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The subversion of citizenship and education in Bertrand Russell's *Alphabet*

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Abstract

Bertrand Russell, the British analytical philosopher and logician, honoured with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950, stands out as one of the most influential figures in the area of humanities of the twenty-first century. The paper is devoted to the close reading of his half-forgotten trifle The Good Citizen's Alphabet. *The tiny book was first published in 1953 by Gaberbochhus Press, a publishing house established by his friends, the Polish avant-garde artists Franciszka and Stefan Themersons. Russell's exploration of the idea of citizenship apparently emerged from his correspondence with the couple.*

I want to demonstrate the multi-layered dialogic, double edged principle behind this work. On one hand, it can be treated as an expression of Russell's philosophy as well half-serious exploration of language that could serve to describe it, to playfully illustrate it. On the other hand, it works on the level of indirect diagnosis and expression of the twenty-first-century crisis of values, which emerged directly from the experience of the Second World War as well as indirectly from the turn-of-the-century general mood of nihilism. This dialogic quality is enhanced by the fact that the book is illustrated with Franciszka's thrifty line art created in the convention of children's drawings. The presentation will thus also examine the inter-media correspondences between the impact of the text and the implications of the drawings. Russell himself observed that the illustrations perfectly express what he wanted to say.

It is also interesting to explore how the genre of quasi-educational alphabet is conducive to create in child and adult readers a distanced, topsy-turvy view of modern society and the idea of citizenship portrayed through grotesque distortion. The stance of questioning the values is displayed in the non-standard choice of entries and the thought-provoking descriptive predicates used to illustrate the subsequent letters of alphabet. This subversion is done with the use of strategies that are still to be observed in contemporary social discourse to be found in the media, politics and education. It is therefore particularly useful to examine one of the early examples of such modern scepticism about the notions of citizenship and education.

Keywords: *Bertrand Russell, The Good Citizen's Alphabet, Franciszka Themerson, subversive definitions*

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), the British analytical philosopher, logician and mathematician, honoured with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950, stands out as one of the most influential figures in the area of humanities of the twenty-first century. In the motivation for the distinction, the Nobel Prize committee declared it was granted 'in recognition of his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought' (*The Nobel Prize in Literature 1950*). It seems

worthwhile to trace these features in his little jocular quasi-educational book entitled *The Good Citizen's Alphabet.* It provides a historical example of philosophical consideration to be placed in the context of the current perception of the concepts of identity and citizenship (Ross, 2014).

This brief book in its subsequent editions is a case of *édition hors commerce*, that is, a privately printed book published with the illustrations of a Polish visual artist Franciszka Themerson (1907-1988), who started her career by creating avant-garde films in cooperation with her husband. The little alphabet book appeared in three editions over the years 1953-1970, first published in Gaberbochchus Press, a private London printing house of the couple. The edition from 1962 was published to commemorate Russell's ninetieth birthday and *The Good Citizen's Alphabet* was then published along with an unusual sense-enhancing epilogue, the philosopher's one-sentence work entitled *History of the World in Epitome*. This tiny ABC book reflects Russell's and Franciszka's non-stereotypical thinking which makes one reconsider commonly accepted truths. In this, it embodies the principles of the printing house that led to its emergence. Gaberbocchus was an independent private enterprise of the Themersons which published the avant-garde artists in London from 1948 to 1979. The range of authors included Alfred Jarry, Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino, Anatol Stern, Raoul Hausmann, Stevie Smith and others, including the works of the Themersons. What this book epitomises of the varied works published by Gaberbocchus is the underlying questioning of values and systems conveyed in an original way which reflects the attitude of the Themersons and their authors. The cooperation in the Press led to establishing an artistic salon called the Common Room, a discussion group of artists gathered round the Themersons that operated from 1957 to 1959. The meetings were held in the cellar of their London home. Bertrand Russell frequented this intellectual meeting place. It was an arena of asserting the artists' progressive ideals and polemical attitudes, distinguishing them from the rest of the London artistic world. Although publishing *The Good Citizen's Alphabet* precedes the rise of the Common Room, it also to some extent prefigures its future concerns and debates.

The cooperation with Franciszka Themerson in producing the final ABC book with her illustrations is acknowledged in the book as she is mentioned as its illustrator. Moreover, the concept of the book was derived from Russell's half-jocular correspondence with Stefan Themerson (1910-1988), Franciszka's husband. Małgorzata Sady, the friend and translator of the Themersons, mentions the fact that Russell treated Stefan as his spiritual son (Sady, 2007, p. 39). He got to know the couple after reading the philosophical tale of Stefan *Bayamus and the Theatre of Semantic Poetry* (1949), which he found 'nearly as mad as the world'. In the same letter Russell admits amusing himself with creating 'pedantic phrases' on human knowledge (Prodeus, 2010, p. 254).

Russell, the world-famous logician, is also associated with philosophical consideration in the field of education and pedagogy (Lunn, 2011). When one looks into his biography, it turns out there were phases in his life when he was involved practically in the field. He published several works on the topic, starting with *Education and the Good Life*, where he reconsiders some postulates of the modern educational theory. He also ponders on the aims of education and devotes some attention to education of character. These considerations are continued in *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood* (both

books published in 1926 in London by George Allen & Unwin). The last book in the series is *Education and the Social Order* (1932, London: George Allen & Unwin). The three books are still in print. He used them to voice his innovative and experimental views on education as freed from the repressing effect of the educational system. In this he develops the philosophical ideas of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) on personal freedom and individual's improvement. Following a request from Bertrand's father, John Stuart Mill assumed the role his son's atheist godfather of a kind and became an influential figure for him through his early readings. Bertrand Russell found his contemporary system of education to be oriented on indoctrination and curbing the free development of the individual, which according to him led to wars, violence and social inequality rather than to the expansion of its professed aims such as development of citizenship or courage (Wilk, 1968).

The proof of his practical interest in education was the fact that he founded a progressive school named Beacon Hill School in 1927. He launched the project in cooperation with his second wife Dora Black at the time when their two children were reaching the age of schooling. His views of the best moment of starting education were also very progressive for his times as according to him it should be the age of two. This might be attributed to the fact that he lost his parents at the age of three and was brought up by his grandparents in what might be termed as firm aristocratic and citizenship-oriented background. His paternal grandfather John Russell, the first Earl Russell, was Queen Victoria's Prime Minister twice. Thus Bertrand himself had the benefit of high-class circumstances and quality tuition at home.

Russell's *The Good Citizen's Alphabet* is a crypto philosophical work although it adopts the format and genre of a primary reader, an alphabet book for little children. Typically for this genre, it visually presents the subsequent letters of English alphabet and illustrates their application with the dictionary-like entries of keywords. The sense of the words is additionally enhanced by the figurative illustrations of abstracted concepts drawn by Franciszka Themerson. Her sketchy line art is kept in the stylistics of childlike drawings. Through these features, the whole book follows the traditional format and aims of a non-literary text, an early textbook. Such textbooks have long functioned in European and post-European culture as the vehicle for social values, as represented by such historically influential works as the *New England Primer* (1683) from the American colonial period, where the purpose to teach the letters was realised as the moral instruction of children. The rhyming verses which were used to introduce the subsequent letters in the American alphabet book were oriented on teaching some ethical values and religious truths. A stands there for Adam and is illustrated with a drawing of the Garden of Eden. The temptation scene is not only depicted but also described by what became a standard opening of such primers 'In Adam's fall we sinned all' (New England Primer). This chronological approach of framing the work with the biblical scene of human fall provided the framework for Bertrand Russell's even smaller work *History of the World in Epitome* subtitled parenthetically '{For use in Martian infant schools}' which consists of just one sentence:

Since Adam and Eve ate the apple,
man has never refrained
from any folly

of which he was capable (Russell, 1970)

As indicated above by the line divisions, this sentence is subdivided into subsequent pages interspersed with drawings of the Paradise and the subsequent aspects of the human fall – taking the Forbidden Fruit, wars and atomic bomb. The final drawing is substituted with a historic book photograph of an atomic bomb mushroom cloud. This text published along with the *Alphabet* in the second and third Gaberbocchus Press edition clearly shows Russells sympathies against the atomic warfare, for which he was persecuted during his lifetime.

What the illustrations for this parodist mini-history textbook have in common with those for *The Good Citizen's Alphabet* is the focus on the abstracted individual obsessed with dominance. This is expressed through the picture of male-female relationship and the satiric image of war depicted by Franciszka's allegorical picture of the fantastically transformed combat. The alleged addressee from the level of infant school, albeit grotesquely distanced by qualifying its geographical location as Martian, is also subversively treated here. The gist of history of human folly is thus shown and described as possible to be grasped only by a philosophically trained adult who can appreciate the paradox of the interrelated nature of the human fall and folly. Thus the book is not the case of the children's text with the amalgam of child/adult addressee (Knoepflmacher, 2009, p. 159).

In *The Good Citizen's Alphabet*, the simple structure of the book governed by the alphabetical order and the childlike style of simple line-art drawings clearly reinforce the style of a textbook for very young children, while the implied reader is instantly made to recognise that the adult citizen is the true addressee. This distance between the professed and the implied reader marks the central tension in the projected philosophical-educational effect. The little book is designed to work as a quasi-educational device for adult readers through provoking doubt and destabilising the perception of some values. It is oriented to disturb one's fixed way of thinking about the citizen, the individual and society as well as about the education system that frames these concepts. This works by means of redirecting the system of values, in the subversive way proper for the avant-garde movement that Russell associated with through the Themersons and their Common Room (Polit, 2012).

This process of remodelling the implied reading can be seen already in the opening of the book. The formal discourse of the introduction written by Bertrand Russell foregrounds the fact that he writes the book so as to fill in the gap in the educational system by providing and entertaining book for the young ones whom he refers to as 'immature minds'. The professed aim of the *Alphabet* is to shape 'the first steps of the infant mind' (Russell, 1970, no pages). However, despite the declared target to educate children, the choice of the adult addressee is evident. This text only pretends to be a primary textbook, being more of a crypto-sociological satire on the mid twentieth century concepts of citizenship and education. The first signal of the ironic distancing of the implied author of the book is the explicitly overdone, pompous language of the opening which works as a wink to the implied reader of the book. It marks the necessity to take the expressed views with a pinch of salt.

> This book, it is felt, will supply a lacuna which has long disgraced our educational system. Those who have had the largest amount of experience in the earlier stages of the pedagogical process have in a very large number of cases been compelled to conclude that much unnecessary difficulty and much avoidable expenditure of school hours is due to the fact that the ABC, that gateway to all wisdom is not made sufficiently attractive to the immature minds whom it is our misfortune to have to address. This book, small as is its compass, and humble as are its aims, is, we believe and hope, precisely such as in the present perilous conjecture is needed for the guidance of the first steps of the infant mind. (Russell, 1970)

The childlike addressee is denigrated and situated below the speaker by virtue of the grammatical structures used such as the impersonal passive voice 'it is felt' and the majestic plural used to voice the opinions of the implied author of the book: 'we believe and hope', 'we have tried', 'we say this with the most complete and absolute confidence', 'we have shown' (Russell, 1970). The introduction also serves to satirise the educational system by blaming it for the 'lacuna' of information and the alleged problems arising from the fact that 'much unnecessary difficulty and much avoidable expenditure of school hours is due to the fact that the ABC, that gateway to all wisdom, is not made sufficiently attractive' (Russell, 1970). Thus, the very book that follows this introduction is identified as the crucial stage of education in terms of providing the introduction to all knowledge. In this context, the selection of words that Russell decided upon in his ABC book is even more indicative of the process of intended cognitive remodelling of perception to be undergone by the reader.

Instead of the traditional English alphabet set of words from the sphere of common everyday objects, animals and human types used to illustrate the subsequent letters of alphabet—such as most typically 'apple', 'ball', 'cat', 'dog', 'egg', 'fish', 'girl', 'horse' and so on—Russell opted for quite an advanced vocabulary not accessible to children at all. His list of alphabetically-ordered twenty-six entries is: 'Asinine', 'Bolshevik', 'Christian', 'Diabolic', 'Erroneous', 'Foolish', 'Greedy', 'Holy', 'Ignorant', 'Jolly', 'Knowledge', 'Liberty', 'Mystery', 'Nincompoop', 'Objective', 'Pedant', 'Queer', 'Rational', 'Sacrifice', 'True', 'Unfair', 'Virtue', 'Wisdom', 'Xenophobia', 'Youth', 'Zeal' (Russell, 1970).

It is worthwhile to consider this set of words in the context of the professed nature of the *Alphabet* as a 'gateway to all wisdom', also reinforced by its framing into the format of a common ABC textbook that promises to provide the basic or key knowledge necessary to understand some field. The focus of the philosopher's reflection seems to be the formation of the individual's perception of crucial concepts and values in society and education. It provides a sort of conceptual framing for the idea of citizenship, expressed through the titular concept of 'the Good Citizen'. It is interesting to note that most of the evoked concepts are being subverted while they are being constructed.

Many entries are indirectly focused on knowledge and wisdom, while these concepts are also directly defined through the entries 'Knowledge' and 'Wisdom' for the respective letters K and W. However, the opening concept which stands for the letter A is the destabilising notion of 'Asinine'. The first defined word in this book introduces the

semantic field of being a foolish person or simpleton by nature, also conveyed by the entry for letter N illustrated by the word 'Nincompoop' (Russell, 1970). The denigrating sense of these words is counterbalanced by the last word used in the *Alphabet* to illustrate the letter Z—'Zeal'. This entry semantically stands for intense endeavour and ardent fervour. Accordingly for such a frame of this collection of entries, there is much explicit focus on mistaken ideas and concepts in the collection. The letters E, F and I are defined through the respective concepts of 'Erroneous', 'Foolish' and 'Ignorant'.

The polemic with social values is reinforced by the fact that there are references to the religious and spiritual sphere to be found in the entries for C, D, H and S: 'Christian', 'Diabolic', 'Holy' and 'Sacrifice'. Apart from being directly denigrated they are also contextually underscored by being listed along with some social ideologies like the second entry in the book, for the letter B, which is 'Bolshevik'. The critical edge of the list is reinforced by the fact that there is much attention devoted to human vices as illustrated by the entries 'Greedy' and 'Ignorant'. This is juxtaposed with the affirmation of some values discernible in the focus on positive individual states and social circumstances in such entries as 'Jolly', 'Liberty', 'Rational' and 'Virtue' (Russell, 1970). Such a motley choice of words and concepts works to redefine the subsequent semantic fields by force of being juxtaposed with each other. The heterogeneous nature of the collection is additionally stressed by its departure from the typical homogenous standard of any alphabet illustrations, with the surface simple style of the drawings consistent with the textbook convention. The intermediary quality of the illustrations is at work here as the letters are illustrated by subsequent, philosophically juxtaposed concepts, while the latter are further illustrated in double way by means of aphoristic explanations and graphic illustrations. The latter work, in an allegorical way, is enhanced by the topsy-turvy sense of the maxim-like compact definitions.

This quasi-educational focus of the book is further destabilised through the way the entries are defined by the rhetorically foregrounded aphorisms that modify the semantic field of each word. Russell's focus on rhetoric is realised in multiple ways as the art of brief and bombastic redefining. What is striking is the explicitly literary shaping of the sayings. The implied author can effectively shape the attitudes, and implicitly reactions or actions, of the implied addressee through ample use of the figures of speech, such as deliberate arrangement, philosophical idiom, juxtaposition, paradox, expansion, omission, substitution, repetition and others. In this, Russell prefigures the postmodern focus on rhetoric through his genre-motivated focus on definitions of significant words which are shifted in semantic scope to the 'political and social discourse' (Drenttel, 2007).

What is crucial in Russell's definitions is sarcasm discernible in operating with the issues of cognition. This is represented as sharing and rejecting one's views. A very subtle subversion of contexts is attained through mutual substituting of the principles of contrast and parallelism in the way typical of rhetorical device of transmutation. Thus, the entry 'Asinine' is defined as '—What *you* think' (emphasis in the text), while the concept of blaming the other is further redefined by Franciszka's picture. The illustration shows two gentlemen engaged in an angry quarrel, accusing each other of erroneous thinking. The subversive, destabilising and disruptive style of understanding, which is evoked by such redefining of the semantic field of the word, marks the opening—

therefore constitutional—address to the reader as for the reading style. The ‘you’ of this first definition could well refer to the addressee of the text, thus constituting a wink from the implied author, encouraging the reader not to rely on their first impressions. The layered structure of subversion is revealed thus as the second twist is attained by gentle questioning of the dominance of the implied author, who questions anything ‘you’, the implied reader, might think. The twist to these cognitive relationships of knowing and not knowing is provided by the second entry, which in grotesque fashion defines the word ‘Bolshevik’ as ‘—Anyone whose opinions I disagree with’. Again, as in the concept of ‘you’ introduced in the first entry, it is not ultimately defined who the ‘I’ of this definition stands for. On the other hand, it clearly works in opposition to this initial ‘you’ from the first definition. The entry for the letter B introduces the political context as well as the social one as the entry is redefined by the drawing of an aristocratic-like individual dressed in a dinner jacket and button-up vest whose figure is composed in the self-righteous bodily posture.

Equally distanced is the attitude to education presented in this quasi-educational book. The subject of education, the child, is here denigrated by the constant mutually undermining focus on wisdom and foolishness. ‘Wisdom’ is defined as ‘—the opinions of our ancestors’ which is ridiculed by the drawing of the two possum individuals hanging upside down from the branch, with folded legs in the style of self-assured arm-folding. The childlike self-righteous facial expressions of the animals redefine the concept into blind following of custom which reveals the subversive side of wisdom - their bottoms get over-exposed. Formal education is also exposed and ridiculed in the entry for K ‘Knowledge’ defined as ‘—What Archbishops do not doubt’ (Russell, 1970, no pages) which is highlighted in its criticism by the knowledgeable bodily posture of the clergymen-style teacher, who shows one finger in the left hand while he is doing an erroneous equation on the blackboard in which the sum of three ones is one. This tuition is faced by the attentive destitute little boys who sit with their backs exposed only to reveal the patchy trousers and the baby-like hairless heads.

The portraits of the adult male characters are also frequently drawn by Franciszka in the style which defines them as little children domineered by the others - usually large female, domineering, matron-style figures. This is so in the entry for M ‘Mystery’ which is developed into the sentence ‘—What I understand and you don’t.’ The ‘I’ stands here for the large motherly figure of a wife or a lover, who is cuddling a frightened tiny man, sitting in the childlike way on a tiny chair, with his feet not reaching the floor, while his open mouth and prominent eye denote paralysis. His facial expression is grasped in the moment of unduly polite focus, as suggested by the tightly clasped bowler hat. The feminine attributes of prominent breasts and ample rounded contours of the figure, which is barely supported by a tiny chair, define the dominance in terms of the battle of the sexes. Childlike and clearly deluded are also the attentive soldiers listening to the speech of their leader who is holding an olive branch in one hand, while he secures a shooting gun suspended from his back. The concept of being inspired and moved to tears in the quasi-religious elevation of the spirits is grasped in Franciszka’s line art, while this entry for the letter O reads as ‘Objective—A delusion which other lunatics share’. One can see here the principle of redefining the concepts by means of what can be termed as the principle of substitution. This is clear in the definitions for ‘Queer’ and ‘Rational’ placed just for once in the whole collection on one page along with two little varied

pictures of two gentleman walking in the rain. ‘Queer’ is defined as ‘—Basing opinion on evidence’ while ‘Rational’ is framed as ‘—Not basing opinions on evidence’. The gentleman in the first picture is displeased as he avoids getting wet by walking under the umbrella as he checks the rain with the extended hand. The second gentleman is pleased as he gets wet in the rain while his hand is extended in the same fashion. The difference is that he uses the umbrella as a walking stick rather than for shelter.

The subversion of the aphoristic, paradoxical definitions is frequently enhanced by the pictures. In the illustration for the letter E which is defined by the word ‘Erroneous’, Franciszka’s line art shows a concerned gentleman. He is defined as all the other gentlemen in the *Alphabet*, by his formal dress, which is marked with a tailored suit, high-heel shoes and a bowler hat. This gentleman is seemingly very properly seated on a chair with his upright bodily posture, except for the fact that he is placed upside down. The formality of the posture is marked by the arms stiffly extended from the seat, which is contrasted with the loosely falling line of the legs, placed in the position of the arms. The drooping line of his lips can be read as a forced smile placed upside down. The formality of the position and its apparent conventionality is foregrounded by the bowler hat placed appropriately, and inappropriately at the same time, on the topmost part of the figure, which is his bottom. The formality of the figure’s position and dress is questioned in its propriety by the fact that the presumable head is substituted here by the man’s more private parts. Thus the decency and conventionality of the figure is questioned while it is being apparently asserted. The visual image redefines the sense of the word ‘Erroneous’ and Russell’s definition of it which are subversive in themselves by principle of contrast with other entries. It clearly is intended to work on the rhetorical level, being more of a logical definition, as it reads ‘—Capable of being proved true’. The upside-down quality of the picture is thus reinforced by the apparently reconciled opposition between the words erroneous and true, placed on the same semantic level, by force of being placed in the relationship of mutual redefining one another. The domineering focus on logic, the inaccessible art of the sage, and Bertrand Russell—the real author of the text, is thus asserted and questioned at the same time in a self-referential way.

The subversion of defining the concept by means of using the opposite sense from the expected one is apparent in many entries, as the word ‘Christian’ is defined by description ‘—Contrary to the Gospels’ while the picture which goes along it is the allegory of war shown through the image of multi-faced and multi-legged aeroplane, depicted as men with propeller-noses who have arms wielding a shooting gun instead of wings. Their action has the effect of fragmentation on the men lying on the ground. The equivalence is created between being Christian and embarking on a war. It is interesting that the Gospels are still held as the source of the system of values by Russell who many times embarked on explaining why he was not a Christian (Russell, 1957). The fact that ‘Christian’ is the third entry of the book makes the religious stance of the author a crucial factor to the axiological system forming the basis for the emergence of the good citizen from the title of the *Alphabet*.

The selected collection of entries, definitions and thrifty pictures which mutually redefine one another, establishes the principle of questioning the social and political authorities as well as spiritual and cultural points of reference. The religious creed, the

system of values of society, the nature and capacity of knowledge and the knowledgeable ones in society are all questioned. What Russell's definitions do to the concepts that are considered is to point to the logically fluid semantic scope of the terms. Thus the word 'Foolish' is trivialised into '—Disliked by the police'. Operating with such multiple dialogic and polyphonic principle of subversion, based on redefining social and institutional cognition works to half-seriously undermine the basic, underlying sense of the instruction manual of how to gain knowledge and how to become a good citizen.

The same is the ultimate purpose of the jocular illustrations. Whenever an individual citizen or a group of citizens are shown in Franciszka's pictures, they are depicted in an unfavourable way as bound by undue ties, as in the picture used to illustrate the letter V and the word 'Virtue' defined as '–Submission to the government' where the stout gentlemen are led on a line in slaves' style. They are connected by the rope attached to their noses and are tended by the zoo-keeper type of leader who is tempting them with a prominently held carrot. The nonchalant pose of the caretaker, with the arm placed on his back, is accompanied by the deliberate facial expressions of the pleased citizens. They assume equally offhand style of bodily postures, with the hands in pockets, wielding umbrellas and clasped at the back. All this implies the domineering point of view of the establishment, the rich, and the citizenship-oriented class of society, which is yet questioned by the on-going, multi-layered, philosophically manipulative subversion present in constant distancing attained by partly incongruous combinations of chosen entries, definitions and illustrations. Russell himself noticed and commented to Stefan that Franciszka's pictures heightened all the points he wanted to make (Barnard, 2003).

On top of all these remarks it should also be stressed that Russell, working in tandem with Franciszka, ironically distanced themselves not only the system of social values of education and citizenship, but also to their own attitude. There are entries in which the author and painter satirically pass a wink to the reader of the book that it all needs to be understood in double way, including the need to question the implied domineering point of view. Subversively, both artists referred to themselves in the self-referential way in the text. P is illustrated by the word 'Pedant' which is defined as '—A man who likes his statements to be true', which is accompanied by the caricature of Russell himself, holding a champagne glass and focused on the observation of the fermenting bubbles, while he is sitting with his back to the face of the page. The colour chosen for this drawing in the 1953 edition, is yellow, the colour of the avant-garde, also the domineering colour of such publications as Franciszka's first version of *Ubu King* by Alfred Jarry. The depicted action of observing the sparkling wine is a turn-of-the century motif of questioning the upper classes, as it appears in the opening of 'The Time Machine' of H. G. Wells (1895). Entry for the letter N 'Nincompoop' which is a word that defines a foolish person is explained as '—A person who serves mankind in ways for which they are not grateful'. This definition is illustrated by Franciszka's messy-haired auto portrait as the minute female painter figure standing next to the large chisel and a finished painting of a rhombus and a dot.

To conclude, it is a multi-layered and dialogic quality which is attained through the double edged principle to be found behind the analysed work. On one hand, it can be treated as an expression of Russell's philosophy as well as a half-serious exploration of

the language that could serve to describe it, with Franciszka's drawings intended to playfully illustrate the considered concepts. On the other hand, it works on the level of indirect diagnosis and expression of the twentieth-century crisis of values, the crisis which the people of the twenty-first century are still heirs to. This crisis emerged directly from the experience of the First and the Second World Wars as well as indirectly from the turn-of-the-century general mood of nihilism. This dialogic quality is enhanced by the choice of the simple ABC textbook format and the fact that the book is illustrated with Franciszka's thrifty line art created in the convention of children's drawings. To fully appreciate the way this *Alphabet* works, one needs to examine the inter-media correspondences between the impact of the text and the implications of the drawings. This is when the complex way of creating senses emerges which is attained through the jocular philosophical questioning of values without giving any definite answers.

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