

THE POETIC EDDA AND THE APPOSITIVE STYLE

The title of this paper, as many will recognize, is adapted from that of Fred C. Robinson's recent book, Beowulf and the appositive style (1985). By 'the appositive style', as he explains in his opening paragraph, Robinson means what has traditionally been called 'variation' by students of Germanic poetry.¹ His fresh approach to variation, as I hope to show here, is of value in helping to identify and describe examples of this phenomenon in eddic poetry, to which his book makes only occasional reference. I myself prefer, and will use here, the traditional term 'variation', which I shall begin by defining in what I would claim are my own terms, even though, as I shall freely acknowledge below, my definition is to a large extent influenced by the observations of previous writers on variation, including Robinson.

Variation may be defined as the use in poetry of two or more equivalent expressions, the second and any subsequent ones of which could be omitted without detriment to the syntax of the passage in which they occur, and of which only one (not necessarily the first one) is essential to the meaning of that passage. This definition may be supported by two passages from eddic poetry, both listed by Paetzel as examples of variation;² one from Völuspá and the other from the verses spoken by the trémanör ('wooden men') in the final chapter of Regners saga. In the Völuspá passage (str. 19):

Asc veit ec stände, heitir Yggdrasill,
hær beðmr, ausinn hvítaauri;³

(I know that an ash tree named Yggdrasill stands, a tall tree
sprinkled with white mud)

the two equivalent expressions are, of course, Asc and hær beðmr. These are in the accusative and the nominative respectively, and together provide an example of an expression clearly used in one of the oblique cases receiving a parallel in the nominative - a type of variation to which Campbell drew attention in the context of Old English poetry.⁴ In the present Old Norse example, the second expression, hær beðmr, could be omitted without detriment to the syntax of the passage as a whole; the past participle ausinn, being in form either accusative or nominative, could in such an event be taken as referring to either Asc or to Yggdrasill. It would not however be possible to omit Asc itself without upsetting the syntax of the passage, since the accusative and

infinitive construction operating in the sentence as a whole requires an accusative subject for the infinitive stande, such as here only Asc provides. Once this point has been made, it may be admitted that there are many cases of variation in Old Norse poetry in which it would be possible to omit the first rather than any subsequent equivalent expression without seriously disturbing the surrounding syntax (and my next example will, incidentally, be one such case);⁵ but the present example is the exception which proves the rule that, as far as syntax is concerned, the first equivalent expression is not always expendable. All cases are, I believe, covered by the definition as it stands.

So far, my discussion of the definition has been concerned more with syntax than with meaning (though it is, in fact, meaning rather than syntax that enables one to recognize hær þaðm as equivalent to Asc); the next example will bring the element of meaning more to the fore. In this passage, which I shall quote from the edition from which Paetzel quotes it (even though, as I shall show below, I do not regard its text as wholly accurate), the trémaðr says:

Dk því settumk svaðmerðlingar 6
suðr hið salti, synir Loðbrókar;
(So 'svaðmerðlingar', sons of Loðbrók, set me up in the south by the sea).

Here the two relevant expressions are svaðmerðlingar (whatever that may mean) and synir Loðbrókar. Svaðmerðlingar is a hapax legomenon and, to a modern reader at least, highly obscure; and it is by no means certain that the word would have been immediately comprehensible to its earliest hearers or readers, even if they were able to identify the elements of which it is compounded. I shall investigate this term in some detail below, where I shall also suggest that the reading Loðbrókar is not wholly accurate, though (to anticipate somewhat) I shall continue to treat the latter term as a proper noun in the genitive, as here. Whatever the original form or meaning of Loðbrókar itself, there seems to be a case for saying that the expression synir Loðbrókar would have been more comprehensible to contemporaries than the difficult word svaðmerðlingar, to which it clearly forms an equivalent; however obscure the Loðbrókar element was to contemporaries, the word synir would surely have been enough to indicate that reference was here being made to the human (or conceivably divine) beings who had set up the trémaðr. I shall in fact confirm below what I hope is already beginning to emerge from my remarks: that in this example of variation the second expression has a clearer and more specific meaning than the first, and that, with regard to the meaning of the passage as a whole, it would be safer to dispense with the first expression than with the second. In this case of variation, then (to recall my original definition), only one of the two equivalent expressions, and in all probability the second rather than the first, is essential to the meaning of the passage.

This is not, I suspect, a definition with which Robinson would be entirely happy, as it is part of his argument that in many cases of variation the equivalent expressions relate to each other in such a way as to generate ambiguities and encourage multiple interpretation; he might well object to a definition that allows for the theoretical omission of such expressions. In reply to such an objection I can only emphasize that the omission envisaged is purely theoretical, and maintain that it is useful as an initial means of analysing each possible case of variation. As regards this aspect of my definition I am, I admit, influenced by Paetzel, who regards as essential to variation the 'semantic and syntactic dispensability' (1, begriffliche, 2, syntaktische Entbehrlichkeit)⁷ of the second and any subsequent expression in each case. That Paetzel is referring to the second and subsequent expressions rather than the first - at least as far as meaning is concerned - is clear from his contention that the variation consists in 'a concept, already sufficiently characterized for understanding' (my italics), 'being brought to the attention of the listener or reader once again, often' he adds, 'with interruption of the syntactic context'⁸ (since this last point is not an obligatory feature of variation - as the word 'often' confirms - I have not referred to it in my definition, though it is in fact illustrated in the two examples I have so far given; and it is worth mentioning if only in support of the term 'variation' as opposed to 'apposition', since the latter might be thought to involve immediate juxtaposition in the context of Germanic poetry,⁹ an objection which Robinson, though equipped to do so,¹⁰ does not quite meet). On the other hand, I have been influenced by Robinson himself in the modification I have made to Paetzel's definition in maintaining that it is not necessarily the first equivalent expression that is essential to the meaning of the passage in which the variation occurs. Here I am taking account of Robinson's valuable emphasis on the frequent tendency of variation to clarify and specify,¹¹ to which I shall return below.

I shall first discuss four of Robinson's Old English examples, partly because I have found them of particular interest and partly in order to illustrate his methods. I shall then investigate five passages of eddic poetry in an attempt to show that Robinson's relatively flexible approach to variation may help to identify a number of Old Norse examples that Paetzel did not admit as such. Finally, I shall return to the second example I have so far given, the passage spoken by the trémeðr.

Since, as I have already indicated, Robinson often stresses the inter-relationship of the equivalent expressions that constitute a case of variation, it is perhaps surprising that he does not make more of the rhetorical device known as chiasmus: the reversal in the second expression of the order followed in the first. The nearest he comes to mentioning chiasmus, as far as I can

discover, is when he identifies the word feorhbealo, meaning literally 'life-bale' (i.e. deadly evil), in Beowulf 2250 as 'a precise chiasitic equivalent'¹² of quðdeað ('bettle-death') in line 2249; here the criss-cross presentation of the life/death contrast and the bale/bettle comparison is indeed chiasitic. His reluctance to press the point in this case, at least, may be due to the fact that chiasmus does not tell the whole truth about this particular example of variation, as emerges when one quotes the passage in which it occurs (which Robinson, rather uncharacteristically, does not do):

quðdeað fornam,
feorhbealo freone fyrg gehwylone
leada minra¹³

('bettle-death, fearful life-bale, carried off every single one of my people')

Taken together out of context (as Robinson presents them), quðdeað and feorhbealo might seem to constitute an example of what Campbell calls the balanced parallel, in which 'an element generally double is repeated by one syntactically equivalent end of approximately equal bulk.'¹⁴ When they are seen in context, however (as here), it emerges that the second expression, feorhbealo, is expanded by the addition of the adjective freone, meaning 'fearful'; it might thus be taken as an example of what Campbell calls the expanded parallel (an expansion of a preceding word or phrase) or, less probably, of what may be identified among Campbell's types as the partial parallel, in which 'only part of an expression' (in this case only the quðdeað part of the expression quðdeað fornam) is paralleled (here by the word feorhbealo) and 'something new' (i.e. the adjective freone) added 'to replace what is omitted'¹⁵ (i.e. the verb fornam). Although Robinson does not discuss the various possibilities in this particular case, it is characteristic of his method in general that he allows such possibilities to emerge, and his tendency is to encourage a recognition that in many of Beowulf's examples of variation more than one form of parallelism is at work. In drawing attention, as he has done here, to the chiasitic equivalence of quðdeað and feorhbealo, he has indeed also drawn attention to the fact that when the passage in which they occur is heard (rather than seen on the page), the variation seems to involve, first, a (chiasitic) balanced parallel, and secondly, either an expanded or a partial parallel, or both. There is thus a possible total of three types of parallel involved, all of which were perhaps meant to be apprehended.

The second example of Robinson's I should like to discuss involves the words eorðsele ... hlæw under hrusan in the following passage (Beowulf 2409-12):

He ofer willan gieng
to ðæs ðe he eorðsele anne wisse,
hlæw under hrusan holmwylne neh,
yðgewinne;

(Against his will, he went to the point where he knew of a certain earth-hall, a cave beneath the earth, close to the sea-surge, the wave-strife)

In this passage, it may incidentally be noted, the words holmuvime and yðgæwinne constitute an example of a (non-chiastic) balanced parallel. With regard to the variation of eorðsele by hleaw under hrusan, Robinson points out, first, that each of the two nouns in the latter expression calls attention to one of the component elements in the former (he could have added that they do so chiastically, with hrusan corresponding to eorð- and hleaw to -sele); and secondly, that the expression hleaw under hrusan has a specifying effect, making it clear that eorðsele means 'chamber beneath the earth' rather than 'chamber made of earth'¹⁶ (though no doubt both meanings are meant to be apprehended). What particularly interests me about this example is that it closely resembles the type of variation that Campbell identifies as 'a compound word ... paralleled by a two-word phrase';¹⁷ the one example he gives is from Beowulf 16-17: Liffres, / wuldres Wealdend ('life-lord, glory's ruler'), where there is, as will be evident, a semantic correspondence between each of the two elements in the first expression and one of the two words in the second. This correspondence is not chiastic, and chiastic examples of this type of parallel are in fact rare in Beowulf, though there is one, at least, at lines 1260-61: wæteregeas ..., gealde streamas ('water-terror ... , cold streams'). The question arises, then, as to whether Campbell's definition of the type (and particularly its 'two-word phrase' requirement) should be modified in such a way as to accommodate the example of Robinson's now under discussion, or whether the latter is better regarded as another case (this time chiastic) of an expanded parallel. Here again Robinson's approach draws attention to different possible ways of reading or hearing passages of Beowulf, and to the danger of being bound by over-rigid definitions.

The third example of Robinson's I should like to consider consists simply of the two half-lines 1972b and 1973a: wicendra hleo, / lindgestealla ('warriors' protector, shield-companion'). Here the chiastic relationship between the two expressions (which Robinson does not acknowledge in so many words) ensures that hleo is understood in its original sense of 'shelter', 'protector', and not just as 'lord'; and that lindgestealla comes across as meaning 'shielding or protective warrior' rather than simply 'shield-bearing warrior'. As Robinson puts it, 'the semantically analogous elements hleo and lind- reinforce each other.'¹⁸ If this argument is accepted, then the example shows Campbell's variation type, 'compound word ... paralleled by a two-word phrase,' operating in reverse, a process of which I was able to offer only a rather uncertain example from Beowulf when I last wrote on this subject in 1981.¹⁹ Now, thanks to Robinson's sensitive discussion, I believe I have found a clearer (albeit chiastic) example.

These three examples have all involved compound words, a subject on which, in the context of variation, Robinson's remarks are particularly illuminating; they have also all involved chiasmus, of which Robinson in fact reveals a number of instances, though he hardly ever mentions the concept by name. The second and third examples, moreover, illustrate the specifying function noted by Robinson as a frequent tendency of variation; the former in showing how the second equivalent expression may clarify the first, and the latter in showing how the first and second expressions may have a mutually clarifying effect. Before looking at some Old Norse examples, I should like briefly to discuss one more example of Robinson's, which involves neither compounds nor chiasmus, but may have a specifying tendency, and if so, will serve to illustrate yet another way in which variation seems to encourage multiple interpretation. This is Beowulf 2955b, 2956a: hord forstandan, / bearn and bryde ('to defend [his] treasure, [his] children and bride'). The word hord ('treasure') is perhaps being used figuratively here, Robinson argues, in which case bearn and bryde is an example of clarifying variation, specifying the 'treasure' in question. If it is being used literally, on the other hand, then hord ... bearn and bryde are an example of enumeration rather than variation, since in this reading (or hearing) the two equivalent expressions (hord on the one hand, and bearn and bryde on the other) do not have the same referent. Both readings are possible, Robinson claims, and both, he seems to imply, were meant to be acknowledged by the audience of the poem.²⁰

My first Old Norse example is one to which Robinson himself indirectly draws attention, with his discussion of the ritual of swearing by the bragarfulli, or 'oath cup',²¹ to which reference is made in, among other places, Helgakviða Higvarðssonar, preserved in the Codex Regius. Here, after a prose passage has explained how, under the evil influence of a sorceress, Helgi's elder half-brother Heðinn vowed at bragarfulli to woo Helgi's wife Sváva, the valkyrie daughter of King Eylimi, Heðinn confesses to Helgi what he has done (str.32):

'Mic hefir myclo glöpr meiri sötten,
 ec hefí kerna ina konungborna,
 brúði þína, at bragarfulli.'

('A much greater crime has afflicted me; I have chosen the royally-born maiden, your bride, by a drink from an oath-cup!')

The relevant expressions here are, of course, ina konungborna and brúði þína. Paetzel does not list these as an example of variation, presumably because he regards them as a clear-cut case of what he calls 'explanatory apposition' (erklärender Apposition); he does not even include them in his list of cases representing the borderline between explanatory apposition and variation.²²

In the terms of the present discussion, however, they surely constitute a simple and obvious example of specifying or clarifying variation. While it should be recognized that the syntactic parallelism between the two expressions is not

absolute - the first consists of the article followed by a past participle used substantivally, and the second of a substantive followed by a possessive adjective - it may be noted that the placing of the substantival element second and first in the first and second expressions respectively suggests a chiasmic arrangement, even though chiasmus is not a particularly striking feature of this example.

My next example, a more complicated one, is intended to illustrate a possible variety of response of the same kind as is illustrated by a number of Robinson's Old English examples. It is from Grimmismál, str. 17, which may be quoted from Neckel's edition as follows:

Hrfsi vex oc há grasi
Viðars land, viðí;

This, as printed by Neckel, presumably means: 'Viðarr's land is overgrown with brushwood and tall grass; with a forest.' In this interpretation, the word viðí is seen to parallel the expression Hrfsi ... oc há grasi and to provide an example of what in Campbell's terms would be called a summarizing parallel, a compression of a preceding word or phrase and the exact opposite of the expanded parallel, discussed above.²³ In Bugge's edition, on the other hand, the word Viðí is printed with a capital V and presented as the name of Viðarr's land; whereas Neckel takes this word as a strong masculine common noun (viðr) in the dative, Bugge takes it as a strong neuter proper noun (Viðí) in the nominative.²⁴ In Bugge's text, then, while it is the last word in the quoted passage that constitutes the second expression in the variation, as in Neckel's, it is Viðars land (rather than Hrfsi ... oc há grasi) that constitutes the first, and it is the specifying rather than the summarizing type of variation that is involved (it may be noted at this point that Paetzel, who was using Bugge's edition, does not include the relevant expressions among his examples, presumably because, once again, he takes them as a clear-cut instance of explanatory apposition; or possibly because he was aware of the alternative reading that Neckel's text reflects, and regarded the case as too doubtful generally to merit inclusion). If viðí in this instance was originally meant to be taken as a common noun in the dative, it is by no means impossible that it could have been read or heard in medieval times as a proper noun in the nominative; according to Roberts Frank, at least, no less a student of Old Norse poetry than Snorri Sturluson was capable of this kind of misinterpretation.²⁵ If, on the other hand, it was originally intended as a proper noun in the nominative, the name in question, which seems to occur in poetry only here,²⁶ can hardly have been so widely known that it would not have been possible to confuse it with the dative form of the common noun viðr. It may in fact be argued that both interpretations of viðí, and consequently two different types of variation (the summarising and the specifying) were simultaneously

possible, and are present in this passage.

My next three examples, which I shall of course claim are cases of variation, are all arguably cases of enumeration rather than variation, and for this reason (I suspect) not included among Paetzel's examples of the letter, or even among his borderline cases. First I would quote the following passage from Ríggvula (str. 38):

Auð nam scipta, qllom veita
meiðmar oc mgsma, mæra svangrifia;
hringom hreytti, hið sunnr baug.

(He proceeded to distribute wealth, to grant to everybody jewels and treasures, slender-ribbed steeds; he threw away rings, broke asunder [many] a ring)

The essential subject-matter of these lines is the noble generosity of Iarlr, the son born to Mððir as a result of Rígr's visit to the abode of Mððir and Faðir, and it is tempting to ask whether the last line of the quotation constitutes the second expression in a variation of which the first two lines constitute the first; and it is also noteworthy that the second half-line (qllom veita) and the immediately following line together provide a clear example of an expanded parallel when seen in relation to the expression Auð ... scipta. Here, however, I shall concentrate solely on the question of whether the two halves of the last line together constitute an example of variation. Paetzel's reasons for not including them as such presumably have to do with the possibility of a difference in meaning between hringr and baugr (each of which can mean either 'finger-ring' or 'armlet') - a possibility perhaps strengthened here by their use in the plural and singular respectively; and with the difference in meaning between hreyta ('to throw away, dissipate') and hgqva sunnr ('to break apart'). I would argue that, if the essential meaning of the passage, the noble generosity of Iarlr, is kept in mind, these differences become unimportant; that the singular form baug is here being used in a distributive sense, as my translation has already suggested; and that, in the context, there is little or no difference between the kinds of ring referred to, or between throwing them away and breaking them up. In short, I regard the line as a perfectly legitimate example of variation, and I would compare it with the one quoted above from Halggviða Higrvarðssonar in pointing out that, although the syntactic parallelism between its two constituent expressions is not total, the placing of the verb in each of them tends to give it chiasmic form.

The next example for which I should like to argue is from Hárbarðzljóð, str. 18, where Hárbarðr, in reply to Þórr's question, 'How did your women behave towards you?' says:

'Spærcaer áttu vér konor, ef oss at spgcom yrði,
horæcar áttu vér konor, ef oss hollar væri; ...

('We had lively women, if they turned into wise ones for us; we had clever women, if they were well-disposed towards us')

There is apparently some doubt as to whether the adjective sparcr, which can mean 'gentle', 'compliant', as well as 'wise', and is here used substantively in the dative plural, is in fact being used in the meaning 'wise' in this context; both Finnur Jónsson²⁷ and Hans Kuhn,²⁸ while giving 'wise' as its primary meaning, suggest that here it should be interpreted as 'compliant' - a suggestion presumably influenced by the presence of the adjective hollar, meaning 'well-disposed', in the corresponding part of the following line. I see no reason to assume a semantic parallelism between the adjectives used in the second halves of the two lines quoted; there is no such parallelism between sparcar ('lively') and horacar ('clever'), the adjectives used in the first halves. Bearing in mind the well-established meaning of 'wise' for sparcr, I would suggest that, if there is a semantic parallelism between the two lines as regards their use of adjectives, it works chiasmically, with horacar ('clever') corresponding to sparcar ('wise ones') and hollar ('gentle', 'compliant') corresponding (admittedly less closely) to sparcar ('unruly', 'lively'). At this point it may be noted that later in the strophe Hárbarðr makes it clear that the women he is talking about are seven sisters, with all of whom he claims to have slept. Paetzel's objection to accepting the two lines quoted as an example of variation may well be that he sees them as dealing respectively with two different groups of women - the primarily lively ones mentioned in the first line, and the primarily clever ones referred to in the second. I would suggest, on the contrary, that Hárbarðr is at this stage simply boasting in general terms about the women he has had, and is not making distinctions between sub-groups among the seven he later specifies. I would further suggest that the syntactic parallelism between the two lines, and the chiasmic relationship between them for which I have argued, imply similarities rather than differences among the women referred to. If these arguments are accepted, then these lines may, I submit, be added to Paetzel's list of examples of Old Norse variation.

Finally (before returning to the trámeðr), I should like to discuss another passage from Vplogaþá, this time from str. 45:

Brøðr munu beriaz oc at bgnm verðaz,
munu systrunger síflom spilla;
(‘Brothers will fight against and slay each other; cousins will
destroy ties of kinship’)

Paetzel's reasons for not admitting this passage as an example of variation presumably include his recognition that brothers and cousins are not the same thing, and the possibility that síflom spilla means 'to commit incest'; in this view the two lines would be referring to different groups of people and to different actions. With regard to the meaning of síflom spilla, Nordal has argued against the meaning 'to commit incest' in this context, to my mind convincingly; it refers here, he claims, 'to enmity between near relations and in-laws.'²⁹ The difference between brothers and cousins cannot of course be den-

led; but it becomes unimportant in the present context when it is recognized that the essential meaning of the passage is 'kin will rise against kin'; once this is recognized, it must surely also be acknowledged that the second line adds very little to the basic meaning of the first, and is simply expressing the same idea in a rather different way. In other words, it is an example of variation.

These five Old Norse examples have together illustrated a number of aspects of variation that came up earlier in the discussion of Robinson's Old English examples: the coincidence of specification on the one hand, and chiasmus on the other, with some cases of variation; the occasional tendency of variation to manifest itself simultaneously (or nearly so) in different forms; and the not always clear distinction between variation and enumeration. Compound words, however, which were prominent among the Old English examples, have not been so as yet among the Old Norse ones, and it is partly for this reason, and partly because I have a special interest in it, that I should like to return, in conclusion, to the passage spoken by the trémeðr in Ragnars saga, and quoted earlier.

The strophe in which this passage occurs (numbered 39 in Olsen's edition of Ragnars saga³⁰) is the second in a sequence of three strophes (numbered 38-40 by Olsen) spoken by a trémeðr in the final chapter of the Y redaction of Ragnars saga (preserved in Ny kgl. saml. 1824b 4to). As I hope to show in more detail elsewhere,³¹ there are reasons for thinking that, while the second and third strophes (nos. 39 and 40) belonged together from the beginning, they were originally independent of (a) the first strophe (no. 38), which, unlike them, also occurs in Hálfs saga ok Hálfrækkja; and (b) the Ragnarr loðbrók tradition, i.e. the tradition according to which Ragnarr and Loðbrók were the same person, of which Ari Þorgilsson's Íslendingabók (c.1122-33) is the earliest known witness, and which is mainly represented by Krákumál, Book IX of Saxo's Gesta Danorum, Ragnars sönn þáttur, and the X and Y redactions of Ragnars saga (the former of which, preserved fragmentarily in AM 147 4to, is edited together with the Y redaction by Olsen). In interpreting the second and third strophes it is thus very important not to let oneself be distracted or influenced either by the first strophe or by the Ragnarr loðbrók tradition, at least in the first instance; though it should not of course be forgotten that the inclusion of these two strophes in one of the redactions of Ragnars saga was presumably due to a sense of their not total inappropriateness in that context. Here I shall concentrate on the second of the three strophes, and in particular on the part of it already quoted (see p. 2 above).

As indicated above, the problematic words here are svarðmerðlingar and Loðbrókar, which I shall discuss in the order in which they occur in the strophe itself; and until I come to discuss the second of them I shall follow previous commentators in assuming that Loðbrókar is the correct reading. As for svarðmerðlingar, Olsen saw this as a masculine plural triple compound, made up of elements formed, respectively, from svart, m. ('skin with the hair on', '[bacon-]rind'); mrðr, m. ('[pine-]marten'); and the diminutive suffix -lingr, m. He took svarðmrðr ('rind-marten') as a metaphor for 'pig', 'boar', and svarðmerðlingar as meaning 'piglets', justifying this interpretation by recalling Ragnarr loðbrók's famous reference to his sons as he dies in the snake-pit: 'the porkers would grunt if they knew the fate of the boar.'³² Not only is this ingenious interpretation extremely far-fetched; it also relies too heavily on the Ragnarr loðbrók tradition in assuming that the Loðbrók here referred to is identical with Ragnarr loðbrók. The same assumption was made by Gutenbrunner, who accepted Olsen's explanation of the

word's individual elements, but took svarðmörðr as a personal name deriving from the habit among seafarers of wearing furry pelts, including marten-skins; he saw it as an appropriate name for a Viking or sea-king, such as Ragnar Loðbrók, and referred to the trémaðr's mention of another sea-king in the first of his three strophes.³³ This interpretation relies a little too heavily on that strophe, however, as well as on the Ragnar Loðbrók tradition. Neither of these interpretations is in my view acceptable, as I shall continue to demonstrate, though as a student of variation, I find them attractive; since if either of them were accepted, and Loðbrókar were understood to refer to Ragnar Loðbrók, the two expressions svarðmerðlingar and synir Loðbrókar would provide a neat chiasmic example in Old Norse of what Campbell in the Old English context called 'compound word ... paralleled by a two-word phrase' (see p. 5, above); svarðmerð- would be paralleled by Loðbrókar, and -lingar by synir.

My own interpretation of svarðmerðlingar is influenced partly by that of Meissner, who took the -lingr suffix as meaning 'associated with', 'bearing', rather than as a diminutive meaning 'child of', and derived the second element not from mörðr, m. ('marten!'), but from merð, f. ('a trap for catching fish in rivers or streams').³⁴ I would not follow Meissner, however, in reading the first element as sverð, n. ('sword') in order to obtain the meaning 'sword-trap (i.e. shield) bearers', 'warriors'; this interpretation again shows too much reliance on the Ragnar Loðbrók tradition, in which Ragnar's sons are, of course, presented as distinguished warriors. I would stick to Olsen's derivation of sverð- from svorðr, m., although, following 'the little Skíða' of the second half of the thirteenth century,³⁵ I would stress the meaning 'hair of the head' for this word more than Olsen did. I would thus take svarðmerð, f., as meaning 'hair-trap', 'head-dress' (cf. the Irish word clóchtheart, 'breast-parcel', for 'brassière'), and svarðmerðlingar, m. pl., as meaning 'head-dress wearers'. Further than that I shall not go for the moment, as I would not wish to make the mistake of assuming, under the influence of the Ragnar Loðbrók tradition, that the head-dresses in question were helmets, and their wearers consequently warriors.

As for the last word of the passage quoted, the correct reading is, I suggest, not Loðbrókar but Loðbróku; in the manuscript, the k in this word is followed, not by the interlinear g that would be expected if -ar were the correct ending, but by interlinear v, which would suggest a u ending. Instead of Loðbrókar, then, genitive singular of a strong feminine noun Loðbrók, we have Loðbróku, genitive singular of a weak feminine noun Loðbróka. Since bróka is listed in the þulur as a heiti for kona ('woman!'), the name Loðbróka may be regarded as a variant of the goddess-name *Lobkona that seems to underlie the Swedish place-name Locknevi (<Loþkonuvé>), as argued by Sahlgren³⁶ and others. In the passage under discussion, the Loðbróka referred to is, I would argue, a woman named after and serving the goddess, rather than the goddess herself; and her sons, the synir Loðbróku, are being said to have set up the trémaðr as part of the goddess's cult. This interpretation finds support in the second half of the strophe, where the trémaðr goes on to say that he was celebrated with human sacrifices in the southern part of Samsø; and, less directly, in the thirteenth century Þorvalds béttr víðforla, which, drawing in part on a strophe surviving from the tenth century, tells how in Breiðafjarðardalir, in western Iceland, a son gave assistance in the conduct of pagan worship to his mother, the second element of whose name, Fríðgerðr,³⁷ is the name of a goddess closely related, if not identical, to Lobkona.

As to the head-dresses alluded to in the word svarðmerðlingar, I would draw attention to Olrik's evidence for Lappish cult-practices, influenced by Old Norse religion, in which male celebrants customarily wore women's head-dresses;³⁸ and would tentatively suggest that it is a custom of this kind that is being referred to here. For further discussion of the background to the trémaðr's verses I refer to my forthcoming monograph on Ragnars saga. To conclude the present discussion, however, where my chief concern is, of course, with variation, I would offer svarðmerðlingar ..., synir Loðbróku as an example of specifying variation.

Notes and references

- (1) Fred C. Robinson, Beowulf and the appositive style (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1965). See p. 3. (2) Walther Paetzel, Die Variationen in der altgermanischen Allitterationspoesie (Berlin, 1913), see pp. 67-68. (3) With the exception of the trematō passage, which is quoted from Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Renisch, eds., Eddica minora, Dichtungen eddlicher Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosaerkeren (Dortmund, 1903), p. 74, all passages of eddic poetry are here quoted from Gustav Neckel, ed., Edde, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, I. Text (4th ed., rev. Hans Kuhn; Heidelberg, 1962).
- (4) A. Campbell, 'The Old English epic style,' in Norman Davis and G.L. Wrenn, eds., English and medieval studies presented to J.R.R. Tolkien ... (London, 1962), 13-26. See p. 22; and cf. also R.W. McTurk, 'Variation in Beowulf and the poetic edda: a chronological experiment,' in Colin Chase, ed., The dating of Beowulf (Toronto, 1981), 141-60; pp. 153-54. (5) As a comparison of it with the first half-strophe of Helgaqvíða Hundingsbana in fyrri, str. 11 (see Neckel, p. 131), may help to show. (6) See note 3, above. (7) See Paetzel, p. 4. (8) Here quoted from Daniel G. Calder's exposition of Paetzel's views in Calder's 'The study of style in Old English poetry: a historical introduction' in Daniel G. Calder, ed., Old English poetry, Essays on style (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1979), 1-65; see p. 35. (9) cf. P.R. Dixon, 'Verbal apposition, coordination and metrical stresses in Old English', Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 86 (1985), 145-58. (10) See Robinson, p. 3.
- (11) See especially Robinson, pp. 61-63. (12) See Robinson, pp. 56-57. (13) All quotations from Beowulf are from Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg (3rd ed., Boston, 1950). (14) See Campbell, p. 20. (15) See Campbell, p. 21. (16) See Robinson, pp. 64-65. (17) See Campbell, p. 21. (18) See Robinson, p. 65. (19) See McTurk, p. 149. (20) See Robinson, p. 63. (21) See Robinson, p. 76. (22) See Paetzel, pp. 24-25. (23) See McTurk, p. 148, for an explanation of the somewhat modified version of Campbell's definition given here (cf. note 4, above).
- (24) See Sophus Bugge, ed., Narræn fornkvæði: islandsk Sæmling af falkelige Oldtidedigte ... almindelig kaldet Samunder Edda ... (Christiania, 1867), p. 79. (25) See Roberta Frank, 'Snorri and the mead of poetry', in Ursula Dronke et al., eds., Speculum norroenvm, Norse studies in memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre (Odense, 1981), 155-70. (26) To judge at least from the fact that this is the only instance of it listed in Finnur Jónsson, ed., Lexicon poeticum ... oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson (2nd ed., Copenhagen, 1931), p. 614. (27) See Jónsson, Lexicon poeticum, p. 528. (28) See Neckel, ed., Edda (as under note 3, above), II, Kurzes Wörterbuch von Hans Kuhn (3rd ed., Heidelberg, 1968), p. 189. (29) See Sigurður Nordal, ed., Völuspá; translated by B.S. Benediktz and John McKinnell (Durham and St. Andrews, 1978), p. 89. (30) See Magnus Olsen, ed., Volsungasæga ok Ragnars loðbrókar (Copenhagen, 1906-08), p. 174. (31) In my forthcoming Studies in Ragnarsæga loðbrókar and its major Scandinavian analogues (Medium ævom monographs, new series, 14, Oxford).
- (32) See Magnus Olsen, Stednavnestudier (Christiania, 1912), pp. 29-30. (33) See Siegfried Gutenbrunner, 'Zu den Strophen des "Holzmannes" in der Ragnarsæga', ZDA, 74 (1937), 139-43. (34) See Rudolf Meissner, Die Kenninger der Skalden (Bonn, 1921), p. 350. (35) See Finnur Jónsson, ed., Edda Snorra Sturlusonar ... (Copenhagen, 1931), pp. lviii-lix, 258. (36) See Jöran Sahlgren, 'Förbjudna namn', Namn och bygd, 6 (1918), 1-40, esp. pp. 28-40. (37) See B. Kähle, ed., Kristinsæga, Þattr Þorvalds ens víðforla ... (Halle, 1905), p. 71. (38) See Axel Olrik, 'Nordisk og lappisk gudsydrelse. Bemærkninger i anledning af solvognen fra Trundholm', Danske studier (Copenhagen, 1905), pp. 39-57, esp. p. 53.