

CHAPTER 11

Satirical Writings

In post-Reformation Iceland, the theme of vices and virtues enjoyed great popularity among poets. Its roots can be traced to classical antiquity and neo-Latin verse (see Friese 1968, 144) and it took a variety of forms, as, for example, in didactic literature where the virtues are extolled, and in satirical writing in which the vices are mocked or excoriated to serve as a warning to potential sinners. Satire is a point of view rather than a poetic theme. It aims to reveal human folly, whether individual or collective: “to expose it to laughter or ridicule in the belief that this is the best way of overcoming it” (Hannes Pétursson 1973, 42).¹ The oldest known text of this kind is the *Saturae* by Lucilius, who lived in the second century BC; this work in turn provided a model for the hexameter *Satirae* of Horace (65–8 BC). Satirical writing in general was widespread in seventeenth-century Europe and rooted to some extent in contemporary reality, though poets also sought inspiration from classical models. It could be comic as Molière had shown so memorably, and his influence can be seen in the works of the Danish writer Mogens Skeel between 1670 and 1680 (Friese 1968, 274). *Sperðill* [Sausage] by Snorri Björnsson of Húsafell (1710–1803) is thought to have been the first play written in Iceland (Árni Ibsen 1996, 595–600; Þórunn Valdimarsdóttir 1996) and is a satire directed against arrogant and foppish behavior. One type of Icelandic satirical literature,

1. Hafa það að hlátri eða spotti í þeirri trú, að þannig verði helzt sigrazt á því

heimsósómakvæði [Poems on worldly folly] was widely popular in Iceland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Satire, of course, exists in an historical context and invariably has a specific purpose (see Könneker 1991, 14). In seventeenth-century European society there were naturally limits as to how far a satirist could go. In Iceland virtually the only texts printed were of a religious nature, and censorship ensured that much the same was true in mainland Scandinavia. Political satire in Denmark could only flourish underground, and such works were never published (*Dansk litteraturhistorie* 3 1983, 265). Denmark's most prominent satirical poet was undoubtedly Jacob Worm (1642–1693) who inveighed like an Old Testament prophet against the society of which he was a disgruntled member; eventually even the king felt the lash of Worm's invective (*Dansk litteraturhistorie* 3 1983, 278–280). He occupied a special position by virtue of his combative attitude towards the good and the great of contemporary society (Sønderholm 1971, Introduction). He was less interested in discussing general social problems than in writing about particular individuals (such as Thomas Kingo, his stepfather) and specific events (*ibid.*).² Worm was eventually sentenced to death but reprieved and sent into exile, where he died at the age of fifty (Sønderholm 1971b, 247 and 257). As we have seen, Stefán Ólafsson was another poet who wrote satirical verse addressing contemporary circumstances (in Iceland), as with his “Danskurinn og fjanskurinn” [The Dane and the damned one], in which he accuses a Danish merchant of using predatory pricing and dodgy scales (Stefán Ólafsson 1886 II, 62) and mocks the way that the Dane inveighs incomprehensibly against the Icelandic locals. The poem ends with the wry observation that “maðurinn kann í íslensku já, já og og” [In Icelandic he knows only “yes, yes” and “and”]. In “Vinumannakvæði” [Workers' poem] Stefán criticizes ordinary folk and identifies some of their worldly foibles: arrogance, idleness, sartorial vanity, and smoking (Stefán Ólafsson 1885 I, 280–281).

Scholars of poetics developed theories as to the appropriate form, function, and style of satirical verse. In his *Buch der deutschen Poeterei* Opitz lists various kinds of poetry, placing satire first and citing

2. Jacob Worm was the son of Sille Lambertsdatter Worm and her first husband, the cleric Peder Jacobsen Worm. Kingo was Peder Worm's assistant pastor and after Peder's death his widow became the first of Kingo's three wives.

Horace, Juvenal, and Persius as examples, all of whom are praised for the excellence of their verse. He argues that “Epigramma” should be included in the overall category, for each utterance is in effect a distilled satire. He defines such poetry in this way:

A satire should include two things: instruction on good morals and honorable change, and polite talk and jokes. But above all and at the same time stern rebukes of vice and reminders of virtue should lie at its heart: this is achieved by all sorts of sharp and subtle language, as if the author is shooting piercing arrows in all directions.³

Thus, a satire ought to be morally uplifting, critical of folly, and unrelenting in urging people to adopt a better way of life. Opitz regards it as appropriate for satire to deploy language that is “sharp,” which was a popular view at the time, and this involved the use of vocabulary that was in some way witty, abrasive, or revealing—like verbal arrows, as Opitz puts it. Such vocabulary was well suited to epigrams and served to conclude poems in the same way as “conceits” (witty and aphoristic phrases) were used by baroque poets in Britain, notably John Donne (King 1982, 40; Hoffmeister 1987, 36). The final line in Stefán Ólafsson’s “Danskurinn og fjanskurinn” is a good example of this “sting in the tail” style.

As for meter and register, satire is not best served by elevated discourse requiring elaborate effects. Vocabulary could be—indeed needed to be—direct and uncompromising, for a key function of such poetry is to mock folly and the foolish. Its linguistic mode is essentially that of the satirico-grotesque (Windfuhr 1966, 288).

In his *Recensus* Páll Vídalín (1667–1727) states that Hallgrímur Pétursson composed “Flærðarsenna” [A satire on treachery] before taking holy orders, which is to say before 1643 or 1644 (Páll Vídalín 1985, 55). Vigfús Jónsson of Hítardalur claims that Hallgrímur composed the poem after a promised cod liver oil bottle [fire lighter]

3. Zue einer Satyra gehören zwey dinge: die lehre von gueten sitten vnd ehrbaren wandel / vnd höffliche reden vnd schertzworte. Ihr vornemstes aber vnd gleichsam als die seele ist / die harte verweisung der laster vnd anmahnung zue der tugend: welches zue vollbringen sie mit allerley stachligen vnd spitzfindigen reden / wie mit scharffen pfeilen / vmb sich scheußt (Opitz 1991, 28).

let him down (Sigurður Nordal 1961, 10; JS 272 4to I, 36v). This information could be interpreted as follows: Hallgrímur composed the poem out of momentary frustration at the malfunctioning of one of life's basic gadgets (a fire lighter), and that at this time, before his ordination, spiritual perspectives were not at the forefront of his mind. Yet Páll Vídalín cites the poem as an example of Hallgrímur's finest work, and if we read it in the light of seventeenth-century scholarly notions about poetry we can see that it is fully in line with best rhetorical practice. The subject matter is both classical and yet thoroughly contemporary, and the poet depicts the world's treacheries with great ingenuity in one stanza after another, using multiple instances and images. It is thus hard to believe that such a poem was simply the work of a momentarily frustrated poet letting off steam; or that it was written for Christian edification or to save anyone's soul. Its primary purpose was to please a learned audience well versed in poetry and poetics.

"Flærðarsenna" has traditionally been called a satirical poem. Sigurður Nordal claims that it was "áhrifameira en flestar aðrar ádeilur Hallgríms" [more impressive than most of Hallgrímur's other satires] (Sigurður Nordal 1961, 10). The title is probably Hallgrímur's own invention. It recalls—and suggests authorial knowledge of—Eddic works such as "Lokasenna," and the subject matter of such traditional flyting pieces always involved conflict or vilification. Other titles in the manuscript include "Gamansvísur sr. H.P. um fláráðan fagurgala" [Comic verses by séra H.P. on false flattery], "Um slægð og hrekki þessarar vondu og vélafullu veraldar" [On the sleights and tricks of this sinful and seductive world], and "Veraldarinnar trúskapur eftir útmálan sr. H.P.S." [The world's reliability as depicted by séra H.P.S.] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:18–21).

The oldest Icelandic example of the meter adopted by Hallgrímur in "Flærðarsenna" must be the "Að iðka gott með æru" [To practice good with honor], a poem by séra Jón Þorsteinsson, the Vestmannaeyjar martyr (Jón Samsonarson 1960, 228).⁴ In each seven-line stanza the first four lines feature alternate rhyme, while the final three lines have both internal and end-rhyme. The internal rhymes receive additional emphasis because the lines end with an incomplete

4. Other Icelandic poets to use this meter include Sigurður Jónsson of Presthólar, Ólafur Einarsson, Stefán Ólafsson and Bjarni Gissurarson; see Jón Samsonarson 1960, 228.

foot: “Meðan *slær* / orð við *eyra*, er mér *kær* / vinur að *heyra*, sé eg *fjær* / svo er það ekki *meira*.” Hallgrímur makes extensive use of internal rhyme in his poetry, far more than other seventeenth-century poets. Such rhyme is sometimes identified as one of the main characteristics of baroque poetry, as with writers such as the Swede Georg Stiernhielm and the German Andreas Gryphius.⁵

“Flærðarsenna” consists of a sequence of images all making the same point. The first five stanzas offer variations on the poem’s basic theme, which is that the world is full of falsehood and anyone unaware of this will soon find out the hard way. The German literary scholar Manfred Windfuhr has argued that the aims of baroque rhetoric resemble those of baroque music, that is, to restate a basic theme (or musical phrase) in as many ways as possible (Windfuhr 1966, 72). “Flærðarsenna” begins with a traditional proverb that can also be found in *Laxdæla saga* (chapter 23): “úlfur rekur (etur) annars erindi” [a wolf devours another’s message]. Sigurður Nordal (1961, 11–13; see *Ljóðmæli* 1:15ff.) has discussed the origin and development of this cryptic remark, whose meaning is that promises are made but not kept. Each stanza presents an image of treachery, while the final line articulates the poem’s laconic conclusion: “ráð er síst að reiða sig upp á marga” [a good idea it is not to rely on many people] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:21). At the level of verbalization there are several examples of word clusters, as at the end of verse 3, where the stress falls on the verbs “kaupa” [buy] and “hlaupa” [run] and then “kallsa, ljúga og raupa” [joke, lie, and boast] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:20). The same effect reappears in verse 5 with “hlæja og hlakka / hrósa um leið, biðja og þakka” [laugh and gloat, / at the same time praise, request, and thank]. There is irony in verse 4 with “Slíkt eru hyggindi haldin / höfðingsskapur og manndyggð þrúð” [This [behavior] is considered to be good sense, / generosity and polite virtue], and again with “hind er á það að heyra” [happiness it is to hear that], where “hind” has the sense of “a source of delight or pleasure” (see Sigurður Nordal 1961, 14), and this in turn means that flattery always sounds or seems good to the individual being flattered.

5. “In Sweden Stiernhielm has introduced a style marked by virtuosic sound effects such as internal rhymes, alliteration, assonance and numerous examples of verbal repetition” [Stiernhielm hat in Schweden einen Stil eingeführt, der von virtuoson Klangeffekten wie Binnenreimen, Alliterationen, Assonanzen und zahlreichen Wortiterationen gekennzeichnet ist] (Olsson 1983, 151). On Gryphius’s style, see, for example, Spahr 1993, 56.

The baroque text assumes that the whole world is symbolic and interpretable. Everything seen and sensed, even in everyday life, has a deeper meaning. In “Flærðarsenna” a potentially banal event such as a broken promise prompts the poet to draw conclusions about the nature of the world. In this way the poet tries to identify a coherent larger-scale meaning behind life’s fleeting moments. The first two stanzas reflect on how problematic it can be to trust others because “vinur í kvöld vélar þig strax að morgni” [a friend in the evening will fool you first thing in the morning] (verse 2). But the poem’s focus is not on deceitful individuals but on the unstable world of which they are a part. It is symbolized by the craft it relishes most: making bronze look like gold. Nothing this side of the grave is what it seems.

Each stanza has its metaphors and similes; thus, a promise or guarantee is unclean wheat (“tryggðagjöld táls með korni” [deception’s trusted payment in corn]; the world is a woman who wraps herself in deceit and lines her dress with unpleasant animal skin, or it is a cat that draws in its claws but might bare them again at any moment, or it is a calfskin, an intriguing if opaque comparison that seems to mean that the world is as soft and slippery as the skin’s surface. The poem’s *conclusio* identifies life’s best qualities. Ferdinand van Ingen notes that the endings of baroque poems are very important, as they present not empty formulae but the essential meaning of the whole poem, often in proverbial or gnomic form. The overall interpretation of the poem must be consistent with its conclusion, where the poet’s real intentions are revealed.⁶ “Flærðarsenna” is unusual in that at the end there is no reference to the soul’s salvation, so often a feature of Hallgrímur’s verse; instead we learn that good fortune involves being alone and self-sufficient. Yet the final verse does refer to virtue and its links with life and death:

6. “A baroque poem ends not with some trite coda but with the core of the entire poetic argument. Conclusions are often gnomic. This element, which summarizes the argument and comparisons, is the main point of the poem. With the conclusion, i.e. the *conclusio*, the poem is complete. The interpretation should also promote this key point, since it will reveal, as Wolfgang Kayser has put it, ‘what the work wishes to be.’” [Der Schluß ist im Barockgedicht nicht irgendeine belanglose Koda, sondern Kern der ganzen dichterischen Aussage. Häufig besteht der Schluß aus einer Gnome. Diese bildet dann, die Argumente und Vergleiche summierend, den Sinnschwerpunkt des Gedichts. Auf den Schluß, d.h. auf die *Conclusio* hin wurde das ganze Gedicht angelegt. Die Interpretation sollte denn auch an diesem wichtigsten Punkt einsetzen, denn hier zeigt sich, wie Wolfgang Kayser es ausgedrückt hat “was das Werk sein *will*”] (van Ingen 1966, 173).

Sá hefði best úr býtum
 sem búa mætti að sínu einn,
 frjáls af lymskunnar lýtum,
 lifir og deyr svo hjartahreinn
 [. . .] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:21)

[He would be most successful
 who could be self-sufficient,
 free of trickery's lies,
 thus living and dying pure in heart
 [. . .]]

Satirical writing in both Iceland and farther afield was directed against matters such as sartorial foppishness and deteriorating standards of behavior. One of the most familiar examples of this is *Veer Scheertz Gedichte* by Hans Willumsen Lauremberg, pieces first published in Low German in 1652 and then translated into Danish later that year. There is criticism of French influence on new modes of dress, behavior, language, and poetry. In his earlier Latin work *Satyra* (1636) Lauremberg criticizes official appointments, greed, false valuations, and social injustice, with his sharpest barbs aimed at the nobility. For centuries there had been a kind of social contract obliging people to dress in a way appropriate to their age, gender, and position. Class divisions ought to be visible and be maintained (not least) in matters of clothing (*Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir* 1985). The complaint was that such long-established traditions of decorum were now under threat, even though some sources tell of prominent officials who were at pains to avoid all sartorial excess, as with Henrik Bjelke, the royal governor, and Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (Helgi Þorláksson 2003, 405).⁷

7. Brynjólfur's dress sense is described: "In dress he was very thrifty and modest, so unconcerned that those of us who were his servants and amanuenses reproached him in private. He responded in this way: because it had pleased God to have him born in a land of sheep's wool, from which clothing could be woven and made cleanly, and not in a land in which silk and cotton would grow to satisfy need, he would happily hold true to that which his homeland had to offer" [Í klæðnaðinum var hann mjög spar og hófsamur, svo vær, sem vorum hans þénarar og amanuenses, átöldum hann þar um heimuglega. Svaraði hann svo: úr því guði hefði þóknast að láta sig fæðast í því landi, sem sauðull tíðkaðist, af hverri klæðnaðurinn mætti vinnast og vefast hreinlega, en ekki í því landi, sem silki og bómull til þarfa yxi, þá vildi hann ljúflega blífa við það, sem hans föðurland af sér gæfi] (Torfi Jónsson 1915, 358–359).

In Hallgrímur's "Oflátungalýsing" [A description of a dandy] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:124–131), written in *vikivaki* meter, the refrain reveals a shrewd understanding of humanity: "það er maður þó hann láti minna" [this is a man (of substance) though he may seem humble], or, in other words, maintaining one's human dignity need not involve behaving arrogantly. Two men are described in the poem, one foolish and vain, the other wise and gentle. As in Sebastian Brant's (1457–1521) *Narrenschiff* the first character is foolish because he has no sense of his limitations ("þeir ætla sér muni vera í valdi / veröldin öll og hennar ljós" [they believe that under their control will be / all the world and its light]), and becomes obsessed with worthless trifles ("hárið ofan á herðar burstar / hér með kampa og skeggið sítt / fis af fötum dregur og dustar / með dávænt belti og handgull nýtt" [hair down to the shoulders brushed, / with moustache and shaggy beard, / feathers from his clothes he flicks and dusts, / with fine belt and new gold band]). He has no sense of eternal perspective because it has never occurred to him that sooner or later death will come calling. To some extent the poem is a meditation on life's pleasures and values but it also recalls *Alamode-Literatur* (as in "Sú er raun það sannast víða" [This is a tried and tested experience], discussed as a transience poem in chapter 10 and in Friese 1968, 265ff.). Verses 1–3 serve as a general introduction but also direct satire toward those who are arrogant, vain, and attention-seeking, though uneducated ("kunna hvorki A né B" [know neither A nor B]), and have no sense of their real situation. In verse 2 three groups of people are treated: the prosperous, the impoverished, and those who care about nothing. The satire is directed against this third group, that is, against a particular type of person rather than a social class. The third verse treats drunkenness and the bad behavior associated with it, particularly among the upper echelons of society. Verses 4–12 describe one sort of individual (or character type), concentrating on his foppish dress:⁸

Ber á höndum breytta hanska,
 buxur fernar klæddur á,
 með knappatreyju og kjólinn franska,

8. See Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1993.

klæðin trúi eg hylji sá,
 sést um hálsinn silkið danska,
 svarðar Heimdalls lagður der,
 margur heldur mikið af sér,
 með stígvél bæði og spora spanska
 spennir út kálfa stinna,
 það er maður þó hann láti minna.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 1:125)

[Wears on his hands decorated gloves,
 dressed in four pairs of trousers,
 with a French buttoned overcoat
 that I believe conceals everything,
 round his neck a Danish silk can be seen,
 on his head a peaked cap of Heimdallur's sward [= of fur],
 many a man thinks much of himself,
 with both boot and Spanish spur,
 stretches out stiff calves;
 this is a man though he behaves like less [of one].]

The haughty behavior that accompanies the extravagant fashions is also mocked: nose in the air, neck stretched, and hands on hips (verse 8), boastfulness (verse 10), indifference to the poor (verse 11), and stupidity and dreariness in conversation (verse 12). In the following three stanzas (verses 13–15) the individual is confronted first by death and then God's anger or the Last Judgment. Things become serious: "Satan klagar, syndin hræðir / samviskan er mjög óhress" [Satan accuses, sin frightens, / conscience is very sick] (verse 15). The last five verses represent the conclusion, with prayer and Christian meditation on all matters arising. The poem ends by stating that "ekki á gangi gaman" [there is no fun afoot here] but rather issues of extreme gravity, and yet parts of the poem are clearly intended to amuse readers, such as the description of a man in the buttoned jacket strutting his stuff with his nose in the air, and also the moment on Judgment Day when he looks around for help: "sé hann þá sem kusi eða kálfur / að kalla á þann sem bjargir lér" [he is then like a bullock or calf, / calling for the One who can save them] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:129). Though the criticism is directed at

life-style and everyday behavior, the baroque poet does not stop there, preferring to situate such images in a broader context and to explore the mundane against the backdrop of eternity.

The complex form used in the final stanza is the very essence of Hallgrímur's style. Some sense of the intricate network of internal and end-rhymes, both half and full, emerges from the italicized syllables below:

Bið ég gæða þýðar þjóðir
 þykkjast *ekki kvæðið við*
heldur vildi heiðursbróðir
hlýða fróðum ráðasið.
 Viskuhorskir, glaðir, góðir
 gleymi slæmu, tíminn þver!
 Margur heldur mikið af sér.
 Förum dýrar friðar slóðir
 en forðumst gerðir hinna
 sem lærðu of seint að láta nokkuð minna.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 1:131)

[I pray all good people—
 take no offence at the poem;
 I wish an honored brother
 would obey wise counsel.
 Those conscience-wise, glad and good,
 should forget the bad; time passes.
 Many think much of themselves.
 Let us follow the precious paths of peace
 and forego the follies of others
 who learned too late to be humble.]

In the poem “Öldin óðum spillist” [The age is corrupting fast] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:174–177), the narrator discusses the nature of the world, as we learn in the refrain, “Hversu heimi er háttað, það hef eg vel séð” [How the world is ordered, this have I seen clearly]. It begins with a general description of contemporary life, where many have adopted bad habits of every kind and strayed from the path of righteousness. But this is just on the surface. The baroque

text digs deeper and addresses the root of the problem: “upphaf allra klækja er ágirnd fast að rækja” (verse 2) [the start of all trickery straight to greed can be traced], with the poet echoing the biblical warning that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Greed is then personified and plays a key role in the subsequent verses, travelling between homesteads, causing strife (“kemur hún illu til leiðar” [she brings trouble to pass]) wherever she finds lodging (“tekur til húsrúm”). Men accumulate riches and pawn their souls. The poem’s message is made more immediate by its claim that everyone understands the problem: “víst um vora daga / veit eg að þvílíkt hefur skeð!” [certain it is in our days, / sure I am that such has happened]. As so often in Hallgrímur’s poetry the theme of bribery is raised, as the laws of the land are “nöguð” [nibbled away]: “mútur málin draga / meinlaus fellur oft fyrir það” [bribery drives events, / the innocent one often falls for this]. Sin rules, virtue has vanished, which leads the poet to conclude that “Von er að heimurinn endi!” [the word is that the world may end]. The next verse depicts Mammon who will be unable to help “þá búkurinn liggur dauður / leirinn rotast rauður / ríkiskroppnum utan að” [when the corpse lies dead, / the red clay rots / the rich man’s carcass from the outside] (verse 7). The contrast is stark: honor and wealth on the one hand, a worthless bed of clay on the other. The poem ends with an exhortation: “Sjá til að sálin lendi / um síðir í Drottins hendi / oft það efnið kenndi / einn sá þessa vísu kvað” [Make sure that the soul ends up / in the Lord’s safe keeping; / often he this lesson taught, / the one who these lines made] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:177). This must refer to the pastoral role of the poet but it also prompts us to consider the connection between satirical writing and preaching. Barbara Könniker notes this link with reference to the satirical verse of Thomas Murner (1475–1537), as the poet repeatedly indicates that his satires emerged from sermons (Könniker 1991, 73).

Hallgrímur’s poem can be read at four exegetical levels. The literal meaning relates to the state of contemporary society; at a deeper allegorical level we are to understand that the world is governed by evil forces (greed and Mammon); the moral meaning or admonition involves the need to develop a true understanding of the spirit of human life; and this, in turn, is achieved by recognizing

that all must die eventually. People are urged to ensure that their souls end up securely in God's keeping. The final level of meaning refers to those eternal perspectives that should be the principal focus in each individual's life. The world view reflected in this poem is entirely characteristic of baroque satire.

A similar philosophy can be found in the *dróttkvætt* verse that begins “Ríkir falla í ráðsök” [The rich judge wrongly] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:155):

Ríkir falla í ráðsök,
 reyna þar með hálsbein,
 rétt er að þeim féð frítt
 flenna greipar valdsmenn
 bleytir mútan meinshnútt,
 má hann kallast hreinn þá,
 glotta við og gefa kvitt,
 góna upp á Mammon.

[The rich judge wrongly,
 and risk their necks;
 they proffer riches to the powerful,
 who reach our their palms;
 a bribe moistens the harm-knot,
 the matter is then said to be settled;
 grin and forgive,
 gape up at Mammon.]

This satire is directed at powerful officials in society. The verse offers a vivid and squalid depiction of bribery in action. Though nothing is known about the particular historical circumstances behind the poem, as so often with satirical works, it was certainly the case that during Hallgrímur's lifetime justice was often elusive and bribery endemic (see Helgi Þorláksson 2003, 400–402).

A similar verse begins “Réttur þver, rjúfast sættir” [Righteousness wanes, settlements riven], composed in a variant of *dróttkvætt*. The themes are bribery, corrupt justice, and the suffering of the innocent. Behind the contemporary world as depicted we sense the underlying decay and transience, but eventually distorted earthly judgments will give way to the Last Judgment and eternity. These *dróttkvætt*

stanzas resemble *lausavísur* but are also similar to classical epigrams. The work concludes by redirecting attention from the contemporary to the eternal:

Réttur þver, rjúfast sættir,
 ræður fé, það er mæða,
 grét saklaus, gefast mútur,
 grandar margt, spillist landið.
 Dæmist rangt, fellur frami,
 friður burt, illur siður,
 amar flest, eilífð kemur,
 endar sorg, þar við lendir.
 (*Ljóðmæli* 1:152)

[Righteousness wanes, settlements riven,
 money rules, woe it is;
 the innocent cried, bribes are given,
 much is corrupted, the land harmed.
 Judgments wrong, prowess fails,
 peace departed, evil practice;
 much is awry, eternity comes,
 sorrow ends; that's how it'll be.]

“Vond ertu veröld” [Wicked are you, world] is a poem that in most manuscript versions consists of two eight-line stanzas sometimes bearing the title “Veröldinni tildrukkið” [Cheers to the world!], though in one version it is called “Um heimsins ósóma” [On the world’s disgrace] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:169). The lines consist of three feet, each normally of two syllables. The first line of the opening stanza is an exception, as the initial foot has just a single syllable, which serves to place particular emphasis on the opening adjective: “*Vond* ertu veröld.” The last syllable of each line in each verse is emphasized by rhyme even where it falls on the unstressed second syllable in a trochee: “*veröld*,” “*margföld*.” The first stanza is as follows:

Vond ertu veröld
 með vélabrögðin margföld,
 þeir fá skjaldan góð gjöld,

sem gefa sig í þín höld,
 þú ritar einum spottspjöld
 og spér hann upp í há völd,
 mútur, flærð og mein köld
 markað er á þinn skjöld.

[Wicked are you, world
 with wiles of many kinds;
 they seldom gain good gifts
 who grant you full control;
 you cut for one a mocking stave,
 demean him to the mighty;
 betrayal, bribes, and cold distress
 are blazoned on your shield.]

This is a typical vision of a world that is corrupt beneath the surface, and the second verse adds, “hvergi muntu heilsmíð / þó haldin verðir dáfríð” [sound throughout you are not / though you seem to be very fair]. The poem concludes that they are happy who do not allow themselves to be deceived by the world, and that nothing is what it seems. From a baroque perspective, salvation depends on each individual soul understanding this.

It has been suggested that satire is the opposite of panegyric, a kind of poetic response or reply to that genre (Könneker 1991, 13; Gaier 1967, 432). In Hallgrímur’s “Aldarháttur” [On the spirit of the age] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:34–41), the two elements are combined: praise for former heroes and criticism of contemporary figures. The poem has two sections of equal length; while the former tells of great deeds in former times, the latter points to the modest achievements during the poet’s own lifetime. The structure of the poem reflects the influence of classical rhetoric. The first stanza is an *exordium*, introducing the subject matter with a reference to reliable sources about the bravery and energy of heroes of old. The following nine stanzas may be called the *narratio*, in which the heroic age is depicted. The turning point appears in verse 11, a *propositio*, in which the essence of the poem is set out clearly: the heroic age has changed into something that deserves criticism. This same verse also provides a transition to the next section (*argumentatio*), in which

evidence is assembled in support of the narrator's view. The poem concludes with a conventional *peroratio* or *conclusio*, in which all viewpoints are explained, the main arguments assembled, and a judgment reached.

Baroque poets drew freely on other texts in their compositions: they composed “gegnum hefðina” [through tradition], as it were. One way of doing so was simply to treat classical authors as models; this was indeed known as *imitatio*, and several Scandinavian poets followed the practice (see Friese 1968, 84–89). In “Aldarháttur” Hallgrímur Pétursson used a different literary model, the *dróttkvætt* verses from *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Flateyjarbók* (see Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1994). This need not surprise us, as he had been preparing a commentary on these verses. The verbal echoes are clear, and this in turn helps us to date “Aldarháttur” to ca. 1663 and no earlier. Such a dating prompts us to reflect on the possible circumstances that might have encouraged Hallgrímur to compose the work. He was not alone in regarding Old Norse-Icelandic poetry as a rich literary inheritance that could guide and inspire contemporary poets. Indeed the same year saw the publication in Denmark of Peder Syv's *Nogle Betænkninger om det Cimbriske Sprog* [Some thoughts on the Cimbric language], in which the author is identified as the “kongelig filolog i det danske sprog” [royal philologist in the Danish language]. Syv claims that old northern poets were in no way inferior to their Graeco-Roman predecessors, singling out their poetic language for special praise. A later, unfinished work by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (in AM 986 4to) makes the same comparison, in seeking to demonstrate that the early northern poets were excellent models for modern writers. Such views mark a revival of interest in early Norse literature that was to leave its mark on late seventeenth-century poetry in Iceland and farther afield.

In “Aldarháttur” Hallgrímur makes use of traditional kennings (for example, “valjörð” [falcon-ground = hand (on which the falcon sits)]), his own kennings (as with “kokks hnífa grélur” [the conflicts of cook's knives = battles]), and kennings created from traditional poetic language (for example, “rof Hlakkar tjalda” [tears of the tents of Hlökk = battle]; see also Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1994). The evidence suggests that the interest in Eddic poetry that developed during the seventeenth century represents not so much a simple

return to the past but rather a process of Icelandic literary renewal influenced by contemporary European baroque verse, with its fondness for classical figures of speech often involving complex periphrasis. The Swedish poet Haquin Spegel (1645–1714) refers to the world as “Thet blaa-Turkoser Hwalf” [that turquoise-blue heaven] and “Saphire-Hwalf” [sapphire heaven]; Thomas Kingo (1634–1703) calls the sea “den vejløse Vej, den silbrig Velte-Bølge, den skum-krused Mark” [the trackless way, the silver rolling-wave, the foam curling field] (Friese 1968, 116). The parallels between such images and the language of kennings are clear. In his discussion of the figurative language and vocabulary of geographical description in Kingo’s poems, Martin Wittenberg (1972) shows that along with the familiar baroque fondness for classical rhetoric the poet also made use of what might be called national ornamentation (*nationalen Ornatus*). Features include expressions that resemble traditional kennings, as when Kingo calls the sea “salten bølge vogn” [salt billow wagon] (Kingo 1975 2:19; see Wittenberg 1972, 189).⁹ Wittenberg believes that Kingo regarded such locutions as a consciously Scandinavian response to Graeco-Roman verbal filigree, and so did Georg Stiernhielm (1598–1672) in his poem *Hercules* (Friese 1999, 24–53; Friese 1968, 93). Kingo sought to cultivate the Norse poetic heritage—he calls himself a “skald” and his work “skjaldre-konst” [skaldic art]. Icelandic poets would have found such attitudes both welcome and persuasive. Iceland’s own poetic renewal clearly owed a great deal to the influence of humanism, most clearly reflected in the renewed interest in Old Icelandic poetry and prose (see Jakob Benediktsson 1987a). This movement can be traced to the writings of Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned. Initially his works attracted the attention of foreign scholars as they began to appreciate the importance of Icelandic manuscripts as sources for Scandinavian history, but Arngrímur’s work later helped to develop the awareness of Icelandic scholars towards their national history and culture. Hallgrímur Pétursson’s “Aldarháttur” is an excellent example of this new historical consciousness.

The poem offers a striking comparison between the poet’s own

9. Unlike Old Norse kennings, Kingo’s myth-based metaphors never made excessive demands on the reader (Wittenberg 1972, 181).

time and those earlier centuries when Icelanders were subject to no foreign royal power: at that time “Ísland má sanna það átti vöð manna þá allt stóð í blóma” [it may truly be said that Iceland had the best of men when all was flourishing] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:36). Those heroic figures had valued their freedom more than gold and were uncowed by threats: “fyrr frelsi kjörðu en Fáfnis skriðjörðu þó flest kostar ættu; / geði þá hörðu var hótað einörðu með hugþrýði mættu” [they preferred freedom to Fafnir’s crawling ground [= gold], though their choices were many; / when cruelty was threatened they confronted it with courage] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:37). And if there is always some specific purpose behind satirical verse then it is not hard to associate this poem with the events of the 1662 Kópavogur assembly. Naturally the text makes no such explicit reference, but we should recall that in seventeenth-century Iceland there was no freedom of speech or thought. Some would pay dearly for criticizing the authorities, as Guðmundur Andrússon did when he was shipped off to Copenhagen and imprisoned for his criticism (in his *Discursus oppositivus*) of the mid-sixteenth-century Stóridómur legislation (see Guðmundur Andrússon 1948; Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 135). Though the royal homage paid in Kópavogur could be described as just a matter of formal observance that changed nothing as far as the Icelanders were concerned, there is one clause that must have been difficult to accept; the Icelandic representatives had to sign a special document renouncing everything involved “í fyrri fríheitum, landslögum” [in former rights, laws of the land] that conflicted with absolute royal authority. Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson tried to protest against this but the Danish governor drew attention to the soldiers under his command, and eventually the point was conceded and the document signed. All the Icelanders present were thus required to renounce the laws of the land; in “Aldarháttur” Hallgrímur says that earlier Icelandic heroes “Land lögum vörðu, vitug ráð gjörðu” [the land by laws defended, wise counsel gave]. This wording echoes a verse in *Flateyjarbók* referring to the defense of the country. In his commentary (referred to above) Hallgrímur notes that “landvörður er höfðingi sá er land sitt ver” [a leader is that nobleman who defends his land] (see Margrét Eggertsdóttir 1994, 562). This may well be an oblique allusion to (then) current events, with early Icelandic verse providing a form of words.

The interest of “Aldarháttur” lies not just in its ideas but also in its metrical and structural innovations. The poem is written for an educated audience rather than for young people, or the laity at large, or Hallgrímur’s own congregation. Such an audience could be found at Skálholt or Hólar, and the piece was probably composed during the winter that Hallgrímur spent at Skálholt or shortly afterwards. The poem is written in classical hexameter, or, rather, a variant known as Leonine verse; it is the first example in Icelandic poetry (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1949, 182ff.). At this time in Germany and in Scandinavia poets were experimenting with hexameter and other classical measures such as the twelve-syllable Alexandrine line. In this respect, then, Hallgrímur’s poem is both innovative and yet influenced by a European model. Georg Stiernhielm composed *Hercules* in 1658 and called it “Carmen Heroicum” [A heroic song]. It, too, is composed in hexameters and discusses ancestral virtues alongside contemporary follies. Stiernhielm colors his poem with Old Swedish vocabulary much as Hallgrímur uses Old Icelandic poetic diction in “Aldarháttur” (Friese 1968, 92–93). Anders Christensen Arrebo (1587–1637) was the first Danish poet to use rhymed hexameters in his epic poem *Hexaëmeron*:

Oc med Hierternes Bøn / højt ofver Himlene svinge,
 Siungende Lofsang skøn / som vel for Herren kand klinge
 (Arrebo 1965 1, 69)

[And with hearts’ prayer, swirling high over the heavens,
 singing beautiful praise songs, that sound well for the Lord]

This meter is discussed by Hans Mikkelsen Ravn (1610–1663) in his *Rhythmologia danica msc. epitome brevissima* (1649). He deals in particular with a variant called *Carmen Aróensianum* after “dets opfinder, mester Anders Arrebo” [its originator, Master Anders Arrebo]. Arrebo uses single internal and end-rhyme whereas Hallgrímur doubles these rhymes to establish Leonine meter, a hexameter variant widely used in medieval writing (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1949, 181). Ravn describes its features: “Ud over liniernes slutrim kan de to forreste adonikere have indrim” [In addition to the rhyme at the end of the line the first two feet have internal rhyme] (*Danske metrikere* 1953, 300). He includes an example:

Lidet at *dricke* / tuctig sig *skicke* / lader ick' *ilde* /
 Meget at *dricke* / galen sig *skicke* / ligesom *Vilde* /
 Gifver baad' *Harme* / Folcket gjør *arme* snarlig med *skamme* /
 Siden maae *mange* Staadegang *gange* / lidet da *bramme*.

[Little to drink / behave well / allow nothing bad,
 much to drink / behave noisily / like wild things,
 causes harm / soon makes people weak with shame;
 many are then reduced to beggary / with little to brag about.]

It is possible that Hallgrímur was influenced by Arrebo's work (see *Dansk litteraturhistorie* 3 1983, 113).¹⁰ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1949) believes that Hallgrímur may have known of Danish and Swedish experiments with hexameter, but points out that Hallgrímur would in any case have read hexameter texts by Virgil or Ovid during his school years and so must have been very familiar with the measure (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1949, 183). Einar Ólafur also notes that Hallgrímur's hexameter poem "Stund er sú seinasta" [This is the last hour] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:156–157) is a translation of Bernard of Morlaix's Latin work "Hora novissima" (ca. 1140) (see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1949, 178–185).¹¹ This work warns man to be on his guard because Judgment Day is imminent:

Stund er sú seinasta, ill og óhreinasta, oss ber að vaka.
 Reiknast sem ókominn réttláti dómarinn reikning að taka.
 Ókominn, ókominn, að afmá rangindin, en jöfnuð krýna.
 Umbuna réttindin, reka burt illindin, ríkið sitt léna.

[The final hour is upon us, evil and most foul; we must be on our guard.

Still to come, the just Judge is to draw up his account.

Still to come, still to come, to crush wrong, and crown righteousness.

To reward justice, to drive away evil, to establish his kingdom.]

10. In fact Arrebo does not have full command of the meter and switches to Alexandrines in the middle of the work. This meter seems not to have appealed to Icelandic poets in the seventeenth century or later.

11. Bernard of Morlaix (or Bernard of Cluny) was a monk renowned for his preaching and poetry whose best-known work was *De contemptu mundi*.

As we have noted, during the first decades after the Reformation there were those who believed that the last days and the end of the world were imminent (see, for example, Pago 1992). Such ideas had been widespread in medieval Europe as a result of apocalyptic prophecies and scholarship (see Le Goff 1984 and others).

Hallgrímur clearly had experience with hexameter composition, because there are verses by him in that measure, such as “Holdið ofkát” [The over-eager flesh] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:106) and “Maður að gá” [Man, beware!] (*Ljóðmæli* 1:117–118), and these pieces seem to have prepared the way for “Aldarháttur.” This is confirmed by séra Halldór Jónsson of Staðir in Grunnavík, who wrote a commentary on the poem:

This kind of meter has not previously been common in our Norse poetry. Instead the poet [Hallgrímur] formed the Latin six-measure meter, especially in the old verses that he himself turned expertly and fluently into Icelandic poetry (several years before he composed “Aldarháttur”), as the accompanying verse shows.¹²

“Maður að gá” generally appears in both Latin and Icelandic in manuscript and printed versions, though the origins of the Latin version are unknown: it may even be Hallgrímur’s own composition. The subject matter of these verses has more in common with satirical writing than with poetry about transience. Readers are warned to proceed with caution in everything they do and to avoid arrogance, because good fortune can never be trusted: “lukkan mjög dá / kann læðast þér frá / það lát þig ei pretta” [this very blessed luck / can leave you; / let it not deceive you]. There is no known Latin model for the “Holdið ofkát” poem, and it may have been just a metrical exercise by Hallgrímur. The subject is earthly transience and the imminence of death (*memento mori*); the flesh signifies the biblical Adam, “hinn gamla mann” [the old man]. He who aims high, trusting in his own strength and reputation, may

12. Bragarháttur flokksins hefur ekki fyrr tíðkast í vorum norrænum skáldskap, heldur myndaði skáldið hann eftir sexstuðla brag latínumálsins, sérdeilis eftir þessum gömlu versum, sem hann sjálfur sneri í íslensk ljóð (nokkrum árum áður en hann orti þennan Aldarhátt) vel og mjúklega sem sjálft erindið hér meðfylgjandi sýnir (JS 272 II 4to, 326v).

forget that “sá er við gátt” [that one is at the door] who will bring him down: that is, death itself.

Though transience poems and satirical writing are two separate literary genres, they are closely linked, as for example in their treatment of earthly possessions and death. Yet whereas transience poetry depicts an unstable and insecure world that collapses like a house of cards before the reader’s eyes, in satirical verse we find a world in which everything is inverted and misdirected. Satirical writing seeks to highlight error and restore order. Thus seventeenth-century satirical poetry turns on the idea that God created the world as a carefully planned whole in which each element has its assigned place and responsibilities. Anything that threatens or disrupts this divinely ordained configuration must be opposed. In this way seventeenth-century social criticism serves often to reinforce still further the idea of a fixed and unchangeable world (see Friese 1968, 265).

At the beginning of the present chapter we noted that satirical writing was invariably linked in some way to contemporary events. This is certainly the case with some of Hallgrímur’s satirical poems, for example “Aldarháttur” and “Flærðarsenna.” At the same time a variety of literary influences and models are in evidence, both contemporary and classical, as noted earlier in relation to the verse based on the Bernard of Morlaix poem. Another example is Stefán Ólafsson’s “Um þá fyrri öld og þessa” [On the former age and the present], which, based as it on a poem by Boethius (ca. 480–524), cannot be regarded as a direct source for seventeenth-century Icelandic social history, even though we may imagine that Stefán regarded his composition as entirely relevant for his own times (see Ringler 1966). When Hallgrímur’s poems are examined in detail we find frequent oblique references to contemporary life, even though definite links to specific events or occasions are hard to establish. Most of his poems treat the popular seventeenth-century theme of the world and its nature, and tend to set current problems against the broader and ultimately more crucial perspective of man’s salvation. This is not the case with “Aldarháttur,” however, for the poem’s precise and symmetrical structure can only accommodate contrasts between former virtues and present vices. The subject matter, meter, structure, and rhetorical effects mark it out as a baroque text composed within Icelandic literary tradition. “Flærðarsenna” is a

satire in which for the poet particular events represent proof of the world's deceitful nature. Thus Hallgrímur, like other baroque poets, found it natural to view everything within the wider context of life, death, and eternity. Nevertheless satirical verse provides us with an insight into seventeenth-century reality and especially into the mindset of Hallgrímur Pétursson. As we have seen, he was not alone in inveighing against arrogant behavior and foppish dress; indeed, complaints against such elements became fashionable. The same can be said about complaints against covetousness and greed, injustice, and tyranny against the poor. Yet no one reading Hallgrímur's poetry can be in any doubt that his complaints, however formulaic, were rooted in uncomfortable contemporary realities, even though the individual pretexts and details are now long forgotten.