

interpretations allows insight into the texts and experiences graduate students take as having meaning for “how it has come about that they act in these ways”.

I am looking forward to working with mathematics graduate students to understand their process of becoming mathematicians and teachers of mathematics, to understand what has meaning for them in determining who and how they should be, and how they feel their lives as mathematicians, their ‘being’ as mathematicians has meaning for how they are as teachers of mathematics. I believe that this understanding is necessary before we attempt to change their teaching practices. For their interpretations of how they need to be in mathematics may prevent them from teaching in ways we might hope for or envision.

Notes

Smith, D. (1983) *The meaning of children in the lives of adults: a hermeneutic study*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. Contact paramita@telus.net. See also Smith (1999, p. 28).

References

- Davis, B. (2004) *Inventions of teaching: a genealogy*, Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Smith, D. (1999) ‘The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text’, in *Pedagon: interdisciplinary essays in the human sciences, pedagogy and culture*, New York, NY, Peter Lang.

Afterwords

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Recounting Cantor was one of the final pieces Dick Tahta wrote; he had circulated an earlier version of it as a Christmas note a year before. His gentle but pointed retelling of elements of Cantor’s history illustrate a number of themes that ran through his own work, not least a striking sensitivity to the psychological intertwined with the mathematical, the personal striving for and living in relation to the impersonal. It also reflects Dick’s intellectual activity that can, unlike many, be fittingly described as *scholarly*. It is with regard to his omnivorous reading that he most closely approximated Matisse’s autobiographical comment, “I overdid everything as a matter of course”.

This re-reading of the two main English sources of Cantorian biography (by Ivor Grattan-Guinness and Joseph Dauben) allowed him the opportunity to nudge up against some psycho-mathematical issues that both these historians had sought to downplay or deny outright. (Some readers may well recall Dick’s special issue 13(1) of this journal on psychodynamics and mathematics education.) Both Grattan-Guinness’s and Dauben’s work was done in their relative youth: the former was 30 in 1971 and the latter 35 when he published his biography of Cantor in 1979. Dick, in his mid-seventies, was re-engaging with pieces written by much younger men thirty to thirty-five years previously. Was there nothing more recent that had been written on this topic?

The trigger for this short note was my recent encountering of a more current lecture that Dauben (2005) had given on “the

battle for Cantorian set theory”. The talk was first presented in the late 1980s (at the AMS centenary meeting): this text, however, had only just seen the light of day in print. It is evident to me that Dick never saw this chapter, despite the fact that the book containing it was in the same Canadian Mathematics Society series (volume 21) that Dick’s own final mathematico-psychoanalytic chapter was to appear (volume 25), made worse by the fact he never held this latter book (Tahta, 2006a) in his hands even though it had been published some days before he died. Had he come across it earlier, no doubt he would have noticed the title and acted accordingly.

As just one instance relating to what Dick wrote, Dauben in his chapter (p. 222 especially) shifts without acknowledgement the attribution of the medical ‘diagnosis’ given in the Grattan-Guinness account (and quoted on p. 10 of this issue) to one Karl Pönitz (a medical contemporary of Cantor), pushing it some seventy years back in time. Compare this with footnote 8 in Tahta’s article. And while Dauben acknowledges the existence of *Infini et inconscient* by Nathalie Charraud (1994) (in footnote 3), he referred to her only as a Lacanian ‘psychiatrist’ and not also as a senior lecturer in mathematics at a Parisian university (her doctoral supervisor was Charles Ehresmann), as she then was.

Just before starting to write this short note, I received a copy of Fitzgerald and James’s (2007) *The mind of the mathematician*. Ioan James was Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford University. In this book, following some general psychological discussion, there are capsule snapshots of twenty ‘mathematical personalities’, one of which is of Cantor. While much of the same material and sources are used as in Dick’s writing here, and it is of a comparable length, the Fitzgerald and James piece seems without direction (I feel this to be the case of many of these ‘portraits’). The subtlety of listening inside the life as well as the making of suggestive allusions based upon it are two hallmarks of Dick Tahta’s style (evident too in his more extensive mathematical biography of Thomas Kirkman – Tahta, 2006b).

I end with a passing biographical note: Ioan James was an undergraduate student at Oxford while Dick was also there studying mathematics: James was apparently an intimidating figure due to his marked mathematical prowess. Dick was interested in James’s current interest in Asperger’s syndrome and mathematicians for a number of reasons. But despite his affinity for such questions, Dick remained decidedly suspicious of psycho-biographical diagnosis.

References

- Charraud, N. (1994) *Infini et inconscient: essai sur Georg Cantor*, Paris, France, Anthropos.
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