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Josep Ferrater Mora and Józef Czapski: Portrait of an Unlikely Friendship Between Two Intellectuals in Exile

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ABSTRACT

Unpublished materials are here used to reconstruct the relationship that existed between two exiles: Josep Ferrater Mora (1912–91), one of the most prominent Catalan philosophers of the twentieth century, and Józef Czapski (1896–1993), painter, writer and key figure in the Polish intelligentsia. The clearest testimony of their friendship is Czapski's 1952 portrait of Ferrater Mora. This article explores how their friendship developed and the extent that each might have influenced the other in their thinking and their work.

RESUMEN

A partir de toda una serie materiales hasta ahora inéditos, reconstruimos la relación entre dos exiliados: Josep Ferrater Mora (1912–91), uno de los filósofos catalanes más destacados del siglo XX, y Józef Czapski (1896–1993), pintor, escritor y figura clave de la intelectualidad polaca. El testimonio más obvio de la existencia de una amistad entre el filósofo y el pintor es un retrato de Ferrater Mora pintado por Czapski en 1952. En el artículo mostramos en qué sentido se desarrolló esta amistad y nos preguntamos hasta qué punto el uno pudo influir en el otro.

KEYWORDS

Josep Ferrater Mora; Józef Czapski; Catalan exile; Spanish exile; Polish exile; Cold War; European intellectual history

PALABRAS CLAVE

Josep Ferrater Mora; Józef Czapski; exilio catalán; exilio español; exilio polaco; Guerra Fría; historia de la intelectualidad europea

Józef Czapski's 1952 portrait of the Catalan philosopher Josep Ferrater Mora reveals him as an unshaven young man sitting on a chair in the cramped corner of a room, his right leg crossing his left and holding an open book in both hands (Figure 1). The philosopher's elongated torso diminishes the length of his legs while emphasizing his head. Ferrater Mora gazes at the painter, thus creating a direct bond between artist and sitter. The color palette and range of tonalities effectively articulate elements of the sitter's dress while differentiating the confines of the room, suggesting a small space that concentrates both his physical being and his presumed activity of reading. There is an element of restlessness about this portrait, as if the sitter is captured unaware and about to move, a suggestion that might also convey a sense of his quick intellect. The portrait is composed, yet conveys an air of informality imbuing it with a sense of intimacy and spontaneity. This is the only known painting in Spain by the Polish artist Józef Czapski

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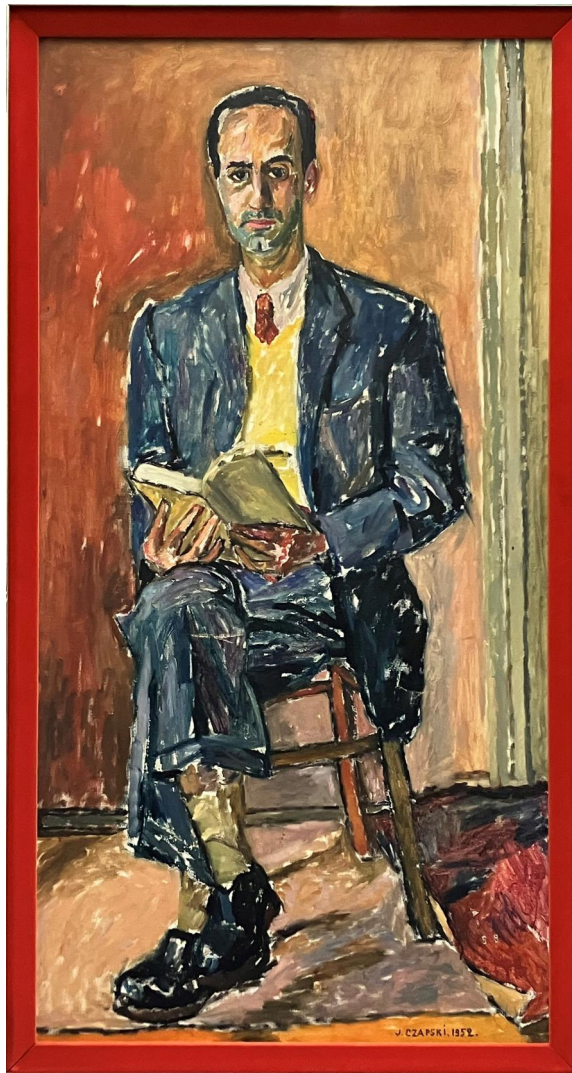


Figure 1. Józef Czapski (1896–1993). *Portrait of Josep Ferrater Mora*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 104 × 54 cm, University of Girona.

(1896–1993) and it testifies to an extraordinary friendship between the philosopher and the artist.

The relationship between Ferrater Mora and Czapski was exceptional in many respects. It formed at a time when both men were experiencing tremendous personal changes. The main aim of this article is to show how this friendship began, and to investigate the influences each had on the other. Linking the development of Ferrater Mora's philosophical thought with Józef Czapski—an outstanding representative of the Polish intelligentsia—will also help more generally to contextualize the history of the Catalan intelligentsia with what was happening in Europe and the wider world during the twentieth century. Too often in Catalonia and Spain the history of intellectuals is

examined within a domestic or national framework, an approach that is difficult to justify given that many went into exile at the end of the Civil War (1936–39).¹

Four types of documents testify to the friendship between Ferrater Mora and Czapski: the portrait described above, a remarkable epistolary exchange between the two, a series of dedications in Czapski's books that are preserved in the library that Ferrater Mora donated posthumously to the University of Girona, and notes that Czapski made in his famous personal diary.² José Ferrater Mora is a well-known figure in Hispanic intellectual historiography. Czapski on the other hand, is virtually unknown. Here their lives and early trajectories (before they met in 1950) are examined with an emphasis on Czapski's biography. Czapski's portrait and the extent to which their friendship mutually influenced their intellectual development are also matters here explored.

Different Origins Towards the Same Meeting Point

Josep Ferrater Mora (1912–91) was born into a humble family in Barcelona. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, he joined the Republican army and on January 30, 1939, while the Francoist troops were occupying Catalonia, he crossed the French border and went into exile in Paris. There he stayed with a French teacher Renée Petitsigne, with whom he had an affair and later married. In mid-May Ferrater Mora and some companions obtained the necessary visas to travel on the ocean liner Flandre to Havana where Ferrater Mora began in earnest his career as a philosopher. In the Cuban capital he finished writing the first edition of the *Diccionario de filosofía* (one volume with “only” 598 pages);³ the dictionary would end up being the work of his life, not only because it would bring him worldwide fame (especially in the Spanish-speaking world), but also because he would continue to update and expand it for almost forty years. The sixth and final edition which came out in 1979, consisted of more than four thousand entries spread across four substantial volumes.⁴

Ferrater Mora found the heat in Havana stifling, and he was eager to give his career a boost. In 1941, when Alfonso Rodríguez Aldave—husband of the philosopher María Zambrano and former secretary of the Spanish embassy in Chile—told him of the possibility of working at a Chilean university, he did not think twice. As soon as he

¹See for example Agustí Pons's complaints in this respect: “Since no one has written a history of Catalan intellectual thought from 1939 to the present, it is difficult to situate the concrete activity of writers, poets, intellectuals, artists, etc. of our country within the most important ideological currents of this period.” Agustí Pons, “María Aurèlia Capmany en el marc ideològic de la modernitat,” in *María Aurèlia Capmany: Escriptora i pensadora*, ed. Joan Vergés Gifra et al. (Girona: Documenta Universitaria, 2019), 282.

²The painting, Czapski's letters and the books with the dedications are in the Ferrater Mora Archive (FMA) of the Ferrater Mora Chair at the University of Girona (Catalonia, Spain). Ferrater Mora's letters are in the Czapski Archive (CzA) at the National Museum in Krakow (Poland). Czapski's original diary is also in the Czapski Archive, and the Polish Library in Paris has copies of an important part of it. Czapski kept a personal diary for most of his life, from 1915 to 1992. The notebooks from the period 1915–39 were lost during the Warsaw Uprising. The notebooks from 1939 to 1941 are in private hands. The notebooks from 1941 to 1992 (275 volumes) are kept in the National Museum in Krakow. Recently a volume of notebooks from the war period 1942–44 was published. See Józef Czapski, *Dziennik wojenny*, ed. Janusz S. Nowak and Mikolaj Nowak-Rogozinski (Warsaw: Instytut Dokumentacji i Studiów nad Literaturą Polską, 2022).

³José Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de filosofía* (Mexico City: Atlante, 1941).

⁴In 1994, a seventh edition was published by Josep M. Terricabras. In June 2020, the *Diccionario* was digitized and expanded. See www.diccionariodefilosofia.es.

arrived in Santiago, he formed strong friendships with many Catalan exiles who had settled there. They included Joan Oliver (who wrote under the name Pere Quart) and Xavier Benguerel, with whom Ferrater Mora maintained an intense lifelong correspondence.⁵ In Chile, Ferrater Mora flourished as an author. He published important works, among them *Les formes de la vida catalana* (1944), *Unamuno: Bosquejo de una filosofía* (1945), *Cuatro visiones de la historia universal* (1945), and *El sentido de la muerte* (1947).

Although comfortable in Chile his stay was destined to be short. Ferrater Mora received a Guggenheim Fellowship to work in the USA and again the Ferrater Mora-Petitsigne family packed their bags. At that time, Ferrater Mora was fully engaged in the preparation of the third edition of the *Diccionario*—it would appear in 1951—and he had begun a new book, *El hombre en la encrucijada* (1952). Two prominent Spaniards in exile in the USA, the historian Américo Castro and the poet Pedro Salinas, encouraged him to stay and helped him find a suitable position in a good American university, Bryn Mawr (Pennsylvania), where Ferrater Mora taught from 1949 until his retirement, but not before becoming a naturalized American citizen.⁶ In Pennsylvania, he wrote many of his most original philosophical works: *El ser y la muerte* (1962), *El ser y el sentido* (1967) and *Fundamentos de filosofía* (1985), works in which he developed his own system, “integrationism.” He was also able to develop his artistic side as a novelist and filmmaker.

Josef Czapski was born in Prague on April 3, 1896. His father belonged to the Hutten-Czapski lineage, linked to the Germanic and Polish aristocracy, and his mother to the Thun-Hohenstein family, of Czech and Austrian descent. Czapski witnessed the outbreak of the Soviet Revolution in 1917 in Saint Petersburg, while he was in the Tsar’s army. Reading Tolstoy had led him to reject violence, and in the midst of the conflict, he left the army and, together with two of his sisters, founded a religious and pacifist community with the aim of helping the starving thousands who roamed the city. The following year he returned to Poland and enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. When the war broke out between Poland and the Soviet Union in 1920—a war that would mean the recovery of Polish independence after more than 120 years of subjection to neighboring empires—Czapski, who had by then abandoned pacifism, contributed with merit to the Polish victory as an officer of the Polish Army.

Czapski then returned to his vocation as an artist, enrolling at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, where Józef Pankiewicz (who introduced Impressionism to Poland) and about whom Czapski would later write a book, was teaching. Pankiewicz had lived in France and was a friend of the painter Pierre Bonnard, whom Czapski admired. The interest Czapski and his companions had in seeing what was in the French capital gave rise to the Kapists, a term that comes from abbreviating “Komitet Pariski” (Committee of Paris). The Kapists rejected historically inspired classical Polish painting and were inspired above all by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Fauvism, and Cubism. Their aim was to travel to Paris and stay for six months that in the end turned into six years.

⁵See Joan Oliver and Ferrater Mora, *Joc de cartes 1948–1984* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1988).

⁶See letter from Américo Castro to Ferrater Mora, March 8, 1949, ref. ID1_1051 (FMA).

Czapski was the only member of the group who spoke French well and, during his time in Paris, he met the key figures of the Parisian intellectual and artistic worlds. He befriended, for example, André Malraux, François Mauriac and Jacques Maritain. He also met Misia Godebska-Sert, a legendary muse of painters and musicians, who was married to the Catalan painter Josep M. Sert (her third marriage). He knew Coco Chanel, Picasso, Bonnard, the Russian dancer Diaghilev, Gertrude Stein, and Sergey Nabokov, brother of the author of *Lolita* and with whom he would maintain a loving relationship until 1926, when Czapski was forced to go to an uncle's house in London to be treated for typhus. With distance, Czapski would lose a lover, but gain a love. While convalescing, he read *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, a work that would profoundly affect him. He began to have his first solo exhibitions and in the early 1930s, after a trip to Spain during which Goya's paintings made a strong impression on him, he returned to Poland with the Kapists.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler's army invaded Poland from the west and after only seventeen days, under the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviets invaded from the east. Poland found itself split in two. Czapski, who had been drafted as a reservist, was taken prisoner by the Soviets on September 27, and imprisoned in the Starobielsk camp. Later he would be transferred to another camp, Giazowietz. After a few months, the prison authorities began to evacuate prisoners, ostensibly to reunite them with their families but in reality—and shrouded in great secrecy—one by one they were shot in the back of the head by the Soviet secret police. A large number were buried in the Katyn Forest, hence the name of Katyn massacre. In total, 22,000 men were killed.

Three of Czapski's most important writings emerge from his soviet experience: *Memories of Starobielsk* is a brief account in the form of a report where he describes the difficulties in the camp and, with great humanity, a whole group of comrades in order to preserve their memory;⁷ the lectures on Proust—*Lost in time*⁸—he delivered to his colleagues in the Giazowietz camp; and the book *Inhuman Land*,⁹ in which Czapski recounts the Kafkaesque vicissitudes and exhausting obstacles he encountered during the research he carried out into his missing comrades. Czapski had been put in charge by General Władysław Anders to find out (unsuccessfully) their fate.

Towards the end of the war, it became increasingly clear that Stalin would take control of Poland and that the Western Allies would not prevent him from doing so. Many members of Anders's army were already known to be in exile. Together with Jerzy Giedroyc and Zofia and Sigmund Hertz, Czapski decided to establish the Literary Institute in Rome. One of the main activities of the Institute was the publication of *Kultura*, a magazine of modern Polish literature for Eastern European dissidents published from 1947 to 2000. First published in Rome, it transferred to Maisons-Lafitte, a town near Paris, where the entire team moved with the help of the contacts Czapski had there. The headquarters of the Institute in Maisons-Lafitte became a kind of sanctuary and refuge where intellectuals from all over the world would gather, especially from countries under Soviet rule. Mainly by virtue of its literary quality *Kultura* also

⁷Józef Czapski, *Memories of Starobielsk*, trans. Alissa Valles (New York: NYRB, 2022).

⁸Józef Czapski, *Lost Time: Lectures on Proust in a Soviet Prison Camp*, trans. Eric Karpeles (New York: NYRB, 2018).

⁹Józef Czapski, *Inhuman Land: Searching for the Truth in Soviet Russia 1941–42*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (New York: NYRB, 2018).

became a focus of cultural resistance against Soviet influence in Europe. Among the Poles who wrote assiduously for the magazine were Nobel laureates Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska, or writers such as Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Witold Gombrowicz, Konstanty Jeleński, Adam Michnik, L. Kolakowski, Adam Zagajewski, and Józef Czapski himself. We could also highlight the collaboration of Albert Camus, Boris Pasternak, Emil Cioran, George Orwell, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sakharov, and the long list of illustrious signatories that included Ferrater Mora.

Meeting at a Special Time

Czapski and Ferrater Mora met for the first time in the middle of June 1950 on the transatlantic liner *De Grasse* connecting New York with the French port of Le Havre.¹⁰ On November 23, 1949, Czapski had embarked on a six-month trip to the United States to give a series of talks and lectures to the Polish diaspora and to raise funds to finance the ambitious projects of the Literary Institute, starting with its headquarters in Maisons-Lafitte. Czapski left a written record of the impressions of this trip in several articles that first appeared in *Kultura* and were eventually grouped in the book *Tumultes et spectres*.¹¹ To return to Europe, Czapski bought a ticket on *De Grasse*, the same ship that Ferrater Mora and his family took on June 10, 1950.¹² It was the first time Ferrater Mora returned to Europe since he had left for Cuba in May 1939.

In 1950, both Czapski and Ferrater Mora were at a particularly crucial and active point in their lives. After years of troubles relating to the war and exile, both were finally enjoying a modicum of stability. It was fragile, but enough to give them the opportunity to devise ambitious projects. Ferrater Mora had finally obtained a position at a prestigious university. He had published books on philosophy and had made a name for himself as the author of the *Diccionario de Filosofía*. Not yet forty, he was already a leading figure of the Spanish intelligentsia in exile. In 1952, on his second trip to Europe, not only would he repeat his stay in Paris, but he was also able to spend August in Barcelona where he met with friends, especially Joan Oliver, and part of the Catalan intelligentsia in “the interior” (that is, in Spain). Having succeeded in America, Ferrater Mora was returning to his hometown as an exile.¹³

For his part, Czapski finally settled in Paris and lived with his sister Maria Czapska on the second floor of the Maisons-Lafitte. Zofia and Sigmund Hertz and Jerzy Giedroyc, the director and driving force behind the magazine, lived on the first floor. Czapski had renewed some of his French friendships forged in the 1920s and was fully

¹⁰In the Ferrater Mora library there is a copy of *Terre inhumaine* with a handwritten dedication by Czapski that reads “To Mr. José Ferrater Mora, the son of a country I love through my eyes and my heart and that I would like to know better through my spirit.” Below, one can read “Ocean Atlantique 14/VI 1950” and the address “1 Avenue Corneille, Maisons Lafitte.” Czapski and Ferrater Mora spoke to each other in French. All their letters are originally in French. In this article they are translated into English. The translation does not always do justice to the particular style with which the Polish painter often used French.

¹¹Józef Czapski, *Tumultes et spectres*, trans. Thérèse Douby (Paris: Les Éditions Noir sur Blanc, 1981).

¹²Letter from Ferrater Mora to Xavier Benguerel, June 20, 1950 (Arxiu Xavier Benguerel, Biblioteca de Catalunya).

¹³*Destino*, which at the time was the prime publication on cultural matters, covered Ferrater Mora’s visit to Barcelona. The magazine presented the philosopher as “Another universal Catalan” and said: “A universal man and at the same time very connected to this land, he must obtain among us, as soon as he is known, the same esteem as in America.” See *Destino* 786, 30 August 1952, 16.

committed to creating and developing of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an umbrella group that brought together a variety of organizations located in different countries and a distinguished contingent of intellectuals. Its main purpose was to counteract the cultural influence of Soviet communism in Western democracies.

In addition to political and social projects, Czapski again took up painting, that had occupied a good part of his life before the war and with which he was most identified. Czapski had hardly picked up his brushes since September 1939. During his captivity in Soviet camps and later during the military campaign, he had been able to write and draw, but he had hardly been able to paint. In *Maisons-Lafitte* he noted that “at fifty years old I started all over again.”¹⁴

Czapski’s portrait of Ferrater Mora was the product of this period of vocational rehabilitation. It was among the works exhibited in Czapski’s second exhibition at the *Galerie Bénézit* in Paris after the long break caused by the war.¹⁵ It was likely painted in the summer of 1952 during Ferrater Mora’s second trip to Europe. The first reference to the portrait is found in a letter from Czapski to Ferrater Mora dated October 14, 1952, that ends: “I am going through the last week of honest work in the studio before the terrible ‘tremors’ of the preparations for my exhibition that WILL MARK A DATE IN THE HISTORY OF ART FOREVER.”¹⁶ In the next letter (December 20), Czapski told Ferrater Mora that the exhibition, in which the portrait of the philosopher was shown, had been a success: “4 paintings and 17 drawings sold which allowed me to cover the expenses and still a request for a portrait which gives me the possibility of going back to work.”¹⁷ He also explained that André Malraux was at the exhibition for more than an hour and that Ferrater Mora’s portrait had “caused a sensation.” Albert Camus also showed up.¹⁸ A month later, on January 17, 1954, Ferrater Mora thanked Czapski “infinitely” for giving him “the portrait you made of me. You are really too kind.” The philosopher would hang the portrait in his living room (Figure 2).

Czapski attached great importance to the exhibition at the *Galerie Bénézit* and including Ferrater Mora’s portrait was undoubtedly a deliberate choice (Figure 3). In his diary, weeks before the exhibition, we find notes on how the paintings should be displayed and even sketches of how they should hang on the walls and in what order (Figure 4). Czapski was clearly both excited and nervous about the exhibition.

Portrait as a Testimony to a Friendship and a Career in Progress

In the early 1950s, Czapski was not a well-known painter and had not established a distinctive and personal style. According to Eric Karpeles, at that time Czapski was already an extraordinary artist, “but working in oil colors was a complicated activity for

¹⁴Józef Czapski, *L’Art et la vie*, trans. Thérèse Douchy, Julia Jurys, and Lieba Hauben (Geneva: L’Age d’Homme/UNESCO, 2002), 55.

¹⁵The first exhibition, after the long hiatus, took place in Geneva, at the request of the philosopher Jeanne Hersch, whom Czapski had met in 1950 at the Congress for Cultural Freedom and who would become one of the main collectors of his work.

¹⁶Letter from Czapski to Ferrater Mora, October 14, 1952, ref. ID1_1403.

¹⁷Letter from Czapski to Ferrater Mora, December 20, 1952, ref. ID1_1404.

¹⁸Eric Karpeles, *Almost Nothing: The 20th-Century Art and Life of Józef Czapski* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2018), 296.



Figure 2. Ferrater Mora at his home in Villanova (Pennsylvania) with the portrait by Czapski. Ferrater Mora Archive, University of Girona.

him; he was often too self-conscious of his technique, operating on a less intuitive level than when drawing.”¹⁹ Czapski himself recognized this fact. In a letter to his friend Ludwik Hering in which he describes the exhibition at the Galérie Bénézit, he observes: “At times my drawings (this smacks of foolish megalomania) are almost those of a master, and the oils are still very uneven [. . .]. Drawing represents ten whole years of not painting. I wish I had today this ease with oils that I already have in some of my quick drawings.”²⁰

¹⁹Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 298.

²⁰The letter is included in Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 297.

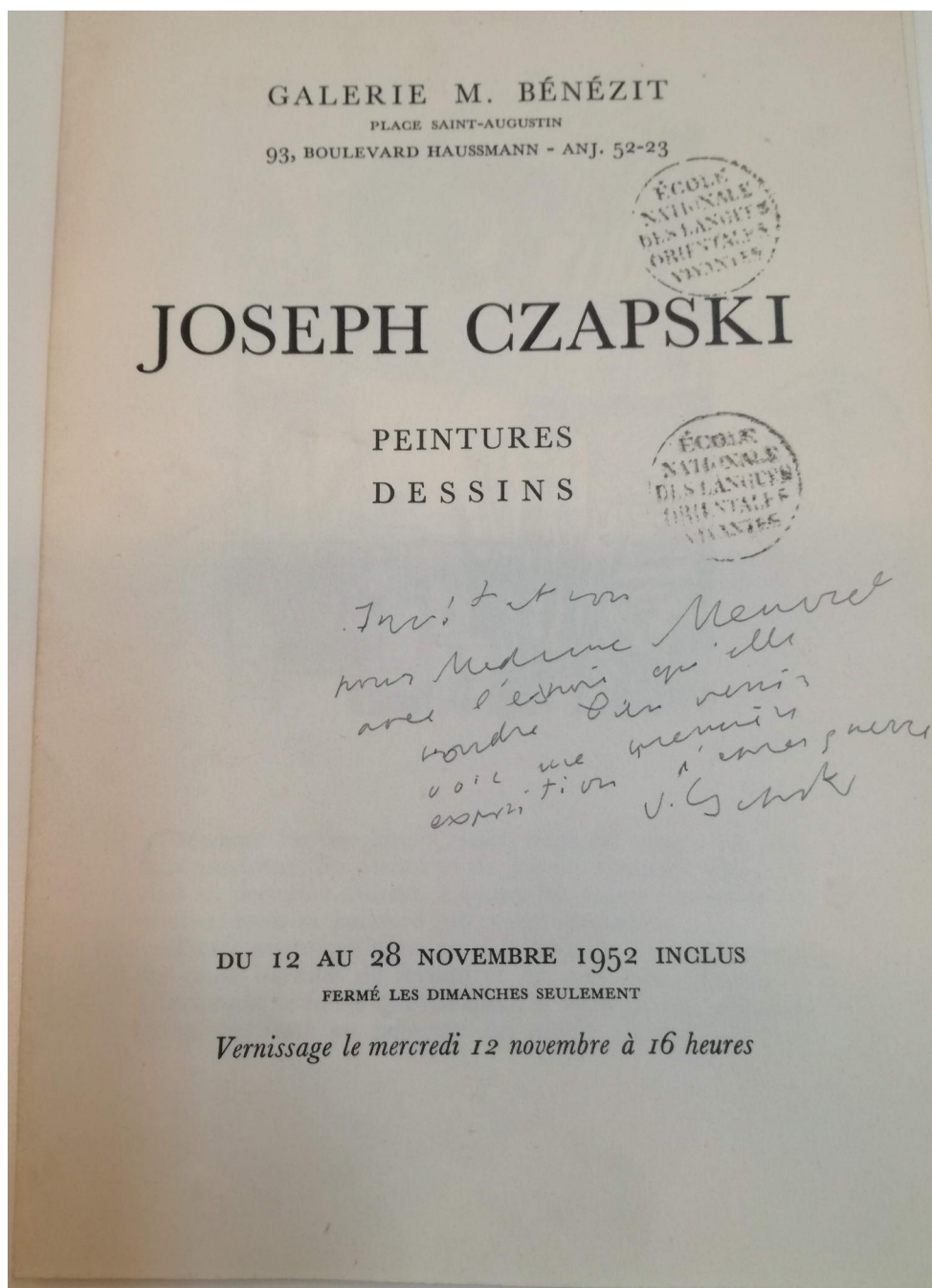


Figure 3. First and last pages of the catalogue of the exhibition at Galerie Bénézit, 1952.

In Czapski's painting the influence of the post-impressionist painters he most appreciated can be recognized, especially Cézanne, Gauguin, and Bonnard. In the first issue of *Kultura* (1947), Czapski dedicated an article to Bonnard in which he explained

TOILES

1. Gare Saint-Lazare.
2. Scouts devant le feu.
3. Paysanne de Corrèze.
4. Femme en bleu.
5. Homme seul.
6. Liseuse.
7. Double Cognac.
8. Patricia Newey dans *Le Consul* I.
9. — — — II.
10. Voyageur.
11. Catherine Dunham.
12. Café rue d'Amsterdam.
13. *Bus-Bar* à Maisons-Laffitte.
14. Bar-patinage au *Rockefeller Centre*.
15. Garçon à l'échelle.
16. Foire à Bruges.
17. La mare.
18. Paris la nuit.
19. Grenoble.
20. Mimosas.
21. Hommage à Dufy.
22. Portrait de M^{lle} C. Muhlstein.
23. Portrait de José Ferrater Mora.

60 DESSINS, AQUARELLES,
CRAYONS COLORIÉS

Figure 3. Continued.

how the Kapists regarded Bonnard's work and how it had served them to consider abstract art while retaining their enthusiasm for the Impressionist heritage.²¹ Czapski's

²¹Józef Czapski, "Les paradis perdu," in *L'Art et la vie*, 63.

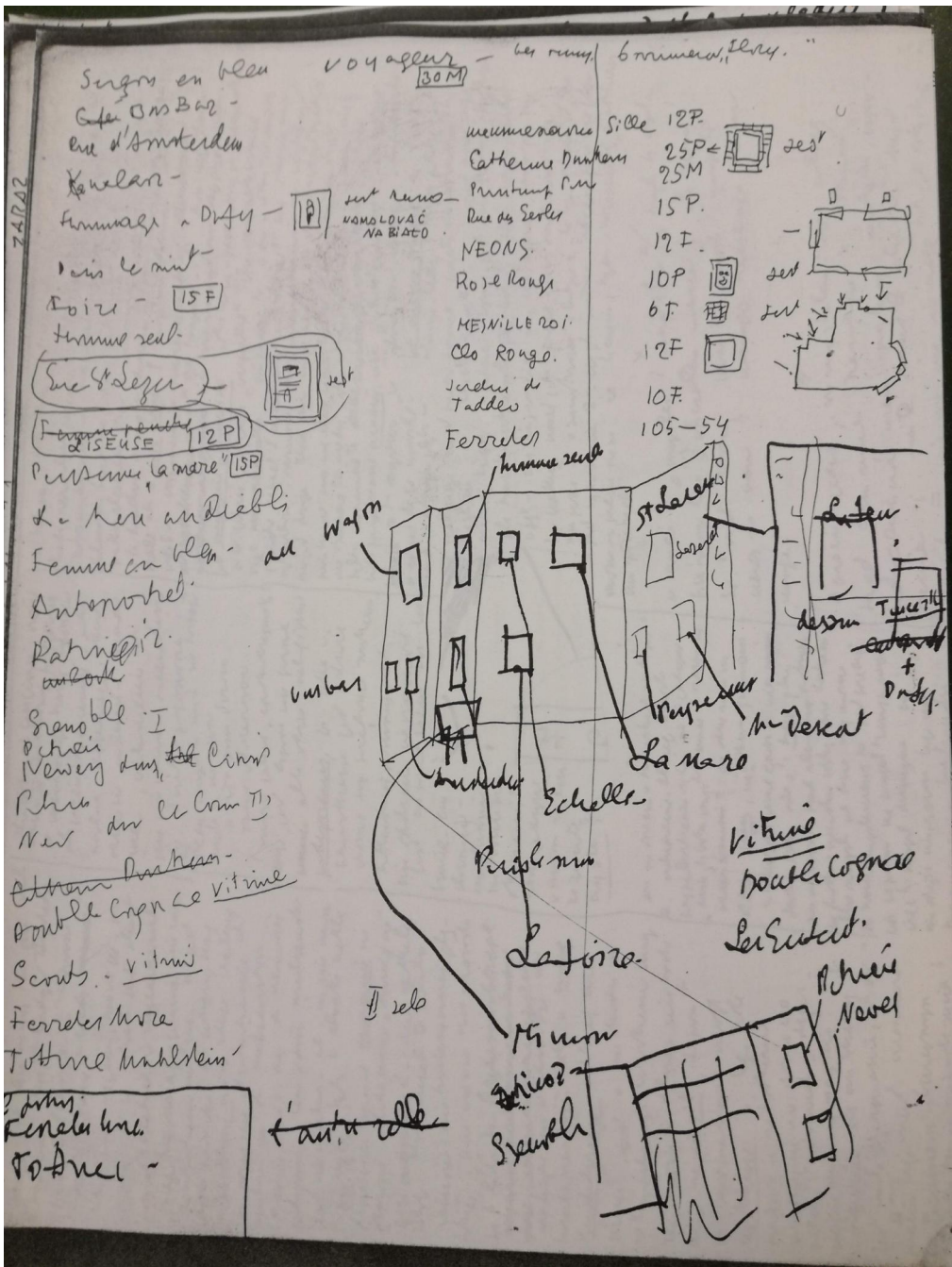


Figure 4. Józef Czapski (1896–1993). Sketch of the exhibition at Galerie Bénézit. Personal diary notebook, 1952. A photocopied partial copy of the diary is kept at the Bibliothèque Polonaise, Paris, from where I did my inquiries.

style has often been related to expressionism. It is possible, however, that in Ferrater Mora's portrait the affiliation with "Latin expressionism" (Goya, Daumier, Toulouse-Lautrec), which, according to Murielle Gagnebin, would characterize Czapski's mature

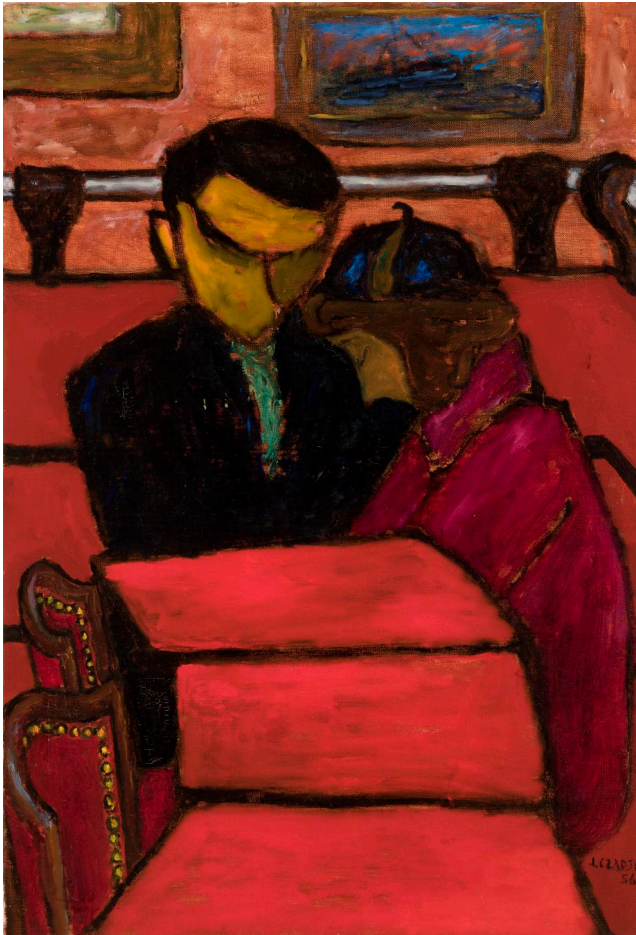


Figure 5. Józef Czapski (1896–1993). *Red Café*, 1954, oil on canvas, 73 × 50 cm. MNK II-b-1240. Laboratory Stock National Museum, Kraków (Poland).

work, is not so clear. If expressionism is characterized by the intention to communicate emotion, to take it from the psychological to the aesthetic plane, the characteristic of “Latin expressionism” according to Gagnebin, is “to keep ones’ emotions in check.”²²

The portrait of Ferrater Mora sits awkwardly within Czapski’s oeuvre for it is not what we expect from the artist. For example, it is uncommon for a sitter to appear so clearly as a model, even less gazing at the artist. In a foreword to a collection of articles on art criticism and aesthetics by Czapski, Jeanne Hersch classifies Czapski’s paintings into two categories. First, there are those he painted based on sketches he had made in cafes, on the street, in train stations, in the subway, at exhibition halls, etc. (Figure 5). According to Hersch these works “are very deeply recomposed, often caricatured, strongly stylized, with surprising framing and a sometimes subtle, sometimes violent

²²Murielle Gagnebin, *Czapski: Peintre du quotidien* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2019), 54.



Figure 6. Józef Czapski (1896–1993). *Still life*, 1956, oil on canvas, 32 × 44 cm. MNK II-b-3595. Laboratory Stock National Museum, Kraków (Poland).

delight in color. They are truly the product of the mind and I sometimes find them to have all the virtues of an abstract canvas, with the added humanity.”²³ On the other hand, there are paintings that do not derive from rapid sketches, but are meticulous and attentive works produced in front of something “concrete,” an undertaking that could last for weeks and which, according to Czapski, served him to “recharge my batteries.” Still life paintings belonged to this category (Figure 6). It is clear that Ferrater Mora’s portrait does not belong to the first category of paintings. Although in Czapski’s diaries we find sketches of it (Figure 7), we cannot say that these sketches were sudden or random. Nor does the portrait quite square with the second category.

It is difficult to position the portrait within Czapski’s aesthetics in which the key concept is “vision.” Czapski talks about it repeatedly and not always in the same way. But when we read his writings, and despite the inconsistencies, it is clear that “vision” occupies a central place in his concept of art. What is vision? In “La vision et la contemplation” (undated), Czapski states that a vision is “A certain synthetic, singular way of looking at the surrounding world. A moment of such vision always comes unexpectedly, like grace.”²⁴ In a text published in 1967 he added that the vision is linked to a “solitary, unexpected wonder, the feeling of being alone in seeing a unique miracle of beauty that, in the eyes of others, either goes unnoticed or, worse, seems

²³Jeanne Hersch, “Éclairer l’obscur,” in Czapski, *L’Art et la vie*, 24.

²⁴Józef Czapski, “La vision et la contemplation,” in *L’Art et la vie*, 49.

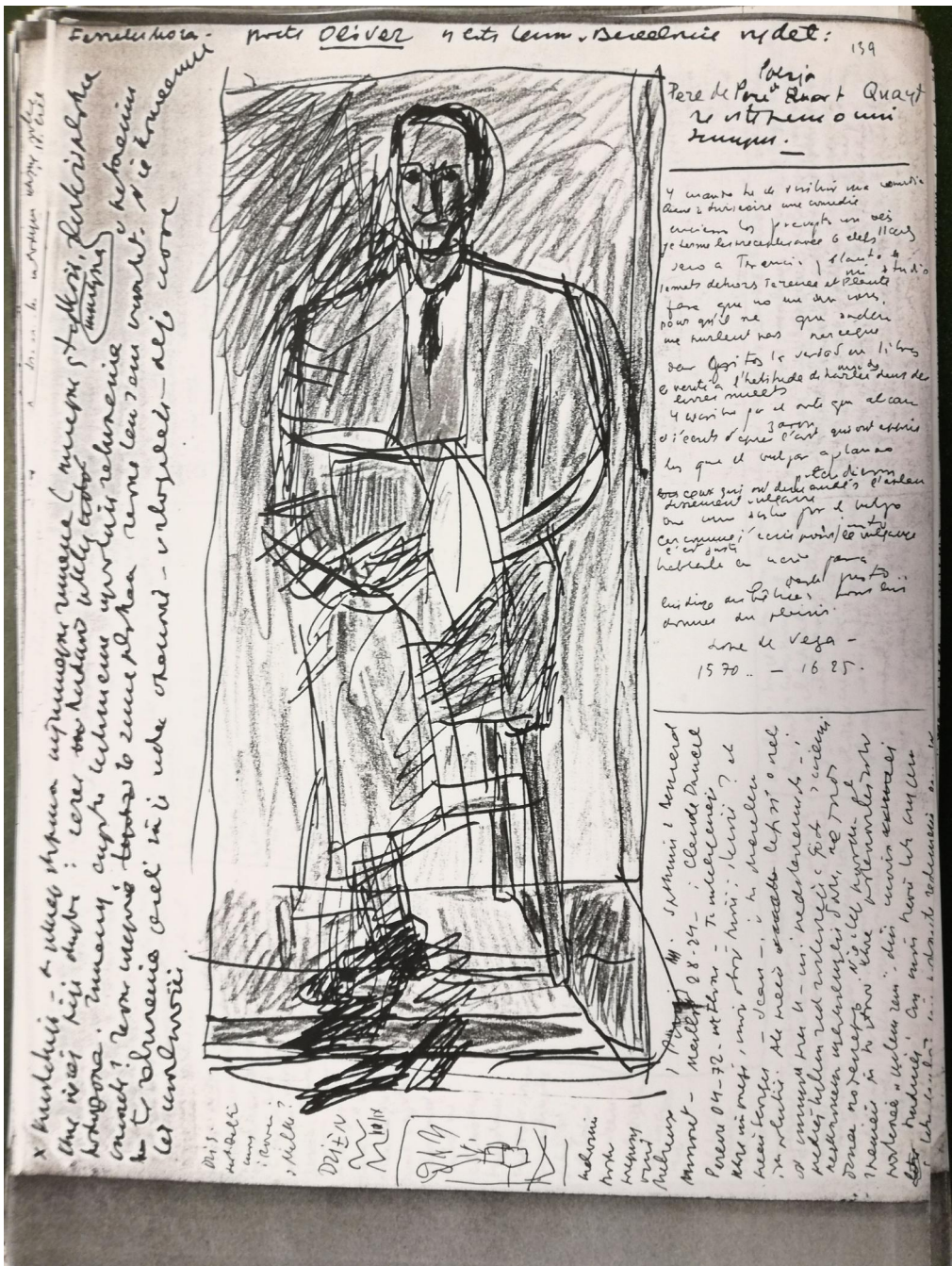


Figure 7. Józef Czapski (1896–1993). Sketch of the portrait of Josep Ferrater Mora. Personal diary notebook, 1952. A photocopied partial copy of the diary is kept at the Bibliothèque Polonaise, Paris. In the margins of this page one can see several references to the Catalan poet Joan Oliver (who also wrote under the name “Pere Quart”) and a fragment of the poem “Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo” by Lope de Vega.

ridiculous.”²⁵ Later, in 1973, in a text published in *Kultura* which questions the purpose of painting, Czapski explains what he means by “vision”:

In general, I look at the world as a map where everything has equal importance, or more exactly where everything is equally unimportant; and suddenly I see this or that combination of forms and colors which makes me discover a fragment of the surrounding world, and that through an insignificant object: purple calves, a red coat, a dirty kerchief on the table [...] or in the same way, a man who, as if by chance, starts to exist for me with all his being through a wrinkle that struck me, an asymmetry of his face or the color of his tie.²⁶

Understood in this sense, the portrait of Ferrater Mora does not seem to be the result of a spontaneous vision. The painting is premeditated. In 1952 Czapski did not quite feel confident with the brush, but neither did he have a clear notion of that aesthetic ideal that would later give personality and style to his painting. We have evidence of Czapski’s attempts to define his ideals in the letters that he wrote to Ferrater Mora that help us to see how they appreciated their friendship and how it was mutually enriching.

A Beneficial Friendship

Apart from quotidian matters, most of what Ferrater Mora and Czapski wrote about in their letters had to do with their work. However, there is a notable imbalance. On many occasions, Czapski appeared willing to promote Ferrater Mora as a philosopher, while Ferrater Mora was not in a position to do the same for Czapski as a writer or painter. Czapski made it easier for Ferrater Mora to publish in *Kultura*, which by then enjoyed international prestige. In 1951 Polish translations of “Filosofía, angustia y renovación”²⁷ and “Wittgenstein o la destrucción”²⁸ appeared in *Kultura*. In 1953, “Dwa znakomite dzieła” [Two Masterpieces of the History of Logic]²⁹ was published, and in 1958 the Polish version of “La filosofía en la sociedad contemporánea” appeared.³⁰

The first and last works corresponded to chapters of his book *El hombre en la encrucijada*, which would be published in 1952 by Editorial Sudamericana. Ferrater Mora thought that this book represented a qualitative leap in his trajectory as an author, and he saw in Czapski the most suitable person to make it reach the French and European intellectual public. In the letters of the period 1952–56 there are constant references to Czapski’s attempts to find a publisher or influential writer to take Ferrater Mora’s book seriously. Although Czapski had not been able to read the book (he could not read Spanish), there is evidence that he spoke with Ferrater Mora about the book and, thanks to *Kultura*, he knew elements of the work. Czapski placed his hopes in

²⁵Józef Czapski, “Comme il est beau,” in *L’Art et la vie*, 130.

²⁶Józef Czapski, “La nécessité et la grâce,” in *L’Art et la vie*, 153.

²⁷Josep Ferrater Mora, “Filozofia, niepokój i odnowienie,” *Kultura* 4, no. 42 (1951): 27–37. It is a revision of a homonymous text previously published in *Lyceum* 5, no. 19 (1949): 67–71.

²⁸Josep Ferrater Mora, “Wittgenstein—geniusz niszczycielski,” *Kultura* 7–8, no. 45–46 (1951): 44–51. In 1949 it had appeared in Spanish in *Realidad* 5, no. 14 (1949): 129–40.

²⁹Josep Ferrater Mora, “Dwa znakomite dzieła,” *Kultura* (Paris) 5, no. 67 (1953): 18–32. The text, an original essay on the contributions in logic of Lukaszewicz and Bochenski, appears simultaneously in Spanish in *Notas y estudios de filosofía* 4, no. 14 (1953): 145–58.

³⁰Josep Ferrater Mora, “Filozofia współczesne społeczeństwo,” *Kultura* (Paris) 10, no. 132 (1958): 3–16.

Gabriel Marcel to whom Ferrater Mora sent the book *Sentido de la muerte*.³¹ Later, they approached Éditions du Seuil, but, above all, they tried Gallimard through Albert Camus, whom Czapski knew. Lacking a positive response, they lost hope. Czapski then suggested to Ferrater Mora that perhaps the best way to convince French publishers was for it to appear first in German, for example in Suhrkamp.³² They tried this through Jean Rounault, but again without success.³³ Their efforts only seemed to bear fruit with the possibility of publishing in English. Czapski told Ferrater Mora about Edouard Roditi, whom he had known since the Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1950.³⁴ Roditi was in contact with an American publisher Criterion, which was interested in Ferrater Mora's book. Apparently, Criterion's interest increased when the English publisher Allen & Unwin came into play. In the end, however, Beacon Press, a Boston publisher would publish *Man at the Crossroads* in 1957.

Why did Ferrater Mora harbor hopes for *El hombre en la encrucijada* to be published in French? With existentialist overtones the theme he tackles in the book is the radically critical situation of man in view of the fact that, for the first time, he can end his own life, but that his final diagnosis is not pessimistic. However, style was important for Ferrater Mora, and he had already examined this in "Mea Culpa";³⁵ it was a way of thinking. Years later, at the beginning of the 1980s, in an interview for the magazine *Basilisco*, he would state that his "integrationism of concepts" already appears in *El hombre en la encrucijada*.³⁶ Since the mid-1940s—and probably earlier—Ferrater Mora had been studying mathematical logic and had become familiar with Wittgenstein's philosophy and his diagnosis that the problems of philosophy result mainly from an inappropriate use of language. At the beginning of the 1950s, Ferrater Mora saw in *El hombre en la encrucijada* a work that might gain him a considerable reputation. In a letter dated May 29, 1953, Ferrater Mora explained to Czapski that the people of *Cuadernos* had asked him for a text, but that "I am interested in readers in other languages."³⁷ He added, "If Bondy doesn't want to immortalize me in PREUVES, however, I can't help it, and neither can you." The Bondy to whom Ferrater Mora referred is the Swiss François Bondy, at that time head of publications of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and editor of *Preuves*.³⁸

Ferrater Mora was interested in "internationalizing" and going beyond the Hispanic sphere where he had already consolidated his reputation. Czapski had the contacts, the sensitivity and the necessary disposition to make Ferrater Mora known and succeeded

³¹See Czapski's letters of August 3 (FMA, ID1_1402), October 14 (FMA, ID1_1403) and December 20 (FMA, ID1_1404), 1952, and Ferrater Mora's letters of August 3, March 15, 1953 (CzA).

³²Letter from Czapski dated June 27, 1954. Czapski suggests Ferrater Mora send a copy of the book to Ferdinand Heer, professor in Vienna, and to do so through his contact at Éditions du Seuil.

³³Jean Rounault (1910–87), pseudonym of Rainer Biemel, writer, translator of Goethe, Rilke, Thomas Mann. He was the brother of the philosopher Walter Biemel (1918–2015), a renowned specialist in phenomenology and author of one of the first essays in French on Heidegger, of whom he had been a student.

³⁴Edouard Roditi (1910–92), poet, essayist and very gifted translator—he participated as an interpreter in the Nuremberg Trials.

³⁵José Ferrater Mora, "Mea culpa," *Sur* 198 (1951): 1–8.

³⁶Elena Ronzón et al., "Entrevista a José Ferrater Mora," *Basilisco* 12 (1981): 55.

³⁷The full title of *Cuadernos* is *Cuadernos por el Congreso de la Libertad de la Cultura* and as the name indicates, it was linked to the Congress for Cultural Freedom founded in 1950.

³⁸Despite his complaints, in 1953, Ferrater Mora would publish in *Preuves* the article "Les trois philosophies" (*Preuves* 76 (1953): 20–31). Simultaneously, a Spanish version was published in *Cuadernos*.

to a certain degree. In the end, *El hombre en la encrucijada* only appeared in English. Czapski's help was critical. As one of the founders of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and closely linked to *Kultura*, Czapski facilitated Ferrater Mora's contact with the editors of *Preuves* or *Der Monat*, for example. We have already noted how Czapski introduced him to Roditi and we know that Bondy had promised Czapski to publish an article by Ferrater Mora in *Preuves*.³⁹ It should also be kept in mind that the journals published under the umbrella of the Congress operated as a network; they fed off each other and sometimes what was published in one also appeared in another. For example, in 1957 Melvin J. Lasky asked Ferrater Mora to write an article on the life of Ortega y Gasset for *Der Monat*, an article, he said, that would surely also interest the Italian and French journals. Ferrater Mora rejected the proposal but offered instead to publish "Las tres filosofías." Lasky gladly accepted and added, "I am only sorry that [Bondy] did not mention it to me before."⁴⁰ Regarding this text, Bondy had written to Ferrater Mora: "Your study on the 'Three Philosophies' is really an 'editor's dream' [...] I will communicate the same article, if you agree, to the other journals that are attached to us, especially to *Encounter*" and then suggested that he also pass it on to *Cuadernos*.⁴¹ In short, thanks to Czapski's contacts in the network linked to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Ferrater Mora managed to publish alongside other well-known intellectuals in international journals beyond the Hispanic world.

What did Czapski see in Ferrater Mora? What did he get out of helping him? The answer is less obvious. The fact that they shared the same ideological principles—their opposition to totalitarianism from a social democratic or liberal stance—helps to explain the efforts Czapski took to promote the Catalan philosopher and the latter's willingness to be helped. At some point, it will be necessary to study Ferrater Mora's relationship with the Congress for the Freedom of Culture and the role that Czapski played in that relationship.⁴² Czapski also saw in Ferrater Mora a young Spanish intellectual who was exiled for reasons similar to his own. This must have created a solidarity between them. In some letters, Czapski inquired about other Spanish exiles and even asked Ferrater Mora to write on the subject of Spanish exile.⁴³ In addition, Czapski had a particular interest in aspects of Spanish culture, and it is possible that he saw in Ferrater Mora someone with whom to share it.

In 1930, Czapski had travelled to Spain and had been impressed by his visit to the Museo Nacional del Prado. In a letter dated August 3, 1952, he wrote to Ferrater Mora:

I am surrounded by things that make me think of Spain, my friends from here have just spent 2 weeks there and because of them I have reread my "Notes de voyage" which appeared 32 years ago in a magazine in Poland. I have the courage to believe that you

³⁹Letter from Czapski to Ferrater Mora, March 20, 1954 (ref. ID1_1405, FMA).

⁴⁰Letter from Melvin J. Lasky to Ferrater Mora dated March 5, 1957 (ref. ID1_3060, FMA).

⁴¹Letter from Bondy to Ferrater Mora, 21 January, 1957, ref. ID1_4489 (FMA). The article would be published with the title "Die Drei Philosophien: Wie gliedert sich das Denken der Gegenwart?," *Der Monat* 9, no. 105 (1957): 51–62. Almost simultaneously it was published in *Cuadernos* 25 (1957): 21–34; and *Preuves* 76 (1957): 20–31.

⁴²For a first attempt in that direction, see Gustavo Bueno Sánchez, "José Ferrater Mora y el Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura," *El Catoblepas* 129 (2012): 8.

⁴³In an undated letter written from St. Enogat-Dinard (perhaps in 1960), Czapski said that the attitude of Spanish exiles to the possibility of returning to Spain was of great interest to *Kultura*. He asked him in particular about Madariaga, Ortega y Gasset and, above all, Marañón (ref. ID1_2157, FMA).

might like them and that you might like a precise description: Goya, Greco, Toledo, Escorial, Avila, etc. Spain made a poignant impression on me then, infinitely stronger both pictorially and morally than Italy. And then I have two things that I come back to almost every day: a reproduction of an extraordinary still life by Juan Sanchez Cotan [sic] 1561–1627 and the mystical abridgement of St. John of the Cross. Cotan is everything that is contrary to me and that I would like to have: a precise sensibility, ABSOLUTELY submitted to the reason, a still life illuminated almost of an abstract light but all that is bathed in an atmosphere that I cannot call otherwise than religious contemplation of the object.⁴⁴

References to Goya recur throughout Czapski's correspondence with Ferrater Mora:

More and more Goya is my master. He made these extraordinary paintings of old people with this unique freedom but at 30 years old he already knew EVERYTHING [...]. Coming back to Goya I am more and more haunted by what I see in the ugliest streets (so called) on the most unattractive faces and really I can't understand why I see everything that makes me live and paint but this vision not only brutal is pictorially clumsy and I am forced to study in parallel in the most "ecolier" [sic] way all that Goya knew at 18 years old.⁴⁵

In an undated text entitled "Le bond et le vol" Czapski speaks of Goya and how the Spanish painter is affected by a kind of dualism: on the one hand, his conscientious masterly portraits of great ladies, kings, and dignitaries; on the other hand, the canvases on war, almost instantaneous paintings made under a kind of ecstasy. The same happens to him: "I have long suffered [says Czapski] from this dualism of approaches, one analytical, cerebral, stemming from the tradition of the Flemings and, to a certain extent, that of the pointillists, and the other, crazy, unexpected to itself—a real leap into life."⁴⁶ It is easy to see a connection between this "Goyaesque" dualism and the possibility of classifying Czapski's work according to the two categories that, as we have seen above, Jeanne Hersch uses to classify his painting. One part of Czapski's painting—the most expressionist—owes much to Goya.

Czapski's interest in Spain would be matched by Ferrater Mora's interest in the culture and intellectual life of Eastern Europe, that must have been heightened by his friendship with Czapski. When he met Czapski, Ferrater Mora was interested in logic and was already well acquainted with the contributions of the Warsaw Circle, especially Jan Łukasiewicz and Józef Maria Bochenski, to whom, as we have seen, he devoted an article in *Kultura*. Czapski was in contact with the Bochenski and he communicated to Ferrater Mora that Bochenski had liked his article.⁴⁷ Later, in 1960, Bochenski wrote to Ferrater Mora about his book *Philosophy Today* (1960), expressing his admiration ("It is, according to my opinion, by far the best book written on that subject") especially for the wisdom of having classified the philosophical currents in a geographical key.⁴⁸ At the same time, he suggested a series of changes to improve his explanation of Russian

⁴⁴Letter from Czapski to Ferrater Mora, August 3, 1952, ID1_1402 (FMA).

⁴⁵Letter from Czapski to Ferrater Mora, March 20, 1954, ref. ID_1405 (FMA).

⁴⁶Józef Czapski, "Le bond et le vol," in *L'Art et la vie*, 47.

⁴⁷Ferrater Mora replies: "Il me plaît beaucoup de savoir que notre fougueux ami Bochenski aie aimé mon article" (letter May 29, 1953, CzA). In Bochenski's letter to Ferrater Mora in 1960, however, the former states that they do not know each other in person.

⁴⁸Letter from Józef M. Bochenski to Ferrater Mora, July 30, 1960 (ref. ID1_639, FMA).

philosophy. Indeed, Ferrater Mora gave Russian philosophy a particularly specific weight as a “philosophical empire,” next to the “European empire” and the “Anglo-American empire.” Ferrater Mora was familiar with thinking in the USSR and the countries that were acolytes of the Soviet regime. He even learned some Russian. It should also be noted that, in Chile, Ferrater Mora had become friendly with Bogumil Jasinowski, a Polish lawyer and historian of philosophy who, between 1945 and 1954, was director of the Department of Medieval Philosophy at the University of Santiago de Chile. The two maintained a remarkable correspondence. Jasinowski helped Ferrater Mora to learn more about Polish philosophy and put him in contact with some outstanding personalities of European philosophy (Émile Bréhier, for example). Ferrater Mora was also a good friend of George L. Kline, arguably one of the world’s great specialists on philosophical thought in the USSR and Eastern Europe. In 1953, Ferrater Mora reviewed Kline’s book *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy* and supported his application to become a professor at Bryn Mawr in 1959. The two nurtured correspondence over the years.

Some aspects of the relationship between Czapski and Ferrater Mora have not been addressed here. Why was correspondence between them interrupted in 1965? Did it have anything to do with the publication in *The New York Times* (April 1966) of the report showing that the Congress for Cultural Freedom had been covertly financed by the CIA?⁴⁹ Or were there more banal reasons?

In this article, my purpose has been to explore the unlikely friendship between Ferrater Mora and Czapski. The strongest proof of this friendship is the portrait and their correspondence. Their relationship has been explored from the point of view of mutual interests related to their respective career paths. The friendship must also be understood within the complex context of the Cold War and, more particularly, the experience of Polish and Spanish intellectuals in exile. Exploring their friendship in this way has allowed us to focus on their individual interests at the time they met. It is most likely though that the ultimate reason why they became friends is that they understood each other well. They saw in each other intelligent men with whom it was pleasant and stimulating to discuss questions of life, art, and thought. It is true that Czapski was beneficial to Ferrater Mora, but this does not exclude the possibility that Ferrater Mora simply saw in Czapski a genuine friend. Friendship is never given for utility, but quite the contrary, neither is it at odds with it.

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⁴⁹See Olga Glondys, *La guerra fría cultural y el exilio republicano español: Cuadernos del Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura (1953–1965)* (Madrid: CSIC, 2002); Frances S. Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

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