

“A more serious blow” The Blank Page and Love

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In his Course of March 14, 1990,¹ Jacques-Alain Miller wrote a formula, which would allow for a solution to the paradox of the society of analysts -the set of analysts - allowing that the result of an analysis would be “a questioning, a discussion, even a negation that falls on an identification.”

The formula indicates that “those who do not belong to any set belong to the set E*”:

$$x \notin E \leftrightarrow x \in E^*$$

This would not indicate that “they are analysts”, but that “it remains to be seen”.

Thus, Miller concludes, “this set [E*] of the School, possesses the structure of Russell's paradox”.

Bertrand Russell writes in his autobiography² that back in 1901, when he discovered his [now] famous paradox, this involved a very big blow to him. It touched his existence, it was not something intellectual.

It was a difficult time for him. The wife of his friend Albert North Whitehead, with whom he [later] wrote his ambitious “*Principia Mathematica*” (let us note that at the age of 29, he already had a path in his practice of writing on logic) suddenly suffered physical pains that left her bedridden, and Russell says that this affected him beyond what he supposed:

“I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated [...]”

He reaches a reflection where something stops him:

“At the end of those five minutes [...] [f]or a time, a sort of mystic illumination possessed me. I felt that I knew the inmost thoughts of everybody that I met in the street, and though this was, no doubt, a delusion [...]”

Immediately(!), he details the discovery of his paradox. It is the interweaving of the letter with his small delirious certainty.

“[...]in the month of May I had an intellectual set-back almost as severe as the emotional set-back which I had had in February. Cantor had a proof that there is no greatest number [...] Accordingly, I examined his proof with some minuteness, and endeavoured to apply it to the class of all the things there are. This led me to consider those classes which are not members of themselves, and to ask whether the class of such classes is or is not a member of itself. I

¹ Miller, J.-A., “*El banquete de los analistas*”, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2000, p. 255.

² Russell, B., “*Autobiography*”, Routledge, 1975, pp 136-38.

found that either answer implies its contradictory. At first I supposed that I should be able to overcome the contradiction quite easily, and that probably there was some trivial error in the reasoning. Gradually, however, it became clear that this was not the case.”

For a long time he sat in front of a blank sheet of paper, trying to resolve the paradox.

Russell continues, around the same time, a second blow struck him. While riding his bike through the countryside, he suddenly realized that he no longer loved his wife, Alys.

What comes before? The blow of the discovery of the paradox, or the blow of the realisation that he no longer loved his wife? Russell counts two blows, perhaps three, including the pain of Whitehead's wife.

If we agree that there is some intertwining between the structure of the paradox and the opening or closing of a love, a living love who suddenly lives no more, then it would be possible to pose the question to those who choose “the school structured as the paradox.” Does this decision imply a decision of a brave readiness for a destiny in love?

The structure of the School of Analysts, as such, would allow such access to this crucial question, which Russell faced, not without pain: what is love? Do I still love? Have I known love? Or is it, as Freud said of analysis, like a train ticket, that you may use or not?