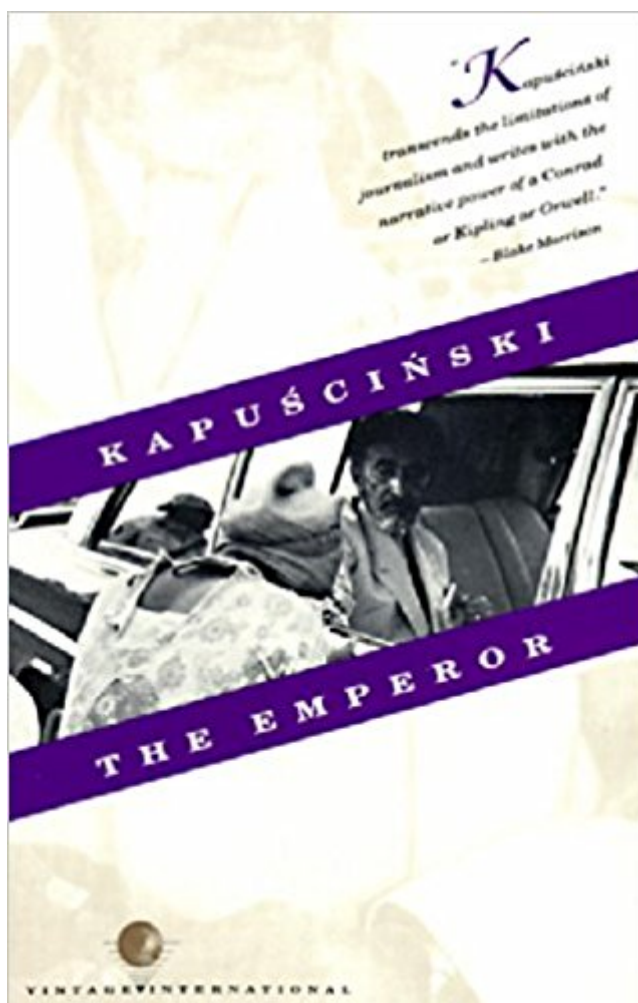


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The Emperor: Downfall Of An Autocrat



Synopsis

Haile Selassie, King of Kings, Elect of God, Lion of Judah, His Most Puissant Majesty and Distinguished Highness the Emperor of Ethiopia, reigned from 1930 until he was overthrown by the army in 1974. While the fighting still raged, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Poland's leading foreign correspondent, traveled to Ethiopia to seek out and interview Selassie's servants and closest associates on how the Emperor had ruled and why he fell. This "sensitive, powerful. . .history" (The New York Review of Books) is Kapuscinski's rendition of their accounts—humorous, frightening, sad, grotesque—of a man living amidst nearly unimaginable pomp and luxury while his people teetered between hunger and starvation.

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Customer Reviews

Haile Selassie, His Most Puissant Majesty and Distinguished Highness the Emperor of Ethiopia, enjoyed a 44-year reign until his own army gave him the boot in 1974. In the days following the coup, the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski traveled to Ethiopia and sought out members of the imperial court for interviews. His composite portrait of Selassie's crumbling imperium is an astonishing, wildly funny creation, beginning with the very first interview. "It was a small dog," recalls an anonymous functionary, "a Japanese breed. His name was Lulu. He was allowed to sleep in the Emperor's great bed. During various ceremonies, he would run away from the Emperor's lap and pee on dignitaries' shoes. The august gentlemen were not allowed to flinch or make the slightest gesture when they felt their feet getting wet. I had to walk among the dignitaries and wipe the urine from their shoes with a satin cloth. This was my job for ten years." (Well, it's a living.) Elsewhere,

the interviewees venture into tragic or grotesque or downright unbelievable terrain. Kapuscinski has shaped their testimonies into an eloquent whole, and while he never alludes to the totalitarian regime that ruled his native Poland during the same period, the analogy is impossible to ignore.

"[The Emperor] transcends reportage, becoming a nightmare of power... An unforgettable, fiercely comic, and finally compassionate book." — Salman Rushdie "Kapuscinski transcends the limitations of journalism and writes with the narrative power of a Conrad or Kipling or Orwell." — Blake Morrison "A Stunning exhibit; the interviewed subjects... enunciate their memories of the days of Haile Selassie with a magical elegance that... achieves poetry and aphorism." — John Updike, *The New Yorker*

The Emperor is so powerful that when he elevates someone to a new position, he changes their body language completely: First, the whole figure of a man changes. What had been slender and trim-waisted now starts to become a square silhouette. It is a massive and solemn square: a symbol of the solemnity and weight of power. We can already see that this is not just anybody's silhouette, but that of visible dignity and responsibility. A slowing down of movements accompanies this change in the figure. A man who has been singled out by His Distinguished Majesty will not jump, run, frolic, or cut a caper. No. His step is solemn: he sets his feet firmly on the ground, bending his body slightly forward to show his determination to push through adversity, ordering precisely the movement of his hands so as to avoid nervous disorganized gesticulation. Furthermore, the facial features become solemn, almost stiffened, more worried and closed, but still capable of a momentary change to optimism or approval. (34) The man becomes old, he becomes slow, he becomes massive and solemn as he attempts to stifle his quirks to fit into that stagnant court atmosphere. Power sits heavily on his shoulders. All of these observations become ironic when one realizes, by reading through Kapuscinski's piece, that in fact the ministers spend most of their time not doing their jobs, but hanging around court just to catch the Emperor's eye to indicate their "unshakable loyalty." (50) And that, moreover, the Emperor doesn't like his ministers to be good at their jobs, so that he "shined by contrast." (33) Kapuscinski doesn't need to write a voluminous tome in order to convey what life was like under the repressive rule of Emperor Haile Selassie. Instead he chooses a few details that stick out in the mind: such as the specific way in which a new minister's body posture changes upon his promotion to power. There is something about each of these images that

causes the reader to pause and think, and remember them afterwards. Five Stars.

The story of how (somehow) Haile Selassie comes to and maintains power. Another revealing, well documented and personal accounting of another African leader taking charge of his country after colonialism. Kapuscinski is undoubtedly the most reliable journalist of the central Africa experience. A must read.

Great book about the downfall of Selassie's autocratic regime in Ethiopia on 1974. One can easily find parallels with the way other dictatorships work and try to sustain themselves. The book is mostly made of impressions from people close to the Emperor and the regime. I don't think it's Kapuscinski's best book (maybe 'The Shadow of the Sun' or 'Travels with Herodotus' are?) but there is no doubt the reading is worth it. The Kindle edition has some minor typos (mainly split words). Nothing that makes the reading too uncomfortable.

A little confusing the way chapters are laid out with initials. Most of the book is very well done and a good short read with not a lot of insignificant writing to distract the reader. I would recommend for anyone who likes Historical politics and wants a chilling look at an unusual Monocracy

Contains valuable information on palace politics during the era of the last King of Ethiopia

The conceit supporting this book, the voices of people from the emperor's inner circle, works admirably to present the full flavour and quasi madness of Haile Selassie's rule. A very readable format for lots of information.

Well written in a detached manner. Sometimes a bit confusing, however, interesting and one gets a clear picture of HAILE SELASSIE. I would have liked more details of his private life and his family.

Kapuscinski does it again! I have only recently discovered this writer and am reading everything of his I can get my hands on. You will too. He has the superb gift of bringing people and places alive often through small details. When I read his book on Russia I couldn't get some of the images of poverty out of my head. In the Emperor he is more detached and just tells us the impossible-seeming truth of the madness of power. Buy it.

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