Leonard Bernstein’s *The Age of Anxiety*, Symphony No. 2 (after W.H. Auden)

**History and Analysis**

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Fall 2007

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Leonard Bernstein’s *The Age of Anxiety*, Symphony No. 2 (after W.H. Auden):

**History and Analysis**

Auden’s fascinating and hair-raising Eclogue had already begun to affect me lyrically when I first read it in the summer of 1947. From that moment, the composition of a symphony based on *The Age of Anxiety* acquired an almost compulsive quality; and I have been writing it steadily since then, in Taos, in Philadelphia, in Richmond, Mass., in Tel-Aviv, in planes, in hotel-lobbies, and finally (this week preceding the premiere) in Boston. The orchestration was made during a month-long tour with the Pittsburgh Symphony... I imagine that the conception of a symphony with piano solo emerges from the extreme personal identification of myself with the poem. In this sense, the pianist provides an almost autobiographical mirror in which he sees himself, analytically in the modern ambiance. The work is therefore no concerto, in the virtuosic sense... The essential line of the poem (and the music) is the record of our difficult and problematic search for faith.¹

Composed between the years 1948 and 1949, with a major revision effected in 1965, Leonard Bernstein’s Symphony No. 2, *The Age of Anxiety*, for piano and orchestra, is a substantial work of soul-searching proportions; for it is a work in which Bernstein’s most intimate thoughts are reflected, as the composer says in his Prefatory Note, “I imagine that the conception of a symphony with piano solo emerges from the personal identification of myself with the poem. In this sense, the pianist provides an autobiographical protagonist, set against an orchestral mirror in which he sees himself, analytically, in the modern ambience. The work is therefore no ‘concerto’ in the virtuosic sense, although I regard Auden’s poem as one of the most shattering examples of virtuosity in the history of English poetry.”²

Based on W. H. Auden’s poem, *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue*, the symphony was commissioned by, and dedicated to, Bernstein’s beloved mentor, Serge Koussevitzky, or “Kouss,” as he was fond of calling him.³ The world premiere took place on April 8, 1949, with Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the composer himself at the unwieldy piano solo, which, according

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² Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.

to pianist Misha Dichter and Bernstein’s daughter, Jaime, is “ridiculously difficult” and “one of the hardest parts ever written.” Dichter goes on to say, “The really great pianists wrote so cleverly for the instrument that very often it’s just a little easier than it sounds. But this is just the opposite…I regret that I learned ‘Age of Anxiety’ after his death, because I would have loved to have gone on up to his apartment door, knocked on it and said, ‘Lenny, you must be kidding here on Page 34.’”

The kernels of inspiration behind *The Age of Anxiety* were in existence as early as July 1944, when he presented to Koussevitzky “with my love and deepest congratulations, a few notes on your birthday, which form a small sketch for the piece I hope soon to have for you. Life is so busy and complicated now that I cannot set any really definite date when I expect the composition to be finished, but I am trying to make it as quickly as possible without sacrificing any quality!—I want this to be as fine as I can make it, since it is for you, who represent quality itself to me. Please accept the sketch now, and let us hope it grows into a composition worthy of your greatness.” Burton clarifies that “[t]he accompanying ‘small sketch’ was the sixteen bars from *The Birds* [1939], which became the echo duet for two clarinets in [the opening of] *The Age of Anxiety.*” However, the forties presented such a whirlwind of activity in Bernstein’s life, as he began his unparalleled rise to fame, that by April of 1945, he reported in a letter to Helen Coates: “I have been collecting themes more than anything else these days…I haven’t actually written anything. I’m confused about what to do first…But the ideas keep hammering at me; a piano concerto, a ballet, songs for Tourel, the Kouss. piece…”

By 1943, Bernstein was assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic and had made his dramatic premiere stepping in for Bruno Walter at Carnegie Hall on November 14. In 1944, he made

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4 Dichter relates his encounter with Leonard Bernstein’s daughter: “I was at a New York Philharmonic concert six or seven years ago, and went to a party afterward, and there was…[Jamie]… I said I was learning the ‘Age of Anxiety,’ and I had thought it was just a nice little piano obbligato part. And her look of horror expressed everything…” Taken from: Eric Harrison, “Dichter Tries Hand at Tough Bernstein Piece,” *Arkansas Online: In Association with the Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 14 September 2007, sec. Weekend, p. 67, available from http://www2.arkansasonline.com/news/2007/sep/14/dichter-tries-hand-tough-bernstein-piece-20070914/, internet; accessed 1 December 2007.

5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 140.
numerous guest-conducting appearances in Pittsburgh, Boston, Montreal, New York, the Hollywood Bowl, and “elsewhere,”
and in 1945, he conducted ten major orchestras as well as accepting the appointment of music director for the New York City Symphony Orchestra on August 25 of that year. Thus he was already a much-sought-after and busy man by the time he began considering his “Kouss. piece,” so that – through his conducting appearances in Prague, London, and the U.S. premiere of Britten’s Peter Grimes in 1946, and his visit to Israel, France, Belgium, and Holland in 1947 – it is no wonder that it can be said that a “repeating pattern of procrastination followed by feverish activity… characterized the composition of both the Jeremiah Symphony and The Age of Anxiety” – that is, Bernstein had a tendency toward “squeez[ing] everything in.”

In December 1947, Bernstein did manage to cancel a visit to Palestine, much to the chagrin of the Palestine Orchestra (later to be named the Israel Philharmonic), and give up his post at the New York City Symphony Orchestra (later taking up the position of music adviser to the Israel Philharmonic between 1948 and 1949). But “[w]hen Bernstein returned [from his overseas travels] to New York in July 1948 he had a deadline to meet. His new symphony, The Age of Anxiety, had been announced for the Boston Symphony’s spring season, and it was far from finished.” Thus began the bout of “feverish activity.” Alongside this daunting task, he faced a full schedule of conducting engagements for summer and fall, a commission to write a jazz work for Woody Herman, and organizing the controversial benefit concert for the Palestine Resistance Defense Fund in New York in July 1948, but relief came soon after in the form of Bernstein’s usual participation at Tanglewood, after which time he set off for New Mexico with his brother, Burton, and poet friend, Stephen Spender. “While in Taos…[h]is life seemed less hectic and precarious than it had a few months earlier: he was making good progress with his symphony.”

Bernstein arrived in Tel Aviv in September 1948 with Helen Coates and “settled into wartime routine,” for “[t]he mood in Israel was exceptionally tense…following the assassination of the United

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9 Ibid., 536.
10 Ibid., 336.
11 Ibid., 180.
12 Ibid., 182.
Nations mediator Count Bernadotte.”\textsuperscript{13} Yet amid the artillery explosions, Bernstein led the devoted musicians across the country and through numerous performances. He wrote to Serge Koussevitzky a month later: “...what shall I say of my beloved Jerusalem, tragic, under constant Arab fire...with machine-guns outside accompanying our performances of Beethoven Symphonies!...I have almost grown to be part of all those wonderful people and history-making days.”\textsuperscript{14} Burton reiterates, “Six thousand Jews died during the struggle for independence and twenty thousand were wounded.”\textsuperscript{15} It was this suffering, of which Bernstein saw such a great deal during his two months in war-stricken Israel, that motivated him to complete and immediately orchestrate the fourth section of \textit{The Age of Anxiety}, titled “The Dirge,” which “evoked a sobbing world remote from happiness...[“The Dirge” was] included in a fund-raising concert in Tel Aviv held to mark the first anniversary of the UN partition resolution which had legitimized Israel’s claim to independence.”\textsuperscript{16} In this partial premiere, on November 28, 1948, Leonard Bernstein executed the piano solo while Georg Singer conducted the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Bernstein made his way home again with one part of his new symphony complete and birthed into the performing world. “In December he traveled back and forth between concerts in Boston, Philadelphia and New York...The month of January [in 1949] was punctuated by conducting engagements in Buffalo and Pittsburgh, but what dominated Bernstein’s thoughts was the need to complete \textit{The Age of Anxiety}. The Boston premiere was only three months off and the finale was still not written. It was at this most unpropitious of moments that Jerome Robbins came to him with the irresistible proposal for a serious musical that could perhaps become the ‘real moving American opera’ Bernstein had dreamed of a year earlier” – the work that would later become \textit{West Side Story}, at which he seemed to be working with diligence and excitement until the collaborators reached a “creative impasse” and “quietly shelved” the project in the spring.\textsuperscript{17} In a letter to Helen Coates, dated as late as February 10, \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 182-83.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 186-87.

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1949, Bernstein exclaims, “Finished the first movement of the A of A [the first half of the entire
work]!!... Am now on page 50, and thriving. It’s a great and good feeling to see it grow. If I were only sure
of the end!”  
At last, on March 20, some two and a half weeks before the premiere, the end was in sight.
“Finishing touches were added during a tour with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and on the last page of the
score Bernstein wrote: ‘NYC—the first day of spring!’”

According to Burton, “The world premiere of The Age of Anxiety…was the crowning moment of
his relationship with Serge Koussevitzky. The work was dedicated to Koussevitzky ‘in tribute’ and was
performed…in the final month of the Russian conductor’s twenty-five-year tenure with the Boston
Symphony.”

The symphony won the 1948-49 Hornblit Prize of $1,000 for the best new work played by
the BSO during the season. 

But reviews of the work in general were lackluster. “If Jeremiah [the first
symphony] had been greeted warmly as a promising first endeavor in the symphonic form, The Age of
Anxiety was regarded as a disappointment. Highly eclectic in content, the work was a somewhat naïve
attempt to infuse a classical form with commercial art…This inevitably led to accusations that he was
trivializing his talent, and prompted New York Times critic Olin Downes to write that The Age of Anxiety
was ‘wholly exterior in style, ingeniously constructed, effectively orchestrated, and a triumph of
superficiality.’”

Robert Ward writes, “For me, The Age of Anxiety is considerably more interesting in the
details than in its expressive content…much fascinating sound and fury is made, but the total significance
impresses very little.”

And Martin Anderson quips, “No. 2 – half symphony, half piano concerto – is
ostensibly a ‘spiritual journey,’ in the first half of which its central characters ‘discuss the conditions of

Bernstein Collection, available from http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lbcoll&fileName=lbcoll/

115.

20 Humphrey Burton, Leonard Bernstein, 188.

21 John Briggs, Bernstein, 125.


for Piano and Orchestra (After W.H. Auden) by Leonard Bernstein." (Notes, 2nd ser., Vol. 7, No. 4 [Sept. 1950]),
627.
human existence’; and in the second half ‘each of the characters experience fearsome self-examination’…

Well, to me it don’t sound none too spiritual, nor particularly fearsome. But it is very attractive music, catchy and dramatic, instantly taking and holding your attention – the programme is much more pretentious than the music – and only after it has stopped do you wonder whether it is as much as the sum of its parts.”

In spite of these harsh criticisms of superficiality, Bernstein assures the listener that it is “absolutely necessary” to have read the poem to really understand this second symphony; indeed, in 1959, a decade later, “Bernstein became angry when he learned that the Russians…had not printed his long program note [during a performance of The Age of Anxiety with Seymour Lipkin at the piano]. Without it, he felt, the work was impossible to follow.” In his Prefatory Note of the score, Bernstein says: “No one could be more astonished than I at the extent to which the programmaticism of this work has been carried…I was merely writing a symphony inspired by a poem and following the general form of that poem. Yet, when each section was finished I discovered, upon re-reading, detail after detail of programmatic relation to the poem – details that had ‘written themselves’…I have a suspicion that every work I write, for whatever medium, is really theater music in some way, and nothing has convinced me more than these new discoveries of the unconscious hand that has been at work all along in The Age of Anxiety.” Nonetheless, Burton claims: “Auden’s influence on Bernstein’s work should not be exaggerated,” and “…it would be a waste of time to try to follow the score as program music: Bernstein wanted his listeners to enter Auden’s imaginative world but did not seek to reflect the poetry page by page. Indeed, he was seduced by his admiration for Auden into overstating his debt to the poem. The musical language is considerably less adventurous than Auden’s pretentious if occasionally riveting poetry.”

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26 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.
27 Humphrey Burton, Leonard Bernstein, 190.
28 Ibid., 189.
While it may be easy to write The Age of Anxiety off as youthful or naïve in its passionate belief in the “unconscious hand” of programmaticism, one would do well to consider the words of Lukas Foss: “…Lenny was a great reader. And anybody who is well versed in literature will find inspiration in literary works. The various arts will always influence each other…I would say Lenny was the most well-read composer I have ever met; for example, he knew a large amount of poetry from memory…[Conductors] I think are generally not on that level at all…they haven’t got that kind of all-round curiosity in them.”

Perhaps there are some gems to be found in the way of a deeper understanding of Bernstein’s second symphony if one could view Auden’s poem with the mindset of a poet, rather than giving it merely a cursory glance and apprehending only its more manifest traits.

The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue was completed in 1946 and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948. Perhaps not surprisingly, Wystan Hugh Auden, “[o]f all the mid-20th-century poets,…was the most actively concerned with music.” Among his more notable accomplishments in the music world, Auden collaborated with Chester Kallman on the libretto for Stravinsky’s 1951 opera, The Rake’s Progress. Additionally, he wrote poems specifically for musical settings, including Barber’s Hermit Songs (1953), Stravinsky’s Elegy for J. F. K. (1964), and Walton’s The Twelve (1965). In The Age of Anxiety, however, Auden “attempted to make [the] human problem [of ‘man’s anxiety in time’] manifest in the form of a dramatic allegory. Baroque in its reaffirmation of the flesh, as well as in its exuberant fantasy and elaborate technique, this work is properly, if ironically, called an eclogue; for its method, however unconventional, derives from the pastoral convention of allegorical characters animating an allegorical landscape.”

The poem is divided into six Parts:

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29 William Westbrook Burton, Conversations About Bernstein, 12.


31 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s The Age of Anxiety" (Twentieth Century Literature, Vol. 10, No. 4 [Jan., 1965]), 155.
“Prologue,” which introduces the four main characters: Malin, Rosetta, Quant, and Emble. The reader comes to understand each of their backgrounds and personal views on life as they sit in a New York City bar during World War II.

“The Seven Ages,” during which our characters gather in a booth and talk, dividing man’s existence into seven ages – infancy, youth, adolescence, the “clown’s cosmos”, the acceptance of the bleakness of life, man’s aging, and finally death.

“The Seven Stages,” a symbolic dream-odyssey in which the characters find themselves, under the influence of “semi-intoxication,” traveling, searching for “that state of prehistoric happiness.”

“The Dirge,” a lament on the loss of the “colossal Dad,” the father figure who guides and in whom one can place their trust.

“The Masque,” a party at Rosetta’s apartment; love is kindled between Rosetta and Emble, the two youngest characters, only for Rosetta to realize later that their love was born of a drunken stupor and will more than likely not last.

And “Epilogue,” during which the sun rises and all return to their normal duties. “Facing another long day of servitude to wilful [sic] authority and blind accident, creation lay in pain and earnest, once more reprieved from self-destruction, its adoption, as usual, postponed.”

The most obvious connection between the poem and Bernstein’s score is, of course, the broader form. Symphony No. 2 is divided into two large Parts, which are each divided into three sections or episodes, adding up to the six original Parts of Auden’s poem. In Part I, Bernstein opens with the brief “Prologue” that leads without pause into “The Seven Ages,” which consist of seven variations. These, too, flow attacca into “The Seven Stages,” which are labeled Variations VIII to XIV – seven more variations. The sections of Part II – “The Dirge,” “The Masque,” and “The Epilogue” – also flow one into the other without pause, and each exhibits a very distinct character. We will take a closer look at each of these episodes further on, but, if we are to take Leonard Bernstein’s admonition seriously, let us first take a brief look into W. H. Auden’s poem upon which Bernstein had so passionately based his symphony.


33 Ibid., 138.
Edward Callan describes the essence of Auden’s work aptly, “There are two levels of allegory in *The Age of Anxiety*; one psychological; the other spiritual…The chance encounter of four strangers in a Third Avenue bar becomes, as psychological allegory, a manifestation of [Carl G.] Jung’s concept of the disintegration of the psyche into four differentiated functions: Thought (Malin), Feeling (Rosetta), Intuition (Quant), and Sensation (Emble). And the allegorical landscape explored by these personified functions is an inner landscape of the psyche encompassing the realms of personal and collective unconscious. The superimposed spiritual allegory presupposes the disintegration of the faculties to be inherited from the Fall…The dramatic action…consists of an unfolding in the direction of ‘wholeness.’ Such change will be most obvious in the evaluative functions [Feeling and Thought], and, therefore, the significant dramatic action will be the raising of feeling to the sphere of consciousness (Rosetta’s awakening to the world of reality), and also the freeing of thought from exclusive preoccupation with the rational (a deepening of Malin’s vision)...”

In analyzing the structural elements of the poem, Callan goes on to say, “The plot…reveals, not character development in the conventional sense, but development within the psychic personality. More specifically, the six parts…are six stages in a regenerative journey…In Part Two, ‘The Seven Ages,’ the quest for an intellectual solution to man’s anxiety is led by Malin [Thought]; in Part Three, ‘the Seven Stages,’ Rosetta [Feeling] is called on to ‘be our good guide’ into the realm of the unconscious; Part Four, ‘The Dirge,’ is sung by all, but in this yearning for a mythological saviour-hero the mode of seeking is Quant’s [Intuition]; and in Part Five, ‘The Masque,’ the quest for sensual happiness is Emble’s [Sensation]. Furthermore, all six parts…at the level of spiritual allegory, are successive stages in a descent into, and ascent from, a purgatorial night…”

The stage is set; let us now delve into the musical and psychological journey of Bernstein’s Symphony No. 2.

According to Bernstein, “the Prologue is a very short section consisting of a lonely improvisation by two clarinets, echo-tone, and followed by a long descending scale which acts as a bridge into the realm

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34 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s *The Age of Anxiety*", 155, 157.
of the unconscious, where most of the poem takes place.”

This opening clarinet duet (see Fig. 1) was “derived, almost note for note, from a duet for muted violin and cello in his 1939 score for The Birds at Harvard.”

This pattern of fashioning new life to his own old melodies is something one will find, not only throughout Symphony No. 2, but also through numerous other works of Bernstein. “Throughout his life Bernstein was determined never to let a good tune languish in a bottom drawer.”

![Figure 1: Clarinet duet from ms. 1-20](image)

The two lines of the clarinets create a gentle ebb and flow as they touch in dissonance then resolve, such as in the very first measure. Opening the work with a concert C in the first clarinet, the second clarinet enters on a concert G-flat, creating a tritone that resolves when the first clarinet ascends to a D-flat. This consistent motion of tension and release continues as in a misty haze under the effects of the echo-tone until the lower strings and bass clarinet enter at measure 20, steadily descending, first in steps and fourths, then in triads that subtly ascend stepwise. Above this, beginning in measure 22, the first flute

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36 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.
37 Ibid., 190.
38 Ibid., 191.
presents Bernstein’s evocative Descent Theme (see Fig. 2), that “bridge into the realm of the unconscious”, that appears throughout Part I.

![Figure 2: Descent Theme, m. 22-26](image)

The mood Bernstein arouses with “The Prologue,” is one of loneliness and distinct individuality – which at times is at odds with its neighbor and is at other times harmonious – that gradually moves toward a certain awareness and integration as we are then swept into the next episode, “The Seven Ages.” Auden creates a similar effect in his own “Prologue.” “The ‘Prologue,’” he says, “…has four...movements, corresponding closely to stages of phenomenological awareness through which an individual awakens into full consciousness. In the first two stages – awareness of the existence of the self and awareness of the existence of a world of objects – the thoughts of each character are presented as interior monologue. Dialogue begins, appropriately, with the stages of awareness of others...In the brief fourth movement, the characters take a significant step toward integration – that of forming a community.”

Of “The Seven Ages,” Bernstein explains: “This is a series of variations which differ from conventional variations in that they do not vary any one common theme. Each variation seizes upon some feature of the preceding one and develops it, introducing, in the course of development, some counter-feature upon which the next variation seizes. It is a kind of musical fission, which corresponds to the reasonableness and didactic quality of the four-fold discussion [of the four characters of the poem].”

Burton describes this unusual variations treatment as seven short pieces “linked one to the other by fragments of melodies or rhythms which are planted at the end of one ‘variation’ and then developed in the next”.

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40 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.

41 Humphrey Burton, Leonard Bernstein, 189.
Interestingly enough, Auden’s “Seven Ages” resonates with a strikingly similar quality: “Auden’s scheme for the seven ages corresponds more closely to the divisions of the life-cycle…Malin, whose province is the philosophical, leads the discussion and his theme of the life-cycle from infancy to extreme old age provides a core around which the clashing viewpoints of the other characters can revolve as they react subjectively in their roles of personified functions and also as representatives of different stages in the life-cycle from youth (Emble) to old age (Quant). The structure of ‘The Seven Ages’ may, therefore, be compared to a musical composition in which Malin’s narrative represents successive phases of the main theme while variations on each phase are provided by the other characters.”42 (Italics added.) Surely, the connection here between Auden’s literary and Bernstein’s musical compositions is too great to be ignored. Bernstein perceived Auden’s intent and exploited it in this unique musical form.

In Variation I, the piano introduces a melodic idea nearly identical, save for the varied harmony, to the clarinets’ theme at the beginning of “The Prologue.” At measure 12, the harp and celli comment with a nearly exact rendition of the Descent Theme ending the “The Prologue.”

In Variation II, the piano enters with a derivative of the Descent Theme, right hand descending and left hand ascending. At measure 5, the winds and horns mimic the ascent of the piano left hand. At rehearsal C, the orchestra resounds with the new Descent Theme first presented by the piano at the start of this Variation, and the piano answers a measure later. This same Descent Theme is given in triplet-version to the winds at rehearsal D, and these “snippets” dovetail one after the other as the piano, aided by the glockenspiel, toys with a theme related to the original. Furthermore, the piano part four bars before rehearsal E is derived from the pattern given to the winds earlier in measures 7 through 9.

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42 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s The Age of Anxiety", 158.

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Figure 4: A secondary theme, a partial basis of what is to come in Variation III.

during which the piano was occupied with the Descent Theme), while the flutes now carry on above with the new Descent Theme. This secondary theme can be thought of as the theme upon which the third variation is built, though the connection between Variation II and Variation III is a bit less clear, for reasons we shall soon discover. Finally, the harp takes the Descent Theme at rehearsal E, four bars from the end, and the piano answers one bar later.

Variation III deviates from the strong similarities of the previous variations, creating a lovely hiatus of contrast that is yet vaguely intertwined; perhaps this is representative of Rosetta’s commentary in the poem. “The flowing melody of the third variation first appears in Bernstein’s unpublished violin sonata, written around 1940.” More specifically, as the Sonata for Violin and Piano is divided into two movements – the first one titled “Moderato” and the second one a series of six “Variations” on the material presented in movement one – it was the fourth variation in the second movement that was thoroughly raided for this Variation III in *The Age of Anxiety*; indeed, the two are nearly identical – again, a common trait in Bernstein’s output. The main phrase running through this variation can be divided into seven measures plus six measures, the latter motive consisting of two instances each of a hemiola-like figure of 3+3+2 spread over two bars (see Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Opening of Variation III

Rehearsal F is a restatement of the beginning, orchestrated for flute and horn (an unusual instrumentation!), with solo cello and harp accompanying. The bar after rehearsal G displays the same theme inverted intervallically and given to the strings, which, at the start of this statement, are divided into soloists, one per part. The rest of the strings join with the clarinets, horns, and harp for the last three measures of the variation; what was once six bars in the previous two statements of the theme, is now reduced to only three, stating the hemiola figure only once.

Variation IV exploits the use of threes against twos (and vice-versa) that was found in the previous variation, developing it into a scherzo in 5/8, felt as 3+2. The phrase can be divided 4+4+5. A contrasting segment of 7+3 bars features a brash melody in unison among the trumpets, horns, flutes, and violins, while the piano is reduced to heavy eighth notes in octaves. At rehearsal I, the charming opening theme returns, with the flutes and clarinets passing a descending “flutter” of notes between them. With the return of the heavy eighth-note theme at the end, the motive is reduced to three measures.

In Variation V, the final aggressive four-sixteenth-note pattern concluding the previous variation is continued by the first clarinet and appears in this variation as a theme of disjointed sixteenths, descending by pairs of thirds. This same recurring motive often serves as both an extra cadential measure and a pick-up to the next phrase. (Ex: m.6 piano; m. 22 orchestra; rehearsal K horns and strings.) Phrases alternate with uneven numbers of measures, creating a rollicking, and at times comedic, rhythmic ride.

Variation VI is a commentary by the solo piano, which elaborates “quasi cadenza” on the dotted-eighth/sixteenth pattern introduced in the previous variation. Variation VII is nearly identical to the beginning of “The Prologue,” granting the entire Part, thus far, a basic ABA form, with the oboe and English horn – and, later, with the return of two echo-tone clarinets - intertwining, touching on dissonance then resolving. The piano then restates the very first Descent Theme, and carries it further downward than before, deep into the lowest registers of the instrument.

“The journey into the unconscious in ‘The Seven Stages’ is the focal point of The Age of Anxiety. This is the deepest penetration the characters make into the landscape of the psyche, and their actions in succeeding episodes are influenced by their experiences there. It is in this episode, too, that the
psychological and spiritual allegories begin to overlap.”  

Meanwhile, “…Bernstein continues with seven more variations of the same modest dimensions as ‘The Seven Ages,’ beginning with a brief passacaglia that recalls his affection for Benjamin Britten. Later the fugal writing for the brass is reminiscent of Hindemith and there is a dash of Shostakovich for good measure.”

The question of why Bernstein should continue numbering his variations where he left off – Variations VIII-XIV, rather than returning to another Variation I with the start of a new episode – is an intriguing one. To be sure, Bernstein desired that the two segments would flow smoothly from one to the next without a pause, as he has specifically notated attacca in the score at the end of “The Seven Ages.” Indeed, he speaks in his Prefatory Note as though these variations are a continuation from the former: “This set of variations begins to show activity and drive and leads to a hectic, though indecisive, close.”

From a literary standpoint, Auden writes at the end of his “Seven Ages,” “The more completely these four forgot their surroundings and lost their sense of time, the more sensitively aware of each other they became, until they achieved in their dream that rare community which is otherwise only attained in states of extreme wakefulness. But this did not happen all at once.” Beginning the next “Seven Stages,” are the words, “At first all is dark and each walks alone. What they share is only the feeling of remoteness and desertion, of having marched for miles and miles, of having lost their bearings, of a restless urge to find water [which, Callan states, is “the commonest symbol of the unconscious”]. Gradually for each in turn the darkness begins to dissolve and their vision to take shape.”

Musically, Bernstein reflects this transitional image with the pianist’s long, slow descent into the instrument’s lowest registers at the end of “The Seven Ages,” and, upon beginning “The Seven Stages,” the violas and english horn enter in unison with a reedy, strained tone, setting the stage for the piano to introduce the six-note bass line of this passacaglia. The effect on the whole throughout this eighth

44 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s *The Age of Anxiety*", 159.
46 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.
47 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s *The Age of Anxiety*", 160.
variation is that of a slow, perhaps inebriated, march, with vague harmonic wanderings that slither to and fro with uncertain direction.

Auden writes further on: “And so, on a treeless watershed, at the tumbledown Mariners Tavern… the four assemble, having completed the first stage of their journey”\textsuperscript{49} – Callan explains that this Tavern “is the gateway to the unconscious”.\textsuperscript{50} Thus begins Bernstein’s Variation IX, in which he has taken the six-note bass line of the passacaglia and made those notes, in various fashions, to be the melody line of an awkward waltz, as in measures 27 through 29 in the piccolo, flutes, and oboes, for example (see. Fig. 7). At measure 39, this melodic pattern returns both inverted in the bass instruments and in prime form in the upper instruments, though in both cases, it is oriented around the pitch G, rather than D-flat as before. At rehearsal S (measure 80), again the theme is in its prime form, though beginning on the pitch C, followed by an answer in the piano the following bar, on the pitch E-flat; the bar after the piano finishes, the brass reiterate the piano’s interjection with the pattern exactly as it appeared in the passacaglia bass line in Variation VIII, though a whole tone higher than where the piano began (or, a major third higher than the original passacaglia). In the final six bars of Variation IX, Bernstein presents this six-note phrase throughout the orchestra as it originally appeared in the bass line (with the exception of the G-flat, now raised a semitone to G-natural), though he continues the descent by repeating the last

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{50} Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s \textit{The Age of Anxiety}", 160.
three notes (and two intervals) three more times, each beginning a major third lower than the last, bringing us headlong into Variation X.

![Figure 8: Var. IX, m. 87-92.]

“The third stage [Variation X], the city (the brain), causes Malin to become aware of the limitations of philosophical man. In the fourth stage [Variation XI] Rosetta runs enthusiastically to the big house of her dreams…only to be similarly disappointed…In these two middle stages then, each of the four personified functions receives an insight into the weakness of his conscious ideals…In the fifth and sixth stages [Variations XII and XIII], all are similarly disappointed or made aware of weaknesses…they find that the progressive road leads to ‘the forgotten graveyard.’”

As one might imagine, Bernstein’s Variations X and XI are very closely linked. Both sections begin with the piano unaccompanied, and both have a frantic, disjointed quality about them. In Variation X, Malin’s cityscape may certainly be assumed with the almost Gershwinesque falling fifths in sauntering eighths in the opening piano solo, followed by the same pattern of intervals in a dizzying array of sixteenths, accompanied by a barrage of falling-fifth eighth notes in the winds. By the time the strings join with aggressive and disjunct eighth note patterns (centered about the D-flat of the passacaglia, interestingly enough), the piano rolls along with an impressive flurry of scalar passages.

![Figure 9: The last measure of Var. X, and the first measures of Var. XI]

51 Ibid.
Variation XI opens with the piano reiterating a disjunct eighth note pattern nearly identical to that which concluded the previous Variation (see Fig. 9). The piano and orchestra present what is, in effect, a continuation of the previous segment, with very similar scalar flourishes in the piano accompanied by the disjunct “hacking” of the strings (a similar motive to the piano’s opening phrase). The emotional effect here could be considered one of innocence that is later shattered, as Rosetta discovers a house of fond childhood images only to return to the others after her eager investigation, saying, “I have watched through a window a World that is fallen…”  

Eleven measures before rehearsal W, almost midway through the Variation, the piano is alone again on a crashing chromatic descent in both hands, perhaps evoking the crestfallen disappointment of Rosetta’s lost dreams. Like the two before it, Variation XII opens with the piano alone, continuing the eighth note saga with a pattern that begins with a six note motive strikingly similar to the passacaglia’s bass line (see Fig. 10) – this theme running throughout “The Seven Stages”.

![Figure 10: Var. XII, m. 1-3.](image)

“The sixth stage [Variation XIII] brings them to the hermetic gardens; the abode of mother nature and the ‘Grandmother’s house’ to which Rosetta [Feeling] promised to lead them…This sixth stage, with its ambivalent references to generation and regeneration, is the central point of the structure of *The Age of Anxiety*…After first feeling joy…the four characters soon find themselves suffering the effects of the Fall…They are thrown into confusion and ‘one by one they plunge into the labyrinthine forest and vanish down solitary paths, with no guide but their sorrows.’”  

Bernstein allows only a single page in the score for Variation XII, this path toward the “forgotten graveyard” that serves very well as an introduction to Variation XIII – this “central” stage of the poem, the Earthly Paradise – during which the piano continues

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53 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s *The Age of Anxiety*", 160, 161.
its eighth note motive while the tuba and contra-bassoon introduce a rhythmically augmented version of
the passacaglia theme. As the rest of the brass imitate and build upon each other into rich and fugal
(albeit, wandering and complex) harmony – evoking the emerging bitterness as the sense of the Fall taints
the characters’ joy – the strings layer upon this foundation at rehearsal Y, and the glockenspiel and first
trumpet present the motive in quarter notes, against the backdrop of heavy half notes. Not long after, the
winds join in, and by rehearsal Y2, nearly the entire orchestra has traded their half notes for the more
agitated quarter notes, which soon after are diminished rhythmically again into racing eighth notes that
whisk us into Variation XIV without pause or hesitation.

“The seventh stage [Variation XIV] introduces the Kierkegaardian concept of ‘the kingdom of
anxiety,’ for which the unconscious (instinctive) cannot provide. In the course of the seventh stage the
characters commence their ascent into consciousness…the ascent is accompanied by imagery which
indicates that the ‘single organism’ of the dream is in process of disintegration…and which associated this
disintegration of the faculties with fallen nature”.54 Here the anxious eighth notes begin to break apart,
being passed from piano to winds, to piano again, and strings. As the jittery violins enter alone, with a roll
in the suspended cymbal to create a panicked shimmer, the violas and clarinets join, then the piano and
xylophone, and so on, until the entire orchestra races with fragmented fury toward the final five tutti
chords. The gradual layering of instruments creates the sensation of ascension and growth into
consciousness, while scattered eighth notes lend to the confusion and disintegration presented in Auden’s
poem – a troubling climax looking for relief in Part II.

“In Part Four [of the poem]…the narrator reminds us that ‘As they drove through the half-lit
almost empty streets, the effect of their dream had not yet worn off but persisted as a mutual mood of
discouragement.’55 Bernstein wrote of “The Dirge,” “This section employs, in a harmonic way, a twelve-
tone row out of which the main theme evolves. There is a contrasting middle section of almost Brahmsian
romanticism, in which can be felt the self-indulgent aspect of this strangely pompous lamentation.”56

54 Ibid., 161.
55 Ibid.
56 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.
According to Pollack, Bernstein felt closer to a more tonal treatment of twelve-tone techniques: “Bernstein felt ‘rather close to the tonal way’ in which Copland used the twelve-tone method...but he seemed rather distant toward such later twelve-tone works as the Piano Fantasy,...Copland’s first piece that he felt he himself ‘couldn’t have composed.’”\textsuperscript{57} In this episode, he seems to utilize the twelve chromatic tones (in general) in the manner that suits his tonal tendencies, rather than adhering to a strict treatment of his original row.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{row.png}
\caption{The Row}
\end{figure}

The main theme introduced at measure 5, is centered largely around the tone B, granting a quasi-tonal center. The piccolo – enhanced by the piano’s flourishes – at measure 6 mimics the motive of the piano in measures 3 and 4. The accompaniment remains generally static harmonically, moving only stepwise by measure, while flutes and clarinets infuse the texture with ascending chromatic lines. One bar before rehearsal 3, at Movendo, the piano enters with an ascending line, presenting the “Row” out of order but only very slightly so, such that it is evidently an intentional re-ordering of the original row in order to bring out the tonal-friendliness of jumps by thirds and fifths. The hauntingly beautiful second theme – the “Brahmsian” contrasting section – is delicately scored for the piano, with select voices from the strings. While this may seem too far removed from the pseudo-twelve-tone experimentalism in the opening section to have a place in this episode, there are moments that are audibly familiar as to have been derived from the earlier section, in a similar vein to the variation treatment of the first Part; an example can be found in the beginning piano motive of dotted eighths and sixteenths reminiscent of the ”limping” quality found in the Movendo section; likewise, the powerful unison strings from the same Movendo moment.

\textsuperscript{57} Howard Pollack, \textit{Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 197.
look forward to the lushness of the second theme. This theme provides an emotional outlet for the angst of the gritty twelve-tone treatment, evoking the empty discouragement of Auden’s characters quite effectively.

Rehearsal 7 returns with the original “Row,” nearly in prime order, given to the entire orchestra, while the next two bars are one enormous tone cluster – all twelve tones are voiced at once. All settles into the opening theme now in the strings, which then works its way smoothly into a restatement by the piano of the primary motive from the beginning of the second contrasting theme.

Regarding Part Five, “Here, the instincts awakened in the hermetic gardens [of the ‘Seven Stages’] lead [our characters] to seek happiness in sensual love. ‘The Masque’ contrasts ironically with the courtly celebrations of marriage for which it is named, for it is primitive Eros, not courtly Cupid, who is ceremoniously honoured…”58 Perhaps, there is no music more primitive and bawdy than “a kind of fantastic piano-jazz…by turns nervous, sentimental, self-satisfied, vociferous…a scherzo for piano and percussion alone…”59

As the strings sustain the pianississimo dodecaphonic chord (all twelve tones layered on top of each other in an eerie haze of texture) begun at the conclusion of “The Dirge,” the snare, bass drum, and suspended cymbal initiate a simple rhythmic framework, over which the piano sets the stage for this awkward jazz frolic, during which the divisions of beat and meter are spasmodic. Bernstein’s gift with rhythm shines throughout this episode as beats and their emphases are added to phrases and taken away, creating surprising jolts of activity that nonetheless flow effortlessly from one into the next, as if to be entirely expected.

The basic structure of this segment revolves around an abandoned tune of Bernstein’s, written for, and cut from, his 1944 musical On the Town, a song originally called “Ain’t Got No Tears Left.” The first time this appears in “The Masque” is four bars after rehearsal 14, in the piano solo, over a minute into the episode after the Introductory melody, three incarnations of the A-theme, and a transitionary B-theme of oscillating seconds. When the piano presents this hyped-up version of the Broadway tune over a bed of

58 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s The Age of Anxiety", 162.
59 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.
oscillating sixteenth notes, the instructions are to play it \textit{with warmth}, offering a certain serenity in the midst of this raging maelstrom. At rehearsal 15, the celesta doubles the melody, granting a sense of sweetness and playful innocence to the whole experience, for in Auden’s tale: “Emble, who personifies the exaggeration of sensation falls asleep at the point where Rosetta comes to grips with reality… Rosetta’s monologue…shows her turning from her habitual day-dream to confront reality…and concludes with a confession of faith in Hebrew: the \textit{Shema} which proclaims the unity of God.”

Twelve bars later, at rehearsal 16, the C-phrase is introduced – offering a merry-go-round- or music box-style flourish of twinkling color as the piano executes a charming theme in 5/8, tied across the original 2/4 bar line, while the glockenspiel mimics the piano’s theme and the celesta rolls easily along with fluid sixteenth notes. This leads into a D-phrase of 2/4 + 3/8 and an easy-going oscillating pattern in the piano, during which, eight bars later, the celesta and harp outline the basic intervals behind the “No Tears” melody in simple eighth notes: ascending minor third then minor sixth, followed by a descending minor second, major second, and minor third. At rehearsal 19, “No Tears” is heard again in the piano,

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Figure12.png}
\caption{Basic intervals, rehearsal 18, "The Masque"}
\end{figure}

xylophone and, later, celesta, while the piano left hand is in an eighth note pattern of 3+3+2. At this point, the Intro starts again, as if repeating back to the beginning of the episode. At rehearsal 24, the piano unleashes a rapid succession of flowing runs, and there is an extension to the A-theme inserted at rehearsal 27, something strongly reminiscent of Gershwin’s \textit{Rhapsody in Blue}. The next appearance of the “No Tears” melody features the celesta, harp, glockenspiel, and xylophone with the piano coming in afterward at the next C-phrase. At the final mention of the “No Tears” melody at rehearsal 37, the entire jazz “combo” is in on the bombastic act. There is then another statement of material from the Intro, followed by four bars of motivic canon of A-phrase material, which is then repeated for eight bars, running headlong into the tail of the A-phrase before it is cut short by the rude entrance of the orchestra at the start of “The Epilogue.”
“[T]he piano-protagonist is traumatized by the intervention of the orchestra for four bars of hectic jazz. When the orchestra stops, as abruptly as it began, a pianino in the orchestra is continuing the Masque, repetitiously and with waning energy, as the Epilogue begins. Thus a kind of separation of the self from the guilt of escapist living has been effected, and the protagonist is free again to examine what is left beneath the emptiness.”

In the 1949 version of the score, the solo piano observed the activity silently, then finished the work with a single resounding chord, but, “…a strange thing happened when I looked over the score years later. I had thought I was making a big Hollywood version of faith in the finale [where the single solo piano chord was the only ‘real thing’ in “The Epilogue”] but I realized then that…the silence of the piano didn’t work because I had once been trying to convince myself that I was talking about faith – once removed – and it just wasn’t true. Also, there seemed to be something very odd about the solo piano sitting there during the whole finale – and pianists complained.”

Bernstein asserts: “In the years that have passed since 1949, I have reevaluated my attempt to mirror Auden’s literary images in so literal a way. It seems to me to have succeeded least well in the Finale…With this in mind, I have revised the Finale so as to include the solo pianist, even providing him with a final burst of cadenza before the Coda. I am now satisfied that the work is in its final form [1965].”

As the pianino mimics what was the D-phrase of “The Masque,” the instrument physically embedded in the orchestra’s midst and giving a distant echo of the madness, the trumpet, con sord. and dolcissimo e nobile, “intrudes its statement of ‘something pure’… the strings answer in a melancholy

Figure 13: "Something pure" theme

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60 Ibid.


62 Prefatory Note from Boosey & Hawkes score, 1993.
reminiscent of the Prologue: again and again the winds reiterate ‘something pure’ against the mounting tension of the strings’ loneliness. All at once the strings accept the situation, in a sudden statement of the newly-recognized faith.”

Burton notes that, “The falling fourths of the principal theme of ‘The Epilogue’ appear in a piano piece Bernstein wrote for Aaron Copland while staying with him in the summer of 1942.” This motive runs abundantly throughout “The Epilogue,” certainly in homage to the open sound characteristic of the work of his friend and mentor, Aaron Copland. The themes found in the piano’s “cadenza” are reminiscent of several of the more serene moments throughout the second symphony, including the piano’s themes in Variation I from “The Seven Ages” and the contrasting section in the middle of “The Dirge;” thus this episode ties the whole work together nicely. At rehearsal J, marked “With serenity,” with the sustained strings, winds, and harp – growing into the whole orchestra by the end of it all – one can truly sense a Hollywood finale with a Hollywood sunrise illuminating the picture screen as the credits roll. This suits Auden’s finale aptly, “The ‘Epilogue’ deals with the thoughts of Malin and Quant as they take separate ways homeward. Malin is described as travelling [sic] southward, i.e. toward feeling, and away from the compass point that represents thought as dominant...On his way he muses on the problems of time and eternity and the relationship of flesh and spirit; and concludes that ‘the new locus’ is ‘For the eyes of faith to find.’...The sunrise and the river at its confluence with the sea bring together the symbols of consciousness and of the unconscious...”

Bernstein was correct that one must understand W. H. Auden’s poem on a deeper level in order to fully grasp the intensity of his symphony. Though he may have come to this powerful result by subconscious means after having immersed himself in Auden’s world, Bernstein has nonetheless successfully given a voice to the printed words, whether critics agree on the effectiveness of his eclecticism or not. James Wierzbicki put it well when he said, “These works [the three symphonies] are long and complex, not the sort of thing for an audience that likes its music short and snappy. But they

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63 Ibid.
64 Humphrey Burton, Leonard Bernstein, 191.
65 Edward Callan, "Allegory in Auden’s The Age of Anxiety", 163.

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represent, more accurately than anything Bernstein produced for the theater, the real essence of his creative personality. They say something about what drove him, about what he pondered when he wasn’t distracted by the glare of the limelight." Bernstein was a seeker of faith – intense, curious, and passionate; in his own words, “the [irony of the] end of the poem and the crisis of faith is that one finds [faith] in one’s backyard ultimately; after searching and going through…these stages and ages…you find it in your bathtub or under the little apple tree outside your house, not in these great terms of faith with a big ‘F’.” We can presume from the sublime final notes of the second symphony that, at least by the end of The Age of Anxiety, he, like the character Malin, had found faith.

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