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Three essential (unpublished) letters written by Josep Ferrater Mora to the sociologist Salvador Giner

These three letters, which were written by Josep Ferrater Mora to Salvador Giner and are appearing here in print for the first time, provide crucial information on two points affecting the reach and impact of Ferrater's writings. The first demonstrates the difficulties he faced in penetrating the Anglo-Saxon book market, even though he had already published a number of volumes in English. The second and third, written shortly before his death, reveal his concern over the widening estrangement, in recent decades, between himself and the publishing house responsible for bringing out the lion's share of his books. At seventy-eight years of age, Ferrater's overriding preoccupation was to secure a publisher for his complete works.

His correspondent was Salvador Giner, the son of childhood friend Ricard Giner Roque. Together, at the end of the Spanish Civil War, Josep Ferrater and Ricard Giner had crossed the Pyrenees and entered into France. Ferrater's friendship with the father and later with the son, who became a renowned sociologist, was always extremely cordial. So it is not unusual that Ferrater, in these letters, should roll out an entire arsenal of ironic and witty remarks to which he was so given in the letters that he wrote to his closest friends.

Ferrater arrived in the United States toward the end of 1947. By the time of the first letter below, English-language publishers had already printed a number of his books in English: *Ortega y Gasset: An Outline of his Philosophy* (1957), *Man at the Crossroads* (1957), *Philosophy Today* (1960), *Unamuno: A Philosophy of Tragedy* (1962) and, finally, *Being and Death* (1965). With the exception of this last volume, all of these books achieved a second edition or reprint. Perhaps the book that found the warmest reception was his overview *Philosophy Today*, which appeared in English with the subtitle *Conflicting Tendencies in Contemporary Thought*.

The first edition of his *Abbreviated Dictionary of Philosophy*, compiled by Eduardo García and Ezequiel de Olaso, came out in 1970. If his high-level

introduction to contemporary philosophy was a success in the Anglo-Saxon book market, why not come out with a new compilation of his hefty *Dictionary of Philosophy*?

The last two letters — in reality, faxes — show a Ferrater Mora who is disenchanted and anxious about the uncertain publishing outlook that affected his literary output in Spanish nine years later. In 1989 and 1990, the edition of his new books in Spanish ran into delays that put their appearance in jeopardy. Ferrater always had a commercial view of literature. He thought that books needed to be sellable and that authors should have a constant presence in bookshops. Accustomed to making the presses roll each year — often several times a year — he was alarmed by the sudden disinterest of his publishers. And his alarm, which was motivated by this specific problem at first, led to a growing unease over the cloudy prospects of his literary posterity.

Xavier Serra

Letter 1

12 February 1981

Dear Salvador:

I hope you can come one weekend in March (either the 14th or more likely the 21st); it would be a shame if you returned to England before we had the chance to get together at least once more¹. Enough said.

Don't be too concerned about Martin's decision, at Blackwell's²; like you, I imagine that the analytical philosophers who provided the information are ingrates, that is to say, people who don't even take into account the author's sympathy for their chosen way of doing philosophy. As far as the dictionary being mutilated from head to toe, though, things are never as radical as that³. Priscilla and I are hugely grateful for what you have done to push the work, condensed though it is, through the cracks in the wall of Anglo-Saxon philosophy⁴.

1 Salvador Giner took a year's sabbatical at Yale and had to return to the University of Lancaster (UK) at the start of the new academic year. Josep Ferrater Mora encourages him to visit his family before setting off. Since 1949, Ferrater had been living in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania (US).

2 David Martin, Managing Director of Blackwell UK, the Oxford-based publishers.

3 That is, mutilated in translation. Blackwell's dismissed the idea of publishing a shortened version of Ferrater's dictionary of philosophy in English.

4 The initiative to publish this condensed version of the dictionary — compiled by Priscilla Cohn — and the contacts with the British publishing house had been in the hands of Salvador Giner.

As I told you, I very much liked your paper on the social aspects of freedom⁵. I regard your ideas as a good way to fill in the many gaps left by my ideas in *De la matèria a la raó* [From Matter to Reason] — a work that, being my most recent, I don't yet find wholly deserving of contempt⁶.

With fond memories and a warm embrace,

[Signature]

Letter 2

J. Ferrater Mora

1518 Willowbrook Lane, Villanova, PA, 19085

2 June 1990

Sr. Salvador Giner

Fax 011-3-4-1-521.8103

Dear Salvador,

I should like to put on record that this isn't a question of *you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours*, but our recent faxes brought the following to mind.

I have a book of essays entitled *Mariposas y supercuerdas* [Butterflies and Superstrings] that my literary agent, Mercedes Casanovas [C/] Teodora Lama-drid, 29, 08029 Barcelona, telephone 212.4791, fax 417.9037, sent some time ago to Alianza Editorial with the idea that they would publish it, as had been their custom in the past⁷. Well, these "Alliance people", which as you know

5 Salvador Giner, "La estructura social de la libertad", *Reis: revista española de investigaciones sociológicas*, 11 (1980), pp. 7-28. This was the second version of his essay on the social structure of freedom entitled *L'estructura social de la llibertat*, Edicions 62, Barcelona, 1971.

6 *De la materia a la razón* [From Matter to Reason], Alianza, Madrid, 1979.

7 Between 1939 and 1954, Ferrater published all of his books through South American publishers: Losada and Sudamericana (Argentina), Cruz del Sur (Chile), Atlante and Fondo de Cultura Económica (Mexico). In 1955, it once again became possible to publish his books in Spain (lest we forget: he was a Republican exile and the Franco dictatorship still imposed strict censorship). In that year appeared *Cuestiones disputadas* [Disputed Questions], published by Revista de Occidente, of Madrid, and a second version of *Les formes de la vida catalana* [The Forms of Catalan Life], published by Selecta, of Barcelona. The growing replacement of established publishers in South America by publishers in Madrid or Barcelona became apparent soon afterwards. The Spanish version of his book on Ortega — *Ortega y Gasset: etapas de una filosofía* [Ortega y Gasset: An Outline of his Philosophy] — was brought out in 1958 by Seix Barral, of Barcelona. In general, however, Ferrater preferred Madrid publishing houses for his books written in Spanish, namely, Aguilar, Revista de Occidente and Alianza. This trend reached its high point when he shifted his hefty *Dictionary of Philosophy* from Editorial Sudamericana, of Buenos Aires — which had published the third, fourth and fifth editions — to Alianza in Madrid. Indeed, after Revista de Occidente published two volumes of his *Selected Works* (1967), Alianza became Ferrater's sole publisher. Alianza brought out *La filosofía actual* [Philosophy Today] (1969), *Indagaciones sobre el lenguaje* [Inquiries

aren't the same as before, wanted so much begging and pleading and even then, in the end, I don't think they're going to publish it⁸. It's the first time this has ever happened to me, but it appears that as I approach eighty, nobody is interested in what I have to say any longer⁹. Do you think the book could come out as part of the Espasa-Mañana collection that you are overseeing? Send me word by fax; if there's a chance, let's talk more about it; otherwise, that's the end of it.

Incidentally, what I said about being almost eighty is truer than you might think. For nearly nine months, this same literary agent (I've started to wonder whether she isn't rather a "patient") has had a print-out of my novel *La señorita Goldie*, which is a sequel to *El juego de la verdad*¹⁰. What is happening? I don't know. Some days ago, I sent her a print-out of a book of "feminist" stories entitled *Mujeres al borde de la leyenda*, which should have been a phenomenal success, but I may well die without seeing the work in print¹¹. Short of taking action with said agent (for the time being), what do you think I can do? Do you have any publishing suggestions? It would be paradoxical to have to "suggest" anything to said patient/agent, but I'm starting to grow impatient and any information would be helpful.

A few days ago, I received a letter from a gentleman in Madrid (I can't recall his name and I threw the letter in the bin), asking for a recommendation on behalf of Emilio Lledó for the Menéndez Pidal Prize. As you can see,

into Language] (1970), *Cambio de marcha en filosofía [Shifting Gear in Philosophy]* (1974), *De la materia a la razón [From Matter to Reason]* and the sixth edition of the *Dictionary of Philosophy* in four volumes (1979), a book written jointly with Priscilla Cohn entitled *Ética aplicada [Applied Ethics]* (1981), the novel *Claudia, mi Claudia* (1982), the stories in *Voltaire en Nova York [Voltaire in New York]* (1985) and lastly, *Hecho en Corona [Made in Corona]* (1986), his second novel.

- 8 In the end they did not publish it. *Mariposas y supercuerdas [Butterflies and Superstrings]* was published posthumously in 1994 by Península, of Barcelona. The incident recounted in this letter to Salvador Giner was the decisive moment in Ferrater's falling out with the firm that had served as his chief publisher up to that time.
- 9 Ferrater, who had been born on 30 October 1912, was then just over 77 years of age. He had already given up his efforts to gain a secure place in the Anglo-Saxon book market and was visibly growing more apprehensive, as we can see, about his position in the Spanish book market.
- 10 Disillusioned by Alianza, Ferrater started looking for publishing outlets in Barcelona, for his books in Spanish as well. His novel *El juego de la verdad [The Game of Truth]* had been a 1987 finalist for the Nadal Prize, awarded by Destino. In the end, *La señorita Goldie* was published by Seix Barral. Now, though, he had no more time to consolidate anything durable and lasting from a publishing viewpoint. Ferrater died on 31 January 1991 in Barcelona, where he had travelled for the launch of his last novel. The estrangement from Alianza was made even more visible in 1994, when Ariel took charge of the seventh edition of the *Dictionary*.
- 11 In effect, the book was published posthumously: *Mujeres al borde de la leyenda [Women on the Verge of Legend]*, Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 1991.

things are afoot. I hope that, in the end, the prize goes to you, unless a recommendation from me proves to be *the kiss of death*. Anything is possible¹².

With a warm embrace,

[Signature]

Letter 3

J. Ferrater Mora

1518 Willowbrook Lane, Villanova, PA, 19085

12 December 1990

Sr. D. Salvador Giner

Instituto de Estudios Sociales¹³

Madrid. Fax 521.8103

Dear Salvador:

A neighbour has notified me of a letter in my mailbox (“Mr. Mora, you have a letter in your mailbox; is your fax out of order?”). I was well and truly shamefaced. I haven’t dared give anything to the postman and I send you this fax covertly. I hope you receive it when you pass through Madrid. If I don’t hear from you within five or six days, I will have no choice but to face my neighbour’s wit again.

What you said about Orquín and Espasa¹⁴ makes me as happy as a little bird (a rough approximation of the phrase Ortega y Gasset used at the constituent parliament when he said to Lluís Companys: “What Señor Companys has said makes me as happy as a birdie). I say a prayer to all the gods spoken of by Dumézil¹⁵ (an octogenarian) that these good intentions may be

12 His confidence in Spanish academe was as low as the confidence he began to have in the publishing firms of Madrid. National prizes in research, to which Ferrater is referring, had been set up in 1982 by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, through the Santiago Ramón y Cajal National Prize in Research for scientific investigation. Added to this, in the following year, came the biannual Ramón Menéndez Pidal National Prize in Research for investigation in the humanities and social sciences, the Leonardo Torres Quevedo National Prize for technical research, and the King Juan Carlos I National Prize for young researchers. Nonetheless, no call for prizes was made in 1991 or in 1993, with the result that all of this back-and-forth came to nought.

13 Salvador Giner was director of the Institute for Advanced Social Studies (of the Spanish National Research Council) from 1989 to 1997.

14 Felicidad Orquín was a literary director at the publishing house Espasa Calpe of Madrid, where she was in charge of the essay collection “Espasa Mañana”.

15 Dumézil was a French philosopher who wrote controversial studies on Indo-European religions.

fulfilled. You should really call Mercedes Casanovas¹⁶, the wife of your former student Enrique Lynch (office phone: 212-4791) because I went with her to speak with the Editor-in-Chief of the University of Barcelona press¹⁷, who *also took an interest in publishing my soi-disant complete works* (I say *soi-disant* because they will always be less complete than those of Julián Marías¹⁸ — and let us say nothing of Camilo J. Cela, who in his articles calls himself, guess what? “The prizewinner!”) To facilitate matters, I have come up with a new modular scheme: according to this incredibly modern scheme, I don’t put much stock in chronological order, I “organise” my work in three sections (or “modules”): articles and essays; philosophy; narrative²⁰. In any event, it would be good if none of these go unpublished! I look forward to hearing more from you!²¹ Thank you!

In a lengthy phone conversation, Esperanza Guisán communicated to me that she had been fairly under the weather over the past three years (sorry: months). Cataracts and other complications. I have to see her this coming May when I’m off to Santiago de Compostela to do some promotion for integrationist philosophy²², but I hope that the planned *Festschrift* starts shuffling forward before then²³, like the doves of Paul Valéry in the translation by Xavier Benguerel: “These quiet rooftops where the doves are shuffling”²⁴.

16 Ferrater’s literary agent, already mentioned in the previous letter.

17 Joan Duran Fontanals, who held the post until 2010.

18 This philosopher, like Ferrater, had published nearly all of his books at Alianza since the founding of the firm in 1966. The ten volumes of Julián Marías’s *Complete Works* began to appear in 1958 through *Revista de Occidente*. The tenth volume came out in 1982 under the Alianza imprint.

19 Camilo José Cela had won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1989.

20 In reality, it was impossible to apply a chronological order, because Ferrater was constantly revising his essays.

21 The publishing solution that Ferrater thought he had found after breaking with Alianza, therefore, was to publish his complete works through Espasa Calpe or the University of Barcelona press. In the end, however, nothing was ever published.

22 Esperanza Guisán was professor of ethics at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Ferrater had served as her doctoral thesis advisor. The “promotion for integrationist philosophy” alluded to here is, in reality, a self-deprecating way to put the matter: Ferrater had to travel Santiago de Compostela because the university there had decided to present him with an honorary doctorate. He did not make the journey, however, because his death occurred a few months beforehand.

23 The *Festschrift* went ahead and was published as the first monographic issue of the journal *Τέλος*: Salvador Giner & Esperanza Guisán (eds.), *José Ferrater Mora: El hombre y su obra [Josep Ferrater Mora, The Man and His Work]*, 1994.

24 Ferrater met Xavier Benguerel, a writer who translated a number of Valéry’s poems into Catalan, in Chile in 1941, when both were exiles there. Benguerel’s translation of the opening line from ‘Le Cimetiere marin’, to which Ferrater is referring, is: *Aquests terrats on els coloms fan via*.

I think I told you that I would return to Barcelona for the week of 26 January to 3 February to talk up and shake up my novel *La señorita Goldie* (poor thing!)²⁵. I hope that we may see each other; on those days don't go off to Cambodia or Kuwait.

I'm glad to hear that your interview with Isaiah Berlin went swimmingly. We'd like to read it, don't forget²⁶.

Yes, I had dinner with Victòria, Sir Paco Rico's partner. I behaved with all the desired humility²⁷.

Thanks again! And give my regards to Monserrat and the children (I received a very kind, beautifully written letter from Ricard Giner i Sariola: he's quite the gentleman).

See you soon!

[Signature]

Translation from Catalan by Joel Graham

25 See footnote 10.

26 Salvador Giner, "Isaiah Berlin: Conversación con Salvador Giner", *Claves de la razón práctica*, 22 (May 1992), pp. 44-47.

27 Victòria Camps, then Vice-Rector of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, was a professor of Moral and Political Philosophy, and Francisco Rico was a professor of philology at the same university and also became a member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua in 1987.

