Rhetoric, Morals, and Patriotism in Early Swedish Literature: Georg Stiernhielm's *Hercules* (1658)

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The honorific title 'the Father of Swedish poetry' is traditionally given to Georg Stiernhielm (1598-1672). This is obviously a title that he would have desired since he considered himself to be the one who taught the Muses to sing and play in the Swedish language, entitling his 1668 collection of poems *Musae Suethizantes* ('The Muses Singing in Swedish'). Stiernhielm was not the only poet writing in Swedish by the mid-seventeenth century, but he certainly was the most influential, and the one who is generally remembered today. It is thanks in large part to one work that Stiernhielm has become emblematic of the beginnings of Swedish literature, namely the poem *Hercules*, which was first published in 1658 and is often described as the epitome of

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Swedish Baroque literature. A central point in the following discussion is that there is a large gap between the intentions behind *Hercules* and the interpretations given the poem by modern readers. Stiernhielm and his poetry may therefore aptly be introduced by a quotation from the Swedish literary scholar Ingemar Algulin's *A History of Swedish Literature* (1989):

> [Stiernhielm's] literary fame rests largely on his hexameter poem *Hercules*, the full version of which was printed in 1658. The classical motif in this heroic poem about Hercules at the crossroads originally came from Xenophon and was often used in the humanistic poetry of the time as a morality tale. This was also Stiernhielm's purpose. He was clearly addressing himself first and foremost to the young men of the nobility who, as a result of the aristocracy's newly acquired economic power, were easily tempted into a dissolute lifestyle. The allegory depicts Hercules at a crossroads, unsure of which path to take. He is then met by a band consisting of Mistress Lust and her daughters Idleness, Lewdness, and Vanity and her son Intoxication. Mistress Lust urges him to appreciate the good things in life, since life is short and death dark and irrevocable. However, as Hercules stands ready to follow her, Mistress Virtue appears and urges him instead to devote his energy to work and scholarly labors which will gain him everlasting fame. With rhetorical skill Stiernhielm leaves the ending open. We do not learn which path Hercules chooses, but Mistress Virtue has, naturally, the final word.
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> The poem, because of its hexameter form, mimics the classical; however, in its scholarly, allegorical construction we encounter continental Baroque poetry in all its embellished and affected splendor. Emblematic art, where a maxim tells the reader how to interpret a symbolic image, played a role in Stiernhielm's way of describing the characters. The language is characterized by the Baroque rhetorical ideal of art, with a large arsenal of effective images, antitheses, enumerations, alliteration, inner-rhyme, etc. But the poem also has a Swedish characteristic in the Old Swedish words that the poet uses to elevate its Swedish linguistic purity and in the vigorous and genuine colloquial language, which, in spite of the scholarly form, renders the poem surprisingly alive. In the diversified and lively realism, which culminates in Mistress Lust's depiction of drinking bouts, gaming and gambling and erotic adventures, there are many contemporary images.[1]

[1] Algulin 1989, pp. 35-36.

There are two things in this quotation that deserve particular consideration in the context of this article. First, Ingemar Algulin's strong emphasis on Stiernhielm's use of all kinds of rhetorical devices, which – along with the keywords "lively realism" – exemplify how critics have extolled the style of *Hercules*. With this poem, Stiernhielm is considered to have exhibited revolutionary linguistic artistry and to have demonstrated that the Swedish language may convey remarkable literary pleasure. Second, not only Algulin but modern critics in general tend to regard the poem's theme as strictly moral. The allegorical images of Mistress Lust ("Lusta") and Mistress Virtue ("Dygd") derive from an old tradition and are often connected with the depiction of Hercules or someone else standing at a crossroads. Taking their point of departure in this common knowledge, critics have often read the poem as a discussion of those morals that were useful in the young nation-state of Sweden.[2] In this article, however, I wish to demonstrate that the female figures of Lust and Virtue should be interpreted in a rhetorical context as well, and that understanding this rhetorical context is essential to understanding the poem.

Although previous scholarship has examined the language and rhetoric used by Stiernhielm in *Hercules*,[3] it has failed to consider what the poem actually *says* about these issues. Thus, it is only in recent studies that Mistresses Lust and Virtue have been associated with bad and good rhetoric, respectively, and that attention has been called to the fact that the poem actually thematizes the art of speaking.[4] The two Mistresses embody an attitude to language and rhetoric that most readers of today are unfamiliar

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[2] On the crossroads motif, see Lindroth 1913, pp. 22-79; Friberg 1945, pp. 84-121; and Olsson 1974, pp. 84-107.
[3] See, for example, Olsson 1974; Hansson 2000, pp. 15-39; and Ekedahl 2000.
[4] See Malm 2001 and Johannesson 2002.

with. In what follows I shall therefore attempt to show how these main characters are crafted in accordance with a long-established (under-)current in the history of rhetoric, and how Stiernhielm drew on traditional imagery of language and rhetoric in order to make *Hercules* represent what he saw as truly Swedish ideals.

Introducing the Main Characters

Hercules opens with the young eponymous protagonist meeting Mistress Lust and her daughters at the well-known crossroads. Mistress Lust eloquently implores Hercules to choose the broad road and ends her speech with an elaborate description of the *locus amoenus* that it leads to. Hercules, convinced, is more than ready to follow her when Mistress Virtue appears and delivers a sobering speech. The poem concludes with this speech; nothing is said about which alternative Hercules chooses, but no reader can be in doubt about which road is the one worth choosing.

In order to give a more precise idea not only of the content of the poem but also of Stiernhielm's use of stylistic devices, in the following I provide both the original text and my English translation of the passages quoted.

Mistress Virtue is succinctly introduced:

> I det een annan kom, i Frus hampn, menskelig ansedd,
> Doch icke Menniskia: men een trofast ädle Gudinna,
> Hon war sedig uti sin gång, och wyrdig af anseend,
> Wigtig i laater, full med alfwar, och ährlig af vpsyn,
> Brun vnder ögon', och bränd af Sool-skijn, mager af hulde;
> Renlig i drächt, sniöhwijt, af silfwer-blänckiande klädnat,
> Slätt och rätt, och skiär, på dät ährlige gamble maneret.
> (vv. 275-281)

> [Then came another one, in the guise of a woman and looking human,
> although it was not a human being but a trustworthy and noble goddess.
> She was modest in the way she walked and of dignified appearance,

> worthy in her movements, serious, and honest looking,
> brown under the eyes and tanned by the sun. She was lean,
> pure in her attire, white as snow, in a silver-gleaming dress,
> simple, straightforward, and neat, in the honest old way.][5]

'Simple, straightforward, and neat' are central terms in Stiernhielm's description of Mistress Virtue and they also characterize the way she speaks. Since she does not flaunt her looks or her apparel, there is no need for Stiernhielm to describe her in a flamboyant manner. The verse is dignified – Stiernhielm's choice of hexameter in *Hercules* may be surprising if one does not take into account that this is the classical heroic and 'masculine' meter – and the introduction of Mistress Virtue is rendered even more dignified through a massive substitution of spondees for dactyls. The words have a ring of modesty to them, as a result of the sparse use of assonances and other stylistic devices.

Mistress Lust, however, is described in quite the opposite manner. Thus, in the beginning of the poem, as Hercules stands pondering what to do with his life,

> Trippar ett artigt Wijf, doch lätt af later, och anseend,
> Til honom an; blomerad i margfals-färgade Kläder;
> Glimmand' i Pärlor och Gull; och gnistrand' i dyrbare Stenar;
> Skön af Anlete; men (som syntes) sminkad, och färgad;
> Som een Drijfwa sniö-hwijt, medh Rosen-färgade Kinner;
> Käck-ögd, diärf vthaf Vpsyn; af Huld war hon fyllig och frodig
> Gull-gåhl-blänkiandes Håår, bekrönt medh Roser i Pärlor.
> (vv. 5-11)

> [A woman comes prancing, pleasurable, but indecent in manners and looks,
> toward him, adorned with clothes of many colors,
> glimmering with beads and gold, and glittering with precious stones;
> with a beautiful face, but (obviously) with make-up and coloring,

[5] I quote the Swedish text from Stiernhielm 1990. All English translations in this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

white as a snowdrift, with rose-colored cheeks,
With daring eyes, and a brazen appearance, round and buxom,
her hair glimmering in gold and yellow, crowned with rose-shaped beads.]

In comparison with the verses describing Mistress Virtue, the hexameters introducing Mistress Lust are predominantly dactylic. Assonances and alliterations are numerous: the Swedish words sound almost alive, practically jostling against one another. This gives the verse a 'tripping' quality, mimicking the prancing gait with which Mistress Lust enters the stage. The style corresponds to what is described, and what is described is tempting, but obviously malign. Formally, as regards the number of verses, the description of Mistress Lust is no longer than that of Mistress Virtue, but in terms of effect Mistress Lust is described in a much more elaborate way.

The stylistic attention devoted to the voluptuousness of Mistress Lust is the more considerable – and the more didactic – in as much as the description of her is echoed in that of her three daughters. Idleness ("Lättia") is simply disheveled (vv. 15-20), whereas Lewdness ("Kättia") looks like her mother and is portrayed in verses 21-29. The third and youngest of the daughters, Vanity ("Flättia"), is also the spitting image of her mother:

Sälsynt af Anlete war den yngst' af dässe tree Systrar:
Ett öga greet; medh det andre då loog hon; snart war hon effterst,
Snart war hon för-åt i tripp-trapp, snäller och dans-wijg å fotom.
Hon war klädd vppå Fransk, där-å alt war brokot och krokot;
Ringat, och slingat i kors; med Franßar i Lyckior, och nyckior,
Pappat, och knappat i längd, och i bredd; med spitsar, och litsor
Rundt omkring, och i ring, ala-mode, beflittrat, och splittrat.
Hon baar opå sijn hand ett seglande Skepp, vthan Styre.
(vv. 30-37)

[The youngest of these three sisters was a peculiar sight:
With one eye she wept, with the other she smiled; now she was behind,
now she was in front, tripping and swift, her steps quick and dancing.
She was dressed in the French manner with everything gaudy and swirling,

> winding, and wreathing around, with fringes in loops and hooks,
> starched, buttoned downwards and sidewise, with points and laces
> all over and around, after the fashion, embellished and with slits.
> In her hand she carried a ship, sailing without direction.]

The depiction of Mistress Lust, including that of her son, Intoxication ("Ruus"), thus occupies verses 5-51. Mistresses Virtue and Lust are supplied not only with visual attributes – plain gown, unaffectedness, and lack of adornment versus gaudy attire, make-up, and an alluring appearance – but with auditory ones as well: the sounds of the verses and words describe the contrasting characters. Thus, Lust, Lewdness, and Vanity proceed in sensuous rhythms, alliterations, and rhymes that correspond to their affected attire, while short, light vowels underline their light-minded disposition. The description of Lewdness clearly illustrate this:

> Tittarne tittade fram vtu floret, och half-bare brösten,
> Gilliand' i lönliga wijs, och puffande, pyste til älskog.
> (vv. 26-27)

> [Her nipples were peeping forth from the gauze, and her half-naked breasts,
> silently enticing and swelling, ripe for love.]

Virtue, on the other hand, strides forward majestically and calmly, fashioned by Stiernhielm in a serene rhythm and with considerably fewer stylistic devices. She seems to embody the very magnanimity and valor traditionally associated with the hexameter, the heroic meter that Lust and her company utterly corrupt by turning it into an affected and enticing body of sounds.

There is thus ample reason to interpret *Hercules* as a critical discussion of language. Stiernhielm is renowned for his ability to create artistic and delightful poetry at a time when the Swedish language was not yet very highly developed, and he seems from a modern point of view to have fulfilled

the kind of ideals that we associate with 'aesthetic pleasure'. To modern readers, therefore, the artistry of *Hercules* may appear straightforward. I would like to suggest, however, that Stiernhielm's mode of artistic representation, founded as it was on the rhetorical tradition, was a highly problematic one. Stiernhielm certainly indulged in a sensuous style, but at the same time he modeled *Hercules* as a warning against precisely that way of writing.

The Feminine Embodiment of Rhetoric

Plato's well-known critique of rhetoric – and of representation as a whole – is probably one reason why ancient rhetoricians often felt the need to defend rhetoric against the accusation that it was harmful. This is especially apparent in Quintilian, who, in his first-century *Institutio oratoria*, repeatedly tried to distinguish 'bad' rhetoric from 'good' rhetoric in order to show that rhetoric *per se* is not detrimental to philosophy.[6] As is well known, in the classical tradition, 'bad' rhetoric was often negatively associated with 'Asianism', whereas the opposite of Asianism was 'Atticism', the unadorned and virtuous philosophical style. 'Good' rhetoric was considered to be closer to Atticism – although it had to be more effective and persuasive. Quintilian and others found that Atticism promotes a style lacking in strength; they maintained that the rhetorical ideal is to add pleasure to style and force to argument so as to make the presentation more attractive.[7] Much worse than being associated with virtuous Atticism, however, was for a rhetorician to be associated with Asianism. Atticists might be lacking in *ornatus*, but Asianists tended to focus on adornment for the sake of adornment itself, thus indulging in sensual

[6] Quintilian explicitly discusses Plato in *I.O.* 2.15.24-32.
[7] See, e.g., *I.O.* 8.Pr.16-17.

delight and producing texts that were either void of content or simply mendacious. Quintilian warned against this:

> However (let me say this again) this Ornament must be manly, strong, and chaste. It must not favour effeminate smoothness or the false colouring of cosmetics; it must shine with health and vigour. And this is so true that, since vices and virtues in this area are particularly close neighbours, those who adopt the vices actually give them the names of the virtues.[8]

The warning against speakers who present vice as virtue clearly derives from Plato, as does the warning against discourse that appears impressive and attractive, but is in fact false and deceptive.[9] Since what is delightful is also seductive, it is clearly something that can spread, and, as Quintilian pointed out, young pupils should not be exposed to this kind of language:

> [Beginners] must not fall for the prettiness of modern self-indulgence, and grow soft with its depraved pleasures, so as to fall in love with that luscious sweetness which is all the more attractive to boys because it is closer to their natural instincts.[10]

The contagious part of language is the voluptuousness – the 'depraved pleasures' ("voluptas prava") – that is equated with effeminacy, a notion that Quintilian expands on in another passage of the *Institutio oratoria*, underlining the correspondence between the human body and language:

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[8] "Sed hic ornatus (repetam enim) virilis et fortis et sanctus sit nec effeminatam levitatem et fuco ementitum colorem amet: sanguine et viribus niteat. Hoc autem adeo verum est ut, cum in hac maxime parte sint vicina virtutibus vitia, etiam qui vitiis utuntur virtutum tamen iis nomen imponant"; Quintilian 2001, vol. 3, 8.3.6-7. This and the following translated passages are quoted from Donald A. Russell's English translation, which accompanies his edition of the Latin text in Quintilian 2001.

[9] On this tradition, see Lichtenstein 1989, pp. 37-54 and 72-90; and Malm 2004, pp. 27-40.

[10] "ne recentis huius lasciviae flosculis capti voluptate prava deleniantur, ut praedulce illud genus et puerilibus ingeniis hoc gratius quo propius est adament"; Quintilian 2001, vol. 1, 2.5.22.

> Healthy bodies, with sound blood and strengthened by exercise, acquire good looks by the same means as they acquire strength; they are tanned, slim, and muscular. On the other hand, if one feminizes them by plucking the hair and using cosmetics, the very striving for beauty makes them disgusting. Again, decent and impressive apparel lends men authority […], but a womanish and luxurious dress, instead of adorning the body, exposes the mind within. In the same way, the translucent and many-coloured style of some speakers emasculates subjects which are clothed in this kind of verbal dress. What I want is *care* for words, but *deep concern* for the subject.[11]

If language and body are seen as analogous, language obviously becomes a matter of morals, and rhetorical virtue becomes tantamount to corporeal virtue. Boys and men may be corrupted by immorality, and since it is they who are expected to perform the civic functions that make society work, in a sense society itself is threatened by moral corruption. Importantly, Quintilian associates voluptuousness with effeminacy, both as regards real life and as regards language: in both spheres contact with voluptuousness leads to emasculation. In the Greco-Roman world, *effeminatus* appears to have been the worst conceivable description of a man,[12] and in Quintilian's text effeminacy

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[11] "Corpora sana et integri sanguinis et exercitatione firmata ex isdem his speciem accipiunt ex quibus vires, namque et colorata et adstricta et lacertis expressa sunt: sed eadem si quis vulsa atque fucata muliebriter comat, foedissima sint ipso formae labore. Et cultus concessus atque magnificus addit hominibus […] auctoritatem: at muliebris et luxuriosus non corpus exornat, sed detegit mentem. Similiter illa translucida et versicolor quorundam elocutio res ipsas effeminat quae illo verborum habitu vestiuntur"; Quintilian 2001, vol. 3, 8.Pr.19-20.

[12] Brown 1988, p. 11, conveys how this fear of emasculation influenced the general (rhetorical) situation in second-century Rome: "No normal man might actually become a woman; but each man trembled forever on the brink of becoming 'womanish'. His flickering heat was an uncertain force. If it was to remain effective, its momentum had to be consciously maintained. It was never enough to be male: a man had to strive to remain 'virile'. He had to learn to exclude from his character and from the poise and temper of his body all telltale traces of 'softness' that might betray, in him, the half-formed state of a woman. The small-town notables of the second century watched each other with hard, clear eyes. They noted a man's walk. They reacted to the rhythms of his speech. They listened attentively to the telltale resonance of his voice. Any of these might betray the ominous loss of a hot, high-spirited momentum, a flag-

results from what he terms some speakers' "translucent and many-coloured style" ("illa translucida et versicolor quorundam elocutio"), that is, inappropriate *elocutio*.

The idea that vice, corporeal and spiritual, is contagious is based on the metaphorical melding of language and body. In the *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian further develops the metaphor into personifications of good and bad language. Thus, as he continues his discussion of inappropriate language and compares eloquence (*eloquentia*) to style (*elocutio*), he distinctly portrays *eloquentia* as a woman: "Eloquence should be approached in a higher spirit; if her whole body is healthy, she will not think that polishing her nails or styling her hair has anything to do with her well-being."[13]

Eloquentia, representing everything good in rhetoric, is thus endowed with a body. As her counterpart, *elocutio* incorporates the stylistic pleasures of *ornatus*, which have been taken to excess, dressing up bodies in gaudy garments and covering them with make-up – something that is in itself a sign of corruption. Quintilian juxtaposes this inappropriate *elocutio*, described in terms of feminine attire and make-up, with the orators, the "healthy bodies, with sound blood and strengthened by exercise" that were at risk of being 'feminized'. What Quintilian saw as detrimental was for rhetorical effectiveness to be replaced by composition for the sake of pleasure, stylistic delicacies, and polished smoothness. Continuing the use of corporeal similes, in a passage that warns against the use in declamations of fictive instead of

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ging of the clear-cut self-restraint, and a relaxing of the taut elegance of voice and gesture that made a man a man, the unruffled master of a subject world."

[13] "Maiore animo adgredienda eloquentia est, quae si toto corpore valet, unguis polire et capillum reponere non existimabit ad curam suam pertinere"; Quintilian 2001, vol. 3, 8.Pr.22.

real issues, Quintilian warned against the power of voluptuous language to 'castrate' men:

> […] declamations, in which we used as it were to fence with foils as practice for the battle of the courts, have long since ceased to be a realistic reproduction of pleading and, being composed solely for pleasure, have lost their muscle; indeed, the teachers, I feel bound to say, have been guilty of the same offence as the slave dealers who castrate boys to increase their attractions. As those dealers think there is no beauty in strength or in a muscular arm, and certainly not in a beard and the other natural endowments of the male, and so take what might, if left alone, have developed into sturdiness and soften its supposed hardiness – so do we cover up the manly form of eloquence and the power of lean and vigorous speech with a delicate veneer of style, and think effectiveness of no importance, so long as everything is smooth and polished. I look rather at nature; any real man is handsomer to me than any eunuch, nor can I believe that Providence is so indifferent to its own work as to make weakness an excellence, or that the knife can lend beauty to a creature that would be a monster if it was born like that. Sham femininity may indeed itself stimulate lust, but a wicked world should never dominate us so much as to make the moral value of things depend on the price it has put on them.
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> Consequently, although this debauched eloquence (I shall speak my mind, you see) may win the approval of audiences enervated by pleasure, I decline to regard as eloquence in any sense something which shows no trace at all of a normal male, let alone of a man of weight and integrity.[14]

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[14] "[…] declamationes, quibus ad pugnam forensem velut praepilatis exerceri solebamus, olim iam ab illa vera imagine orandi recesserunt, atque ad solam compositae voluptatem nervis carent, non alio medius fidius vitio docentium quam quo mancipiorum negotiatores formae puerorum virilitate excisa lenocinantur. Nam ut illi robur ac lacertos barbamque ante omnia et alia quae natura proprie maribus dedit parum existimant decora, quaeque fortia, si liceret, forent ut dura molliunt: ita nos habitum ipsum orationis virilem et illam vim stricte robusteque dicendi tenera quadam elocutionis cute operimus et, dum levia sint ac nitida, quantum valeant nihil interesse arbitramur. Sed mihi naturam intuenti nemo non vir spadone formosior erit, nec tam aversa umquam videbitur ab opere suo providentia ut debilitas inter optima inventa sit, nec id ferro speciosum fieri putabo quod si nasceretur monstrum erat. Libidinem iuvet ipsum effeminati sexus mendacium, numquam tamen hoc continget malis moribus regnum, ut si qua pretiosa fecit fecerit et bona./ Quapropter eloquentiam, licet hanc (ut sentio enim, dicam) libidinosam resupina voluptate auditoria probent, nullam esse existimabo quae ne minimum quidem in se indicium masculi et incorrupti, ne dicam gravis et sancti, viri ostentet"; Quintilian 2001, vol. 2, 5.12.17-20. Cullhed 2000, p. 93, refers to this passage in his discussion of 'the gender of rhetoric'.

For obvious reasons, rhetorical handbooks are generally positive about the power of rhetoric. However, as the examples above show, Quintilian's text also harbours a fear of being over-powered by vice dressed up as apparent virtue. Quintilian's critique of voluptuous language runs along the same lines as Dionysius of Halicarnassus' earlier critique of Asianism. In his treatise on 'The Ancient Orators', Dionysius, who was a Greek by birth but lived and worked in Rome from around 30 BC, tells this discomforting tale:

> In the epoch preceding our own, the old philosophic Rhetoric was so grossly abused and maltreated that it fell into a decline. From the death of Alexander of Macedon it began to lose its spirit and gradually wither away, and in our generation had reached a state of almost total extinction. Another Rhetoric stole in and took its place, intolerably shameless and histrionic, ill-bred and without a vestige either of philosophy or of any other aspect of liberal education. Deceiving the mob and exploiting its ignorance, it not only came to enjoy greater wealth, luxury and splendour than the other, but actually made itself the key to civic honours and high office, a power which ought to have been reserved for the philosophic art. It was altogether vulgar and disgusting, and finally made the Greek world resemble the houses of the profligate and the abandoned: just as in such households there sits the lawful wife, freeborn and chaste, but with no authority over her domain, while an insensate harlot, bent on destroying her livelihood, claims control of the whole estate, treating the other like dirt and keeping her in a state of terror; so in every city, and in the highly civilised ones as much as any (which was the final indignity), the ancient and indigenous Attic Muse, deprived of her possessions, had lost her civic rank, while her antagonist, an upstart that had arrived only yesterday or the day before from some Asiatic death-hole, a Mysian or Phrygian or Carian creature, claimed the right to rule over Greek cities, expelling her rival from public life. Thus was wisdom driven out by ignorance, and sanity by madness.[15]

Dionysius of Halicarnassus here addresses what we may term voluptuous language and the menace it represents to society in much the same way as this topic was later to be discussed by Quintilian. As both Dionysius and

[15] I cite from the English translation by Stephen Usher that is printed, along with the Greek text, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1974, p. 5.

Quintilian exemplify, the discussion of good and bad language often makes use of corporeal imagery based on a polarized, male-female iconography and reflecting a certain anxiety of passivity and submission. Wayne A. Rebhorn has suggested that the extremely ‘male’ images of rhetoric may be understood as a kind of answer to the beautiful and passive boy who was conceived as a sexual object, especially in the Greek tradition: the powerful imagery was a means of defending rhetoric and rhetoricians against being considered as effeminate.[16] This ‘genderized’ iconography clearly formed an influential, although hitherto neither fully recognized nor sufficiently studied, undercurrent in the rhetorical tradition.[17]

Thanks to the Renaissance humanists’ interest in the classical rhetorical tradition, the notion of voluptuous language lived on. In his 1975 study of English Renaissance rhetoric, Heinrich Plett showed that such sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers as Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Fulke Greville employed the image of an adorned woman in their critique of rhetoric.[18] Thus, in *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), Sidney described how the “matron eloquence” had been disguised “in a courtesan-like painted affectation”,[19] and, in *A Treatise of Humane Learning* (1633), Greville portrayed rhetoric as a siren-like woman in the garment of a harlot.[20] In these and other English Renaissance texts, the image of voluptuous language had become one of

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[16] See Rebhorn 1995, pp. 143-149. I am grateful to Pernille Harsting for this reference.
[17] Whereas this iconographic tradition is referred to in other scholarly fields such as art history (see Lichtenstein 1989 on the development of art in seventeenth-century France), it has not as yet been fully appreciated as a tool for interpreting early modern literary texts in their wider ideological context.
[18] See Plett 1975, pp. 144-154.
[19] See full quotation in Plett 1975, p. 144.
[20] See Plett 1975, p. 145.

unequivocal evil: *elocutio* was seen to distort, feign, entice, and seduce.[21] This discussion of good and bad language also had a prominent place in seventeenth-century Sweden.

Imagery of Speech and Body in Hercules

Readers of Stiernhielm's *Hercules* have hitherto agreed that morals and wisdom are the main issues of the poem. I would like to argue, however, that Stiernhielm's representation of vice and virtue should be read as a contribution to the period's discussion of rhetorical language and style. In fact, Stiernhielm's depiction of good versus bad morals clearly resembles the depictions of good and bad language found in both classical and Renaissance rhetorical texts. In *Hercules*, Stiernhielm does not explicitly refer to this rhetorical discussion, but other works of his show that he was familiar with the traditional personifications of good and bad language.

Thus, in 1643, fifteen years before the publication of *Hercules*, in his preface to the projected Swedish dictionary *Gambla Swea och Götha måles fatebur* ('A Storeroom of the Ancient Swedish and Gothic Language'), Stiernhielm favorably compared the Swedish language to Italian, French, and Spanish.[22] Employing the traditional rhetorical imagery, he depicted the Swedish language as an honest and neat 'Gothic Lady' who had been sadly neglected by the Swedes, owing to their passion for the shallow adornments of the foreign languages. Stiernhielm clearly assigned moral values to the language: to him, Swedish was virtuous by nature, whereas the Italian, French, and Spanish languages were voluptuous. Indeed, the depiction and personifications of good and bad language in his preface of 1643 are quite

[21] On such monstrous images, see also Rebhorn 1995, pp. 197-216.
[22] A modern edition of this work is found in Stiernhielm 1993. Stina Hansson further discusses Stiernhielm's preface in her contribution to the present volume.

similar to the depiction and personifications of morals in his poem *Hercules* of 1658.

In fact, when Stiernhielm discusses society's demands for morals and honor in *Hercules*, he is also discussing the use of language. As we have seen above, Mistress Lust is not only *described* as voluptuous in every way, she also *describes* the most voluptuous things, she *speaks* voluptuously, and, above all, she is 'dressed' in voluptuous language: both she and her daughters express themselves in – and are described by way of – sensual, titillating rhythms and alliterations.

Ingemar Algulin's praise of Stiernhielm's *Hercules*, which I quoted in the beginning of this article, is typical of modern criticism. Focusing on the "Baroque rhetorical ideal", the "vigorous and genuine colloquial language", and the "diversified and lively realism" of *Hercules*, modern readers and critics generally overlook what I see as a main characteristic of the poem, namely its stylistic ambivalence. For this is what results from Stiernhielm's obvious delight in sensual language, on the one hand, and, on the other, his urge to dissociate himself from voluptuousness by attributing this vice to Mistress Lust.

Masculine Embodiment of Rhetoric

The colorful depiction of the female characters in *Hercules* is essential to the underlying discussion of rhetoric in the poem. However, the theme of rhetoric is even more strongly accentuated in the central figure of Hercules. Scholars have found it strange that Stiernhielm would allow a classical deity such as Hercules to represent Swedish morals, but – as I wish to show in what follows – he was led to do this on account of the allegorical force of the figure of Hercules.

In his youth, as part of his studies, Stiernhielm had made a handwritten collection of *Loci communes* or annotations on various subjects. Under the heading "Eloquentia" we find a comment on "Mythologia Herculis" that first deals with Gallic druids and other beings whose relationship to Hercules is most unclear and then offers the following description of Hercules as

> old, bald on the top of his head and otherwise grey-haired, wrinkled and tanned, dressed in a lion's skin, holding a club in his right hand and a bow in his left; a quiver was hanging over his shoulder. From his mouth came very thin chains, attached to the tip of his tongue and purer than gold and amber. With these chains he drew a multitude of eager and unhesitating people towards himself, attached as they were to the top of their ears. What could express both the nature and the power of persuasive Queen Eloquence better than this depiction?[23]

Then follows Stiernhielm's interpretation of the description: Hercules is old, he writes, for eloquence demands long practice. He is wrinkled and loosing his hair as a result of his strenuous efforts. He is armed in order that he can bend people to his will; he is cloaked in a lion's hide that symbolizes his power.

The wording of Stiernhielm's youthful note comes very close to the versified text, the *subscriptio*, of an emblem found in the Italian jurist Andrea Alciati's collection of *Emblemata*, a seminal work that was first published in 1531. In the 1550 edition, the emblem is number 151 and is entitled "Eloquentia fortitudine praestantior" ('Eloquence is more powerful than

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[23] "HERCULEM, senem, caluum in occipitio, coetera canum, cute rugosa et exusta, leonis exuuio indutum, clauam dextra arcum laeuâ tenentem, pharetra de humero suspensa: cujus ex ore prodirent catenulae tenuissimae extremo linguae apici annexae, auro, electroque puriores, quibus hominum magnam turbam auribus summis suspensam ad se alacrem, neque reluctantem omnino pertraheret. Quid hoc simulacro est exprimendam flexanimae illius Reginae Eloquentiae tum naturam, tum facultatem aptius?"; Stiernhielm [s.a.], p. 41 (according to the pagination that was added in the manuscript by a later hand).

physical strength'). Further – as the reproduction in Figure 1 shows – the *pictura* portrays an old Hercules, and the *subscriptio* gives the following explication of the picture:[24]

> His left hand holds a bow, his right hand a stout club, the lion of Nemea clothes his bare body. So this is a figure of Hercules. But it does not fit that he is old and his temples grizzled with age. What of the fact that his tongue is pierced by light chains, which are attached to men's pierced ears so that he draws them unresisting along? The reason is surely, as the Gauls say, that Alcaeus's descendant excelled in eloquence rather than in might, and that he gave laws to the nations. Weapons yield to the toga, and even the hardest of hearts the skilled speaker can lead where he will.[25]

The *subscriptio* cites and expounds a famous verse by Cicero, which is also quoted by Quintilian in *Institutio oratoria* XI.1.24:[26] "Cedant arma togae, concedat laurea linguae" ('May weapons yield to the toga, may the laurel yield to the tongue'). In this way the emblem extols rhetoric as the highest civic and republican principle, upon which society should be founded. Moreover, it offers an unusual interpretation of Hercules, the power of his body reflecting the power of his rhetorical skills.

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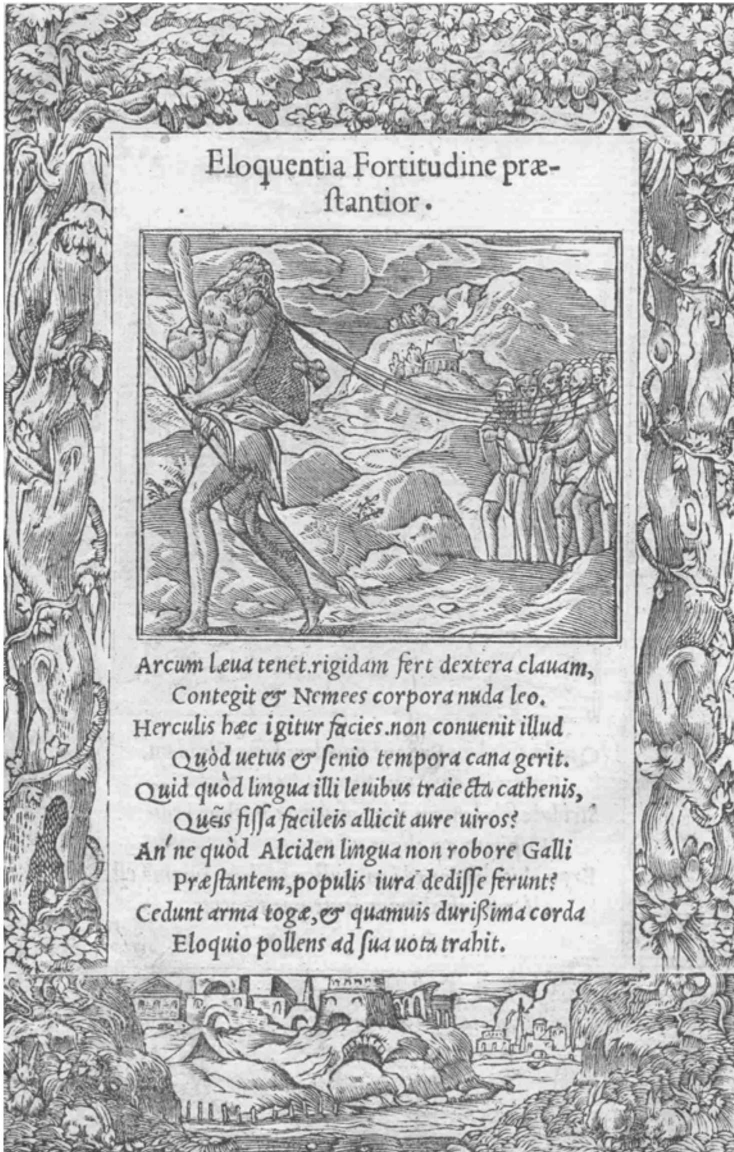
[24] I thank the staff at the Gothenburg University Library for allowing me to reproduce the photo of the emblem from the library's copy of Alciati 1550.

[25] "Arcum laeua tenet, rigidam fert dextera clauam,/ Contegit et Nemees corpora nuda leo./ Herculis haec igitur facies. Non conuenit illud/ Quòd uetus et senio tempora cana gerit./ Quid quòd lingua illi leuibus traiecta cathenis,/ Queis fissa facile is allicit aure uiros?/ An'ne quòd Alciden lingua non robore Galli/ Praestantem, populis iura dedisse ferunt?/ Cedunt arma togae, et quamuis durissima corda/ Eloquio pollens ad sua uota trahit"; Alciati 1996, p. 194. In earlier editions, the emblem displayed the same title and text, but a different picture (the earlier version of the emblem is reproduced in Rebhorn 1995, p. 68).

[26] Probably from Cicero's oration *De consulatu suo*; cf. Donald A. Russell's comment *ad locum* in Quintilian 2001, vol. 5.



Eloquentia Fortitudine præ-
ſtantior.

Arcum læua tenet.rigidam fert dextera clauam,
Contegit & Nemees corpora nuda leo.
Herculis hæc igitur facies.non conuenit illud
Quòd uetus & ſenio tempora cana gerit.
Quid quòd lingua illi leuibus traiecta cathenis,
Queis fiſſa facileis allicit aure uiros?
An'ne quòd Alciden lingua non robore Galli
Præſtantem,populis iura dediſſe ferunt?
Cedunt arma togæ,& quamuis duriſsima corda
Eloquio pollens ad ſua uota trahit.

Figure 1

In fact, this interpretation of the demigod can be traced back to a prose piece by the Greek author Lucian. In this story, dating from the second century AD, the narrator describes how, while traveling, he arrived in Marseille and marveled at an image of Hercules represented as an old grey man dragging a crowd of men tethered by their ears. A Celt approached the narrator and described the native custom of regarding Hercules as the embodiment of eloquence. This legend of 'Hercules Gallicus' was revived in the Renaissance, not least thanks to the humanists' approval of Lucian's elegant prose. Thus, in 1506, Erasmus of Rotterdam translated the story into Latin, and, in 1529, Erasmus's Latin version was translated into French. In France it found readers in both political and cultural circles such as the innovative group of poets known as 'La Pléiade'. Finally, in 1531, the identification of Hercules as a rhetorician and a political leader was ensured by the introduction of this figure in Alciati's *Emblemata*.[27]

Hercules Gallicus also found his way to Sweden and to Stiernhielm's *Loci communes*. There, among Stiernhielm's annotations on a wide range of subjects, we find many references to Alciati's *Emblemata*. However, in the particular annotation where Stiernhielm describes Hercules the orator, Alciati is not mentioned. Instead, Stiernhielm refers to a certain *Programma* written by one of his teachers, Johannes Simonius, who had come to Sweden after having first taught at the university of Rostock. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any such text, and it is still unclear what precisely it may have been; however, I have discovered that, in his book on rhetorical exercises, *Volumen exercitiorum oratorum* (1618), Simonius writes on the topic of

[27] See "Hercules: An Introduction", in Lucian 1913, pp. 63-71. For discussions on the tradition of Hercules Gallicus, see Hallowell 1962, pp. 242-255; Jung 1966, pp. 73-94; Galinsky 1972, pp. 222-224; and Rebhorn 1995, pp. 66-79 (especially pp. 66-67).

Hercules Gallicus in a fashion that is very similar in wording to that of Stiernhielm's.[28]

Accordingly, even though it is difficult to determine the precise route of influence, there seems to be reason to believe that it was Simonius who taught Stiernhielm about the importance of Hercules the orator.[29] At any rate – whether he first learnt about Hercules Gallicus from his teacher or by studying Alciati or maybe even by reading Lucian's text – the allegorical portrayal of the demigod clearly fascinated both Stiernhielm the young student and Stiernhielm the mature author. The poem *Hercules*, which was to make Stiernhielm renowned as the 'father of Swedish poetry', cannot be properly understood without this background knowledge.

From the 'Rhetoric of Harlots'...

In *Hercules*, Stiernhielm was engaging with the classical authorities in the discussion concerning language and morals, claiming that ideal rhetoric and ideal morals are inherent in the Swedish language. However, Stiernhielm also wished to enter into the contemporary European discussion of the issue. Thus, in *Hercules*, verses 132-148, he has Mistress Lust list the books that her daughter Vanity spends time on reading. These are the Roman poet Ovid's *Ars amandi* along with Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the less openly erotic but no less wanton romances of chivalry; moreover, the list includes the works of Rabelais, and, last but not least, the so-called *Rhetorica delle*

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[28] See Simonius 1618, pp. 246-247.

[29] The relationship between Alciati's emblem and Stiernhielm's annotation was discovered by Axel Friberg (cf. Friberg 1945, pp. 244-245), who did not, however, relate this discovery to the discussion of language and rhetoric in *Hercules*. Johannesson 2002, pp. 53 and 55, mentions Stiernhielm's annotation as well as the reference to Simonius' 'program', but appears to have studied the material independently of Friberg's treatment and does not connect it with Alciati's emblem.

Puttane. Whereas in this context, Stiernhielm seems to refer to Rabelais as an example of literary mannerism – and accordingly of a kind of stylistic wantonness – Ferrante Pallavicino's 'Rhetoric of Harlots', which was published in 1642, is something completely different. This meticulously constructed critique of voluptuous language opens as follows:

> The 'rhetoric of harlots' is nothing but the art of amplifying made-up words and false arguments, with a view to persuading and moving the souls of those miserable men who are caught in the nets of words and arguments, and forced to witness their success.[30]

It is obvious that, by referring to Pallavicino's book, Stiernhielm intimated that *Hercules* should be read in the wider context of the international debate regarding good versus bad rhetoric.

... To the Rhetoric of Virtue

'What could better express both the nature and the power of persuasive Queen Eloquence than this depiction?', young Stiernhielm asked in his annotation on Hercules.[31] The mature author's answer seems to have been 'Nothing!', seeing that he made Hercules the main character of his poem on morals and language. However, Stiernhielm decided to stage in *Hercules* not only the personified Eloquence, but also the traditional personifications of good and bad language. Mistress Virtue thus appears along with Mistress Lust, whose whole attire brilliantly encapsulates the very idea of deceptive, feminine adornment that Quintilian and Dionysius of Halicarnassus had warned against in their classical rhetorical works. In his youth, Stiernhielm

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[30] "Altro non è la Retorica delle puttane che vn' arte di moltiplicare artificiose parole, e mendicati pretesti con fine di persuadere, e muouere li animi i quell'infelici ch'incappando nelle loro retì, assistono alle sue vittorie"; Pallavicino 1642, p. 21.
[31] See note 23 above.

imagined eloquence in the guise of a woman – more precisely in the guise of a queen. When depicting Hercules as a young athlete and confronting him with the virtuous and the voluptuous female figures in his poem, Stiernhielm can be seen as echoing Quintilian's praise of the athletic orator and the ascetic body of *eloquentia*, on the one hand, and his warning against ostentatious, effeminate, *ornatus*, on the other. Whereas Hercules Gallicus was traditionally portrayed as an old man, in Stiernhielm's poem Hercules is presented as young and inexperienced, ready to learn about life, morals, and rhetoric through the encounter with the two main female characters.

However, since it is Mistress Virtue who gets the last word, after having thoroughly refuted the arguments of Mistress Lust, it is evident that the young hero of the poem will opt for the path of (Mistress) Virtue.[32] The reader can thus rest assured that he will eventually grow into the character of the old, powerful Hercules, an epitome of eloquence and a pillar of society.

With *Hercules* Stiernhielm offered his main contribution not only to the foundation of Swedish language and literature but also to the development of Swedish national self-identity. As has been argued in this article, to Stiernhielm, true eloquence was to be associated with the Swedish language. However, since modern readers are accustomed to unconditionally surrendering themselves to aesthetic delights, they have not been able to see in *Hercules* the critique of language and the ambivalent attitude toward linguistic ornament that are in fact thematized throughout the poem. To Stiernhielm's contemporaries, however, these aspects of the text must have been quite evident.

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[32] On the composition and the rhetorical genre of *Hercules*, see also Ekedahl 2000.

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