Poetry and Society: Aspects of Shona, Old English and Old Norse Literature

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One of the most interesting and stimulating developments of recent years in African studies has been the discovery and rescue of the traditional poetry of the Shona peoples, as reported in a previous issue of this journal.[1] In particular, to anyone acquainted with Old English (Anglo-Saxon) poetry, the reading of the Shona poetry strikes familiar chords, notably in the case of the *nhetembo* and *madetembedzo* praise poetry.

The resemblances are not so much in the content of the poetry as in the treatment of the themes, and especially in the use made of certain poetic techniques common to both. Compare, for instance, the following extracts, the first from the clan praises of the Zebra *(Tembo)*, the second from *Beowulf*, the great Old English epic, composed probably in the seventh century. The Zebra praises are complimentary and the description of the dragon from *Beowulf* quite the reverse, but the expression and handling of the imagery is strikingly similar:

Zvaitwa, Chivara,
Njuma yerenje.
Hekani vaTembo,
Mashongera,
Chinakira-matondo,
yakashonga mikonde savakadzi,
Mhuka inoti, kana yomhanya
mumatombo,
Kuatsika, unoona mwoto kuti cheru
cheru.[2]

It has been done, Striped One,
Hornless beast of the desert.
Thanks, honoured Tembo,
Adorned One,
Bush-beautifier,
decked with bead-girdles like women,
Beast which, when it runs amid the rocks,
And steps on them, you see fire drawn forth.

eald uht-sceadha,
se dhe byrnende
nacod nidh-draca,
fyre befangen;
swidhe ondraedadh.
hord on hrusan,
waradh wintrum frod;

Hord-wynne fond,
opene standan,
biorgas secedh,
nihtes fleogedh,
hyne fold-buend
He geseacan sceall
thaer he haedhen gold
ne bydh him wihte
dhy sel.

the ancient dawn-ravager,
he that burning
the naked dragon-foe,
compassed with fire;
greatly dreadeth.
the hoard in the earth,
guardeth, old in years;

Hoard-joy (treasure) he found,
standing open,
seeketh caves,
by night he flieth,
him the fold-dweller
He must needs seek
where he heathen gold
nor is he one
whit the better for it.

Beowulf, ll. 2270-6.[3]

Both languages make much use of imagery expressed descriptively, frequently in the form of compounds: *chinakira-matondo* (bush-beautifier for zebra) and *uht-sceadha* (dawn-ravager for dragon). Both forms of poetry employ the technique of variation, repeating the same or similar information in different words, and often with structural parallelism of various kinds: *biorgas secedh . . . nihtes fleogedh* is an instance from the excerpt above, with which one should compare the examples given by Fortune for the Shona *nhetembo* of the Hera, and *madetembedzo (okupfimbana,* courtship praises).[4]

There is a further point which strikes the reader when he comes to consider literatures which are generally classed as related to that of Old English, in particular that of the Scandinavian countries. Old Norse literature flourished at about the same time as Old English, was composed in a closely related language or group of languages, and by peoples sharing a considerable common heritage of traditional material and poetic techniques. Yet despite all this, Old Norse Poetry, and especially the large body of skaldic poetry, is in many ways less like Old English poetry than is Shona.

The divergence of the two Germanic poetries has been noted before, as for instance by Gordon:

> In general style the Old Norse poems are very different from the Anglo-Saxon. They . . . set forth their matter with a lyrical conciseness and abruptness which is nearer to the medieval ballad than to the splendid epic fullness of Beowulf . . . The Norse poems have not the epic dignity or the fine scenic effects of Beowulf, but . . . are vivid and dramatic . . . [with a] fierce power.[5]

The further perception that Shona poetry resembles Old English, in ways in which neither resembles Old Norse, prompts one to ask the question, what factors can be called upon to account for the curious agreement between Shona and Old English?

For at first sight it certainly does seem curious. Shona is divided from Old English by many hundreds of years and thousands of miles; the cultures are vastly different, and the languages unrelated. Conversely, Old English and Old Norse are related Germanic languages, and the cultures similar, including religious development and to some extent political organization. Both flourished in about the same period of time: Old English from about 650 A.D. to the Norman Conquest of the eleventh century, and Old Norse skaldic verse from the eighth or ninth century to the fourteenth. Moreover, the two cultures were for a time juxtaposed and even intermingled, through the Viking invasions of Britain, so that much mutual influence might be expected. The fact remains that the differences between the two poetries are deep and significant, and it is possible to find parallels in Shona literature for the points at which Old English differs from her sister poetry. One such feature is that of variation, described and exemplified above; there is no trace of this in skaldic poetry. Another is in the nature of the descriptive terms used, and this will be more fully dealt with in the sketch of Norse verse below.

Since literature is the product of a society, this seems an obvious place to look for the variables. In seeking to discover a correlation between certain aspects of the society, and certain characteristics of the literature, one does not of course look so much at the relatively trivial features of content and allusion which are clearly culture-based or dependent upon the environment. The mention of frost in *Beowulf* and of salt-gathering expeditions in the *nhetembo* are of this kind. What is at issue here is less obviously 'cultural' features, which are generally classed as literary characteristics, such as the use of devices like imagery, in its various forms of expression.

Equally, one must leave out of account poetic devices so dependent on language structure that they can only occur in languages of a particular structural type. For instance, although one does not minimise the features common to English and Norse poetry as against Shona, it is found that most such features have their origin in the exploitation of linguistic resources at fairly low levels.[6] The two Germanic languages have a clear strong/weak stress distinction, whereas Shona has not, apart from the pre-pausal stress and lengthening (in normal speech) on the penultimate syllable. Thus the stress-based metre of Old Germanic poetry is not available to Shona. Similarly alliteration in Shona is intimately bound up with the grammatical structure, whereas with Germanic langu-

ages this is not so; alliteration makes an aesthetic impact in English and Norse, and can be used in a metrical scheme, in a way which does not hold good for Shona. These differences spring from the different phonological and morphological systems of Bantu and Germanic respectively, and it is not suggested that language structure and society are related in the manner implied here.

Conversely, all three languages allow compound nominals — however much the specific constructional patterns may vary — and one may then compare the use made of this feature in their literatures.

Ideally for such an investigation we require knowledge of the whole literature of each society, and the place of particular genres within it; of the circumstances under which the genre was composed and recited, by whom and for whom; the relationship of the composer (and performer, if different) to the audience, the relationships of both to the rest of the society. A similar body of knowledge is needed for other cultural phenomena, the relationship of the community to others neighbouring, the physical environment and its effect on ease of communication, and indeed, countless other aspects of human life and what affects it.

Set out in this fashion, the task appears formidable, if not impossible. Such information regarding the traditional society of the Shona is, thanks to the researches of recent years, fairly readily available. We know very much less about Old Norsemen, and even less about Old Englishmen. Indeed, most of the relevant facts about Old English must be derived from the poetry itself, and conclusions must therefore be tentative.

Equally important, for both English and Norse, is the fact that we do not know for certain whether what has survived in written records is typical of the genre represented, nor what other genres remain unrepresented. Nevertheless, with all these unpromising conditions, I think one may still come to some reasonably well-supported assessment of the relationship between society and literary characteristics. Because of limitations of space, consideration is confined to the *nhetembo dzorudzi* (clan praises) of the Shona, the narrative and meditative poetry of Old English (excluding gnomic verse, charms and riddles), and the skaldic poetry of Scandinavia. An acquaintance is assumed with Shona traditional poetry, as described in the articles (already cited) by Fortune, but a short account is given of Old English and Norse poetry in general, as well as of the genres selected for study.

Old English Poetry

Very little of the poetry composed before the Norman Conquest of 1066 has come down to us. We possess in all some 30 000 lines, of which by far the greater part is preserved in four manuscripts, all written about 1 000 A.D.[7] The literature had to run the gauntlet, first of the censorship of monkish scribes, who would not have wasted precious writing materials on, say, drinking or love songs — though they did include some rather pagan charms, and riddles of doubtful morality. Secondly there were the chances of time, as of war and natural disaster, particularly fire. A great deal was lost in the fire at the Cottonian Library in 1731, and in the 1807 bombardment of Copenhagen. Much of what had been written down before 1066 had already been destroyed during the Viking raids, when monastic libraries were ravaged. What does remain of the poetry composed from about the seventh to the tenth centuries shows strongly marked characteristics, which we may suppose to have developed during the period when English poetry was still truly oral literature.

There are two stages discernible. The first belongs to the 'heroic age', when society was organized chiefly for war. In the case of the English, the wars were at first offensive, during the fifth and sixth century invasions of Britain; later, when the onslaughts of the Vikings began, there was more need for defence. The central figure in this society was the *hlaford* (lord), with his retinue of warriors living communally in a hall and held together by bonds of loyalty and hope of reward. The entourage of a lord usually included a *scop*, or minstrel, whose duty was to entertain the lord and warriors with song and harp-playing. Most of the epic and heroic poetry, such as *Beowulf* itself, was probably composed in this, the pre-Christian period, although in the eventual writing down it almost certainly suffered considerable change. After the introduction of Christianity into England in the late sixth century, an attempt was made to 'christen' the poetry, with some

rather incongruous results. *Beowulf* as it now exists shows a strange mixture of the old, stoic, somewhat gloomy, though invariably courageous, pagan outlook on life, with the occasional seasoning with Christian ethic. The hero Beowulf has a pagan funeral, complete with pyre, despite his constant references to 'God, the giver of victories', presumably originally Wotan or Tyr, the ancient gods.

After the acceptance of Christianity, the old heroic poetry remained alive, but by the side of it there developed a form, modelled on the traditional type, used primarily for transmitting the Christian teachings. We find numerous lives of the saints, couched in terms more appropriate to the exploits of heathen warriors, parts of Biblical narrative, and even straightforward preaching, such as the 'Soul's address to the Body'. Old Testament stories, like that of Judith, had content rather more in tune with the heroic outlook, but it must be admitted that the Christian poetry is on the whole very dull stuff; it has however given us one splendid piece, the 'Dream of the Rood', where Christian and heroic elements are fused into a strangely powerful mystic whole.

We have Christianity to thank for the fact that the poems were written down at all. Only tiny fragments remain of the runic writing in use before the introduction of the half-uncial script from Ireland, from the seventh century onwards, and in any case, runes were mostly used for carving on wood, bone and stone.

The scop in Old English society

As previously mentioned, the scop or *gleomann* (glee-man) was a retainer of the lord, a warrior chief. There is evidence that at least some of the fraternity were wandering minstrels, attaching themselves to any lord willing to employ them, and departing when the wanderlust took them again.[8] But whether in permanent or temporary employment, the scop was utterly dependent on his 'gold-friend', the lord, and could be replaced if he failed to give satisfaction. The minstrel author of 'Deor' had the unhappy experience of having his 'landright' taken from him and given to 'Heorrenda, a man skilled in song', after many winters as scop of the Heodenings. His position was no sinecure; he had to be able to fulfil what was expected of him, and this appears to have included the recitation of a poem as long as *Beowulf*, of over 3 000 lines.

From the content of the extant poems of the 'semi-Christian' type, a large part of the scop's energy was devoted to extolling the virtues of bravery and loyalty to the lord. This was indeed a necessity if the community was to survive the attacks of enemies: as Whitelock notes, 'The poet's demand of absolute fidelity to a lord was no mere poetic, conventional standard.'[9]

As far as the scop's membership of any particular social class is concerned, there are considerable gaps in our knowledge, but inferences can be drawn from a few scraps of evidence. The structure of English society in Anglo-Saxon times seems to have been rather more complex than that of the Norsemen, for example,[10] although both systems included the two extremes of those of noble blood, and serfs or slaves. *Eorl*, from which our modern 'earl' is descended, a term cognate with the Norse *jarl* (nobleman), seems to have included a man noble in spirit, a hero, sometimes simply a man, especially a warrior. The term corresponding most closely to *jarl* in semantic coverage is *ealdor* and its compounds, as *ealdormann* (chief, prince, nobleman), though there were a number of other terms for king and prince. Another class of society was that of the *cheorl* (churl, common man), above that of the *theow* (servant, slave). In addition there was a class known as *laet*, and the half-free.[11]

Which of these classes produced scops, or whether all of them did, is not known for certain. Bede's account of the poet Caedmon, who died in 680, states that he received the gift of *scop-gereord* (poetic voice or language) in a dream, when he had gone out to the cattle-stall, it being his turn to watch the beasts that night. He is thus unlikely to have been of noble birth, and indeed, the next day he betook himself to the *tun-geref* (town-reeve, bailiff), who was his *ealdor-mann*. Caedmon had gone out to the stall from a banquet he was attending, and which he left largely out of shame at being unable to participate 'when for the sake of mirth it was decreed that each should in turn sing to the harp'.[12] We thus have indications of a society in which even the lowliest may have been acquainted with poetry, and apparently expected, at least on occasion, to perform it, whether a fully-fledged scop or not.

It seems unlikely that the scop composed his own poetry, apart from selecting and arranging themes, plots and poetic expressions from the common stock, although no doubt many added expressions of their own, on traditional lines. We know the names of a few Christian poets, such as Caedmon and Cynewulf, but most of the poetry is anonymous. It may be that minstrelsy was mainly in the hands of a minority of practitioners, but it seems that the poetry as a whole was common heritage; men of noble lineage, as well as Caedmon's banquet-companions, were often accomplished performers on the harp. The scop then is perhaps rather to be regarded as a professional among amateurs, than as posessing a skill peculiar to himself alone.

Characteristics of Old English poetry

It is supposed that the poetry was originally intended to be sung, or more probably chanted, to the accompaniment of the harp; there are numerous references in the literature to the sound of the harp in connection with the scop's performance.[13] We have no means of knowing whether the poetry was sung to a melody or not; *song-craeft* covers poetry as well as song,[14] and terms such as *hleothor* appear to have reference to any sound made by the voice, cry as well as singing. It is most probable however that the harp was used for striking chords at stressed syllables, rather than for playing a tune, when it accompanied the kind of poetry under discussion. Even so we do not know whether the chords were struck in regular rhythm or not, though in the earliest kind of poetry this is possible. The lines there are short and of fairly even length, whereas in later poetry, with some exceptions, the lines have become longer and less even, and we may assume that the harp no longer accompanied declamation. In fact, this poetry was probably read silently rather than recited.

The alliterative metre

Of the various kinds of patterning theoretically available, Old German poets fixed on that of initial rhyme, or alliteration. We are fairly certain that Old English, like its relations and its modern descendant, had strong/weak stress distinctions, and the strong stresses were taken as points of reference in the organization of the verse. The line was composed of words of which four contained strong stress (compounds could count as two words), and of these stressed syllables at least two, and often three, began with an alliterating sound. It is also customary to assume a break or caesura between the second and third stresses, dividing the line into two halves; at least one stress in each half-line alliterated with one in the other. Unstressed syllables were apparently not counted, and their number was probably governed by the criterion of manageability. In the older poetry they are generally few, ranging from none to a maximum of six in any one 'slot'. Examples are from *Beowulf* (with the stressed syllables printed in bold):

hil*de-***rin***ce* *ac he* **hra***the* **wol***de*
(the man of war but he swiftly was minded)
(1.1576; 1 and 3 alliterate)

Fun*don dha on* **san***de* **sa***wul-***leas***ne**
(Found they there on the sand [him] lifeless
1.3033; 2 and 3 alliterate)

wyrm *ofer* **weall-***clif* **le***ton* **weg nim***an*
(the worm [dragon] over the wall-cliff
they let take [his] way [they pushed the dragon over the cliff])
(1.3132; 1, 2 and 3 alliterate)

The total range of alliterations was sixteen or seventeen sounds. All vowels alliterated with each other:

ear*me* **an***hagan* **oft** *ge***bin***dadh*
(the wretched solitary [man] often bind)
(The Wanderer, 1.46; 1, 2 and 3 alliterate)

Alliterating consonants were *b, c, d, f, g, h, l, m, n, r, s, t, w, y; th* and *dh* (thorn and barred *d*) alliterated together. There is some doubt about *p*, which occurs in initial position only in late loans.[15]

Towards the end of the Old English period, rhyme begins to make an appearance. Sometimes the two half-lines rhyme together, a feature found in 'Judith', composed probably towards 900 A.D.; and sometimes there are alliterating pairs of items, as *hlynede and dynede* (resounded and vociferated). With one notable exception, however, rhyme in Old English poetry is sporadic, and certainly not an integral part of the form.[16]

Kennings

The other major technique was that of the kenning. The term is from Old Norse *kenning* (pl. *kenningar*, originally meaning sign

or mark of recognition) cognate with *kenna* (to know). In reference to poetic diction, it means synonym or descriptive phrase, standing in place of a more direct term. In *Beowulf*, hall or building is expressed by some thirty different items; for lord there are at least twenty-five, and similarly for subject or follower. The kenning is frequently a compound, e.g. *beado-leoma* (battle-light for sword). Since warfare is a major theme, the kennings for the various aspects of battle and military equipment are most numerous. Here is a selection of the kennings for sword:

(a) synonyms: *sweord, bill, heoru, secg, brond*
(b) near-synonyms: *mece* (blade); *ecg* (edge); *ire* (iron)
(c) expansions: *beado-mece* (battle-blade); *hilde-bil* (war-sword); *gudh-bil* (battle-sword); *haeft-mece* (hilted blade)
(d) descriptive and metaphorical compounds: *brogden-mael* (ornamented mark); *sceaden-mael* (shadowed mark); *wunden-mael* (waved mark); *waeg-sweord* (wavy sword; this and the three preceding all have reference to the damascening of the blade); *hring-mael* (ring-mark [ringed sword]); *hamera-laf* (hammered inheritance); *beado-leoma* (battle-light); *hilde-leoma* (war light); *gudh-wine* (battle-friend).

The class of kennings includes expressions based on metonymy or synecdoche.

With this range of terms at his command, the scop could include sword in ten alliterations out of the sixteen. One third of the vocabulary of the poem *Beowulf* consists of compounds of the kind shown under (c) and (d); there is on average a compound in every other line, and a new compound every third line.

The kenning had also another function, in addition to substitution for the more direct term in obedience to the requirements of alliteration. Kennings were introduced for variation, which was in part decorative, and in part a retarding device or 'padding', in the same way as the Homeric or epic simile. The following eleven lines from *Beowulf* merely record that the warriors bestowed their armour in a ship and set sail:

bat *under beorge,*	**flota** *waes on ydhum*
on **stefn** *stigon —*	*Beornas gearwe*
sund widh sande;	*streamas wundon,*
on bearm **nacan**	*secgas naeron*
gudh-searo geatolic;	*beorhte fraetwe,*
weras on wil-sidh	*guman ut scufon,*
Gewat tha ofer	**wudu bundene.**
waeg-holm	*winde gefysed*
flota fami-heals	*fugle gelicost,*
odh thaet ynib antid	*othres dogores*
wunden-stefna	*gewaden haefde . . .*
	(11. 210-20)

	the *floater* was on the waves,
the *boat* beneath the cliffs.	
on the *prow* embarked —	The warriors eagerly
the sea against the sand;	the currents swirled,
to the bosom of the *vessel*	the men bore
splendid war-gear;	the bright treasure,
heroes on the willing venture,	the men pushed out,
Went then over the wave-sea	the *bounden wood.*
the *foamy-necked floater*	driven by the wind
until after due time	most like to a bird,
the *bound stem*	on the following day had travelled . . .

'Ship' is mentioned seven times, each time with a different kenning, and in addition, 'men' and 'sea' are each expressed by four different terms. This is a point which will become of importance when examining the poetry of the Norse skalds; the kenning in Old English had a two-fold function — to assist in the alliterative metre, and to serve as variation, whether for aesthetic or more practical considerations, such as mnemonic device, or retarding device while the poet remembered the next part of his tale, or to spin out the tale to a satisfactory length.

This can be compared to the use of expressions carrying the imagery in Shona *nhetembo*, where likewise one finds a succession of what

may equally justifiably be called kennings, similaly often in the form of compounds, and which sometimes virtually constitute the poem.

Skaldic Verse[17]

The type of Norse poetry to be considered here is that of the *skalds*. The term skald means poet in a very wide sense, but is particularly applied to the court poets of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. Skaldic poetry differs from both Old English and traditional Shona poetry in that it is known to be the product of individuals, whose names and often life-stories are recorded. The first known skald, Bragi Boddason, was a Norwegian of the first half of the ninth century, and we know of some 250 skalds by name.

The early societies of the Scandinavian peoples — Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, eventually Icelanders and Greenlanders — were also organized chiefly for war, but here the warfare was far more, and for far longer, offensive. Communities seem to have been smaller and less coherent than in England, and men were more mobile. It was not unusual for a man to spend some months of every year in piracy and raiding, and Viking adventurers went as far afield as Athens and Constantinople, offering their services as mercenaries, or on slave-hunting raids, as well as visiting the Norse colonies in the Orkneys, Ireland, Iceland and the English mainland.

Society was organized in three classes, regarded as divinely ordained: the thrall, or slave class; the freeman; and the *jarl*, the aristocracy who possessed most of the wealth and power. Men of noble birth were looked on as descended from the gods, in pagan times at least, and from the turbulent history of the Scandinavian countries in the era *c.* 700-1000, it is clear that anyone with the requisite lineage, who could command the necessary support, could make himself a king.[18] These petty kings had no established capital city, as did the English, but moved round their territories, expecting hospitality from their wealthier subjects.

Old Norse society was much more favourable to the individual of strong personality and ambition than was the Anglo-Saxon. The English rapidly became sedentary after their successful conquest and settlement of Britain, while the Norsemen continued their raiding and pillaging for several centuries more. The necessarily defensive stance of the English required them to be more unified and co-operative than was the case with the small bands of marauders produced in Scandinavia.

There was much in common between the ethos of both. The duty of vengeance for the killing of lord or kinsman, for example, was a matter of importance to English and Norse alike, as is clear from the laws of Anglo-Saxon England,[19] but this theme does not appear in English literature to anything like the extent to which it does in the Norse. The Icelandic sagas, in particular, frequently show the blood-feud as central in tales like that of Flosi and Njal in the *Brennu-Njálssaga*. The literature, both prose and poetry, is full of personal tragedies brought about by conflicting loyalties requiring vengeance to be taken against one side on account of the other.

The skald in Norse society

The skald was not entirely comparable to the English scop. While a few skalds were professionals, most were men of aristocratic birth, who used their poetic skill to gain favours from those in power. This was especially the case with 'colonials' from Iceland, trying to make their way in the mother-country of Norway. 'In the eleventh century most of the poets of the Norwegian courts were Icelanders; . . . Icelandic gentlemen used their skaldic arts as a means of introduction and advancement in the halls of kings and earls, and they carried their songs to all Scandinavian lands, and even to England.'[20] Further, 'high among the accomplishments of a young gentleman of high birth came the ability to compose in skaldic metres'.[21] Rognvald Kali, Earl of the Orkneys from 1135 to 1158, lists in verse the attainments of a gentleman, and in addition to the ability to read runes, row and ski he mentions *harp-slátt ok brag-thattu* (harp-playing and the art of poetry).[22]

More than one instance is recorded of a man's being spared his life through having composed a suitable poem. Perhaps the most famous is that of Egil Skallagrimsson (born *c.* 910), who obtained his life—temporarily at least—from King Eric Blood-axe by composing and reciting a *drápa* in praise of that grim ruler. We learn incidentally from the saga of his life

that skaldic poetry was at least sometimes recited rather than sung or declaimed to the harp, since Egil is said to have 'raised up [begun] the poem and spoken loudly and got a hearing [lit. silence] at once',[23] with no mention of an accompanying harp. The verg *kvedha*, glossed here by 'speak', is used of saying, declaring, declaiming, uttering, reciting or even shouting or crying aloud, but apparently not of singing. Thus, although we know that playing the harp and singing were certainly part of Norse culture, skaldic poetry was not necessarily associated with them.

The picture we have, then, is of the skald as very frequently an amateur, whose poetry was the creation of an individual, composed with the aim of helping the composer to obtain something he desired from a king. He was always of noble birth, of the same social class as the king, although not as sucessful or fortunate in having acquired power.

Characteristics of skaldic verse

Since much of the poetry is in the form of addresses to a powerful king or earl, it is, as one might expect, encomiastic in the main. We are however told of 'scores of instances . . . when the ruler was criticized, warned, exhorted, excoriated by his skald, who thus sometimes incurred the wrath and sometimes earned the gratitude of his sovereign'.[24] This kind of content is found more frequently in the form of a *lausavísa* or *kvidhling*, a single stanza or even a couplet of epigrammatic character, often supposedly composed on the spur of the moment. *Lausavísur* are found in abundance throughout the sagas, where dream warnings and threats are often conveyed by this means, as well as the comments of the personages on events.[25] The eulogistic poem was generally longer, in the form of a *flokkr*, short lay without refrain, or a *drápa*, a longer lay with a refrain of 2-4 lines every 2-4 stanzas. Egil's 'Head-ransom' *drápa (Hofudh-lausn)* was of twenty stanzas, with two refrains, and, as in almost all Norse poetry, 'the warlike note predominated'.[26]

Skaldic metre

We know a considerable amount on the technical side of skaldic verse, since in the twelfth or thirteenth century, while it was still flourishing, it was written about, as well as being written down. There was a full technical vocabulary, with terms for the different genres of poetry and the various aspects of metre. Skaldic metre was far stricter than Old English, in requiring counting of syllables, as well as of stress, and rhyme as well as alliteration. There were many more varieties of metre than in English, or at least, in what has survived of the latter. Snorri Sturluson, in the *Hattatál*, mentions and exemplifies a large number of metres with different numbers of syllables per line, and different arrangements of rhymes. Assonance was permitted, as well as true rhyme called *adhal-hending* (noble rhyme), and a curious kind of final alliteration, called *skothending*, as, for example, in sang and bring. Although a great variety of metres was permitted, no departure from the basic requirements of counted syllables, alliteration and rhyme was tolerated. Thus although many different forms were at the service of the skald, he was much more restricted, within those forms, than was the English scop with his less arduous alliterative metre.

This led to much distortion of syntax. An example from Egil Skallagrímson is: *thar's í bloahi / í brimils módhi / / völlr of thrumdhi / und véum glumdhi;* which according to Gordon[27] is logically ordered *brimilís völlr glumdhi í módhi und véum, thar's í blódhi of thrumdhi* (for translation, see below, p.19). Another feature, shared to some extent by English, was the inclusion of parenthetic sentences, such as *hugat maelik thar* (a considered [thing] I speak there).

Kennings

The technique of variation is very little used in Old Norse poetry; the kenning is not used to express differently what has been said before, nor is it a delaying device. On the other hand, the art of the kenning has been developed beyond its function in English, to the point where it becomes an esoteric term. It has been calculated that in the extant poetry of one typical skald, Sigvat, one third to one half of the vocabulary is poetic diction, not found in prose writings, and an extreme case is that of Eílífr Godrúnarson, whose vocabulary is nine-tenths poetic diction.

As has often been remarked, practically nothing in skaldic verse is referred to by its ordinary name. In Old English, as in Shona poetry, kennings serve for embellishment and

variation; there was no intention of setting the audience a puzzle to solve. The object in question is very often given an ordinary term, and this is followed by kennings. In skaldic verse, however, the kenning is used instead of the more direct term, and there is no repetition. For example, here is the fifth stanza from Egil's 'Head-ransom' *drápa:*

Vasa villr stadhar	*vefr darradhar*
fyr grams glödhum	*geirvangs rödhum*
thar's í blódhi	*í brimils módhi*
völlr of thrumdhi	*und véum glumdhi.*
Went not astray	the weaving of spears
before the king's glad	spear-field's [shield's] ranks
there in blood	in the seal's meadow [sea]
the plain too lay	under banners roaring.

Since the subject of the poetry is warfare more often than not, there is sometimes a superficial apearance of variation, as in another extract from the same *drápa:*

Hlam heimsödhul	*vidh hjalmrödhul*
beit bengrefill —	*that vas blódhrefill.*
Frák at felli	*fyr fetils svelli*
Ódhins eiki	*í járnleiki.*
Clashed whetstone-saddle [sword]	against helmet-sun [sword]
bit wound-engraver [sword] —	that was a blood-? [sword-point].
I heard that [there] fell	before the belt's ice [sword]
Odin's oaks [men]	in the iron-play [battle].

but this is best regarded as variation on a theme, rather than variation in presentation of the same information, as in the citation from *Beowulf* (p.16 above). In this case, the sword-strokes referred to in the first and second lines are not assumed to be the same.

Mastery of Norse kennings demanded profound knowledge of the myths and legends of pagan times. Examples of kennings using this source are *Fródha mjol* (Frodhi's meal [flour]) for gold, in reference to the legendary King Frodhi, who possessed a magic mill which ground gold instead of flour. *Ódhins seiki* (Odin's oaks, the kenning for men in the 'Head-ransom') includes the name of the Allfather, chief of the Norse gods, Odin (Wotan in Old English). Sometimes the allusion could be even more obscure: *á-brandr* (river-fire) is another term for gold, but here the allusion is to the legend of the Niflungs (Niebelungs), whose hoard of gold sank in the River Rhine, there to gleam like flames beneath the waves.

Christianity was adopted in the Norse countries much later than in England, particularly in Iceland, where the Althing, the High Council of the island, did not make the new faith official until the year 1 000. Hence the reference to stories of the old gods in poetry is not necessarily a poetic convention. Nonetheless, by the time of Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241), the knowledge required for understanding and creating the kennings was fast becoming lost, which prompted Snorri to write the 'Prose' *Edda,* consisting of legends of the gods, an account of poetic diction, and a discourse on the skaldic metres.

Skaldic kennings show a higher degree of complexity than those of the other two cultures. 'Prince of the bone of the island' is a kenning for 'dwarf'; the 'bone of the island' is rock, and dwarves were conceived of as living underground and engaging in mining, hence the 'prince' of the rock meant the dwarf, who possessed it as his realm. 'Goddess of the white land of the hawk' alludes to the sport of hawking, when the bird was carried on the arm, its 'white land'; the 'goddess' of the arm was the lady.[28] Hollander also cites the following, in which there are tiers or 'layers' of meaning:

Haka dýrs bliks dyns saedhinga hungrdeyfir
= warrior
(lit. Haki's animal's glamour's din's seagulls' hunger-slayer [appeaser]).

The analysis is:

Haki: name of a Viking chief, gen. *Haka* (Vikings were great seafarers)

Haka dýr: Haki's animal = ship (on which he 'rode' the seas)

Haka dýrs blik: glamour of Haki's animal = shields (Viking ships were decorated with shields carried along the sides)

Haka dýrs bliks dynr: din of the glamour of Haki's animal = battle (in which shields clash together, making a noise, or din)

Haka dýrs bliks dyns saedhingr: seagull of the din, etc = raven (scavenger of the battle-field, also the bird of Odin, god of the dead)

Haka dýrs bliks dyns saedhinga, hungrdeyfir: hunger-slayer [appeaser] of the seagulls of the din, etc. = warrior, who provides the raven with food in the form of corpses.

Unravelling a skaldic kenning must have given a pleasure akin to ours in solving a crossword clue. Some kennings indeed are still obscure; we know for instance that *skip dverga* (ship of the dwarves) means 'poetry', but the allusion is so far untraced.[29]

There is at first sight a curious paradox in skaldic poetry. The society which produced it was intensely individualistic, and indeed, many skalds were men of considerable, even colourful, personality; yet the skald was bound by conventions far more restrictive than those applying to the English scop, or the traditional Shona poet. The independence and self-reliance of the typical Norseman seem to sort ill with the limited themes and approaches, and very circumscribed forms of his poetry. There was none of the freedom to experiment and variety of form such as are found in, say, later European poetry. Skalds did not apparently seek to be different from each other as poets, in originality of form or even subject-matter; they only tried to outdo each other by excelling within very narrow confines.

In this connection it is interesting to consider Enkvist's discussion of 'group styles' and 'individual styles'.[30] All three societies gave rise to poetry which could be classified as 'group style', but Old Norse poetry was, if one may use the phrase, more 'group' than the others, in its conformity to rigid conventions, which affected many more features than in Shona or English. Unlike Enkvist's 'officialese' writers, however, the skalds can scarcely be said to have aimed at self-effacement!

In order to explain this apparent paradox, one has to call in the fact that Norse society was sharply divided into the earl, freeman and thrall classes, regarded as of divine ordinance, and thus without mobility between classes. As far as can be ascertained, practice of the skaldic art was limited to the earl class; hence the preservation of the characteristics of the art unchanged through centuries, marking the earl class off from both the others, was almost a religious duty. It is indeed difficult here to separate the structure of society from religious belief, since the two were so bound up together (and in any case, religious belief can be regarded as a social phenomenon).

Comparisons and Conclusions

Superficially, the skald and the scop had much in common. Both were 'court' poets, practising an art which in the case of the skald was definitely limited to persons of a social class, and in that of the scop, was as a profession in the hands of a minority. This marks the Germanic poets off from the Shona, where in traditional society everyone was a poet.[31] There is however an important difference in the position and functions of the skald as opposed to the scop. The skald was rarely a professional, in the sense of earning his living by his art; his aim was to obtain wealth, position or some other favour in return for his displays of skill. His relationship was primarily with the person of the ruler, to whom he addressed his poems, the subject of which was the individual addressed. The scop was more often a professional minstrel, and his aim less narrowly focused; his function was to exhort the followers of the lord to courage and loyalty in the service of their master, rather than to flatter the lord himself. The emphasis is different: the skald reinforced the ruler's own sense of his position and reputation, in the more individualistic society, while the scop concentrated on the encouragement of heroic virtues as a factor in promoting the well-being of the whole society. It is true that the scop contributed to the support of the chieftainship, but he did so rather indirectly, and his work served to reinforce the

position, rather than the individual holder of it.

In this respect the scop has more in common with the Shona poet. Both are concerned with a wider spectrum of relationships than is the skald, and both support the structure of society, or part of it: the clan system among the Shona,[32] the unity and effectiveness of the warrior band in Old English, or, in later poetry, the Christian ethic and the authority of the Church.

It seems useful here to draw a distinction between the purpose and the function of the poetry. One can say, for instance, that the purpose of *nhetembo dzorudzi* is to praise a particular clan through one of its members, but that the function is to cement relationships between clans, and to increase the awareness of clan membership in the mind of the recipient — all of which contributes to the strengthening of the clan system.[33] It may be possible, then, for poetry in two different societies to have purposes of similar nature, while their functions are quite different. The purpose is that which is immediately perceptible, even to the outsider; the function, or role, has to do with relationships within the structure of a society, and is only apparent to members of the society, or those with profound knowledge of it. (Such knowledge may be, for the members, intuitive and not fully conscious.)

In both Shona and English, the poet was not so important as his poetry; in the society, provided that someone was at hand to fulfil the function, it was of little moment who it was. In Norse, by contrast, one of the functions of the verse was to gain favours for the ambitious or supplicant individual, and it was important that the poetry be known as that of a particular man. Hence the anonymity, on the whole, of the Shona and English poets, as opposed to the quite different situation for the skalds. While all were dealing in, or drawing from, a common pool of traditional themes and expression types, we are not aware of the contributions to the stock of specific individuals in the two former societies.[34]

The function of the poetry is closely bound up with the poet's place in society. As previously noted, poetry in the Norse lands, skaldic poetry, at least, was the property of the earl class alone. The lower classes had no part in it; it was neither composed by nor addressed to them, and one might therefore say that another function of skaldic verse was to reinforce the awareness, of giver and recipient, of membership of the earl class. This is not quite comparable to the superficially similar function of *nhetembo* in reinforcing awareness of clan membership; *nhetembo* are not limited to one clan, though each clan has its specific praises, and one clan is praised, as it were, *inter pares*. Quite often *nhetembo* are recited by members of other clans, whereas both skald and addressee were invariably of the same social class.

As previously shown, we are not sure about the social class, if any, from which scops predominantly came, and this in itself is some measure of the difference in function of English and Norse poetry. Social class was in any case less clear-cut in England, and despite the frequent references to the heroic society as 'aristocratic', there is nothing in the poetry which appears to warrant the supposition that part of its function was to support this aspect of social organization. The pagan and semi-Christian poetry is concerned more with inculcating qualities useful in the state of siege — both physical and mental — in which the English found themselves.

There are two major resemblances between Shona *nhetembo* and Old English poetry, as already pointed out. One is the use of kennings as a means of variation, repetition of the same message and frequently using direct terms as well as kennings. Old Norse prefers the kenning to the direct term, and uses little if any variation in this sense. Secondly, kennings in Shona and English are relatively simple, whereas the Norse kenning is frequently more laboured and complex, and often 'layered'.

This is despite certain facts which would seem *a priori* to produce different groupings. The purpose of the poetry in both Shona and Old Norse is similar — to praise — while English is narrative or meditative; and on the technical side, the demands of alliterative metre affect both English and Norse, but Shona not at all.

We receive the impression from skaldic verse of a deliberate esotericism, rather than the wish to use a striking image, the cultivation of a diction which could only be decoded by those 'in the know'. Such knowledge was part of the heritage and training of a few, by virtue

of their membership of a certain social class. No such impression is given by Shona and Old English; quite the reverse, in fact, for the repetition by variation shows if anything an anxiety lest the message be lost through obscurity of expression.

On the other hand, one can adduce other possible reasons for the English and Shona situations. It has, for instance, been suggested that the English use of kennings owes at least something to the clamorous conditions prevalent in the banquet-hall; and one may perhaps add that the scop might have been aware of differences of intellectual attainment among his hearers, and repeated for the weaker brethren what they may not have grasped at first, though in such a way as not to offend the brighter minds. In the *nhetembo*, variation is of a slightly different kind, in that it rarely presents an event, but is usually descriptive and eulogistic of, for instance, the clan animal or the qualities of the clan members. Here the stimulus might be a desire to convey the sincerity of the speaker's gratitude, by means of his willingness to continue producing imagery in the service of the clan being thanked. It can hardly be attributed to 'noise in the system', or want of intelligence or knowledge in the audience; no actual information is being communicated, and it is quite clear to both parties what is happening, so that 'noise' would be irrelevant, even if the circumstances of recital were not ideal.

It could be argued that Shona imagery is to some extent esoteric, in that its composition and understanding presupposes considerable knowledge of the clan history and reputation, of natural phenomena, word-building processes, and a sharp observation of similarities between apparently dissimilar objects. This can however be assumed in a Shona, since it is part of his heritage and training as a clan member and Shona speaker brought up in the traditional way. One cannot compare this kind of knowledge to that required for skaldic composition and appreciation, the preserve of one social class; all Shona are members of a clan, and have, or had, the training necessary.

As usual, the English situation is not so clear cut, and seems to contain a compromise. While the main events of narrative poetry, and the major themes of the meditative kind, are presented by means of variation, and thus not open to misinterpretation, there are allusions which do require special knowledge, of history, of legends and myths, and which may or may not have been public property. An extreme example of this is the poem 'Widsith', which is little more than a catalogue of kings of various countries and times. We do not know whether this was composed in order to display the scop's knowledge, or as a help to a young scop in training, or whether it would have been readily comprehensible to his customary audience. For us at least, some of it is now lost: no-one knows who were Hlithe, Incgentheow and Wyrmhere, save that they were probably Goths, nor the 'Geat' whose 'love for Maethhild' is mentioned by Deor. 'That passed away, so may this' *(Thaes ofereode, thisses swa-maeg)*, and indeed it has, all too completely, from human memory. It is saddening to an English speaker to realize that he may more fully understand the literature of the Shona than the far past of his own.

One should not leave the subject of the relationship between society and poetry without a brief mention of what may be called 'secondary' or 'derived' literature, that is, the use of a formal genre for a purpose and/or function other than that for which it was originally developed. It appears that among the traditional Shona, where poetry was very much more part of daily life than it has been for many centuries in Europe, there is little if any 'secondary' literature; Fortune's description of the genres assigns a social role to all of them. But in both English and Norse literature, there is a good deal of poetry which is clearly of the derived kind. For example, even some skalds used their art for purposes other than flattering a king; there are a number of sagas telling the tale of a love-lorn skald, and containing love-poetry in precisely the same metre and style as that used to praise a ruler. Hollander notes the incongruity of the metre known as *drott-kvaet*, developed for the *drápa* as eulogium, for erotic poetry, and comments that it is 'a harsh manacle for the more playful sentiments or passionate outbursts of love'.[35] The later Christian poetry of the Anglo-Saxons was likewise a secondary form; both style and approach were (as noted above on p.13) derived from the heroic poetry, and sits rather uneasily on the Christian content. God is designated 'Lord of Warriors', and His saints are 'heroes',

His angels 'earls' and 'thanes'; there is much dwelling on battle and the miseries of sea-journeys. Poets are notoriously conservative, or have been until now, and we may expect to find little correlation between form and function in these works. It may be that secondary literature only develops with the advent of writing, and it will be interesting to see whether Shona produces poetry of this kind, based on traditional techniques.

This study has perforce been limited to a few selected genres, omitting from consideration, for instance, the Shona *madimikira* style, especially as used in *nheketerwa,* and *zvirahwe* (riddles) both of which could be fruitfully compared with skaldic verse, especially *lausavísur,* in the use of veiled and cryptic language.[36] (Old English riddles are less usefully compared with either, since they are for the most part translations of, or modelled on, Latin enigmas).

Clearly this is a subject which needs to be explored at far greater length than is possible here, but perhaps enough has been said to show that the project is worthwhile, and can throw up some interesting findings. There is certainly enough evidence to show, firstly, that literary devices may be of the same character among peoples of very different language and culture, and secondly, that the use of these devices is at least partly governed by the role of the poetry in the society. Morever, similar features in societies remote from each other in space and time can be correlated with similar usage of literary device, whereas societies differing in these features may show quite dissimilar usage, however closely related they may be in other respects culturally and linguistically.

References

[1]G. Fortune, 'Shona traditional poetry', *Zambezia,* 1971, **2,** i, 41-60. See also G. Fortune, 'Variety in Shona literature', *NADA,* 1972, **10,** iv, 69-76.

[2]I am indebted to Professor G. Fortune and Mr. A. Hodza for kindly allowing me to see and quote from their forthcoming book on Shona traditional poetry, from which the Tembo praise is taken. The lines are selected from the full version; I have omitted tone-marks and hyphenated compounds. The conventions as to bold and italic type are as in Fortune's *Zambezia* article.

[3]The Old English is taken from F. Klaeber's edition of 1941 *(Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, Boston,* D.C. Heath), which supplies lacunae and expands abbreviations. Conventions adopted in the spelling of the Anglo-Saxon are: *ae* = *ash, dh* = barred *d, th* = *thorn, w* = *wynn;* vowel length is unmarked and compounds hyphenated. The same conventions are observed for the spelling of Old Norse, save that vowel length is marked by acute accent, ö is used, and compounds only occasionally hyphenated. Translations are by the present writer.

[4]Fortune, 'Shona traditional poetry', 51-2, 53.

[5]E. V. Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse,* 2nd edit., revised by A. R. Taylor, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, p.xxxvii.

[6]The customary hierarchy is used here, that is, from lowest to highest: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics.

[7]The Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral), the Vercelli Book (Vercelli Cathedral), Ms Cotton Vitellius A xv (British Museum), and Ms Junius II (Bodley, Oxford).

[8]Cf. 'Widsith':

Swa scrithende	*gesceapum hweorfath*
gleo-men gumena	*geond grund fela.*
(Thus the wandering	go as fate [decrees]
the glee-men of men	through many lands.)

[9]D. Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf,* London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1959, p. 87.

[10]See p.17.

[11]For a detailed account of the classes of society, see D. Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society,* London, Penguin, 1952, ch. 5, especially for a discussion of the change in the meaning of terms such as *thegn* and *gesith,* sometimes used to designate the upper classes.

[12]*thonne thaer waes blisse intinga gedemed thaet hie ealle sceolden thurh endebyrdnesse be hearpan singan,* from the version given in *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader,* 10th edit., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1946, p.42.

[13]Cf. *Beowulf:*

	Scop hwilum sang
hador on Heorote.	(The minstrel at

times sang clear-voiced in Heorot [the royal hall].) 11. 496-7.

Thaer waes sang ond swaeg	*samod aetgaedere*
for Healfdenes	*hilde-wisan,*
gomen-wudu greted,	*gid oft wrecen,*
thonne heal-gamen	*Hrothgares scop*

aefter medo-benc	*maenan scolde.*
There was song and sound	both together
before Healfdene's	battle leader
the joy-wood (harp) touched,	the song oft uttered,
when entertainment	Hrothgar's minstrel
along the mead-bench	was obliged to proclaim.
	(ll. 1063-7)

Elsewhere we read of *hearpan sweg* (sound of the harp) in similar context (ll. 89, 2458, 3023) and, in 'Widsith':

hlude bi hearpan	*hleothor swingsade*
loud to the harp	the song resounded

[14]In the proem to Alfred's translation of Boethius it is stated that 'when he had studied this book, and turned it from Latin into English *spelle* (prose), then wrought he it afterwards into *leothe* (poetry).' *leoth* is basically 'song'.

[15]In 'The Battle of Maldon', *prass* (fine array, pomp) alliterates with the place-name *Panta* (Blackwater), but *p* does not occur initially in any word in *Beowulf*.

[16]The Rhyming Poem of the Exeter Book has end-rhyme as well as alliteration, and is written in couplets. We may suppose that there were other poems of like kind, but the rhyming forms were apparently not favoured in heroic and Christian poetry. Alliteration persisted by the side of rhyme as a metrical form, especially in the North, up to the fourteenth century, as in 'Sir Gawayn and the Grene Knyght'.

[17]This section owes much to Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, to L. M. Hollander, *The Skalds*, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1945, and to G. Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1968; equally, a debt is owing to my old teacher, now Professor G. Turville-Petre, whose stimulating Oxford lectures in the years 1947-50 first introduced me to Norse literature.

It should be added that skaldic verse is not, of course, the only kind of Old Norse poetry. The 'Elder' or 'Poetic' *Edda* are in an older simpler style, including narrative, and in many ways are closer to Old English. These poems deal with heroic legend, tales of the gods and traditional wisdom, but we have no means of knowing, as we do for skaldic verse, anything of the background, composers or performers, nor in what context recitation took place. Their relation to the rest of the social environment is unknown, and nothing can thus be said of their function. It is interesting, naturally, to note the many similarities to English in the stock of synonyms and periphrases, and the differences, such as the vividness, dramatic power and robustness of the *Edda*, contrasting with the slower-moving, dignified and somewhat melancholy tone of the Old English. We can however make no attempt to relate these features to extra-literary factors.

[18]Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, p.151: 'during most of the Viking Age Scandinavia presents us with a picture of too few supreme monarchs'. After the beginning of the eleventh century the picture changed somewhat.

[19]Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf*, p. 15: 'One of the codes of King Edmund (939-46) attemped to curb the blood-feud', and this was long after the introduction of Christianity.

[20]Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, p.xliii.

[21]Hollander, *The Skalds*, p.5.

[22]Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, p.155, gives the Norse version.

[23]*Ibid.*, p.112: *'hóf upp kvaedhit ok kvadh hátt ok fekk thegar hljódh'.*

[24]Hollander, *The Skalds*, p.6. One notable example is that of Sigvat Thórdarson, who succeeded in persuading the young King Magnus Olafsson to abate his fury against the enemies of his father, by means of the *Bersoglisvisur* (Outspoken verses), as related by Hollander, p.167 ff.

[25]One must, I think, have some reservations about the authenticity of some of the *lausavisur*, especially as related in the sagas. Many of them are probably the compositions of those who wrote down the present versions, most of which are of a later date than the events narrated. This is a literary device of the author, not the reputed speaker, and cannot be taken to represent a social institution such as the *kutukana* of the Shona.

[26]Hollander, *The Skalds*, p.19.

[27]Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, p.233, note to ll. 189-90.

[28]Hollander, *The Skalds*, p.121; the elaborate kenning for 'warrior' is taken from p.13.

[29]*Ibid.*, p.116, fn. 65.

[30]N. E. Enkvist in *Linguistics and Style*, ed. J. Spencer, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1964, p.22.

[31]Fortune, 'Shona traditional poetry', 41-2.

[32]Other forms of poetry of course support different parts of the structure; for example, the *madanha emugudza* supports the institution of marriage.

[33]Cf. Fortune's use of 'social role' and 'functional use' in 'Shona traditional poetry', 41-2. I would regard 'role' and 'function' as synonymous for present purposes.

[34]Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, p.lxiii, states: 'A good many terms are nowhere recorded outside of *Beowulf*, and not a few of these may be confidently set down as of the poet's own coinage.' I feel this can hardly be maintained in view of the certain fact that much of Anglo-Saxon literature has perished, and of the probability, at the very least, that *Beowulf* is not the work of one hand.

[35]Hollander, *The Skalds*, p.118.

[36]See for example, Fortune, 'Shona traditional poetry', 55.

POSTSCRIPT

This article was based on a series of lectures given for several years in the African Oral Literature course at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. After the present issue of *Zambezia* had gone to press, my attention was drawn to the article by J. Opland, *'Scop* and *Imbongi:* Anglo-Saxon and Bantu oral poets' (in *English Studies in Africa,* (1971), **14,** 161-78). Opland's purpose is rather different from mine, in that he explores the 'contribution that can be made to our appreciation of Anglo-Saxon literature by a study of the Bantu oral tradition', but he makes a number of similar points, such as the social role of scop and Norse skald, and 'the resemblance between the two societies [Anglo-Saxon and Zulu], with their twin focal points of kin and chief'. He likewise emphasizes the fact that we know more about African oral poetry than our own, and notes certain techniques such as those of caesura and variation, common to Anglo-Saxon and Xhosa poetry. However, perhaps the statement most relevant in the immediate context is this: 'It is an attractive hypothesis that societies similar in structure will produce literatures with strong similarities' (p.176). I hope the present article will have gone some way towards confirmation of Opland's hypothesis, and in pointing out that the converse also holds good.

H.C.