

# Avant-garde in earnest! Stern's biographical experiments with Apollinaire\*

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“There seems to be hardly anything less romantic and exciting than a footnote. And yet, it was a short commentary at the bottom of a page that directed me onto the path of exciting adventures<sup>1</sup>”. Thus James L. Clifford begins the story of one of his biographical investigations. Even though the footnote (as a textual figure) has more attraction for the contemporaries than it did for Clifford, still, this story begins with a similar adventure, which paved the way for a few future undertakings. The difference lies in the fact that “a short commentary” was not found at the bottom of the page, despite its footnote-like nature.

<sup>1</sup> James L. Clifford, *Od kamyków do mozaiki. Zagadnienia biografii literackiej* [From Puzzles to Portraits. Problems of A Literary Biographer], transl. by Anna Mysłowska (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 24.

Footnotes to Anatol Stern's *Dom Apollinaire'a*<sup>2</sup> [*The house of Apollinaire*] – this is probably the most appropriate “genre” classification of the fragment of Alicja Stern's<sup>3</sup> reminiscences, which are, unlike Clifford's convictions, both romantic *and* exciting. That is not only because they are molded from figures of the discourse of love and full of passion, but also because they reveal the clues which inevitably direct one onto pathways of literary adventures. I am particularly interested in a specific footnote commentary, from which a volatile intertextual scaffolding originates; an intertextual relation of two auto/biographical stories, one of which tries to shed light onto what the other one always seeks to conceal. This is how a multilayered, unstable construct of mutually enlightening texts of *life writing* is created; one which is becoming more and more uncertain, as it is more and more closely and confoundingly related to that which is auto-bio-graphical with what was meant to remain in hiding. Before we discuss the above-mentioned “footnote”, however, let us devote some attention to the “main text”.

The main text, which was

This role is taken up by a book mentioned above, i.e., Anatol Stern's, *Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poety* [*The house of Apollinaire. On the poet's Polishness and family*], published in 1973 as a collection of essays, devoted to the author of *Alcools* [*Alcohols*]. It was in print till the late 1950s, both in Polish and European journals and prepared for publication after Stern's death by his wife Alicja. In a way, *Dom Apollinaire'a* is a report on an elaborate genealogical investigation, concerning the origin and family history of Guillaume Apollinaire. For many years this investigation remained Stern's obsession, pushing the author to embark on subsequent journeys, strike up numerous acquaintances, engage in arduous letter-writing, assemble seemingly disparate jigsaw elements, search for the missing elements of the puzzle, and finally – prepare consecutive texts which, definitely crossed the boundary of biographical genres, becoming literary works, oftentimes crossing even the boundary of literature. Despite the impressive amount of materials on which *Dom Apollinaire'a* is built, it is impossible to get a sense of how much of Stern's life was devoted to his studies on the life and work of the author of *Calligrammes* without consulting the Sterns' Archive, which comprises six thick folders of documents related to his work on the book.<sup>4</sup> This immense multiaspectual collection includes documents, articles, critical works, notes, tens of letters, pictures and drawings, all of which were simultaneously clues in a genealogical investigation, the foundations of stories written subsequently and biographical *ready mades*. Interestingly enough, a considerable part of the collection are other people's reactions (published and private) to Stern's texts on Apollinaire, which he painstakingly collected. Ultimately, Alicja Stern included them in the book as an appendix, which aligns the text of *Dom*

<sup>2</sup> Anatol Stern, *Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poety* [*The house of Apollinaire. On the poet's Polishness and family*], prepared for print by Alicja Stern, edited by Zygmunt Czerny (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973). Henceforth citations from this edition are indicated by „DA”, followed by page number.

<sup>3</sup> Alicja Stern, *Życie i wiersze. Pamiętnik liryczny* [*Life and poems. A lyrical memoir*] [Warszawa 1979], The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 11854. Henceforth citations from this edition are indicated by „PL”, followed by page number.

<sup>4</sup> Materiały warsztatowe do Domu Apollinaire'a [Workbook for „The house of Apollinaire”], vol. 1–4, The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 14305; Różne materiały dotyczące Guillaume'a Apollinaire'a: prace krytyczne, materiały dotyczące biografii [Various materials on Apollinaire: critical works, biographical materials], The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 17407; Listy od rodziny Kostrowickich [Letters from the Kostrowiczy family], The Sterns' Archive, sg. no. 14356.

*Apollinaire'a* along a particular “axis of time”, thus allowing one to trace both biographical pre-texts and post-texts, arranged together in a single unit.

This heterogeneity of form, genre and medium in the collection is a product of Stern's disparate, programmatically “unprofessional”, biographical practices. One is thus encouraged to adopt a perspective informed by the concept of *life writing*, especially useful where genre-specific divisions prove insufficient in the face of modern experiments with biographical forms. This perspective contextualises auto- and biographical practices in a broad spectrum of “life-writing”, operating in-between what is real and what is fictitious, without ever reaching either of the two points of reference. Most importantly, the *life writing* framework helps to see Stern's *Apollinaire*-project (and everything relating to it) in a broad perspective of dispersed and diversified intermedial auto/ biographical forms, which enter with one another into multidimensional relations, mutually attracting or repulsing, enlightening, and obscuring, trespassing each other's boundaries and interfering with each other's tissues. *Dom Apollinaire'a* most certainly cannot be termed a biography, as the book turns into a strange experiment in “life writing”, which puts a life story into literary use. This feature relates the book to the maximal inclusivity of “life-writing”, which in Zachary Leader's words incorporates not only “memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, diaries, autobiographical and biographical fictions, but also letters, documents, testaments, recorded anecdotes, testimonies, court documents [...] marginalia, poems, scientific as well as historical texts and digital forms”.<sup>5</sup> They all become a part of the “life writing” universe in and of themselves, but they also prove to be an easily transformable material, operating not so much as sources of facts, as in the role of material artefacts, “ready-mades”, which undergo a biographical recycling, producing surprising biographical collages and montages. Montage – this domain of the avant-garde – is one of Stern's most visible practices.

In the course of his genealogical investigation Anatol Stern develops a special bond with his protagonist, which impacts both the manner of his research (which sometimes becomes incredibly intense) and the form of his texts. Overwhelmed by his obsession with Apollinaire, Stern oscillates between fact and fiction, fascination, and critical stance, underscoring his peculiar biographical narratives with a discussion on the past and future of the art of the avant-garde and the forms and rationale for his own experimentation. As stated by Julia Novak, experimenting “with the auto/biographical form will almost automatically render suspicious the ontological status of the represented life, i.e., the position of the text on the fact/ fiction continuum, that is – its authenticity”<sup>6</sup>. From this point of view, Stern's texts devoted to Apollinaire's biography and reworking familiar biographical techniques in scholarly and essayistic pronouncements as well as in literary texts become particularly interesting. Amongst these artistic reworkings we can find both the long epic poem *Dom Apollinaire'a* as well as two projects of a screenplay for a film biography of the author of *Calligrammes*. In each of these works the reader can follow the permanent movement of the narrative along the axis of factuality and fictionality.

*Dom Apollinaire'a* – not a novel *sensu stricto* – often reads like detective prose, which, incidentally, was a frequent inspiration for Stern. In subsequent essays he reveals new clues in his investigation

<sup>5</sup> Zachary Leader, „Introduction”, in: *On Life-Writing*, ed. by Zachary Leader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Novak, „Experiments in Life-Writing: Introduction”, in: *Experiments in Life-Writing*, ed. by Lucia Boldrini, Julia Novak (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 6.

on the Polish ancestry of the French poet and the confusing history of the family of Kostrowiccy. His witnesses are Apollinaire's friends and the living descendants of the family. Their stories gradually help to uncover an astonishing hypothesis on the ancestry of the author of *Alcools*. At first it sounds like spectacular literary fiction, which (to pick up on a wonderful metaphor used by Julia Hartwig with reference to a different hypothesis) "was released with plumes of a black smoke by demonic surrealists"<sup>7</sup>. But the biographical investigation, reinforced by Stern's persuasive narration, unexpectedly turns the hypothesis into a probability. Stern follows the clues left all over Apollinaire's documents, which had not raised much interest before, but inevitably lead to the Polish element of his history. These clues can be found, among others, in Apollinaire's own words about his Polish heritage. Stern initiates a parallel (both literary and real) search: on the one hand he focuses on biographical aspects in Apollinaire's works, on the other – he carries out an actual, detailed investigation, researching the history of the Kostrowiccy family. The investigation is driven by Apollinaire's legendary mother and the unknown identity of his father, which puts into question earlier hypotheses that the father of the poet was either an Italian magnate or an important church official. However, a different hypothesis can be gleaned from the analysed documents and letters received from the descendants of the Kostrowiccy. This hypothesis, to which Stern refers as "imperial", is the most surprising one, as it argues that Apollinaire was the great-grandson of Napoleon. Stern proposes this hypothesis, relying on Jan Kostrowicki's telling of a story of the illicit liaison between Napoleon II and a Vienna lady in waiting, Melania Kostrowicka, which produced a son, born and raised in secrecy, probably under the protection of the Vatican. Apollinaire himself, or Wilhelm Apolinary Kostrowicki, was supposed to be the fruit of a romance between that secret descendant of Napoleon with Angelika Kostrowicka, famous for her gambling and fondness for nightlife. Melania was supposed to be her distant aunt.

Even though Stern's hypothesis, first introduced in a series of articles, sounds like a biographical fiction, causes stir amongst contemporary scholars of Apollinaire's works and his friends, many of whom actually confirm these suspicions, volunteering further pieces of evidence. Some of the reactions to Stern's essays, published in Poland, France and other countries are reprinted as an appendix to *Dom Apollinaire'a*, and constitute peculiar "evidence", which is an interesting example of international reception (interestingly enough, dissenting voices are ignored). Leaving aside the issue of ancestry, biography and works of Apollinaire, the reconstruction of the Kostrowiccy's entangled lives, the investigation and its confusing history, let us focus on Stern's approach. He does not seem to investigate or aspire to the role of a professional biographer, because he does not abandon a writer's role even for a moment. The strategy of Stern's biographical research clearly is not typical for what a good biographer does, because its aim is not, as the author repeatedly declares, to establish what "really" happened, what the facts are, who the real father was. The aim is something else – not to discover the truth but to discover the gossip, rumour or legend of Apollinaire's ancestry, which the latter (as Stern claims) knew about, but never verified yet always concealed. Stern argues that the influence of this legend on Apollinaire's creative imagination was immense and flowed like an elusive, deep undercurrent in all of the works of the author of *Calligrammes*. This undercurrent supposedly revealed subsequent images which, thanks to the "imperial hypothesis",

<sup>7</sup> Julia Hartwig, *Apollinaire* (Warszawa: PIW, 1961), 60. As written by Hartwig, in a clear allusion to Stern's hypothesis: „one of our writers led a skillful genealogy of Apollinaire from the Little Eagle of Napoleon. Indeed, the Apollinaire legend is still alive and encourages new hypotheses, unfortunately all of them are untestable, but their great advantage is their vividness and the unrelenting interest in the poet's biography [...]”. Hartwig, 60.

for the first time could be seen in an autobiographical perspective. Thus, it can be said that the aim of this “semi-biographic” investigation is not realistic but literary in nature.

Stern thus acts a little like a biographer, a little like a literary scholar, and a little like a writer, combining the three roles, now aiming at facts, now looking for fiction, blending the two in a literary narrative. A case in point is Stern’s main argument in his genealogical investigation, which is a piece of literary fiction rather than a fact. The issue concerns Apollinaire’s short novella, entitled *La chasse à l’aigle* [*The eagle hunt*], whose interpretation in the light of biographical elements, collected by Stern is the most interesting point of the detective plot of *Dom Apollinaire’a*. The main protagonist, while walking the streets of Vienna, is reminded of Napoleon’s son, nicknamed Little Eagle, who must have walked those same streets at some point. Moments later he bumps into a man wearing an eagle mask, who explains to the terrified passer-by that the reason he is wearing the mask is that people would be horrified by how much he resembles his grandfather. Moments later it turns out that the masked man is being chased by a crowd of soldiers and butlers who eventually murder him in the street. In his last cry for help calls himself Napoleon’s descendant. The novella ends with a host’s retelling of a legend about the romance of Little Eagle with a young aristocratic woman, the consequence of which was a son raised in total secret, as a potential heir to the throne. Apollinaire, through the words of his narrator, calls this legend “in every way too absurd to be believed by anybody in possession of common sense”. The person met in the street is called “a painful ghost of an old Eagle...”. It is not hard to see how Stern turns the novella legend into a literary piece of evidence, confirming the existence of the legend about Apollinaire’s ancestry, which the writer knew about, and which was to become his secret obsession in life and literature.

The appendix to *Dom Apollinaire’a* contains a letter by René Clair, who thus comments on Stern’s investigations: “[...] What a shame you are a poet! The story of Apollinaire, the grandson of Little Eagle, is so beautiful that it seems to be the product of a poet’s mind. Now, since you are indeed a poet, everybody will think it is a figment of your imagination. Everybody, except those who know that a poet never makes anything up, but always guesses. Let me number you amongst the latter...”. (DA 198). This poetic “guessing” comes to fruition in Stern’s lyrical poem, which became the title of the entire book.<sup>8</sup> Alicja Stern calls the text “a poetic amalgam”, which combines “enchantment with the legend of the house of Kostrowiczy” and Paris, which was “supposed to create a conviction that the boundary between the fantasy of life and its realism is very fluid”.<sup>9</sup> The fluidity of this boundary *post factum* is also manifested in the book in which a poem appears next to scholarly articles, essays, letters and numerous factual assertions.

Stern’s “familiarising” himself with Apollinaire acquires a transmedial character, as it were. Possessed by his Apollinaire obsession, Stern does not stop at continuing with his investigation and

<sup>8</sup> Dom Apollinaire’a was first published in fragments under different titles: Anatol Stern, „Dom na drugim brzegu” [„The house on the other shore”], *Nowa Kultura* 1 (1961): 3 and his, „Dom poety (fragmenty)” [„The house of a poet (fragments)”], *Twórczość* 1 (1971): 5–14. It is then published in its entirety in Stern’s, *Widzialne i niewidzialne* [The visible and the invisible] (Warszawa: PIW, 1964), 35–62, as well as in the book *Dom Apollinaire’a*, 29–52. See Andrzej Krzysztof Waśkiewicz, „Dodatek krytyczny. Komentarz do tomu 1” [„A critical appendix. Commentary on vol. 1”], in: Anatol Stern, *Wiersze zebrane* [Collected poems], vol. 2 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), 375.

<sup>9</sup> Stern, *Wiersze zebrane*, 154.

biographical and literary projects concerning the author of *Alcools*. In the Sterns' Archive one can find, among other things, a few projects concerning a biographical movie on Apollinaire. Stern was planning to write a screenplay<sup>10</sup> for that movie, which he pitched as a film about “the greatest poet of our times”<sup>11</sup>, whose life “was not only full of violent passions but it was also shrouded in mystery. He was the son of an unknown father and everything we know about him so far has been based on suppositions. The latest documents are proof that there was the blood of Little Eagle, the duke of Reichstadt, in his veins, and that Apollinaire suspected as much”<sup>12</sup>. The premise of the envisaged movie –which Janusz Lachowski refers to as “very likely Stern’s final film project”<sup>13</sup> was supposed to be based on and propagate the findings of Stern’s investigation. In the final paragraph of a short introductory commentary to the draft of the screenplay one reads: “In this movie Apollinaire should say everything he didn’t dare and wasn’t allowed to say in his lifetime”.<sup>14</sup> The documents contain two versions of a plot outline, and the working title of the movie, included in the typescript is *An eagle-hunt...* Apollinaire’s novella was then to become the main axis of the screenplay and include a recurring character of a ghost wearing an eagle mask. That character was also to appear in one of the final scenes, in which the movie version of Apollinaire sees the ghost yet again on his deathbed, only this time the spectre takes off his mask, which conceals the poet’s own face.<sup>15</sup>

The main text, which was not

But why exactly does Stern choose Apollinaire? The answer seems obvious: one avant-garde author is fascinated by another great avant-garde poet. This explanation, however, is too simplistic, as it ignores the complex relation which begins to connect the author with his protagonist. Stern is not actually writing a biography; rather, he wants to “align himself” with Apollinaire through literary practice, the writing process, and new forms of re-writing his history. According to Alicja Stern’s account, appended to Stern’s book, Apollinaire was Stern’s first youthful fascination and his last love (DA 194–195). In his poem *Reflektory* [*Headlights*] Stern, too, refers to the author of *Alcools* as his “first fascination” and somebody particularly close: “a panther with a wounded muzzle and head covered in azures”<sup>16</sup>, and one whose arm is “a brother’s arm”. Also, the “last love” finds its, indeed symbolic, manifestation. As mentioned by Alicja Stern:

Anatol’s final essay entitled *Matka Apollinaire’a* [*Apollinaire’s Mother*] was finished on the last day of his life. I rushed to Warsaw with the typescript in my car. It was important for Anatol to bring the

<sup>10</sup>Anatol Stern, [Film o Apollinairze] [A movie about Apollinaire], in his Projekty scenariuszy filmowych oraz konspekt pracy o polskiej awangardzie literackiej [Projects of screenplays and sketches of work on Polish literary avant-garde], The Sterns’ Archive, sg. no. 14303.

<sup>11</sup>Stern, [Film o Apollinairze], [no page no.].

<sup>12</sup>Stern, [Film o Apollinairze], [no page no.].

<sup>13</sup>Janusz Lachowski, *Anatola Sterna związki z kinematografią* [Anatol Stern’s relationships with cinematography] (Kraków: Universitas 2021), 347. The project of the film definitely came into being after the publication of Stern’s most important article about Apollinaire in „Les Lettres Françaises” in 1959 r. After this publication Stern was invited by Jacqueline Apollinaire, whose acquaintance he mentions in film description. It is certain, then that the project came into being between 1959 and 1968, but it is hard to be come up with a more specific date. See Lachowski, 348–351.

<sup>14</sup>Stern, [Film o Apollinairze], [no page no.].

<sup>15</sup>Lachowski, 7.

<sup>16</sup>Stern, *Wiersze zebrane*, t. 1, 89.

essay to the editorial office of “Przegląd Humanistyczny” before the submission deadline. I made it. I then phoned Anatol’s health resort from there. It was too late. In his final days he would repeatedly say: “As soon as I’m well again, I’m getting down to work on the book on Apollinaire” (PL 160)<sup>17</sup>.

Anatol Stern never wrote an autobiography; we will not find in his archive any notes and brullions of personal memories, journals, diaries or notebooks which would contain any unprocessed writing about his own life. In the documents preserved in his archive, Stern adopts multiple personae related to artistic creations: that of a poet, a prose writer, a screenwriter, a dramatist, a critic, a historian of literature and avant-garde, etc. We will find there numerous versions of his retellings of the history of Polish futurism, and hundreds of published pages of memoirs<sup>18</sup>, which Stern used for creating his own legend of the avant-garde and a narrative on its futuristic beginnings. He does not shy away from telling his own history, yet his is a peculiar history – one in which the author almost always presents himself as a writer, and one which is centered on artistic practices and creative activity, collective actions, literary journeys and anecdotes. In Roma Sendyka’s account of the relationship between “diachronics” and “episodics”<sup>19</sup> Stern definitely belongs with the former, building a compact, consistent, “hermetic” narrative about himself. The boundaries of this narrative are clearly outlined and non-negotiable. Most interestingly in Stern’s case, the boundaries of this story are self-creatively sealed around the creator. They refuse entry to any traces of daily life, “private” history or anything which could elude the author’s working overtime. Stern seems to believe unreservedly in the integrating and creative powers of his narrative about the beginnings of the avant-garde, which also prefigured his own, surprisingly monolithic identity. This is an identity founded on casting oneself in the role of a former futurist, an avant-garde creator, who would go on to construct and establish the avant-garde legend, which he pointedly referred to as “the legends of our days” in the title of one of his memoir essays. He shies away from stories about his own life in its private dimension and traces of his own family history, including his most significant silence: the one concerning his own ancestry.

Stern undoubtedly belongs to a numerous group of writers in Polish People’s Republic who – as Artur Hellich says – “wrote about their past as if their ethnicity was not an issue”.<sup>20</sup> One can say that Stern’s self-narrative always begins from his avant-garde debut, which he presents as the beginning of his meticulously construed legend. But even when the author of *Futuryzje* [*Futurisions*] decides that a crucial element of his “personal myth” is his blasphemy lawsuit (a result of a notorious futuristic meeting in Vilnius, which led to his arrest), he prefers to call himself “a martyr of the avant-garde” rather than a victim of antisemitic witch-hunt. No doubt a strategy of tabooisation, enforced by the socio-political context of the PPR,

<sup>17</sup>Alicja Stern also writes about this in *Wprowadzenie do aneksów w Domu Apollinaire’a* [Introduction to the appendices to the House of Apollinaire] (DA 193).

<sup>18</sup>They include, among others, a collection of texts from the volumes *Poezja zbuntowana* [Rebel poetry] (Warszawa: PIW, 1964), *Legendy naszych dni* [Legends of our days] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1969), *Głód jednoznaczności i inne szkice* [The hunger of definitiveness and other essays] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1972), as well as numerous press articles, interviews or radio broadcasts (which are mentioned or transcribed in entirety in the Sterns’ Archive)

<sup>19</sup>Roma Sendyka, *Od kultury ja do kultury siebie. O zwrotnych formach w projektach tożsamościowych* [From the culture of I to the culture of oneself. On reflexive forms in identity projects] (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 384–385.

<sup>20</sup>Artur Hellich, *Gry z autobiografią: przemilczenia, intelektualizacje, parodie* [Games with autobiography: silences, intellectualisations, parodies] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018), 76.

Stern's silence about his Jewish ancestry must also have a different meaning for him, as it is related to a difficult family history. Is it not surprising, then, that the one who glosses over his origin and family story in his own works made the decision to devote himself to an obsessive investigation into the mysterious ancestry of another poet and chose an autobiographically oriented reading of Apollinaire's texts, which supposedly encode the legend of that poet's father? Even though Stern devoted the final decades of his life to work on *Dom Apollinaire'a*, we learn almost nothing about "the house of Stern".

## A footnote to two main texts

This is where the above-mentioned footnote should appear: in a place where answers to the questions posited above are hard to come by. Such footnote is a surprising link between the already existing (semi?)biographical text with a non-existent autobiographical text. In her diary Alicja Stern sheds light on this strange relationship, when comparing her husband's apollinearean search to a search for oneself:

What was that book supposed to be? Formally, it was to be an analysis of the poet's works, viewed from the perspective of what he learned about the mysteries of the Kostrowiccy family and his awareness of his Polish ancestry, encoded on the cellular level. And informally? I suppose he would have made the undercurrent of the volume the same thing that became the undercurrent of everything created in the final decade of Stern's life. The loneliness of a man, the loneliness of a poet, unable to think in established patterns [...] The main theme of a volume on Apollinaire would probably have been the tragedy of "the other"; a stranger to the poetic liturgy in which one refuses to participate, even though the tragic condition of the intruder is only deteriorating if the intruder cannot prove his biological affinity to the nation he is turning to. After all, Polish futurists at the beginning of our century were also greeted with enmity, as "the others". They too, made their own uncomfortable bed by "inviting to their literary salon the wild animal of irrationality, released from the burrow of subconsciousness" (PL 160-161) <sup>21</sup>.

So, is it "the tragedy of the other"? Alicja Stern is writing about the state of being 'the other', which was well known to Stern, and connects it to the fate of a misunderstood innovator. But at the same time, she is also writing about Apollinaire, who remains an intruder, unable to "prove his affinity with the nation he is turning to". Perhaps when she claims that the futurists were also treated "with enmity, as the 'others'", she means something else – Stern's Jewish heritage, who, alongside Aleksander Wat, debuted in 1918 in the atmosphere of an antisemitic witch-hunt. Does this mean that Alicja Stern links his husband with Apollinaire through "the tragedy of 'the other'", which Stern refuses to acknowledge and about which he prefers not to speak or write; which he covers up with different narratives about himself? Perhaps then *Dom Apollinaire'a* could feature a "pseudo -autobiographical" component of its own<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup>Alicja Stern publishes a very similar fragment of a commentary in *Wprowadzenie do aneksów w Domu Apollinaire'a* (DA, 193-194), but she focuses on the fate of the innovator, abandoning the fragment on "the tragedy of the other".

<sup>22</sup>See Hellich, 67.



On numerous occasions Stern writes not only about the problems with his own history, experienced by the author of *Calligrammes* (an unknown father and a search for his identity), but also about antisemitic attacks. In the book there are numerous mentions of Apollinaire's being troubled by "a sense of national alienation" (DA 64). These are accompanied by Stern's depictions of Apollinaire's life, pivoting around a constant fear of being "taken for a Metic". This word, derived from Greek *métoikos*, meaning a foreigner, somebody settled on a land they do not own, is surprisingly recurrent in *Dom Apollinaire'a*. Combining his story about the tragedy of the other with the motif of an absent and unknown father, Stern makes these two the central themes of the entire biographical narrative about Apollinaire, dominating over everything else.

Is it possible then, that Stern, under the apollinairean mask, is writing about himself and his own hidden drama of the "other"? In this perspective the most interesting element in Stern's biographical practices concerning Apollinaire, is no longer the genealogical investigation but the relationship between the author-biographer and his protagonist. This relationship shows itself to be a complex combination of fascinations and identifications, resulting from a shared avant-garde vision of art and from his personal experience, which, although seemingly different, bears uncanny resemblance to that of Apollinaire's. Perhaps we are dealing here with what Marek Zaleski referred to as "the author's own biography overwriting the biography of his protagonist"<sup>23</sup>, which "simultaneously becomes a text we are supposed to read, too"<sup>24</sup>. Undoubtedly, this is how Alicja Stern views the relationship between these two texts, when she is establishing a pseudo-auto-bio-graphical relationship, in which "somebody else's biography becomes a mirror in which our own biography sees and recognizes itself"<sup>25</sup>.

Marcin Romanowski applies Roland Barthes' concepts of *studium* and *punctum* to describe the relationship between the biographical practice and an autobiographical recognition. Transplanted from image interpretation onto biography, *studium* refers to the life story of the biography's protagonist, whereas the biographical *punctum* becomes "a plane on which the personal dimension of the biographer's involvement is revealed", according to Romanowski. "*Punctum* establishes a particular perspective, from which the biographer considers their subject. This position transforms the biography understood as an ideographic representation of the life-story of a specific person into a symbolic story, in which the experiences and life problems of the protagonist become transposed autobiographical clues, which express problems pointing towards and punctuating the biographer"<sup>26</sup>. In the case of Stern, possessed by his detective-like, storytelling passion, gradually discovered facts from the family history and biography of Apollinaire seem to include a number of these "transposed autobiographical clues", which both concern and affect the biographer in a peculiar way, turning the biography into a symbolic story.

<sup>23</sup>Marek Zaleski, „Kłopoty z monografią” [„Troubles with a monograph”], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2008): 117.

<sup>24</sup>Zaleski.

<sup>25</sup>Zaleski.

<sup>26</sup>Marcin Romanowski, „Biograficzne punctum. Pisarstwo biograficzne Joanny Olczak-Ronikier w perspektywie tożsamościowej” [„A biographical punctum. Biographical writing of Joanna Olczak-Ronikier in the identity perspective], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2019): 126.

In one of his essays Stern tries to capture the nature of Apollinaire's silences, and concludes his musings with a very short paragraph, which, as I believe, might just as well describe Stern himself: "There is only one thing he will not write or speak about: his ancestry and his father. He does not want to be hurt again by the hostile, cruel world" (DA 124). And perhaps it is in this fragment that the biographical *punctum* is revealed, simultaneously becoming a pseudo-self-reflection, a pseudo-autobiographical recognition, a transposed clue, in which, hidden under an apollinairean mask, Stern writes about himself, and the biographical text unexpectedly opens an autobiographical wound. Viewed from this perspective, Stern's biographical text about Apollinaire seems to be punctured with the former's own history, leaving behind a visible but very loose thread. On the one hand Stern would like to leave as few traces as possible on the visible side of the textual fabric, but on the other – even though he could probably conceal all of them, he does not seem to want to.

Alicja Stern definitely does not want to do it, as she is the one who sheds some light on the spot purposefully darkened by Stern. Her narrative unravels in a series of complex textual concepts and allusions and operates a language of figures and clues. The recurrent motif of this story is (never explicitly stated but obvious from the very first pages) the issue of the Sterns' Jewish heritage – hidden both as a fact and as a word, yet peculiarly exposed thanks to the properties of the literary language. Meanwhile, one of the obvious topics not mentioned in Stern's works is the story of his absent father, who is named only once in the poem *Cmentarz mojej matki* [*My mother's cemetery*]

I will not find you, even though you are lying here  
like I will not find my father (though maybe somewhere in the clouds?...)

My father was a fairy-tale wind- or maybe a fairy tale itself.  
He flew and he rustled. Then he went silent<sup>27</sup>

Paul Murray Kendall writes about a doubly engaged biography, to which he attributes the ability of creating a "life-giving symbiotic relation", in which the distanced researcher and investigator into the biographical truth can immerse him- or herself, making it possible to find a different life, which is gradually taken over by the author and his or her affects. But ultimately, in the case of biography, "emotion must be translated into understanding and commitment into introspection"<sup>28</sup>. This, however, is not the case with Stern's texts – the further the closer, the later the deeper, the longer, the more precise. This continues right up to the most meaningful gesture: a literary prosopopoeia, in which Stern will lend his voice to Apollinaire, putting on his mask and hiding his own face. But maybe he is doing this so as to be able to say something about himself.

<sup>27</sup>Stern, *Wiersze zebrane* [Collected poems], vol. 1, 354.

<sup>28</sup>Paul Murray Kendall, *The Art Of Biography* (London: Norton 1965), 149. See Anita Całek, *Biografia naukowa: od koncepcji do narracji. Interdyscyplinarność, teorie, metody badawcze* [Scholarly biography: from concept to narrative. Interdisciplinarity, theories, research methods] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), 28–34.

## A footnote to a footnote

If that really were the case, the poem *Dom Apollinaire'a* could perhaps be read as a text woven with this pseudo-autobiographical thread, and as a Marrano-text, constructing a complex structure of secretiveness, in which a broken Marrano identity is revealed – as the editors of the volume *Marani literatury polskiej* [*The Marranos of Polish literature*], Piotr Bogalecki and Adam Lipszyc refer to it – an unstable hybrid subject<sup>29</sup>. A surprisingly chosen mask conceals an intense expression of a sense of estrangement as well as numerous emotions which are triggered by the need to live in hiding, in the shadow of a “mystery” of one’s own origin. But in this case the Marrano-like structure of the secret crosses the boundary not only of a single text but of a single subject as well. As a multilayered, intertextually hidden secret – between the biographical text by Stern and the auto/biographical text by his wife; between what is hidden in the private archive and in what is exposed in the well-known publication – is revealed thanks to a wobbly intertextual scaffolding of the hidden traces of “life writing”. Our guide down the Marrano path, which leads to *the house of Apollinaire* is yet another Marrano text, Alicja Stern’s diary, in which the secret is hidden in much more shallow deposits, purposefully made visible from the level of the narrative.

Stern writes the poem *Dom Apollinaire'a*, captivated by the legend of *Apollinaire*, when a positive reception of his essays in Apollinaire’s circle, featuring scholars, friends and family of the poet (including his wife) “pushed Anatol to penetrating the depths of the mystery” (PL 158). To this Alicja Stern adds that “*Dom Apollinaire'a* is probably the most spontaneous remark of a poet about a poet, about the glory and dark secrets of poetry. It is probably no accident that the cesarian legend of the “Metic” thus captivated Anatol” (PL 158). This idea is supported by a fragment in which Stern, through an elaborate prosopopoeia, lends his voice to Apollinaire, who now speaks in the first person and on a few occasions defines his “I” in parallel constructions: “I, the destroyer of the past [...] / I, the destroyer of tradition [...] / I, the destroyer of relics / I / a Metic [...]” (DA 49). The enjambment, separating the final two words, suspends them in the air: highlighted, exposed, problematic. After all, it is “no accident” that the Metic appears so many times in Stern’s texts; it is no accident, as will be stated, almost as an aside but in a very clear allusion by Alicja Stern, because “it often happened that a poet of foreign blood, carrying the genetic code of his own tradition became the poet of the land where he saw the light” (PL 159). Perhaps the other “I”s, “suspended” in Anatol Stern’s text, draw our attention to the peculiar “I”, sylleptically connecting the textual and the empirical “I”, which is an unfamiliar voice, introduced through prosopopoeia, and the “I” which assumes the mask of the poem’s subject, a particularly integrated “I” of the mask and the “I” of the face hidden underneath it: the “I” of Apollinaire and the “I” of Stern. This is where the etymological clues of the term *prosopopoeia* lead us; derived from the Greek *prosōpon*, it refers both to

<sup>29</sup>Piotr Bogalecki, Adam Lipszyc, „W skórze Ezawa” [„In Essau’s skin”], in: *Marani literatury polskiej* [*The Marranos of Polish literature*], ed. by Piotr Bogalecki, Adam Lipszyc (Kraków–Budapeszt–Syrakuzy: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2020), 15–17. Agata Bielik-Robson provides an in-depth overview of the maran subject in her introductory text to the above-mentioned volume. See her „Fenomen maranizmu” [“The phenomenon of Marranism”], in: *Marani literatury polskiej*, 37–40. In the context of Stern and Aleksander Wat’s futuristic actions the most important reference point for a Marrano-reading (only outlined here as a possibility), which connects the earlier and later works of Anatol Stern, would undoubtedly be Bogalecki’s interpretation of the figure of a Marrano in Wat’s texts. Piotr Bogalecki, „«Ushugi bezimiennie». Figura marana w twórczości Aleksandra Wata” [«Unnamed services». The figure of a Marrano in Aleksander Wat’s works], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2019).

a face and a theatrical mask, a face revealed and hidden through camouflage, the thing that is both a truth and a lie. Prosopopoeia establishes these two – the mask and the face – in the position of a never-ending and unresolved game. The game and invitations to it return in *Dom Apollinaire'a* – one might say, annoyingly, just as annoying are the returns of the prosopopoeia.

It comes as no surprise then that Stern's poem is at its most intense when it discusses a secret. There are many such spots but two of them are especially evocative, as they are clearly marked out from the rest by the expanded font, the fragments (one in the 11th, another – in the 13th part). On two occasions the text loses its typographic "stability", it falls apart in the expanded font, which, by introducing light in between letters, seems to shed light on the entire text. Maybe these two fragments too refer to each other, maybe they are connected by a self-reflective typographical clue? The first of them refers to Apollinaire; it is formulated in the third person, woven – importantly – from a pseudo-citation from Apollinaire, in which Stern adopts the poet's words as his own: "he figured it out a long time ago/ he always knew / t h i s h e a v y s e c r e t w a s b u z z i n g w i t h i n h i m l i k e a r a t t l e" (DA 44). The other fragment is uttered in the prosopopoeia with the voice of the "I" – Apollinaire's voice, dramatically reminiscing the "dark holes springing from the crevices of memories" (DA 46): "d o n ' t m a k e m e b r e a k t h i s s e a l / I ' v e s a i d e n o u g h / f o r a m a n w h o h a t e s s y m b o l s / o u r f e e t l e a v e t h e g r o u n d i n v a i n / w h e r e t h e d e a d l i e!" (DA 47).

In this surprising trans-verse correspondence of expanded typefaces, the "buzzing secret" turns into a shared secret of "our feet", which undoubtedly is the secret of one's origin that cannot be silenced. "It buzzes like a rattle" but it has to remain in hiding because of the "seal" imposed on it; an image which returns in the poem a few times as a warning:

the seal must not be broken  
 sometimes a perverse genie is released  
 one who disfigures everything  
 one had better not examine the terrible eye in the triangle  
 through the ophthalmoscope  
 one can turn into a bunch of algae or a medusa  
 don't make me do it  
 don't make me break the seal [...]

(DA 45-46)

This incredible fragment, permeating with the dread of breaking the seal and revealing the secret, is separated from the shortest, twelfth part. Even though ends with the image of a mother, clearly recalling Apollinaire's story, also seems to concern something else, as it concerns such dilemmas as could also be experienced by Anatol Stern. The thing that should perhaps not be inspected with a tool is perhaps the omniscient divine eye. The risk here lies not only in revealing the secret but also in a surprisingly metamorphic property which such inspection releases, fraught with the danger of losing an old, familiar, safe and domesticated character, guaranteed by "maintaining" the seal, protecting "the secret". The risk of disclosing it – articulating what is "real" – is thus related to the risk of releasing "the perverse genie" of

change, who “disfigures everything” and because of whom “one can turn” into nobody knows what – “a bunch or a medusa”. So maybe it is better, in Stern’s words, not to risk the loss of the current shape, not to release the metamorphic potential of the disclosed secret, to leave “the eye in the triangle” alone, not to inspect, “not to break the seal”. The address to the reader, expressed by the textual “I”, maybe accompanied both by the “I” of the mask and the “I” of the face, helps us break away for a moment from the world of the poem. They all speak with one voice, both familiar and strange: “Don’t make me break this seal/ I’ve told you enough / for a man who hates symbols”. Symbols seem to be tools of an ambiguous textual game: they are despised by the avant-garde anti-symbolist poets, and they refer us to the “main movement” of this story about a poet-revolutionary. As “despised” figures they also attract the readers’ attention. Thus, the actual address to the reader should perhaps read along the following lines: don’t make me break the seal but look for symbols because I’ve told you enough. But this is just a “footnote”, which – despite the threat of turning into “a bunch or a medusa” – undoubtedly pushes one onto the path of future adventures.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

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# KEYWORDS

Anatol Stern

## GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

### ABSTRACT:

The article is devoted to a genealogical investigation, undertaken by Anatol Stern, in his attempt to reconstruct the origin story of Guillaume Apollinaire. The effect of his research is a book entitled *Dom Apollinaire'a. Rzecz o polskości i rodzinie poety*, published in 1973, which is a collection of essays, previously published in Polish and European journals, prepared for publication after the author's death by his wife, Alicja Stern. The subject of analyses in the paper are not only the published texts but first and foremost an extensive archival collection of materials devoted to Apollinaire, collected by Stern, as well as different forms of literary practices, within which Stern carried out artistic biographical modifications of his findings concerning the author of *Alcools*. The theoretical perspective adopted for the analysis a wide range of auto/biographical texts here is the concept of *life writing*. In the course of the study the value of Alicja Stern's commentary, found in her unpublished memoir, comes centre stage, as it indicates the possibility of a "pseudo-auto-biographical" reading of some of Stern's texts devoted to Apollinaire. This line of interpretation – exposing the situation of "the other" – opens up the possibility of looking for a "Maroon-like subject" and places in which Stern's own situation of "the other" along with various forms of masking his own "interrupted", "unstable" identity.

*life writing*

**avant-garde**

**biography**

ARCHIVE

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