

## CHAPTER 9

# The Works of Hallgrímur Pétursson: An Overview

The following chapters will examine Hallgrímur's major works, particularly those most likely to be thought of as baroque pieces, composed in genres that are significant for baroque research. In this present chapter, however, Hallgrímur's less familiar writings will be explored, so that a comprehensive sense of Hallgrímur's overall achievement as a poet can eventually emerge.

In one verse Hallgrímur presents a picture of himself that might almost be called a "portrait of the artist as a young man," because the poem as a whole may well have been composed while he was in his twenties. His appearance and temperament are depicted:

Sá sem orti rímur af Ref  
reiknast ætíð glaður,  
með svartar brýr og sívalt nef,  
svo er hann uppmálaður.  
(Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 74)

[He who composed *rímur* about Ref  
is reckoned to be always cheerful,  
with dark brows and rounded nose—  
that's how he is depicted.]

In another verse he also identifies himself with *Króka-Refs rímur*, suggesting that he was proud to acknowledge authorship, yet here

a different side of authorship appears, for we learn of the poet's frustration at finding his *rímur* in garbled form in manuscript copies:

Séð hef ég áður rímur af Ref  
ritaðar mínum penna,  
nú er mér orðið allt um ef  
hvort eigi mér að kenna.  
(*Rímur af Flóres og Leó*, ix)

[I have seen the *Ref-rímur*,  
written with my pen;  
now it is all a question of  
whether I composed it.]

The first *rímur* that Hallgrímur composed were probably *Rímur af Lykla Pétri og Magellónu*. All indications are that they were written shortly after his return to Iceland around 1637. The story is regarded by some as a “herfilegur reyfari” [cheap thriller] (Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 137) whose origins may lie in *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of stories transmitted into European literature via Italy. These were tales for the common man, translated first into German and then Danish (Seelow 1991, 154–155). Thirty-five editions of the work were published in Denmark, where Hallgrímur may well have encountered it (Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 136). He refers repeatedly to “bókina” [the book] that he was following while composing the *rímur*, but as the original story was never printed in Icelandic it is likely that Hallgrímur used a German or Danish text as his source (Seelow 1991, 155 and 162).<sup>1</sup>

There are nine *Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magellónu*, in a variety of meters: the first is *ferskeytt*, the second *stafhenda*, the third *braghenda*, the fourth *skáhent*, the fifth *hagkveðlingaháttur*, the sixth *gagaravilla víxlhend rímlíðasneidd*, the seventh *skothenda*, the eighth *sambenda*, and the ninth *ferskeytt*.<sup>2</sup> This display of

1. For example, in verse 44 of the fourth *ríma* he says: “Greinir bók til bæna tók / bríkin kvenmanns skarta” [the book tells that to pray began / a tree with jewelry [= a woman]] (*Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magelónu*, 180).

2. For a helpful account of such Icelandic prosodic forms, see Ringler 2002, 361–384.

prosodic virtuosity serves to confirm that the new *rímur* poet did not lack for ambition. The meter of the seventh *ríma* is created by assembling *skothending* (partial rhyme) elements with great artistry:

Kvæða sprettur kornið smátt,  
kemur það skjótt með blómstrið nýtt,  
orða réttur akurinn þrátt,  
ávöxt þótt að færi lítt.  
(*Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magelónu*, 195)

[The modest corn of poems sprouts,  
comes quickly with new buds,  
though from the meadow of words  
the fruit is modest.]

We may note the internal half-rhyme in the second and fourth foot of each line (as with “sprettur” / “smátt”) and the full rhyme between the second feet of the first and third lines (“sprettur” / “réttur”) and between the second and fourth lines (“skjótt” / “þótt”), and also between the final foot of the first and third lines (“smátt” / “þrátt”) and the second and fourth lines (“nýtt” / “lítt”).

Much of the language of such lyrical introductions is formulaic, as when narrators complain of their inadequacy, inexperience with women, or their ignorance of the art of kennings. But personal thoughts occasionally find expression, as in the seventh of the *Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magelónu*:

Má vera dæmi svo með sér  
seggja dróttin fríða,  
héðan af sæmi miður mér  
mansöngs kvæði að smíða.  
(*Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magelónu*, 205)

[so people may judge for themselves,  
the jury of handsome men;  
henceforth it hardly befits me  
to write romantic verse.]

Here Hallgrímur seems to be referring to his own failings in love, which would have been familiar to many. However, it seemed that such humiliations have not broken his spirit, for he states almost boastfully:

Svara eg glaður so með frí  
sviptum málsins brennda:<sup>3</sup>  
Eg er maður, mig kann því  
mannlegt dæmi að henda.  
(*Rímur af Lykla-Péttri og Magelónu*, 206)

[Bright in heart I reply to them,  
bestowers of burnished metal;  
I am a man, thus know how  
to make human mistakes.]

In the next verse he cites Cato's view that a sad soul can be lifted by entertainment, and he clearly regards the *rímur* as exactly the kind of diversion required.

Hallgrímur's next composition may have been *Króka-Refs rímur*, based on the medieval *Króka-Refs saga*. In prefatory verses to the second *ríma* the poet notes that while it had become fashionable for *rímur* to be composed about foreign heroes, there was much to be said for paying due respect to the ancient heroes of Iceland by retelling their heroic feats, which stand comparison with those of their overseas counterparts:

Bragnar þessir beita kunnu brandi rjóðum  
öngu síður öðrum þjóðum,  
ætið héldu sigri góðum.  
(*Króka-Refs rímur*, 14)

[Our brave ones knew how to strike with reddened brand  
no less than those in other lands,  
had victory always at hand.]

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3. In this verse "sviptir málsins brennda" [bestowers of burnished metal = bestowers of gold = those who bestow gold swords = generous men].

The eponymous hero of *Króka-Refs saga* journeys first to Greenland and then Norway, and most of the narrative events take place overseas. In his youth Refur seems unlikely to achieve renown, for like many another saga worthy he was an idle good-for-nothing, a “kolbítur” [coalbiter]. But when put to the test he proves to be a hero in the best saga tradition, with his ingenuity matching his physical strength and skill with weapons. Refur is an accomplished smith, engineer, and architect, capable of creating cunning tricks and traps that his enemies can neither understand nor overcome. He is also a fine poet and a deft creator of verbal puzzles, as in the lengthy riddle he prepared for King Haraldur, having killed a royal courtier. Though honor demands that Refur confess to the slaying, self-preservation involves the king’s initially failing to understand the confession, thus enabling the Icelander to escape before the monarch’s thoughts turn to vengeance and preserving his own honor.

Hallgrímur was not in fact the first poet to compose *rímur* based on *Króka-Refs saga*. The saga was popular and is mentioned in heroic verses by both Þórður of Strjúgur and Steinunn Finnsdóttir; the earliest *rímur* about the eponymous hero have been dated to the second half of the fifteenth century (*Króka-Refs rímur*, xi–xii; Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 279–280). Unlike Hallgrímur’s *rímur*, those early compositions avoid prosodic complexity, and indeed at the time there seems to have been some hostility to poetic elaboration in general (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 291). During the seventeenth century, along with Hallgrímur’s composition, there were also *rímur* about Króka-Refur composed by Þorvaldur Rögnvaldsson, though most of these are now lost.

At the end of his *rímur*, Hallgrímur inscribes his name in runes, as Magnús Ólafsson had done with Ole Worm’s name in his poem dedicated to the Danish scholar (Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 149). In the following verse Hallgrímur signs his name while also setting a puzzle for his audience:

*Hríð með gróða, karfa kör,  
kaunið sært af undum,  
ferð um ís og bauga bör  
bragina færði sprundum.  
(Króka-Refs rímur 1956, 141)*

[Snowstorm by the river, fishes' bed,  
 boil pricked by wounds,  
 journey on ice and rings' poet  
 presented the verse to the women.]

The poet's name emerges as follows: the meaning of "hrið" [snow-storm] recalls "hagall," a word of similar meaning that is also the name for the H rune; "með gróða" [with profit] suggests "ár" [prosperity], the name for the A rune; and "karfa kör" [fishes' bed = the sea] points to "lögur" [liquid], which is runic L. The poet then proceeds to the second syllable of his name. The G rune, known as "stungið kaun" [pricked boil], is signalled by "kaunið sært af undum;" "ferð" [journey] involves "reið" [riding], or runic R; the "ís" in "um ís" [on ice] is runic Í; and "bauga bör" is a kenning for "maður" [man], the name for runic M. Thus, H-A-L-G-R-I-M is identified as the poet.

The introduction to *Króka-Refs rímur* makes it clear, though there are also passing references elsewhere, that the poet had suffered great loss, experienced deep sorrow, and was hoping to assuage his pain by composing these *rímur*. It is more than likely that the sadness related to the death of Steinunn or of another child.

Hallgrímur also completed the *Rímur af Flóres og Leó* that Bjarni Jónsson the Poet (ca. 1560–ca. 1640) had left unfinished, probably due to his death. The *rímur* are based on the story of the Emperor Octavian and his sons Flóres and Leó, with the tale finding its way to Germany from France during the sixteenth century, and from there to Iceland. As with *Króka-Refs rímur* we find Hallgrímur's name encrypted in the final verses of the work, albeit on this occasion with much greater ingenuity. The poet's initial comment about the simplicity of his name seems teasingly ironic:

Einfalt heitið oftast mér  
 almenn ræða myndar:  
*Njóla vikur en nálgast fer*  
*niðjinn elju Rindar.*

En ef breyting á skal gjörð,  
 að því leita megið

hálfu þar sem *hallast jörð*,  
 hitt er *af jötnum dregið*.  
 (*Rímur af Flóres og Leó*, 334).

[A simple name for me most often  
 common speech makes;  
 Njóla disappears but he draws near,  
 descendant of Rindr's rival [= Jörð = Earth].

And if change be made,  
 it may be sought  
 one half where the earth tilts,  
 the other from giants is drawn.]

In the chain of associations in the first verse “Njóla” [night] = “gríma” [mask] = “-G-R-Í-M-U-R,” while “víkur” [disappears] = “hallar” [tilts; the earth tilts as night gives way to day] = “H-A-L-L-” = Hall-grímur. Line 4 has two elements: (i) “níðjinn” [descendant/son] = S-O-N and (ii) “elju Rindar” = “Rindr’s rival” = “Jörð” [earth] = steinn [stone/rock] = “P-É-T-U-R” (as in “on this rock will I build my church,” Matthew 16:18) = Péturs-son. In the following verse Hallgrímur offers an alternative and even more elliptical explanation: the “H-A-L-L-” element again derives from the idea of night disappearing when “hallast jörð” [the earth tilts], while “-G-R-Í-M-U-R” is this time “dregið af jötnum” [drawn from giants], as follows: “níðjinn elju Rindar” [the son of Rindr’s rival = the son of Earth] = Þór, the god of thunder. His approach (“fer nálgast”) suggests the onset of thunder (“þruma”, hence “þrymur” [a commotion]). In turn Þrymr, king of the giants, was also known as “Grímnir,” hence “-G-R-Í-M-U-R” and then “Hall-grímur.” In this way, as Hallgrímur claims, the first part of his name does indeed relate to the earth and second to the giants.

It was no exaggeration for one critic to claim that in such passages Hallgrímur plays with the *Edda* texts “eins og fimleikamaður í fjölleikahúsi” [like a circus gymnast] (Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 165). He displays a deep knowledge of mythology and a creative delight in working with kennings. He sets his sights just as high when it comes to poetic form and prosodic complexity. He certainly has

his hands full in the fifty-three stanzas of the seventeenth *ríma*, written in *sléttubandaháttur*. The individual verses of the *rímur* feature the same rhetorical structure later found in *Passíusálmar*, though here the rhyming is much more elaborate. Not only does Hallgrímur make use of *accumulatio* but also each word has its correctly positioned rhyming equivalent. Not only is this pleasing to the ear, but it could also be visually striking if, when the verses were copied, the rhymes were picked out in different colored inks. The following stanzas are marked by striking parallels and symmetries of rhyme and syntax:

Deyðir, hremmir, skekur, skellir  
 skeytir geira,  
 meiðir, skemmir, hrekkur, hrellir  
 hreytir dreyra.

Keşjur hendast, klofnar málmur,  
 kristnir unnu.  
 Rítur bendast, hrökkur hjálmur,  
 heiðnir runnu.

[. . .]

[kills, grabs, shakes, crashes  
 the shooter of arrows  
 injures, spoils, harasses, teases  
 the spiller of blood.

[Halberds hurled, metal cloven,  
 Christians won.  
 Shields bent, helmet flies,  
 heathens ran.]

(*Rímur af Flóres og Leó*, 279)

It is hard to imagine a more baroque text, with its individual decorative elements, larger patterns, and perfect overall harmony. And it would be difficult to find a more complex or expertly composed *sléttubandarímur* stanza than the final one (Helgi Sigurðsson 1891, 118).



Though scholars regard *rímur* and the *Íslendingasögur* as more Icelandic and less touched by foreign influence than any other genre, in Hallgrímur's *rímur* (and those of his contemporaries) the influence of contemporary European poetry is clear. It is apparent in the priority given to form, consistency, patterns of rhyme, and verbal games and puzzles. It may seem somewhat bizarre to designate *rímur* as baroque, as they are just rhyming versions of prose tales, and yet the baroque elements are clearly discernible (see Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1996a, 112–113). Hallgrímur did not so much compose biblical *rímur* as transpose various biblical texts into Icelandic (see chapter 13).

The literary genres most favored by Hallgrímur were hymns and occasional verse, and the two sometimes run together to the point of being indistinguishable, as with hymns celebrating the New Year or travel, and even commemorative verse. These genres will be discussed further in later chapters. Hallgrímur also composed satirical verse and poems about earthly transience, which will be discussed in chapters 10 and 11.

Shortly before his own death Hallgrímur composed the so-called “death hymns,” which, as the name indicates, discuss preparations for and the arrival of death; and, indeed, it was not unusual at this time for poets to write about their own sickness, bodily decay, old age and mortality.

Hallgrímur also composed various poems of advice and good counsel, such as “Ef þú vilt góða friðsemd fá” [If you wish to have perfect peace] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 69–70) and “Hvað verður fegra fundið” [What will be found fairer?] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 113–114), which can also be read as a philosophical poem full of worldly wisdom. In it the poet emphasizes sincerity, integrity, scrupulousness and courtesy, and indicates that among the keys to good fortune are “Good health, a joyous heart, a good conscience, the support of friends and freedom from sorrow and exhaustion.”<sup>4</sup> He composed wisdom verses that Icelandic children still learn today (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 165–167) and also explains Christian doctrine for young people in rhyming form: “Barnaspurningar

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4. Heilbrigði, hjartans kæti, hér með samviskan góð, ástvina eftirlæti fyrir utan trega og móð (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 114).

um kirkjusiði og seremóníur ungdóminum til fróðleiks og öðrum einföldum” [Children’s questions about religion and ceremonies for the instruction of the young and other simple folk] (*Hallgrímskver* 1773, 240–255; Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 326–336). In his introduction the poet writes:

Ungum horfir helst til heiðurs og sóma  
iðkun og aukning náms ekki forsóma.  
Sá, sem guðs leitar, guðs fær að njóta,  
margt kann óráðþæginn af sér að brjóta.

[The young will fame and honor find,  
who to their studies are inclined;  
God, when sought, will gifts bestow,  
while wilful souls t’wards wrong may go.]

Hallgrímur also deals with the importance of good behavior when attending church:

Þeir þurfa að kunna sig, sem koma til hofgarða,  
mér þykir um guðshús meira varða.  
Illa tilreiddur til kirkju koma,  
mun kristnum virðast til mikils ósóma.

[They must behave, who come to court,  
God’s house means more, I long have thought.  
Ill-prepared for church means shame,  
a Christian then is much to blame.]

The main emphasis here is on rhyme; alliteration is certainly used but quite freely. In addition the rhythm of the lines resembles that of speech, thereby helping the form to seem reminiscent of *þulur*. The poem indicates that its prospective audience is youthful rather than scholarly:

Leiðrétti, ef líta á, lærðir vitringar,  
þeigi eru fyrir þá gerðar þessar spurningar.  
(Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 327)

[Clever men may correct this, if they see it,  
not for them are these questions set.]

“Bergmál” [Echo] is a similar kind of poem (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 336–337), in which key points of Christian doctrine are expressed in question and answer form: the responses take the form of rhyming words at the end of each line (as italicized here), with rhyme performing its original function of making each correct answer easier to remember:

Hver eru laun sem guð vill frómum *færa*? *Æra*.  
Fara þeir nokkuð frá náð *margfaldri*? *Aldri*.  
(Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 337)

[What reward does God wish for the faithful? Glory.  
Do they ever leave his manifold grace? Never.]

In Hallgrímur’s lifetime morning and evening hymns were often composed and copied into manuscripts, often without attribution. Hallgrímur is believed to have created several such pieces (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 72ff.). Hymns for the week were also common, with morning and evening texts for each day. There is no evidence that Hallgrímur wrote such pieces, but he may have composed *Vikuvísur*, in which the significance of each weekday within the framework of Christian history is described. As can be seen from occasional poems, it was not uncommon for special meanings to be assigned to events taking place on particular days. If the dedicatee of a verse had died on a Thursday, for example, the event might be connected with Ascension Day, which was always celebrated on a Thursday. Thus, in Hallgrímur’s *Vikuvísur* we are reminded that Jesus was baptized on a Monday and fed the five thousand on a Wednesday (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 319–322).

Various individual verses and longer poems linked with daily life are attributed to Hallgrímur. He wrote on the quality of newly boiled haddock (“Afbragðs matur er ýsan feit” [Fine food is haddock fat]), while in the so-called “Lögþókarvísur” [Lawbook verses] we learn about the favourite foods of different social classes:

Kóngarnir drekka kryddað vín,  
krásir drottningar taka til sín,  
biskupar súpu sæta  
[. . .]  
sýslumenn éta fleskin forn,  
fá sér hreppstjórar hákarlskorn,  
bændurnir skötu harða,  
prestarnir bjór og brennivín  
—á blám klútum þurrka skeggin sín—  
húsgangar ýsu harða.  
(Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 414)

[Kings drink spiced wine,  
queens take tidbits,  
bishops sweet soup  
[. . .]  
magistrates old bacon eat,  
sheriffs bits of shark,  
farmers dried skate,  
pastors beer and schnaps—  
—on blue cloths dry their beards—  
vagrants dried haddock.]

Other social groups mentioned include travelers, executioners, children, beggars, young people, sailors, the toothless, and the hungry.

Hallgrímur's verses about tobacco are full of humor though their depictions can be very positive or negative. Here he writes about pipe tobacco:

Tóbak róm ræmir,  
remmu framkvæmir,  
tungu vel tæmir,  
tár af augum flæmir,  
háls með hósta væmir,  
heilann fordæmir  
og andlit afskræmir.

[Tobacco shreds the voice,  
 makes vile phlegm,  
 parches the tongue,  
 draws tears from the eyes,  
 chokes the throat with wheezing,  
 wastes the brain  
 and fouls the face.]

The experience of chewing tobacco is quite different:

Tóbakið hreint  
 fæ gjörla ég greint,  
 gjörir höfðinu létta,  
 skerpir vel sýn,  
 svefnbót er fín,  
 sorg hugarins dvín,  
 sannprófað hef eg þetta.  
 (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 413-414)

[Pure tobacco,  
 I can fully confirm,  
 comforts the head,  
 sharpens the sight,  
 helps sound sleep,  
 soothes sorrow of mind;  
 I have proved this for sure.]

At first sight some pieces by Hallgrímur and his contemporaries seem little more than lists or descriptions of apparently banal facts or subjects, as with his weather verses: “Hlýtt er, vott var” [It is warm, was wet]. On closer examination, however, we discover all sorts of verbal ingenuities with rhymes, sounds, and imagery. Three *vísur* entitled “Sumars og vetrar verkur” [The effects of summer and winter] discuss the two seasons separately and then together. It is not easy to memorize these two verses, and they must seem particularly difficult to those hearing them for the first time. As we see below in the summer verse, each odd line has two pairs of

words linked by half-rhyme (as with “hlýtt er” and “vott var”) and each even line linked by full rhyme (“væn hjörð” and “græn jörð”):

Hlýtt er, vott var,  
 væn hjörð, græn jörð,  
 hlý sól, hýr dæl,  
 holt skín, kalt dvín,  
 blátt heið, blítt láð,  
 brauðs nægð, auðs hæggð,  
 geð gleðst, ráð ræðst,  
 reynd tryggð, leynd styggð.  
 (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 394)

[It's warm, was wet,  
 fine herd, green ground,  
 warm sun, calm lake,  
 hill shines, cold fades,  
 blue sky, blithe land,  
 bread plentiful, wealth abundant,  
 spirit soars, plans made,  
 trust confirmed, rage concealed.]

Winter follows in the next verse, with everything inverted but the same vocabulary deployed:

Hlýtt var, vott er,  
 veik hjörð, bleik jörð,  
 sól dauf, dæl úf,  
 dregst kalt, hrekst allt,  
 grimmt heið, hrumt láð,  
 hæggð brauðs, læggð auðs,  
 stirt geð, rýrt ráð,  
 reynd styggð, leynd tryggð.  
 (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 394–395)

[Was warm, is wet,  
 sick herd, pale ground,  
 sun pale, lake rough,  
 cold lingers, all removed,

grim heath, bare land,  
 scarce bread, little wealth,  
 stiff spirit, scant advice,  
 rage confirmed, trust concealed.]

Yet another variation of more or less the same words can be found in “Hvorttveggja til samans” [Both together]:

Hlýtt er, vott var,  
 víst blítt, síst strítt,  
 hýrt loft, súrt svipt,  
 sætt skín, hætt dvín,  
 flest sælt, fæst fúlt,  
 flýr þraut, býr skraut,  
 lán eykst, hrun hrekst,  
 hryggð fjær, tryggð nær.  
 (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890, 395)

[It's warm, was wet,  
 sure joy, least strife,  
 happy air, sourness slaked,  
 peace shines, danger fades,  
 most sunny, fewest sullen,  
 torment flees, fun remains,  
 luck grows, loss removed,  
 sorrow distant, trust near.]

“Samstæðurnar” [Matching elements], also known as “Gaman og alvara” [Game and earnest], works in a similar way. It sets out thoughts on life and good counsel that might also be called meditations, with a mixture of humor and seriousness. The initial words of each verse signal its admonitory tone: “Oft er [. . .], Neyð er [. . .], Treyst ei [. . .], Seint mun [. . .], Varast [. . .]” [Often there is [. . .], There is need [. . .], Trust not [. . .], Late will it be [. . .], Beware [. . .]]. One verse treats natural beauty:

Fagur er: fjallsblettur,  
 fákur skeiðléttur,  
 hár múr hólmsettur,

hringur baugréttur,  
 bugur blómsettur,  
 baðmur laufþéttur,  
 gras það grænt sprettur,  
 gular hárflettur.  
 (Hallgrímur Pétursson 2:1890:425–426)

[Fair is: mountain-greenery,  
 a light-running steed,  
 an isle-set high wall,  
 a finger-right ring,  
 a flower-set bend,  
 a leaf-thick tree,  
 green-sprouting grass,  
 fair hair-plaits.]

The attribution to Hallgrímur of some comic pieces is by no means certain. This is primarily because for a long time it seemed neither necessary nor appropriate to print such poems, and eighteenth-century editors, notably Hálfðan Einarsson, the schoolmaster at Hólar, were reluctant to express a view as to their authenticity. Sources are few, information is limited, and the manuscripts are late. “Þráðarleggsvísur” [Thread-leg verses], for example, may have been wrongly attributed to Hallgrímur. The verses are preserved in a seventeenth-century manuscript (AM 148 8vo) known as *Kvæðabók úr Vigur* that offers no help with attribution. In some manuscripts the same verses are assigned to séra Bjarni Gissurarsson and in others to Hallgrímur. Yet Guðmundur Ólafsson, who was born in 1652 and lived for a long period in Stockholm, where he worked for the Swedes explicating and copying Old Icelandic texts, claims in his unfinished dictionary that Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell had composed “Þráðarleggsvísur.”<sup>5</sup> Ólafur, Guðmundur’s father, was pastor of Vatnsdalur, and his son may well have been familiar with poetry by his namesake.

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5. Jón Helgason 1955, 70; *Orðabók Guðmundar Ólafssonar í Stokkhólmi*, N2, 3:1452.



Two other comic pieces attributed to Hallgrímur are “Sláttukvæði” [Haymaking poem] and “Slátturíma” [Haymaking verse]. In his 1960 unpublished master’s thesis, Jón Samsonarson has shown that “Sláttukvæði” may be the work of séra Jón Oddsson Hjaltalín, pastor at Saurbær on Hvalfjarðarströnd. The poem is included in ÍBR 91 8vo, a manuscript containing other pieces by Jón Hjaltalín. Jón Samsonarson believes that Jón composed the poem while living in the east of Iceland as pastor of Háls in Hamarsfjörður and of Kálfafell in Fljótshverfi between 1777 and 1783; he then moved west, serving at Hvammur in Norðurárdalur and Saurbær on Hvalfjarðarströnd 1783–1811, before moving still farther west to Skógarströnd. “Sláttukvæði” has been attributed to both Bjarni Gissurarsson and Hallgrímur Pétursson. It is not unlikely that the poem was initially associated with Bjarni because Jón Hjaltalín lived for a period in the vicinity, but it was later linked to Hallgrímur because Jón had a text of the poem with him at Saurbær.

Hallgrímur’s most famous hymn collection is, of course, *Passíusálmur*, but he had previously composed much of what was intended to be a large collection of pieces based on 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel in the Old Testament. Among the many memorable stories from King David’s life to be found in these books are his slaying of the giant Goliath with his sling and five stones, and his dealings with King Saul, who was initially his friend and benefactor, but later suffered from mental instability and jealousy of David. The narrative material was attractive in many ways, as Hallgrímur acknowledges in his introduction to the hymns:

These fine narratives show God’s justice when meting out punishment, as in the story of Eli and Saul, and also his great mercy in protecting and preserving people, as can be seen with Samuel and David, and also how the Lord is compassionate and merciful in his punishments, as in his treatment of the Israelite people. The power of faith will also be revealed here [. . .].<sup>6</sup>

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6. Þessar fögru historíur bæði sýna drottins réttlæti í straffinu, sem Elí og Sáls historia kennir, þar með og hans miklu miskunn í vernd og varðveislu, sem sjá má af Samúel og Davíð, og hversu drottinn er þó líknsamur og minnst á sína miskunn mitt í hirtingunni, sem ljóst er af Ísraelslýð. Hér verður og sýndur kraftur trúarinnar [. . .] (Hallgrímur Pétursson I 1887, 184).

Although Hallgrímur relished these narratives, he never completed the hymn sequence. He drew extensively on 1 Samuel for his hymns, but only two complete pieces and the beginning of a third are based on 2 Samuel. In his study of *Passíusálmar* Sigurður Nordal suggests that during this period (around 1656) Hallgrímur may have undergone a crisis of faith that led to his abandoning the Samuel hymns. Sigurður believed that the poet's soul-searching led him just a few years later to pursue a comparable project that appealed to him in a new and exciting way, the Passion of Jesus Christ (Sigurður Nordal 1970, 46–47ff.).

Yet another hymn collection attributed to Hallgrímur is *Andleg keðja* [A spiritual chain], 110 ten-line stanzas in which material from the gospels for the year is summarized and a brief commentary provided (Hallgrímur Pétursson 1887, 1:317–372).<sup>7</sup> *Andleg keðja* belongs to a popular baroque literary genre known in German as “Perikopendichtung” [a poetic sequence based on gospel texts]. The German baroque poet Andreas Gryphius composed a set of Gospel sonnets, a hundred poems in all. Like his Passion poems, these are early works written when he was twenty-three years old (see below, chapter 15). Though Gryphius adopts the new sonnet form, his approach is thoroughly traditional in terms of subject matter and presentation. Previously writers such as Nikolaus Herman (ca. 1480–1561), Bartolomäus Ringwaldt (1530–1599), Johann Heermann (1585–1647), and Martin Opitz composed gospel verses in German; the earliest work of this kind may be by Martin Agricola (ca. 1486–1556) (Krummacher 1976, 91–93). There are, however, poems of this kind in Icelandic, as with the gospel verses of séra Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir that are printed in *Vísnabókin* (1612), and the gospel hymns of Jón Magnússon of Laufás. The intention was doubtless to make it easier for people to remember which was the gospel for the day (when attending church) and also to help them understand the texts.

In his doctoral dissertation, Arne Møller discusses *Andleg keðja* briefly and, like Grímur Thomsen before him (Hallgrímur Pétursson

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7. At the end of the volume the publisher provides an account of the manuscripts and textual transmission. He claims that in ÍBR 9 8vo the title of the work is *Andleg kveðja*; this is incorrect, for the reading is definitely “keðja” (spelled “kiedia”).

1887, 1:387–388), concludes that the collection should be attributed to Hallgrímur. Apart from the uncertain evidence of the manuscripts (Møller 1922, 76), scholars had been particularly exercised about the inclusion of a verse for “kóngsbænadagurinn” [the King’s prayer day], for this did not become law until after Hallgrímur’s death. However, Magnús Jónsson draws attention to internal evidence that appears to confirm that the work was written in 1672, for at one point we find the clause, “Ár nýtt og aldir þrennar / í einu byrjast nú” [The New Year and the three ages / all begin together now]. According to the *Calendarium* published at Hólar in 1671, these “three ages” are those of the sun, the moon, and old age, all of which began in 1672 (Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 322).<sup>8</sup> It seems clear, therefore, that the poem was composed two years before Hallgrímur died. The “kóngsbænadagur” verse tells us nothing about the date of *Andleg keðja*, as it could easily have been added later. Møller states that the structure of the verses recalls *Passíusálmar* and Hallgrímur’s meditational work *Diarium christianum*: they were “gennemgaaende ret ejendommelige og ikke Hallgrímur uværdige” [thoroughly characteristic and not unworthy of Hallgrímur] (Møller 1922, 76). Magnús Jónsson believes that Hallgrímur was the author of *Andleg keðja* and that the characteristic elegance of Hallgrímur’s poetry is identifiable in at least one of the verses (Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 322–324). The present author believes that Hallgrímur probably composed *Andleg keðja*. Those for whom the gospel verses seem plain to the point of drabness might recall that Hallgrímur composed them at a time when prolonged illness was taking its toll on him.

Though we cannot be certain how much of Hallgrímur’s poetry was translated from preexisting works, it seems likely that most of his works are original. We should, however, recall (as noted in chapter 7) that seventeenth-century attitudes regarding the role of the author differed significantly from those of today. It then seemed natural to make use of texts written by others: translating, paraphrasing, interpreting or imitating them. It is thus sometimes far from clear whether a particular poem is an original creation

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8. The sun age lasted for twenty-eight years, the moon age for nineteen years, and the old age for 532 years. This last had begun in 1140, which meant that any new age should begin in 1672, the same year as the other ages would also begin anew.

or not. There is no doubt, however, that the Golden-ABC poem “Á einn Guð set þú allt þitt traust” [In one God place all your trust] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 21–32) is a translation. Its titles in manuscripts always indicate that the work is an interpretation, and analysis of the poem reveals that Hallgrímur drew equally on Danish and German texts when composing it (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1995). His translation is one of three Icelandic versions, which underlines the popularity of this kind of poetry. There is also the verse “Maður að gá / ef hefð þín er há” [Man, take care / if your fame is great] (*Ljóðmæli* 1, 117–118), a translation from Latin, as the manuscript titles reveal; indeed the Latin original accompanies Hallgrímur’s version in many manuscripts.

As for Hallgrímur’s six assorted prose pieces, the principal works are *Sjö guðrækilegar umþenkingar* [Seven godly meditations] and *Diarium Christianum*, which will be discussed in chapter 16. Despite its title the former work contains fourteen meditations, one for each weekday morning and evening. The *Diarium* is also conceived in terms of the days of the week, with seven meditations, one for each day, and each piece linked to a particular element and interpreted in accordance with clear guidelines. Hallgrímur’s *Vikudagabænir* [Weekday prayers] are also in prose: again, there are fourteen prayers, one for each morning and evening. There is also “Hver sá sem sinn lifnað vill sáluhjálplega framleiða, hann verður þessar eftirfylgjandi greinar vel að akta og hugfesta” [Whoever wishes to direct his life towards salvation must respect and remember the following articles], a short work of seven chapters that Bishop Þórður Þorláksson attributes to Hallgrímur and arranged to have printed in Skálholt in 1688. *Burtfararminning* [Memorial address] is a eulogy that Hallgrímur prepared about Árni Oddsson the Lawman (printed in Magnús Jónsson 2:1947, 249–268). Finally, there is an extant letter from Hallgrímur to Þormóður Torfason, written at Kalastaðir 9 July 1671, in which Hallgrímur discusses material from *Völuspá*.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Printed in *Andvari* 1913 and Magnús Jónsson 1:1947, 112–116.