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## **Y. OLESHA'S *THE THREE FAT MEN* IN V. RUBIN'S DIFFERENT OPERATIC VERSIONS**

*Two versions of V. Rubin's opera *The Three Fat Men* are considered from the viewpoint of reorientation of the composition to children's perception. The character's distinctive features and functions, enlargement of certain situations are revealed. It has been studied in what way the composer renewed the composition and created shot dramatic composition.*

*Keywords: children's perception, children's opera, version, libretto, V. Rubin, Y. Olesha.*

Opera for children as an independent genre was formed quite a long time ago and is still interesting both for the performance practice and scientific thought. This is reflected in a fair amount of musical material, and, on the other hand, in some theoretical works that appeared during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the researchers try to define this genre and characterize its typological features. However, fundamental textbooks on history of music and opera art fail to provide systemized information dealing with the evolution of this original genre. Vladimir Rubin's opera *The Three Fat Men*, which exists in two authorial versions, stands out among other compositions created in the 2<sup>d</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This composition has not as yet attracted the attention of Ukrainian musicologists as a composition intended for children's perception. This shows the relevance of the suggested research topic. The purpose of the paper is to identify compositional and dramaturgic features (based on comparison of two versions) that allow us to specify the genre of this comic opera as the one directed toward children.

It is common knowledge that a composer or someone else frequently has to make changes to the final and sometimes even performed composition. It can be caused by different reasons: financial<sup>1</sup>, a composer's discontent with realization of the intent<sup>2</sup>, some disadvantages of the orchestration<sup>3</sup>, ideological motives<sup>4</sup>, and cases when a composer changes genre references points<sup>5</sup>. In addition, a new version of a composition, which has

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<sup>1</sup> It is known that the Baroque composers reworked their operas many times inserting arias on claim of star actors because the full house depended on these singers.

<sup>2</sup> As it happened with N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Maid of Pskov* which was twice seriously reworked by the author.

<sup>3</sup> The leader in this regard is M. Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. It has 7 or more versions now. Also we can mention A. Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* as an example. The composer himself had not finished it, A. Glazunov and N. Rimsky-Korsakov made it for him.

<sup>4</sup> The illustration of the fact is *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and *Katerina Izmailova* by D. Shostakovich; the 1<sup>st</sup> version was forbidden as a formalistic and naturalistic work, and the composer was forced to rework the opera. Although the changes mostly concerned the language of the libretto: the common language words were removed, and naturalism of some scenes was softened; the musical language (its complicacy was blamed) remained unchanged.

<sup>5</sup> M. Krásev's children's opera *Masha and The Bear* (edited in 1940) was intended for the amateur theatre, and 9 years later the composer made changes taking into account the resources of the professional theatre [9, p. 381]. E. Humperdink's fairytale opera *Hensel and Gretel* grew out of the musical fairytale which had originally been written for his nephews [4].

already been finished and performed, can appear if the vector of “*listener-orientation*” (B. Asafyev’s term) is changed. That’s what happened to V. Rubin’s *The Three Fat Men*. The original version of the opera, in 4 acts, after the Y. Olesha’s eponymous novel (libretto by S. Bogomazov), appeared in 1956. The premiere was in Moscow (in concert performance of the Soviet Opera Ensemble of the All-Union Theatrical Society). A bit later The Saratov Opera house put this opera on its stage, but it had a short run. Later on Natalya Sats (the founder and the Artistic Director of The Moscow Children Musical Theatre) asked the composer to introduce some changes into the score. She was looking for a new opera for her theatre at that time and became interested in V. Rubin’s *The Three Fat Men*. However, the first version had to be revised because it was “cumbersome” and “incompatible with the delicate lyricism of the fairy-tale”. N. Sats, the stage director who had had years of experience, asked the composer and the librettist to highlight not the pathos of the revolution but “attention to every singing and acting character, to its inner world and individuality” [13, p. 542]. The specificity of child psychology required these changes, because the static opera wouldn’t have made the audience become interested. According to psychologists child’s attention “has spontaneous character, it is involuntary, and is directed from the outside” [16, p. 138]. Thus, such changes were necessary as they could help a child to “put an increased focus on certain characters delving deeply into their actions, thoughts, and feelings” [13, p. 542]. Taking into consideration the specificity of musical theatre N. Sats wanted children to figure out the main details through musical means.

So, why did the first version appear to be “cumbersome” and what made the authors to remake the whole material? If we consider V. Rubin’s opera primarily as the one addressed to children, the first drawback of 1956 version is typical opera choruses of the people<sup>1</sup>. They disrupt the narration’s dynamics, which is the distinctive feature of Y. Olesha’s fairy-tale, and hold back movement of the stage action. “The ideological advocacy” (as N. Sats called it) of some libretto’s texts is not exempt from criticism. It does not fit well with the children opera genre, but it is in sync with the time when the composition was created (e.g. the chorus in the 7<sup>th</sup> scene – “Sorrow and wrath! The threatening tune sounds as an alarm bell in people’s heart” [10, p. 413]). At the same time, heroic and patriotic themes were still dominant in the opera genre of the 2<sup>d</sup> half of 1950s. This current shaped assessment criteria

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<sup>1</sup> *It hurts, it hurts so much to see him in fetters* in the 1<sup>st</sup> act [10, p. 59], *Raise higher the sacred banner of the victory* in the 4<sup>th</sup> act [10, p.415] and so on.

even in relation to the opera for children. C. Ratskaya, when analyzing M. Krasev's children operas in the early 1950s, writes that children "must hear such an opera which would reflect the Soviet reality, <...> cultivate <...> high patriotism" [9, p. 392]. Arguing her position, the musicologist appeals to the requirements of the time. She says that the time (however strange it might sound) aims to "create the first heroic and patriotic opera for children" [9, p. 393]. This approach in the particular historical period determined evaluating not only in the area of musical theatre, but also in the area of children's literature, both soviet and foreign connected with the socialistic ideas. E. Brandis's statement about Gianni Rodari is significant from this point of view: "The works of the Italian Communist writer are *politically tendentious* and *truly party*" [1, p. 249; italics is mine. – A. K.]. Yury Olesha as the author of *The Three Fat Men*, on the contrary, was criticized for the lack of the revolutionary basis. L. Chukovskaya reproached the author for "the main theme<sup>1</sup> getting lost in the plot's curves, <...> the roses of Olesha's writing style blooming on its way", and a reader never finds out why the people won, why the guard maintained them, how the palace was gotten [2].

In the first version of V. Rubun's opera we can easily trace the development of the revolution plotline. This ruled out neither fairytale motives nor humor of the separate situations. Eventually, it allowed the composer to remake *The Three Fat Men* in view of newly set goals. This was largely enhanced by the fairytale novel itself. Its genre, as Y. Podlubnova states, "balances at the turn of three cultural traditions – fairytale, romantic and the tradition of the literature of Y. Olesha's day" [7, p. 134]. The multi-layer plot gave the opportunity to highlight in the first version people-heroic line, and in the second one to shift the focus on the fairytale and comic aspects. So, let us consider the way the composer managed to fulfill N. Sats's wishes and return the opera into the bosom of children theatre and music.

Comparing two versions of the opera attention should be paid to the total reassessment of chorus scenes. In the 1<sup>st</sup> version choruses represented mostly the people's collective character and took up a lot of space. In the 2<sup>d</sup> version V. Rubin almost refused from big choruses (except for the 6<sup>th</sup> scene of the 3<sup>rd</sup> act, where the guards are set in motion and it was impossible to do with a small group of choristers). In other scenes the composer replaced choruses by ensembles – "an ensemble composed of sopranos, altos (4–6–8

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<sup>1</sup>L. Chukovskaya defines it like this: "Working-people's struggle against the oppressors, revolted people's struggle against the government" [2].

persons) and basso-buffo (1 person)” [11, p. 4]. Their members act as street boys and a townsman, little cooks and a chef, or the courtiers. This decision allowed to dynamicize the running of the plot and made the opera construction more compact, like a tightly coiled spring.

In the 2<sup>d</sup> version the composer offers to use not one layer of the stage space but two of them. He transfers some episodes to the proscenium before the special curtain for the interludes or even sets some fragments in conventional parallel. For example, in the act 2, scene 3, there is a stage direction “The lights go down gradually” when Doctor Gaspar tries unsuccessfully to fix the doll. Then Tutti the Heir appears on the proscenium and during the small duet with the Hofmeisterin demonstrates his wish to get his toy back as quickly as possible. After this the lights are switched again to Doctor Gaspar<sup>1</sup> who fails to repair the doll. In contrast to the line sequence of events in the 1<sup>st</sup> version which paused the act sometimes (because of people chorus scenes, as it was said above), in the 2<sup>d</sup> version the composer uses the elements of the shot principle of development (which is more common for the cinematography but has been applied in the opera for a long time).

The author has also regrouped the material written earlier. The “set” of the scenes used in the 1<sup>st</sup> version remains unchanged (except for the omitted choruses), but the composer recombined some scenes and thus changed some accents a bit. This led to the appearance of the opera in 3 acts, 6 scenes with the prologue and epilogue (which includes the Intermezzo and the Final) instead of the opera in 4 acts, 7 scenes. The prologue here does not prepare the future action, as usual, but shows the real heroes of the fairytale, in contrast to the “title” ones which are mentioned in the title of the opera. This approach is not accidental, but is the result of the close connection with the original literature source where the chapters of the novel are called after its main characters (“Tibul the Rope-walker”, “Suok”, “Prospero the Armourer”). The composition of the opera also was changed on the whole. The author used the circle composition, because the Final is based on the music material of the Prologue (the acrobat’s ensemble “We are the wandering actors”). The “play initiative” was strengthened, and we can accept the scenic action both as undoubted reality and as a performance on the

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<sup>1</sup> In this case the light modeling of the stage space is simple although stage directors like using this method quite often. Vsevolod Meyerhold masterly applied “light architecture”. In staging L. Andreev’s *The Life of Man*, aiming to realize the author’s request to put the action inside the room of four walls, the stage director acted by contradiction: he removed décor at all and replaced them by clothes and local sources of light. “Covered all the stage with grey shadows and lighting just particular points with one source of light ...”, writes V. Meyerhold himself, “we managed to create the audience view as the rooms’ walls are built at the stage but the audience cannot see them because the light does not reach the walls” [quote after: 12, p. 98].

venue of a small carnival (especially since Tutti and Suok sing in the final “And one day we will play a new fairytale, and the name for it is *The Three Fat Men*” [11, p. 271–271]). And the characters on the stage reveal such an important attribute of playing as “ambivalence (duality) of an actor, who is simultaneously in two egos – a real one, “serious”, and a relative one, playing” [6, p. 137]. Having developed the composition in such a way, the author asserts the victory of the sanguine circus men. Thanks to their devotion to each other, openness, and kindness they managed to overcome the evil personified in nameless images of the three fat men.

The vocal parts were also changed in the 2<sup>d</sup> version. V. Rubin uses melodeclamation with fixed rhythm and approximate pitch instead of the traditional recitative (L. Polyakova calls this type of notation “rhythmed prose against the orchestral accompaniment”) [8, p. 54]. The composer most often uses this type of intoning to keep the right rhythm and tempo of the scene (The Balloon Seller tells how the palace was occupied and Prospero was captured; Tibul runs away using a cable and agitated Uncle Brisac comments on it). This method makes the 2<sup>d</sup> version closer to traditional musical and dramatic genres (music comedy, Siengspiel), and enhances its theatricalization. Hence live speech intonations help to create truly real but not conventional operatic images. Besides, the composer, as L. Polyakova states, “has enlarged melodic centers” making them more relief in the opera score [8, p. 54].

Comparing two versions of the operatic composition, we can't skip the question about relationship between them and the original literature source. Let us recall the fact that a libretto is considered to be one of literary genres. Three libretto types have been formed in composer's practice [5]. The first one is characterized by adaptation of a literary work to opera conditions that leads to the appearance of a standard libretto. The second one “is focused on revealing the individuality of the text itself” that leads to the realization of its compositional and dramaturgical features by means of music (this approach is “the first principal of music drama”), the third type is “the fragmentary text reproduction <...> without consistent and detailed action-narration” [5, p. 72–73]. *The Three Fat Men* libretto can be related to the second type because, despite a few exact quotations<sup>1</sup>, the authors did all their best to keep the general tone of the fairytale novel – romantic and full of play at the

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<sup>1</sup> In fact there is only a small song about Doctor Arneri, Suok's song which she sings in the palace (in the libretto the first strophe is omitted, and the rest are changed over – 2,5,4,3 as compared to the novel's text), and the opening phrase of the novel *The time of magicians has passed... Most likely they have never existed, actually*: in the novel it is an author's text, and in the opera it becomes The Balloon Sellers's cue.

same time. When reworking Y. Olesha's text some changes were made, since "the consolidation and summarizing of a character's typical features, individual conditions and situations in the constructed, artistically convincing melodic formations are not possible" without them [5, p. 38]. Thus, all the minor motives were cut off as well as the acts which would take a lot of time to be presented on the stage (Doctor Arneri's trip to the palace and back with a doll which he loses on the journey; The Balloon Seller's escape from the palace through a pot-hatch in the palace kitchen and so forth). The opera libretto has no retrospective method of narration used by Y. Olesha in his novel. The specificity of the genre motivates this because "the linear development of the plot denying violation of the cause-and-effect relations and *chronological time* is obligatory in the normative opera libretto" [5, p. 73; italic is mine. – A. K.]. The authors of the opera introduce minor characters, the Hofmeisterin and a maid named Kitty, non-existing in the fairytale. Their functions in the intrigue are defined precisely. The maid helps the Balloon Seller (he escapes from the palace disguised as a guardian) as well as Suok, who does this indirectly, as he saves the girl in the opera. The Hofmeisterin represents the three fat men's pretended greatness and replaces some characters of the literary fairytale. For example, The Hofmeisterin and The Hunchback but not three unknown men appear in the scene where Tuttu the Heir is put to sleep with the help of some special drops. This couple initiates the associative array including Clarice, Leandro and Smeraldina from S. Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* – classical villains making treacherous plans. The Hofmeisterin's image in *The Three Fat Men* combines some features of two women characters from S. Prokofiev's opera, she is both an evil's servant since she obeys the fat men, and a lady: she behaves with dignity, even with some greatness aware of her mission – to proclaim the ruler's will. Her musical material contains a great deal of the chromatic sliding moves which also reveal the internal connections with the image of Prokofiev's Clarice (O. Stepanov writes that her motive "moves zigzag, dispersing through the semi-tones from the central core *sol*" [14, p. 57; O. Stepanov's italics. – A. K.]). An incidental character – the Hunchback who brings sleeping drops for the heir – involuntarily recalls the emotional character image of Bomeliy, a doctor-poisoner from N. Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride*.

When comparing two versions of libretto, it can be seen that the text of the 2<sup>d</sup> version was changed not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. Prospero's accusatory aria in the

1<sup>st</sup> act is almost half shortened, a very dark text<sup>1</sup> from Brisac's aria in the 2<sup>d</sup> act was removed. Tibul's farewell text was remade (in the farewell scene with Tibul, Brisac and Suok before her departure to the palace as the Heir's doll). In the 1<sup>st</sup> version it was rather cold and had the character of an ordinary guide to action ("*Be calm and don't make haste, / Watch the guard observantly, / When you look around make a decision, / When made it, do it that way*"), but in the 2<sup>d</sup> version it exposes Tibul's character, his nobility and sincere agitation for the destiny of the girl who was charged to free Prospero from prison: "*I would give it all up to take a risk, to face death instead of you<...>*". However the changes were made not only by the way of the text shortening; a new text was written additionally to create new bright images arresting audience's attention as N. Sats wished. Thus, the aria of the dancing-master Onetwothrees appeared (the beginning of the 2<sup>d</sup> scene, act 1). It reveals the character of the personage – "*The dancing-master Onetwothrees will fulfil any whim of yours*". This statement concerns not only the character's profession but his view of the world, because money but not people make difference for him. The words "*The coins clink pleasantly in Onetwothres' purse*" are the evidence of his readiness to do undignified things. The final also was changed. Instead of the scene of people's unity and the revolutionaries' victory there was created a picture of a popular festival, the fete on the square where the carnival takes place.

Unfortunately, the authors of the libretto didn't preserve the motive of Suok and Tutti the Heir's parting and happy reunification in the final. In the fairytale when getting to the end the reader understands why Suok and the doll are so alike, but in the opera there is no word about it. And besides, the family ties of children remains a mystery, since the scientist Tub is not included in the circle of opera characters, and this affects the logic of the plot's cause-and-effect relations.

The opera adaptation in view of N. Sats's requests has not simplified its multi-layer dramatic composition. On the contrary, the composition has become more proportional and compact, the images of the characters are described more in relief, and the plot is developed more dynamically. It has enriched the composition and made the performance interesting not only for children but for the adults as well.

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<sup>1</sup> *The sheets of the daybreak are in the blood, / And the night delays, delays the dawn, / The lanterns on the crossroads / Burn with dead light.* We think that the authors changed the text in order not to create dark atmosphere in the performance for children.

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