

II. REVIEWS

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THE ART OF REPORTAGE*

Review of Aneta Wysocka, *Fakty – język – podmiotowość. Stylistyczne osobliwości reportażu Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego*, 2016, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, pp. 278. ISBN: 978-83-778-4819-7.

Eight years ago, Artur Domośławski published a widely commented book about Ryszard Kapuściński (Domośławski 2010), a book that gave rise to some controversy about the extent to which the author of a biography can interfere in the personal (indeed, intimate) life of his or her protagonist. In 2016, Aneta Wysocka published a monograph about the same legendary journalist, a correspondent for two influential Polish magazines *Kultura* and *Polityka*. Hers is a clearly “quieter” work: a reliable, erudite, and well-composed study with a focus other than biographical or sensational. The Lublin-based researcher devotes her work to Kapuściński’s literary reportage, a genre that for many press correspondents is the leading type of documentary account. In her book, Wysocka discusses this genre, availing herself of thematically-related studies conducted by Polish literary scholars and linguists (e.g., Dziegłowski 2009; Rejter 2000; Wolny-Zmorzyński 2004). Selected aspects of reportage are compared here with the achievements of well-known writers (Franz Kafka, Melchior Wańkiewicz) and the reflections of prominent philosophers (including Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and Józef Tischner).

In her attempt to capture the idiosyncrasy of a specific writer, Wysocka addresses the following basic question: “In what way did Kapuściński use the body of symbolic constructions and the associated interpretations of phenomena for his own informative, persuasive, and artistic purposes?”. A major difficulty in this project was the evolution of Kapuściński’s style over the relatively large time span of over half a century. Ultimately, Wysocka chose three overarching categories as the basis for her stylistic analysis, i.e. facts, language, and subjecthood, as announced in the title and Introduction to the monograph.

First, the book under review devoted much space to language as a tool that is optimal for relating authentic events. Reportage, as the researcher claims, has

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two “constitutive components: the factographic pact and the autobiographical pact” (p. 15), which is why, in good journalism, documentation runs parallel to philosophical reflection.

Secondly, there is the journalistic language: simple and parsimonious by nature but often morphing into a rich and poetic idiom that becomes flamboyant, almost baroque, in passages where the writer invokes intricate contrast. Wysocka appreciates Kapuściński’s exceptional sensitivity to words, but in showing his high level of linguistic awareness, she astutely points out (though not very often) discrepancies between what the journalist promises and what he actually delivers by deliberately choosing constructions and expressions that shape the expressiveness of his writing.

Finally, the writer acts as the subject with potent agency: he uses language to manifest his own self. By referring to the work of Anna Pajdzińska (2008), Wysocka sketches a portrait of the writing self but is far from identifying the portrait of the authorial persona that emerges from Kapuściński’s work with the reporter himself: the caution stems from insufficient knowledge of the reporter’s life and his penchant for self-creation. However, the terms “authorial subject” (*podmiot autorski*) and “subject of all works” (*podmiot dzieł wszystkich*), used throughout the book, consistently designate an inquisitive, searching, and militant person responsible for his words, displaying a polemic streak, who unabashedly expresses his opinions, sometimes sending clear signals of distancing himself from the events he is narrating, attitudes of others, and the social or historical context. Analysing Kapuściński’s successive books (*Busz po polsku* [The Bush, Polish Style], *Gdyby cała Afryka...* [If All Africa...], *Lapidaria* (I-VI), *Heban* [published in English as *The Shadow of the Sun*], *Cesarz* [*The Emperor*], *Szachinszach* [*Shah of Shahs*], *Imperium* [*Imperium*], and *Podróże z Herodotem* [*Travels with Herodotus*]), Wysocka calls him a “deliberate journalist” and uncovers the idiosyncrasies of his style.

In analysing the vocabulary and phraseology of the reportage, Wysocka looks at several lexical phenomena, taking into account the potential connotative associations and invoking the notion of the “common cultural ground” for understanding their meanings. She discusses, among others, examples of newspeak found in Kapuściński’s early writings from the 1960s. The language of propaganda is portrayed as “our own speech” and “someone else’s speech”, a twist that allows the linguist to better characterize the subject-narrator who finds room in journalism for his own valuations. Kapuściński evolved in his personal world view from a serf to a Eurocentrist and found a method of teaching respect for the Other. Newspeak is also discussed against a broader background of Polish linguistics and media studies (e.g., Nowak 2002; Pisarek 2007) and with regard to how the skilful storyteller evaluates his characters: the narrator appears to represent the European perspective. Actually, as Wysocka rightly notes, the intended readership of Kapuściński’s work is European or, more broadly, Western, whereas his characters are the inhabitants of the narrative world, e.g. Africans. This stereotypical division is reinforced by the choice of cultural artefacts that illustrate different standards and styles of living. Wysocka skilfully uses dictionary definitions (*bliźni* ‘neighbour’ in the Biblical sense), provides grammatical interpretations of the words relevant to the body of

work being discussed (the pronoun *inny* ‘other’) and analyses them in terms of such categories as “familiar”, “strange”, “white”, or “black”.

Two conceptual domains occupy a special position in Wysocka’s monograph: BUT ‘shoe, boot’ and BIURKO ‘desk’. The researcher documents the presence of shoes in several works by Kapuściński and characterizes their functions therein. At the same time, she calls up the visual and acoustic details related to wearing shoes. Everyday shoes, monarch’s shoes, or soldier’s boots are considered: all can symbolise the social role and/or wealth of their owners. Attention is also paid to the cult of the shoe, the lack of shoes, and the symbolism of putting on shoes. In defining the meaning of the domain of BIURKO ‘desk’, Wysocka uses the cultural scripts for OFFICE WORK and CLERICAL WORK, extending dictionary data to include proverbs, cultural keywords, and literary texts (Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*, Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s *Promethidion*). Kapuściński portrays the desk as a place for creative work, but also a trap, a snare, an orthopaedic corset, which are all clearly associated with limited personal freedom. Wysocka views the desk as an object associated with competition for promotion and power; she also uses it to evaluate the political situation in the USSR.

Kapuściński’s “deliberate style”, as the book’s author understands it, is largely formed by means of idioms, which the journalist uses for characterising geographical areas and complex family relationships in Africa or for naming political factions (*korkowi* ‘the cork faction’) or other groups and communities (*drobnica* ‘small fry’). Wysocka draws the reader’s attention to the freshness and vividness of modified idiomatic expressions (e.g., *banany wyborcze* ‘election banana barrel’, instead of *kiełbasa wyborcza* ‘election pork barrel’, lit. ‘election sausage’ in Kapuściński’s *The Shadow of the Sun*). The original use of idioms has been classified in the monograph as one of the characteristic methods in which Kapuściński creates the narrative world of his reportage. A similar function is performed by sequences of coordinated synonyms. The peculiarities of Kapuściński’s style also include plesionymy (partial synonyms) and semantic repetition, some of which signal gradation (*duży, wielki, ogromny, olbrzymi* ‘big, large, huge, enormous’), while others are used to intensify the emotion, phenomenon, or quality being described, cf. e.g. sequences of adjectives, participles, or prepositional phrases, often neologisms (*roznabożniać, rozkadziłać swoim pokłonnictwem, pokornictwem* ‘to desolemnise, to de-cense with one’s bowingness and humblingness’).

Kapuściński’s proclivity for experimenting with language is observed not only at the lexical level. He explores this desire in syntax as well. Wysocka carefully tracks the writer’s pursuit of balance between the requirement of journalistic brevity and the need for deeper expression. This is what she believes underlies Kapuściński’s “stream of consciousness”, the practice of “quoting reality”, the use of uncomplicated colloquial syntax, or on the other hand, the use of long, complex sentences, sometimes even anacolutha, a technique known as “oneiric confusion”. A certain role is also played by an idiosyncratic punctuation, which along with the other devices creates the impression of near-simultaneity of the narrator’s perceptions, feelings, and the report he is producing *hic et nunc*. Wysocka discerns in the seemingly chaotic message a well-thought-out concept based on the dichotomies

of cold-hot or same-different; she draws attention to the juxtaposition (or rather, co-operation) of short and extended paragraphs, or the omission of conjunctions, which give rise to the sequential scanning effect. The researcher addresses the import of the varied and non-random syntax of Kapuściński's narration (whose "flow" can be calm or violent), with descriptions of figures of speech, such as repetition, parallelism, and inversion. She also discusses enumeration, whose role is to render the narration more precise and sensual, as well as to revive traditional metaphors. This last device Wysocka takes to be the hallmark of Kapuściński's literary style.

The linguist methodically illustrates her discussion with examples of the constant presence of the reporter in the world he is describing. The subjectivity and subjecthood of the stories he tells is rather strongly marked in the titles and mottoes, which include meaningful meta-textual comments. Sometimes, as in *Shah of Shahs*, the journalist views the world through the eyes of a child, while on other occasions, as in *The Emperor* or *Imperium*, he uses a series of quotations that build a "third narrative track", which allows him to wonder and doubt, or suggest and question things.

The book is a well-conceived and well-composed study, a valuable source of knowledge. The author pays careful attention to the clarity of her argument. Almost every chapter concludes with a brief summary that synopsis and consolidates the relevant details. The multifaceted analyses, along with extensive footnotes and references to a rich body of literature (over 300 bibliographic entries), as well as the use of scientific terminology leave room for the reader to formulate their own comments and reflections.

The main merit of the book under review, however, is that it unveils the peculiarities of Kapuściński's writing technique: the journalist skilfully combines, in documentary accounts, elements of the press release and artistic prose, integrating them into a whole with a distinctive imprint of his idiosyncratic style. These peculiarities are not portrayed as bizarre effects: Wysocka expresses her admiration for the uniqueness of Kapuściński's prose. She views reportage as inherently syncretic and conditioned to some elusive degree by the personality of the traveller-writer. The author of the monograph sides with those researchers for whom works on the peripheries of genres are better described in terms of "reportage license" than reportage as a distinct genre.

Translated by Klaudia Wengorek-Dolecka

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