

Anastasia, The Ballet: Lie, Dissociation or Delusion

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Introduction

The Ballet Anastasia, by Sir Kenneth McMillan¹, is among the countless artistic fruitions blossomed from the story of Anna Anderson, a polish woman whose claims of possession of the identity of Grand Duchess Anastasia of Russia ignited fervorously conflicting opinions. McMillan's strongly expressionist creation, along with this shared belief, depicts Anderson's psychiatric hospitalization and the despair of her struggle regaining her memory after the murder of her parents and siblings, as well as convincing others of such, in a strikingly vivid, nightmarish raw way. Anderson was later disproved to be the tsars' heir, notwithstanding the lack of claravoyance on whether the claims had their roots in delusion, amnesic dissociation or a mere lie. This work drinks from this choreographer's piece of artistict sublimation, along with a multiplicity of sources to elaborate on the phenomenology of psychopathology.

Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia was the youngest daughter of late Tsar Nicholas II, the last sovereign of Imperial Russia, and his wife, Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna. She was **killed** with her family by a group of Bolsheviks in Yekaterinburg on 17th of July 1918². Notwithsatnding, persistent **rumors of an escape** circulated after her death, fueled by the fact that the location of her burial was unknown for the decades of communist rule.

On the 27th of February 1920³, a young woman attempted suicide in Berlin by jumping off the Bendlerstrasse bridge. She had no identitication documents and was unable to identify herself, speaking german with an accent described as russian and ending up admitted as Fräulein Unbekannt ("Miss Unknown") to a mental hospital in Dalldorf.
Two years into her admission, a fellow inpatient, Clara Peuthert, claimed her to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia. Thea Malinovsky, a nurse working in the facility, added years later that the woman had told her so⁴. These events set flames to the ambivalence and scrutiny revolving her identity over the following years.
The woman recieved several visitts from russian eminent figures, some of them members of the Romanov family or servants with intimate contact with them, like physicians, grooms of chamber, tutors or nursemaids^{3,4,5}, resulting in very divergent and vaguely funded opinions, as some would point the physical dissimilarities were striking, her general attitude dissonant and she would narrate past with several incongruencies, having even forgotten her native russian; while others would attribute all that to the impaired physical and psychological state resulting from her tuberculosis^{3,6}.
Tsarina's brother, the Grand Duke of Hesse, hired a private detective to investigate the claims^{3,4,5,6}, rendering the woman was actually a polish factory worker called Franziska Schanzkowska^{3,6,7}, who worked in a munitions factory during World War I. Shortly after her fiancé was killed at the front, a grenade fell of her hand and exploded, severely injuring her. She became apathetic and depressed ever since and was even declared insane, spending significant time in asylums⁴.
Further evidence rose, with the recognition by her brother, albeit the affidavit he signed highlighted physical differences and the fact she did not recognize him^{4,5}. He addmitted, however, he had chosen to leave her to her new life, which was far more comfortable than any alternative⁵. She also had a meeting with her sister, who was certain of her identity^{4,5,6}. but the as the Nazi government would consequently imprison her, no affidavit was ever signed^{5,7}. These declarations never seemed to suffice to clear the doubt on her identity as many other significant figures were convinced that ahe was genuine^{4,5}, leading to a growth in the supporters of her cause.
Attempts at claiming Tsar's estate outside of the Soviet Union, which could only be released to relatives^{3,4,5,8}, using Francizcas's allegations were recieved with hostility by the remaining Romanovs, leading her to flee and aquire the name of Anna Aderson, after which, a pattern of self-destructive behavior arose, with tantrums and on one occasion even running around naked on the roof^{3,6}. An order was signed committing her to a mental hospital³.
It was only in 1970, the lawsuits came to an end, with neither able to establish Anderson's identity^{4,5,7}. In the absence of any direct documentary proof or solid physical evidence, the question of whether she was Anastasia was for many a matter of personal belief^{3,7}.
Throughout Anna's life, many of the characters' she encountered desire for secondary gain was undeniable, and she could have been at some point exploited in her obvious vulnerability. If it was her own too, remains unknown.

The abandoned mine serving as a mass grave near Yekaterinburg was found to hold the remains of the Tsar, his wife, and three of their daughters in 1991, which were identified by skeletal analysis and DNA testing⁹. The bodies of the remaining two children were discovered in 2007, proving that **none of the Tsar's four daughters survived the shooting of the Romanov family**^{10,11,12}. Anderson's was too compared with that of the Romanovs and was **not a match**.

So, was she **delusional**, experiencing **dissociation** or a mere **imposture**?

Discussion¹³ and Conclusions

Folie à Deux: Acquisition of a delusion from a psychotic person to another, giving rise to a **shared false belief**, irreducible towards reason, that both accept, support and share. The affected individual psychotic or not, tends to be in a situation of **vulnerability**.

✓ The first claim emerged from Clara Peuthert.

Delusion of Grandeur: The **unarguable belief** the one is a **figure of unprecedented importace**, comonly in the presence of an **expansion of affects**.

✓ Anderson seemed to display a real conviction she was Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia.
✓ Anderson's behavioral abnormalities were compatible with maniac episodes.

Amnesic Dissociation: State of **narrowing of conscience** with consequent **amnesia** in which the individual seems to retain contact with reality, and **might lose or adopt a new identity**, frequently trigged by an **impactful event**.

✓ Anderson's reaction to the traumatic loss of her fiancé and accident.

After more then a century after, most opinions regarding the case tend on regarding Anderson as an **imposture**. This plot is, however, an ineluctable opportunity to rekindle psychopathology and its phenomenologic rationale.

References

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