

“He Could’ve Been a Contender”: Thematic Integration in Leonard Bernstein’s Score for *On The Waterfront* (1954)

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Just as the longshoremen unified and went with Terry Malloy to work at the close of *On the Waterfront*, so the triumph of this film results from the collaboration of the cast and crew united under Elia Kazan’s singular vision. Budd Schulberg compares the creation of the ideal motion picture with a horse race where all the participants cross the finish line in a “dead heat.”¹ Schulberg and Kazan’s story of redemption, to which all people can relate, the depth of character portrayal by Marlon Brando, Eva Marie Saint, Rod Steiger, and Karl Malden, the documentary style of Boris Kaufman’s photography, and the dual nature of the Hoboken docks—both idyllic and dangerous—make this film a photo finish. Furthermore, the movie is one of those rare art works that not only portrays the cultural Zeitgeist, but also allows viewers of subsequent generations to apply it to their particular place in history. Upon twenty years of reflection about the movie, Kazan stated that, “the love scenes are the best thing in the film.”² While Leonard Bernstein’s music indeed enhances

the love scenes quite well, the following analysis concentrates on sections of his score that escaped critical acclaim, but, arguably, were written more effectively.

While most sources have cited Leonard Bernstein’s disdain for the editing process,³ or criticized the score for various reasons, there have been works that focus analytically on his score. William Hamilton, shortly after the release of the film, employed the conductor part to illustrate cues that were more musicodramatically effective.⁴ The following year, Hans Keller painted an equally rosy picture of the score by declaring Bernstein’s work to be among the best film scores ever composed.⁵ More recently, Stephen Lias made an extensive comparison between Bernstein’s film score and the subsequent *Symphonic Suite*.⁶ Lias discusses cues from the film as well as their inclusion (or exclusion) in the *Symphonic Suite* based upon both musical and dramatic reasons. Lias raises

interesting questions and, perhaps more importantly, provides musical examples from the score not found in the *Suite*. Finally, Jon Burlingame provided a detailed account of the circumstances that led to Bernstein scoring the film, a brief discussion of the music, and a list of Bernstein’s titles for the music cues (“cue titles”).⁷

Despite the film’s important place in Hollywood lore, and Bernstein’s own lofty perch in 20th century American music, the score as a whole has been overlooked by musicology. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, I do hope to bring attention to some of the most striking examples of thematic coherence in the score. In addition, the present work closely examines Bernstein’s sketches and, in doing so, represents a departure from the aforementioned articles as well as a means for a more complete musicodramatic analysis.⁸ The Leonard Bernstein Collection in the Music Division of the Library of Congress contains his manuscripts for *On the Waterfront*. This collection, which is still being catalogued at this writing, is

1 Budd Schulberg, foreword to *On the Waterfront*, ed. Joanna E. Rapf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xix.

2 Thomas H. Pauly, *An American Odyssey: Elia Kazan and American Culture*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1983), 181.

3 Most famously in Leonard Bernstein, *The Joy of Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 68.

4 William Hamilton, “On the Waterfront,” *Film and TV Music* 14 (September-October 1954): 3-14.

5 Hans Keller, “On the Waterfront,” *The Score and I.M.A. Magazine* 12 (June 1955): 81-84.

6 Stephen Lias, “A Comparison of Leonard Bernstein’s Incidental Music for the Film *On the Waterfront* and the Subsequent Music for the *Symphonic Suite* from the Film, and an Original Composition: Symphony No. 1—*Music for Theater*” (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 1997).

7 Jon Burlingame, “Leonard Bernstein and *On the Waterfront*: Tragic Nobility, A Lyrical Song, and Music of Violence,” in *On the Waterfront*, ed. Joanna E. Rapf, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

8 Burlingame does reproduce facsimiles of two pages from Bernstein’s sketches (Burlingame 138-39), though not for analytical purposes.

Example 1: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Main Title.” Opening solo in horn, mm. 1-6.

Horn in F

mf > *p* > *f* > *mf* > *p* dolce

estimated to include between four and five hundred thousand items.⁹ It holds Bernstein's sketches (short score) for *On the Waterfront* that were given to Marlin Skiles and Gil Grau to orchestrate the full score.¹⁰ Detailed orchestral annotations on Bernstein's sketches document that he himself made decisions regarding instrumentation and orchestration before giving them to Grau and Skiles.¹¹ Two of the cues, “The Accident” and “The Challenge,” were composed and recorded, but not used in the film. The former was intended to accompany Kayo Dugan's death and the latter was to enhance Terry's verbal taunting of Friendly before their fight. Burlingame cites music critic William Hamilton, stating that the cues were deleted because “the sound-track was already too full of dialogue and ambient noise to accommodate any music at all.”¹²

9 The Library of Congress, “The Leonard Bernstein Collection,” <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/lbhtml/lbhome.html>. (accessed 12 June 2007). Except for examples 4, 8, 9, 12, 15-17, and 19 from the film score, which is controlled by EMI Publishing Group (per ASCAP), the rest are from the Symphonic Suite published by Boosey and Hawkes, sole agent of Amberson Holdings LLC.

10 The term “sketches” refers here and throughout what follows to Bernstein's short score held at the Library of Congress. The latter term is retained parenthetically to reflect Library of Congress nomenclature and to distinguish from the “Waterfront Rough Sketches,” which are also contained in the Library of Congress Collection and consist of incomplete preliminary sketches of various cues.

11 For more on Grau's and Skiles's role in orchestrating Bernstein's score, see Burlingame, 128-130.

12 Burlingame, 134. Although “The Challenge” is not heard in the film it does survive in the Symphonic Suite. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Anthony J. Bushard, “Fear and Loathing in Hollywood: Representations of Fear, Paranoia, and Individuality vs. Conformity in Selected Film Music of the 1950s” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2006), 485-86.

Bernstein's manuscripts at the Library of Congress are the main source for the musical examples below because they reflect best what is heard on the sound track and also include music not in the Symphonic Suite. Whenever Bernstein's intentions were not clear according to the sketches (short score), or if the Symphonic Suite indicated more accurately what is heard in the film, the author relied upon the Symphonic Suite. Therefore, measure numbers pertain to the source indicated in the caption headings. Music cues were organized by reel and part number and, as noted above, Bernstein provided titles for each one. The musical examples herein are identified by Bernstein's titles on the sketches (short score).¹³

With the *main title* music Bernstein sets the mood for the subsequent drama and introduces themes that will recur throughout the movie. He presents the main musical theme of the movie as a solo in the horn (see Example 1). This melody is filled with a sense of determination. The horn sounds the opening motive centered on F only to sink down then rise again to its original place. It falls a second time then ascends even higher to its peak in m. 4. The theme then descends and reaches resolution.

The steadily rising, arpeggiated melody suggests the feeling of attaining a goal—a journey disturbed by the modulation to D

13 A list of cue titles can also be found in Burlingame's chapter. For a detailed inventory of the materials in the Leonard Bernstein Collection in the Library of Congress pertaining to *On the Waterfront*, see Bushard, 515-18.

minor. Following this event, the A-natural within the new key of D-minor seems to restore order to the passage. After viewing the film, as Bernstein had before writing any music, this resolution perhaps foreshadows the redemption of Terry Malloy—in this instance, the reclaiming of his dignity.¹⁴ Joanna E. Rapf, in her study of Kazan's production notebook for the film, remarks that the idea of dignity was foremost on the director's mind as he worked on this project. Kazan writes that, “He [Terry] wants his dignity back. He wants his self-respect back. He's not going to be cowed anymore . . . He wants his dignity back . . . He testifies!” Later Kazan notes under the heading, “Theme [underline Kazan's]” that, “This Motion Picture is about one thing only: a Young man who has let his dignity slip away, and regains it!”¹⁵ The “blue” note in m. five is characteristic of Bernstein's style and suits the drama as it deals with organized crime and the working class (two sociocultural groups associated with jazz and blues). Furthermore, Bernstein colors the entire score with jazz and blues references.

Upon further inspection, however, the “blue” note injects more than color into the cue. The excerpt progresses within F

14 In fact, Bernstein used as an expressive marking in the Symphonic Suite “Andante (with dignity).” The use of parentheses for the Symphonic Suite differs from the same marking found in the sketches (short score) for the film: Andante, *With Dignity*.

15 Joanna E. Rapf, introduction to “The Mysterious Way of Art”: Making a Difference in *On the Waterfront*, in *On the Waterfront*, ed. Joanna E. Rapf, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13. Emphasis is Kazan's.

Example 2: *On the Waterfront*, Symphonic Suite. “Opening Shot to Scream.” “Violence” theme in timpani and piano, mm 20-25.

Presto barbaro

Timpani I

Piano

hard sticks

gliss.

una corda

stacc.

p

p

8th

Example 3: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Opening Shot to Scream.” “Pain” theme in saxophone, mm. 22-33.

Alto Sax.

ff

8

minor until the C-flat is sounded, thereby changing the complexion of the entire melody. In addition, the tritone created by the descent from C-flat to F-natural establishes a sense of melodic instability—a feeling comforted in the subsequent measures. As this opening theme foretells the journey Terry must take towards his redemption, it also warns of the pain he must endure in order to save himself. This key change in the “Dignity” theme becomes even more prescient when one considers how it relates to the next theme introduced in the film.

In the opening scene of the movie Bernstein creates a dramatic shift in mood from the *main title* music. One sees a large ship in the background and, in the foreground, the docks. Also in the foreground a group of men is seen leaving a small shack. Accompanying the action is a highly rhythmic, violent ostinato in the timpani and piano

(see Example 2).¹⁶ Above this ostinato another melodic idea in the alto saxophone is presented—a bluesy lament that serves as the “Pain” theme (see Example 3).¹⁷

Bernstein’s music forces the viewer to focus on the men on the dock and not the overall setting. The relentless energy of the “Violence” ostinato suggests a primitive, unrelenting force that is not in tune with this seemingly innocuous scene of men walking away from the docks. In addition the irregularity of the percussion polyrhythms within the low register of the timpani establishes a sense of unease that creates tension with the serene view of the docks.

¹⁶ Although the piano is audible on the sound track, Bernstein does not indicate its presence in the sketches (short score), thus the use of the Symphonic Suite for this example.

¹⁷ The name “Pain theme” comes from Lias’s dissertation. Lias cites Bernstein’s reference to this theme as a “tugging, almost spastic, motive of pain” (Lias, 11). The names given to other themes and/or motives in the paper are mine.

Here the music reveals the inner violence of Johnny Friendly’s gang. The plaintive cry in the saxophone of Example 3 (which, among the other intervals that make up the melody) is distinguished by the opening minor second between scale degrees 4 and 3 (in F-major) and introduces a rather dissonant theme whose melodic volatility is an appropriate counterpart to the driving rhythm. In addition, it perhaps underlines the pain caused by this violence and pressure on Terry. It is clear from the expression on Terry’s face and his sloppy gait that he is not excited about whatever it is that he is going to do. His face suggests a person struggling with a moral dilemma. As Kazan puts it.

Watch the way Brando walks—he did it himself—in sort of an abashed way, his head down . . . The feeling that he’s not himself, a feeling that he belongs

Example 4: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). Terry calls up to Joey Doyle, mm. 46-50.

The musical score for Example 4 consists of three staves. The top two staves are labeled 'Violins' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Cellos, Basses'. The music is in 4/4 time and begins with a dynamic marking of *ff*. The Violins play a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, while the Cellos and Basses provide a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and quarter notes.

Example 5: *On the Waterfront*, Symphonic Suite. "Opening Shot to Scream." Terry tells Joey to meet him on the roof, mm. 76-88.

The musical score for Example 5 is a full orchestral arrangement for mm. 76-88. It includes parts for Piccolo, Flutes 1-2, Oboes 1-2, E♭ Clarinet, B♭ Clarinets 1-2, Horns 1-4 in F, Trumpets 1-3 in B♭, Trombones 1-3, Tuba, Timpani 1-2, Snare Drum, Piano, Violins 1-2, Violas, and Cellos/Contrabasses. The score is marked *ff* and features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and slurs across all instruments.

to somebody else, a feeling that he wants his boss's approval, a feeling that he's tied up in a situation that he has no choice about.¹⁸

The action moves to a street outside of an apartment building and Terry yells up to his friend, Joey Doyle, that one of Joey's pigeons flew into Terry's coop. Terry then tells Joey to meet him on the roof to receive the pigeon.

Underneath this dialogue one hears development of the first four notes of the "Pain" theme (Example 3) in the cellos and basses of Example 4. In addition Bernstein alternates repetition of the last three notes of the "Pain" theme with its

18 Jeff Young, Kazan: *The Master Director Discusses His Films: Interviews with Elia Kazan*, (New York: Newmarket, 1999), 146-47.

Example 5A: *On the Waterfront*, Symphonic Suite. “Opening Shot to Scream.” Terry tells Joey to meet him on the roof, mm. 76-88. (continued)

The musical score for Example 5A shows the orchestration for measures 76-88. The instruments listed are Picc. Fl., 1-2, Ob., 1-2, E♭ Cl., B♭ Cl., 1-2, Hrn., 1-4, B♭ Tpt., 1-3, Tbn., 1-3, Tuba, Timp., 1-2, S. Dr., Pno., Vln., 1-2, Vla., and Vc., Cb. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex polychordal textures. Dynamics include *ff* (fortissimo) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The score shows a variety of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines across the instruments.

retrograde in the violins. Given the recent meeting between Terry and Friendly’s men, the dissonance of the first four notes of the “Pain” theme in the low strings—semitone followed by tritone counterbalanced by the more consonant major seconds and thirds in the violins—suggests to the listener that there is much conflict between Terry’s words and Terry’s intentions.

As the camera pans up to show men on the roof the audience realizes that this is a set up. Bernstein presents the “Violence” theme *tutti*, conveying to the audience not only the violence of these same men, but the brutality of the murder they are about to commit (see Example 5).¹⁹ The

first four measures comprise an oscillation between a G-minor/F-sharp minor bichord, followed by another bichord between A-flat minor/E-flat major. The dense orchestral context, the louder dynamics, and the increased level of intervallic tension as a result of the polychordal harmonies within this presentation of the “Violence” theme helps to realize fully the musicodramatic implications of the opening timpani figure in Example 2.²⁰

To establish continuity between both musical and dramatic elements, Bernstein derives motivic material from the opening “Dignity” theme to create the “Pain” theme. As has been suggested, the dramatic climax of the opening melody is

the unexpected passage B-flat - A-flat - C-flat - F-natural. This figure is not only important musically, but also cinematically. At the exact moment in the *main title* music in which the audience hears this passage, the title of the film appears. Furthermore, when those four notes are isolated from the “Dignity” theme (see Example 6) they serve as the basis for the opening motive of the “Pain” theme. Both of the thematic cells begin on B-flat and comprise identical numerical intervals, but different modifiers: M2 - m3 - Aug. 4 for the former and m2 - m3 - P4 for the latter (see Example 7). The characteristic tritone of the “Dignity” motive is replaced with a perfect fourth in the “Pain” motive, and a minor second opens the motive rather

¹⁹ Bernstein outlines the basic harmonic material of the excerpt, but is vague regarding the instrumentation. I employ the Symphonic Suite as a more complete picture of Bernstein’s intentions.

²⁰ Lias, 12.

Example 6: *On the Waterfront*. “Main Title.” “Dignity motive isolated from “Dignity” theme.



Example 7: *On the Waterfront*. “Opening Shot to Scream.” “Pain” motive.



than the major second.²¹ However, the same basic shape prevails between the two motives. In addition the semitone opening of the “Pain” motive is usually on the strong beat with the second note sustained, thus enhancing the prominence of the interval within the context of the theme.²²

Since the “Dignity” theme comments upon Terry’s development as an individual, perhaps Bernstein derived the “Pain” motive from that specific

cell of the “Dignity” theme in order to comment upon those particular aspects of fear and isolation that eventually lead to Terry’s triumph. Bernstein further emphasizes the importance of this relationship in the prominent role that the “Pain” motive plays in enhancing several other scenes throughout the movie.

Bernstein achieves yet another stark contrast between music cues as the rooftop of the apartment building is first seen. In the film the action takes place in two locations: on the ground (the church, the waterfront, the streets) and on the rooftop. Kazan has created two worlds from Terry’s point of view: the dirty, hard reality of the ground and the more peaceful, ideal world on the rooftop. It is on the rooftop that Terry contemplates his fate in life while caring for pigeons. It is on the rooftop where Terry and Edie fall in love and have their first kiss. Later, it is on the rooftop where, after his testimony, Terry decides that he must go to the waterfront and confront Johnny Friendly. The rooftop is first seen the morning after Joey’s murder. There is a haze in the air and life appears to be fine in the aftermath of the previous night.

The scene opens with a local boy running to meet his idol, the one-time prize fighter Terry, who is considering the events of the previous night. The boy, who

perhaps represents the innocence of Terry’s childhood, confronts the adult Terry, who is clearly guilt-ridden. To accompany this scene, Bernstein wrote a dreamlike, rather pensive piece of music. Bernstein scored the passage for flutes, solo oboe, harp, muted strings, and vibraphone (see Example 8). The harp presents an arpeggio reminiscent of Debussy and sustained by the vibraphone and muted strings. Above this is an oscillating passage between A-flat and E-flat in the flutes. The dual ostinato serves as the foundation for a melancholy solo based on the “Pain” motive in the oboe (see Example 9).

The harmonic stasis and the searching, soulful melody create a mood of solitary reflection, isolated from the real world. The scene, though tranquil, conveys a sense of profound sadness, Terry’s sorrow regarding his actions, and the unfortunate course his life has taken since *he* was that innocent, little boy. Bernstein also evokes a sense of unease in this passage, veiled by the outwardly serene quality of the cue. In his contemplation Terry is afraid of the unknown consequences that certainly await him in the real world below. Bernstein depicts this melodically with the characteristic minor second between flatted-fifth and fourth scale degrees (in F-minor) of the “Pain” motive in

21 Here and throughout the paper I differentiate between smaller *motives* that combine to make larger *themes*. For instance the “Pain” *theme* refers to the entire passage as shown in Example 3 while the “Pain” *motive* refers to the cell in Example 7. Likewise, the “Dignity” *theme* concerns the horn solo in Example 1 and the “Dignity” *motive* describes the isolated cell in Example 6.

22 A connection can be made between this motivic analysis and Arnold Schoenberg’s concept of the *Grundgestalt*. The term *Grundgestalt* (generally translated as “basic shape”) originated during Schoenberg’s early attempts at codifying his twelve-tone theory. According to Schoenberg the basic shape is the fundamental motive that affects and governs musical events in a piece. He viewed themes, variations, and other structural entities as manifestations of the *Grundgestalt*. These “events” were usually considered thematic, but there is nothing intrinsic in the theory that confines it to pitch configurations. Furthermore, Schoenberg observed this phenomenon in his studies of the music of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner and therefore found justification for his emerging compositional theories as a continuation of that tradition. While the drama is the main force that guides Bernstein to make musical decisions regarding this score, the way in which he manipulates yet maintains the basic shape(s) of important motives is consistent both with Schoenberg’s principle of the *Grundgestalt* and with the film’s plot structure. For more on Schoenberg’s concept of *Grundgestalt* see David Epstein, *Beyond Orpheus: Studies in Musical Structure* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 17 and Patricia Carpenter, “Grundgestalt as Tonal Function,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 5 (1983): 15-38.

Example 8: *On the Waterfront, Sketches* (Short Score). “Roof Morning.” Dual ostinato in harp, stings, vibraphone, and flutes, mm. 3-8.

Moderato

Flute

Vibraphone

Strings (muted)

Harp

Example 9: *On the Waterfront, Sketches* (Short Score). “Roof Morning.” Melody in oboe based on “Pain” motive, mm. 10-29.

Oboe

Example 9, m. 10. Furthermore, two descending passages in the oboe (between E-double flat and A-flat in mm. 18-20 and between F-flat and B-flat in mm. 24-26) outline tritones and therefore contribute to the despondence of the melodic component. An additional sense of harmonic uncertainty is created through

the presence of a tritone-related chord between tonic and lowered dominant triads centered on F-natural and C-flat in the strings (Example 8, m. 4; the figure is repeated in m. 6). The tension between the lamentful, dissonant melody and the tonally ambiguous accompanying material underlines the conflict between Terry’s ideal

world and his reality, between his potential and what he is. The music of this scene is in stark contrast to the most recent sequence, the aggressive, pulsating rhythms of the “Violence” theme. In addition Bernstein’s use of the “Pain” motive in a different context enhances the strong connection between the drama and the score.

Example 10: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Riot in Church.” “Riot” theme heard as violence ensues at the church, mm. 4-6.

The musical score for Example 10 consists of six staves. The top staff is for Flutes 1-2 and Oboes 1-2, with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff is for Horns 1-4 in F, also with a treble clef and one flat. The third staff is for Trombones 1-3, with a bass clef and one flat. The fourth staff is for Timpani, with a bass clef and a 'Cym.' marking above the first measure. The fifth and sixth staves are for Viola and Clarinets 1-2, and Cello and Bassoons 1-2, both with alto clefs. The music is in common time (4/4). The upper woodwinds play a dissonant melody of three notes (Bb, Ab, G) with various dynamics (mf, f) and accents. The lower strings and woodwinds play a rapidly moving ostinato pattern, starting at a moderate dynamic (mf) and increasing to a forte (f) dynamic.

Example 11: *On the Waterfront*. Closing motive of “Pain” theme.

The musical score for Example 11 is a single staff for Alto Saxophone, with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It shows a closing motive consisting of a descending three-note pattern (Bb, Ab, G) followed by a large leap to a higher note, all marked with a forte (f) dynamic and an accent (>).

Bernstein further coordinates thematic materials during a scene in which there is a fight at the church. Father Barry, in order to get a better idea about how Johnny Friendly and his gang are really treating workers on the waterfront, calls a “secret” meeting at the church. Terry, Joey Doyle’s father, and sister, Edie, are all in attendance. As the “congregation” begins to leave hired men from Johnny Friendly’s gang throw rocks through windows and bang clubs outside the church in order to intimidate those inside. As this violence ensues Bernstein presents a vigorous ostinato in the violas

and clarinets beneath a dissonant melody in the flutes, oboes, and horns, seen in Example 10.²³ Bernstein makes the melodic component more dissonant by adding dyads separated by a major second to the notes of the theme (top notes), tightly grouping the three note chords. As the scene increases in intensity the orchestration becomes denser.

This passage should sound familiar because it, too, is derived from previous material: The excerpt is a reconfiguration of the

²³ Of course, clarinets would never be written in the alto clef, but since the viola doubles the clarinet both are placed on the alto clef for spatial considerations.

musical materials associated with the “Pain” theme. The harmonic basis, in both cases, is a rapidly moving ostinato to highlight the unyielding brutality of Friendly and his supporters, an alternation of thirds, primarily in the timpani and piano for the “Violence” theme, and a repetitive stepwise pattern in the strings and woodwinds for the accompaniment to the “Riot” theme. Secondly the “Pain” and “Riot” themes both conclude in a similar manner: fast, descending three-note patterns, marked by stepwise motion followed by a large leap (see Examples 11 and 12). Furthermore the initial cell

Example 12: *On the Waterfront, Sketches (Short Score)*. “Riot in Church.” Closing motive of “Riot” theme, m. 41.

Woodwinds,
Trumpets 1-3
ff

Violins, Violas
ff

Cellos,
Contrabasses
ff

Example 13: *On the Waterfront, Sketches (Short Score)*. “Riot in Church.” Opening notes of the “Riot” theme in flutes as rhythmic alterations of “Pain” motive, mm. 4-6.

Flutes 1-2
f

of the “Riot” theme (see Example 13) is a rhythmic alteration of the “Pain” motive as shown in Example 7.²⁴ Finally one hears the “Pain” motive in its original form interjected throughout this passage, thus reinforcing the link between the two thematic areas.

This multifaceted thematic integration is further evidence of Bernstein’s consideration of dramatic continuity: When the “Pain” theme is first played it accompanied the events leading up to and including the murder of Joey Doyle (Edie’s brother). In this most recent scene the music complements the brutal acts carried out at the church. When one hears that same music later in the movie it corresponds with the moments before and including the murder of Terry’s brother, Charley. In each instance the music reminds the audience of violence perpetuated on the workers and their loved

ones in order to keep them in line. Bernstein recognizes this and writes music whose melodic and harmonic dissonance, rhythmic syncopation, and urgent ostinato all combine to create aural instability while incorporating consistently similar thematic material.

The lyrical theme associated with the love between Terry and Edie is another prominent melody and the one that most reflects Bernstein’s profound lyrical gift. The first time the audience encounters the “Love” theme in its entirety is following the cruel incident at the church. Following the melee inside the church the couple walks down the street together and engages in small talk. Terry remarks about Edie’s awkward appearance as a youth and then he asks her if she remembered him. Edie replies that she recognized him “the first moment I saw you.” At this point one hears an arpeggio in the harp

and clarinets and the “Love” theme in the flutes (see Example 14).

Whenever there is a tender moment or a passionate kiss between Terry and Edie the “Love” theme is heard. When the audience senses the growing passion between the couple, the “Love” theme serves as an aural representation of that intensity. However the love between Terry and Edie is bittersweet. Terry, as we learned, lured Joey to the roof only to be murdered. Edie, ignorant of this fact, is falling in love with the man who was instrumental in her brother’s death. Bernstein was conscious of this irony and it is reflected in his score. Recalling Examples 11 and 12, one notices the similarity between the closing motive of both the “Pain” theme and its derivative, the “Riot” theme. The opening three notes of the “Love” theme are nearly a retrograde of the final three notes of the “Riot” theme and,

²⁴ Lias, 26.

Example 14: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Glove Scene.” “Love” theme presented in flutes as Terry and Edie walk together, mm. 2-8.

Flute

Clarinet 1-2 in B \flat

Bass Clarinet

Harp

Example 15: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Blue Goon Blues.” Terry receives an important message from Johnny Friendly, mm. 1-6.

Trumpet in B \flat

Tenor Sax.

Piano

B \flat Tpt.

T. Sax.

Pno.

by extension, the “Pain” theme. In addition, the melodic peak on F-natural in Example 14, m. 7 functions as a flatted seventh scale degree and clashes with the expected F-sharp of the G-major scale. In this sense the note is a “blue” note similar to the opening “Dignity” theme (although in that case it was flatted fifth and raised fourth scale degrees).

This relationship works on several levels: Terry just saved Edie from a potentially painful situation at the church, so in the narrative chronology, the course of events that brought Terry and Edie together and allowed them to have their first conversation moved sequentially from violent to peaceful.²⁵ The last musical cue heard before the “Love” theme was the ending of the “Riot” theme. Therefore the violent events at the church brought the two together and led to their first meaningful time together. Besides the obvious relationship between Terry and Edie, the devotion of Father Barry for his parishioners and for justice on the docks informed his decision to hold the secret meeting and Friendly’s subsequent ire. It is also Father Barry’s words that begin to change the way Terry perceives his situation. When viewed in this way the “Riot” theme that accompanied the meeting at church becomes even more effective because it not only allowed the love between Terry and Edie to develop, but it also triggered a series of events that led to Terry’s redemption.

On a deeper psychological level, their love evolved out of their separate connections to Joey Doyle’s life and tragic death. Edie, in her determination to learn who killed her brother, has put her trust

in the one person who she should not trust. Her love for Terry, then, grew out of a need to ease her pain. Bernstein recognized this dramatic conflict and designed themes that are in opposition, yet related to each other. Not only is the opening of the “Love” theme an almost exact retrograde of the closing of the “Pain” and “Riot” themes in intervallic design, but also the harmonic contrasts are much different. The passages that employ the “Love” theme are the most diatonic and lyrical in the score. However, those sections associated with the “Pain” theme are dissonant and distinguished by their vigorous rhythms.

Later, after much coaxing from Terry, Edie agrees to go have a drink with him and the two go to a bar for conversation where one hears piano music emanating from a jukebox. In fact Bernstein composed the piece for use in this context. This scene begins a sequence in which five of the next six cues consist of source music. Some of the cues, like the piano improvisation, are not related to the score thematically and serve to create ambience. Bernstein bases two of the cues on the “Love” and “Pain” themes, respectively.

As their conversation turns to talk of Joey, Edie becomes distressed and leaves the table. She enters a dance hall in the next room where a wedding celebration transpires. The music switches over from a dance band arrangement of Wagner’s “Wedding March” to a slow dance version of the “Love” theme to which Edie remarks, “That’s a pretty tune.”²⁶ While in Terry’s arms, Edie calms down until the next tune, reminiscent of a sea chanty, ends. Then, as Terry receives bad news from one

of Friendly’s goons, one hears a bluesy arrangement of the “Pain” motive in the trumpet displayed in Example 15, beginning in m. 3.

The presence of the “Pain” motive, whose characteristic semitone here is between scale degrees flat-3 and 2, *within* the narrative speaks to the fact that Terry cannot escape Friendly’s reach and his role in Doyle’s death, even when he is trying to enjoy himself. Perhaps, Bernstein suggests that because Terry is concerned about his role in Joey’s death, is afraid of what lies ahead, and disgusted at his place in life, his “pain” manifests itself as music. In his paranoia, a slow, blues piece at a wedding becomes a reminder of all that is wrong in his life outside those doors. Earlier in his conversation with Edie, he complained that everyone is against him and he did not like the way Father Barry was looking at him. Edie reminded Terry that “he was looking at everyone the same.” One finds further evidence of this paranoia as Terry leaves the bar and walks down the street in the dark. In a striking use of source music Bernstein has him actually whistling the “Pain” motive. Often, when a person walks down a dark street alone, whistling can be a calming device. Not for Terry, who only has his fear and pain to comfort him as he feels increasingly isolated from the world around him.²⁷

Another instance in which Bernstein employs more lyricism yet maintains the connection between themes, occurs following

²⁵ In fact, the last three notes of the cue entitled “Scramble” (as a co-worker informs Terry that Edie is Joey’s sister) foreshadow the first three notes of the “Love” theme.

²⁶ According to Bernstein’s notes included in the sketches (short score), the title of the slow ballad based on the “Love” theme is “Sentimental Fox.”

²⁷ Whereas Terry’s whistling is in the theatrical version of the film and the VHS home video release, for unknown reasons it was omitted from the sound track of that scene for the DVD release. For the dramatic value of source music, see Irene Kahn Atkins, *Source Music in Motion Pictures* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1983) and Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 21-26.

Example 16: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “After Sermon.” Plaintive lament following Kayo Dugan’s death, mm. 1-6.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a film score. The first system includes staves for Violins 1-2, Viola, and a group of instruments (Timpani, Harp, Cellos, Contrabasses, Tamtam). The second system includes staves for Violins 1-2, Viola, and another group of instruments (Timpani, Harp, Vc., Cb., T.T.). The music is in 3/4 time and features a plaintive lament with dynamic markings of *f* and *mf*.

the death of Kayo Dugan. After the vicious acts at the church, Dugan confided to Father Barry that he would break his vow of silence and tell the Waterfront Crime Commission anything that could incriminate the Johnny Friendly crime organization. As several cases of whiskey are loaded onto a sling and taken out of the “hole,” there is an “accident” and the cases fall on Dugan, killing him. Father Barry arrives to perform Last Rites and proceeds to make an impassioned speech equating Dugan’s murder with Christ’s crucifixion. When Father Barry says “Amen,” Bernstein presents a plaintive lament in the strings (see Example 16).

While this excerpt sounds different than any of the cues heard previously, it is a reinterpretation of the “Violence” theme, displayed in Example 2. The original version of this theme was a vigorous passage scored mainly for percussion and served as an ostinato accompaniment to the “Pain” theme. Within its new context, Bernstein completely changes the affect of the “Violence” theme. The motive ceases to be an accompanimental idea and moves to a primary, melodic role. In addition, the tempo is slowed considerably and the passage is re-scored for strings, thus distancing itself from its more primitive-sounding predecessor.

Furthermore, Bernstein avoids a traditional resolution in the statement of the revised “Violence” theme, made more dissonant by the pedal tones on F-natural in the bass.²⁸

Even though the “Pain” theme (which originally was accompanied by the “Violence” theme) is absent here, the melodic minor second on beat 1 in m. 5, while obscured in its original context of timpani and piano, seems to carry out the “Pain” theme’s emotional function. In fact, Lias points out that the “Pain” motive, though hidden, is present in the resolution in m. 2. The tetrachord D-natural, E-natural, F-natural, G-natural is

²⁸ Lias, 46.

Example 17: *On the Waterfront, Sketches (Short Score)*. “After Sermon.” Plaintive theme following Kayo Dugan’s death with inclusion of the “Pain” motive, mm. 15-16.

Musical score for Example 17, showing Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Timpani, Harp, Cellos, Contrabasses, Tamtam parts. The score is in 3/4 time and features a plaintive theme. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first measure is in common time (C), and the second measure is in 3/4 time. The Violin 2 part starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The Timpani, Harp, Cellos, and Contrabasses part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ends with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The Viola part has a fermata over the first measure.

Example 18: *On the Waterfront, Symphonic Suite*. “After Sermon.” Plaintive theme following Kayo Dugan’s death with inclusion of the “Pain” motive as it appears in the Symphonic Suite, mm. 220-221.

Musical score for Example 18, showing Alto Sax, Piano, Timpani, Violin 2, Flutes, Clarinets in B \flat , Violas, Bassoons 1-2, and Cellos, Contrabasses parts. The score is in 3/4 time and features a plaintive theme. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The Alto Sax part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the instruction *lontano*. The Piano, Timpani, Violin 2, Flutes, Clarinets in B \flat , Violas, Bassoons 1-2, and Cellos, Contrabasses parts all start with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Cellos, Contrabasses part ends with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The Alto Sax part has a fermata over the first measure.

Example 19: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Confession Scene.” “Pain” motive in upper notes of strings synchronized with sound of dock machinery as Terry confesses to Edie, mm. 1-4.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff, labeled 'Strings', is in treble clef and 2/4 time, marked 'Very Slow'. It contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, with slurs and accents. The bottom staff, labeled 'Piledriver', is in treble clef and 2/4 time, marked 'Very Slow'. It contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, starting on G4 and moving up stepwise.

a reordering of the same collection as the “Pain” motive transposed up a perfect fifth (F-natural, E-natural, G-natural, D-natural).²⁹

While one does not hear the “Pain” motive on the sound track, Bernstein notated it as an inner voice in mm. 15-16 of the sketches (short score) (see Example 17). In addition, when this passage is incorporated into the *Symphonic Suite*, the “Pain” motive does appear, marked *lontano*, perhaps intended as an echo (see Example 18). The omission of such an important motive from a context in which it would be quite appropriate is puzzling. Lacking any notes to explain the decision to include the motive in the sketches (short score), perhaps Bernstein did not want to disturb the affect of the recasting of the “Violence” theme in order to further highlight the contrast between the two musical passages.

Despite the deletion of the “Pain” motive from the sound track, this compositional decision makes dramatic sense as well. The original “Violence” theme is associated with events leading up to murder. The music is heard before the killings of both Joey Doyle and later Charley Malloy. However, the modification of the

“Violence” theme is related to actions following murder. This newer motive is heard again after Charley’s death as Terry ponders what he should do to those who committed the terrible act. The latter manifestation evokes a feeling of painful reflection after terrible events, while the former lends a sense of anticipation of evil. Rather than use themes that are polar opposites (for example, the “Love” and “Pain” themes) to indicate these differing emotional states, Bernstein varies the harmonic and rhythmic contexts to emphasize their respective relationship to acts of violence. Furthermore it reminds the audience of yet another tragedy that has occurred at the hands of Johnny Friendly, making Terry’s eventual redemption at Friendly’s hands even more satisfying.

The next morning, because of his growing love for Edie and the encouragement of the conscientious Father Barry, Terry decides that he will confess to Edie his role in her brother’s death. As Terry pleads with Edie, the noise of dock machinery and a steam whistle renders the dialogue inaudible. Kazan instead allows the audience to see the horrified look on Edie’s face and the expression of guilt and regret on Terry’s face. Here the facial expressions speak louder than words ever could.

As Edie flees the confrontation in horror, Bernstein recalls the “Pain” motive in the high strings creating a sense of heightened tension and distress. In an extraordinary instance of integration between drama and music, Bernstein synchronizes the rhythm of the “Pain” motive with that of the distant dock machinery (see Example 19).³⁰

The effectiveness of the “Pain” motive is again enhanced by Bernstein’s harmonization and orchestration. On the first note of the cell, the composer places an A-natural against the B-natural, creating a clash whose resolution moves in contrary motion by semitone to B-flat. Because the “Pain” motive does not clearly resolve (Bernstein reiterates the opening minor second) the closest Bernstein comes to resolution is the B-flat in the opening measure above. Analyzed in this way, Bernstein seems to exploit the tension between scale degrees

³⁰ Lias, 51; While Bernstein intends this synchronization in the sketches (short score), the word “Piledriver” is written in the staff of the percussion line, the way in which he notates the rhythm is *not* how the passage is heard on the sound track. Fortunately, Lias does notate the passage correctly, but spells enharmonic notes differently than Bernstein and places the passage within 2/4 meter instead of the 2/2 that Bernstein intended. Therefore, the material in Example 19 is a synthesis between Lias’s accurate rhythmic transcription and Bernstein’s intended note spellings, meter, and measure numbers.

²⁹ Lias, 47.

Example 20: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Walk and End Title.” Re-orchestrated “Dignity” theme accompanied by altered “Pain” motive as Terry rises to go to work, mm. 1-4.

1 and flat-2 (here respelled as B-natural) thus undercutting the conventional whole tone movement between first and second scale degrees found in diatonic scales. For the third note of the motive the composer employs a G-natural, creating a tritone with the D-flat, which then resolves down to the A-flat by perfect fifth and up from the G-natural by semitone. Moreover, the placement of the melodic material in the high strings and with accents on the semitone and tritone further intensifies the dissonance through the instruments' shrill tones against the background machinery. Bernstein maintains this scoring throughout the cue to echo the feeling of unease.

Terry's courage to confess and purge himself of this burden has been growing, along with his love for Edie. Naturally the main

problem in confessing to Edie is the potential of destroying the relationship forever. The thematic material in Example 19 enhances Terry's fear of losing Edie as well as her realization that she has fallen in love with a person directly involved with her brother's murder. Furthermore the overwhelming presence of the dock machinery perhaps suggests to the listener that the great, corrupt mechanism—Friendly's organization—is the main agent of evil in the characters' lives. The dominance of the noise on the sound track insinuates that Terry's quest to break free from the machine's grip on his life is truly daunting.³¹

31 For more on the dramatic implications of background sound, see David Neumeyer, "The Musical Function of Sound in Three Films by Alfred Hitchcock," in *Indiana Theory Review* 19:1-2 (Spring/Fall 1998), 13-33, in which Neumeyer analyzes the psychological impact of different sounds and the role of sound as music in *Lifeboat* (1944), *Rope* (1948), and *Rear Window* (1954).

Terry's final, triumphant march, after humiliating Johnny Friendly in front of his fellow workers, is one of the great scenes of triumph in cinema. Musically, the score exhibits a reiteration of themes encountered throughout the drama. As Terry rises to his feet we recognize the "Dignity" theme, absent for much of the movie. As Terry struggles to walk one can see that he is disoriented and half conscious. To accompany this action, Bernstein sets the "Dignity" theme in the vibraphone and harp, evoking a dreamlike quality echoing Terry's semi-coherent state (see Example 20). Bernstein accompanies this figure with a repetitive passage in the strings. The alternation between F-natural and C-natural, within this slow tempo, suggests a slow, deliberate walk similar to the pace with which Terry makes his way to work.

Example 21: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Walk and End Title.” Brass fanfare incorporating “Main” and “Love” themes, mm. 20-24.

Very Broadly

Horns 1-4 in F
 Trumpet 1 in B \flat
 Trumpet 2 in B \flat
 Trumpet 3 in B \flat
 Trombones 1-3,
 Tuba
 Bass Drum,
 Cymbals

Upon closer examination one notices that the accompanimental texture in Example 20 is derived from previous materials. The passage in the strings is a staggered version of the “Pain” motive (isolated in Example 7). A major second substitutes for the characteristic minor second of the “Pain” motive and is found in the first and second violins and violas; the familiar perfect fourth lies in the cellos and basses. In using this setting of the “Pain” motive to accompany the “Dignity” theme Bernstein perhaps reminds us of the agony Terry has experienced thus far as well as the physical pain he endures presently. However, after encouragement by Father Barry and his co-workers that in getting up and going to work he will finally defeat Johnny Friendly, this disjunct manifestation of the “Pain” motive allows the cell to fade to the musical background

and suggests that both the physical pain and the scars on his psyche still exist, but are beginning to subside even more as he realizes his redemption.

Furthermore, the way in which Bernstein voices materials in Example 20 is similar to the method by which he modified the “Violence” theme in Example 16. In each of the examples Bernstein employs quartal chords and the outer intervals of the chords in Example 16 and the high strings in Example 20 are sevenths. The similarity in harmonic treatment is echoed in the dramatic context. In both instances, the music accompanies scenes that follow violence and strengthen Terry’s resolve to defeat Johnny Friendly.

As Terry stops before the shipping boss who commands all the workers by shouting the words “Alright, let’s go to work!” we hear a brass fanfare that sets the

“Dignity” theme in the horns and third trumpet, in counterpoint with the “Love” theme presented in the first trumpet, displayed in Example 21. As the journey towards Terry’s redemption is complete Bernstein reminds us that Terry’s triumph would not have been possible without the love of both Edie and Father Barry. Bernstein’s contrapuntal juxtaposition of the themes echoes Kazan’s alternation between shots of the workers walking in and Father Barry and Edie standing in admiration of what Terry has accomplished, the former represented by the “Dignity” theme and the latter distinguished by the “Love” theme. For the moment, and for one of the first times since the opening scene of the film, the “Pain” motive is absent, suggesting that perhaps Terry has finally conquered his fear and is confident as the leader of a better way of life for the longshoremen.

Example 22: *On the Waterfront*, Sketches (Short Score). “Walk and End Title.” “Pain” motive combined with “Love” theme at closing of the score, mm. 29-33.

As the screen darkens and the audience views the Columbia Pictures logo, the music of the “Dignity” theme subsides and one hears a dialogue between motives throughout the orchestra. The opening motive of the “Love” theme is audible in the horns and strings (Example 22, mm. 30-31). This is contrasted with the familiar minor second of the

“Pain” motive, sounded in the piccolos, flutes, and first trumpet, and answered by the perfect fourth in the bass clarinets, bassoons, contrabassoons, second trombone, and tubas (see Example 22), thus breaking our brief respite from the “Pain” motive.

Also evident in Example 22, the final appearance of the “Pain” motive occurs in the penultimate

measure and is resolved in the final measure. This contrasts with the two previous statements, which are both answered within the same measure. In this final, brief epilogue to the music heard thus far, Bernstein does not appease the listener by providing a triumphant, Hollywood cadence. This was a story about a self-proclaimed “bum” who attained redemption

through the love of a young woman, thus the presence of the “Love” theme. However, the dissonant exclamations of the “Pain” motive remind the audience that this was also a very violent story and several tragic events marred the hero’s paths to victory. The repeated statements of the “Pain” motive’s characteristic semitone leave the listener with a lingering sense of unease. In addition, the ascending minor second in the clarinets and trombones clashes with the descending half step of the “Pain” motive. Bernstein achieves further dissonance as the A-natural in the trumpets and high woodwinds forms a tritone with the root of the E-flat major triad on beat 1 of mm. 30-32. Bernstein’s music enhances the fact that there seem to be more questions than real answers as the steel “curtain”—in the form of the warehouse door—comes down. This echoes what Brian Neve states that “The last shot of the film is not of Father Barry and Edie—plainly satisfied with the resolution, Edie incomprehensibly so—but of the shutters coming down, adding to doubts about how much has changed.”³² Hamilton would agree with Neve observing that the end of this score “requires a finality that does not say that everything is going to be just dandy.”³³

However, the final chord also seems to comment about the way things have been and perhaps always will be. Through the various intervallic relationships that Bernstein employs in this last measure, the composer recalls one last time various motives from throughout the score and supplies the chord with an added musicodramatic meaning.

32 Brian Neve, “The 1950s: The Case of Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront*,” in *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*, eds. Philip Davies and Brian Neve (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1981), 113.

33 Hamilton, 4-5.

The predominant tonal center throughout these last several measures is E-flat. In the flutes and trumpets lies an A-natural in the chord and used as a decorative note. The raised fourth in E-flat recalls the tritone that is central to the “Dignity” theme. The flatted seventh on D-flat in the horns and strings harkens back to the opening of the “Love” theme as well as the peak of the melody on the “blue” flatted seventh. The figure in the timpani both functions as the consequent perfect fourth of the “Pain” motive and also recalls the percussion ostinato that served as the “Violence” theme. In addition to its melodic presence in the preceding measures, the semitone of the “Pain” motive is represented harmonically with the presence of B-flat in the timpani and trombones.

This compositional endeavor aside, Bernstein’s brilliance is realized in the way he voices the chord. The way in which Bernstein builds the chord from bottom to top represents a very close approximation to the natural overtone series on E-flat. For instance, the bass contains octaves and perfect fifths, going up there are tighter triads in the lower brass and woodwinds, and the flatted seventh and sharped fourth reside in the upper woodwinds and brass. Bernstein perhaps philosophizes in this final chord—which culminates a keen sense of thematic integration throughout—that pain, love, violence, and dignity are all part of a natural order of humanity. Whether that natural order favors (or will favor) the workers or the mobsters is not clear. Perhaps all that one can do is go forward armed with dignity and compassion.³⁴

34 I thank Scott Murphy for his insight regarding my analysis of this last chord.

Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* is one of the most critically acclaimed movies in American cinematic history. The film received twelve Academy Award nominations and won eight awards. Among the four nominations that did not win was Leonard Bernstein for Best Original Score. Amidst the adulation for the overall impact and quality of the film, Bernstein’s score has been met with much negative criticism. Roy Prendergast cited Bernstein’s inexperience saying:

In 1954, Kazan called upon the considerable talents of Leonard Bernstein to create the music for his then latest Marlon Brando vehicle, *On the Waterfront*. The collaboration was less than successful, for while *On the Waterfront* is highly regarded among film historians and theoreticians, the music which accompanies it has serious flaws. Indeed, the music for this film is discussed here only because of its popularity in film classes and the mistaken idea that, because the multitalented Leonard Bernstein composed it, the score is a brilliant example of film composing at its best. Unfortunately the contrary is true. Bernstein’s lack of experience in the area of film composition tends to destroy the effect, in terms of the picture, of what is some very beautiful music. However, the same material as *film music*, becomes, in many places, intrusive and inept-sounding from a dramatic standpoint.³⁵

Another author had some more scathing comments concerning Bernstein’s work:

Leonard Bernstein’s score for the film, however, is certainly open to criticism. A melodramatic drumbeat announces the approaching death of Joey Doyle. In the tender love scenes, a

35 Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art, A Critical Study of Music in Films*, 2nd ed., (New York: Norton, 1992), 130.

symphony orchestra threatens to blow Terry and Edie off the roof too. At times we cannot hear the dialogue, thanks to Bernstein's obtrusive, almost operatic, playing. When the cabdriver takes Charlie to his death the music comes up like thunder. Much too often, the pompous score clashes with the visuals. Even with Kazan's and Kaufmann's *poetic* realism, music which would be appropriate for *Tristan and Isolde* seems out of place on the docks of Hoboken.³⁶

Even the director of the film, Elia Kazan, found it difficult to praise Bernstein's attempt to enhance the drama:

I think the music hurt that picture, Bernstein's a brilliant guy, but—you remember, the film opens with a kind of drumbeat which puts it right away on a level of melodrama, rather than just showing the murder, the body falling, just showing it—it's strong enough by itself.³⁷

Despite the negative criticism Bernstein garnered for his contribution to the film, this is an intriguing and dramatic score. From the opening credits to Terry's final, triumphant march, Bernstein's music punctuates the drama in a truly effective manner. What one discovers after a thorough examination of how Bernstein derives and develops thematic material within the score, compared with its dramatic context, is that the film score to *On the Waterfront* is of the highest quality. Writing for film is a difficult task because the composer must think in terms of several, short passages of music rather than longer, more standard movements. Bernstein

recognized this and approached film scoring accordingly:

The very nature of film music is fragmentary, almost by definition. There are exceptions, of course, such as music for films which are pageant-like, or short on dialogue and long on visual effect; in these cases extended musical sections are possible. *On the Waterfront* is not such a picture. Depending, as it does, on highly realistic dialogue, the opportunities for long developed musical sequences are few. In spite of this, I was so intrigued by the atmosphere and power of the film when I saw it in "rough-cut" that I decided to write the score hoping to compensate for the necessary fragmentary quality of the music by strong thematic integration.³⁸

Clearly, Bernstein's effort in thematic integration was a success. Not only do the melodies suit each scene, but also the development of appropriate motives enhances the overall dramatic continuity. While not an exhaustive list of themes (for instance the "Charley" theme is omitted because of its limited role in the score) this glimpse of the "Dignity" and "Pain" themes, and to a lesser extent the "Love" and "Riot" themes, demonstrates well Bernstein's commitment to both musical and dramatic integrity.³⁹ In addition, the music serves as an additional backdrop against which the action takes place, and because of Bernstein's establishment and development of motives, functions equally well as a unified piece of music apart from the film in the form of his *Symphonic Suite*. Furthermore, the same spirit of artistic collaboration cited at the beginning of this article manifests itself yet again

through the interdependence of themes in Bernstein's score.

Bernstein possessed a keen sense of the relationship between music and drama. Three years after *On the Waterfront*, the world witnessed his best effort in combining the latter elements in *West Side Story*. *On the Waterfront* was Bernstein's first and last endeavor in writing film music. In pondering what Bernstein could have accomplished had he written more film music, one could paraphrase Terry's famous lament in the taxi, "He could've been a contender!"

³⁶ Edward Murray, *Ten Film Classics: A Re-Viewing*, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), 93.

³⁷ William Baer, ed., *Elia Kazan: Interviews*, (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 179.

³⁸ Lias, 89.

³⁹ For a more extended analysis of Bernstein's score, see Bushard, 397-498.

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