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Andre Brink and Malraux

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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André Brink and Malraux

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André Brink, the eminent South African novelist with a firm international anti-apartheid reputation, has

recurrently drawn attention to the influence of French existentialist writers on his fiction. But beyond this general tribute, Brink usually singles out Albert Camus for specific acknowledgment of indebtedness and for veneration. Asked in a 1993 interview if he had been influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre, Brink responded: "Not much. I read Sartre before I read Camus. Intellectually, I admired Sartre very much. But Camus bowled me over, emotionally and morally. Sartre affected me intellectually, but that was all" ("André Brink" 5). Brink's tribute to André Malraux is even rarer. In his first politically committed novel, *Looking on Darkness* (1974), Brink quotes Malraux's opinion on virginity: "A man who hasn't committed murder yet is a virgin" (370). Three years later, in a paper he delivered at the annual meeting of the Afrikaans Writers' Guild in Broederstroom, Brink notes Malraux's glorification of violence as a sign of virility (*Literatuur* 85). His collection of essays *Mapmakers* contains another fleeting reference to Malraux. None of these references, however, fall into the category of Brink's many enthusiastic acknowledgments of discipleship to Camus. Yet closely read, André Brink's third politically committed novel, *Rumours of Rain* (1978), can be seen to refer back consciously and demonstrably to Malraux's 1933 Prix Goncourt award-winning **[End Page 91]** novel, *La condition humaine* (*Man's Fate*). In this essay, I seek to establish Brink's hitherto unexplored indebtedness to Malraux. By highlighting the thematic identity of *Man's Fate* and *Rumours of Rain* as well as correspondences in the conception, interpretation, and thematic roles of characters in both novels, I hope to show how Brink interprets the South African situation in the light of a philosophy already used and fictionally structured by Malraux.

Brink's reconstruction of Afrikaner history in *Mapmakers* to indicate its illogical culmination in apartheid presumably contextualizes him as a dissident Afrikaner writer. Inscribe dissidence at the very heart of the Afrikaner temperament and disposition, Brink privileges a history characterized by rebellion against tyranny and an affirmation of human dignity and freedom. Brink's condemnation of apartheid is fundamentally inspired by his conviction that it impoverishes the humanity of the Afrikaner and denies the best in the Afrikaner himself: "It reveals only that side of him which is characterised by fear, by suspicion, by...pigheadedness. What it denies is the Afrikaner's reverence for life, his romanticism, his sense of the mystical, his deep attachment to the earth, his generosity, his compassion" (*Mapmakers* 19). Thus in the scheme of Brink's thinking, the dissident writer's crucial responsibility is significantly not merely the political liberation of blacks but the redemption of the Afrikaner from the ideology of apartheid. Compassionately appreciative of the tragic possibilities inherent in the Afrikaner's situation under apartheid, the dissident writer must awaken the Afrikaner to a sense of his potential for greatness:

[His] struggle is not just *against* what is evil in the Afrikaner, but *for* what he perceives to be his potential for good. In other words, it is not just a struggle aimed at the liberation of blacks from oppression by whites, but also a struggle for the liberation of the Afrikaner from the ideology in which he has come to negate his better self. The dissident struggles in the name of what the Afrikaner could and should have become in the light of his own history, had he not allowed adversity (both real and imaginary) to narrow down his horizon to the small hard facts of mere physical survival.

(*Mapmakers* 20)

Yet enthusiastic as he was that his work should facilitate the democratization process in South Africa and even more crucially **[End Page 92]** redeem the Afrikaner from an apocalyptic threat of virtual self-destruction, Brink consistently denounced the unimaginative transcription of history and mere documentation of the cruelties of apartheid. He remained aware that the demand by some political activists in South Africa that...

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I wish to express my gratitude to the editors of *Contemporary Literature* and to Professor Ben Obumselu for invaluable suggestions that enhanced this revision; and to Professor Hein Willemse for providing me with an English translation of an Afrikaans text by Brink.



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