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Robert Ward's *The Crucible*: Politics and Personal Relationships in an Operatic Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

Robert Ward's *The Crucible*:

Politics and Personal Relationships in an Operatic Adaptation

Ryan Francis Burns, DMA

University of Connecticut, 2017

American composer, Robert Eugene Ward (1917-2013), made a significant contribution to the world of musical composition. His most enduring legacy is likely to remain his award-winning operatic adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which premiered in 1961 by the New York City Opera. In politics, the personal can often be secondary, but for Ward's opera, with political content at its very core, it is essential. By analyzing John Proctor's relationship with his wife, Elizabeth, and his former mistress, Abigail Williams, one is able to better understand how the witchcraft hysteria took hold of a small New England town in 1692.

This dissertation will begin by offering a brief survey of the life and works of Robert Ward, as well as a summary of the historical events that made Salem notorious in 1692, and of Arthur Miller's play. The discussion will then proceed to a consideration of the issues surrounding opera on political themes, analyzing *The Crucible* alongside such well-known operas as Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, and Adams' *Nixon in China*. This historical background and critical framework will provide the foundation for a detailed analysis of the important relationships in Ward's opera, and how these are to be evaluated in relation to its broader political themes. Finally, a discussion as to how such an approach might be applied to other operas with political subject matter will be offered.

Robert Ward's *The Crucible*:
Politics and Personal Relationships in an Operatic Adaptation

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A Dissertation

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Musical Arts Dissertation

Robert Ward's *The Crucible*:

Politics and Personal Relationships in an Operatic Adaptation

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Chapter One - Introduction

American composer Robert Eugene Ward (1917-2013) made a significant contribution to the world of musical composition. Over the course of his lifetime, he composed eight operas, six symphonies, three concertos, as well as solo songs, choral works, and chamber music for a wide array of combinations. Despite the large volume and variety of his compositional output, Ward's most enduring legacy is likely to remain his award-winning operatic adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Ward and his librettist, Bernard Stambler, completed the work in 1961 for its commissioned premiere by the New York City Opera. The opera continues to be performed around the world in both professional and university settings.

In Salem, Massachusetts, in the year 1692, there were nineteen individuals and two dogs hanged for witchcraft.¹ While long notorious as a part of New England's history, these events would be brought into particular focus by the famous American playwright Arthur Miller, in his 1953 play, *The Crucible*. The play was partially a response to what many saw as the political equivalent of witch-hunts that took place in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. Led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, the House Un-American Activities Committee sought to rid the country of its "communists", calling on individuals to "name" those in the party, in a manner not unlike that by which witches were accused in 1692 Salem. The play was also a reaction to Miller's fascination with the events of Salem, of which he first learned in his American History class at the University of Michigan.²

¹ Christopher Bigsby, introduction to Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: a Play in Four Acts* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), vii.

² Robert Paul Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Nationalism* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2009), 43.

“Arthur Miller early on recognized *The Crucible*’s inherent operatic possibilities and considered learning how to compose so that he could set the play to music.”³ This approach was soon abandoned, however, when he was informed by American composer and friend, Marc Blitzstein, how long it would take him to learn how to compose. Still, it is clear from this striking anecdote that Miller was thinking of the play in terms of an operatic adaptation almost at its inception. He first approached Aaron Copland and Carlisle Floyd, but both were busy and unable to take on the work, thus opening the door for Robert Ward. Despite having been written over fifty years ago, *The Crucible* has secured a place in the standard American operatic repertory.

The purpose of this dissertation is to offer a fresh critical perspective on Ward’s operatic adaptation of *The Crucible*. To date, the most comprehensive study of the opera is Robert Kolt’s *Robert Ward’s The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, which was developed out of the author’s 2005 dissertation, “Robert Ward’s *The Crucible*: Creating an American Musical Accent.” In his book, Kolt seeks to demonstrate Ward’s opera as an example of American Nationalism due to the way in which the composer ties together the text and music. He also offers an extensive window into Ward’s personal and professional life, as well as the events that led to the opera’s creation. Three other dissertations, Charles Woliver’s “Robert Ward’s *The Crucible*: A Critical Commentary” (1986), Larry Phillip Fox’s “A comparative analysis of selected dramatic works and their twentieth-century operatic adaptations” (1992), and Shannon Laura Benson’s “The Twentieth-Century Operas of Robert Ward” (2010), also contain extensive analysis of the opera.

³ Ibid., 54.

Woliver discusses the opera's origins in Miller's play, as well as its ties to McCarthyism. After offering this background, he goes on to provide detailed analysis concerning the salient musical components of the work from small melodic motives to large-scale forms. Fox looks at three operatic adaptations, one of which includes *The Crucible*, and analyzes the process by which a play becomes an opera. He also seeks to address the impact that music has on the spoken word and how these newly created works must be viewed and analyzed in and of themselves, rather than with the plays they were based on. Finally, Benson analyzes seven of Ward's operas, one of which includes *The Crucible*. For each of the operas included in her dissertation, she considers their historical background, libretto formation, and musical composition.

Where this research hopes to offer a new approach to this work, as well as to other operas that deal with subject matter that clearly has political dimensions, is the emphasis which is ultimately placed on the political content in our interpretation of the work. In *The Crucible*, the core of the opera (however we may interpret the play), is not about "witches" running free in Salem or the endless fight for property amongst neighbors (accusing someone of being a witch was a quick way to obtain land). Rather, it is about the emotional and spiritual journey of John Proctor, a flawed man, and of those closest to him. In the end, the opera is about the relationships of John Proctor, not the political implications of witchcraft.

This dissertation will begin by offering a brief survey of the life and works of Robert Ward, as well as a summary of the historical events that made Salem notorious in 1692, and of Arthur Miller's play. Then, after tracing the opera's genesis, the discussion will proceed to a consideration of the issues surrounding opera on political themes, analyzing *The Crucible* alongside such well-known operas as Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*,

Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, and Adams' *Nixon in China*. This historical background and critical framework will provide the foundation for a detailed analysis of the important relationships in Ward's opera, and how these are to be evaluated in relation to its broader political themes. Finally, a discussion as to how such an approach might be applied to other operas with political subject matter will be offered.

The potential importance of this research lies in providing a new approach to the interpretation of operas dealing with a political subject matter. So often, such political works are analyzed purely in terms of their perceived ideological symbolism. What idea does this character represent? Why does the drama take place in this specific location? What political or ideological meanings does this musical motive convey? While at one level this is certainly a valid approach, it often tends to minimize the characters as individuals and the relationships among them; and given that the portrayal of human beings and their interactions, rather than the representation of abstract ideas, has typically been the greatest strength of opera as an art form, such a one-sided analysis may overlook a central element of political opera. Furthermore, as noted above, there is a limited amount of research on Robert Ward's *The Crucible*, despite the work's popularity and success. This dissertation, therefore, seeks to call further attention to its significance in the American operatic repertory.

Chapter Two – The Life and Works of Robert Eugene Ward

When one reflects upon the origins of opera one cannot help but think of its extensive European roots. From the earliest works by Monteverdi and Peri to the operas of Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner, the genre owes much to its Eastern influences. Despite this rich tradition, however, American opera has solidified its place in the standard repertory. It continues to honor its past while forging its own unique identity. One composer who has contributed significantly to this identity is Robert Eugene Ward.

Ward's contribution to the world of composition is impressive. Before his death in 2013, he had written "eight operas, six symphonies, three concertos, numerous shorter works for orchestra, music for wind ensemble, compositions for a variety of instrumental chamber groups, two cantatas, various genres for vocal ensembles, and songs for solo voice."⁴ Despite the large volume and variety of his compositions, Ward's legacy will be forever linked with his widely acclaimed operatic adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Ward and his librettist Bernard Stambler completed the work in 1961. The opera continues to be performed around the world in both professional and university settings.

Although Ward's other operatic ventures have never gained the type of recognition that *The Crucible* has, it is worth mentioning that he completed ten operas (and operettas) over the course of his lifetime. These works include *He Who Gets Slapped* (1973); formerly *Pantaloone* (1953), *The Lady From Colorado* (1964), *Claudia Legare* (1973), *Abelard and Heloise* (1981), *Minutes till Midnight* (1982), *Roman Fever* (1993), and *Images of God* (no date). His two

⁴ Ibid., 3.

operettas are *Lady Kate* (1994) and *A Name of Napoleon* (2005). Ward collaborated with Stambler on his first four operas: *He Who Gets Slapped*, *The Crucible*, *The Lady From Colorado*, and *Claudia Legare*.

Ward's exposure to the arts came at an early age. "Growing up at a time when relatively little music was available on radio or through commercially available recordings meant that music making was largely a home-grown affair for the Ward household."⁵ A frequent weekend activity for the Ward family involved the playing and singing of popular songs and church hymns. It would even include pieces from well-known operettas. Since all of Ward's siblings played instruments including violin and piano, accompaniment was not hard to find. Whether he realized it or not this time spent making music with his family would set Ward on a path to becoming a musician. This was not without obstacles, however, given the Great Depression and the financial impact it had on American families.⁶

It was in "listening to his older siblings discuss such things as bread lines, labor unions, socialism, and the perceived failure of capitalism, that Ward began to form the political and social views that eventually found expression in much of his music, especially the dramatic works."⁷ Just as important toward his introduction to music, provided by his family, were the ideas they instilled in him of a just world; one where everyone was taken care of. Perhaps in wrestling with these feelings, Ward found consolation in his music.⁸

Ward found himself singing in his church choir as his interest in the arts increased, as well as in local operetta productions in which he performed secondary roles. At the age of

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

sixteen, Ward requested various musical resources (orchestration, form, and harmony) for Christmas so that he could learn how to compose. Soon thereafter, he received an opportunity to put that knowledge into action from his brother Albert, who asked Robert to write some incidental music for a play that was to be performed at the Cleveland Playhouse. This planted the seeds for the operatic and dramatic music he would compose later in life. As a result of the examples found in his musical textbooks, Ward began to compose in the styles of Debussy, Hindemith, Ravel, and Stravinsky. In doing so, he was able to learn a great deal about their compositional practices.⁹

This excitement toward writing music was almost cut short when he was presented with an opportunity to attend law school for free. This would have certainly been a safer financial decision given that his family had almost gone bankrupt; however, Ward was not swayed. His passion for music and the arts was too great. He was determined to attend the Eastman School of Music to study composition. This would be one of the most important decisions Ward would make in his life. Given his work ethic, character, and commitment, he would have no doubt been a successful lawyer as evidenced by the heavy recruiting he received to do so. He may never have continued composing either. To make a decision like that only exemplifies his desire to make music his life's work.¹⁰

Ward's time at Eastman laid much of the groundwork for his subsequent compositional practices. During his time there, he studied with Edward Royce, Bernard Rogers, and Howard Hanson. It was Hanson who would become one of Ward's most important mentors. Eastman owes much to Howard Hanson as it was he who helped the school become what it is today. "He

⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰ Ibid.

built the institution into one of the finest university schools of music in the Americas, broadening its curriculum, improving its orchestras and attracting outstanding faculty members.”¹¹ In addition to his work at Eastman, Hanson was also a successful composer. Some of his most famous works include the “*Concerto da camera*, a Grieg-influenced work, and *California Forest Play of 1920*.” The latter of the pieces won Hanson the Prix de Rome in 1921. Additionally, his piece, *Mosaics*, which was likely inspired by his study of Italian mosaics some years before, has also garnered much attention. As a writer, Hanson’s most prominent work was his publication, *Harmonic Materials of Modern Music: Resources of the Tempered Scale*. This writing helped to develop what is referred to as the “pitch class set” theory.¹²

While under Hanson’s tutelage, Ward received training in much of the Classical canon but was also exposed to the work of more contemporary musicians such as the Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius. Sibelius was one of Hanson’s most revered composers. Sibelius’ compositions are:

Distinguished by startlingly original adaptations of familiar elements: unorthodox treatments of triadic harmony, orchestral colour and musical process and structure. His music evokes a range of characteristic moods and topics, from celebratory nationalism and political struggle to cold despair and separatist isolation; from brooding contemplations of ‘neo-primitive’ musical ideas or slowly transforming sound textures to meditations on the mysteries, grandeurs and occasionally lurking terrors of archetypal folk myths or natural landscapes.¹³

¹¹ Ruth T. Watanabe and James Perone, "Hanson, Howard," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 7, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12342>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ James Hepokoski and Fabian Dahlström, "Sibelius, Jean," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 7, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43725>.

It is interesting to reflect upon *The Crucible* and how Sibelius may have impacted Ward's compositional style. This is especially true of the "characteristic moods" Ward was able to create amongst his leading roles throughout the opera.

As much as Ward's time at Eastman helped him grow as a composer and musician, it also developed his managerial capacities. Ward was a popular member of his class and "was elected treasurer, class president, and eventually, president of the student association. The duties of these posts enabled Ward to exercise his social and political beliefs formed during the Depression years, and also whetted his appetite for administrative and leadership/service positions..."¹⁴ This experience would become beneficial later on in Ward's life in the various administrative posts he held, which included music director of the 3rd Street Music School Settlement, Executive Vice-President and Managing Editor of Galaxy Music Corporation and Highgate Press, as well as the positions he held as Chancellor of the North Carolina School for the Arts and his professorships at the Juilliard School of Music and Duke University.¹⁵

Ward sought to continue his studies of composition after graduating from Eastman and would stay in New York to do so. Ward received a fellowship to attend the Juilliard School of Music from 1939 to 1942. While there, he worked with Frederick Jacobi (composition), Bernard Wagenaar (orchestration), Albert Stoessel (conducting) and Edgar Schenkman (conducting). In 1941, Ward worked with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center in Massachusetts.¹⁶ This was not the only encounter between the two composers. As a huge supporter of young musical talent, Copland agreed to meet with Ward in New York City for further coaching and training. The two developed a close relationship and it has been said that Copland even played some of

¹⁴ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 6.

¹⁵ Kenneth Kreitner, *Robert Ward: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 5-6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

his own music for Ward, seeking his opinion.¹⁷ It is evident by this gesture how much respect Copland had for the talented young composer.

In addition to the composers mentioned above, Ward would enjoy the company of a great number of famous American composers and musicians through his schooling and professional work. These included, “Elliot Carter, Henry Cowell, Douglas Moore, Vincent Persichetti, and Wallingford Rieger. And during his years at Juilliard, Ward had come into association with well-known international composers such as Benjamin Britten, Darius Milhaud, and Francis Poulenc.”¹⁸ As a sensitive musician and artist, these relationships would undoubtedly help to shape Ward as a composer.

Outside of his family and education, the greatest influence on Ward and his music was his time serving in the military. It was in the army that Ward would meet his future wife, Mary Benedict. The couple married a year after they met in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Despite this obvious joy for Ward, his time in the army also exposed him to the tragedies of war. Although primarily recruited to play and compose music, Ward often found himself in the midst of danger. He recalls one instance when he and his comrades came upon an enemy soldier. Despite the group’s desire to take the soldier’s life, Ward convinced them to spare it. The combatant was then turned over to command where he would eventually provide valuable information regarding the location of other opposition forces.¹⁹ In reflecting upon this, Ward said that he “was happy to have prevented the killing of an enemy who was surrendering. The irony of the situation was that perhaps the saving of his life may have resulted in the death of many of his comrades under

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Kolt, *Robert Ward’s The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

our bombardment. Terrible are the fortunes of war.”²⁰ Although his time in the service would come to an end, the war would have a lasting impact on the composer and his music. Ward composed the following works while in the service: *The Life of Riley* (1942), “an all-soldier review,” *Adagio and Allegro* (1944), and *Jubilation, an Overture* (1945).²¹

Ward returned to Juilliard to complete his graduate certificate after the war. His time in New York would be fruitful as it brought about immediate employment opportunities upon his graduation. Douglas Moore, then Music Department Chair at Columbia University, asked Ward to teach, as well as direct the university band there. Ward would also return to Juilliard to teach conducting. The opportunity was made possible by Edgar Schenkman. Ward worked at Columbia from 1946-1948 and at Juilliard from 1946-1956. President William Schuman would make Ward his assistant in 1955. As part of this position, Ward would run the newly formed development office and oversee the institution’s fundraising. Ward continued to be recognized for both his compositional skills and his ability to lead others. In fact, every organization and institution with which he was associated sought to use his expertise in both. This made him an invaluable asset.²²

Juilliard would also provide the opportunity for Ward to meet Bernard Stambler, who would later become his librettist and close friend. As previously mentioned, the two would collaborate on four operas, the most famous being *The Crucible*. Stambler would receive all three of his degrees from Cornell University. The first was a Bachelor of Arts in English (1931), followed by a Master of Arts in Comparative Literature (1932), and finally, his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Musicology (1938). Stambler was no stranger to music himself

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 12.

having played the violin as a child. Shortly after beginning lessons, he joined the violin section of the Staten Island Lyric Orchestra. Stambler's teacher and mentor, Leon Berry, provided him with his first taste of opera.²³ "In 1921...[Leon Berry], who was also a claqué leader at the Metropolitan Opera, invited Stambler to join him. For the next four years, Stambler's musical education consisted of mostly attending two or three operatic performances a week."²⁴ Unbeknownst to Stambler, he would later offer his services and talent to create one of America's operatic classics in *The Crucible*. One would be hard-pressed to find a better medium to learn about opera than the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Stambler would be pivotal to the success of the opera, especially given the conventions of the form. Ward points out that a "play is generally made up of comparatively short lines, though you do sometimes have soliloquies and longer segments. Because ordinarily a libretto is about two-thirds the length of the play, a major cutting job has to be done."²⁵ Ward and Stambler would go even further in terms of the amount of text they removed in putting together the libretto for *The Crucible*. When finished, the libretto included only a third of Miller's text. Stambler believed that the "greatest need was to compress the drama into a form best suited for musical expression" and that "in an opera one must have carefully proportioned, carefully placed musical climaxes and obviously then, the libretto must justify these musical developments and climaxes."²⁶ In compressing the drama, Stambler also believed in working closely with the composer and whenever possible, the playwright.²⁷

²³ Ibid., 53.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 284.

²⁶ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 57.

²⁷ Ibid.

The Crucible was not the first collaboration between Ward and Stambler. Roughly ten years prior, the two began adapting a play by the Russian dramatist, Leonid Andreyev, entitled *He Who Gets Slapped*. The Juilliard Orchestra and a number of local professional singers first performed the opera in 1956. American critic, Howard Taubman, commented that the “libretto moves and gives the composer opportunity for music.” Irving Kolodin, also a famous critic of the day, said that the opera was “never quite brought into focus.”²⁸ Overall, the team considered the work to be a success and decided to continue their partnership by exploring other projects together.²⁹

“The success of Robert Ward’s *The Crucible* (1961) has caused him to be considered primarily as a composer of operas, yet he has written numerous instrumental works throughout his career.”³⁰ Ward began composing in 1934 and completed over fifty works before completing *The Crucible*. As noted before, his compositions are comprised of a wide array of instrumental and vocal genres. They include songs/cycles for voice & piano, as well as voice and orchestra, string quartets, orchestral works, chamber ensembles, choral works, woodwind ensembles, musical revues (swing band, men’s chorus, and soloists), band marches, solo piano works, choral works, a sonata for violin & piano (and cello & piano), operas, brass choirs with timpani, & cantatas.³¹ What is noteworthy about this body of work is the amount of vocal music Ward had written before even attempting an opera. This experience surely aided him when he moved into the more complex and vocally demanding genre. While the success of his opera would be based

²⁸ Andrew H. Drummond, *American Opera Librettos* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1973), 109.

²⁹ Kolt, *Robert Ward’s The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 16.

³⁰ J. Daniel Huband, “Robert Ward’s Instrumental Music,” *American Music* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 333.

³¹ Kreitner, *Robert Ward: A Bio-Bibliography*, 12-41.

on his ability to write a score in which the music would enhance the text, without solid vocal writing this process would have been impeded.

Despite the amazing popularity of *The Crucible*, Ward is much more than an operatic composer. Ward enjoyed writing in all different mediums and was influenced by a wide array of composers and musicians, all of whom helped shape his musical voice. Moving beyond his composing, one recognizes Ward's deep respect for life and other individuals. Although Ward's legacy will be continually linked with his award-winning opera, it is only one aspect of a truly great artist and an even better man.

Chapter Three –
The historical events of Salem 1692, Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*,
& Robert Ward’s operatic adaptation

In 1692 nineteen men and women and two dogs were convicted and hanged for witchcraft in a small village in eastern Massachusetts... their names remain with us to this day, not least because of Arthur Miller, for whom past events and present realities have always been pressed together by a moral logic. In his hands the ghosts who died have proved real enough even if the witches they presumed to be were little more than fantasies conjured by a mixtures of fear, ambition, frustration, jealousy, and perverted pride.³²

This marked a dark and disturbing time in history where mass hysteria ran rampant and cost the lives of innocent people. It must not be taken for granted that witches were not conceived by New Englanders, nor Puritans for that matter. It was a common belief that witches existed for it was recognized “by the Bible, by all branches of the Church, by philosophy, by natural science, by the medical faculty, [and] by the law of England.”³³ To further exacerbate these times was the fact that “Puritan theocracy was inherently a cause of personal and social unrest. It stressed a strict code of ethics for the Puritans believed that ‘no social or political issue was without its moral dimension as well.’”³⁴ The problem for Salem like many other towns in New England was the lack of proof needed in accusations. As is seen in *The Crucible*, all that was needed was “spectral evidence”.³⁵ As a result of this, accusations rose and mass hysteria ensued.

The first and perhaps most debated motivation for Arthur Miller in writing *The Crucible* is the subject’s parallel to the McCarthy era of the 1950’s. During that time, former Wisconsin Senator, Joseph McCarthy, led a charge to identify all communists living in the United States

³² Bigsby, introduction to Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: a Play in Four Acts*, vii.

³³ George L. Kittredge, "Witchcraft and the Puritans," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 21.

³⁴ Charles Patrick Woliver, "Robert Ward's *The Crucible*: a critical commentary" (DMA, University of Cincinnati, 1986), 17.

³⁵ Kittredge, "Witchcraft and the Puritans," 23.

asserting that they were a threat to citizens and the American way of life. These modern day witch-hunts certainly had an impact on Miller. He once stated that:

It was not only the rise of ‘McCarthyism’ that moved me, but something which seemed more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance.³⁶

This holds resonance in the play and opera. The girls who were making the accusations felt they were doing the “holy work of God” by their identifying witches in Salem. The second motivation for Miller comes in the form of his protagonist, John Proctor. Through him, Miller is able to present the journey of a flawed man and his conviction of truth and justice.

Arthur Miller first came across the story of Salem 1692 when he was a student at the University of Michigan. Although Miller would wait many years before beginning work on the play, his introduction to the Salem witch trials provided the seeds for his award-winning drama.³⁷

As Henry Popkin writes:

[B]efore the play opened in 1953, public investigations had been examining and interrogating radicals, former radicals, and possible former radicals, requiring witnesses to tell about others and not only about themselves. The House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities evolved a memorable and much-quoted sentence: ‘Are you now, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?’”³⁸

It is not hard to assume that a similar line of questioning would have happened in Salem replacing “Communist” for “witch”.

Senator McCarthy led the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee) and would set his sights on those working in the arts. He claimed that they were an imminent threat to the

³⁶ Herbert Blau, "No Play Is Deeper Than Its Witches," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 61.

³⁷ Bigsby, introduction to Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: a Play in Four Acts*, viii.

³⁸ Henry Popkin, "Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible'," *College English* 26, no. 2 (1964): 139.

United States. Aaron Copland even fell subject to such scrutiny having been the subject of a HUAC investigation as an alleged Communist. As a result of his being investigated, a performance of his *Lincoln Portrait* that was scheduled as part of the inaugural festivities for President Eisenhower was canceled.³⁹ This was a volatile time for artists for fear of being blacklisted. The only way to not be banned from working was to offer names of those who were “Communists.”⁴⁰ The committee sympathized with those who were willing to name others. Again the parallel to Salem is clear when individuals would name others as “witches” as a means of saving their own life.

The hysteria became personal when Miller’s own colleagues were being called in to testify. Probably none closer to him was Elia Kazan, who had directed *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. In order to save his own career, Kazan cooperated with the committee and named a number of individuals who he thought to be Communists. “By a strange irony Miller was returning from Salem, where he had been researching the play, when he heard on his car radio news of Kazan’s testimony... He was the first of a number of colleagues and friends to capitulate to the Committee’s demands and blandishments.”⁴¹ When Miller was finally called to appear before the committee, he responded the same way as John Proctor, refusing to name others. He said that “I am trying to, and I will, protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him.”⁴² Perhaps if those in Salem exhibited the same fortitude with which Miller acted when he went before the committee, innocent lives may have been spared.

³⁹ Jonathan Carr, “politics and music,” *The Oxford Companion to Music*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed June 30, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5263>

⁴⁰ Popkin, “Arthur Miller’s ‘The Crucible’,” 140.

⁴¹ Bigsby, introduction to Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: a Play in Four Acts*, xii.

⁴² Ibid.

In his autobiography, Arthur Miller stated that:

At first I rejected the idea of a play on the subject... But gradually, over weeks, a living connection between myself and Salem, and between Salem and Washington, was made in my mind--- for whatever else they might be, I saw the hearings in Washington were profoundly and even avowedly ritualistic... The main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make a public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows--- whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people. In other words, the same spiritual nugget lay folded within both procedures – an act of contrition done not in solemn privacy but out in the public air.⁴³

Despite an obvious parallel in the Salem trials and those taking place in Washington, Miller needed a subject worth writing about. In John Proctor, “so patently the enemy of hysteria,”⁴⁴ he found such an individual.

There are two layers by which one can view the play. From a social and political context, the work deals with mass hysteria in seventeenth-century New England. It is of secondary importance whether people actually believed that their neighbors were indeed witches or were simply interested in obtaining their property to add to their own. The startling truth is that people were put death for these accusations. From a personal viewpoint, one can recognize that John Proctor is desperately trying to move on from his unfaithful past and thereby save his marriage. What becomes so intriguing about Miller’s play is how he is able to intersect these layers. Proctor’s wife is accused of being a witch by his former lover, Abigail Williams. For Abigail, accusing Elizabeth is a clear path to being back with John with whom she is still in love. For Proctor, this accusation affords him the opportunity to express his commitment to his wife by standing up in court and exposing Abigail’s true motivation for calling her a witch. His

⁴³ Ibid., x.

⁴⁴ Richard Hayes, "Hysteria and Ideology in *The Crucible*," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 33.

unwillingness to sign a false admission and his refusal to name others, though, ultimately costs him his life.

On January 22, 1953, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* received its premiere at the Martin Beck Theater in New York City. While the play has now found a place in the regular repertory, it first ran for 197 performances. This is impressive given its political associations. The play also won the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards for play of the year.⁴⁵

As was mentioned earlier, Arthur Miller recognized the operatic potential of the events of Salem and even considered writing one himself. This is evidenced in an amusing exchange with his friend, American composer, Marc Blitzstein. Miller inquired as to how long it would take to compose an opera. Blitzstein responded with a similar question back to Miller regarding how long it would take him to write a good play. The answer? About twenty years! With this humbling realization, Miller decided it would be best to explore the work in the medium he knew best by writing a play.⁴⁶

Ward's operatic adaptation was not the first time this type of subject was dealt with in opera. "Tales of religious fanaticism in New England were the subjects of earlier American operas, such as *Merry Mount* by Howard Hanson and Charles Wakefield Cadman's *The Witch of Salem*."⁴⁷ It is interesting to consider what influence Hanson's opera may have had on Ward given their work together at Eastman.

Despite not being able to write an opera himself, Miller was still intent on setting the play to music. Ward, however, was not the first composer considered for the job. Aaron Copland and Carlisle Floyd were first contacted, but both were tied up with other projects. This provided an

⁴⁵ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁷ Kirk, *American Opera*, 284.

opening for Ward and Stambler. The composer's introduction to Miller's play came by way of bass, Emile Renan, who was performing in *He Who Gets Slapped* (another of Ward's operas). Renan had seen a production of *The Crucible* and suggested that Ward and Stambler attend a performance. The two were considering new material with the success of their first collaboration together.⁴⁸ "Ward went see the play and remembers it as a gripping experience. He felt the possibilities for operatic adaptation were boundless: strong characters, powerful drama, a stirring message, and an ambience ripe for musical setting."⁴⁹ Ward felt it was best to contact Miller directly regarding the rights to the play. To aid in this process, Ward would call upon his brother Albert for assistance. Albert was still working in professional theater at the time and was able to arrange for Miller and his producer, Frank Taylor, to attend a performance of *He Who Gets Slapped*.

Miller was impressed by the performance and as a result was open to Ward setting his play. Ward asked if he would be interested in being his librettist, but Miller respectfully declined. He cited his busy schedule, as well as his lack of experience. Ward then proposed using Stambler since Miller had enjoyed the performance of *He Who Gets Slapped*. Miller agreed to the suggestion, but with the understanding that the two would provide sample material for his review. If he approved of their work he would finalize the deal. Initially, he insisted that the play remain unaltered. This became problematic for Ward and Stambler. They contacted Miller to explain that the play would need to be reduced in size given the conventions of opera. Ward was sure that this would end their negotiations given Miller's initial request. To his great surprise, however, he agreed.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 55.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 54-55.

Miller's agent, Kay Brown, was extremely aggressive in final negotiations insisting there be a performance within one year's time. With a few famous exceptions (Mozart and Rossini, for example), history has shown that most composers generally take longer than a year to complete their operas. Additionally, Ward and Stambler were concerned about guaranteeing an ongoing performance schedule, something Brown was insistent upon. Out of the four major opera houses in the United States at the time (Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago) not one was programming new operatic works. While the New York City Opera would eventually commission Ward's opera, he and Stambler could not have planned on such an opportunity at the time of their negotiations. It would be impossible to guarantee these demands since the piece had not even been written. With Brown proving to be difficult, Ward and Stambler turned to Miller again for help. They hoped that he would understand their situation. Miller promptly dealt with their concern by telling Brown to "give those boys whatever they want!" With that, Ward and Stambler were free to begin their work.⁵¹

With a grant from the Ford Foundation, Ward's operatic adaptation of *The Crucible* received its commission from Julius Rudel and the New York City Opera Company. The opera premiered on October 26, 1961, at the New York City Center of Music and Drama. That next year, the adaptation received a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Critics Circle Citation.⁵²

Stambler was keenly aware of two things when he sought to adapt Miller's play into a working libretto for Ward. The first and perhaps most important consideration was a good working relationship with the composer and an awareness of his or her compositional style.

⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

⁵² Robert Ward, *The Crucible* (New York: Highgate Press, 1962), 3.

Going a step further, he believed that a librettist must be so in tune with a composer's desires that he could put them above his own. Perhaps due to his personal experience in music, Stambler once stated that the "librettist is writing for a musical setting and his ideals of individuality in writing must always be subservient to the music or else he should get into another business."⁵³ Acknowledging the necessity of compressing the drama into a workable entity for the composer, Stambler also believed that given operatic conventions (arias, ensembles, and so forth), the libretto would need to reflect those things accordingly. Additionally, he felt that musical swells and climaxes must be built into the libretto in order for the text and music to complement one another.⁵⁴

Table 2.1 (found on pg. 24) includes the material that was removed, added, or altered when Stambler constructed his libretto. In total, about two-thirds of Miller's play was cut, again due to the conventions of opera and setting the spoken work to music. In constructing the libretto, of note are the scenes that Ward and Stambler added between John and Abigail. They are vitally important to developing their relationship and will be discussed further in Chapter Five. Ward also chose to feature Tituba and Sarah Good in the opening of Act IV. While only a brief episode in the play (only two pages of dialogue), Tituba is given an opportunity to sing of her fate and the community's in a short aria-like passage. By giving Tituba a solo again, Ward provides musical closure for this important Act I character and segues between the new scene he added with John and Abigail, and the deliberations of Hale and Danforth.⁵⁵

There are other important alterations that were made, which are not included in the table. The first is regarding Elizabeth Proctor. In the play, it is learned that Elizabeth is pregnant and

⁵³ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 57.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 59.

as a result, her life is spared despite being accused of witchcraft. Ward and Stambler felt that since they were not able to fully address this aspect of the Proctor marriage, they must leave it out of their adaptation. They felt it was sufficient enough that Elizabeth's life be saved, but not address how.⁵⁶ The second set of significant changes comes by way of the condensing of multiple characters into one. The multiple judges found in the play become a single one in Judge Danforth. Additionally, Stambler condenses Marshal Herrick, Ezekiel Cheever, and Hopkins into one character: Ezekiel Cheever. Finally, Stambler delays the appearance of the young girls of Salem (Mercy Lewis, Susanna Wolcott, Bridget Booth, and Martha Sheldon) until the Act III trial scene.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Woliver, "Robert Ward's *The Crucible*: a critical commentary," 47.

Table 2.1 - Ward and Stambler's adaptation of Miller's play ⁵⁸

Act I	Act II	Act III	Act IV
Deletions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scenes with Abigail and her young friends - An encounter between John and Abigail (some of this material is used in Act III) - Arguments amongst secondary characters 	Deletions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchanges between Giles Corey and Francis Nurse - Lengthy discussions between the Proctors and Reverend Hale 	Deletions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - John Proctor's Speech - Interrogation of Francis Nurse removed from Trial Scene 	Deletions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None, except Stambler condenses much of the material
Additions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A 	Additions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A 	Additions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scene in the Woods between John and Abigail; scene was only present in the original production and took place at the end of Act II, but was later removed by Miller; Stambler combined it with material from Act I (when John learns of false accusations from Abigail) 	Additions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scene between John and Abigail; in the play, Abigail is mentioned as fleeing town, but Stambler and Ward felt that the audience needed to see her a final time
Other changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moves the girl's appearance to Act III 	Other changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - N/A 	Other changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trials moved to the court building rather than the vestry - Shortened interrogations of Giles Corey and John Proctor 	Other changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scene between Tituba and Sarah Good is highlighted musically; Ward felt it was important to give Tituba the chance to sing of her fate, as well as the community's after months of imprisonment

⁵⁸ Woliver, "Robert Ward's The Crucible: a critical commentary," 48, & Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 58-59.

With respect to Ward's compositional approach to the adaptation, he maintains the four acts that are found in the original play. Woliver describes Ward's adaptation as "harmonically, melodically, and orchestrally conservative. It is continuously expressive and inherently dramatic. His vocal style is lyrical and singer-oriented. His orchestra is often a source of commentary and contrast."⁵⁹ There is a definite relationship between the drama that plays out on stage and the music found in Ward's score. Both serve in aiding the other with respect to portraying the tragic events of Salem 1692.

With respect to form, Ward uses all the conventional structures one would expect from opera including arias, duets, quasi-recitative, and ensembles. While some would argue about the success of these individual structures against other examples found in the operatic canon, they are nonetheless present in *The Crucible*. They are used more like that of Verdi's through-composed operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, than that of Mozart. Ward is careful not to create any type of finality in moving between these sections. Instead, he moves through one scene to the next in seamless fashion. This is done to keep the drama continuous.⁶⁰

Perhaps most memorable are Ward's arias, which do much to establish the characterization of his leading roles. John's aria to open Act II presents a man yearning for brighter days, while Elizabeth's aria serves as a response to what he has just told her and is particularly striking with respect to establishing the tumultuous state of their marriage. There are important moments for the ensemble, as well. From the unison chorus that ends Act I to the hysteria ensued mob of Act III, Ward masterfully places his ensembles to further the audience's understanding of the opera's dramatic tension.

⁵⁹ Woliver, "Robert Ward's *The Crucible*: a critical commentary," 51.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 67.

Harmonically, the opera is traditional in terms of 20th-century music. Much of the score is composed diatonically; however, Ward does use dissonance for dramatic effect. “Ward wanted the musical ambience of the piece to depict the American colonial period, yet the music also had to capture the hysteria of witchcraft.”⁶¹ To aid in this process, he was extremely sensitive to how he used rhythm in his adaptation. Ward once said that “I would venture to say that the most powerful element of all in Verdi, in Mozart, and even in Wagner and certainly Bizet, is the rhythmic drive which sets up and underlies the drama.”⁶² This is accomplished in the opera by use of both simple and compound meter and his ease in moving from one to the next. Again, both melodically and harmonically, Ward is concerned with propelling the drama forward.⁶³

There are two versions of the opera with respect to its orchestration. The first, which was used in the New York City Opera premiere, consists of two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. Some critics have stated that this original version of the score is too heavy, especially in the sections of brass. The result is that in some instances, the singers are covered. Some twenty years later, the Chicago Opera Theater commissioned Ward to create a reduction of the original orchestration. This version includes two flutes, one oboe, two clarinets, one bassoon, two horns, two trumpets, one bass trombone, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. This version addressed the issue of the orchestra being too heavy, as well as provided the opportunity for the opera to be performed in smaller settings.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., 71.

⁶² Ibid., 76.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 83.

Chapter Four – Framing political opera

Since politics comes from the Greek word “polis,” meaning community or citizen, and deals with the governing of said individuals, it is natural then that an opera could be classified as political.⁶⁵ Most operas revolve around the interactions of their main characters within the society they live regardless of their location or time period. Irrespective of an opera’s origin, whether it comes from a piece of literature, past event, or is something completely new, looking at how its main characters fit into society provides an opportunity to discuss its political content and perceived associations. It is not sufficient to simply say something is political for there are different sub-types that must be considered.

The first and perhaps most obvious way that an opera can be deemed political is a work based on historical events. An example of this is John Adam’s *Nixon in China*. With a basic knowledge of American history, one would know that a visit from a United States President to China would have political ramifications in the 1970s. As will be discussed later, the work becomes increasingly personal; however, its surface level associations are overtly political.

Many historical and political events have been driven by a struggle over status or the influence of groups in power. So, even without being tied to specific events, an opera can be identified as political through its portrayal of these types of issues. An opera does not necessarily have to be serious to do so as can be seen in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Le nozze*

⁶⁵ Merriam Webster Online, s.v. “politics,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politics> (accessed July 1, 2016).

di Figaro. Here, Mozart deals with the cultural expectations of power and status, but in a comical way.

An opera can also be political in the ideology it presents and addresses through major institutions such as government or religion. One example of this is Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which has long been associated with the French Revolution. The work is centered upon the ideals of freedom and justice and calls into question the government's oppressive ideology. The institution of religion also plays a significant role with respect to ideology. In Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, the historical battle between Protestants and Catholics in France is brought into focus and intersects on a personal level when a man and woman from either side fall in love.

A final type of political opera, which is represented by Ward's *The Crucible*, is one that is an allegory for something else. Using the events of Salem 1692, Miller was able to address the modern day witch-hunts taking place in the United States during the 1950s in a period known as the McCarthy Era. It could be argued that the parallel between the two points in history, which was one of the central motivations for Miller, is less of a concern for Ward. Even so, the operatic adaptation represents a sort of hybrid political work. The opera addresses both the political climate in Salem 1692 while suggesting a parallel to the 1950s.

As can be seen from the following analysis, an opera need not be just one of these types, but like Ward's *The Crucible* can be a mixture of these different classifications.

A. Historical events

As mentioned above, the most overt type of political opera is one based on historical events.

Despite its modern-day associations to McCarthyism, the events of Salem 1692 were political in

and of themselves. The theocratic government represented by both local officials and the church sought to rid its community of witches. The prospect of witches upset the social fabric of Salem and there were those who believed that the only way to rid the town of such atrocities was to confess or hang.

In *The Crucible*, the gravity of the situation is felt right away in Act I with Reverend Parris' grave concern for his daughter, Betty. He kneels at her side convinced that she has been touched by the devil. How horrifying it must be for a minister of the church to fathom a witch entering his own house. Ward begins Act I with frantic music in the orchestra. A rising passage in the strings and woodwinds spans over three octaves and is accented with striking chords in the brass and percussion. The material reaches a fever pitch in mm. 3 – 6 with a repeated two-bar phrase. The 12/8 time signature anxiously pushes the music forward before Reverend Parris' first vocal entrance (Example 4.1):

Example 4.1:

Allegro Molto (♩=120)

(Fl) (Vie) (Vla) (Cel) (D.B.) (Trp) (Tbn)

cresc. mp

(Curtain rises) (The Minister looks out)

(Pastor Parris knelt at the bed on which Betty lay immobile and scarcely breathing.) (Rev. Parris is kneeling at the bed on which Betty lies immobile and scarcely breathing.)

66

In this opening, the dramatic weight is felt immediately. Without knowing Miller's play or even having read the libretto Ward masterfully sets a serious tone for his adaptation. This is similar to the way in which John Adams opens his *Nixon in China*.

Ward begins each of his scenes with programmatic orchestral music, which helps to set the tone for the ensuing drama. In Act III, Scene II, the audience meets Judge Danforth for the first time. It is he who will ultimately determine the fate of those accused in Salem. In a distinctly triumphant fashion made possible by the brass, the following passage marks Danforth's entrance on stage (Example 4.2).

⁶⁶ Ward, *The Crucible*, 7.

Example 4.2:

(Am nächsten Morgen. Die Stadterneammlungshalle, die als Gerichtssaal
(The next morning. The town meetinghouse used as courtroom. Townspeople and
Cheever are already seated. Cheever, the court clerk, at
his desk. Enter Giles Corey and Francis Nurse. (Giles
benützt wird. Bürger der Stadt und Cheever sitzen bereits. Cheever, der Gerichtsschreiber ist an seinem Pult.
speaks angrily and gesticulates excitedly to Francis and others.)

Giles Corey und Francis Nurse treten
ein. Giles spricht ärgerlich und gestikuliert aufgeregt zu Francis und
(Mary Warren und John Putnam treten auf. Beide sind ruhig
(Enter Mary W. and John P. Both are outwardly calm, but
Mary clearly neither looks nor acts like an official of the court.

nach aussen hin, aber Mary verbirgt sich unausdrücklich
nicht wie eine Amtsperson des Gerichtes und John
kann seine Erregtheit nicht vollkommen überbergen.)
and John cannot completely hide the words he feels.)

67

This music is confident in nature with a hint of arrogance, quite fitting for a man who has already made up his mind about how to proceed. Danforth asks the Lord to speak through him so that the government which he represents and the church may rid Salem of its evil. The example also features John Proctor's theme, which returns as he enters the courtroom.

A more modern example of this type of political opera is *Nixon in China* by John Adams. Adams is one of the most prolific American operatic composers in recent history. His works, which include *Dr. Atomic* (a work that deals with the social and ethical considerations of the construction of the first atomic bomb⁶⁸), have become popular in the American operatic repertory and around the world. Another of his operas, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, which received a recent

⁶⁷ Ibid., 179-180.

⁶⁸ Sarah Cahill, "Adams, John," *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed June 30, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42479>.

revival at the Metropolitan Opera in 2014, continues to spark serious political debate due to accusations of anti-Semitism. Adams has become identified as one of the most explicit composers with regard to politically charged subject content, which he often sets to minimalistic scores.

Work on *Nixon in China* began in 1982 and was completed in 1987. Adams teamed with librettist, Alice Goodman, and director, Peter Sellars, for this project. The three would go on to collaborate again for *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991).

Nixon in China is centered upon Richard Nixon's Presidential visit to China in 1972. The work:

[I]s divided into three acts, each of which is shorter than the last. Act I contains three scenes: Nixon's triumphant arrival at the Peking airport, where Chinese Premier Chou En-lai waits to greet him; the meeting between Chairman Mao Tse-tung and President Nixon, alongside their aides; and the banquet where Chou and Nixon toast each other heartily and give speeches about the beginning of this new era of dialogue between the two nations. Act II contains two scenes: Pat Nixon's grand sightseeing tour of China in the area around Peking and the revolutionary ballet that was presented for the President and American visitors by Chiang (or Madame Mao). Act III contains only a single act (and often Acts II and III are presented without an intermission): the dignitaries, having returned to their chambers following the week of meetings, reminisce about past experiences, and have more in common with each other than they might even have imagined.⁶⁹

On a large scale, the work can be seen to overtly deal with the political dichotomy of Eastern and Western culture. However, as will be referenced in the following chapter, this is not the ultimate point of the opera for Adams, but rather a gateway into these characters' humanity.

⁶⁹ Timothy A. Johnson, *John Adams's Nixon in China: Musical Analysis, Historical and Political Perspectives* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011), 21.

Adams' *Nixon in China* begins similarly to Ward's opera with respect to setting a serious tone. The orchestral opening lasts for 77 measures and establishes the gravity of this historic visit. The central melodic figure is an ascending A-minor passage, which repeats every consecutive measure until m. 30 (Example 4.3).

Example 4.3:



The texture of this motive, as well as what is realized by the other sections of the orchestra above, creates a sense of motion. Adams takes his audience on a journey to a distant place – one that is not yet understood. He states that “It seemed to me when I thought of the Long March and of the vastness of the country, and the millions and millions of people, that the repetitive quality of these ascending A minor scales was a perfect way to set that tone.”⁷¹ The music here is neither cheerful nor patriotic, which is similar to the opening of Ward's opera. Like that of the opening to Florestan's aria in *Fidelio*, it is dark and oppressive.

Of the opening, “[w]ith the simultaneous presentation of metrical and harmonic consonance and dissonance, Adams musically depicts this divergence in point of view...The music...contributes significantly to one of the main conflicts of the opera, the differing

⁷⁰ John Adams, *Nixon in China* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1987), 1.

⁷¹ Johnson, *John Adams's Nixon in China: Musical Analysis, Historical and Political Perspectives*, 28.

perspectives of East and West.”⁷² The music is unrelenting in this section, which does much to establish the work’s political tone.

Shortly after President Nixon arrives at Peking airport he sings his famous “News Aria.” This is the first glimpse of Nixon’s humanity; however, it is more like a caricature of what a politician is than anything sincere. This was intentional by Adams.

Nixon, in his ‘News’ aria, immediately establishes that the priorities of the journey are symbolic; indeed, he likens his landing in Beijing to that of the Apollo astronauts who landed on the moon, and notes that because it is prime television viewing time in the USA, his arrival will be witnessed by the maximum possible audience.⁷³

Pompously obsessed with his place in history, Nixon ignores the Chinese welcome and instead, sings of his triumphant visit. The bombastic reeling music, which accompanies his vocal line, is central in painting the picture of an arrogant American politician who has everything to offer, but nothing to learn (Example 4.4). This is important for its contribution to the tension, which exists between the Americans and the Chinese.

In composing the opera, Adams once said that “[o]ne of the principal things that interested me was the typically American sense of assumed superiority. These Americans were coming to China with the tacit assumption that American culture is by far the better one.”⁷⁴ Nixon is not without his doubts, though, as evidenced towards the end of the aria when at the bottom of his vocal range, he sings that “the rats begin to chew the sheets,” over and over, as if

⁷² Ibid., 33.

⁷³ Allan Kozinn, “Nixon in China,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O903478>.

⁷⁴ Andrew Porter and John Adams, “‘Nixon in China’: John Adams in Conversation,” *Tempo*, *New Series*, Cambridge University Press, no. 167 (Dec. 1988): 26, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/945213>.

in a trance. His unsteadiness is felt in the fragmented orchestral accompaniment, as well. Up until now, there have been no breaks in the aria despite changes in meter and harmony. As Nixon's thoughts become increasingly paranoid, however, the music becomes rather jagged. This feeling is enhanced with the chorus speaking "the rats begin to chew the sheets" under his repeated vocal line (Example 4.5).

Example 4.4:

373 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = 160$ NIXON News (etc.)

377 News, News, News, News, News,

383 News, News, News, News, News, News has a, has a, has a,

75

⁷⁵ Adams, *Nixon in China*, 27.

Example 4.5:

661

Nix. *661* sheets. The rats be-gin to chew the sheets. The rats, the rats be-gin to chew the sheets.

Spoken at random by each individual in a low, very soft voice with a slight pause between each repetition.

Male Ch. *661* The rats begin to chew the sheets.

f p

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The mood shifts quite drastically at the start of Act II with Pat Nixon's double-aria, which she sings on her sightseeing tour. As an ambassador for her country, the first lady begins stoically but soon opens up into a deeply caring and sensitive individual. This is far from that of her ego-driven husband. She repeatedly sings, "I treat everyday like Christmas. I come from a poor family. Trivial things are not for me." In this way, she is able to create a bond with those she is visiting. "Marked by a deliberate plainness, Pat's music is quite different from the grandiloquence of Nixon's; anything else would detract from her poetic and historical character."⁷⁷ This simplicity in the musical texture enables the audience to see Pat as human rather than some dominant political figure. "A sense of timelessness and tranquility is recreated in the prophecy of Pat's aria... Her words speak of everyday values with which Chinese and American can identify; a genuine poetic rapprochement is occurring here." Pat's Act II opening allows Adams to begin shifting the focus from the dominant East vs. West political theme and move it inward.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁷ Matthew Daines, "'Nixon's Women: Gender Politics and Cultural Representation in Act 2 of 'Nixon in China,'" *The Musical Quarterly*, Oxford University Press 79, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 9, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742514>.

The next noteworthy historical scene comes at the end of Act II with President Nixon and his wife attending a performance of *The Red Detachment of Women*. The work is “a visually striking revolutionary opera/dance performance piece in which the actresses are clad in Mao suits, bayonets and ballet slippers. The story... takes place during the political chaos just prior to the Communist takeover (1927-37)...”⁷⁸ The ballet involves a poor girl (Ching-hua) who is ravaged and beaten by the “landlord’s factotum,” Lao Szu. In the opera, the role of Henry Kissinger plays Lao (making it a play within a play). Eventually, the girl is able to free herself from Lao, find company with a soldier in the army, and then join the Detachment of Women within the Communist Party. With the help of her fellow soldiers, she is able to rescue the rest of her village.⁷⁹

With respect to the opera, the section leading up to Lao (Kissinger) crying out “Whip her to death!” is particularly striking both musically and dramatically for the audience. With the orchestra rocking back and forth between triple and duple meters, the brass enters with a series of harsh, syncopated chords. Before Lao has spoken a word, the audience feels the girl being beaten (Example 4.6). As Kissinger begins to sing “Whip!” over and over again, the orchestra creates a whipping feeling with two consecutive chords that follow his line.

⁷⁸ “Red Detachment of Women (1971),” accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/155232/Red-Detachment-of-Women/overview>.

⁷⁹ Thomas May, ed., *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings On an American Composer* (Pompton Plains, N.J.: Amadeus, 2006), 118.

Example 4.6:

The image displays a musical score for two characters: KISSINGER (as Lao Szu) and KIS. (Nixon). The score is divided into two systems. The first system, labeled with measure numbers 284 and 215, features KISSINGER's vocal line with the lyrics "Whip! Whip! Whip! Whip!" and a piano accompaniment. The second system, labeled with measure numbers 288 and 80, features KIS.'s vocal line with the lyrics "Whip! Whip! Whip! Whip! Whip! Whip her to death! Whip her to death!" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes various musical notations such as chords, arpeggios, and dynamic markings like "sim." (simile).

Overwhelmed with despair by what she is seeing, Pat Nixon runs on stage to try and stop the ballet believing that it is real. Begrudgingly, Nixon chases after her to restrain her. This is one of the most intense moments in the opera. Adams clearly defines the differences between Nixon and his wife with regard to their humanity. Although this scene is only symbolic, the audience is sympathetic towards Pat since she sides with Ching-hua. Nixon is left looking cold and heartless with his lack of empathy towards the situation.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Adams, *Nixon in China*, 215.

⁸¹ Matthew Daines, "Nixon's' Women: Gender Politics and Cultural Representation in Act 2 of 'Nixon in China'," *The Musical Quarterly*, Oxford University Press 79, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 22-24, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742514>.

B. Power & Status

In any simple or complex society, there exists a social hierarchy, which provides order and cultural expectations for those living in it. The social fabric falls apart without this. While societies can differ with respect to who holds the power or control and how much of it they have, there becomes a delineation between those with it and those without. Why is this important with respect to political opera? It helps the audience understand where characters fall within a society. Ultimately, it answers the question of whether they are the ones giving orders or those receiving them. It establishes whether they have power or not. This then has political ramifications as is played out in *The Crucible*.

By surveying the principal operatic characters of *The Crucible*, one finds three groupings of individuals with respect to power (Table 4.2). These classifications take into account one's occupation, wealth, and perceived status in the town of Salem.

Table 4.2 – Character groupings with respect to power and status in *The Crucible* (opera):

HIGH	MIDDLE	LOW
Judge Danforth Reverend Hale Reverend Parris Thomas & Ann Putman Abigail Williams (due to her relation to Parris) Girls Ezekiel Cheever	John & Elizabeth Proctor Mary Warren Giles & Martha Corey	Tituba

These classifications are not permanent in the opera, especially when the witchcraft accusations become more frequent. Take for example the Proctor's servant, Mary Warren. She takes on a higher status and asserts more power in Act III when she turns on John in the courtroom scene. Here, she joins the mob mentality of the court calling John the "Devil's Man." Conversely, the Proctors take on a lower status as the drama unfolds and they are accused of being witches. While certainly not the most powerful people at the start of the opera, what power the Proctors did have, they begin to lose as the town turns on them.

This is important in *The Crucible* because it shows that the highest classes control the social narrative. This could be said of modern society, as well. In Salem, the authority is represented by the government (Judge Danforth), clergy (Reverends Parris and Hale), and the rich (Thomas Putnam). Despite being a congregation, those of lower status are expected to follow the mores set forth by those in power.

An example of this comes in Act I of the opera in an exchange between Thomas Putnam & John Proctor regarding how the town should handle the witchcraft accusations.

JOHN PROCTOR: And speakin' of poppy cock, Mister Putnam, I hear you've sent for Reverend Hale. How is that you can without the congregation's vote?

THOMAS PUTNAM: Me act without...

REVEREND PARRIS: Thomas did well. It's what we need.

PROCTOR: And by whose decision, may I ask?

Later John says:

PROCTOR: I never spoke a word on witches, one way or another. But your acres do not command her sir. This society acts on the vote of all.⁸²

⁸² Robert Ward, *The Crucible* (New York: Highgate Press, 1962), 41-45.

For John Proctor, it is the entire community that must decide how to proceed with the question of witchcraft, not certain individuals. "Proctor represents the view of society held by Enlightenment thinkers – the society should be founded on the common good, as agreed upon by all reasonable men."⁸³ But that would assume that everyone's opinion holds equal weight in Salem, which as the opera unfolds is not the case. John Proctor questions the notion that due to Thomas Putnam's affluence he should have the deciding vote.

Although initially hesitant to the idea of Reverend Hale coming to Salem, Putnam is quickly able to convince Parris otherwise. Parris wrestles with the idea that witches could exist under his ministerial watch but ultimately succumbs to the pressure of Putnam. He is able to wipe his hands clean of the situation by "believing" in witches. Although Abigail Williams works as a servant, though she has not been hired since she left the Proctors, it is her relation to her Uncle Parris that allows her access to the highest class in town. By being a part of that she is able to make unsubstantiated claims of witchcraft as are the other girls. It is an interesting phenomenon that the children could have such an effect on the adult population of Salem. Ordinarily in society, one would not think of children as having the highest status because they are viewed as not fully mature nor developed. During this time of accusation, however, they maintained a significant amount of power socially.

What is interesting in the opera, however, is the way in which a type of secondary classification begins to shift the social hierarchy in Salem. There becomes a delineation of those who accuse and those who are accused, which coincides with those who believe in witches and those who do not. It cannot be accepted that all those who accused others believe in witches

⁸³ John H. Ferres, "Introduction," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 10.

despite the fact that it was a common practice of the time. There were other motivations to do so.

Abigail Williams knows that if she accuses Elizabeth, and she hangs for it, she will have easier access to John. Does this mean she believes in witches? Probably not. As noted above, even John Proctor has not publically provided a stance on either side of the issue. This delineation is important because it blurs the idea of class and status in Salem. Miller once said, “The society of Salem was “morally” vocal. People then avowed principles, sought to live by them and die by them. Issues of faith, conduct, society, pervaded their private lives in a conscious way. They need but to disapprove to act.”⁸⁴ It seems that the louder one disapproved the more power they gained. This is not unlike Senator McCarthy and his unfounded, but rampant accusations during the 1950’s.

As a result of local officials having the power to control how decisions are made, they are in turn able to reshape cultural expectations. They are able to determine right from wrong, which could benefit them in the acquisition of resources. Throughout the opera, Giles Corey makes the claim that by accusing people of witches those in power are able to take their property. In the first act of the opera, he says the following to Thomas Putnam and Reverend Parris:

GILES COREY: Twisting, twisting! That’s the word for you, the very word for you. Your father stole half of his neighbor’s land and piously claimed it his duty. Now you sound the horn for a witchhunt with an eye for grabbing the rest.⁸⁵

This comes back again in the second scene of Act III when Corey’s case is presented to Judge Danforth:

⁸⁴ Arthur Miller, *Arthur Miller’s Collected Plays* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 44.

⁸⁵ Ward, *The Crucible*, 33-34.

CHEEVERS: This is the statement of Giles Corey: I do hereby swear that Thomas Putnam did prompt his daughter Ruth to cry out witch on Rebecca Nurse and my wife Martha Corey. And that he did this not from any Godly motive but only to acquire the land to which these women hold title. Sworn and attested.⁸⁶

Following the rest of the encounter, Judge Danforth presses Giles Corey to submit proof of such claims. He responds with:

COREY: Why the proof is in the thing itself. If my wife hang she forfeit land.

DANFORTH: Yes, that is the law. Go on.

COREY: But is it not then clear to you? Who here is Salem has the coin to but it up? None but Putnam, Thomas Putnam.⁸⁷

This is still not enough evidence for Judge Danforth. Although pressed to offer names to corroborate his claim Corey refuses for fear that they might hang. A similar event happened to Arthur Miller when he was called to testify in 1956. He refused to offer names of those he attended a meeting with, some of whom he believed to be Communists. As a result of his refusal, Miller was held in contempt of Congress in 1957. This was later overturned the following year.⁸⁸ Given Putnam's prominence and manipulative power in the town, he is able to turn Corey's claim around by raising the question that if he is such an honest man, why would he hold back the truth? Putnam infers that if Corey is unwilling to tell the "whole truth" then he must associate with the Devil. Corey continues to refuse and as a result is ordered to be pressed by stones, which ultimately takes his life.

The idea of an opera focusing on power and status is nothing new. One of the most popular works in the operatic canon is Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. While the opera is an

⁸⁶ Ibid., 184-185.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 186-187.

⁸⁸ Woliver, "Robert Ward's *The Crucible*: a critical commentary," 21.

example of *opera buffa* or comic opera, the work similarly presents the idea of status like that of *The Crucible*. Unlike Ward's opera, which involves life or death situations, there is no real loss in the end of Mozart's opera. Besides perhaps the death of the Count's ego, the opera finds a comical way to turn the class system on its head.

Although a comedy, "Beaumarchais poked fun at the dissoluteness of the upper classes and at the legal procedures of the time...emphasized the enslavement of the lower orders, and bitterly attacked the power placed in the hands of undeserving men merely because they were born into a certain class of society."⁸⁹ The Count, who has gained considerable status as the head of the house in the second of the Beaumarchais' trilogy, is hell-bent on exercising his feudal right to sleep with Susanna before her wedding day. If the Count is of the highest status, and as servants, Figaro and Susanna are of the lowest, it would be assumed that he would be the most intelligent. As the opera proves, however, the lower classes are to be respected as it is they who are able to outwit the Count with the help of the Countess.

In Act III, Count Almaviva finally realizes that his servants are plotting against him. In his famous aria, "Hai gia vinta la causa", he furiously laments the idea that while he is full of despair his servants are happy. With the exception of the Act IV finale, this is the deepest bit of introspection that the Count experiences in the opera. He must come to terms with the fact that he is not the smartest one in the house. In the aria's opening recitative he sings "In qual laccio cadea?" meaning "in what trap have I fallen into?"⁹⁰ The aria is like a pendulum in that the

⁸⁹ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le Nozze Di Figaro: The Marriage of Figaro, an Opera in Four Acts, Vocal Score, including the Secco Recitatives* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1951), vii-viii.

⁹⁰ Jane Bishop, "Hai Gia Vinta La Causa...Vedro Mentr'io Sospiro," *Aria Database*, accessed July 01, 2016, <http://www.aria-database.com/search.php?individualAria=227>.

Count teeters back and forth between arrogant confidence and deep insecurity. In the aria proper (Table 4.3), he sings:

Table 4.3 – Translation of “Hai già vinta la causa”⁹¹

Vedrò mentrio sospiro Felice un servo mio? E un ben che invan desio, Ei posseder dovrà? Vedrò per man d'amore Unita a un vile oggetto Chi in me destò un affetto, Che per me poi non ha?	Shall I, while I'm sighing, See one of my servants happy? And the good thing I want in vain, Shall he have it? Shall I see the woman who woke in me A feeling she doesn't have for me United to a vile object By the hand of love?
---	---

While he ultimately resolves to continue his plight to have his way with Susanna, the aria shows a vulnerability in the Count. It makes him consider his own status within the house. It makes him question just how powerful he really is.

A modern adaptation of *Le nozze di Figaro* is gaining significant attention and notoriety in the United States. *Figaro 90210*, which was created last year by the Los Angeles Opera, features the following updated synopsis:

Undocumented workers Figaro and Susanna can't wait to get married, but on their way to the altar they'll have to navigate a world of lecherous bosses, Botoxed starlets, bumbling human traffickers, ambitious hip-hoppers, and pothead gardeners... not to mention a whole lot of sexting... in a wild adventure that recasts the classic opera as a madcap comedy about citizenship in today's America.⁹²

The production has a new English libretto and has brought this timeless opera into the twenty-first century with topics that are relevant today. As this adaptation deals with such issues as

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Figaro 90210," *Figaro 90210*, accessed July 01, 2016, <http://www.figaro90210.com/#!/about/c1x9v>.

citizenship, human trafficking, and illicit drug use in the United States, it illustrates that regardless of time period and location, there will always be a struggle for status and power.⁹³

C. Institutional Ideology

A third way in which an opera can be political is in the ideology it presents, especially through major institutions. An example of this is Beethoven's *Fidelio*. "As an opera abounding with symbols from the Revolution, *Fidelio* derives its political character through its pervasive concern with republican virtue, both male virtue (fidelity to the state) and female virtue (fidelity to the husband)."⁹⁴ The opera has long been associated with the French Revolution and the ideals of freedom and justice.

Fidelio is a work in two acts, first composed in 1805 with a libretto by Joseph von Sonnleithner. The original libretto received two revisions: the first in 1806 by Stephan von Bruenig and the second in 1814 by Georg Friedrich Treitschke. It is the 1814 version that is typically performed today. The opera was adapted from a play by Jean Nicolas Bouilly, entitled *Léonore, ou L'amour conjugal*, which was founded on a historical event that occurred during the Reign of Terror. The play, however, moves the action from France to Spain.⁹⁵

This was not Beethoven's first attempt at opera. In 1803, he worked on Emanuel Schikaneder's *Vestas Feuer*. Schikaneder is most famously known for being the librettist to Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in addition to creating one of its signature roles, Papageno. Beethoven

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ John Bokina, *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 66.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 70.

quickly moved on from Schikaneder's libretto, though, and took up work on Bouilly's *Léonore* in 1804 instead.⁹⁶ The opera is:

Set in Spain at an unspecified date... [and] concerns an aristocrat, Florestan, vindictively imprisoned by a tyrannical governor of the local prison. The prisoner's wife, Leonore, disguises herself as a young man named Fidelio – thus making us see her double through most of the opera – to get work in the prison and discover if her husband is still alive. She prevents him from being executed, and the king's minister completes the rescue and punishes the guilty governor.⁹⁷

The political overtones in *Fidelio* are established before a single note is played. The setting for a drama must not be overlooked when considering its political viewpoint. With the opera being set in a prison there creates a division of two opposing groups of people: those imprisoned and those who are free. It is the yearning for freedom that is the central ideal throughout the opera.

There are specific moments in the opera that enhance the audience's understanding of the themes present in the work: that of injustice and freedom. The first example comes by way of Beethoven's use of the chorus. He "treats the chorus – the brief chorus of guards in Pizarro's aria excepted – as the voice humanity confronted by tyranny and subjugation, with the prisoners' chorus at the start of the Act I finale a hymn for all who yearn for freedom and the choruses in the Act II finale a celebration of the triumph of love and justice."⁹⁸ With the opera's assumed associations to the French Revolution, it is fitting that Beethoven takes the opportunity to use the chorus as the collective voice of the people, a practice frequently used by operatic composers.

⁹⁶ Douglas Johnson, "Fidelio," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed February 13, 2015,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O005704>

⁹⁷ James Parakilas, *The Story of Opera* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 267.

⁹⁸ Paul A. Robinson, *Ludwig van Beethoven, Fidelio*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 117.

One of the most impactful ways Beethoven presents the ideal of freedom is in Prisoners Chorus in the Act I Finale. At this point in the opera, the chorus is led into the courtyard for a brief period of time. Their vocal entrance is born out of a simple yet effective introduction in the orchestra (Example 4.7).

Example 4.7:



There is a certain amount of trepidation in the music before the prisoners begin to sing, which is to be expected since they have been locked away for some time. The ascending passage in the strings helps to depict the prisoners climbing out from the depths of the prison. There is sincerity about the music, which is somewhat unexpected given that prisoners are often viewed negatively whether warranted or not. The texture and harmony allow the audience to feel compassion for them, rather than disgust. If Florestan has been wrongfully imprisoned, it is more than likely that at least some of them have been too. With this association, the prisoners become the collective voice of freedom. As the introduction begins to grow in confidence so too do the prisoners.

The prisoners' entrance (Example 4.8) is arguably the most lyrical music that has been heard in the first act of *Fidelio*, with the exception of Leonora's previous aria. The bass II's are the first to sing, "O welche Lust! (Oh, what joy!)." The remaining voices repeat these words

⁹⁹ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1935), 88.

with staggered entrances. At m. 26, all voices rejoice together in a refreshing, homophonic texture. They are now resolved to act as one. This continues until the tenor solo, which marks a noticeably different section in the music. The tenor soloist turns to the heavens and proclaims that it is God who shall free them from this oppression. Like that of the rising passage in the introduction of the finale, the bassoons move upwards by step symbolizing the ascent to heaven (Example 4.9). This orchestral passage returns when the full chorus sings “O Himmel! Rettung! Welch ein Gluck! O Freiheit, o freitheit, kehrt du zuruck? (O Heaven! Rescue! Blessed boon! O freedom, wilt thou come soon?).” As the prisoners grow in their desire to be freed so too do the dynamics begin to swell symbolizing strength.

Example 4.8:

The musical score for Example 4.8 is a vocal and instrumental arrangement for the Chorus of Prisoners. It features the following parts:

- Ten. I.** and **Ten. II.**: Tenor staves.
- Bass I.** and **Bass II.**: Bass staves.
- Clar.**: Clarinet part.
- Fl.**: Flute part.
- Viol.**: Violin part.
- Bass.**: Bass part.

The lyrics are in German and English, expressing joy and freedom. The music is in 3/4 time and includes dynamic markings like "cresc." and "p".

The next passage of music marks a third section within the opening of the finale. Having just uttered the word “freedom,” the chorus is ever mindful of the guard’s constant watch.

Beethoven begins the section in quasi-secco recitative (Example 4.10) with a bass soloist who cautions his fellow prisoners: “Sprecht leise haltet euch zurück, Wir sind belauscht mit Ohr und Blick (Speak softly, keep away from here, They spy on us with eye and ear).”¹⁰¹ The rich texture that started the finale seems to retract itself in this exposed section of quasi-recitative. Although this is not a long passage of music, the audience is left to feel the anxiety that the prisoners feel, due to the weight of the guard’s watchful eye. The responding choral lines are jagged in nature

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Beethoven, *Fidelio*, 93.

and deeply contrast with the previous lyricism. The ascending passage in the bassoons is now heard in inversion, which symbolizes feelings of oppression (Example 4.11).

Example 4.9:

The musical score for Example 4.9 consists of several staves. The top staff is for Tenor I (T.), with lyrics: "zu, wir werden frei, wir finden Ruh, wir fin-den Ruh." and "breast: We shall be freed, we shall find rest, we shall find rest." Below this is the Chorus, with lyrics: "Himmel! Heaven!" and "Himmel! Heaven!". The piano part (piano) is shown in the middle staves, with a red box highlighting a passage in the bassoon part. The bottom staves show the vocal parts for the Chorus, with lyrics: "Rettung! Rescue!" and "welch ein Glück! Bless-ed boon!" and "o Frei - heit, o Frei -" and "Free - dom, O Free -". The piano part (piano) is shown in the bottom staves, with a red box highlighting a passage in the bassoon part. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "cresc." and "tutti".

The introductory material returns (“O, welche Lust”) as the guard moves away from the prisoners, but only briefly. The prisoners’ illusion of freedom has come to an end. Their paranoia of being watched returns in both the text and music. This also coincides with them being led back within the prison walls.

¹⁰² Ibid., 92.

Example 4.10:

(A Guard appears on the wall; exit after brief observation.)

Bass Solo.

The musical score for Example 4.10 consists of two systems. The first system features a Bass Solo (B.) and piano accompaniment (P.). The lyrics are: "Sprecht lei-se, haltet euch zu-rück, rück? soon? Speak soft-ly, keep a-way from here, rück? soon?". The second system continues the piano accompaniment with the lyrics: "wir sind be-lauscht mit Ohr und Blick, wir sind be-lauscht mit They spy on us with eye and ear, they spy on us with".

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Example 4.11:

The musical score for Example 4.11 consists of two systems. The first system features piano accompaniment (P.) with the lyrics: "rück, sprecht lei-se, haltet euch zu-rück, here, speak soft-ly, keep a-way from here, rück, sprecht lei-se, haltet euch zu-rück, here, speak soft-ly, keep a-way from here,". The second system continues the piano accompaniment with the lyrics: "rück, wir sind be-lauscht mit Ohr und Blick, here, They spy on us with eye and ear, they spy on us with". A red box highlights a specific section of the score, which includes the lyrics: "rück, here, They spy on".

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¹⁰³ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 94.

If the prisoners represent the ideal of freedom, there must be an opposing force in the opera. It is vital for the opera's drama. Beethoven personifies injustice with the introduction of the opera's villain, Pizarro. He is the overseer of the prison and "is a raging personification of aristocratic tyranny: obsessed with personal honor, personalistic in the performance of his state functions, as corrupt as he is corrupting."¹⁰⁵ His aria, "Ha! Welch' ein Augenblick," both textually and musically do much to shape the audience's interpretation of him. It is this moment in the opera that Pizarro announces his revenge on Florestan, as he represents a threat to his total control and power. Bokina aptly describes Pizarro as an "enemy of freedom and reason," the ideals by which Fidelio and Florestan live by.

The aria opens with deeply agitated music and the tempo is marked *Allegro agitato* (Example 4.12). The orchestra's first dynamic is pianissimo but then surges into a series of sforzandi before Pizarro's vocal entrance. The three "Ha's," which open the vocal line establish Pizarro's smugness. There is also a particular rhythmic pattern in his vocal line, which Beethoven reiterates throughout the aria.

¹⁰⁵ Bokina, *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze*, 82.

Example 4.12:

Allegro agitato. Viel. Str. Wind cresc. *pp*

Pizarro. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha! welch' ein Augenblick! Die Ra- che wird! ich be-
it is not too late! My ven - geance shall be

küh- len! dich, dich ru- fet dein Ge- schick! In seinem
ed! You, you go to meet your fate! To see his

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This repeated rhythmic gesture generates a feeling of uncontained rage. Its syncopation creates a powerful impact in terms of Pizarro's characterization. Another significant example of this comes in the three-repeated "Triumphs" with the baritone close to the top of his range (Example 4.13).

¹⁰⁶ Beethoven, *Fidelio*, 61.

Example 4.13:

66

umphi! Triumph! Tri - umpa!
venge! re-venge! re - venge!

der Sieg, der
Revenge on

Fl. 2
Ob.
Wind

fp *cresc.* *ff*

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The chorus enters at the end of the aria, now as guards, but does not take on an active voice.

This deeply contrasts their role in in the Act I Finale. There is no lyricism about their singing and their vocal line sits at the bottom of their range. They are left subordinate to Pizarro's vocal line and his game of vengeance, speaking only of their "prison rounds" (Example 4.14).

Example 4.14:

mein!
all!

Chorus of Guards.
(sotto voce to each other)
Tenor I & II.

Er spricht von Tod und Wun - de, nun fort auf uns-re Run - del! wie
He speaks of death and wounds now; A - way up-on your rounds now! 'Tis

Bass.

Er spricht von Tod und Wun - de, nun fort auf uns-re Run - del! wie
He speaks of death and wounds now; A - way up-on your rounds now! 'Tis

Str.

f *pp*

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It is vitally important that Beethoven establishes this dark force for the audience. He does this effectively in his composition of Pizarro's vocal line, as well as the orchestration below. The entire aria feels as though it is driving forward with unbridled power. The way in which the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

chorus interacts with Pizarro is also revealing with regard to his assumed power. They are subordinate to him out of fear for what he could do. This aria is crucial to understanding the work politically. There is nothing for Fidelio and Florestan to rise above without Pizarro. Devoid of the opera's villain, there is no context for their yearning for freedom.

At the start of Act II, the role of Florestan is introduced for the first time. The scene begins in a "dark, subterranean dungeon" far from the glimpses of freedom that the prisoners felt at the end of the previous act. While one of the central characters within the opera, "Florestan is never able to act as a true hero. Having been shackled to a rock for two years in the prison's deepest dungeon and more recently weakened by the cuts of his rations, he can merely recount the heroic action which brought him to his fate and invoke the memory of his devoted wife as solace."¹⁰⁹ Beethoven's extended orchestral introduction for this scene is fittingly haunting. The composer takes his audience on an emotional journey into the oppressive depths of the prison. To make the introduction any shorter would have been inappropriate with regard to an understanding of Florestan's physical and emotional suffering. Like that of solidifying the drama's villain in Pizarro, it is equally important to establish for the audience what Fidelio is fighting for. She fights for not only her husband but the ideals of freedom and justice.

Like that of the prisoners in the Act I Finale, it is not surprising for Florestan to speak of freedom in his opening aria. In fact, the word "freiheit (freedom)" can be found some nine times in the aria's closing section. While Florestan begins the recitative in a state of direness he soon resolves to accept his plight in life. This can be heard in the music. The aria turns heroic in the *Poco allegro* section as he envisions seeing his wife Leonora. He is filled with rapturous joy as

¹⁰⁹ Bokina, *Opera and Politics*, 75.

it is she who will free him. The high tessitura alternates between G4 and A4 with a number of high Bb4's on the word "reich (kingdom)." The orchestration is valiant in nature as Florestan proclaims that he will find his freedom albeit an illusion (Example 4.15).

Example 4.15:

Example 4.15 is a musical score from Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Act II, Scene 1. It features the vocal line of Florestan (F.) and the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in German and English. The music is characterized by a high tessitura for the vocal line, with notes reaching up to Bb4. The piano accompaniment is valiant in nature, with a crescendo and a final section marked "stone, hiding his face in his hands".

Lyrics (German): Freiheit in's himm-li-sche Reich, der, der führt mich zur Freiheit, zur Frei-heit in's himm - li-sche Reich, zu Freiheit, zur Freiheit in's himm - li-sche Reich, in's himm - li-sche Reich!

Lyrics (English): freedom, where pain is no more, she, she leads me to freedom, to free-dom, where pain is no more, to freedom, to freedom, where pain is no more, where pain is no more, where pain is no more!

Performance instructions: (sinks exhausted on the stone, hiding his face in his hands)

What further perpetuates the political dynamic for the audience is the fact that Florestan's imprisonment has been deemed unjust. It is this injustice, which motivates all of Fidelio's action in the opera. Her love for her husband, and more importantly her desire to set him free, provide her one and only motivation.

The final example from *Fidelio*, which addresses the opera's political themes, is the Act II Quartet, "Er Sterbe!"

Thus when Leonore steps between the tyrannical Pizarro and Florestan with her pistol, the force of inhumanity is temporarily checked by the counter-force of

¹¹⁰ Beethoven, *Fidelio*, 147.

humanity. Then the famous trumpet call is heard, according to Ernst Bloch, “pronouncing the Savior’s arrival.” That is to say, in *Fidelio*, Beethoven’s music proves itself to be the aesthetic representation of the timeless resistance against the inhuman.¹¹¹

This marks the most important sequence in the opera. Leonora is willing to sacrifice her life for that of her husband. While she does brandish a pistol, there is no knowing what might happen next. That is why the trumpet calls, and in essence, the music, become so pivotal not only for the lives of those in the depths of the prison but also for political justice. It confirms for the audience that freedom will prevail with the arrival of the minister, Don Fernando (Examples 4.16 & 4.17).

Example 4.16:

(quickly presenting a pistol at him) Un poco sostenuto.

L. die - se Brust! Noch ei-nen Laut, und du bist tod! die!
P. my own breast! Say one more word, and you shall die!

ihm, den Tod mit ihm!
death, to meet your death!

Un poco sostenuto.
(The trumpet sounds)

from the tower)

Strings

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¹¹¹ Ramin Jahanbegloo, “The Spirit of Fidelio: Resistance Against the Inhuman,” (October 15, 2012), accessed February 13, 2015, <http://jahanbegloo.com/content/spirit-fidelio-resistance-against-inhuman>.

¹¹² Beethoven, *Fidelio*, 180.

Example 4.17:

The image displays a musical score for a scene from an opera. It features five staves: four vocal staves (L, P, T, B) and one piano accompaniment staff. The vocal parts have lyrics in both German and French. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *p*, *cresc.*, and *piu f*, along with a stage direction in parentheses: "(The trumpet sounds more loudly. Jaquino, officers and soldiers appear on the stairway with torches.)". The page number 113 is visible in the bottom right corner of the score.

Lyrics (German/French):

- Gott! / prais'd! / gro - - sser / God - - be / Gott! / prais'd!
- Tod! / hell! / Höll' und / Death and - hell! / Tod! / der Mi - ni - ster! / Don Fer - nan - do!
- Gott! / God! / ge - rech - - - ter / Al - might - - - y / Gott! / God!

Another example of institutional ideology addressed in opera is Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. The work is an example of grand opera and premiered in Paris on February 29, 1836. The libretto was written by Eugene Scribe and Emile Deschamps. The confrontation between Protestants and Catholics was a popular subject of the time. In addition to this opera, it was used in numerous play settings of the 1820's and in novels including Mérimée's *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* (1829). Mérimée's novel was used in the creation of Hérold's opéra comique, *Le pré aux clercs* (1832).¹¹⁴

In Act IV of the *Les Huguenots*, Meyerbeer presents the Catholics conspiring against the Huguenots (Protestants). The drama directly references the historical events of the St. Bartholomew Massacre where thousands of lives were lost. As Parakilas notes, the composer's

¹¹³ Ibid., 181.

¹¹⁴ Steven Huebner, "Huguenots, Les," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O008109>

approach is interesting with respect to how the Catholics are presented. The typical approach in opera is to present those conspiring as those seeking freedom from oppression. Meyerbeer, however, reverses this role with the conspirators representing the powerful monarchy and Catholic Church. The audience is thus left with an unsympathetic view of their conspiring since they are not seeking freedom, but intolerant control. Perhaps even more unusual is the fact there are Catholics presented in the act who are against attacking the Protestants. Normally, opponents of the cause would be left out of such a scene.¹¹⁵

In Act V of the opera, Valentine (who is Catholic) agrees to convert to Raoul's faith so that they can marry one another. Shortly thereafter, Catholic assassins descend upon them shooting Raoul. Valentine's father, Saint-Bris, comes upon them and learning that they are Huguenots, orders them to be killed. Tragically, Saint-Bris does not realize that his daughter Valentine is amongst them. On a personal level, this final act is important for it shows two individuals (Valentine and Raoul) moving beyond their religious differences to find unity in one another. This is done by Valentine's brave conversion to Raoul's faith. Valentine also shows the outstanding ability to forgive as she tells her father that she will pray for him even though he was the one who killed her. Perhaps more disturbing though is the presentation of religious fanaticism evidenced in both the behavior and plotting of the Catholics and Protestants against one another. Raoul could have converted to Catholicism or lied about his own faith when the assassins came upon him. This would have saved his life, as well as Valentine's. So entrenched in his own faith, however, he accepts the grave consequences of standing up for his own religion. In his actions, as well as those of Saint-Bris and the conspirators, Meyerbeer presents the powerful grip and dire consequences that religious fanaticism can have on one's beliefs. Thus,

¹¹⁵ Parakilas, *The Story of Opera*, 286.

Parakilas aptly defines the opera's overarching theme by stating that "fanaticism breeds more fanaticism."¹¹⁶ A similar type of fanaticism is without a doubt present in *The Crucible* amongst the church goers and witchcraft accusers.

D. Allegory

A fourth way in which an opera can be political is in its allegorical associations. As has been previously stated, one of the motivating factors for Arthur Miller in writing *The Crucible* was the connection he was able to make between the witch-hunts of Salem 1692 and those taking place in the 1950s. Miller was fascinated by the events of Salem since his days as a student, but finally, the political climate in Washington necessitated a type of response, albeit a thinly veiled one.¹¹⁷ The play and subsequent operatic adaptation serve as stories within themselves.

The most vivid example of this allegorical association comes in the Act III courtroom scene when Giles Corey and the Proctors are presented before Judge Danforth. This type of inquisition is probably not unlike those hearings conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee.

McCarthyism became a synonym for reckless allegations of communist and pro-communist attitudes and activities, largely for the purpose of political gain. Not long after McCarthy was condemned by the Senate in late 1954, Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., national chairman of Americans for Democratic Action, declared the McCarthy Era at an end, explaining 'There was real and rational fear of total war, directed at specific people – the Communists. It was the deliberate exploitation of this fear by a group of desperate men in the Republican party that produced McCarthyism.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 287.

¹¹⁷ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 44.

¹¹⁸ Thomas C. Reeves, "McCarthyism: Interpretations since Hofstadter," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 60, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 44.

A similar “exploitation of fear” existed in Salem in 1692. It occurred in the opening scene of the opera when Thomas and Ann Putnam convinced Reverend Parris that calling in the assistance of Reverend Hale was needed for there were witches in Salem.

This fear also existed in Act II when Ezekiel Cheever arrives at the Proctor home to arrest Elizabeth. Abigail Williams has charged her with using a poppet in an attempt to murder her.

The exchange that follows is here:

HALE: Goody Proctor, do you keep poppets?

ELIZABETH: Why no, not since I was a child.

HALE: Well then, our business here is done.

CHEEVER: But I spy a poppet.

ALL: What! What is it?

CHEEVER: The very poppet, your wife’s poppet. The needle in the belly here, the belly of her poppet.

ELIZABETH: I do not understand. What signifies this child’s poppet, and this needle?

CHEEVERS: This needle signifies murder, your murder of Abigail Williams.

ELIZABETH: The girl herself is murder! She should be ripped out of this world.

CHEEVER: “Ripped out of this world,” you heard that, ev’ryone, you heard that. “Ripped out of this world,” the court must hear this.¹¹⁹

Neither Reverend Hale nor Ezekiel Cheever know that Abigail Williams has had an affair with John. They do not realize the pain that this has caused Elizabeth. Knowing the history between the two women, it would seem perfectly reasonable for Elizabeth to respond with “the girl herself is murder! She should be ripped out of this world!” Hale must bring her in to be

¹¹⁹ Ward, *The Crucible*, 153-154.

questioned, however, given the information he has. Like Senator McCarthy, Abigail is able to exploit the fear of those in Salem by making unsubstantiated claims.

This is further demonstrated in the courtroom scene in Act III. After John has confessed to lechery before Judge Danforth and the entire court, Elizabeth is brought in to corroborate his story; however, she lies in an attempt to protect her husband. Reverend Hale interjects with the following:

HALE: No, no it is a natural lie to tell. I beg you, stop now before it is too late. Do not condemn another innocent, I beg you...there is private vengeance working in these trials.

DANFORTH: But she spoke nothing of lechery. This man has lied.

HALE: I believe him. This girl has always struck me false. She has...

ABIGAIL: Yellow bird!¹²⁰

What proceeds from this can best be described as pure chaos. As Hale begins to acknowledge Abigail's manipulation as "private vengeance" and tries to convince Danforth of such, she quickly interjects with a series of "yellow birds." This is to distract the entire court away from what Hale has just said. She realizes that she may become vulnerable if the questioning is turned on her. Abigail even cries out that Mary Warren is clawing at her face. When Mary tells her to stop, Abby just mocks her as if she were in a trance. The rest of the girls follow Abby's lead and join in with similar utterings.

John desperately pleads with Mary Warren, to tell the truth that it was her poppet that Cheever found in the house and that Abby is fabricating the whole story. In an attempt to save herself, though, Mary accuses John instead. She cries out that he is the "Devil's Man" and continues with the following:

¹²⁰ Ibid., 219-221.

MARY: “My wife will never hang; we will overthrow the court,” he say. He come and wake me every night, his eyes like burning coals.

JOHN: Mister Hale.

MARY: His icy fingers claw my back, “sign the book; sign the Devil’s book,” he say. And I sign.

HALE: Your Honor, the girl is mad;

JOHN: Mary!

HALE: ...stark raving mad.

JOHN: Mary!

MARY: No, I love God.¹²¹

It is interesting how Abigail is able to exploit the fear of the court and specifically, Mary Warren. Despite Hales’ own admission that he feels Abigail is not to be trusted, the mob mentality takes hold of the court and turns on John Proctor. John came before the court to save his wife but now is accused of conspiring with the devil himself. *The Crucible* “is at its most powerful in [the courtroom] scene because the playwright is dramatizing with clean precision the process by which psychological terror in the service of a clear and present evil may paralyze the collective mind and will of society.”¹²² This is clearly felt in Ward’s adaptation.

In Act IV of the opera, a chilling exchange takes place between Danforth and Hale. Hale warns the judge that the court in Beverly has been overthrown and this too could happen in Salem. Parris quickly enters the scene to inform them that Abigail has fled town and stolen money from him. Hale is confident that with this new information the Judge will release the Proctors; however, that is not the case.

HALE: Now where’s your case against the Proctors? Who now stands against them?

¹²¹ Ibid., 232-234.

¹²² Ferres, "Introduction," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres, 19.

DANFORTH: I do. I do by God. Beguile yourselves no more. For they shall confess or they shall hang. Till justice is done I shall remain.

PARRIS: But your Honor, those we hang this morning are a very dangerous sort. These people carry great weight in the town. Rebecca Nurse upon the gibbet will wake a vengeance against us. Today, today when I open my door a glittering dagger clatters to the floor.

DANFORTH: What are you asking? Come to the point.

HALE: Postpone these hangings. Say you strive for confessions.

DANFORTH: I'll do no such. And know you this: to quell rebellion in this land I'd draw and quarter ten thousand men. While I speak God's law I will no crack His voice with whimpering.¹²³

What is disturbing about this scene is the unwillingness of Danforth to see through Abigail's lies. Or if he does acknowledge that she is fabricating the whole story, for him, it is more important that the town respects his authority than clear the names of John Proctor and Rebecca Nurse. In this scene, it becomes evident that Danforth perverts his power in the name of religion to control the narrative. In his opinion, the people must fear him and his authority.

At the end of the opera, John says that he will confess to witchcraft to save his life; however, he refuses to sign the confession. Judge Danforth will not accept any other course of action. Here is their exchange:

DANFORTH: Do you sport with me? Sign or there is no confession.

PROCTOR: But why must I sign? All of you have heard my confession.

PARRIS: The village must have proof.¹²⁴

The spectacle has gone on too long for Danforth not to have proof to show the rest of the village, even if it is a lie. He must illustrate that he has been successful in his pursuit of freeing Salem of its witches. He cannot claim to have solved the issue without a signed confession from Proctor.

¹²³ Ward, *The Crucible*, 254-258.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 275.

The problem, however, is that he does not account for John's internal struggle of his own morality. John sees that Rebecca Nurse refuses to confess nor sign her name. Verbally confessing to witchcraft is one matter as it will save his life. Nailing his confession to the church door for all to see, however, would be the ultimate betrayal of truth and goodness and John cannot do it. He sings:

PROCTOR: I am John Proctor, I have three sons. If this is nailed to the church door on the very day that Rebecca hangs for her silence, how can I teach my sons to walk like men? With my sins I blacken them forever. You may tell them I confessed myself. Tell them Proctor broke his knees. Tell them what you will, but I shall not sign.¹²⁵

The final scene is a critical point in the opera. It serves both as a public refusal, but more importantly, personal closure for John. He has lived with such darkness in his heart that he has forgotten what is good. Although it will cost him his life, by refusing to sign the document he can save his name. For what that name represents is the truth. He saves the truth by giving his life. It is deeply haunting that such an atrocity could happen to innocent people. Power and authority are important to social structure, but this serves as a constant reminder about what the exploitation of fear can cause. Modern society must remain ever vigilant to unsubstantiated claims, especially when it affects the lives of innocent people.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 277-278.

Chapter Five – The lens of relationship in *The Crucible*

Quite often the personal is taken out of politics, but for opera it is essential. When analyzing the political, people often neglect motivations or relationships, but opera can help demonstrate an important point that there are often personal reasons underlying a political situation. It is easy to forget that there were mothers and fathers, sons and daughters lost as a result of the hangings in Salem 1692. Reputations were destroyed at the hands of false accusations from good Christian men and women. They turned their back on their neighbors with help from an all too authoritative government. But one must ask why these people did such things. What was their motivation? Opera can help illustrate answers to such questions. However complicated or simple a political issue may be, at the heart of politics there are people and without them, it simply cannot exist.

To understand an opera one must look upon its central characters and their relationships with one another. Without a wife's unwavering love for her husband, an unjust imprisonment is not rectified. Without an attempt by two different countries to find common ground, one does not realize that despite differences all humans have similar fears. Without a once good man coming to terms with his own fleeting power and how his actions affect others, there is no recognition that class does not have to matter when it comes to intelligence.

It can be argued that to truly understand the political nature of a work, analysis must first seek to understand the people of the story. It is easy to make a surface-level assessment of individuals. What greater ideal do they represent? This can be an easy answer if they belong to

a particular ideology as a certain understanding of their beliefs could be assumed. That, however, is not enough for opera.

Opera requires one to look deeper at the situation. Why can an audience both love and hate John Proctor at the end of *The Crucible*? It is because they have an understanding of who he is through his relationships. Whether one agrees with his positions is secondary in a quest to understand the opera politically. By looking at the individual first and thereby his or her relationships there is the potential for a better understanding of them and subsequently, a more inclusive assessment of the political dynamics in opera. At the heart of every political opera, there exists a relationship or two, which becomes a vital component of the work. While a political idea, theme, or event may draw an audience to a particular piece, it is these relationships, which become fundamental.

As previously stated, *The Crucible* represents a time in history where one could be accused of being a witch and could hang for it. There was little evidence needed to convict someone. Those in Salem “felt free to act precisely because they had no doubts about the justice and righteousness of their cause. To them, civil laws and the laws of God were nearly the same thing; consequently, they allowed no dissent.”¹²⁶ This certainly provided a way for Miller to tie the events of Salem and Washington together in the original conception of the work. This is also highlighted in Ward’s opera; the fact that no one seemed to question why someone was making an allegation in the first place. No one was held accountable for their accusations. To understand the work, however, one must seek to comprehend the personal back story of its main characters and what led them to this point. Thus, the single most important question when

¹²⁶ James J. Martine, *The Crucible: Politics, Policies, and Pretense* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 5.

analyzing the opera is why did Abigail Williams charge Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft in the first place?

With this question in mind, *The Crucible* allows the audience to move beyond witchcraft. “The Crucible, while based on historical events of the Salem trials of 1692, is not merely a work about blind, religious fanaticism and rampant hysteria. It is also concerned with commitment and the often fragile nature of relationships: husband and wife, man and neighbor, the individual and the community, man and his God.”¹²⁷ It provides an exploration into the life of a farmer and his relations with his estranged wife, and his former mistress. If it were not for John’s affair with his former servant, it is plausible that these events could have been much different, at least with respect to the Proctor’s involvement. Abigail ultimately accuses Elizabeth of being a witch as a way of getting back with John. This was one of the fascinating realities for Miller when he first conceived of the play: that Abigail refused to accuse John of being a witch like she does his wife.¹²⁸ She refuses to do so because she still is in love with him albeit an immature adoration. It is Abigail seeking revenge on Elizabeth that creates much of hysteria in Salem. It creates a domino effect of destruction, however, provides John with the opportunity for his own redemption.

A. The Relationship of John and Elizabeth

In his dissertation, “A comparative analysis of dramatic works and their twentieth-century operatic adaptations,” Fox writes that Elizabeth takes on a larger role in the opera due to deliberate changes made by Ward and his librettist, Bernard Stambler. These musical and textual

¹²⁷ Larry Phillip Fox, “A comparative analysis of dramatic works and their twentieth-century operatic adaptations” (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 1992), 79.

¹²⁸ M. W. Steinberg, “Arthur Miller and the Idea of Modern Tragedy,” in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), 100.

changes serve to better define her relationship with John, as well as make her a more central operatic figure.”¹²⁹ Elizabeth’s enhancement in the opera paves the way for a greater understanding of the dynamic between her and her husband. Elizabeth is vital to John’s own development. Without her support, he cannot become the tragic hero in the end. As will be seen in the following examples, the state of the Proctor marriage develops and matures over the course of the opera.

1. Act II

There is a stark contrast in the musical material, which opens Act II with that of Act I. The frantic ways of the Parris home are relieved as the action moves to the Proctor farm. At the start of Act II, Ward provides the audience with its first real glimpse of John Proctor. Perhaps similar to a Wagnerian leitmotif, Ward introduces John Proctor with his own musical theme in the opening orchestral passage (Example 5.18).¹³⁰

Example 5.18a:



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¹²⁹ Fox, “A comparative analysis of dramatic works and their twentieth-century operatic adaptations,” 92.

¹³⁰ Woliver, “Robert Ward’s *The Crucible*: a critical commentary,” 52.

¹³¹ Ward, *The Crucible*, 110.

There is a sense of freedom to this music and an earthiness reflective of a man of nature. This moving passage, which features heavy brass and strings, repeats twice. This theme returns at the start of John's vocal entrance.

Example 5.18b:

The musical score for Example 5.18b features three staves. The top staff is for Elizabeth (ELIZ.) with the lyrics "It's near - ly dark." and "Es ist schon Nacht." The middle staff is for John (JOHN) with the lyrics "To - day I want - ed to fin - ish my plant - ing" and "Ich woll - te heu - te das Pflanz - en be - en - den". The bottom staff is for piano accompaniment, marked with "(Sw)", "pp", and "legato". A red rectangular box highlights the piano accompaniment for John's vocal line, specifically the measures corresponding to the lyrics "To - day I want - ed to fin - ish my plant - ing".

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In John's opening soliloquy, the audience is exposed to the depths of his yearning for better days. He cannot wait for the fields to turn green again. For John, there is optimism in the fact that despite the dark days of winter there will be better ones ahead. It is hard not to draw a parallel between this and his marriage. He yearns to move past the darkness of his affair.

This powerful music is interrupted with Elizabeth's first vocal entrance. There is skepticism in the music, which accompanies her first words: "What keeps you so late, it's nearly dark?" The music quickly returns to John's theme. When he says "pray you now for a warm and speedy summer," Elizabeth responds with pessimism, concluding that no prayer of hers is ever answered. He suggests that she bring flowers into the house because it is "still like winter in here." This has both literal and figurative meaning. John wants to move on from his past affair; however, Elizabeth is still in pain as result of his infidelity. John concludes his aria with a repeated line "it's a good time is Spring Time!" With spring there is the opportunity for a fresh

¹³² Ibid.

start. Winter is a metaphor for Elizabeth's brokenness while spring represents John's desire to move forward.

This optimism gives way to the reality that is his wife. Elizabeth is skeptical of why he is returning home so late. The temperature in the Proctor marriage could be best described as cold and sterile at the start of Act II. "The crime of adultery that Elizabeth continues to probe and to worry over has already been adequately punished and repented for, but Elizabeth will never permit herself to forget it."¹³³ It is clear that Elizabeth no longer trusts John.

The tension only increases when John learns that Abigail is leading the witchcraft accusations in Salem. Elizabeth pleads with her husband to set the record straight. He must tell Salem that Abby is lying, but all he can muster is that "He'll think on it!" She pushes him further inferring that if he refuses to go to Salem, it must be that he does not want harm to come to Abigail. John explodes with:

JOHN: Let you not judge me. Let you look to your own improvement. I've forgotten Abigail, do you understand? I've forgotten, but you forget nothin' you forgive nothin'. Learn charity Elizabeth. I've gone tiptoe in this house since she is gone. I have not moved from here to there without I think to try and to please you. And still an everlastin' fun'ral marches around your heart. I cannot speak but I am doubted, every moment judged for lies as tho' I come into a court when I come into this house...¹³⁴

This passage gives evidence to the rockiness of the Proctor marriage. The references to an "everlastin' fun'ral" and "court" are particularly spiteful remarks. It is clear that John is frustrated that Elizabeth cannot move on from the past like he has. That, of course, is easier for John as he is the one who cheated. He takes for granted Elizabeth's feelings in his eagerness to move on. He does, however, shed light on the fact that in order for them to restore their marriage she must find a way to forgive him.

¹³³ Ferres, "Introduction," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres, 79.

¹³⁴ Ward, *The Crucible*, 121-123.

John goes on further to make the point that Abby will retaliate if he goes to Salem to expose her fraud. What that ultimately means is that his lechery will be exposed and they will have to deal with the damage it will cause their reputation in Salem. The section ends with a passionate demand of “I tell you judge me not!” Ward masterfully ends this passage on a high F, which is at the top of the baritone’s range, adding further tension to the situation.

Rather than exploding herself, Elizabeth coldly responds with the following remark to John:

ELIZABETH: I do not judge you John. The court that judges you sits in your own heart.¹³⁵

What is interesting is the ramifications that this line has at the end of the opera. It is this moral “court,” which prevents John from signing his name to a false confession. By admitting to his affair later in the opera he frees himself from the burden that his secret inflicts. As passionate as John’s previous vocal passages were, he is immediately put in his place by Elizabeth. The state of their marriage is a direct result of his actions, not hers. But now, with innocent people being accused of witchcraft, Elizabeth feels that her husband has the moral obligation to do something about it. Furthermore, she believes that Abigail will not damn herself and expose their affair.

Elizabeth’s aria ends with these powerful lines:

ELIZABETH: All this week I’ve been haunted by fear of what she may do next. She has an arrow in you yet, and she will twist it home. You must tear yourself free of her, free of her! You must, John, you must, you must. You will tear yourself free of her. For know that I will be your only wife, know that John, your only wife, or no wife at all.¹³⁶

What Elizabeth ultimately fears is that she will be replaced as a result of a soft place in John’s heart for Abby. It is clear that she still loves her husband, but he must prove that he is willing to

¹³⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 133-135.

do all he can to redeem the situation. By ignoring the present witchcraft accusations, John ignores Elizabeth's feelings. By refusing to act, he minimizes her and the importance of their marriage. Elizabeth does much in the way of John's personal development in the opera as she forces him to once and for all face Abigail.

In this first encounter between John and Elizabeth, there is a division both textually and musically. Ward purposely avoids a duet vocally between the two. Instead, he has their lines interject with one another. This contrasts the end of the opera when they have made their peace and sing together.¹³⁷ This opening scene sets in motion John's own redemption. Elizabeth makes it very clear that John must choose a side.

2. Act III, Courtroom Scene

The second moment in the opera that is significant in John and Elizabeth's relationship is the Act III Courtroom scene. At the end of Act II, Elizabeth has been taken away as a result of Abigail's accusing her of trying to murder her. While hopeful that Mary Warren will testify that this is all a lie, John quickly realizes that in order to expose Abigail as a fraud he must admit to his lechery. This public confession is important for it serves as proof that he is putting his wife first. He is willing to bare his past sins for the sake of the truth. By admitting to his affair with Abigail though, he leaves himself wide open to her retaliation.

What is ironic and further perpetuates the dramatic tension in this scene is the fact that Elizabeth lies about John's affair when pressed by Judge Danforth. She does so in an attempt to save him and his name. This is ironic though since "[f]or seventeenth-century Puritans, the worst of sins was to lie, which represented a breaking of one's faith, one's reputation, one's

¹³⁷ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 82.

name. But *name* for Miller's character means not only one's reputation but being true to oneself."¹³⁸ This makes the scene complicated and tragic. In order to save his name, John must expose the truth, which will surely damage his reputation in the town. The honest Elizabeth is keen on how those in Salem will view him and their family. Ironically then, she decides to lie and thus damns herself.

Nonetheless, for Elizabeth, this is a turning point in the opera, as well. Despite all her anger and pain she ultimately chooses to protect her husband.

DANFORTH: Look at me. To your knowledge did John Proctor commit the crime of lechery with Abigail Williams?

ELIZABETH: Oh, no sir, no.

DANFORTH: Remove her, remove her Mister Parris.

JOHN: Elizabeth, tell the truth... Elizabeth, Elizabeth, I have confessed it.

ELIZABETH: Oh John, oh John, my God!¹³⁹

Although the result of her lie is that the town turns on John and thus, seems like a grave mistake, it is important in the way of restoring their marriage. Both John confessing to lechery and Elizabeth lying to save her husband are done in an attempt to preserve what they have. "All attention goes to [Elizabeth] as she is asked the critical question. And, for once, in a moment of high excitement and suspense, this model of truthfulness lies because she values something more than the truth—her husband's good name."¹⁴⁰ If Elizabeth has contempt for John, she surely would have relished the town knowing his lecherous acts. She would rather live with the pain of his affair and lie than have him suffer any backlash. This same type of unconditional love exists in the *Fidelio*. Leonora is willing to risk it all to save her husband.

¹³⁸ Martine, *The Crucible: Politics, Policies, and Pretense*, 64.

¹³⁹ Ward, *The Crucible*, 217-219.

¹⁴⁰ Ferres, "Introduction," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres, 81.

3. Act IV

The third and most critical interaction between the Proctors comes in Act IV. Judge Danforth has agreed to spare John's life, but only if he confesses to being a witch. Here is their exchange:

JOHN: Elizabeth, I've been thinkin' that I would confess. What say you?

ELIZABETH: As you will, so I would have it. But John, I want you living.

JOHN: I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. Will you forgive me if I lie?

ELIZABETH: John, oh John, it was my lie that brought you here. I, not you, should ask forgiveness. It's a cold wife that drives her man to lechery.

JOHN: No, no. I will not hear it.

ELIZABETH: I counted myself so very plain, so poorly made, that no honest love could come to me. Suspicion kissed you when I did; I never knew how I should say my love. But know this now, as I know it. Whatever you will do, it's a good man's doing.

JOHN: Whatever I will do, will you forgive me?

ELIZABETH: Whatever you will do, whatever way you go, oh John, I will go by your side.

In this moment, the audience witnesses the restoration of the Proctor marriage. Both admit to making mistakes, but they forgive each other. This still leaves John, however, with a decision to make.

John wrestles with the notion of being "good" throughout the opera. He has worn a façade of sorts in the town until his Act III confession. While he has never had the respect of all those in Salem as evidenced by his interaction with Thomas Putnam in Act I, he and his family were always thought of as being good people. As a result of the hysteria in Salem though, the town has turned on him and his name. That is why it is so important that Elizabeth reaffirms John as a good man.

For Puritans, "[r]eputation served as an indispensable guide to the state of grace, for it was an outward sign of election."¹⁴¹ That is why John refuses to sign his name to his confession.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 82.

He must preserve his name for the sake of his soul. If he chooses to lie to save his life his good name means nothing for he will have submitted to a false truth. Surely, that is not the action of a good person. Though it costs him his life, by refusing to sign his name he is able to restore his own goodness. He sings:

JOHN: I can [hang]. And there's your first marvel that I can. You have made your magic now. For now I do think I see some shred of goodness, some goodness in John Proctor. It's not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs...¹⁴²

John is unable to make this decision though without Elizabeth's blessing. Her saying that she will be by his side whatever he chooses gives him the courage to refuse to sign his confession. He very well could have signed his name to save his life, but he would have to live with the guilt of turning his back on himself and God.

The idea of goodness returns in the last line of the opera sung by Elizabeth. Here is the exchange below.

DANFORTH: Hang them high over the town! Who weeps for these weeps for corruption.

REBECCA: I've had no breakfast.

PARRIS: Go to him, go to him, Goody Proctor, there is yet time.

HALE: Please with him, plead with woman! It is pride. It is vanity. Be his helper. What profit him to die? Shall the dust praise him? Shall the worm declare his truth? Go to him, go to him, woman. Take away his shame.

ELIZABETH: He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ibid., 281-283.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Elizabeth's "greatest advance is reaching the point, in the... ultimate moment, when she can recognize and understand her husband's motivation as she allows him to go to his death..."¹⁴⁴

By forgiving her husband, Elizabeth frees John to restore his name and thereby frees his soul.

B. The Relationship of John and Abigail

Every drama needs a villain and Abigail Williams is the perfect one. She has the power to manipulate all those she encounters and uses that facility to effectively brainwash most of Salem. Some might argue that the role of Judge Danforth is villainous too; however, the difference is that he believed that there were witches in Salem. While he is ignorant in his theocracy, he is only in Salem as a result of the hysteria, which Abby perpetuates. She represents the dark side of John Proctor; a side that he has kept hidden from all those in town.

It could be argued that throughout the opera John Proctor struggles to maintain his own self-image while carrying the burden of his infidelity. The town of Salem believes him to be a man of great character, but his extramarital relations have torn his personal life apart. At the heart of his infidelity are the unresolved feelings he has for Abigail. Although John has been forthright with Elizabeth regarding his affair, Abigail continues to have a significant impact on his life.

The role of Abigail is the most important character in the opera, second to only John Proctor. While the opera unveils John's journey towards ultimate redemption, Abigail's relentless pursuit of destroying the lives of others is a necessary evil. What is more important, however, is to understand why she did the things she did. Without this information, Ward's operatic adaptation would be left incomplete.

¹⁴⁴ Martine, *The Crucible: Politics, Policies, and Pretense*, 55.

1. Act III, Scene in the Woods

The first important interaction between John and Abigail is the opening scene of Act III where the audience sees them together for the first time. Interestingly, the scene was deleted by Arthur Miller after the play's opening performance. Miller only included it at the request of the stage director but decided later that it ought not to be in the play. It seems fortuitous then that Ward attended a performance of the play by the Manhattan Theatre Club. In their revival of *The Crucible*, they included the deleted scene.¹⁴⁵ Ward felt that "were the scene combined with the Act I confrontation between Proctor and Abigail (in which the fraudulent witchcraft accusations are exposed), character development would be enhanced by revealing important nuances of their relationship."¹⁴⁶ These "nuances" are vital to understanding the effect that Abigail still has on John.

Since Ward had a good working relationship with the playwright during composition, he received permission from Miller to use the scene, as well as to make changes to the text and its placement in the opera. Kolt writes that:

The scene serves as a dramaturgical respite between Elizabeth Proctor's emotionally charged arrest and the forthcoming courtroom drama. This scene afforded Ward the opportunity to develop further the characterizations of John Proctor and Abigail Williams. The scene was originally written into the play, but was later cut by Miller. Ward and Stambler, however, saw it as being significant to furthering the drama.¹⁴⁷

Without Abigail Williams, the opera lacks substance. As cited earlier, there were other reasons why someone might accuse another of witchcraft, but stolen property hardly provides an interesting backstory. There is a motive with Abigail's unresolved passion for John and

¹⁴⁵ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

subsequent hatred for Elizabeth. And “by placing [the scene] in act three, the action has progressed to the point of Elizabeth’s arrest – an event precipitated by Abigail, who, as a result, appears even more despicable and cleverly manipulative.”¹⁴⁸ Without the dramatic triangle of John, Elizabeth, and Abigail, the opera would lack a compelling story. Ward recognizes the need to include this particular interaction so that his audience can understand a “whore’s vengeance.”

Abigail Williams is “the antagonist of the opera. She is seventeen and possessed with an infatuation for John. Ward characterizes Abigail as a sensuous girl who twists her sexual feelings and mock spirituality into a pious self-righteousness.”¹⁴⁹ Like the previous acts with respect to setting the mood, this type of sensuality is evident in the orchestral opening of Act III. (Example 5.19).

¹⁴⁸ Fox, “A comparative analysis of dramatic works and their twentieth-century operatic adaptations,” 101.

¹⁴⁹ Woliver, “Robert Ward’s *The Crucible*: a critical commentary,” 58.

Example 5.19:

Adagio (♩ = 48)

pp (F#) (Vcl) mp (Vcl) pp (Vcl) mp (Vcl)

pp cresc. e accel. (Vcl) (Vcl)

(Vcl) (Vcl)

(♩ = 132) molto riten.

150

The dynamic swells within the orchestra create a feeling of serious passion. Unlike John's Act II motive, there is a sense of unresolved emotion here. The music builds in intensity before Abigail's first vocal entrance. Clearly, she has misinterpreted John's request for a meeting given her opening phrase:

ABIGAIL: John, I knew you'd come back to me. Night after night, I been waitin' for you.

JOHN: No, no, you could not.

ABIGAIL: I cannot sleep for dreamin', I cannot dream but I wake and walk about thinkin' I'd find you comin' through some door. Oh John, my love. ¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ward, *The Crucible*, 168.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 169-170.

To further support the emotional state of Abigail, Ward uses dynamic extremes almost every other measure. He uses a series of crescendos and decrescendos, as well as markings of *mp* then *mf*. John tries to interject, but Abby continues with:

ABIGAIL: Come to me now as you came before, like some great stallion pantin' for me.
We are free now, free to love.¹⁵²

Abigail hopes to awaken feelings in John that he once had for her, but he continues to protest. Her vivid imagery of a “great stallion” is meant to lure John back. It is important to note that in the first measure of each of the two phrases Ward uses a triplet rhythm. This choice helps to further depict the excitement of Abigail by delaying the arrival of the strong beat. He also doubles her vocal line in the strings.

As the score indicates, John pushes Abigail away and reestablishes his purpose for the meeting. He sings:

JOHN: We are not free I say. Elizabeth lies in jail accused by you. The villages lies under a curse, your curse. That is why I'm here, to tell you must free them. You can and you must.¹⁵³

While John's intentions are very different from Abigail, Ward uses a similar approach in his use of dynamics. To contrast the doubling which exists in Abigail's vocal line, however, the orchestra now moves in frantic, stepwise motion. Coupled with an *accelerando*, Ward creates a sense of urgency in the music and vocal line for John must persuade Abigail to confess. Ward also uses a triplet rhythm here, but on the second beat as opposed to the third and fourth found in

¹⁵² Ibid., 170-171.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 171-172.

Abigail's vocal lines. By placing the triplet on different beats, Ward helps differentiate the two characters and their motivations.

The music moves back to the previous tempo (*a tempo piu mosso*) as Abigail arrogantly replies:

ABIGAIL: I am freeing them from their own corruption. I am possessed by the spirit, I open them to God, these psalm-singin' hypocrites who say I danced with the Devil. Let them suffer for it now who must. But someday they will come to me and thank me on their knees.¹⁵⁴

Although both seem to agree about the religious hypocrisy in Salem, this comment outrages John as he struggles to understand Abigail's complete disregard for ruining the lives of others. He cannot accept that someone who he once thought of so fondly could be a "monster of evil." In a final effort to change John's mind Abigail drops her cloak and sings:

ABIGAIL: I look only for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart. For him that awakened me and taught me to love. Oh John, John you too are possessed of the spirit of God.¹⁵⁵

Clearly a reference to their former sexual relations, John is initially taken aback; however, her insinuation that her behavior is "God-driven" and that he is in fact just like her, is too much for him to handle. With a newfound conviction, John mocks her self-described "holy work" in dramatic fashion. Particularly striking is his "The spirit of God?" as it moves from a high F# to G. This is at the height of the baritone's vocal range and therefore, fitting of John's fury. He sings:

JOHN: The spirit of God?

ABIGAIL: Leave Elizabeth, your sickly wife...

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 173-174.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 175-176.

JOHN: Speak nothin' of Elizabeth.

ABIGAIL: ...together let us do our holy work.

JOHN: Holy work you call it. It's fraud, pretense and fraud, and I shall expose it.¹⁵⁶

This is another turning point in the opera for John as he has now taken his first step toward his own redemption. In this moment, he makes it clear that he will choose his wife. Expectedly hurt and stunned, Abigail quickly attacks by saying:

ABIGAIL: Call it what you will. Do what you like. But if your sniveling Elizabeth dies, remember, remember, it is you who kill her.¹⁵⁷

As with the opening phrases analyzed above, Ward uses a vast amount of contrasting dynamics and tempi to support the drama of the scene.

Of the Scene in the Woods, "Although Ward maintained the common-time meter he proposed in the manuscript, the rhythmic values, melodic curves, and singers' vocal ranges were crafted mainly to highlight Proctor's desperation and Abigail's madness."¹⁵⁸ This is surely evident when watching this interaction unfold. There is a formality in the opera with regard to the Puritan way and this scene breaks that pattern. Again, as stated above, this is probably the most crucial interaction for John and Abigail in the opera. It is a necessary step in John's own redemption and provides important context regarding their previous relations.

2. Act III, Courtroom Scene

The second important moment with regard to John and Abigail comes later in Act III in the courtroom scene. Specifically, it is the instant when John confesses to being a lecher. As

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 176-178.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹⁵⁸ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 152.

attention is drawn to her by Mary Warren, Abigail tries to distract all those present. Abigail says that Mary has “cast a shadow” on her. John has had enough with her childish ways and cries out:

JOHN: How do you call heaven? Whore! Whore!

DANFORTH: What! What’s that?

PARRIS: What!

JOHN: I have known her, sir. I have known her.

DANFORTH: You are a lecher?

JOHN: Yes, with her in my own house. And now she thinks to dance with me on my wife’s grave. And well she might for once I thought on her softly. But this, your Honor, is a whore’s vengeance.

DANFORTH: Do you deny this?

ABIGAIL: I shall not answer it.

JOHN: I have ruined my name, but now you know the truth. Now you know why my wife is accused. *She* knew a whore when she saw one, and put her out on the high road.¹⁵⁹

This marks the beginning of the end for John. It is true that he could have gone on lying about his past with Abigail and continued to push Danforth to see that it is all a hoax. That, however, would not give the necessary context for Abigail’s accusations. By admitting to lechery John provides the court with Abigail’s true motivation for accusing Elizabeth. Thus, the accusations become more personal than anyone could have imagined. John and Abigail have known each other in the most intimate way having slept with one another. John even admits that he thought of her “fondly” at one time, but he cannot stand for the evil that she now facilitates. She is willing to let people die so that she can be with John. The problem with her plan, however, is that it is contingent upon John feeling the same way, which of course he does not.

It must not be overlooked how Ward approaches John’s confession. In the most revealing moment of the opera, the orchestra is held silent (Example 5.20):

¹⁵⁹ Ward, *The Crucible*, 210-213.

Example 5.20:

Musical score for Example 5.20, featuring DANF. and JOHN. The score includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The lyrics for JOHN are: "I have known her, sir. I have known her. Ich er - kann - te sie, die - se Dir - ne." The lyrics for DANF. are: "You are a Ihr üb - tet". The score is marked with "mf" and "f" dynamics, and includes the instruction "(entrüstet) f (shocked)".

160

John is left completely exposed without the support of the orchestra to reveal his affair. He is naked in front of the court, stripping away his pride in an attempt to save his wife.

3. Act IV

In the opening scene of Act IV, Abigail makes a last attempt with John. It is important to note that the scene was added to the opera by Ward and his librettist, Bernard Stambler.¹⁶¹ Of the added scene, the "tragic relationship between her and John and the horrors that it has precipitated demand recall in the final act."¹⁶² Abigail has arranged safe passage for them out of Salem; however, John refuses to go with her. Continuing on with her delusional attempt she sings the following:

ABIGAIL: John, listen, I forgive you. I have come to save you, only you, to take you away from this town of spite and hate. To a land where it's sunny and warm, to a land where it's sunny and warm, where there's nothin' but our love forever, forever, and ever.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 211.

¹⁶¹ Kolt, *Robert Ward's The Crucible: Creating an American Musical Nationalism*, 157.

¹⁶² Fox, "A comparative analysis of dramatic works and their twentieth century operatic adaptations," 118.

¹⁶³ Ward, *The Crucible*, 248-249.

Ward provides a final test here for John and the necessary closure between the two characters. John's "wordless rejection of Abigail's offer once again demonstrates the strength of [his] conviction – he is willing to sacrifice his life rather than compromise his beliefs, whether or not they are flawed."¹⁶⁴ It would be easy for John to slip away from Salem and the mess with which the witchcraft accusations have caused. That would mean turning his back on his wife, his children, and his name, which is not in John's character.

The scene highlights, once again, a lack of maturity and social awareness in Abigail. "Each of the other characters in [*The Crucible*] believes in something... but she believes in nothing. Her life view allows for the manipulation of others. She is a cynic... Her cynicism allows for no sense of honor; there are no rules to her games, no boundaries she will not cross."¹⁶⁵ What is interesting here is that Abigail proclaims to want to save John from the "town of spite and hate." Yet, she is the root cause of so much of the hysteria in Salem. It is her vengeful acts, which turned so many of the neighbors against one another. These lines further define Abigail as the self-centered, destructive mistress. She lives in an idealistic world where she can have whatever she wants. It is never known what happens to her once John refuses her request to leave Salem, but Fox points out that she is not "free" in the end. "She has been caught in the trap of the horrible drama she created, doomed to a life of loneliness and darkness no matter how much she may want the 'sunny and warm.' Abigail, whose voice influenced many and doomed dozens, is powerless now."¹⁶⁶ Such a fitting end for the sinister character.

Despite the horror she causes both publically and personally for the Proctors, John needs Abigail Williams. She forces him to make a decision. On the surface, the decision is to save his

¹⁶⁴ Laura Benson, "The Twentieth-century Operas of Robert Ward" (PhD dissertation, The University of Western Ontario, 2010), 132-133.

¹⁶⁵ Martine, *The Crucible: Politics, Policies, and Pretense*, 56.

¹⁶⁶ Fox, "A comparative analysis of dramatic works and their twentieth century operatic adaptations," 118.

wife and expose Abby's fraud, which he will stop at no cost to do. Equally important, though, he is able to save his soul by refusing to sign a false confession. For John, it would be better to die for his name, which thus represents an unwillingness to buy into the witchcraft hysteria that Abigail perpetuates. In this, he is able to find his "goodness" and redeem his marriage with Elizabeth. This cannot happen without the role of Abigail.

C. The Personal in Opera & Other Thoughts

The idea of trying to present the personal in opera is a consideration for all operatic composers on some level. Events and stories mean nothing without the people behind them. It is worth mentioning a passage from an interview with American composer John Adams. He discusses his *Nixon in China* in a 1988 interview with Andrew Porter:

One of the things about the story that I found so appealing and why I enjoyed composing it, was the opportunity to move, during the course of three acts, from the plastic cartoon versions of public people that the media is always presenting us with, to the real, uncertain, vulnerable human beings who stand behind these cardboard cutouts... What I wonder, as I see them on television, is whether these people actually have personal lives, do they have deep private emotions, do they argue, do they fight, are they nasty with each other when they get alone in their bedroom? Throughout the course of the opera, we chip away at this public mode, until finally we reach the third act where we see them in their psychological and emotional undress.¹⁶⁷

This type of "psychological and emotional undress" is also present in Ward's adaptation of *The Crucible*. Ward uncovers the deeper levels of his characters by his focus on the important relationships in the opera. At the end of *The Crucible*, John Proctor is left to decide the worth of

¹⁶⁷ Andrew Porter and John Adams, "Nixon in China': John Adams in Conversation," *Tempo, New Series*, Cambridge University Press, no. 167 (Dec. 1988): 26, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/945213>.

his name. The idea of self-worth is not a political issue, but rather something profoundly personal. Shall he sign a false confession to save his life or refuse? He questions his very being the same way the characters do in the finale of *Nixon in China*.

The restless and unsatisfied quality of the final aria of *Nixon in China*, sung by the role of Chou, is a far cry from the soaring orchestral opening and President Nixon's verbose "News" aria. The texture has noticeably changed with a somber lyricism not heard at any other point in the opera. The most powerful passage for the audience is Adams' setting of "How much of what we did was good?" The music and vocal line are fittingly unsettled (Example 5.21).

Example 5.21:

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and piano passage. The vocal line is written in bass clef, starting at measure 880, with the character name 'CHOU' above it. The lyrics are 'How much of what we did was good?'. The piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs, featuring a somber, dissonant texture with a two-measure ascending motive. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The page number 168 is visible at the bottom right of the score.

In between sections of Chou's vocal line, Adams inserts an instrumental passage based on a two measure ascending motive first sounded by a string player (Example 5.22). This is repeated three times by both the strings and woodwinds. This motive is then imitated throughout the remainder of the aria. The dissonant music is deeply troubling and reveals the anxiety and tension associated with Chou's innermost fear: that his life has served no meaningful purpose.

¹⁶⁸ Adams, *Nixon in China*, 308.

Example 5.22a:

A little slower and freely played

c done.

mp espressivo

169

Example 5.22b:

902

309

170

The end of *Nixon in China* is set with six beds at the front of the stage. The finale explores the inner fears and concerns of each of the opera's main characters: Nixon, Pat, Mao, Chiang Ch'ing, Chou En-lai, and Kissinger. Adams has said of the finale of his work, "What could be more intimate and private than your own bed..."¹⁷¹ He could not be more correct. In a work whose final goal was to reflect the personal, rather than the bigger than life political figures with which the opera is based on, Adams allows his audience to acknowledge the fact that despite differences all people are united in their aspirations and fears.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 309.

¹⁷¹ Porter and Adams, "Nixon in China: John Adams in Conversation," 27.

John Proctor is continually negotiating the relationships between the two women in his life. It is those relationships, which provide the catalyst for his own “psychological and emotional undress,” as Adams has coined. While certainly his relationship with the town affects how they view his family, the course of his life within the opera is shaped most significantly by Elizabeth and Abigail. In Act III, John confesses his deep secret to the world when he speaks of the affair he had with Abigail. While he was doing it to protect his wife, it also marks a pivotal point in the opera for him. By confessing, John has turned toward the light. He will no longer be pulled down by temptation nor the guilt of his past sins. While he agrees to confess to being a witch to save his life, he wrestles with his relationship to truth in a similar way to the Chou’s, “How much of what we did was good?” In the end, he cannot fully commit himself to the lie. He would rather hang than sign his name to a false document. At least then he would be standing up for his name and what he believes to be true.

When looking at *The Crucible* there are two levels by which one can analyze the opera. The opera is a hybrid political work for its historic retelling of the Salem witch trials of 1692 and its allegorical associations with the McCarthy era. The opera, due to the convention of the form, however, moves further away from the modern day political associations of its literary predecessor, and instead, focuses on the relationships of John Proctor.

Like that of Adams’ *Nixon in China*, the opera moves inward to deal with the personal. In politics, the personal is often neglected getting lost in the discussion of great ideals and the large-scale grouping of people, beliefs, and ideologies. For this opera, though, even one with political content at its very core, it moves beyond this level of realization and provides a window into the human person. This introspection is not only a consideration for *The Crucible* but for all opera.

While the witchcraft hysteria calls attention to a time when theocracy was perverted and authority reigned supreme, this story of Salem 1692 hinges upon John Proctor. Judge Danforth certainly made up his mind before coming to town that there were witches in Salem and people were going to hang for it. Yet, that is not the point of the opera nor the play for that matter. “The real measure of Proctor’s heroism as a standard for today lies in his ultimate discovery that life is not worth living if it must be preserved by lies told to one’s self and one’s friends.”¹⁷² As discussed previously, this personal discovery and ultimate truth are contingent upon his relationships with his wife and his former mistress. It is they who ultimately determine his trajectory in life.

In this work, the personal is exposed in all its splendor and more often than not its ugliness. Had Abigail not been jealous of Elizabeth in the first place and seeking any means to get rid of her, perhaps the political climate in Salem would have been much different. While this is not a new understanding of the situation, what is unique to the form of opera is that it tells that political story by focusing on the central relationships. Ward’s opera still finds resonance to the modern day because it deals with situations and emotions that still face humanity.

¹⁷² Ferres, "Introduction," in *20th Century Interpretations of The Crucible*, ed. John H. Ferres, 8.

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