

Motif

One of the dominant ideas in a work of literature; a part of the main theme. It may consist of a character, a recurrent image or a verbal pattern.

Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 3rd ed. London: Penguin, 1991, p. 558.

Leitmotif

(German *Leitmotiv* 'leading motif'). A term coined by Hans von Wolzungen to designate a musical theme associated throughout a whole work with a particular object, character or emotion, as so often in Wagner's operas. Thomas Mann used it as a literary term to denote a recurrent theme (*q.v.*) or unit. It is occasionally used as a literary term in the same sense that Mann intended, and also in a broader sense to refer to an author's favourite themes: for example, the hunted man and betrayal in the novels of Graham Greene.

Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 3rd ed. London: Penguin, 1991, p. 485.

Theme

Properly speaking, the theme of a work is not its subject but rather its central idea which may be stated directly or indirectly. For example, the theme of *Othello* is jealousy.

Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 3rd ed. London: Penguin, 1991, p. 969.