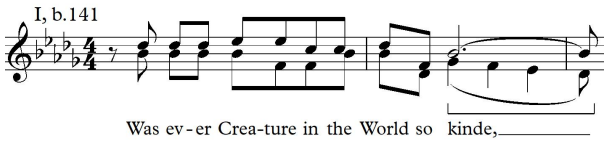
The "kindness motif" in Howard Goodall's *Invictus: A Passion*

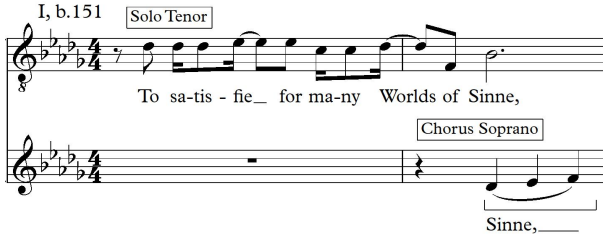
Ralph Woodward

What I call the "kindness motif" appears in several movements, and can best be described as a falling scale against a sustained chord, usually at a phrase-end. Because its first occurrence is on the word "kinde", because its use often coincides with compassionate sentiments in the text, and because its contour makes it sound like a musical caress, I have taken the liberty of christening it the "kindness motif". I'm not suggesting that the composer deliberately uses it in a Wagnerian *leitmotif* way (though I'm not ruling that out), but I do feel that its use adds to the sense of organic unity over the whole of the piece's 55-minute span.

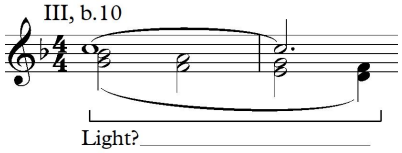
Here's its first appearance, in the Alto line (marked with a bracket):



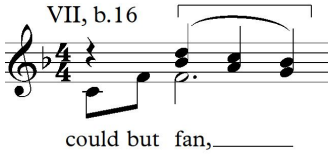
swiftly followed by the same idea in inversion:



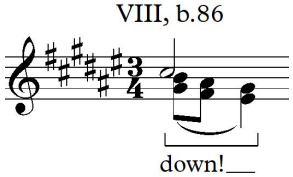
It is subsequently expanded rhythmically (minims instead of crotchets, although the quicker tempo means that the actual speed is almost the same), harmonically (doubled in thirds, more acute dissonance) and in intensity (by repeated iterations) in the third movement:



In the seventh movement, a very similar pattern (and in the same key) occurs several times, of which this is the first instance:

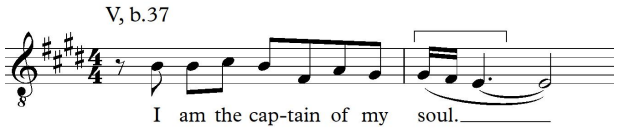


It next appears in the eighth movement, arguably the emotional apex of the piece, made yet more searing by being a semitone higher:

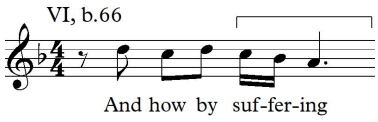


There is another motif which becomes pervasive in the ninth (and final) movement, and which an analyst (musical, not psycho-…) might be tempted to connect to the "kindness

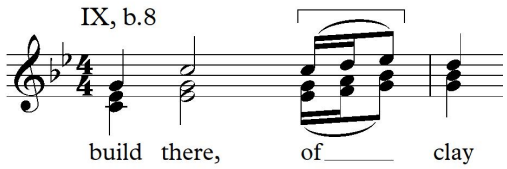
motif". You could make a case for its being introduced by the strings as early as b.5 of the first movement, but it is first sung in the fifth movement; as you can see, it is again based on a short scalic fall, but in this manifestation the rhythmic element comes to the fore:



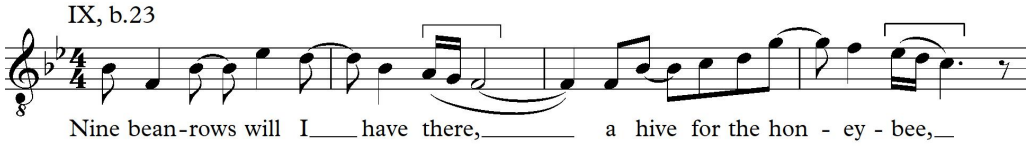
The first-time listener does not realise at this stage that a reprise of this melody will be the final phrase of the whole piece half an hour later. The motif goes on to appear in one of the main melodies of the sixth movement:



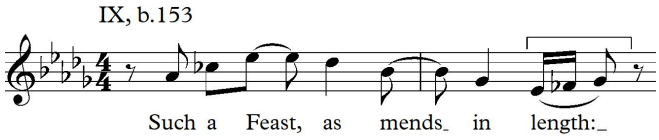
In the final movement, the motif is first sung, in inversion, here:



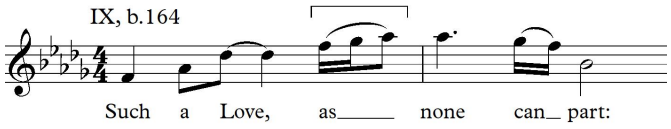
and soon plays an important role in this melody:

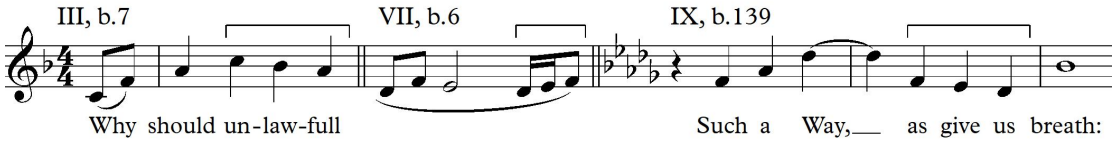


From b.143 it starts to invade the orchestral texture, and is then sung several times at phrase-ends, starting with this:



and climaxing with this:



until the aforementioned reprise sees everyone sing it in the final phrase of the work.

In fact, there are countless moments when these motifs can arguably be discerned; to diagnose them all as part of a complex web of allusion might be over-analysis, given that the idea of a scale is hardly unique to this piece, but the more one gets to know the work the more one tends to hear them as inter-related. Here are a few possible instances – you can decide for yourself.