

washingtonpost.com > World > Wires

Polish Writer Ryszard Kapuscinski Dies

By *MONIKA SCISLOWSKA*

The Associated Press

Wednesday, January 24, 2007; 4:35 PM

TOOLBOX



Resize

Print

E-mail

Reprints

WARSAW, Poland -- Ryszard Kapuscinski, a Polish writer and journalist who gained international acclaim for his books chronicling wars, coups and revolutions in Africa, the Middle East and other parts of the world, died of a heart attack, his literary agent said. He was 74.

Kapuscinski died Tuesday at Warsaw's Banacha hospital, Czeslaw Apiecioneck, one of his literary agents, told The Associated Press.

Poland's parliament honored him with a moment of silence Wednesday morning, and Speaker Marek Jurek praised him as "a witness of human suffering and a witness of people's hopes."

"There is no one among Poland's writers to fill in the space left by him," said Marek Zakowski, president of the Czytelnik publishing house, which published several of Kapuscinski's books and is editing a new one, "Lappidarium 6."

He described Kapuscinski as "a rare kind of great personality. He was always curious to learn more about the world, he was curious to meet people."

Kapuscinski launched a career in the late 1950s and early 1960s that would see him become a master of reportage. In those years, he served as the sole Africa correspondent for the Polish Press Agency, or PAP, reporting on the upheaval across the continent as African nations shook off colonial rule and declared independence.

He went on to publish books such as "The Emperor," probably his most popular book, a chronicle of the decline of Haile Selassie's regime in Ethiopia. But the book, published in 1978, was more a reflection on dictatorships in general, and widely interpreted by Polish readers as a criticism of Poland's communist regime.

Kapuscinski once said the book was more about the "mechanism of dictatorial rule."

Three years later, he published "Shah of Shahs," a book about the 1979 Islamic revolution that toppled [Iran's](#) Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

"Besides reporting current events, I studied books about Islam," Kapuscinski said, according to his official Web site.

"I wanted to describe the people, their mentality, their way of seeing the world. And experience taught me that from each spot in the world one sees the planet differently. A person who lives in Europe sees the world differently than a person who lives in Africa. Without trying to enter into these other ways of looking and perceiving and describing, we won't understand anything of this world."

Several of Kapuscinski's books were translated into English. He also wrote "Another Day of Life," about the Angolan civil war, "Imperium," about the waning days of the Soviet Union, "The Soccer War," and "The Shadow of the Sun."

In past years, he was often mentioned as a likely contender for the Nobel Prize for literature by oddsmakers and followers of the prize _ though the Swedish Academy itself is secretive about who it considers.

Kapuscinski was born in March 4, 1932, in Pinsk, a city then in eastern Poland, and now located in Belarus.

He is survived by his wife, Alicja, and a daughter who lives in Canada, Zakowski said.

There was no immediate information about funeral arrangements.

Associated Press writer Ryan Lucas in Warsaw contributed to this report.