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HOW DO MOTIFS ENDURE AND PERFORM? MOTIF THEORY FOR THE STUDY OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVES

BY

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Summary

Motifs are often confused with and overshadowed by themes. This article argues for the unique identity, functions, and rhetorical force of motifs. Synchronically, motifs are recurrent performers having progressive and cumulative force in a singular narrative. They often build on and acquire strength diachronically through motifs within a given literary tradition. Literary theory on motifs is supplemented here through the intertextual and performative values of motifs as a part of three phases of narrative writing and experience: *emplotment*, *plot*, and *explotment*. Thus, these interrelated aspects of motifs show how they survive through time, reappearing and performing in narratives. A discussion on the motif of light in Luke-Acts demonstrates the value of this approach.

Sommaire

Les motifs sont souvent confondus avec les thèmes et éclipsés par eux. Cet article argumente en faveur de l'identité unique des motifs, de leurs fonctions et force rhétorique. Synchroniquement, les motifs sont des protagonistes récurrents ayant une force progressive et cumulative dans un récit particulier. Souvent ils se construisent et acquièrent de la force diachroniquement grâce à d'autres motifs dans une tradition littéraire donnée. La théorie littéraire sur les motifs est complétée ici par leurs valeurs intertextuelles et performatives dans les trois phases d'écriture et d'expérience narrative : *mise en intrigue*, *intrigue* et *ex-intrigue*. Ainsi, ces aspects étroitement liés illustrent comment les motifs survivent dans le temps, réapparaissent et exécutent leurs rôles dans les récits. Une discussion sur le motif de la lumière dans Luc-Actes met en évidence la valeur de cette approche.

I. Introduction

William Freedman's essay from 1971, "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," challenged interpreters to indicate the specific aesthetic value of motifs in a literary work, going beyond their mere identification.[1] Indeed, the assumption is that when a motif is present, it must add something to the work in question. Rather than searching somewhat arbitrarily for motifs, Freedman helps interpreters to identify them and evaluate their contribution with more precision. His essay is superb, yet it needs to be enhanced by contemporary narrative theory. Accordingly, this article includes studies that underline the aesthetic and interpretative value of motifs. Yet, its main theoretical contribution concerns the intertextual and performative values of motifs by elucidating their role in three areas: the narrator's configuration of the story (*emplotment*), the reading/listening encounter of the story (*plot*), and the post-reading experience (*explotment*). Placing motifs within these dynamic phases of composition and reception illustrates the life cycle of motifs, both their diachronic and synchronic aspects.

This article then seeks to meet two main objectives.[2] First, it argues for the distinct identity and functions of literary motifs, because they are often confused with and overshadowed by themes and other literary devices. Second, it demonstrates how motif theory can be used in the interpretation of biblical narratives as well as other ancient narratives. An underlying presupposition here is that both factual and fictional narratives share certain intentions, structures, and techniques. Narratives, including historiography, seek to provide an encounter for readers, not only to supply information. Thus, with this perspective and my interest in early Christian narratives, I will provide examples of motifs from biblical literature and from other media. Finally, the essay explores a motif in Luke's two-volume work, the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles*.

II. Literary Motifs: Their Unique Identity and Basic Functions

It takes significant effort to work through the maze of definitions for motif, because the term occurs in different fields of research and has various meanings and applications in literary and biblical criticism.[3]

[1] Freedman (1971).

[2] This essay is based on my presentation at the International Conference of the Society for Biblical Literature in St. Andrews, Scotland on 11 July 2013.

[3] See, for example, the critiques of definitions and applications of motif theory by Ben-Amos (1980), Bremond (1982), and Daemmrich (1985).

This fact is compounded within a multilingual research community in which each language can bring various nuances to the notion of motif. The study of motifs belongs primarily to the fields of thematology (or thematics) and aesthetics. In these fields, scholarly consensus has not been reached concerning the definition of motifs.[4] Of course, the pragmatic solution is always to choose the definition that one prefers, to explain it, and to apply it consistently. Yet, this should not hinder our search for greater clarity and more efficient application of literary terms. This article seeks to provide some clarity on the complementary nature of the diachronic and synchronic values of motifs. Yet, in order to avoid misunderstanding from the start, I state here that my argument is mainly driven by the question of repeated elements in a single literary work, what they look like and how they perform. The terms *motif* and *leitmotif* are used most often with this meaning, especially in narrative theory.

Motifs: Some background

In a reductive manner, when one seeks definitions for motif in literary dictionaries, they agree on one thing: a motif is a repeated element. Indeed, they are by nature mobile. Diachronically, they can be studied as a part of historical poetics. Synchronically, they can be analyzed for their contribution in a single work. Both approaches are useful and mutually beneficial. Before entering the English language through French, the word *motif* experienced some transformations. Deriving from Latin's *motivus* (movement or cause of movement), the term assumed various nuances in the French language, from "reason for acting" to "the subject that dominates a work," used first in music (1703), painting (1824), and then in other arts.[5] Thus, in the field of comparative literature (e.g., folkloristics), the term *motif* often occurs in a diachronic sense, as a repeated element in various works, for example, the "loathly lady" who is in reality beautiful, or the man who is fatally enchanted by a fairy

[4] For Jost (1998) xvi, xix, German literary theory has been influential in lexical work for thematics, whose terms have been adopted in most Western literary theory. This especially concerns the distinction between motif and theme. In Jost's classification of motifs, my understanding of motif would be closest to or emblematic of "the Anglo-American school of thematics." Jost uses the notion of motif that has been used in folkloristics, that is, a diachronic motif, found in various literature and cultures. Themes, on the other hand, represent the individualized, concrete renderings of these motifs in a particular work. Consequently, Jost (Ibid.) xx writes, "the number of themes is theoretically unlimited, that of motifs, limited."

[5] Rey (2010) 1369. My translation.

lady, etc.[6] Similarly, Boris Tomashevsky speaks of *migratory plots* ("sujets itinerants") as an object of historical poetics, such as "the abduction of the bride" and "the helpful beast."[7] This is similar to an older term, *topos*, which signifies "recurrent concepts or formulas,"[8] which was known in ancient literary theory. Lucretius, for example, made ample use of repeated elements in *De rerum natura* for didactic purposes as a compositional aid, and as an aesthetic feature inspired by the epic style of Homer, Empedocles, and especially Ennius.[9]

In contrast, contemporary literary theory tends to prefer motif's synchronic value as a repeated element *in a single literary work*.[10] The term *leitmotif* (a guiding motif), which was originally a musical expression in German, also occurs with this meaning.[11] Thus, hereafter, I use *motif* in the sense of a recurring element in a single literary work. This nuance – a shift from multiple works to a single work – is due to the current emphasis in literary criticism on synchronic values rather than diachronic ones. We will return to this distinction in the section on the intertextual value of motifs.

The correct identity of motifs compared to themes and symbols

Owing to frequent ambiguity between motif and other terms, it is constructive to indicate some basic distinctions between motifs and other literary devices, especially themes and symbols. In fact, this process of defining motifs over against other terms can be observed in several dictionary entries on motif.

6 Abrams (1999) 169. Jost (1988) xxi classifies recurrent elements related to patterns of human behavior in the category of 'types' (e.g., 'archetypes' and 'prototypes').

7 Tomashevsky (2001) 273. His use of 'motifs associés' and 'motifs libres' (pp. 275–7) bears some resemblance to Seymour Chatman's 'kernel events' and 'satellite events' (Chatman [1978] 53–56).

8 Abrams (1999) 169. Prince (2003) 55 makes the distinction between motif and *topos* "which is a specific complex of motifs that frequently appears in (literary) texts (the wise fool, the aged child, the *locus amoenus*, etc.)."

9 Ingalls (1971) 235–6. See Shipley (1970) 204 for motifs as recurrent elements in one or more works, thus maintaining their synchronic and diachronic nature.

10 Abrams (1999) 169–170; Abbott (2008) 237; Alter (1981) 95; and Würzbach (2005) 322.

11 Scholars also use term *leitmotif* to describe this literary device in a single work. When used in this sense *leitmotif* is distinguished from *motif* a diachronic figure found in various literary works. See "motif" in Baldick (2008) 215–16. So also Prince (2003) 48: "A frequently recurring motif, related to and expressive of a character, situation, or event." However, Prince (2003) 55 maintains the distinction between motif and leitmotif. In fact, Jost (1988) xxx–xxi uses *leitmotif* in a similar way to my description of a synchronic motif.

Motifs and themes. Motifs and themes often occur interchangeably in everyday speech and in scholarly literature.[12] In fact, *motif* and *theme* are generally considered the two most common forms of narrative repetition.[13] François Jost indicates that distinct nomenclature is still evasive: "One critic may call *motif* what another designates as *theme*."[14] Yet, there appears to be consensus that they are distinct and explained over against the other. In this sense, I follow literary scholars who view the terms as separate and complementary.[15]

There is growing consent, however, that the primary difference between these concepts – when discussing single literary works – is that motifs are normally concrete (e.g., repeated objects, expressions) and themes are abstract (e.g., concepts, main ideas, values). H. Porter Abbott, for example, defines motif as "a discrete thing, image, or phrase that is repeated in a narrative. Theme, by contrast, is a more generalized or abstract concept that is suggested by, among other things, motifs. A coin can be a motif, greed is a theme."[16] This distinction is found outside Anglophone literature. For example, Bernard Dupriez provides this definition: "Le thème dans l'œuvre sera plus général et souvent plus abstrait que le motif…Un même thème aura différents motifs, un même motif peut servir à différents thèmes."[17] Other examples illustrate their complementary relationship such as the 'clock' motif for the 'time' theme in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*. Or the use of a window motif in *Wuthering Heights* to "support a highly complex interplay

[12] In biblical literature, for example, Robert KARRIS (2009) 5, who also applies William Freedman's theory on motifs to Lukan literature, switches repeatedly between 'motif' and 'theme' in his work. For other examples of these terms as synonyms, see BOCK (2012) 303–4; BABAN (2006) 1–2; and FIELDS (1997) 22, 189. In fact, Fields – applying TALMON's definition (1966) 39 – understands motif as *message* or *condensation of ideas and thoughts* (pp. 19–21), which are supported by submotifs (pp. 22–3). It would be easier to consider the first as *theme* and the second as *motif*. Dennis J. HORTON has applied Freedman's motif theory in his book *Death and Resurrection: The Shape and Function of a Literary Motif in the Book of Acts*, but I have not been able to evaluate his use of Freedman's theory.

[13] Abbott (2008) 242.

[14] Jost (1988) xvii. Other formulations of Jost (Ibid., xviii) are emblematic of this distinction between motif and theme, but they are used in the opposite sense: "The motif is abstract and reflects teleological thinking. The theme, on the contrary, is practical and concrete…. In short, the theme is a specific expression of a motif, which is universal in essence. Its individualization is the result of the passage from the general to the particular (Raymond Trousson). It is usually embodied in a plot."

[15] Abrams, 170; Daemmrich, 566–7; HAWTHORNE (1994) 299; Abbott (2008) 95; Prince (2003) 55; Würzbach (2005) 323–4; DUPRIEZ (1984) 302; Sage (2006) 239.

[16] Abbott (2008) 237. So also Hawthorne (1994) 299 and Prince (2003) 55.

[17] Dupriez (1984) 302.

of three themes: escape, exclusion, and imprisonment."[18] In short, "Themes are implicit in motifs, but not the other way around."[19]

Motifs and symbols. Motifs and symbols also occur as synonyms in academic literature. Both carry symbolic values, pointing to something beyond themselves (e.g., themes). Two elements, however, distinguish these concepts. First, a symbol may occur once, while a motif is "necessarily recurrent and its effect cumulative."[20] Second, the symbol is an event or thing described, whereas the motif participates more often in description as Freedman explains: "It slips, as it were, into the author's vocabulary, into the dialogue, and into his imagery, often even at times when the symbolized referent is not immediately involved."[21]

In addition to symbolic value, Freedman adds another significant qualification: a motif can be formed by a pattern of related expressions, such as "a family or associational cluster of literal or figurative references to a given class of concepts or objects, whether it be animals, machines, circles, music, or whatever."[22] This clarification is paramount, as it opens possibilities for exploration, but it also increases the risk of placing too many things under the banner of motif. For this reason, the interpreter's task is to justify the components of a given motif and demonstrate its value.

At this point, having clarified the distinction of motifs over against themes and symbols, it is constructive to gather various elements above in order to propose a working definition of a synchronic motif. The motif is a recurring element in a single literary work, which might be an unchanging element (phrase, object, etc.) or a group of literal and figurative expressions from a particular semantic domain (a family or associational cluster) whose collective function is to act symbolically, revealing progressively to the reader – with cumulative effect – "subtly what the incidents perhaps tell him bluntly."[23]

Motifs can be quite variable, ranging from mere repetition of an expression to more subtle patterns. A few examples suffice to illustrate this elasticity. In Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Mrs. Western repeatedly claims that she "knows the world."[24] The narrator of the book of Judges uses

[18] Abbott (2008) 95.
[19] Ibid., 95.
[20] Freedman (1971) 124.
[21] Ibid., 125.
[22] Ibid., 128.
[23] Ibid., 124.
[24] Jost (1988) xxi.

"king" often enough to illustrate the growing tension concerning leadership (e.g., "In those days Israel had no king" Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, a subtle yet forceful motif develops through railroad imagery, which foreshadows the heroine's suicide.[25]

The previous discussion evinces the distinct identity of motifs over and against other terms. They deserve their place in literary analysis, because they play a unique role in narratives as the following section elucidates.

Some basic functions of motifs

Within the definition in the preceding paragraph, some of the motif's functions have transpired. Here I wish to make some functional aspects more explicit without claiming to provide an exhaustive list. Additional performative attributes will be explored in later sections. For the reading experience, motifs can act as recurrent, inanimate performers participating, with various degrees of force, in the exploration of a work's questions and themes. Freedman summarizes this aspect: "The motif, then, may become a part of the total perspective, pervading the book's atmosphere and becoming an important thread in the fabric of the work."[26] This is the underlying *synecdochic* function of motifs. As a part of the whole, a motif has its own role to play. Yet, how does a motif actually function to contribute aesthetic quality and pleasure? The motif generally contributes to one or all of three aspects of a literary work: cognitive, affective, and structural.[27]

Cognitively, a motif can reveal something about a work's characters, setting, or theses and themes. For example, the repeated phrase « Barkis is willin' » in *David Copperfield* signifies Barkis's devotion to Clara Peggotty.[28] In the book of Judges, fire imagery repeats several times to characterize Samson's irrepressible fury (Judg 14:15; 15:4–5, 6, 14).[29]

Affectively, a motif might contribute to the emotive content of the work, seeking to elicit certain responses from the reader. In theatre, the flute in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* is a motif that evokes idyllic notions. In contrast, the menacing storm motif in various

[25] Ibid.
[26] Freedman (1971) 125.
[27] Ibid.
[28] See Abbott (2008) 95.
[29] See Alter (1981) 95 and Resseguie (2005) 45.

media often accompanies scenes of dread or immanent conflict. In the Gospel of John, variations of "the hour has/will (not yet) come" raise an ominous anticipation in readers about Jesus' death according to divine direction.[30]

Structurally, the motif might help describe the action of the story. Its regular appearance adds to the narrative's unity, which allows readers to follow and experience the exploration of the work. In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the green light motif contributes to the structure of the novel. The light appears at different points (early and late), and its green hue represents hope, especially Gatsby's desire to recapture Daisy's love.[31] The link between motifs and plot structure will receive more attention further below.

Consequently, equipped with these aesthetic and interpretative qualities, motifs can enrich narratives and are worth exploring. The discussion now turns to practical theory about how to identify and evaluate motifs with greater precision.

III. Practical Notions on the Identification and Evaluation of Motifs

The identification of a motif depends on various factors. Objectively, the motif's presence must call attention to itself to some degree. Subjectively, it depends on the reader's ability to recognize and appreciate this technique, whether intentional or not. Some motifs are central to the work while others are peripheral. Some motifs are so subtle that one might notice and enjoy them only in successive readings or viewings. In other words, it is fairly easy to identify a recurring phrase such as Jesus' voice in Revelation: "He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). However, it is more challenging to trace literal and figurative expressions of a common class or association that occur in various levels of discourse (e.g., action, embedded dialogue, asides, etc.).

[30] John 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 16:2, 4, 21, 25, 32; 17:1.

[31] A suggestive phrase in Fitzgerald (2004) 180 is "Gatsby believed in the green light." In addition, Nick compares the image of the green light to the vision that early settlers might have had when coming to America. Crucial to the understanding of this motif's symbolic aspect and its force is that the reader discovers later that this light stands on Daisy Buchanan's dock.

Criteria for identifying motifs

Two main criteria exist for establishing the presence of a motif in a literary work: frequency and avoidability (or unlikelihood). A motif is necessarily recurrent; however, no specific number of occurrences establishes the presence of a motif. This depends on the work and its length. The motif must recur often enough and be used beyond cases of mere coincidence or necessity. In short, motifs must "pervade the atmosphere sufficiently to assure that they will be at least subliminally felt."[32]

The second factor, *avoidability*, means "the contexts in which the references appear or the uses to which they are put (extra literal uses, for example) do not *demand* references from the field of the motif."[33] In some way, the occurrences need to attract the reader's attention, not only by their repetition but also by their uses. For example, automobiles in a story about a mechanic are difficult to avoid, especially if the main setting is a garage. References, however, to automobiles and automobile-like things in contexts where they are unlikely could be evidence of an automobile motif.

When one perceives a motif, some basic questions for charting the motif's construction are: how, where, and in which relationships do the occurrences appear? Who uses the various expressions: the narrator, the protagonists or antagonists, or even characters in the embedded level (parables, stories, and speeches)? If the motif in question goes beyond an *unchanging* element (a phrase, setting, sound, etc.), then the interpreter should explain the family or associational cluster that permits placing various expressions together. These clusters might represent semantic domains such as weather, geography, trees, scrolls, thoroughfares, etc. In short, what notion or reality links the occurrences?

Having established the presence of a motif, the next step is to evaluate its performance.

Criteria for evaluating a motif's performance

A motif can have various degrees of pragmatic force. The factors described below indicate what can strengthen a motif so that it is perceived and meaningful to the reader. Freedman provides five constructive criteria for evaluating the efficacy of a motif as a literary technique toward

[32] Freedman (1971) 126.
[33] Ibid.

the work and the reader: (1) frequency of recurrence, (2) avoidability or unlikeliness of appearance, (3) significance of contexts, (4) coherence, and (5) symbolic correlation.[34] We will consider these criteria first and then explore my contribution regarding the motif's intertextual and performative values in the next sections.

The first two criteria, frequency and avoidability, have been described. These elements add to the work's aesthetic value and make a deeper impression on the reader when the motif occurs frequent and extensive enough in the work in a way that the contexts do not necessarily demand it. Freedman explains, "There would seem to be a law of diminishing returns here, the efficacy of the motif beginning to decline at the point where unlikelihood begins to shade into unsuitability or frequency into tedious repetition. Maximum power will therefore probably be achieved at the degree of frequency and improbability just short of this negative tendency, a point that varies from work to work."[35] In short, a successful motif is neither too obvious nor too discrete; it avoids overuse and paucity.

The third criterion concerns the significance of the contexts in which the motif occurs. The potency of the motif increases when it appears in climactic points of a work. This is particularly strengthened "if the symbolized referent of the motif is in the fore at these points."[36] In narratological terms, the cumulative force of the motif is enhanced in moments when narrative tension is particularly felt, either increasing or decreasing in the reader's reception of the story.[37] This will be elaborated further below in relation to plot.

The fourth criterion regards the coherence of the various elements of the associational cluster that compose the motif. In other words, do they fit together? Are they relevant to the principal end of the motif as a whole? Alternatively, do they ramify into a variety of unrelated purposes? The underlying principal is "the closer the association between the components of the cluster the more unified their effect."[38] Hence, the motif's aesthetic quality and its cumulative effect depend in part on the degree to which the motif coheres.

[34] In addition, readers might find useful Daemmrich's (1985: 569–70) description of motif patterns in contrast to those of themes.

[35] Freedman (1971) 126.

[36] Ibid., 126–7.

[37] For an excellent treatment of narrative tension, see Baroni (2007), especially pp. 130–1.

[38] Freedman (1971) 127.

The fifth criterion concerns the motif's symbolic value. Is the motif appropriate to the referent that it symbolizes? A motif of circularity is more appropriate to a book about circular, repetitive fortune than a story about a love triangle.[39] Therefore, the interpretative and pragmatic force of the motif depends also on its appropriate correlation to the referent, since the reader needs to make the connection between the two in order to grasp and appreciate more fully its function in the narrative. When the reader captures something of the motif's symbolic significance, then the motif has evoked, along with other rhetorical devices, what is *meaningful* in the narrative.[40] The logic of this is that repeated elements can be an indication of what is significant to the author and, presumably, also to his or her readers. This is particularly relevant to narrative with ideological values, since motifs can have a role in the interpretation of the narrative by undergirding the explicit and implicit ideological values developed throughout the work.

The following sections (IV and V) seek to expand on the previous theoretical discussion by examining the intertextual and performative values of motifs. These aspects, as far as I have seen, have not been explored in the way that I describe them here. We will first consider the intertextual function then the performative function, both in relation to *emplotment*, *plot*, and *explotment*.

IV. Intertextual Function of Motifs for Biblical Narratives

In this section, we explore the question of motifs as a part of a network of texts, namely, their intertextual value, their literary origins (diachronic aspect) and uses in later texts (synchronic aspect). It is helpful to place these aspects within various phases of writing and reading narratives. The illustration below shows the life cycle of a motif from a written source into a new composition (emplotment 1), then experienced by reader (plot), then assimilated by reader (explotment), and then incorporated again into a reader's own composition (e.g., emplotment 2), and so on. This helps to portray motifs from diachronic and synchronic perspectives.

[39] Ibid.
[40] Abbott (2008) 241.

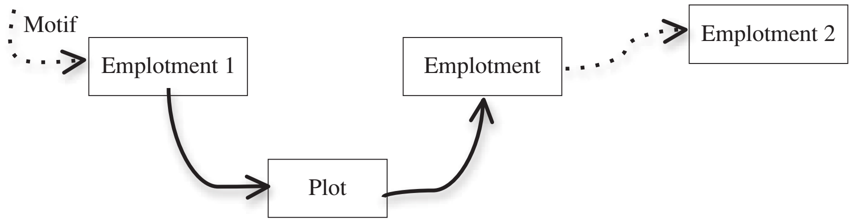

Figure 1. The life cycle of motifs via emplotment, plot, and explotment

Intertextual function and emplotment (diachronic view)

Motifs often acquire significance over time within a particular literary tradition. Biblical narratives, for example, display frequent borrowing of motifs from other sources. Motifs occur to make a point, portray characters, or highlight scenes, because readers – presumably some – were able to recognize and appreciate these allusions. This link between texts illustrates well the complementary nature of the diachronic and synchronic values of motifs when motifs are taken up and appropriated in new contexts.

Here we consider motifs from a diachronic perspective in relation to the concept of *emplotment*, the processes by which narrators compose narratives.[41] Motifs may be understood as a "moveable stock device," which have manifested themselves in various genres, times and places.[42] As for biblical narratives, authors wrote within the perspective of Jewish theological historiography assuming Israel's meta-narrative. Thus, they expressed certain historical information and ideological values, both explicitly and implicitly. To this end, authors adopted terms, expressions, and analogies to contribute to this nexus of texts for their readers' cognitive and experiential encounter. A very clear example of this borrowing and appropriation is Luke's use of thoroughfare imagery such as roads, paths, streets, and ways, in literal and figurative senses. When Luke describes the early Christian movement as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), he may have appropriated one or more oral (e.g. Lk 1:76–79) and written sources (e.g., Is 40:3–5; Mark 1:2–3;

[41] For the terms *emplotment* and *mise en intrigue* in the field of historical narratology, see respectively Hayden White (1987) 7–11 and Paul Ricoeur (1983) 66–104.
[42] Würzbach (2005) 322.

and Gen 18:19; Exod 33:13; Pss 25:4; 27:11; Prov 10:29; Mal 2:8).[43] Indeed, biblical motifs – like the 'way motif' – were mobile, borrowed and appropriated in historical, prophetic, and poetic texts. They then assumed greater intertextual force when they were placed in an anthology (or canon). Similar to the motif above, most motifs in Christian literature have their roots in Jewish literature and this aspect was reinforced (for later readers) through canonical interrelatedness.

Intertextual function and plot (synchronic view)

From the readers' point of view, whether ancient or contemporary, many often read (and still read) with this literary and religious sensitivity, that is, reading and appropriating texts as a part of a sacred story. This discussion follows current narrative theory by emphasizing the reader's role in the progressive exploration and experience of the narrative's questions (*plot*). Thus, if a motif is present, how does it work toward the investigation of questions *and* simultaneously work on the reader? In other words, how does it add fuel to the narration and engage the reader? For this type of analysis, a first attempt can be made with the authorial audience in mind, then for other types of readers. For example, this approach could also be extended to the study of reception among groups of empirical readers. This is precisely where interpreters of ancient narrative can benefit from contemporary narrative theory, especially rhetorical and reception studies, which focus on the relationship between texts and readers.

Thus, when biblical readers demonstrate a play on a diachronic motif (i.e., a meta-motif or "stereotypical motif"[44]) and its interpretative value, this strengthens their arguments for a significant motif in a particular work. This reveals simultaneously something of the author's *emplotment*, and how it might have had a greater effect on the reader (via *plot*) because of its intertextual, pragmatic force. This shows the intrinsic link between the diachronic and synchronic study of motifs. Of course, this begs the question how much the reader(s) knew about a given motif and the stories in which it had already been a part. This is not always possible to demonstrate, but the interpreter can provide plausible suggestions based on the text at hand and other historical material.

[43] See the discussion in MORGAN, *Encountering Images*, 134–140.
[44] AUNE (1987) 173.

This discussion then provides a suitable introduction to the question of the performative function of motifs within a specific work and their possible effects on readers.

V. Performative function of motifs in relation to plot and explotment

If motifs are literary actors in the narrator's repertoire, then it is reasonable to examine how motifs help to guide the readers' interpretation and seek to affect their exploration and experience of the narrative. This analysis can be performed in relation to *plot*, the reader's progressive encounter of the narrative's unfolding questions, or in relation to *explotment*, the reader's appropriation of the motif after the reading experience. In both cases, the interpreter provides a description of the readership, whether implied, authorial, or empirical, etc. These lines of inquiry can help explore the relationship between the synchronic and diachronic values of motifs, namely, how they were and *are* experienced and how they continue to exist and perform in various media, from one generation to the next.

Motifs and Plot

Whether it is possible or not to demonstrate the author's *intentional* construction of a motif, interpreters can still evaluate how an identified motif seeks to lead readers, progressively and cumulatively, to understand various elements of the narrative. For example, given the ideological content of historical narratives, motifs can play a part in the demonstration of explicit and implicit argumentation. They underscore the rhetorical strength of these texts and the experience that they seek to evoke through literary devices. In short, motifs play a part in the overall encounter of narratives, whether factual or fictional.

In agreement with certain scholars who give more attention to the reader in the equation of plot,[45] this notion cannot be reduced to the notion of conflict, change, story, or story structure. Rather, plot can be conceived as the progressive exploration of a work's central questions about an individual, group or nation, etc., namely, a cognitive and affective encounter with the unfolding description of real and imaginary situations

[45] See, for example, Phelan (1989) 115, 155; Baroni (2007) 40–1; and Morgan, 'Emplotment, Plot and Explotment', 80–3.

and questions. For this reason, Natascha Würzbach's term, "plot-intensive motif" is insightful. This type of emphatic motif manifests itself as a part of the narrative's central questions. For this to happen, the criteria above for an effective motif are met in such a way that the motif enriches the cognitive, emotive, and structural aspects. As Würzbach elucidates: "A motif usually builds around a nuclear action sequence which can take different forms and cover more than a single event. Plot-intensive motifs stand at the centre of the logic of action, while less intensive motifs remain peripheral and do not significantly affect a text's narrative progression or plot."[46] In this sense, plot-intensive motifs have a role to play in the cumulative experience of narratives. They enhance the progressive development of the narrative in moments when narrative tension is particularly felt, either increasing or decreasing on the readers' level. Thus, similar to other types of actors, human and inanimate, the motif has a synecdochic role, as a part of the whole, as in a tapestry or in a symphony. During the narration, plot-intensive motifs can be subtle, almost unfelt, while in other moments, they come to the fore either through the description of action or speech, etc. It works *toward* the advancement of the narration, and it also works *on* readers, seeking to elicit various responses from them.

Finally, staying on the pragmatic level, I would like to suggest what could happen to the continued relationship between motifs and readers during the post-reading phase, or *explotment*.

Motifs and Explotment

Just as many motifs existed before entering another literary work and performing their roles, so motifs can continue to live after the readers' encounter of the narrative. Motifs can play a role in the reading event and then contribute to the shaping of readers' lives and their modes of expression (e.g., literature, music, etc.). *Explotment* then describes the notion that the relationship between narratives and readers can continue for a period of time. For example, the relationship may continue through re-readings of the narrative, as well as conscious or unconscious appropriation or rejection of the narrative's explicit and implicit values. Some readers return to their favorite narratives, both factual and fictional. Conversely, other readers might have a loathing for certain stories because of what they represent or claim. In the former case, motifs can

[46] Würzbach (2005) 322.

be integrated into a reader's life story and continue to enjoy further existence and to perform in "real life," and subsequently appear in another form of literature (see fig. 1).

Readers will recognize that this portrays a facet of reception research. For situations in which audiences are no longer available to direct observation, then texts (or other tangible expressions of thought) must be examined for elements shedding light on the reception of one or more parts of another literary work. If texts are not available, then the interpreter can attempt to conjecture a scenario based on the image of the reader (i.e., the implied reader) deduced from a text (e.g. from biblical literature). In the latter case, this analysis (without texts) is admittedly problematic. Nevertheless, this step can help to imagine how the intended audience might have responded to the narrative and its rhetorical elements.

In the case of contemporary research, observation can be performed on empirical readers of literature. It can be beneficial to fields that examine the relationship between people and texts, such as anthropology, historiography, and religious studies (e.g., reception analysis). For example, motifs enjoy much attention by regular readers of biblical texts, who voluntarily (perhaps not always consciously) absorb and apply motifs to their own life contexts. This raises the question how motifs are incorporated into contemporary expressions of faith: fiction and nonfiction, music, poetry, and film. In sum, one can attempt to trace the connection between the life of a motif and the three phases of literature (*emplotment*, *plot*, and *explotment*). This illustrates the diachronic and synchronic values that motifs can exemplify. We now consider an illustration of these notions through the motif of 'light' in Luke-Acts.[47]

VI. Demonstration: The Motif of Light in Luke-Acts

In this final section, I demonstrate how certain occurrences of 'light' (φῶς *phōs*) form a motif in relation to the phases of *emplotment*, *plot*, and *explotment*. As stated above, a motif can be composed of various elements. Thus, the first step consists of identifying specific occurrences of the word 'light' as well as sources of light, for example, sun, moon, lamp, etc. These words can have both literal and figurative meanings. For the purposes of this article, however, this discussion will be limited to the most significant occurrences of φῶς.

[47] For a fuller treatment of a motif in biblical literature using this method, see Morgan for a study on the 'way motif' in *Encountering Images*.

Emplotment. Regarding Luke's compositional choices and techniques ('emplotment'), he uses 'light' seven times in his gospel and ten times in Acts. These occurrences have a literal meaning seven times and a figurative one ten times.[48] The occurrences cover a significant part of the two volumes, ranging from Luke 2:32 to Acts 26:23. They are fairly well distributed, though occurring more than once in certain passages: Luke 11:33, 35 and in the accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 22:6, 9, 11 and again in Acts 26:13, 18, 23. Luke employs light on the action level (description) and others in an embedded level (e.g., teaching and speeches).

From an intertextual view, Luke presumably wishes to engage readers through their knowledge of light as a common metaphor for the divine sphere in Jewish religious literature and other religious and philosophical traditions.[49] For example, multiple uses of light ('ôr אוֹר) represent God and his activity in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., 2 Sam. 23:4; Job 18:5; Psa. 27:1; 43:3; Is. 2:5; 60:19; Prov. 6:23; Mic. 7:8–9).[50] In addition, 1QS 3:18b-25a mentions several entities in relation to divine light: 'realm', 'prince', 'ways', and 'sons'. Furthermore, Luke's audience was certainly acquainted with some important uses of light in Messianic descriptions in oral tradition and Christian literature.[51]

Plot. Concerning the motif of light within the readers' cognitive and experiential exploration of the narrative's main questions ('plot'), it is significant to note that readers encounter figurative notions of darkness and light very early in the narrative through Zechariah's prophecy. This (fresh) revelation subtly identifies Jesus as a dawn from on high who would come to those in darkness and in the shadow of death, offering passage from one sphere to another (Lk 1:78–79). It is clearly a metaphor

[48] In the following list, 'L' stands for literal and 'F' for figurative. Luke 2:32 (F); 8:16 (L); 11:33 (L); 11:35 (F); 12:3 (F); 16:8 (F); 22:56 (L); Acts 9:3 (L); 12:7 (L); 13:47 (F); 16:29 (L); 22:6 (L); 22:9 (L); 22:11 (L); 26:13 (L); 26:18 (F); 26:23 (F).

[49] In other works of antiquity, BDAG (BibleWorks v.9) provides these examples of φῶς in relation to the divine sphere: "the light of God" (τοῦ θεοῦ φῶς, *Ael. Aristid.* 28,114 K.=49 p. 528); "immortal light" ἀθάνατον φῶς (SibOr 3, 787; "word [that is] the light of God" (λόγος … ἐστὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ φῶς, Tat. 13, 2); " the light spoke" (εἶπεν τὸ φῶς, TestJob 4:1); Sarapis as "common light to all men" (κοινὸν ἅπασιν [*sic* ἅπασιν] ἀνθρώποις φῶς, Ael. Aristid. 45, 33 K.=8 p. 97 D.); and Isis as "light to all mortals" (φῶς πᾶσι βροτοῖσι, hymn to Anubis fr. Kios [IAndrosIsis, p. 139] 7).

[50] For the fundamental interpretative role of 'light' in the Old Testament, see Spicq (1991) 1619–22.

[51] E.g., Mt 4:16; 17:2; Jn 1:4; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; 2 Cor 4:6; 1 Pt 2:9; Rev 22:5.

of salvation, of spiritual transformation, as the image elicits for readers the idea of reconciliation with God: "to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1:79). Several of the occurrences of light will build on this initial imagery of light and darkness, orienting readers in the cosmic struggle between forces of good and evil.

In fact, readers quickly encounter the first occurrence of φῶς in another prophetic utterance in Simeon's blessing of Jesus. His words clarify the nature of Jesus' visitation: "a light for revelation to the nations, and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk 2:32). Scholars have noticed the programmatic import of Simeon's utterance.[52] As one of Luke's theological emphases, 'divine revelation' will have a dual focus through Jesus' mission, which is extended not only to Israel but also to the nations. Something will become clear to those outside Israel (the effect of revelation). In addition, as a light, Jesus will also be the glory (or splendor) for his people. From this point on, the reader will encounter one episode after another that show individuals and groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, who receive Jesus' light (teaching, presence, salvation) or refuse it. For this reason, the beginning of this motif is one of the interpretative keys for Luke-Acts. In fact, this picture might have evoked in Luke's readers various allusions to Jewish scriptures, such as in Isaiah (especially 49:6; but also 9:1–2; 42:6–7; 51:4–5). Fitzmyer also suggests an allusion to Isaiah 46:13 (LXX) where salvation is juxtaposed with glory: δέδωκα ἐν Σιων σωτηρίαν τῷ Ισραηλ εἰς δόξασμα.[53] In the Lukan text, the parallel between "peoples" (v. 31) and "nations" (v. 32) in relation to "salvation" and "light" clearly removes any doubt about the extent of God's salvific activity beyond Israel. In the reading experience, this light imagery – via new revelation anchored in ancient texts – elicits anticipation in readers about Jesus as the source of light and seeks fulfillment in the rest of the narrative. Will this promise happen or not? If so, how will it happen?

Luke's readers encounter the next occurrences of φῶς in Jesus' teaching through illustrations of revelation and its reception. Jesus' instruction should burn openly like a lamp and people are encouraged to enter into its light (Lk 8:16; 11:33, 35). The antithetical notion of darkness is implicitly and explicitly present in these contexts. Green's intuition is helpful: "'The light in you' interpreted against this metaphorical horizon, speaks

[52] See, for example, Bovon (1991) 142; Tannehill (1986) 42–3; Green (1997) 148; and Johnson (1991) 55, 57.

[53] Fitzmyer (1970) 428.

to the essential stance one has taken toward the kingdom."[54] Jesus also uses the expression "the sons of the light" (Luke 16:8) to describe those who have entered his light, who, interestingly, can still learn from their contemporaries ("the sons of this age"). Finally, toward the end of Luke's first volume, a subtle touch of irony appears when Luke describes Peter (a son of the light), who while waiting in the courtyard "near the light" (πρὸς τὸ φῶς) denies his teacher during his night-trial (Lk 22:56). His denial of Jesus clashes with this imagery and evokes for readers the thick darkness in this part of the narrative.

In the second volume (Acts), readers discover several uses of φῶς that link the disciples to Jesus. They reflect the disciples' greater understanding of and engagement in Jesus' mission of revelation and salvation. The first two occurrences accompany the appearance of Jesus to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3) and the angel to Peter in prison (Acts 12:7). Four uses (Acts 22:6, 9, 11; 26:13) will echo this first mention of physical light in Jesus' appearance to Paul. After various scenes of spiritual illumination (the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, Cornelius and Peter) that illustrate Luke's theological project, readers come across a central portrayal of Jesus' disciples through Paul and Barnabas's citation of Jewish scriptures: "I have placed you as a light to the nations so that you might bring salvation to the end of the earth" (Is. 42:6; 49:6). This link to Jesus' own calling, revealed early in the narrative and again rooted in Jewish scriptures, provides continuity in God's plan and for the people of Israel. In effect, Paul and Barnabas claim that Israel's mandate was now theirs. This, Luke writes, brought joy to those of "the nations" in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:48).

The next three occurrences of φῶς illustrate for readers Paul's encounter with the risen Christ. The power of this light is underlined as "an intense light" (φῶς ἱκανόν Acts 22:6), which reduces Paul to blindness (now in darkness) "due to "the brightness [glory] of the light" (Acts 22:11). Fitzmyer perceptively observes: "The description of the 'light from heaven' grows with each mention of it."[55] In another defense passage, Paul evokes again for Festus and Agrippa the presence of this light in connection with Jesus' appearance (Acts 26:13). Yet, here Paul continues his account by revealing what Jesus spoke to him: Paul will open the eyes [of the nations] so that they turn from darkness to light, from

[54] Green (p. 466) in his discussion about the relationship here between 'eyes', 'darkness', and 'light' and the macro narrative (1997) 465–6.
[55] Fitzmyer (1998) 758.

the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18).[56] Then, if the reader should have any doubt concerning the missional link between Israel, Jesus, and his disciples, Luke cites Paul's summary of the prophets' and Moses' message, namely, that the Christ would proclaim 'light' to Israel and the nations (Acts 26:23).[57] Again, Luke invites the reader to consider the strong contrast between darkness and light. Thus, the motif of light closes with this evident connection toward the end of the second volume.

This analysis suggests the performance of a plot-intensive motif, because the motif characterizes Jesus and his disciples (especially Paul), who are the main protagonists of Luke's two-volume work. 'Light' never characterizes Jesus' adversaries in the spiritual or human spheres. The motif begins with Jesus in Luke 2:32 and closes with him in Acts 26:23, which also indicates its range from an early to late part of the long narrative. It is certainly not an overused motif; yet, the motif occurs often enough and in significant moments to make its presence felt. The intertextual links with Israel's scriptures bolster the work for the reader's understanding and experience. As regards the coherence and symbolic value of the motif, it lucidly portrays divine illumination, a light coming from God through Jesus and his disciples and leading to reconciliation with or a greater understanding of God.

Explotment. Concerning the explotment phase, the readers' assimilation or rejection of the motif (e.g., Theophilus) as a part of the narrative, this step is problematic because we have no sources indicating the motif's continued life after the reading event. To explore this question then, we must have recourse to the 'implied readers' of Luke's narratives. The question of readers' rejection of the motif of light does not seem likely, since Luke assumes his audience's interest in and acceptance of the narrative's argument. One can presume that Theophilus and readers like him received encouragement for their faith through the diachronic and synchronic values of the motif of light since the motif appears first in a fresh prophetic utterance (i.e., via Simeon) and works toward fulfillment in Luke's two-part work. Yet, it is also rooted in ancient prophetic texts that readers knew and considered authoritative.

[56] If interpreters wish to widen the search, seeking to flesh out the broader idea of illumination in Luke-Acts, then this type of analysis moves into the realm of theme (an abstract idea), which would include the above references to light, as well as verbs of illumination (e.g., 'shine'), and instances where some type of illumination takes place regardless of the vocabulary that is used (e.g., "opening eyes" in Luke 24:31 or the spiritual enlightenment of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40).

[57] Ritt (1983) 1072–3.

Perhaps then early readers received assurance and were inspired to continue the mandate, similar to Paul and Barnabas, as bearers of this same divine light, revelation from the God of Israel. They might have enjoyed the play on opposites, sometimes quite subtle, between light and darkness; clear and hidden; and sight and blindness. These antithetical categories pervade Luke-Acts and betray strong ideological inclinations, which Luke's implied readers likely shared and continued to integrate into their own Christian meta-narrative. Therefore, as one thread of the tapestry of motifs in Luke-Acts, the motif of light was plausibly meaningful and inspiring to Luke and his readers. Among other literary elements, this motif helped shaped the messianic movement's identify in contexts where other groups claimed to have access to divine light and carry it to others. As the appropriation or unpacking of the plot in one's thought or life, this clearly lies in the domain of 'reception history'. Thus, one could explore, for example, other early and later Christian writings to see if the motif of light was appropriated and took part in other forms of literature and if there might be some literary connection with Luke's usage.[58]

VI. Conclusion

I have argued for the value of motifs in the analysis of biblical narratives by elucidating their distinct identity and their diachronic and synchronic functions. Since there are various definitions and applications of the term, it was first necessary to define motifs, especially in contrast to themes and symbols. Freedman's theory has been especially constructive for highlighting their unique identity and aesthetic value, which was further extended by current narrative theory. I have also contributed to motif theory by emphasizing the intertextual and performative force in relation to phases of composition and reception: *emplotment*, *plot*, and *emplotment*. This has demonstrated that diachronic and synchronic approaches to the study of biblical motifs are mutually beneficial.

Current narrative theory places emphasis on the synchronic, which was demonstrated by the example of the motif of light in Luke-Acts. Indeed, as recurrent performers, motifs participate, often subtly, in the progressive and cumulative development of narratives. Often working through

[58] See, for example, Conzelmann discussion of uses of φῶς by various religious and philosophical groups, TDNT, IX, 324–34, 348–9.

description – or "behind the scenes" – motifs express on the readers' level what is happening overtly on the level of action. Regarding biblical narratives, given their literary and theological links within a strong religious and literary tradition, a vital link exists between the motif's intertextual value and its performance in a given work. Often participating in the ideological content of theological historiography, biblical motifs can play a role in the demonstration of their narratives' explicit or implicit argumentation. As was true in Antiquity, motifs continue to appeal to readers by enhancing their understanding and experience of ancient and contemporary stories.

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