

incidents. We thus find love-ditties, humorous verses, satires, lampoons, dream-songs, verses on travels and so on; but the highest level is reached in descriptions of sea-voyages. Indeed, the sea and seafaring have been the constant themes of Icelandic poets from the colonization down to the present day, and some of these songs are justly claimed to be among the very finest poems in our language.

Most of these poems were made in Court-metre or some variety thereof. As an example of this kind of poetry the following verse by Sigvatr may here be given:

1 2 3 6 9  
*Kátr* vask opt, þás *úti*  
 7 8 10 11  
*Þrðigt* veðr á *fjörðum*  
 15 14 4 5  
*vísa* segl, í *vási*,  
 13 12 16  
*vindblásið* skóf *Strinda*;  
 17 19 18 20 21  
*hestr* óð *kafs* at *kostum*  
 22 23 24 25  
 (kilir *ristu* men *Lista*)  
 31 26 29 27  
*út* þars *eisa* *lérum*  
 30 28 32 33  
*undan* skeiðr at *sundi*.

I was often blithe enough in the wet when a stiff breeze swept the Strinder Kings's sail in the firths. The sea-steed waded gallantly on. The keels ploughed the sea, when we made the galley speed towards the Sound.

This stanza consists of eight lines of six syllables each. Every two lines (each couplet) are connected by alliteration (*staverime*). The alliterative letters (here printed in blacker type) must, if consonants, be the same, but can, if vocals, be different. There are two riming syllables in every line (here printed in *Italics*). The arrangement of words and sentences is here more intricate than in daily speech, and in order to understand this verse, the words must be rearranged as indicated by the figures.

The poets employed a great number of synonyms (*heiti*) which were never heard except in poetry, as e. g. "vísi" = king; and circumlocutions (*kenningar* = kennings), as "hestr kafs" = sea-horse, a ship; "men Lista" = the sea. These periphrases or circumlocutions are often extremely complex and make the poems difficult to understand; but not infrequently they are genuine masterpieces of inspiration and deep thought.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a much greater stress than heretofore is laid on the grouping of the different kinds of metre according to strict rules. About 1223 *Snorri Sturluson* composed his