

CHAPTER 8

Hallgrímur Pétursson: Poet And Society

We turn now to seventeenth-century Iceland's principal poet, Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674). Before examining his contribution to particular literary genres and his individual works we need to explore his life and the society in which he moved. Who were his friends and contacts, what was his social status, to what extent did he fulfil the preconditions that we have identified for composing poetry that could be called baroque—namely, that the poet should be well-educated and closely associated with the principal institutions of power within society? To address these questions, both biographical sources and the poetry itself need to be examined.

Short Biography and *Curriculum Vitae*

There are many extant eighteenth-century biographies of Hallgrímur Pétursson written by a variety of learned individuals. It was no easy task to write about Hallgrímur's life at that time, not least because the many stories about the poet that were in circulation soon after his death were difficult to confirm or challenge. Another problem was to decide what was appropriate to include in any biographical account so as not to compromise the poet's reputation. The correspondence between Hálfdan Einarsson (1732–1785) and Bishop Finnur Jónsson (1704–1789) during the period 1767–1770 reveals that they were at odds over this issue. Finnur believed that Hálfdan's biography of Hallgrímur ought not to be printed as it stood

“because nothing that could shame or dishonor an individual ought to be revealed to the general public.”¹ In a letter to Hálfðan Finnur sets out his views (the letters are in JS 128 fol.; the sections cited are printed in Jón Samsonarson 1971, 80–81), proposing that a distinction be drawn between biography and history. In a “history” it would be natural to turn a blind eye to an individual’s oversights and errors, but a biography ought to include everything of significance in that person’s life:

If everything that we have done or that has been said about us were published, then it would be a wearisome and unnecessary list. Yet, on the other hand, everything that had important consequences should be spoken of clearly, as with the illegitimate child of this worthy man séra Hallgrímur, which had very important public consequences [. . .].²

As Finnur’s words confirm, the argument turns on whether any reference to Hallgrímur’s illegitimate son would be appropriate. The bishop agrees with Hálfðan that it would be impossible to speak about Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson in good faith without mentioning the son he had out of wedlock, just as it would be improper to conceal the existence of Bishop Oddur’s two illegitimate daughters; on all such occasions “sannleikur [er] sagna bestur” [truth is the best story].

As printed at the beginning of *Hallgrímskver* [Hallgrímur’s booklet] (1773), Hálfðan’s biography describes very directly the key events in Hallgrímur’s private life:

Among those released [from foreign bondage] was Guðríður Símons-dóttir (who is said to have been the wife of a certain Eyjólfur and to have lived previously in Stakkagerði in the Vestmannaeyjar), to whom Hallgrímur took such a fancy that when in the spring of 1637 these

1. Því allt það sem einum manni er til hnjóðs eður óvirðingar, á ekki fyrir almenning á borð berast (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 80).

2. Ef allt skal festast á spýtur hvað vér höfum gjört og um oss verður talað, þá yrði það leiðinleg og óþörf skrá. En þar á móti hlýtur allt hitt sem hefur gefið orsök til stórra hluta útbrykkilega að segjast og bevísast, svo sem er barneign þess loflega manns sr. Hallgríms, þar hún gaf orsök til svo mikilla hluta sem finnast í Actis publicis [. . .] (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 80; spelling modernized).

poor people had to travel from Denmark, Hallgrímur abandoned school and accompanied Guðríður home. [. . .] Guðríður had a child while living in Ytri-Njarðvík at the home of Grímur Bergsson, and at the time people believed that her husband had been dead before the child was conceived, and thus the legal violation was deemed to be that of concubinage.³

Here nothing is held back; Hallgrímur impregnated Guðríður while she was still a married woman but because her husband died at much the same time they were fortunate to have their relationship classified as concubinage rather than the more serious offence of adultery. Páll Vídalín treats the same events somewhat differently:

On this occasion he [Hallgrímur] fell in love with a woman who arrived as a widow from foreign captivity; he abandoned school (I do not know whether he had graduated or even taken his examinations) and married the woman when they arrived back in their native land.⁴

Here we learn that Guðrún had come as a “widow from foreign captivity,” whereas other sources state that her husband had drowned around the time she met Hallgrímur, and that it is not clear when she first heard of her husband’s death. No mention is made of her having a child in breach of the law. Páll’s brief biography was written for inclusion in a list of authors that he was compiling in Latin and to which international scholars would have access. No doubt he thought that it would be inappropriate to refer to this scandal in a work intended for a scholarly readership at home and abroad. However, Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur’s biography describes these events more or less as does Hálfðan: Hallgrímur began his relationship with Guðríður Símonardóttir in Copenhagen;

3. Meðal þessa útleysta fólks var Guðríður Símons dóttir (er sögð gift hafi verið Eyjúlfi nokkrum og haldið áður til í Stakkagerði í Vestmannaeyjum) til hvarrar hann fékk þann ástarþokka að vorið 1637 þá þetta ánauduga fólk skyldi reisa frá Danmörk yfirgaf Hallgrímur skólann og fór með Guðríði út hingað. [. . .] Guðríður ól barn í Ytri-Njarðvík hjá Grími Bergssyni en þá taldist svo til að maður hennar var dauður, áður en hún tók við barninu, svo brotið reiknaðist fillulífi (*Hallgrímskver* 1773, 7).

4. En við það tækifæri fékk hann [Hallgrímur] ást á konu nokkurri sem kom ekkja úr ánaudinni, yfirgaf skólann, hvort heldur útskrifaður eða kominn að prófi er mér ókunugt, og kvæntist konunni þegar þau komu til ættjarðarinnar (Páll Vídalín 1985, 52).

she was married at the time she was taken hostage in 1627; and Hallgrímur abandoned his studies and sailed home with her to Iceland “but newly returned to Iceland she gave birth to a child in the south at Ytri-Njarvík at the home of Grímur Bergsson. Her former husband was by then dead so her offence was deemed to be that of concubinage. At that time Hallgrímur had nowhere to live [. . .].”⁵

If we review the earliest and most important biographical sources about the poet and their interdependence, the following details emerge:

1. Biographical outline by Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur (1665–1736). Jón’s outline is part of his account of Icelandic clerics, extant in Lbs 174–175 4to and printed in an article by Jón Samsonarson 1971, 84–88.⁶
2. Biographical outline by Páll Vídalín (1667–1727) in his list of Icelandic authors entitled “Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum,” edited and published by Jón Samsonarson in 1985. The discussion of Hallgrímur is among the material sent by Páll to Magnús Arason in 1722. Jón of Grunnavík later asked Bjarni Halldórsson of Þingeyrar about this article, which Bjarni duly sent to him along with another (about Jón Magnússon) in 1740.
3. Biographical outline by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (1705–1779), which is part of his literary history of Iceland. Jón must have made use of Páll Vídalín’s biography sent to him by Bjarni Halldórsson. Jón’s work survives in two copies made by Jón Marteinsson: Thott 1149 and 1150 fol. (Jón Helgason 1926, 190–191 and 341).
4. Biographical outline by Jón Þorkelsson (1697–1759) in his literary history *Specimen Islandiæ non barbaræ*.⁷
5. In 1755 Jón Marteinsson prepared a longer biography of Hallgrímur in Danish (Thott 1151 fol.), drawing extensively on older biographies and adding little himself.

5. hún [Guðríður] ól barn suður í Ytri Njarðvík nýkomin í landið á heimili Gríms Bergssonar. Hét það svo að hennar fyrri maður væri dauður svo brotið reiknaðist frillulífi. Átti Hallgrímur þá hvergi hæli [. . .] (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 85).

6. The present list draws on information assembled in Jón Samsonarson 1971.

7. Sigurður Pétursson’s edition of this work is to be published by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík.

6. Biographical outline by Hálfdan Einarsson (1732–1785), schoolmaster at Hólar. This is extant in JS 272 4to and printed as a prologue to the second edition of *Hallgrímskver* in 1759.
7. An amplified version of Hálfdan's biographical outline is included at the beginning of *Hallgrímskver* in 1765, and séra Þorvarður Auðunsson of Saurbær is thanked for his assistance.
8. *Hallgrímskver* 1770 includes a biographical outline that has been further corrected and augmented; Hálfdan acknowledges the assistance of Bishop Finnur Jónsson, séra Vigfús Jónsson of Hítardalur, and séra Þorvarður Auðunarsen of Saurbær.
9. A biography of Hallgrímur by séra Vigfús Jónsson of Hítardalur (the son of Jón Halldórsson) was printed in *Merkir Íslendingar* II (Reykjavík, 1947). This biography was probably prepared between 1759 and 1765, for the biographical outline in the 1759 *Hallgrímskver* is mentioned rather than the 1765 version. Hálfdan had access to Vigfús's biography and used it extensively in his 1770 biography; this explains the changes from the 1759 version (see Jón Samsonarson 1971, 81).
10. The biography is again included at the front of *Hallgrímskver* 1773, with Hálfdan having made use of comments from Vigfús Jónsson.

From this overview it is clear that our earliest knowledge about the life of Hallgrímur Pétursson derives from the compilations of Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur and Páll Vídalín. The two men were still young when Hallgrímur died and both may well have known genuine stories about him, especially Jón because Hallgrímur had been a pastor in his father's diocese (see Jón Samsonarson 1971, 74). This biographical outline was then amplified and improved by Hálfdan Einarsson of Hólar for his editions of *Hallgrímskver*, and his biography must be regarded as a trustworthy source, not least because he was clearly at pains to assemble additional information and augment his account of the poet's life.

Hallgrímur Pétursson's career was somewhat unusual, and his range of experience, knowledge of people from different social classes, and years spent abroad may be said to have helped mature him as a man and a poet. Óskar Halldórsson has argued that Hallgrímur's experiences in life had a direct influence in making him the great religious poet that he undoubtedly was:

[He] dropped out of education twice, found himself sharing his lot with the most vulnerable of his contemporaries, the impoverished laborers of Suðurnes, as a semi-felon. He was eventually vindicated, which gave him the chance to reflect on the spiritual and secular insights that his education and unusual lifetime experiences had afforded him.⁸

In Hallgrímur's days the class divisions in Icelandic society were clear and regarded as natural, or even divinely ordained. Wealth and office went hand in hand and resided within families (Helgi Þorláksson 2003, 235ff.). According to Páll Vídalín's biography, Hallgrímur came from a good if impoverished family. He was born at Gröf on Höfðaströnd in 1614 but while still young moved with his father to Hólar in Hjaltadalur. His father, Pétur Guðmundsson, was a bell-ringer; nothing is known of his mother except that her name was Sólveig and that she may have died while Hallgrímur was a boy. While Hallgrímur was at Hólar the venerable Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson was still in charge there. Hallgrímur's father and the bishop were cousins, and partly because of this relationship, the boy had every opportunity to gain a good education and eventually an official position. When Hallgrímur was ten years old Bishop Guðmundur fell ill and Arngrímur the Learned assumed his duties while Halldóra, the bishop's daughter, ran the household.

Hallgrímur went abroad while still a young man, for reasons that remain unclear. We do not know whether he went with the blessing of his parents (if indeed his mother was still alive) or guardians, or whether he simply ran off "med de tyske" [with the Germans] (Add. 3 fol., p. 61), as Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík's literary history puts it. The sources do not agree as to whether he went straight to Copenhagen or first to Glückstadt or Hamburg in north Germany. It is quite likely that he landed at Glückstadt because vessels from Iceland at this time often did so.⁹ As noted in chapter 4, King Christian IV (1588–1648) had established the

8. [Hann] hrataði tvívegis út af braut menntamanna, hlaut að deila kjörum með hinum umkomulausustu sinnar samtíðar, þurrabúðarlýð Suðurnesja sem hálfildings brotamaður, en fékk að lokum uppreisn, sem veitti honum tækifæri til að túlka þau trúar- og lífsviðhorf, sem menntun og óvenjuleg ævi höfðu léð honum (Óskar Halldórsson 1996, 57).

9. This might also explain Hallgrímur's knowledge of German.

town in order to challenge the commercial power of Hamburg in the North Sea area. In so doing he sought to guarantee uninterrupted access to the Iceland trade for Danish commercial concerns (Gottskálf Þór Jensson 2001, 95; Helgi Þorláksson 2003, 317). Glückstadt lay under siege in 1620 and three years later served as an outpost of the Icelandic trading company in Copenhagen. It was mandated as a landing port for goods from Iceland, and soon took over from Hamburg as the principal trading centre for Iceland, along with Copenhagen, until the end of the Danish trade monopoly. Most sources agree that Hallgrímur was apprenticed to a blacksmith with the intention of entering that trade. This may well have been around 1630.

Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–1675), later bishop of Skálholt, is among the individuals who appear repeatedly in the story of Hallgrímur Pétursson.¹⁰ The two men were closely related in several respects, not least because séra Jón Sveinsson (d. 1661) of Holt in Öfundarfjörður, Brynjólfur's half-brother, married Þorbjörg, Hallgrímur's aunt.¹¹ On more than one occasion Brynjólfur had a major influence on Hallgrímur's life and their paths crossed in various ways over the rest of their lives. Brynjólfur studied at the University of Copenhagen 1624–1629, returning home to live with his parents for two years before going abroad again in 1631. He became Deputy Head of the Latin school at Roskilde in 1632 and received his master's degree at Copenhagen University the following year. He returned to Iceland in 1638 and was elected bishop of Skálholt. Brynjólfur was the most learned Icelander of his day, a neo-Latin poet and widely respected churchman. It is not hard to believe that the link we have noted between Brynjólfur and Hallgrímur led to his arranging for Hallgrímur to study at *Vor frue skole* (Metropolitanskolen) in Copenhagen, probably in 1632. As we have seen, Brynjólfur was by then Deputy Head of the Roskilde school. *Metropolitanskolen* was a comparable institution, a Latin school attended by the Copenhagen cathedral clergy. This was a major change and a new direction in Hallgrímur's life. He made good progress at the

10. On Brynjólfur, see, for example, Einar Gunnar Pétursson 1998, 27–29.

11. AM 148 8vo, a book of poetry from Vigur, includes a poem that was either composed by a woman or written under her name. This could well have been Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir, Hallgrímur's aunt: see Jón Helgason 1955, 59.

school and, from Brynjólfur's point of view, was now on the right track. Had he completed his studies in Copenhagen the young man had every prospect of an official position back in Iceland.

However, it was at this point that Hallgrímur chanced upon the woman who caused his life to take a new and very different direction. Guðríður Símonardóttir (1598–1682) from the Vestmannaeyjar, along with 300 fellow countrymen, had been captured in 1627 and sold into slavery in Algiers. She was a married woman and mother at the time of the raid; the husband was left behind when she and their young son were seized. Guðríður was one of the few Icelanders to return safely from this traumatic misadventure. She managed to purchase her freedom with help from an emissary of the Danish king, though her son remained in Algiers; it is not known when and how the two were separated. The paths of Guðríður and Hallgrímur crossed in Copenhagen when he was engaged to refresh the Christian faith of the returning hostages after their lengthy period of incarceration in a Muslim land. There are few direct sources concerning Guðríður, save for a letter to her husband that she wrote (or had written for her) in Algiers (Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1998, 61–63). Various stories concerning her developed over time, and more recently her life has attracted the attention of scholars (Sigurður Nordal 1927, Sigurbjörn Einarsson 1988, Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir 1997), playwrights (Jakob Jónsson 1983, Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir 1995), and one modern Icelandic novelist.¹² It has been suggested that Guðríður was from a better-connected family than previously thought and that there may thus have been greater equality in her relationship with Hallgrímur (Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir 1997, 65–66). While this may be true, the match between Guðríður and Hallgrímur clearly did the future poet few social favors given the circumstances of the day. He may have been advised to leave the woman alone and choose another partner, but Hallgrímur was deaf to any such counsel. In Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur's pioneering biography we read that Árni Gíslason, a judge, made arrangements for Hallgrímur and Guðríður to marry when attempts to change Hallgrímur's mind proved futile (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 86). This suggests that Hallgrímur may have had more than one option open

12. Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir, *Reisubók Guðríðar Símonardóttur*, 2001.

to him but chose marriage. Hálfðan states that the wedding may have taken place shortly before Guðríður's fortieth birthday.

The couple were in a difficult situation on their return to Iceland in 1637 due to the judgment hanging over them because of their illegitimate child. They were fined thirty six ells, equivalent to the value of a third of a cow but were unable to pay. In such circumstances punishment normally took the form of a flogging but the intervention of well-meaning individuals saved them from such a fate. The sources are agreed that the couple resided on Suðurnes and that Hallgrímur had worked for the Danes as an intermediary with the local people (see Jón Halldórsson of Hítardal; Jón Samsonarson 1971, 85). His duties must have involved dealing with Danish merchants over practical matters such as the loading and unloading of their ships (Helgi Þorláksson 1997, 15). The couple probably lived apart on their return to Iceland because, as we have noted, Guðríður gave birth to her child at the home of Grímur Bergsson (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 85). He was the district magistrate in Kjósarsýsla in 1632 and later a judge. We do not know whether Hallgrímur and Grímur had been acquainted before this, but it has been noted that Grímur's second wife, Rósa Ásgeirsdóttir, was Guðríður's aunt (Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir 1997, 67–68). Another of their supporters was Árni Gíslason of Ytri-Hólmur near Akranes. He offered the couple shelter and took it upon himself to find reliable information about the death of Eyjólfur, Guðríður's husband. This was important not only so that they could marry but also because their crime was classified as concubinage rather than adultery after Árni was able to confirm that Eyjólfur had been dead before the baby was born. Grímur Bergsson then took responsibility for the couple, promising to pay the fine and also organizing a charitable fund to help them. In fact, because of a misunderstanding or administrative oversight, Grímur landed in trouble with the magistrate and his deputy, and this resulted in a prolonged lawsuit.¹³ Jón Halldórsson of Hítardal describes the situation: Grímur “ran into big trouble because of a particular letter in which due to thoughtlessness rather than mischief he wrote down the year as 1638.”¹⁴

13. For further discussion see Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 1974, 49–56.

14. rataði í stórar beyglur út af einu bréfi, er hann ekki af illvilja heldur óforsjálleika skrifaði anno 1638 (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 86).

The two men who supported Hallgrímur in his troubles were prominent and influential citizens. Grímur was a prosperous farmer and later a judge, members of Árni Gíslason's family were officials, and his father Gísli Þórðarson was a respected lawyer and judge. Árni's wife was Steinunn Hannesdóttir. Many have thought that there was no link between Hallgrímur and Árni Gíslason before Hallgrímur's return to Iceland in 1637, yet Árni's father-in-law, Hannes Björnsson of Snóksdalur, was related to the mother-in-law of Þorbjörg, Hallgrímur's aunt, who (as noted earlier) had married his half-brother Jón Sveinsson.

There are various stories as to how Hallgrímur came to take holy orders. He was about thirty years old, and by becoming a pastor his position in society would change considerably. Though the economic circumstances of clerics varied greatly, some were really impoverished (Helgi Þorláksson 2003, 333), and the living granted to Hallgrímur was by no means a lavish one. Though sources differ as to whose initiative it was, we know that Brynjólfur, by then Bishop of Skálholt, ordained Hallgrímur as pastor at Hvalsnes around 1644. According to Páll Vídalín, protocol demanded that the bishop should have sent for Hallgrímur, whereas Jón of Hítadalur states that a farmer for whom Hallgrímur worked urged him to make contact with the bishop (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 86). According to a pleasing hypothesis developed by Stefán Karlsson, *Konungsbók Eddukvæða*, one of the most remarkable manuscripts preserved in Iceland, may be connected with these events. Stefán believes that a marginal note in the manuscript is written in Hallgrímur's seventeenth-century cursive hand: "Fallega fer þier enn Ordsnilinn og Mier skriffinn Ja Ja" [Your eloquence is splendid and so is my writing. Yes, yes] (p. 14r).¹⁵ Along with Jonna Louis-Jensen (1970), Stefán had previously shown that the Magnús Eiríksson who

15. It is interesting that Hallgrímur also speaks about "orða snilld" [eloquence, verbal ingenuity] when in his introduction to the fourth of the *Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magellónu* he notes that he had once seen the *Edda* with his own eyes (Finnur Sigmundsson 1956a, 174–175). It is not clear whether the reference is to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* or to the Eddic poems. He calls the book "bragarins tól" [the tool of meter] and makes a joke at his own expense concerning how difficult he had found it to decipher the hand. *Rímur af Lykla-Pétri og Magellónu* could certainly have been composed before Hallgrímur became a pastor and he could then have taken on the copying of old manuscripts as extra work.

writes his name in the margin of *Konungsbók* is the same Magnús Eiríksson who was a judge in Njarðvík. Magnús and Brynjólfur the bishop were fourth cousins. Hallgrímur could have known Magnús in the north because the two men were of the same district, with Magnús from Djúpadalur in Blönduhlíð. Stefán Karlsson regards it as quite possible that Magnús sent Hallgrímur to Bishop Brynjólfur with the precious book:

[I]t was clear to Magnús that it would be no use sending Hallgrímur empty-handed to meet the bishop, and so he gave him the *Edda* to take, which Hallgrímur had previously read and expressed his admiration for in a marginal note. Nothing could have pleased the bishop more, and this would explain his sudden change of attitude toward Hallgrímur [. . .].¹⁶

Sources indicate that Hallgrímur's first years as a pastor were difficult in several respects. He and his wife lost more than one child, while professionally Hallgrímur encountered suspicion and even hostility, with various people indicating disapproval at his rise in station. The earliest sources about Hallgrímur suggest that his difficulties were connected with Torfi Erlendsson (1598–1665), who worked for the chief magistrate at Bessastaðir and was later district magistrate in Árnessýsla. In his 1773 biography of Hallgrímur Hálfdan Einarsson says that at the time finding a pastor for the people of Hvalnes had been difficult because it was said that “Torfi Erlendsson, the district judge in Gullbringssýsla, and other arrogant people in the Hvalnes diocese had not shown their pastors much respect.”¹⁷ As for Hallgrímur's ordination at Hvalnes, Jón of Hítardalur says that Torfi Erlendsson had regarded it as “disrespectful to him to appoint this impoverished ne'er-do-well as pastor.”¹⁸ Torfi had been the judge in the Grímur Bergsson case in

16. Magnúsi hefur verið ljóst að ekki tjóaði að senda Hallgrím tómhentan á fund biskups, heldur fengið honum í hendur þá eddu sem Hallgrímur hafði áður lesið og látið í ljós aðdáun á í spássúgreininni. Engu gat biskup orðið fegnari, og það skýrir hina snöggv breytingu á viðhorfi hans til Hallgríms [. . .] (Stefán Karlsson 1986, 73).

17. Torfi Erlendsson, þá héraðsdómari í Gullbringusýslu, og aðrir stórbokkar í Hvalness sóknnum hefðu ei látið presta sína of dátt.

18. sér lítil virðing í gjörð að setja sér fátækan húska fyrir prest (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 87).

1638 as the Bessastaðir magistrate's agent. There were tales of Torfi playing tricks on Hallgrímur, as when he had a hole bored in the church chalice causing the consecrated wine to leak from it, and in turn leading to Hallgrímur's temporary suspension from his duties. Jón of Grunnavík believed this story, whereas in his "Prestasögur" Jón of Hítardalur was more cautious. However, even Jón's account suggests that there may have been something in the tale:

Hallgrímur was unpopular with powerful locals who did not show him the respect that his good qualities deserved but chose rather to deride his poverty. There was also the suspicion that the trickery and cunning of some of his parishioners had caused him to serve the eucharist from a leaking chalice, for which major mishap he was suspended from office for several weeks, with his poverty preventing him from paying the fine.¹⁹

Torfi "was a hard man, avaricious, unpopular and regarded as ignorant about the law."²⁰ He was removed from office in 1660 by official decree and owed the king large sums in fines arising from slander, but was restored to his duties in 1662 by royal decree, following the intervention of his son Þormóður (Torfæus), the historian; thereafter he continued in post until his death. One of Torfi's daughters, Ása, married séra Helgi Jónsson of Melar, thereby becoming the daughter-in-law of Hallgrímur's good friend, Jón Jónsson of Melar, who will be discussed later. Hallgrímur is said to have composed a slanderous verse about Torfi Erlendsson, and a scurrilous rhyme about Einar of Vogar has also been attributed to him. This must have been Einar Oddsson (died after 1683), a farmer and judge from Stóru-Vogar on Vatnsleysuströnd. Magnús Jónsson (1887–1958), a theologian who wrote two volumes about the life and work of Hallgrímur (1947), describes Einar as a "energetic

19. [Hallgrímur] var lítt látinn af stórbukkum þar sem virtu ekki eftir verðugleikum hans góðar gáfur, en fyrirlitu hans fátækt. Var og ei heldur grunlaust að af einhverra sóknarmanna hans tilstofnan og brögðum hafi orðið kaleikslökinn fyrir honum í sakramentissins útdeilingu, fyrir hvert (svo sem stórt gáleysi) hann var um nokkrar vikur frá prests embættis hantéran suspenderaður því fésektir þoldi ekki hans fátækt (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 84).

20. var hinn mesti hörkumaður, fégjarn og óvinsæll, talinn illa að sér í lögum (Páll E. Ólason 1952, 25).

fellow, wealthy and corpulent in the manner of a gentleman”²¹ and someone who was on good terms with the most important people at Bessastaðir. Einar is mentioned in the annals: “Þórður Leifuson hanged in the south, who was said to have stolen from the Hólmsbúðir. Einar of Vogar saw to this.”²²

The events of Hallgrímur’s life as a pastor have been much debated; it was far from usual and probably quite rare for people to be propelled so unexpectedly into a higher social class with much improved career prospects. It may well be that his accumulated experience led Hallgrímur to view himself and life in general rather differently than did those born into the select ranks of officialdom. For example, the works of Iceland’s second finest seventeenth-century poet, Stefán Ólafsson, reflects a very different view of social class.

That said, there is no doubt that Hallgrímur was making a name for himself and definitely on the way up. He must have conducted himself well as a pastor, for after six years at Hvalnes he was appointed in 1650/51 to the handsome living at Saurbær on Hvalfjarðarströnd. Magnús Jónsson is sure that Árni Gíslason must have either helped Hallgrímur indirectly to secure the Saurbær living (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:54) or played a direct role in his appointment. Though there is no clear evidence for this claim, Árni exercised formidable power and influence in the district and may well have pulled strings on Hallgrímur’s behalf; that said, there is no doubt that Hallgrímur was the right person for the position. The next decade was certainly the best period of his life. All the indications are that his most important works were written during these years, including *Samúelssálmar* and *Passíusálmar*, and two meditative texts in prose. Of Hallgrímur’s dateable occasional poems most were composed between 1650 and 1670, that is, after his appointment to Saurbær.

In his 1773 biography Hálfðan Einarsson states that Hallgrímur flourished at Saurbær until the fateful night of 15 August 1662 when all the buildings went up in flames, along with most of the goods and furnishings. This event is mentioned in the *Fitjaannáll*:

21. röskleika maður, vel efnaður og feitur að heldri manna sið (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:45).

22. Hengdur syðra Þórður Leifuson, er sagt var stolið hefði úr Hólmsbúðum. Það lét gera Einar í Vogum (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 1:363).

On the night of 15 August the whole of Saurbær on Hvalfjarðarströnd burnt down including all the houses except the church, though most of the clothing, food, and storage chests were saved; everyone survived, through God's help, except for one vagrant who burnt to death in his living room. His name was Ólafur Pálsson, nicknamed the Scotsman. The pastor, séra Hallgrímur, restored everything by the autumn.²³

In Hálfðan Einarsson's biography we read that Hallgrímur was said to have been struck down with leprosy in 1665 or 1666 though he had been able to attend the Alþingi, and, at much the same time, according to Vigfús of Hítardalur (Vigfús Jónsson 1947, 19), he had seen "sína þrykktu Passíusálma" [his *Passíusálmar* printed] for the first time; the volume was published at Hólar in 1666. By the following year his health had deteriorated sufficiently to justify the appointment of an assistant pastor: first, séra Torfi Jónsson of Reykholt, who died a year later, and then séra Hannes Björnsson, who eventually succeeded Hallgrímur at Saurbær. Hálfðan states that Hallgrímur attended the Alþingi for the last time in 1669. He lived at Kalastaðir for two years before moving to Ferstikla, where he died on 27 October 1674. According to Hálfðan, during his final months Hallgrímur had been "bed-ridden and almost blind but bore his serious illness stoically and during this time composed many profound and poignant hymns."²⁴ After Hallgrímur's death Guðríður lived first with their son Eyjólfur at Ferstikla, where his father had spent his final days. After Eyjólfur's death in 1679 at the age of only forty-two, Guðríður then lived with séra Hannes at Saurbær, where she died in 1682, aged eighty-four.

The Evidence From Verse

Hallgrímur Pétursson's unusual life and career have naturally prompted the question as to whether he should be thought of as belonging to the upper echelons of Icelandic society. There is

23. Nóttina millum þess 15. og 16. augusti brann allur staðurinn Saurbær á Hvalfjarðarströnd og öll hús nema kirkjan, en fót mestöll náðust og mikið af matföngum og af hirzlum; menn komust allir af, fyrir guðlega hjálp, nema einn gamall förúkarl brann í baðstofunni, Ólafur Pálsson, að auknafni skozkur. Byggði presturinn séra Hallgrímur staðinn allan upp aptur strax um haustið (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 2:195).

24. kararmaður og nærri blindur en bar þó sinn þunga veikleik með þolinmæði og orti í honum marga andríka og hjartnæma sálma.

no doubt that he was a man who had seen two different worlds and shared his life with both high and low. Magnús Jónsson says that Hallgrímur was “a close friend of most of Iceland’s most important people.”²⁵ He certainly had no fear of the wealthy and powerful despite never missing a chance to point out their failings, though he himself was “a commoner through and through.”²⁶ Magnús bases these claims on his extensive research into Hallgrímur’s life and poetry. But how reliable are the available sources about the poet and what can we learn from them? The biographical sketches identified earlier in this chapter are certainly important, though most of them are to some degree based on oral tradition. Scrutinized properly, they represent valid sources, while Hallgrímur’s poetry, not least his occasional verse, also represents a valuable source of information for our understanding of his social standing, as we shall see below.

One of the oral stories concerning Hallgrímur can be found in an account by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík in his treatise “Um þá lærðu Vídalína” [On the learned men of the Vídalín family]. Jón’s information came from Hildur Arngrímsdóttir (1646–1724; daughter of Arngrímur the Learned), who claimed to have met Hallgrímur, by then about fifty years old, while she was still in her late teens. She was making her way west to Búðir, in the company of the wife of the Bessastaðir magistrate, having dwelt there for a time. On their arrival at Saurbær the two women met and spoke with Hallgrímur. He received them well but when talking with the magistrate’s wife gave the impression that he was just one of the workers. On the other hand, when he spoke with Hildur in private he said that he knew who she was and prophesied that she would have accomplished offspring (Jón Ólafsson 1950, 87). The reference is to Hildur’s son, Páll Vídalín, and the main purpose of the narrative is to shed light on this accomplished lawyer, poet and scholar. Nevertheless here is a depiction of Hallgrímur as he appeared to a young, well-born woman, which indicates that Hallgrímur had not tried to flaunt or exploit the authority that went with his office. Though only an oral tale, there seems no reason to believe that Jón would

25. vildarvinur flestra helztu manna landsins (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:276).

26. alþýðumaður og alþýðuvinnur í húð og hár (ibid., 276–277).

have misreported Hildur's account, for she was known as a wise and well-respected woman (see Sigurður Pétursson 2001, 77; Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1996b, 179–180).

Discussion of Hallgrímur's social status is closely linked to the kind of poet he was. Occasional poems play an important role in seventeenth-century society and Hallgrímur's contributions to the genre reveal the sort of people with whom he kept company and perhaps also his status as a poet. Occasional verse is composed to honor a particular individual or mark a particular occasion. The poems shed light on both poet and dedicatee. They were mostly composed for men, women, and children from the higher ranks of society. The poets were generally educated men, the most accomplished of whom often composed their verses in Latin, as was the case with Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. It is not known whether Hallgrímur ever composed lines for Brynjólfur or wrote Latin verse, and if he did not it may be because he regarded himself as insufficiently competent in Latin.

Hallgrímur's earliest occasional poems are composed for occasions that have more to do with himself than with others. Among them is the travel hymn composed in either 1632 or 1637.²⁷ The ostensible reason for its composition is obviously an imminent journey home (“Vil eg nú víst til sanns / vitja míns föðurlands” [Now I truly wish / to visit my homeland], v. 6, see *Ljóðmæli* 2, 81). If Hallgrímur composed the hymn in 1632 when just eighteen years old he must have been contemplating a journey home that never took place. If composed in 1637 the hymn bears remarkably little trace of the dramatic events that led to Hallgrímur's abandonment of his studies in Copenhagen and return to Iceland. We may wonder whether Hallgrímur composed these verses on his own initiative or at someone's request, Bishop Brynjólfur, for example. In what way could Hallgrímur have benefited from composing such a fine hymn? Could he have used the poem as some kind of testimonial? Modern readers may be struck by how few personal details the lines contain and indeed we may say that the first person is used irrespective of the identity of the traveler. The narrator did not need to be an

27. The sources cite both years, see *Ljóðmæli* 2, 77–82, but are agreed that the piece was composed in Copenhagen.

Icelander just because the hymn is written in Icelandic. The poem fits our earlier definition of the baroque text very well, especially in respect of occasional poems: they are “without intimacy [. . .] completely public.”²⁸

Other occasional poems composed early in Hallgrímur’s career include two elegiac pieces about his daughter Steinunn (“Nú ertu leidd mín ljúfa” [Now you have been led [to the orchard of the Lord], my gentle one] and “Sælar þær sálir” [Those blessed souls]). In truth we do not know whether the two works were composed at the same time but they may well have been written shortly after the death of the child, that is, in the period 1644–1646. They differ from each other in that the former is brief and straightforward whereas the second has a good deal more creative energy and dramatic staging, and includes a reference to Revelation; it is also an *akrosticon* in which the poem’s message is highlighted: the little girl is at rest and the poem is a kind of requiem.

Though the occasion is very personal the poet holds fast to the baroque literary tradition whereby references to anything concerning his family could be omitted in favor of promoting universal truths. Loss and sorrow are described in such a way that any bereaved individual could identify with the sentiments. Some have expressed surprise that the poem does not name the child’s mother or siblings. In his other elegies Hallgrímur does refer to the mourning family members, albeit not by name; it is their sorrow that is described. Careful examination of the “Sælar þær sálir” poem confirms that it accords well with Storstein’s and Sørensen’s characterization of baroque occasional poems as “teatralske og performative” [theatrical and performative] (Storstein and Sørensen 1999, 60), not least the opening description of the heavenly joy experienced by the saved; however, the poem also emphasizes the consolation to be derived from knowing that the child now rests in peace.

The next dateable occasional piece is the New Year’s hymn “Árið hýra nú hið nýja” [A happy New Year], composed in 1652, shortly after Hallgrímur’s appointment to Saurbær.²⁹ This remarkably elegant

28. uden intimitet [. . .] helt igennem offentlige (Storstein and Sørensen 1999, 60).

29. In an early manuscript the title includes the date 1652 (Lbs 399 4to); the same is true in *Hallgrímskver*; see *Ljóðmæli* 2, 38.

hymn is a tour de force in terms of its rhymes, as if Hallgrímur wished to demonstrate to his congregation that their new pastor was a learned and accomplished poet. Bishop Brynjólfur paid an official visit to Saurbær in August of the same year (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:105), and Hallgrímur may well have shown him the hymn. Two years later (in 1654) Árne Gíslason of Ytri-Hólmur died, as the *Fitjaannáll* records: “On 7 October the respected and honorable Árne Gíslason of Ytri-Hólmur on the Akranes peninsula died; he was one of the wisest men in the country.”³⁰ Hallgrímur duly composes an elegy (“Auvei þær angurs tíðir” [Alas, this time of sorrow]) for his friend and benefactor. The poem refers to Árne’s concern for his friends and willingness to help anyone, including those unable to repay his kindness. The deceased’s ancestry is identified, and though Hallgrímur deems it unnecessary to name all branches of the family, he mentions that both Árne’s father and grandfather were lawyers in the south of the country. The poet’s personal friendship with Árne emerges clearly in the poem, to the extent that Hallgrímur even worries that those less well acquainted with his friend might regard the poem as excessively laudatory. We also learn that Hallgrímur had visited Árne shortly before his death. There are references to the deceased’s good fortune in having been blessed with so many children. It seems certain that Hallgrímur attended the funeral and could have recited his elegy on that occasion.

The next elegies known to us (along with two *dróttkvætt* verses) were composed by Hallgrímur for Björn Gíslason (1604–1656), district magistrate and judge. He was closely related to Steinunn, the wife of Árne of Ytri-Hólmur. Björn’s mother was Þórunn Hannesdóttir, the sister of Steinunn. Björn lived first at Bær, then at Vatnsendi in Skorradalur, and sometimes served as magistrate in Borgarfjörður. Hallgrímur and Björn had clearly been neighbors; their official duties had brought them together and they had also been personal friends. Hallgrímur’s successor, séra Hannes Björnsson of Saurbær, was the son of Björn Gíslason, the judge. It is not difficult to believe that Hallgrímur would have relished the idea of a man from this family taking over his parish. Björn’s wife was Ingibjörg,

30. þann 7. Octobris andaðist virðulegur heiðursmaður Árne Gíslason á Ytra-Hólmi á Akranesi, einn af vitrustu mönnum hér á landi (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 2:174).

the daughter of Ormur Vigfússon (1576–1675), magistrate of Eyjar in Kjós. One of Hallgrímur's occasional pieces is a New Year's poem for Ormur and his wife Guðríður Árnadóttir (1578–1668). The year in question is not known but the dedicatees are clearly advanced in years, with direct references to their "aldurdómur" [old age]. As with others to whom Hallgrímur addresses poems, Ormur is a neighbor and well-placed official, quite apart from his connection with the family: he is Björn Gíslason's father-in-law. There was also a direct link between Hallgrímur and the couple Ormur and Guðríður in that their grand-daughter, Þóra Guðmundsdóttir, married Eyjólfur, Hallgrímur's son, in 1668 (Ari Gíslason 1989 I, 1). Guðríður died the same year and the poem must have been written before then.

"Heillaósk Hallgríms til Guðríðar Stefánsdóttur í Nesi" [Hallgrímur's good wishes to Guðríður Stefánsdóttir of Nes] (1638/9–1728) must have been composed before 1660. The subject of the poem is quite unusual, as will be discussed below (chapter 12). In brief, the work is addressed to Guðríður, the daughter of Stefán Hallkelsson, the pastor of Nes by Seltjörn; she had been the subject of humiliating gossip and the poem seems to have been written to right this wrong. A supplement to the oldest *Vatnsfjarðarannáll* states that Guðríður married séra Helgi Grímsson in 1660 and the poem must have been composed some years earlier.

"Fjögur brúðkaupskvæði" [Four wedding poems] are attributed to Hallgrímur, but we do not know when or for whom they were composed. Though it is hard to prove that these pieces are by Hallgrímur, there is no reason to believe that they are not (see *Ljóðmæli* 2, vii). According to some manuscripts a hymn to celebrate the arrival of summer and the matching "Eitt er við ofi hætt" [There is danger in excess], an advice poem in comic mode, were composed in 1657. At much the same time Hallgrímur was probably composing *Samúelssálmur*, a work that he appears to have abandoned in favor of his *Passíusálmur*, which he finished in 1659. A good deal is known about how Hallgrímur introduced *Passíusálmur* to the public, and these records tell their own tale about his significant position in society.

All the indications are that Hallgrímur sent the first copy of *Passíusálmur* to séra Jón Jónsson (ca. 1596–1663) of Melar in Melasveit (see *Ljóðmæli* 1, 199). Jón was a friend and neighbor of

Hallgrímur, and the son of séra Jón Þorsteinsson, the Vestmannaeyjar martyr, and his wife Margrét Jónsdóttir. Jón Jónsson and Guðríður Símonardóttir were the same age and both from the Vestmannaeyjar; the so-called Turkish raid of 1627 must have left a deep scar on their own lives and those of their families. The pirates murdered Jón's father, a pastor and renowned composer of hymns, and his mother and siblings were taken as captives to Algiers, never to return to Iceland.³¹ Jón studied at the Skálholt school, traveled to Copenhagen in 1616, was appointed to the diocese of Melar in 1626, where he remained until his death. He was provost (*prófastur*) of Þverárþing on the south side of Hvítá, and “was considered very intelligent, a gifted speaker and poet.”³² Like Hallgrímur he experimented with composing in Sapphics (see pp. 208ff.). He was the Jón to whom Hallgrímur sent a copy of his *Passíusálmar* (probably around the end of 1659), requesting his opinion of the work. Jón duly prepared a set of comments about the hymns that is dated 7 March 1660 and survives in manuscript (JS 272 4to, see *Ljóðmæli* 1, 199).

Shortly afterward Hallgrímur made several copies of *Passíusálmar* and sent them to four distinguished women. It appears that he first sent a copy to Ragnhildur Árnadóttir of Kaldaðarnes in March 1660 (see Páll E. Ólason 1939), who was the daughter of his friend Árni Gíslason of Ytri-Hólmur. He then sent copies to Helga Árnadóttir of Hítardalur (1626–1693) and to Kristín Jónsdóttir (1611–1683) in May 1660 (the dedication is preserved in JS 342 4to and printed in Hallgrímur Pétursson 1887, 1:374–379). Kristín was the wife of Sigurður Jónsson (1618–1677), magistrate of Þverárþing. Sigurður's official duties extended over the south and east of the country at the time Hallgrímur composed a New Year's greeting poem for him in 1663. Sigurður's mother was Ragnheiður Hannesdóttir (whose father was Björn from Snóksdalur); Sigurður and Björn Gíslason were thus cousins. Helga was the daughter of the magistrate Árni Oddsson and the wife of Þórður Jónsson (ca. 1609–1670) of Hítardalur, who was “the leading cleric in the Skálholt diocese, a wealthy but generous and well-born man.”³³ Last, he sent a copy of *Passíusálmar* in May

31. Ólafur Egilsson 1969, 166–168.

32. talinn mjög vel að sér, snjall mælskumaður og skáld (*ÍÆ* III, 171).

33. fremstur klerka í Skálholtsbyskupsdæmi, auðmaður mikill, en þó rausnsamur og

1661 to Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir (1641–1663), the daughter of Bishop Brynjólfur (see Hallgrímur Pétursson 1887, 1:379–380). All these women were closely related to influential officials.

According to Hálfdan Einarsson the two prose meditative works that Hallgrímur wrote around 1660, *Diarium christianum* [The Diary of a Christian] and *Sjö guðrækilegar umþenkingar* [Seven pious reflections], were “dedicated to Eggert Björnsson of Skarð on Skarðsströnd, magistrate of Barðastrandarsýsla, and they have been printed several times.”³⁴ Eggert Björnsson “the Wealthy” (1612–1681) was “a farmer and man of means, who became one of the richest men of his time,”³⁵ and there was undoubtedly a link between the dedications and the printing of *Passíúsálmar*.³⁶

It is clear from all this that Hallgrímur was at pains to ensure that his work circulated among the highest ranks of Icelandic society. Personal friendship certainly played its part in these matters. Hallgrímur seems to have been particularly close to one particular family, the descendants of Hannes Björnsson of Snóksdalur. Hannes’s father was Björn Hannesson, the brother of Eggert Hannesson, the royal governor, and grandfather of Hannes Eggertsson, who also served as governor in his day.³⁷ These people belonged to the second highest family in Iceland, the Svalbarðsætt, who dominated the Vestfirðir and Dalasýsla. The origins of these links are not entirely clear, but early in the seventeenth century several members of the Svalbarð family studied in Germany, where Hallgrímur also seems to have lived for a period, and he certainly knew and could translate directly from German (see Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1995).³⁸ These links need not be important in themselves, but Hallgrímur certainly had many

höfðingi (*ÍÆ* 5:102).

34. *dedicerað Eggert Björnssyni á Skarði á Skarðsströnd, sýslumanni í Barðastrandarsýslu og eru þeir [bæklingarnir] nokkrum sinnum prentaðir* (*Hallgrímuskver* 1773, 14).

35. *búsýslumaður og fjáraflamaður mikill, enda varð hann einn hinn auðugasti maður um sína daga* (*ÍÆ* 1:314).

36. Magnús Jónsson suspected that Hallgrímur completed *Flóres rímur og Leós* at the urging of Eggert Björnsson “the Wealthy” of Skarð; see Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:161.

37. Eggert Hannesson’s sister was Ragnheiður Hannesdóttir, the wife of Magnús Jónsson the Polite (ca. 1531–1591).

38. In his biography Hálfdan states that Hallgrímur was “well able to understand Danish, German, Latin and also his native tongue” [*velskiljandi dönsku, þýsku, latínu og sitt móðurmál*] (*Hallgrímuskver* 1773, 12).

friends among the Icelandic ruling elite. He may have served as pastor, and perhaps even as a kind of court poet, for the Svalbarðsætt. Yet despite these clear links with the highest in the land, Hallgrímur's occasional pieces were not directed exclusively toward influential officials, as can be seen from the fact that he composed a New Year's prayer for all classes of society and also two hymns for seamen. He also composed a wisdom poem aimed at children and young people and obviously associated with his pastoral duties. His well-known ale-song "Nú er ég glaður á góðri stund" [Now I am happy at this good time] was probably composed for some feast or similar occasion about which there is no documentary record.

Friend of Magistrates and Bishops

Brynjólfur Sveinsson's time as Bishop of Skálholt (1640–1670) coincided with a period of prosperity on land and at sea, with new settlements developing and the population increasing (Helgi Þorláksson 1997, 24). There was no shortage of fish and the school at Skálholt was flourishing. After the period of post-Reformation turbulence in Iceland the church had gradually come to terms with its new role and structures and its renewal reached a peak around 1660. In 1650 Hallgrímur moved to Saurbær, and all indications are that the following decade can be counted as the best of his life. As we have noted, many of his finest works were composed during those years. At the same time he was closely connected with the two highest officials in the south of the country, the magistrate and the bishop.

We do not know when Hallgrímur composed the poem known as "Valdsmannavísa" [A verse about the powerful]. It is an acrostic in which the opening letter of each line forms the name Árne Oddsson (1592–1665), who was a magistrate in the south and east of Iceland 1631–1663. Árne was the son of the Skálholt bishop Oddur Einarsson, whose father was the poet Einar Sigurðsson, pastor at Eydalir; Árne was the brother of Gísli Oddsson, Bishop of Hólar, and a close relative of Stefán Ólafsson. He worked very successfully with Bishop Brynjólfur of Skálholt (Helgi Þorláksson 2003, 330). The poem was composed in Árne's honor, and its main point seems to be to highlight Árne as an exemplary figure. The

poem expresses the hope that those sitting in judgment over others will act justly and allow neither greed nor bribery to blind them. Its opening clearly reflects a very seventeenth-century worldview: “Allt yfirvald og æðri stétt / er af Guði lifanda” [All power and authority / is from the living God] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 3–5). The poem was probably composed while the Alþingi and law-court were in session. Hallgrímur’s elegy for Árne Oddsson dates from 1665, and the only one of Hallgrímur’s prose eulogies to have survived is also about Árne. It was sent to his widow and children together with a letter dated 22 April 1665 (printed in Magnús Jónsson 1947, 2:249–268) and will be discussed in chapter 17, where we will see the extent of Hallgrímur’s respect for the late magistrate.

Hallgrímur certainly had extensive dealings with the episcopal see at Skálholt, a major centre for manuscript work and other scholarship (Springborg 1977, 67–71). Bishop Brynjólfur had access to many of what are now regarded as the most remarkable manuscripts of the time, arranging for many of them to be copied, while scholars such as Jón Guðmundsson the Learned were entrusted with various other codicological projects. Brynjólfur had it in mind to collect writings about old northern paganism, and the tasks he assigned to Jón were part of the preparatory work. At the same time he assembled related material (Einar Gunnar Pétursson 1998, 32ff., 121). Brynjólfur was enough of a visionary “to allow himself to dream of an Icelandic cultural center at Skálholt with the world as his oyster.”³⁹ He was unsuccessful in seeking royal permission for early Icelandic texts with Latin translations to be printed at Skálholt for the benefit of scholars overseas.

Popular tradition links the *Passíusálmar* with Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson in a number of ways; for example, it is said that Hallgrímur had intended the work to have forty-eight psalms but Brynjólfur urged him to compose fifty (Magnús Jónsson II 1947, 27); Jón Grunnvíkingur claimed that Brynjólfur had first received a copy of the *Passíusálmar* and then failed to let the poet know his opinion of it. In his study of Hallgrímur Magnús Jónsson says that these tales have the ring of truth about them, in that “Hallgrímur must have

39. að hann lét sig dreyma um íslenskt menntasetur í Skálholti með heiminn að umdæmi (Jón Helgason 1958, 84).

had some contact with Bishop Brynjólfur and promised to show him the work before he finished it once and for all.”⁴⁰ Brynjólfur had an excellent library (see Jón Helgason 1948) and we may imagine him lending Hallgrímur books and perhaps offering advice, opinions, and encouragement. But all this is speculation and we are left to guess as to the nature and extent of any actual influence that the poet’s close relationship with the bishop may have had on his poetry. In his theological attitudes Brynjólfur was certainly sympathetically inclined toward the occult, and even Mariolatry, but also greatly valued the fundamental ecumenical truths of the Christian church (see Einar Sigurbjörnsson 1990). Such influences were widespread within the Lutheran church in the second half of the seventeenth century and find expression not least in meditative writings, which emphasize the importance of private worship, mysticism, and material drawn from the leading figures of medieval meditative tradition (see Meid 1986, 101; Helgi Þorláksson 1997, 21–22). As we will see, Hallgrímur was clearly influenced by such thinking.

As noted already, the decade from 1650 was a much happier period for both Brynjólfur and Hallgrímur than the years 1661–1663 proved to be, when both men faced shocks that may have served to bring them still closer together. Hallgrímur suffered major financial losses as a result of the fire at Saurbær. The shock confronting Brynjólfur was even more traumatic and particularly humiliating for a man in his position; his daughter, aged twenty, had become pregnant by her teacher, after having sworn a solemn oath that she had never slept with any man. We may imagine that few people were better able to understand Brynjólfur’s trials than Hallgrímur, who had undergone a painful and humiliating experience of his own many years earlier. There are no direct sources about the links between Hallgrímur and Brynjólfur’s daughter, and there is nothing to suggest that the hymn “Allt eins og blómstrið eina” [Just as a single flower] relates particularly to her.⁴¹ Hallgrímur’s simple priority was to make his poetry known and to show respect to his high-ranking supporters. Vigfús of Hítardalur’s biography

40. Hallgrímur hafi haft nokkur samráð við Brynjólf biskup og lofað honum að sjá verkið, áður en hann gekk frá því að fullu og öllu (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 2:27).

41. The hymn seems initially to have been preserved in *Passíusálmur* manuscripts: see *Ljóðmæli* I, 1.

states that Hallgrímur had “dedicated them [the *Passíusálmar*] to Ragnheiður Brynjólfsdóttir in the sense that her father recommended their publication.”⁴² On the other hand it is likely that he was also fond of Ragnheiður and took an interest in her as she grew up, as she was much the same age as his daughter Steinunn would have been had she not died when only three years old. Both Hallgrímur and Brynjólfur had lived to see their children buried: of Brynjólfur’s seven children, three died young, two of them unbaptized; only two reached maturity.

It was in the early spring of 1662 that Ragnheiður had a child by Daði Halldórsson, “and he [was by then] a pastor when she gave birth and then went overseas. He received no recompense because the bishop had written so critically about him.”⁴³ In the winter of that same year a dangerous epidemic spread through Iceland, and we learn that Hallgrímur was staying at Skálholt at the time. A 1687 letter from Torfi Jónsson, Bishop Brynjólfur’s nephew, to Þormóður Torfason, states that Brynjólfur had summoned Hallgrímur to Skálholt because of the many trials that he and his family were experiencing (Magnús Jónsson I 1947, 59). Men have speculated that Brynjólfur may have asked Hallgrímur to provide support and comfort for Ragnheiður, his sick daughter. She died on 23 March 1663, just twenty-two years old (*Blanda II*, 2).

The homage paid to the Danish monarch at the Kópavogur assembly was the main event in Icelandic history in 1662. The previous year Frederik III had been determined to compel the Danish aristocracy to relinquish their various privileges and to insist that he be recognized as absolute ruler of Denmark. He had assumed the throne much earlier (in 1649), when Icelanders had sworn an oath of loyalty to him. Hallgrímur was present at this ceremony, summoned as one of two representatives of the clerics of the Kjalarnesþing (*Skjöl um hylling Íslendinga 1649 við Friðrik konung þriðja* [Documents concerning the 1649 homage by Icelanders to King Frederik III], Reykjavík 1914, see Helgi Þorláksson 1997, 20). Royal absolutism enjoyed the support of the Danish citizenry and could also have involved

42. dedicerað þá [. . .] Ragnheiði Brynjólfsdóttur, í því skyni, að faðir hennar promov-eraði þá til þrykkingar (Vigfús Jónsson 1947, 24).

43. en hann [var þá] prestur orðinn, er hún varð léttari, og sigldi síðan. Fékk þó eigi restitutio[. . .], af því að biskup skrifaði í móti honum. (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 3:135).

advantages for Icelanders by curtailing aristocratic power and influence. They nevertheless found it extraordinary and even humiliating that they were now ordered to pay homage to the same royal figure to whom they had long ago sworn allegiance. With the king's representative arriving late for the June 1662 session of the *Alþingi* there was no mention of the homage requirement at that time, but shortly afterward the official summoned the Icelandic representatives to an oath-taking ceremony at *Kópavogur* in July. Hallgrímur was in this group, whose leading figures were his friends *Árni Oddsson* and Bishop *Brynjólfur Sveinsson*. *Helgi Þorláksson* (1997, 21) believes that *Árni* and *Brynjólfur* were not necessarily opposed to the consolidation of royal power, but as conservatives they were worried that absolutism could lead to a disruption of the system of officials in Iceland, with Danish citizens appointed as magistrates and well-born Icelanders deprived of the power and influence they had previously enjoyed. The Icelandic leaders at the *Kópavogur* assembly were clearly dissatisfied with the new arrangements; sources say that Bishop *Brynjólfur* made his feelings known, at which juncture the Danish official pointed to his soldiers. That was enough to persuade the Icelanders to submit and sign the agreement, all except *Árni Oddsson*, who resisted stubbornly until in tears he finally added his name to the document.⁴⁴ As one of the signatories Hallgrímur naturally witnessed these events at first hand. Whatever the political and historical significance of this episode, it confirms that he was keeping company with the most important people in the country at a moment that made it clear to all of them just how little influence they and their fellow countrymen had over the Danish authorities.

Within a month *Saubær* went up in flames. In 1773 *Hálfðan* reports that many good people supported Hallgrímur and that the buildings had been substantially restored by the autumn. At that time in Iceland not many people could be described as wealthy and Hallgrímur was fortunate to have well-connected friends such as Bishop *Brynjólfur*. No doubt he benefited from their help during this difficult period. After the fire Hallgrímur composed “*Guð er minn Guð þótt geisi nauð*” [God is my God though troubles rain down],

44. This account is preserved in *Árni Magnússon's* hand. His source was *séra Björn Stefánsson*, one of the delegates at the *Kópavogur* assembly; see *Helgi Þorláksson* 2004, 152–153.

which will be discussed in chapter 14, along with other poems of repentance and consolation.

The traumatic events in Brynjólfur's family and sickness at Skálholt led the bishop to request Hallgrímur's assistance in the complex and wide-ranging projects with which he himself had been entrusted shortly before. Þormóður Torfason, the Danish king's historian, had asked Brynjólfur to prepare explanatory glosses on the verses in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* in the *Flateyjarbók* manuscript. At this time *Flateyjarbók* was in the custody of the Royal Library in Copenhagen, after Brynjólfur had sent it there in 1656 at the request of the king, along with other vellums. Þormóður had devoted two years in Copenhagen to translating the work but did not trust himself to deal with the verses at this point. Instead he transcribed them and wished to have them explained to him before he undertook any translation work. In a letter written at Skálholt in 1663, Brynjólfur informs Þormóður that Hallgrímur has taken over the work:

sickness raged here for a long period and I lay with other sick people for some time. Then others were laid low [. . .]. Therefore, I saw no other solution, because of my infirmity, than to have séra Hallgrímur Pétursson of Saurbær take over that project on my behalf, for he has shown it some interest [. . .].⁴⁵

Hallgrímur prepared glosses for the verses and these survive in an autograph manuscript.⁴⁶ At much the same time he must have composed the poem "Aldarháttur" [The spirit of the age], in which he consciously makes use of and imitates the wording of verses in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*; thus the poem is unlikely to have been composed before he began work on the glosses (see Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1994, 554ff.). It is possible to date "Aldarháttur" to ca. 1663, just a year or so after the Icelanders had sworn their oaths of allegiance to the absolute monarch of Denmark. As Magnús Jónsson puts it, the poem was written "við undirleik Kópavogseiðanna" [to

45. Hér lá sótt á leingst af, og lá eg einn með öðrum nokkra stund. Síðan lögðust og aðrir [. . .]. Því sá eg ei annað fangaráð, upp frá því eg hindraðist, en að fá síra Hallgrími Péturssyni í Saurbæ þetta verk að sér að taka minna vegna, hvar á hann hefur nokkurn lit sýnt [. . .] (Brynjólfur Sveinsson 1913, 135).

46. BL Add 11.193 in the British Library in London.

the accompaniment of the Kópavogur oaths] (Magnús Jónsson I 1947, 259). This event seems likely to have influenced the creation of the poem, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 11.

In 1663 Hallgrímur composed the hymn “Þakkargjörð fyrir afturfengna heilsu” [Thanksgiving for restored health].⁴⁷ The poem tells of the joy and gratitude of someone who has been laid low by illness but is now restored to health and strength. Jesus was the doctor and life-giver responsible for curing the narrator and rendering the harsh rod of punishment harmless. The nature of Hallgrímur’s affliction is not known on this occasion, but it confirms Hálfðan’s claim that he was unaware of the leprosy that was to end his life until around (or after) 1665. Hallgrímur’s elegy and eulogy for Árni Oddsson were composed in the same year, as we have noted. Hallgrímur’s elegy for Jón Sigurðsson (ca. 1610–1670), a barber who lived on Káranes,⁴⁸ was composed in 1670. By then Hallgrímur was seriously ill and this must have been one of his last occasional pieces. Barbers were men who treated wounds and were in effect surgeons. Jón Sigurðsson learned medicine from Oddur Oddsson of Reynivellir, who later married his mother.⁴⁹ It is possible that Jón helped to care for Hallgrímur during his illness.

It may say something about Hallgrímur’s social position that he is nowhere mentioned in *Vatnsfjarðarannáll* (elder version, supplement, younger version), whereas people whom he knew and had dealt with are referred to. He is named in *Grímsstaðaannáll*, written by Jón Ólafsson, who was born in 1691 or almost twenty years after Hallgrímur’s death. The younger *Vatnsfjarðarannáll* was written by Guðbrandur Jónsson (b. 1641), the son of Jón Arason, provost of Vatnsfjörður, and the author of the older *Vatnsfjarðarannáll*. Guðbrandur reports that the Icelandic hostages had returned from “Turkey” in 1637 (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 3:112). He records the death in 1650 of séra Ólafur Böðvarsson of Saurbær in Hvalfjarðarströnd

47. The year 1663 can be found in the titles by which the work is known in both the printed editions and a number of manuscripts.

48. The authorities at Bessastaðir employed barbers who could also perform the role of executioner. Icelanders learned the trade from them or went abroad to study it (Helgi Þorláksson 2004, 95).

49. The manuscript SÁM 42 is a medical book by Hannes Gunnlaugsson, written in 1673. Its title indicates that it is based on another such volume by Oddur Oddsson and Jón Sigurðsson; see Stefán Karlsson 1981.

but does not mention his successor. Nevertheless various events that prompted Hallgrímur to compose occasional verses are mentioned in the annal, such as the deaths of Árni Gíslason of Ytri-Hólmur and Jón Sigurðsson “the Barber,” the marriage of Guðríður Stefánsdóttir, and also, of course, everything concerning bishops and magistrates such as Brynjólfur Sveinsson and Árni Oddsson. For comparison we may note that the older *Vatnsfjarðarannáll* mentions the engagement of Stefán Ólafsson. Though he himself is not named, his prospective father-in-law is, and so (even) is the broken leg that he sustained in 1658. In *Eyrarannáll* (written by Magnús Magnússon, who was born in 1630) Stefán is named as one of the celebrated individuals who died in 1688.

In the supplement to *Fitjaannáll* about Bishop Jón Arason and his sons we find Hallgrímur’s ancestry and kinship with Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson set out: “Guðmundur Hallgrímsson, the father of Hallgrímur and Pétur, the father of séra Hallgrímur of Saurbær on Hvalfjarðarströnd, who has been one of Iceland’s best poets, as his hymns and verses show.”⁵⁰ This may be a later addition by the annalist Oddur of Fitjar. In *Hestsannáll*, *Kjósarannáll* and *Fitjaannáll* Hallgrímur’s death is recorded: “In this year the renowned poet séra Hallgrímur Pétursson died.”⁵¹

The reception history of Hallgrímur Pétursson’s works has not yet been researched in detail but Magnús Jónsson’s 1947 study of the poet includes a short overview in his chapter “Dómar um Hallgrím Pétursson” [Judgments on Hallgrímur Pétursson]. The summary and conclusion of Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur are interesting:

[. . .] in appearance he was large, clumsy in build, swarthy, with a robust singing voice; in manner he was “a man of the people,” good-humored and cheerful, a gifted preacher and the best poet in this country in recent times as his books, especially those that have been printed, reveal clearly: *Diarium vikudaga kvöld- og morgunþankar* and *Passíusálmar*. The latter is one of the best works known to me

50. Guðmundur Hallgrímsson, faðir Hallgríms og Péturs, föður sera Hallgríms í Saurbæ á Hvalfjarðarströnd, hver hér hefur verið eitt hið bezta skáld á Íslandi, sem hans sálmar og kveðlingar auglýsa (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 2:54).

51. Á þessu ári sálaðist það merkilega skáld séra Hallgrímur Pétursson (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 2:236).

by an Icelandic author. He also composed hymns based on 1 Samuel, and on 2 Samuel up to the death of Abner; and also many other hymns and verses, though these are hard to find in uncorrupted texts. There is hardly a comic verse or poem by Hallgrímur that, read in a correct version, cannot be distinguished from the work of other poets.⁵²

In Magnús Jónsson's study we learn that séra Torfi Jónsson of Gaulverjabær and Bishop Þórður Þorláksson were among the first to praise Hallgrímur's works publicly. It is conceivable that Torfi meant primarily Hallgrímur's glosses on medieval saga verses, but Árni Magnússon, Jón and Páll Vídalín all praise his poetry. Hallgrímur's renown as a poet was praised from early on by the highest in the land. The dissemination of Hallgrímur's hymns and poems in eighteenth-century manuscripts and printed editions of *Hallgrímskver* suggests that his poetry was very popular at that time in the community at large.

Hallgrímur was a learned poet, but because of his truncated formal education he must have taken pains later in life to educate himself further, as his works in both prose and verse confirm. He had links with powerful officials and addressed his poems, especially his occasional verse, to them. This all suggests that he took his poetry seriously and intended it to have a role and place in a society based on theological orthodoxy and royal and ecclesiastical authority. Hallgrímur managed to achieve the social position that was essential for anyone wishing to promote his own writings and secure recognition in the baroque period. He was successful in making use of all available help, and in so doing ensured that his abilities as a pastor and poet found memorable literary expression.

52. að ytra áliti hafði hann verið stór, luralaga vaxinn, skinndökkur, stirðraddaður í söng, í siðferði upp á slétta bændavísu, glaðsinnaður og skemmtinn en gáfuríkur predikari og besta skáld hér í landi á seinni tímum hvar um ljósast vitna hans bæklingar, helst sem prentaðir eru, Diarium vikudaga kvöld- og morgunþankar, og Passíusálmur, eitt hið besta verk sem eg veit liggja eftir íslenskan mann, svo og sálmar út af fyrri Samúelisbók og upphafi hinnar seinni allt til dauða Abners og margir aðrir sálmar og kveðlingar, en fást ekki óafbakaðir, og varla er sú gamanvísa og kvæði eftir hann, ef rétt fengist, að ekki megi þekkja frá annarra kveðskap (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 87–88).

Roekrer Lærdoomsriker

Salmar

Og

Andleger

ÆDELSKAP

Besteſter Ordter,

Af hvitniked eſkada, Og Naſu-
fræga Picod: Skalde verr,
ar Trongu:

Eml. Gr. Hallgríme
Petrusſyne.

Prím til Frood'eiks, Suggunar
og Uppvakningar ſem þr ka vlla.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Selt Alment 3i bunded 4. Siffum.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

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Af Halldore Eriksſyne, 1755.

Title page of *Hallgrímskver* (1755). Photograph: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir.