

The rest is given him by the very American society—that American “establishment,” if you will, for which the student-activist professes such contempt. It is the student who is under obligation to the university and its sponsors, not vice versa.”

ANTHONY T. BOUSCAREN

*A Portrait of the Artist as an
Aging Minister of Culture*

Anti-Memoirs, by André Malraux, *New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968.* 414 pp. \$8.95.

AT TIMES I wonder if “great men” (statesmen, writers, philosophers) have always been manufactured of *ersatz* material as they seem to be today. It would be a frightful thing to discover that the ancient equivalents of the press and television were able to fabricate a Caesar or a Cicero, and thus dupe posterity into admiring and imitating them. Will it be possible for us to induce future centuries into believing that John F. Kennedy had real charisma, that Patrice Lumumba was Africa’s Charlemagne, that Nehru was more than a plastic Brahmin?

It is reported that Stockholm’s progressive literary circles were disappointed over the awarding of the 1968 Nobel Prize to a Japanese novelist; their favorite candidates were the rabble-rousing Günther Grass and the lugubrious Samuel Beckett, enemy of all syntax. Would the Nobel Prize make great writers out of Beckett and Grass? Would it elevate André Malraux to the pinnacle of Western Letters? The danger that it would is real, and it is our duty to warn posterity.

Note that in the present era of manufacturing great men, the thought content of the product is unimportant; what counts

is what the press, popular magazines, and TV can grasp in their brutal-fragile fist: a slogan, a face, a gesture. In Kennedy’s case it was the boyish forelock and the phrase: “*Ich bin ein Berliner*”; in Nehru’s, the white rose in the lapel; in Lumumba’s, the speech insulting a speechless King Baudoin. From the moment of his emergence, Malraux provided strikingly coined sentences for journalists, art historians, and amateur philosophers suffering from cosmic nostalgia. In between the sentences (which had grown into books), he also displayed a romantic forelock, a revolutionary stance, and, later, the intriguing figure of the artist taking a modest seat at cabinet meetings and at the *patron’s* press conferences. It would be amusing but perhaps not unjust if posterity were to appreciate Malraux mainly for his decree to clean the sooty façades of Paris—at any rate, a more deserving reputation than Baron Haussmann’s who, a hundred years ago, leveled half Paris and built riot-controlled (?) wide boulevards.

I hope I am not accused of cynicism. But, increasingly since my university years I have found Malraux’s literary production thin and bombastic. Here is a writer in the country of *moralistes* and of *psychologues subtils* whose characters are deprived of psychology and who substitutes the stereotypes of revolution and *Weltschmerz* for moral judgments. When he received the Goncourt Prize (1933) for *Man’s Fate*, Malraux was hailed as bringing to French Letters, like Baudelaire, *un frisson nouveau*; now, with perspective deepened, we know better: he only fathered the ideological novel. Like Simenon who gave the detective story literary calibre, Malraux’s four or five novels lent respectability (since then, alas, abused) to the crossbreed of ideology and fiction. But he never came near the sustained bravura of Simenon’s *Black Rain*.

Malraux’s *Anti-Memoirs* are not worse and not better than his novels, except that he is now an elderly gentleman in the

French Ministerial uniform, the double-breasted suit. Almost all reviewers in France remarked on the anti-climactic character of these anti-memoirs, so named not because the book pretends to introduce a new genre in auto-biographical notations, but simply because it fooled those expecting sensational political revelations. Even so, a life as full as the author's, covering forty years as agitated as the period from 1924 to 1966, ought to have distilled some wisdom. No; the taste left in the reader's mouth is stale; it is poor vintage wine, not champagne.

When I first read it, two years ago, I was looking for the Malraux who had stirred me in the 30's and 40's, that is when the ideological battle seemed to my inexperience as unidirectional as a one-way street. When I finished, I realized I had been fooled by the fanfare and by the \$350,000 the American publisher paid for the rights. (He too must have been a Malraux admirer in his youth.) The Malraux of the 1960's was obviously not very different, he was fairly well mirrored in this spring's photographs showing him with Debré, Schuman, and other worthies of the Gaullist regime, marching up the Champs-Élysées, campaigning for a new vote of confidence in the bankrupt old man. The famous forelock is still there, although the famous forehead over the famous mournful face is burdened now with considerably less hair. Should we suppose that Malraux has learned a thing or two in the last decades? To be sure, his grim features on the photograph mean now: *l'anarchie ne passera pas!*, as thirty years ago they meant: *le fascisme ne passera pas*. Yet, the memoirs give no hint of a real, inner transformation, of more wisdom, of a higher vantage point. I found it embarrassing that the limits of Malraux's vision are still, one, a morbid fear of death, and, two, aestheticism in search of unusual sensations. I guess that prompted by similar embarrassment and for lack of something weightier to say, the first French reviewers of the book hailed a

few *morceaux de bravoure*, particularly the lengthy conversation with Nehru and the passive listening to Mao's monologue. I admit I see nothing in these passages that would keep me awake instead of marking the page for reading on the next night. The conversation in India shows a tired Oriental exchanging the faded fragments of a worldview with a tired Occidental, which explains why the latter remains mute in the presence of a bloody despot (Mao) who fooled both.

Thus the only noteworthy thing I find in the *Anti-Memoirs* is that it is not about the author but about an impersonal and mostly bored witness of the age who had chewed this century bone-dry and now remembers a few flavors left on his palate. At any rate, what we are reading is the epilogue to a tired intellectual dream which, at a few points and for short moments, coincided with the collective dream of the West and created some illusions in our imitation-Prometheuses. How well one understands now Malraux's attraction to the lonely figure of T. E. Lawrence, the man who knew when to give up and stand aside, that is, who *lived* instead of trying to capture destiny in a succession of gratuitous acts. Malraux, on the contrary, cannot escape action, the Hegelian curse of our time, the temptation ceaselessly to contemplate it and contemplate himself while acting.

This is a maddening process, and one may sustain it only by escalation, that is, by attributing to oneself ever greater powers as a creator, if not of real things, at least of myths. Thus last February, at the launching of the first Culture House at Grenoble, Malraux launched *en passant*, a new religion: It is the religion of Imagination, the one missing element which will permit our technological civilization of "rediscover the gods without resurrecting them." (Another one of those striking sentences!) The new god is Man, and the name of rediscovery: Culture. The *Maison de la Culture* is thus the new temple in

which Man, through his imaginative powers, will adore himself.

There used to be a time, thirty years ago, when this kind of thing was a sure hit. Today it is commonplace, and only enthusiastic new-breed clerics rush into print with the revelation of their own divinity. Under the pen of the aging artist and art-philosopher it is hardly more than charlatanism, or worse: the final sentence of a commencement speech at Unesco.

Is the embarrassing emptiness of the *Anti-Memoirs* mitigated by virtues of style, of description, of psychology? Even Mr. Roger Shattuck, eulogizing the book in the *New York Review of Books* and finding in it hidden recurring themes and other goodies, cannot help concluding that "brilliance is not enough." Alas, had we at least brilliance! Truth is, the book is not organized in any sense, it presents haphazard recollections, with suddenly an enormous filmstrip splashed in the middle. Nor is it distinguished by sustained, careful writing: Nietzschean catastrophisms neighbor on flat samples of Resistance rhetoric. There are a few interesting descriptions, for example his capture as Colonel Berger during the war, his short detention, his fear of torture.

The only novelty (for a book of reminiscences) is the occasional use of two dates connected with a place twice visited and calling forth different impressions, reactions. Also the shuffling of dates, the free roaming in time, the luxury of contemplating a full life from different angles of vision. Yet, there is no freshness in this contemplation, rather the puzzlement of an elderly man that *he* was the hero of all this! The jacket of the French edition grandiloquently states that this book is a dialogue on the highest level: "Like Aeschylus and Shakespeare through their choruses and heroes, like Job above his companion's head, Malraux addresses himself to destiny alone." I would say that this is true (minus the ridiculous comparison); it explains the coldness, underlined by the author when he declares: "What is

of interest to me alone, does not interest me!"

This is not a human being speaking but an incarnation of the World Historical Spirit. In his own eyes, Malraux is the equal of the new gods who sit on the mountain peaks now that God is reduced to silence. They are called De Gaulle, Mao Tse-tung, Nehru, new and bloodier versions of the gentlemen conversing in *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*, his last novel, about life's absence of meaning.

Reviewed by THOMAS MOLNAR

The Far Side of the Wall

The Other Germany, by John Dornberg, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968. 370 pp. \$6.95.

OF EAST GERMANY Mr. Dornberg writes "it is a Germany about which the Western world knows as little (perhaps even less) as China." The observation is better than the grammar and Mr. Dornberg succeeds in telling us a good deal more about this Germany than other recent writers on the subject; more than Welles Hangen in his easy gallop around the East German countryside in his book *The Muted Revolution* and with far more detail than Amos Elon recorded in *Journey Through A Haunted Land*. Dornberg was born in Erfurt in what is now part of the "German Democratic Republic." The son of Jewish parents, he remembers seeing as a child the burning of the synagogues in Erfurt, an event that took place before he managed to escape the full fury of the Hitler pogroms by emigrating to the United States. His wife lived in East Germany until 1948 when as a teenager she moved to West Germany. Thus Dornberg writes with the same reservations toward the German past though not with the same depth as Amos Elon, who as an Israeli, came to see and as far as possible