Wiener Slawistischer Almanach 80 (2017), 49-65

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MAPPING THE BLACK VOID: IANKA DIAGILEVA'S POEM 'KLASSICHESKII DEPRESNIAK'

Abstract

The article presents a two-level analysis of a poem on depression, 'Klassicheskii depresniak' ('Classic Depressive'), by the Siberian poet and singer Iana "Ianka" Diagileva (1966-1991). The first level of analysis focuses on the lexical stratum of the poem, while the second compares the poem to psychiatric diagnostics (DSM-IV) and cognitive psychological theory (Seligman 1975), recommended by two expert clinical psychologist respondents presented with the poem. On the first level, the analysis finds a pronounced scarcity of verbs and verbal forms which correspond to an absence of action and agency; vague and ambiguous markers of identity and space; and frequent markers of stasis and absence. Moreover, whereas markers of pain and suffering are clearly present throughout the poem, fear is absent. The lexical analysis shows how the poem maps the state of depression in the form of phases of stasis and absence, where even individual identity is rendered irrelevant. On the second level, the poem is found to confirm all nine DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for a major depressive disorder. The poem also lends itself to comparison with the concept of "learned helplessness" within cognitive approaches to psychological theory, which helps to explain the reason for its particular lexical characteristics. Finally, despite its dark subject matter, the poem utilises humour to subtly ridicule its object of description, undermining its status as an object of fear.

Keywords
Ianka Diagileva, Poetry, Depression, Psychiatry/Psychology, Absence, Stasis.

Introduction

The experience of depression poses considerable challenges for artists, perhaps not least in poetry. For, how to describe in detail something commonly referred

to as "a black void" by the people who have experienced it? (Greve 2016, O'Carroll 2016) As the metaphor suggests, the experience of depression offers neither colours, nor substance, nor agency that can facilitate its description, nor any presence beyond that of acute pain and suffering. Thus, despite the frequency of secondary references to depression, there are few examples of works of poetry or song lyrics dealing directly with the experience. Of course, there is little evidence to suggest that poets should have less experience with depression than anybody else. Instead, a connection could possibly be made between the scarcity of poems describing the state of depression and the subject matter's inherent defiance of description.

The current article analyses Ianka Diagileva's poem 'Klassicheskii depresniak' ('Classic Depressive'), published in the collection *Russkoe pole eksperimentov*, a compilation of early poetry by Diagileva, Egor Letov and Konstantin Riabinov. (1994: 180) For the record, I analyse this poem neither because it is written by Diagileva (biographical interest, rock star perspective), nor because of its proximity to (or distance from) the Siberian punk scene (music scene perspective), but in order to investigate how it succeeds in describing a condition (depression) which evades description in normal language. Thus, this is not an article on popular music, even if it is about a poem written by someone who was also a popular musician. I am grateful if my article may contribute to ongoing research on Diagileva, her biography, and her work, the study of the Siberian punk wave, or other aspects of Soviet and post-Soviet popular music, but in the following these are all to be regarded as secondary issues.

The main priority of the analysis is to let the poem speak for itself, rather than impose on its reading an extensive matrix of authorial-biographical material. Such an open reading offers the possibility to discover aspects and qualities of the poem, which are not necessarily consistent with the canonic portrayal of Diagileva's work. The hegemony of canonical narratives is always a strong factor in popular culture, no less so in the discourse surrounding Russian popular music. Since the work analysed here is a poem, not a song, it becomes particularly important to take precautions against reductionist pigeonholing from the dominant narrative offered by popular music critics and historians. I am acutely aware that it is currently fashionable to disregard close reading as a viable analytic tool beyond the auditorium. Perhaps, then, more academic research should pay its dues to the teaching situation? To ensure that the analysis is consistent with psychological terms and definitions, it has been checked and informed by two expert respondents (both clinical psychologists). In dialogue with the same two respondents, findings from investigating the lexical stratum of the poem have been tested by comparing them briefly to psychiatric diagnostics (DSM-IV) and key concepts from cognitive psychological theory (Seligman 1975).

The focus of the current article is on the poem as a description of depression, on how it solves the challenge of describing its condition. For the above mentioned reasons, Diagileva will only be briefly introduced in relation to Russian rock music culture and the Siberian punk scene of the late 1980s. Those interested in further sociological context are advised to consult Gololobov et al. (2014: 22-48), for more on Diagileva's poetics – Kliueva (2008), for an exhaustive collection of press material and reviews in Russian, see Borisova and Sokolov (2001). As a poem, 'Klassicheskii depresniak' is striking for the manner in which it depicts the condition of depression. A closer scrutiny of the text will hopefully reveal how the poet manages to positively describe an experience, which so strongly resists being put into words.

Ianka Diagileva, Russian rock and Siberian punk

The emergence and development of rock music culture in the USSR during the 1970s and 1980s brought with it a focus on individual experience and the challenges of everyday life of young people in a society run by a gerontocracy obsessed with controlling and protecting the nation's youth from harmful ideological influences. Soviet cultural authorities were deeply worried about rock culture. On the musical level, it represented a return from an advanced harmony to the barbarity of rhythm; on the lyrical, it focused on individual experience, rather than the interests of the collective. Rock music's preoccupation with emotions, existential questions, and problems and challenges of existence translated in the ears of the Soviet cultural establishment as an obsession with "negativity". Later, as Russian rock gained a solid foothold in late Soviet cultural scene during the perestroika years, voices emerged on the fringes of the rock scene that were delving even further into the darker sides of the human experience. What would become known as the Siberian punk scene may have consisted only of a dozen people or so, but it is hard to underestimate its impact on the so-called Russian cultural underground of the 1990s.[1]

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[1] The reasons why I have chosen not to compare the current poem with examples from the Siberian punk tradition is threefold. Firstly, Ianka's aesthetics are frequently on and beyond the margins of local and global punk aesthetics. Secondly, as a poem 'Klassicheskii depresniak' cannot be directly compared to songs with explicit musical and performative generic markers, nor to a scene identified primarily by its musical-performative aesthetics. In poetry "punk" means something else than in music. For an example, consider the works of iconic "punk poet" John Cooper Clarke, whose work owes as much to poets and humorists, such as Pam Ayres, as it does to punk songs. The British punk scene provided Clarke with a stage and an audience, but his poetry cannot for that reason be confined to that scene. Thirdly, the multitide and high diversity of the works of the, heavily male-dominated, Siberian punk scene, combined with their inherent tendency towards deliberate (self-)contradiction, makes them a

The term "Siberian punk" was coined by "underground" music journalists following the first performance of Egor Letov's (1964-2008) band Grazhdanskaia Oborona, at the Sverdlovsk rock festival in 1987. Various musicians from Novosibirsk, Omsk and Tiumen' gathered around ideas pioneered by Letov, or were simply involved in similar musical projects and inspired by his numerous do-it-yourself recordings. Like Russian rock, Siberian punk gave primacy to vocals and lyrics, but instead of offering listeners enlightenment and affirmation, it celebrated the extremes of human existence. Siberian punk declared war on the aesthetic and ideological values of society, employing everything society most feared: an uncompromising individuality and a pathological "negativism" celebrating the abject, filthy and unhealthy aspects of existence, including sentiments such as boredom, desperation, disillusionment – and insanity. Musically, punk in its Western guise was in and of itself incapable of expressing to the full the desperation of Siberian punk. Thus, the local incarnation of punk as semiotic assault (Hebdige 1979) was reinforced with elements of the language and musical styles favoured by the cultural majority, in particular Soviet Estrada (officially sanctioned pop music, e.g. Eduard Khil' and Alla Pugacheva) and bard song (aka guitar poetry, e.g. Vladimir Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava). Recordings were characterised by deliberately distorted and primitive sound, spur-of-the-moment ideas, improvisations, and inside jokes. Live performances were initially limited to apartment gigs, and were for practical reasons often acoustic. The songs combined melodiousness of guitar poetry and Soviet Estrada with punk delivery, primal vocal expression, and uncompromising lyrics in a rich poetic vernacular, usually littered with swearing and verbal provocations.

Following in the momentum of this new scene was a young female singer-songwriter, Iana "Ianka" Diagileva (1966-1991). Her works are still frequently associated with the Siberian punk scene, although her entry in the first widely distributed Soviet rock encyclopaedia (Alekseev, Burlaka and Sidorov 1991: 265-6) contains no references to Siberian punk. Rather, the entry compares her to Janis Joplin (looks), Joan Baez (voice), and, in Russian rock circles, the most highly revered "bard rock" songwriter and performer Aleksandr Bashlachev (1960-1988) (lyrics). Notably, beyond this, the entry contains few biographical references and takes on the form of an obituary or lament departing from Diagileva's verse and its occupation with the darkest shades of human experience. The entry does not mention that Diagileva had documented psychiatric problems and had undergone psychiatric treatment, and its unusual form reflects the fact that in May of the year the book was released, Diagileva was found dead in the Inia river, near her hometown, after having been missing for more than a week. The entry emphasises, however, that Diagileva's sentiment and aesthetics dif-

most unreliable and potentially misleading comparison material for the current analysis.

fered significantly from those of male rock and punk performers. Certainly, her verse mastered the punk sentiments of rage, sarcasm, and celebratory self-abasement. Significantly, however, she also wrote songs and poems of a much more quiet and unsettling kind. More than strictly generic and aesthetic, her proximity to the Siberian punk scene was geographical and social. This proximity was also influenced by her brief romantic relationship with Letov, their shared concerts, and his contributions to the accompaniment and recording of her first three albums. By somewhat paradoxically merging Hippie and Punk aesthetics, Diagileva defined her own realm within and beyond the generic confines of punk, a realm where the topic of depression is often present, if not necessarily the primary center of attention. Diagileva's songs can be described as less violently aggressive than those of Grazhdanskaia Oborona, more deeply psychologically developed and compassionate, rather than cynically misanthropic. Diagileva's songs were characterised by an almost brutal intimacy, served with urgency and defiance. Importantly, however, despite the impression left by the above mentioned rock encyclopaedia entry and the often emotionally harrowing nature of her songs, even in the darkest and most painful of her lyrics Diagileva's pitch-black humour is always subtly present. Her extreme pessimism not only offers the opportunity of mourning, but also cathartic empowerment and traces of momentarily absent life and warmth. Unlike rock bards such as Boris Grebenshchikov or Aleksandr Bashlachev with their universes of spiritual allegory, Diagileva remains in a painfully material reality where the fate and emotions of the outcast take centre stage. Hopefully, these aspects will be reflected in the course of the following analysis.

The poem

Perhaps as a consequence of its topic, 'Klassicheskii depresniak' was never set to music and performed as a song. However, Diagileva is first and foremost known as a singer-songwriter, a fact that has a particular impact on how her written verse is read. A Russian reader even remotely familiar with Diagileva's songs would very probably hear Diagileva's voice reciting for their inner ear when reading 'Klassicheskii depresniak'. In her recordings Diagileva employs a characteristic declamatory style: fast and somehow listless, yet simultaneously human and vulnerable.[2] As well as the performative aspects, the formal side of

[2] Readers who are unfamiliar with Diagileva's voice are advised to listen to the intro to her song 'Vyshe nogi ot zemli' ('Feet up Higher from the Ground') from her 1991 album *Styd i sram* (*Shame and Humiliation*) (Diagileva 1991). Here, her vocal performance comes close to the voice an informed reader would imagine when reading 'Klassicheskii depresniak'. A link to the online sound file is provided in the source references.

the original of this poem in twenty lines leaves a lot to be said. However, because of limited space and language issues, the following analysis will concentrate on the lexical level and proceed to discussing this in relation to psychiatric and psychological approaches to depression. Here, it shall be just briefly noted that the free verse poem is rich in alliterations and assonances and, perhaps unsurprisingly, on the phonetic side marked by predominantly dark vowels.

‘Классический депресняк’ (1987)
1. Кругом души от покаяний
2. Безысходности без движений
3. Неподвижности без исходов
4.Неприятие без воздействий
5. Нереакция до ухода
6. Неестественность чёрных фобий
7. Легкомыслие битых окон
8. Светлоглазые боги глохнут,
9. Заражаясь лежащим танцем
10. Покрываясь стальной коростой
11. Будут рыцарями в музеях
12. Под доспехами тихо-тихо
13. Из-под мрамора биться долго
14. Обречённости и колодцы
15. Подземелья и суициды
16. Стынут реки и ноги мёрзнут
17. Два шага по чужому асфальту
18. В край раздробленных откровений
19. В дом, где нету ни после, ни вместе
20. В рай без веры и в ад без страха

(Letov, Diagileva and Riabinov 1994: 180)

‘Classic depressive’ (1987)[3]
1. Surrounding souls – from confession
2. Inescapabilities without movements
3. Immobility without escapes
4. Discomfort without influence
5. Unaffectedness before the exit
6. The unreality of black phobias
7. The recklessness of broken windows
8. The bright-eyed gods wilt away,

[3] The English translation is my own – YBS.

9. Infected by bed-ridden dance
10. Covered in steel-hard crust
11. They become knights in the museums
12. Under marble armour quiet-quiet
13. To long continue beating
14. Despondence and abysses
15. Shafts and suicides
16. Rivers cool and feet freeze
17. Two steps on alien tarmac
18. Into the realm of fragmented revelations
19. Into a house with neither after nor together
20. Into a heaven without faith, a hell without fear

Lexical analysis

What is going on in this poem? This question brings us closer to the core of the matter than we might expect, for as even a preliminary glance at the verbs applied confirms: apparently not a lot! Apart from the hint of a present tense of "to be" in the opening line (a form which in Russian can be unmarked and invisible/inaudible; its possibility adds a disorienting effect even in the original), the first active verb to occur is "wilt (away)" in the eighth line. For an active verbal form that word has predominantly passive connotations, emphasising a lack of agency rather than a willed or even conscious act. This impression is enhanced in the immediately following lines with the passives "infected" and "covered", which in the original occur in the form of present tense gerunds that are subordinated to the main verb "wilt" and signify simultaneously ongoing processes. In turn, these, along with the adjectives "broken" and "fragmented", maintain the absence of agency. Next, in line eleven, the verb "become" does indeed mark a transition, but the living aspects of the images of the "bright-eyed gods" turned "knights" are immediately negated by situating them "in the museums", enclosed in marble armour, under which they are "to long continue beating". Here the original uses the somewhat ambiguous "bit'sia dolgo", a reflexive in the infinitive, literally: "to beat (itself) long", which evokes the presence of heartbeat, again emphasising the absence of will or agency. However, on a secondary level "bit'sia" connotes an on-going fight or struggle, as supported by the image of the knights in armour, albeit as introvert and static a struggle as they appear themselves.

The last verbs to occur in the poem are "cool" and "freeze", the poem's second and third verbal markers of transition which, echoing the previously used expression "wilt away", represent a movement away from life and movement, towards a frozen immobility. Here, an early version of the poem has "nochi

merknut" ("the nights go dark"), but in the current version the disappearance of heat is instead extended and enhanced by replacing darkness with "nogi merznut" ("[the] feet freeze"). In addition to the verbs, the nouns "exit" and "suicides" represent actions and/or transitions, yet notably both are applied independently of any explicit subjects or causality relationships. Also prominent non-verbal markers of transition are the three times repeated "into" which open each of the three last lines of the poem. In the original, "into" (the preposition "v" + accusative) is actually repeated a fourth time in the second half of the final line, but omitted in my English translation in order to improve the flow. The final transition points back at the "feet" of line sixteen and the "two steps" of line seventeen. It represents an entrance into a space signified by four words: "realm", "house", "heaven", and "hell". Below, further attention will be given to these and their relation to "feet" and "steps".

In general, a scarcity of verbs combined with their substitutions by nouns and nominal phrases creates stasis and the impression that not only change is excluded, but action as such. This was also a main feature of the official language in the late Soviet period, when a particular official discourse was adopted, propagated by Kremlin ideologist Mikhail Suslov. Yurchak terms this "block writing" (2004: 49-50), a practice in which – as a first step – sentences were subject to a nominalisation, which shifted emphasis from the present to the past, from potential action or movement to stasis, from possibility to established fact:

> The corresponding verbal phrases and noun phrases represent the same forms of knowledge but with different temporalities: the knowledge represented in noun phrases is "removed" into the past in logical time in relation to the knowledge represented in the verbal phrases. In other words, these noun phrases present knowledge in terms of "facts" established *before* the act of speaking, while the verbal phrases present it as new claims made *in* the act of speaking. (Yurchak 2006: 68-69, emphases in original)

Correspondingly, verbal phrases can be turned into questions, challenging their own statements, an ability effectively blocked when verbal phrases are transformed into nominal phrases. In 'Classical Depressive', Diagileva achieves a similar effect by way of nominalisation, emphasising that the state of depression is both unchangeable and unquestionable.

The poem's deficit of action and agency warrants a closer investigation of its markers of identity. It soon becomes apparent that these markers are consistent chiefly, if not only, in the use of the plural form. The entities referred to are kept vague throughout, as the reader is offered little or no substantial information on which to build any portrait of the humans that inhabit the poem. Rather, the poem begins with primary references to people, the opening one, "souls", also being the most concrete, although the word arguably figures among the most im-

material terms available to signify "person". The abstract nature of the souls is then enhanced by their description in the following line as "inescapabilities" (depending on the inclusion of the invisible present tense copula "are" in the Russian original, which appears to be the only way of making the poem's opening work on a grammatical level). Next, the "souls" are linked to the "bright-eyed gods" of the eighth line, yet without suggesting that the two entities are necessarily or entirely the same. In contrast, the "gods" explicitly become "knights" (in the museums) in line eleven, whilst the relationship between both these and the "feet" in line sixteen is again ambiguous: the body parts could belong to any, all or none of the above. The progression from entities ("souls") via metaphorical entities ("gods", "knights") to body parts ("feet") is matched by key secondary markers of identity, i.e. the words that imply the presence of a sensing subject or subjects. In order of appearance these are: "immobility" (by context), "discomfort", "unaffectedness", "phobias", "broken windows", "quiet-quiet", (heartbeat), "suicides", "steps", "revelations", "faith", and "fear". All of these markers of identity become gradually fewer and more ambiguous and immaterial as the poem proceeds. Thus, the phobias are black, the revelations are fragmented, and, finally, "faith" and "fear" are absent.

The use of plurals ("souls", "inescapabilities", "movements", "escapes", "phobias", "windows", "gods", "knights", "they" [twice repeated], "museums", "abysses", "shafts", "suicides", "rivers", "feet", "steps", "revelations") serves two main functions. Firstly, it creates disorientation or estrangement, poetic plural forms of singular words such as "inescapabilities" being perhaps the most prominent example. There is no concrete reference to a number of entities in any of the plurals. Even "feet", which arguably comes closest to signifying an individual, could refer to a single or any number of subjects. Secondly, it emphasises the general relevance of the state described, echoing the title word "classic" in referring to a universal phenomenon, a repeated condition suffered by many. The deliberate ambiguity with relation to identities is enhanced by the references generally becoming fewer as the poem progresses, as well as by seemingly moving steadily away from the most concrete signifier ("souls" in the first line), rather than towards it. Even the "feet" in line sixteen are made to seem strangely disembodied. The state described appears to negate or dissolve the presence of an individual personality, to render singular identity irrelevant.

In contrast to the markers of identity, spatial or topographic markers become increasingly more frequent as the poem unfolds. "Surrounding", in the original "vokrug" (literally "around"), places the souls in relation to each other. Yet, apart from sharing the same space and the same experience, there is no apparent interaction going on between them, which may also explain the indifference of their actual numbers. "Exit" implies a border between two spaces, an inside and an outside. It would be tempting here to interpret these phases as stages in

depression, leading from breakdown and ever deeper into depression. However, on closer scrutiny, the poem resists such a reading. There is no substantial evidence to any beginning or an entering into depression, not to mention any hope of an exit from it. Rather, depression, although shifting between phases, comes forth as ever present and all consuming. At the point where the "exit" is mentioned, the poem merely places us (unaffected) before it, still on the inside. The (recklessness of) broken windows could suggest that irresponsible attempts at breaking the barriers between the inside/outside have been made, potentially bringing about the "exit", yet the suggested transition marks no fundamental change in the condition described. By line ten, however, the process of enclosure accelerates dramatically as the "bright-eyed gods" are covered in "steel-hard crust" and are turned into the marble statues of knights in the museums. Barely alive, their hearts continue to beat silently beneath the stone. The process of becoming trapped is now complete.

Then, in contrast, the immediately following spatial marker signifies endlessness. The reader is brought from the enclosure under marble armour to face abysses, and from this new point of departure returns via shafts and rivers to an alien tarmac, where two steps are sufficient to cross the threshold into another space: into a realm (of fragmented revelations), into a house (with no posterity or togetherness), into a heaven (without faith) and into a hell (without fear). We shall elaborate further on the markers of absence shortly, but already evident is that an initially endless introvert landscape has been opened up to the reader in a shocking manner. Then, for a moment, this landscape appears to take on a more material form, leading back into a more finite space. Ultimately, however, this space defies both concrete description and meaningful expectation. Even the metaphors of heaven and hell are enstranged by each of them being denied a defining quality.

The segments that signify transition suggest that the poem's protagonists, the souls, are drifting passively through various phases of depression. First, they are about to pass through an "exit", a passage evoked by a "bed-ridden dance" (out) into a new phase; second, they "wilt away" (whilst being infected and covered in crust), suffering vegetative deaths. Simultaneously with the latter, they are infected with a physical response to suffering (even independently of the current context, "dancing" lying down hardly suggests anything pleasurable or meaningful) and "become" fixed in the steel-hard stone crusts of marble knights. Yet already in the opening of the poem the protagonists are powerless, pinned down by markers of stasis. They are introduced, effectively, as personifications of no escape ("inescapabilities", "without escapes"), they are motionless ("without movements", "immobility"), they even dance (writhe in agony?) while lying down. In the second half of the poem stasis is further maintained by the connected words "despondence" and "abysses", even the "two steps on alien

tarmac" ironically represent hardly any meaningful movement or achievement. Although the steps mark a kind of transition "into" yet another phase, this phase represents no meaningful, material space, but a space of absences. Rather than bringing anyone away from or towards somewhere, the two steps merely mark another passive transition, similar to the exit, the covering with crust, the transformation into museal knights. The quality of meaningful, willed movement (usually associated with "steps") is effectively replaced with passivity, weakness and disorientation. Thus, in the poem's final lines, rather than being undermined by the four-times-repeated movement of "into", the overall impression of stasis is again confirmed and reinforced on a general level.

Throughout the poem, the markers of stasis also frequently overlap with markers of absence, especially in the first half, where escape, movement, influence, affect, and reality are negated. Furthermore, the absence of sound is emphasised by the museum methaphor combined with the "quiet-quiet" beating (of hearts). Towards the end of the poem, however, the markers of absence expand. Thus, "abysses" emphasise the bottomless, the endless, but simultaneously suggest the absence of form, of light, of sound. The temperature literally falls to sub-zero as "rivers cool" and "feet freeze". Along with warmth, the familiar and softness are excluded on "alien tarmac". The lack of guiding structure extends to the crushed or fragmented revelations, and finally posterity, togetherness, and faith disappear, taking even fear with them.

The absence of fear will be further elaborated upon below. Here it suffices to note that it appears strangely absent throughout the whole poem. Fear is substituted with passivity (e.g. "unaffectedness"), whereas pain is clearly present, and not only through the overall impression of inescapability and the shocking shifts from enclosure to endlessness. Similarly, the urge to confession originates in suffering, not to speak of suicide attempts and more directly "discomfort", "black phobias", "wilt[ing] away", "despondence", "freeze" and "hell", which signify pain on a primary level. This is reinforced by images such as "broken windows" or "crust" on a secondary level.

Returning briefly to our point of departure: the experience of depression described as a "black void", all the poem's markers of inaction, stasis and absence become instrumental for the mapping of what defies description. Thus, the poem's very construction relies on a structure of negation. As we have seen, the poem's relative lack of verbs creates similar effects to that of late Soviet official discourse. However, while texts of Soviet block writing could often quite literally be read "backwards" (by reading the nominal clauses in the opposite order) without changing the overall message, Diagileva's poem does allude to transitions, however discreetly, between various phases or spaces of depression. Thus, the stasis of 'Classic Depressive' is not total and its description of the state of depression is layered, and surprisingly rich. Importantly, the ensuing wealth of

images also gives room for subtle, if pitch-black, humour. Perhaps most prominently this comes forth in the poem's title, where the joint reference "classic"/"classical" merge the typical nature of the state described with classical imagery (marble statues, knights, museums). This "Classic(al)" is in the original teamed up with the derogatory slang term "depresniak", which denotes (a state of) depression[4], the mixing of stylistic levels further enabling a certain ironic play and ironic distancing.

'Classic Depressive' and the condition of depression

Relying on qualitative research interviewing has long become customary not only in sociology but also, for example, in linguistics and popular music studies. It is my duty as a researcher to obtain expertise relevant to my analysis, which lies beyond my own area of expertise. In order to test the validity of the findings from the above analysis, I presented two clinical psychologists with my English translation of the poem. Having read it, both asserted, firstly, that the poem's description of clinical depression was highly convincing and, secondly, that the author is highly likely to have experienced the condition personally in order to give such an advanced description of it. The two psychologists, Boy Greve (clinical psychologist, Tromsø University Hospital) and Pierce O'Carroll (clinical psychologist at the University of Liverpool, a pensioner since 2016), kindly offered to quality check my use of specialist words and concepts throughout the article. They also suggested suitable concepts from psychiatry, psychology and psychological theory, complete with their critical views as professionals.

In everyday language, "depression" is often used to describe the lows of ordinary mood swings, conditions that do not qualify as depression in medical terms. What is lacking in such popular use of the term is revealed already by consulting a dictionary entry: "Severe despondency and dejection, especially when long-lasting." (Oxford Concise English Dictionary 1991) When it comes to psychiatry and psychology, however, we are presented with two different approaches to depression. Where psychiatry tends to view depression as an illness that can, at least potentially, be relieved by medication, psychology tends to view it as a condition within the realms of normal human experience, which can get out of hand and is most likely to be resolved through therapy. (O'Carroll 2016) On the principal level, then (if not always in practice), as the basis for a cure, psychiatry tends to focus on the diagnosis, and psychology, on the causes of depression.

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[4] Synonymous with '*depressiia*'or another slang term: '*depressukha*'. It can also be applied in a wider sense, denoting something depressive or depressing in general, or, more narrowly, a particular drug withdrawal effect.

Notably, the focus of the current analysis is neither a diagnosis of the poet's condition, nor an investigation into its causes. Rather, our focus lies on the poem as a cultural object and its descriptions of the condition of depression. Thus, it makes sense to cast a quick glance at what can be gleaned from either side. Let us first see what we can learn from DSM-IV-TR 'Criteria for major Depressive Disorder' (MDD), a diagnostic checklist developed by the American Psychiatric Association for psychiatrists and general practitioners, released in 2000.

Whilst attempting to avoid opening a can of worms and be drawn into a contentious debate about psychiatric diagnostics, it is important to briefly comment on the controversial nature of the DSM concept. Readers who wish to investigate this further can begin by consulting Ronson (2011: 242-66).[5] The objective here is not to criticise psychiatric diagnostics, although there might be good reasons for doing so. Neither is it to investigate which diagnosis was applied to our poet (if any), or on which basis. Obviously, coming from the opposite ideological camp, one would expect DSM to be treated with skepticism and caution by Soviet psychiatry.[6] In the following DSM-IV is applied with the sole function of checking the poem against an established and widespread checklist intended for medical personnel (and also consumed by a Western public, who since the emergence of DSM-III had become eager to identify their own, real or imagined, symptoms). For this use, my respondents recommended I consult DSM-IV. In their opinion, the later DSM-V (2013), which adds further categories to those listed by DSM-IV, is less in line with a clinical psychologist's view of the characteristics of depression (most notably regarding the role of fear). DSM-III (1980) on the other hand has been severely criticised for the manner in which it was compiled: in a small auditorium packed with shouting specialists, no minutes, and a single typewriter (Ronson 2011: 249-50).

Fortunately, our objective here is merely to look for consistencies between our poem and a widely used diagnostic sheet, not to place a diagnosis on anyone, living or dead. The basic criteriae for depression suggested by DSM-IV 'Criteria for major Depressive Disorder' (MDD) is a state of impaired social, occupational, and/or educational function, which represent a change from the

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[5] Ronson informs that from a short folder (DSM-I, 1952) the checklist grew to enormous proportions (DSM-IV, 1994, covers 886 pages) and is accused of generating an excessive number of diagnoses, precariously close to normality, which serve the commercial interest of pharaseutical companies more than public health.

[6] In any case, since my focus is neither on Diagileva's biography, nor her medical or mental history, I maintain that a focus on what is in the actual poem is more important than entering into speculation about what kinds of information the poet might have gleaned from psychiatric theory and/or clinical psychology before, during, or after her treatment by Soviet psychiatrists and/or psychoneurologists. I am predominantly interested in the manner through which the condition of depression is portrayed in the poem, and by which means this potrayal is achieved.

person's normal condition and has resulted in loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities or "depressed mood", lasting for more than two weeks (confirming the above-cited OCED entry's emphasis on duration). It proceeds to list nine specific symptoms, at least five of which should be present every day to qualify for the diagnosis of depression. These are:

1. Depressed mood or irritable most of the day, nearly every day as indicated by either subjective report (e.g. feels sad or empty) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful)
2. Decreased interest or pleasure in most activities, most of each day
3. Significant weight change (5%) or change in appetite
4. Change in sleep: Insomnia or hypersomnia
5. Change in activity: Psychomotor agitation or retardation
6. Fatigue or loss of energy
7. Guilt/worthlessness: Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt
8. Concentration: Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or more indecisiveness
9. Suicidality: Thoughts of death or suicide, or has suicide plan. (DSM-IV)

Compared to the diagnostic checklist, Diagileva's poem clearly reflects the first two points on a general level. The metaphor of "wilting away" connotes to the weight loss of point three and the "bed-ridden dance" to the insomnia of point four. As demonstrated in the lexical analysis above, the poem has rich references to psychomotor retardation and energy loss (points five and six). Worthlessness is again related to the general message of the poem, but the souls' "confession" clearly signifies guilt (point seven). The "fragmented revelations" complement the loss of concentration in point eight and, finally, the word "suicides" is mentioned in relation to abysses and shafts, fulfilling the criteria of point 9. Thus, as might be expected from its title 'Classic Depressive', the poem meets all nine out of nine of the DSM-IV criteria for depression.[7]

Most approaches to depression from psychological theory focus on its causes and do not necessarily have a lot to tell about its actual condition or state. However, in the late 1960s, Martin Seligman introduced the concept of "learned helplessness" within the cognitive approach to psychology. Cognitive approaches focus on the manners in which negative thinking becomes automated. Seligman went further, suggesting that systematised negative thinking might be a

[7] Interestingly, DSM-V (adopted in 2013) adds certain anxieties and worries to the above list, but these are marked as absent by the poem's final line. For this reason, DSM-IV, the use of which is well established, has been deliberately chosen here in preference to DSM-V.

consequence of depression, as much as its cause. (McLeod 2015: 14-18) With "learned helplessness", Seligman suggests that depression is the result of a learning process, where the person learns that attempts at escaping from negative situations make no difference. (18) A person immersed in the state of depression is devoid of energy and initiative, and thus not only unable to act in order to relieve the condition, but also categorically disinterested in acting. Indeed, outside attempts at encouraging a depressed person to act[8] are likely to cause an irritable response (see DSM-IV point 1 above). Suicides are rare at this stage, because the act of suicide demands energy and initiative. Paradoxically, the absence of fear in the depressive state contributes to reducing the risk of suicide at this point. (Greve 2016) Since depression represents an extreme condition of pain and suffering, a condition where things cannot get any worse, it has little room for fear. However, with the painstaking exit from depression, energy and initiative return, and with them returns the fear of returning to depression, again increasing the risk of suicide. (O'Carroll 2016) In his research on depression and behaviour, Seligman conducted an experiment on caged dogs (an experiment of a kind which could easily have inspired another poem by Diagileva). One half of the cage floors was wired for live electricity, the other half was unwired safe zones. When electricity was switched on, the dogs would move to the safe zone of their cage. However, Seligman found that dogs that had been restrained in the electrified zone became prone to remain there even when they were no longer restrained. He also observed that the dogs that disregarded the safe zone showed a number of symptoms similar to depression: lethargy, sluggishness, passivity faced with stress, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. (McLeod 2015: 19) Seligman's further studies also suggested connections between depression and weakened immune defence.

When applied to Diagileva's poem, Seligman's observations are useful in explaining its particular logic and motivations. Like the formerly restrained dogs, the protagonists of Diagileva's poem do not see any point in escaping from their suffering. Even if they had the strength and opportunity to flee from it, escape would come at the price of fear of returning to the torture of depression, so instead they endure. Thus, the poem describes pain and suffering as normality, hence its lack of references to outside realities and almost directionless introvertedness. Change for the better or the worse is absent, as is hope, lament or

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[8] Cf. "Since madness can be dumb immobility, obstinate fixation as well as disorder and agitation, the cure consists in reviving in the sufferer a movement that will be both regular and real, in the sense that it will obey the rules of the world´s movements" (Foucault 2003: 164).

self-pity. The meaninglessness of agency excludes acting characters, which is reflected in the vagueness of the markers of identity and in the erasure of distinctions between the animate-inanimate and the concrete-abstract. Yet the poem far from represents a capitulation to these negative values. For, by successfully utilising them to describe what defies description, Diagileva is able to both succintly depict and subtly ridicule depression, reducing its power as an object of fear. Thus, by carefully portioning out her subtle mockery without underestimating her adversary, Diagileva creates a (self-) therapeutic work of art.

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