

Ryszard Kapuściński's Discourse on the Other: Literary Reportage's Perspective of Reality

Michael Sabelli

Polish author Ryszard Kapuściński became one of the twentieth-century's most renowned journalists for his empathetic style of writing which made the foreign seem familiar. He spent most of his life abroad in constant contact with the other as a foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency. He kept two different notebooks: one for his work as a journalist, and one for his personal notes and impressions; this relates to the controversy that surrounds not his journalistic work but his literature. In recent years, Kapuściński's books have been criticized as fiction for his use of techniques found in literature. However, do the literary techniques Kapuściński employ in his books dismiss the integrity of his discourse on otherness? Kapuściński's literature – though flawed with generalizations and fictional elements it may be – still served as a strong and legitimate foundation for his discourse on otherness.

Categorizing Kapuściński's writings into a literary genre is a difficult task and it is often simply left in the ambiguous genre of travel writing. In his book *Travel Writing*, Zilcosky argues that travel writing is one of the very first forms of written expression using Herodotus as an example of one who brought together story telling

from his voyages with the written form (2008, 3). Kapuściński's books are collections of stories from his travels around the world that are brought back for his intended Polish, European, Western readers, but in time has, much like travel itself, gone global. However, the question remains, what exactly is travel writing besides a written account of travels, and how does Kapuściński fit into it? When travel writing is defined as a "(...) hybrid scope of journalism, anecdote, fictional techniques, stylistic bravura and the generic staple of the phantom quest" (Clark 1999, 199), any reader of Kapuściński would find traces of these styles in his literature. Since only his literature is of consequence to this article, the general category of travel writing can be applicable to Kapuściński.

Another general characteristic of travel writing is potentially unintended by the authors and is altogether highly debatable: it concerns Edward Said's theory of Orientalism as it is applied to Western authors. In *Orientalism* Said claims that the West creates an image of non-occidental countries through their texts in which it becomes imposed onto them, and then this image is exported back to Europe for their use to further control the orient. It is also used to self-impose a reflection of their desired self-image by using otherness as an image of contrast. Zilcosky agrees when he writes, "Travel writing – created mainly by upper-class white men – has produced the 'rest of the world': how it has invented 'others' – women, people of colour, and the poor – in order to craft a certain image of Europe" (2008, 10). It is in this characteristic of travel writing where Kapuściński has been criticized as contributing to "proto-racist essentialism" in reference to his book *The Shadow of the Sun* (Hemon 2001). Within this point Kapuściński becomes controversial, and may have an adverse effect on his theories concerning otherness. Is this a case of saying one thing and doing the other, taking a personal experience and making a generalization out of

it, or are there other factors at work here such as translation, context and journalistic style which has harmed Kapuściński's reputation and above all else his message?

Controversy which surrounds Kapuściński's books can often be attributed to the miscategorization of his works. If one were to read his books categorizing them strictly as journalism or non-fiction then they will undoubtedly fail to appreciate the literary techniques he uses in conveying his insights developed from his firsthand experience. Since his books deal with facts and can be generally viewed as non-fiction, Kapuściński has been criticized for using literary devices that blur the lines between the genres of journalistic reporting and fictional literature. These critics are justified when they read Kapuściński's works from such extremes, but Kapuściński is infamously known for being difficult to place entirely in one genre of writing: in bookstores he can be found in various sections. Thus finding his true genre only enhances his value, and then his work can be fully appreciated for what it is instead of what it fails to be. Diana Kuprel writes in her article of Eastern Europe's tradition of literary reportage:

One incarnation of the literature of fact was reportage, a genre that could lean either towards the documentary-journalistic or towards the artistic literary pole (...) Reportage pre-eminently demonstrated the obliteration of established polarities between "imaginative" literature and fact-based journalism (2006, 375).

Literary reportage is a genre that works well with Kapuściński for it allows a level of freedom for his books to be understood without forcing him into one extreme genre and then to criticize him for falling short of that genre's expectations.

By referring Kapuściński to literary reportage, he is then contextualized with the literary tradition that came before him, especially in Poland. Kuprel notes that some of Poland's most notorious writers from the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century developed the genre of literary reportage at the intersection of journalism,

literature, and the social sciences. Therefore, Kapuściński was following in this Polish tradition when he wrote his books. He didn't invent the genre: he was writing in a style that he learned from his predecessors. The question then is what exactly defines literary reportage, and Kuprel believes that it:

(...)is a type of documentary narrative that uses selection, arrangement, emphasis, and other literary devices to go beyond the portrayal of the factual event as event, the end of which is accuracy or verisimilitude, to explore the event as meaning or interpretation (2006, 381).

Where journalism presents the facts as they are, and fictional literature creates events to explore certain ideas, literary reportage as Kapuściński employed uses facts to explore ideas. There is a bridging between events and theories, and as a consequence sometimes the reader has difficulty deciphering where one begins and the other ends. However, it must be stated that facts are the main element of literary reportage, that actual events are what drives the writer's imagination. It is

(...)according to Wańkiewicz, the creative imagination [that] composes these facts into a "factomontage" that exposes and conveys the "meaning" or the "truth" of the event in such a way as to affect the reader emotionally, intellectually, visually, and/or imaginatively (Kuprel 2006, 381).

Wańkiewicz, much like Kapuściński who came after him, was a journalist who used literary reportage but was never a victim of the same scrutiny Kapuściński came under, such as in the biographical critique *Kapuściński Non-Fiction* by Artur Domosławski (Harding 2010, np).

Where Domosławski criticizes Kapuściński for fiction-writing, he ignores the tradition of literary reportage which Kapuściński followed. In an interview Domosławski stated that, "Kapuściński was experimenting in journalism. He wasn't aware he had crossed the line between journalism and literature. I still think his books are wonderful and precious. But ultimately, they belong to fiction" (Harding 2010, np). The line Domosławski claims Kapuściński crossed is indeed the same line

belonging to the genre of literary reportage. As Kuprel writes, “There is no simple and straightforward choice between fiction and documentary” (2006, 382). Domosławski tries to make that distinction in his critique of Kapuściński as a fiction-writer by making that either/or choice for him, and by doing this, he miscategorises Kapuściński’s books by placing them in fiction. The conflict between the two extremes of fact and fiction is present, and relevant in this debate of Kapuściński’s literature, and that is why it is important to classify them as literary reportage in order to appreciate the value of what they are. Kuprel believes that:

Reportage(...) is a type of “non-fiction writing with a self-conscious literary purpose, or documentary narrative as art,” in which the writer “tries to draw together the conflicting roles of observer and maker, journalist and artist” – and sometimes the role of the activist, the politician, and the social commentator, as well (2006, 381).

Under this category, the reader can view Kapuściński as all these things. Just as Kapuściński wrote journalistic articles for the Polish Press Agency, and at the same time wrote poems in published works such as *I Wrote Stone: The Selected Poetry of Ryszard Kapuściński*, Kapuściński is at times journalist and at other times artist. It should be of no surprise that his books about other people, places, and cultures which aimed to affect the reader emotionally and intellectually can be at the same time journalistic and artistic. Therefore, his books shouldn’t be considered one or the other, but both, and thus he falls under the genre of literary reportage.

Literary reportage has six interrelated aspects, according to Kuprel, which can be applied to categorize the unique reporting styles found above all in Eastern Europe which can then be applied to Kapuściński. The first aspect of literary reportage is creative subjectivity, as opposed to journalism’s strict ambitions to be objective. In all of Kapuściński’s books a first-person narrative of the events is given. It is Kapuściński who is trying to make sense of the events he finds himself in, rather than

simply reporting what it is he saw. This leads to the second aspect which concerns truth claims. This is where the controversy lies in literary reportage, the intersection of journalism and literature. Truth claims entail a certain degree of fact, and what Kapuściński offers is his professionalism and dedication to his craft as a foreign correspondent, and therefore his truth claims are directly attached to his being a witness to the stories he tells (Boyd 1992, 175). This leads to the third aspect of participation. Kapuściński did precisely this by subjecting himself in the narrative. The simple act of describing is in essence participation. This aspect is somewhat tied to the first aspect of creative subjectivity.

As several practitioners of reportage acknowledge, participation is essential to fulfill the hermeneutic function of reporters for it allows them to identify with the otherness they relate. As Kapuściński sums this belief up: Words are incomprehensible if one has not lived through that about which one writes (Kuprel 2006, 383).

It is not enough to simply interpret events, but to bear witness and experience firsthand for oneself like Kapuściński did. Only by being there can one become a participant, and furthermore, write with honesty about what one is interpreting.

The reader plays the role as the fourth aspect of literary reportage, for, according to Kuprel, it explicitly implicates the audience. “With one foot in journalism, reportage is written so as to be read by the broadest possible circle of readers, to invoke a popular consciousness.” (Kuprel 2006, 383). Literary reportage makes the audience take an active role in becoming critical of either the subject or the subject matter. Kapuściński invites his readers explicitly to do this in his literature. The fifth aspect of literary reportage is its hybrid style. This involves the style of writing – much like travel writing – and blending different literary techniques from a multitude of genres: Kapuściński is renowned for using reportage’s hybrid style. The last aspect according to Kuprel which applies to Polish reportage is its allusiveness.

Kuprel is referring here to the metaphors and allegories writers under communist systems had to use in order to avoid censorship or worse. Without explicitly referring to the communist situation in their home countries, writers like Kapuściński would refer to political systems and situations in foreign countries like Bolivia or Ethiopia which readers would then have to decipher in order to apply it to the situation back in Poland. Kapuściński writes:

We read each text as an allusion; each described situation, even the most distant in time and space, is immediately, as a reflex, translated into the Polish situation. Thus, each of our texts is a dual text. Between the lines of type one searches for a transmission written in friendly ink, while this secret transmission is treated as the more important, and above all, the only true one. The reason for this is not only the difficulty of speaking openly, in the language of truth, but also because our country has known all possible experiences and is still faced with trials so diverse that all history is not of our own will, naturally, for us, refers to our own history (Kuprel 2006, 385).

When looking through Kapuściński's career as a writer and not as a journalist, his bibliography seems to be lacking material from Poland (at least for the bibliography of his English translations). But as he states above, it is in between the lines, it is allusive. When Kapuściński wrote *The Emperor* many in Poland read it as a critique of their own situation, but on the surface it was about the downfall of a tyrant who was a pawn for the West. It put the Polish communist authorities in a difficult position: usually they would be celebrating and propagating a story about corruption and the horrors of imperialism, however they were also aware of the allusion beneath the surface which criticized the authoritarian state (Weschler 1990, 20).

Kuprel's six aspects of literary reportage apply very well with Kapuściński's writing style and his works. The subject matter Kapuściński takes on, otherness, requires a genre like literary reportage to benefit off its many literary techniques in order to engage the reader emotionally and intellectually. Kapuściński didn't shy

away when he was criticized as a writer who uses the imaginative and creative realms in his fact-based writings:

I consider myself to be an explorer of Otherness: other cultures, other ways of thinking, other types of behaviour. I want to come into contact with strangeness in order to understand. It is a question of how one can describe reality adequately, but anew. Sometimes this kind of writing is called nonfiction writing. I would call it creative nonfiction writing (Kuprel 2006, 382).

So Kapuściński labels it creative nonfiction writing, Domosławski calls it fiction, and Kuprel categorizes him in the multifaceted and hybrid genre of literary reportage; whichever label one considers Kapuściński with, his empathy for the people he writes about, and his sincere concern about the damage othering inflicts is not lost on the reader. However, by applying the genre of literary reportage to Kapuściński readers are helped through the sometimes tangled lines of literature and journalism he creates to emerge into his reflected reality of the world which the reader can actively be a part of.

In the introduction to Kapuściński's *The Other*, Neal Ascherson reveals that it was from Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski that Kapuściński learned the value of empathy. The empathy that Kapuściński was able to relate to both his subjects and his readers comes from Malinowski's idea that in order to judge something you first have to be there. It is through being there that one can begin to understand others, their lives, their situations, their hopes and fears, but also one's own. In Kapuściński's words:

Others(...)are the mirror in which I look at myself, and which tells me who I am. When I lived in my country I was not aware that I am a white man and that this could have significance for my fate. Only once I found myself in Africa was I immediately informed of this by the sight of its black inhabitants. Thanks to them I discovered my own skin colour, which I never would have thought about alone (Kapuściński 2008, 45).

In much of Kapuściński's literature, including *The Shadow of the Sun*, *The Soccer War*, *The Cobra's Heart*, and *Travels with Herodotus*, he writes about experiences traveling in foreign countries as a reporter for the Polish Press Agency. These books are largely collections of his experiences from the 1950's to 1990's. *The Soccer War* was published in the 1970's, whereas *The Shadow of the Sun* and *Travels with Herodotus* were both released in the twenty-first century. Therefore, much of his literature is reflections of his past experience, of his memories. Then, only in the 1990s, after the fall of communism in Poland, did Kapuściński begin lecturing his theoretical discourse about the other based on his experiences. A collection of these lectures was released in 2008 called *The Other*. Controversy about his literature containing fiction had already been present by the time he was lecturing about otherness as his biggest critics largely criticized *The Shadow of the Sun*. Whether the use of literary techniques in Kapuściński's literature diminishes the integrity of his discourse on otherness is another matter entirely.

As a foreign correspondent, Kapuściński's career was by definition spent as an outsider collecting information abroad. This led him to create his discourse on othering; first, on how people distinguish the other: by skin colour, nationalism, and religion; then how the encounter plays out: cooperation, separation, and confrontation.

Skin colour is the most obvious, noticeable, and quickest distinction people make in assessing one another. One does not even have to speak in order to make this distinction. Kapuściński viewed nationalism as a complicated phenomenon, especially in Africa where tribal relations cross borders, and where conflicts can also happen within a given nation. Culture and language are also important characteristics in distinguishing people through nationalism. Othering through religion is a more

global practice, something more sensitive and fragile. Religion, however, remains a strong characteristic to find either mutual or conflicting views concerning morality.

Judging people by the colour of one's skin is often associated with racism. The idea that there are different races of human beings is usually attributed to the colour of people's skin. Thus, seeing different colour of skin implies two things. Firstly, that there is an outsider present in a foreign country, and secondly, that this foreigner acts as a mirror in realizing one's own colour of skin.

The first thing one notices is my Other's sensitivity to colour, skin colour. Colour takes top place on the scale according to which he will divide and judge people. You can live your whole life without thinking, without wondering about the fact that you are black, yellow or white, until you cross the border of your own racial zone. At once there is tension, at once we feel like Others surrounded by *other* Others (Kapuściński 2008, 54).

Judging people based on skin colour is a mechanism for dividing and separating people. It is a way of classifying where people belong and where they don't belong. The most atrocious manifestation of this is the phenomenon and ideology of apartheid. Usually apartheid is assumed to be unique to South Africa (which did indeed impose a sophisticated political ideology of apartheid) however, it is an international phenomenon.

Kapuściński, at times, was able to overcome the barriers formed by othering. For example, in Africa he made a friend who introduced him to the local tribal leaders as an African, explaining that since he is from Poland he is not a typical white man.

Kofi answered: 'They don't have colonies, *Nana*. Not all white countries have colonies. Not all whites are colonialists. You have to understand that whites often colonize whites.' The elders shuddered and smacked their lips. They were surprised. Once I would have been surprised that they were surprised. But not any more. I can't bear that language, that language of white, black and yellow. That language of race is disgusting. Kofi explained: 'For a hundred years they taught us that the white is somebody greater, super, extra. They had their clubs,

their swimming pools, their neighbourhoods, their whores, their cars and their burbling language. We knew that England was the only country in the world, that God was English, that only the English travelled around the globe. We knew exactly as much as they wanted us to know. Now it's hard to change' (Kapuściński 1990, 231).

Though it was argued that skin colour serves as the easiest way to judge someone's otherness, more often than not othering occurs to someone who shares one's own skin colour. If sharing the same skin colour is not used to bring people together, it signifies that there may be greater and more important distinctions in determining otherness. This has been the case since ancient times. "No Persian provokes so much hatred in a Greek as another Greek does – just so long as he is from an opposing camp or from a tribe that is at odds with his" (Kapuściński 2007, 231). However, this tendency continues to this present age, and as Kapuściński argues, the greatest atrocities in world history have usually been against people of the same skin colour. But it can also make allies of people who would otherwise be at odds due to their nationalities or religious beliefs.

The same mechanism, or reflex even, of identifying and judging according to skin colour also used to work inside me. In the Cold War years, when there was an inexorable ideological division in force between East and West, demanding of people on both sides of the Iron Curtain a mutual dislike, or even hatred – as a correspondent from an Eastern bloc country somewhere out in the jungle of Zaire, I would happily throw myself into the embrace of someone from the West, and thus my 'class enemy', an 'imperialist', because that 'devious exploiter' and 'warmonger' was simply and above all *white* (Kapuściński 2008, 54).

Beyond just explaining the complexity of relations based on race, this text reveals Poland's unique position as being inbetween Western and Eastern cultures.

Kalinowska writes that Poland's geo-political position is often overlooked, and that during the nineteenth-century, "(...) Polish Orientalists' careers and, even more so, Polish writers' depiction of their own travel experiences in the Orient offer

revealing windows into Polish culture's inbetweenness" (2004, 62). Poland thus shares characteristics of the European, but also characteristics which the European would categorize as otherness. However, it is how the Polish conducted themselves, their self-image, which gives insight into their literary tradition concerning otherness. By writing about otherness using the same techniques as Western Europeans, Kalinowska argues that Poland effectively pledged their allegiance to Europe. The troubling thing for Poland, however, is that they were not colonialist like their Western European counterparts, but they still used and participated in their discourse on otherness. But this did not save them from being victims of colonization themselves. This is why Poland has their unique position as being in between, and that, "(...) Polish travel literature about the Orient often bears signs of a discursive powerlessness and submissiveness in relation to its Western counterpart" (Kalinowska 2004, 68). This literary tradition which Kapuściński proceeds is worthy to note when considering that most of his literature is about his travels and encounters with otherness.

The second characteristic involved in classifying otherness is nationalism. In Africa, the state often consists of many ethnicities, and thus this sense of nationalism can be for one's own tribe and ethnic group as well. For reasons of simplicity the term nationalism will also include tribal and ethnic ties and affiliations. Kapuściński identifies nationalism as a mechanism of classifying otherness in this way: "Nationalism, like racism, is a tool for identifying and classifying that is used by my Other at any opportunity. It is a crude, primitive tool that oversimplifies and trivialises one's image of the Other, because for the nationalist the person of the Other has just one single feature – national affiliation" (2008, 55). What Kapuściński doesn't mention is that the nationalist holds this one single feature of national affiliation for himself as well. Nationalist propaganda is used to elicit intense

emotional responses in affirming the interests of a group's nation. These interests could very well mean negating another nation: "The dangerous feature of nationalism is that an inseparable part of it is hatred for an Other" (Kapuściński 2008, 56). For the nationalist the only important factor is the nation. Everything one may have in common – skin colour, ideology or religious affiliations – is negated for the one thing they don't share: nationhood.

Kapuściński is often compared to one of his predecessors based more on nationality than their similar subject matter of Africa. Ryle acknowledges this when he writes that many critics have compared Kapuściński's, "(...) work to that earlier chronicler of the tropics and human beings in extreme situations – his compatriot, Józef Korzeniowski, a.k.a. Joseph Conrad" (2001, np). Conrad wrote in English and he wrote novels, whereas Kapuściński wrote in Polish and his literature, as was previously mentioned, is better suited in the genre of literary reportage. Both Polish writers have become attached to the continent they wrote about. However, they have two very different paths to Africa. Kapuściński wrote during the communist era in Poland and is believed to have cooperated with the communist party in order to be granted clearance to travel the world. Conrad, on the other hand, was a Polish expatriate who moved to England and became an employee for the imperialist power. Therefore, Conrad, as Said points out, kept an ironic distance to his work because he never fully assimilated into English culture, which separated him from some of his colonial contemporaries, for he was self-conscious about his work in both the imperialist machine and his writing (1994, 25). Kapuściński was also self-conscious about the communist authorities back in Poland and sprinkled allusions for the Polish readers in all his tales about authoritarian regimes he encountered abroad. Perhaps his critics' claims of generalization are really based on Poland as mirror image for the other. What Polish readers appreciated from Kapuściński's works was the literary

techniques he used in his stories about distant lands alluding back to realities in Poland.

Religion is the third distinction, according to Kapuściński, that people use to identify otherness. History is full of examples where religion was used to bring people together under the same God or to bring people together in order to fight another group and their God. Kapuściński uncovers two different features of religion concerning otherness: individual religious belief and institutionalized religious communities. This means that religion can be doubled up upon when othering. There will be the first face to face interaction to see where one stands spiritually and with concerns of their personal morality, and then secondly, there will be what one's religious institution has to say about the other.

Religious belief will feature here on two levels, so to speak – on the level of an ill-defined, non-verbalised faith in the existence and presence of transcendence, a Driving Force, a Supreme Being, God (I am often asked, 'Mr Kapuściński, do you believe in God?', and what I reply will have immense influence on everything that happens thereafter); and on the level of religion as an institution and as a social or even political force (Kapuściński 2008, 56).

One has to look no further than Poland for an example of a religious institution as a political force. Under communist rule religious institutions were forbidden, but the Church remained influential. In 1978, a Polish archbishop was elected head of the Catholic Church and became Pope John Paul II. His election can be seen as politically motivated as he was the first non-Italian Pope elected in over five hundred years. He became an inspirational leader for Catholics all over Eastern Europe, and brought them together. Shortly after the Pope's first visit to Poland, the Polish Solidarity trade union movement was established in 1980 with Catholic-social beliefs. Pope John Paul II supported Poland's Solidarity movement over the years, and it became a catalyst in ending communism in Poland. This successful movement

had a spill over effect into other Soviet satellite states, and became the precursor for the end of communism in Europe.

There is something that all these three distinctions of otherness have in common. It is something that Kapuściński believes can make people irrational, reactionary, and partial to act out violently.

I have been trying to find a common factor in these features, to discover what links them. It is that each one of them carries a huge emotional charge, so big that from time to time my Other is incapable of controlling it, and then it comes to conflict, to a clash, to slaughter, to war. My Other is a very emotional person. That is why the world he lives in is a powder keg rolling dangerously towards the fire (Kapuściński 2008, 57).

Distinguishing otherness is only the beginning. The next, far more important step is the encounter with the other. Kapuściński breaks down the possible encounters into confrontation, separation, and cooperation, or in other words: “And so the three possibilities(...) have always stood before man whenever he has encountered an Other: he could choose war, he could fence himself in behind a wall, or he could start up a dialogue” (2008, 82). At first, this might sound like it applies only to a group of people encountering a group of other people, and not individuals. And it is true that these outcomes are usually seen on a large scale. This becomes a major difference in how Said’s bigger picture view with orientalism contrasts with Kapuściński’s more individualistic discourse of otherness. However prevalent group encounters are, at the core of it is human beings interacting with other human beings. Kapuściński believes that the power of the encounter begins with the individual and works its way up to the family, community, society, and finally state.

When othering ends in confrontation the exchange turns into a heated, hateful, and perhaps violent encounter. Kapuściński believes that:

It is hard to justify wars; I think everyone loses them, because it is a defeat for the human being. It exposes his inability to come to terms, to empathise with the

Other, to be kind and reasonable, because in this case the encounter with the Other always ends tragically, in a drama of blood and death (2008, 82).

This is the extreme side of encountering otherness; it doesn't take much effort towards understanding them for that encounter to become a non-violent one. Perhaps they will only be reasonable enough to acknowledge the other's right to live but not necessarily together. But if real effort is put towards understanding otherness, then by being kind, reasonable and empathetic the encounter will bound to show some certain value or worth, or at least interest in being cooperative with another.

When Kapuściński began his career as a foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency, his readers, isolated by the Cold War, desired news from the West, but due to censorship they relished the next best thing: news about international relations the West had with countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The communist censors were, "(...) relatively relaxed about those continents; to describe suffering, capitalist greed and exploitation in the Congo or Guatemala was, after all, no more than to describe reality" (Kapuściński 2008, 7). It shows that his Polish audience was interested in reading about encounters of a Western other turn to conflict with an Eastern other. That Poland's position as in between West and East allowed them a unique perspective in viewing these events.

There are many reasons why the encounter with otherness becomes a situation where the necessity to keep them separated occurs. It all starts with the individual's fear of otherness. So to protect themselves they put up boundaries to keep them apart.

It may also be that instead of attacking and fighting, the family-tribe (...) decides to isolate itself from Others, to separate and fence itself off. In time, as a result of this sort of attitude, objects start to appear that are all based on a similar intention, such as the Great Wall of China, the towers and gates of Babylon, the Roman limes or the stone walls of the Incas (Kapuściński 2008, 81).

A person puts up a barrier to clearly indicate to their neighbours which land is theirs and to keep the other away. It builds momentum: the greater the generality of

otherness, the higher the wall to keep them out. When the end result of an encounter with otherness turns into a physical separation it means that there is an active attempt to limit future encounters with otherness. Thus, the possibility that the relation will be enhanced towards cooperation will lessen due to the other group being separated; however, the relation could worsen into confrontation for the bricks in the wall serve as a constant reminder of the fear of otherness. The Iron Curtain makes for a compelling example of how separation was based on the authoritarian ruler's fear that the Western other would influence their subjects.

Kapuściński notices that there are other kinds of walls besides the strictly physical ones. Metaphorical walls that are built into language and culture that when faced with otherness seem just as impenetrable. Are the physical walls that separate people just the manifestation of the metaphorical walls that make cultures distinct? It takes a positive attitude and above all the willingness and motivation to learn about otherness, learn their language and culture, in order to pass through these walls. Once the barrier is broken an exchange can take place and understanding one another becomes possible. The physical wall announces the defeat of such a possibility, but when an individual takes it upon themselves to learn about otherness and overcomes the metaphorical wall that keeps people apart, then the process of bridging these people together is well on its way.

However, even with willingness and education, language and cultural barriers remain. Kapuściński has been criticised for generalizing the other where he claims to be speaking for them. The problem it appears is that his critics never read him in the language he wrote in, Polish, but relied on translations. “The inevitable differences between originals and translations stem from various reasons, both objective and subjective. Differences between languages and cultures make it impossible to produce an exact copy of the original” (Hejwowski 2010, 208). With there being a

slight difference between the original and translated material it is possible that the reader, through no fault of their own, misinterprets Kapuściński's literature because of something lost or altered in translation.

Kapuściński's book titled *Imperium* is the title in both English and Polish, however in English it means absolute power, whereas in Polish it means a powerful state, empire, and it is in this sense that Kapuściński uses irony in titling his book about the Soviet Union (Hejwowski 2010, 209). Therefore, in this example it is the lack of translation that is the source of misleading information for the reader. Either way, it can be argued that there is a level of interpretation which the translator (or publisher in the case of translating titles) takes part in. However, as Buhler argues, to say that every translation is an interpretation is trivial for, "(...) interpreting is any activity aiming at bringing about comprehension, and translating has the same aim" (2002, 56). Throughout *The Shadow of the Sun*, *us* is replaced with *he*, or the pronoun is omitted completely by changing the sentence structure or the sentence itself is omitted (Hejwowski 2010, 215). It is clear to Hejwowski that Kapuściński tries to use delicate terms in order to avoid an *us versus them* stance, and therefore he uses words like *human beings* instead of *they*. However, in English translations they use the stronger term *they*. Therefore, the translator fails to translate Kapuściński's attempt to avoid the *us* Europeans versus *them* Africans with his subtle language, and instead what Kapuściński was trying to avoid was produced in the English translation. Is Kapuściński to blame for the language used in his translations when in his original version he was purposefully avoiding such discrepancies?

Arguably, the absolute worst separations are those that go beyond metaphorical walls and strong fences that keep people apart, but are weaved into the fabric of society. This manifestation is the phenomenon known as apartheid.

The idea that prompted man to build great walls and vast moats, to surround himself with them and isolate himself from others, has in modern times been given the name of the doctrine of apartheid. This concept has been wrongly limited to the politics of the now defunct regime of whites in South Africa, for in fact apartheid was already practised in ancient times. In simple terms it is a view whose adherents proclaim that anyone may live as he wishes, as long as he is at a distance from me, if he does not belong to my race, religion and culture. But if only that were all it was about, because in fact here we are dealing with a doctrine of structural permanent inequality dividing humankind (Kapuściński 2008, 83).

Apartheid went a step further of simply dividing people into different neighbourhoods: constructing political and administrative systems that ensured the privileges of those in power would remain unchanged, apartheid was a way to keep otherness separated from those resources. In a sense, each community had to fend for themselves. The horrific injustice of apartheid in South Africa was that the small minority of rich white people controlled and owned everything. Apartheid was for them a way to keep the wealth in their hands while casting out the blacks to take care of themselves. Though the blacks and whites were living in the same country, the system of apartheid effectively divided the nation between those groups. Apartheid is more than just separation: it is isolation.

Kapuściński clearly presents the concept of separation as an unjust, outdated approach to encountering otherness. He believes that we must look for ways of cooperation due to the evolving, multicultural character of today's world. "We treat the Other above all as a stranger (yet the Other doesn't have to mean a stranger), as the representative of a separate species, but the most crucial point is that we treat him as a threat" (Kapuściński 2008, 58). Kapuściński makes the argument that humanity should avoid above all confrontation and separation with otherness for that is not how we can reach an understanding which will lead to peaceful encounters. Co-existence

with otherness based on understanding and respect will lead to encounters which he terms cooperation.

The third encounter is through cooperation which embraces the differences of otherness as something beneficial. According to Kapuściński, “This is proof of cooperation – the remains of marketplaces, the remains of harbours, the sites of agoras and shrines, where the seats of old universities and academies are still in evidence, or the traces of trade routes have survived, such as the Silk Road, the Amber or the Saharan” (2008, 82). In these places people of different backgrounds came together to do business; exchange goods that their communities lacked or couldn’t produce. Ideas, philosophies, books and information were shared that helped form understanding, and through that, alliances and unions. Different communities of people realized that though they were distinct in culture, religion or language, there was indeed some commonality between them: the shared human experience, common values, the striving for a better life: the greater exchange and interaction with otherness, consequently, the more familiarity with them and thus less to fear. However, with growing immigration in the West strong nationalistic movements against the Other has developed.

There is an invasion happening (a demographic one, to earn money, but it is an invasion) of representatives of The Third World into developed countries. How prepared are we, the citizens of Europe, for this change? Not very, I'm afraid to say. We treat the Other above all as a stranger (yet the Other doesn't have to mean a stranger), as the representative of a separate species, but the most crucial point is that we treat him as a threat (Kapuściński 2008, 58).

Józef Tischner a Solidarity leader and Emmanuel Lévinas a philosopher are two people that influenced Kapuściński’s discourse of the Other to a great extent. Kapuściński learnt from Tischner that others are in close proximity, and because they exist and are close by, it is both necessary and imperative to feel responsible for

them. What Lévinas revealed to Kapuściński, according to Ascherson, was that only by recognizing otherness is the self possible (Kapuściński 2008, 5). It is being in contact with otherness that one is able to develop their own individualism, for others, though external, are a reflection of oneself.

However, not all scholars view cooperation as a positive encounter. In Said's *Orientalism* he argues that the identity of otherness in the East was systematically created by Western imperialists who were trying to demystify the unknown with a systematic approach to learning, discovery and collecting knowledge in order to shape it directly, and ultimately control it. Said argues that the West views the East as a field of conquest, and any positive relations, whether it be learning about Islam, sharing technology, or investing in infrastructure like the Suez Canal, is only to serve the interest of those Western powers, and as a side effect the East may also gain something positive out of it. This is where the idea Kapuściński has about understanding otherness in order to come together peacefully gets flipped upside down by Said who believes that understanding otherness and cooperating with them as just another means the West uses in conquering the East. Said likes to point to Napoleon's arrival in Egypt as the beginning of such orientalist practices, and something Napoleon does is learn all he can about Islam. Napoleon used Islamic scholars to appear as an ally to the Egyptian people, he sought to understand Egyptian culture in order to avoid offending them by cultural differences and control his soldiers' behaviour with the intention of reducing conflicts. He did all this in the interest of gaining an important and strategic colony for France, not for the benefit of the Egyptian people. Exploring the ancient Egyptian ruins, upgrading their infrastructure and technology, and using Islam to pacify the local population were all ploys Napoleon used in his conquest Egypt (France 1991, 9). Kapuściński would look at the positive effects, perhaps arguably being a bit naive and idealistic, and doesn't

see the political interest as the source of cooperation. For Said, cooperation with otherness is not in an altruistic sense, but in a way that individuals cooperate to enhance their personal interest.

Said's perspective of cooperation between the West and East is a pessimistic outlook on mankind's selfishness and greed powering their motives for being kind and understanding towards the other. Perhaps Kapuściński is being naive, overly simplistic, and idealistic in his discourse of otherness when he believes that cooperation through understanding one another's basic humanity will improve relations between different peoples and cultures. Kapuściński looks at the surface of it without digging deeper. Said suggests that at the core of cooperating with otherness there is a more sinister and selfish motive for this positive encounter. Though Kapuściński acknowledges the fact that people may do business with people of different groups in their interest, he also believes that this will be just the beginning of a relationship that will develop mutual respect: as positive encounters increase the fear of otherness decreases. However, with the example of Napoleon in Egypt, Said diverts this idea towards one where the business encounter begins and ends with one's own interest, and by demystifying otherness, by becoming more familiar with them there is less to fear from them, and the process of orientalising different groups of people in order to control them takes place.

It is important to note that Kapuściński was writing largely for a Polish, Western audience, and even though Africa has been connected with his work, people from that continent aren't as enthusiastic about his literature as their European counterparts are. However, there are people from both continents that criticize Kapuściński for writing things in his literature that simply did not happen or are not true. But then there are his supporters who have their counterarguments. In particular, one Angolan journalist puts it bluntly when he says that Kapuściński made up

everything in his books, but one cannot find a more accurate account of what happened (Pawson 2010, np). This comment illustrates the apparent paradox of being able to write accurately about real events in a constructed, imaginative, and fictional way. This is where an appreciation of Kapuściński's literary genre of literary reportage, what this article demonstrates to be the best representation of his literature, is important in order to better understand his work. Kuprel's six aspects of literary reportage correctly categorizes Kapuściński's genre of book writing. By understanding the genre of literary reportage the reader can avoid being caught up in a debate about journalistic ethics, and allow themselves to be more open to Kapuściński's message of empathy for otherness.

Kapuściński may have used creative licence in his books, however he is using literary techniques in order to better interpret the actual events he witnessed, and to engage the reader emotionally and intellectually. The goal is always a positive one, for understanding and feeling compassion for one another's otherness is the message Kapuściński is trying to relate to his readers. The experiences he writes about in his literature are also the inspiration for his discourse on otherness. He derives from his encounters with others three distinguishing features of otherness; skin colour, nationalism, and religion. Then, once otherness has been distinguished, there are three possible encounters; cooperation, separation, and confrontation. This theoretical discourse on otherness in which he comes up with can be found in a more anecdotal and less developed sense in his literature. To distinguish his books as fiction and imaginative, and thus refusing to encounter his intended message, would be a disservice to the real people Kapuściński met, and who inspired his humanitarian discourse on otherness. In this way discarding Kapuściński's books by labelling them fiction is much like how othering is used to justify isolation from otherness: intentional misunderstanding. Therefore, the criticism against him has been found to

be simply aesthetic, which fails to reach the depth of Kapuściński's message about otherness.

Bibliography

- Boyd, William. 1992. "A Pole Apart". *Transition* 55. pp 174-178.
- Buhler, Axel. 2002. "Translation as Interpretation." *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*. Ed. by Alessandra Riccardi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, Steven H. 1999. *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*. London: Zed Books.
- France, Peter. 1991. *The Rape of Egypt: How the Europeans Stripped Egypt of its Heritage*. London: Barrie & Jenkins.
- Harding, Luke. 2010. "Poland's Ace Reporter Ryszard Kapuściński Accused of Fiction-Writing." *The Guardian Online*. 2 March. Accessed 21 May 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/02/ryszard-Kapuściński-accused-fiction-biography>.
- Hejwowski, Krzysztof. 2010. "Do We Travel Around the Same World? On Selected Translations of Ryszard Kapuściński's Books" In *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing*. Ed. by Gregorz Moroz and Jolanta Sztachelska. Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. "Misguided Tour." *The Village Voice* 24 April. Accessed 2 May 2011. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-04-24/books/misguided-tour/1/>.
- Kalinowska, Izabela. 2004. *Between East and West: Polish and Russian Nineteenth-Century Travel to the Orient*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Kapuściński, Ryszard. 1990. *The Soccer War*. London: Granta Books.
- . 1998. *The Cobra's Heart*. London: Penguin Books.
- . 2002. *The Shadow of the Sun*. London: Vintage.
- . 2007. *Travels with Herodotus*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- . 2008. *The Other*. London: Verso.

- Kuprel, Diana. 2004. "Literary Reportage: Between and Beyond Art and Fact." In *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Ed. by M. Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co. pp 375-385.
- Pawson, Lara. 2010. "A Brilliant Writer Who Mistrusted Clarity." *The Guardian*. 4 March. Accessed 28 June 2011.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/04/ryszard-Kapuściński-angola>.
- Ryle, John. 2001. "At Play in the Bush of Ghosts". *Richardwebster.net*. 27 July. Accessed 28 May 2011. <http://www.richardwebster.net/johnryle.html>.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Weschler, Lawrence. 1990. "Allegories of Eastern Europe." In *The Threepenny Review* 43 p 20-23.
- Zilcosky, John. 2008. *Travel Writing: The Poetics and Politics of Modern Journey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.