

ne serait pas d'aller vers de nouveaux paysages, mais d'avoir d'autres yeux, de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux est".⁹ C'est pourquoi Butor doit tant de reconnaissance à deux amis „qui m'ont tant soutenu dans ma passion de voir".¹⁰

Au regard, conscient de ce qu'il élimine, Butor oppose le regard du policier, qui sait si bien distinguer la couleur des yeux. „Il me semble qu'on cherche à se débarrasser au plus tôt de cette obsédante interrogative prunelle, en la bouchant par cette teinte qui l'entoure, que l'on a notée, captée une fois pour toutes; on se met à couvert de cette taie, on se réfugie derrière cette fiche toute prête; on sait déjà comment on signalerait cet autre, cet intrus, si jamais quelque chose tournait mal, si quelque nouveauté accusatrice tout d'un coup se levait dans sa façon de voir".¹¹ La tâche de celui qui veut regarder bien est autrement complexe.

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Notes

1. Portrait de l'Artiste en jeune singe, p. 16.
2. Méditation Seconde.
3. L'Emploi du Temps, p. 275.
4. Phénoménologie de la Perception, p. 432.
5. Ibid. p. 12.
6. La Modification, p. 11.
7. Ibid. p. 217.
8. Répertoire II, p. 267.
9. Ibid. p. 292.
10. Le Génie du Lieu, p. 124.
11. Portrait de l'Artiste, p. 16.

ANDRÉ MALRAUX'S UNFINISHED NOVEL, *LES NOYERS DE L'ALTENBURG*: A CAVEAT FOR CRITICS

The creative pathway which André Malraux has travelled is paved with many intriguing unfinished pieces of work. His early novel *La Voie Royale* is but the first volume of an abandoned trilogy which was to be called *Les Puissances du désert*.¹ In 1946, Malraux published an essay entitled „N'était-ce donc que cela?" which was to form part of a longer and hitherto unfinished study of T. E. Lawrence provisionally named *Le Démon de l'absolu*.² *La Métamorphose de dieux* (1957) is only the first volume of a projected art criticism,³ and *Antimémoires* (1967) is the

first volume of his autobiography.⁴ However, the most challenging and perhaps the most important of Malraux's fragments is his fictional work *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*.⁵

In his note to the Gallimard edition of this book, Malraux explains that this work is but a part of a larger whole: „La suite de *La Lutte avec l'Ange* a été détruite par la Gestapo. On ne récrit guère un roman. Lorsque celui-ci paraîtra sous sa forme définitive, la forme des *Noyers de l'Altenburg* sera sans doute fondamentalement modifiée.”

In spite of this *caveat*, the custom of many critics has been to treat this book as if it were a finished work of art. Professor R. W. B. Lewis, for one, writing in his introduction to *Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, tells us that *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* is “probably the best place to test any claim one would wish to make about Malraux as a novelist.”⁶ And Professor W. M. Frohock, for another, says in his *Style and Temper* that “Malraux appears to have done this book considerable disservice by persisting in treating it as a fragment . . .”⁷

However, two textual lacunae in *Noyers*, which critical notice has neglected, clearly point up the fragmentary nature of the book. Because this book was written more than twenty years ago and because it becomes increasingly unlikely that Malraux will resume its composition, it is perhaps time to call attention to these two details. (Indeed, instead of refurbishing *Noyers*, Malraux has most recently extracted substantial portions of it and worked them into his *Antimémoires*.⁸)

One of these compositional details concerns chronological verisimilitude. As the book stands, the major portion consists largely of Vincent Berger's „rencontres avec l'homme” (page 29) told through the first-person narrative of his son. This narrator begins his story on June 21, 1940. His age is not given, but he must be in his thirties at least, since he claims to have been an author for the last ten years: „Écrivain, par quoi suis-je obsédé depuis dix ans, sinon par l'homme” (page 29). This means that the narrator was born before the year 1911. Now this narrator's father, Vincent Berger, arrived in Constantinople in 1908 immediately after obtaining his Diploma in Oriental Languages (page 47). There is no indication then that Vincent Berger is either married or the father of any children. Throughout the account of Vincent's sojourn in the Near East and Africa from 1908–1914, there is no sign of a wife or a son in his life.

Perhaps Vincent Berger had left his family in Europe? But when he returns to Marseilles early in the summer of 1914, there is no one to greet him and not once does the thought of wife or child cross his mind (pages 75–79). He proceeds to his ancestral home at Reichbach where, five days later, Dietrich Berger commits suicide (page 79) – still no sign of an immediate family of his own. One week after the funeral, Vincent Berger is invited to Altenburg by Walter Berger to participate in the current colloquium (page 45). After the colloquium, there is a lapse of about a year before the narrative picks up Vincent Berger again on June

11, 1915 (page 157). Here again no thought of a wife or a child crosses his mind even when he watches an attempt to trap a suspected woman spy by confronting her with a child who is thought to be hers (pages 160–167). On June 12, Vincent Berger is gassed. Throughout all this time, there is not one hint or allusion that Vincent Berger is married or has a son. Could Malraux have intended Vincent Berger to marry after 1915? If that were so, it would make his son, the narrator, only twenty-five years old in 1940 – hardly old enough to have been an author for ten years! As it stands, then, the account of Vincent Berger's life does not tolerate close scrutiny: he does not seem to have had enough time to be the father of his son.

That Malraux had worked out the chronology of this fictional piece in haste is further evidenced by a minor contradiction in the text. Vincent Berger presumably arrives at Altenburg on June 2, 1914 (page 102). The colloquium occurs on June 3: on the day of Vincent's arrival, Möllberg says to him, „Nous allons voir demain ce que les autres pensent de ces choses” (page 110). On the afternoon of June 3, 1914, Vincent experiences his moment of illumination before the walnut trees of Altenburg (pages 150–154). Yet Malraux's narrator, obviously using the day of the colloquium as a point of reference, makes the error of saying: „Un peu moins d'un an plus tard – le 11 juin 1915 – mon père attendait dans l'anti-chambre du P. C. du général von Spitz, sur le front de la Vistule” (page 157, italics mine). To an attentive reader, the slip is obvious: June 11, 1915, is not less but *more* than a year after the colloquium.

The other point which shows up the unfinished state of *Noyers* revolves around the question whether Vincent Berger does or does not die after being gassed on June 12, 1915. Most critics who write of *Noyers* as a complete and whole novel assume that Vincent Berger does die. This is Professor Joseph Frank's supposition in his essay “André Malraux: The Image of Man” when he talks about “Berger's death by poison gas.”⁹ Similarly, in Professor Charles D. Blend's *André Malraux: Tragic Humanist*, we read that Vincent Berger “is gassed, and dies.”¹⁰ And again, Professor W. M. Frohock writes in *André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination* that Vincent Berger “dies at the end of the test.”¹¹

In my view, however, it is highly unlikely, in fact impossible, that Vincent Berger should die in the gas attack. After all, the narrator, Vincent Berger's son, was not with him on the Russian front and could only have learnt about Vincent Berger's poignantly intimate experience through his father's own notes. Obviously these notes could not have been made if Vincent Berger had died on the battlefield.¹² Thus it is difficult to make a final and exact estimate of Vincent Berger's character and significance if we know that Malraux meant to extend his career beyond his experience of „l'Apocalypse de l'homme” and „l'appel au bonheur” (page 243).

Malraux's text itself leads one to the inference that Vincent Berger does

not die upon the banks of the Vistula. Immediately after the narrator's reconstruction of the gas attack, he writes: „La suite de ces 'rencontres' de mon père – *et de sa vie* – appartient encore à la même chaîne, mais non plus au même versant. J'en viens donc d'abord à moi” (page 249, italics mine). The implication seems to be plain that Vincent Berger's notes and his life are meant to continue beyond this point in the novel.

It follows from the foregoing exposition of these uncertainties and this inconclusiveness in *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg* that critical statements about the form, plot, or theme of *Noyers* should be made under the author's own reservation that the book is offered as an unfinished piece of imaginative literature. Some commentators, dismissing Malraux's qualification too lightly, seem to have been over eager to treat *Noyers* as a completed artistic whole. We urge greater caution. To urge caution, however, is not to advocate silence. One can neither deny *Noyers* its greatness and importance nor can one deny critics their just right to comment upon it. After all, Chaucer never completed his *Canterbury Tales*, and Pascal's *Pensées* are but rough notes about his encounters with God and man.

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Notes

1. Paris, 1930.
2. In *Saisons*, numéro 3 (hiver 1946–47), 9–24.
3. Paris: N. R. F., Gallimard.
4. Paris: N. R. F., Gallimard.
5. First published in 1943. My text, however, is that of Paris: N. R. F., Gallimard, 1948 – hereafter the title will be cited as *Noyers*.
6. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964, p. 9.
7. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967, p. 62.
8. See pp. 23–50 and 294–326.
9. Reprinted in R. W. B. Lewis, *Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 82.
10. Columbus, Ohio, 1963, page 199.
11. Stanford, California, 1952 (reprinted 1967), p. 127.
12. Professor Frohock seems to become aware of this impossibility in his later book, *Style and Temper* – see p. 77 –; but he does not revise his opinion in the 1967 version of his *André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination*.