CHRISTIANITY AND THE *SENS* OF *TRISTRAMS SAGA*

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The identification of the Anglo-Norman or Norwegian monk Brother Robert in the introductory lines of *Tristrams saga* as the work's translator (5, 4-6)[1], however tenuous this attribution may be in relation to the following work[2], inevitably invites assumptions about the clerical writer, whether or not these are substantiated by the text[3]. A further widespread assumption concerns the supposed inferiority of the *riddarasögur*, which fail to capture the spirit of their sources even when they translate the letter faithfully[4]. *Tristrams saga* has not escaped the general censure. Judgements of it are as follows: 'Schon aus der Schwerfälligkeit des Stils geht hervor, dass die *Tristramssaga ok Isondar* nicht das Werk eines geübten Sagaschreibers oder Übersetzers ist... Auch sonst zeigt sich die Tristramssaga als Arbeit eines nicht besonders erfahrenen Mannes. Alle Seelenstimmungen, woran die Vorlage so reich ist, alle Reflexionen werden gemieden, offenbar, weil sich der Übersetzer nicht in die psychologische Arbeit seines Gewährsmannes hat versetzen können. Nur der Gang der Handlung wird innegehalten'; Robert is 'ganz rücksichtslos und lässt die fein ausgesponnenen stimmungsschilderungen des Thomas ohne erbarmen fallen'; 'Brother Robert has ... cut away not only the excrescence but also the living flesh of the romance. Though Robert runs no risk of boring the reader, he has fallen into the equal peril of playing only upon the superficial interest of action'; *Tristrams saga* 'is of no high literary quality'; *Tristrams saga* 'is not an impressive work of literature in its own right.... it lacks a sense of coherence ... 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'.[5] The purpose of the present paper is twofold: to demonstrate that in the adaptation for a Scandinavian audience the writer used Christianity not in a devout way which might prove his clerical status, but as a clever manipulation of the adulterous love affair, and hence to show that in his playful treatment of the love affair he reveals an understanding of the spirit of courtly love often denied to the North.

The incorporation of Christianity into a tale which presumably glorifies an illicit courtly love affair poses the immediate problem of introducing a new, conflicting set of values into the text concerned, to the detriment of the affair. One may expect an easy avoidance of the difficulty by keeping Christianity away from the body of the text, the method used in *Möttuls saga*. Consequently, it is startling to note precisely the opposite technique operating in *Tristrams saga*, which contains an abundance of religious allusions: far more than either *Erex saga* or *Ívens saga*, both of which set out to depict God's instrument, the Christian knight. A close analysis, however, reveals a pattern to the religious references in *Tristrams saga*. While the large number of Christian allusions renders it impractical to deal with each one singly, in the following exposition I have tried to gather together as many as possible to give a fair representative overview. An examination shows that unlike the Chrétien-based *riddarasögur*, Christian values are not integral to the text. The protagonists are depicted in courtly or heroic, but not Christian

terms, and rely primarily on their own martial or intellectual skill, appealing to God only as a last resort when they are helpless. The story certainly portrays God as supporting Tristram in general and the love affair in particular. Yet the frequency of meaningless or even blatantly insincere religious tags in the story manifests the manipulative use to which Christianity (like treachery) is put concerning the affair in the saga, the values of which are far removed from real life.

A speciously convincing network of Christian references supporting love begins with Blensinbíl and Kanelangres, when Blensinbíl asks God the cause of her sickness (9,20-1), thereby showing that she has no more control over her love than have Tristram and Ísond over theirs after imbibing the fatal potion, and implying that God, on the other hand, does exert control over it. Various religious references concerning their love follow, of which two stand out. The first is Blensinbíl's prayer: 'Guð, vertu skjǫldr ok hlíf mínnar ógurligrar elsku' (10,13), where the appeal to God is marked by religious imagery as found especially in the psalms (e.g. Ps. 3.3; 5.12; 28.7; 119.114) and strengthening the connection between God and love. Secondly, by a twist of his words a basic religious tag, Kanelangres's 'Guð signi yðr' (10,31), is invested with meaning : 'ef þú...bætir þat er þú hefir misgørt til var, þá sértu af guði sæmdr ok signaðr' (10,32-4). Since the amending of wrong can come about by Kanelangres returning Blensinbíl's love, God's benediction again seems to hover over the affair. Blensinbíl's query about her torture (10,18-19), Kanelangres's promise to deal honourably with Blensinbíl if God wills it (11,6-7), Blensinbíl's valediction that God may keep Kanelangres (11,11-12) and her claim when she is pregnant and about to be abandoned that she will die unless God is merciful to her (13,30) all imply simply by linking God with the affair that it is blessed. The approval is strengthened by the fact that God apparently hears the quasi-prayers. Kanelangres does indeed deal honourably with Blensinbíl, chiefly by taking her home with him and marrying her; God preserves Kanelangres when Blensinbíl asks it (his subsequent death in battle occurs for a different cause in a new narrative section), and Blensinbíl does not die at the time that she mentions. When she does die, it is clear that she wants to (15,14-15). The love culminates in Christian marriage, 'með lǫgligum hjúskap ok réttri vígslu' (14,29). Admittedly the prime significance of the wedding is to legalize Tristram and his kingship, but it does also place the final stamp of sanctity on the preceding love. God's endorsement of and connection with the love between Kanelangres and Blensinbíl is important in setting the scene for the second, major love affair in the text.

Three segments of the text are instrumental in portraying supposed divine acquiescence in Tristram and Ísonds' illicit affair. The most significant is Ísond's concluding prayer, unique to the Norse. Most recently, Michel Huby has seen the prayer as evidence that Ísond regards her love for Tristram as sinful. In earlier literature, Joseph Bédier, Golther and Mogk are agreed that the prayer is an indication of the clerical translator, although they disagree on the prominence of the translator: Golther claims: 'der Geistliche kommt nur selten zu Wort', whereas the same circumstances lead Mogk to maintain: 'der Stand des geistlichen Übersetzers zeigt sich wiederholt'. (Bédier's stance is closer to Golther's: 'il était grand temps, en effet, que le traducteur scandinave se souvínt de sa cléricature'.)[6] Kölbing is closer to the point in his comment that the prayer does not fit the tone of the narrative.[7] The validity of Kölbing's belief

is, however, suspect. A concluding prayer provides the opportunity to renounce the values of the preceding text, in the way that Flóres and Blankiflúr renounce their youthful, eartly love by joining religious orders in their old age[8], and as Launcelot and Guinevere in the *Morte Darthur* renounce and condemn their passion at the end of their lives: e.g. 'thorow oure love that we have loved togydir ys my moste noble lorde slayne. Therefore, sir Launcelot, wyte thou well I am sette in suche a plyght to gete my soule hele'.[9] In Ísond's prayer, however, there is no hint of renunciation of the past. Unlike Guinevere, Ísond is not specific about sin when asking for mercy: 'Ver þessum manni ok mér miskunnandi' (111,36); 'Þú ert skapari okkar: eilífr, allsvaldandi guð, vertu nú syndum okkar miskunnsamr svá sem ek vil ǫllu þessa trúa...ok veit mér þat (er) ek bið þik, mínn skapari! at þú fyrirgefir mér mínar syndir' (112,4-8). A request for mercy in general terms before death is standard, and the conventional, almost liturgical nature of her prayer is evident from its creed-like content, referring to Christ's birth, ministry, death, harrowing of hell and redemption, to God as Creator, and finishing by appealing to the Holy Trinity. Jesus died for all men: 'ok þoldir dauða fyrir oss synduga menn' (112,2); nowhere does Ísond turn from the general need for forgiveness to her own particular case, although death is a highly personal matter. Moreover, the prayer passes naturally into a love lament. Admittedly *Tristrams saga* emphasizes the prayer more than the lament by presenting it in its entirety (ten printed lines) whereas the lament comprises only two and a half lines, a drastic reduction of the French, in accordance with the general compression of love, psychology and dramatic monologues in the *riddarasögur*. But the writer makes it obvious that the lament extends beyond the words on the page: 'Hun talaði þá mǫrg orð um ást þeirra ok samvist, ok um þeirra hǫrmuliga skilnað' (112,11-12), which presumably would not be the case if the love affair were to be regarded as sinful. The final endorsement of the affair, whether original to the saga or borrowed at some later stage of transmission from the *Tristrams kvæði*[10] comes with the intertwining boughs over the graves, implying the rightness of their love.

A further apparent endorsement of the affair is apparent from the timing of Ísond's death. Having accepted the storm at sea as a sign that God does not want her to see Tristram alive (110,17-19), she prays that they may die together: 'Nú vilda ek, at guð vildi sem ek, ok ef ek dœja hér, þá yrði ok þínn dauði okkr saman komandi!' (110,21-2). Her prayer at the end of the saga, upon finding Tristram dead, like a final confession, gives the impression of being delivered under the awareness that her earlier prayer for death with Tristram is about to be answered, and her demise thereupon is the actual answer to her prayer.

Two other incidents indicate that the endorsement of the love affair in the final prayer is typical of the stance towards it throughout the text. The first is Ísond's ordeal of innocence. We are distanced from the thought of sin being tested in the trial by the bishop's preceding advice, a long speech which stresses the notion of calumny rather than guilt with its recurrence of the word *hróp* (71,12.18.20.25). A solemn religious element enters with the consecration of the iron, Ísond hearing mass and giving alms (73,27-8) and culminates in Ísond's oath: 'svá hjálpi mér guð í þessari freistni ok svá skíri hann mik af þessu járni' (74,4). The invoking of God means that the outcome will appear very much a sign of His approval or condemnation. Ultimately it is approval: 'ok gaf guð henni með

sinni fagri miskunn fagra skírn' (74,14-15). The phrase 'með sinni fagri miskunn fagra skírn', marked by the unusual collocation and the repetition of the adjective, may possibly imply that the mercy is undeserved. However, if so, the point is certainly understated, as evident from comparison with two analogues. In Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, the narrator states the reality of Isolde's guilt (15648-9) and says after her success in the trial: 'dâ wart wol g'offenbaeret/ und al der werlt bewaeret,/ daz der vil tugenthafte Crist/ wintschaffen alse ein ermel ist.' (15733-6; 'Thus it was indeed revealed and proven to all the world that the omnipotent Christ is as flexible as a windblown sleeve' (my translation)).[11] The *Spesar þáttr* of *Grettis saga*[12] records that Spes was in the wrong, and that men were suspicious of her oath: 'gat hann (Sigurðr) ok engu fram komit, þó at hann hefði rétt at mæla' (p. 284); 'Þá er menn hugðu at eiðstaf hennar, þótti mǫnnum, sem grunr hefði í verit' (pp. 284-5). One can understand de Vries's comment that a strangely frivolous game is played in the incident with matters of faith[13]; the writer's moralizing attitude noted by Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir[14] in the minimizing of the love factor is not discernible.

In addition to this blatant exposition of God siding with the lovers in what may at first seem to be a blasphemous manipulation of Christianity, the Norse also has God support Tristram and Ísond in their exile, claiming that He nourished them in the grotto: 'guð mun vilja gefa þeim nǫkkura næring' (79,16-17). Because God supports the affair, it and the romance can continue at points at which they would otherwise founder. Associated with the divine support is the use - or non-use - of the judgemental word 'sin'. Ísond's purely general use of the term *synd* follows a paucity of explicit moral judgement in the text. Sin words occur almost only when sin is not being committed. In the love grotto when Markis comes across Tristram and Ísond asleep with a sword between them, he sees it as evidence of their virtue, and the concept of sin appears in a subjunctive clause: 'ef syndug ást væri þeirra í milli' (81,2-3). On the strength of this sight, he refuses to believe in the sin or shame of the lovers (81,20). Later, when he expects to find the lovers 'í syndum' in the orchard (81,34), he is thwarted. So the only real judgement of Tristram and Ísonde' sin is that levied by Bringvet when she is half demented - 'ok ei vil ek lengr vera samþykkjandi synda ykkar' (105,26-7) - and her words do not have full effect because of her mental state.

Before the affair begins, we see Tristram relying on God and God helping Tristram in circumstances where Tristram is unambiguously in the right, as a defenceless wronged child and a defender against injustice. Thus in these early stages a pattern is established of the good Tristram receiving divine aid, disposing the listener/ reader to view him favourably throughout the text. A jarring note indicates, however, that all is not as correct as it seems, as is the fact that such trust in God seems only to occur when the person concerned is totally unable to help himself.

The first instance of this occurs with the kidnapped child Tristram. Tristram's helpless condition leads him to pray for divine mercy and protection (18,25-8). Róald also commends Tristram to God (19,6). The course of events reveals God's help, with the Norwegians' perception of the storm as a punishment for their sin against Tristram (19,34-5) and consequent decision to release him (20,1). Upon being stranded in Cornwall, Tristram again prays, invoking God as the Creator, referring to

the Trinity, then appealing for help: 'nú hugga þú mik ok legg ráð fyrir mik, ok ver mik fyrir óráðum ok vandræðum, fyrir háska ok óvinum, því(at) þú veizt, hvers ek em þurfandi...' (20,16-18). Walking along, he continues to ask God for mercy (21,6) and is heard instantly, seeing the pilgrims straight afterwards (21,7). He acknowledges God's power when speaking to them (21,21-2), and God's benevolence is obvious from the fact that he ends up at the royal court. Róald later says that he has found Tristram 'með guðs hjálp ok forsjá' (27,30-1). A jarring feature in Tristram's prayer, however, is its self-centredness, with no thought of thanking or praising God for saving him from his former predicament. Moreover, the prayer (just over five lines of Kölbing's printed text) is overshadowed by the complaining monologue describing his desolation into which it passes (nineteen lines), in which God is all but forgotten.

God also helps Tristram in his battle with Mórhold to free the land from the Irish tribute. The episode is marked by religious allusions in a number of different voices. First the narrator addresses God: 'Dróttinn guð, þolinmóðr ertú, at þú þolir slíkt: miskunna þessum harmi hinum hǫrmuliga!' (30,35-6). Next the people pray concerning the result of the lot (31,18-19), and Tristram offers to fight for them in God's strength: 'með slíku afli, sem guð hefir mér hét; en ef þessi er sterkr, þá er guð máttugr at hjálpa mér ok frjálsa bǫrn yður' (32,1-2). The people pray for him both before and during the combat (34,19-22; 36,3-4). Tristram hears the latter prayer and it seems to spur him on. Yet the episode contains certain disturbing elements. Tristram appears to embody stout faith when speaking to Mórhold about his poisoned wound: 'Guð er almáttugr mér at hjálpa ok frelsi várt fyrir þér at verja með sinni miskunn' (35,33-4). The declaration is itself orthodox, but the faith expressed is subordinated by the heroic statements between which it is sandwiched: 'milku heldr vil ek deyja í einvígi, enn með svívirðing tapa sœmd minni' (35,31-2); 'ek skula vera mín enn hefnandi: hǫgg fyrir hǫgg skal ek þér gjalda' (35,35). Unsettling, too, is that Tristram clinches his victory with words not of humble thanks but of scornful triumph: 'Ef Ísodd dróttning kann eitrlækningar ok megi mér ei aðrir duga, þá skal hun aldri mega þér duga aðr græða...því(at) ljótari er þitt sár ok leiðinligra!' (36,11-14).

A later incident which teems with Christian allusions is the one in which Bringvet is sent to the forest to be killed, lest she betray the lovers' secret. The references all come from Bringvet and are mostly meaningless tags, such as 'fyrir guðs sakir', intended to give vehemence to her words and reinforce her innocence (58,34; 59,3.6.17.20.23). Bringvet is right and good because she is defending the affair, so that through her God and the affair are linked indirectly. A progression is made from justification of the hero to justification of the affair, with implications for the rest of the saga. As with the boy Tristram, it is a case of appealing to God in utter helplessness: Bringvet is totally at the mercy of the thralls instructed to kill her.

Eye-catching gatherings of religious allusions significantly occur only, however, when the characters are unable to help themselves, as a last desperate resort. A more thorough examination of the text suggests that the Christianity in it is no more than a veneer, pushing the effort to justify Tristram and Ísonds' affair into relief and distanced from it. The superficiality of the saga's Christianity is evinced partly by the absence of Christianity at essential places, a feature noticeable especially in

comparison with other *riddarasögur* but also discernible from a contrast with the large quantity of insignificant allusions. Whereas even in the trivial *Möttuls saga* a prologue gives Arthur Christian as well as other virtues and *Ívens saga* links Arthur with Christendom[15], in *Tristrams saga* Christian values are absent from portrayals of the protagonists. Kanelangres is described as handsome, generous, wealthy, knowledgeable, valiant, fearless, wise, prudent, accomplished, fierce when necessary and affectionate in bearing (5,7-18). Some of these values would be approved by the church, but nevertheless they are unambiguously chivalric ones. Blensinbíl is courteous, beautiful, honourable, lovable, rich, generous, wise and noble (8,20-4), again chivalric values. Róald is above all loyal (14,27; 16,26-7) with wisdom and goodwill (16,27); praiseworthy from a Christian point of view, but not depicted from this standpoint. Tristram's values are all courtly or martial, not Christian: he is learned in various disciplines and is courteous, wise and valiant (17,1-5); later we learn that he is the bravest of men (29,21 & 24) and we see his cunning and his prowess in action. (I restrict my references to Tristram to narratorial statements, because it is the narrator who is in control of the romance. What other personae say about Tristram, although it tends to reinforce the narrator's remarks, is coloured by their characters and by the situation.) Kardín is introduced as handsome, courteous and brave (83,14-15) and his sister Ísodd as beautiful, courteous and prudent (83,20-1), again chivalric virtues. Markis is said at various points to be noble (6,19), courteous (6,30), famous (6,39), munificent (or gracious?) (*mildr*, 7,7) and powerful (8,19). Kalinke has noted the contrast between the humility with which Arthur surveys his court in *Erex saga* and the self-satisfaction with which Markis views his here (7,30-4).[16] His retainers are brave, agreeable, generous, courtly and courteous (6,8-9), and those who arm Tristram before he returns home to avenge his father are handsome, courteous, courtly and agreeable (27,6). The number of descriptions of knights in the work, all using the same vocabulary, indicate that the saga is setting out to portray the perfect knight. The absence of Christian values in the stereotype descriptions is curious. The notion of the *miles Dei* must have been familiar to the audience: it is after all based on the exhortation in the Bible to put on spiritual armour (Eph. 6.13-17), and *Placidus saga* in the *Heilagra manna sögur* features a Christian knight. As stated above, Christianity is certainly part of chivalry in other *riddarasögur*. This renders its absence from *Tristrams saga* rather striking and the depiction of Christianity where it does occur somewhat hollow.

Not only are the characters of *Tristrams saga* not described in Christian terms, but, unlike other *riddarasaga* heroes, they rarely exhibit reliance on God, preferring to trust their own strength. This prevents the hero from being a humble figure and God's tool, instrumental in justifying chivalry. One could perhaps argue that such a portrayal would be inappropriate in a love tale, but that it can work is obvious from the Lancelot story, where it contributes powerfully to the struggle between different ethical systems and to the fall of the Round Table. The superficial Christian references highlight the lack of 'real' ones, which occur only when the hero cannot help himself. Thus despite the concentration of Christian references when Tristram has been kidnapped, there are no thanks to God upon his and Róald's reunion (25). No thanks are rendered for Tristram's victory over Mórhold (36) or his recovery from his wound (40); neither do the mourning Irish appeal to Him. When Queen Ísond heals

Tristram from his poisoned wound, the stress is not on God's mercy but on mortal skill (38,23-30), and Tristram later attributes his recovery partly to his own cunning, but certainly not to God: 'Tristram segir...at hann fann list ok lygi sér til hjálpar, ok at sjálf dróttningin græddi hann með tignarligum hætti ok kroptugum lækningum' (40,16-20). That he thanks the queen but not God is especially manifest in the phraseology with which he expresses his gratitude, actually mentioning God: 'guð þakki yðr ok ǫmbuni alla yðar góða gørninga, er þér hafit mér gørt' (39,30). Mention of God again highlights actual reliance on human skill, this time Tristram's own, when he agrees to return to Ireland as a proxy-wooer: 'þá skal ek...gøra slíkt, sem guð vill lofa mér, eptir fremsta mætti ok allri kunnáttu' (43,3-5): it is noteworthy that Tristram does not say: 'according to His mercy'. The pattern of faith in humans continues with the statement when he has been intoxicated by the fumes of the dragon's tongue: 'hann mátti ei á fætr komast ok ei hjálpast, nema hann njóti *annarra manna* miskunnar' (45,23-4; my italics). The reliance on humans, not God, is especially noticeable here because of the connotations of the noun 'miskunn', often applied to God and Mary. And humans, the two Ísonds, do indeed help him, not motivated by God. Standard religious tags after Tristram has killed the dragon, such as his exclamation upon waking (47,12. See also 47,14; 48,20 & 24; 49,11) expose the integral lack of faith. Stress on human mercy again emerges when Tristram, his identity discovered, is in the bath and the Ísonds want to slay him (p.54).

In the episode of the Irish harper, Tristram defeats the Irish harper not for moral reasons, because he is in the right, but because of his own cunning: 'Þú fekkt hana með svikum af konunginum, en ek með vélum af þér!' (63,16-17); 'með mikilli list er hun aptr komin' (63,26). The meaningless tag 'Guð þakki yðr' (62,33) during the episode highlights the actual absence of morality or religion. Similarly, when Tristram offers to kill the giant Urgan, he does so somewhat arrogantly in his own strength: '"Ef þú játar mér bœnina", kvað Tristram, "þá skal ek frelsa þik ok ríki þitt ...ok gøra allt landit frjálst' (76,16-18). The emphasis throughout the speech on the first person pronoun and the failure to enlist God's help are thrown into relief by the duke's reference to Him in his response, 'Guð þakki yðr!' (76,24). Ísond's declaration upon learning of Tristram's marriage that one cannot rely on any man (87,28-9) does not lead her to conclude that one should trust in God (cf Ps. 118,8). Finally, when Tristram is sick and dying, he has no thought of appealing to God to help him (p.108) or even to speed Ísond's journey; his failure to consider God even at the point of death is also marked by casual religious allusions (108,12 & 38; 109,8). All of this could of course simply transmit the source, but the independence of translation, resulting in abbreviation which alters the whole tone of the text, indicates that the writer could have changed this trend had he wanted to, instead of which he stresses it by the juxtaposition with trivial Christian tags. So it could have a deliberate purpose, namely to undermine the divine support of the love affair, the prime overt function of religion in the text, to make the text criticize itself. This would make the use of Christianity more moral, albeit obliquely, than it would be if the endorsement of the affair were not questioned.

The point is reinforced by Biblical echoes on an underlying level . Róald's childrens' jealousy of their putative brother because Róald favours Tristram above them recalls Benjamin's treatment of Joseph and the envy

incurred thereby in Genesis. The storm at sea as retribution for wrongdoing after Tristram is kidnapped reminds us of Jonah. Tristram's declaration to Mórhold that God is powerful to help him (35,33-4, already cited) is reminiscent of the words of Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel (Dan. 3,17), and the completion of the creation of the hall of statues includes what could be a verbal reverberation of Genesis: 'ok líkaði þetta Tristram vel' (94,24-5). The first two echoes are built into the basic plot and are inevitable in any version of the Tristan story; the others are a matter of choice. The cumulative effect invites us to judge the text from a traditional Judaeo-Christian standpoint outside the text, again marking the deficiencies of Christianity within the saga.

The absence of Christianity where it matters is marked by the quantitative weight of the frequent religious tags. Some of these are simply meaningless (except to add emphasis in certain contexts). The highly formulaic nature of such expression is highlighted at the end, where Tristram sends Ísond, via Kardín, 'kveðju guðs ok sína' (109,8), and it is duly reported: 'en hann berr henni kveðju Tristrams' (109,28-9). (Similar formulaic use occurs, for example, at 22,8; 39,37; 48,24; 51,10; 52,27-8; 69,13; 78,23; 91,21; 99,32; 102,33; 102,37 & 38; 103,14; 105,29.) On at least one occasion, however, the formula emerges as ridiculous, coming as a bathetic qualification at the end of a blustering threat: 'ef hun er eigi svá fríð sem þú segir, þá skaltu góra mér rétt, ef guð vill' (97,25).

More significantly, many religious references are glaringly hypocritical, a device to conceal real intentions. Thus Tristram greets Morgán with the blessing: 'Signi guð yðr, hertugi!' (28,1), but that he does not mean it is evident from the fact that he immediately launches into his accusation, and by the end of the page has killed the addressee. Similarly, the wounded and stinking Tristram tells Markis in mealy-mouthed fashion that he wishes to sail off: 'hvar sem guð lætr mik niðr koma með sínni háleitri miskunn eptir mínni þurft' (37,27-8), which simply is not true: he sails deliberately to Ireland. When the courtiers advise Markis to marry and beget heirs: 'hvárt sem guð vildi, karlmann eðr kvendi' (40,34), the pious tone created by their apparent resignation to God jars with the malevolent envy motivating their counsel. When Markis informs Ísond that he wants to go on a pilgrimage and she implores him: 'fyrir guðs sakir, dvelizt heima' (68,31), her emphatic plea is merely a disguise for her desire to be with Tristram free from marital surveillance, and the whole context of the discourse, in which she has been primed by Bringvet, underlines the hypocrisy. The dwarf is insincere when he greets Tristram with the words: 'Guðs kveðju ok frú Ísondar' (68,35-6), as he wants to trap Tristram. Tristram is equally insincere when he assures Kardín: 'Guð veit...mik fýsir ekki þangat at fara' (88,19-20), with a Christian formula for emphasis: we know that in fact he intends to cross the river into the giant's territory, as implied even by the words directly following his speech: 'En ei at síðr leit hann fjarri skóginn' (88,22-3). The hypocritical use of Christian tags coming from various characters, including heroine and especially hero, emphasizes that Christianity in the text is not to be trusted. Criticism comes from within the story itself. Since the lack of religion at meaningful places and the meaningless and hypocritical references reveal that the appearance of Christianity is unreliable, the endorsement of the love affair withers away into nothing. The writer appears to be playing a lexical game with the audience, showing

that the values seemingly operating with approval in the text do not necessarily have the backing that they seem to, and distancing Christianity in the text from real life. As in *Möttuls saga*, the use of Christianity in *Tristrams saga* is essential to demonstrate that the values of the text are valid only within the literary text. But the writer of *Tristrams saga* had a more challenging job than the writer of *Möttuls saga*, because in *Tristrams saga* the allusions occur steadily throughout the tale instead of primarily at the peripheries.

The use of pilgrims in the saga illustrates in brief the treatment of Christianity in the story. The saga features a number of putative pilgrims or pilgrimages: the pilgrims whom Tristram meets upon his arrival in Cornwall, one of whom later directs Róald to Tristram; the pilgrimage which Markis claims to want to make; the one which Tristram, Ísodd and Kardín do make, on which Kardín learns of Tristram's unhusbandly behaviour; the one which they pretend to make when actually visiting Ísond and Bringvet, and Tristram's guise as a pilgrim for Ísond's ordeal. The first pilgrims are true ones, but their function is basically to signpost the royal court. Otherwise, a pilgrim's garb is a disguise, and a pilgrimage a pretext. They are misleading, not what they seem, and as such are a pointer to the caution with which we should regard other Christianity references om the text. They signal throught the plot that something is wrong, supplementing the linguistic indications discussed above.

It is undeniable that within the text Tristram is an outstanding figure and that the love affair appears almost sacred, to be preserved at all costs. The references to God helping the lovers seem on the surface to maintain the love affair. But the superficialty and even unreliability of Christianity in the text shown by the reliance on oneself first and on God only when one is utterly helpless, the failure to count Christian virtues among chivalric ones and the meaninglessness or hypocrisy of the Christian tags has an undercutting effect. Thus we are made aware that the values apparently advocated in the text are far removed from those of reality, and that the writer is manipulating the text as part of a literary game. He deals with his themes as he does with the highly rhetorical language, as a celebration of literature and of his own virtuosity. A double game is in progress, one inside the text and one viewing the text from the outside, resulting in a clever, complicated but frivolous work.

NOTES

[1] *Tristrams saga ok Ísondar*, ed. by Eugen Kölbing (Heilbronn, 1878). All subsequent references are to this edition.
[2] See for example Maureen Thomas, 'The Briar and the Vine: Tristran Goes North', in *Arthurian Literature*, III, ed. by Richard Barber (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 53-90; Sverrir Tómasson, 'Hvenær var Tristrams sögu snúið?', *Gripla*, 2 (1977), 47-78; cf Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, trans. by Peter Foote (Reykjavík, 1988), p. 319.
[3] cf, however, Anne Holtsmark, Review of E.F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, *Maal og Minne* (1959), 161-70 (p. 163).
[4] e.g. Geraldine Barnes, 'Arthurian Chivalry in Old Norse', in *Arthurian Literature*, VII, ed. by Richard Barber (Cambridge, 1987), 50-102 (p. 57); E.F. Halvorsen, 'Norwegian Court Literature in the Middle Ages', in *Orkney Miscellany*, 5: *King Hådon Commemorative number* (1973), 17-26 (p. 23).
[5] Eugen Mogk, *Norwegisch-isländische Literatur*, in *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, ed. by Hermann Paul, second edition (Straßburg, 1901-9), vol. II, Part I, pp. 555-923, (pp. 868-9); Rudolf Meissner, *Die Strengleikar: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der altnordischen Prosaliteratur* (Halle, 1902), p. 135; Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 6 (Cambridge, Mass, 1921), p. 178; Phillip M. Mitchell, 'Scandinavian Literature', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 462-71 (p. 465); Paul Bibire, 'From Riddarasaga to Lygisaga: the Norse Response to Romance', in *Les sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur)*, Actes de la Ve Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas, présentés par Régis Boyer (Toulon, 1982), pp. 55-74 (p. 63).
[6] Michel Huby, *Prolegomena zu einer Untersuchung von Gottfrieds Tristan* (Göppingen, 1984), p. 121; Wolfgang Golther, *Tristan und Isolde in den Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der neuen Zeit* (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 184-5; Mogk, p. 869; Joseph Bédier, *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas* (Société des Anciens textes français, Paris, 1905), tome second, p. 73.
[7] *Tristrams saga ok Ísondar*, p. CXLII.
[8] *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, ed. by Eugen Kölbing, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 5 (Halle, 1896), XXIII, 17.
[9] Malory, *Works*, ed. by Eugène Vinaver, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1971), p. 720.
[10] See Thomas, pp. 73-4.
[11] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, ed. by Rüdiger Krohn, third edition, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1984), II.
[12] *Grettis saga*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), ch. 89.
[13] Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2 vols, second edition (Berlin, 1967), II, p. 503.
[14] Álfrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, *Tristan en el Norte* (Reykjavík, 1978), p. 215.
[15] *Mǫttuls saga*, ed. by Marianne E. Kalinke, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ B, vol. 30 (Copenhagen, 1987), 3, 1-4, 17; *Ívens saga*, ed. by Foster W. Blaisdell, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ B, vol. 18 (Copenhagen, 1979), 4, 4.
[16] Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur North-by-Northwest: the matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæanæ 37 (Copenhagen, 1981), p. 40.

IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA IN SVERRIS SAGA.

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1. The Problem.

The "objectivity" of the sagas has for a long time been a matter of dispute between historians and literary scholars. Since the research of Halvdan Koht early in this century, the more or less accepted opinion among historians has been that the sagas are biased under their deceptively objective surface. They are the products of the violent struggles between the monarchy, the Church and the aristocracy in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and can be grouped according to their attitude to these struggles (Koht, 1921a and 1921b; Schreiner, 1926; Sandvik, 1955: 45 ff., 98 ff.; Brekke, 1958: 49 ff. etc.; Helle, 1958: 72 ff.). This has provoked reactions from literary scholars, who have defended the relative objectivity of the sagas, even expressing anger at these accusations against "the honest old saga writers".[1] Recently, literary scholars seem to have moved in the historians' direction (Lönnroth, 1970 and 1976; Magerøy, 1988). I shall in this paper do the opposite and question the historical orthodoxy derived from Koht.

My objection to Koht's project is that it implies a function of historiography in medieval society strikingly similar to that of the 19th and to some extent 20th century. During this period, history served to give identity to social groups: classes, nations, parties, movements etc., and historical arguments were important in the ideological struggle between the parties and to demonstrate that "the logic of evolution" worked in a specific direction and could not be resisted. There are, however, good reasons to doubt both the existence of parties in this sense and the evolutionary view of history in the middle ages (Bagge, 1986: 147 ff., 168 f. etc.; 1991). The literary scholars, however, easily run into the opposite danger. "Objective science" or "truth for its own sake" may very well be modern ideas. In traditional society the past normally has some kind of function in the present. Consequently, the picture of the "honest old saga writer" may be as anachronistic as that of the party politician in disguise.

Thus, my main hypothesis is not that medieval historiography is not "ideological" but that the contents and purpose of its ideology is of a different kind from ours. In analysing saga ideology, some important distinctions have to be made. First, there is the distinction between explicit purpose and implicit bias or even "mentality". In principle, Koht was quite clear on this point (Koht, 1921a: 76 ff.). In practice, however, he had a tendency to blur this distinction, and this applies even more to his successors. Secondly, there is the distinction between the ideology of individual authors and the common ideology of the the saga literature as a whole. So far, historiographical studies have largely aimed at tracing the attitudes of individual authors to controversial issues of the

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[1] Lie, 1960-61: 30. See also Lie, 1960-61: 29 ff. with references and 1937: 85 ff., 119 ff. and Paasche, 1967.