

Roman Kałuza, Ann Kostant, and Wojbor Woyczyński, *Through a Reporter's Eyes: The Life of Stefan Banach*, Birkhäuser Boston, 1996. x + 137 pp.

Reviewed by

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Mathematical biographies come in all flavors. Such a book might be written by a historian, a mathematician, or a journalist. According to authors' different professional perspectives as well as individual traits, biographies of the same person can vary widely in content, methodology, writing style, and so on. But certain universal standards apply. At the very least, the information presented should be accurate, and the sources of the information should be properly acknowledged and identified.

Sadly, *The Life of Stefan Banach* does not meet even these minimal criteria. This is particularly unfortunate, as the unusual genesis of the book held such promise. In 1992 the journalist and science editor Roman Kałuza published, in Poland, a biography of Banach. The mathematician Wojbor Woyczyński and Birkhäuser's Ann Kostant then prepared the translation/revision under review. According to Woyczyński and Kostant, their contribution involved "extensive reorganizing, editing, and rewriting (with the author's benevolent permission) as well as the substantial addition of new relevant material". Theoretically, the authors' combined reportorial, mathematical, and editorial expertise should have produced a solid piece of work, instead of the flawed book that actually resulted.

And the flaws are many. The most disturbing of them is that many passages are too close for comfort to the previously published writings of others. For example, consider this characterization of Włodzimierz Stozek: "Stozek, cheerful, rotund, short, and completely bald, was Chairman of the Department of General Studies. The word *stozek* means 'a cone' in Polish; he looked more like a sphere." Now take the following sentence: "Although his name means 'a cone' in Polish, he looked more like a ball — rotund,