

CHAPTER 12

Occasional Verse

Occasional verse was the dominant literary genre during the baroque period. The term refers to poems composed for recitation on particular occasions, often in response to a specific request or commission (Jakob Benediktsson 1983:291). After the Reformation it became common throughout Europe to compose occasional poems in Latin, but such pieces also became an almost ubiquitous feature of vernacular culture. Though very popular, the poems have been criticized for their low levels of invention and their rhetorical congestion as poets struggled to keep up with the incessant demand for compositions (Jakob Benediktsson 1983:291). It is certainly true that classical rhetorical figures feature prominently in baroque occasional verse, primarily because of the influence of literary models, as poets sought to emulate classical and neo-Latin tradition.

It has been argued that occasional poems have little literary value because they offer no sense of the poet's personal involvement or experience. Yet baroque literary scholars have long recognized that it is meaningless to attempt to distinguish between occasional verse and personal poetry in terms of levels of authorial involvement (Meid 1986, 31–32; van Ingen 1966, 49). Authorial detachment was a conscious artistic priority (Meid 1986, 32). Indeed, as van Ingen has pointed out, such detachment is a characteristic of baroque verse overall: “The detachment arising from the separation of ‘res’ and ‘verba’, which we call ‘rhetorical point of view’, is the most striking

feature of baroque poetry.”¹ The emergence of occasional verse in Scandinavia reflects the influence of new developments in poetry. Erik Sønderholm claims that the poetry of A.S. Vedel (1542–1616), C.C. Lyschander (1558–1624) and Hans Thomissøn (1532–1573) is untouched by baroque influence in terms of structure and style, but he also notes that in one respect Vedel and Lyschander did respond to the winds of literary change from the south by promoting a new genre (occasional poetry) previously unknown in the north. This would in due course become the most enthusiastically cultivated baroque literary genre (Sønderholm 1983, 129–142, especially 130). Stina Hansson has claimed, first, that most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scandinavian poetry may be thought of as occasional verse, either because of the circumstances of its composition or its links with particular events; and second, that even poems not overtly occasional could be opportunistic in nature by including references to specific occasions (Hansson 2002, 41). Storstein and Sørensen define the baroque text as occasional poetry and claim that this includes hymns composed for formal church feast days or moments of private meditation (Storstein and Sørensen 1999, 60).

Occasional verse in Icelandic was first composed around the time of the Reformation (see Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2000, 125ff.). Early Icelandic Lutheran poets such as Ólafur Jónsson of Sandar (1560–1627) composed verse elegies, Einar Sigurðsson of Eydalir (1538–1626) composed eulogies about both Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson and the King of Iceland and Denmark (of which a fragment survives), while séra Magnús Ólafsson of Laufás (d. 1636) composed eulogies and elegies.

As Magnús Jónsson notes, Hallgrímur Pétursson may well have composed a great many occasional pieces:

If we examine his poetry we see clearly that he usually looks for some specific occasion and rarely composes spontaneously [. . .] Sometimes the occasions are important ones [. . .] while elsewhere the poems are of less moment. Few of Hallgrímur’s hymns are general in character.

1. Die Distanzhaltung, die aus der Trennung von „res“ und „verba“ hervorgeht und die wir die „rhetorische Grundhaltung“ nennen, ist das hervorstechendste Merkmal der Barockdichtung (van Ingen 1966, 47).

They are linked to morning and evening, winter and summer, the New Year or the like.²

Magnús Jónsson clearly understood the essence of Hallgrímur Pétursson's poetry; yet that same element, the link between poetry and social events, is characteristic of the broad literary period under discussion here.

The artistic form of European occasional poetry has its origins in classical rhetoric. It makes extensive use of verbal decoration and classical figures of speech, and this helps to explain their popularity at the time (see Segebrecht 1977). The genre also challenged the poet's intellectual creativity (*inventio*). Names were a particularly powerful stimulus in occasional verse, especially the identity of the poem's dedicatee. Poets wishing to exploit a particular name had a number of options: they could use comparison (*collatio*) with a similarly named mythological, biblical or worldly historical figure, or through contrast (*oppositio*) they could create a protagonist wholly unlike the dedicatee. One popular strategy was to exploit the meaning of the name in question (*significatio*). Indeed, the German poetics scholar Magnus Daniel Omeis (1646–1708) lists this feature rather than *loci notationis* as a special *topos ex loco etymologiae*, thereby pointing to a distinctive meaning of the word *notatio*. The actual etymological meaning of the dedicatee's name is rarely mentioned, though it was hard for a woman called Margaret to be married or buried without being compared to a pearl, by virtue of the name's original meaning in Greek. It is more common, however, to find meaning constructed through a name's less obvious associations, as when a Hungarian invasion of Swabia finds itself associated with the marriage of a certain Herr Unger to a Frau Schwab. In occasional poetry the poet must recognize and respect every aspect of the particular occasion (Segebrecht 1977, 113): people, places, times, aims and objectives, as well as the actual events on the day.

2. Ef litið er á ljóð hans, kemur einmitt í ljós, að hann leitar oftast einhvers sérstaks tilefnis, en tekur sig sjaldan til og yrkir upp úr þurru [. . .] Stundum eru tilefnin stór [. . .] Eða þá að ljóðin eru beinlínis tækifærisljóð. Fátt er til dæmis um sálma eftir Hallgrím almenns efnis. Þeir eru tengdir við morgun og kvöld, vetur og sumar, áramót eða annað þess háttar (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:186).

A good example of the guidance available to poets with respect to compositional *inventio* is Omeis's discussion of commemorative poetry, known in German as *Epicedium* and *Leich-Gedicht*.³ He says that "die Erfindungen" [the inventions] should involve the following elements:

1. Praise of the deceased, including discussion of name and nickname, family heirlooms such as weapons and armor, ancestors, positive characteristics, virtues, achievements, learning, offices and works; the individual's behavior in the face of death, signs and omens, last words, and the like.
2. Lamentation of the deceased and arousal of listeners' sorrow. The poet expresses regret for the unbending laws of mortality and the mercilessness of destiny. Greater impact can be achieved when reference is made to the time and circumstances of death, whether the victim was still young or middle-aged, whether it was a time of war or peace, whether death took place at home or among strangers, and whether it came suddenly or after prolonged illness.
3. Consolation deriving *ab Honesto, Utili, Necessario, Jucundo, Tuto* [from honor, usefulness, necessity, delight, safety], and so on. The reader is then reminded that God is the giver of life and death, that God's will must be done, that we as humans must all die, that it is best to reach harbor quickly rather than struggle out at sea for a long time, that it is better to secure the crown than to struggle for it over a long period, and further such sentiments.⁴

Weddings

In his published treatise on poetics, Omeis indicates that marriage poems should express hopes for a continually green and fertile spring in the marriage bed and for healthy offspring, and these are indeed the motifs most commonly to be found at the end of such poems: notably, that marital sex will be happy, and that there will be

3. Magnus Daniel Omeis, *Gründliche Anleitung zur Teutschen accuraten Reim- und Dicht-Kunst* (1704); cited from Segebrecht 1977.

4. Magnus Daniel Omeis, *Gründliche Anleitung zur Teutschen accuraten Reim- und Dicht-Kunst* (1704), 173ff.; cited from Meid 1986, 39–40.

many children. At this time such wishes were not regarded as indecorous, as marriage was a more public and less private matter than it later became. No offence was intended or taken in mentioning the “hjónabandsdugnað” [marital energy] of the newly married couple or its results (Segebrecht 1977, 154). A marriage poem must entertain but also instruct and exhort. It must pay even more heed to its audience than was the case with other literary genres, for not only did listeners enjoy being mentioned in the poem but they wished to be involved in the overall ceremonial game. This effect is achieved by the poet suggesting rather than stating, expressing himself opaquely, and even creating puzzles to involve the audience and test its alertness and intellectual ingenuity (Segebrecht 1977, 160–161). The game sometimes involves the author concealing his own identity completely or only revealing it indirectly in a riddle.⁵

We know a good deal about marriage customs in Iceland in former times, thanks to the survival in manuscript form of ceremonial directions, speeches and toasts (Jón Helgason 1960; Sæmundur Eyjólfsson 1896; Árni Björnsson 1981). Wedding feasts were well attended when leading figures in society were involved and could last for three or four days, or even longer. It has been noted that “it was toasts that made the feasts especially dignified and ceremonial. When a toast was drunk a large vessel was sometimes passed round the table, from which all imbibed.”⁶ Particular formulae were used for each toast, after which there was general singing. *A dróttkvætt*

5. “The author’s game of hide-and-seek is a suitably felicitous and light-hearted way of presenting a wedding poem. It requires from the author not only technical skill but also a keen understanding of the various demands and expectations of the social situation out of which the poem arises. The puzzle and its solution must suit the occasion, and should not be some unseemly product of authorial attention-seeking or vanity, for they serve a different function in helping to ensure that both audience and honoree are entertained, amused and (even) pleasurable instructed.” [Das Versteckspiel der Autoren ist ein dem Anlaß entsprechendes heiter-scherzhaftes Darstellungsmittel des Hochzeitsgedichts; es erfordert vom Autor nicht nur technische Fertigkeiten, sondern auch ein ausgeprägtes Beurteilungsvermögen der verschiedenartigen Ansprüche und Erwartungen sowie der gesellschaftlichen Situation, auf die das Gedicht trifft. Denn das Rätsel und seine Lösung müssen dieser Situation angemessen sein, sie dürfen nicht in unziemlicher Weise nur ein Produkt der Selbstdarstellung oder gar -überschätzung des Autors sein, sondern sie haben eine dienende Funktion: die anregende Unterhaltung, Belustigung und (allenfalls) angenehme Belehrung des Publikums und der Adressaten ist ihre Aufgabe] (Segebrecht 1977, 163–164).

6. Það sem gerði veizluna hátíðlegasta og viðhafnarmesta, voru minnin. Þá er minni var drukkið, var stundum stór skál látin ganga um borðin, og allir drukku af henni (Sæmundur Eyjólfsson 1896, 103).

verse was customarily sung by the master of ceremonies followed by a kind of refrain in quatrain form sung by the guests (*ibid.*, 104). AM 67 8vo includes an account of wedding customs in 1664. The manuscript is mostly in the hand of Jón Guðmundsson (1635–1694) and it later came into the possession of his daughter Elín Jónsdóttir, who in 1699 married Torfi Hannesson, the pastor at Saurbær on Hvalfjarðarströnd (Jón Helgason 1967, 5ff.). The toast formulae in this manuscript reveal a clear awareness of rhetorical practice: “Let us now drink our fill, briskly and with due decorum; let no drop fall from flask or moustache, from headdress or gown, let us be part of and enhance the wedding through our refined behavior and lively entertainment, with elegant language, worthy tales and noble drinking contests; let everyone in this house now delight one another, let everyone take part who can, and may the mild and merciful Lord make all of us happy[. . .].”⁷

Wedding poems had been fashionable in Graeco-Roman culture and the custom was revived in Renaissance Europe. The earliest Icelandic wedding poems are attributed to seventeenth-century poets such as Hallgrímur Pétursson and Stefán Ólafsson (Jakob Benediktsson 1983, 52). One piece, said to be a translation from Danish, can be found in *Kvæðabók úr Vigur* [A poetry book from Vigur] (AM 148 8vo; Jón Helgason 1955, 59–60). The poem contains a variety of wise counsel and good wishes for the bride and groom, though there is no clear indication that it was intended for recitation at the feast. Such pieces have links with poems known as “vítavísur” [forfeit verses] (*ibid.*, 301; Árni Björnsson 1996, 305–319). These were light-hearted rhymes associated with drink, for whoever was “vittur” [under reproof] in the poem as a result of some trifling offence (real or invented) had to pay a forfeit, which would take the form of drinking from the scone cup.⁸ This did not happen until

7. Drekkum nú duganlega, fljótt og fínlega með fagri hegðan, látum hvorki drjúpa af keru né kambi, skauti né skikkjulafi, bætum vér og blíðkum brúðkaupið með mætri menntan og skærri skemmtan, fögrum fagurmælum og drjúgum dæmisögum og drengilegum drykkjupörum; gleðji nú maður mann um allt þetta rann, leggi til hvör eð kann, mildur Guð og miskunnsamur gleðji oss alla saman [. . .]. (Jón Helgason 1967, 17)

8. *Vítavísur* can be found, for example, in *Sth papp 8vo nr. 25*, p. 175ff. The title is “1643. Til minnis: í Reykjahlíð” [1643. For a toast: in Reykjahlíð]. The verses were clearly intended to entertain the wedding guests. For example: “Sigurður Magnússon sýndist mér líka / á sunnudagskvöldi seint í myrkri / brúðina höndum báðum taka /

the formal wedding feast had ended, and revelers were left to atone for earlier transgressions. In these verses “people at the wedding are named, especially those considered important: the bridegroom, clerics, and other learned individuals; Law Council members, the wealthier farmers, and high-ranking young people; and everyone was charged with having done something reprehensible during the festivities” (*ibid.*).⁹ The forfeit verses served the same function as German wedding poems. Everyone would be mentioned by name, so that the guests would feel closely involved in the feast, and the poems would be part of the overall entertainment. Because wedding hymns were associated with drinking, with the narrator toasting the happy couple at certain points, the hymns must have been sung at the feast rather than during the church ceremony.

The composition of Latin wedding verses was popular in seventeenth-century Iceland:

[. . .] while the genre may be over-represented among the works that have been preserved, the output of wedding poems seems to have been rather high in this period measured by Icelandic standards. (Sigurður Pétursson 1995, 118)

Sigurður points out that a neo-Latin wedding poem by Eyjólfur Jónsson (1670–1745), schoolmaster at Hólar, reveals an impressive knowledge of classical poetry, and such approaches and aesthetics may have influenced the composition of vernacular wedding poems in Iceland, though this topic merits further investigation.

The wedding poems attributed to Hallgrímur Pétursson are preserved in a few relatively late manuscripts. It should be noted that there are no external references or internal evidence that enables us definitely to identify Hallgrímur as the poet, or even to confirm the seventeenth century (as opposed to the eighteenth) as the date of

segjandi hann ætlaði að sofa hjá henni” [late on Sunday evening in the dark, Sigurður Magnússon seemed to me to take the bride in his arms, saying that he intended to sleep with her] (Jón Helgason and Anne Holtmark 1941, 10–11; Árni Björnsson 1996, 307).

9. eru nafngreindir brúðkaupsmenn, einkum þeir sem töldust meiri háttar, brúðgumi, prestar og aðrir lærðir menn og valdsmenn, lögréttumenn og aðrir betri bændur og háttsettir yngismenn og hverjum manni fundið eitthvað vítavert, sem honum hafði orðið á í veislunni.

composition. However, we may at least say that there is no reason to believe that Hallgrímur was *not* the author.

“Föður náðar yndis andi” [Blessed spirit of the father] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 96–97), attributed to Hallgrímur, is written in the same meter as his hymn “Arið hýra nú hið nýja” [A happy New Year], with the latter identified as the melody for the wedding hymn, among other pieces. That these two poems are written in the same meter may suggest that Hallgrímur was the author, and yet it could also imply that the first poem has been wrongly attributed. The many whole and half rhymes create some striking sonic effects. The opening two stanzas feature a general prayer for God’s blessing so that people can sing, play instruments and rejoice at the gift of love. In verse 2 there is a reference to food and drink, “kærleiks byrlist öl á skál / okkur smakkist gleðileg gæði” [may love’s ale be brought forth in a bowl, / may we taste joyful kindness] and the wish is expressed that God “geymi frómlegt þel og mál” [should preserve honest heart and speech], meaning that the feasting should proceed with due decorum. Verses 3–4 focus on the nameless bridal couple, for whom a blessing is requested, to the effect that they might enjoy widespread popularity, serve God faithfully, and benefit from good fortune and support in times of adversity. In verse 4 both natural (heaven, earth and water) and supernatural forces (angels) are called upon to bless the couple. In the final two verses the newlyweds are addressed (“ágæt brúðhjón” [worthy couple]): may they love God, hold fast to the path of virtue, enjoy good fortune, be blessed “í heimanmund” [with their dowry] and rear their children well. Overall, the poem resembles an archetypal German wedding poem of the period, and indeed occasional verse in general, in that the good wishes come at the end and are associated with the idea of bridal fertility.

Another wedding poem attributed to Hallgrímur begins “Karbúnkúlus í gulli glær / glóir og skín sem vitum vær” [A clear carbuncle [set] in pure gold / glows and shines, as we know] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 115–117). Carbuncles, fire-red precious stones, were not unknown in Iceland. The 1667 entry in *Vatnsfjarðaramáll yngri* [The younger Vatnsfjörður chronicle] tells of a large Dutch East India vessel that ran aground on Sólheimasandur in the eastern fjords. The cargo had “silki, skarlat, pell, lérept etc., ýmisleg[ir

dýrmætir eðal]steinar og carbunculi [. . .] var þetta góss, sem upp rak, flutt til Bessastaða” [silk, scarlet, skins, linen etc., a variety of precious stones and carbuncles [. . .] after being washed ashore the wares were taken to Bessastaðir] (*Annálar 1400–1800*, 3:42–143). There is no way of knowing whether the poem is referring to these same jewels, as baroque poetic imagery often referred to precious stones, not to mention sugar and honey, candies and marzipan, apples and cherries, and fragrances, especially those from distant lands, such as ambra, musk and jasmine (*Windfuhr 1966*, 242, 247). In the poetry of Bjarni Gissurarson (1960) we find frequent references to lilies, fruit and spices, though these feature less prominently in Icelandic baroque verse than in equivalent German poems.

In Hallgrímur’s wedding poem, however, the bride and groom are compared to a splendid jewel. Like other pieces by Hallgrímur, this poem is sung to the melody “Gæskuríkasti græðari minn” [My most noble healer], and Thomas Kingo made use of this same meter. The first verse describes the beauty of the bride and groom, verse 2 is a panegyric and an exhortation to hymn writing, and verse 3 offers felicitations to the happy couple. The Holy Spirit is then invoked to help ensure warm fellowship at the wedding feast (verses 4–5). The so-called Holy Ghost toast was usually drunk as the third course was being served (*Sæmundur Eyjólfsson 1896*, 105). The hymn uses images of the Holy Spirit, all of which refer to fragrant liquids: “kærasti vökvinn dýr” [the most beloved and precious liquid], “himneska balsam besta” [finest heavenly balsam] and “hunangs sætasta svalalind” [cool spring of sweetest honey]. It offers “hærri vellyst en holdið gleður” [greater favor than flesh can provide], a discrete reference to the forthcoming physical union. Jesus is addressed in verse 6: may he “sem sneri vatni í vín / virti brúðkaup með nálægð sín [who turned water into wine / honored a wedding with his presence] also turn any marital sorrows into the sweetness of solace. The marriage bed is referred to in verse 7, as is the love with which Jesus will cover the couple as he lulls them to sleep, surrounded by guardian angels. The bridal drinking cup is blessed and brought forth in verse 8, “að lands ljúfum vana” [in accordance with the happy custom of the land], and in verse 9 the narrator lifts it up: “held ég nú glaður á hjónaskál” [happily I now hold the bridal cup]. The effect of this verse is heightened by the

use of *accumulatio*, in this case a cluster of nouns: “sól / skjöldur, vernd, heiður, ljós og skjól” [sun, / shield, protection, honor, light and shelter], while verse 10 includes further repetition (*anaphora*):

Gott ár, gott ár, gott ár fáðu,
 gott ár minn hjartans vinur nú
 gott ár þér guðs son veiti
 gott ár þér gefi Guð til sanns
 gott ár fyrir blóð lausnarans
 gott ár þér Guð ei neiti,
 amen, amen,
 hjartað vottar, gefi þér gott ár
 Guð og þínum,
 gott ár um síðir öllum vinum.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 117)

[A good year, a good year, have a good year,
 a good year, my heart's friend,
 a good year may God's Son grant you,
 a good year may God give you for sure,
 a good year for the Savior's blood,
 a good year may God not deny you;
 Amen, amen;
 the heart bears witness, may God grant a good year,
 to you and yours,
 a good year, finally, to all your friends.]

This and the two following verses represent the poem's conclusion, expressing the heartfelt wish that the bridal couple may enjoy good fortune and prosperity.

In the wedding poem “Komið kölluð af Guði” [Come, called by God] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 118–122), after the whole congregation has been addressed, the Holy Ghost, the spirit of truth, is summoned (verses 2–3) and asked to direct everyone and everything towards goodness. In verse 3 we find both verb and noun clusters: “hagi, hegði og stýri / hug, hjarta og ræðu sérhvers manns” [may [the Holy Ghost] order, arrange and direct / every man's mind, heart and word]. In verse 4 the bride and groom are addressed as “elskuleg börn Guðs

bæði” [God’s beloved children both], while in the following verse Jesus is “brúðguminn besti” [the best bridegroom]. The blessing of natural forces, “af himni, lofti og geim” [of sky, air and space], is invoked (verse 6). The narrator invites the couple to hand him the bridal cup (verse 7) and the following verse requests blessings “af himni, sjó og jörð” [from heaven, sea and earth] and beyond. The lines “ærustund ástverkanna / ávaxti Drottins vígslugjörð” [may the honored moment of love’s deeds, / the Lord’s consecrated act, be fruitful] are an obvious reference to the couple’s physical union. At the end of the verse the narrator probably drinks of the bowl: “eg meðtek hjónaskál” [I receive the bridal cup]. In the penultimate stanza (verse 10) there is discussion of love’s ardor, concluding with “Orð mín svo endast þessi, ósk fylgir hjónaskál” [So end these words of mine, a wish follows the bridal cup]. For the poem to conclude with a wish or *votum* reflects rhetorical convention.

Finally, the two-stanza poem “Heilagur Guð sem hjónastétt” [Holy God who established the married state] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 108–109) is worthy of mention. Its wish that “hreinfífis skarti heilög rós / með hagkvæm blómstur fín” [the holy rose of purity flourish / with fine and favorable flowering] is probably a decorous reference to the potential offspring of a fruitful union.

Though the Latin marriage poems composed in Iceland at this time invariably emphasize the bride’s virginal purity (Sigurður Pétursson 1997, 206), for some reason this motif does not find expression in Hallgrímur’s wedding pieces. Nor are any names mentioned and thus there is no opportunity for any associated wordplay, though it does occur in flyting verses such as the wedding poems by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (Seelow 1990, 165). The wedding poems attributed to Hallgrímur are relatively straightforward and reveal little of the creativity, verbal dexterity and learning so characteristic of European baroque verse. Yet they clearly belong to that tradition as we can see from the choice of themes and the various rhetorical figures used.

Congratulations

Hallgrímur Pétursson composed “Nýársósk” [A New Year’s wish] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 162–163) for Ormur Vigfússon (1576–1675), the

magistrate of Eyjar in Kjós, and his wife Guðríður Árnadóttir (1578–1668).¹⁰ The poem has eight six-line stanzas, with an additional *dróttkvætt* verse. Each of the eight verses features an *aabccb* end-rhyme scheme, with feminine (lines 1, 2, 4, 5) and masculine (lines 3, 6) rhymes. The poem is a single unbroken statement of good wishes, expressed in constantly changing vocabulary. The poem is symmetrical in structure with the first three and last three verses expressing congratulations, while verses 4–5 represent the heart of the poem with their references to New Testament readings for the New Year. The opening verse addresses all members of the household, with *anaphora* at the beginning of each line:

Sælir í sönnum Guði
 sælir í Guðs fögnuði
 sælir í sannri trú
 sælir og sviptir vanda
 sælir í heilögum anda
 sælir í sjálfum Jesú.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 162)

[Blessed [are you] in the true God,
 blessed in the joy of God,
 blessed in the true faith,
 blessed and freed from cares,
 blessed in the Holy Ghost,
 blessed in Jesus himself.]

The second verse turns to the husband, with half the lines beginning with “sæll” [Greetings!], while the third verse, addressed to the wife, begins with the same greeting but in the feminine form “sæl.” We learn that both individuals are elderly. In verse 4, attention is directed to the happiness that matters most—to Jesus, the fount of all felicity. Like many New Year’s poems it draws attention to the newborn Christ child and, not infrequently, to his

10. The couple’s granddaughter, Þóra Guðmundsdóttir, married Eyjólfur, the son of Hallgrímur Pétursson.

name “Immanuel,” meaning “God [is] with us.” By comparing the honored couple to Simeon and Anna (at the end of verse 5), Hallgrímur refers to the biblical account (Luke 2:22–39) of the two elderly people, actually unmarried, who lived a life of prayerful piety in the Second Temple in Jerusalem while awaiting the arrival of the Messiah. They had the joy of seeing the baby Jesus when, as the Mosaic law required, Mary and Joseph arrived with their son for the purification rites. All these elements are, of course, examples of *inventio* relating to the subject matter:

Sjáið þá sælu hreina
sem eg kann besta að greina
yður afhendist vel
Jesús það barnið blíða
burt tekur sorg og kvíða
hann er Immanúel.

Þennan elskið og unnið
allra best sem kunnið
bæði þið heiðurshjón
honum af hjarta fagnið
hagkvæma lofgjörð magnið
sem Anna og Simeon.
(*Ljóðmæli* 2, 162)

[Behold the pure bliss
that I can best tell of,
may you both receive it;
Jesus the blessed child
removes stress and sorrow,
he is Immanuel.

May you love and labor for that one
as well as you can;
honored couple, both of you,
welcome him with your heart,
heighten your wholehearted praise,
like Anna and Simeon.]

The narrator then prays that the couple may experience the peace of Jesus and that the light of God's paternal love may strengthen their faith (verse 7). Word clusters are again deployed: "Önd, lífið, sál og sinni, samt lán, heilsa og inni" [Breath, life, heart and soul, also fortune, health and home]. The final stanza features *anaphora* as the couple are addressed jointly (through the second person plural "sæl") in each line. The *dróttkvætt* verse that follows the poem is really an *additamentum votivum*, a supplementary expression of hope for the husband: "Hýr sé hlaðinn æru" [May the genial one be generously honored]. *Dróttkvætt* measure was popular at this time in Iceland, as was half rhyme in an age that relished rhymes of all kinds. The style of the poem is frequently elevated, as in the fourth line here with the "frægð nægð auðar hægðum" cluster:

Hýr sé hlaðinn æru
 horskur lundur lífs stundir
 sem haninn fiðri fínu
 frægð nægð auðar hægðum.
 Kristur með kærleik bestum
 klár á nýju ári
 sendi yður sannleiks anda
 sá skartar best í hjarta.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 163)

[May the genial one be generously honored,
 the wise man all his life's days,
 like the cock in fine feather,
 with fame, plenty and wealth's comforts.
 May Christ with his precious love,
 pure in the New Year,
 send you the spirit of truth;
 it shines best in the heart.]

The New Year

Hallgrímur composed the hymn "Árið hýra nú hið nýja" [A happy New Year] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 38–44) after becoming pastor at Saurbær, when he was no longer poor and still in good health; it was the

best period of his life, during which many of his finest works were written. The hymn features several elements often found in New Year compositions, such as prayers for prosperity on land and sea and for all social classes, and references to the Christ child, not least to the name (Immanuel) by which he is invariably known in the hymns. As we have already noted, though developing new ideas was not a high priority among baroque poets, great importance was placed on expressing familiar concepts in a fresh and compelling way. In the hymn Hallgrímur makes much of the name Jesus, the name of the baby at the heart of the gospel for New Year's Day. Hallgrímur explores the traditional Christian belief that special strength and blessings accompany that name. Another aspect of traditional Christian faith was the circumcision of the Christ child, which also features in the New Year's Day gospel and was thus especially appropriate for inclusion in a New Year's hymn. The poet prays that the blood shed during circumcision should be distributed among men and be a blessing to them; the more familiar image, of course, was of the crucified Christ's blood cleansing and proving a blessing to mankind. The circumcision motif can also be found in Gryphius's gospel sonnets, the eighth of which is entitled "Auff die Beschneidung deß Herrn. Luc. 2" [On the circumcision of the Lord: Luke 2] and begins, "O Blut! O reines Blut! das meine Blutschuld wendet!" [O blood, O pure blood that redeemed my blood debt]. The reference here is certainly to the circumcision.

The poem's meter encourages singing, and several possible melodies are suggested in manuscripts; and subsequently a number of poems were composed that were to be sung to the "Árið hýra" melody. The wedding poem composed by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík finishes with a votive verse in this meter, and was also to be sung to this melody. In addition to its *ababcdcddc* end rhyme scheme, it also features the same kind of half rhymes throughout the verse (see Seelow 1990, 154). The most striking metrical feature is the influence of *dróttkvætt*, as can be seen in each line's internal rhyme. Thus, in the first stanza:

Árið hýra, nú hið nýja
náðar góður sendi landi voru Guð,
þrautir láti frá oss flýja,

fargi sorgum, *endi grand* og *eyði nauð*,
alla fylli gleði gæðum
 gæsku *miskunn* Drottins blíð,
 í *fastri ást* og *frið* af *hæðum*
 stöðugir *stæðum*,
 oss hann blessi árla og síð.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 38–39)]

[A Happy New Year
 may the good God of grace send our land;
 may he rid us of pain,
 remove sorrow, end distress, banish suffering,
 fill us all with bliss,
 the blessed mercy of the Lord of goodness;
 in steadfast love and peace from on high
 let us stand strong;
 may he bless us early and late.]

The poem contains nine stanzas, each nine lines in length. In the first part of each stanza lines with four and five feet (the latter with a “stúfr” [apocopated vowel]) alternate, whereas from the fifth line there are three lines with four feet, then a single line with two, before a final four-foot line appears. Trochaic rhythms predominate throughout. Close examination reveals the remarkable prosodic complexity of the hymn, which English language translations can scarcely hope to reflect. There are half-rhymes in the first two feet of each line: “Árið” / “hýra,” “náðar” / “góður,” “þrautir” / “látí,” “fargi” / “sorgum,” “alla” / “fylli,” “gæsku” / “miskunn,” and so on: eighty-one in all. Moreover, not only are half rhymes everywhere in the third and fourth feet but sometimes a perfect rhyme is also created with an equivalent mid-line phrase in the next but one line, as with “sendi / landi,” “endi / grand” in the first verse or (later) “oss og blessi” / “krossi hressi.” The complexity reaches its height in verse 8, where there are fifteen half-rhymes of the same kind and thirty words that feature vowel + *st*. This creates striking sonic patterns in recitation:

Kasti verstu kostum lasta
 Kristur bestur, hæstur mestur fólki frá,

víst svo traustið festum fasta
 fyrst og síðst þeim glæstum gesti ætíð á,
 ást þíðasta brjóst ei bresti,
 byrstur þjóstur horfinn sé,
 geystum lasta gusti fresti,
 losta lestir
 flestir næsta falli í hlé.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 43)

[May he cast away sins of all kinds,
 Christ the best, most high, from the people,
 so that we may place our faith firmly,
 first and last, in the glorious guest, for ever;
 may the warmest heart not want for love,
 may brusque hatred be gone;
 may the gushing gust of sins relent,
 evil vices—
 may they disappear.]

One defining characteristic of the baroque text is that it seeks to deflect attention from the poem's meaning onto its form through elaborate verbal artifice (Sejersted 1995, 118). This can certainly be observed in the verse just quoted. The hymn was to be sung at a New Year's church service and is therefore an example of baroque religious poetry also serving as occasional verse. It is a prayer for Iceland and its people, and the various social classes are identified: spiritual and secular authorities, commoners and children. The text thus both reflects and promotes the notion of an ordered and orderly society, partly through its wish that all people should conduct themselves in an appropriate manner, that nature should be bountiful, but also through its prayer that all should be content with their lot.

Hallgrímur's New Year hymn "Árið nýtt nú á / í nafni Jesú sæta" [Let us begin the New Year now / in the name of sweet Jesus] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 57–61) is composed in a variant of Sapphic meter (see Jakob Benediktsson 1982; see p. 208):

Árið nýtt nú á
 í nafni Jesú sæta

byrjast blítt þú þá
 þess vel skyldir gæta,
 segjast vítt sú má
 sælu fregnin mæta
 sem böll kann bæta.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 57)

[Let the New Year now
 in the name of sweet Jesus
 begin happily. You then
 have to take care of this,
 widely should be spoken
 this splendid happy news,
 that can redress wretchedness.]

As so often in poetry of this period, New Year hymns feature the formal elements prescribed by rhetorical tradition. These include a reference to the gospel for New Year's Day, in which the son of Mary is given the name Jesus. Accordingly a key element in New Year's poetry is an exploration of the name Jesus and its meaning. The opening verse speaks of starting the New Year in the name of Jesus. Rhetorical decorum also requires the first verse of a poem to serve as an *exordium*, introducing the context and aims of the piece, which, in this instance, relate to the importance of beginning the year in Jesus' name. The *narratio* then takes over, with an initial *oxymoron* about the birth of Christ: "Guð og mann móðir / mey, í heiminn fæddi" [God and man, mother / maiden bore into the world]. After verses 2–5 treat the basic biblical narrative, verse 6 introduces a *propositio* that is a summary of the intellectual core of the *narratio* and also a transition to the *argumentatio* (Breuer 1990, 116). Here Jesus' name is invoked as hopes for a good New Year are expressed:

Árið nýtt nafn þitt
 náðar herrann góði
 gefi oss blítt gagn sitt
 í glöðum friði bjóði
 nákvæmt þítt af nauð kvitt

svo notkist manni og fljóði
 lán og lífs gróði.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 58)

[In the New Year, may your name,
 good Lord of grace,
 grant us its joyous benefit;
 in gladsome peace may it create
 your closeness free from care,
 so it may for man and woman prove
 a source of profit and wealth in life.]

Then *argumentatio* takes over, which here does not mean “argument” as such but rather a deftly arranged collection of examples of those who need and deserve to enjoy the blessing of Jesus’ name during the coming year. In verse 7 the poet prays for Icelandic nature, so that land, sea and sky may prove bountiful. Prayer is then offered for leading figures in the church and other teachers (verse 8), for secular authorities (verse 9), for ordinary folk (verse 10), and for others struggling in a variety of difficult circumstances (“í háska, hryggð / ótta, blygð / stríði, styggð” (verse 11) [in danger, despondency / fear, shame / strife, stress]). In the poem’s final two verses Jesus is addressed directly whereas elsewhere in the poem (except for the *propositio* in verse 6) he is discussed in the third person and the subjunctive mood. As ever with baroque verse the artistic achievement of this poem lies in its verbal ingenuity rather than thematic originality. The hand of Jesus serves as his symbol in verses 9 and 10; in verse 9 there are prayers for those governing the land, asking that Jesus’ hand may guide them, for it can offer instant mercy and help, and he alone “má allt náða” [may forgive everything]. The prayer in the following verse is that the same blessed hand will calm all tempers and temperaments. The poem’s artistry reaches its height at the end of this section when the sources and victims of life’s anxieties are identified: “Í háska og hryggð kvöldum / í ótta og blygð öldum / í stríði og styggð dvöldum” [those who have suffered in danger and despondency / those brought up in fear and shame / those who have lived in strife and stress]. These dangers alternate

with references to God's salvational powers: "herrann Jesús vægi / ástin Drottins hægi / styrk veiti svo nægi / og allt vel lagi" [may the Lord Jesus spare / may God's love relieve / may sufficient strength be granted / and may all be set in order]. The perils of the world from which mankind needs protection are illustrated by a word cluster in verse 12: "frá huga bráðblindum / bræði, heift og níði / glæpa grályndum / guðleysingja lýði / róg, ráni, stríði" [from sudden blind thought, / anger, spite and defamation / malice of crimes / godless masses / rumor, robbery, strife]. In the final stanza (verse 13) Jesus is addressed in two genitive case metaphors: "himins hnoss snjalla, helgast meyjar sæði" [heaven's wondrous blessing, maiden's holiest seed]. The final verse features a prayer that, as so often in such compositions, serves also as a *conclusio*: the exhortation (*adhortatio*) also often takes the form of a prayer (van Ingen 1966, 167). This need not surprise us, as medieval writers had already developed a rhetoric of prayer.

Another New Year's poem attributed to Hallgrímur has a similar opening, "Árið mætt, nytsamt nýtt" [The good year, new and useful] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 45–47). The poem is an acrostic, with the first word of each verse forming the sentence "Árið Guð gott af náð gefi um loft, lög og láð, amen" [May God in his mercy make the year good on land, sea and air, Amen]. The meter is unusual and complex. In each eight-line stanza the odd lines usually have six syllables (two anapests) and the even lines four syllables (as two feet). In each verse the odd lines feature vertical internal rhyme, while the end rhyme scheme is *abababab*. Internal- and end-rhyming words are linked, in that while the vowels change, the consonants remain the same. Thus the first verse has æ + tt, í + tt and ei + tt:

Árið mætt, nytsamt, nýtt,
 nú sé oss veitt,
 friði gætt, blessað blítt,
 best af náð eitt,
 veður hagstætt vermi hlýtt
 vaxi korn feitt,
 guðs lof sætt syngist frítt,
 sífellt óþreytt.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 45–46)

[A good year, useful and new,
 may it now be granted us,
 may it be peaceful, blessed and joyous,
 a year of best grace;
 may weather be fine and warm,
 may corn flourish,
 may God's sweet praise be sung freely,
 freshly and without end.]

The rhymes in the next verse are æ + r, á + r and é + r: “Guð frábær gæði klár / gefur oss hér” [The glorious Lord fine gifts / gives us here]. In itself the substance of the poem is unremarkable, presenting the standard *topoi* of New Year's hymns: prayers of hope for good weather and the future harvest, and of hope for the future and gratitude for the past, references to Jesus' birth (“guð af frú fæddist því” [God born of a lady]: verse 3, l. 1), his redemptive role and name (“náð tilbýr nafn hans mér” [his name makes grace for me]: verse 5), and prayers for everyone and everything on land, sea and air. The final focus shifts from the temporal to the eternal: “fagnaðar eilíft ár / oss veit hjá þér [an everlasting year of great joy / grant us with you] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 47).

Another New Year's poem begins “Árið nýtt gefi gott / guð af náð oss” [A good New Year may / God grant us through his grace] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 51–52). The poem has only three stanzas, and unlike the two pieces attributed to Hallgrímur (discussed above), does not mention Jesus' name or birth. It consists of two stanzas of prayer and a final one of thanks. The artistry lies in the way the poet creates clusters of thematically associated words, as with the nouns and adjectives in verse 1 that refer to nature and fertility: “veðrið hlýtt, loftið blítt, landið frjósamt / sjávargagn, grassins magn, góðan hagskammt” [the weather warm, the air mild, the land fertile, bountiful sea, plentiful grass, a good portion of benefits], while in verse 2 we find nouns and adjectives relating to (especially) Christian virtues: “réttan dug, hreinan hug, heilsu, velferð / alúð, visku, orku, miskunn, ást, tryggð” [due vigor, pure thought, health, welfare / warmth, wisdom, strength, mercy, love, devotion]; then there are verbs clustered with their grammatical objects: “heiðra Guð, halda frið, hreina von, trú /

lifa vel, seðja sál í sjálfum Jesú” [[we shall] honor God, maintain peace, cleanse hope, faith / live well, satiate the soul in Jesus himself]. Care is taken, as in the examples quoted, to ensure that the third and sixth syllables of the first and third line of each stanza always rhyme.

Travel

Hálfdan Einarsson states that Hallgrímur’s travel hymn “Ég byrja reisu mín” [I begin my journey] was composed in 1632 rather than 1637, when the poet and Guðríður Símonardóttir returned to Iceland from Denmark (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 77–79). Hallgrímur was only eighteen years old in 1632 and had been studying at Vor frue skole in Copenhagen. Magnús Jónsson has suggested that Hallgrímur may have intended to return to Iceland that year and composed the poem with such a journey in mind, only for Brynjólfur Sveinsson to advise him to settle down and continue his studies in the Danish capital (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:30–32). However, travel poems were popular in the early and mid-seventeenth century and Hallgrímur may simply have been experimenting with the genre, perhaps at someone’s suggestion, without having any specific travel plans in mind at the time. There is no doubt that the narrator is on his way home but the poem could really be about any journey or traveller.

The hymn was to be sung to the tune “Gleð þig, guðs sonar brúð” [Be glad, bride of God’s son]. As with many other poems by Hallgrímur its structure reflects standard rhetorical practice. The opening verse (the *exordium*), written in the present tense, states that the journey will begin in the name of Jesus and will be guided by his hand. Thereafter the poem features a refrain of elegant simplicity: “Jesús mér fylgi í friði / með fögru englaliði” [may Jesus follow me in peace / with a fair troop of angels]. The *narratio* (in the past tense) begins in verse 2, with a reference to the narrator’s original outward journey: “Móðurjörð minni frá / þín mildin gæsku há / leiddi með lukku blíða / og létti öllum kvíða” [From my mother country / your exalted loving mercy / led [me] with good luck / and lessened all anxiety] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 80). As a parallel and contrast to the “mother land” the next

verse cites God's paternal grace: "Þín föðurleg náðin frí [. . .]" [Thy paternal grace, limitless [. . .].] We then learn that in foreign lands God the Father has provided for the poet's physical needs, both in terms of sustenance and clothing. In verse 4, also part of the *narratio*, he recalls the past and gives thanks for protection received on various occasions (identified in a word cluster): "Frá fári, sorg og sótt / síð, árla, dag og nótt" [From misfortune, sorrow and sickness / late and early, day and night]. The transitional verse 5, the *propositio*, simply restates the poet's gratitude for past times. In verse 6 the poet turns his attention to the forthcoming journey: "Vil ég nú víst til sanns / vitja míns föðurlands . . ." [Now I wish very much / to visit my fatherland [. . .]]. Verses 6–11 include a prayer for the journey home, a section that is in effect the poem's *argumentio*, addressing issues such as why the narrator trusts God's protection, the nature of that protection, and the dangers that lie ahead, including high seas, bad weather and pirates. In verse 12 journey's end is anticipated, when the narrator will be able to thank God in the same way as did "Jakob forðum" [Jacob long ago] after he had struggled with his Lord.¹¹ Verses 13–14 set such gratitude into a wider context: "Þú skalt í allri nauð / ætíð vera minn Guð" [You shall in all troubles / always be my God] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 82).

At this point we are no longer dealing with a single specific venture but with life's journey, and with God as the narrator's guide. Thus, the following verse deals with the ultimate return to the heavenly fatherland: "Ljóst þegar lífið dvín / leið þú mig heim til þín / í föðurlandið fríða / firrtan við allan kvíða" [When the light of life fades / lead me home to you / in the peaceful fatherland / far from all anxiety] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 82). The final verse begins with "Amen" and then simply repeats the essence of the poem: "til skips þá ganga geri / guðs englar með mér veri" [when I make for the ship / may God's angels be with me]. The poet's creativity (*inventio*) can be seen in the way he manipulates "móðurjörð," "föðurleg náð," "föðurland" and the whole idea of the journey. We also see how the literal sense of a journey from

11. "And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

one country to another works alongside the spiritual sense of the whole of life as a journey and ultimately embraces the final journey to the narrator's heavenly home.

Eulogies

A eulogy ought to appeal to the emotions and arouse both grief and solace (see Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2000, 134ff.). The interaction works by first provoking and then containing feelings. Such is the importance of that interplay that we find it structured into the poems, uniting their constituent elements and controlling the overall process. The ensuing contrasts appealed to Renaissance humanists but found special favor during the baroque period when great emphasis was placed on the tensions between the temporal and the eternal (Krummacher 1974, 110–111).

The eulogy as a literary genre (*Epicidium*) consists of two elements: on the one hand, *dispositio* and *inventio*, structure and argumentation, each of which is important when switching between sorrow and solace; and, on the other hand, the motifs that always accompany these two moods. A selection can be made from a wide range of familiar consolatory motifs, which can then be ordered and coordinated in a variety of ways (Krummacher 1974, 113). After comparing commemorative poems by Simon Dach, Paul Fleming, and Andreas Gryphius, Krummacher concludes that some elements are invariably present in commemorative poems but are not always configured in the same way. For example, in one of Fleming's pieces the theme of comfort and solace looms much larger than other elements, to the extent that the poem resembles a *consolatio*, yet the poem's praise for the dead (*laudatio*) helps it to retain its generic identity. One of Gryphius's poems moves twice between sorrow and solace so that the poem has two climaxes. This is because the poem is also a Pindaric ode, with its initial verse (*strophe*), its contrasting *antistrophe*, and a final *epodos* stanza (see Jakob Benediktsson 1983, 197).

Hallgrímur Pétursson's commemorative poem about Árni Oddsson the Lawman (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 142–149) is structured so that the first two stanzas are devoted to sorrow, beginning with an *exclamatio*, “Ó, hvað aumlegt úrræði” [O, how difficult to

find comfort], followed by a depiction of the futility of all human life and the inevitability of death that is (in biblical terms) as sad as “Davíð og Jósúa tér” [David and Joshua say]. The tone of the next two verses is important, as the poet stresses that God’s children need not fear death, for consolation is at hand: their solace lies in the fact that the crucified Christ has broken death’s spear.¹² In verse 5 the focus narrows as the poet seeks comfort following the death of Árne Oddsson. We learn (verses 5–7) that he died believing in the Resurrection, and we then find him rejoicing at the throne of the Lamb. Verses 5–16 are devoted to praise of the deceased, and include a description of his life and official works. Then verses 17–19 treat the circumstances of his death before verse 20 interprets these events. Árne died in an actual pool, while spiritually he was bathed in Jesus’ blood in a sacred baptismal pool, and the pool can also signify the world as a vale of tears, out of which Árne has been led “í himneskan dýrðar sal” [into the heavenly hall of glory]. Such an interpretation is a fine example of the poet’s intellectual agility (*inventio*). The final four verses oscillate between sorrow and solace. In verse 21 there is a further reference to the grief caused by the lawman’s death, which has resulted in “kinnar, brár regni rakna” [cheeks, brows made wet by rain [= tears]] whenever his name is mentioned, with the tears an extension of the earlier water imagery. While verse 22 is part of the solace, beginning “Huggi hans heiðurs kvinnu / heilagur andi best” [May [it] console his honorable widow / most blessed holy spirit], in verse 23 Árne’s death becomes a symbol of national decline as his fatherland is addressed sternly by means of an *apostrophe*: “Ísland, þér ætlar að hnigna” [Iceland, you are sinking into decline]. The rhetorical figure is a familiar one and the poet exhorts his country to mend its ways and understand what peace involves. Those still alive are urged to yearn for and live in hope of eternal bliss, not least the prospect of a joyful reunion with much loved friends in heaven.

The commemorative poem about Jón Sigurðarson the barber (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 136–138) begins with a consolatory section of six stanzas that speak plainly about the solace that Jesus can provide,

12. See *1 Corinth.* 15.55–57.

presenting an image that Hallgrímur relished: the righteous gathered round the throne of God, shining like the sun (or stars). The source is Matthew 13:43: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in their Father’s kingdom.” Successive motifs then appear as part of the *inventio*. The righteous are identified as people who place their hope and trust in Jesus. The peace and rest enjoyed by the departed are stressed (verse 3), as is their opportunity to view the face of God (verse 4). After a further reference to their heavenly repose, the grave is depicted as a bedroom (verse 5), a striking example of how the same phenomenon can be treated very differently depending on generic context; in transience poems and *memento mori* tradition the grave is a dining room for worms, whereas within consolatory tradition it becomes a comfortable bedroom. Reference is then made to the deceased, Jón Sigurðarson, having died in faith and hope, as we have noted. Verses 8–16 are taken up with praise of Jón, including an outline of his career and official works. We learn that everyone misses this good man (verse 17), yet these are the only lines devoted to grief. The details of his age and death are given in verse 18, while the final four stanzas offer prayer for his widow, children and all who grieve, in the hope that they may find comfort. The children are urged to support their mother and all are exhorted to live their lives in the hope of eternal rest.

A commemorative verse about Björn Gíslason, magistrate and Law Council member (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 98–99), is written in a meter resembling Hallgrímur’s variant of Sapphics (see p. 253). The introductory section is short and simple: “Gíslason er Björn burt / beint það hef ég sannspurt” [Björn Gíslason is no more / I have now had it confirmed]. In verse 2 there is praise of the deceased, linked with sorrow over his death. He will be missed for his many good qualities. After the praise of verses 1–5 the sixth stanza reiterates the sense of loss and poses questions (*interrogatio*) that also highlight his importance in the region: “Hver var honum heldri? Hver í Borgarfirði? [Who was more noble than he was? Who in Borgarfjörður?]”¹³ Further consolation is offered, for he

13. The rhetorical device of *interrogatio* is frequently used at the opening of German funeral poems (van Ingen 1966, 224ff.)

now sleeps in bliss and his soul is now with Jesus (verse 7), while at the same time solace is requested for his widow and children. The final verse includes the poet's own wish that he too might die, a conventional final element in commemorative verse, and the poem's consolatory climax, which is linked to thoughts of joyous reunion and heavenly felicity. The poem makes no mention of the terrors of death or the fragility of human life. Hallgrímur also composed two verses about Björn (in a variant of *dróttkvætt*) that were printed together with the commemorative poem in *Hallgrímskver*; these were "Afgenginn liðs ljúfi" [Departed is the people's kindly one] and "Alfrægur heilhugi" [The famous trustworthy one]; see *Ljóðmæli* 2, 1–2). The two stanzas praise the deceased and are probably epitaphs (*epitaphia*). The form is interesting, with verse 1 featuring half rhyme on the first and penultimate syllables of the odd lines and full rhyme on the second and penultimate syllables of the even lines:

Afgenginn lýðs ljúfi,
lundhægur, nafnfrægur,
gestrisinn, hughraustur,
heilráður, gjarn dáða,
mannvalið, siðsvinnur,
sæmd blaðinn, jafnglaður,
guðrækinn, þelþíður,
þolgóður, um ljóðast.
(*Ljóðmæli* 2, 1)

[Departed the people's kindly one,
calm of spirit, famous of name,
generous of welcome, bold of thought,
sound of advice, eager for great deeds,
choicest of men, virtuous,
honor laden, ever genial,
God-fearing, of gentle disposition,
persistent: this poem speaks of him.]

The complexity intensifies in verse 2, with even more elaborate patterns of half and full rhyme in both odd and even lines:

*Alfrægur heilhugi,
 hýr, glaður, skýr maður,
 vang drottins fang fluttur,
 friðsælu Guðs hælir,
 hér minning kær kennist,
 klárt varir burtfarins,
 nafn lifir; staf stefja
 stað þessa að hressi.
 (Ljóðmæli 2, 2)*

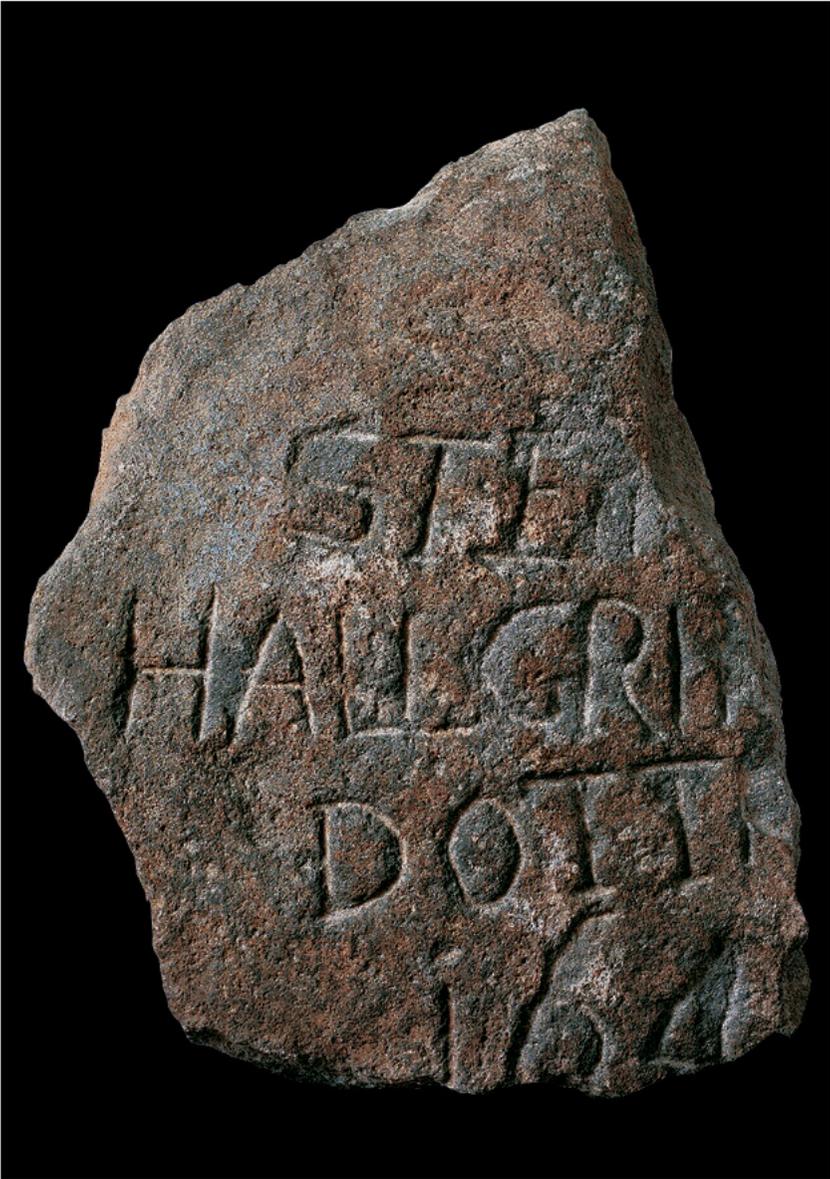
[Famous, honorable,
 genial, happy, intelligent man;
 to the Lord's region and embrace removed,
 in God's peaceful refuge rejoices;
 here may the memory be revered
 of the much loved departed one,
 his name live on; may these lines
 serve to refresh this place.]

Grief is the dominant theme at the opening of the commemorative poem for Árne Gíslason of Ytri-Hólmur on Akranes (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 16–20). In this work there are striking shifts between sorrow and solace. At the start the whole country is lamenting the loss of all its finest men. God punished the Jews by depriving them of good leaders and leaving them with unsatisfactory ones, and the poet suspects that Iceland may now be suffering the same fate. In verse 5 the loss of Árne Gíslason is cited as an example of a death that “eykur gleði tjón” [increases the damage to joy], while Árne himself, by contrast, is sleeping joyful in the Lord and in the hope of resurrection. The possibility is raised (verse 6) that someone may grieve excessively or even “sturlast” [go mad] because of Árne's demise, before the reader is assured that his death is no cause for sorrow because he now lives in glory, singing alongside the Savior. This assertion is then challenged (verse 7): we miss him greatly, pity our poor land, it is impossible not to “andvarpa þungt og gráta / dauða þess drottins manns” [sigh heavily and weep / for the death of this servant of the Lord] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 17). The question about the virtues of the deceased is posed and answered (verse 8):

Hvað hann var hugvits ríkur,
 hver er sá það ei veit?
 Hver hittist honum líkur
 hér nú um vora sveit
 þó gjörð sé á lengri leit?
 Hollráður, hreinlundaður,
 hógvær, mannljúfur, glaður
 [. . .].
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 17)

[He was so full of wisdom,
 who is unaware of this?
 Who will find his equal
 here now in our region,
 though the search be long?
 Wise in counsel, true of temper,
 kindly, warm and cheerful
 [. . .].]

The laudatory section (verses 9–17) then begins and includes a response to the *refutatio*: “Oflofað mætti meinast / mörgum sem heyra kann” [Too much praise might this be thought / to the many who may hear it]. However, the idea that praise for the deceased might be excessive is rejected, for all who knew Árne Gíslason would confirm the truth of everything said about him. The section concludes with a description of the moment of death and how Árne left the world (verses 18–21). The next four stanzas begin with parallel phrases: “Syrgir þig [. . .] lundin mín” [My spirit [. . .] sorrows for you], “Syrgja þig sætir vinir” [Beloved friends are sorrowing for you], “Syrgir nú sorgfull kvinna” [Now a sorrowful wife sorrows for you], “Syrgjandi synir og dætur” [Sorrowing sons and daughters] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 19). But then it is time to put an end to mourning: “Úr brjósti hrindum hryggðum” [From the heart let us remove sorrow] (verse 26). The following two verses set out the three lessons that the community should learn from Árne’s demise, before the final stanza reasserts the idea that immoderate grief is unhealthy, that death will come to all, and that everyone should live and die in the true faith:



Tombstone of Steinunn Hallgrímsdóttir in Hvalsneskirkja. Photograph: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir.

Enginn skal ofmjög þreyja
 annan, því hugsa ber,
 allir eigum að deyja,
 ævin líkamans þver,
 upprisan eftir fer,
 guð láti oss lifa tilbúna
 í lausnarans náð fyrir trúna,
 amen, þess óskum vér.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 20)

[No one should lament too much
 the loss of another, for we should know
 that all must die,
 the life of the body declines,
 the Resurrection then follows;
 may God let us live in readiness,
 in the Redeemer's grace through faith,
 Amen; may this wish be granted.]

Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (1996a) has argued that in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Iceland, the two literary genres that address death and grief were Lutheran commemorative poems and elegies. She identifies the greater personal involvement of the poet in elegy as the principal difference between the two. Though both genres deploy many of the same motifs, in elegies “er það sorgin sem mestu máli skiptir, eða öllu heldur það að syrgja og að komast yfir sorgina” [it is the grief that matters most, or rather grieving and then transcending that grief] (Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 1996a, 84). Though choosing to adopt the term “elegy” for the genre and paying due heed to the British term “funeral elegy,” Þórunn identifies significant differences between British and Icelandic elegiac tradition. She notes that British literary scholars are themselves undecided as to whether the primary focus in elegy is grief or consolation. Þórunn’s analysis of Icelandic elegy draws on seventeenth-century psychological theories about grief and the reactions it generates. The present discussion approaches the poems rather from the perspective

of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poetics and classical rhetoric,¹⁴ and not unnaturally different approaches lead to somewhat different conclusions. Þórunn regards Hallgrímur's poem about his daughter Steinunn as an elegy rather than a eulogy, with grief as its principal theme. The present author believes that consolation was the more prominent focus during the composition of the poem, and that it more closely resembles a *consolatio* than a eulogy or elegy.

However, the work does include what may be termed a *laudatio* section, and its presence may support the idea that the poem can best be thought of as a eulogy. The first part of the poem draws on Revelation. It begins, "Sælar þær sálir eru / sem hér nú skiljast við [. . .] hvílast í himnafrið" [Blessed are those souls / who set off from here now [. . .] rest in heavenly peace] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 158–160). The "hér nú" [here now] phrase may seem strange but derives from the emphasis laid in the biblical text on those who die "from henceforth":

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. (Revelation 14:13; AV)

The entire opening of the poem echoes the memorable description in Revelation:

[14] And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living

14. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has shown that in eulogistic verse "birtist í senn hugmyndaheimur lútherstrúarmanna og áhrif frá klassískum mælskulistar- og bókmenntahefðum" [the Lutheran conceptual world operates alongside the influence of classical rhetorical and literary tradition] (Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2000, 164; more generally, see Þórunn Sigurðardóttir 2014).

fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Revelation 7:14-17; AV)

In the poem we read that the dead are indeed robed in white, symbolizing that they are now clothed in righteousness and without blemish in the eyes of God, and that they sing God's praise both night and day in that wondrous place, relieved of all suffering and sorrow. Magnús Jónsson describes the opening section of the poem thus:

It is strange to read the opening of the poem. The reader does not know where the poet is taking him. There are general descriptions of how the dead have a good home in heaven, three lengthy verses. Has he nothing to say when standing beside his daughter's coffin other than continuously to intone this eulogy?¹⁵

This comment reveals little understanding of the nature of seveneenth-century poetry, though Magnús believes that the poem improves significantly after its disappointing opening. In fact the opening is of crucial importance for the whole poem, establishing its fundamental tone and presenting a clear consolatory vision in which the dead have come “úr miklum harmkvælum” [from great difficulties] and are now permanently safe from them in heaven. The poem describes the souls' beautiful singing of the *Sanctus*, a song of praise from Isaiah (and from Revelation 4:8): “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3; AV). It is a key element in formal Christian observance, notably in the Requiem Mass. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir has pointed out how often the noun “hvíld” and verb “hvílast” [rest] appear and that the term “Requiem” itself means “rest.” The whole point of the poem is that the child is now at rest, as we see when creating a sentence from the initial word of each verse: “Steinunn mín litla hvílist nú” [My little Steinunn is now at rest].

The poem is composed in a heightened style: the souls of God's children enjoy “Tign, æru, sæmd og sóma” [Dignity, repute, honor

15. Er einkennilegt að lesa upphaf kvæðisins. Lesandinn veit ekki, hvert skáldið ætlar með hann. Þar eru almennar útmálanir þess, hve látnir menn eigi góða vist á himnum, þrjú löng erindi. Hefir hann ekki annað að segja við líkbörur dóttur sinnar en þennan líkræðuson? (Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:199).

and esteem] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 159), and we come across an image and comparison that was dear to Hallgrímur: “sem ljósar stjörnur ljóma / lambsins stóli hjá” (ibid.) [like bright stars that shine their light / by the throne of the Lamb]. The poet’s daughter is introduced (verse 4), for this is the heavenly place to which she has been led, and her soul now “ljómar þar skært og skín / í faðmi Jesú fríðum” [shines there bright and radiant / in the embrace of fair Jesus]. This part of the poem has many images of brightness and rejoicing. The child’s suffering at the end of its life is noted (verse 5), but the reader is assured that it is all in the past. The virtues of the child are then commended (verses 7–8), though naturally such praise differs from that directed at a venerable official such as Árni Oddsson; for the subject is a young person who was a source of profound joy to her father. There is a brief mention of sorrow, but those few words also involve the hope of reunion: “því mun ég þig með tárurum / þreyja af huga sárum / heim til þess héðan fer” [therefore I will with tears, / with a grieving heart, miss you / until I make my way home from here] (*Ljóðmæli* 2, 160). In the next verse joy returns, with the narrator recalling happily that the girl was of sound mind and able to speak. The poet then depicts the moment of death, with the child spreading her arms and saying that she wished to be with Jesus. In verse 9 the brevity of life and happiness is noted, but such sadness is transformed into solace, for Steinunn’s soul is in God’s care; while in the final stanza we learn that “hvílist holdið unga” [the young body is at rest], sorrow and grief are no more, sickness and all evil have departed, and the dear child is now able to sleep at peace with the Lord. In fact the author is no more personally involved in this poem than in any other, and the reader is touched most by the fact that the poem’s primary focus is not on grief for the one who has been lost, but rather on those features and memories that can comfort and console.¹⁶

Other Occasional Verse

The poem “Sæl vertu, sæl í Drottni” [Greetings to you, greetings in the Lord], attributed to Hallgrímur, was composed for Guðríður (1639–1728), the young daughter of Stefán Hallkelsson

16. For discussion of a commemorative poem about a little girl, see Battafarano 1994, 429–443.

(1601–1659), pastor at Nes by Seltjörn (Ljóðmæli 2, 155–156). The occasion that gave rise to the poem seems to have been some breach of confidence, with the poet seeking to convince Guðríður that she is without blame in the matter, that the man who betrayed her ought to be ashamed of himself, and that she should start enjoying life again as soon as possible. She later married Helgi Grímsson, a cleric and accomplished manuscript scribe. Hallkell, her brother, was pastor at Hvalsnes from 1655, some four years after Hallgrímur left for Saurbær. The manuscripts that include the poem are relatively late, but the piece could easily have been preserved in oral tradition.

Written in the same meter as the New Year’s hymn “Árið hýra nú hið nýja” is “saung vjisa umm catechism: Luth:” [a verse sung on the Lutheran catechism], the work’s title in the 1773 *Hallgrímskver*. This consists of two verses that may be thought of as a *dedicatio*. Hallgrímur could have composed the piece to accompany an edition of a catechetical work by Luther, perhaps the one published in 1660 (see Magnús Jónsson 1947, 1:337).¹⁷ Among the poem’s stylistic features is the cluster of imperative verbs in the first stanza: “lesið, prísíð” [read, praise], “lærið, heyrið, gerið [. . .] seðjið” [learn, listen, do right [. . .] be satisfied], “njótið, neytið” [enjoy, use], “kannist við” [know about], “leitið [. . .], veitið [. . .], biðjið” [seek [. . .] offer [. . .] pray], while the final lines of the piece offer pithy rules or truths (*gnom* or *sentens*, to use the correct rhetorical terms): “biðjið guð um góðan frið” [pray to God for perfect peace] and “sprettur gott af góðri rót” [goodness grows from a good root]:

Klár Lútheri fræðin fróðir
finna kunna menn hér sett á íslenskt mál,
lesið, prísíð, lýðir góðir,
lærið, heyrið, gerið rétt og seðjið sál;
ljúfra gjafa njótið, neytið,
náðartíðir kannist við,
drottins lítillátir leitið,

17. Martin Luther’s *Catechismus eður kristilegur lærdómur fyrir einfalda presta og predikara, húsbændur og ungmenni* [Catechism, or Christian teaching for ordinary priests and preachers, husbands and young people] was published at Hólar in 1617, with further editions in 1647, 1660 and 1666, 1686 and 1690 (see Halldór Hermannsson 1922, 64–66).

lotning veitið,
 biðjið *guð* um *góðan frið*.

[The faithful Luther's wise words
 may knowing men find here in Icelandic;
 read, laud, good people,
 learn, listen, do right and sate the soul;
 relish and use these gifts,
 recognize the times of grace;
 look to the Lord in humility,
 pay homage,
 pray to God for perfect peace.]

In this chapter we have seen that the occasional verse attributed to Hallgrímur Pétursson includes wedding poems, New Year's hymns, congratulatory verses, travel hymns, commemorative verses, poems for feasts, and pieces about drinking and smoking. In these works the inextricable links between the religious and the secular are clear. Occasional verse is always grounded in religious truth. With commemorative pieces we can identify a tension between the idea that death is irrevocable and grief unbearable and the solace and comfort that accompany faith and hope. Wedding poems are suitably joyous. Nature and the elements are invoked in ways that remind us that sexuality and fertility are part of the natural order. Guests enjoy the food and drink and toasts are proposed. At the same time the Holy Spirit is named, biblical stories are recalled, God's blessing is invoked and hopes are expressed for the couple's future. Similarly, New Year's hymns celebrate the fact that the sun is rising again in the sky, thus providing an occasion for grateful reflection on past achievements, present survival and future prosperity. In this and other poems divine will and providence are indestructible elements in any individual's worldview. In occasional poems, except for commemorative verse, brightness prevails, good wishes are directed widely, and positive signs from the natural elements are eagerly sought. The conceptual world of this period embraced the idea that all life's events and occasions, major and minor, are in God's hands; they have a hidden as well as an obvious meaning, and serve to promote the idea that the ultimate purpose of all human

existence is to achieve eternal life. This notion applies to simple events such as going to sleep at night and waking up next day, as can be seen in many morning and evening hymns composed by baroque writers. Falling asleep can be compared to dying, and therefore men may reflect on their death at bedtime; and arising the following day recalls the resurrection, the victory of life over death, and eternal salvation. Similarly, journeys, marriages, births, book publications and other memorable human events demand and deserve a moment's reflection, for they can have profound meaning; and they also require the support of prayer and the invocation of blessings.

All Hallgrímur Pétursson's occasional verse bears witness to his artistic ambition and learning; and to his understanding of what constituted well-crafted verse in seventeenth-century Iceland. Baroque influence is apparent in his deft use of the resources of classical rhetoric, in the way he embraces ideas about *dispositio* (the ordering and arrangement of material) and *inventio* (seeking out telling examples that support the subject matter), and not least in his deployment of complex meters, some from contemporary Europe, others from medieval Icelandic tradition.

Þæpter filgia Morgun og Svöld Psálmur
með fleirum aðskilnanlegu Lofsaungum.

XXV. Psálmur.

Mikid va tilfallin að sýngja ca öllum
Helgedags Morgnum, nær madur vill
ganga til kirkju.

Lof Dagur i au fre öllum
Lofgjörð; Já: Lof eg
Seige, Lipande Drottin þier,
á Helgum Svöldar Deige,
þyrt en nu birtist mæ, þin
Siartagja skan hreina, Hlj,
þde mæ vel i Nött, Seá ögnum Alla me,
ina, angist Boda og Dött.

2. Mm lidna Þiku alla, á þiggiu þ mi-
barst, þó matti meín til falla, miltur z godur
varst, ey hepnar Allku minar, opt þó eg stígðe
þig Naut eg þvi Næð þin, Naqvam v þun v mig.

3. Svad skal þó Sal min Seigia? Siacand
þina Næð? Ey má þun þ þvi þeigia, and
er betea Næð; Siarta, mal, höld, z ande,
Sjugue z allt mitt sin, Sýnge nu Samfagn,

ande

The opening of "Lofgjörð, já lof ég segi," Lbs 1724 8vo, p. 64. Landsbókasafn Íslands-Háskólabókasafn [National and University Library of Iceland]. Photograph: Jóhanna Ólafsdóttir.