

**Beata Nowacka**

### *In the Laboratory of the Reportage*

*One must constantly read the monuments of the old Polish language, in order to  
refresh the language.*

*In fact, our current language appears to be old and immemorial towards the actual  
creativity, revealingly naming a lot of things for the first time <sup>1</sup>.*

#### **KEY WORDS**

reportage, literary stylization, Saxon period, biography of Ryszard Kapuściński

#### **ABSTRACT**

The presented analysis of *The Emperor* by Ryszard Kapuściński contains a comparison of the first, printed in “Kultura” in 1978, version of the reportage with its final effect. A stylistic and linguistic analysis of the text takes into account the Saxon period (works of priest Baka) and its later evolution (*Trans-Atlantic* by Witold Gombrowicz). In the conclusion, the author critically refers to the reductionist interpretation of *The Emperor*, which, after the publication of Artur Domosławski’s *Kapuściński non-fiction*, became the dominating model of reading by the general public.

The role of language in reportage is still underestimated<sup>2</sup>, although it is invariably one of the few genres in which the origin is usually conversation – language material helps mediate information, identify the visuals of events, and identify values that construct the featured world. In the case of the ‘The Emperor’ Ryszard Kapuściński, his role, however, goes far beyond the standard obligations towards the genre – a trite function definitely gives way to the place of a creative one. Language does not merely serve as a standard tool for communication – it is, above all, a crafted creation, full of formative inventiveness, and subject to numerous archaic treatments. Magdalena Horodecka imaginatively reconstructed

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<sup>1</sup> M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki 1958–1965* [Diaries 1958–1965], Warszawa 1988, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> The value of the linguistic side of the reportage is reminded by Jerzy Jarzębski, who stresses that this problem has also been omitted by the classic of the reportage theory – Jacek Maziarski, in a prepared password (*Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* [The Dictionary of Literary Genres], edited by G. Gazda, S. Tynecka-Makowska, Kraków 2006) – J. Jarzębski, *Reportaż jako spotkanie w języku* [Report as a Meeting in Language] [w:] *Spotkanie w twórczości Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego. Materiały z debat III Festiwalu Kultur Świata* [Meeting in the works of Ryszard Kapuściński. Materials from the Debates of the 3rd World Culture Festival], science editor M. Horodecka, Gdańsk 2009, p. 40–51.

the four planes, covered by the narrative. First, the innermost sphere is the language of Amharic – an official language of Ethiopia (the language of Kapuściński's limiters). Above it, there is a place for the English language, whose relics are preserved in text such as 'My dear brother', 'Mister Richard' (this is the language of some of the discussions and the translation of the guide, Teferra); they are imposed upon by the reporter's Polish language (to which he translated the raw material, collected in Ethiopia). At the limit, in the most available sphere to the reader, we are dealing with an original styling and literary ordering of the collected facts. A language of courtiers, it comes a long way from its original form, through the translation process – across two language systems and covered with a stylistic shine – it has also undergone additional, internal modifications. At the beginning, it was already subjected to distillation, as a result of which it was deprived of the clear characteristics of an individual. The final effect of this treatment is to obtain a uniform, separated voice – a language-mask, behind which, one, including an Ethiopian courtier and an allegory of Polish authorities from the 70's can find a safety shelter.<sup>3</sup>

Fine examples of this unique literary process can be traced, comparing two versions of the book – the one printed in 1978 in the weekly magazine, titled 'Kultura' ('Culture'), and its final form. This comparison will indeed help to see how the need for literature gradually grew in the author, but, however, it must be explicitly pointed out that the *'The Emperor'* was published in weekly intervals. In fact, from the first words is the finished work, which ultimately takes place without strong copyright interferences in the final version. Reading the cover already convinces us that it was indeed created in accordance with the original plan, however, it was a slightly different book: "We start printing the reportages by Ryszard Kapuściński from Ethiopia [...]. The first chapters of the series – a representation of the power of the *'The Emperor'*, aiming to collapse, are next devoted to the dramatic fate of the revolution, and finally – to the country's on-going civil war". The editor's announcement proves, however, that in the course of writing, the book has somehow left the author's hand, and so, he was only partially able to accomplish his purpose – post-revolutionary chaos is, after all, only a briefly described issue within the reportage.

By comparing two versions, one can find some significant convergences – the whole composition is identical, places of separation of the three parts are perfectly overlapped, and small shifts occur only in the titles of the chapters. The titles of the last two are unchanged,

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<sup>3</sup> More about the parabola of gierkowszczyzna, see: B. Nowacka, *Magiczne dziennikarstwo. Ryszard Kapuściński w oczach krytyków* [Magical Journalism. Ryszard Kapuściński in the Critics' Eyes], Katowice 2004 (edition 2 – 2006).

while the first got the new name (Throne), and its original, release version (*The Emperor*) went for the cover. In terms of language differences, one may observe a small number of amendments of various types. We find inflexional interferences: a variety of some names, such as: ‘Amhar’ to ‘Amhara’, ‘thieves – thieves’, and the lexical replacements of ‘you’ to ‘these’, ‘brown faces’ – ‘ebony faces’, ‘messing’ – ‘pushing’; ‘overacting’ – ‘joke’, ‘better run’ – ‘better disappear’, ‘who blew it’ – ‘who conspired’; the use of abbreviations and simplifications – [‘protecting against dust’] – ‘motorcycle glasses’, ‘device reading codes, assembled in the palace’ – ‘palace machine’. In the course of the work, of course, one removed literals, such as: ‘affranchised dignity’ – ‘got dignity’, ‘Prince of Kasa’ – ‘Prince of Kassa’. However, some proofreading interventions have caused damage to the text. Here is a inconspicuous change in the release of Agora (2008), aiming to replace a vowel with another one, which clearly distorts the logic of the text. Referring to the palace castling, being a consequence of suppression of the December’s revolt, Kapuściński writes in ‘Kultura’ (‘Culture’) ‘in this way the special man called the power, which in the last years of his reign supported the imperial seat, undercut by Germame’. In the final version, ‘last years’ (in Polish: ‘ostatnie lata’) was changed to ‘last summer’ (in Polish: ‘ostatnie lato’), which is a rather peculiar choice, considering that the revolt of Mengystu Nyujaj<sup>4</sup> and Germame Nyujaj took place not ‘last summer’ in the reign of the *The Emperor*, but fourteen years before its collapse<sup>5</sup>.

The final version also includes more significant changes – the most important is certainly a clear separation of the segment of the text using the italics, while in the press version, expressions of the reporter are not highlighted graphically. This lack of italicising has serious consequences; the reporter does not act as a distant observer, but by providing his comment using the R.K. initials, he becomes one of the dramatis personae of the last show of power. Thus, the idea of separating his voice in a graphic form is likely the result of a later process – already made from the perspective of planning a book version. Somehow different is the question of reducing the paragraphs, which would separate the statements of informants into a thematically coherent whole. The comparison of the two versions shows that the effect of narrative accumulation, obtained in the *The Emperor*, must have been born in the text’s creation stage, though not immediately. The first episode printed in Kultura (‘Culture’) still

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<sup>4</sup> Does not exist – neither in Polish nor in any other language one adopted transcription of Amharic language, in which Ethiopian names and people’s own names are written in Kapuściński’s report, therefore in the text one he consequently uses the transcription proposed by A. Bartnicki and J. Mantel-Niećko, *Historia Etiopii* [The History of Ethiopia], edition 2, amended and extended, Wrocław 1987.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kapuściński, *Cesarz* [The Emperor], Warszawa 2000, p. 77. One shall remember that it is worth nothing another good interference in the same edition: the change of the conjunction ‘because’ to ‘as’, p. 19.

retains the traditional system of paragraphs; only in the later episodes are there limitations to this valuable tool, and the shape of the expressions of courtiers in the form of a uniform stream. In the book, however, this mechanism has been consequently introduced from the first chapter<sup>6</sup>.

Parallel reading of both versions, initially developing in a quite agreeable manner, in time begins to show pronounced differences. Instead of cosmetic differences between the first chapters, the reader is able to find more and more examples of lexical accumulation. Here is a reporting phrase derived from the original version – “for the purpose of development”, in the book it has the form of literary enumeration: “to grow, overtake, chase”; quite clear words are now brightened by a lush style ‘[silent and secretly], correspondents were notified’; [‘viciously and vehemently], conspired’. ‘[wetted, depressed], a handful of nobles’, one will introduce simple sound systems ‘the success was achieved’ [and it was good]’, ‘the order of words will be presented with pleasure’ the greatest daredevil in the palace’ – ‘the daredevil, the greatest in the palace’, ‘we are brought by dishonour’ – ‘dishonour was brought on us’, ‘he disgraced himself to the world’ – ‘to the world he disgraced himself’. On the other hand, the poetics of excess does not govern the text in an absolute manner – after all, the final version contains quite a few deletions. Despite the impression of a lexical amplification, the proportions are carefully balanced. Probably due to the risk of redundancy, the text is deprived of a few verses of the text of biblical quotations, five mottos (from Andersen, Rabelais, Whitman, Baka, a fragment of a ballad from ‘Dziady’ by Adam Mickiewicz), and there is also the disappearing of several imaging expansions (e.g. the metaphor of two languages is significantly shorter), including official and private ones<sup>7</sup>.



It is time to process, however, to linguistic analysis of the material that was included in the final version. The primary source of literariness is of course the top layer of the text. In a pioneering article on the language of the *The Emperor*, Janina Fras meticulously tracked the various lexical operations. She proved that, although through the initial contact the text gives the impression of highly saturated archaisms, at a closer look one may notice significant examples of formative inventiveness and linguistic commonness. Neologisms are usually

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<sup>6</sup> Also noteworthy is the voice of the reporter, which in time adapted a somehow monotonous rhythm of speech of the courtiers. In the first instances of both versions, he still segments his statements, but towards the end, he somehow controls his tongue less, which is also accumulative, getting more similar to the language style of the palace magma.

<sup>7</sup> R. Kapuściński, *The Emperor...*, p. 89.

created in accordance with a derivation key – by adding suffixes: *-anie/-enie* (‘łokciowanie’, ‘kultowanie’); *-ość* (‘minusowość’, ‘oporność’); *-stwo* (‘pokłonictwo’, ‘pokornictwo’), *-owy* (in the names of pseudo-professions – ‘woreczkowy’, ‘poduszkowy’); *-ec* (‘nieopierzeniec’, ‘zgodowiec’) or prefix-suffix forms (‘roznabożniać się’, ‘dosłuszniać się’, ‘pokorumpować’). Kapuściński does not stop at the formative elaboration, but the newly created words are combined into fancy lexical structures – he creates antonymic pairs („od wszechmocności do niemocności”; „raz zwidnienie, raz ściemnienie”), with zest he constructs numerous repetitions („kręcenie, szwindlenie”, „w tym zapędzeniu, zarobieniu, zawirowaniu”), collects word-related nouns („Kiedyś przyjacielu, to było padanie-zapadanie, padanie-zatrącenie, w proch, w popiół-się-obrócenie, w drzącce, w dygotaniu, na ziemi leżenie”), introduces a number of synonymous combinations, sometimes oxymoron-related ones („była minusowość, w tym, co mówili nie mówiąc, w ich byciu nieobecnym, skurczonym, wyłączonym, w ich istnieniu wygaszonym, w ich myśleniu krótkodystansowym, niskopoprzeczkowym, w ich dłubaniu przyzagrodowym, małopoletkowym”), does not avoid complex terms („oddalenie się pokłonnie-tylno-kierunkowo”, „lokaj otwierająco-zamykający”; „cesarstwo bosonogie, chudobiedne”, „wewnątrzbrzusznie”) and finally – by recording the formative process – he reveals the mechanisms of derivation (e.g. „ludzie korkowi... nic nie uważają, ale liczą, że jak korek na wodzie, tak ich unosić będzie fala wydarzeń...”). In addition to the development of the sphere of formative innovations, Kapuściński willingly goes to the rich facilities of the former Polish language (‘fawory’, ‘superata’, ‘horrendum’, ‘molestia’), as well as native (‘gorliwe zabory’, ‘wydzierki’, ‘łupiskóry’, ‘zdolen’, ‘rozsierdzić się’, ‘sczeznać’), and he uses the old pronouns and particles with pleasure (‘ów’, ‘on’, ‘prawdać’, ‘toż’, ‘aliści’, ‘miast’). An interesting complement of *the ‘The Emperor’*, providing the free use of various layers of the Polish language, is not a small representation of the popular collocations („może dzięki temu ocalałem głowę”, „walnąć prosto z mostu”, „wyrzucił z traskiem na bruk”).

The language of the text, therefore, covers a sophisticated stylistic veil. It consists of intricate and formative structures, words being richly inlaid in systems of rhymes, rhythms and enumeration. Verbal accumulations, which are undoubtedly the favourite stylistic trick of Kapuściński, are not, however, a linguistic anarchy, but instead are a consistent system with a certain rigor. Its specificity is explained by Jerzy Jarzębski, using the image of baroque chaos in the famous metaphor of the departing city from the book, titled: ‘Another day of life’<sup>8</sup>: „pośród rzeczy panuje bałagan, podczas gdy pośród słów” – a specific order, the organization

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<sup>8</sup> R. Kapuściński, *Jeszcze dzień życia* [Another Day of Life], Warszawa 1976 [The collection of reportages from Angola].

of phonetic and rhythmic, parallelisms and symmetries. Kapuściński, however – although fascinated by the state of chaos and disintegration – also likes these moments, when a cosmic disorder results in a free order<sup>9</sup>. But just in *'The Emperor'* we are dealing with a slightly different procedure – here one can experience not a new quality, but rather a solidification of the old form; the language gradually becomes unreal, less and less adheres to the things, and after some time it becomes a dry, institutional gibberish that no longer communicates anything, but only calls a comic effect. The limit of absurdity are recent statements of the ruler, who, with a senile stubbornness repeats many times that to everybody, and so both the court dignitaries frightened and rebellious army, he: „pomyślności życzy”, to their matters, he „najwyższą wagę przywiązuje”, „z osobistą troską się odnosi”. The Emperor, wishing to lead the revolution that overthrows him, does not seem to realize that the interests of the recipients of his wishes are absolutely exclusive and his own words must inevitably turn against himself. The palace, normally functioning above and beyond the world of ordinary Ethiopians, now is even more unreal, and loses contact not only with the available reality, but also with the rules of common sense, gradually sinking into the abyss.

This feeling of an approaching tragedy is encoded in many ways; firstly by the narrative fairy, when the author uses a speech that is apparently subsidiary, multiplies different perspectives, uses verbal acrobatics, creating the impression of a growing noise, progressive dyspnoea, a murderous clinch. Another time, the readable signs of disaster bring forth Kapuściński's intertextual activities. Here, in the last days, the Emperor is patronized by Jeremiah, who, according to the opinion of the grandson of the King of kings, the prince Ermias Sahle-Selassje, was the most willingly read Bible book of the ruler<sup>10</sup>. Fragments of his prophecies and lamentations resound in the deserted palace's private chapel<sup>11</sup> – „Marnością są, a dziełem błędów; czasu nawiedzenia swego poginą” (*Proroctwo Jer.*, 10, 15), „Wspomnij, Panie! Na to, co nam się przydało: wejrzyj a obacz pohańbienie nasze” (*Treny Jer.*, 5, 1), „Ustało wesele serca naszego, płasanie nasze w kwilenie się obróciło. Spadła korona z głowy naszej” (*Treny Jer.* 5, 15–16a), „Dla tegoż mdłe jest serce nasze, dla tego zaćmione są oczy nasze” (*Treny Jer.*, 5, 17), „O, jakoż pośniedziało złoto! Zmieniło się wyborne złoto, rozmiotano kamienie świątynicy po rogach wszystkich ulic” (*Treny Jer.*, 4, 1),

<sup>9</sup> J. Jarzębski, *Reportaż jako spotkanie...*, [Report as a Meeting...], p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> Joanna Mieszko-Wiórkiewicz, „Cesarz” *nie jest o moim dziadku* [‘The Emperor’ is not about my grandfather], an interview with Ermias Sahle Selassje, „Rzeczpospolita” 3.04.2010, p. 12–13.

<sup>11</sup> All of the above-mentioned quotes were found in the popular and often reprinted Protestant Bible, first published in 1632 in Gdańsk, hence, its name comes from (Biblia Gdańska) *Biblia Święta, to jest Wszystkie Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Przymierza z żydowskiego i greckiego na polski pilnie i wiernie przetłumaczone* [The Holy Bible, that is the Whole Scripture of the Old and New Testaments diligently and faithfully translated from Hebrew and Greek into Polish], Wrocław 1855.

„Ci, którzy jadal potrawy rozkoszne, gniją na ulicach, a którzy byli wychowani w szkarłacie, przytulają się do gnoju” (*Treny Jer.*, 4, 5), „Widzisz wszystkę pomstę ich i wszystkie zamysły ich przeciwko mnie” (*Treny Jer.*, 3, 60; „jam zawżdy jest pieśnią ich” (*Treny Jer.*, 63b), „Wrzucali do dołu żywot mój, a przywalili mnie kamieniem” (*Treny Jer.*, 3, 53).

The biblical book of Jeremiah bears witness to the rich inner life of the prophet, who suffers a tragedy of misunderstanding, loneliness and rejection by his people. His uncompromising calls to the conversion and numerous accompanying persecution ends – unlike the biblical Job – a sense of total disaster: it did not help him to prevent the fall of Jerusalem, he did not preserve his nation against Babylonian captivity, the inevitable punishment will fall on the nation of Israel, and he will witness the destruction.<sup>12</sup> Giving the book a biblical context is not accidental – the helpless prophet, deeply loving his nation and weeping over his ingratitude, could be particularly close to the Emperor. The tragic hero of the biblical figure also induces another obvious association – such as a jeremiad, a song of a lament-related character, in which one lamented over the fall of the homeland, deplored over the timidity of the nation, and oversaw the back of freedom. This type of literary execution, although existing in other language areas (English. *jeremiad*, German. *Jeremiade*, French. *jérémiade*), was particularly popular, especially in post-partition Poland<sup>13</sup>.

*'The Emperor'*, however, refers to a slightly earlier era, the consequence of which are the jeremiads – to the infamous Saxon Times, most often identified with the downturn, backwardness and stupidity that led to the collapse of the state. About „Saxon stupidity” – the time, when „A Pole has become a caricature of a Pole”, Gombrowicz wrote: „Na dnie owego kontredansu opasłych szlachciurów, dostrzegać się daje rozpacz wskutek niemożności dotarcia do źródeł żywego wdzięku, to dramat istot zmuszonych zaspokajać się takimi namiastkami jak ceremoniał, honory, godności i wyładowywać się w uroczystym rytuale, podczas gdy obżarstwo, lubieżność i pycha nie znajdują już żadnego hamulca”<sup>14</sup>. Saxon context is clearly present in *the Emperor* by intertextual references (e.g. the motto of the encyclopaedia by Benedykt Chmielowski), and historical and cultural allusions, above all thanks to the linguistic styling. For centuries, the language of this time was an inexhaustible source of literary borrowings, which reliably made every text satisfactory with its firmness, the curt will be flowing, and nature will be expressive. Kapuściński's creditors, however,

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<sup>12</sup> See: *Księga Jeremiasza*, [The Book of Jeremiah], translation, introduction and comment: L. Stachowiak, Lublin 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See: A Czartoryski, *Bard polski*, wydał i wstępem poprzedził J. Kallenbach [Polish Bard, published and prefaced by J. Kallenbach], Brody 1912; K. Ujejski, *Skargi Jeremiego* [Jeremiah's Lamentations], Lipsk 1862.

<sup>14</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1956* [Diary 1953-1956], editor of the text: J. Błoński, [w:] titled: *Dzieła*, [Works], t. 7, Kraków 1989, p. 354–355.

shall be looked for in a number of literary epochs, knowing that the author is not only limited to the achievements of writing of Saxon times, but also using his later creative transformations (such as Sienkiewicz, Gombrowicz).

The Patron of Sarmatia's adventures in *the Emperor* is undoubtedly the priest Baka<sup>15</sup>. The authorship of an eighteenth-century poet who, for nearly two centuries, was regarded a leading scribe of Polish literature, is presented in the book in many ways – it is a valuable collection of juicy, striking phrases, rhythmic and rhyme borrowings, and sensual paintings kept in a climate of black, grotesque, baroque concepts evoking types of nostalgia, transience and decay. It is possible that Kapuściński owes Baka the inspiration for the creative, lexical transformations. Here is the fragment of the poem, titled: *Panom uwaga*<sup>16</sup>

Wy panowie  
Wy grandowie,  
Czy krzesłowi,  
Czy drążkowi

there occurs Baka's neologisms, such as – 'krzesłowi' ('zajmujący lepsze miejsca, senatorscy'), 'drążkowi' ('zajmujący gorsze miejsca, jak ptaki na drążku')<sup>17</sup>, which could inspire Kapuściński to create his own names for the bizarre palace pseudo-professions and courtly social circles ('poduszkowy', 'ściereczkowy', 'korkowy', 'kratowy' etc.).

If we use the experiment proposed by Witold Sadowski<sup>18</sup> (who, by making a versification segmentation of the fragment of *The Emperor* into syntax wholes, finds the melody of a medieval poem), then in the fragment divided into the lines, one can see the text, which would not be displaced by a Saxon poet of rhymes:

padali odmownie  
nijako, grymaśnie,  
wyglądało mi, że padali,  
a w głębi duszy stali,  
niby leżeli,  
ale w myślach siedzieli  
niby płaska korność,

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<sup>15</sup> Valuable thoughts about the poetic world of priest Baka are included in the book by Aleksander Nawarecki: *Czarny karnawał. „Uwagi śmierci niechybnej” księdza Baki – poetyka tekstu i paradoksy recepcji* [Black Carnival. 'Remarks on Inescapable Death' by Father Baka – The Text's Poetics and Reception's Paradoxes], Wrocław 1991.

<sup>16</sup> J. Baka, *Poezje* [Poems], [elaborated by M. Hanczakowski], Kraków 2002, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Hereinafter, p. 171.

<sup>18</sup> W. Sadowski, *Wersyfikacja reportażu*, „Teksty Drugie” [The Versification of a Report, „Teksty Drugie”], 2006, no. 5, p. 82–99.



ale w sercach oporność<sup>19</sup>.

The hastily written ‘poem’ evokes a quite neat baroque concept, in which the oxymoron emerging from a clear opposition has a clear punch line. The text is composed of skimpy, truly Baka-related verses, rhymed in pairs, exposed to an expressively barrel-organ rhythm. It is worthy of thought, why Kapuściński, who ends at Baka, learning from him the poetry of the Saxon rhymes, blurred the traces of his dependence. Here, among the mottos that are not included in the book version, there is a fragment of a well-known poem of an eighteenth-century Jesuit, titled :’Młodym uwaga z Uwag śmierci niechybnej’, which fits perfectly – as a poetic writing of imminent passing - the interpretative argument of the third chapter<sup>20</sup>:

Nie dopędzisz wczora cugiem  
Nie wyorzysz jutra pługiem  
Minęło  
Zniknęło!<sup>21</sup>

The Saxon robe of *the Emperor* does not, however, include one matter. As shown in the linguistic analysis of Janina Fras, Kapuściński freely focuses on various fields of historical and contemporary Polish, not caring about either the authenticity or credibility of the picture of the era, or about the fidelity of colour. In other words, he does not try to exactly reproduce a distant reality, but rather makes updating of an archaic style in the contemporary image. The use of so ostentatiously overt language styling can be associated with the work of Witold Gombrowicz, who also made the Saxon times a mirror revealing the present day<sup>22</sup>. *Trans-Atlantic* and *The Emperor* are conceived as cultural experiments, involving the creation of the Polish language enclave in a distant country. Both the Argentinian, as well as the Ethiopian reality, however, is deprived of its individual characteristics, which makes it only existing in a

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<sup>19</sup> R. Kapuściński, *The Emperor...*, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> The fragment of the poem by Baka was included in the twelfth section of the press cycle of *‘The Emperor’* („Kultura” 28 May 1978) and began one of the next parts of the third chapter. Incidentally, this aphoristic quote was considered by Waclaw Borowy as a valuable exemplification of Baka’s sentences, characterized by ‘firmness’. Quoted by: A. Nawarecki, *Czarny karnawał...*, [Black Carnival...], p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> J. Baka, *Poems*, p. 82–83.

<sup>22</sup> Although Kapuściński declared that he did not know of *Trans-Atlantic* while preparing *The Emperor*, the convergence between the two books is so clear that one can probably still talk about literary inspiration (incidentally, one might wonder whether the words ‘drzączka’ and ‘furda’ did not find their way to *The Emperor* via *Trans-Atlantic*?). The case of any borrowings was obvious to Herling-Grudziński, who wrote: “The book is slim and smart” (despite excessive monkeying from *Trans-Atlantic*) – *Dziennik pisany nocą 1973–1979*, [Diary Written at Night 1973–1979], [w:] *Pisma zebrane*, [Collected works], t. 4, Warszawa 1995, p. 436. The question of the affinity of *The Emperor* with *Trans-Atlantic* (but also with Baka, Żeromski, Saint-Simon and Tocqueville) has been previously recognized by Małgorzata Szpakowska in her review, titled: *Saxon remnants of the Emperor*. “Twórczość” [“Works”], 1979, No. 6, p. 106–110. This topic is also interestingly discussed by Z. Bauer, *Antimedial reportage of Ryszard Kapuściński*, Warszawa 2001, p. 132–146.

story of marginalized backgrounds. The situation looks different when it comes to the crafted literary reality – in each of these, the texts become the centre of that world, as if somehow occupying the foreign space: here, the Ethiopian officials effectively use the language code imposed, while the foreigners from Gombrowicz's works unwittingly take our customs, since for the characters of *Trans-Atlantic*, they exist so far as fitting the Polish cultural norms.<sup>23</sup> However, in none of these cases does the call of Polish language and Sarmatian culture have a merely ornamental nature. The Polish language subjected to archaisation becomes a tool to create an abstracted model of universal experience, which is presented by Gombrowicz as the tradition, and by Kapuściński as the power. The world presented in both books is subjected to a distinct authorial interpretation: both models are built in order to demonstrate their unreliability. Each story begins to gradually thicken and grow; the design loses its stability, in order to split in pieces in the final scene. In both books, the chaos of a clearly presented world harmonizes with the language and stylistic chaos: the narrative of the last pages of *The Emperor* begins to tear, the reporter enters the word of informants, summarizes their speeches, tries to organize their thoughts, deriving any meanings – as if he wanted in this way to attempt to rescue the crumbling edifice of sense. In the final scene of the reportage, there ends not only the world of power that seemed to be eternal, but also the narrative is exhausted. This is the last witness of the Ethiopian apocalypse, who, with some difficulty, continues his speech, which is commented on by the reporter as follows: 'Unfortunately, the story of L.M. is random, the old man cannot combine his imaginings, feelings and impressions in a coherent whole'.<sup>24</sup> The palace is empty; all the sounds fall silent, just dry press releases officially herald the destruction of the world...



The relation to a falling satrap has been at the forefront of Polish and international reportage for thirty years – the reading is accompanied on the one hand by the delights of the original recognition of the problem, and the other – the allegations of falsification of reality. In disputes, which often relate to the margins of the reading, the discussion is led by scientific authorities – experts on the subject of Africa, and journalists, continuously asking about the credibility of the Ethiopian relations and about the boundaries of clerical interference. One

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<sup>23</sup> This phenomenon is well illustrated by the following fragment, which is the proof of Argentinian hospitality: „Dopieroż nas ścisnąć, pod nogi obejmować, do domu prowadzić.” [„Only to hug us, to embrace our legs, to lead us home.”] W. Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantic*, for E. Sławkowa, „*Trans-Atlantic*” by Witold Gombrowicz. *Studies of language and style of the text*. Katowice 1981, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> R. Kapuściński, *The Emperor*, p. 144.

can still read literary masterpieces, you must, however, be aware that this is the reductionist model of reading. Even a trip to Ethiopia, from which one brings opinions, often derived from anonymous informants, concerning the fact that the callers of Kapuściński included ‘alcoholics’, ‘which drank vodka with him’<sup>25</sup> and that *the Emperor* is a patchwork of gossip: „Ktoś mu coś na boku szepnął, a on to potem... no wie pan. Ukolorował. Pofantazjował”<sup>26</sup>, do not help us understand the phenomenon of the book. Just as expert opinions are disclosed by Kapuściński in a non-fiction manner, wishing to lend credibility to his polemical strategy. However, I have some doubts about the election of Domosławski. Here is a biographer, by twice recalling the Ethiopian-professional Professor Harold Marcus, he vainly describes him as the biggest / the greatest ‘expert on the life of Hajle Sellasje’. However, I would mention the opinion of great Polish African-professionals – e.g. Professor Jan Milewski, who worked with Kapuściński over the years, or those who passed away several years ago, including: the authors of the monumental *History of Ethiopia* – Professor Joanna Mantel-Niećko and Professor Andrzej Bartnicki<sup>27</sup>. Among the internationals, I shall perhaps consider the achievements of Angelo Del Boca<sup>28</sup>, the Italian historian of colonialism and author of a biography of Hajle Sellasje that does not end – as the one by Marcus<sup>29</sup> – at the year 1936, but describes the full period of the reign of the Ethiopian rulers and ends at around the mid-90s of the last century. Why does Domosławski not take into account the very personal biography of John Spencer<sup>30</sup>, a long-time collaborator of the Ethiopian rulers, allied with the most important people in the country, presented in *The Emperor*, among others: the Prime Minister – Akilu Habte Ueld, his brother – Mekonnyn and the Minister of Pen – Uolde Ghiorgis. The author of *The Latino-American Fever* also does not mention other biographers of the King of kings, such as Leonard Mosley<sup>31</sup> or Hans Wilhelm Locket<sup>32</sup>.

Comments of Ethiopian experts – although they are undoubtedly a valuable context for research – shall not be read uncritically. Tools of specialists in other fields of research do not take into account the specificity of the literary work and its various reading models.<sup>33</sup> It is easy to prove that *The Emperor* – read as a faithful relation of the Ethiopian accidents – is a book to which one can have a lot of doubts. Mastery of the fall of the exotic ruler, does not,

<sup>25</sup> A. Domosławski, *Kapuściński non-fiction*, Warszawa 2010, p. 418.

<sup>26</sup> Hereinafter.

<sup>27</sup> A. Bartnicki, J. Mantel-Niećko, *History...*, Wrocław 1987.

<sup>28</sup> A. Del Boca, *Il Negus. Vita e morte dell'ultimo re dei re*, Bari 2007.

<sup>29</sup> H. Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I. The formative years 1892–1936*, Berkeley 1987.

<sup>30</sup> J.H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay. A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years*, Algonac 1984.

<sup>31</sup> L. Mosley, *Haile Selassie. The Conquering Lion*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1965.

<sup>32</sup> H.W. Locket, *The Mission. The life, reign and character of Haile Sellassie I*, London 1989.

<sup>33</sup> I presented my broader opinion on the doubts towards *The Emperor* by Harold Marcus in my review of the book by Artur Domosławski published in: “*Media Studies*” 2011, no. 2, p. 159–166.

however, lie in the scientific accurateness or the perfect copying of a distant reality. All in all, such a story – even flawless – would not stand the test of time. The power of this reportage lies elsewhere: in the original idea that by using real and carefully selected props of one space, one can tell about the other space – more universal, intellectually refined, and skilfully woven with literary matter<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> This article is a revised version of a larger whole, which was published in 2012 by Ossolineum.