

Magical Structures in Narrative: some Medieval Examples

Anne Wilson

Paper given to the conference ‘Framing Plots: the Grammar of Ancient Near Eastern Narratives’, at University College, London, 16-17 December, 2005.

This text copyright © 2007 Dr Anne Wilson

I am not the only scholar who has been faced with inscrutable texts. But texts can defy analysis in a variety of ways. My texts have been inscrutable in their own particular way, and yet the story I have to tell may prove useful to people with other kinds of problem. I hope it does.

My texts have been a problem because they are making use of plots belonging to a distinctive type very different from any we have known about. To make matters worse, the plots concerned are irrational plots, largely hidden from the conscious mind and designed to ease the inner heart; they are not about the outer world and do not even take it into account. Shakespeare very truly wrote of one of them, when he used it for his *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, that ‘lords and ladies in their lives / Have read it for restoratives’¹. A crazier story than ‘Apollonius of Tyre’ could hardly be imagined, and yet audiences enjoyed it for its healing power, and it was hugely popular from Greek times till Shakespeare’s. When Shakespeare came to use it, he created a play which has puzzled scholars, who could not find ‘any meaning lying in the progression of events’,² but they found in the playwright’s treatment of the plot themes of parting and suffering, healing and forgiveness.

But I will start at the beginning. Not finding any meaning lying in the progression of events was the spur to my investigation; it was obvious that something in these popular texts had gripped audiences. The particular problem with the texts has been that we could not understand why the characters behaved the way they did. A story can be fantastical and crazy, if you like, while making perfect sense, and a good example is the Egyptian story of ‘The Two Brothers’.³ The hero of this story uses fantastical stratagems for preserving his life and winning his kingdom – he hides his heart in a cedar tree, changes himself into a sacred bull, then preserves his life in a pair of trees at the palace gate, and finally in a chip of wood which flies into the queen’s mouth and finds its way into her womb, from where he is born as heir to the kingdom – all far removed from what audiences are actually able to do, but nevertheless clearly a hero’s steps forward to victory. Many of my texts are also about winning a kingdom, but the path towards it is curiously devious and we need explanations as to what is going on. The hero fails to seize opportunities and puts uninteresting obstacles in his own way. If he is a prince, why pretend to be a thrall (a serf) at a foreign court, ineligible to marry the princess? We are never told. It is hard to see why there is any progression and yet there clearly is.

Moreover, characters can suddenly act completely out of character, without there being any explanation. So the questions about each of these texts are often about the decisions made by the characters. There are questions too about incongruities. A notable example is in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the terrifying Green Knight hears Sir Gawain's confession and grants him absolution, as if he were a priest.⁴ Gawain had actually been to a priest to make his confession a few hours earlier anyway, and the priest's absolution had made him as clean as if the next morning were to be Doomsday.⁵ Yet, when the next morning came, he still felt unbearably guilty and needed the Green Knight's absolution. Problems like this troubled scholars, but it was not possible to deal with them on an ad hoc basis; the problems in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* could not be solved by studying that particular text in isolation from other romances similarly affected. There are also moral conundrums in the texts: critics have pointed out contradictions between an author's moral treatment and his hero's behaviour in the plot,⁶ and evil may be praised as good, without there being any acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Yet these things evidently have not interfered with the enjoyment of audiences: these problem narratives have been among the most popular of all stories, many of them enormously popular.

While many scholars were quite ready to live with the problems, I was not, because my interest in these texts was particularly in their plots. I also think we are more likely to ask questions if we think there might be interesting answers to them. I thought there might be. So I set out to study the problems, without at first having any of the necessary disciplines, and, after some months of muddled results depending mainly on interpretation, I decided one morning (in September, 1972) that I might get more discipline into my work if I concentrated first on the correct approach to these texts. I began by experimenting with the notion that there was only one point of view, that of the hero or heroine, with whom the audience identified – as if the narrative were a kind of shared day-dreaming – and, although the day-dream hypothesis soon proved inaccurate, using the single point of view brought in very interesting results. Working on the texts of the Middle English romance *King Horn*,⁷ I approached each plot as the creation of the hero Horn himself and audience participants identified with him, and immediately a conspicuous structure became visible. I could see a pattern of repetition, the hero passing from scene to scene, enacting variations on the same theme with the use of two king characters playing the king, two princess characters playing the princess, a villain and the hero, until some kind of resolution was achieved. These scenes I called 'moves'. They were not 'moves' in the sense that Vladimir Propp, the Russian formalist, used the word in his study of Russian folktales:⁸ in Propp, a new move begins where there is to be a repetition of the whole story sequence, while the moves I saw referred to much more frequent replays. In the early days, when I thought I was looking at fantasies exploring feelings, I thought the moves represented changes of mood and a struggle for a resolution, but as I examined more and more relevant texts I came to see that the move structure was very highly organised: it was a sequence of steps in which each step depended on the performance of the previous one. The characters were figures placed in strategic postures in step after step. Chart 1 shows the Horn plot as I eventually came to see it. (There is a summary of the texts in Appendix A.)

Chart 1

<p>Move 1. Horn's father, King Murry, is killed by pirates. Horn is exiled with Fikenild.</p> <p>STEP 1 TO KINGDOM</p>	<p>Move 2. Horn is a thrall at King Aylmer's court. He is loved by the king's daughter Rymenild. Fikenild tells the king that Horn will kill the king and marry Rymenild. Horn is exiled.</p> <p>STEP 2</p>
<p>Move 3. <i>Horn is Goodmind at King Thurston's court. He saves the king from an invader and refuses the reward of the king's daughter and kingdom.</i></p> <p>FIRST REVERSAL OF FIKENILD'S ACCUSATION (STEP 3)</p>	<p>Move 4. Horn returns to King Aylmer's court bolder, wins Rymenild from her suitor and is betrothed. He declares his innocence and his plans to win his father's kingdom.</p> <p>STEP 4</p>
<p>Move 5. Horn recovers his father's kingdom and becomes king.</p> <p>STEP 5</p>	<p>Move 6. <i>Horn returns to King Aylmer's court, where Fikenild is threatening the king and seizing Rymenild.</i> <i>Horn defeats Fikenild.</i> He marries Rymenild.</p> <p>SECOND REVERSAL OF FIKENILD'S ACCUSATION</p>

A key detail that I noticed from the outset was that Horn changes his name to Goodmind (or Cutbeard) when he moves to King Thurston's court in the third square of my chart. It can also be seen that the change of name to Goodmind or Cutbeard accompanies a corresponding change in the action compared with what takes place in the second square. Under the name Horn in the second square (where he is pretending to be a thrall), the hero is accused of wishing to kill the king and marry the princess, while, as Goodmind or Cutbeard in the third square, he saves a king from an invader and refuses the reward of the king's daughter and kingdom. At this early stage, I was still too busy interpreting the material in terms of changes of feeling to observe clearly that this third square is a step backwards in a sense, reversing the accusation in the second square by doing the opposite, as I came to understand it. But the third square leads to the fourth, where Horn returns to King Aylmer's court bolder and wins the princess back from her suitor. In the fifth square, he recovers his father's kingdom, lost in the first square, and then we have the sixth square. What is happening in this last square? Fikenild,

Horn's young, undistinguished companion, has built a castle and is trying to force the princess to marry him; King Aylmer is too frightened to forbid this. Fikenild is the character who makes the accusation against Horn in the second square: he tells the king that Horn will kill him and marry his daughter. Now, in this last square, it is he who is threatening the king and seizing the princess. Horn defeats him and marries the princess himself. This strange plot ends in victory for the hero when he removes the idea that the kingdom is being seized from the king, and who better to use for this removal than Fikenild, who embodies the accusation against Horn?

It is useful at this point to look at the plot used by another body of texts, the Ywain romances,⁹ because it helps if I show how, where two plots are different, the same remarkable relationships can appear. Chart 2 shows the plot of the Ywain romances as I came to see it (there is a summary of the texts in Appendix B).

Chart 2

<p>Move 1</p> <p>At Arthur's court.</p> <p>Calogrenant tells of his journey to the Fountain dominion and his fight with its lord.</p> <p>Arthur is pleased by this adventure.</p> <p>THE MAGIC FORMULA FOR GAINING A DOMINION IS PREPARED</p>	<p>Move 2</p> <p>Ywain secretly undertakes the adventure.</p> <p>He kills the Fountain lord and marries the widow.</p> <p>Arthur's approval is won.</p> <p>THE MAGIC FORMULA IS SUCCESSFULLY USED</p>
<p>Move 3</p> <p><i>The Fountain lady denounces Ywain as a thief and traitor.</i></p> <p><i>In the wilderness.</i></p> <p><i>Healed by the lady of Noroison.</i></p> <p><i>Ywain stops Count Alier's thefts from her dominion and then refuses her offer of marriage.</i></p> <p>ACCUSATION OF THEFT FOLLOWED BY ITS REMOVAL USING PENANCE AND REVERSAL</p>	<p>Move 3</p> <p><i>Ywain returns to the Fountain and clears Lunete (his assistant in winning his dominion) of the charge of treason.</i></p> <p>REMOVAL OF THE CHARGE OF TREASON</p>

In the second square of the chart, it can be seen that Ywain kills the lord of a dominion and marries his widow, and then she accuses him of being a thief and a traitor at the beginning of the third square. What follows in the third square is a reversal of this accusation, taking place at the court of another lady, the lady of Noroison: Ywain saves the lady from a thieving invader (Count Alier) and then refuses her offer of marriage – again doing the opposite of the accusation. It can also be seen, looking at both plots (in Charts 1 and 2), that the two squares in italics have an interesting step-by-step relationship with each other: they both deal with the accusation, but the first of the pair uses surrogate characters and a surrogate location, while the

second of the pair uses the exact location and characters, although avoiding using the hero himself. In the Ywain plot, Ywain leaves the Fountain dominion for the lady of Noroison and reverses the accusation using Count Alier, just as Horn goes to King Thurston's court and reverses the accusation using an invading giant. In the second of the pair, Ywain returns to the Fountain and removes the idea of treason using his assistant Lunete, just as Horn returns to King Aylmer's court, and does the same thing using his accuser Fikenild. Each plot ends when the hero returns to the scene of the crime, so to speak, and adjusts things there. These two plots, by the way, have no very obvious cultural connection: the Horn plot has a Germanic background, while Ywain is French in origin, with Celtic links.

It might well be asked at this point, why this obsession with accusations and getting rid of them: what is all this about? I think it is only fair to say now that I eventually found the accusation to be an essential part of the plot framework in many of my texts: it is used to initiate rituals for removing fear and guilt. In order to see this function, I had to reach a view of my plots as having a job to do: finding out how these plots did their job was more important than discovering meaning. Working on my texts became more and more challenging, and I wonder how I would have got on if it had not been for Propp, the Russian formalist: he liberated me from the words, inviting me to stand back from the text to see patterns and regularities revealing underlying structures. Of course, the words were also essential.

Without really thinking of *King Horn* as a model, I used this plot as a model for many years, and also other, rather different plots; these models were undergoing constant change. The models liberated me into learning from my texts in greater and greater detail: every text had something new to add, and slowly I built up a picture of these plots, of the different types, and how many there were – they were a substantial minority in the language range I could explore. From the first, I was also giving some attention to folktale texts, although in general I found the more detailed medieval texts taught me much more. It was actually when I was studying the Grimm story 'The Golden Bird'¹⁰ that I first noticed the plot structure I was later to find in the Ywain plot. In both plots, the hero sweeps to power in the second move, and then he goes through two curious activities. In the Ywain plot, having used a magic formula to gain his dominion, the hero reverses his thieving action in the surrogate situation with the lady of Noroison and then he clears his assistant of the charge of treason, and in 'The Golden Bird', after the hero's ride on the fox has enabled him to steal the golden bird, the golden horse and the princess, the fox suddenly says, 'Pray kill me, and cut off my head and my feet'. The young man refuses at this point, and we have a surrogate scene where his brothers are turned into thieves stealing his bird, horse and princess, and they are punished. After this punishment of surrogate thieves, we are told that, long after the hero becomes king, the fox meets him and begs him again to cut off his head and his feet. At last the hero does so and the fox is changed into the brother of the princess. The fox represents the exact perpetrator and he is killed, beheaded and mutilated; then all is well (my plots are full of such punishments and restorations, and I call these ritual punishments). The Grimm brothers were not very trustworthy collectors of folktales, but I found several of their texts useful, and also those of more modern folklorists. I have also had an interesting time with a handful of modern stories and novels. One person can only work on a limited number of texts, but I found that these

curious plot structures did occasionally turn up in much later literature, and in plots created – not borrowed -- by a modern author, which was food for thought.

In the mid-1980's, my work gathered speed. I had taken the step of working on Continental texts, especially French, and found myself in the rewarding research situation of studying groups of texts in different languages all using the same plot. The romances using the Ywain plot were again wonderful examples. Five great texts use the Ywain plot: the Old French *Yvain* of Chrétien de Troyes, which is the original text, and the three translations of it into Middle English, Middle High German and Old Swedish. There is also a fine Welsh version, *Owein*, which may or may not be dependent on Chrétien. Unfortunately, I have no Welsh, so I have not been able to make *Owein* one of my texts, but I have been able to take an interest in its translation. What I did with this group was to learn all I could from the different treatments the various authors gave their common material. One thing which interested me was how close the four texts could be in the small detail, although medieval translation was hardly slavish. This closeness in apparently trivial detail drew me to look closely at tiny incidents in the plot which I might not otherwise have taken much notice of. There was a scene where Ywain, having defeated Sir Kay at the Fountain, returns Kay's horse to King Arthur, saying that he has taken this horse and is handing it over to the king, because he does not desire anything of the king's unless he gains it in a different fashion. Arthur thanks him warmly and says, "Who are you, Sir?" "I am Ywain" is the reply, and Arthur exclaims with surprise. Ywain then tells the king how he has become lord of the country. The German version of Hartmann von Aue, with its combined explicitness and powerful control of language, reveals the ritual nature of the transaction most strikingly: I realised just how ritual these texts were. Ywain returns in a ritual gesture an object representing the king's property (Kay's horse), with an accompanying statement that he would not take anything belonging to the king. Then he can declare that he is Ywain and lord of the country.¹¹

At the same time that I was learning about the ritual character of these plots, I was also learning from the extraordinary non-relationships I found in the work of outstanding writers such as Chrétien and Hartmann. In these texts I found two layers of narrative, the plot and an extensive overlay added by the author, and neither layer appeared to be aware of the other. The author's treatment introduced moral themes and characterisation, both of them absent in the plot, and it gave all the characters a point of view. The Ywain plot, for example, was given extensive courtly love treatment, including such features as the self-examination of anxious lovers, while the plot remained unaltered, pursuing its concern with the seizure of a dominion and the removal of the ideas of theft and treachery. The authors using the plot evidently did not have it under their control, and this must mean that they were involved in the plot unwittingly; meanwhile, their interest as conscious artists was in their own treatment of the material in their overlay. So the kind of thing that happened was that the plot got on with removing the ideas of theft and treachery, while Chrétien's treatment linked the idea of treachery to Ywain's failure to return to his lady by an agreed time, and the idea of theft to the courtly theme of the thief who has stolen his lady's heart without caring for it. Hartmann, in his text, developed the same material in terms of the point of view of the women characters (the Fountain lady's vulnerable position and Lunete's concern for her). I was given an interesting view of this textual situation by another group of texts which all used the same plot -- the Tristan verse romances. They used

the same story material about Tristan and Isolt, while only some of them showed the problem of there being two parallel narratives in one text. Where there was no problem, what had happened was that the ritual narrative had been dropped, and the author used the story material freely, with complete control. All the Tristan verse romances looked much the same to outward view, but the typical questions raised by the presence of a ritual plot were absent in some of them.¹²

When did I first think of magic in relation to these curious plots? The answer is that it was long before I had the concept of magic I needed. Literary specialists need much more precise definitions of magic than I have found available to us. The sorcerer and the wise woman in the Matter of Aratta use magic,¹³ and here the word 'magic' describes the supernatural powers used by characters in narrative, and what I had to grasp was the existence of another kind of narrative magic which was not used by the characters but by the audience. This kind of magic was designed for serious, practical use. It is akin to the magic of charms and spells, and the oracles observed by Evans-Pritchard in his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*.¹⁴ Anything seriously used as functional magic is very highly organised, and this is fortunate because anything highly organised lends itself to disciplined study. Working on my texts in the mid-1980's, I made the decision that I must try out the notion that magic was a system of thought, thought which could create a plot just like many other forms of thought. It would be able to select and use its materials, invent and plan for its particular ends. One unique characteristic of this system of thought would be that it invested power in things so that they could bring things about in the mind, and those who identified with any of its plots would join in this investment of power. The beginning and end of the operation of magic would be in the individual mind. I want to look briefly at the use of magic in an Anglo-Saxon charm (this particular research, on Anglo-Saxon charms, has been done by L M C Weston, an American scholar).¹⁵ The charm *Wið Færstice*,¹⁶ which was used by healers to cure a sudden pain, was not designed to work on the patient, calling up supernatural powers to remove the pain; it was designed to work on the healer reciting it, to generate in his or her mind a sense of being powerful, and this sense of power could then be released into the healing words and acts to follow. The charm gathers this power together verbally, using its metrical form with heavy and close repetition, and bringing in narrative lines connecting the healer with an ur-battle against supernatural foes. The healer is an effective warrior connected with the mythical. Every now and then the verbs leave the past tense of the ur-battle for injunctions banishing the present pain of the patient waiting for the remedy. A magical process is easier to see in a charm: there we can see clearly that magic is active thought bringing things about in the individual mind. As soon as I had come to think of magic as thought which could create a plot, I found that I could study texts in cases where there was no move structure to help me. A case in point was the magic formula in the Ywain plot (in the first two squares of Chart 2), where I had to try to find out why the formula's narrative elements had been chosen as ingredients – what were their properties? It was essential that I could think of magic as the creative thought which had gathered these ingredients together.

Some of my major texts were entirely without a move structure, having none at all from beginning to end. It was only now that I could tackle them, and the first of these texts was *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. I had already published a study of *Sir Gawain and the Green*

Knight, and had come to realise that I would have to do a radical revision. About this time, I read a remarkable book by Leo Bersani called *A Future for Astyanax*,¹⁷ where Bersani notes that Emily Bronte, in *Wuthering Heights*, tells the same story twice, the replay being a tamed version of the Heathcliff story. This gripped my attention and I also became interested in the way the narrative is filtered through two layers of narrator, the respectable Lockwood and his informant the upright Nelly Dean. It seemed that the narrative was defended against moral censure – not magically in this case, but I wondered whether there might not be deeper, magical defence structures in some narratives. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I found an adventure made possible by a double set of safeguards.¹⁸ Chart 3 shows how I came to see the plot, and this chart also works as a summary of the narrative.

Chart 3

<p><i>Outer defence opens</i></p> <p><i>The plot opens with the beheading game bargain.</i></p> <p><i>Sir Gawain accepts the Green Knight's challenge to a game in which Gawain deals the Green Knight a blow with an axe and is pledged to receive a return blow from him a year later.</i></p> <p><i>Gawain chops off the Green Knight's head and the Knight leaves the hall carrying his head and reminding Gawain to keep his appointment at the Green Chapel a year later.</i></p> <p><i>Outer defence for the narrative opened. The outer defence of the beheading bargain makes the adventure with the lady possible. The beheading game safeguards this adventure because it is a bargain which will be honoured.</i></p>	<p>The adventure with the lady at Sir Bertilak's castle</p> <p>Gawain sets out for the Green Chapel to honour his bargain with the Green Knight. He stays at a castle over Christmas and the lord of the castle suggests that he and Gawain play a game. Each evening, host and guest will exchange whatever they have gained during the day.</p> <p>On the first day, while the lord is hunting deer in the forest, his wife visits Gawain while he lies in bed and makes amorous advances. Gawain resists but accepts a kiss from her, which he exchanges for the flesh of a dismembered deer at the end of the day. The next day, the lord hunts a boar and, at the end of the day, Gawain exchanges two kisses for the boar's head. On the third day, the lord hunts a fox, which is pursued with cries of 'thief', and Gawain exchanges three kisses for the skin of the fox, flayed alive. The lady has also given him a green girdle which he does not declare.</p> <p>The bargain of the exchanges of winnings is a further, inner, safeguard for the adventure: the lord of the castle receives tokens that the hero has not been a traitor, and his own gifts show the hero what would happen should he be one.</p>	<p><i>Outer defence closes</i></p> <p><i>On the following day, Gawain goes to the Green Chapel, which turns out to be green grassy mound. He hears the sound of an axe being sharpened as he explores this mound. The Green Knight appears, and Gawain flinches a little as the axe descends: the Knight withholds the axe, reproaching him. The next blow is a feint, and when the Knight swings the axe a third time he only wounds Gawain slightly on the neck.</i></p> <p><i>The Green Knight is the friendly lord of the castle, and the slight wound is a punishment for Gawain's concealment of the green girdle. Gawain confesses to covetousness and treachery before the Green Knight, and the Knight tells him that he has confessed his faults fully and done penance at the point of the axe. He is absolved of his offence.</i></p> <p>The beheading game bargain is honoured and the hero is reprieved. He has also done penance at the point of the axe and made his confession to the Green Knight, who has absolved him. <i>Outer defence for the narrative closed.</i></p>
---	---	---

The defended adventure is in the middle column, and it is defended primarily by the narrative material in the two outer columns, printed in italics. In the first column, the Green Knight challenges King Arthur's knights to a beheading game: the knight who takes up the challenge will deal the Green Knight a blow with his huge axe, and then turn up at a tryst a year later to receive a return blow. In other words, a bargain is struck giving the hero permission to cut off the Green Knight's head, provided he agrees that his head be cut off in return. In the period between these beheadings, the adventure with the lady takes place. A second bargain is struck in the middle column, where Sir Gawain and his host will exchange their winnings at the end of each day. For three days, the host goes out hunting while Gawain stays in bed, and Gawain is visited by the host's wife, who makes amorous advances. At the end of the first day, the host and Gawain exchange the flesh of a deer and a kiss. At the end of the second day, a boar's head is exchanged for two kisses. At the end of the third day, the host hunts a fox, which is pursued with cries of 'thief', and Gawain exchanges three kisses for the skin of the fox flayed alive. The lady has also given him a green girdle which he doesn't declare. I regard the exchanges of winnings as inner defences, where the lord of the castle receives tokens that the hero has not been a traitor, and in his own gifts he shows the hero what would happen to him should he be one. These bargains well-honoured can be invested with power to keep the adventure safe.

At the tryst with the Green Knight in the third column, Gawain is reprieved, getting a slight wound in the neck for not declaring the green girdle. The host at the castle was the Green Knight. Gawain then confesses to covetousness and treachery before the Green Knight, and the Knight gives him absolution saying, "I hold you cleansed of your offence, and purified as clean as if you had never transgressed from the day of your birth." Narrative magic has made use of confession and absolution elsewhere among my texts, and it also tends to pile on its devices – the honouring of the bargains was not enough. To grasp why there needed to be all these defences, I had to see that the adventure with the lady was a very dangerous one at the deep, primitive level of the plot. In the overlay of this wonderful text, the narrative is set in the age of chivalry, and the bedroom scenes are given courtly treatment: the temptation of Sir Gawain, at this higher level of narration, has been arranged by the lord of the castle and his lady. The lady enters Gawain's room for her courtly temptation, but, in the deeper plot, she does not enter Gawain's room: she is summoned up, summoned up by members of the audience participating in the plot. Why would this kind of adventure be so frightening? I think it must be because the material at the heart of these plots belongs to early stages of life, and it is about the frightening things of that time. What we have here looks like an Oedipal situation, but, while interpretation would be interesting, it is more interesting to consider how this terrifying material is used to create a plot. The plot is the remedy for the very same frightening material, as it provides protection for the playing out of desires and fears. What is also interesting to think about is why these plots emerge every now and then from a deeper level than most storytelling? It does seem to be the genre of romance which encourages them to do so most, while folktale also does so sometimes. I am wondering whether the place they emerge from might be a lifelong automatic storytelling process essential for the mind. This process could take the form of regular re-runs of long-past mental stages. But here I can only be guessing. One thing is evident: the combination of the powerful, primitive plot and the unknown author's chivalric overlay has produced a few conflicts and many great delights.

Before I identified defended narratives, I identified a rather easier group of magical plots, the purification plots. This group includes some fine heroine stories such as the Accused Queen texts, but the best example to use here is the Apollonius of Tyre story. Purification plots are chiefly concerned with dispelling fear and other unwanted feelings such as irrational guilt, so they use a great deal of magic. The ‘endless stories of Apollonius in the Middle Ages’¹⁹ probably originated in Greek, and then appeared as the Latin *Historia* versions which I concentrated on; they also appeared in Old, Middle and Modern English, and fetched up in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, the *Gesta Romanorum* and Shakespeare’s *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. An oral, village version collected on Kos early last century is still astonishingly close to the written versions.²⁰ Chart 4 shows the Apollonius of Tyre plot as I came to see it, and there is a summary of the narrative in Appendix C.

Chart 4

<p>Move 1 Apollonius is a suitor at Antioch and finds an incestuous relationship between the king and daughter.</p> <p>VISION OF INCEST</p>	<p>Move 2 Apollonius saves Tharsus from famine. His goodness and honour are proclaimed.</p> <p>AGENTS FOR THE PURIFICATION ARE ARRANGED</p>	<p>Move 3 Apollonius loses everything in a shipwreck. He becomes the teacher of the princess at Pentapolis, who wishes to marry him. The king approves. When married, Apollonius hears news that he is now king of Antioch.</p> <p>DEFENCES USED TO ACHIEVE MARRIAGE</p>
<p>Move 4 At sea. Apollonius separated from wife and daughter. Wife becomes daughter of physician in Ephesus, and a vestal, While daughter becomes daughter of Tharsus couple.</p> <p>RITUAL SEPARATIONS</p>	<p>Move 5 Brothel and ship’s hold. Daughter proves her invincible chastity in a brothel, while Apollonius voyages in anguish in the dark hold.</p> <p>EXORCISM AND PENANCE: INCEST WITH DAUGHTER ESTABLISHED AS IMPOSSIBLE</p>	<p>Move 6 Ritual repulse of daughter and her ritual statements of her indestructible chastity. Recognition of daughter and then her marriage to the ruler defeated in the brothel.</p> <p>MARRIAGE OF CHASTE DAUGHTER TO VINDICATED RULER</p>
<p>Move 7 Ephesus. The wife appears supreme in chastity as high priestess. The marriage is resumed. CHASTITY OF WIFE IS FINAL STEP TO THE PURIFICATION OF THE MARRIAGE</p>		

The Apollonius texts raise many questions: few stories can be crazier. Apollonius, fleeing for his life (from King Antiochus), does so with ships laden with corn, gold, silver and garments, which come in handy when he arrives at Tharsus, a place suffering from poverty and famine; he is later to leave his baby daughter there and have no contact with her for fourteen years. When he is shipwrecked at Pentapolis, the princess Lucina falls violently in love with him, insists on marrying him and insists too on accompanying him on his voyage when he hears he has become King of Antioch, although she is pregnant. Then she changes character completely when she finds herself at Ephesus after her burial at sea: she becomes the daughter of a physician and a vestal in the Temple of Diana, and stays there for fourteen years instead of sailing home to her husband. When Apollonius leaves his baby daughter in Tharsus, he takes an oath that he will not cut his beard, hair or nails until his daughter is married. He then sails for unknown and far-removed regions of Egypt. Fourteen years later he is a fantastic sight, with 'squalida barba, capite horrido et sordido'²¹. Some writers using the plot try to rationalise these incidents, but these rationalisations tend to make the narrative even more nonsensical. For example, Gower has Apollonius return home to Tyre rather than go to unknown and far-removed regions of Egypt, but there is no reason at all for leaving the child in Tharsus if he is returning home. Then we have Apollonius's exaggerated grief for the daughter with whom he has had no contact. Geoffrey Chaucer's character, the Man of Law, is shocked by his behaviour to follow, throwing his daughter down upon the pavement.²² Finally, there is the extraordinary detail that the daughter, Tharsia, marries Athenagora, the prince of Mytilene, who did not rescue her from the brothel where she was struggling to maintain her virginity. When she was put up for sale, Athenagora had allowed a bawd to outbid him, judging that it would be cheaper to take the girl's virginity in a brothel. Then he took pity on her, but he left her to continue her struggle in the brothel. There is no reflection in the texts on Athenagora's unworthiness: Apollonius agrees to his suit on account of his great goodness and conscientiousness.

The plot I see here is one designed to remove the fear of incest, but Shakespeare's words emphasise its healing power: these ritual plots must do much more than carry out their initial concern. In the first move, Apollonius is a suitor at Antioch and has a vision of incest, from which he flees. In the second move, at Tharsus, preparations are made for the purification rituals to come, and the hero's goodness is affirmed. In the third move, at Pentapolis, using a fresh king and princess pair, conditions are set up to allay the fear of incest, Apollonius playing a passive role, and his marriage can take place. But powerful purifications are still necessary, and the strategy used in the fourth move is that of ritual separation. The hero's wife becomes the daughter of a physician in Ephesus and a vestal virgin, while his daughter becomes the daughter of a couple in Tharsus. The hero is no longer engaged in these relationships, and has departed to the ends of the earth. In the fifth move, the plot resorts to another form of exorcism. Narrative exorcism I define as the removing of the idea of there being evil in the wishes and actions of the plot. In Move 5, incest with the daughter is established as impossible – the move plays out her resistance even in a brothel and against the prince of the city – and, meanwhile, Apollonius undergoes a penance in the ship's hold. In Move 6, we have the ritual repulse of the daughter and her ritual statement of her invincible chastity. Apollonius recognises her as his daughter, and we have her marriage to Athenagora, whom she had withstood in the brothel. Tharsia's marriage seals the exorcisms: it declares finally that there is no incestuous

relationship between the king's daughter and the king (we find Apollonius released from his penance of uncut hair and beard when his daughter is safely married) and it also seals the rightness of the marriage between the king's daughter (Lucina) and the impure ruler (in this case Apollonius). The ambiguous function of the daughter's marriage is the purification of the hero's marriage with Lucina. Lucina, in Move 7, is revealed to be supreme in chastity, and the marriage can be resumed.

The Apollonius plot makes remarkable use of magic for its task of removing the fear of incest. Why is there this fear of incest needing so much attention at the deep level of some of my plots? I suppose it must be that human desire is rooted in early experience and that it is this which gives rise to the fear. Such a fear would be beyond the reach of reason, and its best remedy would be magic. While we as literary specialists may feel we do not know enough about these deep things, I think we have the means to address the irrational when it turns up in our texts: the use of our own specialist skills and data should produce much sounder results than borrowings from theories worked out elsewhere. One final comment: ritual brings comfort in many areas of life, and dispels a sense of evil; it makes those who participate in it feel complete. I think this is also where we should be looking for an understanding of the popularity of my magical plots.

¹ William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, I Chorus, ll. 7-8.

² Philip Edwards, ed. *William Shakespeare: Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Penguin Books, 1976, 31.

³ For a recent translation and full bibliography, see W.K. Simpson, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Yale (1972), 2004.

⁴ W.R.J. Barron, ed. and trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, revised edition, Manchester (1974), 1998, ll. 2374 – 94. G.V. Smithers asks, 'Why is the Green Knight (of all people) represented as hearing a "confession" by Gawain at their last meeting? . . . and why does Gawain make a 'confession' at all, since he has already gone through an orthodox form of confession the day before leaving the castle?' (in 'What *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is about', *Medium Ævum*, XXXII, No. 3, 1963, 171, 178, 183.)

⁵ W.R.J. Barron, ll. 1876-84.

⁶ Tony Hunt, 'Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian romance *Yvain*', in *Medieval Literature, Part Two: The European Inheritance*, 132-33.

⁷ For editions of *King Horn*, see Donald B. Sands, ed. *Middle English Verse Romances* (1966) University of Exeter, 1986, 15-54; W.H. French and C.B. Hale, eds. *Middle English Metrical Romances*, New York, 1930, reissued 1964, I: 25-70; Joseph Hall, *King Horn*, Oxford, 1901 (giving us three texts in parallel), and George H. McKnight's re-edition for the Early English Text Society (Trübner, 1866) 1901, reprinted 1962, which also gives us three texts in parallel.

⁸ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd edition, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.

⁹ For texts using the Yvain plot, see T.B.W. Reid, ed. *Chrestien de Troyes: Yvain*, Manchester (1942) 1967; *Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)*, publié par Mario Roques, Paris, 1980; Ludwig Wolff, ed. Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*, Berlin, 1968; Maldwyn Mills, ed. *Yvain and Gawain*, London, 1992; Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington, eds. *Yvain and Gawain*, Early English Text Society, London, 1964; Erik Noreen, ed. *Herr Ivan*, Uppsala, 1931; R.L. Thomson, ed. *Owein or Chwedyl Iarllus y Ffynnawn*, Dublin, 1968. For translations, see

D.D.R. Owen, *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances*, London, 1987, 281-373; Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, *The Mabinogion*, London, New York, 1949, revised 1974, 'The Lady of the Fountain', 155-82.

¹⁰ For 'The Golden Bird', see Friedrich Panzer, ed., *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, Wiesbaden, c. 1950, where the story is entitled *Vom Goldenen Vogel* and is number 57, p. 208. For an English translation, see Edgar Taylor, *Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Oxford, 1962.

¹¹ I discuss the Yvain texts in full in *The Magical Quest*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988, 53-93.

¹² I discuss the Tristan verse romances in full in *Plots and Powers: Magical Structures in Medieval Narrative*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2001, 117-41.

¹³ Herman Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings: The Matter of Aratta*, Atlanta, 2003, 'Enmerkar and Enshugirana', 28-45.

¹⁴ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, 1937; new edition 1976.

¹⁵ L.M.C. Weston, 'The Language of Magic in Two Old English Metrical Charms', in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (Bulletin of the Modern Language Society of Helsinki), no. 86, 1985, 176-86.

¹⁶ For *Wið Færstice*, see E.V.K. Dobbie, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, vol. 6, New York: Columbia University Press, 1942. The text, with a translation, is also in *Plots and Powers*, 11-13.

¹⁷ Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1978; London: Boyars, 1978, 189-229.

¹⁸ For my revised study of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* see *The Magical Quest*, Manchester, 1988, 189-212.

¹⁹ See Albert H. Smyth, *Shakespeare's Pericles and Apollonius of Tyre*, Philadelphia, 1898, 24.

²⁰ For my full study of the Apollonius of Tyre plot, see *The Magical Quest*, 24-49. For the Latin Historia texts, I used Alexander Riese, *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, 2nd edition, Leipzig, 1893.

²¹ See Alexander Riese, *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, p. 83.

²² See F.N. Robinson, ed. *The Poetical Works of Chaucer*, second edition, Oxford, 1957, 'Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale', ll. 81-9.

This text copyright © 2007 Dr Anne Wilson.

Please do not copy or quote from this text without acknowledging the author.