

## MALRAUX, ANDRE

**André Malraux: his importance for French culture.** André Malraux (1901-1976) was a French novelist, art theorist, and public cultural figure who was of great influence on the social policy and creative thinking of mid twentieth century France.

**André Malraux: the life.** André Malraux was born in Paris in 1901. His parents separated when he was four years old, and divorced soon after; Andre was raised largely by three women—his mother, his maternal aunt, and his maternal grandmother, who had a small grocery store in a nearby village. (His father, who was a stockbroker, committed suicide in 1930, having lost all at the beginning of the Great Depression.) One result of this not completely stable childhood has been suggested (but is not certain); that Andre developed a case of nervous tics, bordering on Tourette's syndrome. It is certain that while the young man did not pursue a regular course of education, he was a voracious reader, and an intense visitor to the many glorious museums of Paris. In 1922 Malraux married for the first time, and had one daughter. Divorce followed. For some time, then, he lived with the novelist Josette Clotie, with whom he had two children; wife and children all died in accidents. For the remainder of his life Malraux lived in loving but unmarried relations. Throughout these years he was also engaged with the literary milieu of Paris, making friends with many of the formative cultural creators of the moment: Jean Cocteau, Francois Mauriac, Max Jacob. In 1923 he made a trip to Cambodia, with the intention of buying *objets d'art* from Khmer temples, and selling them to art collectors in the West; however he was arrested by the French on leaving the country, and had to surrender what he had collected. By this time, however, Malraux had begun to draw public attention with his writing. In the thirties and forties he was to publish his best known works—*La Condition Humaine* (1933), *Man's Fate*; *The Psychology of Art* (1947-1949)—and to begin to occupy an important public cultural function on the French scene. Already in the thirties Malraux was politically active, supporting the Republicans in Spain, the anti-Fascist Popular Front in France, and, during the Resistance, fighting courageously against the Occupation—an effort for which he received the Croix de Guerre. For his many patriotic efforts Malraux was significantly honored by President Charles de Gaulle. Malraux was made Minister of Information in 1945-46, and was appointed as the first Minister of Cultural Affairs, from 1959-69.

**André Malraux: the work.** Malraux's greatest novel, *Man's Fate*, deals with four fascinating and diverse characters caught up in a (failed) Communist rebellion in Shanghai, against the Chinese government of Chiang kai Shek. The interplay of vivid, risk taking, existentially diverse figures brings to a clarity Malraux's intense experience of the bruisingly international culture of his time. Malraux's *Psychology of Art* (1947-49) is only one of his many profound inquiries into the new aesthetics of his time. In the separately published first part of this work, entitled *Museums without Walls*, Malraux addressed the transtemporal, transcultural character of the global art scene, as it displays itself in the new art gallery of the later twentieth century. The new art world, Malraux points out—and actualizes in his distribution of support for Paris museums—is open to works of any kind from any culture, and takes particular interest in non western works, which force the West to reflect on itself.

### Reading

#### **Primary source reading**

*Man's Fate*, tr. M. and H. Chevalier, 1990.

#### **Secondary source reading**

Alan, Derek, *Art and the Human Adventure: Andre Malraux' Theory of Art*, 2009.

### **Further reading**

Cate, Curtis, *Andre Malraux: A Biography*, 1997.

### **Original language reading**

Aubert, Raphael, *Malraux ou la lutte avec l'ange*, 2001.

### **Suggested paper topics**

Malraux was perhaps the most officially important of the writers of 20<sup>th</sup> century France. Review the public contributions of Malraux' contemporary French writers. Is there in France of the last century a pronounced emphasis on the public role of the major literary figure?

Does Malraux'a major *Psychology of Art* reflect his international travels, and his active globalism? As a Minister of Culture he was faced with issues of support and development for France's museums. How did Malraux respond to that challenge?

### **Excerpt**

[http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9\\_Malraux](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9_Malraux)

No one can endure his own solitude.

The human mind invents its Puss-in-Boots and its coaches that change into pumpkins at midnight because neither the believer nor the atheist is completely satisfied with appearances.

What is man? A miserable little pile of secrets.

Our civilization ... is not devaluing its awareness of the unknowable; nor is it deifying it. It is the first civilization that has severed it from religion and superstition. In order to question it.

Chanel, General De Gaulle and Picasso are the three most important figures of our time.

The artist is not the transcriber of the world, he is its rival.

On this earth of ours where everything is subject to the passing of time, one thing only is both subject to time and yet victorious over it: the work of art.

If a man is not ready to risk his life, where is his dignity?

The great mystery is not that we should have been thrown down here at random between the profusion of matter and that of the stars; it is that from our very prison we should draw, from our own selves, images powerful enough to deny our own nothingness.

The attempt to force human beings to despise themselves... is what I call hell.

"Why do you fight?" ... He kept his wife, his kid, from dying. That was nothing. Less than nothing. If he had had money, if he could have left it to them, he would have been free to go and get killed. As if the universe had not treated him all his life with kicks in the belly, it now despoiled him of the only dignity he could ever possess — his death.

The sons of torture victims make good terrorists.

One cannot create an art that speaks to me when one has nothing to say.

There are not fifty ways of fighting, there is only one, and that is to win. Neither revolution nor war consists in doing what one pleases.