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Tchen's Sacred Isolation—Prelude to Malraux's Fraternal Humanism

Abstract

While Malraux's life-long quest was to seek new values in man's perennial and shared struggle against an overwhelming fate, his early protagonist, particularly the assassin, turns to destruction and terrorism in a frenzied search for absolutes. This attempt to identify with the very fatality that has the power to destroy him is especially developed in Tchen, who embodies a despairing fascination with totalistic nihilism that Malraux must overcome in his search for a new notion of man. Tchen's initiation to murder in *La Condition humaine* marks a transgression of a taboo that thrusts him into what Georges Bataille calls the realm of the "sacred." His attempt to reconcile life and death by identifying with his victim irredeemably isolates Tchen from other, uninitiated men. Transformed by murder, he leaves the reality of revolution for the inhuman world of cosmic existence and individual death. Seeking to escape the human condition, he becomes obsessed with killing Chang-Kai-shek in order to kill himself and thereby "possess" his fate. But the illusion of such an escape dies with Tchen. Even his admiring disciples repudiate his nihilistic temptation as Malraux begins to seek in human fraternity the foundations of a new humanism.

Keywords

Malraux, assassin, Tchen, totalistic nihilism, nihilism, *La Condition humaine*, Georges Bataille, sacred, new humanism, life, death

TCHEN'S SACRED ISOLATION—PRELUDE TO MALRAUX'S FRATERNAL HUMANISM

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For you, absolute reality was first God, then man; but man died after God, and you search with anguish for someone to whom you can entrust his strange heritage.¹

In Malraux's post-Nietzschean vision, where the demise of humanism seems the inevitable consequence of the death of God, writing becomes an act of faith, a wager. For the loss of certainty—the “supreme sovereignty of the arbitrary” (TO, 186) that Malraux perceives in the decaying values of both East and West—shatters the belief that existence has purpose and places man at the mercy of a threatening cosmos. Without transcending values, nothing seems to redeem the contingency of existence. Under such circumstances, the serious novelist, if he is not to abandon his task altogether, must believe in at least the possibility that human life can somehow be given meaning.

Malraux's lifelong quest was to seek, in man's perennial and shared struggle against an overwhelming fate, new values, a new humanism. Yet Malraux's early protagonist often reacts to the disintegration of former beliefs by turning to action for its own sake, to destruction, and at times even to terrorism, in a frenzied search for absolutes. His actions are defined in relation to a cosmic fatality that the young Malraux seems to have sensed most keenly and dramatically in the East. Attempting to possess death by choosing the moment and the form of his own death, the character faces the most menacing aspect of his condition. This is usually the case with Malraux's assassin. But the character is active in a different way as well; he does not choose only suicide; he chooses also to become the

agent of death. He does not only appropriate his own death, but he also seeks to participate in death generally and, beyond death, in that cosmic existence that menaces him as an individual. He confronts intimately the very fatality that has the power to destroy him.

This character type is most fully developed as Tchen, the notorious assassin who dominates the opening pages of *La Condition humaine*. Disappearing well before the end of the novel, in a death that, in itself, contributes nothing to the final hope of this work, Tchen embodies within the narrative a despairing fascination with totalistic nihilism that Malraux must overcome in his search for a new notion of man. As a character Tchen marks the moment of transition in a novel that itself is a pivotal one in Malraux's work.

Tchen's unexplained act of murder confronts the reader from the very first lines of the book. Who is he? What has brought him here? Who is his victim? Such questions momentarily go unanswered before the overwhelming immediacy of the murder. Nothing seems to exist beyond the sights and sounds in the room—the mosquito netting, the sleeping man's foot, the rectangle of light from the window, the sound of car horns from the street below—and Tchen's anguished questions as he ponders his act. Assassination is not a simple deed for this character who, "fascinated by the mass of white muslin hanging from the ceiling over a body less visible than a shadow, . . . made the nauseating discovery within himself, not of the combatant he expected, but of a sacrificial priest."² For Tchen is, above all, aware of a taboo that he must transgress and it is this transgression that gives his act its peculiarly solemn fascination.

Writing about such taboos, Georges Bataille maintains that, "For each person it fascinates, the corpse is the image of his destiny. It testifies to a violence that not only destroys one man but will destroy all men. The taboo that comes over the others at the sight of the corpse is the recoil with which they reject violence, with which they separate themselves from violence."³ Like a cadaver, the sleeping victim is motionless, without resistance and, for Tchen, "to touch this immobile body was as difficult as striking a corpse, perhaps for the same reasons" (CH, 183). From the beginning, Tchen operates on the threshold of a violence that both repels and attracts him. This dual aspect of violence is of particular import to Bataille when he claims that, "Men are at once subjected to two movements: one of terror that rejects, and one of attraction that commands a fascinated respect. Taboo and transgression respond to these two contradictory movements: taboo rejects, but fascination introduces transgression"

(ER, 76). At the moment he plunges his dagger into his victim's chest, Tchen does not kill a man as one would in combat; for he also violates a taboo whose power he has felt. He leaves what Bataille calls "the profane world of work" (ER, 77), the "rational or practical world" (ER, 78) of frugal restraint, and is abruptly thrust into a world of excess and violence that, by contrast is a "sacred" realm.⁴

In *Les Voix du silence* Malraux describes fantasy and particularly the sacred as belonging "to the Complete Other, to a world at times consoling and at times terrible, but above all different from the real."⁵ Tchen's murderous act has plunged him into an inhuman, strangely surreal world whose solemn otherness recalls the fear and terror of childhood fantasy that, as Malraux points out, is "like the sacred of which it seems a minor domain."⁶ Alone in the darkened room, Tchen stands next to his dead victim, dagger in hand, as his arm begins to tremble spasmodically: "It was not fear, it was a terror, at once atrocious and solemn, which he had not known since childhood: he was alone with death, alone in a place without men, limply crushed both by the horror and the taste of blood" (CH, 184). This atmosphere of sacred violence gives a special dimension to Tchen's deed as he discovers that "To assassinate is not only to kill . . ." (CH, 182). For Malraux's most fully developed assassin, murder is also an initiation.

A particular mark of Tchen's initiation through murder is his profound separation from other men. All the characters of *La Condition humaine* suffer from solitude. But theirs is an existential estrangement whose cause, while complex, is due primarily to man's absurd condition. Tchen feels this desolation as well, to be sure, but to this primary solitude, fundamental to all men, is added, in his case, the utter isolation of the initiate. Tchen is unable to participate in the search for human contact common to most of Malraux's solitary protagonists in *La Condition humaine*. Other revolutionaries, while they may suffer from an existential solitude, can at times glimpse a human solidarity. Tchen's experience of murder as a manifestation of the sacred prevents any human bond. Malraux makes his point most effectively when Tchen, his arm wrapped around a roof ornament, is the initial link in a human chain of insurrectionists who are attacking a police station by throwing grenades through the window below. In spite of this physical contact in the midst of fraternal combat, Tchen "did not escape from his solitude. . . . Despite the intimacy of death, despite this fraternal weight that was pulling him apart, he was not one of them" (CH, 254–55).

The origins of Tchen's irredeemable isolation are to be found in the opening episode of the novel where, before killing his victim, Tchen pushes the dagger into his own flesh. This seemingly gratuitous act is, in fact, one of the first indications of an ambiguity between Tchen the executioner and Tchen the victim. Moreover, there is an assimilation of life and death that is directly related to the executioner-victim ambivalence: both ambiguities are manifested in Tchen's self-inflicted wound:

Through the weapon, his stiffened arm, his aching shoulder, a current of anguish was set up between the body and himself, up to his chest, up to his convulsive heart, the only moving thing in the room. He was absolutely still; the blood which continued to run from his left arm seemed to be that of the man on the bed; without anything new occurring, he was suddenly certain that this man was dead. (CH, 183)

The ambiguity between life and death continues into the following paragraphs where Tchen sees "a dark stain on the sheet [that] began to spread, to grow like a living being" (CH, 184). This "living" creature that so strikes a hallucinatory Tchen proves to be his victim's blood, while from Tchen's own living body, issues, not life, but a "death that receded from him, that seemed to flow out of his body in long draughts like the other's blood" (CH, 184).

According to Bataille, "it is generally the feature of sacrifice to reconcile life and death, to give to death the upsurge of life, to life the gravity, the vertigo and the openness of death. Here life is mixed with death, but it includes, in the same instant, death as a sign of life, an opening unto the infinite" (ER, 102). This assimilation of life and death is perceptible when one considers life as an ongoing universal force which necessarily implies the death of each individual. As Bataille puts it: "for us who are discontinuous beings, death means the continuity of being" (ER, 19). And since it is the victim who, through his death, escapes from discontinuity, it is only by identifying himself with his victim that Tchen can, in turn, participate in the sacred domain of continuity. This "sacrificial priest" who merges with his victim and the surrounding objects, "in this night where time no longer existed" (CH, 181), does not participate, for the moment, in the irreversible time of men. Rather, during the several minutes it takes to kill Tang-Yen-Ta, he lives in what Mircea Eliade calls "the 'strong time' of myth . . . the prodigious, 'sacred' time when something *new, strong, and significant* [is] manifested." ⁷ Recalling

finally that he had come to kill this man in order to get a document necessary to the insurrectionists, Tchen discovers that he had momentarily forgotten time and the world of revolution: "for the last ten minutes, Tchen had not thought of it even once" (CH, 185). For those ten minutes, murder itself, without reference to the "world of work," is Tchen's only reality.

Indeed, murder represents an ontological transformation for Tchen. For, while he leaves the place of his initiation, he never escapes the realm of the sacred. His act of transgression rent the fabric of everyday reality and opened up the eternal world of cosmic existence and individual death. It is in this world rather than in the daily world of men that Tchen now sees his "reality." Traveling through night-time Shanghai, Tchen observes that "men lived far in the distance; here nothing remained of the world but a night with which Tchen felt an instinctive harmony, as with a new friendship: this nocturnal, apprehensive world was not opposed to murder. A world from which men had disappeared, an eternal world. . . . There was a world of murder, and he remained in it as in warmth" (CH, 178).

On one level Tchen may well be a terrorist, but from now on it will not be mere political terrorism that will define him. It is this transformed Tchen, of course, who takes part in several revolutionary actions in the novel. But Malraux is able to transmit the extent of Tchen's transformation by interrupting the action with several interlocutory scenes in which Tchen, with the help of another character, such as old Gisors or Kyo, engages in both retrospection and introspection. Thus Tchen becomes aware of the difference between himself and the other insurrectionists when he understands that Kyo "would never kill, except in combat. Katow was closer to him . . . And yet . . ." (CH, 189). Tchen's world is now individual and particular rather than fraternal: a world of depths and of the utmost darkness.

Having passed into a new "reality," having acquired a new "knowledge," Tchen certainly feels himself transformed. Yet objects, forever strange to man, resist all transformation: "The room remained the same: mosquito netting, white walls, sharp rectangle of light; so murder doesn't change anything . . ." (CH, 185). Later Tchen notices that murder has not even changed his appearance as he sees his reflection in the elevator mirror and realizes that "Murder left no trace" (CH, 186). By means of this opposition of the unchanged exterior world and Tchen's metamorphosed inner world, the author is able to convey in very stark terms the extent of that transformation.

Transformation through initiation is surely not an unknown experience. Each individual's life is typically marked by several transforming experiences. Among these, sexual initiation is one which is at once impressive and common. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that, as early as the scene in Hemmelrich's record shop immediately following the murder episode, the selectively omniscient narrator⁸ uses the analogy of sexual initiation to explain Tchen's experience: "And while, little by little, he was getting nearer to them [his revolutionary accomplices], it seemed as if he were discovering them—like his sister the first time he had come back from a brothel" (CH, 188). Later, it is Gisors who suggests the analogy of sexual initiation as a means of understanding Tchen's transformation. Tchen's answer is even more specific:

"And you are right to speak of women. Perhaps one has contempt for the man one kills. But less so than for others." Gisors was searching; he wasn't sure he understood: "Than for those who don't kill?" "Than for those who don't kill: the virgins." (CH, 222)

Just as Tchen's sexual initiation had taught him to despise women and to discover a separation between himself and his sister, the initiation of murder teaches him a special disdain for other revolutionaries who are uninitiated to murder.

Tchen goes on to compare death itself to a woman when Gisors asks:

"Weren't you horrified by the blood?" "Yes. But not just horrified. . . . And so? With women, I know what you do when they want to go on possessing you—you live with them. What about death?" (CH, 223)

Thus Malraux links the dual movement of recoil and fascination in the face of death and its taboos to the dual response in the face of sexual taboos.

In this respect, it is of particular interest to note that for Bataille "the desire to kill is to the taboo against murder as the desire for sexual activity is to the complex of taboos limiting it" (ER, 80). For, in both cases, the taboos result from the same opposition: that of the profane and the sacred. The taboo, whether against sexual activity or murder, is, in effect, the means by which the profane world of limits defends

itself from the boundless, sacred world of continuity. It would be misleading, therefore, to see nothing more than a metaphorical link between death and sexuality in Tchen. For both death and sexuality are manifestations of that sacred, cosmic fatality, that ongoing life beyond the individual, to which he has been initiated. As Bataille explains:

If we see in fundamental taboos each individual's refusal of a nature regarded as a squandering of living energy and an orgy of annihilation, we can no longer make a distinction between death and sexuality. Sexuality and death are merely climaxes of a festival which nature celebrates with the inexhaustible multitude of beings, both of them signifying the unlimited waste in which nature engages as opposed to the desire to last which typifies each living being. (ER, 69)

While Bataille is more explicit than Malraux in proposing a link between sexuality and death, the latter's references to sacrifice, solemnity, initiation, and sexuality when dealing with Tchen suggest an affinity between the perspectives of both writers. Tchen's isolation may thus be understood as a consequence of his intimate participation in nature's "squandering celebration."

Malraux conveys a sense of Tchen's alienation not just from other revolutionaries but from this character's former self by means of that retrospective tête-à-tête between Tchen and Gisors. The latter, as might be expected from an intelligent and sympathetic observer, perceives in Tchen a growing fascination with terrorism. His analysis reveals a "resolutely obsessed" if not an insane Tchen:

Able to vanquish, but not to live with his victory, what can he call forth, if not death? No doubt he wants to give it the meaning others give to life. To die the highest possible death. An ambitious soul, sufficiently lucid, sufficiently separated from men or sufficiently ill to disdain all objects of his ambition, and his ambition itself? (CH, 223–24)

This outside perspective clashes with Tchen's discovery of a new world within himself. Earlier he had confirmed that the old professor had never killed anyone and "it seemed to him suddenly that Gisors was lacking something" (CH, 221). Uninitiated to murder, Gisors cannot really understand Tchen's transformation.

For Gisors, Tchen is a distressed being. Yet it is not really a question of distress for Tchen who continues to see his transformation in more mystical terms: “ ‘Distress? No,’ Tchen finally said between his teeth. ‘A fatality?’ ” (CH, 223). Tchen’s feelings serve only to isolate him further, even from this most understanding mentor. For it is clear that an uninitiated Gisors is shocked beyond any possible comprehension, not by Tchen’s act itself, but by the transformation it has brought about in his former student: “Gisors was appalled by this sudden feeling, this certainty of the fatality of murder, of an intoxication infinitely more dreadful than his own. He sensed how inadequately he had given Tchen the relief he was seeking, how solitary murder is . . .” (CH, 224). Malraux elaborates in Tchen, more fully than in any of his other assassins, the attributes which he had ascribed to the murderer as early as *La Tentation de l’Occident*:

The murderer of a life, or of other, more secret things, that the heavy hand of the law does not take into account, can discover himself filled with his crime, *or* with the new universe it thrusts upon him. (TO, 214)

One of the most significant and constant attributes of the assassin for Malraux is the metamorphosis he undergoes once he has killed. In *Les Conquérants*, Malraux alludes to this fundamental change which Garine had found lacking in the assassin figures of the Russian novelists:

In a real situation, I think they [the assassins] would see the world transform itself completely, change its perspective, become, not the world of a man who “has committed a crime,” but of a man who has killed. . . . For an assassin there are no crimes, there are no murders—if he is lucid, of course.⁹

For a lucid assassin, such as Tchen, killing does not bring remorse; rather it ushers in a new, solitary, inhuman existence. Even Manuel, who has little of Tchen’s mysticism, undergoes such a metamorphosis when he orders the execution of two deserters in *L’Espoir*: “I am not a man of remorse. It’s a question of something else. . . . I am every day a little less human.”¹⁰ As late as *Les Noyers de l’Altenburg*, an assassin explains that “The individual killed makes no difference! But afterward, something unexpected happens: everything is

changed. . . .”¹¹ It is apparent that transformation is at the very heart of the assassin's experience for Malraux, despite the several forms such a character might take in the various novels.

While the author does not limit Tchen exclusively to analytical scenes following the initial episode of assassination, it remains true, nonetheless, that Tchen's contacts with other revolutionaries in the novel serve mainly to emphasize the transformation brought about by murder, on the one hand, and his continuing longing for the absolute, on the other. As in the murder scene, a solitary Tchen, often to the dismay of his comrades who do not understand his change, is fascinated by a death of which he speaks in terms of the sacred, while he is oblivious to the revolutionary reality around him. Thus, in the midst of the battle against an armored train, Tchen's thoughts return to the idea of killing Chiang Kai-shek. Even Kyo, perhaps the character most sensitive to the fraternity of combat, senses Tchen's obsession and its threatening solitude: “Beneath the brotherhood of arms, at the very moment he was watching that armored train which perhaps they would attack together, he sensed the possibility of a break as he would have sensed the threat of a seizure in an epileptic or insane friend, at the moment of his greatest lucidity” (CH, 274). Later in Hankow, Tchen haltingly reveals that he thinks about death, his own death, not with anguish but with ecstasy: “An ecstasy towards . . . towards the depths” (CH, 289). It is then that Kyo realizes, even more fully than his father, Gisors, the dimension of Tchen's metamorphosis. The world of men is relative and temporal, but Kyo perceives that Tchen has created his own private, atemporal world of absolutes—a mysterious and sacred world:

A thirst for the absolute, a thirst for immortality, therefore a fear of death: Tchen should have been a coward; but he sensed, as all mystics, that his absolute could be seized only in the moment. . . . This comrade, now silent, daydreaming about his familiar visions of horror, had something mad about him, but also something sacred—what is always sacred about the presence of the inhuman. (CH, 290)

And sensing, as Gisors had done earlier, that Tchen's obsession must end in death, he perceptively adds that “Perhaps he would kill Chiang only to kill himself” (CH, 290). Indeed, Kyo is the first character explicitly to reveal Tchen's real motive for wanting to kill

Chiang Kai-shek—a sort of mystical suicide, or as Bataille might put it, an escape through death from the profane world of limits into the sacred world of absolutes.

Not surprisingly, Souen and Peï, who participate in Tchen's first unsuccessful attempt to kill Chiang, also are sensitive to Tchen's fascination with death when he decides to throw himself, along with his bomb, under the General's car. As Souen asks:

“You want us to commit ourselves to imitate you?”

“It isn't a promise I expect. It's a need.” . . .

“You want to make of terrorism a kind of religion?”

The words were hollow, absurd, too weak to express what Tchen wanted of them.

“Not a religion. The meaning of life. The . . . the complete possession of oneself.” (CH, 315–316)

Tchen seeks a unity which death denies all men. For man, aware of the discontinuity of his mortal existence, such a “complete possession of oneself” can be possible only at the *moment* of death. Like all mystics, Tchen strives to attain the exalted moment that will justify and fulfill him.

Yet, despite his isolation, Tchen is not alone in wanting to “be more than a man, in a world of men” (CH, 349); like all men, he “dreams of being god” (CH, 349), for part of the irony of the human condition is to want to escape it. But if Tchen differs from other men, it is not so much because he is an assassin, but because the initial act of killing compels him to pursue this very human dream to its ultimate conclusion—death itself. The transformation brought about by Tchen's deed, and which separates him from other men, is not to be found in the “will to godhead” (CH, 349), but, rather, in the particular expression of that will. The assassin's isolation is complete when he becomes his own victim.

This, of course, is exactly what happens when Tchen, clutching his bomb, does finally throw himself at Chiang Kai-shek's car. As in the opening scene, this night of assassination is sacred and solitary: “terrorism needed to become a mystic cult. Solitude first of all: let the terrorist decide alone, execute alone” (CH, 352). When Tchen rushes towards Chiang's car, in which, ironically, the General is not riding, he does so “with an ecstatic joy” (CH, 354) in this final accomplishment of his attempt to transcend individuation, to attain unity. As Kyo had so aptly observed in Hankow, “Destruction alone

put him in harmony with himself” (CH, 284). The explosion of Tchen’s bomb and the analogy with sexual orgasm which earlier references to sexuality suggest are but momentary escapes from human limits. They cannot transcend the intensity of the moment. The illusion of escape from the human condition into a “sacred,” nonhuman transcendence dies with Tchen.

Emerging from the darkness of earlier novels, the solitary character of Tchen prepares the way for the new heroes of fraternity. This character who carries a nihilistic view of existence to its violent conclusion seems to have been necessary in order for Malraux to move beyond the forsaken figures of his earlier works. “The tragic poet,” Malraux wrote in his preface to Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*, “expresses what fascinates him, not to deliver himself from it (the object of fascination will reappear in the next work) but to change its nature: for by expressing it with other elements, he makes it enter into the relative universe of things conceived and dominated.”¹² And indeed the assassin and the despair he represents do not disappear completely from Malraux’s subsequent works. But Tchen’s final paroxysm has fixed the limits of nihilism in Malraux’s fiction. While negation cannot be dismissed, it is no longer so overwhelming as to preclude the affirmation of *human* rather than *sacred* values beyond the individual.

After Tchen’s death, the novel focuses increasingly on Kyo and Katow, undoubtedly Malraux’s best known heroes of human fraternity. But the first signs of a shift from a sacred to a human transcendence can be seen in Tchen’s own disciples—Hemmelrich, Souen and Peï.

Hemmelrich who was “obsessed by Tchen” (CH, 313), finally feels free, and even compelled, to participate in the insurrection when his family is killed by Chiang Kai-shek’s men. Like Tchen’s, his first killing is a solitary one as he faces an enemy soldier who had entered a besieged house. As in the novel’s opening scene, it is night and a “fascinated” (CH, 384) Hemmelrich prepares to kill a shadowy victim. But, unlike Tchen, Hemmelrich does not forget the reason for his act at the moment of the murder. Rubbing his hand, stained with the dried blood of his loved ones, in his victim’s face, he shouts: “You’ll erase it! . . . You’ll erase it!” (CH, 386). There is no attempt to identify with fate or with the victim here as he kills this man who “was everything Hemmelrich had suffered from until then” (CH, 385). When he kills, he is not possessed by death but by the suffering life of his family.

Similarly, Souen does not seek to lose himself in death. While “a current attracted Souen” (CH, 315) to Tchen, he does not allow himself to be overwhelmed. Fraternity is stronger than the fascination with death for Souen: “It is for our own that I do battle, not for me” (CH, 316). In spite of his infatuation with Tchen, he demonstrates a knowledge of the risks involved. Like Hemmelrich, his value is not “the complete possession of oneself” but human fraternity.

A more impressionable Pei is perhaps more tempted by Tchen’s murderous zeal. Tchen saw this young writer as a disciple who would “Bear witness” (CH, 317) to the “master’s” murder-suicide. Yet, at the end of the novel, Pei no longer thinks of murder, but of “human power struggling against the Earth” (CH, 426), as he puts it in a letter to May in which, significantly, there is “not a word of Tchen” (CH, 427).

In contrast to the affirmation of Kyo and Katow’s exemplary and fraternal death, Tchen’s violent suicide encloses him within the orb of his own peculiar preoccupations. He has no direct descendants; he fails utterly to create a “race of avengers” (CH, 316) who would feel his “need” to kill. Returning to the life of men, his three disciples effectively repudiate Tchen’s nihilistic temptation as Malraux begins to seek in human fraternity the foundation of a new humanism.

NOTES

1. André Malraux, *La Tentation de l'Occident* (Paris: Grasset, 1926), pp. 174–75. Subsequent references will be given in the text and abbreviated as TO. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this paper are my own.

2. André Malraux, *La Condition humaine* in *Romans* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 181. Subsequent references will be to this edition henceforth abbreviated in the text as CH.

3. Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 50. Subsequent references will be given in the text and abbreviated as ER.

4. “The *profane* world,” writes Bataille, “is one of taboos” (ER, 76). It is the world of “normal life, devoted to ordered activity” (ER, 124), while “the *sacred* world is open to limited transgression. It is the world of celebration, sovereigns and gods” (ER, 76), and “celebration is, by itself a negation of the limits of life that work requires” (ER, 125). Similarly, although from a somewhat broader perspective, René Girard, in his *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ.

Press, 1977), points out that “The sacred concerns itself above all with the destruction of differences” (p. 241). Girard’s observation that “Sacrifice too can be defined solely in terms of the sacred” and that the language of the sacred “detaches violence from man to make it a separate, impersonal entity, a sort of fluid substance that flows everywhere and impregnates on contact” (p. 258) would certainly be an apt description of Tchen’s fictional situation and of the language that characterizes it. But Bataille’s particular emphasis on transgression and on the opposition of the sacred and the profane seems especially useful in attempting to understand the nature of Tchen’s isolation.

5. André Malraux, *Les Voix du silence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 512.

6. Malraux, *Les Voix du silence*.

7. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, World Perspectives, Vol. 31 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 19.

8. While this essay makes no sustained attempt to examine Malraux’s narrative techniques in *La Condition humaine*, it is appropriate to note the author’s use of what Norman Friedman has called “Multiple Selective Omniscience [in which] the story comes directly through the minds of the characters as it leaves its mark there” (“Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept,” *PMLA*, 70 [1955], 1176).

9. André Malraux, *Les Conquérants* in *Romans*, p. 50.

10. André Malraux, *L’Espoir*, in *Romans*, p. 774.

11. André Malraux, *Les Noyers de l’Altenburg* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 78.

12. André Malraux, “Préface à *Sanctuaire* de William Faulkner,” *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 41 (Nov., 1933), 746–47.