

Natascha Würzbach / Simone M. Salz
Motif Index of the Child Corpus

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Motif Index of the Child Corpus

The English and Scottish Popular Ballad

Translated from the original German manuscript
by Gayna Walls



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1. Introduction

The motif has aroused much interest in both folklore and literary studies. In folklore studies motifs are seen as indicating the spread of genres or types, or as the starting point for establishing cultural or regional features. The question of continuity and change, and also the diachronic and synchronic analysis of texts as to their use of motif, is not only relevant to folklore studies but also important for literary research, where the individual text is the focus of consideration, and specific features of authorship, genre, period and nationality are studied. There is much to be gained from a combination of the findings of both disciplines.

Motif collections must form here the basis for further research. No study has yet been made however of F.J. Child's collection of English and Scottish ballad-types from the point of view of motif. Stith Thompson cites the Child corpus as one of his sources in his *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-58), but there are very few references to the Child edition and even these relate to ballad variations in other countries, which Child merely mentions in his commentary.¹ It is not only the lack of adequate classification of the motifs of the Child ballad-types which has prompted the present motif index to the Child corpus. A new perspective on the motif question has also influenced its structure.² We shall therefore explain in the following the specific concept of the motif which underlies this Index, and its importance for the lexicographical classification of motifs.

A motif is the abstract representation of an idea which is realized concretely in individual texts. Motifs such as "adultery", "theft" or "disguise" can be presented in a text with various participants, diverse motivation and in different situations. The tension between conceptual potentiality and textual realization inherent in the motif not only constitutes its fascination but also contributes to the problems involved. This influenced the setting up of our motif index. The frequent occurrence of a motif as a moveable stock literary device, its paradigmatic recurrence, can only be classified in abstract formulation. We thereby move away from its concrete realization in individual texts, its syntagmatic integration which has to be interpreted separately each time. The task of a motif index is in the first instance to classify the paradigmatic recurrence of a motif, describe its features as a moveable stock literary device and indicate its distribution in the literature. We have not covered the syntagmatic integration of a motif into individual texts, and it is therefore left to the user to follow his or her own research interests in that area.

The thematic content of a motif derives from the components of character, action, locality, object and disposition. The character and action components are functionally related, and can be given differing emphases in a particular motif. Thus in motifs such as

¹ See Appendix: References to Child ballad-types in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (p. 247-49). We have only mentioned examples which relate to the motif as defined by us.

² See N. Würzbach, "Theorie und Praxis des Motiv-Begriffs - Überlegungen bei der Erstellung eines Motiv-Index zum Child-Korpus", in: *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 38, 1993.

"murder", "love against family's wishes" or "rivalry between two men over a woman", the "action" component comes more to the fore than the delineation of characters, whereas the opposite is the case with "character motifs" such as "beggar" or "otherworldly being". Nevertheless, even motifs whose primary component is the character are in an action context, indeed it is this context which makes the realization of the character possible. Motifs defined by locality, too, such as "greenwood", throw light on the characters or relate to the action as potential arenas. Similarly, in the case of "object motifs" there is a close connection between the object and the action context, for example the "ring" (as identification; as marvellous token of fidelity etc). Finally, character and action also come into relief in "disposition motifs", which encompass the experience of the characters, their attitudes and moods ("jealousy", "remorse", "loyalty", "pride", "longing (for lover)" etc). They may also be relevant to the action, especially as in the folk ballad "dispositions" are conveyed through actions and speech. It is clear therefore that character and action are fundamental to the concept of the motif.

The possible content components of the motif can be categorized according to "person" (into characters, actions and dispositions), "space" (into localities and objects) and "time" (into courses of action). This clearly recognizable deictic orientation of the motif is the criterion for distinguishing the motif from the related moveable stock literary devices of "theme" and "material". "Themes" do not show any points of deictic orientation (cf. the theme of "love" compared to motifs such as "love against family's wishes", "death from love" or "adultery"). On the other hand in material like "Romeo and Juliet" or "Bluebeard" the deictic orientation is more precise than in the motif.

Identifying a motif is invariably an act of interpretation, so that any final decision may be subject to debate. In defining the thematic content through a formulation, with its concomitant value implications, and in thereby choosing a certain level of abstraction, we are operating within a difficult area spanning the poles of conceptual potentiality and textual realization of the motif. The definition of the motif which we have taken as our basis requires us to include deictic orientation in our formulations, in order to mark the difference in status between the motif and other moveable stock literary devices. In compiling the motif index of the Child corpus, therefore, we had in certain cases to reformulate existing motif terms ("betrayal" instead of "betrayers"). It was also necessary in some cases to add short supplementary phrases, to underline the nucleus of action in a motif ("otherworldly being, encounter with"; "messenger, sending of"; "identity, discovery of"; "ring (as evidence of victory in combat)"). Although it is relatively straightforward to distinguish between motifs and material, it proved more difficult to establish the boundary between motif and theme in the case of motifs of disposition. These have hardly any deictic features, and could therefore equally be classified as themes. Even here, however, the nucleus of action and implied constellation of characters can be highlighted by supplementary phrases: longing (for lover), fidelity (of lovers to each other; beyond the grave).

In identifying motifs and including them in the Index we followed certain criteria. We have defined the motif as having a certain degree of importance within human experience and as therefore signalling something out of the ordinary. There is necessarily an element of subjectivity involved in the assessment of this general importance, and a

decision regarding the status of a motif "in retrospect", so to speak, was not always easy. A further major criterion for the determination of motifs was also their importance within the corpus under investigation. This could be gauged according to the frequency of their occurrence, i.e. their distribution, but this factor did not always coincide with their general importance. So for instance although the motifs "pregnancy", "followers, recruitment of" or "horn signal" occur relatively frequently in Child's folk ballad-types and are therefore included in the Index, their significance in a wider context is debatable. In addition to the above criteria we also took into account the level of universality and popularity of the motifs in the broader field of literature in general. A consideration of these factors, which is only possible on the basis of wide literary experience, brings into play intertextual relationships which go beyond the genre of the folk ballad. Thus even though there are few instances in the Child corpus of motifs such as "eavesdropping", "madness" or "pilgrimage", such motifs have been included in the Index because of their universality and popularity.

The predominantly paradigmatic arrangement of our index is intended to allow greater discretion of interpretation in regard to the realization of the motifs in the texts. We have therefore largely eschewed classifications and rank-ordering. In deriving the motifs from the summaries of the ballad-types, we have not given them status within the text as main, secondary or peripheral motifs. Nor does a semantic rank-ordering of motifs on the basis of thematic components seem useful in a motif index, as it was seen to be in a categorization of ballad-types.³ Finally, the categorization of motifs according to deep structure functions, as suggested by C. Bremond,⁴ besides being too time-consuming to be practicable would also restrict the motifs thus established to a single text corpus.

In order to do some justice to the syntagmatic integration of the motif and to some extent touch on the individuality of a particular text, we have introduced *specifications* and *subcategorizations* of motifs. The level of abstraction of the formulation can thereby be reduced, and the application of the motif in the concrete text can be indicated. Specifications denote the pinpointing of particular differences in thematic content, for which various categories can be used (motif variants), whereas the term subcategorization denotes independent submotifs.

The *specification* of a motif through the systematic differentiation of its meaning content follows from the basic questions "who?", "why?", "in which way?" and "where?". We are thus asking about the actively or passively participating characters, or about their relationship to one other: they may be related, or friends, or lovers. Some examples of specification would be: "murder", specification: "of brother, sister, lover"; "fidelity" (of woman to lover); "otherworldly being, encounter with (elves, giant)" etc. Specifications are also orientated towards the reasons for and the aim of an action. In many cases however, the implied and ambiguous motivation of characters in the folk ballad makes it difficult to define precisely the reasons for and aims of an action. On the other hand they

³ See D.G. Engle, *A Preliminary Catalogue and Edition of German Folk Ballads: The Test of a Thematic Classification System on 187 Narrative Folksong Types*. PHD. Diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1985. University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA 3592.

⁴ See C. Bremond, "A Critique of the Motif", in: Todorov, T., *French Literary Theory*, Cambridge, 1982, 125-46.

can often be deduced from the outcome of the action: "death from love (out of grief at death of lover)", "suicide (out of remorse)", "trickery (in order to lift curse)" etc. Finally, further details of the action itself are also of interest - we must also ask in what way and where the action takes place, e.g. "murder (by poisoning, drowning)"; "trickery (by making drunk, exchanging clothes)". We introduce a specification only where explanation is needed. The range of meaning of a motif and its manifold realizations may suggest specifications, especially in regard to textual variants. Motif specifications are not however suited to encompass all the nuances in the stylistic realizations of a motif. Too many would furthermore restrict the paradigmatic use of the Index, and for this reason not all motifs listed are given specifications.

In identifying independent submotifs, i.e. *subcategorization* as opposed to specification, we followed entirely pragmatic criteria. Whether the meaning variants of a motif were considered to be independent motifs depended on their paradigmatic frequency and level of universality. "Sibling murder", "murder by poisoning" or "crime of passion" were therefore seen as submotifs and given separate entries. "Murder of stepdaughter", "murder by drowning" and "murder in self-defence" are on the other hand listed as specifications under the relevant motif.⁵

The paradigmatic dimension and the potentiality of the motif are demonstrated in the alphabetical arrangement of the motifs in the Index as separate entities followed by a list of their potential applications, i.e. their specifications as they appear in the Child-Corpus. The syntagmatic dimension is at least indicated in the motif formulations, implying as they do constellations of characters and nuclei of action. Where the motifs are more complex, specifications can point up the relationship between character and action in a particular case (see e.g. the entries under "accusation", "reward" or "otherworldly being"). The meaning of a motif for a particular text can however also be elicited from the summaries of individual ballad-types. Here the listing of motifs in order of their appearance in the course of the text makes clear the basic outline structure of syntagmatic relationships between motifs in the narrative sequence. It also makes it easier to understand the assignment of motifs to particular concrete courses of action. Further, in this way their logical connection within the action can be clarified, whereby it can be seen that certain sequences of events frequently occur. It turns out, for example, that death from love, or murder, is often followed by a revenant (see for instance Child 20 B, 49 B, 74 A, 86 A, 155 A etc), and incest by suicide (see Child 50 A, 52 A).

Where there are several variants in the Child corpus, the summaries are on the whole based on the first i.e. the A-version. Since a motif sequence is usually a characteristic of a certain ballad-type, the differences in the variants are mainly to be seen in the formal detail and slight differences of content. Where there are significant deviations in the variants (affecting the motif structure) these are given supplementary annotation, and the letter assigned by Child to the variant is added to the reference in the lexicographical list of motifs.

In order to identify motifs as precisely as possible, and to give users the opportunity to look at them in detail, we have tried to include maximum information in the

⁵ For further illustration see paragraph 1.1.

summaries. Since abrupt leaps and fleeting suggestion are characteristic of folk-ballad style and lead to a wide range of possible reception, in some cases we have used a question-mark where the content is unclear, and/or given several formulations. Wherever it seemed helpful to do so, we made use of F.J. Child's commentary to elucidate logical links in the action, with an indication where this was done. Cases are also marked "(?)" or various suggestions given, where a precise assignment of motifs was impossible because the content was unclear.

In the alphabetically ordered motif Index all references are first listed under the respective headword without any specification. There follow in brackets the differentiations in the thematic content of the generic motif term, i.e. the specifications, in order of logical category (Who? Why? In which way?). Reference to semantically related motifs or submotifs is indicated by the sign (-->) for further consultation.

In the assignment of motifs to the respective ballad-types following each content summary, alternative formulations have been provided next to certain entries (after an oblique), which describe with equal validity the particular textual unit of meaning. Motifs marked "-->" refer here to formulations contained in specifications, which can also be classed as motifs and are therefore also listed in the Index. These may not necessarily be subcategories of the first-mentioned motif (e.g. abduction (by --> otherworldly being); murder (of lover; in --> revenge)). The form of listing chosen, as with decisions about which motif should be seen as the specification of another, are necessarily subjective. In general, however, in identifying motifs we tended to choose formulations which have a strong action component, in order to emphasize the function of the motif as a structural element of the text. So for instance in the case of the motif "otherworldly being" in Child 4, the action-orientated component "abduction" (by otherworldly being) is given precedence and listed as a motif entry.

The evaluation of motifs as abstract representations of ideas which can be processed textually in various ways, entails a certain oscillation between potentiality and textual realization. A motif index is mainly concerned with potentiality. It can be no more than a point of departure for the study of the texts and is not intended to anticipate their interpretation. The function of a motif index is to signpost the paths through a multiform and varied landscape of texts. We hope that in the following Index we have assembled the most important motifs in the Child corpus. At the same time, because it is compiled paradigmatically and restricted to abstract logical differentiations, the Index remains an open repertoire that can be supplemented at any time by an analysis of further ballad corpuses, for example collections of Anglo-American ballads.

1.1. Illustration of types of motifs, specification and submotifs

I. TYPES of motifs

I.i. Motifs involving a CONSTELLATION OF CHARACTERS and a correspondent NUCLEUS OF ACTION:

- combat: C 49
- love against family's wishes: C 65
- murder: C 13
- rescue: C 95

I.ii. Particular features of character emphasized in a motif (action less specific):

- otherworldly being: C 42
- outlaw: C 143
- revenant: C 78
- witch: C 35

I.iii. PLACE and TIME as MOTIFS:

- fairyland: C 37
- grave: C 75
- greenwood: C 41

I.iv. DISPOSITION motifs:

- jealousy: C 73
- joy: C 131
- longing: C 25
- mourning: C 170
- pregnancy: C 6
- sickness: C 84

II. Distinction between SPECIFICATION of a motif and SUBMOTIFS

II.i. SPECIFICATIONS (syntagmatic relation of a motif) (Who? Why? In which way?):

murder:

- of enemy: C 206
- of king: C 89
- of stepdaughter: C 261
- of wife: C 81
- etc.
- in self-defence: C 4

- in revenge: C 11

etc.

- by burying alive: C 20
- by drowning: C 242
- with weapon: C 14

etc.

trickery:

- disguise: C 17
- lulling to sleep: C 268
- making drunk: C 97

- in order to catch criminal: C 169
- in order to conceal adultery: C 274
- in order to rescue lover from death: C 182
- in order to win wager: C 246

etc.

II.ii. Independent SUBMOTIFS:

murder:

- crime of passion: C 73
- infanticide: C 155
- murder by poisoning: C 12

(and some others)

trickery:

- disguise: C 63
- pretence: C 216
- substitution of lover: C 5

2. Motif Index of the Child Ballad Corpus

abduction

--> *flight*

--> *release*

4, 19, 37 (?), 39, 40, 41, 46 (?), 62, 89 B, 221 E, 222, 223, 224, 225, 258, 296

(by unwanted lover): 46 (?), 62, 89 B, 221 E, 222, 223, 224, 225, 258, 296

(of woman by otherworldly being(s)): 4, 19, 37, 39, 40, 41

(using magic): 41

abortion

39, 173 C, D, N, I

(prevented): 39

(unsuccessful): 173 C, D, N, I

accusation

--> *execution*

--> *pardon*

29, 45, 59, 68, 71, 88, 98 C, 124, 126, 131, 136, 145, 152, 154, 158, 165, 171, 191, 194 C, 204, 207, 208, 209, 231, 244, 247, 261, 271, 291

(of infidelity): 29, 59, 191, 194 C, 204

(- to husband): 29, 59, 191, 194 C, 204

(of betrayal): 88

(of foul play in combat): 207

(of high treason): 45, 98 C, 158, 171, 208

(of impotence): 231

(of incest): 261

(of lawbreaking): 124

(of murder): 68, 71, 165, 209

(of poaching): 126, 131, 136

(of rape): 291

(of robbery): 145, 154

(of seducing daughter): 71

(of theft): 152, 191, 244, 247, 271

(false): 29, 59, 68, 88, 98 C, 126, 191, 194 C, 204, 209 (?), 231, 244, 247, 261, 271, 291

addiction to gambling

267

adultery

--> *infidelity (of lover / of mistress)*

--> *rivalry*

29, 30, 42, 59, 80, 81, 82, 108, 156, 173, 191, 194 C, 200, 203, 204, 209 I, J, 235, 241, 243, 266, 274, 297

(by husband): 42, 173, 209 I, J, 235, 241, 297

(by wife): 29, 30, 59, 80, 81, 82, 108, 156, 191, 194 C, 200, 203, 243, 266, 274

(with otherworldly being): 42, 243

(betrayed): 82

(confessed): 156

(supposed): 29, 59, 194 C, 204

anger

28, 43, 54, 64, 76, 87, 96 E, G, 111, 112, 118, 145, 146, 148, 152, 156, 158, 204, 207, 235, 240, 254, 275

(at husband's meeting with unaccepted person): 158

(at ill-treatment of mistress by her family): 240

(at infidelity of lover/husband): 28, 235

(at infidelity of wife/mistress): 156

(at lese majeste): 207

(at daughter's love relationship): 254

(at son's love relationship): 87

(at unwanted lover): 111

(at lover's refusal to share duties of child-rearing): 28

(at another's low regard): 118

(at mistress's rejection): 64, 112

(at wife's request): 54

(at mother sending away mistress): 76

(at opponent's victory in contest): 146

(at being outwitted by mistress): 43, 112
 (at being outwitted by opponent): 145
 (at being outwitted by outlaws): 152
 (at being outwitted by sister): 96 E, G
 (at vain search for outlaw): 146
 (at slander): 204
 (at disrespectful treatment): 275

animal, talking

4 C-G, 18 C, 26, 43, 55, 63 C, E, F, H, 68, 82, 96, 114 B, F (?), 204 J, L, 254, 270
 (bird): 4 C-G, 26, 43, 55, 63 C, E, F, H, 68, 82, 96, 114 B, F, 204 J, L, 254, 270
 (horse): 43
 (wild boar): 18 C
 (falsely accuses wife of adultery): 204 J, L
 (betrays human being): 68, 82
 (bids person take heart): 63 C, E, F, H
 (consults over possible food): 26
 (gives testimony of faith): 55
 (fights with human being): 18 C
 (bears message): 96, 114 B, F, 246, 254
 (reports on events): 43

apple, shooting of

116

arson

161, 174, 178, 180, 183, 196, 199, 246
 (because of family feud): 183
 (prevented): 180
 (in revenge): 246

assistance, divine

53 M, 56, 79 C, 118, 147
 (averting marriage of lover to rival mistress): 53 M
 (averting punishment of innocent person): 56
 (raising dead): 79 C

(assuring victory in single combat): 118

(making voyage possible): 53 M

(invoked): 79 C, 118, 147

banishment

98, 108, 115, 116, 117 (1), 151, 152, 154, 174, 177, 237, 292

(of lovers for relationship unaccepted by family): 237

(of mistress): 292

(of outlaws): 115, 116, 117 (1), 151, 152, 154

(of poachers): 116

(of queen): 174

(of supposed traitor): 98 C

beggar / beggary, life of

17, 66, 107, 133, 134, 140, 142, 157 F, 226 B-H, 237, 241, 242, 260, 267, 279, 280, 292

(disguise as beggar): --> *disguise*

(because of addiction to gambling): 267

(after banishment by family): 237, 292

(after banishment by lover): 292

(money demanded from beggar): 134

(as penance): 66, 242

bells, marvellous ringing of

84, 155

(as marvellous announcement of death): 84

(at encounter with otherworldly being): 155

betrayal

23, 65, 68, 80, 81, 82, 83 C-F, 114, 116, 119, 157 G, H, 176, 189, 213, 214 M, N, 231 E, 247, 249, 266

(of infidelity): 81, 82

(of Christ): 23

(of enemy's/rival's presence): 266

(of husband/lover): 157 G, H, 213, 214 M, N, 266

(of murderer): 68, 157 G, H, 189, 213
 (of murderess): 68
 (of murder plan): 80, 231 E
 (of outlaw): 116, 119
 (of poacher): 114
 (of secret love): 65
 (of secret meeting of lovers): 247, 249
 (of secret meeting of mother and son (supposed lovers)): 83 C-F
 (of traitor): 176

(by (supposed) friend): 23
 (by kitchen-boy): 65
 (by messenger): 80, 81, 83 C-F, 231 E, 247
 (by monk): 119
 (by old woman): 116, 249
 (by otherworldly being): 68, 82
 (by pilgrim): 114
 (by talking animal): 68, 82
 (by wife/mistress): 157 G, H, 213, 266

bewitchment

--> *cursing*
 --> *enchantment*
 --> *release (from curse)*

4 B, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 39, 43 A (?), C, 67 B, C, 270 (2x)

(of man by his mother): 270
 (of man by otherworldly being):
 - (elf): 39
 (of man by magician): 35
 (of man by mistress): 43 A (?), C
 (of woman by man): 4 B
 (of wicked woman by stepchild): 34 B
 (of woman, child(ren) by wicked stepmother): 31, 32, 34, 36

(lulling to sleep by magic harp): 4 B, 43 A (?), C, 67 B, C
 (transformation into animal): 36, 270 (2x)
 (transformation into misshapen woman): 31, 32
 (transformation into monster): 34, 35, 36

(in order to carry out rescue): 270
 (in revenge for rejected love): 35
 (in order to gain woman's love): 270