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The Syndrome of an Emigrant: Memory, Trauma, Longing, and Loss in the Art of Józef Czapski

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This article addresses the multilayered thematic area focused on the impact of trauma, caused by war and political oppression, on the attitudes of artists who followed combat trails and migration routes to ultimately settle far from their homeland. What I consider particularly challenging in this field of study is to find an answer to the question: why did some of the forcefully displaced artists manage to integrate with the art scene of their final destination, while others preferred to attain their position on the cultural margins of the new locality? The best exemplification of these complex issues is the biography of Józef Czapski (1896-1993), a Polish writer, essayist, art critic, and painter, who fought in the ranks of the Polish army on the fronts of World War I and World War II, and, eventually, permanently settled in France. I argue that it was the wartime and the hell of migration that caused Czapski's inability to fully assimilate in the Parisian art world, and stimulated his aversion to avant-garde progressivism and innovative experimentation. My analyses reveal that his paintings epitomise remnants of collective and individual trauma, an overwhelming sense of loss, and a 'residue' of painful experiences resulting from expulsion and exile.

Introduction

Poland developed a long tradition of political emigration. In the 19th century thousands of Poles left their native country – a consequence of three consecutive partitions of the Polish state between three empires (Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary). Due to political repressions following the national uprisings in 1830, 1848, and 1863, subsequent waves of migration spread all over the world. In the post-1945 period, thousands of Polish soldiers and officers – who enlisted in the Polish Armed Forces in the Soviet Union and in the West during World War II – did not return to their homeland, aware of the oppressive nature of the newly established communist regime. They settled in Western Europe, predominantly in Great Britain, France, and Italy, but also in North America, Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa, and New Zealand. As a consequence, hundreds of Polish artists dispersed across all the continents in search of better life and work conditions. The exploration of the strategies of adapting to the new local cultural environments, institutional policies, and/or national agendas undertaken by the émigré artists reveals the multifaceted effects of forced displacement.

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The best exemplification of these complex issues is the biography of Józef Czapski (1896-1993), a Polish writer, essayist, literary and art critic, and – above all – a painter, who fought in the ranks of the Polish army on the fronts of World War I and World War II to permanently settle in Paris to represent the interests of the Polish government-in-exile and to lobby for non-communist Poland. The objective of this article is to determine to what extent the 'residue' of the war ordeal, political persecution, and migratory hell was decisive for Czapski's ethical and artistic choices, and for the development of his artistic attitude and career. I will analyse the process of adopting or neglecting the artistic codes and patterns – which were already existent, dominant or emerging on the Parisian art scene – in relation to the native cultural core of Czapski and to the trauma which he experienced on the wartime routes.

The discourse of *The Syndrome of an Emigrant* unfolds along the following narrative line: after the *Introduction*, there is a subsection dealing with the literature on Czapski's life and work, followed by a brief outline of the artist's biography. The next subsection concerns the political conditions of Czapski's activity in exile and interpersonal relations with important players on the French political scene. It also testifies to his transcultural interests. The subsequent part of the text, titled *Czapski's musée imaginaire,* tackles upon his artistic genealogy as he saw it, and his comprehension of the essence of the creative process. The *Expression of the inexpressible*, another subsection, addresses Czapski's 'living library', comprised of the patrons of his thoughts and studies – writers, philosophers, and poets of various nationalities, and emphasizing the artist's aloofness from the art market and from the phenomenon of the persistently growing commodification of art. This part also relates to Czapski's self-reflection on his position in the French artistic life, presented along with my counter-argumentation. Ultimately, it reveals the expression of solitude and alienation in Czapski's painting, caused by the 'residue' of tragic historical events that conditioned the artist's approach to the surrounding reality. *Emblematic Émigré Artist* concludes the previous analyses in order to emphasise the idiosyncratic features of Czapski's intellectual and artistic attitude as well as his moral standing.

Critical Reflection on Czapski

Core literature on Czapski is basically comprised of three biographies: Murielle Werner-Gagnebin's *Czapski. La main et l'espace* (1974),[1] Wojciech Karpiński's *Portret Czapskiego* (2003)[2] [The Portrait of Czapski], and Eric Karpeles's *Almost*

1. Murielle Werner-Gagnebin. *Czapski. La main et l'espace*. Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme – Slavica, 1974.

2. Wojciech Karpiński. *Portret Czapskiego* (Portrait of Józef Czapski). Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1996.

Nothing: the 20th-Century Art and Life of Józef Czapski (2018).[3] Written on the basis of numerous meetings and discussions between the author and the painter, Werner-Gagnebin's book presents a point of view coinciding with the artist's self-reflection. The biography by Karpiński is mostly a memoir as what bonded the author with Czapski were close relations, frequent meetings in Paris, shared experiences, and numerous discussions. Published by Jil Silberstein, a poet and journalist, for whom Czapski became an artistic authority, *Lumières de Josef Czapski* (2003)[4] is a remembrance of the friendship with the artist, while Karpeles's story about Czapski is the artist's biography, captured in the context of the history of the 20th century, and the author's account of studying Czapski's life as well as reconstructing his thought and activity. Moreover, it is a testimony to the perception of Czapski's painting by another painter, i.e. Karpeles himself, and an expression of the author's aesthetic sensitivity. Enriched with essays by Wojciech Karpiński and Adam Zagajewski, another version of Czapski's biography is contained in Karpeles's monograph, titled *Józef Czapski: An Apprenticeship of Looking*.[5] The philosophical aspects of the artist's creative attitude as well as his ethical and epistemological reflection were analysed by Zbigniew Mańkowski in the book *Widzieć prawdę: Józefa Czapskiego filozofia twórczej egzystencji* [Seeing the Truth: Józef Czapski's Philosophy of Creative Existence] (2005).[6]

However, what is crucial to understand Czapski's complex creative personality are his own reflections on historical events and the current geopolitical situation in Europe, on literature, which he read in many languages, and on the art he saw, both that of the old Masters and his contemporaries. Czapski testified to the tragic history of World War II in the books *Wspomnienia starobielskie* (1944) [*Memories of Starobielsk*] [7] and *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* (1949) [*Inhuman Land*].[8] The story of his life as well as contacts with high-ranking

3. Eric Karpeles, *Almost Nothing: the 20th-Century Art and Life of Józef Czapski*. New York: New York Review Books, 2018.

4. Jil Silberstein. *Lumières de Josef Czapski*. Montricher, Switzerlad: Les Éditions Noir sur Blanc, 2003.

5. Karpeles, with essays by Wojciech Karpiński and Adam Zagajewski, *Józef Czapski: An Apprenticeship of Looking*, New York, London: Thames & Hudson, 2019.

6. Zbigniew Mańkowski. *Widzieć prawdę: Józefa Czapskiego filozofia twórczej egzystencji* (Seeing the Truth: Józef Czapski's Philosophy of Creative Existence). Gdańsk: Słowo/ Obraz Terytoria, 2005.

7. Józef Czapski. *Wspomnienia starobielskie* (Memories of Starobielsk). Rome: Oddział Kultury i Prasy 2. Korpusu, 1944 (First French edition: *Souvenirs de Starobielsk*. Paris: Collection "Temoignages", 1945; English-language edition: *Memories of Starobielsk: Essays Between Art and History*, translated by Alissa Valles. New York: New York Review Books, 2022).

8. Czapski. *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* (Inhuman Land). Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1949 (French edition: *Terre inhumaine*, introduction by Daniel Halévy. Paris: Editions Self. Librairie Plon, 1949; English-language edition: *Inhuman Land: Searching for the Truth in Soviet Russia, 1941-1942*, translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones. New York Review Books, 2018.

politicians, intellectuals, friends, family members, and acquaintances were reconstructed by researchers on the basis of such publications as *Dzienniki. Wspomnienia. Relacje* (1986) [Diaries. Memories. Accounts],[9] *Swoboda tajemna* (1991) [Secret Liberty],[10] *Wyrwane strony* (1993) [Torn out Pages],[11] *Świat w moich oczach* (2001) [The World in My Eyes],[12] *Wybrane strony. Z dzienników 1942-1991* (2010) [Selected Pages. From the Diaries 1942-1991],[13] *Tumult i widma* (2017) [Tumult and Phantoms],[14] and *Rozproszone. Teksty z lat 1923-1988* (2020) [Dispersed. Texts from the Years 1923-1988].[15] Czapski's texts on art were included in a majority of those volumes with the books *Oko* (1960) [The Eye][16] and *Patrząc. Z autoportretem i 19 rysunkami autora* (1983) [Seeing. With a Self-Portrait and 19 Drawings by the Author][17] being comprised exclusively of such pieces. *Listy o malarstwie* (2019) [Letters about Painting] [18] are also focused on this topic. The self-reflective dimension of Czapski's writing, his thoughts on his own creative output, is invaluable.

The other publications on Czapski's life and work are introductions to albums and essays in exhibition catalogues concerning his art. The most important publications of this type include texts by Joanna Pollakówna, an art critic who discussed the artist's creative output with Czapski himself while visiting him in France. They are comprised of the monograph *Czapski* (1993)[19] and introductions to exhibition catalogues: *Czapski. Malarstwo i rysunek* [Czapski. Painting and Drawing] (1986)[20] and *Józef Czapski. Malarstwo i rysunek* [Józef Czapski. Painting

9. Czapski. *Dzienniki. Wspomnienia. Relacje* (Diaries. Memories. Accounts), edited by Joanna Pollakówna. Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1986.

10. Czapski. *Swoboda tajemna* (Secret Freedom). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PoMOST, 1991.

11. Czapski. *Wyrwane strony* (Torn out Pages), edited by Joanna Pollakówna and Piotr Kłoczowski. Montrichet: Éditions Noir sur Blanc, 1993.

12. Czapski. *Świat w moich oczach* (The World in my Eyes). Ząbki – Paris: Apostolicum. Wydawnictwo Księży Pallotynów, 2001.

13. Czapski. *Wybrane strony. Z dzienników 1942-1991* (Selected Pages: From Diaries 1942-1991), vol. 1, edited by Emilia Olechnowicz. Warszawa: Instytut Dokumentacji i Studiów nad Literaturą Polską, 2010.

14. Czapski. *Tumult i widma* (Tumult and Specters). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2017.

15. Czapski. *Rozproszone. Teksty z lat 1923-1988* (Scattered: Texts from 1923-1988), vol. 1 and 2, edited by Paweł Kądziela, Warszawa: Biblioteka „Więzi", 2020.

16. Czapski. *Oko* (Eye). Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1960.

17. Czapski. *Patrząc. Z autoportretem i 19 rysunkami autora* (Looking: With a Self-Portrait and 19 Drawings of the Author). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1983.

18. Czapski. *Listy o malarstwie* (Letters on Painting), edited by Mateusz Bieczyński and Janusz Marciniak, Poznań: Uniwersytet Artystyczny w Poznaniu, 2019.

19. Joanna Pollakówna. *Czapski*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krupski i S-ka, 1993.

20 *Czapski. Malarstwo i rysunek* (Czapski: Painting and Drawing), edited by Joanna Pollakówna, exh. cat., Muzeum Archidiecezji Warszawskiej, May – June 1986.

and Drawing] (1990).[21] Moreover, significant exhibitions of Czapski's art, shown in Poland, encompass: *Dzienniki Józefa Czapskiego. Katalog* [Diaries of Józef Czapski] (1991),[22] *Józef Czapski: malarstwo ze zbiorów szwajcarskich* [Józef Czapski: Paintings from Swiss Collections] (1992),[23] *Wnętrze. Człowiek i miejsce* [Interior: Man and Place] (1996),[24] *Józef Czapski. Obrazy i rysunki ze zbiorów prywatnych* [Józef Czapski: Paintings and Drawings form Private Collections] (1996),[25] *Józef Czapski. Widzenie życia* [Józef Czapski: A Vision of Life] (2000),[26] and *Józef Czapski: Autour de la collection Aeschlimann* (2007).[27] Considering the presentations of Czapski's art abroad, one can distinguish exhibition catalogues from Galerie Motte in Geneva (1966, 1971),[28] Galerie Bénézit in Paris (1961),[29] and Musée Jenisch in Vevey (1990).[30] Critics' comments on and accounts of the artist's expositions were collected in *Czapski i krytycy* (1996) [Czapski and Critics].[31]

21. *Józef Czapski. Malarstwo i rysunek* (Józef Czapski: Painting and Drawing), edited by Joanna Pollakówna, exh. cat., Muzeum Archidiecezji Warszawskiej, February – April 1990.

22. *Dzienniki Józefa Czapskiego. Katalog* (Diaries of Józef Czapski: A Catalogue), edited by Janusz Marciniak and Joanna Pollakówna, exh. cat., Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, 1991.

23. *Józef Czapski: malarstwo ze zbiorów szwajcarskich* (Józef Czapski: Painting from Swiss Colletions). Introduction by Stanisław Rodziński, exh. cat., Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 1992.

24. *Wnętrze. Człowiek i miejsce. Józef Czapski w stulecie urodzin* (Interior. The Man and the Place: Józef Czapski on the Centenary of his Birth), edited by Zofia Gołubiew and Barbara Małkiewicz, Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, April – May 1996.

25. *Józef Czapski. Obrazy i rysunki ze zbiorów prywatnych* (Józef Czapski: Paintings and Drawings from Private Collections). exh. cat., Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 1996.

26. *Józef Czapski. Widzenie życia* (Józef Czapski: Seeing of Life), edited by Wojciech Zmorzyński, exh. cat., Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku, Oddział Sztuki Współczesnej, March – June 2000.

27. *Józef Czapski: Autour de la collection Aeschlimann,* edited by Piotr Kłoczowski exh. cat., Warszawa: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki / Galerie Plexus, 2007.

28. *Catalogue de l'Exposition de la Galerie Motte*, edited by Konstanty Jeleński, Geneva 1966; *Catalogue de l'Exposition de la Galerie Motte*, edited by Thierry Vernet, Geneva 1971.

29 . *Catalogue de l'Exposition de la Galerie Bénézit*, edited by Michel de Ghelderode, Paris 1961.

30. *Joseph Czapski. Rétrospective*, edited by Jean Louis Kuffer, Michel de Ghelderode, Wojciech Karpiński, Jeanne Hersch, and Andrezj Wajda, Musée Jenisch,Vevey, June - September 1990.

31. *Czapski i krytycy* (Czapski and Critics), edited by Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak and Magdalena Ujma, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1996. In April 2016, the Józef Czapski Pavilion was opened, which is a branch of the National Museum in Kraków, where the artist's archival materials and works have been stored.

A Short Biography of Czapski

Czapski could share his rich, multifaceted biography with several people, at the very least.[32] Born in the Czech capital city of Prague into an aristocratic family (his mother, Josephine, derived from the Austrian family of Thun-Hohenstein, whereas his father, Jerzy, was a descendant of the Prussian counts of von Hutten), Józef Maria Emeryk Franciszek Ignacy Czapski (1896-1993) spent his happy and prosperous childhood in Priluki near Minsk (at the time the territory was a part of Imperial Russia, today it belongs to Belarus). He attended secondary school in Petrograd, where, in 1915, he undertook the study of law. As a subject of tsar Nicholas II, he was mobilised in 1916. In 1917 he enlisted in the First Krechowce Uhlan Regiment, a part of the Polish First Corps, singled out from the Russian army. However, under the influence of Tolstoy's pacifism, in 1918 he left the army ranks to start a religious phalanstère in Petrograd. Yet, the commune was ephemeral. The very same year saw Czapski resume his military service; nonetheless, by command's consent, he was not sent into combat. Instead, he was entrusted with the mission of finding these officers from his regiment who had gone missing in Russia. Therefore, holding a diplomatic passport, he covered considerable distances across the USSR territory, at the same time eye-witnessing the dramatic conditions in which the Russian population lived. His mission was a fiasco, as it turned out that the officers he was looking for had already been executed.

Russian philosopher, writer, and poet, Dmitry Merezhkovsky – whom Czapski met in Petrograd – convinced him that one should fight for liberty by force of arms. Consequently, Czapski re-conscripted to the army during the Polish-Soviet War in 1919. He was awarded the War Order of Virtuti Militari – the highest Polish military honor – and promoted to the rank of second lieutenant in recognition of showing heroism in the Kiev Offensive, conducted in 1920 by the Polish Army in alliance with the forces of the Ukrainian People's republic against the Soviet Red Army.[33]

With his taste shaped in the salons of affluent aristocracy, who relished art and music, Czapski began to pursue his dream of developing his skills as a painter in the 1920s, taking advantage of the system of art education that was being consolidated in the newly established sovereign Second Polish Republic. As of 1921, he continued the studies of painting – which he commenced at the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1918 – at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow under

32. Czapski, *Dzienniki. Wspomnienia. Relacje* (Diaries. Memories. Accounts), edited Joanna Pollakówna (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1986); Pollakówna, *Czapski* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krupski i S-ka, 1993); Czapski, *Wyrwane strony*; Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*; Czapski, *Świat w moich oczach*; Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*.

33. Adam Zamoyski. *Warsaw 1920: Lenin's Failed Conquest of Europe*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

the supervision of, among others, Józef Pankiewicz, the promoter of Post-Impressionism, who had just returned from France. In 1924, accompanied by a group of his students, who adopted the name of Komitet Paryski [Paris Committee], Pankiewicz moved to the branch of the Krakow-based academy that was established in Paris. He taught his disciples to venerate Paul Cézanne and Pierre Bonnard and to show respect to the old masters, whose works they admired together in the Louvre galleries. These fascinations of the young years left a lasting mark on Czapski's artistic attitude.

Czapski returned to Poland in 1932. However, the outbreak of World War II interrupted the artistic career he had just embarked on. Re-mobilised, he was captured by the Soviets during the defensive campaign of the Polish Army against the joint invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939.[34] Initially detained in the prisoner-of-war camp in Starobilsk, he was later transferred to the detention camp in Pavlishchev Bor near Smolensk and, eventually, to Gryazovets near Vologda.[35]

In July 1941 the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Soviet authorities signed the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement, which provided for amnesty for the Poles who were held captive in the USSR.[36] At the time, Czapski joined the Polish Armed Forces forming in Totskoye under the command of general Władysław Anders. However, a vast majority of the prisoners of war from Starobilsk did not conscript to the newly-formed army, which aroused concern among the command. For the second time in his life, Czapski was entrusted with the mission of tracing the fate of those Polish officers who had gone missing. As general Anders's *chargé d'affairs*, Czapski traversed the Soviet territory from Moscow to Kuybyshev in the frosty winter of late 1941 and early 1942. He reached Soviet decision-makers in the NKVD [the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs] headquarters in Lubyanka and in the Gulag [a system of labor camps] central office in Chkalovo, Kazakhstan. Unsuccessfully. Why?

In March 1940, the Soviet secret police conducted mass executions, shooting 22,000 Polish officers, members of prison authorities, border guards, representatives of the judiciary, doctors, clergy, intelligentsia and landowners, who were held in prisons and detention camps in Starobilsk, Kozelsk, and Ostashkov.[37] What saved Czapski from execution by firing squad was the

34. John Erickson. "The Red Army's March into Poland". In *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41*, edited by Keith Sword. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991: 1-27.

35. Jan T. Gross. "Polish POW Camps in the Soviet-Occupied Western Ukraine" In *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-41*, edited by Keith Sword. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991: 44-56.

36. Josef Garlinski *Poland in the Second World War*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985: 109.

37. Salomon W. Slowes. *The Road to Katyn*. Translated by Naftali Breenwood. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992; George Sanford. *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth,*

intervention of the German embassy (Nazi Germany was USSR's ally until 1941), undertaken at the request of Czapski's mother's family, who was well-connected with several German families.

The fact that Poles were executed at Stalin's order was consistently concealed by the Soviet authorities as well as by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Germans, who discovered mass graves in Katyn in April 1943, while marching east, were accused of this war crime. It was as late as in 1990 – the time of Mihail Gorbachev's presidency – that the Russian authorities admitted that the annihilation of Polish élite was one of the gravest war crimes of Stalinism.[38] Never did Czapski have any doubts as to who was liable for the crime and exposed attempts at distorting this historical truth throughout his life.

While traversing the territory of the USSR, Czapski saw the enormous existential poverty and anguish of ordinary Russians. To compensate for the difficult experience, he wrote down his reflections on the history of European painting on the train from Moscow to Tashkent. Earlier, while imprisoned in Gryazovets, he resorted to art as an alternative world, a world completely different from the tragic living conditions in the camp. The camp authorities consented for the prisoners to undertake educational activities after a whole day of grueling physical work. Within the framework of self-education, Czapski delivered, in French, a series of talks on Marcel Proust's prose, in which he was engrossed during his several-month sojourn in London in 1926.[39] To the extent to which it was possible, he used scraps of paper to sketch portraits of his fellow prisoners and scenes from camp life. Drawing restored in him the determination to survive and offered a mental escape. When treated for tuberculosis in camp hospital, he began to write the history of European painting from David to Picasso. Unfortunately, his notebook was lost.

In March 1942, while staying with the staff of Anders's army in Yangiyo'l near Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Czapski bought a black linen-bound notebook to resume the habit of writing an 'intimate diary' he started keeping in his youth. The pre-war volumes of the diary have not been preserved. By the end of his life,

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Justice and Memory. London, New York: Routledge, 2005; Victor Zaslavsky. *Class Cleansing: The Massacre at Katyn*. Translated by Kizer Walker. New York: Telos Press, 2008; Eugenia Maresch. *Katyn, 1940*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2010.

38. *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, edited by Anna M. Cienciala, Natalia S. Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007; Allen Paul. *Katyn: Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010; Alexander Etkind et al. *Remembering Katyn, Cambridge*, UK: Polity Press, 2012.

39. Czapski's lectures were written down by two befriended fellow prisoners, and appeared in Polish translation in 1948*:* "Proust w Griazowcu" (Proust in Griazowietz). *Kultura* 1948 (12): 25-36; 1948 (13): 22-43. See also Czapski, *Lost Time: Lectures on Proust in a Soviet Prison Camp*. Translated by Eric Karpeles. New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2018.

Czapski filled the pages of 278 such notebooks with casually rendered drawings of fragments of the reality he observed and regularly wrote accounts of everyday events. Today, they constitute an invaluable testimony to 20th century events, both those constituting the 'grand narrative' of objective political history and the very personal ones, shaping the artist's 'minor narrative.'

Due to the pressure exerted on Stalin by British and American authorities, the undernourished, emaciated, decimated by diseases, and poorly equipped with weapons Anders's army of over 75,000 soldiers as well as 37,000 members of the prisoners' families, who had been deported to the heartland of Russia,[40] were evacuated to Iran.[41] As the head of the Department of Propaganda and Education at General Anders's staff, Czapski traversed the entire combat trail from Russia through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt to Italy. He conveyed the picture of the warfare hecatomb in both his diary and the books published after the war: *Wspomnienia Starobielskie* [Memories of Starobielsk] (1944)[42] and *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* [Inhuman Land] (1949).[43]

Densely filled with hardly legible handwriting, verses on the pages of the diary adjoin or overlap with views of the streets of Tashkent, scenes of the army being transported by ship, or interiors of camp barracks – all rendered by means of a few lines – and, further, with images of Arabs and camel silhouettes, sketches of mosques, minarets, pyramids and desert landscapes, streets of Baghdad, Brindisi, and Taranto, and views of the Gulf of Naples. Let us consider a fragment of the description of the march through the territory of Iran – an account compensating for the lack of possibility to paint and demonstrating Czapski's curiosity of the world and sensitivity to new, earlier unseen, landscapes.

"The deserts between Mashhad and Teheran with rocky mountain-reefs, growing out of a sudden from the desert plain as if from a sea, once bluish grey, once lilac, pink or even lemon yellow; the sandy deserts of Transjordan, with hundreds of lightweight camels, coffee or white fur bearing, munching on shabby prickly bushes, or tens of miles evenly covered with black stones so that nothing else can be seen but these black stones, turning lightly violet and red at sunset."[44]

In Loreto near Ancona, Czapski sketched Luca Signorelli's fresco, adorning the walls of Santa Casa di Loreto. Made amidst the turmoil of war, this escapist gesture was a manifestation of an attempt at 'suspending' time and imbuing the present with the past. Being deep-rooted in the past – be it calming the tormented

40. Keith Sword. *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union 1939-1948*. London: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

41. Norman Davies, *Trail of Hope: The Anders Army, an Odyssey across Three Continents*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2015.

42. Czapski, *Wspomnienia starobielskie*.

43. Czapski, *Na nieludzkiej ziemi*.

44. Czapski, *Tumult i widma*, 9-10.

psyche or awakening dark memories – will become an integral part of Czapski's creative personality.

Political Connections and Transcultural Interests

A resident of Paris since 1946, Czapski worked intensively on behalf of the Polish government-in-exile based in London (he was demobilised in 1948 with the rank of major). He had many contacts among both the French non-communist left, the political centre, and conservative leaders. He would meet André Malraux, the Minister for Information – later appointed the Minister of Cultural Affairs – in the government of general Charles de Gaulle and de Gaulle himself, trying to convince them to support the Polish cause. Owing to family lineage, it was as early as in the 1920s that he developed relations with Parisian intellectual élite and met, among others, Jacques Maritain, François Mauriac, Léon Paul Fargue, Paul Morand, Drieu de la Rochelle, Maurice Sachs, and Daniel Halévy, who later helped him to move on the intricate political scene. He regularly cooperated with the *Kultura* [*Culture*] monthly, published by Instytut Literacki [Literary Institute] founded by Polish émigrés in Rome in 1946 and transferred to Paris in 1947. The magazine addressed politics and culture-related issues and was smuggled to the People's Republic of Poland. Highly esteemed as a writer, literary critic, war memoirist, and anti-Soviet dissident, Czapski became a moral authority for Poles in exile. However, due to law-abiding censorship, he remained unknown to a majority of the public in Poland until the early 1990s - a time of political breakthrough and transformation in East-Central Europe, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In communist Poland, Czapski's texts were circulated as *samizdat*, as they expressed contempt for the Soviet regime and sympathy for the anguishing Russian nation, not to mention the relentless search for the truth about the Katyń massacre.

Czapski was both a patriot – distant from nationalism and chauvinism – and a cosmopolite. Fluency in foreign languages (Russian, French, German, and English), which he achieved at home and cultivated owing to considerable reading, as well as the paths of life, which led him to diverse geocultural zones, made him open to cultural variety and specificity. One of the many examples of this attitude was when, while searching for publications on Shia and Sunni Muslims in Teheran, he discovered the book by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, *Les religions et philosphies dans l'Asie Centrale*, which became his indispensable talisman. He subscribed to the concept of *atonie* (meaning a type of inertia). According to Gobineau, the condition of apathy, indifference, and helplessness was typical of the inhabitants of Central Asia, governed by subsequent dynasties, who fought

one another. Czapski will diagnose émigrés in post-war Paris with such an attitude.[45]

The paths of Czapski's peregrination led him to almost all continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, as well as North and South America. In 1950 he visited the United States and Canada, where he raised funds among Poles to subsidize the publications of Instytut Literacki. In 1955, he spent four months traversing the trail leading from Brazil, through Uruguay and Argentina, to Venezuela, collecting money for the same purpose. During these journeys he created a chronicle of everyday events and situations in both drawing and writing. While in New York and Chicago, he would sketch workers, the urban poor, the homeless, factories, ports, skyscrapers, and museum galleries. It was at this time that his ostensibly anti-aesthetic creed was strengthened. "Only a gaze that refuses to falsify a difficult truth could extract beauty from these streets," he remarked.[46] In South America, he was fascinated by the diversity of ethnicities, exotic plants, colorful birds, and Brazilian Gothic. In the title of one his books, Czapski described this abundance of visual stimuli as *tumult*. The full title of the book is *Tumult i widma* [Tumult and Phantoms][47] and is a reference to Blaise Pascal's antinomy between *le tumulte* and *le repos* – confusion and calm, in which the latter part was replaced by Czapski with the notion of phantoms, understood as fragments of the past looming from memory. However, Czapski did not record the warfare upheavals and traumatic experiences – which seemingly faded away, superseded by current events – in the narrative layer and in the depicted motifs of his paintings. Instead, he succumbed to visions, which were aroused by an accidental visual impulse and which evoked emotions and reminded him of the past. He explained his creative intuitiveness in the following manner:

> "This primeval vision is grace. Everything you do will seem to be evil, for it is burdened with thought and will. […] Never will we become equal to the vision that comes to us. When faced with it, we have to admit our misery."[48]

Czapski's Musée Imaginaire

Czapski resumed painting in the early 1950s, after a ten-year-long break, uncertain of his skills and searching for inspiration in the art of the old and contemporary masters. The diversified assembly of artists he considered to be his

45. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing,* 239-240.

46. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing,* 277.

47. Czapski, *Tumult i widma.*

48. Krystyna Czerni, "Czy Józef Czapski mógłby zostać członkiem Grupy Krakowskiej" (Could Józef Czapski Become a Member of the Krakow Group?). In *Józef Czapski. Obrazy i rysunki ze zbiorów prywatnych* (Józef Czapski: Paintings and Drawings from Private Collections), 10-11.

progenitors included: Francisco Goya, Rembrandt, Georges Roualt, and Chaïm Soutine as well as Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, and Nicolas de Stäel on the opposite end of the expressive range. However, self-irony saved him from derivativeness or emulation of the original models. "You must discover everything with your entire self under the brush, which may be 40 years after you had heard this discovery, after you had understood and comprehended it intellectually, or even emotionally, but not in your work, not at the tip of your brush," he claimed.[49] Czapski transferred his imaginary museum to the pages of his *journal intime*, at the same time analyzing the remarks of the artists he considered to be his spiritual allies, owing to which he could conceptualize his own creative struggles illustrated with miniature sketches of his intended or already completed works. In this way, a personal library was created, and at the same time a kind of archive documenting his output. An ardent opponent of abstraction, both in his aesthetic discourse and in painting, he appreciated the abstract compositions of Nicolas de Stäel. Nevertheless, he was most satisfied with the figurative turn in the artist's late art. This is how he explained his objections to abstract art: "By rejecting observation, studying nature, without exploring those already existing forms through which the artist reaches forms of creative transposition, or even sublimation, art becomes an experience of a purely accidental moment."[50] He expressed even sharper criticism in a statement written in 1985: "[abstraction is] the amalgam of what we call pure intuition with pure latitude."[51] Having adopted Cézanne's concepts in his youth, he strove to capture the essence of the phenomena observed. On the other hand, he highly valued the abstract dimension of the painterly matter in figurative art, above all the luminous color tissue admired since his youth in Bonnard's painting.[52] Also, the point of reference for the late Czapski became the pictorial idiom of Milton Avery who synthesised the observation of nature by approaching abstraction.[53]

From the 1960s to the 1980s, Czapski increasingly subjected his life to the imperative of painting, gradually resigning from political activity and journalism on behalf of free Poland and a free world. It is worth mentioning that, in 1950, he was a co-founder of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin. In order to focus to a maximum extent on art, he decided on radical self-restraint and withdrew into the intimacy of his studio-room at Maisons-Laffitte (the seat of the editorial board of *Kultura* in the vicinity of Paris) as if he had retreated into monastic space. This was where he transposed onto canvas the succinct notes he hastily recorded in his sketch books, heading towards synthesis through emotional condensation and formal asceticism. In his opinion, maximum concentration

49. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 234.

50. Czapski, *Swoboda tajemna*, 15.

51. Czapski, *Swoboda tajemna*, 16.

52. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 276.

53. Czapski, Letter to Zygmunt Mycielski dated to 27 September 1985; see Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 434-435.

during the painting process enabled the evocation of 'involuntary memory' (he borrowed the notion of *memoire involontaire* from Marcel Proust) and brought one closer to the state of contemplative prayer.[54] "Look not beyond memory, the memory which shocked you – the rest is but an obstacle," he recorded in his diary in 1961.[55]

Czapski referred to glancing at the vibrant fabric of current life, which liberated emotions, as a 'flash of sight', an 'illumination', or a 'flight'. For him, an insightful gaze was synonymous with grasping the core of the perceived phenomena. In the crumbs of everyday life, unnoticed by other passers-by, he discerned both an aesthetic value and an emotional load. "After leaving a museum, we notice things that we would have missed before; a green shutter, a ginger stain on the wall […], but this lasts shortly: after a while we fall into a whirl and go blind again," he remarked while explaining the constant pursuit of serendipitous visions.[56]

Czapski's mature painting was an attempt to capture the essence of the human condition, both in its tragedy and in its ridiculousness. The perspicacity of vision in his art was inextricably connected with empathy. His review of Mark Tobey's exhibition from 1961 confirms the imperative to be sensitive to socio-political and universal affairs.

"All Tobey […] is *grâce*, but the *grâce* of a person who has never been to war and who just passed by these fifty years. Yesterday's *France Observateur* – sixty dead Arabs in the Seine River, Arab ghetto, persecution. This *grâce* of Tobey's, this contemplation fuelled by religious syncretism (behaviourists, Zen) is comprised of a kind of detachment from an essential part of our life, our globe."[57]

A long series of images of an anonymous (male or female) inhabitant of Paris, a *flaneur*, a passer-by lost in the hustle and bustle of metropolitan life, in a labyrinth of streets and metro stations, or one confined in the interiors of railway wagons, cafés and bars, museum galleries and theatre boxes; always alone, deep in thought, immersed in themselves. Also, studies of an impoverished, disabled, elderly person, marginalised in society and helpless in the face of their misfortune. The motifs described above might be treated as depictions of the main protagonist featured in Czapski's paintings, which originated between the 1950s and the 1980s. I will argue that this alienated figure, who was the point of focus in the narrowly-framed scenes rendered by Czapski, is the artistic equivalent of the mental condition of the artist himself (see Figure 1).

54. Czapski, *Wyrwane strony*, 150.
55. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 45-46.
56. Czerni, "Czy Józef Czapski mógłby zostać członkiem Grupy Krakowskiej", 10.
57. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 255-256.

Figure 1. *Józef Czapski, Old Woman, 1965, Oil on Canvas, 71 x 92.6 cm, National Museum in Krakow*

Figure 2. *Józef Czapski, Lonely Woman, 1979, Oil on Canvas, 92 x 50 cm, Private Collection*

A plethora of Czapski's artistic output may be referred to as studies of solitude (see Figure 2): overwhelming, incapacitating solitude, which – despite many contacts with friends and acquaintances in Paris, London, Geneva, New York or Buenos Aires, he experienced acutely; the solitude in which phantoms of

tragic past revived. Filling the pages of his diary with a volley of words, which overlapped with drawings, constituted an antidote to solitude.

"The expression of solitude in my work is often commented on. Maybe it's true, but I never pose this kind of question. […] I subjugate myself to daily life, to the discoveries I make seeing a table, a basket, a face in a window or a café. That's where I find the point of departure I call disinterested discovery, the joy of it! Maybe that's the solitude people find, this world apart," he remarked.[58] This is how he explained his mindful insight into common motifs, street episodes or everyday objects he was surrounded with: "Each time, it is almost nothing. But that 'almost nothing' signifies everything."[59] (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Józef Czapski, Lamp and a Sink (Self-Portrait), 1959, Oil on Canvas, 80 x 100 cm, Private Collection*

The verbal record of emotional amplitude, the dissection of one's own psyche, the polemic with oneself – particularly with regard to the reception of philosophical reflection and the exegesis of the creative process – found their equivalent in anonymous images of people who are solitary, mentally isolated (even while having other people around), equally alienated or living shattered lives. Frozen while waiting behind the window of his salon, a hairdresser evokes an impression

58. Unpublished letter to Richard Aeschlimann, Richard Aeschlimann's Archive, Chexbres, see Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 410-411.

59. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 22.

of a person immersed in an aquarium, protecting him from the hustle and bustle of the street. The self-referential motif of a 'picture within a picture' captures the aura of Pascal's *le repos*, filling the spaces of art galleries, isolated from the 'tumult' of the outside world, the spaces where – as if inside a soundproof ball – art lovers engage in the contemplation of paintings.

Frequently rendered as if observed indirectly, in a mirror, the protagonists of Czapski's paintings have almost lost their physical existence and seem to be sublimated from corporeality. Deprived of identifiable physiognomic features through radical compositional cropping, they seem to be confined by objects. Fragmented figures 'imprisoned' between armchair backrests, silhouettes inserted into a spiral staircase, feet and thighs moved to the edge of the frame, treated as metonymic sign of a human figure – an art historian will easily identify these compositional schemes as borrowed from Japanese woodcuts and a continuation of the tradition of Edgar Degas and Pierre Bonnard (see Figure 4).

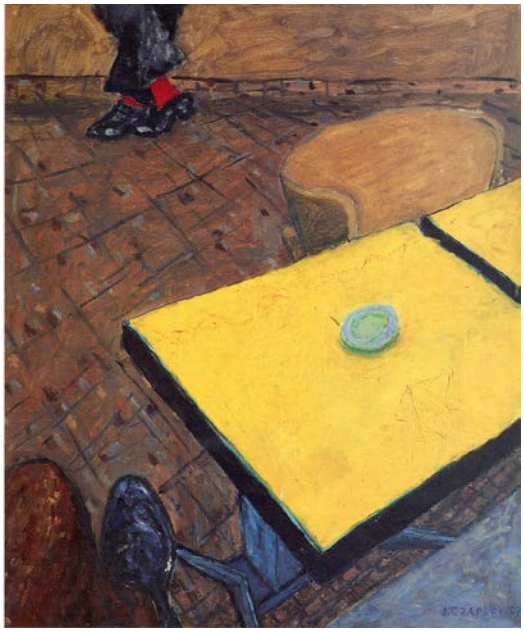

Figure 4. *Józef Czapski, Yellow Tables and an Ashtray, 1957, Oil on Canvas, 65 x 54 cm, Private Collection*

However, despite referring to Bonnard and Matisse, Czapski gradually departed from the *peinture-peinture* dogma, which implied a purely chromatic speculation. What is striking in his mature painting is condensed expression; therefore, his respect for Goya, Rouault, and Soutine shall not be surprising. He believed that inside him, there was a suppressed expressionist who persistently strove to capture the essence of pain (see Figure 5).

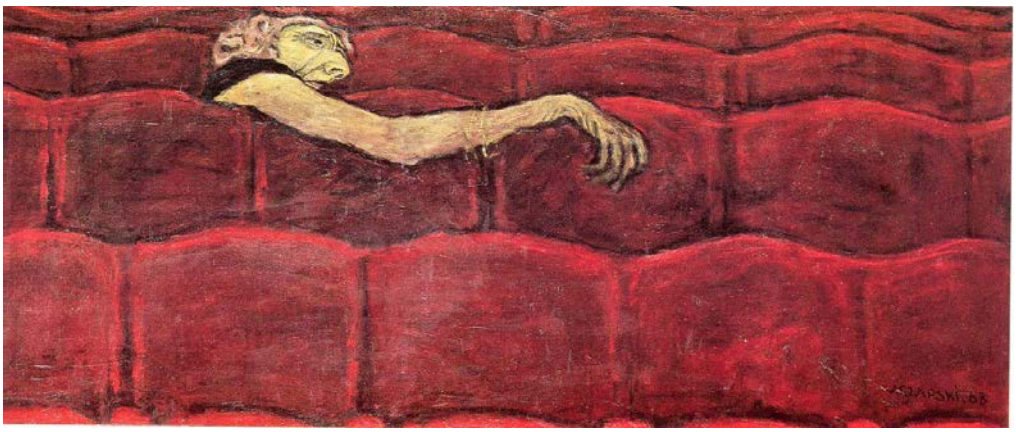

Figure 5. *Józef Czapski, Lonely Woman – Red Armchairs, 1968, Oil on Canvas, 52 x 115 cm, Private Collection*

Expression of the Inexpressible

"Painting is better, calmer, after I have looked into the abyss," he noted in 1988.[60] In the relentless pursuit to make a hardly defined vision real, amidst creative doubts and hesitations, a trace of which was left in the memoirs, Czapski revealed the duality of his attitude. After all, he looked for hints in both Goya's 'black paintings' and the chromatic intensity of Matisse's canvases.

Yet, he concluded bitterly: "The French stifled me."[61] Wrongly so. The sediment of traumatic experiences became the essence of his art. In the context of the artist's statements, the compositional effects and motifs he employed can be interpreted as creation of artistic equivalents of human existence which cannot reach its full capacity in relation to the surrounding world. His studies of solitude can be interpreted as an image of a torn world, which – similar to his psyche – does not submit itself to integration. In his paintings, depicting forlorn railway platforms and empty café interiors, human existence is but implied, recalled from memory. The artist often quoted the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein: "If one makes no attempt to express the inexpressible, then nothing is lost, but the inexpressible is – inexpressibly – contained in what is expressed."[62] This is how Czapski paraphrased Wittgenstein's thought: "[…] it is about vision, it is about the unconceived expression of unconceived feelings, it is an expression of a dark experience."[63]

60. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 97.

61. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 96.

62. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Letter to Paul Engelmann dated to 9 April, 1917; cited after Czesław Miłosz, *Nieobjęta ziemia* (Uncovered Land) (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1984), 116.

63. Józef Czapski, *Wybrane strony. Z dzienników 1942-1991* (Selected Papers: From Diaries 1942-1991), vol. 1, edited by Emilia Olechnowicz (Warszawa: Instytut Dokumentacji i Studiów nad Literaturą Polską, 2010).

The patrons of Czapski's considerations were eminent writers, philosophers, and poets: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Lev Tolstoy, Vasily Rozanov, Aleksey Remizov, Marcel Proust, Simone Weil, Marie Maine de Biran, Charles Du Bos, Rainer Maria Rilke, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Valery, André Malraux, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Aldous Huxley, and Emil Cioran. On the pages of his diary he created a type of a 'living library' and engaged in incessant 'dialogue' with the authors of the works described therein, commenting on their thoughts and deploying counter-arguments to their statements. He argued about the sense of suffering and infinite sacrifice for others with Simone Weil, for whose works he reached most often. This theme resonated best with his troubled psyche. In commentaries to Weil's notes he asked: "Is this exclusivity of suffering, sole suffering, Truth?"[64] The last words he recorded in the diary shortly before his death, when he was almost blind (his sight deteriorated since the 1980s), were: 'Starobielsk' (just to remind: the POW camp in which he was interned) and 'Katyń' (the site of mass graves of Polish officers). Czapski found salvation from despair in the writings of mystics. "This background, this undertone, one must not forget about it and should carry it deep in the lining of one's consciousness in order to be able to live," he argued.[65]

This article is only intended to introduce Czapski. It is too concise to reflect the polyphonic nature of his personality. Its purpose is to emphasise the idiosyncratic character of his creative output and, simultaneously, the marginal position he held on the Parisian artistic scene. He distanced himself from current artistic trends, which resulted from his mental inability to involve in artistic progressivism, and from constant searching for the artistic idiom that would best convey his personality. "After finding myself in solitude, my will to live, to work, manifests itself in breathing again with my own breath, seeing again, breathing with the eyes," he wrote.[66]

Although his works were shown in Parisian galleries – Galerie Lambert, Bénézit, Jacques Desbrière, and Jean Briance – and his artistic output was regularly exhibited in Grabowski Gallery in London and Galerie Plexus in Chexbres near Lausanne, for many years he found himself outside the mainstream exhibitions and beyond the art market. His paintings were purchased mostly by relatives from the extended Austrian-German-Russian-Polish family or by affluent friends. It was only at the expositions in Switzerland – regularly organised since 1973 by the art dealer Richard Aeschlimann, who befriended the artist – that buyers from the United States of America and Canada as well as members of the British royal family began to show interest in Czapski's work. Still, Czapski did everything in his might to resist the mechanisms governing the art market. For example, he rejected the proposal of having a series of exhibitions in several venues in

64. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 196.
65. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 158.
66. Karpiński, *Portret Czapskiego*, 258.

Germany because he considered the dealers' estimates of his paintings to be overpriced. In Poland, most exhibitions of his art have been held after 1990. The only monograph dedicated to the artist's oeuvre and published in Switzerland during his lifetime was *Czapski – la main et l'espace* by Murielle Werner-Gagnebin.[67]

A good illustration of Czapski's marginal position in the Parisian artistic milieu was when a curator from Central and Eastern Europe recommended the artist's name to the commission qualifying artworks to the Biennale de Paris, scheduled for 1985. The commission was perplexed as none of its members was able to remember Czapski's art. Eventually, ten of his pictures were shown, but this did not result in either the critics' interest or financial success (which was never important for Czapski).

Distanced from the artistic mainstream, Czapski perceived himself as a painter who represented the obsolete post-Cézannesque era. Although he treated it as a manifestation of the instinct of self-preservation with regard to the commercialization and commodification of art, he considered his artistic attitude to be completely *passé*.[68] Wrongly so. His biography of an emigré exemplified a complex relation between the historical and political context of art and the artistic vision, a relation that was far from being illustrative. Despite his incessant curiosity of the world and openness to the Other, despite his immense literary and artistic erudition, the essence of Czapski's art were the ghosts of the past whose impact escalated due to the impossibility of returning 'home', understood as the mental and emotional core of personality. "I think that painting is always a challenge and that my canvases contain a lot of darkness, like an inner gash, hundreds of times more than my relations with people do, even with those to whom I'm close," Czapski confessed in a letter to his friend, Ludwik Hering, who lived behind the Iron Curtain and with whom Czapski was engaged in a love affair before the war.[69]

In 1949, marking the 10th anniversary of the joint Nazi and Soviet invasion of Poland, Czapski published in *Kultura* an essay titled *Szeptem* [In a Whisper], in which he reflected on modern amnesia:

"I sometimes think that man has no right to exist, that we are all alive only thanks to our thoughtlessness, our disloyalty, our unremembering. If we could remember for real and remember constantly, no one would be able to breathe, to stay alive," he observed.[70] Nevertheless, his own writings – encrusted with literary

67. Werner-Gagnebin, *Czapski. La main et l'espace*.

68. Czapski, "Śmierć Cézanne'a" (The Death of Cézanne), *Kultura*, 1985 (6) 108-110.

69. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 297. The correspondence between Czapski and Hering was published in: *Listy 1939-1982* (Letters 1939-1982). Introduction by Adam Zagajewski, edited by Ludmiła Murawska-Péja, Dorota Szczerba, Julia Juryś, and Piotr Kłoczowski, Gdańsk: Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Instytut Dokumentacji Studiów nad Literaturą Polską, 2016-2017.

70. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 267.

and philosophical quotations – reveal an abiding memory of annihilation and demise. He ended *Szeptem* with a bitter conclusion:

> "As we speak and write the most sacred words, even our memories of those who died take on the sleekness, the shine of inert, polished wooden objects, of tools of propaganda. All over this planet we repeat words, words, words – and this gives us permission to think that we're being faithful? On this anniversary perhaps it'll be better to be silent and think. To see everything that we have lived through, to get to the bottom of things and not stop halfway, to not erect any rosy screens of fiction between ourselves and reality, to not tape up the wounds with optimistic band-aids, which only hasten the rot. To remain silent."[71]

For Czapski, painting became the silence concealing profound interiorization of the trauma of war. He died in Maisons-Lafitte near Paris on 12thth January, 1993, aged 96.

Emblematic Émigré Artist

The Syndrome of an Emigrant features key moments from Czapski's life and the major points of his reflection on art and human existence. It depicts Czapski as a firsthand witness and participant of the turbulent history of the 20th century, happening in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

The outbreak of World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in tsarist Russia, the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920, and the course of World War II left an indelible mark on his life. Consequently, he became an emphatic observer of the suffering of dozens of thousands of civilian refugees and soldiers fighting on frontlines. Despite such traumatic experiences, Czapski remained open towards people, displayed willingness to meet and exchange opinions with them, and maintained his curiosity of the world and the energy to work for the causes in which he believed. He was always himself and did not change his convictions, irrespective of the dramatic circumstances in which he found himself. Nevertheless Czapski never freed himself of the war trauma, which was reflected in both his writings and historical journalism as well as in the sphere that can be found at the other extreme of objective historical narration – in the aesthetic experience, in the manner of comprehending the essence of painting, and in the expression of the artistic form created.

Despite his intensive diplomatic and publishing activity, he never lost his passion for the pictorial idiom he considered to be fully authentic – anti-avant-garde, free of the imperative of constant progressivism and experimenting, resistant to contemporary fads and mainstream artistic trends, striving to capture the unchangeable essence of the surrounding reality. With the passage of time,

71. Karpeles, *Almost Nothing*, 267.

his painting (of Post-Impressionist genealogy) acquired a more pessimistic tone and featured a more profound expressionist deformation of the situations, figures, and objects observed. The remnants of collective and individual trauma, the overwhelming sense of loss, and the 'residue' of painful experiences resulting from expulsion and exile kept him from embarking on entirely new artistic paths. The memory of the war hecatomb was the reason why Czapski preferred to set his position on the cultural margins of the Parisian art scene – a decision that entailed difficulties and frictions in his career.

Although Czapski was gifted with exceptional personality and polyphonic artistic talent, he became an emblematic Polish post-World War II émigré artist. The alienated figures shown in the narrow frames of his paintings might be read as a symbol of the fate of hundreds of thousands of Poles exiled from their country during the joint Nazi and Soviet invasion in 1939, sent to labour camps in Germany and the USSR during the six-year-long occupation of Poland or following combat trails with the Allied Forces. They serve as a token of the lives of those Polish emigrants who were deprived of the opportunity of returning to their homeland by the communist regime which Moscow imposed on the People's Republic of Poland in 1945.

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