

# Narrative Strategies in Ryszard Kapuściński's Reportages

**Magdalena Horodecka**

Department of Polish Literature and Linguistics, University of Gdańsk

Wita Stwosza 55, 80-952 Gdańsk, Poland

Email: magdahorodecka@op.pl

**Abstract** This paper examines narrative techniques of Ryszard Kapuściński. It presents the most important facts about professional biography of Polish reporter, showing the main places and historical moments he experienced. Kapuściński's art of creative nonfiction writing is compared to New Journalism Movement where some elements of fiction were used to give the artistic interpretation of experienced reality. The author is focusing on three of Kapuściński's books: *The Emperor*, *Shah of Shahs* and *Travels with Herodotus* examining different forms of structuring gathered information into parabola, collage or hermeneutic self-interpretation.

**Key words** Ryszard Kapuściński; literary journalism; reportage; *The Emperor*; *Shah of Shahs*; *Travels with Herodotus*; narration.

## Introduction

Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007), one of the most important literary journalist of the twentieth century is widely recognized on the contemporary map of world literature. He is one of the most often translated Polish writers, among authors such as Stanisław Lem, Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Wisława Szymborska or Andrzej Sapkowski. His most famous books, *The Emperor* or *Shah of Shahs*, were translated into more than thirty languages.

Recent biographers, e.g. Artur Domosławski, the author of *Ryszard Kapuściński. Non-fiction* (2010), tried to weaken the authority of famous writer and journalist, showing Kapuściński's sins concerning his private and professional life. Domosławski tried to prove that Kapuściński was passing the truth in his reportages. That stimulated the everlasting discussion about the borders of fiction and non-fiction in journalism which was very loud in Polish media just after publication of Domosławski's book (two years later translated into English). However, literary researchers much earlier than biographers proved the presence of some types of fiction in Kapuściński's art

of story-telling and understood fiction not as the synonym of lying but as probability or as the use of imagination to create a literary vision based on real experience (Lemarque 1996). What is interesting — this distinction between different types of fiction, obvious for literary scholars, is not an argument for some journalists. The problem of fiction in nonfiction still divides reporters into two groups — one who believes that the borders of literary journalism should be open for some types of creative writing and others who reject literary modes of narrating reality. The famous representatives of the first trend are writers from the New Journalism movement in United States — Tom Wolf, Truman Capote or Norman Mailer (Weber 1974), in Poland very similar idea was realized by Kapuściński. The second group treat literary techniques as kind of risk of missing the truth and disappointing the trust of witnesses whose stories are always incorporated in reportage discourse. In my article, I describe what are the fiction elements of Kapuściński's prose and how they are combined with the representation of reality. I also examine the importance of composing empirical material and the role of choosing different narrative modes for each of Kapuściński's books. I analyze narrative strategies of *The Emperor* (1978), *Shah of Shahs* (1982) and the last of Kapuściński's books: *Travels with Herodotus* (2004).

Ryszard Kapuściński published his first collection of reportages *Busz po polsku* (*Polish Bush*) in 1962. Debut of the young reporter anticipated the feature typical for the style of his later books — entanglement of literary and journalistic discourse. This connection will develop and evolve in his later output leading to different artistic impressions. Kapuściński believed that different forms of narrative strategies frame our interpretation of the word (Kapuściński 1997). His idea was very closed to the contemporary interdisciplinary studies about narration seen not only as a neutral, linguistic form of storytelling but also — as a tool which reflects, structures and sharpens our way of conceptualizing the word (Trzebiński 2002), which is also a paradigm of cognitive narratology (Hart 2001).

Kapuściński sought for always new narrative forms for different subjects of his books (Horodecka 2010). The choice of particular narrative strategy was connected with his vision and interpretation of reality he experienced being a witness of many important historical events in Africa, South America, The Soviet Union and Poland. The beginning of his career coincided with the big anti-colonial movements in Africa on 1950. and 1960. As a young Polish journalist he had a rare opportunity to travel abroad, as a historian — he decided to be an observer of history *in statu nascendi*. That is why he report mainly from Africa. In 50., 60. and 70. he traveled a lot, e.g. to Ethiopia, Algeria, Kongo, Ghana, Tanganika, Kenia, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Angola, Somalia, or Nigeria and observed the rapid changes on the continent, often as a war correspondent (Nowacka, Ziątek 374). In 1967 he went for first time to

South America (Santiago de Chile) and then stayed for three years in Mexico (1969-1972) and was traveling a lot to Honduras, Boliwia, Peru, Brasil and Venesuela often experiencing conflicts and wars. One of the most famous local conflict he described in reportage *Soccer War* published in Poland in 1978. In 1979 he was also present for a few months in Iran and observed the overthrow of Shah — Reza Pahlavi, and then described this experience in *Shah of Shahs*.

It would be enough for the life of two or three journalists but not for Ryszard Kapuściński whose third field of interest — after Africa and South America — was the Soviet Union region. He traveled there twice, first for three months in 1967 to gather materials for the book about Asian and Caucasian Republics of the Soviet Union and came back after more than 20 years to observe and describe the fall of Soviet Union in his book *Imperium* published in Poland in 1993. As we can see — the best Polish reporter did not have much time to write about Poland, but — he came back to the country and stay longer in 1980 to participate in strikes which were an important step towards the fall of communism in Poland in 1989<sup>1</sup>. Although he wrote only a short text about this historical event, he came back to the mechanism of revolution in his reportage about the collapse of shah, Reza Pahlavi. The way of writing about the fall of shah was inspired by the experience of Polish strikes.

It is difficult to believe that one person could have the physical strength and intellectual potential to experience and describe so many spaces, events, meeting with thousands of witnesses. Moreover — the artistic impact of Kapuściński's professional life is really impressing and estimated not only in Poland but also in the word — which can be seen in translational phenomenon of his works. The list below shows the most important reportages by Ryszard Kapuściński with the chronology of publishing in Polish and English language. Two of them — *Travels with Herodotus* and *The Emperor* were not long ago translated into Chinese by Wu Lan.

The most important books by Ryszard Kapuściński published in Poland	English translations
1. Jeszcze dzień życia, Warszawa 1976	1. Another Day of Life, trans. W. R. Brand, K. Mroczkowska-Brand, New York, 1986.
2. Wojna futbolowa, Warszawa 1978	2. The Soccer War, trans. W. Brand, London 1990
3. Cesarz, Warszawa, 1978	3. The Emperor. The Downfall of an Autocrat, trans. W. R. Brand, K. Mroczkowska-Brand, New York 1983
4. Szachinszach, Warszawa 1982	4. Shahs of Shahs, trans. W. R. Brand, K. Mroczkowska-Brand, London 1985.
5. Imperium, Warszawa 1993	5. Imperium, trans. W. Brand, New York-Toronto, 1994
6. Heban, Warszawa 1998	6. The Shadow of the Sun. My African Life, trans. K. Głowczewska, New York-Toronto, 1994
7. Podróże z Herodotem, raków 2004	7. Travels with Herodotus, trans. K. Głowczewska London 2007

This seven books are only a few of his numerous artistic works, which also includes writing poetry (Kapuściński 2008) and being a photographer. I choose to present this titles, as they are the most famous in the word and each of them has at least 20 translation into different languages. In next sections of this article I will examine three of them: *The Emperor*, *Shah of Shahs* and *Travels with Herodotus*.

### ***The Emperor***

*The Emperor* is consider as the most literary book by Kapuściński. Author's intention was to join journalistic and literary tools in describing the splendor and fall of Hajle Sellasie's Court. The narrative effect was so surprising that even nowadays the book divides the reading audience. Some people admire the narrative form of the book, others claim that Kapuściński came to far in experiments with the literary borders of reportage (Domosławski 2010). Many literary critics interpret a book as a kind of parabola, legend or even a myth (Rose 1983). The question appears: how is it possible that reportage is treated as a fictional story? The answer comes with the analysis of narrative strategies of the book.

Kapuściński was present in Etiopia in 1964, 1976 and 1977 (Nowacka, Ziątek 379). He not only observed the reality but also speak with many Ethiopians who belong to Haile Sellasie's court. This numerous conversations were used in the book as an empirical background which was the foundation of wider literary vision of the psychological and sociological mechanisms of the autocratic power. This aim changed the book into a universal parabola through the use of particular narrative strategies.

Significant feature of *The Emperor* is the economy of its structure. The text reveals a variety of devices which formalize and remould the empirical material of reportage into a multi-levelled, intricate narrative. The narrative voice is diversified: in the unfolding of the text, narration is offered consecutively either directly by the reporter or through the framed monologues of the servants in the palace. Multi-layered structure provokes associations with palimpsest.

*The Emperor* opens with a sentence that anticipates the content to follow: "In the evenings I listened to those who had known the Emperor's court" (Kapuściński 4). This opening, calm, almost melancholic phrase embodies the compositional mechanism of the reportage, whose main principle is to follow the reports of encountered witnesses. It could be claimed that *The Emperor* on the narrative level is a collection of monologues of people who survived the revolution. Surreptitiously, under the cover of darkness, they reconstruct their stories, offering a specific *curriculum vitae*. The reporter conceals their actual identities under initials (e.g., F., L.C., P.H.-T.), perhaps unwilling to put them in danger. Above all, however, the device

highlights the universal rather than individual character of the figures presented. In total, *The Emperor* makes use of 34 subnarrators, whose accounts are offered by the first-person narrator: reporter. Most of them present stories only once, some appear two — three times (e.g. P.M. or T.L.).

It is important to stress at this point that a third path the narration follows is related to the mottos opening each chapter. These introduce an external order and serve a metatextual function. The proportion these mottos occupy is substantial: 4 percent of the whole text, 8 pages in total, are devoted to them. The narrator-reporter's segment makes for 25 percent, and the remaining large part (around 70 percent) is devoted to the framed narrative monologues. Such a mathematical summary only confirms what the reader experiences from the very beginning — the first-person narrator recedes into the background, giving right of way to a polyphony of opinions, facts, and emotions of those who for long years witnessed the reign of the autocrat. This in turn clearly underlines the importance of the sources of information — the servants are here reliable — because the most direct — in what they can offer about events. The narrator, in turn, takes the role of a medium.

That is the reason why the journalist himself rarely speaks, similarly to *The Soccer War*, where he clearly distinguishes his narrative parts with italics. This duality of his account broken into his own remarks and collected monologues of the emperor's servants is consistent in the whole text and is a distinctive narrative device serving several significant purposes. For example, it creates the impression of objectivity of the journalist, who separates his point of view from his interlocutors' perspective. This impression is, however, partly destroyed in the process of narrative evolution.

Now let us have a look at the vertical order inscribed in the text. The journalist's narrative is most often represented by a single voice (nevertheless, it happens that the narrator's and servants' voices intersperse). We can notice a peculiar mass of voices in the stories of palace people; they form an order in which the following linguistic planes merge:

1. Information gathered in Ethiopia
2. The authorial process of linguistic stylization of the servants monologues (use of Old Polish) and ordering them in a sequence;
3. Polish as the journalist's language into which he translates collected materials;
4. English as the language of some conversations and Teferra the guide;
5. The Amharic language as the national language of Ethiopia (and the modes of expression — e.g. metaphors characteristic of that language).

Single planes are present in the text with various intensity. For instance, English occurs sporadically — in actual expressions such as “Mister Richard” or (“My dear brother”) and in mispronounced name — “Mr Kupuczysky.” The five-layer system portrays the order of voices overlapping in the narrative of servants, but also stylization, which has been emphasized most, at the same time, and speech structures — typical for the Amharic language. This most profound narrative plane could for example include the anecdotal nature of servants’ speech. Jerzy Jarzębski connects it with the pre-alphabetic culture of Addis Abeba, which is echoed in the colloquial form which Kapuściński uses to describe the emperor’s court (Jarzębski 2009).

The reporter’s narration and the monologues make up a compositional sequence which offers a dynamics to narration, creates a polyphonic effect (highlighted in the mottos), and introduces universal dimension into the story. It seems that the intricate structure determines the parabolic character of *The Emperor* and reveals its symbolic meaning. The compositional dominant consists of various structural elements evoking the sense of time passing. The atmosphere of *vanitas* is evoked by a great number of mottos. The second chapter is preceded by a quote from the *Book of Jeremiah*: “They ... have walked after vanity, and are become vain” (*The Emperor* 59). In the last chapter, there are even four *vanitas* mottos: from Conrad, Procopius of Caesarea, Marcus Aurelius. Let us quote the last one: “Next I ask myself the question. Where is it all now? Smoke, ashes, fable. Or perhaps it is no longer even a fable” (*The Emperor* 107). Thus even the quotes reveal the tension through creating the atmosphere of the coming end. Also the variety of authors and times of the mottos creates an impression of timeless debate on elapsing, unavoidable decline of any power, but also of human life. It is worth noting how in the third chapter Kapuściński skillfully manifests the topos of an ancient ruler, referring to Procopius’s apocryphal account on Justinian and his courtiers (with a ghostly motif of a head which disappears only to reappear on the ruler’s neck — perhaps a symbol of illusoriness or of temporary authority of a particular ruler).

A composition technique evoking the sense of the end coming is connected with the motif of hours elapsing. Monologues are ordered chronologically according to the emperor’s everyday rituals. Even L.C., the second servant from the reportage, talks about the hour when the emperor wakes up (4 or 5 a.m.); another — Y.M. — talks about the denunciation hour during the morning walk; G.S.-D. — about the nomination hour (from 9 to 10 a.m.); W.A.-N. about the financial hour between 10 and 11 a.m. in this manner the other hours pass by. Obviously, this informs us about the extremely schematic and ritual way of ruling the country, but also is an evidence of the totality of power. It seizes all the state functions, but also has something divine in

itself because it seems to control time perfectly. At the same time, some hidden clock strikes further hours of ruling which symbolize the end of the day, of the night, but also of the catastrophe, the end or even death.

*The Emperor* acquire symbolic and literary dimension also as a result of using old Polish language (which sometimes is difficult to save in translation), rhythm and rhymes. It changes the story not only in parabola but also highlights the grotesque as a form of silent estimation of the Hajle Sellasie reign and of each autocratic power. Some journalists, literary critics and even anthropologists argue that Kapuściński went too far in formal experiments with the narrative form which went too far from reality. In fact — Kapuściński gave Hajle Sellasie's servants the language they could not speak. Facts mentioned in the book are true, but it is for sure not the example of literal truth — fundamental for journalism but not for literature. That is way *The Emperor* balancing on the border of both will be for a long time the example of difficult dilemma of literary journalists.

### ***Shah of Shahs***

Similar subject but in completely different narrative form is presented in the second most widely known reportage by Ryszard Kapuściński. Published in Poland in 1982, four years after *The Emperor* a — in the contrary to the story about Ethiopian Emperor — still fascinates journalists as a hidden story about the workshop of foreign reporting. It was the first book where Kapuściński shows not only the wide political and historical analyze of the Iranian powers but also points to the difficulties of understanding and describing the Other cultures. The Iranian society occurs as particularly difficult to penetrate because of religious traditions of islam and great social fear caused by the Savak, secret police determined to punish each suspicion of disloyalty to shah.

The narrative form of reportage reflects the epistemological problem of transcultural communication. In contrast to *The Emperor* Kapuściński uses the poetics of fragment which can be compare to the esthetics of collage. In the first chapter it is announced by the description of Kapuściński's hotel room which changes into a symbol of reporter's lost in the political chaos of Iran. The first sentence of the book — "Everything is in confusion" (*Shah of Shahs* 3) — refers to the Chomeini's coming back and shah's escape from the country and seems to be mirrored by the description of reporter's room:

The worst chaos is on the big round table: photos of various sizes, cassettes, 8-mm film, newsletters, photocopies of leaflets — all piled, mixed up together, helter-skelter, like a flea market. And more posters and albums, records and

books acquired or given by people, the collected remnants of an era just ended but still able to be seen and heard. (*Shah of Shahs* 4)

The table symbolizes journalist's workshop and shows simultaneously — the effort to gather information and journalist's problem with comprehension. In next chapter we can observe how Kapuściński tries to solve the difficulties. He surrenders coherent description and decides to stick elements of gathered information — like an artist making a collage of different materials and fragments. What elements Kapuściński is using in his storytelling? One can observe it in the subtitles of the second chapter (*Daguerreotypes*): *Photograph 1, 2 and 3*, then: *From the Notes 1; Cassette 1; From the Notes 2*; etc.

Each paragraph gives new information — connected with the history of Iran or with contemporary political and social situation. Some of them (like *Cassette* or *Notes*) are presenting reporter's conversation with Iranians but such resources are rare. The most important are *Photographies* — they are the most numerous source of information, particularly significant. Their presence show that it is difficult to get in touch with local people and reporter seems to be forced to use pictures. The way Kapuściński "reads" the photos is very significant for his style and epistemology. He is merging the description of the photo with his own associations and interpretations. This strategy of storytelling will come back in *Travels with Herodotus*, I will come back to this. Now it is important to understand the consequences of such technique — it weakens the reporter's authority as someone who gives as only proven and reliable knowledge. However Kapuściński is presenting lots of facts, dates and real names, simultaneously is not afraid of using his imagination. He changes more into an artists, visionary or — how he was called — into reporter-poet (Parker 1994). I is seen when he uses metaphors or the technique of omniscient narrator or indirect interior monologue:

Whoever scrutinizes this photo of father and son, taken in 1926, will understand a lot. The father is forty-eight and the son seven. The contrast between them is striking in every respect: The huge, powerful Shah-father stands sulkily, peremptorily, hands on his hips, and beside him the small pale boy, frail, nervous, obediently standing at attention, barely reaches his father's waist. They are wearing the same uniforms and caps, the same shoes and belts, and the same number of buttons: fourteen. The father, who wants his son — so essentially like him — to resemble him in as many details as possible, thought up this identity of apparel. The son senses this intention, and, though he is by nature weak and hesitant, he will try at all costs to resemble despotic, ruthless father. (*Shah of*



*Shahs* 22)

Let us add to that characteristic of narration in *Shah of Shahs* that its incoherent, collage structure is not consistent. It is contradicted by the hidden order of chronology in describing gathered sources of information.

### ***Travels with Herodotus***

The last coherent book by Kapuściński<sup>2</sup> — *Travels with Herodotus* — shows the important change in his narrative strategies and simultaneously — synthesizes many of his previous techniques. Probably he never before speak so openly about his professional biography, which changes the book more into autobiographical essay with the elements of reportage. He also never went so far in using intertextual strategies by incorporating vast parts of another book (*The History* by Herodotus) into his own. However one could predict the shape of *Travels* from previous books of the writer, because Kapuściński's "I" was always present — but more indirectly. Questioned who are the heroes of his books, he used to answer provocatively: I am the main hero (Nowacka, Ziątek 9). He had also used quotations from other sources, frequently from literature or historiography. Intertextuality of narration was in each book more and more important — he used it for example as a polyphonic way of describing Soviet Union in his earlier book — *Imperium* (1993).

Although, as we have just mentioned, most of Kapuściński's work is to a degree autobiographical, *Travels with Herodotus* highlights the autobiographical through a curious juxtaposition of two narratives. The link does not lead to a conflict of discourses, but to their interactive coexistence. If there are thematic motifs and narrative devices known from other books, the concept behind the text remains unique. It refers to a generic traditional element of conversation with the dead as well as to an interview with an important figure, a witness of the present<sup>3</sup>. Kapuściński plays a surprising game in this respect. His primary interlocutor, Herodotus — though never directly addressed in the dialogue — is a member of the ancient world and a witness of his own time. His *The History* similarly witness Kapuściński's own journey and become yet another interlocutor of the text. The motif of travelling towards different places in the word with *The History* and with its author, organises the structure of whole book and profiles reporter's interpretation of observed events and his method of describing it.

Although there are two main narrators-protagonists (Herodotus and Kapuściński), the image of one author dominates throughout the book. Autobiography of Polish journalists appears directly (in memories and in all elements of reconstructed biography of the reporter) and indirectly (in reflections, analyses and interpretations of

Herodotus work). In many respects the historian seems to be Kapuściński's *alter ego*, a mirror in which the reporter watches himself and is watched by the reader.

The meeting with Herodotus is for Kapuściński an adventurous meeting with Other. We initiate such meetings, as Lévinas would put it, to transgress ourselves or constitute our own identity<sup>4</sup>. But at the same time the meeting is also an attempt at understanding and describing the difference. Kapuściński has worked with cultural otherness (e.g. with Africa in the very vicinity). In *Travels* he goes to visit an "other" Herodotus — he goes along his spaces and across his discourse. And here, I believe, we face the unique idea. The reporter tries — through narrative interaction (which can be understood as specific collision of texts, stories and discourses) — to reconstruct two portraits that shed light on one another — the portraits of himself, and of Herodotus.<sup>5</sup> Małgorzata Czermińska comments on this issue in the following way: "The first-person voice ("I") is repeatedly reassured in its role of the subject by numerous references to "you." This is clearly a motivation for discourse" (Czermińska 10).

Let us then have a look at Herodotus and the way he appears in *Travels*. It is surprising just how much of the book is given over to the historical accounts of Greek historian. Not only the narrative sections quoted from *The History*, but also some fragments Kapuściński wrote himself to concisely paraphrase it, added to the body of the text. Thus — with almost half of the book being somehow related to Herodotus — it could be argued that *Travels with Herodotus* seems, in large degree, to have been co-authored by the Greek historian.

A comparison may prove useful here between the picture of Herodotus that is revealed in his own *The History* and the image offered by the Polish reporter. The Greek rarely writes about himself, his narrative mainly concentrates on recounting stories as well as describing customs, religions and peoples he meets. There is, of course, a lot of information on topography and the countries explored. Herodotus appears to be not only the father of history, as Cicero would have it, but also as a sociologist, ethnographer or geographer. The interdisciplinary character of his interests is commented on by Seweryn Hammer, who writes that "Herodotus is interested in the lives of people, in climate, soil types and in natural produce. For ethnography he created a system — discussing: nations, languages, religions and cultures. In fact, the list of Persian peoples he offers in book became the basis for subsequent geographic and ethnographic explorations of the ancient East" (Hammer 12).

In *Travels with Herodotus*, the image of the Greek historian is filtered through the personality and interests of the author. Kapuściński remains only partially faithful to the picture that is revealed in *The History* — most of all, he leaves his own imprint on the figure of his master. The reporter paints a realistic portrait of the historian (paying

attention to verisimilitude), but adds a few authorial touches to it. Such reception style (according to the categorization proposed by Michał Głowiński)<sup>6</sup> is to a large degree expressive since its narration strongly aims at individual reconstruction of the identity of the sender of the text. Still, we can also notice elements of instrumental style — it happens now and again that Kapuściński quotes Herodotus to discuss his writing techniques as a paradigm for historians and journalists.

When looking at these most crucial aspects of the subjectively reconstructed figure of Herodotus, it is worth noticing what information we receive about the Polish reporter, who narrates the story. Even the selection of quotes from Herodotus is marked by the writer's personal interests. It is easy to notice that the use of the quotes is motivated by a need to make the reader interested in what fascinated the author himself. Quite frequently Kapuściński offers Herodotus text as if it were contemporary crime fiction — he selects shocking, dramatic moments and never avoids scenes of blood and gore. A person being impaled or the rotting body of the dying queen Feretime are shown with naturalist precision. The brutality is not necessarily an advertising trick, drawing the reader's attention. It is, instead, an example of the author's genuine interest in the sufferings of ancient people. Herodotus, as Kapuściński remarks at some point, treats the material with the indifference of somebody who is well used to it. The reporter, in turn, reacts to the scenes, observing them with awe.

Another dimension of the subjectively constructed portrait of Herodotus is the use Kapuściński makes of his own imagination as an interpretative tool for the ancient book, its style and for the Herodotus methods of traveling and observing other cultures. The interpretation of the events in ancient historiography involves a large dose of imaginative skill. This is visible in the passage describing the Babylon besieged by Darius the Great, where the reporter first offers a quote from the historian, and then adds: "Let us imagine this scene" (*Travels with Herodotus* 129). The fragment following such a question is not always a pure product of imagination. Quite often, as in the case of this passage, such comment is only a symptom of change in the speaking voice — a change of narrators. Authorial narration takes over to reconstruct the events in a condensed, shorter version. It is easy to notice how much Kapuściński's imagination relies on his own extensive knowledge. The symptomatic question quoted above is followed by a detailed passage:

Let us imagine this scene. The world's largest army has arrived at the gates of Babylon. It has made camp around the city, which is encircled by massive walls of clay brick. The city wall is several meters high and so wide that a wagon drawn by four horses all in a row can be driven along its top (...) It will be

twelve hundred more years before gunpowder makes its appearance in this part of the world. Firearms won't be invented for another two thousand years. (...) So the Babylonians feel invincible, able to behave with impunity — nothing can happen to them. (*Travels with Herodotus* 130)

I will return to the motif of imagination as a narrative regulator, but here I would like to stress that an example of such authorial interpretation can be also found in numerous fragments which aim at reconstruction of Herodotus's journalistic talents and his methods of collecting information. The historian is precise and laconic — as could be seen in numerous phrases throughout the book. These phrases also contain an element of the portrait — Herodotus very visibly uses fragments of the stories he has heard but rarely reveals much about the circumstances in which he did so. Let us then have a look at how Kapuściński discusses the historian's workshop:

For now, people gather in the evenings at the long, communal table, by the fire, beneath the old tree. Better if the sea is nearby. They eat, drink wine, talk. Tales are woven into those conversations, endlessly varied stories. If a visitor, a traveller, happens by, they will invite him to join them. He will sit and listen. In the morning, he will be on his way. In the next place he comes to, he will be similarly welcomed. The scenario of these ancient evenings repeats itself. If the traveller has a good memory — and Herodotus must have had a phenomenal one — he will over time amass a great many stories. That was one of the sources upon which our Greek drew. (*Travels with Herodotus* 270)

This representative passage shows very well how the reporter's imagination adds (on the basis of his genuine knowledge) to the content of Herodotus's *The History*. The added material, otherwise absent, is thus more interesting, more actively arousing, as if presenting a detective's work. The writer is puzzled with the places of indeterminacy in the ancient text and consequently tries to solve mysteries through acts of imagination.

Other significant narrative strategy of the book is the poetics of interrogation. For instance in the comment Kapuściński offers after the concise quote from *The History* which mentions women strangled by besieged Babylonians in need of food:

Our Greek says nothing more about this mass execution. Whose decision was it? That of the Popular Assembly? Of the Municipal Government? Of the Committee for the Defense of Babylon? Was there some discussion of the matter? Did anyone protest? Who decided on the method of execution — that

these women would be strangled? Were there other suggestions? That they be pierced by spears, for example? Or cut down with swords? Or burned on pyres? Or thrown into the Euphrates, which coursed through the city?

There are more questions still. Could the women, who had been waiting in their homes for the men to return from the meeting during which sentence was pronounced upon them, discern something in their men's faces? Indecision? Shame? Pain? Madness? The little girls of course suspected nothing. But the older ones? Wouldn't instinct tell them something? Did all the men observe the agreed silence? Didn't conscience strike any of them? Did none of them experience an attack of hysteria? Run screaming through the streets? (*Travels with Herodotus* 128)

We may also notice that these interrogative passages very strongly dramatize the material presented by Herodotus. Facts offered by the historian are reworked in a way that adds new tragedy, escalates fears that must have overwhelmed the people in such terrifying circumstances. Thus Kapuściński completes the gaps left by historical account, which concentrates on major conflicts, royal affairs and large scale processes. In other words, the reporter presents the experience of the individual, common man, unimportant to Herodotus but of immense interest to modern historians.

A characteristic feature of the text, the cascades of questions are also symptoms of a very visibly hermeneutic attitude, which is essentially based on the desire to understand. Kapuściński's writing, thinking and reading of Herodotus and of himself thus reveals some influence of such thinkers as Dilthey, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. Kapuściński follows Paul Ricoeur by making a deliberate effort to interpret not only Herodotus's work but also himself. Ricoeur comments on the issue: "Reflection is not so much a justification of science and duty as a reappropriation of our effort to exist; epistemology is only a part of this broader task: we have to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works" (Ricoeur 45). In this way the interpretation of *The History* has a clearly autobiographical character. It reveals identity of the reporter-reader; leads to self-understanding through interpretative effort and regular accumulation of knowledge about other works and writers.

It is important to mention that Kapuściński's contact with Ricoeur's work is confirmed in *Lapidaria*. In volume VI, we find two somehow encyclopaedic paragraphs devoted to hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics — a method of interpreting texts and the world; discussed by Vico, Schleiermacher, Weber, Dilthey, and others. Both Weber and Dilthey talk about understanding as *verstehen*, putting yourself in the shoes of others.

Recently the same problem has been addressed by, e.g. Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Hermeneutics originates in Protestantism, which pays great attention to appropriate reading of the Bible. Schleiermacher suggests multiple consecutive readings, while Dilthey extends hermeneutic procedures onto the interpretation of all human behaviours and creations. (*Lapidarium VI* 84)

I do not want to dwell too much on such comments on hermeneutics (though this passage shows, for instance, a strong tendency the reporter has for precise concise, synthetic formulations), but I believe we may easily assume that also *Travels with Herodotus* does offer a deliberate reference to the hermeneutic approach. The technique seems more convincing if we realize that the writing of *Travels* is mentioned in the very same volume of *Lapidarium VI*. Hermeneutics is contextually relevant to *Travels* as it also touches upon a problem Kapuściński repeatedly deals with in most of his work. Historical distance between us and most creations of culture is — in hermeneutic approach and in much of the reporter's writing — neutralized neither by biographic recreation of authorial intention (biographism) nor the structure of the work (structuralism), but by the interpretation aimed at internalizing the text, breaking down its foreignness that is inherent in the temporal distance. Any other method would involve, as Katarzyna Rosner claims, an assumption that "all creations of antiquity bear witness to the fact that it does not have anything to tell us" (Rosner 265). Hermeneutics, in turn, makes us believe that every text is alive and will speak to us and play its primary cultural role by becoming a tool for the understanding of ourselves. Kapuściński seems to follow a similar interpretative approach. The autobiographical effects of such affinities follow suit.

The historiographic strategy comes close to some theories offered by Hayden White, who discusses discourses which narrate and those which narrativize (White 6). *Travels with Herodotus* strictly follow the second type. It is not, however, a narrativizing discourse without a speaker (as Benveniste would have it<sup>7</sup>), but a specific kind of subjective, personal, sometimes emotional narration. Kapuściński hides his face behind Herodotus or perhaps he uses the figure as a medium. Thus Herodotus becomes Kapuściński's double, a shade and mirror which had been accompanying him in his farthest travels. In some sense, he cannot dispose of him, but the ghost brings him genuine pleasure. Herodotus is not a romantic double — a phantasm indicating a neurotic chasm, fears or emotions of its original "I"<sup>8</sup>. He is kind and friendly with his twin brother, Kapuściński says: "We wandered together for years. And although one travels best alone, I do not think we disturbed each other" (*Travels with Herodotus* 271).

The last paragraph of the book is giving important interpretation frame.

Kapuściński recollects his stay in Halikarnas, which used to be a Greek city, and now is located in Turkey: "I returned to the hotel. At reception, in place of the dolorous boy, stood a young black-eyed Turkish girl. When she saw me, she adjusted her facial expression so that the professional smile meant to invite and tempt tourists was tempered by tradition's injunction always to maintain a serious and indifferent mien toward a strange man" (*Travels with Herodotus* 275). In the light of Kapuściński's whole oeuvre this does not seem a surprising ending at all. An open epilogue aims to encourage the readers to add their own interpretation and empathically follow Kapuściński who throughout the whole book has followed Herodotus so carefully.

What seems especially important in the scene is the fact that the author again uses an imitating gesture. Like Herodotus, he presents his times through the behaviours of people. The girl comes from between two cultures — one, Western, demanding a "professional smile" and another, local and very traditional. This is indeed a telling signature of our multicultural world, with its dialogue and conflict in which different cultures meet. He watches the girl, reads her face, reads his own times. And writes our history — his *The History*.

## Conclusion

It is surprising how different is narrative form of each of Kapuściński's reportages. Three examples I chose to analyse show the evolution of writer's modes of narrating reality he experienced. In each book he seems to give facts different artistic form according to interpretation of reality he wants to present. In the history of Haile Sellasie's rise and fall he intended to see allegory of each autocratic power which profile narration into a parabolic, universal structure of *The Emperor*. Iranian culture and revolution was so complicated and closed for foreign correspondent that he decided to use fragmented form of collage in *Shah of Shahs*. Finally, in the end of his life he chooses more autobiographical form in *Travels with Herodotus* and shows his inspiration in hermeneutics which changes narration into the tool of self-understanding through the unusual, intertextual meeting with Herodotus- friend and The Other.

## Notes

1. Kapuściński wrote about Polish strikes in the text *Notatki z Wybrzeża* in published Warsaw newspaper *Kultura* in 14.10.1980. See also: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,109015,2893854.html>.
2. After *Travels with Herodotus* published in 2004, just after Kapuściński's death the sixth volume of his notes and collection of quotation appeared in print under the title *Lapidarium VI* (2007).
3. Roman Zimand, *Czas normalizacji: szkice czwarte* (London: Aneks, 1989)71.

4. Towards the end of his life, Kapuściński found philosophy of dialogue more and more important. See Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Other* (London: Verso, 2008).
5. The autobiographical aspect of *Travels with Herodotus* has been analyzed by Dorota Kozicka in "Podróż jako czytanie świata. Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego wędrówki z Herodotem" (*Dekada Literacka* 15, 2005, no. 6).
6. See: Michał Głowiński, *Świadectwa i style odbioru*, in *Style odbioru. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej*, ed. Michał Głowiński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977) 131.
7. Quoted in, *ibid* 7.
8. For more information about the motif of a literary double, see Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiografia i powieść*, 30–40.

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