



Imperium

By Ryszard Kapuscinski



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Ryszard Kapuscinski's last book, *The Soccer War* -a revelation of the contemporary experience of war -- prompted John le Carre to call the author "the conjurer extraordinary of modern reportage." Now, in *Imperium*, Kapuscinski gives us a work of equal emotional force and evocative power: a personal, brilliantly detailed exploration of the almost unfathomably complex Soviet empire in our time.

He begins with his own childhood memories of the postwar Soviet occupation of Pinsk, in what was then Poland's eastern frontier ("something dreadful and incomprehensible...in this world that I enter at seven years of age"), and takes us up to 1967, when, as a journalist just starting out, he traveled across a snow-covered and desolate Siberia, and through the Soviet Union's seven southern and Central Asian republics, territories whose individual histories, cultures, and religions he found thriving even within the "stiff, rigorous corset of Soviet power."

Between 1989 and 1991, Kapuscinski made a series of extended journeys through the disintegrating Soviet empire, and his account of these forms the heart of the book. Bypassing official institutions and itineraries, he traversed the Soviet territory alone, from the border of Poland to the site of the most infamous gulags in far-eastern Siberia (where "nature pals it up with the executioner"), from above the Arctic Circle to the edge of Afghanistan, visiting dozens of cities and towns and outposts, traveling more than 40,000 miles, venturing into the individual lives of men, women, and children in order to Understand the collapsing but still various larger life of the empire.

Bringing the book to a close is a collection of notes which, Kapuscinski writes, "arose in the margins of my journeys" -- reflections on the state of the ex-USSR and on his experience of having watched its fate unfold "on the screen of a television set...as well as on the screen of the country's ordinary, daily reality, which surrounded me during my travels." It is this "schizophrenic perception in two different dimensions" that enabled Kapuscinski to discover and illuminate the most telling features of a society in dire turmoil.

Imperium is a remarkable work from one of the most original and sharply perceptive interpreters of our world -- galvanizing narrative deeply informed by Kapuscinski's limitless curiosity and his passion for truth, and suffused with his vivid sense of the overwhelming importance of history as it is lived, and of our

constantly shifting places within it.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Journalist Kapuscinski (*The Soccer War*) wandered across the Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991. His rewarding, sharply observed travelogue illuminates the tragedy of 20th-century Soviet history and the positive forces struggling against demoralization, poverty, rising crime and a government/military/KGB bureaucracy entrenched amid the disintegration of "the last colonial empire on earth." He describes his return to Pinsk, his Polish hometown that is now part of Byelorussia, which Soviet troops invaded in 1939 when he was seven, killing or deporting almost the entire intelligentsia. With mordant irony and photographic vividness, Kapuscinski journeys from the streets of Moscow to Siberia and across the Central Asian republics, meeting people from all walks of life and pondering the difficulty of democratizing a crumbling empire created through centuries of conquest and annexation. These dispatches from the borderline of Soviet catastrophe make compelling reading. Author tour.

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From Library Journal

Journalist and author of several critically acclaimed books, among them *The Soccer War* (LJ 4/15/91), Kapus'cin'ski here chronicles the life of the Soviet Union. He divides his book into three sections: "First Encounters (1939-1967)"; "From a Bird's-Eye View (1989-1991)"; and "The Sequel Continues (1992-1993)." As such, he covers the relative zenith and dramatic decline of the one-time superpower. Movingly written, eloquently translated, and replete with literary nuances, *Imperium* is thought-provoking and fascinating. The subject matter is vast, but Kapus'cin'ski manages to provide enough detail to satisfy inquisitive readers while at the same time not creating a burdensome work. Because of his keen attention to detail, historical knowledge, and powerful writing skills, Kapus'cin'ski's *Imperium* is a chilling and enthralling record of the decline of an empire and the brutality and inhumanity that frequently characterized it. Highly recommended.

Joseph P. Parsons, Columbia Coll., Chicago

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From [Booklist](#)

In an odd but honest recommendation of his own book, the peripatetic Kapuscinski, last seen traveling around Africa (*The Soccer War*, 1991), writes that his text "disintegrates and falls apart." How apt, considering his destinations, the restive borderlands of the USSR circa 1989. From the Caucasus Mountains to Central Asia, across Siberia, and arriving in cheerless, treeless Kolyma at the very end of the gulag archipelago, Kapuscinski combines his ornate impressions of the present with historical and literary vignettes of the past. Yet this unifying compositional concept becomes fairly haggard before long. Disquisitions on Armenia's ancient manuscripts lead up to the author's adventurous subterfuge to get himself to the war-torn town of Stepanakert. A visit to the fast-evaporating Aral Sea is serviceable, but his account of sneaking around the Kremlin (with events such as Beria's arrest thrown in), while mildly interesting, simply overexalts trivial details. Though episodic in character, this work manages to showcase the author's acuteness of observation of the empire's waning days, a dramatic period in itself. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jerold Richards:

What do you concentrate on book? It is just for students since they're still students or that for all people in the world, the actual best subject for that? Just simply you can be answered for that problem above. Every person has several personality and hobby for each other. Don't to be forced someone or something that they don't wish do that. You must know how great and important the book Imperium. All type of book is it possible to see on many methods. You can look for the internet resources or other social media.

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