
Andrzej Jarosz / Czapski reads André Malraux

Józef Czapski's readings the texts by André Malraux (1901–1977) on aesthetics and art history are among the most important ones. It effected from his physical presence in the Polish artist's biography. "Reading" Malraux's works has a very personal explanation. They were both of the same generation – a Polish artist and soldier, and a French writer and politician met in crucial periods of the most modern history of Europe. These personal contacts allowed Czapski to comprehend better Malraux's views, especially his aesthetic polytheism and a concept of "museum of imagination".

The first meeting of Czapski with Malraux took place in Paris in 1924. Later on, after the war had finished, and Czapski had been sent to Paris by General Władysław Anders, he made a report to Malraux on his knowledge of Soviet Russia. When in 1946 the painter settled down in France, Malraux made big efforts to publish *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* [The Inhuman Land] in France. He also supported the cause of the endangered seat of Parisian "Kultura" [Culture] monthly in Maisons-Laffitte by writing an open letter concerning the matter in 1954. Their direct contacts were also related with artistic life. In 1952 Malraux visited Czapski's painting exhibition, and in 1958 he conducted an interview with the artist. Czapski in turn used to read carefully Malraux's books, paying attention to both literary and cognitive values in the area of thought on arts, noticing at the same time that the latter was adding fiction to reality.

Malraux's quasi-methodological vision of art, his style, as well as cultural and political activity, provoked Czapski in 1952 to write an essay *Głosy milczenia* [The Voices of Silence] – a sort of polemics with Malraux's book *Les Voix du silence*. Just like many other readers Czapski noticed a typical for the Frenchman combination of a novel-like form with an essay or an impression on art and a total departure from an academic discourse. He also noted down the most important issues: Malraux's contradiction between "the world of quest" and "the world of affirmation" and perceiving an artist as conscious of his starting point, method, will and direction of acting – the force which enables to win historical determinism. Czapski was able to estimate the social aspect of Malraux's works in the time of the unfinished political and epistemological disputes. The biggest value in the vast considerations of the French writer was, according to the Polish painter, his intuitive search for truth and its revelations in painting. Czapski however, treated in a rather ambiguous way Malraux's position as "a demiurge" who decides valuation and applies reproduction – being a forerunner of digital iconography and virtual museum spaces. Malraux with his concepts keeps coming back till presence – in a performance and a film by Dennis Adams (2012), among others.