Early Modern Academic Culture

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Open a dissertation from 17th-century or early 18th-century Sweden and you will in all likelihood see poetry somewhere, in many cases throughout the text and in a variety of forms. In the prelude we are met by dedications and acknowledgements, sometimes in verse, occasionally in the form of quite extensive poems. At the end of the dissertation there are laudatory poems. There can be several of them included here, by professors, fellow students, and others.

Furthermore, the main text, the dissertation itself, will often be interspersed with poetry. In the midst of dry scientific prose, a quotation of Vergil suddenly shines through, or of Ovid or Martial. Apart from these, which are made obvious in the text, there are also allusions and paraphrases of poetry.

The presence of the quotations in dissertations on all kinds of subjects – law, theology, medicine, philosophy – is intriguing. Why would Uppsala students and professors in early modern times quote poetry to such an extent in their dissertations, and why, as it seems, more frequently in them than in other scientific literature of the time? Why was this habit abandoned later on? In today’s theses there is hardly a trace of poetry, beyond the ones in literature.

Some reasons for inserting poetry in the academic text are easy to imagine. Partly the quotations might function in the same way as prose quotations do, i.e. they would be part of the argumentation, to illustrate or support a thesis. Clearly poetry also has the ability to make the account more vivid. It brings on a change of rhythm and a more complex word order. It allows us to take a breath and think again. It also gives us, as readers, the pleasure of recognition, and why not the pleasure of being im-

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1 This paper is basically a short version of my article ‘Antika poesicitat i tidigmoderna svenska dissertationer’, (Fredriksson 2015b).
2 Cf. Peter Sjökvist’s publication in the present volume, pp. 117–137.
pressed by the cleverness of the author, who found that piece of poetry to serve the occasion precisely? Still, some would deem poetry to have been used as mere decoration and display.

But is this why poetry was quoted, or is there more to it? As there is hardly any literature on the subject, apart from Harald Hagendahl’s excellent works,³ to survey the situation would be a fruitful way to gain some preliminary insights regarding the role of these quotations in the academic text.

The poetry quotation study

In a previous study I examined the presence of the classics in general, in terms of quotations and references in early modern dissertations from Uppsala University, the top university in Sweden in the early modern period, and also the most productive.⁴ In the study described below, I focused specifically on poetry quotations in the same material. Both studies included surveys of two specific disciplines in this vast

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³ Hagendahl 1947; 1958.
⁴ Results from the first part of this project were published in Fredriksson 2015a.
collection: medicine and political science with eloquence. Further, within these disciplines, in both surveys I limited my investigation to four periods within the time span 1625–1850, more precisely 1625–1650 (period 1), 1685–1710 (period 2), 1760–1785 (period 3), and 1825–1850 (period 4). Only the main body of the dissertation was of interest, and dedications and greetings in poetry were left out of the study. To be noted, the poetry quotation study is solely devoted to poetry quotations in the main body of the dissertation.

The use of the same text material, i.e., dissertations within the same disciplines and from the same periods, for both studies made comparisons of their results possible. In the poetry quotation study I first I explored to what extent poetry was quoted in the selected groups of study; further, which poets were most often quoted in these groups. Finally, one of the periods was studied more closely, to summarize what kinds of arguments poetry usually supported. In this paper, the focus will be on the first part of these inquiries.

In medicine, the tendency is shown in the diagram above (Fig. 2). The diagram represents the subject of medicine approached in two different ways. Group A represents a broader definition of the subject, including all dissertations submitted in the presidency of professors of medicine (within the stipulated time spans). Thus, in periods 1 and 2, this group also embraces dissertations in botany, zoology, physics, and other

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On the selection of these specific time spans, see Fredriksson 2015a, pp. 59–62; 2015b, p. 43.
disciplines, submitted in the presidency of a medical professor.\textsuperscript{6} Group B represents a narrower definition, including only those dissertations which, on their title page, are explicitly defined as “medical,” i.e., they have a heading “dissertatio medica” or the like.\textsuperscript{7} Naturally, some of the dissertations in group B were also part of group A.

The same tendency can be seen in both groups: in the middle of the 17th century, poetry quotations were present in the dissertations to a limited extent; in the more narrowly defined group there were on average two (1.8) quotations per dissertation. Some 40 years later the situation had changed. As compared to the first period studied, the average of poetry quotations in group B had trebled, i.e., there were around six quotations per dissertation. The increase was even greater in group A. On the other hand, looking at the third period, there were hardly any poetry quotations at all. The same is true for the fourth period, the middle of the 18th century.

Regarding political science with eloquence, the same two ways of defining the subject were used (Fig. 3 above); group A included dissertations submitted in the presidency of the professor of political science, the so-called Skyttean professor, a definition which in periods 1 and 2 would include dissertations in philosophy, his-
tory, and law. Group B included the dissertations termed “dissertatio politica” or “dissertatio civilis” on the title page.

In political science dissertations, the tendency corresponds with the one that we saw in the dissertations in medicine, except for the fact that the relation between the two groups, or definitions of the subject, is reversed: in contrast to medicine, political science dissertations in group A include more quotations from ancient poetry than does group B. The more narrowly defined group B had in average 1.5 quotations per dissertation, a number which comes close to the 1.8 of medicine group B. In the second time span studied, the average number of group B was more than twice as large as in period one, i.e., about four. A doubling is noticeable also in group A. In the third period, quotations drastically decreased, and in the fourth there were practically no poetry quotations at all in the dissertations.

Although this study focuses specifically on ancient poetry quotations, it is worth mentioning that in the group of medical dissertations in period 2 – although not shown in Figure 2 above – the variety of poets cited in medical dissertations was the greatest, and the share of ancient poetry actually lower than in any of the four periods. So, if we add the non-ancient poetry to the calculation in Figure 2, the columns for the medical dissertations would be even higher, especially in period 2, and the difference between period 1 and 2 would be even more pronounced. Also in political science dissertations, there was a significant quantity of non-ancient poetry, with the difference that in this discipline there was a greater proportion of non-ancient poetry in period 1 than in period 2.

Concerning the results above, it should be stressed that comparisons were made only of these specific disciplines and periods. We do not know what the situation was in other disciplines or in the periods in-between. We cannot tell whether the use of ancient poetry quotations peaked in the period 1685–1710, in the decade before that, or in the decade thereafter. In any case, it is quite obvious that in the time span between 1700 and 1760 there is a shift in frequency: it becomes less popular to quote poetry in dissertations.

**Analysis**

What could have contributed to these tendencies? Since the quotations are mainly ancient Roman and Greek poetry, one might surmise that this was part of a tendency to cite ancient literature more generally, i.e., also literature in prose. To confirm this, one needs compare the poetry results with the results of the previously mentioned

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8 Fredriksson 2015b, pp. 45, 47–48, 66.
study of references to ancient literature in general. The comparison must, in that case, be a comparison of tendencies, not of actual numbers, as the grounds for calculation differ in the two studies. If we look at the two diagrams below, it seems that – contrary to expectations – the tendency to cite ancient prose literature is not entirely the same as that of quoting ancient poetry.

References to ancient literature in medical dissertations, period 1–4

References to ancient literature in political science dissertations, period 1–4

Figs. 4 and 5. References to ancient literature in medical dissertations and in political science dissertations, period 1–4.
We have already seen that ancient poetry was most frequently quoted during period 2 of my study (1685–1710), in both medical and political science dissertations. The number of general references to ancient literature, on the other hand, was, in the same period, going down, even plummeting, in medicine group B, as well as in political science group B, and the same applies to political science group A. As seen in the graphs above, though, the number of ancient references in medicine group A texts – i.e., in medicine according to the broader definition of the subject – is actually on the rise in the same period. This means that in this group of dissertations the tendency of reference inclusion is consistent with the tendency of including ancient poetry quotations. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to infer that the custom of making references to ancient literature in general does not conform to the one of quoting poetry, including ancient poetry. One may thus, at least tentatively, presume that the cause and circumstances for these practices differ as well.

Context

To contextualize the survey, it is important to put it in the wider perspective of the university milieu at the time, and look into issues that were, in one way or another, related to poetry.9 The survey has made it clear that poetry quotation is a Renaissance phenomenon, and other contemporary sources confirm this. In those days, poetry was an important ingredient in the humanist educational plan, which was more or less based upon the study of ancient Greek and Roman texts.10 The subject was intimately connected to history, philosophy, and eloquence, and thus also to political science. These disciplines were seen as different aspects of the same subject: knowledge of how life works, with the specific purpose of turning boys into men, in this case men qualified to act as officials in the Swedish government.11 Literature of the time stresses the common task of the philosopher and the poet: to induce honourable human habits, deeds, and laws.12 However, the students and professors of Uppsala University could very well have adopted the custom of quoting poetry straight from the ancient writers themselves. Poetry quotations abound in philosophical treatises of, for exam-

10 E.g., Kallendorf 2002, pp. vii–xvi.
12 Johannes Upmark (Rosenadler) (praes.), Olaus Sund (resp.), De poëseos natura II, Upsaliae 1710. C. 4 § 3.
ple, Cicero and Seneca. But quotations were not inserted indiscriminately in any kind of text: studies of the ancient authors show that in texts of literary ambition, such as speeches, letters, lyric poetry, and drama, quotations were banned, as they would disturb the rhythm and harmony of the text. In these genres, “borrowed” poetry was present, but had to be reworked thoroughly in the new text, to such an extent that it might not even be recognized. Philosophical texts, on the other hand, were subject to different rules, such as those manifested in works by Cicero and Seneca. On a couple of occasions, these authors also explained why they used poetry in their texts. Cicero plainly states that he imitates the custom of the philosophical schools in Athens, where both Stoics and Academics inserted poetical lines into their lectures. Cicero wanted to embellish his philosophical treatises in this way. When Seneca explained his habit of quoting poetry, he cited one of the heads of the Stoa, Cleanthes. Cleanthes had explained that when something is pressed together by force, it becomes more concentrated and thus stronger. He exemplifies his point with the air in a horn: just as the sound of a horn becomes strong when the air is compressed in the tube, in the same way, says Cleanthes, will a great thought, which is concentrated in verse and acquires a certain rhythm, “get the strength of a weapon launched by a strong hand.”

The Use of Poetry within University Education in Uppsala and in Sweden

The reliance on poetry as a powerful tool is expressed clearly in the poetics of the Swedish Renaissance, usually placed within the extended 17th century. The professorship of poetry at Uppsala University was first established in the 1620s. After a subdued start, a time of successful and active professors of poetry follows. Poetry was now a mandatory discipline for acquiring a degree, the lectures on poetry were very well-attended, and there was a keen interest in poetical theory at the university. This is mirrored in frequent dissertations dealing with poetry or issues related to poetry, not only within the discipline of poetry itself, but also in dissertations put forth under the presidency of professors of political science, and theoretical philosophy. But it was also important to learn how to write poetry, and some results of the students’

14 Hagendahl 1947, p. 122.
16 See Annerstedt 1877, 1908, and 1909; Lindroth 1975; 1978; Bergh 1916.
efforts can be seen in the congratulatory poems of the dissertations. To be noted, this period produced the most renowned and appraised Latin poets in Sweden, several of whom were professors of poetry in Uppsala. Moreover, there was a market for poetic production, in the realm of official ceremonies, tributes, and the writing of history. In the Golden Age of the Swedish Empire, “Stormaktstiden”, there was a demand for eulogy and panegyric poetry. Another important contribution at this time was the publication of the first “Swedish poetics”, Poetica tripartita, by the Uppsala professor Laurentius Fornelius.\(^{17}\) These poetics were a compilation of works by European academics theorizing poetry, and they, in their turn, relied heavily on Aristotle and Horace.\(^{18}\) A recurring theme in Poetica tripartita was the specific educational qualities of poetry. These qualities were numerous; suffice it here to outline some of the more significant ones.\(^{19}\) Likewise, behind the Renaissance poetics – as perceived by Fornelius and others – there were quite elaborate theories about how the human mind works when we learn and how that learning affects our actions, but this is not the place to pursue those postulates further.

The primary aim of poetry was to please and educate at the same time. Recurrent reference is made to Horace and his utile dulci. Poetry allows for special pedagogical methods, in using examples, tales, and allegories. The human examples that poetry presents are more efficient in making the reader prudent and ready for practical action than other means of education. Contrary to philosophy, which tells you what to do, poetry teaches by visualizing. As humans, we love to imitate, and almost by law of nature set out to imitate these good examples. Allegory, with its slightly concealed message, appeals to the curiosity of the sharp-witted. It could also be used to conceal religious, political, and scientific ideas, which were not supposed to be understood or used by everyone. The tales and the allegories also make the contents more comprehensible to the non-educated or slow-witted, and they evoke the interest of the indolent and the indifferent, whom it takes greater art to reach or convince. Obviously, in order to build the new Swedish state, the rough and unpolished youngsters of Sweden needed to be transformed to sober and civilized men ready for action, and the means for that was poetry. A passage referred to on several occasions comes from

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\(^{17}\) Fornelius 1643. The first part of this work was originally published separately as a thesis submitted by Andreas Wentilius in 1641, whereas the second part was submitted for disputation by Sveno Törne in 1642.

\(^{18}\) Bergh 1916, pp. 2–4, 19.

\(^{19}\) The following summary is primarily based upon Fornelius 1643, but also upon Uppsala dissertations on poetics from the same period. A full account of the sources is given in Fredriksson 2015b, pp. 58–62.
Horace’s *Ars poetica*: the lines about Orpheus and his ability to tame lions and tigers and people of the wild forests alike: “While men still roamed the woods, Orpheus, the holy prophet of the gods, made them shrink from bloodshed and brutal living; hence the fable that he tamed tigers and ravening lions”.

Fornelius’ *Poetics* points out that, in poetry it is possible to bring up any subject matter. It is not restricted to certain themes, as is the case with, for example, history and philosophy. Rather, in poetry one may discuss both what is “above and eternal” and “what is worldly and changeable.”

Poetry, *Poetics* claims, also allows us to experiment, with expressions as well as with thought. In imagining scenarios and in testing those scenarios, with almost alive and full-bodied characters and settings, it gives us an indication about what would be a good, or a bad, thing to do in a given situation. It envisages what would be the consequence of a certain act, without us humans even having to take those risks, or make those mistakes ourselves – in a similar way as screen visual arts, and novels do today. Imagination also helps in formulating an ideal, which we might not expect to encounter in everyday life, but which could work as a guiding principle.

Then there is the pedagogical effect of the metre itself. The metre demands a concentration of the sentences. It also encourages imitation, and, since metre is easier to memorize, people stand a better chance of remembering what is expressed in verse. That, together with the pleasure it evokes, makes poetry more efficient in transmitting knowledge than both history and philosophy. The poetical force can thus be used to convince even larger multitudes of people, and this is the reason why poetry is so effective in the art of eloquence.

Last but not least, *Poetics* stresses, poetry is beautiful. Not only does the beauty open up the minds of the listeners, making them feel good and thus unconsciously embracing a positive attitude to the inherent message. The good message, which poetry generally is meant to convey, then goes deeper into the mind of the listener, bringing on a change in a certain direction, perhaps without the listener even noticing.

Beauty and authority are interlinked: the very beauty of the perfect expression is proof of its legitimacy. In addition, there is a general opinion of the poet having a special connection with the powers above. The poet is held to be a prophet, not only knowing the will of the gods, or God, but also being the instrument of his, or their,

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truths. Do we not at times have the feeling of experiencing something divine, when we read or hear excellent poetry?

In addition to this, the poetics of the time point out that a lot of specialized knowledge – such as astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, optics, natural philosophy, grammar, eloquence, ethics, politics, and economy – can be transmitted to us in the form of poetry.

**Poetical Theory and the Dissertations**

If one compares the postulates of poetical theory with the kind of arguments poetry usually supports in the dissertations, it becomes clear that the use of poetry quotations – at least at the turn of the 18th century – usually complies with the recommendations in the poetics. It is widely used as a treasury of useful insights acquired by real-life experience from antiquity in the realm of universal wisdom as well as knowledge in craftsmanship. Apart from learning transmitted via poetry in specialized fields, such as astronomy, geometry, and so on, poetry also appears to have its very own field of specialized knowledge: knowledge about the nature of nature itself, of human nature, and of human conditions. Thus, beside its role in philosophy and history, it could be considered specialist literature in fields that were at that time not yet defined as disciplines of their own, such as psychology, anthropology, ethnology, sociology, and religion.

**Arguments against Poetry in the Learned World**

Alongside the many arguments in favour of poetry listed above, there is also evidence of counter-arguments co-existing with the aforementioned. These, too, are occasionally recorded in the dissertations on poetics – only to be refuted, of course.

Poetry’s ability to evoke affections, the critics point out, is not altogether unproblematic. It can also evoke feelings that, supposedly, do not bring about good deeds, feelings such as anger, hatred, pain, and fear. The remarkable, and probably not virtuous, circumstance is pointed out: that we may experience even this as a pleasure. Furthermore, it is argued that some poets detrimentally focus on false and foul, even evil, things, not to mention the love affairs of the gods and of the poets themselves, sexual intercourse, drinking, and fights.

Critics also point out that poets deceive and teach false things, they imitate, they illustrate and visualize things about which they have no clue, and they give an erroneous description even of things they do know. They maintain false opinions, and they also add to these whatever they like. Further objections include the poets’ descrip-
tions of gods, which they have not seen, and that these gods are described as having human customs and feelings.

Poetics at Uppsala University from the Middle of the 18th Century

The account above deals with the Swedish, or European, Renaissance view on poetry, predominant in the first two periods of this study (1625–1650; 1685–1710). As previously noted, a clear shift in the form of a substantial reduction in the use of poetic quotations came about in the next half-century. This development actually coincides with the years when poetry’s position within the University and the professorships in poetry and eloquence were sharply questioned. For a few years, the professorship in poetry was even withdrawn, but later revived. After that, it was incorporated into the professorship in eloquence, and in its place the university established a professorship in economics. An important philosophy of this time was utilitarianism. According to this theory, one should judge the value of phenomena in proportion to their usefulness. No doubt, the purpose of poetry in the Renaissance was utility; what changed in the 18th century was rather the predominant view of “utility” and “usefulness”, and the means to help bring about this value.

Another feature that was about to change at this stage was the university’s relation to the ancient writers. The change was well under way within the natural sciences, but it became obvious within the faculty of philosophy, too. Within the humanistic educational system there was a gradual shift regarding contents and focal points of interest. Previously, the study of antiquity aimed at a close contact with the ancient texts for the benefit of practical action. This approach was now being replaced by a theoretical, somewhat distanced, attitude. In the discussions about new statutes of the university in the first decades of the 18th century, many reforms were proposed, among them the permission to use more recent literature in education. There was also a growing demand that professors and students be allowed to express themselves in Swedish in the university milieu, and the first dissertation in Swedish, in economics, was published in the middle of the century. The writing of Latin poetry declined, too, a tendency which coincided with the so-called “Latin culture” being called into

question, the cultural ideal shifting from a Roman to a French one. There was thus a change going on as to the view of ancient authorities at large, but also a change within poetics, if slightly different.

As for poetry, the era of the Swedish Empire was now over, and with it the panegyrics and war lyrics. Occasional poetry, however, continues to grow strongly until the 1770s, not least in Swedish. Within poetical theory new thoughts regarding the aim and purpose of poetry emerge. Both European and Swedish poetics now give prominence to pathos, passion, and fantasy instead of reason and old wisdom. The main objective of poetry is to “please and to captivate”; the former motto, “to please and educate,” is thus altered so as to reduce the importance of poetry being instructive. Poetical ability is starting to be seen as a gift of nature rather than a craft which can be taught. Instead of imitation, originality is rewarded. Still, it was held that the sagacity that a good poet needs to possess can be acquired through reading ancient works. These texts now become educational means, rather than ideals. The general taste in poetry also shifts from the exuberant baroque to sober neoclassicism and ethereal romantics.

**Poetry as a University Discipline in Uppsala from the 1730s Onwards**

In the 1730s, the changing attitude towards poetry is reflected in the Uppsala University Board debate on whether to keep the professorship in poetry or not. The rather weak argument heard in favour of poetry as a university discipline was that “it is a noble and comprehensive field of study”, whereas among the arguments heard against poetry was the view that “nature should create poets; this could never be accomplished through education or rules”. Admittedly, poetry is of value, but it is said to exist first and foremost as “adornment and pleasure”. Consequently, it was declared

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26 Bergh 1916, esp. pp. 78–90.
that “knowledge in poetry is of no importance whatsoever for the general service of the state”, and that obviously meant that it was not for the university to finance.27

**Final Words**

These were some of the circumstances that, in early modern times, contributed to the rise and fall of Latin poetry quotation at Uppsala University, and, quite likely, within Swedish academia on the whole. And, contrary to expectation, it seems that it was precisely at the point when poetry came to be regarded as mere decoration that it ceased to be used in the dissertations.

Let me end with an issue mentioned above, about poetry’s pleasure and rhythm, its ability to open up the heart of the listener, so that the message reaches deeper within and thus is embraced on a deeper level of the mind, bringing on action and practical deed. This idea recurs throughout history, and for this quality poetry has been equally praised and banned. But the topicality of this subject became clear to me earlier this year, as I read a fascinating article by Elisabeth Kendall, who placed the issue in the middle of current world affairs.28 In the article Kendall describes the use of poetry in recruiting followers of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). She describes poetry’s power to “touch Arab listeners and readers emotionally, to infiltrate the psyche and to create an aura of tradition, authenticity, and legitimacy around the ideologies it enshrines,” and that this makes poetry “the perfect weapon for militant jihadist causes”. The arguments sound very familiar. The source of these ideas may very well be precisely the same as of those embraced at 17th-century Swedish universities.

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