CHAPTER SEVEN

LEITMOTIV

The practical application of Joyce’s theory of correspondences is achieved by the skilfully varied organisation of more than a thousand little leitmotivs.¹ Neither before nor since Finnegans Wake has the literary leitmotiv been used so consistently or to such brilliant effect. Before Joyce’s very characteristic development of the technique can profitably be discussed, however, I must define just what leitmotiv is, as I understand the term, and how in general it may contribute to a work of literature. It is not my purpose to compare the uses to which Joyce put the leitmotiv with the methods employed by his predecessors, but some incidental mention of Mann, Proust and others is inevitable in any attempt to clarify Joyce’s procedure. A comparative study of the history of the leitmotiv in literature would be an extremely valuable contribution to technical criticism, but the great exponents of the device have been unlucky in this respect. No extended study of the leitmotiv appears to exist and although there are a number of excellent special discussions, such as Dr. Peacock’s Das Leitmotiv bei Thomas Mann,² the greater part of what has been published is scattered here and there as subsidiary matter in studies of wider scope. The general chapter on leitmotiv in Oskar Walzel’s Das Wortkunstwerk³ is sound and provocative but too short to come to grips with all that his subjects implies. In view of the considerable importance of the leitmotiv in the work of at least

¹ Including literary- and song-motifs; see Atherton, pp. 235 ff. and M. J. C. Hodgart and M. P. Worthington, Song in the Works of James Joyce, New York, 1959; see also Appendix A.
three of the greatest writers of this century—Pound, Mann, Joyce—and its appearance in many places in the work of a large number of others—Zola, Djuna Barnes, Proust, for example—this reticence on the part of the critics is a little surprising and it is to be hoped that the gap will be filled before long. It is, of course, impossible for me to cover the whole field here, even superficially, and I must restrict myself to matters strictly relevant to Joyce.

A comparative study might also be made of the relationship of Joyce's leitmotiv to those of Wagner and other composers. There are many obvious similarities: in Wagnerian opera the musical motif, often a fleeting phrase, is valuable not so much for its intrinsic content as for its structural and atmospheric functions; and in *Finnegans Wake* the verbal motif, no less often a barren enough phrase or trite rhythm, is of importance principally for the overtones and symbolic significance with which it can be charged as it moves from context to context. Beyond one or two comparisons with specific Wagnerian examples, however, I shall not venture here to relate Joyce further to his musical counterparts.

It has become a commonplace of criticism to point out that Joyce's work developed in a period that was conscious of a powerful tension between, on the one hand, the forces of fragmentation and, on the other, those arising from attempts to reimpose order on the fragments by arranging them into artificial patterns. When literature becomes thus fragmented, leitmotiv is an almost inevitable source of reorganisation, as twentieth century writing seems to demonstrate. Joyce was certainly conscious very early in his career of the potentialities of the leitmotiv as a specialised technical device. Although he is nowhere reported to have used the term 'leitmotiv' himself, there are unmistakeable signs at least as early as 'The Dead' of the deliberate use of verbal motifs for structural and tonal effects,¹ while in *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, of course, they are employed with brilliant assurance and, some will say, perhaps a little facilely

¹ For example, the motifs 'leaning over the banisters', etc., D 139, 144, 154, 164, and 'Distant Music', D 164, 167.
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and pretentiously at times. Although, as I have said, the detail of Joyce's books is almost always derived from recognisable external sources, he is, in major technical matters, always less derivative than one at first imagines. He did not, as did many of his contemporaries, combine the activities of author and critic and, though a great innovator, he was much less sophisticated in literary matters than such adulators as Eugene Jolas liked to believe. He was fully conscious of his own greatness—his wife, Nora, told Frank Budgen¹: 'Ah, there's only one man he's got to get the better of now, and that's that Shakespeare!'—but the impression one gains from biographies, letters and conversation with his associates is of a man not wholly in touch with the main stream of English literature, past or present, and not wholly aware of his own relation to it. Indeed, he paid little attention to any but a few great names in literature and worked in an isolation that was not so much arrogant and self-willed as unconscious and naive. As we learn with some surprise, he had not read Carroll until he was well into Finnegans Wake, and then only because somebody had commented on the similarity.² It seems likely that he had never read some of the apparently obvious literary and philosophical models for his work,³ and circumspection is therefore necessary in assessing to what extent Joyce was conscious of his predecessors' use of leitmotiv. Fortunately a little circumstantial evidence is available. He was devoted to the opera and, although he did not like Wagner, he knew his work and was conversant with his technique⁴; he was at least conscious of the existence of Thomas Mann, since he names Der Zauberberg in Finnegans Wake (608.19); he had read some Proust and quotes several titles.⁵ This evidence does not, it is true, amount to very much, but it is probably sufficient to show that at least Joyce did not think he had invented the

¹ Information received from Frank Budgen.
² Letters, p. 255.
³ Mr. Frank Budgen tells me that when he knew him best Joyce's knowledge of Hegel, for instance, was quite slight.
⁵ Atherton, p. 275.
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leitmotiv, as he once thought he had invented Jabberwocky.¹ In any case, Joyce’s debt to earlier models in this matter is probably no greater than his supposed debt to Edouard Dujardin with regard to the stream of consciousness, and that debt must be very small indeed. For better or for worse, Joyce worked out almost all his mature stylistic habits for himself and suffered only the most indirect influence from other writers.

The word Leitmotiv itself is of comparatively recent origin, having been coined by Hans von Wolzogen for specific application to the music of Wagner.² In the musical world Wagner is, of course, the chief exponent of the method, although it has sometimes been suggested that he himself derived the idea in his turn from earlier literary models. Despite the fact that it springs from a long list of antecedents, the leitmotiv proper, in the restricted sense in which I use the word below, is rare in literature before the present century. In embryonic form, however, as a constantly repeated verbal formula associated with persons, places and things, the recurrent motif is of course to be found in the formal literature of virtually all western civilisations. The Homeric epithets and formulae, the refrains and burdens in folk poetry and prayer are direct ancestors of the leitmotiv, and Mann himself was fond of saying that the technique can be traced at least as far back as Homer. The quasi-ritualistic repetition of key-phrases in narrative goes back even further, beyond the origins of writing. A large class of folk-tales is constructed around a constantly recurring line of dialogue. Such stories as ‘Tom Tit Tot’ (260.02) ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ (370.24) and all their many variants are the ultimate formal sources of Joyce’s ‘Prankquean’ (21–3) and ‘Norwegian Captain’ (311–32) with their modulating ‘riddle’ motif.

The main requirement of a true leitmotiv is that it should, as its name implies, lead from point to point; it is, in fact, an essentially dynamic device. Reiteration alone is not enough to convert a phrase into a leitmotiv. Even Gertrude Stein, who,

¹ Atherton, Chapter 5: ‘Lewis Carroll: The Unforeseen Precursor’.

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with the possible exception of Péguy, must be the greatest devotee of repetitiveness western literature has ever known, cannot raise pure repetition to the status of leitmotiv. Real leitmotiv entails a use of statement and restatement in such a way as to impel the reader to relate part to part; each recurrence of such a motif derives in some necessary way from all its previous appearances and leads on to future resurgences, pointing to correspondences and relationships far beyond those that hold between the individual motif and its immediate context. The full course of such a motif, appearing and disappearing, now in full view, now faintly suggested, must be considered as a whole; like Mr. Brown's 'expanding symbols' every successful leitmotiv takes on a life of its own and continually enriches both itself and its contexts as it bears a mass of association from one appearance to another. It will be apparent that an ostinato aside like 'Hurry up please it's time', in Mr. Eliot's The Waste Land, is not leitmotiv in the sense in which I am using the term, since it does not lead the reader from part to part, but—with however rich an irony—functions independently at each statement. Similarly, large-scale repetition of material from the main body of a work does not constitute leitmotiv. The repeated burden of a ballad, for example, which makes a verbal rondo out of narrative, has nothing to do with leitmotiv because, even if the burden is varied, it leads nowhere but maintains a static relationship to the narrative themes. Leitmotiv, to be effective, must in fact grow functionally from the evolving material, yet not recur regularly in a wholly predictable way; it must arouse expectations of its reappearance and yet give new insights when it does recur; it must be a shaping influence, not the fulfilment of predetermined formal requirements; it must have an active, rather than a passive, function. The necessary qualities are much the same as those specified by Mr. Forster for 'rhythm'2:

'not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope.'


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Rather like one of Pavlov’s dogs, the reader is gently conditioned to expect a motif when he is subjected to certain ‘stimuli’. These stimuli may consist of narrative situations, configurations of symbols, thematic allusions, or the presence of other motifs. The process differs from physical conditioning, however, in that both stimulus and response must be constantly varied so that what began as a simple one-to-one relationship may expand into something richly and often mysteriously suggestive. It is just this dynamic flexibility and ever-increasing power of the leitmotiv to evoke and to widen its bounds that saves the technique from degenerating into a dry, profitless and mechanical memory-game. A leitmotiv must emphatically not comply with the definition offered by Mr. Robert Humphrey¹:

‘it may be defined as a recurring image, symbol, word, or phrase which carries a static association with a certain idea or theme.’

The most highly developed motifs in Finnegans Wake attain the maximum possible flexibility of content. Joyce creates, or borrows from popular lore, formal units with an easily recognisable shape or rhythm; into these empty shells he is able to pour almost any kind of content, just as a poetic stanza-form may be filled with virtually any words. As I have pointed out, popular sayings, clichés, proverbs and the like are wonderfully suited to Joyce’s purposes in Finnegans Wake; all he need do is evoke a well-known rhythm in the reader’s consciousness, after which he is free to use his word-play to superpose on that rhythm almost any desired nuance of sense. The rise and fall, the pain and joy of the characters, can be widely and subtly reflected in the changing surface and tone of such motifs. Their flexibility will have become apparent in the examples which I have already had occasion to quote.

Technically the leitmotiv is a highly self-conscious device. It functions primarily at the surface level, within the verbal texture. Clearly it does not commend itself to novelists who adopt a simple and self-effacing style, but it comes quite

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naturally from the pen of a Joyce. Thomas Mann, the most self-conscious of all exponents of the leitmotiv and the real architect of the fully developed literary motif, mixed it into a lucid, transparent, forward-moving narrative style. We are, as a result, constantly impelled to shift our attention from the subject-matter seen through the words to the words themselves, and while this change of focus can often be stimulating in theory, some readers find it, in practice, extremely distracting. No such distraction lies in the way of the reader of Finnegans Wake, in which surface-texture has become all-important. Within it nothing is artificial because all is frankly artifice, nothing is superficial because all is surface. The more clearly Joyce can focus our attention on the surface details of his style, the better we are able to appreciate his meaning. There is never any question of reading through the prose, which has been virtually engulfed by the leitmotiv technique. It is probably true to say that every paragraph in Finnegans Wake is both built up out of pieces drawn from elsewhere in the book and, conversely, capable of being broken down and related to all the diverse contexts from which those pieces came.

Of course the motifs in Finnegans Wake are not all equally functional or dynamic, and there are a considerable number which approximate to what Walzel calls the Visitenkartenmotiv, or what Mr. Forster neatly designates a ‘banner’—although even in the case of Joyce’s simplest adaptations of Homeric epithet and the catch-phrase of Dickensian caricature, he is rarely seen to wave two banners with precisely the same device. Exact duplication is in fact so comparatively rare in this book whose main concern is with modality, that the few examples which are to be found there stand out with particular emphasis; they may well have been used for just that reason.

Stephen Dedalus and the young Joyce, as we know from the notebooks, set great store by static qualities in art. The perfectly poised static moment which made revelation possible was what

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Stephen called the ‘epiphany’. Joyce never entirely abandoned this aesthetic theory, but in *Finnegans Wake* he assimilated it into a mature technique which goes far beyond the imaginative range of the early notebook jottings. Mrs. Glasheen’s assertion that Theodore Spencer was talking nonsense when he stated that Joyce’s successive works are all ‘illustrations, intensifications and enlargements’ of the theory of epiphanies\(^1\) is not entirely justified for, *mutatis mutandis*, the best of the motifs in *Finnegans Wake* serve much the same type of function as do the epiphanies of the early books. Those epiphanies, though frequently effective enough in themselves, tended to halt all forward movement of the narrative, as every reader of *Stephen Hero* is aware; the *leitmotivs* of *Finnegans Wake*, an altogether more streamlined and supple equivalent, are true to their name and always lead the reader on to further variations and relationships. Just as the individual static frames of a motion-picture are given life and movement when resolved on the cinema-screen, so each sequence of penetrating motif-statements is made to fuse into a dynamic image of reality. Even in isolation many of the longer motifs are triumphs of the epiphany technique. ‘Vikingsfather Sleeps’ is an exposure of the total paralysis of Irish civilisation that would have won the harsh Stephen’s astonished approval, while the development of the passage through two major variants shows how much further Joyce’s later manner enables him to go in the analysis of an instant of revelation:

‘Liverpoor? Sot a bit of it! His brayne coolt parritch, his pelt nassy, his heart’s adrone, his bluidstreams acrawl, his puff but a piff, his extremeties extremely so: Fegless, Pawmbroke, Chilblaimend and Baldowl. Humph is in his doge. Words weigh no no more to him than raindrips to Rethfernhim. Which we all like. Rain. When we sleep. Drops. But wait until our sleeping Drain. Sdops.’ (74.13)

‘Rivapool? Hod a briecck on it! But its piers eerie, its span spooky, its toll but a till, its parapets all peripateting. D’Oblong’s by his by. Which we all pass. Tons. In our snoo.

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Znore. While we hickerwards the thicker. Schein. Schore.' (266.03)
'Caffirs and culls and onceagain overalls, the fittest surviva
lives that blued, iorn and storridge can make them. Whichus
all claims. Clean. Whenastcleeps. Close. And the mannormillor
clipperclappers. Noxt. Doze.' (614.10)
The portentous question 'How are you today, my dark sir?'—
the multilingual verbigeration\(^1\) of a wrathful militant society
demanding the abdication of the pacifist—and Piggot-Ear-
wicker's misspelling of 'hesitency',\(^2\) though more fleeting
motifs, are epiphanies of even wider significance.

Whereas Stephen would have built up art out of a sequence
of such independent moments, the mature Joyce preferred to
mobilise a limited number of them into running motifs, whose
power of 'showing forth' would be vastly increased by their
complex interweavings. This new technique is the product of
Joyce's changing world-view. The compartmentalised units
which he saw in his youth, the discrete images of lonely indi-
viduals, each of whose impenetrable faces he carefully and prig-
gishly scrutinised in an attempt to 'pierce to the motive centre
of its ugliness' (SH 23), have become in Finnegans Wake a con-
tinuum where the identifying epiphany is no more than a
momentary illusion, a play of light, still giving insight, but
much broader in scope and capable of being shifted to a virtu-
ally inexhaustible variety of contexts without loss of power.
The leitmotiv, one of the most flexible of all technical devices, is
Joyce's most effective weapon in his struggle to leave individua-
tion behind and create a truly generalised consciousness. To
do this he had to abandon static art and come full circle back
to kinesis; Stephen was obsessed with the problem of how to
capture a 'still' from the motion-picture of life, whereas the
later Joyce wanted to keep the camera of his 'allnights
newseryreel' (489.35) turning with hardly a pause for medita-
tion; he even went to the length of joining both ends of the
film.

\(^1\) See Appendix A; the motif is stated in at least twelve languages.
\(^2\) See Concordance.
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In discussing *Ulysses*, Mr. Robert Humphrey attempts to categorise the many motifs in that book as 'image, symbol, or word-phrase motifs'.¹ He suggests that Stephen’s constant vision of his mother is an image-motif, Bloom’s potato a symbol-motif, and ‘met him pike hoses’ a verbal motif, but all this is true only at the simplest referential level; ultimately, of course, all Mr. Humphrey’s motifs are equally verbal, and Mr. Kenner did well to warn us that in reading Joyce we cannot be too insistent on the need to concentrate most of our immediate attention on the words instead of reading through them.² The point is no doubt a rather trite one, but interpretation of *Ulysses* has long been, and often still is, dogged by too naturalistic a reading of the text, which unduly plays down the linguistic level. In *Ulysses* Joyce has, it is true, often integrated his verbal motifs so skillfully into a naturalistic context that, to use his early terminology, they function dramatically; an illusion of independent existence is created for them. Such is the case with the ‘Penrose’ motif: when Bloom meets the pale young man and immediately afterwards remembers the name ‘Penrose’ (U 170), the leitmotivistic connexion with the earlier passage in which he had vainly tried to recall the name is established by a process so psychologically real and compelling that the reader is, in the first delight at recognition, made to forget how simple a contrivance is involved. In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce abandoned such trompe l’œil methods altogether. Here the motifs are neither superimposed on, nor embedded in, anything but a matrix of other motifs and motif-fragments; no motif can seem out of context in such company, though some will provide greater opportunities for organic development than others. The greatness of Joyce’s art in *Finnegans Wake* lies in the brilliance with which he selects and juxtaposes groups of motifs to develop his materials in the best of a great many possible ways. While feeling his way toward this optimum thematic development Joyce seems to have made a practice of arbitrarily scattering a

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few motifs here and there in his text to serve as stimuli for his imagination. Such a motif, originally included more or less regardless of context, always becomes a source of inspiration to him. Like the grain in the oyster which grows into a pearl-blister, it is slowly encrusted with symbols, images, and overtones which diffuse into and finally become an essential part of the context.¹ The British Museum manuscripts indicate how very often this was Joyce’s working method. It is worth noting, also, that, until Joyce had worked out the horizontal structure of his episodes, the motifs appeared only very thinly in the texts, and often not at all for long stretches. As soon as the basic fabric was clear in Joyce’s mind the motifs began to develop abundantly, building up the harmonic structure and tying the sprawling cycles together with taut bonds stretched from point to point.

It is clear that in Finnegans Wake any such classification of motifs as Mr. Humphrey’s is impossible from the start. The distinction between image and symbol, if it ever had any validity with respect to Joyce’s earlier works, certainly has none here. Recurrent ideas appear now in one guise, now in another. Anna Livia may be seen as a woman, remembered as a dream-vision, heard in the ripple of the watery prose, suggested in the punctuation of a phrase. The only important distinctions now to be made have to do with function.

There are a great many ways in which leitmotivs may function to develop a book. They define character, give accents to the line of narrative development, control the rhythm of the structure and impose order on what may without them seem disorderly. A series of motifs, however slender, creates a skeletal grid-pattern which, provided it has some truly functional relationship to the book’s themes, helps the reader to organise his responses in phase with those themes. Indeed, this ordering and unifying function of the leitmotiv is probably its greatest strength. I shall attempt in the following pages and in my final

¹ Cf. Mr. M. J. C. Hodgart’s happy analogy of iron filings drawn by a magnet: M. J. C. Hodgart and M. P. Worthington, Song in the Works of James Joyce, New York, 1959, p. 27.
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chapter to demonstrate some of the ways in which motifs serve to organise and unify *Finnegans Wake*.

By means of the *leitmotivos* and a host of key-words related to them Joyce constructs the several frames of reference which underlie the scattered component parts of his artificial universe. These are the co-ordinates of his 'proteiform graph' (107.08) to which we may appeal to get our bearings whenever we are 'lost in the bush' (112.03). Usually a number of such referential grids are present simultaneously. Joyce's normal method is in fact to operate on three main planes at once: in the foreground is the manifest content of the episode in question, corresponding to the manifest content of a dream; in the middle-ground is a mass of highly symbolic, but often puzzling, material, scattered about like the stage-properties of a dramatic producer with an obsessional neurosis, and corresponding to the dream-symbols which are frequently incomprehensible until they are referred to the 'latent content'; in the background are the motif-controlled grids or frames of reference against which the symbols can function—often in widely divergent ways. The grids provide keys to the true latent content of the episode. 'Shem the Penman' (I.7) may be taken as a convenient example of this structural procedure. The surface content is a description of the habits and appearance of the 'bad boy' of the book—writer, alchemist, outcast, black in skin and in mind, hated by his righteous brother and by the world. In the middle-ground is a tremendous array of symbolic flotsam and jetsam, at first apparently quite diverse, though almost all of a rather sinister nature. In the background are at least two main frames of reference by means of which all the foregoing can be rationalised: the first is the well known series of allusions to Joyce's own life which makes Shem a close personal analogue of Joyce himself and also reveals a hidden autobiographical significance in many of the symbols, while the second (which until now does not seem to have been noticed) is a full set of allusions to the fourteen stations of the cross; the latter gives point to the profusion of Golgothic imagery and retrieves it from its at first apparently aimless decorative function, while at the same time
the Christ story helps to develop both Shem and Joyce as forms of the murdered and resurrected god.

Thomas Mann had been able to achieve impressive pathos and suggest the machinations of fate with extraordinary vividness by suddenly reintroducing a motif which had originated long before in his narrative; similarly, by establishing the apparent inevitability of a motif’s resurgence, he could create an atmosphere charged with foreboding. Past and future could be controlled at a distance with great power. Joyce’s best motifs share such potentialities with those of Mann, but the very universality of Finnegans Wake makes the full deployment of their evocative and pathetic powers a difficult matter. In the works of Mann and Proust, as to some extent in those of Wagner, though the future lies somehow under the control of the leitmotiv, what this reflects and expresses above all is the mysterious and spiritual significance of the past; in Finnegans Wake, on the other hand, where past, present, and future tend to become undifferentiated, the recurrence of the motifs creates the effect of a cosmic simultaneity and immediacy of experience—the Eternal Now which I have discussed above. While Joyce undoubtedly gains thereby a breadth of context and an illusion of universality, his leitmotivs, caught up in a whirl of reincarnation, lack something of the inexorable finality that they have in, say, Siegfried. The best of Mann’s and Wagner’s motifs often serve to drive the plot forward with a strong pulse and, conversely, they themselves constantly gain in driving power from repeated immersion in the main stream of a strongly developing narrative. As examples of this kind of thing one might quote the deeply moving correspondences of the first and last parts of Tonio Kröger or the early foreshadowings of the ‘Götterdämmerung’ music in Das Ring. This source of forward-driving symbolic energy is largely denied to Joyce’s motifs because of the weary round of cycles, which, however intense, are comic rather than tragic or pathetic; although things can never improve in the world of Finnegans Wake, they equally cannot grow any worse. Proust, of course, had already used correspondences to annihilate time; Joyce, with his re-entrant time sphere,
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improves on this: he retains time and yet holds it wholly within his grasp, so managing to have the best of both worlds. Time is, was and will be, but there is only a certain amount of it, which we simply use over and over again. Each Age apes the preceding one so that the cycling motifs, which in Mann’s hands represent a constant creative imitation, become instead in Finnegans Wake symbols of an amusing but oppressive repetitiveness:

‘Mere man’s mime: God has jest. The old order changeth and lasts like the first.’ (489.09)

If Joyce’s motifs are less dramatic than those of Mann and Wagner, they are even more highly charged with significant content. A representative example of the kind of symbolic condensation made possible by a Joycean leitmotiv is the closing phrase from Anna Livia Plurabelle: ‘Beside the rivering waters of, hitherandthithering waters of. Night!’ (216.04).¹ These words, in themselves suggestive enough perhaps, but not very remarkable, form an epitome of the whole chapter and bear the spirit of Anna with them whenever they appear. Not only are rippling water and darkness evoked, but also the tree and the stone and the two washerwomen of the immediate context. Hither and thither, a pair of opposites, represent Shem and Shaun. Since the phrase is the tail-end of a tale told of Anna Livia and the conclusion of the major cycle of Book I, it always implies, when it recurs, the end of one (female) cycle and the beginning of the next (male) cycle. The wording provides a clear connexion with the whole Great Cycle of Finnegans Wake, since ‘rivering’ echoes the ‘riverrun’ with which the book opens. Earlier we had met Anna in a highlighted passage ‘by the waters of Babylon’ (103.11) and hence this Biblical allusion is now faintly heard as a burden underlying ‘Beside the rivering waters’. The motif therefore draws into those contexts into which it intrudes, overtones of captivity, exile, and whoredom. But its symbolic content is still not exhausted, since in Finnegans Wake the City—Dublin—is usually the male, HCE. The introduction of the female city of Babylon therefore relates the

¹ See Appendix A.
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'change-of-sex' theme\(^1\)—already present in the conversion of the washerwomen into the sons, Shem and Shaun—to the parent figures Anna and HCE. As was Bloom in nightmarish nighttown, HCE the city is transmogrified into an unwilling whore and suffers many indignities in that role.\(^2\) That Joyce is consciously using this potentiality of his motif may be demonstrated from another of its occurrences—that at 355.15–20. Here the motif is amalgamated with another from III.4\(^3\) and is used to conclude the male word-battle of Butt and Taff, which forms a parallel to the dialogue of the two women in I.8. In this latter context Joyce makes the change of sex—from a male back to a female cycle—quite explicit:

'Nightclothesed, arooned, the conquerods sway. After their battle thy fair bosom.' (355.19)

For a writer who delights in indirection, one of the most fruitful potentialities of the *leitmotiv* is its capacity to bring off effects by remote control. Joyce was temperamentally inclined to like the idea of action at a distance by mysterious control. He was fond of manipulating people and events from behind the scenes, as the altogether extraordinary 'Sullivan affair'\(^4\) makes clear. The distant 'Godlike Artist' was one of Joyce's early ideals which he never quite outgrew. There are several varieties of remote control exhibited in *Finnegans Wake*, some of which, such as the 'anastomosis' idea, I have already touched on. Most important of all is the way in which one part of the universe of *Finnegans Wake* can be modified and controlled, stopped and started, by the introduction of motifs from another part at some suitable point. These are the 'Strings in the earth and air' that Joyce takes such pleasure in pulling.\(^5\) The sudden appearance of motifs from the end of I.8 in the children's bedroom scene (572) will serve as an example. At 572.07 there begins a series of questions and exclamations:

2. There seem to be sexual overtones in 'hitherandthithering'; cf. 'the conquerods sway' in the statement at 355.19.
3. See below, p. 178.
—Wait!
—What!
—Her door!
—Ope?
—See!
—What?
—Careful.
—Who?

Taken in isolation, these words might not seem to echo anything else in *Finnegans Wake*, but a quite unmistakeable condensation of the concluding paragraph of I.8 in 572.16–17 points to a correspondence of the dialogue and the half-obscured questions and responses at 215.29 ff. The establishment of this correspondence induces the reader to attribute to these questions and exclamations (572.07–14) both a pace and a rhythm in harmony with the strongly suggested model. The whole passage is brought to a quiet full close in 572.17. These changes of tempo and tone are not inherent in the writing at this point in so far as it relates to the immediate context of the chapter; they are imposed on it by the controlling *leitmotiv*-complex in I.8 from which the passage draws only a small handful of verbal echoes. These echoes, though they amount to no more than three or four words, are nevertheless adequate to direct the whole scene. The ‘salting’ of a passage in this way with snatches from other contexts is of course not new in *Finnegans Wake*, but there is perhaps some originality in Joyce’s courageously allowing the whole rhythmic unity and tone of a sequence to be dependent on such a small amount of introduced matter.

Apart from the very marked emphasis on the verbal level of the motifs, the methods I have been describing are not exclusively Joycean in character and, indeed, many writers have achieved comparable results with organised use of symbol and image. Having chosen the verbal motif as his unit, however, Joyce did find applications for it which made a definite contribution to the art of prose. Joyce shared Thomas Mann’s preoccupation with the problem of how to make the spoken word function like music. In an attempt to approximate to the
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thematic structure of musical forms Mann had experimented with large verbal blocks built up from rich matrices of motifs, in which the serpentine alternations of symbol and theme would produce something like harmony and counterpoint. By going beyond conventional language in the 'Sirens' episode of Ulysses Joyce achieved something which approximated even better to the desired effect, but always in these experiments Joyce failed to transform the Nacheinander into a true Nebeneinander. The closest approach to verbal counterpoint in Ulysses is the kind of syncopation by truncation exemplified in:

'First Lid, De, Cow, Ker, Doll, a fifth: Lidwell, Si Dedalus, Bob Cowley, Kernan and Big Ben Dollard.' (U 276)

The same device is to be found in Finnegans Wake, though more skilfully handled. The following line from 222.06, for example, reads at first like a series of dactyls:

'good for us all for us all us all all'

The preceding words, however, 'a chorale in canon', indicate that we are to read it as a series of telescoping stretti, thus:

VOICE 1: good for us all
VOICE 2: ............good for us all
VOICE 3: ..................good for us all
VOICE 4: ......................good for us all

This is, I suppose, quite amusing, but the simultaneity of statement is achieved by suggestion only. Elsewhere in Finnegans Wake, however, having created a polysemantic style which could sustain true counterpoint, Joyce was able to state motifs simultaneously in significant interwoven patterns which are probably as close an analogy to polyphonic music as any linguistic procedure may be. The simultaneous statement of two motifs is quite frequent in Finnegans Wake but it is a device which always presents considerable technical difficulties since the requirements are conflicting: the individual motifs must remain clearly identifiable, yet if the counterpoint is to function properly the marriage of the two must be as close as possible. Joyce is by no means always entirely successful in these experiments with counterpoint, but quite a good example is to be found at 355.15
where there is a major recurrence of the ‘rivering’ motif, which I have already discussed.\(^1\) This is counterpointed against the ‘rolling barrel’ motif,\(^2\) which is stated eight times (two four-part cycles) in III.4. Specifically, the first and last—and hence, according to the laws of *Finnegans Wake*, identical—versions of the barrel motif are quoted in combination, so that the binding together of the beginnings and ends of cycles is made even richer. The separate elements of the statement may be set out as follows:

(a) ‘Beside the rivering waters of, hitherandthithering waters of Night.’ (216.04)

(b) ‘While elvery stream winds seling on for to keep this barrel of bounty rolling and the nightmail afarafrom morning nears.’ (565.30)

(c) ‘While the queenbee he staggerhorned blesses her bliss for to feel her funnyman’s functions Tag. Rumbling.’ (590.27)

And in combination:

(abc) ‘While the Hersy Hunt they harrow the hill for to rout them rollicking rogues from, rule those racketeer romps from, rein their rockery rides from. Rambling.’

‘Nightclothesed, arooned, the conquerods sway’. (355.15)

Both ear and eye apprehend the two motifs of female ALP and male Shaun; this is true counterpoint. Mr. Melvin Friedman’s cautious assertion that *Finnegans Wake* achieves counterpoint by implication only,\(^3\) is accurate enough with regard to the less successful and less thoroughly digested parts of the book, such as the ‘canon’ quoted above, but when everything was functioning properly, as here, Joyce fully achieved his aim. The achievement of this technical analogy does not, of course, in itself add musical qualities to the text, but in bringing about an even closer association of symbols and ideas than is possible with normal linguistic usage, it lends words some of the immediacy and succinctness of musical expression. Oskar Walzel was careful not to confuse the two arts\(^4\):

\(^1\) See Appendix A.

\(^2\) See Appendix A.


Leitmotiv

‘Das Leitmotiv fügt, soweit es inhaltlich deutet, nicht der dichterischen Form eine musikalische an, sondern es gibt dem Inhalt der Worte durch seine eigene Formung etwas hinzu.’

The symbolic content of all three component parts in the central amalgamation of motifs quoted above is made to interact in a very vital way: Night and Day, two opposites, are resolved in the somewhat surrealist image of huntsmen clad in their night-attire harrowing the hills in the morning, while the object of their hunt is identified as HCE, the stag in (c); the sexual overtones of (a) are reinforced by the clearly sexual significance of (c); the identification of Shaun’s barrel with the floating coffin of Osiris is here emphasised by the association with the hearse (abc).

There remains one other highly important application of the leitmotiv in Finnegans Wake which must be mentioned. This is the technique of amassing motifs into a matrix or complex.¹ There are two main types of motif-agglomeration in Finnegans Wake. The first and simpler type is nothing more than a block of juxtaposed motifs and associated symbols—a further example of the Rabelaisian catalogue-technique to which Joyce was so inclined. Every so often Joyce virtually halts the forward movement of the narrative in order to build up a great pile of undiluted motifs, thematic statements, and symbols, which, to the weary reader trying to work his way straight through the book from cover to cover, come as a welcome, well-earned relief from his struggles with the sinuosities of Joyce’s thought elsewhere. The longest of these resting places is the list of 389 attributes of Finn MacCool in I.6 (126–39). One might suspect, or fear, that the juxtaposition of individual items in these lists is of some obscure significance, but, although there is certainly much to admire in the wit and appositeness of each revealing little phrase, Joyce’s working methods make it clear that the order of items is usually unimportant. So little attention did Joyce pay to their order that he allowed friends to insert his additions, giving them considerable freedom in the details of placement.

¹ See particularly the ‘Letter’, Chapter Eight, II, below.
Leitmotiv

The following unpublished manuscript note is revelatory¹: ‘If possible please insert the following 5 sentences in D, beginning about 2 lines from top at regular intervals and ending about 2 lines from end, of course not breaking any phrase or group of phrases:’

‘Baile-Atha-Cliath, 31 Jun, 11.32 A.D.’
‘Fit Dunlop and be Satisfied’
‘In the March of Civilisation’
‘Buy Patterson’s Matches’
‘Boston (Mass), 31 Jan, 13.12 P.D.’

By halting the narrative for a moment and filling the pause with such concentrations of motifs, Joyce is able to create a series of nodal points where the reader can contemplate the primary materials at his leisure; the essence of the book is refined off from the more impure discursive matter and is shown forth for a moment before the cycles begin again.

The second type of motif-agglomeration, and by far the more important, is the true interacting leitmotiv-complex, of which the Letter is the most outstanding example. The complex of motifs, acting as a whole rather than as a collection of separate parts, is one of the most interesting aspects of the structure of Finnegans Wake. It is a technique which is on the whole used sparingly, but it is all the more powerful for that. A complex allows motifs which have become highly charged from their previous—or, in the case of Finnegans Wake, their future—contacts, to react with one another on a grand scale, and so create a harmony of idea, colour, and sound, which impressively heightens the symbolic power of all the constituent parts.

A good example of a rich leitmotiv-complex held together in a tight synthesis of tone, rhythm, and imagery, is the celebrated closing section of ‘Anna Livia Plurabelle’ to which I have already alluded several times (215–16). In the last two paragraphs of this chapter almost every phrase is a major motif. From their source here they spread either singly or in groups, and with varying

¹ One of sixteen loose MS sheets in the Poetry Collection of the Lockwood Memorial Library, University of Buffalo; the note is undated and bears no indication as to the identity of the recipient; the passage referred to is now 420–21.
degrees of wit and relevance, into almost all regions of the book. The themes with which they deal—the primary principle of historical recurrence and the alternation of unity and diversity—are raised in these quiet and simple statements far above the level of shaping forces to become meditative poetry of the highest order. The motifs seem to emanate as essences from the being of Anna Livia herself, from the slumbering City of Dublin, and from fern-covered Howth Head. After many long excursions through time and space, having churned up masses of trivia and quadrivia which all tell the same story in miniature, we re arrive at those opposed archetypal figures which generate every lesser manifestation.