

UR. JERNEJ WEISS

VLOGA NACIONALNIH
OPERNIH GLEDALIŠČ
V 20. IN 21. STOLETJU

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL
OPERA HOUSES IN THE
20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

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*the role of national opera
houses in the 20th and 21st
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The Italian “National Opera” Imagined from a Southern Slavic Viewpoint: Franjo Ks. Kuhač and Josip Mandić

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Social and cultural frame

The year 1848 was one of revolutions known as “the spring of nations”. In Trieste it was preceded by a wide spread of Southern Slavic cultures *via* the periodical *La Favilla*. On behalf of the democratic policy of the editors, who openly sided with Giuseppe Mazzini, Count Medo Pucić and August Kaznačić, both from Dubrovnik and students in Padua, were requested to edit fourteen articles on the history of the Slavs from Russia to the Eastern coast of the Adriatic sea.¹ As a storm the national awakening involved Trieste and the Slovenian middle class, that in turn was supported by a learned group of Czechs employed in many trading sectors, and appreciated as extraordinary musicians.² The three major ethnic groups of the city, Slovenes (together with Croats), Germans and Italians, founded some cultural and

- 1 See Ivano Cavallini, “Morlacchismo, illirismo, involuzioni esotiche. L’immagine degli slavi del sud nel teatro e nella musica dell’Ottocento in Italia/Morlakizem, ilirizem, ekosotična zamotanost. Lik južnega slovana v italijanskem gledališču in glabshi devetnajstega stoletja”, in *Umetnosti izraz ob nacionalnem vprašanju. Glasba, likovna in besedna umetnost ob slovensko-italijanski meji v drugi polovici XIX. stoletja do prihoda fašizma/L’espressione artistica e la questione nazionale. La musica, le arti figurative e le lettere nella seconda metà dell’Ottocento al confine italo-sloveno fino all’avvento del fascismo*, ed. Aleksander Rojc (Trst-Ljubljana: Glasbena Matica-SAZU, 2014), 375–82, 406–13.
- 2 Aleksander Rojc, *Cultura musicale degli sloveni a Trieste: dal 1848 all’avvento del fascismo* (Trieste: Editoriale Stampa Triestina, 1978), passim; Ivano Cavallini, “Music Migrations from the Bohemian Lands to Trieste and the National Awakening of the Southern Slavs,” in *Music Migration in the Early Modern Age: Centres, Peripheries –*

musical associations working in quasi-pacific competition.³ The territorial unity of both Italy and Germany, which became independent states respectively in 1861 and in 1871, contributed to the political clash among these national groups. The changing of the political environment undermined the attempts to create a collaboration in view of a renewal of the Hapsburg policy, which in turn pursued a pragmatic perspective known as *divide et impera* (i.e., sometimes in favour of the Slovenes and Croats, sometimes in favour of the Italians). However, irredentism, Pan-Slavism, and German nationalism did not exert a negative influence on the musical life of the town. It flourished in a very strange mixture of Wagnerism, Italian bel canto, and, foremost on the shared feeling for *Hausmusik*, i.e., the practice of performing chamber music imported from eighteenth-century Austria, which became a distinctive habit of local culture.

Kuhač, Mandić and the *fin de siècle* Italian Opera

The aim of my contribution is to give a short survey of the criticisms of Italian opera and Wagnerian *Musikdrama*, written in the light of the Southern Slavic revival of both Croatian musicologist Franjo Kuhač (1834–1911) and composer Josip Mandić (1883–1959). The negative judgement of Kuhač on the final works of Verdi, and the opposite appreciation of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, are due to his ideological trust in folk music, as the main source for creating a national grammar of opera. Mandić, as a lawyer and musician who worked within the frame of the Slovenian and Pan-Slavic revival in Trieste until World War I, collaborated with the newspaper *Jadran* (*The Adriatic*), printed for the Croatian inhabitants of Trieste and Istria.⁴ In 1903 he published a long article on Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* and Alberto Franchetti's *Germania*.⁵ In such a context, the composer was attracted by the "neoromantic style" of Italian opera using a different approach than that of Kuhač. He did not want to retrace the authenticity of popular style

People, Works, Styles, Paths of Dissemination and Influence, ed. Jolanta Guzy-Pasiak and Aneta Markuszewska (Warsaw: Liber pro Arte, 2016), 323–35.

- 3 Giuseppe Radole, *Ricerche sulla vita musicale a Trieste (1750-1950)* (Trieste, Svevo, 1988), passim. Idem, *Le scuole musicali a Trieste e il Conservatorio Giuseppe Tartini* (Trieste: Svevo, 1992), 106–07.
- 4 The weekly newspaper appeared in Trieste for a short time, from 1903 to 1904. Cf. Fedora Ferluga Petronio, "Il settimanale *Jadran* di Ante Trešić-Pavičić," ed. Gian Carlo Damir Murković, *I croati a Trieste* (Trieste: Comunità Croata/Hrvatska Zajednica, 2007), 275–84.
- 5 Josip Mandić, "Glazba: nekoliko refleksija," *Jadran* 3–5 (1903).

in the Verismo, but unlike Kuhač he refused any comparison between Italian and Slavic opera, this last one considered as a national product that should have never been affected by Italian or German patterns.

Given that Kuhač's biography, né Franz Xaver Koch of a German family, is well known, I would like to outline some crucial aspects of his thought on folk songs as a source for opera.⁶

During the 1850s and 1860s, the musicologist could undertake some journeys throughout the South Eastern part of Europe, with the task of gathering folk music. The final result of this incredible effort was the publication, from 1878 to 1881, of his collection in four volumes of 1,600 tunes under the title *Južno-Slovenske narodne popievke* (*Southern Slav Folksongs*). His first approach to ethnicity in music produced an ambiguous meaning of the term "narodna glazba", referring to both the traditional and art music based on folk. In his writings the floating meaning of ethnic music seems to be the outcome of a series of political changes that occurred in Croatia and among the Southern Slavs.⁷ This may explain why at the beginning of his career he was inclined to Pan-Slavism, while later he was near to the South-Slavic or Yugoslav ethnicity, and finally, at the end of his life, to Croatian nationalism. As a young musicologist, he converted himself from German to Croatian nationality, and embraced the radical Pan-Slavic idea against the pro-German policy. From the 1860s to the 1870s, he turned his attention to the South-Slavic brotherhood. In that period, he was close to Nicolò de Strmić from Zadar, an Italian-oriented nobleman who composed *La madre slava* (*The Slav Mother*, 1865).⁸ This opera was staged in Trieste and Zagreb, and it includes two famous Illyrian anthems *Još Hrvatska ni propala, Croatia Has Not Yet Fallen*, text by Ljudevit Gaj set to music by Ferdo Livadić in 1833, and *Mi smo braćo ilirskog, We are Brothers of Illyria*, by the priest Mijo Hajko. After the Italian opera *La madre slava*, Kuhač hoped in vain that Strmić had written a Yugoslav national opera, based on the authentic Southern Slavic folklore, as he wrote in a letter addressed

6 See the proceedings *Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834-1911). Glazbena historiografija i identitet/Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834-1911). Musical Historiography and Identity*, ed. Vjera Katalinić and Stanislav Tuksar (Zagreb: Croatian Musicological Society, 2013).

7 Stanislav Tuksar, "Die Geburt der Musik aus dem Geiste des Volkes': The Construction of the Idea of National Music in Franjo Ksaver Kuhač's (1834-1911) Historiography - Slavic vs. German vs. Italian," *Musica e Storia* 12, no. 3 (2004): 563-90.

8 Caterina Brugnera, "La madre slava di Nikola Strmić: un tentativo di incontro tra il lirismo e opera italiana," *Musica e Storia* 12, no. 3 (2004): 591-610.

to the composer of Zadar.⁹ This unrealised goal convinced him that “the moral forces of each of the tribes are too small to make us believe in the possibility of a singular Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian or Bulgarian national music”.¹⁰ This wide viewpoint is also retraceable in his monograph on the musicians at the time of Illyrism in Croatia, from 1835 to 1850 (*Ilirski glazbenici. Prilozi za poviest Hrvatskoga preporoda/Illyrian Musicians. A Contribution to the History of the Croatian Revival*, 1893).¹¹ The personalities Kuhač listed among Illyrians are selected by ideological and not national criteria. Among the eighteen musicians quoted, there are two Austrians, two Hungarians, two Czechs, one Slovene, one Serb, and ten Croats.

Apart from the operatic trilogy of Ivan Zajc (1870–1876), a useful example to understand the national idea in Croatia after the end of Alexander Bach’s absolutism is the article “Nova glazbena struja njemačka i sadašnji talijanski kompozitori” (New Musical Trends in Germany and Contemporary Italian Composers).¹² The short essay, printed in 1892, helps us to recognise not only Kuhač’s personal taste, but also his love for art music inspired by folk songs, whatever the nation! He analyses in detail the reasons why German culture was not able to recover its own folk music, and the slow process of Slavic nations’ freedom in Central Europe. Dominated by the German music school, Bohemia, Slovenia and Croatia reacted to this influence tracing the paths of their own folk music and national/regional poems. The case of Italy represents for Kuhač an extraordinary experience of cultural unity of the nation. He believes that art and folk music coexist in Italian opera. In this respect, he writes in praise of Mascagni’s realism refusing Verdi’s conversion to Wagnerism in his last operas. Although these remarks confirm that he was a clever scholar, in his analysis there is a strange interpretation, concerning the relationship between Verdi and the Italian folk legacy, which will last for a very long time. According to Kuhač,

9 “Ja sam uvjeren da će te Vi koli na našu slavjansku glazbu, toli na hrvatski jezik i u buduće svu pozornost obratiti, je bi želiti bilo da genialni skladatelj *La madre slava* i u ove prode, da se za Jugoslavenstvo vječne zasluge stekne”. This sentence is readable in a letter signed by Kuhač on 25 February 1870, now readable in Zdravko Blažeković, “Prilog biografiji Nikole Strmića,” (A Contribution to the Biography of Nikola Strmić), *Rad JAZU* 409 (1988): 299–300.

10 Franjo Ksaver Kuhač, “Sachliche Einleitung zur der Sammlung südslavischer Volkslieder,” *Agramer Zeitung* 48 (1873): 194–202.

11 Idem, *Ilirski glazbenici. Prilozi za povijest hrvatskoga preporoda (Illyrian Musicians. Contributions to the History of Croatian Awakening)* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1893).

12 Possibly printed in Zagreb, unfortunately without a publishing house.

Verdi was better than other composers in representing national music until he fell into the Wagnerian school network. Following this premise, the authentic folk source survived in the opera *Cavalleria rusticana*, regarded by Kuhač as a renewed supra-national tradition. This was a longtime misunderstanding of the image of Italy, given that the large spread of arias, *romanze*, or choral music drawn from operas are not comparable to the folk-songs of some Italian regions, where peasants, living away from the towns, had very conservative traditions unrelated to opera.

Verdi, the genial and extraordinary prolific Italian composer, regarding the musical context of twenty years before, represented the symbol of the Italian people. Not only did he compose in a true Italian spirit, he also improved the Italian music art tradition. [...] After the appearance of Wagner, this lucky artist betrayed his people in such an unforeseen manner [...]. He rejected music for which Italians were the rulers, clergy, aristocrats, scholars, rich men and audience [...] and then he became a servant of Wagner. Mascagni's Cavalleria rusticana achieved an outstanding success due to the following causes: Mascagni did not become a slave of Wagner or of his followers, and then he did not disguise his Italianness; he was able to use all new achievements of musical progress, and he coined a musical phraseology by means of selected ideas. Mascagni did not imitate the infinite melody, whose parts, each other, do not correspond either to the melody or to the rhythm. Further, he did not adopt the modulation of extreme Wagnerian followers.¹³

Compelling evidence occurs in the analysis of harmonies related to some scenes of *Cavalleria*. In contrast, it is astonishing the prejudice Kuhač felt for some nations he considered unable to preserve their own folk music. This is the case of Germany, Great Britain, and some peoples like the Gypsies, and the Jews:

The peoples in Europe having an authentic traditional music [...] are the Slavic, Italian, French, Spanish, Hungarian and Turkish. German, British, Jew and Gypsy peoples have not traditional music [...]. German folk melodies are not created in the spirit of Germany [...]. When the Germans talk about a German school, instead of

13 Kuhač, "Nova glazbena struja njemačka i sadašnji talijanski kompozitori," 20.

*talking about folk music, they are not wrong, because all their music is the fruit of professional musicians [...].*¹⁴

Josip Mandić and Pan-Slavism in Trieste

Kuhač was in Trieste for a series of reports printed in 1892 by the periodical *Vijenac*.¹⁵ Even if he visited most part of the Hapsburg Empire and the Balkan lands, he came to Trieste with the charge of describing the national exhibition of art and crafts of the Austrian empire, and settled in the free port of Austria. In particular, he was interested in writing on the Slavic regional pavilions, and on the Croatian firms. Different was the case of Josip Mandić. He was born in Trieste in a bourgeois family of inner Istria. After attending a primary German school in his native town, he moved to Sušak and Zagreb for high school, and finally he graduated in Vienna, where his studies included composition under the guidance of Hermann Grädner and Robert Fuchs. Before living in Prague, he worked in Trieste as a lawyer until World War I. Following in the footsteps of his father and uncle Matko, he was politically engaged in upholding the interests of Slovenes and Croats. His opera *Petar Svačić* was played in a concert held by the society *Dalmatinski skup* at the Rossetti Theatre in Trieste (1903). The Dalmatian Society was founded by the Croats of Trieste, whose activities were also supported by Slovenes and Serbs in a common effort to oppose German and Italian cultural domination. Reports on the concert in the Croatian and Slovenian newspapers of Trieste welcomed the event as a sign of the growing cultural and economic power of these communities. Also, the Italian and German newspapers wrote positively about the concert, praising the composer's promising talent.¹⁶ *Petar Svačić* could not be staged in Zagreb, since the Hungarian governor of Croatia, Károly Khuen-Héderváry, abolished opera performances from 1902 up to 1909. Instead of Zagreb, Pe-

14 Kuhač, "Nova glazbena struja njemačka i sadašnji talijanski kompozitori," 7.

15 Franjo Ksaver Kuhač, "Tršćanska izložba," *Vijenac* 14, no 36 (1882): 583, no 37: 590–3, no 38: 612–15.

16 The reviews published by *Edinost*, "Koncert Dalmatinskega skupa", *Trieste*, "La festa del Club Dalmatino", and once again by *Edinost*, "O koncertu Dalmatinskega skupa" (the latter is a translation of the article published in *Triester Zeitung*) are recorded in Natka Badurina, "Teatro e politica ai margini dell'impero: l'opera lirica *Petar Svačić* nel 1903," *I croati a Trieste*, 386–7.

tar Svačić was staged in Ljubljana on 15th January 1904, where the response of the public was enthusiastic.¹⁷

The project of Mandić and his librettist Karlo Lukež was very unusual in the frame of that time. They chose the Croatian theme of Petar Svačić, but they arranged it to promote the idea of the union of all Southern Slavs. Although the topic did not permit it, there are many references. The Prologue is written in decasyllables simulating the folk epics. It was sung by a baritone dressed as a *gusle* player, and, according to the newspapers of the time, the music was heavy and monotonous, recalling the genre of blind *guslar*'s poems. The verses of the libretto also contain lexical and stylistic elements of the common Croatian and Serbian folk heritage.

The feature of the opera can be understood only within the peripheral and multicultural frame of Trieste, where the two young authors were colleagues on the editorial board of the journal *Jadran*. Since its owner, Ante Tresić Pavičić, was a staunch advocate of the Croatian Party of Rights, this periodical was launched with the intention of supporting radical Croatian policy. However, the multi-national competition for the cultural and economic power in Trieste, and the Slavic communities' need to oppose the much stronger German and Italian influences, induced Tresić Pavičić to side with the heritage of the Illyrian idea. For the same reason the two young authors re-elaborated the Croatian pathos, that was implicit in the plot of *Petar Svačić*, and recycled it in favour of the Yugoslav ideology.

In 1903 Mandić published in *Jadran* the aforementioned article entitled "Glazba nekoliko refleksija" ("Music: Some Reflexions"), which is useful to establish a new viewpoint on the reform of Italian opera.¹⁸ At first glance, his writing seems conceived in the light of a neo-national awakening of the South Slavic people, and the related effort in re-thinking the compositional grammar after both the Illyrian amateur Vatroslav Lisinski and the professional Ivan Zajc – the last one renewed the musical life of Zagreb from 1870 up to his retirement in 1908. In fact, any comparison to the national trends of Slavic composers is omitted, because the author links his aesthetic thought to the analysis of modern Italian opera.

The article consists of three issues: the *Zeitgeist*, Wagner, and the Italian modern opera on the traces of Wagner's compositional technique.

17 See the article of *Edinost*, "Triumf mladega hrvatskega skladatelja J. Mandića v Ljubljani," quoted by Natka Badurina. "Croatian Historical Myth, South-Slavic Brotherhood and the Death of the Opera," *De Musica Disserenda* 12, no 1 (2016): 82.

18 See footnote 5.

In the epigraph Mandić quotes a sentence of Robert Schumann, and the writing begins with a second short sentence of the same composer, “Allen neuen Erscheinungen ist Geist eigen”, drawn from *Aus Meisters Raro’s, Florestan’s und Eusebius’ Denk- und Dicht-Büchlein*.¹⁹ The twenty-year old Mandić affirms his Romantic credo on music as a special language, suitable in translating the thought. At the same time, he refers to the Hegelian concept of the spirit of the time, which is the result of a dialectical clash between two different forces (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807). He argues that the evolution of music is the result of a process of a clash, which provokes a purification, readable as a discovery of a new style. The peculiarity of a work of art depends either on the *Zeitgeist* or on the spirit of the composer. How do we explain in detail what happened in music history? As Mandić affirms, as sons of their time neither Haydn nor Wagner could write in the Haydnian or Wagnerian manners. Although they are links with his own time, inside the composer there are the seeds of a creative instinct, *par excellence*, or κατ’ ἐξοχήν, as the author writes in ancient Greek. From this viewpoint it is evident there is a conflict between two basic elements: on the one hand the spirit of the time, translatable as the rules established as a common style and expression of musical language, on the other hand the intuition of the artist (“the spirit exists from the beginning; it works inside the composer looking for patterns in the world outside him. However, it develops patterns according to the composer’s personal insight and force”).

A second important sentence in Mandić’s article regards the career of an artist, which could be separate on two levels:

During his youth, when his imagination is still weak, until he needs more knowledge (nobody can learn by himself without models). This will be the time of comparison between his spirit and the music literature. After the conclusion of this period, the two factors change their proportions. After the separation from the patterns, he is ready to create something bigger, or at least he is able to detach and bring out his individuality. [...] To individualise the work means getting a great opportunity. [...] [In contrast] the untalented composer will follow the mainstream of his time.

The compromise between rules and individuality established by Mandić is very close to the eclectic approach to the biographies of great com-

19 *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1854).

posers from a positivist perspective. As an example, in his monograph on Wagner (1890), the prominent Italian musicologist Luigi Torchi analyses the history of culture in Germany before and after Wagner's dramas.²⁰ Nevertheless, he avoids the discourse on the feeling of the maestro that remains inscrutable. That is to say, musicology can only examine how a maestro writes an opera, i.e., describing its shape and style. Vice versa, if the mission of the scholar is to detect the composer's feeling, any answer would be wrong.

After this assumption, Mandić emphasises the decadence of Western European culture. Even though he neglects any mention of the role of music within the national trend of Central Europe, I suppose he refers to it. His penchant for a renewal of Croatian opera, by means of the Wagnerian orchestration, is witnessed by Slovenian critics after the staging of *Petar Svačić* in Ljubljana. Unfortunately, the lack of a score of the opera does not allow complete feedback on Mandić's attitude. His adverse opinion on Puccini's *Tosca*, staged at the Teatro Verdi of Trieste, is due to a quick dissemination of Wagner's *Musikdrama*. Like a whirlwind that cleans the air, but blows so hard that it tears down the roofs, his music influenced the so-called neo-romantic Italian school. The result is, as Mandić says, "a continuous effort to insert the unpredictability and the bizarre", so that "unusual harmonies, prevailing alterations, recurrent changes of rhythm, gruelling orchestration are the main characteristics of the modern school. This 'theatricality' is the most important goal. [...] What is impossible in music is restored through external requirements". In this regard he quotes the exotic opera *Iris* of Pietro Mascagni and *Tosca* of Giacomo Puccini.

Mandić considers *Tosca* by the dramatist Victorien Sardou an unsuitable source to set to music. He loves the lyrical flair of Puccini, which cannot be arisen in a drama based on murder, revenge and suicide. *Tosca* is a drama of blood, intertwined with an increase of theatrical effects that do not meet expectations. Compared to the delicate and touching *Bohème*, *Tosca* could not reach the peak of the former opera. As remembered by Mandić, *Tosca* was a fiasco in Trieste and at the same time a success in Monte Carlo. This incoherence is due to a group of music critics of the Adriatic city. They were strong followers of Wagner, but also unprofessional writers unable to accept the innovative language of Puccini, whose leitmotif technique stems from Wagnerian drama. Maybe the young Croatian intellectual also sensed that the multicultural audience of Trieste, at the crucial moment of

20 Luigi Torchi, *Richard Wagner: studio critico* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1890): 8–11.

nationalism, was more conservative rather than the learned audience of Vienna. Puccini was not a follower of Verismo, but an international author, as written by the extreme nationalist Fausto Torrefranca in his provocative biography *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale* (1912).²¹ The fate of the Empire's periphery, influenced by chauvinism, was the research of identity in a simple way. The diminished presence of the *romanza* style of *Tosca* in comparison to *Bohème*, that sounded like a model in the vein of the traditional opera by numbers, was perhaps unacceptable for any kind of audience: either for the Italians, or for the Slovenes and Germans, all agreeing that *Tosca* was an anaemic opera. Nevertheless, it is not easy to understand the thinking of a young intellectual dealing with the legacy of Hegel, Schumann and Wagner, but not of Eduard Hanslick. Unlike other intellectuals, the young Mandić was not influenced by the theory of Hanslick. In the Austrian lands and abroad, only faint traces survived of his provocative formalism, which was overcome by positivist scholars, or refused by the followers of Hegel's philosophy,²² even if in Bologna Luigi Torchi translated into Italian the famous *Vom Musikalisch-Schöne* in 1883, and the literate Silvio Benco from Trieste wrote an article in memory of Hanslick after his death (1904).²³ This trend reveals that not everyone was against him, and Mandić, although fascinated by the late Romantic aesthetics, examined the dramaturgy and the technique of *Tosca* with accuracy, avoiding, in such a manner, the suggestions of sound sentiment. Within this frame, he not only defines the causes of the end of opera by numbers, but also the fall of *Tosca*, attaching to Puccini the bad choice of a bizarre libretto, that led him to give up his own intimate style of *romanza*, flourished in a brilliant way in the previous operas. Although the reliance on the topic of Slavic national myth, readable in the libretto of the contemporary *Petar Svačić*, the review written by Mandić is free from ideological bias close to Pan-Slavic or Croatian nationalism. This is the reason why we could affirm, as Michel de Montaigne wrote in his *Essays* (III, 13), "il y a plus affaire à interpreter

21 Printed in Turin by Bocca, the publishing house of the periodical *Rivista Musicale Italiana*.

22 Barbara Boisits, "Der Geist des musikalisch Schönen. Ferdinand Peter Graf Laurencins hegelianische Kritik an Eduard Hanslicks Formauffassung," in *Musicologie sans frontières/Muzikologija bez granica/Musicology without Frontiers. Svečani zbornik za Stanislava Tuksara/Essays in Honour of Stanilav Tuksar*, ed. Ivano Cavallini and Harry White (Zagreb: Croatian Musicological Society, 2010), 205–22.

23 Silvio Benco, "Hanslick e la sua sorte," *Piccolo della sera*, 21 08 1904, reprint in *Scritti musicali di Silvio Benco*, ed. Gianni Gori and Isabella Gallo, introductory word by Gianandrea Gavazzeni (Napoli: Ricciardi, 1974): 114–17.

les interpretations qu'à interpreter les choses et plus livres sur les livres que sur autre sujet".

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