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Kapuściński's collage journalism

The majority of readers and connoisseurs of Ryszard Kapuściński's work would agree that the journalist's literary creation is heterogeneous, hard to define and combines an interdisciplinary amalgam of genres. If we were to analyze the totality of his work, it is almost impossible to disregard Kapuściński's capacity to carefully examine and structure each one of his literary creations, meaning that there is not one published book similar to any other. The author's intuition as a journalist-anthropologist, combined with his poetic passion and academic formation as a historian, make this amalgam of genres that are explored in his texts even more evident. In spite of such an interdisciplinary focus, there is, however, a common theme, a natural logic or continuity that unites Kapuściński's philosophy on life and reportage. He is constantly asking the world questions, pondering interpretations, and uniting the pieces of reality that surround him. It is precisely this continuity and natural logic in his thought process that allows the author to reinterpret the image he previously formulated to the original responses he created, spiraling into a type of perpetual analysis of the world he observes and in which he participates. In this manner the author reflects his genuine interest in participating in the documentation and interpretation of history *in statu nascendi*.

Poetry and photography: two pieces of the collage

Kapuściński's work published in book form is considered a collage firstly because it is interdisciplinary, a quality that also reflects upon the author, who besides working as a journalist for a great deal of his life was also a poet and a photographer. It was because of his poetry that Kapuściński was first hired as a reporter and he expressed on numerous occasions how his real love for writing originated in this form. During

his early stages as a journalist, Kapuściński began experimenting with photography, an art form he later described as being very similar to poetry. Although he was never able to devote his professional life to any of these two aesthetics, his poetic sensibility and photographic eye are present in his narrative. His job as a reporter allowed him to capture a multidimensional reality through the data and feelings he obtained from his numerous travels and encounters with people.

Kapuściński valued photography as a personal interest more than a journalistic activity, although he did send his first photos to the Polish Press Agency to accompany his press releases. In this manner he was able to complement one aesthetic creation (narrative) with the other (photography), given that his highly demanding job did not allow him to dedicate more hours to developing his personal interests. When some of the photography of his journeys throughout Africa was published in book form, Kapuściński once again emphasized his anti-eurocentrist ideology of refraining from stereotypes and encountering people from an aesthetic and less journalistic point of view. In spite of not dedicating his life completely to any of the two tasks he greatly enjoyed, because of the duties he was obliged to fulfill as a foreign correspondent, the journalist always felt a great passion for both of these artistic channels.

Photography represented a channel in which he was able to capture and express the reality that he observed and that attracted him even more than registering mere journalistic facts. Poetry, on the other hand, represented his main creative interest, although it was an activity he engaged in less often. It was also more of an intimate experience through which he was able to explore his most inner feelings and thoughts. The principal interdisciplinary influences in his work are therefore these two art forms that complement each other.

The effort engaged in capturing a good photography and the sensation that one experiences are very similar to those experienced when writing a good poem. Both require the same amount of concentration, persistence and imagination ... Kapuściński's photos certainly possess an intensity influenced by his own poetic force. A perfect example of the union between photography and poetry is the image in which he captures a group of svelte Sudanese woman dressed in sack material that had previously contained food products brought by humanitarian organizations ... Now we are able to understand his decision ... the women pose as a testimony that conveys the world's conscience and awake a feeling of responsibility for the damned.¹

It is important here to put special emphasis on how Kapuściński's creative talent and passion originated in poetry, which he considered to be the maximum expression of language and the noblest manner in which to capture the essence of life and intimate feelings. However, he believed that finding the perfect word required long hours, a task that his job as a correspondent did not allow him to engage in. Because his narrative work's composition is similar to that of a collage, it is interesting to ana-

¹ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziadek, *Kapuscinski Una biografia literaria*, Madrid 2010, p. 346.

lyze to what degree his other talents and artistic hobbies, meaning photography and poetry, influenced his reportage.

The poetry collected in *I Wrote Stone* is a modest complement, a suggestion, the margin of the author's basic work, although it should also be highly valued, because of its elaborate and carefully selected, mature and wise nature, which allows us to meet another face of the *Travels with Herodotus*' author.²

Kapuściński's poetic work therefore forms a very important piece of the author's collage, mainly because the themes he explores also appear in his other artistic demonstrations. Some of these themes are: introspections into his past, scenes, his own philosophical reflections, states of mind, observations and world analysis, death and bits and pieces of here and there. There is, however, a significant difference in the way the author approaches his feelings. In his reportage, Kapuściński appears as a man who, in spite of the difficulties he encounters, is able to escape death and surrender. Contrary to this, his poetic voice is much more fragile and even weak.

In Ryszard Kapuściński's poems — contrary to his prose — one is able to observe a dramatic surrender before the impenetrable and incomprehensible nature of the world. The master of reportage and faithful chronicler, who possesses the extraordinary ability to explain the world in such a clear manner, expresses in his lyrics his helplessness with respect to this world.³

It is through his poetry that we are able to meet a new Kapuściński, who allows us to obtain a better understanding of the totality of his collage.

I have refrained so much from myself
that I am now unable to say anything
about myself
nor about how I feel
when I get wet under the rain
nor when I turn into
a strand of dry grass
burned by the sun
I am unable to find
myself
and describe this character
name him
assure myself
that he exists⁴

Kapuściński wrote poetry because he understood that some feelings could only be expressed through this channel. He recognized his profession as a reporter, although his true vocation was that of a poet. Shortly before his death in an interview with a Polish poet, Jarosław Mikołajewski, he said:

² Ibid., p. 344.

³ Ibid., p. 348.

⁴ R. Kapuściński, *Poesía completa*, Madrid 2008, p. 217.

For me, writing poetry is a luxury that I am able to allow myself on rare occasions. Through poetry we are able to find ourselves in the faces of others in a way that we never thought could exist before we sit and write something down on a piece of paper. Writing poetry is a sort of discovery highly valued about oneself and for oneself. It's a strange and precious sensation.⁵

Although it is very likely that Kapuściński would have liked to dedicate his life fully to poetry, this was never an option for him. His professional life, the style of journalism he developed, and the multiple travels he engaged in constitute the main channel in which he is able to reunite material for his collage. Not only did his personal and professional life become the core material for his work, but he himself was also converted many times into the main protagonist of his texts. In this manner the journalist was able to see the Polish experience reflected in everyday problems of humanity in the countries he visited. This added value provides an ethical and universal criterion, which is worth pointing out.

In 1981, during an interview with a journalist from “Sztandar Ludu” newspaper, Kapuściński confesses that in spite of finding himself in Africa, Latin America or Asia, he never really abandoned Poland. He always kept Polish readers in mind and tried to find universal symbols in the themes he explored that would hold some understanding and meaning for them in their own realities. The axis of Kapuściński's collage is therefore the Polish experience, his experience.

As a Polish journalist deeply connected to my land, I have always tried to search for and describe the young who struggle and fight for independence, for their dignity... people who were willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause. This is the central theme around *Chrystus z karabinem na ramieniu* and *Wojna futbolowa*. Therefore, originally, the world information revealed there was not abstract, but according to me, it was necessary information for readers, especially the young because it awakes in them a spirit of compromise and activity.⁶

History and the social sciences: two more portions

Kapuściński's need to reflect his vision of the world alongside his most intimate experiences faithfully reveals to readers who this author really was and what the true themes behind his books are. Formed under a model of the French historical school of *Les Annales* at the University of Warsaw, Kapuściński was always influenced by this discipline and the historical construction of reality based on small details, observation, and intuition. It did not take long for him to reveal a genuine interest in participating in history as it unfolds *in statu nascendi*.

The social participant observation exercise makes Kapuscinski transcend the journalism sphere to employ knowledge-construction praxis into the divulgation of history. The master produces a type

⁵ A. Murcia Soriano, *Poesía completa...*, p. 10.

⁶ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziadek, op. cit., p. 299.

of reportage that is an important source in the construction of historical, social, and cultural conscience for many people.

His books are the product of the author's travels to distant lands during an incredibly important historical era: the liberation of many ex-European colonies in Africa and other developing countries. His collage reportage is constructed on individual and social accounts of persons and ideologies, and combined with philosophical reflections rooting from his experiences living in these nations as a foreign correspondent. Moreover, the author's books deal with factual accounts and contribute historical information to readers.

...being a historian is my job ... studying history in the moment it is being developed is known as journalism ... every journalist is also a historian. What he or she does is investigate, explore and describe reality as it develops. Possessing wisdom and a historical intuition is a fundamental quality for every journalist ... Good journalism not only describes an event, but also provides an explanation of why it has taken place; bad journalism, on the other hand, only provides a description of the event excluding any connection with or reference to its historical context. Here we find the mere development of an event but are unaware of its causes or precedents. History simply responds to the question: "why?"⁷

Kapuściński adopts several literary postures throughout his career. His human approximation to history is based on the certainty that there are no absolute historical-scientific laws and this is why he carries out what he thinks the majority of contemporary journalists, pressured (with the need) to obtain quick results, do not do: look for the truth.⁸ According to Kapuściński's biographers, these attitudes can be linked to a genre known as *political fiction*, in which different conflicts and events are constructed based on a detailed account from start to end, without necessarily following an exact chronological order. It is evident that Kapuściński's intention is to capture the real causes behind historical processes, rather than focus on dates and detailed accounts of mere facts.

The first of [his attitudes] can be considered an inclination to analyze the mechanisms of phenomena such as revolts, revolutions, or coup d'états stemming from their internal logic, dynamics, the causes of victory or defeat, etc.⁹ ... This analytical attitude was followed by another inclination known as the expert attitude, although more so as a committed expert who prepares the analysis of these problems, following a structure similar to opinion journalism.¹⁰

Later on in his career, Kapuściński was considered to be an expert on topics concerning the Third World, especially Africa, a difficult task to take upon because of this continent's intricate cultural and political realities, sometimes impossible to decipher,

⁷ R. Kapuściński, *Los cínicos no sirven para este oficio: sobre el buen periodismo*, Barcelona 2002, p. 58.

⁸ R.D. Torres Kumbrian, *Kapuscinski o la evolución social de la otredad en statu nascendi*, "Cuaderno de Comunicación Ryszard Kapuscinski" 1, 2009, Compobell, S.L. Murcia, p. 16.

⁹ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziatek, op. cit., p. 143.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

and also because he was the only foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency in the whole continent. From this moment on another one of the fundamental pieces of his collage begins to develop: the influence of social sciences, especially fields such as sociology, anthropology, political science and ethnography, among others. This interdisciplinary influence is clearly noted in his dispatches in book form and is intertwined with romantic imagery, dialogues, character analysis, a keen reporter eye, an ethnographic insight and his more intimate reflections.

His orthodox epistemological, as well as theoretical and methodological decisions are ignored for a practice more focused on social research based on unorthodox theoretical traditions such as hermeneutics, phenomenology and interpretative reasoning. Kapuściński is able to access knowledge based on interpretative construction of life in its most profound social and cultural meanings.¹¹

Kapuściński's analytic insight as a social science influenced journalist is witnessed through his ample knowledge on socio-historical processes and political analysis. But rather than providing facts and never-ending analyses, the author's authoritarian voice and omnipresence provoke a sensation of proximity with his readers. Kapuściński does not construct himself as a hero, but more like an ordinary man of skin and bones, who is weak, occasionally suffers from physical or mental illness and solitude, all in the name of truth and to give voice to those who lack it.

His work methodology is based on communication penetrated by empathy, manifested as a methodology pertaining to social participant observation. The results are texts that translate other people's and his conflicts into a code that makes possible communication exempt from cultural, ethnocentric or ideological discrimination.¹²

As a weaver of genres such as journalism, literature, political science, ethnography and philosophy, among others, Kapuściński gives life to a new literary invention. His reportage is reflexive, intuitive and even philosophical, because it tries to order reality through a mental exercise that reaches the depth of events. Not only do we understand what events take place in his chronicles, but also why they occur.

Kapuściński represents an embodiment of history and journalism, because in his books he is not only able to provide readers with an explanation of a social reality constructed by stories of individual protagonists, but also provide an insight into the past and the future of these events based on his own personal history. "His own autobiography serves him as a historical reference together with in-depth documentation and reflections regarding events and registered locations," wrote the Mexican journalist Jose Garza in "Claves de Razón Práctica" magazine.¹³

It is extremely hard to outline where the job of a historian ends and where that of a journalist begins. The present is continuously in the process of becoming the past. History's borderline ends with today's

¹¹ R.D. Torres Kumbrian, op. cit., p. 16.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ J. Garza, *Ryszard Kapuściński: viaje al testigo del (tercer) mundo*, "Claves de Razón Práctica" 136, 2003, p. 58.

newspaper. An efficient journalist launches inquisitive insight over his shoulder towards the past, while a good historian raises his sight from the page to observe the world surrounding him.¹⁴

A Filmmaker's Eye

The aforementioned creative developments are not the only interdisciplinary genres that the author combines in his collage. Some aesthetic resources and techniques common to cinema are also employed in Kapuściński's work. The Rashōmon technique, applied by a Japanese filmmaker, Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998) is a clear example. By putting this multifocal technique into practice, Kapuściński is able to give life to a fragmented narrative and illustrate a story rich in tones. Similarly to Kurosawa, the journalist employs several documentary materials from different sources that he collects through interviews and fieldwork. The result is a cohesive composition that is able to portray a story from different points of view. *The Emperor* is a classic example to illustrate how Kapuściński uses the voices of numerous protagonists to recreate Haile Selassie's imperial court.

The multiplication of points of view avoids the risk of portraying one sole voice. This way the reader obtains information from several channels, some complementary, some contrasting, and the reportage in itself becomes polyhedron and polyphonic.¹⁵

According to Kapuściński's biographers, the cinematographic resources the journalist utilizes apply not only to the way he organizes his material, but also to the way he presents events.

Kapuściński employs diverse narrative planes, some taken from far, which remind many of the general takes in films, the use of zoom, and first hand shots aimed at focusing on carefully selected details. The best example to illustrate these techniques comes from a reportage collected in *Sha of Shahs* that describes a massacre that took place in the sacred city of Qom, which was the outbreak of a revolution.¹⁶

The testimony of Mahmud, one of the protagonists in the book, is narrated using the inverted pyramid technique applied in journalism. Moments after, the author transforms himself into one of the characters and narrates the same event from the perspective of a person who lives elsewhere and provides cultural symbols that help the reader obtain a better understanding of the situation.

Kapuściński clarifies what connotations he carries for calling someone a "foreigner" among the Muslims and explains why his use of the word towards Jomeini caused such a negative reaction among his

¹⁴ P. Johnson, *Periodistas e historiadores*, "Revista Periodismo Literario", <http://www.saladeprensa.org/art765.htm> (date of access: 4 September 2009).

¹⁵ A. Chillón, *Literatura y periodismo: una tradición de relaciones promiscuas*, Barcelona 1999, p. 350.

¹⁶ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziatek, op. cit., p. 272.

supporters. The author observes the most important stages of this event attentively, and makes clarifications, reflexions, and draws conclusions.¹⁷

Later, the narrative lens moves on to another scene in which a confrontation has staged between a policeman and a demonstrator. A detailed physical description of both of these subjects' faces is provided, observed up close and personal by the narrator-protagonist. The scene finally leads way to the central theme of the book: the collapse of Sha Reza Pahlevi's regime and Jomeini's revolution.

Literary composition

The search for explanations and the descriptive narrative of this author are discovered in many ways. According to some critics, Kapuściński's books develop a genre similar to New Journalism. Others classify it as creative non-fiction, magic or literary journalism. Kapuściński called his reportages "texts." In an interview with Stanislaw Beres, the author stated:

It does not worry me at all what kind of literary genre will be developed in my books. I just focus on writing a text that according to my standards and experience will be the closest and most faithful account of what I have observed. The way in which it will be classified or what name it will be given is a task I leave to critics and researchers.¹⁸

In spite of the criticism Kapuściński has received for excluding dates and names, confusing the order of events, or even eliminating historical moments from his reportage, the author's work was not created with the purpose of serving as a historical-journalistic guide. In an interview included in *El mundo de hoy* Kapuściński states that he always avoided writing about mere facts in his books, and readers who are interested in them would therefore have to access a library or a newspaper archive, rather than his books.

Many people advised me to change the way I write and to explore more adventurous or sensationalist topics. Faithful to my motif, I rejected all of their recommendations keeping in mind that I had to be self-confident that one day there would be more readers willing to recognize and enjoy this type of literature. I knew that my books were different because they did not fall into the classic reportage section, nor was it traditional storytelling. I was aware that most readers were not ready for something like this because most novelties are hard to swallow.¹⁹

The journalist would frequently argue that the stories captured in his books were the result of travels and not inventions from his imagination: "I have always tried to create a new literary genre: something that was neither the typical reportage, nor

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 351.

¹⁹ R. Kapuściński, *El mundo de hoy: autorretrato de un reporter*, Barcelona 2004, p. 26.

fiction ... my efforts are directed towards creating reportage more like essays.”²⁰ Even the techniques and analysis he uses to describe the causes and reasons behind the events he witnesses are closer linked to those employed in literary essays than in journalism. For instance, Kapuściński did not believe in interviewing his work subjects in the pure journalistic sense of the word. His note taking was often done in solitude and he mostly relied on his memory more than on his field notes. Instead of using a tape recorder or writing down the conversations he held with his informants, the journalist preferred capturing the essence of a moment, and as part of his narrative methodology he often attributed thoughts and emotions to his subjects without formally interviewing them. In one of his articles, Aucoin provides an example of how Kapuściński, being a journalist directly immersed in the reality of his informants for so many years, dared to present events and emotions from his informants' point of view. “The Emperor never heard the aristocratic cries or the whispers of the universe because he believed all extremes were harmful and unnatural.”²¹ It is possible to assume that in this way Kapuściński adopted an approach of an omnipresent narrator who provides analyses of reality without necessarily attributing them to anyone. Moreover, he constructs metaphors based on these decompositions that he creates from the fragments of his collage. The essences of these fragments are bits and pieces that he has researched, witnessed, and/or heard from the stories of his informants. Kapuściński creates situations in which his presence is unnoticed and his informants pose naturally, allowing him to decipher what they say and how they say it. It is precisely this interpretative tone and the qualitative social sciences' focused methodology he applies in his collage that allows him to describe and interpret the social and cultural lives of his informants.

Another one of the literary techniques he applies is the point of departure he carefully selects to begin his stories, which is always based on a small detail. In *The Emperor*, for instance, he mentions the small Japanese dog that belonged to King Selassie. This particular detail is especially important and serves as a greater metaphor to illustrate and understand the reality inside Selassie's imperial court. “In each one of my texts I seek to discover, capture, and reflect the *quid* or essence of the event or phenomenon I describe.”²² More than exploring any literary genre in particular, Kapuściński's work causes a more in-depth effect on the readers, which makes them reflect about universal truths. His documented base is solid and his unconventional journalistic prose is able to dispense lists of dates, characters and precise facts when unnecessary.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

²¹ J. Aucoin, *Epistemic responsibility and narrative theory: The literary journalism of Ryszard Kapuściński*, “Journalism” 2, 2001, p. 3.

²² R. Kapuściński, *El mundo de hoy...*, p. 15.

The inherent risks of storytelling in this manner are great, although this method allows Kapuściński to reach a different kind of knowledge compared with the techniques and origins of orthodox documentation. Historic truth is not the only goal the author aspires to, but rather a “poetic and essential truth” obtained through fabrication.²³

It is important to underline that, in spite of the controversy surrounding the author’s alleged fabrication in his storytelling, Kapuściński’s collage journalism defends a solid ethical pillar. The author does not make the reader question the aspects of methodology he has employed. Instead, he explains and provides a detailed account of his fieldwork and (imperfect) documentation process. Moreover, he does not draw conclusions in his narration, but rather leaves the reader to reach his or her own. On several occasions he states: “A journalist’s biggest challenge is achieving excellence professionally and ethically.”²⁴

In his article, Aucoin chooses Kapuściński’s work as a way of evaluating how ethics in journalism and the use of literary techniques come into play. Similar to the works pertaining to New Journalism developed in the United States, Kapuściński’s texts combine emotions with internal dialogues pertaining to real people and historical events, and see the function of journalism as a channel to communicate impressions, ideas, and topics that interest a greater universal audience. Moreover, Kapuściński’s collage journalism is able to perfectly amalgamate these elements through his use of symbols and cultural mythology. According to the narrative theory, “any imposition of narration is a moral act that becomes fictionalized to some degree.”²⁵ It is clear that, to some extent, Kapuściński’s work goes against the precision standards of this theory because it applies scenes, internal and external dialogues, composite characters, and on some occasions, even attributes thoughts and feelings to characters who have not directly stated them. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that one of the elements that most characterizes Kapuściński’s reportage is his own analytic, truthful, objective, and omnipresent voice. In *El mundo de hoy* he stated: “In everything I do I try to speak with my own voice, a personal, toned down and soft voice. I do not know how to shout.”²⁶

Analysis of three of Kapuściński’s most important books

In order to obtain a better understanding of his collage journalism and because of the fact that each reportage is dissimilar to others, some of the author’s most important dispatches converted to a book form will be analyzed. It is important to underline

²³ A. Chillón, op. cit., p. 306.

²⁴ Quote taken from “Cuaderno de Comunicación Ryszard Kapuscinski” 1, 2009, Universidad Miguel Hernández, p. 3.

²⁵ J. Aucoin, op. cit., p. 8.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

the fact that Kapuściński refrained from differentiating his occupations as a journalist, writer and reporter, but rather merged the three into one. He considered himself to be a cultural translator more than anything else and this philosophy of life is what shapes his collage reportage. Through his texts his goal is to transmit the truest, least partial, and most authentic view of the world possible, refraining from stereotypes and by not just “covering” the Third World as a reporter, but understanding and getting to know these nations and their people.

In several interviews he insisted on the fact that his narrative methodology was based on improvisation more than pondering about an exact genre to develop in his texts. “I select different resources and channels without questioning which classification they belong to (this is the duty of the critics) and with the purpose of finding the best way possible to express what I wish to do in that specific moment.”²⁷ The result of this frame of mind is Kapuściński's capacity to combine poetry with travel chronicles, ethnography, and political science-oriented analysis of the world through acute antennae into his collage writing.

Mr. Kapuściński rarely loses affection for the people whose life testimonies he collects or towards his impression about the African spectacle, its size, oceanic variety, the beauty of its surroundings, the heavy-weighting patience and spirituality ... By employing his characteristic style that gives life to small fragments and episodes, Kapuściński unleashes a continent that slowly begins suffering the disastrous effects of a governmental mafia, foreign aid dependence, assassinating tyrannies, and an urban frenetic and unemployed population.²⁸

The Soccer War

If we were to select one of the author's most personal books where he creates a type of reportage more linked with his own biography, without a doubt *The Soccer War* would fall under this category. In spite of being a difficult book to classify, this diary-like text reflects the author's intimate and in-depth reflections during his voyages around the world. His intercontinental travels are therefore more like voyages into his own interior that change with every new location and every story.

Upon its publication, *The Soccer War* was considered an exception in the Polish reportage panorama. Its composite structure surprised many, although in spite of this, readers valued its internal homogeneity, something that interested the writer greatly.²⁹

It is precisely this composite structure made up of even pieces that are held together by a systemized structure that gives the book an unequalled value.

²⁷ R. Kapuściński, *El mundo de hoy...*, p. 83.

²⁸ R. Bernstein, *Books of the Times: Africa, a Mosaic of Mystery and Sorrow*, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res> (date of access: 20 September 2010).

²⁹ Ibid.

In none of Kapuściński's previous books had it been possible to perceive the world as a unified whole. With *The Soccer War* however, he has made us perceive that there is a common unifying bond between the appearance of a street in Guatemala during the kidnapping of Karl von Spreti, the inhabited Kinshasa, the closing arches of Luanda, and a sunny alley in Tbilisi ...³⁰

In an article published by the Polish author Andrzej Pawluczuk in 1979, Kapuściński reconstructs his own biography while taking into consideration the changing processes of history and drawing a parallel line between history's identity and his own. His stories are interconnected by his own dominating, penetrating and authoritarian voice, that is present in his news coverage as another character in the story. Readers are therefore able to perceive the world through the author's eyes, experience, and subjectivity. It is possible to say then that the underlying uniting element of this book is Kapuściński's own analytic voice.

What guided Kapuściński was probably his insatiable thirst of knowing that he converts a reporter's travels into a vivid process of knowledge acquisition. Stimulated by the impulses he finds along his path, the writer is able to find a hidden truth through his own personal value, sacrifices and deprivations ...³¹

His participation and involvement on many occasions appears to be separate from the real chronology and narration of the events he tells in his chronicles. It seems that the documentation of the reality he observes is placed on the second level, while the author's literary pen and the aesthetic resources he employs, such as allegories of his own life, occupy the first. His narrative methodology is comparable to that of a face worker or an artist assembling pieces of a collage to form a new art form.

In spite of employing many narrative techniques common to literature and New Journalism in his books, Kapuściński's work as a whole is completely heterogeneous. *Another Day of Life*, for example, is more of an intimate journal than a reporting product. *The Soccer War*, on the other hand, includes a series of journalistic chronicles combined with ethnographic field work, and *The Shadow of the Sun* incorporates elements of all of the mentioned genres, and therefore seems to be more of a "final synthesis of the author's relationship with Africa."³² Here Kapuściński reveals himself as an anthropologist who encounters more spiritual experiences and tries to find cultural meanings and symbolisms behind them. Through the lessons he learns from encountering different kinds of people and cultures we are able to return to one of the main themes pertaining to his work: "overcoming obstacles that separate us from others is possible through patience in understanding their customs, learning to respect them, and refraining from obvious forms of prejudice."³³

³⁰ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziatek, op. cit., pp. 243, 244.

³¹ Ibid., p. 111.

³² R. Kapuściński, *Los cínicos...*, p. 14.

³³ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziatek, op. cit., p. 398.

Another Day of Life

In *Another Day of Life* Kapuściński gives life to his experiences while covering Angola's war of independence in 1975 as, according to the author, the only Eastern European reporter to be present in the country during this time. Through this book we are able to observe how Kapuściński's aesthetic perception and most intimate feelings are much more relevant than the chronology of events he covers. *Another Day of Life* is a collage in itself because it contains literary metaphors about reality and the extreme solitude experienced by a war reporter who takes his readers by the hand and shows them the battlefield, the tragic farewells between the people he meets along the way, and the experiences of travelling into the depths of an African country at war. The methodology employed in this book is peculiar because the narrative voice constantly changes, reflecting Kapuściński's own confusion, isolation and distraught. Sometimes he narrates in first person and quickly intertwines interviews with soldiers, while excluding important details.

I started fighting ten years ago in Commander Batalha's outpost located in east Angola. We had to learn the languages of those tribes and follow their traditions. It was the condition we were given to survive, otherwise, we would have been treated as foreigners who invaded their land ... it had already gotten dark when I went to the market. There were only abandoned houses with no lights and broken windows around. A couple of dogs were near a well. A cow without an owner next to the grass...³⁴

Kapuściński's role in Luanda transcends that of a foreign correspondent. His support for the MPLA³⁵ is evident, to the point that he even befriended many members of this organization. "Even in the first pages of the book there are traces of this fascination where the reporter gives life to an expressive military style. He even names the opposition, »enemies,« mentions communist assassinations, and other aggressions carried out by the adversaries."³⁶ His apparent approximation with the war and solidarity with one of the parties involved increases the author's vulnerability. Kapuściński's biographers consider this reportage to be an "irregular book," lacking a defined structure or style. The first part appears to follow the author's traditional collage techniques, while in the second, Kapuściński experiments with a politically-inclined literary style containing detailed descriptions and metaphors pertaining to colonialism and the combatants of this struggle.

The chapter titled *Scenes on the Frontline* (the second one in the book) belongs almost completely to the literary creation that is observed in *Chrystus z karabinem na ramieniu*. This similarity is noticed

³⁴ R. Kapuściński, *Un día más con vida*, Barcelona 2005, pp. 47–53.

³⁵ The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola Labour Party, an organization backed by the USSR that fought against Portugal during the war of independence (1961–1974 and later from 1975–2002).

³⁶ B. Nowacka, Z. Ziadek, op. cit., p. 226.

particularly among his selection of characters, most of whom are young free-spirited ideological optimist freedom fighters, sincerely committed to the idea of revolution.³⁷

The book not only reflects the state of decomposition in which the country found itself during a war that seemed interminable, but also the author's own desperate state. In this way he personifies his main character, whose reality is formed by pieces and is terribly affected by a profound sense of solitude. His voice is strongly opinionated, and hardly unbiased or journalistic. On several occasions, for example, he expresses his dislike for the United States government policies and deems the "Yankee imperialism" responsible for many of the dictatorships in developing countries.

Sha of Shahs

Sha of Shahs is a book almost completely narrated as a collage, although its structure is monothematic. Its pages convey the experience of a reporter who confronts several cultural and linguistic barriers when trying to interpret a crucial moment in the political history of Iran. It combines writing techniques of investigative reportage, journalistic chronicles, political analysis, poetry, and more introspective stories of a traveler. The story is narrated in first person and conveys Kapuściński's experience as a reporter who is trying to convey an undecipherable reality with an extremely limited number of sources. The book and his version are therefore imperfect and incomplete. According to Kapuściński's biographers, the book lacks journalistic value and suffers from several structural errors.

The first difficulty is the richness in sources, although sometimes authentic, others are simply adulterated fragments of reality. The reporter unfolds his workshop in front of us, as though he were a true artisan: photographs in different sizes, cassettes, eight millimeter film, bulletins, photocopies of pamphlets, everything stacked and mixed up as though it were in an old market, lacking any type of order or arrangement.³⁸

This disorder of sources and material is easily identifiable and can be perceived from the very beginning of the text through the great deal of inconclusive phrases capable of affecting the total meaning of the book. The author even admits his personal frustration and pandemonium every time he mentions the untidy appearance of his hotel room covered in newspaper cutouts and other documents. Kapuściński's biographers sustain that the reason behind the author's lack of order could have been the profound solitude he experienced during his stay in the Islamic country. Moreover, Jomeini had practically blocked the entrance of foreigners into the country and in spite of the fact that Kapuściński had already found himself inside, his chances

³⁷ Ibid., p. 228.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 266.

of holding conversations or interviews with local people were practically none. The language barrier was his first obstacle, and in the second place, an attitude of indifference or disinterest common among the locals. Due to these reasons, the reporter was forced to interpret other signs and put his skills and talent into play as a cultural translator.

The analysis of the Islamic revolution conveyed in the book is bipartite. On the one hand, the first part is written using more journalistic terms in the form of news dispatches and chronicles where information is ordered analytically. The second part of the book, however, is narrated in a much more literary tone and lacks dates, time precision, and detailed events. *Sha of Shahs* reveals to be above everything else a memory enriched with visual images that trace Iran's history throughout the most significant moments of the country's dynasties and the story behind Jomeini's revolution, which almost appear to be footage from a film.

The central theme that ties the book together is therefore the ordering of materials and the treatment that is given to his informants, the need to make speculations. *Sha of Shahs* is the story of a reporter and the problems he confronts trying to interpret the event in history that was taking place during that time.³⁹

One of the narrative techniques presented in this book that is worth pointing out is the author's fictionalization when recreating scenes and dialogues. There is a particular scene when Shah Nasr-ed-Din's assassin is being detained. This event took place in 1896 and it is evident that Kapuściński did not witness it first-hand, although the literary techniques he employs in his reportage make it seem as though he was present at the moment.

Both this book and *The Emperor* are fables illustrating totalitarian power centered around two figures who were the last emperors of the modern era: Mohammad Reza Pahlevi in Iran and Haile Selassie in Ethiopia. However, a differentiating element between the two is that *Sha of Shahs* provides readers with a more historical and journalistic account of that precise historical moment, or at least its first part. Both the collapse of a regime inside the forces imposed by a new order and the development and analysis of the conflict surrounding both parties are portrayed. Moreover, the book presents the final confrontation between these two forces, the history of the dynasty, as well as the opposition. Through his reporter lens and his capacity to notice the smallest details, Kapuściński is able to present a vivid image of the Iranian revolution. The story's dynamic and detailed narration, his analysis of the revolution and socio-historic contribution, a reflexive tone, and fragments of personal and intimate judgment, are what makes this book a result of his collage reportage. Moreover, another central theme is observed: Kapuściński's value for comprehending other people in spite of cultural and linguistic barriers.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 228.

Conclusions

Kapuściński's work bravely photographs the socio-political realities of his voyages, while also conveying the author's intimate experience in the field. His narrative style and journalistic methodology contribute an authentic testimony. His authoritarian voice is his principal shield of truthfulness throughout his work, and also reflects his perfect command of the language and the ethics of this discipline. Kapuściński's constant evocations of the past he presents, such as his nostalgia for war and the ever present Polish experience convert his readers into active protagonists of his personal experiences regarding his individual memory.

Usually it appears as a reaction to what the writer participates in, as a spontaneous complement of this participation, which sometimes serves as an eloquent letter of presentation towards the people whom he writes about. It is his way of showing that he is in his right and is competitive enough to write about his informants' issues. These discourses in his reportage, either factitious or not, are where we begin to understand the nature, significance, and the permanence of his experiences with war.⁴⁰

The genre that Kapuściński develops is hard to categorize, although it is possible to trace some of his principal influences that form the totality of his interdisciplinary collage. Poetry and photography are recognized as two art forms that influence the writer's narrative methodology and reporter eye from the very beginning of his career. In the second place, Kapuściński's passion for history, the discipline in which he was formed, and other related fields such as political science, anthropology and ethnography are also evident in his reporter methodology and field participant observation techniques. Film constitutes the third piece of Kapuściński's collage because of the fact that the author employs several multifocal techniques also explored by movie directors such as the renowned Akira Kurosawa. In the fourth place, there is no doubt that literature and ethics also play a fundamental role in Kapuściński's books. His valorization regarding other people and the epistemological responsibility involved in these encounters accompany the writer throughout his voyages and are also evident in his writing.

Another conclusion that this research draws is that although the author's techniques and topics vary, his stance regarding his reader is constant throughout his books. It is the reader's personal decision and capacity to judge for himself who Kapuściński really was and what the true moral and ethical value of his journalistic work is. In the majority of his dispatches turned into book form, the author testifies to his process of reporter coverage by providing apparent keys regarding his methodology and norms in the field, discussing his actions, reactions, prejudices, imperfections, and emotions. His techniques and biases are presented to his readers in a transparent manner, allowing them to enter an open forum and judge the credibility of his posture and his chronicles for themselves.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 222.

Finally, it is complicated to analyze Kapuściński's work in general terms, due to its heterogeneity and the fact that none of his books are similar to one another. This is the reason why we have provided a brief analysis of the three of the author's books: *The Soccer War*, *Another Day of Life*, and *Sha of Shahs*. The first one represents a more personal text in the form of a diary where biographical chronicles and the author's intimate ideas are observed. In *Another Day of Life*, on the other hand, the author gives expression to some of his experiences as a war correspondent during the war of independence in Angola (1975), and the informants, mostly soldiers, whom he meets along the way. Here the author's role overlaps with that of a reporter because of the fact that his relationships with these informants become biased and familiar in nature. Kapuściński clearly manifests his ideological and political inclination during this turmoil. The third book that was brought into light was *Sha of Shahs*, characterized by a monothematic and unipartisan structure, and in which the Islamic revolution of Iran under the rule of Sha Reza Pahlevi is interpreted. This book also employs the collage techniques by combining historical analysis with personal reflexions.