

**American Opera and Film Music:
Illustrating a Cultural Identity**

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I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

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Abstract

The purpose and aim of this project is to present an understanding of the American cultural idiom, as seen through the lens of film and opera. To provide a framework, I have selected three texts that I believe to be seminal works dealing with distinctly American topics: *Moby Dick*, *Of Mice and Men* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The three texts were all written within a hundred year period, 1851 - 1947, which encapsulates an era of maturation for the United States. In this time the nation changed from a post-colonial outpost of moderate power, to a dominant industrial power, and an economic superpower. It stands to reason then, that in these texts lies the presentation of how each writer truly saw his own nation, during a time period that saw America develop into its mature, modern identity. By using these seminal texts as a starting point, it is possible to trace how values have changed in the intervening years, as each was appropriated first into a film, and then later into an opera. By attempting to capture the musical values inherent in the two different media, my desire is to see how America's perception of itself has changed over a relatively short space of time.

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Introduction

This project aims to explore the cultural idiom of American music, as expressed through the media of opera and film. The particular goal is to establish descriptive parameters and a summation of the musical culture's defining features. In order to exemplify pertinent elements of American culture, I have selected texts that I believe to be milestones in the American literary canon. Although it can be risky to rely on a common sense approach when guiding one's literary choices, there is a certain wisdom in wide, popular approval of certain texts. Each text chosen holds a significant place in the American literary canon because they each deal specifically with American issues, individuals and landscapes. Below is a breakdown of the three chosen texts, and the chronology of their development:

1. *Moby-Dick*

- a) Novel - Herman Melville 1851
- b) Film - John Huston (dir.) 1956
- c) Opera - Jake Heggie 2010

2. *A Streetcar Named Desire*

- a) Play - Tennessee Williams 1947
- b) Film - Elia Kazan (dir.) 1951
- c) Opera - André Previn 1995

3. *Of Mice and Men*

- a) Novel - John Steinbeck 1937
- b) Film - Lewis Milestone (dir.) 1939
- c) Opera - Carlisle Floyd 1969

The time period that will be examined is not an exact set of dates, as is so often the case when discussing cultural attitudes and trends, but rather a broad period of maturation in the literature of American music shaped by the emergence of these texts and their later adaptations. Broadly speaking, this project focuses most heavily on the 20th century, with reference to important events from before the turn of the 20th century, and also the 21st century. This time period was not arbitrarily selected, but specifically coincides with a period of cultural upheaval and change that shaped the modern American psyche. It was during the period post the Industrial Revolution and World War I that the United States developed from a burgeoning ex-colonial power, to the centre for world finance and banking, a major economy with a formidable military, and consequently one of the biggest producers of mass culture in world history.

It is the last point that is perhaps most important; the position of power for mass output puts a nation in a unique situation where it can control global discussion and opinion, but is also charged with the responsibility of presenting an image that is ethically and morally upright. If you agree that mass producers of culture are expected to behave within some kind of ethical framework however broad, it is not a great leap to suggest that in their texts that are designed to be consumed by a large group of people, the producers may wish to present their own moral and ethical viewpoints from the best perspective possible. This is of course referring to the role Hollywood has traditionally played as a filter between the public's reception of information, and how vested interests can influence the way this information is disseminated.¹

The converse of this are the cultural artifacts not expected to be consumed by as many people, in this case opera. This gives the producers of this less popular art form more licence to present issues in starker terms, given that their influence is less likely to be as widely criticised or scrutinised than their Hollywood counterparts.

Although it is not within the parameters of this study to deal with the inherent ethics of an art form, regardless of shared source material, this issue does lie at the core of how the American cultural fabric has come to be viewed. An example of what I refer to is the cultural role Hollywood film has traditionally played, where initially the pro capitalist message was unabashedly projected to the entire western world, and enemies of its ideology were portrayed in an unfavourable light.

Methodology

This study has been separated into three chapters, each with a different focus on an area that is pertinent across all three forms of each text (original work, film and opera). Instead of separating

¹ One such example of blatant information tampering is the role played by Hollywood reporter Hedda Hopper in the 40s, 50s and early 60s, right through the absolute heart of the second red scare era. Hopper used her extraordinarily large listenership to push her hardline, anti-communist agenda. It is estimated that Hopper had a daily readership of 32 million people, to whom she was able to amplify a strong cultural activism under the guise of light, gossip reading. Jennifer Frost. 'Hollywood Gossip as Public Sphere: Hedda Hopper, Reader-Respondents, and the Red Scare, 1947-1965.' *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2011. University of Texas Press. P 1-2

the chapters into in-depth discussions about each opera, the chapters will instead be molded by an ideological framework, in which, each of the texts, where relevant, will be discussed. The selection criteria for these three discussion areas was not made arbitrarily, nor scientifically, but rather an organic amalgam of recurrent thematic elements that existed across the three media forms of each text.

The three major discussion areas will be:

- 1) Musical representations of individuals
- 2) Musical presentations of physical landscapes
- 3) The role of the mob, and mob mentality

Relevant critical literature will play a large role in shaping the discussion. One of the advantages (and at the same time, complicating factors) of focusing on texts that cross three media is that the body of critical work is extremely broad. To ensure that the argument remains as focused as possible, musical criticism will prove the more dominant; however, it would be irresponsible to ignore the vast body of work pertaining to film criticism, literary criticism and other relevant areas of wider critical discourse.

Outcomes

The eventual goal, then, is to present a musically-focused reading of the filmic and operatic modes of these three texts, highlighting the differences in how the composers went about imparting their messages, and how this illuminated part of the American cultural mythology.

Literature Review

I would like to briefly preface my discussion of the critical body of work surrounding my chosen texts by accepting that this is by no means exhaustive or all encompassing. The three core texts chosen were deliberate decisions because of their centrality in the American canon of modern literature, making them ideal texts to use as signifiers of cultural attitudes and as important archetypal examples of how the American cultural identity came to be portrayed. One of the complications of these choices however, is the fact that there is an immensity of literary analysis of each text that can lead to a sense of being overwhelmed by the many critical views. To overcome this, it was necessary to be ruthless and stick to a single path of inquiry, in this case discussion pertaining to the music inspired by and written about these texts. This is not to say that critical appraisals of the original literature will be ignored, as they prove useful in many instances.

An Overview

Initially, Richard Crawford is a great starting point as he speaks in broad terms about America's musical history. Below is how he outlines the beginning of an America-focused historical music appraisal:

Since 1955, Gilbert Chase, Wilfrid Mellers, H. Wiley Hitchcock, and Charles Hamm, four respected scholars, have each written a history of American music from earlier times to the present... Hamm's words suggest that historians of American music have yet to agree what the history of American music *is*. Chase's book is comprehensive by the lights of its time... Chase breaks sharply with earlier histories by devoting more than half his book to folk and popular music, which he claims as our chief source of musical vitality. Mellers praises Chase's work as "admirable" and then proceeds to go his own way, saying little about folk music or the years before 1900.²

While the western musical history of America³ is relatively new, the western musical tradition of Europe is more complex and is shrouded by logistical obstacles like outdated record-keeping practices, linguistic differences and many political upheavals, wars and purges, which regularly had an impact on records. The upshot of America's historical youth is how little guesswork goes into filling in the historical blanks. Crawford does, however, concede that a lack of widely recognised musical titans (the likes of Bach, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven etc.) means that a nation's historical image lacks a centrality and cohesion and that "[there is an] absence in America of a canon of musical masterworks and composers - the kind of canon on which European musical historiography centres."⁴ If Crawford is to be believed, the musical past of America is a relatively blank canvas, open to the interpretation of interested parties.

The First American Composer

² Richard Crawford. *The American Musical Landscape*. University of California Press, Ltd, 1993. 4-5

³ For simplicity sake, the United States of America will be throughout referred to simply as America.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 5.

Before departing from the immeasurably useful writings of Crawford, it must be pointed out that he considers Charles Ives the first composer to embody a musical perspective that encapsulates a unique American-ness and who composed music that refers almost exclusively to issues and the discourse of his own nation.⁵ Although Ives had no personal bearing on the works to be discussed, it is important to establish a central figure in a culture's compositional pantheon. The operas of Wagner for example do not reflect Bach's Passions, but they evolved from their cultural and musical lineage. German musical history is so rich and all-enveloping however, that this deep-rooted cultural connection need not be referred to. In the same way Ives' influence on later composers need not be seen as explicit rather than a gradual cultural exchange.

Ives' contribution is discussed at length by Virgil Thomson, another invaluable source, who having lived through a period of musical maturity in his nation, has a uniquely first person perspective of how attitudes and styles appeared. Thomson, a likely influence on Crawford, identifies Charles Ives as the first significant and well-known American composer as well, despite accepting that during Ives' lifetime music was a private pursuit, too shameful and socially damning to be openly practiced.⁶ This identification of a seminal figure flies somewhat in the face of Crawford's assertion that the American musical past lacks a canon of masterworks and important composers. Further to this point, Wiley Hitchcock, identified by Crawford as one of the central figures in the American musical record, makes no apologies in his brief history, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, for dedicating an entire chapter to Charles Ives.⁷ Crawford's short-sightedness is possibly accountable for this attitude, given that he was living during a period of musical maturation, and the daunting shadow cast by Europe's musical past can also not be over stated. The identification of a single figure however, echoes the recognition of the singular compositional genius of Bach in Germany during the early romantic period. Without over simplifying the cultural selection of a nation's musical masters, it is possible that hindsight is needed in some instances to appreciate the full immensity of a composer's influence.

One of Crawford's other selected historians, Gilbert Chase, refers to Ives more broadly than just as a seminal composer, but as the quintessential cultured American of the early 20th century, and as

⁵ Ibid.: 4

⁶ Virgil Thomson. *American Music Since 1910*. (Published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1971). 23

⁷ Wiley Hitchcock. *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*. (Prentice-Hall Inc, 1969). P Preface

the proverbial "Yale-man" no less.⁸ The consensus that seems to be reached is that Ives stands alone as the first American composer, owing in large part to his brazen departure from European compositional norms. In his own terms, regarding his initial tertiary education, Ives stated that it "was governed too much by the German rule."⁹ In his seminal and frequently-cited *American Music Since 1910*, Virgil Thomson asks what he believes to be a question of paramount importance when discussing American music:

What Americans are wrestling with chiefly (and the British too) is opera - trying to make our language serviceable for serious dramatico-musical expression... I merely point out that American music, having become by now a musical speech notably different from European, is testing its maturity on the problem that has ever been the final test of a musical idiom, namely, can you put it on the stage?¹⁰

Never one to shy from controversy or dramatic flourishes, Thomson in the early 1970s makes two important statements about the state of American (and also British) opera, namely that it has an established idiom, defined in part by its difference to European forms, and secondly, that it is still in the testing phase, with the suggestion that assessments made based on current forms would be premature. This attitude does strike the reader as strange (if not intentionally divisive), given the immense contribution to Anglo-operatic discourse by Benjamin Britten, who died only four years after this history was published. What this highlights is Thomson's heavy expectations on the part of the English-speaking world in the propagation of art music into the future. His views on the issue of English-speaking dominance and musical ascendancy in the United States are neatly encapsulated in a phrase coined by the man himself, suggesting that the proudest foundations of American folk-music are best referred to as "white spirituals."¹¹ This arrogant (and vaguely bigoted) deliberate alteration of existing terminology speaks volumes about Thomson's hopes and expectations of English-speaking repertoire. What begins to emerge is the difficulty American opera has experienced in

⁸ Gilbert Chase. *America's Music, from the Pilgrims to the Present*. (University of Illinois, 1987). 433.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Virgil Thomson. *American Music Since 1910*. 21.

¹¹ Annegret Fauser. *Sounds of War: Music in the United States During World War II*. Oxford University Press, 2013. 145.

building its own musical heritage, free of the influences of Europe, and the race-related expectations of its own musical establishment.

Alan Rich, in his book *American Pioneers: Ives to Cage and Beyond*, goes to great lengths to establish Ives' uniquely American pedigree as a musician. He relays an anecdote from the American Civil War, which cited Charles Ives' father, George, as commanding the finest band in the military. This was reported by none other than Ulysses S. Grant to President Abraham Lincoln himself.¹² Although this may not provide much information about Ives' musical education or training, what it does is tie him directly to some of the most important figures in the mythology of America's recent past. Surviving the Civil War, and subsequently becoming one single nation, as well as persevering with the abolition of slavery, go to the very core of America's global values, and these two enormous figures (Grant and Lincoln) are both intrinsically linked to these events.

Having a single figure, like Ives, gives not only an art form, but the greater discourse and even a national consciousness, a point of reference from which creation can emanate. The equivalent in the Austro-Germanic tradition is suggesting that without a recognised master like Bach's contribution to the fugue, Beethoven may not have thought to include something that traditional and fundamental in his revolutionary Ninth Symphony, notorious for its ground-breaking innovations.

Towards A Musical America

According to acclaimed music critic, Alex Ross, "There was no lack of music in the American republic at the beginning of the twentieth century... [However,] [t]he orchestral repertory gravitated toward the Austro-German tradition, most musicians were immigrant[s], and many rehearsals took place in German."¹³ In spite of arguments from musicologists, the view of Ross is that even despite the influence of the growing role of American music, it was still without a united voice in the early twentieth century. This dissonance between the Germanic tradition and a cultural resistance was at least in part resolved by America's involvement in the First World War. It is not difficult to see how from this point America sought to establish its own cultural views separate from those of Europe, in particular the central powers of WWI.

¹² Alan Rich. *American Pioneers: Ives to Cage and Beyond*. Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1995. 33-34.

¹³ Alex Ross. *The Rest is Noise*. Picador Publishing, 2007. 27.

Film Music - Where Does It Fit In?

Sally Bick is an excellent resource regarding specific notions of America presented through film music, and with a particular focus on the political events of the 1930s-40s (Hollywood's so called 'golden era'). She feels that an honest discussion of the more popular arm of American 'classical' music (film music) was stifled by the Red Scare era; a time when opinions critical of American hegemony were suppressed and actively denied.¹⁴ The context in which this is of particular interest occurs in her discussion of Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, two giants of musicology, who turned their eyes to the New World during this period in history. Sally Bick provides of an overview of their views on Hollywood in their shared text, *Composing for the Films*¹⁵, from 1947. She makes sure to mention that they were both Marxists - an ideology tarnished along with any other socialist leanings in America between the 1920s and the 1960s. She also discusses at some length the issues these two men had on a personal level in the process of getting *Composing for the Films* translated and published.

The authors portray the American commercial film industry as a destructive force, shaping and controlling public taste and values according to the dictates of the powerful film studios... [they claimed] that Hollywood film music was created with the purpose of engendering false pleasure for the masses in order to conceal the social ills of capitalism - consequently destroying political and social consciousness.¹⁶

As a result of the criticism, Eisler was forced out of the United States under pressure from anti-communist sentiments and the House Committee on Un-American Activities' blacklisting of outspoken leftist thinkers.¹⁷

Bick is certainly assertive in her writing, but without the surety or overt subjectivity of Thomson or to a lesser extent Crawford. She is

¹⁴ Sally Bick. 'The Politics of Collaboration: Composing for the Films and Its Publication History.' *German Studies Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, February 2010. 141.

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno and Hans Eisler. *Composing for the Films*. D. Dobson Publishing London, 1951, c 1947.

¹⁶ Sally Bick. 'The Politics of Collaboration: Composing for the Films and Its Publication History.' 141.

¹⁷ Ibid.

consequently a source that provides both musicological assuredness, as well as requiring less caution on the part of the reader when considering the subjectivity of the author.

Following Bick as a valuable resource dealing solely with film music is Annette Davison.¹⁸ Davison is yet another modern, female voice who provides a less biased, academically assured place in the body of literature pertaining to film music. Davison's work is a far cry from the views of Eisler and Adorno; she discusses musicological elements of film scores in tandem with broader references to the dramatic discourses of source material. In this way, her views are far less reductive, and not to mention more constructive, than the elitist views of only a half century before.

Without delving into the studies of gender, an issue with which this paper for the most part is not concerned (not through disinterest or ideological apathy, but owing to a space constraint), it appears the diversity of modern academia has provided important inroads into a more nuanced, less egocentric understanding of absolute music's development from the concert hall into the film studio.

An important voice in the field of women's studies in music is Susan McClary. Her contributions to both the wider discourse of gender theory, and specifically to opera are undeniable. *Feminine Endings* is a seminal text and has played an important role in spotlighting why it is that in opera women so often go mad.¹⁹ McClary's voice is strong and outspoken, with shades of personal passion that makes her writing enjoyable to read, but the reader must therefore approach it with a degree of caution.

For a broader understanding of the evolution of American film music, James Wierzbicki provides an excellent discussion of the genealogy of the art form. In his 2009 book *Film Music: A History*, Wierzbicki provides an excellent overview of the stylistic expectations of film music in the period this paper intends to discuss:

Because they remembered what had worked so well during silent film's heyday, filmmakers in the early 1930s reverted to scores that featured well-known classical music. Within just a few years they abandoned the use of music that audience members might actually recognise, on the grounds that such

¹⁸ Davison expressly addresses film composition technique and criticism in her book *Alex North's A Streetcar Named Desire*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009.

¹⁹ Susan McClary. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. University of Minnesota Press; 2002.

music would be distracting. Instead, they encouraged composers to write scores that were entirely original in terms of content but at the same time—in terms of sound, idiom, and affect—were remarkably similar to the orchestral music to which patrons, in general, had grown accustomed.²⁰

The Operas

An element of American opera that I would like to spend some time probing is the input of critics. Their importance should not be overstated as they are working from a perspective of vested interests, and work from within a different framework than academics. These critics however, do represent a synthesis between academic thought and public perception. Part of this study is to investigate how American opera portrays well known, distinctly American source works, and so contemporary appraisals of these operas written for a mixed audience are valuable resources within the critical discourse of the art form.

Turning first to Jake Heggie; he is regularly charged by critics with the crime of being too palatable to a wide audience. This apparent offence being, according to Anne Midgette of the *Washington Post*, who despite being a defender of the opera, feels that “some critics... deplore the populist turn that some of this work has taken, a style that Heggie — beloved of the public, but not always of the critics — is often seen to represent.”²¹ There is a long history of composers being considered too profound to be enjoyable to the average concert-goer.²² This is of course not the case, any number of examples could be provided to disprove this myth, none greater perhaps though than once maligned, now seminal, and extremely well-loved *Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky. Steve Smith of the *New York Times*, after *Moby-Dick*'s Dallas premiere, suggests that Heggie's music is heavily reliant on the visual spectacle it is a part of, and

²⁰ James Wierzbicki. *Film Music: A History*. Routledge Press, 2009.195

²¹ Anne Midgette 2014. ‘Jake Heggie, composer of ‘Moby-Dick’, chases his Ahab’, *Washington Post* 14 February. Available from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

²² Turning again to Alex Ross, he suggests that “adventurous programming” has a history of attracting “tepid” responses, especially from America’s “traditional concertgoers”. Alex Ross. *The Rest is Noise*. 32.

devoid of the same innovations that set the staging and logistics apart from other operas. While conceding that overall the opera is a success, he feels that the work may not endure once it is subjected to less extravagant productions.²³ Again, the incorporation of new media, like winning the affections of the wider audience, will often draw criticism from an art form that owes much of its popularity to a curatorship of the past, rather than an embracing of the present.²⁴ The most interesting aspect of these pervasive viewpoints is how they are applied almost exclusively to opera, whereas in film for example, there are entire award categories devoted to innovations in visual technology, sound artistry and the other theatrical deceptions needed to create convincing drama.

Floyd fares little better in the eyes of the critics. In a *New York Times* review from a 1983 New York City Opera production of *Of Mice and Men*, the reviewer Donal Henahan provides brutal criticism of Floyd's music, suggesting that it is a feeble relative of the 1940 film scored by Aaron Copland.²⁵ Henahan's main grievance is the deference Floyd gives to drama, rather than imposing his a more personal musical stamp on texts that are seared into the American consciousness. Once again, the impression given to readers is that a double standard is placed on American composers, who are expected to write music that deals firmly with the canon of American themes, but at the same time are musical masterworks on their own, tacitly compared to Mozart, Verdi and Puccini.²⁶ Interestingly however, in a later publication from the same source, reviewer Anthony Tommasini defends the opera as Floyd's greatest, taking into account the harsh views of the past. His suggestion is that at the heart of its later

²³ Steve Smith 2010. 'A Role for the Roiling Sea as Ahab Hunts His Whale', *The New York Times* 2 May. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com>

²⁴ It should however be noted that a greater relationship between traditional opera and new media is emerging. Opera and the Media of the Future held at Glyndebourne is just one example of the efforts aimed at bringing opera into the 21st century.

²⁵ Donal Henahan 1983. 'Opera: Mice and Men', *New York Times*, 14 October. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com>

²⁶ Alex Ross, reviewing some new American operas asks a similar question: 'Are any of these new operas towering masterworks that will alter the course of music history while winning the hearts of millions? People have been asking that loaded question for a hundred years, and the way they phrase it almost demands a negative answer. Better to ask whether a new work is strong enough to hold the stage. If it does, it has a future, and the masterpiece-sorting can be done by later generations.'" Alex Ross. 'What Next?' *The New Yorker*, 21 August, 2006. 88-89.

success (2004) is the tenor Anthony Dean Griffey who has come to specialise in lyric and dramatic tenor roles dealing with social outsiders, as well as a relaxing of a judgemental musical elite who deride composers like Floyd and Heggie.²⁷

Previn's 1995 setting of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is perhaps the most harshly judged of the three operas. What strikes the reader in some of these comments (the same can be said of reviews quite frequently) is the disregarding of evidence that can refute a claim, such as the one below. According to Bernard Holland:

As beautifully as Renee Fleming sings and as assiduously as she pursues the part, she leaves a hole in the opera that nothing around it can fill. Ms. Fleming does everything an opera singer can do, but I am not sure that Blanche is a character that opera can ever reach.²⁸

The suggestion here is that opera is only capable of portraying coarse, blunt characters, and is an inadequate tool for the representation of nuanced, complicated individuals like Blanche Dubois. Blanche is certainly not the first nuanced character to be depicted in operatic terms though. Examples to the contrary include (but are not limited to) *Othello*, *Peter Grimes*, *Salome* and *Kundry*, to name but a few. It is just convenient for the reviewer to ignore these non-American examples. Perhaps the reviewer could be excused if he had been more specific, as operatic treatment of a character is certainly different to literary treatment.²⁹

²⁷ Anthony Tommasini 2004. 'Music: Classical Recordings; 'Of Mice and Men': It's Not Over Till The Slow Guy Sings', *The New York Times* 22 August. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com>

²⁸ Bernard Holland, 1998. 'Music Review; Pursuing the Soul of 'Streetcar' in Opera', *The New York Times* September 21. Available from: www.nytimes.com

²⁹ Michael Halliwell states that "[i]t must... be noted that operatic characters differ importantly from those in fiction or drama. Operatic characters are essentially larger-than-life." This claim makes the distinction between the fineries of individual creation in literature, and the essentially broad-strokes used to portray individuals in opera. Halliwell however, never suggests that opera is incapable of portraying these characters, just that opera composers employ different tactics to those of their authorial counterparts. *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*. Rodopi Press, 2005. 41.

At best, as suggested by the critical appraisals of his work, Previn could only hope to be a surprise success by exceeding decidedly low expectations, an attitude encapsulated in John von Rhein's 2013 review, entitled *Though not blindingly original, 'Streetcar' music surprises* and although less harsh, Mark Swed's cinematically inclined tidbit from 2014. As well as these low expectations are the insistent references to previous media through which the text has been viewed:

The characters... wore period dress, or in the case of Ryan McKinny's often shirtless Stanley Kowalski, Marlon Brando-esque undress.³⁰

Great literary works seldom make great operas, and, besides, how do you improve on perfection — that of the stage original or that of the classic 1951 film that starred Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois and Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski?³¹

Once again, vast amounts of data pointing to the contrary are ignored when critics suggest that there is often an innate inappropriateness in setting great literary texts to opera, presumably excluding the innumerable, successful settings of Shakespeare, Voltaire, Goethe, Virgil, Homer etc. The United States is a nation well known for its patriotism and pride in its own achievements, and it seems like a bizarre twist of logic to decry a work as inappropriate, especially one that deals so bravely with American themes. A possible answer to this apparent split personality is the American unwillingness (or even shame) to take part in what is seen as a traditionally European art form. The reason for this possible solution is not a baseless assumption. As can be seen in a number of reviews, the film counterpart of the opera being reviewed looms heavily in the consciousness of the reviewer (and more than likely, the viewing audience too). Lawrence Kramer suggests that in America opera and film play separate roles when interpreting the same source material:

Unlike movies. [American] operas are to do justice to the works they adapt. No less, but no more. They

³⁰ Mark Swed, 2014. 'Rapturous response to André Previn's *'Streetcar Named Desire'*', *Los Angeles Times* 20 May. Available from: www.latimes.com

³¹ John von Rhein, 2013. 'Though not blindingly original, *'Streetcar' music surprises*', *Chicago Tribune* 27 March. Available from: www.chicagotribune.com

are as much frame as picture; they append themselves to the national archive.³²

Following Kramer, it is notable that there is deference towards the awe-inspiring power of the film machine in America, a legitimising tool used to reassure readers that each reviewer understands the unspoken hegemonic dominance of the film industry over its impotent competitor.

The point of this study is not to compare the success of film to opera as to do so would be both difficult to quantify, and possibly futile, given the undeniably wide success of Hollywood film in particular. It is interesting to note however, that there is a sense of subservience to the film representation of great American works of literature. American opera is still in its infancy, and can be expected to act with such timidity when tackling these enormous cultural artifacts, but it adds little to the art form to continue to propagate such self-effacing views.

What sticks out as particularly startling is that between the identification of Charles Ives as a seminal musical figure, and the recent operatic portrayals of American texts, little has changed in the looming shadow of Europe's musical hegemony in the United States. The influence of Europe weighs heavily on the American musical consciousness, and has a distinctive effect on the compositional traits of the artists.

³² Lawrence Kramer. "The Great American Opera: *Klinghoffer, Streetcar, and the Exception*". *The Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Winter 2007. 68.

Chapter 1 - Presentations of the Individual

Representations of individuals are one of the most important tools for discussing an American-centric cultural idiom in the chosen texts. The individuals that are focused on do not necessarily represent the average American, but perhaps a more exaggerated, larger-than-life version of him or her. Reading these texts through this perspective is useful in a number of ways; not only do these individuals represent broad cultural markers or signifiers, but also because their transition to the medium of opera, in light of their larger-than-life status, seems inevitable. As mentioned, opera is often charged with presenting larger-than-life characters, so it would seem a logical perspective from which to view these Americans.¹ According to the critics discussing each of the three operas, the transition of these characters from original text to opera was hardly smooth. What I suggest is that this response to American opera is more than likely a product of ingrained criticism of the changing art form itself, rather than any actual issue with the operatic forms of these characters. It is possible that the perceptions of the operatic portrayals of these important fictional Americans are expressed in such brutally realistic terms that their accurate reflection in the cultural mirror is in part to blame for the overt criticism. In order for there to be a culturally agreed upon United States of America, there must at least be a loose artistic consensus as to whom the occupants of this world are.

Who Are They?

I would like to provide a brief overview of each of the characters focused on and why I believe they are important cultural signifiers in each of the chosen texts. Rather than relying here on the input of critical literature, I have let the musical choices of the composers guide my decision making. One of the benefits of musical analysis in opera, and to a slightly lesser extent film, is that a composer will make it clear which characters they have perceived to be the most important.

***Moby-Dick* - Ishmael/Greenhorn**

¹ In *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, the chapter on "Characterisation" by Julian Rushton states: "In any production, a degree of stylization recognizes that operatic characters come over as larger than life, and, with few exceptions, as egotistical." Ed. Helen M Greenwald. *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*. Oxford University Press, 2014. 341. A source like this is not uncommon, and seeks to elevate the role of the individual in opera, but also emphasises how exaggerated these individuals appear in the art form at large.

Moby-Dick's content is so broadly known that it has become culturally ubiquitous, and the nuance of its narrative content subsequently somewhat diluted. The events of the novel are drawn heavily from Herman Melville's own experience on merchant ships during the mid 19th century, and deal with a plethora of issues: it reads in part as whaling essay, but equally as a swashbuckling voyage for human dominance over a terrible foe of titanic proportions.

Ishmael is the central figure; he represents the naïve and curious character through which the readership can connect, as well as one of the central figures taking part in the whaling voyage itself. Readers are invited to use his (Ishmael's) sense of discovery to satisfy their own fears and anxieties associated with the dangerous journey into the unknown. In the opera however, much of the musical discovery is closely linked to Greenhorn's own development of self, and unearthing of his mature identity (later to be unveiled as Ishmael).

***Of Mice and Men* - Lennie Small and George Milton**

Of Mice and Men tells the story of two intrepid travelers, hoping to plant their stake in the real estate soil during the turbulent years of the Great Depression in the American west.² The short novella packs an immense amount of drama into a short space that consists of only two main locales and only a handful of characters. At face value, it would appear to be a story about men trying to find work in the direst of economic conditions, but in actual fact it is a story about the value of companionship in the face of adversity and the doomed plight of the voiceless, social outsider.

Lennie Small needs to be coupled with George Milton when considering the central figures of this story, as he is emotionally and intellectually reliant on George. Lennie's journey as the little understood social outsider makes him the most interesting case study in the story, but his reliance on and genuine affection for George is not to be understated as well. In the operatic setting, Carlisle Floyd emphasises the importance of their relationship by adding to a long history of sympathetic operatic males simply by the selection of the voice types. The baritone and tenor have long been allies on the operatic stage, examples include Nadir and Zurga (*Les pêcheurs de perles*), Guglielmo and Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*), Figaro and Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Rodolfo and Marcello (*La bohème*), it is fitting then that George and Lennie would join their ranks given the historical relationship between the two voice types.

² The mythology of 'the west' as a cultural icon will be elucidated in the next chapter, where the focus moves to physical places rather than individuals.

A Streetcar Named Desire - Blanche Dubois

A Streetcar Named Desire is set in the late 1940s in a rough, urban setting. The story is about the normalcy of working-class lives and the dynamics that money, real estate and familial disputes create, especially on the recently reunited siblings who are at the core of the narrative.

Blanche Dubois has been the focus of many character studies, and it would be difficult to argue that any other character in the play has the same depth and emotional breadth as the fallen southern belle, as she is so often referred to.³ She represents a character torn from her own time and place of fragility and decorum, to a dirty, pragmatic new place where a person is seemingly measured by their potential for economic contribution. Stanley Kowalski's disdain for Blanche is a strong allegory for changing values in the United States at a time when economic gain was at the forefront of America's cultural revolution. Kowalski represents the individualist aspect of capitalist economics, and embodies the idea that a society is only kept from progress by weak links in the chain.

1.1 Views from the Top - Moby-Dick

Philip Sainton's score to the 1956 film *Moby-Dick*, directed by John Huston, does not lend itself to the operatic discourse of character and ideological representation through themes and recognisable melodic structures, as is more the case in the film of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.⁴ What occurs instead is a score predominantly

³ It should be pointed out that this epithet has somewhat a reductive value, as it makes reference to a bygone past where a woman was valued based on her physical appearance. And although this may be in reference to the narrative role of Blanche's beauty, it does little to dispel the notion that a female character like Blanche is without agency or use once she is no longer of sexual interest to male characters.

⁴ What I refer to here is Wagnerian Leitmotif, the notion of recognisable melodic structures representing ideas, individuals and objects. The prevalence of this practice in film music is pervasive. Mathew Bribitzer-Stull insists that it is an essential part of late 20th century film epics, such as *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Mathew Bribitzer-Stull.

concerned with moment-by-moment reinforcement of the physical action, and particularly the more foreign elements of a voyage at sea. Although closer to *Streetcar* in the year of production, the score resonates more with *Of Mice and Men*, where again musical input is more frequently limited to physical action and place, rather than emotional interactions. An explanation that one could put forward with a considerable degree of surety is that *Streetcar* is the one text of the three that deals with a woman as the focal point, along with the psychological issues once considered solely applicable to women.⁵

1.1.1 The Group as Individual

A number of times in Sinton's score, while ignoring individuals, he paints a musical picture of groups of people. Some of these representations may seem based on stereotypes, but they are effective, especially if considered in the context of the 1950s, a time when explicit, and unabashed cultural generalisations were more common practice than today. The first encounter with this aspect of his score is the accordion-led sea shanty played on screen in the Spouter Inn. Although, as just mentioned, the sea-shanty as a musical form may now seem clichéd, it does paint the picture of a group of gruff sailors who despite their lack of formal education or social decorum, adhere to their own musical and historical narrative, showing that each of them takes an active part in the oral/musical tradition of their own seafaring mythology.

Having established the musical parameters that are representative of the crew, Sinton moves to the next scene where a number of people congregate; the final Sunday mass before the Pequod's voyage. A

Understanding the Leitmotif. Cambridge University Press, 2015. 294-295

⁵ It would not be a far stretch to suggest that *Moby-Dick* and *Of Mice and Men*'s male centrality could account, at least in part, for the lack of character depictions in the musical scores. During this mid part of the 20th century the identity of the male was seen as the norm, and perhaps composers felt it unnecessary to paint them as complex nuanced beings, as their character traits and motivations were more easily, and widely understood. Women on the other hand, were considered far more complex, especially in a psychological sense; therefore creating a case, contextually speaking, for Blanche to be musically depicted with a considerable focus on her declining mental state. A basis for these views can be found in: Elaine Showalter. *The Female malady: women, madness, and English culture, 1830-1980*. 'Chapter 6, Feminism and Hysteria: The Daughter's Disease.' Pantheon Books, New York, 1985. 147

sombre unison hymn plays as the congregation enters, during which time the camera pans past the innumerable plaques commemorating the captains lost to previous voyages. It is significant that the minor tonality theme only adds harmonic colour at the final 'Amen', the first in a number of religious rites featured in the text, and heavily emphasised in the film.⁶ It is significant to note that once the congregation is seated, the preacher's homily is without musical support, perhaps in part as deference to the actor portraying that role, Orson Welles, but again supports the view that Sainton was less concerned with portraying individuals than groups.

During some of the most important moments of conflict and disagreement, there is a conspicuous absence of a musical score. When Starbuck first confronts Ahab in his quarters about the fate of the voyage, there is no musical input, highlighting two other sound effect elements (aside from the dialogue). Gregory Peck's presidential portrayal of Ahab⁷ has him speak with a considerable croak in his voice, one of the few times the character appears as aged and grizzled as one would expect.⁸ Aside from the crack in his voice, there is an occasional creak occurring from the timber of the ship. Although these elements may seem unimportant, especially given the significant discussion of which they are a part, they do, however, act to strip bare the relationship between Starbuck and Ahab. Their conflict lies at the heart of the main narrative drama. Ahab wishes to pursue the whale without mercy, and Starbuck would advise against it. By not providing musical support for them, their relationship must rely on visual cues, gesture, verbal communication and the myriad of filmic techniques used to guide the attention of the watching audience.

Ahab and Starbuck's discussion in the cabin foreshadows their tense and final standoff moments before the final attack on Moby-Dick. As they stand above deck on the 'mild, mild day' following the storm,

⁶ *Moby-Dick*. Dir. John Huston. Warner Brothers, 1956. DVD.

⁷ Bosley Crowther, 1956. 'Moby-Dick (1956). Screen: John Huston and Melville's White Whale; 'Moby-Dick' Opens at Sutton and Criterion Gregory Peck Starred as Captain Ahab.' 5 July. Available from: www.nytimes.com. Crowther remarks, quite accurately, that 'Peck gives Ahab a towering, gaunt appearance that is markedly Lincolnesque'. This reintroduces the idea of connecting to the mythology of America's past. A 'Lincolnesque' Ahab humanises the character, and immediately predisposes a patriotic American audience to sympathise with him.

⁸ *Moby-Dick*. Dir. John Huston. Warner Brothers, 1956. DVD.

their dialogue is once again devoid of musical support.⁹ It is only the emergence of the whale breaching the surface that re-opens the musical input.¹⁰ As Ahab identifies the brute and says ``there, there!``, a simple, rippling, rising and falling melody begins, before moving towards a musical frenzy.

One of the more notable elements of the ambitious final set piece of the film is the play out. The journey towards a specific and desired end underpins much of western culture's understanding of narrative. While this claim may seem broad, a quick catalogue of any number of well-known texts can quickly dispel accusations of hyperbole. Susan Mackey-Kallis takes a psychological approach to trace a modern western understanding of the expected narrative arc:

In Jungian terms, the history of humanity's evolution is the history of the emergence of the ego from a pre-egoic state and its inevitable reexploration of this state- through an examination of the collective unconscious - in order to achieve individuation... The journey homeward... is to a ``home`` that we have never known. Although it has elements of preconsciousness - particularly in its emphasis on spiritual unity (the Garden of Eden before the Fall) - it does not truly represent a state of innocence, for, as a result of our journey outward into the realm of consciousness and experience, we have known sin. Such knowledge of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interestingly, only four years after the release of Huston's *Moby-Dick*, came one of Alfred Hitchcock's most famous works, *Psycho*. Arguably, the most widely recognisable scene in the movie is the knife in the shower scene. The music that accompanies that particularly grizzly sequence is as intrinsically tied to its infamy as the visual content itself. The point of interest here being that Hitchcock initially desired for that scene to be without musical accompaniment, and had to be convinced by the composer Bernard Hermann, on the strength of the thematic choices, that it would not undermine the dramatic action. Without relying on a single occurrence to argue for universality, it is possible that this represented a seminal moment in the breaking of conventions dictating when and how music was applied to filmic stimuli. Royal S. Brown. 'Hermann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational.' *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Spring, 1982. 15.

both good and evil, therefore, makes a return to innocence no longer possible. To truly reach individuation, as individuals and as a culture, we must go ``home'' fully prepared to face our collective Shadow and to fashion a new home in the universe.¹¹

Mackey-Kallis' wonderful summation of expected narrative journeys not only reintroduces the religious element of *Moby-Dick*, but also creates a case for why Sainton would have decided to end the musical input without a perfect cadence, and on a bleak minor chord. Even in cases of a pyrrhic victory, it was more common practice in film music of this era to focus on the grandeur of the collective human achievement, rather than the individual human tragedy, and leave the audience to ponder its place in the cosmos with a major chord to finish.¹² This minor chord suggests that Ahab and his men were unable to ``fashion a new home in'' this ``universe''.¹³

1.1.3 In Support of Heggie

An interesting side note in Sainton's construction of the *Moby-Dick* score is that although depictions of the individual are a scarcity, there is a single moment of synergy between the 1956 film and the 2010 opera. In the film, as Ishmael floats away from the wreckage of the Pequod, the oboe plays a stirring and heart-rending theme, which, as previously discussed, belies otherwise rare depictions of the emotions of individuals. Similarly, Heggie begins the narrative arc of the meta-narrative from the point of view that Greenhorn survived the wreckage as a nameless sailor, only taking on the title of Ishmael in the wake of the disaster that just shaped and defined his

¹¹ Susan Mackery-Kallis. *The Hero and the Perennial Journey Home in American Film*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 3-4.

¹² An example of an epic film with a tragic ending, where the music reflects the bravery inherent in human sacrifice is *Spartacus* (1960). Even as the audience is left to ponder Spartacus' tragic and brutal death by crucifixion, the composer Alex North employed Spartacus' wife's theme to bid him a farewell. Varinia's theme, whilst beginning with a minor triad in E Minor, transitions gradually into a more positive G Major ending. Sanya Shoilevska Henderson. *Alex North, Film Composer*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2003. 142.

¹³ Susan Mackery-Kallis. *The Hero and the Perennial Journey*. 3-4.

identity.¹⁴ In the opera, solo woodwind instrumentation (clarinet) plays an important role in his development of self, a notion that is discussed at length later in the chapter. This is not to suggest that Heggie in any way was attempting to borrow from the film, but merely an interesting meeting point, and one worth identifying, considering the surprising rarity of these occasions given that both texts share the same source material. It also supports the above claim, following Mackey-Kallis, that the final destination of the sailors on board the Pequod was not the disastrous battle against Moby-Dick, but instead the construction of the story itself as an important cultural memento.

1.2 *Moby-Dick* - Jake Heggie's Portrayal of Ishmael

According to T Walter Herbert, in the compositional process of *Moby-Dick* the opera, "Heggie and Scheer did not set Melville's novel to music: they incorporated his work into music and a vision of their own."¹⁵ This helps illuminate the vision articulated by Heggie in an interview with former San Diego Opera artistic director Ian Campbell.¹⁶ Heggie explains that his aforementioned adjustment of the narrative structure was intentionally designed to highlight the growing process for the novel's main protagonist, Ishmael (Greenhorn). Heggie's adjustment of Melville's material has a cinematic quality, in that the nature of the medium allows the composer to make temporal jumps without confusing the audience. There is less clarity in a novel that abandons the linear quality of chronological structure. Heggie quite simply elected to the use of the novel's iconic opening line: "Call me Ishmael,"¹⁷ as the final line of the opera. Instead of prefacing the story with Ishmael's reflection on the title of his formed self, Heggie uses the same line as the final line in the opera's libretto [see Figure 1.1]:

¹⁴ It is also worth mentioning that in the Old Testament, Ishmael was the first son of Abraham. He became a powerful warrior and was given his name by God Himself. John Walvoord. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. David C. Cook (publisher), 1985. 57

¹⁵ T Walter Herbert. 'Awakening a Global Spirituality: *The Opera Moby-Dick as a Meditative Quest*.' The Melville Society and Wiley Periodicals, Inc, 2011. P 91

¹⁶ "An Evening With Jake Heggie and Ian Campbell." YouTube. December 9, 2011. Accessed March 17, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlt9uCAdk6E>

¹⁷ Herman Melville. *Moby-Dick or, The Whale*. Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1988. P 3

Figure 1.1 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 2171-2174¹⁸

The image shows a page of a musical score for Moby-Dick, Act II, pages 585. The score is for voice and piano. The voice part is in the upper staff, starting at bar 2171 with the lyrics "Call me Ish-mael." The tempo markings are "rit.", "a tempo", and "free". The piano accompaniment is in the lower staves, featuring complex chordal textures and dynamics like "pp".

The intrinsic tension of E minor in 2nd inversion underpins Ishmael's revelation. Even though the C does not resolve downward, the disyllabic "ma-el" implies the stepwise resolution down into harmonic consonance of E minor. The lack of formal resolution expresses the continuing evolution of the self and the changing nature of identity. Although the experiences on the Pequod were formative for Ishmael, it is impossible to put a full stop on his development as an individual. This motivic introduction in the last moments of the opera links closely to the music in the opening sequence. Although not as formal as an overture or prelude, the opening bars introduce the musical germs that make up the sound world of the opera. As seen in Figure 1.2, the same key area prevails at the outset of the opera, although now in root position, while upper strings explore the tension of that same minor 6th (the unresolved C) against the fifth of the chord the B. The relationship between Ishmael's final musing and the opening bars is inescapably clear and somewhat cyclical.

Figure 1.2 Moby-Dick - Act I Bar 4-6¹⁹

¹⁸ Jake Heggie. "Moby-Dick". Bent Pen Music Inc., 2010. 585.



Already, Heggie's construction of the opera appears to be nuanced, recurrent and extremely self-aware, especially when compared to the relative simplicity of the film score.

Heggie's intention was to present the opera as a present-tense, moment-by-moment discovery of the self for Greenhorn/Ishmael, with the suggestion that he later went over the details of the journey to a third party (presumably Melville), who subsequently adapted the real story into a book.²⁰ This second order fiction within a fiction may seem convoluted, but it serves to highlight Ishmael's journey of introspection as a centrepiece to the titanic-scaled drama, one that is fundamental to the core narrative. John W. Rathbun identifies a dual-narrative that he believes to be already present in the novel, an element Heggie and Scheer perhaps could be alluding to in their setting of the opera. Here is how Rathbun expresses it:

With *Moby-Dick* Melville carries this strategy [of a story within a story] as far as it can go when he develops two separate kinds of fictions, one embedded in the other. The larger of the two is Ishmael's chronicle of the whaling voyage of the *Pequod*, and in his recounting of what happened we are asked to follow the standard convention of accepting the fictive historicity of his account. The shorter narrative makes no claim to have really "happened," but is instead Ishmael's deliberate authorial intrusion into his chronicle in order to present an interpolated, wholly imagined, self-contained "story" that intersects so inconspicuously with the chronicle that readers are

¹⁹ Ibid. 1

²⁰ "An Evening With Jake Heggie and Ian Campbell."

hard put to figure out just when one or the other is in ascendancy.²¹

What Rathbun identifies is that there are at least two facets (but potentially more) to Ishmael. The recounting Ishmael suggests someone younger and less mature, as simply retelling a story requires no interpretive or analytical input. The other Ishmael, the commenting Ishmael, suggests a more mature person, one able to add more sophisticated detail to an existing narrative framework. These two iterations of the same character are conspicuously identifiable in the opera by their nominal separation. Greenhorn is clearly the younger, less mature iteration, and Ishmael the discovered, more developed self. Carl Strauch goes one step further, and suggests that to understand Ishmael's "ordering of experience we must read *Moby-Dick* backward from that vortex" that claimed every other life on the Pequod except for Ishmael's.²² This is not to suggest that anyone actually need read the novel backwards, but seeks to highlight that Ishmael's maturity and sense of a whole identity begins the moment he escapes the wreckage of the Pequod. This supports not only Heggie's subjective choice in his ordering of events in the opera, but more broadly the narrative integrity associated with doing so.

The musical construction of Greenhorn is characterised initially by a single figure, which germinates throughout the entire opera, beginning with the somewhat reflexive relationship between the opening orchestral E minor utterings and Ishmael's final line later in the opera. It begins as a simple rising and falling figure (a semitone-tone structure), giving it a wave-like quality [see Figure 1.3]:

Figure 1.3 *Moby-Dick* - Act I Bar 249-254²³

²¹ John W. Rathbun. *Moby-Dick: Ishmael's Fiction of Ahab's Romantic Insurgency*. *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 21, No.3, 1991. 3.

²² Carl F. Strauch. 'Ishmael: Time and Personality in "Moby-Dick"'. *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 1, No. 4, University of North Texas, 1969. 469.

²³ Jake Heggie. "Moby-Dick". 35.

When initially discussing his identity, preceding his first utterance, the E root note reappears, this time in the form of a function of chord V of A Major, but still using the falling C natural to B semitone relationship for tension, and establishing Ishmael's identity motif. Staying within the confines of the tone-semitone structure, Ishmael's sense of reticence is made clear; whilst Queequeg's questions bear the reassurance associated with whole tone outbursts, uninterrupted by Ishmael's niggling semitone.

This simple figure develops into an enormous musical world. Heggie said in reference to this process, that his vision was to approach the opera from the perspective that it was intimate and like a chamber work.²⁴ Depicting the vastness of the ocean, the whale and Melville's world would perhaps have overwhelmed the attention of listeners, whereas focusing on an individual's struggle is a much more recognisable method of narrative construction, and indeed, reflects the first person perspective of Ishmael/Greenhorn that is the prevalent form of the novel. Alfred Kazin, interpreting the literary work, suggests that Ishmael's first person musings are the single most important tool used by Melville to give a highly creative, imaginative world its realism.²⁵ This mirrors Heggie's argument that musical depictions focused on the individual personalise an otherwise overwhelming body of information.

During Ishmael's soliloquy in the opera, where he questions 'human madness' and whether 'man's insanity is heaven's sense', the orchestra is broken down initially just to Ishmael's tenor voice and

²⁴ "An Evening With Jake Heggie and Ian Campbell".

²⁵ Alfred Kazin. *Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*. 'Interpretations.' Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007. 9.

a clarinet. Initially the clarinet calls out to him, leaving a tritone hanging in the air [see Figure 1.4]:

Figure 1.4 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 1392-1397²⁶



Then Ishmael answers, abandoning his previous stepwise tone-semitone structure for a broader, more questioning leap of a fifth, closed out by a drop to the B flat tonic that is still fighting for dominance over the clarinet's still lingering C [see figure 1.5]:

Figure 1.5 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 398 - 401²⁷

A musical score for voice and piano, Act II, bars 398-401. The voice part (Grn.) is in a key signature of three flats and 3/4 time, starting on a middle C (marked with an 8). The lyrics are "Hu-man mad-ness". The piano accompaniment (piano) is in the same key signature and time signature. The dynamic marking is *pp molto legato*. The score shows a melodic leap of a fifth in the voice part, followed by a drop to the B-flat tonic.

²⁶ Jake Heggie. "Moby-Dick". 476
²⁷ Ibid.

This is another example of Heggie's vision of an intimate work. The musical depictions of complex workings of the ship, the power-struggles and politics, and representations of the ocean and hunt for the whale, propelled by an enormous orchestra and chorus, fall away, leaving the young man to consider how the crew came to find themselves in such peril, and whether it was ordained from a greater power, or a machination of their own folly. This opening duet between voice and clarinet is in an uneasy 6/8 time. The clarinet's motif heavily accents the second quaver of the bar. Even in an opera that is not exclusively consonant, this stands out as a tool for creating tension, in a functional sense by its polarity to comparative consonance. Syncopation and the use of the tri-tone²⁸ have long represented a tension or unattainability in the currency of operatic harmony.²⁹ Aside from the syncopation and use of the tri-tone, Ishmael's melodic line also oscillates between duple and triple time, suggesting that the entire aria is a tug-of-war between God and man for Ishmael, and the triple against duple rhythm could be in reference to the relationship between holy trinity and man (represented by men and women). Following similar melodic construction with some embellishment, duple and triple fight for dominance, as the young man questions his turbulent fate [see Figure 1.6]:

Figure 1.6 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 1406 - 1418³⁰

²⁸ In the early days of musicological practice, the tri-tone was referred to as the *diabolus in musica* or the devil in music. This linguistic term highlights how this interval was perceived until more recently.

²⁹ An example familiar in the operatic lexicon is Orpheus' pained cry in the Italian version of the Gluck setting of the story, where he (Orpheus) asks how he will live without his beloved. As the voice is rising up from "senza il mio" to the "ben" the movement is by a tri-tone, highlighting the dominant 7th harmony, and being rhythmically reinforced by the upper strings who in 4/4 time subvert the common understanding of rhythmic pulse with the same off-beat figure of a quaver opening the bar and placing emphasis on the subsequent crotchet.

³⁰ Jake Heggie. "Moby-Dick". 477.

1406
Grn. thing. It flows like the

1413 *free* *a tempo*
Grn. un- a- bat- ed Hud - son through the most un -

As the aria gains momentum, and as the young sailor speeds towards a greater spiritual understanding, a prevalence of the triple beat (now 9/8) begins to win-out in the steadily growing orchestration, hinting at some kind of religious awakening [see Figure 1.7]:

Figure 1.7 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 1447 - 1449³¹

1447 *Greenhorn gets into the coffin.* *mp*
Grn. I see.

Momentarily preceding the prevalence of the triple beat, seen in the quavers of Figure 1.7, is a stage direction that asks Greenhorn/Ishmael to climb into Queequeg's coffin. It is at this moment that he is faced with his friend's mortality, where he begins to understand the nature of his own delicate mortality.

³¹ Ibid. 478.

Finally, as Ishmael questions whether he can see ‘‘God’s foot upon the treadle of the loom’’, the momentum levels out into 4/4 time and returns to more familiar harmonic territory; a melodious motif most easily recognisable as the ‘‘lost in the heart of the sea material’’ [see Figure 1.8].³²

Figure 1.8 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 1471 - 1473³³

482 MOBY-DICK—Act II

1471 Much slower ♩ = ca. 80 *p* *free* *a tempo*

Grn. We are lost in the heart of the sea,

T. *pp*

B. *pp*

Much slower ♩ = ca. 80 *free* *a tempo*

Following this lush, G flat major utterance in simple time, Ishmael goes into quiet acceptance that the crew are truly alone, and ‘‘lost in the heart of the sea... calling to shadows.’’³⁴

1.2.1 Beyond Ishmael

Concurrent with Ishmael’s personal quest for enlightenment and his journey towards understanding his own identity, is the struggle between Captain Ahab and Chief Mate Starbuck. Both characters are conflicted by their adherence to strict religious principles, Starbuck’s being traditionally religious (a devout Quaker) and Ahab

³² It is worth pointing out that this line is taken as a direct quote from the novel and is so central to the ideas presented within the story that a 2000 novel by Nathaniel Philbrick, based on the true story of sinking of the whaling ship The Essex in 1820 (an event that undoubtedly influenced Melville’s story) was titled *In the Heart of the Sea*.

³³ Jake Heggie. ‘‘Moby-Dick’’. 482

³⁴ Ibid. 482-483

his own hubris and deistic imperiousness. Eric Wilson suggests that Ahab's inner conflict is a reflection of Melville's own theological/ideological ambivalence. He states that there is a tension in Melville ``between the desire to be settled in belief and the acceptance of metaphysical uncertainty... Melville struggles between the urge to be a pilgrim and the impulse to be a nomad.''³⁵ Wilson goes on to suggest that Melville explores his divided self through the characters of Ahab and Ishmael, the latter open to all experiences that will help him to grow (the nomad), and the former hell-bent on a single-minded pursuit at whatever the cost (the pilgrim).³⁶ Given their minimal narrative interaction, it is little surprise that Melville coupled each of these men with their own ideological counter-balances in the form of Starbuck and Queequeg respectively. Herbert's assertion would suggest that their operative counterparts are constructed in the same way: ``In the opera, Greenhorn's awakening, as it is conveyed through his relationship to Queequeg, is intertwined with the fates of Ahab and Starbuck''.³⁷ Parallels can easily be drawn between Starbuck and Queequeg, both deeply religious (despite the chasm of differences in the cultural practices of each), and important tools in the development of the two main protagonists to which they are attached. It is difficult to detach oneself from the emotional elements of these two characters, Starbuck the family man and Queequeg the spiritual leader, when they are both effectively disposable tools, representing Wilson's pilgrim and nomad. Despite Ishmael being the sole survivor, that outcome was only met because his narrative prerogative and desire was to survive, whereas Ahab was almost saved by his off-sider, but sought annihilation as his equivalent to Ishmael's desire to survive and his subsequent awakening. Both their narrative outcomes were met, at the expense of their spiritual companions.

Heggie's presentation of Melville's legendary characters is heavily nuanced, challenging notions of traditional male friendships and relationships, as well as probing cultural taboos like death and religion. Whilst being true to the narrative parameters of Melville, Heggie has managed to present these Americans as real, flawed and prone to a truly human madness.

³⁵ Eric Wilson. *The Nomad, the Pilgrim, and the White Whale*. Colby Quarterly, Vol. 34, No. 3, September 1998. P 226

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ T Walter Herbert. 'Awakening a Global Spirituality.' 93.

1.3 Alex North's Musical World of *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Alex North's score for the 1951 Elia Kazan film of *A Streetcar Named Desire* contains a number of consistent elements and bold musical gestures that push it beyond the role of standard accompaniment-to-action film score, and put it on par with the level of dramatic creation demanded by the original source material, a description one would perhaps struggle to attribute to Sainton's *Moby-Dick* score. In the process of adaptation, Kazan is said to have given North "carte blanche,"³⁸ with which to construct his score.

The musical world painted by North follows the journey of Blanche Dubois more closely than any other character. The musical changes are in relation to Blanche's interaction with the other characters, her emotional changes and particularly her reflections on the past. Interestingly, James L. Roberts suggests that "[t]he structure of this play is best seen through a series of confrontations between Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski."³⁹ Although conflict arguably underpins most drama (whether positive or negative), it is interesting to note that where one analyst sees it as fundamental to the understanding of the core narrative, another interpreter (Alex North) is able to shift his focus heavily to the protagonist and construct his understanding of it from that standpoint.

One of the elements used to present Blanche as a character living in emotional and mental binaries is a score-within-a-score. This musical device is mostly used to illustrate the difference between North's interpretative role of the non-musical drama and his treatment of Tennessee Williams' direct references to music, song or melody in the original text. The differences between the two score types (often existing concurrently or alternating rapidly to and fro) are defined by vastly differing harmonic worlds, and particularly by references to existing musical forms. In a simplistic reduction of the two different score types, North employs the use of African-American Jazz forms for his own interpretative music, and more traditional, Western musical forms for the other. North also uses instrumentation to present the clash of differing social worlds. The overture displays

³⁸ Annette Davison. *Alex North's A Streetcar Named Desire*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2009. 81.

³⁹ James L. Roberts. *The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire - Notes*. Cliff Notes Inc, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965. 37.

this characteristic with sweeping string writing and melodic contours that are constantly punctuated by brass, percussion and piano interjections. This is more than likely a prelude to Stanley fracturing Blanche's fragile world.

By referencing (or at times parodying) recognisable dance forms like the polka, North is setting his interpretative music apart from the music that is explicitly referred to in the Tennessee Williams text. Blanche's recurring $\frac{3}{4}$ time dance nightmare, referred to explicitly in the original text, has a soulless, carousel-like feel, which is representative of the painful memories of her last dance with her late husband swirling ceaselessly in her head. The harmony of that polka oscillates between chords V and I with passing chromaticism in thirds that reflects more a drunken slur of memories than any kind of genuine harmonic exposition - a mad simplicity that reflects the unstopably, repetitive music swirling around in Blanche's head every time she reflects on her first marriage.⁴⁰ North's construction of this part of the score allows the audience to forget that this is composed music, and allows them to feel that Blanche is creating or hearing this music in her head, however involuntarily. Annette Davison suggests that not only is she creating the music, but that "we are granted access to Blanche's mind, with the implication that we hear as she hears... She covers her ears tightly in an attempt to avoid hearing the gunshot that closes the music."⁴¹ It is as if this music is an unavoidable outcome of recalling a traumatic event. Delving further into the meta-construction of the characters than Davison, John Mason Brown suggests that Blanche's journey (and indeed Stanley's too) both emanate from Williams' own organic construction of them, stating: "He [Williams] sees them as he believes they are, not as they would like to be or as he would like to have them."⁴² This presents Williams in the position of an observer rather than creator, lending an extra element of normalcy to the backstreet lives of *Streetcar*, as if Williams were just another common person, quietly observing the mundane lives of those around him. Moving Williams to the observing position creates an interesting dynamic where North is

⁴⁰ The delicate $\frac{3}{4}$ timing of this particular repetitious figure here contains the distinctively fragile feminine quality with which an early understanding of madness was associated, but in the climate of the 1930s and 1940s, the role of the male who may encourage or cause madness was beginning to be more widely explored, like Patrick Hamilton's proverbially titled play *Gas Light*.

⁴¹ Annette Davison. *Alex North's A Streetcar Named Desire*. 91.

⁴² John Mason Brown. "Southern Discomfort". *Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire*. Ed. Jordan Y. Miller. Prentice-Hall, Inc New Jersey, 1971. 43.

in the critic's position, and at times voluntarily in a more passive role as he allows Blanche's own mind to create the music, highlighting the conflict that rules her.

The play's primary antagonist Stanley is merely acting out the expected role of a gruff, sexed-up, working-class, uneducated former-serviceman. It could be said that he most probably lacks the sophistication to intentionally goad the traumatised Blanche. And despite his apish demeanour and total lack of manners, he is himself constantly in the throes of a sweaty, heaving dance of sorts, not as graceful as Blanche's demure 3/4 perfectly neat waltz, but more accurately represented by the hot mess of jazz that follows him from work to his card game and to the conjugal bed.⁴³ His unconsciously brutish brand of grace is equally the counterpoint and catalyst for accessing Blanche's consciously inaccessible suite of painful memories, which leave her constantly on the edge of mental collapse. A major difference in their dancing roles however, is that Blanche is an unwilling passenger, unable to stop the dance, whilst Stanley leads it arrogantly. Nichole Maiman argues that Blanche's madness is not necessarily a product of self-inflicted mental decline, but more probably a by-product of a society and culture prepared at any moment to dismiss genuine concerns and suffering of women as being uniquely 'women's madness'.⁴⁴ There is a meeting point between Maiman's accurate portrayal of women's struggle and Williams' presentation of real people in real circumstances. Both Blanche and Stanley are victims of their own mental demise and of their (albeit segregated) society's unwillingness to listen or respond. Stanley is most likely suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and Blanche a victim of ongoing sexual and psychological trauma. Interestingly however, when considering the cultural conditions of the 1950s, the idea of exploring and treating male mental conditions was far more of a taboo than for women. This lends greater strength to the ongoing idea that Hollywood was presenting a very narrow view of the people it saw as truly American. Stanley, whilst inescapably the antagonist, is still

⁴³ An example is the demented cry of yearning in the clarinet that appears moments after Stanley's famous mating call of 'Stella', in his drunken pursuit of conjugal contrition after his violent outburst. It is often commented on that the clarinet has a timbre not dissimilar to a male voice. Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin refer to the more sexually aware American film culture as the 'new Jazz Age morality', suggesting a strong relationship between perceptions of liberal sexual attitudes and jazz music. Harry Benshoff, Sean Griffin. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

⁴⁴ Nichole Maiman. *Who Wants Real? I want Magic! Musical Madness in a Streetcar Named Desire*. Masters Thesis, University of Maryland, USA, 2004. 5.

deemed to be socially functional, despite obvious impulse control issues, and a violently toxic attitude toward women.

An exception to Blanche's polka being an involuntary stress response occurs when it reappears at the moment she briefly lets down her façade of demure and social grace and seduces the young door salesman. I refer to this as her letting down her guard as seducing younger men is her *modus operandi* in lieu of pursuing a mature relationship. Recurrence of the polka helps link this behaviour to the death of her first husband Allan. Davison disagrees that this music is linked directly to this memory, and suggests that perhaps this salesman merely bears a physical resemblance to Allan.⁴⁵ That is certainly possible, given that the polka had previously only been coaxed out by Stanley, rather than volunteered. In light of Blanche's level of memory repression however, it does seem more likely that it is a momentary lapse of consciousness (mirrored by her outward lapse into sexual behaviour towards a much younger man moments before going on a date with the infinitely more appropriate, but admittedly less exciting Mitch). In Mitch, Blanche appears to be searching for a mate who meets criteria of socially accepted behavioural norms, rather than someone as sexually thrilling as the delivery boy or as intellectually compatible as Allan. The likelihood of Davison's suggestion of Allan and Mitch sharing a physical resemblance seems small, as they are intentionally dissonant characters.

1.3.1 Streetcar as Opera

According to Kenneth Oneal Lee, Previn's decision not to deviate heavily from the original Tennessee Williams text may not have only been enforced by the family estate, "but also in part from [Previn's] respect for this icon of modern American drama and cinema, considered Williams's masterpiece."⁴⁶ He goes on to assert that making "significant changes in a play so well known and revered would [have been] an incredible risk."⁴⁷ Although I may disagree that there is any inherent issue in setting a well-known text, he supports my claim that as in the film, musical constructions in the opera centre around Blanche, but goes further, suggesting that as Stanley fails to show growth he misses out on an aria.⁴⁸ He also

⁴⁵John Mason Brown. "Southern Discomfort". 93.

⁴⁶Kenneth Oneal Lee. *Plays of Tennessee Williams as opera: An analysis of the elements of Williams's dramatic style in Lee Hoiby's "Summer and Smoke" and André Previn's "A Streetcar Named Desire"*. University of North Texas, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2003. 84.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., 114

adds to the subservient attitude towards the filmic iteration of a well-known text. Without being simplistic or speculative, however, it is difficult to imagine that a composer so heavily involved in modern musical practices would feel so deeply indebted to Williams' contribution that he would stymie his own compositional approach.

A perspective that contrasts musical character analysis, is Annette Davison's broader approach that explores the standardisation of musical practices in the initial productions of the play. She points out that physical scores were not the ideal method of transmitting the musical direction between productions, given that Williams was quoted as saying that the music in a particular production had wholly undermined the rest of the drama.⁴⁹ She refers quite accurately to two distinctly different musical needs in the production, one the aforementioned polka, or 'Blanche's memory music'.⁵⁰ The other musical element of the original play is the live Dixieland band required for the other musical cues - a musical world so far removed from Blanche's delicate polka that it is little wonder that the most accurate means for transmission was recording, rather than a written score. Turning again to Lee, he identifies an important notion, namely that Previn pays his dues to this jazz element by the use of jazz instrumentation (particularly saxophone) and techniques, rather than something more explicit like a jazz ensemble.⁵¹ The opening streetcar theme is a prime example of Previn's dedication to the jazz idiom, two widely-voiced chords resound, introducing what I believe to be the pervasive sexuality underpinning the story, coinciding with Blanche's journey via streetcar (the physical carriage that begins her departure from decent society, and her descent into the mean streets of normalcy). The two chords have a heaving weightiness, alluding strongly to the sweaty grittiness of human sexuality.

1.4 *Of Mice and Men* - Something That Happened

The presentation of the individual is harder to perceive in *Of Mice and Men* than *Moby-Dick* or *Streetcar*, partly because the role of the protagonist is shared between two characters, but also because the source material is considerably shorter. The sum of the parts of

⁴⁹ Annette Davison. 'Dramas With Music: Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the Challenges of Music for the Postwar Stage'. *American Music*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Winter 2011). 402.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Here Davison is quoting from the play's producer Irene M. Selznick, who refers to the polka as belonging to Blanche's memory.

⁵¹ Kenneth Oneal Lee. *Plays of Tennessee Williams as opera*.

George Milton and Lennie Small is what fits a more conventional sole protagonist structure. Individually however, they are both at war with themselves and unable to flourish in the harsh environment of the American west. Lennie has the genuine kindness and innocence of a sympathetic character, but at the same time he also has a great potential for committing violence and aggression; traits more commonly associated with an antagonist. George on the other hand is ruled almost entirely by a meticulous personal rationality (perhaps even as far as being cunning) and is resultantly not necessarily the sympathetic father figure to the child-like Lennie that one would expect, but he is without argument the more functional working entity in a relatively civilised society, which is paradoxical, given Lennie's physical might in the context of a labour role. George treats Lennie as an intellectual inferior, but still places the adult expectations of equality on him when his behaviour falls outside of social norms. John Marsden assesses Lennie from an economic perspective and suggests that not only is Lennie a threat to George, but a danger to the system at large:

Throughout the novel, Lennie has been portrayed as an ideal worker for the industrial system: he personifies the sheer bulk and strength of labor power. Clearly, though, his actions illustrate that he is beyond the control of authority, and therefore... a threat to the very system in which it is valued... [B]ecause he can neither be isolated nor coerced, Lennie exists outside the framework of capitalist practices .⁵²

Marsden goes to the very core of how I believe George treats Lennie, extending even further, suggesting that society (in this instance, specifically industrial culture) at large is neither able to contain the physical might nor the social practices of Lennie. As a result, he is excluded from the system in a manner not dissimilar to natural selection. Stephanie Jensen-Moulton addresses this biased presentation of Lennie Small's mental disability in both the opera and the original text. Ultimately, her findings suggest that the character of Lennie is hamstrung in the narrative sense from the outset as she believes that Steinbeck's presentation of the mentally disabled is restricted by his own culture's collective

⁵² John L Marsden. 'California Dream': The Significance of "A Coupla Acres" in Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men". *Western American Literature*. Vol. 29, No. 4, 1995. 296.

misunderstanding of disabilities.⁵³ Jensen-Moulton, without stating this explicitly, posits that Steinbeck's portrayal of Lennie's narrative demise is seen as an inevitable destruction of a foreign body in an otherwise healthy space:

Steinbeck's Lennie - though characterized as an innocent, overgrown child - possesses a certain volatility and danger simply because he is not institutionalized, and the disastrous results of his relative freedom reinforce the notion that he should have been segregated from society in the first place.⁵⁴

It is difficult to reconcile these two perspectives of Lennie as both a volatile creature too unpredictable for standard industrial practices, but also as the ideal work machine, in that he is either incapable or unwilling to complain about poor working conditions or treatment. This inability to question what are by today's standards inhumane working conditions is one of the reasons Floyd chose to set the opera in the 1930s, a culturally significant change from the original Steinbeck setting of the 1920s.⁵⁵ A post-1929 setting imbues the individuals in the story with a greater sense of desperation, and this provides the implicit suggestion that they will all go to greater lengths to avoid financial ruin than their decade-previous counterparts.

Although an assessment of capitalist practices and analysis of the treatment of the mentally disabled may seem disparate lenses through which to read Steinbeck's tale, they both go to the core of Steinbeck's own experience. Morris Dickstein eloquently describes how personal experience shaped Steinbeck's contribution to history's understanding of the Great Depression in the United States:

The plight and migration of the Joads—as conceived by Steinbeck ... the Dust Bowl, the loss of a family home, the trek in search of work, the awful

⁵³ Stephanie Jensen-Moulton. 'Intellectual Disability in Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*.' *American Music*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2012. 131.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 139.

⁵⁵ "San Diego Opera Talk with Nick Reveles: Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaenCX2Tt6Q> (accessed April 15th, 2015)

conditions for migrant farm labor, the struggle to keep the family together, became a metaphor for the Depression as a whole.⁵⁶

In a 1943 journal article, W.H. Mellers suggests that the plight of American capitalist pioneers such as these land-workers is a direct result of their European forebears' religious pursuits; however, he suggests that European colonial expansion was devoid of a legacy of humanistic cultural customs. He expresses it in non-hysterical, but firm and damning terms (as can be expected of a writer working during the worst of the Second World War). He writes:

[I]t was precisely this [English] Puritanic consciousness, with its latent acquisitiveness, that, in their aggressive individualism, the Pilgrim Fathers transported to America in an attempt to achieve religious toleration that ended in a still narrower intolerance; and the fact that America was a new country, without Europe's cultural and humanistic traditions, meant that a process which is slowly happening over the whole world began in America with a rapidity that left the rest of the world breathless. The Puritan who fought for his individual soul merges into the pioneer frontiersman who fights for his individual hunk of land and, with the advance of industrialism, the frontiersman merges into the man of Big Business who fights for his individual pile of money (and power).⁵⁷

This harsh, and unrelenting perspective helps build a context for the real-life circumstances of Steinbeck and the consequent fictive ones for Lennie and George. Beyond Steinbeck's own first-hand experience of what Mellers describes as an inevitable economic collapse, and brutal working conditions, was the fact that Lennie Small is a character rooted in harsh reality too, and thus his plight as a mentally disabled person gains an authenticity equal to Steinbeck's portrayal of the Great Depression. In an interview with the *New York*

⁵⁶ Morris Dickstein. "Steinbeck and the Great Depression." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 1 (2004): 111-131.

⁵⁷ W.H. Mellers. *American Music (An English Perspective)*. The Kenyon Review, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer, 1943). 364.

Times in 1937, Steinbeck explained in plain, laconic terms how reality had shaped the character of Lennie Small:

I was a bindle-stiff myself for quite a spell. I worked in the same country that the story is set in. The characters are composites to some extent. Lennie was a real person. He's in an insane asylum in California right now. I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn't kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman.⁵⁸

In short, machine-like bursts, Steinbeck spells out the closeness of his experience to the action described in the novella. Not only does this quotation tie the real-life events to the fictional, it also mirrors the writing form of the novella; short sentences that go directly to the point in a text that reads almost like a play.⁵⁹ This laconicism is a far cry from the proverbial complexity (and long-windedness) of Melville's *Moby-Dick*. This discrepancy of length has a direct impact on the methods composers must employ when musically portraying events and characters described in immeasurably different terms. Composers, whether drawing from a source as large as *Moby-Dick* or as small as *Of Mice and Men* still need to work within a relatively similar framework.⁶⁰ Operatic characters will appear relatively similarly to one another, given that their character arc fits within the framework of a 2-3 hour work, whilst their written counterparts exist upon a much broader continuum, in works ranging from the epic length of *Moby-Dick* to the concise novella of *Of Mice and Men*. Michael Halliwell argues that operatic treatment of fiction creates character forms of its own, independent of the original source. He states that:

[T]he term 'dramatisation' does not accurately describe the operatic adaptation of fiction; the

⁵⁸ George S. Kaufman. "Mice, Men and Mr. Steinbeck." *New York Times*, 1937.

⁵⁹ Steinbeck was actively pioneering a new form of novel that attempted to distance itself from the long-windedness of the past, by creating something closer to conversational, dialogue-based story telling. Warren G French. *The First Theatrical Production of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*. *American Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (January, 1965). 525.

⁶⁰ In the modern age of theatre, it is less common for composers to present works the length of the Wagnerian epics. It is perhaps a result of their fiscal constraints that most composers steer towards the Verdi, Puccini and Mozart model of 2-3 hours.

process is more subtle and far-reaching. In operatic adaptation, the final work of musical drama not only differs in style and form from spoken drama but subverts dramatic elements to its own ends and simultaneously creates its own criteria for judgment.⁶¹

1.5 Do We Have Individuals?

The individuals presented in operatic terms cover a vast array of the cultural codes of modern America. Aside from the omission of a more representative racial group, which would have created a greater sense of inclusion (but potentially dominated discussion)⁶², these three texts show truthfully, brutally and unabashedly how it is that women, the mentally disabled and the plain curious survived (or as the case may be, perished) in the new world. Although this conception of the individuals living in America may not be overly cheery, I believe that the verisimilitude (which conceptually lies at the very core of modern opera) that defines each of the operatic iterations of the individuals in these texts, adds not only value, but a reliable appraisal, of how America's understanding of self can be viewed into the future. Furthermore, these operatic iterations also highlight how diminishing and reductive Hollywood's musical presentations of the same characters can be. This is not to say that Hollywood films and characters are without value, but merely that they are less representative of the actual Americans Melville, Williams and Steinbeck set out to present.

⁶¹ Michael Halliwell. *Opera and the Novel: The Case of Henry James*. Rodopi Press, 2005. 35

⁶² The inclusion perhaps of an opera like *Porgy and Bess* to satisfy the racial past of America would have required an extra layer of space not only to accommodate the cultural/racial ramifications, but also the musical considerations. A text like *Porgy and Bess* represents a stylistic movement away from the type of opera focused on here, and requires a far deeper discussion of the racial implications on the synergy between traditional opera and forms more commonly associated with musical theatre or jazz.

Chapter 2 - The Physical World of America

The physical worlds of the three chosen operas are vastly different, each playing a significant role not only in the propulsion of the narrative and the construction of the music, but also contributing to a larger understanding of the places the American psyche came to see as habitable, by contrasting them with unforgiving, uninhabitable environments. As is the case with western musical tonality, the power of the tonic as a reassured centre and nuclear point is predicated heavily on its relationship to other important harmonic markers. And just as the dominant seventh creates a fierce yearning for resolution with the ascending scale degree 7 to 8 and the contrapuntal falling scale degree 4 to 3, the inability to exist in an uninhabitable physical landscape creates the same tension, necessarily destined for a resolution to a habitable physical place.

Each of the three texts shares this same theme of an unsustainable place setting that eventually shows itself to be unfit for long-term habitation, at least for the protagonists. Susan Mackey-Kallis suggests that this occurrence, specifically in the American literary canon, is the result of either an involuntary displacement, or a sacrificial search for better living conditions:

[A]ll American immigrants, or their ancestors, were either forced to leave home - as was the case for African-American slaves, poor Welsh farmers, and English prisoners shipped to the colonies - or chose to leave home in search of a better life. Home, therefore, was not something taken for granted, but was actively sought and often hard won, as was the case, for example, for those who settled the American West. ¹

Each of the texts shows the adversity faced by individuals trying to find a place in Mackey-Kallis' new world. And although Mackey-Kallis identifies only the American West, it is important to remember that as the 20th century wore on, other parts of the nation became important destinations for people escaping the horrors of World War

¹ Susan Mackey-Kallis. *The Hero and the Perennial Journey Home in American Film*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 127.

II. I will quickly summarise the case, before going into greater depth.

In *Moby-Dick*, the ocean in its mythic glory literally swallows the entire crew and Pequod, sparing only Ishmael, who escapes, no doubt to return to land. A strong indication of the harshness of the oceanic setting is the fact that a beast as hated as the whale himself is able to thrive there, while the human characters toil and ultimately fail.

The harsh, arid west of *Of Mice and Men* is a place of intense physical labour, malignant characters and loneliness, which plays an enormous role in Lennie and George's doomed plight.² In this post-depression tale of suffering, individuals are only valued by their capacity to be absorbed into a more functioning, industrial whole, but efforts to forge an individual path in this punishing environment are shown to amount to nothing more than futility.

And finally the common, urban environment of depravity and moral destitution in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is instrumental in the downfall of Blanche Dubois, a narrative that began with her removal from a more sophisticated, civilised environment. Aside from just the physical setting, *Streetcar* contains an element of temporality; Belle Reve representing a more decadent and superficially decorous past, while the French Quarter in New Orleans is synonymous with the mean, unfeeling and socially debauched present. The name itself Belle Reve, from the French 'beautiful dream', heavily suggests that this perception of the past is in large part fantasy. The choice of setting in New Orleans is also connected with Louisiana's French past, but Elysian Fields (Stella and Stanley's area of residence) is also loaded with religious overtones, and immediately strikes the audience as profoundly ironic, considering that the sweaty backstreets of the setting are far from common conceptions of a divine utopia.

2.1 Musical Constructions

² So pervasive is the isolation of the west that Carlisle Floyd, when asked in an interview, suggests that the main theme of the story is loneliness and that "any attachment... is infinitely preferable to the absolute solitariness of the ranch hands." *Of Mice and Men Dress Rehearsal/Carlisle Floyd Interview*. YouTube. October 29, 2009. Accessed July 18, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p92M6g635L8>

Musical constructions of these three different landscapes play an important role in both establishing the musical idioms of American landscapes, and also play their own narrative roles in the particular dramas of which they are a part:

1. Depictions of the ocean in *Moby-Dick* form the fundamental basis of Jake Heggie's approach to the musical world of the opera.³

2. *Of Mice and Men* is possibly the most important example of place setting presented through music, as the west has arguably become tied more strongly to American physical mythology than either the ocean or a specific city like New Orleans. Rather than just a vague allusion to the importance of the western genre, I would like to expand by suggesting that many stalwart Americans, particularly in the golden era of Hollywood film, saw the best parts of their cultural mythology embodied in films evoking the glory of the old west.⁴

3. The jazz influence in *Streetcar* is pervasive, even when intentionally omitted, as is the case in the opera, and to a lesser extent in the film. New Orleans being the cultural homeland of jazz imbues the story with an immediate set of cultural and subsequently musical assumptions, although many of which could be argued to be negative stereotypes with a particular racial inclination. It is nevertheless the case that *Streetcar* is synonymous with a hedonistic lifestyle, tied intrinsically to its place setting of New Orleans.⁵

2.2 The West - Aaron Copland's View of America

In the previous chapter, when I suggested that Heggie may have overwhelmed audiences by portraying the vastness of Melville's world, musical depictions of *Of Mice and Men* seem to do the opposite, painting a specific and stylised setting by reference to and the

³ "An Evening With Jake Heggie and Ian Campbell." YouTube. December 9, 2011. Accessed March 17, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlt9uCAk6E>

⁴ Although a statement like this is difficult to justify or quantify in literary terms, one need look no further than Republican political campaigning to see what the most conservatively American believe it means to be an American. Former Texan Governor Rick Perry is a prime example, as he is often seen donning the "cowboy" hat in an effort to reinforce how blue-blooded his pedigree is as an American.

⁵ Again this adds to the references to antiquity suggested by the Elysian Fields place setting. A type of Hedonism, or Bacchanalian fervour certainly seems to pervade the lives of the people inhabiting the French Quarter.

creation of musical representations of place and landscape. It is possible if not likely, that having narratively shorter source material gives the composer more scope with which to build a richer, more nuanced depiction of physical worlds, encompassing physical spaces as well as the event-driven elements of narrative. Once again, the source size no doubt accounts in part for the larger role the physical plays in *Of Mice and Men* when compared to *Moby-Dick*. Although the American West is largely a harsh physical space, the notion of the pastoral certainly stirs regularly. Neil Lerner suggests that the pastoral, even when employed by composers outside Europe, is rooted in a decidedly European tradition:

The characteristic musical features of the musette or the pastorale, as understood and reconstructed in eighteenth-century instrumental music, involve a sustained pedal tone or drone and a simple, naïve melody, musical codes that were said to conjure an idealized rural setting. These musical signifiers could suggest or even affirm a connection with nature. ⁶

Although he does not explicitly refer to European musical practices, the allusion to "eighteenth-century instrumental music" indirectly implies Austro-Germanic musical hegemony, and the pastoral threads therein.⁷ It is interesting then that Copland, a composer synonymous with the musical vernacular of America, would employ a technique so deeply rooted in Viennese Classical hegemony. In his own words, writing to Carlos Chavez, Copland attempts to distance himself from European dominion: "I am through with Europe Carlos, and I believe as you do, that our salvation must come from ourselves and that we must fight the foreign element in America which ignores American

⁶ Neil Lerner. *Copland's Music of Wide Open Spaces: Surveying the Pastoral Trope in Hollywood*. *Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2001). 482. It is interesting to compare Lerner's perspective on the pastoral with Lewis Lockwood's, for example. Lockwood agrees that the pastoral mode emanated from eighteenth century origins, but suggests it was its programmatic and narrative treatment that truly cemented its role in western music. Both Lerner and Lockwood reach the same conclusion though that the pastoral is deeply important in the projection of narrative, but come to it via these slightly different routes. Lewis Lockwood. *Beethoven the Music and the Life*. W.W. Norton and Company, 2003. 136.

⁷ Ibid.

music.'" ⁸ This suggests that Copland's years in Paris may have exposed him to deeply changed, but ever-present threads of the pastoral in European compositional traditions, in spite of his reservations. Although I am verging on speculating over potentially unknowable motivations, Copland either consciously, or unwittingly, appropriated this technique, so successfully in fact that his depictions of the American landscape are some of his most commonly-referenced modes, both in musical discussion and in broader cultural discourse. ⁹ Mellers on the other hand, suggests that Copland's depictions of America go the other way in that the country's 'physical immensity' inspired his sparse and 'hollow' style and that he was behaving reactively to physical stimuli.¹⁰ Mellers' account, written during the lifetime of the composer, is perhaps the most factually accurate and thought-provoking, especially given Copland's own initially critical response to the vast emptiness of the American West, encapsulated in this diary entry:

What a country this is! Sickly looking parched earth inhabited by he-men cowpunchers. I should have gone to Finland... Whatever it was I expected reality proved different - very. I am still trying to acquire a taste for the landscape - it still seems frightfully austere. I can't get used to these barren hills - they remind me of the war-scarred battlefields I saw in France.¹¹

Copland's initial reaction to the country's sparse appearance may account for Meller's suggestions of emptiness in between intervals of

⁸ Carol Oja. *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s*. Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: January 2010. 242.

⁹ Lerner treads the well-worn path of referring to pop-culture's fixation on Copland's American modes. 'The pastoral codes of *Appalachian Spring*, the 'Western' codes of *Rodeo*, and the U.S. patriotic codes of the *Fanfare for the Common Man* resurface, respectively, in James Horner's score for *Apollo 13*, in commercials promoting beef consumption, and in recruitment campaigns for the U.S. Navy, to pick but one example for each.' Neil Lerner. *Copland's Music of Wide Open Spaces*. 479.

¹⁰ Mellers specifies the fourths and minor sevenths as elements that are at once inquisitive and aspiring, but also 'curiously hollow'. W.H. Mellers. *American Music (An English Perspective)*. 371.

¹¹ Jessica Burr. *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews*. 'Copland, the West and American Identity.' (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2002). P 22

the fourth, fifth and minor seventh. Copland was no doubt attempting to represent a place he clearly felt conflicted about. He wrote music that presented an honest account of a landscape whose beauty is not instantly recognisable in the traditional sense of the European greenery, forests and snow-capped mountains so often evoked in the music of Beethoven, Mahler and Schubert, but lies rather in the respect for its danger, immensity and harshness.¹²

2.2.1 Copland's Construction of the Physical - *Of Mice and Men*

His personal feelings aside, if taken on its merits, Copland's score does contain undeniably pastoral elements which are very affecting. Early on in the film, when George and Lennie settle to make camp under the stars, tender, high-register woodwind and string writing gently pierces the silence. A number of mild clashes (mostly 9 - 8, and 4 - 3 resolutions) continue to give the narrative a sense of propulsion, whilst reinforcing the serenity.

Copland does not however, only use the pastoral merely as some kind of representation of a physical utopia, but also uses it to highlight the isolation one feels when living outside the density of an urban environment. When Curly's Wife complains to Curly of her dissatisfaction at not having a chance to interact with a more cosmopolitan, urban culture, the pastoral drone reappears, as if to remind her of her lack of agency and connection with the wider world.¹³ Interestingly however, unlike the above where the pastoral almost mocks Curly's Wife's dreams of a bigger life, when she and Lennie bond over their shared sense of loneliness and social misunderstanding, it is entirely unaccompanied, allowing them to soliloquise separately. It is not until Curly's Wife is killed, and her lifeless body slumps to the floor and anguished chromatic figures begin rising, that Lennie begins to understand his grave mistake. This scene goes to the core of the bitter loneliness, and complete lack of sympathy associated with the desert setting.

¹² A wonderful example is the iconic opening to Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* of 1942. Although this work is inspiring and uplifting, it still favours use of sparse intervals such as the fourth and octave.

¹³ This again refers to Lockwood's Beethovenian pastoral, defined heavily by use of the drone. Lewis Lockwood. *Beethoven the Music and the Life*.

2.2.2 Copland and Hollywood

One of the additional areas of interest in this study is attempting to see composers' conception of America through vested interests, especially the Hollywood film establishment. Turning to Sally Bick, who drawing on primary source material like correspondence written by Copland, suggests that he was fighting an uphill battle to present American music in film free of the influence of the powerful studios:

Harold Clurman, an intimate friend working as a screenwriter in Hollywood, reported to Copland that Hollywood music directors, who were in control of artistic decisions, were still distrustful of art composers. Even directors who were considered more sympathetic... expressed the need for the art composer to be practical, to adjust, and to be flexible... To "adjust" meant to work within Hollywood's norms and conform to a romantic or post-romantic idiom as exemplified by the work of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Max Steiner, and their contemporaries. ¹⁴

Exerting creative control over the practices of composers is one of the ways the various voices expressing what it was to be American was stymied in Hollywood film.¹⁵ Despite the strength of the Copland score to this film, which was inevitably going to be entertaining regardless of studio intervention, it is possible that it lacks some of the critical depth of Floyd's operatic conception of the same source. This is not to suggest that there is anything inherently negative about Copland's musical portrayal of the physical, but that it is perhaps based more on an ideal rather than reality.

2.3 Carlisle Floyd's America

Carlisle Floyd, much like his filmic counterpart Copland, was faced with a stiff task in presenting his own personal realisation of the Steinbeck novella in musical terms. Although this may be an

¹⁴ Sally Bick. "Of Mice and Men": Copland, Hollywood, and American Musical Modernism.' *American Music*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Winter, 2005. 427.

¹⁵ As suggested by this paper, the three categories for national expression selected represent only some of the ways American composers were able to express their own national identity.

occurrence too common to warrant mentioning (i.e. unfeeling corporate bodies impinging on the processes of their creative employees), it is interesting to see how the treatment of the creative in question impacts on the outcome. Floyd's process of bringing the score of *Of Mice and Men* to life was certainly not without incident, and during the initial commission he was told in no uncertain terms that it was musically in need of a complete overhaul if it was ever to see opening night. This account is following a preview of Floyd's work to date on Act 1, in April of 1967:

[Kurt Herbert] Adler did not like what he saw or heard, and gave Floyd a polite but equivocal response: in its present state... he found *Of Mice and Men* unsuitable for a San Francisco production, but stated that if Mr. Floyd cared to rewrite the score, he would be willing to listen to it again. ¹⁶

In the case of Floyd compared to Copland however, he was either unable or unwilling to bend his musical style to the demands of the establishment and eventually lost both his contract and the opera's San Francisco premiere.¹⁷ This extended anecdote is not designed to generate sympathy for the plight of Floyd, whose opera of course went on to premiere in Seattle, but merely to highlight the difference of outcome when a work is produced free of external demands. As previously mentioned however, in the eyes of critics, Floyd's work was deemed the weaker of the two musical readings. It is however arguable that Floyd was working less to create a depiction of America's landscape like Copland, but rather a brutal character study. Floyd's work focuses very little on the physical world, and instead builds a strong, character-led narrative that presents the American national identity in a less positive light than Copland.

2. 4 The Ocean

A recurrent theme, seemingly fundamental to the American psyche, or perhaps more accurately its exterior image, is that it is perceived as a culture willing to push boundaries, challenge limits and move into dangerous or unexplored physical spaces. It could be argued that before their exploration of space in latter half of the 20th century, the established powers of American society sought to conquer the ocean as their domain. Although these merchants were

¹⁶ Thomas Holliday. *Falling Up: The Days and Nights of Carlisle Floyd, the Authorized Biography*. Syracuse University Press, 2012. 229.

¹⁷ Ibid. 233.

economically motivated, unlike the scientifically minded astronauts, they both represent individuals willing to risk their lives in the pursuit of exploration, regardless of their motivations. According to an extensive study of the economic ramifications of whaling by Lance. E Davis et al., America's efforts in that field challenged Britain's dominion as early as 1817, eventuating in complete eclipse in the 1840s.¹⁸ This shows not only an attitudinal irreverence toward their former colonisers, but is in keeping with a much more modern image of a nation capable of being extremely competitive in whichever financial market is the most profitable and of pushing the most extreme physical boundaries.

Further to the previous point, Edwin S. Fussell ties *Moby-Dick* itself to America's national interests in cultural expansion. He states:

It is quite impossible to say whether ocean or West is tenor or vehicle, just as it is impossible to say whether *Moby-Dick* is "really" about whaling or about America's imperial thrust into the waters beyond California.¹⁹

Fussell argues that America's pioneering goals are as central to the narrative as the whaling expedition itself. Accepting Fussell's point, I would only adjust it to suggest that not only is *Moby-Dick* a tale of "imperial thrust[ing]" of economic expansion into a new physical territory, but also that this is a conscious part of the national mythology.²⁰ It is also of interest to note that Fussell equates Melville's ocean with the West. As discussed in relation to *Of Mice and Men*, the West has a mythic

¹⁸ Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, Karin Gleiter. *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity and Profits in American Whaling, 1816 - 1906*. University of Chicago Press, 2007. 459.

¹⁹ Edwin S. Fussell. *Frontier in American Literature*. Princeton University Press, 2015. 263.

²⁰ The idea of national mythology is present to some extent in all nations. The image of the pioneering economic explorer in America could be compared, analogously to the Anzac diggers of WWI. Graham Seal suggests that "Anzac and its essential hero, the digger, are the consequences of historical, social and cultural processes that lie at the core of Australian national identity." Seal points out that the process of fostering a national mythology requires both historical and cultural input, meaning that these mythologies will not necessarily be scientific, but rather a meeting of fact and fantasy. Graham Seal. *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology*. University of Queensland Press, 2004. vii

quality²¹, resounding with the earliest conceptions of what it meant to be an American, thus equating the ocean with the West seeks to elevate the status of the ocean as physical space.

2.4.1 Heggie's Physical World

Turning to the operatic setting of Melville's text: in a 2011 interview Jake Heggie explains how the musical construction of the sea theme is intrinsically tied to the musical constructions of Ishmael/Greenhorn's character identity, and that one emanated from the other.²² Add this to Heggie's decision to set the entire opera at sea, excluding the lengthy opening on land from the original source, and the strength and importance of the ocean setting could not be more clearly established. By drawing a parallel between Ishmael's music and the sea theme, Heggie creates a bond between Ishmael's search for his identity (allegorically linked to the American cultural search for nationhood) and the importance of the ocean as physical space to the mythology of the American cultural identity. It is not only Ishmael, however, who is linked musically to the ocean in a mythological sense. As will be elucidated, Ahab is also a Poseidonic figure in his own right.

A significant absence in Jake Heggie's presentation of the great sea voyage, is Moby-Dick him (or her) self. Despite being the central narrative antagonist, the whale is only ever referred to in musical terms.²³ Even in spite of the whale's centrality to Ahab's single-minded hatred, Heggie's score presents Ahab's vengeance music in surprisingly lyrical terms. This lyricism expresses Ahab as a semi-deistic figure, one linked inextricably to the physical space of the sea. Harsh musical terms would have highlighted the cruel, marauding part of his character, whereas lyricism paints him as an element of nature, to be equally feared and marvelled at, like the whale itself, or like a god. Figure

²¹ Sally Bick identifies the mythic quality of the West and suggests that: "Representations of western landscapes not only have been a central theme in the history and identity of the United States, but they came to express a kind of popular mythology about the American West." Sally Bick. "Of Mice and Men": Copland, Hollywood, and American Musical Modernism.' *American Music*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Winter 2005. 426

²² "An Evening With Jake Heggie and Ian Campbell." YouTube. December 9, 2011. Accessed March 17, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlt9uCAk6E>

²³ Portraying a whale on stage would present a number of logistical challenges, likely to reduce the focus on the central story, which as has been argued here, is not necessarily only about hunting a whale, even if that is the vehicle used to propel the other narrative elements.

2.1 shows one of Ahab's final vocal entries before he makes his final attempt on Moby-Dick's life:

Figure 2.1 Moby-Dick - Act II Bar 2036 - 2039²⁴

Accents aside, this line is surprisingly lyrical, considering that it is the penultimate line before the whale fells Ahab. The tessitura, the phrase marks, lush harmonic shifts (A Major, C Flat Major and then F minor) and use of clean melodic movement (in this instance an octave leap followed by downward stepwise motion) give this line a Puccini-esque sensuousness, not unlike Tosca's final scream or Rodolfo's anguished cries at Mimi's bedside. This lyricism taps into a long history of earnest melodrama presented through lush harmonic consonance, following the example of composers like Puccini. This explicit reference to such a broad western practice suggests that *Moby-Dick* is as much an exploration of the American cultural soul as Puccini's rendering of *Tosca* is of the Italian soul, and that the story is as much about a burning need to survive in a harsh physical world, as it is a narrative about men trying to kill a whale.

2.4.2 Sainton's Ocean

²⁴ Jake Heggie. "Moby-Dick". Bent Pen Music Inc., 2010. 573.

Sainton's score, as previously suggested, is less character-focused than Heggie's, and seeks to invigorate the physical action merely by musically supporting it. The score opens with clashing symbols and aggressive brass figures, immediately conjuring oceanic conceptions. This acts as a musical reinforcement of a title sequence, where the main exploratory theme of the film is presented. As the action moves quickly on to introduce Ishmael however, the notion of the pastoral is briefly hinted at as consonant clashes and contrapuntal melodic material represent the idyllic greenery that Ishmael is walking through prior to leaving for his sea voyage. This device provides a stark contrast, as the brash cymbal-led ocean is shown to be the polar opposite of the gentler greenery of land. Sainton's score, in rather simplistic terms, immediately tells the audience which of the two physical places is easier to live in, leaving little doubt in the audience's mind of how brave the sailors were to abandon such an idyllic physical world in the pursuit of something greater. It is an interesting moment of synergy where the undoubted influence of composers like Copland can be seen on the subsequent generation of film composers. In this instance, Sainton is tapping into a Coplandesque representation of the idyllic, American pastoral.

2.5 The Big Easy

The mean streets and musical life of New Orleans pervades the physical world of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He pays specific attention to the nature of place setting and the musical streets of New Orleans in the opening description in the script:

The exterior of a two-storey corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L&N tracks and the river. The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm... In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. ²⁵

²⁵ Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. University of the South Publishing, 1947. 5-6.

This description is a valuable tool for perceiving specific views of the American cultural life and its physical environment, not only in light of Tennessee Williams' considerable credentials as a respected playwright, but also because in a work as brave and honest as this, he had no reason to undersell the negative aspects of American life as they lie at the very core of the narrative. This suggests that the play is not only an excellent piece of entertainment, but also a valuable cultural artefact that accurately describes life as it really was for people in the lower socio-economic echelons.

Williams also touches on the issue of race and music using inescapably clear (albeit somewhat irksome) language to describe whose fingers were on the keyboards in the bars populating the French Quarter.

2.5.1 New Orleans in Reality

Both André Previn and Alex North's scores focus heavily on character, conflict and internal, personal struggle. In North's iteration the sense of the physical is left almost entirely to the visual elements of film, except for the aforementioned allusions to the jazz influence. At the opening of the film for example, incidental, background Dixieland music floats innocuously in the air, giving the sense of jazz's pervasiveness, but showing that it is not the focal point. This is a clever device used by North, which acts somewhat as a disclaimer: acknowledging that he knows how important New Orleans is to the jazz movement, but then departs musically to put his own personal stamp on the film. Previn as well seems to take it as read that New Orleans' reputation is strong enough not to warrant explicit reference to its jazz history. Very little of the melodic material in the opera is explicitly 'jazzy'; one exception though being Stella's post-coital-bliss arietta [see Figure 2.2]:

Figure 2.2 A Streetcar Named Desire - Act I, Scene III Bars 339 - 343²⁶

²⁶ André Previn. "A Streetcar Named Desire". G Schirmer Inc., 1999. 110-111.

This wordless melody is characteristic of a jazz idiom as it is without formal text underlay (a reference to scat), there is a predominance of broader, slurred phrases, and it certainly has a balmy casualness one cannot help but associate with improvised jazz. Furthermore, Previn uses language that is explicitly part of the jazz vernacular; ``bluesy'', and ``jazz pizz.''.²⁷

2.6 Conclusions

In terms of narrative fulfilment, both *Of Mice and Men* and *Streetcar* reach the same ultimate conclusion which is that in these unforgiving environments only the strong (both in mental character, and group numbers) can thrive, to the exclusion of all others. Any form of perceived weakness fails. Both texts can be read as being highly critical of the construction of America's physical home in their relative contexts, given that in both, communities rise up to exclude the weak parties, either by death (Lennie) or exile (Blanche). Musical constructions, however, in the chosen iterations, do not to elucidate the danger of the physical world, but merely highlight its role as backdrop, amongst which only certain people are able to thrive. *Moby-Dick* does not present a malignant community, but instead focuses on the awe-inspiring power of the ocean, ultimately conceding that it is not a physical landscape in which Americans can thrive, but instead a baptismal trial that can shape the identity of those strong enough to survive it.

²⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 3 - The Mob

3.1 Introduction

The concept of the mob, or mob mentality, boils down to groupthink and activity that fails to consider the nuance of a situation, but instead acts based on seemingly primal urges, or in response to the actions of the others that are already a part of the mob. A mob lacks the unification or regulation of a governed organisation, giving it a chaotic, unpredictable character.¹ Groupthink and mob mentality are central to the conflict in both *Of Mice and Men* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and play a smaller, less significant role in *Moby-Dick*. Whilst conflict may be universal to most literature as a propulsive element in storytelling, it is not necessarily expected or required for a text to project conflict through the lens of groupthink or mob mentality. David Brion Davis explores this idea, suggesting that:

The frequency of fighting and killing in American literature is not necessarily proof of an unusually violent society, but literary treatments of violence have reflected certain historical conditions and circumstances... The ideal of social unity might conflict with the ideal of a self-sufficient and self-relying individual, but later writers projected the image of the individualistic hero into the vacant spaces of the West, where his violent acts were devoid of social consequence.²

What Davis identifies here is a dissonance between the American cultural ideal of an individual willing to depart from social norms,

¹ William Hair and Amy Wood add that the characteristic of a "mob"-fuelled "lynching" in the United States context refers to a concerted effort to "quick[ly]... ascribe guilt outside the bounds of due process." Not only are the physical acts of behaviour unpredictable, and expectedly violent, but the intent is that of an unsanctioned legal action, skipping the process of presumption of innocence and the right to an equitable defence, and instead proceeding to an un-officiated verdict and punishment. William I. Hair, Amy Louise Wood. *Lynching and Racial Violence*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2013. 87.

² David Brion Davis. 'Violence in American Literature.' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 364, Patterns of Violence, 1966. 28.

and the society of lawlessness he or she clashes with, whose constituent parts make up the mass culture that consequently controls what are considered the aforementioned social norms. In the previous chapter it was identified that an important element of the roving, discovering protagonist was his or her place in the American physical world. Davis goes further, suggesting that the mob is a constructed, distinctly American, literary obstacle in this physical world, derived from an historical truthfulness, rather than a reflection of the nation's values. Davis' point here is a perfect analogy for mob mentality. By the very nature of the mob, their values, however well intended, are always dwarfed by their actions. It is following Davis' suggestion of the mob being a specifically American characteristic in literature where we begin our discussion.

3.2 Of Mobs and Men

The idea of the mob is pervasive in *Of Mice and Men*. At the story's outset, Lennie and George flee a lynch mob, an event that foreshadows the narrative's eventual end. As has been previously discussed, one of the most important themes in *Of Mice and Men* is the idea of loneliness and the solitary life of the traveler. It is an interesting counterpoint to this theme that a sense of belonging or community only appears in the form of a bloodthirsty gang. These contrasting lifestyles are most obviously expressed in Carlisle Floyd's operatic iteration of the work. It is important to mention that the film does go to great lengths to present this same concept, but that musically there is less onus on a film composer to depict an idea that can be more succinctly presented using visual techniques. Floyd, however, had to utilise music as the dominant element to represent the idea of the mob and the longing for companionship.

There are two important dramatic episodes featuring a mob; both are foreshadowing events that refer directly to Lennie's eventual end: the chase from the last town (as previously mentioned), and the execution of Candy's dog. Floyd chose to musically illustrate only the dog's death, perhaps because of the inherent difficulty of portraying a mob in the physical confines of the average operatic stage, but more likely due to the sympathetic innocence of a dog, which bears such strong allegoric similarities to Lennie. During the scene, Candy is vocally assaulted by the entire bunkroom of men, who unanimously agree that his dog is too old to serve a purpose. Floyd favours a higher tessitura in this scene, highlighting the furor of united, coercive male voices, reinforced again by utilising a thronging homophonic figure in the chorus [see Figure 3.1]:

Figure 3.1 Of Mice and Men - Act 1, Scene 2 Figure 129³

Vocally, the bunkmates are practically shouting this high-register figure; the marcato marking creating the sense of coercion, echoing the sort of unanimity one expects of the officiating voices in a parliament or courtroom. Although there is rhythmic tumult in the accompaniment, perhaps hinting at some kind of alternative viewpoint, the voices of the mob stand immovably together, enforcing their cruel outcome, overcoming the meek counterargument suggested in the accompaniment. Along with this stark musical gesture, Floyd adds the dramatic instruction that "the men come out of their bunks and surround Candy. He looks imploringly into their faces."⁴ The meaning of which is almost undoubtedly that some outcomes are seemingly inescapable, and that sympathy is not a valuable commodity in this microcosm of wider American society where the voices of many inevitably drown the voice of the few.

Candy's protests are futile; a fact that highlights how close his own status, like Lennie's, is to that of the dog: he himself being older and less capable of physical exertion, one of the few identifiable marks of value. The only form of protest against this act comes from George's lamentations, who in spite of his more pragmatic understanding for the necessity of killing the dog, cannot help but feel that it was needlessly cruel to take away a lonely man's companion. This goes to the very core of George's own character; he is a loyal carer to Lennie and his only companion, despite harbouring serious reservations about Lennie's capacity as a working entity. While George states his case however, the sub-divided ramblings of Lennie arc above his vocal line, suggesting that as per previous interactions, George's pragmatic suggestions are being ignored by Lennie [see Figure 3.2]:

³ Carlisle Floyd. 'Of Mice and Men'. Belwin-Mills Publishing Corp., 1971. 74.

⁴ Ibid.

Figure 3.2 Of Mice and Men - Act 1, Scene 2 Figure 146⁵

The image shows a page of musical notation for the play 'Of Mice and Men'. It features four staves. The top staff is for Lennie (Lon.) with lyrics 'some - thin' young, not growed up yet. It's'. The second staff is for George (Geo.) with lyrics 'They was right though to take his dog.'. The third staff is for the right hand (R. hands) piano accompaniment. The bottom staff is for the left hand piano accompaniment. A box around the number 146 is at the top. The piano part includes a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic marking.

This foreshadows Lennie's eventual demise, and lays the foundation for George's sense of conflict between the will of the group and his own set of values that reaches an impasse when Lennie later commits manslaughter: the catalyst that resolves George to perform the mercy killing of his companion. It is with this act that George's pragmatism supersedes his desire for companionship, further enforcing the idea that the only community that exists in this America is a gang [see Figure 3.3].

Figure 3.3 Of Mice and Men - Act 1, Scene 2 Figure 146⁶

⁵ Ibid. 86.
⁶ Ibid.

The image shows a musical score for three vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are labeled 'Len.', 'Geo.', and 'R. hands'. The lyrics are: 'what I want most in the world. It's real hard but it had to be done.' The piano part includes dynamic markings like 'mp' and 'p', and a key signature change from F major to F minor indicated by a double sharp sign.

The significance of this dog death episode of the opera is reinforced when Lennie once again soars above George and the chorus of ranch hands to land on the tonic of an undecided tonality, as shown in Figure 3.3. This is used as a tool to foreshadow Lennie's own imminent death. Although George sang an A flat earlier in the bar, Lennie only a beat before that sang an emphatic A natural, blurring the lines between F Major and F minor. The tonal, root centre of F is suggestive of a definitive outcome, but the harmonic ambiguity leaves the question in the air of whether Lennie's fate will meet the F minor outcome, like Candy's dog, or whether his own F Major outcome will be met. Although harmonic binaries are a somewhat simplistic way to perceive pertinent narrative crossroads, they are recognisable signifiers, not unlike the use of brighter or darker lighting in film to indicate one outcome or another. It is indeed then, no coincidence that George has intimated that the darker events will prevail with the F minor mode, and Lennie the hopeful, but less likely F Major mode.

3.3 Carte Blanche

Blanche Dubois, who I have argued is the centrepiece of *Streetcar* and the point from which the motivic structures develop, departs from the opera in total musical isolation. Singing her final aria, alone, without interruption is appropriate both as a reflection of her character's journey through loneliness and her final destination in absolute isolation as a result of her fragile character being crushed by a violent and cruel society who act in a way not dissimilar to the marauding mobs in *Of Mice and Men*.

Musically, the aria is a touching epitaph and final dedication, tragically sung by the heroine to herself, and given her status as mentally unstable, overtly sexual pariah, it is fitting that no one

is there to sing her final farewell, not even Stella. Previn in this aria departs from the conversational, *parlando*⁷ style of melodic construction that dominates the rest of the opera, giving Blanche a melodious, Wagnerian farewell. While some would argue that this decision may have been influenced by the diva status of the artist for whom he was writing, it is dramatically supported by the original text, which sees Blanche painting an imagining of her own ideal demise at sea.

Nichole Maiman suggests that the return to melodic consonance is a reflection of Blanche having actually found peace, rather than merely imagining it.⁸ Although it may be splitting hairs to argue over the philosophical implications of imagining or realising a peaceful reality, especially in the face of mental demise, I do believe that this glorious coda is the final installment of Blanche's mental narrative that she has superimposed over the entire story. It is supportive of my previous claim that even in the throes of total mental collapse, Blanche Dubois is so thoroughly defeated by her world that the best future she can hope for is a merciful, peaceful death, rather than any kind of continuation of life.

Another element to Previn's musical portrayal of Blanche's descent that occurs to the listener is the departure from sensuousness and sexuality. Her melodic construction has changed dramatically from a *parlando* style, with frequent extended techniques such as *glissandi* and *portamenti*, to a more straightforward melodic and harmonic framework. A simple comparison to make is the 'Streetcar' theme of the repeated chord figure that opens the entire opera. The same chord is repeated twice, sounding like a tram horn. The chord is a complex, jazzy cluster with a B flat in the bass and a C 4/2 core, but with a number of colouring notes including A flat, D and A natural, as indicated below [see Figure 3.4]:

Figure 3.4 A Streetcar Named Desire - Act 1, Scene 1 Bar 1⁹

⁷ In vocal music, *parlando* refers to a melodic construction that mirrors patterns of speech, and is indeed informed and shaped by the intrinsic melodic shapes of speech. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, 2007-2015.

⁸ Nichole Maiman. *Who Wants Real? I want Magic! Musical Madness in a Streetcar Named Desire*. Masters Thesis, University of Maryland, USA, 2004. 32.

⁹ André Previn. 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. G Schirmer Inc., 1999. 1.

The image shows a musical score for a piano and tuba. The piano part is in the upper staves, and the tuba part is in the lower staff. The piano part features a cluster of notes, and the tuba part features a single note. The score is marked with dynamics and tempo changes.

Previn has marked in the score that "brass instruments bend the pitch each time this figure occurs."¹⁰ This chord is filled with a sense of lustfulness, represented by the cluster, literally bending the listener's sense of harmony out of shape. Although Blanche does not specifically sing this musical line, which is impossible as the essence of it is harmonic, not melodic, it is significant that she arrives on the streetcar being referred to: the vehicle that carries her to her fateful end. Following this introduction of the streetcar, there is very little traditional operatic exultation in Blanche's first vocal entry, which instead amounts to a rather flippant thought delivered in an inconsequential manner [see Figure 3.5]:

Figure 3.5 A Streetcar Named Desire - Act 1, Scene 1 Bar 23 - 24¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. 2.

23 **Blanche:**

They told me to take a street-car named De - si - re

This meandering parlando form predominates for the largest part of the opera, accelerating the rate of narrative propulsion, but also giving the characters the verisimilitude one would expect from normal people having relatively normal interactions.¹² In opera this is an extremely difficult balance to strike; between presenting real people, who are at the same time, larger than life.

Returning then to the melodiousness of her final aria, where the melodic material follows a more traditionally operatic form, this could suggest that Previn's construction of Blanche's music transitioning from parlando style to traditional operatic exposition aims to mirror her own gradual departure from reality. As she sings her farewell it is with an increasing sense of mysticism and magic, a desire her character famously voices in Act 3.¹³ Far from being an emotional trap by Previn, a man well known for his Hollywood film scores, this aria is as true as Blanche's conversational tone earlier, only now she is having a conversation with herself in a dream-like state. The orchestration contains a Wagnerian harp motif, as well as Straussian French horn soundscapes, elements that stick out in an opera with few moments of traditional operatic melodic figures, but are deeply affecting when considering the subject matter [see Figure 3.6].

¹² Although the term "normal" is relative and dangerously subjective, in the operatic sense it can be utilised to form a distinction between characters who represent the common person, and those who represent deities, kings, queens and the supernatural etc. In this way, the term normal could be applied to Carmen, who although she is an exceptional human being, she is still fallible and vulnerable, whereas Mephistopheles for example, is both an exceptional operatic character, as well as a representation of a supernatural being.

¹³ "I don't want realism... I'll tell you what I want. Magic! Yes, yes, magic!" Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. 130.

Figure 3.6 A Streetcar Named Desire - Act III, Scene IV Bar 128 - 130¹⁴

The musical score for Figure 3.6 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, labeled 'B.', with the lyrics 'God cre - at - ed in the sev - en days.' The middle staff is for the Horn (Hn.), marked 'p dolce'. The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, showing chords and a triplet in the final measure.

In further contrast to the opening, Blanche's final aria sees predominance for the first time of relatively simple chord structures, diatonic chords as in Figure 3.6. Previn does not however, depart entirely from his construction of Blanche's declining mental state, jumping regularly by diatonic relatives, shifting the tonal centre away from any kind of tonic, he moves from the initial F Major to as far as E Major, F sharp minor and B Major, lest the audience forget that Blanche now lives exclusively in a far-off reality.¹⁵ One of Previn's most important harmonic elements in this aria is the final cadence which is not, in point of fact, a cadence at all. The listener is led to expect a final, conventional cadential solution, with an established F Major tonic appearing first, followed by a preparatory D minor (chord vi), and then a quasi chord V (containing a C root note and a rising D to E figure, forming the foundation of a dominant function), only to unexpectedly resolve to a fully voiced C Major chord [see Figure 3.7]. This imperfect cadence reinforces to the listener that for Blanche, there can be no happy or perfect ending, but rather an endless continuation of her current state, like some kind of purgatory [see Figure 3.7]:

Figure 3.7 A Streetcar Named Desire - Act III, Scene IV Bar 177 - 180¹⁶

¹⁴ André Previn. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. 291.

¹⁵ Ibid. 293.

¹⁶ André Previn. "A Streetcar Named Desire". 295. It is also noteworthy that the ossia A preceding the final sustained G provides a stepwise, more cadential flow, rather than the more ongoing feeling of raising by a minor third, from the written E. Furthermore, the A is a

as my first love's eyes.

These diatonic harmonic shifts, along with the use of the harp, are what give this touching farewell a Wagnerian essence, not dissimilar to Parsifal's departure at the end of his ascendency from earth. Having fulfilled his narrative mandate, Parsifal's quest theme shifts a number of times to diatonic relatives prolonging a tonic resolution for as long as possible. Parsifal however, is a little bit luckier than Blanche, and reaches his resolution both in narrative and melodic return. It is interesting to note, while briefly comparing these two departures, the regularity of women's operatic demise into madness, as opposed to men's more common achievement of narrative success (which I would argue includes dying for a cause that has been prioritised as being above mortality). Susan McClary, in her seminal text *Feminine Endings* discusses the long history of opera's women falling into madness, merely because of what were perceived to be biological proclivities:

Over the course of the nineteenth century, psychiatrists obsessed over mechanisms of feminine dementia to the extent that madness came to be perceived *tout court* as feminine - even when it occurred in men. Moreover, they came to perceive all women - apparently "normal" ones - as always

diatonic part of the sparse D minor harmony, whereas the E would clash from a harmonic standpoint. Although it is not the point of this study to discuss editorial nuance, it must be said that the ossia A is a far more palatable option in this instance, given Blanche's declining capacity for complex understanding.

highly susceptible to mental breakdown, precisely because of their sexuality.¹⁷

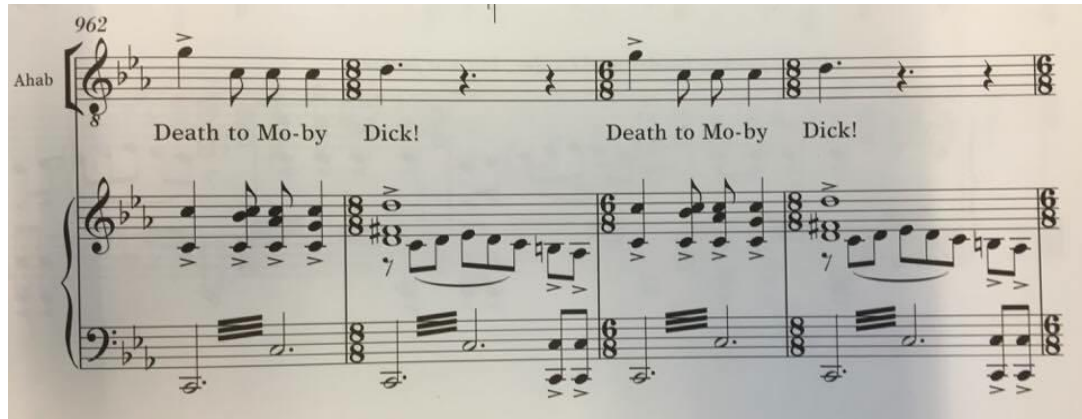
With reference to McClary's assertion that women are indeed isolated by a cultural heritage that has broadly portrayed them as weak and prone to breakdowns, it is worthy of note that Blanche stands out as an individual in her musical farewell when compared to the other important characters in the three selected texts of this study. Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* is granted the mercy of an honourable and (relatively) painless send off from his carer George, even despite his having committed an extremely severe crime (unlike Blanche). He is even fortunate enough to engage in a brief reprise of his and George's opening duet before he is executed, spared the far crueler fate of the rushing mob. Similarly in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael may be the lone survivor, but it is through his development in the narrative that he has been able to endure, despite the calamitous final moments on the Pequod. His growth is seemingly rewarded with a life preserver in the form of his close companion Queequeg's coffin, a macabre symbol of their symbiotic growth. Blanche, in spite of her attempts to make positive change is removed from society and pushed into her final madness by the largest mob present in any of the three texts. The mob that dictates Blanche's social status as pariah is the entire reigning patriarchy, headed by the muscular, aggressive alpha male Stanley, who is supported by the wider community.

3.4 Mobs At Sea

The role of groupthink and the mob is somewhat less pervasive in *Moby-Dick* than the other two texts, aside from Ahab, who has a certain doctrinal power over the crew's will as a group. For Ahab to achieve his personal vendetta, he requires the crew to work together towards that same goal. Ahab imbues the crew with a set of ideological principles that help to put them on his path of destruction of the white whale. In Heggie's portrayal of Ahab's sermon to the crew, he uses a syncopated rhythmic figure, to give the crew a character of testosterone-fuelled, mindless chanting [see Figure 3.8]:

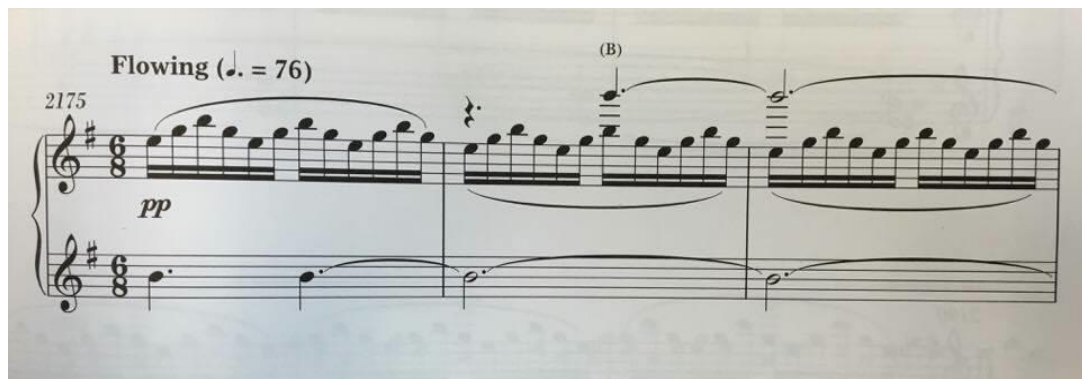
Figure 3.8 *Moby-Dick* - Act I Bar 962 - 965¹⁸

¹⁷ Susan McClary. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Place?: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. 84,



There is a religious fervor in this accented figure, clashing furiously with the wave-like rhythm of the triple-time signature that has been established beforehand [see Figure 3.9]. This presents the notion of the men clashing with nature as they brandish a syncopated duple figure against the previous predominance of the triple. This is an intentional contrast with the aforementioned wavelike figure, similar to the opening, again in 6/8 time [see Figure 3.9]:

Figure 3.9 Moby-Dick - Act 1 Bar 2175-2177¹⁹



Both proverbially, and literally, the men rock the boat and rail against the natural 6/8 flow as their manipulated mob, excepting Starbuck, is now at war with the sea.

It must be said that what takes hold of the men, following only a brief period of hesitation, is a certain doctrinal, cultish madness, one not uncommon in the history of sea voyages. Looking specifically at Melville's interaction with madness, Paul McCarthy suggests that "a general correspondence exists between Melville's experience, his interest in scientific literature about madness, and "the stability

¹⁸ Jake Heggie. "Moby-Dick". Bent Pen Music Inc., 2010. 115.

¹⁹ Ibid. 1.

or instability of each fictional world.’’²⁰ And indeed considering a wider approach, one needs look no further than *The Odyssey* for a tale of the ocean’s maddening influence on the fragile human mind. Robert Fagles, speaking of the universality of *The Odyssey*, both as a common English word, and a narrative that bears relation to the entire history of western literature, quotes Aristotle to establish a succinct, and indeed universally relevant synopsis: ‘‘A certain man has been abroad many years; he is alone, and the god Poseidon keeps a hostile eye on him.’’ This quotation goes to the very core of Ahab’s experience as a lone wanderer of the sea at the mercy of the tenuous fates of the ocean.²¹ Tying Ahab’s crew to the mythological history of ocean voyages in literature has the effect of highlighting the danger and perhaps futility of ambitious human endeavour, especially when acting in accordance with principles established by a group.

3.5 Where Does the Mob Leave Us?

In each text, the mob appears as the structural counterpoint to the individuals portrayed in chapter 1. Ishmael is only able to perceive his identity once free from the influence of Ahab’s mob. Lennie, a social outsider, is unable to survive under mob rule, and is ultimately felled because of his individualistic behaviour. Blanche, similarly to Lennie, is destroyed by the mob of patriarchy at the heart of the society in which she lives. The mob has the effect of homogenising, generalising and ultimately reducing the potency of individuals as well as their acts.

²⁰ Paul Lyons (Review). *American Literature*, Vol. 63, No. 3, Duke University Press, 1991. 547.

²¹ Robert Fagles. *The Odyssey*. Penguin Books Ltd, 1996. 3.

Conclusion

Following the musical readings of all three texts in the operatic and filmic forms, it is apparent that composers treat the same fundamental material differently depending on a number of factors. Input from corporate and non-artistic interests play a role in musical outcomes and representations, but more importantly, so does the influence of the cultural contexts of the composers themselves. The positive outcome is that in all three cases the operatic forms provide more direct musical representations of America than the filmic counterparts. This is not necessarily suggesting that there is an inherent honesty present only in operatic composition, but rather that there has been a movement towards artistic truthfulness over time, regardless of medium.

Musically speaking, the individuals presented in the operas, as opposed to their filmic counterparts, are more carefully and deeply developed. Their nuance and individuality is built and strengthened by their musical constructions. Similarly, the physical spaces that these individuals inhabit are constructed in clear musical terms; some that have become recognisable modes in the wider context, although mostly emanating from the film representations. I have argued that whilst these filmic modes may be more idyllic, like the individuals that live there, they are not necessarily the same stark representations as the operatic iterations of the physical worlds of America. Within these musical worlds, appearing as the counterpoint to the development of the individual, is the role of the mob in these communities. By setting the role of the individual against the obscurity of the group, the individual's strength and growth is more boldly emphasised. The operatic settings of each text focus more on this element than the films. Although you could attribute this to opera's practical focus on individuals, as opposed to film's capacity to capture a more nuanced perception of larger groups, it is equally likely that these texts contain important information about the role of the individual resisting the urge to act with the will of the mass, an element diminished in each of the filmic iterations of these texts.

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