



Imperium

By Ryszard Kapuscinski

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The Polish journalist whose *The Soccer War* and *The Emperor* are counted as classics of contemporary reportage now bears witness in *Imperium* to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This magisterial book combines childhood memory with unblinking journalism, a radar for the truth with a keen appreciation of the absurd.

Imperium begins with Ryszard Kapuscinski's account of the Soviet occupation of his town in eastern Poland in 1939. It culminates fifty years later, with a forty-thousand-mile journey that takes him from the haunted corridors of the Kremlin to the abandoned *gulag* of Kolyma, from a miners' strike in the arctic circle to a panic-stricken bus ride through the war-torn Caucasus.

Out of passivity and paranoia, ethnic hatred and religious fanaticism that have riven two generations of Eastern Europeans, Kapuscinski has composed a symphony for a collapsing empire—a work that translates history into the hopes and sufferings of the human beings condemned to live it.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Polish journalist Kapuscinski offers a travelogue account of the collapse of the Soviet system and the difficulties of creating genuine democracy from what has been left behind.

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From Library Journal

Journalist and author of several critically acclaimed books, among them *The Soccer War* (LJ 4/15/91), Kapuscinski 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 Kapuscinski 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, Kapuscinski'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:

Brenda Carey:

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