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## STRAVINSKY AND C.-F. RAMUZ: A PRIMITIVE CLASSICISM

Tom Gordon

Aside from a taste for fine paper and simple wines, there were few obvious links between Stravinsky and his Swiss literary collaborator and friend, Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz. Stravinsky was extroverted, socially adept, and direct; Ramuz was introverted, dour, and self-effacing. But from the moment they met there was an immediate empathy. Ramuz mythologized it in his famous *Souvenirs sur Igor Stravinsky*. Stravinsky's testament is found in the extended catalogue of works in which he invited Ramuz's collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

The close interaction between composer and poet resulted not only in an inventory of greater and lesser works, but also in a mutually evolving aesthetic. Transcending ethnic differences, Ramuz and Stravinsky enshrined both the elemental and the classic within the same aesthetic. If, at the end of his Swiss exile, Stravinsky rejected Ramuz's provincial limitations, the more literal classicism that he evolved in the twenties still owed much to the discipline and freedom from convention they had developed together. The new classicism was defined, in part, in the transposition of traditions of art into new forms. Stravinsky learned that process in the transposition of the elemental materials of folk music or peasant imagery into art.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the cornerstone work of Stravinsky's new classicism is universally acknowledged as *L'Histoire du soldat*, the single result of the Ramuz-Stravinsky collaborations in which the writer participated fully in the determination of the work.

The gentle Vaudois countryside with its cast of peasants provided the setting for most of Ramuz's fiction, but not his birth and childhood. He was born in Lausanne, on 24 September 1878, the son of a merchant. Though a burgher by birth, Ramuz

was a peasant by ancestry and inclination. In the vineyards that had been tended by his mother's people for generations, on the soil that his paternal grandparents had worked, Ramuz found the sole concrete truths that he could nurture into art, and through which he envisioned the birth of a primitive classicism. Ramuz was well into adulthood before he could accept that the sensations he experienced in the Vaudois countryside were a more vital education than the strictures he dutifully accepted at the Gymnasium and Université de Lausanne. His formal education was classical and doctrinaire. He so capably mastered composition in perfect alexandrines that he persuaded his family to allow him a career in the precarious field of literature. But the classical postures he had acquired were inadequate when the irregular rhythms of Vaudois peasant life naturally suggested a freer poetical form. As early as December 1901 Ramuz found himself questioning the necessity of rigorous discipline:

What does it matter if the numerical symmetry of the syllables is always faithful, the rhymes always return, even if it is contrary to preconceived theories and my lively taste for the regular? . . . After all, all interior harmony (the word is ridiculous) being perceptible to anyone, why forbid any research out of fear of the vulgar and uncouth simply under the pretext of rules of prosody and definitive rhythm (Ramuz 1943: 63)?<sup>3</sup>

The simple recognition that a freer poetic style brought authenticity to his subject matter was not enough to free Ramuz from the metres that had become ingrained in his poetic voice. Remarkably self-aware, even during his apprenticeship, Ramuz recognized that part of his creative struggle would grow from the dichotomy within: the academic versus the elemental. On 28 April 1905 he entered in his diary:

I would like to achieve pure sensation: to paint complex things with very simple words; not to describe, but to evoke, and sometimes even to go so far as to break syntax and grammar. I do not try it yet, because of the remnants of my education, but I lean that way (ibid.: 150).<sup>4</sup>

Ten years later, through the example of a painter and in collaboration with a composer, Ramuz resolved the dichotomy

within. He tempered the academic, extracting from it principles which could transform the elemental objects in his surroundings into universal art.

Ramuz documented his evolution in his writings on art from 1904. From the outset he held emphatically that art was not properly a psychological allegory. Art should be freed to be itself alone: its sole function was to be beautiful. The poet raged against the public tendencies to expect art to represent something other than itself. Instead, he championed a return to the classical. He reviewed the "Salon des Indépendants" for the *Gazette de Lausanne* in May 1905, identifying a new classicism that was not academic, but synthetic, incorporating the lessons of the primitives and the impressionists. The painters to whom he referred were Maurice Denis, Roussel, and Guérin. By the autumn of that same year Ramuz was translating what he had observed in Denis's paintings and aesthetic theory into his own credo as a writer. On 3 November 1905 he wrote in his diary:

I have the very clear feeling that the role of literature today (and what will later be for historians, its *raison d'être*) is to render classical the entire incoherent legacy of the last century; to introduce to it symmetry, architecture, and order (ibid.: 156).<sup>5</sup>

Later, and repeatedly throughout his life, Ramuz credited his awakening as a writer to the lessons of the painters he respected. His journal entry for April 1908 states: "My ideas come to me from my eyes. If I have masters, they are among the painters" (ibid.: 179).<sup>6</sup> And if there was one master whose lessons were more significant than any of the others, it was Cézanne.

Like so many of his generation, Ramuz extracted the message he sought from Cézanne's work. Clearly he was influenced by Maurice Denis's evaluations of Cézanne's classicism. But Ramuz's interest in Cézanne was also motivated by a sense of personal identification. Like himself, Cézanne had been a provincial who struggled within the urban and bourgeois milieu of the Parisian art establishment, only to fall back on the sources of his native soil. As early as his 1906 review of the "Salon d'automne," Ramuz saw in Cézanne the ideal fusion of his own antipodal make-up: the classic and the primitive: "Cézanne is a primitive classicist. He is primitive because of his directness, the simplicity of his

rendering, and a certain appearance of clumsiness. He is classical in his style" (quoted in Racine 1978: 119).<sup>7</sup>

Concurrent with the personal period of crisis in Ramuz's life in 1913, he made a pilgrimage to Aix-en-Provence in mid-October 1913. Face to face for the first time with the landscape whose primitive freshness Cézanne had transformed with classical sensibility, Ramuz was overwhelmed by a sense of self-recognition. Shortly afterward he recorded this revelation in his epiphanal essay, "L'Exemple de Cézanne." What Ramuz saw in Cézanne—what he sought in himself—was an intimate and indissoluble association between the artist and his native environment. Immediately he recognized,

. . . a country and a man intimately mixed, so indissolubly united, so intertwined the one in the other, that truly one could no longer distinguish when one looked around, what were their individual parts (Ramuz 1914: 303).<sup>8</sup>

Through the intensity of this bond between the artist and his subject, a bond determined by the fact that the artist is molded by his environment, and through the elemental quality of the subject itself, Cézanne's work acquired fundamental verity for Ramuz. It was the lesson of an art deeply rooted in the particularity of one's environs. So true was the identification between the artist and his soil that the resultant art would transcend the regional to the universal. Encouraged by the example of Cézanne, Ramuz abandoned Paris in the autumn of 1914 to return to his native soil. Just a few weeks earlier, with the Austro-Serbian declaration of war, Stravinsky had accepted the Canton de Vaud as the first of his homes in exile.

Exactly when and where Stravinsky and Ramuz first met is the most fruitless debate in every chronicle of their relationship. Undoubtedly Ramuz first became aware of Stravinsky through Ansermet. Ansermet may have recommended *Petrushka* to Ramuz. In April 1914 he urged Ramuz to attend the concert performance of *Le Sacre du printemps*. They probably did not meet, however, until the summer of 1915,<sup>9</sup> when Ansermet introduced them at a restaurant in Lausanne.<sup>10</sup> But whatever the actual season or place, Ramuz's account of their first meeting in *Souvenirs* is true to the foundation on which their friendship was based. Its convincing intimacy—not embroidered anecdote—attests to the nature of their friendship.

Ramuz set their meeting at the quaint rail station at Epressés on the shore of Lac Lemán, half way between Clarens and Lausanne. The season was autumn. The vineyards, shedding their summer foliage, revealed that the abundance of summer was an illusion wrought through the artifice of man. The bare, terraced landscape where only a few weeks earlier there had been a profusion of seemingly natural greenery was Ramuz's metaphor for the condition of art: an apparently natural wonder created through the invisible artifice. Together author and composer climbed the mountain behind the village, stopping finally at a little café where they shared a ritual meal of bread and "vin honnête." There were no discussions of art or aesthetics, but a simple communion between the two men and their surroundings:

We came to know each other by things and through things . . . . Here begins your person, and at the same time your art: You are whole. I found my way to this interior knowledge by the most exterior, the most earthly of ways. I came to know you in and through the type of pleasure that you took in things: the most "humble" things, as they say, and in every case, the most elemental (Ramuz 1929: 16-17).<sup>11</sup>

The communion that Ramuz and Stravinsky shared from the outset of their friendship was rooted in their taste for elemental things, starting with the land on which they stood and its inhabitants. Stravinsky, seeing the links to his native soil being severed as the war pressed on, succumbed to the contagion of Ramuz's affection and, at least temporarily, adopted the Vaud countryside as his own. In his autobiography he referred readers to Ramuz's *Souvenirs*, calling them a true testament

. . . to our deep affection for each other, to those feelings which each of us found echoed in the other, to the attachment that we both had for his dear Vaud country that had brought us together, and to his deep and understanding sympathy (Stravinsky 1935: 55).

Along with a taste for the primitive, Ramuz perceived that Stravinsky shared his taste for the classical. The one departure from Ramuz's tone of simple camaraderie in his description of their first meeting was a reference to the poet's classic/primitive icon, Cézanne. "We had passed by several canvasses by Cézanne

which Stravinsky, who loved Cézanne, did not fail to notice" (Ramuz 1929: 16).<sup>12</sup> In the same manner that Cézanne succeeded, in the same manner that Ramuz himself was striving, Stravinsky was proceeding from the known particular to the general in his creative activity:

These particularities . . . further contributed to our entente. Our commonality of taste even gave me the right to participate in a music which I saw as material, rooted in an object, then growing to its interior existence, to yourself through every part of your body (ibid.: 18).<sup>13</sup>

Ramuz commended Stravinsky for his creative materialism. Only through an orientation toward the material—and not the idea—could art attain the spiritual universality which is its ultimate objective.

From their first meeting Ramuz perceived Stravinsky's healthy dualism. To the antipodal Ramuz—the academic and the peasant—Stravinsky was the ideal. He was

. . . a man and a complete man, which is to say, refined and at the same time primitive; sensitive to every complication, but also to the elementary; capable of the most complicated combinations of the spirit and also of the most spontaneous and direct reactions. Because one must be both savage and civilized, it is not necessary to be only a primitive, but it is necessary to be *also* a primitive (ibid.: 19).<sup>14</sup>

\* \* \* \*

"Tout est dans les rapports normaux entre les mots"  
(Ramuz 1943: 310)

What began as a well-marinated friendship developed into an artistic collaboration during the winter of 1916. With the war delaying the première of *Les Noces* indefinitely, Stravinsky had set aside his massive choreographic cantata for work on a commission from the Princesse de Polignac. As a chamber work intended for performance in a Parisian salon, *Renard* required a French translation. The folkloric simplicity of the Russian libretto, and the structural tautness of the work as a whole suggested Ramuz as the logical collaborator in the translation. The directness and vulgarity of Ramuz's beloved Vaudois French

made it well-suited to the common and off-colored sentiments of Renard's Russian texts. Through their work together Stravinsky acquired a deep admiration for Ramuz's linguistic insight:

I saw a great deal of Ramuz at this time. . . . I initiated him into the peculiarities and subtle shades of the Russian language, and the difficulties presented by its tonic accent. I was astonished at his insight, his intuitive ability, and his gift for transferring the spirit and poesy of the Russian folk poems to a language so remote and different as French. I was very much wrapped up in this collaboration which cemented still more firmly the bonds of our friendship and affinity of mind (Stravinsky 1935: 61-62).

Ramuz recorded their working methods in the second chapter of his *Souvenirs*:

It was on the occasion of *Renard* that we began to collaborate. I believe that one does not truly know someone else until they have worked together. It is through confronting the same material, the same subject, and the same difficulties that one becomes conscious, through the common denominator of immediately comparable and spontaneous reactions, of the similarities and the differences in quality and kind, and of certain profound values which do not appear (or rarely) in the course of a simple conversation (Ramuz 1929: 28-29).<sup>15</sup>

This deeper understanding between the two artists developed from a "corps à corps" with the text. They met daily, working through the afternoons, and eating and drinking through the evenings. Stravinsky began by reading the Russian texts line by line. Ramuz would listen for the phonetic shape and note the number of syllables in each line. Then Stravinsky would translate the text literally, emphasizing imagery rather than syntax or discursive logic. After taking down Stravinsky's literal translation, Ramuz went through the Russian original again with the composer to identify vowel placement and syllabic lengths. And finally, the two considered the difficult question of tonic accent and its coincidence (or not) with the musical accent. This working method inducted Ramuz into the fundamentals of Stravinsky's compositional method, revealing, more significantly, his rhythmic instincts:



A too frequent coincidence [of the tonic and musical accent] is boring; it only satisfies the spirit of measure or meter in us. It was completely contradictory with the intimate nature of the music I heard . . . being sung and played at the same time and coming to me in its living matter (ibid.: 30-31).<sup>16</sup>

The living music that Ramuz heard had been composed with the same attention to the text images and linguistic structure that determined the translations. Ramuz continued his reflection on their working methods:

He [Stravinsky] had made it understood very quickly that there would be no rules, and that there ought not be any rules. He made it understood very quickly that there would be only particulars. Each of them called for its own solution (ibid.: 31).<sup>17</sup>

This unprejudiced attention to the text as phonetic material was what led Ramuz to his important observation that rhythm, volume, and timbre are not only basic to music, but fundamental to all the arts, the sole level at which there can be a collaboration across the arts (see ibid.: 43).

The process that produced this translation was of inestimable importance for both Stravinsky and Ramuz. Their mode of working encouraged a view of language as object: sound and duration patterned into groups through unregimented accentuation. The text was treated as though it were devoid of subjective association or the limitations of context. It was simply material—the rhythm, volume, and timbre—out of which both composer and author could construct a new, and well-integrated work.

Ramuz's view of language as a sound object did not emerge solely from his collaborations with Stravinsky. Indeed, much suggests that the poet's predisposition to such a concept was what suggested the collaboration to Stravinsky. In the autumn of 1905, a year after the publication of his first novel *Aline*, Ramuz theorized on the nature of fiction, writing in his journal:

Peripeteia do not interest me. The invention must not be in the subject; it must be in the way of expressing it. It is in the *tone*, in the *choice*; it is in the image; it is in the movement of the sentence; it is nowhere else (quoted in Bevan 1979: 30).

From the very outset Ramuz's fiction had abandoned the usual stuff of the bourgeois novel: plot, narrative, extended anecdote. The reduction of these features to a minimum rendered his works more like tales than novels. Indeed, his two most characteristic early novels, *Aline* and *Jean-Luc persecuté*, were subtitled "histoire," rather than the customary "roman."

Like so many aspects of his art, Ramuz's view of language was rooted in the lessons he learned from painting. Most studies of the poet's work consider the painterly sources for his aesthetic and technique. Several contend that the lessons he drew from the post-impressionists, the cubists, and, particularly, Cézanne, were significant determinants in his treatment of imagery, and in the new syntax he forged.<sup>18</sup>

Ramuz, who wished no more than to paint with words, attempted to translate the concrete objectivity that he found in the painters he preferred to his own mode of representation in writing. As Clarence Parsons has pointed out, this desire resulted in the concrete and anti-symbolic vocabulary that Ramuz employed (see 1967: 70). Language, by its very nature, tends toward abstraction because the word is a symbol of the object rather than the object itself. Ramuz sought to minimize that abstraction by restricting his vocabulary to simple, concrete, and unequivocal words. Limitation to the most rudimentary language possible was sought as a foil against psychological flights of fancy or the verbal byways of discursive logic.

This quest for objectivity was reinforced by Ramuz's typical means of describing the objects he chose to represent. Wherever possible he relied on unadorned geometric description, detailed only in basic colors. Thus the concrete objects represented gave access to fundamental forms. As Parsons has noted, Ramuz pursued Cézanne to the most basic level:

The most striking resemblance between these men is the fact that they both perceive in nature an underlying principle of geometric harmony by virtue of which the world of objects can be recaptured through a reduction to the essential forms of cone, cylinder, and sphere (ibid.).

This formalistic orientation necessitated a break with the conventions that had evolved in writing, those same conventions that Ramuz the "primitive" had found insupportable in Ramuz the "academic." Total faithfulness to the objective reality ne-

cessitated the rejection of all else. Again, Parsons has summarized Ramuz's position:

Everything which stands in his way: imposed knowledge, conventions, abstract logic, must be discarded. The writer and the artist must face the concrete world with an attitude of complete receptivity, accepting only what their eyes reveal to them and submitting each new acquisition to the text of immediate experience (ibid.: 74).

One of the results of these rejections was a recurrent discontinuity in Ramuz's style. As early as 1903 he questioned the validity of formal continuity in the representation of objects which are anything but continuous. The disjunction of his peasant portraits in *Le Petit village* seemed to him to reflect the discontinuity of his own perception of the world. A journal entry for 14 August 1903 suggests an almost cubistic vision in the young writer's mind:

I am incapable of explaining to myself why the simplest narration embarrasses me. Am I too far from simplicity itself? . . . Is it a discontinuity of thought which makes me see the world as a succession of sparkling and bright shocks, scattered fragments which follow one another without relation to continuity? I feel simple and particular things very deeply. I cling to them through a long memory (Ramuz 1943: 116).<sup>19</sup>

As the poet came to accept the discontinuity of his thought, he developed several techniques in his writing that broke the artificial continuity of conventional syntax. These techniques, identified by Parsons, are again transpositions from Cézanne. One such borrowing is a painterly concept of time: taking as his subject something that is generally considered as inert, and interpreting the world around it as a series of separate static images (see 1967: 72). Ramuz supported this anti-linear, atemporal vision with an abundant use of verbs, not to hasten motion, but to create stasis through their abundance and contradiction. Additionally, he made frequent use of reprises, that is, going back and beginning his sentence again but giving it a different turn. Each of these techniques was calculated to arrest the flow of the sentence, forcing the reader's attention toward the object or its underlying formal reality, rather than suffusing

this reality with conventional artifice or evoking associations. The technique is thoroughly Cézannian in its . . . “gradual accumulation of juxtaposed small touches which insure simultaneously through their overall relationship, fidelity both to the subject and to the feelings of the artist” (Parsons 1967: 71). No less, these techniques are thoroughly Stravinskian in their verb-cluttered immobility and emphatic, non-syntactic repetitions. At the very least, their presence in Ramuz’s style identified him as a wholly appropriate collaborator for Stravinsky.

Stravinsky’s idiosyncratic views on language and the appropriate relationship between text and music were beginning to evolve at precisely the time he began his Swiss exile. Up to 1914 there was little that was exceptional in his text selection or setting, the early songs disclosing the range of his idols from Rimsky-Korsakov through Debussy. Even his first setting of Russian folk poetry, the *Souvenirs de mon enfance* composed in the summer of 1913, retains a symmetrical and conventional phrase structure. During the summer of 1914, however, he began his immersive study of Russian folk poetry, and a change in his attitude toward language developed rapidly. He returned from his last trip to Russia on 13 July 1914. A month later he had completed the first of his *Pribaoutki*. The remaining three were finished within six weeks.

The composer recorded his impressions of the epochal summer of 1914 in his autobiography:

My profound emotion on reading the news of war, which aroused patriotic feelings and a sense of sadness at being so distant from my country, found some alleviation in the delight with which I steeped myself in Russian folk poems. What fascinated me in this verse was not so much the stories, which were often crude, or the pictures and metaphors, always so deliciously unexpected, as the sequence of the words and syllables, and the cadence they create, which produces an effect on one’s sensibilities very closely akin to that of music (Stravinsky 1935: 53).

Like Ramuz, Stravinsky was uninterested in anecdote and narrative. Imagery was valued chiefly for its surprises. Peripeteia offered little attraction. The composer’s delight in language was in the “sequence of words and syllables and the cadence they create,” what Ramuz had identified to himself in 1905 as the “movement of the sentence.” So akin to music was

the cadence of the Russian folk poems in Stravinsky's ear that when he began composing he sketched directly on the original text. (This anticipated the technique he would later apply to the trio sonatas and arias of Pergolesi in his recomposition for *Pulcinella*.) They were the objects he represented in music, distilled to their pure, almost (geo-)metric forms.

Stravinsky's view of language and music as sound objects are capsulized in his most-quoted pronouncement. Proceeding directly from the quotation above, Stravinsky stated: "I consider that music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all . . ." (*ibid.*). Stravinsky, who had traced the expressive path of composers like Rimsky-Korsakov in his *Firebird*, and charted a savage expression of his own in *Le Sacre du printemps*, discovered in the imagery and unpredictable rhythms of folk poetry a purity of construction that superseded the need for expression. It was at the same time that Ramuz had noted in his journal: "Everything is in the normal rapport between words" (Ramuz 1943: 310). Composer and writer had arrived at virtually identical theories of language independently and prior to meeting one another. Their collaboration on the translations offered them the opportunity to confront the same problems without having to be much bothered about invention.

Only with *L'Histoire du soldat* did composer and poet address the same problems together at the level of invention. It was their first, and only, fully collaborative work. The general conception of the work, as well as the specific style of the text, owes much to the ideas that Ramuz had been evolving since the beginning of the century, especially since 1913. Four points, in particular, can be traced deeply in Ramuz's own work: *L'Histoire's* pragmatic determination, the non-coordination of elements, the definition of unity through rhythm and tone, and a universality that is defined by proceeding from the particular to the general.

*L'Histoire du soldat* is a unique work: a montage of text, music, staged action, painting, and dance in a hybrid combination that had no single precedent. The story of the indolent soldier, his violin, and the snares of the devil, was drawn from Afanasiev's collection of Russian peasant tales. Stravinsky, still much enamored of folk texts, discovered the stories, and Ramuz, then at the height of his idolatry of Russian peasantlore, readily approved.<sup>20</sup> The plight of the soldier was sympathetic in 1918, and yet as remote as Switzerland itself in the

surreal war which was raging all around, but only being felt secondhand.

*L'Histoire's* theatrical form was to be modelled on street and circus theater, a form that Stravinsky had portrayed in *Petrushka* and recently essayed for the first time in *Renard*. Ramuz's familiarity came not only through his after-the-fact collaboration on *Renard*, but also through the variety of puppet and street theater plays he had edited for publication in the *Cahiers Vaudois*.<sup>21</sup>

The hybrid form of "théâtre sur tréteaux" was suggested less by Ramuz's predisposition as a storyteller, than by the circumstances under which he envisioned production of their work. Each of the firsthand accounts of *L'Histoire's* inception detailed its pragmatic birth.<sup>22</sup> Ansermet's retelling is an "histoire" itself, spun out as a tale about a poet and a composer:

The poet and the musician conversed together. Times were hard. Round about them a great war devastated [sic] the world. All the standards of life were changed. . . . Yet neither poet nor musician dreamed of abandoning their [sic] work, nor did they set to writing "topical" poetry or music; but they wished to find a form of art by which they could justify themselves in this new life (Ansermet 1920: 289).

Their solution was to create a work that was as simple to mount as a lecture, but visually and aurally engaging. A painted backdrop, a few actors, a suite of short pieces played by local musicians—with these an entertainment could be contrived on a shoestring budget. It was to be a portable production, mobile enough to tour throughout Switzerland, compact enough to play even the smallest villages. The pragmatism of the concept—its responsiveness to particular circumstances—was a point of creative honor for its librettist. In retrospect Ramuz wrote:

*L'Histoire du soldat* was born of these practical considerations. . . . Its merit (if it has one) is that it had no aesthetic preoccupations for its point of departure. It sought to express no doctrine. It had nothing to manifest. It was entirely of the occasion (Ramuz 1929: 61).<sup>23</sup>

The pragmatic and simple conception at the heart of *L'Histoire* was dutifully repeated in both Stravinsky's accounts of the work's origins. But it was quickly apparent that Stravinsky's

understanding of that simplicity was of a different order. Once work on the project had begun, the small ensemble of musicians grew both quantitatively and qualitatively, little by little approaching a spectacle of considerable extravagance. Ansermet has recounted (see 1956: 36-37) the evolution of the instrumental ensemble and Ramuz's astonishment at each new increment. The violin, as the soldier's double, was essential to the action of the tale. Beyond it, Ramuz had assumed that an accordion or guitar would be sufficient to fill out the ensemble, approximating the "musique à bouche" which was in vogue with the Vaudois writers at the time. But Stravinsky coupled the violin with a double bass and, one by one, added pairs of woodwinds and brass, culminating with a battery of percussion instruments. The seven instrumentalists, each of whom had to be imported because of the horrific technical demands in Stravinsky's score, expanded the musical component of the production to a much grander scale than Ramuz had originally envisioned.

It is clear from the amount of attention that the pragmatic inception of the work has drawn from every commentator, that pragmatism itself was a source of friction among the collaborators. Stravinsky's response to Ramuz's question, "Pourquoi alors ne pas faire simple?" was aesthetic and theoretical. He wrote for a septet. But in terms of the practicality, it would have been nearly as easy to assemble an orchestra as it was to find a septet in Lausanne capable of playing Stravinsky's score. In its final form, it would have been impossible to play *L'Histoire* as a tour piece in the smaller villages because of the sheer expense of the eight professional musicians and a cast of actors and dancers expanded in number to balance the band. For Stravinsky the pragmatism was a convenient explanation of the new direction his instrumental researches were taking anyway. However good a work *L'Histoire du soldat* actually was, Ramuz felt a bit sour about its deviation from his original intent. Thus a decade after the single performance in which he had a hand, Ramuz grumbled that "*L'Histoire du soldat* was supposed to be a business affair, and a good one. But it has never been good business, nor even simple business" (Ramuz 1929: 61-62).<sup>24</sup> In defense of his own ideal, Ramuz contended that *L'Histoire's* merit—if it had one—lay in the fact that it was born of practical considerations, even if it did not realize them.

The disparity between the intent and the reality aside, *L'Histoire* was the first of Stravinsky's compositions for which

the “work-to-be-done” theory was articulated. Ramuz had been evolving an artisan theory since 1913. Art could not be based on the premises and conventions of art. Nor was it a purely imaginative act, a volition of the artist. It had to be rooted in a concrete relationship between the artist and the object to be made. *L’Histoire’s* merit lay in the fact that it was anti-aesthetic, a piece of work to be done within certain pragmatic limitations.

The varying conceptions of the work’s pragmatic scope held by Stravinsky and Ramuz were symptomatic of another of *L’Histoire’s* distinctions: the noncoordination of elements. If *L’Histoire* was to be vital, then each of the collaborators would have to contribute from his own strength. Thus Ramuz, not being a dramaturge, elected to write an “histoire,” interpreting the theater as a type of yarn-spinning. By the same token, Stravinsky was left free to compose his instrumental suite without concern for serving the drama. Fernand Auberjonois, son of *L’Histoire’s* designer and a firsthand observer of the collaboration, described the relationship between his father, Ramuz, and Stravinsky as follows:

The composer would leave the writer free to do what he wanted, and the painter was to display equal contempt for coordination and planning. From the clash of three very different personalities might result fantasy (Auberjonois 1970: 46).

Robert Craft has encouraged the view that the non-coordination of elements was a result of the collaborators’ inability to understand one another. In support he excerpted and paraphrased a 1945 reminiscence by Ludmilla Pitoeff, *L’Histoire’s* princess: “How fascinating were the interminable discussions with Stravinsky, Ramuz, Auberjonois, though the three men were so different that they could never understand each other” (Craft 1978: 167).

The complete citation suggests that Craft may deliberately have sought to misrepresent the relationship:

How fascinating were the conversations and interminable discussions between Stravinsky, Ramuz, and Auberjonois! These three men had a child-like gravity in common, and the imaginations of a fleeing bird. That latter trait took in each



of them a form so definitively personal and different that they could not fail to understand one another (Pitoeff 1945: 3).<sup>25</sup>

The relationship between Stravinsky, Ramuz, and Auberjonois must be assessed as a planned and complementary independence. The text itself gives credence to the intent of non-coordination. The book, the score, even the décor were consistently disjointed and sometimes self-contradictory. The story itself was selected, at least in part, because of the incoherence (see Ramuz 1929: 63). Stravinsky's widely varied musical materials, particularly those which he makes no effort to veil in the score, indicate a defiance of conventional notions of musical unity. Similarly Ramuz's device of continually altering the narrator's "voice" (now a commentator on the action, now a participant in it) contravenes reasonable expectations of dramatic unity. Even Auberjonois's costumes and curtains were unrelated not only to one another, but to the subject matter of *L'Histoire* itself.<sup>26</sup>

The purpose of this non-coordination within and between the elements of the work was to create a new theatrical form in which each of the constituent elements could retain its own purity. Ansermet's first essay on *L'Histoire* addressed this issue directly:

The work, in its general conception, combines three elements, the verbal, the musical and the plastic, without ever mixing them, realising thus an idea that is diametrically opposed to the Wagnerian theory of blending various forms of art (Ansermet 1920: 291).

Each of the collaborators had sufficient respect for the purity of the other's medium that he encouraged its unimpeded development. In their story "to be read, played, and danced" synthesis was abandoned. The music and the plastic, freed of the need to dramatize the text, were released to operate by their own laws—to be pure. The text itself was likewise freed from the obligation to serve the coherent development of plot. Narrative and anecdote did not demand to be served and each element could concern itself with its own questions of style.

Given this concerted non-coordination of elements, what accounts for the commanding unity which characterizes the work? His work on *Renard* had led Ramuz to discover that the common ground between all the arts lay in the most elemental

qualities of music: rhythm, volume, and timbre. These same qualities afforded the level of conjunction in *L'Histoire*. The broad, unsystematic principles of rhythmic composition that Ramuz learned from Stravinsky during the translation projects reinforced his own conception of ideal language rhythms. Like the clumsy gait of peasant speech he mimicked in his poetry, like the verb-cluttered stops and non-syntactic repetitions he infused in his prose, the self-defining rhythms that Stravinsky composed for *L'Histoire* constitute the gravitational weight in the music. As Ansermet observed, Stravinsky abandoned the "atmospheric" quality of tonality and typical instrumental blends, supplanting this with a "sense of tonal affinity and rhythmic combination, in a *definite architectural form*" (Ansermet 1920: 294).

Both collaborators' consciousness of rhythm as a source of unity is verified not only in the work itself, but also in their correspondence. The metered narration in the "Marches du soldat" which opens both the first and second parts subscribed to that same general principle which Ramuz had gleaned from the translation projects: regular rhythmic coincidence was infrequent, but not prohibited. Thus the metered speaking part is usually in rhythmic counterpoint with the instrumental ensemble, but occasionally in unison. An identification between word and music was created on a purely rhythmic level. Similarly, the alternation between metered and non-metered text setting established a varying pattern, particularly in the "Marche du soldat" which opens the second part.

An undated letter from Ramuz to Stravinsky (but clearly coming from August or September 1918) indicates that both structural and local rhythmic planning were coordinated between text and music:

Do you not think it would be good to try having the devil speak his monologue in front of the curtain during the royal march. I'm thinking of the whole and it seems to me that the music and the text are a little too uniformly successive. We are right to avoid the superimposition of music and poetical text, but there is no risk of that here. Text and music are free and unconstrained. Perhaps one would achieve some interesting coincidences (Ramuz 1956: I, 367).<sup>27</sup>

The conscious non-coincidence of poetic text with Stravinsky's musical meters prevented either text or music from being sub-

jugated to the other. At the same time, it is clear that both collaborators were concerned with establishing a quality of rhythmic writing in their work that was sympathetic, and a structural rhythm that was engaging. Eric Walter White has considered the overall rhythm of the work and assessed its effectiveness. He noted that there is a minimum of musical material in part one of the play. While the principal textual conflict is being exposed, only three musical numbers appear, each being repeated at least once. In the second part, however, there is virtually no repetition of movements and a great deal more continuous music leading toward the climax:

The result is that as the play reaches its climax the music, which has so far been incidental, and carefully geared to the narration and dramatic action, takes over and imposes its own values and pace on the work as a whole, thereby raising it to a higher power than the mere sum of its parts (White 1969: 231).

The appearance of non-coordination between music and text can be seen to be a concerted defence against synthesis and sublimation to dramatic meaning. At the same time, there is a purely architectural level at which the coordination was carefully worked out.

The other important agent of unity was the elemental quality of timbre. The timbral purity of Stravinsky's septet has been remarked on by virtually every commentator, and yet, like Ramuz's text, it carried the trace of a Vaudois accent. The use of the colloquial *cornet à pistons*, rather than the better pedigreed trumpet, and its prominence in the "federal" Soldier's March which functions as a structural leitmotiv in the work, suggest a faintly Helvetian perfume, comparable to the tone of Ramuz's text. It is this particularity of timbre, both in the text and in the score, that is *L'Histoire's* greatest triumph. More than any of his own novels, *L'Histoire du soldat* vindicates Ramuz's basic doctrine: the particular as a means to the general.

Reflecting on the original conception, Stravinsky wrote in 1962:

My original idea was to transpose the period and style of our play to any time and 1918, and to many nationalities and none, though without destroying the religio-cultural status of the Devil. Thus, the soldier of the original production was

dressed in the uniform of a Swiss army private of 1918, while the costume, and especially the tonsorial apparatus, of the lepidopterist were of the 1830 period. Thus, too, place-names like Denges and Denezy are Vaudois in sound, but in fact they are imaginary: these and other regionalisms—the actors also introduced bits of Canton de Vaud patois—were to have been changed according to the locale of the performance and, in fact, I still encourage producers to localize the play and, if they wish, to dress the soldier in a uniform temporally remote from, but sympathetic to, the audience (Stravinsky 1962: 90).

The soldier was Swiss in 1918, or he was Russian in 1853, or even Japanese in 1945, but he was a particular soldier, not a generalization about one, not the abstraction from an idea about a soldier that Ramuz so despised in academic art.

Stravinsky had been rooting his work in particularities throughout the period of his Swiss exile. The whole of the Russian song literature from this period, including *Renard* and *Les Nocés*, exemplified this orientation. But in each instance, the particularity was exclusively Russian. The key departure in *L'Histoire* was not that the "particular" from which he was working was Swiss (or could be Swiss), but that he was working from a montage of particularities. The story was Russian, but set "entre Denges et Denezy." The year was 1918, but also 1830. The music was of Spanish streets, but also Leipzig churches. As Ansermet has noted, each specific reference to a particular source preserved "the direct and frank character, the familiarity and simplicity, which are a feature of the whole story" (Ansermet 1920: 292). At the same time the multiplicity of the references sidestepped the usual limitations of the particular. The picturesque atmosphere of local color is avoided. The unintelligibility of a particular that can only be understood by those who have experienced it is eschewed. By skirting the topical with allegory, by evading the subjectivity of a Wagnerian synthesis, and by building from the particular but transcending it, a true universality was attained.

Stravinsky would abandon Ramuz's particularity immediately after his removal from the Vaud. The familiar quality of the Swiss period works, which most certainly was encouraged by Ramuz, vanished with *Pulcinella*. Instead of Russian folk poetry, Stravinsky would take as his particularity the trio sonatas of Pergolesi, the operas of Glinka, the piano sonatas of Beethoven, songs by Tchaikovsky, etc. Each material became his own

through the same kind of total immersion and assimilation which had characterized his assimilation of ragtime in *L'Histoire du soldat*.

Musical invention remained an act of creative transformation rooted in a material object. Only the objects changed. Ramuz, the provincial, may be forgiven for accusing Stravinsky of insincerity in exchanging the creative attitude for the critical. But Stravinsky, a true cosmopolitan, could claim many particularities as his own. Thus the two-voiced Bach fugue which is at the root of the third movement of the Piano Sonata is as much the particular object transformed as the folk poems in *Pribaoutki*. The premise of the particular to the general is the same. The relationship of the work to an objective reality is the same. The dictum of emotional and technical simplicity in the act of transformation is repeated and the role of the composer as *homo faber* is duplicated.

The association of these principles with a new technical language is also the product of Stravinsky's Swiss years. Ramuz could hardly claim responsibility for the discontinuities, the rejection of contextual determination and conventional syntax, the apparent incoherence and the agrammatical repetitions that had grown to characterize Stravinsky's music since the *Firebird*. But these were specific traits that composer and author shared and that made their collaborations viable. Ramuz's rejection of conventional syntax had been the focus of critical attention since the publication of his first work. Stated positively, Ramuz had viewed his technical departures as the formulation of a new syntax, a postulation borrowed by Stravinsky and promoted in Ansermet's famous essay which set the standard for subsequent Stravinsky criticism (see Ansermet 1921).

Perhaps most importantly, Stravinsky himself associated his Swiss years with the formulation of his anti-expressive philosophy of music (see Stravinsky 1935: 53-55). It was one of the few periods in his life when his pattern of producing one major work each year was broken. The catalogue of smaller, often experimental pieces that were produced during this time are partially attributable to the circumstances imposed by the war, but also indicative of a consciousness of transition on the composer's part. The village interlude is framed by *Le Sacre du printemps* on the one end, in which the composer expressed much from within himself, and *Pulcinella*, on the other, in which he offered a dispassionate criticism of eighteenth-century musi-

cal elegance. In the interim, he formulated the anti-expressive philosophy that would underscore the rest of his life's work and prompt the movement toward a self-conscious neoclassicism in the immediately ensuing decades. His friendship and collaboration with an author who had already reached a parallel conclusion about his own art could only have reinforced this belief. Ramuz, himself the primitive classicist, had rejected plot, anecdote, etc., in favor of an orientation toward the "movement of the sentence." He reinforced Stravinsky's evolving belief in music's "sole purpose of establishing an order in things, including, and particularly, the coordination between man and time" (ibid.: 54).

## NOTES

1. In addition to writing the book for *L'Histoire du soldat*, Ramuz translated the following works by Stravinsky from Russian to French: *Pribaoutki*, *Berceuses du chat*, *Renard*, *Les Noces*, *Trois Histoires pour enfants*, *Quatre chants russes*, *Trois petites chansons*.

2. In the spring of 1920, at the very time Stravinsky was leaving to establish residence in France after six years in the Vaud, Ramuz made the following as his last entry in his journal: "L'acte de poésie est un acte de transformation: elle a donc à puiser dans le non-transformé. Dans transformation il y a forme" (1943: 326).

3. "Qu'importe, même s'il est contraire à des théories préconçues et à mon goût assez vif pour le régulier, la symétrie du nombre des syllabes et des rimes toujours fidèles au rendez-vous? . . . Après tout, pourquoi s'interdire toute recherche par crainte du voyant et du tapingeur, toute harmonie intérieure (le mot est ridicule) peut-être perceptible à d'autres, sous prétexte du règles prosodiques et de rythmique définitive?"

4. "Je voudrais arriver à la sensation pure; peindre le compliqué avec des mots très simples, ne pas décrire, mais évoquer, aller même parfois pour plus de force jusqu'à briser la syntaxe et la grammaire; je ne m'y hasarde pas encore, à cause de mes restes d'éducation, mais j'y tends."

5. "J'ai le sentiment très net que le rôle de la littérature d'aujourd'hui (et ce qui sera plus tard pour les historiens sa raison d'être) est de rendre classique tout l'apport incohérent du dernier siècle; d'y introduire la symétrie, l'architecture, l'ordonnance." Although there is little possibility of a connection, one cannot help but remark on the similarity between Ramuz's private expression here in 1905 and Busoni's public proclamation of the new classicism in 1921.

6. "Mes idées me viennent des yeux — si j'ai des maîtres, c'est chez les peintres."

7. "Cézanne est un classique primitif. Il est primitif parce qu'il a d'immédiat, de simplifié dans le rendu, et par une certaine apparence de gaucherie. Il est classique par son style."

8. ". . . d'un pays et d'un homme intimement mêlés, si indissolublement unis, si enchevêtrés l'un dans l'autre, que, véritablement, on ne distinguait plus, quand on regardait autour de soi, ce qui était la part de chacun d'eux."

9. Ansermet's claim to have introduced them in the autumn of 1914 is unlikely since Ramuz had only just settled in Treytorrens in September of that year. Furthermore, Ansermet had not yet been appointed conductor of the Ballets Russes. Craft dates the first correspondence from Ramuz to Stravinsky on 9 August 1915, implying that it was written shortly after their first meeting. Ramuz's evocation of autumn in the first chapter of *Souvenirs* is probably the product of poetic license and telescoped memories.

10. However picturesque the train station at Epesses may have been as the locus for their first meeting, Stravinsky and Ramuz probably met in a Lausanne restaurant. Stravinsky's 1962 statement that he was thirty-two and Ramuz was forty when they first met is suspect, since it is tainted by Stravinsky's cattiest tone of revisionism. In the summer of 1915 Stravinsky was thirty-three and Ramuz thirty-six. Stravinsky's implication that Ramuz was remarkably older, along with the description of his collaborator as "the liveliest of men (an impression not easily deduced from his books) . . ." are cheap shots aimed at diminishing the important role Ramuz played in Stravinsky's life during the Swiss years. Nonetheless, Stravinsky's attribution of the place of their first meeting is confirmed by a fourth person who was there, Adrien Bovy (see Clement 1978: xi; and Muller-Moor 1978: 94).

11. "Nous avons lié connaissance devant les choses et par les choses. . . Ici commence votre [de Stravinsky] personne et du même coup commence votre art : c'est-à-dire vous tout entier; je me suis acheminé à cette connaissance dite intérieure, par les plus extérieur, le plus terrestre des chemins. . . J'ai lié connaissance avec vous dans et par l'espèce de plaisir que je vous voyais prendre aux choses, et le plus 'humbles', comme on dit, et en tout cas le plus élémentaires."

12. "Nous avons traversé plusieurs toiles de Cézanne, ce que Stravinsky, qui aimait Cézanne, n'avait pas été sans remarquer."

13. "Ces particularités . . . allaient bien plutôt contribuer à notre entente; cette communauté de goûts allant même me donner le droit de participer à une musique que je voyais être située d'abord dans l'objet, puis venir à son existence intérieurement à vous-même par toutes les portes du corps."

14. ". . . un homme et un homme complet : c'est-à-dire un raffiné et en même temps un primitif, quelqu'un qui soit sensible à toutes les complications, mais aussi à l'élémentaire, capable des combinaisons de l'esprit les plus compliquées et en même temps des réactions les plus spontanées et les plus directes; — comme il convient, car il faut être ensemble un sauvage et un civilisé; il ne faut pas être seulement un primitif, mais il faut être aussi un primitif."

15. "C'est à l'occasion de *Renard* que nous avons commencé à collaborer, et je crois qu'on n'arrive vraiment à se connaître qu'à l'occasion d'un travail en commun. C'est par l'affrontement à une même matière, à un même sujet, à des mêmes difficultés, qu'on prend seulement conscience, par des réactions spontanées, immédiatement comparables et ayant pour ainsi dire un dénominateur commun, de ses ressemblances, de ses différences, de sa classe ou de sa catégorie de certaines valeurs profondes qui n'apparaissent pas (ou pas toujours) au cours d'une simple conversation."

16. "Une trop continuelle coïncidence [de l'accent tonique avec l'accent musical] est ennuyeuse; elle ne satisfait en nous que l'esprit



de mesure ou métrique. Elle eût été tout à fait contradictoire avec la nature intime d'une musique que j'entendais . . . m'être chantée et jouée à la fois et qui venait à mois dans sa matière vivante."

17. "Il [Stravinsky] avait été entendu très vite qu'il n'y aurait pas de règles, qu'il ne pouvait pas y avoir de règles, qu'il ne devait pas y en avoir. Il avait été entendu très vite qu'il n'y aurait que des cas particuliers. Chacun d'eux comportait sa propre solution."

18. In this regard see in particular Parsons 1964 and Dunoyer 1978. Briefer discussions are included in Parsons 1967, Racine 1978, Fosca 1978, and Auberjonois 1970.

19. "Je suis bien incapable de m'expliquer pourquoi le plus simple recit m'embarrasse. Est-ce sa simplicité même dont je suis trop loin ? . . . Est-ce plutôt une discontinuité de la pensée, qui me fait voir le monde par chocs successifs, étincelles et éclairs, fragments epars qui se succèdent sans relation de continuité? Je ressens bien vivement les choses simples et particulières. Je m'attache à elles d'un long souvenir."

20. It should be noted that there are similarities in the general plot outline to two of the apocalyptic novels Ramuz had published immediately prior to his work on *L'Histoire*. In both, *Le Regne de l'esprit malin* (1914, but published in 1917) and *La Guérison des maladies* (1917), demonic forces interrupt the normal course of simple rural life and can only be arrested by acts of innocent virtue.

21. Among the theatrical works published in the *Cahiers Vaudois* were: *Tell*, a drama with choruses in four acts by René Morax with music by the Swiss composer Gustave Doret (1914); *Le Mystère d'Abraham*, a dramatization extracted from the Bible by Fernand Chavannes (February, 1916); *Théâtre de poupées*, by René Morax, three short puppet plays ("La Machine volante," "La tendre Rosaline," "Le Baladin de satin cramoise") illustrated with wood-cuts of magic theater scenes; *Sainte-Chagrin*, a "petit mystère pour marionnettes" written by Daniel Baud-Bovy early in 1917 with a musical score by Gustave Doret and designs by Alexandre Cingria; and *Musique de Tambour: Parade comique*, by F. Chavannes, a texted pantomime in three acts "dans l'esprit de l'ancienne comédie italienne." Any or all of these works may have served as a prototype for *L'Histoire du soldat*. Each involves a measure of allegory or ritual in the représentation. None of them makes any attempt at verisimilitude. *Sainte-Chagrin*, being a political satire veiled as a mystery play, suggests a possible relationship to *L'Histoire*. It was produced on 29 June 1918 in Zurich, apparently under the sponsorship of Werner Reinhardt, the Maecenas of *L'Histoire*.

22. Stravinsky 1935:70-77; Stravinsky 1962:90-96; Ramuz 1929:61-65; Ansermet 1920; Ansermet 1956.

23. "*L'Histoire du soldat* est née de ces considérations pratiques. . . . Son mérite (si elle en a un) est qu'elle n'a pas eu pour point de départ des préoccupations esthétiques, qu'elle n'a pas cherché à être l'expres-

sion d'une doctrine, qu'elle n'a rien d'un manifeste, qu'elle doit tout à l'occasion."

24. "*L'Histoire du soldat* devait être une affaire, et une bonne affaire : elle n'a jamais été une bonne affaire, ni même une affaire tout court."

25. "Quelles merveilles que ces conversations et discussions interminables avec Stravinsky, Ramuz, et Auberjonois ! Ces trois hommes avaient en commun le gravité de l'enfant et l'imagination d'un oiseau évadé, mais qui a pris pourtant chez chacun d'eux forme définitivement personnelle et si différente qu'ils ne pouvaient pas ne pas s'entendre."

26. "The curtains for the tiny inner-stage were a series of painted oilcloths containing pictures purposely unrelated in subject matter to *Histoire*—a whale, a landscape, etc. . . ." (Stravinsky 1962:94).

27. "Ne croyez-vous pas qu'il serait bon d'essayer de faire dire le monologue (du diable) devant le rideau pendant la marche royale. Je pense à l'ensemble et je vois que la musique et le texte sont quant même un peu trop uniformément successifs. Nous avons raison d'éviter les superpositions de musique et de texte 'poétiques' : nul risque de ce genre ici : texte et musique sont de fantaisie et de desinvolture, on arriverait peut-être à des effets de rencontre." This suggestion was incorporated in the first performance (see Craft 1978:166).

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