

En tragædisk Historie om den ædle og tappre Tistrand

An Eighteenth-Century King's Mirror

Af Marianne E. Kalinke

Kong Alfonsus lod da lægge disse høy Kongelige Liig tilsammen udi en Kiste, giort meget kunstig af purt Sølv, og Laaget til den Kiste af kostbar Cristal, at enhver kunde see dem; saa blev de med allerstørste Pragt og Liig-Proces indsat i den Kongelige Begravelse i Sancte Diogeni Kloster og blev af mange hundrede Mennesker beskuct, saa at Klosteret vandt mange Penge derved, thi deres Legeme laac i mange Aar uforandret og Pave Cleo lod dem indskrive blandt Helgene og canonisere.¹

Thus concludes the plot proper of *En tragædisk Historie om den ædle og tappre Tistrand, Hertugens Søn af Burgundien, og den skønne Indiana, den store Mogul Kejsereens Daatter af Indien*, a Danish chapbook, published in 1775 (136 pp.) in Christiania, which offers a novel version of the legend that celebrates the love of the most famous literary pair of adulterers. Thomas of Bretagne and Béroul, the two twelfth-century French authors who, with their versions of *Tristan and Isolt*, created one of the most durable themes and plots in world literature,² would have been amazed to learn that their adulterous couple merited canonization in a novel written six hundred years later.

New imprints of the Danish chapbook were published in 1785 and 1792 in Copenhagen in addition to five undated, but presumably pre-1800 imprints from Copenhagen issued by J. R. Thiele, P. W. Tribler, C. A. Bording, and Tribler's widow (the last twice, in imprints of 72 and 80 pp.). By virtue of the title page, the *Tistrand*-imprints fall into two groups: on the one hand, the chapbook is presented as *En Tragædisk Historie om den ædle og tappre Tistrand*, etc., in the imprints of 1775, 1785, and 1792; on the other hand, the work bears the title *En meget smuk Historie*, etc., in the undated Copenhagen imprints. Of these, the one imprint by Tribler's widow was published around 1800 (according to the *Bibliotheca Danica* V) and that by Johan Rudolph Thiele (1736-1815) presumably also appeared toward the end of the eighteenth century.

The novel enjoyed considerable success throughout the nineteenth century, and was published both in Denmark and Norway. Editions of the *Tragædisk Historie* were printed in Copenhagen in 1849, 1855, 1874, 1876, and 1879. One undated imprint of 71 pp. was published – according to the title page – in Hjørring. In Norway nineteenth-century imprints appeared in Christiania (1849, 1864, 1870), Bergen (1879 and 1870), and Lillehammer, the last, however, an undated imprint of 48 pp.

According to the title page of the 1775 imprint, the chapbook was »nu nyligen af Tydsk paa Dansk oversat«. No such German work is extant today. Wolfgang Golther, however, rightly observed in his monograph *Tristan und Isolde in den Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der Neuen Zeit* (1907), that in its rough outlines the plot of the Danish novel follows the fifteenth-century German chapbook *Tristrant und Isalde*.³ Nonetheless, on to the well-known *Tristan*-plot the eighteenth-century author has grafted not only variant names but also changes in setting: Isolt of Ireland becomes Indiana, daughter of the emperor of India; Isolt of the White Hands is Innanda, daughter of King Dagobert of France; King Mark of Cornwall becomes King Alfonsus of Spain. Most surprising of all, the ill-fated lovers have children – by their respective spouses – and these eventually marry each other, thus uniting the crowns of France and Spain.⁴

According to Golther, Denmark did not offer the proper conditions for the origin of the novel (p. 252), whereas eighteenth-century Germany seemed suited for producing a work that concludes with the union of France and Spain. By then the Habsburg domination of Spain had given way to Bourbon rule and, according to Golther, a Danish novel dealing with an alliance between France and Spain presupposed a German original (p. 252). Nonetheless, Golther was unable to explain why the postulated source should be extant only in Danish translation, a fact that suggests the novel gained greater popularity in Denmark than in the supposed country of its origin. Golther concludes by apologizing for his protracted discussion of what he considers a »dichterisch ganz wertlose[s] Erzeugnis«, but he justifies this by the work's relative obscurity and the need to demonstrate that the *Tragædisk Historie* »keineswegs irgendwelche unbekannte und selbständige Überlieferung enthält, sondern nur aus den wohlbekanntem deutschen Quellen schöpft« (p. 253).

The Danish scholar Richard Paulli justifiably called the *Tragædisk*

Historie »et Vildskud paa Tristan-Romanernes Stamme, en Bearbejdelse af det gamle Stof i orientalsk Rokostil«. ⁵ Although the work contains all the significant motifs of the medieval romance – the fight with the dragon, the love potion, the sword between the lovers, Isolt's trial by red-hot iron, the marriage to a second Isolt, and the first Isolt's *Liebestod* – its anonymous author has systematically undermined the medieval novel's essence: the tale of two lovers devoid of free will and forced into adultery by virtue of a magic potion has been transmuted into an exemplum celebrating the power of reason and of free will. Paulli implicitly concurred with Golther's thesis of German origin when he remarked on the significance of the Danish *Tistrand* for German literature, »fordi deres tyske Forlæg er forsvundet« (p. 193), but he also wondered whether perhaps »er det dog ikke Danmark, men Norge, hvem Æren tilkommer for at have oversat denne Kuriositet, eftersom det ældste kendte Tryk er udkommet i Kristiania« (pp. 193-94). By positing a lost German source, Paulli also suggested that the innovations in the chapbook are of foreign origin.

Golther claimed that the existence of a German source cannot be doubted and is even suggested by the language of the work, by its »vielen deutschen Wendungen und Redensarten« (p. 252). In a series of articles in the journal *Iris og Hebe* (1796) on eighteenth-century popular literature in Denmark, Rasmus Nyerup had discussed the *Tragødisk Historie* in a survey of the Tristan legend. ⁶ He noted that the chapbook was not only first published in Christiania but also contains some Norwegianisms. As evidence for believing that the translator had been Norwegian, Nyerup mentions that »her et sted staaer 'ifra Spanien' og et Par Gange 'jeg har ondt af ham' istedet for: det gjør mig ondt for ham«. ⁷ Although Nyerup placed the author in Norway rather than Denmark, he assumed, like Golther and Paulli after him, that the *Tragødisk Historie* is a translation from the German.

The intelligence that the *Tragødisk Historie* is a translation from the German derives from the title page of the earliest imprint and is perpetuated in subsequent imprints. Although the oldest imprint of the novel was dated 1775 in Christiania, nearly half of it had already appeared in serial form in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* (published in Christiania), starting in nr. 47 on 20 Nov. 1771 and breaking off abruptly – just prior to the wedding of the eponymous heroine of the novel to the king of Spain – on 18 Nov. 1772. The installments appear weekly or bi-weekly until 15 Jan. 1772 and are from one-half to three pages in

length. After Jan. 15 there is a hiatus in publication of a little over seven months and then on 26 Aug. 1772 the serial resumes and is published at intervals ranging from one to four weeks through 18 Nov. 1772.

The first installment of the novel bears the relatively short title »En Tragædisk Historie om den tappre Tistrand og den skjønnne Indiana«. The work is anonymous and no information concerning its source is provided. That is to say, unlike the 1775 and subsequent imprints, the presumably first, albeit aborted publication of the *Tragædisk Historie* does not claim that the work is a translation from the German. Given the fact that the anonymous author of the Danish serialized chapbook does not present his work initially as a translation, one is led to suspect that the additional information on the title page of the first imprint is spurious, possibly an attempt to make the novel more appealing by vouching for its foreign origin. The title pages of a series of imprints of the chapbook *Viegoleis* (deriving from the German *Wigalois*, first published in 1493) are instructive. Paulli pointed out that one imprint after another slavishly announces on its title page »nu nyligen ... ofversat ... udi dette Aar«, even as late as 1855, when 200 years had in fact elapsed since its translation (p. 239). The attestation of foreign origin had presumably become a topos, and it is not unlikely that the author of the Danish *Tistrand* advertised a German source on the title page because it was expected of the genre.

Therefore, Nyerup, Golther, Paulli, and the title page of the 1775 imprint notwithstanding, we submit that the chapbook is an original Dano-Norwegian version of the Tristan legend and not a translation, and we shall explore the reasons why late eighteenth-century Denmark should have been so receptive to the romance, not in its original form but rather in a modern recasting. The author of the *Tragædisk Historie* knew the classic tale of adultery as told in the German prose novel of 1484, but he used the given matter freely and only inasmuch as it provided him with the basic, titillating plot. Upon this he superimposed a criticism of contemporary events – which may concomitantly be construed as a criticism of the traditional tale – with a view to providing a King's Mirror, a handbook of royal ethics, if you will. As such, the *Tragædisk Historie* has an exemplary function even while it entertains.

The classic romance of Tristan and Isolt, be it French or German, glorifies adultery and thus hardly seems an appropriate vehicle for imparting guidance on royal behavior. The medieval novel popularized

the love triangle: Queen Isolt is married to King Mark but loves the king's nephew Tristan. Their love is absolute and irresistible because of the magic love potion they have unwittingly drunk. Torn between the obligation of loyalty to his lord and passionate love for the lord's wife, Tristan succumbs to love and betrays his lord and uncle time and again. In eighteenth-century Denmark this novel of adultery underwent a metamorphosis: like the medieval lovers, Tistand and Indiana have unknowingly drunk the magic potion; like the medieval lovers, the eighteenth-century couple love with an absolute love. Unlike Tristan and Isolt, however, Tistrand and Indiana do not enter into a sexual liaison. Indiana tells Tistrand that he must not do anything to defile her royal and virginal honor (p. 54, »min Kongelige og Jomfruelige Ære«) or to burden her conscience in any way. They are to be content with innocuous expressions of affection: at most Tistrand may kiss Indiana's hand and she will respond to this expression of love with a pat on his cheek, for, as she asserts, »mit Legeme er givet Kong Alfonsus og hører ham til, hvilket jeg og vil tilføre ham ubesmattet, og iligemaade holde min Ægteseng reen saa længe han lever« (p. 54). Throughout the novel the sanctity and joy of marriage are celebrated. For example, when Tistrand seeks to convince his uncle that the uncle should marry, he points out that no other royal pleasure can compare with the joyous state of a loving marriage (p. 27, »et kierlig Ægteskabs Fornøvelses Tilstand«).

Golther considered the author of the novel a prude and characterized the *Tragædisk Historie* as »ein[en] geschichtlich-galante[n] Roman eines aufgeklärten halbgelchrten Verfassers«. ⁸ We submit that it was not so much the author's prudery that inspired him to transmute the legend of Tristan and Isolt into an anti-*Tristan*, as it were, but rather the political and personal fortunes of an infamous pair of Danish adulterers. In 1775, the year that the *Tragædisk Historie* was published in book form, the former queen of Denmark, Caroline Mathilde (1751-75), died at the age of 24. Three years earlier her marriage to Christian VII of Denmark (1749-1808) had been dissolved and she was exiled to Germany. The cause of her downfall was her adultery with Johann Friedrich Struensee (1737-72), the king's German physician in ordinary, who had acquired such power that for a period of sixteen months he was the sovereign of Denmark in fact, if not in name. On the night of 16-17 January 1772 both Struensee and the queen were arrested. On 28 April of the same year Struensee was publicly executed while on 30

May Caroline Mathilde was deported to Celle in Germany, never to see her children again.⁹

The constellation Christian VII – Caroline Mathilde-Struensee, which reached a high point in the period 1770 to 1772, is reminiscent of the triangle Mark – Isolt – Tristan. The bride from Ireland in fiction parallels a bride from England in Danish history – Caroline Mathilde was the sister of George III – and the role of the king's nephew in the romance is played by the king's physician at the Danish court. King Mark's passivity vis-à-vis his courtiers and his gullibility vis-à-vis the adulterers in the medieval novel is analogous to the gradually worsening mental condition of the Danish king, his schizophrenia, and his inability to master his intriguing courtiers who connive, like their fictional counterparts, to bring about the downfall of the adulterous couple.

In its essentials the medieval Tristan-legend is so reminiscent or, better, anticipatory of the Struensee-affair, that without major changes or additions the author could easily have produced a *roman à clef*, as P. F. Suhm had done, for example, in his last political work, »den rene statsroman« (DBL, 1983, XIV:196) *Euphron* from the year 1774,¹⁰ published one year before the oldest imprint of the *Tragødisk Historie* but two years after the chapbook began to be serialized in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler*. Contemporary with the Caroline Mathilde – Struensee scandal – with the dissolution of her marriage to Christian VII and her deportation and with Struensee's execution – during a time when hundreds of publications commenting on recent events in the form of satire, ballad, and allegory appeared in print,¹¹ the author of the *Tragødisk Historie* made of the ancient and all but edifying legend a didactic instrument.

Those familiar with one or the other medieval Tristan version will have difficulty suppressing an occasional chuckle while reading the Danish chapbook. For instance, the famous blood-in-Isolt's-bed scene has entered the realm of the tragi-comic – from a modern perspective, that is. Like the medieval lovers, Tistrand and Indiana are suspected of an adulterous relationship, and to trap the alleged lovers treacherous courtiers strew sand between his bed and hers, for Tistrand sleeps in the same chamber as the king and queen, unwillingly, it turns out, for the narrator confides: »thi enhver kand vel tænke, at det var haardt for saadan en ung Herre at sove der, som han maatte see den han selv elskede, laae i en andens Arme« (p. 58). Nonetheless, the narrator reassures us, a screen separated the beds. Tistrand has been in the

habit of stealing to Indiana's bed at night, in order to gaze wistfully at her white arm, from which the covers had slipped. When he notices the trap set for him, he jumps over the sand, bends over Indiana's white hand to kiss it, but the exertion of the leap causes his nose to bleed. The result of his being caught in this compromising situation – compromising, since Røderich, Tistrand's malevolent cousin (about whom more below), falsely informs the king that Tistrand had been caught in Indiana's bed (p. 65) – is a trial at which the lovers are condemned to be executed, he by hanging, she by burning, just as in the fifteenth-century German chap book.

The author of the Danish novel introduced two major innovations that affect the substance of the traditional tale. He intended on the one hand to criticize recent events in Denmark, and on the other hand to offer a model for royal behavior. To achieve this two-fold end, he depicted Tistrand and Indiana as creatures of reason and high moral purpose: additionally, he injected a new theme, that of unbridled ambition at a royal court. In the *Tragædisk Historie* the essence of the Tristan-legend is called into question. Whereas the adultery of Tristan and Isolt could be justified in the medieval versions by pointing to the inexorable effects of the magic love potion that destroyed free will, our enlightened Danish chapbook distinguishes between spiritual and sensual love. To be sure, the potion in the eighteenth-century *Tistrand* also generates an eternal love between the eponymous protagonists, but they are able to sublimate their desire for each other because of the sanctity of marriage. As Indiana points out, her body belongs to King Alfonsus, even though her heart, over which she has no power, belongs to Tistrand.

Unlike the medieval prototype, Indiana does not break her marriage vows, and therefore the courtiers' accusation of adultery is false. Moreover, when the lovers manage to escape execution and seek refuge in the woods, they maintain their innocence. Although Tistrand hopes that Indiana's condemnation by her husband will lead to his own sexual bliss, the queen reproves him: »Jeg er endnu Kong Alfonsi ægte Gemahl, og skal holde mig derfor saa længe jeg lever« (p. 77). Consequently, even though the author of the chapbook transmits the sword-between-the-lovers motif from the medieval romance, the sword retains its symbolic value, whereas in the traditional legend the lovers give the lie to the symbol. Not until Tistrand and Indiana have died is the existence of the love potion revealed and the lovers' heroic virtue

recognized. King Alfonsus is shaken by the revelation and declares that he would gladly have bestowed on Tistrand both his wife and his kingdom if only he had known the truth of the matter.

The king's willingness to relinquish his throne to Tistrand is not a pious afterthought, for the question of the fictional Spanish succession stands in the forefront throughout the work. The Danish novel deviates from the traditional Tristan legend in that the author introduces an antagonist, the aforementioned Røderich, who becomes Tistrand's rival for both the throne of Spain and the affection of King Alfonsus and even for the love of Indiana. In the German chapbook Tistrant has a cousin named Aucrat who does not appear in the plot until after King Mark has married Isolt and who brings charges of adultery to King Mark against Tistrant. This cousin undergoes a change of name and function in the Danish novel: he becomes Røderich and is introduced at the very outset. Since King Alfonsus is unmarried, he declares that one of his nephews, Røderich or Tistrand, will succeed him as king. From the beginning Røderich is envious of Tistrand, so much so that Tistrand feels himself threatened and asks King Alfonsus for leave from court, »thi jeg fornemmer daglig, at hans Had formeeres, for den Naade og Kierlighed Kongen haver til mig, af Frygt jeg skal blive en Arving til Riget, mens jeg begierer det ikke og er fornøjet med min Faders Rige« (p. 25). The Danish chapbook thus couples adultery, the traditional theme of the classic legend, with a new theme, the ambition to power.

If the figures and events in the novel were to be exemplary by virtue of their similarity to Danish figures and events of the time, the author of the chapbook had to cope with two aspects of the Struensee affair: the physician's adulterous love for Caroline Mathilde on the one hand and his political ambitions on the other. Struensee is remembered not only as the queen's lover but also as the man who knew how to appropriate ever more power for himself. On 14 July 1771 Struensee was appointed Gehejmekabinetminister (*DBL* 1983, XIV:156), a title conveying an authority which no royal subject had ever before held in Denmark. The king's progressively incapacitating mental illness rendered Christian VII incapable of ruling, and Struensee himself came to assume the role of sovereign. Since Tistrand plays an exemplary role in the novel, he cannot portray Struensee's increasing position of power vis-à-vis the king. To deal with this aspect, the author of the chapbook adapted the figure of Røderich, Tistrand's cousin, who is no more than

a secondary figure in the medieval romance, and created in him Tistrand's antagonist, a grasping individual who eventually comes to exercise a power intended for the king alone. In the two cousins, Tistrand and Røderich, the author presents both sides of the royal coin, the ideal and the corrupt prince.

The Danish novel sounds a warning against unbridled ambition and is punctuated by statements that one should be content with one's state in life, that one should not seek aggrandizement. Thus, when Tistrand announces to his parents that he wishes to go to Spain to become a contender for the royal throne, his mother advises him to be satisfied with what he has rather than to expose himself to an uncertain future; she admonishes him: »tragt ikke efter et Kongerige, som du ikke kand nyde uden Misundelse« (p. 5). Similarly, when the corpse of Indiana's erstwhile lover, who had sought to win the Spanish crown through war, is returned to India, she exclaims: »O! at han havde ladet sig nøye med sit eget Land, og ikke tragtet efter en andens; da havde han i Roelighed kundet nyde sit eget, og vi begge kundet leve lykkelig! O! du forbandede hofmodige Gierighed, hvor stytter [styrter] du saa mangen en i Fordervelse og Bedrøvelse!« (p. 16). Allusions to the danger of overreaching oneself are coupled with references to the fickleness of fate and worldly glory. When Tistrand and Indiana, who are falsely accused of adultery, are to be executed, the narrator comments on the vanity of life and their fall from royal grace:

... disse høye Personer maatte nu være som et Spectakel paa Lykkens Ubestandighed, og paa Herregunstens Foranderlighed, thi faae Dage tilforn vare de Kongens allerkiæreste Venner og udi høyeste Ære, men nu maatte de med Forsmædelse udføres, som de allerslemmeste Misdædere, saa foranderlig og ubestendig er denne Verdens Ære og Herlighed (p. 72).

The passage could have been written about the fall from grace of Struensee and Caroline Mathilde.

Once Tistrand and Indiana are out of the picture – they have managed to escape execution and are in hiding in the woods – Røderich is declared heir apparent to the throne. He manages to win the loyalty of the king's ministers and together they convince the king that he should no longer grant audiences to his subjects (p. 80, »de fik ogsaa overtalt Kongen til, ikke at tage imod Supliqver«) because, they pointed out,

this was too heavy a burden for the king. Thereby, the narrator comments, Røderich took away the people's freedom to appeal directly to their sovereign. The 1775 chapbook here picks up a theme enunciated by P. F. Suhm in the widely circulated open letter »Til Kongen«, which was published shortly after Struensee's arrest on the night of 17-18 January 1772. Suhm laments: »En skammelig Sammenrottelse af nedrige Folk havde bemestret sig Din Person; gjort Adgangen til Dig umulig for alle Retskafne; Du saae og hørte kun igjennem deres Øjne og Ører«. ¹² Two years later Suhm was to incorporate the accusation into his *Euphron* as rule nr. 39 for governing: the king is admonished to allow all, even the most insignificant subjects, to have ready access to him: »Lad enhver, endog den Ringeste, have Adgang til dig, og bestem dertil visse Tider. Den Minister, som hindrer nogen at komme for dig, eller fordølger et Memorial, bør afsættes uden Naade« (p. 114).

A similar thought is enunciated by Christian Thura in *Den Patriotiske Sandsigerskes Første Deel* (1771) when he calls that monarch a country's worst enemy who is wont »at negte retfærdige og dydige Folk Adgang til Tronen og en retfærdig Dom«, and, he adds, »at plage Folk med idelige Skatte og Paalæg«. ¹³ Taxation is also singled out as an evil in the *Tragædisk Historie*. Røderich talks the king into imposing a heavy tax burden on his subjects; of the taxes collected, only the smallest percentage found its way into the royal treasury; the greater part wandered into the pockets of Røderich and his ilk (p. 80). Røderich ruined the country, we are told, and he did this »at drage Undersaaternes Hierte fra Kongen« (p. 80). Again one is reminded of P. F. Suhm's 1772 letter to Christian VII in which he begs the monarch to get rid of the heavy taxes – »Er det mueligt da afskaf de haarde Skatter som betynger Dine Undersaatte« – or at least to distribute them more equitably. ¹⁴ Similarly, the fictional monarch in *Euphron* is admonished to protect the kingdom's treasury, not to permit expenses to outweigh income, and not to place heavy tax burdens on his subjects, for »Undersaaternes Velstand og Mængde er Kongens Rigdom og Styrke«. ¹⁵ When in the *Tragædisk Historie* Tistrand and Indiana are at last returned to grace, the queen is besieged with complaints about the heavy taxation and she makes an impassioned speech to the king begging him to reduce the taxes which are especially onerous for the poor:

Kongen behager at betænke: At det heele Land er som i et Slaverie, hvilket er en liden Ære for en Konge at regiere over

Slaver; jeg kand vel tænke at Kongen ikke er selv Aarsag hertil, men Røderich med sit Anhang haver practiseret saadant og sat en Sminke derpaa, at det er Kongen til stor Nytte, og at formere deres Skatkammer, da det er dog alligevel til deres egen Fordeel, og de fattige Undersaatter maa lide derunder, hvilket betager hos dem den rette Kiærlighed de bør have for deres Konge (p. 91-92).

Indiana goes so far as to say that she would gladly forgo her income for the maintenance of her court rather than have her subjects so plagued. Here too the coincidence of this detail in the chapbook with historical reality is remarkable. Suhm too had admonished Christian VII in his open letter to »indskrænk de bekostelige Lystigheder« (p. 6) and repeated the exhortation in *Euphron*, which includes the injunction to be satisfied with a modest court: »Vær øm over hver Skilling, du udgiver; thi den er forhvervet ved dine Undersaatters Sved, ja ofte Suk. Til den Ende hold en maadelig Hofstat, og indskrænk dine Fornøyerelser«. ¹⁶ One should recall that despite the many useful reforms initiated by Struensee, he managed to obtain large sums of money from the royal coffers for himself and his friends and at a time when the salaries and pensions of others were being reduced. ¹⁷

In the Danish novel Tistrand eventually becomes king of France; unlike the grasping Røderich he is a model ruler, and the author seizes the opportunity to allow his narrator to comment on the state of the Danish realm. Tistrand, he writes, rewarded those who had helped him in his need, which nowadays is rarely the case. In fact, the narrator continues, »gemeenlig gaacr det nu saa til, at alle gode Velgierninger blive ilde belønnet; ja tit og ofte med en bagvaskende Tunge taler ilde derom« (p. 104).

In his drive for power the evil Røderich goes so far as to attempt regicide. Possibly this aspect of the novel was inspired by contemporary rumors that Struensee and Caroline Mathilde wanted to murder the king and seize the royal power for themselves (*DBL* 1983, XIV: 157). When Røderich is finally apprehended and incarcerated he commits suicide. Nonetheless, the populace is not satisfied with knowing the traitor dead. Slung over a horse his corpse is ignominiously transported by the henchman's assistant to the place of execution and there it is quartered and raised on high for public viewing. The narrator's comments could well apply to Struensee who had also been quartered and then broken on the wheel: although traitors to the kingdom may flour-

ish for a time, »saa kommer han dog engang, at de omsider maa falde i den Grav de graver for andre, og gaac med Skamme, som det her gik Røderich« (p. 112).

In its marked deviation in the characterization of Tistrand and Indiana from their medieval antecedents, whose behavior is outside of and beyond accepted morality, the Danish chapbook presents a counterpoint to the adultery of Caroline Mathilde and Struensee. Had the author been faithful to the medieval source, the resurrection of the Tristan legend in the Danish realm when the Caroline Mathilde – Struensee affair was at its peak,¹⁸ the chapbook could have been interpreted as an attempt at a *roman à clef*; by means of the deviations and new elements in the *Tragædisk Historie*, however, the anonymous author created an exemplary novel that proposed a model for royal behavior at the same time that it recalled contemporary events. Indiana's lament, upon learning that she is to marry King Alfonsus of Spain, could easily have passed the lips of Caroline Mathilde when she was betrothed to Christian VII: »Intet Fruentimmer paa Jorden er mere ulykkelig end Konger og Fyrsters Døttre, de andre kand efter Kiærlighed gifte sig, men vi maa være som et Offer for det gandske Land til dets Handel og Velfærds Bedste« (pp. 39-40). In fact, a letter written by Caroline Mathilde to Princess Mary of Hesse Cassel echoes the above sentiments: »I do not know whether we are not rather objects of pity than envy, when we are politically matched with princes whom we never saw«. ¹⁹ In another letter, to Augusta, Princess of Brunswick, Caroline Mathilde refers to »European princesses, who are obliged to live in perpetual exile for the sake of a husband«. ²⁰ One should recall that the fifteen-year-old English princess was officially engaged to Christian VII without ever having seen him; in fact, she did not meet him until five days before their wedding day (*DBL* 1979, III: 185). The advantages of a marital union with Denmark were clear to George III, who announced the proposed marriage as a means »to cement the union which has long subsisted between the two crowns«. ²¹

Unlike her medieval counterpart – or Caroline Mathilde for that matter – Indiana preaches a pure love without sexual desire for anyone other than her husband, one that would not »defile her royal and womanly honor«. Similarly, the queen's comportment is to be such that she give no cause for evil rumors. One cannot help but recall that many of Caroline Mathilde's problems were the result of her imprudence, of her open familiarity with Struensee and a relationship that had already

commenced early in 1770, after Struensee had been given apartments in Christiansborg on 17 January, and had visible repercussions when the queen gave birth to Struensee's child, a daughter, in 1771 (*DBL* 1979, III: 186). The Danish queen may have placated her conscience by recourse to the fact that the mental condition of the king, her husband, was gradually worsening and proved irreconcilable with a marital relationship (*DBL* 1934, IV: 541). In the chapbook, the queen might similarly have justified a liaison with Tistrand by recalling that she had been falsely accused of infidelity and that her husband had given orders for her to be executed. Nonetheless, when the fictional couple have fled to the woods after having escaped execution and Tistrand suggests to Indiana that she is now free to share his bed since her husband had treated her so shabbily, the virtuous queen points out that she is still the king's rightful wife and that she will consider herself to be such as long as she lives. Just because her husband has wronged her so grievously, »derfor vil jeg ikke gjøre mig selv skyldig og besvære min Samvittighed!« (p. 77).

The moral of the novel in relation to the question of adultery is enunciated by Indiana in a final meeting with Tistrand after he has married Innanda:

Dyden maa overvinde al Kiærlighed, som ikke er tilbørlig, helst hos høye Personer, hvis store Navn ikke taaler nogen Besmittelse, ligeledes betænke den Fare deres Kongelige Ære var tilforn undergIVEN, og tage sig vare herefter, at ligesaa uskyldig som de vare for Gud, de og maatte være for Verden (p. 122).

Indiana's summation of the ethical standards by which she has lived, which stress fidelity to her marriage vows and the need for royalty to set an example for others, is a reprise of her stand upon becoming aware of her love for Tistrand. The young woman who has been promised, but not yet married, to the king of Spain sets high standards of conduct for herself and Tistrand, and the all-knowing author comments:

thi den kloge Dronning vidste nok, at et ærekjær Fruentimmer staaer det altid an hvad enten hun er høj eller lav, at tage sig saa vel vare for det, som kunde give Aarsag til et slemt Rygte, som for Gierningen i sig selv (p. 55).

The analogy between the fictional Alfonsus – Indiana – Tistrand triangle and the historical Christian VII – Caroline Mathilde – Struensee threesome is unmistakable, except that the fictional personages – unlike the historical figures – behave in an exemplary manner. That the intentions of the eighteenth-century author of the *Tragædisk Historie* coincide with the conclusions drawn by a twentieth-century literary historian can unfortunately not be demonstrated. Nonetheless, considering the fact that the author of the Danish chapbook has transmuted the brilliant medieval tale of adultery into what can justifiably be interpreted as a *King's Mirror*; considering furthermore that the chapbook was published precisely when a historical parallel to Isolt's adultery with Tristan had reached its high point and its tragic conclusion at the Danish royal court, one can argue that the Danish chapbook was inspired by the infamous affair between the Danish queen and the king's Privy Cabinet Minister.

Although the 1775 imprint from Christiania is the oldest dated publication of the *Tragædisk Historie* in book form, the chapbook was already known in 1771 from the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler*, where it appeared in installments. Since the serialization breaks off with the installment of 18 November 1772 in the Norwegian weekly, it is plausible to assume that the serialization was aborted because the novel was soon to appear as a book. A striking aspect of the serialized portion of the *Tragædisk Historie* is the fact that the hiatus in the publication of the chapbook occurred after the installment of 15 January 1772, that is, the number of the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* published one day before Struensee and Caroline Mathilde were arrested. The author of the chapbook – or the editor of the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler*, as the case may be – furnishes no continuation during the months that first Struensee and then Caroline Mathilde admit their guilt; Caroline Mathilde's marriage to Christian VII is dissolved (6 April 1772); Struensee is executed at the end of the same month (28 April); and Caroline Mathilde is finally deported (30 May) to the estate of her brother George III in Celle. The chapbook does not surface again in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* until 26 August of the same year.

Although not quite half the chapbook was published as a serial in the Norwegian weekly, a comparison of this text with that in the 1775 imprint reveals only minor deviations of the type that might have been introduced either by the printer or else by the author who decided to revise the text that had already been published with an eye primarily to

syntax and occasional printer's errors. Thus the incorrect *Alfonius* in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* is corrected in 1775 to *Alfonus*; similarly, *Reinsardus* becomes *Reinhardus*. Minor changes in vocabulary are introduced, for example, *Begiær* becomes *Begiæring*; *vel imodtagen* changes to *vel modtagen*; the possessive adjective changes from »sin yngste Søn« to »hans yngste Søn«. One noun of a collocation, such as in »du forbandede Hofmod og Gierrighed« is transmuted into an adjective in the 1775 imprint: »du forbandede hofmodige Gierighed«, which, admittedly, changes the emphasis of the apostrophe somewhat. Now and then a sentence is shortened or lengthened in the 1775 imprint. Thus »I maa elske mig som det sig bør, uden at begiære noget« is later written: »I maa elske mig, men dog uden at begiære noget« (p. 54). The opposite process occurs on the next page. In the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* we read: »thi den kloge Dronning vidste vel, at det anstaar et ærekiært Fruentimmer saavel at vogte sig for et slæmt Rygte som Gierningen i sig selv« (18 Nov. 1772). The statement becomes more pointed in the 1775 imprint (p. 55, »thi den kloge Dronning vidste nok, at et ærekiær Fruentimmer staaer det altid an hvad enten hun er høj eller lav, at tage sig saa vel vare for det, som kunde give Aarsag til et slemt Rygte, som for Gierningen i sig selv«).

Since the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* published nearly half the chapbook before the novel was discontinued, sufficient text was in circulation in 1771-72 to show that the didactic and moralizing comments that we interpret as criticism of the royal scandal are not a later addition but existed already when the Caroline Mathilde – Struensee affair was still a *cause célèbre* in the Danish capital. The spirit that informs Indiana's exhortations to herself to think of her station in life and her obligations to behave honorably are an echo of the sentiments published in critical and didactic writings of the period. We hear Indiana encouraging herself to ethical behavior: »du er jo en Kejsers Datter og en mægtig Konges Dronning, hvor kand du fatte saadane Tanker? Betænk din høje Stand og din egen Ære, lad ikke utidig Kiærlighed overvinde dig! ... fat Mod og lad Dyden tvinge dit Hierte«. In a similar vein she talks to Tistrand about the »Kongelige Ære og Pligt« that she has to her future husband (4 Nov. 1772). In the 18 Nov. 1772 installment Indiana remarks that she may not seek anything »som kunde besmitte min Kongelige og Jomfruelige Ære« or place a burden on her conscience. The last installment of the *Tragædisk Historie* in the *Nordske Intelligenz-Sedler* concludes with the sentence: »Hun beklagede ved sig

selv den daarlige Kiærlighed til Tistrand, dog beviiste hun Kongen saa stor Kiærlighed, at han var hiertelig fornøjet« (18 Nov. 1772).

The three reprintings of the *Tragædisk Historie* within twenty-five years attest the popularity of the novel in Denmark. The work continued to be read in the nineteenth century. We have not only the evidence of the many imprints but also Anton Nielsen's testimony in *Landsbyliv fra Trediveerne* (1894) that he read many chapbooks including »Tistran og Isulde« which he borrowed from the small libraries belonging to the farmers whom he visited.²²

Also remarkable is the fact that the chapbook was translated into Icelandic before the end of the eighteenth century and that *Tistrans saga ok Indlönu* is preserved in three manuscripts in the Icelandic National Library (Landsbókasafn) in Reykjavík. Although the translation of the chapbook *per se* was never published, the tale nonetheless became widely known in Iceland, not in its original prose form but in a metrical version, the *Rímur af Tistran og Indlönu*, published in 1831 by Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798-1846).²³ Three years earlier the author had come to stay for a time with his mother's brother Sira Jóhann Bjarnason of Helgafell. The clergyman, a cheerful person, who was fond of both drink and women, encouraged his nephew, a gifted poet, to compose some *rímur* for the entertainment of his household. This he did, using as inspiration a book he found in his uncle's library, namely the *Tragædisk Historie om den ædle og tappre Tistrand*.²⁴

Sigurð's *Rímur af Tistran og Indlönu* gained notoriety because of the great poet Jónas Hallgrímsson's review of the work (in the journal *Fjölnir*) in the form of a diatribe. Jónas inveighed not only against Sigurð's metrical skills but also against the Danish source which he denounced as »auðsjáanlega svo einskisverð og heimskulega ljót og illa samin að hennar vega stendur á litlu hvurnig með hana er farið« (I:357).²⁵ A different form of criticism was employed by another poet, Níels Jónsson (1782-1857), who tried to show up Sigurður by offering his own version of the *Tistrans rímur*. These *rímur*, however, have been published only in part, and exist in their totality only in the author's own manuscript in the National Library in Reykjavík. Of consequence for our discussion of the Danish chapbook is alone the fact that those aspects of the novel that presumably reflect the Danish political situation in the early 1770's were defused by Sigurður Breiðfjörð who was more interested in pursuing the plot than in providing social commentary. Understandably lacking in the *rímur* are those elements that date

the tale and that would have appealed only to a populace familiar with the machinations of the Danish court.

If the author of the *Tragædisk Historie* intended the comportment of Tistrand and Indiana to have an exemplary function – as we believe is the case – then one can additionally conclude that the lovers in the chapbook also offer an ironic commentary on recent events, that is, recent from the author's perspective, in Danish history, an ironic commentary on the behavior of a pair of lovers who were a scandal before the world, who not only were guilty – unlike Tistrand and Indiana – but who also made no effort to hide their guilt. Whereas the reprehensible comportment of the historical couple led to an ignominious execution for the one partner and exile for the other, the irreproachable behavior of Tistrand and Indiana fittingly concluded with their canonization. If read from a medieval perspective alone, one must adjudge the Danish chapbook a blunder, for the author seemingly failed to grasp the amorality that is of the essence in the classic legend. Considered from the perspective of eighteenth-century Danish history, however, the *Tragædisk Historie* is an ingenious transmutation of a medieval novel glorifying adultery into a king's mirror that implicitly decries and reflects contemporary events.

Notes

1. *En Tragædisk Historie om den ædle og tappre Tistrand, Hertugens Søn af Burgundien, og den skjønnne Indiana, den store Mogul Kejserens Daatter af Indien. Nu nyligen af Tydsk paa Dansk oversat* (Christiania, 1775), p. 134. Subsequent references are to this, presumably first edition, which is to be found in the Royal Library in Copenhagen.
2. See W[illiam] W. K[ibler], »Thomas d'Angleterre«, in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), pp. 549-50; N[orris] J. L[acy], »Béroutl«, in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, p. 45.
3. The oldest imprint of 1484 is available in the edition by Alois Brandstetter, *Tristrant und Isalde: Prozaroman* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966).
4. See Wolfgang Golther, *Tristan und Isolde in den Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der neuen Zeit* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1907), pp. 248-53.
5. Richard Paulli, »Folkebøgernes Historie«, in *Danske Folkebøger fra 16. og 17. Aarhundrede*, eds. J. P. Jacobsen and R. Paulli, vol. XIII (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1936), p. 193.

6. Rasmus Nyerup, »Den danske Almues Morskabslæsning«, *Iris og Hebe* (November 1796), pp. 193-210; The Danish *Tistrand* is discussed on pp. 207-09. Nyerup notes that the edition he has bought »paa Børsen, er trykt hos Johan Rudolph Thiele 1792« (p. 207). In his later *Almindelig Morskabslæsning i Danmark og Norge igjennem Aarhundreder* (Copenhagen: Seidelin, 1816), p. 119, Nyerup refers to the Danish *Tistrand* (in the edition of 1792) in his discussion of Tristan-novels available to him (pp. 118-23), but he does not discuss it other than to point out in a footnote that like the German postmedieval prose version *Tristrant und Isalde*, the Danish chapbook has lost the naïvetè and the poetic coloring (»den Naivitet og det poetiske Colorit«, p. 119) inherent in the medieval German versions.
7. *Iris og Hebe* (November, 1796), p. 209.
8. Wolfgang Golther, *Tristan und Isolde*, pp. 251-52
9. Hans Jensen, »Caroline Mathilde«, *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, ed. Povl Engelstoft, vol. IV (Copenhagen: J. H. Schultz Forlag, 1934), p. 543. Hereafter *DBL*, 1934. See also the articles on Caroline Mathilde, Christian VII, and Struensee in the new edition of the *DBL*. Subsequent references to the new edition are followed by the year of publication. For an overview of the interrelationship of political and literary events in the period, see Johan Fjord Jensen, Morten Møller, Toni Nielsen, Jørgen Stigel, *Dansk litteraturhistorie, 4. Patriotismens tid 1746-1807* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1983), »Struensee-tiden. Et borgerligt diktatur«, pp. 275-94.
10. *Euphron*, in *Peter Friederich Suhms samlede Skrifter*, vol. III (Copenhagen: S. Poulsens Forlag, 1789), pp. 47-118. Subsequent references are to this edition.
11. *Dansk litteratur historie*, 4, p. 284.
12. »Til Kongen«, in *Peter Friederich Suhms Samlede Skrifter*, vol. XVI (1799), p. 2.
13. [Christian Thura], *Den Patriotiske Sandsigeres Første Deel* (Kjøbenhavn, 1771), p. 66.
14. »Til Kongen«, p. 6.
15. *Euphron*, p. 56: »bestyr Skatkammeret viselig, lad aldrig Udgiften overgaae Indtægten, og forhøy aldrig noget Paalæg«.
16. *Euphron*, rule nr. 12, p. 108.
17. Sir C. F. Lascelles Wraxall, *Life and Times of Her Majesty Caroline Matilda* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1864), I:347-48.
18. In the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries ballads about Tistran and Isolt were known in Denmark, but they deviate markedly from the classic Tristan legend and are not related to the Danish chapbook. See »Tistran og Jomfru Isolt«, in *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, ed. Axel Olrik (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1919), vol. 3, pp. 37-46; S. A. J. Bradley, tr., »The Danish Ballads of Tristan and Isolt«, in *The Tristan Legend: Texts from Northern and Eastern Europe in Modern English Translation*, ed. Joyce Hill (Leeds: Univ. of Leeds, Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, 1977), pp. 144-55.
19. Wraxall, *Life and Times*, I:42.

20. Wraxall, *Life and Times*, I:39-40.
21. Wraxall, *Life and Times*, I:40.
22. See R. Paulli, *Danske Folkebøger*, XIII:243.
23. Sigurður Breiðfjörð, »Tistransrímur. Rímur af Tistran og Indíönu«, in *Tistransrímur* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldaprentsmiðja H.F., 1961), pp. 1-119.
24. See »Formáli«, in *Tistransrímur*, pp. ix-x.
25. Now easily available, »Um Rímur af Tistrani og Indíönu« in Jónas Hallgrímsson, *Ljóð og lausamál*, ed. Haukur Hannesson, Páll Valsson, Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson (Reykjavík: Svart á hvítu, 1989), I:356-66. See also Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island i det 15. og 16. Århundrede* (Copenhagen: Andr. Fred. Høst & Søns Forlag, 1888), pp. 130-32, on Jónas's harsh criticism of Sigurð's *rímur*.