

Accused



An anthem for SATB choir and two cellos
by Art Eschenlauer

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Cover image: "The Woman Taken in Adultery", 1805, William Blake (1757–1827), <http://tinyurl.com/blake-1805-woman-taken> which depicts John chapter 8 verses 8-9.

The story

Jesus says very little in this story. What is His focus as He writes on the ground? Could it be that Jesus is focused neither on using His wits to overcome the test nor on modeling compassion for us? Could it be that the individuality and person-hood of the woman and the men accusing her are not afterthoughts for him but rather are the focus of His compassion, thoughts, and will? If, in our zeal to learn about ourselves, we project ourselves into the role of either the woman or one of her accusers, then we risk missing the depth of Jesus' character, nature, and beauty, as revealed in His particular and personal interest in the people at hand. I think that the passage retains its full power and meaning when understood as the story of an actual event rather than as mere allegory.

Characteristics of this composition

Cello I generally reflects the woman's feelings, and Cello II reflects Jesus' ongoing empathy for her. Her feelings are evloving, even at times when the narration focuses on others: The cellos begin somberly reflecting the woman's dread about the possibility that she will suffer an agonizing death. After the second verse the mood becomes more hopeful because she evidently will not be killed, but she still is struggling with rejection; thus, the cellos begin a slow dance, no longer desperate, but still tentative. When she realizes that Jesus will not reject her either, the mood becomes positive, the key becomes major, and the cellos' dance becomes more spirited. The dramatic progression is not so much from near defeat to victory as it is from desperation to hope.

The sections of this piece reflect the drama of the story.

- The symmetrical structure represents that the facts of the woman's life and relationships at the end of the story have changed little, albeit with three notable exceptions: she has been publicly humiliated, her life is no longer threatened, and she has encountered at least one person who accepts her personhood rather than rejecting her for her actions:
 - The overture played by the cello (ms 1-4) mirrors the coda (ms 97-100).
 - The first and last verses are largely sung in four independent voices; unison is used for the story's climaxes.
 - The cello interludes between the verses reflect the woman's feelings at the corresponding point in the story.
 - The middle verse is mostly sung in two voices, with unison for the dramatic climax of the story.
- *Overture* - The overture begins quietly, reflecting Jesus' quietly teaching the people in the temple. It abruptly becomes loud as the accusers storm in with the woman, and it has an aspect of desperate terror foreshadowing the words of the first verse.
- *First Scene* - The cello accompaniment for the first verse reflects the woman's dread as she is present while her accusers propose a violent fate for her. Repetition of the word "this" in the different parts (ms 20-21) emulates the accusation spoken intensely by her several accusers. The increased force of the word "stone" (ms 26) reflect the brutality and inhumanity of the proposed sentence.
- *First Interlude* - The doleful character of the first cello interlude reflects the woman's despair as she hears that they want to kill her; perhaps she realizes that her accusers lack the most basic consciousness of her humanity and fright as they use her as a pawn in their attempt to bring Jesus down.
- *Middle Scene* - The second verse is quieter as all have eyes and ears focused on Jesus before He speaks and as all consider their own consciences afterward. The women's voices in ms 46-7 reflect the woman wailing as she feels humiliated, rejected, alone, and doomed; the cello pizzicato represents her teardrops. The choir sings Jesus' response in unison both to reflect its import and to reflect the fact that, for Him, personally, what is at stake is not the test but rather the plight of the woman and her accusers' need for empathy. The groans in the men's voices in ms 56-7 reflect the groans made (at least inwardly) by the accusers as they recognize their own failings. The parts and dynamics wane in ms 61-3 as the men withdraw, one by one.
- *Second Interlude* - The interlude after the second verse as a tentative dancing aspect to it which reflects the fact that the woman will live but that she still stands humiliated before Jesus (and the crowd, who have witnessed everything); it is unclear at this point in the story whether, though her life was spared, she will live as a pariah.
- *Final Scene* - The shift from minor to Major mode in ms 88 represents the woman's realization not only that will she live to try to make amends with the people in her life but also that Jesus does not number Himself among her accusers. The choir sings ms 90-7 in one harmonic voice to reflect how Jesus' instructions will be life-changing for her.
- *Coda* - The hopeful dancing aspect of the coda reflect the fullness of life that Jesus has rescued for the woman, along with the joy that He has recognized her personhood publicly, thereby encouraging others to recognize it as well.

Performance Notes

For optimal balance, the Sopranos must ensure that they can hear the Cellos, and the other singers must be able to hear the Sopranos. Although it is preferable to have two cellists available, if only one is available, then the Cello I part is written to be performed solo; when performing with Cello II, omit the lower notes of the double-stops in the Cello I part.

Acknowledgements

I thank the members of The United Church of Christ of New Brighton for volunteering to learn and record this piece. I am grateful to Dr. James Reyes for giving feedback on my composition, for helping with notation for choir parts, for encouraging me to set the cello parts in-dependently in dialog with the choir during the verses, and for patiently showing me the advantages of following Palestrina's style of coun-terpoint (although I have followed it imperfectly). Finally, I thank my wife, Julie, who supported my efforts on this piece.

Accused
John 8:1-11

Andante, with a sense of dread

rit. $\text{♩} = 75$

a tempo *smile* $\text{♩} = 80$

Cello I

Cello II

Optional

Jesus is teaching peacefully in the temple.

The scribes and Pharisees burst in, publicly shaming the woman caught in adultery.

mp *mf* *f* *fff* *dd* *d* *dd*

S. They brought a wo - man before Je - sus, shaming her to bring Him

A. They brought a wo - man before Je - sus, shaming her to bring Him

T. They brought a wo - man before Je - sus, shaming her to bring Him

B. They brought a wo - man before Je - sus, shaming her to bring Him

Vlc. I *du* *dd*

Vlc. II The woman feels humiliated, isolated, and scared. *du*

S. wife. I do not condemn you ei - ther. Know God for - gives and gives you Life!"

A. wife. I do not condemn you ei - ther. Know God for - gives and gives you Life!"

T. wife. I do not condemn you ei - ther. Know God for - gives and gives you Life!"

B. wife. I do not condemn you ei - ther. Know God for - gives and gives you Life!"

Vlc. I *ff* *f* *mf* *mf* *f* *ff*

Vlc. II The woman dances with joy.

16 *mf*

S. down. Asthey test - ed Him with ques - tions, Hestoooped writ - ingonthe

A. down. As they test-ed Him with ques - tions,— Hestoooped writing— onthe

T. — down. Asthey test-ed Him with ques - tions, Hestoooped writ - ingonthe

B. down. Asthey test - ed Him with ques - tions, Hestoooped writ - ingonthe

Vlc. I *mf*

Vlc. II

20 *rit.* *f* *a tempo* *rit.* *ff*

S. ground.— "This wo - manis a sin - ner, guil-ty of adulter - y.— Mo - ses'

A. ground.—— "This_ womanis a sin - ner, guil-ty of__ad - ulter - y. Mo - ses'

T. ground.—— "Thiswomanis a sin - ner, guil-ty of ad - ulter - y.——

B. ground.—— "This wo - man is a sin - ner, guil-ty of ad - ulter - y. Mo - ses'

Vlc. I *f*

Vlc. II

84 *♩ = 80 Andante, with growing confidence* *mp* *mf*

S. demns?" Said the wo - man, chok-ing back her tears, "Lord, I

A. demns?" — Said the wo-man, chok-ing back her tears, "Lord, I

T. demns?" Said the wo - man, chok-ing back her tears, "Lord, I

B. demns?" Said the wo - man chok-ing back her tears, "Lord, I

Vlc. I *mp* *mf*

Vlc. II

88 *♩ = 85 Andantino, more hopefully* *f* *mf*

S. see notoneof them!" "Youmay go, but do not sin a-gain. Be a - gain a faithful

A. see notoneof them!" "Youmay go, but do not sin a-gain. Be a - gain a faith- - ful

T. see notoneof them!" "Youmay go, but do not sin a-gain. Be a - gain a faithful

B. see notoneof them!" "Youmay go, but do not sin a-gain. Be a - gain a faithful

Vlc. I *f*

Vlc. II

Jesus' compassion makes the woman's heart stop breaking. Joy bursts forth in her heart as she feels redeemed by Jesus' love and forgiveness.

85 ♩ = 85 Andantino, waltzing tentatively

64

Vlc. I

Vlc. II

The woman now hopes to live, but she still struggles with rejection and remorse.

72

Vlc. I

Vlc. II

79 ♩ = 75 Adagietto, with firm reassurance

S. *mf* "Woman, where have your accusers gone? Is not one left who con-

A. *mf* "Woman, where have your accusers gone? Is not one left who con-

T. *mf* "Woman, where have your accusers gone? Is not one left who con-

B. *mf* "Woman, where have your accusers gone? Is not one left who con-

[illegible]

45

S. *mf* *> mp* *mf* *> mp* *f*

A. *mf* *> mp* *mf* *> mp* *f*

T. *mf* *f*

B. *mf* *f*

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

Altos may choose to sing most of the next phrase an octave lower

The woman stood be-fore Je - sus, shamed, re - ject - ed and a - lone. "Let the

The woman stood be-fore Je - sus, shamed, re - ject - ed and a - lone. "Let the

Vlc. I *mp* *f* *pizzicato ("tear drops")* *arco*

Vlc. II

50

S. *rit.* *ff* *a tempo* *f*

A. *ff* *f*

T. *ff*

B. *ff*

sin-less one a - mong you be the first to cast a stone." As they looked in - to their

sin-less one a - mong you be the first to cast a stone." As they looked in - to their

sin-less one a - mong you be the first to cast a stone."

sin-less one a - mong you be the first to cast a stone."

Vlc. I *ff*

Vlc. II

Jesus challenges the men to rethink their position; the woman remains overcome by fear.

56

S. *ff*

A. *ff*

T. *mf* *ff*

B. *mf* *ff*

Ugh! Oh! Ugh! Oh!

consciences, their own sins came in - to view, and, be - gin - ning with the

consciences, their own sins came in - to view, and be - gin - ning with the

Ugh! Oh! be - ginning with the

Ugh! Oh! and, be - gin - ning with the

Vlc. I *f* *ff*

Vlc. II *f*

The men groan as they repent. Humbled, the men leave, one by one.

60

S. *rit.* *mf* *a tempo* *mp* *p* *pp*

A. *mf* *mp* *p*

T. *mf* *mp*

B. *mf* *mp*

old - est, a-shamed and hum - bled, they with - drew. *One singer*

old - est, a-shamed and hum - bled, they

old - est, a-shamed and

old - est, a-shamed

Vlc. I *mf* *mp* *p* *pp*

Vlc. II *mf*