassed" (*MH*, 386*). Europe gassed. Fascism, Nazism, Francoism, perhaps Communism, are all consummating the corruption, the downfall they think they're countering. "Politics" for Malraux now becomes an all-consuming infection.

The imperialism that he stumbled onto in Saigon may well be "the final stage of capitalism," but what he could smell there more than anything else was the filth stirred up by lawless power, strutting its stuff, endemic to life. André returns to Indochina to dip his pen in that black blood of his nightmares corrupting everything in the colonial organism. Open warfare this time: his earlier mannerism just doesn't cut the mustard when one must counterattack the administration, the justice system, the press. A tone has to be found, some form of material daring, the writing style of an armed infantryman. "Clean break: new departure along a line of steel," Cendrars wrote in 1920. Ten years later, commenting on *The Royal Way*, Drieu la Rochelle renders this homage worthy of a veteran:

As for his style, it is more violent, more abrupt than ever. While the overall conceptualization of the book bears witness to a certain conceptual clarity [*sic*], to a structure still more mordant [than *The Conquerors*], and though every sentence is jammed into the next

as well as the one before it, each individual sentence is an explosion. Malraux does not proceed from one sentence to the next toward some goal; rather, each sentence captures its own momentum, resolving it momentarily. Each sentence is a piece of metal that concision has rendered horribly trenchant.⁷

His aim still needs adjusting, however: the projectile “often strikes the reader’s mind, ripping it open without, for all that, striking at the decisive spot.” Writing must kill off all superfluous illusion. What, then, remains necessary in this time of great suspicion? Especially when suspicion is nourished by the permanent scandal of colonization. In Saigon, the cubist destroyer of reality gets reinforcement from a political polemicist working for all liberties. From one avant-garde to another, all the way to the tropics, the West pursues its war against itself. What the East decidedly lacks, presently — that is, in 1925 — is the East, its silence.

For the Max Jacob disciple, there was pain ahead. Seeing press battles through requires the opposite qualities of those required for poetry. Malraux had already sensed this during the Phnom Penh trial the year before. Why was his condemnation so harsh? Because of his excessive eloquence, for his rhetorical triumph. There, not in the verdict, lay his defeat. “Convincing people at a public meeting serves no great purpose. Five minutes later the guy who applauded the most can be recaptured by his previous arguments, by his comrades, by his milieu. With regard to eloquence, it’s less a question of convincing than it is seducing.”⁸ Malraux turns out to be a great rhetorician, capable of stupefying his audiences. He himself is seduced by his own power: such is the lot of seducers. Irresistible to him is the temptation to impress others, without a moment’s delay. He may pretend that he escapes his own trap but he gets caught in pretending.

Persuasive abilities are invaluable in public polemics. But they always work to the detriment of true thought because they ignore precision. Jean Paulhan showed that success, in the practice of diatribe in Madagascar, went regularly to those orators who advisedly use commonplaces and hackneyed sayings. In “Un défaut de la pensée critique,” a preparatory article for *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*,⁹ the proofs of which Malraux received from his friend in 1927, Paulhan argues, against the purist criticism of the time, that words and rhetoric are as determinant as the energy of thought in any work of literature. Malraux responds by saying that the question is not whether writing can escape the specious (inevitable) power

of the spoken word but, rather, if an isolated experience, an instant of highest affective intensity, can, against all odds, be expressed along the lines of its “difference.”¹⁰ This last term is called “stridency” in *The Voices of Silence* (VS/E, 607).

As concerned as he is to convey the violence of a dramatic situation, the novelist — and, later, the essayist — possesses a style that does not eschew the orator’s declamatory tone or the preacher’s sententiousness. But he has not yet acquired the habit of this compromise in 1925. The pamphlets published in *L’Indochine* are those of an awkward rhetorician still taking classes in the art of writing political polemics. He often overdoes things, and sometimes he seems bored. With his other hand, the *farfelu* storyteller reserves the possibility of lending full stridency to the dread that colonial violence arouses in him. Bombast and intensity: these two different tones are combined in *The Conquerors* and in *The Royal Way*. Political rhetoric will, from this point on, infiltrate his writing. But also his style’s capacity to mesmerize will strike at the baseness inherent to diatribe and infuse glum ceremonial assemblies with dreams.

That odd combination of action and style was unwanted. By engaging in political struggle in Saigon, Malraux was plunging into a wave in formation. Soon that wave would be gigantic. It would rise up, raising him up with it, then crash down over the world, rolling along with it his writing, his thought, and his life. From the pitiful Saigon rag to *The Struggle with the Angel* (of which *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* is all that is left by 1943) through the various episodes of the anticolonial struggle, the intrigues related to his literary successes, the vicissitudes of antitotalitarian combat on the French, German, Spanish, and Russian fronts, through the turmoil in his love life, one single groundswell carries his talent, his desires, his resistance, willy-nilly along with the entire world.

There aren’t exactly what one could call throngs of French writers who exposed themselves to the storm for as long a time, so boldly, and with no catechism to shelter them.

During those years, he turns around to face off, advances backward, jostled, toppled, striving against all odds to see clearly. All he knows of this tidal wave is that, in its brutality and underhandedness, it is never-ending. He deposits it, nearly inert and, for the first time, pensive, in 1941, in a chic villa on the Riviera, between a young beauty who is insatiably in love and a little boy, just learning to walk in his clogs, who overwhelms him. Unrecognizable to himself, André is a wave after breaking:

“At Roquebrune, in front of the log fire, the moment when the man of forty is gripped for the first time by the disease of remembrance” (*Laz.*, 118).

One might believe him to be defeated on every front—colonial administration, fascism, Nazism, finally Stalinism—stunned by literary success, taken hostage by a series of women: Clara demanding her rights, Josette Clotis her desires, Louise de Vilmorin, who demands nothing and makes herself comfortable with everything. The nightmare culminates in 1933: Goncourt Prize, all three women at once, his mother, Berthe, deceased the year before, Hitler chancellor.

Wrong—“glory attains its ultimate luster in the throes of debasement.”¹¹ Malraux admired Corneille. Although persecuted by figures out of the Scourge—of which woman is not the least—he nevertheless refused to surrender to misfortune. The wave broke near Menton, then the sea slackened. In the middle of the worst year of all—1941, the eye of the hurricane—the Malraux frigate, with all its sails slumped, awaits the wind with inexplicable good nature. One of the world’s top novelists will never again write a novel. He now seeks a course. A politics as well. Is the popular insurrection finished? The world’s peoples are all mobilized en masse against each other. Insects in closed ranks, like the scorpions of Isfahan. Whether on the Left or on the Right, they are subjected to the same kapos.¹²

For almost three years, as if he had several accounts to urgently settle, he would write several books simultaneously. First, to place seals on the mysticopolitical adventure in the East. *The Demon of the Absolute*, a biography of T. E. Lawrence that began with “the time of failure” and ended in an “unfinished tragedy” was about finished when he abandoned the project, leaving it in cardboard boxes. Out of that, Malraux will merely publish a sort of argument under the decidedly eloquent title, “Was That All It Was?”¹³

To sum up the generalized defeat, to specify the modern West’s be-reavement, to zero in on a possible mode for resistance. Neither essay nor novel, *The Struggle with the Angel* is an unclassifiable piece of writing: composed in a series of tableaux with no plot unity, scenes of terror on the Polish and French fronts, the recounting of an adventurous political mission to help the Turkish cause, the acts of a scholarly colloquium not unlike those at the Château de Pontigny—each piece held together by the mere patronymic Berger, three generations of males, with no mention of women, the whole thing carried along by a single inspi-

ration (*souffle*), by a single suffering (*souffrance*): that of Jacob assailed by “Man” during his endless night.

Finally, and especially, to pursue the long essay on the “psychology of art” of which *Verve* published some important sections in four installments just before the war. It will be on that ground—the ground of artworks—that for many, many years the mourning process of the politico will be elaborated, that the combat with the colonel’s demon and Berger’s angel will continue, that resistance will find its true powers.

The breaker was beating at the door: Hitler sullyng the Arc of Triumph; the Maréchal of the fascist Liges anesthetizing France’s veterans; mobsters and wasters, with *milicien* berets cocked to the side and their finger on the trigger, buying their survival off the occupier by furnishing him with truckloads of deportees, filling his communal graves with the executed . . . Meanwhile Malraux was writing his “Untimely Meditations.”

A sign (alas, a much too graphic sign) will be necessary to toss him back out into the turmoil of combat: one after the other in 1944 his father’s two other sons, Claude and Roland, engaged in the Resistance, are arrested by the Gestapo and vanish. It will have been understood that a little brother’s death was, for him, *the* primal scene. He suddenly felt supernumerary and, once again, short on virile fraternity and love—the debt par excellence, his life called upon to redeem a priceless loss by exposing itself to death. He immediately got himself admitted into a resistance network, putting himself to guerrilla warfare under the name of “Berger.” He will sign his resistance in the style for which we know him. But it will not be in Spain: he doesn’t have to invent everything. The die is cast, the war is already won elsewhere, Nazism will be crushed between Russian tanks and English and American aviation.

Following this, at de Gaulle’s side, just when one thinks that the child is once again yielding to the desire for epic while the ambitious man yields to the desire for consecration, all evidence will show, to the contrary, that he expects nothing from the farces inherent to political power—nothing except, through them, to deserve and preserve the general’s esteem and his own. As a second-rank minister (and a rather negligent one at that), Malraux is thrown by the fringe of the great wave, henceforth broken up, back to his first loves—those with which he had entrusted Clara: “bookworm,” man in his study, Borges-style, however. It has been said that his research on art served to “compensate” for his disappointment as political militant. Yet, when, if ever, did he believe in

the revolution? And who can strike a balance between reflection and action? Art inhabited his soul from the very beginning, and action could never replace it. Action merely extended the enigma of forms to the point of inscribing that enigma on the flesh of the world. Why the Benteai-Srey venture? Why the sequel in Indochinese politics? For ten absolutely desirable Khmer high reliefs.

Let's brush aside appearances: he becomes a French politician at the precise moment when action, which he saw as urgency and exploit, is a dead letter. What remain perennial are art and writing — their power to marvel unsurpassable. But they have no need of his life: his body, his fear, and his courage are made available — they no longer prove anything. In his great studio in Boulogne, in the Lanterne office, or in the Vilmorin estate, Malraux runs headlong not into the unknown of the jungle, of the sierra, or of the maquis, but into the unknown desert of blank pages.

He may well seek additional energy in tobacco, amphetamines, and alcohol to create silence or to allow it to speak. Bent over his lines, the thinker's body may well suffer: contrary to the exploit, a piece of reflective writing is not truer because one half killed oneself to write it. When time comes to lend voice to the violence that creation exacts upon a Goya, a Rembrandt, a Picasso, or a Dostoyevsky, André Malraux's own pain counts only by transference. The young leader of a Byronian gang becomes a gentleman who works at home in his dressing gown. Minister or not, his writing now instructs him that, in his flesh, he is already dead. The flesh will only allow him posthumous reflections and memoirs. Metamorphoses, antimemoirs, the supernatural, the intemporal, unreality, limbo, precariousness: a glacial cold is beginning to bear down upon his shoulders and a sort of slipping in place causes his countenance to sag. Across the cities, on the radio, on the video screen, his voice starts to ring out like that of the Commandatore.

Sadness: he's aging. Yet he manages to convince himself that the enemy that painting, writing, and his own text all face is none other than the enemy holding Annamese rice paddies under tight security, the enemy that bombarded the Catalan olive groves. Except that, hidden in the depths of the soul, this enemy is more terrible still. Through Flaubert, Baudelaire, Cézanne, Van Gogh — all the great modern Europeans — he writes between 1947 and 1951,

Western culture was losing faith in itself. The diabolical principle — from war, that major devil, to its train of minor devils, fears and

complexes — which is more or less subtly present in all barbarian art, was coming to the fore again.

The diabolical principle stands for all in man that aims at his destruction: the demons of Babylon, of the Church, Freud's and those of Bikini all have the same face. And the more ground the new demons gained in Europe, the more her art drew on earlier cultures which had had their own demons in ancient times. (*VS/E*, 541*)

Is not the hideousness against which artistic creation rises up, then, the very same as that which revolution devoted itself to fighting not long ago? To what was European youth destined already in 1927? To a barely political task: that of “raising and holding high a sphere of the sensible mind composed entirely of movement, change, new relations, and new births against a life to which anything that cannot be translated into acts and figures has become foreign” (*JE*, 153).

Following World War II came reconstruction, growth: numbers. More than ever before, performativity and archiving dominate all other activities. Literatures and arts will slowly be assimilated as cultural goods and, whenever they persist in questioning, lose the audience they had before the war. In short, once the hideous invasion of scorpions is past, all that will remain on Western shores is an alluvium of microprocessors. To Malraux, protons and protists are one and the same: man has massacred man by the millions, yet the nightmare — subtler though it may be — is still present, stifling and freezing his creative power.

Although André makes his debut as political journalist in 1925, perceives the colonial condition precisely, and feels the hatred mounting, the positions he defends and the proposals that he publishes remain reserved, not to say timid. Prudence is certainly advisable: censorship strikes quickly and with any method at its disposal. But political immaturity must be taken into consideration, too. In the 4 July issue of *L'Indochine* (number 16), he answers a reader (a fictive one, of course) under the promising title “Based on What Realities Can the Annamese Effort Be Backed?”

This, my dear Sir, must be well understood: in order to turn Annam into a free nation in which two peoples live on equal footing (as in French India or in the Antilles), the first part of your life must be sacrificed. You can create a true Annam but it is your children who will see it in actuality.

For the French and the Annamese to reach real harmony, the primary necessity is for us French to entirely eliminate what I shall call our “propaganda by bluff.” The French didn’t come here to civilize but rather to earn money *by their own labors*. No need for this to be hidden.

It is important that legitimately acquired rights be safeguarded. From this, it absolutely does not follow that the unorthodox schemes being set up at present are justified.¹⁴

How can all the petty scheming be put to an end? By alerting the Métropole through spectacular action or some campaign of provocation? Error: first of all, power in Paris is changing hands every six months. No, you must speak right here. And you will be heard only on condition that you “do not upset the rights of those, precisely, who are here in the name of a law that you lay claim to yourself.” Ally yourself, then, with the liberal French. And instead of turning your children into humiliated petty civil servants, teach them to become technicians and, especially, agronomic engineers. For then they will be able to organize themselves in professional groupings and thereby acquire the power to exercise effective pressure on the colonial administration and on the wealthy landowners. Then, when the right of the Annamese to an education is violated, their right to equitable justice, their freedom of movement, and when their just retribution is flouted, you can “in a matter of a week close down the entire Indochinese agricultural complex.” To conclude, André conveys the philosophy behind this wise program: “Involving no violence, this means would certainly be worthy of the Indian Hartal. And all free French would be in agreement with you because it would be based on *your own labors*.”

These values are rather unexpected in a young insolent one with a revolver in his pocket who refuses all employ; Gandhian nonviolence and labor, to boot. . . . The lesson does not pass without a measure of condescension: the native masses, in the meanwhile, will have to make do. But what naïveté, more than anything else in this program — what naïveté, if not downright foolishness! In face of the mounting Indochinese opposition, he is quite simply proposing that the conditions for market capitalism be created on the spot. He seems to totally ignore all the mental and social police methods that go hand in hand with colonial overexploitation, he seems never to have heard about the contradictions of imperialism or of the creation, already six years before, of the Comintern.

In his defense, we should mention his marked penchant for peasant action, his feeling of fraternity for the legendary *Jacquerie*. Occupying land, distributing it equitably, canceling all debts: against Comintern directives, precisely, Kyo will advocate this line in order to defeat Chiang Kai-shek. When Malraux arrives in Spain in July 1936 and sees peasants spontaneously occupying the land everywhere to retaliate against the military putsch, he feels so much enthusiasm for the movement that he is momentarily tempted by the anarchosyndicalist dream. Not for long, though, for he knows all too well that spontaneity promises only the return of the same.

As for Bolshevism, the Saigon militant has only a vague knowledge of it. He must be aware that the future Ho Chi Minh is in the process of regrouping the first waves of Annamese political exiles in Canton. On the ground, he knows the "Clandestine Section of the Kuomintang," a group of Chinese merchants in Indochina financing his newspaper. Does he fear a Red supervision of an eventual independence movement on the peninsula? No, not even this. At the banquet held by the aforementioned Section to celebrate the launching of *L'Indochine*, the toast to the enterprise's success that he proposes after Monin's may be considered reserved: "Together we are going to make a newspaper. . . . Together we are going to struggle. It would be false to believe that our aims are entirely the same. . . . What draws us together, what unites us, are the enemies that we have in common" (Clara, 3:121†). This is the reserve of a liberal European, the same European who will sign the response to a reader that we have just read: the native cause is not his.

Let us submit one more piece of evidence to the neophyte's case. The visa was one of the keys in his development program: every young Annamese should be able to obtain a pass to get to France. Without a visa, no education, no cultivated middle class, no professionals, agronomic or otherwise. In reality, visas were granted altogether arbitrarily by the local pencil pusher. Malraux's project could thus be frozen at the administration's convenience. In the 14 August 1925 issue, André denounced this "stupidity that brings tears of anger." He protests that this state of affairs constitutes "the most dangerous affront to our colonization here." Maddening, indeed, especially if the objective is to maintain "our" French presence. This had been Lyautey's ideal in 1900. . . . By 1925, the price that natives were having to pay for maintaining said presence was well-known: Generals Noguès, Pétain, and Franco were cleaning out the djebels in Morocco's Rif region. Worried by the financial crisis, the colonial empires would defend privileges and windfall profits relentlessly. Much

time and blood would flow before liberalization would even be contemplated; even more would flow before negotiations could be possible.

Saigon, in November 1925, awaited the new governor-general, named by the *Cartel des gauches*, recently voted into power in Paris. Varenne is a socialist. Prevented from appearing over the last several months because of administrative pressure exerted on the printer, *L'Indochine* is suddenly resurrected (not without difficulty) under the eloquent new name *L'Indochine enchaînée*. In the first issue, André sounds the alarm for the newcomer's information:

I say to all Frenchmen: "These rumblings that are arising from every corner of the land of Annam, this anguish that in recent years has united diffuse grudges and hatreds may, if you do not heed the warning, become the chant of a terrible harvest . . ." I ask that everyone who reads this try to find out what is happening here. And when he does, to dare to tell a man coming to Indochina [Varenne] to find out where justice lies and, if need be, to render justice, and to say that he does not and has never supported the man [Cognacq, the outgoing governor] who never showed any face other than the double mask of the clown and the valet, of the snitch and the traitor.¹⁵

Quite a bit more taut, André's making progress with his pen stroke. Two years later, in *Voyage au Congo*, Gide will give him points in the area of anticolonialist indictment. And Gide was not publishing on the ground, in a little rag under tight surveillance. As early as 1929, back in Paris, Malraux will reedit the *Voyage*, illustrated by Allégret photographs: an intertwining of "Negro art" and social critique, an early sketch of politics relayed by "aesthetics." In Hanoi, Varenne, the governor, capitulated right down the line on every point involving reform. This confirmed Malraux's visceral disgust for "politics," which issues forth from necessity, its promises being snares.

While a united Right goes at the regime furiously during the Stavisky affair,¹⁶ Malraux can be found jeering, "political forces 'on the Left' that are worth what they are worth, that excite me with great moderation," in an interview granted to the Left's biggest weekly.¹⁷ Any political formation, no matter what its discourse, feeds on the same deceit that it spreads: believing or having others believe that a remedy to nonsense exists. He still prefers the Left, though, because in defending all liberties, it tolerates, in principle, that of the artist. In the realm of fact, experience now shows and will continue to show that writing and art must

constantly and everywhere conquer their independence against the twin enemies of prejudice and dogma.

He delivers, in November 1925, his report to Clara on his engagement in Indochina: “There now remains no other solution than to write” (Clara, 3:228†). One might have expected “no other solution” than to militate in France for justice in the colony. That, at least, was what his farewell editorial heralded at the end of December. The Annamese ponder:

“We can in no way have confidence in promises that have never been kept and that never will be.

“We can in no way have confidence in the men sent here by the French government, since once they get here, these men (even if they speak to us of machine guns and liberties) know nothing other than the freedom to amass piasters.

“We cannot have recourse to violence since we are unarmed.

“Whom can we ask to join us when those who govern us leave us only to choose between lies and baseness?”

My answer to them is:

“We shall appeal to the aggregate of those who suffer like you. The people, in France, will not allow the wounds whose scars you bear to be inflicted in their name.”¹⁸

The peroration is promising — one hundred percent political, in other words. Let’s appeal to the French people “through speeches, meetings, newspapers, leaflets.” Let’s get petitions signed and get writers to give us their solemn speeches. Then, to conclude this flight of oratory, these tragicomical *ultima verba*: “Will we obtain liberty? We cannot yet know the answer. We can at least obtain a few liberties. That is why I am departing for France.”

Nice flourish of the arms, as they say in the legal arena. And it commits him to nothing. Exhausted and ragged, he knuckles down to writing *The Temptation of the West* (which is not exactly an anticolonialist pamphlet) as soon as he’s headed for Marseilles. It’s even dedicated to Clara, “in memory of the temple at Benteai-Srey.” As if the jungle adventure had already erased a year of journalistic warfare. The book had already been due at Grasset for a year. It was now urgent that he honor his signature. Barely tormented now at all by the destiny of the Annamese, the destiny of books preoccupied him much. In a flash, the page of Indochinese politics is turned.

As has been said, he will preface Andrée Viollis's *Indochine SOS* in 1935 after sending a first SOS on 11 October 1933 in *Marianne*: "In the interest of dispelling any misunderstanding, let it be known that, having lived in Indochina, I cannot imagine that any courageous Annamese could be anything but revolutionary." Rather easy to say since his binary rhetoric is in perfect harmony with the Manichaean logic of the time: "Any communism that fails begets its fascism but any fascism that fails begets its communism." The rhetorical figure of antithesis tends to replace all argumentation. He writes as he speaks, through relentless opposition: X is this, and not that; X is not that, but this . . . or, it is this *rather* than that. Examples in his work abound. While Europe in its entirety splits apart, front against front, the trenchant quality (*le tranchant*) of such a trope tends to produce wonderment. The situation in 1925 Indochina, however, resisted being settled in such manner (*trancher*). His pen was still too tense, too mechanical to creep into the viscous. His scenes in the tropical undergrowth are as laborious as his plans for local capitalism. He's ten times better when he sticks to machinelike *farfelu* stuff. In the colony, he found it impossible to *sign*. For antithesis equals signature. In order to sign, one must be able to separate from oneself. The antithesis separates. In oppositional rhetoric what is understood is, of course, ontological anguish; what gets expressed in that rhetoric is a certain resolution—which is the opposite of a solution. Once back in Europe, he will be able to exercise his decisionist rhetoric to the hilt. Novels of adventure or of revolution, harangues at antifascist meetings—everything will now express the two moods of anguish and resolution. He will now slash away in the bestial tide that inundates the world, slash away wildly (*trancher*).

The same compulsion to carve "into the mass" is found in Garine and in Perken. Power does not come from any authority: it is quite the opposite. He instructs Roger Stéphane that the most important date in the history of modern man "is the day when man no longer said: 'I am taking power because I represent the majority,' but instead: 'I am taking power because I have the means to do so.' And that man was neither Franco, nor Hitler, nor Mussolini. It was Lenin."¹⁹

Bolshevism invents the proletariat as Nazism invents the race of masters: they do so by drastic measures (*en tranchant*). It's like Georges Sorel revisited. Sorelian "myth" fits fairly well with Malraux's mythomaniacal rhetoric, doesn't it? Rightist nihilist thinking crystallized around a few key terms: myth, urgency, decision, violence, identification of the enemy. At the time, these are his terms as well. Add to them revolution and the

techniques for mass hallucination. Propaganda, together with a pistol to the neck, can put the masses right up on a theater stage or on a movie set, where they can play out the spectacle of their own heroic destiny. To stage such representations, one must believe in absolutely nothing—intensely. On his return from Indochina, young André writes: “It has been said that no one can take action without faith. I believe that the absence of any conviction, just like having conviction, incites certain men to passivity and others to extreme action.”²⁰

This sounds just like Sorel, even Ernst Jünger or Carl Schmitt. The artist as politico? Fashion designer of history? Ham actor? Big politicians are cynics. As for him, he cannot play the tragicomedy to the hilt. His inner truth prohibits it—his humor, too. He just has to detect the element of playacting even in the greatest figures that he admires or venerates: it raises them in his eyes. Following May 1968, when de Gaulle was down for the count, the Gaullists win a crushing victory in the legislative elections. “Dazzled, [André] murmurs” to his nephew, Alain: “What’s marvelous is that one can say that everything in this story has been born out of bluff—all the way from that of 18 June 1940 to the bluff of this past 30 May.”²¹ His imposter General says, “You know, my only international rival is Tintin!” As for me, no one noticed that I was a kid because I seem so tall (*FO*, 33).

The man of decision relieves his melancholy with anecdotes. They make people laugh while he smiles like a child. The following one, in particular, is a model of the genre, so much does it instruct us about the imbecility of history and the necessity of anecdotes:

You’ve maybe heard the one the British tell where, after the peace agreement, Hitler appears before Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin, who decide, all things considered, that Hitler has increased or breathed new life into their own power. At which point Hitler, imitating Chaplin, tears off his moustache and swatch of hair, reveals his true face, cries “Colonel Lawrence, gentlemen!” salutes them and leaves.²²

Five years of horror for this Clappiquesque sally. And here’s the Machiavellian lesson: misfortune increases your possibilities; your worst enemy is your best supporter.

In vain does Malraux raise the tone of his eloquence to sublime levels: Bossuet, in his mouth, has the accent of a street urchin. His look is hallucinated, prophetic; at the same time, his cockiness makes him blink like mad. In sum, his twitching is the cumulation of his body’s anecdotes.

They scoff at the noble history of the ego, they dabble in the epic, they frustrate the biography of great men. Richard III is also misshapen. Limping and twitching associate you with monsters: you are this as well as its opposite. Shakespeare's truth, for Malraux: while murder is being committed in the throne room, princes are being joked about in the kitchens to the sound of banging pots.

Is he ever altogether taken in by grand style? by *bien-pensant* tragedy? by history? He reveres revolutionary action, defends it, contributes to it, adores the agony and the virtue that it requires to be achieved. But, as for the infamies being fomented by Stalin under the cloak of revolution, he is too much of the people, too much a muzhik to be unaware of the never-ending return of infamy — even if, for a long time yet, he will resist instancing them. He's read too many *fatrassiers*, adores carnivals and masks too much, has seen too much Goya to be altogether taken in by the Soviet regime's edifying speeches and moving demonstrations. He knew instantly that Lady Revolution, in her just fervor, also harbors necrophoric intrigues: he said as much through Garine's voice. Knowledge of the demise. Go entirely astray he did not; being mistaken, for a time, he needed to be.

Balancing on the crest of the great wave, seizing, in his passage, the opportunity for an exploit, getting drunk breathing in the heady foam it produces, filled with trepidation at knowing that the surge carrying him forth is but a strong ebb tide in the cycle of the same. Exalted or droll (or both), that breaker will have nonetheless taken him for a ride.²³

FOR IN THE EARLY 1930s, something not often witnessed in history also occurs: simultaneous with the din wreaked by its various punishments, the upheaval shaking Europe (and beyond) also sparks people's hopes and increases their resistance. Many grumble that it's capital's fault — finance knows only its own profit and subjects our lives to it with the consent of top-hatted politicians and ultimately sends in its henchmen to quell any revolt. Yet there occurs something not witnessed with so much fervor since the demise of the Old Regimes of France and Russia: the muffled and dispersed revolt meets up with the voices of men of letters, of philosophers, of a portion of the educated class in order that it may express itself publicly, articulate its complaints, and radicalize its demand. An intelligentsia comes together, forms a front against the *bien-pensants* and dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, creates its own newspapers and radio stations, calls the people to meetings, climbs up to the platform and cries out to the people that they have not been abandoned, that they are right, that within them lies the only energy left intact amid the general decline. That the time has come to change the world.

In these appeals, the very best merge with the very worst — fascists, socialists, communists — sometimes

opposing each other, sometimes indistinguishable from each other. Agreements between politicians form, then fall apart. The base, with its demands for unity, understands nothing of this bargaining. The old, established parties are, in any case, unanimously against these new ones. Their newness consists in their being directly in tune with the masses and in their gaining ground simply because they know how to mobilize those masses, make them visible and audible—even to themselves—in demonstrations, parades, gigantic meetings. Inspired by a cinema of grandiose proportions, organizing gathered crowds into panoramic shots and sublime sequences, a political liturgy is being invented. Men of the pen, men of thought, or those who know how to speak become the people's orators and agitators. Writing is left behind for oratorical eloquence: some discover their talents as tribunes. It is a Shakespearean moment. Malraux's spontaneous talent for the oratorical epic, for invective, evocation, convulsed irony, his ability to stage a tragic scene in a matter of seconds—three words—his tone, his gesticulations: all come into their own during this time of turmoil. The temptation is all the more irresistible for his having thought, for a long time—since *The Conquerors*—that imperialism was suffering a crisis of mortal proportions and that the only way out is to transform the death pangs into revolutionary action. And even if this action is destined for failure, it will have at least rendered unto the oppressed peoples some consciousness of their dignity.

And so, there he was, climbing onto boards festooned with tricolor or red, erected in town squares, improvised in popular palaces and school auditoriums. Heading up to the stage of some theater or concert hall, there was that altogether youthful man, inspired, quivering before the storm of civilization, drawn away from his work table once again, dashing off to expose his indisputable gift for the word to the enthusiasm of the crowds with those gesticulations of his, reminiscent of some Hindu god, and those grimaces that ran across his face like so many exotic masks. Oh! the celebration of history in the making and the power that high theater can exert over humanity—that humanity, there, listening to him and transporting him simultaneously. Oh! the shamelessness of the raging child having again found his nurturing and murderous mother—the multitudes—whose epic hope and despair he knows better than she. Of what Dionysian dawn and of what illustrious heyday of youth did this encounter with the masses become event for him? Spell-bindingly bewitched was the gift of self that this boy with the forelock made to the mystical body of the people in their caps. That he would be

taken in by all this, like the marionette by his puppeteer, was certain. But there was no ploy, no disappointment that could cause him to lose the sense of grace that he felt in those moments—that sense, felt by Kleist's doll, of dancing weightlessly in full knowledge that one's movements exist solely because of the laws of gravity. His heart will have beaten in unison with the popular. He will have communed despite (or because of) the theatrical machine. Actor's paradox. Mystery of history.

It was as if his role were marked out by the puppeteer's hands. Not for one second did he hesitate about which side to take at a time when so many intellectuals were letting themselves be tempted either by national socialism or by right-wing anarchism or, again, by some mythical return to the racial and cultural origins of Europe's ancient people. He was nonetheless fond of Bernanos, who at first was pro-Franco, and of Claudel, who would later pay homage to Pétain. His romanticism had not been insensitive to the celebration of earth and death found in a Barrès. And, as we have seen, he had attuned himself to the invigorating strength of a classical will in Maurras. Yet why didn't the metaphysical pessimism that he shared with Drieu lead him, alongside his friend, to strike the pose of the grand lord who has lost all hope or of the crusader with no cross? He had barely studied Marx or the Marxists, for that matter, and his experience in Indochina could only make him a reformist at the time. Nothing, in other words, could explain why he was so obviously "on the Left." Just as there were the first Christians, it would seem that he was a born republican of the First Republic. Chateaubriand was no doubt fine for martyrs and for antimemoirs, but Michelet remained unequalled for knowing the people, for the universal value he granted them, and for the sense of a politics that could match up to history. On the stage at La Mutualité, Malraux lived up to his own destiny by using oration to muster resistance to destiny. He possessed the ingenuous rage of a Camille Desmoulins at the Palais-Royal.

His youth had finally arrived: a youth of his own—a man of thirty. And this youth of his appealed to the youthfulness of a still possible world. What a dance! And how that noble soul will be acted upon and duped by the devils of utopian realism! Acted upon first and foremost by the devil within—one of which he is aware, but which he acquits in advance: it is the demon that whispers to him (as it does to every Saint-Just) that freedom cannot be had without the exercise of terror. "In his system . . . the Republic could stand solely upon an austere knighthood with an admixture of GPU" (*TN*, 121–22).¹ Crime, he determined, is

not crime when it is the means to realize a great historical design and when it serves as proof for the absolute.

Hitler is named chancellor on 30 January 1933. The Reichstag burned on 25 February. The state of emergency is declared on the twenty-eighth. The Communist Party is outlawed in March. Thaelmann is imprisoned, Dimitrov is brought to trial in Leipzig in September. Red militants are hunted down, rounded up, sent off to the first “work” camps. Refugees pouring into Paris organize themselves while being stalked by Goering’s secret services or monitored by those under Genrich Yagoda.

In Moscow, the same picture. But the blinding prestige of the socialist revolution will conceal it from the people’s minds and the minds of Left intellectuals. Forced collectivization in the countryside is sending millions of dispossessed and famished peasants to “disciplinary” camps. Stakhanovism is encouraging the reign of an incriminatory atmosphere in the workshops.² Trotsky is excluded from the Party, deported, and expelled in 1929. With the assassination of Kirov in 1934, the “trials” are to begin. Yagoda, the chief administrator of the camps — the Gulag — is promoted to head the GPU, which will be authorized, by the decrees of March 1933, to execute suspects without trial and, one year later, to take hostages for forced confessions. Under GPU control, the Party line can be applied universally: the alliance with “democratic” forces is agreed upon in June 1934. Comrades hostile to such compromises will be eliminated on the grounds of leftist deviationism. Those, on the other hand, who advocate and apply the same compromises will be eliminated for opportunism. For everything there is a criminal term. Generous appeals for unified antifascist action drown out the terrified silence that reigns over the “homeland” of socialism. Meanwhile, beneath these open conflicts, a single death-dealing deluge is invading Europe.

The French Communist Party creates the Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires (AEAR) in 1932. Open-door strategy toward the intelligentsia “on the Left.” Subjection of the cultural sphere to political interests as well. On 21 March 1933 at the Grand Orient de France Hall in Rue Cadet, Malraux speaks at his first meeting “against fascism in Germany, against French imperialism.” The Stalinists surrounding him keep close watch on him. His prestige as a writer “on the Left” (*Man’s Fate* will get him the Goncourt Prize in December by a first-round unanimous vote) constitutes a valued contribution to the noble cause. The new fellow traveler’s file is not flawless — not by a long shot. On the credit side of the ledger, he administered a harsh lesson in realism to Trotsky

in favor of Comintern policy in China during their public polemics over *The Conquerors* in 1931.³ And he protested against France's stopping the distribution of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in 1927.

However, his "explanation" for *The Conquerors* before the Union for Truth in June 1929 made clear the extent to which his bourgeois intellectual anguish prevented him from adhering without reserve to the revolutionary cause.⁴ Further, the pages of *Man's Fate*, published in installments in the *NRF* starting in January 1933, did little to cleanse him of suspicion. Not only does he persist in his "Pascalian" despair, but when he lends voices to the resistance of the Communist sections in Shanghai faced with directives from the Comintern, it sounds as if one is hearing the countertruths spread by Trotskyite vipers. One piece of evidence in particular will damage his case: the interview Malraux obtains in summer 1933 with Trotsky at the latter's residence in exile at Saint-Palais. Does he have a hand in the Hitlerian-Trotskyite plot? Then there was the Mayakovsky incident, too: a text published in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* had presented the poet's suicide as a political abdication. Malraux had thought it wise to sign a letter of protest by a group of far left non-Communist intellectuals, a group of thoughtless noble souls playing into the hands of the counterrevolution. That was in July 1930.

Here is the conclusion drawn by Stalin's agents: Element who is ready to cooperate but unreliable. Idealist prone to adventurism. A cosmopolitan. Undeniably renowned. Useful. To be monitored.

Unreliable. He defines his idea of communism as "an immediately possible communion with the people." Not the people "in its nature (there is never communion with the natural) but in its finality, which, in this case, is in its revolutionary will."⁵ This declaration made before the Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, organized for 21 June 1935 at La Mutualité, marks his closest proximity to the Communists. As does the preface to *Days of Wrath*, published a few weeks before.

Days of misunderstanding, as well. Communism? he is asked. Communion, he replies. Yes, communion. Three days before explaining himself to the Union for Truth in June 1929, he tests the conclusion of his already famous preface ("deepen one's communion") against Groethuyzen's dialectics. Enchanted, the "little lady" bears witness, late into the night (Gide had gone to bed), to the dazzling exchange of views at Rue Vaneau: "He will speak of the Communist communion and say he hopes that others will present the idea as well, defend it in religion, in the idea of the nation, etc. . . . A veritable round of all types of communion was sung."⁶ The Communists are the Christians of a world without Christ.

Without it being necessary to draw on a belief in paradise, fraternity can rescue a crippled life from despair and indignity: “Even beyond communion, there is the willpower of consciousness,” he will declare at La Mutualité in 1935.

The symbolic scene for this fraternity was fixed, once and for all, in the episode of the Annamese typesetter untying a handkerchief he had filled with stolen French typeface and spilling it out on the table: the most humble of us may risk our limited freedom in order that the claim for common liberties can become possible. The Stalinist apparatus is determined to turn such communal excitation to profit. The writer can go on theorizing communism the way he wants: as long as he marches with the Party, his independence of thought is far more preferable to an ideological agreement. This writer doesn’t have to be asked twice: for his adventurous ambitions, the opportunity is ripe for occupying a very visible position in the battle. He likes the Communists because they form an actual army on the ground, they are disciplined, they possess power and efficiency, they know their enemy, and their sole goal is to win. Beneath his discourse on communal strength, Malraux let show a perverse veneration for powers capable of forcing history. These two aspects of his relation to “true politics” fuse together in the insistent figure of the monk-soldier. The image of the fighting orders blinds him to Stalinist reality to the point that he praises as beneficial instruments for revolution those soulless machines that are the Russian Party, the Red Army, the political police. But, damn it! The sense of an impending upheaval was agitating Europe — deeply and in all directions. And the people — exhausted in their misery, plunged in despair — could only see a way out that was radical and bloody.

Even when Malraux senses that the fervor for fraternity is waning, following the aborted Front Populaire, with Spain forsaken and the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union patent, he will still be incapable of betraying his communal pact. By then, he is hearing from all sides that communism has become a pseudonym for tyranny. All the same, he declares in New York in 1937, during his tour to garner support for republican Spain, that “Stalin has lent dignity to humanity and the Moscow trials have diminished the fundamental dignity of communism no more than the Inquisition struck at the heart of Christianity’s dignity.”⁷ He considers the publication of Gide’s devastating *Retour de l’URSS*, in 1936, to be highly ill-timed. In 1939, his riposte to Raymond Aron, who urges him to denounce the German-Soviet Pact, is “I will say nothing, I will

do nothing against the Communists as long as they are in prison” (Lacouture, 287).

Communists, not the Party. A sort of mystical body. By analogy with the beginnings of Christianity, the militants incarcerated by all the fascist and bourgeois police forces stand for the martyrs persecuted for their faith. But Marx is not Jesus, nor is Marxism a belief, nor the NKVD an Inquisition. By relying on the Christian metaphor, why mask or distort the truth of Stalinist totalitarianism, that near cousin of Nazism? Because Malraux understands the history of his time as a reader of Dostoyevsky. Because his idea of communion comes from Alyosha and from Myshkin. Because if what is at issue is propagating the message of love, the discourse of the Grand Inquisitor justifies the necessity of a loveless discipline. Again and again, in the company of Communists, Malraux plays out what he feels is the essential drama of all communities: while charity always lacks a will, the exercise of will cannot but kill charity.

As for the reality of Stalinist terror during the thirties, Malraux, like so many others, rubbed shoulders with it without fully measuring its extent. Bits of information reached him from Trotskyite groups, from oppositionists like Naville. A few German Communists who had taken refuge in Paris—Sperber, Koestler, Regler—were beginning to make known to him their suspicions concerning the procedures used by Stalin’s agents for “removing” the most indisputably militant. Not to mention the massive terror that the political police apparatus caused to reign in the factories and the countryside. But the Malraux fantasy machine worked in the opposite direction: for him, the most ignominious acts illustrated the tragedy of a power threatened from all sides and resolved to carry out, at any cost, the mission of freedom with which history had charged it. Had he known that to get rid of Dimitrov (the Bulgarian Communist leader whose liberation he and Gide went to Berlin to demand in January 1934), Stalin’s agents had to have “fingered” him to the Nazi secret services, he would have seen it as a Shakespearian peripeteia.

While the crisis of the century was engendering a myriad of melancholiacs (or at least was revealing them as such to themselves), it precipitated the dregs into positions of power. And, by the same stroke, it incited those melancholiacs to sublimate the scum into historical heroes. Thirty years later, the *Anti-Memoirs* will still compare the Führer’s bunker with the underground passages in the Valley of Kings (*AM*, 35–37). And with what asinine complicity does Malraux repeat, “In the end, death is the only winner,” as if those words attributed to Stalin derived

from a great pessimistic thinker instead of a cynical and bloody tyrant (*FO*, 43).

Surrounding him in the guise of the communal body, “his” Communists carry little weight in the 1930s. An Ehrenburg, for example, who spies on the Parisian intelligentsia for *Izvestia*, transmitting sentences in which Gide and Malraux are variously “old men addicted to books” or else “adolescents without experience.”⁸ About *Man’s Fate* he wrote that revolution in a “great country” (poor China) had been reduced to the scheming of a few conspirators and that we never really understand why they need guns. There was also Malraux’s exaltation of suffering, devoid of any “necessity.”⁹ The same is true of the well-informed, droll, and tactical Koltsov, who runs *Pravda*; all that an imbecile is not, he observes Malraux with sympathy, from their encounter at the Moscow Congress in 1934 to the Spanish War. But he regularly sacrifices him in the interest of the Party apparatus, which is, after all, his interest — regularly, that is, until the apparatus sacrifices Koltsov. Then there is that incorrigible dogmatism of an Alix Guillain, journalist at *L’Humanité* and Grout’s companion. Let’s not even mention Aragon, who devotes all his talent to flaunting his servility to the Central Committee. Already, ten years before, André, the cubist who didn’t much care for surrealist facileness, was suspicious of this arrogant and capricious overachiever.

Groethuysen (nicknamed “Grout”) is, among those closest to him, the only Marxist to welcome Malraux’s discourse on communion, to echo it. His Communist consciousness finds the true measure of its moderation — on the scale of a crisis of civilization — in the lack of moderation in André’s views on things. Malraux, for once, feels intellectually confident. “He is perhaps the man I have most admired,” Malraux confides to Lacouture in 1972, “he was the only case I have known of oral genius,” the opposite of a blabbermouth, someone next to whom Heidegger seemed like an inconsequential professor (Lacouture, 165). The two cronies, sharing a certain impatience, invented, through boundless speculation, the legend of a new century. They will remain friends right up to Grout’s death.

At the end of May 1934, accompanied by the Ehrenburgs, he and Clara take off for Moscow. What militant didn’t dream of a pilgrimage to this modern Jerusalem? His previous travels (1929–30) having taken him through a scarcely typical province between the Black and Caspian seas, Malraux knew virtually nothing of the homeland of socialism. The Muscovite adventure would be all the more exalting because the spot re-

served for the Prix Goncourt would be in the first row. The other French writers invited to the first International Congress of Soviet Writers—Aragon, Vladimir Pozner, Jean-Richard Bloch—were either French Communist Party members or in the process of joining. Malraux was the sole representative of the “sympathetic intelligentsia.” And he was treated as such. The caravanserais, the occasional truck shaken about on the trails, dinners limited to gnawing on a mutton bone, sleeping flat on the ground in the midst of scorpions—all that was behind him now. Leaning at the rail like some Phileas Fogg, André smiled at the memory of those first expeditions. Clara and he amuse themselves by transforming those expeditions into bits of legendary narrative for Ehrenburg’s entertainment, while to port and to starboard, the Scandinavian narrows run their low profile along the black waters tousled into immaculate fringes by the springtime breeze.

This time around, the young Prix Goncourt winner is elected ambassador of French literature to the Soviet Union. It’s not that he’s surprised: he generally has too high an opinion of his own talent to doubt that his good fortune could ever be undeserved. But the vanity of being welcomed by the new world as the Western figure most deserving of it altogether intoxicates him. Yet, forewarned by the disagreements he has already had with French and Russian Communists in Paris that he will meet resistance and criticism in Moscow, he is already sketching out arguments in his head, and he is seeking a tone appropriate to pleading for the writer’s freedom that he will have to defend. The notion that he will have to mark his difference and impose it in the midst of fraternal debate exalts him: the more so that this prestigious audience—nothing less, in his eyes, than the full tribunal of contemporary history—intimidates him.

All in all, this frame of mind bodes well, for the designs of the Soviet apparatus: this soup of emotions—jubilation, respect, fears, vanity—shows that the great novelist is intensely attached to the revolution. Suffused with such passion, his mere presence at the congress is the best guarantee in the Soviets’ favor. Whether it was bureaucratic disorder, a warning shot, or else the zeal of a Western intellectual who had “defected”—for whatever reason, Malraux had hardly landed in Leningrad when orthodoxy, through Paul Nizan’s pen, began to reprimand him. His party had appointed the author of *Aden Arabie* and *Antoine Bloyé* to direct the French edition of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* out of Moscow. Had Malraux read his novels? The story of an orientalist disappointment, the vita of a modest father, revolt and loss: all fit him like a glove. Nizan

was no fool: later on, despite their divergences, they became friends. One day while pretending to be a bookie specializing in great minds, Clara joked, “If I hadn’t bet on you, I would have bet on him” (Clara, 4:252). But on 12 June 1934, Nizan was in the full livery of a guardian of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. “Death,” he wrote, “constitutes the principal theme of Malraux’s works: the knowledge of life is mediated by the knowledge of death.” Anguish, despair, incurable solitude: the feelings to be expected “in the period of the decline of bourgeois civilization.” In this respect, the world conceived by the French novelist differs little from that of the “great thinker and philosopher, Martin Heidegger.” The slight difference is that the latter believes anguish can be overcome “by the complete and unconditional acceptance of national-socialism,” while for Malraux “only revolutionary heroism can save man from the void.” A typical case of the young bourgeois intellectual who is aware that his class is condemned and who seeks to rally to the cause of the proletariat. “There may exist bourgeois motivations that can lead to revolution; they must give way to motivations of a revolutionary character.”¹⁰

One can hardly imagine a more pointless quarrel. The authenticity of intentions impassioned two full generations of Left intellectuals while the GPU kept things orderly by sending the quarrelers off to the Gulag to sort things out, and while the Western parties demanded autocritiques and resignations. By the time he reached Moscow, the lesson in orthodoxy was bearing fruit. Malraux took things seriously during the interviews he granted the *Gazette Littéraire* on 16 and 24 August. Prudent, at first: We are not quite familiar with the Soviet style. Even flattering: What impels us toward the Soviet Union? The rise of fascism. The Western democracies lack the strength to save culture without your help (for their part, the Babels and the Meyerholds had every right not to count much on Zhdanov for safeguarding thought). Then, finally, he joins the battle.

You know, comrades, all literature (be it social realist — but he refrains from saying it) requires a choice of form, since “the world, in itself, is formless” (as good an anti-Marxist proposition as could be hoped for). He is insistent: even the very first photographs, as “impersonal” as they might be, possess a style. A work never provides objective knowledge of a reality, it constructs that knowledge. It gives expression to intimate as well as social conflicts that would have remained unexpressed. That is why the work “produces relief” (he doesn’t dare say catharsis or cure). In this respect, moreover, the Russians — Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky — are more skilled than the French — Balzac, Stendhal — who feverishly work to as-

certain psychological laws. (Here, André is not indulging in flattery; he is signaling his break with the novels “of conscience,” shall we say, in the “French” tradition; he evokes his debate with Gide and the sensible intimists, his complicity with Stavrogin and *Notes from Underground*, with the Faulknerian madness of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, with Thomas Mann, and, despite what he says, with Freud. One is forced to admit that this is not a very Marxist library.)¹¹ In short, your “realism” is no more realist than my imaginary. He asks forgiveness only inasmuch as the reality that he claims to photograph is an epic: the revolution. He proclaims this last part at La Mutualité, the following 23 October, while “reporting on” the Moscow congress to the AEAR.¹² The Stalinists present did not flinch.

In Moscow, Stalin “himself” (but what is that? Nobody sees him) had excreted his thought in thick lines across the banner that adorned the pediment of the Palace of the Unions: “Writers are the engineers of the soul.” Thus the master summed up his contribution to the idea of writing. Malraux’s “anecdotes” notwithstanding, Stalin made no appearance. Not even at the banquet at Gorky’s. Sonya, the interpreter, explains this absence in the simplest of terms: “It’s because you foreigners couldn’t be searched for weapons [at the border]” (*Owl*, 215).

It took old Gorky, presiding over the congress, three hours to “explain” in dia-mat jargon (dialectical-materialist, we should explain for today’s children) that only fear and ignorance produce myths and that the Good Lord of the Christians is nothing but a hypostasis (later, this will be called “superstructure”) to compensate for the exploitation of slave labor. Malraux chokes. Gustav Regler, too. Then “Malraux laughed and said, ‘They’re putting him to work.’ He meant God. I whispered back, ‘I prefer Nietzsche.’ Malraux . . . said, ‘*Monsieur* is slightly late.’ This time he meant Gorky” (*Owl*, 205).¹³

Then came his turn to speak: one of the only speakers to address the congress who was not Communist. Looking down, he could see twelve hundred workers of the pen who had been summoned by the Union of Writers. The factory and kolkhoz delegates, in their caps and headscarves, are also there to celebrate the revolution in literature. Malraux’s gaze sweeps across the sea of faces successively expressing attentiveness, boredom, and affected enthusiasm. Who mobilized this crowd that fills the hall beyond capacity? The fathers of the revolution hang on the stage curtain: Lenin as Red orator, Marx as infallible thinker, and a bland Stalin keeping watch over his world. One speech had followed the next, trotting out the vulgate. Comrade Malraux leaned toward the interpreter who

told him — not without a sense of humor — what was being said: the interventions, interruptions. Moved by the welcome extended to him, he would hope that it was sincere, knowing full well how an assembly can be manipulated.

The orator lunges forth. The cause is just and he plays on his prestige. He begins by seducing the audience a bit. He takes the high road, in the voice of a bard of universal history: “And it will be said that they [the Soviets] were the first formation in all the millennia which, through all setbacks, through civil war and famine, trusted man.” *Captatio benevolentiae*: it remains that in his heart of hearts, Malraux had persuaded himself that the Soviets were announcing, from the fringes of a failed Europe, the same news of an “antiredundancy” that the Pauline churches caused an imperial Rome, already doomed to rehashing the same old story, to hear all the way from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. In his Siberian hovel, Pasternak will have considerably greater difficulty in allowing himself to believe that he is destined to reveal this gospel.

But did the tone Malraux adopted give away any suspicion of the impending collapse? Though sounding mortally wounded, his voice rises up as if at the end of some requiem, to announce the ordeal that hope must undergo in order to be reborn. This was the tone, already, of the funeral orations and of the speeches he made in the de Gaulle years. For decades to come, the Left intelligentsia will cover up its failures by intoning the hymn of the brighter future in unison. Eloquence of funerary fraternization. The orator may take the lead over the writer, but he cannot efface him. The result of this combination is a speech cluttered with elliptical metaphors that the comrades have difficulty following. But this matters little: they recognize the general line — and it’s the correct one. Moreover, the mere presence of such a prestigious figure must signify a consecration of Soviet literature and, consequently, of the revolution. Of the room’s atmosphere, Fondane said: “All seemed satisfied with everything and nothing.”¹⁴

Malraux then timidly introduces what he believes to be his point of difference: “If writers are the engineers of the soul, let us not forget that the highest purpose of the engineer is to invent.” Further, “photographing a great period of history is not enough to cause great literature to be born.”¹⁵ The revolution brings forth possibilities with which reality is pregnant; writing should deliver its potential power through words. Was this as different as he believed? The motif certainly had currency: from Cendrars to constructivism, from formalists to futurists and to the social-realists themselves, it was understood that a new world was dawn-

ing and that it was necessary to forge the new forms and powers. The true conscience of what is would be attained by affirming that which, at the core, could be. He was gaining approval.

His peroration rather bluntly divided the responsibilities of writers and politicians: "Marxism is consciousness of the social; culture is consciousness of the psychological."¹⁶ At this, the Stalinists started to kick up a fuss. What psychology? That of a moribund bourgeoisie? Nikouline was the first to bark out: Malraux's only truth is death, whereas for us, it's life.¹⁷ Then Radek started rehashing the catechism: the writer who "is not wed by blood" to the popular masses is doomed to sterility, and so on. He concluded with this worrisome metaphor: "I think that comrade Malraux's fear that one day a budding Shakespeare will be found suffocated in our manger proves his lack of trust in those who are caring for the child."¹⁸ Malraux immediately asked to be heard and affirmed his goodwill: after all, he didn't come here as a tourist.

He did not dare (and they figured he wouldn't) run through the results (already known to the West) of the care dispensed to creators by the pediatric engineers' apparatus: Proletkult eliminated; the Russian avant-garde threatened, subjugated, or exiled; Mayakovsky's suicide, Lunatcharsky's . . . highly opportune death. The list of little Shakespeares destined for suffocation remained open. Malraux swallowed the list. He was either required or determined, in the name of communism, to keep silent about what he believed he knew of Stalinist repression.

A year later, on the occasion of the first Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, the delegation that Moscow sends to Paris is so pathetic (Gorky, said to be ailing, is absent) that Malraux urges Gide to intervene with him at the Soviet embassy to get them expeditiously to send on one or two escapees from Zhdanov's nursery: Boris Pasternak? Isaak Babel? "Malraux seems to think that in Moscow, they're a laughingstock!"¹⁹ From her living room in Rue Vaneau, the "little lady" has her muted way of stating things. Malraux didn't believe for a moment that Zhdanov was negligent in having the Soviets so poorly represented: he was simply saving face. With Gide's help, he was able to get Pasternak and Babel to come and speak at the Congress. Wrenched from their beds in the middle of the night by a phone call from the Kremlin, dressed after a fashion in Western attire, shipped off on the first train to Paris, they disembarked flabbergasted. After reciting a poem that Malraux read in French, Pasternak briefly set out his thesis: "Poetry will always renew itself. It is and will remain the organic function of a happy being who recreates all the bliss of language that is clasped within the native heart.

The more happy men there are, the easier it will be to be a poet!”²⁰ A stunning declaration which, in 1972, Malraux thought to transcribe in these terms: “Talk politics? Futile, futile . . . Politics? Go to country, my friends, go to country, pick flowers in fields . . .” (Lacouture, 190). He could laugh and make others laugh with him, but in 1935, Moscow was not laughing.

“Stalin doesn’t diminish Dostoevsky, any more than Moussorgsky’s genius guarantees Stalin’s politics” (*Co/E*, 182). In 1948, when the chief of RPF propaganda deals this weighty truth out to the intellectuals gathered at the Salle Pleyel, no one doubts that he always thought this way. But it is also true that thirteen years earlier, the only way he could express it was by masking it beneath the prudent conjunction of his version of “psychology” and Marxism. He was well and truly taken hostage at the 1934 congress.

The only outlet he found for his malaise was an inconsequential “sally.” During the very Russian drinking binge offered to the congress attendees by Gorky in his dacha, Radek is staggering around the table spitting on decadent Europe. When he reaches André, he spews out thickly: petty bourgeois, comrade Malraux, you’re still nothing more than a petty bourgeois.

The table is a disaster area: victuals are strewn everywhere, glasses and bottles scattered, ashtrays spilling over with cigarette butts, the air thick with tobacco smoke. An orgy worthy of great lords in the midst of Soviet deprivations. For Gide’s benefit, André tempers the tableau: “It was violent, excessive, never abject; these evenings resembled carnival scenes.”²¹ (All right, but *carne levare*, raising the flesh, is never far away from carnage, as in Garine’s delirium.)

Toast after toast has been made. One guest has just lifted his glass to “our socialist homeland.” Embarrassed, the internationalists try to swallow their altogether fresh nationality by sinking their vodkas. That’s when André leans toward Clara saying, “I feel like proposing a toast to Trotsky.” Clara eggs him on. *Farfelu* it might be, but a toast like that would clearly signify his difference from Red chauvinism. You realize they’ll probably lock us up, he remarks. “Go ahead,” confirms the warrior woman. In the midst of the brouhaha, André stands up and declares: “I drink to the health of someone absent whose presence can be felt here at every instant—I drink to the health of Lev Davidovich Trotsky.” Following this, she did have a moment of fright: “Ashen silence. . . . Some of the men around the table looked at each other, others lowered their eyes in meditation or waiting for some decision to be made” (Clara, 3:125). Then,

the glasses were emptied furtively and the subject was quickly changed. Did Clara dramatize this somewhat? Gustav Regler, who was nearby, doesn't mention the incident. Was the incident drowned out in the general noise? That was what the noise was for, of course.

Whatever the case, the incident hadn't the political impact one might expect. When André went to Saint-Palais in early August 1933 to visit "the Old Man," they spoke only of literature, the meaning of life and of death.²² The toast he made at Gorky's paid homage to a way of thinking that seemed to Malraux to be a pure mastery of itself, ceaselessly put in question. Lenin capitalized on successes step by step; after three victories, Trotsky said, we are now faced with the true problem.²³ Malraux believes that he can hear in the idea of permanent revolution what he seeks under the term "metamorphosis." This term comes to his lips as early as 1929 when, before the Union for Truth, he "explicates" *The Conquerors* and explains himself for it. Metamorphosis: this word took on a life of its own in Malraux's thought. It means that no accomplishment—either in politics or in literature—obeys the "precise construction" of its projected goal. It means that the act of realizing anything possesses that virtue of teaching thought that it could not anticipate.

The essential value that he [Gariné] holds up in contrast to what I was calling earlier values of reflection, and which we could also call values of order or of foresight, is a value of metamorphosis. [And the orator stresses that it is thus] *for every human life every bit as much as it is for the revolutionary. . . .* He has no idea what the revolution will bring, but he knows what direction he will take following such and such decision. (*Co/F*, 293†)²⁴

Trotsky is a living illustration of existential decisiveness and the true heir of revolution because he metamorphoses it. A tenacious illustration. Malraux met de Gaulle for the first time in August 1945, in his "general headquarters" in Rue Saint-Dominique. Upon leaving the "long" conversation (which he makes up, of course), the writer tried to zero in on the feelings he had. Here is the association: "The only figure whom General de Gaulle then called to my mind, by way of antithesis rather than resemblance, in the way that Ingres brings to mind Delacroix, was Trotsky" (*AM*, 92). An unexpected comparison? We find, in both men, the same refusal of what is given, of the predictable, the same decisiveness. Tinged, in one case, with Maurrasian conservatism, while in Trotsky there is a certain romanticism.²⁵

This being said, never did the affinity that Malraux felt and recognized in himself for the idea of permanent revolution lead him to be tempted to take part in the Trotskyite movement. While Lev Davidovich is perhaps a prophet inspired by the spirit of metamorphosis, he never located the *means* by which to inflate this soul with facts. He's not a politician. Extremely "political," of course, and even political with much loyalty: witness his review of *The Conquerors* published in April 1931 by the NRF. But on paper. The great revolutionary dealt with young André as one militant to another, as if the latter had in fact taken part in the Canton strife and his book were a relation of that experience. (In actuality, the only China that Malraux knew was the twenty days he spent in Hong Kong with Clara in 1925.) Trotsky examines each character according to whether his original milieu, his ideas, and his acts are (or are not) compatible with the correct revolutionary line. His reading is literal, Manichaean: the reading of a child who identifies with the "good guys" in his bedtime story and who unmasks the "bad guys." Well, the guileless master concludes, the book is "remarkable." Yet one has the impression that it endorses a Stalinist politics in China, the grievous consequences of which would soon appear: Chiang Kai-shek's victory and the crushing of the Chinese Communist Party.

Old quarrels? That's to be seen. The book placed the theory-practice relationship in intense debate. It is as a writer, first and foremost, that Malraux answers back: since a novel is in no way a political platform, it stages contradictory passions that constitute a situation of which "heroes" are merely agents. One must not ascribe to an author that which pertains to his characters: they represent various forces in conflict. As to the Trotskyite line: he bluntly refutes its "soundness." The Kuomintang was well armed and, through the "secret societies" and certain unions, still controlled large portions of the proletariat. The Chinese Communist Party "had no choice": either associate itself with the bourgeois party in order to confront the warlords or be lost. Had it been waged against Chiang Kai-shek in the summer of 1925, "the battle in Canton would have been what it would be in Shanghai" in the spring of 1927: a rout.²⁶

Realism: the argument was clear. And, from the *farfelu* writer, unexpected. But not on the part of the Machiavelli who was the writer's double. What! Trotsky dares to hold up Hong, the terrorist, as an example of the revolutionary potential of the Chinese proletariat? Malraux takes offense: on the grounds of immaturity and lack of discipline, the Russian Bolsheviks, starting with Trotsky, hadn't hesitated a bit in eliminating the anarchist movement by every means possible, had they? The

polemic ends there, for the moment. Trotsky had hoped to administer a good old Marxist inoculation to Garine. But, after reading Malraux's response, he declared, with his blunt loyalty, that it was a lost cause. (The *NRF* having stepped aside, as it were, this text appeared in *La Lutte des classes*, the monthly publication of French Trotskyism.) The writer persisted in his mistrust of Trotskyism to such a degree that he left unanswered every request for testimony addressed to him on behalf of Stalin's victims—Victor Serge in 1935, the POUM militants during the Spanish War,²⁷ Trotsky himself when he was implicated, against all evidence and by a false witness, at the Moscow trial of 1937. Their rupture was impassioned: Trotsky argued that Malraux possessed no moral autonomy while Malraux held that the Old Man was confusing his own personal story with the history of the world.

Malraux's adherence to Stalinist realism (chastely called "possibilism") is not bereft of nostalgia. *Man's Fate* (1933) is a montage of "scenes" illustrating the tragic days of March-April 1927 in Shanghai. Politically speaking, its ostensible motif is to challenge the notion of "necessity" of which the Comintern takes advantage in order to compel the base to avoid the conflict that Chiang Kai-shek seeks to provoke. Suspicion toward Moscow issues not only from the anarchists, but from the Communists as well. The outline of an alternative to "possibilism" can be glimpsed. The line involves uniting with the peasantry ("Complete, immediate cancellation of farm-rents and credits" [*MF*, 118]) and refusing to hand over the workers militias' weapons to the bourgeois army. This line, which Kyo defends in Hangchow against Vologuine, the delegate from the International (*MF*, 115–23), cannot but remind us of the theses put forth by the Russian oppositionists.

After the Shanghai "Commune" was crushed, this line will be recuperated under the term "Maoism." As President de Gaulle's special envoy, Malraux meets the Chinese leaders in Peking in July-August 1965. At the end of one of the immense galleries of the People's Palace, Mao stands waiting for him. Malraux's hallucination of this bizarre giant—simultaneously close and distant—is that of a triumphant Trotsky: "He still believes in the permanent revolution—and what most separates him from it is Russia. I think of Trotsky. But I heard permanent revolution defended only by a Trotsky after his defeat" (*AM*, 385).²⁸ The Long March took on the symbolic value of an actual (*effective*) political metamorphosis that relentlessly affected the community through reverberations like the Hundred Flowers and the Cultural Revolution. Blinded by these "obvious facts," Malraux apparently cannot see the terror that, in

order to render permanent revolution “effective,” the Maoist apparatus brings to bear upon everything, down to individual households and individual souls. One tiny paragraph (“But I know that brain-washing was not limited to these trifling manifestations” [AM, 376*]) against thirty hagiographic pages devoted to the Great Helmsman. They constitute an encomium to metamorphosis in politics: “Every chief of state believes that revolution leads to the establishment of a state. Mao . . . believes that the state can become the permanent means to revolution” (ML, 441). Mao pretends to believe, while Malraux believes, like Garcia, that “it’s in the very nature of an apocalypse to have no future” (MH, 118). According to this very same Garcia, the most “real” result of revolution in no way consists of a people’s metamorphosis; rather, it consists of replacing one executive apparatus with another. This Garcia is a Stalinist: a disgruntled Trotskyite. In *Man’s Hope*, Malraux was already brooding over (*couvait*) the failure, or else he was fermenting it (*couvait*).

Two incidents burst forth during the Writers’ Congress for the Defense of Culture at La Mutualité that ran from 21 to 25 June 1935, of which Malraux was one of the organizers—two warning shots reminding the sympathizing comrades of the limits beyond which they dared not go.

The first one left Malraux indifferent or, rather, amused. Having met Ehrenburg unexpectedly in a Montparnasse tobacco outlet, Breton started in forthwith administering a volley of slaps in the face to him, giving him exactly as many slaps, he declared, as the number of deprecatory epithets against the surrealists that the director of *Izvestia* had published in a recent article. Aragon then demanded that Breton be prohibited from taking the floor at the congress. (Aragon had become one hundred percent Zhdanovian; his famous phrase, “Moscow, the doddering one,” was far in the past—just think: 1928! He wasn’t one to be made dizzy by the sharp turn.) This was seconded by Vaillant-Couturier, a member of the Party’s Central Committee (“Party” all by itself was now commonly used). Thanks to Crevel’s entreaties (his final public act: he committed suicide that night), the statement of the one who was shunned like the plague was read by Eluard on 24 June: “Transform the world, said Marx. Change life, said Rimbaud. For us, these two watchwords are one and the same.”

Malraux did not pay an inordinate amount of attention to these pious hopes. It was late; the room was nearly empty. Henry Poulaille, who had asked to speak in order to air the Victor Serge affair, had already left, conspicuously exasperated by the bullshit.

When the aforementioned affair did appear on the agenda, on 25 June, it was by far the most serious incident. Populist novelist Henry Poulaille, the Italian socialist Gaetano Salvemini, and Magdeleine Paz, the prime mover in the Victor Serge Defense Committee, outlined in detail how the well-known writer and Communist Serge had just been deported to Siberia under conditions worthy of Nazi practice. He was accused, as expected, of having been involved in the counterrevolutionary plot that in 1934 assassinated Kirov, the Party secretary in Leningrad and one of the most important first-generation Bolshevik figures.

Few, at the time, suspected Stalin himself of settling accounts (by the simplest of methods) with those heroes of the great revolution whom he considered dangerous pretenders to the *imperium*. Kirov's murder was considered almost as brazen as Hitler's execution of Röhm and the SA staff officers. After which the tyrant has the killers killed and has further "suspects" accused. Malraux had no idea that the vermin were already at work (or, rather, at unwork) under cover of the Red flag. Even those of his Trotskyite "friends" who could inform him recoiled before this fatal diagnosis. To recognize that the *consequence* of the greatest insurrection of the century was a terror altogether analogous to that exercised by Nazism was not only "to play into the hands of" the (capitalist) adversary and to dash all hope, but, most important, to kiss one's "communism" goodbye. Too early for André Malraux.

Did the Left oppositionists who came to La Mutualité that day to expose "the Serge case" know that they were lifting a corner of the veil covering that distress that was still to come? Tumult and protests: Aragon and Vaillant-Couturier jump to their feet, screaming for these fascist agents to be thrown out. As a matter of conscience, Gide, who presides, rules that they will be heard the next day in subcommittee.

When he opens the session on the twenty-fifth in one of the auxiliary rooms, Malraux finds himself in an awkward position: implored two months earlier by his Trotskyite "friends" to come out in favor of Victor Serge before his Communist "friends," he doesn't make a move. As promised, however, he gives the floor to Magdeleine Paz, who reads a detailed report on the Serge affair above the boos and insults of the Stalinist clique. Ehrenburg, Koltsov, Tikhinov (in person, he whom Serge had translated) leap to the platform, screaming bloody fascist plot, we don't even know the individual, and, anyway, he's certainly implicated in Kirov's death! "Incoherent," Malraux says to himself; "How can he be unknown if he's a suspect?" The "little lady" admires how the session president "imposes decorum with incisive and scathing energy."²⁹ In short,

he tries to extricate himself from this rough spot with his style. Gide draws the meeting to a close with words of appeasement. But two days later, the old master has a letter for the Soviet ambassador in his pocket, protesting the “unfortunate behavior” of the Russian delegation: one might have thought, he notes with faint surprise, that they were attempting to stifle the Serge affair instead of providing an explanation for it.

In the plenary session the same evening, Louis Aragon pronounces “like a maniac, a flamboyant, sharp, authoritarian speech, calling for realism, integral realism it would seem.”³⁰ His *Pour un réalisme socialiste* is, actually, in press. With consternation, Gide, who had come specially for the event, observes this prodigious talent put all his cynicism to work playing the part of Zhdanov’s kapo. But it is Malraux who closes the proceedings. With nerves frayed, wracked with twitches, he steps up to the microphone and proceeds to deliver, in spasmodic sentences, his entire philosophy of art to the dumbfounded audience. Eloquence in a minor key. Perhaps suitable, he reckons, for getting the shattered antifascist front back together. An evasive action, without any doubt, but a confession more than anything. Recondite, yet blunt, his speech abandons the preaching that everyone expected. In a low voice, in fragments, as if for himself alone, he reveals his own personal Pascalism: the revelation of the power to exorcise that lies dormant in artworks.

“This congress has shown [to whom but to him?] that all artworks from which love withdraws are dead, that artworks need us, our desires, our will in order to come to life again. . . . A legacy is never transmitted: it is conquered. . . . A work of art constitutes a possibility for reincarnation.”³¹ The very same theme will subtend the 5 March 1948 Appeal to Intellectuals: the only way to become an heir of the artistic past is to metamorphose it through love or an innovative artwork. But in that somber evening of June 1935, at La Mutualité, at the very moment when the political drama of Communism that will occupy the world’s stage for half a century is taking form, Malraux, withdrawn into himself there at the platform, touches upon his most *throatfelt* truth.

What use is revolution or art if the passion that created them disappears with their artwork and in that work? “What we expect from your civilization, which through typhus and famine has preserved in its blood its old figures of glory, is that through you, Soviet comrades, its new figure be revealed. . . . Each person, in his own field, through his own research, for all those who are also searching, must recreate, must open the eyes of blind statues.”³²

There was a bit of bombast in this peroration, but mostly a petition, and the warning of a Jewish prophet: if you persist in the sin of Zhdanovian realism, you are lost, and so are we. Let us search out, let us seek something else. Let us create: it's the only way to be revolutionary. His Soviet comrades who were listening to him could not have cared less about this poeticopolitical theology. Fascism is preparing for war: let's form our battalions, that's all. It's all well and good to possess enthusiasm, but within the confines of order and discipline. Gustav Regler had already been tipped off by the opening day of the congress. From the platform, he had cried out, addressing the Gestapo agents that he knew were present in the hall, "You have killed Mühsam! You are holding Ossietzky! But you cannot silence our voice!" with such fire that, rising to its feet, the whole assembly intoned *The Internationale*. Upon which Moscow envoy Johannes Becher hissed to him from the wings: "You must be mad!" "Can't you hear what they're singing?" "That's just it! . . . *The Internationale!* You've ruined everything. You've given us away! This congress can't pretend to be neutral any longer. God almighty! You'll be turned out of the Party!"³³

For what remains of his life—underground in the Saar, squadron member in Spain, interned in France, exiled to Mexico—comrade Regler shall be taught that *The Internationale* is Kremlin property. All the same, the Saar Catholic Church had tried to drum into him when he was little that the Gloria cannot be sung without the Vatican's permission. He was too hot-headed to absorb the glacial "truth" that even if thou believest him thy brother, the enemy of thy enemy might well be thy enemy.

It's no good: no one, not even the "dazzling" Malraux, escapes the necessity of redundancy, of the bestial slowness with which clues must accumulate before one can understand a truth that runs completely contrary to one's desires. The procedures used for eliminating opponents on the Left in Spain, the infiltration of the Resistance movements in France, Moscow's expansionist politics following Yalta, the recantations and repeated disappearances of his Soviet writer and artist friends—Malraux will have to have all of these clues before he openly denounces the Manichaeic sophism that served as cover for Stalinist scheming: if you're not for Stalin, then you're "playing into the hands of" capital. Well, I'm afraid not! The Communists are undoubtedly the enemies of capitalism, but they're not my friends for all that.

This is what the "Address to Intellectuals" will say dazzlingly to the well-orchestrated scandal of the Left. This address was pronounced on

5 March 1948, at the Salle Pleyel, and reprinted as an afterword to the reedition of *The Conquerors*. By exalting the figure—in the name of Europe—of a culture that cannot be violated by the “psychotechnics” of propaganda and publicity, that address remains fully in line with the closing speech given at La Mutualité in 1935. Malraux had simply learned, in the meantime, that the violent burst of love demanded from his Soviet comrades had not and could not happen. And, late though it was, compared with most “Left intellectuals,” this bereavement made of him one of the swiftest and most perceptive analysts of his time.

PRONUNCIAMENTOS WERE A TRADITION in this country that had always been treated like its own colony. Its distraught “natives” were periodically called to order by a military takeover touched off unscrupulously by the wealthy, the church, the banks, English imperialism, and the big landed families. Malraux thought that it could very well have happened in Russia or China, following twenty years of “independent” local bourgeois regimes — aside from the fact that here, in Spain, the Bolsheviks count for little compared with the anarchist and revolutionary socialist unions. The popular riposte beats the Madrid government’s response to the punch. In the face of the rebellion, after only three days of pressure, the anarchists got the government to dissolve the regular army — that symbol of oppression — and to allow the people to arm themselves. In all the big cities (except Burgos, Zaragoza, and Seville), the workers’ militias foil the troops who fight for the seditious officers. Peasant committees begin to seize the land: half of Spain is owned by fifty thousand landlords. Many village priests join the insurrection or at least give it their blessing. The rest are shot: “If there’s a single priest who got a single one of us to repent for having defended himself — well, nothing’s too bad for him” (*MH*, 178*). Such are the words of Gustavo, a peasant in the FAI, the Fed-

eración Anarquista Ibérica. He explains, “Collado and I are men who believe” (*MH*, 177*). Then he presses a buddy to retell the story of the Christ-King’s failed passage in the poverty-stricken Hurdes’ country: Jesus has no way to diminish the people’s distress. In place of that, “from the ends of the world and in long lines, all who knew poverty well enough to die fighting against it marched in; some had guns, and those without had their rifle-readied hands; and one after the other they came and lay down on the soil of Spain” (*MH*, 180*). Malraux is so gripped by the legend of Collado that he snips it out and reglues it, thirty years later, into *Lazarus*: a Christian people rises up against a Christianity that drives the Son of God to despair (*Laz.*, 121–22).

Malraux lands in Madrid on 20 July 1936 — three days after the beginning of the pronunciamiento. His pretext: to inform French public opinion. The truth is that he intends to back up the Republican aviation. For months already he’d been explaining that the outcome of the impending conflicts would be played out in the skies. Now there’s no time to lose: in the first days a good third of the military planes were already either destroyed or had fallen into the hands of the putschists, the majority of the air force NCOs were won over to the rebellion, and aid in the form of materiel and pilots that the Francoists had asked for from Rome and Berlin would not be long in coming. When all you have is rifles, how else than by aerial attack do you expect to stand up to the seditionists’ armored vehicles?

All good reasons to intervene quickly, and by air. All this reasoning should not cause us to forget a passion that weighs considerably in Malraux’s inclination for action: his passion for the flying machine. How great was the magical force with which the child endowed aviation! Constant is his desire to fly — the desire of Icarus. To fly as member of a group — a team — with bombs and machine guns on board and with enemy fighters hurtling down out of the clouds: paradise! His dream is of a winged antifascist platform — one that takes off, gains altitude, engages the adversary, shoots him down . . .

He is pursuing, through the Spanish conflict, the same fight as before. Franco certainly hasn’t the stature of a fascist leader. He hasn’t the insanity of a Hitler bent on inverting the course of necessity at any cost. Emanating directly from reactionary elements, the general is, on the contrary, necessary, just as is necessary the return to the same and the return of the same. “Old acquaintance,” Garcia observes (*MH*, 116*). But this time around, the pronunciamiento just won’t wash: whole garrisons remain refractory to the disloyal officers, popular forces are rising up,

inflamed by a holy libertarian fury. Workers, peasants, employees, craftsmen, petty civil servants, lower management personnel, intellectuals: instead of generals, the insurrection is made up of this Frente Popular of the street. The generals remain virtually paralyzed. It is only when fascism from the rest of Europe comes to their aid that the civil war changes direction. Through the fighting that bloodies the peninsula, Europe and the entire planet discern the premises of the imminent world conflict.

To Western democracies, however, Germany remained the loser of 1918 and Italy a secondary power. The British and French armies are still the best in the world. As for capitalism, being under the constant pressure of forces on the Left and shaken by strikes and factory takeovers, it has much more to fear from Stalin than from Hitler or Mussolini. Nazi Germany would even make an excellent rampart against a Soviet offensive. Concessions can be made to such a Germany. The wisest with regard to Spain would be to procrastinate: London and the City impose the principle of nonintervention on the Blum government.

It is of course because Malraux is counting so firmly on Moscow that this civil war—the first one that he wages against fascists in the real world—will administer such a decisive lesson to him. It's not that he's a romantic where politics is concerned: he never thought that a revolution could modify the human condition from top to bottom. But he adores and admires the uprising of an entire people in the name of its own dignity. So he throws himself into action at that people's side, signing its uprising in the form of action—like a revelation. The "blood of the Left" is that of fraternal communion. *Man's Hope's* christening of the tumultuous revolt as Apocalypse transforms it into Johannine vision. Spanish War: God's War.

The Devil's War. Wildcat agitation is always crushed, in the end, by an organized adversary. In order to save it from disaster, it must be organized, too. What discipline other than the Communist one can do the job? Malraux will thus witness with his own eyes (and at his own cost) how Stalinist "order" harnesses popular momentum and diverts it, how that "order" denounces, slanders, and murders everything that is not part of it. Malraux will not easily grant the obvious: he will maintain for a long time still that the Soviet Union is "good" because it alone can smash the expansion of fascism in all its forms. But under the appearances of this obstinate loyalty (widespread at the time), he is in fact gripped by disenchantment. "A popular movement, or a revolution, or even a rebellion, can hold on to its victory only by methods directly opposed to those which gave it victory. Sometimes opposed even to the sen-

timents from which it started out" (*MH*, 117–18). Given that this was written in 1937, we may ask: Does Malraux respect Commissar Garcia for his austerity and his cynical lucidity? Or does he hate him for his presumptuousness in sacrificing what he once believed he could save? "I'm also sure the others will turn rotten when we've won," Garine said of his companions in struggle (*Co/E*, 49). In Spain, they didn't wait for a victory that would never occur. It was much worse there, for while they fought with the people against its enemy, they themselves became that enemy and the people were crushed. Mimetic logic, eternal redundancy: just as Satan infiltrated the Jesus-God's Church, Evil joins his voice with the screams of the humiliated and injured and stifles them.

For Malraux, something other than a political drama got played out in Spain, another plot in the making came as a lump to his throat, a repeated spasm clenching this country against itself, clenching it still tighter when it attempts to break out of the grip. The same repeats itself, and the revolt against the same repeats the same. A horrifying cramp, echoing his own personal and most intimate suffering, grips Spain — that of total despair.

This black, atheological thread is not easy to untangle from the others, so tightly is it braided into the others: the political, the poetic, and the *farfelu* ones. It surfaces. Before coming to improvise his little squadron, Malraux had passed through Madrid in May 1936, with Henri-René Lenormand and Jean Cassou, to make preparations for the new Writers' Congress. In face of entreaties by José Bergamín,¹ whom Malraux had met at that time, Spain had been chosen in June 1935 as the venue for the coming meeting. To Bergamín, Malraux would vow one of those un-failing yet distant friendships for which he had such a knack. Mauriac will later say that along with Bernanos, Maritain, and himself, Bergamín was one of the extremely rare Christians to save the honor of the church during the Spanish War. The Spanish writer slightly modifies this statement by saying that "[we] attempted to save the truth of the Spanish people — a people sacrificed with episcopal benediction." When the clergy sided with the putschist officers, this was "sacrilege and a stupidly satanic crime" — the devil had hidden out in his favorite dwelling place: the Church. Bergamín's idea of the Church was the same as Bernanos's: that of the saints, of the true believers who "take nourishment in doubt." Job is the incarnation of the human condition of sainthood. Of what importance is it that Malraux doesn't want to believe? For him, too, the human condition of hope is despair (*PPF*, 103–39). Some time later,

Brasillach, in turn, would “discover” the despair of *Man’s Hope*—but, sweet Jesus, he saw in that discovery the proof of fascism’s superiority.²

Taking the floor before the Madriline intellectuals at their Ateneo Club on 22 May 1936, the French writer can already be heard tuning his discourse to the Spanish figure of the unbelieving believer. He takes up and strains the familiar theme of revolution as poetic act. Why are we antifascists? Because “fascism is the antithesis of creation,” because it treats artworks as propaganda tools, because the values that artworks are supposed to glorify—nation, race, the superiority of the few—are all exclusionary values, whereas culture only exists “thanks to the wish and will to extend culture.” Man, in his raw state, “has no style; the artist does.” And, in passing, Malraux removes Marx’s Zdanovian greasepaint: he, at least, hadn’t thought “to explain Velásquez on the basis of carriage design in the court of Philip II.” On the contrary, he reflected upon the “eternal youth” of Greek art founded on a “poetic faculty” that is impervious to the wear of the millennia. His conclusion? “Between revolutionary will and poetry, there can be no gap.”³

Is he attempting (as the French Communists “reaching out” to “believers”) to win a ferociously Catholic intelligentsia over to the cause? He’s enough of a rhetorician to try, of course. But expressions like “creation,” “perpetual birth,” “eternal youth” hang a halo over his “poetry” such that this audience ends up recognizing its own hopes: the conflict (whose coming is proven to everyone by daily events) will perhaps prove whether the Christian message of love (of “poetry”) conveyed by the Spanish church can free itself from the dictatorship of the banks, the army, and the Satanic church. Not only free itself, but move against them.

This is Malraux’s question. Cruel Christianity, executioners, and victims linked in an ancient form of terror, the Holy Reconquest that *Don Quixote* lays bare, Montserrat Virgin and Picasso’s *Demoiselles*, everywhere the thrust of hatred from a phantom God, and, as sole outcome, the garrote. For here, people are executed by getting their *throat* crushed: that monster that terrorizes the agnostic theologian indeed exists in Europe and captivates him almost as much as does its antipode, Asia. Is it possible to turn this madness into wisdom through insurgency?

Ten years after *Man’s Hope*, the essay on Goya reveals the true substance, the secret of Malraux’s dramaturgy:

The various types within this grandiose and wholesale massacre [the painter’s work] are not much more numerous than those of the real world: the toothless old woman, the witch, the frog-faced

madam, the doll-faced stylish woman, . . . and the series of burlesques that one could still witness only ten years ago, seated at café tables in small cities, facing some church's red wall on which the heat of the day would cause the commemorative Barbary Coast chains to shimmer. . . . [As for the masculine types, they] range from the moronic knight to the demon, with the miser, the suspicious monk, and the impish gnome. (*TN*, 82)

Spain had remained a gallery of Gothic figures distinguished by the mark linking them to God. In sensual grace, the Italian artists had discovered an expression of harmony between man and himself, between woman and man, between God and the world. Profane love was considered an emanation of sacred love. Spanish baroque unites meaning with the soul only within the confines of mystical ecstasy, when the body is sublimated. "Just imagine Saint Teresa before the statue of her by Bernini" (*TN*, 59).

Creating the nude, the very symbol of art in Florence and Rome, was punished in Spain "by prison, exile, and the confiscation of one's property" (*TN*, 59). Here, the various Catholic authorities — the Inquisition, the Carmelite order, the Society of Jesus — make sure, in the name of the Holy Faith, that the abyss separating the Word from life remains gaping. No concessions to the voluptuous pleasures of paganism: the spirit must have no contact whatsoever with sex. Anxiety is born of this cruel, pitiless foreclosure: when the Word is prohibited the flesh, how can any incarnation or voice that makes itself be heard not be diabolical? Who dwells in the Church, in that place that is supposed to speak for God on earth? Man may serve no purpose other than to testify to that which is greater than he, but is it the Lord or Satan who turns his life into a "penal colony" and who burdens him mercilessly with that "feeling of dependence"?

Having become deaf to the prattle of society, the terrible truth rises up in Goya's throat: what is greater than man is not God but "that which, within him, aspires to destroy Him." It is not the prince of evil whom Bosch still represented in majesty on his throne, but rather an accusation screamed out at God from the blinded and tortured body of the trunk-man, "the dying man all of whose limbs have been chopped off and under whom Goya writes: 'I have seen this!'" (*TN*, 75) — just as Malraux writes "I have seen this" beneath the portrayal of Spain in Gehenna. To this, to the Scourge that Brueghel represented in the form of "bloody slattern unleashed upon the fiery swarming of misery" (*TN*, 69) in his

“Dulle Greet,” to black magic’s handiwork, Malraux gives the name, *Man’s Hope* . . .

What antiphrasis! What dark alchemy supports it? Goya’s black backgrounds, he explains, seem to represent the night, yet “their function is more like that of the gilt backgrounds of the Middle Ages: they wrest a scene from reality and, as in Byzantine painting, thrust it into a universe that does not belong to man. This black is the devil’s gold” (*TN*, 86). A material made for grotesque fabliaux and tragic morality plays, the civil war is portrayed as an interminable mystery play that the people play out for Good Friday in front of an empty church. In vain, he attempts to rescue the gold of true fraternity from the shadows.

The airplane that sets André and Clara down in Madrid in July owed its permission to cross the Pyrenees only to special authorization from the Ministry of the Air. As soon as the putsch was announced, Malraux got it into his head to unite a modest fleet to serve the republicans. To his cause, and in a few short days, he rallies Paul-Louis Weiler (director of Gnome et Rhône) and his friend, Corniglion-Molinier, the same one who piloted him to Yemen and who will now transport him to the Spanish capital. Through these two, he gets Jean Moulin, Pierre Cot’s cabinet chief and minister of the air, to allow a few combat planes to cross over into Spain. This happens just before the nonintervention decision by the Blum cabinet under British pressure is made official and goes into effect on 8 August 1936. (The right-wing press screams that it was an abuse of authority.) Now in full stride and using the favor with which Azaña, the president of the Spanish Republic, looks upon him, he obtains from José Giral, the prime minister, a contract entrusting to André Malraux the organization, administration, and tactical direction of an “esquadrilla Española” in coordination with the republican air command.⁴

The little armada that squeezed out of Paris still has to be piloted. It consists of a few Potez 54 bombers and Dewoitine fighters delivered without machine guns. Added to this are one or two twin-engine Liorés (minus bomb launchers), some Nieuports, Douglas DC-2s, Blochs, and De Havillands: some twenty mix-matched planes in all, several of which are outdated but all of which might come in handy. Malraux immediately publishes an ad and recruits a handful of “mercenaries,” pilots or machine-gunners of various nationalities who have been on the fronts and nonfronts of Europe and Asia since 1914 — adventurers and bad boys (not altogether young), who are joined by a few politicians “on the Left.” Innumerable difficulties (as well can be imagined), like training these

men on machines and weapons such as these, finding spare parts, identifying mechanics . . . D'Artagnan is happy to make light of these difficulties. He is fortunate to have in Guidez (a commissioned French officer pilot and volunteer) just the professional assistant he needs. A plane's workings? The leader of the España squadron hasn't the slightest notion about how one runs.

After three weeks spent running from one ministerial office to another in Paris, Barcelona, and Madrid, and through a series of arms and airplane merchants' agencies (in the midst of which he addresses a packed meeting on 30 July in the Salle Wagram, where he calls for volunteers to fight in Spain), the *coronel* launches two of his fighters to attack Italian surveillance planes (downed), and, still more important, the next day (16 August is dated 14 August in *Man's Hope*), the Potez bombers manage to pin Colonel Yaguë's column to the ground near Medellín. Yaguë's troops were advancing from Mérida toward Madrid to join Mola's army, based in Old Castille, northwest of the capital. That same day, two more Potez fly a sortie over Teruel. Engaged, upon their return, by formidable Italian Fiat 32s, the old Nieuport fighter is able, by some miracle, to extricate them. On 20 August, Malraux boards one of the Potez that will dive-bomb an enemy convoy parked in Medellín's main square. German Junkers attack. Malraux is slightly wounded.

The effect of these first crucial successes is to delay the siege of Madrid by pro-Franco troops. Malraux exults. On his way through Paris, he explains to a flabbergasted Gide that his "pelicans" are now ready to relieve the Asturian front.⁵ Mythomania? No: mythopoesis in action. The *coronel* cobbles his business together with the precision of a sleepwalker, under the worst conditions. That his battalion — this hodgepodge of recruits — held together for five whole months Malraux owed only to his "ascendancy," his rhetoric, his intrepidity, his drollness, the exigency with which he treated "his men," his camaraderie without a trace of demagoguery, the nobility of his vision.

So here he is, gang leader, at the head of his irregulars, and for the good cause. At the end of 1940, Emmanuel d'Astier will ask him to leave for London with him. His answer: "I'm in, but I march alone."⁶ Resistance? Yes, of course. But it has to amaze me and, as a bonus, stupefy others. Machine guns, airplanes, men to be invented — all to support Goya's rebellious people: that's worth signing. Julien Segnaire's photographs taken on the Madrid and Valencia tarmacs say it all: Malraux is as radiant as in the days when he left for Saba, standing next to his limbic object: the airplane — that thing that can make the child weightless

between the vermin below and the stars that couldn't care less about anything.

Even more euphoric than in Yemen, since here, above Medellín, we can crush those wretched creatures: "Seen from the plane, the lorries [of the Francoist column] seemed stuck to the road like flies on a strip of flypaper" (*MH*, 100). Rather than fly off, they explode in their own glue. Who is speaking through Scali? Malraux wasn't on board during the 16 August mission. About the very same mission, the correspondent from *Paris-Soir*, Delaprée, wrote thus in his 23 August dispatch: "Instead of men, the aviators could only make out insects."⁷ Malraux always read newspaper reports: it was his writerly raw material. On the other hand it was, once again, Delaprée, one of those close to André, who was observing these events from the ground that day. So, whose insects are they? Everyone, in any case, belongs to them.

The *coronel's* determination was not to let up at any point during the entire conflict. Nor would his momentum, even as confidence was weakening. The squadron's story, like that of the republic, was that of death throes.

Following Medellín, on 23 and 27 August, the Francoist aviation destroys several Dewoitines parked at Cuatro Vientos, one of the Madrid military airstrips. Guidez, the commander of España's fighters, is filled with consternation.

The first of September, however, brings a short abatement. A peasant had stumbled upon a secret Francoist airbase near Olmedo. Aghast, he's put on board a Potez, which he orients by sight as the plane hedgehops. A fuel tank, an ammunition dump, and three bombers are annihilated in one sortie. *Man's Hope* transposes the scene to Teruel, putting it in December (*MH*, 449–63).

Yaguë forges on toward Madrid, occupying Talavera. The squadron's bombers carry out a series of raids on the city on 2, 4, and 6 September. The Lioré has to make an emergency landing behind enemy lines. Reported missing, the crew returns to base after three days on foot.

By mid-September, the situation worsens. There are shortages of planes and small arms alike. The squadron only has five fighters left: the missions have to be suspended. The Madrid government is reshuffled; two Communists enter. Junkers and Savoias now drop their bombs on the capital every day with complete impunity. All-out war: Europe is beginning to get used to it.

By October, the rebel troops are within sight of the loyalist air bases around Madrid. Getafe and Cuatro Vientos fall in November.

Moscow decides to intervene. Soviet advisers take the reins. Republican aviation has had to withdraw to Valencia. With the Alcalá de Hénarés airstrip reserved for Soviet equipment, the squadron is now based at La Señera and integrated into the governmental air force, which is more or less under the control of the Spanish Communist Party. The men christen it the “André Malraux squadron.”

For two weeks straight, there are daily sorties to reinforce the Thirteenth International Brigade’s counteroffensive in the Teruel sector of the Aragón region. On 27 December 1936, the Potez in which Malraux stood in as machine-gunner breaks down on takeoff and smashes up in a field. He emerges with minor wounds. Attacked by several Heinkel 51s, the other bomber crashes in the snows of the Sierra de Teruel. Malraux’s book and film will immortalize the ritualistic descent of the wounded and dead carried on stretchers by the Valle de Linares peasants.

The squadron’s remnants were sent, on 11 February 1937, to cover the exodus of the civilian population toward Almería on the Mediterranean coast following the fall of Málaga. Shot down by Fiats, the last Potez left crashed in the sea, just offshore. Of the six-man crew, one member was dead. One of the survivors managed to extricate all four of his critically wounded comrades from the overturned and sinking fuselage and get them transported toward a distant hospital. They joined a dense convoy of overloaded carts, hobbling old people, baby strollers, herds of goats, all dragging themselves along under Italian fighter machine-gun fire. Medieval nightmare: massacre of the destitute beneath black skies.

Immediately upon Stalinist request, Malraux left Spain and his broken squadron. While this exalted improvisation created momentary wonderment and would now provide material for a tone of voice and a book without precedent, it was unable to stop the advance of the Francoists. If one is to believe Corniglión, the squadron leader was guilty of tactical errors. And his group of mercenaries was untrustworthy. A certain German pilot claiming to be anti-Nazi was in all probability an agent of the Fifth Column. And what about that Frenchman who returned from mission with his bombs still in the bay? Faced with intense antiaircraft barrage, he claims that he preferred saving his life (and salary) to following orders. Corruption can infiltrate through fear and greed as well. The guilty and the suspicious are dismissed. But there comes a time when military discipline must be established and the militant spirit of self-sacrifice must be appealed to. Without this, as Garcia says, the insurrection becomes inconsequential.

Neither the local Communist Party nor the International are thrilled by the prowess of this squadron of ruffians. A member of the Spanish Communist Party Central Committee, Hidalgo de Cisneiros, is named lead general of republican aviation in the autumn of 1936. After the war, he will write with some lingering perplexity about Malraux's motive in setting up the whole affair: "About that, I really can't say. But what I can affirm is that although Malraux's participation—that of a writer of great renown—might have usefully served our cause, his contribution as squadron leader proved completely negative." There were a few sincere antifascists; all the other pilots were out for the money. "Do people actually realize what a monthly salary of fifty thousand francs represented at the time? . . . Far from being a help, they were a burden."⁸ It is also true that Malraux is not exactly in the Stalinists' good graces at the time Hidalgo heaps this criticism upon him. But by then, he too is panning them. It's already the Cold War. The Party's mistrust wasn't born yesterday.

The fighter managed to win the friendship of a few Communist militants from the team, like Segnaire, who was supposed to have been political commissar (he claims, however, that that was a joke), or important intellectuals, like Nenni, who gives a pleasant portrayal of the flying *coronel* holding his nightly briefings in Madrid's Hotel Florida before an international press and intelligentsia. Stalin's apparatus is busy reinforcing discipline everywhere, both within the "homeland of socialism" (by preparing the liquidations of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and soon, Radek) as well as outside, inside, and in the vicinity of the "brother parties." Among other acts on the ground in Spain this means the physical elimination of Catalan anarchist groups and of the POUM, as well as the assassination of Andrès Nin. The NKVD turns the confusion of civil war to good account in order to liquidate Left oppositionists of all stripes before it becomes the turn of the sincere and loyal militants themselves. By joining the International Brigades and the Fifth Regiment in an excess of both antifascist zeal and political experience far from Moscow, these doomed militants expose themselves to future purges and deportations. Marty, the head of the Brigades in Albaceta, calls Gustav Regler in for a thorough interrogation on the "activities" of the putative squadron leader (*Owl*, 277–78). It is true that at this point Malraux is actively diverting pilots appointed to the Brigades to his unit.

Braced by the sway they hold over the government of the Spanish Republic, having secured the command of the air forces, which are now

reinforced by Soviet aid, the Stalinists put an abrupt end to the España squadron's exploits by sending its mercenaries packing and integrating the "André Malraux Antifascist Aviation" into the regular army. Following the losses incurred during the Almería operation, the "great writer" is cordially invited to go hunt for money in support of the republic over there in the New World. Revolution means paying the army, doesn't it? Two weeks following Almería, he takes the floor, passing the hat, at New York's Hotel Roosevelt.

Final antifascist platforms in Capital's great cities. Final pleasures at the podium surrounded by microphones and floodlights. Already disenchanted, he still goes on exercising his oratorical prestige, improvising profusely, recounting the same scenes wherever he goes — scenes that he is setting down for the book. He can be seen grimacing and snorting, his hands in agitation as he waits to be translated. He takes up the thread of his speech, half lying down from fatigue on the table or the desk. The halls are filled. Despite the Roosevelt management's hostility (they are very attached to nonintervention), the American Left rallied to obtain the right to welcome the antifascist combatant, the prestigious author of *Man's Fate*. Seventeen times without a pause over two weeks, in North America's amphitheaters and lecture halls, the suspended *coronel* applies himself to wresting financial aid to assist victims of the civil war, civilians and fighters alike, arguing that the Red Cross is doing nothing.

In Quebec, that bastion of the Roman Catholic Church, the well-thinking press lays into the "Bolshevik" tooth and nail: "anarchist," "splendid scum," an "unchained King Kong" who dares to come and collect funds "for those who massacre priests, for the church burners, for the iconoclasts of Spanish art, for the Jewish rot of the Caballero butcher." *Man's Fate*? A novel of "consummate vulgarity" that "pastiches Francis Carco's slang" and "borrows from Céline's sinister visions."⁹ *Le Devoir* of 2 April takes cover behind François Mauriac's mean-spirited article published on 11 February in *Le Figaro*: "Malraux's weak point is his contempt for man — the notion that one can trot out anything at all to bipeds and they will listen drop-jawed." And, height of ignominy, the traitor had the audacity to go harangue the Protestant institutions — Montréal's McGill University, that "heart of the Communist octopus dwelling in Quebec" and, even worse, if that is possible, the American Presbyterian Church! Fortunately the crowd was small: those damned English understood nothing. Moreover, since Malraux's "great art" is so entirely made up of parables and contrasts, "muddled ideas and obscu-

rity, [that] his audience is left in total uncertainty. Applause is absent at the very moment one expects it to burst forth.”¹⁰

In short, the civil war went on in Quebec in the form of invective. All this didn't particularly displease Malraux, even if it was too late. He was already writing *Man's Hope*, which he would finish within a few months in France, during the summer and fall of 1937, and publish at the end of November. Criticism was divided — not surprising given the ideological context. Critics were especially disconcerted by his procedure — without precedent in French literature. Was this really a novel?

Idle question. By the beginning of 1938, Malraux is already composing the screenplay he's been imagining for quite some time: *Sierra de Teruel*. Corniglion-Molinier offers to produce it with the help of Roland Tual, who, having invested everything he had in *Drôle de drame*, is at the moment penniless. No matter! Malraux leaves for Barcelona to begin shooting anyway. Catalonia is under Francoist attack from all sides, crushed beneath bombs, dying of hunger. The *Généralité* can provide some financing if the film is shot on location. The Montjuich studio and two secretaries are lent to the film crew. Malraux recruits Spanish writer Max Aub to adapt scenes selected from the novel, Louis Page will become the cinematographer, André Thomas will be the cameraman, Denis Marion and Boris Peskine will do the cutting and editing. A good two thousand young recruits were borrowed from the mountain battalions for the combat sequences: along with the inhabitants of a nearby village, they served as film extras. The studio was no longer equipped. Film stock was smuggled in from Paris. Developing was done at great risk between power outages. Then, it was sent back off to Paris, to Pathé, for printing. Floodlights also had to be imported from France. To depict Schreiner's plane, which was destroyed in his failed landing attempt, they buried the nose of a plane belonging to a *señorito* on vacation. Bomb blasts rained down on the studio set and the venerable Latécoère, on board which the aerial combat shots were taken, was attacked by Fascist fighters. When it came time to evacuate Montjuich, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain in its entirety, eleven out of the thirty-nine planned sequences were still missing.

Witnesses are unanimous in saying that during this adventure André was absolutely brimming with joy. In his linen pants and espadrilles, his youth had suddenly returned — brightness itself beneath the black skies of defeat. Josette had joined him and, with her friend Suzanne's help, busied herself in resupplying him with tender intentions. Incomplete as

it is, the resulting film compels us to admiration. Its style is forceful: it is Malraux's own cinematic "style" derived partially from the great German and Soviet traditions, partially anticipating postwar Italian neorealism. The work signs the writer's farewell to the novel. In 1967, Malraux will tell Greshoff that "as narrative technique, writing doesn't exist."¹¹ To narrate is in no way to tell a story; it is rather to reveal a scene — the only scene — one in which baseness and insurrection both confront and embrace one another simultaneously. This scene is torn from the raw material of fact and worked by filmic technique such that its metaphysical truth may be snatched from the course of things and fixed permanently in that same instant.

Through art, the devil's gold was thus transsubstantiated. The demon nevertheless goes on spreading his shadows over things and men.

IT'S EIGHT O'CLOCK in the evening, 7 December 1933. Between mother and father, she's dining at Chez Luce. The three of them had come in to Paris from their Gâtinais region to treat the young woman to a friendly end-of-the-year night out. The headline on the *Paris-Soir* lying on the bench had her suddenly leaping for the telephone. Noise of a social gathering could be heard at the other end of the line: everyone associated with Gallimard was at number 44 in Rue du Bac to congratulate the new Prix Goncourt winner, crowned hands down. She finally hears what she wants to hear: André telling her to drop by Chez Lipp later that evening. The bar is packed but Roland catches a glimpse of Josette from a distance. They make hand signals to each other. He manages to approach her, glass in hand. In a flash, over heads and innumerable questions, André takes in these two faces of beauty: his brother and the debutante merge in his inner album—he smiles. The next day, when she dashes in Chez Viel, he's gone. Tears of rage. Her parents go back to Beaune-la-Rolande. Her determination magnifying, Josette takes a room at the Montalembert, where the Gallimards had put her up two years earlier, when her first novel was published. She kills time before the mirror, trying on the gifts she's bought for herself (more debts): a new dress from a couturier,

her sumptuous fox-collar coat. Finally André phones: tomorrow, lunch, the Ritz, and he hangs up (Chantal, 49–50).

No point in trying to make herself beautiful: she must be beauty incarnate — hairdresser, makeup from Arden, perfume, that's it. With his photograph in all the papers, they'll be stared at: they are. He's seen making menu selections, choosing their wines with conspicuous care, and holding them up to that full mouth. His courting ritual is incisive. "When we leave, we'll go buy whatever you feel like. Not a word. Let's carry on." And he goes on, Clappique-style, sort of "in six months, we'll get divorced," while they wait for their coats at the cloakroom, lips pursed, shifty looks. "If a man offered to spend a month with you but not a day more, would you be capable of accepting with no desire for more?" He gallantly helps her on with her fur and, leaning toward the nape of her neck, in a tone of feigned despair, certain of success, flatteringly, says, "Honestly speaking, I know of no woman who would" (Chantal, 50–51†). The pretender's heart invades her temples, blinds her eyes. "She's in turmoil and, under penalty of death, must silence that turmoil" (Chantal, 58). Is it her bantering or his that she hears? "The important thing is that it be a thirty-one-day month. The first day, in any case, one believes one can." In the taxi that speeds toward the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (the promised shopping spree is already forgotten — a sign?), the Goncourt laureate approaches, loses himself in the fox fur. What's this? the beauty says to herself, the hero is a child? Guiding him toward her lips, she suddenly finds herself ditched on the sidewalk before Poiret-Blanche in her oblation finery, useless, alone in the cold (Chantal, 51). Ten days later, in a room at the Hôtel d'Orsay, off the beaten track, they would take each other, everything going the wrong way, mad with mutual veneration.

Henri Pourrat had invented Josette Clotis. In the snug comfort between an adoring father and a mother as beautiful as some Phaedra, she wrote stories, impatient to break out of the all-too-cozy family bosom. Contemplating her own beauty drove her to propagate an appetite for the joys of which her flesh and her soul were replete. Lively and insatiable, she straightforwardly advocates throwing one's arms around the neck of whatever pleases, as one would chomp into a peach. Better still, she is the flesh that languishes at not being savored. Mademoiselle sent off simple romantic narratives to everyone she imagined had some renown in literary circles. This is how, on the occasion of a literary contest in Auvergne, Pourrat came to notice one of her short stories, had her come to his place in Ambert, and went over the manuscript of her *Les Temps vert* with a fine-tooth comb.¹ "Rare is someone so very young

who knows how to stay natural.” He cuts and refashions; she takes fright at the thought of someone denaturing her baby. He sends the duly cleaned-up text to Gallimard, who decides to publish it and summons the schoolgirl to Paris. There, she lives from hand to mouth on the small allowance that good Monsieur Clotis grants her and from the lines of Parisian gossip that she’s supposed to contribute to *Marianne*. It didn’t take long for Emmanuel Berl, the recent founder of the journal, to see that the “Maid of Orléans” (the name he gave her kiddingly) didn’t understand a thing about the intrigues of the capital, was out of sync with its rhythm, knew nothing of the literary and political stakes that governed the scene.

Josette irritated the boss. But already she had eyes only for Malraux, for his presently consecrated prestige, for the casual ascendancy of this refined, handsome, tall, and intelligent man. In a lull during lunch one day, a few *Marianne* and *NRF* collaborators started debating freedom for young women. More than one believed it either impossible or objectionable. Under André’s watchful eye, Josette defends it with the rage of a novice:

“One must hurry up and exist. Being twenty years old means nothing. . . . Love whomever you want, experience all your desires, like a young animal. It’s not eternal. It’s something that may only last a few months. What’s bothersome is that no one’s found a way to sleep with someone without it becoming some sort of a . . .”

“Disclosure?” Malraux suggests. “That’s funny.”

“Yes,” she says, suddenly more pensive. “To have enough confidence in someone to entrust him with one’s way of inclining the head and falling asleep . . .”

Freedom, without a doubt. But if it’s to sleep together . . . he can no longer follow her.

Her guiding principle had been: “Sexual blossoming makes you more intelligent than chastity, and happier more than anything else.”

To which he objected, “If you live any old how, you’ll only get any old satisfactions.” (Chantal, 41–43†)

It was thus that Nature and Will met each other: mutually seduced and promised to misunderstanding.

Clara, around 12 December 1933: “In my absence, André was awarded the Goncourt. I had learned of it while in Jerusalem. Would I have liked to be there for a triumph that inevitably degenerated into social whirl?”

When I got back, the hardest part was over: I could grudgingly face the rest” (Clara, 4:210†). The rest was far from negligible: all those pretenders to the victor’s favors, among whom was Josette. “André’s coming to Marseilles to meet me touched me deeply. After the vacation from each other, we really took joy in seeing each other again: it was a reunion.” A twenty-year-old fellow named Soussia had written to Clara two weeks before, “Come and join me in Haifa. And if you don’t want to say yes, don’t say no” (Clara, 4:208†). That was her opportunity to escape a role she absolutely loathed: spouse of the great man just when he was being showered with every possible success — in literature, politics, gallantry, high society. And besides, they had never been to Palestine: André always became indignant at the thought of ascending Golgotha as a tourist. But for her, the Jewish German militant who was already getting glimpses (through the stories of refugee comrades) of the horror that Europe had in store for itself, going to the Temple Wall wasn’t a mere visit to a holy city: it would revive an alliance with her people.

Meanwhile, André was starting up a liaison with Louise de Vilmorin. Clara believes she can checkmate him by joining her Soussia. The husband will just have to take the wife’s independence into account. To remain emancipated and to get herself recognized by him as his equal where freedom of moral behavior is concerned, without for all that breaking up: such are the terms by which she intended to have their union be lived out. Ever since they got together, she had always laid claim to her habeas corpus and strove to get him to understand that he could make full use of his. Waste of time: such compatibility, such misunderstanding could only offend André’s mystically hopeless representation of femininity. For him, love had nothing to do with some parity contract between spouses; it should, on the contrary, be an open proving ground for sexual difference, each party reaching the depths of inadequacy at understanding the other and the reasons for the attachment, each one unleashing incomparable weakness on the other and inflicting it without mercy. Yes, who better than Clara could humiliate him? She negotiated and brought the intractable relation under the rule of property.

“My companion told me how, in the train, the young provincial woman with her list of approachable famous men [Clara wrote, more bluntly, “screwable”] threw herself at him with great efficaciousness” (Clara, 4:210†). Rule of bodily negotiations of which the spouse thought she could avail herself. Terrible blindness. And, she adds sarcastically, since Louise was also in the picture, the beauty from *Beaune-la-Rolande*

would have to wait her turn. Proving that the emancipated mate had the wrong rival in mind. Moreover, it was the writer's renown, more than his affairs, that offended her. "You stole the show," she flung out publicly at the hero following a final celebration that she couldn't avoid. "My dear," he retorted, "no one is preventing you from getting the Prix Goncourt" (*Marronniers*, 335). Was it during this period that she wrote "On the Question of Murder in Conjugal Relations"? In any case, it was at that place in her memoirs that she chose to insert this text (Clara, 4:164–69).²

In the beginning of May 1933, André de Vilmorin handed Malraux the manuscript of his sister Louise's first book, *Sainte Unefois*.³ "I'm pleased," the master writes to the apprentice, "You possess true talent. . . . No need to bother your head looking for a plot: it will remain good work only in this state of dispersion." Thus anticipating the future of their relationship. Following consultation, Drieu and Gide are favorably inclined. Paulhan decides to publish it. Louise, writing to her brother, "In one fell swoop I possess all I could desire: esteem for my 'human condition' from you and from Malraux, who, without being on the same emotional plane as you, is still someone whose opinion counts a lot for me" (*Louise*, 79–80). On his return from a trip with Clara to the North Cape, André (the one who is not her brother) becomes Louise's lover in the Hôtel du Pont-Royal, right near Gallimard. He then skips off to Royan to see Trotsky. By the end of November, he learns that "Madame de" (he said she was La Pompadour) is Friedrich Sieburg's mistress as well. From his apartment at the Ritz, the author of *Is God French?* (1929)⁴ exerted the type of prestigious influence on Parisian socialites that only a German thinker who kept abreast of the crisis and who favored Hitler's solution could exert. Malraux breaks up without warning. How churlish, groans the libertine, so little in keeping with manners of high society. "I never quite understood Malraux," she confides to André (the one who's supposedly not her lover); "I often told him how much he boggled me with admiration without my understanding a word of what he'd talk about" (*Louise*, 93–94, 85). Had it been Consuelo de Saint-Exupéry (another of Sieburg's mistresses) who whispered the news of Louise's liaison with the German in André (the lover)'s ear? The Vilmorin brother and sister stuck to this version — which was, moreover, quite tolerable for them since their complicity would not suffer as a result. Malraux was counted out. He did not see Louise again until 1937, when, in the hallways of the *NRF*,

the España squadron colonel breezed by the witty woman adulated by the chic *tout-Paris*.

“No plot; just dispersion,” André advised the author of *Sainte Unefois*. Just let amorous things take their disorderly course, secretly (he will never write a word about his). They shouldn’t be confused with *his* thing—writing, war, death. “He seems engrossed in something important,” Josette notes, “something where there is no room for any woman” (Chantal, 40). Malraux is a chaste man. The thing that he’s wrapped up in can only exclude him from intercourse with women. And with this distance, he seduces them. It’s not that they are complete strangers from the thing in question: indeed, they are its emanation, its appearance, its livery. The latent and persistent motif in Malraux’s life and work is sexual difference. Did he do anything other than elaborate its enigma and its threat under the various figures of adventure, war, and art?

The feminine implanted itself in his soul through a series of darts: Berthe’s beauty, her ability to engender and to insume, an unrequited demand for love, irrevocable withdrawal. Unable to elude this power, the son exposes himself to its unfathomable violence. Writing is only worthy of signing if the so-called author is willing to risk self-dispossession. This knowledge—the arrogant yet chaste intelligence of a virile conqueror and of a writer of the will—expects abatement from *defeat*. The model for true communion—whether called forth by literature or by the lure of action—is to be found in undivided love, where the ego, subjected to the other in the form of passion, fails at understanding and at willing as well.

“Gratified lovers—‘gratified,’ I believe, is the word?—set up love against death. I’ve never experienced it. But I know that certain works of art can withstand the dizziness that comes from the contemplation of our dead, of the starry sky, of history” (AM, 24). In the same weary tone of voice (it is 1941 and the storm has washed a Malraux asphyxiated by violence up onto a craggy shore), Walter Berger puts an end to his nephew’s speculations about the suicide of his brother, Dietrich. “Man is essentially what he hides. . . . A miserable little pack of lies.” Little sand-pies that Malraux stacked up in the corners of what’s called life. But if he would or could never countersign these open secrets, the women in that life don’t balk one moment at divulging them: Clara publishes six volumes of memoirs; Suzanne Chantal gathers the letters and miscellaneous papers of her friend, Josette, who never stopped writing during

her ten years spent “near” André; a virtual diary is the correspondence that Louise de Vilmorin maintained with André, her beloved brother (Clara was in love with her older brother named André as well, but she gave him up for her lover). Only Madeleine, Roland’s widow, whom Malraux married in March 1948, will have remained silent. She was satisfied to gather and publish a collection of *dyables*—those bizarre little figures that André often drew with a feverish yet continuous pen stroke in the margins of his manuscripts or official papers, and which often, like coded confidences, served as legends. And she at least allowed her son, Alain Malraux, who was raised with his cousins (Josette’s children) at André’s house, to publish the life album showing a family-less Malraux with the family: a notebook, an impromptu composition of those delicate and violent scenes of which only childhood can preserve the flavor. And then there was Brigitte Friang—twice Malraux’s press attaché during the Gaullian period—who in *Un Autre Malraux* portrayed the boss who had placed in her the confidence of a buddy. She did so shamelessly: laughing, losing patience, crying.

“It’s true that women don’t come into play in my work. Nor did they in Chateaubriand’s. The subjects I treated in my books didn’t lend themselves to a feminine presence.” Lend themselves? The expression leaves one pensive: Is the sexual différend—the ultimate force behind any drama—present in the novel only if “the subject” lends itself to it? He corrects himself: “That’s a bad explanation. I should say that for me, a woman is such a different being (I’m speaking of difference, not inferiority) that I just can’t imagine a feminine character.”⁵ Blind spot in the visionary’s pupil, “woman” can very well object that he sees nothing, understands nothing about her: it is because she is inside his eye like some speck suspended in the aqueous humor—one that moves with the movements of his gaze, on which he can never focus. How could one bring to life, through the act of writing, so intimate a foreign body?

This in no way means that Malraux shelters himself from women. To the contrary, he must absolutely expose himself to the test of that difference that he loves as much as he distrusts. Louise’s casualness spellbinds him. She dared to write, “I’m really only a signature. Maybe that’s what my charm is all about” (*Louise*, 69†). As for André, his purpose in signing was to break the spell that the matters of life cast on us, hoping (a hope that he knew to be vain) to exorcise all the Louises. To which Louise riposted, through Valérie’s exquisite mouth, smiling “that necessary smile” (yes, he did indeed write “necessary”), “No man can speak

of women, dear, because no man understands that every new makeup, every new dress, every new lover brings forth a new soul” (*MF*, 99).

André well understands fickleness—that visible aspect of bestial metamorphosis. He can even come to like it, as long as it becomes an artwork.

He encourages [Josette] to go out, to go to the seaside or up to the snow, so as to bring back to him the warm gilding of the Provençal summer or winter in the Pyrenees upon her skin. . . . One day, she complained about a pair of shoes that were too small (her big feet). “The long foot of the Dianas of antiquity,” he cried out, “Greta Garbo’s narrow foot.”

Because she seems made for the dresses and suits of those days, sewn out of exquisite materials, she buys her shoes Chez Cedric, her clothes Chez Lanvin or Lelong, managing to spend a fortune even at insider prices. He likes this, feeling the weight of the tweed, crumpling the silk, mentioning a Persian muslin that would be perfect for a certain blouse or gems that would go particularly well with that open neckline. He has a knack for turning the quotidian into the marvelous. (Chantal, 66†)

High fashion versus the dregs? Yes, except that he adds the slightly overheroic, the just-too-determined touch whereby the depths are somehow never low enough and one must dredge the mud until all is dried up. With his funds often nearly dried up, André spends what he has and more, knowing that the muck we call money is always plentiful in the depths: we just have to overcome our disgust. And disgusted he was not: no scruples when it came to *that*. Fine meals, clothes, wonders. One summer day in 1939, without explanation, he sent Josette out to a garage at Porte Champerret. A ravishing Ford V8 convertible (used, all the same) that he had had repainted bright red was awaiting the leading lady under the watchful eyes of the proles. Radiant, she let out the clutch, never having driven such a boat. She nicks just about everything as she takes her spin through Paris to Joinville, where André is wrapping up *Sierra de Teruel*. From there they leave for Montpellier via Chartres and Les Eyzies like a pair of Hollywood stars: some Fred Astaire twirling Ginger Rogers as they pass through the grand hotel’s revolving doors . . . if he weren’t so awkward.

Here is the femininity of André—that skinny cat who dances off the beat, stopping suddenly to wash his whiskers with the paw. Here, his *far-felu* vein—feline fantasia. It goes with that “not a word” superiority one

sees in a cat who settles in—imperious—first at your house, then on your lap, then taking you hostage. “He asserted,” Friang reports, “that he wrote certain manuscript pages with his arms curled around his cats” (Friang, 164†). Sitting down on the page he was writing with their back turned to him: he could approve of such reprobation expressed to the gentleman who claimed to have something better to do than pay attention to them. André had the same attitude with those closest to him: you have your “personal problems” and your “secrets”—perfectly understandable—allow me to simply sit down upon them, as you can on mine. “In the company of other men, Malraux acts the same way as a real cat surrounded by stuffed ones” (Chantal, 42†). What do those pensive creatures think about? About what the world was like “in 1938 or in 1944 or in 1968 *before Christ*” (ML, 10). Touchy and out of place, they don’t put faith in what the present is.

Even within the feline race, female perfidy (*félonie*) still leaves males jealous and disarmed. Brigitte Friang reports the following note received from Marcel Brandin, André’s old pal from the Bondy days, whom the minister was to keep near him as adviser in 1959, along with Louis Chevasson:

In one of his letters, beneath the indication “Drama involving adultery yesterday at the home of the Malraux. Dramatis personae: the husband (A.M.), the wife (Fourrure, the she-cat), the villainous seducer (your humble servant),” Marcel Brandin told me how, on his first visit to Verrières, Malraux had warned him: “Don’t be cross if the cats take off: they’re wary of strangers.” Thereupon, Brandin wrote, I delicately scratch the back of Fourrure’s neck, against the lay of her fur, then under her chin. Fourrure lets herself be petted for a few moments, then moves away calmly to go meditate—this was clear—about the behavior to adopt in my regard. As we sit down to table, she comes along at a slow trot to jump up on my lap and be petted some more. And she stays there. Malraux was livid. Meanly, he says it’s my odor that attracts her. But I know that I smell neither of Ronron⁶ nor of cat pee and I tell him so. “You must have rubbed yourself,” he continues, “up against some tom-cat before coming.” At the end of lunch with a somber and resolute look: “Tonight,” he blurts, “when she comes up on my bed, I’ll tell her to get lost, bitch, go sleep with that Brandin of yours.” I felt really sorry for him. His voice hissed. As for Fourrure, she visibly couldn’t give a damn. She knew that, once the evening came,

her “Boubouroche” would forgive her. These women! Brandin concluded. (Friang, 162–63†)

That Malraux! Never ceasing to percolate his defeat and to recall, even in the intimacy of his whimsically catty ways, that one never gets beyond sexual difference. And he protects that difference as one safeguards an inexhaustible, inexplicably pure and polluted source of inspiration. “Men and women belong to different species. What would you think of an author who set out to reveal the feelings of birds? That he is merely presenting a distortion of his own. That is our [Chinese men’s] opinion of the writer who discusses the feelings of women” (*TW*, 44*). He will believe he loves Josette as if she were his Galatea: passionately, she expected life and its finery to be granted her by André — with Aphrodite’s help. For if the adorable creature whose ivory knees Pygmalion caresses comes to life and desires him, it is owing to the whimsical goddess. Does André know this? Did he ever believe that he could make of Josette an artwork for himself exclusively? He met a beauty all dressed and ready who only lacked life. She too knows that it is thanks to love that she lives. But thanks to whose love? André’s or hers? Love itself, nothing more: the divine Purveyor’s little companion. And the fruit of the tireless Gravedigger as well.

“No other one of your passions, as much as love,” Monsieur Ling writes to his French friend, “caresses the beast and then arouses him” (*TW*, 41). Whence the agony. No sooner is she aroused than Josette is being tortured. Her creator, kind as he is, has other works in progress. His own statue, perhaps? Yet what if love, she thinks hopefully, were undivided? On this subject, the Western master of *The Temptation* has his ready-made doctrine. One must separate undivided love “from the desire to possess a woman” (*TW*, 93). Does this mean, therefore, that one must give up the idea of signing ardor when it is reciprocal? That love is “a strange forest.” Forest, of course, but what about its strangeness? No way to blaze one’s trail, so caught up one is in the project. No royal way: one is thrust into the lower levels, where “sensibility plays and suffers at will.” There can be no doubt that André suffered the torment of this dependency. With Clara, in the beginning; later with Josette. He was twenty-five, returning from the Khmer forest, when he caught a glimpse of the hell of dispossession: “playing and suffering at will, and, at times, dividing us, as if, *saturated by our emotions*, we could not bear them any longer” (*TW*, 93*). Lovers exasperated by their servitude, charged spheres attracting and repelling each other: Malraux was not ignorant of the ha-

tred for love that love harbors, the exhaustion of wanting still when one no longer wants anything.

He writes a short letter to Suzanne Chantal, by way of his epigraph for *Le Cœur battant*, in which he endeavors to avoid confidences concerning his relations with Josette by shifting the accent onto Suzanne and her friendship alone. A remark slips out, nonetheless: those intense pages that the two women exchanged with such unswerving loyalty are to friendship what love was to the Portuguese nun's *Lettres*.⁷ Between us, you and I have but one throat shared by two and neither of us can stand that for long. Whatever there was between Josette and him was silenced by pain, modesty, and repugnance for all that is biographical.

Yet in comparing his love for Josette to the infrangible union between friends, the lover confesses the extent to which their communion had been violent. The young woman never bargained her surrender to André. He was stunned by the appeal with which this beauty struck him — so naked, so heedless of her own security, so humble, finally, in her splendor. She never dreamed of trying to be his equal and, in so doing, inadvertently taught him that he would never be her equal in the realm of leisure. He fell into a dependency that was perhaps without precedent — a dependency that he needed and that he detested. The more she demanded to give herself, the more he resisted and granted the demand. In coupling, they arranged themselves like “insects one can kill without being able to sever their embrace. Clinging to one another as the dying cling to the red-hot iron of their agony” (*Laz.*, 117–18).

In September 1936, between two stints in Madrid, André, overwhelmed with work — “I sleep three hours a night” — gives in to Josette and to exhaustion and spends long mornings lounging around in their bedroom inundated with sunlight at the Hôtel Elysée Park on the Rond-Point. Does she believe her prayers to have been answered? He sleeps coiled up against her like a child. She contemplates him. She has mocha and brioches brought up: he'll be hungry when he awakes. Those who don't know these long mornings sleeping in know nothing of what he is. Are geniuses insomniacs? If so, she writes to her girlfriend, then André's not a genius. Peering over Florence's cradle in the Rue du Bac apartment, she had dared exclaim, “I'd like to have a little baby like that, too.” Clara dryly replied that in that case, she'd do well to check with Roland. Impossible: to whom other than André could she offer up the sumptuous distress contained in her fabulous golden skin and her plaintive soul? “It's wonderful to bare one's soul to someone who takes everything for good” (Chantal, 80†).

In 1934, at the Hôtel du Théâtre-Français, already naked, she was drawing the curtains and turning out the lights when he emerged from the bathroom. “Close your eyes,” she begged. “Why?” he laughed, “the Venus of Syracuse allows herself to be admired.” Then, kindly, he closed his eyes. She asked him if it was true that she resembled Brigitte Helm.⁸ Yes, of course. But in your serious mood, you look more like Michelangelo’s *Night*, and when you’re tender, Primaticcio’s *Penelope* (Chantal, 59, 60). Dark shadows, the spider spinning the return: figures of dread sublimated by art. Dragged down by his desire, he strives to pull himself back up by turning her into an artwork. Being a creature of art in her soul, by nature, she didn’t need his help. This game of his kills her with disappointment: she gives her all while André just goes along. “My love, my life is spent in a monologue with you. . . . When I’m seventy will I finally be able to phone you without feeling a sense of terror and go to the movies with you on Sundays?” (Chantal, 81, 83†). She’ll never reach seventy.

Meanwhile, with Clara, things are degenerating, inevitably, into a series of unpleasant skirmishes. And for the same reasons things had gone so well before: their camaraderie in matters of culture, intelligence, and intrepidity. Gide, who had been lending an indiscreet ear in those years to Clara’s secrets and grievances (all the while telling third parties how insufferable she was), said to her dreamily one day: Your sexuality is masculine. Mainly it was that she flattered herself—somewhat like a slightly vain man might—in never giving precedence to Malraux. As much for the challenge as out of love she had followed him nearly everywhere, unable as she was to love without being defiant, as if to make clear to him, and to the general audience, that she could give him points in almost any competition: threatening situations, adventure, intelligence, knowledge, and writing. Exercising the will, especially: in love as in hate, Clara suffered from merciless tenacity. This translated into Josette’s never being able to marry André. “She’s deaaaad!” Clara is supposed to have declared in full voice on entering the Toulouse bookstore owned by her friends, the Trentin, when she learned, in December 1944, of the fatal accident that had just eliminated her rival (*Marronniers*, 367). And if it is true that little Florence owes her survival against the Occupiers’ pursuit and deprivation to her mother’s energy alone, she also owes to her mother’s resentment being brought up in an atmosphere of constant hostility to her father: only forty-six years later did Florence find out about the letter, intercepted by Clara, that he had written in 1943 wishing her a happy tenth birthday (*Marronniers*, 343–44).

During the 1930s, Malraux redoubles activities, initiatives, responsibilities of all kinds. He saturates his days to the point of overflowing as if he had to flee something inside: books, antifascist meetings, the short drop-in on the Queen of Sheba, the *NRF*, exhibits, polemics, Spain—he's everywhere. In her capacity as militant, feminist or some other, Clara comes to Madrid from time to time. "I've lost count of the number of committees I'm on" (Clara, 4:218†). First and foremost, what absorbs her is *Neu Beginn*, a small group of German political refugees with Trotskyite leanings, in which she takes her apprenticeship as an underground figure, counterfeiting IDs, identifying hideouts, setting rendezvous in the rear of cafés, near the courtyard door, or in the third car of some Métro train. French security, the Gestapo, and the GPU will all eventually be hot on these outlaws' heels. And the sympathies she flaunts in Spain for anarchism, Trotskyites, and POUM inevitably annoy the *coronel*, who, at the time, is trying to get himself accepted by the Stalinists. Lodging next door to them at Madrid's Hotel Florida, Corniglion-Molinier can hear the Malraux having it out nightly.

But, as often as not, Clara is held back in Paris by her baby. Florence was born on 28 March 1933—a year after Berthe died, nine months before the Goncourt. André-Garine would say, "I don't want to give any guarantees to society." In Switzerland, where they go to rest a bit in the summer of 1932, Clara drags him into a pastry shop and proceeds to wolf down cakes. "What's gotten into you, devouring them this way?" She laughs: "What if I were to tell you that I got pregnant an hour ago?" (Clara, 4:178†). This child "is all you ever wanted out of me," grumbles the gentleman, out of wounded vanity and aversion to reproduction (Clara, 4:207†). As for the child, "she will have at least done one thing intelligent for beginners: she was a girl and not a boy. I would never have been able to stand some caricature of myself" (Clara, 4:180†). As if he were casting an evil spell on the two sons Josette will give him—both killed at twenty years of age. The antifather is somewhat moved in 1933, nevertheless: he suggests that the "object" be named Florence in memory of the grand hours spent in Tuscany. And Flo, her mother says to herself, melting with gratitude, means "flea" in German.⁹ For André the name meant the inverse: a flourishing of lights, tones, and volumes so lofty that the creepy crawlies could never get the better of it.

Clara was a flapper. While he was writing *Man's Fate* in 1932, he had read her the "confession scene" that was destined for fame (*MF*, 41–50). The drama is situated in Shanghai, before dawn, on 21 March 1927. Kyo, in charge of the armed Communist sections, is torn: What is the politi-

cally just line? Touch off the insurrection against Chiang? Or follow the wait-and-see orders that will come from Moscow? May—his companion in political struggle, the woman he loves undividedly—comes back from the hospital where she practices. She “wound up going to bed with Lenglen,” a colleague who has been pursuing her for a long while. It’s of no importance, she says, and besides, Kyo knows her rectitude. And yet, “a feeling that had no name, as destructive as time or death” took hold of him: “he could not find her again” (*ME*, 47*). There follows a solitary meditation on their relations: he hears her and is heard by her not in the usual manner (through the medium of their ears) but live, through the other’s throat, just as one hears one’s own voice. Another big “scene”—that of “repentance”—ensues around midnight on 11 April as the denouement of the previous one (*ME*, 165–72): just when he’s ready to leave to join the insurrection, Kyo locks the door on May, refusing to expose her to dying along with him. He goes off, then has a change of heart, runs back, retracing his steps: “he unlocks the door” . . .

“These are the finest pages of love written for a woman in recent years,” André declared without idle modesty to his wife. Clara was infuriated, and doubly so (Clara, 363). In the first place, this was plagiarism: the text was inspired word for word by the confession she had made to André in 1925, when she’d returned from Indochina, about her brief affair with G. She was, in fact, the text’s author. (An exasperated Malraux will one day say to Alain that “Madame Clara wrote all my books” [*Marrouniers*, 43].) As for the more fundamental point of the scene, she seemed to concede: “Yes, he was right: we hear our voice through our throat, other people’s through our ears” (Clara, 363). But on whether we may hear the other through our own throat and if that is where love resides—the true issue that supports Kyo’s monologue—Clara knew nothing. And this deafness led her to conclude in this plain language: “In the scene with Kyo and May it is only the man’s path that we follow” (Clara, 363). We have seen how the Phnom Penh “suicide victim” was already resisting the follow-my-leader attitude from her hospital bed while keeping her “accounts” beneath the sheets. By asserting her copyright over the scene in Shanghai she was still persisting, eight years later, in saying no to the fusion with the other that Kyo discovers within himself. Clara relent? Inconceivable for her.

In September 1934, they were returning on the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Novosibirsk, the site of the new industrial complex the regime had created. With their eyes closed, an index finger to the map had designated this city for spending their ruble reserve before leaving the So-

viet Union. After a few days spent in a comfortable resort for party officials located at the foot of the Altai, we find them on their way back in a sleeper car tête-à-tête. Through the window of the otherwise empty compartment, the wood-crowned hills rolled by. Clara was deep in her reading. — What's gripping you so? — Let me finish. It was Marcelle Sauvageot's *Commentaire*. The young author had just died of tuberculosis. Charles du Bos had prefaced the edition of these texts that past December. André leafs through it:

Why do you ask me if he for whom I was made exists? To a woman, one says "he for whom you were made," and "she who was made for you" to a man. Why not "she for whom you were made"? Man simply *is* and everything seems to have been put at his disposal . . . even a particular woman, somewhere in the world, suited to him, the union with whom preexisted his birth. (Sauvageot, 61)

The train puffed to a halt somewhere in the steppes. Water was prepared, a *baba* offering little baskets of raspberries made her way along the ballast, beggars begged, muzhiks settled into the next car down. André turns the pages: "For one, love means conquering; for the other, submission. . . . all the rest receives the vague terms 'friendship,' 'affection,' 'devotion' " (Sauvageot, 71–72).

André slams the book shut and tosses it on the bench across the compartment. — It's obviously made to your liking. — And why do you say that? — Because it's a book full of all sorts of judgments. — You judge women. I don't see why they shouldn't have the right to judge you. — Your perpetual demands are absurd. — You're a well-served and ungrateful Charles VII. — The day I leave you, you'll slip into the most sordid Montparnasse-style life. — And you, she thought, into that conceited society life of yours. — Anyway, he finds to throw her into a tizzy, I only married you for your money. — Pimp! Thirty years later Clara recounted the scene to Alain: "I called him that and slapped him! That straightened him out: he grabbed my wrists firmly and said, 'Don't get too crazy on me!'" And you, Clara, a perfidious Alain asks, were you ever slapped by him? "With truly farcical bombast, she pompously said: 'He wouldn't have dared'" (Clara, 4:275).

Thus they thrived on hating each other, their hatred growing because they thrived on knowing how to stage their loathing in unison and how to play it to perfection. Right after picking her up in Marseilles upon returning from Jerusalem, he had taken great pleasure in playing for her the role of the buck confessing his latest conquest. In tandem in the

Trans-Siberian, they executed that great classic of the domestic repertoire: the breakup scene.

To all appearances less femme fatale, gayer, and more of a libertine, Louise possessed the curiosity of a Clappique for what men (and women?) would try to get out of her. Her countless lovers had all been madly in love. Was it that she gave herself without reservation to eroticism? Her motto, in any case, was “Help!” and it was inscribed, in accordance with her wishes, on her tombstone in the park at Verrières. Yet what help could a narcissism so unassailable in its very distress ever hope to accept? Her lovers got no more out of her than that of which she was already capable. She learned nothing. She wrote doggerel, holorhymes, palindromes, changed husbands as one changes rackets between sets, welcomed everyone to her castle. “The crystal ball itself, hey presto! I will have scoured all eternity. I will have had my nights in the mists of time, in its awful obscurity. I will have stretched out my arms in the dark and offered my arm to knights in dress suits. I will have done no more and no less than others, but since I’m well aware of it, I will have lived my life and died alive” (*Louise*, 304).

A living dead man, André’s obsession was the exact opposite. How could he ever have been seduced by such a blasé despair, one so comfortably nestled in its gay wisdom? “Louise,” he confessed to Gogo de Karolyi, “was an illness” (*Louise*, 83). What illness? And who suffered from it? “I succumbed to her charm and she would end up exasperating me” (*Louise*, 284). Enchanted that she knew so well how vain everything was, her frivolity infuriated him even though he was a widower most of his life. That society life of hers surrounded by admirers, raging on into the night and on Sundays in the blue salon at Verrières, that tone of hers—that of some slumming Guermantes—her “words,” all her final judgments on literary subjects—“vacuous and boring as hell,” the marble Lazarus decided: “Elaborate a little, my dear, elaborate.” That high society that didn’t give a damn about anything as long as its pocketbook wasn’t touched considered the minister rather pedantic. One was pretty much allowed to be anything except boring. And Malraux wasn’t droll: he had ideas. She called him her “big recumbent statue” (*Louise*, 287). Because it stirred hers, his melancholy frightened her. “I’m alone, stifled, I’m asking for mercy. Oh! I didn’t know he’d lead me into this desert. I had seen other promises in his eyes” (*Louise*, 300).

Other than her perdition, what else could André’s eyes promise this flirt who, while smiling, implored with her eyes for help? In her bedroom

in December 1969, Louise expired from an elegant cardiac arrest while the confounded hero looked on. “It’s the first time I’ve seen an easy death,” he confessed; he’d always been on the front when the dying behind the lines was going on. The warrior had never given a thought to women’s deaths—least of all his mother’s. A few months later, Gallimard published a selection of Louise’s poems, which Malraux prefaced. He attempted to pay homage to the sad gaiety of her ritornelli: a prosody, he wrote, “born of the passage from a voice that speaks to a voice that remains silent”; “conscious of the ephemeral,” Louise’s tone, he decided, was like that of Heine. Everything’s six of one, half a dozen of the other, as the poor people’s song goes: “‘Louise’ is the *nom de guerre*,” the poetess joked, “that I gave in and accepted.” Thus André wrote a threnody to weariness at giving pleasure, to taking pleasure in everything all the while believing in nothing. She had a slight limp, like Queen Balkis; she was beautiful: an unconsolable star. It was thus that he loved her.

The erotically libertine redolence with which she had marked him in 1933, though tenderly faded, still had him swooning thirty years later. He had been less curious than Louise of sensuous possibilities, of the unknown paths that *jouissance* can open up in bodies and souls. For her, these games were, like their cousin, the act of writing, absolutely necessary: the sole means of killing the time of her dead life. Whereas in Malraux’s theology (or rather atheology), eroticism had always signified safeguarding the self, refusing to lose oneself in amorous communion. “There is something erotic about a mind which applies itself to elucidating a woman,” a sententious Gisors explains to Ferral. “To want to know a woman, it seems to me, is always a way of possessing her or of taking revenge on her” (*MF*, 188). And the no less affected European concludes the thought thus: “man can and must deny woman” (*MF*, 191). Woman: the generic term for the thing that, under human guise, awakens the abject desire to live and proliferate, assuaging that desire through male intervention. Man, inhabited by concupiscence as well, strives to have his partner be the only one devoured in the process. His orgasm (*jouir*) consists not of spontaneous pleasure, but of unmasking the other’s truth: vanquished by delight, this beautiful creature—one among many—lies twisting like a worm severed (*coupé*) in the earth by a spade. And it is in this section, this simultaneous blow (*coup*) and sectioning (*coupe*), that his being-as-man—that which signs—announces itself.

That which signs, however, his separation, his phobia of difference. He’s a miserable individual agitated by the same devilment that he in-

spires in the woman in order to destroy her, a male without object, with no other love than love for himself: “He derived his pleasure from putting himself in the place of the other, that was clear: of the other, compelled; compelled by him. . . . his will to power never achieved its object, lived only by renewing it; . . . he would possess through this Chinese woman who was awaiting him, the only thing he was eager for: himself” (*MF*, 194). These gentlemen are powers that are cleaved, tensed tightly between the fantasy of dominating sex and the anguished thought of being under its domination. As for the other, she is not always the-Chinese-woman-who-was-waiting. “A woman is *also* a human being,” protests Valérie; “I refuse to be regarded as a body, just as you refuse to be regarded as a checkbook” (*MF*, 182). Reproduction of capital and its *jouissance*: just as it lies in our beds, the seat of the sexual is at the bank. Ferrel is a checkbook, he indeed weighs his weight in dirty, mucky dough. But he signs it. Upon the body that she is, Valérie expects also to possess the signature.

Her “human being” keeps its accounts and expects to earn interest on her investments: such is the signature that one can or does indeed possess or that, like Clara, one claims. It’s a question of property law, of habeas corpus, according to Malraux. Diabolical and edenic lovers — the only true ones — forget their reserve and love gets signed by no one: sexual difference can only be guessed at through the missing paraph. Only the ingenuousness of a young male could have suggested that he master his libido the way Perken did in the Somali whorehouse:

The brothel-keeper had pushed a smiling little girl towards Perken.

“No,” he had said. “I want that one, over there. She, at least, doesn’t look as if she enjoyed it.” (*RW*, 10)

This indifference flaunted by the object, its frigidity, or its fear will, he believes, increase by tenfold its pleasure when subjected to his erotic maneuvers. However, permission — obtained by money — to rape the young girl will end in a fiasco. And just as *The Royal Way* opens upon this forced farewell to naive perversions carried out in brothels, the adventure that follows (Perken carving his mark into the body of the woman-forest) also culminates in a total flop (*RW*, 91). Consistent is the lesson that sexual difference administers to Malraux’s libertines: whosoever wishes to derive pleasure (*jouir*) from the fair sex through mastery ends up its slave; whosoever thinks only of fornication loses even the ability to touch the other.

And what if you imagine that you can elude such setbacks by reversing the roles and allowing the Gravedigger to devour you? Abjection is tempting, after all. Maybe as good a system as wanting to sign is to become no more than an object of fancy (*à passades*), a body for tricks (*de passe*), indifferent to signatures, to allow oneself to be signed just any old way by anybody or anything. A kind of suicide? No doubt. But survival as well. With insufficient funds, one can no longer write out checks; overdrawn, one heads for the roulette table. One “stakes” one’s last pennies on chance. All too involved in that game, Clappique lets slip away the hour by which he could have warned Kyo that Chiang’s police were going to pick him up. Drunk with irresponsibility, the baron walks by a pickup bar once again, only to realize, “I am like a woman who doesn’t know what a new lover is going to get out of her. . . . Let’s go and commit suicide with this one” (*MF*, 210). Lodged in his surrender to the “What does it matter?” attitude is the whore-loving male’s secret desire for inversion. Even as Ferral claims to extract from “the woman” an assertion of his conqueror’s identity, is he not *devoured* by his hunger to know what “she” will be able to do with him?

Whichever the mode — active or passive, as they’re called — the erotic contract is signed with no one other than oneself. The whole enterprise derives from the same question and returns to it without response: What of myself in relation to pleasure? Accursed question if there ever was one, according to Malraux. If some escape from Western autism exists, it must be dug out through the underground of the ego’s prison: prior to the sense of sight, far from the ears, that escape passes through the throat.

Recurrent throughout Malraux’s work, the throat motif was expressed early — already in 1929 — and in the quite unexpected context of a discussion on the modern novel and its reception, when the writer was called on to defend *The Conquerors* before the Union for Truth.

Since Christianity disappeared as the world’s framework, the novelist — following the philosopher and whether he likes it or not — has become someone who proposes various ways of life. These he proposes as a function of an irreducible element closely linked to literary creation, that is, as a function of a particular dimension that does not exist in life. (*OC*, 1:287†)

Stripped of the authority that some common faith in God or (at least) in Man had conferred upon it, literary writing is sustained by what Mal-

raux, commenting six years later on Gide's *Later Fruits of the Earth*, would call a "particular obsession": a barely conscious matrix upon which a writer's impressions and expressions are obstinately molded and which lends his writing its secret singularity.

If this is the case, what echo can a work born of such separation find in its readers? "We hear our own voice through our throat and the voice of others through our ears" (*OC*, 1:287†). Is not each and every one of us incarcerated, then, in incommunicability? No, because reading can perform a miracle: "through biographical facts" (*before* them really), we become conscious of a particular character "as we would become conscious of ourselves" (*OC*, 1:288†). Written with intensity, demanding to be read with passion, as foreign to us as it might be, a hero's story comes to us through our throat. Literature (like art) owes its sovereignty, as Bataille would later say, to its ability to share that which cannot be shared. Is this some fortunate escape from schizophrenia? Intractable, schizophrenia persists as it bids the reader adieu. The solitude represented in the work is that very thing that touches the reader trapped in his own. The reader may very well hear the hero's story as the life of another. Yet through the rumbling he also hears another, silent voice: that of his own anguish.

But is this even a voice? In this early Malraux text, the strange form of communication seems to have given rise to a "realization" How can knowledge be obtained from the moan, intermingled with yours, rising up out of my enraptured throat? *The Voices of Silence* speak less obscurely in 1956:

We know that man does not become conscious of himself in the same way he becomes conscious of the world. We know that to ourselves, each of us is like a monster out of a nightmare. In the past, I recounted the adventure of a man who fails to recognize his own recorded voice because he hears it for the first time through his ears instead of through his throat. And, because our throat alone transmits to us our inner voice, I entitled that book *Man's Fate*. (*VS/E*, 630*)

We should understand that the self whose "inner voice" awakens consciousness is a monster. We should understand that the consciousness that we have of it is neither objective nor subjective knowledge. And we should understand that when present, that which within us is most intimate is also most foreign. It stands apart from us as much as we are

apart from others; as much, we should say, as we are “haunted.” In 1929, Malraux suggested the word “obsessed.”

In 1974, Lazarus recalls: “I created a character (I don’t remember which) who hears a phonograph emitting his recorded voice and doesn’t recognize it. Perhaps banal today, this experience hasn’t lost its symbolic power. Men always hear their voice through their throat and those of others through their ears” (*Laz.*, 140–41*). Still unsharable, yet the question of its sharing is raised before the unreal: “If we did hear a voice other than our own through our throat, we would be terrified.” An almost mystical horror. How can we know if the throat is that of another if the groan is a shared groan? We don’t know. But, for better or worse, Saint Augustine of *The Confessions* and a certain Teresa of Avila discern a tone that, while foreign, nonetheless joins in their lamentation. These inaudible nuptials were once called “grace.”

1933. In a Shanghai side street, in the dead of night, Kyo is walking next to Katow. Both of them are silent.

“Yes,” Kyo says to himself, “One also hears one’s life through the throat. But what of that of others? First there was solitude—the immutable solitude behind the mortal multitude like the great primitive night behind this dense and heavy night under which the deserted city, filled with hope and hatred, kept watch.” (*MF*, 49*)

Lost in the immense darkness of the sky and on man’s earth, where everyone calls out without response. “But myself, for my throat, who am I? A sort of absolute affirmation; the affirmation of a madman; an intensity greater than that of all the rest. To others, I am what I have done” (*MF*, 49*). Floored by his fever, Lazarus discerns that “‘I’ without a self” which resists the fatal passage (*Laz.*, 84). Showy performance, parody, eloquent death, the ego plays out its biography on the stage of the world. But inside, beneath the boards, an “I” remains, persisting with bestial tenacity. Affirming what? Nothing: just that there is . . . that there is a remainder.

An ontological experience, a feeling of being that man reproves more than he feels (*éprouve*). He reproves it, yet the inhuman in him says yes to the experience. Does this mean that something that is not pragmatic is nevertheless communicable?

Only to May was he not what he had done; to him alone, she was altogether other than her biography. It was not man who was helped

in the embrace by which love maintains two beings glued one to the other against solitude, but the madman, the incomparable monster cherished above all else that everyone is for oneself and that one holds dearly in one's heart. (*MF*, 49–50*)

Thanks to free indirect discourse, Malraux mingles the voice of the woman to the man's soliloquy, and his voice to theirs. Love's proof "was not happiness, certainly, but something primitive that thrived in the darkness and caused a fire to be kindled in him that culminated in an immobile embrace, like one cheek against another — the only thing in him as powerful as death" (*MF*, 49–50*).

The coitus of larvae, love causes the truth of being to murmur. A throat opens in human existence like a trench through which passes the mute complaint straight from the communal grave of teeming vermin enslaved to *la Redite*—the Redundant One. Deploration will go unheard. "The Italian fighter planes bore down on us through the giant sights of those days. I begin to fire and the sight is furiously shaken. A hellish racket fills the plane's turret." So much for the theatrical. As for the incomparable monster:

Nonchalantly, an ant walks across the sight through which I am firing on the Italians who are doing their best to machine-gun me. Ants are deaf.

In a way, men are, too. (*FO*, 40*)

Communion's only chance of coming to pass is in this bestial, mystagogical deafness. It is the exception confirming the rule of discursive exchange. "I had once written that every man hears the life of others through his ears: not so in fraternity or love" (*Laz.*, 141†). For the initiatory scene, Malraux offers up the image of completely deafened enemy soldiers (Germans and Russians) twisted together into staggering monsters, illegible in the putrid fog of the first poison gases. On the Vistula front of 1916, the Bolgako Forest decomposes into an archaic cloaca; the Scourge reduces man's war to convulsive larvae (*Laz.*, 23–49). The same swoon — in this case fraternal, elsewhere amorous — overcomes the human being as he rears back, speechless, before filth.

(This communion is comparable — if I may be permitted a comparison — to the ecstatic and nocturnal animality toward which Bataille's "inner experience" aims. In 1958, Malraux rendered succinct, scintillating homage to Bataille: "I consider Georges Bataille one of the true writers of our time and the author of some of our best books on art."¹⁰ There

is, with both writers, a resolve to hold up out of the darkness a conviction that the ego and discourse prohibit true communication and that the latter comes only through the experience of extremes. From within the spasm or the throes of death, the sense of unmitigated sacrifice lends their respective understandings of nihilism an analogous consequence no matter how different those understandings may be in tone and mode—I am thinking of the destiny both writers lent to action. For both, only the inhuman—and not the superhuman—can carry out the murder of God because it seeks its nourishment on the putrefaction of his cadaver.)

Is it really necessary to decide once and for all whether, on the issue of degrees of communal violence, love or fraternity gets the upper hand? Were it so, the prize would probably go to love. Fraternity is considered virile because it is experienced in combat—even if combat be carried out by women. There is a stupid clarity, a stupefying obviousness to combat. War or political engagement, one must march right up to the front line, and Malraux misses no occasion to present himself there. Whether colonialism, fascism and Nazism, Francoism, denatured democracy, Stalinism, it's always the same enemy: the evil that in one man desires to subjugate and humiliate another, to force the other into baseness, the meanness that seizes the occasion to resist in the name of some illusory cause. It must thus be confronted on the world's stage.

In love, the enemy does not advance frontally. It already occupies a place that is immanent in passion but masked under the tender tyranny of desire. The sexual is unnameable: it is perhaps the unnameable itself. Its menace symbolizes, at the very least, all intense experience—first and foremost, that of combat: “There are no words to describe the feeling one has when marching upon the enemy. And yet, that feeling is as specific and as strong as sexual desire and anguish” (*AM*, 215†). As we have seen, the same comparison designates the horror that Lazarus discovers beneath the ruins of the dying ego: it is independent of all fear, “as sexuality is independent of all objects (except ourselves)” (*Laz.*, 92†). The tanks of a Hitler or a Franco may advance in waves or in convoys like the killer scorpions we can see: their strength lies, nevertheless, right in the guts of the fighter who confronts them. Is it the same strength that disarms a man who yearns for a woman?

One can destroy tanks: willpower is capable of signing such victories, of appropriating them, of deriving glory from them. Willpower can thus forget itself as daughter of Eros. But will one ever have “made” love enough to have burst that thing inside, the thing below? “Each body

that one hasn't yet possessed is — an enemy," Perken confides to Claude: it just comes along and excites baseness, reviving one's subjection to sex (*RW*, 93). The fiasco in the Djibouti whorehouse wasn't caused by impotence: it was the symptom of an a priori defeat awaiting the libertine conqueror: "All the women I've missed. . . . It's hard to realize all the loathing of the world that lies behind that thought: 'one woman more'" (*RW*, 93). Terrified by his weakness, Don Juan tots up his victims like so many annihilated insects. They are reborn and he dies emasculated.

In 1939, Malraux publishes "Laclos and *Les Liaisons dangereuses*" in *Tableau de la Littérature Française*. He had suggested the idea for this volume to the *NRF* ten years earlier: one of today's writers would enter into an entirely open debate — one, that is, in accordance with his own "obsession" — with a writer of the past who would be conjured up according to his. No academicism, just throat-to-throat writing.

The argument of his "Laclos" can be expressed in these two sentences: "Every psychology and every experience comes from man grasped as a mystery. Every mythology is a victory over that mystery" (*TN*, 43–44†). The hero is the victor who, rather than eliminating the mystery, "devalues" it. Valmont and Merteuil are heroes. They are both intent on subjecting the enigma of sexual desire to their mythology, to the representation that they have conceived of themselves: to become, precisely, masters of sex. *Les Liaisons dangereuses* unveils the fable of a will that, by constraining desire, desires itself. Eroticism is born of this constraint. Eroticism is intensified because the strategy directing the plot and the axiomatic of passion that the various machinations put into play are exhibited openly to the reader in the form of letters exchanged: the reader delights in the voyeurism afforded by having the entire dossier spread wide open before his eyes.

However, Malraux muddles this diagram. Laclos, he maintains, would have produced little more than the story of a woman determined to cuckold a lover who left her "if the book were merely the application of willpower to sexual ends. But it is altogether something else: it is an eroticization of willpower. The will and sexuality intermingle and multiply, forming a single domain. . . . Willpower becomes a component of the erotic domain of the book" (*TN*, 48†). Here we have the psychic and the mythical enmeshed in an awkward complicity, as if the will to mastery dropped to the level of desire formation and as if mythomania (or, worse, mythopoesis — creation) were the mere toy of the sexual instead of claiming the sexual as its plaything.

Malraux's pen twice suggests this somber reading when he situates himself among Laclos's heirs: "We will lose our fine confidence in the strength of the mind over life. . . . Intelligence, which really only opposes stupidity or virtue in *Les Liaisons*, will end up encountering a much more fearsome enemy in *Mothers*" (TN, 31†). (He republishes his Laclos, incidentally, in 1970, along with his no less nocturnal essays on Saint-Just and Goya, under the title *Le Triangle noir*.) Then, in his conclusion, there is this conjecture framed by blank lines: "It is no fluke that the *final* game leader is a woman" (TN, 48).

The heroine of willpower who, like Loyola, practices the mastery of pleasure and pain is not a true game leader. We know, moreover, that Merteuil succumbs to amorous jealousy when she sees for herself that Valmont has fallen for his victim, the *Présidente*. Malraux does not draw from these repeated signs of weakness the expected morality—that is, that from conflicts of vanity love always comes out the winner because it is refractory to ulterior motives. No, what causes the breakdown of the military pride attached to decision making is not the factor of the all-too-tender heart. Berthe's son can make out the effects of the anonymous thing that forces everything to be born and to die—the fatal already-done of the *Moirai*, the *Mothers*' last word (in the second *Faust*) as well as their first: the word that is indifferent to any undertaking. Merteuil is not the game leader because she too is gripped by this: the monster of the depths.

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AT NIGHTFALL, WITH KEY PULLED out of pocket and then slipped into the lock of the little back door, a hand gropes forth toward the table lamp standing to the right on the old wooden chest, precipitating a weak, umbel-shaped light allowing one corner of the kitchen to bloom. Silently, you remove your shoes and loosen your tie. Will you sit down? Pour yourself a quiet glass? Watch the fanciful curl of one last cigarette strut about as it issues from the edge of the chipped ashtray? You let yourself be bathed in the spicy scents emanating from the cupboard and the reek of yesterday evening's stew. From farther off come the acrid odors of slightly spoiled dairy products and the beige aroma floating around the *cèpes* stowed in the root cellar that take the liberty of sniffing at your nostrils like friendly animals identifying you as they identify themselves.

Already, he lends an ear to the light breathing that comes from the end of the hallway: it waits patiently for him in the bedroom. Smoothly, he slips in next to the thing of pulp—both animal- and vegetation-like—overcome by the immobile confusion of sleep, opalescent in her burrow of bedding. A simple heating plant meant for its own conservation as she crosses through the darkness, she nonetheless will not fail to envelop the hard, cold, exhausted body in her climate—your

body that just arranged itself next to her, causing her to turn her rump or her breasts toward you, mumbling something. A man returns home. A child might be sleeping in the room next door, old photographs on the wall may await their moments of veneration. Fatigue has its remainder of time, its reprieve. No need to disguise yourself like Ulysses in beggar getup in order to foil some pretender: there is no enemy in the man's dwelling. And that dwelling gives, it draws from him a truth more ancient than his wars: a peace that is never disturbed.

Such was the offering that Josette tendered to him at the Vernet house in the summer of 1937, at the Roquebrune villa on the Riviera in 1942, at the Saint-Chamant château in the Corrèze in 1943 and 1944 — so many family bosoms she opened to him. Apparently in vain. He couldn't stand being welcomed. He loathed himself as a little boy whose diurnal stupidities would by evening be absolved by the leniency of women. He didn't live anywhere in particular, he would say: he was just passing through, here and there. Everywhere he went he carried his razor, his revolver, his cigarettes, and his pen: the arms and toys of the escapee. Not that he had turned vagrancy into a principle, as those writers and artists do who are infatuated with hotels and furnished rooms and can live on the occasional chunk of bread believing that they are shielding their existence from the weight of bourgeois domestic habits. On the contrary, like certain parvenus, André had a predilection for sumptuousness. None of the successive dwellings that sheltered him — neither Roquebrune nor even Saint-Chamant during the war nor the Boulogne mansion, later on, nor the Lanterne pavilion in the grounds of Versailles, leased to him by the prime minister, nor his late-life refuge in the Vilmorin manor house at Verrières — none, so far as we know, inspired any commiseration on his part. This galloping runaway always took as much care in dressing as he possibly could: while cabinet minister, he bought his clothing at Lanvin. And if he quickly took the habit of lunching in restaurants like traveling salesmen or proles, the tables where he became a habitué were among the finest Paris had to offer.

The man of fashion could, nevertheless, live for a week in the same flight jumpsuit; the gourmet could sustain himself — under enemy fire and without flinching — on a bit of cheese and bread while he shot his film in the arid mountains of Catalonia. He showed no sign of suffering while a prisoner of war in the camp at Sens, where rations were meager or nonexistent and the men slept directly on the ground without shelter. He even tended to show off his endurance. But, in a way, if we think about it, what credit does he deserve for it when he seemed to care little

or not at all about loss of comfort and longed for no particular dwelling place? Cigarettes and wine, the freedom to come and go at will: this was where he was at home. With military regulations loose, the regimen at the Provins barracks had been fairly easy. But when he was made prisoner at Sens, all of a sudden he lacked for everything: alcohol, tobacco, and a wall he could jump over when he wanted. He still had his master key: the pen. And he found paper. “In this place, writing is the only way to keep alive” (*WTA*, 24). He had made the same declaration to Clara upon leaving Indochina.

Before escaping literally, he escaped by the pen. Without leaving the place where he was, he transformed it by writing. The Sens *Lager* became the “camp in Chartres” for *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*. Imagination outclassed realist precision. As false witness, literature was truer than a memoir. If ever there was a dwelling for him, it was this one, which is never grounded, which could be established and abolished with the drift of the pen. For this odd bird, homes and addresses served merely as stages in his migration or as opportunities for taking a breather. Always feeling like a hostage in kitchens, beds, arms, the congestion of sleep, as if they were dungeons, he could think only of clearing out. Always lightly armed, *expeditus*, sleeping with one eye open, he deprived his emaciated body (“too tall for his size,” it was said) of the rest and recovery afforded by any home.

The hospitality that he did receive, here and there, put his terror of the gluey trap on the alert. A cot would do the trick and, in his bag, as his only possessions, a small Braque painting and two or three Indian or Oceanian fetishes. He thumbed through the world’s immense catalog of place-names—calendars, maps, newspapers—and, for each one, planned out some expedition that needed to be led immediately and *de visu*. Lawrence, too, was as impassioned by maps as he was by medieval relics. And he too just had to go see for himself. At twenty he was bicycling all over England and France (280 kilometers a day, would note a stupefied Malraux, who could only handle a pistol) to take pictures of Anglo-Roman pottery and fortified castles and make tracings of recumbent statues (*DA*, 738). Pinning his pictures as he went, Malraux would classify them. This is why all of his books were albums of snapshots taken on the wing, chosen for their intensity, meant for composition. Framing, cropping, mounting—all this was the work of a great reporter: elliptically producing a gripping relationship out of disparate facts. Since today, the “object of art” is no longer to “destroy the fact” in favor of a fictive world created by metaphor (where reporting would have neither function nor

value), the art's work is "the elliptical comparison not between two *words* but between two facts." This being so, "the filmmaker and the reporter are in their glory, and their strength is the same."¹

In his work, we find none of the intimist pauses or long takes that lend that languorous tempo characteristic of narratives by Gide or Proust, Mauriac or Martin du Gard. Other than the rooms where wakes are held over the remains of some son or some father, there are nothing but sketches of streets, deserts, forests, mountains, and sidereal nights. These are projects for monuments to solitude hastily rendered as reminders of the vanity of action, flashes of a memento mori whose pomp will later be displayed in the funeral orations. The only "interiors" one can decipher in the novels are artists' studios, intellectuals' libraries, conference halls, opium dens and cafés, meeting places for militants, underground cells, and the improvised offices of political commissars. In Gisors's Shanghai house, people smoke, discuss art, and pass through to either leave or pick up messages. Lovers more than they are spouses, his son and daughter-in-law meet there: more than the family's younger generation gathering at home, they are fighters testing their revolutionary commitment.

"A small, bristly bird of prey with a magnificent look in its eye had just landed under the lamp at the edge of my work table": as masterly at the ellipsis, as high-flying a long-haul bird as Malraux was, this sketch, which Mauriac took great pains to perfect, offers but one aspect of his character.² Were we to let ourselves be completely taken in by it, we might conclude that the sketched character's vocation was the soldierly monasticism and celibacy of a T. E. Lawrence.

It was thus, however, that he had originally conceived it. Escaping from Bondy at nineteen, he had landed in a little furnished room in Montmartre's Avenue Rachel, which he left very shortly for a room at the Hôtel Lutetia, soon replaced by a bachelor flat in Rue Brunel near Porte Maillot. Same absence of a woman in each case, same staging post frugality, same way of stopping over without actually setting in—a table, box springs, and mattress served also as ironing board; the morning coffee taken at the counter downstairs with the populace whose jesting and melancholy he always enjoyed. Real life was dispensed outside. There, all over Paris, the marvels that came and deposited themselves from the world over and those that were being invented on the spot were to be hunted down.

Unconcerned about his own security, he had exposed his ability to observe and his entire body to the most intense of tests. Granting to writ-

ten and painted things, to situations, to chance meetings their part of violence demanded that his physiology become drained by exertion and sudden moments of ecstasy. If he allowed that body any short respite in the form of temporary dwelling, it was to inure it even more effectively. "If each one of his passions had not been linked to some action, one would have thought him destined to enter one of those brotherhoods for the absent-minded referred to as intellectuals" (DA, 738†).

Paris, at that time, defined the territorial limits of his concupiscence. When Clara announced to him that she was leaving for Florence, he nimbly jumped into her coach to go check things out elsewhere. Thinking he was widening his horizons, he rashly married the girl who stuck him back at his mother's place when they returned from Italy. How they tore through Europe and all the way to the Far East is well known. But even after they had been banished from the Goldschmidt home in Avenue des Chalets, every time they returned from somewhere a disturbing stroke of destiny caused the pair of migratory birds to seek shelter with the Lamy ladies, first in Boulevard Edgar-Quinet in Montparnasse, where they had moved after the sale of the grocery in Bondy, then in Boulevard Murat, in the Porte de Saint-Cloud area, in an inexpensive housing complex. It's as if they relied on these mothers to provide protection and even full board on occasions when they were starving to death. But then, they never stayed.

One could measure just how much importance they attached to their "dwelling" when, following the successes of *The Conquerors* and *The Royal Way*, they could afford to set down stakes right in the heart of Paris in Rue du Bac, between Gallimard and Grasset. That spacious, very "Saint-Germain" flat remained almost bare: a few pieces of art on the walls by friends; on the mantle, a few pieces brought back from the Orient; a sofa where Clara held her salon sessions (during which she vented her bitterness against the wretch); in a corner, Florence's bassinet; and, in the entry area, facing the door to the landing, André's desk. Before the birth of their child, they had continued to set off toward distant lands: Persia, again, in 1930; a world tour in 1931. They could be seen joking, falling silent with admiration, arguing as they jumped from ship cabin to train compartment, from taxi to truck, jostled by rickshaws and overloaded buses. In this continuous agitation, they had been through Singapore, Shanghai, Peking, Kyoto, Vancouver, and New York. Nothing had escaped Malraux's eye. All was fixed for later use as it recreated itself. No work in the world that he couldn't have made himself. He invented the only dwelling where he felt at home: without inside or exterior, ancient

and always new, that immense museum that he said was imaginary because by introducing unforeseen wonders there, the power of creative fantasy compelled one continually to alter the layout of established works.³

Who, then, would have suspected Clara of wishing to catch the bird in the trap of a permanent dwelling? Along with him, she had left to women expert in household matters the care and maintenance of things. And, like her, he always felt safe from domestic hands and the tender asphyxiation that they unconsciously prepared. Gradually, however, an enigma began to cast its shadow over their complicity: Why had he always needed a woman around to serve as witness to his explorations? We have already seen him as he ran about the Uffizi Gallery flushing out wonders and laying down the booty before his mistress. He was on the hunt, and even though he dressed it all up as aesthetic lessons, what he was doing still revealed a dependence upon her that repression made all the more manifest. Why did Clara have to be with him everywhere for so many years? Her money? The fact that she spoke several foreign languages? That's what he'd blurted out to her in the Trans-Siberian; but it was out of provocation, as if to provoke the slap in the face that he indeed received in response. Yet there was some truth in it, too: Clara helped in his continual escape.

From the museum in Florence to the Russian train, his attachment to her remained obstinately denied. This attachment had nevertheless gone through a complete change: Clara was perhaps loved to the very end, but André had begun to loathe her presence. Quite ordinary, one might say, in aging households. But household there had never been: they were travel companions. And we will witness similar banishments fall successively to all of his companions after Clara: Louise, even Madeleine, and Josette, who was only saved from the fall from grace that undoubtedly awaited her by that horrifying death.

What's strange about all this was not just the mounting irritation that would eventually cause him to repudiate women, but also the urgency that initially pressed him to always have one at home at his beck and call, his need to dwell near her, at her house, as if ignorant of how it all would eventually end, so strong and independent in him was the force of denial. Would it necessarily be absurd to flip this picture over? Behind it, one discovers that this very same, all-so-male writer, this globe-trotting freebooter who prides himself in never making a stopover at home, who always suspects his hostess of being a jailer ready to put her clutches on him—we discover that one of the main reasons he writes,

goes navigating, and almost perishes is to be able to toss his trophy of peerless images down on the doorstep of the woman who awaits him, to flabbergast her and then be pampered by her. Thus from the indispensable respite from flight that it appeared to be, the hearth metamorphoses into his unavowed goal and motivation. Malraux would never admit it: he was too frightened. Simply, he either left or ostracized. The mothers (if not the lovers), however, were not deluded: homage was paid to their invincible attraction. And what an homage! He applied all his energies and all his talent to sublimating the misery common to all men, to refusing to allow for the woman in them, who inhabits them already. His oeuvre, in its continuity, was the child of that denial. In vain: his oeuvre would remain under the tutelage of feminine authority. If we are to believe Ferral, woman is simultaneously an enemy, relaxation, and a voyage (*MF*, 193*).

During the summer of 1932 *Man's Fate* was safely completed in the house in the Chevreuse of Eddie du Perron, to whom the novel is dedicated. Then there were the hotel rooms of Madrid, Paris, Barcelona, and Valencia during the war in Spain. Mad scrambling, turmoil amid jealous women, playacting. At the threshold of a door ajar with Josette and Clara on either side, André was like a cat eluding the moment he'd be forced to leap. He made phone calls, sent off pneumatic dispatches, "petits bleus," three-word messages signed with a cat's silhouette. He made dates, broke them, failed to communicate. To "correspond" was a word unknown to him, a gesture demanding something he was incapable of: a sense of unison, tact, continuity.

Nevertheless, Josette waited for him, dreaming of arranging flowers in elegant vases, of cooking up tempting dishes, of spritzing perfume around shiny rosewood consoles and on formal wear stored in the intimacy of closets. She aspired to an atmosphere of carefree balminess, to maternal tenderness, to sumptuous rugs to roll around on naked, evenings before the open fire. Giving her the title of secretary, he brought the lustful Josette with him on the whirlwind American tour of 1937. Both equally exhausted by the brimming agenda, never alone as a couple, they galloped from one hotel to another. Suddenly, she was enduring her hero's celebrity as if it were a machine-gunning. When they returned, she was in a state of despair. Wishing to be consecrated as his spouse and to be the mother of a little Malraux, she began pressuring him to get a divorce. Back in Paris in April, she got a reprieve of a few days at the Hôtel du Louvre during which he went back to Rue du Bac, ostensibly to see

Flo, but especially to shake the snare that the young woman made no secret she was weaving around him. “You take the path you want, pushing doors open like cats do,” he said to her as a compliment. He did little to advance the divorce proceedings begun with Clara’s consent. And for Josette, he painted a detailed picture of the “old” married couple: the solidarity that comes from habit, the shared esteem, the impossibility of a life together. And he was content to leave things that way.

Inaugurated in Valencia and with its closing sessions in Paris in 1937, the last Writers’ Congress was a bit of a traveling comedy show in which the Left was hard pressed to hide its internecine disputes and anguish (Moscow had begun its second round of grand treason trials). Following the congress in July, an exasperated André was taken in by Josette, who had him move in with her and her friend Suzanne at Vernet-les-Bains, near Le Canigou. It was a shadowy gathering spot, a bit of deep water beneath the sun, a silence in the midst of which the delicate voices of women were heard. It was a place where espadrilles brushed across the floor, a bath in which the fragrances of rosemary, melon, and new wine intermingled, where the hazelnut sound of an empty jug placed down on the tile of the kitchen floor resonated. Nothing was missing from this simple and fabulous decor that suited the sense of happiness Josette had had since her childhood in Perpignan. The master’s pen — the object of all this orchestrated consideration whose origin, as well it should be, was feminine providence — flew through page after page. With Josette typing for the editor as it progressed, it was thus that *Man’s Hope* was written. Not long before in Paris, when a girlfriend of Josette and Suzanne joined the little community, the writer was able to mock his “zenana,” this Iranian harem, finding that it had the advantage of distracting his paramour from him. Did the wretch even notice that this *gynaecium* mirrored the one at Bondy and that his affair with Josette thus had a vague air of incest?

What he missed, in any case, was Clara’s opinion about what he was writing. And so, he left suddenly for Toulon to show her the manuscript. The spouse adjudged the book to be “Stalinist.” She gave her arguments, he prolonged his stay. Led forth by pleasure, they wrangled for five relentless days over the book’s substance. Her plea was for libertarians and the Marxist oppositionists in Spain; his was for communist efficiency. These would be the final hours that the disunited couple would share. While walking the length and breadth of the port and the surrounding hills, they solved the world’s problems, as in the old days. Still seduced by the tight game played out by their intellects, their souls had now lost

all affection for each other. And yet, at the moment of departure, his eyes straying above a last glass of rosé, Josette's lover, according to his spouse, supposedly shared the following misgiving: "Will I be able to spend my life with a woman who has no taste for ideas?" (Clara, 5:176). According to the same source, Clara gave the boy a gleaming look that said both "You imbecile: I told you so" and "My poor dear, I possess that taste you're talking about, but you weren't able to keep me."

He returned to his group of women to finish off *Man's Hope*. Once the book was turned over to Gallimard in September, he flew off without warning for Barcelona and Madrid to witness for himself that end of all hopes that was gaining ground everywhere. From Russia came the news (Roland had returned from there with distress calls) that Babel, Meyerhold, and Eisenstein were under surveillance, gagged, or gone missing. There was no longer any chance, as had been originally thought in Moscow in 1934, that the creator of *Potemkin* would direct *Man's Fate* in the homeland of the revolution. So, Malraux told himself, I'll bring *Man's Hope* to the screen by myself, and in Spain. And this was how he kept saying no to Franco. But he neglected to intercede with Stalin in behalf of the endangered comrades.

He still had to deal with "the glue": in those days, when a couple had a free long-term relationship, they were said to be "living glued to each other" (*vivre à la colle*). No sooner had he phoned Josette in November 1937 that he was going back to Paris than she jumped in the first train for Toulouse to meet up with him. Elated to learn that her dear departed was still alive, she was torn between the prudence that called for arranging their meetings in such a way as to avoid providing evidence for an adultery charge and absolute imprudence — she was pregnant. She bled on the trip back, almost losing too much. Then, ill luck would have it that her dear father, on his way through Paris, wished to see his daughter. She had to be rushed out of the clinic, put to bed in a hotel (the Grands Hommes, on Place du Panthéon), and pretend to papa to have a bad case of flu. At the front desk, André watched out for Joseph so that he wouldn't go asking for the room of "Mademoiselle Clotis," then he coolheadedly directed him to his daughter. A Beaumarchais play, he thought, quite amused.

What energy that young woman devoted to accommodating him! She loved him. In Moulins, for a few days at Easter 1938, in the awkward incognito of provincial hotels, she helped him revise the scenario for the Spanish film. Then, in autumn, and under the worst possible conditions, she aided him with the filming in Catalonia. There, finally, under

the open sky as in the studio darkness, at café tables and next to him behind the camera, she could appear as his real wife. For this, the spoiled child that she was resolved to put up with the shortages of all kinds imposed on this last patch of republican land under the vise grip of the advancing fascist front. Did she care about the political stakes involved? She was mainly concerned about not having cold cream on hand and nice pâtés to eat. In January 1939, she withstood, without understanding it, the dramatic exodus through Cerdère of a people defeated, stripped of their weapons at the border before being interned. And when the first screening of the rushes that were saved from this debacle showed how obvious it was that many takes were still missing to pull the sequences together, she was by his side, once again, when he went filming the patchwork in Villefranche-de-Rouergue in April 1939.

What made her cry in Paris, on 3 June, during the first private projection of *Sierra de Teruel*? What made her laugh later that evening, at the Spanish restaurant, with all the pals while they shared an enormous paella? She swung from gaiety to melancholy and back, rendered twice mad at having him to hold with both arms at one moment and feeling him slip away at the next: half secret spouse, half mistress for increasing display. A trip down to Nîmes in the pink Ford, “el coche estupendo,” brought her the happiness of a honeymoon. She started to hope. Then the general mobilization appeared on posters everywhere.

Daladier, out of deference for Franco, had already censored the film’s distribution. The phony war — that great stopping point — was beginning: “limp autumn, cloistered days, blocked future” (Chantal, 131). At Rue Le Marois, Josette emptied suitcases, did her best to arrange books, papers, clothes, linen in every corner of the soulless room, while André just stood there, with his back to everything, staring silently at the blank wall across the way, paralyzed by the immense defeat signified by this war. He was looking for some way to serve. He was waiting. The army air corps had rejected his offers: the reservist was too old, the aviator-*coronel* was incompetent and, furthermore, duly exempt from armed service. What’s more, the Intelligence Office added, he’s a Red from the International Brigades. He waited. He could see that mass of discouraged men letting themselves be convoyed from train stations and barracks, through transit camps and billets to so-called combat positions where they would wallow in their idleness for ten full months until the first enemy assault suddenly astonished them, driving them back all the way to hearth and home. A thirty-eight-year-old guy could see all that and wanted to be part of it. What could he still hope for? To share in the fate

of his buddies who were sacrificed to fascist revenge by Stalin and his pact with Hitler. He volunteered in the armor as simple soldier. If he couldn't fly, maybe he could take off in a tank in memory of his father, of Lawrence. Thus he waited in the night that was descending on Europe when in April 1940, a crepuscular general to whom he was recommended allowed an order to reach private Georges Mabiliaux to join the motorized cavalry unit stationed at Provins. In the train car that transported him too into the hinterland of the Brie, the hussar of the motor ruminated about the coming defeat. The army's old fogies hadn't even created a true "armored weapon" — the very word was too problematic for the secular nomenclature of weapons. You'd have thought you were in 1917.

As for Josette, she showed no sign of recognition for France's state of torpor in the anguish that gripped her when her soldier left:

I've just come out of seven years of life — which I had so firmly believed were a sort of destiny — as if from the lustral waters of baptism. I had my bed, my board, and my washing taken care of. I aged by seven years. As to the rest: it's as if I dreamed it all. There's not one object that we bought together. The car is registered in his name (I think I have to give it back to Clara). There isn't one neighborhood where we have lived together; not one house, one home, one bed against one wall, not one place with a concierge. There isn't a line or a note or a word anywhere in his writings about me. We have no child. He's gone without a trace. I waited, hoped, despaired, was patient, stamped my feet . . . all in vain. Did I exist? If he goes for good tomorrow, if . . . I'll be left empty-handed. (Chantal, 131†)

Suddenly reborn from the ashes of hard times and inclined to ask forgiveness, the unpredictable phoenix had nonetheless set her up, in December 1939, in a nice furnished room in Rue Berlioz, near Avenue Foch, which she took the time to decorate for receiving friends. He then went over to Porte d'Orléans to see Clara, who was living in cramped conditions, and to take care of some other business. "The Accounts Book" that the *NRF* had just published caught his eye. He leafed through it, then tossed it on the floor: "There's what you've done with twenty years of love" (*Marronniers*, 353). And what had he done with them? So much for the melodrama. But Clara didn't yield so easily. One February day in 1940, he received from her an envelope full of photos of their daughter. He mused for a moment over these images, more virtual than real, then

tucked them away in a drawer. Josette had seen him and examined them secretly. In those days when it was easier to satisfy than to control, the urgent desire to have a child gripped her. Not long after, her nausea gave her away and she had to confess her tender cunning. But then, it turned out that it was only her desire to be pregnant that had set off the symptoms.

This was the perfect opportunity to have it out. So they tore each other apart cruelly. He shouted that he would not let himself be had, and she, that she'd had enough frustration. After this the male had to give in once again to the absurd necessity of reproduction that people call "life" — not without covering his retreat with an air of decisiveness. He took her in his arms and said, "We might also do it on purpose." Two months later, the ingenue had achieved her ends. "I've got a baby in me: it's sure and certain. No one can take it away. I'm holding on to it like a relic" (Chantal, 157†).

At that same moment, the father was in work clothes polishing venerable tracked vehicles on a parade ground at Provins: that's how officers kept troops busy while waiting to stop the German offensive in its tracks. How could the good news be got to him? No easier said than done, Josette laughed to herself, as they all do when placing a man directly before his acts. And she trembled in the knowledge that with him, nothing could be taken for granted. Short on ideas, for which she had no taste, love and loneliness inspired these words in her:

I'd like to tell you to split up your personality, to ignore barracks life except for your own amusement and so that you may glean from it whatever is worth gleaning. I want to tell you this with so much love and with gayness of will. None of that is life and makes no sense. It's Private Mabiliaux, your double, who went into it in your place, while the serious part of you is surely here, reflecting on Byzantine art.

Leave your sensible skin and leave it in the cloakroom: it'll be returned when the rest of them come back as civilians. And let yourself laugh at the world's folly. Be like women who, as you once said to me, change their souls as often as they change dresses. (Chantal, 160–61†)

The language of love and murderous clear-sightedness: just imagine the condottiere as a woman! Rendezvous were arranged in the usual hotels and furnished rooms in garrison towns. She came to join him; he would go AWOL or bribe whoever was on guard duty.

The days passed — empty, regulated by the “decision” posted each morning by the colonel’s office, filled with the constant buzzing of men and the minor incidents born of their inaction. This new forced sojourn would call forth its new *entrechat*. Just as before in Phnom Penh and in Saigon and as he soon would in the camp at Sens, the writer was putting this virtual house arrest at the quarters in Provins to good use. He was picking out and stockpiling the characteristics that he would later attach to faces, bits of dialogue, accents, glances, dimensions, and hand gestures with which to compose working-class silhouettes — whether German or French — thanks to which Berger and son in *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* gain access to the “resigned wasting away” of the vanquished and “the nobility which men do not know exists in themselves” (WTA, 190).

André Malraux’s solution was not the one the inamorata was pushing for. On the contrary, Georges Mabiliaux let himself be immersed in the suffocating stablelike heat emanating from the populace packed together in billets while waiting for God-knows-what. Thanks to the incognito, the writer could begin to sketch the fresco that he was preparing in honor of this period of defeat. In his noisy and tragic barracks comrades, he wanted to celebrate the victims of a wrong of whose cause they knew nothing: a scourge, the plague. His pen might at least testify to their endemic resistance to this heavy destiny.

Cavalryman Mabiliaux’s platoon had a sergeant from the conservative tradition who loved reading and music. In the oddly cordial soldier willing to share chore duty but incapable of swallowing the grub and endowed with hands that were a bit too slender, Albert Beuret soon recognized the famous “Red” novelist. He let himself be won over. The military population was confined to quarters as soon as the enemy offensive was unleashed in May 1940. The future father hastily informed Josette that the time was no longer right for having children, especially illegitimate ones. But her gynecologist refused and a backstreet abortionist she interviewed horrified her so much that she decided to keep the relic.

Once Paris was taken in June 1940, Guderian’s Panzers swept through the Yonne Valley. The men of Cavalry Depot 41 moved out on foot westward with their antitank equipment as if on their way to Beaune-la-Rolande. Never having done much marching, Malraux straggled along the burning roads of summer. Taken prisoner following a defense for appearance’s sake, the horseless cavalymen (they didn’t even have motorized horses) were herded toward Sens and its cathedral to be penned up in the sun in a vast construction material yard, which the victor, sub-

merged by the deluge of surrenders, quickly christened a prisoner-of-war camp. From one prison to another, from Provins to Sens, incarceration was declared propitious to some great book:

Three books hold their own against prison life . . . *Robinson Crusoe*. *Don Quixote*. *The Idiot*. . . Now, you will observe that they're the same book. . . In all three cases . . . we have, in the first place, a man set apart from his fellow men, Crusoe by shipwreck, Don Quixote by madness, and Prince Myshkin by his own nature, by — you see what I'm getting at? — let's say: "by innocence." . . . written, the first by a former slave, Cervantes; the second by a former jailbird, Dostoyevsky; the third by a former victim of the pillory, Daniel Defoe. (*WTA*, 90–91)

Will he write the book that a former POW would have written? He was arrested along with the thousands of others in 1940 for the three combined offenses of madness, innocence, and ruination. The people had thought they could change the world: failing the revolution, they had lost all hope. Like the crime for which a stunned delinquent pays by being forced to lie on the ground in the enemy's camps, this was an enormous defeat.

"I'm waiting for it to wear off, myself."

"What?"

"Everything. I'm waiting for it to wear off." (*WTA*, 21)

Our defeat, their victory. Waiting also for the claim that one differs from others because of one's culture or one's ideological engagement to wear off by this continual contact with the people slumped before the cathedral:

I . . . know that an intellectual is not only a man to whom books are necessary, he is any man whose reasoning, however elementary it may be, affects and directs his life. These men I am with, these very men have been living from day to day for thousands and thousands of years. (*WTA*, 22–23)

To write this book required first that he renounce this distinction and that intelligence erode his pride into a much throatier wisdom: "This man has one of those Gothic faces that are more and more numerous now that beards are being grown. The age-old memory of the scourge. The scourge had to come and it has" (*WTA*, 21*). That memory didn't need the defeat to reveal itself:

I remember the silent conscripts of September marching through the white dust of the roads and the dahlias of late summer, who seemed to be marching against flood, against fire; but peeping out from underneath that age-old familiarity with misfortune is man's equally age-old ingenuity, his secret faith in endurance, though, cluttered with disasters, the same faith perhaps as the cave-man used to have in the face of famine. "I'm waiting for it to wear off . . ." (WTA, 21*)

When the common people are forced into the dry dock of History to do repair work with their hefty bare hands alone — those hands forever used to resisting — it's not going to be Dear Mister Writer, however distinguished from anything popular his pen makes him, who can render homage to such abandonment. "What now emerges from the wild crowd that can no longer shave is not the penal settlement, but the Middle Ages" (WTA, 23). As dead or as gnawed by vermin as modern politics may be, as failed as the assault on the powerful may be, and as much as the people may be thrown back into their dog's life or chucked into the communal grave pit, they do not die: "Their joy, all blows and outbursts, has not changed since Breughel, since the fairy-tales; that slapping and that laughter, how the sound of them issues from depths more fathomless, more intriguing than all the knowledge we have of the human race, as intriguing as its endurance!" (WTA, 23). *The Walnut Trees* will rise up as well, as best as they can, from that pit: in four or five exemplary days, like a mystery play acted out on the square before "Chartres." The humble respond to the passion of the great for power and knowledge by moods of the moment, moods of all moments: fear, tenderness, fatigue, pigheadedness in lieu of courage, laughter, ignorance that is never short of know-how.

As to Private Mabiliaux, he had no doubt that the Nazis would soon get their hands on the antifascist leader by that name. Malraux's books were already blacklisted in Paris. Escape was becoming urgent. So he put down his pen and, with a few accomplices he could count on — Beuret, Grosjean, Abbé Magnet — volunteered for a commando that would go harvesting in Collemiers, near Sens. The village's mayor was enlisted in the plan. And, not unhappy that some were willing to take care of supplies and fodder and thus clear out the overcrowded *Lager* for a time, the German command didn't watch over them very closely. Clara was hiding out

with Florence on a *causse* near Cahors and, unless she parted with some Khmer treasure or another, didn't have a red cent. She nonetheless somehow helped Roland get civvies and pocket money for his brother. We soon find André standing in the corridor of a packed train one All Saints' Day, one foot wounded during the warlike skirmish, the other still sore from the forced march, wondering if the train would ever make its way to Paris in the midst of the confusion that reigned on the rail network. Josette was expecting to deliver at the beginning of December. The brother through thick and thin, Roland would give the baby his precious name since the father was otherwise married. And, when the birth did take place, a pass was somehow obtained so that Josette and baby could join the Clotis parents at their new residence in Hyères. It was agreed that all would meet up there despite the atrocious welcome that her mother would undoubtedly reserve for her wayward daughter: Think of it! not even wed and this child — by a Parisian, a Red intellectual, a married man!

Once the scenario was in place, the prisoner on the run reembarks for the south. Leaving the train in Bourges, he took the time to take a load off his feet in a movie theater where, as entertainment, a German newsreel inflicted on the viewers the apocalyptic vision, set to music by Wagner, of Warsaw set ablaze by the Luftwaffe. It's Guernica on the grand scale, he thought as he put Roland's narrow shoes back on. And anyway, they too will be crushed in exactly the same way, burned to death in their turn. And after it's all over, the world will have a simple choice between Wall Street and the Kremlin. "My past is an encumbrance to me. On my fortieth birthday (when I was crossing the demarcation line clandestinely with the black cat), I wished I had been born the day before" (*Laz.*, 75). No more father, no more war, no more history: as if to sign were to thumb one's nose, a cat's procession (true: a bit ostentatious under the circumstances) signed for the ex-colonel-in-Spain-now-buck-private-in-France his farewell to big-time politics and all its crimes. Despite anything that was to follow, this farewell proved definitive: it was a birth.

It was the great tribe of the Passage that was passing over that line with the cat: the medieval bearded blokes with their Brueghel, the grinning little Annamese squashed with their bodhisattvas, Extremaduran bumpkins and Goya. Soon they would be joined by the Périgourdin and the Alsatian immortalized in their Romanesque tympana and Gothic apses. Hardly had the lower classes begun their escape through the eye of the needle than Malraux was conceiving the legend of this passage. One "fi-

nal social incarnation of justice” more fundamental than time and mere lines—the way artworks ignore epochs and borders—would now draw up “something much more elementary” than history: “that old gray-haired mayor with an arm missing, who’s a bit of a mason (a bit everything, really) but who knows his citizens well and knows grassroots justice and that social security is not made merely for clowns and drunks” (Stéphane, 34–35). A grassroots that is intolerant of injustice, that resists the horror of combat whether victorious or lost, that is well-worn yet hard-wearing and well used to scourges: four years later, this phantasm of an incorruptible pedestal one can rely on in the depths of disaster, of a “popular element” in which “solidarity” takes on absolute value, will be called the “bloc Michelet” (Stéphane, 34–35).

By then, in the polar cold of 1945, faced with the death-dealing resistance of an enemy resolved to bar the crossing of the Rhine and thus the invasion of its country, Malraux will have recovered a few stripes: he will be in command of the Alsace-Lorraine brigade on the Vosges front. But for Colonel ex-Berger and ex-Cavalryman Mabiaux, this fighting, its unknowns, and its stakes call upon the spirit of the lower classes buried in the woods, in the frozen holes and the villages smothered in snow with whom he felt at one. At one in the way Michelet’s Joan, his Danton, and his Charles the Bold had figured France in its history simply because they incarnated the basic justice of “boors.” And why not the Germans, after all? The writer had portrayed their fathers’ sense of brotherhood with the Russians when the scourge of gas gripped all of them, en masse, on the Polish front in 1916. Could this writer doubt that his enemies of the moment were somehow less bullheaded and less capable of solidarity than the Alsations now? And, because he had simply refused to lose hope in the inherent valiance of a humiliated and prostrate people, de Gaulle soon found his way into the “bloc Michelet.”

Does this mean that the rebellious prophet was now slipping into some kind of populism? Tolstoy and his patient Koutouzov had undoubtedly emerged from the disaster of grand ambitions. Holding firm somehow seemed more decisive than conquering. This conversion struck people as strange. Many misinterpreted it. They supposed that, once the war was over, Malraux would necessarily continue to play the role of solitary knight, blowing into his ivory horn at the crest of modern revolutions, calling all humiliated peoples to free themselves. Instead, he rejected this role as leftist intellectual. As we know, Sartre would take it up in his stead, making blunders at every step. And Malraux well knew the flaw in his judgment: the era of great struggles—front versus front—

was a thing of the past. With Good and Evil henceforth indiscernible, had he accepted the notion that shaming and offending could no longer be avenged? Not in the least. He realized, simply, that injustice carried every name. He now grasped that even in a state of humiliation, a people or a single man is never really humiliated since within degradation a sense of dignity — no less present when one perseveres than when one is conquered by rebellion — remains intact.

This revelation was more dramatic than one might think. It was as if the fundamentally nihilistic metaphysical hypothesis on which both his work and his life up until then had been built was thrown entirely into question, and with it the poetics of revolt. Now, suddenly, in the underground of existence, not only was there that putrescence in which the remains of dead values are digested and vomited and into which creation and fraternity must descend to tap their force: he was discovering a solid, binding “element” that would perhaps justify writing and living in ways less desperate and less paradoxical than he had previously thought. From beneath the spasmodic time of rebellion emerged a permanence without duration, without history — a latent state of will without willpower, of which the notion he had evoked not long before of “communion” had perhaps afforded a first glimpse. A return of Asia? Another *entrechat*: exoticism setting up permanent residence.

In *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* there are some traces of this good news. Berger, the father, gassed in the depths of the Bolgako woods, is suddenly seized in his attempted flight from the deadly cloud “by a lightning-flash of certainty, as urgent as this slight hissing in his throat: the aim of life was happiness, and he, fool that he was, had been engaged on other things instead of being happy!” (WTA, 186). The book’s note to the reader might have diminished the impact of this obvious fact, reducing it to a “simple psychological reaction” that fails to constitute an “answer to the questions put in the first part of it” (WTA, 5). Whom did Malraux hope to deceive by this palinode? We know that, written by him, the term “psychological” did not possess the sense of an individual agitation. So why didn’t he “simply” cut that episode? The cry of happiness remained: he couldn’t help it.

By the last pages of the book, in any case, this denial could no longer hold. Having extricated itself from the grave during the night, the tank crew paused the next morning in the evacuated village to celebrate its return to the world of the living with the joyful chimes of nativity ringing around them. “Thus, perhaps, did God look on the first man. . . . This morning I am all birth. . . . I can scarcely remember what fear is like; what

I carry within me is the discovery of a simple, sacred secret” (WTA, 222, 224*). Thatched-roof houses and empty barns all around offered their “open doors [that] were banging in the dim light — doors opened on to this life which, this morning for the first time, has shown itself as powerful as the darkness and as powerful as death” (WTA, 223). The magi’s message to “the Child,” Malraux writes, consisted not in gifts: it was rather a maternal one. Those kings announced that doors the world over were opened for him. “So now from that night there rises the miraculous revelation of day” (WTA, 223). The word is out: other worlds may pose their threat, “the world of crystals, of oceanic depths.” And we are far from seeing the last of cold, closed monsters. Yet, “with its trees branching out like veins, the universe is as complete and mysterious as a young body” (WTA, 223).

Birth, revelation, mystery of the Holy Child: the *Walnut Trees* peroration evokes the prosody of the Psalms and of Claudel. Rather than *The Satin Slipper*,⁴ Malraux invoked history according to Michelet. But in his eyes the celebration was in fact the same — the people or Jesus, fraternity or charity: you are always near me even in hell. Without dissipating, the despair of 1938–40 appeared to be touched by grace. André wrote those lines with his son in his arms. What, other than a baby, is the young body “full and mysterious,” like the advent of an altogether new universe? And so it goes with the biographer who does not hesitate to identify motives for some writing in various events in the author’s life. The signer of *Anti-Memoirs* prohibits such nonsense. Or, rather, he inverts it: if baby there was, it was André who, just “born the day before,” crosses the line of demarcation, stumbling in those old shoes as if not knowing how to walk. And in the Jesus (“Bimbo”) he recognized that new ingenuousness.

This edifying revelation came simultaneously with the sense of a complete rout having taken place: everywhere, the people’s revolt had been crushed so that the worldwide conflict could explode unhindered. Crushing them, however, revealed their inexhaustible resistance. And, just when fatigue had beaten him to the ground, André, who had thought himself destined for perpetual migration, received from Josette this child as if it were a source of renewed youth. To hold steady near a people or near a birth was thus not just some other way of dying. Even getting old could kindle a childlike smile. His friends never ceased to be amazed at seeing how, until very late in life, André’s smile alone could deliver his face from the spasms that gripped it. Like the ancestor seated next to the door at the end of *The Walnut Trees*, “propped against the cosmos like a stone. . . .

Yet she smiles, a slow, pensive, delayed smile. . . . she seems to be viewing death at a distance, with patience and even — oh, the mystery of those fluttering eyelids, the sharp shadows in the corners of her eyes! — even with irony” (*WTA*, 224). And, at the very end of the *Anti-Memoirs*, Lazarus appeals to the same wisdom just as he slips into a coma: “an inexplicably consoling *irony*, which momentarily outstared the worn-out face of death” (*Laz.*, 149).⁵ A cat will now pretend to disappear in peace. It’s the Cheshire cat from *Alice* or the one in *Lazarus*: his wink remains when he is gone. A cat appears, bringing peace to the world with its smile. Its name is Pierre-Gauthier and *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* is dedicated to him.

While, in that autumn of 1940, the escapee was crossing the line, the drama of adulterous love was taking its course in Paris. After her friend Suzanne Chantal had left for Portugal just before her visa expired, Josette found herself alone in the occupied capital. As the calendar enabled her to anticipate, she went into labor, but before term, in a metro car. Anonymous hands got her off in an ambulance to the clinic in Neuilly, where her obstetrician delivered the baby with some difficulty, the promised anesthetic unavailable. He came out of her all bloody, forehead dented by his fist, on 5 November. Pierre, Guillaume, Valentin — thus, for the urgent requirements of the hospital registry, was the child named in a somewhat off-the-cuff manner. Josette was kept on at the clinic longer than was reasonable: she had no money and the bill was getting steep. She went off looking for help and the clinic kept the baby as security. She got some money from a few former acquaintances, rich ladies of leisure to whom her Bovaristic ambitions had drawn her. The adorable papa and her brother André, at the Clotis home in Hyères, turned their pockets inside out. The money order they sneaked by Madame enabled Josette and her son to get free. What a worry! In his role flaunting collaboration with the occupier, Drieu took great pleasure in obtaining the *Ausweis* required for getting her over to the free zone.

André greeted the young mother and child at the station in Menton. They left by carriage for Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. The son got acquainted with his father beneath the canopy of a Second Empire carriage that jogged along the cliff road. They settled in at La Souco — a villa leased to them, thanks to an appeal from their old friend André Gide, by the Bussys, an English artist and his wife. They would remain there until December 1942, when the occupation of the southwest by Mussolini’s militia forced them to clear out. By then the tide was turning: at Stalin-

grad, Guadalcanal, and El Alamein, the Axis offensive was being stopped and the Allies were occupying North Africa. One could fully expect an intensification of the ferocity. Already, Vichy was organizing massive deportations of Jews.

La Souco proved a propitious haven for the exhausted nomad: a vast five-bay belvedere affording a view all the way to the Riviera and Monaco, terraced in a garden saturated with those immemorial essences that fringe the Mediterranean from the Cyclades to the Cimetière Marin. Luigi, the majordomo left by the Bussys, took to the new bosses: a mistress as graceful as a Bellini, a maestro who was a great writer without a hint of haughtiness, and a *putto* so plump and golden that the servant christened him “Bimbo.” Luigi staked his honor and his inventiveness on making sure this table of gourmets had inestimable dishes even in these times of privation: a brill he negotiated at the port as if it were on auction, a rutabaga moussaka that one would swear was the real thing and that he served English style, dressed in a white dolman.

The occupier having cut off his royalties from Gallimard, all André had to keep up this lifestyle was the fifty to seventy-five dollars per month that Robert Haas, who edited *Man’s Hope*, placed on his account in New York. This modest income was paid out in francs, thanks to Varian Fry of the Emergency Rescue Committee in Marseilles. Writers, artists, and other intellectuals menaced by Nazism were either gotten to the United States or helped to survive by this committee. To practically everyone’s surprise, Malraux showed himself to be pacified and almost heedless of such concerns. He told Gide, in November 1941, that he was writing “a long novel,” something “very ambitious,” pushing the truth so far as to grant that “one cannot really write the novel one wants to.” And it wasn’t a novel he sought but, rather, *The Walnut Trees*. Agog, the “little lady” noticed that his facial spasms had subsided. The succession of visitors who passed through urging him to take up arms once again were cordially put off. Suzanne Chantal had wished to give birth at La Souco. Her husband, José, had been a reporter in Spain for a Portuguese fascist newspaper. Yet so blasé had Malraux the famous fighter become that by the way he received José one might have thought they had fought side by side (Chantal, 256–57). Enchanted as children are when they try their first steps, Bimbo would occasionally bump the patio table where André sometimes worked: as he passed by, his father would give him a tender and pensive caress. “Roquebrune, the sound of my son’s little clogs in the garden where the Judas trees are in flower (and I remember think-

ing that was what my heartbeats would sound like when I was dying)” (*Laz.*, 66–67).

The passing of fathers ensures filiation. The name was transmitted to the boy by his uncle who adopted the child fathered by an unknown. As for his first name, André didn’t even want to hear about Guillaume. Why not? Perhaps this: Singapore, 1965, Clappique is rambling on at the entrance of Death Street:

One day the Americans sent me this German guy who used to be one of the great Leni Riefenstahl’s assistants. Talk about wanting to hide anywhere you can! Anyway, he was planning a film on Hitler. It was never shown. But the guy had pulled together whatever he could from his remembrances, from those of his former boss, those of others, those from Nuremberg. He told journalist anecdotes and also — not a word! — Shakespeare stories. Shakespeare: heard of him? William, Wilhelm, Guillaume, you know. Like Apollinaire, too. The guy who died while they were yelling “À bas Guillaume!” out in the street. It’s a small world. (*ML*, 317†)

Guillaume, that synonym for death, was just too common. The child will be named Pierre-Gauthier, and Malraux by adoptive filiation. This patronymic has a strange destiny: as if the name were a vessel constantly menaced by shipwreck, every man in the family has to relay the next at the helm in order to save it from the storms of passion and war.

For now, the latest-born in the line believed mostly in the fat little feet that moved forward beneath him. And his mother? Could she believe her desire was fulfilled, now that André was minding their son, feeling right at home at her place? What was still missing? There she was, brimming with motherhood, with sun and sea, with “their love justified by the open air and the nudity of bodies lured forth by beauty and immodesty” (*Chantal*, 251†), bodies that offered themselves without a care to the sensuality of night and the warm siestas. Her celebration of Eros was that of the Holy Spouse in the Song of Songs: “He likes to make love in the morning. He likes making love willingly. He likes making love simply. Afterwards, he wraps his arms about my body, puts his cheek against my cheek, and thus we remain, unmoving, like two blades of grass. . . . His body coiled up against mine, . . . with the absolute confidence of a body given over to sleep. His lustrous hair, his beautiful hair untidy against the skin of my arm: how I love its warm color” (*Chantal*, 275†). Josette knew all too well that in spite of this respite — or perhaps because of

it—the man was still passing through, that he remained homeless and was still dreaming of going elsewhere. She was temporarily eluding the consequences.

He found his exile within sedentary life and she tried to accept it. He closed himself in the dark of the house to write, never going down to the beach naked, intoxicating himself passionately with everything he could find to smoke and drink. Hostile to all the pagan delights he was invited to enjoy, he jumped up and away from them to seize his pen. With his “face greenish” and “looking down in the mouth day and night,” he sought “deliverance from the depths of his stagnant life” (Chantal, 273, 271†) by writing terrible things, she said, “killings, scalplings, Lawrence murdering the Arab, people rotting away after being gassed, the plugged asshole of the Sassanid kings” (Chantal, 270†). There was only one thing that she read into these monstrosities that she typed for him: “He is stripping me of my own powers for tenderness. . . . I’m on the road to non-love” (Chantal, 252, 253†).

Near her, so far from her, settling accounts with the defeat, with all defeats. We’ve just read it: under the title *The Struggle with the Angel*, he was writing the great threnody to honor a vanquished people and that people’s persistence; he was drawing up the death notice of the Lawrence adventure that had been led astray by the Demon of the Absolute; he was undertaking his depiction of the death and resurrection of artistic creation in the form of a single, vast fresco that would be called *The Voices of Silence*.

And, beneath all this, there was that avowal, that desperate view that a disappearance had occurred: the novel was dead. On a visit to Malraux’s place, Gide was invited to listen while he read fragments of *The Struggle*. He didn’t understand a bit of it: the form was decidedly all wrong. Exasperated, the schoolboy remained silent, let his exam paper be corrected, then persisted. As for the “Lawrence,” he soon finds the excuse to give it up. After all, hadn’t the adventurer already recounted his life firsthand in something like eight hundred pages? Why begin to write four hundred in which nothing new can be invented? “The subtlest parts of Lawrence’s adventure would be made much more intelligible through fiction than through my analysis.”⁶ To fantasize was not among the laws of the biographical genre. Why should he venture there? Just to see if one could write without recourse to the imagination?

Once Suzanne had left for Lisbon and Roland for Toulouse, Josette found herself all alone facing her hostage in that great silent living room

overlooking the gray waters. And what she saw was that he had nothing to say to her. “Living in clandestineness, [he] loved me. But who can say that he still does since he’s been here? He’s only got one step to take to be with me” (Chantal, 273†). He was leaving her in the lurch without going anywhere — with a simple *entrechat*.

ON 11 NOVEMBER 1942, the Germans occupy the Free Zone and the Italians take the Riviera, including Nice. Everywhere—from the suburbs of Lyons and Toulouse to the hamlets of the Quercy region and to the Alps—foreigners, Jews, Bolsheviks, and Freemasons are now being hunted down. The border along the Pyrenees is now fully patrolled. Trainloads of deportees are moving. It once again becomes necessary to flee. Like hares flushed from their burrows, all those along the Riviera under suspicion are skedaddling everywhere. The Sperbers hike to Switzerland with their newborn on their back. Gide embarks for Tunisia. Suzanne and her baby flee to Portugal. Luigi finds a hideout in Monte Carlo. Mireille lies low with Emmanuel Berl beneath the chestnut trees of the Corrèze (her favorite song was “Le Petit Chemin qui sent la noisette”).

André heads off to check out the Berls' retreat near Argentat. On the way, he stops to embrace Roland, who introduces him to his fiancée, Madeleine Lioux, who teaches piano at the Conservatory. The gift that André, as head of the Malraux family, presents to the newcomer is the score to Honegger's *La Danse des morts*,¹ as if to suggest to her the kind of destiny she is associating herself with. As for Claude (Fernand's last son, the prodigal child who's a bit of a hoodlum), Roland has landed

him a job that will do justice to his resourcefulness in the Special Operation Executive, the Resistance network directed from London. Not far from Argentat, André discovers the dream home: a castle overlooking Saint-Chamant and the Souvigne Valley. Managing to rent three rooms in this veritable observatory safe from surprises, he has Josette and the boy sent along.

Life takes up as before, with him shut up writing in his tower and her waiting for him either in the kitchen or in bed. She had no one but the child on whom to pour forth the tenderness that she so needed. Once settled in, however, the sober castle proved more propitious to her pleasure than the sumptuous villa in Roquebrune:

You can't imagine the life we have in the Corrèze. It's SO PEACEFUL. We never see a single German. Never. There simply aren't any. . . . I must say that it's gastronomy that occupies the better part of my life—just as it does that of most Frenchwomen, moreover. There's a farm attached to the castle, so we have all the produce we need. I try out all the recipes in *Le Jardin des modes*. (Chantal, 228–29†)

The girl from the Languedoc just coiled up like a cat in the late Limousin winter, making her niche, purring: “Everything is russet-colored and you'd love it,” she writes to her friend. “We have lots of towers; we live in one of them; our bedroom is round, like the office where we dine in front of a big wood fire” (Chantal, 288†). Completing her delight, a second baby was on the way. She wanted this one to be her twin: she was expecting a Corinne; it turned out to be a Vincent—right out of *The Walnut Trees*. He swept in on 10 March 1943 like a whirlwind right in the hallway of a clinic in Brive. Like a piece of excess baggage, this poor young one will be handed over to others by both father and mother his whole life. The task of raising him was passed on to the wife of the *notaire* in Saint-Chamant: she was promoted to the rank of godmother.

As for the godfather (Josette insisted on doing things according to the rules), it wasn't their neighbor Berl she asked (she never liked him anyway), but rather—you guessed it—Drieu. Provincial that she was, she had always been taken by Drieu's lordly nonchalance, his eye for women, the prestige of his name. So much so that strange and lethal phrases flow from her pen as she invites him to be Vincent's godfather: “André and I would like to offer the children something like perfect uncles, since we are both without brothers. Well, if you don't mind, Vincent goes to you” (*Marronniers*, 346). Did André ever know that she was

making a raw offering of her son to another man? Did he realize that, by the same stroke, she was crossing Claude and Roland out of existence shortly before the Gestapo took care of it for good? That she was once again fully discharging Pierre? Now here we get a sense for the radical *différend* between her and André. “Dismissed by everyone now that he’s no longer involved in Bolshevism, Malraux lives in the countryside next to two mediocre Jews, making kids with his wife, and writing a life of Lawrence no doubt to justify his desertion from Communism and his Gaullist neutrality” (Desanti, 404).

In accepting the role of godfather, was Drieu showing off his craftiness? He was certainly not deaf to what this beauty’s desire was saying to him between the lines. Shortly before his suicide he wrote of “his” Suzanne, “She’s a woman the way I love them: no claim to intelligence, bereft of verbal expression that might bother me, she appears to dream sweet dreams about what her shape says” (Desanti, 415). No doubt Josette had let her voluptuous form wander while writing her request near the wood fire in the bedroom where the boys slept in their father’s absence. And, when all’s said and done, none of this was as incongruous as it seemed: What else, in this regard, were those honorable writers like Drieu, Martin du Gard, Gide, Lawrence, and Montherlant after? An idea of femininity that would not disturb their misogynous homosexuality (closeted or out). And even Malraux: Why did he conveniently drop his book on Lawrence? Quite possibly an impossible biography, but it would have compromised him as well: lurking beneath the “virile fraternity,” an indecent propensity would have been all too visible.

One fine day in September 1943, a certain Monsieur Arnouilh came calling at the castle to inform them that a certain firm called Bloc Gazo that he directed in Brive would now be represented in the area by a certain Monsieur Chevalier. Gas? A bloc? Nothing could disturb the mother from the diapers, the gourmet from her recipes, or the lover from her unhappiness. But André deciphered the message — “bloc,” as in popular; “gas,” as in asphyxiation: he would just have to return to the basic resistance of the vanquished. He’d have to share in it and sign it on the ground and with some pseudonym. Too many risks would be bound up with the antifascist writer’s proper name. Too much prejudice against the “communist” might come from certain networks. He already had got the fake name at La Souco. The author of *The Walnut Trees* had cast around, inquiringly, to his entourage: “A tone needs to be given to Walter” or “I’m looking for a setting” or else “Berger: How do you like that

for a name? Berger: It sounds good in French and in German, doesn't it?" His pseudonym would be Alsatian. Now a ground, a setting had to be found.

This company for the sales and distribution of gas-burning appliances was a plausible front allowing the SOE network in the Corrèze to carry out its various liaisons and missions.² The British organization, headed by Colonel Buckmaster, was in charge of transmitting to London all intelligence concerning enemy troop movements and receiving parachuted agents, weapons, and ammunition for sabotaging the communication lines that the German units based in the southwest would utilize whenever the Allied invasion on the Channel took place. The men in this network were to coordinate with the other groups of French Resistance fighters active in that sector: the Gaullist Secret Army, the Francs-Tireurs, the Communist partisans for the most part. And they were to avoid internecine squabbles that diminished reliability in the eyes of the Allied command. Once put into contact with Harry Peulevé, the regional leader, Malraux introduced him to the steadfast Raymond Maréchal. He was the model for Gardet in *Man's Hope*, whose identifying characteristic is the metal plate in place of the nose that he left in the plane that smashed into the mountain at Linares. In turn, Jack Peters, alias Captain Jack, born Jacques Poirier, a French-speaking English officer, contacted Maréchal. Shortly thereafter, Roland Malraux was introduced into this local SOE network, whose code name became "Author" on André's recommendation.

André persists in thinking that it is too early for action, that the odds are deplorable, that to act now would be to march into the slaughter. They must wait for an Allied attack on the Western front and the ensuing disorganization of the occupier's troop deployment. Only then, if they are well coordinated with each other and in unison with the Allied divisions, will the various partisan units be able to play a truly effective role. Malraux had found the model for this strategy in Lawrence's action at Hedjaz in 1917 and Jordan in 1918. After having described it in detail in two chapters of *The Demon of the Absolute* that he wrote in 1942 and 1943, entitled "March to the North" and "The Key to Damas" (*DA*, 803–974), Malraux returns to the military and political genius of the Arabian colonel by annotating the biography that Liddell-Hart, military journalist for the *Times*, had written on him in 1935.³

"A new form of war was emerging. In the Arabian campaign, [Liddell-Hart] could see the prefiguration of that war to come." Contrary to what is commonly thought, Lawrence had in no way "repeated a Saladin's campaign": his was rather "the first campaign in the coming war."

Contrary also to the received dogma at staff headquarters, the strategy of this future conflict would be based, as Lawrence had executed it, on the raid: a light but elite corps with plenty of firepower, operating quickly from inside the enemy zone. “Had [the Arabian campaign] been served by mechanized units, it would have been the prototype of the Blitzkrieg.”⁴ What was Guderian?⁵ A Lawrence with tanks instead of *mehara*. The war of position is as outdated as the frontal assault between two armed groups. Speed, surprise, concrete knowledge of the terrain, and commando formations had proved themselves. Since modern warfare is always civil warfare, all these are tactics of partisan groups: “What country, in the next war, will be able to ignore its inner enemy?”⁶

In Malraux’s mind, the 1918 map of Arabia would gradually come to overlay that of 1944 France. The *maquis* will be Lawrence’s tribes with de Gaulle as their Emir Faisal — de Gaulle who, like the Arab prince following the rout of the Turkish occupier, would rebuild the nation in the wake of the German pullout. He too would swell his regular army by incorporating the fighters from the inside; he too would attempt to enter Paris, his Damascus, before those formidable Allies occupied it. The steps to be followed were already mapped out: coordinate activities in the *maquis* by supplying them with weapons, explosives, instructors, and cash; utilize their courage and resolve to pin down the enemy units in the south and the center of the country (as Lawrence had detained part of the Turkish army around Amman while Allenby advanced toward Damascus); disorganize roadways, railways, bridges, telephones — all the adversary’s communications; carry out surprise attacks; shy from confrontation when the odds were too weak. Everything in Malraux predisposes him to conceive of such an auxiliary guerrilla, to adore while directing this war of the downtrodden.

But there was a problem: it was already the spring of 1944 and Malraux amounted to absolutely nothing in the internal Resistance. In Lawrence’s case, no matter how it’s looked at, his presence on the field of action for months and the support of the English staff headquarters in Cairo were necessary for him to finally carry out his plan. And Malraux knew this. Nothing could convince a haughty *maquis* leader experienced in clandestine struggle that he should be nosed out at the last minute by a rookie. Unless that greenhorn could procure a steady stream of parachute landings — something that only the Allied powers could bestow. His conclusion? If the slowpoke was to throw himself into the campaign at this late hour, and with the rank he thought appropriate to his reputation, he’d have to do so with credentials from London. He’d need to

obtain quickly from Allied agents in the Aquitaine tangible signs of his authority, evidence in the form of radio liaisons, weapons and explosives, instructors, fake documents, and the like. Had he had any doubts about his luck or his abilities to bewitch people, Malraux would have given up such a risky maneuver. But the opportunity to give it a shot soon came. And as demanding as it would be, he seized that opportunity and established himself as the boss of an “inter-Allied staff” invented in a fortnight.

Roland is on mission in Paris during that very same springtime of 1944. He is charged with procuring hideouts and escape routes for Allied aviators downed in France and for SOE agents who have been discovered. Madeleine has become his wife and is expecting. Every week she comes and spends with him the few days she isn't working in Toulouse. On 9 March, Roland is informed by the Normandy SOE (the “Salesman” network led by Philippe Liewer) that Claude has just been arrested following a double sabotage in the outskirts of Rouen. Immediately informed, André makes his way up to Paris to implore his brother and sister-in-law to leave the capital as quickly as possible. Together, they embark for the southwest from Gare d'Austerlitz: André gets off the train in Tulle in order to reach Saint-Chamant, Madeleine pushes on toward Toulouse, and Roland leaves her in Brive to rejoin his group. The “Author” SOE network's radio team and arms depot had been hidden in a modest house situated just off the main road to Tulle. But, following a militiaman's denunciation, a commando of German security agents carries off a surprise break-in at the hideout on 21 March, arresting Roland and his three companions for flagrant violation of clandestine radio liaison laws. They are shipped off to Limoges for interrogation. Maréchal alerts André, who entrusts him with Josette and the children and leaves, once again, for Paris in order to cover his trail. With Groet's help, he gets into the Rue Vaneau, where Maria Van Rysselberghe opens Gide's apartment for him. While he, the savvy clandestine, looks the place over (the balconies, the roofs of the buildings across the way—the building looks onto the Hôtel Matignon—the service stairway), the “little lady” cannot repress her smile: “He couldn't have played himself better if he were making the film, *Malraux*” (CPD, 3:316).

Once having infiltrated the “Author” network, the enemy, meanwhile, was moving forward with its methodical destruction. Maréchal was picked up while driving, his hands held down against the burning manifold, then finished off with a machine-gun on the spot. After a first interrogation in Limoges, Peulevé and his three comrades—one of whom was

Roland— were packed off to the prison in Fresnes. From there, they were deported to the camp in Neuengamme. Luck had it that Jack, the Englishman, escaped the disaster: he had been sent off to hole up in Savoy at his mother's house shortly before. Once back in the southwest, London charged him with reconstituting a network code-named "Digger." The new base would be set up in "The Castle," a big building right in the center of Siorac-en-Périgord, inhabited by a Communist cabinetmaker and his family. This new hideout was protected by the complicity of a townspeople totally committed to the Resistance. The area's postmen and telephone operators were on their side as well. The receiving process resumed when two English agents and some materiel were parachuted in by Buckmaster onto a nearby plot of land as arranged by "Soleil," Maréchal's former assistant.

This network fills out quickly, especially when a Wehrmacht division starts to systematically comb this region infested with terrorists. On his end, Malraux, all stops pulled out now that his two brothers have perished, speeds up the execution of his plan. He says he's got to go to Paris and, under the pretext of assuring Jack's security, advises him to accompany him. The Englishman persuades himself that it's a good opportunity to see how Peulevé can be got out of Fresnes. Through the *NRF's* Resistance network— Camus, Jean Lescure, Paulhan, and so on, all men of honor and all under police surveillance, André finds a hideout there for Jack. It's Easter 1944, and American "Flying Fortresses" come calling in the middle of the night, leveling Villeneuve-Saint-Georges and its railroad marshaling station with their bombs. No one can remember any Parisian having slept that night, with the exception of Jack. André receives confirmation the next day that the enemy is carrying out a big antiterrorist cleanup operation in the southwest. He has Josette notified that she must get out of Saint-Chamant discreetly but immediately.

She shows up at the Gallimard residence with Bimbo. It's early morning and she's completely beside herself, having exchanged glances with Roland, in handcuffs, being led along by two Germans, on a platform at Gare de Lyon. She's still trembling at the idea that the child could have suddenly decided, with joyful laughter, to dash into his uncle's arms. But why had she gone up to Paris by way of Clermont-Ferrand? And what were the Germans doing with their prisoner in that station? The scenario is rather unlikely. It seems more like a nightmare: a hallucination in which that desire directed toward Drieu and whose name is "André and I who are both without brothers" found expression. What kind of brother did she want? At lunch one day in a through-and-through black market

bistro at Censier, Malraux was able to measure the extent of the madness: with delight in her voice, she announced to him that Gaston Gallimard was going to authenticate a fake identity card for her with the name Josette Malraux and that, on the scatterbrain's urging, Pierre Drieu was expecting her immediately, that day, to announce that he was granting his protection to André and his little "family." He shook her hard, just as one would give a slap to someone losing his marbles: Not one word of my presence here to Drieu, do you hear me? And please give up the idea of taking my name just now: it's the dumbest thing you could do. She thought him inexplicably nervous. But, no matter: he was granting her two nights in a hotel just with her, like in the good old days, and a dinner at Chez Prunier where the personnel, with deference mixed with perversion, greeted him with a dozen distinct "Good evening, Monsieur Malraux!" that fluttered about over the heads of the Wehrmacht high officers who were absorbed in their consumption of the conquered people's exquisite cuisine. The master at bluff was delighted: an occupier occupied with eating fine fare frees the clandestine from the usual precautions. Thus he invited Captain Jack in person back to Prunier's the very next day.

This done, they returned together to the Périgord. The old bogies clanked along, wrenching at every switch, behind the asthmatic locomotive. A Spitfire would occasionally swoop down and pepper the pachyderm's back with a few rounds of machine-gun fire: progress had been made in wartime aviation since Spain. In an otherwise empty compartment, Malraux turns to the Englishman: I'm Colonel Berger. The National Council of the Resistance has just charged me with coordinating all patriotic activity in the Corrèze, the Dordogne, and the Lot regions. You and your people have radio links to London, soldiers able to instruct trainees, and regularly parachuted supplies. We are therefore working together (*Girafe*, 113–14).

A manner signed Malraux: in the same "style" as that used on the antifascist platform or the Spanish aviation military targets. I'm working with you but I don't belong to you. Thomas Edward (T. E.) in Cairo . . . Haunted by the attention he pays to his own glory, does he belong only to himself? Quite possibly. And yet, he cannot speak in his own name. He fantasizes that this pseudonym that rules oblige him to adopt will turn him into the nameless individual who will incarnate the resistance of an entire humiliated people. A Malraux could never sign this rising: only an "I-without-a-past." This was how great figures in Michelet's work would crop up out of the void and designate themselves to the people

when that people no longer recognizes itself in already instituted names. The republic had rolled into the gutter, Pétain's state was licking the occupier's boots, wreaking its vengeance for the Dreyfus Affair. But still, was there not the Resistance? Already courting power, its rightist and leftist forms were quarreling just as they had before the war. Berger's intention, at this point, is to sign a more "elementary" resistance, one that belongs to no one, a resistance of the wretched who exchange their half-voiced stories while downing their beer at fairs, a wretched people who bury their old guns only to dig them up again and who can always step lively to find a hideout for the fellow who falls out of the sky. Fellows named Jacques everywhere have similar customs that no one ever taught them. They have no idea about complicated politics, they just know what to do and how, when those who snatch up everything send in their dragoons to saber them. And this was the case.

At the same time, Berger's plunge into the popular element was, for André, parodic. Disguising himself in front of others was, to him, the execution of one last ostentatious rite, as if to reassure himself that his willpower was still intact. Far from excluding the possibility that, like the others, he'd be arrested, tortured, deported, or executed on the spot, this game that gave him childish pleasure demanded it. For something like that to happen was the price to be paid for getting his fable out in the open.

One might think that during the following months, his feeling of exaltation in pretense and defiance, in exposing himself to the enemy out of pure temerity, without fear for personal safety, heedless of safer itineraries, and his joy of fusion in the popular fraternity made him forget everything else. Fully absorbed in trying to cut through the disorder of the underground, he committed shady faces lurking under false identities to memory, located villages, deserted *causses*, wooded havens, decoded messages that came in over improvised radio receivers. Through the screen that separated him from ordinary life, behind the café's window, on the other side of the train's glass, through the skylight, in the understair closet, on the last steps coming out of the metro, with the brief but certain glance of the migratory bird, he sought to differentiate between what announces danger and what encourages audacity. This exercise in intensity and resolve kept him on the alert for months: emaciated and radiant as if he were participating in some big boy scout's game.

Better yet, he was experiencing, in fighter's getup, the same exotic and death-dealing joy that he saw in Lawrence, the young archaeologist, while he crisscrossed Syria on foot, dressed like an Arab:

In any society not chosen by him he felt — he knew himself to be — a stranger. By becoming absolutely so, by acquiring the right to be so, by becoming the passerby, the Christian foreman, the traveler, he regained his equilibrium. And more than equilibrium: he found joy. Without being altogether conscious of it, the right that he had sought in going to the East was the right of asylum.⁷

The *maquis* proved to be a game of estrangement as well — one that is better played in the company of “the poor, the peasants, manual workers, rather than with the bourgeois for whom one’s public identity counts.” Clandestineness in southwestern France will do for Malraux what Arabia brought Lawrence: “the right to be a foreigner.”⁸

He certainly did not become a foreigner, however, to everything that was not part of guerrilla life. As exalted as he was, he frequently passed through to see the woman and child. As much as he could, he let them know what he was doing and what they should do. He returned to get them to change shelters. This care for his “household,” never overlooked whatever turn the combat took, stood as counterpoint to his militant and military activism. These repeated returns betray an appeal for love — one that is well hidden, tucked away, forgotten, like the worn little stuffed rabbit that his son gave him when he was four and that the father carried with him everywhere unconsciously or like the yellowed, crumbling letter, browned at the edges, that the aging lover has forgotten in his billfold and in which she said “yes.” André didn’t know any more about tenderness than Josette understood why she was abandoned. A perfect *différend*: impromptu visits and sudden disappearances convinced her that he was taking his distance from her whereas love and what little faith he had in the future was driving her to do so.

As for the armed struggle, aside from the childish excitation that it inspired in him, there could be no doubt as to its end result. He knew that, contrary to the struggles in Indochina and Spain, the die had been thrown this time. The Germans had lost the war in Stalingrad: Berger’s lofty deeds in the Aquitaine would have no effect on the great conflict’s outcome. Simple baloney-slinging coupled with that sickness impelling him to seduce and backed up at best by an exercise in courage. It was too late: not because he had waited too long to enter the Resistance — he believed that he had resisted before many others, and more strenuously. But it was too late to feed the myth that one day, during or perhaps following a monstrous massacre, the world could be changed. Mechanically, a dismal empire was being born, from the West, the East, or from both —

an empire that would allow no leeway for revolution, rebellion, or even adventure. Whether appointed here by the duty inhering to freedom or appointed there by social justice, *bien-pensants* on both sides would henceforth be able to sit back and calculate, undisturbed, the aid that the success or failure of any given revolt might bring to one side or the other. The age of the “conquerors” was over—that of the “conquered” was taking shape. Madame the Redundant One had won the war.

Around 1942 or 1943, Malraux, in the manner of some Thucydides, had rewritten the “midnight sermon” for *The Demon of the Absolute*. Reported previously by Lawrence himself, this was the sermon that he gave before the Serahin warriors to get them to take part in the extremely perilous raid that he was going to attempt in the Yarmuk Gorges—a zone under Turkish control.⁹ As the loner struggling with despair and searching for the philosophy that would sustain his coming wartime and political prowess, the soon-to-appear Berger was prefiguring himself by dubbing the dead colonel’s voice: it was, in this sense, a solemn declaration that remained unpublished.

“The law of the desert was nothing if not the eternal refusal of everything that tends to allow man to harmonize with the world, nothing if not contempt for the devil’s thousand shapes that the vermin of the city calls happiness. In three words, that law was: Push further on.”¹⁰ The cities wallow in their wait for appeasement while “the wanderers” rush toward the limit experience of their resistance. Far from freebooting, this is “the freely chosen exaltation of misery.” “Being a wanderer [the word “man” is stricken] consisted in realizing—at the instant one collapsed because the nerves and the body had withstood all they could—that one had fallen only into a period of waiting for the moment one could start off again.” This is precisely the portrait of the long-range predator we have examined before: both true and false, as we said. The same as for Berger: the sham of a true fiction. The only eternity consists of “marching toward one’s future”; the only supreme act is “voluntary deprivation”; and the only freedom: “possess nothing,” “hope for nothing.” In 1943, the author of *Man’s Hope* wrote, “Hope was the demon’s ultimate trap: the trap that ensnares man in his future happiness.” Was this meant for Josette and Josette’s lover? Surely not at the moment it was written: it was for the militants, the fighters, the politicians. “If there’s a reason why the desert is sacred, it’s because it’s the one part of the world where hope is dead.”

Hope. It was not healed into a scar but, rather, cauterized and squamous: the wound reopened by all of the defeats in Europe, in Spain, in France. . . . The hope in *Man’s Hope* was neither political nor personal. It

was already that despair we find in *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg* and in *The Demon of the Absolute*: the certainty that all powers are evil, redundancy through and through, ordinarily triumphant, the certainty that the only worthwhile moments are those “flashing instants when man, full of desperate lucidity, confronts the all-powerful.”¹¹ Three pages in the same vein follow: the Prophet didn’t *promise* Paradise to the *moudjahid*; “each carries within him his own divinity”; none should expect any recompense. “Akin to the desert,” prophesy has no more future than Revolt has a final goal. “What would [Revolt] win? Nothing. With Akaba taken, the march to the Yarmok became necessary. And after the Yarmok, another raid would begin. The Revolt demanded ever greater suffering—that of the desert. . . . It [the Revolt] marched from city to city, not to establish itself anywhere but to reach an unknown city called Arabia of which it knows no more than the nomad knows of the place toward which the desert drives him.”¹²

Just replace Revolt with Resistance and you’ll know in what frame of mind Berger got himself into the *maquis* in the southwest and, further, how he came to form the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade a bit later: seeking after the absolute, he was already, mentally, coming to the aid of a Bedouin leader named de Gaulle on his quest for an “unknown city” named France. Malraux was certainly not accepted into the Aquitaine Resistance as a nihilist prophet. More or less Red and believing in the future, the inhabitants of Toulouse watched him with a half-suspicious, half-bemused look in their eye as he entered: he was a bit of a crackpot, irresponsible, a Parisian agent to keep an eye on. If there was a place where Berger’s transcription of the Arabian colonel’s “midnight sermon” could indeed resonate it was in Alsace, that uprooted and uncertain land, that border zone and desert of identity, the left bank of the mystical Rhineland. It could resonate, that is, be misunderstood. As for Berger, the shepherd of arid mountains, he didn’t care how he was greeted as long as he gained acceptance.

From his seat at one end of a train bench, Jack the Englishman kept watch on the hallway while Malraux declared himself colonel. So he’d decided to jump in. Granted, he had to bluff because the National Council of the Resistance isn’t in the habit of making any old guy a colonel only five days after he shows up—especially if his service record isn’t exactly what you might call patriotic. But he tells himself that de Gaulle slapped his Free France together, after all, in a five-minute radio broadcast. Be-

sides, nobody's verifying orders these days: they're just happy to have volunteers.

Arriving in Dordogne, they move the "Digger" network's base to Castelnaud-Fayrac, only to shelter it a little later at the Château de la Vitrolle near Limeuil. Here we find Berger, among his Englishmen, some "Author" survivors, and two French officers who joined to form this "inter-Allied staff" that already had a reputation for its present and potential firepower. The title that the modest company attributes to itself gives a clear indication of the tasks it intends to perform. Drove of people who refused to play Vichy's game rush to Berger's staff headquarters, fleeing militia or Gestapo sweeps; they will soon be fleeing regular German units on the move toward the northwest. We are in the final days of May 1944.

On a fine morning of 1 June, their radioman catches the long-awaited message about the day to come: "The giraffe has a long neck. I repeat . . ." Berger jumps to his feet: the Normandy landing. He goes to Saint-Chamant the next day and entrusts Vincent, once again, to his godmother, Rosine, the *notaire's* wife, and sends Jo and Bimbo off to Toulouse. For three days he does his utmost to convince the Lioux to shelter Madeleine (who is a Malraux) in the Périgord, in the company of Josette and their son. Roland's wife is expecting any day, and André, knowing that the city is entirely won over to the Resistance, fears that the Das Reich SS division will come through and clean out the Aquitaine capital. Given the ease with which enemy troops, aided by the local militia, can surround a neighborhood, control streets, and seal off any inner-city building they want, the solitude of the *causses*, the steep and windy valleys, the grottoes, the low oak and chestnut woods, the rock walls, the secretive villages — everything in the Haut-Quercy offers impenetrable protection for those who hide there. Finding one big bedroom for the two women and the boys at the old people's home in Domme, André was finally able to pack his little world off in the last train for Souillac on 5 June, then rejoin his headquarters right nearby, downstream on the Dordogne.

On the agreed signal, on 6 June, the *maquis* start blowing up railway lines and bridges or attacking with light weapons those fearsome units of the armored division moving up toward Normandy. So muzzled by terror had the entire region been that only later did the price the Périgord and the Limousin inhabitants paid for this delaying tactic become known. Hangings in Tulle, the massacre at Oradour — everywhere the

masters now held at bay were annihilating everything that even looked like it was hampering their march or anyone who simply dared to watch them losing the war in France.

Something makes the elderly residents of the home in Domme prick up their ears on 11 June: echos of the ancient vociferation of the parturient reaches them. Madeleine is bringing into the world the son of Roland, now gone, an Alain Malraux who is received by two sisters of charity and an underground doctor equipped with nothing more than convent linen and a tub of boiled water. Bimbo's mother is in one corner of the room, clasping him in her arms as she trembles with distress. Did every birth—this one and Bimbo's back in Neuilly—have to be stricken by misery and abandonment? André, however, did breeze through the next day to greet the clan's newborn. Resembles a Japanese general, he decides gayly. Then slips away.

Unable to breast-feed the baby, Madeleine quickly runs out of the little powdered milk that had come from Toulouse. Puerperal fever, mammary infection, and the disappearance of a doctor after an SS unit takes up quarters in Domme. On the eighteenth, in the evening, the door swings open and a handsome officer adorned with a death's head enters the women's dwelling, lifts a blond Bimbo up into his arms. Bimbo declaims: "My name Bimbo Maraux. Not Berzer: Maraux" (*Marronniers*, 357). Everyone forces out a bit of laughter, knowing full well that anything suspicious out there is lined up against the wall without a second thought. Deafened by the famished newborn's crying, febrile hallucinations and anguish driving her to distraction, Madeleine suddenly suffers an outburst of panicked screams: "They're going to kill us all! . . . Don't you see that in leaving us here, André has turned us into hostages? . . . In the state you're in, you don't even dare!" (*Marronniers*, 359–60). Josette is losing her mind, too. Spared so long by the war, the inexplicable ferocity has now suddenly flushed out the holy innocents that she and her son are and stands ready to kill them, too. Fear suffocates her, the fury she feels toward that madman who deliberately left her here without help. What her mother harped at her about for ten years—that André takes her for a fool—now seizes her by the throat: Damn the Malraux! Madeleine was so shaken by this scene that she couldn't help telling her son about it years later when he was grown: his entry into life with the SS at the door, his father gone missing, his mother dying, his aunt overcome with terror.

In tandem with this domestic furor, that night was terrible for the village: executions, machine-gunning, explosions, barked orders mixed

with screams, racing motors, the imminence of death, sleeplessness at the old folks' home. With the SS departure from Domme the next morning, the doctor with his black bag reappeared out of the *maquis* and was able to save Madeleine. The women's bedroom took on some semblance of life once again: the children and their mothers were able to eat the local fruit for a few days. Dispatched by Malraux, a Belgian captain in the Gironde *maquis*, Raoul Verhagen, and a real nurse, H el ene Huffman, came to pick up Josette and Bimbo on their bikes and transported them to shelter at the Ch ateau Castelnaud-Fayrac. Then H el ene returned to Domme to take care of Alain and his mother. Three weeks later, the Malraux women and sons were reunited at the Castelnaud manor — all except Vincent, still confined in Saint-Chamant, where Rosine was looking after him. This is where they learn, on 23 July, that Andr e had been wounded the day before and arrested by the Germans, and that the second in command, Commander Jacquot, had taken over for him at the inter-Allied headquarters.

In the meanwhile, "Jack" had acquired immense prestige, thanks to the loyal services of the SOE. On 14 July, 144 Flying Fortresses escorted by 200 British fighter planes had dropped no less than two hundred containers into two areas: one prepared by Captain Jack at Montsoulat in the Corr eze, the other prepared by George Hiller for the SOE in the Lot. A godsend of munitions, automatic rifles, machine guns, grenades, and pistols by the thousands dangled back and forth as it dropped by parachute that July morning into the arms of those dazzled *maquisards*, braced for the final battles. The shadow army was finally recognized in full light of day: promised its victory, it had tears in its eyes. Colonel Berger arrived a bit late at Montsoulat, but didn't fail to attribute the fabulous operation's success to his staff (Penaud, 144–58).

A week later, he's in the hands of the enemy. Replacing him, Pierre Jacquot, an officer in the active army who had enlisted as early as 1941 in the Armed Resistance Organization (ORA), admired Malraux's freelance genius — he admired his genius, period. Berger had had the idea of a wide-ranging activity to slow the enemy units along the Dordogne. The military man was not opposed to this Lawrencian plan, which consisted of a deployment of the *maquis* operating in the region in two double lines thirty kilometers to the south of the river and fifty kilometers to the north. But how could one get cooperation out of partisan units that were political polar opposites of (and sometimes downright hostile to) each other? One can just imagine an officer of the regular army trying to negotiate a battalion displacement with a CGT electrician from

Rodez assigned by the Communist Party to direct the FTP *maquis*. The FFI leader for the region of Limoges thought this Berger character “a little nutty” and shied away.¹³ The Toulousain FFI commander, Ravel, proved more cooperative. As for the numerous FTPs in this particular zone, they were mainly concerned to have popular democracy triumph in the Aquitaine once the Liberation came: they had no intention of giving up their freedom to act in some woolly operation led by some Berger. Only one of the FTP *maquis*, whose political tendency was socialist, might not be reticent.

Along with the SOE leader in the Lot, George Hiller, Malraux decided to contact this particular group. On 22 July, along a road in Cajarc, near Gramat, their car ran headlong into a German roadblock. The driver was killed instantly. Gravely wounded, Hiller was dragged by his bodyguard into a cornfield where he would await help, dying of blood loss. Malraux received a leg wound and was arrested. He was in French high officer uniform, but without stripes. After a sham execution in Gramat, he was transferred to Figeac, then Villefranche-sur-Rouergue (where—it seemed like yesterday—he had made his film six years before). Then, a stopover in a castle where an enemy headquarters was set up. A final transfer to Saint-Michel Prison in Toulouse. The Gestapo decided to postpone his interrogation because they didn’t have the right file: the Malraux they were holding was not the one they thought they had. Names are derisive. The Nazi police take him for Roland, but Roland has already been captured. In *Days of Wrath*, the police released the real Kassner for a fake one who surrendered in his place.

There can be no doubt that the German security force’s procrastination was encouraged by the threat of retaliation, should Malraux be executed, against prisoners held by the *maquis*. Greasing their palms helped, too: having snatched up billions of francs in a Banque de France train holdup, the Dordogne SOE and especially the United Resistance Movements (MUR) made it known that they had the means to buy police tolerance (Penaud, 183–85). No mention of this initiative is made in the *Anti-Memoirs*. On the other hand, the narration (*AM*, 150–80) of the Toulouse incarceration and his liberation abound in “embellishments full of pathos,” as Clara termed them. The occupier was evacuating the insurgent city on the morning of 19 August, and, with the prison doors thrown open, Malraux escaped with the others. He took refuge at Madeleine’s parents’ house, where Josette picked him up with an official car to take him back to Fayrac.

The R5 and R6 regions in the southwest (Corrèze-Dordogne and Lot) had been liberated during his confinement. Jacquot's authority had increased: having secured the unconditional surrender of the Brive and Tulle garrisons, he became the interregional FFI leader—the position that Bourguès-Maunoury had refused Malraux in July. And when Malraux reached Urval in the Dordogne, where the inter-Allied headquarters had been transferred, he found no one. Both in the Angoumois *maquis* and at the Resistance leaders' meeting in Périgueux, where Berger showed up without prior notification at the end of August, he was badly received, treated virtually as an imposter. Victory had slipped from his grip: "As I can see, I am unwanted. . . . I no longer have my place here: I'm leaving" (Penaud, 193).

Bitter disgust overcame him. He went up to Paris to breathe in the liberated capital's air of excitement. De Gaulle was halfheartedly negotiating the formation of a provisional government with politicians emerging from the woodwork. There was a republic and a country to reconstruct. There were purges. André went round to see dear Aunt Marie Lamy, who had stayed on alone in Paris after Grandma Adrienne's death in 1940. He briefly met Hemingway, the GI who had settled into a room at the Ritz as leader of an armed gang and who did his best to mortify the petty provincial partisan who returned to Argentat crestfallen.

Had the adventure aborted and glory slipped away? With rage in his voice, he had declared upon leaving the Périgueux meeting, "You'll be hearing about Colonel Berger." He was determined to see his war to a successful conclusion. Another path offered itself. In early May 1944, a certain Diener, alias Ancel, had visited him at Castelnaud-Fayrac. This Ancel was a young Lorraine schoolteacher who commanded one of the three Alsace-Lorraine *maquis* based in the Périgueux area (the Haut-Rhin *département* having been evacuated to the Dordogne). Ancel was looking for instructors and weapons. Two weeks later, the colonel went to inspect the "Bir-Hakiem century" soldiers who were lined up in square formation in a clearing. Arms were presented, the colors were raised. Berger raised a clenched fist and used few words to announce that the men would receive the weapons and instructors they needed, that they would fight because they desired to fight. He raised his fist again, and disappeared. It had been a great moment: these pious Christians from the east who had felt abandoned suddenly took heart from the words of this strange "communist." Regular contact was established with Ancel and the Alsace-Lorraine centuries. After all, since the Malraux of Red

Spain was now working with London, he could get parachute drops for the asking.

Cut to 30 August 1944, with him back from Paris and in a sorry state. He's having a bite to eat with Berl and Jacquot, whom he finally gets together with again in Aubazines (between Tulle and Brive), when three men from the Alsace-Lorraine movement enter the restaurant. Bernard Metz, the liaison officer for the three centuries, is looking for a leader able to organize the two thousand men of this *maquis* into a single combat unit and to guide that unit alongside de Lattre's army into the heart of Strasbourg. They're determined, in other words, to liberate their province themselves. Metz has come to ask Jacquot to take on this command. The officer introduces him to Malraux. The Alsatian immediately recognizes the author of *Man's Hope*, a book that he admires. And he lets himself be impressed by his haughty manner, his charm, and his rhetoric. So that when Berger adds, Of course you want to return home fighting, it's symbolic (in other words, I'll sign), Metz understands instantly that this is the leader he needs.

By initialing Alsace and Lorraine, the Berger from *Altenburg* was merely willing that which haunts him: possibilities, precariousness. Whether as the German Berger fighting the Russians in 1915 or the French Berger fighting the German one in 1940 — either way one chose to pronounce it, this patronymic was a measure of the extent to which genealogy trips up in its march through the border zone. The Rhine Valley doesn't need to be conquered as much as it needs to be delivered from belonging and returned to the spiritual vocation that André celebrated for Clara before the Lorelei in 1921, after having escaped Robertsau-style from the hussar regiment quarters. The *Anti-Memoirs'* incipit already saturates the initials with transhistorical power: "And so I return here to certain scenes which I once transposed into fiction. Often linked to memory by inextricable bonds, they sometimes turn out, more disturbingly, to be linked to the future too" (*AM*, 7). This is followed by two pages on which Malraux plots the premonitory recurrence, in his work and in his life, of the Alsace-Lorraine initials.

Full of inspiring hills and forests, those eastern provinces produce a landscape that evokes Barrès. That landscape forms the background upon which Malraux constructs the imaginary narrative of his last conversation with de Gaulle at Colombey on 11 December 1969.¹⁴ Dunkirk's timbers, Altenburg's walnut trees, the Bolgako and Vosgian pines, the Khmer

heveas—all of the Malrauxian woods unite to fall upon La Boisserie. “The General’s remains,” he reflects, following the funeral, “should not have been placed in a coffin but rather on display, like a knight laid out on logs.”¹⁵ The hills around Colombey were his hills of Clairvaux and the Order of the Liberation was that of the Knights Templar.

Malraux is, nevertheless, no Barrèsian. What he loves about the Vosgian area is its quality as an uncertain *limes*: both end and beginning, it’s a sort of limbo. Le Corbusier—whom the minister will celebrate in 1965—knew what he was doing when he erected his church on the slopes of Ronchamp.¹⁶ Those softly worn inclines that rise and fall, as if in one movement, embrace all the revolts and their defeats as well. This melee is as ceaseless as the struggle with the Angel. No one takes root on those slopes: they form a threshold like Lawrence’s Arabia and like France for de Gaulle. It takes a mere nothing to convert the brigade’s toughs into exemplary soldiers during the Vosges battles. An ultrasecular Jacquot could well jeer “the ultra-Christian” brigade while the mystic, Malraux, celebrated it as “a gang of twelfth-century brigands” (Mercadet, 267).

Without encountering opposition, Jacquot and Metz got the brigade officially recognized with Berger as its head by the military authority in Toulouse. The real obstacle would come from the Easterners. What?! You expect us, Christians by tradition, to serve under a Red leader, one of those plunderers of churches and priest-murderers? Do you really think we’re going to sing the *Te Deum* behind him in the Strasbourg Cathedral?! Just as they do in Quebec. Bernard Metz holds fast. He, for one, had understood that the author of *Man’s Hope* is no longer or never actually was the fanatic Bolshevik most think he was. His challenge, shouted at the deliberating century leaders: Put me in front of a firing squad after the war if it turns out you have reason to regret serving under him! Everything is settled, finally, on 17 September 1944 at de Lattre’s headquarters in Dijon: swelled now by another battalion of Alsations arrived from Annecy, the brigade is confirmed in its status as special military unit within the Free France Army; to the satisfaction of all involved, it will be André’s old accomplice from the Pontigny days, André Chamson, who will ensure the brigade’s liaison with the command. Without further ado, the brigands are thrown into battle in the Bois-le-Prince sector starting 7 October. With heavy losses, they manage to break through enemy defenses on Haut de la Parère. With the homeland now at stake, the German resistance on the Vosges front becomes so fierce that de Lat-

tre decides to try to outflank the enemy to the south. The brigade is shifted toward Altkirch to provide infantry support for the Fifth Armored Division.

At the 11 November 1944 morning briefing (we're under Scorpio, his sign) in the school at Montagnay (Franche-Comté), the orderly hands Berger a telegram: Josette dying Tulle hospital. On the twelfth when he arrives, she's already dead. She had fallen under the wheels of the good old local as it chugged out of Saint-Chamant's station. No more than a big life-size child's thing, that train: who would have bothered to mind it? She toppled head over heels into the ballast, her whole body was embedded with flint, those divine knees crushed. Her mother had just come from Hyères to see her and start their war all over again: What are you doing with that guy? You'll never be his wife and your kids'll never be his... that Parisian... still married to another... intellectual... a Red. The horror hits Josette: her mother's vociferations scream out her own anxieties—"the tragedy of my life" (*Marronniers*, 32). Maman, you're going back right now. Maman has arthritis, so her daughter gets her suitcase down to the station and, drunk from all this desperate yelling, lifts it into the compartment. The train starts out. She leaps to the steps, her foot slips—you know, those platform soles made of jointed wood. Diane torn to pieces by the Mothers' fury! With coldness creeping up from her dead legs, she has her mother turned away from the clinic in Tulle. Just enough time to order Rosine to make her up and fix her hair. The Venus of Syracuse sees herself with André's eyes. All her oeuvre was her own beauty, which she passed on to the boys. She knew that however much André had resisted, he couldn't resist this. Here is what I can leave you, says the smooth mask in the Tulle morgue as a final sign to him of loving protestation. Friends of Malraux who saw him in Paris as he prepared to return to the Alsatian front were appalled. Try as he might to let nothing show (the old principle of invulnerability), his features, those spasms, his hands, that look—all was aquiver to the point of collapse.

Leclerc's division is pressing forth through Baccarat and Schirmach to Strasbourg. The brigade is engaged before Dannemarie in bone-chilling cold. After a week of advancing from one frozen hole to the next, they arrive in Strasbourg on 27 November. The leaders are compelled to admire the bumpkins; the leaders are sublime: wounded three times in the one month, Jacquot continues on the front line; Malraux is out to get himself killed. For whom is the ceremony held that he asks his chaplain, Bockel, to observe in Strasbourg Cathedral? Not even Leclerc had thought to restore this site to its function as place of worship. Tears were shed

there for all those who died in combat, from Indochina and Spain to Black Périgord. Josette and Roland and Claude were mourned as well. Mourned, in a word, was an entire people. The ever-vanquished people figured on pediments and column capitals.

In the gloom of the Ardennes, history repeats itself. As in 1940, Rundstedt breaks through the Allied front in December 1944. Eisenhower steps up his plan of action and, withdrawing troops from the Alsatian plain, applies pressure in the Vosges. Immediately, the unbearable image: the swastika raised once again over Place Kléber — shame and the foreshadowing of terror. De Gaulle refuses to expose Strasbourg and gives orders to de Lattre to stay and save the city at all costs. The brigade will cover the southern approach to the Alsatian capital. After a few days, the American regiment that was backing them up pulls back. Still holding Colmar, the enemy tries to take Strasbourg in a noose from the south. Malraux gives the order to hold on, no matter what: even if they have to fight street by street, house by house. He salutes his men as “those who will die.” The enemy attacks with ghastly energy. The thermometer reads sixteen degrees Fahrenheit. One of the brigade units eludes total encirclement by taking a deep ford through freezing marshes. Up to their shoulders in the water, their guns held up in the air, these men will rejoin the main ranks half dead from the cold, frozen halfway up their bodies, their feet and legs totally worn out, their testicles having retreated into the relative warmth of the trunk. Colmar is not taken back until mid-February. The fighting to cross the Rhine is pitiless. Now integrated with the Ninth Colonial Infantry Division, the brigade successively enters Baden and Wurtemberg. De Lattre decorates them in Stuttgart in April. By then its status is that of the third half-brigade in a *chasseur* unit commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Jacquot. Beneath that beret belonging to a forger-colonel, Berger truly deserved his *Croix de la Libération*. Then, it's on to the German southeast to occupy Bavaria before the Russians. The Cold War is thus beginning. As if it were a pharaoh's burial vault, Malraux visits Berchtesgaden.

In January 1945, he had found the time to climb to the old podium of La Mutualité to issue the new slogan. This was the first confederated meeting of the *Mouvement de libération nationale* (MLN). The two thousand delegates representing the various independent Resistance organizations were to render their verdict on a proposed union of the MLN with the coalition of Communist-dominated networks named *Front National*. The French officer speaking is in boots and shoulder belt, his forelock brushes to and fro across a wan forehead, his eyebrows pinch

together. He pays homage to the Communist fighters only to better denounce their party as the main enemy. Could this be the same orator who, in this very place, ten years earlier, called for a United Front with the Stalinists against fascism? He comes out in support of selective coalitions with the FN. But by no means should there be any union: We'd be absorbed by them. "A new resistance is beginning. . . . I ask all of you who were capable of resisting when you had nothing whether now that you have everything within your reach you would be able to begin another. I, for one, say yes."¹⁷ He had found his new war. And for him, it's still the same war. The hall is abuzz — some crack that he's turned his coat. His motion against the promoters of the union is carried, nevertheless, by the decisive vote of 250 to 119. A popular front with a Soviet Union that's still weak: all right, he says; but not a popular democracy with an all-powerful Kremlin. After much mocking, the Left counterattacked. (And who wasn't on the Left in those days?) Even de Gaulle — acting in accordance with the long tradition of Franco-Russian alliances opposed to any preeminence of London (or Berlin or Washington . . .) over Europe — showed himself to be quite conciliatory with Thorez and Moscow: "One can always use allies to hold up the rear" (Peyrefitte, 320). What the general and the writer had in common was their position that old parties had no necessary bearing on present politics. But does Malraux really have a politics? "I said 'let's nationalize the banking system,' as I might have said something else."¹⁸ On this issue, de Gaulle was more forceful: he believed that nationalization would unite the nation and reinforce the state. Malraux's thoughts were more with the people and the possibility that they might suffer yet another defeat at the hands of Stalinism. He thought this as a poet might.

So the cat in him — myriad, unhappy, smiling — now swapped the military shoulder strap for the ministerial necktie.

MEN ARE MADE THUS and women know this well, much better than men themselves do, because they chat about it and smile, but with a bit of fear in their voices because they know also that this is the male's madness: suddenly even the most rebellious man will submit himself to another man—how shall we say it?—out of love? He doesn't know it's love. And yet there he goes silencing any dissension he might have with this man, accepting everything from him, flaunting his unconditional obedience to him for everyone to see, much to everyone's indignation, proudly. In another age, he would have been called a trusty liege. This *farfelu*, adventurer, Red, agnostic, mad orator, writer of insurrection, thinker of precariousness bends his knee before General de Gaulle, pledging allegiance once and for all.

We see him entering the church at Colombey on that November 1970 rendezvous with death: he's arrived late, out of breath. We notice that face racked with suffering, bent over in the shadows like some medieval profile sculpted on the corner of a column capital, his fist to his mouth, repressing a sob. The others mourn a master or, simply, a leader. Some are poised to shove the tall cadaver into the grave and occupy the freed-up space. No, André's daughter, Florence, is not mistaken in the least; he loved only one woman madly: de Gaulle.¹ Or

worse, perhaps: the General was the only man whose mystical wife he dared declare himself.

This was passion. And it was stricken with so much unhappiness that he nearly cracked up, nearly lost the use of his pen, publishing nothing during the ten years from 1957 to 1967, as if he had handed things over to the other and accepted his own superfluity. Everything he had made, said, and written had harkened back to that figure of the antimother, the Donatrix. Now, it was as if she were here present and he accepted remaining at her right side.

It would be an unbearable dependence that he would bear, striving to favor the other over himself to the point of ruining his own image. Shamelessly will he exhibit his obedience, all the while disapproving of this or that view the General holds: agreement with the policy of war in Indochina, the faux pas in the Algerian strategy, open hostility toward Israel during the Six-Day War. Everything that revolts him, he now endorses. Not one public word of criticism, of course; not a word before the Council of Ministers, either.

He lies without batting an eye during press conferences: torture has ceased in Algeria since de Gaulle stepped in out there, he declares on 24 June 1958, calling on the three French Nobel Prize winners in literature to go see for themselves. Then there would be that Ministry of Culture that de Gaulle didn't give a damn about: he will resign himself to getting on with a miserable budget thrown at him like scraps from the table. The bitterness that lies beneath that docility! Occasionally, to a close friend, he'll let a complaint slip out: after one televised speech by the chief of state, "He didn't say a *single* word about what I'm trying to do," he says to Alain (*Marronniers*, 292).

But this instance is rare: he never really had a true confidant. Most of his intimate friends are dead: Drieu by his own hands in 1945 and Groethuyzen, who went the next year. Others, except for Manès Sperber and Jean Grosjean, have been brushed aside (*Marronniers*, 88–89). And of the immediate family, what has survived the war? Besides Clara (off-limits) and their daughter, Florence, the only others who escaped the slaughter are Gauthier and Vincent, Josette's sons, and his brother Roland's widow, Madeleine, along with her son, Alain. Once the divorce from Clara was final and it was certain that Roland, who had been deported to Germany, had indeed died, Malraux had married his sister-in-law in 1948. Of this column of survivors, this family stricken by a Shakespearean destiny, André took the head in order to honor his obligations to the dead.

He settled them into a big house situated in Avenue Victor-Hugo in Boulogne-sur-Seine. It was in the “Dutch style of the 1920s,” according to Malraux; quite ugly on the outside, according to Alain.

Madeleine impressed André the first time they met: she was tall, shapely, had that soft velvety look to her eye, a bit shy, a full oval face surrounded by a mass of dark hair. She had a taste for fine clothes and liked to get done up at Chez Arden. She oversaw the house in Boulogne with the ease and confidence of the girl from a good family. The veneration in which she held her husband, the care she took in educating the three children, her reputation as a pianist and the culture inherent to this talent—she was as if made to add her touch of silent grace to the worldwide missions and initiatives led by the overly brilliant minister who was also de Gaulle’s personal ambassador. Observe her again with the Kennedys when Malraux accompanies the *Mona Lisa* to Washington in 1963: no hint of affectation, she was able to be the spouse of this great person.

The lower of the two floors occupied by the Malraux consisted mainly of one high, vast room entirely white, like some Hollywood film interior. It was lighted by a series of vertical windows and a long bay that looked out onto a garden planted with chestnut trees. Madeleine’s piano provided ample furnishing for this great studio: an immense double-manual Pleyel, an extremely rare prototype designed and produced for the 1937 Exposition Universelle. André carved his office out of an alcove off this room. This was where the noontime table was set for the couple, who were joined ritually once a week by Florence. The three boys were served in a modest adjoining dining room furnished in wicker. Complete with nanny, cook, chauffeur, and guards, the upkeep of this household left nothing to be desired. “Monsieur” couldn’t stand messiness or vague approximation in anything. And with the exception of a very few couples of intimates, no one was “received.” The de Gaulles would occasionally call for dinner.

Life in the house, its time, and its space were all arranged so that nothing could disturb the master in his private conversation with “the Question” against which his writing would play itself to the very end. Every morning he came down in tie and a black or indigo silk dressing gown, seating himself at his worktable, only getting up to spread reproductions out on the carpet, to study, compare, arrange, and set. He will have one single activity for the thirty years that now separate him from his demise: an exploration of the enigma that has haunted his thinking since he was a child: How are works possible that can defy—if only by fits and starts—

the corrosive powers of the Redundant One? To his last breath, he will struggle to elaborate this “Psychology.” And far from being a substitute for adventure and action or for novels that might recount them, this “Psychology” was assigned the specific task of bearing witness to the inexplicable transcendence of which the soul is sometimes capable.

Incarnating this enigma, before his eyes, the legendary figure of de Gaulle served as his model. However, the proximity and insistence of such loftiness, combined with the passion that he felt for it, both stimulated and inhibited his freedom to analyze those works that could bear comparison to the oeuvre by the hero of Free France and to write something of value and stature about them. The silence and orderliness of Boulogne helped screen off the contradictory emotions felt by the General’s liege. There, he was able to collect his thoughts sufficiently to write *The Voices of Silence* and *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*—not without difficulty.

The owners of the villa, the Renards, who occupied the ground floor quarters with their mother and daughter, politely asked the Malraux to give back the upper floors to them following the death of Josette’s sons in 1961. The writer could only experience this request as a direct threat to his work: “No apartment comes with my job,” he declared to Madeleine and Alain, “and as long as I remain minister, I will not leave this house. I’ll have it requisitioned by the army if necessary” (*Marronniers*, 220).

But, in the end, they had to clear out: the OAS set off a bomb on the house’s ground level that blinded the Renards’ little girl.² This was in February 1962, and, six months later, it was de Gaulle’s turn to come under the fire of plotters as he was driven through Petit-Clamart. There was no way they could continue to expose the Renards to such danger, so they inquired about other lodging. Everything was too expensive. Named prime minister in April, Pompidou was nice enough to offer the secondary residence that went with his position. The Pavillon de la Lanterne is an eighteenth-century pleasure house verging on the Versailles gardens. Death had once again cut down very close by, as if it were obeying the desire of a Malraux who was doubly racked by his vassalage to the immortal General and by the writing of a work striving desperately to refute death. Death: befallen from outside as if by accident? Called forth from the inside to have done with it all as fast as possible?

Well before that atrocious year of 1961, it was death that provided every pretext for the household head’s chronic hostility toward his own family. It nourished that gnawing war “for eviction,” as Alain called it, a war whose violence rained down with fullest force upon Vincent, the most insolently Malraux of the children, but also upon the innocent Gau-

thier, who was nevertheless his favorite of the two sons he had by Josette, and upon Madeleine herself who, out of natural gentleness, eventually took the position of not replying: “I live with a mute,” he would say (*Marronniers*, 250). And four years after the two boys died — those boys whom she raised as her own — he would toss at her, “As a mother, you weren’t exactly stupendous” (*Marronniers*, 286). Time intensified his harshness. On a day-to-day basis, for more than fifteen years, Madeleine had been charged with matters that made her indispensable to André. While his debit column rose exponentially, their time together was on a countdown, with both approaching that zero-moment that would cancel everything out. The near perfect expression of that moment came in the slip André made in answer to Arland’s question as to why Madeleine wasn’t there one day (the emphasis is the speaker’s): “Clara is in the mountains” (*Marronniers*, 276).

Living under the same roof at La Lanterne proved unbearable. Madeleine first took a pied-à-terre at the Ranelagh, then an apartment in Avenue Montaigne, where in principle André, who stayed on in Versailles, had his own room made up. Her various arrangements became successive pretexts for an identical scene wherein he imposed his ideas on decoration and, if Madeleine didn’t express complete agreement straightaway, he would pick a fight. Already, in Boulogne, he had declared, “You hate this house!” (*Marronniers*, 256). To Alain’s despair, there was no end to the mounting tension. In Madeleine’s presence, one evening, André said, “Love can be anything as long as you’re here; hatred is anything as long as you’re not” (*Marronniers*, 276). All during the trip to Asia that he was advised to take in 1965 to “get his mind off things,” he sent Madeleine letters full of demented abuse. When he returned, she was asked to never set foot at La Lanterne again (*Marronniers*, 278–79).

Only Alain was admitted into his retreat. The nephew had always enjoyed the uncle’s favor. Was this in accordance with André’s phantasm according to which the Malraux name could only be passed on to sons at the price of their fathers’ death? At that horrible time when little Alain waited fretfully for his father to return, it had been André who came in one morning, sat down on the edge of his bed and, with infinite delicacy, made it plain that Roland was never coming back. What severe tenderness had he used in order to render less unbearable the awful truth for the boy (*Marronniers*, 98)! Tousling his hair gently, he would say, “This one’s like a little cat: you can take him along anywhere” (*Marronniers*, 78). No matter what people say, André was not an indifferent father. One sign, among others, that this is true was his relationship with Florence,

the child from whom he was parted. Enlisted from birth in that nasty war that Clara relentlessly waged against André, Florence resisted against all odds. As a child, already, but in her teenage years as well, she knew how to keep her mother's maniacal rage at a wise distance and safeguard the image of an admired father. That she owed to her precociousness, tailored at birth. Not that she believed she could assuage maternal fury, but it was as if it had fallen to her to grant the exemption for it. André loved her as a child, as a young woman, and, in this daughter thus given to him, a proud, cultivated spirit free of all resentment. Those weekly meals that they took together in Madeleine's company provided years of regular opportunities for their mutual esteem to strengthen. One can only marvel at the fact that, in a life where filiation was so threatened, little Florence's foot never got caught in any of the many traps set by the devil. Her soul escaped not only unharmed but wiser from an ordeal that would have corrupted anyone else, even someone outwardly more robust.

As to the boys, André showed himself to be warm and friendly, at least in the early years. When they came at the same time to ask him questions, he made order out of the turmoil with a simple "Who asked the question first?" then answering with care (*Marronniers*, 64). One day he takes the paper a distraught Alain is holding out to him and, in an instant, draws the escutcheon requested at school for homework (*Marronniers*, 109–10). On another occasion, he sits him down at the small piano in the dining room and gets him to play a Bach gavotte just to prove to him that he'll execute it successfully the next day at the young pianist examination that he must fake (*Marronniers*, 110–11). The nephew was pampered but he treated Florence and the three boys according to a single principle attributed to Lawrence: children should be spoken to as adults. So, he explained to them that Communists were not simply the "bad guys" of all those stories: "What they want is good; what they do is base" (*Marronniers*, 38). Or else he would explain that one could believe with Jesus (or not) that everyone is accountable to everyone else but that one could in no way ignore the principle (*Marronniers*, 61). The choice was their responsibility. But what never abated was André's fundamental injustice toward Vincent, the rebel. The child suffered so much from his incomprehension that his school failures and flights multiplied. On Manès Sperber's advice, he was sent off to a Swiss boarding school, but to no avail. Then, to the Jesuits in Metz; later to a *lycée* in Strasbourg. Finally, Père Bockel, the old chaplain of the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade, discovered the young man's talent for painting and got him into the Alsa-

tian capital's Art Décoratifs school. The car crash that killed Vincent at the age of eighteen along with his brother resulted only in "Gauthier's death" in the father's words.

So, there Malraux is in 1965, hiding away in the depths of his lantern, adjacent to those world burial rites that organize the wooded groves and paths of good kingly pleasure. Felled he is, beneath autumns and winters misted over by the haze that exudes from the basins and the Grand Canal. There, in the maniacally geometric impasse where the story of French kings flaunts the acme of its emptiness, he incubates his antibook. He drops in at the ministry or the council, when necessary, then immediately returns to take up his struggle with words beneath the mute lamp where the two cats that Alain gave him come and warm their backs. Outside, the blackness of the Versailles night clings like hundreds of bats to the old windows. At the end of three days spent with him at All Saints' in 1965, Alain, still a young man, hears him answer his "Good evening" with a grim "Thanks." We have already seen that at the end of 1966, when a meeting is set for the following week, the distraught uncle inquires, "So we'll never see each other again?" (*Marronniers*, 285, 287). The nephew ends up being dismissed from behind the big, heavy desk in the Palais-Royal with the words "It has happened that you've been my son" delivered with stress by a "leaden look." That dismissal is confirmed three days later by a note in which he reads, "From the other side of the river, I wish you happiness" (*Marronniers*, 315). Such is his desire for death that he severs the strongest mooring of all.

Similarly, Florence will be banished in 1960 for several years, based on a simple misunderstanding that was amplified into an insurmountable barrier. She had just signed the "Manifeste des 121," in which virtually everyone who counted in French thought, literature, and art denounced the use of torture in Algeria and called on young draftees to begin deserting the army. Astonished, the minister discovers his daughter's name — his name — at the bottom of this text published on the front page of the morning newspapers. Dead silence. Then, in his awful, neutral voice: "This time, I've had enough of her." Another long silence. Then: "What book has she written, what painting has she done that she should sign this text?" (*Marronniers*, 198). One or two days earlier, they had dined together, affectionately, as usual. The petition had circulated at *L'Express*, where Florence worked. She had signed as a gesture, as if "unhappy in love" for a defiled Algeria, out of abhorrence at torture. Did she allude to it in conversation with her father? He, in any case, was in no way im-

plicated by her signing.³ Nor could Florence think for one moment that he felt any solidarity for the torturers. But he took it another way: joining the cohort of idiotically noble souls, even his daughter was now betraying him: “These great revolutionaries who keep explaining to me what I should do in the name of what I have already done are going to look really good when we achieve peace in Algeria. Sartre is simply trying to step into my shoes” (*Marronniers*, 198).

Moral deprivation led eventually to neurasthenia and self-hatred: “What I want is mad and what I am capable of is worthless” (*Marronniers*, 279). A survivor. In the midst of honors, the desert. Striving to pull his writing up out of the disaster, he goes overboard with coffee, alcohol, amphetamines. With calm in her voice, Madeleine had dared to tell him:

“No one’s going to be brave enough but you have to be told — if you want to save yourself, you’re going to have to stop drinking.”

“I was expecting something like that. Well, if I drink, it’s all your fault!”

“Not true: you were already drinking too much with Josette. She complained about it to me, saying that you were only able to finish *Man’s Hope* on Pernod.” (*Marronniers*, 283–84)

He is sent off to Asia to walk it off (without much success) with Albert Beuret’s help. But then this uncontrollable man agreed to be helped. Louis Bertagna, an intelligent, talented, and warm neuropsychiatrist, takes him in hand.

At this point, one might easily have believed him done for. On the contrary. And what saved him was an idea, not a stint of tourism. It was the idea for a book that had awaited him for such a long time, yet came forth from the closest of all possible far-off reaches — an idea that would serve as anamnesis, like Montaigne’s *Essays*, yet written in the style of Chateaubriand. A book of moments that would be deconstructed, reconstructed, invented, built into an elliptical scenario — a book of plenty. Rather than Malraux’s life, its matter would consist of “the Malraux life.” Not the biography “of a guy who has this name” but, rather, the singular name of that which signs life — writing itself as the immanent enigma of all life, as that which slips away from life and disregards it. Par excellence, *Anti-Memoirs* will be that writing attuned to the throat, dictated by the unknown inner voice.

One constant in the table of passions is that meetings between lovers hang by a thread, pass through a filter, obey a certain destiny. Lovers molly-

coddle their innocence and muddle circumstance: they have no bearing on the how or the why of their meeting. André Chamson takes credit for having presented the writer to the General in Strasbourg on the occasion of the *Te Deum* celebrated there in May 1945. Malraux, for his part, alleges several different versions of the failed contact. “Twenty years later,” he received a letter from a certain Monsieur Bénédite attesting to the fact that, as early as November 1940, he had tried to get a message passed on from Marseilles to the leader of Free France in London (*AM*, 97). Madame Bénédite was, at the time, secretary to Varian Fry, who, as we have said, was in charge of aiding and evacuating endangered French writers in the name of New York’s Emergency Rescue Committee. Unfortunately for the preservation of this piece of evidence, following a demonstration commemorating Yugoslavian independence on La Canebière (the very place where King Alexander had been assassinated six years earlier to the day), the young woman in question had had to swallow the message in a police van that was hauling her off to the station for an interrogation.

Novelistic enough? Malraux, moreover, declared “on several occasions” that in either 1943 or 1944 he had asked his friend Alice Jean-Alley (Paris-based “smuggler” of SOE agents and escaped Allied military personnel) to put him in contact with Liewer (another official in that Anglo-French network) in order to get in contact with de Gaulle. Yet another fable? It is compatible with the previous one. Yet the relations between the SOE and the French authority in London were notoriously dreadful. Malraux, furthermore, would not have been hard pressed to imagine the story. And his brother, Roland, a member of the SOE, could very well have ensured the liaison.

For a man who was otherwise so prompt at decisive action, how awkward all this was. There had been the overt biases of a “man on the Left” against a career officer judged to lean too far to the right. To Roger Stéphane, who in late September 1941 had asked him if he was going to make his way to London, Malraux replied, “What would I be doing among those Action Française officers?” (Stéphane, 97). In February 1945 they’re on the Alsatian front when news of the Maurras verdict reaches them: he’ll elude the firing squad. Stéphane pretends surprise. Malraux’s reaction: “No way to condemn Maurras to death if you adopt Bainville’s politics” (Stéphane, 113). In early 1945, once again, to a suggestion made by his old comrade, Corniglion-Molinier, now a close associate of the General — “You should get to know de Gaulle: he’d be to your liking” — he replies, “That fascist?” (*Marronniers*, 157).

The fact is that he was led into the General's office, in Rue Saint-Dominique, on 10 August 1945. It would seem, nevertheless, that a trick, of which both protagonists fell victim, was the price paid for this meeting. Malraux supposedly allowed himself to be convinced to take part in a series of informal meetings of the de Gaulle "entourage" made up of Gaston Palewski, Corniglion, Lieutenant Claude Guy, Claude Mauriac, Pompidou, and Aron. One summer evening in 1945, an automobile flying military flags pulls up in front of the villa in Boulogne: "General de Gaulle asks you in the name of France if you will help him." To which Malraux is supposed to have come back with, tit for tat, "It goes without saying" (AM, 84). No word identifying this messenger.

Within ten days of their subsequent conversation, he became a "technical adviser" in the cabinet of the provisional government's president. With no specific responsibility, equipped with a mere handful of ideas that are rather unexpected for a veritable destroyer when it came to "techniques" for intoxicating the masses — ideas on how to use the media for pedagogical purposes and for opinion polls, for taking the temperature of the political climate. The Constitutional Assembly results from the election of 24 October 1945: tripartite chamber made up in equal parts of Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists. Then consultations, negotiations, portfolio swapping, with de Gaulle gingerly dividing up the pie to concoct the new ministry Third Republic style, as if nothing had taken place since 1940. Put in charge of a nonexistent Ministry of Information, Malraux becomes one of the three ministers without protocol.

Exasperated by the "party regime," de Gaulle will resign after only two months, on 20 January 1946. But the enigma surrounding the meeting is not cleared up. One evening, shortly before the *président du conseil's* departure, Malraux descends the steps in front of the Hôtel Matignon at his side:

"What do you think you'll do at the Ministry of Information now?"

"But there is no ministry, General. It will be finished in six weeks."

"I shall have gone by then."

Whether real or imagined, the hero's outspokenness supposes that he has complete confidence in his admirer. Yet, the latter quickly obscures the motivation for such intimacy: "It was then, for no apparent reason, that I figured that General de Gaulle had in fact *never* summoned me. This was confirmed to me some years later. . . . I imagine that when his putative appeal was transmitted to me, he must also have been given

one from me, which was no less apocryphal” (*AM*, 96–97*). What appeal on his part? It matters little, since it is “putative” anyway. Nobody ever wished for their union: it was just destined to occur. Malraux will see to it that this pathos, that of tragedies, will be safeguarded to the very end. (If the really curious detective types want to learn the intermediary’s identity, it was probably Gaston Palewski.)

Under such conditions, how can he be called a Gaullist? He refuses to campaign either for the RPF or for the UNR. Does he even join this Union for the New Republic? Yet, not being a card-carrying member of the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists in no way prevented him from presiding over their meetings in the mid-1930s. In writing out the greatly fantasized narrative of his last conversation with de Gaulle at Colombey in November 1969, he celebrates the object of his adoration and provides a flattering exhibit of their intimacy. But this narrative is also an excellent opportunity for him to state and restate the old retired leader’s mistrust of the Gaullists . . . or to attribute that mistrust to him.

“It was you who invented the word Gaullism, wasn’t it? What did you mean by it, in the beginning?”

. . . “During the Resistance, something like: political passions turned to serving France, as opposed to France used to serve the passions of the Right or the Left. Afterward, a feeling, . . . the feeling that your motives, good or bad, *were not the motives of the politicians.*” (*FO*, 82*)

A sycophant, without a doubt; but no less doubtfully sincere.

We must reiterate and stress that Gaullism became a political party. Here is de Gaulle: “What will count is unpredictable. A man of History is a leaven, a seed. A chestnut tree does not resemble a chestnut” (*FO*, 106–06*). With which observation Malraux fully agrees: “I don’t believe a future historian will be able to interpret Gaullism in purely political or even in purely national terms. . . . Gaullism has been France, but something more as well” (*FO*, 85). Look at me, General, I’m a good example in that I’m called a symbolic Gaullist because I’ve never been elected to office: “When you thought me too unserious [*farfelu*] in 1958, you suggested half in earnest, ‘Be a minister!’ and I asked ‘What for?’ There are things in Gaullism that are self-explanatory, and some that are not” (*FO*, 86). General, I am what is inexplicable about you. It’s simply not something that’s elective: we are elected otherwise. “Gaullism was prevented from becoming a form of nationalism by its weakness. Your strength

sprang from the fact that you had nothing.” You weren’t acquainted with those who were on your side: first and foremost the antifascists: “You are the last antifascist leader of the West” (FO, 84–85).

To this, de Gaulle: “Whenever I was right, I had everyone against me. I’m used to it.” Malraux: “I believe that in the long run the loner’s ‘NO’ [that is, the no to oppression] is infused with a mysterious contagiousness” (FO, 86).⁴ The General: “You understand, I had a contract with France. Things might have gone well or ill, but she was behind me. . . . This contract was fundamental, because it had no form; it never has had. With no hereditary right, without a referendum, with nothing, I was led to take on the defense of France, and of her fate. I answered her mute and imperious cry” (FO, 16–17).

But now, the “contract has been broken.” Was it because the president had been defeated by the 1969 referendum? Don’t believe it for a minute! Politics is not the issue. The only reason Malraux constructs the fantasy of these dialogues is to better dissociate the great man (and himself) from the politicians who call themselves his comrades. He’s using this same tactic when he “quotes” the following question, whose treachery is slightly despicable: “Did you judge the contract to be broken in May, or earlier, at the time of your reelection?” Did it happen during the May 1968 revolt or was it already when the presidential election of 1965 went to a second vote against Mitterrand? To which came this apparently sibylline response: “Much earlier. That’s why I took on Pompidou” (FO, 20). Pompidou had already been “taken on” in 1962 when Debré stepped down following the Evian agreements. What indicated a breach of contract then was his quasi failure with the referendum on direct election of the president of the republic: 62 percent had said yes, but with only 47 percent of the eligible vote. Upon leaving the council on 31 October of that year, de Gaulle draws Roger Frey, Gilbert Grandval, François Missoffe, and Alain Peyrefitte to the side and delivers this confidence: “Believe me, it’s screwed (*foutu*). The French are simply returning to their habitual nastiness (*vachardise*)” (Peyrefitte, 264). Since the marching orders are no longer being heard, Pompidou will be fine for managing a dozing populace. And he’ll do such a good job that he’ll “succeed” the General.

Here is de Gaulle in 1969: “I have no successors, as you very well know” (FO, 91). “People ought to know—and I count on you for this—that what is going on is foreign to me. . . . This is not what I wanted. This is something else” (FO, 30*). This is politics: Do I make myself clear? For good measure, Malraux delivers a little more of the scene to us:

As he left his study, he was saying to Geoffroy de Courcel, “You know, I like our Old Boys and all that, but . . .”

“But they did stay on!” said Madame de Gaulle.

“ . . . but people must realize that I have nothing to do with what they’re doing.” (*FO*, 53*)

And, as if it were simply as a matter of interest, just as Malraux was leaving La Boisserie, de Gaulle said: “Remember what I told you: I mean there to be no common ground between me and what is happening now” (*FO*, 122).

One deserves to inherit a great oeuvre only if one is capable of an oeuvre that is just as lofty. This is the principle that Malraux pleaded against the Zhdanovians in June 1935 as well as in March 1948 before the intellectuals. It is also his argument against the Gaullists: Who, among those sitting around the Council of Ministers’ table, was a creator? Following the Petit-Clamart assassination attempt in 1962, the rumor circulated that de Gaulle had designated Malraux to take charge of his business in case of death. One can readily guess at the source of this rumor. This was pure fantasy, for Malraux surely did not wish to pass himself off as a great political figure. Being a gang leader was perfectly proportional to his sense of action. It was just that he longed, through the medium of writing, to be the witness of this upside-down Alexander who was restoring Greece and dismantling the Empire. “There are no real adventurers left! . . . All the real *farfelus* are in Hong Kong, but the race is dying out. . . . Their European race” (*AM*, 266*).

Malraux meets that blend of whisky, gesticulations, asides, impromptu, and verbal riptide named “Clappique” in Singapore in June 1965. He adopts Céline’s style to sketch, for Malraux’s benefit, the scenario for the end of the Western adventure. His tone isn’t exactly Gaullian, but what is Gaullian is the melancholy associated with his knowledge that epics of insurgency are forever prohibited. An oath passed between the General and the writer that neither of them would hide from the hard truth that the world was losing its soul. Accompanying the latter to the door of his office on 10 August 1945, the former asks him: “What struck you most when you came back to Paris?” His answer: “The lies” (*AM*, 91). Whether true or false, this reply is a promise. The Left and the Right lie to each other and will always lie. Let us promise, you and I, on our word as disabused individuals, that while we may and might err, we will never be deluded. A work always resumes upon a defeat, yet there is no victory. Paintings, Picasso said, are “gizmos in which things have to

encounter their own destruction" (*ML*, 799†). According to the Gaullian march, from its "particular form," from the miserable vanity of being only what it is, that is, something singular and shattered in its natural grounding and rights, a people is suddenly unleashed and raised up toward its "supreme form." That "supreme form" is the nation—something that the people do not yet constitute and never will, since the nation is not a particular state of the community, but its horizon.⁵ Yet it was necessary for it to be on the brink of disaster: Guernica ripped apart by Nazi bombs, spattered with blood and bits of human bodies. This is what Picasso's brush exalts, for an instant, by putting that martyrdom on its feet and delivering forth the truth of its will and its agony.

In the world of art, there will always be some inspired soul who will put himself on the line with this metamorphosis. "Painters are necessarily reincarnated as painters. They're a race in themselves. Like cats" (*PM*, 143). And there's a cat at La Boissierie. "It used to have a very distinguished name," said a laughing Madame de Gaulle, "but I have forgotten it! Now we call it Grigri" (*FO*, 54*). Grigri teaches the General how to do nothing: ask him! "We play solitaire and take walks together" (*FO*, 41). De Gaulle shares with the cat that "inner remoteness," that "intense presence" which is also that of "distinguished men of religion [and] mystics" (*AM*, 91–92). His soul harbors "a background protected by its very essence . . . the horizon that retreats before you at sea" (*ML*, 813†). "A haunted figure, whose mind was obsessed with that destiny *which he had yet to discover and affirm*" (*AM*, 92).

This hagiographer could go on forever celebrating the object of his passion: "Greatness is a road that leads toward something unknown" are further words that he attributes to him (*FO*, 29). At once Moses and Mao guiding a people by forced marches toward its promise. "Push on, always farther and farther still. And see that it holds. But hold against what?" (*ML*, 788†) asks the painter. In the face of nothing. Long marches are merely absorbed by the horizon. "Politicians . . . gather territories together until they lose them, and they defend interests until they betray them. History is accomplished in other ways" (*FO*, 123). Ways that are absolute and that are in no need of absolution. Picasso recognizes that painting "makes me do what it wants." For de Gaulle, it was the nation.

From August 1945 until April 1969, some twenty-four years pass with Malraux torn between his loyalty to the Gaullian Figure and his loathing of political affairs. Minister of information from 1945 to 1946, RPF delegate for propaganda until the movement is dissolved in 1953, minister

of state charged with culture from 1958 until 1969: to all outward appearances, he is a major personality in the Gaullist “nomenclatura.” The truth is that, since he doesn’t count for very much in the management of Gaullist business, he is rather more like its hostage. The General listens to him because he likes his lofty view of things and his sense for the legendary, he never discusses Malraux’s opinions, and, as usual, he draws his conclusions and makes his decisions based on his authority alone. He sends Malraux off to overseas communities and on various missions with foreign leaders. He is commissioned for those mobilizing harangues at which he excels, for commemorative homages, for funeral orations, and for inaugural speeches. He functions as the president’s roving ambassador and titular preacher.

As minister of culture, his initiatives are well known: the inventory of France’s artistic heritage; the creation of the Maisons de Culture; the facelift for Paris; the regional support funding for the plastic arts, music, and theater; the protection and preservation of historic monuments and urban sites; the creation of the Orchestre de Paris; the overhaul of the Opera and the naming of Georges Auric as its director; and the management of the Villa Medici entrusted to Balthus. He turns the ceiling of the Opera over to Chagall’s hand and that of the Odéon Theater to Masson. Before the assembly, and against a stirred-up right wing, he defends the Odéon’s wish to stage Genet’s *The Screens* in 1967. He accompanies the *Mona Lisa* to Washington and New York in 1962. There were many fortunate decisions that were not all for prestige.

But some of the blunders are first-class as well. Renaud and Barrault kicked out of the Odéon for having flung the doors of the Théâtre de France wide open for the May ’68 protesters. Bréart de Boissanger, the career diplomat entrusted, in January 1959, with the management of the Comédie-Française so that a bit more Racine and a bit less Labiche could be put on, was dismissed without warning only a year later. Against the advice of his intelligent friend and one of the best analysts of his work, Gaëtan Picon, Malraux chose Marcel Landowski to reform and direct the National Conservatory of Music. Boulez published a crushing indictment of this choice. Suspecting that there had been some scheming involved, Picon, the minister’s director of arts and letters, was so furious at the decision that he slapped his resignation down on Malraux’s desk and slammed the door. They never saw each other again. Malraux said to Alain: “The simplest way to deal with it is to not give a shit” (*Marionniers*, 252). He got the state to buy up the greater portion of Henri Langlois’s Cinémathèque, granted it a budget, moved it into the reserve

section of the Palais de Chaillot, and inaugurated the new Cinémathèque Française with a laudatory speech. Having assembled, over a thirty-year period, the world's richest collection of films — one that he managed to save through the Occupation — Langlois was also known to be a prickly and unmethodical manager. The relations he had with the supervisory administration began to sour. News got around that Malraux was ready to relieve him of his duties. A general outcry erupted: protests and petitions signed by Truffaut and the rest of the New Wave, unanimously, Orson Welles, Rossellini, Dreyer, Fritz Lang, and Chaplin, as well — everyone alive who meant something to cinematographic art, everyone Malraux admired.

How were errors bordering on insult like this possible from an intellect who so revered these talents? Was it that he was so used to making decisions as a gang leader? Was it his impatience whenever a project moved slowly? One must factor in his neurasthenia, which, for a time at least, rendered him indifferent to these trifles. And, more generally, there was the boredom endemic to a freebooter who found himself seated behind a desk every morning with piles of paper to shuffle. “It’s a ministry without a minister,” he confesses as his appearances in Rue de Valois become more and more infrequent. He finds a pretext to let this acrimony explode during the Council of Ministers on 7 December 1962:

“We ministers get proposals for budgetary savings in the morning and, by noon, we have to accept the terms. This doesn’t make much sense. That savings have to be made, no one will contest. But we ministers should at least be able to define the nature of the savings that we are constrained to make.”

[Prime Minister, Pompidou, who is reputed to be his friend, decides to play the role of school supervisor and replies, simpering:] “And what do we do if the minister in question can’t be found at his office all morning long?”

[At which the headmaster, de Gaulle, flies to the assistance of the teacher who has misbehaved:] “Could the State Minister not be authorized to make transfers within his own budget?”

“Of course,” interrupts Minister of Finance Giscard, “that goes without saying as it does for all of the ministries.” (Peyrefitte, 522–23)

So Malraux gets an F in budget control. The boss, too. They both consider such questions to fall to the quartermasters, whose duty it is to simply fall in line behind the holy column. For the first time in his life,

he who always refused to “work” has a career. In the boredom of administration, he vegetates, occasionally escaping by whim or by simply not showing up.

A minister of culture should at least take care to win the benevolence of the intellectual class, which generally, at the time, saw de Gaulle as a dictator and staked its hopes in a united Left. Before the war, Malraux belonged—if remaining an independent—to that intelligentsia in the *NRF* orbit. But, ever since taking an anti-Communist position at the MLN Congress in January 1945, he is considered a turncoat. The Left, notably those associated with *Les Temps Modernes* who take pride of place from the end of the war through the 1950s, seize every opportunity to throw a wrench into his works. He might read what they write, but with two or three rare exceptions, he has nothing to do with his contemporaries. He remains loyal to his “tragic writers,” Claudel, Bernanos, Drieu, Céline, and the forgotten Guilloux. While he might admire Sartre’s *The Words*, he nevertheless privately derides the Café de Flore ideologues.

Camus has, to his mind, a special place. Dating from the war, and even before, their affinities are long-standing. These affinities derive from their common sense of revolting without hope. In Camus, this sense is inflamed by the black sun of Algeria, while in Malraux, its gloom is deepened by grotesque bombast. Malraux recommended the publication of *The Stranger* based on the manuscript; a very young Camus adapted Malraux for the theater. He too refused to lie about political action and denounced Stalinist totalitarianism. Awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957 (instead of Malraux, he said), he was killed by an automobile accident in 1960.

Sartre is another story. This Marxist-sympathizing Flaubert who took every opportunity to denounce his own bourgeoisie in the name of the destitute threw all his talent, if we are to believe Malraux, into ignoring that a line had been crossed and that, far from announcing a revolution, the struggles of French workers were mostly an aid to Moscow’s strategy of destabilizing Europe. Sartre simply refused to recognize that the untamed capitalism of yesteryear was now attempting to regulate the exploitation of labor and that the ruling class was little by little assimilating a managerial technocracy. May he rest in peace, that man of breeding who was in the wrong century when he stubbornly insisted that the times he was living in should only be thought in terms of an all-out class struggle that completely cleared the field for his struggle against himself. He too got the Nobel Prize, in 1964, which he refused out of principle.

Malraux's dispute with *Les Temps Modernes* began early, too. In a 1948 issue, Merleau-Ponty had published the translation of a provocative letter from Nathalie Trotsky attacking the Old Man's former admirer for having shifted to the Stalinist camp during the popular front era. Merleau-Ponty wrote a commentary that was so vicious that Malraux demanded that Gallimard cease publishing the journal. Let us now span across the various episodes of twenty years — episodes like the address to President Coty protesting the confiscation of Henri Alleg's *The Question*,⁶ calling for an end to torture in Algeria, and signed in April 1958 by Mauriac, Martin Du Gard, Sartre, and . . . Malraux — all the way to May 1968, when Sartre goes wild (*se déchaîne*). Now that the French have seen de Gaulle stripped of his clothes of power, "the students," he writes, "must be allowed to see Raymond Aron naked. And his clothes won't be returned to him until he accepts the antiestablishment protest." Having always respected Aron's intelligence and rectitude, Malraux is horrified. Sartre's call for the just to be stripped awakens memories in him of pogroms. Confidentially, for his nephew's information alone, he expresses this opinion:

Simone de Beauvoir is just a sheep: Who cares about her? As for Sartre, don't tell anyone I said so, but he's an ass [*bêêêête*]. . . . Not stupid, of course, like just anyone who happens along or your concierge, but like that flawed mind that he's always had, coupled with that way he has — especially when it's wrong — of saying in five hundred pages what only needs thirty. On that subject, there are heights of inanity in his book on Genet, notably when he goes on about capitalism and the Moscow trials. Moreover, there would be no place for any of Sartre's characters — from his theater or his novels — in a society that had become communist. Who would that character have to talk about? But, really, don't tell anyone: otherwise someone will think I'm jealous. That'd be the day! (*Marronniers*, 305–6)

At that, he bursts out laughing. Jealousy — sure, no one's sheltered from petty feelings (if jealousy is petty). But the point is not one of psychology. Jealousy between authors is futile. The only jealousy that counts is writing's jealousy for a name, its desire to be "signed, Malraux." Its desire, in other words, for Malraux to become a proper name for writing and nothing else. That business is strictly between it and him. The only thing that was killing him now was his inability, over several years, to write, either in the form of acts or of books. Two months prior to the

release of *Antimémoires* in July 1967 — a work with which he knows he rivals the best — he proclaims, “I’ll show them that I’m the greatest writer of the century” (*Marronniers*, 297). For “Malraux,” and promised for signing, there would be a book without precedent in this century — this oeuvre-life.

That paraph, and that paraph alone, is the offering he makes to de Gaulle. This explains his hostility toward all of the General’s comrades: his name was to suffer no confusion with theirs. If we believe his stories, he once sent back to Debré a circular that he had addressed to all the ministers with the following message: “My Dear Michel, Your letter displeased me. Would you be so good as to rewrite it for me. — André Malraux” (*Marronniers*, 182). When asked how he viewed the Gaullist party, “It lacks genius,” he answered (*Marronniers*, 291). He took the same precautions to “not involve himself” in the negotiations over de Gaulle’s successor. He’s not surprised and not a little revolted to see his friend Pompidou submit his candidacy. The Gaullists win a crushing victory in the July 1968 legislative elections. This victory is in fact disastrous, because they are now clearly a rightist formation. On 10 July, de Gaulle gives a farewell dinner for his prime minister, to whom he owes the presidency after May, and relegates him, for this reason, to “the Republic’s reserve.” Malraux stands and offers a nasty toast to the man resigning (or resigned): “The honorable deputy from the Cantal, I drink to your destiny.”⁷ You will make a brilliant president, your name will adorn a cultural center and a riverbank expressway, but being a crafty one means that grandeur will elude you.

Above all else, the jealousy of writing (or is it that of a writer?) takes it out on the very object of Malraux’s passion. Following his retirement in 1969, when the General again takes up the pen, as he had done sixteen years before following the Rassemblement’s dissolution, Malraux feigns worry:

“You’re writing the next part of your *Mémoires*, and an ideological book?”

“I’m writing my *Mémoires*, from 1958 to 1962. After that, there will be two more volumes.”

“No crossing of the desert?”

“No. People have told you it was ideology because I am not writing a chronological narrative. It will be a simple thing, you understand, like the *Mémoires de guerre*. I tell what I did, how and why.” (*FO*, 23)

That expression, “crossing of the desert,” imputed to Malraux, signifies the period between 1953 and 1958 during which the Gaullist movement had vanished from the French political scene and ending when the republic, just about out of stopgap measures, urgently called the savior back. He would obviously write nothing concerning that interlude during which he had performed no actions in the name of France: Caesar, after all, only relates what he does as Caesar. Malraux seizes the opportunity of this retirement to suggest a short moratorium of jealousy: “There exists a field of literature which criticism has not singled out because it is confused with memoirs: I mean books that recount what their author *has done*. *Not felt*. Memoirs are often resurrections of feelings. An account of the carrying out of a great plan poses other problems” (FO, 25–26).

Don’t confuse our two names. Your memoirs, General, are about as foreign to my *Anti-Memoirs* as the *Mémorial de Saint-Hélène* is to *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*. Chateaubriand defends his writer’s privilege against the emperor’s encroachments. A boundary marking between the history of deeds and the narrative of the imagination is apparently easy to trace. Yet it is as easily blurred when the author of the former, who is also its protagonist, is already legendary. A confusion weighs heavily on the autobiographies of great men and their biographies as well. Having perceived this problem in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Malraux delimited it thus:

The play of the imagination . . . aimed mainly at creating characters whose prestige (either through sheer worth or through their tragic core) would be greater than that of the author. One such character actually existed: Lawrence of Arabia. Lawrence had in fact acquired that capacity to act upon men’s imagination that writers demand of fiction. (DA, 2:512)

The same holds true for de Gaulle: How could the author of the *Mémoires* ever surpass the mythical power of the hero of June 1940 and of May 1958?

The choice is simple: either the deeds recounted are already legendary or the power of style produces the fiction of a legend. Widening this abyss, Malraux draws up a crushing indictment: Lawrence (read de Gaulle)

was incapable of fiction. He could only write about himself. And then, only indirectly. He could only express himself through the depiction of a world of which he was the half-participatory, half-

foreign conscience, that is, the *éminence grise* of both his narrative and his legend. ~~From this stem the narrow limits of a work which the~~ His imagination could not display remained subjected to experience. (*DA*, 2:510)

Here, the author of *Man's Fate* gains a decisive advantage: the novelist's imagination is necessarily

~~a sharp consciousness of human diversity~~ both marvel and anguish before human diversity. All those other than [Lawrence—de Gaulle himself] were too different and, for that reason, too similar to each other. . . . There was no other for Lawrence. Only an ~~epic abstraction~~ abstract epic to which he adhered by meeting it head on—whether Turkish Empire or Arab revolt . . . and, beyond: Evil. (*DA*, 2:510–511)

With de Gaulle, as well, there is no human horizon, just a concise “tragedy with two protagonists: the French and himself” (*FO*, 26). With Evil, at bottom, baseness. “Picturesque, on occasion, but soulless”—a conflict this abstract cannot do what a Bernanos or a Malraux does (*DA*, 2:511).

The General is suddenly in the position of an overwhelmed school-boy convinced that he'll never make it.

The General put his hand on the worksheet of his *Mémoires*.

“Malraux, really, between you and me, is it worthwhile? . . . Why write?”

[A good question, which took its time in coming, draws this insolently priggish response:] “And why live? . . . General, why need life have a meaning?” (*FO*, 37)

Jacques le Fataliste dealing out a lesson in elementary metaphysics to the helpless master. To each his role. Metamorphosis through writing, the rendering of “*deeds*” by a Braque or a Reverdy—that's your humble servant's specialty. Yours, my liege, is taking care of what has been done: *veni vidi vici*.

Such haughtiness in no way stopped the leader from approving of the writer. On the contrary:

I have, and I shall always have, on my right, André Malraux. With this friend at my side, this genius whose fervor is attracted to great destinies, I feel covered from the prosaic. I draw strength from the idea of myself that this incomparable witness conceives. I know that when the subject of a discussion becomes quite serious, I can count on his dazzling judgment to help me dissipate the shadows.⁸

Celebrated with this perfidious clarity in his role as indispensable vassal to my splendorous glory, I hereby assign Malraux to the office of witness. Witness to the tension that I, de Gaulle, am: "Maybe the most important word is the word 'tension,' says Picasso. Lines shouldn't... shouldn't even vibrate anymore, shouldn't be able to vibrate anymore. But there's more to it than the line itself. You have to create as much distance as possible" (*PM*, 138). Witness, telltale: the bit of plaster with which one overlaps a fissure in the wall in order to see if the tension that opened it in the first place will cause it to crack now. Malraux cracked in order to attest to the wrenching struggle whose name is de Gaulle.⁹

"I don't know General de Gaulle. Who really knows whom? . . . One step further and knowing a man is to know what he hides. . . . In the General, the individual is canceled out, or at least wishes to be. His invisible style is in fact a pronounced one because such a cancellation produces a powerful style. Although he has negotiated much, he never discusses."¹⁰ Malraux doesn't know him: he understands him as he understands a work, through his style. He can think in his place.

It is August 1961 and the negotiations with the FLN are stalled. De Gaulle is seriously considering a plan to regroup Europeans in the western sector around Algiers and Oran, leaving the eastern portion to the Algerians. He asks Peyrefitte to take personal responsibility for this project and, as a sort of test balloon, argue it in the press. The president's actual intentions are of great concern to the young UNR deputy. He seeks advice from Malraux, who, in a monologue, paces back and forth in his office: the General wants to have a free hand as fast as possible to set up his global policy placing France between the Western and Eastern blocs. Your solution seems too expeditious and the war will continue on between the two halves. "That is why I believe that, even if he is temporarily seduced by your hypothesis, he will ultimately reject it." Develop your ideas and you'll see that the French will split into those who want a partition and those who want a pullout. At first, the partitionists will outnumber the others. But if negotiations take off again, the pull-out camp will grow "and the General will do what is necessary to satisfy them." Peyrefitte concludes that Malraux "has mastered the art of predicting what de Gaulle will do, even though de Gaulle might not yet know that himself" (Peyrefitte, 80). Art of understanding a work that the love of style engenders: an art consisting not of knowing some object, but rather of espousing a tone, body movements, an attitude. These are the qualities of the novelist and of Diderot's actor: the ability to recognize

not the character's logic but his economy and to make it one's own. Malraux loves to mimic and mimics well. For him, mimicry is more than a pleasure and it is the contrary of derision: it is the only way he who is incarcerated in his own identity can occasionally be other than the loner he is. Before Peyrefitte, he incarnates the true de Gaulle just as, two years before, he had "played" a perfect satire of the doyon of the Théâtre Français, Jean Meyer, to a scandalized Bréart de Boissanger (Cate, 384–86).

Rather than the General's adviser, he was his witness — known to the Greeks as the "martyr." For risk and pain are both involved in mimicking the prophet in order to propagate and justify his message. What would Jesus have thought of the Gospel of John, his beloved, the apostle seated at his right? What would he have thought of the Apocalypse? What would de Gaulle have thought of being portrayed in *Fallen Oaks* as the old emperor retired from the empire to his Lotharingian countryside, despising Rome with its intrigues, weary of his people's fickleness? Let's say he wouldn't have minded. But thumbing through the astonishing photo album, *The Mirror of Limbo*, would he have appreciated discovering that his picture is pinned there between those of one of Pasha Abd al-Hamid's granddaughters who's a professional clairvoyant, of a bewitched painter (Picasso), of a former Catalan minister just returned from Berkeley and pontificating about drugs and Freudo-Marxism, of a visionary Clappique, and, finally, of Malraux himself in the guise of a resurrected Lazarus? The master simply placed in a collection of intensely *farfelu* characters?

Tacitus also did exactly as he pleased with Trajan, who died too young: elliptical, spirited, almost mad writing that is also his final homage to the sovereign he loved in person. The evanescent and voluble cat busying himself with the edification of a threnody in words to the elephant he venerates: "the wisest of all the animals, the only one who remembers his former lives; and he remains motionless for long periods of time, meditating thereon" (*AM* n.p.). A meditation that takes place behind the mirror, with Alice, behind the mirror of limbo. In his actions, the General merely reflected his previous metamorphoses; in words, he merely reflected upon their subject: Clovis, Charles VII, and Joan of Lorraine, Richelieu, Colbert, the great Carnot, Clemenceau, and the emperor: "In 1940, he [the last one in the list] was behind me when I told the French they were not what they seemed to be" (*FO*, 67). These figures of limbo are reality; the world is but appearance. De Gaulle and his witness commune in this faith at the threshold of the beyond. With the master gone, the liege man will go on fanning the flame of the same

quarrel against what is believed to be reality. But he will do so in words and a propos of style. Finally, the true monument to limbo can be erected. In a manner of speaking, anyway—the wind blows hard in the museum without walls. Malraux’s limbo is turbulent and hallowed works are driven out by the newcomers. Generalized precariousness: once the last portrait of the last soul is hung on the absent walls, then Malraux dies. And then, placed in abeyance for a time, it becomes Malraux. It is thus that his *dyablerie* gets signed (*se paraphe*): the names remain.

To become one’s own name: this alone, General, is worth writing.

“The time has perhaps come, [de Gaulle says,] to analyze a decisive factor in History: the moment at which *the current flows*. For us or against us: the Wehrmacht in 1940 and 1944, the Liberation, and May 1968. . . . Sometimes it disappears as rapidly as it came. . . . I’m speaking of what lends a soul to a people—or to an army.”

[Malraux transposes, here:] “The mysterious character of this current exists in art as well: when Baudelaire becomes Baudelaire.” (*FO*, 108–09*)¹¹

Is homonymy the last word of metamorphosis? A name that one at first receives through the randomness of birth accedes to the glorious role of causing a legendary world to be born and of baptizing it. Is this “Fortune” as the Ancients described it? It is, in any case, the lengthy passage through bygone souls. Do these souls announce the destiny promised to the name? No. That name, while not knowing what it is doing, will have rather got those souls to announce it: “What I did was never defined for me by what I was doing” (*FO*, 105). The “current”—the spark that short-circuits the Redundant One—did it under cover of his name.

Yet the Redundant One was repeating herself once again: that is her nature. The end of Malraux took its time in coming: the time it took for a few fits of madness to recur—fits he suffered and immediately signed. He could no longer stay on at La Lanterne, having resigned his ministry in June 1969. Obligated, once again, to migrate, he took in with Louise de Vilmorin, whom he’d begun seeing afresh, if it can be put that way. She gave him the little third-floor apartment in the Château de Verrières-le-Buisson, where she lodged lovers and friends who passed through. There, like a dogged young man, he reassembled his entourage of fetishes: Caledonian masks, Greco-Buddhist statues (one of which he had sawed into two profiles), a Mexican bull of papier-mâché and steel wire, his

books, a Rouault, and a sublime blue and beige boat enveloped by the night by Braque.

In sum, once more he had to have a woman await him, where she lived. Did she do it? This “Madame de” was certainly strange company for a visionary! While she herself had faded somewhat, her love for society’s whirl had not. He would come downstairs to the blue salon and, though bored, mingle in this crowd of the clever and the classy that she received each Sunday: despite the decor, this wasn’t Madame Récamier’s place. They agreed to fit out for themselves the apartment in Rue Montpensier, next to the Palais-Royal, which André had acquired with his own money (in a manner of speaking: he died covered in debt). Then, suddenly, at Christmastime 1969, Louise passed away.

Her niece, Sophie, who had been the master’s secretary, took over duties in the emotional sector and filled his final years with unusual calm. “The worst that could happen to me, he confided in Florence, would be to fall in love with a young woman the same age as you.”¹² And to top it off, a woman whose guest he was. Desire in this nomad was such that he always had to have a woman at his beck and call. But the best thing possible happened: the tall, young Sophie’s wisdom enveloped him in her honest and tender intelligence. And André found in her presence the haven that his fatigue required. The combined intoxication of misfortune, drugs, and brilliant soirees was finally brought under control. Life found its rule of labor and writing its respite. And then Florence had remained as well. Moved by a sign of intense admiration that his daughter expressed following the publication of *Antimémoires*, André had reconciled with her. Tacit and eternal, no matter what, their muffled dialogue revived. Both similar and dissimilar to each other, the two women got along. It was undoubtedly also because they adjusted their love with the same stump (*estompe*), they shored the retinue that the two of them formed with the same light touch.

In the fall of 1972, André was stricken with dizziness, sudden drowsiness, inexplicable blackouts. Florence and Sophie had him taken by ambulance to La Salpêtrière, where he very nearly died. But he walked back out with *Lazarus*, that admirable account of a scrape with death. The public man’s activities had continued despite the health problems. The whirlwind continued: trips to Bangladesh and Haiti, inauguration of the André Malraux exhibit at the Fondation Maeght, the Nehru Peace Prize in New Delhi, the last funeral orations — one commemorating the Resistance in the Vercors region, another in front of Chartres Cathedral

for concentration camp deportees. And then there was the project that he gave to Brigitte Friang. This woman, whose insolence and courage he greatly admired, had been an intrepid partisan, a sharpshooter, and a former deportee, and was then charged with press relations in the Rassemblement and, later, in his ministry. Now, the Bengali people were defending their independence against Pakistan's bloody repression. Another brigade of volunteers was to be formed to support young Bangladesh and its just cause. Seventy-year-old Malraux was to take charge and Brigitte was to be his second-in-command. At this point Indira Gandhi sent in the Indian Army to put an end to the slaughter and the brigade project was aborted.

Malraux had a rendezvous. In a feverish spate, he managed to finish off the second part of *The Mirror of Limbo*, to lend final form to the second and third volumes of *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*, and to write an extremely lucid "Neo-Criticism" that would become the afterword to a collective volume devoted to his work. He died for good on 23 November 1976 at Créteil Hospital.

Did this mean he had been summoned back into nothingness? Not at all: the first volume of *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*, entitled *The Supernatural*, came off the presses a few months after his burial, as did *L'Homme précaire et la littérature*. Signature from beyond the tomb. As always. The only one.

"IN WESTERN TERMS appearance is everything that suffers the rule of time" (*Surnat.*, 16). A lot falls under this definition. What is not destined to be swallowed up after its appearance? Further, what wreckage is not destined to give rise to another appearance doomed, in turn, to the same cycle? The "flow" exhales a millenarian lament. This phobic expression for the viscous discharge of lives and their consignment to the depths constantly returns to Malraux's writings. From those depths, they resurface, once again bearing the pretense of making sense until the next shipwreck comes along. Master of the world, the modern West gathers all traces of these futile efforts. The history it composes from its millions of documents certainly appears to have been recounted by some fool. Past civilizations may well have meant something for themselves, but this civilization that knows them all is devoid of meaning: immense memory for nothing. Sole certitude: There can be no counterresponse to nothingness that is not a lie. There remains the question.

The question is the enigma. Born within the Redundant One, it is not her child. It interrupts her, if only for an instant. The merest expression of surprise at stupid destiny and you suspend it; you are put back at the beginning, to start instead of continuing on. Waking

from the nightmare will not keep you from being carried along, then, like everyone else, swept off to die just like the others. There's reason to be surprised, however, about your surprise.

Philosophers' and theologians' banalities. Yet, Malraux bothers not with doctrines. He's on the lookout for the apparition: the beginning cropping up from the great flow of appearances, somewhere in all those bodies dispatched by the millions to the grave. It happens that a few have risen and will rise up as if they were the first: works that had been visible, but which now — incarnated questions suspending the disaster — irradiate their birth. Here still and still now, sometimes after millennia. More wonders in a Lascaux grotto than in Plato's cave.

An amateur of the plastic arts? A failed painter? A voyeur's temperament? Is this Malraux? Bunk! In love with the stunning beginnings in stone, in color, in metal. Great works, masterpieces: these are his names for the fetishes of the awakening — the first concrete refuters of the Redundant One. Unflagging is his loyalty to their promise — held always, always unaccomplished. His to cherish are the determination and the toil necessary to create those works. From India, he borrows this tale for his introduction to *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*: Vishnu's tree shakes its leaves; immobile and "on the alert" nearby, Nârada hears his command: "Go fetch me some water." In the neighboring village where he goes looking for the water, an old man gives him his daughter, and the daughter gives him children, and there he lives happily. Twelve years pass, and, one day, the river swells beyond its banks, crushing and sweeping away everything in a jumble, tossing a naked, perishing Nârada into the mud, who cries out, "My children, my children," to which Vishnu softly answers, "But my child, where is the water? I've been waiting for more than half an hour" (*Surnat.*, 16).

"My books on art remain by far the most misunderstood."¹ It is true that his "Psychology of Art" (thus we shall name them as a group) is hard to grasp. Those books have been compared to works by Eli Faure and Henri Focillon (*Esprit des formes* and *Vie des formes*),² Ruskin's essays. Art historians — Ernst Gombrich, Georges Duthuit — mainly pick out the works' errors, their fantasy, their commonplaces. But Malraux had preempted these critics: "This book aims to be neither a history of art — even though the very nature of artistic creation often compels me to follow history step by step — nor an aesthetics" (*Surnat.*, 35). Nor does it offer a theory of the development of forms: "An 'unbroken' history . . . would postulate some progression, even if that progression went through periods of tragic

decline, while in our art world, cathedral statuary does not ‘result in’ Michelangelo’s *Night*: the latter marking no more progress over that statuary than it does over *Rénéfer*. . . . A work springs forth in its time and from its time, but it is what eludes time that makes it a work of art” (*Surnat.*, 32). What, then, would a discontinuous history look like?

“Psychology” pursues Psyche—the silent soul who sometimes takes up residence in a work. She alone is desired by the lover to the brink of madness. Longing to know what she is, complaining of her elusiveness, he yet perseveres. “Being a painter does not mean just looking at a picture in passing. And thus it has always been, whether the artist’s obsession was a Roman excavation, the Musée de l’Homme or Chartres Cathedral. The supreme power of art and of love is that they drive us to wish to exhaust in them that which is inexhaustible” (*VS/E*, 558*). Monologues of a rejected lover, notebooks full of grievances and hopes, pages upon pages pile up for forty years. True, here and there, throughout time, the soul, the fantastic crops up wherever humanity breaks through. Yet man can never own or master them. Malraux loves all of these “presences,” these otherworldly strokes, with a covetousness so infallible that neither the beauty nor the charm nor the perfection of artworks can ever mislead. An artist may err, but not he: “The great work of art is not wholly identical with truth, as the artist often believes. It *is*. It has issued forth. Not something completed but a birth” (*VS/E*, 461*). It doesn’t please: it consumes. Communion by fire. “Genius is inseparable from that which gives it birth, just as a conflagration is from that which it burns” (*VS/E*, 146*). A thunderbolt from elsewhere that strikes the lover as well.³

Even if it might be useful (for relaxing the spasm) to have recourse to filiations, influences, biographies, cultural context, historical circumstance, he always ends up impugning them as so many pathetic procedures for trying to tame the unpredictability of the soul. Nothing can explain the enigma of the masterpiece: it expresses virtually nothing from the realm of appearances, nothing of a time’s customs, nothing—even if it be unconscious—of its author’s life. “The artist doesn’t create to express himself so much as *he expresses himself to create*,” and “though he cannot break free from history, he makes it” (*VS/E*, 446*). Always marveling at it, Malraux confesses this epistemological failure until he’s blue in the face. Perhaps you hoped that the masterpiece somehow “came about through some clarification” (*VS/E*, 453+), thereby signaling the end result of some maturation process? Illusion, my friend: “absolutely inconceivable. Better, it is conceivable only through its own existence”

(*VS/E*, 455*). My proof? Suppose, for a moment, that all trace of the *Mona Lisa* or *Young Woman Reading a Letter* or the Magi of Chartres were lost. It would be impossible for you to induce their existence on the basis of all the other works by Leonardo or by Vermeer or from the remaining accessible medieval sculpture.

In the middle of his ocean of papers, we can hear him laboring to flush out the countless, incompatible “presences” whose violence is sealed by the same incandescent iron. It would appear that what he inflicted upon himself was the insane task of inventorying all wonders. Was he also pursuing the secret of his own genius? “The adventure of which this book was born . . .” (*MISM*, 16†). Unreadable, decides the reader of “The Psychology of Art,” as he closes that extravagant notebook. True, Eros is not easily readable. Following Gide, the least one can say is that Malraux’s pen goes at full gallop, banging into the thousands of names for presence, like a mastless ship tossed about by violent weather or drifting with the winds, driven from the shores of one island to another in the archipelago of creations. “Could the apparently barely compatible forces with which stridence and monumentality continue to operate have been ours of our own free choice?” (*MISM*, 17†). Of free choice those three strokes of color that Cézanne put to paper in 1904? Of free choice that impenetrable tetrahedral cosmos sculpted from tons of stones at Barabudur? (*Surnat.*, 19–20). In a way, Malraux is sounding the depths of his truth as writer. In doing so, he drives to despair his most loyal and hardened readers—those who, like him, but for different reasons, are in distress. Some go as far as to say that this endless self-analysis, this breathless race taking him from the shores of one masterpiece to the next, has replaced adventure in a century where the adventurer can no longer find any. Compensation, in sum? Ersatz?

But the hunt for masterpieces had occupied his entire life. Not one day had gone by where he wasn’t scouring museums, monuments, deserts, or the jungle to flush out some “presence” or another, to experience it, then countersign it. What he cannot see in situ (the world is still vast, then) he places an image of in an album. All those voyages vying with each other—the Benteai-Srey expedition, the Marib razzia, the returns to Ispahan—ratify his tyrannized and willfully chosen dependence on great visible works. His whole life is but a set of shifting, saccadic views attracted like a magnet to singular and unpredictable *puncta*. His political struggles, his wars, his commitments—whether in good or bad faith—barely dissimulate this other motivation. His subterranean and sovereign determination—almost shameful, like that fostered by a child’s nasty

habit — his furious desire is to hear the voice of mute works rise up in his own throat. That silence infiltrates the body through the gaze, overwhelms it, and is then exhaled. Take another look at his Asian novels and at *Man's Hope*; look again at the thunderously mortiferous upheavals of their plots where the world's destiny is played out as if spinning in a hurricane around a serene eye. The Japanese flower, suggested in the wash drawing by the master Kama, is a sign: the sign of a presence that no death can ever efface (*MF*, 160–61). Kassner, the pilot, shields this sign from Nazi fury by plunging his plane into the peaceful eye of the hurricane (*DW*, 124–35).

A few words suffice for *The Voices of Silence* to decline a masterpiece's identity. It is a "conquest," for much navigation and risk was involved in order to attain it; "adventure" too, since the passage to it is unknown; "obvious fact," as well, in that the refashioning of the cartography of works that it precipitates causes everything to fall into order in its wake (*VS/E*, 455*). Rodin's weirdly Sumerian menhir and his inconceivable *Balzac* return his all-too-accommodating marbles and the Art Nouveau foliage of his *Porte de l'enfer* back to their humble place. Thus too with "The Psychology of Art": Who among Malraux connoisseurs could have predicted the crudeness of its *non finito*? And who among today's readers can turn a blind eye to how his entire prior work keels before this late, testamentary monster?

The freebooter in love has aged. We witness his tall frame hunched over ashtrays, empty glasses and microphones, his eyes still more bulging and dull. His voice now crackles and drones; he inhales more tentatively, and expels the air in nasal flutters. His volubility remains intact, nevertheless, and his hands luff around his head like Franciscan birds taking wing. His aging toward childhood is proportional to the amassing of his great logbooks: it's not by chance that the Ancient Mariner writes the Tale of his wonders late in life. Precedents abound and he notes them down as if for his own use. As a true visionary, Michelangelo sculpted his *Pietà Roncalli* just before dying. Titian was very old when he made the Venice *Pietà* that so bewildered those who saw it. The demented laugh of Rembrandt's Cologne self-portrait was brushed a year before his death. And El Greco waited until he was past seventy to dare to reveal the vision that his nearly blind eyes had of Toledo and of the Visitation. "The Titian of the mythologies painted for Phillip II or the Tintoretto who made *Adam and Eve* do not paint more faithfully than their predecessors, nor do they paint what they can see better than them; like Michelangelo, they painted *what makes one see*" (*Ir.*, 227). For a long time now — since

Altenburg—Malraux too refuses his readers the pleasure of staged scenes by eliminating them from his writing. He knows that his pen was once perfectly capable of painting major scenes full of metaphysical tension. But with age creeping up, with age having arrived, another obsession now gnaws away at him: to *show* the masterpieces that have allowed him to see this side of the visible. His writing is now devoted to the night from which the visible is born, to stating apparition within appearance. It is devoted to scenopoesis, which some call creation.

Childish, gigantic, unrealizable project. How to write this enigma? How can one even name it? “Creation” comes from the Scriptures: the absolute prerogative of the Almighty. But can Promethean or even Faustian man seize it? Malraux has often been portrayed as a humanist. True, the orator’s declamations and the impatient writer’s simplifications lend themselves to misunderstanding. His novels, essays, prefaces, and especially his studies on art, however, all ascribe both revolt and creation to a force within man that exceeds him. An orphan of the sacred, as were his times, Malraux perceived — along with a few others, but before many more — that the “modern” ideal of man was withdrawing from the West. In the *Metamorphosis of the Gods* trilogy, between the Supernatural that the sacred arts advanced and truly modern (or postmodern) art, which is devoted to the Intemporal, the truly brief moment during which European art, in diverse styles, commends itself to the Human, the moment of humanism, is placed under the aegis of the Unreal.

An example: “In Athens as in Florence, the idealization [of woman] is not due to her embellishment but because she belongs to the unreal” (*Ir.*, 251). Another example: the statue of the Guatemelata (that condottiere whose name is like an unctuous she-cat), which Donatello placed right in front of the basilica in the middle of the Piazza del Santo in Padova, undoubtedly owes several of its aspects to equestrian renderings of the Roman Caesars (themselves emblems all-too-human of tyranny and, therefore, somewhat secularized); that statue actually “emancipates the privileged image of man from the Divine City by making man a character of the unreal” (*Ir.*, 84). The gods are adored, they are beseeched. Great men are admired. As the Padovans would stop before the bronze in the Santo, admiring the fighter-hero as they admired the sculptor, they were mirroring themselves by reflecting back upon themselves the unreal image of their Ego ideal.

No, if there is a thesis in *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*, it is obviously not one that renders homage to men for their creative powers. So much, in fact, does “theory” appear to the Mariner as academic distraction

and accountant's drudgery that there really is no thesis. The thing after which he quests—the White Whale—can only be approached at the highest risk. Writing demonstrates nothing: it tries to harpoon. We are never anywhere but at the beginning: we mobilize a campaign, rig out the boat, and then despair—what, if anything, will we bring back?

He tries out terminology: After “creation,” how about “genius”? Words that say nothing. The thing is never in or beneath the name we attribute to it. All in all, all in none (*à tout prendre*—*à tout perdre*), proper names would be less disappointing. But there are so many of them: one can never finish detailing differences. La Tour's subjects derive from one of Caravaggio's cycles. He borrowed his reds and his blacks, but his lighting and the play of his color planes form a kind of musical mystery in place of the Italian's rebellious realism. Malraux's work is to compare. He was young when he wrote that “we feel only through comparison” in the Galanis catalog. Immediately, he attempts to have us see a first wonder by contrasting it with a second one that is its equal, as if he had to have all of them present at once and each were jealous of the next for the love that he reserves for them. Today, he notes in his logbook, I reached an ethereal, light-colored, and cold land, named Pontormo, off the coast of which an immobile and forbidding island is situated, the entirety of which is engulfed in the subtlest of lightings: Piero della Francesca. A third land offered the rugged relief of a Souillac pillar to my view, while its near neighbor displayed pleats that rose and sank like the smooth little columns on the portal at Chartres. Constantly bathed in darkness, the land known as Rembrandt could be made out by the ray of light piercing through it. And still another had grimaced with teeth bared like a Melanesian mask. What oceanic depth could produce such a variety of apparitions? Worse yet: I was about to identify the Michelangelo archipelago when someone told me that the *Pietà Roncalli* belonged to it. Eruptions, remodelings, subterranean disturbances: islands are by no means identical to their names. Something below ground disturbs them, sometimes metamorphosing them without warning.

Since the thing itself slips away as soon as a new presence occurs, comparing seems, in a world in flux, a hopeless endeavor: the Argonaut changes course, corrects his route. Although we often neglect his first attempts—the essays of youth, first artist catalogs (he wrote on Galanis at the age of twenty) or exhibit catalogs (the one he organized for the NRF Gallery between 1931 and 1933)—Malraux spent forty years (from 1937 until the end) assembling, disassembling, recutting, and reassembling his

“Psychology” as one would a film: extending some shot or another (Donatello, who was virtually absent from *The Voices of Silence*, has forty pages devoted to him in *L'Irréel*), lengthening or shortening a certain sequence (catacomb art, mannerism), adding alternate itineraries (Carolingian and Gothic arts in *Le Surnaturel*).

The four essays originally published in *Verve*—“Psychologie de l’art” (December 1937), “Psychologie des Renaissances” (Spring-Summer 1938), and “De la représentation en Orient et en Occident” (June 1940)—are fused together, expanded, and reshuffled into three volumes of *La Psychologie de l’art*, published by Skira: *Le Musée imaginaire* (1947), *La Création artistique* (1948), and *La Monnaie de l’absolu* (1950). These three studies, in turn, lend their titles to the three parts of *The Voices of Silence*, dated *in fine* 1935–1951, dedicated to Madeleine, and published by Gallimard in 1951, with a revised collection of illustrations and text as well as a second part, previously unpublished, called “Les Métamorphoses d’Apollon,” in which Malraux traces the various destinies that Celtic, Gallo-Roman, Roman, Greco-Buddhist, Byzantine, and Sassanid artists imposed on the god of the sun. In 1965, for the “Idées/Arts” collection at Gallimard, he gives a new edition of *The Museum without Walls*, which he calls a “bequest.” Before this (1952–54), three big volumes of reproductions devoted to *La Sculpture mondiale* will have appeared with an introduction that ceremoniously stresses that this is the “First Museum without Walls.” By 1957, “Les Métamorphoses d’Apollon” has become *La Métamorphose des dieux*, whose definitive edition, in three volumes, was staggered as follows: the second volume, *L'Irréel*, “finished in 1958,” was published in 1974; the third, *L'Intemporel*, came out in 1976; while the first appeared postmortem in 1977 under the title, *Le Surnaturel*—its first part entitled “La Métamorphose du Christ.”⁴

And this inventory still doesn’t include *Saturne* (1950), his essay on Goya, taken up in *Le Triangle noir* (1970), or *La Tête d’obsidienne* (Picasso’s Mask), published under this title in 1974, then collated with *Fallen Oaks*, *Hôtes de Passage*, *Lazarus*, and several previously unedited texts to form that vast and subtle montage forming the second part of *The Mirror of Limbo* in 1976. Obsidian: stone of Obsius, Picasso’s head, black and vitreous rock that, when struck, breaks into conchoidal shards. On those beaches that Crusoe treaded, whole nations of artists long vanished had left thousands of these marvelous conches. The dual-curved guitar—that little idol to fecundity—waited four millennia for Picasso to find it on the Cyclades.

Passing one day before the Académie Française, Claude Malraux expressed surprise to his older brother that he hadn't yet been named to a seat. — What would I do there? — Well, “Start that over from scratch” is one thing you could command. And Malraux starts from scratch. Unhappy with what he had found? or had written? Of course. His attention diverted by new discoveries? Assuredly. But first and foremost preoccupied with maintaining lively and fresh the “feeling of creation” that emanates from great works and that his own writings must communicate. What metamorphic upsurge from below him, what muddled desire disrupts the mountain of papers in search of a form? What separation ill treats the one who knew so well how to build and complete that cathedral of misfortune called *Man's Fate*?

“Just as the rift between the artist and the period preceding his compels him to modify its forms, and that between him and his masters to alter theirs, so the difference between his present self and the man he was, compels him to change his own forms, too, in the course of his career” (*VS/E*, 417). Not well written at all, is it? He couldn't care less: he's in a hurry. Apparition's value is precarious: one gets used to it. He's got to make haste: presence will not re-present itself — catch it in mid-flight. We might be tempted to believe that what distinguishes the proliferating versions of the “Psychology” is the style. Not at all: writing at degree zero, carelessness of the spontaneous progression by “this and that,” “that less than this,” “whereas . . . then” — this way, his keen intellect, working by breathless dichotomies, opens a path in the deluge of wonders. Bad or good, no more literature. As I have said, for pointing out “presences” and storing instances of the “feeling of creation,” a notebook will suffice. That feeling is affect in its naked state: “the shock of surprise a child has when a shell he is looking at on the beach suddenly begins to move” (*VS/E*, 454).

The child is old, you say? So much the better. Five years left to inspect the conch-strewn beach. Unexpected ones will be found: ones that move. “We would undoubtedly speak differently about classical art if Raphael and Giorgione had, as old men, left us their *Pietà Rondadini*” (*Ir.*, 172). Was it up their sleeve? No one knows. Painters get old, but not their painting. “They had invented their language, then learned how to speak it. That was the instant when they appeared able to transcribe everything. It happened that that language was no longer enough.” Malraux speaks of himself: “it now may happen that . . . he feels a need to deepen his art so as to challenge the power of death, just as he once confronted

the weakness of life" (VS/E, 464*). *La Psychologie de l'art* is his final Pietà, one of "those spellbinding figures . . . illuminated by the approach of death. The last Titians, the last Rembrandts, the last works of Hals" (PM, 78).

The last Malraux. The end approaches: it is beginning. His past as author begins. The list of "Works by the Same Author" in *La Métamorphose des dieux* leaves out *Days of Wrath* and *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*; the second part of *The Voices of Silence*, "Les Métamorphoses d'Apollon," is blue-penciled. Once hitched together with *Saturne*, *The Temptation of the West* is shifted to reside with *L'Homme précaire* in *Le Surnaturel*, the last volume published, which was originally called "L'Inaccessible." Within *L'Irréel*, the eventual second volet of *Mirror of Limbo*, *La Corde et la souris*, is still being called "Métamorphoses" in 1974. "What one *will* do is more interesting than what one has already done," said Picasso (PM, 70). A Pietà of which one has no idea always remains to be done. And if it happens that it gets done, it completely alters the meaning of everything that came before it.

About Goya, he asks Goya: "What genius doesn't save his infancies?" (TN, 58). Well, the one who hasn't grown old enough.

When it was interrupted by death, the notebook had taken the form of a triptych: the Supernatural, the Unreal, the Intemporal. All the world's art can be distributed according to these three panels where, side by side rather than alternately, great works impose "presence" following three distinct modes.

"Presence of another world. Not necessarily infernal or paradisiac, not only a world after death: a present beyond" (*Surnat.*, 7). Ancient or contemporary, a masterpiece opens a space, exhales a time, emanates a matter—all three foreign to the surrounding world. The Braque hanging above a table and chair that happen to be in the little office at Verrières is not "situated there" like the table and chair. It beckons the gaze to come and inhabit it. It demands that our active, seeing body and our sensorimotor organism educated in the manner of our culture cease activation of the visual radar and the mechanics of our limbs. It demands that they obey the readymade of its customs so that another body within it accedes to an uncertain world of colors and lines that is hanging right there. If we no longer take it for an ornament or a pleasant object with its place in the room, if we look at it, where is it? And where are the gaze, the body, and the soul that are suited to it? They are as uncertain of their moment, their flesh, and their extension as the artwork is. They

are every bit as tremulous. Within us we must find deliverance from the *en deça* hidden beneath the carapace that we valorous and talkative animals carry about, if we are to be moved by that world which suddenly arises there as if it just dawned.

“A Roman crucifix or an Egyptian statue of the dead can indeed become a work of the present day” (*Surnat.*, 3). Present-day with that presence which can persist through history, even when we know nothing or very little of the culture from which the work arises and even if the work owes nothing to the canon of classical “beauty” (*Surnat.*, 1). Even art that doesn’t know itself as such — art that is hidden in the forms taken on by devotion, incantation, or an appeal for forgiveness addressed to obscure powers — can radiate presence (obscene, as it were), can give birth to something else that compels the gaze to awaken according to its rule.

“There once was a Little Guy from the Cyclades,” said Picasso. “He believed he was making an idol, but what he made was a piece of sculpture, and I knew what he wanted to make” (*PM*, 141*). I, the Modern, knew that he wanted to make visible what had never been seen. Van Gogh acknowledged that he could dispense with the Good Lord in life and in painting, but not with the need to invent. “He was right. Van Gogh was right, wasn’t he? The need to create is a drug. There’s invention and there’s painting” (*PM*, 141). Artist-painters by the millions . . . “Hideous! Disgusting. And then, from time to time — but without fail — there came a Little Man” (*PM*, 142). “There have always been Little Guys who wanted to sculpt in their own way, and no other. People cut them down. But they grew back again” (*PM*, 141*). Weeds. Actually, it’s always the same one that returns “like the Wandering Jew” since the age of cavemen (*PM*, 142). He returns and waits until the artist-painters are finished. But “they are never finished. So he regroupes. He returns one more time. Maybe it’s me — how do we know?” (*PM*, 143*). The Modern knows that there is a Cycladic cycle of presences — irregular yet necessary, unpredictable — but he doesn’t know if he’s part of it. (The same as for the Righteous: Would he be Righteous if he knew himself to be Righteous? ask the Hasidim, blinking their eyes.)

As for himself, Malraux doesn’t know any more than this, either. What are those three volets: supernatural, unreal, intemporal? Three movements of the same musical score, distinguishable by their motifs and tempo? Yet one would suppose that, together, they would develop in continuous fashion along the line of a main theme, in a single and same duration, like a sonata. But “the history of art can no more be the history of a constant progress than that of an eternal return. . . . Indeed, when the

history of art is the history of genius, [it] should actually be the history of release" (*VS/E*, 623*). The Little Guy's narrative is an impossible one, for he is always only just beginning. Parturitions of presence cannot become serialized. While our desire to link them can very well be assuaged by the game of filiations and influences, we pay the price of wiping out the eternally intact enigma of apparitions.

Those three terms name three turns, three accents by which the other world gives or frees itself—reserves itself—in great works. They indicate neither concepts nor conceptions with which we could circumscribe a work's impact on geography or cultural history by means of some definition. Neither do they indicate styles or stylistic families. They are more like titles, aspects, three types of stakes beneath which being and the absolute slip away to let themselves be taken into the play of meaning where art risks itself as form. "All art of the past gets us, as if in some trap where the universe got caught."⁵

One cannot enter the house of the Father without having one's soul weighed in Christ's opened hands of justice and grace, as sculpted by Gislebertus at Autun. One will not be led in through the portico on which Titian laid his languid *Venus of Urbino* without accepting the fiction of a later Olympia who is troubled by seductions and the challenge of vanity. And, finally, you will have to pay the price of disenchanting solitude and abjection to get yourself, as Baudelaire did, into Manet's *Olympia*.

Yet these differences are at the level of meaning, of content. We understand what each of these works says to us because we know the language spoken about the work when it was made. The strength of their presence is elsewhere. And if the other world that obsesses Malraux "speaks" to us, it is through forms, in a silent voice: in our throat, actually, he tells us. Even if one has no notion of the "meaning" of the culture from which some Assyrian bas-relief arose or of that out of which came the *Dama de Elche*,⁶ the presence that these works radiate is in no way invalidated. After all, a Crucifixion can very well be figured in as desperately cynical a manner as Manet's courtesan was; moreover, this is the very metamorphosis that Manet inflicts on Titian's *Venus*. Carried to its absolute by "genius," by Manet—the Little Guy—the world of venality is no less another world, has no less presence than that of Romanesque faith or renascent dream.

If we really must venture the stupidity of voicing what Malraux's triptych means, so be it. Falling under the Supernatural would be the great works that celebrate the gift and the promise of a lofty destiny of forgiveness and of loss made to natural life: confession of distress, faith in

ultimate meaning. By way of the Unreal, there rise up, to the contrary, works dedicated to prestige, forms that appeal to admiration and furnish men with evidence that they appropriate and order truth according to their ideals of reason and of free will. What, then, would the Intemporal be? A name for that which resists when human values of conquest and obedience to the sacred are past and when Time in its abject Redundancy appears to have become the sole master. When this occurs, it remains to art to make present an inhuman that defies the flow.

To make meaning (even by means of some woolly narration) and to soothe the anguish of presence, of the question, of birth, of apparition, by projecting their occurrences into a becoming or even a genealogy: this temptation, as we know, is so powerful that it renders nearly impossible any sketch of Malraux's three types without their falling into some periodization reminiscent of Rousseau's outdated system of ages or Auguste Comte's equally old-fashioned states. We may as well agree with Malraux that in so doing we plunge what is really all birth and imperishable back into the death of repetition.

Come from elsewhere, presence is of breaking, of interruption — right at the moment when we no longer believe in anything except presence. The Triptych descends neither from heaven nor from theory: it's too late. Malraux, the resolute agnostic, has been planning and assembling it on the basis of not just any old time and place, but of his Europe in a waning twentieth century. Or perhaps we can say that these are any old time and place — absolutely. For here and now, in this era and in this corner of the world, time and place will have ceased to have any meaning; no longer any answer to the questions: Who are we? What are we doing? The most powerful, the most capable, the wisest civilization ever witnessed in history cannot explain to me why I live or to what I am giving my life.

Since the days of *The Temptation* and "D'une jeunesse européenne," Malraux's diagnosis of this singularity in the contemporary West never deviated or flinched. Once rid of ideologies and fashions, its singularity becomes brute questioning. The only meaning left is powerlessness to respond. And this is why the West becomes so passionately curious about (and jealous of) cultures that believed they had an answer. Whence our investigations, our prodigious excavations, and (more dully put) our so-called human sciences. But there's more: to be able simply to sense the "presence" of an elsewhere in all the world's masterpieces, it is necessary to be able to strip presence of the beliefs that once clothed it and

justified it; one must be naked, without devotion or consideration, like a child at birth. Greedy for air and the breast. The determination with which his Little Guy suddenly appears Picasso compares to the love of women for children (*PM*, 141–43). Or, is it rather the love of children for the mother of the visible? Or, better still, the mother of the invisible, source of all presence?

To understand the prayer that the *Pietà* addresses to the heavens, the opposite initiatory scene is necessary—the one camped alongside the flags of Earth. The one that we believe will not have taken place. There, one would see André as the first man, as son, suddenly gripped by silence, his agitated nature paralyzed. The weather would be warm and it would happen in the middle of a little Tuscan cemetery, just outside Monterchi, in an unassuming, amber valley. The boy has pushed open the gates of the dead, he has opened the rustic chapel's door. Red angel with green feet and wings, green angel with red feet and wings: two symmetrical dancers open the double doorway of his life. On her way through the area, the Madonna del Parto awaits him beneath her tent. With a lascivious hand, the Dolorific Desired One opens up her maternity dress. Her upper fleshiness is bathed in a milky light. Yet her gaze is directed elsewhere and throws at man the usual challenge of appearance and seduction by them: come to me but death be to you if you desire me.

Born in Monterchi and having died in her son's absence, the man's mother is probably buried somewhere in this valley. Piero, her son, Piero della Francesca returns from Rome to honor her with this fresco painted above the altar table in the bare chapel. Overwhelmed, Malraux understands perfectly that the artist had to kill his filial sorrow in order to grasp this miracle of Light *a fresco* in the mortar and make an offering of it. In the end, the old man rejoins the child from Bondy. I imagine him smiling. He can no longer be unaware that such grace accorded by the Dispenstress may come if only man agrees to subject himself to the law of his own loss.

Taking it from the top: the truth of a beyond suddenly appears where it hides in a Magdalenian cow or in a Sicilian Pantocrator or in a young girl by Vermeer or in a dish of apples by Cézanne. And it is not the same truth. From one work to another, something has happened. You might say that Malraux wasn't the first to notice this. After all, art history had existed well before him. Yes, but what about the history of "presence"? There is no such history and there cannot be. Each great work is a birth. Presence dots the course of things with pinpricks. Something else—

fresco, stained glass window, statue, or mask — pierces the institution of the community even if that institution (which will eventually pass) doesn't recognize it. Through humans, something else expresses an arresting truth. And who inevitably is struck down by it? Those souls waiting endlessly for the truth that we are, "a sect of the passionate," for whom art exists (*VS/E*, 494*).

Not without the play of certain affinities, though. By their mode of presence, Claudel, Rouault, and Bernanos are certainly contemporaries of Vézelay, of Ravenna, and of the Issenheim retable. Yet, being of today, being top connoisseurs of nothingness and among the most lucid minds of our dazed century, this contemporaneousness of theirs is equivocal. The truth of works from the past comes to them skewed by nihilism, just as Leonardo's presence was for Valéry: the free intellect and conquest of never-before-seen forms that the Italian incarnates, his madly enterprising thought and painting that impassion Monsieur Teste, provide the Modern Man's sensibility with matter for reflection concerning idleness. In an instant, Malraux notices this important nuance that attributes a halo of melancholy to presences:

The Romanesque sculptors had wanted to manifest the revealed unknown, whereas Picasso manifested a form of the unknowable that nothing would ever reveal. All he knew, or would ever know, about it was his own feeling [of] a prayerless and communionless unknowable, a living void, like that of the wind. Such art is the art of human limitations — talons thrust into mankind, as the talons of the birds of prey in the Steppes were thrust into the bodies of wild beasts. It is the art of our civilization, whose spiritual void Picasso sneeringly expressed, just as the Romanesque style expressed fullness of soul (*PM*, 98*).

His "Psychology" is a kind of ontology, but a nonphilosophical one. Great works are brush strokes of the absolute, abrupt epiphanies of being that grab us by the throat. More often than not this brutality was forgotten amid the adoration of gods and the admiration of humans. Moderns collect these wonders and question them. To them, the absolute gives itself and takes flight at the moment of the question. To state "the meaning that presence takes on from an eternal answer to man's questioning of that which is eternal in him" is no doubt a metaphysical project. But if one adds the qualifying "when it arises out of the first civilization conscious of the fact that it knows nothing of man's signification," then the project will inevitably abort since no speculation will escape

the obvious nonresponse that both enlightens the modern condition and gives it cause for complaint.

The museum without walls is the only ontology allowed to our doubting thought, for only that which questions may enter. Its size far exceeds museum collections. It opens onto every planetary site where presence may rise up. And this museum is an album. The beginning of *The Voices of Silence* is devoted to photography's effect on our perception of works. Photography, an art of reproduction? No more than film is. Cutting, framing, the close-up (the "detail"), lighting, color, elliptical editing—the camera enjoys and plays with the same creative means as the motion picture camera. It even has the added advantage of not being subordinated to movement or to movement's fiction, of not having to incite the gaze to expect some outcome, as narratives do. The photograph respects the muteness of works, their questioning, their incomprehensible being-there.

It is thus a portable museum, a "place of the mind" that inhabits us. Is it imaginary because it is made of images and because each of us arranges it with our emotions?⁷ Truthfully, it is a creation of creations. Not only because it gathers and organizes creations into the work that the album itself is (the style of the "Psychology" resides more in its iconographic organization than in the hasty writing of its meditations). Imaginary is the museum because the choice of works and their presentation, their montage (their hanging) into an album, derive from contemporary creations and are, thereby, essentially precarious. At stake in contemporary art for the past one hundred years has been exploring all means possible for causing the visible to be seen. This adventure guiding our peregrinations through thousands of years of art is what governs how the museum without walls is composed and exhibited. It is a Saint-John Perse or a Claudel that allowed us to understand the Popol Vuh and the sacred books of India. Giacometti made it possible for us to see a Bakoba bull sculpted out of iron or a Gallo-Roman Anadyomene Venus. The symbols stamped on a barbarian Veliocasse or Atrebate coin reveal themselves thanks to Paul Klee's "little pen [strokes]" or to André Masson's pencil (*VS/E*, 141–46).

Picasso registers mild protest against Malraux's expression "place of the mind." The museum without walls "could actually exist, right? A small one. With real paintings. It should be tried. But how would you go about it?" (*PM*, 133). Nothing will do. The museum must be a perpetual disturbance: works must be taken down and put up at the unpredictable and fitful pace of masterpiece births today in New York, Tokyo,

Munich, Amsterdam, and Paris. The incredulous present that inquires about everything, that creates and revives past creations by opening our eyes to their presence: modern art has removed the West's classical cataract (VS/E, 608). Apparition alone (and never secular appearances) rules over "the life" of apparitions in the museum. Strange history of masterpieces that is not that of humans, not "the flow," but another life—dark and spasmodic. Once in a while, like a raised index finger, there surges up from it a painting or a sculpture that points out some great work of the past that hadn't been examined. Classification, then reclassification: "the successive resuscitations of the whole world's past" (VS/E, 127). In the various versions of his "Psychology," there are examples galore of this reversal:

It is always at the call of living forms that dead forms return to life. . . . It is not research-work that has led to the understanding of El Greco; it is modern art. . . . it is in the light of those pathetic candles which Van Gogh, already mad, fixed round his straw hat so as to paint the Café d'Arles by night, that Grünewald has come into his own. (VS/E, 66, 68)

The map of the museum must be remade, its calendar adjusted to the latest beginning.

The glory of the greatest works is always subject to turns of fate: a contemporary masterpiece merely has to cast its brilliance or its shadow over them. On that uncertain Olympus, the celestial ones that creative metamorphosis had always seemed to shield from terrestrial corruption continue to live under threat of being deposed by some new and jealous hero who rises up to meet them. Who can say that works will find the serenity of consecration in the museum? Who can say that it is a sanctuary—the final one—for those Western souls that are now soulless? Portable, Malraux's museum is precarious. One doesn't visit it, "it lives in us" (PM, 133). At the rate things were going, if he hadn't died, Malraux would have dismantled and remade it once again ten years following *La Métamorphose des dieux*. "Let us imagine that a guardian-demon (in the form of a cat) said to Baudelaire, just as he'd finished *Les Phares*: 'Now let's just see' and then placed it in *our Louvre*" (Surnat., 2). In the poet's museum, there were "no sculptors before Puget, except for Michelangelo; no Primitives. *Les Phares* begins with the sixteenth century" (PM, 133–34). This was written at the end of the nineteenth century. Malraux, the cat who guards the museum, smiles at the catalog that the curator,

Monsieur Malraux, hastens to wrap up. He was already smiling before the inventory was finished, knowing full well that it was already out-dated.

He signed with a cat's silhouette. And the (dismantleable) cenotaph that was solemnly honored, following his death, in the Louvre's Cour carré was topped by a late Egyptian bronze: the cat-goddess, Bastet, her nose raised toward the cosmos. (His body had been delivered, without frills, back to the graveyard vermin at Verrières.) Cats sign by scratching. Not long ago, the people called them clerks and griffins. They also sign the indeterminacy of space and time by their whimsical comings and goings — some cheery, some nasty — stopping at thresholds we cannot see where they sniff some “present beyond.” The beyond of a just-this-side — the one that roars or rumbles or purrs in their throats. They're beasts, in sum, no heavier than birds, fated to die soon, knowledgeable about how to go about things. Friendly beasts, they are, never hesitating to share their warmth, their dish, or their bedding with us or their fellows in beauty and in wretchedness. And yet, never altogether here — unruly, haunted. They turn their spontaneous distraction into a sort of style. They act surprised. They slip away, suddenly reappear. Of the ellipsis, they understand much. And the name for this, the name for this life at the threshold, for the door that's ajar, for questioning: limbo.

1. Berthe, or the Spider

1. *Farfelu* is one of Malraux's favorite words. The adjective, which he restored from obscurity to fairly widespread usage, means whimsical, eccentric, bizarre, fanciful. Used nominally, it designates a sort of quixotic adventurer. For an in-depth discussion of the term and Malraux's use of it, see Vandegans, 117–19. *Trans.*

2. The feminine noun, *redite*, derives from the past participle of *dire* (to say) to literally mean that which is said again. This repetition specific to voiced language provides Lyotard with an incisive allegory to represent Malraux's peculiar way of feeling the recurrence of death in his personal experience of life. *Redite* connotes not only some word, some phrase or a thought that is reiterated or "rerun," but also palpable uselessness or superfluity in repetition. *Trans.*

3. I have left "différend" in French, here and wherever it occurs, to flag Lyotard's special use of the term. His most concise definition of a *différend* reads as follows: "The plaintiff lodges his or her complaint before the tribunal, the accused argues in such a way as to show the inanity of the accusation. Litigation takes place. I would like to call a *différend* the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim" (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* [1983], trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Theory and History of Literature*, 46 [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], 9). *Trans.*

4. *Marroniers*, 94–95.

5. Sheba is the biblical name of an ancient kingdom centered in southwestern Arabia. The biblical book 1 Kings, chapter 20, recounts a visit to Solomon by a queen of this land known by Muslims as Balkis and by Ethiopians as Makeda. According to Ethiopian belief, this queen had a son by Solomon named Menelik, who is the founder of a dynasty of which Haile Selassie (1892–1975) is the last figure to reign. *Trans.*

2. The Malraux

1. *Bleu horizon* (sky blue), the color of French army uniforms during and following World War I, connotes, when applied to a person and by metonymic association, the patriotism, tinted by absolute confidence in the military, peculiar to that era. *Trans.*

2. *Le Point*, 17 March 1975.

3. Morholt (Morhout, Morold, Moraunt) was the Queen of Ireland's brother and Isolde's uncle. This monstrous giant demanded a heavy human tribute each year from Mark of Cornwall. Tristan challenged and killed him. *Trans.*

3. Dealer in Wonders

1. Cf. Martine de Courcel, ed., *Malraux: Être et dire* (Paris: Plon, 1976), 297–337. *Trans.*
2. “Du livre,” in *Bouquinerie: Catalogue d’éditions originales et de livres illustrés de la librairie Gallimard* (Paris: Gallimard, March 1928), n.p.
3. The S.A. (Sturm Abteilung) was the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party. The terror and intimidation tactics of the “Brown Shirts” were essential to Hitler’s rise to power. Their leaders were eliminated during the “Night of the Long Knives” (30 June 1934) and the S.A. was subsumed under the S.S. *Trans.*
4. Malraux takes this scene up from *Days of Wrath*: “and it was not the first time . . . that he had seen resolution in a moment of danger superimpose the features of childhood upon a man’s face” (*DW*, 129).

4. On Cubes

1. Max Jacob, *Le Cornet à dés* (1917; Paris: Stock, 1923); translated as *The Dice Cup* by John Ashbery, David Ball, Michael Brownstein, Ron Padgett, Zack Rogow, and Bill Zavatsky (New York: SUN, 1979). *Trans.*
2. Max Jacob, “The Cock and the Pearl,” translated by Bill Zavatsky, in *ibid.*, 30. *Trans.*
3. Letter (26 February 1916) from Max Jacob to Tristan Tzara, in François Garnier, ed., *Correspondance de Max Jacob* (Paris: Editions de Paris, 1953), 1:115–16. *Trans.*
4. Max Jacob, “Preface of 1916,” trans. Zack Rogow, in *ibid.*, 6. *Trans.*
5. Letter (5 March 1916) from Max Jacob to Michel Leiris, in François Garnier, ed., *Correspondance de Max Jacob* (Paris: Editions de Paris, 1953), 2:147–48. *Trans.*
6. *La Nouvelle Revue Française* will henceforth be referred to by its well-known abbreviation, *NRF*. *Trans.*
7. John Ruysbroek (1293–1381), Brabant mystic and author of the first great works in the Dutch language; Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328), leader of the Rhenish mystic movement; Teresa of Avila (1515–82), intense reformer of the Carmelite order in Castile, author of poems, mystic treatises, and an autobiography; John of the Cross (1542–91), disciple of Teresa of Avila, persecuted reformer, and author of several mystic treatises that comment on his own poetry; and Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824), Augustinian visionary who dictated her experiences to the poet Clemens Brentano. *Trans.*
8. Joseph von Görres (1776–1848), German publicist. Once an admirer of the French Revolution, von Görres developed a great respect for the Heidelberg group of romantic nationalist poets (Arnim, Brentano, etc.), and, with the Grimms, edited Germanic tales and legends. He devoted his newspaper, *Rheinischer Merkur*, to the German nationalist cause. Accused of liberalism, he fled to Strasbourg. Upon his return to Germany in 1827, he struggled for the idea of a German Catholic party. *Die christliche Mythik* was translated as *Mystique divine, naturelle et diabolique*, by Charles Sainte-Foi (Paris: J. Millon, 1991). *Trans.*

5. Manufacturing Secret

1. Picon, 60.
2. *Ibid.*, 58.
3. Vandegans, 284.
4. *Commune 28* (December 1935).
5. In Charles Maurras, *Mademoiselle Monk* (Paris: Stock, 1923).
6. Paul Valéry, *Note et digression* (1919), in *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (1895; Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 96–97.

7. Letter to Jean Paulhan (1928 or 1929), cited by Claire Paulhan and Christiane Moatti, *Europe* 727–28 (November–December 1989).
8. Jean Giono, *Entretiens avec Amrouche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 38–40.
9. To define *dyables*, no more accurate a characterization can be obtained than Lyotard's: "those bizarre little figures that André often drew with a feverish yet continuous pen stroke in the margins of his manuscripts or official papers, and which often, like coded confidences, served as legends" (p. 197 in the present work). *Trans.*
10. Given the extreme importance for Lyotard of the throat motif in Malraux's thought, as well as Malraux's affinity for cats, it is easy to see why Lyotard used the idiomatic expression "avoir un chat dans la gorge." *Trans.*
11. *NRF* 220 (January 1932).
12. Isidore Ducasse (1846–70), known as the Comte de Lautréamont, lived a brief life almost entirely shrouded in mystery. His *Chants de Maldoror* (1868–69) and two prose fragments entitled *Poésies* were of primordial influence on André Breton and the surrealists. *Trans.*
13. "La Genèse des *Chants de Maldoror*," *Action* 3 (April 1920): 13–14.
14. Paul Claudel, *Partage de midi*; translated as *Break of Noon* by Wallace Fowlie, in *Two Dramas* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960). *Trans.*
15. *NRF* 174 (March 1928).
16. "Jeune Chine: Présentation de documents," *NRF* 220 (January 1932).
17. Picon, 41.
18. *NRF* 174 (March 1928).
19. To shed further light on this discussion of *farfelu*, refer to chapter 1, note 1, where the word is explained. *Trans.*
20. Preface to Jacob, *Le Cornet à dés*.
21. Picon, 32.
22. In English in Lyotard's original. *Trans.*
23. *Exposition Demetrios Galanis* (Galerie La Licorne) (Argenteuil: Coulouman, 1922).
24. *Exposition André Malraux* (Paris: Fondation Maeght, 1973), 39.
25. Georges Gabory, *Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Gide, Malraux et C^e* (Paris: Nizet, 1982).

6. Clara's Entrance

1. In English in Lyotard's original. *Trans.*
2. Frédéric Grover, cited in Desanti, 400.
3. *RAMR* 19, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 1987), and 20, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 50.
4. In English in Lyotard's original. *Trans.*
5. *Gnome et Rhône Journal* 38 (April 1934); *MMM* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1970).
6. *Ibid.*
7. The Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in Paris in 1860 to advance the struggle to defend the rights of Jews and to promote freedom through education. *Trans.*
8. Robert Mallet, *NRF* 295 (July 1977).

7. Writing or Life?

1. *NRF* 126 (February 1924).
2. *Ibid.*
3. For its wordplay, Lyotard's original is worth reproducing: "Mais au total sa biographie surchargée ne sera faite, jusque dans son décousu, que d'un travail de coupe préparatoire à un chef-d'œuvre de haute couture." *Trans.*

4. The adjective *ubuesque*, which Lyotard uses more than once in this book, designates someone (or, sometimes, a situation) with a moral resemblance to the character Ubu Roi created by Alfred Jarry in the play (1896) with the same name. This character is comical, cruel, cynical, and cowardly—all to excess. *Trans.*

5. The Dominican mystics, Johannes Tauler (c. 1300–1361), from Alsace, and Heinrich Seuse (1295–1366), or “Suso the Blessed,” from Switzerland, were both pupils of Meister Eckhart (see chap. 4, n. 7). *Trans.*

6. Gide wrote “à plume abattue,” punning on the idiomatic expression, *aller à bride abattue*, meaning “to ride [a steed] hell for leather.” *Trans.*

7. *CPD*, 2:446.

8. In the original, “un coup d’épée dans l’eau,” meaning, literally, a slash (of the sword) in the water: a vain or useless effort, a waste of time. *Trans.*

8. Raid in Asia

1. *Antidreyfusard* was the noun or adjective used by defenders of Alfred Dreyfus to designate those who were hostile to him during the Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906). I have left the word with its pejorative suffix, *-ard*, to distinguish from the more neutral *dreyfusiste*. *Trans.*

2. Lyotard thought that he found this quote by Pascal Pia in *André Malraux* (Paris: L’Herne, 1982), but I have not been able to trace it. There is an allusion to the episode in Cate (52), and Vandegans (349–62 *passim*) discusses these historical figures in presenting Malraux’s sources for *Royaume-Farfelu*. For an explanation of *dyable*, see chapter 5, n. 9.

3. See Chapter 1, n. 5. *Trans.*

4. Henri Parmentier, *Le Cambodge: Histoire et religion* (Saigon, 1936). *Trans.*

5. See Langlois, *passim*.

6. Letter (12 October 1923) from Max Jacob to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, cited in Vandegans, 233.

7. Prosper Odend’hal and Henri Maître, *Les Jungles Moï: Exploration et histoire des hinterlands moï du Cambodge, de la Cochinchine, de l’Annam et du bas Laos* (Paris, 1912); *Les Régions moï du Sud indochinois: Le plateau de Darlac* (Paris, 1905). On Odend’hal and Maître as source and inspiration for *The Royal Way*, see *OC*, 1:1158–63. *Trans.*

8. Again, Lyotard’s original sentence for its dense, alliterative allusions: “Arousseau s’y appelle Ramèges, rameaux et rémiges, arpèges d’envol?” *Trans.*

9. The Langlois-Ford manuscript contains some of the early material that Malraux would incorporate into *The Royal Way*. The beginning of the manuscript is published in *OC*, 1:1176–1209. A note (p. 1176) explains that “this manuscript is part of an important collection of Malraux documents gathered by Walter Langlois, Sheila Wood-Langlois, and Elizabeth Ford-Wood in honor of J. D. M. Ford (1873–1959), the Harvard philologist.” *Trans.*

10. T. E. Lawrence, introduction to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

11. A *blédard* was a French soldier serving in North Africa. To form the slang term, the pejorative-*ard* suffix was added to the Maghrebian Arabic word *bled*, meaning countryside, the land, farmland, a rural area. *Trans.*

12. *New York Post* (April 1937); my translation. *Trans.*

13. The common pronoun *ça* means “this” or “that.” As a noun, which Lyotard evokes here, *ça* is the French equivalent for Freud’s term *Das Es* (or the id), in his second psychic model. *Trans.*

14. The main historical model for Perken in *The Royal Way* was David de Mayrena (born August-Jean-Baptiste-Marie-Charles David), an adventurer who managed to get himself crowned Marie I, king of the Sedang (or Moï) people of southeast Asia in 1888. See the discussion of

sources for *The Royal Way* in OC, 1:1146–48. Cf. Jean Marquet, *Un aventurier du XIX^{ème} siècle: Marie I^{er} roi des Sedangs* (1888–1890) (Hue, 1927). *Trans.*

9. Exit Clara

1. Since Lyotard plays throughout this chapter with various expressions employing *passé*, here are the two sentences in the original: “Allemande en France, Française en Allemagne, juive nulle part, femme partout. Non pas de passage mais acharnée à forcer la passe.” *Trans.*

2. To quote, again, the last part of the paragraph: “bref l’incapacité de céder, le refus d’oublier, jusqu’à la méchanceté vindicative, sont chevillés en elle bien en deçà d’aucune idéologie. Elle peut rendre hommage à ses chevilles.” *Les chevilles* are the ankles, but also, in the vocabulary of woodworking, pegs; the idiomatic expression, *avoir l’âme chevillée au corps* means to cling to life or to have nine lives. *Trans.*

3. Gustav Janouch, *Gesprache mit Kafka*; translated as *Conversations with Kafka* (New York: New Directions, 1971). *Trans.*

4. See Langlois, *passim*.

10. The Breaker

While not used to designate World War II in its entirety as it may sometimes appear to here, *la déferlante* (the wave or breaker) was a metaphor commonly used to evoke the relentless advance of German troops — and, in particular, General Guderian’s armored divisions — during the Battle of France. Not unlike this image, animated maps of the time illustrated the Nazi “breaker” spreading its brown waters over Europe all during the period 1939–41. I wish to thank Hadi Rizk for confirming much of this information. *Trans.*

1. Hindenburg’s chief of staff during World War I, Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937), participated in the Munich Putsch (1923) and was candidate for president in 1925. *Trans.*

2. *Marianne* 51 (11 October 1933).

3. *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, July 1926.

4. Mikhail Markovitch Gruzenberg (1884–1951), known as Borodin, was the principal Komintern agent in China during the 1920s. *Trans.*

5. The Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF) was a political movement created by de Gaulle in 1947, a year following his resignation as head of state. *Trans.*

6. Again, for an appreciation of Lyotard’s original: “C’est fait, la vague déferle, levée dans les ruines asiatiques.” *Trans.*

7. *NRF*, December 1930.

8. Stéphane, 109–10.

9. Jean Paulhan, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes, ou la terreur dans les lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941). *Trans.*

10. *Europe* 727–28 (November–December 1989): 70.

11. “Funérailles de Le Corbusier (1 September 1965),” *ML* 987.

12. A “kapo” was a prisoner in charge of other prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp. It is interesting to note that while the *Grand Robert* French dictionary traces the word’s origins to an abbreviated form of the German *Kamerad Polizei*, the *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Gegenwartssprache* says that the word is a shortened form of the French *caporal*, and the *Brockhaus Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch* says its source is the Italian *capo*, head or leader. *Trans.*

13. N’était-ce donc que cela?” *Editions du Pavois*, 1946, translated as “Was That All, Then?” by Dorothy Bussy, *Transition* 48 (1948): 44–59; *Liberté de l’Esprit* 3–5 (1949).

14. *L’Indochine* 16 (4 July 1925).

15. *L’Indochine enchaînée* 1 (November 1925). *Trans.*

16. French businessman Serge Stavisky, of Russian Jewish origin, founded the *Crédit Municipal de Bayonne* in 1931. A scandal (the Stavisky Affair) erupted in late 1933 when it was discovered that Stavisky had embezzled tens of millions of francs. When a Stavisky on the run was found shot to death in Chamonix, the *Ligues* of the extreme right accused the Chautemps government of having killed him and organized what would become the infamous demonstrations of 6 February 1934. *Trans.*

17. *Marianne*, December 1933.

18. *L'Indochine enchaînée* (December 1925). *Trans.*

19. Stéphane, 112.

20. *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 31 July 1926.

21. *Marronniers*, 310.

22. *Combat* 4 (21–22 April 1945).

23. From Lyotard's original: "En équilibre sur la crête de la grande vague, saisissant au passage l'occasion d'un exploit, il s'enivre de humer le panache d'écume qu'il fait, tout en s'effarant de savoir que ce déferlement qui l'emporte n'est rien qu'un reflux très puissant dans le cycle du même. N'empêche qu'exalté ou drolatique ou les deux, la déferlante l'aura roulé." *Trans.*

11. Platforms

1. The GPU (*Obedinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie*) was the Soviet secret service agency from 1922, when Cheka was reorganized, until 1934, when it was superseded by the NKVD (*Narodnii Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) (1934–46), which then became the MVD (*Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del*) until it was replaced in 1954 by the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*). *Trans.*

2. Alexei Grigorevitch Stakhanov (1905–77) was a highly productive miner who was reported to have extracted fourteen times the average amount of coal in a contest organized by the Komsomol. This feat led to the principle of evaluation in production during the 1930s known as Stakhanovism.

3. Leon Trotsky, "La Révolution étranglée," and André Malraux, "Réponse à Trotski," *NRF*, April 1931.

4. "Autour des *Conquérants*," *Correspondance de l'Union pour la vérité* 3 (Summer 1929). Maria Saint-Clair Van Rysselberghe had already known Gide for twenty years when she began, on 11 November 1918, to take down in a series of school notebooks everything she could about her friend. This enterprise ended on 23 February 1951, the day after Gide was buried. Van Rysselberghe was nicknamed "la Petite Dame" (the little lady) during World War I and within the group of friends that included Gide (who was nicknamed "the Biped"). Her notebooks were published in three successive issues (1973–75) of the *Cahiers André Gide* (see Bibliography). *Trans.*

5. "Être un homme, c'est réduire sa part de comédie," *Monde* 342 (27 June 1935).

6. *CPD*, 2:450.

7. Langlois, in *Via Malraux*, ed. Bevan, 224.

8. Ilya Ehrenbourg, *La Nuit tombe: Souvenirs 1932–1940*.

9. *Izvestia*, May 1933.

10. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 12 June 1934; French translation in *RLM* 304–9 (1972): 131–32.

11. *RLM* 304–9 (1972): 133 ff.

12. *Monde* 313; *NRF* 254, November 1934.

13. This conversation appears in French in Regler's original German text. *Trans.*

14. *Les Cahiers du Sud* 166 (November 1934).

15. *Commune* 13–14 (September–October 1934): 69.

16. Ibid.
17. Jacqueline Leiner, "Autour d'un discours de Malraux," *RLM* 304–9 (1972): 142.
18. Ibid., 143–44.
19. *CPD*, 2:460.
20. *Commune* 23 (July 1935).
21. *CPD*, 2:417.
22. *Marianne*, 25 April 1934.
23. *Le Magazine Littéraire* 54 (July 1971).
24. This appendix, found in *OC* at the page indicated, does not appear in the English translation of *L'Espoir (Co/E)*. *Trans.*
25. Stéphane, 157–58.
26. *NRF* 211 (1 April 1931).
27. The Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM), founded in Catalonia in September 1935, resulted from the fusion of two groups that had broken with Stalinist communism. Its enemies labeled the group "Trotskyite," but in fact it remained very close to the tenets of Leninism. The movement was brutally eliminated by Communists in June 1937. *Trans.*
28. Cf. *AM*, 390. Malraux added the final sentence in *ML*. *Trans.*
29. *CPD*, 2:466.
30. *CPD*, 2:467.
31. *Commune* 23 (July 1935).
32. Ibid.
33. *Owl*, 232.

12. Black Skies of Spain

1. A Spanish writer and critic, José Bergamín (1895–1983) founded the journal *Cruz y Raya* in an attempt to reconcile Catholicism and liberalism. *Trans.*
2. *L'Action Française*, 6 January 1938.
3. *RAMR* 19, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 1987): 145.
4. Thornberry, 37–40.
5. André Gide, *Journal (1889–1939)*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), entry for 4 September 1936.
6. *L'Événement*, September 1967.
7. Louis Delaprée, *Mort en Espagne*, 73; cited in Lacouture, 225.
8. Hidalgo de Cisneiros, *Virage sur l'aile*, 2:346–47; cited in Thornberry, 73.
9. *La Nation*, 8 April 1937; cited in "L'Incident Malraux," a Québécois press file compiled and graciously communicated by Caroline Désy.
10. *Le Devoir*, 5 April 1937; cited in "L'Incident Malraux."
11. Cited in Bevan, 49. [In French in Bevan, who explains (108 n. 4) that Malraux's declaration arose "in an unpublished conversation with Professor C. J. Greshoff in 1967." *Trans.*]

13. Womanstruck

Lyotard's title for the chapter is "Coups de femme." Coining the portmanteau adjective "womanstruck" seemed the only way to include by inference some portion of the multiplicity of usages for *coup* in French. Some of these that are directly pertinent to Lyotard's work on Malraux are *coup de cœur* (to fall [impulsively] in love), *coup de tête* (an impulsive act), *coup de destin* (a blow dealt by fate), *coup de malheur* (stroke of bad luck), *coup de patte* (sarcastic remark), *coup de théâtre* (dramatic surprise), *coup de folie* (a crazy act), and *coup de foudre* (thunderbolt, to be thunderstruck [*foudroyé, atterré*]). *Trans.*

1. Josette Clotis, *Le Temps vert* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). *Trans.*
2. Also in *Revue contemporaine*, 1951.

3. Louise de Vilmorin, *Sainte Unefois* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934). *Trans.*
4. Friedrich Sieburg, *Gott in Frankreich: Ein Versuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Societats-Verlag, 1929); translated as *Dieu est-il français?* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1930). *Trans.*
5. D'Astier de la Vigerie, *L'Événement*, September 1967.
6. Ronron (or "Purr") is a common brand of canned cat food. *Trans.*
7. Published anonymously in 1669, the five letters known as *Les Lettres portugaises* are attributed to Maria Alcoforado, a Portuguese nun spurned by her lover. They are at the origin of the "psychological novel." *Trans.*
8. The German actress Brigitte Helm starred in Fritz Lang's 1926 classic science-fiction film, *Metropolis*. *Trans.*
9. The German for "flea" is *der Floh*. *Trans.*
10. *La Ciguë* 1 (1958).

14. Entrechats

The *entrechat* (from the Italian, *capriola intrecciata*, or "intertwined jump") is a ballet leap during which the dancer repeatedly crosses the legs, sometimes beating them together while crossed. It is the basis of the idiomatic *faire des entrechats* in French, meaning, roughly, to caper or flit about, to gallivant. Further, in the word "entrechats," we can see, literally, but abusively, "entre chats" or "between cats" . . . not a negligible association in the case of Malraux. *Trans.*

1. Preface to Andrée Viollis, *Indochine SOS*, viii.
2. François Mauriac, *Le Figaro*, 11 February 1937.
3. Lyotard uses the term *musée imaginaire*. The title by which Malraux's book is known in English is *The Museum without Walls*. For the obvious reasons of this sentence's context, we have opted for the more literal translation. *Trans.*
4. Paul Claudel, *Le Soulier de satin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1929); translated as *The Satin Slipper* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931). *Trans.*
5. In Malraux's final revision and reorganization, his *Anti-Memoirs* were subsumed under the title *Le Miroir des limbes* (*The Mirror or Limbo*) and constituted the first volume of this ever-expanding project. The second volume, *La Corde et les souris* (*The Rope and the Mice*) is composed of six parts, of which the final one is *Lazarus*. In this passage, Lyotard is referring metonymically to *Le Miroir des limbes* as *Anti-Memoirs*. *Trans.*
6. Malraux, letter to Roger Martin du Gard, 2 February 1943; Cate, 377.

15. Berger as Colonel

"Berger" is of course the code name that Malraux used in the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade. The reader of Lyotard should remember that *un berger* is "a shepherd" in French. The German nouns *Berg* (mountain), *Bergerz* (crude ore—Lorraine was once a steel-producing region), and *Bürger* (citizen) resonate in the name as well. *Trans.*

1. Arthur Honegger, *Der Totentanz*; based on a poem by Paul Claudel. *Trans.*
2. Special Operations Executive (SOE) was the British organization in charge of planning resistance in occupied Europe. *Trans.*
3. "Tragédie inachevée," *DA*, 492–521. At the time Lyotard was writing *Signed, Malraux*, the only complete version of *Le Démon de l'absolu* was Malraux's manuscript organized by Jacqueline Blanchard at the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. The references in my translation follow Lyotard's for the folios making up this manuscript. When *Le Démon de l'absolu* was edited for André Malraux, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 425 Paris: Gallimard,

1996), the nearly 2,600 folios were ordered differently for a chapter arrangement closer to Malraux's later wishes. I would refer the reader interested in making the translation from the references here to the pagination in the edited version to consult pp. 1689–94. *Trans.*

4. *Ibid.*, 492–93.

5. General Heinz Guderian (1888–1954) was the creator of the *Panzerdivisionen*, the virtually unstoppable tank divisions that the Third Reich's Wehrmacht used to ride roughshod over Europe between 1939 and 1941. *Trans.*

6. "Tragédie inachevée," *DA*, 492–93.

7. Malraux, "Le Temps des échecs," *DA*, 752.

8. *Ibid.*, 714.

9. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 345. *Serahins* is spelled *Cerans* in Malraux's manuscript.

10. Malraux, "La Clef de Damas," *DA*, 892.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *DA*, 892–93.

13. Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) is a labor union with close ties to the French Communist Party. The Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (FFI) were formed in early 1944 in an attempt to unify various home resistance groups (*maquis*) such as the Armée Secrète (AS), the Organisation de Résistance de l'Armée (ORA), and the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP). The FFI was directed from London by General Koenig. *Trans.*

14. *FO*, reproduced in *ML*, 615–732.

15. Cate/E, 504; passage omitted from Cate/E, 407.

16. Malraux, "Funérailles de Le Corbusier," *ML*, 987.

17. *Premier Congrès général du MLN* (Sceaux: Imprimerie du MLN, 1946), 129–31.

18. Quoted in Mossuz, 47.

16. Witness

The noun *témoin* carries the same principal meaning that *witness* does in English; i.e., in the juridical realm there are witnesses for the prosecution, for the defense, eyewitnesses, and so on. In the theological sense a witness is someone who, by his personal presence, beholds an event or some revealed truth. *Un témoin*, however, is also a "witness mark," identifying the boundaries in a land survey. Other things that *témoin* may signify, which Lyotard also alludes to in this chapter, are the baton passed from one athlete to another in a relay and, especially, the builder's telltale, which, when it is applied to a fissure in a wall, indicates the direction and magnitude of the edifice's shifting. *Trans.*

1. Florence Malraux, interview on 20 November 1995.

2. Following the abortive coup attempt of April 1961, led by Generals Challe, Salan, Jouhaud, and Zeller, Salan took over the leadership of an Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), which would pursue, until Algerian independence, all-out struggle—including terrorism—to maintain a French Algeria. *Trans.*

3. Florence Malraux, interview on 20 November 1995.

4. Beginning with "I'm used to it," the remainder of this quote was added in *Miroir des limbes* (*ML* 671). *Trans.*

5. UNESCO Conference, *Carrefour* 116 (7 November 1946).

6. Henri Alleg, *La Question* (Paris: Minuit, 1961).

7. Pierre Vianson-Ponté, *Histoire de la République gaullienne* (Paris: Fayard, 1970–71), 578; quoted in Lacouture, 409.

8. Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 1:285.

9. The terms Lyotard uses in this passage — “telltale” (*témoin*); “fissure” (*fissure*); “to crack” (*lézarder*); “crackled” (*craquelé*); and “wrenching struggle” (*écartèlement*) are echoes of the chapter’s title; see n. 1. *Trans.*

10. *ML*, 644–45; Malraux added this passage in the later version of *Les Chênes qu’on abat*.

11. This passage was obviously revised from the version in *Les Chênes qu’on abat* to that in *ML*. *Trans.*

12. Florence Malraux, interview on 20 November 1995.

17. Limbo

1. *RAMR* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1989) and 22, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 1990): 14.

2. Elie Faure, *L’Esprit des formes*, *Histoire de l’art*, 5 (Paris: Denoël, 1987); Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes: Éloge de la main*, *Quadrige*, 6 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993). *Trans.*

3. With *foudre* and *frapper* as the main elements of this sentence, we are invited to think of “love at first sight” (*le coup de foudre*). *Trans.*

4. *RAMR* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1989), and 22, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 1990), *passim*.

5. *MISM*, 1:61.

6. The *Dama de Elche* is an Iberian polychrome sculpture dating from the fourth century B.C. *Trans.*

7. The literal translation of *Le Musée imaginaire*, known to the English-speaking world as *The Museum without Walls*, is, of course, “the imaginary museum.” *Trans.*

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