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The Royal Rhetor

Princely and common virtues in the operas and plays of Gustavus III

Jennie Nell

Abstract
This chapter analyses how King Gustavus III of Sweden, who was a talented writer, utilized the cardinal virtues in his dramatic works, considering both princely and common virtues. The king used the idea of the exemplum as a tool for educating his people. In fact, the communication can be said to have been two-way: an interplay of ideals and expectations between the King and his subjects, expressed through art. Using a variety of historical material, Gustavus preferred to use the famous Gustavus I and Gustavus Adolphus (his ‘Gustavian’ ancestors) as exempla, and as mirrors for and of himself. Perhaps even more importantly, he used the stage for royal rhetoric, presenting an image of an ideal king as well as ideal subjects.

Keywords: Gustavus III (1746-1792), rhetoric, exemplum, theatre

In a previous research article, I wrote about the virtues of Gustavus III (1745-1792) as interpreted in eulogies by Swedish poet Carl Michael Bellman (1740-1795).1 Honour and glory were two central concepts used in the eulogies, and they were closely tied by the poet to the favoured celebrated virtues of clementia, iustitia, and prudentia (‘clemency’, ‘justice’, and ‘prudence’). These virtues also dominated the King’s early political speeches, which I discussed using the preferred pedagogical instrument of the time: the exemplum.

I decided that it would also be fruitful to explore the opposite route of communication: the King’s own use of the cardinal virtues. Gustavus III is a king famous for his interest in the theatre as a pedagogical tool. He was
not only a dedicated spectator; he wrote several plays himself – mostly tragedies but also some comedies – and several opera librettos, in which he illustrated both exemplary princely virtues and exemplary common virtues. While his plays have been amply discussed from the perspective of his French role models and historical sources\(^2\) – as well as his use of rhetoric and theatricality for political means\(^3\) – his use of and views on virtue, as communicated in his plays, have not previously been researched in depth. In this chapter, I thus aim to investigate which virtues the king employs and how he employs them in his most popular plays. I will use Stephen Greenblatt’s term ‘social energy’ to examine in which ways the King’s plays fit within the framework of the exemplum, and how the arts were used for teaching purposes both by the court and by the people.

Greenblatt uses ‘social energy’ – which he derived from the Greek rhetorical term ἐνέργεια (energeia) and which he defines as something ‘manifested in the capacity of certain verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences’ – to explain the continuous negotiation and exchange between art and society.\(^4\) I find it suitable for this investigation to adopt the approach of seeing literature both as the reflection and the co-creator of a given historical setting, wherein literary creation can be viewed as a reciprocal process of historical influence and cultural production.\(^5\) The literary work thus expresses a collective experience and mirrors the ideals and values of a society, while also playing a part in the forming of these ideals through ‘a subtle, elusive set of exchanges, a network of trade-offs, a jostling of competing representations, a negotiation between joint-stock companies’.\(^6\)

When it comes to the particulars of panegyric, it has been shown that poets in eighteenth-century Sweden not only celebrated what the King expected and asked for, but also used eulogy to elicit certain behaviour from him, thus mirroring the ancient notion that poets had power over the sovereign. This stems from the idea that the literary work of art is the most long-lasting and prestigious monument of a person. What the poet records is what determines how posterity views the sovereign, a thought famously held by Italian court poets such as Pietro Aretino (1492-1556) and Ludovico Ariosto


\(^3\) See for instance Alm, *Kungsord i elfte timmen*; Tandefelt, *Konsten att härskra*; and Berlova, *Performing Power*.


\(^5\) Ibid. Greenblatt suggests the same view in *Learning to Curse*.

(1474-1533). In France the debate was conveyed by writers and philosophers such as Joachim Du Bellay (1522-1560), Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695), and Jean Racine (1639-1699). Gustavus III’s own role model King Louis XIV (1638-1715) had to suffer reminders of the power of the written word in a number of poems. For example, in an ‘Ode au Roi’ by Edme Boursault (1638-1701) from 1668 it is stated that:

Ce n’est pas toujours sur le cuivre
Qu’à la race future on transmet son destin;
Ce que trace une plume et que conserve un livre

(It is not always with the help of copper
That one conveys one’s destiny to future generations;
The trace of a quill and what is conserved in a book
Supersedes the vainglory of copper and the hope of the burin.)\(^7\)

Panegyric and eulogy were thus used in several ways: to manifest and propagate a certain image of the sovereign, and as a formative tool by the poets in an effort to stamp out unwanted behaviour and elicit desired behaviour in the sovereign. In this ongoing negotiation of the image and the actions of the sovereign, we find the workings of both the rhetorical term *evidentia* and Greenblatt’s elusive ‘social energy’.

‘Teaching virtue’ was actively practised during the Age of Liberty and the Gustavian era in Sweden. As crown prince, Gustavus was raised to be a great man (*grand homme*) and an exemplum to his people, greatly concerned with his reputation for posterity. His tutors, Counts Carl Gustaf Tessin (1695-1770) and Carl Fredrik Scheffer (1715-1786) instilled in him a reverence and a love for history and genealogy, and his mother, Queen Louisa Ulrika (1720-1782), compiled her own collections of examples to be used in the education of young Gustavus, focusing on Swedish role models such as Gustavus Vasa and Gustavus Adolphus.\(^8\) Tessin taught the Prince, using Plutarch’s *Vitae parallellae* (‘Parallel Lives’) to implant in him the view that history teaches us to separate virtue from vice and honour from dishonour through good and

\(^7\) Delblanc, *Ära och minne*, pp. 76-84, quote on p. 79. Horace’s verse ‘I have erected a monument more lasting than bronze’ (‘exegi monumentum aere perennius’) from Ode III:30, is a famous early example. All quotes in translation are translated by the author of this chapter unless otherwise indicated.

bad examples. In his adult life, Gustavus III strove to imitate his favoured predecessors, as can be seen in a speech to the Estates from 1771: ‘The hearts of grateful subjects is the greatest reward for good Kings, and the tears that You now shed, are the most glorious monuments You could ever erect, and the foremost encouragement to me, to follow the path, that great Kings and a beloved and ever missed Father have trailed for me’.9

Oscar Levertin has noted how the young prince’s tutors exploited his love for theatre. 10 Count Tessin in particular, modelled his teachings on François Fénelon’s (1651-1715) education of the Duke of Burgundy (1682-1712). Like Fénelon, Tessin wrote fables and dialogues about historical figures exhibiting heroic and royal virtues.11 Fénelon’s *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (The adventures of Telemachus; 1699) had a huge influence on the Crown Prince both as a boy and later in life as king and playwright.12 In his early childhood writing exercises, he summarizes the importance of virtue: ‘nothing but Virtue alone can raise a Throne or monument in the human soul’.13 The concept of virtue – a well-known key concept in the French Enlightenment debates – was discussed at length by the Crown Prince and his tutors.14 At this time in Sweden, the concept was used as ‘a collective term for ethical ideality and the human pursuit of perfection in the way of life’.15

I have chosen to study four of the King’s dramatic works, all tragedies; *Gustaf Adolphs Ädelmod*, *Gustaf Adolph och Ebba Brahe*, *Gustaf Vasa*, and *Siri Brahe*. In these works, the author explores all the cardinal virtues to a different extent. These four tragedies received the most stage time in Swedish theatres, both in Stockholm and in Gothenburg, during the Gustavian era, and there are records of them being staged well into the nineteenth century

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9 ‘Tacksamma undersåtars hjertan äro gode Konungars största belöning, och de tårar J nu fällen, äro de präktigaste äreminnen I kunne upprepa, och den yppersta uppmuntran för mig, att följa den väg, som så store Konungar och en kär och i alla tider saknad Fader för mig banat’, ‘TAL till Rikets Ständer på Rikssalen, vid Riksdagens början, den 25 Juni 1771’, in *Konung Gustaf III:s Skrifter*, I, pp. 73-74. For this particular multivolume edition, which is a collected works of King Gustavus III published between 1806 and 1812, I will henceforth use the abbreviation KGIII plus volume number in roman numerals for ease of reference.

11 Ibid., pp. 8-10.
12 Ibid., pp. 10-16.
14 Sven Delblanc comments on the emphasis on virtue versus vice in connection with honour and dishonour in the education of the Crown Prince in his *Ara och minne* (see ch. 2).
too. I will read these plays partly against a biographical and historical backdrop to establish the possible didactic value of the plays, and will then compare the words and actions of virtue in the plays with the King’s use of virtue in some of his political speeches and other writings.

The plays

During 1782 and 1783, Gustavus III wrote five dramas in a bid to create a national, Swedish repertoire for the stage. The first of these was Märtas Banér och Lars Sparres Kärlekshandel (The love-dealings of Märta Banér and Lars Sparre), later renamed Gustaf Adolphs Ädelmod (The magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus).

The Magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus (1783)

The main plot in this play was borrowed from a divertissement by Voltaire, Charlot ou La Comtesse de Givry, but transferred to Sweden in the early 1600s. It focuses on the King’s favoured theme: duty above love. The Countess Magdalena has arranged a marriage between her two young protégées Lars Sparre and Märta Banér, who were both orphaned in the Linköping Bloodbath of 1600. She is unaware of the fact that Lars Sparre is really the son of the nurse Lucia who, on the orders of Sparre’s mother, exchanged Lars for her own son Erik Johansson in an effort to save him from being killed by the vengeful King Charles IX. The real Lars Sparre thus grows up with the nurse, as a servant, under the name Erik Johansson.

16 See Berg, Anteckningar om Göteborgs äldre teatrar; Personne, Svenska teatern, esp. I-V; Blomkvist, Nöjeslivet i Stockholm 1773-1806; and Carlberg-Mannberg and Hjerstrand-Malmros, Gustaf III:s skötebarn.
17 Levertin, Gustaf III som dramatisk författare, p. 55. The plays are: Gustaf Adolphs Ädelmod (The magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus); Helmfelt; Oden och Frigga (Odin and Frigg); Gustaf Adolph och Ebba Brahe (Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe); and Christina och Magnus De la Gardie (Christina and Magnus De la Gardie).
18 Levertin, Gustaf III som dramatisk författare, p. 62. In effect, all plays by Gustavus III had models in other plays, usually French. The sources and modes of adaptation – a common practice in Sweden at the time, just as the Roman practice of aemulatio – have been carefully investigated and traced by Levertin, Skuncke, and others. What has not been investigated in depth are the end results – what the plays are in themselves, as independent works of art: their purpose, their aesthetic, and so on. I have recently started writing a monograph on this particular subject under the working title ‘A King among the Muses: A study of dramaturgy, history, and pedagogy in Gustavus III’s plays, operas, and carousels’.
The false Lars Sparre is portrayed as a coarse, ill-mannered, uneducated, lazy, petty, cowardly rogue while the false Erik Johansson is portrayed as an eloquent, mild-tempered, brave, honest, dutiful, noble, and delicate soul full of love for his king; a perfect example of the contemporary belief, that ‘blood will out’.

Märta Banér is attracted to Erik, but her sense of duty and loyalty towards her benefactor, Countess Magdalena, prompts her to accept her fate and be married off to the brutish Lars. At the same time, preparations for the marriage, which are to be overseen by the King, are in full swing, and the peasants on the estate of Hörningsholm prepare songs and dances in the King’s honour.

Erik at one point admits his love for Märta, but his virtue prevents him from acting upon it, and Märta insists that duty and virtue must come before personal feelings. Lars being brutal, mistrusting, and jealous, finally shoots Erik, who falls to the ground, seemingly dead. However, it transpires that the gunshot had merely grazed Erik’s temple, and that he had just passed out. Gustavus Adolphus, who knows the real identities of the two young men, and who has earlier tested both Märta and Erik to find out who they truly love, finally steps in to reveal the truth, and champions the marriages of the children whose fathers had been victims of his own father’s tyranny.19 It ends with a feast, turning the play from a tragedy into a comedy, while underscoring the King’s ability to heal and consolidate.

**Gustaus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe (1783-88)**

The action here takes place in Kalmar Castle and on the island of Öland during the war with the Danes. Gustavus Adolphus has been in love with Ebba Brahe ever since she arrived at court as a young girl after her mother’s death. Once he takes the throne, he promises to marry Ebba as soon as he gets back from the war. However, the Queen Dowager, Christina of Holstein, opposes this union, and while the King is away during the war with the Danes, she convinces the celebrated war hero Count Jacob De la Gardie (unaware of the King’s feelings and promises) to propose to Ebba, and manipulates Ebba into accepting his proposal by making her doubt the King’s honesty.

Ebba sends an emissary to the King to ask him to help her in her predicament. The King rushes back only to find that the marriage has already taken

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19 Parts of this synopsis can be found in Levertin, *Gustaf III som dramatisk författare*, pp. 64-65.
place. The dishonest manoeuvrings of the Queen Dowager are uncovered, and the cruel tragedy strikes the King, De la Gardie, and Ebba as they realize what has happened and the consequences thereof. Gustavus Adolphus pleads with Ebba to divorce De la Gardie, but Ebba insists on her virtue, obligation, and the sanctity of marriage, convincing them all of the righteousness of leaving things as they are, and accepting their fate.

In a parallel story, servants and siblings Sigrid and Sven, celebrate a double wedding with servants and siblings Erik and Maria. This is all done with the King's blessing, Sven having saved the King on the battlefield and the King having saved Erik from drowning.

The King, witnessing their happiness, professes a death wish, but his people's love and their pleas for him to remain their father and protector fills his heart with a renewed love for them and for his country, which overcomes his heartbreak. He reconciles with De la Gardie, making him Marshal of the Realm. Husband and wife, Lars Sparre and Märta Banér, characters from the previous play, reappear as the King's and Ebba's confidants.

_Siri Brahe (1788)_

The action in this play takes place around midsummer 1611 in Ebba Bjelke's jointure near the town of Christianopel in the easternmost part of the region Blekinge (a part of Denmark at the beginning of the seventeenth century) during the Polish-Swedish conflict.

Siri Brahe, a friend of Ebba Bjelke, is engaged to Erik Turesson Bjelke, the Steward of Kalmar County serving King Charles IX. However, she is secretly married to Johan Gyllenstierna, Ebba's eldest son who serves the deposed king Sigismund III Vasa, but who is now a declared outlaw. Siri, Ebba, and Ebba's daughter Anna are anxiously awaiting news of the youngest son Göran Gyllenstierna's return from the battlefield, where he serves as an officer in Charles IXs army. The women are guarded by Peder Stolpe, an old officer who served under Ebba's husband Nils Gyllenstierna and who is now Ebba's most trusted servant. Stolpe's daughter Stina, also a servant, grew up together with Anna, and they are confidants.

While waiting, Ebba is preparing the wedding between Erik Bjelke and Siri, destined to take place immediately upon Erik's arrival. Meanwhile, Johan Gyllenstierna arrives in disguise, urging Stina to forward a letter to Siri saying he is alive and waiting for her. Stina, a young, flimsy, nosy, and naively intrigant girl, fails to deliver the letter to Siri. Anna, an equally nosy and intrigue-loving girl, intercepts Stina and forces her to share her secret. Anna, unaware of the clandestine marriage between Siri and Johan,
and thinking Siri has a secret lover, decides to play mind games with her, desperate to find out who he is.

At the same time, the lowly, vicious, and greedy Erik Göranson Tegel, Charles IX’s Inspector General, is scouting for traitors. He learns that there may be a traitor hiding somewhere on Ebba Bjelke’s estate, and so he decides to exact revenge on the family, as he feels wronged and mistreated by the nobility in general and by the Bjelke family in particular. Stolpe discovers that his ‘son’ Gyllenstierna is alive, and vows to hide and protect him. Stolpe also protects the interests of Siri, who finally learns of her beloved husband’s return, keeping them both out of harm’s way, and hiding Gyllenstierna in a secret vault in the house.

Anna, forever snooping, finds a concealed entrance to the vault, and realizes that the stranger who gave Stina the letter might be the same person now hiding in there. She decides something suspicious is going on, and together with Stina they confront Stolpe. He persuades them that the man in hiding is an emissary sent to negotiate peace and he asks them to keep quiet about it. However Anna, still not convinced, decides to inquire of Tegel about the surreptitious emissary, and thereby unknowingly reveals Johan Gyllenstierna’s identity and his hiding place to the distrustful Inspector General, and by that, also unknowingly betrays her own brother and the whole family. Tegel tries to coax the truth out of Stolpe; however, he refuses to betray his masters. Stolpe finally reveals everything to the girls. Anna realizes the full consequences of her actions and runs away mortified.

The tension grows, and Tegel threatens the family. Siri decides to confide in her fiancé and throw herself and Gyllenstierna at his mercy, confident in Bjelke’s honour and virtue. Heartbroken, Bjelke decides that magnanimity and honour supersede romance, and offers his protection. Tegel attempts to invade the jointure but is kept at bay by Bjelke and Stolpe. Gyllenstierna appears, wanting to sacrifice himself for the family, but his mother Ebba throws herself around her son’s waist, and Stolpe tries to stop the soldiers getting to Gyllenstierna.

At the last minute, the young Crown Prince Gustavus Adolphus appears in the belief that he is to celebrate his friend Bjelke’s wedding. Siri, Ebba, and Stolpe plead for Johan Gyllenstierna’s life. Gustavus Adolphus is impressed by Gyllenstierna’s virtue, honour, and courage, and grants him clemency, even though he has chosen to serve the ‘wrong’ king. Ebba embraces all her children vituperating Anna for her meddling, stating that ‘to inquire about other people’s secrets is a crime against the common weal.’

**Gustaf Vasa (1786)**

Christiern Tyrann (‘tyrant’; Christian II of Denmark) is holding Gustavus Vasa’s mother Cecilia af Eka (Cecilia of Eka), his sister Margareta Vasa, and a host of Sweden’s foremost noblemen, along with their wives and children, captive in a dungeon prison in Stockholm Palace.\(^{21}\)

Christiern revels in his victory after the Stockholm Bloodbath, certain of his claim to the throne, while his adviser, Grand Admiral Sevrin Norrby (Søren Norby or Severin Norbi) advocates caution: Gustavus Vasa is on the march determined to avenge his father and reclaim his country.

Christiern states that using fear and terror is the best and most efficient way to rule, ensuring the obedience of the conquered subjects, whereas Norrby insists that the King should practise clemency.

Norrby is disgusted when he learns that Christiern does not intend to spare even the women and children, but instead to use Gustavus Vasa’s mother and Christina Gyllenstjerna (the widow of Regent Sten Sture [the Younger]) as bait, forcing Gustavus to give up his cause in front of all his people. Threatening to kill her young son, he coerces Christina to act as an emissary telling Gustavus Vasa that if he does not give up, Christiern will decapitate his mother. Norrby takes Christina to the Vasa camp, informing him of Christiern’s offer. Christina is forced to deliver the letter that tells of Christiern’s plans for Gustavus’s mother.

Gustavus Vasa is faced with a gruesome dilemma: to betray his people and seal Sweden’s fate as an occupied state, or to sacrifice his own mother’s life. Initially he cannot find a resolution: ‘Damned be my revenge and my victory, if they are to be soiled by a mother’s blood’,\(^{22}\) but Christina, and later all the soldiers, berate Gustavus Vasa for his selfish reasoning; all of them have lost loved ones fighting for freedom, and they are willing to bet their own lives as well. After an internal struggle, Gustavus resolves to refuse Christiern’s offer, and resume his fight to liberate Sweden. In a sweet dream he sees Glory, Victory, and Pallas erect a monument to him in the Temple of

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\(^{21}\) For this chapter, I use Oxenstierna’s edition of the text, based on the King’s manuscript(s) from c.1783, not the revised opera libretto by Johan Henric Kellgren, 1787-88. For a discussion of the making of the libretto, see Levertin, *Gustaf III som dramatisk författare*, pp. 164-69. Oxenstierna’s version is, according to Levertin, and as far as I can tell, closest to the King’s older manuscripts, and might even be a transcription of a French or Swedish version by the King himself. Levertin, *Gustaf III som dramatisk författare*, pp. 150-69. For another examination of the genesis of this opera, see Breitholz, *Studier i operan Gustaf Wasa*.

\(^{22}\) *Gustaf Vasa* in KGIIIS, II, p. 25: ‘Förbannad vare hämnden och min seger, om de skola fläckas af en moders blod’. 
Immortality. At the same time, Christiern has a poisonous dream in which Treason, Contrition, and Hate crush his crown.

Christiern commands Norrby to kill Gustavus’s mother as soon as he appears, but Norrby, deeply moved by Gustavus’s and Christina’s virtue, and claiming his honour as his own, refuses and is thrown into prison. Christiern is plagued by the bloody ghosts of the two young Ribbing boys (sons of the nobleman Lindorm Knutsson Ribbing), as well as by Sten Sture the Younger, Joachim Brahe, and Erik Vasa – all of whom he has previously murdered during the Stockholm Bloodbath – calling for revenge, causing him to lose control of his troops.

Meanwhile, Gustavus Vasa advances with his army, and wins a crushing victory. The Danish soldiers flee, and so does Christiern when Christina Gyllenstjerna announces the Swedish victory from within the palace. Gustavus Vasa vows to rule with clemency, and is celebrated by the people, and Norrby releases Cecilia af Eka to be united with her son.

**Princely virtue**

In the majority of his tragedies, Gustavus III focuses on Gustavus Adolphus, in whom he saw the role model for, and the mirror image of, his own actions during his coup d’état in 1772. The birth of the Crown Prince Gustavus was a major event in Sweden. He was the first heir to the throne born in Sweden since Charles XII (1682-1718), something that was heavily used as a political instrument by the court. Counts Carl Gustaf Tessin and Carl Fredrik Scheffer were responsible for crafting the image of the future king of Sweden. Count Scheffer minted medals that manifested this most important symbol. Gustavus was shown as the rising sun over Sweden, a prince whose great love for his people inspired the love of his subjects. Marie-Christine Skuncke has shown the importance of these medals, which combined a striking image with a quote in Latin, and which early on manifested the image of Gustavus as the sun and as the ‘third Gustavus’. Comparing the sovereign with the sun was a common device seen already in antiquity and in Graeco-Roman mythology, and perpetuated throughout the Renaissance and the Baroque period, the most prominent example perhaps being Louis XIV.

Count Tessin launched the Crown Prince as ‘the third Gustavus’ in a poem in French:

24 See for example Peter Burke’s discussion in ‘The Demise of Royal Mythologies’, p. 252.
Deux GUSTAVES chéris ont régné dans le Nord,
L’Amour de leurs Sujets, l’honneur du Diadème:
A qui le prix est dû, le monde est peu d’accord:
Dieu, pour en décider, nous donne le troisième.

(Two beloved Gustavians have ruled in the North,
The love of their subjects, the glory of the Crown:
The world is not in agreement on who is worthy of the prize:
God, in order to decide, has given us the third.)

Hereafter, the rising-sun motif became the most popular both in eulogies and in lampoons during the Gustavian era, and heavily used by the King himself. It manifested the dynastic ties between Gustavus III, Gustavus Adolphus (II), and Gustavus Vasa (I).

At the time of the Crown Prince’s birth, the ancient notion of the magic qualities of the blood line was revived: the belief that past, present, and sometimes even future generations were linked through blood. Thus, Gustavus III would, as heir to Gustavus I and Gustavus II, be able to recreate the glories of his predecessors. The newborn Crown Prince was used as a unifying, national symbol, ‘as a link between a glorious past and coming days of greatness’ in a time when the political climate was strained and insecure in Sweden.

Gustavus III used these images himself, both in his political speeches and in his historical operas and plays. It is hardly surprising, then, that the subject for his first play is the ideal monarch Gustavus Adolphus.

In The Magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus, we first hear of the King’s character by his people. In Act I, scene 2, Elin, the twelve-year-old young foster child of the Countess, on learning that the King will attend the wedding, jumps up and down and runs around shouting ‘O, we get to see the King! We get to see the good Prince, the brave Sir, the swift, the good King.’

26 Annie Mattsson discusses this in her dissertation Komediant och riksförrädare, esp. in ch. 5.
27 Skuncke, Gustaf III – det offentliga barnet, p. 79.
instruct the peasants to dance and sing the King's praise. Frigelius wants to open with a long-winded eulogy in the pathetic style riddled with Greek and Latin words and references, and have the peasants sing in Latin and Greek. Erik protests asserting that 'a simple expression of our love, pleases the King more, than all the pompous Latin erudition'. However, Frigelius’s humorously tedious eulogy serves the purpose of enumerating the King's virtues: he is brave, chivalrous, intelligent, and prudent, and his court is dominated by 'Jus' and 'Pietas', 'Fides' and 'Aequitas', 'Pax' and 'Sapientia', 'Spes' and 'Prudentia'. His Latin tirades nonetheless fail to impress. Instead, the peasants are instructed to sing a song in Swedish praising the King's magnanimity and his courage in battle. The song ensures that his people are dependent on his well-being and love, and that they love him in return.

This little tableau serves as comic relief in the midst of the tragedy, and despite its nonsensical nature, it helps to stress the idea that the love of the lower classes is a king's highest reward. It also underscores that a Swedish king should be praised in Swedish – a nod to the ongoing project of creating a national Swedish stage in a bid to strengthen the Swedish language.

The greatness of the King is also hinted at in the beginning, when Märta Banér – a child of one of the noblemen murdered by Gustavus Adolphus's father – expresses admiration and love for the King even before she has met him:

My aunt has surely heard everything that Erik Johansson has said about the King? When he speaks of him, it is always with tears in his eyes, and especially when he tells of the great mercy the King shows towards the children of the unfortunate Noblemen his father killed: with what care he advances their happiness: with what tenderness he takes them under his protection. For myself I do not know if it is my friendship with Erik Johansson that makes me love the King so much, but I can never hear the name Gustavus Adolphus without being moved.

30 Ibid., pp. 181-87. ‘[E]tt okonstladt uttryck af vår kärlek behagar Konungen mer, än all den granna latinska lärdomen’ (p. 184).
31 Ibid., pp. 183-87.
The true magnanimity of the King is implied early, but not properly shown until the very end of the play. The King enters as a *deus ex machina* to unwind the ball of tangled yarn: he reveals the secret of the exchanged identities, marries Märta and the real Lars Sparre, proclaims himself the ‘father’ of the orphaned Lars, and bestows on the groom the estates that had been taken from his father by Charles IX, thereby righting the wrongs of his tyrannical predecessor. The Countess exclaims: ‘O, my King! O King, worthy of thy crown! O that our recognition, our gratitude our love be a worthy recompense for thy virtue!’, to which Gustavus Adolphus replies: ‘That is the highest reward for a good king’.\(^{33}\) Thanks to the King, however, the tragedy never happens; his prudence and sense of justice even heals the wounds of the past and relieves the sins of his father. Indirectly then, Charles IX is portrayed as an *exemple à fuir*.

This corresponds both to the image of Gustavus III as the great unifier that permeated Swedish society already at his birth, and to the image he wished to convey of himself during his first speech to the Estates when he came to power in 1771. The King sought to unite the Riksdag, which disagreed on the King’s rights, and to unite the Fatherland – just as Gustavus Vasa and Gustavus Adolphus had.\(^{34}\) In his speech to the Estates on 25 June 1771, Gustavus III urged for unity and harmony for the public good.\(^{35}\) A Swedish king delivering a speech in Swedish was somewhat of a sensation. He declared himself ready to ‘assemble your scattered minds, unite your dispersed hearts’ (‘samla tillbaka edra strödda sinnen, förenda edra åtskilda hjertan’). It is said, even by his critics, that the speech moved the audience to tears and that immediately the whole speech was printed and distributed to all the parishes in the country. It was also translated into French by Count Scheffer and sent to France to be published in the *Gazette de France*.\(^{36}\)

In Act II, scene 7, when Gustavus Adolphus arrives at the estate, he declares: ‘I would consider myself happy, if my presence could eradicate from your memory, and especially from your hearts, the prejudices that our memory have.\(^{33}\) I bid., p. 233: ‘O, Min Konung! O Konung, värdig din krona! Ack att vår erkänsla, vår tillgifvenhet, vår kärlek må vara ett värdigt pris för din dygd!’; ‘Det är en god konungs största belöning’.


\(^{35}\) Lönnroth, *Den stora rollen*, p. 39.

\(^{36}\) Quote from Gustavus III, ‘TAL till Rikets Ständer på RiksSalen, vid Riksdagens början, den 25 Juni 1771’, in KGHIS, I, pp. 73-76, quote on p. 76. See also Odhner *Sveriges politiska historia under Konung Gustaf III:s regering*, p. 28. Cf. Nell, *Vivat vår monark!*, p. 76. Both Mikael Alm and Henrika Tandefelt thoroughly and commendably discuss at length in their previously mentioned dissertations how the royal apparatuses concerning speeches, images, and ceremonies all contributed to spreading the King’s self-image, however neither of them consider the role of the King’s own plays in this respect.
misfortunes that the dispute which has torn asunder the Fatherland, has printed in your mind. This is very close, as noted also by Oscar Levertin, to the wording in Gustavus III’s real-life speech to the Estates after the revolution in August 1772, where he claimed autocratic power in order to restore peace and harmony to a disjointed Sweden. It is also noticeable that many of the panegyric verses written during this time carry the same message: like his predecessors Gustavus Vasa and Gustavus Adolphus, the third Gustavus unites and saves the nation. In my dissertation, I analysed the panegyric verses by poet Carl Michael Bellman before, during, and after the King’s coup d’état, showing that many of these poems closely followed the symbolism created by the court in 1746 portraying the King as a unifying force, following in the footsteps of the previous Gustavians. Already in 1771, when Gustavus III rode into Stockholm as the new king of Sweden after the death of his father, Bellman argued for the new king’s greatness by alluding to his bloodline in his celebratory poem ‘Käre bröder, drickom Gustafs skål’ (Dear brothers, let us toast to Gustavus), in which Bellman relates the feats of both Gustavus Vasa, who fought and conquered the ‘tyrant’ Christian II of Denmark, and Gustavus Adolphus who won considerable victories for the Protestant cause, asking Heaven to make Gustavus III just as great as his two predecessors.

The image-making that took place at the birth of the Crown Prince thus created a kind of reciprocal relationship between political rhetoric, poetry, and actual events, that could be seen as an example of the ‘social energy’ that Greenblatt identifies.

The play was staged first only within the court circle, where it received mixed but fairly good reviews. It was staged for the general public (albeit shortened from five acts to three) at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in 1789, performed five times that year, twice in 1790 and three times in 1791. In 1789, Sweden was at war with Russia, and the King was heavily opposed by the nobility and by the advocates for Enlightenment. The King felt

37 Gustaf Adolphs Ädelmod, in KGIIS, III, p. 198: ‘Jag ansåge mig lycklig, om min närvaro kunde utplåna ur ert minne, och i synnerhet ur ert hjerta, de fördomar, som våra samfälta olyckor, som den oenighet, som sönderslitit fäderslandet, intryckt i ed sinne’.
38 The whole speech is printed in KGIIS, I, pp. 87-94. Levertin, Gustaf III som dramatisk författare, p. 56.
40 Nell, Vivat vår monark!, pp. 75-97.
duty-bound to go to war – *fortitudo* as in bravery on the battlefield being one of the royal virtues he had not yet demonstrated during his reign. The King saw an opportunity to ‘save’ his people, as he had during the *coup d'état* in 1772, and by that, regain his popularity.42 Opponents of the war, on the other hand, feared it would tear the nation asunder; Gustavus III therefore tried to portray it as something unifying. In the play *The Magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus*, he reminds the audience of the consolidating and restorative efforts of the second Gustavus as well as of his own – an act of persuasion through theatre – through *mimesis*, or *showing*.

_Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe_ is perhaps the King’s most well-known tragedy in the pathetic style. It too carefully explores the age-old theme of duty above love, the main theme of many of the Greek tragedies and of the _Aeneid_, and the linchpin of French classical drama represented by Fénelon, Corneille, and Racine.

In this play, the virtues of _fortitudo_, _prudentia_, _pietas_, and _clementia_ are featured most frequently. The major virtues of the protagonists featured are demonstrated in the dialogues in the third and final act, scenes 6 and 7, after Gustavus Adolphus has learned that Ebba is now married to his friend and officer, De la Gardie. All three lead characters display virtue, Ebba being the main advocate for duty and honour, which will be discussed below under ‘Female Virtue’.

Gustavus Adolphus’s first reaction to the news is shock, sadness, and anger. He feels betrayed and abandoned by both his lover and his friend, and he lashes out against De la Gardie vowing revenge. De la Gardie responds with _fortitudo_ (as in patience and perseverance), and replies that he is worthy of Ebba not only because of his heroism, but because he entered the union unaware of the secret liaison between her and the King. In a lengthy monologue he argues his case: he has fought – and won – for the King honestly, and valiantly, using only bravery and no underhanded deeds. His love for Ebba is true, and he was promised her hand as a reward for his victories, made to believe that Ebba entered into the union by her own free will. Discovering he was lied to and manipulated, he feels, is punishment enough, and that they all now must suffer their fate.43 Gustavus Adolphus will not be reasoned with, and urges divorce – maintaining that true love is holy. In a closing argument with Ebba, her virtue, sense of duty and respect for the sanctity of marriage, finally convinces the King of the truth. In his words: ‘Trembling I forfeit my love, I feel all the bitterness of this sacrifice;

but your honour, my duty demands it; I bow to its law [...] War and glory shall show me the path upon which I shall seek an end to my torment; it is among enemy troops, on the fields of victory I shall look for death'.

In the seventh and final scene of the play, Gustavus Adolphus is confronted by the happiness of his newly-wed servants. He confesses his heartbreak to them, and reveals his plans to go to war and seek out an honourable death on the battlefield. They all protest:

**Sigrid:** No, live for us.
**Sven:** No, forsake us not, we who are your children.
**Maria:** No, without you, what will happen to us?
**Johan:** No, live for us, for us who are your children. Our joy has turned, because You cannot share it; but think about us, on your entire people, who cries for their Father, their King. (*All on their knees around the King:* ) No, forsake us not, no, live for us, our good father, our good King!
**Gustavus Adolphus:** God! What a sight! What love! What a moving tableau! My entire soul is thereby affected! [...] O Heaven! I confess your mercy, You show me the love of my people to strengthen my heart broken by love and grief. Soul of my soul! you who guide all my actions: Love for the Fatherland! for Glory! come and enliven, fill my heart, erase from it all weakness, steady my courage, and make me worthy of my people’s affection. Yes, they show me my duty; I shall fulfil it.

He then reconciles with De la Gardie, declaring that Ebba’s lover has shown his rage and bad temper, whereas Gustavus Adolphus has shown his appreciation and gratitude. He displays prudence and clemency by making De la Gardie Marshal of the Realm. He has realized that his duties as King far

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44 Ibid., p.137: 'Jag uppoffrar darrande min kärlek, jag känner all bitterheten af detta offer; men din heder, min skyldighet fordrar det; jag underkastar mig dess lag. [...] Kriget och äran visa mig den stig, på hvilken jag skall söka slut på min plåga; det är bland fiendens övervunna troppar, på segerns fält jag skall söka döden'.

exceed his personal feelings, however true and pure his love has been. His final words are directed toward the peasants at the wedding: ‘Be content; it is your happiness, your love, and the well-being of my people that shall comfort me and stamp out the memory of my grief’. The message is clear: a man of true virtue is someone who can rise above his passions, echoing the famous reflections on virtue featured in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1718-1778) *Émile* and in his *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, both much read at the Gustavian court. Passion, fire, is needed to generate a great man, but the wise man knows how to balance it with virtue, so that he can accomplish great deeds.

This text was versified by the King’s librettist Johan Henric Kellgren (1751-1795), set to music and performed as an opera during the years of war with Russia, premiering in 1788. It was disliked by the nobility but received favourably by the Middle Estate – whose favour Gustavus III was courting in order to proceed with the war. Levertin asserts that this piece was used to encourage royalist sentiments among the Middle Estate; it was, for instance, staged during the celebrations of the victory of Grand Admiral Prince Charles (later Charles XIII, 1748-1818) at the naval Battle of Hogland in 1789.

In *Siri Brahe*, there is no king other than the vile Charles IX, who is never seen in the play but only represented by the brutish and vengeful Inspector General Tegel. However, Gustavus Adolphus emerges as the ideal king, even though here he is still only Crown Prince. Although playing only a minor part, Gustavus Adolphus represents clemency and justice, echoing the same virtues manifested in the nobleman Erik Bjelke, the slighted fiancé, who, after a ten-year-long engagement to Siri, on their wedding day learns

46 Ibid., p. 140: ‘Varen tillfreds; det är er lycka, er kärlek och mitt folks väl, som skall trösta mig och utplåna minnet af min sorg’.

47 This can be illustrated by quotes such as: ‘Qu’est-ce que donc que l’homme vertueux? C’est celui qui sait vaincre ses affections’ (‘Who then, is the virtuous man? He is the one who knows how to conquer his affections’), see Rousseau, *Émile*, Bk. 5, p. 818; and ‘il n’y a que les ames de feu qui sachent combattre et vaincre. Tous les grands efforts, toutes les actions sublimes sont leur ouvrage; la froide raison n’a jamais rien fait d’illustre, et l’on ne triomphe des passions qu’en les opposant l’une à l’autre. Quand celle de la vertu vient à s’élever, elle domine seule et tient tout en équilibre; voila comment se forme le vrai sage, qui n’est pas plus qu’un autre à l’abri des passions mais qui seul sait les vaincre par elles-mêmes’ (‘it is only ardent souls that know how to fight and win. All great struggles, all sublime actions are their doing; cold reason has never achieved anything illustrious, and passions are surmounted only by being set against each other. When passion arises, it rules alone and keeps everything in balance; that is how a wise man is formed, who no more than any other is sheltered from the passions, but alone is able to overcome them’), see Rousseau, *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse*, pt. 4, Letter 12, p. 493.


49 Ibid., p. 130.
that she is actually married to the outlawed Gyllenstierna, and that they now need his help. He has but minutes to choose what is right. In Act III, scene 12, Siri pleads:

I have no right to ask of you anything; but I dare expect everything. I know your magnanimity, I know its value, I know what a noble heart is capable of, and I believe yours too big, too honourable to fear anything that would not resemble it. O! May you instead of the love, that my heart denies you, settle with its esteem, with its reverence of your virtue!\(^{50}\)

Bjelke is mortified, but as he is a true grand homme, duty wins:

By so many deadly stings wounded, paralysed: overburdened by bewilderment, resentment, grief, love, admiration, I am as by thunder struck ... love ... despair ... duty ... Ah Siri! ... Cruel Siri! ...

[...]

What cruel state! ... What conflict! I see everything ... my misfortune ... my obligation ... Honour speaks: it is enough ... I shall obey its terrible voice. O cruel one! ... You shall venerate the heart you rip to pieces...\(^{51}\)

In the final scene, Crown Prince Gustavus Adolphus appears once again as a deus ex machina just as Tegel has ordered his soldiers to take Johan Gyllenstierna away. Ebba Bielke, Siri, and Anna all fall to their knees pleading for mercy for their son, husband, and brother. Gustavus Adolphus exclaims: 'All rise and be assured: you shall have justice. I have come to protect the safety of the realm, and not to undermine it'.\(^{52}\) He listens patiently to all parties, and decides to practise clemency; Sigismund is not a threat, and enough blood has already been shed, he states. Tegel's evil doings are exposed and punished, and Johan Gyllenstierna is given his freedom. Gyllenstierna

\(^{50}\) Siri Brahe in KGIIS, II, p. 250: 'Jag har ingen rätt att något af er äska; men jag vågar vänta allt. Jag känner ert ädelmod, jag vet att värdera det, jag vet hvad ett ädelt hjerta är mäktigt att göra, och jag tror ert för stort, för ädelmodigt, för att frukta något som ej skulle likna det. Ack! Mätte ni i stället för den kärlek, som mitt hjerta er nekar, nöjas med dess aktning, med dess vörndad för eder dygd!'

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 253: 'Af så många dödliga sting sårad, orörlig: tryckt av förundran, harm, sorg, kärlek, beundran, är jag som af tordön slagen ... kärlek ... förtviflan ... skyldighet ... Ack Siri! ... Grymma Siri ... [...] Hvad grymt tillstånd! ... Hvad strid! Jag ser allt ... min olycka ... min skyldighet ... Hedern talar: det är nog ... Jag skall följa dess förfärliga röst. Grymma! ... Du skall vörda det hjerta som du sönderslitter'.

\(^{52}\) Ibid. p. 262: 'Stigen alla upp och varen tillfreds: eder skall ske rätt. Jag är kommen att skydda allmän säkerhet, och ej att den störa'.


expresses his great admiration for the Crown Prince and claims that the only reason he does not come back to Sweden is that he has pledged allegiance to Sigismund, and will honour his king until he dies. Gustavus Adolphus replies: ‘I admire your way of thinking but I do not approve of it’,\(^{53}\) anachronistically echoing Voltaire and the Enlightenment ideal of tolerance.\(^{54}\)

*Siri Brahe* was also staged during the war years. It was performed almost 30 times at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm between 1788 and 1792, and was, according to Levertin, the greatest success next to *Gustaf Vasa* during the Gustavian era, and favourably received especially by the Middle Estate.\(^{55}\)

It is not hard to see how this play could have been used as a didactic and political tool. It serves as a reminder of the genealogy, the bloodline between the second and third Gustavus; it shows Gustavus Adolphus (and Erik Bjelke) practising *clementia* and *iustitia*, and to a degree also *prudentia*. These are virtues that Gustavus III was heavily praised for during his first years on the throne, and, according to his speeches, the very reasons for which he carried out the *coup d'état* in 1772.\(^{56}\) In the character of Peder Stolpe, the steadfast soldier (discussed below in ‘Virtuous Villains and Commoners’), the Middle Estate was given an exemplum of the model citizen, unwaveringly loyal and trusting towards his masters and his king. Similarly, the moral and self-sacrificing Erik Bjelke sets an example for the nobility, showing honour and duty as its own reward. The Crown Prince Gustavus Adolphus too recognizes and praises virtue and loyalty, even when they happen to be directed towards the wrong sovereign; steadfastness and strength of character emerge as virtues in themselves.

The foremost princely virtues prompted by the protagonist in the opera *Gustaf Vasa* are fortitude and prudence. We see a very similar dramatic structure in *Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe*, where a noble woman is the one talking sense to the protagonist (discussed below in ‘Female Virtue’). Looking at this piece solely from the aspect of virtue, we can see

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53 Ibid., pp. 262-66, quote on page 266: ‘Jag vördar ditt tänkesätt, utan att det gilla’.

54 During all of his life, the King had studied texts, not only by Voltaire, that claimed that the love and loyalty of the lowliest subjects is the truest confirmation of a king’s greatness. It is said that Gustavus III could recite Voltaire’s *La Henriade* by heart, and it is likely that Voltaire’s portrait of Henry IV of France was the model for the protagonists in the King’s plays featuring Gustavus Adolphus: ‘a forgiving conqueror who ends all political fraction’. See Lönnroth, *Den stora rollen*, p. 79.


56 See for instance his speech from 21 August 1772, in KGHIS, I, pp. 87-94.
that Gustavus III is working around a hub that explores virtue, vice, and personal sacrifice. As in the King’s other tragedies, and naturally in most tragedies from antiquity and onwards, virtue is shown to be innate to the great man, although frequently it has to be wheedled out when emotion and irrationality temporarily blind him.

This is also the case in *Gustaf Vasa*. In Act II, scene 3, when faced with the choice of either giving up the fight for freedom or sacrificing his own mother, he rages:

> Damned be revenge and my victory, if they are soiled by a mother's blood... what abyss threatens me! ... should I silence nature's voice and remain deaf to the call of honour? I fight for my Fatherland, and send my mother to her grave; and if I wish to spare her, I cause Sweden's demise – O no! – break my promises; become a traitor and a slave ... rip the breast who gave me life ... O God! send a ray of Your light into this heart, which has always humbly honoured your laws, and tell me what sacrifice You demand.57

Torn between saving his country and committing the moral and religious sin of matricide, Gustavus Vasa turns to his soldiers and asks: ‘If one of you were asked, to forsake protecting your fatherland, or lose a wife, a sister, or a mother, what would be your answer?’ The soldiers reply that they have all left their wives, sisters, and mothers behind to fight for freedom, and if so much as one of them would dare to violate their sacred duty, he would be killed on the spot, forever considered a disgrace to his family name.58

This is the final moral push the hero needs, and after displaying due grief over his decision, he is comforted by Sweden's guardian angel, descending on Gustavus in his sleep, showing him the honour and glory that awaits, while the usurper Christiern is shown his shameful fate in a nightmare (Act II, scenes 6 and 7).

In scene 8, Gustavus awakes, and revived and restored in his resolve and courage, he assures in his monologue that his intention is not vainglory, but true glory: ‘If I am led by a vain quest for glory, by the desire to make

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57 *Gustaf Vasa*, in KGIIIS, II, pp. 25-26: ‘Förbannad vare hämnden och min seger, om de skola fläckas af en modsers blod ... hvilken afgrund hotar mig! ... bör jag qväfva naturens röst och vara döf för ärans bud? Jag strider för mitt fädernesland, och störtar min moder i grafven; och då jag vill skona dess dagar, hastar jag Sveriges fall – Dock nej! – bryta mina löften; blifva förrädare och slaf ... sönderslita det bröst som skänkte mig lifvet ... O Gud! sänd en stråle af Ditt ljus i detta hjerta, som alltid i undergifvenhet vördat dina lagar, och såg hvilket offer Du fordrar’.

58 Ibid., pp. 28f., quote on p. 28: ‘Om man fordrade af någon ibland eder, att försaka fosterlandets beskydd, eller att förlora en maka, en syster, eller moder, hvad bleve edert svar?’
a name and acquire a shiny crown: o then let me fall! [...] If again a noble zeal guides my steps; if the reverence for Your name and the love of my fatherland possess my soul: o then snatch the spire from the tyrant’s hand, equip my arm with Your might, strengthen my courage, and Your power shall conquer my enemies!\textsuperscript{59}

In this piece the image of vice is as prominent as the imag(es) of virtue. The portrait of Christiern is a rather blunt, but effectively malicious one of an \textit{exemple à fuir} (an example to be avoided). Everything Gustavus is not, Christiern is. He is the counter image of the enlightened despot – Voltaire’s ideal sovereign that was the model for Gustavus III’s reign.\textsuperscript{60} Gustavus Vasa, despite being the protagonist, is in fact not heavily featured in this piece. He appears in the second act, as seen above, and then in the final act when hailed as the victor and the legitimate king. It is the plight of the imprisoned noblemen, women, and children, the cruelty and maliciousness of Christiern's reasoning, and the objections of the virtuous Sevrin Norrby that instead serve as the haute-relief that further enhances the virtues of Gustavus Vasa. The nastiness of Christiern’s character is achieved by centring on the appalling circumstances under which his prisoners are held: that he imprisons (and in the past has murdered) the elderly and children, that he considers clemency to be a ‘weak’ virtue, that he has a predilection to rule by fear, that he disregards justice, and that he is a coward to the very end. All this combines to generate a clear portrait of a tyrant, and gives a sound justification for Gustavus Vasa to reclaim the throne despite the horrible sacrifice he must be prepared to make.

The opera premiered in 1786, as Gustavus III prepared for a war against the Danes. Its success was immediate and long lasting, well into the nineteenth century. It was reportedly mostly celebrated and loved by the Middle Estate, a constant reminder of Swedish patriotism that had led to past glories, and that would certainly, in the hands of the third Gustavus, also lead to future glory.\textsuperscript{61} The Swedish poet Bellman, a prominent royalist panegyrist during these years, borrowed a melody from the opera for his famous drinking

\textsuperscript{59} Ib., pp. 54-55: ‘Om jag ledes af en fåfäng ärelystnad, om begäret efter ett namn, och glansen af en krona upplifva mig: o då stupe jag! [...] Om åter en ädel ifver styr mina steg; om vördnanden för Ditt namn och kärleken till mitt fäderesland intaga min själv: o ryck då spiran ur tyrannens hand, vänna min arm med Din kraft, styrk mitt mod, och Din makt störte mina fiender!’

\textsuperscript{60} See for instance the discussion in Skuncke, Marie-Christine, Gustaf III – det offentliga barnet, pp. 36-39.

song Fredman’s Song no. 21, ‘Away we trot soon ev'ryone’,\textsuperscript{62} thus spreading the references and connotations, however faint, in ever wider circles and contexts.

The popularity of the motif ‘the third Gustavus’ never waned during the Gustavian era. Appearing at his birth, and perpetuated by the court, by the poets, and by himself, it was the strongest image of the King, produced and reproduced during his reign. It was also the least criticized symbol (even though it was also used for criticism, as shown by Annie Mattsson\textsuperscript{63}). Due to their figuration in widespread legend and broadside ballads, Gustavus Vasa and Gustavus Adolphus were both popular, almost mythical figures throughout the eighteenth century, doubtless due to Gustavian ‘propaganda’.\textsuperscript{64}

At the time of this opera, Gustavus III’s national programme was in full swing. The Swedish Academy, based on the French, was founded in 1786 with the aim of improving the Swedish language to the point of being able to compete with Latin, Greek, and French to produce great, eternal art. The Royal Swedish Opera had been founded in 1773, and plans for the Royal Dramatic Theatre were in the pipeline. The plays and operas all featured the virtues of Swedish warrior kings and noblemen as well as of the Swedish people, steadily moulding the Swedish ‘national character’, embodied in the king and comprising the cardinal virtues.

Female virtue

As a spectator Gustavus III was reportedly most concerned with female roles, and as a child, he memorized the lines of female characters in all the plays he saw, later re-enacting them in his playroom, much to his tutors’ discontent.\textsuperscript{65}

In his own plays, many of the female characters speak of virtue and are depicted as virtuous. A woman (mother, sister, fiancée, or other significant


\textsuperscript{63} See note 27.

\textsuperscript{64} See for instance Levertin’s account of the popular novellas treating the subject of the love affair between Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe in Levertin, Gustaf III som dramatisk författare, pp. 101-18 and p. 121.

\textsuperscript{65} See for instance Levertin, Gustaf III som dramatisk författare, pp. 15-17 and pp. 23-24.
relative) is usually the driving force behind the hero's virtuous choices. Most female protagonists are equipped with fortitude, prudence, and razor sharp logic. In fact, it is the male protagonists who are overcome by affection and sentiment to the degree that they need to be reminded of their duties – just as Aeneas in Virgil's epic.

A common theme in the plays featured in this chapter is the virtue of fortitude, as in forbearance and accepting one's lot in life. As we have seen, the female protagonists in all pieces studied, apart from Gustaf Vasa, are married off to someone they do not truly love, which was clearly an everyday reality among royals and nobility at the time. This is the case for Märta Banér in The Magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus, for Ebba Brahe in Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe, and to a certain degree for the eponymous Siri Brahe. Siri Brahe's case is slightly different, however, because there is the complication of her already being secretly married to the outlaw Johan Gyllenstierna. She is afraid to speak out and betray her husband. She is portrayed as being bound by gratitude to both Ebba Bjelke and Erik Tureson Bjelke and therefore reluctant to disclose her secret. In this play, she evokes the virtues of her fiancé by showing her fidelity and loyalty to her husband.

Of all the female characters in these four pieces, Ebba Brahe is dealt the cruellest fate; deceived by the scheming Queen Dowager into thinking her fiancé Gustavus Adolphus has betrayed her, she marries De la Gardie almost out of spite – an impulsive decision that she regrets but for which she takes full responsibility. In Act III, scene 5, she hastens to defend herself when confronted by De la Gardie, who hears the King confess his love for her at his return and shames her for letting him think she married him out of free will while really being in love with someone else:

> From the youngest age, having been taught to follow the laws of virtue, sacrificing all for her [i.e. virtue], honour is my guide, and it commands me to sacrifice for you, a flame more likely to cloud it [honour].

De la Gardie insists that she will not be able to forget her other love, but Ebba retorts:

> The Queen's pride, her will, my fate has brought me to the Lord's altar, to there give you the hand that was meant for your King, to there promise you eternal faith; and that promise I shall keep [...] Ebba Brahe's heart is too big, too noble, not to follow its laws of duty, not to extinguish a flame that would be a crime to you and to her.
Still in doubt, De la Gardie maintains that she will not be able to get over her grief. She replies:

It shall be suppressed. Virtue, obligation, time, yes, your great qualities shall quench it, and the tender sadness I see you suffer, the beauty with which your love is expressed, shall conquer my heart eventually.66

Gustavus Adolphus rages against their fate, and as we have seen, refuses to accept it. Ebba is the one who reasons with him: ‘My promise has been made, my honour cannot shy away from it; my virtue is known to you, it is constant’67. After the King suggests divorce, she again argues from the point of view of virtue:

O God! My Prince, can love then so blind you? See your obligation, hear the voice of honour, it tells you that it is for You a crime to see me, to love me, to use your despair to soften a heart that belongs to another, whose duty only allows her to regard you as her King, whose obligation commands her to flee your sight.68

Again the King insists and says that divorce is not a crime, the law allows it, but she retorts: ‘Honour forbids what the law allows’ ([H]edern förbjuder hvad lagen tillåter). Then, she uses the argument of *pietas*, claiming that the whole sorry affair has been the work of God, who wants another to share the King’s throne; that marriage is the holiest of bonds and that she will never break them.69 It is Ebba’s strength of character, her steadfastness, and her

67 Ibid., p. 133: ‘Mitt löfte är gjordt, min heder kan det ej rygga; min dygd är dig känd, den är oföränderlig’.
69 Ibid., pp.134-37.
virtue that makes the King see the error of his emotional reasoning, and give her up to instead serve his country and live for his people.

In *The Magnanimity of Gustavus Adolphus*, the false identities add to the intrigue of virtue versus love. Gustavus Adolphus has a different heroic role in this play. He knows the truth about the switched identities, but before disclosing it he takes the rather unexpected role of love-broker in Act II, scene 9. He wants to learn Märta Banér’s true feelings, fearing her youth and innocence might have led her to fall in love with the false Lars Sparre anyway, and he – professing to know what it is to live with a broken heart – does not want to cause her perpetual heartbreak.\(^7^0\) In their conversation, Märta confesses:

> It is my aunt who has decided about my marriage. She has been a mother to me: I should submit to her will and believe she knows best what will make me happy.

> . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

> I owe my aunt everything; her friendship with Sparre’s father is the cause of all the arrangements she is now making to institute this marriage. I would kill her if I refused his hand: I would rather sacrifice my own happiness; it is to do all I can to show her my gratitude.\(^7^1\)

In the conversation, however, she lets slip that her heart belongs to another, but assures the King that she is ready to go through with the marriage and fulfil her duty. The King promises to make her happy and that she will indeed be married to Sparre, making her sad and confused, thinking he is playing with her, mortified that he might have discovered her true feelings for Erik.

\(^7^0\) *Gustaf Adolfs Ädelmod*, in KGIII, III, pp. 204-5. It has been suggested that Gustavus III identified with Gustavus Adolphus’s legendary broken heart. There is an unsubstantiated rumour that the King had a brief affair in 1768 with noblewoman Charlotte du Rietz (1744-1820), and that she was the love of his life; however she was both already married and allegedly unfaithful to the King during their affair, which supposedly caused him severe heartbreak. The nature of this affair is not yet fully disclosed; interpretations are founded on a few letters from the King to Charlotte du Rietz and on letters and memoirs by people in the court circle. Speculations are made in several biographies: see for instance Ribbing, *Gustav III:s hustru Sofia Magdalena*; Erdmann, *Vid hovet och på adelsgodsen i 1700-talets Sverige*; and Landen, *Gustaf III*.

\(^7^1\) KGIII, III, p. 204: ‘Det är min moster som beslutit mitt giftermål. Hon har varit en moder för mig: jag bör underkasta mig hennes vilja och tro att hon bereder bäst min lycka […] Jag är skyldig allt åt min moster; hennes vänskap för Sparrens fader är föremålet, är orsaken till alla de steg hon gör, att stifta detta giftermål. Jag gaf henne döden, om jag nekade honom min hand: jag vill hellre uppföra min lycka; det är allt hvad jag kan göra, till att visa henne min erkänsla’. 
In Act III, scene 3, Märta and the false Erik are left alone to practise a dance performance for the King. Erik carelessly confesses his love for her. Märta is moved but steadfast: she will consider him only a friend, a brother, since she is promised to another, and berates him for stirring her heart. Erik falls to his knees, heartbroken, and asks for forgiveness. The false Lars Sparre sees them, and accuses Märta of infidelity. She defends her honour:

It is on my aunt's command I am here: this room is the King's antechamber; and if I were so weak as to give my heart to an unlawful love, I would not choose this room to declare it. You are free to practise all your bitterness, but be sure I will never give my hand to a fiancé who so little respects my virtue.72

Her forbearance and prudence are rewarded: the King reveals the truth about Lars's and Erik's switched identities, although not yet to the real Lars. After surviving the attempt on his life, false Erik shows magnanimity and clemency by pleading for Lars's life: there has been enough bloodshed in the family. The King is impressed by the real Lars's virtues, and revealing Lars's true birth and status, he marries the young lovers.

In this play, the age-old belief that one cannot hide one's nobility, that it shines through even the most elaborate disguise, is manifest. Reversely, the simple mind and brutish manner of the servant's son, even though raised in a noble family, cannot be masked. Märta's attraction to the real Lars is 'natural', so is the real Lars's magnanimity and fidelity towards the King. This play then, like the others, serves as a mirror for princes; it showcases Gustavus III's ideal king and ideal subjects. Märta Banér's forbearance and loyalty is shown as an honour to her sex – just as Ebba Brahe's reasoning makes her an exemplary noblewoman.

It is fair to say that most female characters in these plays are passive. The virtues attributed to them belong to the realm of philosophy, rather than to action. Fortitudo for the women in these plays almost always means forbearance or patience rather than courage. Siri Brahe is allowed one small act of courage in Act III, scene 15, when she, as Tegel orders the soldiers to tear down the tapestry covering the door to the secret vault where Johan Gyllenstierna is hiding, puts herself in their way crying: 'No you will trample me first – No, no ... I will ... I die ...'.73 but then, predictably, she faints.

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72 Ibid., p. 219: ‘Det är på min mosters befallning jag finner mig här: detta rum är Konungens förmak; och om jag vore nog svag att lemma mitt hjerta till en brottslig kärlek, så skulle icke detta rum väljas att den förklara. Jag lämnar er frihet att utöfva all er bitterhet, men var säker att jag aldrig ger min hand åt en fästman, som så litet vet att vórdra min dygd’.
73 Siri Brahe, in KGIIS, II, p. 256: ‘Nej förr ska ni förtrampa mig. – Nej, nej [...] jag skall [...] jag dör ...’
A different kind of courage is displayed in the character Christina Gyllenstjerna in the opera *Gustaf Vasa* and her intense rebelliousness towards the usurper Christiern. Already in the first act, she challenges the tyrant: ‘Barbarian, who never established your power by any other means than through betrayal and murder, soon you shall recognize a hero who knows how to conquer through bravery and virtue’.74 Because of her defiance, he picks her to deliver the news that Gustavus Vasa may choose between surrendering and watching his mother being executed. At first she refuses: ‘It is not enough for you to have murdered my whole family, now you want me to corrupt a hero’s virtue and hand him the shackles that would enslave my fatherland; no, barbarian! you know me not!’75 Only when Christiern threatens to kill her young son does she comply after a brief moment of hesitation, however, secretly resolved to sacrifice her child and urge Gustavus to keep fighting.

In a long monologue following Vasa’s initial doubts about sacrificing his mother, she lights the first spark that rekindles his heroic virtue:

I share your despair; I fear for a son’s, and you, for a mother’s days. But you, Sweden’s only hope, can you fault in your fidelity, and would you thereby save your mother? Tell me, brave Gustavus: when you are not afraid to violate such holy promises, what truth can you expect from a tyrant? Can the God you beseech more clearly demonstrate His will than through the victories He grants your weapons? The cries of the oppressed and the disgrace of our fatherland have awoken His sense of justice. See Sweden, and see nothing else; may your heart be raised above ordinary virtues; and if Heaven has decided that our freedom is to be gained by precious blood, do not deny your mother an honour that shall evoke the heroes’ envy and the world’s admiration. Be sure that she, under the axe of the executioner, will bless the stroke that at once ends her life and crushes Sweden’s yokes. Fear for your glory, if you are more concerned about her life than about our freedom; fear that her heart will break at the sight of a deplorable son. What have I said? O! ... I forget whose death sentence I sign, when I give you this advice. O my husband! [Sten Sture the Younger] forgive me for condemning your son to be sacrificed for a

75 Ibid., p. 17: ‘Icke nog att du mördat hela min slägt, vill du äfven att jag skall förleda en hjeltes dygd och räcka honom den boja, som skulle förslafva min fosterbygd; nej, barbar! du känner mig icke’.
people, whose pillar you once were; I saw your blood flow for Sweden: your son should follow in your footsteps; my days will end with his, but I have fulfilled my duty.\textsuperscript{76}

Furthermore, Christina is the one at the end of the play who, driving out the usurper king from Stockholm Palace, castigates him:

Flee, tyrant! Evade the punishment for your crimes; all your hope is gone; this castle is no longer yours. The people who have worn your shackles have reclaimed their rights ... Flee! I hate you too much to fear your death. Go, and bring with you in your disgrace the terror your crimes instil.\textsuperscript{77}

It is also Christina who is given the final solo part in the play, spurring the people to crown their liberator Gustavus Vasa. In the first act, she is even recognized by Norrby as being endowed with heroic virtue: ‘The brave Christina, who with all the virtues of her sex combines those of a hero, Christina, so beloved by the people, revives their courage’.\textsuperscript{78}

Christina Gyllenstjerna is an ‘older’ woman, and the honourable widow of Regent Sten Sture the Younger. Historically, she would have been near 30 years old at the time of the Swedish War of Liberation. Her status and position is therefore different from the younger Märta or Siri, whereas Ebba falls somewhere in between; historically, she was married to De la Gardie at the age of 22. Their predicaments differ too: Märta and Siri are young wards,  


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 48: ‘Fly, tyrann! Undvik straffet för dina brott; allt hopp är dig betaget; detta slott är icke mera ditt. Det folk, som burit dina fjärran, har återeröfrat sina rättigheter ... Fly! Jag hatar dig för mycket, att ej befara din död. Gå, och för med dig i van ärans den fasa dina brott ingifva’.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 13: ‘Den modiga Christina, som med alla sitt köns dygder förenar en hjeltes, Christina, så älskad af folket, upplifvar dess mod’.
bound by loyalty and gratitude, which gives them a limited range of action. Ebba is deceived and guilty of the flaw of distrusting her king. They are all confined to displaying virtues befitting their social standing, their sex, and their moral dilemmas, and their virtue is rewarded by them being allowed to settle into married life with heroes. Christina's acts of courage and defiance against the tyrant are befitting her predicament: jailed by a usurper and a tyrant. As a representative of the nobility, her husband, the Swedish people and their character, it is appropriate for her to speak as harshly as she does; it is an act of patriotism. She is thereby an exemplum of an ideal citizen defending the nation. She can also be seen as a female mirror image of Gustavus Vasa, sharing his ardent love for the fatherland and his profound love of freedom. It is not uncommon among Enlightenment thinkers to approach patriotism from the point of view of virtue, or to count patriotism among the virtues: de Jaucourt, author of the article 'Patrie' (Fatherland) in *L'Éncyclopédie*, calls it 'a political virtue, by which one renounced oneself, preferring the public interest to one's own',79 and Rousseau, also in an article in *L'Éncyclopédie*, states that: ‘It is certain that the greatest prodigies of virtue have been produced by the love of country: this gentle and lively feeling, which combines the power of self-love with all the beauty of virtue, gives it an energy which, without disfiguring it, makes it the most heroic of all passions.’80

Both Ebba and Christina are catalysts for their Kings’ true virtue; it is their speech, their virtue, and their spirit of self-sacrifice that make the protagonists see the error of their ways. Love is honourable, true love even more so, but it is always portrayed as second to duty, especially for a sovereign, a theme heavily represented in the French classical dramas so cherished by Gustavus III. This view might also be traced back to the teachings of Count Scheffer, who in 1756 replaced Count Tessin as tutor to the Crown Prince. His pedagogy included letter-writing, giving the prince different subjects to read about and then asking him to argue his standpoint.81

80 Rousseau, 'Economie', in *L'Encyclopédie*, V: ‘Il est certain que les plus grands prodiges de vertu ont été produits par l'amour de la patrie: ce sentiment doux et vif, qui joint la force de l'amour-propre a toute la beauté de la vertu, lui donne une énergie qui, sans la défigurer, en fait la plus héroïque de toutes les passions.’ ‘L'Encyclopédie/1re édition/ECONOMIE ou OECONOMIE’, Wikisource, https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/L%E2%80%99Encyclop%C3%A9die/1re_%C3%A9dition/ECONOMIE_ou_OECONOMIE.
81 This has been treated extensively by Marie-Christine Skuncke in her book *Gustaf III – det offentliga barnet* and by Beth Hennings in *Gustav III som kronprins*. 
series of letters of February and March 1760, the Crown Prince and Scheffer discuss, among other things, Rousseau's views on theatre, prompted by the philosopher's famous and infamous *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les spectacles*, in which he argues that the degenerate and unnatural Paris theatres have a detrimental effect on people's tastes and morals. In one of these letters, the Crown Prince argues that Rousseau may be right in that some plays can be considered to be demoralizing, but overall defends the theatre and its ability to show the citizens good exempla. He then asks Count Scheffer to put forth his own view in a response, which he does in a letter from 1 March 1760:

The only thing I can add for my own part is that I would like Love to be entirely banished from theatre plays. When this passion is treated well, as in some of the tragedies of Racine or Monsieur de Voltaire, it carries into sensitive souls, especially those of young persons, a perturbation and an agitation that, if not dangerous for morals, because virtue in these pieces always remains victorious, at least become so for their tranquillity and repose. [...] [L]ove on stage prepares and necessarily inclines these young men towards sensibility or gallantry. Both have their dangers. [...] The only time where it seems to me warranted to show love on stage is when it can be represented as ridiculous. 82

Scheffer's view, obviously derived from Voltaire's, that the primary role of theatre is to inspire virtue by portraying *grands hommes* seems to have guided Gustavus III as playwright; not only is love treated rhetorically rather than emotionally in his tragedies, but in his comedies, such as *Den ena för den andra* (The one for the other), romantic love and infatuation

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82 'La seule chose que j’aurais à y ajouter pour mon propre compte, c’est que je voudrais que l’Amour fût entièrement banni dans des pièces de théâtre. Quand cette passion est bien traitée, comme dans quelques-unes des tragédies de Racine et de Monsieur de Voltaire, elle porte dans les âmes sensibles, surtout dans celle des jeunes personnes, un trouble et une agitation qui s’ils ne sont pas dangereux pour les mœurs, puisque la vertu, dans ces pièces demeure toujours victorieuse, le deviennent au moins pour leur tranquilité et pour leur repos. [...] [L’]amour sur le théâtre prépare et dispose nécessairement ces jeunes gens ou à la sensibilité, ou à la galanterie. L’une et l’autre ont leur danger; [...] Le seule cas où il me semble donc permis de mettre l’amour sur le théâtre, c’est quand on peut le représenter comme un ridicule.' See Scheffer, *Correspondance entre Son Altesse Royale le Prince Gustav de Suède et Son Éxcellence le Sénateur Comte de Scheffer*, Greifswald, 1772, quoted in Launay, ‘J.-J. Rousseau et Gustave III de Suède’, p. 504. The same quote is used by Molander Beyer in ‘Bland kungligheter, diplomater och vetenskapsmän’, in a discussion of the Crown Prince’s views on Rousseau’s *Lettre à d’Alembert*. 
are usually depicted as folly, sure to cause embarrassment (albeit amusing) to all parties involved.  

Virtuous villains and commoners

The ever-popular theme of virtue in the lower classes, which enjoyed increased popularity after 1789 (when the King sought support from the Burgher and Peasant Estates during the Russo-Swedish War), is well represented in all four plays.

In Sweden at this time, the use of the exemplum was widespread and highly debated. It was believed that it should work at all levels of society, and not be something solely for princes or noblemen. In true Aristotelian spirit, all Estates should have their magnanimi, great souls, to look up to and emulate, so that each and every one could be inspired to become the greatest within their social class. In the 1760s, there was even a suggestion that the Stockholm Stock Exchange building should be converted into a pantheon for great men from the Burgher Estate. Sven Delblanc calls this movement ‘the democratization of glory’. Well-known authors and historiographers such as Anders Botin (1724-1790), Anders Schönberg (1737-1811), and Carl Christoffer Gjörwell (1731-1811), authored their own collections of great men, with varying success.

As we have seen, Gustavus III was raised in the belief that the praise of the lowliest subjects was a king’s highest reward, and during the war with Russia, he sought and received the most support from the Burgher and Peasant Estates. It is not surprising then to note several examples of this in the King’s plays.

The soldiers in Gustaf Vasa are obvious examples. Christina’s speech on self-sacrifice, representing the view of the elite, is followed by the soldiers’ rebuttal of Gustavus Vasa’s question whether they would choose to save a loved one or their homeland. Their speech on sacrificing their families for the sake of their homeland, and their own life in the name of the King, is a short but very telling representation of the desired view of the lower classes. This demonstrates their fortitude. In two strokes the audience catches a view

83 When it comes to female vice in these plays, it can be mentioned that it is rather conventionally displayed through evil, scheming women such as Christina of Holstein in Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe, or young, flimsy, nosy, and overly talkative girls such as Anna and Stina in Siri Brahe. These characters, however, can be said to exemplify inappropriate behaviour rather than actual vices.

84 Delblanc, Ära och minne, pp. 111-16.
of the relentless Swedish national character, high and low, across the board, which ignites in Gustavus the courage and resolve he momentarily loses.

In *Siri Brahe*, it is mainly the old officer Peder Stolpe who represents the virtues of the common man. Granted, Stolpe once served as an officer in the army under Nils Gyllenstierna, late husband of Ebba Bjelke, but he is now working as a faithful servant to her, and his daughter Stina, although Anna's confidant, is clearly seen as a servant girl and not an equal to the noblewomen in the house. Also, Stina is used as a counterimage to her father: he is steadfast, discreet, and keeps quiet, while his daughter is flimsy, nosy, and overly talkative. As an ex-soldier, it is not surprising that courage and bravery are Stolpe's foremost virtues. He is seen distributing weapons in the first scene to protect the estate from roving bands, and in the third act he throws himself in front of the soldiers that are ordered to arrest Johan Gyllenstierna.

He is also depicted as loyal – a trait given to most virtuous characters in Gustavus III's plays and one that is treated almost like a cardinal virtue in itself. He refuses to cooperate with Tegel who tries to prise the location of Gyllenstierna's hideout from him, trying to bribe Stolpe with 500 pieces of silver, to which Stolpe replies: 'Do you think that you with fair words or promises of riches can seduce an old soldier, who has served with honour all of his days? No, I would rather see my old wife and my daughter beg and starve to death, than to see them rich at the cost of an unfortunate one, whose well-being I would have sought at the expense of the happiness of my family.' Stolpe protests against Tegel's rough methods. Tegel asks: 'Is it brutality to defend the King's right, the safety of the realm? How would you like the ruler of justice to be? Do you want him to be weak, indulgent, wavering?', to which Stolpe replies: 'No, but I want him to be fair, incorruptible, not virulent, not hard, but steadfast: that he shall protect innocence and defend virtue; in a word: that he shall not abuse the citizens, in order to exact his own, personal revenge.' Here, Stolpe describes how the ideal monarch Gustavus III himself wished to be seen.

In 1776, Gustavus III was involved in a highly publicized incident. A certain Colonel Gyllensvan was fired by the Council after due pressure from the

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85 *Siri Brahe*, in KGIIIIS, II, pp. 239-40: ‘Menar ni att kunna med dessa fagra ord eller med rikdomar förföra en gammal soldat, som med heder tjent i all sin tid? Nej, jag särre min gamla hustru och min dotter tigga och hungra ihjel, än att se dem rika på bekostnad af en olycklig, hvars välfärd jag hade sökt på bekostnad af de minas lycka’.

Clemency is my most valued Royal virtue, and if a just posterity reviews my actions from the moment I was entrusted the government of the Realm it will not doubt my heart’s inclination; but all virtues have their limits, and when clemency in a Sovereign obscures such faults that pertain to safety of the realm, then this inclination is turned into indulgence, dangerous to the common weal. But this indulgence becomes most harmful, when it covers up such crimes that are being perpetrated [...] against the laws and rights of the common man, that is, the fraction of citizens who are the weakest, whose rights it is a Sovereign’s first obligation to protect. 87

Gustavus III portrays himself as more of a defender of the weak than a righter of wrongs. He thereby connects his own image to that of Gustavus Adolphus, famous for his concern for the lowest of his subjects, amply alluded to in the second act of Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe. 88

The second act of this play focuses on the home of the ferryman Johan, whose sister Catharina was Ebba Brahe’s nurse. Johan's daughter Sigrid is engaged to Catharina’s son Erik, and Johan's son Sven is engaged to Catharina’s daughter Maria. Catharina, Johan, and Maria are waiting for Sven, Erik, and Sigrid to get back. Sigrid and Erik have been sent to deliver flowers as a wedding gift to Ebba Brahe, and Sven is serving as a horseman in Gustavus Adolphus’s army. At her return, Sigrid describes all of the preparations for the noble wedding, but she cannot understand why Ebba did not look happy on her wedding day – Sigrid herself cannot wait to wed her beloved Erik and the feeling is mutual; Sigrid says she will cry, and Erik that he will jump for joy in church. The scenes show the innocence and naiveté of the lower classes, and it is also an idealization of simple, uncomplicated country life.


88 See comments by Levertin, Gustaf III som dramatisk författare, pp. 121-22.
The whole family is deeply concerned for the safety of the King. Although tired from having rowed back and forth between Kalmar on the mainland and Färjestaden (the ferry town) on Öland all day, Erik resolves to row out in an old logboat to make sure that the enemy fleet has sailed away.

Meanwhile, the King and Lars Sparre arrive at the ferry town desperate to get across to Kalmar, as the King is hurrying back to marry Ebba, but a storm is rising and Johan decides it is too dangerous to try. The King insists, and Johan says they can wait for his son to take them over. Not recognizing the King, Johan asks the noblemen if the king is safe and tells them how much he has worried for him. Gustavus Adolphus secretly delights in being so loved by his subjects, and when Johan asks about his son Sven, the King almost gives himself away by explaining how Sven at one point had saved him from being captured by the enemy.

Suddenly the women cry out: the logboat has capsized in the storm, and Erik is drowning. Gustavus Adolphus jumps into Sigrid’s boat, rows out into the storm, and brings the unconscious Erik back to their house. All believe Erik to be dead, but Gustavus Adolphus announces that he is alive and asking for Sigrid. Meanwhile Sven has returned and recognizes the King. They all bless him for his kindness and valour, and Erik falls to his knees in gratitude. The King replies: ‘I have done nothing more than my duty; the least of my subjects’ lives is dearer to me than my own’. Sven protests saying that the King has already done more than enough, saving Sven in return when he was surrounded by enemies. Gustavus Adolphus replies: ‘It was very simple. We fought next to each other, I was surrounded by the enemy, you stabbed your way in and saved me; you were surrounded after me, I stabbed my way in and saved you; no comrade, we are equally good, we have served each other respectively’.

When the King learns that Sigrid and Erik are engaged and planning to have a double wedding with Sven and Maria, he bestows on them two ‘Crown farms’ (‘kronohemman’) as a wedding gift: loyalty, devotion, and love are their virtues. The episode showcases the King as the protector of the weak. The image of the kind, unassuming, simple, trusting, naive country-dwellers is typical for the era.

90 Ibid., p. 113: ‘Det var helt simpelt. Vi stridde bredvid hvarann, jag blef omringad af fienden, du högg dig in och frälste mig; jag blef omringad efter mig, jag högg mig in och frälste dig; nej, kamrat, vi äro ju lika goda, vi har ju tjent hvarann på ömse sidor’.
In my dissertation, I showed how Bellman and other poets frequently used the image of royalist country-dwellers as a testament to or proof of the benevolence of the King. This trope, then, is used by both the king and the poets, a symbol negotiated and renegotiated already in antiquity.

Also in these plays, the subjects know their place, and are happy with their lot in life. They do not envy their masters; in fact, the episode with Sigrid visiting Ebba Brahe on her wedding day shows that the lower classes should be happy in their freedom and innocence, unbothered by stately affairs and the workings of the world.

The operas and plays also usually contain some depiction of ‘virtue versus vice’. In *Siri Brahe*, vice is represented by bad guy Tegel, who harbours most of the capital vices; he is proud, greedy, small-minded, envious, wrathful, and vengeful. The same can be said about King Christiern in *Gustav Vasa*: a clear exemple à fuir. However, in *Gustav Vasa*, we have another character, Sevrin Norrby, the Danish Admiral and King Christiern’s adviser and confidant. Norrby walks a moral tightrope throughout the play, having to obey his king while objecting to almost all his actions. Johan Gyllenstierna in *Siri Brahe* is considered a bad lot and an enemy because he swore allegiance to the wrong king, but Gustavus III complicates the image.

In the case of Johan Gyllenstierna, he is portrayed as an unfortunate rather than a villain. He simply happens to belong to the wrong side. In the play, Charles IX is not portrayed as an ideal king at all, rather the opposite. Gyllenstierna also defends his choice by alluding to the wrongdoings of the reigning king:

> Sigismund is my lawful King, I have followed his banner; and if Charles did rightfully accept the crown belonging to his nephew, he has soiled it with too much blood. I know I am declared an outlaw; but an unjust verdict cannot touch an unspoiled honour.


92 See for example Horace, Ode IV.5.

93 This image of the loyal and loving subject, is also amply manifest in the King’s medal history, as shown by Alm, *Kungsord i elfte timmen*, pp. 119-28.

Moreover, when Gustavus Adolphus grants Gyllenstierna his freedom, the count exclaims: ‘My Prince! My Prince! O, if your father had your virtues, who would have been able to resist him?’,\textsuperscript{95} signalling that Charles IX is not a worthy king, compared to his son. Gyllenstierna is so captivated by the Crown Prince that he is almost prepared to switch sides, but then calms himself; his duty tells him to stay true to his king, to not break a confidence of ten years. He confesses that he wishes to be Gustavus Adolphus’s subject and that he would choose to be if the choice was free.\textsuperscript{96} The Crown Prince lets Gyllenstierna leave with his wife, and says: ‘remember, that in Sweden you leave a Prince, who knows your virtues and knows how to value them’.\textsuperscript{97}

Gyllenstierna’s betrayal of his fatherland is therefore justified, and almost celebrated; he is honest and true to the king he has sworn allegiance to, and for that he cannot be faulted; he recognizes the virtues and greatness of the ideal king, and because of that, his own virtues are highlighted. He becomes an unfortunate victim of political circumstance who allows his sense of duty to rule over personal sentiments. Again, steadfastness is portrayed on par with cardinal virtue, and Gyllenstierna is loyal, both to his King and to his wife, as well as to his family; he is willing to risk his life for all of them in different parts of the play. Ever ready to make the ultimate sacrifice, he is an exemplum of correct noble and virtuous behaviour navigating in a moral and judicial grey zone.

Sevrin Norrby serves as another, different example of virtue operating amidst vice. Grand Admiral and adviser to King Christiern, he has a key role in the play, counterbalancing the image of the Danes served in the portrayal of Christiern as the ultimate tyrant. In the first act, we find Christiern relishing his victory. In his first monologue, his character is summarized:

\begin{quote}
After sixteen years of troubles and war a just revenge and fortune have secured my victory: and deceit has served me better than strength. The proud Swedes are downtrodden; Sten Sture is dead; his widow and son are in my chains. I have revenged my family and my indignity, when I by the use of the axe have caused the fall of the rest of my enemies. The most honourable blood in Sweden has flowed: the nobility is crushed, and my
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p. 256: ‘Min Prins! Min Prins! Ack, om din far hade dina dygder, hvem hade kunnat emotstå honom?’

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 266.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.: ‘kommen ihåg, att j lemnen i Sverige en Prins, som känner edra dygder och vet dem värdera’.
throne secure; the terror I instil protects my power. [...] The victory has no value, unless the oppressed Swedes feel the whole weight of my hatred.98

Norrby is the first to recognize the greatness of Gustavus Vasa: he tells Christiern not to be too secure in his victory, since Vasa is reported still conquering several of Christiern’s troops. Norrby advises Christiern to give up before things get worse. Christiern trusts his methods of murder and mayhem to subdue the Swedes, but Norrby remarks on ‘how unsure is the obedience enforced by executioners’, and advises him to change his tactics: ‘[...] these days of blood are over; let them now be followed by clemency; yes, my King, only clemency should define your dominion’.99 Christiern replies that he believes clemency to be a ‘weak’ virtue, and that he will only rule by fear and terror, for it is the best way.

Norrby is appalled to learn that Christiern uses Christina Gyllenstjerna as an emissary, and Christina also recognizes that Norrby is hesitant towards his king’s methods and reasoning. However, Norrby stays true: ‘I fear – but I obey’ he concedes.100

Throughout the play, he suffers with Gustavus Vasa and Christina and even vows to care for Vasa’s mother who is prisoner under his charge. In the third act, he is commanded by Christiern to fetter Cecilia af Eka to a ship, which he does, and to kill her as soon as Vasa appears, which he refuses to do:

No, Christiern! it is not my duty; I am a soldier, and cannot be an executioner. I know I have to obey you, but without shame and blame; command! I defy a thousand deaths, if necessary; spare neither my property nor my life; all that belongs to my King – my honour belongs to me alone.101

He rejects that order, but at the same time swears to defend his king to the death. Christiern is cuffed, and Norrby pities him: ‘This hand was not meant to wear chains ... but no ... your blind rage should not arouse my anger; it kindles only my pity ... if you can forget my service and my zeal, then I shall at least not forget my honour and my duty’. Norrby is steadfast in his loyalty to his king throughout the play. In the middle of the third act, during the battle between the Swedes and the Danes, Norrby hastens to aid Christiern despite his earlier treatment. At the same time, Norrby frees Vasa’s mother and sends her back to him before escaping with Christiern. An emissary announces:

The noble Norrby sends your mother back. Moved by your virtues, he wishes to prove to you that they also exist at Christiern’s court, and that he knows enough to protect his King against his own rage.

In return, Vasa releases all the Danish prisoners into Norrby’s care before celebrating his victory.

Norrby is portrayed as torn between his duty to be loyal to his king, and his own virtue, his own moral values. Since Christiern is shown to be a true tyrant, an exemple à fuir, Norrby’s refusal to carry out the most abominable orders is justified. Norrby has to walk a moral tightrope throughout the play, fulfilling his duties towards a sovereign who does not recognize the royal virtues. Like Johan Gyllenstierna, he confesses his admiration for the sovereign who possesses all the good qualities, but is duty-bound to serve another, making him an exemplary subject under impossibly difficult circumstances.

The characters Norrby and Johan Gyllenstierna prove that virtue, as argued at length in the Éncyclopédie, is not arbitrary but rather elusive and compound; it is closely connected to such concepts as morality and duty, yet separated from goodness. True virtue, according to the Éncyclopédie, can be discerned by motive and interest:

Distinguish carefully, then, between two types of interest, one low and misperceived, which reason reproves and condemns; the other noble and prudent, which reason acknowledges and commands. The first, always too active, is the source of all our errors; the other could not be too lively,
it is the source of all that is beautiful, honest, and glorious. Do not fear to
dishonour yourself by desiring your happiness with too much enthusiasm;
but know how to recognize it: that is a summary of virtue.\textsuperscript{104}

This exact belief is manifest in \textit{Gustavus Vasa}: Christiern's quest for power is
fuelled by vainglory and revenge, turning him into a tyrant, while Gustavus
Vasa pursues glory in the interest of his people's freedom – he has an altru-
istic motive; he does not \textit{take} the crown, it is \textit{given} to him by the people as
a sign of trust and gratitude. This echoes the ideals of power expressed by
the Enlightenment thinkers. Under the word 'Sovereign' in the \textit{Encyclopédie}
one can read: ‘One sees that their power and their rights are founded only
on the consent of the people; those who establish themselves by violence
are only usurpers. Sovereigns become legitimate only when the consent of
the people has confirmed the rights which they have seized.’\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{The Royal Rhetor}

According to the \textit{Encyclopédie}, it is appropriate to try to emulate virtue. The
pedagogy of exemplum is strongly advocated: ‘Finally, O you, who aspire to
do well, who dare to pretend to virtue, cultivate avidly those respectable

\textsuperscript{104} Romilly, 'Virtue', \textit{The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project},
trans. by Mary McAlpin, Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2005,
h\texttt{http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.115} (accessed 22 October 2016), originally published
(Paris, 1765). Cf. the original French edition: 'Distinguez donc avec soin deux sortes d'intérêts, l'un
bas & malentendu, que la raison réprouve & condamne; l'autre noble & prudent, que la raison avoue
& commande. Le premier toujours trop actif, est la source de tous nos écarts; celui-ci ne peut être
trop vif, il est la source de tout ce qu'il y a de beau, d'honnête & de glorieux. Ne craignez point de
vous deshonorer en desirant avec exces votre bonheur; mais sachez le voir où il est: c'est le sommaire
de la vertu.' \texttt{'L'Encyclopédie/1re édition/VERTU', Wikisource, https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/I%E2
%80%99Encyclop%C3%A9die/1re_%C3%A9dition/VERTU} (accessed 22 October 2016).

\textsuperscript{105} 'Sovereigns', in \textit{The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project},
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as 'Souverains', \textit{Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des
droits ne sont fondés que sur le consentement des peuples; ceux qui s'établissent par la violence,
ne sont que des usurpateurs; ils ne deviennent légitimes, que lorsque le consentement des
peuples a confirmé aux souverains les droits dont ils s'étoient emparés.' \texttt{'L'Encyclopédie/1re
men who walk before you in this brilliant career; young painters thrill and
tremble with admiration before the masterpieces of the Raphaels and the
Michelangelos; before the models that history or society present to you,
you will similarly feel your heart soften and burn with the desire to imitate
them'.

Already Lord Bolingbroke (1678-1751), in his much read *Letters on
the Study and Use of History* from 1735, argues the same point:

That the study of history, far from making us wiser, and more useful
citizens, as well as better men, may be of no advantage whatsoever; that
it may serve to render us mere antiquaries and scholars; or that it may
help to make us forward coxcombs, and prating pedants, I have already
allowed. But this is not the fault of history: and to convince us that it is not,
we need only contrast the true use of history with the use that is
made of it by such men as these. We ought always to keep in mind, that
history is philosophy teaching by examples how to conduct ourselves in
all the situations of private and public life; that therefore we must apply
ourselves to it in a philosophical spirit and manner; that we must rise from
particular to general knowledge, and that we must fit ourselves for the
society and business of mankind by accustoming our minds to reflect and
meditate on the characters we find described, and the course of events
we find related there. Particular examples may be of use sometimes in
particular cases; but the application of them is dangerous. It must be done
with the utmost circumspection, or it will be seldom done with success.
And yet one would think that this was the principal use of the study of
history, by what has been written on the subject. I know not whether
Machiavel himself is quite free from defect on this account: he seems to
carry the use and application of particular examples sometimes too far.

Gustavus III was raised in exactly this vein, as shown by Sven Delblanc
and Marie-Christine Skuncke. He believed in the power of example and in
the image of himself fabricated at his birth by the court, transmitting and
retransmitting it to his people, and receiving its reflection back through

106 Romilly, ‘Virtue’: ‘O vous enfîn, qui aspirez à bien faire, qui osez prétendre à la vertu, cultivez
avec empressement ces hommes respectables qui marchent devant vous dans cette brillante
carrière; c’est à l’aspect des chef d’œuvres des Raphaëls & des Michel-Anges que les jeunes peintres
s’enflamment & tressaillent d’admiration; c’est de même en contemplant les modèles que l’histoire
ou la société vous présente, que vous sentirez votre cœur s’attendrir & brûler du désir de les

panegyric poetry and eulogy. In this sense, it is understandable why the King as well as his contemporaries found it natural, even commendable, to believe that Gustavus III imitated the actions of his Gustavian predecessors. In this sense, it is also understandable why these two kings are so prominent in the King’s plays.

It is possible then to argue that the image of the ‘third Gustavus’ and the connotations that it elicited in the contemporary audience is an example of the exchanges, networks, and trade-offs that Greenblatt claims to be at the core of the concept of ‘social energy’. As for instance Peter Burke has shown in his monograph *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, and Marie-Christine Skuncke in her article ‘Medier, retorik och känslor’ (Media, rhetoric and emotions),¹⁰⁸ the same image or set of images was frequently reproduced in different media and different genres in order to guarantee staying power and longevity.

In a previously mentioned letter to his teacher Scheffer, the fourteen-year-old Crown Prince Gustavus echoes the words in the *Éncyclopédie* and in Lord Bolingbroke’s *Letters on the Study and Use of History*. When in a refutatio exercise on 17 January 1760, confronted with the idea purportedly in Rousseau’s *Lettre à M. D’Alembert* that theatre can be detrimental to the mores of the people, Gustavus responds:

He [Rousseau] wants to demonstrate that the theatre instead of improving people, makes them wicked, and therefore is detrimental to morals. This question, as you know, has been the subject of many works. Some have shared M. Rousseau’s opinion, others have wanted to prove, that the theatre makes people more virtuous by showing them their flaws and making them hate vices. I do not think that M. Rousseau intended to condemn the theatre in general, but only the spectacles of today. One has to agree, that there are many plays one could eliminate from the theatre. M. Rousseau mentions several that he rightly condemns, but there are many others that at once entertain and demonstrate virtue and evoke aversion for vice. When one watches the beautiful tragedy *Cinna*, one cannot but be moved by the magnanimity of Augustus, one is in ecstasy. At least I would have liked to be in the same situation in order to have been able to act in the same way.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ In the original French:
Il veut démontrer que la comédie au lieu de corriger les hommes, les rend plus méchants et par conséquent qu’elle est préjudiciable aux moeurs. Cette question, comme vous le savez a été
Theatre was for Gustavus III the preferred medium for teaching – and learning – virtue. In a time when didactic poetry was held in high regard, and when the belief in the ability of the exemplum to create model citizens and model states was predominant, it is no surprise to find discussions on virtue and vice, right and wrong, in the works of a royal playwright. Gustavus III clearly found an effective way to be a Royal Rhetor with these plays and operas, to use theatre as a means to convey his view of the ideal sovereign and the ideal subject, and to explore the boundaries of different cardinal virtues, especially at times when these values were challenged or put to the test. He took an active role in the ongoing debate on virtue, and he needed to communicate to his contemporaries which virtues he believed to be the most important for a sovereign to possess, and to ensure that he possessed them himself, carefully choosing historical events for his plots that held a parallel to his own reign. With theatrical means he could use the rhetorical device evidentia with full force, showing examples in proper situations, rather than just telling of them, as he would in a political speech.

He aimed to teach his people in the same way as he had been taught by his tutors, advisers, parents, and his people – by exemplum. He perpetuated a set of images of the king, the elite, and subjects that would hold sway until the given of enlightened despotism, and its unquestioned social order, was no longer.

In the classical tradition of Aristotle and Cicero, virtue was understood to be innate in the elite. This belief was to a large degree sustained during the Enlightenment. However, virtue eventually became a concern for all people, providing the framework for discussions of character and social relations. In his operas and plays, Gustavus III provides moral examples for all social classes, and by that, in effect, he creates his own collection of examples.
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