

Is there a Ritual Plot in the Text of *Clariodus*?

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'Clariodus'¹ has the appearance of a light, graceful assembly of incidents from folklore and romance intermixed with elaborate accounts of tournaments and feasts. Helen Cooper finds that the romance models its whole poetic on the Knight's Tale, from its opening tournament onwards.² Scholars have, however, found problems with its great length and apparent shapelessness. David Irving comments that Book V, with its wedding celebrations, appears 'misplaced and superfluous.'³ Hornstein's account of the text gives us little detail of the narrative beyond the first two Books, and she describes Clariodus's journey to and from his sister's wedding as 'interrupted' by a series of adventures. Otherwise she notes only the text's elaborate reference to the etiquette of chivalry and tournaments, feasting and clothing.⁴ My approach to the text will not explain its enormous length, but it argues for its having a decided shape. This decided shape I find in both the Middle Scots romance and the French prose version.⁵

Coming to the end of my long investigation into a group of unusual, irrational plots, I recently decided I must tackle 'Clariodus'. I had been drawn to it while engaged on my PhD in the early 1970s, but, at that early stage, I didn't find a relevance to the work I was trying to do. Returning to it now, I've found that it *is* relevant, although very far from typical in structure.

In this paper, I also want to say something about how my project looks now, as I reach the end of the work I can personally do. The greatest problem of all for me has been finding an explanation for my ritual narratives. Where would they come from in the mind and why would they appear – only occasionally – in our literature? But this paper is about 'Clariodus,' and I must begin with some explanation of my project and why 'Clariodus' had to be one of the last of my texts.

I've neglected 'Clariodus' because of the way in which I've had to conduct my research. I've been trying to gain information about a group of plots which have turned out to be the products of an unknown system. This has meant finding a way of investigating plot structure without involving interpretation; interpretation based on what we know already has not been able to address these structures. I made a good start by experimenting with the notion of the single point of view, and I was fortunate that the plots were very highly organised: as soon as I adopted the single point of view, having the plot the invention of its hero or heroine, a step-by-step move structure became visible. These move structures were then to teach me a rigorous discipline, enabling me to explore the possible relationships between the details of each plot, and I could use some of my results as models, altering them as I learnt from the texts. It was a process of refining my methods

as I worked on text after text. The Middle English texts of 'King Horn'⁶ gave me my first view of a move structure, and their plot was to become one of my models. But I was to discover that some relevant plots would present even greater difficulty than 'Horn' and one of these was 'Clariodus'.

In the case of 'King Horn', I found that two of the plot's six moves were replays of the second move, at King Aylmer's court.⁷ At King Aylmer's court, Horn was accused by Fikenild of planning to kill the king and marry the princess. At the next court of King Thurston, he defeated an invader threatening to kill the king and seize the princess, and then he refused the offer of the princess and kingdom. Finally, at the court of King Aylmer again, he saved King Aylmer and his daughter from the very same character – Fikenild – who had accused him of planning to kill the king and marry the princess in the first of these moves. The outcome was that the king's son who had pretended to be a thrall without explanation won both his father's kingdom and King Aylmer's. I came to see the two replays as removals of the accusation against Horn, using the method of reversal, having Horn the champion against the invader, and finally the champion against the accuser himself, turned traitor. I saw, too, that the replay at Thurston's court was enacted in a surrogate situation, while the second replay at Aylmer's court used the exact characters and situation of the accusation, rather than surrogates. This pair of moves using a surrogate situation and then the exact one appears in many of my plots, and it seems to be about a building up of power in the narrative. In the course of time, again, I realised the key role played by the accusation in many of these plots: the narrative set up the accusation that a crime of treachery or theft had been committed and then worked to remove it. In 'King Horn', I found the accusation was removed by the method of reversal, but these plots employ a variety of devices and, in 'Clariodus', I find an accusation removed by punishment and by the accuser's own confession that he himself is the traitor.

After about a dozen years of using the Horn plot as a model, I became able to see quite different plot structures in some texts. When I identified the Purification plot and the Defended plot in the mid-1980s, I came to call the plots of the King Horn type 'Sovereignty plots'. The Sovereignty plots had taught me a great deal about how to examine these unconscious narrative structures, and while I could only speculate – and often did speculate – on what they represented, I was anchored by my concentration on an examination of the relationships between the steps. In the case of my newly discovered Defended plots, there were no moves, no helpful steps. Instead, I found myself working on narrative safeguards which were set up round an adventure to make it safe. These might, for example, use material giving permission for an adventure, and providing forgiveness at the end. Defended narratives can be more difficult to see and study, and they are also more different from each other than Sovereignty plots. But no two plots of any kind are alike, and, occasionally, a text which begins with defences ends like a Sovereignty plot: this is what I eventually found in the case of 'Clariodus'.

The plot of 'Clariodus' has been regarded as shapeless, especially in the later books, but Books III and IV appear to me to have a clearer shape than the first two Books, and this is because I find a move structure in them, absent in Books I and II. So I will begin by

looking at Book III and return to Books I and II later. Book III has a feature I can immediately recognise, and this is the accusation of treason, followed by sentence of death and then exile – the ritual punishment of so many plots. The accusation is against Clariodus, and it is followed by the exile and degradation of the princess Meliades and Clariodus's search for her. In a ritual plot, an accusation of treason will refer to how the hero or heroine feels about his or her activities, and Clariodus has just had a secret meeting with the princess, in which they are declared lovers. This would be a first step towards sovereignty, a step burdened with guilt, and the accusation would be set up at this point so that the plot can then dispose of it. It makes use of the counterfeit letters strategy, where a wicked character forges letters, in this case from Clariodus to the princess, telling her to poison the king. Clariodus is away, fighting for Christendom (a detail proclaiming his goodness), and Meliades performs the punishment required by the plot. In a ritual plot, the characters are all figures in the rituals, and they can stand in for each other; there is no characterisation in these plots. The hero then returns and makes the counterfeiter confess his treachery to the king, thus removing from himself the idea of traitor. This sequence of rituals is then followed by a rapid advance to sovereignty in Book IV.

'Clariodus', of course, has a considerable overlay, unlike 'King Horn': there is much more material in the text than simply the plot. The overlay makes free use of the material in the plot, ignoring the rituals, and the result could have been some problems for the critics, but not in this case. One problem in these textual situations can be the strange appearance of the plot's devices in relation to the moral themes of the overlay, but these elements haven't come into conflict here. I myself would prefer the conflict, as a researcher, because it does help in the task of untangling some of these texts, and it helps to alert scholars to the presence of a problem. Texts with two levels of narrative offer audiences two quite different levels of satisfaction. Characterisation belongs to the overlay, where there is distance between audience and text; there characters reflect on how they feel, and ponder on matters good and evil, while, in the plot, there is only the solipsistic wish to feel good and bring about this feeling in the mind. The overlay can provide the riches of thought, while the plot can give audiences an instant feeling of their own goodness.

I find that the advance to sovereignty that follows in Book IV of 'Clariodus' shows an unusual formation, a single, remarkable stepped progress, culminating in the king's placing his own crown on Clariodus's head.⁸ It begins with the king's calling his daughter home for her wedding, with great suddenness and haste, and without telling any of the characters who the bridegroom is to be; he also calls her home before he has seen her after her exile. This prior announcement of the wedding is followed by the hero's ascent to the throne: he receives the support of the king of France, and is given a gold ring as a promise by Meliades; he then becomes king of Ireland, and then king of England, receiving both crown and daughter from the king himself. The daughter has already been crowned queen. The French version treats this part of the plot differently, without altering its ritual course. Clériadus has taken control of the kingdom in Book III, after forcing the accuser to confess to the king, and Méliadice returns without being summoned; her father asks her pardon and abdicates in her favour.

Finally Book V follows with a celebration of this sovereignty: it is concerned with the marriage to the princess, and I have found that marriage to the princess is the final, crucial, component of these sovereignty plots.

Books I and II are not part of this move structure. The plot I see begins as a defended narrative, creating protection for the hero rather than moves forward to victory, and I find that the adventures before and after the sister's wedding play a role as safeguards for the adventures to follow, especially for the first, the secret meeting with the princess in Book II. This meeting with the princess would be the first step in taking sovereignty and it needs to be approached with a display of loyalty and virtue. The adventures on the journey can be seen to link together, displaying a hero upholding the status quo and transforming evil into good. In the initial adventure, he champions the king against a challenger claiming his property, and, on his journey to the wedding, restores a lady taken from her husband. On his return journey, he transforms a ravaging beast into a courteous knight, persuades a felon to renounce his felonies, and saves an adulterous husband from his furious wife, counselling her against revenge ('...never to a man be so unkynde As to him slay...'⁹). I also note that this sequence of safeguards takes place during a separation of the lovers: Meliades is left weeping at home while Clariodus goes to his sister's wedding. Separations play a role in ritual plots, and this particular separation between the hero and the princess can help to keep at bay all idea that the hero is seizing her.

What explanations have I arrived at for these ritual narratives? I think the genres of romance and folktale can sometimes trigger the emergence of narration belonging to a deeper level of the mind. There are linkages between the levels of the mind, and thought from deeper levels could surface under a strong stimulus: the feeling aroused in some kinds of storytelling situations would be such a stimulus. I am wondering whether the origin of the narratives might be a lifelong automatic storytelling process essential for the mind – perhaps to cope with stress. The extent of their organisation suggests to me that they have a function there, and the primitive character of their thought suggests that this automatic process might have the form of regular re-runs of long-past mental stages. The exceptional popularity of the texts in which I have found them also suggests that audiences tune in – unconsciously – at the level of the plot, where primal concerns with desire and fear are effectively dealt with. Rare modern examples I have come across have helped me to think about these matters: in *Jane Eyre*, for instance, I find that the author has given her distinguished novel her *own* ritual plot, and I think this may be a result of the extent of her emotional involvement. While Charlotte Brontë seems to have given us her own ritual plot, the medieval custom of borrowing would explain how other such plots found their way into texts. But I think I have also come across instances where an author has dropped the rituals in a borrowed plot. While working on groups of texts using the same narrative material, I've found that the plot is a ritual one in some texts and not in others: it's my guess that the rituals were dropped in texts where the author's interest in the material was strongly engaged elsewhere.

Chart for the Defended Sovereignty Plot of *Clariodus*

The Overlay	The Plot
<p>1. Clariodus falls in love with the king's heir, Meliades.</p> <p>He champions the king against a challenger who is claiming his property, and has a sequence of adventures turning evil into good on his journey to a sister's wedding.</p> <p>Books I and II</p>	<p><i>Safeguards to protect the hero</i></p> <p><i>The hero upholds the status quo and transforms evil into good.</i></p>
<p>2. Clariodus has a secret meeting with Meliades, during which they declare themselves lovers.</p> <p>Book II</p>	<p><i>Adventure safeguarded</i></p> <p><i>Secret meeting with the princess during which they are declared lovers.</i></p>
<p>3. Counterfeit letters are used to accuse Clariodus of telling Meliades to poison the king. Clariodus is away fighting for Christendom and it is Meliades who is condemned and then exiled.</p> <p>Clariodus makes the counterfeiter admit his treachery to the king, and then leaves to find Meliades.</p> <p>Book III</p>	<p><i>Move 1: Accusation and Ritual Punishment</i></p> <p><i>Accusation of treason, followed by punishment.</i></p> <p><i>It is established that the hero is innocent of treason.</i></p>
<p>4. Meliades is summoned home from exile for her wedding. The identity of the bridegroom is not announced, but Clariodus receives support from the king of France and from Meliades, and then he becomes king of Ireland. The king of England crowns him and gives him his daughter.</p> <p>Book IV</p>	<p><i>Stepped Sovereignty Move</i></p> <p><i>a. The princess returns for her wedding.</i> <i>b. The king of France is supportive.</i> <i>c. The princess gives the hero a gold ring as her promise.</i> <i>d. The hero becomes king of Ireland.</i> <i>e. The king crowns the hero.</i> <i>f. The king gives the hero the princess, already crowned queen.</i></p>
<p>5. The marriage is celebrated.</p> <p>Book V</p>	<p><i>The hero's sovereignty is celebrated.</i></p>

¹ David Irving, ed. *Clariodus: A Metrical Romance*, printed from a manuscript of the sixteenth century, Maitland Club 9, Edinburgh, 1830.

² Helen Cooper, 'Romance after 1400', in David Wallace, ed. *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, 1999, p. 693.

³ David Irving, p. ix.

⁴ J. Burke Severs, ed. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967, p. 158.

⁵ Gaston Zinc, ed. *Clériadus et Méliadice: Roman en Prose du XV^e Siècle*, Paris, 1984.

⁶ For editions of 'King Horn', see Donald B. Sands, ed. *Middle English Verse Romances*, Exeter, 1986, pp. 15-54; George H. McKnight, re-ed. for the Early English Text Society, *King Horn*, Oxford, 1962; French and Hale, ed. *Middle English Verse Romances*, New York, 1930, 1964, Vol. I, pp. 25-70.

⁷ See Anne Wilson, *Plots and Powers*, University Press of Florida, 2001, pp. 17-19.

⁸ David Irving, ll. 2766-68.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 284 -85.

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