

Virtues, Vices, Orations. Latin Oratory in the Seventeenth Century

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In antiquity, epideictic rhetoric, the purpose of which was to praise or blame, was not practiced as much as the judicial and deliberative genres. Presenting a natural means of cultivating one's fame, epideictic rhetoric became very popular in the Renaissance. By praising a single person's life and action orators created an idealized picture of him or her, which aimed at propagating and reinforcing desirable qualities and values of the community. The humanistic conviction justifying the encomium and emphasizing its good effect is crystallized in Ovid's phrase "virtue grows by praise" (*Epistulae ex Ponto* 4,2,35-36: *laudataque virtus crescit*), frequently quoted by orators in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In seventeenth-century Finland, Latin orations formed the climax of momentous events of the state, the royal family, the Academy of Turku as well as inaugurations, birthdays, funerals and other occasions of persons with a high rank or position. Orations were usually also published in print, thus preserving the fame not only of the subject person but also that of the orator/writer of the speech. The most essential part of the speeches, that is, the description of virtues (vices) mirrors moral philosophical concepts and hot issues of the time, such as the debate on the significance of one's family origin and hereditary nobility, on the one hand, and of man's own excellence, on the other. Since the hands of an epideictic orator were tied by the detailed instructions of the genre given in rhetorical manuals, by the conventions of the genre and by expectations and control of the audience, it can be asked how truthfully subject persons could be described in orations and where were the limits of the concept of the truth. Among other things, these questions will be discussed in the presentation which examines virtues and vices attributed to live and dead persons, men and women and persons of different social ranks and professions in seventeenth-century Latin orations.