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## THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN JOHN POWELL'S SCORE FOR *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON* (2010)

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THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN JOHN POWELL'S SCORE FOR *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON* (2010)

By

Denise E. Finnegan

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Music

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Anthony Bushard

Lincoln, Nebraska

April 2020

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN JOHN POWELL'S SCORE FOR *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON* (2010)

Denise E. Finnegan, M.M.

University of Nebraska, 2020

Advisor: Anthony Bushard

In this thesis, I examine the dramatic and thematic associations within the score for *How to Train Your Dragon* in relation to John Williams's score for *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. Both of these films contain main plot points associated with friendship and flying and each composer develops musical themes in accordance with these dramatic ideas. I analyze Powell's evolution of his "Friendship Theme" as it relates to the friendship between the main characters Hiccup and Toothless and compare it with Williams's handling of the "E.T. Motive" in correspondence with the friendship between E.T. and Elliott. I furthermore examine how each composer takes a short motivic idea and expands it into a longer musical theme during the first flight of each protagonist and his respective creature. I scrutinize where these themes occur and their narrative import, tracing their development alongside the characters'. I moreover explore Powell's thematic development and compositional choices apart from Williams, displaying his sensitivity to subtler plot points in *How to Train Your Dragon*. I argue that Powell's use of thematic development is pivotal in the storytelling of the film, greatly enhancing character development and our understanding of character relationships.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Anthony Bushard for his guidance and support of this project. He read numerous drafts, served as a sounding board for ideas, and always strived to give me feedback that would push me to new levels in my writing and music scholarship.

I would also like to thank Dr. Pamela Starr and Dr. William Shomos for giving their time to serve as my committee members and offering helpful feedback.

To everyone on the MAMI 2019 conference committee for selecting a very preliminary draft of this thesis to be presented at the 2019 conference, as well as everyone who attended the presentation and gave me thoughtful feedback and ideas.

To Dr. Frank Lehman for setting me on the track of comparing Powell to Williams and letting me cite his quote from an email conversation.

To Dr. Joakim Tillman for assistance with musical transcriptions.

To Dr. Stanley Kleppinger for helping me decipher pop music progressions and suggesting sources for further exploration.

To my parents Keith and Linda Finnegan for their love and support. Thank you for always pushing me and believing in me.

Lastly to my fiancé Kyle Hill for being my number one fan through this whole process, believing in me, and giving me pep talks to get me back on track.

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## INTRODUCTION

“[*How to Train Your Dragon*] is a shrewd blend of conventional pop-culture pandering and exalted cinematic artistry,” writes film critic A.O. Scott in a *New York Times* review for the DreamWorks 2010 animated adventure.<sup>2</sup> Although Scott goes on to declare the beginning and end “noisy” and “attempting to justify the price of a ticket with eye-straining, ear-popping large-scale effects,” he continues by saying that “sitting through those assaults is a price worth paying for the tenderness, beauty and exhilaration that are the movie’s great strengths.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise longtime film critic Owen Gleiberman writes in a review of the film for *Entertainment Weekly*, “*How to Train Your Dragon* rouses you in conventional ways, but it’s also the rare animated film that uses 3-D for its breathtaking spatial and emotional possibilities.”<sup>4</sup> Praising the 3D animation and story of a boy and his “dog” Gleiberman awards the film an A- rating.<sup>5</sup> These reviews and the film’s box office success show *How to Train Your Dragon* was one of the year’s most popular films.<sup>6</sup>

*How to Train Your Dragon* follows the story of Hiccup, a Viking teen living in the fictional, middle-of-nowhere village of Berk. Hiccup’s village is frequently attacked by dragons and as such, dragon fighting is held in high esteem. Hiccup, because he is small in stature, is training as a blacksmith with Gobber, a gruff Viking with numerous injuries from previous dragon battles, instead of learning to

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<sup>2</sup> A.O. Scott, “No Slaying Required: A Viking Aids an Enemy and Wins a Friend,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/26/movies/26howto.html>, paragraph 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 8.

<sup>4</sup> Owen Gleiberman. “*How to Train Your Dragon*,” *Entertainment Weekly*, March 24, 2010, <https://ew.com/article/2010/03/24/how-train-your-dragon-2/>, paragraph 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 1.

<sup>6</sup> According to IMDb total 2010 cumulative U.S. gross box office sales for *How to Train Your Dragon* is \$217,581,231 and 2010 cumulative worldwide gross box office sales was \$494,878,759. (“*How to Train Your Dragon*.” IMDb. IMDb.com, March 18, 2010. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0892769/>.)

fight dragons. Gobber is good friends with Hiccup's father Stoick, who is also the leader of the village. Searching for status and prestige to impress a girl, Astrid, and his father, Hiccup desires to be a dragon fighter. Using his skills from his apprenticeship, he creates a catapult device that he uses to shoot down an elusive Night Fury dragon during the opening battle. No one believes Hiccup took down the dragon so, hoping to prove his worth, Hiccup goes in search of the fallen dragon. He finds the beast tied up in the ropes from the catapult device. Looking into the eyes of the helpless creature, Hiccup is unable to kill him and instead cuts the ropes. As a result, the dragon does not kill Hiccup and flies off further into the forest outside of Berk.

Hiccup keeps his failure to kill a dragon a secret and begins "dragon training" with the rest of Berk's teens where he is instructed that dragons will always go for the kill. Confused, then, why the Night Fury let him go, Hiccup goes in search of the dragon once again. He finds the dragon trapped in a cove further in the woods. Hiccup discovers the dragon has lost half of his tail, preventing him from flying. He returns later, presenting a peace offering of a fish and befriends the dragon, whom he names Toothless. Hiccup then uses his skills as a blacksmith's apprentice to create a prosthetic tail for Toothless. Using a foot-piece attached to a saddle, Hiccup is able to change the prosthetic tailpiece to reflect the natural half of the dragon's tail so Toothless is able to fly with Hiccup's assistance.

After some trial and error, the two friends are able to successfully fly together. However, Hiccup's strange behavior and constant running off to the woods does not go unnoticed by Astrid. Eventually Astrid catches up to Hiccup and prepares to tell the whole village about him keeping a pet dragon in secret. Hiccup and Toothless stop her and after a romantic flight where she agrees dragons are not so bad, the three characters are caught up in a swarm of other dragons. By following the swarm, still on Toothless's back, Hiccup and Astrid discover the dragon's nest. In the nest they find a giant

dragon, the Green Death,<sup>7</sup> that serves as master to the others, demanding offerings of food, hence why the dragons have been stealing from Berk for so many years. Hiccup, however, keeps the discovery of the nest a secret to protect Toothless from the rest of the Vikings.

Unfortunately, Toothless is eventually discovered by the other Vikings who then capture him, bind him up on a ship, and use him to try and find the dragon's nest so they can eradicate the dragon threat once and for all. Upon reaching the nest, the Vikings are overwhelmed by the Green Death until Hiccup shows up with the rest of the teens riding the dragons the Vikings kept in captivity for training practice. Hiccup frees Toothless from the Viking ship and the two friends together destroy the Green Death. After the battle, Hiccup wakes up to find a transformed Berk where Vikings and dragons live together peacefully. The story focuses on the friendship between two dissimilar characters told to hate each other and shows the ability of one person to transform the minds of everyone else by taking a chance.

The touching story and stunning computer animation are only partly responsible for the film's success. A. O. Scott further writes positively in his *New York Times* review about composer John Powell's score for both the "noisy" and "tender" moments: "Music is always welcome, though, and John Powell's score, while occasionally obvious and bombastic, is also subtle and sensitive when it needs to be."<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Konstantinos Sotiropoulos, a film music critic for the International Film Music Critics Association (IFMCA), writes that the score is "A musical triumph for animation, with the exquisite

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<sup>7</sup> In the film's DVD commentary, the filmmakers refer to this creature as the "Red Death." The fan wiki also calls the creature "Red Death" referring to different similar creature called the "Green Death." However, the track from the soundtrack album that corresponds with the battle against this beast is titled "Battling the Green Death" which I reference to identify the music in this thesis. Because this thesis is about the music and since none of the characters call the creature "Red" or "Green Death" in the film, I am choosing to refer to it as Green Death.

<sup>8</sup> Scott, paragraph 7.

signature of John Powell!” awarding the score a 4.5 out of 5 star rating on his website.<sup>9</sup> Critics of many film award committees were also impressed by Powell’s contribution, which received an Oscar nomination for Best Score, and won “Film Score of the Year” from the IFMCA Awards.<sup>10</sup> As will become clear in this document, composer John Powell’s command of dramatic association using thematic development makes his score successful throughout differing scenes, complementing and enhancing the tale told by the dialogue and visuals. Powell is exemplary in his employment of leitmotif<sup>11</sup> technique, taking his themes through many different variations that reflect aspects of the plot, and challenging orchestral writing, as well as his handling of other filmic aspects such as the montage.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Konstantinos Sotiropoulos, “Soundtrack Review: ‘How to Train Your Dragon’ – John Powell,” *Soundtrack Beat: Discovering the Music of the Movies*, March 11, 2017, <https://soundtrackbeat.com/2017/03/11/how-to-train-your-dragon-john-powell/>, paragraph 0.

<sup>10</sup> “How to Train Your Dragon: Awards,” IMDb. IMDb.com, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0892769/awards>, cites both the Oscar and IFMCA awards as well as numerous other nominations from smaller awards ceremonies for both the film and soundtrack.

<sup>11</sup> “‘Leitmotif’ may be defined as a recurrent musical idea which has been invested by its composer with semantic content” (Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif: from Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 7.)

<sup>12</sup> In a 2014 interview Powell says, “Film scores admittedly can turn out a bit ‘donuty.’ In other words there’s lots of semibreves, lots of whole notes that kind of just sit there and don’t do much... when I get a chance, it’s great fun to write something that [the musicians] can really get their teeth into.” (Tim Burden, “In Training with John Powell,” *Film Score Monthly* 19, no. 5 (2014) [http://fsmo-media.filmscoremonthly.com/fsmonline/mp3/V19N5/FEATURES/19.5Powell\\_Interview1.mp3](http://fsmo-media.filmscoremonthly.com/fsmonline/mp3/V19N5/FEATURES/19.5Powell_Interview1.mp3), 1:08-1:30).

## CHAPTER 1 : PUTTING POWELL IN CONTEXT

In a 2006 interview, Powell described how his diverse musical background prepared him for success as a film composer.<sup>13</sup> He began his musical training at a young age, studying classical violin and watching rehearsals with the Royal Philharmonic where his father was a tubist. As a student at Trinity College in London, Powell studied piano, percussion, composition, and electronic music.

The thing I learned most in college, was how to be creative. There was a world of music I didn't know about in the Trinity School of Music basement. It was full of records. A lot of them were world music records, such as Balinese and African drumming. It blew my mind. I would sit and go through the records in there and literally everything I was doing at the time changed.<sup>14</sup>

This exposure to Balinese and African drumming, he says, inspired much of the rhythmic drive for some of his scores, particularly his music for the *Bourne* trilogy (2002-2007).<sup>15</sup>

After college, Powell began a career in Hollywood through connections with film composer Hans Zimmer.

You have to remember the first director in Hollywood that I had anything to do with was introduced to me through Hans Zimmer. Hans told me he was doing a couple of films for this director who hadn't done a film in twenty years and [Zimmer] needed a bit of help on one of them... the next thing you know I'm in a room with Terrence Malick... [Malick] didn't know who the hell I was but he spoke to me as if I was an artist.<sup>16</sup>

And, like Zimmer, Powell has since written for a diverse array of films, ranging from *The Bourne Identity* (2002) to *Happy Feet* (2006). However, in the same 2006 interview, he shares "I get upset about films with so much violence in them. Especially when the violence is so cool. I'd love to work on more films that are about more positive things like love."<sup>17</sup> Powell reiterates his preference for scoring happier

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<sup>13</sup> Denis M. Hannigan, "John Powell," *Score* 21.4 (2006), 12-15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

films in a 2011 interview about *How to Train Your Dragon*, stating “and the other thing about animation is that you get to write music with more joy. That's why I keep coming back to it.”<sup>18</sup> As such, his inclination towards happier films is probably why much of his filmography is for animated films. Before *How to Train Your Dragon*, Powell co-composed many scores for DreamWorks including *The Road to El Dorado* (2000) and *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) with Hans Zimmer as well as *Shrek* (2001) with Harry Gregson-Williams. *How to Train Your Dragon* was Powell’s first solo score for DreamWorks.<sup>19</sup> While it is not known exactly why, his previous work on highly successful films for DreamWorks, such as *Shrek* and *Kung Fu Panda*, and his preference for animated films is likely why he was asked to collaborate on the *How to Train Your Dragon* project.

Powell wanted to create a score on a grand scale for *How to Train Your Dragon*, feeling that “the animation and visuals [gave him] a broader palette to play with.”<sup>20</sup> He further describes *How to Train Your Dragon* as a “...Viking movie, after all, [so] we can afford something a bit more grand and epic.”<sup>21</sup> Powell reached back into his own childhood when he drew inspiration from *The Vikings* (1958 and starring Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis), especially the “Golden Age”-inspired score by Mario Nascimbene.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Powell explains that the directors wanted “size, depth, and emotion” for the

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Pond, “John Powell Goes Epic to Score ‘Dragon,’” *The Wrap*, February 10, 2011, <https://www.thewrap.com/john-powell-goes-epic-score-dragon-24619/>, paragraph 6.

<sup>19</sup> According to IMDb, there are two composers credited for each DreamWorks animation film Powell worked on before *How to Train Your Dragon*. These films can be found on John Powell’s IMDb page. (“John Powell,” IMDb. IMDb.com. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0694173/>.)

<sup>20</sup> Pond, paragraph 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., paragraph 8.

<sup>22</sup> By “Golden Age” I mean the period in film music beginning in the mid-1930s that mostly died out in the early 1940s. The music, which was used extensively, was characterized by a full range of orchestral colors, a melody-dominated style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, leitmotifs, borrowing of familiar melodies, and musical support of dramatic moods. A revival of this style of music occurred with new movie theater technologies in the 1950s. The large screens were well suited for large-scale “epic” films which often featured scores with Golden Age traits (Roger Hickman, *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2017), 124, 220-225.)



score as well as “a feeling of the Nordic musical past. You could say the symphonic musical past was Nielsen, the Danish symphonist. Sibelius. Grieg to a certain extent, although I think he was a little bit more Germanic than he was Nordic.”<sup>23</sup> Powell states that folk music also played a role. “We looked at all the folk music from the Nordic areas. And I'm part Scottish and grew up with a lot of Scottish folk music, so that came into it a lot. And Celtic music was something that [producer] Jeffrey [Katzenberg] felt had this very attractive quality to it, and a sweetness, that he thought would be wonderful for the film.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition to *How to Train Your Dragon*, much of Powell's filmography, particularly his scores for other animated films like *Happy Feet* (2006) and *Ice Age: The Meltdown* (2006), employs a similarly grandiose, post-romantic, symphonic/thematic sound with a full range of orchestral colors. With Powell's extensive and growing filmography, it's somewhat surprising that he has not been considered in more depth by academics in film studies or film musicology/theory. Besides interviews and critical reviews, to this point none of Powell's scores has been thoroughly analyzed by scholars in either film studies or musicology/theory. To my knowledge only Jennifer Dirkes's dissertation (Ph.D. composition), *Synchretic Analysis and Storyboard Scores: The Musical Rhythm of Filmic Elements*—in which she devotes a chapter to two scenes from *How to Train your Dragon*—has offered any academic research into Powell's music.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pond, paragraphs 7, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 11.

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Dirkes, “Synchretic Analysis and Storyboard Scores: The Musical Rhythm of Filmic Elements,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2017), ProQuest LLC.

### Jennifer Dirkes's Exploration of *How to Train Your Dragon*

In her dissertation (Ph.D Composition), Dirkes introduces a new method of film music analysis that examines the musical-visual synchronization of a film, known as synchresis. She uses computer software to measure the alignment of visual “rhythm” or movement with musical rhythm and infers the dramatic implications of this alignment on the story.<sup>26</sup> In addition to *How to Train Your Dragon*, Dirkes examines *Bambi* (1942), *The Lion King* (1994), *WALL-E* (2008), and *Psycho* (1960).<sup>27</sup> Her list favors animated films that are well suited for storyboard analysis since they always use storyboards.<sup>28</sup> Dirkes's list incorporates both traditional animation (*Bambi* and *The Lion King*) and computer animation (*WALL-E* and *How to Train Your Dragon*), showing her method can work for different types of animation. Of course, *Psycho* is the outlier because it is a live-action horror film, but Dirkes explains that she wanted to show that syncretic analysis via Storyboard Scores is not limited to animated films. She saw *Psycho* as a good “natural extension” into live-action films because Alfred Hitchcock used a storyboard to plan out every sequence of *Psycho*.<sup>29</sup>

The manner of alignment in each film varies, but Dirkes argues that each alignment brings out an important plot point for each film. For example, in *Bambi* her findings show an outer conflict between the characters and nature. Places of higher musical-visual alignment reveal when characters are “at one with nature” instead of confused by their surroundings demonstrated in her graph reproduced in Figure 1.1. On the graph, the Y-axis shows the percent of the frames aligned with the music and the X-axis shows the measure number of the music cue.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the higher the blue

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<sup>26</sup> Dirkes, 2, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

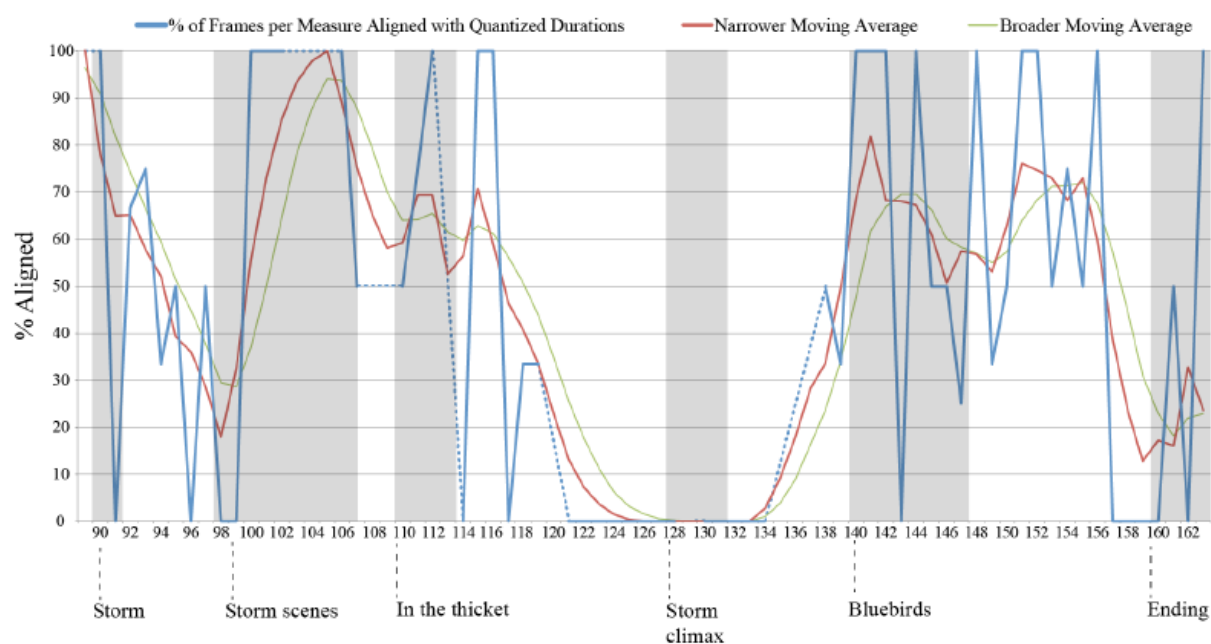
<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 24.

line is on the Y-axis, the higher the alignment between music and visuals is at each measure number on the X-axis.

**Figure 1.1 Dirkes's diagram for *Bambi* showing lower alignment suggesting confusion with nature (Storm) and higher alignment during happiness with nature (Bluebirds).<sup>31</sup>**



Dirkes juxtaposes her analysis of *Bambi* with that of *The Lion King* where the alignment of individual character movement and the music differs. For example, Simba's character movement aligns with different places than Mufasa's in the "Father's Footsteps" scene (Figure 1.2), showing the characters are "out of sync" with each other in their communication.<sup>32</sup> Dirkes's graph, reproduced in Figure 1.3, shows a red line representing Simba's alignment with the music and a blue line representing Mufasa's. The different alignment peaks illustrate how the characters are out-of-sync with each other.

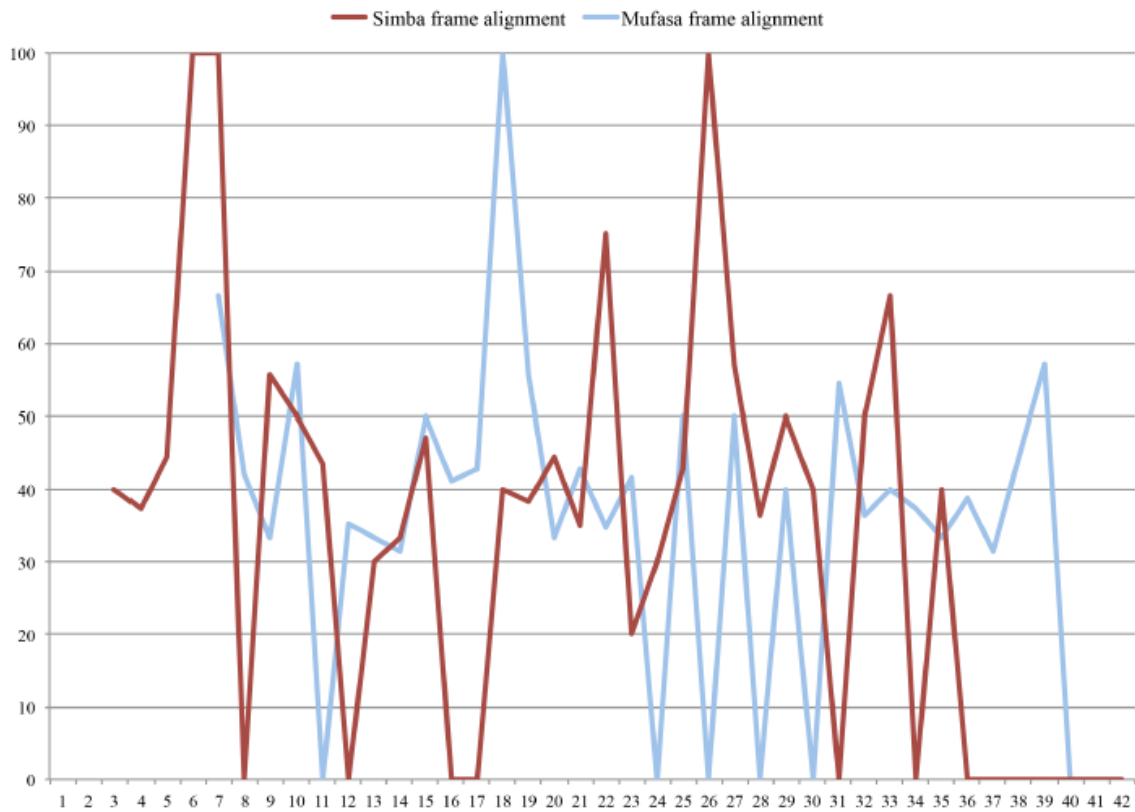
<sup>31</sup> Dirkes, 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56, 66-67.

Figure 1.2: Simba and Mufasa in the “Father’s Footsteps” scene from *The Lion King*.



Figure 1.3 Dirkes’s graph showing contrasting alignment of Simba and Mufasa throughout the “Father’s Footsteps” scene.<sup>33</sup>



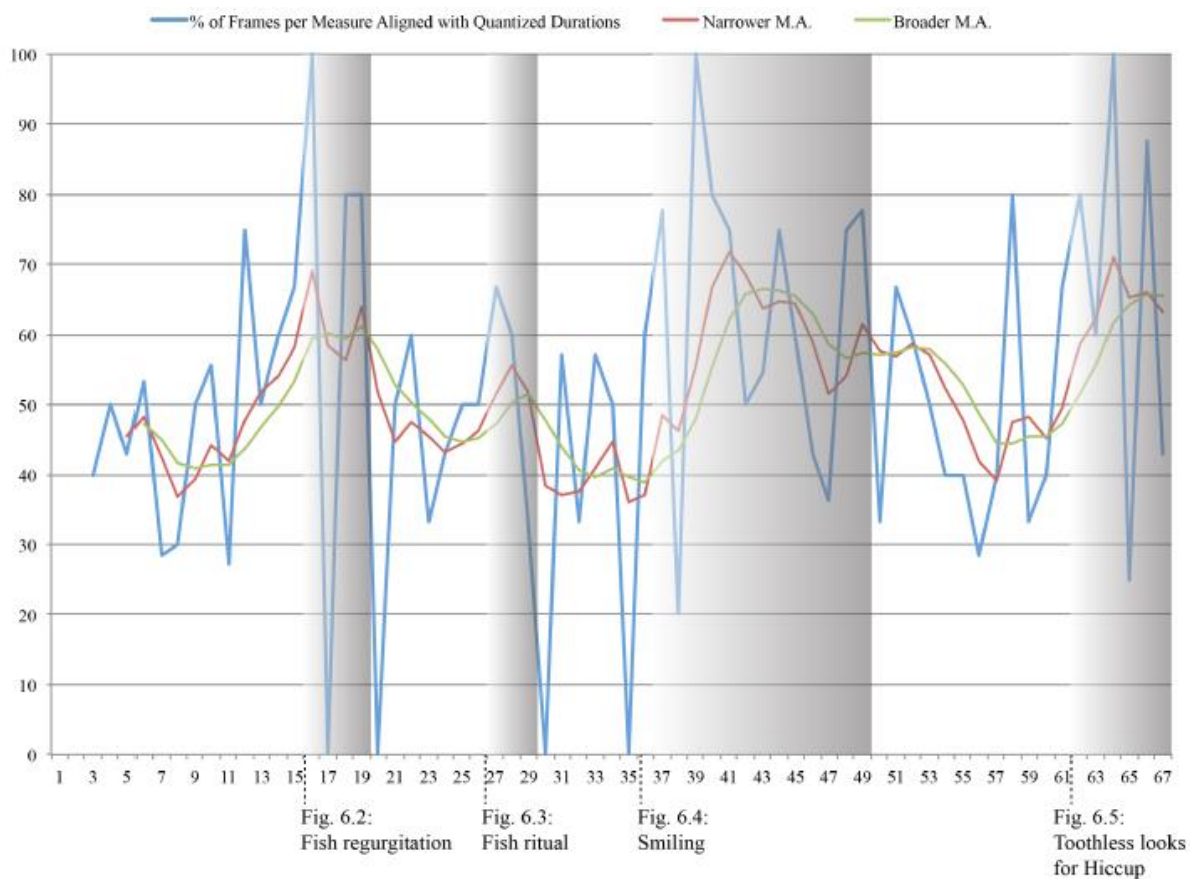
<sup>33</sup> Dirkes, 67.

While Dirkes's method is an interesting approach, there are some limitations to it as an analytical tool. For example, she does not consider thematic development or any other musical features, looking instead at how merely the *presence* of music aligns with the image. A consideration of thematic development reveals more nuanced observations as a comparison between Dirkes's analysis and a thematic analysis of two scenes from *How to Train Your Dragon* will show. I will briefly consider thematic development here and elaborate on it in the following chapters. In her dissertation, Dirkes chooses two important scenes of relational development between the two main characters, Hiccup and Toothless, for investigation. In the first of these cues, titled "Forbidden Friendship," Dirkes asserts that peak alignment occurs at moments of successful communication between Hiccup and Toothless (Figure 1.4). She identifies one of these moments at the beginning of the scene when Toothless tries to mimic Hiccup's smile represented by the green box in her example (Figure 1.5). This example contrasts with a lack of alignment when Hiccup reaches out his hand to try and touch Toothless after swallowing the fish. As the dragon bares his teeth and runs away, his movements counteract the rhythm of the music, represented by the red boxes in her example (Figure 1.6).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dirkes, 116, 118, 124.

Figure 1.4: Dirkes's graph of Alignment in "Forbidden Friendship" showing higher alignment during successful communication (fish regurgitation, smiling, etc.).<sup>35</sup>



<sup>35</sup> Dirkes, 117.

Figure 1.5: Storyboard Score for “Forbidden Friendship.” The top “line” shows the storyboard where green boxes represent alignment of important visuals and music, red boxes a lack of alignment between important visuals and music, and blue boxes an on-screen moment with no musical purpose.<sup>36</sup> The middle staff (DX/SFX) shows a musical representation of sound effect “rhythm” and the bottom staves show a reduced score. The aligned green box shows Toothless trying to smile.<sup>37</sup>

Action:

The storyboard score consists of several horizontal tracks. At the top is the 'Action' track, which contains three storyboard panels. The first panel (00:30:18:06) shows Toothless looking down, with a red box indicating a lack of alignment. The second panel (00:30:18:12) shows Toothless with his ear up, with a green box indicating alignment. The third panel (00:30:18:17) shows Toothless looking up, with a red box. The fourth panel (00:30:18:23) shows Toothless looking down, with a blue box indicating no musical purpose. The fifth panel (00:30:19:09) shows Toothless baring his teeth, with a red box. The sixth panel (00:30:19:19) shows Toothless growling, with a blue box. Below the action track is the 'DX/SFX' track, which contains five boxes: 'Toothless gurgle' (red), 'Toothless gurgle' (blue), 'Toothless gurgle' (red), 'Toothless growl' (green), and 'Toothless growl' (green). Below the DX/SFX track are four musical staves: B. CL. (Bass Clarinet), Vrb. (Violin), S. Bells (Soprano Bells), and Hp. (Harp). The B. CL. staff starts with a dynamic marking of *p*. The Vrb. staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The S. Bells staff has a soprano clef and a key signature of one sharp. The Hp. staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The music is in 4/4 time and starts at measure 42.

00:30:18:06  
Toothless looks down

00:30:18:12  
Ear up

00:30:18:17  
Toothless looks up

00:30:18:23  
Toothless looks down

00:30:19:09  
Toothless bares teeth

00:30:19:19  
Toothless growl

DX/SFX:

Toothless gurgle

Toothless gurgle

Toothless gurgle

Toothless growl

Toothless growl

Act. 42

B. CL. *p*

Vrb.

S. Bells

Hp.

<sup>36</sup> Summarized from Dirkes, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 123.

Figure 1.6: Storyboard Score for “Forbidden Friendship.” The red boxes show Toothless flying away from Hiccup out-of-sync with the musical line.<sup>38</sup>

The storyboard score is organized into three main sections: Editing, Action, and DX/SFX.

- Editing:**
  - 00:30:20:07 Panning speeds up (blue box)
  - 00:30:20:13 Toothless exits frame R (red box)
  - 00:30:20:07 Hiccup's hand out of frame L (red box)
  - 00:30:20:20 Toothless in frame R (red box)
- Action:**
  - 00:30:20:05 Toothless turns head (green box)
  - 00:30:21:06 Wings down (blue box)
  - 00:30:22:00 Wings down (red box)
  - 00:30:21:15 Wings up (red box)
- DX/SFX:**
  - SFX whoosh (green box)
  - Toothless growl (blue box)
  - Wings SFX (green box)

The musical score below the storyboard includes staves for Acft., B. Cl., Vib., S. Bells, and Hrp. The Acft. staff shows a melodic line with various dynamics and articulations. The other staves show accompaniment for the instruments.

Examining Powell's use of his "Friendship Theme"<sup>39</sup> in this scene highlights a slightly different narrative. Whereas Dirkes's graph of alignment shows various peaks throughout the scene based on moments of successful communication, Powell's theme shows a continuous growth of friendship through the introduction of a theme in fragments that grows into a full version with fuller and louder orchestration. Both analyses reflect the trial and error in the friendship with Dirkes's highlighting specific moments of successful communication and the thematic analysis highlighting the general upwards

<sup>38</sup> Dirkes, 124.

<sup>39</sup> A theme that follows the growth of friendship between Hiccup and Toothless, elaborated on in Chapters 2 and 4.



growth. Each analysis, in different ways, brings out the importance of this scene in the establishment of the friendship that will be tested later in the film.

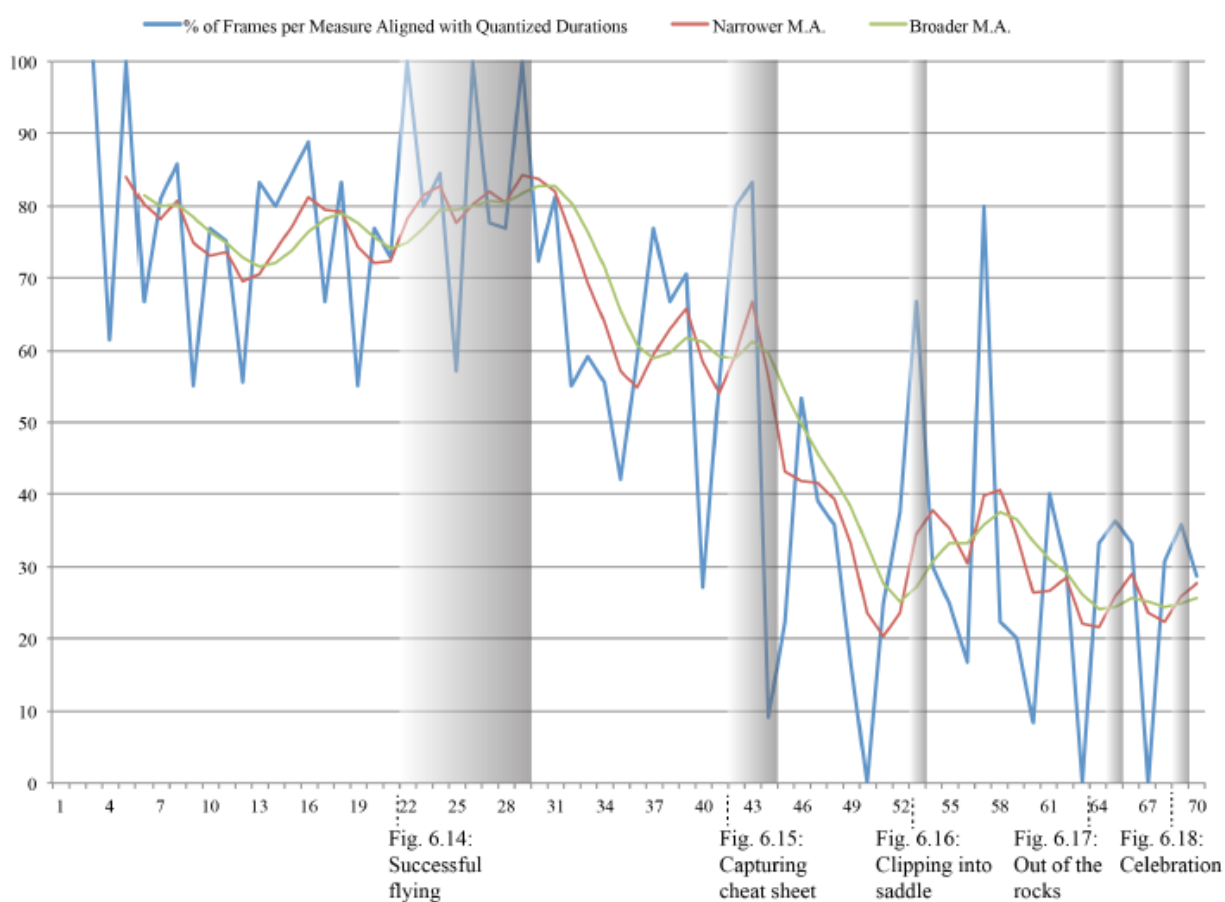
Although Dirkes's alignments interpret the scene in a similar manner to thematic development, there is very little evidence the alignments in the "Forbidden Friendship" scene were planned by Powell or the filmmakers. Most of the alignments in Dirkes's diagrams occur within a steady stream of eighth note accompaniment. However, the audience will likely notice the themes more so than the repetitive background filler. And, since there is no significant musical change at Dirkes's alignments, it is hard to argue that it was the intent of the composer to create them. In contrast, the development of the themes present in this and other scenes shows careful planning by the composer as my analysis in Chapters 2-4 will reveal.

Furthermore, in the "Test Drive" scene, the first flight between the two characters, the differences between Dirkes's syncretic analysis and my thematic analysis are even greater. Dirkes's graph for this scene shows a general decline in alignment that counteracts the thematic development and other filmic aspects (Figure 1.7). When the two characters fly together at the beginning of the scene, Dirkes's graph shows alignment is high, but once they reach the rocky flight at the end, alignment has decreased dramatically. Dirkes argues this lack of alignment is representative of the "rocky" path the characters will face leading up to the film's climax. She claims that the general decline of alignment shows Hiccup's overconfidence at the beginning of the flight and then his return to reality by the end.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Dirkes, 143, 156.

Figure 1.7: Dirkes’s graph of Alignment in “Test Drive” showing an overall decrease in alignment as the scene progresses.<sup>41</sup>



Dirkes’s analysis reveals a few discrepancies. The first is between her own analysis of the “Test Drive” scene and the “Forbidden Friendship” scene. In “Forbidden Friendship,” Dirkes asserted that alignment represented successful communication. In “Test Drive,” when there was successful communication—the reliance on instinct to fly safely through the rocks—there was less musical-visual alignment creating a contradiction in her interpretation. Additionally, the claim of Hiccup’s overconfidence at the beginning of “Test Drive” is at odds with the dialogue and visuals. At the

<sup>41</sup> Dirkes, 144.

beginning of the scene Hiccup is hesitant about flying, saying “We’re going to take this nice and slow”<sup>42</sup> to the dragon. Uncertain about which tail position he needs, Hiccup consults a cheat sheet he made for himself. By the end of the scene Hiccup is flying without his cheat sheet, instinctively changing Toothless’s tailpiece to navigate through the treacherous rocks, showing a growth in his assurance of his ability to fly. His excited, “Yeah!” where he throws his hands up in the air at the end of the flight also shows a greater confidence than the beginning of the scene. Powell’s use of the “Friendship Theme” and “Truth Theme”<sup>43</sup> in thicker and louder orchestration at the end of the scene, reflects Hiccup’s increased confidence.

Because Dirkes’s method of analysis ignores musical decisions, it is not useful for the musicologist concerned with the conscious decisions of the composer.<sup>44</sup> Her method may be beneficial for a film composer interested in the subconscious effects his or her visuo-musical alignment may have on a viewer while he or she is writing the music. If the music has already been written however, Dirkes’s method is only useful if one knows that careful planning went into the synchresis of the film such as with *Bambi* or *Psycho*. In *Bambi*, the composers worked closely with the animation designer from the beginning of production, even writing some of the music first and setting the animation to the music.<sup>45</sup> For *Psycho* Dirkes asserts that Hitchcock’s careful planning in the murder scene laid out a clear rhythmic

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<sup>42</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon* DVD, Directed by Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, DreamWorks Animation, 2014, 43:35-43:39.

<sup>43</sup> A theme relating to Hiccup’s search for the truth about dragons elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>44</sup> Although Dirkes’s Ph.D. is in composition, she presents her method as another musicological analytical tool (Dirkes 1-2).

<sup>45</sup> Dirkes, 29.

blueprint for Herrmann to follow,<sup>46</sup> which is not true in most live-action films.<sup>47</sup> For these films, using Dirkes's process reveals how successful each composer and director team were at creating synchresis. But for a score like *How to Train Your Dragon* that uses themes extensively, analyzing the thematic development reveals a deeper understanding of the composer's skill and intentions in crafting his score and places him in the historical line of film music composition, as the following chapters will reveal.

### Why Leitmotivic Analysis Still Matters

The thematic development in *How to Train Your Dragon* extends beyond the "Forbidden Friendship" and "Test Drive" scenes, creating cohesion for the entire film. In a 2014 interview, Powell provides insight into how he approaches creating themes for a score:

I try not to attach leitmotifs to characters, but to ideas. It's a little hard in films ... if the leitmotif is just established purely on characters. The stories aren't constructed in that fashion... I mean we have a tune we called "the truth about dragons," and [having a title attached to an idea] gives [the theme] the flexibility to work in lots of different ways. You can make it a dark tune about dragons, and you can make it a light tune about dragons but it's the truth. The idea is if the story has a question that there's been a lie about something and eventually your characters learn the truth, it allows you to take that tune and attach it to those ideas whether or not it's the lie or whether it's the revelation ... it's clearer I think for the subtext which is what you're trying to attach yourself to.<sup>48</sup>

Powell is certainly not the first or only film composer to use leitmotifs based on ideas or concepts instead of characters.<sup>49</sup> In his recent book *Understanding the Leitmotif: from Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull cites criticism of the filmic leitmotif by musicologist

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<sup>46</sup> Even though Hitchcock originally planned for no music in the murder scene (Steven C. Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann*, (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002, Ebook), 192.)

<sup>47</sup> Dirkes, 158.

<sup>48</sup> Burden, 16:23-17:28.

<sup>49</sup> A concept reaching at least as far back as Bernard Herrmann in the 1950s.

Theodor Adorno who labels the leitmotif in film as no more than a “calling-card.”<sup>50</sup> Bribitzer-Stull, however, asserts that the development of leitmotifs is what makes them stand out as more than “calling cards,” referencing Christoph Henzel’s example of a pervasive half-step motive that permeates many themes in Howard Shore’s score for *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>51</sup>

Bribitzer-Stull further references a debate over how long it takes to develop a leitmotif. For instance, Aaron Copland argues that long uninterrupted spans of music, such as in a Wagnerian music drama, are needed for effective leitmotivic development. On the other hand, certain film composers<sup>52</sup> see the leitmotif as the only form of development that is successful within the confines of short music cues.<sup>53</sup> Composer Franz Waxman<sup>54</sup> further argues that, “if [the themes] are easily recognizable, they permit repetition in varying forms and textures, and they help musical continuity.”<sup>55</sup> Bribitzer-Stull sees the leitmotif as the single-most important contribution by Wagner to film music, giving the orchestra the ability to narrate the story without the assistance of singing, or dialogue in the case of film music.<sup>56</sup> Powell’s music reflects Bribitzer-Stull’s assertion bringing continuity and depth of understanding to *How to Train Your Dragon*.

Film music scholars Tom Schneller and Bribitzer-Stull argue that leitmotivic analysis is still a useful tool of investigation for films when appropriate. Because film music composition is such a collaborative effort, other features such as orchestration are not always determined by the composer.

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif: from Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 267-268.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in, *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>52</sup> Bribitzer-Stull references “film composers” but does not name them.

<sup>53</sup> Bribitzer-Stull, 271.

<sup>54</sup> Known for his score to *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) among others.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in, Bribitzer-Stull, 268

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 268, 271, 267.

For instance, not even John Williams who is more heavily involved in orchestration than many film composers writes out the full-orchestration, but rather leaves detailed notes for his orchestrator(s).<sup>57</sup> What the lead composer almost always writes is the themes and since my goal is to examine Powell as a composer of themes and how he develops them, leitmotivic development is a good place to begin the exploration of his technique. Drawing from interviews with Powell and the filmmakers, it becomes clear that Powell also makes some decisions about orchestration, not relying purely on the orchestrator's mind, which is why I will also explore some orchestrational ideas as well as harmonic choices in Chapters 2-4.

### New Technologies and the State of Modern Film Scoring

Powell's score stands out during a time when many scores, for films that would have used highly thematic music in the past, rely instead on driving ostinatos, not thematic development. Recently, film and music scholar Emilio Audissino asserted that new technologies are part of the reason for the shift away from thematic development.<sup>58</sup> Much of today's film music is not even written down but rather looped through a computer. For example, when the Roman film *Gladiator* (2000) was shown while a live orchestra played the score, the arranger had to spend weeks transcribing multiple percussion lines that had not been written down. Audissino argues that the electronic looping process leads to orchestral writing that resembles rock, techno, and/or pop music that has been arranged for orchestra rather than the neo-Romantic sound of much of Hollywood's "Golden Age" scores. For example, Audissino describes

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<sup>57</sup> Ian Sapiro, "Star Scores: Orchestration and the Sound of John Williams's Film Music," In *John Williams: Music for Films, Television, and the Concert Stage*, ed. Emilio Audissino (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2018), 197-198.

<sup>58</sup> Emilio Audissino, "John Williams and Contemporary Film Music." In: *Contemporary Film Music: Investigating Cinema Narratives and Composition*, edited by Lindsay Coleman and Joakim Tillman. London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2017 (Ebook), 222-224.

the score for *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) as “an orchestral score that sounds like rock music played by a big orchestra” as opposed to the “old Hollywood swashbucklers.”<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, digital editing technologies have changed the film-making process as a whole. Making precise changes is now simply done with the click of a mouse instead of laboring over the precise cutting and pasting of physical film. Since last-minute editing changes are easy to make even after the music has been written, composers never know if they are working with the final cut. The possibility of last-minute changes makes easily modifiable music, such as ostinatos or short musical ideas, a safer choice for a composer who may be asked to make last minute changes to fit editorial adjustments. Audissino further asserts that even if composers choose to write out their music, as opposed to looping tracks through a computer, they still need to be well-versed in computer technologies since most directors require MIDI mock-ups of scores before paying for expensive recording sessions.<sup>60</sup>

Because of the trend toward less melody-driven scores, Audissino hails John Williams as today’s preeminent composer for continuing to write highly thematic scores despite new technologies. Audissino sees Williams as able to adapt to changing circumstances and continue his old methods of writing scores out by hand and playing mockups for directors on the piano.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Ian Sapiro explains how Williams still writes out compositional sketches by hand, although the changing technologies have affected the level of detail in these sketches. Through most of his career, from 1952 into the early 2000s, Williams worked with roughly the same team of orchestrators, who learned what he wanted.<sup>62</sup> Now, most of his orchestration is outsourced to the JKMS company where workers place

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<sup>59</sup> Audissino in *Contemporary Film Music*, 222.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-224.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Sapiro cites orchestrator Herb Spencer working with Williams from roughly 1967-1990 overlapping with John Neufeld who worked with him from 1989-2011 (Sapiro, 194).

his scores into music notation software, functioning more as copyists than orchestrators.<sup>63</sup> As such, Williams's sketches have become more detailed, showing he does not trust the musicianship of this new process, but still wishes to maintain his signature sound.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast, Powell uses digital technologies himself to create a leitmotivic sound similar to Williams. While Audissino decries the ways that new technologies affect traditional symphonic film music, Powell embraces the modern film scoring paradigm while still achieving detailed thematic development in his score for *How to Train Your Dragon*. Unlike Williams's pen and paper method, Powell describes using Pro Tools and sequencer programs, such as MIDI and Logic, in a 2006 interview with *Score* magazine.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Powell uploads snippets of his scores in both graphic notation (Figure 1.8) and traditional music notation to his Instagram feed, @johnj\_powell. If one sorts through frequent pictures of his poodles, one will also find him holding guitars and percussion mallets, sitting at his piano keyboard, and even conducting on the scoring stage. The combination of photos suggest that Powell is a musician well versed in "traditional" music-making as well as digital technologies.

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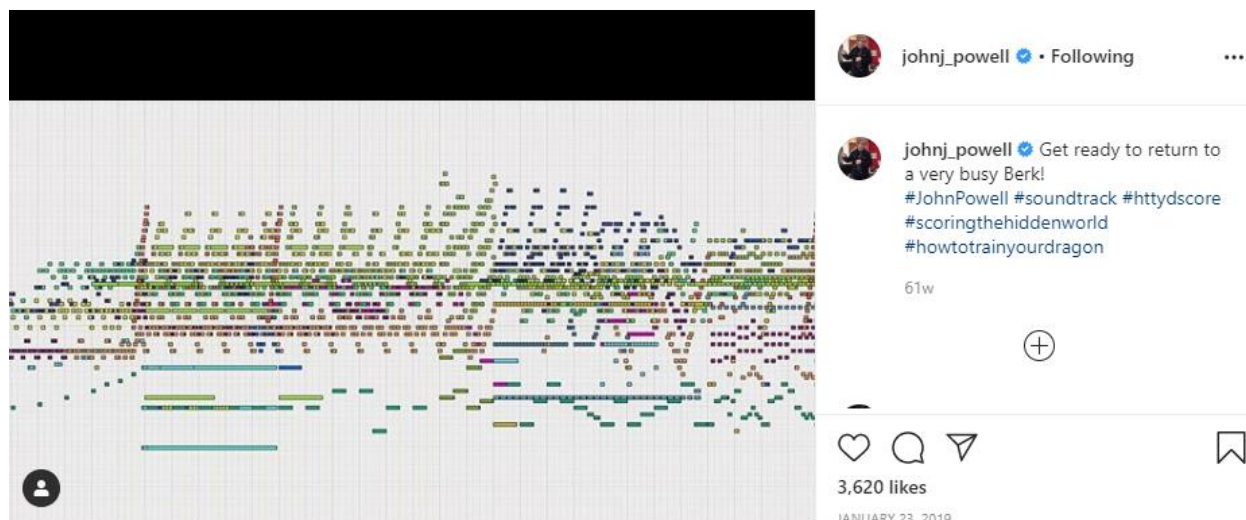
<sup>63</sup> According to their website, the Joan Kane Music Service provides a variety of services including copying/proofreading, professional mockups, librarian services, and film music rentals (<https://www.joannkanemusic.com/>).

<sup>64</sup> Sapiro, 196, 193.

<sup>65</sup> Hannigan, 14.



Figure 1.8: A piece of a score in “graphic notation” uploaded to Powell’s Instagram account. Different colors represent different instruments while the length of each “block” shows the relative length of each rhythmic figure and the vertical position of the same blocks shows relative pitch.<sup>66</sup>



Despite their differences in compositional process, in some ways, Powell’s approach to thematic development for *How to Train Your Dragon* is similar to Williams’s approach in many of his fantasy-film scores. In my personal email conversation with music theorist Frank Lehman, he observed:

I really think the *How to Train your Dragon* series is as richly and thoughtfully constructed in terms of themes and their development as anything Williams has written. And since [Powell] did such a fantastic job with *Solo* [:A *Star Wars* Story (2018)], on Williams's home turf as it were, I think he's the heir-apparent to the mantle of master thematic storyteller in mainstream film scoring.<sup>67</sup>

Lehman’s reflection that Powell’s themes are as “thoughtfully constructed” as Williams’s themes, suggests that Powell may be using a similar thematic development technique. However, Powell’s distinctive compositional process shows he is not a replica of Williams but rather someone continuing Williams’s legacy through his own process of creating complex thematic development in mainstream film scoring. In order to recognize which aspects of Powell’s thematic development derive

<sup>66</sup> John Powell (@johnj\_powell), “Get ready to return to a very busy Berk!” Instagram photo, January 23, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtATVEjFbrO/>.

<sup>67</sup> Frank Lehman, email message to Denise Finnegan, September 27, 2019.

from Williams's, it is first necessary to establish how Williams creates and handles leitmotif in film. Of course, there are many scores to choose from when looking at Williams's thematic development, many of which come from his longtime collaboration with Steven Spielberg.

### Determining Genre

In general, film scores come with certain expectations based on the genre of the film. Many animated films contain songs that are either sung directly by the characters as diegetic music or are added by the filmmakers as part of the nondiegetic scoring.<sup>68</sup> Although *How to Train Your Dragon* is an animated film, the directors, Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, wanted to make it feel more like a live-action film and, through detailed planning, used techniques taken for granted in live-action filmmaking. For example, something as simple as actors performing together in the same room, is not common in animated film. Producer Bonnie Arnold remarks in the film's DVD commentary that it is a logistical nightmare to get actors to record together for animated films, so the recording is normally done separately with the film's editors piecing the separate tracks together. However, recording together creates real emotions between the actors, which Arnold and the directors thought was worth the challenge for certain scenes in *How to Train Your Dragon*.<sup>69</sup> One of these scenes is the father-son argument late in the film, where the pain and frustration of the characters is evident.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from joint voice recording, the directors used computer animation to its full effect to evoke a "live-action" atmosphere for much of the film. Both DeBlois and Sanders came from a traditional animation background, so they were excited to employ the subtleties in textures, lighting,

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<sup>68</sup> Songs sung by characters such as "Belle" from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) or nondiegetic songs incorporated into the plot such as "I'm a Believer" from *Shrek*.

<sup>69</sup> "Filmmakers' Commentary," In *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, directed by Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders (Glendale, CA: DreamWorks Animation, 2014), 16:11-16:44.

<sup>70</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 1:04:48-1:06:20.

and facial expressions available in computer animation.<sup>71</sup> For instance, they asked the animators to create a wet sheen over the “set” of the dragon training ring to show a storm had just passed (Figure 1.9, top left).<sup>72</sup> Subtle lighting was evident in the rich, dark shadows cast by only two candles during a scene in Gobber’s workshop (Figure 1.9, bottom).<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Stoick’s subtle shift in facial expression from stern to pained is apparent when he leaves the great hall after a heated argument with Hiccup (Figure 1.9, top right).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “Filmmakers’ Commentary,” 59:09-59:45.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 19:10-19:26.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 47:12-47:33.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:05:50-1:06:18.

**Figure 1.9: (From left to right) wet sheen, pained facial expression, and low lighting demonstrate the “live-action” capabilities of computer animation.**



The directors further discuss creative visual choices that generate the illusion of a camera filming the scenes. For example, the whole screen shakes when the giant dragon breaks free from his mountain before the final battle, creating the impression of “on-location” shooting with a handheld camera.<sup>75</sup> Also, the animators render Toothless’s movements in ways that make him seem more like a

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<sup>75</sup> “Filmmakers’ Commentary,” 50:33-51:08.

real animal than an imaginary dragon. One example occurs when Toothless sits down at the beginning of the “Forbidden Friendship” scene (Figure 1.10).<sup>76</sup>

**Figure1.10: Toothless sitting down at the beginning of the “Forbidden Friendship” scene.**



Furthermore, the directors expressed their desire for a realistic plot to complement the realistic visual choices. As such, they did not shy away from plot points that convey realism throughout the film, such as Hiccup losing his foot in the final battle. As the directors continued to develop the final battle sequence, they realized it would not make sense for the hero to emerge unscathed and chose the loss of Hiccup’s foot to mirror Toothless’s tail injury, further solidifying the bond between the two friends.<sup>77</sup> Although many other characters were likely injured in the final battle, the main protagonist’s injury was a step towards realism while maintaining a PG rating. Similarly, Toothless not speaking, especially since he does speak considerably in the original book,<sup>78</sup> adds realism to the plot. The combination of a realistic

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<sup>76</sup> “Filmmakers’ Commentary,” 31:37-32:17.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 1:24:57-1:25:38.

<sup>78</sup> The film is loosely based on the book of the same title by Cressida Cowell. (Cressida Cowell, *How to Train Your Dragon*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003).)

plot and advanced computer animation techniques make *How to Train Your Dragon* feel more like a “live-action” fantasy film than a traditional animated film.

### Defining Fantasy

The term “fantasy” can mean different things to different people. It can range from knights in shining armor rescuing damsels in distress, to children learning magic at a school, to heroes gallivanting across space. Jacqueline Furby and Claire Hines attempt to define the genre in their book *Fantasy*. They pull criteria from a variety of sources, such as Louis Giannetti whose spectrum of fantasy, science fiction, and horror genres attempts to remedy the blurring of lines between these genres but fails to create a coherent definition for any of the three.<sup>79</sup> Other definitions Furby and Hines explore are too narrow, such as Tzvetan Todorov’s definition, which asserts that a move from our world into a fantastic world is a necessary component of fantasy.<sup>80</sup> Whereas Vivian Sobchack, whose definition combines fantasy, horror, and science fiction under the heading of “The Fantastic,” is too vague.<sup>81</sup>

Exploiting other scholars limitations of what fantasy entails, Furby and Hines establish their own criteria for deciding if a story is fantasy— something magical, ordinary people doing extraordinary things, a coming of age narrative, something fantastic about the location, and an element of journey— concluding that if a story contains most or all of these aspects in some form, that story can be labeled a fantasy. They also provide many examples for these criteria. The “something magical” can be magic itself (the *Harry Potter* series), a magical event (*Clash of the Titans*, 1981), a magical time (*Excalibur*, 1981), or magical characters (*Labyrinth*, 1986). Fantasy stories tend to center around ordinary people who end up doing extraordinary things (*Alice in Wonderland*) and often rely on a coming of age narrative

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<sup>79</sup> Cited in, Jacqueline Furby and Claire Hines, *Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2012), 33-35

<sup>80</sup> Cited in, *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in, *Ibid.*, 30-31.

(*Big*, 1988). The stories may take place in another world (*The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy, 2001-2003), involve a transition from our world to another world (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 2005), or something from another world ends up in our world (*E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, 1982). There is also normally an element of journey, whether a literal journey/quest or a journey inward of self-discovery.<sup>82</sup>

In the case of *How to Train Your Dragon* the magic is in the realm of fantastical dragons. Hiccup's coming of age is an important element of the plot that happens through his journey of self-discovery apart from his village's expectations. *How to Train Your Dragon* is based loosely on the real world of the Vikings, in the fictional town of Berk, the location of which alludes to the real coastal regions of Scandinavian countries like Norway or Iceland. Hiccup's journey of self-discovery ultimately leads the whole village through their own journey to a change from thinking dragons are mindless monsters that must be killed, to learning dragons can be their friends. With these combined elements Furby and Hines consider *How to Train Your Dragon* a fantasy film.<sup>83</sup>

By viewing *How to Train Your Dragon* as a fantasy film instead of just an animated one and accounting for Powell's role as the "heir-apparent" to Williams, it is logical to select music from a fantasy film scored by Williams to compare with the thematic development in *How to Train Your Dragon*. Williams has written scores for many different film genres. In general, his fantasy scores have memorable themes, big heroic brass scoring, a full orchestral palette of colors, and leitmotivic development. On the other hand, Williams's scores for films such as the historical biopic *Munich* (2005) and combat film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) sound very different from his fantasy scores. *Munich* for instance, is influenced by Klezmer music, and *Saving Private Ryan* makes use of musical materials akin to Copland's orchestral music. Likewise, the plot structure of a movie like *Saving Private Ryan* is very

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<sup>82</sup> Furby and Hines, 38-40.

<sup>83</sup> Furby and Hines list *How to Train Your Dragon* as an example of "coming of age" fantasy in their book (Furby and Hines, 59).

different from *How to Train Your Dragon* because it revolves around soldiers saving another soldier. The characters spend most of the film in a war zone which is very different from a plot that revolves around a boy befriending a dragon.

The thematic development in Williams's fantasy scores makes each one a potentially suitable comparison for Powell's thematic technique in *How to Train Your Dragon*. As such, comparing how Furby's and Hines's "fantasy criteria" found in *How to Train Your Dragon* line up with the fantasy films Williams has scored, is another way to consider selecting a film. A perceptive composer like Williams develops music sensitive to plot. As I will demonstrate in Chapters 2-4, Powell's thematic development is also very closely tied to plot. As such, comparing films that share a similar plot structure is an appropriate way to examine the thematic development between composers. When considering Williams's pre-2010<sup>84</sup> "blockbuster"<sup>85</sup> fantasy scores, the main ones that stand out are *Star Wars* (1977), *Superman* (1978), *Indiana Jones* (1981), *E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial* (1982), *Jurassic Park* (1993), and *Harry Potter* (2001). A closer look at *E.T.* reveals a plot structure similar to *How to train Your Dragon*.

In *E.T.* the protagonist, Elliott, is a young boy who feels misunderstood by his family and his older brother Michael's friends. Elliott stumbles upon a strange creature, E.T., who turns out to be an alien from another world. Elliott befriends E.T. in secret, later introducing him to Michael and his little sister Gertie who, after initial fright, also befriend him. All three siblings agree to help E.T. return to his home planet. When Elliott takes E.T. into the forest to "phone home," the two characters fly together when E.T. magically elevates Elliott's bike. After he "phones home" E.T. becomes ill while waiting for the return of his spaceship. Elliott also begins to feel the same illness, discovering he shares a bond with E.T.

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<sup>84</sup> Those scores written before *How to Train Your Dragon* was released.

<sup>85</sup> I choose to limit the search to "blockbuster" scores with the hope that the reader will be familiar with the general plot and musical themes from the films. Furby and Hines identify the technical skills of blockbuster films such as *Star Wars* as very high quality and innovative (Furby and Hines 102). Likewise, Roger Hickman defines the blockbuster as an "enormously successful" film (Hickman, 564.)



beyond normal friendship where both exist symbiotically. Eventually, the scientists led by “Keys,” who have been following the creature from the beginning of the film, invade Elliott’s home. The scientists monitor E.T. and Elliott until E.T. appears to die. The scientists pack away E.T.’s body in a special “coffin” and allow Elliott a private moment to say farewell to the alien. After saying his goodbyes, Elliott notices the geraniums coming back to life and hurries back to the “coffin” as E.T. wakes up. Elliott excitedly tells Michael and the two brothers help E.T. escape the scientists. They meet up with the rest of Michael’s friends for a dramatic bike chase away from the scientists, government agents, and police into the forest so E.T. can meet his spaceship and go home.

*How to Train Your Dragon*, likewise, features Hiccup, a young, male protagonist looking for belonging in his community. Hiccup meets a dragon—a creature unlike himself—and names it Toothless. Eventually, Hiccup secretly befriends the dragon and the two fly together as an illustration of their friendship. Toothless is then discovered by Astrid, another young character in the film, who accepts him, although not as readily as Michael and Gertie accept E.T. However, the adult characters wholly reject Toothless and capture him upon his discovery. To save Toothless, Hiccup becomes a leader, guides the other teens of his village to rescue the creature, changes the minds of the adults, and saves the day. Thus, both films share similar plots revolving around the friendship between a human protagonist and a nonhuman creature. Additionally, the first flight between each protagonist and creature is an important plot development and turning point for each friendship. Williams and Powell each use the similar plot ideas of friendship and flight as points of musico-thematic characterization. In the following chapter, I will explore how Williams and Powell develop themes alongside the developing friendship of the main characters in each respective film.

CHAPTER 2 : COMPARING THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF FRIENDSHIP IN *E.T.* AND *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON*Musical Illustration of Friendship in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*

To the extent that the boy and creature friendship is at the heart of each film, Williams and Powell employ their most effective thematic development to highlight this dramatic idea. Williams accomplishes thematic transformation that parallels the dramatic development of the friendship between E.T. and Elliott with various iterations of the “E.T. Motive”—a perfect fifth ascent followed by a varying eighth note pattern that leads to a downward leap with varying degrees of resolution (Examples 2.1-2.3).<sup>86</sup> While broadly similar because of the shared perfect fifth, the specific pitch qualities of each version have led to disagreements among scholars about whether the “E.T. Motive” is three versions of one theme or three separate themes.

**Example 2.1: “E.T. Motive” otherworldly version.<sup>87</sup>****Example 2.2: “E.T. Motive” love version.**

<sup>86</sup> “E.T. Motive” named by Tom Schneller in “Sweet Fulfillment: Allusion and Teleological Genesis in John Williams’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*,” *The Musical Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2014), 101.

<sup>87</sup> “Version” labels as presented in the captions derived from combining analytical ideas of Schneller (2014), Emilio Audissino (in: “*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T. The Extraterrestrial*: The Bonding Power of Music,” in: *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*, Palgrave Macmillan US (2017)), and Chloé Huvet (in: “John Williams and Sound Design: Shaping the Audiovisual World of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*,” in *John Williams: Music for Films, Television, and the Concert Stage*, ed. Emilio Audissino (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2018)).

**Example 2.3: “E.T. Motive” flying version.**



Viewing the motives as three separate themes suggests a lack of thematic development,<sup>88</sup> that focuses on the differences in aspects of E.T. and Elliott’s relationship rather than the connections. For instance, Emilio Audissino labels three separate motives as: “E.T. motif,” “Friendship Theme,” and “Flying Theme.” The “E.T. Motif” (Example 2.1) is the theme heard in piccolo at the very beginning of the film. The “Friendship Theme” (Example 2.2) is frequently heard in harp and is present “each time [E.T. and Elliott’s] friendship moves one step forward.”<sup>89</sup> The “Flying Theme” (Example 2.3) is present when Elliott’s bicycle lifts off the ground.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Chloé Huvet, although never explicitly stating the similarities between motives, analyzes three separate themes. Two of these, “Flying Theme” (Example 2.3) and “Friendship Theme” (Example 2.2), relate directly to E.T. and Elliott in her analysis. The third motive, however, is not even linked to the two main characters and is identified as the “Otherworldly Motive,” with its suggestion of the Lydian mode, and association with the “otherworldly” as in the opening shot of the night sky (Example 2.1).<sup>91</sup>

Audissino further cites Williams’s discussion, in a *San Francisco Examiner-Chronicler* article from 1982, of a “love theme” between E.T. and Elliott: “It’s not sensual in the way a love theme would be, but it develops as their relationship develops. It starts with a few notes, they look at each other—a little bit

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<sup>88</sup> Other than expanding the “flying version” (Example 2.3) into a longer theme.

<sup>89</sup> Audissino in *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*, 210.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-212.

<sup>91</sup> Huvet, 295, 298.

uncertain. And it grows and becomes more confident, and more lyrical as E.T. goes away..."<sup>92</sup> Audissino elaborates that what many scholars identify as the "Flying Theme" is this "Love Theme" to which Williams refers. However, he then mistakenly identifies Williams's "Love Theme" (Example 2.3) playing when E.T. heals Elliott's finger, when what is really playing is Example 2.2. Audissino's mistaken identity shows how similar these themes sound to the ear, suggesting they are in fact derivative of each other rather than functioning as three separate themes.

The idea of three versions of one theme is supported in the work of Tom Schneller, who considers multiple versions of one "E.T. Motive." Addressing the tendency of film music scholarship to analyze isolated music cues, Schneller argues that "it is the goal-oriented, processive approach to form of late Romanticism, rather than the balanced, symmetrical formal patterns of classical music, that are of most relevance to film music."<sup>93</sup> He asserts that Williams goal is then moving the "E.T. Motive" through Examples 2.1 and 2.2 above to reach the full "Flying Theme." Schneller backs up his claim with a quotation from the composer: "The music evolves, and morphs itself, so to speak, into something that's loving and familiar, and, finally, almost familial . . . it becomes . . . a kind of love theme between the two of them."<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Schneller identifies another version of the "E.T. Motive" which he labels "E.T.'s Powers" that is the same as the "flying version" (Example 2.3) except for a rearrangement of the eighth notes in the first measure (Example 2.4). He calls "E.T.'s Powers," which occurs when E.T. causes five balls to levitate, foreshadowing the flying bike, an "adumbration" of the "Flying Theme."<sup>95</sup> "E.T.'s Powers" is used so infrequently that it is not even identified by Audissino or Huvet in their book chapters. Because of the lack of identification by other scholars and Schneller's own identification of

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Audissino in *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*, 210.

<sup>93</sup> Schneller (2014), 98-99.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

“E.T.’s Powers” as a faint sketch of the “Flying Theme,” I choose to combine “E.T.’s Powers” with the occurrences of the “flying version” instead of considering a separate variation.

**Example 2.4: “E.T.’s Powers.” An additional version of the “E.T. Motive” identified by Schneller.<sup>96</sup>**



Looking at the three themes as versions of one also demonstrates Williams’s attention to depicting the growing friendship between E.T. and Elliott. By changing his theme as the characters develop, Williams provides a deeper musical narrative that complements the film. The themes are similar enough in melodic and rhythmic structure to argue that they are derivative of the same material as Schneller’s analysis and quotation by the composer suggest. Considering thematic transformation in *E.T.* also provides a direct comparison to Powell who develops one “Friendship Theme” into multiple versions, which is ultimately why I choose to analyze the “E.T. Motive” as three separate versions of one theme.

The “E.T. Motive” appears in the “otherworldly version” at the beginning of the film (Example 2.1). It accompanies the camera panning down from the night sky to E.T.’s spaceship, containing fellow members of his species (Figure 2.1). Schneller describes the “E.T. Motive” here as an opening fifth followed by a “decorated half-step descent” with a Lydian inflection between the opening A and the D# at the beginning of the second measure. The Lydian inflection gives this version an “otherworldly” sound that reinforces the alien nature of E.T. and his fellow extraterrestrials.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Huvet titles the motif

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<sup>96</sup> Schneller (2014), 102.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

in Example 1A the “Otherworldliness Motif,” also for its Lydian inflection in a book chapter on John Williams’s sound design in *E.T.*<sup>98</sup>

**Figure 2.1: The extra-terrestrials outside of their spaceship after landing on earth.**



The “otherworldly version” is also associated with E.T.’s longing for home and Elliott’s longing for someone who understands him. Before the two characters meet, they are musically connected by this version of the motif which accompanies both E.T. looking out over a cliff as his ship leaves him behind and Elliott looking out the window of his home after getting into an argument with his family. Huvet elaborates on the cinematography and orchestration in Elliott’s scene. The close-up on Elliott’s face framed by the window emphasizes his loneliness. Meanwhile, the piccolo plays the “otherworldly version” of the “E.T. Motive” accompanied by harp glissandi, which Huvet sees as a musical representation of the hazy steam from the running water. The sound of the water and the harp add to

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<sup>98</sup> Huvet, 298.

the dream-like nature and longing of the character (Figure 2.2).<sup>99</sup> The steam from the water also connects to the steam from the extra-terrestrial's ship (opening scene), further connecting E.T. and Elliott.

**Figure 2.2: E.T. watches his spaceship leave without him (left) and Elliott stares out the window through a cloud of steam (right).**



Later in the film, Schneller observes that the “otherworldly version” transforms into the “love version,” thus marking the beginning of E.T. and Elliott’s friendship (Example 2.2).<sup>100</sup> The “love version” of the theme initially appears when Elliott lures the elusive creature into his home with a trail of Reese’s Pieces.<sup>101</sup> First, the “otherworldly” “E.T. Motive” accompanies E.T. as he follows the trail of candy. Since the viewer still has not fully seen E.T., the music is a reminder of his mysterious nature. Once E.T. reaches Elliott’s room, the love version of the “E.T. Motive” plays as E.T. mirrors Elliott’s movements (Figure 2.3). Schneller describes the “love version” as opening with a perfect fifth that descends by whole step to a diatonic fourth, which is more “familiar” to the listener’s ear than the “alien” Lydian

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<sup>99</sup> Huvet, 299.

<sup>100</sup> Schneller (2014), 102.

<sup>101</sup> Interestingly when Elliott first truly sees E.T. in the cornfield, there is no music, which contrasts with the first encounter between Hiccup and Toothless discussed later in this chapter.

fourth. This newfound familiarity reveals the change in Elliott’s perception of E.T. from frightening to benevolent.<sup>102</sup>

**Figure 2.3: Elliott wipes his nose (left) and E.T. mimics the action (right).**



Similarly, Huvet calls this version of the “E.T. Motive” the “Friendship Theme,” tracing its usage at important points in the evolution of Elliott’s and E.T.’s friendship.<sup>103</sup> Huvet also highlights its usage in the scene where Mary is reading *Peter Pan* to Gertie, Elliott’s little sister, while E.T. watches through the closet door. The theme’s presence helps articulate E.T.’s interest in the tender human connection shared by mother and daughter that is reflected in his friendship with Elliott, which becomes “parental” in a sense when E.T. puts on “Dad clothing” and fills the role of fatherly comfort for the fatherless, lonely boy.<sup>104</sup>

The final version of the “E.T. Motive” (Example 2.3), is the first motive of the longer “Flying Theme.” I observe the first instance in the scene when Elliott fakes illness to skip school so he can get to know his new friend. The love version of the “E.T. Motive” plays throughout the scene as Elliott shows E.T. all his toys. The music shifts to the “flying version” when E.T. playfully tries to eat one of Elliott’s toy

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<sup>102</sup> Schneller (2014), 102.

<sup>103</sup> Huvet, 295.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.



cars. The use of the “flying version” here alludes to the friendship between E.T. and Elliott that will continue to grow throughout the remainder of the film, culminating when the two friends fly together. It may also foreshadow the final chase scene when Elliott and his brother Michael’s friends elude the cop cars and E.T. causes their bicycles to fly.

#### Introduction to Powell’s “Friendship Theme” and “Truth Theme” in *How to Train Your Dragon*

In *How to Train Your Dragon*, Powell’s “Friendship Theme” functions in a similar manner to Williams’s “E.T. Motive” with two main versions: one in a minor modality and another in a major modality. Powell introduces his minor version when the two characters first meet. The minor version is characterized by an opening perfect fifth interval, like the “E.T. Motive,” followed by a descending scalar passage that ends just short of the tonic A, suggested by the key signature and opening interval (Example 2.5).<sup>105</sup> Powell’s major version outlines a perfect fourth interval followed by a downwards scale that arrives on the suggested D tonic, which is set up by the two-sharp key signature and the movement of A up to D (Example 2.6). Powell also creates two combination versions of the “Friendship Theme” that incorporate aspects of the minor and major versions and complement the plot (Examples 2.7 and 2.8). For the purposes of a direct comparison with Williams’s technique, I focus on an in-depth analysis of the minor and major versions in this chapter because these versions relate more directly to the plot points shared between *How to Train Your Dragon* and *E.T.* I elaborate on the combination versions in Chapter 4.

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<sup>105</sup> This modal context is elaborated on later in this section.



**Table 1: Occurrences of the “Friendship Theme” in *How to Train Your Dragon***

Name and Length of musical cue where the theme occurs in Minutes: Seconds <sup>106</sup>	Minutes: Seconds theme begins in the film	Context of the occurrence	Version of the Theme
“Downed Dragon” 11:17-14:15	13:43	Hiccup about to kill Toothless before realizing he cannot	Minor Version
“Downed Dragon” 14:19-14:45	14:30	Toothless pins Hiccup down then decides not to kill him	Minor Version
“Dragon Book” 23:14-25:30	24:21	Hiccup reading about Night Furies in the <i>Dragon Book</i>	Combination 1
“Forbidden Friendship” 29:02-33:08	31:22 (first full occurrence of the theme in this scene)	Throughout the scene of Hiccup and Toothless becoming friends	Major Version
“See You Tomorrow” 39:02-42:53	39:15 (first time in the montage)	Throughout montage of Hiccup training Toothless	Major Version
“Test Drive” 43:25-45:52	43:32	Hiccup rides Toothless over the ocean	Major Version
	45:21	Hiccup regains control of Toothless while flying	Major Version
51:55-52:27	52:03	Toothless comes after Astrid in the cove	Minor Version
“Kill Ring” 1:00:33-1:04:47	1:00:45	Hiccup waiting to enter the ring to fight a dragon for his final exam	Major Version
	1:04:30	Toothless captured in the ring	Combination 2
1:05:31-1:06:23	1:05:35	Hiccup mentions the dragon island to Stoick	Combination 1
“Battling the Green Death” 1:14:14-1:20:23	1:18:12	Toothless chained and sinking into the ocean	Minor Version
	1:18:31	Stoick dives in to free Toothless	Minor Version
	1:20:06	Toothless catches Astrid	Major Version
“Counter Attack” 1:21:39-1:23:22	1:21:47	Toothless attacking the giant dragon master	Combination 1
“Where’s Hiccup” 1:26:18-1:26:51	1:26:47	Hiccup and Toothless walking to the door of Hiccup’s house together	Major Version
“Coming Back Around” 1:26:54-1:29:00	1:28:07	Hiccup mounts Toothless to fly with the other Viking teens	Major Version

<sup>106</sup> Names of cues are taken from the soundtrack album. If a cue does not have a title, it is because the music does not appear on the soundtrack album (Powell, John. *DreamWorks How to Train Your Dragon: Music from the Motion Picture*, DreamWorks Animation LLC, 2010, CD.)



forth with the clarinet insisting on triplets and the oboe maintaining its rhythmic character. This playful argument between rhythmic figures alludes to Hiccup's frustration that he cannot find the dragon and may also foreshadow his initial struggle to become friends with the dragon.

**Example 2.10: Oboe and clarinet melody from the opening of "Downed Dragon."**

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Oboe and Clarinet. The music is in 3/4 time. The Oboe part (top staff) consists of a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7. The Clarinet part (bottom staff) consists of a series of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. There are three triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over the notes) in the Clarinet part, occurring at measures 2, 4, and 6.

The melody is joined by the rest of the woodwinds and the violins but ends abruptly when Hiccup shoves a broken branch aside that rebounds back into his face. He looks down to see a trail in the dirt that appears as if it was made by a large creature and hesitantly follows it. Powell emphasizes the change in mood through sustained violin harmonics a major seventh apart and periodic bass drum hits that lead to a crescendo and abrupt cutoff. The music leads into a suspended cymbal and bass drum roll that lands on a fully orchestrated tonal cluster mimicking the startled protagonist when he first sees the fallen dragon. Hiccup slowly peeks over the hill at the dragon accompanied by a pronounced minor second in high flutes and an upwards violin glissando. He draws his knife and sneaks over to the dragon as minor second tremolos are heard in the violas. Thinking the dragon is dead, Hiccup places his foot on the dragon's leg stating, "I have brought down this mighty beast."<sup>108</sup> His statement is abruptly cut off by a tangled run of woodwind notes as the dragon shoves Hiccup's foot away. Another tonal cluster accompanies the panning of the camera over Toothless's tied up body, resolving to an F# minor chord when the camera reaches his eye (Figure 2.4). The minor second dissonance, extended techniques, and

<sup>108</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 12:52-12:55.

lack of melodic content, create a frightening atmosphere that accentuates Hiccup's anxiety upon discovering the fallen, and very much alive, dragon.

**Figure 2.4: A bound Toothless, looking up at Hiccup.**



After the lack of pulse in the preceding measures, a war-like march pattern in the violas illuminates Hiccup's initial determination to kill the dragon. A decisive melody, which enters in the horns, and the accompanying chords, F# minor, D major, and A major, suggest a key center of D major. Hiccup raises his knife and shouts "I am a Viking" twice at Toothless, the second time louder as if to convince himself. The determined viola march disappears, and an eighth note pattern enters in the violins outlining D minor, F minor, and A minor triads, emphasizing a modal shift to D minor after the previous, more determined major, mirroring Hiccup's faltering resolve, which is also complemented by his confused expression (Figure 2.5). This pattern builds dynamically for three measures before slowing to quarter notes a measure before the "Friendship Theme" enters also in quarter notes.

**Figure 2.5: Hiccup expression turns confused as he struggles to kill Toothless in “Downed Dragon.”**



The harmony moves through A major to second inversion D minor, back to A minor, to first inversion F major, followed by a root position F major triad and finally a root position D minor triad. The shift from dominant to predominant harmony and the motion of III-i keeps the passage unstable, much like the knife Hiccup holds shakily over his head. Furthermore, following the D minor triad, the bass drops out and the upper strings are left holding a unison B, unrelated to any of the accompanying chords, as Hiccup lowers his knife to his head, realizing he cannot kill the dragon (Example 2.11).

**Example 2.11: First instance of the minor version of the “Friendship Theme” in the “Downed Dragon” cue.**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system includes three staves: Violins and Upper Woodwinds (8va), Horns, and Low Strings. The second system includes two staves: String Alone and Horns 8vb. The music is in 4/4 time and features a descending scalar passage in the strings and a unison B in the strings alone section.

The top staff in Example 2.11 shows the minor “Friendship Theme” employing a downwards leap from E to A, larger than the perfect fourth leap used in the major version, followed by a descending scalar passage that is lengthened with a repetition of each note, arriving on a unison B far away from the tonic D and just above the dominant A, leaving the listener unsettled. The B $\sharp$  instead of B $\flat$  suggests a modal D Dorian for the passage as a possible allusion to Jean Sibelius, one of the Nordic composers Powell studied as inspiration for his score, who uses the mode at different pitches throughout his



Symphony No. 6 as a means of unifying the movements.<sup>109</sup> Landing on the B $\sharp$  likewise, emphasizes the raised sixth scale degree that separates D Dorian from D minor. Additionally, the choice of the violin section, rising to a full *forte* at a slow tempo, adds to the emotional turmoil felt by Hiccup as he holds the knife above his head, struggling with the question of whether to uphold the values of his village or his own conscience.

The camera shifts to the ropes binding Toothless, then to Hiccup stepping away from the dragon saying, "I did this," regretful that he shot the dragon down in the first place. The first motive of the "Truth Theme" emerges above the sustained B, accompanied by a first inversion G $\sharp$  minor chord placed above the unison sustained B. Likewise, this fragment of the theme ends on a B major chord, which resolves the sustained B from the preceding material, illustrating Hiccup's decision to follow his conscience over his village's expectations. His remorse from this moment will lead him to befriend the fallen dragon, learn the truth that dragons are not mindless monsters, and ultimately use that truth to change his village for the better.

Directly after the ending of the "Truth Theme" there is a slight pause in the music, then the frightening atmosphere from earlier returns when Toothless's eye bursts open. The violas enter with a tremolo D accompanied by a pizzicato A in the cellos and basses. The violins hold a high C $\sharp$  and D against each other that become upwards and downwards glissandi as the cellos join in with a D pedal point. The violins ascend to G and F $\sharp$  that clash against each other as the drums lead into the second iteration of the "Friendship Theme." Here the "Friendship Theme" begins as before but moves to a downwards half step motion at the end of the third measure (Example 2.12) instead of the descending scale in Example 4A. This time it is Toothless's turn to decide whether or not to kill Hiccup. The visuals once again are

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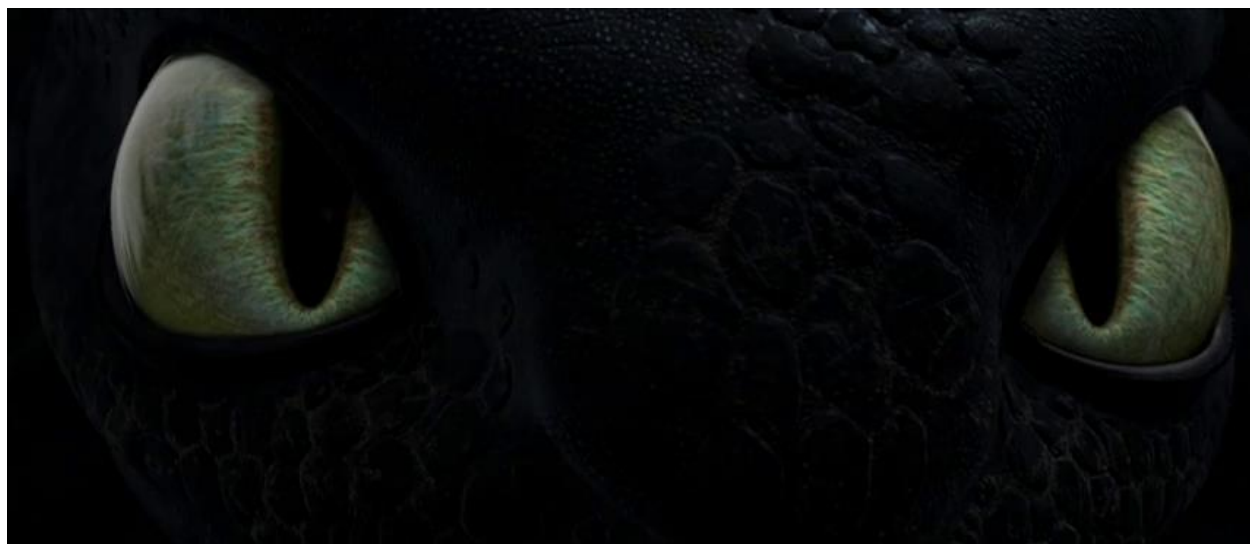
<sup>109</sup> Lionel Pike, "Sibelius's Debt to Renaissance Polyphony," *Music & Letters* 55, no. 3 (July 1974), 318.

focused on the eyes of the characters, as Toothless glares down at Hiccup (Figure 2.6). The cinematographic focus on the fear and apprehension in the characters' eyes, echoes each character deciding whether or not to kill the other. Likewise, Powell supports this visual choice by using the minor "Friendship Theme" in both instances.

**Example 2.12: Second instance of the minor version of the "Friendship Theme" in the "Downed Dragon" cue.**

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The top staff is labeled 'Solo Violin' and contains a melodic line with a minor key signature (one flat). The middle staff is divided into two parts: the left part is labeled 'Bass Drum' and shows a rhythmic pattern of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, with 'x' marks indicating the drum's position; the right part is labeled 'Guitar' and shows a series of eighth-note chords. The bottom staff is labeled 'Bagpipe Drone' and features a continuous, low-frequency drone consisting of two notes.

**Figure 2.6: Toothless glares down at a helpless Hiccup at the end of the "Downed Dragon" scene.**



The orchestration at this moment also contributes to Hiccup's fright as Toothless holds his life in the balance. The aggressive bowing by the fiddle-like violin and subsequent guitar strums suggest the Viking's belief that dragons are untamed and violent. Additionally, the Celtic associations of the strings

and bagpipe drone, which recall the Scottish accents of the actors, insinuate the Vikings.<sup>110</sup> This insinuation coupled with the visuals of the angry dragon parallel the aggression of the Vikings towards the dragons, suggesting the two species are not that different from each other. Likewise, the fact that each character spares the other shows both species are also capable of compassion despite their violent ways. The cue ends with a repetition of the first two measures of the “Friendship Theme,” leading into a fully orchestrated sustained tritone between G and C# right as Toothless is lifting his head back to kill Hiccup. The tritone resolves to a unison G that ends the cue right before Toothless screams in Hiccup’s face and flies off.

The modality, dissonances, and aggressive orchestrational choices in “Downed Dragon” work together to create a frightening musical world that matches the fear of the protagonist. The first encounter between Hiccup and Toothless is more serious than when Elliott first meets E.T. in the cornfield. Neither E.T. nor Elliott ever tried to use violence against the other, whereas Hiccup holds a knife over the dragon and Toothless pins Hiccup down after being freed. These differences are reflected in the music. In *E.T.*, when Elliott first truly sees E.T. there is no music, only both characters screaming, showing their equal fright of the unknown. In contrast, Powell’s scoring in “Downed Dragon” amplifies the silent fright of both characters, making the scene feel more serious overall.

### The Major “Friendship Theme” in “Forbidden Friendship”

Powell later transforms the minor version of the “Friendship Theme” into a major version that accompanies the “Forbidden Friendship” scene, in which friendship and trust develop between the two main characters. The directors, Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, chose to reserve “Forbidden Friendship” for music and images to tell the story, free of dialogue. They found this to be an effective storytelling

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<sup>110</sup> Although not historically accurate, the adult Vikings in the film have heavy Scottish accents.

technique in other films on which they worked.<sup>111</sup> Powell uses this extended musical cue to introduce the major version of the “Friendship Theme” in fragments that slowly grow into a full iteration of the theme that traces the story arc of the scene.

“Forbidden Friendship” occurs right after the second scene of dragon training in which Hiccup tries unsuccessfully to obtain information about Night Furies from Gobber, his instructor. Afterwards, Hiccup decides to learn firsthand from the dragon trapped in the cove. Hiccup’s continued search for the truth is emphasized by the occurrence of the first motive of the “Truth Theme,” when he enters the cove. There is a pause in the music while Hiccup offers Toothless a fish as a peace offering. The music labeled “Forbidden Friendship” on the soundtrack album begins when Toothless devours the fish from Hiccup’s hand.

The cue begins in B major, modulates to D $\flat$  major (C $\sharp$  enharmonically) and returns to B major. The modulation upwards by step is referred to as an “elevated modulation” by Dai Griffiths, a senior lecturer in music at Brookes University in England. The elevated modulation is frequently used in popular songs such as Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You” and Michael Jackson’s “Man in the Mirror.”<sup>112</sup> Although Powell’s modulation is considerably subtler than these popular music examples, his use of a modulation upwards by whole step may be a nod to this technique. Powell’s return to the opening key center after his “elevated modulation” complements the similar visuals at the beginning and end of the “Forbidden Friendship” scene. In the scene’s opening, Hiccup tries to touch the dragon’s nose, but Toothless bares his teeth and flies away. Hiccup gives up on physical contact until the end of the scene when he finds himself face-to-face with the dragon simultaneously with the return to the opening key (Figure 2.7). The return to B major and the similar visuals remind the audience aurally

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<sup>111</sup> “Filmmakers’ Commentary,” 22:12-22:23.

<sup>112</sup> Dai Griffiths, “Elevating Form and Elevating Modulation,” *Popular Music* 34, no. 1 (2015), 24-25.

where the scene began, highlighting the new bond of trust evidenced by Toothless's change in response to Hiccup's touch.

**Figure 2.7: Hiccup attempting to touch Toothless at the beginning of the "Forbidden Friendship" scene (top). Hiccup successfully touching the Dragon's snout at the end of the same scene (bottom).**



Throughout this scene Powell drives the action forward with eighth note ostinato figures at a moderate tempo in bell-like percussion instruments (Example 2.13). The repeating figures in these instruments along with the gentle melodic content in harp and celeste lend a silvery, dreamy timbre to

the scene. The rhythmic drive and ethereal texture suggest the hesitancy and disbelief of the characters that a friendship between a dragon and a human could occur.

**Example 2.13: Eighth note ostinato figures in the “Forbidden Friendship” scene.<sup>113</sup>**

The musical score for Example 2.13 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Vibraphone, starting with a rest for the first two measures and then playing a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The middle staff is for the Glass Marimba, playing a continuous eighth-note pattern: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F#2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1, F#1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0, F#0, E0, D0, C0, B-1, A-1, G-1, F#-1, E-1, D-1, C-1, B-2, A-2, G-2, F#-2, E-2, D-2, C-2, B-3, A-3, G-3, F#-3, E-3, D-3, C-3, B-4, A-4, G-4, F#-4, E-4, D-4, C-4, B-5, A-5, G-5, F#-5, E-5, D-5, C-5, B-6, A-6, G-6, F#-6, E-6, D-6, C-6, B-7, A-7, G-7, F#-7, E-7, D-7, C-7, B-8, A-8, G-8, F#-8, E-8, D-8, C-8, B-9, A-9, G-9, F#-9, E-9, D-9, C-9, B-10, A-10, G-10, F#-10, E-10, D-10, C-10, B-11, A-11, G-11, F#-11, E-11, D-11, C-11, B-12, A-12, G-12, F#-12, E-12, D-12, C-12, B-13, A-13, G-13, F#-13, E-13, D-13, C-13, B-14, A-14, G-14, F#-14, E-14, D-14, C-14, B-15, A-15, G-15, F#-15, E-15, D-15, C-15, B-16, A-16, G-16, F#-16, E-16, D-16, C-16, B-17, A-17, G-17, F#-17, E-17, D-17, C-17, B-18, A-18, G-18, F#-18, E-18, D-18, C-18, B-19, A-19, G-19, F#-19, E-19, D-19, C-19, 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B-211, A-211, G-211, F#-211, E-211, D-211, C-211, B-212, A-212, G-212, F#-212, E-212, D-212, C-212, B-213, A-213, G-213, F#-213, E-213, D-213, C-213, B-214, A-214, G-214, F#-214, E-214, D-214, C-214, B-215, A-215, G-215, F#-215, E-215, D-215, C-215, B-216, A-216, G-216, F#-216, E-216, D-216, C-216, B-217, A-217, G-217, F#-217, E-217, D-217, C-217, B-218, A-218, G-218, F#-218, E-218, D-218, C-218, B-219, A-219, G-219, F#-219, E-219, D-219, C-219, B-220, A-220, G-220, F#-220, E-220, D-220, C-220, B-221, A-221, G-221, F#-221, E-221, D-221, C-221, B-222, A-222, G-222, F#-222, E-222, D-222, C-222, B-223, A-223, G-223, F#-223, E-223, D-223, C-223, B-224, A-224, G-224, F#-224, E-224, D-224, C-224, B-225, A-225, G-225, F#-225, E-225, D-225, C-225, B-226, A-226, G-226, F#-226, E-226, D-226, C-226, B-227, A-227, G-227, F#-227, E-227, D-227, C-227, B-228, A-228, G-228, F#-228, E-228, D-228, C-228, B-229, A-229, G-229, F#-229, E-229, D-229, C-229, B-230, A-230, G-230, F#-230, E-230, D-230, C-230, B-231, A-231, G-231, F#-231, E-231, D-231, C-231, B-232, A-232, G-232, F#-232, E-232, D-232, C-232, B-233, A-233, G-233, F#-233, E-233, D-233, C-233, B-234, A-234, G-234, F#-234, E-234, D-234, C-234, B-235, A-235, G-235, F#-235, E-235, D-235, C-235, B-236, A-236, G-236, F#-236, E-236, D-236, C-236, B-237, A-237, G-237, F#-237, E-237, D-237, C-237, B-238, A-238, G-238, F#-238, E-238, D-238, C-238, B-239, A-239, G-239, F#-239, E-239, D-239, C-239, B-240, A-240, G-240, F#-240, E-240, D-240, C-240, B-241, A-241, G-241, F#-241, E-241, D-241, C-241, B-242, A-242, G-242, F#-242, E-242, D-242, C-242, B-243, A-243, G-243, F#-243, E-243, D-243, C-243, B-244, A-244, G-244, F#-244, E-244, D-244, C-244, B-245, A-245, G-245, F#-245, E-245, D-245, C-245, B-246, A-246, G-246, F#-246, E-246, D-246, C-246, B-247, A-247, G-247, F#-247, E-247, D-247, C-247, B-248, A-248, G-248, F#-248, E-248, D-248, C-248, B-249, A-249, G-249, F#-249, E-249, D-249, C-249, B-250, A-250, G-250, F#-250, E-250, D-250, C-250, B-251, A-251, G-251, F#-251, E-251, D-251, C-251, B-252, A-252, G-252, F#-252, E-252, D-252, C-252, B-253, A-253, G-253, F#-253, E-253, D-253, C-253, B-254, A-254, G-254, F#-254, E-254, D-254, C-254, B-255, A-255, G-255, F#-255, E-255, D-255, C-255, B-256, A-256, G-256, F#-256, E-256, D-256, C-256, B-257, A-257, G-257, F#-257, E-257, D-257, C-257, B-258, A-258, G-258, F#-258, E-258, D-258, C-258, B-259, A-259, G-259, F#-259, E-259, D-259, C-259, B-260, A-260, G-260, F#-260, E-260, D-260, C-260, B-261, A-261, G-261, F#-261, E-261, D-261, C-261, B-262, A-262, G-262, F#-262, E-262, D-262, C-262, B-263, A-263, G-263, F#-263, E-263, D-263, C-263, B-264, A-264, G-264, F#-264, E-264, D-264, C-264, B-265, A-265, G-265, F#-265, E-265, D-265, C-265, B-266, A-266, G-266, F#-266, E-266, D-266, C-266, B-267, A-267, G-267, F#-267, E-267, D-267, C-267, B-268, A-268, G-268, F#-268, E-268, D-268, C-268, B-269, A-269, G-269, F#-269, E-269, D-269, C-269, B-270, A-270, G-270, F#-270, E-270, D-270, C-270, B-271, A-271, G-271, F#-271, E-271, D-271, C-271, B-272, A-272, G-272, F#-272, E-272, D-272, C-272, B-273, A-273, G-273, F#-273, E-273, D-273, C-273, B-274, A-274, G-274, F#-274, E-274, D-274, C-274, B-275, A-275, G-275, F#-275, E-275, D-275, C-275, B-276, A-276, G-276, F#-276, E-276, D-276, C-276, B-277, A-277, G-277, F#-277, E-277, D-277, C-277, B-278, A-278, G-278, F#-278, E-278, D-278, C-278, B-279, A-279, G-279, F#-279, E-279, D-279, C-279, B-280, A-280, G-280, F#-280, E-280, D-280, C-280, B-281, A-281, G-281, F#-281, E-281, D-281, C-281, B-282, A-282, G-282, F#-282, E-282, D-282, C-282, B-283, A-283, G-283, F#-283, E-283, D-283, C-283, B-284, A-284, G-284, F#-284, E-284, D-284, C-284, B-285, A-285, G-285, F#-285, E-285, D-285, C-285, B-286, A-286, G-286, F#-286, E-286, D-286, C-286, B-287, A-287, G-287, F#-287, E-287, D-287, C-287, B-288, A-288, G-288, F#-288, E-288, D-288, C-288, B-289, A-289, G-289, F#-289, E-289, D-289, C-289, B-290, A-290, G-290, F#-290, E-290, D-290, C-290, B-291, A-291, G-291, F#-291, E-291, D-291, C-291, B-292, A-292, G-292, F#-292, E-292, D-292, C-292, B-293, A-293, G-293, F#-293, E-293, D-293, C-293, B-294, A-294, G-294, F#-294, E-294, D-294, C-294, B-295, A-295, G-295, F#-295, E-295, D-295, C-295, B-296, A-296,

In a 2011 interview, Powell describes his compositional process for writing this cue:

Once I cracked [the flying scenes], one of the hardest things to do was what we call “the forbidden friendship scene...” It's about trust. [The composition] had to be done very carefully, and I did that right at the end, because I wanted that [cue] to be an evolution of the music of the film. I couldn't do that until I'd evolved the film music far enough. But once I got to the end, I could take elements of the score and break them into pieces. In that one scene you go from just a note or two to the melodies that are part of the score from there on.<sup>114</sup>

In “Forbidden Friendship,” the “Friendship Theme” begins with only the first quarter note of each measure of Example 2.14 after Toothless graciously invites Hiccup to eat the newly regurgitated fish segment (Figure 2.8). Powell quickly adds the perfect fourth interval discussed above, to the thematic fragment as Toothless waits patiently for Hiccup to eat his gift (Example 2.15). This feeling of arrival is amplified because the thematic fragments are the only melodic aspect occurring amidst a sea of eighth note ostinatos.

**Figure 2.8: Hiccup holds the regurgitated fish segment (left) while Toothless waits patiently for him to eat it (right).**



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<sup>114</sup> Pond, paragraph 14.

**Example 2.15: The “Friendship Theme” fragmented down to the first note of the first two measures, followed by beats 1 and 3 of the third measure of Example 2.14 (top). The first two measures now show the perfect fourth interval and major third from Example 2.14 (bottom).<sup>115</sup>**

The image contains two musical staves for Harp in 4/4 time, D major. The top staff shows a fragmented 'Friendship Theme' with a perfect fourth interval (D4-G4) in the first measure and a major third (D4-F#4) in the second measure. The bottom staff shows the original 'Friendship Theme' starting with a perfect fourth interval (D4-G4) in the first measure, followed by a major third (D4-F#4) in the second measure, and then continues with the rest of the theme.

Powell abandons the opening perfect fourth to develop the second half of the first two measures of Example 2.14 for the next fragment as Toothless tries to imitate Hiccup’s post-fish-eating smile (Example 2.16). The repeating fragments cut off abruptly when Hiccup reaches out his hand to try and touch the dragon. After Toothless bares his teeth and flies off to relax by himself, an upwards harp glissando leads the cue into D $\flat$  major as the dragon watches a bird fly away.

**Example 2.16: Fragments of the major “Friendship Theme” showing development of the second half of the first two measures of Example 2.14.<sup>116</sup>**

The image shows a musical staff for Harp in 4/4 time, D major, showing fragments of the 'Friendship Theme' focusing on the second half of the first two measures.

When Hiccup attempts to examine the dragon’s broken tail, one hears the first note of the theme, now in D $\flat$  major, followed by an almost completed third and fourth measure (Example 2.17). This portion of the theme continuously loops as the scene shifts to Hiccup drawing a picture of the dragon in the dirt. The full theme in D $\flat$ , as shown in Example 2.18, then continuously repeats in

<sup>115</sup> Top stave heard at 29:22-29:27 and bottom stave heard at 29:34-29:41 in *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD.

<sup>116</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 30:16-30:21.

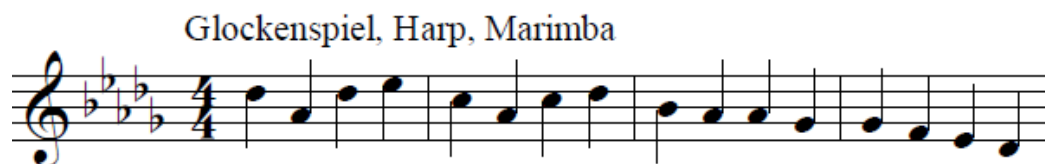


Glockenspiel, harp, and marimba, building confidence through crescendo and repetition, as Toothless examines Hiccup's drawing. The dragon then attempts his own drawing and the orchestration shifts from vibraphone to strings when we see Toothless's clumsy drawing of Hiccup. Powell mimics the continued visual action through this portion of the scene by constantly delaying resolution back to tonic with frequent use of deceptive cadences (Example 2.19).

**Example 2.17: Development in the second half of the major "Friendship Theme."<sup>117</sup>**



**Example 2.18 Full version of the major "Friendship Theme" in the "Forbidden Friendship" cue.**




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<sup>117</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD ,30:45-30:53

**Example 2.19: Deceptive Cadence in measures 108-109 in “Forbidden Friendship.”<sup>118</sup>**

The musical score for Example 2.19 consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 107 and 108, and the second system covers measures 109 and 110. The parts include Soprano (Sop.), Baritone (Br.), Choir, and Strings (Str.). The key signature is D-flat major. Roman numeral analysis is provided below the staves: I6 for measure 107, V for measure 108, vi for measure 109, ii7 for measure 110, and vi for measure 111. A Bagpipes part is introduced in measure 111. The score also includes a Dulcimer (Dulc.) part and a section for Strings + Harp + Celesta.

Powell begins to work his way back to B major with a sequential pattern in the violins that aligns with Hiccup’s winding walk through Toothless’s drawing, leading to a B major triad. The sequence lands on B when Hiccup exits the drawing to find himself standing right in front of the dragon. He has now come full circle in proximity to the dragon from the beginning of the scene, evidenced by the return to B major. The full and continuously moving orchestration drops to quiet sustained chords in wordless choir, celeste, vibraphone, and strings with a B pedal in the bass. The residue of the constantly moving energy from the rest of the scene is present in a snare drum figure, a quarter note followed by two eighths, on

<sup>118</sup> Example extracted from Dirkes, 137-138. Roman numeral analysis mine.

each downbeat. A solo voice moves hesitantly through suspensions, showing there is still uncertainty between the characters. These musical elements capture the nervous tension of the moment as Hiccup decides whether or not to try touching the dragon again. The drums disappear when Hiccup decides to turn away and stretch out his hand showing he has made his decision. Likewise, the B pedal changes to an F# creating a second inversion B major chord as Hiccup holds out his hand. This unstable chord moves to a more stable, yet still unresolved, F# major chord in string harmonics, as Toothless gently lays his nose in Hiccup's hand. The lack of resolution in the sustained chords, which ends the scene on a half cadence, suggests that while trust has been gained, there is much potential for the development of their friendship.

Both Williams and Powell use themes to represent a particular friendship in each film. In *E.T.* the "E.T. Motive" moves from its Lydian "otherworldly version" into the "love version" when E.T. and Elliott have become friends and further into a major "flying version." Similarly, in *How to Train Your Dragon* Powell transforms his "Friendship Theme" from its minor version into a major version when Hiccup and Toothless have become friends. In addition to friendship, flying is another important plot point in both *E.T.* and *How to Train your Dragon*. Williams's and Powell's musical choices relating to flying are analyzed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3 : COMPARING THE THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF FLYING IN *E.T.* AND *HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON*

The first flight of each main protagonist represents the sealing of the friendship with his respective nonhuman and each composer highlights the moment's importance with a complete version of a theme that was hinted at throughout each film. The technique of a theme growing from a short motive is referred to as "teleological genesis" by Schneller who defines it as "the emergence over the course of a piece of an extended melodic idea that develops gradually out of motivic fragments."<sup>119</sup> Teleological genesis is not exclusive to film music. For instance, in his tone poem *Death and Transfiguration* (1889), Richard Strauss—who is recognized as a main influence on John Williams<sup>120</sup>—begins with a simple two-bar motive that expands throughout the piece. Strauss uses the development of the motive to tell the story of the transfiguration of the dying artist in his tone poem.<sup>121</sup> In a similar way, Williams extends the flying version of the "E.T. Motive" into an 8-bar phrase that becomes the "A" section of a complete ABA form.

Musical Illustration of Flying in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*

In an interview in the DVD extras for *E.T.*, John Williams discusses his intention to create the suggestion of a theme that was not heard in full until the first flight:

We may have the first few notes of this emotional theme suggested early on, then three or four more notes, then finally the whole theme, so that finally when you hear it all, there's something vaguely familiar about it. You've been prepared for four reels to actually hear this melody. It isn't presented to you immediately in its complete form. There's a suggestion here, it's done a

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<sup>119</sup> Schneller (2014), 99.

<sup>120</sup> Mervyn Cooke, "A New Symphonism for a New Hollywood: The Musical Language of John Williams's Film Scores," in *John Williams: Music for Films, Television, and the Concert Stage*, ed. Emilio Audissino (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2018), 11.

<sup>121</sup> Schneller (2014), 100.

little bit frighteningly over here, a little uncertainty there, and finally expressed harmonically or intervallically in some way you feel comfortable with.<sup>122</sup>

Table 2 below traces the use of each version of the “E.T. motive” including when it appears in its full “Flying Theme” version. Some notable instances that foreshadow the flight are the use of the “flying version” when E.T. levitates the balls. The film’s opening panning down from the night sky with the “otherworldly version” likewise suggests the similar night sky that E.T. and Elliott fly across. There are also many instances of the “otherworldly version” of the “E.T. motive” when E.T. talks about phoning home and looks for scraps to create a device to “phone home.” These uses of the motive foreshadow the flight, since the two friends fly to “phone home” and later when they take E.T. to his spaceship to go home.

**Table 2: Occurrences of the “E.T. Motive” in each of its three versions<sup>123</sup>**

Length of musical cue where the theme occurs in Minutes: Seconds	Minutes: Seconds theme begins in the film:	Dramatic Context	Version of the Theme/instrumentation <sup>124</sup>
1:09-7:50	1:09	Camera panning over night sky	Otherworldly- piccolo
	6:58	E.T. stands at the edge of a cliff watching his ship fly away	Otherworldly- piccolo then horn
18:50-20:52	18:50	Elliott stares out the kitchen window	Otherworldly- piccolo
20:57-22:17	21:01	Elliott lays a trail of Reese’s Pieces on the floor for E.T.	Otherworldly- piccolo
22:30-25:14	22:45	E.T. mirroring Elliott’s actions	Love- harp
27:24-29:55	28:07	Elliott shows his toys to E.T.	Love- celeste then clarinet

<sup>122</sup> “Behind-the-Scenes with Composer John Williams,,” in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. DVD. Directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Studios Home Entertainment (1982), 2005, 7:46-8:22.

<sup>123</sup> Occurrences determined from my own viewing of the film.

<sup>124</sup> Version taken from Examples 2.1-2.3 in Chapter 2.

27:24-29:55	29:40	E.T. tries to eat one of Elliott's toy cars	Flying- flute with oboe
33:02-33:53	33:02	E.T. playing underwater in the bathtub	Otherworldly- piccolo
37:07-39:15	37:15	Gertie and Michael meet E.T.	Love- harp
37:07-39:15	38:06	E.T. looks concerned when Michael takes Gertie's doll away	Love- clarinet
41:02-43:35	41:02	Elliott points to the globe saying "home"	Otherworldly- piccolo
	42:01	E.T. levitates some toy balls	Flying- violins <sup>125</sup>
	43:21	E.T. cures the geraniums	Flying- flute then violins
49:33-51:50	49:46	Elliott talks to his frog in science class	Flying- string harmonics
	50:53	E.T. looking at the Buck Rogers comic that says "help, help." Meanwhile, Elliott looks at the frog and says "save him"	Otherworldly- piccolo
57:19-1:02:50	57:19	E.T. says "home phone" pointing at the sky	Otherworldly- piccolo
	57:56	E.T. says "phone home" and points at the sky again	Otherworldly- piccolo
	1:00:11	Mary reads a bedtime story to Gertie while E.T. listens in	Love- harp
	1:02:11	E.T. starts making his machine to phone home	Flying- oboe then piccolo
	1:02:39	E.T. levitates various objects in Elliott's closet	Otherworldly- piccolo
1:05:19-1:08:03	1:07:07	E.T. and Elliott fly over the forest	Flying- whole theme in violins
1:10:27-1:12:55	1:11:15	E.T. phoning home	Flying- harp
	1:11:58	Elliott shouts "It's working" as E.T. phones home	Flying- horn

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<sup>125</sup> This is the instance Schneller identifies as "E.T.'s Powers," which is my example 2.4 from Chapter 2 (Schneller (2014), 102).

1:13:02-1:14:39	1:13:33	Elliott tries to convince E.T. to stay when no one is responding to his call home	Flying- flute then clarinet
	1:13:42	E.T. says "home" after Elliott tries to convince him to stay	Otherworldly- piccolo
1:13:02-1:14:39	1:14:03	E.T. lifts Elliott's face and wipes away a tear	Flying- cello
	1:14:28	E.T. looks at the night sky and says "home" again	Otherworldly- celeste then1flute
1:16:40-1:20:52	1:17:58	Michael finds E.T.'s sheet in the woods	Flying- flute
	1:18:15	Michael runs to E.T.'s body which is lying in the river	Flying- violins
	1:20:13	Michael opens the door to find the agents standing outside	Otherworldly- piccolo with muted trumpets
1:27:12-1:29:28	1:27:12	E.T. dying in the table and Elliott says "E.T. stay with me"	Flying- clarinet
	1:28:07	E.T. dying	Flying- violins
	1:29:05	Michael wakes up and sees the drooping flowers E.T. had previously cured	Otherworldly- celeste
1:34:51-1:38:49	1:35:33	Elliott alone with E.T. after he "dies"	Love- celeste then clarinet
	1:37:06	Elliott notices the flowers perking up	Flying- flute then horn
	1:38:29	Elliott is pulled away from E.T. and tells Michael E.T. is alive	Flying- woodwinds
1:38:52-1:53:38	1:41:17	Mary backs out of her driveway and Keys asking her where she is going	Flying- English Horn
	1:42:21	Michael's friends see E.T. for the first time	Otherworldly- piccolo
	1:42:32	Full shot of E.T. when the friends see him for the first time	Flying- violins and horn
	1:44:34	Shot of E.T. on Elliott's bike	Flying- violins

1:38:52-1:53:38	1:45:11	Right before one of the friends says “we made it”	Flying- woodwinds
	1:45:35	All the friends flying on their bikes	Flying- whole theme in violins
	1:46:37	Lights from the spaceship fall on Elliott’s face	Otherworldly- bassoon
	1:47:37	Shot of the light flashing in E.T.’s chest	Otherworldly- horn
	1:50:26	Elliott hugging E.T. goodbye	Love- horns
	1:52:19	Ship takes off with E.T. on board	Flying- strings
	1:52:38	last glimpse of E.T. before the ship door closes completely	Otherworldly- piccolo
	1:52:51	Ship leaves and music goes into a fanfare.	Flying- brass

Williams expands the flying version of the “E.T. Motive” into a traditional ABA form during the first flight (Example 3.1 shows the “A” section).<sup>126</sup> The first A section opens with the familiar fragment that becomes an 8-bar phrase, followed by a new 8-bar phrase (B), and a short transition leading back to the A section.

**Example 3.1: “A” section of the “Flying Theme” from *E.T.***<sup>127</sup>



<sup>126</sup> The first flight occurs at 1:07:07 (see Table 2)

<sup>127</sup> Transcription taken from: John Williams, “Theme from E.T.,” In *The John Williams Piano Anthology* (Hal Leonard, Milwaukee: WI, 2015), 55.



In the film, the second A section is cut off before it can end on a decisive cadence, timed with E.T. and Elliott landing back on the ground. The Soundtrack album version finds the cue ending decisively on a perfect authentic cadence.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, Williams's handling the harmonic writing of this scene differs in the soundtrack album version. In the film the cue stays in D major for both "A" sections. However, in the soundtrack album version and in *The John Williams's Piano Anthology* version, Williams uses the B section to modulate to the dominant for the second A section.<sup>129</sup> The modulation to the dominant in the soundtrack album version, a typical modulation in the Common Practice era, contrasts with Powell's elevating modulation, a typical pop music modulation, in "Forbidden Friendship," (both in the film and on the soundtrack album) showing a difference in preference for modulatory technique between the composers.

After the first flight, Williams continues to use fragments of all three versions of the "E.T. Motive" throughout the rest of the film. The theme returns only one other time in the full version during the second bike flying scene at the end of the film, further associating the full version with flight. After this second flight, Williams uses all three versions of the motive to close out the film which he describes as "a kind of operatic sense of completion, a real emotional satisfaction, as well as satisfaction from what we see" way to close to the film.<sup>130</sup>

#### Musical Illustration of Flying in *How to Train Your Dragon*

Unlike Williams, Powell expands the "Truth Theme" rather than the "Friendship Theme" for the first flight of *How to Train Your Dragon*. The "Truth Theme" is short for "The Truth About Dragons," a

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<sup>128</sup> John Williams, "Flying, (From 'E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial' Soundtrack)," Universal Music Group, track 5 on *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial Music from the Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, 1982, digital.

<sup>129</sup> Williams, "Theme from E.T.," 55-59.

<sup>130</sup> "Behind-the-Scenes with Composer John Williams," 6:03-6:17.

theme Powell discussed in his interview with Tim Burden (see Powell's quotation on page 18 above).

While Powell did not specify which theme this was, I believe it is the one shown in Example 3.2 because throughout the film it traces Hiccup's discovery that dragons are not mindless monsters, but smart creatures one can befriend if one first respects them.

**Example 3.2: Full version of the "Truth Theme."**



Before the first flight, the "Truth Theme" appears as four separate four-measure motives sometimes grouped together (motives 3-4 in particular are often grouped together) or standing alone (Examples 3.3-3.6). These motives make up two 8-measure phrases designated by cadences. The first cadence at the end of the second motive is a half cadence in the key of D major. The final cadence can be thought of as a tonicized half-cadence ending on a V/V chord. This chord's function is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Regardless, ending on V/V feels incomplete, which leaves the close of the theme full of possibilities about where to go next. These two phrases stand alone at times during the first flight cue, "Test Drive." For example, after the whole theme is presented, only the first phrase repeats before the rest is cut-off. Likewise, the second phrase returns to close "Test Drive" without following the first phrase.

**Example 3.3: Motive 1 of the “Truth Theme.”****Example 3.4: Motive 2 of the “Truth Theme.”****Example 3.5: Motive 3 of the “Truth Theme.”****Example 3.6: Motive 4 of the “Truth Theme.”**

As Williams’s constructs musical expectations with only the first motive of his “Flying Theme” (the “E.T. Motive”) so Powell uses only the first motive of his “Truth Theme” before the first flight.<sup>131</sup> In this way both Powell and Williams are preparing the listener for the longer theme without spoiling the ending of that theme. The audience is prepared with the first motive of the “Truth Theme,” in two different versions before the first flight (Table 3). The only real difference between the two versions is the use of a major third in the “Truth Theme” variation rather than a minor third as in the “Truth Theme” (Example 3.7). As Hiccup observes Toothless and becomes his friend, the variation disappears, suggesting he has learned the truth that dragons can be trusted. The only other time the variation appears is after Hiccup’s friend Astrid discovers Toothless. Hiccup stops her, knowing the villagers will

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<sup>131</sup> With the exception of the of motives 3 and 4 in the opening “overture” which I will discuss later in this chapter.

probably kill Toothless rather than accept him. The return of the variation highlights the distrust of the rest of the villagers.

**Example 3.7: “Truth Theme” variation (transposed to D major for reference).**



**Table 3: Occurrences of the “Truth Theme” in *How to Train Your Dragon***

Name and Length of musical cue where the theme occurs in Minutes: Seconds	Minutes: Seconds theme begins in the film:	Dramatic Context:	Phrase(s) of Theme:
“This is Berk” 00:00-1:00	00:05	Shadow of a dragon swooping past the DreamWorks logo	Motive 1
	00:43	Panning over the ocean while we hear a voice over from Hiccup introducing Berk	Motives 3 and 4
“Downed Dragon” 11:17-14:15	14:01	Hiccup decides not to kill the injured Toothless in the woods	Motive 1
“Wounded” 20:40-21:58	20:55	Toothless trying to escape from the cove	Motive 1, Version 2
	21:49	Hiccup makes eye contact with Toothless	Motive 1, Version 2
“Dragon Book” 23:14-25:30	23:16	Hiccup reading the <i>Dragon Book</i>	Motive 1, Version 2
“See You Tomorrow” 39:02-42:53	39:15 (and throughout this scene)	Montage of Hiccup training Toothless	Motive 1
“Test Drive” 43:25-45:52	43:50	Hiccup riding Toothless over the ocean (First Flight)	Entire theme
	45:29	Hiccup regaining control of Toothless while flying	Motives 3 and 4
“Not so Fireproof” 46:38-47:06	46:54	Hiccup pets a small dragon and says “Everything we know about you is wrong”	Motive 4
“The Cove” 58:53-59:49	58:56	Hiccup stops Astrid from telling his father about Toothless	Motive 1, Version 2
“Kill Ring” 1:00:33-1:04:47	1:03:51	Toothless wrestling the dragon in the kill ring	Motive 4

“Ready the Ships” 1:06:24-1:07:43	1:07:03	Toothless lifted onto the Viking ship in chains	Motives 3 and 4
“Battling the Green Death” 1:14:14-1:20:23	1:18:46	Toothless bursts out of the water after being freed	Entire theme
“Where’s Hiccup” 1:24:07-1:26:11	1:25:29	Hiccup wakes up in his own bed after being injured	Entire theme
“Coming Back Around” 1:26:54-1:29:00	1:28:16	Final narration while Hiccup and Toothless are flying with the rest of the village	Entire Theme

Although there is some allusion to flight in *E.T.* it is still a surprise when Elliott’s bike magically leaves the ground. The writers of *How to Train Your Dragon* refer more directly to flight in a few scenes leading up to the first full flight. One of these is a montage of Hiccup training Toothless called “See you Tomorrow.” This scene shows a few failed trial flights with both the “Truth Theme” and the major “Friendship Theme” appearing throughout the scene. The most successful of these trial flights is when Hiccup and Toothless are “flying” while tied to a stump in the ground (Figure 3.1). Powell places the first phrase of the “Truth Theme” and the entire major “Friendship Theme” together, associating the two themes together with flight. Powell’s scoring of this montage is particularly notable, and I will elaborate on it in Chapter 4.

**Figure 3.1: Toothless and Hiccup practice flying while tied to a stump in the ground.**



Powell explains that the flying cues, like “Test Drive,” were some of the first he wrote “because they worried [him] the most. [He] knew that the filmmakers were sort of relying on the music for that feeling of flying—that massive, lump-in-the-throat, joyful feeling that they wanted to express.”<sup>132</sup> To accomplish the “joyful” feeling of flight, Powell opens “Test Drive” with a looping major “Friendship Theme” in violins and bagpipes accompanied by an open tonic-dominant pedal point in the key of D major. The pedal point continues as the familiar first motive of the “Truth Theme” enters, progressing into the second motive. The orchestration shifts from tin whistle to horns at the start of the third motive that follows directly after the close of the second. The pedal point is replaced with chords that change every two beats. The quick changes in harmony complement faster shifts in “camera” angle as the two continue flying over the ocean. The repeated half-notes of the theme coupled with the strong volume of the basses adds a stability to the cue that lets the melody float above like Hiccup and Toothless floating above the ocean.

After a shift to violins for the fourth motive of the “Truth Theme” the phrase closes unconventionally on V/V (an E major chord). The lack of harmonic closure suggests this is not the true end of the tune. A short interlude characterized by running violins, where Hiccup mistakenly steers Toothless into a couple of rocks, leads back to the first phrase of the “Truth Theme” as the two characters climb higher and higher in the air. The return of the tonic-dominant pedal point D-A, which accompanies the repetition of the theme, provides some resolution for the unresolved V/V, E major, chord. The repetition of the first two motives ends abruptly with an upwards horn glissando as Hiccup loses his cheat sheet and yells at Toothless to stop even though the two are high in the air. Powell then seems to suspend musical time with an unmeasured sustained dissonance in the orchestra with slowly moving upwards string glissandi as Toothless stops and the rope tying Hiccup to the dragon comes

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<sup>132</sup> Pond, paragraph 17.

undone. The two begin to hurtle to the ocean far below. Musical time returns with a measured rhythmic pattern in the snare drum as though beating away the short seconds Hiccup has left to regain control of the dragon before falling to his death.

Various instruments are added to the texture as the friends continue to fall. The woodwinds and strings play upwards and downwards flourishes. The brass trades off a quarter-note triplet melody at odds with the duple rhythm around it, creating more chaos. As Hiccup grabs hold of Toothless and begins strapping himself back into the saddle, an ascending scalar pattern commences in the low brass, beginning in half notes, progressing into quarter notes, and finally quarter note triplets. The upwards motion of the musical line complements the visuals of Hiccup regaining control. The horns begin a sequential pattern of two sixteenth notes followed by a half note overtop of the low brass quarter notes. The horn pattern ends on a unison B resolving to an E pedal point in the low strings established with the return of the “Friendship Theme,” which is timed with Hiccup pulling up on the dragon, successfully slowing their speed (Figure 3.2). The beating snare drum pattern also disappears at this moment illustrating the end of the ticking clock.

**Figure 3.2: The return of the “Friendship Theme” accompanies Hiccup pulling up on Toothless to slow the dragon’s speed.**



The second half of the “Truth Theme” sounds when Hiccup lets go of his recovered cheat sheet and nimbly steers Toothless through a maze of rocks using instinct to change the tail piece. The strings create continuous motion with running sixteenth notes while the brass blare the third motive of the “Truth Theme.” The woodwinds take over the running sixteenths as the violins join the horns for the fourth motive. An ascending scale in upper strings leads into one more iteration of the “Friendship Theme,” in violins and bagpipes, when Hiccup throws his arms in the air shouting “yeah!” The last two beats of the “Friendship Theme” are repeated, followed by a bass drum roll that abruptly ends the cue with the two friends flying into the remains of the fireball Toothless fired out of elation at their successful flight.

Like Williams, Powell uses fragments of the “Truth Theme” throughout the rest of the film. Unlike Williams who continues to use only the opening fragment of the “Flying Theme,” Powell uses mainly the third and fourth motives of the “Truth Theme.” Using the ending fragments instead of the beginning suggests Hiccup’s arrival at learning the truth about dragons whereas before the first flight, he was still uncertain. The first flight represents a turning point in the bond of trust between Hiccup and Toothless and learning the truth about dragons.

#### Harmonic Choices in the First Flight Scenes

The first flight scenes show each composer’s ability to expand a theme from a single motive into a longer coherent theme. Each composer also prepares the audience for the longer theme with repetitions of the opening motive throughout the film leading up to the first flight. Although the thematic evolution between Williams and Powell is similar in these two scenes, the way each composer handles the accompanying harmonies differs. In an article about modal interchange in the music of John Williams, Tom Schneller observes Williams’s use of the II $\sharp$  chord (not functioning as a V/V) borrowed from the Lydian mode. Schneller sees the progression from I to II $\sharp$  projecting a sense of “lifting off” that



is used by Williams in *E.T.* and other films such as *Superman* and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*.<sup>133</sup> Schneller furthermore quotes Frank Lehman describing the use of this chord as “soaring wonder” associated with “victorious, optimistic, and childlike connotations.”<sup>134</sup>

In *Superman*, the use of the chord during the love theme accompanies Superman soaring through the clouds with Lois Lane (Figure 3.3). The theme progresses from I to II# to ii and back to I, a nonfunctional harmonic progression featuring the II# chord. The chord is also present in *E.T.* during the bicycle chase scene.<sup>135</sup> After the opening tonic chord, the next chord is II# followed by V<sup>6</sup> (Example 3.8). In the *E.T.* excerpt the II# chord could be analyzed as V/V since it is followed by V (as Schneller shows in his analysis),<sup>136</sup> but the visuals of the flying bike complemented by other instances of the chord still give it the sense of lifting off.

**Figure 3.3: Superman and Lois Lane flying in *Superman* (1978).**




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<sup>133</sup> Tom Schneller, “Modal Interchange and Semantic Resonance in Themes by John Williams,” *Journal of Film Music* 6, no. 1 (2013), 68.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Reprinted in Example 3.8 or see Schneller (2013), 70.



Powell also makes use of the II $\sharp$  chord in “Test Drive” although in a different manner. In the examples by Williams’s cited in Schneller, the II $\sharp$  chord always follows I.<sup>141</sup> When Powell uses the II $\sharp$  chord in “Test Drive,” it follows V. Likewise, II $\sharp$  in “Test Drive” is not followed by the expected V but by IV. The unconventional II $\sharp$  going to IV is akin to much of the early music of the Beatles as music theorist Walter Everett asserts in his book *The Beatles as Musicians*. Everett identifies II $\sharp$  moving to IV in many Beatles songs from “She Loves You” to “She’s Leaving Home.”<sup>142</sup> Likewise, music theorist Richard Repp cites the chord progression for the Beatles song “Yesterday,” Showing a movement from V/V to IV during the words “Oh I believe in yesterday” from the first verse.<sup>143</sup> The commonality of the II $\sharp$  to IV progression in music of the Beatles provides a possible inspiration for Powell’s otherwise unconventional ordering of triads.

The whole progression underlying the third and fourth motives of the “Truth Theme,” is presented in Examples 3.9 and 3.10. The chords accompanying the third motive follow a traditional predominant to dominant to tonic function. However, the chords accompanying the fourth motive of the “Truth Theme” follow a dominant back to predominant function with V going to V/V and then IV. Like with his modulation up by whole step in “Forbidden Friendship,” this is another possible instance of Powell’s attention to pop music ideas over common practice period ones.

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<sup>141</sup> Schneller (2013), 69-71.

<sup>142</sup> Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310.

<sup>143</sup> Richard Repp, “Using Beatles Songs to Demonstrate Modulation Concepts,” *College Music Symposium* Vol. 49/50 (2009/2010), 181.

**Example 3.9: Third motive of the “Truth Theme” with accompanying chords and Roman numeral analysis as they appear in “Test Drive.”**

Example 3.9 shows the third motive of the “Truth Theme” with accompanying chords and Roman numeral analysis as they appear in “Test Drive.” The score is in D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features two staves: Homs (top) and Low Strings/Low Brass (bottom). The Homs part consists of a melodic line with notes: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The Low Strings/Low Brass part provides harmonic support with chords: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The Roman numeral analysis below the staff is: D: vi IV V I vi IV V I.

**Example 3.10: Fourth motive of the “Truth Theme” with accompanying chords and Roman numeral analysis as they appear in “Test Drive.”**

Example 3.10 shows the fourth motive of the “Truth Theme” with accompanying chords and Roman numeral analysis as they appear in “Test Drive.” The score is in D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features two staves: Viols (top) and Low String/Low Brass (bottom). The Viols part consists of a melodic line with notes: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The Low String/Low Brass part provides harmonic support with chords: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The Roman numeral analysis below the staff is: vi iii V V/V (II#) IV V/V (II#). An “Echo in Flute/Violin” is indicated for the final measure.

Each composer uses their “first flight” cue to expand a theme that was hinted at throughout each film. Williams uses a monothematic approach with the flying version of the “E.T. Motive” whereas Powell expands the “Truth Theme” and also uses the major version of the “Friendship Theme” in his cue. After expanding his theme, each composer then harmonizes it differently. Powell uses a pedal point for the first half of the “Truth Theme,” and calls on popular music idioms for the second half. Williams, in contrast, uses V/V in a conventional manner returning to V in *E.T.*

### Setting up Themes in the Opening Cues of *E.T.* and *How to Train Your Dragon*

Beyond the thematic variations and teleological genesis already discussed, both composers use the opening cue for each film to set up their themes for success. By introducing main themes in the opening cues, both composers use the opening sequence as a sort of “operatic overture,” representing a “coming attraction.”<sup>144</sup> In *E.T.* the “E.T. Motive” is presented at the beginning of the film before a dramatic association can be formed. Likewise, the “Truth Theme” is the first melodic content heard in the opening cue of *How to Train Your Dragon*.<sup>145</sup> The presentation of these themes primes the audience’s memory to recognize them later in the film and form musico-dramatic associations.<sup>146</sup>

Williams introduces many important thematic ideas in his opening cue and uses musical ideas that establish the world of the film. The introduction of themes is accomplished in the first visual cue, but the opening credits music is also worth noting. What sounds more like ethereal moaning than music in the opening credits is very different from the rest of the score and creates a sense of unease suggesting a frightening venture into the unknown.<sup>147</sup> The opening credits give way to a peaceful view of a starry night sky followed by a lone piccolo playing the “otherworldly version” of the “E.T. Motive.” Despite the Lydian inflection, the sound of a familiar instrument playing a melodic line sets the audience at ease after the uncertainty of the credits. However, the questioning nature of the theme, which ends on scale degree 5, suggest this is not an ordinary starry sky. Likewise, Huvet describes the opening piccolo solo and panning shot of the starry sky as situating the action of the film in an “otherworldly enchanted place.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Bribitzer-Stull, 102

<sup>145</sup> See the first entry in Table 3.

<sup>146</sup> Bribitzer-Stull, 102

<sup>147</sup> Although, these sounds do return in the film when Elliott is sitting in his backyard waiting for E.T. to reappear.

<sup>148</sup> Huvet, 298-299.

Williams adds some sparse accompaniment for the piccolo when it reaches the D# on the repeat of the theme. The addition of more instruments aligns with the camera panning down to the trees revealing a dense forest setting, not the lonely expanse of space. Huvet notes how Spielberg planned this unveiling to create a magical and surprising effect, quoting him as saying “you come down over the trees, you see the stars, and suddenly you think you’re in space – wow, you’re not, you’re in a forest somewhere.”<sup>149</sup> Williams complements the visual unveiling with an “orchestral awakening” using glistening harp glissandi, triangle, and violin harmonics. The entrance of these instruments coincides with the introduction of a number of natural sounds—chirping birds, rattling insects, rustling leaves—that create a realistic forest environment further planting the viewer on earth.<sup>150</sup>

As the cue continues, Williams introduces a mysterious theme for the aliens and a low menacing theme for Keys, the faceless antagonist of the film. Additionally, Williams uses this cue to set up important orchestrational elements such as piccolo, horn, and harp that will all play important roles in the remainder of the film. Through the introduction of important themes and orchestrational ideas Williams sets up the musical world for the rest of the film, a complementary mixture of familiar and unfamiliar.

Unlike *E.T.*, *How to Train Your Dragon* does not have opening credits, other than a brief animated DreamWorks studio logo. However, like Williams, Powell sets up the dramatic story through the presentation of two musical themes that represent contrasting ideas: the “Truth Theme” and the “opening battle theme.” The “Truth Theme” eventually illustrates the change in perspective about dragons that the Vikings will reach by the end of the film. The opening battle theme, which features a Scottish snap and compound meter, highlights their initial instincts to kill any dragon they see. These

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<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Huvet, 299.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

rhythmic features, coupled with the fast tempo in most occurrences as well as the frequent use of violin and tin whistle orchestration, confer a Celtic musical feel (Example 3.11). Additionally, the battle theme appears in other places in the film where dragons are seen as the enemy, such as Astrid’s attempts to beat Hiccup in dragon training<sup>151</sup> and Toothless trying to throw Astrid off of his back.<sup>152</sup>

**Example 3.11: Opening Battle Theme from *How to Train Your Dragon*.**



Like Williams, Powell also uses his opening cue to establish a musical world for the film. The music opens with the “Truth Theme” before the story even begins when the shadow of a dragon swoops past the clouds of the DreamWorks logo. The battle theme follows at a slower tempo than in other instances. The slow battle theme proceeds into the third and fourth motives of the “Truth Theme,” which appear in compound meter instead of the usual simple. The opening low brass drone, as well as the Scottish snap and the drum pattern that accompany the battle theme, help maintain a Celtic feel of the music. Furthermore, the compound meter of all the themes and the tin whistle and solo violin uttering the second half of the “Truth Theme” further establish a Celtic musical world for the Vikings.

Above the music, Hiccup’s voiceover presents a negative view of Berk’s location and refers to the dragons as “pests.” The associations formed throughout the film by the “Truth Theme” and opening battle theme foreshadow the change in perspective that is echoed in Hiccup’s closing voiceover where

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<sup>151</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 49:47-50:17.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 53:34-54:11.

the word “pests” to describe the dragons is changed to “pets.”<sup>153</sup> Powell draws a musical connection between the narrations by accompanying both voiceovers with the “Truth Theme.” However, for the closing voiceover, he replaces the battle theme with the “Friendship Theme” to illustrate the change in the village viewing dragons as pets instead of pests.

Although each film opens in a different way, both Williams and Powell use the opening cue to introduce important themes and establish the musical world of each film. These themes are developed in important ways throughout each film. Williams sets up his “E.T. Motive” in the opening cue and transforms it alongside the developing friendship between Elliott and E.T. through the remainder of the film. Powell uses the opening to present his “Truth Theme” that he expands through teleological genesis in the first flight scene as Williams also does with the “E.T. Motive” in *E.T.*’s first flight scene. Although not introduced in the opening cue, Powell presents another important theme, the “Friendship Theme,” in a later pivotal scene that he develops alongside the growing friendship between Hiccup and Toothless.

The following chapter explores how Powell handles plot developments that do not relate directly to *E.T.*, including an extended look at how the “Friendship” and “Truth” themes function together; Powell’s handling of Montage; and, most importantly, the further evolution of both the “Friendship” and “Truth” themes. Moreover, a thorough examination of Powell’s thematic development will show a heightened sensitivity to plot structure of *How to Train Your Dragon* and reveal Powell’s own compositional voice as distinct from Williams, establishing him as a skilled composer in his own right.

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<sup>153</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 1:28:17-1:28:50.



## CHAPTER 4 : POWELL BECOMES POWELL

Chapters 2 and 3 explored how Williams and Powell used the plot ideas of friendship and flying to drive thematic development in *E.T.* and *How to Train Your Dragon*. This chapter explores further variations of Powell's themes that do not compare directly with Williams's variations. For instance, Powell creates other variations for the "Friendship Theme," which are the "combination" versions that were briefly presented in Chapter 2. Powell also creates a variation on the "Truth Theme," which was presented in Chapter 3 and elaborated on in this chapter. These additional variations as well as Powell's unique handling of montage and presentation of the "Friendship" and "Truth" themes together are all ways he handles thematic development differently than Williams in *E.T.*

#### Development of the "Friendship Theme" in the "Dragon Book"

Powell uses the "Friendship Theme" Combination 1 as a transition from the minor version to the major version of the "Friendship Theme" that mirrors Hiccup's own journey to acceptance of the dragon. A major plot difference between *E.T.* and *How to Train Your Dragon* is Hiccup's conditioning to kill any dragon he sees. In contrast, Elliott, who has encountered aliens in popular culture as evidenced by the *Star Wars* figurines he shows to E.T. in his room, knows that aliens are not all bad: Some, such as Yoda, are in fact friendly. Furthermore, even though Elliott is initially frightened by seeing a live alien in the cornfield behind his home, he gently lures the alien into his home, never treating him violently. On the other hand, Hiccup begins the film wishing to become a dragon slayer, shooting down Toothless to prove his worth and make his Dad proud. Yet, Hiccup discovers he cannot kill a dragon when facing the fallen Toothless in the woods.<sup>154</sup> After his private failure, Hiccup begins dragon training class with the other Viking teens. His experience with Toothless, where the dragon let him go instead of killing him, is

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<sup>154</sup> The "Downed Dragon" scene elaborated on in Chapter 2. (*How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 11:17-14:45).

challenged by his instructor’s teachings about dragons. For instance, part of Hiccup’s instruction is to read the Viking *Dragon Book*, which contains everything the Vikings know about dragons. When Hiccup sits down to read the book, he is presented with a highly biased view of dragons passed down through generations of Vikings, shown in the instructions to kill every dragon on sight. Powell highlights Hiccup’s confusion between the book’s message and his own firsthand experience with Toothless through a version of the “Friendship Theme” that is “in between” the major and minor versions, featuring the perfect fourth of the major version followed by the upwards minor second of the minor version (Example 4.1).

**Example 4.1: “Friendship Theme” Combination 1, opening with the perfect fourth of the major version but following that with an upwards minor second as in the minor version.**



The “Dragon Book” scene opens with no music and only the sounds of a storm raging outside. When Hiccup begins reading aloud, the second version of the “Truth Theme” enters in string harmonics doubled by male choir. The harmonics create an aura of mystery, reflecting the mythical aura of the various dragons described in the book. Additionally, the many octave distance between the male choir and harmonics complements the expanse of the great hall and the chilling text, which describes the various ways dragons can kill their victims. The sparse orchestration at a quiet dynamic renders the “Truth Theme” unobtrusive to the surrounding monologue and sound effects of the storm. In addition, the placement of the “Truth Theme” at the opening of the book, aligns it with Hiccup’s search for truth about dragons.

As Hiccup's search for the truth about dragons is thwarted by the Vikings' biased views, Powell shifts to the marcato theme from the opening battle,<sup>155</sup> played in a legato style here, in upper brass and woodwinds (Example 4.2). This theme reinforces the Vikings' instructions to kill each dragon on sight. As Hiccup continues reading, the music's volume and frightening sound effects of each dragon rise, drowning out the sounds of the storm and drawing the viewer into the book with Hiccup.

**Example 4.2: Opening of the Marcato Battle Theme.**



Rolls in bass drum and timpani lead into Combination 1 of the "Friendship Theme," when Hiccup reaches the page about Night Furies (Example 4.3). A D pedal in cello and bass as well as a complex sixteenth note triplet rhythm on D in the trumpets suggest a D key center. The B $\flat$ , E $\flat$ , and F $\sharp$  accidentals in the theme suggest a key of G minor, but the incessant pounding of D, that does not feel like it needs to resolve up to G, makes D feel like the tonal center instead. The chosen accidentals with a D tonic suggest that Powell is playing with the "gapped" Phrygian mode, which is akin to the Arabic maqam hijaz. The maqam hijaz is a Phrygian scale with an augmented second between scale degrees 2 and 3 and certain quartertones, which western instruments are not designed to play. With D as the key center, the F $\sharp$  in Powell's theme creates an augmented second between scale degrees 2 and 3. The Eastern influence of the maqam hijaz on the "gapped" Phrygian mode suggests "exoticness," befitting the unknown world of the Night Fury. This mode is also used by Howard Shore in *the Lord of the Rings* trilogy to represent the ancientness and mysterious world of the Lothlorien elves.<sup>156</sup> Additionally, the

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<sup>155</sup> Named for the accented manner it is played during "This is Berk" in contrast to the jig-like opening battle theme discussed at the end of Chapter 3.

<sup>156</sup> Doug Adams, *The music of The Lord of the Rings Films*, (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music Publishing Company, 2010), 54.

augmented second interval, although generally between scale degrees 6 and 7 as in a harmonic minor scale, has been used to represent the exotic in many classical works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as the melody of the “Bacchanale” from Camille Saint-Saëns opera *Samson et Delilah*.

**Example 4.3: The “Friendship Theme” in “The Dragon Book” scene.**

The musical score for Example 4.3 is set in 4/4 time and consists of three staves. The top staff is for Dulcimer, the middle for Trumpet (in C), and the bottom for Cello/Bass. The Dulcimer part begins with a melodic line in a minor mode, featuring an augmented second interval between the sixth and seventh degrees of the scale. The Trumpet part consists of a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth-note triplets. The Cello/Bass part provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pulse.

Powell’s scoring emphasizes Hiccup’s confusion through “exotic” modality and a version of the “Friendship Theme” in between the major and minor versions. Although the dragon did not kill him in the woods, Hiccup has not yet developed a bond of trust with Toothless. Likewise, the musical transition into the subsequent scene illustrates the growing disparity between Hiccup’s and his fellow Vikings’ views. In the following scene, where the Vikings are seen sailing to the dragon island to destroy their nest, the D pedal from the “Dragon Book” cue moves upwards to an A $\flat$ , a tritone away, an interval often associated with fear and the otherworldly. The distance of this interval suggests the developing divergence in the viewpoint about dragons between Hiccup and the villagers. This disparity culminates

in the “Kill Ring” scene late in the plot where Powell uses the Combination 2 version of the “Friendship Theme” to highlight the betrayal felt by Toothless.<sup>157</sup>

### Development of the “Friendship Theme” in the “Kill Ring”

The “Kill Ring” scene occurs after the establishment of friendship between Hiccup and Toothless. Because of this friendship, Hiccup has been doing very well in dragon training by tricking the villagers into thinking he is subduing dragons through skills as a fighter when he is actually doing so by giving them gentle neck scratches or distracting them with a reflection from his shield.<sup>158</sup> As such, Hiccup is selected as the top student in his dragon training class which means he has the “honor” of killing a dragon in front of the whole village in the “Kill Ring” scene.

At the start of the “Kill Ring” scene, before the music enters, Stoick gives a speech to the village about how proud he is of his son. The visuals switch from Stoick speaking, to Hiccup waiting at the entrance of the kill ring, Viking helmet in hand, as the music opens resolutely with a solemn horn melody. A solo clarinet plays the first two measures of the major version of the “Friendship Theme,” against the horn when Stoick announces to the crowd that today his son becomes a Viking. The “Friendship Theme” here insinuates Hiccup’s thoughts are turned resolutely to Toothless despite his father’s expectations. After Hiccup enters the ring, the Monstrous Nightmare dragon that Hiccup is supposed to kill is let out of its cage (Figure 4.1, top). The tempo of the music suddenly increases with the brass and percussion breaking into a chaotic flurry of eighth note and quarter note triplets while the woodwinds insert ascending flourishes as the dragon rushes around the metal grating encasing the ring. The music abruptly drops in dynamics leaving only the flutes playing a triplet pattern based on a whole tone scale over sustained G octaves in the violins when the dragon notices Hiccup and slowly

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<sup>157</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 59:56-1:04:50.

<sup>158</sup> These instances take place in the “See You Tomorrow” montage discussed later in this chapter.

approaches the boy. The flute pattern continues, beginning on consecutively higher pitches with each repetition as Hiccup drops his knife and shield, holding his hands out over the dragon's snout as the village looks on in confusion (Figure 4.1, bottom left). Hiccup says "I'm not one of them" tossing aside his Viking helmet to a sustained tremolo in strings. The villagers gasp and a downwards tritone in bass clarinet suggests the growing anger of Stoick who calmly says, "stop the fight." The tritone also recalls the transition out of the "Dragon Book" scene and the growing distance in values between Hiccup and his father. Hiccup refuses to stop, instead telling the village they do not have to kill dragons. The music takes a hopeful turn with a rising brass line until Stoick shouts "I said stop the fight!" slamming his hammer into the metal grating over the ring (Figure 4.1, bottom right). Upon hearing the crash, the dragon's self-preservation instinct activates and the Monstrous Nightmare snaps at Hiccup. The music returns to cascading chaotic triplet figures similar to when the dragon was first let out of its cage.

**Figure 4.1: (from left to right) The Monstrous Nightmare dragon bursting out of its cage, Hiccup subduing the dragon, and Stoick angrily slamming his hammer into the side of the dragon training ring.**



Far away in the cove, Toothless hears his friend's call and desperately claws his way up the rock face, running full speed through the woods into the village. The music continues at full orchestration through complicated rhythmic figures and fast notes. Hiccup gets pinned under the Monstrous Nightmare's claws when a loud timpani pattern interrupts the fully orchestrated chaos announcing Toothless's arrival. Toothless shoots a fireball into the metal casing around the ring, breaking it and creating a dense haze of smoke and fire. As Toothless emerges from the smoke, wrestling the Monstrous Nightmare, the fourth motive of the "Truth Theme" enters, moving from violins to horns

with the final measure echoed by the violins (Figure 4.2). The “Truth Theme” affirms the truth about dragons the villagers are now seeing as they watch one dragon wrestle another to save a human. However, Stoick and many of the villagers decide to follow their own command to kill every dragon on sight, jump down from the surrounding seats, and charge Toothless with weapons raised. Powell emphasizes the chaos with a hemiola between a quarter-note triplet figure in the strings and a loud brass melody full of eighth notes as the Vikings charge.

**Figure 4.2: Toothless wrestling the Monstrous Nightmare.**



Toothless, feeling threatened, tackles Stoick and opens his mouth to smite the Viking leader. Hiccup desperately yells at Toothless to stop, the dragon obeys, and the music dies down to a first inversion B diminished chord. Toothless lowers his head and gives Hiccup a sheepish look. A drum roll leads into the “Friendship Theme,” which enters in the violins when a hammer, thrown by a villager, hits Toothless in the face, knocking him over. The theme begins with the descending/ascending perfect fourth, followed by the major second of the major version. However, the next group of eighth notes starts on the wrong note for the major version. Based on previous occurrences, the A should descend by minor third to an F#. The presence of the F# is the first thing “wrong” with the theme. The F# leads downwards not to a perfect fourth or perfect fifth, but a minor sixth, creating an even greater divide





atmosphere, accentuating the pain and betrayal of Toothless as he is captured while his best friend watches helplessly.

Powell brilliantly weaves together this version of the theme to illustrate the confusion of Toothless at the seeming betrayal of his friend who is not able to save him from the rest of the Vikings. In particular, the progression of the theme from major to minor, shows a regression in the bond of trust between the friends. The theme ends meandering downwards like its original version heard in the woods before the two characters learned to trust each other, highlighting the feeling of betrayal. The violins also recall the orchestration of the scene in the woods as does the D key center.

### The Rhythmic Variation of the “Friendship Theme”

The different versions of the “Friendship Theme” in both the “Dragon Book” and the “Kill Ring,” show Powell’s attention to plot details and subtext. In both scenes these versions bring out the unspoken feelings of characters: confusion for Hiccup and betrayal for Toothless. In addition to the harmonic variations of the “Friendship Theme”—major, minor, and two combined versions—Powell further develops the “Friendship Theme” with a rhythmic variation of the major version that occurs in three scenes where different villagers are reconciled with Toothless. Example 4.5 compares the rhythmic variation with the major version we are used to hearing. Through the rhythmic variation, Powell highlights friendships between dragons and other characters, allowing him to reserve the continuous quarter note versions of the “Friendship Theme” exclusively for Hiccup and Toothless.

**Example 4.5: The major “Friendship Theme” transposed to A $\flat$  (top) to compare with the rhythmic variation of the “Friendship Theme” (bottom). The rhythmic variation is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time with differing rhythms but contains the same pitches as the major version.**

The first time the rhythmic variation of the “Friendship Theme” occurs is in the “Romantic Flight” scene. As soon as Astrid discovers Toothless in the woods, she runs off to tell the village about the dragon, but Hiccup and Toothless stop her, scooping her up and leaving her hanging from a branch high in the air. When Astrid agrees to let Hiccup show her why he is hiding a dragon in the woods, she mounts Toothless behind Hiccup who instructs the dragon to let her down gently. Toothless, however, annoyed by the presence of a human who earlier ran at him with an axe, spins out of control, trying to throw her off. The opening Celtic battle theme plays during this cue as an invigorating addition to the out-of-control flight. As soon as Astrid says, “I’m sorry,” Toothless stops his chaotic flying and calmly soars through the clouds.

A gentle solo violin melody that is associated with Astrid in other parts of the film,<sup>159</sup> accompanies the graceful flight past the sunset, through the clouds, and into the northern lights (Figure 4.3). The solo violin is accompanied by female chorus outlining diatonic chords in B major with an emphasis on IV and vi chords. The gentle upper voices of the wordless choir provide a serene accompaniment with the violin floating overtop. At the end of the melody a few harp arpeggios enter, adding to the dream-like nature of the theme and orchestration, befitting Astrid’s wonder as she flies through the clouds for the first time. The theme repeats in the horns and cellos with the other strings playing the same chord progression outlined by the wordless choir earlier. The dynamic level stays relatively low and unobtrusive while the serenity from the opening chords remains with a touch of majesty from the horns repeating Astrid’s theme. The music builds to a louder dynamic and fuller orchestration with the “Friendship Theme” rhythmic variation, which appears prominently in high cellos. The piccolo rides overtop with a sixteenth note triplet figure reminiscent of some of the earlier Celtic musical tropes, but at a sufficiently slow tempo to complement the gentle atmosphere created by the

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<sup>159</sup> Namely during her introduction in the opening battle (*How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 3:00-3:13).

soft orchestration. The trumpets join the cellos upon the repeat of the “Friendship Theme” along with a wordless female choir, riding gently above the theme with sustained pitches and that slowly descends through chords diatonic to the new key center of D $\flat$  major (Example 4.6).

**Figure 4.3: Toothless, Astrid, and Hiccup soar through the clouds.**



**Example 4.6: Friendship Theme Rhythmic Variation in the “Romantic Flight” scene.**

Piccolo

Variation in Cello

Violin

Choir

Basses

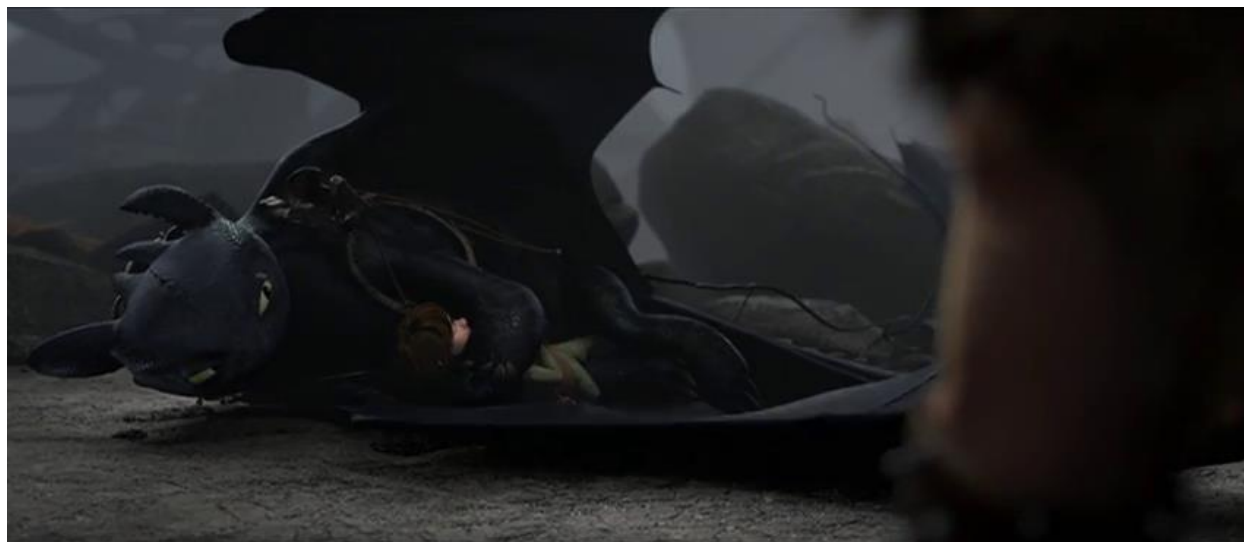
The musical score is written in 3/4 time and D-flat major. It features five staves: Piccolo, Variation in Cello, Violin, Choir, and Basses. The Piccolo part is characterized by a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped in triplets. The Cello part has a more melodic line with quarter and eighth notes. The Violin part provides a steady accompaniment with eighth notes. The Choir part consists of sustained chords that slowly descend in pitch. The Basses part has a simple, rhythmic accompaniment with quarter notes.

A short transition leads back into Astrid's theme in flute and horns predominantly, with continuous eighth note motion in the upper strings that drives the flight forward. The cue ends with a sustained tonic chord and the gentle orchestration and harmonic resolution suit the serene animation and foreshadow the romantic relationship that will begin between Hiccup and Astrid.

Powell highlights Astrid's changed perspective through the shift from Astrid's theme to the rhythmic variation of the "Friendship Theme" showing her change of heart towards Toothless and (by extension) all dragons. The use of a rhythmic variation preserves the original "Friendship Theme" exclusively for the friendship between Hiccup and Toothless. Using a specific variation to illustrate the friendship between the creature and other characters is different from how Williams handles the "E.T. Motive." For example, when Michael and Gertie first meet E.T., Williams uses the love version of the "E.T. Motive;" the same version used for Elliott and E.T.'s growing friendship in earlier scenes. Powell's use of a different version highlights his attention to subtext, keeping friendship tied to one theme but separating the main friendship with a variation for other characters.

The rhythmic variation on the "Friendship Theme" appears in a few other spots later in the film that highlight the "conversion" of other Vikings. The first of these is the beginning of the "Where's Hiccup?" cue, following the long battle with the Green Death towards the end of the film. Stoick runs desperately to a fallen Toothless while searching for his son and after a moment says, "I'm so sorry" to the dragon. Toothless seems to understand Stoick's apology, as he did with Astrid, and opens his wings to reveal he has saved Hiccup from a fiery death (Figure 4.4). The music builds towards Toothless disclosing he has saved Hiccup through strings and lower woodwinds, adding upper woodwinds, and finally brass, all of which slowly crescendo through an eighth note pattern that leads into the "Friendship Theme" rhythmic variation. Stoick's apology and later gratitude ("Thank you for saving my son") directed at Toothless, demonstrate his reconciliation with the truth and acceptance of Hiccup's unusual friend.

**Figure 4.4: Toothless opens his wings to reveal he has saved Hiccup.**



The final appearance of the rhythmic variation of the “Friendship Theme” occurs in the last scene of the film. Hiccup emerges from his bedroom after recovering from his lost foot to find a transformed Berk. The theme appears as the villagers greet Hiccup who looks on in wonder at the dragons living side-by-side with the Vikings. The use of the theme here represents the conversion of the rest of the village to accepting dragons as their friends. All of these instances of the “Friendship Theme” rhythmic variation highlight the conversion of different Vikings to becoming friends with dragons. They likewise show the Vikings’ acceptance of the truth that Hiccup demonstrated through his relationship with Toothless.

#### **Additional Music that Changes How the “Friendship Theme” is Introduced**

The rhythmic variation on the “Friendship Theme” further shows Powell’s attention to details and subtext in the film, a concern that is further highlighted by music that did *not* make it into the film. Although Powell had a good relationship with the directors, they still had the liberty to make final decisions on what comprised the final score and decided to cut music from a couple of scenes. One of these cuts pushes the original introduction of the “Friendship Theme” to earlier in the film. In the DVD commentary, the directors discuss removing music that had been written for the scene preceding

“Downed Dragon” because they felt the conversation in this scene between Stoick and Gobber about Hiccup was more serious without the music.<sup>160</sup> Track 3 on the soundtrack album, titled “Downed Dragon,” contains all of the music for the “Downed Dragon” scene, as elaborated upon extensively in Chapter 2, with about a minute of additional music preceding the music used in the movie. The author believes this “lost” music is this extra minute of music from the “Downed Dragon” track on the soundtrack album.

To test this hypothesis, I started the track behind Gobber and Stoick’s conversation to see if the extra music would match the length of the scene.<sup>161</sup> Not only did the length match, but I found that the additional music could have complemented certain moments in the conversation between the two characters, such as the male choir and trombones accompanying Stoick explaining what it means to be a Viking, further emphasizing the character’s masculinity and toughness. Track 3 moves seamlessly from the cut music into the music used in the film without break, suggesting it was originally meant to flow from one scene into the other.

Most notably regarding Powell’s thematic development is how the cut music for “Downed Dragon” opens with the “Friendship Theme” in the harp, thus changing the first occurrence of the theme. With the alignment of additional music in place, the first instance of the theme would fall when Stoick tells Gobber how Hiccup is different from the others, hinting at the importance of Hiccup’s centrality to the film’s plot. Other than the opening minor third, this instance of the “Friendship Theme” is in the major version which changes both the placement and version of the theme’s introduction (Example 4.7). Without this snippet in the film, the first time the “Friendship Theme” is heard is in the minor version when Hiccup is deciding whether or not to kill Toothless. If the directors had decided to

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<sup>160</sup> “Filmmakers’ Commentary,” 11:06-11:51.

<sup>161</sup> *How To Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 10:29-11:31.

keep the cut music, which places the major version before the minor version, Powell's initial deeper plan to foreshadow the friendlier direction the theme and the story are headed would be revealed. Although Powell's original introduction of the "Friendship Theme" was cut, the rest of his variations create a convincing thematic representation of friendship that follows the relationship between Hiccup and Toothless.

**Example 4.7: The "Friendship Theme" as it appears in the cut music. The theme follows the interval pattern of the major version other than beginning with a minor third (the major version opens with a perfect fourth).**



#### The "Truth Theme" Variation

Powell's thematic development is not exclusive to the "Friendship Theme." Chapter 2 examined the entire "Truth Theme" and hinted at a second version (Example 4.8). Although the "Truth Theme" goes through fewer variations than the "Friendship Theme," Powell's attention to plot details is also present in the way he handles this theme. The first version, the "Truth Theme" without variation, opens the film and is used in the "Test Drive" scene. The "Truth Theme" variation occurs in a couple of scenes leading up to "Test Drive." One of these (the "Dragon Book" scene) was discussed earlier in this chapter and the other scene, and the first time the variation is used, is the "Wounded" scene where Hiccup finds Toothless trapped in the cove and discovers his missing tailpiece.

**Example 4.8: The "Truth Theme" variation.**



Before the "Wounded" scene, Hiccup completes his first day of dragon training where Gobber insists that dragons will always go for the kill. Hiccup wonders why Toothless did not kill him and goes



looking for the dragon. After Hiccup enters the cove in the woods, Toothless swoops out of nowhere, clawing at the rockface trying to escape. The music, likewise, enters abruptly with an opening flourish leading to a D pedal point held in low strings. The music is then masked by the sound effects of the dragon until he lands back on the ground, followed by a solo female voice, vocalizing in the middle to upper range. Hiccup climbs down the rocks to get a better view of the dragon as the varied first half of the first motive of the "Truth Theme" enters. The "Truth Theme" variation appears in string harmonics and a female chorus in the middle range. The variation is interrupted by trills and flourishes (swift upwards and downwards scales) in the upper woodwinds before re-entering with the second half of the first motive, still in string harmonics and choir, as Hiccup watches the injured dragon try to fly away (Example 4.9).

Example 4.9: The “Truth Theme” variation at the beginning of the “Wounded” scene.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of four staves: Violins (top), Choir, Harp, and Cello/Bass. The second system consists of four staves: Violins, Choir, Harp, and Cello/Bass. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Key annotations include 'Harp flourish', 'Flute tr', 'Clarinet flourish', 'Piano flourish', 'Fl. flourish', 'Harp glissando', 'Cl. flourish', and 'Piano'. The Cello/Bass part features a prominent descending minor third followed by a perfect fourth in the final measure of the second system.

Another interruption with a glissando in harp and more upper woodwind flourishes occurs before the theme proceeds. The first half of the second motive enters in piano while the violins play a countermelody, still in harmonics, as Hiccup draws the dragon in his notebook. The second motive of the “Truth Theme” opens as expected but a descending minor third followed by a perfect fourth in the final measure, varies the theme. A cymbal scrape followed by movement upwards from the D pedal in

strings to an F minor triad emphasize Hiccup erasing the missing part of Toothless's tail from his drawing. The vocalization returns and the harmony shifts between triads diatonic to D minor. A rising major scale appears in the choir and horns then stops for a moment as Hiccup drops his pencil, which catches the attention of Toothless, who looks up and makes eye contact with Hiccup. The first motive of the "Truth Theme" variation returns at half the speed of the previous iteration and in a lower orchestration of horns, tuba, and male voices. The theme ends after the second measure coming to rest on an F major chord, suggesting a turn to the relative major.

The orchestration through most of this scene, particularly the string harmonics, solo voice, and surrounding flourishes, creates an ethereal, dream-like quality showing Hiccup is uncertain he really found the dragon. Likewise, the fragmented variation of the "Truth Theme," broken into two measure sections (rather than the usual four measure motives), adds a hesitancy to the cue that matches Hiccup's careful attempt to observe the dragon while remaining out of sight. The shift to lower, more "grounded" orchestration after the characters make eye contact, shows Hiccup's acceptance that he has found the dragon and is not just imagining him.

After the "Wounded" scene, the "Truth Theme" variation does not return until much later after the "Test Drive" cue. In this scene, "The Cove," Hiccup and Astrid, have just discovered the dragons' nest that the Vikings have been trying to find for years. They also learned that the dragons have only been attacking the Vikings and stealing their food to appease their overlord. Astrid is eager to tell Stoick and the rest of Berk what they discovered about the dragons' nest so that the Vikings can eradicate the threat and free all dragons to live peacefully with humans. The "Truth Theme" variation appears as Hiccup stops Astrid from running off to tell the village about the nest. He is afraid that Stoick will not listen and kill Toothless instead of accepting him. The varied "Truth Theme" in this scene emphasizes the truth about the dragon overlord Hiccup and Astrid have just discovered. The variation here is fragmented as it was in the "Wounded" scene regarding Hiccup's hesitancy in communication with

Toothless. In “The Cove” he is unsure about communicating with his father and the rest of the village. The variation also recalls the reading of the *Dragon Book* which demonstrated the Vikings’ tendency to kill dragons on sight, another reason Hiccup is hesitant to reveal Toothless to the village.

The orchestration of “The Cove” also differs from earlier utterances of the “Truth Theme” variation. Instead of string harmonics or horns, here it appears in woodwinds, violins, and harp in a comfortable register for each instrument. Although the variation on the “Truth Theme” is less mysterious sounding without harmonics, it still sounds hesitant because it has the same interruptions as in the “Wounded” scene. The accompaniment in “The Cove” includes gentle eighth note harp movement filling the gap between the two halves of the first motive as opposed to the “Wounded” cue’s flourishes. Likewise, “The Cove” features a “pedal” E as pizzicato notes in the basses instead of a sustained pitch. The same upwards ascent of a major scale from the “Wounded” scene occurs at the completion of the first motive of the varied “Truth Theme.” The cue then diverts to a sustained open fifth E and B held in the strings that leads into Astrid’s theme in accordion and later tin whistle. Astrid’s theme aligns with her decision to trust Hiccup and wait to tell the villagers. Her theme fades away with the scene on a D major chord sustained by low strings feeling incomplete after the E pedal from earlier.

#### Powell’s Scoring for the “See You Tomorrow” Montage

Beyond Powell’s variations and the separate occurrences of the “Friendship” and “Truth” themes, the two themes together highlight other plot aspects, particularly flight. One of these instances already explored in Chapter 3 is the “Test Drive” cue. Another is the “See you Tomorrow” training montage where the two themes together foreshadow the coming flight in “Test Drive.” In the DVD commentary, directors DeBlois and Sanders reveal they planned for a bright and uplifting montage that would show both the trial and error in learning to fly and how Hiccup’s double life was getting harder

and harder to hide.<sup>162</sup> The directors recognized the need for continual music to bring cohesion to this disjunct scene, specifically requesting a musical cue with a “song structure” of verses and choruses that did not necessarily feel like the rest of the score.<sup>163</sup> Many training montages use popular songs as accompaniment such as *Rocky III* (1982) or *Mulan* (1998). These precedents may have contributed to the directors’ preference for a “song form” for the montage’s scoring. They also could have used a “real” song like they did in *How to Train Your Dragon 2* (2014) but either did not want to license one or decided original underscoring would be more effective in keeping “realism” in the plot.

Normally when instrumental scoring is used for a montage it is one continuous cue featuring an important musical theme from the film such as the lighting of the Beacons of Amon Dîn (“The Lighting of the Beacons”) montage in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) or the training montage in *Batman Begins* (2005). This practice is similar to Powell’s writing for the “Forbidden Friendship” montage where he develops fragments of the “Friendship Theme” into the new major version of the theme. In contrast, Powell uses four distinct themes in “See You Tomorrow” that transition from one to the other, creating a coherent piece of music without the monothematic build of other instrumental montage cues.

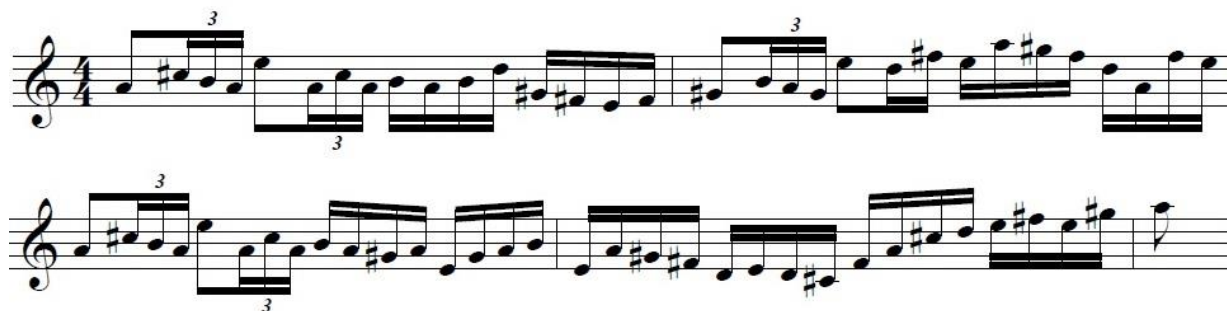
Two of the themes Powell employs for the montage do not appear elsewhere in the film, perhaps to make the sequence not sound “like a score” as requested by the directors. However, the jig-like rhythms of these two new themes played on penny whistle and violins still bind them to the rest of the score through their association with the Celtic tradition. I will refer to these two new themes as the A and C themes for the order they appear in the montage (Examples 4.10 and 4.11).

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<sup>162</sup> “Filmmakers’ Commentary,” 39:08-40:04.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 42:07-42:28.

**Example 4.10: “See You Tomorrow”- A Theme.**



**Example 4.11: “See You Tomorrow”- C Theme.**

In addition to the two new themes, Powell uses the “Friendship” and “Truth” themes, which always occur simultaneously in this cue, so they can be analyzed as one theme (the B theme) for the purposes of the cue’s form. The final theme Powell uses, the D theme, is first heard when Hiccup crafts the tail piece for Toothless.<sup>164</sup> The D theme starts with an ascending minor scale that descends into a triplet. This opening figure coupled with the half note that leads into a perfect fourth dotted eighth-sixteenth note jump that repeats, gives the theme a determined, resolute feel. This opening scale and following triplet are often separated and treated canonically between instruments of the orchestra (Example 4.12).

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<sup>164</sup> *How to Train Your Dragon*, DVD, 34:30-35:05.

**Example 4.12: “See You Tomorrow”- D Theme in canon.**

The musical score shows two staves: Horns (top) and Trumpets (bottom). The Horns part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The Trumpets part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note F#4, and a quarter note E4. Both parts then play a triplet of eighth notes: G4, F#4, and E4. The score continues with various rhythmic patterns and rests, ending with a quarter rest in both parts.

Powell’s alignment of the themes in “See You Tomorrow” creates the form: A-B-transition-C-D-transition-A-B-transition-D-transition-C-transition-B-transition-D-ending. This nontraditional form fits the visuals in a few ways. For example, the transitions between themes tend to line up with the transitions of the visuals. The placement of the B theme fits with the idea of flight, whereas the D theme relates to Hiccup trying to hide his new life. The visual content could account for the switching of the C and D themes the second time through the form. One could also surmise a semblance of the “song form” the directors had in mind if some of the themes were considered verses and others choruses, but it would not be the standard verse-chorus-verse-chorus of many pop songs through the whole cue.

Powell’s scoring of “See You Tomorrow” with its use of multiple themes, especially two that do not appear elsewhere in the film is as far as I know unique to the *How to Train Your Dragon* score. The directors use this montage to set up the idea of flying. Powell, likewise, lines up the “Truth” and “Friendship” themes with the visuals of the trial flights to associate the two themes together with flight.

#### The “Friendship Theme” and “Truth Theme” Functioning Together

The idea of flight with the combination of the major “Friendship Theme” and the “Truth Theme,” is furthered in later scenes. Besides the “Test Drive” scene, flight is also represented in the “Battling the Green Death” cue that accompanies the final battle between the Vikings and the dragon master, the Green Death. Both the “Friendship Theme” and the “Truth Theme” are used a few times in

the second half of this cue. Powell also uses the minor “Friendship Theme” to parallel the action and emotions from “Downed Dragon.”

The “Friendship Theme,” as it appeared in “Downed Dragon,” is the first of the two themes to emerge in this cue. The action during the theme parallels Hiccup and Toothless’s first meeting in the woods. Toothless, still bound in chains, is sinking into the ocean depths. As Hiccup swims after Toothless and tries to free him, the first minor version of the “Friendship Theme” is heard in its entirety only beginning on F instead of the E in “Downed Dragon” (Example 4.13). Once again, Toothless is bound and helpless, at the mercy of Hiccup, who tries in vain to free his friend when Stoick reaches down and pulls his son out of the water. Stoick then dives in to free Toothless and as the burly Viking makes eye contact with Toothless, the second minor version of the “Friendship Theme” is heard in its entirety starting on A instead of the D in “Downed Dragon” (Example 4.14). Although the theme appears the same, the orchestration is varied. A solo violin (played as a fiddle) has the melody, but the bagpipe drone that accompanied the theme in “Downed Dragon” is replaced with double basses playing a tonic pedal in octaves. Additionally, a wordless male choir is present singing most of the notes of the theme as a countermelody. The changes in orchestration reflect the difference in scene, with Stoick freeing Toothless instead of Hiccup. After Stoick successfully liberates Toothless, much like Hiccup did in the woods, Toothless once again spares the life of a Viking, showing the friendship has developed between the dragon and other members of the village. Fittingly, Powell calls up the emotions of life and death from the “Downed Dragon” scene through the same music. Powell’s choice complements the similar visuals and helps the viewer latch onto the similarities with the same music.



**Example 4.13: The minor “Friendship Theme” the first time it appears in “Battling the Green Death.”**  
 The notes of the theme as well as accompanying chords and orchestration are all the same as they appeared in “Downed Dragon.”

Violins and Upper Woodwinds

8va

Horns

Low Strings

String Alone

Horns 8vb

**Example 4.14: The minor “Friendship Theme” the second time it appears in “Battling the Green Death.”**

Solo Violin

Solo Violin and Male Voices

Male Voices

Guitar

Basses

Instead of ending the music with a repeated unison G like he did in the “Downed Dragon” scene, Powell transitions directly into a full iteration of the “Truth Theme,” timed almost exactly with Toothless bursting from the water, pulling Stoick behind him. The theme begins triumphantly in the horns for the first motive, switching to the trombones for the second. The whole orchestra decrescendos creating a more intimate third motive with the lower dynamic that begins with horns as the violins play a countermelody. The orchestration switches to flute, oboe, and violins for the fourth motive. The accompaniment follows the pattern of “Test Drive” with a tonic pedal accompanying the first two motives followed by the same functional chord progression of vi-IV-V-I accompanying the third motive and the Beatles inspired vi-iii-II $\sharp$ -IV-II $\sharp$  accompanying the fourth motive. The calming of the orchestration allows one to hear the “Truth Theme” accompanying Stoick saying “I’m proud to call you my son,” illustrating he has finally come around to Hiccup’s understanding of the truth about dragons as well as a profound awareness of his son’s greatest strengths.

The fourth phrase of the “Truth Theme” is echoed a few times in various instruments. The whole theme then repeats aligning with Hiccup and Toothless taking off into the sky. The second motive is cut off, leading into music similar to the falling music from “Test Drive.” Instead of Hiccup falling, Astrid is falling this time, having lost her grip on her dragon. Toothless catches her and the “Friendship Theme” in major is heard once before the last two motives of the “Truth Theme,” are played triumphantly in the brass. The cue culminates dramatically when Toothless shoots a fireball at the wings of the Green Death.

In the “Battling the Green Death” cue, Powell further connects the “Truth Theme” and the “Friendship Theme” together in relation to flight utilizing the minor “Friendship Theme” leading into the full “Truth Theme” as the two friends take flight. Powell also connects the “Friendship” and “Truth” themes to flight in the closing cue “Coming Back Around.” This cue repeats most of the music from “Test Drive” and parallels the visuals of the first flight with Hiccup and the other teens flying through Berk on

dragons. However, in the second half of the “Where’s Hiccup?” cue, Powell uses the “Truth” and “Friendship” themes together not in relation to flying.

In “Where’s Hiccup?” both themes appear to culminate Hiccup and Toothless’s friendship. The scene opens with Hiccup asleep in his own bed, recovering from the final battle. Powell chooses solo piano to deliver the first and second motives of the “Truth Theme” in a high register accompanied with the same tonic pedal from earlier instances, a middle C this time. As the theme progresses into the second half phrase with the left-hand notes outlining the roots of the chords from the “Test Drive” progression, Hiccup wakes with Toothless’s help and realizes they are both back safely in his house. An excited Toothless leaps around the room as Hiccup tries to calm him, echoed musically in the gentle solo piano, yet at odds with the agitated dragon.

Hiccup is about to leave his bed when he realizes something is not right. He pulls back the blanket to see his new prosthetic foot that must have been attached while he was sleeping. The third measure of the fourth motive of the “Truth Theme” lands on a D minor chord, ii in the home key of C, instead of the expected IV chord from the “Test Drive” progression. The same pre-dominant function of these chords leaves both utterances feeling unfinished. The music fades away as Hiccup sighs and places both feet on the ground, the slight pause emphasizing his shock and hesitancy about his new normal. Toothless sniffs the prosthetic foot curiously as a sustained G enters in the violins resolving the earlier D minor chord (Figure 4.6). The piano repeats the “Truth Theme” an octave lower than before in the right hand while the left hand holds a tonic-dominant pedal. Additionally, the thematic repetition is doubled in the cellos and bolstered by light accompaniment from the other strings.

**Figure 4.5: Toothless investigating Hiccup's prosthetic foot.**



Hiccup hesitantly tries to stand and falls after his first step. Toothless catches him and, leaning on the dragon, the two friends make their way to the door. The second motive of the “Truth Theme” lands on the expected half-cadence with a G major chord that proceeds into the major version of the “Friendship Theme” as Toothless’s broken tail slides into view, visually connecting the friends’ injuries earned in the quest for truth (Figure 4.7). This bond is doubly emphasized by the “Friendship Theme,” orchestrated delicately through piano and light strings. Through the unique orchestration (this is Powell’s only cue with solo piano) and merging of themes, Powell highlights the poignant reunion of friends and offers hope for a new Berk where dragons and humans live side-by-side peacefully.

**Figure 4.6: Shot of Hiccup's prosthetic foot and Toothless's broken tail showing the similarity of their injuries as the two friends walk to the door.**



## CONCLUSION

Positive critical reviews and various award nominations for John Powell's score for *How to Train Your Dragon* reveal that the score factors importantly in helping to convey the film's narrative. Powell had already shown his skill as a film composer in co-composed scores for other DreamWorks animation films such as *Shrek* and *Kung Fu Panda* as well as solo composition in *Ice Age: The Meltdown* and *Happy Feet*. Though none of these scores have been analyzed by scholars, tracing Powell's thematic development of the "Friendship Theme" and the "Truth Theme" in *How to Train Your Dragon* shows that in this film, each theme greatly enhances character development and an understanding of character relationships.

By considering Powell's thematic development in *How to Train Your Dragon* alongside John Williams's in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, one could argue convincingly that—as Frank Lehman suggests—Powell is the heir-apparent to the mantle of master thematic storyteller. Each composer presents musical themes associated with friendship that develop alongside the characters' growing bonds. Furthermore, each composer develops a motive of a theme through the film that expands into a full theme at the first flight between the main protagonist and his creature. These thematic development choices show Powell's similarity to Williams's technique. However, Powell does other things unlike Williams, such as passing his minor "Friendship Theme" through a separate version before reaching the "friendly" conclusion of the major version, showing his sensitivity to the length of time it takes for Hiccup to accept Toothless. Furthermore, Powell takes his "Friendship Theme" through other versions such as the rhythmic variation that becomes a theme of friendship between Toothless and other Viking characters.

Many scholars have considered the work of film music exemplars like Bernard Herrmann and John Williams. Further, research into comparatively younger composers, such as Hans Zimmer and

Thomas Newman, is also on the rise. However, John Powell's music has mostly been ignored. After examining Powell's thematic development and attention to detail in his score for *How to Train Your Dragon*, the author believes he deserves a place in scholarly film music research as well. Yet, further research into Powell is needed. Since this document is the only one to consider an entire score of Powell's through a scholarly lens, one cannot reach a conclusion about his work as a whole. Considering the score for *How to Train Your Dragon*, in addition to the "Friendship" and "Truth" themes, a fuller consideration of the opening battle theme, Astrids's theme, or the development of themes in the *How to Train Your Dragon* sequels is also needed. Additionally, extensive work needs to be done on Powell's other scores in order to fully understand him as a composer. This document is a first important step towards discovering more about Powell's compositional technique.

While this thesis dwells extensively on how Powell's technique is similar to Williams, Powell's connections to Zimmer are also important in understanding the composer. Powell is listed as a composer on the website for Zimmer's studio Remote Control Productions and Zimmer was the one who first introduced Powell to director Terrence Malick, which helped Powell get his start in Hollywood. Some of the more modern influences in Powell's harmonic ideas, such as the modulation upwards by whole step touched on in this thesis, are something one could explore through the lens of Zimmer. While there is more to be done, this document has presented a first look at Powell's contribution to the film music repertoire.

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