

## Conference Paper

# Django Reinhardt's "Minor Swing" in the Novel "Petrushka Syndrome" By Dina Rubina: Jazz Adaptation of Prose

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## Abstract

This article explores the features of the mutual influence of musical and verbal texts in the works of Dina Rubina, the features of their interaction, the system of key-notes in various works and its functions. The principle of the influence of musical form on the compositional structure of a verbal text is disclosed. From these positions, the novel "Parsley Syndrome" is analyzed and a hypothesis is put forward on the reasons for choosing Django Reinhardt's jazz composition "Minor Swing" as the leitmotif of the novel. Also, the intersection points of the two texts are indicated both in the symbolic, and in the ideological and artistic part. The figurative structure of the novel and the similarity of the fate of the central characters with the fate of the author of "Minor Swing" are considered. The development of one of the main themes of Dina Rubina is shown: the continuity of the fate of the family and the clan, the mystical connection of the past and the present, the fatal inevitability of the logic of fate belonging to one genus, the talent and fortitude of the heroes of the novel, which allows one to overcome the vicissitudes of fate. The theme "doll-man" is highlighted, relevant for the novel "Parsley Syndrome", its variations and forms.

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## 1. Introduction

The relevance of the theme "music in the works of Dina Rubina" is due to several reasons. First of all, this is an excellent knowledge of musical material by an author with a conservatoire education. Apparently, in this regard, in a number of works by Rubina (and this series is quite extensive), a musical theme appears that not only makes up the verbal text, but also enters into dialogical interaction with it, brings additional meanings to it, and expands the field of its understanding.

Keynote music themes can be of different qualities and levels: Jimmy McHugh's famous jazz composition "On the Sunny Side of the Street" in the novel of the same

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name and the obsessive paid-up motive in the story "One Intellectual Sat on the Road", the famous Lily Marlene of the Second World War and the baroque oratorio of Marcus Sven Weber "The Prodigal Son", which is the semantic and compositional center of the trilogy "Russian Canary".

Rubina repeatedly designated the theme of music in her works as nonrandom and important. "The book should sound. This is one of the secrets of this literature: you always want to recite it if you don't sing. Each literary phrase, like a musical one, has its own plastic, its own rhythm. In general, these matters -- music and literature - are interconnected even more than they say. Including the genre" [1].

So, in the story "Adam and Miriam" we clearly define the features of the rondo form, which is based on the principle of alternating the main unchanging theme of refrain and constantly updated episodes-verses with changing motifs, tonalities, and contrasting themes. The story is one of many stories that make up "this unpronounceable nightmare, which <...> is called the Holocaust" [5, 108]. Fate pushes two strangers on the street of Jerusalem, and one of them, Miriam, tells her story. The story of the Jewish Romeo and Juliet, which ended, despite the unimaginable events of the century in which they "fell to be born," is happy. Miriam and Adam, who fell in love and lost each other in the Grodno ghetto, meet again after a decade and a half. Both escaped through hell. Constantly returning her heroes to a cozy Georgian restaurant, where they took refuge from the rain, to the aromas of food and tea, to the sounds of the Georgian chorus (refrain), the author weaves this steady motif with endlessly changing episodes of the heroes' life, details of the specific fate of Miriam and Adam. Here, as in the form of the rondo itself, more and more terrible and touching, everyday and incredible details arise in the updated episodes of which life itself consists.

## 2. Django Reinhardt's "Minor Swing" As a Cipher of Novel "Parsley Syndrome" Heroes Fate

And again jazz. The musical leitmotif of Dina Rubina's novel "Parsley Syndrome" is the famous jazz composition of the gypsy musician Django Reinhardt "Minor Swing", written by him together with Stefan Grappelli in 1937. The article will hypothesize why this particular musical piece invariably appears on the pages of the novel, sounding in different countries and situations, everywhere accompanying the main character of the novel, puppet actor Peter Uksusov.

Although, in fact, Rubina weaves this piece "Minor Swing" so much into the plot that it becomes clear to the reader without further explanation why this piece, heard

at the concert of the outstanding jazz violinist Stefan Grappelli, offends the soul of the protagonist. As part of the "Minor Swing", Petya and Lisa performed that unusual dance where Lisa, who did not want to become a doll in Petya's hands, who had always been in love with her, nevertheless turns on stage for some time, but comes to life and dances as an equal partner "bewitching, <...> captivating-erotic dance" [2, 64].

The melody is subtly woven into the verbal text, in which the fate of the heroes is encrypted, and Petya writes in a letter to his friend: "there was something in that music that <...> told us painfully and nakedly" [2, 434].

A feature of the hero's perception of the world is that he sees this reality through the surreal world of dolls, which for him is true authenticity, which does not require verification and proof. Through the doll, he manifests himself, his true self, becomes visible and interesting, attractive and dangerous. The puppet world and everything that it consists of is born, built, constructed, mystically comes to him in childhood and helps to find his own body and soul.

For Petya, the world began with fabric dolls sitting on the hands of an old actor-puppeteer: "On both hands was sitting a fabric doll that suddenly came to life, and all the blades began to talk, run, laugh and sing" [6, 125]. The motive of the hand, lively and animating (the hands of actor Kazimir Matveevich), dead and still incomprehensibly alive (the prosthesis of Romka, Petya's father), the hand of the puppet freed from the power of the actor who manages it (performed by Philippe Ganti, who is described by the artist of the South Sakhalin Puppet Theater Jura) [3, 153] is one of the most important for the novel, in which the doll and the person mystically unite in different situations, drawing souls from each other, poisoning each other's lives (Ellis and Lisa) and providing life an opportunity to continue (the story of Korchmar, the family doll of the Lisa's family).

But, of course, the main owner of extraordinary hands capable of "transmitting spiritual and physical energy" [3, 313] is Petya, "with omnipresent hands, as if living separately from the rest of the body, and with such fingers-fanciers, as if each had not three, but four phalanges and the last without bone and all-pervading" [3, 69].

Actually, the novel begins with a demonstration of the infinite possibilities of the puppeteer's hands. So, in a scene at the airport, Petya shows tricks to a fidgety girl: "where his right hand was supposed to be... - horror!!! - moved, wriggled and rose on the tail of the snake! <...> "He made her out of hand!" -- the girl realized, screeched, jumped up and petrified" [3, 8].

Since childhood, Petya has been fascinated by the hands of Lisa, his eternal tragic love: "to take her, it was enough to give her a hand, it is better both of them, and she

began to weave braids from her fingers, make up figures, play them, invent roles..." [3, 425].

Petya's hands save him from the "special school for fools", in which his teacher threatens to transfer him: (he does not learn, he doesn't answer the teacher's questions, it is impossible to take him to the blackboard). And then the mother recalls that Petya's tongue is unleashed when he sculpts men from plasticine and makes them chat in different voices [3, 121--122].

The hand that animates the inanimate, the hand of the Demiurge, the creator, the imperious owner of this world: Rubina again and again returns to this motive.

On the reverse side is Romka's dead hand, replacing the right hand attached to a cult, a small handle, the prosthesis that Petka somehow brought to school and raised a question for the teacher. With this hand, Romka "beat Petya at home, dropping the prosthesis <...> and again throwing it at his son. He shouted not from pain, but rather from ecstatic horror: the sight of a dead hand flying around the room was fascinating -- the hand itself fought" [3, 121]). And mystical power was given to this dead hand, the drunkard and brawler Romka fought with his left hand with the terrible force, apparently transmitted to him from the right one.

If we look at the portraits of the jazz guitarist and composer Django Reinhardt and a few surviving videos, we can see a mutilated hand on the guitar deck, which by all laws of nature is not able to extract sounds that the musician, very popular in the 1930s and 40s, gave to his listeners.

Reinhardt's left hand was mutilated in a fire, only two fingers fully moved. However, the musician developed a unique technique of playing, playing mainly with two fingers, but using mutilated ones for certain strings [4]. And this vital power of the hand that overcame the mutilation is directly related to the main image of the novel and to the symbolism of the hand indicated in the Dictionary of Symbols by J. Tressider, which is designated as action, power, dominance, which we understand here as a victory over circumstances, as a fate. According to Tressider, the hand has healing power, and much more can be read about the character of a person and his fate than by face [3, 312-313].

"Minor Swing" was written by Django Reinhardt and Stefan Grappelli at the time called the "Swing Age". The swing boom began in America and Europe in the early 1930s, and this style of orchestral jazz, originally represented mainly by big bands, began to be performed by chamber ensembles by the end of the 1930s [5, 220] and one of such ensembles, "the original representative of European jazz", became the famous quintet "Hot Club de France" [5, 47--49].

Created in Paris by Reinhardt and Grappelli, the quintet consisted only of stringed instruments: three guitars, a violin and double bass. The sounds of percussion were extracted from harmonious guitar playing. "Minor swing" exactly corresponds to the classical style of swing: its specific combination of repeatability of the theme with its further solo improvisational development with various instruments, with a characteristic swing pulsation (swinging) [5, 220].

But the main thing in this play is the unrestrained, relaxed and exciting rhythm inherent in genuine jazz, free-flying improvisation, a kind of absolute fearlessness and triumph: "these tart sobs of the violin, the bitterly melancholy beats on the strings" [3, 434].

Compared to the original (the original recording of 1937 was preserved), the modern performance of Minor Swing often sounds at an accelerated pace. But if you take into account in what unusual way Reinhardt plays his play, how bizarrely he extracts sounds from his guitar, then the play also acquires additional courage and audacity - the theme of the fight against fate and victory over it. And this interweaving of the word and the "mockingly sensual labyrinth of "Minor Swing" [3, 488] -- "the motive <...> is embedded, drilled into every cell of his body" [3, 31] -- is not just accompaniment of Petya and Lisa's dance, it is a mirror of the very fate of the heroes of the novel.

It is here, in our opinion, that the musical and verbal texts are combined, and the narration is conducted in the "swing style": the main theme is the fate of Petya Uksusov, his growing up, apprenticeship, becoming an actor, his strange, forever meeting with Lisa, the creation of Ellis -- being in an improvisational vein.

So, two lines, two opposing themes, whimsically pass through the novel: a doll and a person, a doll that looks like a person, and a person who looks like a doll. Petya is inclined to divide people into dolls and living ones, already in childhood he sees a doll in his father and a real person in his mother.

### 3. The Human-doll Theme in the Novel "Parsley Syndrome"

As a child, Petya stole Liza from a stroller, carelessly left by a negligent nanny unattended, precisely because she reminded him of a doll, and he hoped that she would be his forever, his "main doll". But Lisa is too human to fully belong to Petya, and her fierce resistance resembles the performance of Philip Genti, in which the puppet fights with his puppeteer.

Petya himself, with his absolute devotion to the world of dolls to such an extent that sometimes he himself cannot understand who owns his soul, who gave him this talent

and hired him, he feels like a boy from an old manuscript that professor Ratt spoke to him about (and the quotation from which is the epigraph to the novel): "a boy created from the air and "pressed into flesh", whose soul the Creator or He, the other --- one of the two --- took to his service. But for which of them I was hired, what is the meaning of my ministry <...>" [3, 471].

And this confrontation between the doll and the man appears again and again in the novel, passing, as in swing improvisation, from one voice to another: the narrator, Dr. Gorelik, Dr. Jacob Ziv, the unforgettable grandmother of Boris Gorelik, professor Vaclav Ratt, Petya himself.

So gradually, in the voices of different performers, the story of the creation and death of Ellis unfolds, the mystical story of Korchmar, the family doll of the Lisa's family, the tragic story of this family, its distant mysterious origins and detective modernity (Korchmar, who is hunted by a "string of fiery-haired women").

And this main narrative line is intertwined, complicated by new improvisation stories, the veil of secrets is opened, the heroes themselves will learn something, and something will be hidden from them forever: the secrets of their past, having sounded and went to the crescendo, will go nowhere, be picked up by other narrators, events, the movement continues, like improvisation in jazz.

So, the main plot node, the central nerve of "Parsley Syndrome" is the theme of various interactions and relations between the person and the doll: from complete merger to hostile confrontation. But as an additional topic, the issue of confrontation between a person and fate, sometimes cruel to its owner, is important here. Perhaps the life path of Django Reinhardt himself, a nomadic gypsy and world famous musician, led the author of the novel to the image of Petya Uksusov and his bold movement to overcome his vicissitudes, their fate with Lisa.

Django Reinhardt, one of the founders of gypsy jazz (jazz-manouche; gypsy-jazz), was born in 1910 in Belgium and as a child wandered along with his native gypsy camp along the roads of Italy and France, Corsica and Algeria. His family was not related to music, having settled in the suburbs of Paris, the parents of the future musician were engaged in the manufacture of furniture. Music early entered the life of Django, and since the age of 9 he earned his living by playing the banjo and violin. He made a strong impression with his playing, as he was a natural virtuoso, able to play both classical and folk music on a violin or guitar.

The young gypsy attracted the attention of famous Parisian accordionists and at the age of 13 he already performed at dance evenings, went on tours, recorded his first records, that become popular and in demand. The fatal fire, which damaged the

musician's hand, first seemingly hopelessly, was supposed to cease his brilliant career. But he restored the remaining fingers in order to create a new jazz, in which rich and whimsical gypsy arrangements merge with the nervous torn rhythm of jazz

The story of Petya Uksusov suggests a parallel: an immersion in the world of a puppet theater art from childhood, an early working life, performances with Lisa at the most famous festivals and theater venues in Europe, and a sharp breakdown of this triumphal procession when fate wakes up and inflicts a severe blow - Lisa gives birth to a child with "Parsley syndrome", Angelman's disease.

In this plot twist, we see the main grain of the doll-man theme: its ambivalence, constant readiness for a dirty trick. From the joys of childhood, theatrical fun - dolls running around in the hands of puppeteer artist Kazimir Matveyevich -- to the terrible, mystical, gloomy, "underground".

We have already noted that the theme of the interaction between the doll and the man is carried out in the novel like jazz improvisation with the voices of different narrators, entwined with additional connotations. For the first time, it was voiced by the voice of the author describing a strange scene in an expensive hotel in Eilat, where Petya was taking his wife from a psychiatric hospital for a new first meeting, for another recognition after a long treatment. The mysticism of the theme is immediately felt, accentuated by a strange scene: Petya dances to Django Reinhardt's "Minor Swing", but with whom? By that time, the reader still does not know that after the death of a sick child, Lisa was not able to go on stage to continue to perform Petya, who had already become famous, and then Petya created a twin for his performance, a doll that he valued no less than Lisa, perhaps being afraid to admit it to himself. Because, unlike his wife, who does not want to become his property, his doll, as he had conceived as a child, when he dragged baby Liza from a gaping nanny, Ellis belonged to him completely.

However, this first dance to the "Minor Swing" in the novel makes a strange impression, as it is both fascinating and frightening, because Petya's hands are empty, and with the movements of his fingers fingering the levers and buttons of an imaginary doll, he resembles a person calling "spirits from kingdoms of darkness.

From this mystical side, the theme of the doll man will be revealed in the story of Dr. Ziva about the sad fate of Lisa's mother, who became a doll, a toy in the hands of the "underground" Teddy, and also in the scene of the meeting between Petit and German professor Ratt (this is where the echo of the gypsy theme appears: Ratt will turn out to be a gypsy taken by a family in which a healthy child is not destined to appear). Here in the house of Ratt, whose father spent his whole life collecting small parsley, left for



the memory of himself as the ancestor of his fire-haired wife, a puppeteer, Petya and finally he will hear the story of Korchmar.

This love story is the love of the puppeteer, the revenge of the insulted father, who imposed on all the descendants of the artist who owned Liza, a terrible curse - the birth of children with "Parsley syndrome", which only the Korchmar doll can save from this horror, breathes Gothic mystery and intrigue and becomes the climax theme of the doll-man. The author solves this topic in the finale, when Petya bitterly admits how sometimes this mysterious inextricable connection with the doll, with the world which sometimes seems different, burdens him.

## 4. Conclusion

Change of rhythms and proportions of "Minor Swing" becomes a musical illustration of the life performance of the heroes who live their hard lives and try to clarify, straighten out what their ancestors twisted and twisted. Do not give up before fate, but survive, like Jango Reinhardt survived the struggle with his fate, about the music of which Haruki Murakami writes: "The feeling of freedom and joy is added to the energy that only live music has: "I live and can compose music" [6, 170].

The paradox of Reinhardt's "Minor Swing" also lies in the fact that through the melancholy note characteristic of this tonality, the irresistible force of life breaks through. We see the same thing in the novel, in which, nevertheless, the person's incredible desire for creativity, life and happiness triumphs - this, in our opinion, is the reason for the appearance of "Minor Swing" by Jango Reinhardt in the novel "Parsley Syndrome".

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