

FROM RIDDARASAGA TO LYGISAGA : THE NORSE RESPONSE TO ROMANCE

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The reception of Romance in Scandinavia, especially Norway and Iceland, involves a number of problems. Two groups of difficulties will be examined in this paper : firstly, that of the translation of Romance into Norse, how and when this took place ; secondly, that of the composition of Romance in Norse, why such texts are different from translated romances and from other genres of Norse literature, and why they were so popular. Each of these topics merits a separate study, and therefore the present paper must of necessity be somewhat simplistic. It may at the least, however, set them in an appropriate context.

The term *riddarasaga* is used in this study for any saga of courtly or quasi-courtly content, and, solely within a Norse perspective, the term romance is used as its approximate equivalent. The terms *lygisaga* and *Märchensaga* are not regarded as appropriate genre-terms. The word *lygisaga*, to judge from its use in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, deals not so much with the text itself, as with the response of the audience to the text. The term may not necessarily be pejorative, but could perhaps be defined as "a saga which a sceptical audience might regard as factually false, but which it found entertaining". The potentially sceptical audience is of course presupposed by such prefaces and colophons as eg. the preface to *Sigurðar saga þögla* or the colophon to the longer version of *Mágus saga jarls*, although the limits of scepticism are of course undefinable. The term *Märchensaga* is also unsuitable as a genre-term. Icelandic is very rich in folk-tales, and these appear to have influenced other literary forms at most periods. But there are few respects in which the courtly or chivalric texts are more influenced by folk-tale than are, for instance, the Íslendinga sögur themselves. In the strict sense of the term, *Grettis saga*, for instance, is as much of a Märchensaga as most, in that much of its material must be derived from folk-tale. In one respect only may the courtly texts especially resemble folk-tale : that is formal, and is discussed below.

For purposes of the present discussion, the term *Primary Romance* will be used for the translated texts (seen of course wholly from a Norse viewpoint), and the term *Secondary Romance* will be used for the texts composed in Norse.

While in origin the Norse Primary Romances are very disparate, they form a fairly homogenous group within Norse, though the distinctions

between romance and learned history or pseudo-history on one side, and the moral fable on another, are difficult to draw. A few texts stand on the borderline between Primary and Secondary Romance : eg. *Mágus saga jarls* has a source outside Norse, but that source is freely treated in the manner of Secondary Romance, while *Mírman(t)s saga* has no known source outside Norse, but may well be based upon a non-Norse text otherwise unknown. The Norse Secondary Romances also form a fairly homogenous group, though here the distinction between Secondary Romance and fornaldarsaga is sometimes very difficult to draw. That such a distinction is nonetheless necessary will be argued below.

Primary Romance does not form a particularly large or outstanding part of the corpus of Old Norse literature. There are some eighteen or nineteen surviving texts (taking the *Strengleikar* as a single text) which are normally considered to constitute this genre ; six of them have overt connections with the court of King Hákon Hákonarson the Old and King Hákon the Young in Norway (ie. the period 1217-63). However, attribution to the court of one or other of the Hákons appears to have become something of a literary topos : there is a spurious attribution in the preface to *Blómstrvalla saga*, and the court of King Hákon Magnússon is cited in the preface to *Viktors saga ok Blávus*. Two or three other translations were probably or certainly made in Iceland. A general, and almost certainly misleading, rule-of-thumb has been made, that texts translated from Latin may have been translated in Iceland, while those translated from Old French or Middle High German were translated in Norway : for a cautious and qualified expression of this view, see E.F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, Copenhagen 1959, pp. 16-17. Halvorsen argues that "it was obviously easier to find Norwegians who knew French than Icelanders : in Norway, there were at all times a number of men who had to know some French for commercial or diplomatic reasons, whereas in Iceland at this time there were few merchants and scarcely any diplomatists." This argument is unsound. During the 13th and 14th centuries the language of commerce was primarily Low German in the area of the Hanseatic League, while the language of diplomacy was above all Latin. This argument also disregards the well-attested fact that a relatively large number of educated Icelanders during the 12th and 13th centuries appear to have travelled abroad for extended periods of study or pilgrimage in or through France, Germany and Norman England. There is less evidence to show that Norwegians went abroad to study. The cosmopolitan court of the Earls of Orkney is also certainly a cultural centre of sufficient activity and linguistic capability until well into the 13th century. Place of translation should not, therefore, be determined merely on *a priori* assumptions, but should be considered for each text on the basis of any evidence that may exist for that text.

There is however a strong, if less definable, reason for the translation of romance at the court of the two Hákon. That, of course, is Hákon the Old's attempt to integrate Norway into the cultural and political life of Western Europe, and so to model his own court and its manners upon the best courtly style. Literature is the most obvious means for this, and the new, courtly literature of France, the romance, was an ideal vehicle for Hákon's plans. The new, secular, courtly ethic of 12th and 13th century Europe could most swiftly be transplanted into Norwegian soil by means of the texts which embodied it. The great houses of the nobles would certainly emulate this, but at least in this respect any translation in Orkney or in Iceland is almost certain to be secondary to that in Norway, simply because the literature is courtly and ultimately therefore royal. So, in broad outline, translation of romance may be seen as one aspect of Hákon the Old's attempt to establish a culturally and politically centralised medieval monarchy in Norway. Further discussion of the social and political significance of romance must be excluded here. While this, however, is certainly the broad picture, it is also necessary to remember undoubted Icelandic literary eclecticism at a period of great literary activity, and there is no reason why the translation of romances, or at least acquaintance with romance, should not have begun earlier.

It is of course impossible to give a date for the first acquaintance of Norsemen with the romance. The date 1226 in the heading to two manuscripts of the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd* seems to have mesmerised scholarship, and to be taken tacitly as a *terminus a quo*. This heading is of dubious textual status, the two manuscripts which contain it are both late (15th and 17th centuries), and in any case transmission of numerals is frequently inexact, as Jónas Kristjánsson has pointed out. For a fairly full discussion of this heading, see Sverrir Tómasson, *Hverær var Tristrams sögu snúið*, Gripla II 1977, pp. 47-78, and references there.

Bjarni Einarsson (in *Skáldasögur*, Reykjavík 1961, revised, abridged and translated as *To Skjaldesagaer*, Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø 1976) argued strongly that a version of the Tristram-story must underlie the narrative of *Kormaks saga* and some other texts, and since he also considers that *Kormaks saga* is early (composed at or before the beginning of the 13th century), he also argues that a version of the Tristram-story must have been translated into Norse early, probably before the end of the 12th century. This is neither impossible nor implausible, given the fairly constant flow of churchmen and pilgrims south to France, Germany and England.

Bjarni's arguments are of two sorts. Firstly, he considers that a number of precise details in *Kormaks saga* are derived directly from a version of the Tristram-story (neither of the two surviving *Tristrams*

sögur). Secondly, he considers that the underlying story told in *Kormaks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga orms tungu*, *Laxdæla saga* and elsewhere (a very productive narrative !) is itself partly modelled upon the Tristram-story. Proof that there was early acquaintance with the Tristram-story in Norse, on the basis of *Kormaks saga* alone, is dependent upon the belief that *Kormaks saga* itself is early. This it may well be, but the relative and absolute dating of sagas is at best dangerous, and there have been complete reversals of opinion over major texts. However, if Bjarni is also right in seeing a version of the Tristram-story underlying the complete group of texts mentioned above, then fairly early acquaintance with the story is certain, since that narrative pattern has to be established in Norse prior to its use by these different saga-authors. Unfortunately, the link with the Tristram-story is probable rather than proven as things stand. What is certain, however, is that the narrative pattern shared by this group of texts is romance, and that these texts are romances. See also J. de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1967, vol. II, p. 503, note 6.

Other arguments that romance must have been known in Iceland earlier than 1226 are strong, if imprecise. The evidence of the pilgrimage of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali in the 1150s informs us that the ideas and attitudes of courtly love were already brought to Iceland by soon after the middle of the 12th century. Several of Earl Rögnvaldr's court poets, including those who composed quasi-troubadour skaldic poetry on the pilgrimage, were themselves Icelanders. When one comes to *Snorra Edda*, probably composed in the early 1220s, one finds that Snorri effortlessly transforms the rather grim little tale of Freyr and Gerðr, as told in *Skírnismál*, into a charming miniature romance. This implies not only that Snorri was familiar with the romance and with romance conventions, but also that his audience was equally familiar with them, and so would appreciate what he was doing. When, the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* takes the tale of Víga-Styrr and the berserks, and treats it as an ironic inversion of the romance story-pattern of Culhwch and Olwen, again he shows a complete assimilation of romance attitudes and implies the same in his audience. *Eyrbyggja saga* also uses a variant of the narrative pattern mentioned above in connection with *Kormaks saga*, in the narrative of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi.

Romance influence upon major texts of Old Icelandic literature, therefore, is deep and thoroughgoing ; it implies a complete and conscious assimilation, a familiarity with romance upon the part of the saga-authors and of their audiences. In a few instances, such as *Snorra Edda*, the texts can be dated moderately precisely, and can be shown to be fairly early. It is very difficult to believe that acquaintance with romances, which probably means their translation, was not widespread in Iceland by the 1220s ; this means that translation of romances into Norse had probably

begun, as Bjarni Einarsson suggests, before or by 1200.

Further, romances were translated into sagas. This is most striking. The European romance was of course originally composed in verse, and prose versions are in most instances secondary and later. It is unlikely that there was any major prose romance model for the translators into Norse, and where the sources of a translation have been identified, these sources are verse. Yet Norse translation from verse into prose was virtually complete and universal. Apart from *Merlínússpá*, the only exception is the use of rhymed couplets at chapter-endings in *Parcevals saga*, until metrical translation appears in the *Eufemiavisor*, translated into Old Swedish partly from Old Norse shortly before 1312. When romances were translated into other languages, eg. Middle High German or Middle English, if corresponding metres did not already exist in those languages, they were invented for the purpose. That this could and eventually did happen in Scandinavia is shown by the *Eufemiavisor*.

The translation of verse romance into Norse prose saga is a major problem ; to it there are perhaps two answers, either of which may be sufficient, but which must probably be taken together.

The first reason why verse romances were translated into Norse prose may have been metrical. Translation into Norse verse could not occur until suitable metres existed. Translation into skaldic metres was obviously not a serious possibility. Translation into Eddaic metres may not have been culturally acceptable because of the specific associations of these metres with the native heroic and mythic poetry. The translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*, Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínússpá*, is hardly romance, and it has been translated not only in language and form, but into the conceptual world, specifically and consciously, of *Völuspá*.

New metres, corresponding approximately to those in which the romances were originally composed, appear in the Scandinavian languages, and almost entirely supersede the older metres, during the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These are exemplified by the metre of the *Eufemiavisor* in Old Swedish, and in Icelandic by the metres of the *rímur* and ballads. The first recorded instances of the new metres in Iceland are of course those cited in *Íslendinga saga* in association with events of the year 1221 :

Loptr er í eyjum,
bítur lundabein ;
Sæmundr er á heiðum,
ok etr berin ein ;

and the *dans* quoted by Þórðr Andréasson on his way to execution in the year 1264 :

Mínar eru sorgir

Þungar sem blý.

Since the new metres are not attested until the 1220s, it may be argued that the conventions of romance translation were established earlier than this, before these new metres were available and acceptable.

This view is supported by a linguistic argument. It is very striking indeed that in almost all Western European languages, major, thorough-going and largely identical metrical changes appear more or less simultaneously with major linguistic changes : the re-organisation of syllable-quantity which first appears in Latin, perhaps around the fourth century AD, and which affected the Germanic languages during the High Middle Ages. Prior to these changes, these languages possessed partly quantitative metres which were in general neither syllable-counting nor isochronous in rhythm. Attempts to scan them with isochronous rhythm do violence to the actual texts. Subsequent to these linguistic changes, these languages possess largely non-quantitative, syllable-counting, isochronous and frequently end-rhyming metres. It is difficult to avoid the hypothesis that the revolution in European metrics, to isochronous, syllable-counting metres, is dependent upon the quantitative changes which took place during the Dark and Middle Ages throughout Western Europe, and that such new metres could not easily be introduced until these linguistic changes had at least begun. Further, recent studies of Icelandic quantity (those of Sara Garnes, *Quantity in Icelandic : Production and Perception*, Hamburg 1976, and Kristján Árnason, *Quantity in Historical Phonology : Icelandic and Related Cases*, Cambridge 1980) suggest that the re-organisation of Icelandic quantity was beginning in the thirteenth century, although it may not have been completed for some considerable time ; this view is supported by the present writer's work.

If the new metres required for romance were dependent upon linguistic change, it would have been very difficult to compose these new metres in Norse until these linguistic changes had at least begun. And since an example of the new metres is cited from 1221, it follows that they were linguistically possible, known and acceptable by that date in Iceland. If, then, the romances were translated into Norse prose because no possible metres existed or could easily be invented for the purpose at the time when the conventions of translation were established, it follows that these conventions of translation were in all probability established considerably earlier than the 1220s.

It is necessary, therefore, to assume on both literary and metrical grounds that the conventions of romance translation into Norse were established early : earlier, for instance, than *Snorra Edda*, and earlier than the first recorded instance of the new metres.

There is of course a second, and very important, reason why romances were translated into prose. More specifically, they were translated into prose sagas, with the changes of literary conventions which that implies. The translated romances are for the most part transformed, as they are translated not only from one language to another, not only from one literary medium to another (verse to prose), but also from one literary form to another. This has been much discussed, for instance by Geraldine Barnes (*The riddarasögur and mediæval European literature*, Mediaeval Scandinavia viii 1975, pp. 140-158) and by Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir (*Tristán en el Norte*, Reykjavík 1978). The necessary conclusions which must be drawn from this are that the saga must have been the dominant literary form at the time at which the first romances were translated, and that it must have been the dominant literary form for the actual translators themselves. P.V. Rubow's old suggestion (in *Two Essays*, Copenhagen 1949) that the sagas came into existence through the translation of romance is of course nonsense, since, as Astrid van Nahl points out (*Originale Riddarasögur als Teil altnordischer Sagaliteratur*, Frankfurt 1981), this transformation of mode and content is only intelligible in terms of assimilation to an already established genre, the saga.

That strange and sophisticated art-form, the Icelandic saga, appears to have developed more or less simultaneously with the European romance during the second half of the twelfth century, so translation of romance into saga cannot have begun much before the last decades of that century: neither genre was established much before that time. And it is necessary to assume that, during a period of intense literary activity, Norsemen were prepared to accept the latest fashions from the south as soon as they met them. There is good evidence for this.

Further, the early and immediate translation of romance into saga requires, as stated, that the saga must have been the dominant literary form for the actual translators themselves. This implies a much more important role for Icelanders as translators than has hitherto been allowed. The saga can hardly be seen as a native Norwegian literary form, either during Hákon Hákonarson's reign, or earlier. It follows that at least some of the earliest translators were in all probability Icelanders, participating in the upsurge of Icelandic literary activity which we have to assume took place in Iceland during the latter part of the twelfth century, and who were experienced in its dominant literary form, the newly developed saga. This does not mean, of course, that these earliest translators were necessarily working in Iceland for Icelandic patrons (though this possibility is not excluded): on the contrary, as discussed above, the Norwegian royal court certainly commissioned many of the translations. But many Icelanders worked in Norway for Norwegian patrons, and to good effect: the best-known example, of course, is *Sverris saga*.

Thus the Brother Robert who is said to have translated the *Saga of Tristram ok Ísönd* in 1226, himself probably Anglo-Norman, must be seen as working upon models provided by earlier translators - how otherwise could he have written a saga? - and some of these earlier translators were probably themselves Icelanders.

It may be suggested, therefore, that there are strong and cumulative arguments for the claim that translation of romance into Norse began considerably earlier than 1226, but not only later the composition of the romances themselves, but also later than the establishment of the saga as the dominant Icelandic literary form. The last decades of the twelfth century seem by far the likeliest period. Further, it may be suggested that such translation probably involved Icelanders, whether working in Iceland or in Norway or (more probably) in both countries.

As discussed above, the surviving corpus of translated romances consists of some eighteen or nineteen texts (counting the *Strengleikar* together). As frequently noted (eg. by Halvorsen and Alfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, modified by Geraldine Barnes, all op. cit.), they typically modify their sources in two major ways. Firstly, they drastically reduce the amount of direct speech in that they eliminate the long speeches of introspective emotional analysis typical of early Old French romance, which constituted one of the major strengths of Chrétien's innovations. This, as mentioned, is a sign of translation from romance to saga. The saga of course does not typically indulge in long formal speeches of self-expression, and where it depicts emotion, it typically does so indirectly and externally. Thus the romances are altered to conform to the literary conventions of the sagas. This alteration has wider aspects, however. Introspection, and the long, formal speeches which express it, are an impractical luxury in the hard literary world of action. The wealthier and more leisured south can better afford this self-indulgence than can the poorer and harsher world and world-view of Iceland. This also reflects a different notion of the self in the two cultures, though this is a topic in its own right.

Secondly, as noted particularly by Geraldine Barnes (loc. cit.), the texts are frequently modified to give a more directly didactic tone; they appear now in translation more as handbooks of secular ethics. This is largely to be explained in terms of their intended function, discussed above, in Norwegian courtly life. Hákon Hákonarson, in particular, was trying to change the attitude and style of the Norwegian nobility, to transform the old, heroic order into a new pattern of chivalric courtesy, just as his son, Magnús Lagabættir, transformed the old orders of *lendr maðr* and *skutilsveinn* into baron and knight in 1277.

The results of such processes are not usually literary masterpieces. Brother Robert's *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd* has attracted much scholarly attention, because it has been thought to give fairly direct access to the poem of Thomas of Brittany. But it is not an impressive work of literature in its own right. Its fairly ornate "Court Style" (see Halvorsen, op. cit., pp. 9-11, and Jónas Kristjánsson's paper in the present volume) is competently handled, though for the present writer it hardly deserves the praise which Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir bestows upon it (op. cit., p. 216), especially since during generations of copying it is probable that infelicities of style would have been smoothed out (for stylistic transformation of this text during copying, see Jónas Kristjánsson's paper). But, as Álfrún also points out, the saga lacks a sense of coherence. Omission of the long speeches of self-expression leads to a shift of emphasis away from the subjective experience of love, which is the *raison d'être* of the text. Further, although these alterations must be intended to make the text a credible narrative within the conventions of a prose saga, Brother Robert does not succeed in "translating" the contents of the work into the Norse world. This is particularly unsatisfactory in terms of the ethics of the work. The saga neither presents a wholly remote fantasy-world, where alternative ethical systems may function, nor does it present the ethics of the action in a way at all compatible with either the Norse code of honour or any Christian system of values. The ethical implications of vocabulary, in particular, are at odds with the actual events of the saga. Thirdly and most importantly, Brother Robert seems unaware of this conflict between ethics and action within the saga: there is no sense, for instance, of a tension between an outer law of loyalty and the inner law of love in Tristram's relationship with Mark. His characters are therefore trivial, for they have no ethical significance. A contrast with the younger *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* is illuminating here. As Paul Schach has pointed out (*The Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd: Summary or Satire?*, MLQ xxi 1960, pp. 336-352), this saga sets out to present a much more acceptable picture, in that it attempts to justify some of the characters. Here Tristram has some sense of responsibility for (some of) his actions, and the Mark-figure (Móroddr) does not behave merely with blindness punctuated by wild suspicions, but is motivated by real affection for Tristram. Equally, the younger saga resolves the ethical problem by the alternative means of parody, complete with the punctuation of "authorial" comment. For instance, when Móroddr (Mark) has offered Tristram both Ísodd and the throne, and Tristram has refused, the saga-man adds, "but I swear, says he who composed the saga, that I would rather have received Ísodd than all the world's gold". If the entire story is comic, then its ethical shortcomings cannot be taken seriously. The same sort of comic "authorial" interjection appears elsewhere to much the same effect: there is a splendid example in *Saulus saga ok Nikanors*, chapter 21, introduced by a similar (comic) formula: "En þat veit trú mín, segir sá sem söguna hefir skrifat, at...".

It is not only Brother Robert's *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd* that has lost its original function and failed also to find a new literary justification in Norse. Other sagas, especially *Parcevals saga* and *Valvers Dáttir*, which form an incoherent and fragmented translation of parts of Chrétien's *Conte del Graal*, have also lost their fundamental point. The translator has not understood the nature of the Grail itself, or less probably has thought it and its religious significance inappropriate in such a work, and so the text loses its *raison d'être*. This has been discussed by Peter Foote, *Gangandi greiði*, Einarsbók, Reykjavík 1969, pp. 48-58. Others of the translated romances never had very much merit in the first place, eg. *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*, the source of which is described by Halvorsen as "this very rough and vulgar chanson de geste" (op. cit. p. 18).

Not all the translated romances can be dismissed in terms of literary value. Probably the most successful is *Möttuls saga* (a translation of *Le Mantel Mautailié*), which is a witty, elegant and economical piece of work in its own right, and which can stand beside any native piece for quality of narrative skill. It is perhaps unusually well-suited to the rather sharp sense of humour which runs through the *Íslendinga sögur*. In that it attacks the practice of courtly love, as well as expressing its ideal, it mirrors the ironic double vision of the sagas. Its popularity may be shown by the cross-reference to it at the end of *Samsons saga fagra*. Another text which is by no means unsuccessful in translation is *Iven(t)s saga*, but it succeeds in Norse probably for much the same reason as it had been successful elsewhere : its multi-coloured marvels, many still with a Celtic flavour. The Norse version is a wonder-tale, pure and simple, set in the courtly conventions of romance, and as such it is very enjoyable. Again, the moral implications and exposition of Chrétien's original are simply omitted : that dimension has no part to play in the Norse text. While the Old Swedish version restores some of the elements cut in the Norse version, it does not restore these : see Tony Hunt, *Herr Ivan Lejonriddaren*, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* viii 1975, pp. 168-186, but cp. Sigurd Kværndrup's paper in this volume.

As mentioned above, it is possible to see a practical application for Primary Romance in Norway : that of courtly instruction. This is much less plausible for Iceland. There, although moral didacticism may play a part, the only major function of romance can be that of entertainment : the function of the *lygisaga* for King Sverrir. It is partly in this sense that the romances may be termed *lygisögur*. And their ability to entertain lies largely in their aspect as wonder-tale, already mentioned for *Iven(t)s saga*. The Secondary Romances, produced (it is assumed) wholly in Iceland, can be seen almost entirely as wonder-tales.

Norse already possessed a literature which largely fulfilled the function of wonder-tale, among others : the *fornaldarsaga*. It is as wonder-tale that romance and legendary saga may be grouped together as *lygisögur*. *Fornaldarsögur* also, of course, fulfilled other major functions. They served to transmit and develop a more or less coherent body of legendary tradition, which fulfilled the function of a "legendary history". This body of legendary tradition, largely derived from Icelandic sources, was in fact organised specifically and self-consciously into a "legendary history" by Saxo Grammaticus in the early books of the *Gesta Danorum*; it is directly comparable to, for instance, the pseudo-history of Geoffrey of Monmouth. This aspect of the *fornaldarsögur*, as "legendary history", gives them a whole range of features distinct from those of romance. Nonetheless, their matter is marvels, and this material is presented in a world in which the conventions of everyday, practical realism are to some extent suspended, where actions and individuals may be idealised to mythic status, or trivialised to mere entertainment. In this they are exactly parallel to the romances, primary and secondary. Therefore the development of the Icelandic Secondary Romance must be seen in relation not only to Primary Romance, but to the *fornaldarsaga* also.

In the transition from Primary to Secondary Romance, there are major transformations of both material and form. Unlike both Primary Romance and the *fornaldarsaga*, Secondary Romance makes relatively little use of inherited narratives, whether re-worked or not. The only major exceptions are the younger *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar* and *Mágus saga jarls*, both of which, as mentioned, may be seen as occupying an intermediate position between Primary and Secondary Romance in that they are not translations but re-workings of foreign originals. Instead, the Secondary Romance almost always constructs its narrative on the principle of morphology and motif, though some of the motifs (eg. that of the Unkind Beloved, the Maiden King, discussed below) may involve or imply quite substantial fragments of narrative-pattern. Thus the text will give the origins of the hero, with the motifs appropriate to that; it will present his progress through an invariably successful sequence of testing conflicts against a variety of opponents, drawn from the inventory of appropriate motifs; and it will conclude with the equally inevitable Happy Ending at or soon after marriage to the inevitable princess, and a brief notice of his descendants. This method of construction was noted long since by Margaret Schlauch, who in chapter V of *Romance in Iceland* (London 1934) provided a light-hearted and (intentionally) incomplete sketch of such an analysis. Astrid van Nahl (op. cit.) has now provided a much fuller analysis of a limited selection of the texts. A full motif-index of all surviving texts is still much to be desired.

The sole characterisation of the hero is usually that he is of noble

birth, skilled in arms, handsome and generally heroic. He frequently, however, has a more or less helpful Companion (or companions), who may be more specifically characterised. Occasionally the hero is not of noble origin : examples are *Vilmundr viðutan* and *Vigkænn kúahirðir* : the latter appears to show the *kalbítr*-motif, not native to this genre. *Áli flekkr* has an arbitrary facial blemish ; it serves no narrative function, but mirrors the arbitrary *álög* which motivate the saga. If the hero requires other, special attributes (sometimes supernatural), these are usually given to separate characters who accompany him, or sometimes to special possessions : this largely accounts for the more specific characterisation of the Companion of the Hero, mentioned above. Otherwise they require specific narrative motivation (eg. *álög*) ; special possessions may also require specific narrative introduction. Even the exceptions, such as *Drauma-Jón*, who has both a Joseph-like ability to interpret dreams and consequent Joseph-like adventures, and is also of low birth, or *Sigurðr inn þögli*, who simply does not speak for the first eighteen years of his life, behave in a largely conventional way when they enter the conventional situations of the romance. The peculiarities of *Drauma-Jóns saga* have been adequately explained by regarding it as intermediate between romance and *ævintýri*. The hero of *Dámusta saga* is virtually unique in committing a major and morally reprehensible crime early in the text ; this unusual and interesting text, although set in the world of Secondary Romance, is more to be seen as a pseudo-Marian legend. The only exception noted to the Happy Ending is in *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands svikara*, where the hero meets an unexpectedly sticky end half-way through the saga. He is however happily replaced by a son of the same name, identical appearance and attributes, who satisfactorily completes the narrative pattern. The Companion of the Hero plays a particularly important and pleasing role in this saga, and so ensures its unity. Occasionally the Happy Ending is deferred until marriages are arranged for the Companion(s) of the Hero (who can assume the status of minor heroes), eg. in *Sigurðar saga þögla*. In *Mírmann(t)s saga*, most exceptionally, the Happy Ending is at the reconciliation of hero and heroine some time after their marriage ; in *Gibbons saga* it is at the reconciliation of hero and son, as also to some extent in *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*.

The setting of the romance is uniformly Elsewhere : occasionally England (eg. *Ála flekks saga*) or Germany (eg. *Mágus saga jarls*) or France (eg. parts of *Sigurðar saga þögla*), but more usually strange lands such as Ungaríá or Tartaríá, while the princess is sought in Constantinople or Serkland or India (see Margaret Schlauch, op. cit., pp. 50-), where she is an emperor's daughter.

Narrative motivation is frequently slight, and sometimes lacking. In *Ála flekks saga* the action arises from a series of arbitrary and wholly

unmotivated *álög* laid upon the hero by various trolls or troll-like persons. But this becomes something of a literary virtue ; it reflects the inherently arbitrary and irrational nature of the *álög* themselves, comparable to the Celtic *geis*, and so it presents the hero struggling, if ultimately triumphant, within an irrational world subject only to the malevolent whim of Fortune. Where narrative motivation is present, it can arise from any of the constituent motifs of the saga. *Vilmundr viðutan*, for instance, enters upon adventure in pursuit of his lost she-goat *Gæfa*, "good luck, fortune". He does not find his goat, but he finds his fortune, not to mention a princess. The most frequent motivation, however, is the pursuit of princesses : the Bridal Quest. In *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, a dream-vision of the hero's marriage to his beloved motivates the action which ends with the fulfilment of the vision : a very pleasing structural device which encloses the rest of the narrative. It also contains, most unusually, a strikingly venomous anti-heroine in the person of a slighted Saracen princess, as well as (possibly) an important echo of a Lancelot motif not otherwise known in Scandinavia : see Halvorsen, op. cit., p. 25, but cp. Broberg's remarks in his edition of the text, and Rudolf Simek's comments in his paper in the present volume. Strikingly popular as an elaboration of the Bridal Quest is the motif of the Unkind Beloved, where the young lady (usually a Maiden Queen) rejects her suitors, usually somewhat forcefully, and is only finally tamed, again by force, by the hero himself. This motif is genuinely of courtly origin (*daungeur*) ; it is present in, and probably derived from, one of the translated romances, *Clari saga*. This rather nasty text shows a picturesque but distinctly morbid concern with the humiliations of the heroine once she is tamed. *Nitida saga* must be seen as an intentional response to this : it uses the same motif-structure, but presents the heroine in as favourable a light as possible. The correspondences of the names (*Clarus = Nitida*, Lat. "shining" ; *Eskilvarðr* for the disguised hero in both texts) demonstrates the intended and specific relationship between the two texts, but *Nitida saga* is much the more pleasing work of the two in its grace and lightness of touch. Further developments of the motif are seen in *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, where it is motivated by pleasingly picturesque *álög*, and at its fullest in *Dínus saga drambláta* and *Sigurðar saga þögla*. The former of these is unusual in that the Unkind Beloved herself initiates the action ; it is an elaborate and ornately symmetrical narrative structure of magical contests between hero and heroine. *Sigurðar saga þögla* has so monstrous a virgin queen that most (male) readers will undoubtedly applaud her wholly deserved reduction at the end of the saga. These three sagas are unusual in that an inherent characteristic of the hero (intelligence) is functional in the operation of the plot : the hero outwits the Unkind Beloved, admittedly with supernatural assistance. In *Clari saga* the (quasi-supernatural) outwitting of the Unkind Beloved, and the intelligence required for that, is provided by another character introduced for that purpose, and who thus fulfills the role of Companion of the Hero. This

motif can itself provide narrative motivation. Thus *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* is motivated by the hero's relationship with an unfaithful companion; *Járlmanns saga ok Hermanns* is certainly intended as a specific and intentional response to *Konráðs saga*, to which its shorter version contains an explicit reference: it deals, of course, with the hero's relationship with a faithful, though unjustly suspected, companion. It is also related to *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*. In *Þjalar-Jóns saga* the Companion of the Hero takes over the saga. The pursuit of a precious, picturesque and sometimes supernatural object can also motivate large sections of narrative. *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* contains a fine example, in an expedition to the Land of Serpents (ie. Babylon, see Margaret Schlauch, op. cit., pp. 76-8) to seek a green gem, in order to prove that the hero is worthy of the heroine. This motivation is incidentally an example of the Impossible Task set by the woman's father for the lover, and as such is a genuine romance motif, ultimately of Celtic origin, cp. the Tale of Culhwch and Olwen. Another example of the quest for a precious and supernatural object is that for the mantle which forms the entire second part of *Samsons saga fagra*, though this requires further discussion.

The particular popularity of the Unkind Beloved motif may be explained by the way in which it permits unification of the testing contests of the hero with the Bridal Quest and ultimate marriage: the hero's opponent will also be his bride.

From this discussion of Icelandic Secondary Romance, it will be clear that it rejects many if not most of the characteristics of European romance. In their form, the Icelandic Secondary Romances not so much disregard the inherited narratives derived from Primary Romance, as break them up into their constituent motifs, which they then recombine according to their own morphological rules. This is discussed in much detail by Einar Ól. Sveinsson in his essay on the sources of *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, published with Jónas Kristjánsson's edition of that text. In their setting, similarly, they largely take elements from the Matters of France, Britain and Rome, and from the Crusader Romances, and recombine these into a fairly homogenous background against which the action is set. In motivation, the pursuit of honour and the exploration of the notion of "courtesy" are only trivially present in the majority of cases. An individual hero may set out in pursuit of *frægd*, but this notion is normally of no further importance in the text, and any idea of the maintenance and extension of a jealously guarded honour is irrelevant to the Icelandic Secondary Romances. The pursuit of love is, chastely enough, usually the acquisition of a suitable bride, and any association of adulterous passion is largely restricted to troll-women (a motif derived from *fornaldarsögur*). *Gibbons saga* is a rather incoherent exception to this. The Icelandic texts almost wholly disregard the notion of the religious quest, though the search

for the Earthly Paradise (exemplified in *Eiríks saga víðföria*) proves a welcome source of motifs in, for instance, the quest for the green gem in *Konráðs saga keisarasonar*. Most importantly, however, the ethical and tragic dimensions of European romance are wholly lacking. The hero of Icelandic Secondary Romance usually has little or no ethical significance: he does not explore or (usually) significantly exemplify ideals of courtly, chivalric or Christian morality. And since he has no ethical significance, the possibility of tragedy does not exist. As already mentioned, the Icelandic Secondary Romance virtually unfailingly ends with the happy marriage of the hero to his beloved: by no means a usual outcome of European romance.

The inheritance of the Icelandic Secondary Romance from Norse Primary Romance may therefore be fairly precisely defined. It is threefold: a generalised, courtly world, actual and intellectual, within which to set the action; a body of motifs more or less disengaged from any established narrative patterns; lastly, the range of styles available to the romance-author. This last point is a separate topic, which must be excluded from the present discussion: see Jonas Kristjánsson's paper in the present volume.

It is difficult to explain all the differences between Norse Primary Romance and Icelandic Secondary Romance. This is a major problem of Icelandic literary history, which has received remarkably little attention. The major success and continuing popularity of this new literary form constitute a second problem. Although only some 47 have ever been printed, many more exist: Stefán Einarsson quotes a figure of 265 surviving texts (*Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, Reykjavík 1961, p. 205). Further, they continued to be popular long after the Middle Ages, and continued to be composed as late as the 18th and 19th centuries. The *rímur* also give strong evidence for the great and continuing popularity of this material.

Relatively few of the differences between Norse Primary Romance and Icelandic Secondary Romance can be explained as due to the constraints of composing romance in saga-form. In its literary form, the Icelandic Secondary Romance cannot be seen as having developed under the influence of other saga-genres. As has been emphasised, it has largely abandoned inherited narratives in favour of morphology and motif composition. While this can certainly be exemplified elsewhere in saga-literature, it is not, as far as can be judged, usual. Many of the inherited, translated Saints' Lives were constructed in this way, but when the Icelanders themselves composed Saints' Lives they did not in general use this method of composition. Nor, with some exceptions, is there other evidence of significant influence from the Saint's Life upon the Icelandic Secondary Romance. The two genres are explicitly contrasted in the

preface to *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*. Further, the abrupt end of the text at the hero's marriage, almost universal in the Secondary Romance, is largely unique in saga-form, and is completely contrary to an otherwise universal principle of saga-form: that of narrative completeness. A partly related point is that the Secondary Romances show little sign of the tendency towards narrative syncretism visible both elsewhere in the saga-literature and elsewhere in the European romance. In Norse it appears most obviously in the historical sagas, which almost always occur woven together into cycles of texts; the tendency is also strong, if less obvious, in both the *Íslendinga sögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*. This tendency is partly motivated by the principle of narrative completeness, and partly by the apparent fact that such groups of sagas do actually reflect coherent and internally organised bodies of tradition. So they tend to approach the ideal of the "seamless web of story".

This is largely untrue of the Secondary Romance. Instances where one text is explicitly linked with another in terms of character or narrative consequence are rare. *Sigurðar saga þögla* refers to *Flóres* and *Blantzeflúr* at its beginning (the Maiden Queen is their daughter); *þjalar-Jóns saga* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* (shorter version) refer to *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* (Konráðr is Hermann's grandson); *Samsons saga fagra* refers to *Möttuls saga* at its end (calling it *Skikkju saga*; the mantle sought in the latter part of *Samsons saga* is the central object in *Möttuls saga*). In addition, *Mágus saga jarls* (longer version) is related at its end to western European historical chronology, and, in its colophon, refers to the pleasure which "spakir menn" take in hearing *Þiðriks saga*, *Flóvents saga* or "aðrar riddarasögur", in the context of whether such sagas are to be believed or not.

Instead of a syncretic relationship between different texts, there sometimes seems to be a conscious and deliberate establishment of relationships between Secondary Romances on a basis of commentary or even parody. As mentioned above, there are clear, intentional and explicit relationships between *Clari saga* and *Nitida saga*, and between *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* and *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*. In both cases, the second saga takes the same situation and examines it from an opposed viewpoint, as if to provide a commentary upon the first saga. There is a similar situation in the case of the younger Icelandic *Tristrams saga ok Ísoddar*, though here the commentary is comic and amounts virtually to parody, as Paul Schach pointed out (op. cit.). However, any parody here is probably not of Brother Robert's *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd*, as Schach had assumed. The younger saga cannot merely be seen as derived from Brother Robert's saga, since it preserves correctly and clearly a few motifs which are unclear and incorrect in Brother Robert's saga. For example, it preserves the motif that a serving-woman administered the love-potion

(the younger saga also preserves the name *Bringven* more precisely than Brother Robert's *Bringvet*), and the motif of the Husband in the Tree, where Brother Robert has King Mark sitting firmly under the tree, so making nonsense of the text at that point. Marianne Kalinke has also pointed out that the younger saga has also incorporated a Lancelot-motif not found in Brother Robert's saga. However, the confusion of names in the younger saga might indicate that it is a memorial reconstruction of the Tristram story, and so it should be seen as a comic commentary upon the Tristram story in general, rather than specifically upon Brother Robert's saga, whether or not the author of the younger saga knew that text in addition. It should be noted that the view that the younger saga is a memorial reconstruction independent of Brother Robert's saga, coincides with Gísli Brynjúlfsson's final opinion (in his edition of Brother Robert's saga, p. 390, there presented without evidence or argument). It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider whether comparable literary relationships of commentary or parody exist between Old Norse texts beyond the romances.

The Icelandic Secondary Romances cannot be considered, then, to have modified the forms inherited from Primary Romance under influence from other saga-genres. Their reliance upon morphology and motif construction could, however, be derived from folk-tale. This view is expressed in the German term *Märchensaga*. But this explanation is not as satisfactory as it might seem. It may be intrinsically implausible that folk-tale should especially and uniquely affect romance, that the most popular and least highly-regarded literary form (if it can be so described) should modify an educated, sophisticated and courtly genre. Further, it need not be inherently true that folk-tale, as such, must be of morphology and motif construction. Such a view is based upon Propp's (justly) famous analysis of Russian folk-tales. Propp's terminology and analytical technique may of course be used to describe universals of narrative, in which case they are useless in the attempt to determine the relationships and derivations of individual narrative traditions. When restricted to their more precise use, they constitute an analysis of a limited corpus of folk-tales in a single culture at a single time. There is no inherent or necessary reason why folk-tales in other traditions or at other stages should share these characteristics, or why these characteristics should more especially be associated with folk-tale than with other literary forms. There is good evidence and good argument to show that Icelandic folk-tales did and do preserve entire narratives composed of a fixed series of specific motifs, as well as morphological rules capable of organising a range of unattached motifs. It could well be argued, in fact, that a morphology and motif method of composition represents the last stage in the break-down of a tradition, as inherited narratives are disassembled into their constituent motifs and into a set of rules for combining or recombining them. This need

not be particular to folk-tale : all that it requires is a literary tradition subject, for whatever reasons, to creative fragmentation, and the same processes may be seen elsewhere in other literatures (eg. the Revenge Tragedies of Jacobean English).

While narrative incompleteness in the Icelandic Secondary Romance could well be an inheritance from Primary Romance, it is most striking that the Secondary Romances do not show the narrative syncretism, discussed above, which is as much a tendency of European romance as of the Icelandic saga. Further, the virtually invariable Happy Ending at the marriage of the hero has no obvious source whatsoever, whether in Icelandic or in non-Icelandic literatures.

In terms of setting and content, also, the differences between Primary and Secondary Romance are difficult to explain in all respects. However, the generalised courtly world of Secondary Romance may be seen as approximately parallel to the generalised legendary world of the fornaldarsögur : *Sudríönd*, parallel with *Nordríönd*, as Cederschiöld had it. It could thus be seen as constructed on the model of the legendary world of the fornaldarsögur, and as a conscious parallel to that world.

In the repertory of motifs available to the authors of Icelandic Secondary Romance, there is also visible but varying influence from the fornaldarsögur. Both Primary Romance and Norse legendary tradition had some motifs in common, for instance giants. And it is at such points that Secondary Romance is most vulnerable to influence. So the giant-like opponent of the hero (all too often called *Eskupatr* : see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *op. cit.*, pp. cxvii-) may acquire troll-like attributes, or, more rarely, those of the berserk. And once trolls have got into the texts, they can flourish, together with all their accompanying motifs. There is a splendid family of trolls in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, and another in *Ála flekks saga*. Similarly, the hero may well encounter a Viking berserk and indulge in the usual legendary battle, together with all the usual supernatural apparatus. There is a good example in *Sigurðar saga þögla*. However, it is most striking how limited such penetration from the fornaldarsögur actually is : it is restricted for the most part to specific groups of motifs, and to specific sagas or parts of sagas. Barrow-breaking, for instance, is one of the most common activities of the hero in fornaldarsögur ; it is absent from the secondary Romance. *Sigurðar saga þögla*, often cited above, is remarkable for the richness and range of motifs which it contains, while *Ála flekks saga* is as much a fornaldarsaga as a romance in terms of style and setting as well as range of motifs. *Þjalar-Jóns saga* incorporates a range of specific motifs from *Völsunga saga*. The most striking example, however, is *Samsons saga fagra*, the latter part of which is a short fornaldarsaga, attached rather loosely to a Secondary Romance. Both

parts, very strikingly, employ folk-tale narratives for their basic substance, but in each part told within the conventions of each genre and with the motifs proper to each genre. Since each is very well-written, and the romance section in particular shows a graceful wit, as well as capturing a distinctively Celtic tone, the text must be regarded as a stylistic tour de force. Rudolf Simek, in a paper in the present volume, has shown how the romance section is dependent upon a Lancelot-narrative. However, in this context this text is most useful as a demonstration of the clear and conscious distinction made by most saga-authors between the body of styles and motifs proper to Secondary Romance, and that proper to the fornaldarsaga. They are parallel but largely independent genres, and overlap to a surprisingly limited extent. Both are wonder-tales, but in the romances, the vigour of the fornaldarsögur is toned down and their corresponding coarseness smoothed away. Instead, the romances show frequent emphasis on picturesque and exotic description (usually restricted in the fornaldarsögur to the attractions of troll-women). The world of the Secondary Romances is (literally) highly-coloured : precious things are described in abundance, especially in terms of their luminosity and colour, and this concern with precious and exotic objects mirrors in physical terms the courtly and exotic setting of the romance-world, and the courtly and exotic manners depicted therein, not to mention the ornate and elaborate styles employed to express this subject-matter. The construction of Secondary Romances and their relationship with folk-tale and fornaldarsaga have also been discussed, rather differently, by Astrid van Nahl and Jürg Glauser in papers given at the Fourth International Saga Conference, München 1979.

It is possible, therefore, to explain some of the differences between Primary and Secondary Romance in terms of their setting and content, as due to influence from the fornaldarsögur. This influence, however, appears to be limited and relatively trivial, and consciously to have been avoided by many of the saga-authors. It must be noted that there is little certain reciprocal influence from romance upon the fornaldarsögur. Influence from the fornaldarsögur cannot explain the more profound differences between Primary and Secondary Romance : the fairly complete elimination of serious ethical issues from Secondary Romance, and with this the elimination of the possibility of tragedy : hence the obligatory Happy Ending at marriage, which is of course as much a matter of content as of form. It is not the Icelandic Secondary Romances which inherit from Primary Romance the pursuit of honour or of adulterous love, and the tragic outcome which can ensue. It is Kormakr or Kjartan who is the true heir of Tristram, and it is the Íslendinga sögur which have assumed within their ample range the true functions of European romance. Chivalric honour, tragic love, or transcendent religious understanding are to be found in the Íslendinga sögur ; they are absent from the Romance whence they

sprang.

In contrast, the Icelandic Secondary Romances are themselves, and present within themselves, a world, formal, exotic and highly-coloured : as stylised and as artificial as a courtly dance, and as inevitable. These romances are rituals of human achievement, where violent endeavour, reconciliation and social fulfilment are unified into a single narrative pattern. In the idealised social world of courtly life, the pattern must not be disturbed by the failures and approximations of reality ; here, therefore, the hero always wins his battles, always marries the heroine, always succeeds to the throne.

Here, it may be, lies the answer to our problem, as well as to the otherwise largely inexplicable popularity of this genre. Construction according to morphological rules is here the formal consequence of ritualisation. And those inherited narratives which do not already conform to the desired pattern - the vast majority - are therefore disassembled into their constituent motifs, which can then be recombined according to the morphological rules of the ritual. The analysis of ethical problems, and so the exploration of ethical codes, whether those of chivalry, courtly love, or Christianity, allow for the possibility of flaw and failure, the possibility of a tragic outcome. This conflicts fundamentally with idealisation, not so much of the individual as of the world within which he is presented. Hence ethical analysis and exploration are eliminated, together with the tragic possibilities which they imply. Instead, and it is no unworthy purpose, the end is fulfilment.

Romance is probably the only vehicle available for this idealised expression of human achievement and fulfilment within society, because the metaphor of the courtly world was (and possibly remains) the only available idealisation of society. Nor should such idealisation merely be dismissed as the fantasies of a society burdened by poverty, hardship and the oppression of long neglect. Wish-fulfilment fantasies the Secondary Romances certainly are, but they serve another function also. They serve, as it were, to define the parameters for much of the rest of the literature. Without an expression of the social ideal to which individuals may aspire, their actual aspirations and their shortcomings are less intelligible. Figures such as Clarus or Sigurðr the Silent exemplify the paradigms of behaviour within which, for instance, the tempestuous relationship between Gunnarr and Hallgerðr is largely to be understood. The Icelandic Secondary Romances are not great literature, though they are very frequently very entertaining literature. But they define the terms by which the Sagas of Icelanders are largely to be judged.

I. LES SAGAS DE CHEVALIERS EN TANT QUE GENRE

