

Rhyme and Alliteration in Skaldic and Eddic Verse

The main principle of construction in Old Germanic verse is alliteration. It is this device, giving its name to the entire Old Germanic poetic system, which so far has been primarily studied and analysed. This creates an impression that canonized rhyme either appears in Old Germanic verse *ex nihilo* or, what is roughly the same, is borrowed from foreign literary traditions. The native type of sound-pattern, alliteration, is thus contrasted to the "foreign" rhyme, appearing in Germanic verse in its main variants: a) in Old Norse skaldic poetry, not only retaining but taking to an extreme the main characteristic features of alliterative verse; b) in West Germanic poetry, gradually destroying the alliterative tradition. Usually the origin of skaldic rhymes is traced back to Celtic poetic art, whereas in German and English verse rhyme is considered to have been borrowed from Latin hymns and Romance poetry.

However, within alliterative verse itself, it is possible to single out some integral factors, governing the origin and development of rhyme. The canonization of skaldic rhyme is an organic manifestation of the evolution of Old Germanic verse, the realisation of possibilities inherent in epic verse. Obligatory rhymes appear in the process of the canonization of embryonic sound-patterns devoid of constant compositional function and used only as an aural decoration of verse. A borrowing, even if it takes place, becomes possible only when in the poetic system itself there mature some internal conditions for the development of rhyme and is by no means the cause of its appearance but just the catalyst of spontaneous processes. Thus, the question of the monogenesis of rhyme is displaced by a new problem, requiring analysis of the sound-instrumentation of verse, concealed behind its canonical façade. Such analysis acquires special importance because the entire history of the Germanic verse form lies between the sound-repetitions appearing in rhythmic-syntactic parallelism and formalized skaldic rhymes; between sound-patterns, integrating the alliterative long line, and end-rhymes, correlating neighbouring lines. Some kinds of sound-patterns go back to the most ancient devices of expressive word-repetitions; other show how in verse the sound-form

become abstracted from concrete sense-units. Analysing this diverse and unstable situation we shall have to give up the method traditionally dictated by chronology; from the embryonic rhymes of epic verse working our way up along the stairs of the canon (in that case we would have been deprived of valid criteria for singling out embryonic rhymes). The present paper will suggest another way of analysis - from the fully developed, rigidly canonized rhymes in skaldic poetry, back to the sources of its formation. This kind of approach has its own inner logic because the internally reconstructed evolution of skaldic rhymes would later clarify the dynamics of embryonic sound-patterns in the typologically earlier eddic poetry. It is important to start with an attempt to single out those functional factors which made the canonization of rhyme in Old Norse tradition not only possible but also necessary.

Skaldic versification is a manifestation of formal hypertrophy, characterizing skaldic poetry in general and appearing as a result of conscious authorship of form [Steblyn-Kamenskij, 1979, p. 93-101]. In contrast to the laws of alliterative verse, prosody becomes totally alienated from semantics: notional and auxiliary words can occupy any place in metrical structures irrespective of their semantic weight. The demotivation of stress in skaldic poetry requires formal markers, complementing alliteration. These markers take the form of hendings - inner rhymes, which are by definition inseparable from metrical stresses.

In skaldic poetry the main unit of alliterative verse, the long line, is split up. The appearance of a new poetic unit, the short line, makes it necessary for a new sound-device to emerge within it.

The main role in the formation of the short line is played by hendings, whose canonization marks the total independence of short lines in skaldic verse. The formalization of sound-patterns, which establishes phonetic identity irrespective of semantic similarity and thus forever breaks with the traditions of alliterative verse, can be seen as the most important functional factor in the canonization of hendings in skaldic verse.

Hendings are from the very start dissociated from the semantics of the word and because of that are valued by the skalds solely as a sound-device. The importance attached by the skalds to the phonetic structure of hendings is revealed by the existence in classical skaldic verse of a whole system of detailed and complex rules, restricting the sound-structure of hendings. Hendings can be called a "school of phonological studies", which enabled the skalds to single out a phoneme as an element of

formalized sound-repetition (cf. the opposition of *aðalhending*s - full rhymes, *sinni* : *minni* Eysteinn BI, I, 99.2; *eggja* : *leggja* Tindr BI, I, 4.4; and *skothending*s - consonantal rhymes, *lung* : *langa* Hallfrøðr BI, 3, 14.1; *reyk* : *riki* Einarr BI, 6, 55.1). In determining the qualitative structure of *hending*s a strict distinction between different phonemes and allophones of one phoneme is maintained: allophonic variants are regularly used in rhyme, whereas different phonemes (even those which are the closest in articulation) never form rhymes. Thus for example in contrast to allophonic pairs of fore-lingual and back-lingual fricatives (voiceless [p̥] - voiced [ð], voiceless [ç] - voiced [ɣ], which are widely used in skaldic rhymes: *laps* : *baða* Sighvatr AI, 6, 1.6; *vags* : *age* Bragi BI, I, 19.2), the pair of labio-dental fricatives [f] and [v], which appear as different phonemes in Old Icelandic, never form rhymes. The only deviation from the rule is phonologically justified: rhymes with the non-labial phoneme [a] and the labial phoneme /q/ can be accounted for phonologically: at the time of "imperfect" rhymes of the type *hond* : *standa* the phoneme [q] was a "Janus-phoneme" [Steblin-Kamenskij, 1965, p.370-371].

In the quantitative structure of *hending*s the most important phonological oppositions are manifested. For example, consonantal and vocalic oppositions of length are treated differently in *skothending*s and *aðalhending*s. In *aðalhending*s, whose structure was most rigidly determined, only quantitatively identical vowels and consonants can be used. On the other hand, *skothending*s permit the use of geminated consonants, (e.g. *ték* : *ekkjum* Sighvatr BI, 3, 10.7) apart from the pairs [ll] : [l] and [nn] : [n], because these geminated consonants acquired dentalization, or in other words, were characterized by qualitative distinctions [Kuzmenko, 1978, p.76-101].

In classical skaldic verse the structure of rhyme depends on the morphemic division of the word. All elements of consonant clusters, belonging to the root, must be identical (e.g. *hagl* : *seglum* Einarr BI, 3, 8.7). If a group of consonants is split up by a morpheme boundary, only its initial consonants are included into the rhyme (e.g. *mal spakr* : *mæla*) Þjóðólfr Hv. BI, 2, 3.3). In early skaldic verses partial consonances of the type quoted above did not always belong to different morphemes (e.g. *Eynefes* : *öndre* Bragi BI, I, 16.3). However even the earliest skalds permitted this licence only in *skothending*s, applying more rigid rules to the consonant structure of *aðalhending*s. In the course of time, this difference in the sound-structure of both types of rhyme was gradually

eroded because of the tendency to standardize both of them. The phonomorphological status of hendings invalidates the assumption (characterizing Germanic studies of the past) That the evidence of skaldic rhymes can be used as a basis for conclusions about the principles of syllable-division in Old Germanic languages [Kluge, 1913, p. 82].

It is normally emphasized that the process of consolidating skaldic canons remains beyond the scope of investigation. Apart from the rhyme, skaldic poetry is regarded as firmly established by the IX century. However the rhymes of the first skalds, for example, Bragi, the beginning of the IX century, are significantly different in their sound and phonomorphological structure from the hendings of classical skaldic verse.

Comparing the rigid forms of *drottkvætt*, the most popular skaldic metre, with the archaic art of the first skalds, we can trace the process of gradual canonization of rhyme-devices, which became an accepted norm in classical verse: consonance (*skothending*) in odd short lines; full rhyme (*aðalhending*) in even lines.

In the earliest skaldic verse the main opposition of *skothending* to *aðalhending* is already firmly established; its regular use permits certain deviations from the canon. In odd lines rhymes are either not used at all, or have the form of consonances. The first short line remains without rhyme most often because of the greater regularity of the second half of the helming; in the second, and particularly, in the fourth line of the helming full rhymes were very early established. Thus, for the first skaldic verses the main opposition is *aðalhending* which prevails in even lines (marked position) and optional rhyme in odd lines (unmarked position). So in odd lines not only is the presence of rhyme optional but also its quality is variable. It has been suggested that the opposition of hendings in odd and even lines appeared as a result of the odd lines usually containing the beginnings of sentences and serving as a starting point for natural language with its "automatisierende" word-order, since the formal factors of the language had to be satisfied first of all. Odd short lines left less freedom for the verse than even lines, which prevented the appearance in them of rigid rules about hendings [Åkerlund, 1939, s. 167-169]. In other words, while in odd lines language factors dominate and take precedence over verse structures, in even lines the elements of verse composition prevail over the requirements of the language and enrich the structure of sound-patterns, converting consonances into full rhyme. The functional importance of *aðalhendings* accounts for the maximal rigidity of the rules, which from

the earliest times were imposed on their phonomorphological structure: in the first skaldic verses the structure of *aðalhending*s is fairly precise and does not deviate from the canon.

The rigidity of the skaldic canon, its concreteness and inability to detach itself from the substance of language [Smirnitskaja O.A. 1988, p. 42] create the need for variation. In deforming and stylising the substance of language, the general canon admits licences, but these licences become essentially additional rules. The development of skaldic *hending*s takes the form of increasing strictness and complication, and incorporating new elements of language-form into canon creates even more detailed and diverse rules. This highly complicated and detailed system, determining the sound-structure and the location of rhyme in short lines, develops over the course of two centuries and is fully established only in the XI century.

The study of the gradual canonization of skaldic *hending*s allows us to establish the general functional tendencies of the development of rhyme in Old Norse poetry. The evolution of the sound-devices in Old Norse verse, in which secondary forms (skaldic *hending*s) cast their reflections on forms which are typologically earlier (sound-patterns in the "Elder Edda"), represent specially interesting object of investigation. In spite of the fact that in short lines of eddic poetry there may occur different types of sound-repetitions (as far as their structure and location are concerned), the sound-patterns, which are not represented in skaldic poetry, are unreproducible and unpredictable in the "Elder Edda". On the contrary, the sound-patterns of the "skaldic type" are highly significant, noticeable and perform their function, keeping one eddic poem distinct from another. The constant skaldic rhyme can be clearly traced as a tendency in eddic verse. The analysis of the sound-structure and the characteristic location of embryonic rhymes in eddic short lines helps to clarify this tendency and to establish a relationship of succession with the highly canonized skaldic rhymes.

The problem of continuity between eddic sound-patterns and skaldic rhymes is far from being obvious. Attempts have been made to trace elements of skaldic form to non-Scandinavian and even to non-Germanic sources [Edzardi, 1878, s. 570-589; Mackenzie, 1981, p. 337-356]. However in eddic verse, the immediate and the typologically closest predecessor of skaldic poetry, there appear the first signs of the formalization of rhyme.

Already in eddic verse the embryonic rhymes begin to involve the weakest, and never alliterating, second syllables in even lines, prefiguring the most important metrical innovation of skaldic verse, namely the strengthening of the end of the line owing to the canonization of inner rhyme. In eddic verse, as in the poetry of skalds, the sound structure of embryonic rhymes is connected with their location: consonances and full rhymes tend to occupy even short lines in 70% of the examples, whereas in odd lines consonances occur only in 30%, and full rhymes appear extremely rarely (cf. the distribution of skothendings and aðalhending in early skaldic verse).

The sound structure (quantitative and qualitative) of eddic sound-patterns is analogous to skaldic rhymes, especially the earliest. Just as in skaldic poetry (where in even lines aðalhending were constituted only by quantitatively identical vowels and consonants, whereas in odd lines skothendings allowed the combination of geminated with short consonants), in eddic verse embryonic rhymes with geminated consonants (e.g. þótt : nótt Sd.26,6) tend to occupy even lines (62%). Sound-patterns formed by geminated and short consonants (e.g. halir : allir Vsp. 56,7) are normally used in odd lines (74%). As in the earliest skaldic poetry, which in skothendings (odd lines) permits rhymes where consonant clusters belonging to the same morpheme are not fully identical, but restricts them in aðalhending (even lines) to morpheme boundaries, so in eddic verse incomplete consonances in even lines are usually (96%) separated by a morpheme boundary (e.g. goðveg : troða Hdl. 5,6), whereas in odd lines 50% of incomplete consonances belong to one morpheme (e.g. fór : horna Am. 8,3).

The distribution of embryonic rhymes in the "Elder Edda" is also comparable to the earliest skaldic poetry. Possible deviations from the canon in the regular opposition skothending-aðalhending, established in the first skaldic verses, are analogous to the distribution of sound-patterns in the "Elder Edda". In skaldic poetry the greatest regularity of construction was characteristic of the second half of helmings, and similarly in eddic verse most full rhymes (67%) occur in the fourth short line, whereas in the third line consonances are normally used (72%).

Thus the sound-structure and the location of sound-patterns in eddic short lines prove the succession between eddic embryonic rhymes and canonized skaldic hendings. The reproducibility and the use in the "Elder Edda" of exactly the same types of rhymes as were chosen by skaldic tradition, give direct evidence of the source of skaldic hendings.

However, in spite of the fact that in eddic short lines there occur sound-patterns, prefiguring canonized skaldic hendings in their distribution, demotivation and phonetic structure, it is important to bear in mind their functional difference. Eddic sound-patterns are devoid of any significant role in verse-construction and are used in purely ornamental function. It is only in skaldic verse that such rhymes become obligatory for certain parts of the short line and acquire a metrical function in the compositional structure of verse. Embryonic sound-patterns, used only occasionally in the "Elder Edda", are thus transformed into rhyme in the proper sense of the word, - canonized hendings of skalds.

However, side by side with the relationship of succession between eddic and skaldic verse, a possibility of their interaction cannot be excluded. Some eddic poems are characterized by tmesis, skaldic kennings, fixed number of syllables per line, consistent distribution of alliterating syllables. A case in point is "Hymiskviða" to which numerous parallels in skaldic poetry can be found (Bragi "Ragnarsdrápa", Úlfr Uggason "Húsdrápa" etc.). The sound-organisation of this poem is also very specific - it is one of the most saturated with sound-patterns poems of the "Elder Edda". These sound-patterns are exceptionally close to skaldic hendings in their form and location. Full rhymes, such as *kyrr* : *fyrir* (Hym 33,6); *hver* : *verr* (Hym 34,6); *eitt* : *hormeiðið* (Hym 39,8) *hiálmstofn* : *ofan* (Hym 31,6) etc., are, in analogy to skaldic aðalhending, used in even lines. The only two exceptions are conditioned by the presence of alliteration, preventing them from being employed in even lines and restricting their use to odd lines *þlóm* : *þl* (Hym 3,7) and *hafði* : *hǫfða* (Hym 8,3). Like skaldic skothending, consonances are mostly used in odd lines (12 out of 22). The analysis of the phonetic structure of rhymes in "Hymiskviða" can make their proximity to skaldic hendings even more noticeable. As can be seen even from the above quoted examples, in "Hymiskviða" there occur the rhymes of geminated and short consonants (*hver* : *verr* Hym 34,6); the rhymes of geminated /l/, /nn/ and dentalized short /l/ and /n/ (*fold* : *þll* Hym 24,1; *mundo* : *vinna* Hym 26,1); the rhymes with Janus-phoneme /q/ (*hafði* : *hǫfða* Hym 8,3) the rhymes with a consonant cluster split up by a morpheme boundary (of *ljótt*: *ofan* Hym 23,7) etc. Thus in the case of "Hymiskviða" it's probable that canonized skaldic hendings could have produced some impact on the sound-organisation of the poem in question. In comparison with "Hymiskviða" another eddic narrative poem, also describing the deeds of a mythological character, "Þrymskviða" has got a different sound-

organisation. There the majority of the sound-patterns appear as a result of rhythmic-syntactic parallelism or lexical repetition (see below), whereas internal rhymes of "the skaldic type" are, comparatively speaking, rare (7 examples in 33 stanzas in "Prymskviða" vs. 30 examples in 39 stanzas in "Hymiskviða"). Therefore, the exceptional proximity of canonized skaldic hendings and the rhymes in "Hymiskviða", keeping it distinct from other eddic poems, enables us to assume direct influence of skaldic verse on the sound-organisation of "Hymiskviða".

Another argument in favour of stating a relationship of succession between skaldic and eddic sound-organisation can be added. To do so it's sufficient to compare the sound-patterns in long eddic lines, and optional rhymes, occurring in neighbouring short lines in earliest skaldic verses, where hendings have not yet been established as a rigid and formalized system. In the poetry of the first skálds characterized by a weakly canonized system of hendings, there appear additional rhymes, binding the short lines with each other. As a rule it is easy to notice some kind of defects in hendings used in lines linked in this way. In Bragi's verses, for example, six out of twelve types of connections unite short lines without skothendings (e.g. svá á rennirauknum / rauk, Danmarkar auka Bragi BI, I, 13.3-4). In these lines the syllable, involved in the rhyme, always occupies the constant place of skaldic hendings - the penultima.

These additional, compensating rhymes can be accounted for by an attempt on the part of the skálds to support the not fully established system of hendings. There can be no doubt that even at this stage of the development of skaldic art the choice between the rhymes in the long lines and the internal rhymes (hendings) was made in favour of the latter. But the existence of these interlinear sound-patterns (used less and less frequently and gradually disappearing by the time of the final canonization of hendings, by the XI century) proves that in Old Norse verse there existed organic tendencies for using rhyme as a means of linking short lines. These inner capacities are fully developed in the sound organisation of the long lines of the "Elder Edda".

The sound-instrumentation of eddic verse abounds in inter-linear sound-devices. This might be explained by its closeness to gnomic and ritual genres, where sound-repetitions acquired a specific magic value. The magical function of sound-repetitions was gradually transformed into the ornamental or stylistic function, consisting in singling out and correlating separate units of verse. This functional transition becomes

most noticeable in sound-patterns, appearing as a result of repeating words within the same line.

Genetically the device of word-repetition (first and foremost as meaningful and not phonetic units) can be accounted for by the belief in accumulating the magic power of words giving new significance to ritual oaths and incantations. However in eddic poetry this device is regularly employed in organising the main verse - units - short and long lines, and becomes the basis of one of the eddic metres - *galdralag*. It might be assumed that word-repetition was used as the most archaic means of organising metrical elements. Lexical repetition, where the identity of meaning results in the identity of sounds, contains the chief principle of constructing verse - alliteration, enriched and deepened by the exact rhyme of root morphemes. Therefore the device of repeating words (in which the primary verse-organising means - alliteration and rhyme, have not yet been abstracted from the substance of the language, and the phonetic likeness is subservient in relation to the semantic similarity and only results from the identity of lexemes) can be regarded as the first step in employing the rhyme as a metrically relevant device. The most primitive and the most widely spread type of word-repetition (75 examples) - binary, is used as a means of constructing the main unit of the eddic verse - the long line. From the semantic point of view the first member of this binary complex dominates over the second one, which in its turn usually varies and enhances the meaning of the former: *heyri iǫtnar / heyri hrǫmþursar* [Skm 34, 1-2]. From the formal point of view, repetitions underline the parallel (as, for instance, in the example quoted above) or the symmetrical structure of these binary complexes.

The device of repeating a word three times, is employed less frequently than binary repetition (the use of which is not restricted to a certain metre). This only happens in one eddic metre - *ljóðaháttir* (40 examples). The spreading of this type of repetition in *ljóðaháttir* (in contrast to the binary structure common for eddic verse) is conditioned by the presence there of a third unpaired line, which echoes the word repeated in the preceding two lines: *Deyr fé / deyia frændr / deyr síalfr it sama* [Háv 76, 1-3].

In *fornyrðislag* three-member repetition occurs quite rarely (3 examples) and is probably used in imitation to the gnomic verses of *ljóðaháttir* [Meletinsky, 1968, p. 35]. It is interesting to note that even in the context of the epic metre (*fornyrðislag*), the three-member repetition is employed in the description of magic and ritual activities. On the

whole, the greatest part of internal, interlinear and interstrophic repetitions (105 examples out of 163) is concentrated in the mythological eddic poems, going back to ritual-magic and gnostic genres. This device is often employed in Old High German and Anglo-Saxon spells, for example, in the 13 lines of "Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche" there occur 10 examples of word-repetition (like in eddic verse initial repetition united with rhythmic-syntactic parallelism prevails).

In contrast to exact lexical repetition, creating the effect of full rhymes, the repetition of etymologically cognate words (37 examples: *dœgrs eins gamall, / - nú er dagr kominn* HHI 6, 3-4) or the use of different grammatical forms of one and the same word (35 examples: *Andvari ek heiti / Óinn hét minn faðir* Rm 2, 1-2) gives the linguistic grounds for bringing into use consonances of root morphemes. The non-identity of vowels can, usually, be accounted for by ablaut, for example, in the case of using different grammatical forms of strong verbs (*heiti-hét*) or the derivative and the word, from which it has been derived (*dœgr - dagr*). The similarity of the two above-mentioned types of sound-patterns is fully predictable and conditioned by the use of the same devices in form - and word-building in Old Norse. In both cases the linguistic grounds for the appearance of consonances is created by the most important element of the phonomorphological word-structure - ablaut, which in combination with other derivational means is used for differentiating between nominal stems as well as verbal forms.

The phonetic similarity is naturally dependent on consonants because it is the consonants that constitute the constant part of the root-morpheme, responsible for conveying the semantics of the stem, whereas vowels, varying according to ablaut or other mutations, only modify its grammatical or derivational meaning. The semantic weight of repetition, containing both full consonances and identical initial sounds, determines their location in verse-units - they invariably coincide with the main accents in the long line. Undoubtedly, the full consonance in the root morphemes of different grammatical forms or etymologically cognate words has not yet abstracted itself from the language-substance and become a purely sound-device.

The main difference between sound-repetitions, created by any type of lexeme-reproduction, and unmotivated embryonic rhymes in words, which are not connected etymologically, consists in the phonetic identity of the latter not resulting mechanically from the semantic similarity but being valuable as such. However the phonetic likeness of root-

morphemes, which appears as an independent sound-device, is, unlike skaldic hendings, not divorced from the meaning of the words involved. Embryonic eddic rhymes always bring into prominence and link the key words, the semantically most important units of the text. The semantic value of eddic embryonic rhymes is determined by their relation to alliteration, always marking the most meaningful morphemes (the roots) of notional words.

The largest part of embryonic rhymes in the "Elder Edda" is indissolubly connected with alliteration insofar as their function, location and semantic relevance are concerned. As well as alliteration, rhymes most often occupy the positions of either the first and the third stressed syllables of the long line (anaphoric type - 257 examples : *barði bára / við borðpili* Gør I 7, 5-6) or the second and third stressed syllable (junction type - 138 examples : *Bilrøst brotnar / er þeir á brott fara* Fm 15,4-5). These embryonic rhymes help alliteration to unite the two short lines into one long line and thus build the relationship of a higher order. These types of rhymes prevail in mythological poems composed in fornyrðislag (200 examples) and in all genre-varieties of ljóðaháttir (184 examples).

Less frequently (117 examples) there occur in eddic verse end rhymes, unmotivated by lexical repetition but sometimes supported by rhythmic-syntactic parallelism: *varð ára ymr / ok iárna glymr* (HH I 27, 1-2). This kind of embryonic rhyme is detached from alliteration both in its location and function. Here the second and the fourth stressed syllable, which, being the weakest syllable in the line, was never marked by alliteration, are involved into the rhyming sequence. This makes the internal pause more noticeable and breaks the rhythmic structure of the long line into two independent segments, related to each other with the help of rhyme.

Unmotivated embryonic rhymes prevail, in analogy to repetition, in mythological poems of the "Elder Edda". In 333 stanzas of mythological poems, composed in fornyrðislag, there are 170 unmotivated rhymes (51,05%), whereas in 457 stanzas of heroic poetry we find 198 examples (48,24%). The tendency to greater regularity, observed in the sound-instrumentation of mythological eddic poems, (in comparison with heroic poetry) can be accounted for by their genetic proximity to ritual-magic genres, where the repetition of sounds was believed to have magic power. The study of the distribution of sound-patterns in heroic and mythological poetry allows to draw conclusions connected with their typological characteristics. The sound-repetitions, motivated by their semantic

relevance as well as exact anaphoric and junction-rhymes, enriching alliteration and sharing with it its functions, prevail in mythological poems and indicate the relative typological antiquity of their verse-organisation. In these poems the rhyme as a metrical device is neither detached from the substance of language nor from the sound-repetition peculiar to the primordial alliterative verse technique. Exact embryonic rhymes, unmotivated by their semantic relevance (among which end rhyme stands out functionally) are most frequent in heroic poetry and signify the conception of a new principle in the metrical structure, of a new organising means, in the womb of alliterative verse. End rhymes become most important in the metrical units of málahátr (with the weakened function of alliteration and a tendency to equisyllabic structure), where they begin to perform the compositional function in line, which in historical perspective they are destined to receive in the typologically late systems of versification.

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