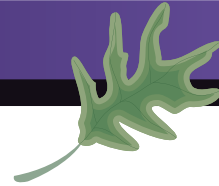




Off The Couch



PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CULTURE

V4N1

The Soldier's Tale (L'Histoire du soldat)

I. The Production

Music by Igor Stravinsky

Text by C.F. Ramuz

A new translation from the French original by Liz Diamond

A production of the Yale School of Music and Drama directed by Liz Diamond

April 1, 2014 – Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall, New Haven, CT

II. Text and Music

The Soldier's Tale was conceived by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) and the French-Swiss writer C.F. Ramuz (1878 - 1947). The pair met in Switzerland where both were exiled during WW I. They collaborated on the works, *Reynard* (1916) and *Les Noces* (1917). Stravinsky was hard up for money; the Russian revolution had shut off funds from his estates in Russia and his publisher was not paying royalties on his works. Stravinsky said in his *Memoirs*:

The thought of composing a dramatic spectacle for a théâtre ambulant had occurred to me more than once since the beginning of the [great] war, however. The sort of work I envisaged would have to be small enough in the complement of its players to allow for performances on a circuit of Swiss villages, and simple enough in the outlines of its story to be understood.

Stravinsky recalled several memories that entered into the work. One was a dream: Stravinsky dreamt of a young gypsy sitting by the roadside and playing a fiddle to her child with long sweeps of the bow. On waking, he recalled the motif she played, and used it in the 'Little Concert' section (played by the Soldier after he regains his fiddle); the score includes the instruction "with the full length of the bow." Another was a memory: of standing in a street in Seville with Diaghilev and listening to a "bullfight" band – cornet, trombone, and bassoon – playing a 'pasodoble' (a lilting Hispanic dance). Then a big band came blaring down the street and drowned out the little one. This lies behind the 'Royal March'. Stravinsky also said that the work captured childhood memories of Russian country fairs with puppet shows, clowns and musicians.

The text is based on the Russian fairy tale, "The Runaway Soldier and the Devil", in the collection of Russian fairy tales by Alexander Afanasyev. Ramuz's text follows the tale quite closely, with a few updating of the details, i.e. in the fairy tale, the soldier becomes a rich merchant while in the text he becomes a trader in stocks and bonds. The fiddle becomes a central motif. It is likely Ramuz that suggested a narrated play with music.

The music is scored for a septet of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, cornet (often played on trumpet), trombone, and percussion, and the story is told by three actors: the soldier, the devil, and a narrator, who also takes on the roles of minor characters. A dancer plays the non-speaking role of the princess, and there may also be additional ensemble dancers. The libretto carries the following

introductory note concerning the staging:

A small stage mounted on a platform. A stool (or barrel) at either side. On one of the stools the Narrator sits in front of a small table on which there are a carafe of white wine and a glass. The orchestra is placed on the opposite side of the stage.

The orchestra traditionally has a conductor; this production did not. The violin plays the role of the soldier while the percussion embodies the devil. The music is grouped into interludes between sections of narration and dance. The most obvious sound here is jazz, a form of music that Stravinsky had never actually heard. He was familiar with it through scores that his friend Ernest Ansermet had brought from America. This instrumentation closely resembles that of the New Orleans Dixieland Jazz band that was traveling through Europe during this period. Stravinsky also uses tango rhythms, marches, a waltz and a chorale. The "Grand Choral" parodies J.S. Bach's Cantata 80 from 1715, which, in its turn, is based on Martin Luther's hymn, "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress is Our God"). Orchestral color is prominent with each individual instrument used soloistically. The texture of the piece is generally contrapuntal; the tonality is localized; there is no overall harmonic scheme, but rather tonally stable sections mixed with bitonal clashes.

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1. Wiener Fassung
HISTOIRE DU SOLDAT
The Soldier's Tale Geschichte vom Soldaten

Texte de C.F. RAMUZ
English version by Richard Flaxman and Kitty Black
Französisch-Übersetzung von Hans Krahmer

Music by IGOR STRAVINSKY
First published in Paris, France (1918)
Performed and edited by James Blake

One person in three months or four
Others, the whole day, or sometimes the
whole night, in the same place. The music
is a part of the story. The orchestra
is a part of the story.

A small stage, mounted on a platform, at
either side of which is a stool. On one of
the stools the narrator sits in front of a
small table on which there are a carafe of
white wine and a glass. The orchestra
is placed on the opposite side of the stage.

Ein kleine Geschichte in drei Monaten
oder vier
Andere, den ganzen Tag, oder manchmal
die ganze Nacht, an demselben Ort. Die
Musik ist ein Teil der Geschichte. Das
Orchester ist ein Teil der Geschichte.

1
INTRODUCTION
Introduction Einführung

MARCHE DU SOLDAT
The Soldier's March Marsch des Soldaten

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The work was premiered in Lausanne, Switzerland, 28 September 1918, conducted by Ernest Ansermet. It has since been played worldwide. Stravinsky also extracted a suite of music from the play. In this production, the band is placed to the left of the stage. The Narrator sits at a table to the right. The dancing and acting takes place in the space in-between. Mood is provided by baseboard lighting of varying colors. The play has the following scenes:

Part One, Scene 1 – (Music: The Soldier's March). The Soldier, returning to his native village with a fortnight's leave, is accosted by The Devil disguised as an old man with a butterfly net (Music: Airs by a Stream). The Soldier is dressed in a green uniform in white face. He marches with exaggerated steps and is empty of emotion, like a Mime. The Devil is dressed in red with red lips and painted eyes. He obtains the Soldier's fiddle in exchange for a magic book that promises unlimited wealth and invites him to spend three days of his leave with him, providing food, drink and smokes. The Soldier accepts. After the 3 days, the Devil transported the Soldier to his native village.

Scene 2 -- (Music: The Soldier's March) On reaching his native village, the Soldier finds he has been away not three days but three years. The villagers think he is a ghost back to haunt them. His mother slams the door on him and his fiancé is married with two kids. He realizes that he has been tricked by the Devil (Music: Pastorale). The Devil appears disguised as a small time hustler and explains that with the help of the magic book the Soldier can make his fortune. The Devil now is in full command of the Soldier.

Salesman at first, just a salesman of stuff
'til investing his profits became quite enough.
No need for stuff once dividends pay.
People now do whatever I say
Because I've got the know-how while they merely pray.

This is no book...It's a real treasure chest;
Open it up, and at once you're the best.
It's got what you want; you just need a desire.
So hurry up! Grab it, before you expire.

Scene 3 -- (Music: Reprise – Airs by a Stream) The Soldier is thoroughly disillusioned by his wealth.

They who've got nothing, they have it all;
And I, who have everything, I have none!

The Devil disguised as an old woman calls on him and brings his old pack, including the fiddle. He wants to buy it back, but finding he can get no sound out of it, hurls it into the wings and tears up the book in despair.

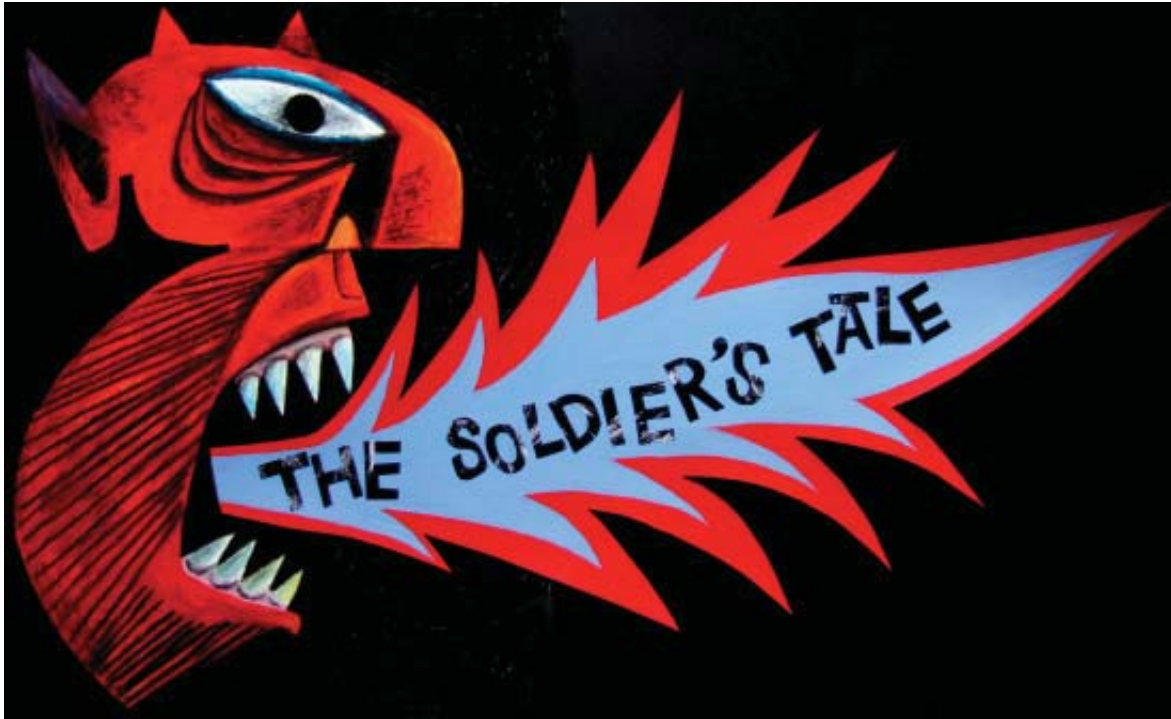
Part Two, Scene 4 -- (Music: Reprise – The Soldier's March). The Soldier is now marching on.

Down a beaten dusty track
On he tramps without his pack.
Where can he be going now?
Does the poor man even know?

The Soldier comes to a town where the King's daughter is ill and the King has promised her hand in marriage to whoever succeeds in curing her. Here is a chance for the Soldier to become human again, find love and happiness. He decides that he will cure the Princess (Music: Royal March). The Devil appears with the fiddle:

It was silly of you to get so mad...





You were rich, admired, a hero.
But then you went and lost your head.
And, now? You are a zero.

The Narrator points out that the Devil's hold on the Soldier is his money. If the Soldier is to lose all his money, then he is free of the Devil's power. He proceeds to do this at cards. The Devil's power is broken and he is finished off with drink. The Soldier seizes back the fiddle and plays the Little Concert.

Scene 5 -- (Music: Three dances, a Tango, a Waltz and Ragtime). The Soldier enters the Princess's bedroom and begins to play. The Princess is lying on a couch. The Princess rises and dances a tango, a waltz and a ragtime, at the end of which she falls into the Soldier's arms. During their embrace, the Devil enters now undisguised. The Soldier plays the Devil's Dance and is now in control of the Devil. The Soldier and the Princess drag the Devil off into the wings (Music: Little Chorale). But the Devil is not finished:

You're doing well right now, it's true,
But Soldier – I'm not done with you.
Whose share of joy he would surpass
Let him be warned: it will not last.

Scene 6 -- (Music: Grand Chorale). The Narrator gives the moral of the story:

It's never wise to try to add
What you had
To what you have.

You cannot at the same time be
What you were and have become.

In this life you have to choose;

You have no right to "have it all,"
And if you try – you're bound to lose.

One joy is all the joy we get;
A second wipes the first one out.

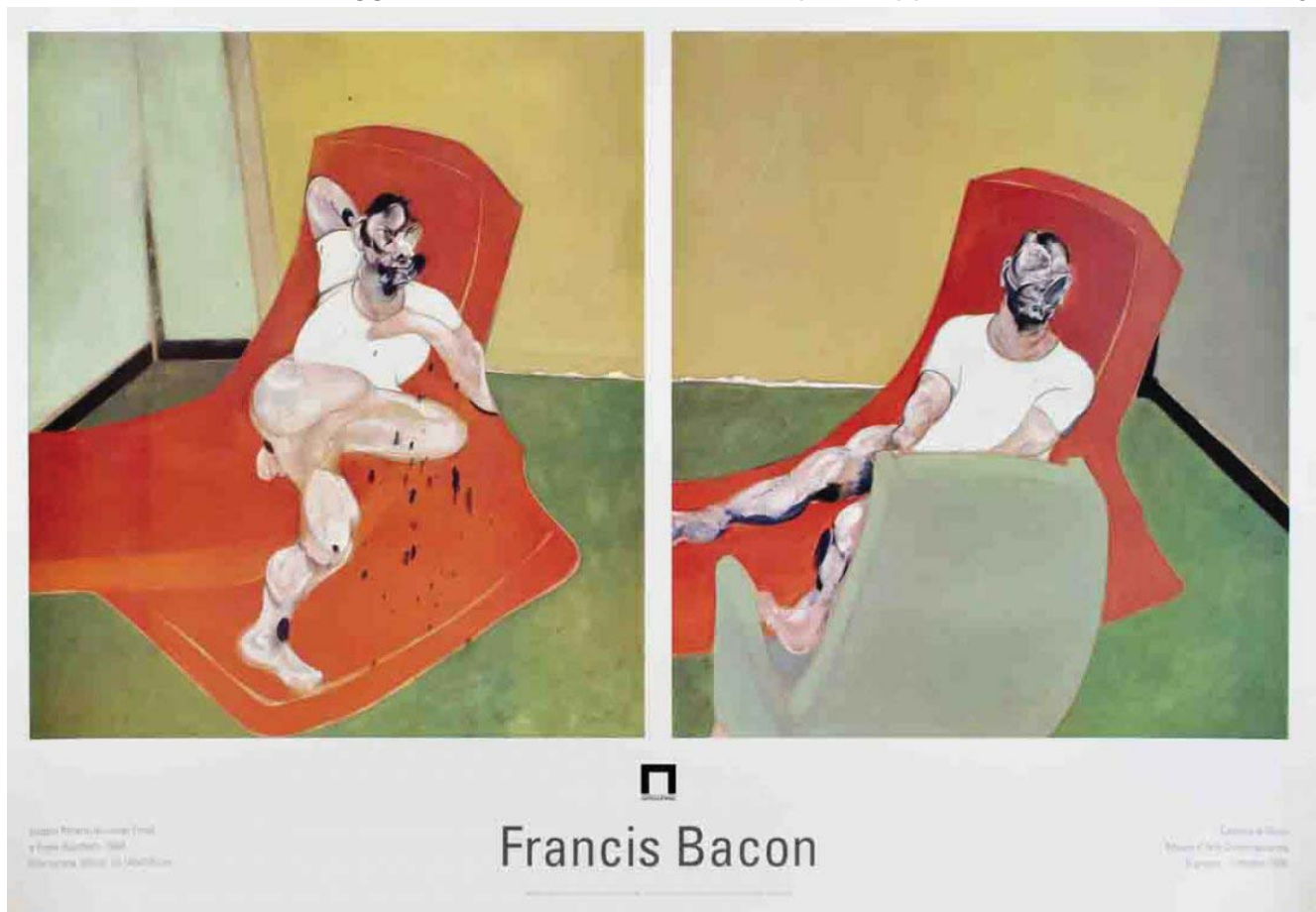
The Princess wants to know about his background and this brings up memories of his mother. The Princess urges him on and they decide to visit his native village.

And here his thoughts began to play:
"Maybe my mother will know me know;
We could bring her back with us to stay.
I'd really have it all that way..."

As soon as he crosses the frontier, he falls into the power of the Devil, who appears in a magnificent red costume, who once again has the fiddle. (Music: The Devil's Triumphant March). The Devil is back in control and the Soldier follows the Devil very slowly without resisting.

III. Discussion

We could understand the pair, Soldier and Devil, as a double. The Devil is the doppelgänger of the Soldier. Relevant here is the novella by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Double*, published in 1846. In the novella, Golyadkin is a minor bureaucrat in the government who is insecure about his position, envies those above him and struggles with rivals for attention from various father figures. After a series of rebuffs, his double appears. The double, Golyadkin Jr looks exactly like Golyadkin Sr but is the opposite in character, confident, aggressive, and extroverted, the polar opposites to those of the toadying



“pushover” Golyadkin Sr. In the Stravinsky piece, the Soldier is an everyman, no ambition but to marry and settle down. He is a faceless dusty tramp. The Devil appears as his opposite, full of life and bright colors, promising fantastic wealth and unlimited power in exchange for life, symbolized by the fiddle.

Freud (1919) describes the double as “a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self.” (p. 243). Freud thought that the double was originally an insurance against the primitive fears of loss, mutilation and death. But then the double transforms into “the uncanny harbinger of death” (p. 245). And later in development, the double may represent the dissociation of the superego from the ego and become an externalized judge and observer. “There are also all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will” (p. 236).

Melanie Klein elaborates on these mechanisms of dissociation. She emphasizes the splitting of good and bad feelings about the self and its objects. To protect itself in fantasy against attack by the bad objects, the self attempts in fantasy to expel and project outside of itself everything that is dangerous and attacking while retaining in itself all that is good and comforting. The Soldier, is confronted by his futility of existence:

Down a beaten dusty track
Tramps a soldier with his pack.

Two weeks' leave is all he's got
On he tramps, tired and hot.

Tramps for miles, tramps for miles and miles
On he tramps and tramps and still
Always one more endless hill.

The Soldier is trapped, no home, no direction, no relief. Suddenly a magic solution: the soldier splits into two. The Devil appears as his projection, a tempter, promising unlimited wealth. The exchange is to give away his fiddle, symbolizing life, for unlimited wealth and power. Now the situation is reversed: the projected Devil has the power and life and the Soldier, while rich, is depleted and empty. The Soldier has retained the split off idealized self while the aggressive self has been placed in the figure of the Devil, externalized and attacking. Yet the Devil cannot play the fiddle; he too has no real life and needs the double of the Soldier to simulate life.



What good is all that if I've nothing inside?
False, empty, dead things,
Hollow, stone cold...

When the Devil re-appears, there is another reversal. The Soldier tricks the Devil to take back the money and it gives him life again. He can now play the fiddle and control the Devil. But the split double remains and the Devil remains potentially alive. The Soldier can now have life and marriage but a restriction remains. He must remain under certain bounds to keep the Devil at bay. The temptation is to see his mother again. Note he still thinks:

I'd really have it all that way...

He still wants to achieve the ideal, to have everything. He has not accepted the limitations of life. Once he crosses that boundary, the Devil again has power and takes him over for the final time. The play ends with the percussion signaling the triumph of the Devil. True healing would mean an integration of the split off parts of the self. Freud talks of the reality principle, the accepting of compromise and delay in our wishes for power and wealth. As the Narrators states:

In this life you have to choose;
You have no right to "have it all,"
And if you try – you're bound to lose.

Freud, S. (1919). The 'Uncanny'. SE XVII, 217-256.

Klein, M. (1946). Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms, in Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963. London: Delacorte Press.

