

Árni Oddsson: A Memorial Address

This chapter will examine *Burtfararminning Árna Oddssonar* [Memorial address for Árni Oddsson], composed by Hallgrímur Pétursson after the death of the *lögmaður* [lawman] and sent to his family with an accompanying letter. Hallgrímur composed the obituaries for Árni discussed in chapter 12. The letter indicates that Hallgrímur had been prevented from attending Árni's funeral but nevertheless wished to honor him in writing. The manuscript text (JS 92 8vo) has been printed in Magnús Jónsson's *Hallgrímur Pétursson* II (1947, 249–268); in the present discussion all quotations and page numbers derive from or refer to the printed version. In his introduction Magnús describes Hallgrímur's address as unique and unrelated to all Hallgrímur's other works (Magnús Jónsson II 1947, 249). Yet the text refers in various ways to Hallgrímur's poetry and certainly sheds further light on the author's other writings. It is the only extant address of its kind by Hallgrímur and therefore represents important evidence about the poet's learning and working methods, confirming that Hallgrímur follows the rules and conventions of classical rhetoric as closely in prose as in poetry.

The address begins with the letter addressed to Árni's widow, Þórdís Jónsdóttir, and her children, Jón, Sigurður, and Helga. We learn that Sigurður was by this time a member of the Law Council and that Helga had married a learned preacher, séra Þórður Jónsson of Hítardalur; the recipients are thus people from the upper ranks of Icelandic society. The letter is dated 22 April 1665, Árni having

died just over a month earlier on 10 March. Though quite brief, the letter, like the address, reflects in its structure and style traditional rhetorical priorities. After an initial greeting, the introduction (*exordium*) cites and interprets a scriptural verse, explains the reasons for sending the address (*narratio*), outlines its subject matter and purpose (*dispositio*), expresses the hope that the recipients will appreciate the text, and concludes by praying that they may be blessed and consoled (*conclusio*). The scriptural quotation is from the Wisdom of Solomon, one of the Old Testament apocryphal books, and the same text is also treated in the address itself: “But though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest” (Wisdom of Solomon 4:7, AV; Magnús Jónsson 1947, 2:251).

Hallgrímur entitles the work “Burtfararminning” [Memorial address], and the text serves as a eulogy even though it was never delivered at the actual funeral service. The address was prompted by the lawman’s death but says little about his life and works. Its main focus is on explaining the significance of Árni’s death for the individual himself, his friends and family, and the nation. The conclusions vary according to these differing perspectives, and at times this renders the argument complex and even contradictory. The author recognizes this:

Ég hef áður sagt og meðkennt, segi og meðkenni enn nú hið sama, að þessi hans burtkallan hafi honum verið fyrir sína persónu hin hægasta, mjúkasta og sætasta innleiðsla í eilífa gleði [. . .]. Allt og áður held ég þar við fyrir mitt leyti, hvað sem aðrir meina, að það verk Drottins hafi á honum verið og sé oss, sem eftir lifum, ein alvarleg vísbending [. . .]. (265)

[I have already said and acknowledged, and I say and acknowledge again now, that for Árni death has been the easiest, gentlest and sweetest introduction to eternal joy [. . .]. For me, as before, and no matter what others believe, the way the Lord has worked through him was and remains an important lesson for us [. . .].]

It has been noted that Jón Vídalín’s sermons reflect classical rhetorical practice. Each begins with an *exordium*, with its own

internal structure, and thereafter features elements such as *narratio*, *argumentatio*, *refutatio*, and *peroratio* (Þorleifur Hauksson and Þórir Óskarsson 1994, 416; see Gunnar Kristjánsson 1995, lxxxviff.). The same holds true for Hallgrímur's address.

The work begins with a lengthy *exordium* (pp. 251–255). The scriptural quotation that heads the address is not treated directly; Hallgrímur turns instead to the 2 Samuel 6, which tells of King David's pain when the one charged with steering the Ark of the Covenant into the city dies suddenly. Moses's words about death are cited and, together with those of King David, are then directed towards Hallgrímur's own time (252). This represents, in effect, an introduction to the introduction, whose main substance (*narratio*) is that the people of Iceland ought to “hryggjast og óttast fyrir Drottni engu síður en Davíð, vegna svo mikils skarðs, sem Drottinn hefur hjá oss gjört” [grieve and fear the Lord no less than did David, because of the great harm that the Lord has done us] by calling away Árni Oddsson, one of those Icelanders who had charge of the chariot conveying the Lord's Ark of the Covenant in secular jurisdiction “í þessum vorum tveimur landsfjórðungum” [in our two quarters of the country] (252). This Old Testament perspective is underlined by transferring onto Árni the three qualities for which Moses was praised by Sirach: he was from a good family, he was loved by God and men, and he was loyal and kind. Finally, the narrator claims (*propositio*) that just as there was no prophet comparable with Moses, “muni ei heldur fremri valdsmaður að mörgum dyggðum og mannkostum meðal vor eftir þennan upp koma” [neither will a more prominent leader with as many virtues and good qualities appear among us after this one] (254), though he emphasizes that he will be happy to be proved wrong in this. The circumstances of Árni's death are then mentioned; he is linked with aspects of Moses's life and death, but also with the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who died after bathing in cold water. The introduction concludes with the speaker outlining the structure (*dispositio*) of his main discourse, with the initial biblical text divided into three elements, to be treated individually. This kind of division is known as *partitio*. Hallgrímur concludes in the traditional way by praying that his efforts will be successful (*peroratio*).

The second part of the address (*narratio*) begins by discussing the question “Hverjir þeir réttlátir eru, sem svo ofsnemma kunna

að deyja” [Who are the righteous who may die so prematurely?]. The ensuing discussion examines three kinds of justice: *justitia affectata* [self-justice], *justitia imputata* [justice granted by God], and *justitia inchoata* [preliminary justice]. The second issue for discussion is “Hvað það kallast að deyja of snemma” [What does it mean to say that someone has died too young?], a question that is then subdivided into three aspects: *respectu dei* [in God’s opinion], *respectu justí* [in the opinion of just and true believers] and *respectu carnis et mundi* [in the opinion of the world and the flesh]. This final aspect is, in turn, subdivided into two, with the views of the flesh and the world discussed in turn. At this point a passage is inserted in which the material is summarized and the speaker explains his own understanding of the notion of dying too early: “Sjá nú, minn bróðir, hvað heitir nú hér út í of seint eður of snemma? Er þetta nú ekki allt í hinn sælasta og fegursta máta ske?” [Do you see, brother, what in this instance is called too late or too early? Has not everything happened in the most blessed and beautiful way?]. Having set out the essence of his discourse (*propositio*) the speaker concludes that section with “amen.” The next chapter treats the world’s views and functions as a *refutatio*, as the speaker confronts his (implied) opponents, by which, of course, is meant not the god-fearing mourners but rather those who behave as “atheistar og guðleysingar” [atheists and godless people] (261):

Nú þó þessháttar spottfuglar séu ekki andsvara verðugir, þá samt vil ég mér til eftirtektar sjálfum og þeim, sem láta sér kærar vera góðar og trúlegar, trúlyndar viðvaranir, mína meining um þess háttar efni stuttlega auglýsa. (262)

[Though such mocking birds are not worthy of reply, I still want briefly to set out my thoughts on this sort of topic, both for my own benefit and for those who appreciate good, trustworthy and honest admonitions.

Here Hallgrímur seeks to challenge the godless view that death is terrible and pointless. The speaker claims that God is at work at the moment of death, and again divides his argument into a threefold substructure: “Guðs orð” [God’s Word], “viss reynsla”

[certain experience], “sannreynd eftirdæmi” [proven examples]. Discussion of this topic concludes with the words: “[. . .] hvar um fleira að tala mér að sinni hugur við rís, er og ei heldur frammar mitt áform um að tala. Guð veri oss náðugur í Jesú nafni. Amen” (266) [I tremble at the thought of saying more about this, and it is not my intention to do so. May God be gracious to us, in Jesus’ name. Amen]. Then, finally, discussion turns to the third and last point of the address, which is “Hvað fyrir hvíld það sé, þeirra sála öðlast” [What kind of a repose is it that their soul will achieve?] and refers to the last part of the opening scriptural text. This section is a fitting conclusion to the address (*conclusio*), with its emphasis on compassion, exhortation and prayer.

Hallgrímur employs many kinds of figurative language in the address, often the same ones used by Jón Vídalín, though Hallgrímur’s overall style is more straightforward than that of the bishop. He uses *exclamatio*, such as “Hann gekk í lífinu með lífinu. Ó, herra Guð! Það mátti heita [. . .]” [he walked in life with the Life [Jesus]. O, Lord God! It might be called [. . .]] (260) and *apostrophe*, as in “Sjá nú, minn bróðir” [See, now, my brother]. He makes frequent use of rhetorical questions (*interrogatio*), sometimes accompanied by answers (*rogatio*): “Má þetta nú ekki með réttu heita einn hægur, sæll og blessaður dauði? Er þetta nú ekki sú rétta, sæla Símeonis friðarför? Heitir þetta ekki með réttu að líða í gegnum dauðann til lífsins? og smakka ekki dauðann að eilífu? Já, það má kallast að vera undireins lifandi og dauður” [May this not truly be called a slow, happy and blessed death? Is this not the true peace journey of the blessed Simeon? Is this not truly called passing through death into life? and not tasting death in eternity? Yes, it may be called at one and the same time being alive and dead] (260). Repetition and *accumulatio* are widely used in the address, such as “gleðilegt, æskilegt, elskulegt og gagnlegt, og leiðir eftir sig þeim til handa það allra bezta, lukkusamlegasta og farsælasta [. . .]” [happy, desirable, lovable and beneficial, and leaves behind it for them the best, happiest and most successful [. . .]] (262). We also find *parallelismus*, as with “vakandi hjarta, biðjandi munn og lifandi traust” [waking heart, praying mouth and living trust] (258), and *antithesis*, such as “ekki upp á hans síðu [. . .] heldur upp á vora síðu, ekki honum, heldur oss [. . .]” [not up on his side [. . .] but up on our side, not him, but us [. . .]] (263).

Other rhetorical figures used include *epiphora*: “ein rétt hvíld, já ein rósöm hvíld, ein unaðarsamleg hvíld, ein staðföst og eilíflega varandi hvíld” [true rest, yes, calming rest, joyful rest, steadfast and everlasting rest] (267); *symploce* (repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning and ending of lines): “eilíflega rósöm hvíld án alls erfiðis, eilíflega unaðarsöm hvíld án allrar sturlanar, eilíflega staðföst hvíld án alls ótta, sem eilíflega vara skal” [an ever-tranquil rest free from all trouble, an ever-joyous rest free from all turmoil, an ever-secure rest free from all fear, which shall last for ever] (268); and *polyptoton*: “hann var sjálfur Jesú elskari, og svo einnig aftur af Jesú elskaður” [he himself was loving towards Jesus and so also in return loved by Jesus] (260); “heimur er heimur, og þeir sem hann elska, rækja og stunda, verða heimiskir, heimverskir, heimskir” [the world is the world, and they who love, cultivate and pursue it will be worldly, world-like, foolish] (260). An element of irony or sarcasm through wordplay is clearly detectable here.

Hallgrímur sometimes uses similes in the address: “Hann vissi vel, að þar sem einn merkilegur maður fellur frá að kvöldi, er ekki strax annar kominn í hans stað að morgni svo sem náttdöggin á morgunstrám” [He knew well that when one remarkable man dies in the evening, another has certainly not taken his place in the morning, like evening dew on morning straw] (251). He employs figures to dramatize moments and events for his audience. Among them we may note *evidentia*, as with “En kristinn maður, byrg um stund þín holdleg augu og ljúk upp með mér augum hugskotsins, og sjá [. . .]” [But, Christian man, hide for a moment your carnal eyes and open your mind’s eye with me, and see [. . .]] (259), and also personification: “Æ, það var, segir holdið, of snögglegt og sorgarlegt” [Ah, says the flesh, it was too quick and sad] (259). Hallgrímur makes frequent use of *exempla* in the manner of a medieval preacher citing significant events from the Old Testament, from early literature, or from human life in general. Thus, he cites instances of men who grieve sorely over the deaths of dear friends:

Og eftir þess háttar holdsins álitu sorgaði Jakob sinn burt-horfna Jósef og Davíð sinn unga son. Það sama viðurkenndi

hinn sæli Lutherus, þá hann missti sína dóttur Magdalenam [. . .] svo sem gjörði sá merkilegi og hálærði doktor Philippus Melanchton. Þá hann sína kæru dóttur lengi sorgaði [. . .] (258–259)

[And through the eyes of the flesh Jacob lamented the departed Joseph and David, his young son. The blessed Luther acknowledged the same, when he lost his daughter Magdalena [. . .] so also did the remarkable and learned Dr Philip Melanchthon. He grieved long for his beloved daughter [. . .]]

Árni Oddsson died in a pool, an event interpreted through metaphors associated with bathing and cleansing:

[. . .] böðum oss ekki lengur svo hirðuleysislega í synda, gjálífis, galinskapar og veraldlegrar áhyggju laug, upp á það sú heittflóaða Guðs reiðilaug verði oss ekki of skæð og skaðleg [. . .]. Þvöum oss heldur og hreinsum í vorri iðrunartára laug og í þeirri heilsusamlegu blóðlauginni vors herra Jesú Kristí. (266)

[[. . .] let us no longer bathe so recklessly in the pool of sins, lechery, insanity and earthly concerns, so that God's hot-flowing pool of wrath will not be too harmful and dangerous for us [. . .]. Let us rather wash and cleanse ourselves in a pool of our penitential tears and in the health-giving pool of our Lord Jesus Christ's blood.]

In the address, various links with Hallgrímur's poetry are identifiable, including, not surprisingly, his eulogy composed for Árni. That poem refers to David and Joshua (“dauðinn er dapurlegur sem Davíð og Jósúa tér” [death is sad, as David and Joshua say]), while in the address much the same reference occurs: “hvers vegna og dauðinn verður kallaður af Jósúa og Davíð gata eður vegur allrar veraldar” [and why Joshua and David call death the road or way of all the world] (257). Then Hallgrímur uses the same metaphor that we find in the hymn “Allt eins og blómstrið eina,”

when he says “Því þó einslags leið liggi öllum í heim þennan til þess náttúrlega lífsins, þá sýnist þó, sem ólíkir vegir leiði mann úr heiminum til dauðans” [Therefore, though there may be only one way for everyone into the world of this natural life, yet different roads may lead mankind from the world to death] (257). Further, links with Hallgrímur’s funeral poem for Steinunn, his daughter, are evident in his discussion of the idea of “hvíld” [rest], the final theme of the address. He discusses what “sá blessaði sælustaður Guðs útvaldra sálna” [that blessed place of bliss for God’s chosen souls] is called in the Bible:

Herrann Kristur kallar hann Abrahams skaut, Paradís, síns föður hönd. Sankti Stephanus kallar hann Jesú hönd. Hinn heilagi Davíð kallar hann land lifandi manna og Bók spekinnar kallar hann hönd Drottins, og fleiri önnur nöfn verða honum gefin. Í þessum ofanskriðuðum orðum verður hann kallaður hvíld (*refrigerium*) [. . .] það eilífa lífið og sá blessaði samastaður útvaldra sálna [er] ein rétt hvíld [. . .]. (267)

[Christ the Lord calls it the Bosom of Abraham, Paradise, his Father’s hand. St Stephen calls it Jesus’ hand. David calls it the land of living men and the Book of Wisdom calls it the Lord’s hand, and several other names are assigned to it. In the following [sic] words it is called rest (*refrigerium*) [. . .] the eternal life, and the blessed place of elected souls [which is] the only true rest [. . .].]

From the initial word of each verse in the funeral poem about his daughter, the sentence “Steinunn mín litla hvílist nú” [my little Steinunn is now at rest] is formed, and we see from these words that for Hallgrímur “hvíld” [rest] has both a literal and transferred meaning. Other phrases such as “land lifandi manna” [land of living men] and “hönd Guðs” [God’s hand] occur widely in his hymns, and the address confirms the appeal of this idea for the author.

In this and the previous chapter we have examined Hallgrímur’s prose works. They are all religious in substance, though they vary in form: prayers, meditations in which the author addresses his soul,

and a funeral address that was never formally delivered. Hallgrímur must have composed many other addresses and sermons that have been lost. In the oldest source about Hallgrímur's life, the short biography by séra Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur, we learn that some people rebuked Bishop Brynjólfur and considered it "heila-grillur" [eccentricity] on his part to have ordained Hallgrímur as a pastor—"þar til heyrðu hann predika fyrir vígslu; skipti þá um hljóðið og hét svo að ekki vissu menn hvað undir hvörs stakki býr" [until they heard him preach at the dedication; then people changed their tune and declared that you never know what lies under each person's coat] (Jón Samsonarson 1971, 87). Hallgrímur's extant prose works confirm that his magisterial command of the verbal arts is as much in evidence here as in his poetry. Much of his prose reflects Christian literary culture through the ages. Yet Hallgrímur was also a child of his time, informed by baroque-age thinking in his view of the Creation, the Almighty, the human condition, mankind's role in the Creation, and not least in his understanding of the verbal arts, rhetorical decoration, texts, and interpretation.

