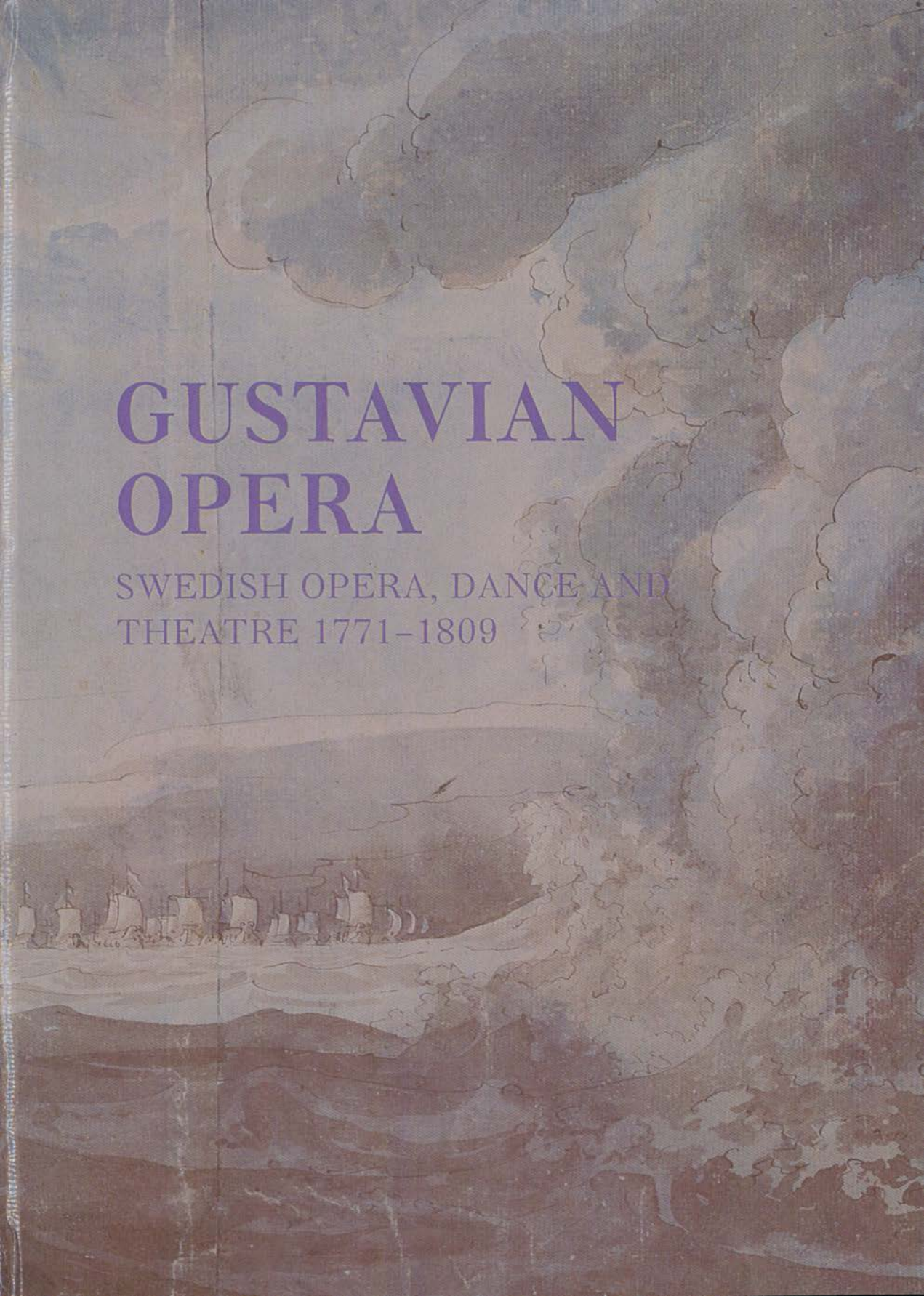

GUSTAVIAN OPERA

SWEDISH OPERA, DANCE AND THEATRE 1771–1809

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY READER IN SWEDISH OPERA, DANCE AND THEATRE 1771–1809

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Cover illustration: The Trojan fleet in the prologue of *Æneas i Carthago,* lyrical tragedy in five acts and prologue by J. M. Kraus. Libretto by J. H. Kellgren, scenography by C. J. Hjelm, partly after L. J. Desprez. First performed at the Royal Opera on Nov. 18, 1799. Boreas unleashes the winds, the rock sinks into the sea and the Trojan fleet appears on the horizon. "The storm grows worse and in the distance can be heard the mingled choirs of Sailors and Winds." Watercolour drawing by L. J. Desprez, about 1790. NM.

Illustration page II: The plumed *chapeau rond* and the mask Gustaf III was wearing when he was shot down at the Masked Ball of March 16, 1792. Royal Armoury. Photo: Gösta Glase.

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Hans Åstrand & Gunnar Larsson

THIS BOOK AIMS TO provide an interdisciplinary overview of a concept in the history of music and the theatre which cannot profess to be well-established outside Sweden (or Scandinavia). The very fact of an "epoch" in operatic history being named after an autocratic monarch, Gustaf III, causes interest to focus more on the totality of the individual operatic compositions and the complex apparatus making possible their performance and reception, than on any genre such as *opera seria/buffa/semiseria* or *tragédie lyrique,* German *Singspiel* and so on, or on a composer-dominated style, such as the Wagnerian drama or the Italian verists. And yet it is perfectly justifiable that this monarch, so profoundly involved in theatre and who so deftly controlled and organized most aspects of the "operatic machine", should represent a distinctive phase of operatic output. This golden age in the history of music drama in Sweden has its own place in general operatic history, just as much for example as the Dresden opera (above all Hasse, but also including Naumann–Schuster–Seydelmann) or—*mutatis mutandis*—the French Lully epoch.

No doubt the main reason for "Gustavian opera" not having been included in the conceptual apparatus of the operatic world at large is its meteoric brevity. Intensive as it was, the period had barely gained a foothold before the fateful shot at the Masked Ball in 1792 brought the curtain down on it (although, such was its vigour, the ripples persisted into the following century). The remarkable thing, however, is the dynamism which prevailed and the astonishing results which were in fact achieved. Thanks to the sense of purpose imparted by the king, an operatic ideal was realized which is distinctive in more ways than one.

Gustaf III wanted to create a *Swedish* opera (sung all the time in Swedish, needless to say), with the grandiloquence of classical drama

and having Gluck (presented in Stockholm at a remarkably early date) as its prophet, and which also readily took heroes of Swedish history for its basic themes. Through his skilful choice of foreign composer profiles like Naumann and Vogler, as well as the serendipity of Joseph Martin Kraus, the young Sturm und Drang aesthete, who also migrated to Stockholm, the king gathered about him a trio of composers who brilliantly perpetuated the Gluckian tradition and, in a brilliant fusion of, mainly, *opera semiseria* with *tragédie lyrique*, set his dramas of ideas to a music which, always consummate and at times a work of genius, adumbrated the early romantics.

Hæffner—another "imported" German composer—also wrote the perhaps most Gluckian opera *Electra* on this classical theme.

The intention, however, was not only to produce heroic dramas in archaic style but to achieve a seamless fabric of music and drama in which the "simpler" Singspiel was not neglected and where spoken drama was frequently drowned in skilful incidental music. The ballet had international contacts, and the standard of stage design by so great an artist as Desprez was unsurpassed by any theatre at the time. The royal theatres in and around Stockholm, opened in 1782, and the entire theatrical machinery then available, together offered performing facilities which put Stockholm in the forefront of contemporary opera centres, with resources comparable to those of the Parisian and Viennese opera houses. Such earlier researchers into Gustavian Opera as Richard Engländer have stressed the importance of its contribution to European musical history.

In the present publication, an effort is made to describe this *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the ideas from which it sprang. Even though a great deal remains to be publicized and scientifically verified, it is to be hoped that this "reader" will explain a fair amount of what is still very much alive in the unique Gustavian theatre at Drottningholm, where not only the "great" international operatic repertoire, epitomized by Mozart, but many of the works created by Gustaf III are authentically performed in a pristine "apparatus". The "Masked Ball" lives on, not only in Verdi's opera (which is still subjected, far more often than not, to censorship) but also in the whole concept of the Gustavian opera.

Another source of satisfaction is the resurrection of the Ulriksdal Confidencen Theatre, which, carefully and meticulously restored, is becoming a second stage for Gustavian theatre, music and dance.

Most of the contributions to this book were originally presented as papers read at an international symposium in Stockholm, on June 9–15, 1986, entitled "The Stockholm Symposium on Opera and

Dance in the Gustavian Era, 1771–1809". It was a preliminary attempt to bring together performers and researchers and throw interdisciplinary light on this brilliant epoch in the history of Swedish opera. It also initiated a collaboration between researchers, musicians and artists in what concerned the Gustavian Age's repertoire of opera, theatre and ballet. The symposium revolved around a number of performances at the Drottningholm Court Theatre and at Confidencen, outside Stockholm.

Shortly afterwards a special issue of the journal *Artes* was devoted to the Gustavian era. Two of the articles are here republished in English translation, together with a number of new ones, either offered or commissioned as complements to the symposium papers.

The aim of this book is to make this fascinating if relatively brief period internationally accessible.

The symposium was jointly organized by the Royal Opera, the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, to all of which the publishers wish to express their gratitude; likewise to various funds, e.g. the Gertrude och Ivar Philipson Stiftelse, which also made it possible. We also owe a thank to Inger Mattsson, who has been the general editor, and to Paul Britten Austin, who has supervised the translation work.

Fig. 1. Gustaf III (1746–1792). Engraving by A. F. Berndes after an original by C. Fr. von Breda. DTM.

FOREWORD

Kirsten Gram Holmström

WHEN WE BEGAN preparations for "The Stockholm Symposium on Opera and Dance in the Gustavian Era", part of our objective was to present, from several angles, the wealth of theatrical activities in Stockholm from the time when *Thetis och Pelée* had its première up to the post-Gustavian years. More especially we intended to focus on the year 1786, when these activities reached their climax with the first night of Gustaf III's 'national' opera, *Gustaf Wasa*.

Both in point of quality and quantity, the 1780s are one of the most flourishing epochs in the history of Swedish theatre. At that time Stockholm had three theatres: the old Bollhus, where a troupe of French actors was alternating with a Swedish one; Gustaf III's impressive new Opera House; and, finally, an elegant little private theatre, the Munkbro, which staged *opéra-comique*. To this must be added what was being performed at the court theatres in the royal palaces of Drottningholm, Gripsholm and Ulriksdal. This, for a city with only 70,000 inhabitants, most of them poverty-stricken, was an immense output.

Native talent not sufficing to realise the king's artistic-political visions, he imported composers, musicians, singers, dancers, actors and stage designers from the Continent. Many of these highly paid artists represented new trends in theatre. Such foreign imports may seem to have been in contradiction to the king's principal objective, which was to create a national Swedish theatre. But his intention was not merely to present artistically acceptable stage productions, but also, in equal degree, that these foreign artists should act as models and teachers for promising young Swedish talent. And in general it has always been characteristic of Swedish theatre—as Agne Beijer, the rediscoverer of the Drottningholm Court Theatre, used to say—that it has been a window open onto the outside world, and a bulwark

against narrow-minded nationalism. This is why contacts with foreign researchers and an international perspective have always been important to anyone concerned with Swedish theatrical history.

The sporadic interest of foreign research in the Gustavian era has not, of course, primarily been due to its having been a brilliant epoch in the history of the Swedish stage, nor even to the way in which Gustaf III, in drawing on national themes for his stage works, broke out of the magic circle of what was traditional, thus anticipating nineteenth-century developments; but rather because this wealth of theatrical activity has left behind a great and comprehensive mass of source material, above all the Drottningholm Theatre, which has been of such great importance even to international research. Many problems, for instance, connected with the interpretation of stage imagery, sketches for sets and costumes and other iconographic material had remained insoluble until Drottningholm's unique collection of intact stage equipment and its store of original décor from the eighteenth century became available for study. The Swedish Royal Theatres' collection of music from that period is also unique, internationally speaking, above all because it contains not only scores but also individual parts, the study of which can yield much useful information on European performance praxis at that time. The same applies to stage plays and their 'books', many of which contain cuts and additions, and sometimes even stage directions to the actors. Also crucial to our understanding of the theatrical profession and stage artists' working conditions at that time is the extensive administrative material still extant—e.g., the regulations, contracts and accounts. The present anthology contains many examples of ways in which this wealth of source materials can be utilized. In it we shall see how one and the same source can answer questions posed from completely different angles and based on a variety of scientific models.

One thing all the Symposium's participants had in common: an interest in the Gustavian era and its source materials, as studied from an international point of view by researchers in the fields of music, theatre, dance, literature, art and the history of ideas. Also, not less importantly, by singers, musicians, conductors, dancers, choreographers, actors, scenographers and producers. To this common interest must be added the stipulation that all the lectures and papers should preferably throw light on Gustavian theatre as seen against its ideological, sociological and cultural backgrounds, or else highlight difficult questions of style and interpretation. Yet even this requirement was subsidiary. The Symposium's overriding objective was to stimu-

late discussion of the forms needed for a genuinely interdisciplinary collaboration.

Since theatre is an art that is created collectively and is furthermore dependent upon the political, social and cultural environment, nothing may seem more self-evident than that any thorough study of it must depend upon cooperation between the various disciplines. But so rigidly is our academic system designed in terms of particular disciplines, and so divorced from professional praxis and creative artistic work, to bring about interdisciplinary research of a kind not content merely to pile up one item of knowledge on another, or to limit itself to personal cooperation between individual researchers and artists, must call for no small effort.

More especially this soon becomes very clear to anyone researching the history of dance. Dance has never been accepted as entitled to a place in our Swedish academic system. Folk dance and social dancing have been the province of ethnologists, and research into theatrical dancing has become the province of historians of theatre and music. Strikingly, such research has been the work of individuals possessed both of practical and scientific schooling, or else by dancer/choreographers collaborating with purely academic researchers.

Though the art of dance was intentionally given a prominent place within the Symposium's framework, this may perhaps not transpire so clearly in this anthology. If it doesn't, it is because several of the lectures on the subject took the form of commentaries on practical demonstrations. Even so, it was the first time in Sweden that the terpsichoral art had been placed on an equal footing with other humanistic subjects. We did not even mind being a trifle provoking! For one thing, such prominence was motivated by the great importance accorded to dancing in the Gustavian era, both as a mode of polite intercourse and as an important element in its theatre. For another, Swedish contributions to modern international dance research have lain within the field of historical dances, and notably in what concerns late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century theatre.

In planning the Symposium we hoped that its lectures, demonstrations and performances would lead to a discussion on the need for long-term interdisciplinary collaboration. To our great satisfaction, lively debates arose on this question, both during the Symposium itself and at the meetings afterwards. But whilst everyone was in full agreement as to the need for such interdisciplinary collaboration, opinions diverged as to the proper form such research should take—one reason being that participants held differing notions of the interdisciplinary

concept: from various disciplines mutually helping one another to solve some subsidiary problem, to research using a single overriding method and mode of problem formulation.

On one point, however, there was complete agreement: that access to the source materials should be facilitated by the establishment of a catalogue of the lists available in the various archives. Here better information was also needed on relevant articles in the various specialist journals. Everyone also agreed, on the whole, that the time is not yet ripe for launching an interdisciplinary project on the basis of a common scientific theory, e.g. structuralist or semiotic. What the researchers into traditional academic subjects all shared was an interest in studying the Gustavian theatre from overall questions related either to the history of knowledge or to cultural history. Here proposals were made for more specific themes, such as the study of common forms of expressing "the popular and the heroic" and "national identity". Further, it was considered urgent, within a broader and comparative perspective, to pay attention to the Gustavian performing arts' sociological and economic aspects.

In the first place, however, it was agreed that priority should be given to projects based on collaboration between exponents of theory and practice. The Symposium had shown unequivocally that this is the only way of extracting really new knowledge, above all by concentrated research on individual plays or operas. The ultimate goal would be to stage, for today's audiences, hitherto unknown treasures from the Gustavian opera, *opéra-comique* and drama repertoire, in the same way as has already been done at Drottningholm for items from the Gustavian dance repertoire. The road to this ultimate goal will be a very long one; and before we can even set out on it, painstaking 'theatre-archeological' work will have to be done. Scores, voice-parts, performance texts and dance notations, often extant in differing versions, must be brought to the light of day, compared and analyzed. It will also be necessary to establish the venue of any given performance, and which sets and costumes were—or may have been—used for them. It will also be necessary to establish the cast, or, if the work enjoyed a long run, which was not uncommon, its alternative casts. And finally, if possible, it must be confirmed what kind of audience attended. Yet even all this, taken together, will only yield a vague notion of what the production was like. Before we can imagine that, all the material will have to be interpreted, partly in point of eighteenth-century theatrical conventions and artistic inspiration, partly in the academic sense of penetrating its meanings. We must discover what 'message' was con-

sciously or unconsciously communicated and how it was received by its audience. Only when all this work has been done will we even be able to begin to discuss how such a work should be presented to a contemporary public—not as an eighteenth-century panoptikon, however tasteful—but as living theatre.

CHAPTER 1

THE GUSTAVIAN ERA

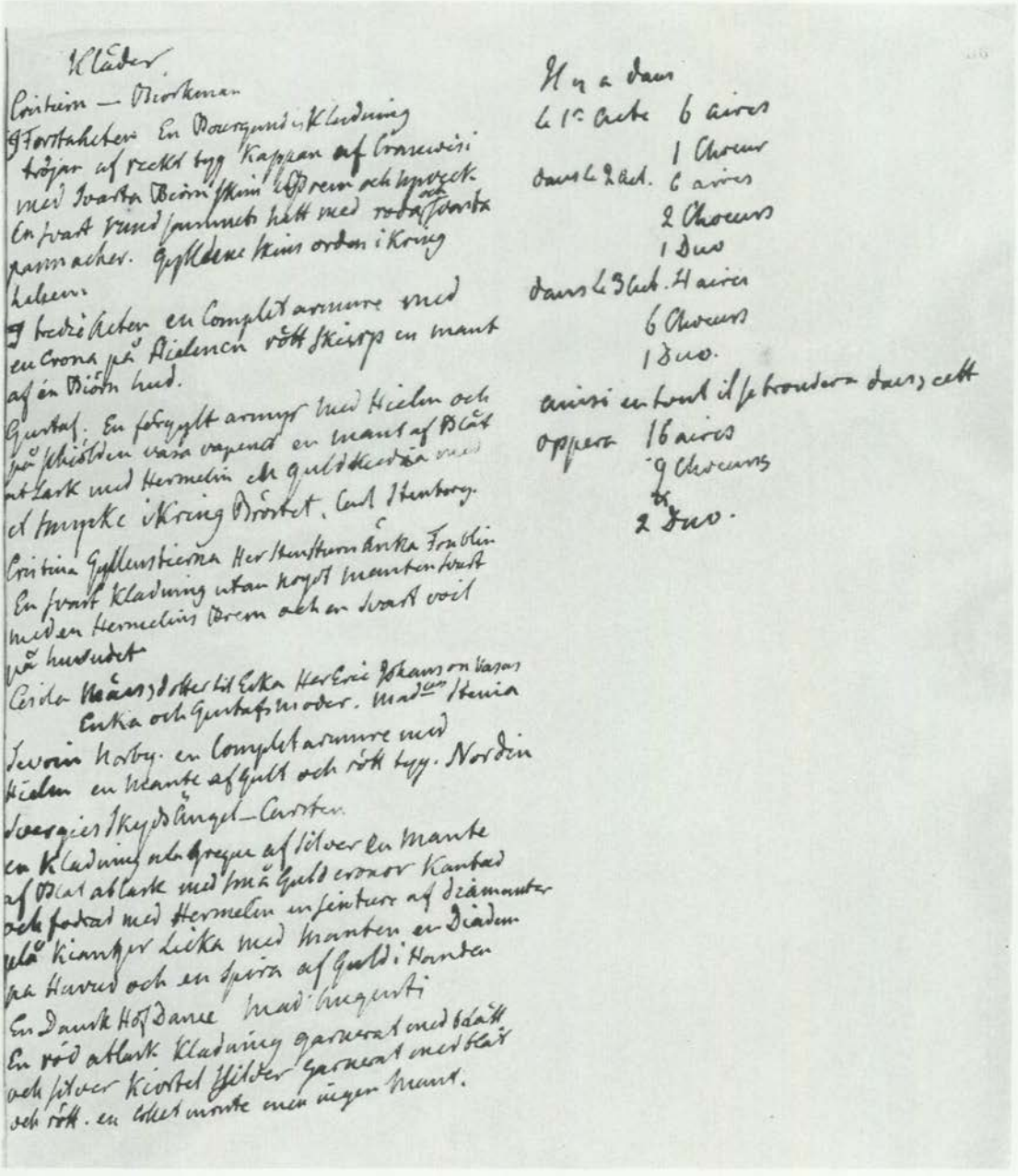

Fig. 1. Gustaf III's first costume list for Gustaf Wasa, *lyrical tragedy in three acts by J. G. Naumann, libretto by J. H. Kellgren after a draft by Gustaf III, scenography by L. J. Desprez and choreography by L. Gallodier. First performance at the Royal Opera on Jan. 19, 1786. Comparison between the king's initial projects for costumes and the extant list shows that the former were to have been more luxurious than they in fact became. See also the colour supplement. UUB.*

PROLOGUE

Erik Lönnroth

GUSTAF III OF SWEDEN has often been called—or rather nicknamed "the Theatre King" and been regarded as a semi-professional dramatist, with acting as a rather unseemly hobby. This, I think, is a rather shallow way of seeing his theatrical bent. His flair for dramatic entertainment was genuine enough. And acting, in real life, was inherent in his nature. As King of Sweden, heir of the Enlightenment and of a decidedly chaotic experiment in parliamentary government, he identified with the leading characters in the drama of Swedish history. From the very beginning of his reign he was determined to educate Swedes to live up to the feelings and ideals appropriate to a heroic nation. And theatre, both spoken and sung, was one of his means of doing so.

As an author he wrote only prose and dialogue, not poetry. This left him only stage dialogue as a vehicle for communicating his ideals. Yet he had always been aware of opera's superiority as a means of reflecting feeling and stirring sentiment in a large but partly illiterate audience. He could himself be moved by operatic music. In February 1771, on his first visit to Paris, he wrote to his young sister Sofia Albertina about a performance of *L'Amitié à l'épreuve*, an *opéra-comique* at the Italian Opera, where an aria sung by the famouse Mlle Larnette had thrown both himself and everyone else into ecstasy. Again, in the spring of 1772, he, as co-author, helped to organize the opera *Thetis och Pelée*; ("Thetis and Pelée"); and on the very night before his *coup d'état,* August 19 of that year, he attended one of its rehearsals. It was in that year too he decided to build a new opera house. Completed and opened in 1782, it was one of the jewels of Gustavian architecture.

His aim was to create a national Swedish opera with inspiring motifs taken from Swedish history. Behind this plan, however, lay not only the power of music but also a certain royal distrust of Swedish as

a stage language. In 1780, after his first experiments with operas on conventional themes from Greek and Roman literature, he began hectically writing plays dominated by two earlier kings of the same name as himself. At least some of these plays were meant to be synopses, to a certain extent also librettos, for operas. In them recitative played an important part, as a moulder of public opinion.

Their musical, literary, dramatic or theatrical values are not my theme. All I must stress is Gustaf's dominating influence on the birth and growth of Swedish opera. All his many and varied activities served only one purpose: to build up the nation's greatness and stress the importance of the Crown. His masterpiece, the opera *Gustaf Wasa*, succeeded in both these aims. Since it had a specific purpose as part of royal policy, I must dwell at some length on its intentions.

Its hero, Gustaf I, founder of the Vasa dynasty and Sweden's first national king after the Middle Ages, had liberated the country from the Danes. He was already a familiar dramatic subject. The dramatist Abbé Piron, Voltaire's rival, had already written a play about Gustaf Wasa, in 1733. Famed in folklore by myths about his adventures while escaping as a refugee from the cruelties of the Danish king and his spies, he was already the country's symbolic liberator and champion. In Gustaf III's imagination both the earlier Gustafs had been enlightened and cultivated eighteenth-century monarchs, and both had been victorious in just wars. In his dramas Gustavus Adolphus is the great reconciler, in the spirit of Voltaire's Henri IV; and Gustaf Wasa is the great warrior. All quite contrary to historical realities. But Gustaf III needed him in that role. In 1783 he was planning to make war on Denmark and conquer Norway, which at that time was part of it. Gustaf I was to inspire the Swedes in a fight against the hereditary foe: perhaps also the Norwegians in a struggle for national liberation. The king regarded only the best capacities as worthy of helping him make an opera out of his draft, and engaged the great lyric poet Johan Henrik Kellgren to write the arias and choruses, and the German composer Naumann to write the music. Returning home from his Italian journey in 1784, he brought back with him from Rome the great scene painter Desprez. Work on the opera was several times delayed by quarrels between Kellgren and Naumann; nor did the Danish primadonna make the atmosphere any happier. It is possible that Gustaf himself was in no hurry to stage the opera, the moment was still not ripe for it to influence public opinion. But when it came, in January 1786, the situation was charged for unleashing anti-Danish feelings.

Fig. 2. Costume drawings for Christina Gyllenstierna and her son Svante Sture in Gustaf Wasa. *Watercolour pencil drawings in the costume books of the Royal Opera, about 1800. KTA.*

The opera's content carries rather a theme of hatred than of joyous liberation, and its central figure is in fact not Gustaf Wasa but Christian II of Denmark, known in Sweden as The Tyrant. As the curtain goes up he has just beheaded many of the Swedish aristocracy, among them Gustaf's father, and the leading Stockholm burghers. In a word, he is the perfect theatre villain, always ready to thrust a dagger into an innocent victim or pronounce an unjust judgment, with cruelty and bloodthirstiness as his only attributes. The first scene shows a cellar in Stockholm Castle, where the nobles, ladies and children of the Swedish nobility are being held prisoners. In a later scene King Christian threatens to kill the little son of Sten Sture, the Regent who had been killed in action the same year, and also threatens his widow, and Gustaf Wasa's mother. One scene represents the two adversaries, Christian and Gustaf, asleep, with Christian haunted by the ghosts of his victims and Gustaf encouraged by Sweden's guardian angel and by

happy dreams. In Act II, before the besieged castle, Gustaf and his officers overflow with noble intentions and the third and last act shows their triumph and Christian's and his Danes' ignominious defeat. This last act is full of fighting, but, according to critical observers, ended with a rather flat finale.

Gustaf Wasa was a tremendous success, and remained in the repertoire until June 1786. It was the very prototype of a Swedish national opera and kept its position until far into the nineteenth century. Whilst its propaganda is unambiguous, wellmeaning spectators stressed that it was no insult to the Danish nation as such. It's said that in the war scenes the pit shouted out "*Slå på, slå på*!" ("Let 'em have it!"), and that soldiers of the royal guard who'd been commandeered as supernumeries refused to be Danes and tried to sell their parts for drinks to fellow-guardees who were to impersonate Swedes. Many eyewitnesses testify to the strength of the national enthusiasm inspired by this opera. And its contemporary content, planned by its royal sponsor and co-author, corroborates its propagandist intent.

The plan to attack Denmark, imminent in the summer of 1783 and never abandoned, was less urgent in 1785. Gustaf's correspondence from the end of that year, however, hints at great events to be expected in the following year; and in January 1786 the opera was staged. April saw the founding of the Swedish Academy, primarily to cultivate eulogies of great Swedes, strengthen the Swedish language and, in general, stimulate nationalist feeling. In May the Estates were summoned, officially for reasons of public welfare, but obviously to decide on reforms which would facilitate mobilization of the army. A great military assembly in western Skåne was announced for June. All this looked no little ominous, and the parliamentary opposition rallied and managed to put a stop to it. The King felt defeated and humiliated, and it never transpired what great deeds should have been immortalized by the Academy, where Kellgren, author of the great lyrical parts in *Gustaf Wasa*, was the leading poet.

Although another royal opera, *Gustaf Adolf och Ebba Brahe* ("Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe"), to an original text by the king, adapted into poetry by Kellgren and to music by Abbé Vogler, celebrated the royal virtues in Swedish history, the greatest of Gustaf's operatic productions and far the most effective as propaganda was his *Gustaf Wasa*. In several respects it is unique.

INTELLECTUAL DISCUSSIONS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SWEDEN

The background to the Gustavian Era

Tore Frängsmyr

THE GUSTAVIAN ERA IS regarded by historians of ideas in one of two different lights: either as a cultural climax, with an abundance of music and song, opera, ballet and theatre; or else as an age of transition between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, and a period of decline. My view is that there are good grounds for both views, depending on which aspect one chooses to look at. By this survey of its intellectual background I hope to indicate the reasons for the prevailing ambiguity.

First of all, we have the question of how to define historical periods. Such definitions, of course, are the historian's way of dividing up historical chronology—a type of classification usually based on political events. But we also know that the cultural climate does not depend on political decisions, at least not wholly. The traditional way of looking at Swedish eighteenth-century culture is to describe the period preceding the Gustavian Era—the one we call the Age of Freedom—as having been the heyday of science and enlightened ideas, and the Gustavian Era itself, by contrast, as a period of belles-lettres promoted by the king and the Stockholm court. To some degree I hope to be able to modify this view. Some historical events, certainly, can be regarded as facts; yet all depends on how the historian analyzes them.

I

The long war waged by Karl XII had brought Sweden to economic ruin, and it had been his death in 1718 that had marked the advent of

the new era known as the Age of Freedom—by which was meant freedom from absolutism. The Swedish parliament had seen the consequences of a royal autocracy. And the time for such rule had passed. Now it was the Estates which were to rule, the king being only formally head of state.

The party in power in the years 1739–1765—the Hats—embraced mercantilist theories, of the kind then popular on the Continent. And the government supported manufactures, in order to increase exports and reduce imports. This did not mean, however, that the interests of agriculture were ignored. By improving the position of the peasantry, the most numerous social group, it was hoped to bring about an increase in the rate of population growth, one of mercantilism's cherished goals.

The preoccupation of the government was with practical economics; its ideology was utilitarianism, hinging on the notion of economic benefit. By considering all decisions and reforms from the standpoint of economic utility, it wished to rally the nation's strength, so that Sweden, both economically and culturally, would once again become a major European power. This emphasis on industry and on improving agriculture also made for a receptivity to modern science. People were aware that science could have a part to play in economic progress.

There is no disputing the progress made by science in the Age of Freedom, of whose intellectual culture it constituted an essential ingredient. Important contributions were made in one field after another. The first name to come to mind, of course, is Linnaeus, who reformed contemporary botany with his sexual system. But Linnaeus was not the only prominent figure. In his youth Anders Celsius, the great astronomer of the day, had taken part in Maupertuis' expedition to northern Sweden to measure the length of one degree along the meridian. And before dying, all too early, in 1744, he had done important work as professor of astronomy at Uppsala. Samuel Klingenstierna was a leading mathematician and physicist, who made penetrating comments on Newton's findings in the field of optics and whose experiments appear to have paved the way for John Dollonds' design of the achromatic lens. Johan Gottschalk Wallerius had to his credit notable achievements in chemistry, particularly agricultural chemistry and hydrology. Another leading chemist was Torbern Bergman, who improved the system of chemical notation and wrote a *Physisk beskrifning öfver jordklotet* ("Physical Account of the Globe", 1766: new edn. 1773–4), a work well ahead of its time. He gave

encouragement to Carl Wilhelm Scheele, the retiring apothecary of the provincial town of Köping, who discovered oxygen. And here we should also mention Pehr Wilhelm Wargentin. As secretary to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences from 1749 to 1783, Wargentin was in constant touch with the world's leading scientists, and himself an eminent astronomer. It was also he who introduced the form of population statistics which would become a model for other European countries.

Founded in 1739, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences probably played a crucial part in spreading a scientific attitude of mind. Its aim was to obtain concrete and practical results, and its proceedings were published in Swedish—not in Latin—in order to reach the widest possible readership. This did not mean, of course, that the findings of science were accepted without opposition. At times conflicts arose in which science had to struggle against the accepted theological views.

Linnaeus himself had his clashes with the theologians. He was criticized when he expressed too free an opinion on the subject of the Creator and His intentions; only a practised theologian was allowed to pronounce on such weighty matters. Though Linnaeus often expressed a deep religious feeling for nature, he was certainly not particularly orthodox.

Ecclesiastical policies were consequently traditional and conservative. The orthodoxy of the seventeenth century still held sway, and was confirmed by new religious laws designed to preserve the State Lutheran Church from encroachment by other religious currents coming in from abroad. A system of government censorship monitored all printed books, and the Church was the ultimate censor and authority when they touched on theological matters.

In their dealings with both Church and State, the universities were in a dependent position. The government could and often did appoint university chancellors and professors over the heads of the university council. And the Church still had the last word on what was taught. On several occasions when sensitive theological questions were touched upon in doctoral dissertations, the theological faculties intervened.

The basic antithesis was between a classico-theological and a modern scientific concept of learning. Superior authority indicated that the universities' main task was to train clergymen and public officials. Scientific research should be left to the Academy of Sciences. When, in 1750, a commission proposed that instruction given at the universities should be of a more strictly vocational nature, the professors, who

Fig. 1. Lovisa Ulrika (1720–1782). Oil on canvas by P. Krafft the Elder, after an original by A. Roslin. KMA.

wanted to see research also carried on there, protested. Whilst not wishing to abandon classical education, they demanded more science. And in fact the year 1750 Sweden's first chairs in physics and chemistry were established at Uppsala.

Seen in broader perspective, however, the influence of science was perhaps after all more important than that of philosophy. The government's utilitarian policies enabled science to develop, and the level of scientific work being done in the mid-century decades was definitely high by international standards. As a result of these developments, a more modern and scientific way of thinking came to penetrate intellectual circles.

The importance of science may be summarized by saying that, on the one hand, it acted as a general driving force by offering an alternative to the classical educational idea, and thereby, albeit under a cloak of economic utilitarianism, introduced a more rationalistic view of the world, a new way of thinking which in the long run would undoubtedly become important. On the other, it played an important part in direct confrontations on concrete issues where a classico-theological outlook clashed with an empirico-rational one.

II

It was not in the universities of France that the philosophy of the Enlightenment flourished, but in the fashionable Parisian *salons*. Sweden had no such intellectual *salon* culture. At the Stockholm court, it is true, there was one striking exception to this generalization: in the queen herself. Lovisa Ulrika (Fig. 1), sister of no lesser a personage than Frederick the Great, detested the clergy and loved intellectual conversation; and in 1753 she founded an academy to cater for her own cultural interests. She had modern French books in her library, exchanged letters with Voltaire and the encyclopaedists, and made d'Alembert a corresponding member of her academy. Her efforts, however, did not have any far-reaching effect, one contributory reason being the royal couple's involvement in an abortive political *coup* in 1756, which led to a decline in both their prestige and their power.

Nor did Sweden, in the 1750s, have a circle of independent literary figures, though it is true a few individual writers of an independent nature were beginning to appear. The young poet Olof von Dalin wrote sardonically of worldly vanity and learned pedantry, and introduced Voltaire to Sweden—admittedly only his early verse. And Lud-

vig Holberg's witty and satirical comedies enjoyed success. Critical and tolerant, he drew inspiration, much to the annoyance of the clergy, from such sources as Bayle and Locke.

But such contributions were few and far between. Intellectual debate, it must be understood, was virtually confined to the universities, establishments which, still powerfully influenced by theological orthodoxy, were not particularly receptive to Enlightenment ideas. This does not mean that no one was aware of them. On the contrary, it must be said that there was a good state of preparedness. Indeed, to put the point a trifle incisively, we may say that even before the Enlightenment had secured a footing in Sweden, the fight against it was already on.

The main reason for this was that the universities were already imbued with a philosophy of a kind the traditional-minded State Lutheran Church could embrace within its fold. This was the Wolffian philosophy, deriving from the German philosopher Christian von Wolff. Based on a mathematical and deductive mode of thought, its fundamental principle was the use of strict logic in order to reach irrefutable conclusions. This does not mean that when it had first been introduced into Sweden in the late 1720s Wolffianism had been received with great scepticism, not to say hostility. Indeed for some years it had even been proscribed, as excessively rationalistic. If taught freely, Christian faith would suffer. But the arrival of a new university chancellor in 1738 led to a sudden change in the whole situation. Wolff himself became increasingly orthodox with the years, and in his *Theologia naturalis* (2 vols., 1736–7) he used his philosophical method precisely to combat atheism and other forms of heresy and sectarianism. By this time it was also realized in Sweden that his philosophy could be used to combat contemporary rationalist trends. The enemy, so to speak, was to be intercepted on his own ground.

Thus Wolffianism, supported by the Church, had become the prevailing university philosophy of the 1740s. It provided an outlet for the age's rationalist tendencies. Reason had come to the aid of the Christian verities, and Wolffianism had become a handmaiden of the faith, *ancilla fidei*, in the literal sense. That it was merely a means, not an end in itself, was emphatically made clear at Uppsala in 1742 in a defence of an academic thesis which attracted wide attention. The situation, to say the least, was piquant: Wolffians strongly attacking a Wolffian dissertation, and the theologians trying to define, once and for all, the boundaries of philosophical freedom.

Though Wolffian logic continued to be used as the main anti-

Enlightenment weapon, no one thereafter thought it should be anything but subordinate to orthodoxy, a view which reached its peak in 1755, when Nils Wallerius became the first professor; the right man, undoubtedly, in the right job. With implacable consistency, with Wolffian logic and intolerance, he pounced on anything that smelt of the Enlightenment. When sniffing out new heretics, he left nothing to chance, and kept himself *au fait* with the latest literature, filing, in his very first year, an application to be allowed to purchase banned books not allowed into the country but essential to him if he was to perform his professional duties. His application was granted. His list of fourteen titles, a veritable roll-call of English and Scottish deists, included Leland's work on the deists and, more particularly, the deists themselves: Toland, Collins, Woolston, Morgan, Chubb, Grove, Bolingbroke, Hutcheson, an anonymous work entitled *Christianity not founded on arguments* (1746), and Hume's Works.

As for the Frenchmen, he dealt with them elsewhere. Repeatedly attacking Pierre Bayle, he called Voltaire the greatest fraud of the time (*nostrae aetatis impostor maximus*) and, in a special dissertation seeking to destroy Mettrie's "blasphemous work" *L'Homme Machine* with a battery of philosphical acumen, theological dogma and selected biblical quotations, tore it to shreds. No other reaction was to be expected. Even so, it is interesting to note that La Mettrie should have been known so early. Although no leading Swedish protagonist of the Enlightenment had yet appeared, it is clear its foreign spokesmen were sufficiently well-known to be regarded as a threat to the established order.

The theologians, however, were not its only enemies. They had a close ally in the State. While they actively countered Enlightenment tendencies in the religious sphere, the government did its best to check any move towards free-thinking in politics.

But by the beginning of the Gustavian Era, at the time of the 1772 *coup d'état*, a new cultural spirit was already in the air. The Enlightenment had never been a conscious movement in Sweden, and the position of the natural sciences was already becoming weaker. By the middle of the 1780s nearly all the great scientists had gone: Linnaeus, Klingenstierna, Bergman, Wargentin, Scheele were all dead, and there was no younger generation to take over. Within a few years science had gone into a total decline, a fact that has sometimes been related to the new ideals at Gustaf III's court. In point of fact, however, the decline in science had set in much earlier—for exactly the same reason as had initially promoted an interest in it, namely Sweden's

parlous economy. By the 1760s it had already become obvious that science could *not* solve the country's economic problems. No longer in power, the Mercantilists' industrial policy had failed. Since the new political leaders were not themselves interested in science, the Nobility followed suit and withdrew its support. More than anything else, the events of the 1770s were a final phase in a longer process.

III

Though we have had much to say about them, this should not give the impression that the new natural science and philosophical Rationalism had dominated intellectual discussion. By the middle of the century there already existed mystical and sentimental undercurrents which would grow stronger as it approached its end.

Many of these ideals drew deeply for their inspiration on religious Pietism. Some of the poets were influenced by Rousseau and his emotional cult of nature. To Pietism and Rousseauism must be added the Freemasons, Mesmerists and Swedenborgians, together with the new mystical orders and societies, which were beginning to gain ground. The king himself was interested in them, and so was his brother Duke Karl (later Karl XIII); many courtiers and members of the nobility participated in nocturnal séances, where many a soothsayer's prognostication dropped a heavy hint as to political tactics.

It is difficult to characterize one cultural period as distinct from another. We know that ideas and ideals were floating around, sometimes attracting attention, sometimes being neglected. Even so, it is quite easy to see where the difference lay between the mid-eighteenth century and the Gustavian Era as a whole. Intellectual attitudes were different; the cultural tide was turning.

It was at that moment, in the clash between rationalism and mysticism, that the old Enlightenment ideas came back into favour. In the century's closing decades we find the battle between reason and mysticism again being joined, though this time the struggle against mysticism, primarily represented by Swedenborg and the Mesmerists, was led by the poet Johan Henrik Kellgren. In the newspaper *StockholmsPosten* in 1787 Kellgren proclaimed the formation of a new society, called *Pro sensu communi*.

An association of the friends of commonsense was obviously just what was needed at this particular moment in time, wrote Kellgren, with reason being banished "from the realms of both arts and sci-

ences". His new society's great redletter day would be August 29, when it would annually celebrate the birthday of John Locke, "the most sensible man the world has seen". Further articles presented a series of theses formulating the Enlightenment programme, the first of which read: "Two and two make four". The society, of course, was fictitious, and Kellgren himself its only member. His articles, quite in the spirit of Voltaire, were bitingly satirical. The mysticism of the orders, he said, were a disgrace to the human race and human reason:

> Formerly such orders' ceremonies were a means of keeping secret such knowledge as they possessed, now their purpose is to hint at knowledge they do not possess.

A vehement discussion ensued. The defenders of mysticism and the system of orders accused Kellgren and his sympathizers of atheism. These in their turn warned the Church of the religious subversion which might ensue if the mystical movements were to spread. Having attacked the established Church from their respective positions, rationalists and mystics alike were now appealing to it for support! Even Gustaf III's relationship to all this may seem paradoxical. Deeply interested in mystical movements, the king himself took part in séances and chapters. But since he was just then preparing for war with Russia, he had no time for philosophical discussion or polemics. Sure as he was that the secret societies numbered some of his aristocratic opponents among their leaders, he had come to regard all mystics as enemies and therefore, in these matters, remained neutral, and thus, despite his weakness for occultism, can still be regarded as an enlightened monarch.

As we have seen, the Gustavian Era was not an absolute contradiction of the Age of Freedom. But it was certainly different. In the new cultural climate some ideas and intellectual currents at first hardly discernible, surfaced and grew stronger. The enlightened resistance did not prove strong enough to block the way for the mystical movements—a mysticism which in itself was no more than a hint of a period yet to come: the Age of Romanticism.

NOTE

This article is based on materials published in Swedish, particularly *Wolffianismens genombrott i Uppsala* (Uppsala 1971), and "Den svenska upplysningen—fanns den?", *Artes* 1 (1987), pp. 4–17.

Fig. 1. Four portraits in profile of Gustaf III. Drawn in Italy and bearing the inscription "Behold! Be amazed! See and know that perfection exists!". Pencil drawing by J. T. Sergel. NM.

GUSTAF III—THE THEATRE KING

Librettist and politician

Peter Cassirer

THE LIBRETTIST

The Swedish Crown Prince Gustaf received the news of the death of his father, King Adolf Fredrik, on March 1, 1771, in a box at the Paris Opera. Twenty-one years later, on March 16, he was struck by a charge from the pistol of the regicide Jacob Johan Anckarström, again in an opera house—at a ball at the Royal Opera, *Kungliga Teatern*, in Stockholm.

That could have been a mere coincidence, but it was none. Opera played a very important role in the life of the Swedish king (Fig. 1), as it did in his death. He founded the Swedish Opera and wrote several libretti himself. His life, too, would form fit substance for an opera libretto, though in one respect at least, and if it were to be historically true, this would have to be arranged in a manner quite different from the versions given by Scribe and Somma. For whatever may have been the motive leading Jacob Johan Anckarström to shoot his king in 1792, it was certainly not jealousy! Since childhood, Gustaf had been able to see opera at the Swedish Court: his mother, Lovisa Ulrika, a sister of Frederick the Great, had had an Italian opera company brought to Stockholm. In later years, however, Gustaf III was less concerned with the text than with the music; this was because he had one particular aim in mind for the Swedish Opera: believing that the Swedish language was still too rough and unwieldy, his intention was for the music to render that language as supple as Italian and French.

In the very first year of his reign, the king drafted a libretto for his opera *Thetis och Pelée* ("Thetis and Pelée"), set to music by the Italian Francesco Antonio Uttini, who had been court *Kapellmeister*

in Stockholm since 1754. This, the first Swedish opera, had its première in the tennis court (*Bollhuset*) in January 1773, and its resounding success spurred Gustaf on to build an opera house in Stockholm. This was opened in 1782, and it stood until 1891 on the site where the present opera house, the Royal Opera, stands.

Gustaf and those who worked together with him on operas preferred above all the works of Christoph Willibald Gluck, several of whose operas were performed in Stockholm. *Orfeo ed Euridice* ("Orpheus and Euridice") which had had its premìere in Vienna in 1762, was performed in Stockholm in 1773—a year before Paris! Gluck's main attraction for Gustaf was that he brought in a larger number of recitatives, and more extensive ones, than the Italians, so that Gluck's operas were better suited to Gustaf's particular purpose. "The Italians are only good for twittering and trilling: they cannot wait to pass from one aria to the next", was the view of the most striking Swedish representative of the Enlightenment, Johan Henrik Kellgren, who had been commissioned by the king to put the royal drafts into verse.

Together, Gustaf and Kellgren produced the libretti for three operas in three different genres:

The national opera *Gustaf Wasa*—about the Reformation king—with music by Johann Gottlieb Naumann, who had been summoned from Dresden. This is still considered to be Gustaf's most distinguished operatic creation, on account of its fine orchestration, its impressive choruses, and the many effective recitatives, the composer being here called upon to do his utmost. The première was given in 1786 and was an enormous success. Tickets for the 47 public performances 1786–97 were in such demand that the booking-office conditions were described by one observer as "a danger to life and limb"! (*Gustaf Wasa* was performed 122 times at the Royal Opera 1786–1823.)

The librettists found an apt subject for *Gustaf Adolf och Ebba Brahe* ("Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe") in the liaison between Gustavus II Adolphus and a court lady. This opera was set to music by the Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler—also a native of Germany and known today chiefly for his organ music. The opera was performed just before the Russian War of 1788.

The next opera, as indicated by the title *Æneas i Carthago* ("Æneas in Carthage"), is on a classical theme, the composition of the music being entrusted to Joseph Martin Kraus, another native German. The first performance was not given until 1799, after the king's death.

When translating the original libretto to *Un Ballo in maschera* in

1958 for the Stockholm Opera, the Swedish poet Erik Lindegren made use of numerous textual passages from the works of Gustaf and the other so-called Gustavians, notably Kellgren.

THE THEATRE KING

Gustaf's real interest was not so much the opera as the theatre. "I have never witnessed such a passion for the theatre as in the king's person", recounted a diplomat at the Swedish court. At the outset the king himself played major roles in the performances at the court theatres of Drottningholm and Ulriksdal. In the first little theatre in Gripsholm Castle, standing on such a beautiful site on Lake Mälar (*Mälaren*) west of the capital, he acted at Christmastime 1775/76 in plays by Voltaire (*Ghengis Khan*), Crébillon (*Rhadamiste et Zénobie*), Racine (*Athalie*) and Corneille (*Cinna*). It was not, however, considered *comme il faut* for the king to work as an illusionist, "making a jester of himself at his own court". Fredrik Axel von Fersen said of his monarch:

> When the king got up in the morning he went to the theatre to rehearse with the actors the plays which were to be performed in the evening. Often His Majesty dined in the theatre, and after the performance was over the king came to supper with the whole court, dressed in his theatrical costume. Thus we saw him in the guise of Rhadamiste, Cinna and as the high priest in the temple at Jerusalem, presenting himself as an object of ridicule at his own table.

Gustaf was not insensitive to this criticism, and after 1776 he gave up acting, turning himself instead into a stage manager and author. In order to refine the Swedish language, the king established a "Society for the Improvement of the Swedish Language" also called the "King's Little Academy". In the winter of 1783/84 the intellectual élite of Stockholm would meet every Wednesday and Saturday to read aloud from their own works. One favourite member was the song-writer Carl Michael Bellman—though his membership was never to be extended to the Swedish Academy which grew out of that Society.

This Swedish Academy was founded by Gustaf in 1786. Like *L'Académie Française*, founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1634, its aim was to encourage eloquence and creative writing and, according to the statutes which Gustaf wrote himself, "to spread abroad the honour of Sweden and of the Swedish language". Since 1901 the Swedish Academy has been internationally known for awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Apart from its cultural responsibilities, the Academy was to fulfil a political purpose: in that time of unrest, Gustaf wanted to keep a rein on "unruly heads" among the intellectuals. Lastly, it was the duty of the Academy to offer him, personally, an intellectual and literary milieu for his authorship.

In the space of a single year, from the autumn of 1782 to the following autumn, the king had written five dramas on Swedish themes: *Gustaf Adolfs Ädelmod* ("Gustavus Adolphus' Magnanimity"), *Helmfelt*, *Frigga*, *Gustaf Adolf och Ebba Brahe* ("Gustavus Adolphus and Ebba Brahe"), later reworked into the opera libretto) and *Drottning Christina* ("Queen Christina") (about Gustavus Adolphus' daughter, who had converted to Catholicism and abdicated).

Gustaf's love for the theatre made him a stranger at the Swedish court, where at the time of his accession the rather bourgeois etiquette of his father Adolf Fredrik was still in vogue. Gustaf had brought from France an obsolete and exaggerated court ceremonial, which was felt at court to be ridiculous. There were complaints and reproaches to the king, too, of the "French" customs—deplorable customs, it was felt—which they considered he had imported along with the ceremonial. His sister-in-law, Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, wrote in her diary—in all likelihood not without personal experience from her marriage to Duke Karl, later Karl XIII: "For the rest, there is here no lack of amorous affairs; it is the general custom to have a lover, and each lady now has one."

One thing is quite certain, though: the king himself was not involved in any such affairs. As his sister-in-law wrote, he was "quite free from any weakness for the female sex and entirely insensitive to its charms". Lack of virility was a reproach against the king even during his lifetime, and rumours were in circulation about the legitimacy of his first son, later to be King Gustaf IV Adolf (Fig. 2). Although these rumours were almost certainly without foundation, the king was affected by them and they lessened his joy in his first-born.

Gustaf had lived for nine years with his wife, the Danish princess Sofia Magdalena (Fig. 3), without consummating the marriage. He did not do so until he felt the wish to give the country an heir to the throne, and even then it was only achieved with great difficulty: he first had to learn the facts of life from his Court Equerry. Gustaf never had any erotic interest. That is why his assassination could never have been motivated by any amorous intrigue as in the libretto of *Un Ballo in maschera*. Its causes were entirely political.

Fig. 2. Gustaf III exhorting his son Gustaf Adolf to emulate his famous ancestor Gustavus Adolphus. Sepia pencil drawing by J. T. Sergel. NM.

THE POLITICIAN

It was not only cultural policy that formed Gustaf III's field of action. Far from it: as early as 1768 he had participated in an abortive *coup d'état* of his parents, which had been intended to give greater powers to the crown. At the time of his accession in 1771, the royal power, in Sweden, was still very greatly restricted. After the losses in the wars which had put an end to the Swedish Empire, and following the

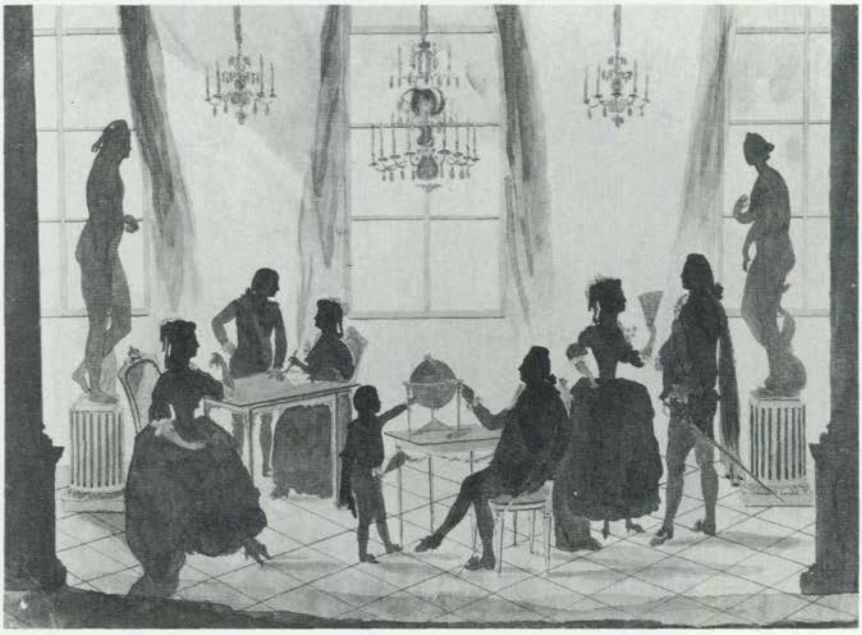

Fig. 3. Gustaf III with his family, about 1791. Washed contour etching by J. F. Martin. NM.

extinction of the direct line of succession with the abdication of Christina (daughter of Gustavus Adolphus), the political order in Sweden had been almost democratic in the modern sense. This is a period known in Swedish history as the Age of Freedom. To terminate the long succession of wars, for instance, the king was not permitted to go to war without the consent of parliament. This was a restriction which Gustaf III, in 1788, decided to ignore, thus arousing strong opposition and sowing the seed for the conspiracy against him.

The year of his coronation Gustaf had carried through his own successful *coup d'état*, on August 19, 1772, which gave him considerably greater powers. This *coup* was staged with the same skill as he was later to employ in his theatrical productions: officers in key provinces, initiated into his plans, helped him to carry them out. In this, an important role was played by the troops in Finland, which at that time still belonged to Sweden.

On August 19, 1772, the king inspects his guard, and holds a short speech to his officers and non-commissioned officers, expressing his regret for the step he is obliged to take but calling upon their loyalty in the difficult situation. And this is assured him, even though perhaps without any great enthusiasm.

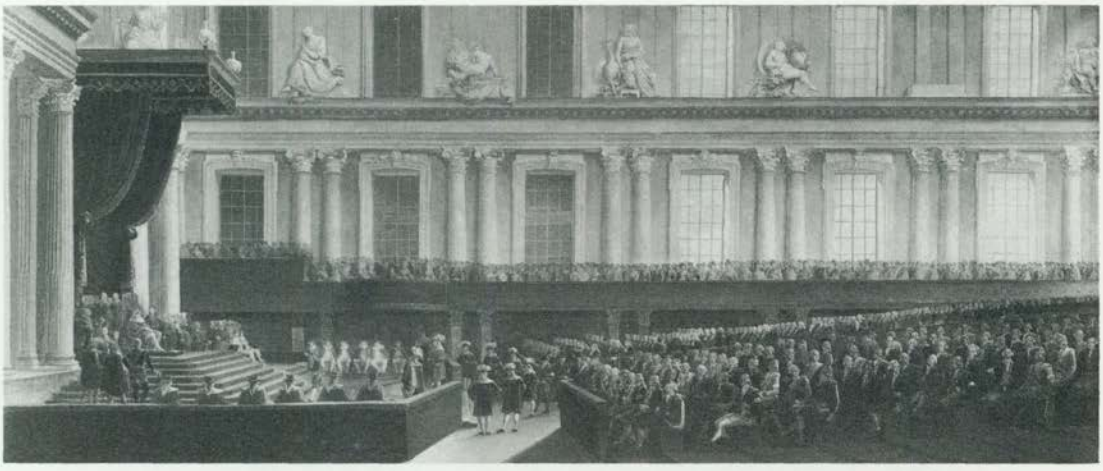

Fig. 4. Gustaf III at the opening of Parliament (the Riksdag*) in 1778, in the Hall of State at the Stockholm Palace. Below the throne are the members of parliament, ranged in their Estates: Nobility, Clergy, Burghers and Peasants. Oil on canvas by P. Hillerström. NM.*

Fig. 5. The king on his way to the opening of Parliament in full regalia with crown, sceptre and robes, wearing under these a "burgundy gown" of cloth of gold. Pencil drawing by J. T. Sergel, about 1780. NM.

Solemnly apostrophizing his ancestors Gustaf Wasa and Gustavus Adolphus, he then also wins over the rank and file. This process is facilitated by the ducats from the French treasury, of which the guardsmen receive one each and the non-commissioned officers three.

After this, Gustaf gains the allegiance of a member of the Council of State, who happens to be there to discuss the threatened coup. Mounting his horse, and with a white armband on his left sleeve, the king rides through Stockholm at the head of the parade of guards. The crowds cheer him, and many put on a white armband to show their allegiance. Returning to the palace, the young king receives ministers of foreign powers to explain the situation to them, and then, in the evening, goes to the Skeppsholmen naval base, and from there out into the town, where he hears a song written by the ever-faithful Carl Michael Bellman being sung in his honour. Three days later, the king summons the Estates, presenting them with a proposal for a new form of government which assures him considerably greater personal power. The Estates unanimously accept the proposal—possibly assisted in their decision by the muzzles of some of the cannon in the courtyard, which are pointing at the Hall of State, the wind wafting the smell of the burning match cords in through the windows. One witty chamberlain is traditionally supposed to have remarked to the king that presumably nothing would be refused him since he had "canonical" right on his side.

Thus, without shedding a drop of blood, Gustaf had put an end to the Age of Freedom. The *coup* had cost him—or rather the French treasury—300 000 French *livres*.

Thus foundered the first Swedish attempt at democracy. However, although the Age of Freedom had closed, this enlightened monarch did also make certain liberal contributions. He personally stood out for a welfare policy, moving a wealthy Gothenburg merchant, Sahlgren, for instance, to endow a public hospital. The rack and interrogation under torture were abolished for ever, full freedom of religion was introduced, and industry was encouraged (Fig. 4–5).

Nonetheless, in the course of time opposition towards Gustaf III grew. Among the burghers and peasants there was great discontent with his cultural policy, which was considered mere pleasure-seeking. Economic measures such as the prohibition of home distilling angered the nation. Criticism of the king's advisers led to severe restrictions on the freedom of the press. But the strongest opposition came from the nobility. What triggered this was the war with Russia of 1788. Gustaf had considered a war expedient for two reasons. Firstly, Russia had

been exerting great influence on Swedish domestic policy through connections with the middle-class faction, and the king wished to put an end to that. Secondly, he believed that he could bolster his ever-decreasing popularity by a war which would unite the whole realm under him. The result was the very reverse: from Anjala, in Finland, a group of officers sent a letter to Catherine II of Russia, proposing negociations for peace, on grounds—in fact quite correct—that the attack on Russia had been a violation of the Swedish constitution. Although the king succeeded in putting down the mutiny, the war went badly and would probably have ended in a disaster for Sweden if the Great Powers had not intervened. Gustaf also seems to have received diplomatic aid from his uncle Frederick the Great of Prussia. Thanks to all this, he was able to return to Stockholm in the guise of a victor; indeed he succeeded, at the 1789 parliament and with the help of the Burger Estate, which he had succeeded in winning over by concessions at the expense of the Nobility, in getting a new constitution passed, which increased his powers yet again. The opposition of the Nobility must have been poorly organized—at all events, they had no success in preventing the king's illegal measures. Instead, they staged the conspiracy which was to cost him his life.

THE CONSPIRACY

As in Somma's libretto for Verdi's *Un Ballo in maschera*, the conspiracy against the king had three main actors: the assassin himself, Jacob Johan Anckarström (first names after Jean-Jacques Rousseau!), who was engaged to do the deed by Counts Claes Fredrik Horn and Adolf Ribbing. The latter had resigned from the household troops because the king had given the rich young Charlotta de Geer, whose hand Ribbing had hoped for, in marriage to the Court Equerry, von Essen. Behind the scenes of the conspiracy, manipulating the wires, stood an elderly general by the name of Pechlin, who also happened to have close connections with the Russian Ambassador in Stockholm. Apart from these men, only perhaps half a dozen officers were privy to the plot; it was planned that, after the deed, they should take command of the Stockholm regiments.

The assassination, first planned for an opera ball of March 2, 1792, was then postponed to the next ball, on the 9th, and finally to the 16th. (The very number of these masquerade balls also formed grounds for reproaches against the king on account of his pleasure-

Fig. 6. Anckarström's mask and weapons. He had bought his mask for 42 skilling from a hat-liner by the name of Martin, on nearby Helgeandsholm island, and had borrowed the pistols, manufactured in 1775, from Count Claes Fredrik Horn, one of the aristocratic conspirators. Each pistol was charged with a lead musketball, three pieces of lead and a nail. Using a file, the assassin had given the knife, intended as the third possible murder weapon, a barb. Royal Armoury.

seeking tendencies!) On the very eve of the attempt, a plan was being discussed in Pechlin's rooms to proclaim the crown prince king after the death of Gustaf, and then to assemble the Estates and get them to accept a new form of government.

Anckarström then went to his own rooms, where he loaded two pistols with small shot, tacks, and two balls, equipping himself as well with a specially barbed butcher's knife, though this was not used. At half past eleven Anckarström went to the Opera, accompanied by Horn. Ribbing followed later. All three were dressed in black dominos with white masks (Fig. 6).

The king himself was in low spirits that day, speaking of *Idus Martii*, which he had always feared. On that evening he drove from his pavilion at Haga into town, where he first attended *Les Folies amoreuses* by Regnard, performed by his French theatre company. He then went to his private rooms at the Opera House to dine. There, he was handed a long letter, written in French and urgently counselling him not to appear at the Opera Ball because there was a threat against his life. However much the content of this letter may have affected him, he did not follow its advice. Instead, he went making his way to his royal box, where he opened the lattice window and showed himself. He then closed the window with the words: "If anyone had wanted to kill me, that would have been their best possible chance." From his box he went down into the auditorium, where people rapidly gathered around him, several of them wearing identical masks. A shot rang out, and the king was heard to cry: *"Ah, je suis blessé; arrêtez-le!"* Though staggering, he was still able to stand. The doors were immediately locked, and he was led to a couch. In these moments he showed the same self-possession as he had often before shown in crucial situations. Accepting help, he rose once more and, crossing the stage, walked up the steps to his private rooms. Medical examination showed that he had been hit in the back, above the left hip. "Would anyone ever have expected me to be shot from behind?" the king calmly remarked, concerned as always not to show himself a coward. He assured those standing around that the was in no pain, but they could see the blood reddening both his clothes and the couch. The doctors, however, would not risk an operation (Fig. 7 a–b).

The king was taken the same night to the palace, where he lingered on for almost two weeks. So many days passed between the shooting and his death on March 29 that the realization of the revolutionary plans was prevented, and thus there was no question of reforming the constitution (Fig. 8). Far from it: the assassins were arrested, and as

Fig. 7a. The costume Gustaf III was wearing when he was shot down at the Masked Ball of March 16, 1792. Jacket and breeches are of knitted silk, on the pattern for the Swedish court costume designed by the king himself, a Venetian cape of black taffeta and a black chapeau rond *with a white plume and a mask completed the outfit. On the jacket are the orders of the Seraphim and the Sword. Royal Armoury.*

Fig. 7b. Detail of 7a. Though the assassin, Capt. Jacob Johan Anckarström, fired point blank at the king from behind, he only wounded him severely. Gustaf lived on for thirteen days and nights before dying on March 29, 1792 of a high fever induced by blood poisoning. Royal Armoury.

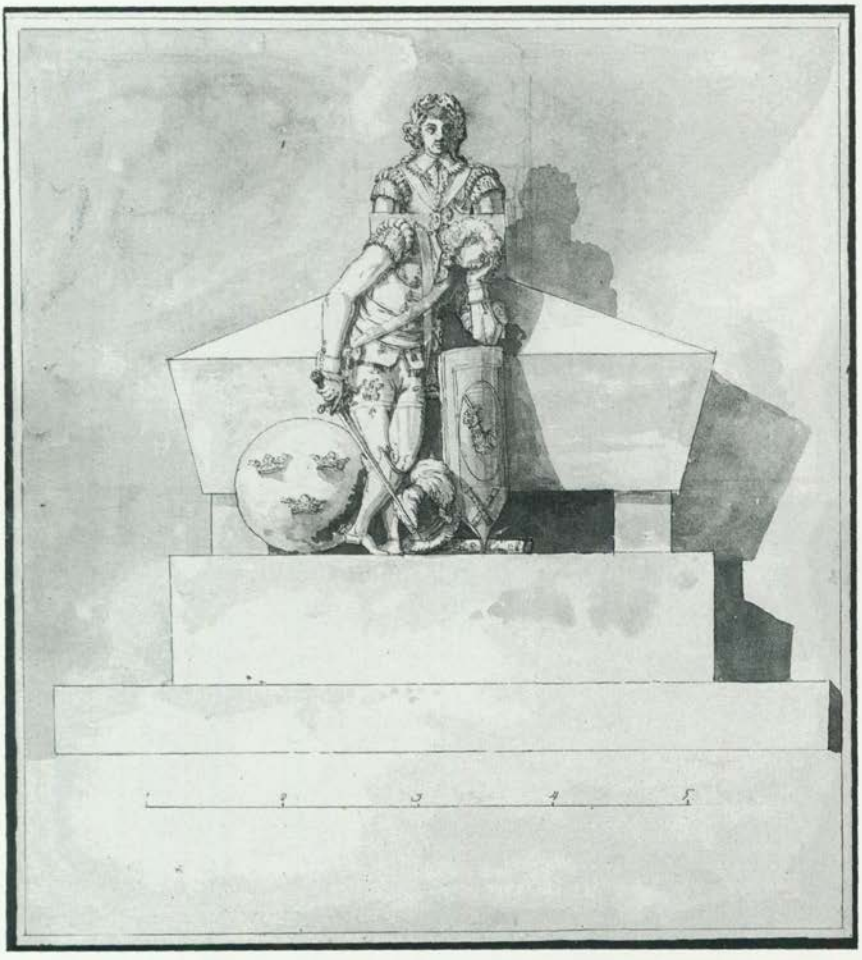

Fig. 8. Sketch for a monument to Gustaf III. Watercolour drawing by L. J. Desprez. NM.

they showed little sense of honour amongst themselves, the Chief of Police was able to arrest all the conspirators within a few days.

The murder stripped the opposition of all prestige. What the war with Russia had failed to bring about—namely, to unite the whole country behind the king—the assassination had now achieved. The murder had no immediate political consequences. After a period of regency, the boy-king Gustaf IV Adolf, who had been brought into the world with such difficulty, acceded to the throne in 1796. When in 1809 Sweden lost Finland in the Napoleonic Wars, he was deposed (Fig. 9–10). His uncle, Karl XIII, ruled Sweden until his own death in

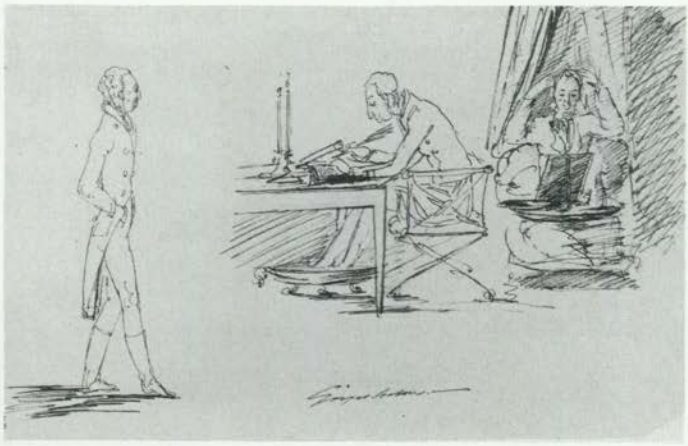

Fig. 9. Gustaf IV Adolf imprisoned at Gripsholm, 1809. The king walks about, sits at his writing desk, takes baths and combs himself in front of a mirror. Brown pencil drawing, from P. A. Adelborg's sketch book. NM.

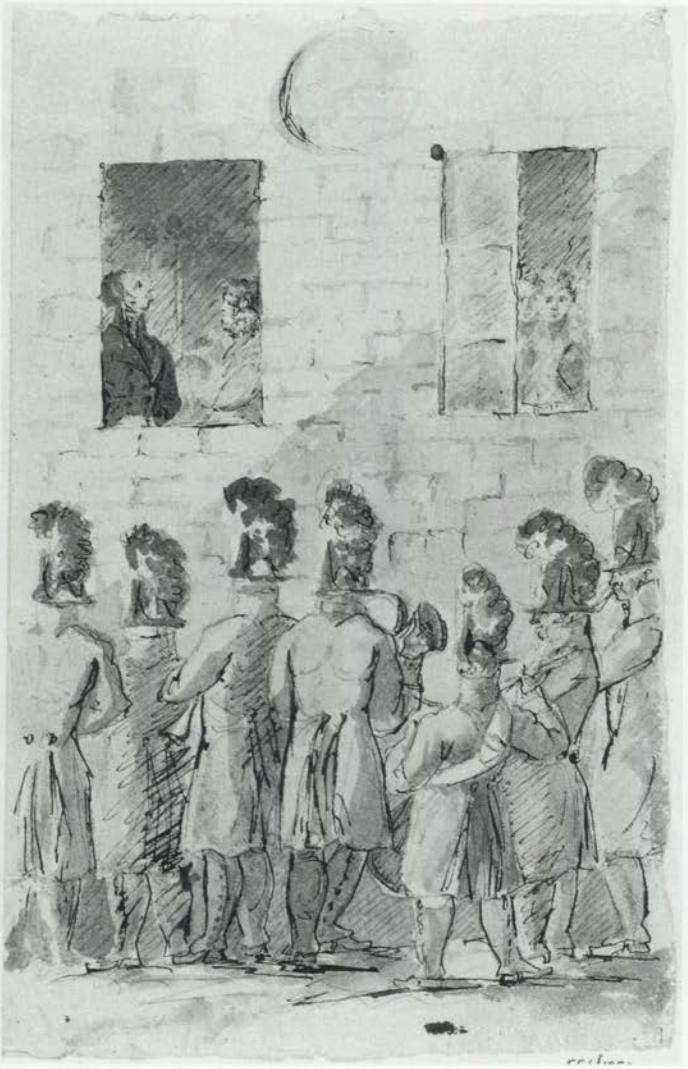

Fig. 10. Gustaf IV Adolf and his queen listening to a military band during their imprisonment at Gripsholm in 1809. Brown pencil drawing, washed in grey, watercolour from P. A. Adelborg's sketch book. NM.

Fig. 11. Sketch for the statue of Gustaf III. Washed pencil drawing by J. T. Sergel, 1791. NM.

1818. Since he would leave no heirs, the Swedish Riksdag elected the French Marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte Crown Prince. As Karl XIV Johan he founded the present Swedish royal house.

The death of Gustaf III, though it produced no immediate political effects, did change the course of Swedish cultural life. Within a very short time a reaction had set in. Yet, all the same, the institutions founded by Gustaf III are still among the chief pillars of contemporary Swedish culture (Fig. 11).

NOTE

This article was originally published in *Wiener Staatsoper's* programme for Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Un Ballo in maschera* ("the Masked Ball") 1986/87. The production had its première on the 19th of October 1986. This was the first time that the 'Gustaf-version' of the opera was performed in Vienna. The libretto of the opera was written by Antonio Somma after Eugène Scribe.

(Translation: Robert Dewsnap)