

Man's Fate Short Guide

Man's Fate by André Malraux

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Man's Fate Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Themes.....	6
Literary Precedents.....	7
Copyright Information.....	8

Characters

First, it must be clearly understood that all of Malraux's works are novels of situation. Each one presents a male protagonist who, haunted by his sense of alienation, attempts to find himself through active communal involvement that inevitably leads to his defeat.

Ironically, this defeat serves as the catalyst for him to heroically accept his tragic destiny with his fellow man. In *Man's Fate*, the focus broadens to include a multiple protagonist, made up of a politically and psychologically diverse group of individuals. In reality, however, Malraux has created but one protagonist, Modern Man, given him different names and placed him in various historical settings. In *The Conquerors* (1928), he is Garine, a gambler and adventurer, involved in a power struggle over Britain's expulsion from Hong Kong; in *The Royal Way* (1930), he is Claude Vannec, a fortune hunter, involved in a dangerous archeological expedition in Indochina that promises to benefit not only himself but all of mankind; and in *Man's Fate*, he is several people, but mostly he is Kyo, a committed revolutionary, involved in the 1927 Shanghai rebellion.



Social Concerns

Malraux's recreation of Chiang Kaishek's bloody break with the Communists places the reader in the throes of social revolution. As Malraux has stated on various occasions, however, the Chinese Revolution served as the novel's setting rather than subject. Like the two novels that preceded *Man's Fate*, the central focus is metaphysical, not social. The sociopolitical events depicted in this work — although critical to Malraux's aesthetic, since according to Malraux, it is in just such historical crises that man is able to transcend his existential isolation and alienation — are of minor concern compared to the conflict that is raging within the characters. Malraux refers to this inner turmoil as the "Pascalian aspect," namely, a profound metaphysical pessimism. The novel's impact on the reader lies precisely in its ambiguous stance concerning the existential human condition. Throughout, the reader experiences a tension that, on the one hand, expresses a hope founded on human solidarity and, on the other hand, underscores the painful realization that individual man is ultimately alone in a cold and indifferent world.

In the final analysis, *Man's Fate* transcends the whirlwind of historical activity it so dramatically depicts, and quests after a new vision of Man, albeit a tragic one. In the midst of violent revolution man experiences an awakening that allows him to see beyond the apparent absurdity of human existence, to face death heroically, and, in his communal struggle for social justice, he is able to create himself anew.

Techniques

Malraux's robust, terse style is peppered with newspaper headlines and radio broadcasts that heighten the story's dramatic impact and help to create the illusion that, what one is reading, has truly taken place. Frequently, he juxtaposes a series of concise, dynamic scenes, reminiscent of the flashback and flash-forward techniques employed in the cinema. Closeup depictions of events are followed by gradual fade-aways, to be followed by other close-ups, then fade-aways and closeups again. This constant changing of focus helps to subordinate the external events to the conflict within. Emphasis shifts from the historical to the metaphysical, and the reader begins to see that the sociopolitical struggle described so dramatically by Malraux is only a reflection of the hero's inner turmoil, who is himself but a symbol of Modern Man.

Themes

Although the particular historical events around which his novels revolve may change, several recurrent themes dominate Malraux's literary perspective. For instance, exoticism and violence, blindness and suffering, and the ubiquitous presence of death appear throughout his writings. Malraux portrays the human condition as tragic, but it is precisely in confronting this situation, that man experiences hope.

His novels, therefore, oscillate between the pessimism of individual existence and the optimism of collective action.

In *Man's Fate* Malraux recreates the 1927 Shanghai workers' strike and Chiang Kai-shek's subsequent military struggle against the Communists, because he saw in this political cauldron a perfect metaphor for man's tragic situation as well as the ideal setting to express his own poetic image of mankind, namely, men united in death for a common cause. Unlike the historical reality it portrays, however, Malraux's fictional world demands that its hero die, for only in sacrificial death can one transcend the metaphysical anguish and solitude inherent in modern man's notion of individualism. Whereas Malraux's previous novels focused on one individual's quest for wholeness, *Man's Fate* describes a large number of individuals whose interaction dramatically illustrates man's alienation both from himself and from others. For example, there is Tchen, a terrorist who becomes utterly obsessed with killing; there is Ferral, a powerful businessman blinded by his unquenchable thirst for power; there is Baron de Clappique, whose blatant self-rejection moves him to choose a mythical existence of disguises; there is Konig, the police chief, whose deep-seated selfhatred causes him to be impotent. Even Kyo Gisor, a man deeply involved in revolutionary service, is depicted as alienated from within and without, for he is unable to recognize his own voice when played back to him on tape, a fact that graphically confirms his own confession that he feels more alienated from himself than from his unfaithful wife. Nevertheless, when Kyo and a Russian comrade, Katow, face death together, heroically, by offering their cyanide capsules to fellow prisoners so that their comrades would not have to suffer the pain of being burned alive, their initial fear of death is replaced by feelings of solidarity and brotherhood.

Literary Precedents

Because his novels focus on key sociopolitical events that have contributed substantially toward the creation of the Modern Era, Malraux was, at first, thought to be a "committed" author, whose purpose was to further the cause of social revolution throughout the world. A careful reading of his novel, however, indicates that Malraux has little in common with the traditional "engage" writers, whose works attempt to enunciate an ideological point of view. Rather, he more closely resembles the "dominated" writers such as Dostoevsky and Faulkner who write as a way of resolving personal existential problems through literary projection. Nietzsche and Freud also played major roles in forming Malraux's literary perspective. The former for his announcement concerning "the death of God" and his call for the creation of the New Man, and the latter for his studies on the subconscious that he hoped would lead to the development of self-determining rational individuals. Another major influence was Oswald Spengler. What Spengler described in *The Decline of the West* (1926/1928), Malraux dramatically portrays in his novels. Malraux's greatness lies precisely in his ability to project the profound philosophical, psychological, and historical ideas of such intellectual luminaries as Nietzsche, Freud, and Spengler into flesh and blood drama.

By his artistic use of symbolic situations and characters that embody the twentieth century's version of "Every Man" Malraux has presented for readers' reflection and analysis some of the major moral and metaphysical dilemmas facing mankind today.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994