



MEMORY AND ABSENCE IN ALEXANDER FAYNBERG’S “SNOW SPARKS”: SYMBOLISM OF WINTER AND EMOTIONAL DISPLACEMENT

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ANNOTATION: This article analyzes Alexander Faynberg’s poem Snow Sparks as a poetic reflection of memory, absence, and emotional displacement. The study focuses on the symbolic function of winter imagery, particularly snow, as a metaphor for impermanence and preserved longing. Through close textual analysis, the paper examines paradox, repetition, and spatial movement as key poetic devices that convey the coexistence of presence and absence in human experience. Special attention is given to cultural and historical references connected to the Soviet and post-Soviet context, highlighting themes of migration and psychological dislocation. The research demonstrates that although the poem is rooted in personal emotion, its philosophical treatment of love and memory renders it universally resonant. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Faynberg’s lyrical poetics and his representation of time, loss, and emotional continuity.

Keywords: Alexander Faynberg, “Snow Sparks”, symbolism, winter imagery, memory, absence, poetic paradox, displacement, lyrical poetry.

АННОТАЦИЯ: В статье анализируется стихотворение Александра Файнберга “Snow Sparks” как поэтическое осмысление памяти, отсутствия и эмоционального смещения. Основное внимание уделяется символической роли зимних образов, прежде всего снега, который выступает метафорой мимолётности и сохранённой тоски. На основе детального текстуального анализа рассматриваются парадокс, повтор и мотив движения как ключевые



поэтические приёмы, передающие сосуществование присутствия и отсутствия в человеческом опыте. Особый акцент сделан на культурно-исторических реалиях советского и постсоветского пространства, отражающих темы миграции и психологической дезориентации. Исследование показывает, что, будучи глубоко личным, стихотворение приобретает универсальное звучание благодаря философскому осмыслению любви и памяти.

Ключевые слова: Александр Файнберг, “Snow Sparks”, символизм, зимняя образность, память, отсутствие, поэтический парадокс, смещение, лирическая поэзия.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry has long been regarded as a medium capable of conveying emotions and inner experiences that often resist direct expression. In *Snow Sparks*, Alexander Faynberg masterfully weaves personal longing together with existential reflections on memory, love, and time. Set against the backdrop of a wintry Moscow, the poem employs snow not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a powerful symbolic element. The transient nature of snow becomes an emblem of the fragility of human relationships, while the poet’s movement through the frozen city streets mirrors both physical displacement and emotional transformation.

Through an examination of the poem’s structural composition, symbolic imagery, and cultural-historical context, this paper seeks to reveal the deeper semantic layers embedded in Faynberg’s work. Particular emphasis is placed on those poetic lines that most vividly express the central philosophical and emotional concerns of the text (Yo‘ldosh, 2016).

Translated Version of the Poem

“Snow Sparks”



(Qor Uchqunlari — by Alexander Faynberg, English translation)

In Moscow, January—

A storm roars beneath the ground.

Where are you going, my love?

The Central Telegraph—on every step

Blue frost stands frozen.

I slip past them, at the forefront—

A city crowded with people.

January's snow scorches the lips,

Rattling against the street lamps,

Rushing through underground paths.

You are not here—

Yet you are everywhere.

You are my love, my final love.

The solemn march of Suvorov.

A dwelling shaped by snow.

My heart heaves with every ascent.

I see—

You once cleared the way for youth on a tram,

Your coat hem trembling,

Snow scattering in flight.

Across Moscow—snow.

Bags whirl through the air.

Before my eyes—



A shimmering, icy belt of frost.
On your shoulder, a fragile strap
Of a small bag sways gently.
Snow cloaks window grilles,
Statues wear silver fur coats of snow.
Every second, every breath
Melts the pure snow spark in your mittens.
I see you—
And yet, you are not here.

Thematic and Symbolic Analysis

1. Presence Through Absence: The Poetics of Paradox

One of the most compelling features of *Snow Sparks* is its reliance on paradox as a means of expressing emotional complexity. The repeated assertion:

“You are not there—
You are everywhere.”

captures the psychological state of remembering a beloved who is physically absent yet emotionally omnipresent. This contradiction reflects the nature of memory itself—intangible, fleeting, yet profoundly influential. Snowflakes, which dissolve upon contact, function as metaphors for memories that momentarily resurface only to vanish again (Quronov et al., 2010).

The paradox reaches its culmination in the final lines, where the speaker simultaneously acknowledges loss and emotional persistence. Faynberg thus emphasizes that absence does not erase presence; rather, it transforms it into an internal, enduring experience.

2. Winter as an Emotional and Philosophical Metaphor



In *Snow Sparks*, winter is not merely a seasonal setting but an active emotional force. The opening image—

“A storm roars beneath the ground”

suggests turbulence both in nature and within the speaker’s inner world. Traditionally, winter in poetry signifies isolation and the passage of time; however, in Faynberg’s poem, it also symbolizes preservation. Just as snow blankets the city, memories envelop the poet’s consciousness, immobilizing him in the past (Yo‘ldosh, 2016).

The cold landscape intensifies the sense of emotional stagnation, where time progresses outwardly, yet the speaker remains frozen in longing.

3. Movement, Travel, and Emotional Displacement

Motifs of travel and motion recur throughout the poem, reinforcing themes of separation and irreversible change. References to Sheremetyevo Airport and distant cities underscore physical departure and emotional rupture. Airports and trains serve as symbols of transition, emphasizing the inevitability of distance in both space and relationships (Meliqo‘ziyeva, 2023). The image of reflection in a train window further highlights the ephemeral nature of presence—suggesting that what remains is only a shadow of the past, sustained through memory rather than reality.

Literary Devices and Poetic Techniques

1. Repetition as a Tool of Memory

Repetition plays a central role in shaping the poem’s emotional rhythm. Recurring lines echo the cyclical nature of remembrance, as thoughts return obsessively to what has been lost. This technique mirrors human consciousness, where memories surface repeatedly, often without intention (Quronov et al., 2010).



2. Symbolism of Snow and Light

Snow functions as the poem's dominant symbol, embodying purity, fragility, and impermanence. The act of holding snow—only for it to melt—parallels the human attempt to preserve fleeting moments. Similarly, light imagery, such as the “star of frost,” evokes distant hope and unattainable longing, reinforcing the poem's melancholic tone (Fitz, 2005).

3. Sound, Rhythm, and Sensory Effect

Faynberg's use of sound enhances the poem's immersive quality. Soft sibilant sounds imitate the hush of falling snow, while rhythmic repetition of seasonal imagery sustains a cold, pulsating tempo that reflects emotional numbness and restraint.

Cultural and Historical Context

1. Soviet and Post-Soviet Spatial Memory

The geographic references in the poem—cities across the former Soviet space—reflect a shared historical and cultural memory shaped by mobility and subsequent fragmentation. Following the collapse of the USSR, displacement became both a physical and psychological reality for many, a theme subtly woven into Faynberg's poetic landscape (Meliko'ziyeva, 2023).

2. From Personal Experience to Universal Meaning

Although rooted in personal experience, *Snow Sparks* transcends individuality. Its exploration of love, loss, and memory resonates universally, allowing readers to project their own experiences onto the poem's emotional framework (Yo'ldosh, 2016).



CONCLUSION

Alexander Faynberg's *Snow Sparks* stands as a poignant meditation on memory and emotional endurance. Through paradox, symbolic imagery, and carefully crafted repetition, the poem captures the tension between absence and presence, motion and stillness, warmth and cold. Snow, storms, and departing trains collectively remind the reader that while time advances relentlessly, emotional attachments often remain suspended in the past.

Ultimately, the poem affirms that love and memory persist beyond physical separation, shaping human existence long after their tangible forms have disappeared.

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